



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

February 4, 2010, to December 2, 2010
and Index

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker



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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, February 4, 2010

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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	Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

3 p.m.

Thursday, February 4, 2010

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

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated January 20, 2010, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

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

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

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome. Join me in the opening day prayer.

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

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join in in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lorieau.

That enthusiasm, ladies and gentlemen, will carry through this whole Assembly through the spring session. Thank you. Please be seated.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

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

[The Mace was draped]

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

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

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

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

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

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

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

Speech from the Throne

His Honour: Please be seated.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Third Session of the 27th Alberta Legislature. It is my honour to deliver the Speech from the Throne, as it has been my honour to serve Albertans as Lieutenant Governor over these past five years.

I hope the House will indulge me for a moment as I reflect on what a privilege it has been for my wife, Mary, and me to see so much of our province and meet so many of its amazing people during my time as Her Majesty's representative in Alberta. This job has been the highlight of a rewarding career that took many unexpected turns, such as being in a Grey Cup, Stanley Cup, and a few other things. No one could be as surprised as I am that my road brought me to where it did. I'm grateful for every day and every experience I've had as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor.

Much has changed in our province since I was appointed to this role. The unprecedented growth we knew has given way to the deepest recession the world has seen in half a century. Our world may have changed, but our people have not. They remain hard working and innovative, entrepreneurial and compassionate, and, most of all, confident about our province and its future. That confidence is well placed. Our province has substantial cash reserves and low taxes, providing a solid foundation from which we can make a strong recovery. Albertans have worked hard to earn this fiscal advantage, and the actions we take now will ensure that our province emerges from these difficult times even stronger than before.

Alberta's Fiscal Advantage

Alberta's resource-based economy brings with it one of the most volatile revenue streams in North America, providing surpluses in good times but prone to sudden economic reversals. Your government took aggressive steps to create a cushion for the inevitable downturn, improving the fiscal position of the province by almost \$50 billion while maintaining low taxes. A \$23 billion debt was paid off in full, and nearly \$25 billion has been saved and invested on behalf of the people of Alberta.

Most of the money we saved went into the sustainability fund, \$17 billion in cash reserves which could be called upon quickly if the province experienced a sudden drop in income. These dollars are now at work protecting municipalities, social programs, educational institutions, and the health care system from the kind of cuts seen in other places. The sustainability fund enables Alberta to keep investing in the public infrastructure we know we will need for

tomorrow at a time when we can take advantage of lower costs. We will continue to strengthen the province's transportation, health care, and education infrastructure in all regions of the province.

The government's wise financial and capital planning is now supporting tens of thousands of jobs across the province. While other jurisdictions are cutting back and growing their infrastructure deficits, Alberta is improving its competitiveness and looking forward with confidence.

Alberta capital bonds will be introduced later this month, available only in Alberta and only to Albertans. Albertans are proud of our province and want to invest in its future. Backed by our province's triple-A credit rating, the bonds will be one of the safest investments possible in today's economic climate and offer Albertans a way to invest directly in our province. Proceeds raised through this sale of bonds will go toward building accommodations for Alberta seniors, including continuing care and supportive living facilities.

Alberta's fiscal strength has allowed the government to keep taxes low and maintain support for health and education. As we work to be back in the black in three years, Albertans will continue to enjoy the highest incomes, the lowest taxes, and the most advanced public infrastructure in Canada.

The sustainability fund is a great backstop in difficult times, just as this government planned, but we can't rely on it alone to carry us through. Government must live within its means. We must and will carefully manage spending, with a focus on key priorities such as health, education, and supports for vulnerable Albertans.

With a shared effort over the next two years this year's budget will bridge the recession and position Alberta to take full advantage of the recovery.

Improving Health Care

Alberta ranks near the top in Canada on health spending per capita, yet the results are not what Albertans expect. Your government believes Albertans deserve better results for their health care dollars.

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Health has recently proposed improvements to the publicly funded health system to make it more patient focused. Your government will act on these recommendations, including creating a new Alberta health act this fall and setting principles for the development of legislation, policy, and program delivery changes across the system. This work will be guided by Albertans themselves, who will be engaged in the evolution of the health system from its first steps.

Part of this evolution will be predictable funding. Budget 2010 will provide stable, five-year funding to Alberta Health Services. This will give our health care partners the security of knowing that growing cost pressures will be addressed. At the same time we will share the challenge of focusing ever more vigorously on better performance in key areas such as wait times and access so Albertans will proudly be able to say that their health care system is the best in the country.

The health system must be accountable to Albertans. Your government will go beyond statistical measures of the health system's performance and seek input from Albertans themselves on whether the system is performing to their expectations. We will report back to Albertans on action taken and progress made.

Building Safe, Caring Communities

Albertans believe that safe, strong, and caring communities are important to our quality of life. Government actions will continue to support these values.

The Alberta gang reduction strategy will provide a comprehen-

sive, long-term approach to suppress gang crime in Alberta. Civil forfeiture legislation is already in place, and witness protection legislation will be tabled this session. We will bolster the front lines of Alberta police forces with 100 new officers, the fulfillment of a three-year, 300-officer commitment.

Government's goal of creating 14,000 new child care spaces will be met and surpassed this year, allowing us to focus on maintaining existing spaces and supporting the creation of new spaces in the areas of most need.

Your government will continue working with its partners to deliver on the pledge to develop 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012 and on the 10-year plan to end homelessness.

Social programs for Albertans will become better integrated and more focused on the people they were created to serve. These improvements will make it easier for Albertans in need to access information and assistance as well as transition between programs as they move from childhood to adulthood to their senior years.

This government is concerned that only one-third of Albertans belong to workplace pension plans. We will continue to push the national agenda for reforms that help people plan for a financially sound retirement. A pan-Canadian solution is preferable, but if an agreement cannot be reached, we are prepared to join with British Columbia and Saskatchewan to develop options for a regional plan to improve retirement income prospects for future retirees, of which I'm one, I think.

Increasingly Competitive in a Global Economy

The global economy is undergoing profound changes, with significant impacts on the lives of Albertans. Our people are naturally entrepreneurial, and government has supported their drive to succeed with training, information, services, and counselling, but we can do better.

Albertans know that a good education is an essential foundation to prepare for the future and that our thinking in this area must constantly evolve. In the coming months we will launch a new vision for education, making the improvements needed to ensure that learning in Alberta is flexible and ready to meet the needs of the next generation.

Your government will strengthen the province's research and innovation system under the Alberta Innovates umbrella. The new system will be more responsive to the needs of researchers and entrepreneurs and help Alberta maintain a leadership role in the global economy. Our great Alberta spirit of competition will do the rest.

Our province must be a magnet for the talented individuals and businesses its economy needs. Your government will ensure that the workforce has the right skills to keep Alberta strong.

As Alberta's profile increases in the global economy, our trading partners will expect greater contact and the ability to travel directly to Alberta. We will continue to work with the federal government to expand direct air access between Alberta and its key markets. This is what business, trade, and tourism need to be competitive.

Much of Alberta's economic growth will occur in the north, and we will invest in new transportation infrastructure to support this growth.

We are working toward a western economic partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan to create Canada's largest boundary-free trade and investment market. The three provinces will also work together on a joint trade mission to China and Japan to market western Canada to the growing Asian market.

Government regulation must accomplish our collective goals

while at the same time promoting business entrepreneurship, individual liberty, and creativity. Your government will aggressively pursue improvements to ensure we have effective regulations that are both clear and practical. For example, with respect to conventional oil and gas development government's approach will put more focus on assuring compliance with environmental outcomes rather than creating hurdles at the approval stage for companies accessing the land.

We will complete the review of the First Nations consultation policy and guidelines on land management and resource development this year, which will give us another tool to improve competitiveness.

Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are key and sustainable economic drivers of our province. We are a responsible producer of safe, high-quality food products that are in demand all over the world, but we need to break into new markets and beat the competition from other countries that export agricultural products, including the United States and Australia. So we will continue efforts to increase our competitive edge, foster value-added opportunities, and increase access to important international markets.

Alberta is now a major global energy player with enormous untapped potential. This sector is vitally important to all Alberta communities, with 50 per cent of our province's gross domestic product tied to energy in some way. Energy development is a partnership between Albertans, who own the resources, and industry, which develops them on Albertans' behalf. It's a partnership that has yielded tremendous benefits in economic activity that touches every corner of our province.

But the best days in Alberta's energy story are yet to come. Your government is committed to ensuring that this industry remains vibrant and continues to attract investment and create new technologies. We have the resources the world needs, including renewable forms of energy, and the know-how to develop them responsibly.

The review of Alberta's competitiveness will point the way and ensure that Alberta is an attractive place to do business. Your government will partner with industry to design the right model to encourage the investment in technology Albertans are known for. All of these initiatives are part of the government's plan to enhance competitiveness. As we lead the way out of the recession, we know there will be tough competition for investment and jobs. Those economies that offer speed, controlled costs, superior innovation, and extraordinary talent will flourish.

We must succeed in maintaining and growing our markets and attracting and developing people and innovation. This is the route to the strong communities, healthy environment, quality of life, and prosperity that we want to pass on to future generations.

Bill 1 of this legislative session, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will signal our government's resolve to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America. To do this, we must minimize the cost of doing business here, including the cost of regulation, while at the same time providing the world-class services that are the hallmark of competitive jurisdictions.

Alberta's next generation economy will see emphasis on attracting new industries in new sectors, serving the world's expanding need for safe food and sustainably produced minerals, forest products, and energy.

We will continue to work on a world-class, integrated petrochemical hub, drawing on the raw materials from the oil sands and adding value before they reach our markets, not afterward. The bitumen royalty in kind policy will accelerate this effort to promote new upgrading opportunities in Alberta.

A Clean Energy Future

Albertans value our province's environment. To protect our eastern slopes and boreal forest, we will continue to fight the mountain pine beetle.

Alberta's oil sands are the focus of a great deal of world attention. Your government recognizes that customers of our energy are looking for a better understanding of our environmental values and improvements in our environmental management. This is what Albertans want, too. We take great pride in our environment, and we are committed to ensuring that the right policies are in place to address the challenges of being a global energy provider.

Alberta's energy industry has met and exceeded every challenge to limit the impact of oil sands extraction and return the land to a natural state. Our history of technological breakthroughs and engineering excellence will go even further in the future toward shrinking our environmental footprint.

Around the world the drive toward cleaner energy is a fact of our times and a welcome one. The Alberta government and Alberta business leaders have chosen to lead by example in developing the cleaner fuels and clean energy know-how our customers are seeking.

As a result of the international agreement in Copenhagen we will work with the federal government to reach a thoughtful, continental approach to controlling greenhouse gas emissions, one that spurs Alberta-based investment in new technologies and the next generation economy.

While we must develop new opportunities to participate in markets like China and India, our economy will be seriously harmed if access to the U.S. energy market is impaired. Alberta fought hard for free trade, which has proven a boon for our people. We cannot lose those hard-fought advantages. We must secure access to the emerging clean energy market south of the border.

To be competitive in the new global marketplace, we must take a hard look at our own backyard. Albertans value a clean and sustainable environment, but that is not always the perception beyond our borders. Your government will continue to promote Alberta and the amazing technological advances our industries have made in environmental management such as their work on carbon capture and storage, and we will act to improve environmental performance in the oil sands. We will continue to invest in research and technology solutions to the significant environmental challenges posed by oil sands development, including the eventual elimination of tailings ponds.

Energy conservation and renewable sources of energy will become popular economic choices for consumers in the 21st century. Our province has what it takes to succeed in this economic environment, the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve.

These qualities were illustrated recently when 110 Albertans participated in the Solar Decathlon, an international competition hosted by the United States Department of Energy, in which 20 selected teams of university and college students from around the globe competed to design, build, and operate the most attractive, practical, and energy efficient solar-powered home. Team Alberta's home reflected not only the natural landscape of our province but also our values: innovation, excellence in education, and the willingness to meet the energy challenges our world faces head-on. I should mention that Team Alberta placed sixth against the best in the world, an outstanding achievement for its first time in this competition. I should say that project manager Mark Blackwell and representatives of his team are with us today. I would ask that Mark and his fellow solar decathletes rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

Alberta's Place in Canada

Albertans have always been committed Canadians. Our province's economic success has provided benefits across the country, and our economic renewal will be an essential part of the nation's economic recovery.

Albertans are proud contributors to the well-being of our country, and we have a right to be treated fairly under universal federal programs like health care or unemployment insurance. If a person is sick or out of work, the challenge to that family is no less difficult in Alberta than in any other province. Whenever Alberta receives less than other provinces for basic transfers, your government will work with the federal government to provide options to address that fiscal imbalance and close the gap. Equality is a matter of principle and basic fairness, the very hallmark of our nation.

A strong economic recovery requires an Alberta that is constantly striving to be better, stronger, and smarter. We will use expert advice from the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy to set a path to a secure and prosperous future for Albertans.

We will proudly share Alberta's story at the Olympics and elsewhere on the global stage to make the world more aware of our unique talents, products, and capabilities.

We will be a leader in clean energy production.

We will help the forestry and agricultural sectors adapt to new market realities and seize new opportunities.

We will continue to build world-class universities of the 21st century.

We will foster a competitive and innovative economy.

And we will build public services and transportation systems that unite our communities in commerce and culture.

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

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen. [Standing ovation]

Thank you for that great farewell.

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, please remain standing.

Your Honour, on behalf of all of the people here and on behalf of all of the citizens of Alberta thank you so much for being Alberta's Lieutenant Governor, and thank you as well for sharing your very delightful and gracious partner, Mrs. Kwong, with the people of Alberta. [Standing ovation]

I would now like to call on Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of *God Save The Queen*.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

Tablings

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

Introduction of Bills

Bill 1

Alberta Competitiveness Act

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act.

The world-wide recession has highlighted the fact that we're living in a truly global marketplace. One economy can greatly influence another. That is why we need to look at the world as being one economy, one in which Alberta is determined to be a leader. To do this, we need to make sure that we are as competitive as possible.

Our government is committed to creating the conditions that will attract new businesses, innovators, and the next generation of entrepreneurs to our province. That's what Bill 1 is all about. If passed, the Alberta Competitiveness Act will increase collaboration among government, industry, business, and Albertans to enhance Alberta's competitiveness. This is the best assurance of sustainable prosperity and a high quality of life for Albertans for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Motions

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I move that the speech from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration the week of February 8, 2010.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly stand adjourned until Monday, February 8, 2010, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:47 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to February 04, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Blakeman
Campbell
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Rogers

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
Campbell
DeLong
Denis
Johnston
Kang
MacDonald

Standing Committee on Community Services

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Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer
Vacant

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle
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Leskiw
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Rogers
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VanderBurg
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
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Bhardwaj Quest
Boutilier Rodney
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Forsyth

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
Amery Mitzel
Berger Notley
Calahasen Oberle
DeLong Pastoor
Doerksen Redford
Forsyth Rogers
Johnson Sherman
Leskiw Taylor
Liepert Zwozdesky
McFarland

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Quest
Benito Johnson
Bhardwaj Kang
Chase Mason
Dallas Olson
Denis Sandhu
Drysdale Vandermeer
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Jacobs

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, February 8, 2010

Issue 2

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, February 8, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back.

I'd ask members to remain standing after the prayers so that we may pay tribute to former colleagues who have passed away.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Hon. members, there are three memorials today, unfortunately.

Mr. Ronald Armor Moore July 28, 1925, to January 9, 2010

The Speaker: On January 9, 2010, Mr. Ronald Armor Moore, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 555, passed away. Mr. Moore was first elected in the election held November 2, 1982, and served until May 18, 1993. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Lacombe for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Ron Moore served on several committees: Select Committee on Workers' Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act; Select Special Committee on Upper House Reform; Select Standing Committee on Law and Regulations; Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts; Select Standing Committee on Public Affairs; Select Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act; and the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

Mr. Harry Elliott Alger April 8, 1924, to January 27, 2010

The Speaker: Mr. Harry Elliott Alger, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 547, passed away on January 27, 2010, at the age of 85 years. Mr. Alger was first elected in the election held November 2, 1982, and served two terms, until March 20, 1989. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Highwood for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Harry Alger served on the standing committees on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, Private Bills, Public Affairs, Law and Regulations, Public Accounts, and the Select Special Committee on Upper House Reform.

Mr. William (Bill) John Yurko February 11, 1926, to January 28, 2010

The Speaker: Mr. William (Bill) John Yurko, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 440, passed away January 28, 2010, at the age of 83 years. Mr. Yurko was first elected in the by-election held February 10, 1969, and served until April 24, 1978, at which time he resigned to seek the nomination in a federal constituency. During his years of service he represented the constituencies of Strathcona-East and Edmonton-Gold Bar for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Bill Yurko served as Minister of Housing and Public Works and Minister of the Environment. As a private member he served on the standing committees on Private Bills, Standing Orders and Printing; Public Accounts; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; Public Affairs; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Law, Law Amendments and Regulations; Law and Regulations; and Automobile Insurance.

Mr. Yurko was elected to the Canadian House of Commons for the constituency of Edmonton East May 22, 1979, and was re-elected on February 18, 1980. His term ended September 4, 1984. He was a recipient of the 2002 Michael Luchkovich award for outstanding public service by a parliamentarian of Ukrainian origin.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of these families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I would ask you to remember hon. members Ronald Armor Moore, Harry Alger, and Bill Yurko as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I'd invite all present to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 32 visitors from Annunciation school. Now, we have a group of grade 6 students, some of the best and brightest in our constituency and in our province, accompanied by Mrs. Kathleen Korner, Miss Christine Melnyk, Mrs. Linda Girard. These are young people who want to grow up to be teachers, veterinarians, hockey players, pediatricians, and I'm hoping that after they enjoy their day today, some of them will want to serve the public and join us here in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, they had an unfortunate fire last summer at Annunciation school, so they had the privilege of being in a makeshift school in trailers. Lo and behold, their school has been renovated and reopened, and it's better than new. I'd like to congratulate these young folks for joining us. I'd like all members to give them a round of applause, and I'd ask the young people to rise and receive their warm applause.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I introduce to you and through you a group of grade 6 students from Meyonohk elementary school from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. These students are participating in the School at the Legislature program this week. I had the privilege of meeting them this afternoon in the rotunda. I would ask all the students and teachers Mrs. Sylvester and Miss Peterson to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Terry Alston. Terry has served as a member of

the board for the Association of Alberta Registry Agents for the past two years and was recently elected as the new incoming president of the association. Terry is also the vice-president and managing director of Crowfoot Plates Registry Inc. He's a very positive individual with a great enthusiasm for all the registry offices across Alberta. I now would like to ask Terry to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Blaine Maller, who is seated in the public gallery. Mr. Maller has been a great supporter of mine. I look forward to working closely with him as my political adviser and, I think more importantly, a friend. I'd ask Mr. Maller to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the audience our vice-president of policy for the Wildrose Alliance Party. I'd ask that John Hilton-O'Brien rise to receive the warm welcome of this audience.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Leduc Recreation Centre

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to share with the House a success story in my riding that helps my constituents lead healthier and more active lives. The Leduc Recreation Centre, constructed with nearly \$5 million in grants from this provincial government, had its grand opening in November, which was attended by the hon. Premier and my colleague the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. It features an NHL-sized performance arena with seating for 1,800, home to the Black Gold Rodeo, and twin NHL-sized arenas, which have hosted NHL team practices and the Canadian Olympic women's hockey team. It is the only sledge hockey compatible facility in Western Canada. It serves as the official practice facility for the Edmonton Rush lacrosse team. The LRC's two indoor field houses are used for soccer, lacrosse, volleyball, badminton, basketball, and banquets.

It also features a modern aquatic centre serving from babies to seniors. The eight-sheet curling complex, with reputedly the best ice in Western Canada, served as the year-long training facility for the Chinese women's Olympic team. It has a fully equipped fitness centre, four-lane walking and running track, and a youth/education centre containing a school space and the Boys and Girls Club of Leduc. The facility is completely barrier free and has been nominated, Mr. Speaker, by the Canadian Paraplegic Association for the Percy Wickman accessibility award. It is also environmentally friendly, utilizing recycled heat and low-use water fixtures.

Mr. Speaker, this facility is a tremendous example of a great partnership between the provincial government, Leduc city and county, and the private sector and was built on time and under budget by a tremendous Alberta construction success story, PCL. I commend everyone involved in bringing this great jewel of a recreation facility to completion for the benefit of the citizens in my constituency and the surrounding areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Minister's Advisory Committee on Health

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On January 20 the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health delivered its report to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. It was my honour to serve as co-chair of this distinguished group. Entitled A Foundation for Alberta's Health System, our report proposes a new legislative framework that puts patients and families first.

Mr. Speaker, throughout our deliberations Albertans told us they want three things: clarity about what Albertans can expect from their publicly funded health system, assurance that Alberta will continue to abide by the principles of the Canada Health Act and then go further to reflect made-in-Alberta principles, and most importantly the ongoing engagement of Albertans in meaningful dialogue about new legislation and policies that affect them. Recommendations include establishing a set of overarching principles created by Albertans and embodied in a new Alberta health act, a new mechanism to support evidence-based decision-making, and provision for a future patient charter to clarify what Albertans can and should expect from their health system.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the over 1,700 Albertans who contributed to our work through an online survey, the committee met with 39 key stakeholders and received 34 detailed submissions from all sectors, including health regulatory bodies, academic faculties, and advocacy and labour organizations from across the province. We were delighted with the minister's recent announcement that the government has accepted all four recommendations, beginning with the tabling of the Alberta health act this fall. In doing so, this government has confirmed that publicly funded health care is and always will be a treasured public good in Alberta, one that will continue to be supported and improved upon through a promise to involve Albertans in the decisions about the future of their system. Delivering on that promise begins very shortly when we begin a province-wide dialogue on the committee's recommendations.

On behalf of the House, Mr. Speaker, thank you to co-chair Deborah Prowse and the other members of the committee for this tremendous contribution.

Thank you.

Optimist Club

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I believe that healthy optimism for the future is one of the characteristics that defines Albertans, and I try to live my life as an unrepentant optimist in the great Alberta tradition. But optimism alone can't move a province forward to a better tomorrow. If I am an optimist, it's because I see the amazing work that Albertans are doing every day to help their neighbours lead better lives.

That certainly applies to the members of the Optimist Club, a wonderful organization that I was pleased to visit this past Saturday morning at the Blackfoot Inn in Calgary. I was honoured to bring greetings on behalf of this House to the club's quarterly conference.

For those unfamiliar with the Optimist Club, it is a volunteer-based, nonprofit service club that enhances youth activities in the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan and the state of Montana. This venerable organization was founded way back in 1938. They've been doing good work for over 70 years. For example, the Optimists created Optimist park in southwest Calgary and a green space up here in Edmonton.

They have sponsored workshops for teens, giving pointers on important life skills for young people; they've conducted essay and speech contests for young people; they've held annual banquets

recognizing contributions of teens who have made a difference in the community; and they also have provided bursaries for students continuing their education. The club also funds the Alberta juvenile curling regional playdowns and provincial championships. The club is also involved in activities promoting musical education and youth activities in many schools.

I was very impressed by the dedication and commitment of the fine folks of the Optimist Club. They're really living the Optimist creed, which includes the following line: "be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble." In word and in deed the members of the Optimist Club give youth and all Albertans cause for optimism. On behalf of the Official Opposition and, indeed, all members of this House I want to publicly congratulate them on their hard work and efforts.

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

Raymond Student Achievements

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to rise today and recognize a group of extraordinary students in my constituency. Inside and outside the classroom the students of Raymond junior and senior high schools demonstrate what creativity, dedication, and hard work can accomplish. On November 21, 2009, the Raymond Comets defeated the Bev Facey Falcons 19-2 to win their second consecutive tier 1 football championship; 2009 was also an incredible year for Raymond Comets basketball, with both the girls' and boys' teams winning the provincial 4A championships in Red Deer. In rugby coach Dan Bickman led the Comets to victory over the LCI Clippers to win the tier 1 high school girls rugby championships. In calf roping Clay Barnson was a provincial high school champion in 2008-2009.

These students also demonstrated that they are just as determined to win inside the classroom as they are on the field or basketball court. They exceeded the provincial average for those eligible to receive Rutherford academic scholarships and the participation rate of students writing four or more diploma exams. They can also be proud of their outstanding fine arts program, including show choir and band.

Mr. Speaker, these exceptional students and their teachers give me great faith in the future of our province. I would ask all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating them for their accomplishments, and best wishes for future success.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to acknowledge and celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Alberta initiative for school improvement, or AISI. Formed in 1999 by the government and several education partners, the mandate of AISI was to encourage awareness and involvement in continuous improvement for teaching and learning. Alberta teachers have always looked for ways to improve student learning, but AISI formalized a process so students across the province could benefit from the successes that were happening locally. It's the grassroots focus that has really driven and built momentum in AISI. The projects Alberta schools are involved in are playing a pivotal role in developing new best practices that will be relevant to students today and into the future.

Over the years AISI has encouraged those serving in the education sector to ask thoughtful questions and explore new learning

approaches and methods to ensure our students have the best possible learning opportunities. Mr. Speaker, it's an influential program that is strengthening the foundation of innovation, which is the heart of our province's education system. To date AISI has inspired over 1,700 projects, that have been filled with innovation, creativity, and a true desire to improve student learning and teaching.

Teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and students have gathered in Edmonton to celebrate AISI's 10th anniversary at the annual AISI conference. The conference is showcasing over 60 creative projects developed by school jurisdictions across the province. It's a wonderful forum for education stakeholders to share ideas, learn from one another, and be inspired to achieve even more for students in Alberta.

I'd like to personally thank all of those involved in the AISI projects for their passion and contributions to the students of our great province. Congratulations for a very successful 10 years of AISI. This is an important milestone, one which all Albertans should be extremely proud of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Clerk sets in motion the daily question period, let me just say that at the conclusion of the Routine today I will be making a statement with respect to question period rotation. Today's rotation will be that outlined in my memo to all members dated February 1, 2010.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Budget Process

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta doesn't need a new committee to maintain its competitive advantage. It needs a new government, a government that has the ability to make things better, a government that has a stable budgeting process, which has a long-term vision for the province, a government that is not devastated when oil and gas prices decline. To the Premier: how is the Premier changing the budgeting process to prevent the need for further cuts in the future?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, over the summer our minister of health will be consulting with Albertans about health care because it is Albertans' number one priority. The minister of finance will be delivering a budget tomorrow, which will roll out the details of a funding commitment to the Alberta Health Services Board.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government may have pieced together a budget for this year, but what about next year? What about 10 years from now? What is the long-term plan to establish a stable economic future for our province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition will have to wait until tomorrow for all of the budget details, but I'm sure that once he hears the budget coming from the minister, he'll be pleased with the commitment. As I said before, it will give predictable funding for Alberta Health Services Board. I just ask that we wait for tomorrow's budget.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hollow bill put forward by the Premier is a weak move to give the appearance of action. Albertans need certainty, not vague gestures. When will the Premier take real action toward ensuring Alberta's long-term competitiveness?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, competitiveness is very important. Just watching the very large global economic shifts and countries competing for people, competing for investment, we have to make sure that we position this province to be competitive in all areas – that's not just oil and gas but agriculture and forestry and tourism – and make sure that we're in a position to attract continuing investment that drives, of course, the revenue that pays for all of the social programs that we enjoy.

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

Health Care Public Consultation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's response to problems shows they are disconnected from what Albertans say and need. Albertans say we need family doctors; government says we need to restructure. Albertans say we need more public long-term care; government says we need to strike a committee. Albertans say we need to improve emergency wait times; government says we need new legislation. To the Premier: when Albertans need action and solutions, what is the Premier's reason for waiting six months to hear back from another committee?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, consulting with Albertans about health care is important. It's important particularly now as we start to define exactly what Albertans want from the system. Part of that, as I said before, is long-term, predictable funding. There are other ideas that will come forward from the public that the minister will then put into an Alberta health care act that will be presented to this House later this fall, and we'll be able to deal with Albertans' number one priority, which is health.

Dr. Swann: Well, what is very clear, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has no idea where they're going on health care. What Albertans have told us they need is more public long-term care, not expensive, privately run designated assisted living. Will the Premier commit to creating more publicly funded, publicly delivered long-term care beds?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. member will be very pleased later next week and the early part of the following week as more announcements will be made on further capital projects for continuing care in this province. We know that we have to build at least 775, 800 new continuing care beds, and we will meet that commitment. In fact, I feel very confident that we will exceed that commitment. That is one way, again, of dealing with the number one priority of Albertans, and that is good quality publicly funded health care.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What Albertans need right now from their government is a plan and real action to ensure that every Albertan has a family doctor. How will looking at legislation for six months help Albertans to get a family doctor?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, long-term, predictable funding to Alberta Health Services goes a long way in providing predictability in the system. Once again, unfortunately, I can't give the details. The details will be in tomorrow's budget, as presented by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

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

Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To get out of the recession, we need to get business going again. We need to get the oil and gas business going again, but oil and gas companies aren't going to start investing in long-term resources until there's some certainty over royalties. Albertans and the industry have been promised a competitiveness review that has been delayed and delayed and delayed and delayed again. To the Minister of Energy: what is the minister waiting for? Why don't you release the competitiveness review?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to see this opposition finally recognize that oil and gas is a significant driver of the economy in this province. Unlike the Liberal oil and gas policy that was released a couple of weeks ago, what we want to do is ensure that we have good interaction with industry that is continuing. Because this is more than just royalties – this is a competitiveness review – industry has said: take the time you need to do it, but do it right.

Mr. Taylor: Uh-huh; do it right. The former health minister now in charge of doing it right in Energy.

By delaying the release of this report, Mr. Speaker, does the minister see that he is doing Alberta's core industry no favours whatsoever?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no delay. What we've been doing is working with industry to ensure that all of the issues related to a changed environment in the world are addressed, and we will do that in due course.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I'm assuming here that the competitiveness review of the oil and gas industry is already sitting on the minister's desk. I can't imagine where it is if it's not. So why is it that Bill 1, which will lead to yet another committee to review competitiveness, is needed? I mean, how many times do you have to review the review the review the review?

Mr. Liepert: Well, just to correct the member, it is not sitting on my desk. The consultation, as I said, is continuing with industry, and that is happening as we speak. I'm sure we'll have plenty of opportunity to debate Bill 1 during second reading and committee. Bill 1 is much broader than just the oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier just alluded, Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is to ensure that across all sectors of the economy in this province we are competitive.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Royalty Framework

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government's new royalty framework has been the most damaging attack economically on Alberta since Pierre Trudeau's national energy program. Although the world economic downturn has not helped, the evidence

is irrefutable that thousands and thousands of Albertans have lost their jobs, hundreds their businesses, and our reputation as an attractive and stable place to do business has been severely compromised. To the Premier: will he apologize to the thousands of Albertans whose lives and prosperity have been harmed due to his government's disastrous energy policy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that all sectors of the economy are important to this province given the current economic downturn and especially the unpredictable drops in oil and natural gas prices. Especially as a result of the American market diminishing as quickly, it has created issues. That's why we introduced the drilling incentive program, to increase the drilling in the province of Alberta. We've also met with the oil and gas industry over the last number of months to ensure that we can find other ways of promoting more jobs in the industry across Alberta.

2:00

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this Premier knows very well that industry, the hon. members for Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Fish Creek, myself, and many of his own backbench MLAs continually warned him of the harm this proposed royalty change would have on the economy before the new royalty framework was ever even introduced or implemented. To the Premier: why didn't he show true leadership by heeding the warnings of those who obviously understood the complexities of the energy sector far better than he did on this issue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I don't have any backbenchers. They're government members. I actually find that term quite offensive.

Going on to the issue of the oil and gas industry, the framework was structured in such a way that it would, obviously, reward risk, but it would also share the responsibility of partnership, low prices and higher prices. Over the last number of months we've seen incredibly low prices in the natural gas industry, and that has been reflected in lower royalties paid at these prices. There is work to do at higher prices when and if we return to those, and that is part of the overall competitiveness review that's taking place at the moment.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, what's offensive is the thousands of jobs that have been lost to Albertans over the last year.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are confused as to why this government would meddle with the economic engine of Alberta and Canada without doing a thorough competitiveness review before developing the new royalty framework rather than doing it after the damage has already been done. To the Premier: would it not have made more sense to conduct a proper competitiveness review prior to overhauling the royalties? Why is he doing this backwards?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the world-wide economic recession has taught all of us is that there is a huge global economic shift, number one, and, number two, that all countries are competing for investment and for people. It's a different world stage, and we must react to what has happened over the last 18 months. Our number one partner in trade was, of course, the United States, and we've seen that economy diminish somewhat, so we have to aggressively pursue new markets around the world. That means we have to diversify our markets to ensure that we keep growing the Alberta economy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Provincial RCMP Services

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reducing crime is a high priority for Albertans, including those outside large cities. Crime in small communities does not seem to get the same attention as in large urban centres. Residents of these areas want to know what is being done to promote and enhance their safety. Most of these communities, including my constituency, are served very well, I might add, by the RCMP. My question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is the future role of the RCMP in Alberta after 2012?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is essentially asking me for a vision of policing in Alberta post-2012, so let me share that with him and with this House. We will provide policing through a spectrum of resources: community police officers, sheriffs, municipal police forces, First Nations police, and the RCMP functioning at the municipal and at the provincial level. Those forces will be sharing information, collaborating, and bringing unique strengths. We will be working together to make our highways and our communities safe and secure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is for the same minister. It has been suggested that it would be more cost-effective and a better use of taxpayer dollars to move towards Alberta having its own provincial police force. Are you looking at this option, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Oberle: The short answer is no. It may be true that it is less expensive to deploy a sheriff, but that ignores the fact that the sheriffs and RCMP officers have different responsibilities, different levels of training, different overhead costs. It also ignores the fact that we would have significant infrastructure and start-up costs, and it also ignores the fact that we get 30 per cent funding from the federal government for our RCMP forces in our province. No, we are not considering provincial police, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, Mr. Minister, thank you for that answer. My final supplemental, then, is: if the province is committed to continuing the relationship with the RCMP, Albertans want to know what the RCMP is bringing to the table to support the province's efforts to combat gang crime.

Mr. Oberle: They will be bringing what they have already been bringing and more of it. They'll be bringing expertise, training, equipment, special teams, all of which will be deployed in concert with and co-operation with other police forces in our province. We're working together for safe communities, Mr. Speaker, and will continue to do that.

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

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since December of last year the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports has left disabled Albertans, families, and PDD service providers wondering what is

the future of their supports. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: how is the minister protecting vulnerable Albertans when for the last three months everyone involved in PDD services doesn't have a clue of what's happening?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make it very clear. The people who receive supports from our persons with developmental disabilities programs are a priority for this government. The Premier has said it over and over again, and we will maintain that they are a priority. We have a budget of approximately \$600 million that we are spending for 9,200 individuals. We're working through our boards and through our stakeholders to ensure that the supports and services that are vital and necessary to people in this program are provided.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. A minister communicating the decisions that they make is the honesty that Albertans expect, and they absolutely deserve it. Why did the minister not inform the public of these cuts through a press release showing how much was to be taken from PDD service providers?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, requiring the savings that we needed in the PDD program is an operational exercise. It's something that we're doing all the time. It's something that our PDD regional community boards perform. We do expect them to communicate with families and with the stakeholders. That's their job, and that's what, I understand, they have been doing.

Ms Pastoor: I'm not sure that that's exactly how they feel, but thank you for that. Will the minister commit right now to maintaining the funding for all individuals and agencies supported by PDD?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once again I'll make it very clear. This is a very important program to this government and to the people of Alberta. The funding that we provide, around \$600 million, is what we use to ensure that the services and supports that our PDD clients receive stay in place, and there will be no removal of any vital services to our PDD clients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has announced that the minimum wage will not increase this year even though average weekly earning appears to be increasing. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is this government re-examining a policy that has only been in place for two years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is this government's and my ministry's priority to keep Albertans employed. There are about 20,000 Albertans right now who are earning minimum or close to minimum wage, and these individuals are in a very fragile position. Where the economy slows down, they are the most vulnerable and most likely to be laid off. It is my ministry's position that we want to develop a policy on setting minimum wages

that takes away that fear of losing a job and keeps our employers who employ these minimum wage earners at a stable position.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some provinces, like Newfoundland and Labrador, announced significant increases to their minimum wages this year to assist in economic recovery. Why are we doing the opposite?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can't comment on what my counterparts do in other provinces, but I can tell you that I will do what is best for Albertans. In Alberta in our current economy I will always take jobs before wage increases. At this point in time I want to make sure that the minimum wage is fair but also supportive of employment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: when can small businesses and those who earn the minimum wage expect a decision from government in order to plan ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very soon I will be asking a committee to review minimum wages in this province. [interjections] The opposition would like to think that one size fits all and that this minister should be making those decisions. Since they are so vocal, I would really like to engage them in some capacity as an all-party committee and decide what is the right minimum wage for low-income Albertans and how it should be set from year to year so they don't have to be sitting there every year and screaming about the same thing.

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

2:10 Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week we had another tragic situation come to light, drawing further attention to the ongoing problems in the Alberta children's services system. The minister's response: call for the latest in a series of internal reviews, which have more to do with the protection of the ministry than with the protection of the child. Unfortunately, simply changing ministers is not going to change the underlying issues in the children's services system. To the minister. We and many Albertans have called for greater transparency for the Child and Youth Advocate. When will the minister require the advocate to report directly to the Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we did have a very terrible situation last week that the member has referred to, and yes, I did call for a review. There is an initial review that's done by a CEO when an incident comes to their attention, and then there is a case review that's done months later after a police investigation.

This review is completely different. It's going to fill in that gap, and I hope to have answers to that here by the end of February.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The government's theme song, Mr. Speaker, is: we are reviewing the situation. By removing the hiring freeze and committing to sustainable funding, the minister could address the overwhelming workloads and insufficient supports that front-line staff face. When will the minister take this step?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have had a need for front-line staff. I can tell you very clearly that the children and family service authorities, when they do identify the front-line staff that are needed in the different authorities – we've approved 51 staff within the last few months. We will continue to do that as each of the needs arises. We know how critical those positions are.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. With up to 700 vacancies in Children and Youth Services to be filled, there is a lot of hiring to go on. What assurances can the minister provide that the American-borrowed outcome-based service delivery system is designed to serve the best interests of our children and youth as opposed to saving dollars at their expense?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I think that you're going to hear more in the Assembly here in the future about outcome-based service reviews. I can tell you that what the children and family service authorities are doing right now in looking at that outcome-based service is that they'll be bringing that back through the ministry, and I will then bring that on forward to you, hon. member.

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

PDD Funding

(continued)

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have met with many constituents about budget adjustments made to the PDD program. My constituents are expressing great concern about the removal of vital services and supports that are provided to those with the greatest needs among us. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: can she assure me and all Albertans that the reductions to PDD won't impact the health and safety of the vulnerable people this program serves.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, let me make this perfectly clear: there has been no removal of vital services and supports to individuals supported by PDD, and no one has been put at risk. I have made it clear to the PDD community boards that if there is a health and safety concern, they are to discuss this with the agencies and the families and find a solution immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: is the ministry still looking to find money from the PDD program?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to inform the hon. member that we have completed what we set out to accomplish, and

we have found the money that we needed through administrative efficiencies and savings. As you can appreciate, this was a very challenging task. It was very complex and very time consuming. I am pleased to say that by working with the boards and the stakeholders, we were able to find the funds with very little impact to our clients. This was a collaborative approach, and I do want to thank the people involved in working with our department to find those savings.

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

Water Allocation Management System

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Water is a critical issue for Albertans. Alberta has limited water resources, antiquated allocation, and an unfair water market process, which the government is stubbornly sticking to. The cost of this is that municipalities are being denied water for their citizens to drink. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Is this the best the government can do with a water policy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope not. I think I've made it pretty clear that the government is about to embark on a very broadly based review and update of the water allocation policy. I have spoken around the province talking about the need for us to update our water allocation policy, and we're committed to doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of Environment. Now, recently the municipality of Crowsnest Pass was denied their appeal on a water licence, and Okotoks is reaching their designated allocation. Why does this government persist in upholding its first-in-time, first-in-right approach when people's water needs are coming second?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I guess I have to remind this member yet one more time that there's only so much water to go around. You can't just issue a licence when water doesn't exist. That's what this process is all about. This is a process about respecting the historical rights of long-standing licence holders and at the same time allowing for the inclusion of new population bases in an expanding and growing economy.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Minister, that's unacceptable. People's drinking water should come first.

This minister has said again and again that a new water policy is coming this spring, but I listened carefully, and there's absolutely no mention of it in the throne speech. How long do municipalities which are junior licence holders along with industry and any Albertans who want a clean glass of water to drink have to wait?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's the most ridiculous statement I have ever heard in this House. The fact of the matter is that Albertans are not waiting for a clean glass of water. There is not one municipality in this province that doesn't have an allocation of water that serves their needs. We're talking about the future. We're not talking about today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Fiscal Accountability

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've all seen this movie before: careless spending, a lack of clear priorities, reckless tax cuts for the most wealthy, followed by a drop in oil and gas prices, a burgeoning deficit, and then large cuts to the services needed by ordinary Alberta families. It was a bad horror movie then, and so is the sequel. How many times will this Premier and this PC government put Albertans through this painful cycle? How did you, Mr. Premier, let this happen again?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, a revisionist point of history there, but I'll perhaps allow the minister of finance to address the question.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I really think the leader of the third party should pursue a new career as a fortune teller because he seems to be able to preordain what the budget will be tomorrow. If he has those kind of powers, he should really be in another line of business.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You learn an awful lot by reading the minister's clips.

Albertans are still feeling the effects of cuts made in the '90s. Now we're on the brink of repeating the same mistakes. My question is to the Premier. Why didn't you take the necessary steps to ensure that Albertans never again had to endure massive cuts to the services they and their families depend on?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would hazard a guess that \$17 billion worth of savings, \$25 billion worth of expenditure on infrastructure, paying down all of the debt, putting us in the best financial situation of any jurisdiction in North America is probably doing that. But I think the hon. member might just want to wait and see what the budget has to bring.

Mr. Mason: So much fun we're going to do it again.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been a member of this government since the mid-1990s. Will he admit that he and his government have failed to learn from their mistakes and caused suffering on a massive scale as a result?

Mr. Horner: I will answer on behalf of my colleagues here that, really, when you look at what Alberta has today, we have the best financial situation of any jurisdiction in Canada, perhaps in North America. We have the best health system, I believe, of anywhere else in North America. We have the best postsecondary institutions in North America, possibly on the globe. We have the best K to 12 system in Canada, bar none, Mr. Speaker, and we have an economy that is the lifeblood – the lifeblood – of this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:20

Northland School Division

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Paternalistic," "heavy-handed" are words I have heard used to describe the Minister of Education's actions in firing the corporate board of the Northland school division. Many of my constituents have children who attend schools run by the Northland school board, and they're worried and hurt and concerned about the future of their children's education and

their fundamental right to elect local school board trustees. My question is to the Minister of Education. Since 95 per cent of students who attend Northland schools are First Nation and/or Métis peoples, did you even bother to consult with or speak to First Nation and Métis leaders before firing a democratically elected board?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, I took the opportunity to speak with the grand chiefs of Treaty 8 and Treaty 6 as well as the president of the Métis Settlements General Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta. We also contacted the members of the partnership council, which we've set up with First Nations and Métis in the province. I can tell you that I've had a lot of very positive feedback from right across the north with respect to the steps that we've taken. It's not about firing the board. The board are people who were elected and who serve on their local councils and do good work. It's about what we need to do for the children.

Ms Calahasen: A majority of the Northland school division is in my constituency. My constituents understand that change was needed and that Northland did have challenges, so why did the minister use a hammer to address the problem rather than using a scalpel when it was required? When you do this, the people feel disenfranchised by your actions, and they feel oppressed and silenced. Now that you're running the Northland school board from downtown Edmonton, what's going to happen to the locally elected school committees?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it should be very clear that we're not running Northland from downtown Edmonton. In fact, the superintendent of schools is still in place, operating out of Peace River as per normal. The official trustee will be operating out of the headquarters in Peace River, and the inquiry team will be visiting each and every one of the 23 communities involved.

The locally elected boards are still there. No one was fired. We dissolved the corporate board and replaced it with an official trustee. Northland trustees are elected to their local school boards for each of the 23 schools, and they are there as elected representatives and remain there as elected representatives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are also very concerned about another item, as all Albertans should be, that the dismissal of the Northland corporate board is an omen of further provincial incursions into the jurisdiction of locally elected authorities. Northland was just an easy first target and a convenient testing ground. Is this not a sign that you're going to be getting rid of locally elected school boards? Who's next, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to be perfectly clear. This question has come up since the start of the Inspiring Education process. We have absolutely no interest or intent or plan to do away with school boards. School boards are a necessary connection between the education system and communities. It's absolutely essential that communities and parents be involved in education, and their connection to the system is through their schools and through the school boards. So that's absolutely necessary.

We needed to move in this particular instance to protect the best interests of the children, to make sure that we could make the change that was necessary, not on a slow or incremental basis but immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

School Closures

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2002 15 public schools in the Edmonton public school division have been closed, resulting in 6,900 student spaces disappearing from central Edmonton neighbourhoods. My first question is to the Premier. Given that Alberta Education and the government project that we are going to have 80,000 more students in the system in the next 15 years than we presently have, does the government not think that these school spaces that are closed and the proposed plans to close additional ones will be counter to the government's strategic plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are moving as fast as we can to build spaces for students where the students are. That obviously has implications for spaces where there are not student populations, and school boards have the obligation to rationalize their student spaces in the best interests of educational opportunities for their students. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the Edmonton public school board has one of the best examples of this with the city centre school project where, indeed, they had to close some student spaces a number of years ago, but they created better opportunities for the students in that area, better educational opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that McCauley school in downtown Edmonton is proposed for closure, how will that community and the students that live in that community be better served if that public school is closed forever?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the last series of questions I was answering why it's so necessary to have local boards to deal with the issues of local communities, and now I'm being asked about doing the local board's job. It is the school boards' job to make sure that the facilities that they have in place and the teachers that they have in place and the opportunities they have in place make the best possible educational opportunities for the students that they serve.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Education this time. Surely he knows that he calls the shots with the public boards. If he didn't, he would give them the right to increase their mill rate if they saw fit to make a flexible budget for themselves. Now, given that – and this is a direct quote from Alberta's 20-year strategic plan – the plan is “to maintain and improve existing schools to ensure they can deliver top quality education for Alberta students,” then why are you forcing Edmonton public to close another 5,000 student spaces in the central neighborhoods of this city? You're the political minister of this city, and you won't even defend it.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not forcing school boards, either Edmonton public or any other school boards, to close schools. We're not forcing them at all. They have the obligation and the duty to make sure that they have the best educational opportunity for students.

When the hon. member quotes the strategic capital plan, surely he must understand that when we're talking about renewing and improving physical space, obviously it's physical space that has

value because there are students available to use that space. It makes no sense at all to read that to suggest that we fix and improve schools where there are no students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Climate Change

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to media reports back home the Alberta delegation received more than its fair share of negative attention during the global climate change conference in Copenhagen in December. To the Minister of Environment: other than pointing fingers on the issue of growing global emissions, what was actually accomplished in Copenhagen?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, while there is no doubt that there certainly were some in Copenhagen that had an intent other than arriving at an agreement that would help us to address this issue of climate change, we had a number of objectives there. One was to engage in as many bilateral discussions as we possibly could, and I'm pleased to advise the House that we had a very positive response from the groups that we talked to when we told them about what we're doing here. At the end of the day we got an agreement that all nations signed on that gives us the flexibility we were looking for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Alberta is investing significant resources to combat climate change, be it in carbon capture and storage, regulations to reduce emissions, consumer rebates, or other programs. These investments are occurring in the wake of climategate, where the science behind climate change was suggested to be fabricated. How can the minister assure my constituents and all Albertans that this government's investments and actions on climate change are necessary?

Mr. Renner: Well, there's no denying that there is some controversy around some of the science, but the fact remains that the overwhelming evidence clearly indicates that climate change is real, that human-induced climate change is something that we need to address. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it's our responsibility as responsible resource suppliers to the world to ensure that we develop our resources in a responsible, low-carbon environment.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Despite the leadership that the minister suggests, the oil sands continue to be criticized for their environmental record both from within and outside of Canada. Just this past week the federal Minister of the Environment demanded further leadership from Alberta's oil sands industry. How does the minister respond to the latest tough talk about our resources, and how will he ensure Alberta's story is understood?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I share the concern that was raised by the federal minister. I, too, hear the same kinds of concerns raised. We have a target in northern Alberta. We have a responsibility to do two things. We have a responsibility to share information about the regulatory regime that's in place in Alberta – this is one of the most highly regulated industries anywhere in the world –

but we also have a responsibility to continue to push the envelope to continue to hold industry responsible to ensure that they improve their record.

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

Political Minister for Calgary

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's recent cabinet shuffle added a couple of new cabinet ministers and a new portfolio to the political lexicon, the political minister. I know I'm the Justice critic, and therefore I assume I'm the political minister critic; however, I'm not exactly sure exactly what a political minister does, so my question is simple. To the Minister of Justice, the Political Minister for Calgary: what exactly does your new job entail? It'll help me do my job.

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if my hon. friend knows what his job is. Maybe he should talk to his boss about that. I'll say that I do know what my job is, and my job, in discussions with my boss, the Premier, is to ensure that we have an approach as part of a team leading this government to make sure that all communities and all people in this province are represented and have their voices heard around the government cabinet table. We will continue to make sure that happens.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you for that answer, but it didn't help me too much, Mr. Speaker, so I'm going to try. I've been searching the websites and searching elsewhere for more clarification on this, and I couldn't find an order in council or anything I get that made you this. How did you get this job? What are your qualifications? Did you apply for the job? What, really, is this all about?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure quite what this has to do with government policy, but I'm not surprised that my hon. friend didn't actually get the answer the first time. I would say that I know that my job in this government and this caucus is to be an effective voice for the city that I represent and the constituency that I represent, and I'll continue to do that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that by adding the term "political" to a minister's title, it inevitably brings into question partisan politics, that in our system of government is supposed to be the purview of our respective political parties, not government departments. Accordingly, my question for the political minister is whether she is accountable to this Legislature or to the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, or at least the Calgary wing?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member just answered his own question, which is: if that's his view of my job, why is he asking questions in this House along those lines?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Integrated Traffic Units

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a frequent driver on our highways I can't help but notice the incredible number of drivers who seem to think our speed limits are a guideline. I've also driven by more collisions than I care to, and some of them are quite serious. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Safety. Can the minister explain what is being done to get bad drivers off the road?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this House and the province that speed limits are not guidelines, and I hope he wasn't referring to anybody within this House when he brought that up.

I'm pleased to announce today – I announced it at K Division just shortly – that the government of Alberta has chosen an integrated model with sheriffs and RCMP officers and will deploy 19 traffic safety enforcement divisions across the province. I'm confident that our integrated traffic units will help us reduce serious injuries and deaths on Alberta's roadways.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Isn't this just a reorganization of existing resources? How will integrated traffic units make our roads safer?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I suppose this could be cast as a redeployment, but it would be one to provide more efficient and more effective enforcement.

This comes about as the result of some traffic enforcement pilots that were conducted in the last year integrating RCMP and traffic sheriffs in four different models. We showed clearly that it improved traffic safety, improved the quality of traffic investigations and enforcement coverage, increased enforcement visibility on the highways, and made it easier to hand off Criminal Code investigations to the RCMP, including impaired driving investigations. It's also critical to note that this will provide at 19 different locations . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could you just explain how the 19 locations for these integrated traffic units were chosen?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it was necessary to concentrate resources in 19 locations in order to provide a critical amount to staff special operations such as checkpoints, vehicle safety checks, and those sorts of things. It was also necessary to disperse, to provide a presence across our province, and it's necessary to be visible. So this model is going to provide all of the above, and it was chosen by the officers themselves, not by the minister.

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

Fiscal Accountability (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Late last week the Premier issued new mandate letters to a shuffled cabinet, but one thing that seemed to be missing from these mandate letters was true accountability. The government of British Columbia announced that if the provincial budget was not balanced, then 10 per cent of the ministerial salary goes back to the taxpayers. My question is to the minister of finance. If the government of Alberta continues to run deficits, will the Premier and his cabinet demonstrate real leadership and real accountability and hold themselves personally and financially accountable?

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

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd remind the hon. member that we've already done that. She actually was a member of the party when that decision was made.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I'm not even going to answer that.

Mr. Speaker, last year the government pushed through a 35 per cent pay increase. Then the government turns to front-line agencies that help people with developmental disabilities and pressures them to break their contracts. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. How could she accept a 35 per cent pay increase but try to force some very lean service providers to accept another broken contract in December?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we were looking for some savings, and we work with our PDD community boards because the funding that we have is distributed through the community boards to our agencies, to our families, and to our clients. By working with our community boards and our agencies and our families, we were looking for ways to be efficient and to have some savings. At the same time there were no vital services cut to any of our PDD clients.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: That's not the case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans watch this government continue to break contracts and their word. It's hard to believe that this government could not find 1 per cent in their administrative budget to honour these signed PDD contracts. Will the minister show real leadership and find 1 per cent in her own administrative budget to protect PDD agencies?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, all PDD contracts were honoured. Only contracts that were agreed to were altered, and we have found the savings within administration and with the help of stakeholders, families, and service agencies.

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

Protection of Children in Care

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to charges of sexual abuse against a foster parent the new Minister of Children and Youth Services told the media that incidents of abuse in care are very unusual. The minister's own reports, however, show 79 confirmed instances of abuse against 150 children in care between January and June in 2009 alone. So my question to the minister: is it the minister's view that these numbers are business as usual, or do they confirm that the government's record in this area is unacceptable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that my comments were based around the situation that I learned of on Thursday morning, and I can tell you as well that that is very unusual, what I did learn in regard to this situation. I happen to agree with the staff that have brought that forward to me in the way that they explained the statistics. As I gather through this review further statistical data, I'll be able to look at it and ensure that we make changes if necessary following the review, based on this situation, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the children's advocate defended the government, saying that it's just one of those things and that the best

screening the system knows how to do is already in place, yet in November the government's own review acknowledged that serious failures exist in screening potential foster parents. So why won't the minister move the children's advocate to her communications branch, where he'd be better suited and apparently believes he already lives, and replace him with an independent advocate who's able to represent children without fear of repercussion?

2:40

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, honestly, to answer a question like that – to say that the children's advocate, who works on behalf of the advocacy of children that are vulnerable and need protection and ensure safety, should be over in a communications branch: that's so disrespectful.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be or may not be disrespectful, but it is indeed what the advocate said to the media this weekend. I was as shocked then, when I heard it, as you appear to be now.

Now, given recent charges of sexual abuse, 79 confirmed cases of abuse in care in six months, and internal reports saying screening is not up to speed, one would expect an advocate to sound the alarm, not defend the system as he did this weekend. So why won't the minister show leadership in her new post and finally join the rest of the country and do the right thing and make the children's advocate an independent officer of the Legislature?

Mrs. Fritz: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I did not agree with you about what you said about the advocate being in the communications branch of this department at all. I've read all the advocate reports back over the last five-year period, and I can tell you this: he speaks very strongly for children and youth that need protection and need their safety ensured. As I said before, it's just a disrespectful question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Eighteen members were recognized today. Of the 18, eight came from the Official Opposition, four came from the independents, six came from the government, and that was 106 questions and responses.

In 30 seconds from now we will continue with the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Provincial Wheelchair Curling Championship

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend four teams gathered in Edmonton for the 2010 Alberta provincial wheelchair curling championships, two teams from Edmonton and two teams from Calgary. At the end of the round robin, Calgary's number one team and Edmonton's number one team played for the gold medal and the right to represent Alberta at the nationals in Kelowna, B.C.

Calgary's team B consisted of Glen Brunelle, coach; Dale Keith, skip; Bruce Matthews, third; Ron Pawlyk, second; Wanda Pizzinato, lead; and Curtis Junor, alternate.

Edmonton's team B was Wanda Crawford, coach; Don Donaldson, skip; Doug MacEachern, third; Don Munroe, second; Bonna Gerlitz, lead; and Marie Laframboise, alternate.

The silver medal winners were Edmonton team A: David Jerke, coach; Cliff Nuspl, skip; Warren Fleury, third; Mike McMullan, second; Shawna Walsh, lead; and Romeo Johnson, alternate.

The 2010 gold medal winners were Calgary team A: Tony Zummack, coach; Jack Smart, skip; Anne Hibberd, third; Martin Purvis, second; and Calgary-Hays constituent Bridget Wilson, lead.

Congratulations to all the athletes involved. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the victims services branch status report for 2008-2009. More than \$7.4 million in grants was provided to 97 organizations, an increase of 36 per cent over the previous year's funding. These programs reported providing services to over 43,000 people. Sixty-two per cent of those cases involved assisting victims of violent crime. In 2008-2009 more than \$11.6 million in financial benefits were provided to eligible victims of crime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a report entitled A Foundation for Alberta's Health System, prepared by the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health and delivered to the minister in January 2010.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of the House a letter dated November 12, 2009, from the Capital Region Board to the chair of the Alberta Utilities Commission and to the former Minister of Energy, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. This letter is in regard to the heartland transmission project proposed by EPCOR and AltaLink.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today a copy of the proposed schedule for the 2010 main estimates, as provided for in the standing orders. These have been circulated previously to Opposition House Leaders and representatives. I just want to say in tabling, if I may, that it's the same schedule as we had for last year, as I had indicated earlier to many people, with the exception that intergovernmental affairs now is scheduled for March 10 and Energy for February 16. There has been some concern about the scheduling of Energy for February 16, so I've indicated to parties that under the standing orders with agreement of the House we can move something from a policy field committee in the evenings as scheduled to an afternoon or to another time. I'm still open to that discussion, but I thought that in the best interests of having members understand the schedule, we should table this at the first opportunity.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am tabling today copies of a new brochure that will be produced by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta entitled Page Biographies, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 27th Legislature, Third Session, Spring 2010. I'm sure copies will be circulated to all members as well.

Is that it for tablings?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I should have mentioned that on this schedule, just so that people notice, under 59.01 the estimates for Executive Council will be heard in Committee of Supply in the Assembly on March 9 and that pursuant to Standing Order 59.03 the votes on the estimates are scheduled for March 18. It's on the schedule, but I just wanted to bring it to members' attention.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Redford, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta's annual accountability report 2008.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to the question period today I indicated that the rotation that we would use today would be that outlined in my memo to all members dated February 1, 2010. I indicated that at the conclusion of the Routine I would make a statement with respect to the position taken by the chair on the rotation and operation of question period for the Third Session of the 27th Legislature, and I'm pleased to do that now.

The chair provided members with notice of the rotation in a letter dated February 1, 2010, which is in a form sent at the start of every session every year by this Speaker. The one variation that I made is that a week ago, on February 1, I included in my letter, an operational letter that I send every year, a statement with respect to the rotation of question period. Normally statements on question period are made on the first day of the session, but as a courtesy to all members one week ago I included that in my letter, and the chair will now state for the record how the rotation has changed, why the changes were necessary, the rationale for these changes, and offer some comments about the development of question period. It will take a few minutes.

2:50

The need to revisit the rotation of questions during Oral Question Period arose because of changes in the composition of the various groupings since the Assembly last met. Very early this year two members of the government members' caucus joined the caucus of the Wildrose Alliance. As a result of this change in caucus composition, the standings in the Assembly at this time are as follows: Progressive Conservatives, 68; Liberals, 9; Wildrose Alliance, 3; New Democrats, 2; and one independent member, who is an independent by himself although the members of the Wildrose Alliance are also independents and the members of the New Democratic caucus are also independents.

The government caucus has been reduced in size by two members, and the Wildrose Alliance caucus increased by two members, making them the third-largest caucus in the Assembly. Accordingly, they are the third party in the Assembly. The Official Opposition has not changed in size, nor have the New Democrats, but they have lost their position as the third party albeit by one member.

In the interests of providing certainty to members, the chair distributed the rotation schedule in the February 1, 2010, letter. Until that letter went out, the chair had no knowledge of any House leaders' agreements or even meetings. It appears that the House leaders have been discussing the rotation in question period and other matters related to the apportionment of business associated with relative caucus size. The chair wants to encourage House leaders and all of the independents to keep working towards an

agreement that could work to the satisfaction, presumably, of all 83 members of the Assembly. The chair will always be guided by advice provided by all members in a consensus/unanimous approach. At this time, however, as of the time we arrived in here this afternoon, at 1:30, there was no agreement from among the various parties, and the chair does not want to assume that what might be acceptable to one party or group or individual would be agreeable to others as well. The chair is more than willing to revisit this issue of rotation and related matters but is extremely reluctant to do so in the absence of any agreement.

For those who might be wondering why the answer is not found by looking in the standing orders, there is nothing in the standing orders about the rotation of questions. By convention, history, and practice the rotation of questions is not found in the standing orders, nor should it be. This absence is due in part to a recognition that it is the Speaker's responsibility to recognize members to participate in debate and the question period. The chair is fully aware that it is the members themselves who make the rules through the standing orders, and this chair has given effect to House leaders' agreements, but it is ultimately up to the chair to recognize members during question period.

Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia, the fourth edition, just one of hundreds of different scholarly treatises published around the world, by one of the longest serving clerks to follow the British parliamentary form of government in the world, Mr. George MacMinn, addresses this very point at page 140, when he states:

The order in which Members are recognized in Oral Question Period is at the Speaker's discretion . . . and this discretion remains intact at all times. From Parliament to Parliament (and indeed, from Session to Session) informal agreements are proposed relative to the recognition of Members and the number of supplementaries, but such agreements have never been considered as binding the Chair to a rigid course of action on a particular day. In order for the Chair's historical authority to remain intact, his or her discretion must remain unfettered.

The chair in recent days has been invited to apply the same rotation that existed following the provincial election in 1986. If one reviews Speaker Carter's ruling of June 13, 1986, found at page 7 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, one will see that there are many differences between the operation of question period then and now. That ruling provided for the then Official Opposition New Democrats to have the first two main questions and up to three supplementary questions and that the then third-party Liberals, which had achieved recognized opposition party status, be entitled to the third main question and three supplementaries while the two-member Representative Party or delegate was entitled to the fourth question.

After those questions the chair recognized members from "all parties in the Legislative Assembly in a fair and representative manner." Each member asking a main question could ask three supplementaries, and one supplementary could be asked by one member in each of the other parties. One member would ask a question, three supplementaries, then every other grouping in the Assembly, which in this case would have been four more, could ask supplementaries to the same question. I was there. We had about five members recognized during the 50-minute question period. The chair was implored to apply the 1986 precedent by the NDs in 2005, and the chair rejected it for reasons that members can see at pages 90 and 91 of *Alberta Hansard* for March 8, 2005. Of course, in 1986 the third party had achieved recognized opposition party status, which is not the case with either the third or the fourth party today.

In 1989 the first two questions went to the Official Opposition New Democrats, the third main question to the third-party Liberals, which had eight seats, and the fourth to a member of the government caucus. Speaker Carter indicated in his June 2, 1989, ruling, found

at page 9 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, that "the remainder of question period will be conducted on a random basis." That meant that after the first number of questions were identified, members simply threw up their hands when they came into the Assembly, and the Speaker would sit here and look at 25 hands and make a list of the first 12 or 14. You can bet your bottom dollar that if 12 rose at the same time, he – it was a he at that time – had to make a decision, and those 11 members who weren't called were mad at the Speaker for being blind or not seeing them or a whole series of other things.

We made some changes. Some members – there are a few in this House – may recall that it was not until the House leaders' agreement of September 1993 that the practice of submitting lists was established. This measure gave greater certainty to members, and since then there has been no turning back to allowing the Speaker to randomly select members wishing to ask questions. Since that time, essentially, and the way it has operated since I have been the Speaker is that I receive from the various groupings in the House a listing of the members that they have decided should ask questions that day, and I apply that list. I have never changed the names unless there has been an error in communication, nothing ever deliberately to change the names.

In 1993 there were only two parties represented in the Assembly, so after the third main question, which was asked by the Official Opposition, the rotation was quite simple. It was not until 1997, with the return of the New Democrats, that a more complete rotation had to be developed to provide members with the certainty they desired as represented by the 1993 agreement. The chair – I was the Government House Leader at the time – was one of the signatories to that agreement, and I want to indicate that there was a strong desire at that time to avoid what some believed to be the arbitrary nature of selecting members to ask questions by submitting lists. In other words, it was not to be the caucus whip or anybody else who would say: you are a good boy or girl today, so you can be on our list. Hopefully, it would be a caucus workout to allow everybody, the greatest number of people within the various caucuses, to basically have an opportunity to ask a question in question period.

This simply serves as background and a way of saying that examples even from this Assembly prior to 1997 are not particularly helpful as the practices were different from what exists today. In other words, there's an evolution. The chair wants to assure members that he conducted extensive research on this subject and is more than happy to discuss this history with the members at a different time. But I can assure you that for 10 days in the month of January I scoured my memory and book after book after book, coming up with the conclusion that I reached on Monday of last week.

Based on the historical analysis and a sincere determination of what would be fair for all parties based on their size relative to the other groupings in the Assembly, the chair communicated the following rotation to members. The Leader of the Official Opposition or his delegate is entitled to the first three main questions, including two supplementaries, each day. As a note to that point, the Official Opposition has had the first three main questions since September 1993 despite the size of its caucus or that of the third party and the presence or absence of other groupings of members.

With respect to the rotation on days 1 and 3 the Wildrose grouping, the deputy leader or his delegate, would be entitled to the fourth main question and supplementaries. A member of the government caucus would be entitled to the fifth main question, the Official Opposition to the sixth, and it would then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government members until the 11th question, which would be asked by the fourth-party New Democrats. Members of the government caucus would be entitled to the 12th,

14th, and 16th questions while members of the Official Opposition would be entitled to the 13th and 15th questions. The third-party Wildrose Alliance would be entitled to the 17th question, the New Democrats to the 18th, and in recognition of their size members of the government caucus would ask any question past the 18th. That's what was outlined. That's what happened today, exactly the way it was outlined.

On day 2, which is tomorrow, the positions of the Wildrose Alliance and the New Democrats will be reversed. The leader of the New Democrats or his delegate will be entitled to the fourth main question, and as on days 1 and 3 a member of the government caucus will be entitled to the fifth, seventh, and ninth questions while the Official Opposition will ask the sixth, eighth, and 10th main questions. The Wildrose Alliance will be entitled to the 11th and 18th questions. The New Democrats can ask the 17th question. Members of the government caucus will be entitled to the 12th, 14th, and 16th questions, and the Official Opposition would, like on days 1 and 3, be entitled to the 13th and 15th questions. Members of the government caucus will be entitled to ask any questions past the 18th. So that covers days 1, 2, and 3.

3:00

Day 4 will be a bit different as the independent Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo would factor into the mix. On day 4, like on day 2, the New Democrats would be entitled to ask the fourth question. The independent member – although members of the Wildrose Alliance and members of the New Democrats are also independents – will be recognized for the fifth main question and supplementaries. The Official Opposition, like on every other day, would be entitled to the sixth, eighth, and 10th questions. Government members would be entitled to fewer questions on day 4 as they would not have their first opportunity to ask a question until the seventh main question, and the next opportunity would be the ninth question. The Wildrose Alliance would be entitled to the 11th and the 18th questions, and the New Democrats would be entitled to the 17th. Government members would be entitled to ask the 12th, 14th, and 16th questions and the Official Opposition the 13th and 15th questions, and once again members of the government caucus would be entitled to questions after the 18th.

Assuming that the Assembly reaches the level of 18 main questions – and this is not a wild assumption; we have accomplished it on many, many occasions, and I'll provide graphs and information to you a little later showing where this has become quite frequent – the Official Opposition would have 32 questions a week, the same as it had in the last session. No change. The New Democrats would have eight questions, which is also the same as the last session. The Wildrose Alliance would also have eight questions a week, which is a dramatic increase from the last session. The number of questions asked by members of the government caucus would drop, from 29 in the last session to 23 in this session. So the only party that actually has a reduction in questions is the government. The Official Opposition and the independent from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo would remain with the same. The New Democrats remain the same as well, and the Wildrose Alliance has that increase.

The chair does not believe it is unreasonable to expect that there will be 18 main questions a day. Members will recall that on April 6, 2008, the chair indicated to the Assembly that there would be a 35-second time limit on questions and answers. For the First Session there were 18 questions or more in many question periods, and in one day there were 21 main questions. The average was 17.5 main questions. That was in the year 2008. Roughly speaking, there were 18 or more questions on two-thirds of the sitting days. As I said, I'll be circulating a series of graphs to members to demonstrate the number of questions asked in the first and second sessions of this Legislature.

The chair admits that there was a slippage in the past session, that is 2009, where the average dropped to 16.5 main questions a day. The 18-question mark, however, was reached one-fifth of the time. In order to achieve at least 18 questions per day, which the chair assumes is the will of the Assembly, there will be a more vigilant watch of the clock to ensure that questions and answers do not run past 35 seconds. My experience today was that the very person who I'm counting on most to have 35-second responses was the one who went beyond 35 seconds on more than one occasion.

The chair wants to assure members of the commitment to fairness in the proceedings of the Assembly. The role of the Speaker is to balance the competing and strongly held beliefs of members. In preparing the rotation, the chair was mindful that neither the third nor the fourth party has the requisite number of members to constitute a recognized opposition party within the meaning of the Legislative Assembly Act. There is no direct correlation between the number of questions and that number, but there is little doubt that it enhances the position of the party reaching that milestone.

Some have and may further draw reference to the Canadian House of Commons. The chair wants to advise members that those caucuses that failed to reach the required number of seats have little role to play in the question period. Members interested in this point may wish to review page 499 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, where it states:

Members of a political party not officially recognized in the House and independent Members are permitted to ask questions, although not as frequently as those Members belonging to recognized parties.

During the Thirty-Fifth Parliament . . .

That is the parliament of 1994 to 1997.

. . . when their numbers climbed as high as 17 . . .

That is 17 independents.

. . . over the life of the Parliament, the Speaker attempted to recognize at least one of them every other Question Period . . .

So every two days one of the 17 independents would get a question.

. . . if not every day, generally towards the end of the proceedings.

The number of members required to be a recognized political party in the House of Commons is 12. However, as this chair indicated in his March 8, 2005, ruling:

While this chair has always welcomed advice on procedures in other jurisdictions, it is fair to say that after 99 years of being a province, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has developed its own practices and traditions, which we can draw upon. As the chair has noted, the practice across Canada with respect to question periods varies widely, with the length running from 15 minutes to one hour.

Now, some of these things have changed even since I made that 2005 ruling. As a result, the chair has had extensive research conducted on practices in other Canadian jurisdictions. Times have changed with respect to question periods, and they now vary across the country of Canada, from 25 minutes in the question period in Saskatchewan to 90 minutes in Nova Scotia one day a week on Wednesday. The other days of the week in Nova Scotia it's 60 minutes. In most Assemblies parties not having official status would not have as many questions as third or fourth parties here. However, the chair is mindful and respectful of the history and traditions of Alberta, which have seen several small caucuses over the years. As indicated above, the chair has attempted to strike a balance between the interests of the minority and those of the majority, and as always the chair would welcome the collective views of the House leaders on this issue.

Before closing, I want to make it very clear that it is a tradition in Alberta for all private members to be granted the ability to ask questions, and that includes members of the government caucus. The practice of this Assembly has been for private members on the government side to be recognized during Oral Question Period but not, certainly, in proportion to their numbers. The chair does not believe that he can or should depart from that tradition or the

principle that all members elected to this Assembly and not serving on the Executive Council have the right to hold the government of the day to account by asking questions, and the chair is not willing to depart from this basic tenet of representative democracy in the province of Alberta.

Hon. members, since I put this statement out last week, in essence, I've received a number of pieces of correspondence from members. I'm not sure I have to table them in the House or even refer much to them, but I did say on Wednesday last, in a written statement to the members of the New Democrats and the members of the Wildrose, that I would be amenable to an agreement being reached by all the parties and provided to me by Monday morning of this week. That was the request. I waited and waited and waited. I have not received such an agreement. The position that I hold is the one I've outlined. If the members want to continue working together to find an alternate to this, I'm open to that. I'm amenable to that. But it has to be in a kind of unanimous situation.

In addition to having a question with respect to the question period, it took a negotiation that seemed to go on forever just to deal with the chairs. You may not notice this, hon. members, but as a result of the movement of two members to another part, what had to happen here is that we had to deal with eliminating one desk from the government side, from seven to six. Okay. No big deal except that all the egos get into play to move that one desk from there to back there to back there. Then it meant that we had to move the Liberal desks down one closer to the Speaker. Now, the Liberal Opposition likes that because they want the Leader of the Official Opposition to be directly across from the Premier. So that was not a problem. They were happy. They haven't said anything. They haven't said thank you, haven't acknowledged it, but that was okay. That was no problem.

3:10

Then because we've now got three members of the Wildrose Alliance and because we have a physical concern and a courtesy concern and a concern of considerable merit to an hon. member needing additional space, that meant that we couldn't have the two members of the New Democrats side by side. So we had to move one member of the New Democrats behind the first, which didn't help their ego one darn bit and their self-worth one darn bit, in order to allow us to move up the deputy leader of the third party. One, two, three. The third party. Then, of course, well, fine. How would I place those three? Would I place them on the basis of longevity of service in the Assembly? Would that mean the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek should sit in the front, or should it be the deputy leader? Well, that took a lot of, you know, debate and discussion to make sure. The scenario was that it would be the Member for Calgary-Glenmore because he is the deputy leader of the party. Then you put behind him the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and then we had the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere behind that hon. member. So it was symmetrical; it looked good. But then the request was made: well, can we move the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere up? Well, okay. That happened.

In the meantime the poor old Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo – well, I don't mean it that way – is an independent of exact equality, because the principle was to have equality among all the independents, but he's tucked away way in a corner. By the way, he shouldn't feel lonely there because when I first came to this Assembly, that's where I sat. I considered that a seat of honour – a seat of honour. But from the perspective of all the members perhaps if all independents want to be treated equally, the longest serving members of the independents should be the ones sitting in the first row – the longest serving members would be the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood

Buffalo – but that would have caused a whole series of more angst. So this is how we have arrived at this.

Solomon had it easy. He had one baby, and he had two mothers conflicting. Well, one was the real mother, and one wasn't. I have one basket with five parties. If you all want to agree on it, this is fine. You can't cut it up five ways. I want an amicable approach, and if all members recognize the manner in which it goes, we can conduct ourselves very, very well. In addition to that, if the members want to continue to evolve this question, I am very amenable to this, but right now here's where we're at.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On what would you be speaking?

Mr. MacDonald: Standing Order 13(2).

The Speaker: Okay. The explanation one.

Mr. MacDonald: A further explanation to your ruling, please. You spoke about a milestone of having four seats, which is recognized as an official party in the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. MacDonald: Will this ruling or decision or proposal today change if either the New Democrats or the Wildrose Alliance achieve official party status as determined by the Legislative Assembly Act?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, it's a speculative question that, first of all, that would happen. It could just as well be the Liberal caucus. You know, five members there could go to another one. It could create another one, so let's not just pick on those. This matter will evolve on the basis of the change. If, as an example, five members were to say that they wanted to join the Progressive Conservative caucus, that would be five members less over there, so we'd have a different scenario to have to deal with.

But, absolutely, if a party assumes official party status with the four, they would be seated together in a grouping of four, and those less than four would move off the front rail. That would be a reality of the evolution of it all. No chair could deal with it in any other way on the basis of the historical and constitutional precedent.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, given that the Order Paper discloses no business that's eligible for discussion this afternoon under private members' business, I would honourably request the unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 8(1) in order to revert to Government Bills and Orders so as to allow for replies to the Speech from the Throne.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a great honour to rise today and move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne given by the Lieutenant Governor, and it is an honour to do this on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Ellerslie.

I would like to begin by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for both his eloquent words and the honour of his presence. I would also like to thank him for formally beginning this Third Session of the 27th Legislature. Mr. Speaker, His Honour's career should be looked upon as a model of the virtues of public service. While the Lieutenant Governor stated that he felt privileged to serve his province, I would argue that it is us who are truly privileged to serve with such a graceful leader.

I would also like to extend thanks and gratitude to our hon. Premier. Under his leadership Alberta has poised itself to weather the economic downturn better than any other jurisdiction in Canada and has also taken steps to enable us to emerge from these difficult times stronger than ever. Mr. Speaker, making choices that will benefit the province in the long term is not easy. It requires conviction, dedication, and a strong vision for the future. After all, the true test of a leader is not in how they govern when times are good but, rather, how they respond when problems arise. I for one can say that during these times of uncertainty our Premier has had the confidence to lead Alberta with pride and passion. Therefore, I would like to thank our Premier for his dedication, his conviction, and his leadership and consider myself truly honoured to work with him during these exciting times.

Mr. Speaker, it is true that Alberta along with the rest of the world is in one of the deepest recessions seen in half a century. It is true that Alberta has a resource-based economy that has proven to be extremely volatile. What is also true is that this government had taken aggressive steps well in advance of this downturn to help cushion the blow. As His Honour stated, this government improved its fiscal position by almost \$50 billion, including paying off a \$23 billion debt and saving or investing nearly \$25 billion. Much of these savings went into the sustainability fund, a fund designed to protect the programs Albertans value most if provincial income were to suddenly drop. These are the actions of a government that recognizes that while resource income may fluctuate widely, the needs of its people do not.

These are the actions of a government that recognizes the need to continue to invest in public infrastructure now, even when the times are tough. Mr. Speaker, these are the actions of a government that recognizes that while other jurisdictions may cut back and grow their infrastructure debt, it is imperative that we plan now to support our future. The foresight exemplified by the reintroduction of Alberta capital bonds is an example of the planning that is required in times like these. After all, what better way to invest in needed infrastructure while at the same time allowing Albertans to invest in the future of their province, in infrastructure like seniors' accommodations and continuing care and supportive living facilities? Furthermore, as His Honour stated, Alberta has a triple-A credit rating, which enables us to offer Albertans one of the safest investments in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, while it is important to invest in the future during uncertain economic times, it is also important to step back and take a look at the government's overall fiscal position. Simply put, it is imperative that a government live within its means. As His Honour stated, Alberta must and will carefully manage spending while

focusing on priorities such as health, education, and supports for vulnerable Albertans. After all, health is one of if not the most pressing concern for many Albertans. Although health spending per capita is amongst the highest in the country, the results are not. Simply put, Albertans demand and deserve better value for their taxpayer dollars.

3:20

In recognition of this fact this government has initiated a dramatic shift in how we approach health care in this province. Essentially, as the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health recommended, health care in Alberta must become more patient focused, and to meet this goal, there needs to be a legislative framework in place. In recognition of this need the government will introduce the Alberta health act later this fall, after it has been guided by Albertans themselves.

Mr. Speaker, beyond legislative controls a successful health care system needs two things: one, to have access to predictable funding, and two, to be accountable to Albertans. Therefore I'm pleased that His Honour stated that there would be a stable, five-year funding plan introduced in Budget 2010 as well as the idea that health care will be accountable because of a commitment to performance consultation with everyday Albertans.

I'm also pleased how the Speech from the Throne highlighted this government's commitment to safe, strong, and caring communities. Commitments like adding 100 new police officers and creating 14,000 new child care spaces are among these highlights.

Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that it takes more than enforcement to ensure that our communities remain safe. Rather, it takes an understanding that a truly safe community only comes with a commitment to social programs and to those in need, commitments like those highlighted by the Lieutenant Governor. As he stated, this government will continue to work toward its pledge of providing 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012, and this government will ensure that social programs become better integrated so that they focus on the people they were intended to serve. After all, a program is only useful if it successfully targets the people in need. The improvements proposed by this government will ensure that Albertans have access to the information they need to effectively transition from program to program at each stage in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, while I applaud this government's commitment to both health care and safe communities, I'm also intrigued and excited about how this government proposes to keep Alberta in the forefront of global competitiveness. After all, Alberta's competitive edge has enabled us to be the best place in Canada to live, invest, and ultimately succeed, and it is essential that we retain this edge. For this reason I was pleased to hear His Honour's statement that Bill 1 of this legislative session would be the Alberta Competitiveness Act, which will ensure that Alberta remains the most competitive jurisdiction in North America by minimizing the cost of doing business in the province.

However, Mr. Speaker, competitiveness means more than just having a strong business climate, which we do. It also means a commitment to education and innovation. This is why this government will continue to develop the Alberta Innovates program, to better reflect the needs of entrepreneurs and researchers in order to help ensure that Alberta's technology plays an ever-increasing role in the world economy.

Beyond the economy, education and technological innovations will also help us address the needs of our environment. As His Honour stated, our history of technological breakthroughs and engineering has gone a long way towards shrinking our environmen-

tal footprint. The drive towards cleaner energy is a welcome fact, welcomed by both the Alberta government and Alberta's strong business community. Mr. Speaker, the commitment by both the government and our business community is exciting, and this commitment will enable us to develop a well-thought-out and equitable approach to controlling greenhouse gas emissions while ensuring that our energy industry remains strong.

Finally, I would like to conclude on the same idea as His Honour, Alberta's place within Canada. I'm truly proud to be a Canadian, just as I am proud to be an Albertan and to serve the people of this great province. As the Lieutenant Governor stated, Albertans are proud to contribute to the well-being of our nation. We only ask to be treated fairly by federal programs. After all, Mr. Speaker, a sick or unemployed person is still sick or unemployed regardless of where they live. For this reason I'm pleased that our government is committed to working with the federal government to promote regional equality. After all, I believe that a strong Canada needs a strong Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour to rise today and move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne, just as it has been an honour to serve as the elected representative of the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie. In closing, I would again like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his inspiring words and dedicated public service and, again, our hon. Premier for his strong leadership and noble vision. I believe that under the guidance of these two men and with the dedication and spirit of the people of Alberta we can make a future which we can all be truly proud of.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank you and all of the hon. members for indulging me. Sahakarini is an NGO from Camrose that has been very active in India, Africa, and Central America. One of its project partners is the Kaqchikel Presbytery from Guatemala. We have guests here today from those two organizations. Above me in the members' gallery are Ronaldo Similox, who's a teacher and psychologist and also a Mayan spiritual guide, along with his wife, Noemí Cuellar, an oil painter. They represent the Kaqchikel Presbytery. They've been here on a speaking tour. This is their first exposure to snow and ice, so it's been a bit of a shock to the system, I think. Also with them is Alan Fielding, a noted Camrose volunteer and representative of the Sahakarini. I'd ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two members from my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat in southern Alberta, from Bow Island specifically, Mr. Jim and Anne Geldreich. I'd like to have them rise – they're seated in the public gallery – and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech (continued)

The Speaker: The next two participants will be the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to second and then the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and a privilege to rise today in this House to second the motion to accept the Speech from the Throne, eloquently delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. For five years the Hon. Norman Kwong has served Albertans with honour, humility, and dignity. His life accomplishments and dedication to public service are an inspiration to those who believe that Alberta truly is a place where you can achieve your dreams. In a remarkable life that took many unexpected turns, I know my colleagues and I are grateful for his continued service as Her Majesty's representative in Alberta.

As the proud representative of the constituents of Cardston-Taber-Warner it was an honour to accept the Premier's invitation to second the motion to accept the Speech from the Throne. Like Albertans across this diverse province, they have seen how quickly times can change. In a remarkably short period of time unprecedented economic growth gave way to the deepest recession the world has seen in half a century. Alberta, with its strong trading relationship with the United States, was not immune to the rapid decline in our economy. Throughout our history Albertans have faced similar challenges of economic uncertainty, and time and again we have united to face these challenges together to emerge stronger than before. Under the inspired and visionary leadership of our Premier I know we will do so again.

3:30

Forward-thinking leadership and prudent planning led Alberta to be the most prepared jurisdiction in North America for the economic recession. No other government in North America entered the recession debt free with substantial cash reserves. Of any jurisdiction in North America we are the best prepared to weather this recession and emerge stronger than ever. The \$17 billion sustainability fund will ensure that Alberta remains debt free and continues to provide quality education and health care for Albertans. Moreover, our Premier has committed our government to live within its means and to be back in the black within three years.

Mr. Speaker, few could have predicted the extent of the economic recession we currently find ourselves in. There is no question that our policies will help Alberta emerge stronger than any province in Canada.

I was very pleased to hear the throne speech address what has always been central to the Alberta advantage, our competitiveness in a global economy. In an increasingly competitive global economy we must continue to ensure Alberta continues to succeed. This includes ensuring our children continue to have access to a world-class education system that will prepare them for future opportunity, challenge, and success. In a 21st century economy with rapid developments in technology and innovation, we must continue to ensure Albertans have the tools they need to succeed. To this end, I was pleased that the throne speech outlined the government's plans to launch a new, modern vision for education, with improvements that will ensure learning in Alberta is flexible and ready to meet the needs of the next generation. Albertans are by nature innovative and entrepreneurial, and with the right tools there is nothing we cannot accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, a competitive economy also means ensuring that businesses have the freedom to thrive and prosper. Unnecessary

legislative barriers and regulations can stifle business and the economic potential of a province or nation. In a world that is increasingly competitive, we must continue to ensure Alberta remains the best place to conduct business. That is why I'm pleased that the Speech from the Throne outlined this government's intentions to aggressively pursue improvements to ensure we have effective regulations that are both clear and practical. Positioning our province for an even brighter future will be the objective of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. In a time when the world economy is positioning itself for a return to future growth and prosperity, I am happy with our Premier's resolve to ensure we are the most competitive jurisdiction in North America.

Our government's goal to become even more competitive includes a renewed dedication to what has always been a fundamental pillar of our economy for generations, agriculture. Indeed, the earliest settlers were farmers who came to Alberta and built the foundations of what is now one of the world's most productive agricultural economies. I am happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that both of my grandparents came to this province in the early 1900s, and our family has stayed here and been involved in agriculture ever since that time. I am now the third-generation rancher and farmer in our family, my son is the fourth, and I have a grandson getting ready to become the fifth.

After a century of hard work, sacrifice, and love for our province Alberta's farmers can be proud of a legacy of achievement. As the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner and a farmer myself I was proud that His Honour recognized the valuable contribution of Alberta's agriculture and agri-food industries in the Speech from the Throne. The history of this constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner is rooted deeply in the legacy of farmers who arrived in the late 19th century whose bravery, entrepreneurial spirit, and can-do attitude continued to define us as Albertans.

Fleeing from religious persecution in Utah, 10 Mormon families settled nearby what is now the town of Cardston, named after their leader, Charles Ora Card. Using their agricultural expertise, they earned the respect of their neighbours and, due to the region's dry climate, developed the region's first irrigation system. Having seen that irrigation system as it was, I'm impressed with their engineering ability and what they were able to do with horses and what we would call today primitive equipment.

The innovative irrigation techniques pioneered by those first bold Mormon settlers continue to provide nourishment for the crops of southern Alberta. Today the greatest portion of irrigation in Alberta takes place in 13 irrigation districts in the South Saskatchewan River basin, providing half a million hectares of land with water. Seven of those districts, interestingly enough, lie in the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. These irrigated lands produce a wealth of crops, including 113,000 hectares of barley, 97,000 hectares of wheat, and 90,000 hectares of alfalfa.

Across Alberta more than 20 million hectares of land are used for crop and livestock production, and in 2008 total farm cash receipts reached a record of \$10 billion, accounting for nearly 22 per cent of Canada's total agriculture production. Of this total, beef and cattle account for the largest category of farm income. In 2008, Mr. Speaker, cash receipts from beef and cattle accounted for nearly \$3 billion, or 30 per cent of total receipts, the highest in Canada. Furthermore, a healthy beef and cattle industry supports thousands of jobs in value-added agricultural production. These world-class products are then sold to consumers here in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world. As a matter of fact, Alberta exported roughly \$961 million worth of beef products and \$558 million of live cattle to international markets in 2008.

Indeed, our export markets are essential to the continued sustainability of our agriculture and agri-food industries. This is why

ensuring the health and competitiveness of our agriculture industry is more important now than ever. We must continue to build on our strength as a safe and reliable producer of high-quality products and break into new markets, as His Honour so rightly stated. Furthermore, we must work together to ensure that our products continue to compete favourably with other agriculture producers, including the United States.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture, like other industries, has not been immune to the global economic recession. However, thanks to the bold leadership of our Premier, I feel confident that we can face these challenges together and continue to build a sustainable agriculture industry for generations to come. Even before the recession began, this government launched the livestock and meat strategy, a blueprint for the future prosperity of our agricultural producers. It calls on government to work with industry to redirect resources to key priorities, revitalize livestock industry organizations, realize benefits from enhanced value chain relationships, and refocus efforts to achieve a competitive and sustainable industry. I am confident that these initiatives and our continued work will lead to a more competitive, prosperous agriculture industry and a stronger province.

Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we live in challenging times, but Albertans have never been a people to shy away from a challenge or to do what is necessary to succeed, and neither is this government. Together we will continue to build a province worthy of the hopes and dreams of those who came to this province and built it with sacrifice, hard work, and, above all, a compassion for our fellow citizens. Under the leadership of our Premier I know our brightest days are yet to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

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

Hon. members, the leader has up to 90 minutes to participate.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As Leader of the Opposition it's my duty and honour, indeed my privilege to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. When he delivered the Speech from the Throne on Thursday, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was quite eloquent in remarking on how much he appreciated the opportunity to travel this province and meet with so many amazing Albertans. Just as His Honour is grateful for his experience as Lieutenant Governor, so too am I grateful to serve as Leader of the Official Opposition. As I'm sure His Honour would agree, it's not the title or the privileges that make the job mean so much; it's the opportunity to serve our province and its people and, in the course of our duties, to meet so many fine Albertans, to experience every corner of this beautiful province, and to work for a better tomorrow for all of us.

I'd like to thank His Honour for five years of outstanding service to Alberta and wish him and his lovely wife all the best. They did a remarkable job, and Albertans are justly proud of the Kwongs. You could say that the China Clipper's term was one last touchdown for a great Albertan. Your Honours, thank you.

Like His Honour I've been impressed and uplifted by the spirit and compassion of Albertans. Though times are hard, people are still looking out for each other and working hard for a better future for their families and for the magnificent province we call home.

This past weekend I went snowshoeing with my brother in the foothills west of Calgary. The beauty, the serenity of the landscape reminded me again of why I am in politics today. I love this place. The snow blanketing those beautiful foothills, the trees, the wildlife all reminded me that Alberta and Albertans will be here long after all of us are gone, and that's why good governance and visionary

leadership is critical. We need to serve not only our own generation but all future generations to come.

Serving the public interest for the short term and the long term means a greater commitment to getting people involved in government initiatives. If the administration plans to massively overhaul health care or energy or education, then consultation with the most directly affected citizens and organizations is key, and I mean real consultation, not after-the-fact, focused consultation intended as a rubber stamp for decisions the government has already made. We must be beyond that now. We need to go beyond that.

If we want to preserve the beauty, the biological diversity of these foothills and the whole province that I enjoyed so much in these last few weeks, then we must also commit to using good science as our primary guide to public endeavours. Science – and I'm including all the sciences here – provides the essential data we need to make the right decisions on the environment, the economy, education, and social programs. We need the courage to use our best science and put our plans before the public for honest debate and improvements without pride or prejudice.

That's why I'm in politics, because this administration has not taken these fundamental principles to heart. This has created an undercurrent of grave concern among Albertans, if not distrust. People are hurting: thousands out of work, thousands more afraid that the public health care system and other crucial social services won't be there when they need them. Already vulnerable Albertans are facing diminished levels of service because of cutbacks.

Albertans don't ask for much from government, but they do demand a basic level of competence, a level of competence that the Premier's administration has failed to deliver. Politics in Alberta isn't about right versus left anymore. It's about right versus wrong, and this Conservative administration has become infamous for making the wrong decisions. Wrong decisions made by this Premier and his ministers have sown chaos in the health care system, have created instability and uncertainty in our oil and gas sector, the engine of Alberta's economy. They've damaged our international reputation and our environment, failed to enforce standards to address pollution and climate change, have allowed family farms to stagnate and wither, have failed to protect our forests and the forestry industry. Wrong spending decisions have frittered away the opportunity to save for the future and wasted millions of taxpayers' dollars on lavish perks for the elite, reducing support by 30 per cent over the last 20 years for Albertans most vulnerable to this economic recession.

I've always been from the good news first school of thought, so I'm happy to give the administration credit for a few good notions contained in this throne speech. Unfortunately, even the good news is tainted by the administration's long record of half measures and broken promises. As a believer in planning for the long term I applaud the Premier and the minister of health for providing Alberta Health Services with a five-year budget cycle, provided the allocation is actually sufficient to meet the system's needs. Considering all the damage done to our public health care system by this administration's catastrophic bungling, this is, at least, a small step towards restoring a smidgen of confidence to the health care professionals who have done their best while dealing with the consequences of this administration's mismanagement.

Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is a step forward for efficiency. I've long advocated for less red tape for Alberta's business community, and I'm glad that this administration finally sees this as a priority. But speaking of competitiveness, what happened to the competitiveness review? Why has it been delayed? For that matter, whatever happened to the red tape review led by the new finance minister himself? The fact that the minister seems to

have dropped the ball here doesn't instill me or Albertans with great confidence. Did he lose it along with his briefcase a few weeks ago?

At a time when the oil and gas sector is desperate for stability, when they need confidence, this administration cannot provide it. Cleaning up some red tape is fine, but it's not nearly enough to erase years of mishandling in the energy portfolio. What we have here is, basically, a new panel with a vague mandate to speed up the process of establishing government initiatives and evaluating regulations. This Conservative administration has already set up a regulatory review commission with a similar mandate to the one being established in Bill 1. If they couldn't make it work with that commission, how can Albertans expect anything from this new initiative? This is the Premier's number one bill. Frankly, I'm underwhelmed. If this is the best you can come up with for your administration's top bill, Alberta is in even more trouble than we thought.

We're glad to see that the Premier's administration has heeded opposition and community calls for more police officers, but even the addition of a hundred officers will leave Alberta's two largest cities underpoliced. Per capita Calgary and Edmonton are two of the least protected cities in the country when it comes to crime. We simply need more boots on the ground to meet population growth. And what about Fort Macleod and the police college: whatever happened to that project? It's wrong to leave the people of Fort Macleod hanging, Mr. Speaker. They haven't forgotten this administration's promise.

Finally, I'm glad that the administration is at last starting to think about unfairness in the federal EI program. Alberta workers haven't been getting their fair share of rightfully earned benefits, and the opposition and labour groups have been raising this issue for months. I hope that the Premier can make some real progress and bring those benefits home to Alberta workers, working moms and dads who desperately need and deserve that assistance. I would suggest that the Premier should also do something about skyrocketing wait times for processing EI applications. Many Albertans live paycheque to paycheque. They can't afford to wait for months for EI benefits, nor can the Premier shift all responsibility to the federal government. Provincial income supports need to be examined to make sure that unemployed Albertans will have somewhere to turn when EI benefits are exhausted.

Well, Mr. Speaker, aside from these few bright spots, even by the rightfully diminished expectations of Albertans in this throne speech we see a new low standard for a government that is clearly out of ideas. The cupboard is bare: virtually no new ideas, no leadership, no vision, no inspiration, no imagination, and no plan. Given the Conservative track record many of these commitments will drag on for years and years without any real progress. The sheer emptiness of this administration's Speech from the Throne leads me to expect the worst from tomorrow's budget.

3:50

For years opposition parties, think tanks, journalists, and Albertans from all walks of life have implored successive Conservative administrations to change their approach when it comes to public spending. Instead, we have seen them stuck in a common pattern: spend lavishly during good times, indiscriminately slash vital public services when oil and gas prices fall. That's a hell of a way to run a car wash, Mr. Speaker, let alone a province. It's the complete opposite of how to sensibly manage public finances in a province with a cyclic economy.

After nearly four decades in power you'd think this administration would clue in at some point. Yes, the administration built up a sustainability fund, a Liberal idea I'll remind you, but it's a fraction

of the size it could have been, and it's not nearly large enough to maintain public services during a long recession. This administration's financial planning is based on a wing and a prayer that oil and gas prices will bounce back in the near future. Well, we all hope that that will be the case, but that's not a plan. It seems pretty foolhardy to me and to a lot of other Albertans.

I expect that Tuesday's budget will bear more bitter fruit of Tory short-sightedness. Along with jobs and the economy, health care is the number one concern for Albertans. But aside from the five-year funding cycle promoted for Alberta Health Services in the throne speech, there's nothing that's remotely reassuring for Albertans. You say that input from Albertans is important. What will this be, then, the 17th or 18th consultation process in the last decade? Another report will be promptly filed away to collect dust. This administration has yet to show with detailed plans how they will protect public health care. This administration has yet to show that they have a plan to create more family doctors, to create more long-term care spaces, to improve emergency room access and wait times, and to address mismanagement and waste throughout the system.

Our vision for health care very simply calls for a return to regional delivery programs focusing on primary health care, a family doctor for every Albertan, home-care services to keep people well and in their homes as long as possible, and reinvestment in prevention programs and wellness programs to keep Albertans healthy and reduce costs. Let's get back to basics. We are spending more and getting less because of a lack of clear planning, practical patient-centred decision-making, and follow-through on those plans with ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

These are real problems that should be tackled now. Albertans have had their fill of studies and ad hoc decision-making. Pick the best ideas from the endless reports, and act on them. Even the five-year funding pledge means nothing if the funding isn't adequate to cover the system's needs. If this administration stays true to form, at best it might give health care professionals a head start on cutting back programs and services as budgets are being slashed.

The Official Opposition receives more mail, e-mail, and phone calls about health care than any other single issue. From professionals to patients to family members, the people of Alberta are demanding better management of this public health care system, not for reasons of ideology, not because they have a grudge against the government, but because bad decisions and misallocated resources are having real impacts: delays, complications, and increased costs. I'm going to read into the record just a few of the hundreds of horror stories that have been sent to us in the last few months. These letters, e-mails, and phone transcripts are edited only for length, to protect the jobs of health care professionals, or to omit the mention of names of members of this House.

Here's one example.

I am a medical Resident who works in Calgary. I have seen firsthand the devastation the health reforms and mismanagement of the H1N1 vaccination program has caused. Last month, I was working in the [Peter Lougheed Centre] ICU. 14 out of 16 patients in ICU were [there] with severe H1N1. Most were under the age of 40. Most were previously healthy. None had the opportunity to be vaccinated prior to the outbreak. We were fortunate, on ICU, to be encouraged to leave for our vaccinations the [very] first day they were available – most other staff, patients, and other front line workers were not so fortunate. Only a fraction of people were able to get vaccinated before the vaccine was pulled. After the vaccination schedule was "reintroduced," I witnessed seven nurses, waiting to vaccinate anyone who came to the clinic. No one came . . . for hours. [These staff] were paid to sit there, and wait, while patients upstairs were told to wait until the following week and then come downstairs to the clinic to get their vaccine. The nurses said that the vaccine that wasn't used by the end of the day would be discarded.

Another crazy scenario: Again while on ICU, we had a patient who had been waiting for transfer to the ward for so long that he was actually ready for discharge from ICU. Only he needed 3 additional days of oral antibiotics. We tried to give him a [prescription] for the drugs, but being homeless, he could not afford . . . the prescription. The in-patient pharmacy is now restricted in terms of giving meds to patients at discharge (ie. they can [only] dispense one day's worth, but not more – because of budget cuts). So this gentleman, with no medical bed (only an ICU bed) was required to stay in ICU for 3 additional days, because the hospital would not give him \$25 [worth] of antibiotics. (The Math: 3 x \$2,000/day . . . = \$6,000 cost, because we can't give him \$25 of free antibiotics). Here's another story from a health care professional.

I am a Registered Nurse. I have 15 years of work experience, and this is after attending a 4.5 year degree program here in Canada. The government and their arms (including Dr. Duckett) are seeing that I will no longer be a trusted front line worker. I am now a business expense. I am the reason the budget doesn't balance. I only exist to fight over the remaining managerial positions, and only after I orientate an LPN to [take over] my job. I used to love being a nurse. I used to think that I was a required resource. I used to think that I was part of the budget – not the expendable piece of waste that is being cut . . .

I immunized thousands of Albertans every week during the H1N1 campaign. I have been verbally abused, and threatened in the early stages of this debacle called the "Pandemic Plan" while the government stands by and says we are all doing our best. Bah! If you want my best, then let's all go read the Pandemic Influenza Plan that is on our internal website and see just how the plan was supposed to go. Then let's admit that it was you (the government) and not me (the Registered Nurse) who decided to ignore most of the parts that dealt with triage. Let's just say that the Alberta Government has embarrassed me, infuriated me, and led me to believe that another province may be a better place for me and my family . . .

Now of course, I can't sign my name, or even my place of work because I have a code of ethics that does not protect me when I have something to say to the public. So, you have to take my word that I am an RN here in Alberta . . . Big Brother is watching and has a copy of that code of ethics in hand to swat me with if I step out of line.

Here are a few shorter but no less shocking comments.

"I have been with the Calgary Health Region for 25 years, and never have seen things as bad as they are now."

"I have never been so concerned with the future of health care as I have this year and [I] have been working in the system [now] for 35 years. I hope that something can be done before it is too late."

"My mother (68 years old) was on the waiting list for a routine colonoscopy for two years before she was called for an appointment. The terrible thing about the situation was that she was diagnosed with colon cancer before she was able to get the colonoscopy."

"Was it not just 3 years ago that the colleges and universities in Alberta expanded their programs to accept more nursing students? And the 2010 graduating class now has a 40% chance of finding a job in Alberta. This is not planning for our future."

Mr. Speaker, this is just a small sampling of the typical concerns we receive in our offices every day. I'm sure that even government members are hearing the same kind of stories. Yet it's absolutely clear to me that this administration will never get health care right. You had your chance, and I have a feeling that Albertans are ready to move on.

The Speech from the Throne also talks about a new vision for education, but the only thing Albertans know about this administration's vision for education is that you keep saying you have a vision for education. Why not provide Albertans with something concrete? Why haven't you reported back on the Inspiring Education dialogue?

Why did you pull the new School Act from the agenda for this spring sitting? Is it because you're starting to realize that your vision for education isn't the same as the vision shared by Albertans? I don't see a vision for education from this administration, just another collection of wrong decisions.

It was wrong to violate the contract with teachers and then fight and lose the case in court. The Minister of Education's response to the ongoing teachers' wage issue has been less than inspiring. He was obviously completely unprepared for a verdict that favoured the teachers. It was wrong to claw back \$80 million from Alberta's public school boards. Can Alberta's students and parents expect even greater cuts to come? It's wrong to cut education funding, our primary investment in our future. By all means, look for efficiencies, but ensure stable, dependable funding for this vital public program, especially during recessionary times.

4:00

It's wrong to fire a school board without exhausting all avenues of understanding and board support. It's wrong that we have an administration whose only response to the social challenges faced by aboriginal communities is to fire their local school board. A short simple message repeated by many Calgarians has made its way to our offices. It reads: Alberta's continued prosperity will depend on the knowledge and skills of its future citizens; in these times more than ever it's important to continue to invest in our children's education, and as a concerned Albertan I urge you not to cut funding for our schools. End of quote. As ever, there is great wisdom in the direct, no-nonsense advice of Albertans. This administration should listen.

The throne speech contains a claim that the Premier's administration will build world-class universities. How can this be accomplished when the minister of advanced education has already admitted that the best-case scenario for postsecondary funding this year is a zero per cent increase. The University of Calgary is already laying off staff; the University of Alberta is considering the same. We should be investing in postsecondary education and research to move Alberta from a 20th century economy to a 21st century economy.

It's wrong, Mr. Speaker, to balance a budget on the backs of students. Students and their families are rightfully alarmed by the prospect of massive tuition increases. Now more than ever Alberta needs talented graduates to fill the jobs in the energy sector, the health sector, information technology, agriculture, et cetera. How can we ever address emergency room wait times and the need for greater capacity and long-term care without more professionals? How can we continue to keep the energy sector alive without new engineers and scientists? These short-sighted policies are driving away our best and our brightest.

The minister should say no to each and every request for tuition fee increases. It wasn't so very long ago that this Conservative administration promised the lowest tuition fees in Canada, an admirable goal that really would have increased Alberta's competitiveness and quality of life. Alberta's students and their parents know what those promises are worth.

Consider this letter from last month to the advanced education minister from Rithesh Ram and Natarie Liu, presidents, respectively, of the classes of 2012 and 2011 of the Calgary Medical Students' Association. In their letter they write:

We request that you consider the following when considering a change to post-secondary funding:

- Government deregulation of medical tuition in the 1990's led medical tuition to increase to triple that of other undergraduate programs.
- Tuition often exceeds maximum government student assistance intended for all education-related costs (housing, tuition, food).

- Deregulation has decreased the number of students from low income families from 35% to 13.5% [in medical schools].
- Medical school tuition is seen as a barrier to students from rural communities who are interested in pursuing a career in medicine.
- A survey of Canadian interns and residents from 2006 found that a first-year resident will have a \$158,000 debt that will continue to climb during residency; this value is [actually] higher in Alberta.

Please, do not create a system in which my educational and career choices are prescribed by my ability to pay.

In difficult times a responsible government would focus on protecting public services that Albertans depend upon while finding efficiencies to bring down the deficit. This administration claims to protect public services, but ask anyone who depends on PDD funding how they feel about this government's spending priorities. These people are desperate, and they weren't getting the help they needed even during the boom. Betraying their security and well-being is wrong.

Ask any of Alberta's seniors how they feel about this administration's priorities. Seniors deserve all the gratitude we can offer. People want the dignity of compassionate care in their golden years. It's wrong to leave our seniors without enough public long-term care, crowding in our hospitals, and placing incredible financial burdens on the few families lucky enough to be able to afford long-term care at private facilities. Why does this administration rely on selling bonds to build long-term care spaces for seniors? That should be part of the government's annual spending. It's not enough that Albertans buy bonds, another debt, by the way. Are you going to blame them for the lack of affordable housing as well?

The environment is another top issue for Albertans. We all want to protect our air, water, and land. We all want to participate in the fight against climate change to protect the health of our children and grandchildren and to ensure that Alberta's economy will remain prosperous in an increasingly competitive, environmentally aware world. It's wrong to play politics with our primary economic driver. We need a long-term plan that includes other provinces, forging a common approach to carbon reduction. Even the federal Tories are admitting that Alberta needs to do better, but all this administration offers us is carbon capture and more money for slick ad campaigns. That won't cut it.

My Energy critic and I spent months talking to oil and gas companies. We know that their leaders want to do their part. It's time to work constructively with industry and start working together to make our oil and gas sector not only the most competitive in the world but also the cleanest. It's time to protect and renew Alberta's reputation by ensuring the highest standards of leadership and a clean energy agenda.

A responsible government would realize that the term of the current capital plan should be extended. It took years of neglect by this administration to create Alberta's massive infrastructure deficit, but the plan to address the deficit was created during the waning days of the boom. Yes, Alberta's communities need new infrastructure, but surely we could roll out new projects more slowly now, distributing the impact on Alberta's books over a longer time period with the evident reduced construction costs that we're now facing. After all, new infrastructure does no one any good if the government can't afford to cover operating costs, and massive deficits pose exactly that risk. We're already spending at stimulus levels double the national average.

The most precious and potentially vulnerable citizens of all, Alberta's at-risk children, have been completely overlooked in this throne speech. There is no commitment here to improve services to at-risk children and youth. Bosco Homes, Boys and Girls clubs have already suffered devastating cuts, and the Children and Youth

Services portfolio has been rightfully criticized as the worst-run department in government right now. Children deserve all the love and support society can offer, and it's simply wrong not to make children and youth our very highest priority. The sustainability fund should be used to protect people and essential services, not the Conservative administration's reputation for balanced budgets.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we see no vision, no imagination, no leadership in this throne speech, just a knee-jerk swing to the right to appease disgruntled Tories within the Conservative caucus and a few token patch-up jobs to cover oversights that a responsible administration would have taken care of years ago. When I was a young man growing up in Calgary, my parents set an example for me. Their words and their actions made it clear that a moral life meant following two essential rules: first, tell the truth; secondly, take care of each other. Elected officials are entrusted by the people with the power to make far-reaching decisions affecting every citizen in this province and beyond. When governments fail to tell the truth, when they fail to protect our common interests, everyone loses.

I have seen incompetent, negligent leadership ruin our health care system, the same mismanagement lead to the abuse and neglect of seniors, people we should be venerating not with words but with deeds that actually give them the dignity and care they deserve. I've seen this administration squander the legacy of our children by spending over 90 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues, saving only a pittance for the future, a pittance that will soon be used up to weather this recession.

During my travels and work around the world I have seen what happens when governments become old and corrupt: dissenting voices become afraid to speak; waste gets worse each year; decisions are made without proper consultation or scientific analysis. Perhaps worst of all, the people in power come to feel a dangerous sense of entitlement. They come to feel that they are above public scrutiny. A responsible government would behave far differently than this current administration.

4:10

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, everyone should have a family doctor thanks to long-term planning, incentives for health care professionals, and affordable tuition to create a new generation of professionals. We would have hospitals that work, with nurses and doctors that aren't stretched to and beyond their limit. We would have seniors enjoy quality, affordable long-term care and prevention and wellness initiatives, including mental health, to help everyone lead healthier lives and lower the costs on the health care system.

A responsible administration would actually act on the advice of the Auditor General. They would work with the energy industry to hammer out a final royalty deal that serves our most important sector and the people of Alberta while protecting the environment. It would create the conditions to foster a flourishing upgrading and value-added sector in Alberta. It would reform the electricity system with the best interests of the consumers in mind, and it would repeal or amend all legislation that limits access to information, freedom of speech, and public consultation. Albertans have solutions, and this administration is foolish not to listen.

A responsible administration would stop spending millions on PR campaigns and actually protect our environment. It would create incentives to move to more clean energy sources and jobs related to energy efficiency, housing, and public transit. In my travels I've discovered that as proud as Albertans are of their province, many of us share a sense that we could do better. With the resources at our command — our natural wealth, our well-educated, well-skilled population, our can-do culture — we should be able to build a truly

world-class society, including hospitals, postsecondary institutions, and research centres. If we put our minds to it, we could build the world's first truly sustainable economy. We could be leaders in that race.

We must eliminate homelessness and dramatically reduce poverty in this province.

All this is possible with a government that committed itself to four simple principles: health, enterprise, foresight, integrity. This is a time for solutions. We need energetic, forward-looking leadership, a government that can adapt with changing times and new challenges. We need a government that makes decisions based on principles, not political expediency. We can do better.

As I snowshoed recently with my brother across Alberta's snow-covered foothills, I saw with perfect clarity what I and my caucus have been fighting for over many years of professional work and now five years, for me, in politics: a better way for our province, its economy, its environment, and most importantly for our people. My vision for tomorrow includes everyone who calls Alberta home, everyone who wants to return to the sensible centre, a return to common-sense government, government that listens honestly, works for the public interest, the common good, and a better future for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) there is a five-minute question-and-comment period should a member or members choose to participate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition if he was surprised that the government in the throne speech made no announcement of a plan to deal with the \$1.2 billion accumulated deficit that has been rung up by Alberta Health Services in the short period of time that they have been administering our health care system. In fact, the budget is over \$9 billion. My question, specifically, to the hon. member would be: were you surprised that the government made no reference to that or did not provide any details as to how they're going to solve that \$1.2 billion deficit that was just rung up in a very short period of time?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I think all Albertans were surprised to hear the rumours of such a huge deficit in one year as a result of the restructuring, a third restructuring in 15 years. Previous deficits in the health system were less than one-tenth of that, and there are still many questions being asked about where that cost went.

Once again an example of a government that is not forthcoming with its expenditures, not clear about where our money is going, and again we have to ask the government: open the books; let's get a value-for-money audit on this government. This is another example of very poor implementation if there was a plan and clearly wasteful spending that has left all of us reeling in a health care system that is the envy of our world and still struggling to provide value for the extra funding that we provide for health care in this province. Indeed, a real need for indicators of where we're spending, what we're getting for that spending, and greater accountability for a government that seems to lurch from one decision to another in the health care system and wonder why people are concerned about chaos, frustration, and now brain drain to other provinces.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Then I will call on the next speaker and also identify four additional speakers after that. The next speaker will be the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. So the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and respond to the throne speech delivered so eloquently by our Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Norman Kwong. Before I dive into the merits of this timely speech, I'd like to thank His Honour for again coming here and sharing his inspirational words.

The Speech from the Throne highlighted many of the priorities of this government, priorities that include health care, the economy, the environment, and ensuring that Alberta remains a leader in global competitiveness. These are priorities that Albertans hold dear, priorities that will build on our strengths and lead us into the future. And while I believe strongly in each of these priorities, I'd like to focus my comments today on two specific commitments: safe communities and agriculture development. After all, Mr. Speaker, these two commitments, I feel, are of critical importance not only for my constituents but for each and every Albertan.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Safe communities are the backbone of our society and are essential for the continuation of our strong economy, our effective public services, and our overall well-being. As His Honour stated, "Albertans believe that safe, strong, and caring communities are important to our quality of life," and I'd be inclined to agree. To this end, I know that this government has pledged several initiatives to promote and develop safe and caring communities that assist those in need while protecting us from those who would do us harm, initiatives like the Alberta gang reduction strategy. Mr. Speaker, this strategy is comprehensive. It includes initiatives to improve enforcement while at the same time actively going into the community and addressing youth before they take up a life of crime. Moreover, our commitment to enforcement can be measured by boots on the ground. As His Honour stated, the government "will bolster the front lines of Alberta's police forces with 100 new officers, the fulfillment of a three-year, 300-officer commitment."

In addition, I'm pleased to note that this government will combat gang activity from a legislative standpoint, introducing legislation designed to protect witnesses. After all, if we can convince a witness to step forward, we could have a greater chance of putting away those who threaten our communities.

Furthermore, this government recognizes that creating safe communities requires more than enforcement initiatives. Rather, it also requires a commitment to those in need. To this end, the Lieutenant Governor stated that this government will meet and exceed its commitment to creating 14,000 new child care spaces and will continue to work to deliver 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. This is wonderful news. Mr. Speaker, these are commitments that will not only improve the welfare of those in need but that will also improve the safety and the welfare of our communities.

4:20

A second theme covered by His Honour that I'd like to address is the importance of ensuring that Alberta remains competitive on the world stage, and I believe that this is most important when we look at our agriculture sector. After all, agriculture is one of the key

sectors of the Alberta economy and a sector that, I believe, stands to benefit greatly from improved access to both international and domestic markets.

To this end, one of the most promising ideas represented by the throne speech is the idea of creating a western economic partnership. Essentially, this partnership would include Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan and would create Canada's largest free trade and investment market. This market would then be able to work on joint trade missions overseas and market the goods produced in western Canada, goods like those produced by Alberta's agrifood industry.

After all, as His Honour stated, Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are a key and sustainable economic driver of our province. We are a responsible producer of safe, high-quality food products that are in demand all over the world. In fact, it is estimated that in 2008 the value of agrifood shipments was over \$11 billion, and while this figure is good, if not staggering, I believe that we can make this figure even better.

What the agriculture sector in Alberta needs is a commitment to break into new markets and aggressively sell Alberta internationally. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud this government is making this commitment. For example, 86 per cent of our exports are with our largest trading partner, the United States. We struggle to adjust to the seemingly ever-changing restrictions placed on our trade with the United States, and I'm pleased today to note that the United States has announced that Canada is no longer on the restricted list of countries for the buy America program, which previously kept Canadian companies and products out of the U.S. markets.

We are an exporting jurisdiction, producing more than we can consume, and we must have markets. Therefore, the three partners united in the western economic partnership will also be working together to expand trade in the growing east Asian market. After all, the economies of nations like China and India are set to expand dramatically, and it would be incredibly beneficial to get Alberta's agriculture products there at the ground level.

In addition, I believe we must work to add value to our agricultural products. Again, this is a sentiment shared by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor in his speech, specifically when he said that Alberta "will continue efforts to increase our competitive edge, foster value-added opportunities, and increase access to important international markets." Moreover, Mr. Speaker, adding value to an agricultural product could range from age verification on livestock to full meat testing to processing plants. Not only will processes like these make Alberta's agricultural products more valuable; they will increase our overall market access as increasingly more international jurisdictions are demanding value-added products.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the government's previous actions on safe communities and agriculture development, and I'm excited that these issues remain a priority in the coming year. The Lieutenant Governor's words should remind us once again that together Albertans can accomplish anything. They should remind us of the value of hard work and forward thinking, and they should remind us of the power of Alberta's character. We have the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. Does any hon. member wish to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In chapter 1 of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens provides us great

insight into his antagonistic protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, whom he describes as

a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone . . . a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster.

Dickens also points out that “external heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge.”

Flash forward over a century and a half to 2010 Alberta, and recall the adage that fact is frequently stranger than fiction. While it is purely coincidental that our Premier shares the same E.S. monogram as Dickens’ fictional character, it is very disconcerting to acknowledge that according to the latest polling numbers 86 per cent of Albertans see similar character flaws in the governance of this province.

Due to this government’s lack of transparency and accountability Albertans have no idea how many of the original \$17 billion remain in the sustainability fund, which the government has frequently boasted puts Alberta in a much better position to weather the recessionary storm. Even if the government has squandered what remains of this fund, how can the Premier justify clawing back \$12 million from Alberta’s most vulnerable persons with disabilities, their families, and supporters? How can either he or his minister of employment, who didn’t blink at awarding themselves a 35 per cent across-the-board wage increase, begrudge a 12-cents-an-hour increase to individuals making the minimum wage while working for wealthy transnational corporations like McDonald’s and Wal-Mart? Is facilitating 12-year-olds’ entry into the workplace their solution to the 78,000 plus Alberta children who according to last spring’s StatsCan figures are living below the poverty line?

When it comes to the descriptors “squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching,” one need look no further than the Minister of Education, who not only froze increases to special-needs children but cut \$80 million out of last year’s budget. As if that wasn’t bad enough, at this moment the minister is pleading poverty when it comes to the arbitrator’s awarding of the additional 1 per cent weekly wage increase that the government acknowledged was the way that not only teachers but school support staff and custodians would be compensated during the five-year agreement. Do the words “bargained in good faith” have no meaning for this government?

When it comes to the weekly earnings average, which determines MLAs’ compensation, what’s good for the government goose appears to be too rich for the Albertan working gander. If that is the case, why should members of the United Nurses association, the Health Sciences Association, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, or the Canadian Union of Public Employees, whose contracts are coming up for negotiation, have any faith in the government’s word?

The terms “secret” and “self-contained” could easily apply to the ministry of advanced education, whose actions or lack thereof would suggest that the government views education as a liability, an expense rather than an investment. With the passing of Bill 40, the opportunity to debate tuition increases in this Legislature was lost. The closed-door decision of the minister is what students in postsecondary institutions have been both dreading and anticipating for the past number of months.

This government doesn’t seem to understand that education and economy are inextricably linked. For every dollar invested in education, there is a \$3 return. The farce that is being played out to both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta of tuition increases in professional faculties of between 47 to 60 per cent might at first appear comical if its potential reality didn’t have

such a devastating effect on students themselves and Alberta’s economy. Alberta already has the highest high school dropout rate in the nation and the lowest postsecondary enrolment. Twenty-five per cent of eligible students who have the required entrance grades and can afford the ever-increasing tuition costs, which are growing more disconnected from the quality of education they receive, are already turned away each year.

The way off the globally dictated nonrenewable resource funding roller coaster is through education and diversification. This reality should be even more obvious during a recession. Why would the government consider making access to a postsecondary education even more exclusionary than it already is? What happened to the increases based on inflation principle? Why does the government undermine its students and its institutions by not providing the necessary predictability and sustainability of operational grants? Why would the government break the backs of our most important natural resource, our students? When it comes to the importance of investing in advanced education, Europe is light years ahead of Alberta.

4:30

With regard to public education this government trots out the notion of choice, yet this government chooses to unfairly advantage private schools to the tune of almost \$200 million annually. Private schools, which are permitted to discriminate on a number of factors, including religious preference and affordability, not only receive 70 per cent of their public school per-pupil funding and additional infrastructure grants, but they are permitted to charge tuition, which in some cases runs into thousands of dollars.

The fact that the average age of Alberta’s public schools is over 40 years old, with minimal government infrastructure maintenance over the last 20, combined with the fact that due to the government’s space utilization regulations school boards have been forced to close more schools than they have opened should be a major concern to all Albertans, whose futures will be decided upon by the calibre of the students being educated today.

With what little time remains, I would be remiss to not at least touch on the series of ongoing problems within the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Currently, due to the hiring freeze, up to 700 positions remain vacant. How can this possibly be considered in the, and I quote, best interests of children when their caseworkers are so overloaded as to make advocacy almost impossible? The turnover of workers in contracted-out children’s services due to wages, which are half or less than those of government workers, adds to the inconsistency in care and advocacy. Reducing qualifications for workers in the hopes of stopping the exodus does an even greater disservice to children.

Over 150 years have passed since Dickens penned his novel of redemption. In Alberta, however, when it comes to valuing or delivering critical public service, time appears to have stood still.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for comment or question.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a tremendous honour to rise today on behalf of the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency to address this Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne. My constituents have seen a lot of highs and lows in 2009 and have expressed many concerns in these trying times. I am dedicated to representing my constituents’ interests and to working hard to

promote sustainable development in my community in 2010. I am confident that this government is committed to doing the same.

However, my constituents need to believe in this also. They need to be shown that we as a government will come through for them in uncertain times. As a government we need to reach out to Albertan communities and communicate the ways in which we will foster growth and take action. We need to keep our communities strong and sustainable and encourage co-operation among them.

My constituency is extremely diverse, Mr. Speaker, as is Alberta. Our communities are made up of many different people from many different backgrounds, professions, and places. While it will be difficult to work together on every issue due to the conflicting interests, we must persevere to ensure that opportunities are being created and that all Albertans' needs are being met.

This past weekend my constituency had the distinct privilege of hosting the 2010 Alberta Winter Games. The chair of the Winter Games, Phil Kushnir, told the *Cold Lake Sun* that the games were one of the first things he has seen that has incorporated the town of Bonnyville, the MD, the city of Cold Lake, 4 Wing so comprehensively and that it's incredible what we can do as a region. Mr. Speaker, I, too, believe this is incredible.

It is an event like this that makes you realize how easy things become when we all work together towards achieving a common goal. My constituency has been struggling with its inability to work cohesively this past year, as I'm sure many areas across Alberta have as well. In late 2009 Cold Lake applied for a dissolution study due to revenue and sustainability issues and is waiting for the recommendation from our government. While opinions differ on this issue, I am happy to be part of a government that is willing to provide support to my community when in need, wherever that support might be. While our communities work together towards strengthening their relationships, we will see industries, markets strengthen in response to this.

I would like to see responsible development in 2010 in the two industries that impact Bonnyville and Cold Lake the most, agriculture and energy. Agriculture is the major area of concern for my constituents, Mr. Speaker. Many hard-working farmers across Alberta and in my community have passed their land down from generation to generation. However, it's getting harder for the family farm to yield a considerable profit, as they once had. Like all Albertans, farmers are worried about the economic downturn and how it has affected their finances and how they will be able to restore their business. We have been doing a tremendous job as a province in support of this industry, but we need to continue to move forward into new markets by limiting barriers to growth.

Development in all industries needs to occur in order to keep up with global markets, especially in the energy industry. The five major oil and gas companies in my constituency are working on ways to improve methods of extraction to increase productivity and limit their environmental footprint. For example, Imperial Oil's Cold Lake heavy-oil operation facility reached its one-billionth barrel mark in October of 2009. The facility joins three other facilities in Canada who have also reached this milestone. It is the first in situ operation in the country to accomplish this, and it happened in my constituency. Another example is Osum Oil Sands Corp., an emerging in situ oil sands company. It has recently applied for the Taiga project and is seeking approval for a 35,000 barrel per day in situ project in the Cold Lake region. This project will not involve mines, tailings ponds, or fresh water and will have a relatively small surface footprint.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents rely heavily on this industry, but at the same time we do not want to compromise the natural beauty of our land. By encouraging new and responsible development in this

industry, we can expect more environmental accountability from its key players. The recent development of our province's research and innovation system under Alberta Innovates will help to do just this. I am now a government liaison committee member of Alberta Innovates: Energy and Environment Solutions. This new system will help to strengthen markets, encourage growth and technological development, and allow our province to emerge as a global player in innovation.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents are also concerned about health care, its accessibility in rural communities, and the changes that have been implemented over the past year. Many families do not have family doctors in my constituency. Approximately 3,000 in Bonnyville alone do not have one. They are worried about the shortage of doctors in rural communities and the wait times that occur as a result of this shortage.

My constituents are also concerned about funding for priority services. A recent issue that my community struggled with was the funding for a nurse practitioner in Bonnyville. A nurse practitioner is vital to this area, and without one, patient care would suffer. We need to work hard as a government to ensure that health care remains patient focused and that the health and well-being of Albertans are considered first and foremost.

As a former teacher I believe that education needs to be a major priority of this government and that it's important to continue to act in the best interests of Alberta students. Our Education minister has proven that he will take action when student learning is affected. We need to continue to take steps to ensure that Alberta students receive the best possible education. Mr. Speaker, if we can commit to strengthening all of these areas of concern, I know that we can successfully support Albertans in need.

It has been a pleasure to be part of this government for the past two years. Even though times have been tough of late, we have the strength to band together to create positive developments for our communities. While Alberta is comprised of many different communities, we are all part of one very important one. This province binds us together through thick and thin, and I am confident in our ability to grow as many and as one.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for comments and questions. Hon. member, you wish to use five minutes?

Mr. Chase: Yes.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Something we share in common is our pride as teachers, having worked within the Alberta education system. Do you have concerns that the government's clawback of \$80 million and the unknown figure that may be clawed back this year to balance the budget have a potentially detrimental effect on children in the classroom?

Mrs. Leskiw: As you know, I've taught for 36 years, and I've taught classes of 36, taught a class of 39. The size of the class doesn't matter, but the makeup does. I've had a class of 18 that was worse than my class of 36. I also know that within the school systems alone – and I can only talk about the school systems I worked under – they themselves need to look into how they spend money. The government gives the school board money, but the ultimate decision of how they spend it is in the hands of the school board. Schools, the teachers, the school boards all need to look at how they spend the

money that is provided for them. I am confident that the education of our students will not suffer.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a short question to my colleague. She mentioned in her presentation that there were 3,000 people in Bonnyville that didn't have a doctor. I wonder if she could enlighten us, firstly, as to the population of Bonnyville and, secondly, on the number of doctors in Bonnyville.

Mrs. Leskiw: The population of Bonnyville is over 6,000, but the doctors in the Bonnyville area also service the patients in the MD of Bonnyville, which is another 9,000. We have 12 doctors. They are right now recruiting three more. We did hire a nurse practitioner, and we're hoping that that will relieve some of the problems. But we are short of doctors.

Mr. Allred: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton – help me out here – Calder. Sorry.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's all in Calder, sir.

To the hon. member. I've had many opportunities to enjoy the recreational amenities of your constituency, in particular both Bonnyville Beach and Floatingstone Lake, as well as some of the other amenities that you have, not to forget the aptly named Cold Lake. My question is not, however, about the fine body of water itself but has more to do with the dissolution of the community of Cold Lake. My question is: what is the impact that that's having on the local industry in the community? Are you seeing any loss of economic opportunity or any increased levels of unemployment or, you know, any other negative impact indicators at this particular time?

Mrs. Leskiw: Actually, our area is doing quite well. The oil companies are expanding every day.

In regard to the dissolution study I think that what Cold Lake was trying to do by applying it was for the government to take a real close look at how municipalities are funded across the entire province, the difference between rural and urban municipalities. It's a problem. It's not a problem that just occurs in Bonnyville. It's a problem that has to be addressed in the entire province. But we're doing just fine.

By the way, all things don't happen in Calder. They all happen in Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In 2003 with the Learning Commission report the government only lived up to half of the wage increase, which stuck the school boards, who are solely funded by the government, for the rest. Sixty-three different locals, approximately 50,000 Albertans, are going to be forced by the minister's decision to live up to the arbitrator's ruling. Do you have concerns about that effect on the school boards' budgets and directions you might suggest to the minister about bargaining in good faith?

Mrs. Leskiw: Well, I lived through the time when we teachers had to take a 5 per cent cutback, and that still is in my memory quite well. I believe that if the school boards take a closer look at what they're doing, they're going to be able to accommodate the increase

for teachers. I believe that teachers deserve the raise that they got, and I definitely am glad that it went in that direction.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, it's a 15-minute allocation for a response?

The Deputy Speaker: Right. Fifteen minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. There we go. Mr. Speaker, I always listen to the throne speech for a couple of reasons: primarily to see how the government's vision for the upcoming year is going to affect the good constituents of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and then, secondly, because I'm critic on a couple of portfolios. I'm looking specifically for what I can glean out of there around culture and around environment because those are the two portfolios I'm responsible for.

There were a number of things that came up for my constituents, and I've actually been seeking input from them for most of the previous month on Facebook and website and e-zine that I do and in just talking with people and responding to issues they brought up with me. You know, what are the concerns? What do you want me to bring forward on your behalf?

Here's what I'm hearing from people. The most dramatic one, I think, for a number of my constituents and their families was the cuts to PDD. The minister responsible will immediately respond that, "Well, these weren't cuts; these were administrative adjustments," and some other carefully crafted language that gets used. Frankly, my constituents were not led astray by any of the fancy footwork on the language there. These were cuts, and it has already been affecting them. I have heard a number of stories of people who were getting a specific number of hours of assistance that allowed them to live independently.

These are adults. These are persons with developmental disabilities. These are not children. Once individuals move out of the care of children's services, they usually move onto AISH or onto PDD. Where someone had enough hours of help to be able to exist in a roommate situation with another individual with PDD or special needs, their hours have been cut back enough that that was really in jeopardy. If they didn't have someone that could help get them up and get them dressed and get some food into their stomachs, they would not be able to exist in their home and they would have to move back in with their families. Frankly, their families just are not able to cope. In many cases their parents are of an age where they physically cannot assist their adult children and move them about. Even with some of the aids to daily living, which are available in a limited manner, Mr. Speaker, to assist them, that's still not enough to allow them to be able to look after their adult child.

There have already been cuts, and frankly I was offended when the minister was talking about the need to find administrative efficiencies. These not-for-profits already – they invented the meaning of administrative efficiency. They're already counting every single paper clip. Actually, they do without them because they're too expensive. They are already operating in a very efficient manner, and to say that they're not was really offensive.

The increases that have been experienced in PDD and some of the other social service sectors were to address the enormous wage gap that existed between individuals working for NGOs providing that service and contracted to government and government workers doing exactly the same job. We had a 25 to 40 per cent wage difference on that, and the government was slowly adjusting the grant programs to deal with that difference in wages. So to be saying, "Oh, they've

already had an increase,” or “They’ve had an increase of X per cent or X million dollars in the last couple of years,” is not true. Yes, they did, and it was for a very specific purpose. Frankly, for most of them, by the time the allocation got doled out, it was a difference of literally pennies an hour in their wage.

4:50

They have already been dealing with cutbacks in that sector and in the social service sector overall. What we’re seeing now is the government making it harder to qualify for programs. They get less hours of support. There’s more pressure on the NGOs to do separate fundraising to subsidize the cost of a program that they’re contracted by the government to deliver. So we have agencies fundraising to subsidize government programs.

There is a huge issue here around the government’s ability to protect vulnerable people and to allow them to engage in the full life of the province, and that continues to be an issue. I did not hear it addressed in the throne speech, and where I did, I have an argument with it. I mean, when you say that social programs will become better integrated and more focused, what I’m hearing is doublespeak for tougher criteria and that fewer people are going to get into the program. We already know that’s what is happening. The outcomes-based activity that they are moving toward in the whole social service sector is going to be even more of that: less money, more expectation that the not-for-profit delivers more service for less money. The people that really end up being unprotected in all of this are the Albertans that should be getting the service.

I want to talk about university tuition. Again, I’ve been hearing from students about the increase in tuition and the enormous struggle that it is becoming for them, especially those in so-called professional programs which are subject to the market modifiers. We’re talking medicine, obviously, law, and some other faculties that that would apply to. Here we have the situation where everybody is saying, “We don’t have family doctors; we need more family doctors,” yet at the same time the government is making it so that the universities have to make choices about raising the tuition rates, particularly on these professional programs, so that fewer people can afford to be going. We’re not seeing incentive programs that would get people to go to university and then serve as a family doctor in a rural area, and they would get, you know, part of their tuition paid. No, we’re just seeing the tuition go up. Where is the sense in that? How is that moving us along the road that we all know we need to go on?

I have a number of seniors in my constituency, and they continue to express concerns to me. They still feel that they tightened their buckles the last time the government got into trouble, in the mid-90s, and they lost a number of programs. Those programs were never restored to them, and they continue to struggle with that. The details around the pharmaceutical plan for seniors are still unfleshed out. My office phones the department of health about every six weeks and tries to get clarification on how this is going to work. I’m now being told that this is going to be an opt-in program; before I was told it was an opt-out program. How much is it going to cost them? Seniors are really worried about how much extra this new scheme is going to cost them, and they don’t believe that it’s going to save them much money. We’re not seeing the support for seniors that we expected.

There’s been a lot of talk over the last six months about the effect of government policy on mental health. We have now heard that they’re going to stop trying to shut down Alberta Hospital, but really the point that started all of this was that Alberta Hospital needed renovations. It needed upgrading. It needed modernization. We’re hearing nothing about that, even if it’s a long-term plan, even if it’s

this infrastructure amount will be, you know, rolled out over five years. Now we’re getting nothing. We’re told it’s going to be shut down, and then we’re told it’s not.

In fact, some of the seniors were moved from the Alberta Hospital to a new facility that was built by Caritas out by the Misericordia hospital. You know, Mr. Speaker, some of my seniors from the General hospital, which was also going to be renovated, were supposed to go to that Caritas facility. They can’t go there now because that space is now being taken up by geriatric mental health patients.

So a huge chaos has been created there, a great deal of uncertainty for people, and frankly two steps forward, three steps back is what we keep getting here. There has been no step up as to the provision of those programs in the community that would keep people with mental health issues stable with help with medications, with help with daily living, help with housing. All we know is we’re going to end up with more and more people with mental illness and addiction challenging our housing and homeless problems that are already pretty big.

I want to talk very briefly about minimum wage. I just find it so interesting that the rhetoric that came out of the government was all about helping small businesses. Mr. Speaker, small business doesn’t pay minimum wage. They can’t afford to. They pay better than minimum wage to people. They want to keep them in place there, and their employees are really key to them. They don’t want a high turnover. Who does pay minimum wage? Huge corporations, multinational corporations: Wal-Mart, McDonald’s, TacoTime, a lot of the fast food agencies, a lot of the megamall dwellers. That’s who pays minimum wage. I am truly curious as to how the government is going to explain to my constituents – a lot of them work in the service sector – why they are making it easier for multinational corporations like Wal-Mart and McDonald’s to get away with continuing to pay a lower rate to the people that work there.

You know, the other sector that pays minimum wage is the government itself. Here are the groups that are actually going to gain by what the government is putting out, not small businesspeople but the government itself and huge multinational corporations that actually do pay minimum wage. That’s not going to help my constituents.

I want to talk about the fact that, you know, as you drive through my constituency you see people lined up in the medicentres. Every single seat is taken. People are leaning against the wall waiting to get in, and that’s not a family doctor. I mean, maybe it’s a place where your file is still there the next time you come in, but it’s not offering primary care. Actually, the government stopped talking about primary care or primary care networks, and that is an important component that we need to continue to move forward on.

I’ve heard from people who are really concerned with, again, the doublespeak we’re getting from the government about debt creation, the sale of Alberta bonds, which is a creation of debt. Why is the government getting into that? Why can they not reorganize and find their own administrative efficiencies, stagger out the amount of infrastructure they’re spending over a longer period of time, for example, and cut some of the other expenditures that we’ve brought up time and time again? No, instead we’re going to have Alberta capital bonds being sold, which is debt creation, but it’s all being sold as though granny is going to get a roof over her head. Well, yes. But those same taxpayers, all of us, are going to be responsible for the interest rate that has to be paid on those capital bonds. So a few people will do well out of it, but every single one of us who are taxpayers in Alberta will end up paying that extra interest rate that goes out to pay on those capital bonds.

The government is moving ahead on revising the condo act, and it needs to be bigger, faster, and more wonderful on that one because we have more condos, not less. And we need revisions to that condo act to move along as quickly as possible.

I'm also looking to see how the government is doing on the creation of child care spaces, but I'm not hearing from them how they expect to deal with subsidizing the creation of child care spaces for the very large private providers of child care that we now have moving into Alberta and into our marketplace. I'm not sure why taxpayers have to subsidize private business for the creation of child care spaces.

On the cultural scene we need more venue spaces, and that, by the way, includes a request I've had from people in Jasper that they're looking for an acknowledgement from the government that they could use part of a large space vacated in the courthouse in Jasper for a Jasper arts centre. I'll talk more about that as the session goes on. I'm also hearing from the film industry here in Alberta, who are really struggling to remain competitive with the other provinces, and their request to the government to consider revising the streaming process that they have right now. I think that's an area where a little bit of investment would go an awfully long way, and we know that. We've learned this. We've learned this lesson, and still the government goes backwards on it. Frankly, that whole thing needs to be on a tax credit system, and I hope eventually that the government can manage to get there.

5:00

The other issues that I would like to raise are on the environment. Of course, our biggest worry is around water. It's around air quality. It's around cumulative effects. It's around reclamation and some pretty strong regulations around reclamation. You know, Mr. Speaker, we do believe that climate change is a reality, and it poses a significant challenge. We believe that we as a government, certainly the Alberta Liberals as a government, would act in good faith to reduce Alberta's carbon footprint.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'd like to ask my esteemed colleague a question and provide a little bit of a background for the question. The question is: are you suffering from late 1990s déjà vu? The reason I say that is that in the 1990s in Calgary we lost half our hospitals. What I've been noticing is that at that point, as part of the qualifier, we didn't have a \$17 billion buffer in the sustainability fund. Are you seeing programs, health delivery, either complications or closures in Edmonton that approach the magnitude of losing half the hospitals? Is the government playing musical beds with the existing positions?

Ms Blakeman: It's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you that we see in Edmonton are buildings being built but not being completed and not being operational. We have the Mazankowski heart centre being built and then huge problems with it being completed – again, is there the staff to actually operate it? – and secondly, the Stollery children's centre, where, again, we had kids being looked after in a tent outside for an extended period of time. After stop and start and stop and start, we seem to have now a commitment to move ahead on that. Then there's the Edmonton clinic, which is also in the wings, plus what needs to be done for the expansion of the Cross Cancer Institute. So there was a lot of

infrastructure that got started, stopped, with huge indecision around that. Work orders change, the money mounts up, and still the question of whether or not we would actually have the staff to work in it.

So am I seeing a déjà vu in programs? Yes, and here's an example. I remember talking to the minister of what was then employment, I think, or Alberta Works, who was the former Member for Lethbridge-West. He had participated in a study around cultural workers and that whole concept that, you know, investing in the arts and creating cultural workers was a cheaper way to create jobs and very long-lasting jobs. That whole project and the report that came out of it went nowhere, yet there was so much potential in it.

What we saw is a stagnation in what's happening in the arts. We had a bit of an injection the last couple of years, and we're now hearing that the government is going to give it a haircut. Well, frankly, a 15 per cent haircut in the cultural area is going to take us back to where we were in spending at about the end of the 1980s. So, yes, it's very much feeling like a déjà vu. Here we have programs and grants that we could be applying for federally for cultural career choices and promoting careers in culture, labour market agreements around culture, and we can't get any uptake on it in Alberta because we have no government policy on cultural workers and how that fits into our whole scheme of things.

So it's very much feeling like a déjà vu to me.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: I'd like to say that I was listening with bated breath to that speech, but that would not be the truth, Mr. Speaker. But I did hear out of the corner of one ear that the member wanted us to spread out our construction. So I'd ask the member for a yes-or-no answer. Would she also have had that same position with the construction of the art gallery in her constituency? Yes or no?

Ms Blakeman: If the timing had been the same, yes. I mean, to look at the Art Gallery of Alberta now and start to construct it now, knowing where we are, yeah, I would be advising that they stagger it out a bit longer.

Mr. Liepert: We'll remember that next election.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you asked me to tell the truth, so why don't you remember that as well?

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

Mr. Chase: Yes. An historical note: scalping is a Caucasian-introduced area. Would you suggest that the 10 to 15 per cent haircut is more like a scalping?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in the House today to reply to the Speech from the Throne. It is interesting to note that the first Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, the Hon. George Hedley Bulyea, read the first Speech from the Throne on March 15, 1906, for the First Session of the First Legislature of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Since then there have been over 100 throne speeches. I have heard His Honour deliver three in this Chamber in person, and I am saddened to say that not one of them mentioned me.

Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness, I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his moving and inspirational speech. The throne speech acknowledged that despite difficult times Albertans remain confident when looking to the future, and we have every reason to be. It is because in times like this Albertans roll up their sleeves and work together to ensure a bright future, a future where our economy continues to flourish, a future where our health care is the envy of the country, and a future where our children are able to grow up and thrive in strong and safe communities all over this province.

Mr. Speaker, fiscally this province has a solid foundation. This government's fiscal management and accountability have elevated Alberta to one of the best fiscal standings in North America. Alberta has some of the lowest taxes as well as some of the most established saving plans for the future. Due to this excellent fiscal planning and a commitment to saving for a rainy day, this government has put itself in a fortunate position. Saving is of utmost importance to this government. For over the past three decades Alberta has been saving. Savings like the sustainability fund can provide a soft landing in economic down times. With the sustainability fund we have the tools to face any economic storm head-on and persevere.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are deeply interested in our economy, and this deep interest is matched only by our passion for health care. Alberta's health care system will continue to be a leader as we spend near the top amount per capita in the country. The health of all Albertans is at stake. That is why it is imperative to assess and reassess health care in Alberta to make sure we are doing our absolute best. As His Honour has stated, "Your government will go beyond statistical measures . . . and seek input from Albertans themselves." The ability to plan ahead is integral to health care, and the Alberta government knows this. With the implementation of a five-year funding plan Alberta health care will remain stable and secure no matter what the economic environment entails.

His Honour also mentioned that our health care system will be accountable to Albertans, and accountability in health care is paramount to this government. Mr. Speaker, a key area on which Alberta Health Services will focus their efforts is in reducing wait times for procedures. As well, Alberta Health Services will do their utmost to ensure that health care is readily accessible to all those who need it. It is through public consultation that Alberta Health will provide added transparency, efficiency, and accountability. With a five-year plan implemented, Albertans will be able to say that we have one of the best health care systems in the country.

5:10

Along with providing better health care, we are committed to building safe and caring communities. Our quality of life depends on us having strong and safe neighbourhoods to call home. Reducing crime in a meaningful, long-term way is essential in creating great communities. The existence of criminal gangs threatens to upset the balance we have in our communities. Their criminal activities are a danger to our residents and our property. As His Honour noted, "the Alberta gang reduction strategy will provide a comprehensive, long-term approach to suppress gang crime in Alberta." Mr. Speaker, initiatives like this will make sure that the gang environment and lifestyle does not look like an attractive option for our youth. In addition, minimizing the number of gangs decreases the inherent dangers which gang activity can lead to. With fewer gangs and less crime Albertans can focus on the multitude of opportunities this beautiful province has to offer.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been blessed with abundant natural resources. However, our most valuable resource is Albertans themselves. It is the industrious, innovative, and driven people that

make the most of our resources and of the opportunities our province provides. It is through them that our province remains in a fortunate position. The Speech from the Throne thoroughly confirmed that Albertans can genuinely look to the future with confidence, a confidence that ensures that our economy will continue to grow, confidence that our health care system will continue to be a leader, and confidence that our children will grow up in safe, healthy communities, free from the dangers of gangs.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, Norman Kwong, who has represented Alberta exceptionally well in the last five years. His Speech from the Throne outlined and envisioned Alberta's continued and future greatness. A remarkable man once said: learn from the past, watch the present, and create a better future. I can proudly say that this is what our government is all about: creating a strong and stable future for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about the government's wisdom of saving for a rainy day. I would suggest that we have recessionary rain of Noah's ark epic proportions occurring in Alberta at this time. Unfortunately, the government has not saved very much over the last number of years, when we had billions of dollars of surplus. The heritage trust fund is worth less now than when Peter Lougheed left it.

I'm wondering two questions of the hon. member. Does he have any idea, even to the nearest billion, how much remains of the sustainability fund, that he has praised his government for setting aside? If there is a significant amount left in the sustainability fund, why is his government not using the sustainability fund to eliminate any cuts to public service provisions? I'll be glad to repeat them if necessary.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question by the hon. colleague. I'd like to repeat the principle: this government's fiscal management and accountability I believe elevated Alberta to one of the best fiscal standings in North America, and the Premier's intention of making this province one of the best places to live, work, and play is basically related to the fiscal management of this government.

I beg to disagree with my colleague in that he does not believe that this government is doing a good job on our savings system. The fact of the matter is that we were able to pay through this Conservative government the deficit that we had, \$21 billion. In addition to that, we have savings in our sustainability fund of \$17 billion. This is just like using the money that we have, the interest that is supposed to be received from that money, for the deficit that this government will be incurring for the next few years. So it's money, from the left, but it is our own money that we are using at the same time. I'd like to remind our colleague that Alberta has some of the lowest taxes as well as some of the most established savings plans for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you for your enthusiastic support of your government's ability to save. I hope the minister of finance will reveal the figures tomorrow. We keep hearing about \$17 billion in our sustainability fund, but Albertans have no idea how much of that \$17 billion remains and how that money will be used to preserve public service programs. I asked you if you had any knowledge, and apparently you firmly believe and have stated in this House that there's still \$17 billion in the fund. What good is a large bank account if your house is falling apart, if your children require clothing and you can't afford food?

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this is exactly the reason why we have the sustainability fund. In times of crisis this government is using that money to meet the expenses. I think what our colleague does not understand here is the fact that that money, that we are using in this time of need of our province, is really there. You know, knowing what the balance is, for me, is not really the important issue here. But knowing that the government is using that money to sustain our need, to pay the hospitals, to build the schools and the infrastructure of this province and meeting what other – you know, that this government thinks it's very relevant to forward us into the future, I think, is the issue that we should be discussing here.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been very interested to hear the hon. member's response to the throne but also the comments that he was making as it related to the answers to the questions. I'd be interested to know how he feels this kind of throne speech will be received in his constituency.

The Deputy Speaker: We ran out of time, so I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to commend His Honour for his service to the province. For the past five years His Honour has shown his love for this province and its people. Thank you for your dedication.

I would also like to commend our hon. Lieutenant Governor for delivering the Speech from the Throne and providing us with a vision for this upcoming legislative session. The priorities are centred on rededicating our Legislature to ensure that Alberta remains a leader in Canada. These priorities focus on Alberta's fiscal advantage; improving health care; building safe, caring communities; remaining competitive in a global economy; ensuring a clean energy future; and, as stated, securing Alberta's place in Canada.

Since I arrived in Alberta in 1970, this province has undergone many changes. No matter these changes, the people of this province have demonstrated resolve and passion to further themselves and their communities. Although our province has changed over the course of time, our unique values such as fiscal responsibility, entrepreneurial spirit, and self-dependence still resonate among Albertans today. The people of my constituency, Calgary-Hays, believe in this province. This positive attitude is reflected throughout Alberta. Albertans have a determined attitude, and their positive work ethic contributes to making this province a pre-eminent leader

in Canada and throughout the world. I am enthusiastic about the agenda that has been set forth for our Legislature, and I am encouraged to work with all of my colleagues to meet the needs and priorities of Albertans.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged by our government's commitment to improving Alberta's health with the creation of a new Alberta health act and engaging Albertans in a conversation on health. Health care is on the minds of many Albertans, and I believe that by making the health care system more patient focused, we will be able to better meet the needs of our constituents. Calgary-Hays will soon benefit from the service of the new South Calgary hospital, ensuring that all Calgarians have timely access to medical facilities. I look forward to the grand opening and to future investment in this hospital as it grows to serve the needs of Calgary and the surrounding regions.

Albertans are experiencing the impact of a continually changing economy. Our government has a great opportunity to continue forward momentum of needed infrastructure. This past year the government has made immense investments to meet the infrastructure needs of all constituencies in this province. I am optimistic that this investment to strengthen infrastructure will continue and that the construction of the southeast Calgary ring road will progress. The extension of the Calgary ring road is important to my constituents and serves multiple purposes such as reducing commute times, improving safety conditions, and decreasing the depreciation of our roads.

I would also like to comment on the objectives in the throne speech that focus on building a stronger Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this government has a goal to ensure that Alberta is the most competitive market in Canada as well as in North America. We are in an enviable position to have an opportunity to build on our successes by developing alternative energies and focusing on environmental sustainability. This includes continuing to develop a sustainable and competitive economy that is diversified in order to extend the longevity of Alberta's prosperity. We will continue to diversify our economy and energy sector and strive to reach our full potential. There is great opportunity in renewable energy sources such as bioenergy, wind, solar, and hydroelectric, all of which are examples of our alternatives that represent a stronger, more diverse energy sector.

Securing our place in Canada also includes seeking fair treatment for Alberta under universal federal programs. This province has contributed to the success of the nation, and it is only right that we receive fair treatment.

Mr. Speaker, providing safe and secure communities is a priority that I believe in strongly. As a 25-year veteran of the Calgary Police Service I have always believed that we need to make a concentrated effort towards crime prevention and reduction. We need to continue to protect our communities from illegal and unsafe activities, ensuring that our cities and towns are filled with an atmosphere of co-operation and safety. Reducing hostility and violence in our neighborhoods is an objective of utmost importance. We should strive to continue to provide sufficient support for our police services in their efforts to secure our communities. Therefore, I am pleased with the priorities that have been put forward.

This government's priorities include ensuring that our communities are safe and secure. In the past two years this government has enacted the safe communities strategy and is continuing to strengthen the strategy in the upcoming session. I am encouraged that the new initiatives will strengthen our police forces by adding 100 new front-line police officers. In addition, the Alberta gang reduction

strategy will address the ever-growing problem that many cities are facing.

Mr. Speaker, the priorities outlined by the Lieutenant Governor reflect the desires of Albertans. I believe that our priorities represent the many special individuals throughout Alberta, and I applaud this government's continued support for them. Some of these individuals include those who have chosen to join the Canadian armed forces. These men and women are choosing to make the ultimate commitment as a citizen. I believe we have an obligation to support these dedicated Albertans, and I want to acknowledge their selfless sacrifice to assisting those in distress, despair, and fear.

Having served myself for 11 years with the Canadian armed forces, I personally understand the diligence and loyalty to our country that our military personnel demonstrate both as full-time and reservist soldiers. Currently I have four family members serving in the forces: a niece serving here in Edmonton, a nephew serving in the navy in Esquimalt, and another nephew and my brother in Kingston, Ontario. They along with all members recognize the need to volunteer their services for the betterment of our province and our country.

The dedicated men and women of our armed forces face dangerous challenges abroad. I commend their efforts and would also like to acknowledge the competent individuals in our police service who are engaged in the effort to address the safety and security concerns in our communities here in Alberta. Their jobs can often be thankless, stressful, and demanding, but they carry out their duties because they have made a commitment to the people of Alberta.

The hon. Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne highlighted priorities that reflect what Albertans feel are the most important to them. The speech provided a thoughtful, comprehensive account of our ambitions for this Legislature, and I am sure that this government will continually strive to fulfill these priorities. I am honoured with the opportunity to diligently work every day to ensure that Albertans can continue to realize the benefits and experiences that this province affords us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much value and appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays' military and police background, his service not only to the city of Calgary but his service to the nation.

I have four questions. I know that the hon. member tried to bring forward a private member's bill with regard to distracted driving legislation, so I would like to hear his opinion on what the chances in the near future of that actually coming forward, possibly as a government bill, might be.

I'd also like to know how he feels about the delay in the Fort Macleod police college and his reflection on what has happened with part of that community and crime legislation, which saw the property of a mother seized because her son used her address as part of a fraudulent activity. Now, the court has since overturned that decision.

So distracted driving, delay for Fort Macleod police college, and how effective the community and crime legislation is if it's wrongfully seizing houses where an innocent person had nothing to do with it other than her address being used and abused.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, if you wish.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The distracted driving legislation is still in the process, so I have every confidence that it

will pass eventually. It is back, I believe, in the agenda and priorities, and we're still working on it. I do agree with Minister Ouellette sometimes, and this time I do agree with him that at least we've got it right. I wasn't totally happy because when I started working on this, we would have been third in Canada with the legislation. We may end up being last, but I think we're going to get it right. We're taking a long, hard look at it. I have spoken to people on this, and they feel it's much, much better to get it right, pass it eventually, and it'll be excellent legislation, I feel.

The delay in the police college. I believe it was announced two and a half years ago. Since that time we've obviously had a recession, and that affects not only Albertans but Canadians and everyone in North America.

Mr. Liepert: They want to stretch it out anyway. They want to stretch capital out anyway.

Mr. Johnston: Yeah. I was going to say that it hasn't been cancelled, so I'm still optimistic. Until it's announced that it's being cancelled, I'm optimistic that it will come forth in the future.

Now the appeal process. I wasn't aware of this case that you mentioned where someone, a lady – I believe it was her address that was used. If her son used that in a criminal way and it was caught, then the appeal process worked because you have a judge that appealed that process, looked it over, and rescinded the decision. Therefore, the system worked. It's no different than when I was on the drivers' review board. You would have someone use someone else's driver's licence or use a name or whatever, and the appeal process worked. They'd come before us, and we'd make a decision in that person's favour. So, as I said, I'm encouraged that this appeal process works.

5:30

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, I did a little math. I understand that you served 11 years in the Canadian armed forces in addition to 25 years in the Calgary city police for a total of 36 years of public service, not to mention the fact that you were elected to this Assembly in 2004, I believe, which, if we add that on, would give us some 42 years of direct public service. I'd like to say, hon. member, that I have always found you to be a glass-half-full, not a glass-half-empty type of individual, and you're very true to your cause. So whether today is a saving day or a spending day I'll leave to others to determine.

I would like to ask one simple question of you. In terms of the additional policing resources that are arriving in the city of Calgary, are you satisfied that the deployment of them is being done in a timely manner?

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Time is up. You can answer the hon. member at conversational time.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join with my fellow members to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong. Before I begin, I would like to thank His Honour for his years serving Alberta as Lieutenant Governor.

Mr. Speaker, every year I along with many Albertans am renewed and encouraged to hear of the successes of our government over the past year and our plans for the future. I was pleased to hear of several of the priorities planned for 2010, priorities like health care, where this government is committed to making our publicly funded

health system more patient focused, or priorities like ensuring that Alberta remains competitive in the global market. As His Honour stated, Bill 1 of this session, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will signal our government's resolve to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America. While I look forward to the success of all of these priorities, I would like to focus today on this government's commitment to striking the right balance between responsible spending and effective service delivery to all Albertans.

Right now is the time to invest in public infrastructure. Currently, as a result of the global economic downturn, many construction projects cost far less than they did a little over a year ago, so jurisdictions with money in the bank would be able to take advantage of these reduced prices and essentially get more value for the taxpayer dollar. Alberta is one of those few jurisdictions in the world that has money set aside to spend when construction prices provide better taxpayer value. As His Honour stated, this government took aggressive steps to create a cushion for the downturn and improved the fiscal position of the province by almost \$50 billion while maintaining low taxes. A \$23 billion debt was paid off, and nearly \$24 billion has been saved and invested.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, \$17 billion of these savings went into the sustainability fund, a fund designed to be used if the province ever experienced a sudden drop in income. This cushioning fund enables this government to continue to protect core programs from the cuts seen in other jurisdictions. In addition, this fund allows us to continue to spend on infrastructure. As the Lieutenant Governor stated, the sustainability fund enables Alberta to keep investing in the public infrastructure that we know we will need for tomorrow at a time when we can take advantage of lower costs. Essentially, this government's good planning has left us in a situation where we're able to take advantage of low prices and get the best deal for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this good planning can also be seen by the proposal to introduce Alberta capital bonds. Alberta capital bonds will be available only in Alberta and only to Albertans. Moreover, capital bonds give Albertans the opportunity to invest in their province and support its future growth. In addition, because of Alberta's triple-A credit rating Alberta capital bonds are also an incredibly safe investment. This is particularly attractive considering the current economic climate.

Mr. Speaker, these capital bonds will function in a similar way to our sustainability fund; that is, the money obtained from the sale of these bonds will be used to finance needed infrastructure projects. As His Honour stated, "proceeds raised through this sale of bonds will go toward building accommodations for Alberta seniors, including continuing care and supportive living facilities." Essentially, capital bonds will ensure that those most in need will have the infrastructure in place to support them both now and in the future. In this way infrastructure spending is actually complementing this

government's commitment to both social programs and to supporting those in need, commitments like the goal of creating 14,000 new child care spaces or continuing to develop 11,000 new affordable housing spaces by 2012 or, as the Lieutenant Governor stated, commitments like integrating and focusing our social programs so they effectively target those who need them most.

I'm also looking forward to another goal described by our Lieutenant Governor, improving our global competitiveness through education. One step towards this goal is creating a western economic partnership, as mentioned by His Honour. Another important step is ensuring that we have the skilled and qualified workers that the world demands. As His Honour stated, "our province must be a magnet for the talented individuals and businesses its economy needs." After all, Mr. Speaker, a skilled workforce is a result of a government dedicated to education, and I'm proud to say that because of our sound fiscal planning we're in a position to do just that. Instead of having to cut back or reduce like other jurisdictions, Alberta can continue to invest in its future by supporting our invaluable postsecondary institutions. Institutions like Red Deer College in my constituency of Red Deer-South will be instrumental in training the workers of tomorrow not only in central Alberta but, increasingly, in the world as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, because of our sound planning we are set to position Alberta and its workers in the global economic spotlight, we are set to expand the infrastructure Albertans need most, and we are set to effectively support those who need it most. These are the actions of a government that takes a long-term view of our province. These are actions that recognize that sound planning is critical not only now but for our future and the future of our children.

In closing, I would like to once again thank His Honour for his encouraging words and once again applaud this government for its sound planning and long-term vision. I believe that the strength of this province has always resulted in the character of its people and that with a long-term plan for the future Alberta and Albertans can accomplish anything.

Thank you.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn debate on the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:40 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

Issue 3

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

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

Please be seated. Hon. members, before we proceed to the first order of business of the Routine, I would just like to advise hon. members that at 11:38 this morning I received a memo from our esteemed colleagues in the grouping of six, and tomorrow when you come in, there will be a revision to the manner in which the chairs are currently configured. That will be done for tomorrow, amicably, in harmony, together.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very enthusiastic class from St. Vincent elementary school. This class made their way from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora to the Legislature today to take in a tour of the building and to witness the excitement of question period. I had a chance to chat with them and talk to them a little bit about the budget that is being presented today. I would like to thank the class for coming today, and I would ask the students as well as their teacher, Angela Whelan, and the class teaching assistants, Michelle Harper and Deb Morley, to all rise so they can receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly eight of Canada's finest. They are guests here today from Edmonton Garrison, which sits in my constituency. There are seven franco-phone soldiers and their teacher. They spend their time at the base learning English right now. They are Corporal Pierre Gregoire, Private Sylvain Morgan, Private Jonathan Michel, Private Anne Maltais, Private Mathieu Richard, Private Dominic Raymond, Private Caroline Garnier-Baril, and their teacher, Deborah Stasiuk. I'd ask them to please rise – I believe they're in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you 20 students from the Yellowhead Tribal College in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder and their teacher, Ms Linda Anderson. These young folks are here. They've completed all of their necessary course work at the Yellowhead Tribal College and are just in their final few days prior to graduation. I would ask them all now to stand and please receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: We have a very long list today, hon. members.
The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through to members of this Assembly two friends of mine who are sitting in the members' gallery, first being Mr. Joey Oberhoffner. Joey was born here in Edmonton, has lived in Calgary most of his life. He actually works for parks and protected areas with the government of Alberta and owns and operates a music school in Calgary. He also owns and operates a blog, enlightened savage.blogspot.com.

Mr. Speaker, the second individual is Janice Harrington. She is visiting for the budget today. She's the vice-president of communications and government relations for CGA Alberta. She is a resident of Airdrie, where she is the president of the Airdrie-Chestermere PC Association.

Mr. Speaker, I also noticed Jim Stevenson, alderman for ward 3, walk in.

I would ask that all members of this Assembly please rise and give them the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you two wonderful people from my constituency: Earl Marshall, the reeve for the county of Stettler, who has done amazing work in our area of looking after the folks out there – I'll always remember him for his efforts in getting safe water to the people throughout the area – and Tim Fox, the administrative officer for the county of Stettler, who we stole from Saskatchewan a number of years ago. He's a leader in sustainable communities and environmental design in public buildings. He's an amazing asset to our province. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the greetings of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce two constituents, the CEO of Nexen, Mr. Marvin Romanow, and the director of government relations, Mr. Brian Humphreys, who are here today to listen to the budget speech by our esteemed colleague. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests who are visiting the Legislature today, namely Matthew Bissett and Brendon Legault. Matthew and Brendon are from Sherwood Park, which is divided between my Strathcona constituency and the Sherwood Park constituency of the Hon. Iris Evans.

The Speaker: Uh-uh.

Mr. Quest: Yeah.

Matthew and Brendon are third-year political science students at Grant MacEwan University and have joined us previously in the House. They are here with especially keen interest as they anticipate today's budget speech, these two individuals and their academic skills and their passion for politics within our province. They are seated, I believe, in the members' gallery. I can't see them from

here. If they are here, I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two people that I consider to be very good friends, my best friends and confidants. First is Curtis McLauchlin. Curtis and I have been best friends probably since about the third grade. We used to live across the alley from each other in northeast Calgary. Curtis is currently a surface land manager at Imperial Oil on the Kearl project.

The other gentleman is Peter Davis. Peter and I have known each other for a while. He was the former executive assistant to former Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General Harvey Cenaiko and is now the assistant vice-president of government relations at Credit Union Central Alberta. These two individuals have had, whether it's envious or not so envious, the position of being my constituency presidents for the Calgary-North Hill PC Association for the last probably three years. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Tim Banman, a reporter for the *Bonnyville Nouvelle*. Tim arrived in Bonnyville five weeks ago from Brandon, Manitoba. I would ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Welcome to Alberta, Tim.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have an introduction. I am very pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Cheryl Smith. Cheryl is from Camrose, and she is a member of the Battle River regional school division. She is the Camrose representative and also the board chair. It's her first time at question period, and I know she's very interested. She's in the members' gallery. She's also here for the budget speech, and I'm very happy to have her here. I'd ask that you and members of the Assembly give her a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour today to introduce to you and through you my executive assistant, Mr. Bryce Dudley. Mr. Bryce Dudley is a graduate of the University of Calgary political science department. He has brought a sense of clarity and vision to my office that I can only thank him for. It is really, indeed, welcome to have him every day when I walk into my office and see his bright and shining face and organization. The effort he puts into making my office work right is truly commendable. I would ask Mr. Dudley to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this august House.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Len Skowronski, the leader of the Alberta Social Credit Party. A functional democracy values a variety of views and voices; therefore, Len, would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you two friends that are seated in the members' gallery, Al and Kathy Kemmere. Al is the reeve of the county of Mountain View. They're up here today meeting with me and the Minister of Transportation, dealing with some local issues. Accompanying them earlier were Doug Plamping, the CEO for the county, and also Lana Yakimchuk, counsellor for division 2. Unfortunately, they had to go back to do some real work. Al and Kathy, fortunately, were able to stay here and join us for not only question period but the budget. I'd ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Lakeland 2010 Alberta Winter Games

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was an honour for my constituency to host the Lakeland 2010 Alberta Winter Games this past weekend. I first would like to thank the hon. the Premier and Mrs. Stelmach as well as the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation for attending the opening celebration and helping to kick off a wonderful weekend for many Albertans. The Winter Games is always such an exciting event in our province and a tremendous opportunity for athletes ages 11 to 17 to compete in events to achieve their personal bests. This event was particularly special for me this year because it gave all the participants an opportunity to experience Bonnyville-Cold Lake and see the many attractions that my community has to offer.

Approximately 2,400 athletes, coaches, and officials took part in over 20 competitive sports over the weekend. Some of the most memorable awards presented were the Alberta Cup, which was awarded to zone 3, Calgary, for achieving the most medal points over the weekend. The Alberta spirit and sports award, which is presented to the zone that demonstrates the spirit of fair play, sportsmanship, team spirit, and co-operation both on and off the field, was awarded to Edmonton, zone 6. Finally, the Minister's Cup was awarded to zone 7, my home, the Lakeland area, for the most improved from the last Alberta Winter Games.

I would like to thank everyone involved for helping to make this event such a tremendous success. It's incredible to see what can happen when communities come together. A big thanks to the over 2,800 volunteers from the town of Bonnyville, the municipal district of Bonnyville, and the city of Cold Lake plus 4 Wing as well as Lakeland catholic and Northern Lights school divisions for lending their facilities out to create the athletes' village for all those athletes. Without all of your help and support Lakeland 2010 Alberta Winter Games would not have been possible.

Thank you, everyone.

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

Safer Internet Day

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured and pleased to rise today to recognize Safer Internet Day. This internationally recognized day designated to promote safe and responsible use of online technology especially among children and youth is, in fact, today.

The Internet is a powerful tool, capable of connecting us to vast amounts of information and people around the globe. Unfortunately, this technology is also increasingly being used online by predators as a tool to lure and exploit children and youth. Children and youth today spend more time than ever before online, whether they are doing homework, playing games, updating their profiles on social networking sites, or chatting with friends. Despite their high level of knowledge about this technology many youth still engage in risky online behaviour such as posting photos and personal information, including their school and e-mail addresses, or accepting friend requests on Facebook from strangers. That is why it is so important for families, communities, and government to work together to ensure that our province's children and youth have the support they need to stay safe online.

Mr. Speaker, our government provides many resources to help educate about online dangers. Different online tools are available to parents, children, and teens through the Children and Youth Services website home page. I rise today not only to recognize this particular day and the importance of protecting children and youth online but also to encourage all Albertans to learn more about Safer Internet Day and reflect on what each of us can do to help children and youth remain safe as members of the world's online community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great sense of loss that I note the recent passing of Darrell Cook, a very dedicated and vocal Calgary-based advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Cook's dedication is indicative of the thousands of people in this province who care deeply for those with developmental disabilities, but many of those caregivers are contacting my office and the offices of the Official Opposition with grave concerns about this administration's approach to funding and care of people with developmental disabilities. With the amount of money wasted by the administration on grants to golf courses, foreign offices, travel, salary increases for MLAs and cabinet ministers, and bonuses for top Tory appointees and bureaucrats, it's very disconcerting for those involved that this government would actually ask the agencies that care for people to give back millions of dollars in the middle of a fiscal year.

To claw back money after it's been delivered is unfair, wrong, and shameful. We cannot balance the books off the backs of those least able to defend themselves. There are those who require help in our society, and what does it say about us when we marginalize them even further? Yes, we are in a recession, but we are still the wealthiest province in this country, and our future is better than most in the global community.

The Official Opposition has suggested a list of cuts that could help balance the books but not at the expense of vital programs and services. A dismissal of these suggestions out of hand is political, not governance. This government has not looked nearly hard enough for savings if they really believe PDD funding is the appropriate place to cut.

Governments and society are judged by how they treat their most vulnerable citizens. We need to do better, far better, to do the right thing and hope that one day we will have a favourable judgment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Samaritan Club of Calgary

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to recognize an exceptional Calgary organization that has worked tirelessly for a century to provide assistance to our less fortunate citizens.

I attended a van dedication to Calgary Meals on Wheels last month and had the opportunity to learn about the quiet evolution of a women's-only charity in Calgary called the Samaritan Club of Calgary, an organization created in 1910 by an extraordinary woman named Leonora Christine Woods. Initially named the Young Women's Benevolent Society, this organization's aim was to assist the hundreds of immigrants coming to live in Calgary, some of whom were very, very poor. While their name changed in 1916, their objectives did not, and they remained focused on helping families in need.

Today, with almost 200 members, this distinct Calgary-based Samaritan organization raises funds to address a wide range of needs in the community, including providing food vouchers, medications, dental procedures, and wheelchairs. In addition, the Samaritan Club of Calgary also donates to schools, hospitals, the Glenbow Museum, and the YWCA just to name a few.

The year 2010 marks this organization's 100th year of service to Calgary's less fortunate, and they have chosen to honour members both past and present through the donation of a delivery van to Calgary Meals on Wheels.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the amazing contributions that the Samaritan Club of Calgary has made to our great province. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today this government is going to tell Albertans their services will be cut and they'll be saddled with multibillion-dollar debt. The consequences of being short-sighted with Alberta's finances are obvious to everyone except the members sitting across the aisle. While this government prays oil and gas prices will improve, the rest of us are still hoping to see a longer term plan. To the Premier: what longer term plan does the Premier have in place to pay back the billions of dollars in debt that this government has taken on over the last several years?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the government has not incurred any debt. We set aside a sustainability fund during the good years. We set aside some cash in reserve just for economic downturns like we're facing today. That's in the amount of \$17 billion. We also have another savings fund which was for our grandkids and their grandkids, which is the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and that is there for well, well into the future, when we run out of oil and gas in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: what action has the Premier taken to lessen the impact of the boom-bust cycles that continue to wreak havoc on this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we set aside \$17 billion in a cash surplus fund to cushion the blow of the economic downturn. The economic downturn has created a huge global economic shift that most of the world is trying to work through. But I can tell you that with good fiscal planning on behalf of this government, we're going to be back in the black in three years, the first jurisdiction in Canada to do it.

Dr. Swann: Prayers again for oil and gas prices, Mr. Speaker.

How can the Premier justify the lack of action and the lack of leadership that has led Alberta again down this path that we said we would not take again?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the only jurisdiction in Canada and perhaps even in North America that has set aside a cash surplus fund to help cope with the rapid drop in revenue stream is this province. We will come out without any operational debt, meaning that for the surgeries that are done, for the children that we educate: all of that will be done with cash that we set aside in a reserve fund especially for situations like this.

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

Long-term Care Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 13 health care forums across Alberta Albertans told us they need more publicly funded, publicly delivered long-term care. Instead, this government is focused on providing for-profit designated assisted living. Alberta's fixed-income seniors don't deserve to be charged for needing an extra bath or extra housekeeping. They pay, and corporations skim off the profit. To the Premier. The Premier is quick to say that he supports a publicly funded health care system. Does the Premier support public tax dollars going to for-profit health care providers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that today, once the budget is delivered, we will hear the minister deliver, I believe, the only long-term funding increase to health care in the country of Canada. That's a five-year commitment. That is part of good fiscal planning.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'll try it again, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier support public dollars going to private, for-profit health care providers? Yes or no?

Some Hon. Members: Like doctors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think you picked up that some of the people are saying that, well, doctors are private operators, but let's set that aside.

First of all, we have a goal in mind as the government, and that is to ensure that we provide accommodation – suitable accommodation, continuing care accommodation – for our seniors no matter where they live in the province of Alberta. Our goal here is to ensure that seniors can retire in the very same community that they helped build.

Dr. Swann: Well, yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Premier indicated that 800 continuing care beds would be available to seniors in the province. How many of these will be publicly funded and publicly delivered long-term care, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to at least 800. I believe the plan that the minister will roll out will get us beyond that

number. This is one area where we have to move very quickly. We have approximately 300 or so seniors in Edmonton and Calgary that are occupying acute-care beds. Hospitals are really not homes. We want to provide the appropriate care in an appropriate facility, and we will do that. Just wait for the budget this afternoon, and the minister will give all the details.

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

Competitiveness Review

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, while it's disappointing that this government is taking so long to catch up with the needs of the oil and gas industry, it is at least encouraging that the Minister of Energy has started reading our policy as he admitted in the House yesterday. Having read our policy, which was based on extensive consultation, the minister should know by now that the oil and gas industry needs certainty, quicker approval turnaround times, and well-thought-out royalties. To the Minister of Energy: when the minister finally gets around to releasing his competitiveness review, will he actually make the changes at that time, or is this just going to be yet another report?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we should be clear. The reason that I was familiar with the policy is because it had a striking resemblance to the policy of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. In fact, I think they xeroxed the Petroleum Producers' presentation. We will, as I said yesterday, be releasing the competitiveness review in due course, and we'd be happy to discuss it in this Assembly.

Mr. Taylor: Just not now, apparently.

Mr. Speaker, by the time this minister does anything, it will be the fifth or sixth royalty tweak in the last two and a half years. Investors no longer trust that the rules this month in Alberta are going to be the rules next month, so how long can the industry expect this latest system to last?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about royalty tweaks. What we're talking about is a competitiveness review. It's a review that's going to take into account all of the elements that business and the oil and gas industry have to consider when investing in this province. This particular review is going to be about one thing only, and that's going to be about jobs for Albertans. We're going to ensure that this is the most competitive environment so that Albertans are working in the oil patch.

Mr. Taylor: And 78,000 unemployed Albertans wait and wait and wait.

One of the policies we know right now should be implemented is a simplified one-window approach to speed up applications. When will the minister bring in a one-window approach?

Mr. Liepert: Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Because of this government's policies Albertans pay more than other Canadians for child care, health care, education, and home utilities. According to Statistics Canada Alberta households pay out of pocket the second

highest amount for utilities, the third highest for child care, the second highest for education, and the highest amount for health care. My question is to the Premier. While corporations and the wealthiest Albertans have done extremely well by this government, ordinary families are paying more. What, if anything, is this Premier going to do to help ordinary families in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have the lowest overall taxes in the country of Canada. We also have the highest exemption compared to other provinces for families. That means that the first, I believe, roughly \$34,000 of taxable income is exempted in Alberta compared to other provinces. With respect to the one province that the hon. member is referring to, and that is the province of Quebec, I would say that it's a contribution from Albertans, the \$21.1 billion that we sent to Ottawa last year to subsidize them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, he dodges, but he can't hide.

Alberta has the most deregulated and privatized utility sector in Canada. [some applause] It should be no surprise, then, that Alberta families spend on average over \$3,000 a year on utilities. This is 33 per cent higher than the national average, and the members opposite are applauding it. To the Premier: will he admit that his deregulation policies have led to higher costs for Alberta families, and if not, will he explain why they are so high?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if you look at the last couple of months – I don't know how far back we have to go – we've had some of the lowest wholesale electricity rates in the country of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. He just deals with part of the problem and doesn't answer the questions.

The average Alberta family spends more on school fees, supplies, and postsecondary tuition than in any other province except Ontario. Postsecondary education was supposed to be affordable, and primary and secondary was supposed to be free, yet education costs are now a major burden on Alberta families. Will the Premier tell the Assembly what steps he's going to take to reduce the costs of education in the household budgets of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. One, going back to the first question, I think the hon. member has to also look at all of the other fees that are attached by others that are providing electricity, water, and other services to the houses. Most of those are franchise fees that are set by municipalities, have nothing to do with the province of Alberta.

The other issue is that here we have the best postsecondary system in all of the country of Canada. Seventy per cent of the cost of public postsecondary education is covered by the provincial global taxpayer.

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

2:00

Health Legislation

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are very aware of the recommendations that our government recently accepted from the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. One of the main recommendations is for Alberta to have our very own

Alberta health care act. This is probably a good idea, but I have a few questions for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are you bringing in a provincial health act when we already have a Canada Health Act? Isn't that a duplication of effort, especially when our report supports the Canada Health Act?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe it's a duplication of effort at all. Albertans have told us rather resoundingly that they want their own health care act that specifies issues and principles based around Alberta themes, and they're going to get that. They've also said that they want an Alberta health care act that enshrines the Canada Health Act principles of accountability, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and public administration, and that's what we're going to deliver.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. How will an Alberta health act improve our health service delivery system? Is this sort of an exercise in public relations?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, some people might refer to it as an exercise in public relations when you're consulting with key stakeholders and when you're communicating with Albertans, when you're engaging them in the discussion. I refer to it as my job, and I'm very proud to have this job to help out. I know that when we look at what the principles will be that underline our own Alberta health care act, they will enshrine the Canada Health Act principles that I already mentioned. It will identify key responsibilities that we all have as Albertans, and it will also look at consolidating different acts so that people can have a one-stop shopping centre to go to to read and understand what's going on in health care in a much clearer way than today.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, if this is so important, why is it taking so long to get one?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the short answer would be that I don't recall a report, at least a formal report, wherein anyone ever advocated for our having our own Alberta health care act. But they have now through a committee co-chaired by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and they have said: we want our own act; we want it to reflect what the Alberta principles are, what the Alberta experiences are. In many ways we're so far ahead of so many other jurisdictions. They want us to reflect that from Alberta's perspective, and we will.

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

Air Quality Monitoring

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton recently had two heavy smog days, but you'd have to look long and hard to get specific information or, in fact, any information. The national air monitoring system would have allowed Albertans to immediately check air quality by turning on their televisions. To the Minister of Environment: why cut Alberta out of the benefit of being onboard with the full national program?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we've been studying very intently the national program, and we have determined that it does not serve the needs of Alberta. It does not measure some of the key air contami-

nants that we believe are important to Albertans, and for that reason Alberta maintains its own separate air monitoring system. I should point out, though, that I think it is a shortcoming that we don't have the same accessibility, and I can assure the member that that's one of the priorities that we will be addressing in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: well, how can a monitoring system like Alberta's, that doesn't report cumulative effects, give Albertans an honest picture of what's going on?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what cumulative effects the member is referring to, but what I will accept is that the monitoring system that we have in place here doesn't talk about particulates. So I think that's a real shortcoming. We are reporting that we have good air quality, and the average Albertan can either look outside or step outside and smell smoke from the forest fires or experience the results of an inversion. That is a shortcoming, and that's something that we are committed to addressing, and we will address it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The minister is exactly right. But a number of people can't step outside. In fact, they can't step outside, and they need to be able to look at something to know whether it's even healthy for them to step outside. So why would we have a monitoring system that people don't know about? How cost-effective is that?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's not quite that extreme. We do have accessibility to our monitoring system. What I'm saying is that we need to do a better job when we're talking about having a web-based system that the public can access and, frankly, that the media would be able to access as well and provide for that additional source of information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Fish Consumption Advisory Guidelines

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a fish consumer. My people are fish consumers. At the recent Waterkeeper Alliance fundraiser in Banff and in subsequent media reports comments were made that Alberta's fish are not edible, and that has caused many of my people to be worried, creating uncertainty about fish as a food source. Therefore, my question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What are you doing to ensure that Alberta's fish are safe to eat for me, my people, and anybody who wants to enjoy Alberta's fish?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, Alberta Health and Wellness base their advisories with respect to fish consumption on guidelines from Health Canada, and SRD, my ministry, communicates these advisories on an annual basis and even during the year through our fishing guidebook. Fishing is a big business in Alberta. It's over a \$400 million business in the sport-fishing industry and about 3 and a half million dollars in commercial fishing. By the

way, about 2 million kilograms of whitefish, on average, have been netted from the province of Alberta and sold internationally. They meet all of the guidelines required.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, if that's in fact true – I'd like my first supplemental question to go to the Minister of Health and Wellness – can he then tell us how many of Alberta's water bodies have fish consumption advisories? This kind of information is really important to those fishermen as well as to the people who eat it.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, we have between 2,000 and 3,000 water bodies in the province of Alberta, and for those 2,600 or so water bodies we have about eight advisories that have been issued by the chief medical officer. We're concerned about those eight, obviously, but we have to keep in mind that most of the mercury accumulation that occurs in those water bodies tends to happen from natural sources such as rotting trees or wildfires and the like. Nonetheless, it's a serious issue, and we are looking deeper into it.

Ms Calahasen: Well, eight is really great.

Words are one thing, Mr. Speaker, but actions are what count to my people. So what is the Department of Sustainable Resource Development doing to support fish testing activities, and if they are not doing what they should be doing, will the minister make a commitment to joining me and my constituents in fishing the waters in question and then eating the fish that we do, smoked fish?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, water bodies in the province of Alberta are tested for mercury in fish at any point in time when there's a perceived risk. It can be a natural risk that could take place by occurrences, something like wildfire. We also conduct periodic studies and get information from local and regional programs and industry players. So my department does help to collect fish samples, and we are testing fish whenever asked. Also, the department has a multistakeholder group, a regional aquatics monitoring program, and we work with them to make sure that Alberta fish are safe for consumers.

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

Teachers' Salary Arbitration

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday a provincial arbitrator finally resolved an ongoing dispute over the correct wage increase teachers should be given this year. However, the fact that we are still dealing with this issue almost a year later is symbolic of this government's inept management of our public education system. To the Minister of Education: why did the minister choose to leave school boards in the lurch yet again by not setting aside a contingency fund in this year's budget in the event that the province lost an arbitration?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the preamble leaves things that need to be answered. Inept management? All around the world people are looking at Alberta as having an education system that is among the best in the world. Even at a conference this week in Edmonton I understand that education was held out as one of the areas that government is succeeding in. So I don't know where this hon. member comes from with statements like that about inept management.

The long and short of it is that if he understands labour relations processes, he understands that when you have a disagreement with respect to the interpretation of a clause of a contract, you put it into an arbitration process or some other governance process to deal with it, which is what we did and got it resolved relatively quickly.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A result, I would add, that this government has ignored.

Statistics Canada reported that it would change the formula used for wage increases in December 2008, but when the change occurred in March of the next year, the ministry was caught flat-footed. Considering the tens of million of dollars involved, why wasn't the minister monitoring the situation?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there were discussions, apparently, about what StatsCan might be doing with its formula, but up until the end of February of last year the published number was 4.82, which is the number we very prudently used in planning our budget. The fact is that they came out at the end of March with a larger number without any notice to us other than prior to the middle of March, when the first inkling came out that there was going to be a new calculation, a new number. That is not something that a person would guess at and speculate on, so we did the prudent thing, and we budgeted on what was known.

Mr. Chase: Well, I would suggest that there's a tremendous lack of foresight in that statement as well as in your general dealings.

If the province had initiated arbitration immediately, a decision may have been reached in time for this year's budget. Why did the minister dither until August of 2009 before announcing that he would not honour the wage increase figure supported by the teachers? It's your arbitrator.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we've never ever said that we would not honour the contract at all. In fact, it's a contract between school boards and local ATAs. We have never said that we would not honour the contract. We said that there was a difference of interpretation with respect to a clause in the contract in terms of how to calculate the adjustment. That's not an abnormal circumstance. Contracts provide for how to deal with those issues. This contract provided for how to deal with that issue. We used the terms of the contract to deal with the issue in exactly the way that it was intended, and it's been done, as I say, in accordance with labour relations processes in a very timely manner. In fact, it's probably the fastest arbitration decision in the history of labour relations.

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

Bioenergy Initiatives

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pine beetle has created some real challenges in this province, especially in my constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and in many other forest communities around the province. But at the same time it has also created some opportunities. My questions are all to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Your previous portfolio in Energy and now your existing portfolio in Sustainable Resources give you a great opportunity to promote bioenergy fuels. How come you're not knocking on my doors, and how come you're not

knocking on industry's doors to tell us about the great nine-point plan that the Alberta government has?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, perhaps, that the member opposite has a short memory because we've knocked on all the doors. Nevertheless, what's happening in the department now, in SRD: we are working with all of the producers in the province, particularly the major producers with large FMAs that are experiencing difficulty relative to the mountain pine beetle.

Mr. Speaker, there are tremendous opportunities in the province of Alberta in bioenergy and even in petrochemicals and fuels relative to the fibre business. We'll continue to work with industry. They're in the game with us. We're working with them. We believe there are some wins on all sides here.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, that's a good answer, Mr. Minister.

Again back to you. It seems like there's a lot of red tape to get through the granting programs and through the nine-point bioenergy plan that we have. What are you doing to streamline this process so that we can get to work and take advantage of this fibre source that we have here today?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, you know, when we put out these types of initiatives and when we're using public money – let's remember that my colleague has about \$239 million that we have earmarked to invest in these particular types of programs, not just with fibre but a number of other initiatives as well. We need to be prudent that where we apply public dollars, there is the best possible chance of a positive outcome.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, since you mentioned your colleague, I'll supplement this to the Minister of Energy. Will you commit, Mr. Minister, to working with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the communities that are so dependent on the forest industry to get this bioenergy plan going now?

Mr. Liepert: Well, one of the difficulties we're having right now – and this is what we're attempting to work through in the near weeks – is that it's not so much to get the program going; it's a question of an uneconomic situation over the last couple of years. We need to look at the potential of extending the particular program because there are a number of projects out there. Many of them are tied to federal dollars. Again, as my colleague said, it has to make economic sense, and that's what we're trying to work out.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Alberta Health Services Board

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shortly after he was appointed, the Minister of Health and Wellness stated that his ministerial style was, and I quote, that he's always been hands on. That was what he said. Then within days of becoming minister, he completely changed a number of major decisions made by Alberta Health Services. Just when it didn't seem possible, there's even more confusion than ever within Alberta Health Services. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: as a hands-on minister is he running Alberta Health Services or is Ken Hughes and their board and staff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, let's understand the body. This body has two arms. The body is called Alberta Health and Wellness, and the ministry is called the Alberta Health and Wellness ministry. One arm is the delivery arm, and that is Alberta Health Services. It is very competently run by a gentleman named Mr. Ken Hughes, and he is doing an outstanding job. That arm reports to this body. The other arm is the Alberta Health and Wellness department. That arm also is connected to and reports to this body.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I appreciate the minister's anatomically correct explanation. Let's see if this body has a head, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister clarify whether it was his decision, the Premier's, Ken Hughes's, or Stephen Duckett's to keep the 290 acute-care beds open in Calgary and Edmonton? Whose decision?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it was a joint decision, not quite involving all the parties that he mentioned but most certainly involving direction from the Premier overall to improve the health care system. For the Health Services folks to have found some efficiencies that allowed us to make some of those improvements so quickly, I'm grateful, but I did connect with them prior to making any comments on it. I hope you will agree that it's important to keep those 300 acute-care beds open in Edmonton and Calgary. That's what we're trying so hard to do, and we will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the same minister: will the minister tell the Assembly whether the CEO and board of Alberta Health Services clear all their major policy decisions with himself before those decisions are enacted?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker. They're not required to, but I think there would be occasions when they may wish to at least speak with me about what policy decisions they're taking.

The reason that we appointed one province-wide board is so that we could take a look at the width and breadth of health care and health care costs and health care services so that we could make the improvements necessary. I hope that when the member sees the budget and the business plan coming out, the five-year guaranteed funding plan, a first of its kind, to my knowledge, anywhere in the country, will in fact do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Carbon Capture and Storage

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By its actions this government has hurt the Alberta energy workers and industry and injured our reputation as a reliable place to invest. This government doesn't understand that consumers and taxpayers are tired of paying for their failed policies. The Environment minister has openly talked about tripling the price of the carbon levy, from \$15 a tonne to \$45 a tonne. My question is for the minister. What would a \$45 tax levy add to the price of Albertans' average home heating bill?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the member fails to recognize are two things. First of all, the price of energy, oil and gas, is established on the world market. This industry are price takers, not

price makers. So the short answer is that it wouldn't impact. The longer answer is that of course it would, but it would impact Alberta homeowners in the same way it would impact homeowners anywhere else in the world. We've also said, which the member failed to point out, that we're not prepared to take an action until the rest of the world steps along with us.

Mr. Hinman: He's talking about it, and they'll end up doing it, but what he fails on, as I asked, is what it would add to the bill. Albertans understand what the cost of the commodity is.

Mr. Speaker, this government's approach on the big issue is to delay, not actually solve the problem. If we look at carbon sequestration, their approach is to bury billions of dollars of taxpayers' money in the ground, cross their fingers, and hope that it gets them out of trouble. Well, it won't work. Does the Environment minister agree with his blue-ribbon panel that the government would need to spend \$24 billion on this dead-end carbon capture and storage plan?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think what this member is saying, only he doesn't have the courage to state it, is that he doesn't believe that we need to be dealing with climate change. The fact of the matter is that the world is struggling right now to deal with this issue called climate change. There will be costs associated. No one has ever said that there would not be costs associated. Alberta and Canada need to be part of the decision-making process that determines how we as a collective society around the world deal with this very, very critical issue of climate change.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, he didn't even answer the question about his own blue-ribbon panel and be honest with Albertans on what that would cost and wait for the member's statement before he makes such a judgment. If the Environment minister does or doesn't agree with his panel and the cost, why won't he come through and tell the cost to Albertans? The question is: will the minister do the right thing and put on a world-class forum that only accepts scientific, peer-reviewed reports to find the facts for Albertans?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the cost of carbon capture and storage is enormous because it doesn't apply just in Alberta; it applies in Canada, in the United States, and throughout the world. That is the very issue that we are struggling with right now, and when I say we, I mean collective mankind. This is transformational technology. It's like any new technology. Everyone expects that over time the price will come down. But make no mistake; there are costs associated with it. This government is prepared to lead by example and demonstrate how we can apply technology to address this critical issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Hail Insurance

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency office has received a number of calls recently about a recent decision by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation board that will change the way our producers purchase hail insurance. As a result, farmers can purchase the hail insurance product online or, in the case of my constituency, travel on average about a hundred kilometres to a district office. Two problems: district offices are not located in many rural communities in Alberta, and secondly, the online portals

are not readily available to all parts of the province. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Minister, I'd like to know just how much consultation there was involving our agricultural agents of hail insurance that took place before the decision was made.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have definitely been changes made to the way producers can purchase their hail insurance. We have expanded the service and the options available to those producers, and we did it after receiving information from a steering group of Alberta farmers. In addition to the hail insurance available through their local agent, they now will have 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week availability online. This year that information will be filed with their other crop insurance information through the online option.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks. The first supplemental that I have, then, to the same minister: will this decision be reviewed so that, actually, the best service and choice and practices that are available to the farmers are considered a priority before you implement the change?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The input has already been reviewed. People have come back and made comment on our direction. Our producers are always, of course, of the highest interest to us as we expand services across the province. In addition to the online and their local agent, they also have the availability of those 52 AFSC offices across the province that can take care of their insurance needs.

Mr. McFarland: My final supplemental to the same minister: how will AFSC's decision improve rural community viability for businesses if the businesses aren't there to offer their service?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, the service will be available through those agents at the local level, as it always has been. My expectation, though, is that with the online options available to producers, there will be a number of them that will take advantage of that. It's going to be the market that decides what the viable option is with respect to insurance. All options will still be available to those producers, and hopefully this works very well for them.

Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, in 2004 this government announced it would be building the Alberta police college in Fort Macleod. At that time the government indicated that it was necessary to build this complex in order to ensure that a well-trained police force was present in Alberta. To date the project has not been built. I assume there must be a reason for this. My question is to the Solicitor General. Does the government still believe that the building of an Alberta police college is necessary to improve the delivery of law enforcement services in this province, or can we get by with the status quo?

Mr. Oberle: Thank you for the question. As the member correctly points out, we have not built the college in Fort Macleod. We're reviewing the financial situation at the moment. As members

opposite have pointed out, we are in fiscal difficulties right now. I'm reviewing the situation and will report back to this House when I'm ready.

Mr. Hehr: Well, it sounds like we still sort of need a site; we're just not sure when. That's, I guess, fair. Is Fort Macleod, then, still the preferred site for this training centre?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member just made a bunch of assumptions that I never gave him in the first question, so I can't really address it. I didn't say that we absolutely needed it, nor did I say that we're looking at Fort Macleod or any other centre. I said that I would report back to this House when I'm ready to do so.

Mr. Hehr: Well, let me back up the bus. In 2004 I thought we were clear: you guys announced you were building a training centre. Is that on or off the table? Can you confirm to this community whether you are going to be building it and quit jerking around, then?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, might I refer the hon. member to answer 1(a).

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Canadian Access to U.S. Procurement Market

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our federal government has recently come to an agreement with the American federal government to address protectionist measures in the U.S. Recovery Act that previously discriminated against Canadian business. My question to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: what impact does this agreement have on Alberta businesses?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this is a very good first step. Let's back up a bit and recognize, especially during the recession, that businesses on both sides of the border needed to have some degree of confidence that the senior levels of governments were going to work in harmony and be able to work together to resolve issues. The Canadian government, acting through negotiations with America, tapped in on the resources in each one of the provinces because we're responsible for implementation of agreements and understood that participation of the provinces was essential in defining what we would have as a strategy. So \$6 billion was available . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question, then, to the same minister. Access to \$6 billion worth of procurement contracts isn't that much considering that Alberta exported an estimated \$96.6 billion to the U.S. in 2008. Can the minister please explain what use this agreement is to us if they only allow us to access \$6 billion worth of contracts?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it sets the stage in the right direction so that companies in Canada, companies in Alberta will have a chance at the U.S. major procurement opportunities. It's a good first step, and we believe at this stage it's a positive sign, moving in the right direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question to the same minister. Our federal government has indicated there are provincial and territorial commitments in the new agreement that may affect our procurement system. Can the minister explain how this will affect Alberta's procurement system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have already advanced in our procurement system well beyond what this agreement implies. We have a very open and transparent procurement system with the TILMA agreement and the kinds of work we've been doing to take down the barriers to open ourselves and our borders for this kind of responsible trade. We are already in Alberta well positioned. Many other jurisdictions may not be as well positioned, but Alberta is in good shape.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Deerfoot Trail

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are already hearing about cuts to the municipal sustainability initiative, and now we hear about the province wanting to return the Deerfoot back to the city of Calgary. This is another example of this government downloading costs at a time when resources are being cut. To the Minister of Transportation. My constituents want to know: is the minister planning to return the Deerfoot back to the city of Calgary?

2:30

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think there was a big misunderstanding here by someone when this first came up and was talked about. As everyone knows, the policy of this government is that any time we build a ring road around a city or a bypass to any town or city in Alberta, when that road is completely done and we have a new highway and then we have a highway that's not needed anymore, we sit down and negotiate with that municipality on returning it to them in the very highest possible form that we can, and we take it from there. We haven't got that new highway around the city of Calgary yet, so it's a long way off before we're actually in the process of trying to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking the minister just to clarify things.

To the minister again: given that returning the highway to Calgary wasn't part of the original agreement, is the minister doing this to download the cost to Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just said that it's a policy of this government that we always sit down and negotiate. We don't force anything onto anybody. We sit down and negotiate when — when — we have the proper highway that all Albertans need to get around the city.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Deerfoot Trail is still the highway. It will remain the highway.

To the minister again. Maintenance of the Deerfoot costs around \$8 million a year. Will the minister commit to funding the ongoing maintenance costs of the Deerfoot if it's handed over to the city?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I already committed to him that we look after our provincial highways, and as long as that's a provincial

highway, we will do a very good job of maintaining it to keep Calgarians and Albertans safe on our highways in Alberta.

High-speed Rail Link

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary to Edmonton corridor is incredibly busy. According to an Alberta Transportation study in 2006 nearly 10 million trips were taken in this corridor, and since the study numbers have continued to rise. High-speed rail has been raised as an option to reduce traffic on the Queen Elizabeth II highway, reducing congestion, shortening the travel time, and reducing emissions. All of my questions are for the Minister of Transportation. In view of the market demand assessment released last July, can the minister advise whether the government will support a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the market demand assessment was a very, very good step towards high-speed rail in Alberta. That said, that report makes no recommendations regarding future government involvement in such a project. We know that planning for the future and having an innovative transportation system is important, and we will continue to look at all options to support Albertans and the province's economic future. However, the report does say that high-speed rail . . .

The Speaker: Maybe we'll come to it.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, given the fast growth and the increased intensity of land use in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, it would seem to make sense to acquire the land for a future right-of-way. Will the minister advise whether or not he's prepared to move in the direction of acquiring the land for such a right-of-way?

Mr. Ouellette: Real quick, to finish my last answer, the report also does say that with the amount of people moving into Alberta, even if we had that, we will need to put that extra lane on the QE II.

Mr. Speaker, if all of my colleagues decide to say, "Let's proceed with the corridor study," we would have to do that to determine that alignment. The study would take about two years to complete . . .

The Speaker: And we may come back again.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, would the minister be prepared to consider a public-private partnership agreement to move that high-speed rail project forward?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we will look at all options to do the very best deal we can for Albertans and Alberta taxpayers. The Calgary-Edmonton corridor has been described as an economic tiger to this province. We know that it's an important component for all of our transportation network in the province. The government supports the use of P3s. We always support whatever is the best deal for our taxpayers in this province, and P3s have proven to be part of that, but we will look at various numbers of options. If the deal isn't good enough for private enterprise, it probably isn't good enough for Alberta taxpayers either.

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

Minimum Wage

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's move to freeze the minimum wage will by its own admission impact 20,000 of Alberta's most vulnerable, grabbing an expected \$240 per year out of their pockets and giving it back to their employer. Only this

government would be so out of touch to think that the best way to create jobs is on the backs of the very poorest people in this province. Will the minister admit that not only is it wrong but that this callous decision denies minimum wage earners money that they desperately need?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, only this government would make sure that Albertans who are in a position where they are earning minimum wage, who are the most vulnerable to being laid off because of their circumstances of either a lack of transferable skills or being employed in a very volatile section of our economy, would now, at a time when our Alberta economy is most fragile, increase the minimum wage and put them on social assistance, put that welfare wall in front of them and have them dependent on social assistance. I will focus on keeping them employed, and that's what we will do.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, copious studies show that the notion of fair minimum wage levels leading to job loss is pure fiction. The sad truth is that minimum wage earners don't earn enough to do anything other than pour their money back into their local economy. Their dollars are the best at creating jobs. Why won't the minister stop being such a miser and give minimum wage workers the 12-cent raise they were promised?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. In Alberta there are roughly 20,000 Albertans who are working at minimum wage. Of that 20,000, more than 50 per cent are individuals who are working in an industry where there are tips and gratuities included. We can't account for how much they're making in addition to that. The fact of the matter is that I have spoken with restaurant owners. They would end up laying off low-income earners if that cost was added onto their bottom line. My preference is to keep them working, to find a more effective formula and have them staying employed.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of minimum wage earners are women, many of whom are single parents, and we know that there is a huge linkage between low minimum wage and child poverty. In this context this government has just grabbed 20 bucks a month out of their pockets. Twenty bucks a month won't bankrupt a business, but it will mean less food on their tables. Why is the minister doing petty favours for industry by picking pennies out of the pockets of low-income Albertans?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let's be honest here. This government has not grabbed any money out of anybody's pockets. What this government has done is made sure that they stayed employed. Let's be frank. If those individuals who are employed right now were laid off, they would be receiving low-income benefits, which are significantly lower than what they are earning right now. The fact of the matter is that since this member is so very passionate, I will be asking an all-party committee to take a look at the whole structure of minimum wage, find out what is fair once and for all for Albertans, and then I will more than welcome gathering that kind of input. Thank you.

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

Government Spending

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to talk about working for all Albertans and taking care of their priorities. When the Premier announced his new cabinet, he also added a Political Minister for Calgary and a Political Minister for

Edmonton. My question is to the Deputy Premier. If the work of these political ministers is so valuable and so needed, why didn't he name a political minister for rural Alberta or the larger cities, like Fort McMurray or Red Deer, that exist across this province?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously Edmonton and Calgary, the two larger centres in the province, contain roughly two-thirds of the province's population. There are a number of issues that are being worked on in both of those cities, and it's a prudent move to have one place for those cities, those municipalities to have a contact. I also point out that we have a chair of Calgary caucus, we have a chair of Edmonton caucus, we have a chair of the rural caucus, and we have representations to all of those committees. This is simply a political move on the other party's part to try to take away representation from those two cities.

2:40

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, we have 83 MLAs elected that are supposed to be representing their constituents.

The government also likes to stand up and say that it is fighting for Albertans and working on their priorities. In 2004-2005 the Executive Council office cost taxpayers about \$2.1 million. In 2008-2009 the same office cost taxpayers about \$4 million. That is an 84 per cent increase in the size of the Executive Council office budget. Mr. Speaker, my question again is to the Deputy Premier.

The Speaker: Okay. Deputy Premier, go ahead.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we're going to have a fair bit of time here in the next little while to debate the budget. We're going to be debating the estimates. In fact, today, obviously, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise is going to be presenting the budget, which is going to show that this government has listened to Albertans. This government is going to do what Albertans want us to do based on their priorities, not their priorities.

Mrs. Forsyth: That's nice to hear, Mr. Speaker. I'll look forward to a decrease in Executive Council's budget.

Mr. Speaker, the previous Premier didn't need as many advisers. Perhaps if the government had a vision that Albertans knew about, then they wouldn't be so troubled right now. My question is to the Deputy Premier. If extra staff and salary are so essential to do the job, where is the accountability, and why aren't Albertans getting better results?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard the question, but I guess I'm struggling with the idea of extra staff because we haven't actually had the budget yet. I'm sure the hon. member will have plenty of time to discuss the budget in the estimates, which is her right as a private member in this House. I look forward to her participating in the debate in the many hours that we'll be going through that debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today 18 individual members were recognized. The Official Opposition had eight questions, the two independent parties had two each, and the government caucus had six. There were 108 questions and answers.

We'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well over 500 caregivers, professionals, family members, and service providers are attending the sixth annual Alberta Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Conference in Calgary this week. They are learning more about how to prevent, treat, and support people living with FASD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It's an issue that I take very seriously as I saw the deep and wide-ranging effects first-hand during my time as AADAC chair a few years ago.

It may come as a shock for many to learn that over 23,000 Albertans have FASD, and the social and economic impacts of the disorder touch every single one of us. That's why our Alberta government is continuing to fund community-based supports, research, and education and awareness programs throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that a cross-ministry team of no fewer than nine ministries has brought its best people together to give those with FASD all-encompassing supports. With the guidance of a 10-year strategic plan we're seeing great results, such as the 12 FASD service networks, which help people living with FASD to reach their full potential in their communities. We're also seeing the number of FASD assessment and diagnostic clinics rise. Alberta now has 20 clinics, twice as many as we had in 2008. We're also focusing on providing caregivers and professionals the training needed to further support people with FASD and utilizing mentors who are helping expectant at-risk mothers to live healthy lifestyles during pregnancy.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that there are many incredibly inspirational people who are dedicated to helping the most vulnerable children and their families. I encourage every Albertan to learn more about the role they can play in assisting all in our communities who are affected by this preventable disability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Spending

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in December Albertans watched as activists and politicians flew in their private jets to Copenhagen. We were even able to witness their fleets of luxury cars driving people to cocktail receptions, invite-only meetings, and celebrity events.

While in Copenhagen Alberta's Environment minister made some comments that were very concerning to Albertans. When asked about the price of carbon credits, the Environment minister told reporters that he did not believe that \$15 per tonne was enough and that the cost should be double or even higher.

Over the past year it has become clear that much more research must be done on whether or not and to what extent man-made carbon dioxide is affecting our planet. Mr. Speaker, you'll be pleased to know that I support this research taking place because we need answers that strip away the hype and give us the facts. Without facts we cannot make informed decisions. Without facts we cannot figure out what the best solutions are for any other issues as well. But at this point to invest billions of taxpayers' dollars without the full picture is just wrong.

Mr. Speaker, this government has undermined investors' confidence as a result of its blatant disregard for contracts and its disastrous royalties scheme. It talks out of both sides of its mouth on many issues. If we take the Environment minister at his word, he wants to pile even more costs on Alberta industries, all industries that operate here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this government is addicted to spending. We need an intervention on behalf of hard-working Alberta taxpayers and businesses so that they can be protected from this government's ever-increasing shakedown to support their spending habit. The first step to recovery is to acknowledge that one has a problem. The second step is to apologize to those that you have hurt. The third step is to do all you can to make it right. This government has failed on the first two steps. We need a government that can actually get it right.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent of mine, Dustin McNichol. He writes to express his concern with "the University of Alberta's recent decision to levy a new non-instructional, mandatory fee of \$570 in order to make up for budgetary shortfalls."

The second, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a document from the Parkland Institute, which uses Statistics Canada data to show that Albertans pay more out of pocket for child care, health care, education, and utilities than Canadians in other provinces.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm tabling today the appropriate copies of letters, one dated January 27, 2010, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs advising me of his resignation from three different standing committees; a letter dated February 1, 2010, from the Member for Calgary-Egmont advising me of his resignation from three different committees; and a letter dated February 8, 2010, from the hon. Member for Peace River advising me of his resignation from two standing committees of the House.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, Budget 2009 third-quarter fiscal update 2009-2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Advanced Education and Technology public postsecondary institutions audited financial statements, universities and the Banff Centre, for the year ended March 31, 2009.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as it is budget day there is a requirement for us to do a few little modifications in the Assembly prior to us coming back, so I'm now going to declare a recess of the House. We will reconvene at 3:15 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:48 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I read his message, I would like you to pass on to him what a tremendous honour and privilege it has been for everyone in this Assembly to work with the Hon. Norman Kwong over the past few years. [applause]

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Rise in the galleries.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

As well, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Government Motions

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 4, I wish to table the 2010-11 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2010-11 government estimates. Also being tabled for the information of the Legislative Assembly are business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the Government Accountability Act. In addition, the Government Accountability Act requires that the government at the same time table the government's business plan and the consolidated fiscal and capital plans. The hon. Premier will table the government's strategic business plan, and the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise will table the consolidated fiscal and capital plans.

4. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2010-11 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply and that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2010-11 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply following consideration by the policy field committees.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the government of Alberta strategic business plan as required under section 7 of the Government Accountability Act. The strategic business plan sets out the government's vision. It sets out the long-term strategic plan. It also includes the government's three-year business plan, which outlines the government's goals, strategies, and measures necessary to track results over the next three years.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table two documents at this time. First, I wish to table the government's consolidated fiscal and capital plans for Budget 2010. The consolidated fiscal plan is required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act, and the consolidated capital plan is required under section 7.1 of the same act.

Second, I wish to table the government's heritage savings trust fund business plan. The business plan is required under section 7 of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.

3:20

Budget Address

5. Dr. Morton moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege today to present the government of Alberta's proposed budget for the fiscal year 2010-11. I do so with confidence but also with caution, caution because our province and, indeed, our country and the world are all still feeling the impact of the worst economic recession since the 1930s – these are difficult times, and difficult times call for difficult choices – but also with confidence because these choices are made easier and the path to a brighter future made more certain by knowing that this Assembly and this government can draw upon the many strengths that are Alberta's heritage.

Alberta's heritage is one of strong families and strong communities, of independence and self-reliance but also a spirit of caring for our neighbours. We value our past and provide for the future. We respect and support those generations that built Alberta, and we are proud to act as stewards of our natural and economic resources, responsible for passing on to the next generation an Alberta that is as good as or better than the one we received. Budget 2010 is faithful to Alberta's heritage. It protects services for the young and the elderly, the sick and the disabled, and it protects our air, land, water, and wildlife. It keeps us on the path to prosperity, both present and future.

Another part of Alberta's heritage is the effect of the ups and downs of commodity markets on our resource-based economy. Too often governments have responded by spending too much in the good times and cutting too much in the bad times, but thanks to past fiscal prudence and accumulated savings, today we do not have to make deep cuts to essential services. Over the past 16 years Alberta has paid down \$23 billion in debt. We have saved nearly \$25 billion, primarily in the heritage and sustainability funds. Mr. Speaker, Budget 2010 puts a stop to the wild ups and downs of this fiscal pendulum.

I'm pleased to report early signs of economic recovery: higher oil prices, growth in the housing market, and 12,500 new jobs in Alberta since October. In the past three months five new oil sands projects have been announced, adding over \$5 billion in investments. Just last month a \$4 billion bitumen upgrader was announced for Alberta's Industrial Heartland. That kind of investment is expected to spur Alberta's economy to grow by 2.6 per cent in 2010 and by an average of 3 per cent over the next three years.

That's the good news, that we and the rest of the world are transitioning out of this recession. But how long and how steep this transition will be and whether there will still be some dips ahead no one knows for sure. As an exporting economy what happens in the rest of the world affects Alberta, and there will be many risks still out there and beyond our control. The high Canadian dollar and fluctuating financial markets and energy prices create volatility in government revenues. Natural gas prices remain low. Canadian and U.S. stimulus funding will end this year with unknown impact. Our largest trading partner is \$12 trillion in debt. The outlook for commercial real estate is very uncertain. So while we have cause for optimism, the strength and the pace of Alberta's economic recovery cannot be taken for granted. Fiscal prudence is still required.

It is within this context that I present Budget 2010. It is a budget that enhances Alberta's competitiveness in the global market. A competitive Alberta creates jobs and opportunity, it reduces demand on social programs, and it generates the revenue to support the public services and social supports that Albertans value. The Fraser

Institute recently ranked Alberta as the number one province in Canada in which to invest. Budget 2010 keeps it that way by implementing our Premier's pledge that there will be no new taxes.

As I deliver this budget, I do so knowing that it will not satisfy everyone. Some will say we spend too much. Others will say we spend too little. Mr. Speaker, it's not about spending too much or spending too little; it's about spending the right amounts in the right places. This is what Budget 2010 does. It strikes the right balance. It protects priority programs without draining our savings, without going into debt for ongoing operations, and without raising taxes, and it puts us back into the black by Budget 2012. We will not meet today's needs on the backs of tomorrow's citizens. We will not saddle future generations with high taxes and debt.

Budget 2010 includes a total operating expense of \$33.2 billion. Excluding a one-time payment to Alberta Health Services, that is a 4.3 per cent increase over the 2009-2010 forecast. That 4.3 per cent is somewhat higher than the expected population growth and inflation of 3.5 per cent for this year. However, total increases over the full three years of this budget will actually be less than population growth and inflation over that same period. Based on projected revenues of \$34 billion and a total expense of \$38.7 billion, we are forecasting a deficit of \$4.7 billion. A smaller deficit of \$1.1 billion is forecast for 2011-12, and we get back into the black in year 3, with a projected surplus of \$505 million in 2012-13. Savings from the sustainability fund will offset the two years of deficit.

A year ago government announced plans to make \$2 billion in adjustments in Budget 2010 unless our financial situation improved. A great deal of work was done to achieve this, and I commend the decision-makers across government ministries who helped us to achieve \$1.3 billion in savings through program changes and efficiencies. In light of a brighter than expected fiscal and economic picture, we have chosen to reinvest these savings into priority areas and still be back in the black in three years. This does not mean our job is done. As we did last year, we will continue to identify and make in-year savings, with a target this year of finding an additional \$240 million.

There has been much speculation, and some of it, frankly, fearmongering, about potential budget reductions. Budget 2010 does reduce funding in a number of areas. These reductions start in government areas that do not directly affect services to the public: a reduction for Executive Council of 8.6 per cent, for Service Alberta of 15.6 per cent, and for International and Intergovernmental Relations of 7.7 per cent. About 700 government positions are being eliminated, but we have worked hard to minimize job losses, with an effort to reassign many affected employees to vacant positions. We will continue to work with our public-sector unions to live within our budgets while minimizing job losses.

Some reductions are made to programs that deliver front-line public services. As more Albertans go back to work, the demand for income supports is expected to diminish, resulting in a reduction to income supports of \$41 million. Greater emphasis on early intervention and more permanent and enhanced foster placements will reduce child intervention services by \$27 million. We will save \$19 million by focusing our community grants to those groups that provide services and supports to the most vulnerable. We will reduce the costs for the rent supplement program by \$13 million by targeting rental assistance to those with the greatest needs.

Reductions, however, are not being made across the board. Budget 2010 protects programs that help the most vulnerable. Benefits are protected at current levels for recipients of AISH and Alberta seniors' benefits, and funding levels are maintained for the persons with developmental disabilities program. Benefits are also

maintained for seniors' supports for dental, optical, and school property tax assistance. More than \$40 million is added to some of these programs to accommodate growth in caseloads. Funding levels are also maintained for programs such as Alberta aids to daily living, affordable housing programs, and homelessness initiatives. Mr. Speaker, this budget and this government will help those who need help.

3:30

Budget 2010 highlights Alberta's continuing commitment to publicly funded health care. It eliminates the Alberta Health Services debt with a one-time injection of \$759 million on top of a \$343 million payment made in 2009-10, and it increases Alberta Health Services' annual budget by \$1.3 billion, adjusting the base by more than \$800 million and adding 6 per cent more to address cost pressures associated with an aging population, expensive drugs, and technologies. The 6 per cent increase is part of a five-year plan of predictable increases to support long-term planning in health care delivery, and the subsequent four years will see increases of 6 per cent in each of the next two years and 4.5 per cent in each of the following two years. Our commitment to public health care now totals more than \$15 billion, and with this five-year plan for health care funding health officials commit to identifying new efficiencies in service delivery to ensure that the health care system operates within its means.

Our government is also committed to ensuring that Albertans are treated the same as all other Canadians. Today the province of Alberta receives from Ottawa at least \$200 less per person than other provinces under the Canada Health transfer. This amounts to a shortfall of more than \$700 million a year. This is not right. This is not fair. We will vigorously pursue fair funding on behalf of all Albertans.

Alberta's most important renewable resource is our children, and the biggest investors in Alberta's future are their parents. So to protect our children, our homes, and our communities, Budget 2010 provides \$148 million to continue our safe communities program. This \$148 million will enhance addiction prevention programs and services for families of at-risk children, it will complete the Alberta gang strategy and the long-term crime reduction strategy, and it will hire another 100 front-line police officers. Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that 2010 is not a good year for gangs, drug dealers, and thieves.

These social programs are not cheap. To pay for them, Budget 2010 contains initiatives that generate jobs, opportunities, and revenues. Value-added initiatives such as the bitumen royalty in kind will help us get the most out of Alberta's conventional energy and oil sands. Budget 2010 allocates \$237 million to innovation, research, and technology commercialization that will bring that research to market. This includes \$188 million for programs under Alberta Innovates to develop Alberta-grown technology and environmental, medical, and manufacturing solutions into marketable products and services.

A strong reputation as a good environmental steward is increasingly important to protect access to our export markets. Budget 2010 continues Alberta's commitment to carbon capture and storage with the potential for the technology to increase oil recovery from existing wells. But our environmental stewardship goes well beyond greenhouse gases. Budget 2010 supports renewable energy, environmental management and compliance, and the renewed water for life strategy. For environmentally friendly municipal transit \$470 million over three years is committed to the Green TRIP, and work will continue on developing regional plans under Alberta's land-use framework.

Other natural resources such as forestry and agriculture contribute to Alberta's economic strength, and Budget 2010 allocates \$10 million to address workforce retention and retraining and to enhance forest health initiatives. In agriculture Budget 2010 provides over \$9 million to AgriFlex, a new cost-shared program with the federal government to improve agriculture's competitiveness. Plus, \$40 million is added to the cost-shared Growing Forward initiative to support agricultural innovation and risk management.

The future of Alberta is sitting in classrooms and lecture halls across the province right now, and Budget 2010 recognizes that a solid education is both a personal advantage for students and a competitive advantage for Alberta. School boards will receive an increase of \$250 million, or 4.8 per cent, for announced grant rate increases, enrolment growth, and specialized services. Support for adult learning is increased by \$31 million, with a focus on training for work programs. Overall, base operating grants for postsecondary institutions are maintained at 2009 levels, which is over \$2 billion.

This budget fulfills our commitment to invest in the future through expanded, improved infrastructure. The capital plan supports \$7.2 billion in infrastructure in 2010-11 and more than \$20 billion over the next three years. This infrastructure spending will create thousands of new jobs in construction at a time when unemployment is high and costs are low. Lower building costs mean we get more bang for our buck, and the new jobs will support financial stability for many hardworking Alberta families.

Budget 2010 recognizes that Alberta's economic future is increasingly in the north. Accordingly, we will build new resource roads in northern Alberta and continue the twinning of portions of highway 63. In Fort McMurray we will complete two highway interchanges and a new five-lane bridge over the Athabasca River.

Across the province work will start on 41 schools that were already approved under the capital plan. Funding is also allocated for water and waste water, affordable housing, and supportive living. The proceeds from Alberta capital bonds will provide \$100 million to build seniors' accommodations, including long-term care facilities. This year work continues on the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads and on improving highways across the province.

Fully one-quarter of our three-year capital plan is invested directly in municipalities. Municipalities receive infrastructure grants and support totalling \$1.78 billion in 2010-11 and \$5.25 billion over three years. This includes the municipal sustainability initiative, which receives a \$476 million increase, providing municipalities with a total of \$876 million to address their infrastructure needs.

In summary, Budget 2010 strikes the right balance, and we achieved this balance because we stayed true to the Premier's four-point recovery plan. We have reduced spending in most departments, with over \$1.3 billion in cuts from forecast targets. Second, we have used our savings, the sustainability fund, to protect priority programs: education for the young, health care for the sick, and strengthened supports for the elderly and the disabled. Third, we continue to build infrastructure, creating more jobs today and a

foundation for future economic growth. Finally, we've kept Alberta competitive with no new taxes and a balanced budget by 2012. This budget will restore economic growth in Alberta. And let's be perfectly clear about this: in today's economy what's good for Alberta is good for all of Canada.

Some critics will point out that this budget has a large deficit. It does, and neither I nor anybody else on this side of the House is happy about that, but running a deficit in 2010 doesn't make us any different than most other provinces or the federal government. What does make us different is that we are not creating new debt for the day-to-day operations. Our projected debt supports capital spending, infrastructure that will be there for future generations. What does make us different is that our budget shortfalls this year and next can and will be covered by our rainy-day savings account. What other government in Canada can say that?

We will not allow annual deficits to aggregate into a large debt to burden future generations. Albertans want to pay for services, not to service interest on debt. We made that mistake in the 1980s, and we will not make that mistake again.

Mr. Speaker, this budget supports the Premier's vision of a fiscally strong Alberta with a competitive and innovative economy and the best publicly funded health care in Canada and the most advanced infrastructure.

Will budget cutbacks present challenges for some Albertans? Of course. But it is a fair budget. No one group is singled out. Every sector, every Albertan will be asked to give up a little. That's the key to our recovery: the recognition that we're all in this together. So working together, we can weather the economic storm until sunnier times return, which they will, and we will keep Alberta a beautiful and healthy Alberta, the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is certainly a challenging budget, deserving of comprehensive scrutiny.

At this time I would beg leave to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on February 10, 2010.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:42 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

Issue 4

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: I have the introduction of the Lakeland Ridge public school, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes. You've been recognized.

Ms Evans: Thrilled – thank you – especially since our Premier was the one who first envisioned that this school could be an ideal partnership between Catholic, public, and the two government departments that exist in the school. Well, today we have the privilege of hosting two classes, and I haven't seen them here yet, so I trust that they may be behind us. Oh, there they are. We've got 55 visitors from Lakeland Ridge public school accompanied by Lindy Mair, Jay Robertson, Savi Kajan, Sasha Robinson, Heather Wilton, Lorie Fisher, Leeann Fries, Debbie Borody, and Jenny Stober. These students are very buoyant, and we had a wonderful discussion while we took their picture. I'd ask them to please stand, and we will give them the recognition they richly deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a couple of guests that are constituents from Little Bow. Mr. Kim Craig is the mayor from the town of Coaldale, and Mr. Leo Ludwig is the town manager. Mr. Ludwig actually attended the same high school as our colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview maybe a year or two ago. I would like them to rise – I see they're up – and receive the traditional warm welcome. They're here to receive some meetings with the AUMA, and they met this morning with our Minister of Environment.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Trevor Theman, registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, and Ms Marian Stuffco, the government relations adviser at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Dr. Theman assumed the position of registrar in 2005 and continues to be very interested in the role that health care professionals can play in creating a culture of safety, while Ms Stuffco, as you may know, has an extensive background in sports at the local, national, and international levels. I see they've risen. I would just ask all of our colleagues in the Assembly to greet them with a warm, thunderous round of applause.

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

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three staff from the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. They are Alberta wildfire operations team members, instrumental in forest firefighting efforts here and in British Columbia last year. Rick Moore, wildfire operations officer in Rocky Mountain House, with 27 years of service, led efforts to fight the 3,000 hectare Brookmere fire near Merritt, B.C. Doug Smith, the wildfire operations officer in Whitecourt, with 25 years of service, was an incident commander in British Columbia involved in multiple fires near Bella Coola. Mr. John Brewer, director of wildlife operations at the provincial forest fires centre in Edmonton, 33 years of service, co-ordinated help in British Columbia to ensure that Alberta remained well protected from wildfires in the province last year. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly and would thank them for joining us today.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a visitor from Ludhiana, India, Mr. Gajjan Singh Thind. Mr. Thind is a director of M.G.M. public school Ludhiana. I hope he is enjoying his visit to the capital city of Edmonton in the wonderful province of Alberta. Mr. Thind is joined here today by Gurbhalinder Singh Sandhu, chief editor of the *Des Pardes Times*, Vattandeep Singh Grewal, and Roop Brar. At this time I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to introduce two guests from my constituency: the mayor of Strathmore, Mr. George Lattery, and the CEO of the town of Strathmore, Dr. Dwight Stanford. They attended meetings with ministers this morning and are in Edmonton to attend AUMA meetings later today and tomorrow. Welcome, and I would ask all of my colleagues to extend the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour for me today to rise and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly several individuals in the public gallery that are here today to show their concern for the mismanagement of our health care system. Please rise as I say your name and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly: Jayne Hamilton, Elaine and Neil Fleming, Tom and Bev Sawyer. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly six bright young students. They are from the University of Alberta Conservative Association. They have interests in political science, sociology, teaching, business. I would like them to stand up in order of their names: Mr. Kevin Tam, who is the president; Mr. Adam

Risling, executive vice-president; Miss Heather Mickalyk, vice-president of events; Mr. Christian Lowden; Mr. Matthew Sztym; Mr. Patrick Ross. This is a bright young future. They are here to keep an eye on us, learn from us, and maybe teach us and guide us in the near future. I look forward to seeing them maybe one day sitting in our chairs. I would like all my friends to give them a warm welcome to the Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise again today and introduce to you and through you students from Meyonohk elementary school, from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, sitting in the members' gallery. I would ask the students to please rise along with their teacher, Mrs. Sylvester, to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Tribute to Forest Firefighters

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about wildfires and the heroic work done by a select group of Albertans who protect the lives and properties of their friends and neighbours from forest fires. It may seem strange to speak of wildfires in February, when sub-zero temperatures are common and snow covers the ground across much of our province. However, the conditions that support wildfires will arrive very soon in Alberta – the season typically begins April 1, less than two months from now – and we will once again have cause to be thankful for the efforts of the firefighters who protect public safety in our province.

These brave men and women put their lives at stake every day of the wildfire season in Alberta to ensure that Alberta communities are protected when danger threatens, and it's not just Albertans that they protect. Last August 290 of our brave firefighters were sent from Alberta to British Columbia to help with the terrible situation facing our neighbours to the west. B.C. was experiencing extreme fire hazards and catastrophic fires burning across that province. Fires encroached on many communities, placing lives at risk and threatening to destroy homes and businesses. Alberta's firefighters stepped up to the challenge and helped British Columbia overcome the dangerous situation.

What is also notable about the effort is that Alberta was able to provide help without compromising safety in this province. Last summer also saw extreme fire hazards in Alberta. Last year we recorded 1,000 wildfires by mid-June, the earliest date we've ever reached that number. Luckily for us and British Columbia, our wildfire hazard lessened as the summer progressed, allowing us to assist British Columbia when they most needed our help.

This scenario illustrates the value of the firefighting agreements Alberta has in place with other agencies across North America, allowing for sharing of resources when one jurisdiction or another faces extreme conditions. Alberta has benefited from this agreement in the past, most recently last June, when 200 firefighters from across Canada and Mexico arrived to assist Alberta with a rash of wildfires.

1:40

Wildland firefighters are a rare breed indeed. They are quick to stand in the front lines to fight fires at home and to travel to other jurisdictions to help neighbours in need. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of the wildland firefighters who protect

people and property in this province, whether they are part of Alberta's firefighting corps or personnel from other . . . [Mr. Johnston's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Haiti Relief Effort

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to many organizations that have come together in support of the people of Haiti. It's estimated that 230,000 people have been identified as deceased and that approximately 300,000 have been injured. However, through this darkness we have brought out characteristics of humanity that really encompass the best of us: charity, compassion, and the spirit to persevere.

To this end, I would like to bring to the attention of the House some of the hard work done by organizations with whom I've dealt over the last few weeks. Two of my constituents, Kamila and Bong, recently hosted a Haiti ARISE concert that brought together many churches in east Calgary, including Christ is Coming Church, Calgary Mosaic Church, Eastside City Church, U-Turn project ministries, Centre Street Church, Peace Chapel Church, Rockpointe Church, and the Way Christian Mission.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Sikh community and the Dashmesh Culture Center as well as Radio SurSangam and radio Sabrang have raised approximately \$25,000 for the Red Cross. My friends here in Edmonton, the Sikh youth of Edmonton, recently held a fundraiser for an organization called United Sikhs that has medical professionals on the ground in Haiti. I believe they raised approximately \$10,000.

This earthquake shook not only the lives of those in Haiti but also the lives of many here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all members to join with me and show their appreciation for the fundraising efforts of these organizations as well as ones in their own communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Good Neighbour Award

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I love living in Edmonton, and most of that is because of the spirit of Edmontonians. We participate. We volunteer officially and sometimes unofficially by just helping out a neighbour, a friend, even a stranger.

One of the projects currently being sponsored by the city of Edmonton is the good neighbour award, now in its third year. This award is to recognize some of the thousands of people who take positive actions to make Edmonton safer, better, more fun. This award is special for me this year because it is particularly encouraging people who live in multifamily buildings, like apartments and condos, as well as business owners and the not-for-profit agencies to consider nominating someone. Of course, the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre is home to a lot of people who live in apartments and condominiums.

The short stories and nominations received for the award in 2008 and 2009 were all inspiring and have confirmed a belief that it is the little everyday things neighbours do, those small gestures to assist each other, that make our city safe and livable. The city put the stories together in a lovely booklet called Looking Out for Each Other.

This whole venture is supported by the Realtors Association of Edmonton in conjunction with the city of Edmonton. Thank you to

the Realtors Association of Edmonton for being very good neighbours and for supporting good neighbours. Nomination forms are available at all libraries or online at www.edmonton.ca/safeedmonton. And hurry, because the deadline is the 1st of March. I encourage all of our Edmonton MLAs and all of those living in our fair city to consider nominating their own good neighbour.

Thank you very much.

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

Terry Fox Run Commemorative Quilt

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise today and recognize the town of Taber's inspirational ongoing commitment to the Terry Fox Run. Every year the citizens of this compassionate community make an extraordinary effort to raise money in the fight against cancer. In 2008 this community of roughly 7,500 people broke records by raising nearly \$51,000 over the course of the Terry Fox Run with help thanks to extra events, including head shave promotions and a stop by the Taber Tour of Hope.

Last November the one-of-a-kind Terry Fox legacy quilt was unveiled in the Taber public library. This incredible quilt is made from T-shirts from every single Terry Fox Run in Canada, including the province of New Brunswick. To collect these shirts, every Terry Fox Run co-ordinator in Canada was contacted about donating a shirt. Once collected, the quilt was assembled by the Taber Cotton Pickers Quilt Club, while Kaye's Kwilting then completed the outside of the quilt. Now Taber's focus turns to its 2010 run, which hopes to be as successful as in past years.

Mr. Speaker, may I congratulate the citizens of Taber for their extraordinary efforts in the fight against cancer. I know that this beautiful and unique quilt will serve as an inspiration to current and future participants in the Terry Fox Run.

Thank you very much.

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

Darrell Cook

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise in the House today and recognize the passing of a great Albertan, Mr. Darrell Cook. Darrell's passing was brought to the attention of this House yesterday, and while we're all saddened by this, I was most disappointed by the nature in which his passing was mentioned.

Darrell was a great Albertan in many ways, upholding the intrinsic values of what it means to be Albertan. He was hard working, entrepreneurial, compassionate, and giving. Darrell was president and chief executive officer of Gibraltar Mortgage. He was committed to business, earning his CGA designation in 1977, and was director of Mainstreet Equity and Canex Energy. But this is not what Darrell will be remembered for. Darrell's life was focused on serving his community and, more specifically, those that are most vulnerable in our community. He was steadfast and deliberate in ensuring that those with disabilities enjoyed the highest quality of life. He had an active leadership role in developing the Road Ahead Society, which was established in December 2000 in response to the needs of families with disabled children and adults.

He was also involved with Calgary's Family Managed Resource Centre as well as being involved in Family Voices Calgary and their Calgary Family Summit, which enables parents and family members to connect with each other. He was a contributor to many charities, a major donor to the Alberta Association for Community Living.

Darrell was instrumental in lobbying the Alberta government to implement the registered disability savings plan in a manner that

maximally benefited people with disabilities and their families. Darrell and his wife, Sheilagh, were awarded the Colonel Eric Cormack and Dr. Barbara Cormack memorial award for their long-term voluntary commitment to families and their leadership in the development of new and innovative community initiatives. In addition to this, he was a board member and current president of the Calgary-Varsity PC Association and an active member of the Calgary Winter Club and the Country Hills Golf Club.

On behalf of the members of this Assembly I wish to express our condolences to the Cook family for their loss, a loss that will be felt throughout the province.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Alberta once set the standard for sound fiscal management and responsibility both nationally and internationally. Sadly, those days are long gone. Over the past several years almost no provincial or state government has raised their spending as much or as fast as this one. They have scrapped our no-deficit laws and plunged us back into debt, showing great disrespect to all the Albertans who sacrificed so much, even their own jobs in some cases, to achieve a debt-free Alberta for ourselves and for our children, and things are only getting worse.

In Budget 2010 this government claims an expected deficit shortfall of roughly \$4.7 billion. This number is brutal on its own, but it actually underestimates the true cash deficit this government is running. You see, the \$4.7 billion deficit number does not include an additional \$2.8 billion in infrastructure spending that is offset on the government's books as an asset, as stated on page 18 of their 2010 fiscal plan document. This is still cash going out. It's just, essentially, hidden from public view. Taken together, the total cash deficit for this government is a staggering \$7.5 billion. Added together with Budget 2009's cash deficit, that brings the total to – and I'm glad to see you're sitting down, Mr. Speaker – \$15 billion of red ink in just two years of work.

1:50

So how is this government paying for this? Partly by draining our shrinking sustainability fund, down from \$17 billion just two years ago to \$8 billion this year, and partly through debt financing, which is estimated to climb to \$6 billion by 2012. Mr. Speaker, this PC government has failed Albertans. They have totally mismanaged this province's finances, and they are now heaping billions in debt and unsustainable spending on the backs of young Albertans. This government must be held accountable for this train wreck.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Budget

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Another budget full of spending without any sense of the value we're getting for our money. While cuts weren't drastic, how do we know the dollars we're spending are getting the job done? To the Premier. Spending more money doesn't mean spending more wisely. How will Albertans know they're getting value from the increased spending money this government is throwing at our problems?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all of the spending is scrutinized by the Auditor General. He looks at all of the departments and many of the agencies that deliver services like Alberta Health Services and other

publicly funded agencies. That is the role of the Auditor General, and he has done a good job.

Dr. Swann: This government is making a bet on commodity prices, that are risky to forecast. How can the Premier take a gamble with Alberta's future by spending money that isn't actually out of the ground yet?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe in Alberta. I believe in the entrepreneurial spirit of this great province. There are signs of economic recovery, but I can tell you that that does not mean that we put our heads in the sand and hope this all goes by without any major repercussions. There are huge global shifts. We've got to get into the marketplace. There's huge competition for people, huge competition for investment. We just can't sit around and wait for a brighter day. We've got to take action, and we have through this plan. We will have a balanced budget by 2012-13.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe in responsible fiscal management. Just weeks ago this government claimed that the buffet was closed. We're not so sure. What specific changes are you putting in place that address, Mr. Premier, value for money rather than simply the amount of money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that in infrastructure we're getting tremendous value. We're seeing tenders drop by 20, 30, and in some cases as much as 40 per cent. Over a third of that money on infrastructure will be spent by municipalities, so we'll be able to redo all of the old waterlines, sewer lines, build new roads, build schools, build hospitals for future generations. That is money well spent, and that's just one part of the overall budget.

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

Health Care Budget

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two days ago every Albertan knew that we were not receiving value for money in our health care system. Alberta Health Services' and this government's management of the health care system is a mess. Albertans also know that the only way to get better value for money is to use the money more effectively. To the Premier: what have you changed in the last two days that will mean Albertans will get better value for the extra \$1.7 billion in the health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it was clear that by amalgamating all of the boards down to one, the Alberta Health Services Board, we saved about \$600 million in administration. There was still \$800 million that was a deficit within the health system. That gave us a better appreciation of the true cost of delivering health care in this province. There is no jurisdiction – no jurisdiction – in Canada that has given any health service authority five-year funding, increased funding over those years. Our population will be increasing; it'll be aging. We know that there will be more requirement of health services delivered. Now the board can plan successfully and deliver those services that Albertans require.

Dr. Swann: We're talking about value for money, Mr. Speaker. It may be a political fix to throw another \$1.7 billion at health care, but a practical fix means Albertans have access to a family doctor. To the Premier: specifically, how many more family doctors will Albertans have access to with this increase?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are maintaining our plan in advanced education to keep increasing the number of seats. We will be graduating more homegrown physicians in the province of Alberta. We will meet our target, and that also goes to complement all of the other health care providers – nurses, physiotherapists, the whole broad range of health care providers – that we will need in the future.

Dr. Swann: Under this government's incompetent management the deficits of the health authorities have increased year by year: \$68 million, \$297 million, then \$343 million, and now a projected \$759 million deficit. Is this not clear evidence that Alberta health care's main problem is mismanagement?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we know now the true cost of delivering health care. We wrote off the deficit because that deficit is really part of the overall balance sheet of the province of Alberta. We're starting fresh; we're starting clean. We're starting with a good plan. The minister will be consulting further this year with Albertans in terms of having our own Alberta health care act, that will enshrine the five principles of the Canada Health Act, and also listening to Albertans in terms of what else they would like to see. I believe that we are blazing the trail here in a good health system, improving it, and most importantly it will remain publicly funded.

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

Provincial Budget (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is determined to drain our precious savings account down to zero before the next provincial election. Yesterday's budget turned the multibillion-dollar sustainability fund into this government's personal re-election fund. [interjections] Oh yeah, laugh. To the Premier. If the commodity prices go down, not up, the fund won't last until the next election. What will you do then?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, through good, solid, prudent financial planning we're going to be in the best economic position of any province in Canada. In fact, we're going to lead this nation out of the recession. I have, as I said earlier, great faith in the economy of this province and in recovery, and we will show by 2012-13 a balanced budget, money being put back in the sustainability fund to make sure that we're prepared for the next economic downturn, whenever that may come.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: before the hon. Premier drains the sustainability fund, why not reduce the size of your bloated cabinet and save millions and millions of dollars that can be used for children in need and those that are unemployed who need help?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if I remember, using your calculation, I think the whole Legislative Assembly, this whole operation – all the members here, all of the benefits paid to members, the cost of running offices – is about .1 per cent of the total operating budget. There are savings. We cut about 8.6 per cent out of Executive Council. There will be more savings coming out of the operations of this government.

Let's not fool ourselves. This is the worst economic recession since, well, the 1930s. Many economists are saying that. We have seen oil go from \$75 to \$147 down to \$35. There is no jurisdiction in Canada that has a \$17 billion surplus cash fund, especially for this

kind of opportunity to cushion the blow on revenue and keep our services going.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, that was quite an interesting response.

I have a press release dated December 15, 2006, when the hon. Premier reduced the size of his first cabinet from 24 to 18. This is what the Premier stated: "The people of this province told me they wanted more effective government, not more of it." What changed since then other than the fact that we now have a \$4.7 billion deficit as a result of you and your government's mismanagement?

Mr. Stelmach: Since 2006 considerably fewer Liberals on the other side.

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

Provincial Deficit

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the President of the Treasury Board suggested that I lacked math skills because of my outrageous claim that the actual budget deficits in 2009 and likely in 2010 would understate the true cash deficit by about \$3 billion. Now, this is puzzling to me because on the bottom of page 18 of their document, Budget 2010, in very small print it clearly states that capital investment is not reported as an expense. To the Treasury Board President: is the roughly \$3 billion in capital investment included in the government's final \$4.7 billion deficit number or isn't it?

2:00

Mr. Snelgrove: Sometimes people prove themselves correct.

Mr. Speaker, there are two kinds of capital investment. There are capital grants that we give to municipalities, to health authorities, to schools. Those aren't our assets; they're theirs. That's listed in line 3 on page 67 of the book very clearly. Further down it shows capital investment in government-owned properties, \$2.8 billion, roughly. That is accounted through amortization, which is clearly spelled out on page 78 and again on the bottom of page 79, and it is the most basic of accounting standards to follow.

Mr. Anderson: Wow. That is good spin. Your own Treasury Board accountants explained this to me personally. Are their math skills in question as well?

Mr. Speaker, it is clear despite the verbal jiu-jitsu from the President of the Treasury Board that the real cash deficit for Budget 2010 is \$7.5 billion. This number is staggering. To the Premier: will he admit to Albertans that the true deficit is \$7.5 billion so that we can have an open and honest discussion in this House on how to get our spending under control?

The Speaker: Who is answering this?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have just said goodbye to one of the most respected officers of this legislative building today, Mr. Fred Dunn. Mr. Dunn and his staff go through these books on a year-to-year basis with a fine-tooth comb. They have given us unqualified support for every financial statement we've produced. The true cash cost of our government amortization this year is \$519 million, as stated very clearly in our book, and has followed the same accounting principles for years and years and years. There is no attempt to hide any spending.

Mr. Anderson: Oh. The last thing I need is a math lesson from a minister who has given us a \$15 billion red ink in the last two years.

The government appears to be financing their \$7.5 billion cash shortfall by debt financing. In fact, it is projected that by Budget 2012 Alberta will have incurred \$6 billion in debt, up from exactly zero when this Premier took over. In my view, this is disrespectful to the thousands of Albertans who sacrificed so much to rid our province of this debt. To the Premier: at what level are we going to stop the debt?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member should have been taking a better look at the books. Every chartered accountant agency in Alberta, also the federal group that oversees accountants in the country of Canada, keeps telling us and all Albertans that we have the most open and transparent books in the nation. We are not going to change that policy, and we'll continue to ensure that we're fully transparent with all of the spending that this Legislature approves.

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

Health Care Budget

(continued)

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the budget the minister of finance announced that there would be a new five-year commitment to health care funding, including \$759 million to cover the accumulated deficit for the new superboard. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the rationale behind paying off the health care deficit at this time? Why now?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is that a bill has been incurred as a result of providing the kind of health services Albertans need. That bill has manifested itself into a deficit, and it has to be paid. The important thing to remember is, of course, that those monies have already been spent. Now we're just covering them. Paying it off now also provides the new provincial board with a clean slate, as the Premier just indicated in the previous answer. The provincial board is working very hard still to find efficiencies now that we have all of this consistent information flowing in in consistent ways.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the new five-year commitment to funding and annual increases set out in the budget, what can we expect to see as improvements to our health care system as it pertains to accessibility and wait times, and how will the minister achieve these targets?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely, obviously, with the delivery arm, which is Alberta Health Services, to ensure improvements, and those improvements will see themselves coming to be as a result of a predictable and stable funding plan. I should say that it's a five-year funding plan, a first for this province and, I believe, a first for all of Canada. We're going to reduce wait times for patients that are looking for help in the ER. We're going to also speed up the access time to specialists, and we're going to also speed up admission rates. So a lot is happening of a positive nature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents want to know where we are going with health care in this province with the commitment of the five-year funding. Will the minister share a revised health care road map like Vision 2020 with Albertans, and if so, when?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a lot of that has already been shared with Albertans through the committee co-chaired by the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford wherein the government accepted all four recommendations of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. That is one very clear indication that we're serious about addressing the issues that are on Albertans' minds. A blueprint for action will be ready through a consultative process that culminates in September, and an Alberta health act will soon follow thereafter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday in the House the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports stated that she had found the funds needed for the PDD budgets through administrative and efficiency savings. Could I ask the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: would she table in the House the exact amount of funds that were clawed back from each PDD community board?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to thank the member opposite for giving me the opportunity to tell the good news about my budget from our recent budget announcement. I'm one of the very few ministries that received an increase, a 2.2 per cent increase, almost \$2 billion, and \$43 million to spend within my budget. The audits and the bookkeeping are all made available to the public on the Internet and through my ministry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I looked at the budget, it had gone from \$604 million to \$597 million. That was kind of, I think, a decrease.

Can the minister guarantee that PDD will not face another mid-year cut this coming year that would be identical to what's happened in the last few months?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that the PDD budget has remained the same, that we will be able to find efficiencies within our administration and be able to distribute those efficiencies back to the front-line services for our PDD people, and that the core supports that they're eligible for will remain the same.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I have great respect for people who have the conviction to stand out in the cold on the Legislature steps because, apparently, they weren't allowed in. We had PDD-supported individuals, front-line staff, and families here today concerned over the future of their supports.

Has the minister actually talked to the front-line staff and those receiving support to ensure that the money taken back has not affected the quality of the supports that they depend on or that, in fact, they are still on a waiting list?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that I've had meetings in the last two weeks, one with a group of people from Edmonton who are families and stakeholders, service providers. On Monday I sat and I had a three-hour meeting with the Alberta community association for disability supports, ACDS. We were able to talk about their concerns and actually identify some solutions.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, you made an allegation about people being denied access to this building. Would you kindly convey to me in writing which people, when, what day? What are the circumstances?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Calgary Transportation Infrastructure Funding

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as a fast-growing urban area Calgary needs municipal funding support from the province in order to keep pace with the demands of Calgarians to move to and from work. According to a 2006 study transportation and logistic infrastructure was also the number one selection criterion for companies when making a decision about where to put new businesses. My questions are all for the Minister of Transportation. Can the minister assure Calgarians that his department will continue to invest in critically needed transportation infrastructure in our city?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell the hon. member that I believe yesterday's budget was a very good-news budget, a budget that's right for this time. We're moving ahead on all the projects that we had planned. Just a few months ago we opened a large portion of the ring road in Calgary worth \$1 billion. The entire ring road in Calgary is now 45 per cent complete, and we're going to continue on till we get it done. We've also completed \$200 million worth of work on the Deerfoot, and just a couple of weeks . . .

The Speaker: And we'll get to it, I'm sure.

2:10

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, that's all very well and good, but we do know that the local governments set their own priorities. What is the minister doing to ensure that the city of Calgary's priorities are accomplished in good time?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation is providing substantial funding to the city of Calgary to be used towards their projects or their priorities. In fact, in the 2010-11 budget there's over \$160 million for Calgary through municipal infrastructure programs that includes the city transportation fund, basic capital grant fund, streets and improvements programs, and this is over and above the work that we are doing on our own provincial highways.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be some confusion over exactly what is provincial jurisdiction and what is municipal jurisdiction when it comes to transportation. Can the minister clarify who is responsible for what when it comes to transportation in our urban areas?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I always am pleased to bring clarity to this House. My department is responsible for maintaining the provincial highway network, and that includes the ring roads, Deerfoot Trail, and all commuter highways into the city.

Projects coming forward this year include 21 kilometres of the southeast ring road, three interchanges on Stoney Trail, continued upgrades to the Deerfoot, and there are also numerous waste-water and other area projects coming forward. No one can say that my department isn't providing adequate transportation infrastructure funding to all municipalities in Alberta, including Calgary.

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

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's budget was another reminder that this government does not understand the connection between investing in education and diversifying Alberta's economy. My questions are to the minister of advanced education. Given that yesterday's budget expanded access to loans but slashed funding for nonrepayable grants and bursaries, should Alberta students be grateful for the minister's facilitation of an even greater debt load?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta today we lead the nation with our scholarships even after this budget is tabled and even after we did reduce some of the scholarship funds and two of the grant funds. If I give out \$1 in grants, I can give out \$3 in loans for that same dollar. We want to help more students with the funds that we have.

Mr. Chase: You want to help more students go further into debt. Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Speaker, education equals economy. By freezing operating grants to colleges and universities, is the minister signalling that he is going to allow institutions to replace the missing government funds through massive increases to tuition in professional faculties, which will effectively prohibit students from pursuing a professional career in Alberta?

Mr. Horner: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Students will look forward to that.

At least one university is also considering slapping students with a \$500 tax for nothing to fill its budget shortfall. Will the minister show leadership by placing limitations on these outrageous noninstructional fees?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the fees that the hon. member is referring to are fees that all institutions in the province can levy that are outside the CPI cap. What we look at there is the overall affordability framework for students. We've lowered loans to prime. We have increased the amount of grants that we put out for graduate students and for undergraduate students over the last six years. We have increased the base operating grants to postsecondary institutions in the last six years by more than 42 per cent. That is second to none to anyone in North America.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week students at the University of Calgary joined together to protest the proposal to raise tuition in several professional programs, potentially making them out

of reach for many young Albertans. This is a huge concern for my constituents, for students who are making decisions on their university studies, and for parents who are fearful they will not be able to provide the help they had hoped for their children. My question today is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why is the minister considering . . .

The Speaker: The minister, please. We've had the time.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I can expand on the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity when I simply said no. What I want to be clear on is that this government and this Premier remain committed to the tuition cap, the CPI cap. Some of the postsecondary institutions felt that when we froze tuitions in 2004, there may have been some areas where we made an error because we didn't go to them first and say: is the tuition level for these programs correct? We may have made some errors.

Mr. Cao: To the same minister: did you or your department make any mistakes in 2004 when you froze tuitions?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I believe that in 2004 the decision to freeze tuitions at the levels that they were at was the right decision. There were some specific programs that, potentially, we may have capped without consultation with either the students or the postsecondaries because it's about maintaining affordability, and it's about being able to maintain the program. Taxpayers in this province pay for 70 to 80 per cent of the cost of every program. The students pay the balance of that. We want to ensure that we're getting good value for the dollars and that we have set the right price.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: when can students and parents expect your decision so they can make their own financial decisions on postsecondary education?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question because it is fair to say that the institutions and the parents of the students all want to have a timely decision so that this fall they can make the right decisions as to the programs that they may want to enter. It is certainly a top priority for this ministry and for me over the coming weeks to ensure that we get the proposals – I still have not seen the total proposals yet – and we'll make a decision as the time goes on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Condominium Property Act Consultation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's approach to problems is to strike a committee and leisurely review the situation while real people suffer. One area where Albertans deserve real action is on changes to the Condominium Property Act. Service Alberta says that it won't be ready until 2012. To the Minister of Service Alberta. The condo act is actually out of date and hasn't been substantially updated in 10 years. Does the ministry really think that making Alberta's condo owners wait another two years is acceptable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the review of the Condominium Property Act right now we are working with a Condominium Property Act committee which consists of condominium owners, lawyers, property managers, and insurance providers. Part of that team is looking at moving forward and looking at some of the issues that need to be brought forward when we begin the consultation on the Condominium Property Act in the spring of 2011.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: how many condo owners have to get lost in the system while your committee studies or looks at the problem or pays tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees before the minister decides to take action?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As said previously, the complexity of the Condominium Property Act was reviewed in 2000. Moving forward, we want to make sure that the review we do is comprehensive and effective, and the fact is that with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, with the building codes there are issues there as well. When you look at some of the correspondence that's coming to my office with respect to condominium reserve funds, all of the issues that are out there, there are a lot of tough issues out there. So I'm very happy that a lot of Albertans are writing to me on that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. The major problem with the condo act is that Albertans have to go to court to enforce it. Why is the minister not willing to move quickly to put some teeth into the condo act so Albertans don't have to go to court to enforce it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ultimately, with the Condominium Property Act, the way it's set up now, there are courses of action that individuals can take if they want to go to legal action.

Again, the review of the Condominium Property Act: there are so many new issues this year that were not there in 2000, so part of the problem is making sure that all of those issues are dealt with so that it's comprehensive and what we end up with is real and effective.

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

Renter Assistance

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year government locked the doors on rent support for new applicants in August, saying that they couldn't help the growing numbers of Albertans who couldn't make their rents because they were, effectively, out of money. Now, as a result of the government's policy to cut those who need help most, new applicants won't be considered even earlier in the year, if at all, and current recipients may be pushed out early. To the minister of housing: why is this government knowingly setting up a situation that will force Albertans out of their homes and onto the streets?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. The member is correct. In fact, there is a \$13 million reduction coming from this program, but that's as a result of people being transitioned out of the system, people whom we've helped who no longer require our assistance. This ministry will continue to provide assistance to those people who need it the most. Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there were actually copious people looking for that assistance after August last year, and they couldn't get it.

Now, yesterday the minister of housing said that it's not an entitlement program. I would disagree, and I'm supported in that opinion by the United Nations' declaration of human rights. Having a roof over your head is an entitlement, and if this minister doesn't believe that, he's in the wrong portfolio. Given his comments, will the minister tell this House exactly who he believes deserves housing and who he believes should end up on the streets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite has raised an issue about our housing program and about whether or not there is an entitlement. In this government we believe in targeting the money to those who need it the most. Our policy is that we have a means test that is far more stringent than other provinces. Why? Because we want to help the people who are most in need. In British Columbia, for example: up to \$100,000 of assets and you can still receive funding under affordable housing. I think this is wrong. We should be giving money to those who need it the most.

Ms Notley: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, last August you stopped giving money to those who needed it most.

Now, as of yesterday we have seen an overall depletion of funds for housing supports in this government for low-income people by one-third, so it's absolutely ludicrous for this government to pretend they're doing anything to address homelessness. Will the minister admit to all members that he has no intention of trying to end homelessness and that these misplaced priorities will actually make the problem worse?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I believe in being compassionate not only to those in need but compassionate to the taxpayer. We will still be on track with our 10-year plan to end homelessness. We are on track to create 11,000 new affordable units by 2012. Perhaps the member should read our business plan.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is supposedly working on that 10-year plan to end homelessness, but with the \$13 million cut to programs it's hard to take that commitment seriously. Rent support reduction runs contrary to the homelessness plan's main goal of getting people off the streets. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: won't cutting rent supports only aggravate a problem your department is saying that it's trying to fix?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing and Urban Affairs is a hot topic today. I'm happy to hear that.

The Member for Edmonton-Decore is quite correct. Year over year we have reduced spending by about 19 per cent in our department; \$100 million of this comes from the discontinuation of a three-year funding plan to the municipalities. As I mentioned earlier, the measure of our success isn't so much how many housing units we build or how much money we put into the program but, rather, how many people we can transition out so that they no longer need assistance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only have one supplemental question. Before this budget about 80,000 Albertans a month, a good portion of them in Edmonton, were assisted through rent-support programs provided by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. To the same minister: can he provide this House with an estimate of how many fewer Albertans will be helped out and what, if anything, he plans to do with them now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. In this department we help people on a needs basis. Currently we're helping 80,000 people, on average, every month to pay their rent; 800 of these through transitioning are brought through the system every month.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Bow Valley Wildlife Corridor

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fight for the completion of the Bow Valley wildlife corridor connecting Kananaskis to Banff has been going on for nearly two decades. Instead of simply completing the corridor, this government has stalled any action on the part of local municipalities and approved further recreational development in the area. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: when will this ministry stop turning a blind eye to the building scientific evidence and complete the last three kilometres of this essential corridor?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member would know, there is continuous work that goes on between a number of departments in this government, particularly SRD but others as well. The ministry that I came from, Energy, and I believe Environment also and Municipal Affairs all have some hand in working towards solutions to these problems. We'll continue to do that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I like to hear that all the ministries are working together, but it's been two decades, so they're working together rather slowly. Anyway, if they could complete some of this corridor with the minimum 450 metres and include this action in the South Saskatchewan regional plan – will those be included in the corridor when it's complete?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I would not be able to estimate at what point in time the whole corridor will be complete. I think we've had discussions over a period of time, that I could probably recall as likely 25 years, on the Y to Y corridor. This may or may not be part

of that broader discussion. We'll continue to work with the parties involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like you indicated, it has been 25 years, and this corridor is crucial to the survival of many species, including – get this – grizzly bears. The BearSmart program is not sufficient action on the part of this government. Will this minister take the necessary steps and complete the Bow Valley corridor now?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the issue around species at risk is a very serious concern not only for Albertans but all Canadians. Many of the species at risk have been identified in the province of Alberta. We work very, very hard with all of the people that use the landscape for recreation, for activities in industry relative to agriculture, the forestry business, and others. From the point of view of just, "Let's build a corridor someplace, and then everything is going to be fine," I think the issue is much broader than that. We're looking at it in the land-use framework and will develop the proper amount of space for Alberta's wildlife.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Long-term Care Facility for Didsbury

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents from Didsbury and area have been waiting for years now for a new long-term care facility that's needed to replace a very old and substandard one. In fact, seven different ministers of health have been appointed to this portfolio during this wait time and still no new facility in sight. My question is to the current Minister of Health and Wellness. What can I tell the people of Didsbury and district this time? Are we getting this desperately needed new facility or not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think you can safely tell them to remain cautiously optimistic. That would include their knowing that I'm aware of the need and that we have an assessment going on right now. I'll ask immediately for that assessment to be sped up so we can get that answer factually back to this hon. member ASAP.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for that answer. The throne speech stated that monies raised by Alberta capital bonds would be used to replace continuing care and supportive living facilities. Why doesn't the minister just commit to using some of those funds to build this facility now and just get on with it while construction costs remain low?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, part of the answer, of course, is going to be unveiled here very soon, when we come forward with the capital plan for health facilities. That is being worked on as we speak. I will have the details, hopefully, ready just at the time the calendar switches over into the new fiscal year, and I'm hoping that the funds that will come in from the capital bonds issue will help complement our existing capital plan. We'll ensure that this project is given fair consideration.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister. Our population in this area has grown significantly, and we have been waiting for so long for

this replacement facility that we now may actually need up to a hundred beds, not just 60. Would the minister ensure that the growth and aging factors will be included as part of your capital plan process for the Didsbury facility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I drove through the area in question, Didsbury and the surrounding area, not long ago. I'm well aware of the needs there. I'm very familiar with the need for other health care facilities across the province, not just in Didsbury but elsewhere, and I will ensure that the factors that he's mentioned are included in that assessment along with all the other factors that health care providers and community caring people such as the hon. member have provided to us.

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

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds Regulation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's tailings ponds give us an international black eye. They are an underfunded liability to Albertans and industry. They kill wildlife, and there's a strong suspicion that they leak. We can't blame industry for their choices or lack of action if the government doesn't give clear, enforceable targets. Last year the ERCB put forward tailings performance criteria, and in October it was reported that seven of the nine projects will not meet the criteria by 2011 and some not for another 40 years. To the minister: is the minister concerned that these companies aren't meeting the ERCB's criteria?

2:30

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that you have to deal with when you're a regulator is balancing retrofits as opposed to new construction, and therein lies the issue. How do we incorporate new technology into existing facilities? When the member talks about adherence to a new policy, I can assure her that the new developments will be required to adhere to the new policy. How we bring older developments up to those new standards will take some time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These tailings ponds can be seen from outer space.

Back to the same minister: what are the penalties if companies fail to meet the targets?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, seeing something from space hardly qualifies it as an environmental hazard. I'd suggest that there are a lot of other things that can be seen from space as well.

The fact of the matter is that we have standards in this province. We hold companies accountable to meet those standards, and we continually strive to move those standards forward. The way we deal with tailings ponds in the long term is by changing the technology. That reduces the need for the tailings ponds in the first place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I take it there are no penalties if they fail to meet the target, so the next question to the minister: when will this government require that best practice for cleanup technology be implemented by all companies across the board?

Mr. Renner: It's really fun to be in the opposition, Mr. Speaker, because you can pretty much say anything you want and never be held accountable.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, there are two very important factors when we discuss best practices. One is on new developments, and clearly there is an opportunity and a need for us to have best practices. The other is: how do you retrofit existing facilities? I can assure this member that we are pushing the envelope very hard on industry to come up on both sides of the equation, retrofitting the existing and bringing the new ones online with the best technology available.

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

Propane Pricing

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past little while there have been significant decreases in the cost of electricity, oil, and natural gas, and it has made life more affordable for many Albertans. At the same time the cost of propane has increased dramatically, and consumers like my constituent John Isley have felt the pinch. To the Minister of Energy: can you explain to me and to everyone here why the cost of propane has increased so much while other forms of energy have so dramatically decreased over the last couple years?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member makes some statements and assumptions in his preamble and talks about significant decreases in the cost of electricity, oil, and natural gas over the past two years. Clearly, those prices have gone up and down, and that's the commodity market we're in. I think it's a little bit of a stretch to say that the price of propane has gone up dramatically. While we don't necessarily regulate the price of propane or any of the other fuels, we do monitor fuel prices, and propane for the most part has remained steady over the past year.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, given that answer, maybe you can explain to me and to this Assembly how the price of propane is linked to the price of natural gas. I always understood that there was some type of a link between the two.

Mr. Liepert: Well, the linkage is that propane is a by-product of both natural gas and oil through the refining process, but the price itself is not necessarily linked. As I said in my first answer, they are all commodities. They trade on the international commodity market. Prices go up and down. A lot of the price is set, in the situation of propane, on a local supply-and-demand basis, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, given that answer, again, I'll go back to the Alberta gas protection act, when prices were \$5.50 for natural gas, 50 cents for propane. Propane, 73 cents: I think it's time that we enact a protection plan for those consumers. What are you going to do about it, Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what we're going to do about it is that we're going to ensure that we don't pick particular segments of the economy or of industry to subsidize and not subsidize. I think we made it very clear when the natural gas rebate program expired about close to year ago now that we wanted to ensure that we promoted energy efficiency and conservation. Any time you start subsidizing, that doesn't happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Executive Council Budget

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that the best way to lead is by example. Albertans are doing this by balancing their budgets. The problem is that the Premier and the Executive Council are not. In recent years the Public Affairs Bureau has almost doubled to \$14.3 billion, a modest 8 per cent cut. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Why does this government not lead by example and cut the Public Affairs Bureau in half, to \$7 billion?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the Executive Council has cut their spending this year by 8.6 per cent. The Public Affairs Bureau in Alberta has a very important job to do. When you are a marketer of products that go around the world, the story that we have here needs to be sold around the world. It also in many cases needs to be sold right here in Alberta so that Albertans that want to understand the facts about the oil sands or the facts about government spending or the facts about accounting principles get the true story.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe they should break it down so that Albertans can really see if there's any value for it. I think they only promote their own propaganda.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want the Alberta advantage back, not billion-dollar deficits. Will the President of the Treasury Board please explain to Albertans why there's a \$7 million program to rebrand the Alberta initiative?

Mr. Snelgrove: So things like this don't happen, Mr. Speaker: U.S. firms won't use the tar sands because there are people, some in this House, that have the opportunity to go around and talk about the tar sands as if they're evil and bad and that many, many Albertans don't enjoy a good standard of living from them. Many don't understand how much of Canada depends on the economic engine of Alberta. Do we feel we have a little bit of responsibility to go around the world and around this continent and sell Alberta's story in a correct and factual manner? We certainly think we do.

Mr. Hinman: This is the problem, Mr. Speaker. They're spending \$7 million for this freedom to create when they just destroy what people are creating here. Reckless spending is never acceptable, and in these tough times it's even less desirable. The question is: why aren't front-line services like health care, education, seniors, and providing for people with developmental disabilities accessible? Will the President of the Treasury Board do the right thing and transfer \$20 million from the Executive Council budget to these important services?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, what I would do is challenge the people at home that are watching this Assembly to get a pad and paper out and put it by their desk and to start to keep track of just how the questions come. Are they spending today? Are they saving today? Are they for business? Are they against business? I started last year myself. I had to create a whole new column: is it relevant to anything that people are concerned about? That column was overtaking the spending or saving. People really need to watch, keep track for themselves, and they can judge. Are the questions here relevant, prudent, towards government policy, or are they simply about them pushing their own agenda?

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

Tuition Fees for Postsecondary Education

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government claims to understand that the way out of this recession rests on the ability of Albertans to be part of a more educated workforce. Now, last summer they inexplicably gave \$180 million back to the liquor industry, yet today they're asking students to take on \$50 million more debt in order to get an education. Will the Minister of Advanced Education admit that this example of misplaced priorities is going to make education even less accessible for the Albertans who need it at the same time that liquor is more so?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I really don't see the connection there. What I will say is that we have not eliminated the loan relief completion program, which actually remits and forgives student loans for students who have completed their programs and who are in need. I'll reiterate what I said earlier today. That is that we want to help as many students as we possibly can to achieve their dreams in our postsecondary institutions, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Ms. Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're achieving their dreams while they take on more and more debt.

Now, the U of A is talking about hitting students with a fee increase of roughly \$500 a year, more or less 10 per cent of what tuition fees would be. This is in part because the government is failing to invest in the growing university sector by freezing their operating dollars. How can you possibly claim to be using advanced education as a means to grow our economy when your funding policy clearly is designed to shift more costs to the very students you're hoping to attract to higher education?

2:40

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, our funding policy is not designed to shift costs to students. Our funding policy is designed to ensure that we have the best system in North America and, in fact, parts of the globe. It's designed to ensure that we have accessible and affordable postsecondary education for every student who wants and desires it. It's designed to ensure that there's an investment by the students. The hon. member, you know, doesn't seem to realize that the students' investment in their future is important not only to them but to society as a whole. I think what we've developed as a postsecondary funding formula, that we're rolling out this budget, is second to none.

Ms. Notley: Mr. Speaker, the minister suggested in the past that allowing astronomical increases to tuition in certain programs isn't really an increase; rather, it's just a reassessment of the original tuition level that was in place when they put in place their cap. But, really, it doesn't matter how tortured a communications spin you put on the increase. The students paying tens of thousands more dollars each year for certain programs will still pay it, or they'll choose not to enrol. My question simply is: will you resist all requests to increase tuition in any program beyond the inflationary limits that you claim to have in place right now?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the freeze that we put on tuitions in 2004 was done very quickly, and perhaps in some areas of the over 3,500 different tuition levels across the province we may have made an error in one or two of those tuition levels. All we've said to the postsecondaries is that we're willing to look at a proposal from them – this is not from government; from them – that would illustrate

whether or not there was an error made. If there was an error made, in order to protect the CPI cap, I think it behooves us to fix that error. We've had that discussion with the students. They understand what I'm trying to accomplish with the postsecondaries. I don't understand why the hon. member doesn't.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 18 members were recognized today: 12 opposition members, six government members. There were 106 questions and answers.

In a few seconds from now we will return to the Routine.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition of 84 signatures petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the preservation of the current charitable gaming model. It says: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 2

Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill, if passed, would paraphrase the Health Professions Act by requiring professional regulatory organizations to consult with the ministers responsible and consider their comments prior to removing or approving a program of study for registration requirements. This omnibus bill would ensure this provision is included in the Architects Act; the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act; the Land Surveyors Act; the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act; the Regulated Accounting Profession Act; and the Veterinary Profession Act. If passed, Bill 2 would also update the language in both the Agrology Profession Act and the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, both of which have similar provisions already in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 2 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 3

Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010.

This legislation will amend section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act, which awards a set amount of damages for bereavement to a

surviving spouse; adult interdependent partner, or AIP; parent; or child of a deceased person. The current act limits the class of claimants eligible for damages. The limits are: no damages to parents if their deceased child was married or had an AIP and no damages to a child of a deceased person if the child was married or had an AIP.

The proposed amendment will remove references to marital status currently found in section 8 of the act. This reflects a decision made by the Alberta Court of Appeal and the current state of law in Alberta.

The amendments will also remove the reference to illegitimacy as the current act defines child to include an illegitimate child. Consistent with current demographics and family law legislation all children are treated as children of their parents regardless of the parents' relationship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

Mr. Hancock: I would like to move that Bill 3 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail correspondence from Erin Kinloch-Galesloot regarding cutbacks to persons with disabilities. She is an individual with a disability, and having been supported by PDD, she's been able to live independently with a roommate and work at a paying job like everyone else. She's very concerned that with the current cutbacks in PDD she's going to lose that.

The second e-mail is from Geoffrey Ryan, who's also a constituent. He is also writing with concerns over PDD funding cuts, expressing his utter disdain over the proposed cuts and worried specifically about how the funding cuts would affect the chances of finding a group home for his brother who has Goldenhar syndrome. He's very worried about the burden that will be placed on the family.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, errata for pages 15 and 342 of the 2010-11 government estimates, tabled on February 9, 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Energy, a report dated December 23, 2009, entitled Assessment and Analysis of the State-of-the-Art Electric Transmission Systems with Specific Focus on High-Voltage Direct Current, Underground or Other New or Developing Technologies, prepared by Stantec.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

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

The Speaker: This motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

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

The Speaker: This motion also is nondebatable.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Standing Orders Amendments

6. Mr. Hancock moved:
- A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended by adding the following after Standing Order 52.01:
27th Legislature
52.011 For the balance of the 27th Legislature the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and each of the policy field committees shall consist of 12 Members.
 - B. Be it further resolved that
 - (1) The amendments in this motion come into force on passage;
 - (2) The amendments in this motion shall have effect until the conclusion of the 27th Legislature.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion is with respect to the makeup of committees and changes that need to be made in that area.

The Speaker: This motion is debatable. Anybody want to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand the need for this motion, and in principle I support it in that the Government House Leader has chosen to expand the number of positions on these committees in order to incorporate the inclusion of members who are representing a fourth party in the Assembly now. I certainly do support that participation.

My concern is a small one, more under the heading of a quibble. Nonetheless, I think it's worth putting it on the record, and that is that the Government House Leader has chosen to make Government Motion 6 be in effect until the conclusion of the 27th Legislature. Given the flux that we are experiencing at this moment, I'm less comfortable with having this put in place for effectively two years. We're still expecting that we wouldn't see the next election until approximately two years from now, in the spring of 2012, which leaves us this spring sitting, fall sitting in 2010, spring in 2011, fall in 2011, and possibly a spring sitting in 2012 until we would revert back to the previous standing orders.

I would have preferred to see it in place just for 2010, given that there's still some expectation there could be changes in membership of various caucuses. [interjection] Well, not that I'm planning on doing, but I keep hearing that this is going to happen. The Government House Leader might be in a better position to be talking about who is shifting from which side to another. Nobody is moving here, so I'm fine. But that was my concern overall, that we are putting this in place for, really, an extended period of time. It's half of the

sitting time for the 27th Legislature, and I just found that was being a bit more enthusiastic than I think we needed with this particular motion. As I say, I do support the principle of including and recognizing the need to have participation on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, on Members' Services, and on the policy field committees, of which there are five, to have the participation of individuals from different caucuses.

Thanks for the opportunity to put that on the record. I appreciate it. In principle I support what the government is doing here. It's the timing I'm not so happy about.

The Speaker: It's a debatable motion if others want to participate.

Shall I call on the Government House Leader to close the debate or just call the question?

Mr. Hancock: Call the question.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Committee Membership Changes

7. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to
- (a) the Standing Committee on Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund be approved: that Ms Tarchuk replace Mr. Campbell, that Ms Tarchuk replace Mrs. Forsyth as chair, that Mr. Groeneveld replace hon. Mr. Denis, that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Kang;
 - (b) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be approved: that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Horne, that Mr. Lindsay replace hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, that Mr. Hinman be appointed to fill a vacancy;
 - (c) the Standing Committee on Private Bills be approved: that Mr. Hinman replace Mr. Anderson, that Mr. Kang replace Mr. MacDonald, that Mr. Xiao replace Mrs. Forsyth, that Mr. Drysdale replace Mr. Quest;
 - (d) the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing be approved: that Mr. Groeneveld replace Mr. Johnson, that Mr. Hinman replace hon. Mr. Liepert, that Mr. Jacobs replace hon. Mr. Oberle, that Mr. Lindsay replace hon. Ms Redford, that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Rogers, that Ms Tarchuk replace hon. Mr. Zwozdesky;
 - (e) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved: that Mr. Rodney replace Mr. Quest, that Mr. Rodney replace Mr. Quest as deputy chair, that Mr. Anderson replace hon. Mr. Denis, that Mr. Weadick replace Mr. Jacobs, that Ms Calahasen replace Mr. Drysdale;
 - (f) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Mr. Campbell replace Mr. Fawcett, that Mr. Campbell replace hon. Mr. Oberle as deputy chair, that Mr. Anderson be appointed to fill a vacancy;
 - (g) the Standing Committee on Community Services be approved: that Mr. Bhullar replace Mr. Bhardwaj, that Mr. Anderson replace hon. Mr. Lukaszuk;
 - (h) the Standing Committee on the Economy be approved: that Mr. Bhardwaj replace Mr. Campbell, that Mr. Bhardwaj replace Mr. Campbell as chair, that Mr. Fawcett replace Mr. Bhullar, that Mr. Lund replace Mr. McFarland, that Ms Woo-Paw replace Mr. Xiao, that Mr. Boutilier be appointed to fill a vacancy;

- (i) the Standing Committee on Health be approved: that Mr. McFarland replace Mr. Horne as chair, that Mr. Groeneveld replace Mr. Dallas, that Mr. Lindsay replace Mr. Fawcett, that Mrs. Forsyth be appointed to fill a vacancy;
- (j) the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services be approved: that Mr. Drysdale replace Mr. VanderBurg, that Mr. Drysdale replace Mr. VanderBurg as chair, that Mr. Rogers replace Mr. Anderson, that Mr. Xiao replace Ms Woo-Paw, that Mr. Boutilier be appointed to fill a vacancy, that Mrs. Forsyth be appointed to fill a vacancy;
- (k) the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment be approved: that Mr. Dallas replace hon. Mr. Denis, that Mr. Mitzel replace Mr. Drysdale, that Mr. VanderBurg replace hon. Mr. Oberle, that Mr. Anderson be appointed to fill a vacancy;
- (l) the Select Special Auditor General Search Committee be approved: that Mr. Quest replace hon. Mr. Lukaszuk.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the last motion we now have the opportunity both to add members to the committees in respect of the fact that there are a number more members sitting as independents in the House under the WRA Party banner and to make changes to the standing committees based on the fact that there have been changes in Executive Council and other changes on our caucus side. I have requested changes from both the Liberal caucus and the ND caucus. There were a couple provided, and they've been incorporated. This should accomplish everything we need to accomplish, at least pending further developments as speculated by the House leader from the opposition side. I don't know who she was talking about from her caucus that might be moving, but this should accomplish it for us.

The Speaker: It's a debatable motion.

Shall I call on the hon. Government House Leader to close the debate or call the question, then?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go on, the chair wants to raise a point with respect to the last two motions, 6 and 7. I'm pleased that there's agreement in the House. There's nothing in either of these motions about where the funds are to come and pay for these extra stipends and salaries. This is not the first time that this has happened in this Assembly, and it becomes incumbent upon, then, the Speaker to try and find the funds. So I'm going to listen very attentively to hon. members in this Assembly in their questions and their responses about spending without making decisions as to where the spending is to come from when I have to deal with this matter.

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

3:00 Provincial Fiscal Policies

- 5. Dr. Morton moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 9: Ms Blakeman]

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Leader of the Official Opposition it's a duty and privilege to rise today and respond to

yesterday's budget. I'm frankly astounded by the haphazard nature of this budget: massive spending increases in certain areas offset by drastic cuts in others. Far from striking a balance, this budget throws Alberta wildly off balance with no plan for sustainable spending and our province's future prosperity in jeopardy. This is a balancing act all right, but it's like a high-wire performance, a big show for the audience with potentially catastrophic consequences. Only it's like the minister of finance is sitting safely on the sidelines, poking Albertans out onto the high wire without a net.

Over and over again during my time as Leader of the Opposition I've stated my belief that Alberta is in dire need of government that understands the importance of planning for the long term. Albertans have told me that they share this view, but clearly this Tory administration has no concept of what a long-term plan entails. Why else would they lurch from budget to budget, shifting priorities on the fly, commissioning studies only to abandon them, ignoring the advice of our Auditor General, and passing a law to make deficit spending illegal only to repeal that law as soon as oil and gas prices collapse? Is it a spending problem, or is it really a competence problem, Mr. Speaker? We believe this budget confirms that this government has a competence problem.

Both as a physician and a medical officer of health I took a careful, comprehensive approach to assessing problems, coming up with solutions in consultation with patients, and following up to be sure that my solutions were working then amending as necessary. For example, if a patient came into the office with a headache, I couldn't just give him a pill and send him away. I needed to know his medical history, what other medications he might be taking, what other medical conditions he had, problems at home and work, and so on. Once deciding together on a course of action, we would monitor the patient's progress together and make changes to treatment as necessary.

The same common-sense approach must be applied and should be applied to policy problems. The state of public health care, the condition of our economy, social issues such as homelessness and child care: all of these require a responsible leadership to consider the big picture without the baggage of ideology or personal prejudice. Comprehensive analysis, full assessment, action, monitoring, and amendments as needed: that's the approach a responsible government would take to the big issues of the day. Instead, we have ad hoc policy designed to address partisan political problems while many equally important issues get swept under the rug.

The cut to children's services, for example, is a scandal. The decision to slash nearly \$40 million from a crucial program is beneath contempt, especially when the amount being cut is the same as the amount being devoted to subsidizing the dying horse-racing industry. Mr. Speaker, Albertans care about children a helluva lot more than they care about horse racing. I'm profoundly disappointed by the lack of empathy and short-sightedness displayed by this administration's decision, especially given the news stories of troubled foster families this past week.

Yesterday I talked about the impact of this administration's cuts on Alberta's students – the next generation of engineers, tradesmen, scientists, doctors, artists, the leaders and builders of tomorrow – over \$200 million cut from Advanced Education and Technology, creating even higher student debt and imperilling access to postsecondary education. If there's one investment that could lead to creating a sustainable economy for Alberta, surely it's education. But this administration, with typical short-sightedness, just made it harder for countless Albertans to achieve their full potential. The consequences of this decision will affect Alberta's prosperity for a long, long time to come.

It certainly makes it no easier to address our critical shortages of health care professionals. That \$2 billion added to the health care budget won't help much without new doctors and professionals to make the system work. Clearly, the heartfelt but logical appeal of University of Calgary medical students Rithesh Ram and Natarie Liu, whose letters I read yesterday in the House, fell on deaf ears. Student debt, already crippling, is going to rise even higher, and I don't see how the minister of advanced education is going to deny any of the proposed tuition increases given these cuts. High youth unemployment, declined registered education savings plan values, frozen minimum wage: all these factors, combined with this administration's cuts to advanced education, make this a terrible time to be a postsecondary student in Alberta.

Slashing income supports in an economic recession shows not only a lack of compassion for Albertans struggling to cope but again reinforces this administration's reputation for short-sightedness. You predict that the unemployment picture is not going to improve in the near term, so why cut benefits? They're going to be needed, especially since employment lags behind general economic growth. It takes time to recover lost jobs. In the meantime Alberta families will struggle to cope.

The choices made by this administration reveal a, quote, flavour-of-the-month mentality. It recognized correctly that Albertans are concerned about health care, but rather than addressing the complex problems of management and resource allocation, it has decided to take the easy road and, in relation to health care in particular, throw money at the problem.

I can't imagine how the minister of finance wrapped his head around this administration's incredible \$2 billion increase in health care spending. In fact, there was a comment on Twitter yesterday that I thought was both funny and revealing. I'm paraphrasing: Mr. Premier, when your finance minister is in tears while reading the budget, that's not a good sign.

You know, if I'd called upon this government to increase the health budget by \$2 billion, the heckling from that side of the Assembly might very well have brought the House down around our heads. Yet here we have an ideologically conservative administration, or at least, certainly, an ideologically conservative minister, or so he tries to appear, telling Albertans that their prescription for saving health care is throwing dump truckloads full of money at the system. As a medical doctor I can tell you that, yes, the system needs money, but what it needs most is competent management. Given this administration's disastrous record with public health care, why should anyone believe that this huge increase in the system's budget will actually lead to better results?

This administration's own throne speech, delivered just days ago, admitted that Alberta receives far less value per dollar spent on health care than other provinces. Now we'll receive even less value per dollar, because I don't trust this administration to use those extra resources any more efficiently. In fact, by cutting child intervention services and income supports, this will foster situations that cause bad health outcomes for hundreds, perhaps thousands of Albertans, and they'll wind up in the health care system, costing that system much more in the long run.

I find it incredibly ironic that two years ago this very administration was trying to tell Albertans that health care spending was out of control. Oscar Wilde might not have been a big fan of consistency, but I think most Albertans do not want a government that's constantly sending out mixed messages.

A few months ago this administration claimed that it could find \$2 billion in savings through greater efficiency. You seem to have come up about \$700 million short and certainly haven't found any appreciable efficiencies in health care, not when, as I explained yesterday, there are cases of keeping patients in intensive care units

for days at a cost of thousands of dollars rather than shelling out less than a hundred dollars for antibiotics. Or cases like a former friend forced to wait too long for what would have been an easy, inexpensive gall bladder operation, but delays resulted in a potentially life-threatening infection, costing the system thousands of dollars and, more importantly, resulting in a vastly less desirable health outcome for my friend.

Yesterday in my response to the throne speech I shared some stories from the many Albertans who have contacted us with stories of how they're trying to cope with this administration's mistakes. I shared those stories because I think it's important that we all remember that the decisions we make as elected representatives have real impacts on real people every day: our neighbours, our fellow citizens, the people that we have been entrusted to serve. When we fail them, we fail in our primary reason for being in the Assembly. I hope that at least a few government members will take these stories to heart because we all share some responsibility for them.

3:10

Here is one I did not bring up yesterday.

After 10 years of billions of dollars in surplus we now find ourselves with \$4 billion in deficit. Where did the money go? I live on a disability pension; I don't have lot of money to throw around. I have multiple sclerosis, and on occasion I need a chiropractor and some adjustments. But Mr. Liepert saw fit to delist these treatments, and now I cannot afford to go to a chiropractor. I have no balance. I fall frequently and require adjustments often. Also, I cannot afford my prescriptions because the minister of health raised the price of the plus for Blue Cross from \$44.00 to \$82.00 per month. Doctor appointments are over a month's wait. The more you can do, please do, and more power to you. We need help.

Here's another.

I asked for hospital beds, not a \$250 million a year ambulance transition. In April this year Alberta Health Services took over emergency medical services throughout Alberta at a cost of \$250 million a year, forever, after refusing to release publicly the findings of the EMS discovery project in the former Peace and Palliser health regions. What is our health minister trying to hide? I wrote my local government MLA and received this response from her in writing. She stated: "I am unable to share these findings with you," and later, "The findings of the EMS discovery projects cannot be released publicly." Disgusting. Very George Bush style of governance. This was a great selling feature to taxpayers. For example, in Calgary, where EMS operations were close to \$30 million a year, this was not supposed to be passed down to us. Then why is it I am now facing a 4.8 per cent property tax increase? The system is clearly not working.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, believe me, these stories represent just the tip of the iceberg. To paraphrase Shakespeare: this surely is the winter of Alberta discontent. This budget uses a boatload of cash to wallpaper over problems while failing to address fundamental issues of poor governance, mismanagement, and the failure to consider the long-term implications of habitual, moment-to-moment decision-making. I believe that as a society we must do our best to live within our means so that future generations will not be compromised. As our First Nations citizens might say: we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.

This budget borrows heavily indeed from the next generation of Albertans. I only wish I could believe that this administration had the skills to put this loan to best use. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing no longer with merely a financial problem but with a competence problem. There is a better way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. leader, you were aware you had up to 90 minutes if you so chose? Okay. Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to rise on behalf of the Wildrose Alliance opposition caucus and also on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of very disappointed fiscally responsible Albertans across this great province of ours to respond to this government's latest red ink smeared budget.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2010 is a stunning illustration of the profound mismanagement of our province's finances by this PC government. According to Budget 2010 the government of Alberta is expecting to spend roughly \$38.7 billion this year against revenues of approximately \$34 billion. This implies a budgetary deficit of \$4.7 billion. An additional \$2.8 billion in so-called capital investment is not accounted for in the government's current deficit projection. Again, I would point to page 18 of the government's 2010 fiscal plan. This brings the government's real cash deficit to a staggering \$7.55 billion, which it plans on financing using debt, which is now reaching about \$4.4 billion from the past two years, and draining the province's sustainability fund from roughly \$15 billion last year to \$8.2 this year, and optimistically down to \$2.8 billion by 2012. This vast swath of red ink is similar to that of Budget 2009 and is evidence that this government has yet again failed to bring spending under control despite repeated warnings to do so or face the prospect of higher taxes, a return to massive debts, and further erosion of the Alberta advantage.

A Wildrose Alliance government would not permit this to happen, Mr. Speaker. Although Albertans expect their elected representatives to protect front-line social programs like health, education, and PDD while providing critical public infrastructure, they also expect their government to responsibly protect the Alberta advantage, live within their means, and prioritize needs before wants.

Although erasing the \$7.55 billion cash deficit in one year is not practically possible without heavy cuts, the Wildrose Alliance opposition caucus believes the government can cut this cash deficit by approximately \$4.67 billion down to roughly \$2.88 billion, which is a 62 per cent reduction from the government's projected cash deficit of \$7.55 billion.

We can do this as a House by implementing the following spending adjustments. First off, we should spread the \$20.1 billion capital budget over 4.5 years rather than three years. This yields a budgetary savings of nearly \$2.79 billion in 2010 alone. This would still leave Alberta's per-person capital expenditures slightly above that of British Columbia and behind only Newfoundland and Quebec.

Second, we should indeed increase health and educational operational spending, but we should do so in line with inflation plus population growth, which the government says is 3.5 per cent, rather than the astounding Budget 2010 increases of 13.7 per cent in health and 4.6 per cent in education. This would yield a savings in 2010 of \$1.33 billion.

Next, we would suggest delaying, until the economy recovers, the Green TRIP mass transit initiative for a savings of \$70 million.

We would cancel the wasteful and unproven \$2 billion carbon capture and storage experiment, saving Albertans \$100 million this year.

We would eliminate Alberta's venture capital fund. Governments should not be allocating funds to private business ventures. This would return \$100 million to the balance sheet in 2010.

We would also cut corporate subsidies for product commercialization. The government, as Premier Klein said over and over again, has no business being in business. This would save Albertans an additional \$110 million in Budget 2010.

With all due respect to the former minister of agriculture, who is a good friend and was a very competent minister, we would suggest terminating the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency. Marketing

beef is a role for private farmers, agricultural marketing organizations, and private business, not the government of Alberta. This correction will save roughly \$50 million in 2010.

We would reduce the size of cabinet from 23 to 16 by combining, among others, Infrastructure with Transportation, Treasury Board with Finance and Enterprise, Municipal Affairs with Housing and Urban Affairs, just to name a few examples. This will save Albertans approximately \$44 million.

We would end the direct subsidization of horse racing to the tune of \$25 million per year.

Through retirement and natural attrition we would increase the government's worker-to-manager ratio from its current 4 to 1 ratio to 12 to 1, understanding that the ratio in the private sector can be as high as 25 to 1. Surely we can come halfway. This will save Albertans approximately \$35 million this year alone.

We would cut the government's communications/Public Affairs budget in half, saving taxpayers \$7 million.

We would end Executive Council's wasteful and misguided rebranding initiative and save \$7 million this year alone.

Again, these proposals will reduce this government's real cash deficit of \$7.55 billion by \$4.67 billion to a much lower and more manageable deficit number of \$2.88 billion. It is also important to note that these proposed adjustments would not cut the government services Albertans deem most important, such as health care, education, PDD, seniors, or public security. They would simply limit their departmental increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth.

3:20

More importantly, these adjustments make it possible to eliminate the province's real cash deficit by next year without the need to deeply cut core social programs. The PC government, even if all their rose-coloured projections pan out, will keep Alberta in a cash deficit position well past 2012, contrary to their claims of being back in the black by that time. It should also be clearly understood that these proposed adjustments do not take into account the billions more in potential savings that would be achieved through much-needed systemic reforms to our public health care system and other high-cost government social programs as well as by negotiating a much fairer equalization arrangement with Ottawa, both of which this PC government has utterly failed to accomplish.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to the issue of this government's hidden deficit in more detail. This was talked about in question period today. The government of Alberta is claiming a \$4.7 billion deficit in 2010, but that is not the whole story. There is at least one large set of expenses that is not included in the budget deficit number. Total capital spending is projected to be \$7.2 billion, yet only \$4.4 billion in infrastructure spending is accounted for by the final deficit number. An additional \$2.8 billion of capital investment in government-owned assets is not included in the government's quoted deficit number. It says so right on page 18 of their own budget document. Therefore, the government of Alberta's true cash deficit is a shocking \$7.55 billion.

Perhaps I could show more proof. Besides the notation on page 18 I would also turn members' attention to page 67, where it specifically notes that the sustainability fund projected total from this year to next will decrease from \$15 billion to \$8 billion. That's a difference of \$7 billion that is going out the door. In addition, another \$1.5 billion in debt on top of that is also allocated in this budget. So that is \$8.5 billion going out that we are not bringing in. That does not equal the \$4.7 billion that the government is suggesting the cash deficit really is. There is a huge discrepancy there.

Now, I'm not saying that it's intentional or anything else, but I would hope this government eventually would admit that this year we are spending \$8.5 billion more than we are taking in, and we are financing it through the sustainability fund to the tune of \$7 billion and \$1.5 billion in debt. This is totally unacceptable to Albertans. There is no excuse for this.

While our budget proposals that I've talked about would reduce this cash deficit substantially to roughly \$2.88 billion, this PC government has been so fiscally irresponsible that it would be impossible to balance the books in cash terms without more aggressive cuts to public spending, which would not be prudent in today's market conditions and is something we would not recommend. I guess the question, Mr. Speaker, is: how did we get into this mess? Alberta has not been in a deficit position since Don Getty was Premier. Indeed, the market conditions in the world today are difficult, and many governments are struggling. We fully admit this and understand this. However, that is not a good enough excuse for the degree that we have fallen fiscally in this province.

It is clear that since the late Klein years and throughout the entire current administration this PC government has allowed spending to run completely out of control. I saw this consistent inability to restrain spending first-hand for two years. Every member of the government caucus knows full well that I along with others in the caucus that are still there today spoke out on this issue, me personally during my nomination race, the 2008 election, and for two years in the PC caucus. Finally, admittedly, I gave up on this caucus's ability to ever act in a fiscally responsible way. It was for that reason as well as the total lack of caucus democracy, which I spoke of in the media last month, that I left the PC caucus last month.

It was a frustrating experience. I could never seem to get the Premier's inner circle, including the Treasury Board president or the Deputy Premier, to understand the necessity of consistent, legislated fiscal restraint. Beginning in the 2003-04 budget year, if the government had merely restrained spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth, overall spending would have been approximately \$8.3 billion less today than currently projected. Furthermore, following this path of restrained spending would have resulted in much larger surpluses, which could have been used to build savings in the heritage trust fund. In fact, had both Mr. Klein during his last four years and the Premier today exercised fiscal prudence and held total government spending growth to the rate needed to keep up with inflation plus population growth, Alberta would today be looking at a budget surplus of \$3.9 billion – a surplus of \$3.9 billion – rather than a record deficit.

Mr. Speaker, despite this government's failing record there is still time to turn this ship around. There are still fiscal conservatives in that government caucus. I know that first-hand. I'd ask them to speak up as we go through these budget deliberations.

We can and must restore Alberta to strong fiscal health, and the Wildrose Alliance caucus has a plan for doing just that. First, we must get our current cash deficit under control and retired by next year. Piling up billions in debt on the backs of future generations to dull the pain of a self-inflicted spending hangover is the height of irresponsibility. So, too, is expanding the size of government entitlement programs to the point where the only way to adequately fund such is to raise taxes or increase debt on future generations.

The budget deficit can be dealt with in the short term by implementing some of the fiscally responsible strategy that we've noted. For example, as discussed, spread the capital budget from three years to over four and a half years, and then keep that budget line for infrastructure consistent with the rate of inflation plus population growth. We currently spend about two times – two times – more than the next closest province in Canada on infrastructure. We don't

need everything right now. We can wait another 18 months and be responsible to future generations. Bringing our level of capital spending down to slightly more than B.C., behind only Quebec and Newfoundland, would save future Albertans a great deal of inflation and unnecessary debt.

We also need to restrain health and education operational spending to a healthy and sustainable rate of increase, again being the rate of inflation plus population growth, at least until the time when spending in these areas falls more in line with other Canadian provinces. We're way, way out in front on that, and we're not getting the results that we need.

Over the long term the government of Alberta must begin to practise good old-fashioned fiscal restraint. Clearly, nonrenewable resource revenues are very volatile. In Alberta we have developed a reliance on these revenues to feed our spending habits. We need to reform our spending practices by, first, legislating a cap on year-over-year increases in government spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth. Instituting this measure, which has proven extremely effective in other jurisdictions, will ensure that spending is controlled through good times and bad while providing the funds necessary for successful core social programs and required infrastructure. It will also have the effect of curtailing the size and scope of government bureaucracy as departments look for innovative ways to provide more efficient and better services by reallocating existing resources rather than simply asking for more money in funding while perpetuating outdated and wasteful programs. In fact, if our federal and provincial governments of the day had controlled spending in this way starting in 2000, both would be running large surpluses this year despite being in the midst of a global recession.

I would hope that the hon. finance minister will do what he has repeatedly, over and over again, said needs to be done and what the Premier has even alluded to, and that is, in the case of the finance minister, to pass a legislated cap on spending. There is no legitimate excuse in this environment not to do that. [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for offering a five-minute question-and-comment period. Oh, my Lordy; three members. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was an interesting conversation that you just had, and I was listening. You talked about the Horse Racing Alberta piece. Many people don't understand that unless the horse-racing industry earns money, we don't get that money, and we don't get to keep our share of that money. It's based on an agreement where Horse Racing Alberta earns money, government keeps some, sends some back. I'd say to this member: are you going to say that the agreement that Horse Racing Alberta has with the government of Alberta should be broken, and then, in turn, we don't build the track in your riding and do that big investment in Airdrie? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Anderson: What I'm saying is that being with the Solicitor General, who did a fantastic job in that department, one of the things I became aware of or looked into was this very issue. That \$25 million is actually not from receipts or anything like that. It's strictly VLT money that goes directly to Horse Racing Alberta. If we're going to start doing that, let's start funding every society and community organization doing that. That's a one-off deal that was made by the previous Premier. I don't think it's something that we should brag about.

3:30

The Speaker: I think I'd better recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East first.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you are speaking about that debt, have you included the \$100 million bond issue that will be coming out next week plus the interest that we aren't sure of what the percentage will be? Was that included in your comments?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, it was. That was part of the increased debt load that this government has been responsible for.

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

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I was wondering if the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere had some other comments on nonrenewable resources and the impact that it would have on our long-term finances. Maybe he could expound a little bit more on that area.

The Speaker: Recognizing that other members want to participate as well, go ahead hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: I would love to do that. Thank you very much for that offer. I would say that the second component of a long-term fiscal plan surrounds the need to reduce our reliance on volatile nonrenewable resource revenues. I think that we can do this through the implementation of an aggressive heritage fund savings strategy. If we cap spending to inflation plus population growth, revenues would begin to outstrip the newly restricted spending levels, giving us the ability to invest a substantial portion of the resultant budget surpluses into Alberta's heritage fund. As annual interest earnings from the fund increase, they will not only replace a reliance on nonrenewable resource revenues; they will also allow us to gradually begin lowering personal and corporate income taxes, thereby attracting new businesses, entrepreneurs, and skilled labourers to our province.

This kind of sustainable long-term fiscal planning will accomplish the goal of diversifying our economy and will leave our children with less dependency on nonrenewable resource revenues along with even greater opportunities than we enjoy today.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I just wonder if in your debt calculations you took into account the \$250 million that was borrowed, I believe, from the Royal Bank. I may have the wrong financial institution, but I'd like to know if that was included in your debt calculations.

Mr. Anderson: It was. As we know, the government has gone from zero in this sort of debt financing when this Premier took over office to roughly \$6 billion is what the projection is in 2012, and that would be a part of that number. It's a staggering number. There is no excuse to have plunged our books back into debt. To saddle future generations with this debt load is just beyond irresponsible, in my view.

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

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of questions. Canadian and U.S. governments, governments all over the world have been borrowing heavily to stimulate their economies and help

with the economic recovery. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere proposes to do the opposite here. I'm just wondering if he would have any data to show what kind of devastation removing \$4.3 billion or \$7 billion or whatever he's decided the deficit is would have on the Alberta economy.

Mr. Anderson: That's a very interesting way of putting it. As you know, the province of British Columbia has a huge stimulus program going right now for the Vancouver Olympics. Our proposal actually just takes our infrastructure level down, actually still above that massive British Columbia stimulus program. We're not talking about massive cuts, hon. member, we're talking about being reasonable, not thrashing a massive amount of debt onto the backs of future generations.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. We're now going to move on.

I'd now like to recognize the leader of the ND opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond to Budget 2010. This is a fire brigade budget because the Premier is scrambling to put out the very flames he fanned with his attack on public health care. Health care is an area where Albertans have little patience for meddlesome politicking. Our party has known this for years, as we've been telling the government so for just about as long. In fact, any good that may come from the health care system in Budget 2010 is due in no small part to the efforts of the NDP to mobilize Albertans against yet another attempt by yet another Progressive Conservative government to cut and privatize our health care system. After the shine of these funding announcements fades – and judging by this governments' track record, it will – Albertans will see that this government is committed to only one thing: hanging onto their tarnished reputation at all costs.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Budget 2010 sets a dangerous precedent of spending that, while temporarily beneficial to some industries, is unsustainable in the long-term. Rather than prudent fiscal planning, it represents a spending scramble aimed at placating Albertans who have been outraged by this government's irresponsible initiatives to disrupt our health care system. Once again, this Conservative government has presented Albertans with a fiscal plan that offers disproportionate benefits to wealthy individuals and corporations. It does nothing to address what many Albertans see as a revenue problem in the form of extremely low royalties and ongoing handouts to the oil and gas industry. The government has created a permanent financial squeeze by giving away tax revenues to profitable corporations and the wealthiest Albertans.

In 2006 the revenue from the income tax structure was approximately \$4.7 billion, \$5.5 billion lower than it would have been if the previous tax system had been in place. Alberta's deficit is currently projected to be \$4.7 billion, again something we could eliminate if we simply restored a progressive income tax in this province. Because this government has refused repeated recommendations to invest in the diversification of Alberta's economy, we have once again been presented with a budget that hinges on the predictability of the patently unpredictable revenue streams of oil and gas. Alberta has become overly dependent on volatile oil and gas revenues, particularly gas royalties. The failure to diversify our economy makes budgeting in Alberta even harder than it needs to be. As it is,

Budget 2010 contains questionable speculations on the strength of the Canadian dollar and banks on a rebound in natural gas prices despite economic forecasts that predict otherwise and a marked increase in natural gas reserves south of the border.

As with past budgets in this province Budget 2010 shows that the Conservative government has no plan to diversify Alberta's economy so that we may begin to rely once more on stable revenue streams. It is this kind of short-sighted gambit, that continues to force this government into positions it cannot possibly maintain, which has led to a perpetual string of broken promises for long-term funding initiatives. Budget 2010's plan to boost health care spending is just the latest in that string. The NDP has no faith that the long-term funding promises made in Budget 2010 will be kept, and I suspect many Albertans don't either. Mr. Speaker, the government's promises are simply unbelievable.

I can say this with confidence because the NDP is the only party to have travelled the province offering Albertans a chance to freely express their opinions and suggestions about health care reform. We're the only party to have put together a public document recording these sentiments, which we've called What Albertans Want. We were very successful in that campaign, Mr. Speaker, so successful, in fact, that the minister of finance has now begun to use the title of our report in his efforts to sell Budget 2010 to Albertans. Unfortunately for the government, there is one major problem with their attempt to adopt the title of our health report as their own: the Premier and his caucus don't actually know what it is Albertans want. Rather, they know that their efforts to privatize public health care in Alberta have failed yet again and that a backpedalling strategy may help stop the drubbing the Premier and his Tory party are taking in public opinion polls.

When it comes to understanding what Albertans really want, this government is making it up as they go, creating policy based on poll results rather than what is right for Alberta families. Take, for instance, the fact that neither the Premier, his finance minister, nor his health minister ever consulted openly with Albertans about health care reforms prior to implementing their ill-conceived plans. The NDP did hold such consultations and continues to do so. What we are hearing from Albertans, what the government fails to comprehend, is that in addition to protecting public health care, Albertans want a government that they can trust. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans cannot and do not trust this Conservative government to protect public health care. The Progressive Conservatives in this province have broken too many promises too many times for people to believe that they will honour the commitments for long-term funding made in Budget 2010.

Granted, some good may come from this budget and from the government's decision to stop poking a pointy stick into the health care beehive at least for the time being, but it will have been financed on the backs of Alberta's most vulnerable and poor citizens. Budget 2010 is disingenuous in that it proposes paying for a questionable commitment to health care by cutting services to the homeless, to the unemployed, to vulnerable children, and to students. I don't think that's what Albertans want, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

Consider the \$36 million budget cut to the Children and Youth Services ministry. This includes a 7 per cent reduction in funding for programs aimed at child intervention. These programs are designed to identify children at risk of suffering dangerous and traumatic circumstances and to remove children from environments where they are being neglected or worse: physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. Mr. Speaker, this cut is perhaps the most cynical contained in Budget 2010, especially given the repeated tragic and,

frankly, embarrassing failures of this ministry to protect vulnerable children in care.

It was the NDP, Mr. Speaker, that identified this ministry's inability to ensure proper and timely reporting of the state of children in care. It was the NDP who made public the documented evidence of children in care being forced into face-down restraints and being placed in foster care environments where caregivers knew that children may have been sexually abused by other children. It was the NDP who made this House aware of the tragic circumstances that led to the death and hospitalization of children in the care of this ministry. Given all of this sadness and the obvious need for more oversight and better care, it is unacceptable that Budget 2010 should shave a single penny from child intervention programs. Bankrolling lofty promises for health care funding by stripping away the protection of children in care is shameful, and I don't think that's what Albertans are looking for.

Consider the \$112 million budget cut in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Nothing could signal more clearly that this government has abandoned its 10-year plan to end homelessness. In fact, Budget 2010 represents a total commitment of less than one-third of the funding promised to achieve this objective. Programs designed to help the homeless make rent have been slashed from \$144 million last year to \$88 million this year and are falling to \$75 million next year. Coupled with the minimum wage freeze and a \$47 million cut to the Alberta Works social assistance program, cuts to the housing ministry will force more people out of their homes and onto the street. Mr. Speaker, we know that once people are forced onto the street, their next stop is often the health care system. This is yet another short-sighted cut that harms vulnerable people, and I don't think that's what Albertans are looking for.

Mr. Speaker, this government's hollow promises to fund health care also come at the expense of Alberta's workforce. Budget 2010 has taken \$87 million from the Ministry of Employment and Immigration, the effects of which may be far reaching. In addition to the hundreds of Albertans who will lose their jobs, thousands more will suffer from this reduction in income supports, health benefits, and job training programs. At a time when Alberta's economy is desperately struggling to stay afloat and following a year in which nearly 80,000 jobs were lost in this province, such cuts will cause unnecessary suffering for working families.

Working Albertans want help during a recession in order to go back to school, to upgrade their training, and to get back to work. Immigrants coming to this province to join our workforce rely on government supports to ensure that educational training is affordable. All of these programs are aimed at bolstering our economy by ensuring that out-of-work Albertans get back on the job and new immigrants can contribute to our workforce while still feeding their families. Cutting the very services that are designed to cushion our economy in tough times makes no sense, and I don't think it's what Albertans are looking for.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I must say that the NDP is at best skeptical about this government's promise for a long-term funding commitment to health care. There have been too many previous broken promises, and I think Albertans are skeptical for good reason. Their long-term promise to end homelessness has been a sham. This government's long-term commitment to fund the Green TRIP program has been a sham. This government's long-term promise to cap tuition increases to the rate of inflation is a sham. And their repeated promises to give Albertans the health care system they want have all been a sham.

Rather than show that the Progressive Conservatives truly understand what Albertans want, Budget 2010 makes clear the fact that this government remains prepared to say anything in order to

retain its grip on power. The Progressive Conservatives have a deplorable track record of broken promises. This gives Albertans little, if any, confidence in their latest promise for long-term, stable funding for health care.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans wanted a budget this year that showed a commitment to correct the mistakes of the past. They wanted to see an increase in health care funding, yes, but they certainly did not want it paid for by Alberta's homeless, our unemployed, our immigrant populations, and our vulnerable children. Moreover, they are justifiably skeptical that looking back five years in time from now, they will find that this government has kept its promise for predictable health care funding.

Mr. Speaker, this government has created an unsustainable situation primarily because it has walked away from billions of dollars in revenue that was paid when we had a fair and progressive income tax system in this province. But in order to benefit the wealthiest Albertans, they instituted a flat tax, that may cost this province's treasury \$5.5 billion a year or more. Moreover, this government has cut corporate income tax by over a third in the last eight years, and let's not forget that corporations pay income tax not when they're losing money but only on their profits.

Finally, as we've said many times in this House, this government charges the lowest royalties in the world. What's happened is that we have become overly dependent on natural gas revenues, which are, in my view, in permanent decline because of the dramatic increase in the reserves south of the border. So we're not going to see the high, high prices for natural gas that we have seen. The dependence on natural gas revenues or royalties is in fact going to create a permanent financial situation for this province that is going to hurt the ability of this government to deliver the services that Albertans want. Mr. Speaker, we should not have to lay off nurses every time the price of natural gas goes down, yet that's what's happening in this province because the government has failed to be responsible in looking after its revenues in the long run.

That underlines, I think, the kind of problem that they have when they create a fire brigade budget, running from one fire to another. This year it's health care. Next year it might be education. The year after that it might be the environment or children's services. We can't continue in this way. We have to do better. We can do better. If the NDP proposals were accepted in this province, if we had an NDP government that put proper fiscal measures in place, we could protect the very services that Albertans treasure. That's something this government has failed to do, and I think they will pay a price for it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just would like to ask the member a question. He talked about how his proposals would result in an increase in oil and gas royalties, an increase in income tax. What other taxes would he raise to go through all of these grandiose entitlement programs that he talked about?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it very interesting that this hon. member talks about health care and public education as entitlement programs. I think it's very indicative of the mentality on the other side.

These are the birthrights of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and for this minister, newly minted though he may be, to stand up and say that

these are just entitlements and the NDP wants to increase taxes in order to pay for them is disingenuous at best. We are talking about taxes that existed in this province under a Progressive Conservative government. A previous iteration under Premiers Lougheed and Getty was a little more balanced in its approach and believed that the very wealthiest in society should pay their share. This government has cut taxes but for the wealthiest people of this province, and those are the corporate tax and the flat tax.

Mr. Speaker, we did a little experiment at the time. We ran some numbers. We took a bus driver – and I picked a bus driver because I used to be one, an actual, live bus driver in Calgary, I might say – and Ron Southern, and we estimated the tax savings of those individuals under the flat tax when it was first brought in. Now, Mr. Southern's savings were substantial. He received a tax savings of \$60,000 according to the best estimates that we could make. The bus driver got about 50 bucks in tax savings on an annual basis. That illustrates very clearly the unfairness and the unbalanced nature of this government's tax cutting. They're cutting taxes on the wealthiest Albertans and on large corporations, and it is the poorest Albertans that have to pay for those cuts through cuts to their services.

So if you're unemployed and you want to take upgrading, they cut that program. You know, if you're unemployed and you want to get off welfare, they cut that program. They cut in half in this budget the number of new housing units that were going to be built, Mr. Speaker. So you can see how this Progressive Conservative government, in order to reward the wealthiest Albertans and the corporate sector in this province, will attack the poorest and most vulnerable, and they do it over and over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. minister for his question.

3:50

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Yeah. Just one question for the hon. member. Taxes are being held or reduced world-wide in an effort to stimulate the world's economy and again get everybody back on the road to recovery. Of course, the recovery has already started, so this has been quite successful. I'm just wondering if the hon. member can think of a country, a government, a society that's taxed its way out of a recession and has taxed its way to prosperity.

Mr. Mason: You know, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting question. I'm going to use the example of my friend the former Republican Governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin, whom I met with a couple of years ago. She increased the royalties paid by oil companies operating in Alaska by a substantial amount. At a hundred dollars a barrel Alaska collects 66 per cent more per barrel than Alberta does, and that's before this so-called competitiveness review that we're going to see, where we're going to try and cut royalties back to the bone. So if a gun-toting, Bible-thumping Republican can do it, what's wrong with this crew?

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

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm curious. I wonder what the rest of the story is on that member's comments about Alaska and Sarah Palin. As I understand it, yeah, they may have collected more on royalties, but they also didn't have property tax or personal income tax. So one kind of offsets the other.

My question to that member: can you explain for the benefit of my constituents your philosophy, then, on why government should be

spending taxpayer dollars to build housing for people that are supposedly low income or in need when a lot of my young constituents that are busting their butts with jobs have to try to build their own houses without any subsidy?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 8: Mr. Dallas]

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to present the Wildrose Alliance's response to the government's Speech from the Throne. Before I go on, on behalf of the Wildrose Alliance caucus and our leader, Danielle Smith, I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong for his service to the people of Alberta. I had the opportunity to be with him at many events, as have so many people. I have truly enjoyed the pleasure of his company. I even had the opportunity to travel with him and his gracious wife, Mary, a couple of times. He is an outstanding ambassador for the province as the Queen's representative. He has been a tireless promoter of Alberta's values and its people. Albertans admire his courage, his sense of humour, and his warm heart.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that a Speech from the Throne is intended to set a vision for what the government wants to do for a period of time. We just wish that this government had articulated a vision that actually did something to eliminate the deficit and get the province's finances back in the black. We also recognize that the mechanics of the government's plan will come before this House in the form of legislation, committee work, and ongoing announcements. We'll be a constructive, respectful opposition caucus. We'll support the government when it does the right thing. We'll support the government when it honours its commitments and promises that are in keeping with what Albertans want, and we'll hold them accountable as our constituents expect us to do.

In that spirit, Mr. Speaker, let me share with you and the members of this House a vision for this province that is based on meetings that we have been holding for months and months, miles and miles, in community after community. It is a vision based on pride in this great province, a firm belief that we are all better off when we are truly free. Albertans have shown a real desire for change. They want and need accountability from their elected officials. Our vision is for a province where government is proud of business and the free-enterprise system because it helps us all enjoy a higher quality of life and the freedom that we cherish.

Our vision is for a province where government actually listens to the concerns, the hopes, and the dreams of Albertans. Let's not

forget, Mr. Speaker, that listening is far different from hearing, and that is something that many elected MLAs often forget. Our vision is for a government that actually represents the interests and values of Albertans instead of its friends and those connected through backroom operatives.

Our vision is for a government that puts agricultural policies in place to help those who have chosen to farm, those who have chosen to raise our food and those who have chosen to grow the products that we rely on. We want a government that gives the agricultural community the freedom to market and sell their own products as they see fit, to be able to have the freedom to do what is in the best interests of their family and business.

Our vision is for a government that understands that we serve at the pleasure of our constituents, the people who invest their hard-earned dollars in key services based on promises and commitments that we make here in this Assembly. Preston Manning used to say that the seats we represent belong to the people who have given us the honour to serve them here in this great Assembly. These seats do not belong to us as individual members.

In keeping with that spirit, Mr. Speaker, our vision is for a Legislature where every single member in this House is able to vote freely. If the people of my constituency don't support a particular policy or piece of legislation, I am elected by them and should be able to represent their interests first. Likewise, if I constantly do things that go against the wishes of my constituents, they should be able to gather signatures and have me recalled. Accountability to the people we represent should be every day, not just on election day, as this PC government likes it to be.

As we have tried to explain to you and to other members in this House, we also believe that a truly free House means that each member here must have the proper funding to do their job, to research important pieces of legislation, and to represent their own unique points of view. This should be a place where thoughtful and vigorous debate can take place even when we don't agree with our own party members or one another. That funding and the opportunity to participate should be afforded to every member even if your party has only one elected member.

Our vision is for a government that drives true health care reform instead of promising and passing the problem on with further delay and study. Access to a waiting list is not access to health care. There is so much we can do within the Canada Health Act to create efficiencies and savings that can be reinvested in front-line services, technologies that save lives, and medical research that helps make the diseases of today a thing of the past.

Our vision is for a province where municipalities receive long-term, sustainable sources of funding instead of having to go cap in hand to a government that will decide what the local priorities are. Those decisions should be left to locally elected officials.

Our vision is for a province where environmental stewardship goes hand in hand with economic development and where we can harness the potential of both. Albertans share a unique connection to the environment, the land and the water. We want to do everything we can to make sure that we teach our children and grandchildren the benefits of being good environmental stewards so they can have those special places that we enjoy today, that they are there for them, their children, and their grandchildren.

Our vision is for a province where people are not afraid to speak out over fear of losing a grant for their municipality or a government contract or even their position within the government. True freedom only exists when people can speak out. True freedom only exists when government listens and when members of the House are able to speak freely. To do this, all members must have access to proper resources. They need to have the ability to do their work for the

people and the views they represent. True freedom for Albertans can only be realized when the power is back in the hands of the voter through recall and other democratic reforms such as citizens' initiative referendums.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, we are living in a very competitive world. We cannot afford to drop the ball as the world struggles to recover from this credit debt fallout. It is true that we went into this recession better off than others, but that does not mean that we can continue with this reckless spending. We need a plan, and we need to prioritize our spending. We need to make the infrastructure plan public. Both the people and the municipalities need to know. Industry can plan, and the people can expect the projects to come online in a timely and orderly sequence. The yo-yo spending in infrastructure with unreasonable timelines has cost the taxpayers dearly. The on-again, off-again projects like the police academy in Fort Macleod are wrong. They've announced it. They need to follow through with their commitments.

What this government doesn't understand is that long-term, stable funding is essential. We made the cuts in the '90s and had this good fortune and discipline to control the spending, but the spendaholics have gotten their hands on the chequebooks and do not realize or acknowledge the fact that what we spend we must pay.

This is only a portion of what the Wildrose Alliance vision is for Alberta. I'll bring my comments to a close, but please be assured that the Wildrose Alliance will be here to support the government when it makes sense but will hold the government accountable when it goes off track. We hope that we are supporting them more often than not because that means they are in step with the real values of Albertans, not the imaginary values and priorities that are whispered into their ears by friends of this government. Mr. Speaker, we are here to represent the people we serve. It is time for this government to get it right. Albertans deserve nothing less.

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

Seeing none, I'll call on the next speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get into discussing the merits of the throne speech, I would first like to thank the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, and his wife, Mary, for five remarkable years of service to the Alberta people. On a number of occasions I have had the pleasure of having dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Kwong and got to know and appreciate first-hand their commitment to this great province.

Interestingly, my first brush with the greatness of the so-called China Clipper came in 1977 as a seven-year-old playing hockey for the Varsity White Warriors. On a chilly October evening we were playing a game of hockey on the outdoor community rink on Varsity Drive, right beside the Varsity Community Centre and next to the Varsity Acres school. Mr. Kwong's son played on the rival team from the Triwood Community Association. His son's name was Randy, and man, could that kid skate. Following our first game against Triwood on the open ice, I asked my dad who the really fast skater on the Triwood team was. My dad told me his name, which, as indicated, was Randy, and interestingly Randy went on to play for my junior hockey alma mater, the Calgary Canucks, and received a hockey scholarship to Harvard.

After we talked about what a great skater Randy was, my dad then asked me whether I saw the rather small, spectacled man standing watching the ice time in the corner of the rink. I said yes, and from

there my dad told me the story of the China Clipper, the story of how a small of stature, slight of build man who once played for the Edmonton Eskimos dominated the Canadian Football League with his passion and simple love of the game. Mr. Kwong was more than a football player. He ran a successful dry cleaning company, a successful real estate company, held many positions, including being president of the Calgary Stampeders organization and was a large part of the Calgary volunteer community.

More impressive than all of this, though, is the fact that over the seven or eight years of playing against his son, I can't remember a game where he wasn't present quietly in the corner of the rink overlooking the proceedings. To my memory he never missed a game.

Truly, the Lieutenant Governor is a great man, and again I would like to thank the hon. Mr. and Mrs. Kwong for their service to the Alberta people. They will be missed.

Moving on, let's discuss the throne speech. As you are aware in this House, this has been my third opportunity to listen to a Speech from the Throne delivered by this government. In fact, I think it's the 39th consecutive throne speech given by the Progressive Conservative government. Again, much like the last two throne speeches I have listened to, they have contained glowing reviews of the programs, policies, and enactments of this government. And why not? If they're not going to toot their own horn, who is? The truth is nobody because right now the people of Alberta are questioning whether or not this Progressive Conservative government of Alberta, or as my friend calls it, the socially regressive, fiscally irresponsible government of Alberta, is making decisions in the best interests of Albertans for the long run. Sadly, I believe the answer is no.

At the end of the day everything we do in this Legislature should be about building a healthy and vibrant life for ourselves and our children. As I see it, Alberta needs a few things to ensure that we live the best lives that we can and that our children live even better lives, and it is the government's job to help deliver those things. The government's throne speech failed to show any vision or direction but simply pretended that all was well.

The current government has been in power for over 40 years, and they pretend they've done great things. What is their true legacy? As the throne speech reminded us, yes, they paid off a debt, a debt that was incurred by them. Yes, the tax rate is relatively low. But what else is there, really? The answer is, unfortunately, not much.

This year Alberta will run another huge deficit. At this rate we'll eat through the entire sustainability fund. As much as they may claim that Alberta will continue to be debt free, these Alberta bonds that the throne speech lauded are nothing but debt. Make no bones about it; the government has returned Albertans to a position of debt and is well on its way to eating through our modest reserves.

A healthy and vibrant society cannot exist without a healthy and vibrant economy. In Alberta for the present term our economic welfare will be directly linked to the energy sector. It is essential that Alberta's energy companies are competitive and have the opportunity to make an honest buck. The throne speech spoke at length about Alberta's competitiveness. It spoke about innovation. It spoke about education and advanced technology. It repeated the same promises that Albertans have heard for years. It promised changes. But this government refuses to release its competitiveness review and tell us what those changes will be. I'll believe that the government is actually going to change things for the better when I see it, but I hope I see it soon.

Alberta's economy is hurting, and the government's constant tinkering with the royalty structure has done nothing but aggravate the effects of the recession. Having said that, the energy industry

has a responsibility to ensure that all Albertans share fairly in its prosperity. Yes, they must produce wealth, but they cannot shirk or avoid their environmental obligations.

The throne speech promised that Alberta's health care system would become "more patient focused." This begs the question of what it was focusing on if it was not the patient beforehand. The bottom line is that Albertans must have access to the best health care available. There will always be a push and a pull as to what the precise level of care should be. What I do know is this: it is a person's need and not their bank book that should determine their access to the system.

In looking closely at our system of health, the problem is not money. It is poor management. The government has and continues to throw Alberta's health care system into disarray, the latest with the creation of a superboard that no one asked for, a move with no publicly available study showing its necessity. Clearly, the superboard has been a colossal failure and a colossal waste of money.

The vitality of the energy sector, health care, and the education system are major Alberta issues. The government has a significant role to play in these areas. Let me make it clear that I do not believe that the best government is a government which governs least. It is not a question of big government or small government; it's a question of good government. I am committed to good government. It is clearly past the time for political and economic reckoning in this province.

I was born in 1969 at the Holy Cross hospital. For almost 40 years I've been fortunate to call Alberta my home. My life has been good, and I say that sincerely. I have very few complaints. I certainly hope my two nephews, Marshall and Jackson, will have the same opportunities I did. Government must understand that they have an obligation not only to the present but also to the future. Opportunities squandered are opportunities lost. I believe we still have time if we wish to take control of our future and ensure that my nephews and your children and grandchildren can continue to live in a province that is not only the envy of the rest of Canada but the world. We can do that.

4:10

I sat through the throne speech thinking to myself that it all seemed too good to be true. Some of you might remember that last year I stood here and pointed out that the government's throne speech reminded me of the fictional paradise Shangri-La. This year is not much different. I couldn't help but think the government was just pretending that all was well. The government was pretending that there were few problems, pretending that those problems didn't exist and that the problems that did were just not this government's fault.

In fact, when I was thinking about giving this address to this august House, quite coincidentally a song came on the radio that I had not heard in quite some time. It was called *The Great Pretender*, that was originally done by The Platters and later on covered by Freddie Mercury. The song goes like this: oh, yes, I'm the great pretender, ooh ooh, pretending that I'm doing well, ooh ooh; my need is such, I pretend too much; I'm lonely, but no one can tell. It continues: oh yes, I'm the great pretender, ooh ooh, adrift in a world of my own, ooh ooh; I play the game, but to my real shame you've left me to dream all alone, ooh ooh.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to offer a response to the government's great fiction.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to stand in the House today and reply to the Speech from the Throne. We all know that we have been faced with the most challenging economic circumstances since the Great Depression. For Alberta to be in the position it is today, ahead of all other jurisdictions in Canada, is truly a result of the hard work of all Albertans. It is important to remain optimistic in these times and keep thinking of the opportunities that lie ahead of us as we emerge from this economic turbulence.

I want to touch on a few issues that highlight our province's bright future, our competitive economic position, our clean energy future, and a health care system that is designed to meet the challenges of an aging population. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is well known for its competitive advantage for those who live and conduct business in our province. Alberta is truly in an enviable position when it comes to economic competitiveness. For example, we have the lowest tax regime in Canada. This is something our government values and is very proud of. We understand that taxpayers' dollars are best left in the hands of taxpayers. While other governments are raising taxes, it is our Premier that has made a pledge to all Albertans that under his watch there will be no tax increases. What this means is that Albertans will continue to benefit from paying no provincial sales tax, a low flat-rate income tax, and will continue to have the highest personal income tax exemption in Canada.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Albertans also benefit from the foresight of our government, particularly in that our province does not have any net debt. In fact, as many Albertans are aware and proud of, we have billions in cash reserves, savings, and other assets due to the hard work of all Albertans. It is this competitive economic environment which has provided a solid foundation which will lead Alberta to make a strong recovery from the global economic recession. It is this competitive edge that has brought so many opportunities to our province. In my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar alone I was pleased to host our Premier and our agriculture minister for the opening of the Alberta Rhodiola Rosea Growers Organization processing plant in October. We also had the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development at the Bio-Mile opening in Drayton Valley.

These are, of course, only a few examples. Folks are excited about the opportunities that await them in Alberta. It is also important to note that we are competitive in the resource sector. Alberta is richly blessed with important resources such as agriculture, forestry, and energy. This government is committed to ensuring that our resource sector continues to thrive, which will be reflected in Alberta's competitiveness review. This commitment is reflected in Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This legislation will ensure that Alberta remains as the most competitive jurisdiction in North America.

In addition to the prosperity of the resource sectors we will also work towards value adding these resources right here in our province of Alberta. I'm happy to say that found within my constituency is an innovative opportunity for the value-added sector. As I mentioned, the Drayton Valley Bio-Mile has received both federal and provincial government support because we believe in diversifying our economy. We know that it is an important step in the right direction for our province. The economic boost to the region surrounding Drayton Valley is incredible, and I look forward to seeing the benefits not only for the economy but for our environment and the forest sector as well.

Our government remains committed to supporting a world-class integrated petrochemical hub that will upgrade the raw materials from the oil sands before it is delivered to markets. It is our resource sector that will continue to attract investment and help meet the

energy demands of North America throughout the 21st century. However, clean energy is also crucial to this province's future. Albertans are proud stewards of our land, our air, our water, and this government will support their efforts. Energy conservation is one area where all Albertans can play a role. As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy I look forward to working with the minister and several industry players to be involved in these important initiatives.

We also need to continue supporting efforts like advanced technology such as carbon capture and storage. Technology will play a major role in ensuring we meet our environmental objectives. It is technology like carbon capture that we can use here at home to reduce our GHGs while at the same time enhancing resource extraction, adding many years to fields like the Pembina field in my constituency, which equates to jobs and a return on the investment many times over. This serves a dual benefit of ensuring environmental responsibility and an economic advantage.

Mr. Speaker, right here in Alberta we have an innovative research and development sector that can advance technology of this nature. This is complemented by the fact that we will be able to export this technology to the rest of the world. Alberta has always led the way in environmental stewardship. Through clean energy incentives, stringent carbon reduction targets, and innovations like carbon capture and storage it is Alberta that is acting on climate change and not just talking about it.

Mr. Speaker, another issue that is of great importance to my constituents and, indeed, to all Albertans is health care. However, as the Speech from the Throne indicated, we need to achieve better results for the money we spend for all Albertans. For the monetary value we invest in our health care system, I believe all Albertans expect to get the care they need where they need it regardless of where they live. Over the past year we have made some significant changes to our health care system which will provide a solid foundation to build upon. I know that this government will continue to support and improve our health care system through its commitment to a stable five-year funding arrangement for health care.

This is important because with an aging population we will continue to see additional pressures placed upon our health care system. We need to ensure that our system is properly established to provide high quality of care for all Albertans and especially our seniors because they deserve to have the options to age in place together and not be separated, as my parents had to be after 50 years of marriage. That's why I'm proud to say we are committed to enhance the quality of seniors' care in Alberta.

This government has made considerable improvements in pharmaceuticals by lowering the price of generic drugs. We have also expanded the role of pharmacists in client care as a part of this government's strategy on pharmaceuticals. With the funds generated through the Alberta capital bonds, we will be able to improve and build even more seniors' residences to ensure that those who helped build this province receive the high-quality care they deserve and that they may stay together.

Mr. Speaker, I am so proud that our Premier has committed to ensuring a high quality of life for all Albertans. While the global economic realities that we face today challenge our resolve, the spirit of Albertans will continue to shine through. Through our competitive economic foundation, our clean energy future, and our world-class public health care system we can be assured that under the leadership of our Premier and this government we will continue to have a province that is the greatest place on earth to live, work, and raise our families.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the hon. Lieutenant Governor, who has

served this province with integrity and passion and also a very good sense of humour. His service and Mrs. Kwong's will be forever remembered and greatly missed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to stand before the Assembly today and reply to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for Alberta. Before I begin expressing my thoughts about the Speech from the Throne, I would like to recognize the hon. Lieutenant Governor for his tireless, dedicated commitment to public service and personal passion for our great province. Over the past five years as Her Majesty's representative in Alberta the hon. Lieutenant Governor's exemplary and distinguished service has been greatly appreciated, valued, and will be wholeheartedly missed by many. His example remains, and he has set a standard for all of us in two crucial ways, by meeting challenges and capitalizing on opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, those are the two things that we need to do in building the next Alberta in the coming years. To say that Albertans and their government are facing a time of considerable challenge is to seriously understate the case. This is unquestionably a time of substantial volatility, complexity, and uncertainty in so many aspects of our lives. In terms of the economy together we have been working hard to help Albertans weather the first great financial storm of the 21st century, and it has hit hard. The winds may have diminished, but we honestly don't know for sure that the storm has passed.

Our neighbour to the south and our biggest trading partner is at this time considering a proposal for a budget deficit of one and a half trillion dollars, a figure that almost defies understanding and one that has made many people justifiably nervous. There is not the slightest doubt that if our friends to the south can't effectively work their way through the daunting economic and financial problems, our challenges are going to become more complicated.

Much of this economic volatility comes from the fact that Alberta is deeply embedded in an increasingly globalized and competitive economy. When international natural gas prices recently fell dramatically because of new technologies for recovery combined with an economic downturn, Alberta could not avoid being affected. Mr. Speaker, that is simply not going to change in the years to come. By all accounts these international forces are going to continue to shrink our world, and Albertans will either be buffeted by these forces or will emerge to find ways to benefit from them. That is the critical point. We need to have a deep understanding of the changing landscapes around us, and we have to find the opportunities that are embedded in these challenges. Make no mistake: there are opportunities in abundance.

Right now efforts of creating global strategies are more apparent than ever. As we are setting directions and discussing and weighing options, in the booming economies of India and China entrepreneurs and supportive governments are looking for and finding ways to profit from changing situations in the midst of all this volatility and uncertainty. Around the planet countries such as Brazil, Russia, and new European member states also have emerging economies, and together over the long term they could be the future drivers of global demand. Mr. Speaker, with the assets and advantages of this province there is simply no reason why the people of Alberta should not be leading the way in taking advantage of those opportunities,

developing effective competitive strategies, and improving the quality of lives in the process.

We are the only major political jurisdiction on this side of the world that has the ability to see our way through the worst economic circumstance since the Great Depression of the 1930s yet not saddle our children and youth, including future generations, with a debt they played no part in making. We may experience some short-term inconveniences, Mr. Speaker, in regards to our standard of living. However, all our resources and our people have allowed us to become not only a debt-free political jurisdiction in the western hemisphere but one of the few that has cash reserves in a sustainability fund to draw upon.

Also, there is no doubt that people will no longer accept a trade-off between economic advancement and the integrity and well-being of our environment, and we need to seize the opportunity to lead the way in that regard. We need to ask ourselves a key question. Why should Alberta not be leading the way in finding the methods of meeting energy needs in the ways that are consistent with the long-term health of our communities and planet? Why should we not be the ones who benefit from the inevitable profits that will flow to the jurisdictions which develop these approaches, that we know will be coming because the world is increasingly demanding them? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that Albertans are in a perfect position to lead the way. Albertans have the expertise, the experience, the powerful, resilient, and adaptable entrepreneurial and enterprising spirit which leads us time and time again toward greater economic growth and stronger prosperity.

This is the lifeblood, Mr. Speaker, of our local economies that we value and are so proud of, which was built over the years and continues to lay a strong foundation for years to come. We have a government that knows how to respond, add value, and be supportive and knows when to stay out of the way and let the hard-working hands of the people of our province do what they are capable of achieving. These key principles will continue to serve us well as challenges are presented during these tough and turbulent times. Also, through the strong leadership of our Premier we will continue to build on the many strengths of this remarkable province.

Mr. Speaker, our province's strengths and assets are enormous, but it is essential to recognize that they are grounded in the diversity of the gifts and talents of our people. In a time of unrelenting globalization the fact that Alberta's people come from every corner of the globe is increasingly a major part of our unique advantage. The people who have come to this province are by definition risk takers, or they would have stayed where they were born. It is precisely this risk taking that is going to be essential in building the next Alberta.

It has become part of conventional wisdom to say that ingenuity, innovation, and entrepreneurialism will be the key to our success now and into the future, and in this case conventional wisdom has it right. Those things will require above all else a first-rate system of lifelong learning founded in a strong public education system that takes seriously the central task of developing that potential of every one of our children, youth, and adult learners. It is the foundation for a prosperous, inclusive, and democratic society, and we should be unrelenting in our commitment and investment in this regard.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is building on a strong foundation, but we need to do more if we are to ensure that the unique gifts and talents of every child and youth are fully developed. We are fully committed to doing so, given that education remains a top government priority.

In addition to a well-educated population, we want and need healthy people. Mr. Speaker, the opportunities in these areas of health and learning are among the most promising strategies for the

years ahead. If we identify wise approaches to health promotion and prevention of disease and illness, we can save enormous amounts in our health care system and at the same time have far healthier individuals, families, and communities. Improvements in health directly support increases in education attainment, labour productivity, and economic growth. Healthy workers live longer, are more productive, and are less likely to be absent from work due to illness. Mr. Speaker, we need a comprehensive approach to health and learning, and I believe we are firmly headed in that direction.

Also, we need to be thoughtfully engaged in building the next Alberta for the foundation is strong to build upon. The future is unwritten, and I am proud to say that the people in our province together with this government are going to meet the challenges as presented and with confidence will capitalize on all the opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, as the people's representative for Edmonton-Decore I have never been more hopeful about our province and its future. It is truly an honour and a privilege to join hands with Albertans to create the next chapters of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

4:30

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne that was presented in this House last week. I would like to commend the hon. Lieutenant Governor for delivering this speech and providing us with a vision for this upcoming legislative session. I would like to thank His Honour for his valuable service to this province. I am pleased and honoured to represent the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks and would like to take this opportunity to thank my constituents for their continued support and their faith in allowing me to represent their interests in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I concur with much of what my colleagues have said in terms of the priorities and expectations voiced on behalf of their constituencies. These are shared by many in Strathmore-Brooks as well. Of course, I would like to add some comments of my own. Again, I would like to thank His Honour for presenting a speech that I believe resonates with many of my constituents in Strathmore-Brooks in that he has enumerated the challenges we face with optimism and direction for the future, determined to emerge from these difficult times even stronger than before.

In my constituency, Mr. Speaker, as in every region in this province, access to health care services is a priority. My constituency is served by three local hospitals in Brooks, Strathmore, and Bassano. I'm encouraged by this government's commitment to improve the delivery of health care services all across this province. Secure and stable funding and a vigorous focus on better performance in key areas such as wait times and access are important to my constituents. There is an urgent need to restore obstetric services to the Brooks hospital. Not only are families facing the cost in convenience and rise of risk of extra travel, but services in outlying areas are also strained by higher than anticipated patient numbers. This is a situation where Albertans deserve and expect better and one that I am confident will be resolved in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the important contribution of our health care professionals to our communities. Certainly, without their dedicated service to our system and to Albertans our health care system would not be what it is today. We appreciate their dedicated service.

The completion of the new Sagewood garden in Strathmore later this year will include 60 new assisted living spaces for seniors and 40 seniors' affordable housing units providing care options close to home for many seniors in the Strathmore area. This initiative is one that is very important to my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour has focused our attention on the importance of improved competitiveness in a global economy. Improved competitiveness is important to attract and sustain investment in both the energy and agricultural sectors in this province. These two sectors, energy and agriculture, are the two most significant drivers of the economy in my constituency, and both have suffered losses in these tough economic times. The results of the competitiveness review are important to my constituents involved in the energy service sector, who count on Alberta's stability as a good place to invest.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1, the competitiveness review, sends a signal that is important to industry and entrepreneurs in this province. Every day Albertans are impacted by the cost and inconvenience of excessive regulation: energy, agriculture, health care, education, transportation, environment, food service. Every jurisdiction in this province can benefit from the improved performance a more appropriate regulatory regime will deliver. I say that with confidence from discussion with my colleagues, who have experience in a broad range of these areas as well. That is not to say that we abandon our high regulatory standards, but I'm encouraged that this government can and will deliver improved efficiency by reducing excessive and ineffective regulation, and I'm motivated by the resolve my colleagues share to ensure that we deliver in this area, where the rubber hits the road, so to speak. My constituents are looking for common-sense solutions to complex problems, and I believe that smart regulation delivers on that concept.

The principle of competitiveness is important to Alberta taking its rightful place in Canada and the world. As government does its part to build the framework for greater efficiency, Albertans will succeed in domestic and international markets. This matter of competitiveness is also very important to agricultural producers in my constituency. Beef producers, in particular, have been burdened with increased costs of excessive regulation. Canada has an international reputation as having one of the very best animal health and food safety production systems in the world, and it is important to Alberta producers that we maintain that. However, I believe that regulatory scrutiny could also deliver some cost efficiencies to livestock producers as well. I'm pleased to see this government addressing this important initiative of improved competitiveness, and I look forward to working as part of a team, led by our Premier, to ensure that we deliver in this area.

To quote His Honour, Mr. Speaker: "Our world may have changed, but our people have not. They remain hard working and innovative, entrepreneurial and compassionate, and, most of all, confident about our province and its future." That reflects the attitude and spirit of my constituents as well. I'm thinking of small business owners who have stretched their resources to keep as many people working as possible through these difficult times and of the rig and oilfield service workers who are working less hours at reduced pay to make ends meet, employers and employees working together to weather difficult economic times. I'm thinking of health care professionals who have brought forward proactive and innovative suggestions to deliver seniors' care and restore obstetrics care to our communities through Alberta Health Services' Action Your Ideas initiative, people working together to solve problems.

Mr. Speaker, the strong fiscal position this province enjoys is also reason for optimism. Alberta's low tax rate is good for individuals and companies. The opportunity to draw on the \$17 billion

sustainability fund at a time when most jurisdictions are increasing their debt puts Alberta at a distinct advantage into the future. Timely investment in important infrastructure projects keeps many Albertans working, meets the needs of a growing population, and helps ensure ongoing efficiency. Projects like water systems and fire halls, that support municipalities, can facilitate future growth. Community halls and sports facilities can enhance the quality of life in the communities of Strathmore-Brooks. I think the new Brooks centennial arena, which will celebrate a grand opening next Saturday, February 20, a project that has been ongoing for a number of years, is a delight to see completed.

Mr. Rodney: Are you going to sing *O Canada*?

Mr. Doerksen: I could do that, my colleague.

Mr. Speaker, as I reflect on His Honour's speech and the positive contribution our Lieutenant Governor has made to this province, I am optimistic about our future, optimistic about the opportunity we have, building on past successes, to establish the framework that will ensure continued success in the future. This House is about people, people who want to create opportunities for success, people who want quality and efficient health care services and safe, secure communities for their children.

I look forward to this legislative session and look forward to working with all of you toward the future success of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the member opposite actually a couple of questions if I might. I wonder if you could explain and perhaps use examples of how we can cut down red tape. One of the areas that is particularly of concern to me is people who are doing self-managed care for persons with developmental disabilities. What has happened is that the paperwork has increased and increased and increased, and to me that's red tape. So perhaps you could explain if that's going to be looked at.

Then the other thing was on the results that we get from our livestock. Do you or do you not sort of support the COOL, which would open up some very strong niche markets for Alberta beef?

4:40

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for those questions. I think you raise some good points, particularly with regard to the regulatory burden and the reduction of red tape. I think that's a matter where every member of this House could probably tell some stories as the member across the way has. We all have individual experiences where we'd like to see red tape reduced. I think that that's a very practical application as a part of what I see us addressing through this review of regulations in a broad range of areas. Certainly, with regard to the health care example that you've raised, I think there's opportunity to address those types of things in a whole range of areas.

With regard to the livestock question you raised and the matter of COOL legislation down in the United States, I think there are opportunities for niche market development. Certainly, the livestock industry has addressed that by trying to take advantage of niche opportunities in the U.S. and domestically as well, but there's no question in my mind that border restrictions in North America are inappropriate. Where they increase costs of production, they're

unnecessary because we have very similar standards with regard to animal health and food safety. We need to do whatever we can to ensure that borders are open in North America, and access to other markets is based on sound science, not political initiatives, which we know is the case very often. This particular piece of legislation is difficult for Alberta producers.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. If I might just carry that conversation forward. One of the areas that I look at when I think of COOL and some of the things they are doing is in terms of food safety, and I look at labels. I've become a label reader. When I look at labels, I have absolutely no idea where that beef has come from. In fact, we know that beef is labelled coming from the States into Ontario, but in fact it's Alberta beef. So it sort of goes this way, but they have no idea. I'm sure that if their choice was to eat corn-fed American or barley-fed Canadian, I think their choice would probably be barley-fed Canadian, but how are they going to know if it isn't labelled?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that in most countries around the world origin labels are the standard in beef production. With regard to the movement of beef in North America the fact that beef comes up into eastern Canada at times is partly a matter of the market. My goal would be to have Alberta beef and Canadian beef producers – and they do – sell to the highest bidder at every opportunity, and that implies that we have open access to markets.

The matter of origins of beef. There's a whole set of initiatives to differentiate product, and country of origin labelling is not the only one. More successfully, often, are brand products that come with a guaranteed standard. I think that's a more effective way of marketing product, whether that goes into the U.S. or into eastern Canada.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. Seeing no one, the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to rise today and join my colleagues in supporting the Speech from the Throne as I'm excited to share with you the concerns and hopes of my constituents in West Yellowhead. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's words filled me with renewed confidence for the future and clearly painted a picture about where we are today and where we should be going.

Before I dive into the merits of the speech itself, I would first like to take this time to thank His Honour for both his words and his years of dedicated service. In my mind the Speech from the Throne centred on the need to maintain a balance between economic development and care for those most in need. After all, this is the same balance that has guided Alberta for years, and it is one that has resulted in Alberta being one of the most enviable jurisdictions in the world.

Mr. Speaker, to this end, I would like to talk about two industries that are important not only to the economy of my constituency of West Yellowhead but to the province as a whole. I speak, of course, of forestry and coal mining.

Now, it is true that the forestry sector has been negatively impacted in recent years. We all know the effects of issues like softwood lumber and the mountain pine beetle. To this end, I am pleased that the Lieutenant Governor confirmed our commitment to

combatting the pine beetle not only for the impact it has on the forestry sector but for the damages it causes to our world-class parks system.

In addition, I am also excited about Bill 1 and the development of the Alberta Competitiveness Act, which I believe will help address the pressures facing this important industry. After all, if we can ensure that Alberta remains competitive on the international stage, we can ensure that Alberta's forestry sector remains internationally viable.

We can also ensure that Alberta's forest industry has access to markets it needs to sell its world-class products. This is why I am pleased to hear His Honour's mention of creating a western economic partnership. Mr. Speaker, this partnership proposes to include the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan and would create the largest free trade and investment market in Canada. In addition, these three provinces would work together on a joint trade mission to the eastern Asian markets. The potential benefits this mission has to Alberta's forestry sector are staggering. These are large and developing economies, and as they expand, they will need wood products and building materials. If we can get in on the ground floor in these economies, the economic benefit to the forestry sector could be impressive.

The second key industry I would like to talk about is one that I have considerable experience with, and that's coal. The issues confronting the coal industry are not market related but, rather, deal with the environment. That is why I'm pleased to hear the Lieutenant Governor mention Alberta's amazing technological advances in environmental management, most notably in carbon capture and storage, or CCS. Mr. Speaker, CCS has many potential benefits to Alberta's coal industry. With this technology in place not only would Albertans have access to an affordable source of energy but a source of energy that is mindful of its carbon emissions. Compounding this, with CCS in place the emissions from coal production could be used to make conventional oil and gas recovery more effective. CCS is truly an accomplishment Albertans should be proud of, and I'm glad that His Honour mentioned it.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to highlighting his commitment to maintaining and expanding our key industries, I'm also excited that the throne speech addressed our commitment to maintaining care for those in need. Specifically, I applaud our government's commitment to seniors. Not only this, but I'm happy that we've created a system where every Albertan can invest in the welfare of its aging population while earning a financial return. I'm speaking, of course, of the introduction of Alberta capital bonds.

As His Honour stated, capital bonds will only be available in Alberta and only to Albertans, and all the proceeds raised through the sale of these bonds will be used to build accommodations for Alberta's seniors. This could include continuing care and supportive living facilities. Mr. Speaker, this is a great idea. We are creating a system that recognizes that Alberta's population is aging; we are creating a system that realizes that as Albertans age, they require different levels of care and different facilities; and we are creating a system that supports our past while at the same time allowing us to save for the future. This is an example of the kind of leadership that recognizes that even though the economic situation may change, the needs of people do not.

Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank His Honour for his encouraging words. I would like to thank him for the recognition he has given to two key industries not only in my constituency but in Alberta as a whole, forestry and coal. I would like to thank him for highlighting this government's commitment to those in need, specifically our seniors.

In my mind, the strength of Alberta has always been measured in how it addresses the needs of a world-class economy while at the same time providing care to its vulnerable citizens. Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted this strength and, in my mind, painted a clear picture of the path Alberta will take to maintain its prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: I appreciate the member's comments. In your riding, like in mine but especially in your riding, there is an abundance of coal and opportunities for coal in the future energy business and others. How do you see the coal business developing in your riding and my riding?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think that, you know, there are a number of projects going on. As we know, we do have an abundance of coal. Under the current mining methods a lot of it's not economically feasible. But, of course, the Swan Hills project, for example, where we're drilling down a thousand metres and bringing syn-fuels out of the ground and actually having a very small footprint is, I think, a great future for the industry. Of course, I look in my riding along the eastern slopes of the Rockies, where we've mined at Cardinal River and Gregg River. There are still coal reserves there. They're down deep, but we know that there's lots of methane gas in that area. I think that through some of the new technologies that are taking place, it's going to make those areas viable again to go back and mine but, again, with a very small footprint and also create jobs and bring money into the government coffers.

4:50

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for that answer. I think it's interesting for people back home to understand that they have an MLA that understands the coal industry but also an MLA that understands the forest industry.

I wanted to know a little bit about your views on some of the industries in your communities and mine that are so affected by the pine beetle. What do you see over the next year? Especially coming out of the throne speech, there was a little mention about pine beetle. What are you projecting as opportunities because of an abundance of fibre that may hit our ridings?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne said, our ridings depend on forestry. We have some of the largest FMAs between the two of us in all of Alberta. With the mountain pine beetle, we have areas where up until last summer we had no pine beetle, and they're now being affected, and it causes great concern in the industry. But with the wood I think we have three options. One, we just leave it alone. The second one is that you burn it. The third one, I think, is that you cut it and you make use of it. In talking to a number of the forest industries in both our ridings, I think there are great opportunities for biofuels. I know that in talking to a number of the forest industries, they're looking at that. It's a way to use the wood that's there now but also give them the chance to diversify their industry.

I think that, you know, we have to look at the tree as a whole tree, not just a two-by-four. For example, I'll talk of Foothills Forest

Products in Grande Cache, which I'm very familiar with. One of their biggest products right now is wood pellets. You know, they're doing their conventional two-by-fours and their panelling, but their waste they're turning into wood pellets. Right now the only thing that's keeping that mill going is their wood pellet operation, where they're selling not only in Canada and the U.S. but also into Europe and using wood pellets for not only wood-burning stoves but also, which I found interesting, for horses. In a lot of the European market they're actually using the wood pellets instead of hay to keep their barns clean.

I think that there are tremendous opportunities in the wood industry, and I think that the industry understands that. I think that with the work that we're doing at the provincial level and also the work that the federal government is doing in assisting the forest industry, there is a bright future there for them. We just have to make sure that we work with the industry and reduce some of the regulatory red tape that they're facing right now and make sure that we streamline the plan so they can get the business done.

Mr. VanderBurg: Another project that you didn't have an opportunity to talk about was the resource road program. Again, it was very lightly touched upon in the throne speech. I know that important to your community of Grande Cache and to my community of Whitecourt is to try to provide another transportation link. You know, it's a great project that our constituencies are working on together to have that link complete between the ANC haul road, maybe, and Grande Cache but also a great opportunity for tourism and a great link that we can get our communities working closer together on snowmobile issues, on trail rides. Just wondering how you see that program, the resource road program, may help to link our communities, finally.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I say, it was touched on very lightly, but I think the natural resource road program is going to be very beneficial to all of northern Alberta. I mean, myself and the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne are at the southern tip of the NADC zone that I look after as chair. I think that the opportunities that this is going to offer to the north – I mean, one of the biggest problems we have in the north is getting product to market. We've had a number of issues with CN Rail, had a number of discussions with them. Also, I think that the work that the oil industry and the forest industries are doing together, where, again, they're looking at using one road and reducing the footprint, goes a long ways in making sure that the industries stay viable and look after the environment.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered so graciously by our Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Norman Kwong. I would also like to add my thanks to His Honour for his dedication in preserving and enhancing the traditions, heritage, and character of our province as Lieutenant Governor over the past five years.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted many of this government's priorities, and at the conclusion of this inspirational speech I felt strongly that the priorities of our government echo those of myself, my constituents in Strathcona, and all Albertans. Alberta's fiscal advantage, the economy, health care, safe communities, and the environment are topics that all Albertans deem important, and these are issues that our government will continue to address.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's fiscal position has drastically improved since the early 1990s. In 1993 our provincial debt was approaching \$23 billion. Since 1993 our province's fiscal position has improved by almost \$50 billion.

Mr. Rodney: How much?

Mr. Quest: Fifty billion dollars improvement.

I commend our government for its dedication to improving our fiscal position. However, I'm most proud of how this was achieved. We have accumulated substantial cash reserves while our tax rates are the most competitive in Canada, even in the absence of a provincial sales tax. With our strong fiscal situation and tax advantage Alberta is poised to emerge from these difficult economic times stronger than ever before.

Two things come to mind when I think about Alberta's current situation: our government's planning and foresight and the hard-working, innovative citizens of this province. Boom periods do not last forever, especially here in Alberta, where we have one of the most volatile revenue streams in North America. The price of natural gas, oil, and the exchange rate can fluctuate, causing major swings in our revenue stream. The government has recognized this and saved money during the boom years, the bulk of which was put into our sustainability fund.

This type of forward thinking is not foreign to me. In a past life I owned a small General Motors dealership, before I was MLA for Strathcona. Traditionally in our business January and February were very slow months. We always planned for these fluctuations in our sales by keeping enough cash on hand to keep our staff working through the late winter months until sales picked up in the spring, so we didn't have to lay off our skilled staff, we didn't have to jeopardize their families, and we were always in a great position in the spring to continue to grow our business, and grow it did.

Over the past year our government's revenue has declined, but we were prepared for this. The \$17 billion saved in the sustainability fund serves as a cushion for declining revenues. Furthermore, because of our fiscal responsibility our government can continue to uphold ambitious capital plans and continue to invest in our province. These capital plans are constructing public infrastructure projects that will benefit Alberta in the future while stimulating our economy by sustaining tens of thousands of jobs around our province.

One initiative that will fund these infrastructure projects is the sale of Alberta capital bonds. Mr. Speaker, the purchase of these bonds allows Albertans the opportunity to invest in their province. Our triple-A credit rating is a testament to years of fiscal prudence, and Alberta capital bonds will be backed by our strong credit rating, thus one of the safest investments that Albertans can make. I commend the Premier for allowing Albertans the opportunity to make such a secure investment in their province. Investing in Alberta capital bonds will be a show of support and pride for our citizens, especially given the infrastructure projects that they'll support.

Mr. Speaker, our demographics are changing. In 2011 there will be over 400,000 seniors living in Alberta. By 2021 there will be over 600,000. Our government has made it a priority to protect vulnerable Albertans, and that's exactly what Alberta capital bonds will achieve. The sale of capital bonds will be used exclusively for building accommodations for our senior citizens. Our senior citizens have been instrumental in building this province. They've instilled the qualities of hard work and entrepreneurial spirit and respect for our province in our generation. They are the foundation of Alberta, and our government recognizes that these outstanding Albertans deserve to live comfortably in the communities that they helped build.

Mr. Speaker, our low taxes and provincial savings have also allowed our government to continue to support health care in Alberta. Our government's goal is to have a health care system that is among the best not only in Canada but in the world. I firmly believe that we can achieve this as our government has taken a focused approach to moving towards this goal.

5:00

One measure that our Lieutenant Governor spoke of during the throne speech is the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. Through public input the advisory committee created a number of principles that our provincial health system should follow. They include putting people and their families at the centre of their health care, being committed to quality and safety, ensuring equitable access to timely and appropriate care, and focusing on wellness and public health, to name a few. These recommendations will help formulate a new Alberta health act. I'm particularly excited about this development because my constituency, Strathcona, and all Albertans will be consulted in the development of their health care system. I commend the government in their efforts to involve Albertans, to allow citizens to take an active role in the development and improvement of our health care system, a system that's accountable to all Albertans.

Another area of the throne speech that piqued my interest, along with, I'm sure, the interest of many of my constituents, dealt with building caring, safe communities around Alberta. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is comprised of thousands of communities, and to use an old adage, we're only as strong as our weakest link. To this end, I was enthused to hear that our government will surpass their goal of creating 14,000 new child care spaces. I was also enthused to hear that government will be creating 11,000 new affordable housing units over the next few years as we move towards our goal of eliminating homelessness in Alberta in 10 years. Given the dedication of leadership of our Premier I know this goal will be attained. These initiatives display the emphasis that the government places on enhancing Alberta communities, and I know that my constituency, Strathcona, and all Albertans are looking forward to continued efforts to ensure vibrant communities throughout the province.

While strong, caring communities are important to Albertans, recent changes in the global economy have also been weighing on the minds of my constituents. Our government has stressed that we need to continue to focus our efforts on becoming increasingly competitive in the global economy and providing Albertans with opportunities for training and education. These initiatives will be vital to the future prosperity of our province as Albertans' knowledge and skill sets will be in sync with those needed to thrive in the evolving global economy.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier of the government's foresight in preparing for turbulent economic times, and I'm enthused to see the government's foresight in preparing for a changing global economy. Alberta's recent increase in population is a testament to the opportunities that are available in our province. In this changing economic climate it's imperative to provide opportunities to Albertans so they may learn the skills needed to keep Alberta competitive for years to come. While Albertans continue to enhance their skill sets, it's the job of our government to ensure that we are continuing to create value-added opportunities and foster greater contact with new and existing trading partners.

Examples of industries that will benefit from these commitments are the agriculture and agrifood industries. Our agricultural industry is vital to the economic health of our province. We need to separate Alberta from other provinces and countries by making these

products competitive in new, previously untapped markets, and this is exactly what our government is planning to do. I know that my constituents in Strathcona who work in the agriculture and agrifood industry are excited to embrace these new markets and opportunities that will surely benefit their business and the province.

In addition to the agriculture industry many of our constituents work in the energy sector. Mr. Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor said during the throne speech that the best days in Alberta's energy story are yet to come. Under the leadership of our Premier I wholeheartedly agree. Alberta continues to be a leader in both renewable and nonrenewable energy and is poised to continue to embrace this leadership role for years to come. Our government is committed to attracting investment in the energy sector while also creating new technologies and protecting the environment.

Surely there are challenges that face our government along with the energy sector in extracting our natural resources in an environmentally sensitive manner. Through a joint effort we have limited the environmental impact of oil sands extraction thus far, but we know that new challenges await us with respect to this process. Through continued investment in research and technology we will be prepared to face these challenges, reduce emissions, and return the land to its natural state. Our Premier is fully committed to environmental stewardship, and I'd like to thank him for his efforts and his leadership in this vital area.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne served as yet another reminder of why I'm proud to be an Albertan and why our citizens have reason to be optimistic for the future. We were prepared for the current economic downturn and will emerge as a global leader and a stronger, more united Alberta. The economy has peaks and valleys, but Albertans' values along with our government remain constant: a dedicated work ethic, perseverance, and a sincere, devoted commitment to fostering continued growth in our economy and a sense of belonging in our communities.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. The member has spoken about the agriculture in his area, and I'm certainly aware of some of the excellent agricultural land that they have in that area. Are there any conversations around the fact that some of this agricultural land should be protected only for agriculture?

Then the other thing, I think, that is in his riding as well is the new niche farming. It's the new face of farming, where people have just small acreages but, in fact, are creating niche markets for, say, Cornish game hens, raising turkeys, or different products that they actually take and can sell locally so that people do that buying within a hundred miles, that new way of buying our food. Is this a growing industry in his riding, and is there any discussion about protecting our agricultural land?

Mr. Quest: Well, obviously it's very important that we protect our agricultural lands, our highly productive lands, all over the province. Certainly, this fits in with the province's land-use framework.

With respect to smaller operations, I'm not familiar with any reference to Cornish game hens and that type of thing, but certainly because of the value of the property, of course, in my constituency it is evolving into that situation: a lot of greenhouses, market gardens, that type of thing. So it is certainly becoming a lot more intense than it was based on the property values and the rich, productive land that we have in some areas of Strathcona.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask to ask the hon. Member for Strathcona how he feels the Speech from the Throne will be perceived in his constituency of Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Well, Strathcona has always been a very enthusiastic, optimistic part of the world, so the constituents that I've talked to since the Speech from the Throne have all been generally very optimistic about it. I think the same optimism is prevalent throughout the province. We live in an incredible province. Albertans are positive and optimistic, energetic just by their nature. So I'm not sure that my constituency would be all that different from any other constituencies, but yeah, the response has been very, very positive.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Before commenting on the throne speech, I would like to recognize the outstanding job that the hon. Lieutenant Governor has done and thank him for his service to this great province of ours. His is no small job, and he has gracefully proven his capabilities and brought his own style and finesse to this honoured position. Throughout these past five years, the Lieutenant Governor has shown a remarkable love for this province. He will be missed, and I wish him the best.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly address the Assembly today on behalf of my constituents in Calgary-Fort. During my time representing Calgary-Fort, I have had the opportunity to work and meet with so many of my constituents. I am proud to say that we have been working very well together, and together we have made life in Calgary-Fort better. My constituency is made up of hard-working citizens who are proud of being Albertans and being Canadians. Like many Albertans, they are most concerned with the current state of the economy. I know that they fear for their job stability, for the well-being of their families, and for the future as well. Calgary-Fort consists of communities that will benefit from the investments that the province is continuing to make in Albertans now and in the future. Making life better in our beautiful Alberta is our government's goal, and the Speech from the Throne provides a blueprint for us to achieve this goal.

5:10

There are several aspects of the Speech from the Throne that I would like to address as they are of particular interest to my constituents and to myself. I'm pleased to note that our government programs are very mindful of supporting those senior Albertans who have helped and contributed to our society. As an example, the proceeds earned from the sale of Alberta capital bonds will go directly towards supporting our senior citizens. I'm very pleased that this government is working to expand continuing care and supportive living capabilities. With this our seniors can trust that they will have the care they need when they need it.

Our far-sighted Alberta sustainability fund, set up years ago, like our household savings account, will protect the social programs for the most vulnerable in this province. I'm pleased that these programs will be protected and, in particular, the support for persons with disabilities and our vulnerable Albertans are not being forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased that our government, in addition to protecting our vulnerable citizens, has made a commitment to

education. That is a very, very interesting point for my constituency as well. Education, I strongly believe, is an investment in our future. This government's drive to seek a new vision for Alberta's education system will benefit Alberta's children for years to come. With the availability of the resources that they need, there is no limit to what they can achieve and how they can contribute to our province's overall well-being.

Not only is our government focusing on our children but on postsecondary education as well. Our government has made a commitment to continue to build world-class universities. Mr. Speaker, this will help ensure that Alberta remains competitive with the rest of Canada and the world. Postsecondary students contribute to the prosperity of this province, and they help to contribute to ensure a bright future for all Albertans.

Another concern for my constituents is the safety of their living and the security of their communities. I'm also pleased to see that our government has dedicated itself to providing us with safer and more secure communities. As I see it, this priority is linked to enhancing Albertans' quality of life. Alberta citizens should not have to be fearful of walking about in their communities. As the Alberta government works to provide an enhanced sense of security, Albertans' quality of life will also be enhanced as they will also be free to sleep in the comfort of knowing that they and their families are safe. That feeling is invaluable.

I applaud the government for addressing gang crime, an issue that I know is on the minds of many of my constituents. With the new gang reduction strategy and the addition of front-line police officers we will all feel safer. This new strategy builds on the successful safe communities strategy, that is now two years old.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, my constituency of Calgary-Fort is made up of hard-working citizens, and they are striving to be successful and prosperous. I believe the plan our government has put forward, as stated in the throne speech, will give my constituents a renewed confidence in our province and in our future. In particular, the investment in infrastructure in all corners of the province is ensuring that we keep people working. On this particular point I'm very grateful that the Minister of Transportation is embarking on the southeast leg of the Calgary ring road, which runs through my riding.

By creating a competitive and innovative economy, jobs will not only be protected but created.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has faced hardships in the past, and we have always persevered and come out stronger than before. I have confidence that we will once again rise above today's challenges and triumph in creating the kind of Alberta that we can all be proud of. Our Alberta government has a comprehensive plan that will lead us through these challenging times and will continue to make our province the best place to live, work, and dream. It is important that we continue to invest in our province. This investment will provide increased stability and renewed prosperity for all Albertans.

My last point regarding the Speech from the Throne is that I am very pleased and my constituents are very pleased to hear of the five-year stable funding for our public health care system.

I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Fort for allowing me to have the honour of representing them for these years in the House. I pledge that I will continue bringing constituents' concerns and ideas into government processes to make improvements in the quality of life for all Albertans. I look forward to the implementation of the government's plan, ensuring Alberta's continued success, and to this productive spring session.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for presenting the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I wonder if the hon. member might make a comment on the fact that the ring road is certainly needed in Lethbridge. I drive the Deerfoot all the time and realize that – sorry; Calgary.

Mr. Denis: That's a big difference.

Ms Pastoor: Yeah. Well, you know what? We're going to need a ring road soon, too.

Anyway, if he could comment on the ring road. In fact, the ring road is basically all driven toward car traffic. Where is the public transportation corridor that would go along with that ring road?

Mr. Cao: Well, I want to say that the ring road is mainly for commercial transportation. There is a need for it because that's part of the Canada-American-Mexico corridor. That ring road is part of it, particularly in the service sector of Calgary, where we have a very big industrial park.

When we talk about public transportation, I can only imagine that public transportation on the ring road will be buses like Greyhound and others. The city transit buses probably will be going inside the city, and that's done through funding through Municipal Affairs and other grants to municipalities. The city of Calgary has a big program, funded by our province, for light rail transit. As you know, they've put extra lengths on it. So I think that goes hand in hand with the ring road.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else wish to participate in 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne from His Honour Norman Kwong. I have to say as well that I want to echo many of the comments from members on both sides of the House earlier today thanking His Honour and Her Honour for their great service to this province over the last several years. I have to say that my favourite memory of His Honour is his continual sense of humour no matter how long a day he must have had, and we've all had some long days here.

Mr. Speaker, this year marks my 10th anniversary as an Alberta resident, and I'm very proud to be Albertan, as is the Premier, as is the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace. I have to say that when I look at the throne speech, I often look back at my 10 years here and how good it has been for me and what a great province this is in which we live.

5:20

Dealing with the throne speech itself, I was reflecting on this over the last couple of days. Moving forward to Bill 1, talking about competitiveness, competitiveness to me, Mr. Speaker, means more than just the competitiveness review that, obviously, is happening here and will be released shortly by the Minister of Energy. Competitiveness to me means competitiveness for small business, for individuals, a competitive economy, and, specifically, a competitive tax regime. One thing that the Premier has been clear on in the speech and throughout is that there will be no new taxes here. That means no new payroll taxes, no new income taxes. Of course, no new sales taxes; we're the only province that doesn't have one. That's important for our competitiveness as well.

I must reflect, Mr. Speaker, on my new ministry, meaning Housing and Urban Affairs. I have to say it was the highest honour of my life to be named to the cabinet here as minister for this area, and I wanted to look forward, to the issue of homelessness in our society. Anybody who takes a stroll in downtown Calgary or downtown Edmonton realizes that this is, in fact, an issue. It's an issue outside of Calgary and Edmonton as well, but it's most acute in these areas.

We're in the second year of this – and I'm happy that this was mentioned in the throne speech – the 10-year provincial homelessness plan that was developed by the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. It is a serious issue affecting Albertans, and it continues to grow and not just in boom times, when there are spikes in rental rates and in property values. This is a systemic problem that affects us year in/year out and day in/day out.

The 10-year plan to end homelessness incorporates a major shift in traditional ways of thinking about this issue. It's based on a Housing First approach, and it aims to provide permanent housing and necessary supports to the homeless in order to break the cycle of homelessness, which can be very difficult. This is a similar approach, Mr. Speaker, that's being used in jurisdictions in North America such as Portland and New York City. I would submit to you that Alberta's 10-year plan is better for the homeless and reduces the pressure on acute-care services, hospitals, police, and corrections, and even emergency doctors. Implementation of the Housing First model is estimated to reduce overall service costs by up to 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's 10-year plan aligns directly with and supports local plans created by Alberta municipalities, and the secretariat and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs will work directly with municipalities and local communities to implement these plans. If not addressed, the number of homeless Albertans could increase dramatically over the next several years. As part of this commitment to supporting safe and strong communities, this government has adopted the secretariat's plans and strategies. I ask you to be mindful that we're only in year 2 of 10 of this whole project. Ending homelessness as we know it today will make our communities safer, but it's a long-term issue that we have to address and that we have begun to address. Action is already under way to implement this new approach to homelessness by putting people and putting the need for housing first.

As a result of the Housing First model, Mr. Speaker, health and social supports will help homeless people become independent and productive citizens. I have to say that I think it's good that we have a plan to build 11,000 new units by 2012, but at the same time we can't just measure the success of this program solely on the amount of units that we build or the amount of people that we are able to assist but, rather, the amount of people that we're able to bring off of assistance, that can become self-sustaining themselves. That is a true measure of success.

Dealing with the issue as well, I'm very happy with what we've done to date, but there's much more to do, and that's what was mentioned in the throne speech in and of itself. Homelessness in itself is something that is not just addressed, of course, by government. There are many nongovernmental organizations such as the Calgary homeless association, which I've met with recently, that provide quality service to individuals, and it's important for us to partner with them as well.

I mentioned earlier today, Mr. Speaker, that some of the programs such as rent supplements that we provide are not entitlement-based programs but, rather, needs-based programs. When I looked at the means test that is applied under the act, it was rather interesting because when I came to Alberta 10 years ago, I would have qualified

for assistance under that program. However, not everybody has the fortune that I did of having a couple of university degrees. We have to help people move forward who maybe don't have the advantages that I had when I moved here.

I also wanted to address that the Speech from the Throne talked about crime. This is something that's very important in the constituency of Calgary-Egmont, that I'm privileged to represent. Of course, January 1, 2009, we had three murders on 94th Avenue. I won't deal with that directly because the matter is before the courts. At the same time, this said to me that the issue of crime and the issue of gang violence, specifically, is not one localized just to the downtowns of bigger cities like Calgary or Edmonton; rather, it has become a suburban issue. I had almost a record number of phone calls about that issue in the next few weeks that ensued. I'm very happy that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is getting really serious, for lack of a better term, about this issue in our two major cities.

Of course the goal, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta remains a safe place to live, work, and raise families, and that is my goal for my constituency and for all of Alberta as well. We obviously need a justice system that holds people accountable for their crimes and reflects the changing nature of society. It's a simple reality that we live in a much different world than we did 20, 30 years ago, when a gang fight was something you would hear of perhaps only on a television episode. It's here in Alberta today, and we have to deal with this. If we don't, it's simply at our own peril. Albertans expect the actions of their government to reflect their values, and that is something that we're working on here as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch briefly on the issue of Alberta's pharmaceutical strategy as well. That was something that was also mentioned briefly in the throne speech. It was something that I had the pleasure of being involved with last year. The benefits of this, of course, are that pharmacists will be able to spend more time advising patients about their medications, Albertans will pay less for their prescription drugs, and both generic drug prices and brand name drug costs will be reduced, saving money for Albertans and, of course, the system. I think that this is a real step forward for health care, but as I often say to my staff, there's always room for improvement no matter how far you go.

Those are my submissions today with respect to the throne speech. I look forward to any questions or comments under 29(2)(a).

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. A singular honour to stand today and speak to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the constituents I represent and to recognize, first, the valuable contribution His Honour Norman L. Kwong has provided not only as an outstanding sportsman and leader and philanthropist in his community but in these last five years as our Lieutenant Governor. Along with his wife, Mary, he has provided stellar stewardship in a most distinguished position in representing our province.

The Speech from the Throne and the promises contained therein and reinforced with yesterday's budget speech contemplate that in Alberta we still are in an advantaged position over many other people not only in Canada and in North America but in the world. Sometimes it's important to count those advantages and to contemplate what we're promising in this fiscal advantage that we discuss, in improving our health care, in building our safe and secure communities, and in being increasingly competitive in a global

economy. When we contemplate the Speech from the Throne, that we have written and presented to Albertans, it is light years ahead of so many other parts of the planet.

We are a conglomeration of people, a relatively new society, who have come from many places, where dreams of our ancestors may well have been fulfilled and exceeded by the things that we're contemplating and the actions we're taking. When I reflect on the innovation of the community and the innovators that are there, who serve not only in our government but who serve in many outstanding ways in corporate boardrooms and in corporate structures that build this province and its great advantages, I think of the beauty of representing people who are healthy, who are living the good life, and who are in many respects very mindful of their advantages and sharing those advantages with people far beyond our borders.

5:30

A recent example is that emergency services from the province help the people of Haiti, who have undergone yet another cruel blow not only to their health and their social structure but to their future economic prosperity. Here once again, not only within the government, we had people that came forward and provided leadership in Haiti. We had a number of people who said: we can adopt children. We can display ourselves in a way that shows the hearts that we have and extend to people who are less fortunate than us a helping hand in a time of need.

The leader of the emergency preparedness found his history in Strathcona county as a fire chief and in New Orleans in Katrina and then more recently organizing to a large extent on behalf of a request from the government of Canada emergency services personnel to go and help in Haiti. That kind of resilience, that kind of extending a helping hand is what the community I represent and the community the Member for Strathcona represents gives us, a great privilege. These folks have learned how to compare and compete but also to extend that helping hand. So members in this House have been privileged to know many who have assisted in that outpouring of compassion to other parts of the world.

We have many other ways that we are represented in the communities that gather with their representatives in this House, not the least of which are those innovators that are taking advantage of the oil and gas opportunities in our province and who are in this time of recession celebrating their environmental contributions as well as their contributions in enterprise and technology to improve the vast opportunities we have to compete in a global economy. Some of these folks have been cited in the most recent celebrations of *Alberta Oil: The Business of Energy*, that is a part of a periodical produced, again, in Alberta that talks about the trailblazers, the outposts of progress that create an environment where we build a greater tomorrow by acting today. When you read these kinds of things that are produced right here in our province – *Alberta Oil*, *Alberta Venture* magazines – you celebrate the capacity of what we're doing in Alberta through the entrepreneurs that are acting well beyond the scope of the government.

Productivityalberta.ca, which is referenced in this throne speech through the discussion of how we are going to work on our value-added, talks about the kinds of things that Alberta businesses can better do. In the throne speech are references to agriculture and agrifood industries as key and sustainable economic drivers of our province, the kinds of businesses that benefit by the leadership of Productivity Alberta. Through this leadership we are working on making sure that we have high-quality food products that continue to be in demand all over the world, in places like the United States and Australia but increasingly in places like Japan and in China. I think it behooves us to continue to provide our leadership and

support, providing the right tools for the job, doing the lean assessments that are done to make sure that our manufacturing is better and to work to refine and hone in on the products and the markets that we can improve upon in the years ahead.

My new responsibilities in this ministry will see us look very closely at our western economic partners, with both British Columbia and Saskatchewan, to see how we can work together in a way that reduces our expenditure for the infrastructure that we build and provide in other parts of the world but, in fact, still maintain the advocacy of the people that represent our province so that we work as partners in this partnership, collaborators in a partnership with other provinces and yet not, in fact, contemplate in any way being conspirators against the best advantages that each province can bring in marketing their own systems. To that extent, the TILMA agreement and more recently the partnership created by our Premier's innovation in extending a hand to Saskatchewan is a hallmark of the kinds of things that we can do to better the capacity to deliver in what has been described by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development as almost the global jewel of some of the highest and best undeveloped resource-based economies in the world.

Clearly, we have as well a Charter that over the last 10 years and more contemplates how we deal with the capacity of the Northwest Territories to emerge as a global winner through their linkage, not only through health and social structures but their governmental linkage with the province of Alberta to improve upon the kinds of opportunities for value-added and access to international markets. We have developed here in western Canada a unit of competitiveness and increasingly a unit of advocacy that can benefit all.

One of the interesting things about the ministry I'm representing is that there are nine foreign offices, and the ministry, the Alberta House, if you will, in Washington, has an advocacy role which increasingly International and Intergovernmental Relations wants to move towards. It will help us market for the world the capacity we bring in the energy industry to do things in an environmentally sustainable way, so we will be marketing.

Not only are we doing that marketing in Washington, but the upcoming mission that is being contemplated by those that are involved in the CCS, carbon capture and storage, in Oslo, Norway, in Germany in Düsseldorf, and in the United Kingdom in London will contemplate how we work in a way of selling Alberta's innovation and capacity so that people understand that we intend to be clean, green, and sustainable in the future.

So advocacy, productivity, and increasing competitiveness will help us assure that "the best days in Alberta's energy story are yet to come," and those are the words straight from the Speech from the Throne.

I was interested in one of the more recent editions of *The Economist*, for January. There is actually a new edition out for February. On the editorial page under Leaders it talks about the size and the power of state. Then it talks about the growth of government, but it also speaks to something that I think is fundamental in this throne speech, to the way that the Alberta government has been developing not only its throne speech but the budget speech. It reads in the document on page 11: "How much a state spends often matters less than how it spends. Systems in which the state pays and the private sector provides often work well." It goes on to talk about how we work in a co-operative and collaborative way as a governance body with a private sector that delivers systems.

Many times we've talked in this House about how doctors and physicians providing primary health care do so as private people employed through the fees they charge that government pays and in many respects have provided very effective and efficient private partnerships that deliver public health care. We see this in many of

the P3 models that have in this House been accused of adding debt, but they have been debts that have been enabling us to provide a better infrastructure to lead to the development of highway 63. Future infrastructure needs in this province are taken care of when, in fact, we have Albertans who participate through the opportunities provided in policy to develop the kinds of things that we should: the businessman that's the farmer, the businessman that's the manufacturer, the businessman that's the small businessman, which is the core of the business leadership involved in Alberta albeit that it's sometimes overshadowed by the larger multinationals that develop our oil and gas industries.

5:40

In short, Mr. Speaker, this speech is about Albertans. It's about their entrepreneurial spirit. It's about continuing to take their place not only in Canada but in the world as global leaders. It's about living the values and lifestyle that our entrepreneurial grandparents and ancestors contemplated. Above all, perhaps it's about keeping our taxes low, our fees lower but maintaining support for health and education as the keys to the successful lifestyle that we hope will be our legacy to our children and our grandchildren in the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I take my leave. Thank you for the opportunity to present some comments on the Speech from the Throne.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister in her comments mentioned carbon capture and storage in an international context. There has been some negativity in this House with respect to carbon capture and storage. I wonder if she could comment on how this proposal is viewed internationally.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much for that opportunity. I think I'm going to take this opportunity to state my enormous pride in the Minister of Environment and the kinds of advocacy he has provided not only in Copenhagen but prior to that and in the post-Copenhagen strategy, where without fear of criticism he stands tall and makes it clear that Alberta has a role in developing a sustainable resource economy.

We have contemplated, he and I together and the newly appointed Minister of Energy, a way of increasing the advocacy on things that could be done in the future not only in the Euro-environment but across Canada to make sure that people in other parts of the country who may have slagged Alberta in Copenhagen are fully familiar with the advantages that they get from having an Alberta economy that's robust: huge tax advantages, huge advantages in the workplace environment. What we have to do is acknowledge that where we are spending some \$2 billion in carbon capture and storage with the hope of improving technological knowledge transfer not only within our province but elsewhere, we are only \$1 billion short of the entire budget of the United States on carbon capture and storage. We should celebrate that, sell that. That's a co-ordination role in my ministry with the players that our Premier has selected to more than adequately serve as advocates not only in the energy sector but for the due diligence in the work that's been done by our esteemed colleague the Minister of Environment.

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

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to stand up and speak today in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Like others so well said, it's an honour to have witnessed the Lieutenant Governor and his family here. It was pretty interesting. The family sat in front of me here during the throne speech, and it was very moving to watch them watch their father and husband during that time. I think that all of us had a lot of pride in the actions of our Lieutenant Governor.

Mr. Speaker, a lot was said during the speech. First, about the Alberta fiscal advantage, you know, we have over the last number of years had the opportunity to pay off in full \$23 billion in debt and managed to save about \$25 billion in cash, at the same time having one of the lowest income tax rates as well. And one thing that Albertans all enjoy is not paying a provincial sales tax. Let's remember that one of the promises our Premier made in the campaign for the leadership and afterwards in the election was not to consider a provincial sales tax. So many times we hear from people that say, "Well, over in Ontario or in B.C." I say, "Well, you know, do you want what they have?" They say, "Well, what do you mean?" I say, "Well, would you like to have that sales tax added onto everything we purchase?" Of course, the answer is no, and Albertans pride themselves in standing out in Canada in having that advantage.

As well, the Alberta capital bonds were talked about, and I spoke about this in the Legislature last fall. Many of my constituents had taken the time over the past number of months to talk about the opportunity with capital bonds. I think that we're going to see a great opportunity for Albertans to purchase those. They'll purchase them with pride like my parents had in Canada savings bonds. It wasn't just the bond. It was a piece of paper investing in Canada, and now people will have that opportunity to say: yes, I have that piece of paper, and I've invested in Alberta infrastructure and especially in the opportunity to invest in our seniors' housing projects. I think, you know, that it's something to be very, very proud of, and I'll be very proud to promote the sale of those bonds.

Government must live within its means, and we heard many speeches here much earlier about the deficit that we'll have from last year and this year and next year. Let's remember, no different than I would teach our sons as they have a household and new families that they've started, that sometimes you have to spend a little more, that sometimes you have to save a little more. You have to make those decisions as a family and as a government on when those times are.

I think this is a perfect time, Mr. Speaker, to spend a little more and invest in the future. But not too much. We don't want to leave debt for our grandchildren. I'm a new grandfather and very proud of that. I don't want to leave a debt for my little Alyssa, but I want to make sure that she has some good infrastructure to take part in in five years when she goes to elementary school, that there's a new modern school for her to attend, that there are good roads for her to go to school on and good infrastructure. I think that was talked about by our Lieutenant Governor in the speech, that he envisioned an opportunity for us now to invest in the future, to not leave debt in the future but to invest in the future. I think that all of us are so very, very proud to take part in that.

The second issue that the Lieutenant Governor talked about was improving our health care system. I can say that in my constituency one of the opportunities I had early on in 2001, when I first got elected – and I spoke about that in my first speech in the Assembly – was that we needed to address the issue of housing for our seniors. When I was elected, we had somewhat of a good system in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. We had two housing authorities but two housing authorities that were very taxed. There were long waiting

lists and not a lot of opportunities for our seniors when they needed a lodge or they needed some assistance for further health care to take part in.

Well, since 2001 we've made a large expansion in Whitecourt to the Spruce View Lodge, and we've modernized the facility. We have a facility that I was proud of when my mom moved into it. She said that it was time for her to move out of her home and into a lodge, and I was proud of that facility and would recommend that to anybody in our community.

5:50

As well, since 2001 we built a new lodge in Onoway. The community did some fundraising, and I think you'll all remember when we had the Ralph bucks. You know, every Albertan received \$400, and we had a campaign of: donate your Ralph bucks to the Onoway seniors' facility. Any of the opposition people or anybody in Alberta – and I put the challenge out here – that didn't want those monies could sure donate them to the Onoway chateau and build a home for the seniors. That's what I did with my money, and that's what a lot of people in our constituency did. Then in turn we found some matching grants and built a great facility in Onoway, and a lot of seniors in that area call the Onoway chateau home now. [interjections] If you want the floor, you can have it, but I have the floor right now, and you better respect that.

Mr. Speaker, as well, we've had the opportunity in Evansburg in my constituency through the Legion to create a Legion lodge, and what a great home that we've helped create through some provincial granting and through mainly the community getting together and working on behalf of their residents. I can say, again, that the people in Evansburg sure appreciate that new facility.

Mr. Speaker, we had the opportunity in the fall of this year to have the sod-turning of a new Mayerthorpe lodge. The lodge that was built in the early '60s was great, but it doesn't meet the standards of 2009-2010. We've had the opportunity to access some housing grants. Again, we're carrying on with the tradition in our constituency of not talking about these facilities but actually building them. We've done the sod-turning, and construction is on now. I can say that I'm very, very proud of what we've done in our constituency as far as seniors' housing.

You know, the Lieutenant Governor talked about building safe and caring communities, and we've had some issues with some gangs. I have to thank our past Solicitor General. There were concerns that came forward in the town of Whitecourt. The Solicitor General addressed those issues. Did we solve the gang issues completely? No, but we sure raised some hell and said that the community would not tolerate gangs settling in Whitecourt-St. Anne. I'd like to thank him for that help.

We talked in the throne speech about the increased competitive issues in the global economy. Forest issues in Whitecourt-St. Anne are huge, and it's tough when you're supplying mainly one market, the United States. Our big mills employ thousands of people in Whitecourt-St. Anne and have supplied millions and millions of

board feet of dimension lumber to the housing markets in the United States. So we felt the issue of the downturn in the economy in the United States, and it's affected our industry, but we've managed to keep competitive by keeping those mills modern and by keeping that workforce very well trained and diverse. I'm feeling pretty good about the forest industry, about how they'll come out of this. I'm hearing that the prices in the lumber market are slowly coming up, so as long as we don't see the Canadian dollar fluctuate too much, we'll see some outlook of being very, very positive in the forest sector.

Mr. Speaker, I see also in the throne speech that about 50 per cent of our provincial gross domestic product is tied to energy in some way. Well, we see that in Whitecourt-St. Anne and especially in the service sector. The service sector plays a very important role in employment in Whitecourt-St. Anne. We have many, many companies and their head offices located in our communities, and they employ and they spend big, big dollars in the area. So it's noticed that the oil patch has slowed down over the last little while. Again, I'm talking with folks in that sector that have had to let people go last spring but are hiring them back, so it's great to hear that the companies are starting to come back and do some work again in the area.

Earlier there was some talk by members in the government caucus about the clean energy future, and it talks in the throne speech about Alberta's oil sands. You know, there's a great amount of attention addressed to the oil sands and a lot of unfair attention, I can say, about the oil sands. But what a lot of people don't understand when you talk about oil sands is that it's not always surface mining projects. It's a lot of in situ work, you know, work that's done underground, and the footprint on the land is very minimal. I had the opportunity with a number of caucus members to go and tour the Devon facilities in the Fort McMurray area, and I'd encourage the new Minister of Energy to take part in a tour and see how well they've worked with the local community and to see how innovative that group has been. I think they're producing oil at a pretty competitive price, and I think we'll only see that opportunity grow.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I could talk here for hours about the opportunities in Whitecourt-St. Anne and how the Speech from the Throne related to that, but I see that the clock is ticking, and at this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly now do stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, February 11, 2010

Issue 5

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 11, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of 48 very intelligent and exuberant young people from St. Albert, the Bertha Kennedy Catholic community school. I had a chance to speak with the kids in the rotunda. If this is an example of what the province's future is going to be, we are indeed in good hands. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Scott Raypold and Mrs. Brianne Tworek. They have parent helpers Mrs. Feraco, Mr. Neuls, Mrs. Saive, and Mrs. Benko. I believe they are in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 36 visitors from Prairie River junior high school in High Prairie. They are here on a tour of the province, starting out with the most wonderful place of all, this Legislature. They are accompanied by teachers – and I'd ask that they rise as I say their names – Ms Rachel Mount and Mrs. Michelle Keshen and parent helpers Mr. Ed Fudali, Mr. Ed Leonard, and Mr. Dave Paddon. I'd ask that all the students and the teachers as well rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly our two sessional researchers for the NDP opposition caucus. Gwyneth Dunsford and Meagan Johnston are seated in the public gallery. Meagan hails from St. Albert and recently graduated from McGill University's Faculty of Law. She's a lifelong feminist and activist in the antipoverty, environmental, and queer liberation movements. Gwyneth, who is originally from Rocky Mountain House, studied in Norway and in Washington, DC, while pursuing her BA from the U of A. Her primary interests are women's issues, aboriginal rights, and arts and culture. Both of our sessional researchers have already shown themselves to be very talented individuals and a pleasure to work with. Mr. Speaker, I ask that both Gwyneth and Meagan now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly four remarkable individuals from the Networks Activity Centre located in my constituency of Edmonton-Calder. The Networks Activity Centre is a leisure and recreation program for the survivors of brain injury. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and I had the privilege of touring the facility in January and were both very impressed at the amazing work that is being done in this community. I would ask these individuals to rise as I introduce them to receive the traditional greetings of the Assembly: Mrs. Christine Hrasko, the president; my good friend Mr. George Kapetanakis, the executive director; Mr. Richard Hanes, a participant in the program; and Ms Andrea Vermeulen, also a participant in the program. Please give them the traditional greeting. Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Networks Activity Centre

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak a little bit more about the incredible group of people that I introduced a moment ago called the Networks Activity Centre, or NAC. NAC has been supporting brain injury survivors and their families since 1998. By creating a community-based system for social contact among adults with brain injury, Networks creates opportunities for these individuals to participate in social networks outside of the home.

This is a place where they can partake in recreational and educational activities that contribute immensely to their personal growth. These activities include playing games, computers, sewing, quilting, painting, ceramics, exercise, swimming, theatre, leather work, and some actually quite good karaoke. Anything that will allow them to develop new skills and brush up on old ones contributes to the confidence that we build in these individuals.

Mr. Speaker, it is essential to the rehabilitation of the brain injured that they reintegrate themselves into the community and develop new interests and new relationships. I would very much like to thank these individuals involved for increasing the quality of life for brain injury survivors and especially for those who have joined us here today. Networks is a tremendous addition to my constituency and to all of Alberta. They're able to recognize the need for support and to provide it to those who need it within this community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to represent the thriving, fast-growing communities of northeast Calgary, but the rapid growth of these communities also presents challenges, particularly when it comes to transportation. If nothing is done, expansion of the Calgary International Airport will soon strand thousands of commuters in Calgary-McCall and vastly increase congestion on Deerfoot Trail, with huge impacts on the economy, environment, traffic safety, and the quality of life of Calgarians. Many businesses will be harmed, many lives made more difficult. Building the proposed airport tunnel is the only way to avoid this potential headache, and building it now is the only way to avoid an even greater expense in the future.

Yesterday afternoon I met with the Minister of Transportation to plead the case of the tens of thousands of Calgarians who will be

tremendously affected if the tunnel is not built. The city of Calgary and the Airport Authority have already committed \$90 million to help build the tunnel. Now the federal and provincial governments must come to the table before March 1 to make this project happen.

The new runway at Calgary International will open up Alberta to a far greater range of international flights. This is a positive development for every citizen in this province. For business, for travel, for cultural interchange and family ties this is a great development, not just for Calgary but for all of Alberta. That is why I believe that it is a provincial imperative to support the construction of the airport tunnel, and the people of Calgary cannot be asked to bear the burden alone.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

2010 Olympic Winter Games

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow night the Olympic torch will be lit at the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Winter Games. International attention will be focused on our neighbours next door, but this is also a unique opportunity to show the rest of the planet that Alberta is a world-class destination for tourism, business, culture, winter sports, and so much more.

Alberta enjoys a great history in this respect, and Albertans have every right to be proud of the legacy of the 1988 Calgary Olympic Winter Games. Since 2004 our Alberta government has invested more than \$100 million to renew our Olympic heritage venues, and this has been invaluable in solidifying Alberta's position as Canada's national centre of winter sports excellence. This leadership role is irrefutable: more than half of the 2010 Canadian Olympic team were born in Alberta or live and train in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our province will shine in other ways during the games. With the Alberta train, Alberta House, and Alberta Plaza we will share our story with the rest of the world. Alberta artists will offer medal-worthy performances in the Cultural Olympiad and in free nightly concerts at Alberta Plaza. In addition, an Alberta executive chef will showcase our food industry with gourmet cuisine from our own backyard.

Meanwhile, Albertans can be part of the Olympic experience in the comfort of their own homes from nightly live streaming videos of artists performing at the Plaza to the latest Twitter update about Albertans owning the podium. Our constituents can enjoy up-to-date news and results online at alberta.ca/vancouver2010. By the end of February the story of Alberta's athletes, artists, food, and opportunities will be well known.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the 2010 Olympic Winter Games is an invaluable venue for us to tell the rest of the country and the rest of the world about our amazing Alberta spirit and celebrate our successes together. Go, Canada, go, and go, Alberta, go.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

1:40

Black History Month

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February is Black History Month. It's a time to reflect on and celebrate the achievements and contributions of black Canadians and black people throughout the world. I feel particularly honoured to be presenting this statement today, February 11, the day 20 years ago that Nelson Mandela walked out of prison and into the history books. His belief in the equality of all people led him to change the world forever.

And so it has been in our province, Mr. Speaker. For the past 100 years black people have been coming to Alberta seeking freedom and equality, whether from the Jim Crow laws and discrimination of the turn-of-the-century United States or the instability and violence of other countries or, as my parents and many of their friends did in the 1960s, seeking a better future for their children.

On this day I think of Corporal Ainsworth Dyer, a black soldier based out of Edmonton who lost his life in Afghanistan in 2002. I think of Violet King, who in 1954 was the first black woman to graduate from the U of A law school and Alberta's first black female lawyer. Of course, we can't talk about Alberta history without acknowledging one of our greatest cowboys, John Ware.

Mr. Speaker, many great black Canadians have blazed a trail both in our province and throughout this great country, and there are many great examples of today's contributors, people like Dr. Tony Fields, the cancer specialist; William Eddins, conductor of the ESO; Dr. Fil Fraser, the noted writer, broadcaster, and filmmaker; and the poet laureate of Edmonton, Rollie Pemberton, known by his stage name of Cadence Weapon, who is the grandson of the late Eskimo great, Rollie Miles.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to serve in this Legislature as the first black member along with my colleague the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, the second such serving member. I'm very proud to live in this province at a time when colour is neither a barrier nor a requirement to serve in this prestigious office.

I would like to commend all the organizers and volunteers of the many events throughout Black History Month and encourage my colleagues and all Albertans to participate in the celebrations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Lunar New Year

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 14, 2010, is New Year's Day for over 1.5 billion people in the world. It is celebrated as a 4,000-year tradition of people in China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and many other parts around the globe. On behalf of all members of the Assembly, I wish them all [remarks in Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese]. It all means: Happy New Year.

Based on the lunar cycle, there are 60 names for the years based on 12 animal zodiacs and five elements. From the first use of the lunar calendar this coming year, 4078, is the Year of the Metal Tiger. Being a feline species like a cat, it doesn't matter how it is tossed around; the tiger always lands on its four feet solidly. Attached to the metal element, it is strong like steel and valuable like gold. This year it is special to have New Year's fall on Valentine's Day and during the Olympics. We celebrate love, relationships, achieving our potential. This will be a great year for Alberta and Canada.

New Year's Day is celebrated as a family affair, a time of renewing and thanksgiving. Remembrance of ancestors is the most vital part of the New Year's ritual, linking the living members with those who have passed away. Nothing should be lent or borrowed on this day as anyone who does so will lend and borrow all year round. The New Year's Day activities set a precedent.

Mr. Speaker, there are some Lunar New Year traditions that may apply to us in the Assembly. Everyone should refrain from using bad language and unlucky words. References to the past year are also avoided as everything should be turned toward the new year and a new beginning. It is believed that the appearance and attitude during the New Year's celebration sets the tone for the rest of the year.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I wish all my colleagues here a healthy, happy, productive year of the roaring golden tiger.

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

Provincial Budget

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In making its lofty promises about funding for health care and education, this government has abandoned the people who need our help most. There is no place in this budget for Albertans struggling to keep a roof over their families' heads, for Albertans who are working minimum wage jobs, for Albertans who are homeless or who are at-risk youth in the foster care system. So much for the compassionate Conservatives.

Mr. Speaker, this government cut \$112 million from the Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs. This government cut the affordable housing program in half.

This government cut \$2 million from its already overburdened rent supplement program despite the fact that this program was full for 2009 by August and was thus unable to help thousands of people who needed it. Mr. Speaker, this government has also cut \$28 million from services to its most at-risk youth. The government broke its promise to index the minimum wage, taking \$240 out of the pockets of 20,000 low-income Albertans.

This government would like us to believe that these cuts are necessary to boost the health care system, but really they will just increase costs. By cutting funding for social services, this government may look like it is saving money, but it's only shifting the cost. If you don't make the commitment to put roofs over people's heads, if you don't make the commitment to care for kids who need child intervention, you'll be finding a lot more people in the health care system because of the consequences of life on the streets. One way for our economy to recover is to increase access to postsecondary education. Again, instead we see cuts to student grants that will limit opportunities to students living in low-income families.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans see that this budget isn't neglecting people who fall through the cracks; rather, it's almost pushing them down through those cracks. We need to do better, and with the inherent wealth that we have in this province there is absolutely no reason that we cannot. [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order in the gallery!

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a report that was released in the fall by Water Matters. It's called Share the Water: Building a Secure Water Future for Alberta. It's produced by Water Matters and Ecojustice. I will table the appropriate number of copies of that.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from constituent Jack Barrows, who is writing with concerns around the tailings ponds, which he likens to the Chernobyl disaster, and who is very concerned about the chemicals that may be leaching into the groundwater supply. I will table the appropriate number of copies of that document.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of the House and Albertans a

document entitled Seniors Care in Crisis: Alberta Seniors Deserve Better; It's Time to Take Action. It's produced by Public Interest Alberta.

Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the standing orders I may ask a question of the Government House Leader in which he would share with the Assembly the projected government House business for the week commencing the 16th of February.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Of course, Monday, February 15, being Family Day, we will not be sitting.

On Tuesday, February 16, 2010, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders the potential for further consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne and potentially second reading of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act; Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; and Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010.

We will also anticipate receiving letters from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor with respect to supplementary supply, which would be tabled, which would then afford us the opportunity on Wednesday, February 17, under Government Bills and Orders for Committee of Supply for supplementary estimates and, time permitting, consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday, February 18, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders day 6 of consideration of His Honour's speech as well as the potential for further second reading time on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act; Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010; and discussion of Bill 2 at whatever stage, second reading or Committee of the Whole.

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Health Quality Council of Alberta recently released a report which highlighted that under the management of this government and Alberta Health Services emergency room wait times in Alberta have actually increased between 2007 and 2009. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: when will the minister provide details showing how the \$1.7 billion increase to Alberta Health Services will improve emergency access for Albertans?

1:50

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, very soon. In fact, I anticipate making an announcement next week with respect to a specific strategy that has been developed with, by, and for the Alberta Health Services folks to benefit all Albertans, and that will include looking at how we can reduce the wait times and how we can improve access time to family doctors and to specialists.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. How many additional acute care beds will this new funding mean for Calgary hospitals, now stretched beyond their limits?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I just rushed in from Calgary. In fact, I was at the Peter Lougheed hospital just hours ago, and I met with people in the emergency department. I'm sure the member asking the question would be happy to know that I informed them that our capital plan is being worked on right now government-wide. It's about a \$7 billion plan this year. The Health and Wellness component of that for health facilities is going to be \$2.5 billion, and we'll have the details very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you. Then probably the minister will be able to answer the question about the 140 beds that lie empty in the Peter Lougheed hospital and why we're going to wait three years for a new hospital when we have 140 empty beds in the Peter Lougheed that could be opened. When will they be opened?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the wonderful things I learned today is that the new wing of the Peter Lougheed hospital is providing outstanding care, and those are 120 or thereabouts brand new beds. Unfortunately, in order to get those open, they had to close those that were in the existing facility. What I've said to them is that all we've done is sort of shift the number of beds from one centre to another. Those that are there and vacant in the existing Peter Lougheed wing I've asked Alberta Health Services if they would look at, now that they have their five-year funding plan in place and now that we're moving forward, to see what can be done to utilize those beds as well.

Dr. Swann: Good news. Good news, Mr. Speaker. We'll hold you to that.

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

Hip and Knee Surgeries

Dr. Swann: Since May of last year Edmontonians have been waiting in pain because this government cannot manage the health system. Last May the Royal Alexandra hospital was told that they're working too efficiently, performing too many hips and knees, so their funding for elective surgery was cut by 15 per cent. To the same minister: given the budget increase will the Royal Alex now be directed to work to their full capacity and finally start reducing the number of Albertans waiting in pain for hip and knee surgery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was at the Royal Alex just last week, and I was there the week before. I was touring and learned a lot about how that hospital functions as part of my learning curve. Now that we have a fixed budget and now that we know a little bit more about the predictable and stable funding, I'm sure we'll be able to address exactly those kinds of issues. I'm grateful for the honourable doctors and the hon. Leader of the Opposition's question in that regard because it will help us focus on what's important, our patients, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A plan is what is needed, and this minister has yet to show that he has a plan other than to pile on more money. Are there enough staff to actually increase the number of hip and knee operations at the Alex? Staffing.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, staffing is an issue, and that's why on Dr. Duckett's blog today you will see a comment on how we're going to retain the maximum number of people possible, how we might possibly be hiring even more people to keep up with the demands for the services that Albertans expect out of the Alberta health care system. We are focused on a plan, exactly that, that will deliver the best performing publicly funded health system in Canada right here in Alberta, and we're going to get that done.

Dr. Swann: Well, what an interesting flip-flop in messaging from Dr. Duckett between this month and last.

If the minister has a plan, he should have specific details and outcomes. Can the minister tell Albertans how many more hip and knee surgeries the budget increase in Alberta Health Services will get for Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that will depend partly on how quickly we can get on with activity-based funding, which addresses exactly that. We'll know more by April 1, quite clearly. We'll be having a meeting next week, which will bring together the nurses, the doctors, Alberta Health Services, myself, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. We're going to sit down and thrash through some of this stuff, including performance measures, which I suspect is partly where the hon. leader is going. We'll get there.

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

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you can see why the energy industry has lost so much confidence in this government. I mean, two of the most senior ministers apparently can't agree on whether royalty changes are going to happen or not. Yesterday the Minister of Energy apparently told reporters that royalty changes were not going to take place a mere two hours after the finance minister told the same reporters the exact opposite. To the Minister of Energy. Here's your chance to clear things up. Will this government be fixing the royalty system in this province or not?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to clear things up because certain media have taken out of context what I believe was said yesterday. I can't comment on what the finance minister said in a private meeting, but let me be very clear about what is happening. We are in the process of going through a competitiveness review. Part of that competitiveness review is to ensure that our royalty structures within the royalty framework are appropriate. There is no new royalty framework because that is much greater than just royalties, and that's what will be coming as part of the competitiveness review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'm still wondering – I mean, I know media does sometimes take remarks out of context; it's happened to me – how workers in the oil and gas industry, how investors in the oil and gas industry let alone

other sectors of our economy are meant to trust a government that's working, or being reported to work, at cross-purposes with itself?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, one thing that is certain: there's a lot more trust in this government than in the Liberal opposition. In the last election the former leader was campaigning for higher royalties, and just a couple of weeks ago we had this particular leader, this particular opposition, come out with a report, which is the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' report, verbatim now as their new Liberal policy. So I have some difficulty understanding where they're coming from.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. CAPP called. They're wondering why you haven't.

To the Minister of Energy: why aren't you more aggressively pursuing a pipeline to the west coast? It's not only royalties where this government needs to take urgent action. Our reliance on one single market south of the border places our energy exports at risk of boycott, so why aren't you more aggressively pursuing a pipeline to the west coast?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'll be very happy to send a copy of our energy strategy over to the member because clearly outlined in our energy strategy are the initiatives that we are taking. We recognize that we do not want to be so reliant on one particular customer. There's a lot of work going on there, Mr. Speaker.

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

Funding for Children in Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the very day the Premier is travelling to Vancouver to take part in Alberta's \$8.3 million advertisement at the Olympics, back home our government has a practice of keeping children in its care in downtown offices with 24-hour supervision because no other safe place is there for them to go. To the minister of children's services: how can the minister possibly justify reducing support for child protection when it is abundantly clear that her ministry is already operating over capacity and children are suffering as a result?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, our recent budget announcement is \$1.1 billion for this ministry. I want to assure you that children and youth remain our number one priority. They always have been; they always will be. I want you to know that. Also, I want you to be certain of the safety and well-being of our children and youth, that they're not put at risk. I can tell you that in the budget what this member is referring to is under child intervention. Many people think that we go and we take that child into care under child intervention. That's simply not the case.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, once you take into account inflationary and population pressures, the real cut in this area is at least 10 per cent. Now, last year in the first six months 150 children in care suffered abuse. That's simply not the kind of record that justifies any kind of reduction in support. Why doesn't the minister call a spade a spade and admit that children in Alberta will suffer as a result of these cuts to her budget?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this budget, as I said, is \$1.1 billion. It's a 3.1 per cent increase. Child intervention is multidimensional. That means early intervention, and we have excellent organizations out in the community that are doing early intervention. I was over at the parent link centre for west Edmonton this morning, at the Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre, and you would be amazed at the good work that they're doing for early intervention so that they help families with their children to remain successful and not go into care.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's interesting because, in fact, in terms of early intervention the prevention of family violence and bullying budget was also cut by roughly 10 per cent. These are the kinds of services that the minister knows help keep families together, and if they're cut, it's likely that more kids will end up in government care as a result. Why won't the minister admit that, in short, the system is losing safe places for children and that these cuts will make it worse?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you once again that early intervention through our community programs is enhanced. It was legislated here with the family enhancement act. We have been working, changing our programs to be really responsible. The very earliest we can do is out in the community, and it is working. This budget is a good, solid budget for Children and Youth Services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Oil Sands Development

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Communication is the key, the government says. Everyone will communicate better. It's a new team. Albertans will have to take a haircut, and the buffet is closed. Well, the photo which I will table at the appropriate time says: not even a trim. My question to the minister of finance is this: does he not like haircuts, or is he planning on becoming a long-haired hippie, moving away from his core political values?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've carefully burned all the pictures of me prior to 1975, so I know that the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has not seen those pictures. In fact, my haircut has been getting shorter and shorter, and I'm more than happy.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, he didn't answer the question, but I'll ask it again. Communication is the key, the government says. The budget reflects increased revenue projection in oil sands bitumen royalties, which I believe is very important. It creates jobs for my community, Albertans, and all of Canada. However, I will table the *Globe and Mail*. The Minister of Energy says: I want to slow down the oil sands. Your numbers say that you want to speed up the oil sands. This is a total contradiction. Which is it? Do you want to speed up the oil sands, Mr. Minister of Finance?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we'll have to find the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo a job in the media; he's doing such a great job of taking things out of context. In fact, I seem to have recollections of the hon. member voicing concerns many times about things going too fast up in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Are oil sands revenues increasing from last budget to this? Absolutely. Will they continue to increase? Absolutely. I've said that Alberta's future is in the north, and we all support that.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, to the minister of finance. All Albertans are watching. The question is that you are saying full speed ahead with the oil sands in order to back up your budget numbers, quite contrary to what the Minister of Energy has said in the *Globe and Mail*. Is this full speed ahead with the oil sands in terms of development, in creating jobs for Albertans? Yes or no.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, did anybody hear the words “full speed ahead” on Tuesday afternoon? I didn’t. In fact, I’ll send a copy of the speech over, and of course they’re not there.

We will continue with the orderly development there. We’ve created a positive environment for investment. Based on that, we’ve seen five announcements of new projects in the oil sands, so obviously there will be new jobs and new wealth created in the north.

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

Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks about competitiveness but will not back the Calgary airport tunnel, a project that will keep businesses going, keep people employed, and increase tourism. This government talks about being green, but they won’t support a project that will keep cars, trucks, and airplanes from idling. To the Minister of Transportation: has the minister studied the economic and social impact of not building the tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is trying to do the right thing, but I do not understand why he doesn’t understand that he’s trying to drag me into something that has nothing to do with my job. My job is to look after provincial highways in Alberta, and the airport tunnel is a municipal project. If you look back at the amount of money that we transferred to Calgary last year, there was double enough money there to build the tunnel if they would have made it their first priority.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don’t think the airport tunnel is a Calgary issue; it is an Alberta issue. The minister should be taking a look at the bigger picture.

To the minister again. The airport is already over capacity. Without an airport tunnel we can expect even more traffic problems. Why doesn’t the minister think that Calgary needs this airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely have not at any time said that Calgary didn’t need it or did need it. I just said that it wasn’t our responsibility. I’ll tell you that this member will be one of the first people that will be out there if we change and if I sway from policy and do something that I’m not supposed to be looking after and look after it. They’ll be the first ones jumping down my throat on not following our policies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the contrary, I think I’ll be the first one applauding the minister to do the right thing, to come through with the funding for the airport tunnel.

To the minister again. The tunnel is a necessity for the LRT to go to the airport. Will the minister reconsider and put his support behind the airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as you know, there’s new money going to Calgary in the new budget that just came out. They have to decide what their priorities are and what infrastructure they spend their money on. I’ll tell you, we have members on our side of the House, the Member for Calgary-Montrose and the Member for Calgary-Cross, that have been working very hard with my department also, trying to figure out how they could get support for the people in Calgary. We’re building a ring road around the city of Calgary to help get rid of the congestion that he’s talking about on the Deerfoot. Therefore, I want to stick to the job I’m doing and try to do the very best for Albertans that I can.

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

WCB Appeals Commission

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Public Agencies Governance Act is intended to bring greater transparency to quasi-judicial agency governance and generally has been well received. However, in a recent conversation with an employers’ safety organization they indicated to me that some challenges existed with respect to the provisions of the timelines for service on public bodies. My question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. This legislation may have a negative impact on the pool of WCB appeals commissioners. How will you mitigate the loss of qualified appeals commissioners and ensure that we don’t run out of the good folks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When appointing commissioners to the Appeals Commission, first of all, it should be stressed that the Appeals Commission has to be balanced. The balance is composed of representatives of the labour world and the employers’ world. So when appointing commissioners to the Appeals Commission, that is the first prism through which I look to appoint new commissioners. But there’s another balance, of continuity, of experience so that we get quality decisions, accurate decisions. Also, there has to be a succession plan built into it so new commissioners who get appointed can learn from the experience of the more savvy ones.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Will you endeavour to use section 14(4) of the Public Agencies Governance Act to provide a grace period for commissioner appointments?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, that is a section that can always be used, but there is no necessity to even contemplate it because the Appeals Commission has a chair, and the chair appoints and recommends members to the commission. The chair is in charge of making sure that this balance that I referenced prior exists – hence, it is labour and employers, experience versus nonexperience – so that we don’t continuously renew the same commissioners. If we did, there would be a time when most of them would retire, and there would be no new ones with the experience to take over.

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

Climate Change

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Climate change is a reality and poses a significant challenge for this province. Alberta Liberals believe government needs to act in good faith to reduce Alberta's carbon footprint. To the Minister of Environment. The minister's federal counterpart just came out with a target of 17 per cent reduction by 2020. How is Alberta going to participate in Canada meeting those targets?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is going to participate in Canada meeting those targets by continuing to do what we're already doing: by continuing to lead the way; by using the legislation that we already have in place in this province, that no other province has, quite frankly, that has mandatory reductions for large industrial emitters; like the announcement that we had at noon today, when we formed a partnership with our municipalities, put \$2 million into a centre of excellence program so that municipalities can work to achieve reductions of their carbon footprint. Alberta will do its part.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Given that the feds have moved to hard caps, at some point the minister will have to stop dithering around with intensity emissions and put in real caps to meet the federal targets. When is this going to happen?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue of hard caps versus intensity caps is something that is often the subject of much debate. But I remind the member that whether it's intensity or whether it's hard caps, the fact of the matter is that the legislation that we have in Alberta requires real reductions of CO₂ on the part of industry. In the hard cap world, the European world, in case the member hasn't noticed, there are actually allowances built into that system for growth. So whether you call it intensity or whether you call it hard cap, the fact of the matter is that you have to allow for growth. That's what our system does.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. As a result of the government not having their act together on tailings ponds, on reclamation, on wetlands, on emissions, on the health of our northern aboriginal population, our international reputation is getting hammered, and our economy is being affected. When is the government going to ramp up Alberta's environmental performance?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that is the job that I have on a day-to-day basis. There is not a day that goes by that we are not pushing the envelope, that we are not improving the technology, improving the performance. That being said, let's not overlook the tremendous amount of work that's already in place. This is the most highly regulated industry in all of the world. That can improve and will improve, and it will do it under the stewardship of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately \$572 million have been put into the Alberta initiative for school improvement since 2002. What I've heard from a lot of teachers and

students and parents is that this money takes teachers out of the classroom and puts them into administrative or management-type roles. I'm curious as to what value taxpayers and students are receiving through this program. To the Minister of Education: are there any quantitative measurements in place to measure the outcomes of the AISI program?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me say that we're celebrating the 10th anniversary of the AISI program. It has been an outstanding success for the Alberta education system. All AISI projects must meet criteria and requirements set out by the Education Partners Steering Committee, which is comprised of government, teachers, school authorities, parents, and educational institutions. I can tell you that there are very, very few circumstances where the process of AISI would take teachers out of the classroom and put money into administration. It's about teachers in the classroom doing applied research, and they're doing it very well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that happens all the time.

To the same minister: what measurable improvements in student outcomes can be attributed to the AISI program?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of examples of AISI projects which have improved results in literacy, in numeracy, in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education practices, in distance learning, in student engagement, just to name a few. All results from the 10-year history are available publicly on the Education website. We have compiled reports and done studies on the various sectors of the AISI research to show, first of all, its impact, and secondly, to be able to share it so that the results of those projects can be used by other people.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple weeks ago the minister spoke to the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils and indicated that it was important for government to maximize its finite resources. Again to the Minister of Education: has any cost-benefit analysis been done to determine if AISI is indeed the best value per dollar as compared to something as, let's say, reducing class sizes or simply just increasing the base instructional grants to school boards?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's always necessary to learn how to do things better. You can learn how to do things better by doing research on the job; applied research is a very effective tool. It's more than just about money to schools. It empowers educators to be involved in the evolution of teaching and learning and learning how to do things better and then sharing that learning. They have to be able to take risks. Not all AISI projects succeed. If all of them succeeded, we wouldn't be pushing the envelope hard enough and far enough. So it's important. We've done a 10-year review, and what came back from that 10-year review, I'll just say one thing: world-class, world-leading example of a system-wide educational strategy that inspires teachers and administrators. That's the succinct statement that I can give you from the review that says that AISI is working for Albertans.

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

Funding for Children in Care (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Child intervention services suffered a debilitating \$27 million cut in this week's budget. Essential services like child protection, family supports, and assistance for families providing permanent homes to children and youth are the programs that will suffer. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: given that Alberta already has one of the highest per capita populations of children in custody in Canada, why has the minister further reduced in-home support for children and their families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned to you earlier in the Assembly, it really is about early intervention, and the intervention area of the budget is multidimensional. We have some very good organizations in the province. Most recently in Calgary we had the FASD Conference, 600 participants, and every one of those people in that room worked with agencies in some way, whether it was policing, psychologists, health care with nurses, psychiatrists, just a number of people working together for that early intervention, to go in and assist that family so that the child does not need to be taken into care. That's cost-effective.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like the hon. minister to go back in time to her former career and recall the times when she physically patched up broken families. I would like to see that type of compassion demonstrated with families within Children and Youth Services.

This government is full of mixed priorities and mixed messages. Can the minister clarify how these proposed cuts reflect the government's commitment to protect the most vulnerable Albertans?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't want you to be misled into thinking that there are cuts throughout this whole budget because that's just not the case. There have been some cost-effective measures with the budget, which we've been asked for; all ministries were over the past year. I can tell you very clearly that the early intervention side of the budget, where the reduction is going to occur, is because it is cost-effective with what we've seen with the good programs over the past year that are showing really strong results. Tomorrow you will see the announcement of the triple-P program, which is the positive parenting program through parent link centres. They're making a real difference out there in the community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would just like the minister to note that it is considerably less expensive to maintain the children and support them within their homes rather than to institutionalize them. There are a number of loving foster care parents out there – and I thank the families that provide that support – but it's less expensive to look after them within their families.

This ministry has been in crisis for years. Why should Albertans trust that these cuts won't bring about further decreases in the quality of already constrained services?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see that the member agrees with me about the early intervention piece where you actually

assist families with positive parenting skills, which the community is coming together to do. We just had the 100th anniversary yesterday of the Bissell Centre, and that's very much a part of their work. That's where you have the success of the family, and you don't take the children or youth into care. Foster parents: I agree that, you know, that's a very important program in this ministry, and that area is being increased by over \$900,000.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

2:20 Airdrie-Chestermere Constituency Issues

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Dylan Nielson is a constituent of mine who suffered from a brain cyst that caused life-threatening seizures and made him so light sensitive that he couldn't even leave his house. His condition was initially misdiagnosed, and despite subsequent referrals from his family doc, specialists repeatedly refused him a second opinion, citing the initial misdiagnosis. Dylan was able to go the U.S. for treatment, and the seizures and light sensitivity have stopped. Unfortunately, the Nielsons have a huge medical bill that they can't afford. To the health minister: would you be willing to sit down with the Nielson family to see if there's anything this government can do to help them out?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and I'd be pleased to have the hon. member join me in that meeting.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Minister. That's very good of you.

On another topic, the city of Airdrie has been forced into divesting itself of its prized integrated fire and ambulance service due to what looks like bungling by some agenda-driven bureaucrats at Alberta Health Services. This would be very disappointing for Airdrie-area residents. To the minister again: would you be willing to meet with the mayor and CEO of Airdrie to see if we can work out a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is an integrated ambulance plan for ground ambulances, and Alberta Health Services has set some new, improved standards to protect safety and quality of delivery of services. In some other municipalities, perhaps the one being referenced, they are fortunate enough to have a separate fire department, and in some cases staff serve in both the ambulance sector and the fire sector. What we're trying to do is ensure that the standards aren't compromised by having staff vacate one position to service the other. So we're working that out, but yes, I'd be happy to meet with them as well.

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that. No further questions. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Oil Sands Global Image

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've now read in a few papers some troubling news that two American companies are boycotting Alberta's oil as part of their new policies designed to reduce their carbon footprints. The southbound flow of Alberta oil, which represents a fifth of all U.S. oil imports, is obviously crucial for our province and their economy as well. My question is to the Minister of Energy: what is the government doing to respond to the

actions of these corporations and set the record straight about energy from the oil sands?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, for starters, that story appeared a couple of days ago in the great central Canadian bastion of Liberal propaganda, the *Toronto Star*. What has happened, actually, is typical. Two days later one of the companies issued a statement – that happened to be today – where they said: characterizations that we have rejected any particular fuels are not accurate because we're not in a position to do so. I think that this is just another one of those particular examples of where, quite frankly, business might make some decisions, and then consumers will express their views on those decisions, and it'll all work out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that we get the factual information out, though, and based on studies by T.J. McCann, Cambridge Energy Research, and the Alberta Energy Research Institute, the wheel-to-well emissions from our bitumen are equal to or less than oil from other jurisdictions, including California's heavy oil and oil from Nigeria and Venezuela, to name a few. To the Minister of Environment: what is our government doing to make sure that the full life cycle of emissions is calculated and recognized when comparing energy from Alberta to other producing jurisdictions?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. Our oil sands oil does compare very favourably with a number of other alternate sources, including Venezuelan and California thermal, even taking into account that 80 per cent of emissions that are derived from the combustion of fossil fuel come out of the tailpipe and are not attributable to the source. That being said, as I've said many times in this House, this government is committed to ensuring that we not only talk about our existing record but that we have continuous improvement to ensure that we reduce that footprint.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another interesting piece of information that some people, including the opposition, tend to overlook is that industries in Alberta's oil sands are investing in cogeneration, producing power without incremental emissions, effectively generating low-emission or no-emission power from the oil sands. Constituents say that these should be used as part of the calculation of our oil sands carbon footprint. To the same minister: how will you ensure that these efforts will be fairly cited and recognized to further the development of our oil sands?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a complex issue that we're spending a great deal of time on right now. We're trying to come up with an accurate way of determining what are the CO₂ savings as a result of cogeneration, but most importantly intuitively we know that cogeneration is the right thing to do. We need to ensure that whatever kind of regulatory regime we put in place gives the right signals, gives the proper incentives to encourage industry to make these very valuable investments.

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

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plans that the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports has for the persons with developmental disabilities program are not clear, making the future of this program quite uncertain. To the minister: what was the minister's reasoning for creating a new PDD eligibility criterion, and what evidence was used in its creation?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, it's very important to me that every Albertan with a developmental disability is treated fairly and equally across the province. The eligibility requirement that the member refers to has not been changed. What we have changed is that instead of having it just in policy, it's now in regulation. The regulation provides more clarity and consistency throughout the province, and that was my purpose for putting it into place.

Ms Pastoor: Why is the minister making all PDD-funded individuals undergo reassessment with the new eligibility criterion?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the eligibility criterion is not new. Any person that is PDD funded and is eligible for our supports will not have to go through any new assessments or program. What we have that is new is something that's called the supports intensity scale. This is a new assessment tool that we are using to ensure once again that all persons with disabilities in the province of Alberta are treated the same from north to south, east to west.

Ms Pastoor: Will the minister guarantee that all people currently on PDD will not be denied PDD supports after the reassessments have been finished?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, any person in Alberta with developmental disabilities who is eligible for our funding supports and services will receive the supports and services that they are eligible for, and if they are receiving the correct supports, nothing will change.

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

Northtown Seniors' Housing

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shortly after my election almost two years ago I was contacted by a number of people from Wetaskiwin about a complex called the Northtown condominiums. These condominiums were inherited by Alberta Health Services from its predecessor the David Thompson health region. Many of those units had been empty, and they now have been empty for several years, and I'm wondering why. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can he advise as to what's being done to ensure that these units are made available to people in Wetaskiwin who want to live there?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, let me first say thank you to the residents of Wetaskiwin for their patience. The sale has not yet been finalized. There are some details that we still have to go through, and that includes looking at some bylaw amendments that are necessary. However, once those details are finalized, hon. member, you could see residents moving into that facility within four to six weeks after the details are sorted out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. I have one supplemental. I've been told that there are as many as 19 units sitting empty, many of them for a long time. I've been asked often about the costs of maintaining these units while they sit empty. I'm wondering if the minister can share any information that he might have in terms of the cost of maintaining these units.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are some nominal fees associated with keeping those units, and those nominal fees include things like condo fees, for example. The situation is not ideal, but it is solvable. I asked for this process to be looked at when I first heard about it a couple of weeks ago, hon. member, but I thank you for raising it here now, which will help accelerate the acceleration, and we'll get there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Severance Payments

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Treasury Board budget estimates forecast \$30 million in separation payments this fiscal year. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. What is the \$30 million in separation payments for?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, generally when we put aside money for separation payments, it's to pay people that are leaving government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That certainly confirms that there are plans by this government to lay civil servants off.

Again to the President of the Treasury Board: how are you going to calculate these separation payments fairly given that Paddy Meade, when she left Alberta Health Services after 10 months' employment, was paid \$1.3 million in severance?

2:30

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have a very consistent approach to the employees that work on behalf of the Alberta government. It is certainly not our pleasure or what we like to do to have to narrow down our number of employees that work for the Alberta government, but there are times that change, there are processes that we do better, there are IT improvements that we're able to do better, and occasionally people on our staff, both management and union, are let go. We very fairly deal with these people on a basis that's predetermined by their agreement with us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how is the government going to calculate these separation payments fairly after providing Jack Davis, the CEO of the Calgary health region, with a \$1.6 million severance package and a \$22,490-a-month pension for life?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, that severance was given by the Calgary regional health authority, which is one darn good reason why we needed to bring all of these regions under one management. I'm sure that people were dealt with separately. There's no one in this House, I would presume, and probably very few Albertans that

believe that some of the people that were let go earned or deserved those severances, but unfortunately when deals are made and contracts are signed, then you have to live up to them, and you go forward, not backwards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Highway 55

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 55 runs through the northern part of my constituency. It is the lifeline of my constituents who work in the Cold Lake oil sands. The section of highway that my constituents are most concerned about is an eight-mile stretch that doesn't have any shoulders. My first question to the Minister of Transportation: why was this eight-mile stretch missed when the rest of the highway from Lac La Biche to Cold Lake has shoulders?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we recognize the importance of widening highway 55 and all other highways in Alberta. I do have to say, though, that this MLA, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, has done a great job championing this project. We realize that there is large-truck traffic on that highway and that widening is important. My department is currently completing the engineering and design work. In fact, we've purchased about half of the required rights-of-way, and I've asked them to try to look at this project to see if we can move it along.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next question is to the same minister. This eight-mile stretch is a huge safety issue for my constituents. It is the number one concern for commercial truckers in my area. It has a school on it, which means school buses pick up and drop off students, it has logging trucks because of the logging business, it has tankers, and of course it has farmers that live on both sides of highway 55. What would it cost the government to widen this eight-mile stretch?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, on this particular stretch of highway it's difficult to determine that exact cost as we're still trying to work through the design and the detailing. But I have to tell you that when we used to always produce what we thought it was going to cost to build something, that seemed to be what the prices came in at. When we started not telling people what we thought it would cost, we started getting better bids, so we have no intentions of telling people what these bids should be.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next question is to the same minister. I've been campaigning for the completion of this project for the past two years. My predecessor had been campaigning for it for several years before that. How long do my constituents have to wait for this dangerous eight-mile stretch to be widened?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear here. These highways are very, very important to us. When she says that it's a danger, safety is very, very important on the highways in Alberta. We plan on doing what we can, but we have to work within a budget. We have criteria out there that we adjust all our roads against, and at one point in time hers will be on the list. We're doing what we can to move it forward.

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

Environmental Monitoring of Oil Sands

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rate of bitumen extraction needs to almost double over the next three years, or this government will never balance a budget again. Now, added to this house of cards is the government's so-called plan to increase monitoring in the Fort McMurray area by not adding one single cent to compliance and monitoring and, instead, cutting it in every other area in the province. To the Minister of Environment: how can the minister stand by as development almost doubles without increasing environmental monitoring and compliance and protection at the same rate?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there are really two components to monitoring. One is the monitoring that is done by Alberta Environment, and basically that's to make sure we keep everyone honest. We have opportunity to do ambient air quality and water quality that is downstream from industrial operations. We also have as a requirement of an operating approval the monitoring by the developer, whoever that developer happens to be. So if there is an increase in the amount of development in the area, it will by extension result in an increase in monitoring.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, monitoring and enforcement measures have never been adequate in this province, so it's no wonder that international operations are discussing the possibility of boycotting the oil sands. It's interesting because the reality is that the environmental integrity of oil sands development will always be questioned as long as this minister continues to allow industry to police itself instead of investing in comprehensive, effective, independent oversight. To the same minister: why are you fighting for balance on a scale that is weighted so heavily in favour of oil and gas profits at the cost of our environment?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue of monitoring is one that I think gets misconstrued. As I've said and as I just said in the answer to the previous question, there are requirements within the operating approvals that industry must monitor and must report the results of that monitoring. In addition to that, there are spot checks that are done on a periodic and on an informal basis. These are not preannounced. These are like an unannounced visit to ensure that the monitoring is being done in an appropriate way. Over and above all of that, we do some of our own monitoring, that confirms or denies that the results we're getting from industry are accurate.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you're going to be left with fewer unannounced visits if you don't change the budget, and meanwhile you're leaving the fox guarding the chicken coop. It's not going to work.

The budget was called Striking the Right Balance, but an honest title would be: Hoping the Oil Sands Will Cover the Bills; We'll Deal with the Consequences Later, If Ever. How can you stand by and support a budget that cuts the environment as a whole when the need to protect it has never been greater?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'll let the minister of finance address the issue of what the budget does or does not presume in the future, but I can answer on behalf of my ministry how we are going to continue to ensure that we protect the environment despite the fact that, like a number of other ministries, we have had to find some efficiencies within our system. Those efficiencies do not involve the direct service to environmental protection. There are a number of ways that we have found to reduce within our department, and I can assure this member that none of them will compromise our ability to do our job.

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

Alberta Health Services Board

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former health minister disbanded the regional health boards without any transition plan in place. A year later he cobbled together a superboard from a temporary board and paid out approximately \$18 million in gold-plated severance packages to 30 health care officials. Would the president of the treasury please advise this Assembly and all Albertans how many of these officials received a new job with Alberta Health Services or any other government position?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't know that answer. Certainly, any employment that has been offered through my department has been absolutely zero, but I would let the minister of health answer that question.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Could I just augment that and say that the new provincial board has effectively saved us between \$600 million and \$700 million so far.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, they'll do some research to find out whether it's happened or not.

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Health was assembled because of obvious flaws with the current health superboard and poor management decisions that were having a negative impact on patient care. In the interests of all Albertans will the new health minister replace the centralized superboard bureaucracy with local hospital administrators and give them the power and the authority needed to run the hospital in the best interests of their own communities?

2:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we had a good system for the time when we had the 17 health authorities and the nine, but, you know, having one provincial board for the health system has already proven beneficial. Let me give you three quick examples. Common procurement is one of them. Stopping the issue of doctor poaching, as it was sometimes referred to, is another. We stopped the bidding war, in other words. Having a centralized payroll system is saving the system between \$600 million and \$700 million annually. Between \$600 million and \$700 million annually. We think it's the right direction, but we also have local health advisory committees that are feeding into the system, so local input is still there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that of each of those problems he talked about – procurement would be very easy to do without a superboard. Encroachment: easy to eliminate that problem with proper management. It's not acceptable. The hundreds of millions that they're saving – we used to have volunteer hospital boards that looked after the local hospitals. Why doesn't the minister trust local hospital administrators to act in the best interests of the people in their own communities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what we've done is we've standardized a lot of things by centralizing them. We now have consistent stat gathering and consistent statistical data reporting, which helps us speed things up, such as the Alberta wait-list registry, so you can

go back into the computer and punch up wherever you might want to go for a particular type of surgery. That system has been down for a while because of one central problem, and that was that everybody was doing their own thing locally and doing it very well, as the member has said. Unfortunately, they were reporting things and collecting data in their own ways. We now have standardized and centralized that, and we'll have a lot more of that consistency of purpose coming along as a result of centralizing it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to thank you for your co-operation again today. We were able to recognize 18 different members. There were 102 questions and answers: 12 came from opposition members and six from private government members.

Before I call Orders of the Day, it's quite amazing, in listening to all the members' statements today, all the enthusiasm that one could get for this particular weekend in 2010: the opening of the Olympics, which will put Canada's face before the whole world; Black History Month celebrations this weekend; for all your sweeties, Valentine's Day on the 14th; Family Day on the 15th; Chinese New Year; Vietnamese Tet. I'll tell you; I can get quite excited listening.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 10: Mr. VanderBurg]

The Speaker: Who am I recognizing to participate in the Speech from the Throne? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much. It is indeed an honour to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne. Building roads and schools and hospitals and public infrastructure to meet the needs of our growing economy and population is a priority for this government. Alberta is known for having the most advanced public infrastructure in North America, and yes, Mr. Speaker, we will fix those lights, and we will try to do it very soon so that you are not in the dark. While building modern infrastructure to meet Alberta's needs, it is vital to look beyond the bricks and mortar. It is what happens inside our buildings that is critical.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans and the services that we deliver to them are our first priority, and we are always striving for the best way to deliver Albertans' needs. The world has been in the deepest recession we have seen in half a century. Through good planning Alberta has a better outlook than most. This is due to our carefully planned fiscal advantages, including low taxes and nearly \$25 billion we have saved and invested during good times. Our province is in an excellent position for a strong recovery. Our Premier's strategy for economic recovery includes continuing to strengthen our infrastructure in all regions of the province. This infrastructure is what will increase our competitiveness in a global economy.

Mr. Speaker, our universities, our hospitals, our schools attract people and business to this province. On my first day on the job I had the honour of attending the openings of three schools in the Grande Prairie area: Hythe regional school, Alexander Forbes

school, St. Theresa Catholic school. I spoke to teachers, to students, and to parents about their new and newly renovated schools. I asked them what it was like to work and to learn in these new facilities. They were happy about their new schools, and the feedback came in in regard to their high-performance classrooms, which they described as incredible. They love the Smart boards, they love the acoustics, and they love the new space, that has both comfort and versatility. In these modern environments our students thrive. By providing places that students want to go to every day, we inspire and support learning and creativity. This is why it is important to continue building schools in this province and to continue building them well.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, our made-in-Alberta schools alternative procurement project is a prime example of government's innovative solutions for delivering much-needed schools. These schools will provide first-class learning environments for students and staff. Classrooms are wired to accommodate the latest learning technologies. They are energy efficient and high quality and have lots of natural light. This innovative building project has already received national and provincial recognition, including six prestigious awards. The positive feedback and the success of the first project has led to the second one.

Altogether, Albertans will gain 32 new advanced schools in six Alberta communities two years faster than if we had used traditional methods. Mr. Speaker, let me repeat: two years faster than if we had used traditional methods. While these schools are leading edge and comfortable, they are also more economical. They save taxpayer dollars on design and on construction, and schools get built faster.

The Speech from the Throne also highlighted the government of Alberta's commitment to caring for our most vulnerable. Alberta's population is growing and aging. Albertans are also living longer. The increasing number of Albertan seniors will impact how new seniors' facilities are planned. Access to quality seniors' care is the foundation of our government's continuing care strategy. When I talk to seniors in my constituency, many tell me they want to live independently. They want to remain in their communities even as their needs change. They want to live with their partners. Basically, what they want are choices that help preserve their independence, quality of life, and personal dignity.

We know that supporting and enabling seniors and those with disabilities to age in place improves their quality of life and life expectancy. However, we want to go one step further so that Albertans can age in the right place. This is not about buildings; this is about what happens inside buildings. It is about creating a facility that enables the best continuing care. It is about creating support. It is about creating a place our seniors are proud to call home. Ensuring that our seniors are well cared for demonstrates the importance of what we're trying to achieve and why we are trying to do it.

2:50

The Alberta capital bonds will be introduced for sale later this month. They will only be available in Alberta, for Albertans. Proceeds raised through the sale of the bonds will go towards building accommodations for our seniors, accommodations that provide Albertans with choice and flexibility to meet the Premier's vision of supporting our seniors as they age in the right place. Providing high-quality space for our seniors delivers on our Premier's commitments of building tomorrow. Albertans are innovators. Albertans are proud of our province, and Albertans want to invest in their future.

When we build, we build for people who will use those facilities. Albertans as taxpayers must also be respected. Government has introduced a number of strategies to build and maintain public

infrastructure for the best return on their tax dollars. We take advantage of opportunities to ensure good value for taxpayers and deliver infrastructure in a timely, cost-effective, and efficient manner. While many jurisdictions are cutting back and growing their infrastructure deficits, we're continuing to innovate and build. We know we have a responsibility to build wisely to get the most out of our investments, and we are. Through careful financial and capital planning we are getting the most out of each infrastructure dollar spent and supporting tens of thousands of jobs across the province. We are doing this because a strong provincial infrastructure is the foundation for long-term economic growth and for Albertans.

Investing in our infrastructure is a direct investment in improving Albertans' daily quality of life. In building new schools we are helping to educate. In building new hospitals we are keeping Albertans healthy. In building new seniors' accommodations we are letting seniors age in dignity. My top priority is to ensure that Albertans have the public buildings they need today and into the future. This is a priority of our Premier, for my ministry, and for the government of Alberta. We have the responsibility to plan now for the infrastructure needs of tomorrow, and building tomorrow begins today.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Would anybody like to ask a question of the minister or make a comment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the minister in his comments on infrastructure can tell us – and I don't have the information in front of me – if the government's inventory of the condition of provincial roads is showing an improvement or a deterioration over the next few years, the number of roads that are in good shape or poor shape, and I forget the middle category.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite knows that roads fall under Transportation, but if I can take the liberty to comment, to say that this government is investing \$7.2 billion in infrastructure this year, and that includes schools, hospitals. It includes roads. It includes the infrastructure that this province is very much being a leader in, ensuring not only that we have the infrastructure but that it helps provide the jobs and that it helps provide a stable economic future for this province.

The Speaker: Others?

We'll go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to start by thanking and congratulating the hon. Lieutenant Governor Kwong and his amazing wife, Mary, for serving and representing our great province in a dignified and honourable fashion.

Mr. Speaker, from when I was first elected, much has changed. We're in the midst of a world economic crisis. We've had H1N1. Hopes and dreams across the world have been shattered, and many in this world suffer from despair. Our province has been hit particularly hard economically due to our natural resource revenue declining at a time when we were in the midst of catching up to our recent economic boom. The truest test of the character of a people is not how you fare during the good times; it's what you do during the tough times.

Now, the Speech from the Throne applies to Albertans and to my constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'd like to touch on a few

points. One is Alberta's fiscal advantage. The major advantage that we have going through these tough times is that, one, we have no debt. No province in this nation can say that. Secondly, we have money in the bank in our RRSP account. No province in this nation can say that. Thirdly, we have money in a savings account, our sustainability fund, to help with the priorities that matter to people during the difficult times, priorities such as looking after educating our children, caring for our seniors, looking after our vulnerable, and providing services on the human-sector side. We do have challenges, Mr. Speaker, but these are challenges everybody in this nation and everybody in this world faces.

At the same time, on the economic side we have an economic climate with the lowest possible taxes to encourage the spirit of entrepreneurship in this province, to encourage small business, and to create what matters most to people, jobs, j-o-b-s. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. During the tough time we still had a hundred thousand people flock here in search of jobs and hope so that they could care for their families.

The second issue is building safe communities. Safety is one of the main issues for the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark. We have to fight crime. We have to get tough on crime, on the bad guys. There are many people in Alberta, many people who are going through difficult times, and they make mistakes in life. Many of them have interactions with the health system and the criminal system. It might be because of homelessness. The root causes of homelessness are addiction and mental health issues and sometimes poverty. Are these hardened criminals? I'd say that these are Albertans who are having a tough time, and we've got to look after them. That's that commitment of building affordable housing units, getting our mental patients the help that they require and the wraparound services that they require, marrying mental health and addictions so that we can provide better, more effective care because many times patients have comorbidities. Not only do they have a mental health problem, but they have an addiction problem, and they also have a medical problem. In breaking down silos and barriers, we can address these issues.

The third issue is an increasingly competitive global marketplace. We need to continue to foster the Alberta dream, the dream of entrepreneurship, that if you want to work hard and work smart, you can achieve anything you want. Sometimes it requires a little bit of luck, but the two main characters are hard work and smart work and then to be in an atmosphere where those dreams can be encouraged, and that's what this province does. I can say this: part of that is addressed with a good education.

Let's talk about regulations. We can overregulate or underregulate. Really, what we need to talk about are good regulations to enable dreams to happen versus disabling dreams from happening. We're a major supplier, a safe supplier of energy and minerals and resources to the global marketplace. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will address and make sure that we are the most competitive in this nation with respect to the energy sector and our resource sector.

The fourth issue is environmental stewardship. We do have to be careful with our environment in this world. I believe that in Alberta we took that leadership with, first, the intensity targets. I think there is more that needs to be done. We have solar power, wind power. Carbon capture and storage is one solution, and there's individual responsibility. I think we all as individual Albertans can play a major role in improving the environment of the great province that we live in. We can be a beacon of hope to other, developing nations in helping them with their environmental challenges such as India and China and other nations that are up and coming who want to have the life that we have here.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the most important thing I'd like to talk about. You know, I had mentioned a quote by Martin Luther King Jr.: life begins to end the day we become silent about things that matter. In this House today I'd like to break my silence about the number one issue that affects not only our great province but also this great nation and many of the G-8 nations, and that issue is health care. Dealing with health care is actually beyond health care. Health care is the symptom, not the problem. The wealth of our nation depends on the health of our nation, the fact that we're competing in a global marketplace. The health of our workforce determines the economic productivity of our business sector.

I just have to give you, I think, evidence and examples of the best way to deal with this. A good friend of mine – I won't mention his name – went to the United States, fell off a bus, and broke his ankle and needed a cast. He was in Florida. He was hospitalized for two days, got a cast, and got an X-ray. No operation, no intravenous, no CAT scans. Guess what his bill was? Take a guess. Thirty-seven thousand dollars U.S. – \$37,000 U.S. – at a private hospital. Our insurance plan had to get the lawyers involved, and we whittled that down to \$9,000 plus the legal fees. You know what his bill would have been had he come to our hospital, the Royal Alex? Six hundred bucks. We never would have put him in the hospital because he probably didn't need to stay in the hospital. Six hundred bucks. I think we can deliver health care more efficiently here.

In the U.S.A. our good cousins south of the border spend an average of \$7,500 U.S. per person on health care. Here's the outcome: 60 per cent obesity rates, and their life expectancy is less than ours. That's after 50 million hard-working Americans, hard workers, have no insurance. They just get medicaid when they end up sick in the emergency department. Then they get very expensive care.

This has affected the economic productivity of every major corporation who is competing against the Indians and the Chinas of this world. They have healthy, productive employees who don't get paid too much. Here we have unhealthy, unproductive employees because of their health. There's a reason that there is an economic catastrophe south of the border: health care. Health care is their major issue, and part of health care is the drug costs and the legal costs.

My health insurance, my legal liability insurance to work at an inner-city trauma centre here, is about 245 bucks a month. In the U.S. I'm sure that figure would be at least 10 to 15 times more.

In Canada we spend \$4,200 to \$4,400 per person per year on average in this nation. Our outcome is that we have 30 per cent obesity rates. Life expectancy is 78.2 years for men and 82.7 years for women according to the 2008 census figures. But the challenge that we have in this nation is – actually, times to get access to care have been improving.

Now, here's a critique of our health system in this nation. We in this nation have talked about the Canada Health Act. We have this Canada Health Act. The five principles are public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility, but access to care has gotten worse. In this nation, in Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, many of these provinces, in their budgets health care is 50 per cent.

My comments are based on the fact that I've worked for 17 years, talked to many experts in this province, this country, and this world on what we need to do. This is what we're doing. Mr. Speaker, number one is that we need a vision. That vision was articulated in A Foundation for Alberta's Health System. It's a comprehensive document developed by experts in health care, experts in safety, experts from this province, and this report has been accepted.

The number two issue is to actually fund health care. We in this province have made a decision to fund health care.

The number three issue is really how we're going to deliver health care. I believe we can deliver it efficiently. That's why we went to one region. Health care is so superspecialized that you simply cannot provide every service in every hospital in every town, let alone every province. There are fantastic ideas that happened in nine different regions. We're taking the best of the regions to apply those standards province-wide.

We go to one electronic health record. Fantastic work was done in Calgary in bone marrow transplants. Great work in Capital health in cardiac transplants. We were the model in health care in the nation with the electronic record, and that record is being standardized. We did Bill 52 last year. We're going to hook up all the family doctors' offices, get the records so we don't have to keep repeating tests all the time, but we must do it while protecting the public's privacy. It was a collaborative decision made by an all-party committee. I believe we came to reasonable compromises in helping protect privacy while we work on the record.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is really about creating the best performing publicly funded health care system not just in this country, I would say in this world. We have an opportunity to have the best publicly funded health care system on this planet. For that, I would first start by thanking the Member for Calgary-West for creating the opportunity, having the political will and the courage to withstand the criticism to allow us to do this by going to one region.

Secondly, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and Ms Prowse for leading this conversation and bringing out this report.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the Premier and the hon. minister from Edmonton-Mill Creek for taking this baton forward and working on the funding part.

Mr. Speaker, when I was a representative of the emergency docs – and I still work every Sunday – when I used to lecture across the country, my friends across the country used to say: we in the other parts of the country have wonderful ideas, but you people in Alberta actually have the courage to do something about it, the political courage to actually do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, the nation is watching. I lay a challenge to every health minister in this nation. I lay a challenge to the Prime Minister of this nation to adopt this, to revise the Canada Health Act and stop rationing health care. Let's deliver it efficiently. Let's deliver it effectively. Let's have evidence-based health care. Let's concentrate on outcomes: what do we do with the money we spend, and what outcome do we get? Let's do it together with the people that actually work on the front lines. Let's start by asking Albertans and Canadians what they expect from their health care system, what they want, how we're going to get there. We've got to get there with them coming at our side.

I lay a challenge to our good friends south of the border to pass that bill. Those 50 million people who are not insured are workers. That's got to make the economic productivity of the labour workforce even worse. Mr. Speaker, this issue is way beyond health care, way beyond the proportion of your budget. This issue will affect us economically. It has affected us economically because now the borders have opened up.

We have not enough young people coming up. We have a lot of seniors. It's not the seniors alone. It's their kids and their grandkids when they went from active lifestyles to inactive lifestyles. Our childhood obesity rates in this nation have gone the wrong way.

The one thing that's gotten better is smoking rates. We're down to 19 per cent from, I believe, 50 or 40 per cent from when Mr. Marlboro used to smoke, and guess how he died. Lung cancer. All

his buddies had heart disease 15 or 20 years before their mother and father would have had it.

You know what? Their kids', their grandkids' obesity rates have gone from 20 to 29 per cent. These kids are having diabetes at the age of 10, type 2 diabetes. Mental health rates have gone through the roof. One hundred per cent of our kids eat too much salt. They don't move enough. They move less than ever. They eat more than ever and eat the wrong stuff more than ever.

Yes, we need more doctors and nurses. Yes, we need to run the system more efficiently. But you know what? We need fewer patients.

3:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, but there's an opportunity now for 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. member – you said something that sparked my attention. You said that health is going to be the number one issue in the world and here as well. Now, I would think that the economy would be the number one issue in the world because if we don't have a healthy economy, how are you going to pay for health and education? Could you answer that for me?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question. In fact, these issues are all intertwined. You're absolutely correct. Jobs are very important, and health is very – they are all intertwined. Health, education, and economic participation: these are the pillars of every society. When we have jobs, we've got to make sure that employees are healthy. But you know what? You could have healthy employees, but they have no jobs. Then they get unhealthy, and they get depressed. So we need it all.

I'd like to thank the hon. member. I'm a doctor, so I'm a little biased. I have to sort of put the health thing a little forward, but you're absolutely correct. Economy is also one of the number one issues.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. I enjoyed his presentation, and I listened with interest.

First off, I would like to request a copy of the document that he was referring to in his speech. I could see the title from here. I'm surprised. It was A Foundation for Alberta's Health System. It's a document I'm not familiar with, and I sure would appreciate one. I believe I'm going to get one, and I would like to say in advance thank you.

I would also like to ask the hon. member how he feels the activity-based funding formula that was referred to in question period earlier today will ensure that we do not see any more of the billion-dollar deficits that were recently racked up by Alberta Health Services. How will that exactly work?

Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for another opportunity to answer a good question. Really, the activity-based

formula in simplified terms – there are two ways of funding. One is global budget, which is: here's a lot of money with no performance and accountability measures. Activity-based is – I don't want to use the words "fee for service" because as a doctor I get paid a salary for one day; whether I see zero patients or a hundred patients, I get the same salary. Or another situation: I get paid only if I see patients; if I don't see anyone, I get nothing. Activity-based is really saying: "You know what? If you do X amount of operations, you get X amount of funding. The more you do, the more you get." It's really about performance and efficiency and outcomes, but it's not just simple activity-based based on how much you do. We have to look at quality as well, make sure you have high quality and high performance.

That's my understanding of activity-based funding. The person we really need to ask, the real expert in this, to be honest, is Dr. Duckett, who is the CEO of Alberta Health Services Board.

Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: In the time remaining, quickly, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member: will an activity-based system create competition between hospitals within Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for another good question. As I mentioned, health care is so superspecialized. We simply cannot provide every service in every hospital or every city or every province even. It's really not about competition. It's about: how can we get every hospital to perform the best that they possibly can?

I see a collaboration between the hospitals. I work at the Royal Alexandra hospital and the U of A hospital. There's no competition. If I have a patient that's suffering and they need specialized care at the U of A, my good friends at the U of A help us out. This is really about delivering good, efficient health care and less about competition. The only competition is how I performed yesterday in my own department. Can I perform better tomorrow in the same department?

But if you have two identical hospitals with two identical services, there is that opportunity for them to – I don't want to use the word "compete." I'd rather use the word "collaborate." But, yes, you can actually assess how one does against the other. Then with the one that doesn't do so well, the other hospital can actually coach them and teach them. We apply these standards and say: look, this is what we're doing better. "Collaboration" is a better word.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll begin, as so many members have, with acknowledging the fine work and the wonderful presence and sense of humour and, somehow, a magical combination of humility and pride that the Lieutenant Governor has had. He could always tell a joke and deliver it like nobody else could. I want to acknowledge the work he and his wife did over the last several years.

I'm going to focus in my response to the throne speech on health care since that's a theme this afternoon. The minister is here, and I appreciated the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'll try to take a little bit different approach here.

I do want to just spend a moment on how we got to where we are, from where I see it, with our health care system. I genuinely believe that up until 1993, for the period probably from about '85 to '92 or

'93, Alberta had perhaps the best health care system in the world, and we'd like to restore that. Amazingly, if you actually go back and crunch the numbers, costs were quite flat during that time. We got into a period of terrific upheaval from 1993 onward.

I notice there's a new deputy minister of health in the last couple of weeks. It's worth pointing out that he is – I have the list here – the 12th or 13th deputy minister since 1993. I have the list of all the names. That's just one symptom of how unstable that health care system has been. We've had regional health authorities come and go there, consolidation of boards and then further consolidations. Some were disbanded, and now we're down to one.

We've had really erratic funding. We went from among the highest in the country to the very lowest. We sat at way below the Canadian average from about 1995 to early into the last decade, 2000 and 2001 – I've been studying these numbers recently – and then it's just been a roller coaster ride since. That unstable funding keeps the whole system off of balance. It affects not just buildings – and we are desperately squeezed on the health care infrastructure front – but it also affects, more importantly, staffing. That instability continues to play out.

Many of us were at an AUMA breakfast this morning, and the mayor of Cold Lake, who I'd never met before, stood up and said, you know, as I recall the mayor this morning: "What's going on here? Two or three months ago Dr. Duckett was in our hospital essentially telling staff to leave or to get ready to leave." You know, 18 months ago we were on an aggressive recruiting campaign. Then we went into a hiring freeze. Now we're back into some kind of – well, we're not sure what we're back to, and that was the mayor's question this morning. He quite rightly pointed out that that instability is devastating to morale.

There are a lot of reasons that we are where we are with health care, and I think it's because, frankly, of 17 years of poor management and poor leadership. I can't put it any more bluntly than that. I hope that's come to an end.

I will say this to the minister and to all members, that with the increase of funding proposed in this budget, assuming that goes through, there will be no excuses for anything less than a health system that delivers and delivers on time and at high quality, that runs like a well-oiled Swiss watch. We do not need big increases after what we've seen in this budget; that's for sure.

I think we need to spend a minute on asking ourselves: why are costs soaring? I think one of the reasons, obviously, is the instability. That kind of up and down and up and down is simply inefficient. I also think that there are concerns around an overcentralization in Alberta Health Services. For all the purported savings that we hear the minister talk about, there are also indications that there are much larger problems. I think we want to consider returning to a model where the delivery itself is more decentralized.

3:20

Clearly, there's a role for a strong centre, but having the situation that we've gone through in the last year, where virtually all external recruitment has to be signed off by the CEO, doesn't make sense. This is an organization that has 90,000 employees. It's larger than the entire Canadian armed services. When you have one guy at the top insisting on signing off recruiting individual RNs from outside the system, this is not a way to run the system effectively. I have concerns with the overcentralization of service delivery.

That doesn't mean that consolidating IT, maybe payroll, and setting provincial standards isn't a good idea. I think it is. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? What I really want to dwell on is that I think there's more to what's happening to our health care system and what's driving health costs than just how we administer the system.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark alluded to some of these. He said – I liked his term – it's not that we need more health care; we need fewer patients. We need to ask ourselves: why are we getting those patients? And we do need to pay attention to the economics because one of the downsides well demonstrated in the health economics literature of fee for service and other incentives is that medicine is one of those things where doctors can create their own customers. They can actually start bringing people back, you know, "Well, come back in two weeks, and I'd better check you" or that sort of thing. So economic incentives in health care do not work like they work elsewhere, and we need to understand that.

But it goes way beyond that. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark hinted at some of it. In fact, he spoke directly to some of it: lifestyle issues; diet issues, which he mentioned; inactivity; even, frankly, an issue that I wish we spent more time on in this Legislature, which is highway safety. Do we actually – we used to do this; I don't know if we still do – look at what drives, sometimes literally, or what brings people into emergency rooms? It certainly used to be the case that highway safety and road safety accidents created a terribly heavy burden on our emergency systems. Alcohol abuse, drug abuse: all of those kinds of things. But we need to go beyond that even more. We need to look at issues around the environment.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I want to spend a couple of minutes on this. What I would have liked to have seen in the throne speech would have been some acknowledgement of the social conditions that create health problems. They are widespread. I would urge the minister of housing, for example, and the minister of health and other MLAs to think more broadly about health care. I was looking at Statistics Canada figures on Alberta's spending on issues like health and housing and justice, social services, things like that, and I saw that as Alberta's spending on health care was inching up and inching up and sometimes spiking up and dropping down but overall inching up, our spending on housing actually almost literally disappears off the graph. When you divide it through by population and so on, it almost disappears. I realized when I did the numbers – I think the minister of housing might want to take this to next year's budget debate – that a 2 per cent increase in health care would be a 50 per cent increase in spending on housing.

I ask myself: when we're spending so far below where we were 20 years ago on housing, is that really wise? How many people who are hard to house, who would benefit from a stronger social housing program actually end up in emergency rooms? Well, a lot of them do. They're on the street. They end up in crisis. The police are called in or an ambulance, and they're taken to the hospital. I think it would be worth a very serious look by the minister of housing to look at the connection between homelessness and health care use. Maybe we should look at a tiny shift in increments to the health budget going to housing and having a huge impact on housing and improving social conditions that way.

I also think we need to take a harder look at poverty. Again, looking at Statistics Canada figures over the last 20 years, Alberta went from above the Canadian average on spending on social services – it was hard to believe; I went over the numbers again and again, but in a single year, 1994, we fell to the bottom of the country when you compile all social service spending, and we've sat there ever since.

We need to understand that this is a factor in what's happening to our health system because good investment in social programs, Mr. Speaker, is going to help address some of the issues that cause health

problems. If we don't catch them early by addressing poverty, by addressing family violence, by addressing mental health issues that occur often in the home, by addressing addictions issues and other things, those people end up in our health care system. So I think we need to have a broader look at health care than just what happens in our health department.

We need to be looking at social services. An example that I raised repeatedly in this Legislature and finally gave up talking to the government members about was feeding hungry kids, kids who go to school every day. Today in Alberta several thousand children went to school hungry in this province through no fault of their own. You know what, folks? That becomes a health issue, if not in the short term then in the long term. It would be a lot smarter for us to understand that a little bit of investment in our kids and their diet isn't just about social justice, it isn't just about humanity, but it's about smart long-term health policy.

As we address those kinds of issues – housing, poverty, social services – we also address something that's actually turning up more and more in the progressive research into what's driving health costs. Amazingly, inequality itself begins to show up as a factor, a significant factor, in health problems. Over and over you can look at the distribution of wealth in various societies, and those that have the most unequal distribution of wealth typically have worse health outcomes than those that have fairly tight distribution of wealth.

You can take a country like Greece or Portugal. They are much poorer countries than the United States, but once you filter out all the other variables, what comes out over and over is that they have better health indicators than the United States because – and it's a bit hard to get your head around – inequality is actually less in countries like Greece and Portugal.

Inequality creates a stress on mental health and endorses almost a sense of blame on poverty. It reflects a society that stops trying to raise people out of poverty and begins heaping blame on them and telling them: it's your fault. That turns up over and over in the scientific literature as a contributor to health problems.

I'm going to run out of time here in a minute or so, Mr. Speaker, but I want to urge this Assembly to think more broadly about health. If we're going to get that health budget under control, then let's really, really search the issue that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark raised, which is: why are we having so many patients? If we really, really search that and really get serious about it, we will address issues around diet and exercise and lifestyles.

But we'll go beyond that. We'll get back to where we were from the 1950s to the early 1990s, which is having genuinely good housing programs for people who are hard to house. We'll get back to what would've been a simple issue of humanity 20 years ago, which is feeding hungry kids. We'll look at environmental issues. We'll understand that it is a legitimate role of government to try to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, not just because of the humanity, as I say, but because it's good for people's health and it will help us contain health issues.

If I had more time, Mr. Speaker, I'd speak briefly about the proud history that this province and this country have on those kinds of issues and how I'd like to see that history revisited.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview had started to talk about the history. Would you mind expanding on that?

Dr. Taft: I would be happy to expand on that.

An Hon. Member: Recognizing that there are other questions.

Dr. Taft: Okay. I will recognize your other questions.

Ever so briefly, Mr. Speaker. Back, actually way, way, way back before this government was in power, Social Credit, to their great credit, started a program called preventative social services, PSS, as it was known, in the later '60s. In I think the first term of this current party holding government, in the first half of the 1970s, that program was rolled into FCSS, which is still in place. For those who don't know – I'm sure everybody does – it's family and community support services. Now, that program has been hemmed in a bit. Both of those programs were in their origins quite visionary. They understood that health is about a lot more than just what goes on in a hospital. It's actually about strong communities. It's about supporting families. It's about giving kids a place to play and just helping them have fun.

I will ever so briefly mention a few other things. Canada in the '70s was truly a global pioneer on issues around a broader perspective on health. There was a very important book brought out in the mid-70s called a New Perspective on the Health of Canadians, which understood – we're still debating these issues – that health was about a lot more. Our housing programs, starting from the '50s through until about 20 years ago or so, were fantastic, and there are still thousands of people in Alberta living in affordable housing that was built 40 and 50 years ago. I could go on about that.

I'm just saying that all of this was possible. We used to be able to do it. Let's do it again, and that'll help us contain our health spending.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to address one particular issue that the hon. member made with respect to what I believe he called the overcentralization of health services in Alberta, or words to that effect. My point to the hon. member is this. I'm wondering whether or not he agrees with comments made by the Auditor General of Alberta that prior to establishing one provincial Health Services Board, we basically had nine rather different health systems in Alberta. In fact, the Auditor General, as I recall, went on to say that there was a lot of differentiation among these nine regions. I just wonder if the hon. member would agree with the Auditor General's observations.

Dr. Taft: I do, actually, but I think the solution was somewhat different. What I would have liked to have seen would be actually a bulking up of the muscle in the Department of Health and Wellness. That department was basically cut in half by the predecessor in 1993-94. That department used to be able to set standards on everything from infection control to long-term care, and they used to have consultants that would go around to all the different facilities and enforce them. Now, that was not a perfect system, but what I felt happened when this centre was chopped in half: all that expertise was gone, and it was pushed out into these regions, which became empires.

What I'd like to see would actually be a stronger central department setting standards and enforcing them and decentralized delivery.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of things that I picked up while the member was speaking. One thing, just a reference to poor management in our health care system. I'm not sure that comment is entirely fair to our health care administrators in this province. I think he would agree that health costs are soaring because of increasing skill levels and training, equipment, technology, drugs, all the things we can do today that we weren't able to do that we still fund through a public system.

A couple of other things. He touched on feeding hungry kids and some huge societal issues, which certainly need to be tackled a piece at a time in Alberta, but they exist pretty much all over the world. Quickly, though, he talked about unequal distribution of wealth, and I'm just wondering what his vision would be to redistribute wealth here in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: I have to recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to have the opportunity to address this Chamber and express my support for the plan for Alberta set forth by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor in his Speech from the Throne on February 4. Let me just say what a wonderful privilege it's been the last two years to serve with our Lieutenant Governor, Norman Kwong, and his wife, Mary. They've been truly an inspiration to us all, and it's been an absolute pleasure for me to get to know Mr. and Mrs. Kwong.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said that true character shows itself during times of adversity and that the measure of a person's character is how we react to the most difficult situations in life. This past year more than any in recent memory has challenged not only Alberta but the entire world. The province's resource-based economy has been dealt a staggering blow by the global economic downturn. Many Albertans have felt this blow and seen a decline in their quality of life. I believe the plan outlined by the Speech from the Throne shows the government's character and proves that the principles and priorities identified by the Premier over the past two years are guiding Alberta into a bright future.

This plan will meet the needs of Albertans by balancing strategic investment in infrastructure with sound fiscal management. Investment in infrastructure will continue to create jobs and provide necessary improvements for Albertans, while careful spending and saving will ensure that this province continues to enjoy the lowest taxes in Canada and remains one of the world's most attractive business environments.

Careful spending requires careful prioritization, and I believe the government has achieved that. A perfect example has been the commitment to reforming our health care system to deliver the best services while managing costs that threaten to spiral out of control in the coming years. While many of these reforms will come from within the health care system itself, Mr. Speaker, I'm also encouraged by this government's commitment to consulting with Albertans on the future of health care. My constituency office conducted a series of focus groups with Lethbridge seniors last year. This focus group showed that health care was their number one concern. I know they will also be glad to know they've had the opportunity to have a say in this matter.

In Lethbridge we have already seen a number of success stories in health care. The Chinook regional hospital, for example, has the lowest emergency room wait times in the province, according to a recent survey. Wait times were also drastically reduced for colonoscopies thanks to a partnership between the CHR and the Coaldale health centre.

Despite what many critics would have Albertans believe, our health care system is working and will only get better as we move forward with changes to increase efficiencies and reduce unnecessary costs. The five-year funding plan will go a long way to achieving that goal, especially in addressing much-needed capital projects and allowing for long-term planning. I urge my constituents and all Albertans to take an active role in understanding and contributing to the changes that will create a world-class, economically sustainable health care system for themselves and generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I was also encouraged to see this government's approach to maintaining safe and caring communities. The creation of 100 new positions for police officers will not only bolster public safety throughout the province but will also create a hundred jobs. I'm sure many of those jobs will go to graduates of the Lethbridge College criminal justice program and that those people will make outstanding police officers.

The Premier's 10-year plan to end homelessness has also been embraced in my hometown. Lethbridge's Social Housing in Action committee has been working tirelessly to address homelessness in the city. In addition to many other projects, the committee also created Project Homeless Connect, an event that saw hundreds of people receive food, clothing, toiletries, and even haircuts. The event also connected people to various agencies around the city that are dedicated to helping the homeless such as JobLinks, Wood's Homes, and the Lethbridge Legal Guidance Society. Mr. Speaker, I believe a balanced society is a successful society and that spending on social programs must be balanced with support for the entrepreneurial spirit that built Alberta's economy into one of the strongest in the world.

3:40

As a businessman for over 30 years I was excited to see the government's commitment to maintaining this province's reputation as a smart place to do business. By reducing red tape and removing hurdles, we will attract new companies to Alberta and encourage existing companies to grow. Last night I had the privilege of attending *Venture's* fast-50, which are the fastest growing 50 companies in Alberta. Let me tell you: what an exciting and charged room to be in, with entrepreneurs from across this province that are working and working hard to keep our economy going. Yes, many success stories, Mr. Speaker.

Lethbridge is known far and wide as the agricultural hub of southern Alberta, and food production and processing are an integral part of our city's economy. At the same time, there's a huge potential to grow the city's industrial base. Economic Development has been working hard to position our city as a prime spot for new business, particularly light industry and other major employers. In fact, the team was honoured by the Economic Developers' Association of Canada with an award recognizing its collaborative business promotion. Let me just say that I was at an announcement last week where the federal government as well as the private sector committed significant dollars, and we now have a brand new business incubator in Lethbridge that will provide opportunities to bring to market many of the wonderful technologies being created in Alberta at our universities and colleges.

Mr. Speaker, this dovetails nicely with a recent move by the city and the county of Lethbridge that landed former WestJet executive John Hamilton as the new director of the airport enhancement and marketing initiative at Lethbridge County Airport. Mr. Hamilton's job will be to attract new air carriers to help create more competitive local markets for airfares.

Mr. Speaker, education goes hand in hand with growing the economy, particularly in these changing times. As the new parliamentary assistant to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology I look forward to helping implement the government's new vision for education. Alberta will need a variety of people in the coming years to help us grow and develop to our fullest potential. This will include highly skilled workers, innovative researchers, and forward-thinking entrepreneurs. Lethbridge will be a key source of these future leaders thanks to our two world-class postsecondary institutions. The University of Lethbridge has grown from the little school on the prairie to one of Canada's top undergraduate institutions and is also recognized as one of the best, if not the best, neuroscience research schools in the world. Thanks to the \$20 million Polaris grant from the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research the U of L added Dr. Bruce McNaughton to this already impressive lineup of neuroscience researchers last year.

Lethbridge College is also a world leader in a field that dovetails perfectly with this government's focus on ensuring positive environmental outcomes. The college's wind turbine technician program, one of only a handful in the world, won the 2009 program excellence award from the association of community colleges. The program attracts students from all over the world and produces graduates with unique skills that are in global demand.

On the subject of the environment, Mr. Speaker, I am impressed with this government's continued commitment to reducing the environmental impact of Alberta's energy sector, particularly in the oil sands. I had the opportunity a few months ago to see the oil sands projects in person, and I was very impressed by some of the new technologies like SAGD that will help transform this method of oil extraction in the years to come. I am confident that the collaborative approach to reducing Alberta's carbon footprint outlined in His Honour's speech will allow our energy sector to continue to thrive and Alberta along with it.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne shows that this government is already moving forward with the business of serving Albertans. By finding the right balance between social and fiscal responsibility, we have laid out a map for the future that is not only affordable and sustainable but caring as well. Albertans deserve a government that meets their needs without picking their pockets, a government that understands the importance of both a thriving economy and a network of social programs that ensures that no Albertan gets left behind. I'm proud to be a member of that government. I will continue to represent Lethbridge-West and help this government achieve its goals in the coming session of the Legislature. Now more than ever I believe that when all Albertans work together towards a common goal, there is nothing we can't accomplish.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for his rather impassioned speech. The member commented on some of the housing and homelessness initiatives that this province is undergoing. I'm wondering if he knows offhand how many people every month we helped out through rent support programs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I'm not an expert at this, I've heard numbers in the area of 80,000 people that

we've been able to help through this program in Alberta. I think it's wonderful that we can help Albertans that need it. I know that every day in Lethbridge we hear where this has been successful. It's helped needy families and single parents, so it's a great program.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member want to join the five minutes?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the throne speech debate this afternoon, and it was certainly interesting to listen to the comments from hon. members from across the province. I, too, would like to express my gratitude to His Honour Norman Kwong for his service to this Assembly and, certainly, to the province. He and his wife have done a very, very good job of representing Her Majesty in this province, and we can only thank him now and wish him and his family all the best and good luck in the future.

Certainly, I remember with fondness and admiration some of the efforts that His Honour has made in our constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, in particular. He was gracious and very welcoming to each and every constituent who in 2005 received a centennial medal. He and his wife went out of their way at a reception we hosted to make everyone – everyone – who was awarded a medal feel like the moment was memorable and to be cherished. I really appreciated that, and I appreciated his time. He agreed to come to our constituency, and I and our constituents will never forget it.

He also agreed at one point to attend a banquet for young football players. They will never forget that evening with His Honour. He went around to each one of those individual players and made them feel very, very special. After he had left, I asked them if they had any comments, and as high school students would say: he was very small, but he must have been very quick. He was absolutely quick on the athletic field, and he was quick in this Assembly with his humour. With that, again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish His Honour and his family good health and good luck in the future and thank them for their outstanding service to our province.

Now, when we look at the throne speech that His Honour delivered last week and we listen to the comments from various speakers, it's almost like we're living in two different worlds. When we look at what has happened in this province and across the world since the last throne speech to now, it is an incredible story, and it's unfolding as we speak. Economic conditions have changed. Prices have changed for our resource-based economy. That, of course, has had quite an impact on the budget of this province.

3:50

Before I get to the budget and where we're spending our money, I would like to get on the record and thank the hon. minister of health for his report that was initiated by the advisory committee on health. We had seen that, but the Internet version, I believe, starts on page 8, and that front page bold title is one that I had not seen before. Yes, we have had a look at this, and we've had a look on this side of the House at other health care reports. It's not this report, I believe, that's guiding the government in their health care changes. I think it's that Vision 2020 document or the old third-way document with the green Granny Smith apple. I guess all Granny Smith apples are green. It is that document that is guiding this government's latest policy initiative with Alberta Health Services. We know, getting back to the budget, Mr. Speaker, how that has worked out.

We are looking at an organization that's been created and, certainly, controlled by this government, Alberta Health Services. It's a large organization, and it's also governed by a large board that meets in public routinely for 35 or 40 minutes monthly. That's it. The information that's provided publicly by them regarding their deliberations is limited; it's restricted. Who knows what they discuss, because so little is discussed in public, but the public is expected to foot the bill.

Now, I had a look at some of the limited information that was available on December 3, 2009, and there is a breakdown here of the accumulated deficit of the health board, the operating deficit, the accumulated deficit. Taxpayers would certainly be interested to know that for the year to date the accumulated deficit for Alberta Health Services was \$682 million, the operating deficit was \$301 million, and it was anticipated that the accumulated deficit for the year ended March 31 would be \$1.2 billion. We see this week that the government in the third-quarter update paid off the \$342 million deficit for the year ended March 31, 2009, and a substantial payment on the accumulated deficit for this year.

It is amazing. This is an organization that was set up without any internal or external cost-benefit analysis to see if it would control costs, improve service. Nothing was done. It was just this sweeping change: fire the nine regional health authorities that existed, create this one superboard, and we were going to see an improved system. Well, we know exactly what has happened with the system, and we know exactly what has happened to the deficits that have been racked up.

The Auditor General was mentioned by the minister of health, and certainly that was an interesting exchange between the minister of health and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, but we also have to remember, I would like to point out, that the Auditor General last fall gave this Assembly and the government clear directions and guidelines on what needed to be done in order to make Alberta Health Services accountable. But I'm not so sure that those measures have been introduced, and I'm not so sure that the government is willing to enforce them. Certainly, they should be introduced and enforced before these large amounts of money are provided to Alberta Health Services above and beyond what they have received in the past. There have clearly been mistakes made, and this government is responsible for those mistakes.

Now, before session started, Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to attend a number of public meetings where taxpayers were very, very concerned about the direction this government was going with public health care. I attended a meeting down in the south part of the city. I attended a couple of meetings in the central part of the city. One issue that certainly caught the attention of taxpayers of this province was how this government was treating those who, unfortunately, have a mental illness and how Alberta Hospital was no longer needed or necessary to provide assistance and care for individuals who have or were suffering from a mental illness. Suddenly, community care was the answer.

There didn't seem to be any direction from the government other than: "Alberta Hospital. We don't need it. We're going to close it down. We're going to move people here, and we're going to move them there." Citizens – and they were right – questioned the government on this. They were not convinced that this was the right direction to go in. I must say that I admire the response from a lot of members of this Assembly, including government members, who said: hold on; maybe we're not doing the right thing. That decision was reversed.

When we look at what this government is now going to do, I would urge all members of this Assembly to over the long weekend have a look at the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, October

2008. The Auditor has some very, very good suggestions for each and every one of us regarding Alberta's mental health service delivery systems. The Auditor, who as you all know is retiring, Mr. Dunn, had some very, very good suggestions for us here and some specific directions which I think we should read and consider before we make any more policy changes to not only Alberta Hospital but to the whole mental health care system. I'm sure each and every member of this Assembly wishes Mr. Dunn and his family the very best in all their future endeavours, but I would urge all members to again have a look at his recommendations. They're only a year and a half old, and they've been lost somehow in the public debate about how we should deliver mental health services in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot in this throne speech, but one of the points that I would like to make in the time that I have is that the fiscal advantage that this government is talking about, the stability fund, was a fine idea from the Alberta Liberals. I don't know where this government would have been, what kind of lifeline they would have thrown if they hadn't adopted this idea from our policy platform, but fortunately they did, and fortunately we have set aside money.

Dr. Taft: Thank goodness for the Alberta Liberals.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank goodness for the Alberta Liberal Party and its good policies.

We have to be careful with the introduction of these Alberta capital bonds. It seems very good. Why not borrow money to build seniors' housing? But I would remind, particularly, the minister of – he's no longer Infrastructure. That's just stuck in my mind. You were a good Infrastructure minister, I guess.

4:00

Now, the capital bonds. This is a public relations exercise by this government to convince taxpayers of this province that debt is good. When we look at the fiscal plan, we can see on page 83 that we have already borrowed significant amounts of money for capital purposes, billions of dollars. And two pages away is another little pool of cash: it's over \$4 billion for the 3P projects. We forget that we're making this yearly payment on the schools and on the roads that are being constructed in the 3P manner, but over the long period of time we owe – it's called an obligation, and an obligation is a debt. We have already racked up close to \$7 billion in debt. That's something that we cannot forget.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I was just gripped by the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. As he was talking about the bonds, I just happened to be reading the Alberta heritage savings trust fund business plan for 2010-13. I noticed in appendix B, page 8, the glossary defines "bond." This is the heritage fund document. "A bond is a financial instrument representing a debt." It goes on from there. I was wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is concerned that the debt of the Alberta government is actually growing.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I am concerned that the debt is growing. These are the numbers. It's \$7 billion. When we look at how rapidly the sustainability fund is being depleted and

we look at the projections that they have made in the budget for energy prices, I am very concerned, hon. member, that this level of spending is not sustainable. There have been many people, including people in this caucus and in other caucuses, who have suggested that perhaps we should stretch out our capital spending over a longer period of time. The Premier used the same statistics in the House the other day as he did in his Christmas speech, that was paid for, again, by the taxpayers, not his party, and that bill was \$66,000 to be precise, Mr. Speaker – \$66,000 for that speech.

However, when you consider that there are considerable savings because contractors have had to sharpen their pencils, I think it's a very good idea to stretch out the expenditure, the \$7 billion expenditure that is pegged for capital projects, over a longer period of time. I think we can save a lot of money and get a lot of projects done with the same amount of money.

In conclusion, I would remind all hon. members to have a look at the deferred projects from the fiscal year 2008-09 that the government has rolled over in their capital plan. This is last year's money that has been deferred. So if we could defer it in a previous fiscal year, there's no reason in the world why we couldn't do it now and make sure we get maximum use of the tax dollars that are allocated.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have just under two minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. member exactly what his understanding of the Alberta sustainability fund is – what its purpose is, how it's used – so that we can get a better understanding and a balanced feel and information for the constituents that he represents as to what this fund is all about and how it serves Albertans.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. For the hon. member, a history lesson. It was first discussed by the hon. Ken Nicol, who was the former Member for Lethbridge-East, a very distinguished member of our caucus and an economist. He promoted this idea. The government adopted it. It's a very, very good idea to stabilize government revenues whenever the price of oil and gas spikes. However, this government, I'm very disappointed to realize, is using it as nothing more than an election slush fund. It has turned into a re-election slush fund for the Progressive Conservative Party, and they're bound and determined to spend it all before the next election.

The Deputy Speaker: Other hon. members?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour for me to stand to respond to the Speech from the Throne. Before I get into details of the speech, I want to take this opportunity to recognize the amazing contribution of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, and the contribution that he has made to the province not just recently in his role as Lieutenant Governor but as an example to all Albertans about hard work, drive, humour, his caring attitude towards the people of Alberta, and the amazing contributions he and his wife have made. I think it's a lasting legacy that we will be able to look back on and see what actually can be achieved and what amazing, wonderful people a province like Alberta produces and can foster the growth of.

The Lieutenant Governor, of course, in the Speech from the Throne mentioned that much has changed in Alberta. He also said that much has changed in our world, and I believe that the Speech from the Throne represents much of the response that was necessary to that change that we've seen.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak first of all about Alberta's fiscal advantage. I'd like to speak about the amazing steps that have been taken forward with the \$50 billion improvement to Alberta's financial situation that has taken place. I think it's important to note the \$23 billion of debt that was taken care of by good fiscal management. I think the huge investment in Alberta's infrastructure that makes it the envy of the rest of our nation is important to mention.

I think most importantly of the foresight – and I wish that I could take credit for it, but I wasn't here when the decision was made – of the Members of this Legislative Assembly in establishing the \$17 billion sustainability fund. At a time when many other jurisdictions, provinces and territories, in our nation were accumulating debt and not making the tough decisions that this province did, we set aside money in Alberta for a situation that no one could have predicted. Of course, that's the economic correction, I'm going to call it, that's taken place in the world. That economic correction has made us all very aware that not only is it important to plan – and that \$17 billion shows the importance to plan – but it's also important to get value for the money that we spend on behalf of Alberta taxpayers.

The history of our province is rich, indeed. As we look at the Speech from the Throne this year, we see some of the advantages that we are able to bring Albertans because of that good planning. I don't think that it would be correct to say that without talking about the very hard work, dedication, and sacrifices that Albertans have made for us to be in the situation that we're in today.

4:10

I'd like to speak about a few of the specifics addressed in the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Speaker, if you'll forgive me, I'm going to make reference a bit to my family's history in this province and how I feel that it connects to what's taking place.

I want to talk a little bit about health care. This year my family will celebrate the centennial for our farm, 100 years. It's with a huge sense of pride that I look back on that hundred years and what's taken place that's allowed me to be standing here before you today. I think about my grandfather, and I wanted to talk about the health care. I have three grandchildren now, the sixth generation in Alberta. My family's history goes back, Mr. Speaker, to the days of the homesteader, obviously. I think about my grandfather, and I think about a health care system that was in place when I was a teenager, which isn't, of course, that long ago. I was a teenager when I lost my grandfather, but I think about the changes that have taken place, and I think about health care in particular because my grandfather was a very important person in my life.

I went and visited him in the seniors' care that was available at that time. I'm talking back in '63, which if I say I was a teenager, it will give you an idea of just what's happened since then. When I went and visited my grandfather, what had happened was that he retired from a very hard life on the farm and came into the city to enjoy his retirement. He had a fall on a slippery sidewalk – there were no sidewalks where he was from, so it was a new situation – and he broke his hip. When he broke his hip, my grandfather literally laid in the extended care that was available to us at that time because there were no hip replacements, and he passed away because of the immobility.

When I fast-forward to today and I see people that get hip replacements, knee replacements, I see the amazing things that are available to them, and I realize that we are so blessed because we

have members of our families that are with us well into their 80s or 90s that not that long ago wouldn't have been there for us at all. I think about the health care plan and the improvements that we're talking about in this province, Mr. Speaker, and it's important to point out that no one in our entire nation spends more per capita on health care than we do in Alberta. Albertans are truly blessed because of that.

So where do we find the efficiencies? First of all, in the Speech from the Throne, talking about the improvements that we've made, our commitment now to a five-year funding plan and improvements that can happen is something that I'm extremely proud of because when we look back, we think: how could we possibly improve on something that's gone this well? But we always seem to come up with improvements, and we have a lot of dedicated people out there that are doing it.

I think about some statements of one of my colleagues that spoke earlier, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I think about one of the things that that hon. member said in a speech to a group of people that I'd asked him to come and talk to. His comment really struck home with me when he said: one of our problems is that we have too many healthy people in our hospitals. That's absolutely true. As we move forward and create the spaces that have been referred to, these healthy people in our hospitals are going to be in more appropriate care. People questioned our commitment on the bond issue that, Mr. Speaker, I must point out, is going to triple the number of seniors' residences, seniors' care opportunities from what we would have otherwise been able to do, which makes us a leader in the entire nation once more.

I'm very proud of what we're doing, and I'm very supportive of our way forward. Our building safe and caring communities: people, of course, of this province are blessed in the wonderful communities that they're in, but that doesn't mean that we can't improve it. The direction that we're taking as a government and moving forward with will definitely make the lives of Albertans safer. They'll have a richer experience where they live. They'll be able to enjoy their friends and families far more than they would've before.

I want to also just mention, of course, where we're going with our competitive position in a global economy. As Albertans we are in a new world along with everyone else. We are going to need to be more competitive than we've ever been before. If there's a downside to what we produce in Alberta, it's that the quality of what we produce is so much higher than it is in other places; we have to be a little more selective in the markets that we look for.

I think about this economic downturn that's taken place and the correction that's taking place. We find ourselves as Albertans producing T-bone steaks in a hamburger market, Mr. Speaker. But there are still a lot of people out there in the world that want the T-bone steak. We see the growing economies of China and India. I see the actions that we're taking in agriculture, as an example, to grow those markets and to move into them and to find that customer that suits the things we produce. Nowhere in the world is anyone better positioned for this global recovery than we are in Alberta.

There are two things that the world needs as we move forward. The first one is that energy is going to be required to fuel that recovery. We are best positioned in the entire world to provide that energy that's going to be required and to do it in a responsible and predictable and safe manner for those people that are going to need that. The next is that as that recovery takes place, the agriculture sector, which is our number two industry in this province but our largest renewable resource industry, is there to feed them and give them the things that they need.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that as the recovery takes place, we are going to recover more quickly than others. People are already investing in our province and always have invested in our province because they can come here and enjoy the lowest tax rate in the entire nation, which produces the highest income. I might point out that Albertans' average income is the highest in the entire nation. There are amazing opportunities. I see that so many people, all three of them, appreciated that comment.

Mr. Speaker, in this global economy that we're going into, we are in the best position that there is available. I'm so pleased to be a part of that. I'm so pleased that the Speech from the Throne is going to take us forward in that new direction. People from the world will continue to invest. We continue to see our province growing at approximately the size of Red Deer. Those people that are coming here every year are not coming here to suffer with the rest of us. They are coming here to enjoy the benefits that this province has for them, the opportunities for growth, and the amazing bright future that we have.

Just for a moment I would like to speak about the clean energy future of our province and talk about a couple of initiatives. One of the hon. members mentioned infrastructure and some of the things that are happening in the province. How does that relate to clean energy? We are a world leader. In this province our provincial buildings, the ones that we support and the ones that we have directly, number approximately 1,500 buildings. Ninety per cent of the power in those building is produced by green energy, Mr. Speaker, wind energy and biomass. We are absolutely a leader. We have the most pristine environment that you can imagine and could find anywhere. While we're criticized in certain areas, Alberta is known around the world for its pristine environment, its beautiful vistas, its amazing recreational opportunities, and its healthy, clean, and safe food. These are things that we can be very proud of.

We have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to the rest of our nation to carry on forward as we have. As indicated in the Speech from the Throne, we are the engine of the Canadian economy. Fifty per cent of the activity on Bay Street in Toronto, in the banking industry, is funded out of the industries of Alberta. Our entire nation depends on us. This Speech from the Throne sets our way forward, and we will be able to not only benefit Albertans by these actions, but we'll be able to benefit all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the direction that's been taken. I'm very confident that what has been taken forward in the Speech from the Throne, the direction that this government is going, is going to pay huge benefits to the Albertans that live here. I'm so proud that the sixth generation of my family is here, and I hope that many generations beyond enjoy the benefits that will be incurred because of the good planning that has taken place in the past and that is taking place now as directed through this Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 16, to be precise.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:20 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to February 11, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

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- 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)**
First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)
- 2 Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)**
First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)
- 3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, February 16, 2010

Issue 6

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Egmont, (PC),
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs,
Deputy Government House Leader
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC),
Deputy Government Whip
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC),
Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (WA),
WA Opposition Whip
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),
Minister of Municipal Affairs
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
Groeneveld, George, Highwood (PC)
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
Minister of Education, Political Minister for Edmonton, Government
House Leader
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Hinman, Paul, Calgary-Glenmore (WA),
WA Opposition Deputy Leader
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Seniors and Community Supports
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology,
Minister Liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Treasury Board
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),
Minister of Service Alberta
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),
Minister of Energy
Lindsay, Fred, Stony Plain (PC)
Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Minister of Employment and Immigration
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Leader of the ND Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
ND Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
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Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for
Calgary, Deputy Government House Leader
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology
Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 16, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Hon. members, today Mrs. Judith Garcia will lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Mrs. Garcia is a talented artist in voice, piano, ballet, and flamenco dance and resides in Westlock. Mrs. Garcia won 26 awards, a world record, at the 2008 World Championships of Performing Arts held in Hollywood, California. I would ask all present to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, madam. [applause]
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mrs. Linda Kroetsch. In March 2009 Linda volunteered to have her head shaved and donated her hair to Locks of Love, which is a nonprofit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children under age 21 suffering from long-term medical hair loss from any diagnosis. The community responded, and Linda raised over \$7,000 for the Stollery foundation and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Linda was crowned Jarvie queen in August 2009 for her dedication to the community and her efforts toward this worthy cause. She is accompanied this afternoon by her husband, Mel Kroetsch; her daughter Gloria Byer; her brother and sister-in-law Carl and Audrey Byer; and her friend Cathy Hemmings. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. Today it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some people from my ministry, Housing and Urban Affairs, people who all have been instrumental in forwarding our province's agenda to increase affordable housing and end homelessness within 10 years, which, I may add, is the only province in Canada to push this goal. Today we have with us the deputy minister of my ministry, Ms

Marcia Nelson. I'd ask that you please stand as I read your name. Ms Nelson is joined in the members' gallery by her executive team: Mr. Robin Wigston, the assistant deputy minister, homeless support and land development; Mr. Mike Leathwood, assistant deputy minister, housing development and operations; Ms Barb Korol, director of communications; Mr. Arthur Arruda, executive director, strategic corporate services; Ms Line Porfon, executive director, policy and urban affairs; and Ms Sandra Kraatz, director of human resource services. Mr. Speaker, all of these people give me perspective as I carry out my duties in this ministry. I would ask all members to please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of my family, coming all the way from Cardston, Alberta. Today we have visiting with us my daughter Jolene; her husband, Jeff Strang; and three of their children: Ashlyn, Dylan, and Camden. They're accompanied also by my lovely wife, Linda. I'm pleased to have them here today. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm response of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two people: my very good friend and constituent, the executive director of Homeward Trust, Ms Susan McGee, and Mr. Ed Lavallee, who is an elder for the Bissell Centre. Ed, I'd like to add, has also recently won a ROOPH award for outstanding contribution to members of the aboriginal community. Now that they're both standing, I'd ask you all to please give them the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a good friend, Mr. Preetam Sharma, president of the Council of India Societies of Edmonton. I will be doing a member's statement this afternoon to recognize his contribution to the Republic Day of India, which was celebrated this past Sunday at the Jubilee Auditorium. At this time I would ask Mr. Preetam Sharma to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two Red Cross representatives, Nancy Beasley Hosker and Jackie Specken. Nancy is the provincial manager, communications and strategic relations, for the Red Cross, and Jackie is the central and northern Alberta regional council president. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. We thank them for joining us today.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly approximately 50 very bright young students from

Donnan elementary school in my constituency. Besides the great visit they're having today, they also had the pleasure of meeting the great-grandchild-in-law of Mr. John Donnan, after whom the school is named. I would ask them along with their group leaders, Fiona White, Larry Goodwin, and Bernice Abraham, to please rise and receive the wonderful applause of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's always a thrill to introduce students who come to visit the Legislature. Today it's my pleasure to introduce 26 students. They're in grade 6, and they're at Malmo elementary school in Edmonton-Riverview. They're participating for a week in the School at the Legislature program, and I hope that some day some of them might even become MLAs and sit on the floor of the Assembly. Today they're accompanied by their teacher, Samia Sassi, and parent helpers. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and ask all MLAs to give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

1:40

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Jim Gurnett, who is the new chief of staff for the NDP caucus. Jim is no stranger to the provincial Legislature. He was elected in the 1985 by-election to represent the people of Spirit River-Fairview. He was named as one of Alberta's 50 most influential people by *Alberta Venture* magazine in 2007 and has a long history of community activism. He recently completed a lengthy term as executive director of the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. Jim's work has been recognized by numerous organizations including the University of Alberta with a distinguished alumni award, by MacEwan University with an honorary diploma in community studies, and by the Edmonton Social Planning Council with its social justice advocacy award. We are very pleased to have Jim as part of our team. Jim is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

ROOPH Awards

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 2 I attended the fifth annual recognizing outstanding organizations and people in housing awards, also known as the ROOPH awards, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. The keynote speaker, Mr. Iain De Jong, said, and I quote:

As a nation, if we are going to make the shift from managing homelessness to ending homelessness, we need to look to Alberta for leadership and proof about what works. Yes, there are pockets of innovation and commitment elsewhere in this great country of ours, but no other province is showing the kind of aligned leadership between the province and the cities. Indeed, as the late Peter Drucker told us, there is a difference between management and leadership. Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.

The awards celebration, which was hosted by Edmonton Home-ward Trust, highlighted the success stories within the housing and

relative support services sectors and demonstrated what can be achieved when the community works together. The 2010 ROOPH award recipients were Mr. Jim Gurnett for the Larry Shaben award for outstanding service in the housing sector; the city of Edmonton Youth Council homelessness subcommittee for partnerships for success; HIP Architects received the excellence in building design for Immigration Hall; Direct Energy, the Edmonton office, received the exceptional volunteerism in housing award; and the gentleman I introduced earlier, my honoured friend Mr. Ed Lavallee, received the outstanding service for the aboriginal community award.

I would like to congratulate all of the 2010 recipients. They have truly demonstrated their commitment to helping Edmonton's most vulnerable. I am confident that this government will continue to work with these community-based organizations to put an end to homelessness and to ensure that affordable housing is available to all in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

India Republic Day

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday, February 14, I was honoured to join several of my MLA colleagues and thousands of Indo-Canadians at the Jubilee Auditorium in celebration of the Republic Day of India. The Republic Day of India, which is recognized internationally on January 26, is a day that we pay homage to the historic events that led to the Constitution of India officially becoming India's governing document 60 years ago. Sunday's event was hosted by the Council of India Societies of Edmonton, whose organizers I introduced earlier. I'm very happy to say that the event was extremely well attended by the Indo-Canadian community of Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, the Council of India Societies of Edmonton is an umbrella organization that is comprised of membership from every single state in India. The organization exists to provide services to the community in many ways. A few examples include settlement of immigrants, safeguarding the welfare of senior citizens, counselling for vulnerable groups such as abused women, assistance to Indian students in Edmonton, and much more. I would like to take this time to thank the Council of India Societies of Edmonton and its president, Mr. Preetam Sharma, for providing a valuable service to both the city of Edmonton and the Indo-Canadian community of Alberta.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues in the Legislature for joining me in congratulating 90,000 Albertans of Indo-Canadian origin and over 1.3 billion people of Indian descent world-wide on the 60th Republic Day of India.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

School Closures

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Edmonton public school board voted to start the debate on the closure process for at least five public schools in central Edmonton. No community should lose its public school so another community somewhere else can have a school built. Next year the government plans to open 18 public schools across the province at a cost of over \$1 billion over 30 years. Nine of these schools will be located in communities recently developed here in Edmonton. Because of the provincial school utilization rate these new schools force the Edmonton public school board to close older schools in mature

neighbourhoods. This provincial government formula discriminates against older schools in mature, established neighbourhoods.

Since 2002 the Edmonton public school board has closed 15 schools in central Edmonton. These closures have resulted in the elimination of over 6,500 student spaces. The Edmonton public school board plans to close at least another 5,000 student spaces if they get their way. According to the Edmonton public schools student enrolment is going down, way down. Meanwhile, this government's 20-year strategic capital plan projects that in four years there will be more students in the system than we've ever had before. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they're projecting 80,000 additional students.

Which projection are parents and taxpayers to believe? Until we find out the truth, we should stop the closure process in Edmonton and any other community that's affected by it. If the city of Edmonton increases population density in the central neighbourhoods as planned, we will need the student spaces now being considered for closure.

I urge the province, the city of Edmonton, and the Edmonton public school board to sit down, to work together, and to plan once and for all for the future. No neighbourhood should lose its school so that another one can have one.

Thank you.

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

Municipal Climate Change Action Centre

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Using less energy means spending less money, no matter if you're running a city, a company, or a household. Energy efficiency is also a win for the environment as much as it is for the pocketbook, which is why it is an important plank in our government's climate change strategy.

During extensive consultations with Albertans leading up to the strategy, we heard from many stakeholders. One of these groups was municipalities. Local leaders told us that they wanted to assist with addressing the issue of climate change by being more energy efficient but that they needed our help. Mr. Speaker, this is why over the past two years Alberta Environment has worked with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties to create a Municipal Climate Change Action Centre for their members.

Last Thursday the Minister of Environment announced funding of \$2 million over three years from the government of Alberta to support this initiative. This centre will help the cities, towns, villages, and municipalities of Alberta reach further out towards a cleaner energy future, and it will build on the tremendous climate change leadership being shown at a local level across the province. What this means is that if municipalities need advice on what climate change policies can have the most impact, they'll get it; if municipalities need to know what could happen to their community in a changing climate, they'll find out; and if municipalities want to improve their operations and save money by being more energy efficient, they'll be helped.

I want to thank the two municipal organizations for their vision and willingness to work with the province to make it happen. I look forward to seeing the results of this partnership that delivers on one of Alberta's climate change commitments.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Sustainability Fund

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta spends more than it makes in stable and reliable revenue. What we're using to fix that gap is the rapidly shrinking sustainability fund. At some point this government will have to increase its revenue or lower its spending. Every new finance minister seems to see the problem clearly, but none actually do anything about it. To the Premier. I'll ask again: what is this Premier doing to fix our problem of spending more than we collect through stable revenue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are not spending money we don't have. We have a large sustainability fund that we are using to cushion the blow to our revenue stream. It's in the amount of about \$17 billion. We also have an additional savings fund, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, which is a separate fund, and that fund is there for our grandkids and our grandkids' grandkids. So, again, two funds. We've put the savings in place just to deal with dropping revenues like we've seen lately.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Last August the finance minister said that this government would not allow the sustainability fund to be drained, yet that's exactly what's happening now. Where will the government find the money to balance the books when the sustainability fund is gone?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are using the sustainability fund to cushion the blow to our revenues. We want to be back in the black by 2012-13, and we will be. We will be replenishing the sustainability fund for, again, sometime in the future that we see another drop in revenues or another economic downturn.

Dr. Swann: Surely the Premier doesn't manage his farm that way.

The volatility of oil and gas prices will not go away. Something needs to change here. Why does the Premier continue to ignore the fact that using our savings account to cover shortfalls again this year is simply a Band-aid? It does nothing to address our unstable funding.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, I think the hon. leader perhaps isn't fully aware of what we've done as a government. We're the only jurisdiction in Canada to set aside a separate fund, a cash surplus fund, to help cushion the revenues. We are not adding to our debt. We're the only jurisdiction that, even though we're running a deficit, is not adding to our debt. That is substantial. We will be the first to come out of this, leading Canada out of the recession.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Private Health Care Services

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today this government announced it was holding the Royal Alex orthopaedic centre to an increase of a mere 16 extra knee and hip procedures. In comparison, it's giving a for-profit corporation subsidies for an extra 180, more than 10 times as much money for corporate medicine as for a public hospital. To the Premier: why is this government letting the state-of-the-art public orthopaedic facility at the Royal Alex sit underutilized while it pours huge subsidies into corporate medicine?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're the only jurisdiction to commit to a five-year increased funding to a publicly funded health care system, and we remain committed to that goal. We also remain

committed to the best-performing publicly funded health care system in Canada.

Dr. Taft: Well, I hope everybody in Alberta is noticing he's not saying publicly delivered because it's going to be delivered through private, for-profit corporations. In fact, this government is providing 750 extra cataract surgeries at for-profit private providers and only 175 at the public Royal Alex centre. To the Premier: why is this government pouring more money into private, for-profit cataract surgery instead of into public services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day it's access and it's quality, and that is our goal here, to increase access and the quality of care in this province. Once again, we're going to show leadership with a five-year funding commitment to a publicly funded health care system.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier should know that every single assessment I've seen of Calgary versus Edmonton on cataract surgeries shows that Edmonton delivers better value, higher quality, and lower cost. My question is to the Premier. How is this government going to responsibly hold to account the funding it's providing to for-profit, corporate health care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this is just an example of very selective reading on the part of the hon. member asking the question because what he forgot to tell people is that there are 175 cataracts scheduled for the Royal Alex, there are 60 colonoscopies scheduled for the Royal Alex, and there are a number of hip replacements and knee replacements and robotic urologies all scheduled at the Royal Alex. This numbers well over 200. Regardless of where the services are provided, be they in a public setting or a private setting, they are publicly funded by this government.

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

Cabinet Travel to the Olympics

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The all-you-can-eat Tory buffet is now airborne. Taxpayer travelling-through tickets to the government of Alberta's version of gravy trains, planes, and automobiles have been doled out to the Premier and half his cabinet. Competing in the frequent-flyers-of-Olympic-excess event are our Premier and intergovernmental affairs minister. In the who-can-luxuriate-the-longest competition we have the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit facing off with the Minister of Tourism, Perks and Vacations. To the Premier: are you not concerned about the Olympian optics of your high-flying excesses during a time of recessionary lows?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, you know, there is some negativity on the other side of the House, but I can tell you that on this side of the House there is a huge amount of optimism. I'm looking forward to Canada's Vancouver Olympics. I mean, all roads to Vancouver lead through Alberta. What better way to promote this great province than at Alberta House, Alberta Plaza, right in the city of Vancouver, during the world Olympics? By the way, 3.5 billion people are watching the Olympics – 3.5 billion. What better market than right here in Alberta?

Mr. Chase: Again to the Premier: did you and your cabinet not receive the memo that going for the gold refers to the athletic

competition and not your personal withdrawal from the public purse?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as Albertans we're very, very proud of the role that we are playing in the Vancouver Olympics. We've supported the Olympics over the last three years by making improvements to the Calgary Olympic Park. We've also sent hundreds of volunteers that have supported the Vancouver Olympics over the last number of years in preparation for this huge event.

You know, it's difficult for our Alberta athletes to be enthused and want to do their best when this side of the House constantly wants to drag them down – drag them down – and not have them do better.

Mr. Chase: While showcasing Alberta athletic and artistic talent has value, political pandering does not. Given the budgetary restraints you have placed on PDD, children, seniors, and postsecondary students, how do you justify your partisan expenses?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are all kinds of positive messages that can be delivered by elected officials or volunteers, all Albertans. I invite this House, all political stripes, no matter where they sit in this House, to take part in these events. If they want to participate at Alberta Plaza and Alberta House, so be it. We'd gladly support any political party in terms of selling and promoting the province of Alberta because, again, we are very, very proud of our province.

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

Surgery Wait Time Reduction Strategy

Mr. Hinman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The funding of Alberta's health care system is a significant investment made by Alberta taxpayers. Recent court decisions have told governments across the country that access to a waiting list is not access to health care. It appears this government has finally realized this also. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will you please tell us how much overtime medical staff will be expected to put in in order to deliver on this government's six-week wait time reduction push, and have the health care workers agreed that they are able to take on this added workload?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question. In fact, as a result of a lot of cost savings which Alberta Health Services have realized, not the least of which is us covering their deficit, which yields a bunch of money saved because they don't have to pay the interest on that deficit, we will immediately earmark \$8 million, starting today, so that a number of additional surgeries can be performed. We are also going to talk with, and already have, the persons who are providing part-time work and see if they will increase their time to help out. They said they would, so we feel confident about the plan.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I hope that confidence works out.

Mr. Speaker, the money invested in health care is not the government's; it belongs to hard-working Albertans. For that investment they expect results and accountability. If these new procedures only cost \$8 million, it's hard to understand why they didn't find this money within their existing \$15 billion budget. Can the minister of health please tell us who was negligent for not implementing this plan sooner: the previous minister of health, the government, or Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no one was negligent about anything. The fact is that circumstances have changed. We have half a million more people in this province than 10 years ago, and we have new services, new techniques, new procedures, new equipment, new pharmaceuticals, and the like, all of which are good things, but they're driving up the cost. So what we've said is that we want some results immediately. Alberta Health Services has come up with that plan, and we're going to deliver the health services that people require, starting right now, in a more improved way.

2:00

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, this should have been done years ago and not waiting now to all of a sudden say: oh, we can do something.

There are many changes that we can make in how Albertans receive health care while staying completely within the Canada Health Act. In today's announcements the government is telling Albertans these treatments and procedures will be completed by the end of March, but experts are questioning that capability. My question again is to the health minister. Do you have an agreed-upon and executable plan that will be completed in the next six weeks, or is this another case where the government fails to plan and ultimately fails Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, of course there's a plan. You don't announce something if you don't have a plan. We have the people, we have the money, and we have the results earmarked based on input from the Health Quality Council, based on input from the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health, and based on the dashboard indicator project undertaken by Alberta Health Services. The bottom line is that Albertans want, deserve, and expect better services, and they're going to get them.

Mr. Vandermeer: Along the same lines, Mr. Speaker, the constituents in my area have expressed many concerns and frustrations with respect to wait times for certain health services. Being on a waiting list for months for an important surgery is simply unacceptable. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: if we are paying more money per capita than any other province, why aren't we getting the results that Albertans expect and deserve?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question, and I share the frustration that the member has just expressed. I'll bet you everybody here and I'll bet you every Albertan shares it as well. The point is that I want to tell you what we are doing about that. Starting today, through Alberta Health Services we are adding 2,230 new spots for surgeries to be performed as part of the first six weeks of a longer term plan. That will help to address the issues that the member has alluded to, and this is just the beginning of the longer term plan toward helping Albertans achieve the access they're after.

Mr. Vandermeer: To the same minister. My constituents are equally frustrated with having to wait too long for an MRI. What's causing the delay, and how are you going to fix that problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know others who share that frustration as well, including this hon. member. However, that's another reason why today I announced that we are adding 3,500 new spots for MRI and CAT scans to be performed immediately, within the next six weeks, again as part of the longer term plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Albertans have heard these stories before. Can the minister tell us what is going to be different this time and why we should believe this new plan will actually work?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what is largely different this time is that we have a five-year funding plan that provides predictability and stability to accomplish the objectives that we have just enunciated. Those figures are based on some increases that include inflation, that include an aging population, that include a growing population and all of the stuff that I mentioned a little bit earlier in terms of new innovations in the system. We will get there because we're on the right track.

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

Government Liabilities

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Progressive Conservative government's balance sheet indicates that the government liabilities will increase by over \$10 billion in the next three years. My first question is to the Premier. Why are liabilities increasing by \$10 billion in such a short period of time?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. President of the Treasury Board can probably provide a better response.

Mr. Snelgrove: He might as well get to his next question. It'll be the same one.

Mr. MacDonald: Ten billion dollars on the hook, and he's got no answer. That doesn't surprise me. That doesn't surprise taxpayers either. Again to the Premier: what is the government's plan to address this \$10 billion liability?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there are two sides to a balance sheet, expenditures and assets. We're building in Alberta some of the most forward-thinking, some of the most economic-enabling assets this country has ever seen. We believe that by growing the economic pie, there will be more money for Albertans to do the good work that they want us to do. So when we build a road, when we build an overpass, when we build a government building, when we build a hospital, it shows on our balance sheet as an asset. If you only look at expenditures, you won't get a true picture of the assets in Alberta, and our assets per Albertan compared to the rest of Canada are multi, multithousands of dollars more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. It's interesting to note that the President of the Treasury of Board only reads one part of the balance sheet.

Now, again, to whoever can answer over there: where will the money come from to pay for the \$10 billion increase in liabilities? Are you going to pick the pockets of the poor again?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we've explained as slowly as we can explain, and we've put it in documents that are hundreds of pages thick about how we intend to use the sustainability fund, which is our savings account which we put there as a rainy-day fund to carry Alberta's economy through to the next expansion situation, that

we'll be in far ahead of the rest of the country. In here it very clearly explains that we will use our sustainability fund. Our economic growth is based on very sound projections of energy and the Canadian dollar, interest rates, and it shows clearly how we'll be back in the black in 2012-13. It's simply explained in the budget. Read it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Federal Housing Finance Regulations

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty announced new mortgage regulations for Canadian homebuyers intended to prevent the type of housing collapse we saw in the United States. My questions are to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. What do these new regulations mean for Albertans making the ultimate transition to home ownership?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This member raises an important perspective. Home ownership is very important in this province. We want to make it as affordable as possible. Now, of course, the federal regulations announced today are aimed at protecting homeowners from future interest rate spikes and also limiting purchaser debt to a reasonable level.

I recognize that housing affordability continues to be a challenge in Alberta. We are one of the most expensive jurisdictions in which to own a home in Canada. That is why our government provides rent supports and community housing and affordable housing, having over 6,000 affordable housing units and providing support to 80,000 people monthly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among the new rules the one that should most concern the minister is the increased down payment regulation: 20 per cent down for investment and non owner-occupied properties. The government plans on having 11,000 new affordable housing units in place by 2012, but it would seem this new rule will seriously discourage investors from building these types of properties. To the same minister: how much of a hit does he think the government's 11,000-unit plan will take because of this new rule? What does he plan to do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I want to thank the hon. member for that question. Our government has anticipated that this may happen, and that's why the financing that we looked at for these 11,000 units is completely different from the financing that would apply from the announcement today. So the short answer is that we're still going to be on track for the 11,000-unit plan by 2012.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final question to the same minister. Before these regulations were announced, prices were increasing and housing starts were reaching record levels.

What will be the impact of these new regulations on Albertan house renters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This member has raised another interesting point. The increasing supply of rental properties is a challenge. We'll be providing 11,000 units, again, by 2012. I would also like to mention that through our rent supports 800 new people are assisted every month as we move people through the system, helping those most in need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Signage on Highway Rights-of-way

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in Peace River don't want a nuclear plant in their backyard, but they aren't allowed to express themselves. They have put up signs protesting the proposed nuclear plant, but Transportation officials have taken these signs down. To the Minister of Transportation: why are Department of Transportation officials targeting antinuclear signs?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the policy within this government, as everybody knows, is that you have to have permits to put signs up within the highway rights-of-way, strictly for the safety of motorists. Therefore, our policy is that if there are people that put signs up within our rights-of way, we take them down or they get a letter to take them down. If they're not removed, we remove them. I understand that that policy was followed.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that policy was not followed. Transportation officials are out there to make the highways safer for Albertans. To the minister again: is targeting antinuclear science an indication that this government only respects free speech when it is convenient?

Mr. Ouellette: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. We respect free speech all the time, but we cannot allow people to put things in the right-of-way. Our maintenance contractor's job is that if they see things in the right-of-way, they have to go remove them. That policy is there for the safety of Albertans.

Mr. Kang: Well, Mr. Speaker, by going over and taking those signs down, I think those officials were trespassing on private property. To the same minister again. We are spending millions of dollars selling Alberta's image at the Olympics, yet back at home this government can't uphold basic rights of free speech. What is the minister doing to ensure that this doesn't happen again?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there was one sign. I agree with the hon. member that there was one sign that was on private property. I'm just going by hearsay, trying to get to the bottom of everything that happened there, but apparently someone was asked by the maintenance contractor if they wanted that sign to go also, and they had said yes, so they removed it. When I found out about it and when our department found out about it, immediately they made a new sign and took it back to that private property, the one that was on private property.

Design Process for New Schools

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, government is using different ways to fund its new school buildings, including P3s. I've heard concerns that they are taking a cookie-cutter approach to the design of schools. I'm especially concerned that the government's plan, which includes four new high schools for Calgary, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and Spruce Grove, will not meet the diverse learning needs of students. My question is for the Minister of Education. Did school boards have any input in the design of the four high schools to ensure that they meet students' needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It should be clear that partway through the process we separated out the high schools from the elementary-junior highs. The high schools actually have proceeded on a design-build project. The school boards have been involved with Infrastructure and Education through the design process and have had ample opportunity to ensure that those school designs meet the educational programming and educational needs of the students in their areas.

Ms Woo-Paw: To the same minister: in regard to the ASAP schools how involved are parents and community groups in the design process for the high schools? Does the government have a genuine interest in hearing their input?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, with respect to the high schools the school boards would have had meetings in their communities with respect to those schools to discuss with the communities what was going into the schools, and they would have had an opportunity through the school boards to get input in that way. This isn't the traditional build process, which would have started through community meetings, et cetera, but there is certainly ample opportunity for communities to be involved.

With respect to the ASAP school projects we do have a standardized school design, which was developed with the input of a number of different groups, but even in that circumstance school boards have had the ability to meet with their communities and to adapt the designs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. My final question is this: is the design process based on any research or studies that identify how other groups, key stakeholders, can be involved in the design process of schools? Was it an arbitrary process?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years Infrastructure and Education have worked with organizations such as the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta School Boards Association, the School Business Officials of Alberta, the Council of Educational Facility Planners, school plant officials, and others to develop what we call standard designs for the K to 3, K to 6, and K to 9 schools. Those standard designs are used as a starting point with the school jurisdictions, and the school jurisdictions have had the opportunity to work with those designs so that they enable them to develop the educational opportunities that they want for the students in their area.

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

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm still receiving many, many inquiries about the PDD. Last Thursday the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports stated that people on PDD will not be reassessed for eligibility for PDD but that funding and the support that they receive will be reassessed using the supports intensity scale. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Will the minister tell the Assembly how many different ways were being used to determine how much funding support disabled Albertans were entitled to before the introduction of the supports intensity scale?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PDD program is very important to me and to this government and to the 9,200 people that it serves. We have implemented a supports intensity scale, but I'd like to make something very clear: it's totally and completely different from the eligibility requirement. Once somebody passes the eligibility requirement, which are two criteria, they are in the PDD program. Once they are in the program, we need to determine what kinds of supports and services they need. We need to be clear about that, and we need to be consistent throughout the province.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. And, yes, I do understand the distinction, but there still are many questions.

Can the minister tell the Assembly what the supports intensity scale actually measures and how this would be different from how staff and funding are currently allocated?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The important thing about the supports intensity scale is that it looks at many things. One of the things that it builds on is the natural supports that a person might have, so it won't necessarily change the way services and supports are given to a PDD individual at this time. What it will do is that it will ensure that the supports that we do provide for PDD clients are consistent throughout the province for the same sorts of disabilities.

Ms Pastoor: Last Thursday the minister stated that if a disabled Albertan is currently receiving the correct level of supports, that will not change, but the obvious question is: could someone's supports be decreased after the reassessment using the supports intensity scale?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, it's really important that when we have a program that's a provincial program, we treat everyone equitably and fairly across the province. It is possible that there may be somebody in a corner of the province that is receiving perhaps more supports than somebody with that certain kind of disability really needs, and that's not doing a person a favour when we give them more than they need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Surgery Wait Time Reduction Strategy

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today's health announcement by the Minister of Health and Wellness about funding for elective surgeries is one of the most short sighted I've ever seen

from this government. Spending \$8 million on a six-week surgery party at Alberta hospitals will do nothing to eliminate surgery wait times in the long run. Albertans need to know that the extreme wait times for elective surgeries and even cancer treatments in this province will become a thing of the past forever, not just for the next six weeks. Will the minister stand and tell the House how long he expects people to wait for important surgery in this province? What's the plan, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we don't expect Albertans to wait any longer than they have to, obviously, and that's why the announcement today is so important toward reducing wait times and to reducing wait lists. There is a fundamental difference there.

The bottom line is, Mr. Speaker, that this is just the beginning, and it says that right in the release. I've said it earlier today in the House. I'm surprised the hon. member doesn't catch that because I also said that this is part of a longer term plan. We will get that plan moving very quickly. As soon as these six weeks are over, the rest of the plan kicks in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, will the minister please tell us what the rest of the plan is? It's fine to fund something for six weeks, but that's a minuscule amount of time, and it won't solve the basic problem. If such a plan for the long-term health of Albertans actually exists, Mr. Minister, when will you make it public?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a few plans that are being finalized right now. They will come out early in April. For example, the long-term capital plan for health facilities will be ready on or about March 31 when the clock strikes 12. We'll also have more details on the five-year funding plan, and there will be additional plans on a per-area basis available at that time.

Right now we've just done the first part of a much longer term plan because people need those services right now. They've been identified as a high priority.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the minister has more plans than he has news conferences, but none of them are public yet.

I'd like this minister to stand up and tell Albertans when we're going to see a comprehensive long-term plan for the health care system in this province and what he's actually going to do to consult Albertans about these plans.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I could have sworn I just said that the long-term plan in various areas, including the one he's asking about, will be ready early in April. In the meantime we have an extremely good consultation process going on right now because that's what the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health said and that's what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has pledged to deliver. It will include a blueprint for action on the Alberta health act, on the patient charter, and on a number of other things prior to September 30.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

2:20

School Closures

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have heard many of my constituents tell me that if you close down a school, you

damage the community. Well, there have been lots of rumours about school closures, not just in the teachers' lounges but right here in the Legislature. My question is to the Minister of Education. What are you doing to keep schools open and keep Alberta's communities from further damage?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously it's important to have schools in communities where kids are. It's important to have schools in communities because schools are oftentimes the core of the community, but it's not possible to keep schools open if there are no kids for them. We asked the school boards. The school boards have to make the most appropriate judgment, in their judgment, as to what is the best educational opportunity for the children within their jurisdiction. They have that authority, they have that ability, and they do it well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's population has been growing over the past few years, especially in areas like my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie in southeast Edmonton and other outlying areas. To the same minister: what is the government doing to deal with this population growth?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in fact, that is the problem that we face because under the ASAP program we are building 18 schools in Edmonton and Calgary, one of them in the member's constituency. That is good for those communities because we don't have to bus those children to other schools. I would say that that does not mean that all the schools in the inner city or other neighborhoods have to be closed. In fact, the Edmonton public school board has provided one of the best models in the country with respect to the city centre school project, where they provide better educational opportunities with fewer schools but better schools for those students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: are there any plans to examine the regulations surrounding the school closures?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are, obviously, with our Inspiring Education project looking at everything right from the very top with respect to how education is delivered in a 21st century model, how we make sure that we have the right kind of educational opportunities for students, and part and parcel of that will be a re-examination of what kind of physical platform we need to deliver education in communities. So we will be looking at that, and in the meantime we are looking at our school closure regulations, and we're working with municipalities to make sure that school properties can survive a closure and live to be of community purpose until they're needed again as a school.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Renter Assistance

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs has stated that the \$13 million cut to rent supplements reflects the fact that fewer people require assistance. The direct-to-tenant rent supplement program has a one-year expiry date, and seeing that the program started last April, support is running out. To

the minister of housing: while the rent subsidy is only one year long, the wait-list to get into affordable housing is almost three years long. How are people supposed to pay their rent without support while they wait another two years for affordable housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for that question, but what he doesn't recognize is that we're supporting those most in need. There are always people who may be in need, but at the same time we have to set a guideline because we want to be compassionate most to the taxpayers but, as well, to those in need. We will continue to support those most in need of rent assistance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess, you know, we're talking in a sense about rationing. One way to reduce wait-lists is to reduce the number of people who qualify for support. It sounds like that's what he's done. Will the minister explain the changes which have been recently made to tighten up the qualifying criteria for rent supplements and affordable housing?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, it really saddens me, the approach that this member has taken to such an important program. The means test that we have had over the last several years remains the same. It is more stringent than other provinces', but that enables us to target hard-working taxpayers' money to those most in need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see no reason for the minister to get sad. All the minister needs to do is answer the questions. With fewer people qualifying for assistance and more people running out of rent supports, has the minister given up on the Housing First policy and now back to the old approach of merely managing homelessness?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, there's one government in the country that has a 10-year plan to end homelessness, and that is the government of Alberta. That's the plan that we will continue on forward.

Thank you.

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

Edmonton Ring Road

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents have expressed their enthusiasm for this government's renewed commitment to infrastructure and transportation in the 2010 budget. My first question is for the Minister of Transportation. Can he update this House on the ongoing work to complete the Anthony Henday ring road?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this budget positions Alberta well for the future. We know that investing in infrastructure supports jobs today and lays the foundation for economic growth and competitiveness in the future. This year's capital plan is nearly \$1.9 billion, and we'll continue to build and take advantage of our lower construction prices. Construction on the world-class Edmonton ring road continues, and the 21-kilometre northwest Henday is going very well and is set to open in the fall of 2011.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many of my constituents the intersection at the traffic lights on Anthony Henday leads to frustrating delays and unsafe driving conditions. My first supplemental to the same minister: can he tell my constituents when they are going to complete the Cameron Heights overpass?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that, yes, the planning and development of the Cameron Heights interchange is most definitely progressing. We've completed the functional plan work, and we're set to complete the detailed design work later this spring, with construction already under way on the three other interchanges in his area. The province recognizes the importance of having all of Anthony Henday free flow, and our actions support that.

Mr. Xiao: My final supplemental to the same minister: can he assure all Edmontonians that he will eliminate all the intersections and the traffic lights on the Anthony Henday and when?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure this hon. member knows that our province has set the goal of 2015 to have the complete ring road done, which means that would be free flow, and it would remove all traffic signals on the Anthony Henday. I think the hon. member should drive by there every day and maybe go out and have a coffee with some of those guys and watch that work being done, and then he'll believe us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Land-use Framework

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The land-use framework progress report was released last week, and despite the report being labelled a progress report, I can see very little progress that has actually happened. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. It's been well over a year since the land-use framework was created, and only two regional plans are in the process of being established. When can we finally expect to see anything concrete come out of the land-use framework?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the land-use framework initiative, of course, is extremely important for all areas of Alberta. But let's be reasonable about how we're going to approach this thing because I don't think that it would be in anybody's interest, particularly not in the interests of Albertans, to go out there with a shotgun approach and try to develop a land-use framework for all seven regions at the same time. We've done some very, very good work in the lower Athabasca, and that plan is moving ahead now very nicely. The regional advisory commission have most of their work together, and we are expecting a report from them at the end of March.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: has there been some meaningful consultation done with the Métis communities in those areas?

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, in fact, they have. There are aboriginal people involved in the regional advisory committee, so they have representation on the committees and are responsible for taking that information back to their own communities. We know that this is one of the areas that in order for this to be successful, we will continue and we have to continue to have meaningful consultation with aboriginal groups.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Developments in Sylvan Lake are currently happening that will have a major impact on the Red Deer regional plan that is being created. How will these developments, that are going forward as we speak, be dealt with by your department without the actual implementation of the land-use framework having gone through yet?

2:30

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is one issue of many. Of course, as the member opposite would very well understand and realize, you cannot stop the development of the province of Alberta while you develop a land-use framework and then start again. The natural gas industry in Alberta is again, you know, going to come to the fore. The development of forestry continues. The development of communities across the province continues. The land-use framework will have to take into account all of those developments as it moves forward and as we get the plans in place.

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

Utilities Consumer Advocate

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some constituents in Edmonton-Decore have expressed their deep concern about the effects that Bill 50 will have on their electricity bill. Specifically, they have been asking me what role the Utilities Consumer Advocate has in protecting and educating consumers of the electricity market. My first question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. What power does the Utilities Consumer Advocate have to protect Alberta consumers from unwarranted charges on their energy bill?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The main role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office is to answer consumers' questions, to provide information, and also to intervene for consumers at rights hearings. This past year we had approximately 50,000 phone calls in the UCA, intervened in 90 hearings. So the work UCA is doing when consumers call the line is excellent.

Mrs. Sarich: Well, Mr. Speaker, I obviously agree that there is a great need for the Utilities Consumer Advocate; however, my concern is that the UCA directly falls under the control of the government of Alberta, the same government that controls energy policy, specifically the creation of Bill 50. So my next question is to the same minister. Has Service Alberta ever considered reinventing the Utilities Consumer Advocate as an arm's-length organization outside government control?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the 50,000 people who did contact the UCA, that concern was not raised at all. The

bottom line with the UCA is the input we get from Albertans and the good work it does. We know it's providing good service to Albertans as well as maximizing the services and benefits that are available in Service Alberta so we can work together and they can get the answers quicker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. How do you measure the effectiveness of the current model?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the best ways is about the people who contact the UCA information line. Over 80 per cent of the people who contact our line are happy with the services provided, and they will recommend it to a friend for them to contact as well. That's really important to me as minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Government Borrowing

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2010 projects this PC government will add roughly \$6 billion in debt by 2012, up from zero when this Premier took over. In order to sell this bad-news story to Albertans, part of this debt has been packaged up and sold to the public as Alberta capital bonds to be used for seniors' housing. The fact is that it's just plain, old-fashioned won't live within our means, so we'll get our kids to pay for it debt. To the President of the Treasury Board: why is this government heaping billions of debt and related servicing costs on our kids' backs when we still have money in the sustainability fund?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, you don't have to take my word for it; you can go to the Auditor General, who says that in his opinion "these consolidated financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Province of Alberta." It goes on. He's done that for eight years. We have accounted for the capital expenditures in this government on a consistent basis for at least 20 years or more. Every single penny that we spent is accounted for in these books, and the Auditor General is an officer of the Assembly. TD financial group says exactly the same thing: the accounting of the provincial government's capital plan rightly split outlays of capital investment and expenses for capital purposes.

Mr. Anderson: That had nothing to do with the question I just asked, Mr. Speaker.

It's bad enough that this government is using the plight of seniors being unable to find housing as a way to sell a return to debt financing; it is also a fiscally foolish thing to do. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation noted last week that the government would save \$17.6 million in interest by simply taking out a regular loan rather than offering a comparatively higher rate of interest for capital bonds. To the same minister: if he is going to borrow money, why would he not borrow at the lowest interest rate possible?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I do hope that they develop a strategic kind of alliance between that party and the Taxpayers Federation and then publish some of the discussion that they'll have. It'll be worth the comic relief that comes out of it.

Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to do is give Albertans an opportunity to invest in things that they feel very strongly about, and

that's caring for seniors. While it is debt, it's very effective debt. Most of the money that we're raising through bonds will be leveraged at least once or maybe twice to build hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of seniors' facilities for our parents and grandparents.

They, quite honestly, need to be honest about it. They really don't care about anybody except themselves.

Mr. Anderson: This caucus does have a relationship with the taxpayers of Alberta; the caucus over there does not.

One commentator noted that the government borrowing in this way is like having a million dollars under your mattress and then going to the bank and asking for a high-interest loan to buy a new car. It just doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this government put off issuing additional capital bonds until he can justify to Albertans why he isn't borrowing at the lowest rate possible for Alberta taxpayers? It's a simple question.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, by and large the greatest amount of money that we're borrowing for capital projects in Alberta is at the lowest rate in the country. As a matter of fact, Alberta's triple-A plus credit rating has allowed us to borrow money for these projects far cheaper than any other province in Canada. That's not from bad management; that's from good management. Giving Albertans an opportunity to invest in their province is what we're doing: 3.3 per cent is not a gift; it recognizes that many seniors would like to have a long-term, stable income come into their homes. So let's be clear: they care about themselves.

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

Oil Sands Emissions

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Energy minister recently announced a plan to indoctrinate school kids about oil sands and carbon capture plans. It appears the minister is worried about media stories that are saturated with embarrassing scrutiny of his government's failure to protect the environment, and his plan is to turn a blind eye to the black one they have created in the oil sands. Now, instead of using propaganda in schools, why doesn't the Energy minister educate oil sands companies about protecting our environment by forcing them to reduce actual emissions instead of paying them to bury the problem underground?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to chuckle because we have been successful at one thing: we have convinced those two members over there to call it the oil sands. So our education program is already working. Schoolchildren in this province are not going to take as long to learn as those two members over there.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess this just goes to show why propaganda is something that ought to be carefully controlled.

Instead of introducing said oil sands propaganda into the classroom – we know it will not stop the growing criticisms of this government's failure to responsibly manage our environment. So instead of playing Big Brother, why doesn't the Energy minister teach kids a lesson in responsible governance and force oil sands companies to clean up their act and reduce emissions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is very important is to ensure that – and this might be a better question, actually, to be placed to the Minister of Education. As our Educa-

tion curriculum continues to unfold to changing circumstances, it is important that we ensure that students in our classrooms are apprised. Unlike what the member would like to lead this Assembly to believe, there's no propaganda involved here. This is a situation where, you know, when curriculums were developed a number of years ago, the oil sands was not in existence.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I doubt the Energy minister's plan to infiltrate classrooms will include a frank discussion about the pitfalls of carbon capture, I doubt it will teach children about global warming and the effects the oil sands are having on our environment, and I doubt that it will teach kids about lobbyists and how oil sands companies can increase political influence. Why won't the Minister of Energy admit that this Orwellian plan isn't about educating but, rather, about hiding his government's failure to protect our environment today and for the very kids he's going to propagandize to?

2:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, what it will talk about, Mr. Speaker, is the tremendous activity that's gone on in the oil sands area relative to reclamation. It will talk about and put in real terms the emissions from the oil sands relative to not only the rest of the country and to the world, but it will also probably talk about things like how many jobs in Quebec come directly from the oil sands. I'm glad to see that the Premier of Quebec has realized this and is now planning a mission to Alberta to encourage Alberta oil sands companies to buy products from Quebec. These are the kinds of things that we want to ensure, that Alberta students have the real facts.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were 18 members who were recognized today, 108 questions and responses, 12 members recognized from the opposition parties and six from private government members.

In a few seconds from now we will continue with the Routine and continue with Members' Statements, but in the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just noticed that several people I know have joined us in the gallery today. All, I believe, are from Calgary: Jeff Gaulin, if you could please stand, as well as De-Anne Carson and Rob Schaefer. Would you please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Oil Sands Image

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands capital of the world has been my home for the past 30 years. Our city slogan is: We Have the Energy. It captures the spirit of who we are, what we do, and how we do it. This past week I took issue with the leader of the government of Quebec, Premier Jean Charest, for his comments about my home and the oil sands of Fort McMurray. The headlines read: Quebec hypocrites when it comes to the oil

sands. In actual fact, we think that of the Albertans and the many workers who have come from provinces across Canada to find work and who have built the oil sands over the past 30 years, the real hypocrite is Jean Charest, not his workers. He knows better, having served in the federal Parliament and at the time having served as Minister of Environment, that Alberta is always open for business.

The Charest government promised to subsidize expenses for businesses who are going to be attending an important mission on the oil sands opportunities of \$200 billion in March. We celebrate that. But at the same time he speaks about criticizing the oil sands in Copenhagen.

We are entrepreneurial as Albertans. We welcome those who share that same spirit of competition. But as Albertans we do not like or take too kindly to a Premier who talks out of both sides of his mouth.

So do the right thing, Jean Charest, the same as Shane Koyczan said in his poem at the Olympic opening ceremonies in Vancouver in defining Canada, entitled *We Are More*. We are certainly more than what Premier Charest has said about our oil sands. The poem goes on: you might say “the home of the Rocket and the Great One who inspired little number nines and little number ninety-nines . . . and some say what defines us is something as simple as please and thank you” and you’re welcome, too.

So, Premier Charest, do the right thing and tone it down. Come visit my home. Come visit the oil sands and my two and a half year old son, who breathes that air every day.

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

Alberta Red Cross

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a Canadian Red Cross luncheon in January the secretary-general spoke about the work being done in Haiti following the January 12 earthquake. He commended the generosity of Albertans and of the Alberta government, among others, in helping after the devastating disaster. He also talked about the strong connection between the work of the Red Cross in Haiti and right here in Alberta, and it is the Alberta Red Cross presence that I wish to speak about today.

The Canadian Red Cross has become an important part of the Canadian fabric since 1885, providing education in injury prevention, water safety, violence and abuse prevention, as well as medical equipment loans. The Alberta Red Cross is a network of 2,000 paid and unpaid personnel across the province standing prepared when disaster strikes, a quiet professionalism and service that doesn’t always make the news.

Mr. Speaker, because of the tireless efforts of these volunteers, any citizen of Alberta facing a disaster, whether it’s a house fire or a flood, can get help. Alberta disaster response volunteers provided more than 4,000 hours of direct service to Albertans plus an additional 22,000 hours on call last year. Over the last three years the Canadian Red Cross has responded to 521 disasters across our province and has helped 2,500 people.

Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate to have such a strong partner as the Canadian Red Cross in service of vulnerable people here in Alberta during times of disaster. I want to commend our government’s own Alberta Emergency Management Agency for the strong ties it has and continues to build with this outstanding provincial, national, and international organization, and I want to thank the volunteers and staff of the Canadian Red Cross for ensuring that Albertans receive the help and hope they need during times of vulnerability. This is the power of humanity in action, and I’d like to thank the representatives from the Red Cross for their patience today.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the first of a series of pages of petitions coming from residents of Carstairs, Crossfield, and Didsbury. They are petitioning the Legislature as follows: we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to consider providing increased funding to Midway school to ensure that various programs continue to be available to its students, teachers, trustees, and parents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mr. Joel Crichton. He writes to express his concern that Alberta schoolchildren will not receive balanced and accurate information about the oil sands from this government.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table correspondence from Dean Goodine, who is a property master for the film and television sector. He’s writing that he started working in the Alberta film industry in 1986 after attending SAIT and has worked on a number of films made in Alberta. The twist is that he no longer lives in Alberta because it is not a competitive place for film. He is currently working on *Human Target*, being filmed in Vancouver, with another ex-Edmontonian producer, Grace Gilroy, and he hopes that we can become more competitive.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I have three sets of tablings. The first is the program from An Evening to Celebrate Catholic Education: 125 Years of Calgary Catholic. Mr. Speaker, as a former teacher you would have been terrifically impressed by the talent shown by the Catholic youngsters of Calgary.

My second tabling is the fall 2009 edition of the Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary’s newsletter.

My third is the most recent Momentum: Developing Productive Futures annual report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the

service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

2:50

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a second or subsequent set of estimates is to be tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that an amended fiscal plan be tabled. On February 9 the Minister of Finance and Enterprise tabled the 2009-10 quarterly budget report for the third quarter, which serves as the amended fiscal plan. The quarterly report tabled by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise provides the framework for the additional spending authority for nine departments of the government.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2009-10 supplementary supply estimates. These will provide the additional spending authority to nine departments of the government. When passed, the estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$920.5 million in voted expense and equipment/inventory purchases and \$4.7 million in voted capital investment. These estimates will also authorize an approximate increase of \$32.9 million in voted nonbudgetary disbursements.

Government Motions

8. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2009-10 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question on the motion put forward by the hon. President of the Treasury Board?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2009-10 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand before the Assembly today and move second reading of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act.

In the wake of profound economic changes the face of business is changing. Bill 1 acknowledges this and resolves to see Alberta adapt to the shifts in our global economy with diligence and innovation. Mr. Speaker, over the past several years this government has made changes to our services, programs, legislation, and regulations to support our province and its prosperity. Initiatives such as Productivity Alberta, the western economic partnership, and Alberta Innovates are examples of major resources made available

to Albertans and those wishing to invest in our province. However, they are all branches of one tree, competitiveness. Bill 1 will bring us back to our roots by engaging industry and business in a collaborative process with government to analyze our circumstances and to enhance our strong economic foundation.

Mr. Speaker, we are truly fortunate here in Alberta. We are blessed with a very hard-working population, which is a driving strength in our economy. Bill 1 draws on this resource and gives the Lieutenant Governor in Council the ability to strike a body for the purpose of improving Alberta's competitiveness. This body will discuss and work to develop the best methods to increase our province's competitive edge. For example, our province's forestry and agriculture sectors have a deep-seated history as well as an incredible potential for a prosperous future. The committee will be able to advise on the best ways for our province to move forward by fostering value-added opportunities and increasing access to emerging international markets. These goals are best achieved by continued focused collaboration with industry stakeholders as well as with other government ministries such as Advanced Education and Technology.

This body will also be apprised of the province's competitive review. This review investigated components of conventional operations such as regulatory efficiency, taxation, and the availability of labour. In order to continue attracting investment, it is important for us to remain aware of how our province's regulations and royalty regime affect our businesses. A thorough understanding of these concepts requires communication and collaboration among industry stakeholders and government. The body that would be established under Bill 1 would be aware of the necessity of this relationship and will work closely with industry stakeholders to better understand these issues. They will be able to determine the regulatory impact and what can be changed to attract investment while maintaining safety; in essence, finding the balance.

Mr. Speaker, in many ways this work is already being done. This government is aware of the importance of regulatory reform, which is why we have the Regulatory Review Secretariat, chaired by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, who, by the way, is doing an outstanding job. This body reviews regulations, usually when their expiry date comes up. At this time the cost of the regulations to both government and industry are assessed, and changes are made to ensure that we continue to attract investment and promote efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, not all regulations have expiry dates; in fact, 30 per cent do not. This can result in their becoming outdated before they are reviewed. We are changing this to ensure timely review of our province's regulations. Furthermore, regulations often expire approximately 10 years after their inception. However, we have noted that in rapidly changing industries they may need to be reviewed sooner. Therefore, we will be making efforts to see these regulations expire sooner, for example after five years rather than 10, thereby ensuring that they are reviewed in a more timely manner.

In addition, Alberta is employing a one-window application system known as BizPaL, which will contribute to our province remaining competitive. This means that when industry is required to adhere to regulations while working on projects that involve several levels of government, they are only required to submit one application to one level of government for their project to be approved. The approval of the other levels of government will happen behind the scenes through a collaborative process between governments. In essence, we are streamlining the application process and making it easier for industry to come to Alberta with their investments.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will embrace these developments in our regulatory review process, and the body that the bill will establish

will have the best understanding of our regulations as well as our royalty structure and how these compare to our competitors in such places as Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Texas. By this mechanism they will be able to advise government on the future of our oil and gas sector. This advice will include considerations for infrastructure and transportation improvements within the province and specifically within the north.

Further, as part of their work the body will integrate the First Nations consultation policy and guidelines on land management and resource development. Mr. Speaker, it is important to Albertans that we continue to work with all land stewards while respecting the heritage of our province. Bill 1 embraces our legacy and will ensure that, going forward, the initiatives regarding land management reflect the respect that Albertans have for our history.

Mr. Speaker, the body will of course put efforts into our province's world-class integrated petrochemical hub. This is currently an area where increased collaboration among industries and government can have a substantial impact on our province's economic diversity. By promoting co-operation between the oil sands and our province's refineries, significant cost-reduction mechanisms could be identified and employed to a point where Alberta's petrochemical products are even more competitive than they currently are.

Another industry that can have a significant impact on Alberta's prosperity is research and development. Recently Alberta Advanced Education and Technology reinvented our province's research and technology system. The system, now known as Alberta Innovates, is designed to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to research in the province, ultimately providing new opportunities to Alberta researchers and entrepreneurs. The system includes an international advisory board and five provincial agencies, including Bio Solutions, Energy and Environment Solutions, Health Solutions, and technology commercialization. This new approach will help to ensure that Alberta remains on the cutting edge of research and technology advancement.

Furthermore, under Bill 1 Alberta Innovates will be given the unique opportunity to collaborate with other industries in the province such as our forestry, agriculture, and oil and gas. Together these industries will have the ability to foresee and anticipate unique areas of opportunity in the province and ensure Alberta's competitive edge.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, another important initiative of government going forward is Productivity Alberta. The web portal, which was launched earlier this month, is an online resource for Alberta businesses to use in order to improve their productivity and global competitiveness. The site includes best practices and strategies along with assessment tools for companies to measure their progress. This site can be used by businesses and industries such as forestry, ag, and oil and gas, and Bill 1 will help to integrate this initiative with all the other work that is going on within the province.

Overall, the act will promote co-operation amongst all these industries, businesses, and government in looking at the competitiveness of our province on a global scale. The body will develop an overall strategic approach to competitiveness, recommendations of priority actions within the province as well as establish benchmarks to measure our accomplishments. Further, they will be responsible for reporting to the Premier on the status of Alberta's competitiveness, making clear recommendations and thereafter preparing annual reports on progress.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe this province has a tremendous capacity for competitiveness. We have the greatest resources in the

world, from the wheat fields in the south to the oil sands in the north and, most importantly, the people who drive our economy, and all of this is built upon a solid foundation of low taxes.

There is no doubt that in coming out of this global economic recession, the world of business is changing, and it is impossible for one single person to thoroughly understand the face of this change. Rather, it requires several knowledgeable individuals in both the public and private sectors coming together in the same room for us to assess the directions of our global economy. This is what Bill 1 will permit. Ultimately, the Alberta Competitiveness Act is about adapting to these changes.

Mr. Speaker, the 32nd President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, said, "Wise and prudent men" – and I'm sure he meant women – "have long known that in a changing world worthy institutions can be conserved only by adjusting them to the changing time."

An Hon. Member: You can't assume that.

Mrs. McQueen: Absolutely I can assume that.

This government has the ability to recognize the truth in this saying. We must adapt to the changing markets and directions of our provincial, national, and international business partners. Bill 1 will legislate the best possible way to do this by bringing together those who can most accurately paint the picture of our future. Through Bill 1 and the strong leadership of this government and the incredible work ethic of Albertans I have no doubt this province will become one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world. For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand before the Assembly in support of Bill 1.

I would now like to adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

Before us today we have proposed legislative revisions to six acts along with updated wording to another two acts. These revisions, if approved, would require professional regulatory organizations to consult with the minister responsible for the act itself and the minister responsible for parts 1 to 3 of the Post-secondary Learning Act. Currently the ministries responsible are Employment and Immigration and Advanced Education and Technology.

I suppose you could say that there are two main reasons for this amendment act. First, this government wants to ensure that the qualifications asked for – for example, either courses, diplomas, or degrees required for an individual to practise in a certain profession – are reflective of the true requirements to do the job. While we encourage continuing learning for all Albertans, sometimes these increased standards may be unnecessary for the individual to perform the work. Likewise, we would ask to be consulted if there's a proposal to reduce educational requirements.

Second, this government wants to ensure that we are consistent with the Health Professions Act, which has had a similar provision in place since 2001. These proposals would mirror the piece of legislation and add a clause to the Architects Act, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act, the Land Surveyors

Act, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, and the Veterinary Profession Act. If passed, the amendment act will update a similar clause that's been part of the Agrology Profession Act since 2007 and the Regulated Forestry Profession Act since 2002.

In essence, the clause will read that for the professional regulatory organization or institute or college, depending on the specific language of each act, the government body must consult with the ministers responsible for the acts and must consider the comments received from those ministers. Mr. Speaker, I understand each professional regulatory organization has been advised of Bill 2 and are understanding of the reasons behind these proposals.

In closing, this legislation ensures that government has a chair at the table and is kept in the loop. It is helpful for government to know what's being discussed and to be involved at the earliest stage possible, especially when we're talking about any potential changes to postsecondary curriculum. Most importantly and in addition to providing greater consistency among similar legislation, Bill 2 enhances a strong, proactive relationship with Alberta's professional regulatory organizations. I'm proud to carry the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, and I encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate at this time. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3

Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and begin debate on Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010. This bill proposes two amendments to the current act. The first amendment relates to section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act. In 1979 the Alberta Legislature enacted section 8 to allow certain surviving family members – a spouse, an adult interdependent partner, a child, and parents – to recover damages for the emotional suffering and grief caused by the wrongful death of a close family member. This law ensures that family members do not have to litigate in order to receive damages for their grief. In other words, bereavement damages are automatic, and the amounts are set by statute. There is no need for family members to testify in court about the grief they suffered as a result of the death of a spouse, a child, or a parent.

Presently the act limits the class of family members eligible to receive bereavement damages. These damages may not be awarded to parents if their deceased child was married or had an adult interdependent partner, and damages may not be awarded to a child for their deceased parent if the child was married or had an adult interdependent partner. Mr. Speaker, the passage of Bill 3 will broaden the eligibility for bereavement damages by opening up eligibility to a child that is married or has an adult interdependent partner. This change will mean that parents may be awarded damages regardless of the marital status of their deceased child, and a child may be awarded damages for the death of a parent regardless of the child's marital status. This amendment is consistent with the rule of law and court decisions that there should be no restriction on bereavement damages based on a child's marital status.

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment removes the reference to a child as including an illegitimate child. An illegitimate child refers to a child whose parents are not married. Distinguishing between

legitimate and illegitimate children is no longer appropriate in legislation. It is also out of step with modern-day family structures and dynamics. All children should be considered equal regardless of the marital status of the children's parents. This amendment is consistent with Alberta's Family Law Act, which focuses on the relationship between the child and the parent rather than the relationship between the children's parents. This is also another step towards removing the final vestiges of illegitimacy remaining in Alberta's legislation.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments reflect the rule of law and current demographics in Alberta. I encourage all members to support Bill 3.

I would like to adjourn debate at this time. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:10 Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 11: Mr. Hayden]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise in the House today to reply to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his poignant and stirring speech. The throne speech acknowledged that despite tough times Albertans remain optimistic when looking into the future, and we have every reason to be. Over the years we have all seen many ups and downs in the Alberta economy, but Alberta always bounces back better than ever.

Our economy is the powerhouse that will lead Canada out of this recession, and our health care will be the future envy of the country. Mr. Speaker, fiscally this province has a solid foundation. We have high employment, we have low income tax and corporate tax rates, and we are the only province in Canada that has no sales tax. Alberta has the lowest fuel tax in Canada and the lowest general corporate tax rate. In addition, Alberta businesses and financial institutions do not pay capital taxes. Moreover, they also benefit from the absence of a payroll tax, which is levied in Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. If Alberta had the same tax system as other provinces, Albertans and Alberta businesses would pay between \$10 billion and \$18 billion more in taxes every single year. That works out to about \$3,000 to \$5,000 per person.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, Albertans pay low personal income taxes, and we are enriched by the largest personal basic tax exemption in Canada. This exemption allows individuals to earn more than \$16,000 before having to pay one cent of provincial income tax. These facts allow everyday Albertans, like those in my constituency, to keep more of their money in their pockets. This in itself can help spur the economy and keep it strong. Alberta is the envy of the whole country when it comes to taxes.

On top of this, Mr. Speaker, we have savings. In fact, we are the only province in the country with not one savings account but two,

savings like the sustainability fund, which can provide soft landings in economic down times. With the sustainability fund we have the tools necessary to face any economic trials and tribulations head-on and persevere through this global recession.

The heritage savings trust fund is not just a rainy-day fund but an investment in our future, an investment put aside for future generations that may not have the security we have in our nonrenewable resource revenues. Mr. Speaker, Albertans themselves are the engine that keeps our economy moving forward, and this is why the Alberta health care system aims to keep Albertans healthy and thriving. With the implementation of a five-year funding plan Alberta health care will remain stable and secure no matter what the economic environment entails.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's health care system will continue to be a leader in this country. The health of all Albertans is at stake. That is why it is imperative to assess and reassess health care in Alberta, to make sure we are doing our absolute best. Accountability in health care is paramount to this government as we need to ensure that the budgetary increase directed towards health care pays off in measurable outcomes. As His Honour stated, "Your government will go beyond statistical measures . . . and seek input from Albertans themselves." It is through this public consultation that Alberta health care will provide added transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

The ability to plan ahead is integral to health care, and the Alberta government knows this. With the implementation of the five-year plan Albertans will be able to say that we have one of the best health care systems in this whole country.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans have a right to equitable and consistent services, especially people with developmental disabilities. This government will do the utmost to make sure all Albertans receive the care and support they need and deserve.

Mr. Speaker, social programs for Albertans will become better integrated and more focused on the people they were created to serve. These improvements will make it easier for Albertans in need to access information and assistance. Furthermore, every effort will be made to make sure the transition between programs as they move from childhood to adulthood to their senior years will go as smoothly as possible. Our health care system along with our social programs are in reliable hands.

This enables Albertans to focus on the multitude of opportunities and attractions this beautiful province has to offer. In my own constituency of St. Albert thousands of children and parents gather from all over northern Alberta every spring for the International Children's Festival. This year it will be held June 1 to the 5th. It is a sample of what is best about Alberta: people working together for a common goal.

When I think about Alberta's bright future, I cannot help but reflect on its glorious past. Mr. Speaker, St. Albert is the oldest nonfortified continuously inhabited settlement in Alberta. Next year, in 2011, we will celebrate the sesquicentennial, or 150-year anniversary. What a long way we have come in 150 years.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong, who has represented Alberta exceptionally well in the last five years. His Speech from the Throne outlined and envisioned Alberta's continued and future greatness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments if there are any.

Hon. members, I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall today, and something will happen in the Assembly

that very infrequently happens. In our Assembly two languages, the official languages of Canada, are recognized as the spoken languages of this Assembly, but in the time that you've honoured me with the opportunity to be your Speaker, I've also recognized a multitude of other languages. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall today wishes to give his remarks to the Speech from the Throne in Punjabi, and I'm accepting that. You should have on your desks a copy of the speaking notes, the complete speech, with respect to this.

To the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, I'm very pleased as part of the reflection of the diversity of Alberta to permit that, probably the only Parliament in Canada that would permit such. I hope it's understood, the uniqueness of this opportunity.

Secondly, sir, I trust, I pray, I hope that the speech given in Punjabi will mirror word for word the English translation that is on the desk of all individuals. The member should know that if it is not, I will hear, and then, unfortunately, we will have a discussion and consequences.

Proceed, please. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm greatly honoured to rise today to offer my thoughts on the Speech from the Throne. I'm proud to be a Calgarian, an Albertan, and a Sikh. I'm also proud to offer these remarks in Punjabi to reflect the diversity of this Assembly, the diversity of my constituency, Calgary-McCall, and the diversity of this wonderful province we all call home.

When I came here 40 years ago, few could have imagined that this Assembly would feature so many different kinds of people from such a wide range of diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. It is a wonderful thing to see.

[Remarks in Punjabi] My response begins with a note of gratitude to His Honour Norman Kwong, our Lieutenant Governor, for five years of dedicated service to the people of Alberta. His Honour did a magnificent job, and he makes us all proud to be Albertan. The people of Calgary-McCall are a hard-working bunch, Mr. Speaker, full of optimism and hope for the future. They believe in Alberta. But many of the citizens who visit, call, or e-mail my office are concerned with the direction of this administration. Thousands of people are out of work. Thousands more are deeply concerned about this administration's mismanagement of our public health care system and cuts to vitally important social programs. Albertans don't ask for much from government, but they do demand a basic level of competence, a level of competence that the Premier's administration has failed to deliver. [As submitted]

3:20

Politics in Alberta aren't about right versus left anymore; they're about right versus wrong. And this Conservative administration has become infamous for making all the wrong decisions.

[Remarks in Punjabi] Wrong decisions made by this Premier and his ministers have sown chaos in the health care system; have created instability and uncertainty in our oil and gas sector, the engine of Alberta's economy; have damaged our international reputation and our environment; have failed to enforce standards to address pollution and climate change; have allowed family farms to stagnate and wither away; have failed to protect our forests and the forestry industry from the pine beetle; have left Alberta's most vulnerable citizens more vulnerable than ever; have created transportation bottlenecks and headaches. [As submitted]

Wrong spending decisions have frittered away the opportunity to save for the future, have wasted millions of taxpayer dollars on lavish perks for the elite, have reduced support by 30 per cent for Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, now more vulnerable than ever.

The throne speech features a few positive developments, but even

the good news is tainted by the administration's long record of half measures and broken promises.

[Remarks in Punjabi] Providing Alberta Health Services with a five-year budget cycle is a good idea. Considering all the damage done to our public health care system by this administration's catastrophic bungling, this is at least a small step forward to restoring a smidgen of confidence to the health care professionals who have done their best while dealing with the consequences of the Premier's mismanagement. [As submitted]

We're also glad to see that the Premier's administration has heeded opposition and community calls for more police officers, but even the addition of 100 officers will leave Alberta's two largest cities underpoliced. Per capita Calgary and Edmonton are two of the least protected cities in the country when it comes to crime. We simply need more boots on the street to meet population growth.

[Remarks in Punjabi] Finally, I'm glad that the administration is at last starting to think about unfairness in the federal EI program. Alberta workers haven't been getting their fair share of rightfully earned benefits, and the opposition and labour groups have been raising this issue for months. [As submitted]

I hope that the Premier can make some real progress here and bring these benefits home to Alberta workers, working moms and dads who desperately need and deserve the assistance. I would suggest that the Premier should also do something about the skyrocketing wait times for processing EI applications. Many Albertans live paycheque to paycheque, and they can't afford to wait for months for their EI benefits.

[Remarks in Punjabi] Aside from those few bright spots, even by the rightfully diminished expectations of most Albertans this throne speech sets a new low for a government that is clearly out of ideas. The cupboard is bare: virtually no ideas, no leadership, no vision, no inspiration, no imagination, no plan. And given the Conservative track record many of these commitments will drag on for years and years without any real progress. [As submitted]

The speech talks about a new vision for education, but the only thing Albertans know about this administration's vision for education is that you keep saying you have a vision for education. Why not provide Albertans with something more concrete? Why haven't you reported back on the Inspiring Education dialogue? Why did you pull the new School Act from the agenda for this spring sitting? Is it because you're starting to realize that your vision for education isn't the same as the vision shared by most Albertans?

[Remarks in Punjabi] I don't see a vision for education from this administration, just another collection of wrong decisions. It was wrong to violate the contract with teachers and then fight and lose the case in court. The Minister of Education's response to the ongoing teachers' wage issue has been less than inspiring. He was obviously completely unprepared for a verdict that favoured the teachers. [As submitted]

It was wrong to claw back \$80 million from Alberta's public school boards. Can Alberta's students and parents expect even greater cuts? It is wrong to cut education funding, our primary investment in our future. By all means look for efficiencies, but ensure stable, dependable funding for this vital public program. It is wrong to fire the school board without exhausting all avenues of understanding and board support. It is wrong that we have an administration whose only response to social challenges faced by aboriginal communities is to fire their local school board.

A short, simple message repeated by many Calgarians has made its way to our offices. "Alberta's continued prosperity will depend on the knowledge and skills of its future citizens. In these times more than ever it is important to continue to invest in our children's education."

[Remarks in Punjabi] "As a concerned Albertan, I urge you not to cut funding for our schools." As ever, there is great wisdom in the direct, no-nonsense advice of Albertans. This administration should listen. The throne speech contains a claim that the Premier's administration will build world-class universities. How can this be accomplished when the minister of advanced education has already admitted that the best-case scenario for postsecondary funding this year is a zero per cent increase? The University of Calgary is already laying off staff, and the University of Alberta is considering the same. We should be investing in postsecondary education and research and development to move Alberta from a 20th century economy to a 21st century economy. [As submitted]

It is wrong to balance the budget on the backs of students. Students and their families are rightfully alarmed by the prospects of massive tuition increases. Now more than ever Alberta needs talented graduates to fill jobs in the energy sector, the health sector. How can we ever address ER wait times and the need for greater capacity in long-term care without more doctors and nurses? How can we continue to keep our energy sector alive without new engineers and scientists? These short-sighted policies are driving away our best and brightest.

[Remarks in Punjabi] In difficult times a responsible government would focus on protecting public services that Albertans depend upon while finding efficiencies to bring down the deficit. This administration claims to protect public services, but ask anyone who depends on PDD funding how they feel about the government's spending priorities. These people are desperate, and they weren't getting the help they needed even during the boom. Betraying their security and well-being is wrong. No vision, no imagination, no leadership: that's what this throne speech offered Albertans. [As submitted]

As proud as Albertans are of their province, many of us here sense that we can do better. With the resources at our command – our natural wealth, our well-educated, well-skilled population, our can-do culture – we should be able to build a truly world-class society, including hospitals, postsecondary institutions, and research centres. If we put our minds to it, we could build the world's first truly sustainable economy. We could in fact be leaders in that race.

[Remarks in Punjabi and English] We could eliminate homelessness. We could dramatically reduce poverty. All these things are possible if we had a government that committed itself to four simple principles: health, enterprise, foresight, integrity. This is a time for solutions. We need energetic, forward-looking leadership, a government that can adapt to changing times, new challenges. We need a government that makes decisions based on principles, not political expediency. We can do better.

3:30

In conclusion, I would like to thank Mr. Manjit Singh Piasa for helping me translate my response to the throne speech from English to Punjabi.

[Remarks in Punjabi and English] Pure: the true believer belongs to the Lord, and the victory also belongs to the Lord.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. [Remarks in Punjabi] I have just said in Punjabi, of course, "Thank you for your speech, hon. member, but I don't agree with everything you've said, and I would like to ask you one question." Do you agree with the significant investment that we are

making in health care as announced in the Speech from the Throne, as backed up by the business plan and the budget that was introduced last week so that we can seek and find the kinds of improvements to health service delivery that we have promised Albertans and that they rightfully deserve and requested?

Mr. Kang: [Remarks in Punjabi]

Secondly, you know, we are glad to see more funding for the health care. I agree with you there fully. But it remains to be seen if it will be publicly delivered, publicly funded. So far we are not seeing that happening. I think it still can go towards a private system. Those are our concerns. It remains to be seen how successful we will be even with throwing all that money at health care.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Punjabi and English] Dear Uncle, I'm very happy and pleased to hear about very important issues in our mother tongue. I'm acknowledging in your speech how we're going to address the emergency wait times and long-term care and the doctors and nurses issues. We're training more doctors and nurses than we've ever trained before. The emergency wait time is the number one performance measure for Alberta Health Services and Dr. Duckett. Dear Uncle, how can you say that we're not addressing this? We have first offered a vision in the Alberta health act. We've spent and invested so much in providing care. We have one board to implement that job. If you could please answer that question, I would appreciate it.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you. [Remarks in Punjabi] I think that before we had 24 health boards, and we reduced them to 17. Then we brought them to nine. Then we brought them back to one. [Remarks in Punjabi] So it remains to be seen. [Remarks in Punjabi] You know, we were training more nurses; we were training more doctors. Then all of a sudden there was such a big uncertainty, and those nurses and doctors were not even sure, you know, that they would have jobs here in Alberta.

With the new funding some certainty has come into the health care system. Increasing the long-term care beds will help the hospitals to reduce those wait times. You know, everything is in progress, but it remains to be seen if all the money the government has put into the health care is going to grow the situation in six weeks, in three months.

Mostly, it has been mismanagement, but it's not on the delivery part. The health care we read about in the papers, you know: we've got the best service providers in the hospitals. I commend all those hospital front-line staff, who provide the best service. But somehow there is something up in the management part with the delivery of the system. So it remains to be seen how we're going to improve this.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely proud . . .

The Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member, but I'm sorry; the time has expired.

For those members who participated in Punjabi, if you get a request from the *Hansard* people in the next couple of minutes about

a translation or the proper text, do not hesitate to respond very immediately because it's a very, very tight schedule that we produce this *Hansard* with. So if you get the request, bang back right away, please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I did grow up in northeast Calgary just outside of the hon. member's constituency and just outside of mine, I definitely will not be participating in this debate in Punjabi, so we don't have to worry about that.

I do want to say that it's a pleasure to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne that was delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor just a few weeks ago. Again, it's always an honour to be in his presence. He's such a great Albertan. It never ceases to amaze me the dignity and sense of humour that he delivers such speeches with.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

What I would like to do, Mr. Speaker, is just go through some of the major points in the Speech from the Throne and try to equate that to what it means for my constituents and what they have to be excited about. First of all, I think what was clearly outlined in the Speech from the Throne was the unique fiscal position that our province is in right now compared to any other jurisdiction not just in Canada but right across North America.

I had the pleasure earlier in this year of travelling to both the state capitals in Washington and Idaho on behalf of the Pacific Northwest economic delegation, and it became very apparent to me that we're very fortunate to live in the place that we do. These people are having to grapple with some of the most difficult decisions of cutting substantial amounts out of their budgets. But here in Alberta we don't have to do that because we do have this thing called the sustainability fund.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think that we should maybe change the name. It should be called the stability fund because that's exactly what it provides Albertans, stability in times when there is some uncertainty around revenues and some uncertainty around the potential for economic growth. We do know that we are going to come back to a time of great economic growth and prosperity, and it's probably not too far around the corner. But we do have this \$17 billion that was put into the sustainability fund that will get us through these times. I believe that this government does not have to be bashful about putting this in place and using it appropriately in this past year and in the next few years to come as we find ourselves back in the black in the fiscal position.

You know, I guess, the speech did talk about Alberta's relative position as having the highest incomes and the lowest taxes and the most advanced public infrastructure in Canada. That's something to be very proud of, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to speak briefly to this idea of having the lowest taxes. While I'm very proud of being in the province that does have the lowest taxes, we need to be very cognizant that we need to continue to push the envelope. I was elected to this Assembly because I really believe that we as politicians and members of this Assembly have the obligation to deliver the services that people require as well as to make sure that we're doing it in a way that's the best value to taxpayers and in a way that allows us to put more of the hard-earned money of the average citizen back into their pockets so that they can spend it on the things that they believe are important in their lives.

3:40

I want to make sure that we are continually looking at making sure we do have the lowest taxes because it does create a better opportu-

nity for investment and economic growth – that’s no secret – but from a moral standpoint it does put more money into the pockets of the average hard-working citizen so they can make the choices themselves instead of having government make choices as to where that money should be spent. I really believe that as we move forward in using the sustainability fund and move forward into, you know, 2012, when we are back in the black and are in a surplus position, we should continue to look at ways to invest our surpluses so that we can continue to lower taxes in our jurisdiction in a way that’s sustainable for not just this current generation but future generations. I really believe that we do have the opportunity to allow that we do have the lowest taxes in Canada and right across North America not just now but for future generations of Albertans. I think that’s very, very important.

The second thing that was very prominent in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, was health care, and we can see that just last week, with the delivery of the budget by the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise, health care is a significant concern of our government. We’ve seen the follow-through of what was in the throne speech, a five-year committed spending plan on health care. I think this is very important because, again, I believe this provides stability to the health care system, which is what Albertans are wanting, and I think that this is an appropriate time to provide that stability. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because I think we’re at a very, very important crossroad with our health care system. I was very excited about the report that was released by the committee that was chaired by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the opportunity that Albertans are going to have to have input on the future direction of health care at a very, very broad level.

Mr. Speaker, it was only about early October, I believe it was, when I convened a round-table discussion of about a dozen members in my community. I might get some jeers from the opposition here across the aisle, but this was a very broad spectrum of people in my constituency. There is no doubt about that. There were probably at least half of those people in that room that did not vote for me – hard to believe – in the last election. This was a very broad cross-section of the diversity that’s in my constituency both from a business standpoint, an age standpoint. We had students, seniors, business people, social activists, immigrants, those types of things.

We had about a three-hour discussion about health care, about the government’s plans for health care and what these people would like to see moving forward, and I really got the sense that there is a huge appetite for Albertans to enter into dialogue about the future of health care in our province. I don’t mean, sort of, the ins and outs about how many nurses or how many doctors but a very, very high level about what we cherish about our public health care system.

I think all Albertans realize the tremendous pressures and strains our current health care system is under. We know that when it comes to pharmaceuticals, when it comes to the aging demographics of our population, when it comes to the technological advances we’ve seen in our health care system over, let’s say, you know, the last two decades, people are living longer. Children that would normally not have lived past a certain age are living longer and with a greater quality of life, and the supports are there to provide them that. The problem is, Mr. Speaker, that these are very, very expensive.

A number a decades ago, when public health care was brought in by Tommy Douglas, I’m not sure he really imagined the types of escalations in cost to the public purse that health care would have. We’re now sitting at very close to 40 per cent of the actual provincial budget on health care. I know that it’s over 50 per cent in Ontario. That’s certainly concerning.

Albertans from right across the political spectrum want to have the discussion about what that means for them moving forward. Does that mean that we might have to change some of our thinking around our public health care system?

You know, Mr. Speaker, it was baffling, just mind boggling, particularly over the last two days, that we had members of the Official Opposition make comments about this government’s wanting to give health care money to for-profit enterprises or companies or people. What I don’t understand is that I haven’t met a nurse, I haven’t met a doctor, I haven’t met anybody involved in the health care professions that would do that job for free. What I don’t get is that we sometimes like to think of our health care system as something that’s free, that’s just always there, but the money comes from somewhere. I know that our doctors and our nurses and all of our health professionals want to be fairly compensated for the work that they do. Those are the types of things that we need to have conversations about, as to how to best deliver them. We need to get past this debate about for-profit or not-for-profit and what that means to public health care.

When I brought this group of constituents together in my constituency, the one amazing thing was that I was a little worried that we’d evolve into this very partisan, heightened political rhetoric about, you know: you’re going to privatize health care or, no, you’re not going to privatize or we need more privatized health care or we don’t. That’s not what happened, Mr. Speaker. When we really sat down as a group, a community group, knowing that we were all in this together, we had very, very articulate, very thoughtful debates about what is the role of the private sector in health care and what is the role of government in health care. All people want are the proper assurances that those roles will be there when they need them.

Mr. Speaker, I really believe this whole idea right from the throne speech that Albertans themselves will be engaged in the evolution of the health care system from its first steps is key. I think that’s what Albertans want. I know that that’s what people in my constituency want. They told me that when we had that round-table meeting.

Mr. Speaker, the final thing that I want to address in the throne speech is this whole notion of increasing Alberta’s competitiveness, not just in Canada but right across the world. There are many different facets to this, obviously, but the one that I find most interesting is this whole idea around regulations and red tape. You know, I have to admit that since I’ve been elected, the feedback that I’ve received from a number of my constituents, not just businesses but constituents that are involved in the social sectors and that sort of thing, is that there are too many hurdles to go over and hoops to jump through just to do what they’re passionate doing. Whether it’s helping out someone that is a PDD client or whether it’s delivering a service as part of their small business, they believe that government has put obstacles in their way. As I say, it actually goes against our slogan of the freedom to create because, really, these people feel that they don’t have the freedom.

I’m very much looking forward to how this rolls out over the next year because I believe there are a lot of things that we can be doing. I’ll provide one example. Just the other week, Mr. Speaker, I read an e-mail from a constituent, and he had some concern about a gentleman in Ontario that, for whatever reason, thought it would be okay to keep a tiger as a pet. I find that very peculiar myself, but the conclusion of the story was that this individual that decided to keep the tiger as a pet ended up being attacked by his pet and dying. My constituent thought it was very, very important for us to create a law to keep people from keeping tigers and other dangerous animals as pets.

3:50

Well, I don't know, really, whether we as a body, as an Assembly need to protect our constituents from just common-sense type things. I think at times governments, not just this one but governments right across the world, try to protect their citizens from stuff that is just common sense. I'm not going to sit here and say that this individual that had the pet, you know, deserved that fate or whatever. I guess what I'm saying is that we need as governments to be very focused, to let people use their creativity and imagination to be not just the best businesspeople, the best workers, but the best citizens and the best neighbours possible. I'm, again, really excited about this idea of the government seriously looking at what kind of burden it's putting not just on businesses but on average citizens, my constituents, through its requirements of regulation and red tape and all of the hoops and the hurdles that they have to go through.

Mr. Speaker, just one last thing. I have to say that, you know, I'm coming up to the sort of two-year mark of being elected to this Assembly, and it's been such a great honour to serve with all of the colleagues in here on both sides. It's been an honour to serve my constituency. I think we have a great opportunity right now here in Alberta to come through what was – you know, a lot of people were saying that they could foresee what happened with the economy, but I'm not sure that a lot of people were able to envision how it unfolded. We have an opportunity right here to emerge as the best place to live, to work, to play, to invest, and to raise a family. That's what I'm going to be dedicated to doing for my constituents in Calgary-North Hill over the next year.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to make a quick comment. I appreciate the hon. member's speech. In fact, I too share his passion for Alberta somehow getting on a more sustainable track in the future.

I heard your talk at the beginning, more on us being prepared in the future to be able to keep taxes low and for people to keep investment going here in Alberta, and I agree with that. I think that primarily the best way to do that is through what the Mintz report suggests, where we're almost saving 30 per cent of our royalty resources through good or through bad times or whatever the deal be and for us to get off this roller coaster.

I know it's easier for me as an opposition member to say that, but I noticed that earlier, in the Lougheed era, I guess, you would see 30 per cent as a general rule just come off, from '71 until about '79 or maybe even sometime after. I'm just asking what your proposal is to sort of ensure – I see the way for us to be able to get to that perpetually low tax base is for us to save over the short term in order to build up that revenue because we're not going to have the petroleum resources, which I see as giving us our competitive advantage, at that time.

I'll let you take the floor. That's sort of the basis of my question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo because I think that's a very important one. I know that the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise has talked over the last couple of weeks about developing a savings strategy or some sort of legislated savings strategy. I'm pretty sure that he is sort of in the primary stages of looking at what that might look like. I do know that our Premier did provide that direction to the former Minister of Finance and

Enterprise, and she had the challenge of trying to address that in a time where the fiscal, I guess, capacity of this province fell out of the bucket.

You know, we're going to get there. I truly believe that. I have the honour of being appointed chair of the Cabinet Policy Committee on the Economy, which the Minister of Finance and Enterprise falls under, and I know that we've had some preliminary discussions about how we can maybe bring forward some of the ideas, to have discussions amongst our caucus members, to eventually bring something to this Assembly. I think that's very important. It's something that I know this government is looking at. I would suggest probably staying tuned. It's probably not too far down the road.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I wish I could remember who came up with the quote that the only certainties in life are death and taxes. That seems to be part of today's conversation. With regard to Alberta having the lowest tax regime in Canada, I would suggest that the flat tax puts an unfair burden on our middle-class taxpayers. If you compare the tax rates that people in the upper echelon of our middle class pay versus other provinces, I think you'll find that other provinces using a progressive tax rate have breaks for their middle-class individuals.

With regard to health care and the delivery and costs the member used the 40 per cent figure. The reality is that as a portion of our GDP health care spending, whether it's in a recession or in a boom time, has never exceeded 7 per cent of our gross domestic product, so be careful when you use that 40 per cent figure. Also, be careful when you talk about Tommy Douglas and universal health care. Universal health care has three pillars. Publicly funded is just one of them. Publicly administered and publicly delivered are the other two pillars that are extremely important.

In terms of taxes, in Alberta we pay a terrific amount of hidden tax, and one of those hidden taxes would be the amount of interest we pay for P3 projects, which this government refuses to transparently and accountably put forward. We just had a meeting this past week with the Ministry of Transportation, and they refused to provide the interest rates that we're going to be paying for the next 30 years on road projects. We've been unable to get answers for how much they're spending on school projects.

So when it comes to rah-rah Alberta, there are a lot of things to cheer about, but get your costs and your taxes straight.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: EI, Employment and Immigration. It's not the beginning of a song. It's not ee-eye, ee-eye oh; it's just EI.

The Acting Speaker: This is the throne speech.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Honoured to be over here. It's definitely hard to compete with some of the speeches, nor will I do a reply in Punjabi, but I really appreciate the fact that in this Assembly members can express themselves in their native language. I think it reflects the nature of this province and how open and welcoming we are to newcomers in this province and how proud we are of our heritage. So congratulations to the member for delivering his comments in Punjabi.

Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to express my appreciation to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor and his lovely spouse for

being such vital contributors to our province and for representing the Crown not only within the province but also outside of Alberta in such a dignified way as they have. I can only imagine how onerous the task of being a Lieutenant Governor is, yet this Lieutenant Governor has always fulfilled all of his obligations and has done it in a top-notch manner. I really take off my hat to him.

The Speech from the Throne really gave Albertans an outline of what this government's values are, and I firmly believe that these values very closely reflect those of Albertans. First of all, Mr. Speaker, it also builds on the fact that the government of Alberta has worked very hard with Albertans – actually, probably most of the heavy lifting was done by Albertans – to put us in the position that we're in right now to make us able to respond to any adversity that may fly our way without advance warning.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the recent economic downturn was a phenomenon that was felt world-wide. No economy on this planet has not felt the repercussions of the economic downturn. We saw it down south in the United States, an economic superpower relative to other economies. We saw it in Japan. We saw all of the European Union and their economies literally shrivel overnight. Yet in the province of Alberta, a province that perhaps not enough people know about outside of Canada, outside of North America, we have managed to cultivate an economy and a fiscal regime that managed to a large degree to shelter us from this economic downturn. No, we can't say that we escaped it unscathed. This budget that has been tabled shows the fact that we had to adapt and that we had to bring in measures that are reflective of what a responsible government would do. However, you will see over the next few months, as other provinces from coast to coast will be delivering their budgets over probably the next three to four months, how tempered our measures were compared to what you will see in other budgets. That is because (a) Albertans expected us to be fiscally responsible, and (b) we have managed to, for lack of a better term, sock away money for a situation exactly like this one. Although we cannot say that we expected this to happen, we were always ready for when it happened. Much like an insurance policy: you don't buy your house fire insurance policy because you expect a fire to occur, but you have one just in case, and when it does occur, you're happy you had it. This is exactly the situation.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, compared to other provinces and states and countries throughout the world, as opposed to borrowing money from outside banking institutions or financial houses at a certain rate of interest, we were able to actually borrow money from ourselves, our own money, and balance our budget to a larger degree than what you will see in other jurisdictions. That's something that I think not only this government but predominantly Albertans should be proud of because it was they who expected it to happen, and it was they who allowed us to do it as government. Frankly, they wouldn't be supporting this government if they didn't want us to do exactly what they told us to do.

Our financial advantage, Mr. Speaker, as the budget clearly indicates, is not only benefiting us right now but will also benefit us in the future because some analysts will tell you that we are already in the recovery phase of this recession, but Alberta will be the first one to be able to go out and say to the world: "We're open for business. We have rebuilt our economy. We have in the meantime built up our infrastructure, which is now ready to receive an influx of investment, and we have a young, skilled, educated workforce ready to perform in a new, robust economy."

That will be something that not many provinces will be able to say because as their economies are shrivelling up and they are cancelling

construction projects and cancelling infrastructure projects, which will be needed in a recovering economy, this province is actually doing the opposite. We are investing in our infrastructure, and we are investing in construction so that we will be ready to accept a new, robust economy. I would like to again thank Albertans for giving us this initiative and for supporting us in doing so.

Mr. Speaker, another very important aspect of the speech – and it appears at the very front of the speech – is our health care. As you know, we have a minister who, as I just said a couple of days ago in a radio interview, probably hasn't slept for the last month or so but, like this government and like Albertans, is committed to making sure that we get the best possible health care system for the money that our taxpayers pay. Let's face it. Again, there is always lots to be desired. Albertans should be commended on the fact that they have high expectations. They should have high expectations because they pay for the system, and they should expect to get the best outcomes possible from our health care system.

I had some personal experiences with the health care system through my family, and I have to tell you that when called upon, the system responds very well. Our nurses and staff in our hospitals are working very hard, and we have some very good professionals delivering the best that they can. However, we should always strive for more. I know that our goal is simply reflective of that of Albertans. We want the system to be as good as possible, just like Albertans do, not because we want this for political reasons. We want this because these are our family members, these are our constituents, these are our friends who end up in these hospitals, who end up at these doctors' clinics. We want them to get the best possible treatment that is available and that could be made available through our expenditures and our management of the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the name of Tommy Douglas has often been tossed around. A bit of a personal connection, actually: a member of my family went to college with Tommy Douglas. Every time we have a family gathering, I get a lengthy lesson on Tommy Douglas, what he stood for and what his ideas were. If you read any of his writings and any of his speeches – and I think the members who tend to toss his name around the most probably have read the least; at least, it would appear so.

Mr. Tommy Douglas's idea of publicly funded and publicly delivered health care had nothing to do with the system we have in place right now. Mr. Speaker, his idea was to provide emergency care for those who need it most. It has grown since, and even though the ideas are still in place, this is not what we would want to go back to. Propagating the ideas of Tommy Douglas and asking us to follow them right now would take us back decades. I think Mr. Douglas would be quite surprised that we took his idea from there to what we have right now.

Mr. Speaker, another aspect of the Speech from the Throne talks about building safe and caring communities. That is something that I hear about very often in my constituency. Our constituents expect to be safe, and they expect the law to be on their side. They expect that the victims, not the perpetrators, will receive the benefit of the law and that the government of Alberta will do anything it can within its realm of influence to create as safe communities as possible. Needless to say – and that's not passing the buck – a great deal of the jurisdiction that deals with the criminal element lies within the Criminal Code of Canada, being the federal government. But I can tell you that as a member of government I see no effort spared among my colleagues who are involved with the delivery of justice and with apprehending some of these individuals.

If you look at the track record of this government over the last two years, Alberta is not exactly a welcoming province for the criminal

element. If one were to be a criminal – and I'm not encouraging them to look for more competitive markets – Alberta is not the place to start business. We are tough on our criminal element. We seize any proceeds of crime that they have. We apprehend children who are witnesses to or in the realm of drug dealers, and we support our police force and our judiciary in doing the work that they do.

Observing, Mr. Speaker, as a government member the work of my colleagues, I see a great deal of collaboration also with our federal colleagues. I know that this is one of the common areas where we feel that no effort should be spared in making Albertans safer in their communities. Again, why do we do it? Not for political reasons. We do it because we live in these communities. Our friends, our colleagues, our neighbours live in these communities, and we want Alberta to be safe for everyone.

That sort of takes us, Mr. Speaker, to being competitive. We live right now in a very competitive world. Investors will invest anywhere as long as they get a good return on their investment. Skilled workers and scientists and developers also will move and live anywhere there are possibilities for starting up a business or investing. So part of our competitive advantage is not only to have a competitive economy, going back to my initial comments, but also in creating a welcoming province in which people want to live, do business, raise their children, raise their families. Safe communities is part of that.

Also part of that, Mr. Speaker, is creating quality of life. Through our Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit Alberta has invested a great amount of money into diversifying our culture, into enhancing our culture, our arts. Those are very important components in a competitive economy because if we want to attract the bright minds and the hard workers to this province and if we want to encourage our homegrown talent to stay in this province, they expect a quality of life. That's where our parks, museums, art galleries, and concert halls come into play.

I know that there are individuals on the opposite side that think this is not a wise way of spending money. They calculate everything in dollars and cents. What gives you the best return? What is cheaper? They like to quantify everything mathematically. But there are aspects of life, Mr. Speaker, that government is involved with that simply can't be quantified by dollars and cents. Those are the qualitative aspects of governance and of our life that are reflected only by the individuals that we bring into this province enjoying a good quality of life.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, last but not least, it is important to highlight the fact that the Speech from the Throne also reflects Alberta's position in Canada. One would probably have to live only for one day in this great country of ours to realize that Alberta has become a tiger – my reference to a tiger; it seems like "tiger" is the word of the day – within Alberta's economy. What is good for Alberta is good for the rest of Canada. I'm very encouraged that maybe the Premier of Quebec has read Alberta's Speech from the Throne now that he is coming to Alberta and is soliciting investment from Alberta in Quebec following some disparaging remarks made not very long ago about Alberta's economy.

Let's face it, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some 3 million people, but the economic spinoff from this population and from this province reaches from coast to coast to coast. The steel that we use over here to produce our rigs and to extract our oil comes from Ontario. A lot of the labour force comes from the Maritimes and Quebec. The research comes from virtually all provinces. Most importantly, the consumption of our product is done by all provinces. So all of us benefit from it equally.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to say that the Speech from the Throne shows that this government is on the right course. This government is on a course of balancing our budget by 2012. This government is on a course of making sure that Alberta will be and continues to be the most competitive economy when the recession ends. This government is on course to ensure that we will get not a tiger's but a lion's share of investment from throughout the world into this province and, also, to provide Albertans with the best quality of life.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the member if he could comment a little more – both he and I represent urban constituencies – on how the safe communities initiative is impacting his constituency.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Actually, there is a great partnership right now among the residents of my constituency – and I know that the same thing is happening in Calgary and other urban settings – where our constituents, our citizens, are saying: "Enough is enough. We want to collaborate with government, and we want to own our communities. We're taking our communities back."

I will use this opportunity to highlight one particular program, which is supported by the government of Alberta but also by the Edmonton Police Service, called the NET, neighbourhood empowerment team, where through both provincial and municipal funding a team of police officers and social workers will enter a community where crime stats are above average and will do great proactive work. What they will do is identify hot spots, inform residents of crime occurring in their neighbourhood, and make the neighbourhood as unwelcoming as possible to the criminal element. Combating crime is a team effort. The government of Alberta and other agencies can provide the expertise and the resources, but it is also important that the citizens of Alberta engage in this process, report crime as often as possible, and take measures to prevent crime from happening.

In Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, to answer this member's question, there is a great amount of collaboration that I'm seeing. I'm very proud, in particular, of the constituents in my riding who are taking their personal time to take their neighbourhoods back and push out the criminal element. It works.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I do appreciate hearing the thoughts of the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration, but I take exception to his use of the term "tempered." He talked about tempered measures that the government had taken. I equate "tempered" with "balanced," and the cuts to PDD, children's services, public education, postsecondary, parks, environment, SRD, and seniors do not show temperance, do not show balance. I believe in a balance where energy and environment are bookends of balance; if you go forward in energy, you also have to go forward in environmental protection. You can't have one without the other.

Likewise, infrastructure and operational funding. What good is an empty building if you don't have the staff and the operational budget

to keep that building functioning? Likewise, education equals economy. Other sets of bookends: you have to have a strong public education system, a strong postsecondary education system if you're going to develop your economy.

We are not in a balanced situation in this province. When the sustainability fund runs out, we're back to riding our nonrenewable resource roller coaster. I would like to see the type of temperance and balance that the hon. member put forward, but as yet it hasn't happened. If the hon. member would like to provide other examples of what he believes is a balanced approach, I'll leave him the remainder of the time to do so.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I sit over here and look across the aisle first thing before question period, I try to figure out: will it be a spending day or a savings day? They tend to be altering from day to day. Right now the Member for Calgary-Varsity has listed a whole bunch of ministries where he would not cut out any money, yet in the same sentence he's arguing that our sustainability fund will run out and that we will be again relying on natural resources. Well, give me another list. Give me a list where you would cut out the budget so we don't have to rely on the sustainability fund and perhaps one day on natural resources. That list never appears.

What we hear are one-offs: "You're spending too much money on this" or "You're not spending enough on that." Bring it into balance, and tell us: what would you cut out? Don't tell me about Horse Racing Alberta because you've spent that money 55 times over already on everything else that you pointed out, which we don't spend anyhow. But every time you say that we should spend more money in something, give me the other thing that you would limit or diminish spending in. That I have never heard yet.

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

Seeing none, the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne and the government's plans for the upcoming session. I'd like to extend a personal thanks to His Honour, Norman Kwong, and to Mrs. Kwong for their years of dedication and service to this province.

First, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a quick look back at how far we've come since this government's last throne speech, and a quick look it will be because, frankly, it looks like this government has been standing still. The words in last week's Speech from the Throne do not match the urgency required to protect working families in this economy. Albertans were counting on this government to take bold, strategic steps. At this time last year the government begged for Albertans to have confidence in their actions. What they said then we can say again today: this Progressive Conservative government has done nothing but inspire scant hope. This session's throne speech offers no clear direction for our province's future. In my years in politics I've never seen a throne speech as vague as the one that was delivered last Thursday.

Three major issues have Albertans struggling to sleep at night, but this government keeps ignoring them. They are health care, the environment, and jobs and the economy. It will take more than platitudes and glossy reports for Albertans to regain faith in this failed government. The NDP believes in a strengthened, publicly delivered health care system for all. We believe in fighting for

Alberta workers, their families, their jobs, and their communities. We believe in a just government and one that encourages prosperity for all its people.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to lay out the priorities that we see for this province in the next several years. First, let's invest significantly and sustainably in our health care system. Albertans want to hear that their health care will be publicly delivered, not just publicly paid, and that it will be there when they need it instead of hearing promises of five years of underfunding. Albertans will not tolerate five years of bed closures, hiring freezes, nursing layoffs, and increased user fees. Frankly, hearing the new health minister muse about user fees in emergency rooms is unacceptable. Albertans already pay more out of pocket for health care services than those in other provinces. This is wrong, and we all deserve better from this government.

4:20

My colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona and I toured the province last fall, and we met with Albertans in seven different communities to hear their concerns with our public health system as well as their suggestions for how we can strengthen the current system and move it forward to meet our needs. The stories we heard focused on four principles of health care, which I urge the government to adopt.

First of all, people want high-quality care focusing on best practices and education and training.

Secondly, they want accessible health care, and that means ensuring that beds and basic services are available throughout the province in urban and rural areas, not concentrated just in Edmonton and Calgary.

Thirdly, they want affordability. People know that they pay for their health care. They know that it's not free. They know that they have paid taxes to sustain it, and they don't want to be charged again when they go to an emergency room or when they go to a doctor or when they have some surgery.

Most importantly, I think, Mr. Speaker, they need timely care. We were told loud and clear that 14-, 18-, 20-hour waiting times in emergency rooms are unacceptable. Six months' waiting time for cancer surgery is unacceptable. Yet in today's system under this Progressive Conservative government these things are commonplace.

Public opinion polls show time after time that Albertans value their public health care system and that it should be maintained and strengthened, not dismantled and privatized. Albertans know the value of health care and need to know that it will be there when it's needed. We heard from Albertans across the province who feel that this government is working towards dismantling the public health care system. The first recommendation in our health care report What People Want is that the government release all planning documents relative to health care reform. We heard the minister today in question period indicate that he has a number of plans in the works. Well, I call on the minister to publicly release all of the planning documents that are currently in the department's control so Albertans can see what's being considered.

Any potential changes should be discussed openly and honestly with Albertans. Public input should be valued instead of squelched. We see in this throne speech a move towards attempting to solicit the input of Albertans, and we'll hold the government accountable to ensure that this happens. We need to hold them accountable so that decisions like the recent decision to close hundreds of beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton are made openly and with the interests of those who will be most affected taken into account.

Albertans found out what this government means when they refer to community-based care. What that phrase really means is less

public services, leaving individuals and families with fewer options and supports. Albertans rallied with groups like the Friends of Medicare, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and Alberta's NDP opposition. The government has temporarily backed down on the closures. They are still closing 108 beds and moving these patients to a long-term care facility. Again, let me be clear. What this really means is that the government has taken away another 150 long-term care beds, that are desperately needed for our aging population. In light of this, the throne speech should have looked at alternatives to the closure of Alberta Hospital Edmonton such as the redevelopment of the facility so that it could serve the community more effectively in the future.

While more than 1,700 Albertans have been assessed as needing long-term care, this government's solution is to take beds away and break its election promise to build 600 new beds. This demonstrates this Progressive Conservative government's complete lack of respect for the promises they make to their constituents.

Our caucus uncovered this government's real plan for seniors' care in the fall, and the truth is that they were planning on having three times more designated assisted living beds than long-term care beds. The same leaked government document talked about increasing fees for seniors to entice more private investment. This is certainly no way to treat those who helped build this province and who paid their taxes their entire lives. Now, when they turn to their government for promised care and support, they often end up in emergency and acute-care hospital beds when they and their families can no longer cope. This leads to a backlog in our hospitals and, in particular, our emergency rooms.

The updated wait times were released last month, and the numbers aren't good for Albertans, Mr. Speaker. The typical wait in Edmonton and Calgary was more than 14 hours this past year. It is unacceptable that we make those who are sick wait that long before they are admitted. The waits would be reduced if there were open acute-care beds, but there aren't. Fortunately, the announcement to close 300 acute-care beds has been reversed, but it's absolutely absurd for a government to address long waiting times by closing beds.

This throne speech should have offered clear, positive moves regarding public health care. It should have made specific recommendations that will benefit all Albertans. Instead, this government is creating an Alberta health act which threatens to undermine the very fabric of the Canada Health Act, which is the foundation of our public health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the second priority that I'd like to talk about is providing meaningful and proactive solutions for an ongoing and vital concern for all Albertans, their environment. Alberta innovation can make us leaders in renewable energy and create green-collar jobs, and we need to begin investing in these technologies not now but yesterday. One of the prevailing barriers to easing the stresses of Albertans regarding our environmental future is the issue of a government that still refuses to support an economic transition to renewable energy. We still rely on fossil fuels.

Now, I'm happy to hear that the government has finally heard that there is a real risk to our province's prosperity; that is, a potential boycott of oil sands oil due to the environmentally irresponsible policies of this government, something we've been warning this government about for several years now. The government has finally taken the first step, admitting that tailings ponds are a negligent means of disposing of toxic waste.

Alberta's NDP opposition has been warning for several years that unless the government got serious about cleaning up the oil sands, Alberta ran a real risk of being unable to sell its oil in the world market. Now the government says that it will eventually eliminate

tailings ponds. Well, Albertans and consumers of oil sands oil do not want to hear terms like "eventually." This black eye needs to be resolved, and it needs to be resolved quickly. New projects should use dry tailings technology, and trafficable tailings need to be a priority for existing ponds. Eventually isn't good enough, Mr. Speaker. Abandoning compliance for projects at the approval stage and moving towards compliance after the fact for companies accessing land for oil and gas development certainly isn't good enough and is definitely unacceptable. The result will be more environmental degradation and more damage to Alberta's environmental reputation internationally.

The answers we get to questions regarding environmental mismanagement. Well, we get carbon capture and storage. Despite concern and criticism world-wide and here in Alberta regarding carbon capture and storage, an unproven and expensive technology, this government is pushing forward with its plans by handing \$2 billion in taxpayers' money to the energy giants for implementation. Most Albertans agree that industry should be paying the cost for the environmental degradation that they are causing, not the taxpayers. Albertans should take no solace in these veiled attempts to position us as energy leaders and environmental conservationists. Alberta's NDP has long since argued for a shift to renewable energy sources, with wind energy and solar power to be on the list, to name a few. These are technologies that have minimal impact environmentally and maximum benefit overall.

The third priority, Mr. Speaker, but not the least one is to commit to making strategic investments in ensuring economic prosperity for all Albertans. The boom and bust goes over and over again. As a result, this time 78,000 full-time jobs have disappeared. Thousands of families have been left to access food bank services and rely on the charity of their friends and neighbours. Last year I warned of the job losses that were impending, and I urged the government to consider stimulus spending initiatives to keep families with jobs and roofs over their heads. Instead, the government decided to implement a hiring freeze and asked agencies to return money that was already committed to those most in need.

On Friday we heard that they decided the minimum wage would not be increased as promised. Approximately half of those earning minimum wage in Alberta are over 24, and two-thirds are women. These cuts across the board are impacting families negatively, and this government doesn't seem to care. This government failed to plan for the bust, and families are paying the price. Alberta's NDP caucus has long been advocating for a living wage policy, one that would ensure that families could keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.

We've also seen yet another broken promise that this government has made; that is, eliminating the sale of unrefined bitumen from this province. Processing of our bitumen here in Alberta would create thousands of jobs in construction and would result in long-term jobs in the operation of those facilities. Again, this is an issue that Alberta's NDP opposition has been arguing for for some time, yet despite the addition of the new bitumen processing plant in Alberta's Industrial Heartland we are still witnessing the mass export of this raw resource, and tens of thousands of jobs are popping up south of the border instead of here at home.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to touch briefly on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This legislation will establish another committee, yet another empty gesture. The bill is a public relations exercise. This committee will do nothing to help Albertans who are struggling in this recession. Bill 1 should have been used to strengthen universal public health care, it should have focused on public delivery and access to health services throughout the province, and it should have ensured that communities have a say in

regional health delivery by electing representatives to their community health councils.

4:30

Bill 1 is further evidence that this government's priorities are misguided. Alberta's NDP opposition will continue to fight for this truth. The government's plans keep surfacing in brown envelopes, and we will continue to expose Tory secrecy and patronage. We will continue to demand openness and will forge on to protect public health care, jobs, the environment, and public services. Mr. Speaker, this is a government that has lost its way, and this throne speech is simply more proof of that. We will not waiver in our fight for Alberta families. They deserve better from this government, and for that reason Alberta's NDP opposition will not be supporting this throne speech.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Speaker, and I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1

Alberta Competitiveness Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mrs. McQueen]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, this afternoon. I was listening with interest to the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Certainly, I was sitting listening to His Honour deliver the throne speech. I waited with interest for this bill to be tabled, and I was surprised that this was it. In the time that I have had the privilege of sitting in this Legislative Assembly, I have seen significant legislative initiatives come forward as a result of legislation from the Premier or from the Premier's office, but this bill certainly wouldn't be included in that group or that assessment.

If this legislation was a fuel indicator in a car, not only would it be near empty, but the warning light would be on that you only have five litres left. This bill is totally unnecessary at the time.

An Hon. Member: They're running on fumes.

Mr. MacDonald: They're running on fumes and, as the rock band would say, running on empty. I cannot remember the name of the band.

Mr. Hehr: The Eagles.

Mr. Campbell: Jackson Browne.

Mr. MacDonald: Jackson Browne. Ah, yes. Absolutely. The people in Hinton certainly have rock 'n' roll stations there, and they listen to them more keenly than the people in urban Calgary from the sounds of that. But it was Jackson Browne, *Running on Empty*. Absolutely this bill reflects that this government is running on empty.

When we look at this bill and we look at past initiatives of this government, there is simply no need for this legislation other than that perhaps at some time, Mr. Speaker, we're going to create

another board or another committee that we can put our loyalists on through order in council and ensure that they receive a per diem or they get an honorarium or they are looked after in some way.

I was listening to speeches previously, and there was mention of a hiring freeze. I look at the supplementary supply, and I see a transfer of money, \$30 million, to provide separation payments for some individuals in the civil service who may be retiring early. I don't know what exactly is going to happen, but I look at those sums. Of course, we're told there is a hiring freeze, but one only has to look at the *Alberta Gazette* to see that as the orders in council come through, there seems to be appointment after appointment after appointment. A constituent came into our office last Friday and asked to see one of the *Alberta Gazettes*. I showed this individual online the *Alberta Gazette*, and that individual was surprised at the number of appointments this government is continuing to make, and he wanted to know who they were.

I thought: well, if this government was really open and transparent, their number one bill would be an open and transparent process for all those appointees. Also included in that, of course, would be a book or a log where individuals such as the gentleman who came to our office last Friday could look and see which appointments are coming up for renewal, which ones are vacant, which ones he may be interested in applying for himself, how much he gets paid if his appointment was to go through. There could be any number of information points put forward so that taxpayers, if they were interested, could apply. But, of course, none of this happens in public. It's all done behind closed doors. There are whispers and quiet phone calls made, and, bingo, you're selected.

That would be an alternative that I would think that we could have to the Alberta Competitiveness Act. That certainly would be a start toward instilling some confidence in the taxpayers in this government, because it is not open, this government, nor is it transparent. That's one of the suggestions that I would make. Certainly, the government, if they wish, could use that idea because I think its time has come in this province.

It's interesting that this document is not even a year old. It's last May, May 2009. It was a document gathered by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Alberta Finance and Enterprise department, and it's titled Alberta Industry Sector Performance and Prospects. We're dealing already in this government with ideas as to how we can become more competitive.

There are ideas in here on everything, everything from oil and gas extraction to industry energy services to primary agriculture, agrifood industries, forest products – and we all know, unfortunately, how difficult times are in that industry – industrial manufacturing, plastic product industries, construction and engineering, transportation and logistics, financial services, tourism. By tourism we don't mean going to North Vancouver, hiring a train that a former leadership candidate is on the board of directors of the company that owns the train – yes, the Minister of Education is looking at me puzzled, but it's Mr. Dinning. My research indicates that he's on the board of the company that owns that gold leaf service. That's not my idea of promoting tourism, nor is it the taxpayers' of this province.

Mr. Speaker, there are any number of industry sector analyses already completed, including education services, culture, biotechnology and medical devices, and health care services. Already been done. There is an executive summary – it's on the Alberta Finance and Enterprise website – and there are some very, very good ideas in here. It surprises me that the government is not working on these suggestions already and why they would come forward with this bill. There's no need. It's redundant. The work has already been done. Unless this government was so desperate for ideas at a time when

they were essentially fighting among themselves that they decided, "Ooh, we're out of time; the throne speech is coming along, and we need to come up with a bill for the Premier and for the Premier's office," and this was the idea, the Alberta Competitiveness Act.

4:40

Now, we can certainly make ourselves competitive by having a good, solid fiscal regime. We had one here, but the last couple of years it's been everyone else's fault but our own spending habits. This government was quick to take credit when oil was at \$147 a barrel, very quick to take credit for that, Mr. Speaker, but now that we're in a difficult financial situation, well, of course, it's someone else's fault. That is just so far from the truth.

With Bill 1, of course, we heard earlier that we're going to have an intent to increase collaboration between government, business, and industry to improve Alberta's competitiveness. As far as I know, that's already going on. There are some people that have issue with that but certainly not this member. How it's conducted is another issue. The fact that people talk and they try to work things out is no problem, but those talks always should be in public because we have no idea if the taxpayers' interests are being met.

Now, certainly Bill 1, as we heard, also allows for the establishment of a board or committee – and I talked about that earlier – with a general mandate to identify actionable areas for increased competitiveness to quicken the implementation of government competitiveness initiatives and to establish benchmarks to measure Alberta's competitiveness.

Well, one benchmark that I would like to mention is one that we used to always have a look at in the Energy estimates. It was the amount of oil royalties that we were to collect as a percentage after all the deductions had been calculated. The target was 20 to 25 per cent, and it would range, depending upon the year, anywhere from 15 per cent to close to 20 per cent. But this year in the budget I had a look at that performance measure, and it had been removed or eliminated, and another one had taken its place because the government knows that that performance measure is not working.

Another example of this government's performance measures and their ability to press the delete button, Mr. Speaker, is in electricity prices. Years ago we would have in the Assembly, of course, a chart indicating the cost of electricity in Alberta, whether you're an industrial user, a commercial user, or a residential user. It would be in the business plans. You could have a look at it, and you could see for yourself how we ranged with electricity prices in comparison to our neighbours.

We had before deregulation some of the lowest cost electricity in North America. We all know that's no longer the case. We have some of the highest costs for our electricity. I know the other side is very keen to blame the high cost of natural gas for electricity prices going up. Natural gas prices, as we know, have moderated substantially, but the price of electricity hasn't gone down on a consumer's bill. Certainly, the wholesale price has gone down significantly, but bills keep going up and up and up.

All that information used to be provided. I think the President of the Treasury Board was so guilty about the failures of deregulation that he suggested that that performance measure be removed from any of the government documents supporting their budget estimates. I'm sure it would have to be the President of the Treasury Board, but I'm not certain. I am certain that it did happen; it was removed.

That's an example of a benchmark that measures Alberta's competitiveness that this government doesn't want to deal with because they know that after health care their electricity deregulation plan has been a spectacular failure. We know all the promises. We know the promises weren't kept. We know the frustration Alberta

consumers have every month when they open their power bill. Some people tell me they don't want to even open it because they don't even know if they can afford to pay it. But it is another point to make on how this government has to date established benchmarks to measure Alberta's competitiveness and how they conveniently change them when it suits their propaganda campaigns.

Now, when we look at the bill and we follow from the day the throne speech was delivered, a week ago last Thursday, the underlying principle behind the bill is to increase collaboration between the government, business, and industry, but again there are no specifics, and it's difficult to determine what, if any, impact there will be. The government news release on this bill states that throughout the next year benchmarks and goals will be established. I'm sure others will be deleted because the embarrassment bar will be very high, and this is a government that doesn't want to be embarrassed. There's no reference to completion or when action on these benchmarks and goals will take place, nor is there any reference to specific action that will be taken now. The only reference that I can see to anything specific, both in the bill and the news release, is the government's oil and competitiveness review and the western economic partnership between B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan.

The oil and gas competitiveness review: I have no idea. That's going on, as far as I know, behind closed doors. I know nothing about who's involved, what's going to come out of it, but I do know that our research indicates the review is being delayed. I heard in question period last week that it was on the minister's desk, and I know the minister's desk has got a lot of paperwork on it. There will be paperwork on there from when the hon. gentleman was in the health department, and included in that paperwork would be a huge pile of bills from the debt that this folly Alberta Health Services created, \$1.3 billion worth, to be precise.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want anyone to be suggesting that I'm getting off the topic of Bill 1, so I will continue. Establishing benchmarks, reporting explicitly through annual reports, collaboration between ministries and with key players in industry are all important and positive steps towards improving Alberta's competitiveness, but this bill does not take any real action towards making any of these things happen. There are no details. There's no time frame. Everything is stretched out. It's politically convenient. No end goal other than the elusive phrase "increase competitiveness." All this bill does is legislate an idea. The government's own news release states that benchmarks and goals to increase competitiveness will be released in a year, with no indication of how long after that year action will take place.

The government, it is worth noting, already has a Regulatory Review Secretariat with the following mandate:

The goal of regulatory reform is to identify opportunities to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden of government on the people and businesses of Alberta. Supporting the development of good regulation creates the conditions for business to thrive and [to] enhance productivity towards sustainable prosperity. Alberta's regulatory reform places stakeholders at the center of its regulatory activity to uphold the regulatory environment to a standard of excellence. Regulatory reform has been a long standing policy of the Government of Alberta, and endeavors to reduce regulatory burden where possible while ensuring that personal safety, public health and our environment remain protected.

The Regulatory Review Secretariat seems to be concentrated on the red tape burden of compliance requirements and regulation whereas the guiding principle behind Bill 1 is more about collaboration, yet both have very similar mandates and, ultimately, have the same end goal of allowing for productivity, competitiveness, and sustainable prosperity.

4:50

Now, I'm curious about who's on this Regulatory Review Secretariat. It's chaired by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, and he is assisted by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead and the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. They're the latest group to be charged with this review. It'll be interesting to hear in the course of debate how they feel about this bill, whether this bill is going to make their efforts redundant, if there's going to be overlap, or what's going to happen. I'll be listening keenly, and if I'm not available, I will certainly read *Hansard*.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to please adjourn debate on Bill 1. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3
Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010
(continued)

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. Weadick]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010. This is a bill that I will be supporting. The Fatal Accidents Act awards a set amount of damages for bereavement to a surviving spouse, adult interdependent partner, parent, or child of a deceased person. The proposed amendments would make eligibility for bereavement damages less restrictive by removing reference to marital status and would remove the reference to a child as including illegitimate child.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, this bill is just updating the language. It's making damage awards easier for individuals to obtain and not have cumbersome impediments that really should have no bearing in law or, in fact, get in the way of someone being able to collect the damage award. With this bill, as mentioned by the hon. member earlier today, it'll just be easier for people to collect an award under our system. In fact, there are no restrictions now to collecting an award if someone is married or there's none of that unfortunate language of legitimate or illegitimate child. That has gone by the wayside in our measures of what we as a society deem important, and I think that's a good thing.

As a little bit of a background to this act, it was interesting or maybe not so interesting that in the past development of the law when a person was killed at an accident site, their spouses, their children could not receive any benefits. The only thing that was available after the death of a person, what that caused, was solely emotional and pure economic loss to the relatives. It was declared in a court that you couldn't do that, and the only way that a person could actually collect on this was if a person survived.

What this did was that it set up sort of a strange dichotomy in the law where if a person was killed at work, they couldn't get any damages for their families, but if they were injured, well, their family could collect damages. So that part of the law was rectified and sort of caught on foot here and advanced more in the development of the rights. It seems that this is just a continued advancement along a reasonably progressive path, a path that sort of allows both families and individuals to get recompensed at a reasonable rate, where they don't have to claim that damage in lawsuits and they can merely go ahead with their lives. Obviously, this bill will benefit vulnerable members of our communities, and we as a party are supporters of benefits to those families who are facing bereavement circumstances like many of those that exist in fatality incidents.

Without saying more, I appreciate the government advancing the language of this bill, making it compatible with other jurisdictions

and in the eyes of the law, and moving forward in a reasonable fashion in this regard.

At this point in time I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 3, and we'll go from there.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1
Alberta Competitiveness Act
(continued)

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. MacDonald]

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, and its impact on businesses and communities throughout Alberta. As His Honour the Lieutenant Government outlined in his Speech from the Throne, one of this government's top priorities is achieving Alberta's goal of becoming the most attractive business environment in the world. For decades this government has recognized the importance of being business friendly because when business is successful, Albertans reap the reward. That simple strategy has resulted in historically low unemployment rates and one of the highest standards of living in Canada.

But times are changing, Mr. Speaker. The global economy has evolved, and potential new markets are opening up around the world. Geography is no longer the limitation it used to be, and companies are taking a global perspective when it comes to finding the best possible location to do business. To adapt to this new reality, this government recognizes that we are now competing with the entire world for both new and existing revenue streams. To be competitive, we must look at every angle of the situation to ensure that we have the ability to meet the needs of companies that create jobs for Albertans and contribute to the economy that sustains us.

Mr. Speaker, the essential purpose of Bill 1 is to discover and eliminate any unnecessary hurdles that might keep new businesses from choosing Alberta or that might keep existing businesses from expanding here. In the Speech from the Throne His Honour used as an example the conventional oil and gas sectors, that have traditionally driven Alberta's economy. While I recognize the immense contributions these industries make to the economic well-being of the province, I would like to focus today on how Bill 1 might have an effect on a different level across Alberta.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, competition isn't just a global phenomenon between nations. It also exists between provinces and even between municipalities within a province. I am encouraged by the western Canadian partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan to create a boundary-free trade and investment market. But I would also like to see this government clear hurdles for smaller cities and towns within Alberta that don't have the advantage of being associated with the energy sectors.

My home town in Lethbridge is a perfect example. As an agriculturally driven city that is also a hub of postsecondary education and light industry, it has its own unique advantages and challenges in attracting business. Communities such as mine must compete with similar communities across Canada and around the world to attract business and new jobs. That's keeping with the Alberta government's priorities and ideals, and it's a good thing. But the playing field isn't always level. Communities often struggle with finding accurate, up-to-date information on where they stand in relation to their competition. For example, if two communities are competing for a new processing plant, neither knows what kind of tax situation their competitor may offer. Instead of being an open

and merit-based competition, this kind of situation has the potential to degenerate into a gamble where neither player can see the other's cards. To use a sports analogy, it's like facing off in a hockey game against a team whose roster, stats, and records are all sealed.

5:00

Comparable competitive data is essential to creating an environment where every community can compete based on its own merits. Such data would allow communities to have greater confidence in their own competitiveness and allow them to market themselves accurately and strategically on the provincial, national, and global stages.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 would establish a governing body to help implement the competitive strategy set forth in the Speech from the Throne. It is my hope that this body will also collect and distribute the data that communities such as mine need in order to increase their own competitiveness. I also hope this body can create a cohesive, strategic marketing message that all communities can use. We know that Alberta has the lowest taxes in Canada and is one of the world's most business-friendly places. But while we can all talk about the obvious advantages of doing business here, communities also need specific information on what resources we have to encourage productivity.

In short, Mr. Speaker, I believe our communities would benefit from one cohesive story for all Alberta. Such a story would outline the specific advantages of this province as a whole. It would also provide the information our communities need to strategically position themselves and showcase their unique strengths. This would help communities or regions define themselves within the overall Alberta community and allow them to compete openly and fairly based on what they have to offer. By creating a level playing field where each team is allowed to compete on their own merits while drawing on the strength of the province as a whole, we can help foster competitive environments throughout Alberta that follow the same principles set forth by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the members of this House will keep my comments in mind as we move forward with Bill 1 and strive to improve Alberta's competitive edge at home and throughout the world. Let's make our communities, our businesses, and our province the most competitive place on earth.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment or question.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just to sort of continue on from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West's stance, Alberta, to its credit, has done some good things. One of those good things in terms of improving our competitiveness was the agreement reached with the B.C. government prior to TILMA, and that was the investment in the container port in Prince Rupert. That was a very worthwhile long-term investment because if we're going to be successful as a province, we have to go beyond the United States as our chief market source. Our relationships, of course, with the United States need to continue to be strong. We'll have to make sure that our regulations and theirs work together, or we'll be cross-purposing and working against each others' economies. We have to have other alternatives. With the container port at Prince Rupert what we should be considering are India and China as our future markets so that we don't put all of our apples in that one U.S. basket.

Now, the government has been proposing and paying for and supporting pipelines down to Illinois and down to Texas for bitumen

upgrading, but where I would like to see the pipelines growing and flowing is to the coast, to Prince Rupert. Obviously, we're going to have to have environmental regulations in terms of both the structure of the pipeline and making sure that the loadings and so on are of a safe nature. Once the ships are out to sea, we don't have that same control; it becomes a federal matter. But doing the best we can to get not only our raw materials but preferably our upgraded bitumen, our refined bitumen, to the potential of markets in China and India is extremely important.

In terms of the southern portion of the province, which the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West represents along with our hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, and in terms of improving our economic competitiveness, we need to be spending the same type of investments in the twinning of highway 3 so that we have an east to west highway of equivalent value to our north-south highway 2. The government is slowly getting its act together when it comes to the twinning of highway 63, but until that twinning is accomplished, economic opportunities will continue to elude us based on the narrowness of that highway and the frequent bottlenecks.

There is always a balance between cutting red tape and governance. Now, I'm very supportive of facilitating economic development both in this province and in our partnerships not only with other western provinces and with the U.S. but, as I mentioned earlier, with India and China, who are the two most rapidly growing markets. We also have to have a balance, which, unfortunately, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stated, hasn't been achieved in terms of the detailing of the whys and wherefores of Bill 1. Bill 1 says that we'll start playing the game, and then at some point in the future, a year or so down the road, we'll give you the rules of the game.

Now, we've seen that kind of lack of rules in the numerous attempts at the royalty review. Business depends on consistency. Business requires not only consultation; business requires collaboration. Without the rules to go forward, it's an uncharted course. It's a game that is very difficult to play, to negotiate. So for Bill 1 to be successful, we're going to have to decide what the reduced regulations are, what the reduced red tape will be.

We've had examples leading up to this global meltdown, this recession, that is the worst since the 1930s, where there wasn't sufficient red tape or there wasn't sufficient regulation and process. This government and a number of institutions within Alberta were suckered because of a lack of regulation by the Alberta Securities Commission, a lack of red tape when it came to investment in asset-backed commercial paper. ATB took a tremendous hit. AIMCo took a hit. The University of Calgary took a hit. So when we're cutting through the red tape, let's make sure we're not cutting through the regulations and the governance and the oversight.

Another example, fortunately, because of stronger red tape regulation such as Bill 1 is purporting to propose is the subprime mortgages. In Canada we escaped some of that fallout although it overlapped into Alberta and Canada with, as I say, the asset-backed commercial paper. But because we had strong regulations, which Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, has yet to define, Canadians were saved some of the hardship that our American counterparts are going through.

5:10

The balance between governance, regulation, red tape is extremely important. We've seen examples in Alberta, for example, when there wasn't sufficient regulation. I don't say that regulation and red tape are synonymous, but red tape has to do with regulation. For example, when we had the mad cow crisis here in Alberta, we only had one inspector, and that inspector was so caught up with chronic

wasting disease that it took three months to actually confirm that we had a case of mad cow disease here in Alberta. We all know the fallout from that, especially in terms of our beef entry into the States, again our major trading partner.

The government realized the mistake, and instead of one regulator they hired more so that the processing could occur. While our economy suffered some tremendous damage, some good things came out of the regulation, and that was recognizing the age of an animal, the marking of an animal so that you could trace its origin. I know that because of the lack of regulation on the importing of cattle – I've mentioned the example of a cousin having his whole Angus herd that his dad had built up over years and years butchered, culled. That's an example where we have to balance our need for regulation and red tape with the moving forward.

Now, this government has frequently undermined outfits like the Canadian Wheat Board, and they have supported the nonregulated crossing of the Montana border by individuals wishing to sell their grain at whatever price they could get. They cheered when the individuals who sort of did their cross-border shopping were freed from jail for the illegal importation of grain. We have to in Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, match the need for governance with the need for regulation.

For example, in housing the city of Calgary has improved its processing of building permits, particularly when it comes to affordable housing, because they recognize this as a need. Now, if Bill 1, when we finally establish whatever the rules are for Bill 1, prioritizes affordable housing and getting approvals through in a more timely manner, then that's wonderful because we'll be able to take advantage of this basic 40 per cent discount that we currently have.

Again, with regulation and red tape and governance you've got to achieve the right balance. We want sustainable infrastructure projects, for example, to go ahead. Those long-term care projects that the government has issued bonds for: we want to see those be successful, particularly for the nonprofits and the publicly administered long-term care. We would want to see that go forward.

We also have to regulate the degree of profit-taking, for example, that long-term care or assisted living can charge because without some kind of governance then we'll see what happened with the market sort of being let loose on sky-high rents and the increase in property values only, in the case of property values, to start to, well, in the States take a nosedive; in our case be reduced. So, hopefully, Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will create that necessary balance.

The other concern I have is that the government has said – Ralph's mantra was: we're no longer in the business of being in business. But that doesn't mean that we simply wave the checkered flag without any kinds of expectations on the quality of a product.

Another Alberta historical circumstance due to lack of regulation was the pine shingles fiasco, where B.C. was dumping its rejected shingles into Alberta's market. We were rubber stamping, approving a whole variety of fly-by-night pine shingle outfits, and we have very expensive roof repairs as a result.

The other part of the regulation/red-tape balance is getting it right. This government has actually moved more toward regulation and away from legislation. Is Bill 1 signalling a different direction? For example, in postsecondary, Bill 40 changed from a debate on increases in tuition for postsecondary to a regulated circumstance where the minister of advanced education has the sole authority to permit tuition increases. Again, the balance is absolutely essential for us to get it right. We need, we want to say to Canada and to the world: we're a great place to not only visit, but we're a great place

to do business. In order for that to happen, we have to provide an elimination of risk for investment in Alberta.

Now, because of the changing royalties, for example, we've lost a lot of our competitiveness to our neighbours, B.C. and Saskatchewan, so striking that right balance is absolutely essential. Part of achieving that balance is our land-use framework. Where will we allow development to go forward? Where will we set aside parks and protected areas? Where will the no-go zones be? This is part of what Bill 1 has to achieve, and unfortunately what we've seen in terms of the regulatory process is that we've seen a whole bunch of bills – Bill 50, I think it was Bill 46, Bill 39, and I believe it was Bill 19 – that all had to do with land usage, but we still don't have the sustainable land-use policy.

Bill 1 is, again, kind of putting the cart before the horse because it hasn't, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stated, set out the regulations. It's a great concept, but without the concrete rules and regulations to make the concept work . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East under 29(2)(a).

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity if he could perhaps expand on his vision of the pipeline to Prince Rupert, on who would own that pipeline and how it could get constructed.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I am rather big on provincial ownership. Having said that, we could certainly strike an agreement with CAPP or one of the subsidiary companies within CAPP to determine not only the most environmentally sound route but the degree of ownership. I am not suggesting – please, I would never want to be thought of as promoting a P3 project, but we can work with industry to create the most favourable circumstance.

We are already doing a lot of container trucking to the port of Prince Rupert. It only makes sense that we would have an environmentally sound pipeline route which would respect both people's property rights and the environment but would create an opportunity to send our refined petroleum, bitumen upgraded, in its finished state to China and India. We'd do the refining. We'd get the added value for propane, butane, methane, all of the things that we're losing to Illinois or down in the Texas area, where they're going to upgrade our bitumen and then get the added benefit from it.

I hope, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, that I gave you a better sense of the routing, the approval process, and why it's so important.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is still available.

The next member to speak, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

5:20

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. The purpose of Bill 1 is to create a focus on competitiveness that brings together government and industry to co-ordinate current government initiatives and develop a strategy to improve Alberta's competitiveness. This collaboration will be led by partnerships under the direction of the Premier. Furthermore, it will be com-

prised of the relevant ministers and key stakeholders, who will assess all areas where Alberta can strengthen its competitive edge.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to point out that the government of Alberta has already taken action in a number of areas. In advanced education we have introduced Alberta Innovates, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, and the trade, investment, and labour mobility act, just to name a few. All of these programs give Alberta an edge. We also have the most competitive tax regime in Canada.

Bill 1 will develop an overall strategic approach to competitiveness in Alberta. This will include an operational plan to enhance Alberta's competitiveness in the global marketplace. The Alberta advantage may no longer be our official provincial slogan; however, this should always be our goal. This landmark legislation will do just that. It will focus our efforts to ensure Alberta increases its competitive advantage in the face of a highly competitive global economy.

Mr. Speaker, our newest slogan says it best. In order for us to remain competitive in the world, Albertans require the freedom to create mixed with their spirit to achieve. Bill 1 ensures that Albertans have the freedom to create by providing a competitive economic environment. This will provide long-term benefits for Alberta families and for the entire province. The freedom that comes with the lowest taxes in Canada will create the conditions that will attract new businesses, innovators, and the next generation of entrepreneurs to our great province.

Thanks to the steps taken earlier through the Alberta immigrant nominee program and the trade, investment, and labour mobility act, Alberta has and will continue to attract the best people from across Canada and around the world to come and enjoy all Alberta has to offer. This in turn will help Alberta achieve a more prosperous province, which will benefit all Albertans and Canadians alike. A more competitive economy grows faster, adapts quicker, leads to lower prices, better wages, more jobs, and improved living standards for all Albertans. Bill 1 shows our commitment to make our province one of the most economically competitive places in the global market.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will always ensure that Alberta has the freedom to create with our spirit to achieve. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. A quick question to this member. He's an active component of the mushroom industry. I wonder if he could talk about the competitiveness of the mushroom industry and how that bill relates to that.

The Acting Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to respond?

Mr. Benito: Well, I'm not sure if that's a question or something that I should be mentioning with regard to the goodness of this bill that we are proposing. I firmly believe that the Alberta Competitiveness Act will create an environment so that the business environment will be much better than what we have right now, so that the economy of this province will become the leading edge and a good example in North America. The bottom line of this, Mr. Speaker, is making this province the best place to live, work, and play in the whole of North America. I believe the Premier has the best intentions to make the Alberta government one of the best-managed administrations in the whole of North America.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Frequently as members of the opposition we somehow didn't receive the memo, or we didn't get the second part to a bill. I'd just ask the member: have you received anything spelling out the rules of this philosophical concept? Have you been given the plans or the operating manual for accomplishing what Bill 1 proposes to accomplish?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you. Hon. member, what I know is the reality of this Alberta Competitiveness Act, which we are trying to name Bill 1. For example, in education we have introduced, you know, the Alberta Innovates program, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. One of the best programs, that we have already introduced and from my own personal experience, is the Alberta nominee program, the AINP program. Out of that program we were able to bring the best skilled workers to this province and in turn meet all the labour needs to make our economic development. Without the introduction of this program I don't think that during the high season of being competitive in North America we can meet the labour needs of this province. I firmly believe that this is one of the reasons why we should strengthen more this kind of program that we are trying to do for Bill 1, which is the Alberta Competitiveness Act.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's wonderful to be able to be in total agreement with the value of the nominee program. What the nominee program does is that it fast-tracks immigration, which I'm sure the Minister of Employment and Immigration will agree with. It also provides workers with rights because they are fast-tracked to citizenship. Hopefully, this will be reflected as one of the rules and accomplishments that have yet to be outlined in Bill 1. If this is the direction Bill 1 is heading, then the direction is a good one. We just need the substantive rules, regulations to know where it's headed.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address a few things regarding Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. One of the things that I've been hearing is the business of reducing red tape, and certainly the Liberals have for many, many years been speaking of the necessity to reduce red tape, particularly for our small-business owners and entrepreneurs in this province. We can speak about competitiveness within our country and certainly within our international community, where clearly the global market has moved, but I'd like to talk about the competitiveness just within our province.

One of the things that I can see coming is that some of the smaller business owners – and I'm going to use the example of perhaps pharmaceutical salesmen who are working for large pharmaceutical companies. Because of the way that we will be buying pharmaceuticals in this province – we'll be buying by volume – many of these pharmaceutical salesmen won't be required in exactly the same way. Some of our smaller pharmacies also will be affected by large-volume buying, which in itself is good, but there always is a consequence to an action, and this is part of the consequence that may well happen to the smaller businesses that will be affected because of volume buying, not just in pharmaceuticals.

I attended an agricultural day in which they were speaking about value-added. One of the valued-added was the ability of larger

companies to buy bulk tomatoes from California to be able to make a pasta sauce, which totally bypasses some of our smaller farmers who are creating greenhouses to produce specific vegetables and using, actually, solar power to heat them.

5:30

There are amazing things that are going on in this province. We have a lot of advanced thinkers, particularly on the value-added side, in terms of our food that we're going to eat and the fact that we are moving into specialized farms that are smaller and are supplying specialty restaurants with, for instance, perhaps Cornish game hens or some of the vegetables which probably in the old days we would have considered exotic but now – I'm thinking of a bok choy – we consider just a regular part of our diet. There is a lot of red tape around this, and I think that one of the most important things that we can look at in this Competitiveness Act is that we get rid of the red tape that holds the hands of our entrepreneurs while they're trying to get ahead and create new and interesting things in our province.

One of the things that I can certainly speak about from my area – and I know that my colleague from Lethbridge-West has been working on this as well – is that we have the chance to produce poppies in southern Alberta. We have a great environment. The geography is good, and also the weather is good to be able to create these poppies. They are non narcotic-producing poppies. They create something called thebaine, and it will be produced and marketed mainly towards the pharmaceuticals. But this has been in the offing for almost three years.

One of the things that this bill is talking about – I believe I heard it from the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar – is to try to get the levels of government together so that many of the red-tape forms and regulations can be streamlined because there is a tremendous amount of redundancy when you move from one level of government to the other. One of the things that is holding up our poppy production is the fact that the feds, of course, have to okay the use of this. Now, I know that we have gone through huge risk managements that have been done by retired RCMP members and that it actually has passed this business, that it isn't a risk. It will be a very viable product that we can produce and grow in southern Alberta. But the feds are still sitting on it, and it's because of regulations that this is not moving forward nearly as fast as it possibly could have. So I think that this is a very important bill, as I've said, mainly from the red-tape side of it.

One of the things, though, that I've noticed is that the benchmarks and goals are going to be released in a year, and there is no indication after that year how long the action will take, which to me is a perfect example of what we're talking about, red tape. This has to move much, much quicker with very clear, defined lines on how this is going to work. I don't think that our small businesspeople who are looking forward to this want to sit around for another year.

British Columbia is a much-cited example of successful efforts to reduce its red tape. It met its goal as of January 2010, and they've eliminated 152,000 regulations since it first started in 2001. It's a red-tape reduction of 42 per cent. I realize that this is over a nine-year period, but I think that with this Competitiveness Act we should be able to move forward much, much more quickly.

Chad Ford of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who is their policy person, has said that this bill doesn't mention small business and that it seems to be written only for gas and oil. I think that he has a point.

One of things that I would like to talk about is PDD. One of the ways that people are getting help for persons that require PDD funding is through self-managed care. What's happened is that it is a fairly successful program where people actually can get the money

from the government, and they hire their own workers. But what has happened in that is the huge red tape that is tied up with the people that have to fill out the paperwork. It's a terrible burden on some of these family members that have to do all the forms that they're filling out, which I call red tape.

I realize that a lot of the information that is being gathered is used for a data analysis, which is fine because we need to know where our dollars are going and how they're being spent. But I maintain that the information is in the government ministries in their computers, and they should be pulling that information that they need out from the government computers and not forcing some of the people – mainly, a lot of them are computer illiterate and are filling out all of these forms by hand.

To me that's an example of one of the ways that a competitiveness bill can look at not just the red tape for small business, where I think it should start – oil and gas, yes; oil and gas have many, many employees that are lawyers and accountants that can easily fill the bill about giving their input into this competitiveness bill – but I think we have to look at how what I call red tape affects every person in this province and that we can move much quicker. I'm hoping that some of this bill and the conversations around it will address the smaller issues and our smaller businesses in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. On one of our numerous outreach trips to Lethbridge I recall visiting a small business that was a trailer outfitter. This organization did the folding beds. It did a lot of the furniture that you find in RVs and so on. One of the problems our local manufacturer pointed out was the difference in terms of import-export regulations. He pointed out that American trailers could come in built to considerably lower safety standards, but our export requirements were considerably higher. You've mentioned the need to co-ordinate with the federal government. I think you're familiar with this trailer outfitting company, that is doing very well despite the American competition.

I'm also wondering in terms of co-ordination with government if there have been any examples of problems with genetically modified seed in the Lethbridge area because I know that that's been a major problem with some of our exports to European countries. I don't know whether there are problems like that that have arisen in Lethbridge, but I'd be interested in hearing your take on that regulation or lack thereof.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that I can really address the modified seed part of it. I'm not sure. I do know that some of our modified seeds are not accepted in Europe, so it then presents a problem for the farmers that are actually producing them.

I can talk about the RV industry in Canada. At one point – and I certainly was a part of the heyday of recreational vehicles being produced in this country. We are now down to one. Basically, the recreational vehicle manufacturing in this country is dead, and part of it is because we didn't insist that American-made RV vehicles coming into this country had to meet the same standards. There are a huge number of people over the years clearly that have lost jobs, and the whole industry has gone down.

As I've mentioned – and I wish I could remember; there's one, I believe, in Manitoba and one in B.C. – this was a huge, huge employer that brought in millions and millions and millions of

dollars to our economy and employed many. It's just one example of, as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity has mentioned, bad communication between the provinces and the federal government. Some of it was a province responsibility in terms of looking at what comes across the border, and the other part of it was the feds. They should have sat down and addressed this as it happened.

5:40

I think that this in a way is a small example of – I'm going to go off on a tangent here – how we do not have inspectors at the federal level inspecting the food that comes into our country. I read a label, and it doesn't say where it comes from. It says that it's a product of, but it doesn't say where it is. If it has been packaged in Canada, they can call it a product of, but I actually have no idea. I believe that we need more inspectors to look at the food that's coming into this country and, in fact, some of the items that are coming into this country. I think we just noticed that there was a huge recall on kids' toys because they were loaded with lead.

These are the kinds of things that we should be looking at coming across our border. I believe that had we had stronger regulations that were actually enforced, we still would have viable recreational vehicle manufacturing in this country.

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

Mr. Kang: My question is to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on how this act is going to help in, as you said, growing poppies. What kind of income is it going to bring? How many drug addicts are we going to have if we start growing poppies here? We've already got a problem. You know, they come in from Arizona. Are we trying to compete with Afghanistan by bringing in this bill to grow poppies? What are your thoughts on that?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Hancock: I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:43 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Issue 7

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 17, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, after the prayer I would ask you all to remain standing as I pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Mr. Frederick Haliday Peacock November 23, 1916, to February 15, 2010

The Speaker: Mr. Frederick Haliday Peacock, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away on Monday, February 15, 2010, at the age of 93 years. Mr. Peacock was first elected in the election held August 30, 1971, and served two terms, until February 14, 1979. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Calgary-Currie for the Progressive Conservative Party.

During his term of office Fred Peacock served as Minister of Industry and Tourism and Minister of Industry and Commerce. He also served on the standing committees on Public Accounts; Public Affairs; Law and Regulations; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act; and on the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly Reviewing Intra Provincial Trucking Regulations.

Mr. Peacock served as Agent General Asia Pacific for the Alberta government from 1982 to 1985.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family, who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. Member Frederick Haliday Peacock as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is such a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members here about 50 visitors from the lovely school in my area called Mill Creek elementary. They are here with their teacher and group leaders Mrs. Rushmi de Rincón and Ms Mara Rodríguez. I would ask them to all please rise now and receive the warm applause of the Assembly.

Thank you very much for being here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group that is seated in the members' gallery. They are from CAMTA, the Canadian Association of Medical Teams Abroad, including, I'm pleased to say, a constituent of mine, Christina Prins, who happens to be the niece of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. Christina is here with six other people from the group. They are

John Lilley, Eileen Guilfoyle, Pablo Valenzuela, Donnie McIntosh, Trina LeBlanc, and Nicole Beaudoin. They are going to Quito, Ecuador, on a medical mission this month with CAMTA. On the trip CAMTA plans to perform over 40 hip replacements on adults and over 40 operations on club feet or the hips of children. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm wishes and the warm welcome of the members of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you five guests from the Canadian Somali community seated in the public gallery. Earlier this week we spoke, and our discussion focused on their desire to integrate into our society and truly be Canadian. I would like to welcome five Canadians: Jama Nur, Farah Bubyare, Nasteha Ahmed, Saida Hussain, Kahiye Dubow. I believe it's more than five, but I do not have all the names. I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I have a number of special groups in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, but certainly the most glamorous, definitely the best tiaras is the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose. I will be doing a member's statement about this organization later, but right now I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the individuals who currently comprise the 34th house of the imperial court in Edmonton. If you would please rise as I call your name. First we have Imperial Crown Princess XXXIII Kelsey-Breeze, Imperial Grand Duke JeffyLube XXXPress, Imperial Grand Duchess Kitty LeBehr, Imperial Crown Princess GoDiva, Imperial Crown Princess Empress XXXIII Marni Gras, and Her Most Imperial and Sovereign Majesty Empress XXXIV Ivanna Diamonds. Please welcome them to the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The wild rose has never looked better.

I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three members of the University of Alberta New Democratic Party campus club, seated in the public gallery. The U of A Campus NDP provides a forum for students who are passionate about such issues as social justice, accessible postsecondary education, and a sustainable environment. The club has hosted a number of events this year, allowing students to have a chance to have dialogue with elected officials from both the provincial and federal levels of the NDP. With us today are Joel French, president of the U of A campus club; Kayla McCarthy, the vice-president internal; and member at large Aditya Rao. Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that my guests now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Family Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Monday, February 15, was a public holiday in Alberta to celebrate Family Day. This

holiday has been celebrated since 1989, when former Premier Don Getty introduced the Family Day Act. He wanted to recognize the importance of the family as it was families who built this province and continue to make Alberta a great place. This holiday is also celebrated in Saskatchewan and Ontario, and a provincial holiday is also held on the third Monday in February in Manitoba as Louis Riel Day and in Prince Edward Island as Islander Day.

There were celebrations around our province, including festivities right here at the Legislature. In my constituency of Edmonton-Manning I attended the Kilkenny Family Fun Day. There were many fun activities, and a great day was had by all.

Our government also marked the ninth annual Family Day free fishing weekend from February 13 to 15, where Albertans are allowed to fish in any public body of water that has an open fishing season without a fishing licence.

I would like to thank the different communities and groups that organized activities throughout the province to make this a special day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I introduced Edmonton's 34th House of the Edmonton Court of the Wild Rose, and I'm going to take this opportunity now to celebrate this organization and the work that they do. The Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose is operated by the New Royalist Social Society of Northern Alberta. It is part of the International Court System, which began in 1965 in San Francisco. The society's goal is to raise funds through activities for charities and other organizations which either provide direct services to the gay community of Edmonton or which work to promote an accepting attitude to gays and lesbians in the community as a whole. It is a volunteer organization dedicated to the betterment of the community.

1:40

The court includes an empress and emperor, who are elected by members of the community, and they act as figureheads of the organization, goodwill ambassadors in the community, spearheading charitable fundraising efforts and at their own expense representing the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta throughout North America.

I have attended the end-of-the-year ball many times and admire the incredible amount of work that goes into serving in the royal house of that year. Most of the money raised is raised from members of the GLBT community themselves. The Edmonton court has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars since its inception. All of this money stays in Edmonton, funding AIDS/HIV research and support services, domestic abuse, breast cancer, the Children's hospital, homelessness, and the John M. Kerr memorial scholarship award to further the education of gay and lesbian students in the province of Alberta.

Among many others, the 34th house under Empress Ivanna Diamonds will be supporting the following charities: prostate and breast cancer, HIV research, and Camp fYrefly, a camp for gay, lesbian, and transgendered youth.

My thanks to this organization for its contribution to my city. Your work is most impressive and generally goes unsung.

Thank you so much.

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

Making Space for Children Innovation Fund

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday I had perhaps one of the greatest days in my constituency, when I had the opportunity to visit first the Boys and Girls Club of Penbrooke and, secondly, the Honey Bear Day Care. It's there that I met little Paige. She's two years old. She saw me come into the room, and she ran up to me, which doesn't always happen with young kids. I picked her up, and she gave me the biggest hug of my life. I visited the rest of the daycare, and every time the staff would try to take Paige away and say, "Paige, he's got to move on," she would cry. I was about to cry, too, so I kept little Paige with me the entire time. It was an absolutely beautiful moment that a politician gets to connect with his constituents in a manner that I think is most profound.

Now, I owe this moment to the ministry of children's services for their making space for children space creation innovation fund. It's through that program, Mr. Speaker, that my constituents get to have more child care spaces in our constituency. The Elf Inn daycare received enough funding for 55 new spaces, the Boys and Girls Club of Penbrooke received funding for 15 new spaces, and the Honey Bear Day Care received funding for eight new spaces. Since April 2008 I am pleased to say that 12,575 new spaces have been created across Alberta. This is no small accomplishment.

To the hard-working families of Calgary-Montrose, to the hard-working young families across Alberta this investment means that their children get a better start to ensure Alberta is in the best hands possible in our future.

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

Vancouver 2010 Olympics

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Canadians are joining together to celebrate the 2010 Olympics, as we did in 1988, when the world came to Calgary. Many of us in the Assembly remember what it was like to host the Olympics, to watch Canadian athletes like Karen Percy or Elizabeth Manley take the podium. We remember that the focus of the Olympics is the athletes and the love of sports.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, some groups are trying to hijack the Vancouver Olympics for their own purposes. These same protesters will use any event – a meeting of the world leaders, the death of someone in the public spotlight, a tragedy, or the Olympics – to try and get media coverage. In a democracy people have the right to speak freely and to gather in a peaceful manner. But what we see happening in Vancouver is not lawful, and it's not peaceful.

Mr. Speaker, the Olympic motto is Swifter, Higher, Stronger. It is a motto that pushes athletes to excel. The Olympics are supposed to be an opportunity where athletes showcase their amazing talents. Running a police barricade is not a sport; it is serious business. It takes away from the years of training that Canadian athletes have put into their sport as they represent our country.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a proud Canadian, I love amateur sports, and I love the Olympics. I am cheering on not only our Alberta athletes but all of the Canadian competitors, who are working so hard to bring home the gold or to simply achieve a personal best.

As the Vancouver Olympics continue, let's hope that these protesters look for proper ways to express their point of view instead of trying to overshadow the athletes, who have worked so hard to get there and to do their country proud.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, go, Canada, go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Grande Prairie Area Schools

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise and congratulate students, staff, and parents at three Grande Prairie and area schools. On January 18 I attended with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Infrastructure the official school openings of the Hythe regional school and the Alexander Forbes school, which have been newly renovated, and the newly built Mother Teresa Catholic school.

Grande Prairie is one of Canada's fastest growing cities, and these three schools will help meet the needs of our growing population. We want to provide students with a place that they look forward to going to every day and a place that inspires and supports learning.

The two renovated facilities were not only refurbished but wired and equipped with the latest learning technologies. They have more natural light, improved acoustics, and enhanced connectivity. These classrooms look like permanent classrooms, but they give school boards the flexibility to respond quickly and easily to changing enrolment and community needs.

I noticed with pride that these new and newly refurbished schools demonstrate our government's commitment to providing safe and secure learning environments for our children. They are great examples of how government and communities work together. Since these schools have opened, they have already become hubs of their communities, providing after-hours recreational opportunities and places to play and pursue active living. They are all top-quality schools that meet the growing, changing community needs in Grande Prairie and area. Projects such as these help advance our Premier's vision for strong, safe, and vibrant communities. They are a good investment in the future of our children and this province.

Once again, I would like to extend my congratulations to the students, staff, and parents at Hythe regional school, Alexander Forbes school, and Mother Teresa Catholic school.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Reading Milestone at C.J. Schurter School

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It took 15 years, a whole lot of staff members, the librarian, thousands of students, parents, and community volunteers from C.J. Schurter school in Slave Lake to reach their goal, and their goal was to read and share 1,500,000 stories. There is something very special about being able to pinpoint the exact moment when we reach a goal. At exactly 9:40 a.m. on Monday, March 16, 2009, C.J. Schurter school did exactly that, recorded their reading milestone.

This all began when librarian Marge Rennick and her committee organized a student reading incentive to celebrate the then 1994 Arctic Winter Games in Slave Lake. Students were encouraged to read for Rocky, the Arctic Winter Games mascot. However, in September 1994 special ed teacher Helen Ord and her team of educational assistants took this initial concept and developed it into a powerful reading link between home and school that enhanced early literacy skills.

In September 1996 the Reading Cottage was introduced. Students were encouraged to bring their completed reading sheets down to the cottage, where staff would then write the child's name on a square located on the specific story character they were reading at the time.

Now, Snow White, Peter Pan, Cinderella, Wizard of Oz, Winnie the Pooh and friends, Franklin and friends, and Muppets, just to

name a few, lined the hallways at C.J. Schurter, containing the names of all the special students that have participated in this program.

However, in September 2004 the program moved from the special ed area to each individual classroom. Teachers and students recorded the stories read in the classroom and reported the number of experiences at each assembly.

It is common wisdom that literature expands our perspective of the world. In the words of Dr. Seuss: "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go."

Congratulations to the visionaries and the whole community for nurturing reading as a great experience. Keep up the great work.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Surgery Wait Time Reduction Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My heart goes out to all Albertans whose surgery has been delayed because of this government's mismanagement of the health care system. We support reducing wait times and wait-lists. Our concern is the way this government is handling and accomplishing this task. Of the hip and knee surgeries announced yesterday, 83 per cent are going to be performed at a premium at for-profit corporate health centres. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister tell Albertans how much of the \$8 million boost is going to for-profit hip and knee surgery providers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the point here is that people who are enduring long waiting lists don't have to wait as long anymore because we're speeding things up. I have asked for a cost-benefit analysis to be done. That's being done because I want to make sure that for the services we're providing to Albertans, we're getting fair dollar value. At the same time I want to assure Albertans that regardless of where they get that surgery performed, it's fully covered by this government.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the same minister: why are we giving so much less to public institutions versus for-profit private providers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think that if you took an analysis of the \$9 billion – that's with a B for Bob, \$9 billion – that we're putting into Alberta Health Services' budget, with the increase that we've given them, guaranteed 6 per cent over the next three years after we've adjusted their base, you would find that by far the largest amount of that money is going into public institutions and publicly funded services.

Dr. Swann: The minister seems to be able to provide exact numbers of procedures for the funding to each institution, but he will not give us the exact dollar amount. Will you present the House with a dollar amount that's going to the private versus the public system in this \$8 million?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as soon as those surgeries are performed and accomplished, that's public information. Everyone has access to it. This is an open and transparent process. What we've done is work with those providers, those professionals, those surgeons, those surgical teams, and the list goes on, all across the

province. They're the ones who deserve the credit for stepping up to the plate and saying: yes, we will work some weekends to accomplish this; yes, those of us who are working part-time will work more full-time hours. Those who are already working full-time will work some overtime to help accomplish this for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. People are asking me why the vast majority of surgeries announced yesterday by the Minister of Health and Wellness are going to for-profit health corporations in Calgary. According to Alberta Health Services Calgary gets 200 extra hip and knee surgeries in the next six weeks while Edmonton and presumably all of northern Alberta get a total of 16. To the minister: why the 10 to 1 discrepancy in favour of Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that is an offensive question, and the member knows it. The fact is that waiting lists are managed by doctors, not by this minister and not by the Health Services people. Waiting times are what we're trying to impact, and if we get that right, and I think we are, it will affect the waiting lists. The fact is that these lists are done up at the local level by the surgeons, and when they compile all of their information, they tell us where it is that the lists are needed to be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. It turns out that in this case, for this one example, the member may be right. But we could look at other examples, too, of different surgeries.

Dr. Taft: Well, to this same minister: is this government paying a premium to the for-profit orthopaedic centres for hip and knee surgeries? In other words, will the for-profit providers be paid exactly the same as public hospitals for the same kind of cases, or will they be paid more?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. The fact is that you can't compare one system that finitely with the other because in the public system there are a lot of costs that are absorbed by the public institution, which don't stand out and jump off the page, but when you contract out, you get an exact amount. You can't do and you can't compare the math that simply and that easily. To answer the member's question just a little bit further, a cost-benefit analysis is being done with respect to some of these surgeries right now. I'll ask for more to be done, and I'll be happy to share it with the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's system of for-profit cataract surgery has been plagued with problems for years, including conflicts of interest, long waiting lists, and quality concerns. In Edmonton's public system these are simply nonissues. Why is the Minister of Health and Wellness rewarding the problems in Calgary's for-profit system and penalizing the successes of public care in Edmonton?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's an RFP process going on across the province right now. It's a request for proposals. It will be brought forward. There's a cost analysis coming forward. I can tell the hon. member and all Albertans, for that matter, that when you look at the costs for cataract surgeries, regardless where they're done but in this case Calgary specifically, the cost on average is less when

they're contracted out than when they're done in the public institution, and we're going to prove that.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Provincial Borrowing

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, when the Official Opposition asked the Premier about our public debt, he stated, "We are not adding to our debt." Page 24 of the fiscal plan, the government's budget, states explicitly that this government plans to directly borrow \$3.3 billion over the next three years. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. If direct borrowing is not considered a debt, what exactly did the Premier mean yesterday in the House?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, borrowing \$3.3 billion is a debt, and when it's spent on capital projects for the government, it becomes an asset. In our consolidated financial statement we will offset borrowed money with a capital project, which at the end of the day balances even, gets us good value to continue to build while prices are right.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: why are debt-servicing costs doubling over the next four years to over \$400 million?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we also have tools that have been used very effectively by this government, some P3 partnership groups that are building ring roads around these cities, that need to be paid for. All of the capital debt that we're assuming is accounted for I think on page 70, where it spells out that this interest will be paid to support our capital investment in our infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I would remind the President of the Treasury Board that the 3P debt, all 5 billion plus dollars of it, is in another section of the fiscal plan. We're not talking about 3P debt here.

Now, again, if you borrow money, you have to pay it back. That's a debt. What is this government's plan to pay back the \$3.3 billion in debt that it is taking on as a direct result of your years of fiscal mismanagement?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, you know what? We do believe in Alberta, and we believe in Albertans. We believe that if we invest in the infrastructure that enables business to thrive and come to Alberta and grow its economy, we will take our fair share as the Alberta government, we'll reinvest it in the programs that they all want us to, in health and education, and we'll build a bigger pie rather than shrink the pie and all suffer and be happy together like them.

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

Centralization of Cytology Lab Services

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's plan to centralize cytology lab services in Edmonton and Calgary will cost more money, and it will jeopardize patient safety. That's

what two-thirds of the province's top pathologists have told this government in letters that we're tabling in this House today, and that's why this government cannot be trusted with public health care. Centralizing labs will delay test results and raise the risk of patients being misdiagnosed and mistreated. Will the minister of health immediately reverse his move towards centralization and privatization of lab services in this province, and if not, why not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've received a few letters on this subject, and I thank the member for bringing it to our attention. The fact is that I've already agreed to a meeting with the pathologists and staff from the Red Deer hospital, and I'll be meeting with them next week.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we already heard the minister say that privatizing and contracting out is cheaper than doing it in the public system. He's already made up his mind on that point. But the doctors who've written these letters don't mince words. They see hospitals losing experts that they need to diagnose diseases, and there's no financial benefit, but it puts patients at unnecessary risk. I want to ask the minister why he won't admit that this move to privatize this area of the health care system will jeopardize patient care and reverse his plan to centralize and privatize lab services in Alberta.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, just for the record I was speaking about cataract surgery specifically. We know that on average they don't cost any more in this setting than in that setting. I said that I'm looking at other costs to do with hip replacements, knee replacements, shoulders, and so on because I want to convince myself more so that that is exactly the fact, that it is cheaper or, at least, not more expensive, depending on where it gets done.

Specific to the cytology example I am sensitive to what you're saying, hon. member. I'm going to have a meeting next week, find out more about it, and I'll be happy to chat with you after that.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A government that would close labs in hospitals is not a government that we can trust to protect health care. For example, a patient who needs urgent treatment for colon cancer could be left waiting much longer for test results that should have been looked at in conjunction with one another, not two different labs in two different cities. Why won't the minister admit that this plan will cause harm to patients and reverse the decision to centralize these labs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the intimate details of that plan. It has just come to my attention. I've already indicated the proactive step I've taken to meet and learn the information. That's part of my hands-on issues approach. I can assure the hon. member that I will look at that very thoroughly and very carefully. I just want, at the same time, to assure Albertans that they will not be compromised for quality or safety regardless of what the decision is.

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

Activity-based Funding Model for Hospital Care

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've talked to many members of my constituency who are concerned about health care service and equally so about health care costs. Constituents in my area are quite familiar with different funding models such as population-based funding, needs-based funding, and global, or general, funding. However, not everyone knows exactly what activity-based funding means. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Firstly, if Alberta Health Services is moving to activity-based funding, can the minister explain what that is and why they're going in that direction?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, hon. member. That, too, is a good question. There are different funding models, and I think the one that we're able to bring onto the scene now that we have a five-year predictable, stable funding plan includes activity-based funding, which in a nutshell can be described as funding that follows the patient. What we've had in Alberta for quite some time now you might call the last item, which I think you referred to as general funding or something to that effect. What we're saying now is let's work with the people delivering the services and the people designing them, bring that together, and provide as much as we can as quickly as we can on that new formula.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for that answer. My second question again is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Please explain if there are any specific advantages or disadvantages to this system of funding as opposed to the previous systems that were used in Alberta.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think some of the advantages that we're going to see once this is fully implemented – and it'll take a year or two to see some of those results as plainly as we'd like – is some cost-effectiveness. That would be one thing. I think you'd see some streamlining but, in general, much better planning and a much better handle on exactly what we're doing, how long it takes to do it. That ties in with the dashboard indicators, which Alberta Health Services provided about January 21 or 22, somewhere in there, that talked about specific measurements and benchmarks. This is all part of that plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That sounds very impressive. Mr. Minister, what assurances can you give Albertans that activity-based funding will result in a better value for taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, that will be part of the cost-benefit analysis that I referred to earlier. As part of that we're very cautious and very careful about how taxpayer dollars get spent, but we don't want that to interrupt the good flow of improved services to Albertans such as with the announcement yesterday, such as with this announcement of activity-based funding, which we think and hope and are quite confident will deliver the results we're looking for.

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

Environmental Protection

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is not helping our oil and gas industry by failing to take the lead on environmental protection. Instead, the government is jeopardizing this sector, its reputation, Alberta's competitiveness, and the ability to maintain a strong industry into the future. We can have both a strong energy policy and a strong environmental policy. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. The energy sector is getting ramped up. Why isn't environmental protection?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree with the member more when she says that our ability to conduct business in the world of resource development is dependent upon our ability to demonstrate clearly that we have the necessary regulatory environment in place to ensure that we protect the environment and develop those resources appropriately. I couldn't disagree with the member more when she says that Alberta Environment is not ramping up and preparing for it. That's exactly why we're developing the cumulative effects environmental management.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister: given that the land-use framework banks on growing production in the oil sands and thus intensity targets will not be effective in even maintaining the current levels of carbon output, when will the minister implement hard targets?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue of hard targets is very much part of the discussion that's ongoing now nationally and internationally. To directly answer the member's question, Alberta will adopt hard targets when the rest of North America adopts those same hard targets.

Dr. Taft: Well, that's leadership.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Dawdling at the back.

Okay. To the same minister: given that the ministry has had significant cuts for the upcoming year, how does the minister expect to do more monitoring and compliance enforcement for more industrial activity with less money?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that question is just about impossible to answer in the 30 seconds that you will allow me. So I would suggest that this member come to the estimates for the Department of Environment, and I will be more than happy to go through it in great detail for her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

AltaLink Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. AltaLink, which is an electric transmission facility operator, has been holding information meetings throughout central Alberta these past few days and weeks regarding several possible routes for the new 500-kilovolt HVDC line. This line directly impacts my constituents, so my question to the Minister of Energy is: what is the process to determine the final preferred route?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that meetings are taking place right now with the proponents, in this case

AltaLink, with the constituents of his constituency. This is part of the process where the proponents are required to gather input from Albertans. Once that consultation is completed, there will be an application filed with the regulator – this is the normal course – and then the regulator will decide the final route.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A big concern to my constituents is compensation to landowners. Again to the Minister of Energy: what is the process to establish a fair and equitable compensation package for landowners?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think that is something that needs clarification, Mr. Speaker, because really the compensation comes down to an agreement between the proponents and the landowners. In this case AltaLink will be negotiating with landowners to secure easements. The company has stated publicly that it's their intention to pay fair market value. Those agreements would then take place but not until after the commission hearings and the route is determined.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Energy. What is the role of the Alberta Utilities Commission, or the AUC, in relation to the issue of compensation, including the role of the AUC in limiting the amounts of compensation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the AUC does not deal with the compensation as such between the landowners and the transmission facility owners. That is something, as I mentioned in my previous supplementary answer, Mr. Speaker, that is negotiated. What is important is that the Utilities Commission through the hearings process determines what part of those costs will be passed on to consumers. It is important to note that only an amount that is considered prudent can be recovered and passed on to consumers. So that's the only part of the agreement that consumers will bear the cost of.

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

Support for the Horse-racing Industry

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Employment and Immigration mused about the government's \$26 million handout to Horse Racing Alberta. A recent report submitted by George Cuff & Associates to the Solicitor General shows that horse racing is a dying industry kept on life support by revenue from slot machines and off-track betting. Accordingly, how can the Solicitor General claim that spending \$26 million on horse racing and a breed renewal program represents sound fiscal policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member would know or should know by now that the government does not transfer taxpayers' dollars to Horse Racing Alberta. It's a contract that Horse Racing Alberta has with the provincial government that allows it to keep a portion of the revenues generated from gaming facilities at racing tracks.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've read the report, and the report indicates something different than what the hon. member just answered, so I guess before I ask my final supplemental: have you read the Cuff report?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the member is in error. It's quite clear that the government of Alberta has a contract with Horse Racing Alberta which allows them a portion of the revenues that are generated from slot machines at racing entertainment centres.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This report that maybe the hon. member has or hasn't read indicates that instead of merely regulating horse racing, the government has chosen to actively promote the industry. To the same minister: why is a government that is allegedly not in the business of being in business actively promoting and propping up an industry most Albertans don't care about to the tune of \$26 million?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I'll point out again that those monies are generated from slot machines that are run at racing entertainment centres, and while a portion of the money that is generated there goes to Horse Racing Alberta, another portion of it goes to fund charitable organizations across our province, maybe some of them in that member's constituency.

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

Crime and Safe Communities

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Time and time again the police in Alberta announce successful drug busts and apprehension of drug dealers. While it makes positive headlines for a few days, these drug dealers are more often than not ultimately let go. I believe and my constituents believe that shutting down drug houses and locking up drug dealers is a critical component of keeping our communities safe, so my questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. What is your department doing to stop the revolving door of justice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you very much. It's been a very interesting couple of weeks in both Calgary and Edmonton with respect to law enforcement. The police have done a tremendous job in making our communities safe in the past two weeks. Unfortunately, what we do find from that, Mr. Speaker, is that as a result we have people who are in jail looking for bail. Bail is something that is part of the federal Criminal Code tests. We are continuing to lobby the federal government to try to ensure that they can amend the test so that we don't see this revolving door. We share this concern with the mayor of Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: the safe communities initiative has been very popular in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, but there are concerns with cross-ministry budget cutbacks that SafeCom will suffer. Can the minister tell this House what the new budget and potential cut mean to the safe communities initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt that we are going through some difficult times, but I am so pleased that this Premier and this government have maintained their financial commitment to the safe communities budget. In fact, in reviewing the budget documents, there has been no reduction to our safe communities commitment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can Albertans expect anything new on the legislative front that will make Alberta communities safer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased yet again to have a fairly busy legislative session with respect to legislation. We have already created a very strong web of legislation to assist police with our mandatory gunshot legislation, our civil forfeiture legislation. This spring we'll also be introducing legislation that deals with the restriction of armoured wear, bulletproof vests, and also witness protection legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Livestock Industry

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the Canadian beef producers as of January 1, 2010, cattle inventories are at their lowest in 15 years and hog inventories at their lowest in 12 years. Last year the Alberta livestock and meat strategy and agency received over \$100 million in government funding, with a similar amount estimated for the next year. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: how can the minister deem this an effective use of these dollars while the industry continues to deteriorate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, ALMA, that was just referred to, is an agency that has just started up, and we're already seeing good results from that agency. A lot of their work is the promotion and working toward new markets globally, which are going to be very necessary. The industries that the hon. member opposite spoke about: about 50 per cent of our market needs to be global, outside of our boundaries, and about 50 per cent domestic. But we did experience an economic correction globally that has been very difficult on all industries.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. You've partly answered my next question, but I would like a little bit more. This government keeps throwing money at the industry, but the real problems are structural. Besides writing cheques, what plans does the minister have to meet the ongoing challenges that are facing the Alberta livestock industries?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't disagree more. I would not characterize the support to the agriculture industry, that is our largest renewable resource industry and our second largest industry in the province, as throwing money at an industry. I would say that that's investing in Alberta's future.

Ms Pastoor: Clever semantics.

When the government made check-offs voluntary, they were acting in the interest of the big beef producers at the expense of small family ranchers. How is this ministry helping our regular Alberta beef and hog producers as they attempt to compete in an industry that appears to have turned into a near monopoly?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, all parts of the value chain are important. As I've stated to a number of the groups that I've spoken with and where I've spoken publicly since being appointed minister for this ministry, the primary producers are of utmost importance. Without the primary producers the rest of the value chain collapses. All portions of that value chain need to be profitable and healthy, and we're working towards that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Government Spending

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the 1990s the people of Alberta made great sacrifices to help the government get its spending under control, as did many members of this government. Last week the finance minister said that he wanted a bill that would legislate savings. The government was quick to toss aside balanced budget legislation when times got tough, and now they want to bring forward a bill that legislates savings. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Why would Albertans expect the government to treat the proposed savings legislation any differently than the balanced budget legislation when times get tough again?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, Mr. Speaker, this finance minister and the previous finance minister both understand finances well enough to know that in the middle of the recession the most important thing we can do is get Albertans working and make sure that our financial house is in order. When things turn around – and they will – we will have a broad discussion with Albertans about how they want to see their future dollars, their savings, their investments in the future, their returns to Albertans being allocated. That's exactly what the finance minister is committed to doing.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have every right to question this government's commitment to truly fiscally conservative principles. At times their words are good, but their actions leave a lot of Albertans with heartaches. If this government had kept its spending under control in the really good years, this government wouldn't have needed to get rid of the Deficit Elimination Act or drain the sustainability fund. My question is to the same minister: how soon can Albertans expect that the sustainability fund will be restored to the same level it was at before this government decided to use it to re-create fiscal restraint?

Mr. Snelgrove: Some days it's spending, some days it's saving, some days it's, "Let's go back to the '90s," and some days it's, "Let's go back to the '50s." The reason people are coming to Alberta is because we got it right. We didn't get it perfect, but we got it right. We're creating an environment where people are allowed to create wealth, to raise their families, to build small business into big business, to make responsible use of our resources and our people. We have a province that the rest of the world is trying to come to. All of the preview of what they're going to offer Alberta is not what they want.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, what we're offering is what Albertans want.

Mr. Speaker, it is important for Alberta to remain a successful, attractive place to do business. Albertans are hard-working, honest entrepreneurs. The government is planning on burning through more than 80 per cent of our province's rainy-day fund by 2012. Can the minister assure Albertans that a fixed percentage of nonrenewable resource revenues are saved each year for our children and our grandchildren?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, let's be perfectly clear. We have two funds. We have a heritage savings trust fund that is there, untouched, for future generations and will continue to grow, and we have a savings account that we prudently put aside on the eventuality that this might happen, that we might enter into a recession. Wisely led by this Premier, we said: we'd better set some money over here for a rainy day. Well, I've got bad news for the member over there. For a lot of Albertans it's been raining pretty hard lately, and they want to see us get through it. They haven't bothered to say: "What school are we going to close? What hospital are we going to close?" We're going to bridge this economy to the next go-forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:20

Funding for School Boards

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our rural school board in my constituency is facing an \$850,000 shortfall in the 2010-11 school year despite the announcements by the Minister of Education that school boards will receive a zero per cent increase. I don't know if zero per cent is an entirely correct figure as I have heard that school boards will in fact receive an overall budget decrease of over 4.17 per cent, 1.17 per cent in 2009-10 and approximately 3 per cent in 2010-11, due to the lack of funding for this government's negotiated settlement with the ATA. My question to the Minister of Education: when will the government provide the funding for the agreement that they negotiated?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, in this budget this year – and we'll go into it more during estimates – we have provided the same amount for school boards as last year, no increase in budgets overall, although there will be some adjustments between school boards based on the number of students they have, based on increased enrolment, based on changes in transportation, and based on changes in the class size funding.

With respect to salaries the member is absolutely correct. There are agreements in place with the ATA locals which provide for an adjustment based on average weekly earnings, and we've had an arbitrated process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Education. Because of the budget shortfall boards will have to make significant cuts to staffing in the upcoming year and will face public outcry as the current information does not indicate the deficit created by the government's lack of commitment to the agreement with the ATA. Question: why did the government fail to budget for teachers' salary increases at the more prudent figure of 5.9 per cent?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the average weekly earnings index at the end of 2008 was 4.82 per cent. At the end of March

Stats Canada changed the way they calculated the index, and that change resulted in the 5.99 figure. That was not something we could budget for because the budget was already prepared. However, there was also a dispute with respect to interpretation as to whether the index should be what they had previously calculated or what they changed it to. We went through an arbitrated process. We didn't win that, unfortunately, so now we have an index that's certain, but we haven't budgeted the money for it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. In addition to the shortfall due to the government's salary settlement with the ATA, boards will also face increased costs for support staff, benefits, grid movement, and increases due to inflation. Without additional funding in the current budget school boards will be forced to either make significant program and staff cuts or submit deficit budgets. Question to the minister: does the minister envision school boards submitting deficit budgets to maintain the current educational programs being offered to students in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Well, the good news, Mr. Speaker, is that school boards across this province are in great financial shape. There are close to \$360 million in operating reserves. Yes, those monies have been saved for specific purposes, but they're in good shape to manage through this year. I've asked school boards to bear with us. We now have the arbitration in place, so we know the index that we're dealing with. I will have to work with the ATA and the Alberta School Boards Association school boards with respect to the salary issue over a longer term process so that we can make them whole over a longer term if we can't in the short term. In the meantime they have the resources in their operating reserves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Signage on Highway Rights-of-way

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister said that only one antinuclear sign in Peace River was inappropriately taken down, but according to other accounts many signs were on private property and were specifically targeted while real estate signs were left alone. To the Minister of Transportation: would the minister explain this, please?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, all I can explain is that I think we have a good policy to keep people safe in Alberta. I know that our policy states that if signs are improperly placed in road allowances, our maintenance contractors are forced to take them down. As far as actually knowing exactly what that maintenance contractor did, I'm trying to find all that information out. I can tell you that there was one sign that definitely was taken down that was on private property, and we built that private property owner a new sign.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think those signs were emitting any radiation so that they were not safe for the public. To the minister again: will the minister clear up the confusion and table the instructions Alberta Transportation gave to the contractor about removing antinuclear signs?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm under the impression here that everything that I've questioned on this – what was given as a direction from our department was to make sure that people are compliant and follow the rules. The rules are there to keep all of our travelling public safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why are those rules only for antinuclear signs? To the minister again. If taking down private signs is a matter of safety, then signs across the province should be taken down. Could the minister please tell us how many signs on private property are pulled down annually throughout the province?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, on private property probably or hopefully very, very few. There should be none. We do send out letters to everybody that's within our 300-metre zone, even though it's private, and say: "You're not compliant with the law. Please remove the signs." We don't go in and remove them ourselves.

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

Sour Gas Well Emission Monitoring

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The quality of the air we breathe is an issue of concern to my constituents and to all Albertans and, as you might expect, to residents of the oil sands area in particular. My question is for the Minister of Environment. The level of hydrogen sulphide, or sour gas, in the Fort McMurray area is concerning. Hydrogen sulphide standards were exceeded more than 1,500 times in 2009. Residents deserve an answer. What are you going to do to protect the health of the residents in the oil sands area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me assure this member and all of the residents of the Fort McMurray area that these exceedances do not pose a health risk. Nevertheless, they certainly are a legitimate concern because of the odour associated with them. On that count we are taking this issue very, very seriously, and we expect the operators in that area to take it as seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. While the majority of exceedances may have been on plant sites, the fact is that the standard was exceeded more than 1,500 times last year. That's completely unacceptable. Residents need more than hot air. If industry is working to eliminate these releases, then why do they continue?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right: the vast majority of these exceedances are measured on the plant site itself. As I said, there is every expectation that this problem will be addressed in a very serious way, but it's not as simple as simply turning off the valve. In this particular case, as far as we've been able to determine, the majority of these exceedances are caused by unexpected releases from Suncor's tailings ponds. There is an order in place, and Suncor is expected to deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second supplemental to the same minister. You say that you're committed to addressing the issue of exceedances in the oil sands region. I question how that's possible if, as some have stated, there's been reduced monitoring because of budget cuts in your department. How does the minister reconcile the difference between what he's saying and what these numbers are saying?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is in place as we speak an environmental protection order that requires the operator, the approval holder, to take appropriate action and the necessary action to resolve the problem. The next step could well be legal action.

As to the issue of monitoring, I can assure the member that there is no reduction, none whatsoever, in monitoring at developed areas and industrial sites. If there are to be changes in monitoring, they will be in very remote areas where we have had a long-standing record of little or no change.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Research and Technology Commercialization Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the government succeeds in creating a functional competitiveness board, the first priority the board should review is the government's own postsecondary education policy, which is rapidly making Alberta less competitive. My questions are to the minister of advanced education. How can the minister trumpet Alberta innovation while cutting funding for research and technology commercialization by \$35 million?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really do look forward to the discussion around our estimates because the hon. member may have missed a couple of things. When we consolidated a number of entities in Alberta Innovates, we did have some changes to our budget, but I can assure the hon. member that the Premier's vision of the next generation economy is clearly on track based on what we've done with Alberta Innovates and Campus Alberta. And I would correct the hon. member: the international community is looking at Campus Alberta as the system to look at and perhaps follow in the future.

Mr. Chase: They're going to have to look really hard to find it.

By freezing base operating grants, the minister has put faculty layoffs and unpaid furlough days on the table as universities struggle to balance their budgets. Is this what, in quotes, world-class universities look like to this government?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is obviously aware that Campus Alberta is all of the postsecondary institutions across the province, and if he hasn't figured that out yet, as my critic I would encourage him to go to the website and read what we've done over the last two years. I'm sure he would find that very enlightening.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, other jurisdictions in North America that one would consider world class, like Harvard or MIT or Berkeley, have had 20 to 30 per cent cuts to their base operating grants. Indeed, we'll get into the budget debate, but the base operating grants of every institution in this province were protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Rather than finding it enlightening, I'm finding that a number of university students are finding their wallets considerably lighter based on your policies.

Given that we already have the lowest postsecondary enrolment in the country, how is Alberta supposed to compete with our provincial counterparts for talent when this minister is considering tuition increases as large as 70 per cent?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, here we go with the nabobs of negativity and the purveyors of pessimism. Obviously, the hon. member has been reading a lot of newspapers. He's been reading a lot of blogs. He's been reading a lot of other things. Unfortunately, he hasn't been reading the truth.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are livestock producers, and I continue to hear how they're affected by the U.S. mandatory country of origin labelling and the negative impact it has had on the beef and pork producers on this side of the border. I've also heard that we have talk of a Canadian trade challenge on this rule. My question is for the minister of agriculture. Can he update this House on that challenge and just what the status is?

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

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, of course, as a government share the concerns with the producers on the country of origin labelling. There is a challenge in place by our national government with the World Trade Organization, and a panel is being put together now. Of course, we support our federal counterpart's efforts towards resolving this issue.

Mr. Berger: Again to the same minister: while I would expect and I hope that that challenge would conclude that the MCOOL ruling is indeed a violation of trade agreements, what if the ruling does not go in our favour? What action can we take, and can we have a made-in-Alberta solution to this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, after the first round, if we're not successful with the ruling in the first round, there is an appeal mechanism that's available to us. But I think it's worth noting that the same challenge is being made by Mexico, so we have a challenge by both of the partners in the North American free trade agreement on this particular violation. We're hopeful that that will settle the question.

Mr. Berger: A final question to the same minister: what else can we do? What other initiatives do we have in the pipe so that we may be able to help our producers on this side of the border succeed in this trade climate?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I think that the actions that the United States is taking with this country of origin labelling may have

brought about some patriotism and buying changes in the market. If we're not successful through this, I suggest that we need to look at it, too, because I know that Canadians would like to know where their food is coming from and know that there's an opportunity for them to buy Canadian beef. Some already do that. It's voluntary at this point, but that may be the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Support for Family Farms

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has decided that small agriculture producers should get out of the business. They gave the lion's share of BSE support to packers and feedlots, ALMA is dominated by big business, and last year they limited the participation of small producers in their own associations in favour of massive agricultural corps. Now, this government has been successful at pushing farmers off the land because as of January 1, 2010, this year, we've lost nearly 5,000 family farms in the last nine years alone. Will the minister tell . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has been recognized.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would really be a lot easier to work with the members opposite if they actually asked the question instead of just making a statement that I don't know is necessarily very accurate.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, StatsCan tells us that 5,000 family farms have been lost, so why aren't you doing something to actually fix the problem instead of announcing a \$25,000 cheque to the whole darn industry? The whole industry. Why can't you do something real to help family farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I expect that the hon. member opposite is making reference to the announcement that went out today on the inspection costs for agricultural producers, livestock producers in the province that through the drought and through other conditions move their livestock to Saskatchewan or British Columbia during the summer months to pasture them. We have now taken the inspection costs and taken that upon ourselves as a province. That is a small part of the over a billion dollars that we invest in the industry.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that \$25,000 to a whole industry that's lost 5,000 farms is worth a press release.

Producers are struggling to keep their farms and ranches out of hock. The former agriculture minister told this House that if small farmers can't make a go of it, they should just get out of the business. Does this minister share the attitude that family farms have no place in the current market?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, this year my family farm celebrates its 100th birthday. I firmly believe that family farms have a place in this market. Last year I presented 22 Century farm plaques in my constituency, about the same again this year. I very much support that. This government is very much behind that industry. I learned a long time ago from a constituent of mine that when you talk about money in the thousands of dollars and people make the statement, "That doesn't count," they say, "Send me that cheque."

The Speaker: With all this love in the air, will the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development kindly invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to your 100th family farm celebration this year?

Health Care Funding

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week the minister of health claimed that Alberta's new superboard has saved us between \$600 million and \$700 million. This statement appears entirely out of step with reality. Budget 2010 increases operational health spending by a stunning 13.7 per cent, or \$1.7 billion, with continued massive increases planned going forward. I would really like to see my parents as well as my four boys inherit a health system that they can actually pay for and is there when they need it. To the minister: given the massive increase, how can he claim that the superboard is lowering health care costs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's a fact that Alberta Health Services has found some efficiencies, and there are three primary areas, which I've explained before, but let me explain them quickly again because everybody has an appetite for this information, I know. Number one, they're moving toward this centralized payroll system; number two, they've already moved toward a common procurement system; and number three, they've stopped what's called doctor poaching or doctor bidding between one area of the province and another. There are other efficiencies such as that, hon. member, which they have found within their budget. That's their figure, between \$600 million and \$700 million. That money is being channelled . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: A \$1.7 billion increase does not sound like we are moving toward sustainability, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans, especially health care professionals who have heard the health minister's promise to tackle surgery wait times by simply paying nurses and docs to do more, are scratching their heads. We have long been told that there is an acute shortage of doctors and nurses and that most are working incredibly long hours. To the minister: is there so much excess capacity in the system that by simply spending \$70 million per year extra we could solve this problem forever, and if so, why didn't we do this sooner?

2:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I believe I answered that question before, but just in case it didn't communicate well, let me say it again. We have a budget right now that we're working on for the five-year plan, that starts April 1, and there will be additional surgeries added at that time. In the meanwhile we have some flexibility in the current budget because we have paid off or are covering the entire \$1.3 billion deficit that the current provincial board inherited from the previous regional boards.* So that's a salient factor. Number two, we're adjusting their base because we now have a better picture of what it costs to deliver health services province-wide. Number three, we're adding 6 per cent on top of that, and it's the 6 per cent increase we should be focusing on.

Mr. Anderson: I appreciate that. If you do the math, though, Mr. Speaker, it works out to be about \$1.3 million per week in additional spending. If it was that simple to solve the problem – that's roughly \$70 million a year – I still don't understand why we wouldn't have done this last year or the year before.

*See page 188, left column, paragraph 5

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, there is a person sitting on his left that could help answer that question because she helped us at that time, and it was the right move at that time to move to regional health authorities. It's the right thing to do now to move to the provincial board. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this new provincial board has inherited this accumulated deficit over the last few years, and now we have to cover it because we know what the actual costs are more accurately than ever before. We have consistent data gathering, we have consistent statistical information gathering, and we're sharing that with Albertans as fast as we can.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we were able to recognize 18 members today: 12 opposition members, six private government members. There were a total of 108 questions and answers, which is the highest number you'll find in any parliament anywhere in Canada.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having sought the proper approval of Parliamentary Counsel, I am retabling this petition, which states:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider providing increased funding to Midway School to ensure that various programs continue to be available to its students, teachers, trustees and parents.

It comes from parents of Didsbury, Carstairs, and Crossfield.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Bill 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to beg leave to introduce a bill being the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, being Bill 201.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 seeks to include primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer in the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters make claim for under workers' compensation. Bill 201 would help Alberta keep in line with other provinces who have recently added these cancers to their list of presumptive cancers for firefighters.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

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

Bill 202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act.

The goal of Bill 202 is to mandate the reporting of child pornography. It does not intend to mandate seeking out child pornography. Rather, it would require that if an individual believed the particular material is or may be child pornography, it's mandatory to report the

incident to the police or any other reporting entity. This bill will also protect the informant and ensure that no repercussions for reporting are experienced. Further, Bill 202 will establish the actions that a reporting entity must take following a report.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, on February 16 I tabled the 2009-2010 supplementary supply estimates. I am now tabling a replacement for page 12. This page shows the reason for the Department of Advanced Education and Technology's request for a supplementary amount. Unfortunately, due to a word processing error the header of the second section was presented as Capital Investment rather than Nonbudgetary Disbursements. This tabling does not affect the supplementary appropriations being considered by the House.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of three letters to the minister of health concerning the centralization of gynecological cytology lab services. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood referred to these letters in his questions earlier today. Each letter is signed by a group of pathologists, and each letter asks the minister to reverse the decision made last year to close various labs across the province because the move would not save money and would not improve patient care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two individuals that are here today. Actually, I was expecting three, but I only see two. They are Brad Hoekstra, secretary of the Alberta Firefighters Association, and Greg is not here, but we have Paul McGonigal. Paul is the first vice-president of the Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union. They're here today to witness the introduction of Bill 201. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order and recognize the President of the Treasury Board.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2009-10 General Revenue Fund

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move the 2009-10 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue

fund. The estimates will provide additional spending authority to nine government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize increases of about \$920.5 million in voted expense and in equipment/inventory purchases, \$4.7 million in voted capital investment, and \$32.9 million in voted nonbudgetary disbursements. These estimates are consistent with the third-quarter fiscal updates, which updated the 2009-10 fiscal plan for all government entities.

The estimates will authorize increases for the departments of Advanced Education and Technology; Employment and Immigration; Health and Wellness; Housing and Urban Affairs; Municipal Affairs; Sustainable Resource Development; Tourism, Parks and Recreation; Transportation; and Culture and Community Spirit. The ministers that are responsible for these departments will be happy to answer any questions from any members of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Before we begin, as we start with the questions, do we want to combine the times, and we'll move back and forth with the questions and answers?

2:50

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, we are at the pleasure of the opposition members as to how they would like to deal with the questions.

Health and Wellness

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. If it's of the interest of the President of the Treasury Board, certainly we could do that. We could have specific questions, and then, hopefully, we can get an answer.

Now, my first question would be that earlier, in question period, we heard the minister of health suggest or imply that there would be a cost-benefit analysis now done on some of the expenditures that are hopefully going to reduce waiting times in operating rooms and waiting times in our hospitals. I'm quite surprised that there was never a cost-benefit analysis done. There was a clear admission of this in Public Accounts by the former deputy minister of health, that before the nine regional health authorities were fired and the one superboard was created, there was no cost-benefit analysis done at that time. I'm glad to hear we are starting to do some now.

We all know the results of the disaster which is Alberta Health Services. We can't say that it was an inherited debt that they had from the RHAs. Some RHAs, it's true, did have debts but not anywhere even close to the \$1.3 billion that was racked up in record time by Alberta Health Services.

My question would be to the President of the Treasury Board. Before this money was allocated – and I believe the sum is \$243 million – was there a cost-benefit analysis done before this expenditure was ratified by the Treasury Board?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, hon. member, for the question. I think you have to bear in mind that costings are always done just on a routine basis with regard to any expenditures made in the government of Alberta, but cost-benefit analyses are slightly different. In fact, I would argue that they are vastly different because they are much more detailed. You are not

just looking at the costs in terms of the numbers, but you are looking specifically at what benefits come from those costs.

For example, if you wanted to talk about some of the issues that came up today in question period with respect to, let's say, cataract surgeries, I've asked for not only a costing but for a cost-benefit analysis because I'm of the opinion that it costs on average the same or less to do a cataract surgery in a public institution compared with doing the same surgery in a private institution, albeit that we cover it fully as a government no matter what as long as it falls into the category of being medically necessary and it's medically covered and so on and so on. That's one distinction that I would like to make.

In the end, Mr. Chairman, I'm not only asking today through the Treasury Board motion that we approve \$243.2 million in supplementary estimates that will go toward the two priorities identified, which are accumulated deficit of the former health authorities, many of whom were running deficits and many of whom were not running deficits – they were doing the best job they could under the circumstances – and, secondly, to cover H1N1 response costs.

I want to add to that that we are going to talk about not only that particular supplementary funding, but we are also going to look, hon. member, at other savings that have been attracted in our ministry, such as lower demands in areas such as prescription drug benefits and physician services and some savings brought about by reprofiling and reduced cash flow requirements for certain capital projects. So what we're going to have altogether is some savings on the one hand coupled with the supplementary estimates on the other hand to deal with the pandemic costs alluded to and also the accumulated deficit costs and so on.

I should just close by saying, Mr. Chairman, that the H1N1 costs were declared by the Lieutenant Governor through an order in council as extraordinary expenses this year because, in fact, they did meet the criteria of being deemed a public emergency. I would hope to have the hon. member's support in that respect.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again along that line of questioning. I appreciate the answer from the minister of health, but at the same time I would like to point out to the hon. minister the report of the Auditor General of Alberta from last fall, October 2009. The Auditor points out that the 2008-09 RHAs' budgeted operating deficit was \$392 million. Business plans of those RHAs – and we've got to remember that everything was organized through East Central health authority – were not approved by the Alberta Health Services Board or the minister at the time.

Again, in regard to your previous statement, how can taxpayers have confidence that this money is going to be wisely spent? It's not simply walking up to a bank machine and withdrawing the cash and ensuring that it is spent prudently. What exactly is in place that's different than what was pointed out in the Auditor General's report that will give taxpayers confidence that this money is going to be spent wisely?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, hon. member, for the question. We're perhaps not quite finished spending them yet in a couple of small areas, but the monies were spent, as I said, with respect to the H1N1 response costs. That total, hon. member, was \$148.9 million. Albertans should take comfort in knowing that \$22.1 million of that amount was for doctors' services, \$116.4 million was for Alberta Health Services, and \$10.4 million was to purchase the actual vaccine. Now, the H1N1 costs include such items as drugs, supplies,

staffing, emergency medical services flu response units, immunization clinics, assessment centres, emergency room visits, and so on. So that is one part of it.

The second part is the accumulated deficit, which is, in total, \$343 million for the period that we're talking about here. That deficit was accumulated partly because we had a system in place that was regionalized. We had regional health boards, in this particular case nine regional health boards. Some of them operated differently than did others. Some of them were facing different circumstances than others. In any case, they were all doing their own thing and, I should say, for the most part doing it very, very well. I was quite proud of what regional health authorities were doing, and I think they deserve some kudos for having managed through some difficult issues and some difficult times as well.

In the end, moving to one provincial health board has streamlined a lot of those organizations, and it simply would be unfair to move to a new provincial board and saddle them with a \$1.3 billion deficit at the get-go. They're just coming up to their first-year anniversary with their new CEO in April. They deserve a fresh start, and I think Albertans appreciate that.

I hope that clarifies some of the member's concerns for the time being.

Mr. Snelgrove: I appreciate the question: how do we know we're getting better? I think one of the things that the minister has talked about earlier today – and we've made a great effort – is doing it better. In fact, by finding within Alberta Health Services between \$600 million and \$700 million worth of a better way to spend your money in health care, the government's approach hasn't been to try to withdraw money from the system. It's to make sure that we're getting better use of it. So they have in the last year, to your point and to the Auditor's point, looked within their responsibilities and through procurement, payroll, the other things the minister talked about have been able to identify over \$600 million of spending that is getting better results for them. I appreciate your question. It doesn't show out as a saving from health care because we believe they should be able to find it and reinvest it into health care.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister to supplement.

3:00

Mr. Zwodzesky: I'm sorry. I forgot one important point that you asked about. That was the Auditor General. My apologies. I want to tell you, hon. member, that I did meet with the Auditor General, and just apropos to both points – and I'll get to the second one in a moment – he indicated to me that when he was auditing and reviewing the difference between having one provincial board for health as opposed to nine provincial boards, basically, we saw so much differentiation among the nine regions that it was sometimes difficult to track the information and to record it in the kind of order that you would need to make the best decisions at the provincial level.

To put that in some more graphic terms, if we take the Alberta wait-list registry as an example – and I'll be as brief as I can, Mr. Chair – we had all of these regional boards collecting information and inputting it to the provincial level, but everybody was collecting it slightly differently, and they were using slightly different terminology. We started to straighten that all out, and now we're hoping to get that Alberta registry back up and running because we've got what I've referred to before as more consistent data gathering, more

consistent information reporting, and a better system overall of applying that information now. So when the Alberta wait-list registry gets back up and running, people will be able to go to their computer, punch up hip replacement or knee replacement, and they'll know what the wait time or the wait-list is in Camrose or Ponoka or Wetaskiwin or Pincher Creek or Edmonton or Calgary or wherever that particular surgery is being offered.

That's one of our main goals over the next year, to get all of that information put in place. Now that we have the guaranteed funding plan, now that we have the five-year funding plan, we're able to provide more stability and more predictability for everyone concerned.

The other point, very quickly, that the Auditor General mentioned to me was this. These are his words, and I asked him if I could quote him on this, hon. member, and he said yes. I wrote it down exactly the way he said it. Even the Auditor General said, quote, that the provincial board inherited certain deficits; they did not create them. That's not to say that the regional health authorities weren't doing a good job. The fact is that some of them were running deficits; some were not.

Now that we have a more consistent approach, hon. member, I say to you that the days of deficits are gone. This supplementary estimate today will help us pick up the costs that we're able to in the current year, that extends to March 31, and then we'll deal with the balance of the deficit for health regions in the 2010-11 year.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader to respond.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a matter of order and just to understand what's happening this afternoon, we had had discussions with the opposition indicating a process. Advanced Education was going to be started with first, followed by Employment and Immigration, then Health and Wellness, as per the estimates, with the only exception that Culture was going to be at the bottom. Now, I have no problem if the opposition wants to deal with Health and Wellness first on the understanding that the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology might not be here if they want to get to him down at the bottom of the list. You know, the House can handle it however they wish, and the opposition can raise questions in whatever order, but I'm going to assume and I think ministers are going to assume that if you've jumped over their department in the order, they are then free to go.

Mr. MacDonald: No. Certainly, I was unaware of that. Mr. Chairman, we were starting with the largest budget, which is the request for Health and Wellness, which is, as we indicated earlier, \$243 million. We were starting at the largest budget, and we were planning to work our way down.

We come in here, hon. member, all the time and wait patiently for our bills to come up for debate. In fact, we waited in here yesterday quite patiently for over an hour. I know we're all busy, but certainly this is a significant amount of money, close to \$1 billion, so hopefully through the course of debate all our questions can be answered.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I have no problem with the hon. member wanting to start with the largest numbers, just that we had communicated with his House leader, and probably he should, too.

Mr. Chase: Just as part of clarification, we also have members involved in the budgetary debates tonight, and it is because of that

involvement in the debates that we have reordered the debate this afternoon in order to accommodate members who will also be on duty tonight.

Advanced Education and Technology

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps if I could put some comments on the record as it relates to my budget, and we could get going on Advanced Education and Technology. There are really only two key areas where we are seeking supplementary estimate approval, and I do this for the information of all members of the House. The first is to meet the increasing demand for student financial assistance. The second is, of course, to address changes in our capital budget.

I'm going to start first by addressing the demand for student financial assistance. When it comes to student financial assistance, one of the top priorities is to ensure that we are able to provide adequate financial assistance to all eligible students. In Alberta's current economic climate that has become a greater challenge. More Albertans are choosing to pursue postsecondary education in this environment, and as a result we have seen a 20 per cent increase in the number of student loan applications. To ensure that we're assisting every eligible student, we are increasing our 2009 spending on student loans by \$30 million. As a result, no eligible student was turned away or declined financial assistance for their studies. We do expect demand to remain high, and we have made changes to our student assistance programs as outlined in Budget 2010 so we can continue to meet the needs of those students, Mr. Chairman.

Moving on to our capital budget. The supplementary estimate in this area is \$178.7 million, a large sum. A significant portion of this is a result of a capital funding injection of \$97.7 million from our friends in the federal government. This federal funding, targeted for projects at various institutions under the knowledge infrastructure program, or KIP, as it came to be known, came after our 2009 budget was approved. We're simply seeking legislative authority to transfer the funds into the budget and spend them as needed. The majority of Alberta's approved KIP projects will upgrade building systems such as mechanical, electrical, roofing, and windows that will extend the useful life of the buildings, something that all of our postsecondaries were asking for.

The remaining changes within our capital budget are related cost escalation for the Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science at the University of Alberta, on which I know the hon. members are very keen in terms of their interdisciplinary studies that they have there. The original approved funding was based on 2004 cost estimates and did not take into account the significant increases in construction costs that occurred between 2004 and 2008. To meet increased costs we have worked with the university to find as many cost savings within the project as possible, and we've also directed the university to shift cost savings from other projects to the Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science, significantly reducing the need for additional funding.

This is a critical project for the university that will accommodate an additional 1,500 undergraduate students and 500 graduate students in the science programs. It will be one of the only few of its kind in the world to house interdisciplinary science research teams in one faculty and attract and retain outstanding students as well as world-class teaching and research talent. In short, it meets the objectives of our Alberta access planning framework to ensure that it provides access to meet demand for science and engineering

training. The total cost expected for this project is to be in the range of \$465 million, and it should be completed by 2011.

Mr. Chairman, those are the very brief comments that I wanted to make on the Advanced Education and Technology supplementary estimates. They really are two fairly simple points, and I would ask the House for approval.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate the minister not only being here but staying here for the debate on Advanced Education and Technology. As the minister has noted, almost half of the \$217,176,000 comes from the federal government. He and I have been at numerous presentations at the University of Calgary. I very much thank the minister for contributing to infrastructure for postsecondary institutions. We were together at the sort of checking off of the cogen plant at the University of Calgary. We were there together at the ISEEE, the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, when that part of the cheque was presented. These cheques are very much appreciated. However, what we are doing with the federal funding and the provincial funding: we are creating shells, but we're not then providing the operational funding to keep those shells operating.

3:10

ISEEE did receive some operational funding, and I am not complaining about seeing the Taylor digital library go up at the U of C and the Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science at the University of Alberta. These are all positive aspects. But if you're going to keep the programs running, the postsecondary institutions have to have predictable, sustainable operational funding. That has been missing both from the provincial government's and the federal government's.

The ministers, federally and provincially, are there for the cheque blow-up opportunities for new buildings, but when it comes to the financing of the operations, there have been not only freezes but effectively cuts to all postsecondary institutions in Alberta. That is affecting the delivery of academic programs to students. It's also affecting the quality of the teaching experience as well as that of the learning experience of students. This is important to note.

Also, again, it's important to note that half of the announcement that the minister made is thanks to federal transfers. While appreciated, the money that is missing – for example, we've heard about \$30 million of debt load that has been granted to students but at the expense of reduced grants and bursaries. Now, the minister – and I'm sure he'll explain it to me again, that he can get more bang for the buck through loans than he can through grants and bursaries. But from a student expense point of view, with a grant and a bursary there is no debt to be repaid, and also it allows the student to get involved into the economy to a much greater extent.

In question period I talked about the possibility of a 70 per cent increase. It's up to the minister as to the extent of the approval of whatever percentage of increase is provided. But we have got desperate institutions, like the University of Alberta with a \$58 million deficit, trying to get it back, and they can't get it through operational funding. They can't get it through infrastructure grants. So the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary are looking at their only other source of funding, and that's basically tuition.

The University of Calgary has proposed an up to 47 per cent increase in tuition costs for professional faculties. At a meeting that I was at with the provost a couple of weeks ago in Calgary, the

education faculty has now joined the medical, the law, the business, and the engineering as the highest debt load potential faculties.

In addition to those potential increases in tuition, of course, at the U of A, because they are in a larger hole than the U of C, they're talking about – I think the highest one was a 67 per cent increase in one of their professional faculties, medicine, I believe. But the point is that – I've said it so many times in this House – education equals economy. Without that support for education students are going to go into greater debt.

Now, when the minister said that no applications – I don't want to put words in his mouth, but I think he said something along the lines that no qualified applications were rejected. But I've had a number of individuals contact my Calgary-Varsity constituency office and say that while they were able to get a loan for their first year of university, when it came to the second year, there was no loan available. For the students who are in Bow Valley College, for example, or SAIT, the Alberta Works program funding has completely dried up, so students looking for funding to help them pursue trades are out of luck.

Now, specific questions that I would like to ask the minister are as follows. How will the ministry distribute the additional funds for capital expansion across the province? This comes from line 4.0.1 of page 13. Will these funds be concentrated in certain institutions? I gather that a large chunk, obviously, due to inflationary costs is going to the University of Alberta, but I'd appreciate clarification on what the other institutions can expect in terms of continuing infrastructure projects.

In terms of the additional funds for capital maintenance and renewal why was the additional \$56 million not anticipated in the 2009-2010 budget? Is there an opportunity with the reduced costs of materials and labour to potentially recoup some of this money with our reduced construction costs?

Are postsecondary institutions experiencing higher deferred maintenance costs than expected? I mean, the University of Alberta is sort of approaching 100 years of operation. The University of Calgary is heading towards 45, so obviously deferred maintenance is going to make the bill even larger if the repairs aren't addressed.

How many learners will be assisted with the additional \$30 million in student loan disbursements noted in line 3.0.6? I know that it's a projected answer, but I'd appreciate any attempt at giving the possibilities or possible scenarios. Even with this extra \$30 million will eligible students be denied student loans? Now, according to the minister, this isn't likely to happen, but as I say, the practical experience of students calling my office indicates that they could not get loans for their second year's studies pursuit. If so, what size of appropriation would be sufficient to address this demand?

I've tried to keep it short. I look forward to the minister, and I thank him for being here to respond.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot of stuff in there. I want to start with the last part there. There were no students that I'm aware of this year that were turned away because of the budget that we're talking about here today. In fact, we're not even talking about the budget here today. We're talking about supplementary estimates. The \$30 million, obviously, is to accommodate the increased load of student applications so that we didn't turn away any eligible students.

Certainly, when we talk about the grants and the bursaries in the budget, which I understand is coming next week, we'll be talking about our estimates, and we'll also be talking about student finances

and the investment that students make in their education. We're trying to look at a system where we can keep the student investment in their education at about the 20 to 30 per cent level of the cost of what it is to do their program. I think that's something that Albertans have come to recognize as a representative investment in their future because the taxpayer is paying the other 70 per cent. We do not serve the institutions.

You know, the hon. member is correct. We've been to a number of openings of capital dollars across this province. In fact, I think we've probably got well in excess of \$1.3 billion worth of capital under way in this province in postsecondary today. I doubt that there is a province in Canada that can make that boast, quite frankly, hon. member, and it's good to do that.

3:20

When you talk about operating dollars, which, again, are not related to what we're talking about here today, but the hon. member brought it up, certainly in the budget that we have for '09-10, we had a 6 per cent base operating grant increase to all postsecondaries. We had a fairly substantial increase in our EPE funding to all of the postsecondaries. We had, in fact, a doubling of the maintenance funding to all postsecondaries. It went from \$35 million a year as the line item in my budget, I believe, to something around \$70 million a year. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Chairman, that our postsecondaries have fared probably better than any jurisdiction in North America, dare I say perhaps even around the globe on the basis of a population of 3 and a half million.

It tails quite nicely, Mr. Chairman, into what we've been able to accomplish this year, really, and we launched it on January 4 of this year in Alberta Innovates. What we've done is brought forward all of the different research organizations from across the province, whether that be, you know, the UTIs or the TEC Edmontons or the Alberta Research Councils. In fact, the Alberta Research Council actually raises a lot of money every year on its own by way of a fee for service. We'd like to expand some of that because we have some great infrastructure that we've invested in in this province that companies or postsecondaries or individuals who have a great idea should and could use because that's a taxpayer investment that we want to get a return out of.

We brought all of the Alberta Innovates with all of these research entities together into one group. Call it branding it Alberta Innovates, similarly to how we branded Campus Alberta. We wanted to brand Campus Alberta because when we go internationally, we talk about the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge. We talk about Lethbridge College, Lakeland College, the 26 different institutions that are the width and breadth of this province. We want to be able to sell the quality of Campus Alberta. We want to be able to sell the fact that you can enter the system anywhere and transfer around in that system. That's APAS, which is another thing I'd love to talk about, Mr. Chairman, the one-window approach.

But back to Alberta Innovates. We brought everything together so that if you have an idea and you were starting at a certain point within that value chain of that idea, what we want to be able to do is bring you forward to the culmination of the value chain of that idea. So if you're starting in your garage and you created the next best mousetrap, and you want to put that into the marketplace, what do you need?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mice.

Mr. Horner: Well, you need mice, yes, but you also need to have a business plan. You need to figure out how you're going to raise

funds. You need to figure out how you're going to build that prototype. You need to figure out how you're going to get that prototype into the marketplace. Alberta Innovates creates a cluster and a process and, really, a concierge service for you that will help you do that. That's tied to the postsecondary system, Mr. Chairman, because postsecondary does a lot of our basic research, but it also does a ton of our applied research. Lakeland College is doing a number of projects on biofuels, on biodiesel.

Mr. Snelgrove: Funny you should bring that up.

Mr. Horner: I just thought it was timely, as is Grande Prairie College, as is a number of our – SAIT and NAIT are well known in the aeronautical system in the hon. member's own riding. We have a number of things going on down around Medicine Hat and the Lethbridge area in terms of research and development in unmanned vehicles which are really progressing quite nicely. Again, Alberta Innovates is going to be a huge contributor to turning those things into marketable products.

When we talk about Alberta Innovates in terms of the budget side of it, which we'll get into, I'm sure, in much more detail next week, when we start talking about how the dollars will flow now versus how the dollars flowed before, it also helps our postsecondaries on the operating side, as the hon. member brought up, operating for new infrastructure because we're able to attract corporations to help us with our infrastructure and to help us with our operating dollars because of Alberta Innovates, because of Campus Alberta, and because of where these companies want to perform their research and create new products and new wealth, Mr. Chairman.

It is really about creating wealth. We want to create a bigger pie. We want to create a bigger pie so that we have the resources to have the world-class operational dollars for our postsecondaries and our researchers. We want to be able to attract new researchers into the system. We want to be able to attract the kinds of companies that are going to build on the strengths that we have in our system. There is a lot of work to a new mousetrap, actually.

Mr. Chairman, the other thing as it relates to grants and bursaries and the investment of the loans. Alberta has probably the best loan remission program in the country. When we're talking about loans and we're talking about adding student debt, a lot of times people kind of ignore the fact that Alberta has a very substantial loan remission program upon completion of graduation for entitled students where the entire Alberta portion of their loan on a four-year program can actually be waived. They need not pay it back to the taxpayers of Alberta. That's a pretty significant investment in the students in this province.

The other thing that's a significant investment in the students in this province is really the student finance program that we have. It is heavily subsidized. It is also one where we bring very low interest rates. We have increased the living allowances every year that I've been the minister. We've increased this in this budget, and we've got some very good news as it relates to the student finance regulations and where we are going with those.

I think, Mr. Chairman, the other ways that we are helping students save some dollars, as I mentioned earlier on in my discussion, is APAS, the Alberta access portal for enrolment in postsecondaries in Alberta. Today a student in Lac La Biche can get onto the enrolment system and apply at any institution in the province and only upload his transcripts once. He only has to enter all of his personal data and all of his application data once, and that is transmitted to all of the institutions that he wishes to apply to. That system, as it grows and as we add more things to it that we want to use to manage the system, is going to provide tremendous management informa-

tion. It's going to provide some tremendous opportunity for us to do better planning in the future because it really is about how we can respond to the student needs and the student demands.

Mr. Chairman, I think I've answered probably every question that could possibly come now.

Mr. Snelgrove: And ones they haven't even thought of yet.

Mr. Horner: And probably some they weren't even thinking about. So with that, I'll take my seat, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope that I'm not repeating some of the questions that were asked. I was a bit distracted at the beginning, so you can nod right away if that's the case.

As a starting point, obviously, with respect to the issue around seeking more money to address the increased demand or the increased cost of student loans, just as sort of a preliminary comment, as you probably know, we have some concerns about the idea of shifting the funding structure where we're asking students to take out more loans and take on greater debt in order to finance their education, notwithstanding, of course, that, you know, we provide a very good education here in Alberta. The question is how much debt we're asking our students to anticipate taking on before they go in through the hallowed doors of that excellent postsecondary education and the degree to which it may result in a certain portion of the population, particularly lower income Albertans, choosing not to seek out the kind of education that would give them that true equality of opportunity that we presumably all seek to provide. I will say that I did find it a teeny bit ironic that, on one hand, this government is opening the doors for students to take on more debt load; on the other hand, we just have the federal government being very concerned about the growing debt load of Canadians and stepping in quite aggressively to address that issue.

Nonetheless, that aside, my concern at this point anyway, obviously, with respect to having more loans in the future, of course, relates to the many loopholes that exist around our tuitions and the fact that they may grow dramatically. But that's not what we're talking about now, so I won't get too much more into it and simply ask – and again, if these questions were asked, I apologize – is the extra money for more loans, or is it for higher loans, or both? Can I get numbers with respect to that in terms of how many more loans or whether there was an increase in the average size of loans that generated the need for this extra request?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good to have a question on topic. The actual number of applications went up because, as the hon. member very well knows, the maximum loan amounts this year were not raised, but we are looking at, if my budget is passed, maximum loan amounts being raised next year. That's a reflection – and I know that the hon. member was lobbied by the students' associations, just as I was and just as all hon. members were, to raise the student loan limits because the cost of living has risen. Remember that for the students this is an investment just as it is for us, and they, in fact, view it that way as well. Also, just as a point of clarification, even though we are looking at a higher level of loans, if students are applying at a lot of postsecondaries and if we actually increase the percentage of participation rates in our postsecondaries, I will probably be back. This is one of those things where, if the students apply for a loan and they are eligible, we want to be able to help them.

3:30

You know, the hon. member talks about low-income Albertans wanting to go to school. That's exactly the kind of situation that these student finance programs are geared towards. If they weren't, they'd go to the bank. They don't need to come to us if they're already wealthy. They'd just go to the bank, or they'd pay it on their own. These types of student financial assistance are for exactly those students who are in need, who want to pursue their dreams, and I view that as an absolute positive.

The other thing I would say is that Alberta, even in the new system that we're talking about, will still be number one in scholarships in the country.

Mr. Chase: You talked about the consolidation of Alberta Innovates, Mr. Minister. If consolidation ended up with greater efficiency, then the superboard would not be \$1.3 billion in the hole. I'm not convinced that this consolidation has made up for the fact that there's \$35 million less in the fund, so it remains a concern.

Another concern related to Alberta Innovates is patenting, ownership. For example, out of the University of Calgary a terrific, innovative surgical invention, the robotic arm, occurred due to on-campus research funded both by the province and the federal government. But it disturbs me that the patent for that robotic arm is being sold. If you could please explain why that intellectual property is not valued at a higher level, that it's being sold as opposed to retaining the rights and further developments of that arm and the technology associated with it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Obviously, Alberta Innovates is not the topic of the discussion this afternoon. We're talking about supplementary estimates. It did key into the comments that I was making because they're kind of all related there, but I'm sure we're going to have a lot of time to discuss Alberta Innovates next week as I do my estimates.

As it relates to intellectual property – again, Mr. Chairman, it's hardly something we'd talk about during supplementary estimates – I would point out that the hon. member might want to talk to the University of Calgary because their intellectual property agreements with the professors are part of their agreements. We are looking at ways that we might be able to change that. I think that's one of the things that we need to actually open up, to make easier access to intellectual property because, again, it's about creating wealth.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be brief in my asking of questions. I have three.

Just to clarify my previous request, you did mention that the number of applications had gone up, and I'm wondering if we could be provided with the actual number, what that increase was.

Then the second question was that while I appreciate that the loan max increases for the year forward, I assume that for the year behind the average amount of loan given is not always the max. So you have an average that's below the max; thus, it's possible for the average to have increased within the max. I was asking whether or not this \$30 million is actually also about an increase in the amount loaned on average last year beyond what was expected.

My third question – and then I won't have to get up again – is just with respect to the construction of the centennial centre. Given that we were looking at lower costs of labour and materials last year – perhaps I missed it, and if I did, you can just refer me to *Hansard* – what is the explanation for the cost being so much higher than what was budgeted at the beginning of last year?

Mr. Horner: Not a problem, hon. member. Certainly, on the number of loan applications we'll have that data once the year is complete because, frankly, we're still processing some applications as we speak. So we'll be able to garner that data. I know that the hon. member has actually quoted data to me from student finance in the past year. Certainly, those numbers are going to be available. Frankly, we're not seeing a huge increase in the average amounts. What we're seeing is a larger number of applicants coming to student finance as opposed to wherever they were going before.

Remember, hon. member, that we probably had the highest percentage of working students, by choice in some cases, than pretty much everywhere else. I think everybody in this House knows that a number of employment positions that are in that kind of part-time category did not materialize over the last couple of years, and students were one of the ones that that hurt, which is one of the reasons, you know, that when we talk about a minimum wage, we wanted to keep the number of jobs the same. That was part and parcel of where we went with that. In terms of the average amount, again, I'm pretty sure that that's part of the statistics that we develop at the end of the year when we're done.

As it relates to CCIS, you're right; a number of projects over at the University of Alberta were coming in lower than what we budgeted. In fact, the dollars that are included in the supplementary estimates are a balance between what we need to make it whole and savings that the university has been able to bring about from other projects that they've been working on. This project was costed out in 2004. So recognizing what happened in '05-06 in terms of cost escalation, when we complete the project, we'll be completing it based on an overall capital plan with the University of Alberta.

I would take this opportunity, actually, Mr. Chairman, to commend the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, all of the postsecondaries, frankly, on their ability to manage their capital assets and their capital plans. They've done an outstanding job over the past year and a half, two years that we've been working on some of these issues. There's not one capital project on a postsecondary campus in this province that is not proceeding.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Right. I just wanted to clarify the process that the hon. Government House Leader brought up. Here are his exact words, actually, coming from his assistant, George Samoil: here's the revised order for today; the only ministers who are not here today for sups are tourism and culture as they are hosting Alberta Day at the Olympics. Mr. Samoil went on to list in alphabetical order the various portfolios that would be debated for supplementary supply today, but there was no House leaders' agreement on the order in which the topics would be discussed.

I wanted to put that on the record. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to do so.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.
We'll move on, then.

Employment and Immigration

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other questions with regard to any of the other estimates? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Well, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to rise and take part in the debate on supplementary supply estimates. Perhaps we could subtitle it "What's a billion?"

since we're talking about almost a billion dollars, \$958,125,000, in requested supplementary supply.

I was wondering about some of these numbers in the 2009-2010 supplementary supply estimates for Employment and Immigration. We're looking at a total supplementary amount close to \$177 million. Some of that, about \$4.6 million, is for employment program planning and delivery to support employment and training programs that will help individuals improve their skills in order to obtain and maintain employment; another \$28 million and change is for employment and training programs specifically, programs that'll help individuals improve their skills in order to obtain and maintain employment; \$25.9 million is for health benefits due to higher caseloads and cost per case; \$129.7 million is for income supports due to higher caseloads and cost per case.

I guess what I'm concerned about here – and I certainly wouldn't lay the total amount of blame for this request squarely at the feet of any one minister – is that what this shows is an underestimation of the impact that the recession was going to have on employment in the province of Alberta when the budget for 2009-2010 was prepared.

3:40

I'm not going to lay the blame squarely at the feet of either today's Minister of Employment and Immigration or his predecessor, who was in place a year ago, when the budget was brought down, because this has been a wicked recession, the worst economic downturn since the Dirty Thirties. A lot of people got a lot of things wrong in projecting this. Nevertheless, we're looking at \$177 million that was spent that now we are being requested in this House to approve because income supports, health benefits related to that, and employment and training programs ended up costing a lot more than we thought they were going to.

Interestingly, Mr. Chairman, the numbers for all four of those categories for fiscal 2010-2011 – and I was at a different budget hearing last night, different estimates for a different department, but I would expect and understand that this got fairly full discussion at estimates for the Ministry of Employment and Immigration last night – have been reduced again this year from what was actually spent in 2009-2010, and that's what I'm wondering about. You know, concerns were raised in the estimates debate for the '09-10 budget about the size of the increases to training and income supports programs, concerns that were raised because, well, frankly, we thought maybe they were underestimating a little bit what it would cost.

I guess I'm looking for the minister to admit that the government did not correctly anticipate the demands the recession would place on these programs, not so that we could just say "gotcha" but because that goes to, I think, what's being budgeted this year. I really hope that we're not back here 11, 12 months from now with another sup supply increase for employment training and income supports programs because we underestimated it again. I'm looking for some justification of the numbers going forward, I guess, and some comment on the numbers as they actually turned out to be in '09-10.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, trust it to the hon. member. I agree; it's not an exact science. But I can tell you that we are using data from StatsCan and other economic indicators that show us that we're looking for an unemployment rate around 6 per cent next year and dropping down to 5.3 per cent the year after that. They're hopeful, but I think they're doable given the indicators we see. We're also intending to save money because of a reduction or, certainly, a pause

in some of the international recruitment that we bring. They're all kind of connected.

I can tell you – and I don't want to put words in his mouth – that I think that when we budget, we need to be flexible. It doesn't serve us well to put all the money in and hope things get better because we've found over time that departments will spend it. You know, if you have the flexibility to move from one department if you see the trending going – if unemployment is climbing, if the demand for advanced ed spaces or other adult training is dropping, you know that you're going to get it somewhere. It's going to come in supports of one kind, either back into some kind of literacy programs, but it's going to get you. There's that segment of the population that follows the economy. I really think this shows the flexibility within government to say: okay; maybe we don't have the particular supports for some kind of upgrading or moving to a higher level, but we do have a lot of people who need supports at this level.

You know, we just have the stream of people that will always follow the economy, and you'll pay through one department or another. I personally think the flexibility to move those supports and come back to the House and say: well, we didn't get it right in our guess last spring, but a lot of things happen in a year, and it was important to address the very specific needs of that group. So I think it works.

Mr. Taylor: If I could just pick up on that and this notion of the group of people who kind of follow the economy. You know, how often do you actually ever get real consensus from a room full of economists? That said, I think there is a degree of consensus among economists that that group of people tends to follow by perhaps as much as two years. In other words, the unemployment rate is going to continue to go up or remain high before it starts to come down for up to two years after the early signs of recovery start to make themselves obvious. I think the President of the Treasury Board would most likely agree that we are seeing some fairly substantial early signs that the worst is over and that we're starting to recover. The question, then, really is: if that group of people according to the economists' quasi-consensus, put in quotation marks, is going to follow the economy with up to a two-year time lag, have you done enough here in terms of anticipating that?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, if we take the total Canadian unemployment picture, it will lag further behind it. But I think the hon. member and certainly anyone who's watched some of the oil patch workers go back to the Maritimes would agree that you can just about guarantee that some of them aren't coming back to work. Even in Alberta many people will work in the oil patch until either a downturn, old age, a bad back, or something puts them out of it, and they'll go on to where they really intended their life to be. A lot of the people that were making pretty good money in the oil industry have gone back to their provinces. We don't see directly those people on our doorsteps with their hand out for unemployment. They're getting it, but they're getting it through the federal government in the Maritimes, and that might put us in a slightly different position than most economic models around where the workforce would be. So we're probably slightly better off, but somebody is paying for it.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you to the Provincial Treasurer for that. I can certainly understand and accept that we are a unique case in that sort of situation.

In terms of the supplementary requests to employment and training programs, are these increases essentially passed on to clients in the form of training payments?

Mr. Snelgrove: Some are shared costs, and there are many. Some of them are shared programs with the federal government, so the cost of the program wouldn't necessarily reflect all or nothing here. It's the blend of whatever particular training issues: some cost shared with the recipient, some cost shared with the federal government, and some with employers.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. A couple of more questions along the same line. Were any of these increases used to build capacity in these programs in the form of hiring additional staff, et cetera? If that's the case, how will the ministry shrink these programs when demand really does recede? How much of this is kind of like one-off requests, I guess? The point here is that, you know, economic recovery is going to create jobs, but it's not going to replace the same jobs that we've lost over the last two years. The net result of that is that you will have – and we see it already – job vacancies where we don't have people with the appropriate skill sets to fill those vacancies, and we have unemployed workers who have skill sets that aren't in demand any longer. You don't always get that turned around by one six-week or semester-long course in this or that particular program, right?

Some of those workers are going to need multiple years of training to requalify in a postrecession economy. Should the ministry be considering some multiyear increases to upgrading programs and learner funding to address the situation? Lest the minister feel like he should stand up now and accuse me of making this a spending day, we're talking about an investment day.

Mr. Snelgrove: The hon. member is very correct for us to be aware that when we go into initiatives, not just in this department but in any department, where we increase our capacity to deal with the different issue that we're at, and all of a sudden that issue isn't there, it seems far tougher to take the dollars back out or to reallocate to another department. On that heads-up I can commit to the hon. member that we will be watching that for sure, not only in this one but generally across government.

3:50

We've also put together ministerial working groups, where we are able to identify trends and changes – the health workforce development, that's a joint initiative between, obviously, Employment and Immigration, Advanced Education, and Health and Wellness – to make sure that we are identifying the workforce of the future in many ways, whether it's the personal care person or other upgrading within the system. I get his point; it's a good point. We will make sure that if, in fact, the capacity is greater than what a normal population requirement is, we'll be able to either redirect that to be more effective, or we'll take it back from that department and put it where it works.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I didn't quite get the answer, not from the minister not trying but from Advanced Education and Technology. I see under Employment and Immigration this basically \$28 million figure for employment and training programs. Now, I appreciate the hon. President of the Treasury Board talking about cross ministry and putting the money where it's going to do the most good. Will any of this \$28 million go to make up for the Alberta Works program basically being shut down? Will any of this money be transferred to that program?

Mr. Snelgrove: I don't have the answer for the hon. member. I'll take it.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm just wondering if any of the money that's indicated here will go towards increasing the number of individuals qualifying for the provincial nominee program. I would think that would fit under immigration. We've increased it each year, and if you have any numbers, that would be helpful.

Mr. Snelgrove: Okay.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? We can move on?

Mr. Taylor: Are you specific, Mr. Chairman, to this department?

The Deputy Chair: No. We've got eight different ministries here. You can move on if you wish.

Mr. Taylor: Kind of a free-for-all.

The Deputy Chair: Well, not quite.

Mr. Taylor: Just testing, Mr. Chair. Just testing.

Housing and Urban Affairs

Mr. Taylor: I'd like to speak to Housing and Urban Affairs. We're looking at a supplementary amount of \$73,632,000, which is a net of \$3.4 million from lower than budgeted spending in other programs.

By the way, I'm noticing that in a number of these departmental supplementary supply requests we're running into the situation where you have come to us asking for money but not as much money as you need to cover the additional cost of whatever it is that you're looking to cover, because you have achieved some savings through budgeted monies that were not spent in other areas. I just wanted to note that for the record.

Now, in terms of Housing and Urban Affairs the supplementary amount breaks down into a couple of different areas. One is \$19 million and change provided to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation for on-site costs and temporary access associated with the development of phase 1 of Parsons Creek in Fort McMurray.

You know, I probably know what the answer is here, but I need to ask and get the answer from the minister. The other is \$58,090,000 to support the development of affordable housing and the retrofit and regeneration of the existing social housing portfolio. This funding, it says here, "is offset by a transfer from the federal government." I think the question that I want to ask the minister is: when will the province receive the \$58 million transfer from the federal government? If I'm interpreting this correctly, it sounds as though what the minister is really doing here is asking the Legislature for a \$58 million cash advance, knowing that the federal government or assuming that the federal government is good for the \$58 million. But maybe I'm interpreting this wrong. I don't know.

Does the Housing and Urban Affairs ministry have the \$58 million from Ottawa already? Does that trigger a situation where you're required to match those dollars with \$58 million of your own, which is why you're here asking for the money? What would not have happened that has happened or what won't happen that will happen if we approve this expenditure? Give me some numbers in terms of units of affordable housing or units of social housing that

are getting a little down-at-the-heels that get a retrofit and a renovation, that sort of thing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank the hon. member for that question. When my predecessor the Member for Calgary-Cross was in this portfolio, of course, we were in a significant economic downturn at that time. We weren't exactly sure what was going to happen with the federal government. That money, as he mentioned, that \$58.09 million to support the development of affordable housing, was in order for Alberta to get its share of what the federal stimulus package would be. At the time of the budgetary estimates this time last year or around there this was in the hopper, but it was not confirmed. That's why it shows throughout the budgetary cycle as opposed to in the estimates last year. I'm not sure exactly of the date of the disbursement of the funds from the feds, but I can undertake to get that to the member subsequently.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Minister, for that. To be clear, though, you have the money from Ottawa?

Mr. Denis: Yes. That's correct.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. And you've spent it already, or you're well on your way to spending – sorry – to investing it, Minister?

Mr. Denis: Well, you know, interestingly enough, Mr. Chair, I see a lot of spending days, a lot of savings days from this member. Now I have an investment day, so I'm very happy with this.

My understanding, Mr. Chair, is that the money is not completely spent. It will be pushed through very shortly. The bulk of it has been spent. Again, I can get you some specific details if you'd like.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Minister. I would appreciate some specific details in terms of what we got for the money, in terms of units of new housing, units of existing social housing that have been brought up to code, brought up to a higher standard, whatever you can provide in those areas.

I guess the only other thing that I would like to know as a point of interest is: if all this was in the hopper at budget time last year – and I seem to recall that it was – where was the lag? Was it on our part, or was it on the feds' part?

Mr. Denis: I will write this member, again, as I've promised.

The budgetary process itself. When I said that it was in the hopper, I meant that we knew that it likely was going to be coming, but it wasn't fully finalized exactly what the feds were going to be doing. I hope that answers this member's question.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I'm kind of interested in whether any of this supplementary supply is going to affect what used to be referred to as the rental assistance program or the homeless and eviction prevention fund. We know that it started off at about \$10 million and climbed to about \$110 million. We've had people on waiting lists for rent assistance for up to three years. Does any of this money have anything to do with helping out those people who are on the

edge of eviction or those trying to keep people in their homes through rental assistance?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. I want to thank the member for that question as well. As the member probably knows, our funding through our programs helps almost three times the amount of people through assistance as it did only a few years ago. My understanding is that this money that has come from the feds involved the construction of new premises, which, of course, contributes to our department's goal of 11,000 new units by 2012.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'd like to just for the record point out that we received the supplementary supply estimates document yesterday, and I want to give credit to our researchers, who have worked extremely diligently over the last 24 hours in putting together and assisting us with creating questions. It's most appreciated, as is this opportunity to discuss the supplementary supply estimates.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I have a couple of questions with respect to this. We're looking at a request for approval by this House of an additional \$73.6 million, and it appears to me that we're looking for \$19 million provided to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation for on-site costs and temporary access associated with phase 1 of Parsons Creek in Fort McMurray. Now, my research, which again was very rushed – sorry, not my research; it was again the research of our frantically working very small staff – suggests that this \$19 million was for this parsonscreekvillage.com. They actually advertise their rates, and they identify that a one-bedroom apartment, if you signed a one-year lease, would be \$2,100 per month. If you were not prepared to sign a one-year lease, you'd be paying \$2,200 per month. Yet the average rent, according to the CMHC, in Fort McMurray is \$1,700 a month. I'm wondering why we're looking at spending an extra \$19 million for a project that in my mind is a long ways away from meeting any objective definition of affordable housing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. This member is quite correct. It does take a long time to actually go and construct housing. You can't just go and construct these facilities overnight. It does take a while. But there is a plan that we're working towards, and this is exactly the type of initiative that we need. We expect that by 2012 the current inventory of developed land in that area will be somewhat depleted. And, again, we need to not just plan for what it is today in Fort McMurray. We realize it can be a very volatile situation. We need to plan also for when the next boom actually happens itself. That's what this whole project in Parsons Creek is moving on towards.

Ms Notley: Well, I appreciate that information, but I guess I'm still concerned about how it is that the government is defining affordable housing and how it is that our money is going to a project which charges rents which are well in excess of what anybody could possibly define as affordable housing. If all this time we've been

talking about an inventory where the average rent being charged is \$2,100 per month, then I think we have a little bit of explaining to do to the taxpayers of Alberta about why it is that we are spending so much money for something that's not affordable.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, sometimes it's got to be taken in context. If you're in Wood Buffalo, in Fort McMurray, and you're trying to rent anything, \$2,100 to someone who is making \$135,000 driving a big truck is pretty affordable. Yet we recognize that the only long-term solution to moving down that rent, especially for our employees of the government that work up there, is to get a stable market where the checks and balances of a regular market will work. The development at Parsons Creek along with the other ones that we're working on with the hon. minister up there are going to be bringing on several thousand lots a year so that we will have the development of many different kinds of housing initiatives up there. But, you know, to single out one in Fort McMurray and say that \$2,100 is not affordable – it's expensive, but it is far better than living in your half-ton or renting a bay in a car wash or six to a garage, where some are. Affordable has to be taken in the context of Fort McMurray.

Ms Notley: I appreciate the context issue. That's, of course, why I quoted what the CMHC says is the average rent in Fort McMurray for a one-bedroom, which is \$1,700 per month. My understanding is that when we're kicking all this money out the door, primarily to the private sector, to develop affordable housing, all this time there has been a consistently applied definition of what affordable is.

I've always taken some issue with how the government defines affordable because I believe they define it too high as it is because I always want to go with the 30 per cent of income deal. I'd always thought that, at the very least, you were looking at a certain percentage below market. I believe 15 per cent below market or something like that was the standard definition of affordable housing. If that's the case – I mean, market would be defined by the CMHC, I would expect; that would be an objective measure – and you've got \$1,750 as market, obviously \$2,100 or \$2,200 a month is not 15 per cent below market. So I guess, flowing from that, I'm a little concerned about this. I'm wondering if I can be informed about how many other projects within the affordable housing line item are actually – well, I guess this would be roughly 25 per cent to 30 per cent above market. Are there others that are also in that price range?

Mr. Snelgrove: The hon. minister may want to talk about other ones, but I think the biggest problem in Fort McMurray is the fact that we don't even know how many people are living in the different apartments. Many of the areas that are zoned single family have huge problems with four trucks parked out in the street, yet if you're asked by anyone, you don't have renters because it's not allowed; you don't have a basement suite with four people in it. So just the uniqueness of Fort McMurray makes it very difficult to understand how hard it is to get ahead of that curve.

I don't disagree with any of your numbers about affordability, but I will say that until you spend some time in Fort McMurray and try and see how two people in that house could need nine vehicles, you know, it becomes a little bit of: what's affordable, and who really knows how much people are paying there? So that's different.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. Further to the response to the member from the President of the Treasury Board, we recognize that Fort

McMurray itself is a very unique situation in this province. Calgary and Edmonton are obviously major urban areas, but at the same point in time that's why we've gone into this situation in Parsons Creek. The ultimate goal is that through the development of Parsons Creek we'll have 1,000 new affordable units by its completion date in 2012. I would also submit to this member that it's in the best interests of the individuals being assisted here but also the taxpayers to be constructing this facility now as opposed to some subsequent date when, again, the economy is hot and construction prices are significantly higher.

Ms Notley: Well, again, I appreciate those comments about trying to get ahead of the curve, but I have some really significant concerns about taking money out of a line item when I think there has been a common consensus within this House that that line item is designed to fund affordable housing as per criteria that we all had a common understanding of, and the people of Alberta were told what that criteria was.

Now, if it's the case that you've decided that life is so crazy in Fort McMurray that we have to completely rewrite how we define affordable, if we're going to give to the private-sector companies that we're giving this money to the right or the ability to go 25 to 30 per cent above market, if we're going to ask Albertans to put hundreds of millions of dollars into affordable housing projects, then I think we should be telling them that we have made a very, very profound change in how we define affordable, particularly in the area of Fort McMurray. Of course, we know that this has a tremendous benefit to the employers in that area. I'm a little concerned that we're talking about this, and we haven't heard that the definition of affordable has apparently been quite profoundly changed without our knowing about it.

Mr. Snelgrove: When we went into Parsons Creek, we needed a vehicle to manage the money for the development, so the \$19 million we're talking about is going to the affordable housing corporation of Fort McMurray. It's facilitating the water and sewer and road building into Parsons Creek. This \$19 million you're seeing here is not going directly to affordable housing. It's going to develop part of that entire area of Parsons Creek. It's not to say that the Alberta Social Housing Corporation in Wood Buffalo doesn't have a lot of rental houses. They work on that. That's an ongoing process. They were there. To save us time and money, we partnered with them to develop all this new land. The money that we asked for from Treasury Board and from Transportation to flow through them to do the site servicing is the \$19 million that we're talking about here.

4:10

Mr. Chase: Right. Theoretically, this \$19 million can be leveraged to approximately \$30 million, given the reduction in terms of labour costs and materials, which hopefully applies to Fort McMurray. Now, last year in the recession for the very first time there were actually houses for sale at considerably reduced prices in Fort McMurray, so I'm hoping things are starting to stabilize.

My question, though, is in terms of the money going to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. Do we have stronger guarantees that this money will go towards, in quotations, affordable housing so that we don't get burnt like we did with the Red Deer experience, where the money was put forward not only for affordable but accessible housing for individuals with a variety of physical disabilities, and then those people were evicted from their so-called accessible, subsidized housing? What new measures are in place to make sure that this money is accounted for and goes to affordable

housing as opposed to somebody snapping up eight of the houses and then putting it at whatever rent they chose to put it at?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, and I want to thank the member for that question. It is a good question dealing with accessibility of housing. We recognize that there are a significant amount of people who require social housing or rent support that actually do have these types of disabilities, but at the same time what I would put to this member is that it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. Some people do better with rent support, some people do better with the agreements that we have with the federal government with respect to the subsidies that we give to landlords in lieu of rent, and some people actually do better in social housing. No one approach is best. We do have these types of important controls in place. The Auditor General has reviewed our books the last couple of years. What I can do is get the member some specific information at a subsequent time as to where exactly the units have been located as we partner with the federal government with the stimulus funds.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The assurance I'm looking for is that this doesn't become a speculative market subsidized by the Alberta government, where someone with deep pockets buys a whole series of these houses at affordable housing prices and then basically turns it into a for-profit as opposed to an affordable housing section.

Mr. Denis: I'm not sure what assurance the member is looking for, but at the same time I put back to this member respectfully that, again, it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. We have some situations where we have partnered with private business. We have some situations where the government does own the facilities. Again, we have a goal of 11,000 units by 2012. That being said, I do agree that that is an issue. We always want to keep tabs on specifically where the money is going and specific controls on a go-forward basis as to who is specifically being helped and how many people are being assisted and that we're doing this in the most efficient manner possible.

Mr. Snelgrove: If I could just supplement, Mr. Chair. You are right. Too many times we've released land up in Wood Buffalo where it was picked up by a scant few, and the prices went through the roof. That's why we've taken control of the development there in this particular area that we owned as a government and said: we are going to invest in it. As we lay out the master plan for this community – and it's a big one – we're going to ensure that within it are areas that are strictly for building affordable or low-cost housing.

There will be areas of Parsons Creek that are sold, tendered out to developers who wish to do a 100- or 200-lot subdivision where the market forces will work. That's really part of creating the number of houses. In the total plan there are areas in Parsons Creek, there are areas of development up in Saline Creek, and we're looking at the development around the airport as a far more orderly development where, if there is to be a benefit from the land, it should come to the people who own it.

It's been a long process and sometimes a little frustrating, working with all the departments that had land, bringing it together, sitting down with the Wood Buffalo council, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and talking about what they wanted to see as a

community in that area, then working through the engineering, how we service it with both roads and water and sewer, long term. Within that plan there are very definite areas that are going to be developed by the Social Housing Corporation where it will remain affordable or low-cost housing, but built in around it will be areas that are sold off. I don't want you to have to stand up next year and say: you said it's all low-cost housing; there are 1,200 lots going for sale. That's all part of the plan that has been worked on jointly with the municipality of Wood Buffalo, our Municipal Affairs planning, and the other interests in Wood Buffalo.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just so that I understand this. Cities like Calgary and Edmonton, for example, are moving ahead and suggesting that any new developments should have a potential, say, 10 per cent guaranteed for affordable housing. Is the Fort McMurray situation almost the reverse, where a significantly large percentage of these houses will be of the affordable nature, and are you able to put a percentage to it? I know there will be other types of developments, and you want mixed development, but if you can provide a percentage of what is defined as affordable, that would be helpful to know.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. I'm not specifically sure as to what has happened with Calgary city council. I'll leave that in their purview. But what I can tell this member is that when we refer to Parsons Creek, the parcel of land is intended to accommodate about 8,000 housing units. About 1,000 of those are stipulated to be as affordable housing, and we expect the completion in 2012.

Ms. Notley: Well, you started to answer the question that I was going to ask there. In the last set of supplementary estimates last year I believe we were asked to consider requests for about \$8 million. That was the piece about transportation at that time. What I'm getting here is that right now this project is already renting stuff out, and of course they're clearly not renting stuff out at a rate that would meet any common understanding of what constitutes affordable housing. What I now hear is that we're helping to develop it and that a portion of it will ultimately be affordable housing, but none of it is yet.

I'm finding this all very hard to follow, so what I'm wondering is if we can ask the minister, because I know you've said you're happy to provide information after the fact: exactly from this affordable housing budget – and for the moment let's just limit it to Fort McMurray – can we get an accounting of how much money has gone through that affordable housing line item to these projects up there? How many units have we created since then that meet either the 30 per cent of income definition of affordable housing or the 15 per cent below market definition of affordable housing? If there has been a change such that there is now a third definition of affordable housing, can we be provided with that?

I'm really quite concerned that we have this big line item, and every time I ask questions over there, I hear all these grand proclamations about how we're providing affordable housing units for low-income Albertans, but now what I'm hearing is that what we're doing is subsidizing developments, small portions of which may in the future be affordable housing units for low-income Albertans. In the meantime developers are having a field day, having the govern-

ment cofund their opportunity to sell and/or rent at well above market. I'm asking the minister if we can get information on the basis of what I just outlined before I made that last statement.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. Mr. Chair, I do believe, with respect, that this member is speaking well outside the purview of supplementary estimates. However, I will get her some of the information that she requests. I also would respectfully dispute any notion that the developers are having a field day under our programs. There are many good success stories happening here. At the same point in time we have to realize that it's the taxpayers money that's funding this operation. It's a balance, actually, that we need to make between being compassionate to the taxpayers and compassionate to those in need. We will get you that information.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I don't want to belabour the point, but, you know, whether it's a mansion or whether it's a shack, you've got to have a road to it, and you've got to have a sewer. A significant amount of this \$19 million is going to just laying out the development is my understanding.

I do appreciate the fact that you mentioned that basically 1 out of every 8 houses, or 1,000 out of 8,000, are affordable. That reduces the affordability grant, in my mind, down to about \$2 million going specifically to houses that are affordable in this district, keeping in mind that you've got to lay out the land and put in the sewers and roads and so on. Correct me if that 1 to 8 ratio isn't also reflected in how much money is actually going to affordability in Fort McMurray in this development.

Mr. Denis: The member has raised a couple of issues here. Of course, you require good infrastructure – roads, sewers, what have you – and the funding being requested will obviously support the cost of clearing, storm and water management, roads, underground services, anything required to reasonably move forward with the development.

To answer the member's other question, my understanding is that as this is constructed, this will be flipped back, actually perhaps even at a net profit to the taxpayer. What will end up happening is that of the 8,000 units, again, 7,000 are private individuals. Then you'll have roughly a thousand units scattered throughout there, so about 12 and a half per cent, not dissimilar to the figure, that I trust this member is correct about, about future developments in the city of Calgary.

Sustainable Resource Development

The Deputy Chair: We'll move on to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. I'd just like to ask the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development a few questions. Good afternoon. We're just turning to some estimates for SRD. I have a few questions. The supplementary amount you're asking for is approximately \$150 million and some change. It looks like \$130 million of this is for emergency spending for firefighting costs as a result of high wildfire hazard levels and high fire activity in some parts of Alberta, and \$25 million is for emergency spending for continued ground survey and control operations to fight the mountain pine beetle.

It appears that year over year the SRD department relies on emergency funding for fires and the pine beetle although these have almost become regular to us. You know, we understand that there are going to be many forest fires, and we understand, I think, that we're going to be battling the pine beetle for some time. Nevertheless, we tend to budget low on this. For instance, last year I think we asked for \$117 million to battle the forest fires and then another \$15 million for the pine beetle. Can the minister explain why the budget doesn't include a more accurate reflection of these costs when you're starting out the process?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I certainly can. The situation, of course, that we're faced with in both of these issues – but I'll separate them and, I think, deal, first of all, with wildfire. We have a budget line that deals with preparation for wildfire. Depending on the year and on our financial circumstance, of course, it runs somewhere from \$90 million to \$100 million or \$110 million a year. That is a budget line, and that is spent on wildfire preparedness. What happens with that is that we'll take that money, and we'll go out, and we train firefighters on a regular basis, an annual basis. We'll set up the camps in different locations, set up the fire bases, get contracts with aerial firefighters, water bombers, the bird dog people, and all of that sort of thing, and put that thing together in preparation for the fire season. Those dollars we can get fairly close to what we're going to spend. As a matter of fact, we budget it, so obviously we stay inside the budget relative to those numbers.

However, we have tried in the past a number of different approaches to dealing with this wildfire situation. We've done things like try to insure part of the risk. That didn't turn out necessarily good for us, but we have tried those kinds of things. The issue really is that there is no way for us to actually budget a number. We've been all the way from – well, I can't remember a low, but, you know, anywhere up to \$300 million plus to fight wildfires. We actually don't want to put that kind of money, firm numbers, into the budget and then end up not using them because depending on the weather, really, and other perhaps industry-related activities and so on, you just really don't know. So we do the best we can to be prepared for wildfire and then go into emergency funding for the amount of money that is an uncertainty. I think that it's a responsible way to do it. As I say, we've tried other methods and found that this was the best way to do it.

Another thing, I think, that we need to understand about the situation there is that when you get into the middle of this thing, we don't actually know how many outside sources we need to call on at any given point in time during the fire season. So we'll have a requirement to hire Cat contractors, transportation people, you know, all kinds of different sorts of resources that we need to draw on. Then we have reciprocal agreements, also, with other provinces and internationally relative to the movement of firefighters in and out of Alberta if that's necessary, and of course there's always some cost allocated to that. So it's a very difficult thing to actually put a number in the budget.

Mountain pine beetle, by the way, is a very similar circumstance because you will very well recall what happened to us last summer. We had a circumstance where we really felt, from two or three years' previous worth of pretty good work, some solid money put on the ground to combat the spread of mountain pine beetle. We had a circumstance that we were enjoying, we thought, relatively good success, so some of the dollars that we'd sort of looked at putting into the mountain pine beetle we thought maybe not necessary.

All of a sudden – I believe it was in July last summer – there was a huge inflight from B.C. again. A really hot summer period and a

high wind came up, and there was literally just a hundreds and hundreds of thousands influx again. It hit certain areas there, particularly north of Grande Prairie and so on. We can't accommodate that in the budget. What we have to do is now we're going out. We've had a very active season now combatting mountain pine beetle, but that money isn't in the budget, so we have to go back to supplementary and ask for that out of emergency funds.

Very difficult to try to budget. You don't know, one, the weather and that circumstance and, two, how successful you're going to be in the winter season when you try to eradicate and then what's going to happen the following summer. That's the reason for the numbers. We have a base number for both of those things, but we need to go for supplementaries because it's difficult to control the costs.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you. I hear the minister, and I appreciate that you do have those two models where you prepare for the base funding, and you do that, you say, with \$93 million to \$100 million, whatever that might be, that you know you have a controlled cost on, and then you wait for a certain time.

I think for the three years, at least, that I've done this estimate, you guys have always asked for at least \$100 million maybe. You guys have now balanced this out and explained it to me so that what you're doing seems reasonable, I guess, but there might be a need to maybe say: "All right. We're for sure going to have \$50 million in those expenses. We've averaged that at least for the last four years." But I understand what you're doing now, and hopefully now – this is the third time you've explained it to me – maybe by next year I won't have to ask again why the heck that line item is here because I at least now know that there are two separate processes as to what's going on. I thought I knew that last year when I asked the question, though, and needed it repeated to me again. Thank you for being so patient with me and doing that again here today.

4:30

Anyway, on the pine beetle expenditure, were there some different techniques? Are they the standard techniques you're using, or is there more of a breakdown? I know some people have advocated for eradicating the pine beetle in different ways. What was, basically, this \$25 million for? Could you break that down?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, we use a number of different techniques, and of course like all kinds of technology, innovation there are always things that come forward. One of the things that had been tried earlier, I think, and some of the suggestions, of course, that people have, particularly when you're dealing with this in areas where it's more urbanized and you have pine beetles spreading into what we would call, I guess, towns, cities, villages, and that sort of thing, where pine trees have either been planted or are there naturally and we get beetle attacks – people would say: well, you know, there's got to be a way; just spray these things.

But the problem is that if you try to do any kind of eradication with spraying, number one, it's very difficult to do it. You can't really catch them, necessarily, externally in order for anything like that to work. The second part of that, of course, is that you get all the good stuff with the bad stuff when you use these types of eradication methods. So we don't do that. That has been tried, you know, in spot areas, mainly in localized kind of communities and that kind of thing, but I don't believe that's used at all anymore. I believe it had been tried.

We use some capture techniques where you'll get a tree that's infected, and you actually – now, I might have to be corrected on the

pronunciation, pheromones. We bait them, the trees. Trees that are already under attack: you put this bait around those trees, and it draws the beetle to a certain group of trees. You'll get a whole influx of beetles into a group of trees, and then the thing there is kind of a slash and burn, right? They'll go into that area, cut those trees, buck them up, and burn them. That's really one of the most effective ways to get small groups of beetles contained.

The other thing that has been quite successful for us is to plan a forestry harvest program. You know, we've had harvest programs that take place. They come forward with these programs, bring them to the department. You take a look at the harvest programs, and they're – I don't know – two or three years in advance, maybe more than that. I believe that there's some period of time in advance that the harvest programs are delivered to the department. With the situation with beetles we ask them to in some circumstances take their harvest programs and consider that they would move harvesting into areas that have been highly infested by beetles. So you actually harvest that wood at a period of time when the beetles are dormant, move it out, and try to suppress them that way.

Another way, of course – and this has been successful in some cases, but it's a technique that you're a bit skeptical about doing on a large scale – is just to go into areas and kind of cut into where the infestation is and actually just take the trees down and burn them so that you have a swath around these areas. There are a number of different ways like that that we do it.

Recently there have been a couple of operators – and I don't know how widespread it is – that have kind of devised some specialized equipment to go in and do single-tree harvesting, where they can get into an area and then take out trees that are infested and dispose of those trees, not on such a broad-based kind of an effort but on a more targeted effort with specialized equipment. Those are probably the primary sources of expenditure for those dollars.

Mr. Hehr: This is just more of interest. I think the word was pheromones. How much are you using those pheromone techniques? The reason why I ask is because I think one of my friends about 10 years into graduate study was actually doing some research on pheromones. You're now just using the pheromone spray, and it attracts the bugs. Is that proving successful? Are you guys doing that quite widespread?

Mr. Knight: It's been in place, I understand, for some period of time, two or three decades probably. I have to say that the experience that we've had with it relative to containing these kind of large in-flights of beetles: it works in certain circumstances, but it's not really something that is a magic bullet.

Mr. Hehr: Fair enough. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I fully understand that you have to set money aside for fighting fires. We have a tremendous amount of forestry in this province, and protecting it in a variety of ways is absolutely essential. I have no problem with setting aside the money and paying the bill after the fact, that kind of thing.

It pleases me to hear you explain the preferred methods of dealing with the pine beetle. I'm pleased to hear of sort of a return to the old style of logging the one tree at a time kind of thing because the damage that happens when forests are clear-cut only to be replaced by a monoculture reforestation – we don't gain anything from taking out all the trees and then replanting the same species. Lodgepole pine was my prime experience in Cataract Creek.

I am wondering if any of the money that has been set aside for the pine beetle program – for example, you talked about the ability to preplan. Have you targeted based on infestations specific areas in this province for selective logging, which takes place in the winter, and then it's usually transported out in the early spring when the roads are more passable, that kind of thing? At least that was my experience in Cataract. They'd cut in the winter, transport in the spring once the gravel roads hardened and so on. If it seems that I'm incorrect, could you please correct how the method works?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure that I quite heard all of the question, but I'll do the best I can with it. If you're asking about when we take these dollars and go out and take a look at the planning and the process that we're going to use to try to make sure that the dollars are put to their best use relative to suppressing mountain pine beetle, there are a few things that we do. One of them is active right now. We've been doing this on an ongoing basis for a number of years; that is, we go out and we monitor all of the areas where there has been a previous beetle attack and into areas where the signs are, you know, relatively easy to spot. You can see where the in-flights have landed. In a short period of time you can actually gauge where they're moving to, so we go out and monitor.

The forest companies and SRD will use their resources, and in some circumstances we hire individuals that are specialized in doing that kind of thing. We go out and monitor the infestation and the infestation levels. We do that across the province and then lay out a plan, and we're in the throes of doing that now. About the end of March, that sort of thing, we'll have the monitoring done – and that's part and parcel of these dollars that we've got in the front end of this thing – and then put in place a program to go out and mitigate the beetle problem.

4:40

Now, there are a couple of different organizations that have kind of formed around this. There's one in the Grande Prairie region. That includes the county and the operators in the area, people from SRD, and others. The municipalities, actually, have been instrumental in helping us with this control effort. Municipalities in certain circumstances are granted some of these dollars out of the program, and they, you know, help us manage in municipal areas, not necessarily in the green areas but in municipal areas to help us manage the beetle problem there.

There are two or three different ways that we do this, but there is a step where we monitor and then sit down and organize a plan of attack if I'm getting at the question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the explanation. National Parks Canada has been very successful, for example, with controlled burns in the Banff area. They've managed under most cases to keep control of the so-called controlled burns. I know that fighting the pine beetle in different areas involves different strategies, but are you able to put an overall provincial sort of percentage to what percentage of pine beetle is fought primarily through pheromones? What percentage is fought through selective logging versus clear-cutting? Are you able to sort of look at that large provincial picture?

If I'm putting you on the spot, that's not the intention. I'd love to receive that information as to our selective approaches to the pine beetles. If the information isn't here today – I realize you're a new minister in this area – I'm looking forward to receiving it later.

Mr. Knight: I can certainly find out for you, but to my knowledge we wouldn't necessarily break down the percentage of trees that

have been infected and look at the different methods in a percentage of, you know, mitigation of the problem. I would have to suggest to you that things like removal and incineration: probably the largest majority of control is done either in that method or in the method as I described about harvesting. Those two things probably take up a great majority of the mitigation. If you need percentages, I could try to find them, but I don't think that we actually keep track of any percentages that I'm aware of.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What would be helpful, you know, if you can't put a dollar figure to it, is if you could put a geographic, almost like a battle zone – in this area we've primarily used this method; in this area because of proximity to municipal districts we've tended to go – that would be helpful to get a sense of the overall picture.

This may not fit into this particular supplemental supply estimates, but can you comment on the ability to retain sustainable resource staff – fisheries, forestry – whether you're finding yourself having to go more towards seasonal or if you're able to keep year-round, especially, you know, in terms of identifying pine beetles and things like this? Is your staff fairly secure and intact?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Chairman, you know, relative to the situation with SRD's budget, I mean, we will have a good opportunity to fully discuss those situations when we discuss the upcoming budget numbers. I could make a comment to the member opposite that under the circumstances that we find ourselves in today, all departments to some degree are very prudent with our resources, and of course we think that we'll gain quite a bit of efficiency in some of the things that we're doing with officers on the ground and generally speaking with the department's personnel. So we'll be able to continue to maintain, you know, the issues that we all face here, whether it's in SRD or Environment or the other departments that have people on the ground, and that is the safety of Albertans and the idea that we will continue to develop any of these resources in a sustainable manner and in an environmentally conscious manner. We believe that in the budget numbers that we have put forward, we'll be able to continue to do that.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for that assurance. In the three summers I spent in southeast Kananaskis I received tremendous support from SRD, from conservation officers. I just wanted to say that keeping those people in place, allowing the experienced ones to have a career in SRD and allowing the young upcoming through seasonal employment, at least, is a terrific investment in Alberta protection.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions?
We'll move on, then.

Municipal Affairs

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak to the supplementary supply estimates for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. We are looking here at a supplementary appropriation of just a little over \$15 million, broken down thusly: \$500,000 for assisting with the response to the H1N1 pandemic and \$19,550,000 for disaster recovery and municipal wildfire assistance programs. Interestingly enough, this supplementary amount of \$15,341,000 is net of \$4,709,000 from lower than budgeted spending in other programs.

I'd like to start off by asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs why there was nearly \$5 million in unspent funds and, in particular, whether he knows which local government services received less funds than were budgeted for or ended up not needing the funds or whatever the case may be. In fact, I think that's an interesting question right there: was it that the funds weren't needed, or was it that the funds weren't spent by his ministry? If it was the latter, why weren't they spent?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First, I want to indicate and re-emphasize that the funding that we're requesting will be used to help offset the costs that were incurred by a number of unexpected events that unfolded this year. As the member indicated, the majority of the request is for disaster recovery and municipal wildfire assistance programs. Under the municipal wildfire assistance program there is a total of \$8.85 million. That was for two incidents in Lamont county, and Sturgeon county, Strathcona county, and the county of Thorhild had wildfires.

Then the other ones were basically disaster recovery programs for a total of \$6.6 million. There was an incident in south-central Alberta, and that was a flooding, \$1.8 million. In Edmonton here and the surrounding area: a windstorm; we covered some of the costs, up to 4 and a half million dollars. Then in central Alberta: another windstorm, \$300,000.

Those costs, then, amounted to, as the member indicated, \$19.6 million. There were five municipal wildfire assistance programs and three disaster recovery programs and, as the member indicated, another half million dollars for the costs incurred responding to the H1N1 pandemic.

Now, we were able to identify about \$4.7 million in savings from our value review. We went through and did a value review within the ministry, and we were able to look at \$3.47 million that was there and lapses in programs of about \$731,000. Those were in terms of grants in place of taxes. The request wasn't quite as high as what we'd anticipated, so we were able to find about \$730,000 under that particular one. It's a combination of a couple things where we found the money. Part of it is the ministry's value review savings.

Mr. Taylor: So we're only about \$94 million short from being able to fund the airport tunnel. I'm just kidding about that.

A couple more questions for the minister. The \$500,000 for assisting with the H1N1 pandemic: will that be reimbursed by the federal government? Does it fall under the category of disaster recovery? If not, why not?

4:50

Mr. Goudreau: There is a formula that's usually used and normally followed when we make a request to the federal government. That request generally triggers, I believe, after \$1 per capita per event. So we need to spend about \$3 million plus per event before we can trigger some federal dollars coming in. This year most of the individual numbers were below that – \$1.7 million, \$3.3 million, \$3.1 million, \$1.8 million – so we're not able to access federal dollars for the majority of them. They were all below that level to be able to trigger dollars. That's including the H1N1, so I don't expect that we're going to get any recovery at that particular level where we are committing the half million dollars.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you to the minister for that. That also gives me a sense of how much of the \$19.5 million for disaster recovery and

municipal wildfire would be recoverable from the federal government. It sounds like not much, if any, this year. Too bad we can't put in a block request for that, but unfortunately we can't.

This is my last question on Municipal Affairs. Could the minister explain to me what the \$500,000 for assisting with the H1N1 pandemic is specifically for? Mr. Chairman, I should know this. I'm sorry; I don't. I just want to find out for sure because this \$500,000 is separate, of course, from considerable supplementary expenditures on H1N1 under the ministry of health's budget.

Mr. Goudreau: The \$500,000 of those costs was incurred by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. We are doing a fair amount of co-ordination across the province to make sure that some of the services are there. So when the decision was made to open up the stadiums, for instance, our agency was involved in getting those kinds of things to happen.

Mr. Taylor: So just as a supplementary to that, just a clarification. None of that would be specifically for H1N1 shots for municipal emergency workers, police, fire, EMS, that sort of thing, then. That would be under the health budget.

Mr. Goudreau: It was more of a co-ordination effort amongst all of the members.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think Moses could relate well to Alberta. If it's not a summer of floods, then it's potentially a summer of fires, and if somehow we miss both of those, we can potentially worry about grasshoppers as opposed to locusts. In terms of being proactive and reducing the costs of, say, fires or floods, in the case of floods has the Municipal Affairs department required cities and towns to stop building on flood plains?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Chairman, I know that that particular issue has come up over and over again over the last many, many years. Certainly, there's an encouragement there. We are constantly working with our municipalities. Naturally, that seems to be the most attractive land to build on. It tends to be the land that has the best views and, you know, the most ideal places. So there's a tremendous amount of pressure from people who want to build and for municipalities to develop those particular properties and, on the same side, to look at the risk factors involved, so where we're saying that the risks are 1 in 100 years, then there are probably more options for them to build than if there are risks that might be a 1 in 20 years or 1 in 10 years flood activity.

Over the years there are some areas – I'm very familiar with Watino, for instance, a community up in my constituency, where it typically flooded probably every 25, 30 years. Today there's not a single building there, nor do we allow any type of development.

We are working with our municipalities. We're encouraging them not only on floods but on fire and fire mitigation, working with SRD staff – and some of the new funding we received from the federal government in terms of the community development trust dollars – to fireproof communities, to make sure that communities can respond to fires, that we minimize the impact of threats of fires. So in both instances we're trying to take a preventative approach, an approach to try to minimize that.

Are we successful in all cases? No. We still have some municipalities that have some issues. Some municipalities over the years

have actually developed properties, that are for sale and that people are still building on, that are subject to potential floods, and we are working with them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I know, for example, that the Highwood River had two such incidents one week after the other. They were supposedly 100-year events. But, unfortunately, in the High River area they're still building below the flood plain. As a province I'm wondering if we should be paying out the insurance costs for people who knowingly purchase in an area that is below the flood plain.

The other circumstance – and I don't know whether you can comment on this or not, and I don't know whether any of the funding goes towards this – is in terms of wildfire assistance programs as it relates to municipalities. There is always a balance between not taking up more agricultural land, for example, having an attractive forest or the beauty of nature surrounding towns and cities. Is the province working with the municipalities to sort of fireproof the surrounding areas?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Chairman, certainly, the discussion around High River was a number of years ago. We're requesting at this time a supplementary estimate for a total of \$15.34 million. The High River incidents at that particular time – and I believe it was the same time that the Bow overran its banks as well, and we lost some property around Kananaskis. It was a huge disaster year for the province of Alberta. I believe that year we probably spent about \$120 million towards offsetting some of the losses and the costs. That's when I think the High River incidents happened a couple times, back to back. We're working with the municipalities and certainly trying to devise ways to flood-proof their communities.

As I indicated, on wildfires we're doing the same thing. Those communities that are subject and are closer to the forest areas where there is predominantly a high concentration of wood fibre around their community that might be subject to flash burns, or quick burns, where there are really no formal firebreaks, we're working with those communities to try to minimize the impact of potential fires and the threats of fires to their communities. It's a work in progress. Certainly, the community development trust fund that was transferred from the federal government to the province and spread amongst a number of ministries: a good part of those dollars are used exactly for fireproofing communities.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the cross-ministry co-operation. For example, SRD works with parks in terms of setting out fire bans and so on. Within the Municipal Affairs department is there a co-ordination such as putting areas out of bounds, say, for quads during a high fire type circumstance? Do you have that ability within Municipal Affairs to say to SRD or to say to parks and recreation, you know, that there's danger potential, so we've got to keep people out of this area except for just walk-in, non fire type of circumstances?

Mr. Goudreau: My responsibility, Mr. Chairman, probably ends where the municipality ends. Once we get into the green zones or into the public lands, then it becomes an SRD decision, or if it gets into a parks area, then it becomes the responsibility of the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. They would have that authority to call that. Typically the local municipality knows best when they're under threat or potential threat. They can impose fire bans.

They can impose different bans, including transportation bans or weight bans and those kinds of things, on their roads if they feel that there's potential damage to their communities. So initially municipalities will.

5:00

If there tends to be a growing pressure from a number of municipalities or threat that might occur to municipalities, then our Emergency Management Agency will get in touch with the municipalities. Often it's the other way around, where municipalities are deemed to have the responsibility over their own jurisdiction. If they feel they need help, then we strongly encourage them to call us before things happen or when issues are small rather than waiting till the issues just flare up and it's spread all over the place. It's two-way communication that we're establishing. We encourage municipalities to act sooner rather than later.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If there aren't any more questions with regard to Municipal Affairs, I would like to move on to Tourism, Parks and Recreation. I just wanted to make sure. Thank you.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation

Mr. Chase: The breakdown of expenditures, the supplementary amount of \$8,590,000, which is net of \$902,000 from lower than budgeted spending in other programs, is requested to provide \$8,992,000 to complete 13 nominal sum disposals of parkland to municipalities to fulfill prior agreements. I'm not sure who's handling this portfolio. I am a little bit concerned that we're creating a larger sort of footprint and losing potential parkland in the process, and we're spending \$9 million to further reduce parkland. If someone could set me straight on that, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm happy to. The bulk of the \$9 million comes out of Sylvan Lake and the town of Sylvan Lake, and that is about \$7.69 million of the total. It's been a very long negotiated agreement with the town. It's always been a bit awkward because the park separated the business from the lake. Of the rest of them, Willow Creek down in the MD of Willow Creek was \$1.4 million. Most of the rest are quite small: Horseshoe Canyon, Hanmore Lake, Crane Lake West in Bonnyville, Sun Haven, the summer village of Sunbreaker Cove, Crane Lake East in Bonnyville, Groat Creek, Fork Lake, Holmes Crossing. I can give the hon. member some because I'm pretty familiar with some of the stuff up in our area.

A lot of these areas are very expensive for us to run and to look after or to supervise. In these cases, all of them, we have a very willing participant, that's a municipality. These aren't going to private developers. They're going to counties, MDs, towns who want to run that park, basically, to better suit the needs of the people that live around there. I know they've been through quite an extensive consultation. It simply is, really, about making sure that we can focus the provincial level resources on areas that actually make a difference. I think we've got a pretty good record in establishing and preserving parks in our parks system, but when you're nipping away at a whole bunch of little ones, where there are people who are ready and more able to run them, those are the ones. I'll have a copy of this made and sent over to the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I was sort of looking at the larger picture. If the land continues to be park and it's operated by the municipality

as opposed to the province, then I don't have a problem with that. Where I have a problem is with access for the public being further restricted. My concern – and I've brought this up in the House – is that with just barely 4 per cent of Alberta's land set aside for provincial parks and recreation areas, any loss of that already small amount is a concern for me.

Another expenditure, \$500,000 for equipment and displays at the Canmore visitor information centre to complete the renovations of that facility. I don't begrudge one single cent of the millions of dollars – this probably brings it up fairly close to about 40 and a half million dollars – that have been spent over the last five years on the Canmore Nordic Centre primarily for water and waste treatment facilities. It's money well spent. It's a terrific facility. It's a jewel in our parks system. However – and I'm not suggesting it's an either/or – it concerns me when I look down the list and see that only \$2,731,000 has been set aside for trail maintenance, repair, and upgrading of numerous provincial parks to expand the number of campgrounds. It really concerns me that we're spending a great amount of money to attract and promote Alberta from a tourist point of view, but we're not spending the money to maintain the facilities that we currently have.

I'll not go on, but I've experienced it as a park operator in the Kananaskis in 2002, '03, and '04, where less than \$2 of a \$17 registration fee were ploughed back into the maintenance of the park. It concerns me that we've spent almost as much money in putting more parks online for reservation than we have for actually maintaining the parks. To me, at some point if we're going to encourage people to come and have a wonderful wilderness experience in our Alberta, then we're going to have to start repairing. Just as we've got a multimillion-dollar repair bill for schools, we've got a multimillion-dollar repair bill for parks. The answer is not to reduce the number of parks but to repair those that are existing.

I realize that's a rather large comment, but I would welcome the proportional explanation for why we're spending almost the same amount of money on making fewer spots available on a first-come, first-served basis and then, once they get there, the value for it.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, now, the \$2.73 million. The reason it's here is because in the fall the federal government came to us and said: "We've got some money we'd like to put into parks. What have you got?" That's normally the only easy part of dealing with the federal government and trying to get money from them. As well as you, I don't want to send any of the money back to Ottawa because I, too, believe that one of the treasures we have is our parks, but we're spending, you know, \$37 million on park operations. I don't want to get into what the trails are, but it's part of it. The \$2.7 million really was this department facilitating from the western economic diversification community adjustment fund \$2.7 million into Alberta parks, which we happily accepted, but it does show up here as kind of an afterthought.

Your comments about Canmore Creek. The demand for the Canmore Nordic Centre is literally multiplying in front of us. It truly is and will remain a very, very popular both local and resort destination. I think your comments are correct: reinvesting, investing in that are well-spent dollars.

I think that was all that we had.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the explanation. I hadn't realized, even though this is my fifth year, how much of the supplementary supply is actually funneled through federal funding. It's a revelation for me.

Ms Blakeman: That's not usual. That's just this year.

Mr. Chase: I'm corrected that this is a special circumstance.

I agree with the hon. President of the Treasury Board that for any federal funding that we can get, we want to say thank you, thank you, thank you.

I remain concerned about the amount of money we've spent in terms of promoting the province. We're sort of promoting what I see as a deteriorating circumstance in the majority of off-highway parks, and I don't know if, other than this federal transfer, we shouldn't actually be investing more in the parks system itself as opposed to the reservation system. If you're able to comment on those two figures, I would appreciate it. My understanding is that for every dollar we invest, there is a potential of a \$10 return, and I want that sort of park wilderness experience to be really valued.

5:10

Mr. Snelgrove: I have to be a little careful here because I do have a park myself. I know how you can sell camping experiences, and I think, quite honestly, private industry can do that better if it's a camping experience you want. I think we need to understand that I might not be able to sell a wilderness experience on your mountain. I think parks are kind of going through their part and saying: what we do as government we should do well, but building a camping stall might not be it. Providing the opportunity for – and I think there has been some terrific work done by the Alberta hotel and lodging people and the campground operators to say: "You know, we're all in this together. Getting someone to Alberta is the goal. Where they go in Alberta, that's the key."

It could just be a personal observation, but I don't think we need to be the ones that build the campsites, that build the trails or maintain them. We sure need to understand what our customer wants, and we've got to connect the dots with a lot of private operators or in some cases our other departments. Give them what they want within the realm of maintaining and preserving ecosystems and some of our eastern slopes yet provide that experience that they will go somewhere else for. There is a lot of Alberta. You're correct that there's not a lot of it that's provincial parks, but they are still very good.

I think people are more aware of the environment that we camp in. I see a difference in the recycling that's happening in our campgrounds and the way they're more concerned about that. I mean, they all used to have a fire this high and sit back 20 feet. We are learning as a people that, you know, we kind of have to live with nature. It's the best gift we've been given. I think the evolution of camping will go where government can do what it needs to do. We can get a ton of private investment from private operators who can sell that experience, but I believe it's connecting us to the outside world that's their big key.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. That was very interesting. Can we just pursue that a little bit because I think the hesitation that I hear from people about private operators of campgrounds – and I agree with you. I think they can offer and do offer a great experience a number of times. I know there's one spot that I always stop in just the other side of Valemount because it's the right place, and they do a nice job. It's a private campground. I'm very happy to go there. I think the hesitation people have is that when you have a private operator, will we end up at the point where a private operator is operating campsites that are in protected areas? The concern always is that you end up with corners being cut or not the same level of vigilance.

Let's face it. Government has a job, part of which is around protection, and those employees are going to be more likely to kind of honour the boundaries of the wilderness areas they're in. You may not get that same vigilance with a private operator, who has a profit motive. That's why they're in business. Fine. I've got nothing against that, but there is a different focus on why they are doing something. I think people's hesitation is: are we going to be turning over our public campgrounds to private, and what will be the result of that? Will there still be the same vigilance around protecting it in context?

Mr. Snelgrove: Happy to engage because this is a really, really important discussion. I don't think that 20 years ago you had people willing to pay for an ecological experience, a few but not very darn many. Most people hooked up the tent trailer and went and camped. The world now has really changed, and I agree that the fit of privatizing our campgrounds hasn't gone as well as I certainly would have liked. You take a circumstance that might work for government. It doesn't necessarily work in the private. We tied their hands in many ways about providing camping experiences that people wanted.

I agree that if we don't very carefully manage our resources when we talk about access to sensitive areas – I think that the other thing that private industry has also gotten aware of is that they can't do the stuff that they used to do and get away with it. We have smarter people in government, I think, and in the business that know it's about pristine wilderness. I can tell the hon. member – I don't know if she's ever had the good fortune to go into some of the remote areas, whether it's a fishing camp or something – that the operators of these facilities that I have had the good fortune to know are absolutely the fussiest people I've ever met. There is no more of this throw your plate in the fire or your plastic fork or a beer can in the creek. They are far more aware.

But I agree with you. When we're going to get into the area of providing the experience that is truly rare, we'll either need to be very hands on, or we'll need to have very, very clear guidelines about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, and there really shouldn't be a whole bunch of grey in the middle. So as we go forward and develop that in Alberta, we need to watch, but there is a way. If you're going to have access, under managed conditions I believe that you can have that partnership with private operators that, I think, exists there now in many cases.

Ms Blakeman: The other piece of this, then, is that one of the problems we had when we handed over sites before was that the infrastructure wasn't in great shape. I'm thinking of some of the campsites that I've been into, one of which is fairly close to where I have a recreational property. It's actually next door. For what I was used to, for the province of Alberta, it was in crappy shape. You know, the outhouse wasn't in good repair; the door was hanging, blah, blah, blah. Sorry. A little pun there. And it didn't get any better under the management. That was actually managed by a local fish and game association, right? But that's when you were trying to get other people to manage it.

So I'm wondering. If you're looking at shifting this, is there a long-term plan to invest in the infrastructure so that it gets handed over at a certain standard and that that standard is to be kept up? Or is it just, "As is, where is, we're handing it over now for you to manage; you take it as it is, and you improve it"? What are you looking at? Are we going to bring it up to a standard and expect it to be kept, or are we going to hand it over and say, "You bring it up to speed or keep it, you know, whatever, let it go"?

Mr. Snelgrove: No. I'll tell you, and this comes from experience because I did take one of the parks to run. I've been and I've done everything, and profit has never really been a big deal. One of the things we did is that we tried to get private business to come in, and then we wouldn't let them do what they would do. Everybody in the business will tell you that the washroom facilities in parks are absolutely the most important thing that you can do, yet you cannot go in and rebuild a washroom on the money you're generating from a five-year contract in a park of 80 sites. I can tell you that that won't work.

We need as a government to be able to go to private operators and say, "Okay; if you're going to make that investment, you have to be able to get a return" because nobody in their right mind, me included, would do it. I was fortunate to have a darn good ranger and some pretty good representatives, and we were able to make a deal. I said: okay; I'll invest. I put some big dollars in, but I had to have time to recover them. So there was no incentive for many people to improve it because they've still got to get a return.

Maybe it was the five-year or the two-year contract some wanted to have. You just can't make long-term business decisions on a two-year opportunity. You could invest and lose your equity to a low bidder. In many ways giving our parks to a low bidder probably isn't going to get the experience that we want from tourism. So it's that fine balance between, you know, an open and transparent business deal yet bringing in someone who's going to sell the experience that we want people to have when they come to Alberta and get a return from the investment that they're willing to make.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

5:20

Ms Blakeman: Okay. So just to clarify, what I'm hearing, then, is that what we're likely to get is a contract that would set out what infrastructure was expected to be maintained or invested in by the private contractor. But in return for that, there's a longer period that the contract runs for in order to allow them to recoup their investment and make a profit out of it.

We wouldn't necessarily be investing up front the money to say: okay, it's in, you know, a class A shape, and we expect you to keep it in class A shape. We're not going to do the investment up front; we're going to put it in as part of the contract that they keep it up. Then – and this is going to be a familiar refrain coming from me – where's the monitoring and compliance enforcement? If you're going to run those contracts – and one of the things you guys are not good about is monitoring those contracts to make sure that what you think was going to happen happened and to be able to catch it before it's too far gone.

Go ahead.

Mr. Snelgrove: I think I missed probably the most important part of what you said before and the response. The fact is that when we went to privatizing, most of them were in the crappy shape you talked about. That really puts people at a huge disadvantage.

I really can't speak for how the minister wants to approach getting the washrooms and the rest of the parks into a shape that you would be able to have a contract that you could maintain. If the darn thing is falling apart when you get it – and normal contracts say that you will, given normal wear and tear, return it in as good as or better shape than you get it. But if you got it and it's falling apart and you give it back and it's falling apart, what have you accomplished? There does need to be that discussion about the starting, the way we're going to go to it, and then you can monitor.

But I agree. I think we spent a great deal of money, and we were known – once again, I can talk about myself – for years as having some of the best provincial parks. We've still got the parks, but we haven't managed them as well as we could have. I can accept that because I've seen them myself. It doesn't mean we can't be better. I think that with the partnership that they've developed with industry right now so that customer service becomes one of the biggest things they talk about – I'm talking the camping experience, and I know that other line up over here with the environmental experience – they're on the right track. I really do. I'm still involved with it but very remotely with the campground association. They've needed to pick up their boots, so I accept your nice criticism.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the fact that you've run a campground because that's the experience I had for three years. I'm not suggesting that private operators can't do a good job. I worked for a fellow; his name is Ian Nicholson. He is in charge of High Country Camping. That's the outfit I worked for. He's a former conservation officer, so he really gets what a quality camping experience entails.

The problem exists in terms of not only the maintenance but the support for the private operator. For example, my wife and I were so fastidious that we cleaned the firepits out down to the gravel. You would not find a cigarette butt anywhere within that area. But things that we couldn't control, for example, were the fencing. The fencing had gone down; the Texas gates were filled in on the roads. So what happened was that when the cattle were dropped off for free range, I became a herdsman. I did an awful lot of shovelling and raking, that kind of thing, because there wasn't that support in terms of the overall maintenance. That's a frustrating part.

Also, if I hadn't built the equivalent of sort of an information centre – my wife and I would gather, courtesy of Tourism, Parks and Recreation and SRD, information booklets. With material that I managed to confiscate from behind the local park shed, I was able to build an information centre and build with the wood that existed tables and stools and, you know, make it attractive for people to come. My wife and I would provide what information we could with regard to fishing regulations, with regard to the beautiful hikes to the Cataract falls, and so on.

But we found over the years that we were seeing reduced support from the province in terms of reduced conservation officers. In 2002, when we had the G-8, we had hot and cold running seasonals. We'd see them every day, and they could help out. But as we got through to 2004 and unless things have changed, if they've continued to decline, the areas that the conservation officers were required to supervise made it impossible for them to come in and talk to people about coolers on their picnic tables and the danger that, you know, if a bear comes into the camp, he's a dead bear if he goes near a cooler.

What I'm suggesting – and maybe it can't be covered under supplementary supply – is the need for co-ordination and support. If privatization is one of the ways that the province is going to move, then they still have to support the private operators to the same extent they do the provincial operators. That's my appeal.

In terms of maintaining the park – and you've experienced this first-hand – you can only put so many coats of paint on the wall of an outhouse that is starting to rot. If you're going to privatize it, the province has to make sure that there's funding available and directed to the operators and that they have sufficient funding to be able to hire the people to provide the maintenance. Some of the stuff I did wasn't pretty, but it was substantial.

Mr. Snelgrove: I can't believe I've talked about parks for this long and not mentioned the lovely Spring Beach resort on Muriel Lake. I just can't believe that. Well managed, well run, clean, neat campgrounds for the entire family. Did I mention that? Spring Beach resort on beautiful Muriel Lake, just south of Bonnyville. Just in case no one caught that.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other questions, then?

Ms Blakeman: I'm just wondering if anybody is speaking for the Culture and Community Spirit budget.

The Deputy Chair: We have not spoken on Transportation or Culture and Community Spirit, and that doesn't preclude us going back to any of the others either. It's still open. We've got a half an hour.

Ms Blakeman: All right. Well, if I can put in a plug for Culture and Community Spirit, then, that would be great. Anybody want to talk to me about that? All right. Go.

Mr. Snelgrove: Yeah. Just go ahead. Go for it.

Culture and Community Spirit

Ms Blakeman: This money has been requested to provide for site reclamation costs at a couple of different historical sites, so the obvious question is: which historical sites are they for? That money for the upgrading I think was in last year's budget, so why is the site reclamation so far behind? Related to environmental liabilities that were expensed in prior years, which are the sites, what were the environmental liabilities, and why wasn't the money closer to the actual expenditure of the upgrading? I'm curious as to why this is coming through as a supplementary supply. It should have been in the regular budget. Was there extra money that got thrown in there, or is there some sort of environmental problem and they had to clean it up, that they were on the hook for it and had to clean it up, so they had to come up with the money one way or another?

I'd just like to hear what the heck is going on. It's \$2 million and change, \$2.8 million. It's not an incredible amount of money, but I'm always curious with supplementary supply, especially when it's almost a billion dollars and nine different departments, and we had to respond to it in 24 hours. I just thought that I'd get that one on the record.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, I really want to apologize because I didn't think that the hon. member would really want to talk about the reclamation of this. I thought she would get her plug in for other culture and community stuff because supplementary estimates hasn't necessarily stayed within the framework of supplements. I'm sorry; I didn't mean to suggest that this wasn't important. I just thought that there were bigger fish to fry with culture, but I will tell her.

5:30

The Culture and Community Spirit sites are the Turner Valley gas plant, the Bitumount, and the Greenhill mine. What we have done is started in many of these areas. Any time you're dealing with hydrocarbons and other kinds of contamination, often your original assessment is not exactly complete. The other thing that happens is that we are becoming – I want to say stricter, or we're getting a little fussier about how we do reclaim and how that will go forward. It is reacting to the recommendations from the Turner Valley gas

advisory panel, that we got in September of last year, and it also works on an abandonment of the Dingman No. 2 well bore. Any time you're getting down there, if you've got a bad abandonment, you literally can spend millions, and you can't quit halfway through, normally, when you're down there. But it is basically around the environmental issues of those three areas. Actually, I don't know why I didn't list it in the sup estimates so you'd know.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you for telling me which one it is because I know a lot about the Turner Valley historic gas plant, not the least of which because that's where the Blakeman side of my family comes from. My father used to party underneath the gas flares in the middle of the night. Yes, yes, yes. So Turner Valley and gas. Yup.

I have been to the site a couple of times, and we, in fact, have had people here in the gallery. Roxanne Walsh has been an activist down there for some time around that site. Because we weren't very environmentally conscious way back when, we dumped stuff on the ground outside of plants and didn't necessarily clean up when there were spills, and it's a huge problem.

On the one hand, I think people in Alberta genuinely want that museum to exist. It is very much part of our heritage. It's where our money came from originally, before Leduc No. 1, and it still comes from natural gas to a great degree, depending on the year. So I think it's very much a part of our heritage, and people want to see it and experience it.

On the other side, this place has got problems. I don't think we even begin to understand – I'm trying to choose my words carefully here – how much work needs to be done on that site. I've raised questions in this House before around the testing that went on about leaching into the Sheep River, which runs right by it, next to it. The gas plant is on a bit of a slope, of course, and the slope ends in the river. This was also a wrestle between community development, health, and environment. Each one was testing differently and had different results. Ultimately, it comes under community development, which signed the contract to take it over. This is a tough one because we do want to clean it up. We want to make it possible for people to participate in this site. I just have real questions about whether we can.

The Dingman flare is a perfect example because as weird as that might seem to people, that direct flaring is part of our heritage. People wanted to see it, but it ended up getting shut down in order to deal with the site that it was coming from, that actual well. It's on the side of a hill. When you drive across the bridge, that Dingman flare is, you know, 25 feet away. You can see it, but it's flaring 25 feet away from a road, and it's flaring out of the ground.

Can you tell me how much money is being spent on that site, and specifically what is being done? We've gone back on that site a number of times, often for testing, occasionally to remove some of the soil and the contaminants, so I'm interested in what exactly happened on that site.

Mr. Snelgrove: I don't know the exact number. I know that on that site they are going to do an enhancement of the containment system, and I know they're using some of the money to do a risk assessment of the river basin, but I don't know the exact dollars.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. You know, there was something else about culture that I wanted to ask. [interjection] Ticketmaster? No. That's Service Alberta.

You know what? I think that for the specifics of what we've got in front of us on this supplementary supply, I'm fine with the

explanation. They should've been able to do it in the regular budget. It shouldn't be coming through as a supplementary supply, but it did, and at least we know what it is now.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If it's all right, I'd like to move along to Transportation.

The Deputy Chair: Fine.

Mr. Chase: Am I talking to the Treasury minister? Thank you. Thank you for indicating.

Transportation

Mr. Chase: I'll note how things are broken down, and then I'll put forward the questions. The supplementary amount of \$73,827,000, which is net of \$148,833,000 from lower than budgeted spending in other programs, is requested for the following programs: approximately \$13 million for the Alberta municipal infrastructure program; approximately \$86 million for the Alberta cities transportation partnerships; approximately \$12 million for the resource road program; \$8 million and change for the streets improvement program; almost \$76 million for the municipal water, waste-water program/water for life, a terrific investment; \$15 million for the federal public transit trust; approximately \$12 million for the Canada-Alberta municipal rural infrastructure fund; and \$250,000 for program services.

Of these various amounts \$30 million is being reallocated to corporate human resources for separation payments. This comes from page 47. Is it possible to provide, as specific as possible, the types of severance packages that were given out? How many people, you know, to the nearest hundred, I suppose, were impacted? Is it possible to provide specifics as to the type of restructuring that occurred? I'm throwing this all out. How much money is the government expected to save in the long term? Will the Auditor General be looking at these separation payments?

It seems, from a quick perusal, that Transportation is getting very hard hit in terms of separation payments. We've seen several millions of dollars go to separation in the health care programs, and this seems like a large chunk of change.

If I can just sit down at this point and get an answer to why such a large separation. Hopefully we're not seeing a Steve West in Transportation.

Mr. Snelgrove: Oh, no. The \$30 million is not for Transportation. We have been working with all departments to try to establish more of a corporate approach to much of what we do in government, whether it's our IT, in payroll, and stuff like that, also in our approach to the people that work with us. We are going to have some layoffs, that we actually announced earlier in the summer, that were the result of contracting out some of the IT/desktop contracts for cross-government through Service Alberta. There would be approximately 110 people that would be let go because of that. They're just being let go. We haven't spent any of that \$30 million yet. That is to address some changes that are going to come about from some of our restructuring, and that is to deal with all government. The severance packages, if they are union, are dealt with in our union agreements. Our packages for management/nonmanagement are set out in our understanding with our –

I'm struggling for the word. But there is a set amount. These are not for any specific part.

5:40

I should say that most of the money that Transportation had to reaccount for here was as a result of us trying to access every penny we could from the opportunities that the federal government had in their different spending programs. Whether it was for some of the stimulus funding; we had to be flexible in anticipating that. We didn't exactly know where they were coming from. We took money out of MSI, put it in Treasury Board. Because the federal government often says that it has to be new money, it couldn't come from that department. So we took it, anticipated that we might need it. It worked out very well for Albertans, but a lot of this was a shell game, to make sure that we could access all that we could from the federal government. So this, in all fairness to Luke, wasn't his poor planning. That was us trying to use that department to access the federal government money.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate the clarification. I thought it was a very potentially large hit to a single ministry. I'm very aware that the number of roads in Alberta that are rapidly approaching that fair to poor condition are significant, and we need people in place to oversee that.

Again, I'm appreciative of the federal dollars. It makes it a little bit difficult, I think, for our minister of finance to be hammering away at the feds in terms of transfers when it seems that there have been some significant transfers this year. But that's his discussion.

The reallocation was made possible by changes to the rules for matching of federal stimulus funding. The result is that less funding went to capital projects. Which projects, large-scale if you like, were cancelled due to the ministry having to pull back funding?

Mr. Snelgrove: No. There was nothing cancelled, Mr. Chairman. Last year, as the cost pressures changed, we started to get projects done for much less money. So it wasn't a case of us pulling back in specific projects. It was simply realizing a savings from the economic changes that we went into. It wasn't a case of cancelling to do that. As a matter of fact, with the federal government spending, I actually think they ought to have made that commitment to Alberta at least every year for the next 10 years. I still have a little trouble doing cartwheels with them in their pictures when they give us \$800 million and take \$21 billion back. I'm still not sold that we're getting an equitable partnership with our good friends. But it's better than it was, so we'll continue to work with them. But it's from savings on projects, not from cancelling.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Provincial highway systems left \$6.9 million in funding on the table. We've talked about, you know, the 40 per cent benefit of reduced costs in materials, and I talked about the fact that almost half of our highways are approaching that poor condition. I'm just wondering why that funding wasn't used to rehabilitate more of our province's aging highways.

Mr. Snelgrove: It is hard to put it in a line sometimes. You know, I think they spent last year close to \$400 million on preserving and maintaining highways. So I do have to know: okay; how did you save this from that? We have an accounting, things we follow. If they actually save it at this line, it has to show to that line. Some of the savings came from a decrease in the cost of supplies. I think

most of it came in process and how they administer some of the contracts that we do. So we're not saving the money at the expense of the road itself. We're saving the money in the way that we approach how we do our maintenance.

Mr. Chase: Again, I want to look at having good roads as an investment as opposed to an expense, so I don't want to get caught up in the definitions of spending, saving, and investing.

Why was \$50 million that was budgeted for noncash items not spent? Again, I think we've probably reached the bottom of our recession in terms of saving that 40 per cent deduction that we've currently got. I think that window of opportunity is probably starting to close.

Mr. Snelgrove: The \$50.4 million from noncash spending resulted from the lower capital amortization requirements because we didn't build as much. Much as our friends in the Wildrose would like to think that it isn't there, amortization is a real number, and it is in our budget, and if we build less, we'll account for less. The other part is that we suspended nominal sum disposals, and transportation is one department that normally has to get rid of a lot of government land along or near the highways we don't need, and that has to show as a cost to our books. So where we had anticipated getting rid of some of that land, where we don't get the money but we have to show it, we didn't do that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's just a matter of the budgeting process.

There's \$148 million needed for municipalities that's partly showing up in the supplementary supply. There was sort of a 10-year agreement with municipalities going to receive a certain amount of funding, and of course, dependent on the recession, there was a formula built into what kind of funding went. Why wasn't this budgeted for during last year's estimates? Is this additional funding coming out of next year's reduced budget for municipal support? It's a significant chunk of change, and I'm sure the municipalities are wondering at what point they're going to receive it.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, we made a conscientious effort last year to move money out, knowing it would be going to the municipalities eventually but knowing that if we needed to access federal dollars, it wouldn't be considered existing money. If we had put it all in MSI up front, the feds would not qualify for it now. I'm telling stories out of school. We probably won't get any money ever again. Strike me dead. Whatever. The fact is we took it out when we were able to meet the requirements, then we were able to replace it, and as our budget went, we were able to top back up to make sure that everyone still received their equitable funding. You know, a little bit of smoke and mirrors in how we dealt with the federal programs, but that basically was taken out with the purpose of being replaced when we could.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. So that I completely understand: the idea was to set aside as much money as we possibly could with the hope, anticipation, expectation that the federal government would match our designated savings?

Mr. Snelgrove: No. It was so that whatever program criteria they came up with, they couldn't get us on a technicality. We really in

Alberta are spending near what we can, from a government or from a supported point of view, in infrastructure. So we needed to make sure that we were, one, doing projects that we needed to do. We're one of the few provinces that actually has a capital plan that goes a few years out, so we felt it was very important to make sure that that capital plan, that had been prioritized when there wasn't someone looking over your shoulder and telling you to spend, spend, spend, was put in place. So we took the money out, anticipating that if we had to use it to match federal and municipal funds, we would have available room in our capital plan in our existing finances.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In conclusion, while this was a rushed process, I do appreciate the answers that have been provided by the ministers. In particular, I want to thank the President of the Treasury Board for filling in in such a substantive way. Thank you very much.

**5:50 Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2009-10
General Revenue Fund**

Agreed to:

Advanced Education and Technology	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$178,666,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$30,000,000
Culture and Community Spirit	
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$2,888,000
Employment and Immigration	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$176,751,000
Health and Wellness	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$243,191,000
Housing and Urban Affairs	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$73,632,000
Municipal Affairs	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$15,341,000
Sustainable Resource Development	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$150,508,000
Tourism, Parks and Recreation	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$8,590,000
Capital Investment	\$4,731,000
Transportation	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$73,827,000

Mr. Denis: I would move that we rise and report the estimates.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, have been approved.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$178,666,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$30,000,000.

Culture and Community Spirit: nonbudgetary disbursements, \$2,888,000.

Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$176,751,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$243,191,000.

Housing and Urban Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$73,632,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$15,341,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$150,508,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$8,590,000; capital investment, \$4,731,000.

Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$73,827,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the lateness of the hour, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, February 18, 2010

Issue 8

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker

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Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Environment	Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), ND Opposition House Leader
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC), Minister of Infrastructure	Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC), Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)	Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Egmont, (PC), Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, Deputy Government House Leader	Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC), Minister of Transportation
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC), Deputy Government Whip	Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL), Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)	Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)	Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC), Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations	Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC), Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for Calgary, Deputy Government House Leader
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)	Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC), Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (WA), WA Opposition Whip	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC), Minister of Children and Youth Services	Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC), Minister of Municipal Affairs	Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)	Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Groeneveld, George, Highwood (PC)	Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC), Minister of Education, Political Minister for Edmonton, Government House Leader	Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), President of the Treasury Board
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC), Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC), Premier, President of Executive Council
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL), Leader of the Official Opposition
Hinman, Paul, Calgary-Glenmore (WA), WA Opposition Deputy Leader	Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Seniors and Community Supports	Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC), Deputy Premier, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Minister Liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces	Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Minister of Seniors and Community Supports	VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development	Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Treasury Board	Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology
	Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC), Minister of Aboriginal Relations
	Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
	Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
	Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 18, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly former member 607, Mr. Mike Cardinal, who is seated in your gallery. Mr. Cardinal was first elected in the general election held in 1989 to represent the constituency of Athabasca-Lac La Biche, re-elected in '93, '97, and 2001 to represent the constituency of Athabasca-Wabasca, and re-elected in 2004 to represent the constituency of Athabasca-Redwater. Mr. Cardinal served in six cabinet portfolios, and I'm proud to say he did an excellent job. He's left some very big shoes for me to fill as he's my predecessor. I'm also proud to say he's my friend and mentor and has served Alberta very well. He's accompanied this afternoon by Peter Bidlock, a prominent businessman in Edmonton who is a member of Travel Alberta's strategic marketing council. I'd ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of nine interns who are currently learning on the job within my Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology. These interns come to us from a variety of Alberta postsecondary institutions and programs, so we know they have the knowledge and skills to succeed. In fact, they are already valuable assets in the divisions where they work. I'd ask them to rise as I call out their names. We have Krista Comfort, Alisha Cupido, Crystal Lee, Jo Tolentino, Stephen Boyd, Angela Ta, Olga Romero, Lindsay Manz, Brent Wellsch, Ameer Persson. They are all in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they all rise, as I said, to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two people who are very important to me. First of all, my wife, Wanda, who is visiting question period this afternoon, and also my son Barry, who is on reading week, taking the week off from the Lethbridge community college where he is studying business. I'd ask them both to rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a special guest seated in the members' gallery today, Mr. Ron Boutin of the Edmonton maximum security prison, in my riding of Edmonton-Manning. I will tell the Assembly more of what Mr. Boutin has been doing at the Edmonton maximum security prison in my member's statement. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Boutin last year. I was impressed by the operation. I would like to formally introduce him to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. Please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to introduce some very special guests who are joining us in the Assembly this afternoon. They are students of Brentwood elementary school. There are 62 visitors, and they're seated in the public gallery. If I could, I would like to acknowledge the teachers or group leaders that are with them: Mr. Vantour, Ms Capton, Mrs. Rossman, and Ms Oseen as well as parent helpers Mr. Fehr, Ms Jacobson, Mrs. Keirstead, and Mrs. Peters. I'd ask this group to rise so that all members can give our traditional warm welcome to this group of outstanding young students from Sherwood Park.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce two Albertans. The first is no stranger to this place – she's worked in the Legislature for many years – Evelyn Oberg. Evelyn is working in my office here in the Annex. I'd like to ask Evelyn to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Evelyn, thank you.

As well, indeed a new Canadian, who has been in Alberta for over two years. He also is working in my office, and that is Rolando Nicolas. I'd ask Rolando to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one other introduction I would like to make, and that is a group of student representatives that are in the Legislature today doing their work, representing students from across this province, talking to members about postsecondary education and their concerns and bringing them forward, and I certainly do encourage them to do that.

They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'll read their names off very quickly: Ms Carol Neuman, who's the executive director of the Alberta Students' Executive Council. We have Mr. Robert Jones, who's the chair and VP external, Mount Royal University; Miss Amber Herman, vice-chair, VP events, Medicine Hat College; Mr. Timothy Jobs, director of finance and VP of academic at NAIT; Ms Kerri Hartman, who's their treasurer and VP campus life of Grant MacEwan University. We have Steven Kwasny, who's director of policy and also president of Red Deer College; Mr. Colin Rose, director of advancement, president of SAIT students' union association; Miss Heather MacBeath, director of marketing and communications, VP academic at SAIT; Mr. Travis McIntosh, who's the president, Students' Association of Mount Royal University. We have Mr. Brady Schnell, president, Medicine Hat College; Ms Sage Wheeler, president, Alberta College of Art & Design Students' Association; and Mr. Geoff Tate, who's the president of the NAIT

Students' Association. I see they have risen in the gallery. I would ask all members to give them a warm appreciation for what they do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please as well join me in recognizing the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who's celebrating a birthday anniversary today.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I think we have some folks here from the Lakeland country home school, located in Vermilion. These students are from around different areas of Alberta and provide a tremendous asset to many of the families around Alberta. If they're in the gallery, I would please ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Lethbridge Technology Commercialization Centre

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to this House about a new partnership in Lethbridge that will help the city attract new technology-based start-up businesses. Thanks to a \$4 million grant from the federal government's community adjustment fund, a commitment of funding from the city of Lethbridge, and an investment of \$1 million from Iunctus Geomatics, Lethbridge will see the creation of a new incubation centre to help draw and foster new high-tech businesses.

The Technology Commercialization Centre will be based in a 10,000 square foot facility designed to offer flexible space and support services to start-up technology businesses. Iunctus, which is a Lethbridge-based company that has grown exponentially over the past decade, will move its operations to a second structure while a third will be built nearby as home to a secure data centre with a backup power supply. As Iunctus president Ryan Johnson puts it, his company has grown up in Lethbridge, and this is an opportunity to partner with the community that has helped it become the success it is today.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, this partnership is truly a win-win situation for the city of Lethbridge, the province of Alberta, and Iunctus Geomatics. By attracting new support businesses to Lethbridge, the centre will bring jobs to the city. It will also provide opportunities for graduates of Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge. At the same time these new highly specialized businesses will be able to support Iunctus Geomatics and supply the company with the qualified workers they need to continue to grow. As Mayor Bob Tarleck stated, the centre will "strengthen existing industries and attract new businesses as part of [Lethbridge's] commitment to developing a globally strong, knowledge-based economy."

Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge and the surrounding area have long been known as the hub of the agricultural and food processing industries. With the advent of the Technology Commercialization Centre, it is well on its way to developing an even more diverse economy. In doing so, the city of Lethbridge is taking to heart the priorities outlined by this government to diversify and develop a leading-edge economy that will take full advantage of all of the resources of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Ron Boutin

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I introduced Mr. Ron Boutin of the Edmonton maximum security prison earlier today, who is here to watch question period. Mr. Boutin is the warden of the Edmonton maximum security prison. He has devoted the last 30 years with the Correctional Service of Canada to ensure public safety. He was appointed warden in August 2007.

Edmonton maximum houses approximately 250 offenders, all of which have sentences of over two years. Mr. Boutin has faced many challenges in his role. One of the major issues has been finding ways to deal with offender aggression. The solution that originated at the Edmonton maximum security prison has become a national policy for all maximum security prisons throughout Canada. More attention is paid to an offender's eventual return to the community, and they are being taught job skills, such as welding and carpentry. There is also more accountability for prisoners through the offender disciplinary process.

Mr. Boutin is known for the pride he has in his dealings with the public, for his fairness, and for his willingness to listen. I am proud of Mr. Boutin's progress at Edmonton maximum. It has made the prison a safer place, which certainly has a positive impact on our city as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Grandparents' Rights of Access to Grandchildren

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It takes a village to raise a child, or an extended family at least. In Alberta certain members of an extended family can be shut out of a child's life, and I'm talking about grandparents. Over the years I've heard from numerous grandparents who are grief stricken at being denied access to their grandchildren. It is argued that it is in the best interests of the child to be acquainted with their extended family and to have a place in that family. Access is the child's right and should not be used as a form of punishment by the parents or the grandparents for wrongs either real or imagined.

Yes, grandparents can at their own cost go to civil court and try to convince a judge to allow them access to their grandchildren, but this is onerous, expensive, time consuming, and some would say unnatural. Access, custody, and guardianship is governed by half a dozen provincial statutes and three different courts, a bewildering maze to work your way through for a nonlawyer, especially when all you want to do is have a relationship with your grandchild. The Provincial Court Act does contain a specific provision for grandparent access, and it describes the process of access and custody for a child and the criteria for the best interests of the child. However, the Family Law Act allows the parents the right to determine the individuals they want their children to associate with, and the court can only grant a leave of application for contact with the child if it's determined to be in the best interests of the child.

It's bewildering, frustrating, and heartbreaking. We need a better, nonadversarial method to address this situation. On behalf of grandparents, including one of my constituents, Wendy Walker, I ask the government to work toward an improved role for grandparents, one that is not defined by court litigation.

Thank you.

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

Immigrant Employment Mentorship

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is expected that Alberta will have a labour shortage of 100,000 workers by 2013, and projections suggest that by 2011 Canada could be completely reliant on immigration for its net labour force growth. Many of the skilled immigrants in Alberta have valuable skills and experiences but have difficulty finding employment commensurate with those skills and experiences. Lack of employment networks and unfamiliarity with the Canadian workplace culture and expectations are two of the significant barriers they face.

I'm pleased to inform you that action is being taken in Calgary and in Edmonton to ensure that skilled immigrants coming to our province are well positioned to respond to Alberta's labour market needs and that employers are aware of the rich potential of the immigrant demographic. The recently formed Calgary region and Edmonton region immigrant employment councils are nonprofit organizations dedicated to ensuring immigrants' meaningful participation in our labour market.

The councils have each identified mentoring as an excellent means by which skilled immigrants can become better prepared for employment in their field and a way for employers to better understand the advantage of having these workers. The councils are each launching mentoring programs to connect these skilled immigrants with people already employed in their field in March. The findings from these pilot projects will be shared at a mentorship summit in September 2010.

Mr. Speaker, full employment of immigrants is good for our economy. Because of the Calgary and Edmonton immigrant employment councils most skilled immigrants will be able to obtain employment that matches their education and skills, benefiting themselves, our communities, and Alberta's employers. I'm pleased to note that the Ministry of Employment and Immigration has supported both immigrant employment councils, joining other funders like Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The Calgary and Edmonton immigrant employment councils are unique initiatives offering practical solutions to our province's future labour needs.

Thank you.

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

Competitiveness Review of Royalties

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government appointed the Alberta Royalty Review Panel, which urged the government to increase royalties by about 20 per cent, an additional \$2 billion per year. Later that month the government announced an increase to royalty rates of not \$2 billion but \$1.4 billion, instead.

Three months later they decided even that was too much, and they announced their first rollback, a new contract with Suncor that would have reduced our take by about 40 per cent per barrel as they went to a bitumen basis of calculation. Three months later they announced another rollback, this time for deep drilling, costing Albertans \$37 million a year. Seven months later there was a new deal with Syncrude and another rollback. Our take per barrel was cut nearly in half. The next day there was another rollback. This time new wells would see a royalty exemption of \$172 million in the first year and more than half a billion by 2013. Last March there was yet another rollback for oil and gas, which would cap royalties at 5 per cent regardless of the price of oil or the profit margins of the companies extracting our resource.

The Premier has rolled back royalties at least five times, and government admits that it cost the province about \$2 billion a year

so far. The Premier even bragged about saving industry about \$500 million in one quarter.

We have seen delay after delay to the competitiveness review, which is being hammered out behind closed doors with the oil and gas industry. The citizens who own the resource are being kept in the dark and excluded. When I asked the minister during estimates why these changes were being made without Albertans involved, he said: Henry and Martha would be so lost. Mr. Speaker, they're trying to lose us.

We have no choice but to conclude that this government is letting oil and gas write its own ticket. The oil industry has been funnelling money to a party that's even further to the right of the Progressive Conservatives to put pressure on the government on royalties. It is obvious that when faced with this threat, the government is prepared to fold like a cheap tent.

Oral Question Period

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the House the minister of advanced education said, "the base operating grants of every institution in this province [are] protected." This morning, however, it was revealed that by consolidating a series of separate grants, the government has effectively hidden a reduction in expected grant funding of \$27 million to the University of Alberta. If the minister won't give Albertans a straight answer, perhaps the Premier will. Students in postsecondary institutions have ridden this government boom-and-bust fiscal roller coaster for far too long. When is the Premier going to start treating postsecondary education as an investment by delivering a plan for stable, predictable funding?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has met with all of the postsecondary institutions and gave them good information on what to expect from this year's budget. He is continuing to work with them to ensure that postsecondary education remains a priority for this government.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this government's incompetent management is close to creating a crisis in postsecondary education. Cutbacks and tuition hikes are not the solution. Why isn't this government exploring constructive options such as low-interest loans for postsecondary institutions, that would allow them to maintain capacity as Alberta's economy recovers?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be more than happy to correct some of the gross errors in the preamble. Number one, the tuition increases this year are based on the CPI cap. We are maintaining that cap as an investment in this province's future. Number two, the base operating grant for all of the postsecondary institutions in the province of Alberta for the past six years has gone up 42 per cent, and we protected that. That's a great investment in the future of this province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this government has also eliminated targeted funding to high-demand programs which produce skilled workers. Alberta will need these workers as we emerge out of the recession. Is the Premier not concerned that in addition to running

up a massive budget deficit, his legacy will be presiding over a massive skills deficit?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm not exactly sure where the hon. member is doing his research, other than perhaps the *Edmonton Journal*, which I would advise is probably not the best place to do his research given the fact that what he's talking about is probably rumour as opposed to actual fact. The training part of it in terms of apprenticeship is based on the demand of the number of apprentices that are showing up at the postsecondary institutions. We have a very good handle on where that's going, and this province does more training of apprentices per capita than any other province in the country.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a tradition across Canada of sharing the costs of postsecondary education between provincial governments, which pay two-thirds, and students, who pay one-third. But as the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has demonstrated, this balance is being jeopardized as the government downloads more of the cost to students. To the minister of advanced education. The government's failure to invest in postsecondary institutions is forcing them to ask for massive hikes to tuition in professional faculties. Why is the minister not coming forward with a clearer position on these increases?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much clearer I could be on this issue. The institutions told us that when we froze tuitions at the 2004 levels, there may have been some areas where we made an error. I simply said to them: "If you believe that there was an error made in 2004, present those facts to me and to the students, and let's have a look at them. If there was an error, we'll fix it." That's the only adjustments we're talking about. The CPI cap on tuitions of 1.5 per cent for this year stands.

Mr. Chase: Given that postsecondary institutions are trying to make up for their reduced provincial funding by raising additional fees, will the minister solve both the students' and institutions' dilemma by investing the necessary funds to eliminate the need for mandatory fee hikes?

Mr. Horner: Today, as I stand here, I know of one, maybe two institutions out of the 26 that we work with within the province that are talking about external fees of, you know, a significant nature. We're still working with the postsecondary system and crunching the numbers to ensure that we have accessibility, that we have affordability for the students. So to say that the entire system is looking at these huge increases is simply not correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In response to my questions yesterday regarding postsecondary funding, the minister stated, "Unfortunately, he hasn't been reading the truth." My quest for the truth continues. Given that students need to make admission decisions and institutions need to set their budgets, when can they expect definitive answers from this minister?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said to the hon. member several times with regard to the market modifier question, which is what he's after, so far I believe I've received from three institutions their proposals. We're reviewing them as we speak, and within weeks we will be able to deliver what we think is going to be the appropriate response to those postsecondary institutions so that they can ensure that they have their tuitions in the calendars at the appropriate time so that students and parents can make the appropriate decisions as to where the kids want to go for their postsecondary.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Funding for Calgary Hip and Knee Surgeries

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. The minister needs to answer an obvious question that he completely evaded yesterday. Why is Calgary receiving funding for an extra 200 hip and knee procedures in the next six weeks while Edmonton is receiving funding for only 16?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is that the surgical teams are ready and able to do those extra surgeries in Calgary. In Edmonton we spoke with the Royal Alex this morning, and they would tell you that they have a temporary shortage of anaesthetists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. It's interesting that he spoke to them this morning because this announcement was made several days ago. To the same minister: given that he's admitted, or indicated, that waiting lists are kept by local surgeons, which local surgeons in Edmonton were consulted about their wait-lists before this morning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was actually in a different meeting when I phoned for other purposes, and that's where that information came from, but I'll try and get that answer for you, hon. member. I know that we talked with a lot of people across the province, and if you want a definitive list of doctors, I'll try and get that for you. It wasn't I who did the phoning – it was Alberta Health Services – but I'll get that information for you.

Dr. Taft: Okay. I'll look forward to that being presented in this Assembly.

Again to the same minister: while he's tabling the list of surgeons that his people consulted in making up this 10 to 1 discrepancy in favour of Calgary, will he also table the wait-lists and the wait times for hip and knee surgeries at all Edmonton and Calgary facilities so that we can know whether or not this decision was based on good evidence or on politics or on strategic marketing by HRC?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I believe what I indicated yesterday and perhaps in days earlier is that staff with Alberta Health Services had talked with doctors and surgical team members and/or staff or whomever in various parts of the province, so I'll try and get that list more definitively defined for you. I'll try and get you more information on the question you've just asked as well. Those are details that are really in the hands of Alberta Health Services, but I'll see what I can do to help you out.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policy

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans young and old are concerned about our province's return to large deficits and debt. These people are worried not for themselves but for their kids and grandkids. They want them to have the same Alberta advantage that they enjoyed, and they see that advantage slipping away. This week the President of the Treasury Board suggested that those Albertans voicing concern over skyrocketing debt levels are only concerned about themselves. Although this statement is as laughable as the minister's handling of the public purse, does the minister actually believe that those concerned with piling debt on our kids' backs are only thinking about themselves?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, I'm as equally concerned about people who do not wish to share facts.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I guess I'll have to explain that point of view to my four kids when they're old enough to understand what higher taxes and fewer jobs in Alberta mean.

Mr. Speaker, one need only look to Saskatchewan for how a competent conservative government would manage our finances. Yesterday Premier Wall announced that his government would limit health spending to – wait for it – inflation plus population growth and would freeze overall spending at current levels in order to balance their books. To the same minister: why aren't you following the example of our neighbour and national economic leader, I might add, by reining in our deficit? Or does Premier Wall care about only himself?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, probably a couple of reasons. One, Albertans have worked very hard to put ourselves in the opportunity we're in, to be able to provide world-class leading health care, publicly funded in this province. I'm not prepared to turn around and tell Aunt Martha and Uncle Henry, who need their hips, just to wait because Saskatchewan is now leading the way in health care.

Mr. Speaker, these are the people that say, "We're only going to cut \$1.3 billion out of health care" in their recently released budget, "and it won't affect health care at all." They need to come clean. What 30 or 40 hospitals are they going to close? What major facilities in Edmonton and Calgary are they going to close? Just come clean.

2:00

Mr. Anderson: The hon. member knows that we would not cut anything. We would raise health spending by inflation plus growth. He knows that. He's misinformed as usual.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that this government's spending is irresponsible and out of control, and Albertans know it. To the Premier. You've already broken your promise this year that you made to Albertans at your party's AGM to limit spending increases to inflation plus population growth. Will this open-buffet spending policy continue next year as well, or will you follow Premier Wall's example and help us get back on the road to sound fiscal management?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to population growth and inflation we did something this year that is quite unique in the country of Canada, and that is to assist the Alberta Health Services Board in a long-term plan to provide health services in Alberta by eliminating the accumulated deficit of the board and giving them five years of committed funding. We're the only jurisdiction in Canada to do that. In fact, I know it's very easy for other Premiers,

perhaps, to try and balance the budget, but just look at the many people that are in the Maz centre and over at the Royal Alex in the neonatal unit from neighbouring provinces that come here to Alberta to get the best health care in Canada.

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

East Calgary Health Centre

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of east Calgary are inquiring on a daily basis about the east Calgary health centre. This centre was built and designed to provide flexible, integrated, co-ordinated services, being respectful of the diverse nature and needs of the population: individuals, families, and the community of east Calgary. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is the status of the east Calgary health centre?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the status of the east Calgary health centre is that it is still on our capital plan. It's being reviewed right now along with dozens and dozens of other health facilities that are also in the plan and some new ones that wish to become part of the plan, and we'll have that finalized very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The shell of the centre stands vacant since about mid-2009. Seventy-five thousand square feet of interior space in this building remains in its raw state, uncompleted, yet it is my understanding that the capital budget provided funding allocation for the completion of this centre. To the same minister: can the minister tell the residents of east Calgary when they can expect to begin accessing services in this centre?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that we'll have the health facilities capital plan completed, I hope, by March 31; that's the date that I've committed to. At that time we'll be able to provide information about that particular east Calgary health complex along with all the others throughout Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for this answer. The east Calgary health centre was to provide services in many, many areas, including mental health and addictions, seniors' resources, diverse services: home care, primary care, primary medical care, well-child services, community development initiatives, and childhood obesity intervention. To the same minister: where are these program services being delivered to meet the needs of the residents of east Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that for the time being the residents would find those services either at the Peter Lougheed health centre or perhaps at the Rockyview hospital or some other one that's not too far away. The important thing here is that our capital plan is undergoing very close scrutiny at the moment, and as soon as we have it ready, I'll inform this member and all members of the House about the progress.

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

Electoral Reform

Mr. Hehr: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know their electoral system is badly broken, yet the government keeps applying tiny bits of Scotch tape to the Election Act instead of enacting real reform. To the Minister of Justice. You were quoted today as follows: we believe the system that we have now serves Albertans well. How can you justify that statement given the well-documented problems in the last election?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand by that statement. I believe that the most important thing that Elections Alberta needs to do is to ensure that there is a system that Albertans can have confidence in to elect a government, and I believe that that is what happened. That doesn't mean to say that there isn't room for improvement. We have of course received recommendations from the former Chief Electoral Officer with suggested changes that related to the last two elections, and we'll be responding in due time.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the political minister for that answer, and I'd encourage her to implement some of those 182 changes she mentioned of the last gentleman who actually held the position before.

Of those 182 recommendations one was fixed election dates. Can we look forward to seeing those? Many of my constituents really have expressed an interest in seeing that coming forward.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that there are a number of opinions with respect to fixed election dates. The opinion of this government is that they are not necessary for us. We believe that it is possible and quite reasonable for elections in Alberta to be run according to when it is appropriate to call an election. We've seen in other provinces criticism that once you have fixed election dates, the government agenda tends to drive toward that date, and I think it impacts good government.

Mr. Hehr: Now, I guess my follow-up question to the answer would be that if you deem that fixed election dates are not necessary, is that you answering as the political minister or as the Justice minister when you answer that question?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My job with respect to the Election Act is to be the Justice minister. My job is to ensure that we respond to the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer, and that is the job that I will do.

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

Podiatry Surgery

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents are asking me about costs for foot surgery. It seems that these costs are covered in one part of the province but not in other locations. Therefore, I have to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness a question. Why are my constituents being told that they have to pay for foot surgery if it is done in Edmonton but not if it's done in Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, if a procedure is covered in one part of the province, it should be covered throughout the province. This particular case, obviously, needs to be looked into. Typically, podiatry services is one of the complementary services, and as part of the Alberta health care insurance plan there are certain types of foot surgery that are covered. I'd be happy to look into that further.

Mr. Sandhu: First supplemental: will the announcement you made yesterday help address this type of surgery?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, yesterday's announcement dealt more with urgent surgeries such as cancer surgeries and so on, but I will look into the specific case if the hon. member will provide me with some additional details. I'd be happy to pursue it for him.

Mr. Sandhu: The final: what will you do to clear up my constituents' confusion? They are very concerned.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, hon. member, if you like, we can sit down and have a meeting with them and get the particulars: get the date, get the description, find out some information from the referring doctor, and so on. Then we can address it and deal with it as quickly as possible.

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

Water Use by Oil and Gas Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The issue of industry water use continues to be a concern. We still have oil sands production using a minimum of two barrels of water per barrel of oil, and other methods of resource extraction anticipate using more water, not less water. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. How can the minister be certain that the current system is able to handle increasingly water-intensive unconventional oil and gas production?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of the use of water is dealt with in two ways. First of all, we have a requirement in place, particularly for injection uses – and the member referred to the new types of oil exploration and industrial work that require water – that they have as first choice and be able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the department that saline water is not available. So that deals with part of it. The other part is that we put maximums on the amount of water that can be withdrawn to protect the integrity of the stream itself.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, given that some of Alberta's biggest oil sands producers have said that they would not voluntarily stop pulling water during low-stream flow, is the government going to make compliance compulsory to save our water? It has to be compulsory.

2:10

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue here is that the total amount of water that is currently under licence in the Athabasca River is a minute portion of the overall stream flow. What we're talking about is future users that will come on stream. In that respect we've made it very, very clear that the in-stream flow needs of the

Athabasca River and virtually any other river in Alberta will have to be recognized before there is industrial use.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Some companies are still using fresh water in deep formations for enhanced oil recovery. Will the minister ban this practice?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, it's not so black and white. It would be nice if it were. The fact of the matter, as I've already indicated in the answer to my first question, is that there is a requirement that the primary source of water for these kinds of facilities would be saline water, would be brackish water, would be salt water. There are certain circumstances where there is not access to that source of water, and in those circumstances and those circumstances only they can receive a waiver.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Public-private Partnerships

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's been discussion in this House that has stated that we will incur \$5 billion-plus in P3 debt or unaccounted-for capital expenditures. To the President of the Treasury Board: can you please explain? We have billions in the sustainability fund. What are we borrowing and, for goodness sakes, why?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, with regard to P3s this government has made very effective use of the P3 process in building the ring roads and building some of the schools. It's not just about the capital costs that come with building the P3; it's the built-in guaranteed operational costs that accompany the P3 process that give certainty to the taxpayers on both ends of the equation. It's our responsibility, even encouraged by the Auditor General, to look into and verify and use all available means at our disposal to achieve the best possible cost for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. There seems to be considerable confusion as to how this is accounted for in our books. Can you please explain to my constituents how this is reported in the financial statements?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, our P3s are accounted for in the line in our books that very clearly spells out the total cost of our P3s. As a matter of fact, going into this year, total financial asset liabilities on capital was around \$2.9 billion. In three years if it stays the same, our total financial liabilities on capital projects would be about \$5.9 billion, or an increase of \$3 billion. That's very small when you consider our net asset liabilities exceed \$20 billion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My last supplemental is to the same hon. President of the Treasury Board. If the only reason that we are borrowing again is to support capital projects, why not just slow down on construction and stay out of debt?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a good point. The fact is that we are only borrowing for capital. We are not borrowing nor have incurred any operational deficit, so borrowing or, as most would say, smart debt. In Alberta we realize that if we're going to lead Canada coming out of this recession, we need to have the infrastructure that enables industry to succeed, and we will use those tools. When you consider the last ring road in Calgary saved us several hundred million dollars – you know what? Quitting halfway around the city isn't my idea of a good project.

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

Family Farms

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are going in ever-increasing numbers to farmers' markets both urban and rural, yet because of the design of our agricultural industry, often as a result of the government funding structure, small family farms continue to disappear from the Alberta landscape. This government just recently announced Explore Local, a program that's meant to "capture growth opportunities in the local food market." To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: through this initiative how many dollars will go directly to new and small-scale, locally focused producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will get the number for the hon. member on what would qualify in that particular category, but of course with these programs there are a number of categories that qualify for funding. Those categories that are accessed first by whatever area of the industry will get the money. We have seen an over 30 per cent increase in market garden sales over the past couple of years, and it's a huge opportunity for Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that number is in the budget, which has already been tabled.

Ms Pastoor: If I'd found it, I would have probably not asked the question.

The Speaker: Please continue.

Ms Pastoor: What is the minister using as a funding definition for farming when small farm-direct producers are not included? I think that was partly in your last answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work with a number of small producers. We have people that are working off of acreages right now, and the hon. member and others have given me names of producers that want to access our programs. Some of these are becoming very profitable, and the understanding within the community in Alberta of the value of the safety and quality of the food that's produced here is really being showcased in those markets.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. When will the minister introduce farm-direct initiatives that will help small family and unconventional farmers compete against the huge industrial farms?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we already do. What you would consider large operations in the province, about 20 per cent of the agricultural operations in Alberta, produce about 80 per cent of the agricultural goods. The remainder are what would be considered smaller or medium-sized operations. When we talk about that and think about the size of those things, an average livestock operation provides the protein requirements for about 900 people. So these may be considered small, but in fact they're very big operations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Postsecondary Education Funding

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government's ongoing cuts to postsecondary education will reduce access to school for students. The University of Alberta is already coping with a \$59 million deficit, and this government saw fit to kick them while they're down with an additional \$20 million cut. Teachers who've been promised jobs will be laid off, and students who've been promised affordable education will be unable to afford it. Why is the minister of advanced education making postsecondary school less affordable for students?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I could ask the hon. member to refer to my answers earlier because it's the same question that was asked by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Really, postsecondary in this province is second to none in any jurisdiction, I would wager, in North America. We have also been very, very generous in terms of the support to our postsecondaries; as I said, a 42 per cent increase over the last six years. We've maintained that momentum. The University of Alberta was in the headlines today, and that's where the question came from.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister didn't answer the question the first time, and he didn't answer it the second time. It's ridiculous for this minister to claim that he can meet a commitment to create 16,000 new student spaces in postsecondary schools while delivering blow after blow to their budgets. How will this minister be able to keep his commitment to create 16,000 new student spaces given the cuts to postsecondary education contained in this budget?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to actually take a look at the numbers, which I know he hasn't done, that are based on what the University of Alberta received last year less prepayments for things that were done in the year before, and then look at the base operating grant that was provided to the University of Alberta versus the dollars that they received this year versus the number of other projects that are coming forward. The point of my answer is that it isn't just, well, \$20 million is off because that's what the headline was. We're still working with the University of Alberta to ensure that we can meet our commitments across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I read the provost of the university's letter. Mr. Amrhein wrote a letter in which he is contradicting what the minister is saying about the funding for the University of Alberta. Now, the university's plan is to recoup some of these costs, and that'll cost students an additional \$550 a year in fees on top of very expensive tuition fees already. Many students will simply be unable to afford it, Mr. Minister. Why won't the minister admit that rather than improving access to postsecondary education in this province, he's placing it out of reach for more and more Albertans?

2:20

Mr. Horner: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the University of Alberta is not the entire Campus Alberta. The University of Alberta has put a proposal in front of their board and in front of us and the students for this fee across the board. That is not, by any stretch of the imagination, yet done. The University of Alberta has put a proposal in front of the ministry and the department as it relates to market modifiers, or some professional tuition increases. That is not yet done. The university has talked about the sticker shock that they've got. We're still working with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Municipal Election Campaign Financing

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are concerns among municipal councillors and mayors about changes to the municipal election campaign contributions act. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Don't tell me this means that if an individual intends to run for mayor or councillor, he or she can't fund their own campaigns.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you are aware, Bill 203, a private member's bill, was adopted by this House nearly a year ago. My ministry staff is working very hard to ensure that the Local Authorities Election Act is workable and practical. As it stands now, an individual can spend up to a maximum of \$5,000, and that's contributions from any one source. As I have previously indicated, we plan on introducing amendments to the existing legislation this spring to ensure that this is workable and practical.

Mr. Vandermeer: To the same minister: can the minister explain where this legislation is as far as being implemented right now?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the bill was passed about a year ago. We sort of feel that the members of the House believe that accountability and transparency of local governments are extremely important. The work that we did with Albertans indicates the same thing. So we are presently looking at a practical approach to levelling the playing field so that all municipal candidates in Alberta are governed by the same election campaign rules. Now, the guidelines will further promote strong and vibrant municipal governments that serve all Albertans.

Mr. Vandermeer: To the same minister. My supplementary question: will these proposed guidelines also affect school trustees, who are governed by the Local Authorities Election Act?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no. These proposed provisions will not affect the school board trustees' elections. They are all aimed at the municipal elections.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Cabinet Policy Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year taxpayers paid each and every government MLA a total of over \$1.4 million to sit on internal cabinet policy committees. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. How are government members appointed to the cabinet policy committees?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the selection of the committee members for the cabinet policy is done by the Premier and Executive Council.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: for the government members appointed to the cabinet policy committees by the Premier through Executive Council, are they appointed by order in council, by regulation, or ministerial order?

Mr. Snelgrove: I guess I'm just from the old club, Mr. Speaker. When somebody tells me to show up at a committee meeting, I go. I really didn't ask who appointed me.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the President of the Treasury Board: will the hon. minister provide to this Assembly the statutory instrument by which these members were appointed to these five separate cabinet policy committees and received last year over \$1.4 million in payment?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we can provide and have provided to this Assembly what every member of this Assembly gets paid from different committees. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has forgotten his particular amount, I see here he was paid as the chair of the legislative Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Mr. MacDonald: That's public.

Mr. Snelgrove: Yeah, it is public, as we were all paid. Who appointed you to that? Amount paid for policy field committees: \$11,000, \$16,750. Who appointed you to those?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Bison Industry

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta livestock industry has suffered several setbacks in recent years, and it is now questionable whether ranchers can even make a living from cattle ranching. Buffalo – and I know the proper term is bison, but I prefer the term buffalo because it has more of a frontier ring to it – has a number of advantages over beef. Buffalo meat has less fat and produces less cholesterol. Ranching of range buffalo on native grasses will restore habitat for endangered species and eliminate the reliance on high grain prices. My question to the hon. minister of agriculture: has the minister investigated the market for buffalo products?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm pleased to report today that the bison industry is one of the bright spots in the agricultural industry, and it's grown large. There are in excess of 85,000 bison in Alberta. We work with the United States and with European nations to promote the markets there. This past year, as a matter of fact, 10,000 live bison were even shipped out of Alberta into other countries for programs. So it's a bright future indeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: could the existing federal and provincial programs be modified to promote and accommodate the raising of buffalo for commercial markets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the programs that the province of Alberta has designed and that the federal government has designed put bison in the same categories as all other livestock groups, so bison qualify for every type of funding that's available for other livestock groups. We, of course, in the province of Alberta have programs above and beyond what the federal government and other provinces have in place also.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: in the minister's discussions with our trading partners – and I'm speaking more of the Asian trading partners than American partners – has the minister raised the issue of exporting buffalo products to Asia and other countries?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Any opportunity that we have when we're speaking with trading partners from throughout the world, we of course mention the bison industry in Alberta and we promote it. ALMA promotes it. We work hand in hand with the bison industry associations in the province to promote their product around the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Oil Sands Image

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be a bit of a misplaced focus when it comes to addressing the negative reputation that the oil sands are getting. On the one hand, this government is putting out promotional pamphlets in Alberta schools, and the Ministry of Energy is measuring their performance in shaping Albertans' knowledge of the energy industry. But the danger to our industry comes, I think, from ignorance from outside the province. To the Minister of Energy: why the misplaced priorities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I wouldn't agree with that statement, Mr. Speaker. It's not one or the other. Clearly, one of the things that we need to do is continue to inform and ensure that Albertans understand the importance of the energy industry in this province. There have been and will continue to be initiatives externally. That's not going to change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week in budget debates the Minister of Energy acknowledged that the government was not doing enough to promote the oil sands. We agree. What is this minister going to do differently from the last Minister of Energy in that regard?

Mr. Liepert: I missed part of that question, Mr. Speaker, but I think that in essence it's: what are we going to do? I would suggest to the member that we're going to do many of the things we outlined in our business plan and more.

Mr. Taylor: To improve the reputation of the oil sands, the minister has to concentrate his efforts beyond Alberta's borders. Given that, is the minister concerned about the clear failure of our lobbyists in our offices in Washington?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that's not a fair statement, Mr. Speaker. You know, the world is – what? – 8 billion people or whatever it is. It's a massive task to counter some of those well-funded organizations that want to destroy our industry. We need to do everything we can to fight back.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

2:30 Value Review of Government Departments

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Treasury Board has recently undertaken spending reviews within each department, leading to about \$1.3 billion in savings of taxpayers' money. This is certainly a positive step. My question is to the hon. President of the Treasury Board. In what areas were savings achieved, and how were they identified?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, in one way I think the success of the value reviews is the fact that very few in the public or even in our government would actually have known where they came from, showing that they were very effective in removing them. We looked at accommodation, we looked at some of the granting opportunities or synergies in some of the grants, we looked at internal financial accounting and procurement, but mostly we worked with our departments collectively.

Mr. Fawcett: Okay. Well, Mr. Speaker, since the minister was going to give me an example from Service Alberta, I'll ask the minister directly. What changes are you planning to make, knowing that your budget has seen a 15 per cent reduction, that will actually improve service to Albertans and not negatively impact front-line services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're planning to introduce a number of efficiencies. Some of the areas include simplified and standardized government contracts; more electronic invoicing; standard vendors for computer hardware, cellphones, and hand-held devices; software licences for the whole government, not just licences per department. This won't impact front-line services because it's going to make it easier for companies to do business with government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay. Let's go back to the hon. President of the Treasury Board. It's great that our dollars are being spent more efficiently where they are currently allocated, but it may be true in many or some instances that we do not need to spend this money at all. Are there plans in place to examine the value and relevancy of specific programs within each department?

Mr. Snelgrove: Absolutely. Mr. Speaker, I think it was a mindset change to go from what is easy and typical government to grow and to not re-establish priorities. I can absolutely commit to the hon. member and all hon. members that we are going to continue the work of the internal review. If it means program elimination, we just want to be darn careful that we don't have an unintended effect on a different department by cancelling a program in one area. We want to think these things through and make sure that we use a scalpel as opposed to an axe.

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

PDD Funding for Community Agencies

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When you look at all of the places where Albertans invest their hard-earned tax dollars, a very healthy amount of funding goes to the Seniors and Community Supports department. Yesterday I attended the main estimates meeting with the minister, and I have to say that I appreciated her directness and her candour. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given the concern that exists across this province with PDD groups, can she please confirm that her department will not enter into new contracts and then cut the funding during the budget year?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the PDD program is a very important priority for this government and especially for myself and my department. The contracts that we develop through our community boards – and there are six regional community boards – are pretty important contracts. I've said in the past that we will honour our contracts, and I maintain to this day that we will honour our contracts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Groups that the government contracts with to provide supports to communities across the province need certainty. They need to hire staff. They need to ensure proper training is in place and be able to deliver on the programs that their clients, Albertans, rely on. My question, again to the same minister. Groups across this province are contacting me because they are afraid that some of the reviews that will take place this year are simply an exercise in service reduction. What is the goal of the minister and the government as it relates to these social assistance based reviews?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to express my appreciation for all the service agencies that provide the supports and services to our people with developmental disabilities. They work very closely with our boards, and they do a great job. I understand their concerns.

Any of the reviews that we're doing are for the benefit of the people of Alberta. Any reviews that are being done in my department are for purposes of clarity and consistency, efficiency and effectiveness, and sustainability in the programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the decision by her department to seek funding cuts from PDD agencies last year, these groups are justifiably concerned that the government's signature on a contract may not mean much. To identify areas where her department can improve its effectiveness, reduce administration, and maximize front-line services, will the minister commit to having an independent audit completed on the community boards' direct operations and PDD provincial operation budgets?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we have six regional community boards. They all do an excellent job. They all send in their reports to my department. I want to reiterate that when we have a contract, we honour our contracts. We honoured all of our contracts last year, and we appreciated the co-operation from the agencies that work with the community boards.

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

Education Funding

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education is shortchanging students by deliberately underfunding Alberta's public education system. By the time September rolls around and teachers are due for a salary increase, this minister will have racked up at least \$175 million in an education funding shortfall. Why is the Minister of Education taking resources out of the classroom instead of doing what's right and providing sufficient funding up front to ensure our children's education isn't made to suffer?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we're not taking resources out of the classroom. In fact, budgets for school boards this year are the same overall as budgets last year. There is a requirement that school boards do have contracts with teachers for salary increases, and we're going to have to work with the teachers and with school boards to find in the long-term how we deal with those salary increases in a time of fiscal restraint. But the budgets are the same as last year: no monies, no cuts.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've seen the letters that school boards are sending home with children. Parents are fearful of warnings that school staff and resources will be cut back because of this minister's failure to adequately fund education. To the minister. You have had two years to plan for these cost pressures. Why do parents, teachers, and kids have to wait another several months for you to figure it out, all the while worrying about the future of their education?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, parents and students shouldn't have to worry about the future of education. We've talked to school boards. The school boards in this province are on the strongest financial footing anywhere. There is approximately \$360 million in operational reserves in the school system in this province. What we've said to school boards is . . . [interjection] Edmonton-River-view is very rude today, Mr. Speaker.

What we've said to school boards is: "Do not adjust the student-teacher ratio. If you need to draw from your reserves, do so. If you need to go into deficit, do so." We'll work on the long-term agreement with teachers because there are always questions with respect to wages and resources.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the school boards' surplus is not this government's personal piggy bank. Now, schoolchildren are coming home with fearful tales that cuts are coming and that their education will suffer. Parents and school boards are worried, and this minister is trying to scapegoat the teachers by failing to fund a salary increase that he signed off on. Why is the minister sacrificing the quality of our children's education instead of funding current education levels like he promised?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, far from sacrificing the education of students today, I'm fighting hard to make sure that we improve education for students today. I'm working with school boards and with the ATA to make sure that happens. We do need to work through a period of time where we've got because of the arbitrated process, we understand, the adjustment from the average weekly earnings index. We do have some work to do, both short term and long term, in terms of how we finance that. Basically, there is only so much money, and the money can go to wages, or it can go to numbers of teachers. Either way we have a one-year period to do what the school boards are quite adequately funded to deal with. Over the longer term we'll deal with what those increases are over the first, second, third, and fourth years.

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

Postsecondary Satellite Campuses

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We keep hearing about the harmony in Alberta's postsecondary system through the concept of Campus Alberta. However, it appears that there is a great deal of competitiveness for students, with institutions like the University of Lethbridge having a presence right here in Edmonton. My question today is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Is this kind of competition a waste of taxpayer dollars when a community like Edmonton already has two universities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, Campus Alberta is about providing students with the opportunity to achieve their dreams wherever they are in the province from whatever institution they want. It's a system that doesn't have borders. Certainly, choice and accessibility for students is our top priority. The University of Lethbridge has had a presence in Edmonton for some time and has had success in the entire Edmonton region. We trust the institutions to know what's best for what their own budget is and where they need to be.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: was the heightened level of competition the reason the University of Calgary closed their office here in Edmonton?

2:40

Mr. Horner: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the decision of the University of Calgary to close one of their satellite offices here in Edmonton is a budgetary one that the University of Calgary is perfectly capable of making, and they should be making those kinds of decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: instead of competing, why aren't we looking at expanding institutions based on enrolment demands, regions, and limiting the growth of others?

Mr. Horner: Well, in effect, Mr. Speaker, the last couple of years we've put into the Post-secondary Learning Act the sectoral categories that we have for postsecondary institutions in the province of Alberta, Campus Alberta. That six-sector model aligns and focuses the institutions so that they can concentrate on students who are looking specifically for programs that are offered in their sector. That helps us allocate resources. It also helps us respond to student demand, and that's exactly where we're going.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness would like to supplement an answer given yesterday, which will allow, then, a member who raised the question in the exchange with the minister to raise an additional question.

The hon. minister.

Health Care Funding

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday during the cut and thrust of question period and specifically in response to a question from the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere I said that we have paid off or are covering the entire \$1.3 billion deficit that the current provincial Health Services Board inherited from the previous regional boards. In fact, I should have said \$0.3 billion, not \$1.3 billion. Therefore, I just want to apologize for that error.*

I would also like to note that I did say it correctly later yesterday afternoon during debate, on page 156 of *Hansard*, when I said, "The provincial board inherited certain deficits." So I apologize once again, and I invite the member's questions, as you've indicated.

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Minister. No need to apologize. But I am still puzzled by some of the statements from yesterday, specifically your saying that the Health Services Board has saved us \$600 million or \$700 million. I don't see how that is consistent when you just announced a \$1.7 billion increase just in operating expenses, not to mention the debt portion. How are those numbers consistent? A \$1.7 billion increase in spending doesn't equal \$700 million in savings.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Services Board has indicated to me through their chair and their CEO that they feel they have about \$600 million to \$700 million of annualized savings as a result of common procurement procedures, a forthcoming centralized payroll system, and stopping the issue of doctor poaching, as it's sort of commonly referred to. Now, those are their numbers, hon. member, so we'll get more information if you like.

With respect to the deficit, Mr. Speaker, when you go back to about the period of '07-08, '08-09, somewhere in there, you can see where the deficits started to accumulate. What we've said is that we'll eradicate about \$0.5 billion of that deficit this year, right now, and we'll look after \$0.7 billion plus in the coming year. Then we're ramping up their adjusted base, and then we're giving them 6 per cent on top of that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, not counting the last three, 19 members were recognized today. We had 114 questions and answers – that's very significant – and 12 opposition members,

seven private members were recognized. We're going to continue with the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Canadian Troops at Vancouver Olympics

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know I've not been the only one recently watching some of Canada's finest athletes, a number of which are Albertans, compete in Vancouver, where we captured our sixth medal last night. However, there's another group of Alberta's and Canada's finest present at the games this year, members of the Canadian armed forces. Some were deployed as early as January 6, and most will spend around two months away from their families, starting to return home the first week of March. There are also those who will stay on for another month, continuing to serve throughout the Paralympic Games.

There are three elements representing our forces at the 2010 games – the army, the navy, and the air force – totalling about 4,500 members, about 1,400 of which are soldiers from the army. About half of those are from the Canadian Forces base in Edmonton and my constituency.

The soldiers' mandate is to assist the RCMP with two unique skill sets. First, they are the eyes and the ears of the RCMP in the backcountry for multiple events, where they'll not only be on foot and on skis but on Ski-Doos and quads. Secondly, they have a mobility directive to ensure that the RCMP are moved quickly from one location to the other safely.

Our soldiers at the Olympics are led by our own CFB Edmonton's Colonel Andre Corbould, and he is supported by Brigade Sergeant Major, Chief Warrant Officer Ken Hodge. Typical of our dedicated members of our military and the duties that they carry out across the globe, most of the work they're doing at the Olympics is out of the spotlight.

I would ask that all Members of this Legislative Assembly join me in publicly thanking these men and women for yet another service that they provide to our country, to Albertans, and indeed to the whole world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 4

Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 4, and that's the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation for industry. It doesn't add regulatory burden for industry. It actually provides some protection to industry by harmonizing our legislation with federal legislation which was amended in June of 2009. The rules already exist in federal legislation, mandated by the federal government, but matching our legislation with the federal legislation as much as possible helps to achieve standard conditions for the movement of dangerous goods within provinces and across Canada.

By mirroring the federal legislation, we're able to ensure our place in enforcing the rules and monitoring industry. If we don't mirror

*See page 153, right column, paragraph 7

the federal legislation, we run the risk of losing our jurisdiction over industry in Alberta and our ability to enforce these rules the way we see appropriate. The legislation actually provides some protection to industry here in Alberta. The changes are minor and mainly administrative in nature. As I say, this legislation will ensure to industry that it continues to be business as usual in Alberta.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings from constituents today. The first is an e-mail from Amanda Hollman. She wishes to express her disappointment with recent changes to the funding regarding postsecondary. She has been upgrading herself, earning her GED, and is now in the top 10 per cent of high school graduates and achieving honours in the medical office assistant program, but she doesn't think it's going to be realistic for her to continue further without the student loan relief program. There's one story.

The Speaker: Hon. member, another one?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. The second tabling is also from a constituent, Donald R. MacRae. Mr. MacRae is expressing his distress at the government's decision to close Alberta Hospital. He reminds us that a quarter of the street people used to be institutionalized, and he wonders if, with the beautiful grounds that the hospital sits on, there isn't a condo grab or some similar undertaking going on here.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a copy of a document titled Securities Regulatory Proposals Stemming from the 2007-08 Credit Market Turmoil and Its Effect on the Asset-backed Commercial Paper Market in Canada.

The second tabling I have is on behalf of a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The constituent's name is Karen Durda, and she has provided written permission for me to table an e-mail urging there to be no cuts in funding to schools throughout the province.

Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(6) I would request that the Government House Leader share with us the projected government business for the week commencing February 22.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the week commencing February 22, we anticipate that on Monday Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010, will be introduced for first reading.

On Tuesday, February 23, 2010, we will continue consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne – that will be day 8 – and then second reading of the Alberta Competitiveness Act as well as the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act and, time permitting, bills 2, 3, and 4: the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010; and the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010.

On Wednesday, February 24, in the afternoon again consideration of His Honour's Speech from the Throne, day 9, if there are any remaining who wish to participate; second reading for Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, Bill 4, the dangerous goods transportation act, and in Committee of the Whole the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act and, time permitting, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act and the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act.

On Thursday, February 25, in the afternoon again consideration of His Honour's speech – it will be day 10; therefore, the engrossing motion will come forward – second reading of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act; third reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation Act; and, time permitting, Bill 4, the dangerous goods act, at whatever stage it's at. We've provided for committee and third reading of bills 2 and 3 or whatever stage they're at.

Statement by the Speaker

Adjournment of Debate and Assembly by Same Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, I have a little statement with respect to a process procedure in the House. While this Assembly draws on hundreds of years of experience from parliaments around the world and over a hundred years in Alberta, we're still a dynamic institution open to change and, therefore, must continually assess our practices to ensure that they are appropriate for the Alberta Legislative Assembly in 2010.

The need to reassess one such practice arose on Tuesday, February 16, this week, when at the end of the sitting the Government House Leader moved to adjourn the debate on Bill 1 and then moved to adjourn the Assembly, all of which can be found at page 142 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

Over the years the chair and other presiding officers have consistently applied paragraph 465(9) of *Beauchesne's* sixth edition, which states that a member who has moved adjournment of debate "cannot afterwards (during the same debate) rise to move adjournment of the House." In order to revisit the appropriateness of this statement, the chair scoured the more obscure references in *Beauchesne*, which led him to the most recent edition of a venerable Canadian authority, the fourth edition of *Bourinot's Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*. This most recent edition was published in 1916.

In reviewing the dusty pages that are the authority for the passage in *Beauchesne*, the chair and table officers found it ambiguous as to whether the adjournment of the Assembly could be moved by the same member who successfully moved adjournment of debate. After reviewing the possible consequences that could arise and canvassing other authorities, the chair has determined that the procedure set on Tuesday can continue. To restate, the same member who moves adjournment of debate may move adjournment

of the Assembly, but these would still have to be separate motions. It only took, hon. Government House Leader, nearly 100 years to apply this.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

10. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the following changes to:

- (a) the Standing Committee on Private Bills be approved: that Mr. Lindsay replace Mr. Rodney;
- (b) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved: that Mr. Groeneveld replace Mr. Bhardwaj, that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. Johnson, that Mr. Xiao replace Ms Woo-Paw, that Mr. Elniski replace Mr. Weadick.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion if anyone wants to participate. None? Then shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. Mason]

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

Mr. Mason: I've completed, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Completed? Okay.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise in response to the Speech from the Throne, read February 4, 2010, by His Honour Norman Kwong, Alberta's Lieutenant Governor. Along with my colleagues I want to thank Their Honours for their service to our province. We share your family's pride in both of you and the class and the infectious humour that you brought to your office.

In the past 105 years since our province was created, we've come a great distance. We've got a lot to be thankful for. The Speech from the Throne contained the following statement: "Our world may have changed, but our people have not. They remain hard working and innovative, entrepreneurial and compassionate, and, most of all, confident about our province and its future." Looking back through Alberta's history, this could not be more evident.

In the 1919 Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor reflected on the end of the First World War and how Alberta's part

throughout the four and a half years had been an honourable and important one, how, moving forward, we needed to address the concerns of employment, agriculture, health care, education, and infrastructure. It's not surprising that 91 years later these are still our top priorities.

Mr. Speaker, I've very seldom stood up in response to the Speech from the Throne, but as a member representing Little Bow, I today am pleased to give an agrarian or an agricultural viewpoint to this speech. This past weekend made me reflect on the changes that have occurred over the past 112 years. Our family celebrated the life of my aunt at her funeral last week. Barb was the last of the third generation of my paternal great-grandfather, who came to Alberta from Ireland to his homestead via York, Toronto, in 1898 along the Waterton River in the Yarrow district south of Pincher Creek. It's reported that his homestead raised beef for the North West Mounted Police at Fort Macleod. Their home was a visiting place for Father Lacombe and Kootenai Brown.

Today I can't imagine the hardships that pioneers of that day endured. There were no LRTs. There were no SUVs. There was no Greyhound bus or air bus air travel. Travel was by horseback or shank's mare. In other words, Mr. Speaker, they walked. Joseph Patrick McFarland's brother-in-law is reported to have walked from a sheep ranch in Montana, past Chief Mountain south of Cardston, all the way up to Calgary. When he found that Calgary wasn't to his liking, he walked back to the Yarrow district to help establish his ranch.

People of that era helped each other. They built their own churches, and they took care of one another. In 1906 Alberta spent \$18,466 on agriculture. They spent \$10,680 on education and \$33,500 on public health. That was on behalf of 185,412 Albertans. In 1910 Alberta's population had doubled to 374,663 people, and agriculture's budget had blossomed to \$24,000, 7 cents a person; \$20,000 was spent on education, 6 cents a person, while public health care got \$84,700, 23 cents a person.

Around that time two of the communities that I'm proud to represent had already been established for a couple of years, but in 1910, 100 years ago, the villages of Carmangay and Barons were formally incorporated. Fortunately for me, my grandfather started farming in Bindloss, Alberta, but moved to Barons, where Barb and her four siblings were raised. In those early years there were Norwegians, Swedes, Estonians, Finlanders, and even one French family, my wife's great-grandfather. All of these people adopted their new country and the language that was prevalent at the time, English, and the laws without any reservation.

As my dad and uncle grew up and married, they moved to Carmangay, where each of them started their own farms. My uncle John, who I really looked up to, never thought for once that he was building this country. I think I remember him saying that he was too busy paying for the farm, raising his girls, hoping someday to put them through university, and keeping the banker happy.

3:00

In the late 1920s my best friend's mom had emigrated from Czechoslovakia to Kuroki, Saskatchewan, with her parents as a young girl. His dad would immigrate to Raymond with his parents in 1930. Once again I marvel at what we have today and how some people today receive a government program or benefit and over a period of time then look upon it as their entitlement. If you were to have asked John and Jo what their biggest challenges were as newcomers to Canada, they would tell you: language and existence. There were no ESL programs, no programs to preserve their culture, and no food banks. They had to learn a new language on their own.

They preserved what few keepsakes they had from their home country in their own house, and if you wanted to see them, you were welcome to see their Czech culture in John and Jo's house. They preserved what they had, and without the help of neighbours, Jo would say, they wouldn't have made it. The neighbours provided them with cabbages, potatoes, and meat.

There were no government programs to help them establish a business. Later in life, after they married, the Carmangay Lions Club approached them and encouraged them to take over a local grocery store that had gone broke. There was no formal purchase agreement. The agreement was verbal, and the only condition was that they had to provide free locker service to the patrons that had prepaid for their locker supplies. In those days you didn't have deep freezers. You had a locker in a plant. It was a little wooden container, and that was where you kept your cold meat. John and Jo later added a meat butchering service and later dry goods to their store. Without any government help or assistance, they operated this family business and raised their three children until their retirement.

Today we spend millions of dollars provincially on ESL, cultural programs, seniors' benefits, programs for the less fortunate, children's services, and I often wonder: were these essential at the time when our pioneer parents helped establish this country?

My maternal grandparents had moved to Carmangay from Wisconsin in the early 1900s. You might be interested, as I know you are with a lot of people that hold higher office, that my grandfather's brother moved to Washington, and he would become the great-grandfather to the past governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin. One-room schools were the norm in the years that my grandfather farmed in the Carmangay district. He himself held office as a school trustee and the school board chairman for many years. I've seen the contracts, Mr. Speaker, that he signed from 1915 until the early 1930s. It's amazing to think that in those days a teacher's salary was \$700 a year. Today we spend over \$16 million a day on education. That's about \$1,600 per person for every man, woman, and child.

We tend to think that regionalization is new, but that's not even true. In the early 1940s, when my grandfather was seeing the demise of the one-room school, they created the Lethbridge school division, which actually ran from Lethbridge-West to Fort Macleod up north past Carmangay. It was a huge distance then.

Looking at some of the old documents, we found that a vehicle registration for a 1943 Dodge cost \$23. Today it's \$78, not a bad change.

Around that time, my dad and my father-in-law also took their turns serving their village councils, and it wasn't uncommon for either one of them to jump into a trench when a waterline was broken and help the town man repair it because everyone wanted to have water, and money wasn't the issue. Per diems weren't even thought of, and there were no union jobs saying that you shouldn't go down and help in the trench, and I'm sure there weren't any scaffolds or anything else to protect them.

Moving forward into my generation, I have to look back and admire the pioneers. These were truly the people that built this country, not today's version of a senior.

Moving forward, as I said, I've seen change since 1972, when I and my wife started our own farm. We started from scratch. We sold rye for a dollar a bushel, barley for 90 cents a bushel. Diesel was 25 cents a gallon. That's 5 and a half cents a litre. Anhydrous ammonia was \$40 a tonne. A 100-horsepower tractor cost \$8,700. Interest rates a few years later hit 23 and three-quarter per cent in September 1981. I think the Premier and I shared that little bit of history together.

Yesterday barley was \$2.90, rye was \$3.63, fuel was 78 cents a litre, anhydrous is \$580 a tonne, and a 100-horsepower tractor is

\$140,000. Our population is now 10 times larger than it was in 1905. Our Agriculture budget is \$1.1 billion. Our Infrastructure budget is \$1.1 billion. Education is \$6.1 billion – and I think it bears repeating – \$1,600 for every man, woman, and child in Alberta. Health, \$15 billion a year, over \$4,000 for every man, woman, and child.

As John F. Kennedy was quoted, "The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways." I salute our farmers today, who continue to help feed a nation.

Alberta is a leader and will continue to be the production leader of clean energy, striving to meet the demands put onto our energy sector by people who would have it go another way. Our education is world class, from elementary schools straight through to our postsecondaries. We know that a well-educated workforce will keep us competitive in today's market, and we're looking forward to ensuring that all Albertans have the greatest advantage compared to our trading partners.

Our tax system is competitive and enticing towards the global economy, and I dare say our business incentives keep us competitive, and our personal tax structure is by far the most advantageous. Our personal income tax structure in Alberta is the most advantageous, in my opinion, for all Albertans. The world around us is definitely changing, and the goal of our government is to help Albertans change with it.

Again, I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to wish His Honour a very much well-deserved rest. He has served us well. He has been a dedicated servant to the province and a true representative, and I admire his culture and those of his pioneering forefathers.

Thank you.

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

Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise on behalf of the constituents of Airdrie-Chestermere to respond to this government's Speech from the Throne. It has been one of the most remarkable and humbling experiences of my life to represent the teachers, health professionals, entrepreneurs, neighbours, friends, and family in my community to whom I owe so much for my own upbringing. It is an honour unlike any other that I've ever known to serve these people, and I pledge to do so to the best of my ability, however imperfect it may be. My remarks today are derived from the now thousands of conversations I've had with my constituents. I feel that my vision for this province is merely a reflection of the hopes and dreams that the majority of my constituents share.

My constituents are very entrepreneurial in nature. They are concerned that our province is losing its competitive advantage as the best place in Canada to start up and run a business. They are burdened by excessive and growing amounts of government regulation. Many own or work in our province's energy sector, which has been hit hard by lower commodity prices and this PC government's energy policies.

3:10

Given that oil and gas remains the primary driver of our economic engine, an important balance must be struck between creating a business environment that encourages ongoing exploration and development activity while at the same time ensuring that Albertans receive appropriate compensation for these resources. Unfortu-

nately, our current provincial government has demonstrated by its actions that it has no understanding of how to strike this critical balance. Tens of billions of dollars in energy investment and tens of thousands of jobs created thereby have fled to neighbouring provinces due in large part to the new royalty framework, one of the most misguided and mishandled policy debacles in Alberta's history. Aside from reversing the damaging royalty hike imposed on our conventional oil and gas entrepreneurs by the current government, I'm committed to advocating for policies that create a business environment in which energy entrepreneurs can thrive and create jobs for all Albertans. Doing so is essential to the continued prosperity of our province.

My constituents are also concerned about our health care system. Improving our health care system is a top priority for almost every one of them. They know that we are increasing health care spending at a rate that is entirely unsustainable for young Albertans, especially given our aging population, and they also know that despite all the spending, wait times to undergo important medical procedures continue to increase.

Albertans deserve better, Mr. Speaker. We need a health care reform strategy that is centred around the needs of patients rather than the whims of a large, centralized bureaucracy in Edmonton. Meaningful health care reform is extremely difficult at the best of times, but it is made infinitely more challenging by our current provincial government's lack of a coherent plan. I'm of the view that a competent and responsive provincial government would articulate a clear plan for health care that voters understand. Such a government would first consult with provincial stakeholders, including doctors, nurses, home-care workers, patients, and others, in developing its plan. This has not been done.

After developing the plan, an effective government would communicate the specific health care goals they intend to achieve and why these goals are necessary. It would show how they intend to achieve these objectives and what timelines and milestones to expect along the way. The current government has failed to do this also.

An effective health care reform strategy would give Albertans a personal stake in health care reform. Just as Albertans were willing to pull together in support of eliminating our debt in the '90s, I believe Albertans would be willing to do the same to save our public health care system today but only if they are first consulted with and the overall health reform strategy is explained clearly to everyone up front. We can reform our health care system into one that is accessible and patient-centred without compromising universal accessibility. Dozens of western European countries have successfully tackled health care reform without abandoning their commitment to a public system. With Albertans' entrepreneurial spirit there is no reason why we cannot do the same.

In order to achieve this result, any Alberta health care reform strategy should set principle-based guidelines around which an acceptable plan can be developed. As a starting point I would include the following principles. The system must be sustainable for ourselves and future generations financially over the short and long term. The system must measurably improve the quality of our health care, including shorter waiting times for medical procedures and improved patient outcomes as well as increased access to family doctors and specialists, and these should be tracked. The system must allow each individual the maximum amount of choice regarding their personal health care decisions. And the system should ensure that the best health care professionals and facilities remain available to every individual regardless of ability to pay. It's time to start building a health care system that we can be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency is the fastest growing and among the very youngest in our province. We value the education of our children so very much. In my view, ensuring that all of Alberta's children receive a world-class education is one of the most important roles our provincial government can play in building our province. In partnership with the important core values taught by parents, education provides a launching point for a healthy and contributing citizen. To deny a child the proper education is to greatly increase the risk of losing that child to ignorance, poverty, and even crime.

The provincial government spends more per capita than any other province on education. The problem is that tens of millions of those dollars are wasted on what is a massive, centralized bureaucracy in Edmonton. For example, in my view, we spend millions on unnecessary standardized testing for grade 3 students. We spend millions more finding ways to burden our classroom teachers with additional paperwork, record keeping, and other make-work projects. Personally, I want our teachers spending their time teaching rather than filling out forms.

It is my view that the provincial government should work on moving millions of dollars in funding away from centralized bureaucracies and towards front-line teachers and staff in our children's schools. This means flowing more funding directly to individual schools, where principals, teachers, and parents know best where it is needed.

Mr. Speaker, a distinguishing and important feature of Alberta's education system is that it provides parents with a greater range of educational choices than do other systems in North America. Although strong public schools are critical to our education system, charter schools, private schools, and home-schooling provide educational opportunities and teaching methods that are sometimes unavailable in our public system.

In fact, our public school boards have responded to competition from charter, home, and private schooling by rolling out a diverse range of excellent core and optional courses that are second to none in North America, which is why Anita and I send our oldest and plan to send our younger three when they are old enough to a public school in our community. Our public schools have proven themselves to be able to compete with the best that charter, home, and private schools have to offer. Continuing to foster this culture of educational innovation and competition will pay dividends for our teachers, parents, and children for decades to come.

Mr. Speaker, one of these educational innovations that I think we should explore more in this province involves student-centred learning. As Internet and computer technologies continue their exponential advances, it is becoming clear that current teaching models need to be altered. For over a hundred years the traditional classroom model of a teacher lecturing students in front of a chalkboard served as the best way to teach large numbers of students simultaneously. However, this traditional model also has its limitations. It often results in gifted students having their potential restricted by peers who may not learn as quickly. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some students who fail to grasp key concepts are moved on to higher grades and more complicated subject matter regardless of whether or not they are ready. This can result in frustration, the domination of a teacher's time by a few struggling students, perpetual poor grades, and even behavioural problems.

I believe Alberta has the opportunity to lead the world in the way we deliver education to our children. Using emerging technologies to complement the work of our teachers will fundamentally alter for the better the way we educate our kids. Imagine an education system where the classroom is entirely centred around the learning needs of each individual student. Imagine a learning model where a student can take the time needed in select pedagogies specific to

his or her learning capacities to master a specific competency before moving on to new material. Gifted students would be given the tools to reach their full potential. Students who need more time and practice to master basic concepts would receive such before moving on. In short, our children would be able to learn at the right pace and in the right way for them rather than participating in the traditional one-size-fits-all approach. Big changes such as these are difficult; I know that. However, I'm convinced that Alberta's teachers and parents are up for the challenge.

Mr. Speaker, we can only build the public health and education systems Albertans want if we have the money and provincial wealth necessary to pay for it. During the '90s Alberta established itself as one of the best places in the world to do business. We limited government spending growth, paid off the debt, lowered taxes, and provided tax incentives to attract new businesses and industries. The people of our province proudly referred to this as the Alberta advantage. Although Alberta still possesses some of these same features, our edge has slipped dramatically over the last decade. Our personal and corporate tax advantage has decreased and will soon be surpassed by several provinces, specifically on the corporate side, and our provincial government has no plan to regain that advantage.

Only a few short years after declaring Alberta debt free, the provincial government has taken on billions of new and unnecessary debt, with no commitment to paying it off over the short term. As mentioned previously, tens of billions of dollars in investment in Alberta's energy sector have fled to neighbouring jurisdictions, due in large part to the new royalty framework.

Provincial government spending has been growing out of control for some time. Over the past several years we have spent far more per capita than any other province in Canada. Government spending increases have been more than double the rate of provincial inflation plus population growth. By refusing to control spending to sustainable yearly increases, this government now finds itself in the position of both taking on massive amounts of debt while facing the prospect of cutting the promised programs that Albertans have come to rely on.

The current government's failure to plan was a plan to fail. Despite the recent damage done to our financial reputation and well-being, it is not too late to turn things around. An obvious first step would be to reverse the damaging royalty hike imposed by the current government on our oil and gas entrepreneurs. However, we must also develop and implement a long-term financial plan to become more economically competitive with jurisdictions around the world. In short, it's time to restore the Alberta advantage.

3:20

The first component in a long-term financial plan for our province is to stop the financial bleeding. The current provincial government is spending beyond its means. It's accruing debt for future generations to pay. In my view, piling up billions in debt on the backs of future generations to dull the pain of a self-inflicted spending hangover is the height of irresponsibility. So, too, is expanding the size of government entitlement programs to the point where the only way to adequately fund such is to raise taxes or increase debt on future generations. Over the past several decades we have relied on nonrenewable resource wealth to lower taxation rates while increasing spending on infrastructure and social programs. Continuing this course is unsustainable. We must diversify our economy and decrease our reliance on nonrenewable resource revenue.

So how do we do this? In a global economy entrepreneurs, businesses, and ideas flow to where the best opportunities for success exist. The best minds don't necessarily work where they graduate. Skilled workers are highly mobile and will go wherever

the best opportunities arise. A technological breakthrough is often not commercialized where it is created. When contemplating where best to develop a new technology or product, entrepreneurs and corporate executives generally seek out jurisdictions where levels of taxation and burdensome regulations are low. Historically governments who gamble taxpayer money on investing in the next big idea or industry generally end up with a bill and nothing to show for it at the end of the day. If Alberta wants to successfully diversify its economy, we must make our province more fiscally attractive to the brightest people, best entrepreneurs, and most successful businesses.

I want to see an Alberta where my children and grandchildren will have jobs in industries that people are just now starting to dream about. We need to start planning today to make this a reality. A long-term financial plan for Alberta will be needed to accomplish this goal. I believe that any such plan should include the following three components: first, limit yearly government spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth; second, as economic growth increases and government revenues begin to outstrip newly restricted spending levels, invest the majority of resultant budget surpluses in Alberta's heritage fund; and third, as annual earnings from the heritage fund increase, thereby replacing our reliance on nonrenewable resource revenues, gradually begin lowering personal and corporate income taxes, thus attracting new people and new business. This kind of sustainable fiscal planning will accomplish the goal of diversifying our economy and will leave our children with even greater opportunities than we enjoy today.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for Alberta to step up and lead again. It is time to restore the Alberta advantage. We can and we must do better. We owe it to generations of Albertans past, present, and future to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and value his commitment to public education and so on.

There's been a lot of debate about the merits of containing government spending to a combination of inflation and population growth. There's a sort of intuitive appeal to that, and I can see that as a short-term way to control spending, it could be a tool.

My concern is that that, then, doesn't account for growth in the economy. That means that your government will never ever participate in the growth of the economy. If we adopted that level, say, this year, then forevermore the Alberta government spending would be stuck at the levels of this year in real per capita terms, and the people 10 or 20 or 30 years from now might be saying: "Well, you know, why are we funding our schools at the levels of 2010 or building roads at the levels of 2010? Our economy has grown. Why can't we have public services that reflect that?" I'm wondering how you justify holding that position of keeping government spending to population growth and inflation in light of my comments?

Mr. Anderson: Very good question. This has been done in other jurisdictions. You'll see this in Bill 204, that I'm going to be introducing next week, actually. I agree with you. You don't want to in perpetuity cap spending at inflation plus growth. You want to be competitive with other jurisdictions across the country and be able to hire nurses and doctors and teachers, et cetera, at the same rates as other jurisdictions.

So what I would propose is that you limit it to the rate of inflation plus population growth, which in the short term will keep us above the average of the other Canadian provinces for a long time. But, eventually, if the average per capita spending of the rest of Canadian provinces is at a level and that cap brings us below that level, we should adjust the cap to bring us up to the average of the other provinces.

What we want to do is just make sure that (a) our spending is sustainable. If we don't do that, Member, we are leaving such a debt, not just a physical \$6 billion which is projected debt, on the backs of our kids, but we're also leaving them with a totally unsustainable set of social programs that they will not be able to pay for without losing the advantages that we have.

The reason you don't tie it to GDP, just incidentally, is – actually this government has over the last 10 years generally tied, if you look back, to GDP. That's generally the increase that has been accomplished. As you can see, it is not sustainable. It doesn't take into account things like scales of economy, where, basically, the more people you have, the bigger pot of money you have. You should be able to deliver the same amount of services for a more efficient cost. It doesn't take that into account.

I do believe this has been used in Colorado. It's been used very effectively in Colorado and several U.S. states. You've seen what's happened to California and New York and other states that have not had this in place. Now they're just slashing social spending, education programs, health care benefits. It's mass chaos.

So, yeah, that would be the answer to your question.

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

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just ask the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere whether he could elaborate a little bit on his suggestion that Alberta should innovate and have some health care reforms. I think he alluded to the western European countries, some of whom have different models but still have universal public health care. Would he not agree that the Canada Health Act, which is federal legislation, is somewhat constraining in that regard? How would he propose that Alberta might go about reforming the health care system along some of these other models? Could he be a little bit more specific about what type of models he might be alluding to?

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely. There have actually been several studies on comparing these western European health care systems to ours and what types of reforms we could make that would still be in line with the Canada Health Act. One of them I'm glad to see the minister is talking about, which is activity-based funding. That is important. That is something that's going to create more efficiencies in the health care system, in hospitals. I think that that's just one of many examples. There's not enough time to have that debate right now, but I'm more than happy to talk about that.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but we must move on.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, then Athabasca-Redwater, then Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, then the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today in reply to the Speech from the Throne, so eloquently delivered by our Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong. I heard of the

China Clipper a few years after immigrating to Alberta in the early 70s, and even to this day becoming a successful Canadian professional football player remains rare for Canadians of Chinese descent.

I was trying to follow, so to speak, the hon. Lieutenant Governor starting in the late '80s, when I was organizing and running children and youth cultural and multicultural programs. I came to recognize the barriers and challenges faced by many immigrant and minority youth and how issues impacting visible minority youth are so invisible in the eyes of our institutions. These young people also bear the added challenges of not having the vocabularies or lacking the language to articulate the issues and experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Then by chance I saw the Hon. Norman Kwong interviewed by a Vancouver television station, and he talked about his experience with racism and discrimination. I thought: this is the guy that my kids need to hear from and learn from, a person in a leadership position who has the audacity to talk about unpleasant, difficult subjects. Though I was not able to commit him to speak to my kids, I was very pleased and honoured to recognize and celebrate his many achievements at the 2001 inaugural Asian Heritage Month event in Calgary, including introducing him and members of the Calgary Stampeders to a gymnasium full of youth from the Chinese community. Mr Speaker, we are indeed very fortunate to have the Hon. Norman Kwong as our Lieutenant Governor, who also serves as a source of inspiration and dynamism to our evolving, modern, and vibrant province.

3:30

According to Statistics Canada the province of Alberta has seen a population expansion of about 10 per cent every five years since 2001. For the city of Calgary it was at 13 per cent over a five-year period. We are an energetic, youthful province with a healthy number of young families and a median age of 36 for our population. A whole 20 per cent of our population of 3.5 million people is under 15 years old. But our province also mirrors many other industrialized centres that are experiencing declining birth rates combined with more and more people living longer. The abundance of natural resources and a generally robust economy has attracted continuous waves of skilled as well as entrepreneurial people to this province on the prairies.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne, I believe, has responded to and reflects the hopes and values of Albertans. Our government's commitment to act on the recommendations from the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health includes creating the first-ever provincial health act, that would articulate our collective beliefs and values through a set of principles which will guide the development of public health policies and program deliveries. This is a demonstration of our government's responsiveness to Albertans' expectation to be engaged in our ongoing effort to sustain a high-quality, efficient, and accountable health system. The path forward is one of ingenuity, greater predictability, and continuous engagement. Equally important, our stakeholders and citizens alike will gain and share greater understanding and ownership of the public health service that Albertans and our nation hold dear. These, I believe, will be very much welcomed by the constituents of Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. Speaker, it's imperative that our work here also serves to instill a sense of pride in our young people and those who come here for the economic opportunities. In order for us to sustain future prosperity for our province, I believe our government's commitment

to the following areas, articulated through the throne speech, will help us achieve that: to strengthen and ensure the province's leadership role in research and in the innovation system under Alberta Innovates, to continue to build world-class universities of the 21st century, to demonstrate that Albertans take great pride in our environment and that we will be a leader in clean energy production as well as our interest in building public services and transportation systems that unite our communities in commerce and culture. With these investments in our people and infrastructure a modern, dynamic, and energetic Alberta is within reach.

I mentioned in the beginning of my speech that, comparatively, we are a province with a high proportion of younger population. Our government listened to Albertans with young families and responded with our pledge to meet our promise to create 14,000 new child care spaces this year. In addition, our government is launching an exciting new vision for education to ensure that learning is responsive to the needs of our future generations.

Our seniors, that will comprise 15 per cent of our population by 2020, present an urgent need to create the necessary accommodations in a timely manner. Our government is offering Albertans the opportunity to invest in our future through the purchase of capital bonds to build the much-needed seniors' accommodations. Many Albertans agree that this is an innovative and welcoming way to address the needs of our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, Imagine Calgary, which captured Calgarians' long-term vision for the city at the turn of this century, highlighted the city's value of peace, safety, and security. Calgarians identified living in peace, feeling safe in our homes and throughout our city, as a cherished goal. I'm confident the citizens of Calgary would be pleased with this government's continued commitment to the safe communities initiative to sustain safe, strong, and caring communities.

This government understands the importance of being tough on crime, but it also recognizes the importance of strong and effective social programs to help those in need. For example, our government will continue to work to develop 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012 and to work on the 10-year plan to end homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, our strong, competitive economic foundation and our high-quality social programs will continue to attract new Canadians to Alberta. This province has a vision where all citizens feel a sense of belonging and pride and participate in all aspects of this province. After all, our diversity strengthens our competitive advantage. It will lead Alberta into a prosperous future as we work together with trading partners to enhance investment opportunities.

An example of this is our commitment to working towards a western economic partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan to create Canada's largest boundary-free investment market. This economic market will be well positioned to trade with the emerging Asian markets, and working together with B.C. and Saskatchewan on the joint trade mission to China and Japan will enhance our economic potential in Alberta and western Canada.

While the global economic recession has provided many challenges – we have experienced the lowest energy prices in many years; we've seen the worst economic recession since the Great Depression – we also have seen a resilient population, willing to tackle today's challenges with courage and optimism. It is this optimism that encourages me, knowing that regardless of what challenges we face, Albertans are up to the task. Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta is well positioned to overcome these challenges and steer towards an even more vibrant and dynamic future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and a privilege to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. After listening to the eloquent and the compelling words of Her Majesty's representative, I'm certain I'm not alone in having left this Chamber with a renewed admiration and respect. As an immigrant from mainland China I will do everything I can to make this province, this country, a better place for all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege to serve the people of Edmonton-McClung for nearly two years. Time and again they continue to inspire and impress me with their dedication and accomplishments and love for this great province. In many ways the Speech from the Throne captures the spirit of my constituents. They understand that these are challenging economic times not only for the people of Alberta but for all the people of the world. They know that after several years of unprecedented growth our government must continue to build the infrastructure for the future growth of our economy. They know that we must continue to build our great social services such as health care and education so that they will continue to serve our future generations.

Under the dedicated leadership of our Premier I know we can face these challenges with pride. Thanks to the decisions that this government took before the recession began, Alberta is the best prepared province in Canada to emerge stronger than ever. Not only did this government eliminate more than \$23 billion in debt, but it has built up substantial savings of \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. Today this sustainability fund provides us with the financial cushion we need so that Alberta remains unique as the only debt-free jurisdiction in North America.

Mr. Speaker, while our government is fortunate enough to be able to draw on these savings, other jurisdictions in Canada continue to fall deeper into debt, with greater interest payments to maintain that debt. It is by no accident that Alberta finds itself in this fortunate position today. It was the bold leadership of our government with the experience of previous recessions that enacted the policies that now keep this province debt free. I commend this government's commitment to eliminate the deficit within three years so that we can start replenishing the sustainability fund for future economic downturns. With an economy that is already one of the strongest and the most competitive in North America, I know this is a goal we can achieve.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, today Albertans and Alberta businesses enjoy the lowest income taxes, and we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has no provincial sales tax. This government is keeping its commitment to eliminate health care premiums. With that said, I'm particularly proud of our Premier's pledge to Albertans: no new taxes. However, in a global economy that is becoming more competitive, we must do more, and we will.

The first piece of legislation that this Assembly will consider is the Alberta Competitiveness Act. As His Honour stated in the throne speech, it will send a powerful message of our resolve to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in the world. To this end, Mr. Speaker, we must continue to minimize the cost of doing business in Alberta. We must eliminate unnecessary regulations and barriers that restrict our economy from reaching its full potential.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of our government's leadership in building a western economic partnership with our two great neighbours, British Columbia and Saskatchewan. This

partnership will bring lasting benefits to all Albertans not only by building Canada's largest free trade and investment market but strengthening interprovincial collaboration on international marketing, innovation, and procurement. By working together, we will be able to better market our goods in the emerging markets. I also look forward to working with other provinces across our great nation in reducing trade barriers for an even more competitive Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta must also ensure that our energy industry remains the strongest, the most competitive in North America. After decades of development through hard work and sacrifice Alberta has the most secure and stable energy supply in North America. Ensuring that we continue to have an even more secure and stable supply of energy, which has to be developed in an environmentally responsible way, is vital to our future prosperity, and I'm proud to say that Alberta is on the right track, is leading the way. Initiatives such as the competitiveness review and many environmental initiatives are building an even more competitive 21st century energy industry that will benefit Albertans for generations.

Competitiveness also means having the most advanced, world-class infrastructure in North America. In my constituency, Mr. Speaker, we can see the positive results of this government's commitment to Albertans. The completion of the Anthony Henday ring road will provide an efficient transportation network for Edmontonians. Last year funding was approved for the construction of overpasses on Lessard Road and Callingwood Road, while planning continues for the proposed Cameron Heights overpass. Once completed, these overpasses will provide a safer and more convenient commute for my constituents and all Edmontonians. Eliminating these traffic lights will hopefully reduce the level of noise for my constituents who live alongside of the ring road.

Mr. Speaker, a competitive, next generation economy also means having the best education system in the world. Throughout Alberta new schools are being built for a new generation of students. Nearly \$1 billion of funding for the smaller class size initiative has been targeted at lowering or maintaining class size averages. Two of these new schools have been planned for my constituency, Edmonton-McClung. In the Hamptons area the K to 9 Sister Annata Brockman Catholic school will be completed this fall, and in the Grange area a K to 9 public school will be completed in 2011. I'm very pleased that His Honour's speech dedicated our government to develop a new vision for education that will successfully serve a new generation of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour's Speech from the Throne outlined the bold vision of this Premier for a truly next generation economy. Thanks to the hard work of Albertans and the leadership of this government we are well positioned to be the most competitive jurisdiction in North America in the years to come. While we face the greatest economic recession in over half a century, we will recover. Albertans are a courageous people. I'm proud of this government's plan to prevail from this economic recession and build an even stronger province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I'd like to join my colleagues who previously spoke in thanking His Honour for his dedication and public service to the people of Alberta these last many years.

Mr. Speaker, while His Honour's speech detailed the challenges we currently face as Albertans, I'm confident that this Premier and this government have the right plan to build a truly next generation economy. Thanks to the responsible and prudent financial fiscal leadership of this government we find ourselves in the strongest position of any government in North America. During years of unprecedented growth this government paid off nearly \$23 billion in debt, saved \$17 billion in the sustainability fund, and invested another \$8 billion in the heritage trust fund. This forward-thinking leadership continues to protect our key social services from the worst recession the global economy has seen in decades. Furthermore, with low taxes our province remains one of the most competitive jurisdictions to raise a family or conduct business in North America.

However, our greatest asset continues to be the hard-working, well-educated, and entrepreneurial people of this great province. With the right tools for success I know that there is nothing our people cannot accomplish together. One of these essential tools is a flexible, strong education system that all Albertans can depend on, regarded as one of the best in the world. A next generation economy demands a renewed long-term vision of education in our province.

Last year I was honoured to be asked by the Minister of Education to serve as co-chair for the Inspiring Education committee to conduct a dialogue with Albertans on the future of education in our province. The objectives of the committee were threefold: to heighten public appreciation of education in Alberta and the value of that education to a strong economy; secondly, to develop a clear understanding of what it will mean to be an educated Albertan in 2030 – in other words, what are the key outcomes that we want out of our education system? What's its purpose? What will it need to deliver in 20 years? – and thirdly, to help create a basis for a broad policy framework describing the overall direction, principles, and long-term goals for education in Alberta.

From April 2009 to June 2009 the Inspiring Education committee met with thousands of Albertans in Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Bonnyville, Red Deer, and beyond, right across this province. Others joined in online, and others met in smaller focus groups. Mr. Speaker, when the committee's report is released, I'm confident that it will help contribute to Alberta having the strongest plan in Canada for a 21st century education system, and Albertans can be proud that their input served as the foundation for this new vision for education in Alberta. After all, education is a lifelong journey that belongs to the students.

It's the same approach that the government is taking as we develop a 21st century vision for our publicly funded health care system. The Minister's Advisory Committee on Health recently proposed a new Alberta health act, the development of which would be guided by Albertans. At the same time, I'm very pleased that the government is providing stable, five-year funding to Alberta Health Services. These initiatives will ensure a health care system that is both patient focused and prepared to deal with growing cost pressures. This funding will help ensure that Alberta's seniors and my rural constituents can count on accessibility of health care and health care that meets their needs.

3:50

I'm also pleased that His Honour's speech outlined the government's plan to direct proceeds from the sale of Alberta capital bonds to seniors' accommodations, including continuing care and supportive living facilities. This government's renewed commitment to strengthening the social services that empower our citizens will be key to building a globally competitive economy in the 21st century.

As the Member for Athabasca-Redwater I was particularly pleased that His Honour's speech addressed a key economic driver of our province: our agriculture and agrifood industries. [some applause] Hear, hear. Through hard work, sacrifice, and ingenuity Alberta's agriculture producers have helped build our great province into a world-class producer of safe, high-quality food products. Today these producers face an increasingly globalized economy where competitiveness is crucial to long-term sustainability. Through initiatives such as the livestock and meat strategy we will continue to ensure that our producers are even more competitive to beat the competition from other countries and break into new emerging markets.

Another key driver of our next generation economy will be the continued responsible and sustainable development of our oil sands. As the Member for Athabasca-Redwater I have witnessed first-hand the tremendous economic prosperity they have brought to the province and the tremendous growth pressures. Today, more than 50 per cent of our GDP can be attributed to energy development, and Albertans are grateful for the natural resources our province has been blessed with. From our world-class social services to high-paying jobs energy development has been a primary contributor to our development as a province. As the rightful owners of these resources we must continue to ensure greater value-added development here in Alberta. This will mean Albertans receiving greater value for the resources they own, more jobs, more knowledge-based jobs, and a more competitive, stronger, more stable economy.

Part of this government's strategy to encourage value-added development is the collection of bitumen in kind rather than cash from energy companies involved in the oil sands development. Under current guidelines the government reserves the option to take bitumen in kind rather than cash, just as we do with our conventional oil. Essentially, the government could use this bitumen to stimulate value-added development here in Alberta or diversify our customer base. Mr. Speaker, I'm excited for the opportunities this program will have for the future development as a global energy producer and for my constituency, in particular. With the second-largest proven reserves of oil in the world the oil sands provide a safe and reliable source of energy for our fellow Canadians, the United States, and other emerging international partners.

To ensure the continued leadership of Alberta's economy, including the energy sector, our government is undertaking a competitiveness review to encourage additional investment. In an increasingly competitive global economy I'm pleased that this government is determined to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America to invest in and to do business in. Under the leadership of this Premier I know we will succeed. Albertans are by nature a forward-thinking, innovative people who do not settle for second-best, and they want a government with a positive vision that reflects their priorities and fulfills the potential of this great province.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the Speech from the Throne delivered that. It outlines the government's vision of a 21st century education system that provides Albertans with the tools to succeed. It outlines the government's commitment to a sustainable, publicly-funded health care system that future generations will be able to depend on. It outlines this government's plan to ensure that our economy is the most competitive in North America. In short, Mr. Speaker, this government is working hard to meet the priorities of Albertans.

Together we will face the changes of the 21st century with the same ingenuity and optimism that has characterized Albertans and my rural constituents for generations. I'm very proud to be a fourth-generation Albertan, and my children are the fifth generation of our family in this province.

I'd like to again thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his years of public service to our province and the impact that he has left with all of us. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today in response to the Speech from the Throne, delivered so eloquently by His Honour the Hon. Norman Kwong. I'd also like to thank His Honour for his dedication to Alberta and his commitment to preserving and enhancing the heritage, traditions, and character of our province as Lieutenant Governor over the past five years. I'm sure that His Honour would also like me to acknowledge that he is the first and only great Alberta football player to serve in this illustrious role.

The Speech from the Throne highlighted many of this government's priorities. In the conclusion of this inspirational speech I can honestly say on behalf of my constituents that we have reason to be very optimistic about our province's future.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has one of the most volatile revenue streams in North America, being heavily reliant on resource revenues. No one could foresee the depth of the global economic downturn that we're currently facing. Economic fluctuations of this magnitude are out of Alberta's control. This is, indeed, a world-wide phenomenon.

What we can control is how we prepare for these fluctuations. Our government had the foresight to recognize that booms do not last forever and that fiscal responsibility and savings are crucial to the future prosperity of our province. To that end, Mr. Speaker, this government socked away some \$17 billion in a one-of-its-kind sustainability fund, a fund that will allow Alberta, unlike any other jurisdiction in North America, to weather this economic storm without saddling our grandchildren with a debt burden. This foresight has allowed our government to uphold our ambitious capital plan, which is crucial to creating jobs in Alberta and providing the infrastructure that we need today and, indeed, for the future.

This is especially important because as the Lieutenant Governor stated in the throne speech, construction costs today are lower. In fact, Mr. Speaker, tenders for major projects are coming in significantly below cost estimates: more bang for our buck. Therefore, not only are we investing in vital infrastructure projects that Albertans need, but we are getting exceptional value for our investment in capital projects: schools, roads, hospitals, and much, much more. This government's capital plan supports an ever-changing Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our population and our economy have experienced tremendous growth in past years. At the height of the boom this province grew by the equivalent of a city the size of Red Deer per year, and we continue to grow by some 50,000 per year today. It is vital that our capital plan reflect the changing needs of Alberta. As an example, our continued economic and population growth have led to increased pressure to further develop our provincial highway network. Many of my constituents travel Alberta's highways on a daily basis, and I know they appreciate the government's continued efforts to foster the safe, efficient movement of people and goods throughout Alberta. I also know that through our government's preparation for this economic downturn we'll be able to continue to invest in our provincial highway network. I know that many of my constituents are very anxious to see the twinning of highway 19 between Nisku and the town of Devon. Investing in roads and highways is one of many infrastructure projects that our government has committed to.

As I mentioned earlier, we are a resource-based province, but our greatest resource is our people. As such, Mr. Speaker, services that touch people's lives each and every day are vital. The direction laid out in the throne speech puts a strong focus on health and education. I was pleased to hear the throne speech highlight that we will evolve our education system so that it will continue to enable every student to reach their full potential as a lifelong learner and citizen.

Mr. Speaker, with advances in technology traditional classroom teaching has become only one method for our students to learn. Interactive media and the Internet have become tools in our learning environment, something that was not even a dream 20 years ago. Our government has acknowledged this change, among others, which is why Inspiring Education was launched, and the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater referenced that in his speech earlier. This consultation was designed to advise the government of how Albertans see the future of basic education in our province. The throne speech highlighted that in response to this initiative, our government will launch a new vision for the basic education system in the coming months.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to hear that this government has employed such forward-thinking tactics and has and continues to anticipate change. By preparing for this change and beginning to adapt now, we will see our education system remain one of the best in the world and well suited to ensure the prosperity and success of each and every student.

To complete the support for Albertans becoming lifelong learners, this government has continued to demonstrate leadership in our postsecondary education system. Campus Alberta, which is our province's collective postsecondary system, has seen two of our province's exceptional college facilities become universities, of course, Mr. Speaker, those being Mount Royal in Calgary and Grant MacEwan right here in Edmonton. What that has done is grow our degree-granting capacity and overall profile.

Further, ApplyAlberta was recently launched, which integrates the application process to all 26 publicly funded postsecondary institutions in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this initiative will enhance participation of Albertans as well as students from other jurisdictions in our province's exceptional advanced education system. This comes in addition to our system's current accomplishments, which include the University of Alberta being ranked the fourth best university in Canada and a respectable 59th world-wide.

Mr. Speaker, as the Lieutenant Governor stated during the throne speech, our global economy is undergoing profound changes. Here in Alberta the same technology and knowledge that has allowed our province to prosper in the past will need to be updated in order to remain competitive. Under the leadership of our Premier I'm proud to say that our government has recognized the changes in the global economy and is taking measures to ensure that Alberta remains prosperous and competitive not only in a Canadian context but also in a global context.

There is no single facet of our province that can foster competitiveness in our domestic and international economy. Rather, a comprehensive approach is needed, bringing together industry and government in order to develop an integrated strategy to ensure that Alberta's industries will be able to adequately respond to the changes that they face. Mr. Speaker, Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is an example of the government's foresight and dedication to ensuring a healthy, thriving provincial economy. Essentially, Bill 1 will ensure that Alberta is ahead of the curve in responding to the changes in our global economy as they occur.

The Speech from the Throne allowed me the opportunity to reflect on the values of Albertans, especially those in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to hold the trust of my constituents as their representative. I serve at the pleasure of the people of Devon, Leduc county, the city of Leduc, the town of Beaumont, the villages of New Sarepta and Hay Lakes, and two divisions of Camrose county. I'm very proud that my constituency was recognized by *Alberta Venture* magazine as the best place to do business in Alberta in 2009, thanks to the work of the Leduc-Nisku EDA and the many great business leaders and volunteers.

I'm proud to live in a province and an area whose citizens have such a dedicated work ethic, who persevere through difficult times and flourish through good times, who have a sincere, devoted commitment to fostering continued growth in our economy and providing for their families, and who take pride in calling themselves Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be an Albertan, and with our hard-working citizens and the sound leadership of our Premier I'm very optimistic about our future.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always an honour to have the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the important initiatives my ministry is working on in response to the Speech from the Throne, delivered on February 4 by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to sincerely thank His Honour the Honourable Norman Kwong for his very distinguished service to the province of Alberta. His Honour is an inspirational champion who has shown that it is possible to achieve your dreams twice. So to His Honour I express my deepest gratitude and appreciation for his wisdom, his wit, and his dedication to the people of Alberta.

The government's decision to stay its course through the recent downturn in the economy has ensured that vulnerable Albertans will continue to receive the supports and services they need. My ministry focuses on programs that are vital to supporting seniors and persons with disabilities. I am proud that support for these groups continues to be a priority of this government. This priority is reflected in our comprehensive seniors' benefits package and programs for people with disabilities, both of which are among the best in the country.

For seniors we provide the highest monthly cash supplement, with the most generous income thresholds, through our Alberta seniors' benefit. This benefit provides \$280 per single senior and \$420 per month per senior couple. In fact, my ministry will provide over \$400 million in the 2010-11 fiscal year to seniors through income supplements and assistance with expenses for prescription drugs, long-term care, housing, dental work, and eyeglasses.

For people with disabilities, including developmental disabilities, we provide one of the most generous monthly income support benefits through the assured income for the severely handicapped program, more commonly known as AISH. AISH clients receive a financial benefit of up to \$1,188 per month as well as comprehensive health benefits for items and services like prescription drugs and dental and eye care, and they may also receive assistance to help pay for child care or special diets.

Like the rest of the country our population in Alberta is aging. Today there are approximately 391,000 seniors in our province. By

2016 that number will increase to more than half a million. We know this demographic shift will present a number of challenges and opportunities for all sectors of society, including governments, nonprofit and volunteer organizations, families, and individuals. We also know that the needs and circumstances of baby boomers will be different than those of our current seniors. As Alberta's population ages, we will need a holistic, aligned, co-ordinated, and sustainable approach to meeting the needs of an aging population.

In preparation for an aging population my ministry created the Demographic Planning Commission. The commission's role was to consult with Albertans and advise on meeting the needs of both current and future seniors. The commission asked Albertans what they believe future seniors will need and what they believe are the shared roles of families, individuals, communities, the private sector, and government in meeting these needs. Over 10,000 Albertans of all ages completed an online survey, and the commission met with over 100 stakeholder organizations across the province.

The three overriding messages we heard were, one, the need to ensure sustainability; two, the need for more choices; and three, the need to start planning now. This work along with input from other ministries and research is guiding the development of an aging population policy framework. This strategy provides seniors with more options that will allow them to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible while addressing changing health and housing needs. That's our continuing care strategy.

When thinking about care and housing options, many seniors have told us that they want to stay in their communities, with the people and in the places that make them feel most comfortable. This government's aim is to accelerate the growth and modernization of health and personal care services and to increase housing options across the continuing care system. A key part of the continuing care strategy is to build infrastructure that meets the aging in the right place vision.

I'm very pleased that part of the 2010-11 budget announcements included another \$50 million for the development of more than 500 new affordable supportive living spaces in communities across Alberta. This government has now invested approximately \$465 million for the development of approximately 9,000 new or up-graded affordable supportive living spaces since 1999.

4:10

I'm also proud that the new Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, which was taken through the House by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, supports my ministry's goal to improve the quality, supply, and client choice in the continuing care system. The new act, which is expected to be proclaimed in April, also recognizes and reflects the changing needs of Albertans who want to live as independently as possible while having access to the accommodations and services they need.

The act will ensure quality accommodation and services that enhance the safety and security of residents whether or not the facility is funded by government. It will also improve my ministry's ability to keep the standards current and will introduce features to meet the needs of an evolving supportive living sector. Under the new act there will continue to be a process for addressing complaints and concerns about accommodations and services as well as enhanced options that will allow my ministry to take the necessary steps, which may include closure if a facility operator consistently fails to meet standards.

Another important piece of legislation is the Protection for Persons in Care Act. This improved act will help ensure that safeguards are provided for adults receiving care and support services from government-funded agencies by improving abuse

prevention, monitoring, and follow-up when abuse has been reported. This improved act will make a real difference in this province by enhancing the protection of vulnerable adults and ensuring abuse complaints continue to be addressed effectively. The act will also make people who provide care to clients more accountable for their actions in preventing abuse and protecting clients from harm. I thank, once again, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for taking this act through the House.

I'm also very proud of the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, or AGTA, which came into effect on October 30, 2009. The AGTA strives to maintain the dignity and autonomy of Albertans and allows adults to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. I believe this legislation will improve the lives of many Albertans as it reflects a more current understanding of mental capacity and supported decision-making. The AGTA provides more decision support options through the capacity assessment continuum while providing protective safeguards for some of Alberta's most vulnerable citizens.

One more program area I would like to mention is our persons with developmental disabilities, or the PDD, program. Without question, the PDD program is a good program and very important to the over 9,200 adults with developmental disabilities who we support. These individuals are among the most vulnerable Albertans, and the PDD program is critical to their personal independence and inclusion in their community. Because it is such a vital program, we want to ensure it is sustainable into the future. That is why I was pleased that with the 2010-11 budget we were able to maintain funding for the PDD program.

However, at the same time, it's important to improve the PDD program and make it even better. Over the past year we have received a lot of input from stakeholders about ways to improve the PDD program. The PDD community boards consulted with over 200 people, and I met with individuals supported by the program, their families, and many community agencies who deliver PDD supports. From those consultations we developed six priority actions. The six priority actions lay out very clear directions and goals, and these are intended to achieve clarity, consistency, effectiveness and efficiency, and sustainability. These changes will ensure that each person receiving PDD supports will be assessed in a common way and that the funding and supports they receive will be consistent. To me this is a fair and balanced approach. These changes will also ensure the PDD program remains viable today and into the future.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, my ministry and I have been working very hard to bring forward initiatives and changes in legislation that better protect our most vulnerable adults while providing some of the best benefits and supports in the country. We remain committed to working with our community partners and agencies to fulfill my ministry's mandate to support vulnerable Albertans and enhance their quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for her speech, and I have a question to ask. She talked about, I think, 2,000 additional spaces – maybe that's not the right number, but she can correct me – in seniors' housing, and I'm assuming that these will be assisted living type of beds. I'd like to know, first of all, if any of those beds are being achieved by the conversion of beds that are currently medical beds, that are long-

term care beds specifically, and how seniors in assisted living in the new beds who have medical needs – require nursing care, for example, or require a lot of drugs, require assistance for bathing, perhaps, or toileting or going to meals – will be able to be accommodated in assisted living beds and how that will be made affordable for those seniors.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To correct the hon. member from across the way, I did say that this year, in our 2010-11 budget, we have \$50 million for the development of more than 500 new affordable supportive living spaces in our communities across Alberta. Then to further let him know what I said in my speech, this government has now invested approximately \$465 million for the development of approximately 9,000 – 9,000 – new or upgraded affordable supportive living spaces since 1999.

Mr. Speaker, to further address the question from the member, my department is responsible for supportive or assisted living care. The long-term care is still within the Alberta Health and Wellness department and within Alberta Health Services. I can speak to what I am responsible for, and I can tell you that the majority of the spaces that we provide through our supportive living are new. We have refurbished some of our lodge spaces.

I can tell you that we don't call them beds anymore because they're far more than just beds. If you've looked at any of our affordable supportive living facilities that we have in Alberta, they're beautiful accommodations with entire bachelor suite type of apartments with even small kitchenettes in some cases. So when we talk about affordable supportive living, we're talking about some beautiful accommodations for our seniors, not just beds anymore but complete units where our seniors will be very comfortable in a very beautiful, home-like setting with their friends and family and in their communities. That's what we're striving for, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate that. I have a wonderful vision now of these units. But the question really relates to people who require a level of care that would

normally be accommodated in a long-term care unit and whether or not any of these new assisted living beds are being achieved at the conversion of long-term care beds. I know that it crosses the boundary, but the minister should have an idea of how many units, lovely units, coming into her jurisdiction are coming at the expense of long-term care beds and how patients with needs like requiring assistance being toileted and taken for meals and bathing will be accommodated in an affordable way if there are not long-term care beds for them to go to. How will the assisted living beds, units, facilities be able to accommodate those people in a way that they and their families can afford?

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under my program in Seniors and Community Supports I am not aware of any long-term care beds or units that have been converted to assisted or supportive living. I believe that any long-term care bed that we have now in the province of Alberta has remained long-term care and has not been converted.

The health care needs of our seniors in assisted living – let's talk about level 4, designated assisted living – are managed by Health and Wellness.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the first legitimate opportunity to do so, having moved to adjourn debate, I now wish, as the Speaker afforded the opportunity legitimately to do so, to move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, February 22.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:22 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to February 18, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft., adjourned)

2 Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft., adjourned)

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft., adjourned)

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)

First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, February 22, 2010

Issue 9

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, February 22, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

On February 18, 2010, John Babcock died at the age of 109 years. He was a Canadian soldier and was Canada's last living link with the Great War, World War I. In our prayer today let us remember those Canadians who served and continue to serve our country. We give thanks to them and mourn the loss of those who have given their lives for us. Through Your grace grant them all glory, laud, and honour. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now participate in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, all. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of grade 6 students from Camilla school in Rivière Qui Barre in my constituency. They're just embarking upon their week at the Leg., and I can tell you they're very excited about doing that and very excited about the program that you and your group put on. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and they're accompanied by teacher Mrs. Amanda Murray and parent helpers Mr. David Soetaert, Mrs. Lori Reaville, Mr. Shawn Dolan, Mrs. Bianca Patterson, Mrs. Karen Streeter, Mrs. Monique Perrott, and Mr. Walter DeRudder. They're in the members' gallery, as I said. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 49 of the hardest working and brightest young people in my constituency from St. Benedict Catholic school. They're joined by Mrs. Lynne Holzman, Mrs. Tina Letki, Mrs. Kristie Brahim, and Mrs. Niki Hodgins.

We had a good chat outside, Mr. Speaker, about the different levels of government, about what we do here. These young people understood the laws that we pass, and we talked about what we're doing in spring session, defending the budget. Now they're going to see what we're doing here today. We have young people that

want to be doctors, teachers, a veterinarian. One young fellow wants to be in the army, a hockey player, but none of them said politicians. Hopefully, we can inspire these young people in my constituency to run for public service in the service of this wonderful province, as many of us have done here.

Mr. Speaker, they're all in the public gallery. I would ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of all of my friends in the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 27 guests that attended the Girl Guides of Canada 100th anniversary celebration earlier today in the rotunda.

Girl Guides of Canada has a rich tradition of leadership and community building in Alberta and Canada. When I joined Girl Guides of Canada 50 years ago, at the age of six, in the city where it all began a hundred years ago, St. Catharines, Ontario, I didn't realize that I was to be a member of the largest women's organization in the world, and I didn't know that I was about to have one of the greatest adventures of my life as a Brownie, a Girl Guide, a Sea Ranger, a leader, and a member of Trefoil Guild. On this day, February 22, we celebrate Thinking Day around the world, the birthdate of both Lord and Lady Baden-Powell.

Today's celebration in the rotunda is a testament to the contributions made by the Girl Guides over the last century. Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery – I would ask them to stand as I call their names – are Margaret Utgoff, provincial commissioner; Henny Smit-Nielsen, provincial international adviser; Lori Coghill, parkland area commissioner; Pat Guillemaud, provincial PR adviser; past provincial commissioners Lissi Westergaard and Kay Clement; the 2010 committee chair, Terri Funk; area commissioners Beverly Simpson Headon and Kathy Batty; Leslie Horton, provincial cookie adviser; Edie Jubenville, provincial program adviser; Sue Fortunka, provincial program adviser; and Enidd Isaac, chair, national international selections committee.

Seated in the members' gallery are the Guiders Marguerite Helps, Mary Gerritson, Margaret Campbell, Liz Barter, Alice Mah, Madelyn Underhay, Laura Balding, Susan Balding, Liz Cotton, Janeen Marko, Isabelle Marko, Annie Desautels, Coral Desautels, and staff members Fennie Fraser and Mary Chibuk. They're standing in our galleries. Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Assembly to give them the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: I asked the question: how many boxes of Girl Guide cookies per year in the province of Alberta? I was told there were over 250,000 at \$4, so that's over \$1 million for cookies. So let's enjoy our cookies and milk.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the winners of the ATCO Olympic contest from my constituency, their family members, and the director of government affairs for ATCO. Representing ATCO is a name that is very familiar to this Assembly. His name is Mr. Roger Mazankowski. I'd ask you to rise. I'll ask the winners of the contest to rise as I mention their names as well: Lexie Lynn, Enrique Schwanke, and Chanel Perri. I'd also ask their families to rise with them and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very large group of firefighters who are here today in support of Bill 201 and to witness its second reading this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I believe they're seated in both galleries. They represent locals from across this province and beyond. With us we have firefighters from local 4739 Leduc, local 3021 Spruce Grove, local 2494 Fort McMurray, local 237 Lethbridge, local 209 Edmonton, local 867 Winnipeg, local 263 Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie local 2770, local 1190 Red Deer, local 255 Calgary, and local 2461 Strathcona as well as the Alberta Firefighters Association. With them are two other very special guests, Sharon Harris and Braxton Harris. They are the widow and son of Edmonton fire captain Alexander "Rainbow" Harris, who passed away, sadly, from esophageal cancer on June 20, 2009. These are just a sample of the very, very brave men and women across our province who lay their lives on the line every day to keep us and our loved ones safe. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2010 Olympics in Vancouver is a very special time for our country. For those who are able to attend, it will bring memories to last a lifetime. I'm introducing to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Enrique Schwanke, who won a trip to the Vancouver Olympics, along with Mr. Jason Schwanke Sr., Mr. Jason Schwanke Jr., and Alma Sarmiento. My colleague for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview will be doing a member's statement to follow about this trip. I believe they are seated in the public gallery. I would ask these four individuals to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Dave Hodgins. Mr. Hodgins started as a volunteer firefighter many, many years ago and was vice-president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and is now president of Fire Prevention Canada. More importantly, Dave Hodgins is our manager, managing director of Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Mr. Hodgins is here to witness the introduction of Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010, that will be introduced later by our Member for Calgary-Montrose. I'd ask Mr. Hodgins to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then join with me in recognizing the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, who's celebrating an anniversary today of his arrival on Planet Earth. I don't know the exact date, but I think it's considerably more than that identified in a very transparent moment by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Members' Statements

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

Girl Guides of Canada Centennial

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to rise to mark the 100th anniversary of the Girl Guides of Canada.

This past weekend I was honoured to be a part of the celebration held in my constituency and to have the opportunity to learn and visit with Guides and Scouts, the parents, and volunteer leaders and to hear about the awesome job they are doing in my constituency.

The Girl Guides of Canada have a powerful and meaningful mission statement. They work to enable girls to be confident, resourceful, and courageous and to make a difference in the world. In a world where our young women face so many challenges and opportunities, it is important for organizations such as this one to be there to help guide them along the way. The leaders work with the girls and teach them to be honest and trustworthy, use resources wisely, respect themselves and others, recognize and use their talents and abilities, protect the environment, live with courage and strength, and share in the sisterhood of Guiding.

Over the last century hundreds of thousands of girls have been touched by the Girl Guides organization, including two of my daughters, Kristen and Jacqueline, and, as we heard, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. Girl Guides of Canada has engaged girls and women in fun activities that have built new friendships, allowed them to learn new skills, serve their community, and grow as young women. Perhaps most importantly, Girl Guides provides the tools and resources for the girls of today to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Guides would not be possible without the commitment of thousands of women who dedicate countless hours to this worthy organization. Annually on February 22, which is called Thinking Day, Girl Guides from across the world take time to remember and celebrate the birthday of their founders, Lord and Lady Baden-Powell.

I would like to welcome all the Girl Guides and their leaders who are here at the Legislature today to celebrate their hundredth anniversary and to thank the hon. Speaker for hosting the celebration in the rotunda earlier today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bissell Centre Centennial

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to the attention of this Assembly a very special occasion celebrated recently by an organization in our constituency, the hundredth anniversary of the Bissell Centre. The Bissell Centre is a nonprofit, charitable society that has been serving the community of Edmonton since 1910 with a formal vision statement of neighbour helping neighbour.

The centre started as a Methodist Church mission founded by William and Florence Pike. They worked from a storefront office at 96th Street and 103A Avenue, where the current police station now stands. Programs originally offered included a Sunday school, social groups, and a Ukrainian Sunday service to help Ukrainian immigrants settle into their new community. The mission later merged with the Presbyterian McQueen Institute, taking the name All People's Mission in 1925. When the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, All People's Mission began to focus its services to support people living on low and modest incomes. In 1935 the organization was christened the Bissell Institute after farm machinery baron Torrence Bissell donated \$25,000, allowing the centre to move into its new brick building on the northeast corner of 96th Street and 103A Avenue.

Throughout its history the Bissell Centre has been an inclusive force for social change; for example, helping Second World War Japanese-Canadians who had been stripped of their property or

advocating on behalf of First Nations people to protest laws preventing them from speaking their own languages.

The Bissell of today at 105 Avenue and 96th Street is a busy and ambitious operation, having expanded to the west and east centres downtown. The Bissell Centre has a powerful philosophy, that is one of hope for human potential and social justice. The Bissell Centre believes that every person has the right to have basic human needs satisfied and that each of us has a responsibility to care for one another.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you and the members of the Legislature to join me in celebrating the hundredth anniversary of this very important, vital institution.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

ATCO Celebrating Excellence Program

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and share a great program with you, the ATCO celebrating excellence program, that rewards young Albertans who have demonstrated leadership in their communities. Students in grade 4 through grade 12 from every corner of the province were invited to share stories about how they make a difference in their communities. Thousands responded. Of those thousands, 83 students were awarded laptops, that will assist them in their studies. The other 166, one boy and one girl from each constituency in Alberta, were selected for a once-in-a-lifetime experience this year.

With the support of the Alberta government these young leaders had the privilege of spending a day at the Olympic Games watching competition, a medal ceremony, and visiting Alberta House in the heart of downtown Vancouver. Because of the wonderful things that they do in their communities, these students were rewarded with a chance to witness the dedication and the determination of the world's best athletes. There is no doubt that they've come home inspired by the heroes of the Olympics, and we hope that this experience will encourage them to continue being involved in their communities and making a positive contribution to our great province.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join me in congratulating these young people and all of the students who shared their stories through this program. These young leaders are our future, and we are so thankful that they are committed to making Alberta an even better place to live.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before moving to question period, I just wish to advise that when I call Orders of the Day in approximately an hour or so from now, I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay to rise and ask for unanimous consent to make a procedural change in the Order Paper. If you look in the Order Paper, we have motions other than government motions 503 and 505. The member will be asking for a switch, that Motion 503 become 505, that Motion 505 become 503. Unanimous consent will have to be given in order to deal with that procedural matter.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Electoral Reform

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Justice minister said that the most important thing for Elections Alberta to

do was to ensure that Albertans have confidence in their electoral system. Well, Albertans do not have confidence in their electoral system. They want to remedy 2008's pitiful 41 per cent voter turnout. Isn't the minister concerned that the erosion of democracy in Alberta is happening, enough to commit to allowing postsecondary campuses to have polling stations for students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that democracy is eroding in Alberta. Everyone is entitled to their opinion; that's what democracy is all about. However, we will be, as I said last Thursday, introducing legislation in due course that will respond to recommendations that have been made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, a 41 per cent voting turnout is not a success in most people's books. That's a failing grade.

Of the 182 recommendations from the former Chief Electoral Officer one key recommendation was to increase accessibility of polls. I would be placing polling stations in high-traffic public locations. Will the minister do the same?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it's not my job to do that. It's the Chief Electoral Officer's job to do that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, that question has been raised in this House before, and I'd be happy either now or at some other point in the debate to expand on the impracticalities of that.

Dr. Swann: Practical or not, Mr. Speaker, last week the new Chief Electoral Officer said that it wasn't his job to get people out to vote. This seems quite consistent with this minister's approach to electoral reform. Was this by design or was this coincidence that you both said the same thing?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understood the question, but if the question was, "Did I intend to ensure that people could have sensible and fair access to vote?" then our response to the report will address that in a very full way and ensure that that happens.

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

Protection of Children in Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The \$27 million cut from child intervention services will without a doubt adversely affect the care of vulnerable children and youth. There will be fewer dollars for caseworkers, that are already overwhelmed by caseloads, caseworkers that supervise children and youth in very vulnerable situations, that provide safety and security when children need it most. To the Premier: how will the cuts to intervention services not lead to reduced monitoring in homes protecting children? How will it not produce that?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, children are a priority for this government, especially their safety, and those that are also in the care of government. The minister has laid out a very clear, articulate plan, and she'd be able to comment further on her plan.

Dr. Swann: Well, to the minister, then: how will the cuts not reduce services and monitoring in homes where children are most at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the cuts I can tell you, hon. member, I appreciate your concern, and I can understand that concern. I want you to know very clearly that with the change in this budget, the way the budget has been allocated, the restructuring of this budget will not affect front-line staff, critical workers, which you're concerned about. It will not affect accreditation of programs. In fact, the change in programs is because of efficiencies that have been created, and I can share that with you in another question.

Dr. Swann: That's really hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, when we've seen 75 per cent cuts in the last three years to in-home supervision. How can the minister justify these comments?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing I've learned, especially in this session, is that I need to look into the statistic that this member has brought forward. I don't know if it's accurate. Having said that, I can tell you that the efficiencies that have been created with child intervention very clearly have been with the movement of the youth that are in group homes, which on average per youth is \$14,000 per month, for more permanency in foster homes. We've created over 900 spaces with foster homes and kinship care over the last 18 months. Foster homes and kinship care are on average about \$1,500 a month, so there are savings and efficiencies in that area.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Cabinet Policy Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: why are appointments of Conservative MLAs to the Treasury Board and the Agenda and Priorities Committee done through an order in council, which is published, while appointments to the Conservative cabinet policy committees are not done through order in council but done through the Premier's office? Those appointments are done in secrecy.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, they can't be secret because everybody knows who sits on what committee, so I'm not quite sure where the member is going with it. We do have members that are appointed to what we call cabinet policy committees. They're there to talk about issues that come forward from Albertans, whether it be looking at regulations or laws that some constituents are asking us to put in place. They vet, discuss it, and bring it forward as a recommendation.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: what legislative authority is the Premier using to appoint and pay Conservative caucus members to the internal cabinet policy committees, which meet behind closed doors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the CPCs, the cabinet policy committees, were put together to discuss issues and policies that come forward and to bring those recommendations. Many of those recommendations lead to legislation, and that legislation ends up here in the House for full and open debate, as does every piece of legislation.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: is the Premier's exercise of this authority to appoint and pay cabinet policy committee members a violation of the Legislative Assembly Act, specifically section 37? Did you read that before you appointed those people?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I always trust you as the Speaker of this Assembly to make sure that nobody at all breaks any legislation with respect to this legislation.

The other thing is that I'm sure that across this way and in that party over there, even the party of three, they get paid for a whip, an assistant whip, and a House leader, and all of those things are paid for through the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The payment for whips, though, only applies to officially recognized parties, so in the case of the third party that wouldn't happen.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Bitumen Upgrading

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to create value-added jobs in the oil sands is caused in part by the raw bitumen flowing to the United States via the Alberta Clipper and Keystone pipelines, taking Alberta jobs with it. When I asked about this last week, the Energy minister said that no new jobs were being created in the United States because they had existing capacity in the refineries there to handle the upgrading. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Does the minister stand behind the statements he made during his estimates last week?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have in front of me what our discussion was last week, but what is important, what I was trying to get across to the member, is that there is significant excess capacity in the United States. To just assume somehow that when bitumen is going to the U.S. to be refined, there are new jobs being created is not necessarily correct. If in some way my comments didn't reflect that, I'll put it on record as being so now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Interesting. In budget estimates the minister said that Alberta bitumen could be piped to existing American refineries and that new ones were not being built to handle the flow. The truth is that at least 10 American upgraders are being built or expanded to handle Alberta bitumen. They're investing more than \$37 billion to increase capacity by more than a million barrels per day and creating more than 23,000 full-time jobs in the process. Why is the minister shipping Alberta jobs south instead of finding ways to give those 23,000 jobs back to unemployed Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what I did say to the member during estimates last week is that this is a market decision. If there is an economic business case to be made, the private sector will build upgraders and create jobs wherever they feel is the best return on investment. The reality today is that with the price of bitumen there is not a great incentive to build, but that could change as time moves on.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's not a market decision; it's a government policy. Unemployed tradespeople in Alberta need to look no further for where their jobs have gone than this government sitting over there. There are at least 10 different upgrader projects in Michigan, Illinois, Oklahoma, Indiana, Louisiana, Texas, and Ohio. Alberta's unemployment rate is more than 6 per cent, and we've lost 35,000 full-time jobs in the last year alone. Why won't the Energy minister stop sending our jobs and our bitumen to the United States and create real, permanent jobs here in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what this member has to remember is that the refining and upgrading that goes on in the United States is to serve a huge market. It takes supplies from all over the world wherever they can get it, including Canadian bitumen. I would just like to reiterate that it's this particular government, our policies that have created the jobs in the oil sands, not the policies of those two sitting there, who want to shut down the oil sands.

The Speaker: Hon. members, ordinarily on day 4 of the rotation, and this being day 4, the fifth question will go to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. The hon. member has decided to switch his place today with another hon. member, and that's the reason why I'm now recognizing the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Provincial Budget Caucus Approval

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to me leaving the PC Party in January, the government caucus met to approve the basic parameters of the budget. One of the things agreed to almost unanimously was to limit the increase in overall spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth, or 3.5 per cent, but Budget 2010 calls for a 6 per cent increase in spending, or about 4.3 per cent if you don't include the superboard debt payment. In any event it certainly was not what was originally approved by caucus. To the Premier: as your caucus did not meet again until late January, did your caucus approve the spending increase prior to the budget being printed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget was presented by the minister. It included a one-time payment of all of the deficit that was incurred by Alberta Health Services. It also included a five-year increased funding commitment for the Alberta Health Services Board to ensure that we provide the best health services possible in the country of Canada. All of those will be publicly funded, obviously. Now it's giving the whole health system continued support, and they are better able to plan for the future.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, that was not my question. When I left the government in January, caucus had agreed to limit this year's spending increase to inflation plus population growth. That decision was altered. What I want to know is whether Albertans' elected representatives had any say in this change, so I'll repeat the question to the Premier. Did your caucus approve the spending increase above inflation plus population growth prior to the budget being printed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing the member should realize is that on the government side this caucus had a full discussion of all of the issues that are facing the Minister of Finance and Enterprise in terms of finding a budget that meets the needs of Albertans. There were revisions made to the budget, and one of them was, of

course, increased funding for health because if we are going to make health a priority, as Albertans expect us to do. That's exactly what we did. We put it in place, and that budget is before this House for debate.

The other issue is about caucus or no caucus. It's not a policy issue. In question period we talk about how policy is formulated and why we took a particular stand on policy, not when or what happened in a caucus.

Mr. Anderson: Well, this is an issue about democracy, Mr. Speaker, and goes to the very heart of what we do in this House.

Just to confirm, caucus agreed to keep spending increases under the rate of inflation plus population growth. The government raised spending above that level prior to the budget being printed and then asked caucus to affirm that decision the day before or the week before the budget was presented. Is that what happened, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if I could just take that question and try and move it into a policy area but not talk about caucus deliberations, what that party wants to do is to limit spending to population and inflation, which is very good, very laudable, but in this particular instance we had to deal with the incurred deficit of Alberta Health Services.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that I don't ever hear coming from any of the other parties when it comes to inflation and population increase spending: what happens if we have the same population, but the age of our population increases? When we get older, we demand more health services. That means he's saying that he's not going to cover it from what I gather from his deliberations.

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

Municipal Election Campaign Financing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government didn't think through the effect that new legislation would have on municipal election campaigns. According to the new rules, municipalities are going to hold onto funds for the candidates, but with campaign money not being released to the candidates until just four weeks to go before voters go to the polls, there will be no way to pay for most aspects of a municipal election campaign. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how is a candidate supposed to pay for signs, billboards, brochures, and even rent a campaign office without the money to pay for them?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, just as a reminder to the members of the House Bill 203, which was a private member's bill, was passed in this Legislature. We are now working to ensure that when it does take effect, it is workable, it is practical, and it aligns with the legislation that we presently have. We will be bringing forward amendments to that effect.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, that should work well. We're bringing forward government amendments to a private member's bill that the government has proclaimed without consulting with the AUMA and the AAMD and C. Why didn't you consult with them before proclaiming this legislation?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, again, not to defend the rights of a private member's bill, but there was a fair amount of consultation that did occur. My understanding is that there were contacts made

with the AUMA, their executive, and representatives from AUMA as well as AAMD and C, so there was ongoing dialogue that way. As well, there were a number of letters and correspondence that were received from numerous elected officials from across the province as Bill 203 was developed.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that consultation with members of the AUMA and AAMD and C that the minister talks about, whether, you know, as members of those organizations or individual mayors, city councillors, town councillors, and so on and so forth, actually happened before the proclamation of this legislation – and the minister has already admitted that it needs to be amended, and it will be amended – why did they go ahead and proclaim the legislation? Why not just hold off on it till you've got it right?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, what we heard from people across the province is that, you know, generally Albertans believe in accountability, they believe in transparency, and they believe that our local governments are extremely important in providing the services to Albertans. We are attempting to level the playing field so that all municipal candidates across the province are governed by the same rules. Now, we are hearing from Albertans who are asking us to move forward with these particular initiatives, and I would dare say that the vast majority of people who talk about it want to see limits placed on such things as election spending.

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

Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the current economic situation some Albertans are worried about the status of our government's savings. Albertans are seeing their savings dwindle during this recession, and it seems there is no plan. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: to what extent has the global recession diminished our savings in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund during the fiscal year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Hays is very justified in his concerns about the heritage savings trust fund. It's one of the centrepieces of our party, put in place by the founder of our modern party, Premier Peter Lougheed. Did we lose money last year because of what happened in the markets? Yes. But the good news, if you look at the third-quarter report that was tabled the same day as the budget, is that this year we're projecting a \$2 billion increase – a \$2 billion increase – in the value of the heritage savings trust fund.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. The Canadian dollar is gaining in value. Is this having any impact on our investment strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The change in the currency value for the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar has both positive and negative effects. The negative effects are that a lot of the heritage trust fund is invested in U.S. securities, so if the U.S.

dollar gets weaker vis-à-vis the Canadian dollar, that decreases our value there; also, most of our exported oil and gas is purchased in U.S. dollars, so again when the Canadian dollar goes up, those U.S. dollars are worth less to us when they come in.

That's the bad news. The good news is that the rising value of the Canadian dollar signals the rest of the world's confidence in the Canadian economy and the Canadian financial system. This country is better situated than other countries to recover from the recession, and Alberta is the best situated of all the provinces.

2:10

Mr. Johnston: My final supplemental to the same minister: are there any plans to inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund this fiscal year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inflation-proofing of the trust fund is done as a matter of course under normal times. Last year because the fund lost value, there was no inflation-proofing. This year because there is no inflation projected, there is no inflation-proofing. But for budget 2010-11 \$300 million is allocated for inflation-proofing and to protect the value of that money.

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

Edmonton Remand Centre

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the deplorable state of Edmonton's Remand Centre was highlighted in the legal decision *Trang versus Alberta, Edmonton Remand Centre*. Clearly the commentary contained in this legal decision is a black mark on justice in Alberta. To the Solicitor General. This Queen's Bench decision noted the inhumane conditions in Edmonton's Remand Centre amounted to Charter of Rights and Freedoms violations. Accordingly, what is the Sol Gen doing to rectify these ongoing and persistent violations at the facility?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the decision is not a black mark on justice in Alberta. It's certainly a cause for concern in the operation of our corrections facility, namely the Edmonton Remand Centre, but it is not a black mark on justice in Alberta. I don't accept that preamble at all.

Mr. Hehr: Black mark, cause for concern: tomayto, tomahto.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta court noted that a major problem in Edmonton's Remand Centre was overcrowding, overcrowding that still exists today. Given that the new remand centre is not to be finished until 2012, what interim measures are being introduced to address these issues?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the decision in question is still, in fact, before the courts, and Alberta at this point has not decided whether or not to appeal the decision. However, I can tell the member that we have taken steps to resolve most of the issues in the judgment, and we'll continue to work on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite what the Solicitor General says, we all know here that there are 800 inmates in the Edmonton Remand Centre at night. Really, that place is supposed to hold 500. What is he doing besides telling the House

one thing when another situation exists? What is he really doing to rectify this ongoing Charter violation?

Mr. Oberle: I am and my department is working on resolving the issues within the Edmonton Remand Centre, and we're quite busy constructing a new one if the hon. member would care to go for a little drive, Mr. Speaker.

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

Carbon Capture and Storage

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has been criticized for spending \$2 billion on carbon capture and storage when we're using the sustainability fund to balance the budget. My question to the Minister of Energy: why can't we eliminate the plan and save some money?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think we need to look at this as an investment and not an expenditure. It's an investment because not only does it help us meet our environmental challenges, but it will be an important element in extracting oil in the future but, most importantly, I would say long term the opportunity to sell the technology globally. One thing that I think we have to make clear is that unlike some parties who believe that this \$2 billion investment over the next 15 years is not good for Alberta, we happen to believe it is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question for the same minister. Some people say that CCS is an unproven technology that never has been used effectively. Are we spending money on something that may not work?

Mr. Liepert: Well, in fact, it has proven to work in smaller scale projects throughout the province over the last 20 years. But, you know, there is a major project that has been under way in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, for a number of years – I think it's some 10 years now – where they've injected successfully some 13 million tonnes of CO₂. Again, it's just part of our diversification initiatives, and it will be a success.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Energy. Despite everything that we're doing, a lot of environmental group and political opponents continue to criticize this province for contributing to global warming through the oil sands. Are we a major obstacle to reducing greenhouse gases?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, it's important to get the truth out, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands really, I think, produce about one-tenth of 1 per cent of all the global greenhouse gases. You know, as an example, the oil sands are responsible for about 5 per cent of Canada's overall greenhouse gases whereas the transportation sector is about 25 per cent. So my guess is that on any given day there's more greenhouse gas from the tailpipes of vehicles on the streets of Montreal and Toronto than there is out of the oil sands.

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

Energy Efficiency Rebate Program

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, meeting climate change goals is more than carbon capture and storage. It must include energy efficiency measures. The province is partnering with the feds through EcoEnergy to offer rebates to home and condo owners on boilers, hot water, and insulation, but the feds will also cover windows. Given that the purpose of rebates is to incent people to make improvement they wouldn't otherwise make and that windows are responsible for up to 50 per cent loss of energy efficiency, not including them is a big error. To the Minister of Environment: has the government moved any closer to funding window replacement as part of the energy efficiency rebate program?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the consumer rebate program has been up and in operation for some time now. Unfortunately, it does not include windows. I can't advise the member of anything different than that. It's a matter of getting the maximum amount of efficiency out of a limited amount of dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Although they meet the under-three-storeys requirement, most three-floor walk-ups are not eligible because they're rental units. Why doesn't the government include these under the rebate program?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue around rental units is a good one. I, frankly, would welcome some feedback and some suggestions from the opposition on how we might deal with that because in most rental units it is up to the tenant to pay for the cost of utilities. There's really no incentive even if there is a consumer rebate in the hands of the owner of the building. So it's necessary to try to point the rebate to the person who has the responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister is exactly right. The individual renter has to pay the utilities but has no control over the energy efficiency of the building. That goes to the apartment owner, and they have no incentive to do anything because they're not paying the utilities. My recommendation to the minister: will he consider creating a special category for these kinds of rental buildings?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to create a special category, but as I just enunciated and the member confirmed, a category is not what's needed. What is needed here is being able to target the funds to the individuals that have control over making the decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Health System Utilization Review

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health has talked about a cost-benefit review of public versus private facilities doing certain medical procedures. We can have a debate about this in the House, but if the review is done properly, then the numbers won't lie. My question is to the Minister of Health. When did the cost-benefit review begin? Was it after he came to this portfolio, or was it started by the previous health minister? When will it be completed?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge costings have been done off and on throughout the time that the former minister was there and the former minister before the former minister. It's just ongoing. What I specifically asked for was to add the word "benefit" to the word "cost" so that we would know not only the cost, but we'd also know more about the benefits. Some of that might have to do with convenience or distance or wait times. There are a number of other things to be considered in answering that question.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the government is now talking about activity-based funding. It's nice to see that after five years of our party promoting activity-based funding, someone on the government side has finally come around to the Wildrose way of thinking. Proper utilization is also important, and that is a priority this government has missed. We need to know the capacity of our operating rooms and diagnostic equipment in order to address the wait times. Will the minister launch a full system utilization review?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're constantly reviewing things. We're constantly making improvements. As for whose idea it was, it matters not to me whose idea it was. If it was theirs, good for them. If it was ours, which I suspect it might well have been, then good for us. The point is: if it's a good idea, we'll do it.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, he missed the question. That was the preamble.

We need a full system utilization review to know if, in fact, our facilities are being utilized properly. We also need a labour review to see if we have the labour to utilize those facilities. Will the minister launch a full system utilization review to know if we're using our equipment to the best?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I said that we do reviews all the time, so I thought I'd sort of addressed that. But we're going to be doing more. For example, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is about to engage in a province-wide blueprint for action, that will be determined by the end of September, that will culminate in the Alberta health care act. That's the type of consultation, input, and ongoing engagement Albertans want, and that's what they're going to get. There'll be more of that going on in the future. There's some good, effective evidence to show that evidence-based decision-making works, and that's what we're pursuing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Environmental Regulations

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have always been very, very protective of their environment, the pristine environment that we have in the province, and that's why the Lougheed administration put in place the first environment department in Canada. It's also why in the Getty administration, as they were going through the whole exercise, the minister of environmental protection, the Hon. Ralph Klein, introduced and passed the most comprehensive environmental legislation in the country, that being, of course, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Now, of course, we're still under attack from outside the province. To the minister of environmental protection: do you see any connection between the volume of regulations and the protection and enhancement of the environment?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there certainly is a relationship between the number of regulations and the protection of the environment, but sometimes, frankly, the regulations can get in the way of protecting the environment. That's why we're committed to streamlining the process. But let me be very, very clear. Streamlining the process has absolutely nothing to do with reducing our very strict standards. We will hold industry accountable, and we'll do so under a streamlined process.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to hear that, but I'm curious why it is that we continue to add regulations if, in fact, there's another way of doing it. I would encourage the minister to give us examples where, in fact, we can do it in a different manner.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think there are a couple of examples that I'd like to give if I have time. First of all, on the innovative side. Right now if a company wants to use waste heat to produce electricity, the regulations that we have require them to have a separate approval for each facility along the line. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense. The other is to reduce a number of redundancies where we have duplicate processes in place. Once is enough.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really curious how you're going to incorporate the new technologies into helping to reduce the number of regulations.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess as the Minister of Environment challenge is something that we welcome with open arms, and this will be yet another one. I'm not for a moment suggesting that it will be easy. I'm not for a moment suggesting that it's not complex. What I am suggesting is that it's absolutely critical that we do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Assessing Supports for PDD Clients

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this year's budget debate for Seniors and Community Supports the minister stated that over the next three years all of the 9,200 people supported by Persons with Developmental Disabilities will be reassessed using the supports intensity scale, SIS, to determine how much support they receive. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: what will be the total cost of performing the reassessment of PDD individuals, and will this be coming from the department's budget or from the PDD community boards' budget?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the cost of implementing the SIS supports assessment tool is very minimal. We did have to hire four people, but they're hired temporarily to help us get through the next few years in the assessment process. The cost of the assessment will come from the PDD budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister explain where the supports intensity scale came from and what the cost is of purchasing it and using it?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the cost for the SIS supports – the software that we have and the computer, the training, all of that – is very minimal. We did purchase it; I'm not sure what the name of the company is. The reason we purchased the SIS assessment tool is because it's a very well-researched program. It's used in 23 different states, and it's used in two other provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I guess my point on that question was that I believe it's American.

Will the minister inform the House how the level of PDD supports was determined before SIS and whether there's an evaluation process to track the difference between the new SIS and the previous method?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once a person is determined to be eligible for PDD, there is an assessment process. We have six different regional community boards, and the evaluations they use have evolved throughout the years. They're not necessarily the same, and they're not necessarily consistent. We felt that it was very important that each individual in Alberta is assessed in a very consistent way, so we have a process now where somebody in Grande Prairie or a person with similar disabilities in Lethbridge can be assessed equally and fairly through the same system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

School Class Sizes and Utilization

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After doing a little bit of research, it came to my attention that from 2004 until 2009 there was an increase of 3,300 teachers in Alberta's school system, but there was only an increase of 12,000 students. That represents a 10.5 per cent increase in the number of teachers, but the student population only went up by 1.4 per cent. To the Minister of Education: what would drive such a huge increase in the teacher population relative to a small growth in the student population?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a very clear answer to that, the class size initiative. We've hired almost 3,000 teachers in order to meet the class size policy that was put in place after the ACOL report, Alberta's Commission on Learning. Almost all of those teachers that you're talking about are in response to meeting the class size initiative.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cities like Las Vegas have realized that an exceptional growth in their student population warranted more schools, but they also realized that they did not have the budget to build or maintain those needed schools. To better utilize taxpayers' dollars, they've opted to educate students in shifts and run year-round schooling to better utilize the space they have. Our school buildings, new or old, sit empty for a third of the year and half the afternoon and evening. To the minister: have you considered adopting some of those well-developed methods to better utilize the school space that we currently have so that Education dollars go to educating students rather than to buildings and maintenance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there are a number of situations around the province where school boards have put in place programs either to do year-round schooling or to extend the school day, in some cases even considering whether double-shifting might be possible, to use the school on two different school days within one date, so to speak. Of course, there are always the issues of change management, which have to be dealt with. We've become used to the concept that we go to school for certain months of the year and for certain times of the day, but that really, clearly, has to change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We spend a lot of money building, running, and maintaining school buildings. I think the minister has picked up from my previous question that I have concerns about how we focus our expectations and performance requirements usually on the building rather than on outcomes. To the Minister of Education: do you have plans in place to help with that change management that will refocus our attention to the fact that our province's future rests on well-educated children, not on whether a community or neighbourhood has an attractive building to stand in?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm firmly of the opinion that public buildings should be attractive and should be the hub of the community and should be a place that we can be proud of.

The hon. member is absolutely right. As we go through the Inspiring Education process, talking about what kind of education we need to be successful in the future, we also have to look at our physical platforms and say: are the schools that we have performing the function that we need? There would have to be a lot of review on what an education facility looks like while recognizing that we have those facilities; they're important to communities in terms of libraries, gymnasiums, and the other things that are essential.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:30

Northland School Division

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government disbanded the board of trustees of the Northland school division last month. Since then Albertans have been learning more and more about the social and economic challenges facing residents of Northland. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Given that the challenges facing Northland were beyond the capacity of the trustees alone to address, would you please describe the efforts your ministry has made to involve other ministries such as children's, Aboriginal Relations, and employment to support the work of the board of trustees, and will the minister table evidence of this previous . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with Health and Wellness, with Children's Services, with Aboriginal Relations, and with other ministries to make sure that we don't operate in a silo whether it's in the Northland school division or any other school division in the province. The absolute ability for us to co-operate in

the interest of children is one of our primary purposes. The first phone calls I made after the changes to cabinet were to the Minister of Health and Wellness and to the Minister of Children's Services, talking about the need for us to continue our collaborative processes supporting children in the education process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Part of the question that you may have missed was the tabling of those initiatives prior to the disbanding of the Northland school board.

Given that the previous efforts of the trustees and the government did not succeed in producing acceptable academic results in Northland, what new resources and supports is the government placing at the disposal of the official trustee appointed last month?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think it's very prudent not to give people answers while you're still asking the questions. We have a review team in place that's visiting each and every one of the communities involved in Northland, talking with the families in the communities, talking with the educators in those communities, working with the official trustee. Rushing in with a dump truck load of programs before we've asked all the questions and analyzed what we can best do to create the community engagement, the community value for education that's so necessary to succeed I think would be imprudent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This problem has existed for over 20 years. The government took very dramatic action, blaming the trustees. It would be nice to know what some of the remedies are.

Finally, when the inquiries committee's six-month deadline is up, will the minister release the report to the public immediately along with a timeline for acting on the committee's recommendations?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I take offence to the idea that anybody blamed the trustees. I was very clear that I wasn't blaming trustees. What we were looking for was another way to deal with a very, very important issue so that the children could be put first and we could find a way to move forward with results for the children. The trustees that were involved are still in place, as a matter of fact, as chairmen of their local councils, to which they're elected. We still hope that they will participate in this process. It's not about the trustees; it's about the children. We'll focus on that and make sure that we get it right.

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

Payday Loans

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Payday loan companies seem to be growing rapidly in our province. In this challenging economy many Albertans are struggling to make ends meet and might turn to these high-cost lenders to help pay the bills. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. What are you doing to protect people who borrow from payday lenders?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year I introduced the payday loans regulation that established strong, clear rules for

the lenders. One of the measures is that it caps \$23 per \$100 for the amount of money borrowed. The federal government had to approve the maximum amount before it became effective. We recently received that approval, and effective March 1 that's the cap that will be in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Capping the cost of loans is certainly a good step, but what are you doing to help Albertans to stay out of this vicious cycle of borrowing at such a high cost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cap is, indeed, only one part of it. The other areas that are excluded are that there are no longer rollovers and discounting. That is when the lender withholds part of the loan, and often consumers receive less than they thought they were getting. It's about giving the consumers the right information to make better choices.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: how is the minister making sure Albertans know their rights when they borrow from payday lenders?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the best ways to protect consumers is to ensure that they know their rights when they do go into a payday loan business. One of things that will happen on March 1 is that all of this rate will have to be posted on the walls or on the windows. As well, we have a tipsheet. We also have what's called a payday loan calculator, so a consumer can go on the Service Alberta website and actually see what they're getting into when they do need to take one of these loans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Postsecondary Education Ancillary Fees

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's university students are currently charged an average of almost \$1,000 a year in unregulated extra student fees, the highest of such fees in the country. Students and families can't budget for education when schools are allowed to increase fees in this arbitrary and excessive way. To the minister of advanced education: why won't the minister follow the leads of provinces like Manitoba and Ontario and start regulating these auxiliary fees?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed we are working with our student associations to ensure that we have an affordability framework for postsecondary education for all students and all institutions. I'm aware of a couple of institutions in the province right now that are floating proposals of ancillary fees. We're continuing to monitor that, and we'll report back.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we need more than monitoring. As the minister mentions, the University of Calgary is now considering plans to copy the U of A's move to raise unregulated student fees by

another \$500. Add that to tuition, and postsecondary education in this province is right back to being the most expensive in Canada. Why won't the minister of advanced education regulate these school fees, respect the tuition cap, and stop creating barriers to education?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are respecting the tuition cap. I've said in this House that the cap is near about 1.5 per cent this year. We're respecting that cap. She also mentioned in her preamble that these are considerations and proposals. It's hypothetical at this point.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on one hand universities are looking at what is, in effect, a 10 per cent tuition increase. At the same time they're asking for huge, expensive exceptions to the tuition cap in certain programs. This will mean that fewer Albertan kids can afford education. Why won't government start focusing on access by saying no to both these increases and adequately funding institutions so they stop going after students for the money they need?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, the students and the taxpayers in society are the clients of these institutions. Obviously, we're going to make sure that we keep them focused on what they need to do, and that's affordability, that's access, and that's quality. All of the things that the hon. member has mentioned are proposals at this point in time. We'll see what happens when they come forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Registered Nursing Graduates

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nurses in this province are a critical part of our health care system. If I'm in the hospital, I want an RN to assess me properly, identify what my nursing care needs are, get me healthy, and get me home. Nurses who are currently in school are coming to me with their concerns over having a job in Alberta when they graduate. My question is to the minister of health. How many nurses are graduating this spring, and what percentage will have a job here in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I expect several hundred are probably graduating. I don't have the exact number, but I'm sure we can find it for her. On average I think about 70 per cent, that I last heard, of our Alberta graduating nurses were finding employment with Alberta Health and Wellness or with Alberta Health Services or some related function that we're responsible for. There are other jobs for nurses such as in private facilities and such as in laboratories and so on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In August of 2009 Alberta Health Services hired only 40 per cent of the registered nurses who graduated that month. British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have benefited from Alberta nurses leaving Alberta to find work. My question is to the same minister. What is this minister doing to ensure that nurses who are graduating can find work here in our province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm in fact meeting with the United Nurses of Alberta. I've met with them already once, maybe twice, and we're meeting again on Wednesday to address this very

issue. I've also met with the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, CARNA, and addressed the same issue with them. I've met with the health sciences folks, who look after the training aspects to a large degree, or at least the program development. I'm doing everything I can to speak and meet with nurses and find out what some of their ideas and solutions are as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the announcement last week to address wait times in surgery and the shortage of home care, can the minister of health tell us if a long-term health plan will also include more home care for patients when they leave the hospital?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I believe that is the plan, Mr. Speaker. Home care is a critical part of the way that we help deliver services and extended services and follow-up services to Albertans in need. Without home care a lot of our folks would not be back at their jobs as fast as they would be, they wouldn't be back on their two feet, as the expression goes, as quickly as we would like them to be, and a lot of general improvements otherwise would not be occurring. But we are confident that they are now, and I'm quite sure that home services will be increased in the next tranche.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:40 Property Assessment Appeals Training

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs with respect to the new property assessment complaints system that the province has adopted and that went into effect at the beginning of this year. Can the minister explain why appeal board members and assessment review board clerks need enhanced mandatory training?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of January 1 there is only one level of assessment appeal with three separate boards to hear different types of property assessment complaints. We have implemented a mandatory training component to ensure that those hearings are accountable, that they are done in an effective, efficient, and timely manner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the same minister. Who is responsible for the cost of this enhanced training for these appeal board members?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government is covering the cost of training materials, the instructors, and meals during the training sessions, but the municipalities are responsible for the incidental travel costs that are involved. I want to be clear that training to ensure competent education is very essential, and that's because a lot of those decisions could eventually be appealed to the Court of Queen's Bench.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister, has to do with the locations of these training sessions. Are these training sessions held in each municipality across the province?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, presently these sessions are being held or have been held in five central locations across the province, and that's in Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, and Grande Prairie. Now, we've had several hundred people trained in 41 different sessions, and we are trying to minimize the cost to municipalities and are prepared to look at maybe other municipalities or other locations for training.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 19 different members were recognized today. That was 114 questions and responses. Of the 19 members 13 came from the various opposition parties and six from private government members.

We will continue with the Routine and members' statements in 30 seconds from now.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

National Flag of Canada Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A symbol of Canada that is known around the world is our flag. The Maple Leaf flag officially became Canada's flag on February 15, 1965, during Hon. Lester B. Pearson's time as a Canadian Prime Minister.

Our government thought that Canada needed a flag that was different from the Red Ensign. The Red Ensign had flown throughout our country for many years and showed our ties to Britain. There were many different designs that people wanted for the flag before the present flag was chosen. On December 15, 1964, a motion to adopt a national flag for Canada passed the House of Commons. The Senate of Canada approved the motion on December 17, 1964.

Mr. Speaker, since I moved to Canada in 1979, the Canadian flag has been a very important part of my life. I have placed the Canadian flag in both my house here in Edmonton and my native home in Punjab, India. I am so proud as a Canadian when I see the flag each and every morning. When I see the flag, I remember the troops who have fought for our country for freedom in the past and those who are still fighting today. I urge all Canadians to place the flag in their homes and businesses to show their pride in this great country of ours. Canada has been a great home for me and my family and will continue to be a great home for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Culturally Diverse Health Services

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second national transcultural conference, Multiple Voices for Enhancing Health Equity through Research, Policy, Education, and Clinical Practice, to be held in Calgary in the spring of 2010, is hosted by the child and women's health diversity program in collaboration with a number of stakeholders in Calgary and southern Alberta. Some people may question why such a conference is needed. Well, according to the organizers, while many parts of our country, including Alberta, are working to create more effective multicultural or inclusive health

policies and practices, gaps in services exist. There is a need to share experiences when working with others to begin to identify national standards in the field.

The upcoming national transcultural conference has the following four objectives: examining current and emerging practices and strategies that are used to make health care institutions culturally viable; assessing the essential role of evidence-based research in the development of future transcultural diversity practices and policies; developing cultural competency, knowledge, and skills in health service delivery to reduce inequity in health care; and bringing together policy-makers, health care professionals, administrators, educators, and community representatives from across Canada to discuss cultural competency in a broader spectrum collectively.

Organizers believe that improving culturally and linguistically appropriate services will ensure that children and their families will access services at a level closer to their Canadian-born counterparts. One of the benefits of this change is improved health prevention, which will help to reduce the long-term burden on the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, a culturally competent system is one that possesses a set of behaviours, attitudes, policies, and procedures that enable an institution to effectively work with and serve a diverse community. These knowledge and skills are transferable to address issues of age, gender, ability, class, and other issues of diversity. Developing cultural competency will benefit our institution's overall capacity to serve our changing demographics in measurable ways in the years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the crown jewels in Calgary-Lougheed is Fish Creek provincial park. Like so many others from our constituency and around the world, I'm always spellbound by the beauty of the great outdoors. But during a recent visit I was also mesmerized by the great indoors at the newly, extensively renovated Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre. It all adds up to a greener centre for all Albertans, which is even more connected to its environment than before. The project replaces dated construction materials and increases overall space while maintaining the look and feel of the original building.

It serves as a model of sustainable and innovative construction through progressive technologies in design, including Skyfold walls that provide convertible classroom and presentation spaces; Nana doors, which open rooms to the outdoor environment; high-efficiency heating, cooling, and water fixtures; a green roof upon which plants replace shingles; new educational technologies such as video conferencing; a celebration of each of Alberta's six natural regions and the plant and animal species found in them; and vibrant expressions of art courtesy of local students and artists.

School programming is already under way and, again, offers curriculum-based programs modelled on research, best practices, and a dedication to connecting students with their environment. Mr. Speaker, over 800,000 students, teachers, and volunteers have enjoyed award-winning programming at this important Calgary facility since 1982, myself included. I trust that all members of this House will join me in thanking and congratulating all involved as they celebrate the grand reopening of the Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petitions that have been received for Private Bills under Standing Order 98(2):

- (1) the petition of the Lethbridge Community Foundation for the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act;
- (2) the petition of the Calgary Olympic Development Association for the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010; and
- (3) the petition of the board of management of the Lamont health care centre for the Lamont Health Care Centre Act.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

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

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill is part of our government's response to strengthen the emergency management system across our province. This bill will extend the good-faith liability protection currently provided to firefighters to search and rescue workers and their organizations while they're providing emergency rescue services under the act. Alberta's search and rescue workers contribute greatly to the safety and security of our communities.

Another amendment will focus on the language of the act to change the current negligence standard for providing emergency services to one of good faith. This matches the language found in the Municipal Government Act. This will provide additional legal defences to the minister, local authorities, and their agents and will help limit their exposure to lawsuits.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, changes to the act will focus on regional emergency service delivery and will allow communities to work together. This administrative process will help with the financial and the training burden that's placed on municipalities today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010, be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail that I received from a constituent, Milena Laban. This constituent is urging funding not to be cut to public schools.

The second tabling I have is from a constituent also, Grace Parr on 67A Street. This is an e-mail correspondence to the former Minister of Health and Wellness. It is regarding funding cuts to PDD service providers.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of several news releases and articles related to 10 upgrader expansions in the United States. The articles state that the projects will be upgrading Alberta bitumen. My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood referred to these projects in his questions earlier today.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council annual report 2007-2008.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report 2008-2009 and the Alberta Vital Statistics annual review 2008.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, now, if I can have the attention of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, I will deal with an issue that I gave notice of. I said I would be recognizing at this point in time the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, who wants to ask for the unanimous consent of the House.

The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request unanimous consent of the Assembly to change Motions Other than Government Motion 503 to 505 and 505 to 503. I have consulted with the Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

The Speaker: It's okay. There's no debate required in this. You need unanimous consent. I'm going to ask one question. Is any member opposed? If so, say no. Okay. Done.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Bill 201

Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. member – I will call on the hon. member; he'll be the first speaker to move this bill – nine members have also indicated their desire to participate. I will outline those remaining eight after the hon. member has moved his bill.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and open debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. Bill 201 is an important piece of legislation and would require two cancers, primary site esophageal and primary site testicular, to be added to this province's list of presumptive cancers for firefighters.

Presumptive legislation can be seen all across Canada. In fact, Alberta was one of the first to introduce such legislation in 2003. The Workers' Compensation Act was amended in 2003 and states, in essence, that if a firefighter is diagnosed with a cancer where the primary site is among the lists in presumptive legislation, the illness shall be presumed to be an occupational disease. Without presumptive legislation the onus would fall on the firefighter to prove that their cancer was caused from their occupation and all too often be required to specify and prove at exactly which fire the cancer took hold, a daunting and impossible task, Mr. Speaker.

In simple terms, a firefighter's work environment can be the cause of the cancer development. This government has recognized this, and as a result eight cancers are currently listed in regulation as presumptive. These cancers include bladder, urethra, kidney, colorectal, and lung for nonsmokers, as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Mr. Speaker, as stated, these cancers are listed in regulation, and as such this bill would require the Lieutenant Governor in Council to amend this regulation to include primary site esophageal and testicular cancer.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 201 builds on what this government has already achieved to protect our firefighters; however, advances in medical science are giving us new information in regard to cancer and its causes. All around North America in the last five to 10 years there has been an increasing amount of long-service firefighters and veterans being diagnosed with cancer. According to the International Association of Fire Fighters there are approximately 10 firefighters that lose their lives annually as a result of job-related cancers in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, many have attributed the increase in cancers to the greater use of synthetics in building materials. The risk is not necessarily from the inhalation of fumes; rather, it's absorption of these dangerous chemicals through the skin. Just to illustrate this, I know that several members in this Assembly today participated last fall in the MLA firefighter for a day event. One of my colleagues who participated in that event commented that the smell of smoke permeated his skin despite the protective gear that he donned and that even after three showers that odour was still present. This is despite the exceptional advances that have been made in the protective gear worn by our firefighters. This exemplifies to me the risk that firefighters are faced with each day.

Firefighters are typically some of the healthiest people around. In fact, it is a job requirement that they be fit. This is why any spike in cancer is abnormal. Cancer is a devastating disease, and I believe that by passing Bill 201, we can provide comfort in a time of uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, last year Edmonton lost two of its finest to cancer, all in the course of two weeks. In fact, it was the sixth in the span of a few years, an all too stark reality that reminded firefighters of the hidden dangers in their jobs. One of these individuals was Captain Bob Chalmers, who passed away last July from leukemia. May he rest in peace. He was a 35-year veteran of the Edmonton fire department and, sadly, only 60 years young. I'm very pleased to add that as a result of this Assembly's work in 2003 Captain Chalmers was able to receive benefits while undergoing treatment for his cancer. While fighting his six-year battle with the disease, and in

typical fashion of the many men and women like those in our gallery today, he stated that he would not hesitate again to devote his life to firefighting.

3:00

The other hero we lost was Captain Alex "Rainbow" Harris, and I mentioned that his wife and son were here, Mr. Speaker. He was 53 years old. Mr. Harris passed away from esophageal cancer. However, as he was unable to pinpoint the exact fire where the cancer took hold, his claim was denied.

This is a tragedy, Mr. Speaker, two firefighters who devoted their lives to their community in similar fashion and who were treated differently by the rules.

In Calgary, of the 21 members of the Calgary fire department lost since 1923, 12 of those have been from cancer. This includes Captain Ed Briggs, who passed away from leukemia in 2004.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, in all reality, is not so much for the firefighter as it is for their families, families who, when cancer strikes, drop everything to fight this disease alongside their loved one. Families face additional emotional stress as they battle for their loved one's life. Without workers' compensation these families are often faced with considerable financial stress.

I believe that each of us in the Assembly has met or knows a firefighter and has seen the immense impact that they have in our communities. These brave men and women put their lives on the line every day to protect Albertans, and we thank you for that. Firefighters do more than just fight fires. They attend medical emergencies, chemical spills, aid in natural disasters, and provide educational tools to the community.

The firefighters of this province have been very instrumental in having esophageal and testicular cancers added to the presumptive list of cancers that are currently listed in the legislation. They have been advocating government for these changes for several years. By adding the aforementioned cancers, we are giving firefighters peace of mind, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank all the Alberta firefighters for their dedication to the people of this province and the many who are here with us today who have been instrumental in this fight. Many of these cancers are often silent, discovered too late. Let us not be silent anymore on this issue. Firefighters fight to protect us; we should fight to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, it is a small measure that this Legislature can do by passing this legislation to attempt – and I stress, attempt – to repay the tremendous debt that the people of Alberta owe to these dedicated men and women who are so instrumental in the safety of all of our citizens. I look forward to further debate on the bill, and I pledge my support to firefighters with this bill.

I would move second reading, and I would humbly ask all hon. members to support passage of Bill 201.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I too would like to get on the record regarding Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, and thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his work on this amendment. I think it is appreciated not only in this House but across the province in the firefighting community if we could call it that. Certainly, Bill 201 will require the Lieutenant Governor in Council to amend the firefighters' primary site cancer regulation to include esophageal and testicular cancer.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon listed off the other cancers that are recognized as an occupational hazard or an occupational disease, and this is, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, not the last time we will be looking at an amendment in this House. I suspect, as research will hopefully prove me correct, that we're just beginning to understand the consequences of this very, very hazardous occupation for firefighters.

Firefighters have no idea when they report to work exactly what they're going to face, Mr. Speaker. In the course of their shift anything could happen. It could be a chemical spill as a result of a truck accident. It could be any amount of hazardous material that's inadvertently spilled that they are responding to. There are fires not only in residential neighbourhoods but also in commercial and industrial locations that they have to respond to. When we look at some of the materials that are now being used to construct our residential buildings, whether it's the epoxies and the glues that are in OSB, whether it's chemical additives to carpets so they don't mould, so they don't catch on fire, there are any number of exposures that a firefighter may encounter. Bill 201 is certainly further direction from the previous legislation, and I would encourage all hon. members to support this legislation.

Now, there are those that say differently, but surely we must recognize that there is strong scientific consensus that firefighters face a higher risk of developing a long list of cancers. As a result, not only Alberta but a number of other provinces have created presumptive clauses allowing firefighters to claim workers' compensation benefits if they should contract particular types of cancers that are defined in the regulations. The types of cancer that we're hopefully going to add as a result of Bill 201 appear to be within, certainly, the national mainstream. The hon. member is not asking for anything that has not already been discussed and debated in other Legislative Assemblies. British Columbia and Saskatchewan to our knowledge include testicular cancer in their regulations. Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick are examples of provinces that include both testicular and esophageal cancer in their comparable regulations.

Certainly, when we look at this, we realize, again, that Alberta firefighters place themselves at great personal danger for our citizens, and they deserve legal protections that recognize the harm they face almost on a daily basis. I have no problem supporting this amendment, and I again would like to thank the hon. member for his work on this.

Now, I was told that the officials in the Department of Employment and Immigration, the ones that keep their eye on the Workers' Compensation Board and the Workers' Compensation Act, are doing a study to see how other sectors of the workforce are affected by exposure in the workplace to various chemicals or various repetitive activities that may lead to the development of a cancer.

I have requested a number of times that the Department of Employment and Immigration once and for all do a long-term study on the hazards of welding in particular. To my knowledge, if this is proceeding, it's proceeding far too slowly. I would certainly like to see the province and the Department of Employment and Immigration, which oversees the legislation that governs this, have a look at what occupational health and safety laws and regulations need to be changed to ensure that all workers are protected. Firefighters, in my opinion, are a good first step. It's needed. It's necessary.

3:10

The idea of adding additional compensation coverage for all workers if their workplace has caused them to be susceptible to cancer: we need to examine this issue, we need to study this issue, and we need to act. Certainly, when you look at some of the welders

— and I'm going to use that as an example — there are far too many welders at a very young age being affected by throat cancer to start with, and I think we need to look at that. Hopefully, the department that I mentioned earlier is working on that as we speak, and they have yet to make the results of their work public.

Certainly, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is a very good bill. It takes protection of firefighters an additional step. I don't think we will stop here. If there is a need for additional protection at a future date, hopefully this Assembly will deal with it straightaway as it's needed.

Again, thank you to the hon. member. I hope this bill receives speedy passage through this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have a long list of speakers here. I just want to read it out, and then I will recognize the next member. The next members will be Calgary-North Hill, Calgary-Varsity, Lacombe-Ponoka, Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-Hays, Edmonton-Strathcona, Airdrie-Chestermere, Drayton Valley-Calmor, and Cypress-Medicine Hat.

You are next, Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to provide some input to this important piece of legislation. Bill 201 is a great idea, and I know that there's an incredible degree of support for this bill. Bill 201 seeks to broaden the coverage for firefighters against potential hazards of their job, a job that I personally have a great deal of admiration for.

Through prior legislation we have committed to ensuring fair workers' compensation for firefighters for a variety of cancers related to their firefighting. It is an honour, Mr. Speaker, to stand up here because I know it was my predecessor in Calgary-North Hill, Richard Magnus, that brought forward the original piece of legislation.

Today there are new findings indicating that two additional types of cancer, esophageal cancer and testicular cancer, should be included along with the eight types already covered in the legislation. It is fitting, then, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 201 seeks to have those cancers included, following the same logic as put forward by my predecessor in prior legislation.

Firefighters provide an invaluable service, as we all know, and when the time comes, they act selflessly to save others, sometimes at great risk to their own well-being. Our firefighters should not have to be concerned that despite their courage and dedication they may not be compensated fairly if they acquire an illness as a result of their work.

I'd like to provide some background, Mr. Speaker, on the important mechanism that Bill 201 relies on as well as the prior legislation brought forward by my predecessor in 2003, that included the first types of cancer in this legislation. Bill 201 relies on presumptive legislation, as does the legislation currently in force. Presumptive legislation alleviates the burden of proof for the worker, in this case firefighters, for the purposes of workers' compensation. It presumes that if a firefighter acquires an illness potentially related to the hazardous materials he or she may have encountered and has been in the profession for a sufficient length of time, then the illness is a result of the occupational hazards. In the case of firefighters these hazards will primarily consist of toxic substances in a fire, burning chemicals and materials.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that presumptive legislation is not misplaced in its assumptions. There is both statistical and scientific support for the assertion that certain cancers are heavily correlated with a number of hazards faced by firefighters.

I was fortunate to participate in the MLA firefighter for a day that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon mentioned earlier, and I can attest that it's very obvious to me just from that very short experience that this is something that's real and is not something that is a myth.

While there is probably a very small chance that some of these cancers are not correlated, I do not doubt at all that in the vast majority of cases there is sufficient cause from an actuarial standpoint to support this legislation. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the burden of proof is definitely difficult in most circumstances, virtually impossible.

Consider smoking, for example, and its association with various types of cancers. There is overwhelming evidence that the toxins in cigarettes cause various cancers, and the messaging from the health community is consistent with this. Essentially, it is accepted as a fact that if every smoker develops certain types of cancers, it is a result of their heavy smoking. Of all the smokers who have been diagnosed with correlated cancers, did none of them acquire the cancer from exposure to something else? Well, maybe. More likely than not a small number acquired the cancer from something else other than smoking, maybe radiation or genetic predisposition, without which they would have never acquired the cancer. But how does one even prove that, Mr. Speaker?

We know that in a vast majority of cases certain toxins cause certain cancers with sufficient exposure. This is entirely true for firefighters, just as it is for smokers, Mr. Speaker, although I'm sure the firefighters have a different attitude towards toxic smoke than most smokers do.

Mr. Speaker, presumptive legislation does not just assume causation. Presumptive legislation infers causation based on extensively studied correlations between two factors, in this case certain cancers and toxic substances in a fire. In circumstances which our firefighters face, fair compensation requires this presumptive legislation. The burden of proof in individual specific cases is just simply not feasible, nor is it fair to treat our firefighters this way.

Mr. Speaker, I wasn't here earlier for the introductions but, you know, I was graciously hosted during our MLA firefighter for a day by an old school buddy of mine, Todd Russell, who is part of the Grande Prairie local 2770. I want to say hi to him. You know, I haven't seen him in a long, long time, and it was great to not only learn about their profession but to catch up with him. I went to elementary school with him and attended high school with him with the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. I think that it's very, very important that we treat Todd and his wife and family and all of his colleagues up in the gallery and that they work with on a day-to-day basis in a way that's fair and respectful to the way that they put their lives on the line every day for us.

Mr. Speaker, I hope I have shed some light on why Bill 201 is so important. It's this reason for relying on presumptive legislation: if these two types of cancers are indeed tied to hazards in firefighting, then I believe it is our duty to include them in the firefighters' coverage. With that, I look forward to further debate.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to give my wholehearted support and that of my colleagues to Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I'd also like to give credit where credit is due to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who, as far as I am concerned, has basically completed the third volume in the trilogy of firefighter protection. As the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill noted, volume one came from a former MLA, Richard Magnus of Calgary-

North Hill. I believe that volume one was contributed to by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs last year with a continuance of firefighter recognition and protection legislation.

3:20

Again following in the footsteps of the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, I have gone to school with, worked with, and played with a number of firefighters over my years. The first significant individual that I'd like to mention is Rob Tomlinson. In 1966 Rob and I were attending Ernest Manning high school. I was upgrading, and he was completing his high school. We worked at Woodward's in the parcel pickup, so I worked with him, and I also went to school with him. In the fall of 1967 I began my university career, which took me towards a bachelor of education. While I was attending university classes, Rob was doing his training as a novice firefighter for the Calgary fire department. Rob's friendship continued throughout the years, and he played a pivotal role at my wedding to my wife, Heather, of going on 41 years. He played the role of best man at our wedding. Rob recently retired as a captain from the Calgary fire department.

I mention Rob because Rob talked to me about some of the tremendous obstacles he fought as a firefighter. One that comes to mind very strongly – and chemicals were involved – was putting out a fire in downtown Calgary at a restaurant called the Beachcomber. Now, the Beachcomber was probably the seventh or eighth name that that location had, and it had several false walls to it. Rob described in great detail crawling along the floor with his mask on and seeing a phone melting off the wall from the intense heat of the fire. So the chemicals that firefighters face are beyond a doubt a serious concern that leads to cancer, and this type of legislation, which does not require proof, is absolutely essential to protect our firefighters, who spend every day protecting us.

Other firefighters who I've had the pleasure of coming into contact with are Keith Hart of the famous Hart wrestling dynasty that Stu Hart founded in the city of Calgary. Keith and I were on opposite ends of propping for the Saracens rugby team. Another firefighter-cum-rugby player that I had the pleasure to associate with and who is also a teacher is Adrian Smith. I played rugby with Adrian on the U of C Stags. Most recently, a firefighter who I've come to know and tremendously respect is Greg McDougall. Greg McDougall was a firefighter for a number of years for the city of Calgary. Greg went through a series of very traumatic experiences, which he also shared with me.

My hope, Mr. Speaker, is that the type of firefighter protection that we're seeing today in Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, will be extended to provide firefighters who are currently on the job as well as those who retire with support for posttraumatic stress syndrome. A number of firefighters, unfortunately, have been driven to suicide because of the stress that they faced on their job. It has led to marital breakup. Anything that we can do to provide treatment for firefighters, whether on the job or when they're forced to leave because of stress, I think is absolutely essential. Right now the federal government has a program that recognizes posttraumatic stress syndrome for our military and also for our RCMP, but no such provincial regulation exists to provide firefighters, municipal police with this kind of counselling and support and likewise.

Another area that I'd like to see this extended to is to first responders in general. While it's the firefighters that put themselves in the most immediate danger in the centre of a burning building or in the centre of a spill, I don't want to leave out the fact that we have also police on the scene and we have paramedics frequently on the scene where these chemicals are very much in the air. The firefighters have the equipment in terms of the gas masks that they put on when they enter the building. In some cases they're almost better

protected in their first response circumstances than policemen who are cordoning off the area or paramedics who are waiting to assist the firefighters as they retrieve the individuals from the hazardous circumstances that they find themselves in.

I would urge the government to extend this legislation to cover first responders as well. I'm sure that firefighters would support the extension to their first responder colleagues of this recognition that today we are affording to firefighters. There's no doubt about the danger they face. They should not be worried as they go into a burning building or clear up a chemical spill as to whether their insurance company will cover their situation and especially in the event of their passing continue to support their spouse and children.

This is a wonderful piece of legislation. As I say, volume three in the firefighters protection trilogy. Again I want to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for following in the footsteps of his predecessors in fighting for firefighters. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to have an opportunity to join in debate on Bill 201. I would like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his efforts in bringing forward the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. The legislation complements a broader initiative our government has been advancing which focuses on building safe and secure communities. Leading this initiative are those individuals who live and work in Alberta's communities. They know their communities best and what is needed to make them succeed. As a government we need to continue to offer support to our communities and the individuals who help to protect them. Individuals such as firefighters embody the greater qualities of community service.

I also want to acknowledge all the firefighters that are with us this afternoon watching this debate. They are a very strong part of our communities and add to the quality of life in our communities. Professional firefighters in larger centres do their jobs on a daily basis. Smaller communities, such as Lacombe and the area that I live in, often depend on volunteer firefighters for their services. They are also highly trained individuals that serve their communities from time to time. They receive calls at any time of night or day to respond to emergencies of many kinds, often fires but sometimes motor vehicle accidents and other emergencies. Mostly they don't know what they're getting into or what risks may confront them when they leave their homes.

In a past life I was a reeve of the county, and I want to say that I was part of the regional fire service in the Lacombe county that co-operated between the Lacombe county, Lacombe town, and other municipalities within the county. I spent some time with the firefighters there attending their practices and going to meetings with them. I understand the pressures and the dangers that they face in their jobs, and I want to acknowledge that. I also want to say that they are highly trained. We always enjoyed visiting with these firefighters when we would bring them a new piece of equipment like a big ladder truck, tandem tandem, about a million dollars. "You can tell the importance of the boys by the size of their toys," we said, and they appreciated that.

3:30

I want to acknowledge and thank the firefighters that are with us today in our gallery and all the firefighters that serve our communities from day to day. They perform their roles with the bravery and courage their daunting work requires. Our government will ensure that these men and women know that we're behind them. Bill 201

serves this end as it enhances the efforts that have been previously taken by the Alberta government.

Alberta was one of the first provinces to introduce presumptive legislation for firefighters. We've already heard what presumptive legislation is. Our government remains focused on the task of helping our emergency personnel who are on the front line of protecting our communities and assisting Albertans in times of vulnerability. Through enacting this legislation, we would join other jurisdictions in Canada that allow firefighters to claim workers' compensation for esophageal and testicular cancer. Recently Manitoba and New Brunswick added these two forms of cancer to their presumptive list as well. Mr. Speaker, these additions are an acknowledgement of the potential dangers of firefighting.

Comprehensive studies have shown that there is an increased risk of firefighters developing different forms of work-related cancer. The Alberta Workers' Compensation Board statistics indicate that almost 75 per cent of work-related firefighter deaths since the year 2000 have been due to cancer. The work of firefighters requires these individuals to respond immediately to emergency scenes that are often complex and dangerous. We want to ensure that firefighters have the best support for whatever repercussions may result from their duties. This is why we took steps before to implement effective workers' compensation benefits. This legislation is an extension of that previous support.

We know that firefighters are often cast into different environments that sometimes pose inexplicit consequences. Smoke from a burning structure can contain numerous toxins that will have lasting effects on all who are exposed to it, but this does not deter firefighters, who are trained to put the safety of those they are rescuing ahead of themselves. In the past we have seen firefighters enter into these situations with the goal of saving lives regardless of the consequences of engaging harmful fires.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've experienced this personally myself. I had a farm – well, I still have a farm – and some years ago a large fire engulfed some of my barns with a lot of animals inside. We phoned the firefighters. They were there within a few minutes – you know, 15 minutes from town – and they just went right into this fire and put it out, saved an enormous amount of property, not human lives at that time but lives of animals. They put their lives on the line. I have been very, very thankful for the help that they provided for myself and my family.

History has demonstrated this time and again. Perhaps the most vivid example is the fire that consumed the World Trade Centre on 9/11. On that day several New York fire departments battled blazes in the Twin Towers in a heroic effort to save lives. It was a time of crisis, and these individuals engaged in the treacherous situation nevertheless, as all firefighters so often do. It is only years later, when the dust settles, that firefighters are faced with the repercussions of putting themselves in harm's way. Mr. Speaker, 9/11, like many serious fires, caused long-term effects to those who were embattled in dowsing the flames. There are now several documented cases of firefighters who have been afflicted with higher than normal rates of cancer directly as a result of fighting those fires. This is an unfortunate reality of firefighting. The work involves taking serious risks.

As a government we'll continue to provide support to comfort and compensate those brave individuals who take on such roles here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is our obligation to create a reasonable legislative framework that will allow these individuals to be compensated for damages suffered through keeping our communities safe. Bill 201 enhances the support for those who work to provide the relief, assistance, and rescue that Albertans need. It's difficult work, but that's what these men and women sign up for.

They never shy away from the hard and sometimes hazardous work their occupation requires. We know that when the call comes, our firefighters will be there. It's the Alberta way.

Through this legislation Alberta will again be leading in providing compensation benefits for our firefighters. In an emergency it's important to stick together and help each other out. That's how strong communities are built and protected. This is how fire departments approach each day together, united in an effort to take on whatever may be ahead of them. They often don't know all the dangers within a burning building, but this does not deter them. They still dutifully enter it as it is their job, and this is what they're trained for.

So when the flames die out and these brave individuals return home, if they are afflicted by illness as a result of their efforts, I believe they should be allowed to apply for compensation. They have demonstrated their resolve to support our communities, and I think it is only fitting that we in turn offer support through these measures as proposed in Bill 201.

With that, I would again like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his work on Bill 201. It is an important piece of legislation that serves to assist those who help make our communities safe and secure. I'm also encouraged by the support of all members of this Legislature. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will be offering my support as well for Bill 201.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House in strong support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As a result of our elected positions, many in this House have had the opportunity to meet with first responders or to watch them work together to help people in a time of great need. For their selfless sacrifice and willingness to help others without hesitation or equivocation, we owe them our thanks and the proper protection against the hazards they experience. This is why I rise in support of this bill and why the entire Wildrose Alliance caucus stands in support of this bill.

Being a firefighter is not a typical job. The people who serve as firefighters are not typical people. I cannot think of many who would willingly rush into a burning building to save someone's pet or, more importantly, to risk their own life to save another, but they do this, and for this we are eternally grateful, Mr. Speaker. Many years ago we had a devastating fire in our home. From the eyes of a child these big, burly guys racing in and out of your house can be pretty intimidating. We lost everything, but what they did manage to save was really important: my dog and my turtles. From that day forward firefighters have and will always be my heroes.

In the course of their duties we know that they become exposed to materials that even the latest technology, building standards, workplace safety measures, or breathing equipment cannot protect them from. It is for this reason that the former Member for Calgary-North Hill proposed the original bill to help and protect firefighters. I supported the original bill, Mr. Speaker, because it was the right thing to do then, and these are the right things to support now.

Each member of this House could go on and on at length about the work that firefighters and all emergency workers do to protect life, limb, and property, but words will never do true justice to the risks they take, to the pride they feel, or to the care for the people of Alberta communities. Bill 201 is a small way that we can recognize their sacrifices, their willingness to race into the face of danger, and to help us in times of greater need.

My thanks to the sponsor, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I encourage all members to support Bill 201.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to voice my support for Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I would like to start by commending the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward such an important piece of legislation. Bill 201 proposes to strengthen Alberta's commitment to our firefighters by including two additional cancers, primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer, to the list of presumptive cancers that firefighters may claim for under workers' compensation.

Alberta firefighters play an integral role in the safety and well-being of our community. Every day they are asked to risk their lives in order to protect us and our property from the devastating effects of fire. In fact, firefighters are the only group of workers that cannot refuse to work due to unsafe conditions. Their jobs require them to risk their lives both in the moment that they are fighting a fire and in the longer term as they face the possibility of cancer.

Unfortunately, in this line of work firefighters are constantly being exposed to large amounts of toxins that are produced as a result of burning plastics, chemicals, and building materials. While they do have protective gear that helps to shield them from the harmful effects of these toxins, this equipment is not a hundred per cent effective, and some of the toxins will inevitably be absorbed into the body. Many of these toxins are highly carcinogenic. In fact, almost 75 per cent of work-related firefighter deaths in Alberta since 2000 have been due to cancer. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that it is impossible to tell when the seeds of cancer have been planted in our firefighters. The latent nature of these diseases means that it could be 20 or 30 years before they are detected, yet there is compelling scientific research which suggests that they are the result of a career spent fighting fires.

3:40

The province already recognizes eight cancers in its presumptive legislation for firefighters' compensation. However, research is showing that this list should be expanded. By including primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer, we can ensure that more Alberta firefighters and their families are adequately compensated for the sacrifices that they have made for our communities. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is as much for the families of these firefighters as it is for the firefighters themselves. As anyone who has been touched by cancer knows, when an individual is diagnosed with cancer, it is their entire family that comes together to fight it.

In the absence of the presumptive legislation that would automatically assume that these cancers are work related, the onus is on the firefighters to prove that their illness is a result of their occupation. Without this legislation Alberta firefighters that are diagnosed with esophageal and primary site testicular cancer would have to file a workers' compensation claim and endure the uncertainties of the claims process. This process of claims and appeals can take years to produce a final decision, and even then there is no guarantee that the claims system will recognize their illness as occupational and award appropriate compensation. Bill 201 would allow these families to focus all of their attention and energy on fighting these diseases rather than on the claims and appeals process of workers' compensation.

Mr. Speaker, the life of a firefighter is one that can sustain substantial amounts of uncertainty, and their families live each day with the possibility that their loved one may not return home at the end of a shift. Even if these firefighters manage to enjoy a long career, they will continuously face the possibility of developing a life-threatening disease as a result of their line of work. Alberta firefighters and their families have made great sacrifices to ensure the safety and well-being of our communities and have taken many risks on our behalf.

Bill 201 would see these families protected from the devastating financial hardships that accompany a battle – primary site esophageal and primary site testicular cancers – allowing them to focus on getting through the daily struggles that these illnesses bring without having to worry about how they'll pay their bills. This legislation will also serve to reach out to those families and show them that Albertans appreciate all that they have done to help keep us safe and support them in their hour of need. At the heart of Bill 201 is respect and compassion for those who have served the people of our province so selflessly. The service of the men and women who bravely enter burning buildings, gladly risking their lives for ours, is quite obvious.

More subtle is the service rendered to the people of Alberta by the families of these firefighters. Each day, like the firefighters themselves, they deal with a great amount of uncertainty. Mr. Speaker, they're also the ones who will take care of our firefighters if they have to battle cancer and are the ones left behind if they lose that fight. For all that these families choose to sacrifice for the benefit of Albertans, I believe Bill 201 will go a long way in continuing to recognize their hardship and contributions.

I would once again like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. I wholeheartedly support Bill 201 and urge my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise in order to lend my support and the support of our caucus to this private member's bill. As many, many speakers today have already talked about, we all share a tremendous amount of respect and appreciation for the work and the sacrifice that we see from our firefighters each and every day in all of our communities. These are people that work very, very hard to protect members of the community. Quite frankly, I think it's a very special person who chooses to make their living in the job of putting themselves in danger to protect and assist others. It is, without question, a heroic choice and a heroic type of work that they perform every day.

I have had the benefit to attend the firefighters' memorial service each year, as I'm sure other members of this Assembly have. Every time we attend that memorial, we stop and take time and consider the memory of those firefighters who have died in action. Without question a number of those who die in action are those who have succumbed to some form of cancer, whether it be a form of cancer that's already recognized under this legislation or, now in the future, whether it's a form of cancer which up until the hoped-to-be-soon passing of this legislation was not previously recognized by this piece of legislation. So I think it's very, very important that we add to the list. As one speaker has already pointed out, in so doing, we negate the obligation of that firefighter and/or his family or her family to subject themselves to the workers' compensation system and the challenges that exist in terms of proving the compensability of a particular type of illness or disease.

I have to also say, though, that when I attend those memorials, I am very aware of some of the other common diseases or processes which occur and result in the illness or death or injury of firefighters. There are those who most obviously and most tragically die while in action, and then there are those who succumb to the type of cancers we've identified or we are about to identify, but there are also those who die from heart disease. It's very common that heart disease of different forms will result in either injury or illness or fatality to firefighters; also lung diseases, stress, posttraumatic stress, and other illnesses that arise secondary to the particularly dangerous and hazardous type of work that they engage in.

In short, I believe that there are many firefighters out there who even today suffer from illness or injury, or there are families of people who have suffered from deaths which are not currently recognized under our workers' compensation system. While this bill will assist in identifying and adding to the list the types of cancers which receive presumptive treatment by the Workers' Compensation Board, I believe there is a great deal more work to be done in this regard in terms of understanding the hazards faced by firefighters in their day-to-day work.

I also think that there is another point that needs to be made here. I believe very strongly from my own conversations with many firefighters, particularly in my past life working as an occupational health and safety advocate and working in particular with a number of different professions, including firefighters, that what we know is that firefighters are not the only profession to be subjected to hazards in the workplace which ultimately kill or cause significant illnesses as a result of exposure to those hazards.

As much as we all appreciate and must remember every day the heroic efforts of firefighters, we should also remember that other workers who are exposed in their workplace to chemicals, whether burning chemicals or whether chemicals in the day-to-day handling requirements of their job, also become ill or may in fact die from exposure, and they are not always recognized. There is also the whole question of long-term injury to musculoskeletal parts of the body that, again, are difficult for workers to receive recognition of when dealing with the Workers' Compensation Board.

In short, the Workers' Compensation Board, particularly in Alberta, does not do a good job of recognizing or compensating for occupational disease and illness, and that means that workers in this province go uncompensated for illnesses and, in some cases, deaths that arise as a result of hazards to which they are exposed in their workplace. Almost 10 years ago now Justice Friedman reviewed our WCB system and made a number of recommendations with respect to how we needed to improve it. Although originally the government agreed to adopt those recommendations, they subsequently changed their mind on that decision, and there remain significant substantive flaws in our workers' compensation system in Alberta today. Workers do not have equal access to representation, there are concerns around the way in which medical advice is given within the system, and there is an adjudicative framework which discourages both workers from claiming and adjudicators from recognizing significant numbers of occupational diseases and illnesses within the workplace.

3:50

It is wonderful that everybody here is agreeing that firefighters need to receive compensation for a bit more of the injury and illnesses from which they suffer as a result of the good work that they do on our behalf. I don't at this point believe that we're coming close to recognizing all of those. I also believe that we are failing to understand that the bigger picture is that we have a system which does not fairly compensate our workers for the illnesses and the

injuries that they suffer in their workplaces, which are under our watch. Ultimately, should we choose to deal with that much larger issue, I think we would also be doing a grand thing in memory of those firefighters who have sacrificed themselves on our behalf, and I do believe quite strongly that they would support that call.

I certainly hope that members of this Assembly will give some consideration to that and remember those discussions that we have had in the past about the fact that we have a very problematic workers' compensation system in this province, where a number of independent overseers have looked at it and made recommendations, calling on us to do better for Alberta workers, and that to date we have not responded to those recommendations.

As we happily go about passing this piece of legislation today, let us not forget the many, many other workers, both identified and not identified, who suffer injury, illness, disease, and death at their workplaces every day, every year, some of whom receive compensation, many of whom do not, in a province which, of course, as many people here will know, also suffers from the fact that it is the only province in the country which does not provide workers the capacity to ensure their own safety at their own workplaces as a matter of course. Through that, I'm talking about health and safety committees, which is a matter of law in every other jurisdiction in the country except for this one.

We could do much, much better protecting workers in this province before they become injured. We could do much better protecting firefighters in this province before they become injured, become ill, or succumb to disease, and I think it's important for members of this Assembly to be fully aware of that.

Having said that, I do support the particulars of this legislation. I just believe that there is much, much, much more for us to do if we are going to properly recognize and appreciate the work that is done every day by our firefighters and if we are to properly appreciate and recognize the work done every day by workers in Alberta and to properly to protect their health and their safety from here forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. There's a contingent of people in this province that dedicate their lives to working within emergency services. These people include police officers, paramedics, and firefighters. Daily these individuals put their lives on the line in efforts to ensure the well-being of other Albertans.

For firefighters the risks only begin on the site of a fire. Like they say, where there's smoke, there's fire. But there are also toxins. Despite their best efforts to protect themselves, these toxins make their way into firefighters' bloodstreams. Mr. Speaker, many people would assume that this occurs by inhalation, that these toxins are breathed in. While this is a contributing factor, more recent research has demonstrated that oftentimes these toxins are actually absorbed through the skin. In realizing this, one can begin to understand how vulnerable firefighters actually are as the entire surface area of their bodies can act to admit these toxins into their systems. While science and technology work to improve the protective wear that firefighters use, it remains that firefighters are exposed to more toxins in comparison to the average person.

Some of these toxins are what are called carcinogens, which are cancer-causing agents. Household items that seem benign can in combustion emit these carcinogens. For example, mothballs contain a substance that is a possible human carcinogen. Formaldehyde, a

known human carcinogen, can be released from materials such as particleboard, insulation, and aerosol cans when they are combusted. These are just a few examples. Many other household substances, including things like paint thinner, glues, and plastics, can all emit potentially hazardous and cancerous substances. Mr. Speaker, the ingestion or absorption of these substances eventually leads to the circulation through the body by the bloodstream. They can then impact cells in all organs of the body, causing genetic mutations which can ultimately result in a tumour.

Research in this area has led to the development of presumptive legislation in Alberta and many other jurisdictions. Presumptive legislation ensures that if a firefighter develops a particular type of cancer and has been working with the fire protection service for a prescribed number of years, it is presumed that it is a direct result of their occupation. For example, in Alberta if an individual develops leukemia and has been working as a firefighter for a minimum of five years, it is assumed that the dominant cause of the cancer is a result of their profession as a firefighter and the associated exposure to combustion-related toxins. This permits workers to then claim compensation through the Workers' Compensation Board if as a result of their illness they are unable to work. Currently there are eight cancers in Alberta that fall under presumptive legislation: leukemia; brain cancer; bladder cancer; lung cancer, provided they are nonsmokers; ureter cancer; colorectal cancer; and non-Hodgkin's type lymphoma.

Mr. Speaker, since the passing of presumptive legislation to cover these eight cancers in firefighters, which was in 2003, research has continued to expose trends in the development of cancers in firefighters. More recent studies have begun to demonstrate that in addition to these eight cancers there is an increased occurrence of other types of cancer, specifically testicular and esophageal cancers. For example, a recent study took advantage of the California Cancer Registry, which is one of the largest of its kind in the world as it dates back to 1988 and contains over 1.1 million relevant case files.

The study compared the rates of several types of cancer in men that reported their primary occupation as firefighters to the remainder of the males in the database. This thorough and extensive study concluded that several types of cancer consistently occur more often in firefighters. The list includes several cancers, among them esophageal and testicular, the two cancers that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon is working diligently to include under presumptive legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the increased rate of occurrence of both testicular and esophageal cancer in the study that I'm referencing is significant at a 95 per cent confidence interval. Despite this, it is my understanding that some studies show smaller spikes in occurrence of these two cancers. In light of this, some believe that they do not merit being included in the presumptive cancers list. I couldn't disagree more.

Mr. Speaker, research is now telling society that the best method of prevention of all cancers is to lead a healthy lifestyle. This includes being active and eating well. By virtue of their vocation firefighters need to remain fit. Because of this, it is reasonable to conclude that in the absence of the toxins that their profession exposes them to, they would be at a reduced risk for cancer in comparison to the average citizen. Therefore, any spike in the occurrence of this disease is worthy of evaluation in terms of its relatedness to the profession of firefighting. I particularly believe that in light of the studies done on rates of occurrence of esophageal and testicular cancers, being a firefighter predisposes these individuals to their development. As such, like the other eight cancers, they have a higher frequency of occurrence in firefighters. I believe these two should be added under presumptive legislation.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, firefighters are integral to our society. They take risks and face challenges that some of us, fortunately, don't experience in the entirety of our lifetime. They do it to ensure the safety and security of all Albertans, our infrastructure, and, by extension of that, our communities.

Mr. Speaker, these are positions of honour, and it is therefore important that we as a government continue to demonstrate our support for the roles they play. I believe that by responding to the reasoned outcomes of our research community, which indicate an increased prevalence of testicular and esophageal cancer amongst individuals in the firefighting profession, we are continuing to show our appreciation for their hard work and sacrifice.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. I support it fully and urge my hon. colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a list of speakers here. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to rise in support of Bill 201 and would like to commend the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing such a current and relevant piece of legislation forward. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and myself share a common thread in that we both represent communities that have an integrated fire and ambulance service in place. They mean a lot to our communities, and I'll talk about that a little bit later. This is an obvious piece of legislation that needed to be – well, it's not so obvious. If it was so obvious, it would have been done by now. Obviously, the member has done his homework and has been listening to his constituents, and I commend him for that.

Ever since I was a little boy, I was, you know, very much a fan of and looked up to firefighters, like so many people in this Chamber probably did. My uncle Aro Dudley was a Calgary firefighter. We were neighbours of him. I remember being in awe watching the show *Rescue 911*, if you remember that. He was on it, and he had saved some little girl from a fire. I remember very vividly just how proud I was to be related to a real-life hero. When I saw this bill come forward, he was the first person that I thought of. But there are so many stories like that, and there are just so many heroes among our firefighters today.

Section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act, which this amends, specifically alludes to the integrated fire-ambulance services. It specifically says that in these cases this act covers these types of firefighters. I feel that that's really appropriate and a good thing and probably one of the reasons why this member is taking this bill through.

In Airdrie we have, as I said earlier, an integrated fire-ambulance team, EMS service, one that we are very proud of. It has become quite an issue of contention with this government in our community right now because our city council has just chosen to divest themselves of this service because of some happenings with the province.

I want to read an article into the record that was published in the local paper in Airdrie. I'm of the hope that the current minister of health will be able to assist my community in retaining our integrated service and actually reverse what has happened because of some developments with Alberta Health Services. I would like to put that into the record, and I'll do so now. The article is entitled *Airdrie Emergency Services and Broken Promises* and is as follows:

Many residents of Airdrie were disappointed when they heard the news the City would be divesting itself of its provincially renowned integrated fire and ambulance service.

Run by Chief Sheldon Leavitt, Airdrie Emergency Services has a sterling safety record, attracts and trains dozens of highly skilled individuals to Airdrie, and saves millions of taxpayers' dollars by efficiently integrating the use of equipment and personnel thereby limiting duplication and waste.

So why would the City feel the need to divest itself of this service? Two words – broken promises.

As a newly elected MLA, I was approached by [the] then Health Minister . . . to carry Bill 43, the Emergency Health Services Act (2008). The proposed law was to enshrine responsibility for providing ambulance services with the newly created Alberta Health Services (AHS) entity.

I immediately brought up a concern with the Minister, communicated to me by Mayor Linda Bruce shortly after taking office, that Airdrie was worried this centralization of authority might mean the end of our community's prized integrated service. I said that if the minister could guarantee me that this legislation would not interfere with Airdrie's ability to retain its integrated service, I would be happy to carry Bill 43 through the Legislature. The minister made the promise, and I, somewhat naively it turns out, took him at his word.

Roughly one year later, and to my great consternation, I received a phone call from our good mayor explaining that [Alberta Health Services] was alleging that Airdrie Emergency Services was in breach of its contract with AHS, and that the demands being made by AHS were so expensive in nature, the City may be forced to divest itself of its integrated service entirely.

The stated complaint by AHS was that the integrated service was overstretched and not adequately safe. Given the unblemished safety record of the service, I found that difficult to believe. Upon further investigation, it appears a high ranking bureaucrat at [Alberta Health Services] was on a bit of a power trip, and was looking for any excuse to have AHS take over Airdrie's integrated service.

After investigating this issue, I called [the] Minister . . . explained the situation and reminded him of his pledge. I suggested that all he needed to do was rein in one or two bureaucrats at AHS and the problem would be solved. He said he would look into it but that I should not involve myself. He hired a mediator. City managers provided three options they felt would address the stated concerns of AHS. AHS declined each option and stubbornly refused to alter its original position on the issue.

Late last year, [the] Minister . . . called me with the news that mediation had failed, but that he would have communications staff at [Alberta Health Services] call me about spinning the news to my constituents as a "public safety concern." I guess he has control over that part of the bureaucracy. I crossed the floor shortly thereafter.

Now, I've asked the current health minister to meet with the city and the city staff to see if there could be something worked out to keep our integrated service. The minister has very thoughtfully agreed to do that, which I'm very grateful for. There's a lot of hope in our town right now that this sort of nightmare might be over, especially for the staff of the integrated service. If anyone looks at the Airdrie papers for the last couple of weeks, since the minister agreed to that meeting, they'll see that there is a lot of hope that something might be done. I would just ask that the minister – he's not here right now, obviously on other duties, a very busy man – when he hears of this first-hand from the city, will do the right thing and reverse a very damaging decision by Alberta Health Services.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, may I just call on you. This is Bill 201 about firefighter cancers.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. As I stated earlier, the bill actually specifically addresses the integrated ambulance

service, that is unique to many communities, including Leduc and Airdrie, so it's very, very relevant to the topic.

I will say this in conclusion, that I do support Bill 201 wholeheartedly.

I would conclude with another story by saying that, you know, when I was in New York late last year, I had the opportunity to visit the World Trade Center site. Across from the World Trade Center site is a church.

An Hon. Member: It's still standing.

4:10

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. It's still standing.

They based rescue operations out of that church. Firefighters from all across the world came there and were based out of there when they were going to and coming from. They would sleep right there in the graveyard that's at that church. It really had a special feeling to it, just a really special place.

I noticed that there's a pile of badges; I'd say about four feet tall. It's just a pile of badges from the different fire departments and police departments from around the world that came to serve there. There's a big kind of commemoration to it and a big photograph of it that you can see on every side of the church and then, of course, the badges in the church itself. I noticed to my excitement that the Edmonton fire department has the badge right smack on the very top. The picture just focuses right down on it, and the first thing you see is the Edmonton fire department. You know, I got to thinking about what absolutely amazing people would go all the way across North America to search and help their brethren in distress in the ruins of the World Trade Center. That was a special moment for me personally, and I think all Albertans and Edmontonians should take pride in being recognized that way.

I think Bill 201 is definitely the least that we could do to make sure that just as our friends in the fire departments across this great province are there for us when we need them, we're there for them when they need us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and voice my strong support for Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, thousands of men and women in Alberta have chosen career paths knowing that their job description would involve putting themselves in life-threatening situations to protect and rescue others. Firefighting is this career. Firefighters have received medical emergency training, which allows firefighters to perform rescue services and prehospital care in numerous situations.

As a former mayor I know first-hand that these men and women are also very active members of our communities, engaging in several charitable organizations and educating Albertans on fire safety and prevention. In my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar firefighters are active in different organizations and are certainly in our schools to teach our children the importance of fire safety. These men and women are trained to cope with numerous situations that could endanger lives and damage property, such as motor vehicle accidents and hazardous goods spills.

Mr. Speaker, there aren't many people that go to work every day knowing that they may face potentially life-threatening situations. There are endless terms we can use to describe these men and women. Brave and selfless are two that come to mind. But I believe

there is no better term to describe these firefighters than heroes. Imagine a house or building engulfed in flames. While people are running away from the flames and smoke, firefighters have the instinct to run towards them. They are more concerned about the lives of the people trapped inside than the thick, black smoke and the over 500 degree Celsius temperature that await them.

As I said, rescuing people from burning buildings and extinguishing flames are only part of the firefighter's responsibility at the scene of a fire. Often fire victims have been exposed to large amounts of smoke or other toxic substances. Since this is part of the job, Alberta firefighters are required to receive emergency medical training. This training also allows firefighters to provide prehospital care to fire victims who have burns, who may have suffered from smoke inhalation or other injuries as a result of a fire. Mr. Speaker, prehospital care means the difference between a minor or a serious injury or even between life and death.

As a result of the educational programs in our schools our children know that a house fire can turn deadly in approximately three minutes and that the average response time for a firefighter to respond to a fire is only a few minutes. The time between the detection of a fire and the firefighters' arrival on the scene is very crucial. In light of these facts, firefighters across our province are leading fire prevention and evacuation seminars in our classrooms and in our communities. This increases knowledge about escape routes, reducing the likelihood of a fire and educating our children on how to make smart choices that can save lives.

The Alberta Fire and Injury Prevention Educators' Network is one of many examples of Alberta's firefighters' dedication to reducing both the number and severity of fires in our province. This group of men and women have made fire and injury prevention education a priority for our province's fire emergency services. The network also aims to recognize and close the gap between fire and injury prevention education so that Albertans have the best information possible on fire safety.

Mr. Speaker, firefighters are known for saving lives. We often think about the image of a firefighter carrying someone out, away from the flames, or providing prehospital care that saves lives. While these are the most visible ways of saving a life, I would suggest that firefighters are saving lives every day in our classrooms and our communities teaching Albertans about both fire and injury prevention. This preventative training saves lives in a different way, and Alberta firefighters should be commended for their dedication to public safety.

In addition to our firefighters' commitment to public safety and promotion of fire prevention in our communities, there is another area in which Alberta firefighters display their commitment to our communities. The volunteer work and charitable organizations that our firefighters are involved in is truly phenomenal. In my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar and, indeed, around the province fire departments have a strong desire to help those affected by fire and to bring smiles to children's faces.

Numerous fire departments raise funds for burn victims to ensure that money is available for necessary upgrades to the highly specialized equipment in their burn unit. This funding often provides the local burn units' health care teams with educational opportunities that allow them to remain informed of new treatment techniques. This provides comfort to those suffering serious burns. Raising funds for burn victims is one of many causes that the Alberta firefighters are associated with. Many fire departments across Alberta organize toy drives for underprivileged youth or raise funds for cancer charities for children.

Mr. Speaker, one of the realities of being a firefighter is going to work knowing that you may endanger yourself to save another's life.

Alberta's firefighters are truly heroes, and it is very difficult to show the depth of our gratitude for what they do. Anyone who has been victimized by a fire knows that there really is no proper way to thank the firemen and women who may have saved your home or a family member. Bill 201 recognizes the role that firefighters play in our society. It also recognizes the dangerous working conditions that firefighters face each and every day. One simple way we can display our respect and admiration for our firefighters is to support Bill 201. Bill 201 acknowledges that the risks associated with being a firefighter do not end once the flames are extinguished.

Spouses and the family members of our firefighters also make sacrifices when their loved ones are called out, and this might happen at supper, at a birthday party, or at any family event. It is a sacrifice that they all make. We also thank the spouses and families for their dedication and sacrifice as well for the support they give to our firemen and women. This bill goes further by thanking our firefighters for the role they play in our communities as lifesavers, educators, and volunteers.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. The wonderful work that he has done, an amazing amount of work, needs to be acknowledged as well. It is my pleasure to support Bill 201 and to thank all those who serve in this noble profession.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

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

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much. Also known as member 709.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise in support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. Like the original amendments that were brought forward with respect to firefighters, I am fully in support of this bill. The bill amends the Workers' Compensation Act so that esophageal and testicular cancers will be added to the list of eligible cancers for which firefighters can be compensated.

Mr. Speaker, one of the difficulties with our workers' compensation system and the way it is administered is that the onus of proof is very much on the person making the claim that the condition or injury from which they suffer directly arises out their work. So when certain diseases are deemed to be grounds for compensation, this makes that whole process much easier for the person who is making the application. I think that when there is clear evidence that particular diseases or injuries arise out of particular occupations, then we ought to make sure that people are entitled to that compensation.

Now, the Workers' Compensation Board currently recognizes kidney cancer, leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, brain, bladder, colorectal, lung, and uterine cancer. This is based, I think, on an approach that provides a great deal more fairness. If someone is suffering from cancer or other serious illness as a result of their occupation, the last thing they want to be doing is going through the various steps and hoops that are provided for in order to get the claim approved. This, unfortunately, is an all-too-common experience of people who apply in Alberta for workers' compensation. So by adding these two cancers, which designate a primary site esophageal cancer and a primary site testicular cancer, to the list of diseases to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies, that would mean that the applicant would not have to prove the relationship to their employment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we all recognize the tremendous courage of our firefighters and the wonderful job they do protecting the lives and property of citizens. But I think that this bill is important for a different reason, and that is that people who are in a hazardous occupation and who are exposed to carcinogenic chemicals or other harmful materials in their environment that result in serious disease or injury have a right to be compensated.

This should apply not only to firefighters, in my view, but should be an underlying principle of workers' compensation in this province. I regret to say that I don't believe that it has been fully accommodated within the current practices of the Workers' Compensation Board or within the legislation that we now have. The principle of this bill is excellent, and I'm saying that it needs to be extended to all workers who face hazardous conditions in their employment and suffer long-term diseases or severe diseases as a result, not just firefighters. Not just because firefighters are brave do we award them with this.

It's important, I think, that we recognize that as human beings, as workers they have the right to compensation, and they have the right to be fairly compensated without having to go through enormous hoops and bureaucratic mazes and the frustration that comes from that. Mr. Speaker, I know, because in my position I've dealt with many people who have been frustrated by workers' compensation in this province, the almost desperate look in their eyes and just their gratitude that somebody will actually sit down and listen to them. Some people, in my view, have become almost obsessed with getting justice because they were denied justice, Mr. Speaker, under our workers' compensation system.

So, in my view, Bill 201 is a wonderful piece of legislation, and I commend the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing it forward, but its principle needs to be extended to other diseases and to other workers. This is something that we should be providing for anyone in our province who has been negatively impacted to the extent that they now have a disease that threatens their life or their livelihood as a result of their occupation. When those diseases can be shown to be caused by their occupation, then there should be deemed to be a sufficient reason for providing the compensation under the act.

Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, I very much support this bill, but I don't accept the notion that this protection is provided to firefighters by reason of their courage or their standing in the community. It ought to be provided to every worker who is in an occupation where their health and safety can be compromised and it can be shown, reliably, that particular diseases are a result of their occupation and the environment in which they do that job. So I would urge the government to go beyond private members' bills and bring forward some comprehensive legislation that extends this principle to all workers in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, brought forward by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I believe that the objective of Bill 201 is to enhance the Alberta Workers' Compensation Act by expanding the presumptive cancer list for firefighters. This is essential because in serving our communities, firefighters respond to emergencies and are exposed to a multitude of known and unknown dangers to their health and well-being.

I commend the province for already having substantial workers' compensation legislation, but Bill 201 would help ensure that this government supports our firefighters to the fullest. Alberta's current presumptive cancer list for firefighters includes brain, bladder, uterine, kidney, colorectal, lung, as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Bill 201 would expand this list to include primary site esophageal cancer as well as primary site testicular cancer. These additions would help ensure that Alberta is in line with other provinces and states that have recently added esophageal and testicular cancer to their lists that presume cancers for firefighters. For instance, B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick as well as several jurisdictions in the United States include one or both of these cancers on their presumptive cancer lists.

4:30

I'd like to further discuss these examples of other jurisdictions as they demonstrate that Bill 201 is feasible and beneficial for firefighters. Mr. Speaker, Manitoba and New Brunswick have incorporated both esophageal cancer and testicular cancer in their presumptive cancer list. In 2009 Manitoba amended its Workers Compensation Act to incorporate esophageal and testicular cancers to their list of cancers covered by workers' compensation. The legislation is retroactive to 1992 and ensures that families of firefighters who fall ill or pass away can access money to cover their expenses. This amendment was known as Bill 17 and received royal assent on June 11, 2009. Mr. Speaker, esophageal and testicular cancers can develop in firefighters after regular exposure to harmful toxins over many years. This is why Manitoba set the minimum periods of employment at 25 years for esophageal cancer and 10 years for testicular cancer.

Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick also recently expanded its list of presumptive injuries. As of 2009 firefighters in New Brunswick may be awarded compensation or benefits in relation to esophageal and testicular cancer. New Brunswick's Firefighters' Compensation Act provides coverage to active and retired firefighters who have served the required number of years of service and who have been diagnosed with a specific cancer or who have suffered a heart attack within 24 hours of an emergency response.

Alberta should follow their lead as it would ensure that we continue to protect our honourable firefighters, who risk their own lives to protect ours. These provinces have rightly acknowledged that there is a link between firefighting as an occupation and certain cancers.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan and British Columbia are also examples of provinces that have recently changed their legislation. However, they have only included primary site testicular cancer in their presumptive cancer lists. In '05 and '09 Saskatchewan and British Columbia respectively amended legislation to include testicular cancer under workers' compensation for firefighters. Similarly, Ontario amended its legislation to include esophageal cancer as a prescribed disease in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, these provinces have recognized the connection between certain cancers and firefighting as an occupation like Alberta has, as well. However, they've gone one step further in ensuring that firefighters are fully protected. Statistically firefighters develop certain types of cancers at a higher rate than other workers, and it's vital that these cancers are covered under the firefighters' workers' compensation. Bill 201 would help ensure that our province remains a national leader in workers' compensation coverage, which would provide further protection for Alberta's firefighters and their families.

In addition to the provinces that have recently expanded their presumptive injury list, there are also 17 states that have done the same to include both or one of these proposed cancers. These states include California, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Texas, Rhode Island, Illinois, Alabama, Tennessee, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma. These 12 states have presumption laws that contain broad or nonspecific language that can be interpreted to cover all cancers. Other states such as Washington and Vermont have added only testicular cancer to their list of cancers presumed to be occupational diseases.

That being said, in Washington the presumption of occupational disease may be rebutted by a preponderance of evidence, including the use of tobacco products, physical fitness and weight, lifestyle, hereditary factors, and exposures from other employment or nonemployment activities. For instance, the presumption of occupational disease does not apply to a firefighter who develops a heart or lung condition who's a regular user of tobacco products or has a history of tobacco use.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned earlier, these other jurisdictions are good indicators that Bill 201 is practical and feasible. Furthermore, an expanding list of presumptive injuries to include primary site esophageal and testicular cancers would reach out to our firefighters and show this government's support of the invaluable job that our firefighters do and our commitment to ensuring their well-being. We've talked about that a lot this afternoon.

Alberta is known for being a leader, which is why we should continue to ensure that firefighters have the proper workers' compensation rights. Let's continue to support our firefighters, who face safety risks in their service to Albertans each and every day, by passing Bill 201.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for introducing Bill 201 into the Legislative Assembly. Now, Bill 201 is to add two primary cancers to the presumptive list of cancers so that firefighters may claim under the workers' compensation if they get esophageal and testicular cancers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was just doing a literature research here on the computer. In San Francisco they did an extensive study: 1 in 3 firefighters either have or have had cancer. These are astronomically alarming rates amongst the population. In fact, lung cancer wasn't a leading cause of cancer amongst firefighters. The usual top cancers around are either lung cancer, usually due to smoking, or for men, 1 in 7 get prostate cancer. There's an alarmingly high rate of all these other cancers, especially amongst firefighters.

Before I go on, I'd just like to tell you a couple of brief stories about the interaction I have had with the heroes of our society. Personally our house had a big fire in Squamish. Recently the Olympics are right there, in Vancouver. Nobody was home. Thank God the fire department arrived and put the fire out and saved our home.

I was visiting in Boston at a conference years ago and was building my new home. Somebody was sleeping in my home for the weekend, and there was a fire. At 3:30 in the morning the fire department called and told my family that my home had been put on fire, and they had put it out.

Recently in Edmonton-Meadowlark one of the elementary schools had a fire in the summer, and they put the fire out. The school survived. It has been refurbished, rebuilt, and actually many of those children were introduced today.

Now, other things I'd like to say about these front-line heroes of our society. You know, you have police officers or paramedics or firefighters, those on the front lines of health care. I have had many interactions with them first-hand. In fact, many of them are my friends. We have integrated fire and EMS services in town. It's beyond fire. Any time there is a 911 call, these are the first responders that are there when there is a car accident. In fact, they get there before the ambulance and police do.

I remember as a STARS doctor being called to a scene in Strathcona. It was just like television. This pickup truck was underneath a train, a high-speed accident, and these are the people who rip these vehicles apart so that we can do fantastic work with them in the front lines in the emergency departments. They can't get to us health care workers until these folks up here put their lives at risk in 35 below weather at 3 in the morning in some strange, cold location.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then there are the risks of stepping into a fire at 3 in the morning when you're tired. You're woken up, and suddenly you jump into a truck, put your uniform on. This is a profession that you have to shoot first and think later. You've got to act immediately. You don't have time to think. They are trained professionals, trained to act accordingly in the right way, and the last thing on their mind usually is their safety. The first thing on their mind is everybody else's safety. I'd just like to acknowledge the efforts of all our dear friends and heroes out there. You are the best of us.

Now, because they react first, they place themselves at the greatest risk. Mr. Speaker, when they come to us in the emergency room, patients are cleaned up, and the scene has been secured. When the to-do happens, they place themselves at greatest risk simply because they must. If they don't, there may be a hundred school kids that burn in that school.

As I said, you know, when I first started as a medical student, I did a ride-along with the paramedics. Gee, I felt really nauseated at the end of the ride because they made me sit backwards. We'd go sit in the fire hall. These guys would be cooking healthy food all the time, and they would be working out. As an ignorant, young medical student I thought: man, these guys have got an easy life. But when they're called into action, the reason they've got to eat this healthy food and the reason they have to get their rest and their sleep and the reason they are working out is because they might be called and they might have to lift a 300-pound man down the stairs, so they have to be in fantastic physical shape. In fact, if everybody else did in health care what these folks do, we would have no problems in the health care system. Healthy lifestyles, healthy eating: this is the embodiment of our society.

I would just like to say: you know what, Mr. Speaker? We have to endorse this. We can't even think about not endorsing this because, unfortunately, it's years later when the damaging effects of the poisonous chemicals are known. The dermal exposure from all of these chemicals that these heroes get from the plastics, the dioxin, the carbon monoxide, the cyanide, all the million chemicals: they experience them later on in their life. The last thing we need to do is ask them to prove to us where they got this from when, really, the evidence already exists.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for introducing this. I'd like to thank all of our friends up here in the gallery for being here. I'd like to thank all of our friends in the Assembly for speaking positively to this.

Thank you.

4:40

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak in support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. The objective of this bill is to include two new cancers in the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim under workers' compensation.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for sponsoring this important piece of legislation. I'd also like to take this time to extend thanks to the brave firefighters in my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, specifically those men and women who work in the communities of Medicine Hat, Redcliff, Bow Island, Cypress county, and Forty Mile county.

Mr. Speaker, many of these firefighters have come to see me and have expressed concern that they're not covered adequately by existing workers' compensation legislation. I am pleased to say that the proposals made under Bill 201 will effectively address their valid concerns.

Now, our current legislation does a decent job of ensuring that firefighters and their families do not have to suffer unsupported with a work-related cancer. However, this can always use some updating and improvement. In 2003 Bill 202, the workers' compensation presumptive legislation for firefighters act, received royal assent in Alberta. With the passing of this bill, Alberta became the second province in the country to provide its firefighters with presumptive legislation and coverage under the Workers' Compensation Board. This legislation was brought forward by the former Member for Calgary-North Hill, Richard Magnus, to protect firefighters and their families.

The dangers related to firefighting go beyond just fighting fires. These additional risks are now recognized by this legislation and proposed amendment changes. After all, Mr. Speaker, firefighters are vital to essential services in Alberta and are committed to the safety of all Albertans. We are incredibly lucky to have such brave men and women shield us from danger, and when a firefighter is unable to do their job, it weakens our line of defence.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat: it isn't just flames that pose an on-the-job hazard for firefighters. The unseen threat posed by toxic chemicals can be just as deadly. Firefighters are exposed to many compounds designated as carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. These include benzene, diesel, engine exhaust, chloroform, soot, styrene, and formaldehyde. Some of these cancer-causing agents can actually be absorbed through the skin.

It's amazing that one of the most dangerous occupations in the world can become even more hazardous when smoke is factored in. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States points out that there are some 70,000 substances listed as toxic and that if these are to combine, there are over 70 million possible toxic combinations.

Moreover, science has shown an undeniable link between firefighting and cancer. The Alberta Workers' Compensation Board has stated that almost 75 per cent of work-related firefighter deaths since the year 2000 have also been due to cancer. The Workers' Compensation Act in regard to firefighters uses presumptive legislation to determine compensation, entitlement, application, and payment. The Workers' Compensation Act states in essence that if a firefighter is diagnosed with a cancer where a primary site is among the list in presumptive legislation, the illness shall be presumed to be an occupational disease. In simple terms, a firefighter's work environment can be the cause of cancer development, and that's why Alberta passed presumptive legislation.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Alberta was the first province to recognize seven forms of cancer as work related. Later an eighth primary site was added to the list. Currently these eight cancers are recognized by the Alberta government as more likely to develop in firefighters than in the general population, and these have been mentioned in debate many times today. If passed, Bill 201 would amend the list to include primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer.

In order to qualify under the primary site cancer regulation, a firefighter must prove a minimum period of exposure to the hazards of firefighting. For example, Mr. Speaker, to qualify for compensation for leukemia, a firefighter must have been a full member of the fire protection service for five years. For compensation for brain cancer it's 10 years. For bladder, lung, and ureter cancer it's 15 years. For kidney, colorectal, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma they must have been working for a fire protection service for 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, without presumptive legislation the responsibility would fall to the firefighter to prove that their cancer was caused by their occupation. In the absence of presumptive legislation firefighters have been asked: at which fire did you contract this cancer?

This legislation removes the burden of proof from firefighters when a diagnosis is made. In addition, with this presumptive legislation firefighters who are diagnosed with cancer do not have to deal with the compounded stress of the diagnosis along with how they would provide for their families in the event that they are unable to work.

Mr. Speaker, advances in science and technology can provide us with new information regarding cancer and the causes of cancer on an ever-evolving basis. If passed, Alberta can continue to be a leader in the protection of our vital services and ensure that firefighters and their families feel a veil of protection in their choice of career. Moreover, it'll work to raise awareness of the important role that individuals play in our society. Finally, it could allay potential fears of those contemplating the profession, ultimately encouraging them to pursue it.

Our current legislation has taken into account the best interests of the firefighters themselves as well as the vocation of firefighting. By passing Bill 201, we will continue to demonstrate our appreciation and support for these everyday heroes. Firefighters put their lives on the line to protect us and the public, and they do not think twice about putting themselves in harm's way.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour of this legislation, this bill, and urge all members of the House to do the same. Thank you.

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and speak in support of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I would first like to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for introducing this piece of legislation. I'd also like to take a moment to thank all the men and women who serve as firefighters to protect and provide safety to all Albertans. These men and women put their lives on the line every day. It is a risk that they and their families live with on a daily basis. They train relentlessly. They serve honourably, without hesitation and with great ability and perfection.

This bill we are discussing today is small but meaningful, a way to further support our firefighters. It is also another example of this government's commitment towards Alberta's firefighters, their families, and the safety of all Albertans. Bill 201 would make amendments that would expand the list of presumptive cancers for firefighters to include primary site esophageal cancer and primary

site testicular cancer. This expands what was achieved in 2003 with Bill 202, the workers' compensation presumptive legislation for firefighters act.

The 2003 legislation created firefighters' coverage for certain types of cancers under the WCB, including brain, bladder, urethra, kidney, colorectal, and lung as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. However, since the first passing of this presumptive legislation research has begun to show that the current list of cancers should be expanded to include esophageal and testicular cancer. That is what Bill 201 achieves by including these two additional primary cancers in the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim for under workers' compensation.

Mr. Speaker, I would specifically like to highlight the many important roles that firefighters play in keeping us safe and how this bill would provide support for these brave men and women. Each day firefighters arrive on the job not knowing what the day may bring. From motor vehicle accidents to wildfires to structural fires firefighters are exposed to various challenges and perform various roles with our safety as their primary objective. The roles of firefighters include fighting fires, rescuing people, as well as fire prevention. Prevention is the ultimate goal of firefighters. Preventing fires by taking necessary safety precautions reduces the number of incidents where firefighters are required to put their lives on the line for the safety of our families. However, incidents do occur that require firefighters to be on the job, ready to deal with any situation they may come upon. Firefighters are extensively trained to deal with a variety of different emergency situations.

Mr. Speaker, the current Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and the Member for Calgary-North Hill as well as myself spent a day last fall with firefighters learning about their training in a firefighter 101 course. It was very informative for all of us. It was also a great experience to take a walk in their shoes and just feel the adrenaline and what they go through on a daily basis.

4:50

These firefighters are trained to deal with the most complex and tragic motor vehicle accidents that require the use of technologies such as the jaws of life and other hydraulic tools to remove victims from motor vehicles. They also allowed us to demonstrate and play with the jaws of life a little bit to see what it is actually like to operate that apparatus.

Firefighting can also lead firefighters into complex and dangerous firefighting situations. In each circumstance firefighters use their training and ability to achieve the goal of saving lives, saving property, and protecting the environment. Fires under any circumstances can pose harmful and challenging environments. For example, most fires involve solids like wood, paper, grass, and plastic; however, a fire may also involve flammable liquids like petroleum, oils, and kerosene and flammable gases like methane, propane, butane, hydrogen, and carbon monoxide. Additionally, fires can also involve combustible metals like sodium, magnesium, lithium, and aluminum, each of which provides different and difficult challenges.

Our firefighters deal with these situations on a daily basis and have the training to know exactly how to best save lives, property, and our environment. However, Mr. Speaker, while firefighters are putting themselves out on the line to protect us, they face many personal dangers that can result in long-term debilitating effects. As described, firefighters are exposed on a regular basis to numerous burning materials, chemicals, and other toxins. When these

chemicals and plastics burn, they combine to form complex and unknown chemical combinations which can be very harmful.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States there are more than 70,000 substances listed as toxic; however, when these toxins combine, there are approximately 70 million possible toxic combinations. Evidence points to these carcinogens as having a direct connection with various cancers. Despite our best efforts at prevention fires do occur, and this requires the training, knowledge, and the ability of these firefighters. Bill 201 fully recognizes the roles and situations that these men and women face and how in performing these roles . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you very much, but time now precludes any further debate.

I'll ask the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is a pleasure to have this opportunity to bring such an important subject before the House. I want to thank all the men and women of the fire services in Alberta who have spent a good portion of their afternoon listening to the debate from my hon. colleagues. I want to thank my colleagues from both sides of the House for the eloquent way that they spoke to this topic and thank them all for their support. If I'm not mistaken, every member spoke very much in favour of this piece of legislation.

With that, I would move to close the debate, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a second time]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might beg the indulgence of the House to note that we have only five minutes left in the time period allocated for consideration of private members' business, bills, and I'm wondering if I might seek unanimous consent to call it 5 o'clock and move on to Motion 501.

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, we'll do that, but I am reluctant to do this. There are still five minutes left. An hon. member could be present to move a second bill, and that would be within the time frame. Can the Deputy Government House Leader advise me if that hon. member will raise a point later?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess if that member is here and wishes to deny the consent, then that would be the case. My concern is that five minutes is generally far less than what the member would normally have to properly introduce a bill, and it would be split over two days.

The Speaker: Again, my point is a procedural one. There is provision in here in the standing orders to continue this order of business till 5 o'clock, and the standing order says that we then move to the next one. There is opportunity for another private member to raise a bill and introduce the bill. The member not being here, I just want to make sure in my head that this does not preclude a privilege issue that we'll come back to later.

The hon. member can proceed with the request, then, for unanimous consent to adjourn this motion and proceed to the next order of business. Please make that request, and we'll see where it goes.

Mr. Renner: All right, Mr. Speaker. I would seek unanimous consent of the House to conclude business for private members' bills and move on to a private member's motion, that being Motion 501.

The Speaker: I'll ask one question. Does any hon. member oppose this request? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

MLA Salaries and Benefits Review

501. Ms Pastoor moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly and to report to the government and this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to stand up and speak to my Motion 501. The question would be: why should I be talking about this now? Partly, I think, we all understand how we draw numbers, and it's been fortuitous for me to be able to have drawn the number when, actually, at this point in time our salaries are frozen. So I believe that this is the time that would be good for an independent review to take their time and review the salaries and benefits, that haven't been reviewed for 16 years, by an independent commissioner. Actually, in this case it was an accounting firm, KPMG. At the end of, I believe, 2011 – our salaries are frozen for two years – the questions would be: should there be an increase, should there be a catch-up, or were, in fact, the salaries of 2009 still fair?

As I've mentioned, the last time there was a review was in 1994, and there were recommendations at that time. One of them was to have a basis for tracking compensation needs. They also thought that the comparison between the substantial gap between member and private-sector compensation wasn't, perhaps, a suitable way of comparison. At this point in time I think that the public and private salaries have come a little closer together, so I'm not sure that this particular recommendation, with the addendum to it, would be still valid.

The second recommendation was to appoint an independent commission and, in fact, that once every three to five years it should be reviewed by that commission. On December 2 in the Members' Services Committee, which is the committee at this point in time that does set our salaries, the leader of the fourth party proposed a motion to strike an independent committee to review the remunerations of the MLAs. At that point the Liberal members of that committee did support that. The Premier and his cabinet increased their own salaries behind closed doors within the last year; however, the Premier and the cabinet also announced that they would reduce their salaries as of October 29, and the October 15 release was released from the office of the Premier.

5:00

There certainly was a push-back from Albertans when the Liberals objected to the process in this House, but I believe the point is that Albertans do feel that they have a vested interest in how their elected officials are compensated and the benefits that they receive. As I've mentioned, how it compares to private and public compensation, I think, could certainly be a point that could be reviewed. At this point in time who gets what and for what I don't think is necessarily the issue. I think that the establishment of an independent commission to review our current salaries and benefits is the issue on the table.

Certainly, by passing this motion, we would be doing exactly what this Premier has said that he wants. He wants open, transparent, and accountable government. Because we as a government legislatively do vote on our own salaries – these are public dollars that are going out – I believe that all MLAs would also like an open, transparent, and accountable way of actually talking to their constituents and to other Albertans on how we are paid.

There were some jurisdictional comparisons, and there are some governments – the Parliament of Canada, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories – where at this point the remuneration is decided by an arm's-length process, and it's formally recognized in legislation. The Northwest Territories has a different way of doing it, but they have it set out in legislation that within two years after the polling day of a general election the Speaker establishes a commission and appoints members who are independent, neutral, and knowledgeable, and they establish the guidelines and the principles for the responsibility of this commission. The commission then, of course, reviews MLAs' compensation.

One of the reasons I feel very strongly about this motion is that when I sat on city council, this is exactly what we did. We did have – I believe that it was KPMG as well – an independent accounting company that did do the comparisons. They did it within Alberta, within Alberta municipalities, and did come up with what we as a council – again, we had to vote on it because they were public dollars – decided was fair. Now, they also had a recommendation on how we would go forward.

Yes, in this House we do have a mechanism whereby every year the weekly earnings ratio is looked at, and our compensation raise is based on that. I think that may be fair. I'd like to have someone tell me that it's fair. The point is that all that does is really raise the base salary. It's some of the other compensations that I think have to be looked at in terms of what is fair: committee work and many of the extras that MLAs, of course, do.

I feel that when I had the independent review as an alderman, I had no problem defending my salary to people who probably thought, as they still do, that all politicians are overpaid. Unless someone has really walked a mile in someone else's moccasins, I don't think that they really understand what others do or the hours that are involved in someone else's jobs. MLAs work long, hard hours, but I don't believe the general population particularly cares about that as long as their voices are taken forward by their elected officials, which is why they were elected, and that they are fairly paid and only fairly compensated. Even if increases are justified, the public perception would be more amiable towards the increase if it came from an outside body and it didn't come from, certainly, those who would stand to benefit directly.

At present the MLA salaries and all of the allowances, et cetera, for ministers, the Premier, leaders of the opposition are posted publicly on the Assembly website. But to determine who receives the committee pay and the total amount paid out to each member requires that you look at the report of payments to Members of the Legislative Assembly, which is tabled once a year by the President of the Treasury Board. This is a sessional paper, and it's also available in the Legislature Library. I think that it requires a fair amount of work to dig out this information. At the present time it's not posted online, and I believe that it should be.

Clearly, the compensation from 1994 was . . . [Ms Pastoor's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list of nine additional members who want to participate. We have approximately 45 minutes. I'm going to recognize them in the following order: the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon.

Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Drayton Valley-Calmar, then Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, then Calgary-Varsity, Strathcona, Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share some of my thoughts on Motion 501, which was brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East. This motion proposes to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits paid to MLAs. This commission then would be required to report their findings to the House. In my mind, this motion is all about ensuring that Albertans receive high-quality representation. While I recognize that there's some angst regarding the present compensation, it's important that it is adequate to ensure that existing and prospective MLAs are fairly paid for what they do. After all, Albertans deserve to have confidence knowing that they are receiving high-quality representation for their taxpayer dollars.

I also believe that Albertans recognize and expect that their elected representatives are fairly compensated for their work. Therefore, I think it is important that we have a process to determine MLA salaries that Albertans can be confident about. To this end, Mr. Speaker, I welcome this proposed independent commission. After all, this would help to ensure the confidence and support of Albertans. However, I believe that for it to be effective, it needs to represent the interests and perspectives of all Albertans. In my mind, the membership of the independent committee should reflect the diversity of the constituents that MLAs are elected to represent. It's important to understand as well that this commission will have to have the ability to look at this issue and could go either way with their findings. In fact, they could recommend that the existing compensation is less than it should be and should be increased.

This commission should also include members familiar with the different challenges facing rural and urban members. My constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat is a blended constituency that includes a vast area of rural Alberta, with oil and gas and agricultural issues. As well, my blended constituency includes about one-third of the city of Medicine Hat.

Mr. Speaker, this commission should also include someone who is familiar with the job of an MLA. After all, I believe that if we reflect this diversity correctly, the commission's report will provide Albertans the opportunity to carefully examine and reflect on its findings. Again, Albertans must have confidence in the membership of the independent commission in order to have confidence in the findings of this commission.

5:10

Some questions come to mind. Who will determine the makeup of this commission? Who is going to decide what is fair? For example, I might include the salaries of some of the presidents and CEOs of some of the companies in the oil and gas sector and the agricultural sector: EnCana, \$12 million plus bonus; EPCOR, \$1.9 million plus bonus; ATCO, \$4 million plus bonus; Agrium, \$7.9 million plus bonus. Given some of these numbers, what would the commission recommend?

In closing, I'd like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing this motion to the attention of the House. I believe that creating an independent commission to explore the compensation given the members is a good idea. We just need to ensure that this commission reflects the values of all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my comments and look forward to the remainder of the debate.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It truly is a privilege to rise and speak very much in favour of Motion 501, requesting that an independent committee be set up for MLA pay. I'd really like to congratulate the Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing forward this motion and putting some good, solid work into it. It's an idea that is long past its due date. It's time that Alberta really catches up to some jurisdictions in our great nation by following what they've done and establishing an independent committee to set MLA wages.

It's not that we necessarily do it badly here in this Legislature. It's not necessarily that what we have been paid here in the past or even right now is wrong. What it comes down to is the fact that in open and transparent governments, rightly or wrongly, the rank-and-file population, the Marthas and the Henrys of Alberta, don't want us to be in charge of setting our own pay rate. Simply put, it's like the Caesar's wife rule, I guess, that we politicians should be following: not only do we have to be pure; we have to be seen to be pure. By that, what I mean is that we shouldn't be setting our own rates. The average Albertan would feel much better if there was an independent commission that was established that could look at different salary structures around Alberta, with maybe some union representation, maybe some representation from the business community, maybe some representation from all walks of life on this committee to add a certain bit of context to what we do in the Legislature and on what our pay should be. Let's face it; that's going to entail a whole complex variety of arguments from all across the board.

Let's look at this. One of the things is that we want good people to come into this Legislature. That's going to entail some sort of pay to, I guess, reflect what people are willing to come to public service for. That said, there's got to be a recognition that we in this House do come here with, hopefully, higher goals than simply drawing a paycheque. For if that was the only thing, many of us who are here, well, wouldn't be doing this. That's not why we're here. At the same time, it has to reflect, I guess, a balance as to what is going to attract people to this House and a balance that reflects the public service element to what, in fact, we are doing.

I would state that the process that we've gone through here over the last course, since I was elected in March 2008, really hasn't been that transparent or open or, I guess, in step with what the Alberta electorate wants. Job number one, or I think the first thing we did here upon my arrival in the House, was to go into a Members' Services Committee and to pass what looked to the average Albertan like a large pay increase. If we look around, that's what happened. We did it at a Members' Services Committee meeting. Yeah, I saw the letters go out from the Premier's office saying that it was decided at an all-party committee level, but we know what happened. We came in here, and the government decided: we're going to boost pay. Fair enough. It's in your purview to do so, but it wasn't on an election platform. It wasn't decided beforehand. It was simply after an election where a vast majority was elected. We thought: "Hey, let's put through a pay raise. Now the time is right. They'll forget about it by the next election, and everything will be back to normal by then."

But that's just what I think. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm wrong. Nevertheless, to take this thing, whatever it is, from there, to take whether that was true or whether it was not true – let's just set up an independent committee to go forward and do this work. Take it out of the hands of the politicians. Yes, at the end of the day I know we're going to have to pass it, but at least we can wave around a piece of paper saying: "Look here. Sorry we have to do it, but this committee is making us do it."

Nevertheless, I appreciate the hon. member bringing this forward. I believe it goes a long way to having open and transparent government. I believe the people of Alberta would feel better about this motion being put forward, and it would simply take a lot of static off both the governing party and the politicians who are in this honourable Chamber.

I thank you for this time, for allowing me to speak, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to hearing other members of this honourable House.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and join debate on Motion 501 as brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. This motion proposes to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly. This commission would then report its findings to the all-party Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, the body currently responsible for all matters related to MLA remuneration.

The Special Standing Committee on Members' Services is comprised of 12 members and chaired by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. In addition to determining adjustments to MLAs' salaries, allowances, and benefits, the committee is responsible for approving the annual estimates of the Legislative Assembly Office; modifying regulations, orders, or other directives governing the office's financial and personnel administration; and establishing human resource information and financial management policy for the Legislative Assembly Office. Without a doubt this committee operates in a transparent and accountable manner. Records of its debates are available on the Legislative Assembly website, and public conversations surrounding the appropriate levels of MLA compensation are always welcome.

In 1998 the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approved a motion to adjust components of member remuneration on April 1 of each year by the same percentage increase or decrease as in the average weekly earnings for Alberta as reported by Statistics Canada's survey of employment, payrolls, and hours for the immediately preceding calendar year. In February 2009 this committee voted to freeze this annual adjustment for the fiscal year April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of this all-party committee to review this policy in future deliberations. Therefore, the research and conclusions of the independent commission might be helpful to the committee in future meetings. Other parties in this Legislative Assembly through the Members' Services Committee could have input on how to assemble a commission that satisfactorily represents what they see as credible and reliable information on this topic.

Mr. Speaker, I support the proposal of an independent commission assisting the committee, but the assessment of remunerating MLAs' salary should be left to the Members' Services Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and participate in the debate on Motion 501 this afternoon. Certainly, it's a motion that I think all hon. members of the House should give consideration to and, hopefully, support. What the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is proposing here is

certainly a fine idea, to have an independent committee review our remuneration and certainly our benefits.

5:20

With no disrespect to the Members' Services Committee, I think this Legislative Assembly and democracy would be better served if our remuneration and benefits were set by a completely independent body. This issue has been discussed and debated through the entire province, particularly since the last election and particularly since each and every one of us in this House received a substantial increase in our pay and, it would be safe to say, our benefits as well.

Now, when you look at the work that individual members do regardless of what side of the House they sit on, members work very, very hard for their constituents and work very hard in this Assembly. There's no doubt about that. But when we look at what other jurisdictions have done whenever this discussion has occurred, we only have to look to the west, to British Columbia, and see what was done there. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, with British Columbia we're talking . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Now, British Columbia started with the citizens' assembly. There were many, many things that came out of that citizens' assembly, including fixed election dates, what role citizens should play through referendum, the overall composition of the Assembly. Certainly, MLA pay and benefits were discussed. As I recall, we had a presentation from a member of that citizens' committee. This gentleman was from Creston, British Columbia. He talked in the presentation he made to us about how good it would be if there was another way to set the scale for remuneration and benefits to each and every MLA. It was interesting to hear this gentleman describe the proceedings of the citizens' assembly, and regardless of where they went in the province, whether it was urban, whether it was rural, whether it was south, or whether it was north, citizens all had sort of a consistent opinion on this matter.

When we look at this House, I really think we should see the merit in this motion. This should be the logical first step towards establishing a completely independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for the members of this Assembly and to report to the government and to this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate and leave it at that. Certainly, other speakers have spoken about previous recommendations that have been made. The recommendations that were made, Mr. Speaker, were obviously read by Members' Services.

Now, it was discussed earlier, certainly, that KPMG recommended that MLAs' salaries should increase. They certainly have. In order to maintain public confidence in this institution and the members that have the privilege of sitting in here, I really would encourage everyone to please consider this motion, to give it some thought, pass it, and allow it to be the first step towards reforming how our benefits and our remuneration are set in this House.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Motion 501 as brought forward by the hon.

Member for Lethbridge-East. Motion 501 urges the government to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly and to report to the government and this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate.

Mr. Speaker, I support the objectives of this motion as it is in line with this government's record of a transparent and accountable government. I welcome the opportunity to have a discussion on how MLAs' salaries and benefits are determined. But I can tell you from my past elected experiences, both as school board trustee and municipal councillor and mayor, that this is always a very difficult issue because at the end of the day elected officials are responsible to make the decision on their salaries, and it is never easy. I welcome and support this motion, as I believe my constituents will as well.

Establishing an independent commission presents certain questions and challenges. Challenges would arise such as how many members would sit on the commission as well as the process for selecting members. All parties represented in the Legislative Assembly could provide valuable input as to how to comprise the commission.

If this committee were formed, it is important that the commission should reflect the broad diversity of Albertans, whom Members of the Legislative Assembly serve. As elected officials MLAs gladly serve all members of their communities, and the membership of the commission should indeed reflect their interests and perspectives. This could include Albertans of various professions, including labourers, teachers, office workers, certainly business leaders, and others.

Mr. Speaker, other provinces have experience in establishing independent commissions to review MLAs' salaries and benefits. As such, it may be helpful to consider their expertise in forming the commission. The governments of British Columbia and Manitoba formed commissions in 2007 while Saskatchewan established an independent review committee in 2006. In selecting its membership, the Legislative Assembly could include members from these commissions for Alberta's own review. These individuals could include present and former Speakers, MLAs, chairs of the commission, and private citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing forward this well-intentioned motion. This committee would provide an opportunity to provide helpful advice to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, which has the responsibility for establishing salaries and benefits for MLAs. In selecting its membership, I hope that all parties can provide useful input as to how to bring this committee forward to best reflect the diverse views and perspectives of our constituents. Therefore, I'd like to extend my support for Motion 501 and look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak to Motion 501 on MLA compensation, put forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. The motion conforms with some of the rules that we get when we ask to propose a motion in that it has to direct the government in some way. I just want to say from the beginning that I believe this is something that is ultimately in the purview of the Members' Services Committee. However, that does not mean that the Assembly itself could not take up the matter, I believe.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of public concern with respect to not only the level of compensation for MLAs and for members of Executive Council specifically but also the process by which these decisions have been made. I want to indicate in general that I think it's very important that there be some independent look at the compensation of MLAs. That is something that I think the public very much would like to see.

5:30

As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East indicated, at the last meeting of Members' Services Committee, in December, I made a similar motion, which has, however, some significant differences. That motion was made in Members' Services Committee, which I think is the more appropriate place to bring it. I'm going to support this motion, Mr. Speaker, but with some reservations. First of all, I believe that the appropriate place to deal with this is Members' Services. Members' Services Committee did in fact deal with it.

The other problem, though, is the general nature of the motion. First of all, it involves the government in determining the MLAs' compensation. I think that's a problem. I understand the problem the member has because when you submit motions for approval, they will tell you that there are certain ways that you can get a motion on the floor, and usually it's to urge the government to do something. But I have a reservation about the government selecting this committee. That's number one.

In the motion that I made in Members' Services Committee, it specifically said that the terms of reference of the committee must include "the requirement that the committee take into account the workload and remuneration of elected members of provincial and territorial Assemblies in Canada." That's important because I've had an experience before at the municipal order of government where a similar committee was appointed and the view on that committee – because this view primarily came from business members on the committee, they were amazed at the amount of work that politicians were asked to do for very little compensation. They had a frame of reference in their minds of the compensation levels you would see at an executive level in the private sector, which is quite a bit higher, so they felt that the compensation should be dramatically increased.

When the recommendation came back from the committee, it was for a significant increase in the salary of the city councillors at that time, and there was a public backlash against it. That's why when I made my motion, I specified that they have to look at compensation of other people doing the same job. I think that's really important. The risk here is, of course, that we're going to have recommendations made coming back to us for even bigger increases in our salary, and I think the public wouldn't stand for it. I think that's an important thing that has to be included in the terms of reference of any independent committee, and that is that we're comparing apples to apples, not apples to watermelons. That I think is something.

But, you know, I think we should support this motion because I think having some independent review of the compensation of MLAs is appropriate, and I think that the public expects some sort of action on our part to ensure that our compensation is not out of line with other MLAs as they operate in different provincial and territorial Assemblies. I would urge, then, all members to support the motion, and I would hope that some of the difficulties that I have outlined can be overcome in the implementation of it so that we do get truly an independent review of our compensation and one that is reasonable and compares us against our peers rather than against people who may have significantly higher expectations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In speaking in favour of Motion 501, which is calling for an independent commission to recommend how compensation is provided for Members of this Legislative Assembly, it's important to note the nature of a motion. It's a recommendation of a desired direction, an urging the government to take steps in the direction suggested. It's extremely important that we have this discussion, and it gives me great hope that so far within this discussion, which we're better than halfway through, the majority of individuals who have spoken, while they may have expressed some individual reservations, support the notion that the motion is putting forward.

I personally believe, Mr. Speaker, that collectively we've lost the confidence of the Alberta electorate, and I say that in a very nonpartisan way. Forty-one per cent of eligible voters chose to participate in the March 2008 election. Whether they chose not to participate because they were satisfied with the status quo, whether they were busy that day, whether they were alienated, whether they didn't figure their vote counted, we'll never know exactly why we had such a low voter turnout, but something every single member of this House has urged for is transparency and accountability. The hon. Premier was chosen as the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party based on a platform of transparency and accountability, something that I believe every single member in this House shares.

Now, being a member of an opposition party, we basically are outvoted regardless of whether it's in the House or whether it's on a particular committee. I would suggest that this motion is not only in opposition parties' best interests, who are on the record asking for an independent commission, whether on the Members' Services Committee or in this House as a whole; I would say that this lets the government off the hook.

It takes away any accusation of self-interest by putting the authority on the shoulders of an independent commission, and I agree very much that we have to make sure that that commission has representation from former MLAs who can attest to the amount of work that we as representatives of our constituencies provide. It will be a challenge creating the membership on that independent commission; there's no doubt about it. But it takes the responsibility, to a large degree, for setting our own wages off our shoulders, and it puts it in the hands of an independent commission to make the recommendations, which then the Members' Services Committee will eventually accept or reject.

Now, we've had suggestions from the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who generally, I believe, supported the motion, but he was the first to bring forward the spectre of large salary increases. That spectre has been echoed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: what if the independent committee looks at the work that we do and suggests that we're not being nearly compensated for the work we do? Well, again, the independence of the commission with the discussion in Members' Services to provide what might in this case be a leavening or a levelling of the proposed wage increase will be extremely important.

5:40

The convoluted calculation that led to the significant increase for the Premier and cabinet ministers was based on the opposition leaders getting a significant increase. Now, it's important to note that that wasn't something that they asked for; it was something that they actually voted against. But based on the fact that the committee decided to give the opposition leader an increase, they then said:

well, sheesh, if we've given the opposition leader this increase, we'd better darn well give our Premier and members of the cabinet an increase. That was a bit of a convoluted calculation, and with this Motion 501's recommendation the convolution would be taken out.

I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is anxious to speak, and I am equally anxious to hear him, so thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 501, brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. There are a few things to keep in mind. I think a review by an independent group probably is a good idea, although currently that duty, of course, is done by the Members' Services Committee, which has representation from all parties now. So all parties are represented. The formation of an independent commission, I guess, could further promote accountability and transparency in regard to setting the salary and benefits for MLAs. Our government, of course, has always promoted these qualities through many different initiatives: all-party committees, ministerial expenses available for public view online, and so on.

Just prior to the formation of this type of commission I think certain criteria should be met and agreed on by all parties. The commission itself would need to represent the diverse views and interests of all our constituents, of all Albertans. I'm just trying to picture what that committee would look like. We would need, I guess, people from different occupations. So maybe we'd need a cashier, a teacher, a seven-figure CEO, construction worker, small businessperson, probably a QC – I'm looking around this room – a nurse, a fellow that owned a drilling company, a fellow that sold his business to do this.

People would understand, I think, perhaps, the opportunity cost, not just what we're compensated for the duties that we perform in this room or outside. When I think of that, would any of those people truly understand what this job is? I've been in it for a couple of years, and I'm still learning what this job is. But one thing I learned right away is that it's not just a job; it's your whole life while you're in here. The diversity that we would need on this committee would involve so many people from so many different areas of expertise, I think, to get it right that it would become a very, very large committee.

Then the next question, of course, is: should this committee be able to come to some consensus – it's been brought up a couple of times – when we got the answer, what would we do with it?

It's a bit complex. We could have, again, measurables against peers, but responsibilities and so on would be a bit different in every province, obligations. Our province, of course, is the economic driver for Canada at this time, so the decisions that are made here can impact the entire country. Again, I just don't know how you would measure that.

I think it would be complicated work. It could be cumbersome. I am having trouble visualizing what the committee would look like. But I do believe that all the members of this Assembly are interested in the views of their constituents regarding MLA compensation. Motion 501, you know, would give us the opportunity to learn from this independent commission, however it's made up, on whether compensation is fair and adequate. With all parties' consent and the committee reflecting Alberta's diverse population and backgrounds and experience, an independent commission could provide valuable input on the compensation of MLAs.

In summary, I'm not sure what this commission would look like, who it would be, or what the results would be, but in general I do support Motion 501, and I do urge all other members to support Motion 501. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Dr. Brown: I want to thank my colleagues for being brief to allow as many people as possible to participate in the debate. I am supportive of Motion 501, sponsored by my colleague from Lethbridge-East.

As my colleague from Strathcona has said, being an MLA is a lot more than a job; it's one's life. We do have a lot of responsibilities, and for those responsibilities we should be compensated in a fair and equitable manner. However, Mr. Speaker, the present means of setting compensation and benefits presents us with a clear conflict of interest. Our purpose and our duty in serving the House ought to be to give faithful and undivided loyalty to the best interests of our constituents and to all Albertans.

It's inherently as problematic for a committee of this House to determine their own compensation as it is for members of Executive Council to set theirs. Members of the House should divest themselves of this responsibility of setting their own salaries and those of the Executive Council. I support the motion for the establishment of an independent body to determine these matters and to make recommendations to the House.

Mr. Speaker, it's not for me to say what might be undertaken by such an independent body or what conclusions might be drawn from such a review. However, I would say that in my respectful opinion the present payment of the so-called transition allowances should be eliminated. They attract criticism, deservedly in my view, because they are far more generous than what transition allowances or severance payments or lump-sum retiring allowances are in the private sector. They continue to grow in magnitude with continued service in the House far beyond the upper limits of what jurisprudence would indicate as justifiable in the world of business, and they accrue even to those who voluntarily terminate their service with this House.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that an outside body might give serious consideration to reinstating some sort of a pension plan for members of the House which need not be modelled on the federal Parliament but might reflect the level of pensions available to managers in our civil service. Those members who have transition allowances accumulated might be permitted, perhaps, to contribute or transfer those benefits retroactively to a pension plan.

Mr. Speaker, the composition of an independent body should include not only professionals, experts in compensation, members of the business community but probably also ordinary members of the public at large. Whatever its makeup it should be free from the influences of members of this House, and its recommendations should be binding.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to eliminate the conflict of interest and the resulting stigma which accrues to us as Members of the Legislative Assembly when we set our own compensation. I urge all members of the Assembly to support the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to say that, like many of the comments today, I support Motion 501. I believe that not only the fact but the perception of the fact relative to the independent review of setting salaries for MLAs is most appropriate. I think it reflects the spirit of what Albertans are saying

in coffee shops. I want to say to the hon. member who is proposing the motion that I think this is a noble cause, and obviously she has been listening to what people are saying in coffee shops across Alberta.

Consequently, I will also be supporting Motion 501. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others to participate?

Then shall I call on the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close the debate?

5:50

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of humility that I do stand up and thank everyone that has supported this motion. I really appreciate the comments that came from the speakers because I do know that they have reflected on this motion and have given it thought. So thank you for that. We know that motions are for government consideration and that they really don't have to do anything in particular with them, but passing this motion will open up and push the really important merit of the recognition of this discussion of what the commission would look like and of having an independent review.

Some of the comments that I have heard have been right on the point, as far as I'm concerned. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is asking for diverse members for this commission. I think we've heard that thought from other speakers, and I certainly agree. Also, because we would have diverse members, it doesn't preclude having an MLA on that commission or, in fact, perhaps a retired MLA that truly understands the kind of work that we do in this House. As has already been mentioned, it's more than a job. It truly is a 24-hours, seven days a week job where you're always sort of on.

Comparing my salary to EPCOR and EnCana presidents, I think, would be most interesting. However, I think that we have to compare apples to apples and not apples to extremely specialized apples.

The Member for Calgary-Hays also suggested that it should be left up to the Members' Services Committee. To me, it is still self-serving to set your own salaries, but the Members' Services Committee could work towards establishing this commission and what it should look like. I think that's the first discussion that would

come forward before we would allow them to go forward and look at our salaries.

The Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar was also calling on diverse membership and actually had some very good suggestions on the kind of commission it would be and the kind of members of society that would be reflected in that.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood suggested that the public really wants to know what our salaries are, and I agree with that. Again, I think that Members' Services could deal with what the commission should look like. As I've said, they could establish the parameters of what a commission would look like and what kind of people would comprise that committee. I think, Mr. Speaker, that having the criteria set by Members' Services is an excellent idea.

The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has suggested reinstating pension plans, which I've often thought was probably a fair idea, but perhaps these pension plans could start at 65 because I think that we know at this point in time that there are people that have been collecting very rich pensions for a great length of time. So if it started at 65 and if, unfortunately, a death occurred ahead of that, then there would be some kind of formula that would have that money go forward to their estate.

I think there have been some very good ideas expressed around this motion. As I've said, I think that having this motion pass will at least get this discussion to go forward, and I think at this point in time it is very important that it does so.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

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

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Blakeman
Campbell
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Tarchuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Blakeman
DeLong
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr

Anderson
Benito
Bhullar
Chase
Johnson
Johnston
Notley
Rodney
Sarich
Vacant

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Bhardwaj
Deputy Chair: Mr. Taylor

Allred
Amery
Boutilier
Fawcett
Hinman
Lund
Marz
Taft
Weadick
Woo-Paw

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. McFarland
Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor

Forsyth
Groeneveld
Horne
Lindsay
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Hinman
Lindsay
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell

Anderson
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
Rogers
Taylor
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred	Jacobs
Amery	Kang
Benito	Lindsay
Bhardwaj	McQueen
Boutilier	Olson
Calahasen	Sandhu
Dallas	Sarich
Doerksen	Taft
Drysdale	Xiao
Hinman	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

Amery	Lindsay
Berger	McFarland
Calahasen	Mitzel
DeLong	Notley
Doerksen	Pastoor
Forsyth	Quest
Groeneveld	Sherman
Hinman	Tarchuk
Jacobs	Taylor
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Issue 10

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some visitors from Saxony, Germany, including the Hon. Stanislaw Tillich, who is the Minister President of the Free State of Saxony; Mrs. Veronika Tillich, the Minister President's wife; His Excellency Dr. Georg Witschel, who is the ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, in his first official visit to Alberta; Mrs. Andrea Dombois, vice-president of the Parliament for the Free State of Saxony; State Secretary Johann-Adolf Cohausz, who is the spokesman for the government; Mr. Hansjörg König, State Secretary of the Ministry for Higher Education, Research and the Fine Arts; Dr. Roger Mackeldey, head of the division for international relations, state chancellery; Mrs. Jutta Wolf, division for international relations, state chancellery; Ms Melanie Ottenbreit, head of the press division; and a good friend of ours, Mr. Bernd Reuscher, honorary consul of Germany in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today President Tillich and I signed an agreement to renew the Alberta-Saxony co-operation for another five years. We both agreed that this agreement will further strengthen ties between our two jurisdictions, and we also agreed that we should get it signed before Canada plays Germany this afternoon. This agreement will provide us a platform for exploring new opportunities for collaboration. Germany is the largest economy in Europe. Alberta's relationship with this economic powerhouse will help us build a stronger position in a global marketplace and increase our province's competitive advantage. We also look forward to working with Ambassador Witschel and his staff to further enhance the ties between Alberta and Germany.

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

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone who is indeed no stranger to us, the current Member of Parliament for Edmonton-St. Albert, the hon. Mr. Brent Rathgeber. Those of you who may know Brent will realize, of course, that in recent times he was the former MLA for Edmonton-Calder, until the electorate ultimately decided that they needed a taller one. It's a rare opportunity for Mr. Rathgeber to be here today, which may or may not have anything to do with Parliament currently being prorogued. I would invite him to stand and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly another group of outstanding young students from Donnan elementary school in my constituency. Forty-seven of them are here today, including teachers and group leaders Mr. Jason Knight, Mr. Gerry Hawkes, and Mr. Sheldon Sitter. I would ask them all to please rise, and the rest of us can welcome them with a thunderous round of applause.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a group of grade 6 students from Holy Family Catholic school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. I had the privilege of meeting them moments ago, and I hope they're having a good time at the Legislature. They're sitting in both galleries today. I ask them along with their teachers, Mrs. Marlene Norsworthy and Mrs. Isabel Pinto, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today three gentlemen who are seated front and centre in the members' gallery. We have Jim Bowhay, president of the Feeder Associations of Alberta, who is a cattle rancher from Sundre; Mr. Reg Schmidt, general manager of the Feeder Associations of Alberta and a cattle feeder from Thorsby, and I'm told by my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar that that's in her constituency; and we have Pat James, who is a 40-year member of the association and who has a ranch in Olds known as EV Ranches. Pat is also a member of the Farm Products Council of Canada, but more importantly Pat has been a long-time riding buddy of mine. We trail ride in the Rocky Mountains, and we've had a couple of occasions to try to give riding lessons to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, with limited success. I'd now ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Duncan Wojtaszek. Duncan is the executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students, CAUS, which is an advocacy group representing the interests of over 70,000 university students across the province. CAUS has been working very hard for the past year to see the adoption of some of the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 2008 election regarding postsecondary students. I will be tabling their report and recommendations today, which is entitled Students and Democracy: Improving Post-Secondary Student Voter Turnout in Alberta Elections. I'd like to ask Duncan to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly

the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees' Committee on Political Action. I'd ask them to rise as their names are called. They're seated in the public gallery. There's Glen Scott, chair and vice-president; Kathy Cayenne, local 071; Gerald Forbes, local 071; Bill Piggott, local 003; Garry Ritchie, local 003; Christina Sefton, local 048; and David Climenhaga, the staff adviser. Our caucus had a very nice chat with them this morning, and we look forward to working with them as we move forward. I ask all members of this Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there others? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, do you have another one?

Mr. Elniski: Yes, I have another one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two individuals from the Children's Autism Services of Edmonton. One in 150 children are affected by autism, and many of these children are on the waiting list for treatment. Children's Autism Services of Edmonton has put forward a development proposal to build a clinic to meet the needs of children affected by autism and their families. I will be discussing more about this organization and their proposal in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would ask them both to rise: Miss Terri Duncan, the executive director of Children's Autism Services of Edmonton; and Mrs. Marcy Henschel, a mom of twins affected by autism. Please receive the traditional warm greetings of the Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alberta Queen's Printer

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last session I asked a question in question period about the Queen's Printer and the downloading of copies from the Queen's Printer website. I'm pleased to say that subsequent to my question the Queen's Printer is now offering copies of all Alberta statutes from their website at no charge to the public and also, I should add, all Alberta regulations.

My thanks to the minister responsible for Service Alberta for the prompt action on this query. This may seem like a small concession and a small issue to many people. It was likely a small concession, but I would suggest that it is not a small issue. There are over 600 acts and over a thousand regulations that comprise Alberta statute law. We are all deemed to know the law. It is important to know the law, for if one should break the law, you will be brought to justice. To expect everyone to know all of Alberta's laws and the intricacies of those laws is absurd, yet it is important for government not to erect barriers to a person's desire to know the laws that affect them in their everyday lives.

Unfortunately, Alberta law is just the tip of the iceberg, for there is also a myriad of Canadian acts and regulations as well as municipal bylaws that one must also wish to acquaint themselves with. Fortunately, however, Canadian statutes and many municipal bylaws are also readily available and downloadable from the website, free of charge, I might add.

As we all know, the law does not stop with the statutes and bylaws but extends to the many decisions of Alberta's courts as well as the Supreme Court of Canada. Again, we are fortunate to have all of those cases, at least all recent cases, readily available on the web.

I guess that in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that with the facilities we have through the Internet and with the co-operation of agencies such as the Queen's Printer, we in Alberta are very

fortunate to have all of this important information at our fingertips, convenient and at little or no cost.

Thank you.

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

Children's Autism Services of Edmonton

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak a little bit more about the two people that I introduced earlier from Children's Autism Services of Edmonton, or CASE. As a service delivery agency CASE does a remarkable job supporting over 85 families in Edmonton with the challenge of raising a child affected by autism. While they do their best to meet the needs of the children affected with autism in Edmonton, they cannot continue to operate effectively without a proper treatment facility. Staff are spending more time driving to clients and less time with actual clients.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the family-focused treatment we expect in one of the best health care systems in the country. In 2008 CASE started a capital campaign called The Children Can't Wait, a campaign to grow a treatment centre. The campaign proposes to build a clinic with special equipment that will support the needs and growth of autistic children. With the facility CASE is expected to see a 20 per cent improvement in productivity because they will spend more time with their clients, addressing their needs, and less time commuting to their clients.

Edmonton is one of the only major cities in Canada without a treatment centre of this kind. CASE is hoping to raise \$5.5 million to build this facility and are well on their way to doing so. Without our support, however, children affected by autism and parents like Marcy Henschel are unable to get the immediate, life-changing treatment that their children deserve.

Hon members, we need to act now to support this cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Electoral Reform

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member of this Assembly is sitting here today because our fellow citizens chose us to serve as their representatives. Some people may be a little jaded about democracy, but I'm still amazed, astounded, and grateful that we live in a nation where people rule themselves. We need not fear tyrants in Canada or in Alberta for our democratic system protects us from would-be dictators and autocrats.

We all know that the price of democracy is eternal vigilance, and Albertans have reason to be concerned about democracy in Alberta. This is no external threat but an internal one. The majority of Albertans have stopped exercising their right to vote, with voter turnout reaching an all-time low of 41 per cent last election. Voter turnout among young Albertans is particularly disappointing, but there are a few young people who are working hard to change that. The Council of Alberta University Students has identified a number of barriers to greater student participation in elections, and they have offered five recommendations to break down these barriers.

First, they feel that students should be allowed to choose between their residence during studies and their family home for the purpose of identifying their ordinary residence; that is, which constituency they can vote in. Second, they would like advance voting stations to be established on postsecondary campuses. Third, they would like advance voting for all electoral divisions at any returning office as well as any advance voting station. Fourth, they feel that returning officers should be selected earlier, a recommendation I think many candidates would heartily endorse.

Finally, these students would like to have Elections Alberta and individual returning officers work with student unions to increase voter turnout. The key here is accessibility and awareness. Make it easier for students to vote, and perhaps we can kick that voter turnout rate a couple of percentage points in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the council of Alberta students for considering these important issues and making these recommendations. I hope that this administration will heed their advice.

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

Bawlf School Racism Project Achievement

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a special occasion when constituents from anywhere in Alberta are recognized on the world stage, and I'm proud to say that today is one of those occasions. It's my pleasure to be able to rise today and recognize a grade 8 class from Bawlf school, within the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright, for their participation in the Racism debate.

Racism is an online, world-wide debate with the goal of eradicating racism by starting with students, our future leaders, first. The countries represented during the debate included the United States, India, China, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and of course from Canada, Bawlf school.

For most grade 8 students I'm sure it would be intimidating to debate students from all corners of the world, but the students from Bawlf school believed in themselves and in the resolution they were debating. The resolution was: differences make us stronger. With that belief and a great deal of debating skill Bawlf school advanced all the way to the semifinals, Mr. Speaker. They came down to being one of the last four teams from around the world.

I'm incredibly proud of the students' success, but I'm most proud of the efforts of the students and the teachers from Bawlf school, who so effectively articulated the values and ideas of Canada and Alberta, and I know I share in the pride of the parents in their children's achievements.

Differences, Mr. Speaker, certainly do make us stronger, and the differences and the diversity within this Assembly are a perfect example of that. After all, it is a combination of our shared experiences and diversity that sheds light on new ways of thinking and improving the province in which we live.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the staff and students of Bawlf school for their participation and accomplishments in the Racism debates and thank them for representing Alberta so well on the international stage. Thank you.

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

Amanda Lindhout

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure today to rise and speak about an event that I attended over the weekend. I and the Member for Calgary-East had the honour of meeting Amanda Lindhout, who was held hostage in Somalia for some 15 months.

Mr. Speaker, there is no honour significant enough and no medal or cup or award prestigious enough to recognize her. She put her life in danger because, as she put it, she wanted to bring light to the crisis in Somalia in her own humble way. Despite everything she went through, she says: despite my own suffering in Somalia and without condoning what was done to me, I feel that those inflicting the violence, while certainly not innocent, are deeply wounded and war traumatized individuals. It takes a profound human being to see the perpetrators of such acts in that way.

There is a need in our world today for individuals like Amanda. There's a need for people that stand up against injustice and recognize that they can do a small part in bringing more justice in our world. A few hours ago I learned of a Sikh man that was beheaded by the Taliban for being a minority in Pakistan. This world today more than ever needs individuals like Amanda that have the courage, the conviction, and the heart to do something about the injustices that are all around us throughout this world.

We need people like Amanda to stand strong, and we need nations like Canada to build a greater democratic and peaceful society around our world, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

1:50

Review of MLA Compensation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to acknowledge that yesterday afternoon the Assembly unanimously passed the Alberta Liberals' Motion 501, which called for an independent review of MLA pay. This is a very encouraging step. How this government responds to the passing of this motion will be a true test of its openness and accountability. To the Premier: when will the Premier establish an independent committee to review MLA pay?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we will begin to work on establishing the committee. Because it was a motion passed before the House, it's incumbent upon the government to begin those discussions, and I'm open to the opposition taking part in those discussions just like we have MLAs taking part in the Members' Services Committee. We have members of all parties represented.

Dr. Swann: Thank you to the Premier. Again to the Premier: what does the Premier envision as the scope of the committee?

Mr. Stelmach: I have some ideas. I'm sure the Liberals have some ideas. The other parties have some ideas. Let's come together and build a committee and bring clarity to this issue.

Dr. Swann: Very good. Finally, to the Premier: does the Premier envision the committee being functional by this fall?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar.

Cabinet Policy Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the Legislative Assembly Act in order to be paid for sitting on a cabinet policy committee, three things must happen: payments must be reported, the rate of payment must be set through order in council, and the appointments to these committees must be done by an order in council, by a ministerial order, or by regulation. My first question is to the Premier: why did the Premier appoint 69 government MLAs, that were paid last year \$1.4 million, to five cabinet policy committees without issuing an order in council?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All members on CPCs are paid in accordance with an order in council that was passed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given that we have requested a copy of this order in council going back to December 9, 2009, when will this order in council be made public?

Mr. Hancock: All orders in council are published and made public.

Mr. MacDonald: It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, that this one to date has not.

Now, again to the Premier. The Premier set up these appointments; he can answer this question. Who in the Premier's office decided to set up the cabinet policy committees in such a way that the Legislative Assembly Act was not followed when those appointments were set up?

Mr. Stelmach: They're not committees of the Legislature.

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

Peter Lougheed Centre Beds

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago we asked the minister of health when the 140 empty beds at the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary would be opened to provide relief to the overburdened hospitals in Calgary. The minister said that he had already told Alberta Health Services to look into it, so these questions are to the minister. When can Calgary see these 140 beds opened?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what I said was that I would pass that information along to Alberta Health Services, and in fact it's on our agenda for further discussion tomorrow evening. I don't think that a decision will be made tomorrow evening, but it's up for discussion. It all has to be part of our longer term capital plan, which I said we would have ready on or about March 31.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. According to the March 2009 CEO's report of Alberta Health Services it was estimated that \$48 million to \$50 million would be needed in operating funds for the 140 beds at the Peter Lougheed. When these beds are open, will Health Services make this funding part of their permanent operating costs for the next five years, or is this a one-off this year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the answer in large part will come when we have the five-year funding plan in place. That'll be starting on April 1, 2010, and those very considerations and concerns that the hon. member has raised will be given the exact discussion that he requested and that I have demanded.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Existing hospitals are already understaffed. How many RNs and LPNs and support staff will be needed if those 140 beds are to be kept open?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I don't have the math in my head, Mr. Speaker. I visited that particular Peter Lougheed Centre a couple of

weeks ago, and I can tell you that the nurses and the LPNs and the docs and the nurse practitioners and the front-line triage people are working extremely hard, and they're very pleased, as are the patients, to have the new wing open. What we're looking at now is: what's the best use of the 140 beds that had to be closed? We're considering all of that right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Government Caucus Consultation

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seniors have built this province. MLAs bring ideas from seniors to their respective caucuses. About a year and a half ago I sat on the government side when I brought an idea of a long-term care centre that the government committed to in a commitment to the people of Fort McMurray. New money has been spent, but the old commitments have not been lived up to. My question to the Premier is: why don't you listen to your backbench MLAs?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, I've said this in the House: we don't have any backbench MLAs; they're all government members. Secondly, we take the advice of all of our government members seriously. That's how we build our capital plan and all of our policies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out that as the budget came forward, the Premier failed to go back to his caucus, so what is disturbing is why he is not choosing to ask his caucus members when changes are being made. This summer he kicked me out of his government caucus without consulting with his caucus. My question is: for an MLA doing their job representing seniors, why were you failing to consult with your caucus members this past summer?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a huge misunderstanding on that side of the House. If this Minister of Finance and Enterprise disclosed to caucus his budget before he introduced it in terms of all of our projections with respect to natural gas, oil, all of the tax implications or no tax implications, I would have had to fire him. I have great confidence in this minister. He brought in a tremendous budget. Albertans are supporting it in overwhelming numbers, and I stick to it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question now is Calgary MLAs. Of course, a commitment was made to the city of Calgary, commitments again that are now not being honoured. Are MLAs from Calgary going to be kicked out of the caucus for representing their constituents, for doing their job in bringing forward the points that are so important in an MLA's responsibility?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that he's referring to the municipal sustainability initiative. No province, absolutely no province in the country of Canada supports municipalities like this province. That is guaranteed. Secondly, in recognition of the good, close working co-operation we have with municipalities, we indicated to all municipalities through very open and transparent dialogue that there will be changes in the funding coming this year.

However, before the end of December we gave them a general knowledge in terms of what their MSI funding would look like. That is, I believe, good co-operation with municipalities, and many have worked that into their budgets and have continued to operate.

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

Homelessness Initiatives

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. This minister has talked about the complex issues around homelessness and that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to ending homelessness. I would like to know what he is doing to address the realities that service agencies face of more demand and less support for assisting the homeless?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question. She's quite correct: there is not one size that fits all. Just over this weekend I saw an example of the private sector partnering with government and nongovernment agencies through something called project homeless connect, which was held downtown in Calgary at the Suncor Energy Centre. More than 5,200 people have participated in this over the past eight years. Some of the services that were provided included medical treatment, mental health services, and income support. I also had the opportunity to meet with 12 homeless people after they had asked me for a meeting, and they had some very interesting perspectives on this difficult issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the same minister. Some would perceive that using the word "partnership" could mean downloading onto municipalities and the nonprofit sector. Groups who protect vulnerable Albertans are stretched financially, and the cuts in this current budget certainly are not helping. What would this minister do to protect the many vulnerable Albertans, including the chronically homeless, who require various services?

2:00

Mr. Denis: I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question, a good question again. At the same time to this House: we're the only province that has a 10-year plan to end homelessness. We're just finishing the first year of this plan. We're ahead of schedule, where we are looking at going, but at the same time we have looked at some rationalization of some costs. It's important also to look at the taxpayers who are funding us and give them value for their money. You will see performance measures implemented by my department over the next several months.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Municipal Campaign Election Financing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs responded to my questions by saying that the government wants to "level the playing field" with election financing laws for municipalities. But here's the thing. The individual wards in Edmonton and Calgary are bigger than many entire

municipalities, with 60,000 or more constituents. So what playing field is the minister trying to level, the urban-metro one with 60,000-plus constituents or the rural one with 10,000?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I was reiterating some of the comments that we are hearing from Albertans in general. Albertans are believing in accountability, and they are wanting to see transparency within their local governments. They believe that those issues are important. So part of the process of Bill 203 was the fact that we are trying to have the same rules for every elected official across the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would think that you would be trying to raise the bar rather than lower the bar. Given that the city of Edmonton has election financing rules that are already more comprehensive and in some ways stricter than the provincial rules, is the government trying to make Edmonton conform to weakened average provincial rules?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly the regulations and the rules and the amendments to the bill that are coming forward will provide some clarity to all municipal elected officials. I recognize that Edmonton has their own rules and regulations. When we do introduce the amendments, it's going to complement those types of decisions that they've made in the past.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about clarity, but there's a big fat catch-22 here. Candidates are individually responsible for their campaign debts, but if the debt is greater than \$5,000, they can't pay it individually because that would contravene the act's limits. How would the minister advise that this situation be addressed?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think, you know, aside from disclosing the information that will be coming up after our break, that clarity will be provided when we introduce the amendments.

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

Foreign Qualifications

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. New immigrants are constantly faced with the challenge of getting their international training and credentials recognized right here in Alberta. In fact, it can be so challenging that we hear about potential doctors, engineers, and other professionals working as taxi drivers and at fast-food counters. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What are you doing to help speed up this process so that they can utilize their expertise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there are anecdotal stories of doctors driving taxicabs. Any time we have human capital that is underutilized in this province, it is not only unfortunate to that very individual himself or herself but also to our economy and to all of Alberta. In view of that, right now our department is developing the foreign qualification recognition

program, assisting self-governing bodies in determining who should and should not practise in Alberta. Let's keep in mind that it's not the government, nor is it us here in this House, who should determine who are qualified doctors.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. Mr. Minister, we hear of so much red tape when it comes to evaluating foreign credentials. So my question is: are associations and other institutions properly equipped to fairly and quickly assess foreign credentials?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I started answering in my first answer, you don't want government or politicians making a decision on who are qualified doctors. That's why we task self-governing bodies such as the colleges and other professional organizations and/or employers. In view of that, my department has put in \$2 million to develop tools assisting colleges and other self-governing bodies in processing and setting up expectations so that individuals, even before they board a plane coming to Alberta, can determine what their likelihood is of actually practising in this province in their profession.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Is your department doing enough to ensure that foreign-trained professionals can receive their credentials in a timely manner and resume their careers here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working very diligently to work with international professionals and international students because it is very, very important to our next generation economy. It's very important to the future of the province. Our prior learning assessment plan is there for international professionals coming into the province to help them bridge to whatever new credential they may need given their professional body. We stand ready to work with them to create the kind of bridging that needs to happen within the province.

Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been both supportive and proud of our troops serving overseas in the protection and defence of people's right to vote for a democratically elected representative. Given this backdrop, my question is for the Justice minister. Why did your government select an individual to run Elections Alberta who does not believe that it's his job to encourage people to vote, or is this the government's whole idea?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not my understanding that the government did select this individual. I believe that was the purview of this House.

Mr. Hehr: I understand that, but we all know who actually selects these individuals to run our departments.

Do you think it's possible for your department to maybe instruct this individual that their mandate is to encourage active participation in getting Albertans to vote, or are you going to ignore that job?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Officers of the Assembly

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, just for clarification. The person in question, the Chief Electoral Officer, is an officer of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, not the government of Alberta. If it came to my attention that a minister of the Crown was actually intervening in the affairs of an officer of the Legislative Assembly, there would be an intervention all right. It would come from me.

Third question.

Chief Electoral Officer

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that. I guess I just like the old way when the old guy was actually trying to actively promote things and actually get people to vote, but who am I to argue with the process that we have in place here?

I guess my final question for the political minister – I mean the Justice minister – is that given her answers today are what most people already know, are there really any substantive changes coming to the electoral act? Can we see some fixed election dates? Can we see some reform to university students being able to vote at the schools where they're going to school? Or what's going on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'd say is that if there are people in Alberta that are concerned about the efficiency, the transparency, or the honesty of this system, I would suggest that one of the reasons for that might be because of the sort of information that's being propagated through the prelims to these questions.

However, Mr. Speaker, as I have said on more than a regular basis, we will be introducing amendments to the Election Act based on the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer, both the current one and the previous one, as a result of lessons learned from the past two elections that are printed in published reports. I think we'll have a great debate in the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Provincial Achievement Tests

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard in the Assembly that the number of teachers has increased in the province by 10 per cent while at the same time the student population has only increased by 1 per cent. My question to the Minister of Education is: have student achievement test results seen a corresponding rate of increase during that same time frame?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the short answer to that would have to be no. The PAT results, or the standard of excellence, have remained relatively stable during this time frame. There was a slight decline since 2005-2006. We saw improvement at the acceptable and excellence levels in 2008 and 2009. But I'd have to say that student outcomes have not increased commensurate with the investment in the class size initiative.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, we've repeatedly heard that high class sizes produce low test results. Then wouldn't it be logical to assume

that lower class sizes should produce better test results? Why is this not the case?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that there are a number of factors that go into it. Having said that student outcomes haven't increased in a commensurate way is not to say that there haven't been a lot of good things happen as a result of the class size initiative. Teacher satisfaction, parent satisfaction with the education system has improved significantly. Obviously, the ability of teachers to do their jobs has improved significantly. With respect to the question of outcomes I think it's fair to say that the research and the literature suggest that class sizes themselves in the higher grades do not make a significant difference, but it does at K to 3.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then my final question to the same minister: what's this minister doing to improve test results aside from just trying to reduce class size?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that in this year's budget we have reprofiled the class size initiative money so that it is focusing on increasing the number of teachers at the K to 3 level, where the research shows that it does make a significant difference, and at the high school level with respect to the credit enrolment units for courses where it makes a difference; in other words, courses where safety is a factor or class size is a factor.

The other thing we have to realize is that there are differences in class sizes across the province, and what we report on are the averages of school boards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We speak of the extreme importance of oil and gas in Alberta and to Albertans, but we can't lose sight of Alberta south of Calgary. The promised police college is very important for police services, retaining our rural culture, and fostering economic diversity in our rural communities. To the Solicitor General. Fort Macleod has had this carrot dangled in front of it since 2006. Why has the minister waited so long to provide them with answers?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't waited all that long. I've been in the position for about a month.

The hon. member will know the conditions under which this college was first suggested, that being that it gets private funding and it's operationally self-sufficient. Given the fact that I can't identify private funding to that level, I have no public funds to proceed. Given that, I will do everything I can to make this project proceed, but I can't make any promises at this time.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. I think that's a tiny little door that's opened.

My next question is: can we expect a concrete, well-prepared, long-term implementation strategy or evidence of any sort of planning? What kind of work has been done to actually attract private? Should we maybe rethink private?

Mr. Oberle: Well, we can rethink private if we want, Mr. Speaker, but the fact remains that I don't have any public funds available to me right now. As the hon. member pointed out, we need long-term planning. I think we have a capital plan that stretches out for a very long term. In order to pull this project off, I would need to find a way to reprofile that, and I can't do that right now.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. My next question to the same minister: I guess, given those answers, what I'd like to hear is that there is a pledge that it will be built.

Mr. Oberle: I've made about the clearest pledge I can make, Mr. Speaker, and that is that I will work very hard for the citizens of Fort Macleod and the MLA that represents this area. I feel for their position. I will do everything I can to make that college happen.

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

Long-term Care Funding

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NDP caucus has heard from Albertans what they want from their health care system, and as we've mentioned in the report of what people want, long-term care is a top concern. This government's move to close long-term care beds in favour of private assisted living facilities allows operators to charge outrageous fees for services that are covered under long-term care. Here's an example from one in Edmonton: if you need to be escorted to the dining room, \$300 a month extra; \$125 a month for help with putting on your support stockings; \$75 a month to get your bedsheets washed. Why is the minister of health closing long-term care beds in this province and forcing people into private facilities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any long-term care beds that are being closed. In fact, the opposite is true. We're actually looking at building more long-term care spaces. We have about 20,000 such spaces in Alberta today. We have about 9,000 acute-care spaces. We need more. We have about 2,000 addiction treatment beds in this province, and we're working on increasing that as well. So it's really kind of the opposite to what the member is saying.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's not kind of the opposite. In fact, many long-term care beds have been closed in this province since the last election despite a previous promise to build 600 more.

Here are some more costs: incontinence management, \$175 a month; oxygen, \$175 a month; medication assistance, \$200 a month. This is basic care, Mr. Minister, and public long-term care facilities do not charge extra for it. Why can't the minister of health see that forcing seniors to pay these kinds of fees for basic care could send grandparents to the poorhouse?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're going to be building more long-term care facilities. I think everybody knows that. The hon. member may have missed the announcement that there's a \$100 million bond issue right now, and all of that money is going to go toward that. Plus we have a long-term plan coming out on or about March 31. It's called the health facilities capital plan. There will be, I anticipate, some additional good-news announcements in that package of goods as well.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that this minister understands the difference between long-term care and assisted

living because we're talking about assisted living. We released a report showing the government's plan to eliminate many of the long-term care beds in this province. Now, \$300 a month for meal escorts, \$150 a month for night checks, and \$100 a month for a weekly bath is way too much for ordinary seniors and their families to be able to afford. Why won't the minister be clear that long-term care beds, where things are not charged for, are in fact what the government is intending to build?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm sharply aware of some of the fundamental differences between long-term care and assisted living or daily assisted living or supportive living or whatever. I know that under the long-term care arrangements, for example, we must have 24/7 supervision by a registered nurse whereas in some of the other facilities registered nurses might be on call but not necessarily staffed at the facility. Nonetheless, the issues that he has raised are those that are on the table for discussion right now.

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

Primary Care Networks

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I met with a group of doctors on the management team of the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network. They, along with all Albertans, feel strongly about making improvements to our health care system. They support innovation and creative solutions that positively address faster access and better availability of services. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Since primary care networks are proving to be very effective in my area, can the minister assure us that they will continue to be funded?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have about 32 of these so-called primary care networks in Alberta that involve a team-based approach. Those teams vary; they could be a doctor, a pharmacist, a registered nurse, a dietitian, a physiotherapist, or any combination thereof. They're doing a very good job, in my view. My hope is that the PCNs will, of course, be continued, and that's what we're striving so hard to do. The funding, however, is going to be part of the discussion, depending on how the contract negotiations go. Those are coming up very soon, so my hope is there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you. Albertans also want more emphasis on prevention and wellness. My question is again for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister have any plans to expand primary care networks so that more Albertans will be able to benefit from this team-based approach for primary health care delivery?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the 32 that we already have up and running that are proving very successful, I'm aware of at least 11 others that are under development. I expect at least six of those to come on stream very soon. Now, the issue of the funding. This is all part of the five-year funding plan, so we just have to be patient until April 1 comes along, and then they'll have the details they seek.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Lacombe the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network, which includes Lacombe, Ponoka, Rimbey,

and Sylvan Lake, does an outstanding job for constituents in central Alberta. Is there anything the minister can do to increase the effectiveness of primary care networks in terms of facilities and equipment that they require?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Wolf Creek PCN is one of the more recent ones. They have a tremendous response network there for diabetics in particular. I want to say on record how pleased I am with what they're doing in the Wolf Creek area. In total we see about 39 family physicians in eight clinics serving more than 80 per cent of the residents in that network's catchment area. That's a very good thing.

As for the equipment part, that, too, will come forward in the April 1 budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Carbon Emissions Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Walking and cycling have been used throughout the world to reduce car usage, road wear and improve citizen health and community connectivity. This government is doing the oil and gas sector a disservice in terms of meeting our emissions targets when it insists on spending billions on one big-ticket CCS but ignores the smaller initiatives that can have significant, enduring effects. To the Minister of Environment: what is the province doing to encourage more people-oriented initiatives like building cycling lanes and walking trails?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate that there may be some environmental benefits to cycling and walking, I'd suggest that the benefits probably accrue more to the cyclers and the walkers. She may want to address that question to the minister of health.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I think that if they're walking or cycling, they may not be driving, and that should help us.

To the same minister: given that the municipal sustainability initiative has been cut two years in a row and given all the other areas this wonder-fund is supposed to cover for cities, how does the minister expect cities to extract money to pay for environmental programs which are more the minister's responsibility?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we just recently announced a \$2 million contribution to a project jointly managed by AUMA and AAMD and C that will create a centre of excellence for municipalities large and small throughout the province to find opportunities for them to significantly increase their energy efficiency and at the same time decrease their environmental footprint. So while we're not expecting that we'll pay for the initiatives, we certainly will give them the expertise that they need to find the direction that they're going.

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister. Well, here's an opportunity. Why doesn't the minister amend the Green TRIP program to include incentives to expand walking and cycling infrastructure?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't necessarily be opposed to doing such a thing, but I do want to point out that the Green TRIP program is designed to reduce in a significant way the carbon footprint. And while I said at the outset that there may be some

marginal benefits from this, I don't think that's the best bang for the buck for this program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along the east side of the border hunting is a critical element of the economy. Particularly within the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright hunting is a significant economic driver. As such, ensuring a healthy deer and elk population and plenty of hunting experiences is critical. The threat of chronic wasting disease is a worry to many of my constituents concerned about their livelihood. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: now that hunting season is over, can you provide me and my constituents with an update on the management of the CWD issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have got, I think, a very solid monitoring program and process in place. After the last hunting season we confirmed that 10 new cases of this disease were found as a result of the program. Now, the disease boundaries have shifted slightly this year a bit south of highway 1 in one case and again a little further west near Wainwright. But the concentration of the disease is still situated around Empress and Edgerton and remains there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hunters have long advocated that they're the best tools the government has to ensure that deer and elk populations are managed appropriately, which in turn controls the spread and therefore the threat of CWD. I believe they are correct since utilizing them ensures economic stimulus for the region and manages the population. Can the minister indicate if there are any plans to change the policy of utilizing local hunters in the management of CWD?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, in a word, no way. We really believe that hunters have played a very positive role in this, and Alberta hunters have been key to the surveillance of the disease. The last hunting season they submitted about 4,500 heads for testing, and 4,166 of those have been tested. The proof of that is that hunters' value to the province of Alberta relative to the results that we're getting and relative to mitigating the circumstances around this disease is very positive for us. We will continue to work with that fraternity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's excellent news. We all know that chronic wasting disease is a difficult disease to manage and control, but with more information and monitoring we may increase the chance of successful management. It's important to know, however, whether the CWD has been contained to border communities or if it continues to spread. Is the province expanding its monitoring practices further beyond the border hunt zones to ensure that management practices are in line with the disease and its potential spread?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Again, the only wild deer in Alberta that have tested positive for chronic wasting disease have been within about 80 kilometres of the Saskatchewan border total, most of them within 20 kilometres of the Saskatchewan border. The majority of testing is done along the Saskatchewan border. We have to understand also, Mr. Speaker, that testing this disease occurs throughout the province of Alberta with receipt of these heads, and any deer that our officers find that show symptoms of disease are tested also. We continue to monitor this, and we think that with the help of our hunting community we will be successful.

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

Signage on Highway Rights-of-way

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Driving from Calgary to Edmonton, one can't help but notice a variety of signs on private property, from semi-trailer billboards to the hay bale towers advertising feed, yet this minister specifically targets antinuclear signs, and his answers have not cleared things up. This issue is not just about removal of signs on private property; it is about a situation where of all the signs out there on the highways of the Peace Country only the signs against nuclear power were specifically targeted. To the minister: why?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that this hon. member is absolutely wrong. Look, I've told him many times that this department has a policy that we do not allow signs within our right-of-way, and they're noncompliant 300 metres on private land outside the right-of-way. On outside the right-of-way signs we send out letters telling people that they're not compliant and to remove the signs, but we don't remove them. Inside the right-of-way it doesn't matter what's on the sign. If they're not compliant, we will remove them.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Speaker, this is about expressing freedom of speech, and it has nothing to do with the right-of-way. It is not right that only the signs expressing opposition to a government policy are removed. We haven't had an answer on this. Perhaps the minister doesn't know why his department is having this removal done. What investigation of this has he undertaken?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this policy has absolutely nothing to do with freedom of speech. It has to do with noncompliant signs within a right-of-way, and if the signs are noncompliant, it doesn't matter what's written on them; they're going to be removed.

Mr. Kang: Those signs were not in noncompliance, Mr. Speaker. When can we and the people of the Peace Country expect to see a public formal review and report on this matter?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're looking into some of the claims, but I've got to tell this hon. member: they are noncompliant. We don't allow signs in the right-of-way.

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

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wood shipments out of Alberta are increasing, and the price of dimension lumber is slowly getting better. So much optimism in the forest industry right now, but also so many concerns coming to me from my mills in Whitecourt-St. Anne. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable

Resource Development. Can you tell me and give me the assurance that you and your department are doing everything you can to make sure on the ground – not here in Edmonton but on the ground – that work is being done to fight the pine beetle?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, I can assure the member that everything that we can do is being done relative to mountain pine beetle. Of course, this situation changes on a daily and, certainly, yearly basis depending on a number of factors. The hon. member knows very well that influx and in-flight of beetles into Alberta is a major problem that we're faced with. But, yes, we are continuing to put a lot of dollars into this and to put front-line people and staff on the ground. They're there today as we speak, and we continue to work with this problem.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister. This concern is not just in Alberta. It's interprovincial, and there's a federal responsibility. What are you doing with the federal government to assure that there's some partnership in the dollars needed to fight this emergency?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we work very hard to try to convince the federal government that they should have a program in place. In fact, to my knowledge the federal government doesn't have a mountain pine beetle mitigation program. They've come at it with a bit of an ad hoc situation that helps us, to be sure. Very grateful for what they have done. But we continue to work very hard with the federal government, with our department people, dealing with them to try to get them to understand that if this problem leaves the province of Alberta and goes farther east, the federal government does have a very serious problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

2:30

Health Care Decision-making

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the minister of health announced a surge in a few medical procedures. My question focuses on the ideas that can help cure long-term wait-lists, not Band-aids. This government made a flawed decision to centralize health care decisions in the hands of a few appointed bureaucrats. When will this government realize that taking away decision-making power from local health care administrators was wrong?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, people at the local level have every opportunity to speak to their MLAs to bring those issues forward. They have every opportunity to speak with their local health advisory councils. There are over a dozen of those in place. They have every opportunity to pick up the phone and call my office. There are a number of ways that people can still have direct input. I should also add that I'm on a very aggressive tour of all of Alberta right now, so I'm meeting with a lot of these people, and they can speak to me directly when I arrive there. There are just so many ways to do this.

Mr. Hinman: Well, that's interesting, but if they don't change this centralized health care system, Albertans will change this government. When this government centralized health care, it blocked competition and innovation. To the minister: does he know that the efficiencies and innovation that his superboard wants to achieve actually came from leading local health care administrators?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I think I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that I'm not so concerned with where good ideas come from. If there's a good idea and we have a chance to review it and we can cost it out and we can look at the benefits of that costing and it makes sense and it improves services and people are happy with that and we can move waiting lists down and we can improve access and we can unclog the system, you can count on us to do that. But it doesn't all happen overnight. One of the great things that we have right now, of course, is the five-year funding plan, which will assure us that the deliverables we seek will be worked on and diligently pursued until they are delivered.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, those are nice words, but he's still missing the point. He places more trust and authority in the hands of a few government-appointed bureaucrats than he does in local health care administrators, who see the flaws and the opportunities in our health care system every day and are blocked when trying to implement new ideas and procedures. Would the minister agree that when the superboard interferes with the implementation of these local initiatives, patient care suffers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, no, I won't agree because I can tell you with great assurance and with some authority that the people who are working to deliver those important health services are doing a darn good job, and they should be commended for what they're doing. With this six-week rollout we have doctors working extra weekends voluntarily. I mean, we're paying them for it, but they volunteered their service time to step up to the plate. We have people who were working full-time who are working some overtime, we have other people who were working part-time that are working more time, and they should be thanked as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Foster and Kinship Care Spaces

Ms Notley: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we know that 592 foster spaces were lost in Alberta as of March 2009 while 630 new spaces were found. That makes for a net increase of 40 foster and kinship care spaces in Alberta as of March 2009, seven months into the 18-month period discussed by the minister yesterday. Now, talking about spaces that are created without acknowledging those that are lost leads people to draw the wrong conclusions. Will the minister of children's services admit that her claim of 900 new spaces for children in government care . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can be very clear that permanent placement for children is a priority for this ministry and that over the past 18 months the foster care spaces and the kinship care spaces, which, you know, is when a grandmother or an aunt and uncle or whoever is kin to that family looks after the child, are well over 900 spaces. I can get the information, though, for this member over the last number of years and equate that and go through it if you'd like to see a statistical analysis of that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, to defend this government's cuts to children's services, the minister yesterday led this House to believe that the availability of foster and kinship care spaces had grown enough to accommodate a \$30 million cut in her ministry. Talking about increases without talking about losses is only half the story.

There's an old Yiddish saying that sometimes a half-truth can be a whole lie. Will the minister admit that she only gave us half the truth yesterday?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you very clearly that, as I said previously, foster care spaces have increased, kinship care spaces have increased, and permanent adoptions have increased. In fact, the whole change with the child and family enhancement act is working, and that is where, as you know, previously a worker would go into a home, would remove that child, and often the child would remain in care for a very long time whereas now they work immediately with the family to assist the child being in the home. Those kinds of services are working.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it's deceptive to report an increase of 900 new foster spaces without telling people exactly how many spaces have been closed in the same time frame. Now, with nowhere near 900 additional foster spaces – who cares if they're new or old? – the minister's plan to save money on the backs of these fictional homes can't be real. Will she admit that she has no plan to cut \$30 million without hurting the kids she is responsible for taking care of?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that the children and youth that are being cared for through this ministry are going to continue to be cared for in the way that they were yesterday, the way they are today, and they will be in the future. Because of the good work that's being done out in the community – there has been so much that has happened with this ministry that I am learning about that has created really something that is just profound for children and youth out in the community, and that's through foster care, kinship care, adoption placement, good support services programs, and as I said, I'll get you the statistical analysis.

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

Trade Mission to Washington, DC

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta plan for economic recovery includes a push to become one of the most competitive jurisdictions to do business in the world. Obviously, I've spoken to many Albertans, as I'm sure my colleagues have, who are very supportive of this, but I've also spoken recently with constituents who are a little concerned about how this can be achieved in a time of recession. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. My constituents understand that there may be value in meeting with U.S. officials recently in Washington, DC, but in today's tight economic times how is this a prudent use of tax dollars?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's been over a year since a member of the cabinet has actually been to Washington to meet with officials, and we attended, with the Council of the Federation and governors from several states, meetings to talk about the ways that we can expand our interests in energy. We met with others thanks to the ambassador, Gary Doer, and the officials of the White House. We really focused our attention on those people that could provide us assistance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. I understand the minister met recently with Lisa Jackson, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has stated that it may go it alone, so to speak, if the U.S. Congress cannot pass

climate change legislation. My question is to the same minister. What are the implications right here in Alberta?

Ms Evans: They could be dire if we, in fact, didn't do our due diligence. Ms Jackson spoke to us about the carbon intensive reductions that are necessary. So carbon intensive industries, she indicated, would require reductions. She spoke very eloquently about the fact that the Obama administration and her department, which has some 17,000 workers that are responsible for environmental protection, intend to keep environment front and centre even though jobs and health care are huge for the administration in the United States at this time.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister. As part of the COF mission the minister attended two round-tables with Premiers and DC policy groups on border management, energy, and the environment. I'm hoping there were concrete benefits or insights that were gained that would help Alberta. Was that indeed the case?

Ms Evans: In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think it certainly opened my eyes to the large challenge we have to make sure that America is fully cognizant of our needs here. You know right away when you walk into a room and someone talks about the tar sands that they may not be friendly or disposed towards listening to the kinds of things that we've already done with the clean air technology strategy. We indicated at all junctures that we supported our Prime Minister and the President of the United States to discover better technology, to on a go-forward basis make sure that we followed through with what the Minister of Environment currently is doing, and that is making sure that we're as clean and green and sustainable as possible.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 19 individual members were recognized today. There were 110 questions and answers: 12 came from the opposition, seven from private government members.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Water Management

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In many ways human behaviour is predictable. We want to progress, but we want to do it in the easiest way possible, just as water. But there are consequences when we do not think things through. Our forefathers settled close to sources of readily available water so they could survive. They found ways to store water so that during drought times they had a source of water that would sustain them.

This government's water for life strategy is flawed and lacks the vision and commitment of our forefathers because it does not address the growth of Alberta or the changing climate and the need for increased water storage. We have more water over a shorter period of time and must build the infrastructure to capture and store this precious resource.

Unlike this government, who only focuses on the next election, our forefathers focused on the next generation. When you look at the regions in southern Alberta that have grown and thrived, they have been able to do so because of the ability to capture the value and energy of Alberta's water resources. Calgary, Lethbridge, Fort Macleod, Medicine Hat are just a few of those communities. The diversification and innovation in southern Alberta through water storage and distribution canals has allowed people in industry to

flourish in a part of the province that is semi-arid. We produce a tremendous amount of produce and food products that Albertans enjoy, everything from cattle and corn to grains, legumes, sugar, and potatoes.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, our future food security is often overlooked. It's just as critical as our air, water, and land. This government needs to focus its infrastructure storage on water, H₂O, not the storage of CO₂. Albertans know how to do this. We are good stewards of the land, air, and our water, and we know that a government that does not focus on the future food sources, clean air, and water will undermine our quality of life.

As we recognize Scout Week, we need to be mindful of part of their law, to be wise in the use of all resources. I would encourage all the members in this House to visit the website aipa.org from Alberta Irrigation so that we can make sure that every drop counts and that we are able to enjoy farm-fresh Alberta products.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Monday, February 22, 2010. I can advise the House that the petitions comply with Standing Orders 90 through 94. Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one report to table, the appropriate number of copies of Students and Democracy from the Council of Alberta University Students and their five recommendations on how to improve democracy and improve voter turnout amongst our university students.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a report entitled *The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* as well as a summary report of that report. Just so people have an idea what the report is about, the conclusion says that

AISI is an impressive change strategy that is perhaps without parallel in the world today. It contributes to teacher development and educational change in a manner that is stable, steady, and credible among the educators it most seeks to impact. AISI leadership is transparent, responsive, and trustworthy.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, the appropriate number of copies of a document from the Churchill Retirement Community, an assisted living facility in Edmonton. The document provides a list of fees charged to residents for various services.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report by the NDP caucus entitled *Alberta's Health Care: What People Want*. The recommendations in the report are based on public hearings which we held in seven communities around the province. Participants at those hearings showed strong support for

maintaining health care services that are both publicly funded and publicly delivered.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first tabling is with permission from Mr. Keith Wilson on 56th Street and 90th Avenue in Edmonton. Mr. Wilson is writing urging the government to not cut funding for our schools.

The second tabling I have is also with permission from the author, Janice Stefancik, and it was sent to me and the hon. Minister of Education and the hon. Premier. It, too, is urging the government to not cut funding for our schools.

The third tabling I have is a letter that I wrote on December 9, 2009, to the hon. the Premier regarding the cabinet policy committees and how they were set up and requesting the order in council, that the Minister of Education agreed to table in this House forthwith today.

Thank you.

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

The Speaker: Point of order. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), the hon. member in tabling indicated that I had agreed to table an order in council. I did nothing of the sort. That's a total misrepresentation and would seek, at the very least, to engage us in debate. It's a misrepresentation. I made no such statement. What I did say is that all orders in council are published.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find that quite interesting. Now, I don't have the benefit of the Blues before me, but certainly in the exchange in question period when I asked the Premier today regarding the appointment to the cabinet policy committees by this government, I thought that I had heard the hon. Minister of Education, who was responding for whatever reason, I don't know, on behalf of the Premier, indicate that not only was there an order in council to set up the 69 individuals to the cabinet policy committees, where we spent \$1.4 million last year paying them, but that it was a published document and was certainly public. My interpretation was that the hon. Minister of Education certainly had no problem tabling that at the appropriate time in the Assembly so that we could see once and for all how this process works.

I don't really think that there's a point of order here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, I think it's certainly clarified now by the words that were used, and the words will be printed in *Hansard*, so all can read that.

Just a couple of points before we go to Orders of the Day. Tomorrow during Tabling Returns and Reports it will be my intent to table with the Assembly the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I will not make it available to anyone prior to my tabling it in the House tomorrow during the appropriate mechanism of Tabling Returns and Reports. So, please, hon.

members, don't venture down to my office hoping to get a copy. You'll all get one at the same time, which I think is the fair and open and transparent approach with respect to this matter.

There was a bit of a disruption here in this Assembly during question period today. Pages were totally inappropriate in delivering a bunch of paper because it was delivered without my permission or my knowledge. That should not be taking place, will never take place, and there will be some clarification made by way of an educational process to ensure that doesn't happen again. Members are here in this Assembly to pay attention to one another, to focus on the subject at hand, to be civil and courteous to one another, and not to be disrupted by the movement of paper and people moving and walking behind them in the lanes in which they sit. The hon. member who asked them to distribute the information was not following the traditional protocol of this Assembly.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ensure that some concerns and questions are put on the record concerning the supplementary supply estimates. It's a lot of money, as the President of the Treasury Board realizes, I'm sure. One of the concerns I'd like to get on the record is how this number has grown over the years. You know, it's not realistic to expect budget perfection. I think we all aim for it, and this president might get there. I don't know.

An Hon. Member: He's a good man.

Dr. Taft: He's a good man. He's a good man.

We do have some concerns about the trends with supplementary supply estimates. [interjection] Well, there always has to be a qualifier there.

If you were to go back, Mr. Speaker, over the years, you would see that the general trend is quite dramatically upward, although it's not always even. Sometimes it spikes and drops and spike and drops. But if you look at it over the last decade or so, it's more often that this supplementary supply estimate is in the range of a billion dollars or more than it used to be. The extreme would have been 10 years ago when the supplementary supply estimate was about \$30 million, if my figures are right, which is darn near perfection with budgeting. Now we're looking at \$958 million. That's not, of course, the record. The record in the last decade or so was about five years ago when we hit over \$2 billion. I'm trying to remember if that might not have been a result of BSE or something else.

In any case, the general point is that a billion dollars or thereabouts is a terrific fudge factor or a terrific amount of money to have to make up in this sort of supplementary supply. We're always urging the government to refine its budgeting processes, to increase its discipline in controlling budgeting. We understand that there are

lots of things that might come along: mountain pine beetle, BSE, forest fires, floods, those kinds of natural disasters, H1N1. I don't think anybody is going to argue with some extra spending on that. But I think we need to always challenge the government to come as close at the end of the year to meeting its budget targets as is possible. It looks right now like we're close to a billion dollars off, and it's possible that there'll be a second supplementary supply bill before we're all done.

Those are my general comments.

I want to, however, Mr. Speaker, give the government some accolades for moving the budget process up a little bit. I have long been a supporter of that, and I've urged that kind of action from the government. We were in the habit for many years of not passing the budget until well into the fiscal year that the budget addressed. We seem to be improving at least that part of the budgeting process, so perhaps that will also be reflected in greater accuracy at the end of the year. By having the budget this year moved through and passed before the beginning of the fiscal year, then all the agencies that depend on that budget may well be able to plan more effectively for their year and, as a consequence, be more accurate in their financial management.

I'm going to just speak a little bit about the extra funding requested for Health and Wellness here, Mr. Speaker, because it's an awful lot of money, and it's getting folded in with a very large increase in the budget for next year. I'm glad to see that there are special provisions for the H1N1 flu. See how happy I am, Mr. President? Two compliments there. It's still the season of Valentine's.

I'm glad to see that there is a special allocation for H1N1 vaccine costs because it would have truly been unfair to take that out of the regular operating budget of the health care system. I think everybody or most of us, at least, in this Assembly understood that that was more akin to a forest fire or a flood or some other natural disaster, that's dealt with out of separate funds. So that's a good move.

I am concerned with the management of some of the funding for some of the special projects under Health and Wellness, in particular, for example, the surge in expenditures for hip and knee surgeries. That's money that's going to come out of this budget year. It was quite a chunk of money, I believe, a week ago. Now, my concern, Mr. Speaker, is around the administration of those funds. I'm concerned that there be the strictest possible conflict-of-interest policies in place around the allocation of funds to surgeries done in private, investor-driven facilities. That would include organizations like HRC and the cataract surgery clinics in Calgary and some other locations.

My concern is that a substantial part of that money is getting steered toward private, for-profit clinics by people in the public system who actually have a vested interest in those clinics. It's poor management, and it invites abuse. I hope that we have a government here that will bring in strict conflict-of-interest policies because I'm going to be working hard to ensure that those conflicts of interest are not allowed to occur.

It would be really helpful if the President of the Treasury Board could give us some more detail on where the Health and Wellness funding is going. How much, for example, is going to things like air ambulance, municipal ambulance? How is that whole ambulance transfer process going? Is that costing more? Is that driving up some of the costs? Is that one of the issues behind this extra allocation? What's happening to pharmaceutical costs and drug costs? Those historically have been inflating. What about lab costs? Some of those will be probably caught up in the H1N1 allocation, but what's happening in other lab costs? Why are we seeing such a

need for extra funding for Health and Wellness over and above the H1N1 issue?

There's one other issue that I would like to get on the record. I see there's another \$73 million, almost \$74 million, for Transportation. I'm a little surprised at that because, after all, we've heard so much about how estimates for a lot of that work are actually coming in way below what was budgeted. I would be curious if the President of the Treasury Board might be able to explain exactly the dynamic behind the increase in expenditures in Transportation, particularly when we're in a period of real financial restraint.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

3:00

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's with interest that I rise to participate in the debate on Bill 5 this afternoon. We were having a discussion last week on supplementary supply, and it was unfortunately cut short. I, too, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, have questions surrounding the allocation, first off, of \$243 million to Alberta Health and Wellness. Now, it's only last fall that all hon. members from the Assembly and taxpayers read with startled interest the Auditor General's report and realized that there had essentially been an override of financial accountability at Alberta Health Services when the budget in the business plan had not, as I understand the Auditor General's report, been authorized.

Now, we know the fiscal dilemma that Alberta Health Services is in. We know this allocation here is for funding through to March of this year. We know that last year there were also one-time allocations. One only has to look at part 1 of the Alberta Health and Wellness annual report to recognize that there were additional monies allocated. I believe, and I could stand corrected, that it was in the neighbourhood of 300-plus million dollars. The majority of it went to the old Calgary health authority in one form or another. This seems to be a persistent, chronic pattern of this government. Health care services and the delivery of those services certainly is not improving, but we're being asked to give more and more money.

Now we're finding out that amounts of this money, Mr. Speaker, are being used to channel health services or health procedures to private facilities. How much of this is going to go through this \$243 million allocation to private hospitals is a good question. Also, can the minister responsible, in this case the hon. President of the Treasury Board, be confident that the Auditor General's recommendations from last fall have been implemented to ensure that the budgeting process is now being followed?

Certainly, whenever you look at the Alberta Health Services Board and the fact that it may meet for 35 to 40 minutes in public on a monthly basis, that's not good enough, that short period of time. They're spending 9-plus billion dollars, and they should be accountable through the ministries to the Assembly and then through to the taxpayers.

When we look at the past practices, I for one don't have a great deal of confidence in this government to deliver public health care efficiently and effectively. They have failed to date. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has certainly detailed this in the past and detailed it with considerable accuracy, to the point where citizens are now directly questioning whether this government is capable of managing the biggest budget of any respective department.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also have questions around – and this goes back to the 2008-09 annual report, where on page 3 it is noted that at the end of March last year, in 2009, there was \$1.5 billion from

fourth-quarter results that was transferred. If we go to page 16 of the same report, we will see where in the sustainability fund, another great Liberal idea . . . [interjection] You may laugh, hon. member, but it was past Conservative caucuses that initially rejected that sound fiscal economic idea. Fortunately, one Conservative caucus had the sense to see that it was needed, and you are living on that savings account as we speak.

The additional cash of \$1.5 billion from 2008-09 fourth quarter results will be deposited in the fund in 2009-10. So here we have essentially a \$1.5 billion allocation. I understand that a portion of this was investment income. I would be grateful to know if that was investment income from the general revenue fund or where exactly that investment income has come from. I would like a breakdown of that \$1.5 billion in the course of this debate as to how much was left over or unexpended from various government ministries or programs in that year and brought forward to this year.

Now, that money has been brought forward, Mr. Speaker, but at the same time we are looking for a considerable amount of cash here, in total close to a billion dollars, \$920 million. So that's a lot of money. At one point in the budget year we're getting this amount reallocated or put in the sustainability fund, and then probably six months after the annual report is published, we're before this House looking for two-thirds of that amount back to pay for programs in Health and in Culture and in Employment and Immigration.

One, again, can see the significant negative effects of the recession and why there would be additional funding needed for Employment and Immigration. Tourism, Parks and Recreation is looking for \$12 million. That's at least the amount, if not more, that we will spend at the Winter Olympics promoting this Conservative government. I see it, Mr. Speaker, as a promotion of the government, not of this fine province. Sustainable Resource Development for other reasons is getting additional money for forest fires. Housing and Urban Affairs.

Transportation is certainly an interesting one. I would like to point out that with the Transportation department when you look at the annual report from last year – and hopefully I can get an explanation in the course of the debate from the President of the Treasury Board – in 2008-09 Transportation had unexpended amounts of \$550 million. Now, again, this is taking from Peter to pay Paul. That money was reallocated or shifted ahead into the next year for capital projects, as I understand it, some of it, at least. But here they're looking for \$73 million, Mr. Speaker. So how exactly does this work? If you go to the front of the annual report, you will see where some of the funds that were left over in 2008-09 are set aside for projects that are going to take place in this year and the following year as well, but not all of that money. So I would like an explanation.

Transportation wouldn't be the only department. Infrastructure certainly had a significant amount left over, \$505 million according to my research. Of course, not all of that was turned back into the general revenue fund, but some of it must have been.

I would like to know as we debate and we discuss this advance or supplementary supply: how much does the President of the Treasury Board expect will be left over in unexpended amounts this year? We went through this process last year, and we see quietly in the footnotes \$1.5 billion that was found and put in the sustainability fund. I'm not saying it's a bad idea, but I would just like to have full disclosure of these amounts.

3:10

Again, Mr. Speaker, to the President of the Treasury Board: how much do you anticipate you will have left over at the end of next month, March 31, 2010, from this budget year to put back in the

sustainability fund? I'm not talking about extra investment income or money from the sale of oil and gas leases; I'm talking about unexpended amounts from each and every respective ministry. How much will it be, and will it be an amount equal to or greater than the supplementary budget that we are discussing here this afternoon?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Comments, questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are you on the 29(2)(a), or are you on your own?

Mr. Mason: I'm on my own.

The Speaker: Okay. Go for it.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 5, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010. This bill is requesting nearly a billion dollars in supplementary supply for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010. That in itself is a breathtaking figure. We're used to using billions when we talk about the finances of our province, but that's a very large amount for supplementary supply.

It includes Advanced Education and Technology; Culture and Community Spirit; Employment and Immigration; Health and Wellness, of course, \$176 million there; Housing and Urban Affairs; Municipal Affairs; well, pretty much every department.

Advanced Education and Technology is requesting \$30 million for student loan disbursements, but at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing tuition fees rise around the province. The government, I think, has an inkling how much extra debt they are asking students to take on in this province, but they're cutting funding in the 2010 budget. They want an extra \$270 million for the University of Alberta centre for interdisciplinary studies. In general, much of the costs are being passed on to students.

We've already seen, if I can turn to Employment and Immigration, where the ministry wants an extra \$129.7 million for income supports due to a higher caseload and a higher cost per case. January already saw the highest income support caseload since 1997. All of these budget lines are cut in next year's budget, especially the line that went most over budget; that is, for people expected to work or working. The budget relies, then, on vague hopes that the recession will end and people will no longer need the same government resources. What guarantees do we have that the government will not be coming back and asking for funding to come back the next year?

Mr. Speaker, I brought this to the attention of the Minister of Transportation last night in estimates. What we've seen in a lot of cases is cuts in one year's budget for specific programs of specific departments and then supplementary estimates to make up, in some cases exceed, the cuts that were made in the budget. So it makes it very hard for us to see what exactly the budget numbers mean. I at one point said to the Minister of Transportation: what do the numbers in the budget mean? When you cut it in the budget and then you go back and you replace it with supplementary supply and then you cut it again in the budget the next year, what does the budget actually mean?

I think there is in some cases a misuse of supplementary estimates in order to create the impression in a budget that spending is actually under control. The government is cutting spending in some areas and then replacing the money after the budget is approved. I think

that many of these programs require more funding. Not all, but many of them do require funding, especially when you're in a recession and people are hurting. It doesn't make sense to me to use supplementary estimates in this way.

Using Transportation as an example, they want an extra \$73 million, much of which is going to programs which were cut last year and will be cut again in next year's budget. So are these cuts being used to hide what the government is actually spending? I don't think that that's an appropriate thing to do. There are many programs that deserve proper funding, and I would like to see those things funded but funded, you know, up front and in an honest manner.

Mr. Speaker, we've got \$150 million for Sustainable Resource Development, including \$130 million for firefighting. That's similar to a figure last year. I think it's a fair assumption to make that we're going to have forest fires most summers, and if it's an ongoing, predictable expense, it should be included in the budget and not just used by supplementary supply.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go into detail on all of these departments, but I do think that the government needs to reduce its dependence on supplementary supply because I think it masks a bigger problem, which is the inability to budget accurately and then live within the budget that's provided. It's an excuse for, I think, a little bit of breakdown on discipline. In saying that, I'm not suggesting that we need to make widespread cuts to important services that people need or any cuts at all. I am simply saying that it means that the government is getting sloppy in its budgeting process and that it undermines the value of a budget document.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I will take my seat. Before I do, though, I wonder if I could request of you permission to distribute . . .

The Speaker: Why don't we deal with 29(2)(a) and get the bill out of the way, and then I'll recognize you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Additional speakers?

Then the hon. President of the Treasury Board to conclude the debate.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge the constructive comments from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and in fact I do take very seriously the opportunity to maintain a very close watch on government spending. It is easy to ascertain from this particular document that if you take out the spending from the '08-09 accumulated health deficit ending March 31, '09, if you take out the capital that was used in most cases to access federal funding programs, deal with the H1N1 and the fires, we are dealing with less than half of 1 per cent of our budget. It's actually smaller than that, but just given that the opportunity for math is not something that they need to waste much more time on, I would at this time close debate in second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would respectfully request permission to distribute copies of the report prepared by the NDP caucus called What People Want, health care in Alberta. It is a result of public hearings that we conducted in seven cities around the

province in the fall and a number of public meetings that we've held recently around the province. It represents the views of many individuals and organizations that are involved in the health care field in our province.

3:20

Statement by the Speaker

Distribution of Items to Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, the background to this is that a little while ago, before we had Orders of the Day, I rose and I basically said that a certain thing had happened in the House today. One of the things that's really important is how we deal with decorum in the House, and there are a variety of ways that groups and agencies and individuals get their message to us. Sometimes you'll receive in your offices prior to 1:30 of the day a ribbon, a pin from a group, a cause: it's HIV day, it's awareness day, it's daffodil day, it's Red Cross day, or something like this. We wear these ribbons, and we wear these pins.

Sometimes they come to my office and ask me to put them on the desks of hon. members, and depending what they are, we invariably say yes because they're small and they're not disruptive. But on other occasions there are bigger packages that groups want to have delivered to MLAs. We had a situation yesterday with the Girl Guides. Basically, they said that they wanted all members to have some cookies, so we said: sure, they could be circulated. But they could only be circulated after, essentially, Orders of the Day were called so that it was not disruptive during the Routine and anything else.

Then there are some other things that, basically, I've said, no, can never be put on members' desks. Now, I've had requests made by individuals in the past to have samples of tainted meat put on the desk of every member to highlight a cause. When the pork industry was really, really down and piglets were literally being given away, I had groups advocating their promotion of the price of pork to give every MLA in this Assembly a piglet, and would I allow them to put it on their desks in the Assembly? One other member in the past has come very genuinely, very enthusiastically, saying: "Look, we have to do everything we can to promote the SPCA. I'd like to give every MLA a kitten and have it placed on their desks." Well, okay. The answer to those was no, but there are other ways of doing this.

Now, there's a great way of getting the message through. If an individual member wants to convey an envelope of information to other members, ask my office, let me make sure that it's appropriate, and we can deliver it after Orders of the Day are called so that there's no major interruption and disturbance of the Routine. You're all supposed to be focused on question period and listening to one another and all these other things that are very, very important.

Unfortunately, something got through. A member went and got the pages to go and do it, which was not the way it was supposed to have been done, so then the pages had to go back and retrieve these documents. The Sergeant-at-Arms, you must have them under lock and key someplace, under an embargo. Well, first of all, would you have them returned to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood now? He's dutifully asked for the appropriate process, he's got all of his envelopes back, and we'll ask the pages now to distribute them to all members so that they're least disruptive and interruptive of the process of the Routine in the House, and love will prevail.

Second thing. I've now had an opportunity to look at the Blues with respect to the exchange, the point of order from the Government House Leader and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Government House

Leader is absolutely correct. There's absolutely nothing in the Blues that suggests that he said that he was going to be tabling any OC. When you stood up, you said you understood. Okay, we deal with it. But the point was correctly raised by the Government House Leader, and a point of order would have been upheld. Again love is in the air, so let's go forward.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 18: Mr. Hancock]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to take the opportunity to afford a few comments with respect to the Speech from the Throne delivered most graciously by His Honour the Hon. Norman L. Kwong, the Lieutenant Governor, and start, as others in the House have done, by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for his years of service to this province as Lieutenant Governor and for providing both a sense of humour and graciousness to the office that has really served the office well and, therefore, served Albertans well.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne addressed a number of topics that I think are very important not only to my constituents but to all Albertans. One of the first substantive portions of the Speech from the Throne deals with Alberta's resource-based economy, which "brings with it one of the most volatile revenue streams in North America, providing surpluses in good times but prone to sudden economic reversals." I think that statement in the throne speech is extremely important for us, positioning us as we go forward, first of all, to recognize that we do have a resource-based economy in the province, that the oil and gas industry particularly but also the forestry industry are subject to world-based commodity markets and are subject to a high volatility not only with respect to price but also with respect to the quantity that's needed from time to time in the world economy.

As a prudent government in the province of Alberta with that type of an economy, there are two things that really speaks to. One is to ensure that when the economy is working well and when our resource-based industry, particularly our carbon industry and oil and gas, is in a high-price mode, the revenue which comes from the sale of that asset is used wisely and invested wisely not just for current Albertans but also for future Albertans. I want to speak to that. The second thing which it points out to us most urgently is the need for us to make sure that we look to the future economy of the province and what the foundation of that future economy will be. More than one constituent has said to me that they wish that we could broaden the base of the economy so that we weren't so affected by the swings in the oil and gas prices.

In saying that, I think it's necessary to clear up one of the fundamental questions that many Albertans ask. They ask: "What happened to the money? Where did the money go? We had a very solid economy a couple of years ago with a good revenue stream from oil and gas. Why didn't we save it?" When I talk to Albertans

who ask that question and tell them what's actually happened, it's a message which a lot of Albertans I don't think have heard, that we've actually done a very good job with that revenue stream.

When you look at the record, Alberta has paid off \$23 billion to \$25 billion in debt. That's an investment in future Albertans. That debt was accumulated in earlier years both in terms of program spending and in terms of spending on infrastructure, but it was a debt which would have burdened future generations of Albertans in terms of paying it off. So I think getting that debt paid off was a very prudent thing to do.

We've built \$40 billion in enduring infrastructure. We've created a platform for the province to move forward in terms of our postsecondary institutions, in terms of our schools, in terms of our transportation infrastructure, roads, particularly. There's a significant investment that will help to continue to build the future economy and build the future of the province. There is an appropriate place to take money from the sale of an asset, the oil and gas asset that's owned by Albertans, and invest it in a multigenerational infrastructure. I think that's important.

We saved \$17 billion in the sustainability fund because of the recognition that in a volatile economy there will be downswings and that when there are downswings, Albertans want to be protected from the impact of that downswing over a period of time. The \$17 billion that we have in the sustainability fund is doing exactly that right now. We don't have to have a knee-jerk reaction. We don't have to wrench the economy and the community back. We don't have to cut back on important areas like health care and education in order to be fiscally prudent and to stop from building that deficit for future Albertans. So the \$17 billion is well set aside.

Then an additional \$8 billion has been contributed to the heritage savings trust fund and associated endowments. I'm particularly proud, Mr. Speaker, of the access to the future fund, with a little over a billion dollars – I'd hoped that it would grow to \$3 billion by now – which is invested in an endowment fund which will help to fuel future learning potential for young Albertans. You could say the same about the billion dollars or so that's been invested in the ingenuity fund and an extra billion, I believe it is, that was invested in the heritage savings medical research fund. Each of those endowments are funds which drive the future economy by driving our knowledge base, and that's a very, very important message.

3:30

I think that when you add all that up and see that there's been \$90 billion not wasted, not dissipated but which has served to do exactly what Albertans would have wanted it to do – to pay off the debt, to put us on a sound fiscal footing, to invest in the future infrastructure needed for the future economy, and to invest in the future knowledge base which is needed for the future economy – Mr. Speaker, I think a very good record. When we start the throne speech and see the comment about Alberta's fiscal advantage and the acknowledgement of the volatile revenue streams, I think it's really important to point out that there has been a very, very strong fiscal record in Alberta, using the resources that Alberta has to invest in the future of Alberta.

The other piece that I wanted to focus on, Mr. Speaker, is later on under the Increasingly Competitive in a Global Economy section of the throne speech, the statement that "Albertans know that a good education is an essential foundation to prepare for the future." That is an exceedingly important statement. We are moving into an era, well, we're well into the era, well into the 21st century now, 10 years into it, where the world is getting smaller. Alberta has always traded out into the world and always will trade out into the world because we are a relatively small population, but we're not always going to have the benefit of trading out into the world just with our

resource base. Oil and gas, as we can see now, the carbon-based energy, is increasingly coming under fire with respect to the environmental issues around greenhouse gases and particularly carbon dioxide, and more and more effort is being put into finding renewable sources of energy.

As we trade out into the world, it's not just the export of our oil and gas products. It's not just the export of raw forestry products. It's what we do with our products and how we use the benefit of those products to prepare our students and our economy to compete in a knowledge-based world – adding value to our resource products, adding value to our agricultural products – but also moving to the biosciences and the life sciences and being able to trade out into the world in the service industries, providing expertise.

Again, this is not new for Alberta. Alberta has led the world in the past on environmental technologies. We've shipped environmental technologies and knowledge about environmental sustainability all around the world. We've certainly shipped knowledge with respect to our oil and gas industry, tertiary and quaternary production, to various places in the world where they've exploited their oil and gas resources perhaps too quickly, resulting in problems. It's knowledge from Alberta that has gone to help them to recoup those areas.

It's also knowledge which will allow us to further exploit those resources that we have because I think it's fair to say that in most of the conventional fields, not only in this province but right around the world, we're only able to exploit about 25 to 35 per cent of the resource that's there. Technology, including how we increase pressure on oil wells through the injection of carbon dioxide, solving two problems at once, is very, very important to us.

The statement that a good education is an essential foundation to prepare for the future couldn't be more true than right here in Alberta, and it's for that reason that we really do need to focus on how we ensure that every single Albertan has the opportunity to maximize his or her potential, that every Alberta child has a good educational opportunity to move from where they are now to where they can be, to find out what they're good at and to be able to develop that potential. That's what we're working towards, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta.

Over the course of the last year we've talked extensively about Inspiring Education. Inspiring Education had two basic purposes. The first and perhaps the most important one was to have Albertans talk about the value of education to our community and our society and to understand that without education we are at peril. Without education in a world that's moving more and more to technology, where knowledge and information are available to more and more people and where the ability to use that knowledge and information in appropriate ways is becoming so important, those that do not have the capacity or the ability to operate in that type of a world will fall behind.

We've seen all over the world examples where economies have moved ahead, but not all the people have moved ahead with the economies, so the wide diversity in economic opportunity, the wide diversity in quality of life has created a strain on civil society. That's not what we want for our province and for our country. It's imperative that we have education as a value in our community, education as a value in our families, and education as a value in our province.

We have a very cosmopolitan community here, with people with backgrounds from all over the world. We live together here in peace and harmony better than anyplace in the world, and we can continue to do that if we make sure that every Albertan, whether their family has been here for generations or whether they're just new arrivals, whether they're new arrivals coming with the benefit of education

and the benefit of income or whether they're coming as a refugee, has that opportunity to find their potential, to maximize that potential, to grow up to be able to take care of themselves and their families, and to contribute back to their community as a full citizen.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be more important, in my view, in this throne speech than the focus on education as an essential foundation to prepare for the future, and I think what we're doing in Inspiring Education and raising the societal value for education by having that discussion front and centre is so important.

The second piece, of course, is important as well, and that's where we talk about what it means to be an educated Albertan in the year 2029. That's important, Mr. Speaker, because most of us are experts on education because we all went through the system some 40 years ago, well, maybe some a little later than that. It has been a long time since most of us have been in the classroom, yet I'd hazard a guess that if we went into a classroom today, most of us would recognize it very fondly. It hasn't changed very much. Yes, there's maybe a Smart board up at the front of the room, a whiteboard where there used to be a blackboard, but beyond that, the essential formula of education has not changed significantly over the years, yet our world has changed significantly.

It's been 15 years now that we've had access to the World Wide Web, and now we're into Web 2, and we're into very, very robust technologies where people can have access to information. They can basically go anywhere in the world, see anywhere in the world, and it's moving rapidly, so we do need to ask what it means to be an educated Albertan in the year 2029. What is it that our children are going to have to know to be able to participate in that global economy, to be able to be citizens of a global community as well as participate in a local economy and be citizens in their local community?

It doesn't mean that what we're doing now is wrong. Alberta is recognized as having one of the best education systems in the world. I think it's fair to say that regardless of how you measure it, people from around the world coming to see what we're doing basically indicates that that statement is correct, that people do recognize Alberta as having one of the best education systems in the world. That's great for today, but if we stand still, if we don't recognize that there's a need to change as the world changes, that we need to examine new pedagogy, that we need to examine how we use technology in education, not use technology as education but how we use the tool to make sure that our children can have those advantages and be among the best in the world and continue to be among the best in the world, then we will lose the opportunity to have the quality of life that we want not just for ourselves but for all Albertans. We will have that problem of a civil society which is riddled because there's too wide a gap between those who have and those who don't have.

I may be accused of being passionate about education, in which case I would plead guilty, Mr. Speaker. I may be accused of being single-minded about education. I don't think I'm totally single-minded about it, but I am single-minded about the concept that education is the foundation and is fundamental to our success . . . [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time is so short.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: It seemed to me, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Minister of Education was mid-sentence. I wonder if he'd like to complete his sentence.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you wish to comment?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the time for questions and answers is so short, and there's so much more to be said. I think I'll leave it there.

3:40

The Speaker: Others to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. We're under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Bhullar: Oh. We're still doing that. Well, in that case I will take the privilege that I've been afforded as a member of this Assembly to ask the member a question and the opportunity to ask him a question.

Sir, many of the international experts that visited Alberta and spoke at the Inspiring Education conference commented on how this was a process that is not taking place in very many jurisdictions throughout North America. They said that this sort of open and transparent dialogue with the citizens, asking them for input on what that future Albertan looks like and how the system should reflect enabling such future Albertans – they said that that doesn't happen. My question to you. We've set a very large stage. We've gotten praise, essentially, from some of the world's best thinkers in education. How, sir, are we going to ensure that we walk the walk when it comes down to looking at the Inspiring Education report?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, if you wish to respond.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm so glad he asked that question. I should have thought of getting to that point because it is important for us to lay out for Albertans that the discussion is not over and that it can never be over, that we need to continue the discussion on an ongoing basis of how we inspire education.

We have issues in education in this province. For example, the ministers of education across the country, the Council of Ministers of Education, are meeting in Toronto next week. One of our agenda items is always: how do we eliminate the gap in success between First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and other students? There are issues that we need to deal with, so we need to keep the discussion first and foremost.

In Alberta, specifically following up on this, we expect the report from the task force on Inspiring Education imminently, and then we will be developing what would have been called in the old days before technology a white paper to frame the issues for discussion. We're using technology so that it can be a robust discussion across the province on the issues that come out of the discussion, but there will be more things that we need to deal with.

What are the physical platforms that we need in terms of the infrastructure for education? What kind of curriculum is necessary to move from a content base and a knowledge base to an innovation and creativity and skills base? What does it mean for our pedagogy? How do our teachers teach in a new learning environment? The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere touched on that in his comments last Thursday. What does it mean for pedagogy in the change? There's a lot more work to be done, a lot more discussion to happen, and of course the School Act or the revision of the school act, the education act, whatever it ends up being called, which will come back to the session in the fall.

The Speaker: Others?

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to participate.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to address this Assembly on behalf of the Edmonton-Calder constituency in response to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to touch on a few key priorities outlined in the speech that I believe are crucial to all Albertans, priorities that my constituents care about, like fiscal responsibility, health care, infrastructure, and the funding for education.

Edmonton-Calder is a blue-collar constituency with a proud history of planes, trains, and automobiles. Mr. Speaker, I was born and raised in this constituency, and I face the same issues as my constituents. Edmonton-Calder residents work hard to provide for their families. They must always strike the right balance between spending and saving, and they must create a budget that allows them to get the most out of their incomes. When times are tough, many individuals will cover a shortfall with savings because it's smarter than taking what amounts to a cash advance on a credit card.

The government of Alberta is using its savings in the budget of 2010. By offsetting this year's deficits with savings from the sustainability fund, we will not see the devastating cuts to priority services that many Albertans fear, nor will we do what most jurisdictions do, which is borrow to cover operations. Mr. Speaker, my constituents cannot afford this to happen.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

As the deputy chair of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee I am reassured by the savings mandate of this government for future generations. Our rainy-day fund, the sustainability fund, is a second useful tool. Our rainy days are near an end, and we have put Alberta in the best possible position for sustainable recovery.

Albertans have worked hard to stimulate growth and development in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. They want to see their tax dollars go to further protect health care and education funding, just like the personal incomes that they manage. They do not want to burden their children's generations with servicing debt payments. It is important for us to help all Albertans by funding priority areas, especially with some of our most vulnerable, senior citizens. Edmonton-Calder is home to seven major senior citizens' homes: Shepherd's Care, Rosslyn lodge, Venta Care, Extencicare, Rosedale, Lions Kensington, and the Kipnes Centre for Veterans. Shepherd's Care Vanguard recently received \$3 million in additional funding this year for 29 new spaces. This is incredible news for the seniors in my constituency.

Are there any other concerns that need to be addressed for this group? The majority of seniors are on a fixed income and cannot be burdened by an increase in health care expenses. Over the past years many seniors in Edmonton-Calder have expressed their concerns with the future of PDD funding. One of my constituents, Mr. Bill Shillabeer, is a senior who has a daughter in her 30s living in a group home. Bill is very concerned about who will take care of his daughter when he is gone. Mr. Speaker, this is a concern that many Albertans in this position have, and as a government we must continue to support the services and programs that Bill and his daughter need.

Health care can be identified by the majority of Albertans, not just seniors, as the number one priority in this budget. This has not changed from my parents' generation or from the generation before that, Mr. Speaker. This government has always strived to eliminate barriers to accessibility and affordability of health care in Alberta,

and it will continue to do so. New challenges continue to emerge, but we will manage as we have always managed.

An important priority that was outlined in the Speech from the Throne for my constituents is the spending for infrastructure. The \$20.1 billion in infrastructure spending outlined in Alberta's three-year capital plan will help provide my constituents with jobs, and for this I am thankful. Approximately 60 per cent of Edmonton's industrial land is in Edmonton-Calder. To connect to this industry, we rely on sound infrastructure. Infrastructure spending not only creates jobs for my constituents but allows Edmonton-Calder to continue to be the centre for air, rail, and road transportation within the capital region.

This infrastructure spending can also go towards building new educational institutions in this province. To postsecondary institutions in Edmonton-Calder, like NAIT, it can mean expansion. To my elementary, junior high, and high schools it can mean smaller classes, better tools, and instruction that is student focused.

I am confident that this government will continue to make education a priority so that future generations can build on the innovation and technology that Albertans have seen in the last century. I'm a member of the board of directors of Alberta Innovates: Technology Futures, and I look forward to being part of the future innovation. This structure will give Alberta the necessary tools, education, and technologies it needs to break into new markets and then to increase its competitive advantage.

Mr. Speaker, all of the key priorities I have mentioned today need to remain a focal point for this province in the years to come. By doing so, we can create a sustainable province that serves the best interests of its residents both in good times and in bad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne. I guess a Speech from the Throne can be considered to be in parallel with a state of the union. I met somebody not too long ago who gave me an example of what a ruler some few hundred years ago used to do to assess the state of his kingdom. I found that to be very interesting, to say the least. What this particular ruler used to do was dress up as a beggar. He would ensure that nobody could recognize him and go and see how fellow citizens treated somebody that was so vulnerable. He didn't go to see how a specific agency or a religious leader and so on treated this vulnerable person. He went to see what the average person on the streets in those days thought of and how they treated these individuals.

Mr. Speaker, that really inspired me to consider the state of our province and our nation in many different respects. I think that in this House we have discussions very often on the policy and the financial implications of what we discuss in this Assembly. We talk about the budget, and we have great stories to tell, Mr. Speaker. We've improved the fiscal position by almost \$50 billion while maintaining low taxes; \$23 billion in debt was paid off, and nearly \$25 billion was saved. We have a \$17 billion sustainability fund. I think that is good news.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we have a commitment to health care, I think, that signals how much value we place on health care in this province, but we also present a very realistic outlook that says that we know Albertans expect better when it comes to health care, and so does the government. So we'll aim to get there.

In addition, 100 new police officers is, I think, a wonderful item in keeping with our safe communities priorities.

We'll meet and surpass our 14,000 child care spaces commitment, that the Premier made, which I think is profound news.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go a little bit further and reflect on our society as a whole. I'd first like to just recognize the fact that I think people in Alberta and in Canada do not – do not – give thanks enough for living in a free and just and secular democracy. I think that if we just look at some international occurrences over the last number of months, we should be giving thanks for being Albertan and Canadian.

The very concept of building codes, Mr. Speaker, and safety codes ensuring construction is safe is something that we should take a great deal of pride in. Ask the people of Haiti how much they wish more of their structures were built with such codes. Again, such a small thing that we take for granted but something that is so profound.

Mr. Speaker, next I want to reflect on integration. I firmly believe that we as a nation are no stronger in our diversity unless we integrate. I think the truth of Canada is not realized if we are divided, if we keep up the artificial borders that surround us. If we continue to see difference, the potential of our diversity is not realized. With that, I think we must do a couple of things. One is to look at what unites us, and the second is looking at what divides us.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at what divides us, I think each of us needs to look at our pasts. Whether we're new immigrants or old immigrants, whether we're immigrants or the children of immigrants or the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants, we need to ask ourselves if there are any aspects of our past, any beliefs or stereotypes or myths from our past, that we bring with us today. Is there anything from our past that is not contributing in a positive light to the unity of our citizenship?

I think this requires very honest dialogue with ourselves, ourselves as individuals, ourselves as family units, as local communities, and broader. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because these stereotypes and myths that humanity far too often keeps perpetuating lead to polarizing politics, where we continue to have this us and them mentality, where one group sees themselves in one way and fails to recognize something good in another. This sort of polarizing politics I think comes about when the leaders of the day have no vision that is grand enough to capture the positive attention of their citizens. As a result, people stoop to the lowest common denominator, and they try to find divisions, real or not, to separate and divide people.

We should be very fortunate that in this nation it does not happen as much as it happens in other parts of the world. In other parts of the world these divisions lead to true harm – physical harm, mental harm, emotional harm, sexual abuse, and sexual assault – all because people see difference. This harm, Mr. Speaker, led to me seeing something this morning. I woke up to an e-mail from a human rights organization in the U.S. outlining what they believed happened where the Taliban have killed a few Sikh youth in Pakistan. Why? Because they could capitalize on difference. Because they could capitalize on difference. Because the leaders of the day throughout the world may lack true vision and true compassion, they resort to difference. It's disgusting. It's absolutely disgusting.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we must look at what unites us, and that is a conversation that we can have for a long period of time. That is a conversation that can uplift each of us, but we just don't have it enough. We don't have it enough in this Legislature, we don't have it enough in this nation, we don't have it enough in the media because it's easier to divide, to polarize.

If we look at what unites us, I am inspired by a story that I read of a Rwandan genocide survivor. She wrote in her book that she refuses to see those that killed her family, her friends, and thousands

of her fellow people through a lens of hate. She says: I refuse to give them that power because if I give them that power, they win. She says: if I give them the power to hate them, they win. I think she is a profound human being, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if I could have such compassion and such depth, but I think she has set the standard for each of us. If she can look at those that butchered so many of her countrymen through a lens of compassion and say, "If we are to move forward, if we are to have harmony, then we must see no difference," then I think that each of us can do our own little parts.

Mr. Speaker, we have profound examples here. I had the absolute privilege of meeting Major Harjit Singh Sajjan, who was the first officer wearing a turban in the Canadian Forces. In 1989 he joined the forces, and I am in awe of this man. I'm in awe because he joined the forces at a time when Sikh people were still having debates on whether or not the turban could be allowed in the RCMP. I'm in awe of him because he's served in Afghanistan twice, and I'm in awe of my country because of what he represents in Afghanistan. He said that the people of Afghanistan saw him as a symbol of democracy that works. When the people of Afghanistan saw this fellow, who looks more like them than the rest of the soldiers, who wears the Canadian flag on his arm, they saw that democracy works, that having a secular democracy works, that having the rule of law works, that having equality works.

4:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, you can be safe while being a minority. You can live in peace. You can enjoy opportunities. You can have the freedom to create your own destiny. You can be protected by laws in the book as well as those that must uphold them. You can be safe in the hands of another. You don't need to fear those that are different. He shows that you don't need power. Harjit Sajjan is an example of that for these people, that you don't need power and majority. You don't need more wealth than somebody else to be protected.

There are thousands of stories such as this that show that Canada works, that Alberta works. We need to spread this message by example throughout the world, Mr. Speaker – throughout the world – and it's here in this very Assembly that such inspiring ideals should arise, yet it's often not the case. We are often lost in our own theatre, which, I must confess, I've done myself a few times. It reminds me a little of recess. I think I enjoy it now more than I did when I was a child.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a couple of examples of what is so profound about us. I really hope that we are able to reflect on this a little more. I really hope that we're able to tell these stories a little more. We have greatness all around us. The hope that we need is all around us. It's not hidden in a corner. It's not showcased on prime-time television. Yes, during this time, during the Olympics, we'll see that hope on the Olympic podium, but more often the hope is amongst our people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today in support of the Speech from the Throne so graciously delivered by our Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Norman Kwong. Before I discuss the throne speech, I would like to take time to thank His Honour and his wife, Mary, for both their wise and kind words and their years of dedicated service to our province.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted many of this government's priorities, including strong communities and a healthy environment. Others have spoken on numerous issues outlined in the Speech from the Throne, and I've enjoyed them all. In my response I would like to focus on the province's goals to build the transportation infrastructure required to sustain current and future growth and to find new ways to improve and protect the environment.

Mr. Speaker, building new roads provides jobs and is an excellent way to boost the economy both today and in the future. Our goal is to provide safe and efficient transportation networks throughout the province and into other provinces, territories, and states. Transportation infrastructure, or roads, acts as corridors for linking trade, investment, people, and new ideas both in commerce and in tourism. Roads connect us to markets, connect us to our friends and families and other places, and connect us to our natural environment.

Our natural environment is one of our greatest tourism assets. People need or desire to get out of their urban environments from time to time to connect with the outdoors: the prairies, the parklands, the mountains, and also with lakes, rivers, and streams. To get to these places, we need roads that are safe, reliable, and in the right places.

The throne speech clearly stated:

We are working toward a western economic partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan to create Canada's largest boundary-free trade and investment market.

It also says:

Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are key and sustainable economic drivers of our province. We are a responsible producer of safe, high-quality food products that are in demand all over the world, but we need to break into new markets and beat the competition from other countries that export agricultural products.

Much of this export-bound produce travels by road to ports in Vancouver, travelling through the Kicking Horse Pass on highway 1, the Yellowhead Pass on highway 16, and even some through the Crowsnest Pass on highway 3. These may be the best roads we have now, but for most of our transportation needs there could be another route.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the main part of my comments today, which is an important issue to my constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka and especially to constituents in the Rocky Mountain House area and many other Albertans and residents of Saskatchewan that live east of central Alberta, and that is the matter of finishing the final link of the route through the Howse Pass. More specifically, the Howse Pass is a perfect example of how trade corridors were the foundation of this country's history and will be part of Alberta's future.

The Howse Pass, which could be an extension of the David Thompson highway, is located on the border of British Columbia and Alberta. It has a long history in our province. Beginning at the junction of the North Saskatchewan and Howse rivers, it follows the Howse River to the confluence of the Freshfield, Forbes, and Conway creeks to the Alberta-British Columbia border. From there it continues through Crown lands controlled by the province of British Columbia to the junction of the Blaeberry River and Cairnes Creek, which is near Golden, B.C. It was part of the Kootenay Trail, linking the eastern slope of the Rockies with the Columbia valley, a traditional aboriginal transportation route for many years, probably even many centuries.

Europeans didn't arrive on the scene until about 200 years ago. In 1807 David Thompson and a North West Company party first used the pass, which was then subsequently used by the Canadian fur traders to explore and establish a post west of the Rockies. The pass was named after Joseph Howse, a Hudson's Bay Company employee

who first crossed the pass in 1809. In 1871 Walter Moberly, a surveyor for the Canadian Pacific Railway, concluded that the Howse Pass was the best location for a railway line because of its lower elevation and a shorter distance. In spite of this, on April 2, 1872, prior to the 1872 federal election, the federal government from thousands of miles away, in Ottawa of course, adopted the Yellowhead Pass over the Howse Pass by an order in council. So the Howse Pass was rejected at that point. A leading reason given at the time was to leave open a variety of harbour location options. I just wonder sometimes if the politics of the day may have had an impact on that decision. If you just go back to your history books, in 1872 you'll find that there was a railway scandal that actually caused the Prime Minister of the day to resign.

By 1918 the Alberta-British Columbia interprovincial survey concurred with Moberly. They said – and this is a quote as well – that the Howse Pass is of a lower altitude than Kicking Horse by 319 feet and has no steep approaches and will some day be found suitable for a trunk motor road from the Columbia to the prairies, the feasibility of using the pass for such a road or for a railway having already been established. End of quote. So by that time, 1918, motor cars were more common – they weren't even in existence in 1872 – and they established that this would be a great route.

Mr. Speaker, last week my wife, Pauline, and I travelled the David Thompson highway on our way to Vancouver, and it reminded me of the very first time I travelled the David Thompson highway. It was about 1966. The road was under construction, so we actually travelled on detours, which were no more than dirt trails through the forest along the river near Saskatchewan River Crossing. I was probably among the very first people to actually travel by car all the way from Nordegg to highway 93 to the junction of Saskatchewan River Crossing.

Mr. Speaker, over a hundred years have passed since these decisions. Some of the factors for determining location have changed, and new transportation issues are at hand as we move forward. There is potential for this pass to be part of Alberta's future transportation infrastructure and contribute to a healthy environment and a more competitive transportation network.

4:10

Howse Pass is an example of a road that would initiate economic growth and reduce our impact on the environment. This route is through a fairly level area, and it passes through the lowest land point between Mount Assiniboine and Mount Columbia. It is a direct connection from Saskatchewan River Crossing to near Golden, British Columbia. It would extend the province's highway 11, which is the David Thompson highway, over the Continental Divide to the Trans-Canada highway in B.C.

Mr. Speaker, there are many benefits to the construction of the Howse Pass. Building this pass would reduce fuel consumption and carbon emissions as Howse Pass shortens the driving distance from central Alberta to Vancouver by about 100 kilometres. About 80 per cent of CO₂ in the transportation footprint comes from tailpipes, and reducing the drive to cross over the Rocky Mountains can significantly reduce this impact. The pass could be an alternative route for travel and transportation of good when the Yellowhead or Kicking Horse passes are closed due to landslides, accidents, or frequent avalanches.

Some critiques of the pass are evident, but they can be overcome. For instance, part of the pass goes over Banff national park, and there is a legitimate concern for the wildlife there. The animal overpasses that have successfully been built over highway 1 near Lake Louise and Banff are excellent models of a structure that could be built on the Howse Pass and could be much more creative if built as the highway is being constructed.

Mr. Speaker, care for our environment and for our national parks is important to our government. Traffic diverted to the Howse Pass highway will travel through Banff national park for a mere 34 kilometres. On the highway 1 route traffic travels 126 kilometres through the Banff and Yoho national parks, and on highway 16 traffic travels 76 kilometres through Jasper national park, a mere 34 kilometres through the Howse Pass. Mr. Speaker, protecting our environment, reducing our carbon footprint, and conserving energy are important.

An independent cost-benefit study for a Howse Pass highway was completed in October 2005 by Schollie Research & Consulting in Red Deer. This study was funded by the Clearwater county, the town of Rocky Mountain House, the Lacombe county, and the government of Alberta. This economic feasibility study supported construction of the Howse Pass highway as the entire central Alberta region would benefit from net contribution to the economy. It will basically bring central Alberta and regions as far away as Saskatoon at least a hundred kilometres closer to markets.

As His Honour stated in the Speech from the Throne, “a strong economic recovery requires an Alberta that is constantly striving to be better, stronger, and smarter.” To increase our competitiveness in the global economy, the federal and provincial governments should work collaboratively towards the construction of Howse Pass. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will look for ways to make our economy more competitive in a very challenging and aggressive world-wide economy. To improve the competitive advantage of many of our products produced in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, we need to remove barriers to our markets, the most obvious barrier being the expansive portion of mountain transportation. The future economy will see emphasis on new ways to increase safety, efficiency, and practicality. The Howse Pass holds the potential to meet many key points defined in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, we will build transportation systems that unite our communities and commerce, culture, and tourism. As we seek to achieve the competitive goals of our province, it is important to bring the construction of the Howse Pass into serious consideration. This could be a great asset not only to my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka but to all of central Alberta.

It is time, and I’m asking our government to collaborate with the government of British Columbia and the federal government to develop the final link, or the last spike, in a 21st century transportation strategy.

In closing, I would like again to thank the Lieutenant Governor for presenting the Speech from the Throne. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The comments on the Howse Pass brought back fond memories. In the 1960s I was on a committee, chaired by Marwood Swain from the hon. member’s constituency, that was promoting the construction of the Howse Pass at that time. It was my understanding that the whole issue had died, so I’m very pleased to hear that there’s some interest. My question is: is there an active movement in the member’s constituency to actually revive this plan to construct a highway across the Howse Pass?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question, hon. member. I’m not aware at the moment of any really active movement to promote it, but I do know that over the past several years – and I mentioned the report that was done by

Schollie and associates from Red Deer. I think it was Schollie. This report was done in 2005, and it actually outlined the economic and social benefits of the Howse Pass project. The study was done in 2005, tabled with the government. There was some opposition from environmentalists and the federal government, that didn’t want to build any more roads in national parks. The fact is that the entire Icefields Parkway from Jasper to Lake Louise is a big highway right down the middle of a national park, and it is strictly for tourists. There is no commercial traffic on that road. What we need is a road that goes from central Alberta straight across to British Columbia using the David Thompson highway as the first link and then the Howse Pass as a very short link into B.C. It will cut off, you know, many, many miles from central Alberta.

I think for people from Calgary it won’t make much difference. For people from Edmonton it won’t make much difference. But in central Alberta probably half a million people are kind of land locked behind the mountains, away from their markets and their shortest route into British Columbia. So there is a movement out there. I know that Clearwater county and Rocky Mountain House and Lacombe county and probably Red Deer county and now even the town of Golden, B.C., are onside. I think in the future they will continue to work collaboratively to address this issue with their respective governments. We need the federal government to come onside first, and then the provincial governments can move forward.

The question about funding for the Howse Pass is a big issue as well. It will probably be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, but it is no different than what B.C. did with the Coquihalla highway years ago to shorten the route around the Fraser Canyon. They turned it into a toll road, and it actually paid for itself. People were happy to pay a few bucks to take the shortcut on a new road. The tolls are gone from the Coquihalla highway now if you go down there. The road is paid for, the public owns it, and it’s a wonderful short route through B.C. My opinion would be that this could be a toll road. The cost to the taxpayer is nothing except for the users.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I’m wondering if the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka can indicate: is there any chance, if the Howse Pass road was built, that another road could be closed? My concern, of course, is with habitat destruction, and that’s very rare and special habitat through there. If a new road was opened through the Howse Pass, is it possible to, say, restrict traffic or even close highways somewhere else in Banff?

Mr. Prins: Thank you, again, for that question. I think that is a good question as well. The answer would probably be absolutely not. Right now highway 1 from, say, Banff to Golden is one of the most dangerous highways in all of Canada. A few years ago the fatality rate on that highway was five times the average of Alberta highway fatalities. That’s the stretch through the Kicking Horse Pass. The federal government and the B.C. government have put a lot of money into improving that stretch of highway. I don’t know if you’ve been through there lately, but just beyond Field, on the way to Golden, there’s a brand new bridge through there down the Kicking Horse Pass. They’ve spent close to a billion dollars on that section of road between Banff and Golden. It’s not quite a billion dollars at this point, but I think later projects, that came in after this study, probably total a billion dollars.

What we want to do is decant some of the traffic away from that road, take the busyness off that road, and put them on a new highway through the Howse Pass. It would divert some of the traffic. Both the Kicking Horse Pass and the Yellowhead Pass from

time to time close because of avalanches, mudslides, accidents, and whatever. When that happens, there's a total blockage, and the Howse Pass would be an alternate route to suffice for that problem.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

11. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mr. Stelmach:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Acting Speaker: This is a debatable motion. Do any members wish to speak?
Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Government Motion 11 carried]

4:20 Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. Hancock]

Mr. Hancock: I need to take an opportunity to address Bill 1, albeit hopefully briefly. I think Bill 1 is a very important piece of legislation. Legislation in this House can have several purposes, and in fact I think Bill 1 has several purposes. The first purpose of any legislation, I would suggest, is to provide a sense of direction. In some cases it can be almost poetry; it can be symbolic. Basically, one of the things that I think needs to be symbolized in Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is that Alberta needs to be positioned in the world as a very competitive place to do business.

I was mentioning only this afternoon in the response to the Speech from the Throne how important it is for us to be well educated as Albertans. We're in a northern climate. We're a fair distance away from significant population nodes in the world. If we want to compete in the world, if we want to be citizens of the world, we need to have a good education. If we want to have opportunity for our children in Alberta, we need to be competitive.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It's very important that we send a message to Albertans and to the world that Alberta is a competitive place. It's a good place to live, it's got equality of life, it's got a strong education system, and it's a place where government does not get in the way of people doing business, does not get in the way of people in their ordinary lives yet has the appropriate regulations to ensure that we protect our environment, the appropriate level of protection in terms of workplace safety, in terms, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose said earlier, that our buildings are safe, and those sorts of things.

That's always one of the most difficult tasks, I think, for a government. Whenever anything goes wrong in the world, somebody will say: there ought to be a law. And we get burdened by

adding more and more laws to our lives. We were talking in an earlier debate in an earlier session about government and what government's role is, and there may be philosophical differences of viewpoints even in this House about the role of government. One of the things that I've always maintained is that government should not get in the way. Government should do the appropriate things that are necessary for a society to live together in peace and harmony, but it shouldn't go above and beyond it. It shouldn't be restricting individuals' ability to have and run their lives in their own interests, in what they believe to be important for themselves and their families.

Yet we do need government, and we do need some rules and regulations. We need criminal law, for example, because some people do not abide by the norms of society. We need codes in some cases, but we have to be careful that we're not telling people how to live their lives over and above what is necessary for a civil society. So there's a balance that is a very difficult one to achieve because, obviously, people do want to ensure that bad things don't happen; for example, every time there's a school bus accident in the province. There have been school bus accidents in the province, and they shouldn't happen, but when you take a look at those situations, people say: well, there ought to be a law. We look to see what more we could do to ensure that that situation doesn't happen again.

Oftentimes the things we ought to do are to go back and say: what responsibilities do we have as individuals to act in a cautious manner, to act in a prudent manner? You know, we shouldn't have to have a rule that says the bus driver has to go to the back of the bus to make sure that all the kids got off. We shouldn't have to have a rule that says you shouldn't run a bus if the back wheels are rusty and will fall off. You shouldn't have to have those rules. So there is that balance. We want to make sure that our children are protected. We want to make sure that our buildings are built right. We want to make sure that our environment is protected. Albertans, generally speaking, I think, are people who are environmentalists. We value the big blue sky and the clean water and the clean air. We value that, so we want to have environmental regulation.

What we need to have is a balance that says that while we understand the need for appropriate regulatory frameworks, we need to also have appropriate processes to make sure that those regulatory frameworks are operated appropriately so that they're not getting in the way of people living their lives and doing business but are ensuring that business is done appropriately and lives are lived appropriately. That is a very interesting balance.

I think Bill 1 is important because it gives us, again, the framework to look at what we're doing as a government, to say that during the boom years in the province, when there have been lots of things happening, people have looked around and said, "This has gone wrong; there ought to be a law," and then a new law is created. In terms of codification perhaps things don't need to be codified if you can have a good policy framework in place. We need to look at that and make sure that we're not overburdening our society with rules but that we have the appropriate rules so that we can have the kind of society we want.

So I think Bill 1 is a very symbolic bill from that perspective because it really in the preamble sets that stage, but it also then goes on to provide for a mechanism by which we can examine our rules and say: "In what areas have we gone overboard with the rules? Let's get rid of those."

It's not simply a numeric thing. Some people say that, well, B.C. or some other jurisdiction has said: we're going to cut back on the rules by 35 per cent. If you look at some of the places where they've done that, it's actually sort of an arbitrary and not useful process to go through because often what they've done is, yes, reduced a number of regulations but not necessarily the thickness. They just

consolidate three regulations into one regulation and call it a day, and that doesn't help anybody. What we really need to do is to look and say, "Does the regulation provide a useful purpose? Is it there for a good reason? Is that reason still necessary? Are we doing something that we don't need to do?" If we're doing something we don't need to do, we should get rid of it.

I think it's very important for us to have a framework to constantly be able to assess the burden of law that we put on society. That's not to say that law is unnecessary; law is necessary. But there is a time and a place when law becomes a burden, and we should be careful of that.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make those few comments about the Alberta Competitiveness Act itself as both a symbolic act and a useful act but also, then, to take it one step further and comment about how that might be interpreted in other areas. For example, in the area of education we need to do, as government has indicated it will do and shall do, a value review to look at everything we're doing, because it's not just in the area of a regulatory reform and regulatory burden. It's not just in the area of whether it's competitive to do business in the province that we need to ensure that our resources are used to the most value for Albertans.

Last fall, for example, we had an opportunity to speak with school boards across the province, to ask them to work with us to identify the things that we're doing that don't add value. Are we asking for reports in areas that those reports don't actually accomplish much? If so, then we should stop asking for those reports. If we think those reports have value, we should be able to justify the value that we get from them. We need to look at everything that we're doing. We need to ask school boards to co-operate regionally to make sure that the resources we have afforded education go to helping to achieve the outcomes that we need in education, that every child has the opportunity to maximize their personal potential.

If we can do that, then the fact that we are in a fiscal restraint or the fact that we are in a period of time when we have a fiscal surplus, either of those can be weathered appropriately. When we are in a time of fiscal restraint, we can ensure that resources go to get the most value for Albertans' dollars, and when we're in a time of fiscal surplus, we can save that surplus for the benefit of future Albertans. Those, I think, are laudable objectives.

4:30

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Alberta Competitiveness Act is important both for what it actually says and what it actually does and for the message that it should send to all of us in government: to talk to the people we work with in our communities to find out where we're actually putting more of a burden than necessary, more regulation than necessary, more requirement with respect to paperwork and bureaucracy than necessary to accomplish the laudable goals of having a safe, civil society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. I listened to the minister's comments with some interest and will agree and will disagree on some of them. I am puzzled by the fate of what I think the former Premier used to call the stupid rules committee or something to that effect, the committee that was struck – and I think it was chaired by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View – which was supposed to cut red tape and do away with unnecessary rules and follow the example of the B.C. government and so on. It just seemed to disappear, so you'll have to excuse me, but I greet this bill with some skepticism, and you'll hear more about that when I have a chance to talk about it at length.

Why should a member have any more confidence in this bill? Given what happened to that stupid rules committee, it's just that there's an inconsistency. I mean, there's talk here, but historically there's been no action. Frankly, I'm not sure why I should think there would be action now. Maybe the minister can speak to that.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question, and I think it deserves a response. The response would be that there is no single point in time when you can say that the job is done. In fact, the dumb rules committee did some good work in its time. In fact, we have a Regulatory Review Secretariat that's chaired by one of our members, which reviews every new regulation coming forward to determine whether it's necessary and appropriate. There are processes in place to deal with regulation. In fact, before my time in this House, I served as a private-sector member on a review committee which actually had the effect of cutting back regulation.

But in government, regardless of what government you're in, whether you're a socialist government or a conservative government, regulations tend to grow, and laws tend to grow. I mean, members of the opposition have in the past wondered whether we would have more legislation. The very fact that we sit all the time suggests that we should be bringing legislation to the House because, after all, that's mainly what we do after passing a budget.

So legislation will grow, regulation will creep, and there's always a necessity to pick a point and say: we're going to have a new and renewed effort. Some of those times it has to be done with more vigour. This is one of those times, and that's why the Alberta Competitiveness Act, I think, is so important right now. We're in recessionary times. We want Alberta to be well positioned to lead not only Canada but the world out of that recession. If we're going to do that, we have to look at the overlap and duplication in so many of our processes and regulations.

It's not that the previous activities didn't work; they did. They had efficacy. They removed regulation; they've stopped regulations from coming in. But there is always an incessant pressure to grow the regulatory burden. We need at this time more than any other time to really focus on what the appropriate processes of government should be, the appropriate value we should be getting, and how we should intercede when necessary but not always necessarily intercede in the lives of Albertans.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Speaking of competitiveness, again to the hon. member. In terms of business research and development Alberta's performance has been dismal. Spending in research and development by Alberta businesses as a share of GDP ranks last among the four largest provinces, sits well below the national average, and has stayed relatively flat over time. What would the hon. minister like to see done or achieved through this competitiveness review to reverse this trend?

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an interesting question, so let's just speculate on that. At one point in time I think there were seven different ethics committees that were necessary if somebody wanted to do medical research, seven different ethics committees that you might have to go to. If you wanted to do trials, for example, you'd have to go to the university. If presumably you were starting at the University of Alberta, you'd go to their ethics committee. Then you'd have to go to the Capital health ethics committee. Then if your patient population that was involved in this test or study was in other geographic areas, you might have to go to eight ethics committees across the province to

be able to deal there. If you had another educational institution involved, there might yet be another ethics committee. All of them are doing exactly the same thing. So why would you have eight or nine ethics committees in the way of getting your research done when one would do the trick?

The Deputy Speaker: To speak on the bill, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first congratulate Ashleigh McIvor and her family. Just a few minutes ago she won a gold medal in skiing for Canada. [applause] I will say that that's now six gold medals. That's one behind the lead, so we're doing well. We're doing well.

Now, on a not so positive note I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. There's no doubt we need to be more competitive, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Education clearly pointed out and spoke to. There is no doubt about that. It is good to see that this Premier and his government are finally willing to pay, at the very least, lip service to this important fact. I'm glad to see a growing Wildrose Alliance movement has had the intended effect, I hope.

During the 1990s Alberta established itself as one of the best places, Mr. Speaker, in the world to do business. We limited government spending growth. We paid off debt. We lowered taxes and provided tax incentives to attract new businesses and industries to our great province. The people of our province proudly referred to this as the Alberta advantage. Although Alberta still possesses some of these same features, our edge has slipped dramatically over the last decade.

Our tax advantage, for example, both in regard to personal and business income taxes has decreased dramatically as well. For example, B.C. now has lower income taxes for any person making under \$118,000. That's the vast majority of the population. For any person who makes under \$118,000 – that would be nurses, home-care workers, teachers, police officers, welders, construction workers, or janitors – it now makes more sense from a personal income tax perspective to live in B.C. That's definitely not what we want to be the case, I would argue.

We haven't lowered business taxes for years, and many provinces are quickly catching up to us, with plans to surpass us soon. If we allow them to, Albertans will lose jobs to other jurisdictions – it's as simple as that – and we will lose Albertans to other jurisdictions, which we certainly do not want.

Energy, Mr. Speaker, as everyone in this House knows, is our most important industry currently and pays for the health, education, and other programs Albertans and their families rely on. Because of this government's actions tens of billions of dollars in energy investment and the tens of thousands of jobs created therefrom have fled to neighbouring provinces due in large part to the new royalty framework, which I believe was one of the most misguided, mishandled policy debacles in all of Alberta's history. This has made us less competitive.

Then there is the danger on the horizon that we can see. Provincial government spending has been growing out of control for some time. Over the past several years we have spent far more per capita than any other province in Canada. Government spending has increased at more than double the rate of inflation plus population growth. By refusing to control spending to sustainable yearly increases, the provincial government now finds itself in the position of both taking on massive amounts of debt, a planned \$6 billion by 2012, while facing the prospect of cutting the promised programs that Albertans have come to rely on.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, piling up debt on the backs of future generations to dull the pain of a self-inflicted spending hangover is the height of irresponsibility. So, too, is expanding the size of government entitlement programs to the point where the only way to adequately fund those programs is to raise taxes or increase debt for future generations. It is my view that if we continue on our present course, we will leave ourselves and our children with an Alberta disadvantage. As nonrenewable resource revenues decrease, taxes increase; health, education, and other important social services are cut; and opportunities disappear.

4:40

Finally, the issue of overregulation and red tape, which the Minister of Education spoke to earlier. The regulatory burden on Alberta businesses, our engine of job creation, is astounding. Several independent assessments rank Alberta dead last nationally in this area. It is, in very fact, the Alberta disadvantage. It costs business billions of dollars in compliance costs, delays billions in investment, and costs thousands of jobs and millions of hours of opportunity costs. This government has done nothing to address this issue to this point.

I could go on about the current government's abysmal record with regard to helping our province be more competitive, but I will not. I will not. Bill 1, in my view, could be – and I emphasize could be – a first small step in the right direction. If this is simply lip service or a tool for appointing new do-nothing committees or agencies, then this bill will be a failure. If, however, this bill is used to mimic what has been done by other jurisdictions to become more competitive, then it is worth the support of this House, in my view.

The Wildrose is always looking for pioneers in our own province and in other jurisdictions who have found innovative ways to improve their economy and social programs. We like solutions to problems that mimic them, if appropriate, in the Alberta context. I will focus on one example today, that of our good neighbour to the west, British Columbia.

In 2001 the newly elected right-of-centre party – most would call them conservative although they do go by a different name, to be sure – promised to reduce regulation by one-third, or 33 per cent. It sounded to me, when I first heard that, like a typical promise, a big promise short on detail, but it turned out not to be. Through deregulation and regulatory reform efforts they exceeded that target, and to date they have reduced regulatory requirements in British Columbia by 42 per cent from 2001, a truly remarkable figure.

How did they do it? First, they identified a minister responsible for regulatory reform. The minister championed the initiative and reported to colleagues and to the public on the government's progress. Second, they established a regulatory reform office responsible for leading the initiative. They call it Straightforward B.C., and that organization was put within the ministry of the minister in charge of this initiative.

Third, they established a baseline measure. This is so important. I very much appreciated the remarks of the Education minister on this, but where I do disagree with him is this idea that if we do not track our progress numerically, we can still have the intended effect. There's no doubt you could have some effect doing that. I feel that you need to track those. You need to have measurable goals and objectives, or it just does not happen. It's just a fact of life, I think, in government especially.

They established a baseline measure by counting all regulatory requirements contained in provincial legislation and accompanying regulations and policies. This central database established a starting point so that they could monitor their progress. Just for the record, they started with a stunning 384,000 identified regulations in the province of British Columbia.

Their new office, Straightforward B.C., then reviewed existing legislation by developing and implementing three-year plans that laid out when each ministry would be reviewing existing regulations. Priority was given to regulations that affected economic competitiveness.

Next, they made an effort to control new regulation by creating a regulatory reform policy that set out criteria that must be used to develop and assess new regulations. Ministers must certify that proposed legislation and regulations have been developed using the criteria and provide rationale for any deviations.

Finally, and very importantly, the ministries set real and tangible targets and reported on performance. Targets were set out in the annual three-year business plans, as mentioned, for each ministry. The minister responsible for the initiative reported monthly to cabinet on the government's progress, and quarterly progress reports were published publicly. To date there's been a 42 per cent reduction in the regulatory burden, so roughly 239,000 regulations now exist in B.C. compared to the aforementioned 384,000 when they started.

Mr. Speaker, it is my view that this government, the current government in Alberta, has done a very poor job of making us competitive since the current Premier took office. They have some successes before that, but it has been a disaster since. It's never too late to do the right thing. I will be supporting this bill with the caveat that this had better be more than just lip service. We have a good example to follow in B.C. on reducing red tape, so let's do it. The Wildrose has been offering solutions to make us more competitive in the energy sector as well as offering ideas to maintain the Alberta advantage through better fiscal management and savings, so let's do it. In short, it's time to stop talking about being competitive and start being competitive.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to thank the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for his comments. One thing he and I do share in common is a concern about the tax burden on working families in this province.

He mentioned a comparison to B.C. One thing that he did not mention is that B.C. currently has a 7 per cent sales tax and on July 1, 2010, will move to a 12 per cent harmonized tax with the federal government. I would like to ask this member if he supports the introduction of a sales tax in Alberta.

Mr. Anderson: Well, it's a bit of a stretch, but I'll do my best. First of all, the harmonized tax didn't increase their tax burden. As you know, that's just a harmonization of the GST with the provincial sales tax. I mean, I don't know where that's coming from. You know, for a lot of people income tax takes more of our money away than sales tax because sales tax, as you know, hon. member, often gets worked into the prices, whether you have it or not. It's just that corporations will generally know where the supply-demand curves are, and they'll account for the GST, so essentially you're going to get a lot of times, not all of the time, generally the same pricing.

I don't think that really has anything to do with my comments on personal income tax. That fact is that everyone under \$118,000 in income in B.C. pays more tax than they do here. That's almost 90 per cent of the population of Alberta. So we're not that competitive. We think we're competitive. We think we've got a great Alberta advantage, and we do still have some, there's no doubt, but if we do

not start seriously working on this, the Alberta advantage that you and I grew up with in our younger years, now that we're old men, we might not be able to pass that on to our kids, especially with the incredible overspending that we are currently doing in this province. It's very important that we get that under control, that we put a plan in place where we can actually start lowering taxes to remain competitive.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the member's comments with interest. He raised an issue which he'll need to explain to me. I've thought about this with his party's platform for some time. It looks to me like his party's position is that the Alberta government should cut taxes, it should maintain programs, it should reduce royalties, and at the same time it should avoid debt. That seems to me an impossibility. My question to the member from Airdrie-Chestermere, because he more or less spoke directly to that issue in his comments, is: how are you going to do that?

Mr. Anderson: It's actually just basic economic theory. We're going to build the pie. We're going to create more wealth in our country and in our province. That means that the same amount of people will actually pay more in tax revenues but not on a per-person basis. I think this is basic conservative economic theory, and I espouse it.

The other thing that we need to do – and this is something I know you agree with because I've heard you talk about it a hundred times – is we need to grow the Alberta heritage fund. We need to continue to grow it to the point where the interest from that fund every year replaces our reliance on oil and natural gas revenues and thereby eventually allows us to slowly lower income taxes, replace the need for income taxes with a mountain of investment capital that is providing interest each and every year. That is how I think we can, outside of just simply growing the economic pie through lower taxation, attracting new businesses, et cetera, to the province. Those are kind of the two main ways I see that we can accomplish all those great things. We can have our cake and eat it too. It's the great thing about being a Conservative.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a comment for the follow-up question. First off, the member had mentioned about the PST in B.C. Actually, it becomes a much broader tax when you put it with the GST as opposed to the narrower tax. That notwithstanding, I don't think I heard an exact answer. Would this member like to see an introduction of a sales tax in Alberta under any circumstances?

Mr. Anderson: Well, you know, I think it's pretty clear that should any type of sales tax be implemented or be proposed, we have clear legislation . . .

An Hon. Member: We?

Mr. Anderson: Sorry. The government has clear legislation that states that that would have to go to a referendum vote, and I support that concept.

The Deputy Speaker: I have a list here of speakers sent to me recently. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join second reading debate on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This act will essentially create a body charged with assessing the progress of initiatives aimed at improving Alberta's international competitiveness. Moreover, this body will also be charged with creating recommendations to further enhance government, business, and industry programs designed to improve competitiveness. In simple terms, this means that Bill 1 will create a mechanism to ensure that Alberta remains the best place in North America to invest.

Now, for many this might mean a review of our royalty structure and energy industry. After all, Alberta is Canada's energy powerhouse, and this industry, perhaps more than any other, dramatically impacts our provincial revenue and our overall economy. This is a reality that is well known in my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. In fact, around 60 per cent of Alberta's total energy revenues have come from the bountiful natural gas reserves in and around my constituency.

It is clear that Alberta needs to be competitive in this area. However, I would argue that competitiveness goes beyond energy, investment, and development. Rather, it's important to ensure that Alberta remains competitive in all areas of the economy, be they energy, agriculture, or tourism. In my mind, Bill 1 will allow us to remain competitive from a trade perspective. In fact, I would argue that the benefits to trade competitiveness are perhaps the greatest strength of this legislation.

Nowhere does this become more apparent than by looking at agriculture, specifically the ag food industry. One of the most dramatic events affecting this sector of the economy is the slow closing or constriction of our largest market, the United States. We can all remember the situation that arose with BSE a couple of years back, and we can all remember the havoc that it caused our ranchers and their families. Simply put, Alberta's agricultural sector has increasingly made itself dependent on one market, and if this market closes or contracts, it could negatively impact this sector. In fact, just days ago the President of the United States announced that Canada will no longer be on the restricted list of countries affected by the buy American incentive protectionism. Mr. Speaker, this is good news. This is a change.

What we need, Mr. Speaker, is to look for additional markets not to replace the United States but to complement and diversify, and increasingly this means eastern Asia and other parts of the world. However, when we look to expand our trade beyond the United States, it quickly becomes obvious that we're not competing alone. Rather, jurisdictions like Australia and Argentina are actively competing with us for access to Asian markets. This, of course, leads us back to the issue of competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, all markets and all consumers look for two things, price and quality. Now, with Alberta placed in a position where it is competing with mass-producing jurisdictions like Australia and Argentina, it becomes difficult for us to compete from a price perspective. This means there is a large quantity of goods on the market, which in turn drives prices down.

However, Alberta can compete on the quality side of the equation with quality grain like durum and barley. We have quality Alberta beef. From a competitive perspective this means that initiatives need to be expanded that further develop the high quality of Alberta's agricultural goods. Initiatives like livestock age verification and meat packaging and processing can dramatically enhance the quality of Alberta's agricultural products. Initiatives like getting rid of the monopoly marketing structure for grains and an increase in quality can mean an increase in price.

Mr. Speaker, a second area of international competitiveness I would like to explore is the idea of expanding our name recognition. After all, Albertans already know about the quality of our agricultural sector, they already know about the strength of our energy industry, and they already know about the potential of our people. What is important from a competitive perspective is that the rest of the world knows. The world needs to know that Alberta is the provider of safe, secure, and convenient energy. They need to know that Alberta has a world-class agricultural sector committed to safety and quality, and they need to know that Alberta is committed to free trade and industrial development. Essentially, in order to be competitive, I believe Alberta needs to expand, develop, and strengthen its international name recognition. People in foreign countries need to instantly associate Alberta with quality and sound business sense.

In addition, people around the world should also be able to instantly recognize Alberta as a beacon of world-class tourism. After all, our national parks are already the envy of the world. Instantly Banff, Jasper, and Waterton come to mind. While I support measures to promote our already world-class tourist destinations, I feel that from a competitiveness standpoint we should focus on some of our more hidden treasures, treasures like the Milk River badlands, where they are currently excavating dinosaur fossils for the Royal Tyrrell Museum; Writing-on-Stone provincial park, where there's one of the greatest concentrations of rock art in North America; and Medalta Pottery, which historically made 75 per cent of this country's pottery at the turn of the century.

These treasures, which are in and near my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, are truly spectacular and could stand to benefit greatly from the international limelight. Mr. Speaker, there are treasures all over this province. I believe that promoting these treasures like this should be one of the key priorities of the competitiveness body created by this act.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I believe that in order to be competitive on the world stage, we need to recognize and encourage our export-based businesses, businesses like Meggitt industries in my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. Last weekend here in Edmonton Meggitt industries won the prestigious exporter of the year award from the Alberta Chamber of Commerce. This award recognizes an organization that has achieved outstanding success in exporting their products outside of Canada's borders. In the case of Meggitt industries these products are primarily unmanned vehicle systems. These systems are very interesting pieces of technology that can have many practical uses, both in the military, by police forces, and commercially as well.

Also, that is why the Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems is located in Medicine Hat. The unmanned vehicles made and exported by Meggitt industries include land, sea, and air vehicles. The land vehicles are used for search and rescue as well as towing military targets in live-fire exercises. The sea vehicles are Zodiac-type boats, which are used by countries to remotely patrol harbours and also anywhere that there are naval exercises. Their vehicles are drones, et cetera, that we hear so much about that are used in both military and civilian applications from surveillance in Afghanistan to patrols using radar and spectral imaging for such things as search and rescue and watching for forest fires. All these are controlled remotely and offer the military the opportunity to create a realistic training scenario, and they offer civilian applications to carry out their work while keeping people out of harm's way.

Mr. Speaker, because of the success of this company and its technology its products are in high demand all over the world, including the United States, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom,

and South Africa, to mention a few. This is truly a great success story for this industry, my constituency, and indeed Alberta as a whole. After all, Alberta is an exporting jurisdiction that transports billions of dollars of energy products every year, and for a technology industry to win exporter of the year truly highlights the value and potential of Alberta's technology. After all, this is just one example of how Alberta's technology is leading the world.

5:00

In closing, I'd like to thank the government for its sound decision-making, exemplified by its commitment to overall competitiveness, competitiveness that stretches beyond the energy industry and royalties to examine where Alberta stands on the international stage and where we need to go to remain an in-demand jurisdiction. To this end, I believe that initiatives like adding value to our agricultural products, developing our international name recognition, and recognizing our export businesses will go a long way towards telling the world who we are and what we're capable of. Albertans already know this, but it's our job to make sure that the rest of the world knows. I will offer my full support to Bill 1, and I encourage all members of the House to join me.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question to the hon. member, speaking of value-added initiatives. While synthetic crude oil production has increased, an enormous amount of bitumen continues to be shipped by pipeline out of this province. Indeed, the share of synthetic crude oil and bitumen production remaining in Alberta for refining and transport fuels has fallen, from 34 per cent a decade ago to 23 per cent in 2007, the latest statistics that I have. Would the hon. member think it is to our competitive advantage to ensure that there is a significant increase in the upgrading of bitumen here in this province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that question. Yes, I do. I believe that there's an advantage to increasing our upgrading, and I believe that the fact that there are upgraders standing in the wings ready to be built, as far as I know, in this province speaks to that point. When you talk about the 1.3 million barrels of oil being produced by the oil sands ramping up to 5 million barrels per day perhaps by 2015, my question is: how many upgraders is that going to take to be able to handle that amount of capacity? The reason I ask that question is: how much can each upgrader do? If we're talking 1.3 million barrels per day, and we need, according to the quotes that you mentioned, perhaps a couple more upgraders to handle those – and I don't know the capacity of each upgrader – when that increases by two- or threefold, does that mean, then, that we should have two or three times as many upgraders built in Alberta to be able to take that? Is that actually realistic?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same member. I appreciate that response. However, as the next export pipeline is commissioned and comes on stream, it is to my knowledge going to provide at least 600,000 barrels a day of extra export capacity, all going south. As this production of bitumen increases – and I hope the hon. member is right, that it increases significantly; I don't know if it will reach the 5 million barrels a day mark in such

a short period of time – do you think we should take our export eggs, put them in separate baskets and that the next pipeline that is to be built from this province, whether it's for upgraded bitumen or bitumen products, should be to tidewater in either Kitimat or Prince George so that we can serve the east Asian market?

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. One of the things to remember as well is that the Alberta government is not building the pipelines. It is the companies themselves that are doing this. This is all industry. The hon. member has mentioned something about perhaps looking at moving to the tidewater, whether it's to Kitimat or whether it's to someplace on the west coast. Certainly, that's possible. I think that if the thing is warranted by the companies, they will consider that.

Mr. MacDonald: Does the hon. member not agree that it's in the public interest in this province to ensure that we diversify our export markets not only to the lower 48 states for our petroleum and petroleum products but also to the Asian markets, which are expanding much more quickly than the American market?

Mr. Mitzel: I think this goes back to the point I mentioned about diversification. In my notes I talked about diversification and the fact that in order to be competitive, we should work with what we have in value-added. We should also consider diversification. I was speaking at the moment about agriculture and agrifood products, but the hon. member brings up energy. We are the powerhouse for energy in Canada, and certainly the opportunity to diversify is there as well.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to read the list here again. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the Member for Calgary-Hays, the Member for St. Albert.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure it'll come as a shock and a surprise that I have a very different reading of this legislation than the government or the member from the third party, now the Wildrose Alliance. I think this is one of the silliest bills I've ever seen. I read it carefully, I think about it, and it just strikes me as silly, wasteful, empty, pointless, and misguided. I'm not sure what else I can say to make my position clear.

Mr. MacDonald: You've convinced me.

Dr. Taft: Okay. I've convinced one person already.

I have trouble right from the beginning with this bill. Obviously, being economically competitive is important and so on, but underlying this bill, if we ask ourselves as legislators what's beneath the surface here, beneath the surface is essentially a view of a society as an economy. I think a society is much more than an economy. I think that we would be better off to have bills that address not competitiveness but all kinds of other things: productivity or social justice or equality or co-operation.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

One of the issues that I think we need to acknowledge and debate in this Assembly as this bill works its way through is: what does competition mean? Inevitably with competition there are winners

and losers. So you might want to just change this and call this the Alberta winners and losers act. If we understand Alberta as being fundamentally driven by competitiveness, then we're also, really, re-enacting what, for example, we've watched in the Olympics right now, which is a handful of winners and a huge number of very worthy competitors who lost. If we build our society on that principle, then we're going to end up with a society where there's a handful of winners and a huge number of very worthy people who are the losers. I think we need to think through that approach to a society.

I also wonder even: how is competitiveness defined here? One of my great frustrations with this government's business plans and so much of its legislation is that they're so vaguely presented that you don't actually know what they mean. How would you know if it succeeded? How would you know if something happened? In this case, how would we know if we were more competitive? How is competitiveness reflected in our society? Does it mean that the rich get richer? Does it mean that we have a better education system? Does it mean that we're closing the gap between the impoverished and the middle class, that we're enriching the middle class, that we're more culturally advanced? What does it mean? There's no clear sense of that in this piece of legislation.

5:10

Of course, then, without that you could say: well, how is it measured? Well, you can't measure it if we don't define it. I mean, if we were to look at, say, the activities of Goldman Sachs – they were devoted to competitiveness – or Bear Stearns or some of those other merchant banks on Wall Street, that was all about competitiveness, wasn't it? If there was one lesson in the last couple of years in the global economy, it's that unfettered competitiveness is destructive. In fact, one of the great lessons for the conservative movement of the last couple of years – and it's a lesson apparently lost on some – is that unfettered competitiveness is a bad idea. Committing yourself to nothing more than competitiveness sets you up for disaster. So I hope we hear some discussion about that from the government on this bill.

Are we talking here about long-term competitiveness or short-term competitiveness? Once you unleash competitiveness, inevitably the time frame gets tighter and tighter and tighter, and decisions are made to become competitive in the next few years and then in the next year and then in the next few months until we're really scrambling on this treadmill that's getting us nowhere but down. It does become, as so many people have observed, a race to the bottom. So I don't see what's in this piece of legislation to help us avoid a race to the bottom.

Does this mean more tax cuts until we have the lowest tax regime in the developed world? Then why stop there? That's not as competitive as, you know, China might be or India. Does it mean reduced environmental rules? Does it mean other adjustments like that that become lower labour standards? You know, one of the reasons I'm told in this Assembly over and over that farm workers have no coverage under WCB or occupational health and safety or the labour code is: well, we'd be uncompetitive. Well, if that holds for agriculture workers, then pretty soon it's going to hold for other workers, industrial workers and others. So this kind of blind commitment to competitiveness, I think, is ignorant. It's short sighted, it's misguided, and it'll be destructive.

What is the point of competitiveness, Mr. Speaker? Has this government asked itself: why do we want to be more competitive? Is it because we want to be wealthier? Is it because we want to be culturally richer? Is it because we want to have healthier people living longer lives? If those are the goals of being competitive, then

why don't we have acts that talk about that? Why are we so focused on competitiveness?

Now, the Minister of Education spoke of the preamble to Bill 1 as if it were poetry. That was his word, and I gagged. I object to the very first line of this preamble, which reads: "Whereas Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans." Mr. Speaker, that's nothing short of distortion. That's a misrepresentation. I can tell you that Alberta's success is founded every bit as much on co-operativeness. Alberta's success is founded on people coming together in the late 1800s to form school boards so that they could all pay taxes so that their kids could get an education. They co-operated. Alberta's success is founded on religious organizations and municipalities bringing people together to build hospitals. It's founded on people coming together and co-operating as farmers to bring in all kinds of improvements to our agricultural system. It's based on programs like rural electrification. The rural electrification program, one of the most important advances in the history of Alberta, didn't happen because of competition. So this nonsense in the first sentence of the preamble here, that Alberta's success is founded on competitiveness, should be struck from this legislation.

Then it goes on, Mr. Speaker. The next phrase of this preamble goes like this: "Whereas competitiveness is core to the Government of Alberta's plan to position Alberta for sustained prosperity." It goes on. The fourth line of this preamble may be the most disturbing line in this legislation: "Whereas the Government of Alberta believes that the role of government is to create the conditions for competitiveness."

Mr. Speaker, it may be news to members of this Assembly, but the role of government is not to create conditions for competitiveness. The role of government, I would argue, is to steward this province's people and natural resources to build a better future. Sometimes that's through healthy competition, and a lot of the time it isn't. But if members of this governing party actually believe what this legislation says, that "the role of government is to create the conditions for competitiveness so that entrepreneurship, innovation and investment will generate benefits for Albertans," I think we're in worse trouble than I ever believed.

What about justice? What about cultural development? What about the role of government in making sure that every Albertan has a meal and that every Albertan has a roof over their head and that every Albertan has the right to vote in provincial elections? Now, those would be legitimate roles for government. Those could be considered as the role for government.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, even if we were to accept the notion that the role of government is to generate competitiveness, isn't it really the role of government to be a referee? If we accept that sometimes competition is good, then isn't it the role of government to make sure that it's healthy and fair competition? Isn't it the role of government, for example, to make sure that children born into impoverished families have a fair right to compete equally with children born into families where there's wealth and all kinds of opportunity? That used to be a role for government.

Mr. Speaker, I think what we've done in this piece of legislation is lost sight of what government really is about. I think that this reflects a government that's been captured by one ideology and one set of interests and has stopped taking the long-term welfare of our society into consideration. My esteemed colleague from Lethbridge-East, if I may quote her without even having consulted her, said something to me in the fall that really, really stuck with me. She said: you know, it took centuries to separate the church from the state, and now we have to separate the corporation from the state. I think truer words were never said.

We have here a piece of legislation that doesn't actually reflect the broad interests of the people of Alberta. This is a flagship bill that essentially says that the role of government is to create conditions so that corporations can flourish. Well, sure, that is a role of government, but it's certainly not the role of government, and it certainly is misguided to say that Alberta's success is founded on competitiveness.

5:20

Many people here probably don't realize it, but the roots of the New Democratic Party actually go back to the city of Calgary and very, very important political activity that happened in the city of Calgary in the 1930s that led to the foundation of the CCF, which eventually led to the rise of the New Democrats. It's true. I wish that some acknowledgement of those traditions was also in this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on beyond that, but I think my point is clear here. This is a piece of legislation that is misguided, and I'd like it to be struck from the Order Paper of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: Thank you. First, I'd like to compliment the hon. member for a great speech. I enjoyed it very much, and I agreed with all of it, which is not something I always can say about his speeches. In this particular case I thought he was absolutely dead on, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to ask the hon. member what he thinks the government needs to do in order to be competitive with other jurisdictions in the matter of education. I don't think he spoke at great length about that aspect.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the matter of education, I'm going to focus on postsecondary education if I may. My strong feeling is that not just for competitiveness but for the health of our democracy, for the health of our society we need to invest in stable, long-term, generous funding for postsecondary education as well as for K to 12, but I'm just choosing to focus on postsecondary education. Historically the concept of public education in this country – and it is a very, very proud history – is that it was the great equalizer, that we made sure that every child, no matter how privileged or underprivileged, had the right to an education. That started in grade 1 and then in kindergarten, and it went right through to postsecondary education, and many, many, many Albertans and many, many Canadians have benefited from that.

One of the key roles of government is to make sure that that opportunity is sustained, and I would argue that an important way to do that is to stabilize the funding for postsecondary education so that tuition fees can actually be reduced. When I was a student way, way back, tuition fees were, I want to say, \$300, something like that, and it was unusual for students to have to work to support themselves while they went through university. I think there's been a real loss when we now see students who have to work 10, 20, 30 hours a week to put themselves through university.

One of the things I'd like to see government do is understand that a crucial role for them is to bring all members of this society along through a generous education program, starting at preschool and going right through to postgraduate. We're halfway there. We're maybe even more than halfway there, but we're slipping. Let's stop the slippage and reverse it.

I will also raise, if I may, one other key point here, which is that I think it is morally abhorrent that in this province we allow children to sit in classrooms hungry through no fault of their own and that this government refuses to take any direct action about that. I think that it is morally bankrupt of this government to do that. I tell you that if you wanted to win me over to competitiveness, then you could come forward and say: you know, we're going to make this a more competitive society by feeding our kids who are hungry through no fault of their own and giving them a chance. They're sitting in schools by the thousands, as young as six and seven and eight, wondering where their next meal is going to come from. That's wrong, and it's a black mark on this government that it won't take any direct action on it. Fix our competitiveness there.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I found the member's comments quite interesting. I do agree with him with respect to the definition of competitiveness and that one of the opportunities that we have in this province is to explore exactly what that means. I was a little surprised to see the balance between – and I don't mean this in a facetious way – how we decide how to invest in social programs and how we can afford to pay for those social programs. Now, I do believe that if you read the legislation as the hon. member quoted and you read it very specifically, I could see some of the arguments that the hon. member made, but I'd like him to think a little bit more about what the consequences might be with respect to that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to stand in this Assembly and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I am very pleased to expound on how this timely and important act can positively impact on my constituents in West Yellowhead. This important piece of legislation will examine ways to further enhance Alberta's competitive advantage.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is in an enviable position. We have an economic environment that promotes hard work, investment, risk taking, and entrepreneurship. More importantly, we have a government that facilitates and enhances this positive economic climate. I believe that through this act we will examine whether or not we are doing the best we can in accomplishing our objectives, and if not, we will act.

Mr. Speaker, one of this government's priorities is a competitive economic climate. A competitive economic climate is the result of many factors, including fiscal, trade, labour, and regulatory policies, just to name a few. Alberta currently has the most competitive fiscal policy of any province in Canada. It is one that values low taxes. After all, low tax rates are crucial to help small and large businesses and industries compete in the global economy. Our fiscal policy also enshrines sound fiscal management, which is exemplified by initiatives like the sustainability fund, a \$17 billion fund designed to help sustain our programs if there is a decline in revenue.

Mr. Speaker, we also made great strides to reduce barriers to trade, investment, and labour through the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, known as TILMA, which we have signed with British Columbia. Through TILMA there will be increased access for businesses, investors, and workers to the markets of both Alberta and British Columbia, which will enhance the competitiveness of both jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, in comparison to other jurisdictions we are well positioned to compete in the world marketplace. However, I'd like to focus on specific areas in the microlevels of government where we could possibly improve on our competitive advantage, especially in relation to the forest industry.

Mr. Speaker, the forest industry is very important to my constituency of West Yellowhead, and this government recognizes the important contribution of this industry to the overall Alberta economy. As such, this government has made efforts to limit the amount of unnecessary regulation while at the same time promoting innovative changes aimed at increasing the competitiveness of this industry.

However, Mr. Speaker, regulatory pressures, particularly in the various levels of government, continue to have a direct effect on the forest industry. Those in the industry tell me that it is often the constant changes in regulation that erode our competitiveness, and while this government has made an effort to limit the amount of regulatory change, we could perhaps go even further. For example, when the Auditor General audits an SRD operation, it tends to be followed by an overabundance of regulatory changes launched to address the issues identified by the Auditor General. This can result in layers of regulations that increase costs, staff workloads, and decrease competitiveness.

In addressing these types of challenges, I would suggest that it is crucial to involve the industry and take common-sense approaches that address the identified issues while minimizing the layers of regulation. One way of addressing this would be to increase forest industry advocacy in both the senior and junior levels of government. At first advocacy may not seem like a component that would improve competitiveness. However, a lack of advocacy can result in and have the effect of regulations being developed without proper consultations. This can of course adversely affect the competitiveness of this industry.

5:30

Another area where we could remove red tape is in the process for conducting historical resource surveys. Currently whenever an industry is proposing development, they are required to conduct historical resource surveys that are of great cost to industry. These surveys are important to ensure that heritage sites are protected. However, they are required of forestry, energy, recreation, and even government often on the same landscape. Perhaps this process could be streamlined to ensure that there is not a redundancy while at the same time save industry money.

A third area where we can improve our competitiveness is in the process of surveying new or amended licence of occupation roads, or LOCs. Currently the costs of conducting road surveys are a huge burden on the forest industry and all industries that are required to survey new roads. Mr. Speaker, GPS technology has gone a long way in the last few years. The same surveying objectives could be achieved by using advanced GPS technology that would be even more cost-effective for industry.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize that on the larger scale, the macro level, Alberta is well above other jurisdictions when it comes to competitiveness. That said, the competitiveness review provides the opportunity to examine the micro-operations of government, ensure that regulations are in place which are mutually beneficial. This will further enhance our competitiveness advantage and enable an even higher standard of living for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. Premier for introducing this important piece of legislation as I think it exemplifies his commitment to ensuring that Alberta remains the most competitive jurisdiction in North America.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I wonder if I might ask the hon. member across: does he not consider that some of the thought processes behind this Bill 1 in terms of competitiveness could be interpreted as a direct interference in the business community?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't see it as a direct interference with the business community at all. You know, the world has become a very small place. I think it's important that government and industry partner together to make sure that we are competitive in the global economy, so make sure that we have good regulations in place, make sure that we have safety for our workers, and make sure that we can compete in the global economy. If we continue to work and function within the microcosm, we're going to lose our advantage. I think that we're starting to see that as industries such as Russia's, China's, India's come on stream. With the innovation they have and the large population they have, we have to work together to make sure that we are there at the end of the day.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wish to speak on 29(2)(a)?

I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. It's always interesting when we start a new session to see what the government has selected for Bill 1. Sometimes there have been bills that have been selected which have a theme with which I can't disagree; I think children and poverty. There have been a number of them that had good intentions. Very rarely did they make a significant difference if you evaluate them. I think the same thing might be said of this one.

Competitiveness in and of itself is not a bad thing, considering the economic system in which we operate. It's something that's important, and it's the responsibility of governments to ensure that we are competitive. But to place it by itself without a reference to the other things that are important, I think, is showing that the government is far too single-minded with respect to the issue of economic or financial competitiveness.

I know that the hon. Minister of Justice has suggested in some of her questions that we need to take a broader view of this. But in my submission, Mr. Speaker, this bill is not written in a way that could lead a reasonable person to believe that a very broad measure of competitiveness is intended. I think that it's very clear that the act is focused very much on the economic competitiveness. In that sense it is one-sided, and it is focused on a number of things which are not new to this government in terms of competitiveness.

If I think back to the days when Ralph Klein was the Premier and he talked about the Alberta advantage, and you broke down the Alberta advantage and what many of the components of that were, they included things like lax environmental regulation, particularly in the vicinity of the oil sands. It meant that there weren't the same protections for workers in terms of health and safety, in terms of the enforcement. It meant that it was harder to organize unions, which is something that corporations like to see because they see that as part of the competitive environment. So this is not new to the government.

What is new, Mr. Speaker, is the rise of another political party in our province, which is, if you can believe it, even further to the right than the Progressive Conservative Party and the consternation and

political concern that has arisen on the part of this government that it may be losing the favour of some elements in the business sector and particularly in the oil industry as a result of its very, very watered down changes to royalties in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the first thing that I would do is to suggest that we rename the bill, Bill 1, from the Alberta Competitiveness Act to the Wildrose Alliance inoculation act, something that will protect this government from those in business and particularly in the oil and gas industry that have become disappointed, shall we say, in the Progressive Conservative Party and have begun to fund the Wildrose Alliance Party as a way of bringing political pressure on the Progressive Conservatives to return to the fold of true conservatism. What that means, of course, is very low royalties, very low taxes, very low regulations, very high thresholds, for example, for forming unions or for protecting the rights of workers in our society.

This direction, this race to the bottom, is, I think, of great concern to all Albertans. This competitiveness, as practised by this government, comes at the expense of worker health and safety. It comes at the expense of the very poor in our society. It comes at the expense of environmental degradation, and it impacts in a significant way the cultural development of the province. It impacts education, and it impacts our health care system.

Now, we're running a very large deficit, Mr. Speaker, in this budget. The government has provided additional funds for health care and some aspects of education. They've cut many other things in the budget because it's a political budget dealing with the political situation the government now finds itself in.

One of the aspects that it does not address is the whole question of the revenue side of this province. Now, this government has, since I've been involved in politics municipally and here, introduced the flat tax on personal incomes in the province. Of course, the biggest reductions in taxes under that come for the very wealthiest of Albertans. It's very, very heavily weighted in that direction.

Many middle-income Albertans actually are paying more taxes, yet the government is not addressing the competitiveness of their taxation system on personal incomes for middle-income Albertans, who are actually paying more taxes than they would have. They are focused instead on the competitiveness of the wealthiest Albertans. According to calculations that have recently been made public, the value of that in terms of lost revenue in this budget is \$5.5 billion, most of which goes to the very wealthiest individuals in our society. Mr. Speaker, that alone would cover the entire deficit of the province of Alberta in this budget.

5:40

Then there's the whole question of corporate taxes. At a time when corporations were earning massive profits and I think EnCana a few years ago earned a profit of I don't know if it was \$7 billion or \$9 billion of profit, this government has cut taxes on corporations by over a third in the last eight years. I was present when Steve West, who was then the Provincial Treasurer, announced the goal of cutting the rate for corporate taxes from 15 to 8 per cent. I think we're around 10 per cent now, Mr. Speaker, so the government's got a couple of points left to go, but that has also caused the government to give up several billion dollars of revenue in each budget year.

Now, these are policy decisions, Mr. Speaker. I assume that they have been taken in the pursuit of competitiveness, in pursuit of making Alberta a competitive place. But it has placed our province in deficit, and it's also made us extremely dependent on natural gas revenues, which is where we get the bulk of our royalty revenue.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're now in the difficult position that when the price of gas tanks, we have to lay off nurses. That's not a competitive government, in my view. It's a government that is spending its children's inheritance because it is unwilling to make those who can

afford to pay more and who benefit the most from our society pay their fair share. Of course, we also have some of the lowest royalties in the world when it comes to oil and particularly for tar sands oil. These are policy decisions that this government has made already to try and make us, quote, more competitive.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that I think the government could do to actually make us more competitive – and I'm still using it in a fairly narrow sense economically – and that is to start making investments in renewable energy in a big way. If we go forward as a province, we will find that there comes a time when it's more and more difficult to sell our oil on the international market and where oil in particular is being displaced as a major source of energy in the world. Now, that may be difficult to accept today, but I think it's a reality.

The problem is that this government is doing nothing to position this province so that it can be the energy leader in Canada in the future in a posthydrocarbon, postcarbon economy. I think that if we want to be competitive, then we need to focus on that. Simply a race to the bottom with the lowest possible taxes is not going to be the answer. You need to be intelligent about it. You can't just say: "We're going to slash our taxes to the very bone. We're going to charge the lowest royalties in the world, and the free market will take care of us." You know, the history of the world is replete with jurisdictions that have adopted that approach and have ended up in poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about some of the language. I appreciated very much the comments from Edmonton-Riverview with respect to this bill and with respect to the one-sided and breathtaking assumptions contained in the preamble to the bill. "Whereas Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans": that is a very questionable statement. For the government to quote it in the preamble to its Bill 1 is extremely presumptuous and downright, I think, inaccurate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview did talk about the co-operative spirit in Alberta, and I'd like to add to those remarks a little bit. Let's not forget the agricultural societies that were created in this province, the wheat pools. Let's not forget the gas co-operatives, which still operate; the rural electrification associations, which still operate. One of the things that gives me hope as a social democrat in Alberta is the co-operative traditions of this province, which are long and deep.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the United Farmers of Alberta represented much of that co-operative spirit among agricultural producers in the earlier years of our province. The United Farmers of Alberta government was, in fact, the same government that negotiated with Ottawa so that the natural resources in our soil belong to the province of Alberta and not to the federal government. Albertans owe that particular party and that movement a real debt of gratitude. The UFA still continues today but not as a political party. A large portion of that party, the UFA, was involved in the founding of the CCF in our province, which is, of course, the direct precursor to Alberta's NDP.

I think that if we look back on history, we'll find that the assumptions contained in this act are false and misrepresent Alberta's history, and I think they also are equally false in terms of a compass for moving the province forward. If we want to be more competitive, I think we need to make sure that we have a first-class health care system. That's one of the advantages Canada has relative to the United States in terms of the location of companies in our country.

A first-class education system is even more important to our competitiveness, so I think the government should be focusing on that, but there's not a mention of it in this act. A clean environment and good social conditions all go towards making Alberta more competitive, a more desirable place to invest and to live, and I think

that the one-sided nature of this bill is in fact going to be at cross-purposes with true competitiveness, that we would like to see in our province. We would like to see the oil and gas industry continue to prosper at the same time as they pay their fair share and at the same time as we prepare for the day when renewable energy replaces carbon and hydrocarbon fuels.

We would like to see a much better bill than this, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of questions for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I've always had some difficulty following the tax-the-rich economic theories that come from that part of the House. Just some clarification, because I've heard it twice, on how being competitive is somehow a race to the bottom. That would be one question, but I have a couple more if I may.

I'm just wondering how the member envisions us caring for our vulnerable and ensuring that we have good, well-paid jobs in this province and a safe work environment for all if we're not competitive and we don't attract national and international business investment to our province. That's one question.

The other question. When we spoke about investing in renewable energy, I'm just wondering how he envisions that replacing the hundred million dollars a day plus that flows into our province from our export of oil and gas.

A few questions there, but just some clarity on some of those would be great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to oblige. Well, the race to the bottom means basically lowering labour standards, environmental standards, and not being able to afford education and health care as is necessary.

I want to talk about another aspect, since you raised it, in terms of how we make sure that our people are working, and that has to do with the government policies around bitumen in our province and the mass export of unprocessed bitumen, creating billions of dollars of investment in the United States and thousands of jobs while we here in Alberta have lost in the last year I think 35,000 jobs.

5:50

There are many ways to be competitive, but certainly to let, as the Minister of Energy said in the House yesterday, the market decide where jobs are created with our resources I think is a complete abdication of the government's responsibility to look at how we build our economy in an intelligent way. That hemorrhaging of capital and jobs to the United States is something the government needs to address.

In terms of the money that we get from the export of our raw materials, that is fine as far as it goes, but unless we make sure that we take full advantage of value-added opportunities, then we will lose against what we could potentially have. It's fine to say that we get a lot of money from exporting natural gas with all of the volatiles in it to petrochemical industries in Chicago and so on and that we export our bitumen to the United States and allow them to build the upgraders and to create the jobs and to create the investment in a number of states in the United States. We're rich for now, so we lose sight of the fact that we are letting much of the riches that we possess slip through our fingers to the benefit of others.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I've always believed that the government's job is to create a level playing field and that business will come if there's money to be had. I think it's a false economy when the government interferes with that because it truly isn't what we talk about when we talk about a free market. If the marketplace is always depending on tax dollars to make their profit, then I'm not sure how we can call that a pure free market.

What I would like to see: in terms of them wanting competition, I would like to compete with the United States and have our own upgraders. I think that would be a good use of the taxpayers' money because ultimately we would have more control, and in the end competitiveness is about control. Maybe we should be looking at controlling more of our value-added jobs. If the member could comment on that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I agree generally with what the member has said. To me it's a question of policy.

The Acting Speaker: The next speaker, the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the lateness of the hour, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Third Session

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Issue 11

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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	Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
	Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
	Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Parliamentary Counsel	Stephanie LeBlanc
Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Chris Caughell
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Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House in his position as vice-chair of the Legislative Offices Committee.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to the Assembly the members of the 2009-10 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, who are sitting in your gallery. This commission was established on July 31 of '09 with the daunting task of coming up with some 87 constituencies using a whole number of factors to make sure that they are fair and equitable. The commission had a series of hearings across the province, and now they are issuing their interim report. I am pleased to introduce the members of the commission. We have the hon. Judge Ernie Walter, chair of the boundaries commission, and the members: Keith Archer, Peter Dobbie, Allyson Jeffs, and Brian Evans. Of course, Brian was a member of this Assembly and also a minister. I see they have with them one of their very able administrators, Karen Sawchuk. I would ask our guests to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 44 very special guests from Win Ferguson school. The students are accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Ali Dixon and Mrs. Claudia Klippenstein, and parent helpers today are Mrs. Robin Lee, Mrs. Monica Schouten, Mrs. Donna MacLean, and Mr. Paul Kristensen. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a researcher funded through one of our Alberta Innovates corporations, Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions. Dr. Braden Manns, who is sitting in the members' gallery, is a physician, researcher, and an associate professor in the division of nephrology in the department of medicine at the University of Calgary. The chronic disease team that he helps lead brings together 23 specialists from across Canada and abroad in fields ranging from medicine to law, from nursing to knowledge transfer. Together they are tackling an urgent matter in health care, and that's how to help people with chronic medical conditions like diabetes and high blood

pressure to better manage their health. His research is just one example of the excellent work coming out of Alberta Innovates. Again, Dr. Manns is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this gallery.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce some staff from my department who are on an orientation tour. I met with them in my office. Right about now they're probably wondering what they've gotten themselves into, but it's my honour to welcome them to this Chamber. I'd like to introduce Wendy Mallery, Nnam Okoye, Lena Borle, Wendy Joy, Marilyn Quaadvlieg, Kerrie Henson, Amanda Goulet, Michael Michalski, George Wiebe, LauraAnn Sedgwick, Christy Ma, Raena Chatwin, Dana Belyk, Teresa Babinski, Marcia White, Kathie Heard, Shannon Klaus, Gerhard Krueger, Lesley MacAllister, and Karen Bilinske. I'd ask them to rise and please accept the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly six human resources staff members who provide shared corporate services to both my ministry and Alberta Transportation. If I could please introduce Stacy Gloster, Donna-Joy Loe, Andrea Hayes, Michelle Sadler, Anita Belisle, and Khadija Allidina. They are here today to tour the Legislature Building. They are seated and have risen in the members' gallery, and I'd like all members to give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly over a hundred individuals and families and organizations from across the province who've come here to show their concern for service cuts to persons with developmental disabilities. Every one of these Albertans is tremendously concerned that the millions of dollars in cuts will leave providers and parents scrambling to find adequate supports. I would ask our guests to rise or wave if they wish and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2010 Arctic Winter Games

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, sports is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle and a strong population. From March 6 to 13 Grande Prairie will host the 21st annual Arctic Winter Games. This is an exciting opportunity for our province as participants from Alaska, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, northern Alberta, Nunavik, Nunavut, Greenland, the Sami people from the Sapmi region, and the Russian province of Yamal-Nenets come together in Grande Prairie to compete and celebrate their cultures.

The Arctic Winter Games are a unique celebration of sport and culture. They promote traditional aboriginal games based on survival in the north. There are three categories of sports that are included in the games: major sports; northern sports, including Inuit games, D  n   games, snowshoeing, dog mushing, and Inuit wrestling; as well as emerging sports. The games offer a venue where developing athletes and officials from across the north can meet and enhance their athletic skills and share their respective cultures.

The original philosophy behind these games is athletic competition, cultural exhibition, and social interchange. While participants of the games are looking forward to competing in this biennial event, the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti are very excited to have the opportunity to showcase their city and their hospitality. If you're interested in attending the Arctic Winter Games or want further information on the events, please visit www.awg2010.org.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of this Assembly join me in welcoming participants, athletes, volunteers, performers, and spectators from all over the north to Grande Prairie.

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

Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today a hundred Albertans have joined us here in the Legislature to express their disappointment and justifiable anger at the callousness of this administration's decision to claw back supports so desperately needed by people with developmental disabilities. Citizens who live with conditions such as autism, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome need the compassion, assistance, and understanding of a caring community. That community starts with their immediate family and friends, but it also encompasses all Albertans.

We're all part of a civilization, a civil society, with common rights and obligations. One of our duties is to ensure that people with special needs are looked after. Responsible leadership would make absolutely sure that there's enough public funding to meet the special needs of the people, including those who have joined us in the Legislature today and the many thousands of others with developmental disabilities across the province.

I applaud the men and women who devote their lives to caring for people with developmental disabilities. With meagre resources they are doing their absolute best to provide sons and daughters and the people they support with a quality of life.

1:40

Unfortunately, this administration is not providing sufficient support to allow people with developmental disabilities and their families and caregivers to live with a level of dignity that is their birthright. Millions of dollars in cuts have left aid providers and parents scrambling and desperate and vulnerable Albertans in crisis. This is the result of poor financial planning. These are not the actions of a compassionate and responsible government. I would ask the Premier to reconsider these cruel PDD cuts. The worth of a civilization is judged on how it treats its most vulnerable. Today this government is failing that important test.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Youth Apprenticeship Program

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately 6,000 students, 25 schools, five off-campus schools are part of Northern Lights school division 69, otherwise known as NLSD. NLSD

operates one of our three youth apprenticeship program, or YAP, pilot projects in this province.

As a former teacher of the Northern Lights school district I am very proud of the work that NLSD is doing with this particular program. In the YAP program students begin in grade 7 and continue through grade 12 to explore career options through integrative learning of both trades and other professional vocations. Students can earn certificates in WHMIS, first aid, H₂S awareness, transportation of dangerous goods awareness, bear awareness, hunter education, and job safety skills.

YAP is currently a pilot project that expires in June of 2010. Northern Lights is hoping to extend the funding for the Lac La Biche program for the next three years as well as exploring the possibility of expanding it into my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

The youth apprenticeship program has successfully improved students' achievement, enhanced program choices, and increased participation and opportunities for First Nation, M  tis, and Inuit students. One hundred and seventy-five students participated in YAP, all of whom remain in school. Six of these students are currently enrolled in registered apprenticeship programs in Alberta. In 2009 these students accessed close to 15 per cent of the province's scholarships in the registered apprenticeship program.

Mr. Speaker, the YAP project has been a huge success for students in the Northern Lights school division. It gives them the ability to learn in a setting outside of the classroom through hands-on experience. This can increase their chances of staying in school and teaches them to develop skill sets that will encourage them to take an active role in their education. It also gives students who want to pursue a career in the trades a way to gain experience and understand the importance of applied learning as a means of achieving their goals.

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

International Mother Language Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November 1999 the United Nations proclaimed the first-ever International Mother Language Day. This date is celebrated each February 21 around the world. This holiday shows the importance that language has in our society as this is how we express our culture and heritage. International Mother Language Day is a great way to become more aware of other languages and cultures around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Canada is a country where we are very lucky to speak our native language and celebrate our culture freely. This is something that many other countries do not allow, and we should be thankful for our freedom. I immigrated to Canada 30 years ago from Punjab, India. It is important to me that I am able to speak my native language, Punjabi, and can pass it on to my children.

In Alberta we have many people who speak languages other than English and French. Some schools offer language programs to help children retain their language if their mother tongue is not English or French, at the same time allowing English children to learn other languages and cultural traditions.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency alone Kildare elementary school has an excellent Chinese Mandarin bilingual program, as does Londonderry school. Father Leo Green school has wonderful French and Spanish immersion programs. J.J. Bowlen junior high school will open a program for Spanish language and culture in the fall, and M.E. LaZerte offers courses in Mandarin and Ukrainian as well.

I would like to thank all the parents, teachers, and those in the community who promote diversity of language. May God bless our country for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Royalty Framework

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the University of Calgary released a study concluding that Alberta ranks dead last in terms of competitiveness for oil and gas, citing this PC government's new royalty framework as the biggest reason. This policy has been among the most harmful and misguided public policy debacles in Alberta's history. It has severely damaged our international reputation as a stable and business-friendly jurisdiction to invest in. It has put thousands of Albertans out of work. It has bankrupted hundreds of small businesses, and ironically an initiative intended to increase revenues to the Provincial Treasury has actually resulted in the exact opposite.

Many of us have family and friends who are struggling to find work, and every time I talk with them, they simply ask why. Why would they do this? This government should have known better. They should have known that the answer to increasing provincial revenues is not to raise taxes on business. All this does is drive out investment and jobs and the income earners that pay taxes. They should have known the importance of the rule of law and respect for contracts in creating the stability necessary to attract and retain industry and businesses and the jobs and tax revenue they provide. They should have known that you can't overhaul the entire regulatory framework governing an industry without first consulting with that industry to make sure there are no unintended consequences.

That shale gas, for instance, was changing the investment landscape. Industry knew that information long before the new royalty framework. Many of this Premier's MLAs knew it and told the Premier so, yet it fell on deaf ears. Now the government, realizing its mistake, has undertaken a competitiveness review. This review is welcomed and needed, and I hope they get it right this time, but the government also says they want to move on. Well, for those whose jobs, businesses, and dreams have been shattered by this government's devastating carelessness, moving on is not so simple.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Affordable Supportive Living Initiatives

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Much has been said in this House over the last few weeks about continuing care options for seniors in our province. I am very proud to stand here and say that providing assistance to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities is, in fact, a major priority for this government. Evidence of this priority is reflected with the Seniors and Community Supports ministry leading the initiative to improve the choice and availability of continuing care accommodations in this province. This initiative is a priority through Alberta's continuing care strategy, now in full implementation, by increasing the supply of spaces and choice in the continuing care system.

This commitment continues, Mr. Speaker. For the 2010-11 fiscal year this government has budgeted \$50 million for the affordable supportive living initiative, or ASLI, to help develop 500 more affordable supportive living long-term care and, I should add, group home spaces in Alberta. Since 1999 and including the funding in this year's budget, approximately \$465 million in provincial capital funding has gone toward helping to build and modernize 9,000 affordable continuing care spaces across this province. This level of funding speaks volumes about our government's commitment to assisting vulnerable Albertans.

To help build spaces for these Albertans, the Alberta capital bonds were recently placed for sale. This innovative approach provides us

with the opportunity to invest in the future of our province and at the same time help to address the changing accommodation needs of seniors and persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few important facts regarding ASLI funding that I think are worth mentioning and reminding members about. First of all, funding for these projects contains operator agreements that require a 22-year plan to ensure the project can continue to operate as an affordable supportive living facility. The accommodation rates charged in these facilities are capped at the maximum residential long-term rate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204

Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010. That's Bill 204.

This bill would limit year-over-year increases in government spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth or the average spending of Canada's remaining nine provinces, whichever number is higher. This bill is, I believe, a critical step in reducing our province's \$7.5 billion deficit and preserving the Alberta advantage for future generations.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

1:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 6 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly and by doing so make public the interim report of the 2009-2010 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission entitled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta. Each member will receive a copy of the report as soon as I table this.

Oral Question Period

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

PDD Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today in the House we have roughly a hundred guests whose quality of life has been negatively affected because of government changes to the persons with developmental disabilities program. They have sent me the following basic questions they want asked to the Premier. To the Premier: what did the province do with the \$1,403.60 raised at a bottle drive in January and delivered here on February 10?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to supporting adults with developmental disabilities, and we're also committed to ensuring that the program that we have in place is sustainable for years to come to support all Albertans with developmental disabilities. The PDD program continues to be well funded. I believe it's in the area of about \$600 million.

Any of the other details with respect to the program the minister responsible can answer.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier. According to the Seniors and Community Supports business plan and budget for 2010 the total estimate for direct operations for PDD, their community boards, is \$15.8 million. How many individuals would this support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PDD program is very important to this government and to all MLAs in this Assembly. I know that first-hand because I've heard from many of them. I'm committed to this program, and I can tell you that with the direct program we have for our people with developmental disabilities, in Michener I know we have approximately 270 people that are served in that program.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we're looking for some evidence that this money is being spent on the delivery of care to persons with developmental disabilities. What does the \$119 million under supports to delivery system pay? What does it pay for, and why is there such a large difference in how this is allocated across the six PDD regions?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the PDD program that we have here in Alberta is one of the very best in Canada. This program and our budget show our commitment to people with developmental disabilities. The goal of the program is to help our people with developmental disabilities to live the most independent and the best life that they can live. I'd like to quote my friends from the Camrose Association for Community Living where they say: our purpose is to help our friends with developmental disabilities live their best life.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today will also be to the Premier and given to me by the people that are visiting in our gallery. To the Premier. Typically board members are volunteers, certainly in the nonprofit organizations, that provide most of the supports to individuals funded by PDD. Why does it cost \$915,000 for board governance for PDD?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once again speaking about the PDD program being one of the very best in Canada, we have six regional boards, and the purpose of the boards is to be able to contract and develop programs within the different regions. Things are different in northern Alberta, obviously, than they are in southern Alberta. They are a very important part of the delivery of our program and making contracts with our service agencies so that we are able to give the best possible programs and services to people with developmental disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Madam Minister. I think we understand the difference between what they do, the care that they deliver, but I think the question was: what is the discrepancy between being able to run boards with volunteers and actually having to pay \$915,000 for board governance?

My next question would be: with the estimates and target budget of 2010-11 and 2011-12 being the same as the 2009-10 forecast of \$597 million . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I would like to say is that because this program is so important to this government, we want to make sure that the program is very consistent throughout the province. We want to make sure that there's clarity in the program. We want to make sure that there's efficiency and effectiveness, especially effectiveness, to the services that we provide. The most important things besides all of those is that this program is sustainable now and into the future. So we have a plan in place. It's our six-priority action plan, which we have travelled across the province and talked to people about to make this an even better program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the budget debate the minister of seniors stated that they were projecting PDD clients to increase from 50 to 100 people in the coming year. How does the minister expect to deal with the AUPE increases, annualized cost for individuals who have come into the service and that the budget is still being held at the '09-10 rate?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the member across is absolutely correct when she says that our budget remains level. I think that's a wonderful accomplishment considering what's happening in these times. We are always looking for efficiencies in our program so that we can support our people with developmental disabilities, so we will be looking for those efficiencies, and any savings that we find within my ministry will go directly to the front line for people with disabilities.

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

Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. An interesting report came out today from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, comparing Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the state of Texas. The report states that Alberta is the least competitive of those jurisdictions for oil and gas investment. This is extremely concerning. To the Premier: what are the Premier's thoughts about the conclusions this report presents?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it clearly follows what the government has in place. We have the Competitiveness Act before this House that's being debated. We want to ensure that we're the best place to do business in the North American continent. There have been substantial changes in not only price but in the availability of gas in shale, and that's changed the situation considerably. So we're waiting for the competitiveness review to be done and also completion of the act so that we can undertake putting the competitiveness review in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I asked the Minister of Energy about upcoming royalty changes, he stated, "The framework itself is in place and will stay in place." Does the Premier now think that more needs to be done than the tweaks to the payouts that the minister is considering?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we will have the most competitive and innovative economy in North America. I just ask him to wait and listen for the completion and the presentation of the report, which will be here soon.

Mr. Taylor: You're not asking me to wait; you're asking 78,000 unemployed Albertans to wait.

We're hearing these days of record land sales in the province because of the interest in the Duvernay shale gas play, and you might almost be able to kid yourself into thinking that happy days are here again if it weren't for those 78,000 unemployed and were it not for this School of Public Policy report. To the Premier: is the province still committed to its own competitiveness review?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, we are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Distracted Driving

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A recently released health and safety report blames distracted driving for the death of an Edmonton teenager last summer. Distracted driving kills, and this government's refusal to introduce legislation to stop it amounts to negligence. The Transportation minister makes excuses about enforcement while drivers glued to cellphones continue plowing through stop signs. Why has this Minister of Transportation failed to implement the recommendations of a standing committee of this Legislature and draft legislation to stop drivers from talking and texting while driving?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is speaking about was a very, very tragic incident. This issue is a little more complex than what the member is talking about. We do have legislation in this province that deals with distracted driving. It's a very severe penalty of \$402, I think, for the fine and six demerits, and because it's so severe, it doesn't get handled a lot. Let me tell you . . .

2:00

The Speaker: No. I'm sorry. We may get it next time.
The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. That's just smoke.

Every day that this government stalls, innocent Albertans risk becoming the latest victim of a distracted driver. In 2008 the RCMP reported that more than 300 people were killed in areas that they patrol and nearly 2,000 injured by distracted drivers. Pedestrians and motorists are dying on this minister's watch, and he is refusing to take action to stop it. When will this minister take action and ban the use of cellphones and texting while driving?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working hard at that every day. One thing that we want to make sure of is that we still push education on this system. The big thing is public safety here. We want to make sure that we keep people's eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel. Let me tell you that we can't just pick one-offs and do like everyone else, just pick cellphones as a distraction. There's a large number of distractions, and we're trying to put them all together and give the police another tool to keep our highways safe.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's been almost two years since a standing committee of this Legislature dealt with this issue, and the minister is still stalling. Every other province except one recognizes that drivers on cellphones can kill people and has done something

about it. By failing to act, the minister is leaving responsible motorists and pedestrians at the mercy of those who text and talk behind the wheel. Why is he failing to protect Albertans by refusing to introduce cellphone legislation to protect the people of this province?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we are working on that legislation. We're working on the big picture of the legislation because we want to make sure we get it right. We want to make sure that it's practical, enforceable, and effective. In order to do that, we have to get it right. We will get it right, and we will bring it forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Services in Grande Prairie Area

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents from the Grande Prairie region are concerned about the current condition of and access to hospitals in our area. We currently have one of the oldest hospital facilities in the province at Beaverlodge and desperately need a regional hospital in Grande Prairie. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us the status of the study his department is conducting on what a regional hospital facility should be and what a rural hospital facility should be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of Alberta's service optimization review of capital projects was to in fact ensure that we were providing the right services in the communities aforementioned and/or to identify any gaps in those services, similarly, in the locations mentioned. The general rule of thumb when talking about regional hospitals is that they're designed to provide a very broad spectrum of services and to function as a go-to place for a much broader population base, whereas rural hospitals are smaller and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. When can the residents of Grande Prairie and area expect a new regional hospital to be built?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, a lot of input has been provided to the review of that issue both from a community perspective and from Alberta Health Services perspective in terms of what they are looking to deliver there. Our three-year capital plan will be released at the end of March, around March 31, I hope, and at that time we'll have the announcements for the places that we're proceeding with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question to the same minister: what other actions is the minister taking to make sure that residents of Grande Prairie have timely access to the medical services they need?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the actions that I'm personally taking is that I'm travelling up there in about two or three weeks, I believe, and I would invite the hon. member who has asked

the question to join me. I'll be visiting the QE II hospital there. I should also mention that one of the things we're doing right now is working with that community to support a capital project plan with respect to the emergency department and the endoscopy department. Those are some positive things, and they'll be completed next year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Grande Prairie Bone and Joint Clinic

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's an important day for health care in Grande Prairie. The bone and joint clinic at the QE II hospital in Grande Prairie reduced waiting times and human suffering by accelerating hip and knee surgery, yet despite the surge in orthopaedic funding announced last week, this clinic in Grande Prairie is being disbanded this week. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: who made the decision to phase out this program, and why?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the funding being phased out or ended per se. What I do know is that the current arrangement expires I think at the end of this fiscal year, but that issue is up to Alberta Health Services to review. As people here know, I'm meeting with them later tonight. Hon. member, I'd be pleased to address that question with Alberta Health Services later this evening.

Dr. Taft: Well, please do so because my information, which is very firm, is that they basically took their last patient on Monday.

Again to the same minister: what steps will be taken to ensure that the people of the Peace Country have similar access to orthopaedic surgery as the people of Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think we should make it clear that the clinic being talked about didn't actually, to my knowledge at least, perform surgeries at the site. They did more of the co-ordination of ensuring that the services got provided somewhere in the region around there. So if there's an issue here with respect to services for Peace River or other locations you've mentioned, then that, too, can come under the discussion this evening, and I'll make sure it does.

Dr. Taft: It was a co-ordinating service that, as I said, accelerated wait times and helped reduce people's suffering, and it should be continued.

Again to the same minister. Alberta Health Services has a hip and knee steering committee, which had a role – and I know this in writing – in deciding to fund this clinic last June. Who are the members of the Alberta Health Services hip and knee steering committee, what's their mandate, and exactly who are they accountable to?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll get the names that the member seeks; I don't have them with me, obviously. I know that about six years ago when we created this hip and knee steering committee as a subgroup of a larger management committee, its purpose really was to look at reducing wait times and managing the times better. I think they did a good job, hon. member. I'm curious to know about the funding issue that you mentioned, so I will find out about that and get back to you with the answers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Grasshopper Control

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dry conditions last fall provided excellent conditions for grasshoppers to lay their eggs, and counts of grasshoppers last summer indicated a strong possibility of an extreme problem for farmers this year if dry conditions persist this spring. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What's the minister doing in preparation for such an occurrence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are keeping track of the conditions and where the conditions are the most severe with respect to the possibility of an infestation of grasshoppers. It does show a number of spots in our province that could have an infestation from moderate to severe. I'm particularly concerned with some areas southwest of Edmonton and in the Grande Prairie area and some areas in northern Alberta, but we are monitoring it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there adequate resources in the minister's budget to provide the necessary assistance to farmers similar to what happened in the last outbreak?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is always access to disaster funding should the outbreak be severe and be something beyond what our programs normally offer. I think it's worth noting that there are risk management tools and insurance programs in place that are heavily supported by government for instances of grasshopper infestations and other areas. I would hope that producers are looking at that risk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. In previous years farmers have encountered shortages of the chemical to control grasshopper infestations. Can the minister assure farmers that there will be adequate supplies of product should such an event occur this year?

Mr. Hayden: Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the chemical is a private industry, but they're reading the same reports that government is and are looking at the same information. My expectation is that because it's the private sector, the chemical industry will be gearing up their supplies for the possibility of this infestation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:10 Support for Children with Disabilities

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nature of care that not only protects but nurtures children with disabilities in Alberta is of the utmost importance in ensuring that they experience the best quality of life possible. It is therefore essential that there be appropriate placements and ongoing evaluation of the care that is provided for vulnerable disabled children. To the minister: given the highly specific individual needs of disabled children, can the minister briefly introduce and follow up in writing what quality and

quantity of training specific to physical or mental disabilities is required for Children and Youth Services staff above and beyond the limited staff members in the family support for children with disabilities program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the family support for children with disabilities program is highly valued by our families. We did have a survey, and 86 per cent of families said that they value this program and recognize the good support and services that we do offer because it's customized to the needs of the child. I know this member does care about this area. I've seen you at many organizations out in the community, hon. member. What you've requested in writing – I think it would be the multidisciplinary teams that you're looking at for the specialized services – I can provide.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the follow-up, Madam Minister.

Is the minister absolutely certain that all Children and Youth Services staff are adequately trained and have the necessary understanding and experience to provide the proper placements and supports to Alberta's vulnerable disabled children?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely certain. I go back to what I said earlier about the families, to what we hear back from the families. I've been told that this is a leading program across Canada, and that's because of the good specialized support services that we offer to families. This is a \$120 million area of the budget. We've added another \$5 million in this coming budget to the programs, and it's with that support. As I said, hon. member, I will provide the information you are seeking.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What type of follow-up does the ministry conduct to ensure the well-being of disabled children after they have been placed in either foster care or kinship care? How frequently does the support evaluation occur to ensure that the placement and care continue to be appropriate?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, with the foster care program there was a review that was done two years ago. That review did show that there needed to be more extensive assessment with families, and that would include families with children with disabilities. That assessment is, of course, face-to-face interviews. Those have increased on a monthly basis as well as on a quarterly basis. I can get back to you as well about the orientation, the home training, and the follow-up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Athabasca River Water Management

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since an important portion of the oil sands is in my constituency, my constituents take great interest in the management of this important resource. The Cumulative Environmental Management Association recently released recommendations to better manage the lower Athabasca River. One

area of contention is the amount of water used by industry during periods of extreme low flow. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What action is the government taking to move forward on the association's recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this report is one that was conducted at the request of our department, so we're pleased to have it. It's to be used in the implementation of phase 2 of our in-stream flow needs regime on the Athabasca River. I'm pleased to note that this is a multistakeholder process, and we've come a long way towards having a consensus report and consensus recommendation. I can assure the member that along with Fisheries and Oceans we'll be acting on the recommendations in the report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. I understand that the current water allocation to oil sands operations on the Athabasca River is only 2 per cent of the average annual river flow. The actual industry withdrawal is even less, about 1 per cent of the average flow. Furthermore, this minister has often expressed great confidence and assurance regarding the effectiveness of the existing water management framework for the Athabasca River. With all this in mind, why is an updated framework even necessary?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the ultimate goal in all of this is to maintain a high degree of protection on the Athabasca River. We consistently review our policies, and we really strive for continuous improvement. Clearly, we're not intending to get rid of what already works. Things are reasonably good. This framework is designed to deal with the longer term approach and, as I said in my response to the original question, to ensure that we protect the health of the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. The minister constantly notes that there have been 40 years of water quality monitoring in the oil sands region, but activities in the region have increased significantly in recent years. What type of monitoring is the government actually doing right now?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the Athabasca River and its tributaries have continuous monitoring at 11 sites in the region. We also audit the monitoring of the data that is collected by the operators operating within the region, and we have participating in the regional aquatics monitoring program more than a hundred water quality stations throughout the region. So as I have pointed out, there is a significant amount of ongoing monitoring of this river.

Electoral Reform

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the recent changes to the mission and vision of Elections Alberta highlight the inadequacies of the current approach to democratic renewal in Alberta. While the former Chief Electoral Officer engaged and encouraged the voting public, his replacement seems to have a less ambitious agenda. Why won't the minister admit what Albertans already know? Real democratic reform to Alberta's electoral system is not on the government agenda.

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's legislation coming before this House very shortly that's going to deal with a number of great recommendations that were made by both the current Chief Electoral Officer and the former Chief Electoral Officer. I would say that the future of democracy in Alberta is certainly well and good in place, and he shouldn't be predicting anything else.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stakeholder groups have spoken to me about what they perceive to be a wilful blindness to solve the problems that have been identified to the government many years ago. An example of this is providing university students with the ability to choose their ordinary residence for the purpose of voting. Why does this government refuse to act when these Albertans are asking for these types of changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We think that's an issue of a great deal of importance, as did the former Chief Electoral Officer. We've carefully reviewed the legislation, and I believe students do have that right at the moment.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I realize that the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of this Assembly, but it baffles me why this Legislature would hire an individual who does not want to actually promote individuals voting in elections. What bothers me more is the fact that this minister appears to be satisfied with a 41 per cent voter participation rate in Alberta. To that end, how many of the former electoral reforms will the Justice minister be bringing forward out of the 180 recommendations?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislation will be before this House shortly, and the hon. member will be able to see that for himself. I'm not going to debate that ahead of time. Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I think is very important to discuss here is this constant association between the voter turnout and whether or not democracy is in peril. In this very House one hon. member from this member's caucus speculated on 10 or 15 reasons why people may or may not have voted in the last election, and none of them had to do with democracy.

Legislated Spending Controls

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, today I introduced a bill that legislates a cap on government spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth. Several Alberta Chambers of Commerce chapters, the Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Fraser Institute, and multiple financial policy experts have repeatedly recommended this type of legislation as a critical cornerstone of a responsible fiscal plan for this province as we move forward. To the minister of finance: does he support this type of legislation?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I believe there's a private member's bill coming before the House on this subject. The principle, of course, I support it, and so does everybody here. But as we've had many discussions, putting that into an actual statutory requirement causes certain issues. If you look at what's happening in most of the U.S. states that have those types of rules right now, you're seeing massive cuts to education, law enforcement, health care. There needs to be some flexibility there that that statute law . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Anderson: Thanks. Actually, in those other jurisdictions it's the no-debt rule that's hurting them, not the spending cap rule. That's something that should be looked into.

Just prior to the Premier's leadership review last November he promised Albertans and PC Party members uneasy with his leadership that he would limit spending increases to inflation plus population growth. The Premier broke this promise a mere 90 days later with Budget 2010. Talk is cheap on this issue. It has to be legislated. If it's not, it won't happen. To the same minister: will he do the right thing for ourselves and for our kids and enshrine this important principle in legislation?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I might remind the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere that this issue came before the party in Red Deer last November and was actually defeated. We usually listen a little bit to what our party congress says. Again, we're going to debate this issue next week, and we look forward to a full discussion.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I've heard this minister prior to his most recent appointment talk over and over again publicly, and eloquently I might add, about how off track our province's finances have wandered and the need for this exact type of legislated fiscal restraint. To the minister: now that he is in a position to make a real permanent difference on this issue, will he step up and champion this piece of legislation into law?

Dr. Morton: I can only assume, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere must be very pleased that I'm now the minister of finance for the government of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Employment Standards Information Program

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the government launched an employment standards campaign, and I believe it's called Tell Your Boss Where to Go. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Mr. Minister, with an ominous title like this could you please clarify what the campaign is all about and, as such, how you can justify spending this kind of money during these times of very scarce resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Tell Your Boss Where to Go campaign is simply about educating our young workforce about the rights and obligations that they have relevant to safety and labour standards. Indeed, it's a costly venture to educate, but we have cut the spending from \$700,000 to \$350,000 for this campaign. In the long run it saves Albertans money, it saves lost time, it saves injury times, and it's important that young people are informed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: I guess I would say thanks that you managed to cut this program in half from \$700,000 to \$350,000, but just the same wouldn't it make more sense to use this \$350,000 to hire more employment standards officers to enforce the code?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, for \$350,000 we probably would be able to hire about four compliance officers for one year. The benefit of education is long term. If properly educated, young people will prevent themselves from being injured, prevent their colleagues from being injured, so I think that it's a much more long-term positive effect that we will have. It's very important that they know their rights and exercise their rights.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: in keeping with the campaign theme, I'm just wondering if the minister might share what is the most effective way and whether he has ever told his boss where to go to find this information.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the hon. member is referring to my wife or the Premier, but I have to tell you that I haven't had the need to tell either one where to go. Both of them treat me, although differently, rather well. I would encourage all Alberta workers to tell their bosses where to go to get information on labour standards. There's a very easy way to find out. If you want to go on our website, go to hirestandards.alberta.ca.

Thank you.

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

Energy Efficiency

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Window rebates, the inclusion of rental properties in rebate initiatives, and support for walking and cycling infrastructure are all smaller but significant initiatives to help reduce emissions. Further areas for the government to pursue are greener building codes and legislation to support the construction and demolition waste reduction program. To the Minister of Environment. Construction waste makes up 25 per cent of our total waste in Alberta, but only 10 per cent is recycled. When will the minister introduce construction and demolition waste reduction legislation? It's ready to go. It was supposed to come in the fall. Will we see it this spring?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we're currently engaged in conversations with the Alberta Construction Association and others associated with this initiative. We have a memorandum of understanding in place. I can advise the member that that dialogue is ongoing, and I am hopeful that we will be able to move forward as soon as possible.

Ms Blakeman: That was a nonanswer.

To the same minister: since 96 per cent of Albertans feel that conservation and energy efficiency in our homes is important and 86 per cent of Albertans are willing to pay more for this feature when purchasing a new home, when will the minister increase the energy efficiency requirements for new homes in the provincial building codes? That's directed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I wasn't paying attention to the question.

Ms Blakeman: Well, that's typical but unfortunate.

Back to the Minister of Environment. Since there is a high degree of support for legislated energy efficiency targets and the govern-

ment's own 2008 climate change strategy promised it would develop an energy efficiency act, when will the minister introduce energy efficiency legislation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of energy efficiency is one that's critical if we're going to be able to accomplish the much-needed commitment that we have to CO₂ reduction in our overall climate change strategy. That being said, the legislation that's already in place, the climate change and emissions management legislation, has significant amount of authority under our regulation-making powers, and we anticipate that we'll probably have a two-step approach. We'll be moving forward under existing legislation and then introducing new . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Market Modified Tuition Fees

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard concern from constituents, students, and educators that the proposed market modified based tuition fee increase to professional faculties would negatively impact accessibility for students with limited financial means, rural students, and students with disabilities. As well, students who intend to pursue a career inside the academic research arena definitely would not make as much money as those who practise. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What mechanism do you have in place to ensure equitable access for these students in the face of tuition increases?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to clarify that the market modifier question is really about some of the postsecondary institutions in the province feeling that in a few programs tuition may have been capped too low in 2004, and they requested that opportunity to make the case to me. We've said yes, that we would be open to them making the case, but it's a one-shot deal.

To address the question with regard to equitable access, that is certainly a priority of this government and this Premier. We've made significant changes over the last several years to our financial assistance program to assist our students. We increased the spousal earnings exemption.

Ms Woo-Paw: With the debt remuneration program removed and students having to rely more on loans, would the minister consider providing students impacted by this increase a longer period to pay off the loan, a longer interest-free period, or waiving a portion of their loan when they graduate, stay, and work within the province for a set period of time?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, no decision has been made to increase tuition for any professional programs above the CPI cap. If and when that decision is made, we're going to ensure that it's fair and it's equitable to all students. I'd also like to clarify that we've not removed our debt relief program. We still ensure the debt above set threshold is forgiven for qualified graduates to help them ensure that they have manageable debt loads, which is something – again, the affordability framework in this province I would match up against any province in Canada. We're improving our repayment assistance plan to provide more flexibility to grad students.

Ms Woo-Paw: Again to the same minister: when will you be making your decision on the proposed tuition increases so students can plan accordingly?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to discussing the estimates in the House for our department because of the great things that we have done in terms of student finance, increasing the living allowances, increasing the lifetime loan maximums, but also we don't take the issue lightly as it relates to the market modifiers. We want to make sure that the decisions have the appropriate level of due diligence, that the institutions have the appropriate time to prepare their proposals, that we have the appropriate time to assess those proposals and make sure that they're covering off what we said we wanted to cover off, and then we'll make those decisions. It is one of the top priorities of the department right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:30 Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary is now the fourth-largest city and its airport is the third busiest in the country. The airport is expanding, and we need to provide for growth around it. The deadline for commitments from the federal and provincial governments for the Calgary International Airport tunnel is approaching, and after March 1 without those commitments the deal is dead. To the Minister of Transportation: why are you killing any chance of Calgary having this necessary airport tunnel by not providing any support, sir?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely wrong again today. We supply all kinds of support to the city of Calgary. This is a municipal, local road, and the municipal district of the city of Calgary should be making their priorities on what they do with the money we give them on what roads they plan to build.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary already committed \$50 million, and the airport authority committed \$40 million. This issue is a provincial one, not just one for the city of Calgary. This government should be looking at the issue from this perspective, not running away from it. To the minister again: why isn't the government treating this vital tunnel as an issue of provincial importance?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member knows that every single issue in the province is an issue for this government, but there are ways of handling the issues. I can't run out and try and find money on a tree somewhere to start supporting areas that are not my responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as it would improve Alberta's competitiveness for the federal government to open up the Calgary airport to more flights from overseas, so too would it improve Alberta's competitiveness to have an airport that is fully accessible to the whole city of Calgary and the whole of Alberta. Why is the minister unable to see the competitiveness incentive behind this?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I also have to tell the hon. member that he's into another area that's not my jurisdiction. Other airlines'

open skies agreements are the full purview of the federal government. They regulate who is allowed to fly into this country, province, wherever you want to call it. I've written letters to that minister agreeing that Alberta would love to have open skies and bring more people and allow other airlines to fly into Calgary and to fly into Edmonton so that we have more competitive rates for all of our constituents.

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

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Swan Hills Treatment Centre is an important facility in Alberta and has certainly served the province very well in removing thousands, maybe millions of tonnes of PCBs from the environment. However, unfortunately, it is now losing money. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Is he concerned about this operating loss, and what are his plans to rectify it?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I need to say that when the government took over the Swan Hills treatment plant, the goal was to provide a public service. The facility has done an excellent job to rid this province of PCBs and dioxins, and the primary goal is to operate a service that provides and is aimed to be efficient. There is no doubt that there is a \$23 million annual net cost.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't hear him really enunciate what his plans were to rectify the situation.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, every five years we do an assessment of that plant, and there has been a review of the facility. We are presently as a government reviewing the recommendations.

If I can add that the federal regulations call for the elimination of PCBs in Canada by 2015, and that will have a major play on the revenue of that plant . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The treatment centre processes waste other than PCBs. You mentioned the year 2015. What will happen to that waste if the plant was to close in 2015?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not just looking at the cost efficiency. We are looking at where hazardous waste can be disposed of. Presently we have 57 facilities in this province that can dispose of different forms of hazardous waste. In addition, there are many out-of-province alternatives. As I said before, the PCBs are to be eliminated – well, I hope by the federal government – by 2015, so there are facilities out there.

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

Caribou Habitat Protection

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has bad forest management policies, and threatened and endangered species are paying the price. With less than 3,000 woodland caribou left in Alberta, they are a species at risk, and it is because their natural

habitat has been decimated. For years the government has been warned about this. Why won't the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development look at the first word in his ministry's name and start protecting the habitat for caribou?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we have been protecting caribou habitat in the province of Alberta at least for 30 or 35 years. It's been very well recognized. The work that we're doing currently in the province of Alberta: again, well recognized. The caribou recovery plan and movements forward with things like the lower Athabasca regional plan all contain major pieces of work that have to do with habitat protection for caribou. We're very well aware of this, very well aware that Albertans and other Canadians . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] Thank you. The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, instead of protecting natural habitat, the government is faulting wolves. They poison them, and now they're shooting them from helicopters. In 2008 seventy-two wolves were killed, 160 more last year, and 35 so far this year. This government's plan to protect caribou must be bulk buying of bullets. Will the Minister of SRD tell this House how many more wolves will be shot from helicopters before he finally protects enough of the boreal forest to give caribou a future?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are times when the balance between predator and prey gets out of shape, and in certain areas in the province of Alberta that's what we have happening now. There are a number of reasons that the wolf population in this short term needs to be controlled. The control measures that we have put in place have helped the Little Smoky caribou herd be very successful over the last two or three years. They can't have it both ways. We need to do some control.

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the last general status of Alberta wild species report says that wolves are a problem because of human activity. This report didn't say that wolves should be shot because human activity is a priority. It said that maintenance of old growth forest is critical, but this government has ignored their own recommendation for five years. Why does the minister continue to ignore recommendations critical to the survival of woodland caribou?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, what I have to say is that the wolves that I'm talking to that live at my place aren't telling me that it's me that's bothering them or creating a situation where they have become more populous. The truth of the matter is that alternate sources of food, like more deer, more elk, more rabbits, more mice, more whatever, have created a situation where populations of wolves are increasing at exponential levels in some places. Some control is necessary, and we do that to protect the caribou.

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

Crime and Safe Communities Recommendations

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the government received the recommendations of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, that I had the privilege of chairing. At the press conference the Premier said that he would implement all of the recommendations that were released in this report. Sadly, that isn't happening. My question is to the Minister

of Service Alberta. Why has your department not changed FOIP legislation so that law enforcement communities, school and health agencies could share information without the risk of being sued?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to FOIP legislation and that particular matter, that is something I'm prepared to check into and get back to the hon. member on.

Mrs. Forsyth: The safe communities report also recommended that a tracking system be established and reported on key indicators such as delays in court proceedings, the number and percentage of cases where bail is provided, the number of bail violations, and the percentage of cases in which the maximum penalty is provided. Why has the Justice minister not produced legislation on requiring annual reports on this?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we run a court system quite effectively. We've introduced in the last two years as a result of the report some very significant initiatives and projects such as the court case management project. We don't need legislation; we do it as a matter of course.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister to read the report again. It was accepted by the Premier.

The issue of crime prevention is an important one, but the best crime prevention strategy is to stop crime before it takes place. To help prevent families from being overwhelmed and at risk, the task force recommended that a family source be established within the provincial government to provide information, resources, and community connections. When will the Justice minister identify that central resource, and when will it be in place, as the Premier has promised Albertans?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member has mentioned, there were 31 recommendations in that report. We've taken that very seriously. As a government we've committed half a billion dollars to do more than implement 31 recommendations, to change the way that government works, and to make sure that we honour that report. We take it very seriously.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we had the opportunity to recognize 18 different members. There were 108 questions and answers: 12 came from the opposition parties, six from the government.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: Are there additional tablings for today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Jan Buterman. They are commenting on their concern with the city centre inner-city school closure recommendations, particularly noting the Edmonton school board comments on being overburdened with 30,000 excess student spaces yet without explanation of the provincially mandated funding practices, and wonder how many people are aware of the demands placed upon school boards by the province when it comes to developing new facilities.

My second tabling is from David Phillips on the subject of needing a fair sales tax to pay for health care in which they note, "We need a fair sales tax to pay for health care."

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4

Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to move second reading of Bill 4, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010.

As I outlined when I introduced this bill several days ago, this is an important bill for industry. In essence, the act is just being refreshed, though, to ensure that Alberta's legislation is consistent with federal legislation. That federal legislation is the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, 1992, which was amended in June of 2009.

Components of this bill, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010, include giving Alberta the ability to require security plans for certain prescribed dangerous goods, requiring shippers to report lost and stolen shipments of dangerous goods, clarification of details for the manufacture and use of containers used in the transportation of dangerous goods, and introduction of an administrative penalty option that would enable Alberta Transportation and industry to deal with noncompliance issues outside the provincial court system.

This isn't adding regulation because, largely, the regulations already exist in federal legislation, but it does provide Alberta industry with protection by creating provincial jurisdiction over these issues so that it continues to be business as usual for industry here. Matching provincial legislation to federal legislation as much as possible also helps achieve some standard conditions for movement of dangerous goods within provinces and across Canada. The changes are mainly administrative in nature and minor, but it also helps protect our provincial jurisdiction over enforcing regulations.

I urge all members to support this important legislation, and I'd ask that we now adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Montrose I'd like to move second reading of Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, the vision for Municipal Affairs is to create strong, safe, and sustainable communities. This bill is part of our government's response to strengthen the emergency management system across the province. Search and rescue teams support our provincial emergency services. This bill will extend the good-faith liability protection currently provided to firefighters to search and rescue workers and their organizations.

There is growing concern over potential civil litigation, making it difficult for these organizations to recruit volunteers while incurring increased insurance and administrative costs. One search and rescue group in British Columbia suspended its service over concerns of

legal liability. This is not only an Alberta issue, Mr. Speaker, but a national issue.

This bill will extend the good-faith liability protection currently provided to firefighters to search and rescue workers and their organizations while they're providing emergency rescue services under the act. By supporting search and rescue teams, we are demonstrating the government's commitment to providing safe and strong communities.

Another amendment, Mr. Speaker, will focus on the language of the act to change the current "gross negligence" standard for providing emergency services to one of "good faith." This matches the language found in the Municipal Government Act. Changing the legal standard from gross negligence to good faith would provide consistency and alignment with other legislation in Alberta that sets out a liability standard. This will also provide additional legal defences to the minister, local authorities, and their agents and help limit their exposure to lawsuits. An example is ham radio operators who perform a specialized function during an emergency on behalf of the ministry or a local authority.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, changes to the act will focus on regional emergency service delivery and will make it easy for communities to work together during an emergency. These amendments will allow for the establishment of regional service commissions, regional directors of emergency management, and other partnerships to deliver emergency management services. This will help municipalities provide a cross-jurisdictional response to a disaster, better serving their residents during a crisis. By centralizing services, the administrative, financial, and training burden placed on municipalities could be reduced.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this bill introduces changes that will help protect Alberta search and rescue teams from liability claims. Amendments will also strengthen the emergency management system by formalizing regional co-operation amongst communities. I urge members to support Bill 6, and I look forward to further discussions on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, I request that we adjourn debate at this time on Bill 6, Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

2:50

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. President of the Treasury Board first.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we deal in Committee of the Whole with appropriation, supplementary supply, it's important to identify the fact that the huge majority of the money in these supplementary estimates is being spent on health through the H1N1 and addressing the accumulated deficit of the health board ending in March of '09. It deals with the issue of forest fires, and quite candidly it forced us to move money from different areas to accommodate spending programs by the federal government. Outside of those numbers, the bulk of the increase was in Employment and Immigration, where it's very difficult to identify where the pressures on a social system will arise given the economic conditions

that the government went through. In fact, when you take out the items that I've identified, it's actually less than one-half of 1 per cent of our total spending that was involved in it.

But a billion is a big number and deserves the attention of the Assembly, and I look forward to the discussion in Committee of the Whole.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to approach this in a couple of different sections, and the first is to talk about the process, which the hon. President of the Treasury Board has referred to in his comments. There are a couple of observations that I'd like to make. I continue to be dismayed and perplexed, actually, about why we see such frequent requests for supplementary supply and the amount and the number of departments that are affected. I have a chart in front of me that staff were kind enough to make up, and it only goes back to '99-2000. Actually, since I've been here, the '96-97 fiscal year and on, there has been at least one and often two supplementary supply estimates every year.

I accept that there are some things that you need a supplementary supply budget for; for example, forest fires. We hope there are not any. They have to put some amount in the budget, and then you deal with what you get. Fair enough. I understand that, and I would expect to see that happening. But this has become common practice with this government, and it is far, far more than covering the costs of forest fires or this year the extraordinary costs of H1N1. You can certainly see a clear explanation for why that couldn't be anticipated down to the exact dollar.

I am more concerned with what I see as a planning and perhaps a management deficit in that this is now commonplace. We just expect it, at least one or two a year, and it's covering not one or two departments but nine, 10, 12, 14 departments. Often more than half of the departments that this government administers programs through come forward in a supplementary supply estimate, and at that I have to call question. We have nine departments in front of us this year, so I'll put that on the record.

You know, the government always gets up and says: "Oh, well, come on. Give us a break. There have been all kinds of things we couldn't anticipate." But I have to say that with the resources behind the government, with the time and care and expertise they're able to call upon to work out things like the projected price of a barrel of oil within, you know, a minutia of a cent or gas or the royalty rate, they clearly have a lot of expertise to pull upon for certain areas when they're interested in it. I just feel that they get sloppy in the rest of the areas and could be doing a better job overall on tightening up their original budgeting process.

The second thing I'm seeing in the budgeting process: again, I would call it a sloppiness except that it's worse than that because there's an intent behind it. I want to be careful to convey that I think this just isn't a matter of: well, whoops, didn't pay a lot of attention. I think this is deliberate. What I'm seeing in last year's budget and this year's budget – and we see the effect of last year's budget in the supplementary supply in front of us – is a lack of budgeting. When closely questioned on items that are in particular departments and just about any department but certainly the ones I witnessed, I would often hear back from ministers: well, we're working on that; well, we're developing a policy; yeah, well, we'll figure out a way to do that; well, you know, don't forget that we've got such and such a plan or a strategy coming.

In the world that I come from, which is the not-for-profit sector, a budget is clearly a plan on exactly how you're going to spend the money, where your revenue is going to come from, how your

expenses are going to go out, and you've got to be pretty tight on that stuff. You can't say: "Yeah, I think I'm going to produce a show at the Citadel. It'll be a million bucks. It'll have some actors in it and be written by somebody, and yeah, there'll probably be costumes." You've got to know what you're doing. But that is what I'm seeing from the government, and I'm beginning to wonder if they actually are budgeting for particular programs.

You know, this year again as I questioned, the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and I got a little snippy with each other because I said, "Where's this money going to come from that you're going to find somewhere to finance this thing that you don't have enough money for?" He said, "I'm not going to talk about that." "Excuse me? It's a budget debate. You're supposed to be able to defend to me what you're spending the money on." "Well, I'm not going to talk about that." "Really? Where are you going to get the money from? What programs are you going to take it from?" "Oh, uh, we'll see." That's what the budget is for. It's a plan of how you're going to do it, and if you can't tell me how you're going to do that as we go through the budget debates, that's telling me the government doesn't know, and that is going to put us in much deeper problems down the road.

The third observation I want to make is the amount of information that's actually contained in the supplementary supply estimates booklet that we get. Usually the requests that are coming forward under supplementary supply tend to break into a couple of different categories. We're not talking, you know, 15 different ways that that money is going to be spent. Even when you look at the health budget, which is one of the larger ones, as the President of the Treasury Board observed, it essentially breaks into four categories. I'm quoting here from page 24: "\$343,000,000 to fund Alberta Health Services' accumulated deficit as of March 31, 2009." It gives you four lines of description there, so it's breaking into not very many categories. We're not getting a heck of a lot of information here.

Let me use one of my critic portfolios as an example as to how little information is given here and how easy it is to give more information. On page 16, under the supplementary supply estimates requested for Culture and Community Spirit, one line: "This supplementary amount of \$2,888,000 is requested to provide for site reclamation costs incurred at various historic sites related to environmental liabilities that were expensed in prior years." When I questioned – and the President of the Treasury Board was kind enough to stand and give an answer – that actually covers three locations. What was the problem with listing the three locations in this booklet? It's another line of ink. Was it going to break you to just be able to say this much for this facility, this much for this facility, and this much for this facility? I'm not quite sure what all the secrecy is about, the need to sort of, you know, open the book for a quick little glimpse and then shut it again. If you want us to co-operate with this stuff, what is the problem in actually giving us the information on what this is about?

3:00

Even with the Health and Wellness budget: okay, it's the costs of responding to an H1N1 pandemic. What exactly was that? Could we get a better description of how that breaks down? Again, you've got a full page. You could fill up the whole page without it costing you more money for the booklet. It's blank. You could fill it with information; it wouldn't kill you. It contributes to the idea that this government is fixated on secrecy and keeping information to itself. I'm just trying to help you out, just trying to make you more popular than you already are and win over some more friends to your side. But, honestly, you could give us some more information there.

Housing and Urban Affairs, two lines. Look at all the page you could have filled up, telling me what you were up to with that money. That's just a wee little suggestion for you to follow up on. I think it would be helpful.

As we encourage people to become more interested in what we're doing in this Assembly, they do follow along online. They do watch the podcasts. They watch the live audio and video streaming. Some of them are getting very well educated in following us. They're interested in that kind of thing, too. So I think that just one person, one little opposition MLA standing up and saying, "You could give us more information" is going to give way to a lot more people saying: "Hey, what is this? We want to be able to see what this is about in a more reasonable way." Again, I don't want a volume. I don't need tens of pages on this. But surely you can give me more than a sentence, especially when you know what it is. It looks to me like you don't know what you were doing. You needed money to cover some kind of reclamation area in culture, but you didn't know quite what it was. So that's that little bit.

The other issues that I wanted to raise are some things that aren't in here and probably shouldn't be in here but should probably be considered in the long run.

I'm sorry. There was one more thing that came under the helpful hints section. That is the number of times that I'm seeing the government slyly present federal money as part of a provincial budget. To be honest, you're fessing up a bit more in this supplementary supply document than you have in the budget. You actually fess up someplace that this is including transfer payments from the feds. You know where it was? Employment and Immigration, I'll bet you. No, it wasn't. I've read through it recently. Sorry.

Mr. Snelgrove: Advanced ed.

Ms Blakeman: You think it's advanced ed? Yes. That's exactly right. They do fess up on page 12 for Advanced Education and Technology, right in the little documentation – good on them, little brownie points, yay, check mark – that "\$97,681,000 is offset by a transfer from the federal government under the Knowledge Infrastructure Program." Good on you. Thanks for that. But that's not always the case.

It's very interesting doing the supplementary supply budget at the same time as you're doing the following year's estimates, budgets. You might want to think about that the next time you schedule these things together because I get a lot of comparison opportunities.

Increasingly, as I say, is the number of times that the government is not admitting that something has happened which is, in fact, federal government transfers. Again, I'll go to the one that I know well, which is Culture and Community Spirit. The way the government press release read, that department officially admitted that it was cut by 1.8 per cent, yet when you looked at it, it was cut by closer to 20 per cent in most of those areas, \$35 million, but it was offset by \$30 million of capital spending. You think: oh, well, that's okay; all right. When you look at that – and I actually went through, and I dug out the federal government press releases, and there are all the dates – that \$30 million is federal money. It's not provincial money, but it's showing up in the budget for this department as though it is operating expenditure money.

I know why it's there. Because the provincial government doesn't actually own those facilities, they cannot claim any money they put into them as a capital asset or a capital expense. It gets expensed out in the year that it's in. I understand that. But to actually try to pretend that this is money that the government was putting into this: no. That requires a closer acquaintance with the truth.

Sorry. That was the final bit of observation I wanted to make about the process and the reporting structure that we're dealing with.

Now, a couple of issues that I wanted to raise as part of what I'm seeing here. I'm sorry. Would pensions come up under Employment and Immigration or under Treasury Board?

Mr. Snelgrove: Finance.

Ms Blakeman: Finance. Oh boy. I was way off. Okay.

I think that one of the things we need to look at and that I am quite concerned about is protection of Albertans' investments in private-sector pension plans. Who of us ever imagined that Nortel would go down? Never. Nobody would have thought that that one was going to happen, yet it did. The pensions that Albertans have through that company are imperilled or have been reduced or lost.

I think it is incumbent upon us to look to legislation that would better protect Albertans' money that is part of a corporate or a private-sector pension plan. In some cases, like with GM, those pension plans are invested with the unions. They're safer there, frankly. But for those that are being held by private-sector corporations, I think we have a good argument that we need to step up and protect Albertans. If it doesn't, it's going to end up in a supplementary supply document somewhere down the road because we're now having to add money to a number of assistance programs, like we're seeing in the Employment and Immigration budget, to help out Albertans.

Staying with the Employment and Immigration budget, I am frustrated with what I'm seeing here. It is important, where we have programs that are structured to assist Albertans, that we do it, that we make use of those programs, that we spend that money as appropriate. My frustration is that we are essentially in year 2 of the recession. It started in year 1. For us to have to be looking at a supplementary supply budget for training programs and higher caseloads in health benefits and a higher caseload in income support: I would have expected the government to be more on top of that.

This recession didn't start, you know, this year. It started last year. Why were we not able to better anticipate the number of people? I mean, computer modelling makes everything possible now. They can computer model how to put somebody on Mars, but we can't computer model how many Albertans are going to require the various assistance programs that exist so that we're able to budget at the beginning of a fiscal year what the uptake will be on the cases? I would have expected better.

I am surprised to see the number of programs. We've got here \$4.6 million for employment program planning and delivery. We've got \$28 million for employment and training programs for skill development and to maintain employment, \$25.9 million for health benefits due to higher caseloads and costs per case, and \$129.7 million for income supports due to higher caseloads and costs per case. That's a whack of money and a lot of people, clearly. I'm surprised that the projections were not closer to the mark. Maybe somebody is able to tell me why that happened and why we're not able to get a little closer to the mark.

The other issue – sorry. I tend to keep all these things in a file. I'll deal with that another time.

Okay. That's a great opportunity. Thank you very much for allowing me to put those observations on the record. Maybe I'll be able to hear back from somebody, which would be helpful. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

3:10

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate how difficult it is preparing a budget, especially during a recessionary time period. I understand the need for having a supplementary supply budget. I do

believe that certain forecasting is available, and as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, there are programs that could give us a degree of insight or forecast.

One of the things that is missing from the supplementary budget is the \$23 million, the 1 per cent difference, in the arbitrator's agreement for teachers. Now, I understand that the budgets have to be prepared well in advance, but my understanding is that the supplemental supply budget's purpose is to add on those missing factors so that the province can run smoothly. Right off the top \$23 million is missing from Education as well as any kind of increased funding to recognize special needs, school infrastructure, and so on. It's the second-largest investment this province has after health, but there's nothing additional to it, so it's basically more cuts.

Under Advanced Education and Technology while there was increased funding for student loans, there was no increased funding for grants, for bursaries, or for operational funding. As a result, the universities, most likely, at least the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, are going to be asking the government, the minister of advanced education, to allow them to increase professional faculty tuitions up to 60 per cent, which will have a dramatic door-closing effect on those faculties.

Under Culture and Community Spirit during a time of recession is a time more than any other for both our mental and physical well-being that we need the arts supported. We need to enjoy the arts. Some might call it a distraction. Others might call it an inventive celebratory spirit.

Under Employment and Immigration the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned what's happened with failing companies such as Nortel. I attended a meeting earlier in the month at the Varsity Community Association where a number of Nortel employees, many of whom had their LTD cancelled and have no idea what small percentage of their pension they'll get back, were extremely concerned. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, these people will find themselves on the dole in some form in Alberta because their company pension plans fell apart. The federal government hasn't enacted any legislation to cover these individuals; therefore, it's going to fall on the province to pick up their financial pieces, and there are quite a few of those pieces to be picked up.

In a time of recession, when we need to get people working – and a number of people have gone back or tried to get into postsecondary institutions to get upgrading – the government has cancelled funding for the Alberta Works programs. I think it was mentioned that 78,000 people were unemployed. Trying to get them upgraded and re-employed should be a focus. Unfortunately, it's not.

Under Health and Wellness I'm concerned about the amount of money that's going into private, for-profit clinic contracting versus operations performed within public facilities. Part of that problem in Calgary is that we lost half of our public facilities.

This falls under Advanced Education as well as Health and Wellness and, I guess, under Employment as well. This government did the right thing in creating a number of postsecondary spaces at the universities and at the colleges, Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal now having joined the universities, for registered nurse training. We've put out those significant subsidies to encourage nurses to train in this province, yet there had been a freeze on hiring. Now the new minister is speculating about reopening 300 beds. We have the rooms, we have the space, but we don't have the nurses to make those beds operational. That money isn't specifically tagged in this budget, so I don't know where it's going to come from.

Under Housing and Urban Affairs my concern is the reduction in rental subsidies and the fact that there's nothing left in the homeless and eviction prevention fund. We're far from being through the

recession. The minimum wage has been frozen, and I don't see a whole lot of help for individuals who are at the poverty end of the scale.

When it comes to Sustainable Resource Development, I was pleased to see that there was supplemental investment, for example, in fighting pine beetles, which was positive, but the elimination of the junior warden program, a program that gave students an opportunity to have a wilderness experience, to consider a potential education towards forestry, towards conservation, towards sustainable resource development careers – that's been cut short. These young people would have been the eyes and the ears in the parks at a very low investment cost.

Last night, of course, we had the Tourism, Parks and Recreation budget. That budget took a \$30 million hit. There's very little increase in the supplementary supply budget. What was discussed was that rather than provincial parks being expanded, there will actually be a reduction in park operations. There will be a reduction in seasonal personnel. That's a concern for me. Also, while more money is being spent promoting tourism, the actual product is being reduced because the quality of the experience is being reduced through lack of infrastructure maintenance, lack of trail maintenance, and so on. Last week we had a good discussion about the need to keep our parks vibrant.

I'm also concerned when it comes to Transportation. When I had the former responsibility of being the opposition critic for Infrastructure and Transportation, I frequently brought up the concern I had about highway 63. It's taking forever to get that key economic route twinned. In the meantime we continue to have significant loss of life on that particular highway. It also concerns me that there seems to be no plan for our east-west corridor, the twinning of highway 3. While supplementary alone can't possibly solve the problem, almost half of our highways in this province are in fair to poor condition, and that's obviously a concern.

This supplementary supply budget is part of the carry-over until April, at which time more financial announcements will probably be made. Maybe some of the concerns that I've indicated such as where we go with advanced education tuition increases or subsidized support from the government will be revealed. In the meantime there are an awful lot of Albertans living on the edge, wondering to what extent they can count on this government for support as they seek employment, as they seek further education and, in some cases, struggle just to keep a roof over their heads.

The backdrop for this play is a \$17 billion sustainability fund, and I hope that in future supplementary budgets and budgets to follow we'll see that \$17 billion invested in a sustainable, predictable, supportive way for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3:20

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to start off with the usual mantra that I think you probably hear from this side, and I'm quite sure that other members in the House have probably said this to themselves as well: how on earth can a budget be balanced if you always have to come back to the trough for extra money? Certainly, I know that if families ran their budgets like that, the personal debt in Canada would be a great deal higher than what it already is, and it already is at an alarming rate.

I certainly can understand the need for supplemental funds for emergencies. But my question is that in my budget I have money put aside for, quote, emergencies. I don't understand why we don't have an emergency budget or some dollars put aside, I would

suspect, in addition to the sustainability fund and in addition to the heritage trust fund because I think we can guarantee that in a province this busy, in a province that has not only the labour side in terms of high-risk labour costs – we never know what's going to go on, and usually there is some kind of an emergency. We have no idea what it may be, but to put money aside to be able to meet it when it does come I think would be wise planning.

In Housing and Urban Affairs there was \$3,488,000 in unspent funds – \$3,488,000 in unspent funds. Now, which programs did not spend their total budget? I find that amazing. I believe the same thing happened in the department for the PDD funds. I think there was \$10 million that wasn't spent. I can understand, perhaps, taking that money back. But who suffered as a result of not spending these dollars? They were budgeted to be spent in a particular way, and the question I think is quite clear: why weren't they spent? If that money was clawed back and put back into the budget, then it certainly should look better for the next year, and they wouldn't have to necessarily require all of these supplementary accounts that they've been asking for, all of these extra dollars.

Under Municipal Affairs they were asking for more supplemental funds. Again unspent funds and not necessarily explained where that money went when they found out that it wasn't spent. Some of that money was for H1N1. Absolutely. Totally necessary. But why didn't we have emergency fund money put aside?

One of the questions that I would ask under Municipal Affairs – there was a report that came out. I think it was called the heat intensity residential fire report, and it was as of 2007. There were some recommendations in there, some of which I think should be under further discussion. I also believe that developers should be at the table when this discussion takes place because most of it has to do with the construction side.

In fact, some of the statistics were that many of these fires, a goodly portion of these fires, were based on carelessness: smoking in your homes, barbecues on your back porches, or arson on construction sites. I think that is what I've heard from the other side many times: education, education, education. I'm not altogether sure that those kinds of preventive things actually should be legislated, but it would appear that the recommendations coming out of that particular report are.

As I've mentioned, I think one of the most important things is that the developers be at the table because they are the ones who are going to incur the extra cost as a result of what I think upon reading that report was just a little bit, perhaps, over the top in terms of regulations. I know this government often speaks about not having a lot of regulations, having the freedom to go forward, having the entrepreneurial spirit that they always speak about, and now we're going to have a competitiveness bill to talk about. Well, I don't think that when you have all of these regulations made by people who aren't in the industry that is actually going to suffer the consequences of them, these recommendations shouldn't be – in my mind, go back to the table and have the developers there with them. One of the recommendations was to have the municipalities and the developers involved, but that was a recommendation going ahead. I would like to see that particular discussion happen before the recommendations go forward for any kind of legislation to be made around them.

Mr. Chair, I believe that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity spoke very well to Education.

Again, nonbudgetary disbursements. I know that you talk about the sustainability fund a lot, and I know it's always nice to have that little cushion behind you, but I think that when you look at family budgets, there is not only the cushion for saving; there's also the cushion for maintenance of the homes, if they happen to have a

home, and there's always that little bit extra put aside for emergencies. This is what I would like to see this government do because we always will have something that is over and above what we could possibly imagine when we're putting that budget together.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise and join in debate on Bill 5. This is a bill where the government is seeking from this Legislature permission to spend roughly another billion dollars. I think the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood made the point, when he was talking about this issue a couple of days ago, that it seems that we have a real problem with our budgeting process in that it really doesn't seem to be a real thing anymore. We have a budget presented to us, and we have a bunch of sort of pretend cuts made in that budget or pretend savings or whatever they are, and then we herald to all corners of the province our ability to either balance the budget or come closer to balancing the budget than we'd expected, whatever the case may be. Then we come back here eight months later, and we ask for more money because, in fact, we never really meant it. We never really meant that we were only going to spend that much money.

Now, of course, as you know, I'm not a big advocate of cuts. That's not what I'm here for, but I do think that we need to be able to have an honest conversation with Albertans about what it is that we're spending and what it is that we're going to have to spend. It seems to me that we have gotten into the habit of strategically underestimating certain expenditures throughout the budget in order to try and paint a better picture at a time when the government feels its under a great deal of political pressure to bring in a more balanced budget. It seems to me that we've done this in a number of different areas.

Of course, just to state at the outset, there are some areas that are less predictable, and that's what we should be here for. We should be spending this time coming back to talk about those expenditures which arose which were simply not predictable. The H1N1 is a perfect example of that kind of thing. That had a number of additional costs attached to it, and no one could have necessarily predicted that. That's what supplemental estimates should be about.

3:30

We shouldn't be coming here to talk about things that anybody could have seen coming 12 or 13 months ago. Of course, the perfect example of that is the Employment and Immigration budget. Last year the government suggested that it was going to be able to maintain the level of funding that it had had previously in place for income support, and everybody knew that the unemployment rate was increasing dramatically. Everyone knew that we were going into a recession. Everyone knew that there were going to be significant changes. So, no big surprise, here we are, you know, 10 months later from when the budget was passed asking for an additional \$130 million for income supports, or \$150 million when you include the health benefits. We all knew that that was going to happen.

Of course, now we're going into this current budget, and we're pretending that that number is going to actually come down. We have no reason to believe that because what we've seen is that caseloads are going up very, very dramatically. There's no reason to believe that they will stop going up, and there's certainly no reason to believe that they're going to come down. Yet the government is very intentionally underbudgeting in that area. So it's very frustrating for us to be here having to deal with these because these are not unpredictable expenditures.

Now, another thing that I wanted to sort of put on the record is: why do we have this unpredictable form of budgeting? Because the government wants to be able to say: "Oh, look at us. Look at us. We've come relatively close to balancing the budget." My position on this is that, you know, if you want to do that, instead of making up fantasy budgets where we have fantasy line items and fantasy cost-reduction plans, why don't we look at the revenue side of the formula? Why don't we acknowledge the fact that by going to the flat tax eight or nine years ago, we are effectively shortchanging this budget this year by roughly \$5 billion? Why don't we look at that?

There are ways to bring this budget into balance. There were ways for this government last year to make this budget balanced, but they refused to look at them. We leave billions and billions of dollars on the table in this province primarily for high-income Albertans. It is a myth that low- and middle-income Albertans pay the least amount of tax in the country, a complete myth, but it is true that high-income Albertans pay the least amount of tax.

At a time when we're all collectively coming together and acknowledging that we're in a recession and we all need to chip in and pull up our socks and help out and roll up our sleeves and all those great things, it would seem to me that maybe what we might start doing is saying to those higher income Albertans that it might be more helpful for them to start paying just a portion of that \$5 billion that we've been leaving on the table year after year after year. I would suggest that that's a much better way to balance the budget rather than underestimating chronically, repeatedly, predictably, systemically the expenditures that we need to make.

Now, the other key area in these supplemental expenditures that the government is seeking, of course, relates to health. The government has done quite a grand job of patting itself on the back over the course of the last two or three weeks because they've increased spending in health both going forward as well as in the current year in relation to both the Alberta Health Services deficit for the year '09-10 and also for their so-called surge funding.

I think a number of people, of course, raised the concern that I will mirror, that I'm very concerned about this money being thrown out the window at private deliverers of health care because I believe without qualification that that is the more expensive route to take to addressing that problem and, again, not wise money management.

There's another piece about the money management discussion that I think needs to be addressed. We're throwing money at the health care system, not that much ultimately because if you factor in inflation, population increase, the predictable increases of an aging population, in fact we are probably even with the five-year plan, underfunding health care, but at least we're not grabbing a whole bunch of money and pulling it out. Unfortunately, what we are doing is that we're grabbing a whole bunch of money and pulling it out of other areas: family and children services, income supports for people with low income, training for people with low incomes who are on income support, housing. We're cutting back on our housing expenditures. We're cutting back in all these areas.

If anyone spends even a little bit of time talking about health care, you know full well that the research is pretty unequivocal, that what you need to do is look at that issue more globally, and you need to look at the whole social determinants of health. You need to understand that until you ensure every Albertan has a roof over their head and enough money to put food on the table for themselves and for their children, you are going to have more expense in the health care system. You're going to have expense in the health care system that's going to come back year over year over year over year as people who are unable to access secure housing and unable to access any kind of consistent nutritional support will repeatedly end up going to the health care system, where ultimately the care for them costs the taxpayer much, much more than it would have otherwise.

Again, we're being asked to approve additional money for the health care system, yet unfortunately we're doing this in the context of a budget that goes forward where we're going to cut from those other areas which would ensure on a preventative basis that we're having fewer people enter into the health care system. It's that kind of silo-based budgeting and that failure to look at the bigger picture and that failure to understand the importance of prevention that is resulting, ultimately, in the need for us to spend more money in this area, more than we need to. That's a real concern for us with respect to that issue.

Finally, of course, we've mentioned before that this request for extra money also deals with the increase in students seeking student loan assistance in order to frantically try and access our postsecondary education. Again, what this really is is an opportunity for the government to shift debt load onto individual Alberta citizens. As I've said many other times in the House, we are looking at moving Alberta back to a place where we become the most expensive place in the country for our citizens to access postsecondary education, and our answer to that problem is to simply invite those students to take on more debt. Again, this is not a big picture analysis. This is not a long-term analysis. This is not any kind of planning that is anything other than reactive to the most recent poll and the six-month planning cycle.

I have to say that I understand that it is frustrating sometimes for governments who have to get re-elected to make hard decisions in advance of challenges that won't be resolved for two or three years down the road. But, good Lord, you know, a government like this, that's been in power for this long: instead of the way in which we see arrogance demonstrated in other ways, we'd think that they would be able to actually plan outside of a polling cycle or an election cycle and actually have some good institutional sort of infrastructures in place. Instead, we're right back in a situation where this government is managing our budget as though they're six months away from an election and they're on the verge of losing, which they may be this time. But it's very frustrating to see the lack of foresight which this bill demonstrates to the rest of us in the Assembly.

With those comments, I will complete my commentary on this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the committee format and the opportunity to speak more than once. Under the what's missing category I want to bring up Children and Youth Services. Children and Youth Services received a \$27 million cut in their operational programming under the protection for children in care and custody area, and that's a major concern of mine. We're seeing jobs frozen, we're seeing caseloads increasing, and there was nothing in supplementary supply to ease that circumstance.

3:40

This past year we saw three children being charged for murder. We saw three children being killed while in custody. Unless there is oversight and support, more children are going to either go astray or be harmed within the custody of the province. The numbers of children that are being taken into custody in this province considerably outweigh those of other provinces, so if we're going to take them into care, then the least we can do is provide care for them.

It concerns me that the number of hours of in-home support are part of that \$27 million cut, that trying to keep kids within their homes rather than putting them into foster care or fast-tracking foster

care to adopt is not being supported within the budget. The business, as the hon. Member from Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, of being proactive in your investments is extremely important. Whether it's children or disabled individuals in PDD, the support we provide up front saves considerable support in terms of hospitalization, in terms of institutionalization. Most families, with a degree of support, can manage their loved ones, but they need that extra support.

Going back to Culture and Community Spirit, I had the privilege of attending with my wife Theatre Calgary's production of *Beyond Eden*, which is part of the Cultural Olympiad. The funding for that type of production, which was absolutely incredible, is extremely important. Also, the funding, for example, for M. Grand-Maître, who is the artistic director for the ballet, whose talent we've seen with the opening of the Olympic Games: those kinds of projects need ongoing funding. This was a special Alberta showcase not only for athletic talent, but Grand-Maître, witnessed by millions around the world, indicated to the world the kinds of artistic talent that this province possesses. We need to be promoting that.

This supplementary supply budget, after a fashion, is a Band-Aid. There's no doubt about it. Greater planning and the potential for recognizing liabilities and the need for increased care as the population ages and experiences greater need has to be built into the main budgets. But when, for whatever reason, it escapes the main budget preparation, then the sup supply is kind of the backup parachute, and unfortunately this parachute will not get us safely down and through this recession.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to speak again. The money that we invest up front produces terrific return.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, I want to say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre that I take her constructive criticism very seriously. I don't know why we won't ask for more information on questions. I can assure you that when there are supplementary estimates coming back in, if I can't understand what it means in there, then we'll send it back and get the information there. I agree. It could have been better explained. I will commit to her that we'll do that.

The Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the bill?
Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report the bill.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 5.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mrs. Jablonski]

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My initial reaction to this bill was not very kind towards the government because . . . [interjections] Well, I'm always struck by how this government feels that it needs to pass legislation to provide conditions that many would expect they would do as a matter of course. So when I have a government that needs to pass a Fiscal Responsibility Act to keep itself from going into debt, I have to shake my head and laugh. Well, duh. Governments are supposed to manage their resources responsibly. Why did this government feel that it needed to pass an act of legislation to keep itself in line? That always struck me as really odd. Well, I guess history proved them right and me wrong. They did need a piece of legislation to try and keep them under control. It didn't work very well.

I remember when the — surely he's not the federal Finance minister, but maybe he is — former Member for Red Deer-North, who was then our Treasurer, brought in . . .

Mr. Chase: Stockwell Day.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah.

It was called something around fiscal administration or responsibility. I mean, that's what it was supposed to do, keep them from running up a deficit. Yet that bill came back every single year for an amendment to adjust everything so whatever they decided to do that year would still be legal, but they'd already done it, so this was being passed, you know, after the fact. I thought: well, that makes a mockery of the whole process. You say you need this legislation to keep yourself in line, and then you're going to go outside of the lines of it, and then you've got to hurriedly change the boundaries of it so that after the fact you can say that you didn't actually contravene your own act. It's a level of public spin that I think brings all of us into question by the population. They look at us and go: "What the heck are you guys doing? It doesn't make any sense." Frankly, I agree.

When I heard that the government had brought forward an act called the Competitiveness Act, I had exactly the same reaction. I rolled my eyes heavenward and went: oh, here we go again. Then I read through the act and thought: you have got to be kidding me. This is the Premier's flagship bill? This is what we're going to put forward as the big news from the 2010 legislative sitting? That's it? Guys, it's three pages long. It's just the tiniest bit short on substance if you know what I mean. And is it actually going to, you know, do anything? Well, no. They're going to form a committee.

3:50

Dr. Brown: Big things come in small packages.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, but there's some substance and some value to the small packages, and that's not what I'm seeing in here.

It actually establishes a board or a committee to go and look at this stuff. So all this talk, all this hype about, you know, how competitive we are, and what are we going to do? We're going to establish a board or something to come up with whatever this is.

I've had a couple of weeks since this was introduced to actually think about this, and I have two reactions to it. I was reading the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, and he has brought forward a really interesting perspective that in its most basic elements I agree with. I think the basis of the disagreements that I often end up having with members of the government is that I don't think that the only role of government is to enable the private sector to make money.

I think there are roles for the government around protection, whether that's protection of the vulnerable or protection of Albertans in a consumer protection way, which is why I brought forward things like the concerns I was raising about Ticketmaster. It's why I brought forward concerns around payday loans. It's why I brought forward concerns around heat metering. Those were all consumer protection issues, in essence, so obviously that's deeply important to me.

I am concerned that we continue to think of our constituents, of our citizens as clients, as taxpayers, and that's the only role that this government seems to be willing to assign people. You're either a client, i.e. a recipient of services, or you're a taxpayer. But this government doesn't seem to be willing to look upon the people who live in our province as constituents, as citizens, people who have more in their lives than the agenda that the government puts forward. So I want to say that I do agree with the intent of what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has said.

The other thing that occurred to me as I thought about this act was: what competitiveness? What competitiveness are you talking about? We focus so much on the oil and gas sector in this province. I've never worked in the oil and gas sector, and I've never worked in support services for the oil and gas sector. I have spent my working career in public service and in the NGO sector, which is a significant sector in Alberta, but we all tend to not want to think about that for some reason.

I was struck by a couple of things I've been looking into recently in which Alberta has an opportunity. It's laid in front of them how they could be more competitive – in other words, get more business for the benefit of Alberta citizens – and they choose not to take advantage of it. That perplexes me. I'm going to focus in on one and give you a really specific example to think about because Alberta is more than oil and gas. Let me say right off: don't bother bashing me that I'm not appreciative of the oil and gas sector because I am. I like that money. I like that money because it builds things like art galleries. It funds our schools. It makes a lot of things possible for us. It makes us a wealthy, wealthy province. I'm not going to bash them. I understand where that money is coming from. I want a better balance with environmental protection, and I also won't back off on saying that stuff. But that's not the only thing that can be used in this province to be competitive.

I want to talk about the film sector. Now, this is low-hanging fruit, guys. This is easy. We have a film sector in Alberta. It's easy to sell Alberta's natural beauty. You may not be aware, but we have very unique light in Alberta that shows up on film stock. It's why people like to come and shoot films here. Our big sky country and literally the quality of the light makes films look really good. So it's low-hanging fruit. To get people to come here is not hard, right? We have a certain amount of natural resource that they want to take advantage of. We have trained people. Both SAIT and NAIT train people to work in film and television production. We have unions who willingly take those students from SAIT and NAIT and work

with them and have programs that work those students into the actual production in film and television. Then we have a regulatory regime which is so ass-backwards that we are losing competition. [interjections] I apologize for the use of that language, but it was the most descriptive in two short words that I could come up with. Asinine, okay? All right, I'll change the language.

So what have we done here in Alberta? We used to have the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, which actually developed scripts and worked with our producers and our screenwriters and our technical people to move our film industry along. This government in all of its wisdom disbanded that in 1994. Then we had nothing, and our film production dropped like a rock. Everybody went to B.C., Saskatchewan, anywhere but here because we had nothing, no incentives to offer them.

Then with much lobbying from the film industry, we got the then Treasurer to come up with the three streams scheme, that is actually still in use now, in which stream 1 offered a 25 per cent credit or payback on money that was spent in Alberta as long as you met certain criteria. This stream 1 is basically Alberta production. It has to have key individuals and a lot of key individuals involved in the production, so it was really meant to be Alberta centred and use a lot of Alberta technicians and artisans and craftspeople and artistic people in the production.

Then we had stream 2. It was meant to attract big Hollywood films in from other places, but we still wanted them to train our people. You can see how old this is, right? We don't really need to train our people anymore; we've got lots of trained people. We're still running with that old system of: well, we need other people to come in so we can train our people so they can be good enough to, you know, have their own film industry. But the truth of the matter is that we are going to have a hybrid film industry here. We are going to have smaller, low-budget local productions that have a lot of people involved. We also want to attract the honking big Hollywood films to come here and shoot because in order to get credits, they are also part of this streaming, but the credits that they're being offered are significantly lower than what they can get in other places.

So we are losing out to B.C., to Saskatchewan, to New Mexico, even to the Maritimes. I am so frustrated with that, Mr. Speaker. This is so easy to be competitive if that's what is important. And you know who gets the work? Albertans, citizens, constituents. They get to work at home. And for those of you in the oil sector, you understand all too well what it means to not be able to work at home. It's the same thing in the film sector. How do you think our artisans and technicians, our directors, our writers, our actors feel about always having to go somewhere else to work? To be able to come home, to be able to earn a paycheque here in Alberta, to be able to work here at home, and to be able to contribute – these are good people. They volunteer in their communities. They coach baseball teams. They're involved in their communities.

So it's about the citizens that are here, and that money stays here. This is not about making megabucks for some corporation that has its headquarters in Houston or Chicago or New York. This is about Albertans and our ability to be able to be good citizens and to earn a decent living here through a sector that we know well.

The stream 3 that I was talking about. The first stream was all Alberta, the second stream was kind of a hybrid, and stream 3 was a brokerage stream. It was meant to address a problem that cropped up in which a big Hollywood film could come in, and if they had certain people and they were willing to kind of give up half of their control of the film, then they could get a better percentage back. But you know what? That just doesn't work anymore. You're not going to end up with Disney or Pixar coming in here and going, "Oh, yeah,

sure. I'll give up half of my points in a film or half of my ownership of a film so that I can get a couple of percentage points more on a film credit system that they have in Alberta." It's not going to happen. I mean, guys, be realistic here. It's not working, and there are way better deals to be had elsewhere.

4:00

Let me talk to you about B.C. B.C. just raised its tax credit – it works on a tax credit program – from 25 per cent of a tax credit to 33 per cent of a tax credit. You think that doesn't matter? If you were going to do a film, would you be in Alberta, where you were getting at best somewhere in the 20 to 25 per cent range, or would you go to B.C. for 33 per cent? Again, the answer is: well, duh. Where are our Albertans going to get work? They're not going to get that work that they could have had here.

We need to have stream 2 and stream 3 combined, and that could be done by the minister tomorrow if he wanted to. The other thing is that, really, you need to consider moving to a tax credit model. For the minister to be talking to producers and to the head of the CBC, based in Ontario, does not help us here. Frankly, those people are not producing here in a lot of cases, or they're making demands that just don't work for us. We should be able to be competitive here. B.C. right now is the third largest production centre in America. We used to be right behind them, and now we're way behind them.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm very interested in the film possibilities. As the hon. member mentioned, not only do we have terrific backdrops – mountains, prairies – we produce more than westerns in Alberta. I'm just wondering if the hon. member could talk about some of the homegrown talent and the education opportunities for theatre and the arts in this province, some of the potential that we're not necessarily realizing.

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

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Thank you. I do have something for that. I guess it was last week I actually tabled this letter, so it's in the sessional papers. This was someone that contacted me, and they were very frustrated with what's happening. Here's their story. This is Dean Goodine, and he started working in the Alberta industry in 1986 after attending SAIT. He worked on *Unforgiven*, *Legends of the Fall*, and was the property master on *Jesse James*, all films shot here in Alberta which you would all be familiar with. His wife is an Alberta-born Academy Award nominee for *Unforgiven* as a set decorator, Janice Blackie-Goodine. Now, Janice also won a Genie award for set decorating *Passchendaele*, again partly filmed here in Alberta.

They have trained 75 per cent of the props and set people in Alberta. They've been tireless spokespeople for the industry. Here's the twist. Where do they live? They now live in Vancouver, and that's where he was writing to me from. He is working with another ex-Edmontonian, Grace Gilroy, and their crew is mostly Albertans living there. So here we have people we've trained, given experience to, and they can't work here in Alberta.

Here's another bit that I want to add to that about benefits to Alberta. When Janice was working on *Unforgiven*, she went to Nanton to look for some set decoration. They were in an antique store, and she and her crew were piling all of this stuff they wanted

to buy in the middle of the store, and the owner said, "What are you doing?" She explained that she needed all of these antiques for a movie. He said, "Well, how are you going to pay?" And she said, "Cash." That's how they work. The owner started to cry because that was the day he was going to go out of business. By walking in there and buying all of the sets and the antiques that she needed to dress the set, she was able – at 11 o'clock that Tuesday morning they paid over \$20,000 in cash to that antique business owner, and he stayed in business until he finally retired many, many years later. So there's a direct benefit. A true story of how the big film industry can very much benefit Alberta artists and Alberta businesses.

Thank you for the question.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You mentioned the natural light, the geographic splendour of this province. Could you comment a little bit about the need for sound studios and production facilities in this province and why we should be encouraging that homegrown production?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. That's a tougher issue. We do have a sound studio that was built here by the late Charles Allard, and it's now being privately run. This is a business that moves ahead fast. If any of you could have thought 20 years ago that you'd be watching a feature film like *Up*, that was entirely animated, you can see how fast this industry moves forward on technology. In fact, a number of people say that that space in Edmonton as a sound stage will only do small commercials, and it's not big enough to shoot films. In Calgary we actually don't have a big enough sound studio at all, which is part of what the minister was working on and why I was interested in how that is progressing because it's been something that we've needed.

We could get more postproduction work done and more of the actual big Hollywood films shot here with all the extra work that comes with it: the catering and the wranglers and the scene shops and the carpenters and the businesses, the lighting shops that sell equipment to them. All of that money that comes from the big Hollywood productions can stay here in Alberta, and more of it could stay in Alberta if we had a sound studio that they could work with. We don't, so they pack up, and they go back to L.A., or they go back to the other cities that actually have those large sound stages. It's certainly something that's an investment for us. It would certainly generate a lot more money to stay here.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get to say a few words today about Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I want to just comment on the discussion that's just happened regarding the film industry. Having a son who's in the film industry, now living and learning in Toronto but is intent on moving back, I want to say that he'll probably not appreciate my talking about his life. He also has a great foundation in Alberta, learning film in Alberta and being a recipient of support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. So our government is doing a lot of good things to support these people, but we sure like to get them back.

I've listened with great interest to the many and diverse perspectives that have been presented in terms of Bill 1. It's interesting how we can have such a variety of views about this bill. You know, some have spoken about the traditional significance of a Bill 1, how it signals government's intentions. Others have been critical about the bill being shallow or too focused on negative things like competition and so on. So I want to offer my own perspective here.

First of all, the question of: is it even desirable to be so focused on competition? It is kind of appropriate, maybe, to talk about that at a time when the Olympics are on in the context of the Olympics. Any competition requires at least two participants, and essentially what it is is a comparison of how you're doing measured against somebody else. You know, some who have commented feel as though that maybe could be a negative thing, but I'd point out that very often those who comment on how our government is doing, what we're up to, do point out how we compare, I suppose how we are competing with what's happening in other jurisdictions. I welcome those comparisons. I think it's healthy, and I think it's a good idea. One has to be somewhat careful, though, about comparisons because there are always many variables, and those have to be taken into account so that we are comparing apples to apples.

Another good thing about comparisons is that it forces us to look at ourselves, to self-assess. Even in the Olympics context people try to achieve their personal best, so it's a good thing for us to look at how we're doing, assess ourselves, see if we are achieving our personal best. Imagine an Olympics where that's all people did, tried to achieve their personal best and didn't ever compare how they were doing against what others are doing.

4:10

Now, Alberta hasn't been immune to the downturn in the global economy. We've been bruised a little bit, and as has been mentioned many times in this Assembly, we're vulnerable to big swings in revenues and so on, but as we recover from what many say is the worst recession since the 1930s, I think we're in pretty good shape compared to other jurisdictions. In fact, I would suggest that, probably, most jurisdictions in North America would be very happy to trade places with us in terms of where we sit financially. We've got \$17 billion in a sustainability fund, a savings account which we can use to protect programs because of these swings. I would suggest that that demonstrates some good foresight and some good planning.

Another thing I just want to comment on a little bit, again in terms of interpretation of what this act is about, is the scope of the act. I think there is a danger in taking a very narrow focus, focusing only on a narrow type of competition and thinking that it relates only to industry or even to specific industries such as the oil and gas industry. When you look at the wording of this legislation, I think it's much broader than that, and I think the intention is that it be much broader than that. I just picked out a few words and a few phrases from the bill, and I just want to read them, things like "quality of life," "innovation," "technology," "environment," "alignment of activities across government," "strengthening partnerships." Those things speak to me of a much broader approach than just a narrow focus on competition in that negative sense.

We have to recognize that coming out of this recession, the global economy isn't going to be the same. We're going to have to be adaptable. We need to pursue different strategies, and there are all kinds of ways we can do that, but just to throw out a couple, and it's been mentioned a number of times in this House: regulatory burden. Now that's something that certainly touches industry, and we want to reduce regulatory burden wherever we can. Some steps have been taken to achieve some efficiencies. I think of something like BizPaL, which is a single portal for industry to access government agencies and programs and so on.

But, again, it's not just about industry. I think about my constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. If you were to talk to my staff there, they would talk about all of the phone calls they get relating to employment issues, housing issues, long-term care issues, health care issues, and so on. Sometimes just manoeuvring through that

system and dealing with the system can be very intimidating. There are efficiencies that we should be trying to achieve so that it's more user-friendly. So we're not just talking about user-friendliness for industry; we're talking about user-friendliness for all Albertans.

Now, the notion of a competitive provincial economy is centred on our ability to attract new people, new businesses, new innovation and technology, the next generation of entrepreneurs, and generally to make Alberta user-friendly for all of those. As we would all know in here, we can sometimes get a little bit preoccupied with the issue of the day, the pressure of the moment, and maybe we don't always have the kind of time that we would like to have to take the long view, to get our eyes off the ground and look to the horizon. That's why I really appreciate this bill, and that's why I would say that the Premier has shown great foresight, vision, and leadership in presenting this bill as Bill 1, because it sends that message that we have to look ahead.

I think it's been mentioned here in earlier debate that doing this kind of thing is not a one-off. It's a work in progress. It's the type of thing that has to be continually worked on, an ongoing process in order to stay ahead of the curve. We have to be adaptable to changes that are coming.

For all of those reasons I very much support this bill, and I encourage all of my colleagues to support it as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I sincerely appreciate your reflections and also the personal connection to the arts and film industry. Being a father as well as a grandfather, I can relate very directly. You mentioned, and I agree, that Alberta is much better prepared to weather the recessionary effects, and you referenced the \$17 billion sustainability fund. I'm just wondering if you have any insight or knowledge of how much of the 17 billion original dollars remain, if you have any sense of what's left so that we can hopefully continue to use it as a buffer over the next two years.

Mr. Olson: Well, I will try to answer that question. But first I'd like to say that regarding the arts, you've given me a great opportunity to promote a film festival in Camrose this weekend. Check out www.nordlysfestival.com. Nordlys is Norwegian for northern lights.

The sustainability fund. You know, obviously that fund has been talked about a lot. In a perfect world we'd never have to use it, but it's not a perfect world. It's there to protect us in downturns. There is no desire within our caucus to blow that wad in one year or even two or three years.

I'm going on memory here now, and I'm standing straight across from the minister of finance. I think the number was in the \$3 billion range. You know, that's a moving number, too, just as revenues change. I can remember my first summer in government: we were talking about an \$8 billion surplus, and within eight months we were talking about deficits. So that's an example of the volatility. It's a moving number, but it's there, and there would be few, if any, other jurisdictions that have that kind of protection.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that qualification, and I'm very glad the minister of finance is here to echo that number. For any Albertans interested, if my math is correct, then we have approximately \$14 billion left in the sustainability fund so that we continue to provide a buffer.

The other question I have – and I'm not getting into wordsmithing or semantics, but one of the things you mentioned in the Alberta Competitiveness Act was that when we compete against someone else, we also have an opportunity for self-reflection, for trying to achieve our personal best. I wondered about the notion of, instead of an Alberta competitive act, if we had an Alberta collaboration act, where we worked to accomplish the best from within the province with the talents we have, with interministerial co-operativeness, consultation with Albertans, and using that same sort of collaboration aspect such as the TILMA agreement, if we then branched out to the other western provinces. So instead of the competitive, so to speak, where it suggests win and loss, we should be looking more at a collaborative process. Or is that collaboration built into this competition act as you see it?

4:20

Mr. Olson: Well, I would say that, I suppose, there can be some subjective interpretations of what some of these words mean, but for me competitiveness does not preclude collaboration. I think there are words such as partnership embodied in the legislation: partnership, government working together, and so on. So I don't think that the two have to be mutually exclusive.

The Deputy Speaker: We're back to the bill. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, your turn.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on the bill. When it was first introduced, I saw the value of an act that would cut through red tape, but I was concerned about the manner in which this cutting was proposed. In essence, what this bill allows for is the establishment of a board or a committee with a rather loose mandate of increasing competitiveness. The underlying principle behind the bill is to increase collaboration between government, business, and industry, but there are very few specifics, and therefore it's difficult to determine what, if any, impact there may be. I talked about the need for rules of the game, so to speak, so that we could head in the direction we wish to go and then have some sort of system of evaluation to know if we got there.

The government's news release on this bill states that throughout the next year benchmarks and goals will be established. Again, this is part of my concern: sort of putting the cart before the horse. Why don't we have the benchmarks? Why don't we have the goals pre-established? As a teacher I always had objectives for my students. When we went into a lesson, I had behavioural objectives where I could say that after this particular lesson is completed, this individual will be able to demonstrate their knowledge by doing this, this, and this in a very practical sense. Then I had overall general objectives, where I expected a larger learning than just specific skills to take place.

There's no reference to when completion or action on these benchmarks and goals will take place nor is there any reference to specific action that will be taken now. I'd like to think that every student I had was self-motivated, and they were an empty vessel waiting for me to introduce information to them that they would just automatically take in. But without goals or expectations, without report cards, if I never marked their assignments and just came up with a grade at the end of the year, they wouldn't have kept on doing their assignments. What would the grade mean if there was no feedback during the process?

The only reference to anything specific both in the bill and in the news release is to the government's oil and gas competitiveness review and the western economic partnership between B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan. We're still waiting for that oil and gas competi-

tiveness review, and possibly that'll spell out the types of benchmarks that could be applied to other areas of our economic well-being.

Establishing benchmarks, reporting explicitly through annual reports, collaborating across ministries and with key players in industry are all important and positive steps towards improving Alberta's competitiveness. But this bill does not take any real action towards making these things happen. There are no details, no time frame, no end goal other than elusive phrases: increase competitiveness.

We have a concept, we have a destination, but we don't have a map. We don't have a plan for arriving at that destination. All this bill does is legislate an idea. Here we have a philosophy; let's turn it into a piece of legislation.

Also, there is a little bit of overlap in the sense that the government already has a Regulatory Review Secretariat with the following mandate:

The goal of regulatory reform is to identify opportunities to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden of government on the people and businesses of Alberta. Supporting the development of good regulation creates the conditions for business to thrive and enhance productivity towards sustainable prosperity. Alberta's regulatory reform places stakeholders at the center of its regulatory activity to uphold . . .

I'm not going to go on, but the point is that that's already there. If we're going to take it beyond sort of motherhood-type statements, then we have to create the rules. We have to create the evaluatory instruments to let us know: are we getting closer to achieving the type of competitiveness that we're looking for? Are we eliminating red tape? Can we say that we've accomplished this, this, and that, and therefore it's easier to get a permit to do whatever it is, whether it's building, exploration for oil and gas, and so on?

The Regulatory Review Secretariat seems to be more concentrated on the, quotes, red tape burden of compliance requirements and regulations whereas the guiding principle behind Bill 1 is more about collaboration. I talked a little bit about this in terms of co-operation, competition, and collaboration, yet both have very similar mandates and ultimately have the same end goal of allowing for productivity, competitiveness, and sustainable prosperity.

Eliminating red tape is not the only step necessary to increase competitiveness. It is an important first step. Other provinces such as B.C. and Newfoundland have set percentage reduction goals and have produced results. In other words, they have said: "By such and such a time we'll have achieved this. We can check it off. We can say we've been successful." We don't have those benchmarks in this bill. Alberta has been reviewing regulatory burdens for over 10 years now and has yet to produce the reductions in red tape that other provinces have. The CFIB argues that Alberta has actually increased its regulatory burden in that time frame. In terms of the regulatory burden I believe we're on our sixth attempt at getting the royalty regime correct.

Also, the government already has a Premier's economic advisory committee, a Regulatory Review Secretariat, an oil and gas competitiveness review that we're still waiting to see, a western economic partnership with B.C. and Saskatchewan, and a Canada-Alberta western partnership. How many more committees and partnerships do we need? Why can't the goals of Bill 1 be carried out by one of these other arrangements? Why is the government seemingly afraid to take definitive action as opposed to creating endless committees with endless discussions and, unfortunately, no resolution?

This is the kind of initiative that the premise of this bill is intended to eliminate. The government is actually creating more legislation and more regulations with this bill. This makes me flash back to the ministry affectionately known as RAGE, restructuring and government efficiency, that was the first platform to stardom for the hon.

Minister of Transportation. Fortunately, he survived the elimination of that questionable ministry, but this bill sort of suggests that we're trying to bring back to life the idea of restructuring and government efficiency. It didn't work within the ministry, and it has yet to demonstrate any workability in this bill.

Ultimately, this bill is meaningless. The intention behind the bill is something that is laudable and necessary, but the bill itself is hollow. There are absolutely no specifics in the bill, and it seems unusual that this act is being done through legislation. Why are we mandating another committee to do the role of government? Why, for example, doesn't the Premier set up a specific task force with a particular budget, with a particular timeline? He's been great at providing individual ministries with assignments. Why couldn't this have been dealt with under a particular ministry with a particular mandate?

4:30

Some of the questions that arise. Which industries is this bill targeting? How exactly will this bill improve competitiveness? What kind of competitiveness are we talking about here? What's the red tape that's getting in the way, so that we can eliminate it? Are we primarily dealing with the oil and gas industry, a key industry to our prosperity, beyond a doubt? If we could solve the oil and gas dilemma, then possibly we could apply the same logic to the other ministries, but we don't have that structurally strong foundation with regulations and rules to achieve that competitiveness that we're trying for. By creating a competitive environment for small business, by reducing red tape – I would assume that's one of the goals. Diversifying the economy in general: we have been fortunate by the God-given nonrenewable resources in this province, but unless we diversify our economy and get off our dependence on this globally determined nonrenewable resource value, we're going to continue to ride the roller coaster of bust and boom. What is our end goal? What is the time frame for us to reach this goal?

There are more questions than there are answers. I'm hoping that the government will be able to provide examples of how we're going to get there because at this point everything is set out that at some point in the future we'll somehow come up with benchmarks, we'll somehow have a report card, we'll somehow be able to evaluate how far we've come, but other than the goal of improving our competitiveness, which is a very broad-based goal, it's not spelled out, as I say, how we're going to get there.

I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker. I hope that the people who designed the bill and have a sense of where they want to arrive at can assure me and Albertans that there is a direction, there is a focus, there is a set of regulations, there is an evaluation so that we know that we'll have gone so far down the line towards improving our competitiveness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you. It was pretty nice to hear this hon. member sound very positive about this bill. I take it that he's supporting the bill. I just thought I'd ask him: is that an outright support of the bill?

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Possibly, like the UN, we need to set up a translation system here. I don't know. What I said is that I'm supportive of the intent of the bill, but unless you have the mechan-

ics to accomplish the intent, unless you spell out the rules, unless you set out how you're going to evaluate – evaluation has been a big part of my life for 34 years as a teacher. I'm very proud of that background. On a daily basis I evaluated my kids, and as such they evaluated me. I marked their papers. I created exams. I reported on their progress in a variety of ways. I don't see those interim measures or long-term measures built into this particular competitiveness bill. If you don't know what the rules of the game are and what standards you have to achieve, then how do you progress? That was the concern that I was expressing, not with the intent, but how do we get there?

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 1 today. I thought that I might take just a slightly different approach in the discussion on this bill. I want to accomplish two things in the time that I have. One, to have a look at the preamble that's in this bill. Oftentimes we overlook the preamble, and admittedly in some cases preambles are not designed to be an integral part of the bill. But I would suggest to you that in this particular case it would do us all a lot of good to have a look at the preamble and spend a little bit of time discussing it because the preamble, really, is the essence of this bill. The rest is really the operationalization. But I think that there's much to be gained by discussing the preamble.

The other thing that I want to spend a little bit of time talking about is the whole concept of regulatory streamlining and the reduction and avoidance of duplication. As the minister of a department that is one of the most recognizable regulators in the House, I think it's appropriate that I spend some time discussing how this bill may or may not affect the environment in particular and the way we do business in Alberta Environment specifically.

Mr. Speaker, let's just for a moment have a look at the preamble that's in the bill because I think it's worth spending a little bit of time. First of all: "Whereas Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans." What more can be said? Every time that I have an opportunity to speak inside and outside of Alberta, particularly outside of Alberta, I make particular note of the fact that Alberta has a wealth of resources. Much of the reason that others look to Alberta as being a success is attributed to our natural resources, but the fact of the matter is that while we have abundant resources in this province, they have been developed not by the government, not by the federal government but, in fact, by the people, by Albertans, by the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans, by that spirit that all of us are so proud of here in Alberta.

The next preamble says, "Whereas competitiveness is core to the Government of Alberta's plan to position Alberta for sustained prosperity to provide a high quality of life for Albertans." Again, we're talking about how we frame competitiveness in the context of creating the base, creating the opportunities for us to have economic activity in this province, to have wealth creation in this province, but recognizing that while we have abundant resources, it takes more than just abundant resources to be successful.

Now, this is a critical one, Mr. Speaker, the next one: "Whereas global competition for access to markets and for investment capital, people and skills is ever increasing." That is critical. We're not just talking about the things that often get reflected upon when we talk about a competitiveness review. When we talk about reducing the amount of regulatory burden or when we talk about other kinds of

barriers that are put in place, the key here is that not only are we competing in a global market for investment; frankly, we're competing for skilled people. If we don't have an opportunity for those skilled people to come to Alberta, to bring their knowledge, to bring their entrepreneurial spirit, we are not going to be successful. A lot of that has to do with competitiveness, competitiveness from the perspective of ensuring that we do have a vibrant arts and cultural community to attract people here, ensuring that we have a school system that will continue to attract people here. That, too, is part of the competitiveness.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, I could not talk about what brings people here and not mention the environment. Certainly, people are attracted to Alberta because of the beauty that we have, the environment that all of us are so proud of and spend so much time and effort protecting and ensuring that it is here for our children and our grandchildren.

The next *whereas* clause says: "Whereas the Government of Alberta believes that the role of government is to create the conditions for competitiveness so that entrepreneurship, innovation and investment will generate benefits for Albertans." I won't spend a lot of time on that one. As a Conservative that one is almost self-evident. How many times have we heard people ask, you know: what is the government doing to create jobs? What is the government doing to do this or that? Mr. Speaker, I don't have to remind you, I'm sure, that it's not the government that creates jobs. It's entrepreneurs, it's small businesses, it's large businesses, it's people who have the faith to invest in our province that create the jobs. It's the role of government to create a level playing field, to create the opportunity for that investment to be successful. Let's never forget that it's not the responsibility of government to create the jobs. As soon as we try to convince ourselves that we the politicians, we the government create the jobs, the faster we'll defeat our intent to do just that.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the last *whereas* clause says, "Whereas better alignment of activities across Government to strengthen partnerships among Albertans, business, industry and Government will support the development of a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness." This is all about how are we going to not deal with issues in isolation but ensure that any kind of a plan that comes forward, an initiative that comes forward out of this bill takes into account the fact that there needs to be integration. There needs to be a reflection that an action taken on one front may have a negative or perhaps an unwarranted or unwanted reaction on another front. It's imperative that when we develop policies, we do so in the context of keeping that reality in mind. We can't make changes in isolation in one part of government and not expect that there won't be any unintended consequences, perhaps, in other areas of government or other parts of the economy.

Now, if I can, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just spend a few moments talking about what this means from the point of view of some of the comments that were in the Speech from the Throne and, I think, are by extension included in Bill 1. That is: how are we going to address the issue of protecting our precious environment but doing so at the same time as we remove unnecessary duplication, as we remove unnecessary burden on industry, on investment, on Albertans so that they can do what it is we want them to do, and that's create wealth and create jobs?

I want to give just a couple of quick examples of the kinds of things that we need to be aware of. When we do approvals in Alberta Environment, it's a very prolonged process where we have an industrial approval that is before our staff, and our staff are very diligent, do an outstanding job, in my opinion, of ensuring that they

cover off all of the possible concerns that might be in a particular industrial application.

It tends to be focused very much on the type of technology that's employed, on the emissions that may or may not be created as a result of the approval, Mr. Speaker, but frankly I think that there is a lot of duplication. In fact, I've had some discussion with some of the approval writers in the department, and even they will admit that for many approvals the first 50 to 60 pages could almost be photocopied from one to the next because they are virtually the same. The last 40 or 50 pages or in some cases maybe only 10 pages are critical because they deal with what is different about this particular application as opposed to a number of others. When we talk about eliminating unnecessary duplication, it's about ensuring that we don't spin our wheels, that we don't spend a lot of unnecessary talent and resources within Environment writing and rewriting our approvals in areas that are duplicative of many others in that same office.

The other side, I think, is equally important, and that's ensuring as a government, as the government of Alberta, not just Alberta Environment, that we're working together, that we're communicating, because many of the areas that Alberta Environment is responsible for regulating have overlap. We have overlap with the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the ERCB, and we have overlap with Sustainable Resource Development, SRD. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, there may be a very real probability that on any given day we might have three trucks – one from Alberta Environment, one from SRD, and one from the ERCB – all at the same site at the same time, yes, each doing something slightly different, but is it really necessary that all three be there? Are there ways that we can work together so that if there are issues that need to be dealt with by the ERCB and an Environment person is on-site, they can pass that information on?

Is there, Mr. Speaker, unnecessary duplication of reports to each of those organizations? Are we even sharing the information internally, or are we requiring the approval holder to send individual reports – one to ERCB, one to Environment, and one to SRD – when, in fact, it's all the government of Alberta? How are we expecting folks to do business here, recognizing that it's one government and at the same time ensuring that we're not in any way denigrating the very important role that each of those organizations plays?

So that's what this is all about, Mr. Speaker. It's not a simple matter of putting it in a bill and it will happen. What this bill accomplishes is that it creates the opportunity. In fact, I would suggest that it doesn't just create an opportunity. It creates a requirement for us in government to have a look at the way we regulate, how we protect the environment, at a myriad of other ways that we have organizations that are protecting the environment, protecting Albertans, and doing so very, very well, I might add. But have we actually taken the time to ensure that we do so from a co-ordinated approach? That from the head of a regulator is critical to this.

I know that there are other ministers, there are other members that will comment more on some of the fiscal and financial side of things, but I felt it was important that I commented from the perspective of a regulator because I think that there are huge opportunities in this bill for us to in fact do a better job at what Albertans expect us to do, to protect the environment, but to do so in a much more streamlined, effective way that will encourage investment in Alberta and will in fact address this whole issue of competitiveness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes for comment or question. The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for those comments. I was very encouraged to hear you talk about, basically, a one-window approach. Quite frankly, I think you're very accurate when you talk about different parts of government that have some jurisdiction and all the reports that have to be written, the regulations that pertain to different things.

I guess I'm wondering how far we can go down this road. I would envision a time when rather than being prescriptive as to how industry does something, we set out and have very specific targets that industry must meet at the end of the pipe or in the stack and let them figure out how they do it as opposed to us prescribing how they would get there. I think that that would cut down considerably on the regulations.

Really, I don't believe for a minute that within government we've got all of the answers. There's so much expertise out in the field, so much new technology that can be used, so many different ways that you could get to the same end result. I think it's critical that we be very prescriptive as to the standards that they must – must – meet, but let's let industry figure out how they get there and allow that kind of an exercise to work its way through.

Mr. Renner: Well, I think it was more a comment than a question, but I couldn't agree more. The member is absolutely right. There needs to be a transition from a regulatory mindset that is very prescriptive on what the inputs will be, the technology that will be employed, that then creates expectations on what the outcome is going to be rather than having a regulatory regime that is very prescriptive on what the outcome is that we expect and giving some flexibility to industry, to the approval holder, on how they achieve those outcomes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that being said, it then becomes imperative that we have a rigorous system in place to ensure that we are in fact holding the approval holders and industry accountable for those outcomes. It may not be that we save a whole lot of time and effort at the back end. In fact, we'd probably end up spending more time and effort on the part of government on ensuring that we achieve those outcomes, but we've given a great degree of flexibility on how we achieve those outcomes.

I should also point out, Mr. Speaker, that in achieving those outcomes, it would have to be, really, twofold. One is from an individual operator's perspective, but that all has to be within an overall global context of cumulative effects. It's one thing to achieve outcomes for individual operators. But if we don't take into account the cumulative effect of multiple operators all achieving their outcomes but at the end of the day perhaps not achieving our outcome as Albertans on air quality or water quality or the like – that is why we put so much emphasis on the development of a cumulative effects regulatory regime as well.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My favourite of the five preambles is the fifth, and it's suggesting: get your own house in order; proceed from a secure base. It's a great philosophy, but there's no mention of how we're going to get there or when we're going to get there.

With regard to the environmental balancing act I believe that future project approvals should be based on past reclamation. Demonstrate your responsibility.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, there may be a mistake. I think I'm triumphant on this one. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: All right.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and speak to Bill 1 this afternoon. Having listened intently to a number of my colleagues in the Legislature, I think it's very evident that all of us agree that competitiveness is very important for our province as we move forward. Certainly, as entrepreneurs and pioneers of what is, you know, a fairly young jurisdiction, we view this idea of competitiveness and being able to compete in the global environment as number one.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to refer to the throne speech, and I'm going to pick a couple of passages out of the throne speech that I think are pertinent here. The first: "Our world may have changed, but our people have not. They remain hard working and innovative, entrepreneurial and compassionate, and, most of all, confident about our province and its future."

Mr. Speaker, that confidence is well placed in the sense that we have made excellent investments in where we're going. We have certainly the lowest tax regime in the country. We have dollars on hand to do the things that we need to do. As the throne speech continues, it says: "That confidence is well placed. Our province has substantial cash reserves and low taxes, providing a solid foundation from which we can make a strong recovery." That is really, really true of our province, and certainly I think we can build upon that.

Another quote from the throne speech:

The global economy is undergoing profound changes, with significant impacts on the lives of Albertans. Our people are naturally entrepreneurial, and government has supported their drive to succeed with training, information, services, and counselling.

But, Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also says, "We can do better." I think that Bill 1 is one of the things where we're talking about doing it better.

Again to the throne speech:

We must succeed in maintaining and growing our markets and attracting and developing people and innovation. This is the route to the strong communities, healthy environment, quality of life, and prosperity that we want to pass on to future generations.

Bill 1 of this legislative session, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will signal our government's resolve to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America. To do this, we must minimize the cost of doing business here, including the cost of regulation, while at the same time providing the world-class services that are the hallmark of competitive jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, a little over a hundred years ago you can well imagine pioneers crossing the border of Alberta – well, there was no border for Alberta at that time – a very difficult thing to imagine. If you can imagine them trying to eke a life out of what to them would have been a very inhospitable climate, what would have been a very difficult situation, you have to admire the strength and the courage of those pioneers. You also have to admire the fact that they were competitive, that they were innovative, that they knew how to get their products to market. Then their market might have been the neighbour. Their market was the closest town. Perhaps that was what built that entrepreneurial spirit which carries on to this day in the population of Alberta. As the markets expanded and as communication expanded and as production expanded, we had to reach

more customers because we were creating more product than we could consume in our own jurisdiction.

That is certainly true today. Today we, obviously, produce way more energy than we can consume in a population of 3 and a half million people, we produce way more food than our population can consume, we are the number one cattle industry in the country, we are the number one energy industry in the country, we have a very, very strong forestry industry, but all of those industries are dependent upon trade, Mr. Speaker. All of those industries are dependent upon being globally competitive so that we can compete with others who are catching up to us and very quickly.

5:00

I think that really comes to the crux of the comment that I wanted to make, and that is: what does being competitive mean in today's environment? In today's environment it means working together. It means not competing within our own jurisdiction because, frankly, that's not our customer base. Our customer base is outside of our jurisdiction. It means that we have to work together to sell our own brand.

Mr. Speaker, prior to getting into this august Legislative Assembly, I was in international trade. I spent 20 some-odd years running around the world trying to sell product from our province, and what I learned in that situation is that you always have to be one step ahead of your competition. That means you have to move down the value chain. That means you have to be innovative. That's where Alberta has to move, and we have to signal that in whatever ways we possibly can. One of those ways, obviously, is by putting legislation in place that says that Alberta will be the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada and, hopefully, in the world in the areas that we work to. It says that we're going to respond to the province's needs but also to our customers' needs. We're going to seize on new opportunities.

Many of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly have said that Albertans have told us that they want us to get rid of the red tape. They want us to get rid of the bureaucratic walls that may be stopping them from doing the things that they need to do to be competitive. We need to be in touch with those markets that we're going to serve. We need to find out what our customers want, so we need to travel. We need to be out and in the face of our customers so that we can show them what we're doing but also recognize if we're doing it right or wrong.

In that sense it's working together with all levels of government. I know that the legislation contemplates a committee or a group that's going to look at how we can benchmark, how we can measure, and I think that's absolutely important. We had today an announcement from one of our universities in southern Alberta and one of the professors there that came up with his competitiveness report. I think it's important we take all of these things, Mr. Speaker, from all sectors of our economy, put them together, bring them together, work together in different levels of government, different departments of government, use that information to change how we do it and what we do.

We need to show the world like we did with Alberta Innovates, something we did in our department this past year, Mr. Speaker. We brought together all of the research entities in the province. We brought together all of the players, if you will, the stakeholders in research and innovation and commercialization of the province. We brought them together and said: "How can we be the best at what we do in the world? How can we make sure that we're commercializing things here in the province and creating wealth in the province?" They created Alberta Innovates, which is very similar to what the legislation contemplates, working together for a common goal, and

that is to have the jurisdiction of Alberta be the place to commercialize new technologies and new innovations.

We couldn't have done that, Mr. Speaker, if we hadn't done Campus Alberta first. Campus Alberta is another example of what happens when partnership and working together come together and you create a system and a framework where everybody can pull together for the common objective of the students, the taxpayers, society, and the economy. That, again, is predicated on being able to compete in a global market.

The Premier's mandate letters have also been driving this change and vision. It's a vision to be in a position to capitalize on that next generation economy. It's a vision to be able to capitalize on the resources and the partnerships that we've placed and we've created. The province, of course, is also blessed with another resource, and that's the talented and highly skilled researchers and entrepreneurs that we have within Campus Alberta and within Alberta Innovates. Thanks to their work we've been able to identify research and technology commercializations – in life sciences, in energy and environment, in nanotechnology, in ICT sectors – and strategic priorities of equal importance.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that these initiatives – Campus Alberta, bringing technology to market, and Alberta Innovates – aren't disparate or arbitrary initiatives. Each works in collaboration with the next, building on alignment among our postsecondary institutions, research organizations, and our innovation support services in business and entrepreneurs. It is all about working together.

Now, with each of these essential pieces in place, we have another solid foundation that we need to take the next step with, and that next step is Bill 1. Bill 1 clearly states in the second part of the bill, the mandate of the bill, that the goal is to increase Alberta's competitiveness by accelerating the implementation of current government of Alberta initiatives to increase competitiveness. It's important, Mr. Speaker, that when we travel abroad or when we're telling Albertans what we're doing, there is the message from this government that says: "Yes, we will do this. Yes, we will move forward with being competitive." Current initiatives like those I've just outlined.

Section 2 goes on to state that we're going to increase Alberta's competitiveness by developing a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness through strengthened collaboration with industry, business, and Albertans. Again, Mr. Speaker, very, very important to where we're headed in the future. My ministry has been strengthening collaboration among the stakeholders, as I've said, toward that very purpose as we've done Campus Alberta and Alberta Innovates. I can tell you that the staff within my ministry are ready and able to take all that we've developed through those collaborative processes and apply it to that next level.

Bill 1 does that very thing. It focuses on alignment of effort at the very next level, not just among our ministry's key stakeholders but right across government and among all of the government of Alberta ministries, working to improve Alberta's global competitiveness. I see this kind of government-wide support for initiatives already under way within the ministry as a very positive thing towards working with Bill 1. By aligning the various efforts of government and increasing co-ordination and collaboration among us all, we'll be able to make Alberta more competitive more quickly. Albertans have told us that as a province and as Albertans we must be competitive in that global economy.

Still in section 2 the bill states that we'll develop strategies and initiatives to encourage innovation and develop and adopt technology. Right up the ministry's alley, Mr. Speaker, and we're very, very pleased to see that in the bill. Again, it provides strength of

purpose. It puts that signal there for us. It really boils down to the old adage: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Working together, we can make Alberta's economy competitive on a global stage more than any of us could do individually.

I believe that Bill 1 is that next logical step towards achieving Premier Stelmach's vision for Alberta. He envisions a knowledge-based economy, one where we're known around the world as the preferred global destination for turning ideas into products and services that can benefit people all around the world. He knows – and I think this is key to his strength as the Premier – that a strong, competitive economy is not an end unto itself. Instead, a strong economy is the means to achieve the things we want as part of a larger global society, like a strong health care system, like a world-class education system. We're ready to take that next step in the form of the Alberta Competitiveness Act because of the long-range planning that has characterized this Premier's leadership. It is the right way to go, and it's a signal to the world.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What I'm hearing from this minister adds to the confusion that I see in this bill. We're not sure whether we're competing or we're co-operating.

When it comes to the claim that Alberta has the lowest taxes, tell that to the middle class, that is unfairly burdened by the flat tax. We forgive a few people at the poverty end of the scale, and we reward the people at the upper end of the scale on the backs of the middle class. I have trouble with that concept.

Now, the Premier made such a boast about not increasing taxes. In fact, he went so far as to rescind the \$180 million of liquor taxes. Think what that would have paid for. It would have provided \$23 million for the teachers' settlement. It would have meant that there wouldn't have been a \$27 million cut to Children and Youth Services. It means that there wouldn't have been a cut to PDD. There are a whole bunch of areas where tax has a value. The Premier in stating that there would be no tax increases, I gather wasn't referring to the fact that the educational portion of the property tax is going up in municipalities across Alberta. So much for a tax freeze. The unfortunate part of that educational portion of the property tax is that it's not going to education; it's going into general revenue.

5:10

Now, in somewhat of a mixed revisionist history model the hon. minister of advanced education talked about competition being how the west was won. He put forward two notions in Alberta, that of the gunslinger, who succeeds in spite of everyone else, versus that of the barn raiser or the quilting bee. To me it's that co-operative spirit that's absolutely essential if we're going to be successful.

I agree with the minister about the whole being larger than the sum of its parts, and that's what the fifth premise in the preamble is about.

Whereas better alignment of activities across Government, so first we get our own act together, to strengthen partnerships among Albertans, and then we build up that collaborative collective, business, industry and Government will support the development of a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness.

My vision of Alberta is a co-operative version, but how are we going to get there, I keep saying, and when will we know we have arrived?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

Mr. Chase: Yes. How will we get there, and when will we know we've arrived?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, obviously, he worked real hard to find a question in that rant. It was interesting that first he talked about that we don't have the lowest taxes and that we're trying to hit the middle and lower incomes, and then he suggested that we should raise taxes on liquor. I'm assuming he doesn't assume that they buy liquor.

You know, we don't have a sales tax. Overall, Mr. Speaker, it is a true statement to say that Albertans are under the lowest tax regime of any province in Canada because we don't have a sales tax. We don't have a payroll tax. We have the highest personal income deduction level of any province in the country.

Mr. Speaker, it's nice to have a negative view of the world when that's what you want to have. I think the pioneers that came here weren't gunslingers, nor did I use that term; the hon. member did. They were very positive people, not negative. They viewed this province as having hope and prosperity for them and generations to come. And you know what? They were absolutely right because that's what's happened in this province. We have created an economy that still has hope, prosperity, and draws people from around the globe. And that's because of the competitive environment that we've created.

This bill signals to the world that we're going to continue with that competitive environment, that we're going to continue to create that kind of environment, because that's what Albertans want us to do, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and respond to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. Our Premier's strategy for economic recovery includes continuing to strengthen infrastructure in all regions of this province. In fact, his vision is to ensure that we can continue to have the most advanced public infrastructure in North America. This includes the roads, schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure needed to support our growing economy and population.

Continuously improving our infrastructure will give us an edge in the global economy. This keeps us competitive and supports Bill 1. By building for tomorrow today, we are supporting the growth of our current and future generations. Our strong infrastructure will provide the environment needed to create new business opportunities, existing careers, and high-paying jobs.

Through careful planning Alberta is in the best financial position of all provinces, with the most innovative and competitive economy in North America. We are looking far ahead and planning for the long term.

When the recession hit, jurisdictions throughout Canada were rushing to find shovel-ready capital projects to invest in, even at the cost of going into debt. Here in Alberta we already had a long-term, 20-year strategic capital plan, hon. Speaker. A 20-year strategic capital plan. Unlike most jurisdictions we were and are in a position to invest in our infrastructure, and we have the money in the bank to pay for it. It only makes sense to buy what we need now, when the prices are low and the materials and the labour are available.

Our sustainability fund is providing us with cash reserves, so we can use them now. Due to careful planning this province has saved billions of dollars from surpluses in good years. We are using those

cash reserves strategically to position Alberta to come out of this recession stronger and faster than any other jurisdiction in North America.

Alberta's investment in infrastructure is nearly double the per capita average of other provinces. In total, the 2010-2013 capital plan supports more than \$20 billion in capital projects, over \$7 billion this fiscal year alone.

We are continuing work on the federal building, on the new remand centre, and the Edmonton clinic. We are delivering 18 new schools this September, two years sooner under the P3 partnership than would have been possible using traditional delivery models. These will all be top-quality, energy efficient buildings that all Albertans can be proud of.

When building modern infrastructure to meet Alberta's needs, it is vital to look beyond the bricks and mortar. It is what happens inside our buildings that is critical. Albertans and the services we deliver to them are our first priority, and we are always striving for the best way to deliver what Albertans need. By successfully meeting the needs of Albertans, we are also showing our best face to the world. Safe, modern, and efficient infrastructure is essential to the growing economy to create the wealth and prosperity needed to sustain social programs and services. This is why infrastructure is an economic enabler, a force that will enhance Alberta's competitiveness on the global scale.

Strong infrastructure will help Alberta continue to attract investment, to provide jobs and prosperity. While we do need to be careful with our dollars, cutting back on infrastructure during a downturn is not a smart long-term move. Investment in infrastructure keeps Albertans working. This year's infrastructure investment will support about 70,000 jobs.

Mr. Rodney: How many?

Mr. Danyluk: Seventy thousand.

That means 70,000 more Albertans will have security, and those 70,000 Albertans will continue to spend money and spur growth in other parts of the economy.

Bill 1 will enhance the conditions for competitiveness in this province by enabling better alignment of activities across government. This will strengthen partnerships among Albertans, business, industry, and government.

Striving for the best public services and the most competitive economic environment will attract the best and brightest to help build our province. We can no longer use our neighbours in B.C. and Saskatchewan to measure our successes. Instead, we need to work with those neighbours to be competitive in much bigger markets.

We must position our province so that we come out of this recession bigger, stronger, and smarter than ever before. We must build innovative, reliable public infrastructure to ensure our industries are competitive. We must establish this province as an economic leader in the postrecession world. Alberta needs to and will compete and win on the global economic stage. We need to aim high because aiming high is the Alberta way.

Thank you.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for that very inspiring speech on how we're going to do so much in the competitive field and how this bill allows that to happen.

I'm curious. You mentioned a lot of buildings, and I imagine you're thinking of schools and hospitals and those kinds of things. You mentioned roads and investing in those kinds of things. I wonder if you would expound on how it is that this is going to help make us competitive and how this bill encourages that kind of thing. You did mention: competitive in the world. That's what is so critical. Of course, I think that you could validly bring in TILMA and how working with the other provinces is going to help us in the world market. If you could elaborate with those comments on the infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me talk about Alberta and the need to ensure that competitiveness is in place and alive and well and that the investors and the people that are in other parts of this great country in North America and in other parts of the world see Alberta as an opportunity, see Alberta as having an advantage of where they want to raise their children, where they want to work, and where they have opportunity.

If I can just go back a little bit, Mr. Speaker, and talk a little bit about history. What happened is that when this government eliminated the machinery and equipment tax to encourage investment, encourage development in this province, that is what has made this province what it is today. The hon. member was part of that decision, and it was a decision of foresight. It was a decision that enabled this province to be at the competitive level where it is today.

I want to say to you that when we talk about the competitiveness and the importance of having a sustainability fund, our Premier and this government have had the foresight to bring forward a sustainability fund. What does the sustainability fund do? It does two things: it takes off some of the hills, and it fills some of the valleys. It gives opportunity for people who have come to this province to make a living over the long term, not that they would make a living today and starve tomorrow. Mr. Speaker, that advantage of having a continuum of funding, having a continuum of \$20 billion over three years, \$7 billion a year, provides that opportunity. What it does is that it brings people to this province. It makes and has people come into this province to invest.

What exactly does that mean? That means that we have to be ready for the next growth spurt. It means that we cannot forget about business and the people of this province. We have to build the schools, and we have to build the hospitals, and we have to ensure that this economy does a couple of things, that this economy provides the opportunity when the growth spurt comes back but also provides the jobs.

Now, when it provides those jobs, it provides stability. What does it do with the discussion, if I can say, of stability? It makes this province, as I said before, a place that people want to come to. It is a province where there is opportunity. It is a province of hope. It is a province of the future.

Mr. Speaker, if I can say, when we talk about those types of opportunities and the opportunities into the future of our children because of the education system that we have, because of the postsecondary education system that we have, as well as having the infrastructure in place in regard to hospitals, to making sure that we are ready, I think that is the most important part.

When we look at the Minister of Transportation – and he left. He escaped, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's going to be hard to follow, but I'll give it a go.

More than obviously, I'm pleased to rise today and join all of my colleagues speaking in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. It's no secret. We are extremely fortunate to live in the province of Alberta, free to pursue our dreams, our ambitions, to be presented with opportunities that, quite simply, are not afforded to people in many other places around the world. Even with this global economic recession, we find ourselves as Albertans in a much better economic situation than most. But this province's success didn't happen by coincidence. It happened because of the vision, the foresight, and the entrepreneurship that have been cultivated in a long history of successful Albertans working to better their province and to better the lot of their family.

I support Bill 1 because it, I think, will work closely with our industry, with our business leaders, in fact with all Albertans towards a shared goal of making the province one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world. Bill 1 will enhance Alberta's competitiveness in that global economic market that we live in today. It's about helping Alberta business so that we can continue to maintain and improve on an excellent standard of living that we currently enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, there are several factors that affect that economic competitiveness in our province. For example, we could talk about taxation rates, we could talk about regulatory burden, and we certainly need to talk about trade access. Alberta is already a leader in many of these areas. We have the lowest personal and corporate tax rates in the country, we have no provincial sales tax, and we have the highest tax exemption for families.

Alberta is also competitive because of the trading relationships which it has established. We already have a free trade relationship with the United States through NAFTA and a groundbreaking economic relationship, TILMA, with our neighbour to the west, British Columbia. I'm also pleased that we're making progress on a western economic partnership that includes both Saskatchewan and British Columbia, which ultimately will create Canada's largest free trade zone.

Now, it's true that many will view competitiveness solely in terms of royalty rates, our Alberta energy industry. While I think it's critically important that this industry remain strong, I would argue that competitiveness must extend to all sectors of our economy.

5:30

Specifically, I'd like to talk about competitiveness from the standpoint of small business. Small business and entrepreneurs are a significant driving force in our economy. In addition, they are often the sources of the technological innovation and development that blossoms into outcomes that benefit all Albertans. Small businesses in my constituency of Red Deer-South not only help to shape our community, but they also contribute to the prosperity of the entire province.

Therefore, when we talk about competitiveness, we're also talking about the steps that we can take to enhance and promote small business. One such step is promoting the reduction of regulatory burdens. Regulations are never created with the intent of placing an undue burden on our small business community. As a government and a member of the Regulatory Review Secretariat I believe that it falls upon us to look at these regulations and adjust them to make them workable for our business community. Now, that is not to say that we should cut regulations simply for the sake of cutting regulation. Rather, we need to tailor our regulations to suit specific industries while ensuring that we do not compromise our commitment to environmental standards, health standards, and public safety. I believe that by doing this, we can improve the competitiveness of our small business community.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would again like to applaud the government for the foresight required to draft the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This action demonstrates that even though we are the most competitiveness jurisdiction in Canada, we must always be looking to the future to ensure that we retain our competitive edge.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments and voice my support for Bill 1. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a), five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Member for Red Deer-South for his comments with regard to Bill 1 and share his sentiment with regard to the opportunity that is provided through the spirit of Bill 1 and, I think, the direction that it takes, that is well indicated within the preamble of the bill and the specifics that it speaks about. I think that the direction of this bill is something that will very closely resonate with the average Albertan.

Given your experience with the competitiveness review commission and your experience in small business and your reference to the small business community – and I share your concern and your belief that this will resonate with small business because the cost of the regulatory burden to small business in this country and in this province is significant in the time that it takes from small business owners. One of the things I've done in my constituency is talked with some constituents about: what are the things that hamper competitiveness or that get in the way of competitiveness, whether it's regulatory concerns or other things that we can do to be more competitive?

My question for the Member for Red Deer-South: does the Member for Red Deer-South have some instances or some particular areas that he can identify that we need to address, specific situations that Albertans will connect with? I think at the end of the day that's something that this bill will address. I'm wondering if the Member for Red Deer-South could comment on that.

Mr. Dallas: I'd be delighted to, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we can have a broader discussion than the burden of regulation, but I think small business is particularly impacted by regulation by virtue that larger enterprises have the capacity to develop a compliance unit within their enterprise to be constantly on the lookout for the kinds of activities that their company is engaged in and the responsibilities that they have in complying with legislation.

Small business, on the other hand, often single owner-operator enterprises, family-based enterprise units, or two or three employees: much more significant challenges with respect to managing that. Those entrepreneurs work long days often actually delivering the services related to the business; evenings are spent doing books, filling out forms, complying with all of the requirements that we provide to them. Often they really don't have a problem with the issues around environmental compliance, public safety, health. These are things that business understands and knows that they need to do well. The issue is really not about: what are the requirements of the regulations? It's the requirements of the reporting, I think, that are significant to business.

I think that what we have in front of us is a great opportunity to work with all Albertans to look at compliance requirements not to say, "How can we take down the requirements that are necessary, that have been debated in this Assembly in terms of what we need to do to ensure that environmental standards are met, that public health is not at risk, that safety is there?" but to say, "What are the

processes that we've surrounded those requirements with, and are there some things that we can do that ultimately would streamline that process, that would reduce the time that it takes business to effectively complete the requirement that they have, and in the course of that would we positively affect the productivity, which is so important to our competitiveness, as a result of potentially removing some of that underbrush that's requiring time, that's really unnecessary, and again, most importantly, ensuring the compliance to the requirements that we've established in this province that are so important?"

The Deputy Speaker: You have eight seconds.

Ms Blakeman: So what you're talking about is not so much the compliance but the reporting on the compliance. Is that correct?

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I would like to start by thanking our hon. Premier for bringing forward this inspired piece of legislation that would see government and industry come together to create a more competitive and prosperous Alberta. Despite tough times Albertans can remain optimistic when looking forward because in times like these Albertans roll up their sleeves and work together to ensure a bright future. Bill 1 recognizes this and moves Alberta to adapt to the change in the world economy.

Mr. Speaker, this innovative piece of legislation will examine ways to further improve Alberta's competitiveness position. For instance, it will increase collaboration between government, industry, and business. This will allow development of Alberta's competitiveness and provide long-term benefits for Alberta families and the entire province. This government will use this legislation to build upon and strengthen current initiatives such as Alberta Innovates, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, and the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA. These programs already give Alberta a competitive edge, which will be bolstered by the Alberta Competitiveness Act. There will also be recommendations to enhance Alberta's competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Mr. Speaker, ministers and stakeholders will review all economic sectors and determine whether Alberta can strengthen its competitiveness advantage. Through Bill 1 Albertans can create a more prosperous economy, which will benefit all citizens, including our most vulnerable. In addition, the Alberta Competitiveness Act will enable Albertans to construct a better future while utilizing the initiatives this province has already put in place, initiatives like the sustainability fund, which cushions Alberta from the full brunt of any economic downswings. Due to this excellent fiscal planning and a commitment to savings for a rainy day, this government has put itself in a fortunate position. In addition, Bill 1 will let this province continue to build on our strengths and result in an outstanding quality of life for all Albertans.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, regardless of our individual affiliations I think we can all agree that Alberta is already a leader in many fields. Our

trade programs, for example, are second to none in Canada. As a journeyman mechanic in my former life I understand the importance of training Albertans to work in the trades. I believe very strongly that as Albertans we're lucky to have the incredible opportunities to learn and develop our skills in our province.

For example, when I was a teacher, I served as a registered apprenticeship program co-ordinator at one of the Edmonton public schools. For those who don't know the RAP program, it allows high school students to work in a field they are interested in while allowing them to earn credits towards a high school diploma. It also qualifies up to 500 students for scholarships in Alberta in order to continue training in the trade of their choice, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to programs available, there's also great infrastructure support to help learn trades in Alberta. Recently I attended an open house at Amiskwaciy Academy, which is run by Edmonton public schools for their skills centre, which was built to help students gain real-world experience with hands-on courses. The visit really opened my eyes on how committed our schools are to helping students learn the trades by building world-class facilities and developing world-class programs.

Mr. Speaker, these are just two examples. There are many, many programs out there for all Albertans right across the province. From the better known trades like carpentry, plumbing, automotives, and welding to trades like toolmaker, baker, cosmetologist, hairstylist, ironworker – I could go on and on – the options that today's Albertan has are truly incredible. My point is that as a province we are already doing really innovative things, and this is all part of increasing our competitive edge. By training Albertans in all these different trades and committing to programs that allow them to pursue their future, it is easy to see why Alberta truly is the best place to live, work, and invest.

Tradespeople are benefiting from learning skills and becoming more competitive in the labour marketplace. Companies are benefiting from a homegrown, talented, and skilled workforce, and all Albertans benefit from our products becoming superior to our competitors' and becoming increasingly relied upon thanks to the skills of our workers trained right here in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, these types of innovative programs should be continually examined and strengthened. I see that as part of what Bill 1 will do. Because of this I strongly support this bill and would once again like to thank our hon. Premier for showing incredible vision in doing what is best for all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I would like to move to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate members for a good afternoon of lively debate and remind all that we have another lively contest on in Vancouver tonight, and we may want to find out how the Canadians are doing against the Russians. For that reason I move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:45 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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Issue 12

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology
Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Chris Caughell
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Gordon H. Munk
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 25, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. members, today is the fifth anniversary of the four fallen RCMP members who lost their lives in Mayerthorpe March 3, 2005, and our prayer today will include a moment of silence.

We give thanks for the lives of Your faithful servants who defend the freedoms and values that are a true expression of Your divine intent. We humbly ask Your blessings and grace upon the lives of Canadian police officers and military personnel lost in service to their countrymen.

I would ask you now to observe a moment of silence.

May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured today to introduce the Hon. Michael de Jong, the Attorney General of the province of British Columbia, who also represents the constituency of Abbotsford West. Over the noon hour, which has been my third opportunity to meet with the minister, I had the opportunity to talk to him about the work that we are doing together across western provinces and particularly in B.C. and Alberta on ways to make our communities safer and to ensure that people in our provinces feel more secure. I am pleased today to ask the minister to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 32 of Alberta's brightest and best students. They're visiting us from the East elementary school in Leduc, which is my hometown. They are accompanied by four staff: teachers Roxanne Brayford and Tanya Dukeshire and educational assistants Shelley Hanson and Nikki Lafreniere. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 11 current participants from the municipal internship program. I had a chance to meet with them earlier, and I'm very confident that we have a great group of future municipal administrators. The municipal internship program encourages recent postsecondary graduates to pursue a career in municipal government. The program provides an opportunity to gain first-hand municipal experience. Since 2002, 86 interns have completed the program. This increases the pool of trained, skilled professionals who manage our municipalities.

The municipal interns with us today are Charlotte Nesbit, the city of Camrose; Sean Lee, the town of Beaumont; Darren Reedy, the town of Didsbury; Jared Milne, the town of Morinville; Arlos Crofts, the town of Ponoka; Keith Davis, the town of Raymond; Michelle Neilson, the town of Sylvan Lake; Ian Phillips, municipal district of Foothills and the town of High River; Matthew Kreke, the county of Newell; Meredith Seeton, Vulcan county; Kristen Tuff, county of Wetaskiwin. Mr. Speaker, joining the interns today are four program staff from Municipal Affairs: Wendy Peters, the manager of the internship program; Val Hope, internship adviser; Kristine Jonah, internship adviser; and the other internship adviser, Melanie Wood. These individuals are all seated in the members' gallery today, and I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent of mine, Lori Simon. Ms Simon has had a long interest in the workings of government and also in learning more about the processes and proceedings undertaken during question period in the Legislative Assembly. As her MLA I'm pleased to have her attend today. I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three outstanding social workers who have joined us as we recognize the first week of March as National Social Work Week. We thank all social workers across the province, who work hard to support our children, youth, and families in our communities.

Our guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that each of you rise as I introduce you to the members of the Assembly. We have the executive director and registrar of the Alberta College of Social Workers, Rod Adachi. We also have Line Brunelle, who has her diploma and is currently completing her bachelor of social work. Also, we have Connie Zacharias, who has worked in our department for almost 25 years and is the recipient of the award of excellence from the Alberta College of Social Workers. Well done, Connie. She is joined by her husband, Richard, and her son Shane, who, as he said to me earlier, is very proud of his mom. I'd ask that everyone here please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Shahid Hassan, seated today in the members' gallery. Mr. Hassan is president of the Bangladesh Canada Association of Edmonton. This past weekend I was honoured to join the association in celebrating International Mother Language Day at the Pleasantview community hall along with 400 other Albertans. For those who do not know, International Mother Language Day was declared by UNESCO in 1999 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity as well as multilingualism. I think we can all appreciate the importance of our own mother languages in shaping ourselves, our families, and our communities. I would like to thank Shahid Hassan for continuing to champion this important work. At this time I ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly seven members from the Harmony Dialogue Group in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder. They're a hard-working nonprofit organization that focuses on intercultural understanding through volunteer-powered events. They were here today to distribute Noah's pudding in the lower rotunda. I'll discuss a little more about this group in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would like the members to rise as I introduce them: Mr. Ibrahim Cin, the executive director; Dr. Fatih Dogan and Mr. Taner Tunali, board members; and the four other members of the Harmony Dialogue Group that are here with them as well. I'd ask you to receive the traditional warm greetings of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a new and unique facility in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. This facility has provided services since November and opened its doors officially in January. I met some of the staff and asked them to please come down and be introduced. I'll be doing a member's statement later to talk about the facility, but what we're talking about is the new Today Family Violence Help Centre. With us we have Patrick Dillon, who is the executive director. Please rise, Patrick. As well, Megan Davies has joined us. She is a resource worker at this wonderful new centre. Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Fallen Four in Memoriam

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mark a tragic anniversary and a dark day in the history of our province, the day we lost four RCMP members near the town of Mayerthorpe. Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, Anthony Gordon, and Leo Johnston tragically lost their lives in the line of duty on March 3, 2005. I think we all remember the moment when we heard of the shocking events on that day. Their deaths and those of all police and peace officers who perished in the line of duty are a national tragedy. Albertans, indeed all Canadians, continue to mourn their loss.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, police and peace officers play an important role in our daily lives here in Alberta and across Canada. They uphold the laws of our land, protect our families, keep our communities and neighbourhoods safe. Every day they leave for work never knowing what they will encounter in the line of duty. The deaths of these four officers remind us of the risks that all police officers face while carrying out their duties.

So many people were touched by this senseless tragedy, Mr. Speaker. Five years later the pain and grief are still with us. These four members deserve our deepest gratitude for their sacrifice. Today I hope we all honour the memories of Peter, Brock, Anthony, and Leo. On behalf of a grateful province I extend our deepest sympathies to their families, friends, and colleagues, who continue to live with the loss. They will forever be remembered for their courage and bravery.

I ask all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, to remember these four men and all of the peace and police officers who gave the ultimate sacrifice in service to their communities, their province, and their fellow citizens. May God grant them all eternal rest.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General has spoken with eloquence and sincerity on an issue that deeply touches Albertans. I want to thank him for honouring the four fallen officers and the men and women who risk their lives on behalf of each of us every day. Well said, hon. Minister.

As a person whose life has been directly affected by crime and violence, I have the deepest appreciation and respect for police officers. I understand the risks they face every day, the sacrifices they make to protect our lives and our values. Canadians value law and order very highly. It's part of our national culture. Whereas the opening up of the American frontier has been characterized as a chaotic Wild West, we took a different route, sending out the North West Mounted Police first to ensure that the law and peace were upheld and respected even before European settlers made their way across the prairies.

Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, Anthony Gordon, and Leo Johnston were following that proud tradition when they were senselessly murdered. There are no words that can ever heal the pain of this tragedy, but I hope that their loved ones can take some solace in the deeply felt regrets and compassion that all Albertans felt and continue to feel surrounding this terrible incident.

In many ways the men and women of the RCMP and our other police and peace services are ordinary people – husbands, wives, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, parents – but in one particular way they are truly extraordinary. For the sake of the safety of their fellow Canadians they risk everything every day. Sometimes, as in Mayerthorpe five years ago, they pay a terrible price for their altruism.

Thank you, Peter. Thank you, Brock. Thank you, Anthony. Thank you, Leo. For your sacrifice we are eternally grateful. May your friends, families, in fact all Albertans take comfort in the knowledge that your sacrifice was not in vain, but it was in order to uphold the highest ideals of our civilization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that additional members would want to make comment today with respect to this very tragic anniversary. I'll ask one question: does any member object to additional members participating? If you do object, just simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many Albertans and Canadians March 3, 2005, will always be remembered as a dark day in our history. The shocking news immediately made headlines around the world and would go down in history as Canada's worst police killing. Constables Brock Myrol, 29; Anthony Gordon, 28; Leo Johnston, 32; and Peter Schiemann, 25, were doing what they loved and what they were sworn to do when joining the RCMP, which was to ensure the safety and security of the people who lived in their community. These brave men will always be remembered for their dedication, their determination, their valour, their gallantry, and the sacrifice they made to protect the citizens that they were sworn to protect. As a former Solicitor General I had the opportu-

nity to travel the province and meet many of these brave men and women of the RCMP. They are truly among Alberta's and Canada's finest.

Today we honour the lives of the Fallen Four RCMP constables and extend our thoughts and our prayers to their loved ones as the fifth anniversary of their deaths approaches.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to take this opportunity to again express my condolences to the family of Leo Johnston, Anthony Gordon, Peter Schiemann, and Brock Myrol on the fifth anniversary of their deaths near Mayerthorpe. March 3, 2005, is a painful memory for the loved ones of those four RCMP constables, the people of Mayerthorpe and its area, and all Albertans. It serves as a reminder of the dangers that people in uniform face. They accept a duty to uphold the law and protect all of us, and sometimes the price they pay is extremely high. Law enforcement in Alberta had never experienced a tragedy of this scale, and we are all united in the hope that we will never see anything like it again.

The Fallen Four Memorial Park in Mayerthorpe is evidence of the community's dedication to preserving the memory of these individuals. It also shows the determination of the people of Mayerthorpe to move beyond their grief and celebrate the lives of these four men, something many Albertans will be reflecting on in the coming days.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and the House for this opportunity.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank all those that have so caringly expressed their condolences to the families. Not just the families but the communities of Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt suffered a sincere loss. Next week in Mayerthorpe on March 3 at 7 o'clock at the Fallen Four memorial site there will be a ceremony. I wish to extend an invitation to any one of you that would like to attend on behalf of their constituencies to attend this event with me.

Thank you, sir.

Members' Statements

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

Harmony Dialogue Group

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk a little more about the Harmony Dialogue Group, that I just introduced. They came to the Legislature today to distribute Noah's pudding for Ashurah, an important day of observance for many Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Ashurah falls on the 10th day of the month of Muharram in the Islamic lunar calendar. Noah's pudding is a healthy dessert filled with nuts and fruits, and I hope that many of my colleagues had a chance to taste this pudding first-hand today because it was very good.

In the Turkish culture this pudding commemorates the Biblical story of the landing of Noah's ark. They believe that towards the end Noah was running low on rations and cooked this dish from whatever happened to be left over. They distribute this dish each year to members of their community through churches, schools, and other organizations to raise awareness about harmony within the community.

The Harmony Dialogue Group has sister organizations in major cities like Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Melbourne, as well as in many other countries around the world. The motto for this group is From Dialogue through Hospitality to Friendship. They believe that we can all exist together despite our differences in backgrounds and cultures. By sharing their pudding, the Harmony Dialogue Group encourages involvement, participation, understanding, acceptance, and co-operation in and amongst communities and organizations. It is their hope that together we can find a dialogue that helps to make the connections between communities stronger.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

PDD Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the House the Premier was asked questions that came directly from guests in the gallery. The Premier was dismissive and perhaps disrespectful of the guests by not answering their questions. Today we ask the Premier to do the right thing and provide real answers, that the guests were seeking. To the Premier. The Seniors budget shows \$119 million allocated to supports for the delivery system. What does this money pay for, and why is there such a large difference in how this is allocated across six PDD regions?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have provision for discussion of estimates. All departments are bringing their estimates forward. I believe the opposition has close to two hours on each department to ask these questions. The ministers are able to provide specifics to every line item in that budget.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, another question from yesterday: why is \$915,000 going to board governance when the board members are typically volunteers? Why is there such a large difference in this spending between the six regions?

Mr. Stelmach: A very good question. We'll find out during the estimates why the discrepancy, and if there are some boards that are charging more for their input as board members than others, then we want to know about it. If some are doing that on a volunteer basis, we certainly commend them and will try and find out why other boards aren't doing it.

Dr. Swann: Well, since Seniors is already done, Mr. Speaker, I guess I would ask a third question to the Premier. The minister of seniors stated that the PDD budget will not be increased but that any efficiency savings that come from her department would be directed to front-line staff. How much will need to be found in efficiencies to accommodate PDD caseloads, that are increasing by 50 to 100 per year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the overall support for the vulnerable has increased in the budget, but the question I would have to the hon. member is: why is it that the good questions have now come from those that offered those questions and not from members across the House? Now he's saying that we've already done the estimates and that we can't ask those questions. I would say: put those questions all in writing, and the minister will give detail to every question.

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

Municipal Sustainability Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to talk up its municipal sustainability funding. In fact, in press releases it's claiming that the municipal sustainability initiative will be maintained over time, but this program is now being stretched out far beyond the original number of years. Again to the Premier: given that the government is providing less each year than was agreed upon when the MSI was signed three years ago, why is the government claiming in press releases that funding has actually increased?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to \$11.3 billion over 10 years. Given this economic downturn I spoke very honestly in open dialogue with municipalities and said: "Look, we can't dip even further into savings than we have already to date to sustain municipal funding. Would you be open to stretching that 10-year period another year or two?" All municipalities agree that that's the way to go. They appreciate the funding. Notwithstanding the fact that it isn't as much as what they thought they were going to receive in the original plan, it is still much more than any other province supports their municipalities anywhere in the country of Canada.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the question was: why is the government claiming to be increasing the funding?

Mr. Stelmach: Municipalities are receiving today more for infrastructure than back in 2007. That's very clear.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the original deal promised to stretch out over 10 years, but now the money is going to be stretched over more, so less money each year. Does the Premier accept that his government broke its word again to municipalities in the province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're working in partnership with municipalities.

The other thing is that we are receiving some very, very, very good tenders on infrastructure in the province, whether it be the building of roads, replacement of water or sewer, improvements to infrastructure no matter where we are in the province of Alberta, sometimes with as much as 40 per cent savings. So there may be less going this year in terms of some very specific grants, but on the other hand we're getting a very good buy for the money that we're investing in infrastructure. I would say that most municipalities said that it more than equals what they've seen in reduction in their municipal funding.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with the third Official Opposition main question.

Cabinet Policy Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When asked about appointments to cabinet policy committees on Tuesday, it was stated that members were paid according to order in council, but that wasn't the question. The question was: how are Conservative members appointed? The Legislative Assembly Act states that to be paid for committee work, members must be appointed by order in council, by regulation, or ministerial order. To the Premier: since we know the appointments were not made by order in council, how did the Premier appoint all 69 Conservative members to the cabinet policy committees without violating the Legislative Assembly Act?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the other day the member asked for a copy of the order in council. Unfortunately, I didn't bring it with me here today, but I believe that order in council was issued close to two years ago. It's public. For all orders in council, as soon as they're signed, copies are left with all members of the media. I know the media has them, and we'll make sure that a copy is given to the opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the Premier is confused and does not understand. We're not after the order in council that set up the fee schedule for the committee work. We are after the order in council, if it does exist, for the appointments to the five cabinet policy committees that you set up so that each and every Conservative MLA last year received \$1.4 million. Show us that order in council, or you're in violation of the act.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. Each member did not receive \$1.4 million. You know, one day we don't have an order in council, and today we do have an order in council. All members were appointed to CPC through ministerial order. The order in council gave, very publicly, the rate of pay to those members.

Mr. MacDonald: He's digging himself in deeper, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the Premier. If what the Premier stated on Tuesday is true, that the cabinet policy committees are "not committees of the Legislature," why does the order in council or the ministerial order that sets out the fee schedule for these committees fall under the authority of the Legislative Assembly Act, specifically section 37? Are you not violating that section?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this is almost a point of privilege at this stage.

An Hon. Member: He needs a lawyer.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member is not entitled to ask for legal advice, but he probably should get legal advice if he can't even read section 37 of the Legislative Assembly Act, which allows for the payment of members in a number of different circumstances. One of the ways that Members of the Legislative Assembly are paid is pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the allocations under the Members' Services Committee. Another way that Members of the Legislative Assembly are paid is if they take on other responsibilities. Some serve as members of Executive Council, some serve as members of cabinet policy committees, as an example, and some in the past have served as members of agencies, boards, and commissions, and the Legislative Assembly Act specifically allows and provides for that.

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

Royalty Framework

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under previous leadership the government could actually brag that Alberta was the best place to do business. We had low taxes, an economy that was firing on all cylinders, and we had a balanced budget. Today that has been eroded by this government and this Premier. We condemned this government's decision to increase royalties and undermine the confidence of people wanting to invest in Alberta. To the Premier: what compelled him to destroy investors' confidence in Alberta and make our oil and gas industry the most uncompetitive in Canada?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have seen record investments in the oil sands over the last couple of years.

With respect to the issue on natural gas there has been a significant play now in shale gas not only in British Columbia and Saskatchewan but in various states in the United States. In fact, indeed, according to the latest *The Economist* thousands of trillions of cubic feet of shale gas could be found in countries around the world. There are significant pressures, and that's why we introduced Bill 1, the Competitiveness Act, and I encourage all members to actively participate in the debate.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has a predictable pattern. They make bad decisions and then refuse to recognize that they are responsible for the consequences. When this government plowed ahead with changes to the royalty, it ignored industry concerns, dismissed opinions from the investment community, ignored pleas from small communities across Alberta, and refused to change course even when its own members and our party pointed out the problems. To the Premier: why did he want to tax our oil and gas industry out of Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the royalty and all of the other issues related to competitiveness are overarching in terms of the oil and gas industry, agriculture, forestry, and also tourism. That's why we're looking at competitiveness in all the fields, coming forward with measurements to make sure that we're the most innovative and competitive economy in North America. We are going to get there. We'll have to make adjustments. There's a huge global economic shift, and there's huge competition amongst countries for not only investment but for people as well.

2:00

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Premier, your decision for the new royalty framework will go down in history as the most draconian and worst decision ever made by a Premier of this province. Albertans have never forgiven Trudeau and the Liberals for the national energy program, and they'll never forgive you for your new royalty framework.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Alberta's Showcase at 2010 Winter Olympics

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Olympics have been going on for some time now in Vancouver and have generated a lot of excitement and interest in winter sports. We want to wish all our Canadian athletes the very best. The world's attention has been on Canada, and this has created a perfect opportunity for Albertans to promote our province and our products.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that Monday was an important day for Alberta food products at the Olympics. My question to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: what was involved in that day, and how were you able to promote Alberta's food products?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, Monday was Alberta food day at the Olympics in Vancouver. We have over 20 producers and processors of Alberta food products in the province that provided food for the Olympic experience, and food writers from around the globe were invited to sample Alberta's offerings on

Monday along with members of the public at Alberta House. It was an unbelievable experience, and there was nothing left on the plates. I'm sure they enjoyed the experience.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can speak from experience. I was there a couple of weeks ago, and the food was good at Alberta House.

An Hon. Member: Who paid for it?

Mr. Prins: I paid for it.

My second question is to the same minister. What other efforts are being made to showcase our agricultural products in Vancouver?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a great opportunity for Albertans to showcase how proud they are not only of their province but of their country because many people, of course, don't speak that way. Over the Olympic experience 18,000 to 20,000 people from around the world will taste what Alberta has to offer. That's our future for our second-largest industry and our largest sustainable industry and renewable industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: has our presence at the Olympics opened any doors for expanding our markets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we've had opportunities to meet with a number of people in the food industry that are already exporting products into other countries and want to locate in Alberta and want to add employment and want to further export products and increase our market share.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Bitumen Upgrading

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how I'm going to follow that, but I'll try.

Today we learned of another move by oil sands companies to limit the amount of bitumen being upgraded here in the province of Alberta. We need this value-added industry. We need the jobs and the taxes that it brings, and we need the industrial by-products that it makes. To the Minister of Energy: does the minister accept that this cutback and others like it are a serious blow to maintaining a substantial upgrading industry in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I've stated in the House before, Mr. Speaker, these are business decisions, and they're made on the basis of whether or not they're economically profitable. Ideally, obviously, Alberta would like to have more upgrader capacity in Alberta, but when the margin is very narrow, you're not likely to encourage private-sector investment in that business.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government keeps talking about bitumen royalties in kind, but these kinds of shifts indicate that that's not going to keep a very large proportion of bitumen here in Alberta, so I'd like to know from the minister what's next. What else does the minister have to use because the bitumen royalty in kind program seems clearly not to be enough?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I don't agree with the member, Mr. Speaker. The bitumen royalty in kind is a very important program that's been introduced by our government. We believe over time that that will be a very wise decision. As production ramps up, there are opportunities for increased bitumen for the people of Alberta. As you know, we have a proposal out there right now for an upgrader to upgrade the Alberta portion of the BRIK program, and I think that's going to be, if we look back 10 years from now, a very important decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While we wait for the government to act, long-term decisions are getting finalized by industry. I understand the proposal is out there. We need some time, but time matters. So how long do Albertans have to wait before the minister starts to push other means of adding value here in the province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, I don't agree with the preamble, Mr. Speaker. The impression was left that somehow Alberta is not coming forward with initiatives. The BRIK initiative is a clear indication of what we're prepared to do to ensure that Albertans going forward have the opportunity to benefit from upgraded bitumen in this province, and we'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Cabinet Travel to the 2010 Winter Olympics

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a very large Alberta presence at the Vancouver Olympic Games, and I'm not just talking about curlers like Kevin Martin or Cheryl Bernard or a hockey player like Jarome Iginla. We've got the Alberta express, we've got Alberta House, and of course attendance by a number of cabinet ministers. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Mr. Minister, are there some real benefits that I can tell my constituents about, or are we just being good neighbours?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much for the question. I was one of the cabinet ministers that attended the Olympic Games in my capacity as minister responsible for the Francophone Secretariat. While I was there, I met many francophone leaders across the country, including the secretary general of the international francophonie organization, the Premier of Quebec, my colleagues from the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie.

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjections] Hon. member, you have the floor.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents from the town of Beaumont would be quite interested to find out why the minister is working so hard on francophone issues at the Olympics.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the bilingual nature of the games makes it an ideal opportunity to promote Alberta's francophone culture internationally. We were joined by other provinces and territories to participate in initiatives like the Canadian Francophonie Day and the Cultural Olympiad. In fact, Prime Minister Harper's personal envoy on official languages at the games praised Alberta's presence there, and he recognized the participation of Franco-Albertan artists at Alberta House.

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjections] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Mr. Minister, I understand that one of your meetings included the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General for B.C. Could you expand on those meetings?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware . . . [interjections] Thank you. Thank you. As you are aware, Alberta and B.C. co-operate very, very closely during times of crisis or emergencies. As an example, Alberta is the primary source for co-ordinating a response to major earthquakes in B.C. I took advantage of the time there to discuss other issues, the best practices that we have when it comes to law enforcement, forest firefighting.

Energy Efficiency

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. I didn't know that it was puffball day. [interjections] I didn't know. I didn't get the memo.

Energy efficiency is an essential step towards achieving Alberta's emission targets and the most effective means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from a cost perspective. Guys, it's low-hanging fruit. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister include a minimum standard of EnerGuide 80 for all new home construction going forward into the energy efficiency legislation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the words of the member opposite, it's puffball day. I'll hit one out of the park for her. The issue is not for the Minister of Environment to make that decision. I advise the minister responsible, who is the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

2:10

Ms Blakeman: You're supposed to be guiding this government in environmental policy.

Question 2 to the same minister: given that energy efficiency in homes increases property values while significantly benefiting our environment, will the minister include mandatory third-party energy efficiency labelling of new homes in the energy efficiency legislation or talk to his friend about it?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a myriad of opportunities that we have to incent and enhance the degree of energy efficiency. That is the responsibility and the role of the Minister of Environment, to point those opportunities out; in fact, to urge caucus to adopt those. But I think it would be presumptuous in the extreme for me to tell this member that I can promise something that is not within my jurisdiction to implement.

Ms Blakeman: Well, why doesn't the minister share with us exactly what he is doing to get his colleague to implement this legislation? There's a puffball for you. Go ahead. Hit it out of the park.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we have initiated an interdepartmental committee that is responsible for reviewing all things related to the

building code and other matters with respect to energy efficiency. That will then drive towards a recommendation that comes forward not only from Environment but from Municipal Affairs, from other ministries, not the least of which is Treasury Board because some of this will involve public dollars. At that point in time we will make a decision, and I'll be more than happy to advise the member what it is.

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

Children and Youth Services Workforce

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we heard during the introduction of guests this afternoon, next week is National Social Work Week. Social workers are extremely important members of our communities. Many of them work to help keep children and youth safe and to ensure that families have access to the supports and services that they need to build on their strengths and overcome their challenges. My first question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I know that government currently has a hiring restraint in place. What assurances can you provide that your ministry is making sure there continue to be the social workers that are needed to serve vulnerable children and families in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know this is a concern of this member. She has spoken with me directly about it, and the member is correct. We have hundreds of social workers that work within our department. They are providing excellent service. I want to assure you, hon. member, that any hiring restraint that you're referring to, the critical front-line positions are going to be filled. My expectation, as I've told you earlier as well, is that any front-line position that becomes vacant will be filled.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second question to the same minister: what initiatives does your ministry have under way to ensure that front-line workers, as you mentioned, including social workers, are able to manage their workloads in a way that allows them to give each child and family they work with the attention that they do need?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say once again that we have great respect for the good work that's being done by our staff on the front line. Staff have brought a very real concern to our attention that relates to workload. That's the extra, it seems like, huge volume of paperwork that they're needing to fill out. How we've addressed that is that we've had staff work with management. They've developed a new software system so that they can manage not only the paperwork but their workload. That's known as the new Intervention Services Information System – you'll be hearing more about that – that's called ISIS.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's very good news.

My final question to the same minister. According to documents released when the budget was announced, there will be a reduction of more than 50 full-time positions at the Ministry of Children and

Youth Services. Could the minister please tell which staff are being laid off and how many of these staff are front-line workers?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I have had this discussion with the hon. member as well, and I've made it very clear that we are not laying off any staff as a result of the budget. Any reduction that was reported in the budget will be achieved through attrition, and front-line positions that are critical to supporting vulnerable children and families, hon. member, will continue to be filled.

Number of Provincial Constituencies

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes to Alberta's electoral boundaries provide further evidence that the growing pains that we are experiencing in this great province are very real and very evident. The current provincial budget frequently incorporates the term "finding efficiencies." How about this efficiency: keep Alberta's Legislature at 83 seats and save millions. Will the minister consent to doing this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the boundaries commission has provided a report reflecting the current state of the legislation in Alberta. There's much time for public comment, and I'll look forward to what the result might be in the future.

Mr. Hehr: Well, regarding public comment much of that has already been made to the commission. It was noted in the report that many Albertans really don't want another four MLAs. So how about following the first rule of democracy, listening to these people and not incorporating these four MLAs?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Legislation

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, the first rule of democracy is to uphold the laws of the province of Alberta. This Assembly has passed a piece of legislation mandating 87 electoral divisions. Is the hon. member asking the Minister of Justice to not observe the law, to break the law?

I'm sorry. You're going on to your third question, please.

Number of Provincial Constituencies (continued)

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Here's my third question, then. If that is in fact true, can we put forward some new legislation, then, to keep it at 83 seats so that we don't have another four?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Legislature is open for public business, and if the member wants to introduce legislation, he's certainly entitled to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Sour Gas Well Safety

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it certainly is Thursday.

As we speak, a gas well in northern Alberta is on fire, threatening the health and safety of people who live nearby. A 1982 fire at

another site killed two people and created a toxic cloud so thick that it hung over Edmonton for weeks. Sour gas wells are a constant threat to those who live around them, and this government is ignoring the threat. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Why is your government putting Albertans' health at risk by ignoring the threats posed by sour gas?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, this particular member in raising the question the way he did is, I would say, irresponsible at best. We have got one of the world-renowned agencies, the Energy Resources Conservation Board, on-site with seven monitoring units which say that there is zero odour. Zero. It is not sour gas. There is no sour gas being detected in the area. So I would suggest that the member might want to tone down his rhetoric and ask a responsible question, and I'll try and give him a responsible answer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, deflecting responsibility onto the ERCB is a cop-out. That body is an industry lapdog designed to approve and expedite requests from the oil and gas industry. The fact is that this well could have been a sour gas well, and technically it was expected to be. [interjections] Laugh all you want, but there are sour gas wells affecting thousands and thousands of Albertans all around this province. They're dangerous to their health, and the government is doing nothing about it. Why doesn't the minister simply admit that they don't care about the health and safety of those Albertans because they just keep putting . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I won't admit it because it's absolutely false.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, all over the province sour gas wells cause fear and anxiety among families who live nearby. They have sour gas wells in both Edmonton and Calgary in residential areas. People are bombarded with the smell of hydrogen sulphide every day. Even small levels over time can lead to major health problems. Albertans should not be forced to live with these fears because the government will not stand up to industry. Why won't this government end the approval of sour gas wells that are in close proximity to the homes where Albertans raise their families?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this member in raising his first question said that it must be Thursday, and he's right. It absolutely is Thursday. I think that is best exemplified by the absolute baloney in the preamble to his question.

2:20

Integrated Traffic Units

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, who didn't get to go to the Olympics. Recently the minister announced that Alberta traffic sheriffs and RCMP traffic services would be integrated into new traffic units in 19 locations throughout the province. This new model is based on pilot projects held in 2009 in Whitecourt, Airdrie, Wetaskiwin, and Olds. I'm somewhat puzzled to see that the units are being established in Innisfail when right next door in Red Deer another unit is stationed and the next one located south in Airdrie. My question to the Solicitor General is: would it not be more feasible to have a more central location between Red Deer and Airdrie such as Didsbury or Olds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I did not get to go to the Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to 19 integrated sheriff and RCMP traffic units that are going to be deployed across our province. Of particular note, four of those units, based in Leduc, Ponoka, Innisfail, and Airdrie, are dedicated to freeway traffic in the QE II corridor, and they are reasonably spaced along that corridor.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister: who made the decision on where to locate these traffic units?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, that was and is a decision best left to the people that plan such things, the operational officers involved, in this case the integrated planning team between the RCMP and the sheriffs.

Mr. Marz: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that a more central location could save on things like fuel costs as well as improve the response times to accidents on the QE II between those locations. Were these issues not considered in this decision?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I believe all factors were looked at in the decision-making process. We had to consider traffic volumes, collision data, and areas with the greatest number of highways and roadways. If I could refer the hon. member to my first answer, those four traffic divisions dedicated to the freeway corridor are reasonably well spaced along it.

Thank you.

Nortel Pension Protection

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, world-wide economic conditions have impacted all Canadians, but they've had dire consequences for a group of former Nortel employees living in Alberta whose LTD and pension benefits were cut off when Nortel collapsed. To add insult to injury, the federal government permitted the sale of Nortel's assets without guaranteeing employee compensation as a precondition. To our EI minister. Ontario is the only province with a pension benefits guarantee fund that's funded entirely by corporate contributions. Will the minister commit to similar measures in this province to protect vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always horrible when a situation like this occurs and workers and their families are left without income.

I have to say two things. Number one, it's very rare for it to occur in Alberta. I must say that my provincial counterparts as early as the beginning of this week have raised this issue at our federal-provincial-territorial meeting to the federal minister. It is squarely a federal matter, so if there is any provincial overlay, I would suggest the member direct his subsequent two questions to our minister of finance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To whoever wishes to answer, I am pleased to hear that these discussions are occurring. The effect is going to be felt in Alberta because we'll be picking up the pieces. Since Nortel's bankruptcy proceedings began, what efforts has the ministry

made to ensure that the federal government amends the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide protection for employees affected by corporate bankruptcy? The hon. minister of finance would be fine.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I would have assumed the hon. member would know, both of Nortel's pension plans are registered in Ontario and regulated by the Ontario superintendent of pensions. That's because of their location of Ontario. There is a federal dimension as well. We have been in touch, as the other minister has indicated, with the feds, but this is largely outside of our jurisdiction.

Mr. Chase: What I'm hoping is that this government will stand up for Alberta's former Nortel employees who are being directly affected by the bankruptcy. It's our problem now, and working with the feds is part of the solution, but we have to come up with a made-in-Alberta solution as well.

Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government has promised former Nortel employees that the first \$1,000 of their monthly pension payments will be guaranteed, and Quebec offered some pension protection to Nortel retirees in October of 2009 . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Dr. Morton: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising that Ontario has done this since both of the Nortel pension plans are registered in Ontario and regulated by Ontario. I would tell the hon. member and the House that the Alberta superintendent is consulting with Alberta Justice currently as to whether or not we would have the opportunity to intervene in the March 3 hearing about the Nortel settlement and, if we can, to possibly object to that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Inner-city Urban Renewal

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Increased density; increased diversity, including a growing immigrant population and an urban aboriginal population; increased crime levels; decreased home ownership; aging infrastructure; closure of schools; increased commuter traffic; increased property taxes; and a congregation of social facilities are all problems that are facing the urban inner-city communities in my constituency. Does the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs have a strategy in place to address the need for urban renewal and revitalization as a result of these changes in our inner-city communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question. I particularly appreciate it given the fact that I also represent an inner-city community. One such strategy that we employ is the capital grant program. This creates partnerships with nonprofits, municipalities, and the private sector as well as other levels of government and also stakeholder engagement. Both of these types of plans ensure that there is always local input in any decisions that we make. They also cost less money than if the government would simply do it alone.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Urban areas may very well benefit from a program similar to the rural development fund, which focuses on both physical capital and building a sense of community. As well, the state of Idaho has an urban renewal law, which assigns powers to urban renewal agencies. My next question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Do you see any potential for allocating issue-based funding and decision-making powers to collaborative partnerships, that include certain municipalities such as Calgary and Edmonton, various provincial ministries, and community-based organizations, for urban renewal?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta the responsibility for urban renewal rests with the individual municipalities. These municipalities are required to give notice of intention to prepare plans and provide opportunities for input. The level of involvement between the municipality and the community group is virtually at the discretion of that individual municipality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. The second part of his ministry's mission is to assist urban communities in addressing their unique needs. My question is: will he commit to this Assembly to advocating amongst his cabinet colleagues for greater awareness about the challenges of urban inner-city communities before these communities lose hope?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member raises an important point, the fact that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. What may work for his inner-city community may not work for mine. That's why, again, we are going through these partnerships with the local areas here.

A couple of weeks ago I attended phase 1 of the Boyle Street renaissance in Edmonton. That's a great example of partnerships that revitalize the community. We look at neighbourhood renewal, but again it's on an individual, case-by-case basis, realizing that one size does not fit all.

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

Food Production Land Use

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I didn't get a chance to go to the Olympics either.

This week the Edmonton city council passed their municipal development plan, which included a section on food and urban agriculture. The local food industry has a significant impact on the economy, environment, social, and cultural growth in urban areas. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Sustainable food systems will be a defining aspect of our urban areas in the future. Has the minister incorporated this into long . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you can proceed.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed pleased that the member opposite is such a supporter of the local food industry because, of course, it's hugely important to our province's economy.

It is one area of agriculture that we've seen the greatest increase, 30 per cent, in our farmers' markets over the past couple of years. The products and the variety that they're producing and that they're showcasing around the world now are available right here in Alberta, and I hope people take advantage.

Ms Pastoor: The expansion of urban areas has led to dramatic losses of prime agricultural land, yet this is not the focus in the land-use framework. What is the minister doing to address this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I recall rightly, I believe about 4 to 5 per cent of the provincial land base is urban settings. Unfortunately, one of the problems with that is that around these centres is some of the best soil that we have in our entire province. But the markets continue to increase around our urban centres for products and things that are being brought in, so people can do that shopping within a hundred kilometres.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. That's the urban side of it, but I still think we have to protect our agricultural land. Will the minister introduce initiatives to encourage municipalities to include food and urban agriculture as a central aspect of the development plans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a past municipal politician I would expect that the member opposite would understand that land-use issues are issues that are at the local level. It's their responsibility. I expect that they do very much consider at their tables the highest and best use for land and try to make their decisions based on good information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Immigrant Nominee Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Mr. Minister, funding for the immigration program has dropped substantially this year. Is this government abandoning its commitment to bringing new immigrants to this province and to programs like AINP?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it is true that funding in that line item has dropped in my budget from \$74 million to \$65 million but mostly because of the fact that there was one-time federal funding of \$6 million in that budget line, which is no longer available. Let me be clear to the member: immigrants have played a vital role in not only the social but the economic development of this province since 1905, and they will continue to play an important role.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. Even with one-time funding it still looks like there's a budget reduction. What are you cutting, and how will it impact our ability to get the people we need?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, naturally in this economic climate there is a lowered requirement for foreign workers, be it trained, skilled, or unskilled, so our department will not be as active on the foreign markets assisting employers in attracting workers to this province. However, having said that, we will continue Alberta's presence in foreign markets because I and my colleagues in cabinet are optimistic. We know that the economy will recover, and we will continue to need immigrants in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what about programs for immigrants who are already here? Can they be confident that they will continue to be supported?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, they can be very confident. We will continue to focus our efforts on the settlement of immigrants who are already here. For instance, programs like English as a second language will continue to be offered in various modes. Some 17,000 clients, immigrants, will be receiving those programs in Edmonton and Calgary alone. The settlement of immigrants right now will become one of our focuses while we still keep active in foreign markets but at a reduced level.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Royalty Framework (continued)

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In estimates last week I asked the Minister of Energy whether he thought a recent survey of businesses which found Alberta to be the least competitive place in Canada for oil and gas development was fair. The minister replied that because the report was from the small "c" conservative Fraser Institute, it was likely skewed. Well, yesterday the University of Calgary released their report stating that Alberta is, indeed, the least competitive place in Canada to produce oil and gas. To the Energy minister: will he now admit that the new royalty framework has been a disastrous policy for this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did read the report by Dr. Mintz. We accept advice wherever we can get advice. Dr. Mintz has made some observations, and as part of our competitiveness review strategy in compiling information, we will certainly use that analysis. What we're doing is much more comprehensive than what the report was yesterday, but we will take that information.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that this government always wants to move forward; they don't want to look to the past. Well, the past is useful for learning what mistakes to avoid in the future, which is why I find it distressing that the government didn't learn from Pierre Elliott Trudeau's national energy program. They don't understand that when they attack the energy business, regular Albertans suffer. To the minister: why is it taking this government so long to reverse its made-in-Alberta national energy policy? Let's move forward.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to move forward, and we are moving forward. You know, as I pointed out in this House one time – and the member may not have been here because it might have been before he was elected. You know, there's a country music song, *No Future in the Past*. I think that's where the member might be living. We are moving forward and look forward to the report.

Mr. Anderson: Well, he can tell that to my family and friends who are still looking for work in the energy sector thanks to this government's ridiculous energy decision.

One of the bewildering things I can't get my head around to this day is why on earth this government would call a competitiveness review and consult with industry after announcing the royalty framework overhaul. To the minister: why didn't this government ask the energy industry for input first, before making such an extreme policy decision involving our most important industry? How could it be so incompetent?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member is trying to leave the impression that somehow this is Saskatchewan in the '70s. As the Premier pointed out earlier in a response to a question from his equally ill-informed colleague sitting next to him there, there is large investment going on in this province today, lots of it in the oil sands. You know, in the last month we have had literally record land sales. That is confidence in this economy, in conventional oil and gas.

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

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of the past, in 1974 my father stood in this House and raised concerns that wildfowl were dying on the tailings ponds. Thirty-six years later these tailings lakes have grown to 50 times their original size. The minister's answer for the existing ponds is: this will take some time. Will the minister admit that the time for politely asking for cleanup has long passed and it's time to use your full authority to actually make it happen?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. We've issued directives, that will be enforced, that will require significant reductions in the use of tailings ponds and eventually will lead to their elimination.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the existing projects are not complying with the government's performance criteria at this point. Now, next week is the start of the trial against Syncrude for their role in the death of over 1,600 ducks on their tailings lake, and of course we know this is only a fraction of the devastation experienced by wildlife as a result of these toxic lakes. How can the minister stand by while companies continue to lakefill dangerous chemical waste without imposing any consequences?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we do not stand by. I just advised the member that we have in fact issued directives that will lead to the elimination of tailings ponds. But this member seems to live in a world where you can suddenly make a decision today and change 25 years of history by tomorrow. It takes time.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would have been really nice if they'd made a decision 36 years ago because that's when they were

first warned. Now when asked to do the right thing, all they say is: eventually it will happen. I'm going to ask a clear question asking for a clear timeline, and I hope I can get a clear answer because I really don't want my kids to be having to ask this question 36 years from now. Will this government commit to eliminating the existing lakes of poison sludge within 20 years and to exercising all authority necessary to make sure it happens?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, when someone frames a question with such broad parameters and then wants a yes or no answer, it's about impossible to do so. The fact of the matter is that we have directives in place. There will be significant changes. In fact, I would suggest that within 20 years there will be in place technology that no longer requires tailings ponds. Will the existing ponds be eliminated by then? I cannot predict the future. I guess this member has some kind of power that is beyond me.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today and until March 8, I believe. There were 107 questions and answers today raised by 18 different members, 12 on the Official Opposition and opposition side and six by the private government members' caucus.

We will continue the Routine in 30 seconds from now, but just let me leave you one thought – okay? – please, as you depart in the next 30 seconds. Vancouver is one hour and 10 minutes from the Edmonton International Airport. There is no greater show going on in the world: the Canadian Olympics in Vancouver.

Mr. Boutilier: It's \$69 on WestJet.

The Speaker: The hon. member points out that it's a \$69 airfare. Anybody can go.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to my guests for staying until I could do my member's statement.

Today Violence Help Centre

Ms Blakeman: A collaborative help centre for people impacted by family violence: this short description is on the letterhead of the Today centre, a concise and apt description of the vision and mandate of this new centre in downtown Edmonton. I first heard of this idea when it was a twinkle in the eye of some established NGOs, the Edmonton Police Service, and three levels of government who wanted to take the next step in service delivery in this critical area of family violence. Along with many others I attended the partnership celebration event in January, which let us see what they had been up to since doing a soft opening in November 2009.

This is a community-based centre dedicated to changing the cycle of family violence through co-located staff and linked community services. Their vision is of a healthy community safe and free from family violence. This collaborative community includes the John Howard Society, the Edmonton Police Service, Catholic Social Services, Aboriginal Consulting Services of Alberta, the RCMP, the city of Edmonton community services, and Alberta Children and Youth Services.

These organizations recognize the obstacles of long waiting lists for assistance and financial constraints. They have organized to be easily accessible and to work together to meet the needs of those seeking help regarding domestic violence. I was particularly struck by the space provided for smaller NGOs to come in and work with clients so that a small immigrant women's organization could come and meet their clients there or bring them and, literally, walk them from room to room to connect with the many organizations and services offered there.

The Today centre is striving to increase accountability from those who perpetrate violence, reduce repeat victimization, increase the level of reporting of family violence, enable the active participation of clients in their movement to a safer, healthier life, and reduce the harm caused by violence.

Congratulations to Patrick Dillon and to all of the staff and the agencies who brought this idea to a reality. We welcome you and thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

First Nations Education Agreement

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of us know that a significant academic achievement gap exists between First Nations students and all other students in the province. This is unacceptable. However, yesterday was a great day, a day for celebration because it marked a new beginning for aboriginal education in this province.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Education, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, the previous Minister of Aboriginal Relations, and three grand chiefs of Alberta a memorandum of understanding on First Nations education was signed which has as its goal strengthening, learning, and educational success for First Nations students. This was done at a signing ceremony at the Tsuu T'ina First Nation junior and senior high school west of Calgary.

Perhaps most importantly, Mr. Speaker, this memorandum of understanding signifies that all parties recognize the importance of education to all our children, our families, our community, and the greater society. Every student in Alberta deserves to receive the best possible education regardless of where she or he lives and regardless of his or her background.

This MOU will provide a framework for collaboration and will support a range of education-related initiatives, including parental and community engagement, treaty and cultural awareness, and ongoing work on tuition and education service agreements. It provides a framework to guide the transformation of First Nations education in Alberta.

The key highlights include the establishment of an indigenous knowledge and wisdom centre, which for the first time will create a centre of education expertise for all the First Nations and the three treaty organizations; a commitment to develop a long-term strategic plan for First Nations education in Alberta to improve First Nations student outcomes; and a creation of the Alberta First Nations education circle comprised of senior officials from all parties to oversee the implementation of the MOU. It was a profoundly moving event incorporating the finest of First Nations traditions such as music, dance, oratory, and, of course, food.

The chiefs who were all involved thank you for being leaders. Chief Keenooshayo said: I hope this marks the beginning of a true treaty partnership that, among other things, provides us the opportunity to ensure ever-increasing knowledge for our children. Let's realize his vision.

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

National Social Work Week

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and recognize March 1 to 7 as National Social Work Week. Established by the Canadian Association of Social Workers, this special week honours the valuable contributions of social work professionals and the positive difference they make in the lives of others.

Albertans are aware of and support the critical role social workers have in our province, and they recognize that much of their good work happens behind the scenes. Social workers are heroes in our communities, much like firefighters, police officers, and paramedics. They often deal with complex situations involving vulnerable Albertans, ensuring that children and youth are safe, that people with disabilities receive assistance, and that families get the support they need to stay strong and together.

Each and every day social workers help create a brighter future for the people of this province. They embody the Alberta spirit of compassion, courage, and commitment as well as the Premier's vision of making this province the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Our government is privileged to have many of these skilled and dedicated professionals as employees and as partners.

During National Social Work Week I encourage all Albertans to take the time to show their appreciation and say thanks to social workers in their community. The small effort of saying thank you can have benefits far beyond the value of the moments involved. A thank you can motivate, validate, and give positive reinforcement. We cannot afford to not say thank you frequently and graciously to those who do so much for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Inner-city Communities

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Calgary-North Hill includes a number of established inner-city communities. These communities have a very diverse composition, from new infill owners, renters, and long-term residents to a high proportion of seniors and new families. To say that these communities aren't homogenous is an understatement, and that's what makes them unique. However, many of these communities are struggling to develop an identity as they go through the natural changes of mature communities.

Many of my constituents believe that the identity of their community is changing but not in a positive way. A number of concerns have been sent to my office regarding the siting and development of social facilities such as group homes, rehabilitation and recovery facilities, affordable housing complexes, and shelters. Overwhelmingly my constituents are concerned that their communities are being used as dumping grounds for these facilities without substantial and prior consultation. They're concerned that both the government of Alberta and the city of Calgary are too focused on sacrificing the livability of their communities to address the very real challenges of a growing metropolitan centre.

Mr. Speaker, residents have invested their entire lives in these communities as well as a portion of their savings through paying higher property taxes and deserve a say in how their communities evolve. My communities are committed to supporting our most vulnerable, and we all share in that responsibility equally. We also have the responsibility towards municipalities and communities to ensure that funded projects do not disrupt the established and evolving identity of communities and that funding approvals include

consultation requirements with the communities' elected representatives, officials, and community groups.

Mr. Speaker, these projects will only be successful if the communities that they reside in buy into them. This must be a clear objective of siting these facilities. We strive to have strong communities in this province, and communities are strongest when their residents feel like they have a say and ownership of how the community evolves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

School Closures

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Chronic underfunding of schools is once more leading to plans for school closures in Alberta for the fall of 2010. Some of these are in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Instead of school jurisdictions being able to make decisions on the basis of educational value, they're pushed to make decisions for financial reasons that are bad for the education of our children and youth.

2:50

Excellent facilities have been built in communities like Eastwood, Parkdale, and McCauley here in Edmonton. Excellent, dedicated staff have chosen to work at these schools to assist children to achieve educational success. Formulas imposed by the province make it especially difficult for schools with small enrolments. Yet often these schools are located in mature communities and have more students with higher needs, including children from new immigrant families. These schools often have a strong community atmosphere and provide innovative and effective places where children achieve success. When a nearby school closes and more travel is necessary, students and parents face more obstacles. In more distant, larger schools children face larger classes and a more impersonal environment, adding to their learning challenges.

School closures are mostly happening in old neighbourhoods, which makes municipal revitalization efforts more difficult. One of the most important criteria for a young family in deciding where to live is the proximity of schools. Neighbourhoods that are mature will continue to deteriorate if they do not have schools to attract the next generation to make their homes there.

Two days ago the annual implementation plan from the superintendent of Edmonton public schools was released. It includes a sectoral review which puts 76 schools in established neighbourhoods at risk of closure. Mr. Speaker, this has to stop. Funding education that reduces the chance for lower income children is wrong. Forcing the closure of inner-city schools contributes to urban decay. The Alberta NDP will keep demanding a commitment to education that puts children first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, March 8, 2010, we will deal with Motion for a Return 9.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be here today to speak to the introduction of Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

The amendments were developed in co-operation with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer and in response to the recommendations for improvement made by that office. Bill 7 will update and streamline how provincial elections are prepared for and held. We wanted to ensure that changes would improve the elections process while maintaining the integrity of the elections system, and Bill 7 does that.

Under Bill 7, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer will appoint returning officers instead of asking government to appoint them, making the appointment process less time consuming and eliminating any perception of political involvement.

Bill 7 would also change the process for hiring enumerators. Under Bill 7 returning officers would personally hire enumerators under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer, eliminating the need to get recommendations from constituency associations.

Bill 7 also includes amendments that broaden investigative powers of the Chief Electoral Officer and open advance polls to those who for any reason want or need to vote early. The amendments also give Albertans who are prisoners the right to vote. This amendment is necessary due to a Supreme Court of Canada ruling.

Third-party advertising legislation will also be improved through Bill 7, ensuring that Albertans who wish to engage in political advertising are able to while ensuring that the public can see who is sponsoring the advertising.

In addition, this legislation increases safeguards for the list of electors and updates the type of information voters can present at polling stations.

To keep Alberta up to date with the latest technological advances, Bill 7 provides a mechanism for the Chief Electoral Officer to explore the use of new voting technologies.

Bill 7 does not address fixed election dates or allowing Albertans to vote at any polling place in any electoral division because of the logistical challenges with that.

Leadership campaign financing rules are also not included in Bill 7, Mr. Speaker. I will be asking the chair of the policy field committee on Public Safety and Services and request the committee to initiate a review and make recommendations regarding financial disclosure rules for leadership contestants for political parties.

This legislation deals with fundamental democratic principles, Mr. Speaker. With Bill 7 we have achieved a balance between updated and streamlined processes and maintaining the integrity of the democratic system.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

Bill 203

Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010.

The objective of this bill is to improve transparency of local access fees and franchise fees by creating a standardized methodology for their calculation using a formula that's easy to compare

across jurisdictions. Bill 203 will not impose restrictions on the amount of money that municipalities can generate from these fees nor require them to even impose these fees at all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a memorandum that I have sent to the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services. This memo is indicating that pursuant to Standing Order 52.07 I am requesting that this particular standing committee inquire into and report on the issue of financial disclosure rules for leadership contestants and thus make recommendations for consideration of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table two separate documents, and I have the requisite copies here. One is a good neighbour agreement between the Fresh Start Addictions Centre and the Highland Park Community Association and the Thorncliffe Greenview Community Association regarding a facility that has received provincial funding that will be in place in that community.

The second one is also a good neighbour agreement between the McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association and the Triwood Community Association for a 24-unit apartment building offering affordable housing options for young adults which resides in the Triwood community in my constituency of Calgary-North Hill.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the cover page of an online petition created by an Albertan named Teresa Woo, who is passionate and who is watching us from home right now, as far as I know. When Teresa heard about a possible treatment for multiple sclerosis, she started this petition, and it gained over 10,000 signatures in just a few months. Teresa says: "The people signing this petition are angry and frustrated because our government is not approving this treatment. Those of us with MS are desperate to have this procedure available because if it's a cure or even close, it would be worth it. If we got only half of our mobility back, it is worth a try." The petition can be found by going online at www.gopetition.com and searching for the Zamboni procedure.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today on behalf of constituents, and I have received permission from both to do this. The first is from Diane Brouwer, who lives on 82 Street in our constituency. She would like to see funding maintained to our education programs and system.

And also Rosa Bruno, who lives on 86 Street. She would also like to see education funding be maintained and that there be no cuts whatsoever.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of documents showing how the tailings ponds in northeastern Alberta have grown since the 1970s. The first document is an excerpt from a report published in the *Open Conservation Biology Journal* in 2009, which includes figures on the size of the tailings ponds. The other is a series of satellite images from Environmental Defence Canada. This information relates to the questions of my colleague the representative of Edmonton-Strathcona today.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Edmonton public school board's annual implementation plan for 2010-11, which was made public this week. It shows that many schools in the inner city are in danger of being forced to close as the number of schools in Edmonton's suburbs expand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it being 3 p.m., I must now advise under Standing Order 7(7) that it is 3 p.m., and the daily Routine is deemed to be concluded.

3:00

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. It's going to be interesting. Last night we had a good, frank discussion on this year's budget on the fourth floor in the Annex with the hon. minister of finance. Now we're back here this afternoon with Bill 5 for this current fiscal year, which is ending, and it's sort of the hon. President of the Treasury Board's annual allowance.

Certainly, there are valid reasons for some of these expenditures. The details of those expenditures have been debated and discussed as this bill has gone through the Assembly. Whenever we look at supplementary supply estimates over the last number of years – and this goes back to, certainly, a time when the hon. President of the Treasury Board was occupied at other things – it's startling to realize that in the last 11 years, going back to 1999-2000, the total additional money requested through supplementary supply is \$15 billion. That averages well over \$1 billion, about \$1.3 billion a year over the last 11 years. Ironically, that's the same amount of money, that we know about, that Alberta Health Services has racked up in budget deficits since they were created on the fly.

Now, if one was to look at this province's and this government's budgeting capabilities from a distance and you were to see this \$15 billion number, I think there would be reasons for concern. Those reasons could be, Mr. Speaker, any number of things. People could ask: "How come they can't budget? How come they can't stick to a budget? Why is it that every year they seem to have to go back and on average request an additional \$1.3 billion in expenditures?"

Now, we're looking at advanced education. It's the first item, Mr. Speaker. We're looking at \$178 million here. We open today's paper and we see where there is concern over at NAIT that there could be a tuition increase. Many members of this Assembly met with various student groups and student leaders in the past couple of weeks to hear their issues, their concerns. Whether a student is at NAIT or Grant MacEwan or at the University of Alberta or the University of Lethbridge or the University of Calgary, they all have concerns about the cost of postsecondary education. These concerns are valid. They're certainly not going away.

We discussed this in a small amount of detail, Mr. Speaker, during the debate that was previously held on Bill 1, on this competitiveness review or whatever is going to be initiated through that mysterious little unnecessary bill. We don't have, when you compare us to other jurisdictions across the country, a large number of students attending our postsecondary institutions. I don't know whether cost is a factor in this. I'm sure the hon. minister of advanced education is thinking: oh, well, we just went through a large economic expansion and boom, and there were jobs for all regardless of whether they attended a postsecondary institution or not, and that would be the reason for our attendance rates being so much lower than other parts of the country.

Regardless of whether it's tuition or capital maintenance and renewal, higher deferred maintenance costs than expected, the changes in student loans and how we're going to apply those changes, there are certainly some concerns around the Advanced Education and Technology budget. Now, there are a lot of things that we could do to ensure that core government services are protected. We had a discussion on this last night in the finance estimates debate, and I would encourage all hon. members to have a look at that debate. It was certainly interesting, to say the least.

Now we go through Culture and Community Spirit, and we look at Employment and Immigration. With this amount of \$176 million coming forward, with each respective quarterly update that this government issued, whether it was the second quarter or the third quarter, you could see as the recession lasted that there was certainly a need for money to support those whose EI benefits had exhausted or whose savings had exhausted because, unfortunately – and some members talked about it earlier in question period – the recession was deeper and longer in this province than the government had anticipated. Those amounts in Employment and Immigration certainly are not unexpected if you were looking at the quarterly updates because it seemed to be going up and up and up.

We look at Health and Wellness, and this is always an interesting budget. There doesn't seem to be any attempt at trying to control spending. We are spending more and more money and getting less and less from this government. It's clear that this government cannot manage health care, Mr. Speaker. They're grasping now at the private delivery of health care services. They're hoping that will work. Certainly, whenever you compare us to other jurisdictions, it doesn't seem to have helped. It helps people with very thick, fat wallets and lots of money in their bank accounts, but for the majority of citizens it certainly does not.

We look at some of the moves that have been made by Alberta Health and Wellness, and here we are asking for in this fiscal year an additional \$243 million. If you go back to the annual report last year – you can pick volume 1 or volume 2 – you can go through it and can see where some of this money has been spent, not all of it. When we consider how quickly Alberta Health Services was set up and the regional health authorities were disbanded and we look at the role that the former Capital health authority had played in health care delivery in this province and how that role was recognized not only nationally but internationally, it was recognized as a leader in

not only health management but also in the delivery of programs and services.

Now, Capital health had very little difficulty balancing their budget, or if they were over budget, it was by a very, very modest amount. But for many of the officials that were working so hard for Capital health, I don't know what role, if any, they are playing in the new Alberta Health Services Board. I was surprised at how silent so many of the government MLAs were when all this happened and Alberta Health Services was set up and the officials at Capital health were told thanks but no thanks. Many of the accounts that were – they weren't full of money, Mr. Speaker, but certainly there was money available as a result of the prudent management. That money was used, at least part of it, to operate Alberta Health Services across the province.

3:10

The Official Opposition asked a lot of questions about where that money went, but we didn't receive any answers. I must say that I was so disappointed in the government members when they failed, in my view, to come to the defence of the Capital health region when it was at the mercy of this new board and this new direction that was initiated as a result of a memorandum that was signed between the former minister of health, the board of Alberta Health Services, as it was at that time, and the deputy minister of health at that time as well. I think there were three signatures on that if my memory is correct.

There certainly are a lot of questions around the budgeting and the expenditures at Alberta Health and Wellness, and that's why I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the Leader of the Official Opposition, was right on when he suggested on budget day that we have to have a close examination, an independent examination of the books of Alberta Health Services. I would encourage, particularly, the fiscal hawks over on that side of the House, if there are any left, to please give some consideration to the suggestion from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Now, certainly, also with this additional allocation of \$243 million, Mr. Speaker, the government, before this bill is passed, should provide the details as to how this money is going to be reported in the next annual report, for the fiscal year that's going to end March 31, 2010.

I know we're going to have a lot of consolidated line items in the budget, when in the past, Mr. Speaker, we could clearly see what was spent on information technology in the Edmonton region, what was spent in Calgary on information technology, what, for instance, was spent for registered nurses in Calgary, what was spent in the capital region for registered nurses, what was spent in Northern Lights on registered nurses or in the David Thompson region. An individual could get a breakdown of all these expenditures, and I don't know how this is going to work with the one new superboard, that just seems to be able to devour billions and billions of dollars in cash without improving any services whatsoever.

When we're asking for this allocation – and it's a significant sum – exactly how is the spending of this money going to be reported when we've made such significant changes with Alberta Health Services? Taxpayers are going to have no idea which part of the province this money is going to go to and why, and I think they deserve an explanation as to how this money is being spent. Whether you liked it or not, if you wanted to go through in detail volume 2 of Alberta Health and Wellness's annual report, you could see how individual regional health authorities were spending the money that was provided to them. You could also see where the bonuses went, where the termination benefits went, who got them and why, what kind of pensions were given out. You could see all

that, but you had to sort of look at the fine print to see it. I know the President of the Treasury Board is going to resolve those issues. At least, I hope he is. There were millions and millions of dollars wasted there, and I have no idea who was watching whenever those contracts were signed.

Now, Housing and Urban Affairs. I believe my colleague from Calgary-Currie had some comments on that earlier. On Municipal Affairs as well I believe the hon. member had a lot to say. At least, he certainly did whenever we had a discussion on Bill 5 in caucus, and I'm sure he had the same remarks here in the Assembly.

Now, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, we're having inventory purchases here of \$8.5 million and a capital investment of \$4.7 million.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I heard a couple of questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Centre called them puffballs.

Ms Blakeman: Uh-uh.

Mr. MacDonald: Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah.

Mr. MacDonald: Edmonton-Centre. How could I have made that mistake?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre referred to them as puffballs. They were questions concerning the activities in Vancouver.

I agree with the Speaker that it's quite an event. It's a significant event. I was watching it last night. Actually, after budget debates I thought I would watch Sweden and Slovakia play hockey. It was a good game. I was surprised that the Slovaks won. But after it was over, I thought: this is the second time in essentially a generation that western Canada has hosted the Winter Olympics, 1988 in Calgary and now 22 years later in Vancouver. I thought to myself: this is symbolic of the gradual transition of economic and political power to the west. [interjection] And of opportunities as well. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is absolutely right.

I thought: this is a significant event. In a generation or two historians in this country will mark these events as a sign of the increasing influence in our Canadian Confederation of the western provinces.

Certainly, that was my view after – I would rather think out loud than listen to some of the analysis of the hockey game, actually. I enjoyed the game, but the analysis afterwards was something, Mr. Speaker, to be improved on.

Now, with that being said – I'm sorry I got off topic – I did see in the public accounts under Tourism, Parks and Recreation last year, for the year ended March 31, 2008, a \$120,000 allocation from Sierra Systems, which is a big outfit in Vancouver. I think they're a consulting outfit. They had a contract with Tourism, Parks and Recreation for \$120,000. A year later, for the year ending March 31, 2009, they had, I think, a \$4.4 million contract. In the discussion of this allocation here for Tourism, Parks and Recreation for an additional \$13 million plus, I'm wondering if in the course of debate someone from across the way can tell me if any of this allocation would be going to an outfit like Sierra Systems. I have no idea what they do, but I do know that we're going to be faced with quite a tab in these puffball questions, as my hon. colleague described them today.

Actually, I don't think they were puffballs; they were softballs. This government is trying to soften up the taxpayers so that whenever the final bill comes in for these Winter Olympics and our socializing and our hosting, the taxpayers will not be too irate. I

think we can be, you know, good neighbours and we can be gracious hosts without breaking the backs of the taxpayers here in this province.

What role, if any, did Sierra Systems have in this allocation for Tourism, Parks and Recreation? I certainly would be interested in finding out. I can look forward, I think, to receiving the details from the President of the Treasury Board straightaway, I'm sure.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I think I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague. Transportation, I'm told, has been addressed by other members as well. I just appreciate the time that has been provided to me to get my remarks regarding Bill 5 on the record, and I would certainly encourage the President of the Treasury Board and the minister of finance to look in a lot of different areas that they have not already done so to see if they can get control or, at least, attempt to get control of the wasteful spending that has gone on in this government. I think that if they can control the wasteful spending, we'll go a long way towards balancing our books in this province.

Thank you.

3:20

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I was speaking to this bill in Committee of the Whole, I knew there were a few things that I couldn't find in my notes, and I have located them. I'm aware, now, that in third reading we're speaking to the anticipated effect of the implementation of the bill, and I will try to focus my remarks in that way.

Specifically, one of the ones that I wanted to talk about was what was happening to postsecondary students in this province. It has always puzzled me, right from when I was first elected, this government's sort of schizophrenic relationship with people who are attending postsecondary institutions. I would argue that the effect of the government policy and funding has resulted in less money available for the institutions and higher tuition fees for the students, not only in universities but also in colleges and technical institutes.

Now I hear the government arguing: well, that's okay if tuition goes up because we're going to have lots more bursaries and things available for them. Yet as I look, I don't particularly see that. More specifically, I notice that with the funding amounts available in these various bursaries, largely connected to the fact that we've had a downturn in the stock market and their investment return income was not as flush as they expected, that, in fact, there has not been an inflationary increase in most of these bursaries and grants that are available to students in postsecondary institutions. The effect that I see of what is rolling through from both the '09-10 budget, of which, of course, we're looking at the supplementary supplies today, and also the budget that the government is going forward with is that there are cuts and corresponding tuition increases. In fact, I don't see the corollary, which is the increase in the value of the bursaries and grants.

I noticed as I was reading through some things that there's actually a resolution from the Alberta Teachers' Association to urge the government to increase annually the monetary value of Rutherford scholarships to reflect both increases in student tuition fees and the cost of living as per the Alberta consumer price index. Of course, the Rutherford is the one that's directly connected to high school marks, I think.

Mr. MacDonald: Was he a Liberal, that fellow?

Ms Blakeman: Rutherford? Yes, he was.

Mr. MacDonald: Was he an Education minister?

Ms Blakeman: No. He was Premier.

Mr. MacDonald: Premier and Education minister.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, was he? Oh, okay.

So there is a recognition from an educational association that the Rutherford scholarships have not kept pace with inflation and a request for the government to look to that, but I'm not aware of corresponding increases in any of the other ones.

I think that the anticipated effect of what we're looking at in these supplementary supplies and the choices in policy direction that the government has been working in is that we actually have a double hit on students. We know that the effect of the cuts from the previous administration of Conservative government in the early '90s was that it took students much longer to graduate. Instead of coming out of a three-year arts degree in three years, it's four years or four and a half or even five years, and therefore we didn't get those people into the workforce as quickly. You know, there's an argument that they didn't have the same quality of experience in university or any postsecondary institution because they spent so much more time working.

Certainly, when I went to university, yes, a number of my fellow students worked but not out of desperation, and that's certainly what I'm seeing now. They have to. It has flipped. Instead of, "How much time outside of my school do I have to go and work and supplement the money that I have?" it's now determined the other way around: "How much time do I have left after working to earn enough money to invest in education this year?" The whole focus of a student's life has switched around from education to work with a little education on the side. I'll be very interested to see what the effect is of the policies that the government is instituting now, with even further tuition increases, decreases in funding directly to the universities so that they're looking for additional funding through a number of sources, and this corresponding lack of increase, inflation-proofing, or indexing in some way of the various bursary and grant programs. That's one observation.

The second one I want to talk about is connected to the introduction and the member's statement that I did today with the Today Family Violence Help Centre that has just opened in Edmonton. For those of you in Calgary that are a little jealous of this wonderful new centre that has opened in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, not to worry, because they are working in Calgary to start one there. Actually, some people from Calgary have come up to tour through the centre that is opened in Edmonton.

The interesting part of this is that I hear the government talk a lot about administrative efficiencies and finding administrative efficiencies. I hear a lot of people talking about the need to reduce the duplication in the not-for-profit sector. We have too many groups, they say, providing services in certain areas. Here is an initiative that is all about, you know, finding administrative efficiencies and housing themselves together in a very accessible place. I've talked to the group about, you know: can you start to keep records of recidivism? If you're able to show that having all of those services grouped together and that somebody coming to you is less likely to go back into a cycle of violence because of the way the services are bundled together, that's a very good thing.

They're doing exactly what the government talks about. The interesting thing is that the organizations are all having to slice off a piece of their operating funding to devote towards the running of that particular facility because there is no direct funding to the facility itself. Here you have all those agencies I talked about: the

RCMP, the city police, Alberta family and youth services. There was an aboriginal consulting organization, John Howard, and Catholic Social Services. You have all of those organizations that are each contributing towards this particular service delivery model, but they're all having to give up some of their operating money in order to fund the actual facility.

I'm concerned about the long-term sustainability of this particular organization. One of the effects that I see from the government's particular policy changes that they have been pursuing under this administration is – well, actually, it's not a change – a continuing lack of understanding about how the not-for-profit sector operates. While the not-for-profit sector has been trying to work in the way the government says they want them to work, there is a lack of corresponding funding models coming from the government to help these organizations do exactly what the government asked them to do. So it doesn't help us if they try these innovative new service delivery systems and can't be successful at it when it was saving money overall because we have a funding model that doesn't understand that one of the pieces needs to be funded differently, and that is the facility model.

3:30

I don't think that was too complicated. Do you understand what I'm talking about? [interjection] Great. Okay. Well, the President of the Treasury Board was with me, and if he got it, then I'm happy. Good. I think this may well be where we want to go. I often push back when people say: oh, there are too many not-for-profits, and they're all delivering the same services. I tend to push back and go: well, not necessarily. Bundling everybody together and ending up with larger and larger organizations to deliver this kind of service isn't necessarily a good thing.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think what the government is experiencing, particularly with the move they've made with Alberta Health Services, is a perfect example of that. I don't know that in the end we're going to be incredibly happy with taking the control away from local decision-making and moving it up the ladder and making that organization huge. I think there's going to turn out to be a longer term effect on how that whole system gets administered. And I would argue in defence of the not-for-profits that they need to guard against that.

But I am very interested that organizations have taken the government seriously and have sought ways to deliver their services better. They're willing to innovate, they're willing to think outside of the box, and they're willing to take into consideration what the government is telling them about a weariness from the government with spending money on the same issue, if I can put it that way, to a number of different organizations. Here we have a bunch of them coming together to try something innovative, so I hope there is support from the government to at least give them long enough to see if the model works because if we end up with funding cut off in the next fiscal year, we'll never know if this worked, and we will have spent a bunch of money to get here. It's got to run for long enough to see if we actually get the stats back that tell us it's a good model. So that's the second thing I wanted to talk about, the choices that I see being made here.

The third piece is – and I heard this come up in question period today – what is happening around, well, temporary foreign workers, the issue of the government's assistance to businesses to bring people in to fill particular kinds of jobs that businesses in Alberta, interestingly enough smaller businesses, usually seem to have a hard time getting Albertans or people who are already here to fill, so we

end up going outside of the country. The Philippines is a good example.

I've had a letter – and I'm sure others have had a letter – from a group that's actually operating out of B.C. that offers cleaning services. They can't hire cleaners locally, so they're trying to bring in people from the Philippines, I think. Their issue is that they're puzzled about the pilot project through the – and these are initials; I apologize for that – AINP program, which allows room attendants who are working in hotels to be considered for permanent residency visas. The national occupation code that relates to these room attendants is the same one for light duty cleaners, which is what this group is recruiting, but the program doesn't extend to the cleaners. So they're not eligible for that residency visa under the program, which is a head-scratcher. What's the difference between, you know, cleaning an office and cleaning a hotel room?

I'm finding that it's very difficult to work your way through a logical through-line of how we actually work with temporary foreign workers and inviting people to move to Alberta permanently. Now, I've always believed and my caucus has always believed that if we're going to ask people to come from other countries to work here, to fill jobs that Albertans can't or won't fill, then we should be extending immigration rights to them. I just think, you know, that if we want them here, then give them those rights and privileges. I personally really struggle with the concept of temporary foreign workers because I think it's a form of 21st century slavery, frankly, but it seems to work for a lot of small businesspeople. I represent a lot of small businesspeople. This is the concern they've raised with me, and I'll put it on the record and maybe follow up with a letter to the minister specific to this as to why we end up with these inconsistencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to put those questions on the record, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre: could you provide more details to the House regarding the temporary foreign workers and their plight in this country and the fact that we have a two-tiered system for workers? They do not have the same rights as landed immigrants or Canadian citizens. Do you think we should be ensuring that they have the same rights in the workplace as Canadian citizens or landed immigrants?

Ms Blakeman: I'm responding to this from a human rights perspective, but I am puzzled by what I see as, as I said, an illogical through-line from the government policy on these workers. I do see what we're doing as two-tiered. It is to me a form of 21st century slavery in that they are not offered the same rights and protections that are offered to other classes of people; that is, full citizens and people with landed immigrant status here. I'm very uncomfortable as a citizen of this country to not be treating a particular group of people in what I think is a fair way, particularly when things go wrong. When things go right, everybody's happy, right? It's not a problem. It's when things go wrong.

What happens – and this whole issue of agents who bring people in for a certain amount of money, I cannot find a way to think that that's a particularly good idea. Frankly, I think it's preying off of desperate people. I don't know why we allow it, but this is an entrepreneurial society, and we seem to allow that.

I'm more concerned about what kind of protection we offer for people when things go wrong, and we do not offer the same level of

protection and service for when things go wrong. It's complicated, I agree, because you're dealing often with languages that are not English. You're dealing with people that may not be aware of the cultural norms or even what's available. But this just strikes me as very un-Canadian.

Mr. MacDonald: Not fair.

Ms Blakeman: Not fair. I've never been comfortable with this concept.

Now, clearly, my family are in the trades. They're all working hard. The trades are really struggling with that idea, too, because they want to work. They don't understand if there's an ironworker out of work in Winnipeg, why can't that ironworker come and fill a job in Alberta? Why isn't there an attempt to do that? At the same time none of my family would say that we should treat somebody from another country that's brought in to do a job as badly as we're treating the people that are coming under temporary foreign workers when things go wrong.

I don't know if that answers your question.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is making vague allegations about misconduct against foreign workers, why don't you come forward and bring to my office actual complaints? My job is to make sure that these occurrences don't occur. Standing in the House and talking vaguely about things apparently occurring but not actually bringing forward to my office cases where you can identify to me where these breaches occur – because my role and my commitment is to make sure exactly to fulfill what you're asking for: that workers are treated fairly, that they're on an even playing ground with all other hard-working Albertans, that there is no abuse of foreign workers.

3:40

Unfortunately, if there are instances that aren't reported, I would suggest to you it is your role as a member of this Legislature, as much as it is mine or any citizen's, to report these occurrences. You seem to indicate that you know of them. You seem to be telling me about instances that you know of occurring. If you know that they occur, if you know where they are, why won't you send a letter to the minister and advise us of it so that we can investigate and prosecute and punish any wrongdoers who may be causing harm to any workers?

After all, we're all Albertans. We want to make sure that no one is abused in this province. We want to make sure that when these workers leave, they tell good stories about the province of Alberta and perhaps encourage others to come over here if such is required. But to be rising in the House and talking about hypothetical cases – and I believe they are hypothetical until you show me who they are and where they are or at least give me enough grounds to investigate – is not doing anybody any good.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who wish to join the debate?

Seeing none, then I call on the President of the Treasury Board to close the debate.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully to the dialogue, particularly when it was actually relevant to the estimates, and I will respond accordingly to those suggestions that are appropriate.

I want to thank members of the Liberal Party and members of the New Democratic Party who chose to participate in the discussion here. I am surprised, Mr. Speaker, that the Wildrose chose to be totally absent from the debate or chose to not participate. I would presume that means they support the supplementary supply.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 3

Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. Hehr]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on Bill 3.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I see this bill as one of stubbornness and archaic concepts. To me it's also a bit of an I told you so. What we are seeing is the government having to come forward and correct archaic language but, mind you, language that they have insisted and persisted in putting into legislation all the way along and up to very recently. The world has moved on. As much as this government likes to talk about moving on, the world moved on. They now are stuck with some language in their legislation that has hindered the actual delivery of the purpose of the legislation.

So here we have two particular ones that are around the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act in that it's using very specific language. One of them, shockingly, is that we still have references – and this does shock us now, but you know in my parents' generation or before that it wouldn't have shocked them at all. There's language that is still in our legislation and in this that talks about illegitimate children. I can't believe that any child would be considered illegitimate. All children are legitimate. But, in fact, this act and the history of where it came from does contain that kind of language, and of course we've got to get rid of it. So there's the archaic language that we would have had in legislation, at one time quite legitimately, that talked about illegitimate children. We're no longer willing to do that. It has to be removed from the legislation. So the obvious thing is that you're going to end up with an amending act like you have in front of you that removes that language.

The second piece of this is a persistence in this government of upholding, I would argue, a fairly archaic concept. Our constitution makes it clear – in fact, Mr. Speaker, our Alberta human rights act also makes it clear – that service is to be delivered with a prohibition against discrimination based on family status or on marital status. That's the other thing that was in this bill in which it talks about very gender-specific roles and assignments like wife, husband, et cetera. It did not take into consideration where the law has moved and where society has moved around what we consider and how we define households, families, and legal unions in our society.

You can no longer say that you'll only offer a service to a man and wife who are married in a legal ceremony. That just doesn't cut it anymore because we also recognize, and all services are now offered to, common-law couples and also to same-sex couples. Now, speaking of archaic language, the government went to some effort to come up with “adult interdependent relationships.” That was the way they wanted to get around actually talking about same-sex relationships. That's the other thing that they're having to correct in this legislation to allow for the fact that this process cannot

be limited to people that are narrowly defined as a traditional husband and wife relationship. So it's adding in the language that allows for present-day reality, frankly.

My colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is our critic for Justice and the Attorney General, has already spoken to the bill and has indicated that our caucus is willing to support it. Of course, I will vote in favour of it because I approve of what's happening here. I do just get a little frustrated that we could have corrected a lot more of this way back when if this government hadn't fought with its little fingernails scraping the rug in between us as it got dragged into the 21st century in its refusal to acknowledge what was actually going on in our society and its insistence on trying to stick to an old definition of things.

As we went through the Family Law Act, it insisted on defining the same way and making the same mistakes. Again, we're slowly having to go through and change that language as well.

So I'm willing to support the bill. To me it is one of stubbornness, archaic concepts, and an I told you so, but I'm happy to see that we're in fact moving forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I support second reading of Bill 3.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

3:50

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate February 24: Mr. Bhardwaj]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to stand today in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I'd like to start by thanking the hon. Premier for bringing forward this innovative piece of legislation that would see government and industry come together to create a more competitive and prosperous Alberta.

Alberta, like the rest of the world, has been affected by the recent downturn in the economic climate. All governments have had to change strategies when dealing with such economic turbulence. The difference between Alberta and other jurisdictions is that our fiscal savings have allowed our government to adapt to global economic changes as they occur.

This important piece of legislation will examine ways to further enhance Alberta's competitive advantage and help us promote a more competitive provincial economy. This act will increase collaboration between government, industry, and business. This, in turn, Mr. Speaker, will enhance the ability of all industry sectors to adapt to the evolving new global economic order. The Alberta Competitiveness Act will also increase collaboration between government, industry, and businesses. This will allow an enhancement of Alberta's competitiveness and provide long-term benefits for Alberta families and business.

This government will build on current initiatives that will improve our overall competitiveness. Examples of these initiatives include the Alberta Innovates program, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, and TILMA, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement that was passed last year. All of these programs give Alberta an edge. Through Bill 1 a strategic approach to competitiveness will be developed, including implementation to measure competitiveness

and an operational plan to improve economic procedures. This collaboration will be led by partnerships under the direction of our esteemed Premier. Mr. Speaker, key ministers and stakeholders will access all areas where Alberta can strengthen its competitive edge.

I believe that Bill 1 will lay the groundwork for a more prosperous economy and benefit all Albertans. The Alberta Competitiveness Act will allow Albertans to construct a greater future while utilizing the initiatives this province already has in place, initiatives like the sustainability fund, which cushions Alberta from the full brunt of any economic downswings. The sustainability fund has allowed Alberta to be in one of the best financial positions compared to anywhere else, any other jurisdiction in North America.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will let this province continue to build on our strengths and will result in a better quality of life for all Albertans. Albertans have always embraced the challenge to make this province a better place, and Bill 1 is a conduit which will enable this. My constituents and all Albertans will benefit from this innovative legislation. Because of this, I strongly support this bill.

In closing, I would like to again thank the Premier for bringing this bill forward. His leadership and extraordinary commitment to improving the quality of life of Albertans has been remarkable, and it is a privilege to stand behind him and be part of his team.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to stand today in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This is certainly an important piece of legislation for Alberta today and moving into the future. Much of what we do in this Legislature has more of an impact on future generations of Albertans than it sometimes does currently. I think this is one of them.

Obviously, this legislation is a result of, certainly, the changing circumstances we've seen right across the globe as far as economic prosperity and development. It has been a tough time for many Albertans, whether they be business owners, workers, investors, and families because I really do believe that families do feel the stress of some of the unfortunate situations that have happened in today's marketplace. But we have to be realistic. These aren't things that have happened just to Albertans. Many people right across the world are certainly feeling the squeeze of the global recession.

What this has created is a situation where we as a province can emerge with a clear vision and some goals of where we're going as an economy into the future. Certainly, we've enjoyed a very, very prosperous history in this province, and certainly I'm much more aware of the recent prosperity that we've enjoyed, particularly over, let's say, the last decade. So we need to be able to have a clear vision and some goals for the future prosperity of this province. I think at times it's unfortunate, but times like these allow us to step back and assess that and put in place those visions and those goals moving forward. But we must not forget some of the lessons that we have learned over our history.

I really believe that as the world starts to come out of this economic recession, it's going to be a new global economy out there. The competitiveness of the global economy is certainly shifting. We knew that before going into the recession. The recession has only strengthened our knowledge that it is going to be different. There are going to be new opportunities for business and new opportunities for Albertans to prosper in that new economic order.

Fortunately for our great province we're in a position that's probably not comparable to many right across the world. We've got substantial savings in the sustainability fund to cover our temporary budget shortfalls, that we're incurring right now, and I can tell you that that's unique as compared to many other jurisdictions, particularly in North America, Mr. Speaker.

We also have a heritage savings trust fund that is going to remain intact and untouched throughout this whole time. I know that our Premier has committed to that; the hon. minister of finance has committed to that. I think that's substantial because that is, again, an opportunity for Albertans to take the fortunate prosperity that we have, that is in place, as far as our geological formations in oil and gas plays and to be able to use that not just for Albertans' benefit today but for future generations.

We know that, you know, those are finite resources. We know that the world is changing as far as its carbon plans and that sort of thing, and we know that there could be a possibility sometime in the future that there's going to be less reliance on those traditional carbon sources for energy. We need to make sure that as those revenues could potentially diminish, we have the opportunity to utilize those revenues so that we don't have to raise taxes on Albertans to provide the same services that we're delivering today. So that's very, very important to note that we do have that heritage savings trust fund and, again, that the minister of finance is committed to looking at how we can build that up as we move into more prosperous times.

As well, by having the sustainability fund to cover our temporary budget shortfalls, it allows us to continue to support Albertans in a way that improves their quality of life, that makes Alberta a great place to live and raise a family, Mr. Speaker. This is very, very important, I believe, and it's very much linked and correlated to our competitiveness as it allows us to attract the best people and capital not just because they want to invest here but because they want to live here as well.

The result is that what we're doing right now and what we have done to set us up for right now is that we're facilitating future economic prosperity, again, by supporting quality of life for all Albertans today and for years to come. Bill 1 complements the actions that the government has taken up to this point. It focuses on developing new opportunities for Albertans and their businesses. Alberta already is a safe place to invest, but if we can help businesses to open more doors and to be more competitive as the global economy emerges from this recession, then I think that's a very, very important step to securing the prosperity of future generations of Albertans.

Bill 1 will increase collaboration between government, industry, businesses, and Albertans, and it's going to enhance our understanding of our place in the global economy. I wouldn't hesitate to suggest that our place in the new, emerging global economy is going to be one of a leader, one where people are going to be looking at investing here in Alberta. I know in just hearing some of the stories and the evidence coming back from some of our ministers that have visited Vancouver and met with some very, very key, important global leaders that they are looking at Alberta as a significant place to invest their money as the global economy starts to recover.

4:00

Bill 1 will also embrace opportunities led by industry. I think that what is missing in this is that this is a great opportunity to insist that government alone can't just fix the economy. In fact, government probably has very little to do with fixing the economy. A lot of what's going to drive our future growth is going to be industry and business led. This bill allows the government to be able to do that

and work in collaboration and allows the government to support industry through various strategic initiatives.

The end goal, Mr. Speaker, is to be more competitive in the global economy, and there are all sorts of different challenges and opportunities when it comes to that. The first thing that needs to be accomplished and that this bill does set out to accomplish is facilitating a competitive business environment. Simply, this means maintaining a low tax base and removing barriers to investment in business operations: two things.

This is not industry specific. It's just very basic, fundamental principles to a prosperous economy. Low taxes, which are a cost to business and not only a cost to business but a cost to productivity and a cost to investment, are the first piece of this, to make sure that Alberta is in a position to maintain its position as being a low-tax jurisdiction. Then the second piece is, again, removing the barriers to invest and removing red tape for businesses operating in this province. Again, I think it was pretty obvious from the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, that that's something that this government is committed to, and I believe that Bill 1 is a great example of what our government is going to do, working with industry, to address those issues.

Mr. Speaker, let's not kid ourselves. You know, as much as government getting out of the way by keeping the tax burden low and by reducing regulations and red tape is important, what is also important is that government becomes very strategic in its investments and initiatives when it comes to its industry and economy. Yes, I am going to say this, and there are probably some people that, you know, might raise their eyebrows, but sometimes there is a role for government to play in facilitating new investments in new industries and technologies. Now, I think that government, in doing so, needs to be very, very careful. This is a very fine line, and I'm hoping that Bill 1 is going to address that and sort of set out some parameters and barriers as to where and what and how the government should be involved in partnering with industry. It, hopefully, will determine priorities in collaboration with industry and support them in ways that the government can support them.

An example. If you look at Alberta, Alberta has got a great history. Everybody thinks of Alberta as very, you know, government hands-off business. Yes, we've created that environment, but we've got a great history. The Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority in the 1970s. Okay? Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the exact numbers are, but could you imagine where we would be as a province right now if the government hadn't invested in that? I'm not sure we would be in the enviable position that we are in. The reinvestment of revenues from this conventional industry into unconventional will certainly prolong our economic prosperity and has brought in a whole new opportunity for Albertans to find work and create revenue for the government.

Certainly, I think there are numerous examples. I believe the government was very much involved in the Alberta Energy Company. I can't remember what the exact dates were, but it was very instrumental in creating the Alberta Gas Trunk Line, again a very strategic investment for Albertans, again an investment that Albertans continually will in the future reap the rewards from: greater jobs, more prosperity, higher quality of life.

Bill 1 is going to need to look at where those strategic opportunities are for Alberta. Certainly, there's a lot of work, and it will go and build upon the initiatives that have already been undertaken by this government. Alberta Innovates, Productivity Alberta, and the western economic partnership are all great examples of ideas and strategies that can be fine-tuned and thought of as part of Bill 1. It will exemplify Alberta as one of the most competitive and driven places in the world to do business and will facilitate a common

understanding that Alberta is and will continue to be the best place to live, work, play, invest, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's what we're all here for, to make sure Alberta remains a place for all of those things to happen, that Alberta is a balanced place. At the foundation of that is an economy with a huge amount of opportunities for everybody, no matter what their skill or background is. In order to do that, we need to continue to attract the next generation of entrepreneurs and skilled workers, and they will only come here if Alberta is the best place to live, work, play, invest, and raise a family. We cannot merely react to changing circumstances in the economy as they come up. We need to be proactive, and that is exactly what Bill 1 does.

We are at a pinnacle point in our great province's advancement, with endless opportunities as we emerge from the global economic recession, Mr. Speaker. I am very confident that this bill along with the many other initiatives that this government has undertaken, that have been laid out in the throne speech, is going to lead Alberta into an economy that's brighter and exciting for our kids and their kids. The world is going to be looking at Alberta as a great place, again, like I said, to live, work, play, raise a family, and invest.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to stand in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I'd like to start by thanking the hon. Premier for bringing forward this timely piece of legislation. Since 2008 the global economy has been in a state of uncertainty. The global recession was caused by factors outside of our province but, of course, is still felt by all Albertans.

A large part of our provincial economy is centred on natural gas and oil prices. Fluctuations in the price of these commodities cause fluctuations in our provincial revenue stream during both good and bad periods. To protect against these fluctuations, our government has practised prudent fiscal planning, recognizing that the prosperity that's experienced during the boom periods will not last forever. Under the leadership of our Premier our government has saved during economic peaks, knowing these savings will prove to be of value during our economic valleys.

Over the past few months the global economy has shown signs of recovery. However, the economy is also undergoing profound changes. We want to ensure Alberta is in the best position to respond and adapt to these changes. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, recognizes that the global economy is changing and our government must take appropriate measures to ensure that we keep pace with these changes and continue to attract investment to our province.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, favourable business conditions in Alberta have been instrumental in attracting investment in our province. Bill 1 will continue to enhance these favourable conditions, attracting new businesses and innovation.

One way that we can continue to attract business and investment is by evaluating our regulatory framework. By improving this framework, we'll continue to attract investment, new business, and innovation, that play such a large part in our province's success. With an efficient regulation system we'll continue to send a strong message to prospective investors, innovators, and entrepreneurs that Alberta is one of the best places in North America to do business.

Attracting investment and promoting competitiveness in Alberta are vital to both our economy and our quality of life. As a government we should continue to support regulations that enhance economic, environmental, and social aspects of Albertans' lives. Competitiveness breeds a healthy economy. A healthy economy will grow faster. It leads to lower prices. It leads to higher wages. Essentially, a competitive economy ensures that Albertans will continue to enjoy the high standards of living that have characterized our province for decades. Bill 1 will increase collaboration between government, industry, businesses, and Albertans in order to enhance our province's competitive edge. By allowing businesses to operate more efficiently, we are strengthening the bond between government and industry. This leads to enhanced investment and creates a more competitive and affluent Alberta.

Alberta is in one of the best fiscal positions in North America coming out of the economic downturn. Moving forward, it's vital that the Alberta government finds ways to enhance our competitiveness and create a thriving and more diversified economy. This is exactly what Bill 1 proposes to do. The Alberta Competitiveness Act displays the foresight and planning that has characterized the work of our government for years. We were prepared for the global downturn, and with the recommendations that come forward from the partnership formed under Bill 1, Alberta is poised to emerge from these challenging economic times with a stronger, more competitive economy.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons I am pleased to stand before this Assembly in support of Bill 1. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Dr. Taft: We do, Mr. Speaker. I would like to exercise my right to that.

I was listening to the comments from the Member for Strathcona. He had a line in there, I think, that was exactly to the effect that competitiveness breeds a healthy economy. My concern with the whole approach to this legislation is that the emphasis is so heavily on competitiveness that we forget some of the other things that also breed a healthy economy. Sometimes – and, actually, the Member for Calgary-North Hill, I think, sort of alluded to this – co-operation breeds a healthy economy, and sometimes competitiveness actually destroys a healthy economy. You've seen that play out on Wall Street. Even people like Alan Greenspan have admitted that unbridled competitiveness has destroyed aspects of the American economy.

My question to the Member for Strathcona would be: wouldn't it be sensible to have, instead of an Alberta Competitiveness Act, an Alberta productivity act? Because, really, sometimes competitiveness leads to productivity. Sometimes co-operation leads to productivity. Productivity is actually easily measured in economic terms. If this act is really about encouraging productivity, then maybe we should amend the act and call it the Alberta productivity act and then build it around the concept of productivity.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that we want to rename the act, but when we talk about competitiveness and co-operation and collaboration, these things are not all independent of each other. These are interconnected.

Just the reference to Wall Street. I think, you know, what happened with the meltdown and all that sort of unbridled activity, possibly underregulated, another topic, certainly not something that could happen here in Alberta.

I look at competitiveness, obviously, as an environment. It's healthy. We're not talking about cutthroat competitiveness here. I think we're talking about something that's gone on in the world of trade and commerce since the beginning of time. I think of sort of co-operation between competitors in certain things, certainly with respect to research and development and so on. So I don't see one being exclusive of the other. I think we can have a competitive economy or a competitive environment for business and still have co-operation and collaboration all going on at the same time. What we're doing here, again, is trying to continue to create and nurture an environment in this province where all of this competitive economic activity can take place.

Again, for all of those other things, I think that as Albertans, by our very nature, our competition is healthy. I think we work together. I think we work collaboratively. I think we work co-operatively. That's the spirit that built this province, and that's the spirit that will continue to allow us to prosper and grow in the future as a people, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Benito: I understand, hon. member, that in the past three months five new oil sands projects have been announced, I think over \$5 billion in new investment. When we say competitiveness, I always relate this idea to job creation. Can you be more specific on how the competitiveness of this province will relate to a job creation program?

Mr. Quest: Well, if I understood the question, I think the answer is relatively straightforward. Again, we talked about this competitiveness. A province attracts investment to the province because it's a good place to do business. When it's a good place to do business, investment dollars come here. You mentioned oil sands, and of course investment in oil sands comes from all over the world now. This attracts the dollars to Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move that we adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we do adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on March 8 pursuant to our standing order.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:18 p.m. to Monday, March 8, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to February 25, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft., adjourned)

2 Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft., adjourned)

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft., adjourned)

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft., adjourned)

7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)

First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)

First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)

First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)

First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 8, 2010

Issue 13

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 8, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, welcome back.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Mr. Richard (Dick) Gruenwald
January 22, 1917, to February 24, 2010

Ms Heather MacDonald-Webber
July 5, 1962, to March 3, 2010

The Speaker: Hon. members, Mr. Richard (Dick) Gruenwald, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, 483rd member to be sworn in as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, passed away on February 24, 2010, at the age of 93 years. Mr. Gruenwald was first elected in the election held August 30, 1971, and served one term until March 25, 1975. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Lethbridge-West for the Social Credit Party. During his term of office Richard Gruenwald served on the standing committees on Private Bills; Private Bills, Standing Orders and Printing; Privileges and Elections; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; and the Special Committee of the Legislature on Professions and Occupations.

On March 3, 2010, Heather MacDonald-Webber passed away at the age of 47 years after a courageous battle with breast cancer. Heather was the wife of Alberta's Minister of Aboriginal Relations, the MLA for Calgary-Foothills, and the mother of Lauren, Jaime, and Kelly. As the spouse of a member of this Assembly she very ably participated with her husband in his many ministerial duties and in service to their constituents. Heather leaves a legacy of strength, love, and inspiration.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them. Family members of Mr. Gruenwald are here with us today in the Speaker's gallery. In a moment of silent prayer I would ask you to remember hon. member Richard (Dick) Gruenwald and Heather MacDonald-Webber as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

I would now like to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I would invite all here to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleague Mr. Richard Gruenwald. Today with us are two of Mr. Gruenwald's children and their families. As I mention their names, I would ask them to rise: son Mr. Gerry Gruenwald and his spouse, Joyce; daughter Lois Weeks and her spouse, Al; granddaughter Tanna Toliver and her friend, Lynn Weinberger. If all would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

I would also like to advise all members that on their desk is a special message from Her Majesty the Queen, the head of the Commonwealth, on this day known as Commonwealth Day.

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce four students from my constituency from l'école Ste. Marguerite Bourgeoys. They are here today with Mrs. Lynn Fisher, their teacher. The four students' names are Luke Di Danieli, Geneviève Lévesque, Audrey Labrie, and Racha El-Dib. It's a pleasure for me to have students come from Calgary. They're only here for the day. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group from the Home Educators of St. Albert and Area, who are accompanying us this afternoon. We have three parent-teachers and eight students. The parent-teachers are Mrs. Katherine Seddon, Mrs. Fiona Lang-Sharpe, and Ms Tamara Westran. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 27 students from the Eleanor Hall school located in Clyde who are participating in the School at the Legislature program this week. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Amy McConnell, parent helpers Tori Ward, Susan Ringuette, and Karen Potts as well. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an outstanding Albertan who has made all Canadians very proud. Shannon Szabados is truly the best in the world, and she proved it at the Vancouver 2010 games. Together with her teammates on the Canadian women's hockey team she showed the world how good Canada's athletes really are. Along with teammates like Meaghan Mikkelson, Hayley Wickenheiser, and the rest of Team Canada they brought home the gold medal for the third time in a row. I'm sure all of Canada was watching when Team Canada faced off against

Team U.S.A. in the final game of the tournament. With Shannon in goal Canada's women skated to a 2-0 shutout of the U.S. and raised the Canadian flag at the gold medal ceremony. [Standing ovation] I guess there's no reason to ask all members to issue a warm welcome because we already did. Shannon, thank you, and all the very best.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is more Olympic hardware yet to be displayed. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a gentleman who is well known to all of us in this House and throughout Alberta, Dr. Bob Steadward, founder of the Steadward Centre at the University of Alberta. Dr. Steadward was on February 28 awarded the Olympic Order, the highest distinction conferred by the International Olympic Committee, in recognition of exemplary service. Dr. Steadward's order comes in no small part due to his role as the international founder of the Paralympic Games. I would ask Dr. Steadward to please rise and receive the very warm welcome and congratulations of this House.

1:40

The Speaker: We're fortunate today to have had three school groups in the Assembly to recognize their new heroes. Wonderful. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly one of my constituents, Milan Sorenson, and her grandfather, Wayne Sorenson. This is Milan's first visit to the Alberta Legislature. Milan is the proud recipient of a laptop computer that was awarded to her from the ATCO celebrating excellence program, which was partnered with the government of Alberta. This is also not the first time that I've met this extraordinary young woman of nine years of age. I was privileged to meet with her and her parents, Kevin and Lisa, at their home on Saturday, February 27, for a short visit. I would also like to commend Milan's grandfather for taking the time to come to the Alberta Legislature and bring her for this extraordinary opportunity today. I would ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you Mrs. Janet Ryan-Newell and her husband, Gordon Ryan-Newell, seated today in the members' gallery. Janet is an executive director of Crossroads Family Services, who recently hosted a foster parent recognition award evening, that I will be speaking about later on. I would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Ryan-Newell for their contribution to our city and our province, especially towards our children and youth. At this time I would like to ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of the province of Alberta. Mr. Don Johnson is the president of the Association of Municipal Districts

and Counties. Mr. Johnson spends many, many hours working for the betterment of all of our municipalities in the province of Alberta. Just recently, in meetings that I've had with them, he has indicated the times and the hours that he has spent even in Ottawa representing the better interests of our municipalities. With that, I'd like Mr. Johnson to rise and receive the warm appreciation of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guest from the Alberta Federation of Labour Women's Committee, Carisa David. Today is International Women's Day, a global day for celebrating the economic, political, and social achievements of women. The AFL Women's Committee encourages the involvement of women in the Alberta labour movement and works to ensure that issues affecting women remain at the top of labour's agenda. Women make up almost half of Canada's workforce yet are still a long way from equality. The labour movement is working to close the gap. My guest is seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the Coalition des femmes de l'Alberta, Isabelle Déchène Guay, board president, and board member Jacqueline Bégin. The Coalition des femmes de l'Alberta is a nonprofit organization which provides a voice for francophone women in Alberta. Their aim is to motivate women from all regions of the province to work together on common interests and to support greater visibility for women of all ages. The coalition works in partnership with various francophone organizations such as Réseau santé albertain to support women as natural caregivers. I've asked my guests to join us here today in recognition of International Women's Day and also to pay tribute to the contributions of francophones in Alberta during Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie week. Je vous souhaite la bienvenue, en particulier aujourd'hui, pour célébrer la Journée internationale des femmes. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

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

2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to speak on the success of Alberta's involvement in the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. These Olympics will long be remembered as the games that sparked Canadians' sense of national pride in perhaps a way that we had never experienced before.

Mr. Speaker, before I go any further, I'd also like to recognize Shannon and say: welcome, Shannon, and great job. Great job.

For 17 days in February thousands of visitors descended on Vancouver and 3 billion people around the world turned their focus to the Winter Olympics. Some called it the ultimate reality show. Alberta called it the ultimate opportunity. Unlike Nagano, Beijing, or Torino, Vancouver is next door, and this was a rare opportunity to promote our beautiful province and do business on a world stage.

Plus, Mr. Speaker, having hosted the Winter Olympics in 1988, many Albertans, including the some 70 volunteers who stepped up to assist the Olympic and Paralympic Secretariat, had first-hand Olympic experience, and they hit the ground running.

As the head of our Olympic Secretariat, Russ Tynan, once said: if you've never done the Olympic Games, you'll never understand the opportunity of the Olympic Games. So when Vancouver spent billions setting the Olympic table, we were there to serve up a taste of Alberta, literally, with a side of business savvy.

Two years ago we committed to an outstanding location for Alberta House and Plaza. Even before the games opened and before construction was finished, kudos started. In this beautiful prime space we served an innovative selection of Alberta foods such as prairie chowder, elk, boar, bison, cheeses, and Alberta beef. We rocked the house every night with free performances by talented Alberta musicians.

I'd like to commend my colleague the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and the staff in the arts branch for ensuring that so many talented Albertans could travel to Vancouver and Whistler to participate in the Cultural Olympiad and entertain thousands at our venues.

Alberta House was the place to be. Canadian Olympic medalists and celebrities like Wayne Gretzky dropped by to celebrate with us and the crowd, and for Alberta businesses it was the place to meet and host events, a place to develop new opportunities and relationships.

I'd also like to make mention of the 166 lucky young Albertans we hosted at Alberta House. Thanks to our Olympic Secretariat and ATCO's celebrating excellence program, two kids in grades 4 to 12 from each Alberta constituency and their parents won a flight to Vancouver, attended an Olympic event, and had dinner at Alberta House. Mr. Speaker, I'll never forget their smiles as they sat in Alberta House wearing red hockey jerseys and enjoying a meal prepared by executive chef Brad Smoliak. I know that every one of these young Albertans carried that Olympic spirit back into their schools and to their classmates. The further north we went, we had kids who'd never been out of their communities and never been on a plane. It was really wonderful to hear their stories.

We also sponsored 26 young Alberta athletes, future Olympians, and a parent to see their winter sports event first-hand courtesy of Alberta sports and rec and the secretariat in something called Pathways to Excellence. It was an inspirational experience for them but also for us. We got to see the next generation of Olympians.

These athletes also had the opportunity to ride the Alberta train. This was the Olympic venue that attracted more media attention around the world than we could have ever imagined and was dubbed one of the hottest tickets at the Olympics.

About 18 months ago we agreed to and signed a lease with the *Rocky Mountaineer*, voted the world's leading travel experience by train for the past four years, and wrapped it in Alberta's brand and colours. I'm delighted to say that the *Rocky Mountaineer* proudly announced that they'll keep that train wrapped for the entire 2010 vacation season. Wonderful news, and it goes to show the value of creating great business relationships.

Mr. Speaker, anyone could buy a ticket on the train during the Olympics, but we targeted decision-makers in the global tourism industry, the business world, and the media, the kind of people who don't always answer our e-mails or our phone calls, and they went on that six-hour round trip up to Whistler. They talked with Alberta tourism operators and business leaders, and it was the ultimate networking opportunity.

The Vancouver media joked that we had hijacked their train, but they were also the first to give us kudos. Alberta's Olympic vision is as clear as it is down to earth, they said; it's to drum up business

for Alberta. Even Premier Campbell publicly said that he was happy for the success of Alberta, B.C.'s good and supportive neighbour. We want to thank B.C. for graciously allowing all of us to participate in these games. They truly made them Canada's games and were great hosts.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, Travel Alberta estimates that just from the 17 days of the Olympics Alberta will gain more than \$70 million in media exposure in important markets around the world. Just last week I saw a German newspaper featuring the *Rocky Mountaineer* and skiing at Lake Louise. I couldn't read the language, but I could read the pictures.

Another special group that had an opportunity to travel on the Alberta train was the Children's Wish Foundation. I'd like to read for you an excerpt from their e-mail.

We were the family with three young girls sent to the Olympics from the Children's Wish Foundation. We were so lucky to get a ticket on the *Rocky Mountaineer* train trip. What a time we had.

We just want to thank you. It was the most fantastic adventure.

We'd like to say: "You're welcome. We're glad that you could travel with us, and we wish you continued strength through the challenges that you face every day."

Of course, Mr. Speaker, the greatest story and success story of the Olympics is the pride that Canadians felt in their country and in their athletes. I can't recall ever hearing so many spontaneous outbursts of *O Canada*. From Alex winning the first gold medal, to our men's hockey team winning the last, to our women's hockey team, to our curlers, skaters, skiers, snowboarders, and sliders, whether they won medals or represented our country to the best of their ability, we're fiercely proud of all of our athletes and the sacrifices they made to represent this country. These Olympics will be remembered as a turning point for Canada not only for our medal count but for recognition.

It's a great point of pride for Alberta that more than half of these Canadian athletes live, work, or train in Alberta. It's because government has made the investment necessary to maintain and upgrade legacy facilities. I don't know that we can ever thank our athletes, our volunteers, or our artists enough, but on behalf of this Assembly I'd like to extend our deep gratitude and congratulations to everyone who committed their time, energy, talent, and heart to proudly represent Alberta and Canada at one of the world's most recognizable events.

Just over a week ago the Olympic men's gold medal hockey game was shared by 22 million Canadians, and the second that goal crossed the line to win gold, we felt it echo across this nation. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud and I know that we were all proud to represent the province of Alberta, but the one thing that I will take away from these games was how proud I felt to be a Canadian.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, the normal length for ministerial statements traditionally in this Assembly is four minutes or less. You went over seven.

We are now up against the daily Routine, Standing Order 7(1.1). We're now going to the question period.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Calgary Cancer Services

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Since the nationally respected Alberta Cancer Board was dissolved by this government, a major

voice for cancer care in this province has been silenced. This government has been told there is not enough capacity for cancer care in Calgary since at least 2003, yet it fails to act. Even if work began now on a new facility, it would still be several more years before it would be up and running. My question is to the Premier. How many more years are the people of Calgary going to have to wait before they get a full-fledged cancer hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, cancer care is a priority for my government. Alberta Health Services is looking at improving access to cancer treatment and not concentrating always on the bricks and mortar.

Any further questions the minister of health can give more information on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll try the Premier on this. Is the Premier aware that the site in which cancer services are being delivered at the Holy Cross, which is rented on behalf of the Tom Baker centre, is the subject of a very serious class-action suit concerning deadly asbestos poisoning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think I've made it clear in this House on a number of occasions that the health infrastructure capital plan will be unveiled on or about March 31, and that will include looking at cancer facilities in Calgary.

Dr. Taft: Well, I'll repeat the question to the minister. The Tom Baker centre is so crowded, Mr. Speaker, it has to deliver services in rented spaces. One of these spaces is the former Holy Cross Centre. So again to the minister: is the minister aware that the site in which cancer services are being delivered at the Holy Cross is the subject of a very serious class-action suit concerning deadly asbestos poisoning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no, I am not aware of the asbestos issue that has just been raised, but I can assure this member that I'll look into it right away. In the meantime I would like to assure all Albertans who are listening and watching and those who are participating in this debate that we are going to be adding more capacity for cancer care in Calgary. I believe it's the McCaig centre that will be opening relatively soon, and that will take some stress off the system. But let's wait for the capital plan to come out in its formal sense in a couple of weeks.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children and Youth Services is a ministry in crisis, a broken system that puts children's lives at risk. It is a system where qualifications aren't valued, where monitoring is not a priority, and where screening of foster and kinship homes is insufficient. There is something systemic and fundamentally wrong with this ministry which will not be resolved by simply changing ministers. To the Premier. The current system is costing children their lives. What specific actions is the Premier taking now to fix the system to ensure that we don't see another life lost?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's always a tragedy when a child dies

no matter what the circumstances. Certainly, you know, as a father and a grandfather – and many of us are parents and grandparents – this is a serious situation, and our hearts go out to the families involved. The minister has ordered an investigation, and she may have further detail in this particular case.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: when will this government introduce legislation to ensure that all individuals who care for our most vulnerable population are properly qualified?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, foster parents do exceptional work in this province. There are many, many untold stories of children's lives that have been turned around through the exceptional care of foster parents. As I said before, the minister is undertaking an investigation in this particular matter. Once the results are provided to the minister, she will take action.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Front-line workers are facing enormous caseloads. They cannot provide the help because the government has not helped them. Will the Premier require that the children's advocate report directly to the Legislature as a first step to improving transparency and accountability within the ministry? This is the case in all other provinces.

Mr. Stelmach: As I said, Mr. Speaker, this matter is under investigation. The minister will review the results of that investigation and make the appropriate decisions.

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

Domestic Violence

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One-third of homicides committed in Alberta are a result of domestic violence. Every year over 12,000 women are forced to live in shelters while more than 14,000 are turned away because of lack of space. Yes, Mr. Speaker, you heard that correctly: 14,000 women fleeing from abuse are turned away every year. To the Premier: when will this government take action to help the 14,000 women who are unable to be accommodated in shelters?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, not only has the budget increased for housing and accommodation; there are dollars put into a number of areas. One is to get the message across to many Albertans in terms of the physical and verbal abuse within families, especially towards women and their children. There are many not-for-profit agencies that have undertaken the education process in this province. But we will continue to keep ensuring that we work with agencies, that there is appropriate housing, and provide comfort for those that have been abused by their families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the message is getting out there, but it is awful slowly. We need to do something for those 14,000 women who are fleeing violence right now. In that regard, why aren't we increasing our operational funding right now

to improve more shelter space to help these 14,000 women fleeing these horrible, horrible situations today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, having attended many of the fundraising events that raise funds to supplement those that are provided by government to the various agencies providing housing, counselling, and protection and in speaking to the president, she was quite satisfied in terms of the direction the government is taking and the increase in funding. We'll continue to do that in spite of the fact that, you know, our resources are constrained. But this is a serious matter. We take it very seriously. Yes, education will help, but there are other ways of intervening to ensure that women are protected in their own homes.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know money is tight right now, but if this government is looking for money, we can always look to the \$50 million that is ready and able to help people in the victims of crime fund. Why isn't this money being put to use right now to help these 14,000 women who are fleeing domestic violence situations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not responsible for the fund, but the minister that is responsible can certainly answer the question.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the member will know that we have allocated millions of dollars to help victims of crime. The surplus in the fund is required to achieve stabilization. Nonetheless, my department is looking at it, and we'll report in due time.

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

Protection of Children in Care

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's tragic death of a Morinville area foster child is the latest in an unfortunate list of incidents that have continued to cause grief for all Albertans. After each of these tragedies the NDP made recommendations that would better protect children in government care, but each time our suggestions have fallen on dead ears. To the Premier. It's not enough just to say that you care when you are the one in charge. Why has the Premier failed to take action to better protect the children in this government's care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has undertaken an investigation in this matter. Once the results of that investigation are known, then she will make the appropriate decisions based on the evidence that's brought forward by the agency that is doing the review.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, children in care have suffered, their families have grieved, and this government's response has simply been to cut funding and staffing levels in this ministry. Child intervention services have been cut by \$26 million. Countless positions have been left vacant due to a hiring freeze. Again to the Premier: how can the Premier claim that he is working to protect vulnerable children while at the same time stripping the ministry of support and resources that are needed to do the job?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to reach conclusions in terms of what the issue was in this particular tragic case, but I would

ask the House to wait until the minister completes the investigation. Then we will have more information to reach a conclusion.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this House is still waiting for the results of an investigation that we were promised over a year ago, so waiting isn't going to do it. This government's own reports show that there are 79 confirmed instances of abuse against 150 children in care between January and June of '09 alone. This is a clear indication that the ministry was not in a position to sustain further funding cuts. Again to the Premier: how can you possibly think that this ministry, with its tragic record over the last two years, can protect the children in its care with fewer resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This member knows full well that the budget for child intervention is substantive. We have over \$525 million in this budget. We are going to be discussing this during estimates on March 17, and I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker: I am monitoring this budget very closely. I've discussed this with staff, the overall budget. They've assured me that the foster care review report that was conducted two years ago has made a significant difference in the area of foster care. It's about the screening, and it's also that we have good people that are applying for foster care and with the right intentions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Long-term Care in Fort McMurray

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was speaking with some schoolchildren as well as some voters in Fort McMurray, and they asked the question on question period on why we cannot get answers from government ministers or the Premier, so I'm going to provide an opportunity for the Premier on my questions that I asked just a week and a half ago. My question was pertaining to a commitment to long-term care in our community of Fort McMurray as well as 15 others and why new money is being spent, yet the old commitments that were made have still not been lived up to. Could the Premier please answer the question: why haven't you lived up to the old commitments while you are out spending new money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is no new money being spent. We are working within our capital budget, and decisions with respect to continuing care facilities will be made very shortly. We just completed the sale of our capital bonds. We are looking at other areas to ensure that we provide the appropriate facilities for our seniors, and as I said before, we want to have seniors retire in the very same community that they helped build.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, our seniors, who have built this very province – again, pertaining to the question, new money has been listed in the budget. It has been announced in Fort McMurray, but the previous commitments that were made to communities across Alberta, in fact, appear to have been forgotten. My question is: will you honour the previous commitments that have been made to seniors across this province, not just in my constituency, as opposed to new money that is going out and being spent in new initiatives as opposed to, in fact, responding to the old commitments that have been made?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue on our plan to build the appropriate number of seniors' accommodations in the

province. I will say that the attitude towards seniors and the way we provide that housing has to change. We're not going to continue to build facilities where we keep dividing couples after 60 years of marriage and move one into perhaps a lodge here and move the other one into long-term care. That won't happen. We can keep seniors together, and we can get better quality of life and better service. That's the direction this government is taking.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, to the seniors I've spoken to in my community and across Alberta, there have been over 15 commitments made to MLAs' constituencies in taking care of seniors, who have built this province. To the Premier. There are billions of dollars being spent today, new money, on carbon capture and storage, yet the previous commitments that were made have not been honoured. Will you honour these commitments, Mr. Premier, and assure this House that you will honour those commitments before any new money is being spent?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the hon. Member for Fort McMurray of a few certain facts. In the last decade over \$1 billion was spent on highway 63. On education there's \$40 million being spent on a new junior high school, \$53 million being spent on a new high school. Total government support: \$1.4 billion. He says that there's nothing new on the capital plan. Of course, there's nothing new on the capital plan. The point is that with revenues down, we're still building it. If he doesn't want it in Fort McMurray, I think there's a mayor down in Calgary that might like it.

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

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By ramming through Bill 50 last year, this government took away a landowner's right to be consulted in the construction of high-voltage power lines. Now that projects are being planned, landowners are frustrated that they're being left out of decisions that are severely affecting the value of their property. For example, a 40-acre strip by Crossfield is virtually unsellable because of uncertainty on where those transmission lines are going to go up. To the Minister of Energy: how are Albertans supposed to invest in this province when they're kept in the dark and they aren't given any power to protect their interests?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there are a whole bunch of accusations made in that preamble that are completely false. What Bill 50 did was ensure that we not have hearings around the need. The need is evident, and Bill 50 passed the House last fall. What are taking place right now are negotiations with the various proponents of the transmission lines, with the landowners, and it'll be going before a hearing shortly.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, instead of consultations this government prefers information sessions so that people can find out what this government has already decided. With this Big Brother mentality what process is left for Albertans to make their concerns known to this government, Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, any Albertan has the opportunity through any elected official to make their views known relative to any issue. I would suggest that if there's a particular

situation that this member has that he would like to draw to my attention as a minister of the Crown, I would also be open to those suggestions. Then on the official side of it, as I said, the hearings will begin. There's ample opportunity there as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, we've heard reports that the so-called experts sent to these sessions not only lack knowledge, but they also met Albertans' concerns with contempt. Given this government's track record for silencing Albertans or attempting to silence them, how can Albertans have any confidence that this government will finally hear and act on their concerns?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure where the member is getting his information. He prefaced his question by: we hear. I'm not sure where he hears. But, certainly, in the process of going forward with the negotiations with landowners, I'm informed by many of those who are involved that negotiations are proceeding satisfactorily.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:10

Beef Industry

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several constituents that are cow-calf beef producers, and as you know, due to a number of factors their viability is in question. Many are exiting the business, Alberta's herd is shrinking, and of course this would have dramatic impacts on rural Alberta. My question is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What can he do or what will he do to ensure these important primary producers remain viable and strong in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, that industry as part of the agriculture industry is hugely important to us as it's our second-largest and largest renewable industry in the province. In 2008 this government committed close to \$360 million to a long-range plan to spur innovation in technology, strengthen and stabilize the industry into the future. We face a great number of challenges right now with the new global economic situation, but that industry remains important, and we remain investing more than any other province in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. These same constituents are telling me that one of the big problems they see is that there isn't enough competition among purchasers in Alberta. They often point to the fact that we only have two major packing plants in our province, which they feel keeps prices depressed. What's the minister's response to that, and what can he do to ensure that there's more competition amongst purchasers?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, it's true there are only two major packing plants in the province, but there are over 50 smaller processing facilities in Alberta. I understand the hon. member's concern. We need to open more markets, and we need to work closely with our neighbours throughout Canada and with the federal government to ensure that we can open more markets through those other processing facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. My primary producers continue to be frustrated by the regulatory burdens that they feel they have in this province, particularly in light of the fact that beef being imported to Alberta does not have to comply with the same standards that Alberta beef does. Is this true, and can the minister tell us what he can do to eliminate this unfair disadvantage?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, the quality and safety standards for meat that's brought into the province are the same whether those are processed here in the province or whether they're brought in from outside. Some of the competitive disadvantage that I hear about and some of the things we need to address are the extra funding that we spend on SRMs in our country compared to some of our competitors. We need to take a look through Bill 1 to make ourselves more competitive and create a better environment for the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Syphilis Caseload

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The way the government has handled the growing syphilis rates in Alberta is embarrassing. Firing three top public health officers and proceeding to do virtually nothing for three years has seen infection rates soar. Syphilis is entirely treatable, and for Alberta to have twice the national average for infection rates shows this government has ignored their own advice and allowed this situation to get out of hand. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. The former minister of health apparently ignored this issue. Will the minister finally act on the recommendations made in 2007 and have a province-wide campaign?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The spreading of an infectious disease is a great concern to all of us. I thank the member, actually, for raising the issue because we do have a plan in place now, and there is a little bit more of an addition to that plan coming soon that will see, among other things, targeted interventions with certain population areas and certain population groups. That plan will also include establishing a 14-member group that will look further into the prevention aspects of this particular issue, and there are other enhanced clinical screenings being done as well.

Ms Pastoor: A proper health care system should have enough capacity to shift resources when needed and not completely drop everything else. This appears to have been the case under the H1N1. What is the minister doing to make sure that we have very balanced public health?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the chief medical officer for health, who is one of many advisers to me as minister, has the additional parts to that plan. That'll be coming out very soon, hon. member, and I'll be sharing that with the public.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I wonder if the minister could tell me just

on what basis the projection was made by the public health officer. You've talked about the plan coming forward. Is there a specific timeline?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're already establishing the new 14-member team as we speak. But there will be more specific actions very soon that we'll be rolling out that will address exactly that issue. It's a cause for concern to be sure, and we're targeting to get back to zero within five years, which is a very realistic projection at this stage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Regulatory Reform

Ms DeLong: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. We all want Alberta to be greener. We all want Alberta to be safer. Thus, government creates regulations. Often the government overregulates when trying to achieve these goals. Unfortunately, each added regulation increases administrative costs to Alberta businesses, Alberta businesses that have to compete internationally with others not burdened with unnecessary regulation.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We appreciate the hon. member's concern with overregulation. In fact, this government has been reviewing regulation on a regular basis since the mid-90s. That's not surprising given the economic growth that has taken place in the province. Particularly with our resource-based economy, concern with environmental protection and worker safety is paramount. To ensure that the regulations are appropriate, my department works collaboratively with other ministries in the development of regulations. In particular, we've had since the mid-90s the Regulatory Review Secretariat, currently chaired by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: what is the regulatory load upon business, and is overregulation hurting our competitiveness?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, overregulation, of course, poses a threat of hurting our competitiveness, but again thanks to the good work done by the Regulatory Review Secretariat and the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, we scrutinize all new regulation, and any change to existing regulation is scrutinized to make sure that the results that we want are achieved in the least burdensome way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What are the government's plans to rein in and reduce our regulatory load on Alberta businesses and enhance our competitiveness?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we think we have a system that's working well now, and we'll continue to use the Regulatory Review Secretariat. The hon. Minister of Energy is just completing a competitiveness review that looks at a broad sector of factors that affect the competitiveness of the energy industry. One of those is

regulation, and you'll be seeing action on that front shortly. Of course, Bill 1, the Competitiveness Act, will be looking at all the factors that affect Alberta's competitiveness, one of which is regulation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Impaired Driving

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is at a crisis point in the battle against impaired driving, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving have called repeatedly for the government to step up to the plate. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Will you commit to lowering the acceptable blood-alcohol content for operating a vehicle to 0.5?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, impaired driving is a crime, and it's treated as such in this province. Our message has always been clear: don't drink and drive, or sooner or later we're going to get you. We're going to keep our policemen on the roads. We're going to keep doing everything we possibly can to catch the people that drink and drive and keep them off the roads.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, your message is not working. In 2007 there was a 19 per cent increase in the rate of impaired driving, and 2008 brought a 40 per cent increase. That's pitiful. Will the Minister of Transportation be forecasting double-digit increases to the rate of impaired driving again in 2009?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we've been expanding our program. We brought in last year as part of our program a regulation that now we also convict people that are driving under any type of drugs, whether it's prescription drugs or anything else. Under our graduated driver's licence for all new drivers there's absolutely zero tolerance; they can't have any type of alcohol in their system. We plan on keeping the pressure on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are not talking about GDL drivers; we are talking about drivers who already have the licences.

Twenty two per cent of drivers who suffered a fatal crash in 2008 had consumed alcohol prior to the accident. The government's inaction is killing people. Why doesn't the minister amend the Traffic Safety Act to increase the current 24-hour suspension to a week-long penalty?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we look at the whole system. We're going to make sure that Justice does their part of it, that the Solicitor General does their part of it, and we're doing our utmost to keep drivers safe in Alberta.

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

Private Registry Services

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many years ago the government made the decision to get out of running government registries and allow community-based entrepreneurs to step in.

While the oversight of the important registry function remains with the government, these entrepreneurs have built strong, credible, and important community-based businesses. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Why is your department threatening to ruin hundreds of businesses across Alberta by opening up the registry business to banks, financial institutions, and others?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to say that registry agents do excellent work across Alberta, the over 200 offices that we have doing the front-line counter service that needs to be done on a daily basis. It's really important here: over these last couple of years just meeting with the registry agents, talking to them about the partnership they can continue to have with the government, and moving forward in a number of new areas like online services, areas like that.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, that wasn't the question I asked you.

Mr. Speaker, many Albertans have invested huge amounts of time and money to build a livelihood and a private business for their family. Sadly, this government faction once again is undermining the ability of businesses to invest with confidence and certainty. The provincial government is now moving forward with a plan to allow banks, financial institutions, and others to get into the private registry business. My question is again to the same minister. If you're going to allow banks and financial institutions to get into the registry business, will you ensure that the playing field is truly level and require them to operate as stand-alone businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to some of the comments that the hon. member has made, at any time we are discussing ongoing things. Nothing has been set in stone. We are discussing and having good feedback on a number of issues. Just last year we signed a phenomenal registry agent agreement. It took one year to sign that agreement. I was very proud of that work, very proud of the partnership we have with the agents on this. Moving forward, anything we do will be discussed openly, and that's what's really important.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, it was your document that was leaked to the association, not mine.

My final question is to the same minister. Why are you allowing your department to undermine the confidence and security of the investment that thousands of Albertans have made in their own registry business by not stopping this ill-conceived plan in its tracks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very good to clear this up. Any time internal documents are shared with the public, that's something we have to look at. It's really important to note that it's an internal discussion document. Nothing has been decided. We are moving forward and will be consulting with registry agents as well as with Albertans. I think what's really important here is being competitive, more online services, and giving registry agents a chance to succeed and do more good business.

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

Women's Issues

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People around the world are proudly acknowledging and reaffirming their commitment to the equality, freedom, and advancement of women on this International Women's Day. Today's theme is Strong Women, Strong Canada, Strong World, and I truly hope we're making strides towards this. My first question is to the minister responsible for women's issues, the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services. In the past I've had constituents question whether the public service has done enough with respect to women's issues. What is the minister's department doing with the other levels of government to ensure that women's issues are given the proper attention they deserve in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important day for women in Alberta and across the country. As provincial ministers we do meet, hon. member, with our federal counterpart. We work as partners through the Status of Women, through the ministerial forum. The meeting, I understand, will be taking place this June. On the agenda we have issues such as economic security for women, issues of violence against women, aboriginal women's issues. As the member said, we very much remain committed in this province to the equality, freedom, and advancement of women.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Canadians may well be celebrating certain progress towards equality for women, but barriers do remain. My first supplemental question is for the Minister of Justice. What is her department doing to address the serious challenges faced by Alberta women and girls, and are these efforts truly meeting the needs?

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

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a woman in Alberta and the mother of a seven-year-old it's very important to me that we take this time today to talk about what our successes have been but also where we as government and as society still need to do more work.

Under the safe communities initiative, Mr. Speaker, we have put tremendous resources into investing into community-based projects that will ensure that women can feel safe and comfortable discussing issues that have to do with how they need to realize their lives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I truly do appreciate the candid answer, but I do have one more question for the same minister, who has spoken about supplying women and families with the tools they do need to live better lives. Can the minister give us some tangible evidence as to whether these efforts are actually making a positive difference for these really important Albertans?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to justice matters we believe that while there are a number of issues that government programs may support that address concerns and needs that women in our communities have, there's no doubt that we need to deal with where some of the issues are. We need to spend some time, we believe, particularly on domestic violence issues. We're very

concerned about women who are vulnerable in their homes and about the children who are vulnerable in those homes with them. So under the safe communities innovation fund we've invested in over five projects that encourage dialogue, debate, and support to people and families to deal with domestic violence.

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

Aboriginal Learning Outcomes

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the government announced a memorandum of understanding on aboriginal education with treaty chiefs and the federal government. Motion, however, should not be confused with progress. On aboriginal education this government is standing still and in some areas is actually going backwards. To the Minister of Education. The partnership memorandum seems to be an agreement to come up with a strategy later, an IOU rather than an MOU. Will this MOU require the provincial government to actually come forward with any new resources to improve aboriginal learning outcomes?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the memorandum of agreement that was signed a week ago last Wednesday together with the partnership agreement which we signed last fall are two very, very important steps forward. First of all, the partnership agreement that we signed last fall with the grand chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8 and the president of the Métis Settlements General Council and the president of the Métis Nation of Alberta set up a partnership with Advanced Education, Education, and Aboriginal Relations, working with those groups to really focus on how we can move aboriginal education, First Nations and Métis education, forward in this province. This new partnership, that includes the federal ministry: I'll be able to elaborate further, Mr. Speaker, on the good work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a tremendous difference between smoking a ceremonial pipe and blowing smoke. Provincial per-student funding for First Nations learners has been frozen at last year's level and only increased by \$12 the year before that. How are school districts supposed to improve aboriginal learning outcomes when their ministry is standing still?

Mr. Hancock: Far from standing still, we've made the most progress in this area that has been made in ages. First of all, the progress really is the leadership of the communities themselves, the leadership together with the province and now the federal government signing on, making it the highest priority.

Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't be in that member's position of making light of very important ceremonies that people undertake in terms of the pipe ceremonies at the start. We take very, very seriously our partnership with treaties 6, 7, and 8, our partnership with the Métis Settlements General Council, and the work of all of us to make sure that, first, the achievement gap is eliminated between First Nations and Métis students and other students of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I certainly don't take First Nations' ceremonies for granted. I'm a big fan of the Black Elk sacred pipe, as one example.

High school completion rates for First Nations students are at 52

per cent compared to 79 per cent for all other students. But Budget 2010 eliminates grants intended to boost high school completion rates. Why is this minister backtracking on raising completion rates for aboriginal learners?

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely not backtracking on that. In fact, it's still one of the most important things we can do; that is, to ensure that each and every one of the students in this province regardless of their background, regardless of whether they live on a First Nation or in a city or a town or in a rural area—every single student matters. Every student, every day. No exceptions.

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

2:30 Calgary Road and Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are hearing that the city of Calgary is not receiving adequate funding for its road and infrastructure projects. I've heard that some of the projects may be in jeopardy due to lack of funds. My question is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. Can the minister explain why his department is not providing enough funds to help Calgary complete these projects?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'd like this member and all members to know that my department supplied \$1.6 billion to the city of Calgary in the last five years. That's \$1.6 billion, with a "b." What the city spends these grants on is up to the city; it's their choice. The city sets its own priorities because the city is in the best position to know what its citizens need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I'm very glad to hear the city is getting transportation grants, many of my constituents in south Calgary are concerned with the progress made on the Stoney Trail ring road. My second question is to the same hon. minister. Can the minister tell us when we will see some activity on the southeastern section of the Stoney Trail?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're not going to be waiting very long. By the end of March we expect to announce the successful bidder on the project, and I'm sure that they will be out there moving dirt later on this spring. We're going to extend Stoney Trail from 17th Avenue SE to Macleod Trail, and it will open to traffic in the fall of 2013. That will complete roughly 70 per cent of the ring road in Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Calgarians have different views on which projects should go first with municipal sustainability funding, MSI. Can the minister explain how it is determined which projects proceed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true that municipalities receive substantial support through MSI. In the last four years—and that's including this year—Calgary has received \$639.9 million in funding. We are still committed to Calgary for the full amount of \$3.3 billion. But the beauty of MSI is that it gives the

municipalities the autonomy to pursue projects that are right for their local residents. The local decisions are best made locally, and then it's up to the municipal leaders to do what they feel is right for their citizens.

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

Support for the Film Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The film industry in Alberta is in a very grave situation, but the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit is being divisive rather than constructive. The minister has recently described film unions as selfish and acting like children, which isn't very helpful. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: why did the minister claim during budget debates that the head of IATSE, Damian Petti, was in a November meeting with the minister and the president of CFTPA, Norm Bolen, and somehow refused to co-operate, when Mr. Petti and Mr. Bolen have never met?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no smoking gun here. What I did say at estimates was that I had met with Mr. Bolen, who is the head of the CFTPA, and I had met with Mr. Petti on the same day. I didn't say that they were in the same room.

With respect to the fact that I said that they were acting like children, I said that in our film industry there are many reasons why we have to be competitive in Alberta. That's because we have a film development program that has a labour rate that's competitive with Ontario, with British Columbia, but we need co-operation from our film producers and our unions and guilds. British Columbia and Ontario have an agreement . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. The hon. member has the floor.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, back to the same minister. Given that IATSE has signed a binding agreement with 250 producers for a North American low-budget agreement, which helps Alberta producers, why does the minister ignore that in favour of advocating a nonbinding contract with Canadian producers? How does that help Alberta film workers?

Mr. Blackett: I said it again in estimates, Mr. Speaker. That's great that they have a binding agreement with low-budget films. The question was: why do we not have larger productions that employ more Albertans? I said that if we want to get more large productions into Alberta, then we need those agreements similar to the ones that we have with the small producers to attract those people from the States and from other countries and across Canada to our province.

Ms Blakeman: It needs to be a binding agreement, Minister.

Back to the same minister: why did the minister dismiss as grandstanding a gathering of almost 300 concerned film actors, stage workers, directors, set dressers, makeup artists, DOPs, and other film workers? Why did you dismiss them as grandstanding rather than taking their concerns seriously and working with them, not against them?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, if they were really interested in talking to me, they wouldn't have given me less than 48 hours to respond to their invitation knowing full well that I was in Vancouver and I wouldn't be back in Calgary until late in the day last Monday. They can call whenever they want. If they want a chance to talk to

me – I've talked to hundreds of them in the past; I will continue to do so in the future – my door is always open, and we're available.

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

School Transportation Grants

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School boards in Whitecourt-St. Anne are concerned about education funding, not just the dollars that go into the schoolrooms but dollars that are scarce and that are needed for their transportation departments to get the students to and from their homes and schools. My questions are to the Minister of Education. With the price of oil on its rise, last year you reduced the subsidy for fuel. You eliminated that program, and that program offered lots of stability. Why did you do that?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, last summer, when we were doing our value reviews and looking to see areas where we could actually save money, it became apparent that we were continuing with a grant to top up diesel prices over 60 cents per litre at a time when the price of diesel had actually fallen below the level that it was at in 2005, when the program was instituted, so we determined that that top-up grant was no longer necessary. I would point out that although that saved \$6 million, the transportation grants have actually increased by \$53 million, or 26 per cent, over that period of time.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, the transportation grants may have increased, Mr. Speaker, but not equally to all school divisions, and that's part of the problem. With the subsidy leaving, we leave our school bus drivers and those contractors very, very vulnerable. I think that you've made a big mistake, and I'd like you to relook at that issue. Will the minister reconsider?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a budget, and we have a finite amount of money to allocate to school boards. We have to put together formulas that can distribute those monies in the most effective way. What I can say is this. If the price of oil goes up and if there are more resources available to the province and that creates an increase in the price of gasoline and the price of diesel in particular, then of course we'll have to look at it and say: there's more revenue coming to the province, and there are more costs at the price, so we'll have to have a look at it. I would have to go back and get more resources from Treasury Board to be able to do that.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, has the minister made that commitment to the school boards and to our bus contractors across this province directly, or is this your first chance at this?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'm not in a position to make a commitment to school boards and to school bus drivers that we will reinstate that program, but I am in a position to say that if resources are there – this particular grant is tied precisely to the price of fuel, and our revenue stream is very much tied to the price of fuel. So it makes sense that if the revenue stream goes up because prices go up, perhaps we can revisit the question of whether a subsidy grant needs to be put back in place.

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

Northeast Edmonton Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Four years ago the then minister of health announced plans for a primary health centre

for northeast Edmonton. Four years later the building sits only half occupied by the public health clinic that was relocated from its previous location. In an area chronically short of doctors and health care services generally this health centre is badly needed. My question is to the minister of health. When will the acute-care facility promised four years ago be fully staffed and operational?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we'll be rolling out a plan in a couple of weeks that will include approximately \$2.5 billion worth of health and health-related facilities, and this project that he's referring to is on the radar screen for consideration as part of that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Six primary care physicians were promised to communities which are chronically short of doctors. When will the six primary care doctors so badly needed by northeast Edmonton communities be hired?

2:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, primary care networks are working extremely well in this province. They're a relatively new concept. We have about 17 of them up and running now. I've met with some of these folks; I'll be meeting with some of them again in the very near future. I'll be happy to have this question passed on to the folks who are putting those specific PCNs in place right now in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a \$44 million facility, and it sits half empty. The lights are on, but nobody is home. Can the minister tell the Assembly whether or not an investment of \$44 million for a half-empty building is a good use of taxpayers' money?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, any project that commits money to help improve services for Albertans, to help access those services, and to help put the right people in the right place to deliver those services is a good investment. In case the hon. member missed it, we have been suffering through a very, very dramatic global economic downturn. Now we're starting to see a coming out of that, as it were. As soon as we're a little further along the way, I hope we'll be able to look at a number of projects that have been deferred and get as many of them moving as possible.

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

PDD Funding

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I met with constituents and service providers this last week, a common concern was this government's lack of trust as families and service providers struggle to provide services for those in need. After hearing their stories, I have to agree. This government is implementing a program to reassess the 9,000 clients of PDD. What is really needed is a complete audit of the value and quality of services that are being provided for those clients. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will you cancel the reassessment program and focus on providing adequate care and services for those people on PDD?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, it's very important to us that we get the services and supports for those who are eligible for PDD supports right, and one of the ways we can get that right is by assessing their individual needs. The new program that we have put in place, which is called the supports intensity program, will reassess

the 9,200 individuals to ensure that they are receiving the right supports, and if they're not, we will put the right supports in place.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, audits have shown that those assessments are accurate. This minister needs to ask her department if it's more concerned about repeated assessments or helping PDD agencies deliver on their mandate. Agencies are telling me that they are spending so much time dealing with these new repeated assessments that new clients are not able to be assessed and get the services they need. My question to the minister of community supports again: is this waste of taxpayers' dollars and PDD agency resources simply a make-work project for department staff?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you there is plenty of work in the PDD program to go around. This is a very important part of the priority action plan that we have in place to ensure that we are providing the right supports for all of our PDD clients. The thing that's most important is that we'll have consistent supports throughout the province for all the clients so that we have the same sort of services provided in Grande Prairie as in Lethbridge and east to west as well.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the audits have been done. The assessments are accurate. They're wasting taxpayers' money, their time. It just isn't good. This government has a predictable pattern. They make rash decisions and then refuse to recognize that they are responsible for the consequences. I'll ask the minister again: will you cancel this PDD reassessment and get the proper support for those families and agencies that need to provide the actual services, not reassessments?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that our PDD clients are receiving the best supports and services that can be provided in the country of Canada. We need to ensure, because we have a budget that we have to look after, that people are receiving the right amount of supports, the right amount from north to south, east to west. We have to make sure it's consistent throughout the province, and we have to make sure that the right supports are in place. That's what the supports intensity scale will do. It's a proven program. It's used in 25 other locations around North America, and this will bring better results for our PDD clients.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 108 questions and responses today, made up of the recognition of 13 opposition members and five government members.

When we went to the question period, we were in the Routine with respect to Ministerial Statements. We had recognized a ministerial statement from the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and as is our custom, we'll now recognize a spokesman from the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ministerial Statements

2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics

(continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Olympic athletes, volume 2, the under-four-minutes version.

Mr. Speaker, like the hon. minister, I agree that the Vancouver Olympics were a spectacular success story for the nation. Our athletes truly shone, delivering the most gold medals ever won by a host country at a Winter Olympics and giving us a solid third place in the overall medal count. Medals aside, every competitor put her or his heart into these games, performing to the very best of their ability as well as helping play host to the world.

This was a signature moment for Canada alongside events such as Expo 67 and our own Winter Games in Calgary in 1988. No matter where in Canada we hail from, we should all be very proud of these Olympics and the men and women from coast to coast to coast who made the games such a rousing success story. That includes Alberta's tremendous contributions to the games. The majority of the Canadian athletes participating at the Olympics trained in my hometown, Calgary, thanks to the legacy left behind by the '88 Olympics.

I'll certainly join the minister in welcoming, or I would have, Shannon Szabados to this House. Our Olympic women were amazing at these Olympics, individually and collectively. Congratulations and thank you for making Canada proud.

The minister also mentioned that many volunteers from Alberta used their Olympic experiences in Calgary to help the Vancouver games go even more smoothly. These folks, too, made contributions of truly Olympic proportions.

I'm pleased to give this administration credit for the success of the Alberta pavilion and the Alberta-branded *Rocky Mountaineer*. These were logical investments that have without question helped promote Alberta as a destination for business, for tourism, and for living.

I think the many artists who participated in the Cultural Olympiad at the pavilion and across the lower mainland deserve the gratitude of all Albertans for putting on such a spectacular show. These talented men and women helped the world catch a glimpse of the true Alberta in all its spectacular diversity.

I hope this administration will recognize, however, that advertising requires the advertiser to live up to its promises. The budget for Tourism, Parks and Recreation is of course facing some pretty drastic cuts: over \$26 million in cuts from sports, recreation, and physical activity. Cuts this deep cannot help but have a dramatically negative impact on health, fitness, and future Olympic prospects for Alberta-based Canadian athletes. Community agencies across the province are saying that it's very difficult to do the work that they need to do in the face of these cuts. Certainly, we could cut down some of the costs to our health care system if we did more to encourage active lifestyles. In the wake of these highly successful Olympics many young Albertans are going to be looking for opportunities to participate in sport. This administration, showing characteristic lack of foresight, has cut many of those opportunities short.

The many people who were exposed to Alberta at the Olympics would expect to visit a province that puts a high priority on wildlife habitat preservation, but that budget has been cut by \$13.5 million. Such a decrease will certainly have a negative impact on aging park infrastructure as well as information, distribution, and enforcement activities. If Alberta's Olympic showcase brings as many visitors as the administration hopes, we need to be sure that the rising expectations of tourists and business travelers are matched by the reality of their Alberta experience.

These concerns aside, I am truly proud of Alberta's contributions to the Vancouver Olympics.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to request unanimous consent from the House to respond to the ministerial statement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has requested unanimous consent to participate with respect to this ministerial statement. I'll ask only one question. Is any hon. member opposed? If so, simply say no.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Members' Statements

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

Crossroads Family Services

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Foster homes and foster families in this province care for some of the most vulnerable children during what can often be the most difficult time in their lives. This past Friday I was joined by the hon. members for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, Edmonton-Calder, and Edmonton-McClung in participating in the Crossroads Family Services foster parent recognition event, highlighted by awards recognizing five, 10, and 15 years of dedication to foster parenting. The awards night was organized by Ms Janet Ryan-Newell, whom I introduced earlier, along with her hard-working team at Crossroads.

Currently supporting 139 children in 74 foster homes within the Edmonton area, I am honoured to say that Crossroads Family Services has its head office in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. In fact, last summer I teamed up with Crossroads to host a foster parent barbecue in Mill Woods park, an experience that was tremendously rewarding.

Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that foster parenting is one of the most important jobs in the world, and they deserve our support for their dedication, generosity, patience, compassion, and strength. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of Alberta's foster parents and the agencies, like Crossroads, that support them. Without a doubt your kindness, skill, and commitment are making a difference in the lives of young people and helping to create a stronger, more vibrant Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:50

Heather MacDonald-Webber

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, International Women's Day, I am honoured to pay tribute to an inspirational Albertan who was taken from this Earth far too young, at the age of 47, after her third battle with cancer, leaving three daughters and her husband, the MLA for Calgary-Foothills.

Heather Webber was a hero, not just for what she did in her life but how she did it. She was an incredible daughter, sister, wife, mother, mentor, and leader. After graduating from St. Mary's high school in Calgary in 1980, Heather took a volleyball scholarship at the University of Idaho, was captain of the Red Deer College Queens volleyball team, was awarded athlete of the year, and finished with the University of Lethbridge Pronghorns. In 1987 Heather married her best friend, the hon. member, who stated that she motivated others to be their best, to stay positive no matter what, and she stayed that way until the end.

After decades in the corporate health and wellness industry while running a busy household, Heather was diagnosed with breast cancer and fought it valiantly for a decade. During that time she coached, captained, competed, and served as president of the Sistership Dragon Boat Association, codirected the CIBC Run for the Cure twice, was named a Warrior for Cancer twice, received the Alberta centennial medal for community volunteerism, and was awarded outstanding CIBC Run for the Cure volunteer just last year. Believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, less than two months ago she led 20 Honolulu Hopefuls in successfully completing the Honolulu Marathon.

I'm so proud of and inspired by her husband, our dear friend and intrepid colleague, as well as by his brave, intelligent, and beautiful

daughters – Lauren, Jaime, and Kelly – for their amazing grace under the most difficult of circumstances. Countless hearts are broken at the loss of Heather, but we may be consoled that a treasured angel has truly earned her wings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

International Women's Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and recognize March 8 as International Women's Day. Each year around the world hundreds of events are happening, not just on this day but throughout March, to mark the economic, political, and social achievements of women. Our province proudly acknowledges this day and our commitment to the equality, freedom, and advancement of women.

Women play leadership roles in the health and education of our families, in our fields, our classrooms, and our boardrooms. They are also great politicians, businesswomen, top athletes, celebrities, and are also serving in our military in great numbers as well. Women have taught us about hope, about courage, and about opportunity.

Alberta stands proud as a province where women have made advancements and taken advantage of the numerous opportunities available. Whether it is in the growing numbers of women in business or completing graduate school, women are making a strong imprint on the history of Alberta.

Alberta's Famous Five fought hard for equality and the rights that women in Canada enjoy today. My religion, Sikhism, also teaches that it is important to honour women. In the 15th century the first Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji raised the profile of women in society. He said [remarks in Punjabi]. This means: why condemn women, who give birth to kings and saints?

As we celebrate International Women's Day, we must stop and give thanks to the amazing women both past and present. It is a time to remember and honour the sacrifices, talents, and leadership of women around the world. Mr. Speaker, I believe we should offer a round of applause to all the women who have played an important part in our lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Lethbridge Family Services

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1905 this province was born. In 1910 many service organizations were born. In 2010 I want to recognize the hundredth anniversary that was celebrated on February 15 in Lethbridge, and I refer to Lethbridge Family Services. Their mission statement in part is: "We believe that the family, more than any other institution, shapes the personality and the character of every person. We also believe that the nature of life in society is, in a large part, determined by the quality of family life."

Lethbridge Family Services provides in-home support services to individuals and/or families in order that they can live independently for as long as possible. There are three specific programs – home support, tenant support, and homemaking – in addition to counselling, outreach, therapy groups, presentations, workshops, personal growth groups, and a resource library. The DaCapo program supports those affected with brain injury, fetal alcohol spectrum, and those with developmental disabilities. Immigrant services provide settlement support for newcomers to Canada.

LFS makes an average of 27,000 home visits per month in an area stretching from the Crowsnest Pass to Taber, north to Picture Butte, Granum, and Nobleford. Their dedicated staff number 350 and operate three different sites and have an annual operating budget of \$12.1 million. The agency will develop and manage a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder diagnostic and assessment clinic in the very near future. Imagine the ripple effect from the many people who've been helped and moved to other parts of our province and our country.

Thank you, Lethbridge Family Services. Please join me in congratulating them on their hundredth anniversary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Bob Steadward

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, Dr. Bob Steadward was recently awarded the Olympic Order, the highest distinction conferred by the International Olympic Committee, in recognition of exemplary service. Bob is perhaps best known to Albertans as the founder of the Steadward Centre, a multidisability fitness, research, and lifestyle facility located at the University of Alberta. The centre has made an immeasurable difference in the lives of Albertans living with disabilities.

Today, however, is an opportunity for this House to recognize Dr. Steadward's work on the international stage. As the founding president of the International Paralympic Committee and recognized around the world as the visionary behind the global Paralympic movement, Dr. Steadward successfully proposed and negotiated a formal structure in the Olympics to include athletes with disabilities, a movement we know today as the International Paralympic Games. The road to this incredible achievement, Mr. Speaker, began over 27 years ago, when Bob brought together 41 nations in the Netherlands to discuss his proposal to include Paralympic competition in the Olympics. By the year 2000 175 countries had committed to Dr. Steadward's Paralympics movement, and the Olympics and Paralympics were permanently joined, a remarkable feat by any measure.

Mr. Speaker, to what do we attribute the achievements of this exceptional Albertan? Calvin Coolidge once said:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan Press On has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

Mr. Speaker, as 1,350 athletes and officials from over 40 countries make their way to Vancouver for next week's games, I know all members of this House will want to join me in thanking Bob for his persistence and in congratulating him for this recognition so richly deserved.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bighorn Sheep

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In February of this year the Wild Sheep Foundation Convention and International Sporting Expo, known as the Sheep Show, honoured a number of nationally and internationally acclaimed conservationists during the event. One of the award recipients is a constituent of mine, Ms Beth MacCallum of Bighorn technologies in Hinton, Alberta, who was recognized with the outstanding achievement award for research that led to the

population growth of some of Alberta's biggest bighorn sheep herds. These are no ordinary sheep herds as these herds are on the Gregg River and the Cardinal River Coals active mine sites, and these sheep are being transported to other projects throughout the western United States.

These awards and others were presented by the Wild Sheep Foundation during their annual convention and expo in Reno, Nevada. Mr. Speaker, the Wild Sheep Foundation, formerly the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, was founded in 1977 by sheep and mountain hunting enthusiasts and conservationists. With a membership of more than 10,000 world-wide and a chapter network in North America, the WSF is the premier advocate for wild sheep, wild goats, and other wildlife and their habitat. Since forming in 1977, the Wild Sheep Foundation has raised and expended more than \$74 million on conservation and education programs in North America, Europe, and Asia.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) reads, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are still items to be concluded under the Orders of the Day, I'd like to seek unanimous consent of the House to extend Orders of the Day to the end of the normal list for today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:00

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

The Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act is generally amended every single year to ensure that Alberta maintains a fair, equitable, and competitive tax regime. While most of the amendments in this year's bill are of a housekeeping nature, I'll address a few specific measures during second reading, which will include a clarification of the rules which allow corporations to file returns in currencies like the U.S. dollar or the British pound in response to changes that the federal legislation made as well as changes to the regulation-making authority in the act that ensure that new refund interest rates can be made applicable to prior periods.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, chair of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table five copies of the 2009-2010 third-quarter update on the fund. Copies were distributed to members on February 26.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings. My first tabling is from Calgarian Michael McAra. He's deeply disappointed that the government has not stepped up to fund a portion of the airport tunnel in Calgary. He believes that we can find a way to make it work.

My second tabling is correspondence from Calgary-Varsity constituent Donna Tetarenko, who grew up in Edmonton but lived in B.C. for 20 years. She doesn't understand what happened in Alberta while she was gone and expresses her concerns about several issues, including postsecondary costs, the health care premium being cut, and lack of forward thinking.

I'm also tabling correspondence from John McMechan, who is a student at the University of Calgary. He is greatly distressed at the idea of tuition increases that he feels are being used to pay for the costs of poor administration at the university.

I'm tabling correspondence received from my constituent Isabelle Emery, who urges me to convey her opposition to cuts in public services, particularly to education and health care, as she feels this is a short-sighted approach that will cost more down the road. She's concerned about future cuts and how that will affect taxpayers.

My final tabling is from constituent Bill Wakefield, who, with his wife, was shocked to learn that a group of nurses were holding a potluck dinner at their own expense to raise money to purchase new baby scales for the hospital because there was no funding in the budget to buy them.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table, first, the appropriate number of copies of 18 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds.

In addition, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition with 605 signatures which calls on the Legislative Assembly to "urge the Government to keep the current 14,500 long-term care beds in Alberta fully operational and to follow through on their 2008 election commitment to open an additional 600 long-term care beds."

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, first, to offer my humble apology to you, and second, to table a report entitled Alberta Law Enforcement Review Board 2008 Annual Report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: I'm going to now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for an introduction.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very

pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Lorelei Kuchera. Lorelei has joined us in the public gallery. She is very active in the film community here in Alberta in two different roles. One is vice-president of film for IATSE local 210. Of course, IATSE is the international alliance of theatrical stage employees and moving picture technicians of the United States and Canada. She is also a member of the Alberta Association of Motion Picture and Television Unions. I would ask Lorelei to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go to Orders of the Day, on March 5, 1982, 18 years ago, the hon. Member for Little Bow was elected to this Assembly for the first time. His election was very important to him. It was also very important to me and remains one of the highlights of my life. Congratulations to the hon. member.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Returns

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

Calgary Airport Access Tunnel

M9. Mr. Kang moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports, studies, financial forecasts, or materials prepared for Alberta Transportation regarding the construction of the proposed Calgary airport tunnel.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I submitted this motion for a return in order to determine why this government has failed to take a lead on the construction of a Calgary airport tunnel. I would like to see what studies, research, and other documents the government has collected in hopes that this information might help all parties better understand where they stand relative to the completion of this project.

I had hoped that after hearing the arguments from the city of Calgary, from the Airport Trail Access Committee, and from myself on why the Calgary airport tunnel is essential to Calgary, the Minister of Transportation would reconsider his position and support its construction. However, this has not yet happened. I have said many times that the Calgary airport tunnel is essential infrastructure to my constituency, to Calgary, and to all of Alberta.

Calgary is growing into an international hub not only for business leaders but also for visitors from around the globe. The Calgary International Airport is set to expand to reflect this fact. While the airport expansion is great for all Alberta, it will soon leave thousands of commuters in Calgary-McCall disconnected from the rest of Calgary. It will also increase traffic congestion on Deerfoot Trail, which is a major problem, since without the airport tunnel it will be the only route to the airport. Many businesses will be directly harmed if an airport tunnel is not built, and the quality of life of Calgarians will be seriously compromised.

The construction of this Calgary airport tunnel is essential to avoid these problems, and to achieve this, this government only needs to show leadership and commit \$98 million toward these problems, something that could have been easily done if they'd stopped spending money on frills such as horse racing.

I submitted this motion for a return to determine the government's level of support for the Calgary airport tunnel. I also wanted to check on their progress. With the requested information I will be able to report back to my constituents and to Calgarians on the likelihood of this tunnel being built. These are the reasons we have requested reports, studies, and financial forecasts that the Transpor-

tation department has prepared on the construction of this project.

Before taking my seat and awaiting their response, I want to thank the members of this Assembly and anyone who has been an ally in this battle for the airport tunnel.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation to respond.

3:10

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to this hon. member and to the House. The member has asked for "a copy of all reports, studies, financial forecasts, or materials prepared for Alberta Transportation regarding the construction of the proposed Calgary airport trail tunnel." This proposed project falls under the jurisdiction of the city of Calgary and not the province of Alberta. Alberta Transportation gives the city municipal grants to put towards their priority projects as they see fit. In 2009 the city of Calgary received through my department and through Alberta Municipal Affairs more than \$459 million in capital grants for infrastructure. If the tunnel was a priority for the city, they could have simply allocated this money to the tunnel.

Mr. Speaker, since this is a municipal, not provincial, jurisdiction, my department does not have any reports, any studies, financial forecasts, or other materials related to the construction of the proposed Calgary airport tunnel. Therefore, it isn't possible to provide these documents.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to reject this motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to conclude the debate.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really disappointed to hear the minister say that he doesn't have any documentation because consultations were going on. ATAC met with the minister, and Mr. Stevenson met with the minister so many times.

I feel it's kind of a sad day not only for northeast Calgary but for the whole of Calgary. I'm really disappointed in the Calgary government caucus, the MLAs, for not showing support for this very valuable project for the city of Calgary, especially the MLAs from the east side because, you know, it will be affecting northeast Calgary more than any other part of Calgary. It will not only affect northeast Calgary, but it will affect the whole of Calgary and the province as a whole. As I said before, the only access to the airport will be the Deerfoot Trail and Country Hills Boulevard.

We have been talking about reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is going to increase greenhouse gas emissions because the cars will be stuck in traffic jams. They will be just sitting, idling. For those poor workers who are working for \$10 an hour at the airport, it's going to add \$150 a year to their gas bill. And the hotels in Calgary northeast: it's going to cost an extra \$2 million a year to the 20 hotels, never mind the lost revenues they're going to have if we don't build the airport tunnel. And 18,000-plus workers are working at the airport. If we don't have the airport tunnel, we may not have the LRT going to the airport for the next 25 years, maybe.

So it's going to impact not only northeast Calgary, but it's going to impact the whole of Calgary and the province because the Calgary International Airport – we are bragging about being the gateway to the world, to southeast Asia, to the middle east. If this tunnel doesn't happen, it's just going to affect the quality of life for people. It may affect the property values in the northeast because the northeast will be boxed in.

With those comments, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, the debate is concluded on this question. If you have something else, a point of order or something, we'll hear it.

Mr. Bhullar: I'm not quite sure if what I was looking at is quite significantly a point of order. Mr. Speaker, the member said he's disappointed in east Calgary MLAs. Well, I would say the member needs to do a little bit of reading on jurisdictional boundaries within the Canadian Confederation.

I'm not quite sure if he went far enough for something that warrants a point of order, but I would make the point that this government supports its cities and gives our cities the ability to make decisions within their borders themselves. They have \$254 million this year, Mr. Speaker, that they can allocate towards the airport tunnel, should they choose.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to call the question, and then I'm going to make a comment.

[Motion for a Return 9 lost]

Speaker's Ruling Motions for Returns

The Speaker: I'm going to give this advice freely to my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. This is a motion for a return. The request is for "a copy of all reports, studies, financial forecasts, or materials prepared for Alberta Transportation regarding the construction of the proposed Calgary airport trail tunnel." Quite legit. A good question. Well written. It may have been edited but well written. It's on the Order Paper.

The minister stands up and says that he doesn't have any. Then the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall gets up and gives a 10-minute debate on why the tunnel is important. It has nothing to do with the question. It's not this part of the Order Paper to have debates. This is having to do with a question: do you have the documentation? Yes or no. An individual's view with respect to the Calgary airport trail tunnel could find a different place on the Order Paper so it would become more efficient. Then to suggest that some hon. member, which prompts a point of order – I'm telling you that when we get away from dealing with policy issues and start getting into personal things, we get into nothing but terrible pavement and rough water, and a lot of people have drowned in this Assembly by doing that in the past.

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

Bill 202

Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, join me in saying happy birthday to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Actually, her anniversary was yesterday, so she's one day older today than she was yesterday.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise in this House to begin second reading of Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I am sad that this is an issue that even requires a piece of legislation or that Albertans would have to worry about it, but wishing that the issue of child pornography was not a problem does not make it go away. As a former Solicitor General

and a former minister of children's services for the government of Alberta I had the opportunity to work very closely with law enforcement officials. As the Solicitor General I witnessed hardened police officers break down in tears as they described the images that were forever seared into their minds, I listened to them outline ways to help reduce the number of children who had been exploited to satisfy a sexually deviant pleasure, and I heard that we needed to give them more tools to go after criminals. That is the purpose behind the private member's bill and why I hope that every member of this House will support it.

The goal of Bill 202 is simple and straightforward: to mandate the reporting of child pornography. It does not intend to mandate seeking out child pornography. Rather, it would require that if an individual believed that a particular material is or may be child pornography, then it's mandatory to report the incident to the police or other reporting entities. This bill would also provide important protection for those who report this vile material and ensure that no repercussions for reporting are experienced. In addition, Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 will establish actions that a reporting entity must take following a report. This includes but is not limited to ensuring that the entity performs an inspection, and where it is believed that child pornography is occurring, a report is made to the child and family services agency or law enforcement agency so as to both protect the child and apprehend the offender or offenders.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

When I first began to serve in this House, the Internet was in its infancy. E-mail was relatively limited. Personal computers were starting to take off. Our world has changed, and our laws must keep up, Mr. Speaker. Each of us knows the unspeakable evil that child pornography represents. Because I was the Solicitor General, I saw some of the material that investigators came across in their efforts to put these sexual deviants behind bars.

As we try to focus on what Bill 202 is truly about, let me paint a picture for you and members of the Assembly and Albertans. Imagine a small house in a community. It could be anywhere. Imagine walking up to that house and walking up the stairs to the second floor. Imagine a door that is closed. You hear some noises coming from behind that door, and you open that door. Then imagine stumbling upon something no one should ever see: a small child – and we'll call her Jennifer – being sexually violated and this abuse being broadcast through a camera onto the Internet as orders are taken by sexual deviants about acts to be committed on that child.

Imagine stumbling across these images on the Internet and calling your Internet service provider and reporting what you've seen but the company cannot give the police some of the information that they need to stop the crime and track down those who are paying for these acts to be committed against Jennifer.

3:20

Jennifer is the face of one child. There are thousands more like her that face complete degradation at the hands of pedophiles and sexual deviants. It is these kinds of images that will never leave my mind. The impact of these crimes will forever scar children like Jennifer who are abused and who are violated.

Mr. Speaker, this Assembly has the opportunity to help prevent child pornography from winding its web in our communities. This Assembly has the opportunity to turn people and companies who become aware of child pornography into good Samaritans who can give law enforcement the information they need to stop the crime in progress. This Assembly has the chance to prevent other Janes or

Jennifers from being victimized and forever hurt by child pornography.

The intent of this bill is simple. It is clear; it is straightforward. Law enforcement supports it, many Albertans support it, and I hope all members of this Assembly will support it also.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to Bill 202, Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward. I support what the hon. member is trying to accomplish. Having been a father for 38 years, a teacher for 34, and a grandfather for six, I understand the vulnerability of young people and the need to protect them.

Where problems occur is in the interpretation, to a degree, of what is child pornography. Some examples are obvious; others are not. Examples being the situation with the Calgary Transit authority when they refused to run the poster of the statue of a naked newborn boy on the sides of their bus because they felt that some individuals might view that sculpture, that piece of artwork, as an example of pornography. Other types of pornography, when a child is in an abusive situation, are more obvious, and I agree with the hon. member that the reporting of these acts is extremely important.

While I trust the intelligence of a number of people who use the Internet, I can imagine situations whereby a simple family photo of a newborn child or a situation that would appear in a family album of mine that was entitled three men in a tub, with appropriately placed face cloths, my father and myself and my brother when we were little: this is part of family heritage. The thoughts, you know, of my grandchildren sort of frolicking around doing what they would call the naked dance: I hope that would not get onto the Internet on a large scale. The point is that it's part of our family album, and it's part of our family experience. I would hate to think that my children would be potentially targeted by this family circumstance, that if somehow the computer wasn't wiped clean, somebody could suggest in a rather tainted fact that this might constitute pornography.

As an art major I'm wondering to what extent we would take whitewash to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. There are images of nude children throughout art history, and they're not of a pornographic nature unless some perverted individual sees them in such a light.

I appreciate what the member is attempting to accomplish. I am also somewhat concerned about the mandatory reporting. If it's beyond a doubt an exploitation, if a child is being hurt or harmed or there is any kind of evidence of a child being targeted, then I certainly would want that type of pornography to be reported. I am not sure, though, how we would force individuals who have access to the Internet or the computer companies that are charged with erasing files, how we would know that they were the recipients of this type of pornography and then go after them should they fail to reveal the source or that they were, in fact, the recipients of this pornography.

The number of ads that pop up unsolicited on our computers in terms of various enhancements and so on to an extent fall into this situation. You could be a completely innocent recipient of vile images without having any ability to potentially prevent those. Yes, I myself, if I ever received such images, would report them immediately to the best of my knowledge.

Again, I'm not sure that this bill, while its intention is absolutely terrific in terms of protecting young children, can achieve its goals. I do, however, wish the member well. I support what she is attempting to do with Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child

Pornography Act. I'm hoping that in discussion with other members this afternoon they can put forward suggestions on how to have this bill, the mechanics of it, realized so that we can eliminate the abuse that, as the hon. member pointed out, so many children throughout this world are subject to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. The purpose of Bill 202 is to mandate the reporting of child pornography. Under Bill 202 an individual who encounters child pornographic materials would be obligated to report the incident to the police or other reporting entity. Further, Bill 202 would establish the actions that a reporting entity must take following a report.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that child pornography is a very serious issue. It often affects some of our most vulnerable citizens, which negatively impacts their life and that of their loved ones as well. It may be found in books and photographs as well as a variety of audio and visual material, but perhaps its most pervasive and offensive form takes shape online. Individuals can now hide behind their computers and easily produce, consume, or distribute materials involving children. Access to such materials has been made easier by the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, as a mother of four great young ladies and a grandmother of one amazing boy, as a society who cares deeply about its most vulnerable citizens, we must consider any sensible response to this problem. Bill 202 is a reasonable reaction to this issue, and its scope and timing are appropriate for the task at hand. The premise behind Bill 202 is laudable, and its objectives are in line with our government's vision for safe communities. Bill 202 would provide the additional tools that agencies need to act against these child abusers. It will also complete the work of existing task forces such as the Alberta integrated child exploitation unit, the ICE unit, which has largely been successful in its work.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the federal government is looking at similar legislation, but debate has yet to be completed on the subject in the House of Commons. Although it is likely that this federal bill will be reintroduced, there is no way of knowing when. Nor can we know whether, or even if, it will pass. This is yet another reason why Bill 202 is a welcome piece of legislation. Provinces can act on their own when warranted, and this is a good opportunity to help lead the way on such a serious issue.

3:30

Three other provinces have already taken action. In fact, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia have all moved forward in recent months and have enacted mandatory reporting of child pornography.

In April 2009 Manitoba became the first province to enact mandatory reporting of child pornography by amending the Child and Family Services Act. Under the new law if a person in Manitoba sees something they believe to be child pornography, they are required to report it to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, Cybertip, which is Canada's national tip line for the reporting of online sexual exploitation of our children.

In Ontario private member's Bill 37 amended the province's Child and Family Services Act. Under the new legislation, which is not yet proclaimed, persons are required to report if they suspect a child is being exploited by this means.

Nova Scotia passed similar legislation. However, unlike Ontario

and Manitoba, where the bill amended the existing child protection law, Nova Scotia created a stand-alone bill.

In watching the actions of these provinces, this suggests there is a need and a value in provincial initiatives such as Bill 202. It is also helpful to observe and learn from how they brought forward their own initiatives and how their regulations were drafted as this can guide us in our own work regarding this serious issue.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to predict when action may be taken on this issue at the federal level. A federal initiative would likely be more effective as it would ensure a national, streamlined approach to this serious issue. However, this should not deter us from taking action to protect our youth in the meantime. We should therefore continue to encourage the federal government to bring forward nation-wide legislation. I believe we must act now to ensure that our own provincial bill becomes law.

Mr. Speaker, I support Bill 202, and I believe it to be the most effective mechanism by which to accomplish our goal at this time. Bill 202 is both a timely and effective step in dealing with this issue and those it hurts. Ultimately, our children and their families will stand to benefit from it. I again thank the member for bringing forward this piece of legislation. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise in this House today to begin review of Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. I cannot praise enough the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for taking initiative and leadership on this important and vital issue. She, more than any other member in this House here today, has consistently fought for the safety of our children with multiple private member's bills and during her time as Solicitor General of this province, and I thank her for that on behalf of the children of Alberta and on behalf of all Albertans. Her experience as Solicitor General was pivotal in crafting this crucial piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this issue could not be more important to this province. Twenty-five years ago child pornography had been virtually eliminated as a threat to our children. The predators were on the run, and they were nearly extinct. With new technologies came new life to this disgusting problem. They are organized, and they are stronger than they have ever been in the history of the world. Child pornography is a sophisticated, international industry with revenues of over \$30 billion annually. Sophisticated fraudulent financial techniques involving credit cards and shell corporations are used to perpetuate this filth. The innocence of children is being bartered to satisfy the greed of criminals and the lust of sexual predators.

As evil as this content is, the industry has taken on an even more brutal and savage nature. The victims are increasingly younger, the content ever more graphic. Over 80 per cent of the content involves children younger than the age of 12. There are over a million pictures of child exploitation on the Internet every day. The victims are primarily very young girls, our future mothers and wives. This problem is only growing with time, Mr. Speaker. It must be stopped. Brutal images depicting abuse of children increase exponentially with each passing year.

Sadly, this is an issue that could not be closer to home. Canada is the second-largest commercial distributor of child pornography in the world. We must fight the tide of this filth at all costs. Law enforcement needs every available resource to combat this affliction,

and Alberta, sadly, is not immune. In December a man from Camrose was arrested for distributing child pornography. In February a Calgary man was convicted for luring minors into child pornography. Last week in Calgary a man was convicted for distribution. He had over 5,000 images of child pornography.

This bill is but another step in a long journey. It will require the reporting of child pornography to police and protection for those who step forward for the greater good of humanity. Any material believed to be child pornography must be reported to the proper authorities for analysis under this bill. Offensive material will be investigated, and those responsible will be brought to justice. Police and child and family services will step in to protect the child and pursue the predator.

Action will be mandatory, Mr. Speaker. No excuses. There's no excuse for it not to be mandatory. Investigations will be performed. Child and family services will be called in, securing children from danger. Police will pursue the predators, who will become the prey. There is no artistic grey area with this issue. There is no place where one can agree to disagree. This is a clear case of black and white, right and wrong morality. The vast majority of people arrested for child pornography have also molested a child.

Barriers have been created in the name of other principles, Mr. Speaker. For example, privacy and freedom of expression are vital, as we all know, to any democratic culture such as ours, but the souls and innocence of children cannot be sacrificed for anonymity and entertainment. They must be challenged in the name of our children. Those who wish to make the world a better, safer place must not be stifled and must not be frustrated. This bill will save lives. It will save childhood innocence. Step by step we can make the world a safer place for our children.

This bill has the support of law enforcement and all law-abiding Albertans. With the support of this Assembly we can make a difference in this war.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I'd first like to thank the hon. member for initiating debate on this important subject. Child pornography is a heinous and despicable issue that affects some of the most vulnerable citizens in our society, namely our children. It is incredibly important to this government, as it is to society as a whole, to protect our most vulnerable members. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek along with every other member in this Assembly has made this an absolute priority.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 202 will contribute to the accomplishment of this goal. While we all want to protect children of Alberta from falling victim to child pornography and sexual abuse, we must also ensure that we continue to take a comprehensive approach to accomplishing this task. In addition to provincial initiatives and legislation, we should continue to promote awareness and to encourage our federal counterparts to bring forward similar nation-wide initiatives.

I would like to highlight a particular organization and their dedication to keeping children from falling into this type of exploitation. Mr. Speaker, Cybertip.ca is Canada's national tipline for reporting of online sexual exploitation of children. The tipline is owned and operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, which is a charitable organization dedicated to the safety of all children. Cybertip accepts and addresses online and telephone

reports from the public regarding a variety of issues that affect children, including child pornography, online luring, child exploitation through prostitution, travelling to sexually exploit children, and child trafficking. The triages who work at the tipline assess the reports from the public and forward those that are potentially illegal to law enforcement in the appropriate jurisdictions.

3:40

While Cybertip provides citizens with the ability to report instances of child exploitation and luring, it also has a role in collecting and reporting statistics. These statistics facilitate the public understanding and discussion, the severity of the issues, and reports to this organization. On average Cybertip receives about one million page views and over 8,000 reports of child abuse throughout the year. In fact, Cybertip has received over 35,000 reports from the public pertaining to child pornography since their inception. Of the over 35,000 reports received by Cybertip, 37 per cent have been confirmed as child pornography. These figures suggest that people are not only aware of this organization but that they are also committed to reducing child exploitation. This would suggest that the public is already engaged in reporting these instances.

Mr. Speaker, Internet safety is one of the largest issues pertaining to both the parent and the child. In fact, over 78 per cent of child pornography incidents are now based on websites. This is why Cybertip has launched numerous public awareness campaigns designed to educate and inform parents and citizens on a wide variety of topics, specifically child exploitation of youths and the relatedness of the Internet. Examples of these campaigns include encouraging the public to become familiar with identifying the signs of child sexual abuse, increasing awareness regarding the risks associated with communicating with strangers over instant messaging, and a public alert regarding adolescents using webcams to send inappropriate pictures over the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the public awareness campaigns are an integral part of reducing instances of child exploitation. Given the prevalence of the Internet, cell phones, and gaming consoles, children of all ages use one or more of these tools on a daily basis. Cybertip recognizes that simply educating the parents on the importance of Internet and mobile safety with a single set of tips may not be the most effective way to inform parents of the potentially dangerous situations that their children face. This is why they have taken a comprehensive approach and focused on age-specific education starting at age five up to about age 15. There is also the recommendation to be made to parents to be centred on the issues that are facing their children during that specific time in their life.

Regardless of age one recommendation remains constant throughout all age categories, supervision. Given the age gap between parents and children and the rapid rate at which technology has advanced, many parents are not fully aware of the potential risks associated with things like cell phones, webcams, and the Internet, tools that children use on a daily basis. Cybertip urges parents to take an active role in monitoring and supervising their children's Internet and mobile activities. Essentially, the public awareness campaigns and information provided to parents by Cybertip is shifting parents away from the this-would-never-happen-to-my-child type of mentality.

Mr. Speaker, these awareness campaigns are another mechanism that permits us to effectively decrease instances of child exploitation, and as I had stated previously, we must ensure that we continue to protect our vulnerable citizens in the most effective way possible. It is for this reason, Mr. Speaker, that I support Bill 202 as I believe it will effectively reduce the amount and accessibility of child pornography.

However, in addition to organizations like Cybertip, the federal government has been taking steps to drastically reduce the amount and accessibility of child pornography, oftentimes amending our criminal laws. So while I support this bill, I also believe that it would be prudent to continue to encourage the federal government to bring forward nation-wide legislation.

Child pornography, luring, and pornography are a plague upon our society, Mr. Speaker. These issues affect children and families on a daily basis. Every member of this Assembly wants to ensure that no child is subject to these abuses. I believe that Bill 202 is certainly well intentioned and can reduce the amount and accessibility of child pornography in the province of Alberta.

I'd once again like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this piece of legislation and look forward to the remainder of the debate. Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a very heavy heart – and certainly, as eloquently and emotionally portrayed by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, this is a huge problem. I can't believe that there is even any hesitation at the federal, provincial, or municipal levels that these kinds of laws aren't instantly put into place. Unfortunately, I think what has happened is that with television and computers and the busy lifestyles that we have, people have become desensitized. People think that this is something that happens on television, that it doesn't happen to their neighbours and certainly would never happen to their children.

I thank very much the member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the body of work that she has created towards this very important Bill 202. That would be in addition to all of the work that she's done campaigning against child prostitution. The protection of children involved in the protection act is an example of that. She continues to be a champion of children, launching the high-risk offender website and Canada's first Amber Alert program during her tenure when she was the minister. It is a very important piece of work, and I know that as history will be reckoned, it will be recognized for the importance that it really has.

In terms of the degradation that happens to innocent children, the perpetrators of these crimes are the ones that should be tracked down like the criminals that they are. I know that it's difficult to prove things from the Internet, but what happens now is that, yes, we find them, but these people are almost getting less time. The time that they get in jail certainly does not reflect the purpose that they have done and that they have totally ruined young children's lives.

Talk to sex trade workers, and you'll find out how many of them have been sexually abused as children. They have become so desensitized that almost nothing is wrong or right, certainly not within any sort of sexual contact or behaviours, and they actually have no idea of the psychological damage that has taken place as a result of this kind of behaviour. It's almost impossible to reverse the damage that has been done because one of the things that never happens again is that these people, these young children that are exploited, are never able to trust again because more often than not the people who perpetrate these crimes against them are actually the people that should be protecting them.

It's a sick society that we live in, Mr. Speaker, that we should even have to be discussing this in the Legislature, but I believe that if we could get more of the perpetrators – and I believe that I would like to see more funding. I know that we're always accused of asking for more money on this side of the House, but I believe that this is the kind of money that would be well spent. It is very

difficult to track down people on the Internet. It's hugely time consuming; therefore it becomes expensive.

But by having this law in place, where people must report what they suspect as being any kind of child abuse, particularly in the child pornography side of things – and they must report it. Section 8 says:

- (1) Any person who contravenes section 2(1), 6 or 7 is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$10 000 or to imprisonment for not more than 2 years, or to both the fine and imprisonment.
- (2) Any person who falsely and maliciously reports to a reporting entity that a representation or material is child pornography is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$10 000 or to imprisonment [again] for not more than 2 years, or to both the fine and the imprisonment.

This is for the people that would not report.

Sometimes there is a fear factor out there that you are not understanding, perhaps, what you're seeing. I think that that's a very bogus kind of argument. I would say that 90 per cent of our society, if not 95 per cent – let's go to 99 per cent of the people in our society – know what is right and what is wrong. My colleague from Calgary-Varsity had said that people's rights may be in jeopardy because of an interpretation of what some pictures may look like. But I think we're all pretty clear on what child pornography is and what child abuse is.

3:50

I find it interesting that even in this province but certainly in this country, because, I suppose, it's our right, we tolerate full flights, 737s, of men who are considered pillars of our community to fly to Thailand, to fly to the Philippines to engage in absolute child abuse and engage in sexual activities with, certainly, children that are underage. I watched a program on CPAC where the fellow that has been valiantly trying to fight against that kind of behaviour and trying to identify people, in fact, said that men from Canada have actually paid \$10,000 for what they consider to be a virgin at the age of 2. I mean, that should make all of us almost throw up. It is absolutely beyond disgusting.

I couldn't imagine what I would do if something had happened to certainly my children when they were younger but my grandchildren at this point, when they're young. I don't know what I would do. I'm sure that it wouldn't be pleasant, and I could probably end up in jail because I think that I would just be so beyond control that something like that would happen.

I think the other thing that happens is that sometimes people are aware and can't sort of prove things. Then when it is proven, that person lives with a tremendous amount of guilt, and many times they need psychological counselling to get them over the fact that perhaps they hadn't done enough to protect that child.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we support this bill. I don't think there's one that I've come across in my five years in this House that is as important as this one. We are trying to valiantly have a society that we can be proud of and that we go forward. We have just come out of the Olympics and are very proud of all of our athletes. How many of these children have been abused and used for strictly commercial interests? Often it isn't just the sexual appetite of people who are truly sick, but it is strictly a commodity. These young children are simply commodities in criminal organizations. This is how they make their money.

I believe that we should support this, and I would like to, clearly, see tougher laws. I want to see them go faster, and I want to see much, much stronger and longer sentencing for people who are actually convicted of this abhorrent behaviour.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been some very good and impassioned speeches on Bill 202. I also rise to support this bill. I wanted to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her work on this.

Even though I have a background as a trial lawyer, I don't have a background in privacy legislation, so when I was looking through this, I actually consulted three individuals. I'd like to say thank you to them just on the record. Ivan Bernardo was one of them, Kristine Robidoux, both lawyers in Calgary, and Rachel Hayward-Shymko, who's a privacy consultant in Edmonton.

Going through this more from a legal angle, I found that the purpose of PIPA is to ensure the right of any individual to be protected when it comes to a collection, use, or disclosure of their information. In that angle I have to advance that we must always consider the privacy of an individual when drafting legislation that could potentially require them to disclose personal materials. It is, in fact, a balance.

Mr. Speaker, as it was mentioned, our government has taken strides to ensure that we, in fact, do have protections in place to prevent a breach of privacy rights of individuals, and this is something that we must continue. This legislation also has ramifications on that. Now, some of these strides that have been taken include the implementation of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, or FOIP, which has developed a privacy interest with Albertans in mind. Mr. Speaker, protecting the privacy interests of Albertans and Alberta businesses, again, is of the utmost importance, and we must always consider this.

While I am going to strongly support Bill 202 and encourage other people to do the same, it's important that these reporting measures proposed continue to respect the privacy rights of individuals. Our government will continue to be addressing the root causes of criminal issues, but we must ensure that our efforts respect the privacy rights of citizens and the judicial framework that has been developed over time to protect such rights. We need a balanced approach and not a knee-jerk reaction.

Mr. Speaker, our laws work to protect the victims of crime as well as the individual in society. While we do not want to implement mandatory reporting that would violate the privacy rights of individuals, at the same time this is a bill that is worth consideration, the most vulnerable people in our society, of course, being our children. I support the intent of this bill, but I also believe that it's important that we ensure that it does not infringe on an individual's privacy rights. If this legislation appropriately addresses the issue of privacy, then I believe it will provide a useful tool to reduce these crimes in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the sexual exploitation of children and youth is a disturbing issue that crosses all social and economic boundaries and, indeed, it is one that many individuals of many different parties of this House are passionate about. Our government is committed to protecting the most vulnerable and ensuring that our communities are safe and caring environments. I believe Bill 202 continues along this vision.

The creation, proliferation, and dissemination of child pornography is a global issue, as has been pointed out, in regard to the global communications village that has come up over the past couple of decades. But it's also important that we do what we can here at home in Alberta and make sure that this is a place that is known to protect our children as opposed to a haven, which, of course, it is not. At the same time, this is not a road that we want to go down, and that requires a proactive measure such as Bill 202 to protect our children from these predators.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank, again, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this legislation forward. I'm pleased to support it, and I encourage all members to support it regardless of partisan stripe.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure in one sense to be able to be in the House to speak about this important bill, but it's a sad day that we have such a problem here in Canada that we need to be acting here in the province. But it's important, and I'm happy to be able to stand up and support Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act.

I can only applaud the hon. member representing Calgary-Fish Creek for taking on such a crucial issue. The legislation should have been acted on before now, Mr. Speaker. Her previous experience was essential in crafting this fundamental work of legislation, and I have a great deal of gratitude and respect for the work that she did as a Solicitor General and also that followed as the minister of children's services. She has dedicated many hours of her life in protecting our vulnerable children.

Mr. Speaker, this issue is close to the heart of Albertans. Children are our most precious and vulnerable among us. They must be sheltered from harm. They are our future, and their future must be protected.

Child pornography is a global menace lining the pockets of immoral and corrupt individuals. These monsters are as wicked as they are organized. It is a global industry worth billions of dollars. They are monsters without borders, and they must be stopped. As extreme and as bad as this continent is, it is getting worse: 20 per cent of the tender victims are under the age of 3, 40 per cent between the ages of 3 and 5. Thousands of pictures are added daily. This represents an attack on the children from the moment they enter the world.

This is an issue that strikes right at our heart. The second-biggest dealer of child pornography in the world is Canada. A call to arms is at hand, and we must stand up and speak out. We'll be judged on how we respond. Recently a Calgary resident was convicted of trading this material by e-mail. He was brought to justice through an amazing teamwork that spanned all of North America from Victoria to New York involving Calgary police and the Department of Homeland Security.

This bill is a first step in a long journey. It will require the reporting of child pornography to police and protect those who step forward for the welfare of children. This legislation will require the reporting of child pornography. The first step is rooting out the problem. Any material believed to be pornographic must be reported to the proper authorities and investigated. Offensive material will be investigated, and then those responsible will be brought to justice. If the material is in fact child pornography, the police and child and family services will step in to protect the child and pursue the predator.

4:00

Action must be taken. This will be a building block for teamwork. This is a global problem that will require global co-operation. The mandatory reporting of child pornography is a step in the right direction. The immorality is clear, Mr. Speaker. We are all in agreement. We must do all we can to protect our children. There is a clear link between those arrested for child pornography and those who have molested a child.

Obstacles in protection of the perpetrator are in place in the name of various freedoms, including artistic. This is a false freedom. They do not have the freedom, Mr. Speaker, to abuse our little ones and to torture them. We are not talking about art. We are talking about captured and tortured. We must all work together in concert for a single goal, protecting our children. This bill will serve and protect. It will rescue those in harm's way. A long journey begins with one small step. This bill has the support of those who work with and protect children. All decent-minded Albertans agree. With the support of this Assembly we can protect and nourish the future of our children.

Canada has a terrible reputation in the world. As the Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out, Canada is used as a conduit for people to travel to the Philippines and Thailand. I disagree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont in saying that this is a knee-jerk reaction. This is a long overdue reaction, Mr. Speaker. Canada is a haven. We need to acknowledge that, and then we need to act on that as Legislatures. To think that we're going to protect the information and the privacy of travelling people is a false protection. We need to protect those that are being abused, not the abusers.

If we are going to enjoy a safe and prosperous community, we must pass laws that protect the innocent and the victims of crime and abuse. Too often we pass legislation that does more to protect the perpetrator than the victim. I ask this Assembly: are we doing all that we can to protect our children and their future? I don't think so. We need to prevent the exploitation that is going on, and I'd ask all the members to vote in support of this bill that we might protect the future of our young children here in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for the opportunity to rise today and speak to this well-intentioned piece of legislation. Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, is being brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I would like to thank her for doing so. Child pornography is a blight in our society. It's a heinous crime whose victims are some of the most vulnerable people not just in Alberta but in the world. As a government, as community members, and as citizens we need to be actively engaged in protecting our children and ending this intolerable behaviour.

To the credit of the member Bill 202 proposes a method to attack child pornography. Specifically, Bill 202 proposes to require that an individual who believes that they have come into contact with child pornography be mandated to report the finding to a designated authority such as the police. To be clear, Bill 202 would not require people to seek out child pornography. Instead, people would only be required to report if they stumble across it or accidentally find a case of child pornography.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the intention of Bill 202 is noble and works toward the best interest of our society. However, I have some reservation about the effectiveness of the proposed legislation. Specifically, I'm concerned that Bill 202 may not directly target the production of child pornography. This is not to say that this problem is a result of the legislation. Rather, it may be a jurisdictional problem. The reality is that the majority of child pornography is not produced in Alberta or even in Canada, for that matter.

Child pornography is a global problem that may be better addressed through co-operation with other jurisdictions in Canada and, perhaps, even with other nations. This is the role that effectively falls within the control of our federal counterparts, and I'm hopeful that this legislation will move us in that direction.

Because of the jurisdictional limitations we face, Bill 202 may be unable to effectively target the root cause of child pornography, that of the production of the same.

However, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the measures proposed by Bill 202 may have the potential to address the second issue associated with child pornography, that of distribution and proliferation. Currently it is possible that a person will inadvertently find a collection of child pornography and be unclear of their legal obligations. Bill 202 would clearly define these obligations. An individual stumbling across a collection of child pornography would be required to report their findings to the police or to a reporting entity. Mr. Speaker, it's also worth noting that Bill 202 would also enact legislation to ensure that the informant suffers no legal repercussions for reporting their findings.

The end result of these proposed legislative changes would be the creation of a system where there would be a clear process for individuals regarding the reporting of cases of child pornography. In turn, more reporting could lead to more prosecution and conviction of users.

Essentially, Bill 202 is proposing legislation that would target people who own and distribute child pornography, not the people who create it. Now, this is not to say that targeting the users of child pornography is a bad thing; quite the opposite. In fact, I would agree that targeting these people is a good preventative measure. After all, it would stand to reason that people using child pornography might also be the people inclined to create this material. Alternatively, by prosecuting these individuals, we may also be able to decrease the demand.

This is a laudable goal. However, I do not feel as though it is addressing the crux of the issue. Mr. Speaker, while I believe that new reporting legislation may not be the best way to remove child pornography from our communities, I do agree that it is a needed step. After all, child pornography is already illegal in Canada, and I feel that a greater impact could be felt by a renewed commitment to our national initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, we have the most to gain by focusing our efforts on enforcement, particularly international enforcement. As I previously mentioned, the vast majority of child pornography is created outside of our jurisdiction. This does not mean that we are powerless to combat this crime. It is possible that dedicating our resources to improving our international information sharing network would help investigators all over the world battle this shared threat, but at the same time there are things that we can do here at home, like mandating reporting.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the intentions of Bill 202 are both commendable and worthy of praise, and I believe that they are notable steps towards ridding our communities of child pornography. Moreover, I believe the intentions of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek are honourable and clearly come from the heart.

My concerns with Bill 202 stem from my belief that we should do more. However, the fact that jurisdictional restraints hamper this legislation does not mean at all that we should reject it. Mr. Speaker, the act of combating child pornography is complex and in many cases disheartening. It is a dark subject, to be sure. However, I feel that the discussions that we are having today will go a long way towards shaping both legislation and policies that will eventually rid us of this heinous crime.

With that, I will be offering my support to Bill 202 in recognition that this bill, while it may not be perfect, is a step in the right direction. Again, I thank the member for bringing forward this piece of legislation and look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 202, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Bill 202 addresses a very complicated issue facing our society, an issue that in all of its manifestations represents serious criminal behaviour. Child pornography is a crime that jeopardizes the safety and security of our communities as it targets some of our most vulnerable citizens, our children.

4:10

As we have stated in this Chamber many times, a priority for our government under the leadership of the hon. Premier is to create safe and secure communities, communities that are free of the types of crimes this bill proposes to address. Albertans know that safe, strong, and caring communities are essential to our quality of life, and our government will continue to take actions that strengthen our streets and neighborhoods. Much of our attention recently has been on the economy, as it should. But in the face of the worst recession since the Great Depression our government has not forgotten to place emphasis and resources on creating safer places for Albertans to work, live, and raise families. Our efforts are part of a comprehensive, long-term approach to suppress crime in Alberta. These efforts include bolstering the front lines of Alberta police forces by adding a hundred new officers to fulfill our three-year, 300-officer commitment. We want to ensure that our police services have the resources and tools they need to be effective.

Bill 202 proposes implementing reporting measures that may help our police officers in their good work. I support implementing legislation that will address these heinous crimes, as I'm sure all of my colleagues do. However, I emphasize how important it is to have this legislation strengthen our enforcement efforts, not impede them. We must take steps that will improve the utilization and effectiveness of our communities' policing resources. We're in this together, and we'll build better communities working together. We need to use our resources wisely and support the programs that will keep our province safe. The decisions we make now must reflect the realities on the ground, and we should be considering how we can help address crime in communities by working with all levels of government.

Mr. Speaker, we in this House know that criminal problems are complex and that they'll require an approach that is comprehensive and effective. Federal legislation that's coming forward will also help address this issue as it would create a streamlined, nation-wide approach to reporting instances of child pornography.

Furthermore, we have existing initiatives here in Alberta that are working in this manner such as the Alberta safe communities initiative, which has been building a foundation for a stronger, more secure province for the past two years. This initiative is a partnership of nine government ministries and serves as a great example on how to address crime at the grassroots level by involving those in our communities who are closest to it.

We are pooling resources and expertise to address crime head-on and from the ground up. I wanted to emphasize that this approach is a very important mechanism in how we work to tackle crime effectively. No other province is approaching crime in such a comprehensive way, and with the leadership of the hon. Minister of Justice we will continue to push ahead with solutions that involve all levels of government and the communities themselves.

Albertans have a proud history of partnering together to address whatever challenges lie ahead. When it comes to crime and building safe communities, our approach will be no different. Our government understands that the people in our communities and their local police services know what they need to best address crime, and we've developed our crime reduction strategies with them in mind.

We know they need the tools to make gains in reducing crime, and our government is committed to providing those tools. The safe communities innovation fund is just one of those tools. The first year of the fund saw our government support pilot projects across the province to address targeted crime issues that directly affect communities. From youth at risk and mentoring programs to family and violence support to gang intervention strategies, these projects are making a real difference because they were developed by people who have the greatest stake in seeing them succeed. We know that a number one priority for Alberta's police service is reducing crime amongst youth. This includes crime in all forms.

We know where we need to focus our attention, and we as legislators must ensure that our authorities can address the root cause of crime efficiently and effectively. We stand a much better chance of preventing young people from falling into the hands of ill-intentioned criminals if we do so. Our approach must be a collaborative effort between all levels of government and the communities where these crimes take place. As we all know, Alberta's police are highly trained, and we want to make it easier for them to carry out their duties and their roles.

Let's be clear. We are committed to addressing this serious criminal and social issue, and we must calibrate our approach appropriately. We want all levels of government along with citizens and police to co-operate in a manner that contributes to stopping the creation, distribution, and proliferation of child pornography. Through this co-operation we will come to effective solutions. We know the harmful consequences that child pornography presents to the health and well-being of our communities. I'm confident that by working efficiently and providing the right resources within the right legislative framework, we can be effective at reducing and eliminating child pornography in Alberta. I laud the intent of Bill 202. I believe it may help our co-operative efforts to address these crimes. That being said, I stand in support of Bill 202.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to stand and support Bill 202, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Enough has been said. Child pornography or child prostitution is a billion-dollar industry world-wide. Children are being exploited day in and day out with all these materialistic things. They're lured into prostitution. They're drug ponies. You name it. There are all kinds of crimes going on world-wide involving children, and those children are not to blame. It's the predators that get them to do all that. This bill will go to protect the children to some extent. I think we should have tougher laws for the perpetrators and predators so there is a big deterrent for them not to commit any crimes with children. It's only these vulnerable children that get caught into a trap of delivering drugs or being drug ponies or being dragged into prostitution.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, I think, is very passionate about children. Bill 202 is entirely congruent with much of the other legislation the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has sponsored during her tenure as MLA, and prior to her appointment to cabinet she was also well known for campaigning against child prostitution. The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act is an example of one. I commend the member for doing so much hard work on behalf of children. After she became the Solicitor General, she continued to champion children's causes, launching a high-risk offender website and Canada's first Amber Alert program during her tenure.

Nova Scotia became the first jurisdiction to attempt something

similar—that's Bill 187, Child Pornography Reporting Act—to what this Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is proposing. It received royal assent on November 25, 2008. However, it's not proclaimed yet. Ontario also came out with a similar kind of bill. Manitoba also placed a similar mandatory obligation to report child pornography on the books in April 2009. On November 24, 2009, the federal government also introduced a similar concept in Bill C-58. So this bill will go a long way to protect children.

There are some things to be clarified in this bill. The term "child pornography," the definition of which is found in section 163 of the Criminal Code of Canada, throws out some of its own difficulties. In 163.1, if a depiction portrays someone as under 18 regardless of the fact the person in the depiction is 18, it will still be considered child pornography. A reporting entity could mean almost anything and is left to the regulations. This particular approach becomes very vague. So there are little issues with the bill, but overall, in considering this bill, I will gladly support this bill as long as it goes to protect children from all those evils that children are put through.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I'll wholeheartedly support this bill from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, that is being brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This bill contains numerous well-intended objectives for the reporting of child pornography.

4:20

Specifically, this bill, Mr. Speaker, would see that it would be mandatory to report instances where an individual believed that particular material is or may be child pornography. Additionally, the bill would establish the actions that a reporting entity must take following a report. This would include measures like ensuring that the entity performs an inspection, and where it is believed that child pornography is occurring, a report would be referred to the appropriate body.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, the measures in this bill are very honourable, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing it forward. They address a matter that is of high priority to this government. One particularly is the protection of children. Increasingly we are hearing of detestable actions toward children across the world and even at home. That's our reality. With trafficking in other countries and child predators sitting and using computer technology, this issue has taken a new face, one which this government takes very seriously. It is important to make sure that our laws can effectively deal with these issues so that it is clearly understood that these behaviours are not tolerated within our society.

There can also be a connection drawn where child pornography can be a gateway to even more horrendous crimes. That is why there are strong pieces of legislation at both the provincial and federal levels to protect children and to prosecute the predators. Alberta's Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act is one such piece of legislation that addresses this particular issue. More importantly, section 4(1) of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, or CYFE, reads as follows: "Any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is in need of intervention shall forthwith report the matter to a director." In essence, Mr. Speaker, this mandates that a report be made to the ministry in cases where a child may be in need of intervention.

In addition, section 1(3)(c) of the CYFE Act reads as follows: "For the purposes of this Act . . . a child is sexually abused if the

child is inappropriately exposed or subjected to sexual contact, activity or behaviour including prostitution related activities." Through this act it is already indirectly mandated that child pornography be reported. However, even with the act in place, the abuse and exploitation can still occur. It is our responsibility as a government, Mr. Speaker, to do whatever is necessary to prevent this. Although I believe that the measures proposed in Bill 202 may not completely rid our province of child pornography, I believe that it is a strong tool that can help us achieve this particular goal.

We can also look to the federal government to see how their legislation aims at cracking down on child predators. Specifically, it is the Criminal Code that addresses child pornography. Section 163.1 of the Criminal Code specifically defines child pornography, and the legislation also clearly outlines the punishment for that individual who makes, prints, publishes, or possesses child pornography. These crimes can lead to imprisonment of up to 10 years. It's also interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that the Criminal Code also outlines the punishment for anyone who possesses or accesses child pornography. These crimes are taken very seriously in that they can lead up to five years of imprisonment. Overall, the Criminal Code clearly emphasizes the severity of child exploitation. This is important as with the Criminal Code the authorities have the ability to reprimand and prosecute those who exploit children.

Furthermore, the Criminal Code, coupled with Alberta's Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, provides law enforcement agencies with the very tools that they need to crack down on child pornography; for example, Alberta's integrated child exploitation unit, also known as ICE, of which there are two team units in the province, Mr. Speaker. There is one for northern Alberta, which includes areas north of Wetaskiwin, and one for southern Alberta, which covers all areas south, including Wetaskiwin. These tools, provided to the units, daily fight to outline child exploitation.

To this point current initiatives of both federal and provincial governments have led to the prosecution of hundreds of people in Canada and around the world who partake in these heinous crimes. However, it may be true that we can do more. Bill 202 contains a number of specific initiatives to further address child pornography. In terms of legislative steps it may be best if such legislation was brought forward by the federal government. However, I believe that it is important for us to do what we can to address this particular issue in the province.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, because this government takes protection of children very seriously, I support the current initiatives of this government as well as the intention of Bill 202. Once again, I thank the hon. member for bringing forward and to our attention this very important issue. I also appreciate that other members of the Alberta Legislature would also support this particular bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and join in the debate on Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. I want to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her efforts to bring forward this legislation and do whatever we can to protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, child pornography is one of the scourges of our age. Its victims are amongst the most innocent, trusting, and vulnerable people in society. The issue itself has perhaps existed for years but recently has become compounded by the fact that most of these heinous crimes and images are disseminated on the Internet. This has resulted in its proliferation as it has become so easily accessible

with little or no consequence. Furthermore, it has become a difficult place to catch perpetrators and enforce laws.

Mr. Speaker, it must be recognized that child pornography does not exist without child abuse. They're not mutually exclusive. Stopping the illegal practice of sexually exploiting children requires collaborative efforts by lawmakers, law enforcement, web innovators, parents, guardians, and individuals world-wide. Investigating cases of child abuse and child exploitation may require specialized technical skills outside the scope of usual investigative methods.

Mr. Speaker, this is why Alberta instituted the Alberta integrated child exploitation unit, known provincially as ICE. The unit plays a pivotal role in protecting our children from Internet predators. This unit is provincially integrated, involving the RCMP, Edmonton Police Service, Lethbridge Regional Police Service, Calgary Police Service, and Medicine Hat Police Service. In addition, there are two teams covering the province, one for the areas north of Wetaskiwin and one for all areas south of Wetaskiwin. One of the team's main objectives is to find, investigate, and arrest people who prowl chat rooms looking to sexually exploit children. Another initiative is to investigate and arrest people who are trading child pornography. This initiative addresses child exploitation in regard to people accessing, possessing, distributing, and manufacturing child pornography. In addition, the unit monitors attempted child luring over the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, a survey conducted by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children in the year 2000 showed that 1 in 5 youth had received sexual solicitation over the Internet and that 1 in 4 had exposure to unwanted nude pictures. Ten years on, these numbers are likely to have increased with the availability of new technology such as the Internet, compatible smart phones, and wireless Internet connections on all kinds of mobile devices.

Mr. Speaker, in sting operations members of ICE will pose as individuals in Internet chat rooms looking to exploit children and then build a connection with perpetrators and purveyors of child pornography. Once the investigators have acquired enough evidence, often through the help of officers in other jurisdictions they will launch arrest warrants for those involved.

Another element of the battle against child exploitation was initiated by Alberta Justice in 2003 with the appointment of a special Crown prosecutor for technology and cybercrimes. This specialized Crown prosecutor provides support for such warrants and legal advice. This is to make sure that the Crown will have the strongest case possible to get these criminals off the streets.

Mr. Speaker, there is evidence that supports our belief that child pornography shared over the web is increasing. In the year 2000 Alberta had three Internet child pornography cases before the courts. Now there are over a hundred cases pending in the courts. Each conviction from an ICE-led investigation sends a clear message that child exploitation will not be tolerated in Alberta. The proposed Bill 202 advises that an individual who thinks they have come into contact with child pornography report the finding to the police or other reporting entity. With provincial ICE teams this is already being done to some extent, but increased measures need to be taken, and we need to further promote education and awareness regarding this issue.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, there is a collaborative effort needed in helping our children to stay safe, online and otherwise, in regard to sexual predation. ICE teams tour the province, visiting schools to promote awareness of online child exploitation, which contributes to their mandate of eradicating child pornography and abuse. While this provincial initiative is very effective in the province, there are challenges regarding apprehension of perpetrators.

Child pornography is not just a provincial issue; it's an issue which extends to the global level. A federal initiative working in collaboration with Alberta ICE units along with other similar organizations throughout the country may be more effective at curbing child exploitation. To a certain extent governments of the world acting together to end this blight on humanity may be something to consider in terms of implementing an effective initiative. However, Mr. Speaker, I believe it's important for us to do what we can here at home. This government takes the protection of children very seriously. This is evident in the creation of the ICE teams.

I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for initiating this debate as it continues to raise the awareness of this important issue. Provincial initiatives like the ICE teams and the hard work of all our law enforcement officers are to be commended. We need to give them every tool possible and use all resources at our disposal to protect our children. I will support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I would like to join the chorus of those praising and thanking the hon. member for bringing this forward and for all that she's done in this respect in the past.

Mr. Speaker, the objective of this bill, as we know, is to mandate the reporting of child pornography. Under the bill if an individual believes that certain material is child pornography, that person would be required to report the same to the police or other reporting entities. I've heard that some members have a little trouble with this, but I fail to see the problem.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, child pornography is a very serious issue. Having become a father less than two years ago and expecting a second one here soon, I had no idea of the seriousness and how this touches every single one of us. I've spoken with a number of law enforcement officials, and they have told me directly from first-hand information that sexual exploitation of children on the Net is not just growing; it's dramatically growing. That's why I fully support Bill 202 as well as the current initiatives that this government has in place for protecting children from sexual exploitation already.

I'd like to just give a few examples if I may. For instance, the Alberta government implemented the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and initiated the Alberta integrated child exploitation unit, also known as ICE, as the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater has alluded to. I'll just go into a little bit more detail here. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act came into force in 2004, and it requires anyone who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is in need of help to report the matter to a director. A report is then made to the Ministry of Children and Youth Service in cases where a child may be in need of intervention. From this perspective, Mr. Speaker, it's already mandatory at this point for people to report child pornography.

Now, furthermore, the ICE unit is a provincially integrated unit involving the RCMP, the Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, the Lethbridge Regional Police Service, and the Medicine Hat Police Service. Currently the ICE unit is comprised of two teams, one in northern Alberta and one in southern Alberta, appropriately so. Each of these teams has very qualified investigators and forensic technicians. These teams are responsible for keeping children safe from predators. It's their job, but I dare say

it's the job of every single one of us as, you know, Albertans who really care about our neighbours.

ICE investigators track and investigate, and yes, they indeed arrest people who prowl chat rooms looking to exploit children as well as individuals who view and trade child pornography.

Mr. Speaker, the enhancement act and the ICE unit both help to protect our communities from child pornography, and I believe that Bill 202 will complement these initiatives of our Alberta government that are already instituted at this time.

In addition, I'd like to highlight some of the important support mechanisms that are in place for children who've suffered sexual abuse, which includes child pornography. It's vital for victims of sexual abuse to be aware of the support mechanisms that are available to them. It can change their lives. It can save their lives. One example is the Zebra Child Protection Centre. It's child focused. It's child friendly. The Zebra Child Protection Centre in Edmonton, I'm happy to say, is the first centre of its kind in the country. The centre integrates a community of professionals. Yes, it includes the Edmonton Police Service and Alberta Children Services, but it also includes Crown prosecutors, child-at-risk response teams, medical and trauma screening professionals, and, of course, volunteers. Where would we be without them?

This, Mr. Speaker, allows for a streamlined approach as the integration of law enforcement and social service agencies serves the children in a vital way because it allows for a more efficient system of gathering information. Essentially, for those who are not aware, the Zebra centre provides children with essential social, medical, and mental health services to assist them in their recovery. This community group, like so many others, deserves recognition. They serve over 1,000 children every year.

Another community support agency is the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres, which does invaluable work every day. They are truly angels in our midst, Mr. Speaker. This organization acts as an umbrella for other groups, for members engaged in direct support services for victims of sexual abuse throughout Alberta. Therefore, rather than just delivering front-line services, it acts as an intermediary focused on improving the effectiveness of the sexual abuse victim support sector in facilitating its further development. The mission of this umbrella organization is to provide leadership and co-ordination and a unified voice on issues of sexual violence while at the same time increasing recognition and support for sexual assault centres in Alberta. This support agency focuses on those who are victims of sexual abuse, and, as mentioned earlier, it includes child pornography.

So I hope you can see, Mr. Speaker, that there are a lot of great things happening, bad news turned into good news in the province as it is. But I'll add that with the support of Alberta's Children and Youth Services, the core services of the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres has expanded across the province. The centre is continually removing client barriers by ensuring that services are available and accessible to diverse populations, rural communities, and previously unserved or underserved areas.

Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee you that I've seen it with my own eyes. It's essential. It's vital for effective delivery services for all Albertans. I would go so far as to say that it's imperative for all Albertans to know that healing and recovery from sexual abuse is possible and that the support groups in Alberta provide a safe place for healing to begin, but only if everyone knows about them and utilizes them.

Sexual violence, which includes child pornography, of course, is not an easy topic for many of us to discuss, but we must. Community support groups work to give victims a voice in order to help

them overcome their horrific experiences. It's the least that we can do.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, I'll just add other community support groups in the time remaining because they do deserve the acknowledgement for the great work that they do every day. That includes groups like the kids' helpline, the Métis Child and Family Services, the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, the Distress Centre, the Edmonton Police Service child protection section, and, of course, closer to my home, the Calgary Communities against Sexual Abuse. These are just a few of the many more organizations that are out there, and it's the groups like these that continue to help make our community stronger as they provide invaluable support for victims and their families. They truly turn things around.

These groups are advocates for the survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse. I hope that you might agree that the more we talk about this issue, the better chance we have of achieving justice and helping to prevent it from happening in the first place. I do believe that that's the direction that we need to go. In this way, it's important to continually raise awareness on this matter, which these support groups do successfully, but they do need our help with a bill such as this. Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 helps with exactly that, to raise awareness about the seriousness of this issue.

I believe that this bill will contribute to this government's vision of ensuring safer communities. This government has already committed to protecting our most vulnerable and ensuring our communities are safe and caring environments. That's why I support this bill fully. I also support the community groups and current legislation that already protects our youth from sexual exploitation.

Finally, I'd like to again thank the hon. member for her past, present, and future work in this regard. I'll be voting for this, and I trust that all hon. members will be doing so as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I, too, would like to thank the hon. member for her tenacity in sponsoring legislation of this type that continues to make our communities that much safer and certainly for her efforts in bringing this particular piece of legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 would mandate individuals who believe material to be child pornography to report that material to law enforcement or other reporting agencies. While Canada's Criminal Code indicates that the possession of child pornography is illegal, it currently does not mandate individuals to report content that they may encounter. Thus, Bill 202 would appear to fill an important gap in our current child pornography legislation by empowering citizens to aid law enforcement in bringing the perpetrators of these heinous acts to justice.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is a matter that our own Justice department in Alberta has taken quite seriously for years. Alberta Justice has lobbied our federal counterparts in Ottawa to enact similar legislation to what is being proposed here today. I'm pleased to say that our federal government has acted over the last several years.

In 2002 the federal government enacted Bill C-15A, which strengthened the Criminal Code by extending the offence of possessing and distributing child pornography to accessing it. The

amendments also made it an offence to communicate with children via a computer system for the purpose of facilitating or committing certain sexual offences such as child luring or abduction. Even recently we've heard and read in the news of Albertans that have been prosecuted, and I just can't say enough, Mr. Speaker. I hope that this piece of legislation and others will give us a much bigger book to club these horrible individuals with.

Mr. Speaker, following the throne speech in 2004, which committed the government to cracking down on child pornography, Parliament enacted Bill C-2, which included a broader definition of child pornography and increased the penalties.

On November 24, 2009, the federal government introduced Bill C-58, the Child Protection Act (Online Sexual Exploitation). This bill would require Internet service providers to report cases where child pornography may be available to the public or if they have reasonable grounds to believe that their Internet service is being or has been used to commit a child pornography offence. On November 27, 2009, Mr. Speaker, Bill C-58 was referred to the House of Commons Justice and Human Rights Committee. While Bill C-58 was dropped from the Order Paper after the prorogation of Parliament, the federal government has promised to reintroduce this legislation. I would encourage all members and certainly all members of the public to speak to their Members of Parliament and remind them how important it is that this piece of legislation come back on the Order Paper before the federal House.

Mr. Speaker, a federal legislative solution to fight child pornography would have numerous advantages. First, it would have the benefit of uniformity in approach. Second, there would be no need for individuals to determine which level of government to report to and in what format. Some provinces such as Manitoba and Ontario have implemented mandatory reporting measures that echo what is proposed in Bill 202. However, a single piece of federal legislation would ensure consistent mandatory reporting measures across all provinces.

Finally, a streamlined, single piece of federal legislation could receive greater compliance from industry and the private sector. Internet service providers such as Telus, Bell, or Rogers operate nation-wide. A single piece of legislation throughout Canada would reduce confusion among Internet providers and allow for stronger enforcement. Should Bill C-58 pass upon reintroduction, Internet providers such as Telus and others will have only one piece of legislation to enforce rather than one for Manitoba, one for Ontario, and for others who choose to enact such legislation.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the scourge of child pornography may be a task better suited to our federal government. Similar to a pandemic that knows no boundaries or borders, the task of eradicating child pornography will require the co-operation of nations world-wide. Our federal government is constitutionally empowered to accomplish this. However, these efforts do not preclude the efforts of provincial jurisdictions across the country. As I mentioned, other provincial jurisdictions, including Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia, have enacted their own legislation mandating the reporting of child pornography.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Alberta should pass legislation to mandate the reporting of child pornography while the federal government continues its efforts. First and perhaps most importantly, the federal Conservative government is in a minority position. Therefore, it is possible that Bill C-58 will not gain the support of the majority of the House of Commons. It is possible that even if it did pass the House of Commons, it could be defeated, stalled, or amended in the Senate. While this government certainly commends the federal government for its ongoing efforts to pass nation-wide legislation like Bill C-58, we must do our part to help in the fight

against child pornography. For these reasons I will be voting in support of this legislation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her excellent work in bringing forward this piece of legislation and for her ongoing efforts to protect our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to further debate.

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

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for the opportunity to rise today and speak to this piece of legislation. Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, is being brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I would like to express my thanks to the member for initiating this very important debate. Over the many years I've known this member, she has always been very committed to protecting our children and to a law and order agenda for this province.

Mr. Speaker, debating subjects that are uncomfortable and unfortunate is one of the duties and realities of being an elected official. Bill 202 deals with one of these subjects. Child pornography and exploitation are absolutely harrowing issues that affect some of our most innocent and vulnerable citizens, our children. As elected officials it is part of our job to find ways to protect our most vulnerable and ensure our communities are safe, healthy environments.

Child pornography and child exploitation is a disturbing subject, to say the very least. It is a permanent record of the abuse of a child, which can include pictures, videos, audio recordings, drawings, and stories. A particularly disturbing trend is the proliferation and distribution of child pornography as well as opportunities for child luring via the world-wide Internet.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, the materials I just mentioned are created deliberately and can be easily shared through numerous electronic means such as cellphones and the Internet. The government of Canada recently released a report entitled *Every Image, Every Child*. This report details the global scope of the very real problem of child pornography and exploitation and the use of the Internet to distribute this content. It is estimated that there are over 5 million images of sexual abuse towards children on the Internet at this moment. Each week there are tens of thousands of images and videos depicting sexual abuse towards children posted. This is heinous.

In addition to the sheer volume, there are more disturbing trends emerging with regard to child pornography and exploitation. The distribution of child pornography over the Internet has seemingly had a distressing effect on the content itself. The constant flow of information and the ability to interact with other criminals either creating or distributing child pornography has led to a wide variety of deviant materials and subjects which are being displayed. Adding to the issue surrounding the trends and the content of materials containing child exploitation are the issues of availability and supply. The access to and distribution of these images can be done from any computer, any cellphone any time.

Given the prevalence of the Internet and modem technology, the issue and problem of child exploitation extends far beyond our province's borders. Our national child abuse tip line, Cybertip, recently reviewed the geographical distribution of countries hosting websites that contained images of child sexual abuse. Cybertip found that nearly 60 countries were hosting this type of content. It is clear that the issue of child exploitation is not localized explicitly in Alberta or Canada, for that matter. Cybertip's report, published

in November 2009, found that the number one country in which websites were registered that hosted images of child sexual abuse was the United States, followed closely by Russia. Combined, Russia and the United States were home to approximately 70 per cent of the websites found that contained explicit material involving a child. Canada was home to 9 per cent of almost 13,000 website incidents displaying images of child sexual abuse.

Mr. Speaker, while these figures seem to suggest that interest in this material is localized, it says nothing of where the material was created. Furthermore, the difficulty with these statistics is that the measures taken by purveyors of child pornography are sophisticated and very difficult to track. For example, Cybertip observed a single website cycle through over 200 IP addresses in a single 48-hour period. Just as an aside, an IP address is a numerical label attached to devices that are connected to the Internet. One site used over 200 in a 48-hour period. These unique labels can be used to indicate the location of a particular computer. In essence, this means that the purveyors of child pornography have taken great measures to conceal the location from which these images are being posted.

Mr. Speaker, this data demonstrates that the creation of child pornography is a problem that requires our continued attention, and because of that, I support Bill 202. I believe that it will have an impact here in Alberta. However, I continue to believe that due to jurisdictional issues federal legislation may be the most effective approach to this very serious subject. Furthermore, Cybertip has recommended the implementation of international standards with regard to hosting a website as an effective measure in reducing child exploitation. Again, it is likely that jurisdictional issues will prevent our government from moving in this direction.

Ultimately, the issue of child pornography and exploitation is multifaceted. As a society we hope that no child will ever fall victim to abuse. Every member of this Assembly wants to ensure that we continue to protect our most vulnerable and valuable citizens. I support Bill 202. It is certainly well intentioned. However, due to the issues I mentioned previously, I would like to see our government continue to lobby the federal government. Again, I thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this piece of legislation and look forward to further debate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

If not, I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened very intently to all of the comments that were made, and I will definitely provide the definition of child pornography. I listened with rapt interest in regard to "We're waiting for the federal government initiative" and "We're waiting for the federal government." Well, we've been waiting since 2002 for the feds to move: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, '08, and again in 2009, but Parliament was prorogued. I think about that timing, and I think about how many people have been hit with this issue of child pornography. I'd be pleased to answer questions in Committee of the Whole on Cybertip and the ICE teams and from my colleague across the way from me on privacy.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I'll move second reading of Bill 202.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a second time]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the close proximity to 5 o'clock, I would like to seek unanimous consent of the House

to proceed to private members' motions business rather than to the next private member's bill.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Local Food Production

503. Mr. Griffiths moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore the feasibility and viability of developing substantially diversified local food production.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think my biggest regret with this hour of debate today is that we will only be having one hour of debate on this issue. I specifically framed this motion to encourage debate in this Assembly about a lot of issues. This discussion that we're about to have can talk about environmental issues. It can talk about support for local agriculture. It can talk about diversifying the economy. It can talk about land-use issues. There is no limit to what we can discuss when we talk about diversifying our local food production here in the province of Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, where this started, Mr. Speaker, was when I heard over and over again – and I've worked in agriculture a long time – so many people discuss how our farmers feed us. Looking around, we experience farmers' markets, but oftentimes I think we exaggerate just how much of our local food production could feed us. I had one person actually suggest openly that if we only ate stuff that's produced in Alberta, if that's all we were allowed to eat, then the majority of the population would actually suffer from scurvy because we don't produce enough vegetables and fruits or other production. If we eat wheat, barley, canola, beef, bison, and chicken, we'd suffer significantly healthwise.

Now, this discussion about local food production, Mr. Speaker, I believe is one of the most important issues that we'll discuss in the next 20 years, and I think we'll have to address it more and more often in this Assembly. In fact, this is a discussion that's going on globally. I went to a conference in the United States – and there is a lot of discussion going on around the globe – about utilizing food to produce fuel and whether or not our nations actually benefit in the long run when we're turning food into fuel. There are discussions globally around the economy's productions. A lot of great books have been written that discuss the status and situation with Third World countries and the way they produce food. They've actually reached some critical points and fallen backwards because of the way they produce food, importing food from other countries.

In fact, one of the challenges we have globally is that Third World nations are often forced to borrow money from First World nations so that they can turn around and use that money to buy food from First World nations. I don't quite know how you get out of a circumstance where you borrow money from somebody in order to buy their own products. And it's core products. We're not talking about big-screen TVs and couches. We're talking about food, the very essence of survival.

5:00

There are also discussions, Mr. Speaker, globally when it comes

to local food production about soil conservation questions and soil health issues. How much, and how extensive? Should we use fertilizers and pesticides to produce our food? What does it do to our water quality and our soil quality? We can't forget that environmental issues when it comes to local food production and consumption are huge in the forefront, the quality of our water issues, which can be polluted because of the fertilizers we use and the pesticides that we use and other chemicals that we use.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, carbon capture and storage, carbon sequestration, is often thought of as being a critical issue when it comes to energy production. I mean, that's why the province has a \$2 billion carbon capture and storage policy to help address some of those issues when it comes to energy production. But the more front and centre carbon becomes in our debate about the environment, the more we're going to realize that it's not just about energy production that's critical when we talk about carbon capture and storage, or carbon sequestration. What about food production? Food production properly done can help sequester carbon. But we have to ask the question.

I hope the issue actually comes up today, that producing a head of lettuce in Alberta ourselves may cost more money to produce than getting it cheaply from Mexico, but, you know, if you factor in the cost of carbon produced in hauling that head of lettuce all the way up here, it may be cheaper to produce it locally. If consumers actually have to pay the cost of producing carbon in order to get that head of lettuce up here, they may find it's cheaper to buy it here. If we're going to discuss carbon issues globally when it comes to energy production, why don't we start to discuss it when it comes to food production? I think we may very soon, in the near future.

Now, I think most Albertans have had the benefit and a positive experience when they go to their local farmers' market. I don't think there are very many Albertans out there that think that the farmers' market is just a neat tourist attraction and a cute place to go to find some novelties and knick-knacks. I think more and more farmers' markets are drawing in people who want to identify more with agriculture and where their food comes from, want to see more organic or locally produced food, so they support their farmers' market. But I think it's critical, Mr. Speaker, that when we talk about local food production, we actually explore the feasibility and viability of encouraging more of it, diversifying our local food production more.

I have not done an extensive study on the subject, but I do believe the economic benefits will extend beyond just farmers' markets, which Albertans can identify with. In fact, I'm sure somebody out there in the world has done some feasibility study, some economic study, but my notion from what I've read, my understanding from what I've read, Mr. Speaker, is that the majority of stable, strong, enduring economies around the globe always are so because they have a strong, stable agricultural sector and more diversified local food production. The reason why that works is because no matter what – well, look. My grandpa told me a long time ago – and I think I've used it in this Legislature before – that when you evaluate what is important in life, remember that you can go for three minutes without air, three days without water, and three weeks without food.

If we're trying to build a stable economy in Alberta, in Canada, just like other economies have where they've had a stable agricultural base, if we get into a trade dispute with the United States or England or Argentina or whoever, we may not get big-screen TVs. I think we can live without those. We might not get new running shoes. I think we can live without those. But if we're dependent on another country for our food, in a trade dispute that puts us in a vulnerable position. Most economies that are strong and stable and have endured for decades and decades and decades have discovered

that the strong, stable agricultural sector is critical to their own success.

Now, I also believe that researching this and finding out how we can diversify and stabilize our agricultural sector is critical because I understand the value and importance of extending our agricultural reach into other markets and selling them our product. We have fantastic products to sell, but we make ourselves vulnerable when we produce twice as much of a product as we can consume locally. I don't want to name any particular industries, but there are industries that produce twice as much of a product as what we could eat here in Alberta or even in Canada, so we ship it to other countries. Then we oftentimes have trade disputes that are shelved in health issues to close the border off so that we can't export our product, and suddenly we have an industry in crisis. Throughout agriculture we have many sectors of that industry in crisis right now because of trade disputes mostly that are shelved or housed in some sort of health issue. If we focused on a diversified agricultural base, our economy, I think, would be more stable, and I think it would ensure us long-term benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to occupy all the time because I do believe this will be an interesting discussion. I will attain my seat and listen to the discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great interest that I stand and speak to this. I've been working on this since I became the new agricultural critic. I think, as has already been mentioned, that this is absolutely imperative as we move forward in our society. I agree also that I would love to see a much longer debate on this where people could bring in and have a chance to do a lot of research on this particular issue because, as has already been mentioned, this isn't just an Alberta issue; this is a world-wide movement. I'd like to call this movement going forward to the past because this is how we used to eat in the past. We knew who our producers were. Our food was good. It wasn't full of chemicals to preserve it.

I would suspect that I am probably healthier than my children, and I think that people perhaps in my age range could say that they are healthier than their children. I walked to school, and when I picked up a loaf of bread, if we didn't eat it in two days, it was gone. I think that the fact that we had all of that good, safe food was . . .

An Hon. Member: Wonder bread?

Ms Pastoor: No. No Wonder bread. We didn't have Wonder bread. I'm trying to think. Good old Canada Bread I think is what it was called.

One of the things that has been mentioned is about the fact that we might get scurvy because we didn't have vegetables. There are greenhouses in this province as we speak that can actually produce two crops a year of vegetables because they use solar to keep up not only the energy that they need but also the heat that they need in their greenhouses. Any of these greenhouses could be run on geothermal or wind.

When I was fortunate enough to live in Spain in the early '80s, when we first went there, there were probably – I don't know – maybe 15 to 20 acres of greenhouses. They called them plásticos. What they did was actually make greenhouses out of plastic. They took the soil from the harbour and desalinated it, and that was used as the base for the greenhouses. Then they had a tank of water and fertilizer, and it was dripped at the bottom of the root of each plant.

They got three crops a year, anywhere from carnations to English cucumbers, tomatoes that we've never seen the size of, and were very successful. Now when I go on Google Earth, I look and see that what was desert at one point is now totally covered in what they call plásticos. There's no reason that we cannot do that here in this province. We are going to alternative energies, and it would be more than certainly economical.

There was also a mention and has been talked about the increased costs of organic or perhaps the increased costs of local food. We know that much of this food that we can get locally really is a better food. It is actually picked when it's ripe, which means that it's ripened on the vine or however it's being grown. It's being ripened in the ground if it's a root vegetable.

My argument to that would be that if we spend more money to buy really good food, perhaps we'd eat less. I think that in this day and age of obvious obesity, that wouldn't be a bad thing, so I think that's another argument that doesn't stand up.

5:10

One of the things that I see happening as well is that we are exporting first-grade food to other countries. I'm not altogether sure after some of the things that we've heard that I totally trust the inspectors, who have been cut down in numbers, to inspect the food that we are actually bringing into our country. I think we've heard many horror tales about foods that actually had to be recalled because of various things that were in them. Melamine would be one.

Interestingly, the United Nations has predicted that over the next 25 years nearly all population growth will be in the cities of the developing world. At current rates 60 per cent of the world's total population will live in cities by 2030. As the cities grow, so does the number of urban poor. Unemployment, hunger, and malnutrition are commonplace. In the big city most of any cash income the poor might bring home goes to feeding themselves and staying alive. Any food that does not have to be bought is a bonus. As a result, more and more people are attempting to grow at least some of their own food to supplement poor diets and meagre incomes, but farming in the city, urban agriculture, is too often seen by municipalities as a problem to be eradicated rather than a part of the solution to make the city and its environment more sustainable.

I was at a lecture given by Mike Harcourt, the former Premier of B.C., who is now very involved in sustainable communities and spoke about this subject, that more and more and more the ability to actually make a change in terms of how we create our food and have it within our communities really will be at the municipal level. He didn't feel that either federal or provincial legislation would have as much impact as people actually working towards this movement on the ground.

It's interesting to point out that there are actually two cases before the courts in Calgary about people that want to keep chickens in their backyard. Now, one of the women who is challenging this in the court is a single mom and on a limited income and has three chickens in her backyard. She, coincidentally, also has three children, and each one of those children gets a fresh egg every morning. That, I think, is a part of her argument. However, it is interesting to note that Vancouver, New York City, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Victoria, Burnaby, and Richmond, just to name a few, actually have legislation that says: yes, you can have chickens in your backyard. So the movement is moving; the movement is catching on. We even know that here in Alberta the sales at farmers' markets have increased by 30 per cent over the last two years. Just think of the millions of dollars that are going back into our local economy, but think of the good food that our citizens are actually eating.

The new face of farming is going to be smaller farms. I visited a farm that was only 10 acres. One of their things is that they have specialty vegetables, but one of the examples that I use that came off that farm is that they raise Cornish game hens. This is a place here just near Edmonton. It's sold by contract to specialty restaurants that have very, very picky chefs. These people are actually going to make a living off this 10 acres. The problem with some of these smaller farmers is that the land doesn't really say that they're a farm, but they're sort of not a small business that a bank would look at in terms of giving them those extra monies just to get them over that threshold of allowing them to be a little bit bigger and to actually hire staff.

I think that this is very timely, but I also think that we really have to look at what has already been mentioned, called the 100-mile diet. I in Lethbridge am very lucky that I can actually get any kind of a meat product that is hormone free and some, certainly, vaccination free. With our vegetables, I know which ones are grown organically. I think that these are the kinds of things that we should have in downtown Calgary, Edmonton, and everywhere else. As has been mentioned, these farmers' markets are certainly growing as we speak.

I think that it's important that we work with our agriculture minister. It should be legislated in some way so that there is help, so that there is even education toward thinking about how important this movement can be. One of the economic benefits – this is actually a dollar figure where I put the 30 per cent – is that farmers' markets in Alberta currently have sales in the range of \$380 million a year. They are increasing in numbers, as I have already mentioned.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Alas, hon. member, the time has escaped us.

The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm listening with a keen ear here to the debate on the motion, which urges the government to investigate the feasibility, the viability of developing substantially diversified local food production, which, I think, on the surface of it could be agreed with except that to me that kind of reeks of calling for government intervention in the agricultural business, in the local food production business. It may be a laudable goal, but I'll guarantee you that we've heard the Member for Battle River-Wainwright arguing exactly the opposite in this House a number of times.

Then the debate on this thing revolves around some confusion over local food production versus organic food production. The motion doesn't speak anything to organic food production; it talks about local diversified food production. But the Member for Lethbridge-East repeatedly talked about local food as if she meant organic food. Let's examine that issue for a while because, actually, there's organic food in all of our markets and has been for quite some time. Recently there's been quite a take-up on organic food.

I don't know what the number is today, but not too long ago 70 per cent of our organic food was produced in China and shipped to Canada. If anybody knows anything about the Chinese market, they'll know that it's the wild, wild west. It's rather unregulated. Anybody that wants to put "organic" on their package can do so. There's no regulation to say what that word means, so we buy organic food in the market. It's crazy. My concern here is that we have this ridiculous propensity to rush lemming-like into new fads. This could be confused with another one.

Now, the member talks about the future of farming being smaller farms. By what reasoning? I should point out that there's a

difference between a farm and a garden, first of all. The Member for Battle River-Wainwright has argued on numerous occasions about what an efficient farming community we have. Now, by what economic reasoning is a farmer in Alberta going to abandon his methods of production – tractors, herbicides, fertilizers, all of those things – unless there's an economic benefit for him? A farmer is a businessman like any other, and if he can make a dollar at doing something, he's going to do it. It has been proven time and time again that the consumer will not pay more for produce in the supermarket.

I urge the hon. member to plant a garden and eat local food. I wholeheartedly agree that it's better for you. But let's not urge our agricultural community to switch to uneconomical practices unless somebody is willing to subsidize. And there's the word. Somebody has to pay for all of this, and if it's not the consumer in the grocery store, who is it? I urge the hon. member to think about that. We're not talking about organic food. We're talking about local production here. All of that is a very good argument for another day.

The reason that we get our fruit from other places is because they can produce it more economically, and there's a limit to what our consumers are willing to pay. In exchange for that we trade goods with them, and we ship our beef there. Who is going to tell the beef producers, "Oh, boy; well, now, we probably should cut down – oh, I don't know – to 10 per cent of our current production"?

Ms Pastoor: COOL will tell the beef producers what they're going to do.

Mr. Oberle: While the member seems willing to tell them that they should cut down to 10 per cent of their current production, I'm not, Mr. Speaker. I think we should let markets evolve. The agricultural community is doing a heck of a good job of that, and I think that we should leave the system be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

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

Ms Notley: Oh, that was a bit sooner than I expected.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on this motion and, unlike the previous speaker, to speak in favour of it for a number of reasons, some of which may be good ones.

I want to start by simply noting the government's own sustainable land-use framework and some of the information that they talked about last year when they brought in the land-use framework and heralded much of what it meant for us in the future and what a great thing it would be. One of the strategies in that land-use framework was strategy 5, which suggested that we ought to promote the efficient use of land to reduce the footprint of human activities on Alberta's landscape. Well, obviously, we have local production, but promoting local consumption of locally produced foods is, in fact, a clear mechanism for reducing our footprint and for enhancing the effectiveness of our land use. That's one good reason why this government presumably would already be in favour of this motion, because it completely aligns with their stated goals under the land-use framework that we all talked about last year.

What we need to do in Alberta is not look at this as a fad because, you know, I'm pretty sure that eating is one of those things that's been around for some time. As a result, I think that coming up with efficient and economical ways to feed ourselves is not a fad but is, in fact, kind of survival-like, so we ought to maybe consider it that way. Even if we risk potentially challenging some very vested interests of some very, very large but singular agricorp interests that some folks in this government are quite fond of, at the end of the day, in the long term, what we really need to do is look at how to

develop this province in a way that sustains our environment, sustains our food supply, and sustains our health. All of that is something that can be achieved through more focus on enhancing local food production and distribution and consumption.

Generally speaking, I mean, the government itself, I believe, last year reported that their own surveys were suggesting that 90 per cent of Alberta households had purchased local food in the previous year and that a significant portion of them would like to buy more local food if the opportunity was provided to them in the following year.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Now, the government has put quite a lot of money, of course, into the Alberta livestock and meat strategy, a strategy that has gotten it into not a small amount of hot water with their historical supporters. Of course, that's done in order, we're told, to enhance the ability of Albertans to export their meat products and to compete internationally. Now, that may well be, at least in part, a good objective. Whether this particular strategy is the most effective strategy to achieve that objective, I don't know, but the objective is certainly a good one. But why only look at creating an international market if we have the opportunity to enhance and build a local market? In fact, studies show that dollars spent on local food will circulate eight to 15 times in a local economy. If the food is grown here, transported here, bought here, then in fact more of the economic benefit from that stays here.

The other issue that some people have talked about is cost. Of course, there was the whole discussion about organic food versus nonorganic food, but as has been pointed out, we're not necessarily talking about organic food. What we're talking about is the government looking at ways in which they can efficiently support a food distribution system that removes the middleman and connects the consumer much more closely with the producer, and the more you're able to remove that distribution, eliminate or minimize the number of people between the consumer and the producer, the cheaper and more marketable that product becomes.

What we need is government support and exploration into how to connect the consumer with the producer locally because that's one of the problems that we have here in Alberta, that it's very, very difficult to do that. When you seek out organic food, if you're in a major grocery store, you end up buying organic food that's travelled half-way across the continent as opposed to, you know, 10 miles down the road, which, of course, you do with the farmers' market. As many people here know, of course, the only year-round farmers' market in the city resides in the centre of my constituency. I can tell you that that place is overwhelmed every Saturday morning with shoppers, and it drives the economy of the whole area around it. So to suggest that there isn't actually a market for this is really quite short-sighted.

The point is that it's not necessarily going to happen everywhere right away. Is there something the government can do to enhance it? Heaven knows they enhanced the market share of the very small group of agricorporations out there. They do everything they can to support them, so why not look at trying to find ways to do that with respect to enhancing local food production and diversification?

A few interesting statistics that were provided to me by people who are very much in support of this vision of creating a vibrant and sustainable local food economy are as follows. Basically, there is a long-term concern about food security across the world, and ultimately this is going to become a problem. As a result of that, we see a lot of foreign purchases of huge amounts of farmland around the world, up to 15 million to 20 million hectares of farmland in certain countries, equivalent to anywhere between 50 and 75 per cent of the province of Alberta.

As the food shortage develops, or as the market becomes increasingly monopolized by one or two or three or four distributors, primarily at this point, the prices shoot up, which we have seen quite a bit recently. Meanwhile, what the producers receive goes down because, of course, they have far fewer places to sell their produce. The monopoly destroys the so-called free market on both ends. The producer has fewer places to sell, and the consumers have fewer places from which to buy, and the market is distorted.

Anybody who's a student of economics will tell you that even the most right-wing believers in the joys of the free market will acknowledge that monopolies are not always a good thing. Therefore, what we need to do is find ways to get around them. [interjection] I've even got the attention here of the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. How often does that happen, that I get nods of agreement from him? Having said that, though, I think we can agree on this piece.

Food prices soar due to demand surges and supply constraints, and as a result of that we see these huge peaks in food prices. Another thing that people ought to know is that the distribution systems that we currently have in place across the world account for about 10 per cent of the annual greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. For those of us in the building who actually believe that this is a problem, this is something that maybe we ought to be concerned about. One way to do that is to stop transporting a freeze-dried vegetable thousands and thousands of kilometres and, rather, find ways to move it from farm A to adjacent urban community B. Anyway, that's another thing.

We also have issues with respect to the way things work right now. I heard one speaker talk about: "Why should we fix it if it's not broke? Why should the government tamper with it? The market is working just great." Blah, blah, blah. The problem is that Canadian farmers at this point are posting record losses, surpassing those that we saw during the Depression in the earlier part of the previous century. Tens of thousands of farmers sell their produce to only one or two large corporations at this point. Food travels on average 2,400 kilometres from field to plate.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and offer my support to Motion 503, urging the government to explore the opportunity and viability of developing diversified local food production. Right now the Alberta government is working closely with industry, business leaders, and Albertans towards a shared goal of making the province one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world. A more competitive province will provide the right environment for the creation of new business opportunities for Albertans and our future generations. This focus cuts across all sectors of government, including agriculture. Motion 503 will help us accomplish this by promoting our local producers.

Agriculture has been and continues to be integral to the success of our province. It is an essential component of Alberta's economy, culture, and heritage. Producers provide our communities with nutritious and healthy food as well as employment and economic opportunities for local businesses that offer services and supports to our producers. Over the years this industry has faced and continues to encounter many hurdles that require innovative solutions, so it is especially important that we continue to look at different ways that the Alberta government can continue to help this industry.

I believe that many Albertans feel the same way and would like to know when they can purchase and consume locally produced food. I know that I do. Not only do we want to support our local

agricultural producers, but we also trust the quality of their food. Mothers may not want to buy the cheapest food for their children. They may want to buy the best quality food for their children. In fact, consumer trends report that local food production and sales efforts have seen unprecedented growth over the past few years and have increased by 30 per cent.

With the high Canadian dollar it is especially important that we support our local producers as U.S. producers are now more competitive in our markets and better able to sell their products in our stores. Oftentimes when we go to the grocery store, it's not always obvious where the food that we are buying comes from. Research has shown that Alberta households indicate a lack of product availability as the number one barrier to buying local products. If stores do not indicate where the food is coming from, we do not necessarily know when we have the choice to purchase Albertan. Exploring the possibilities of diversified local food production might alleviate this by increasing our awareness and the profile of local producers as well as providing us with more locally grown products.

I prefer to buy Albertan, and I'm willing to pay more money to do so. I believe that a lot of Albertans and constituents from Grande Prairie-Wapiti would do the same. The desire of Albertans to buy locally can be seen in the over one hundred independently operated farmers' markets in Alberta.

I commend the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright for this motion to support our local agricultural producers. This motion is one of the ways we can ensure that our province's agricultural industry is competitive and provides jobs and prosperity to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time to speak on this very important issue, and I look forward to hearing other members' thoughts on diversified local food production.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were having a deep conversation on the free market with the hon. member from the ND Party. A deep subject.

I appreciate the hon. member bringing forward Motion 503, but until I heard him speak on it, I thought that it was a typo error: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore the feasibility and viability of developing substantially diversified local food production." What I thought he wanted in his motion was to ensure that there is a competitiveness review to see why we're not more diversified here in the province of Alberta. I believe that if you actually look at the problems, as the Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out, you're actually punished for having a small farm: "Well, you're under 10 acres," or "You didn't have this much income," that in fact you don't meet the regulations to get those benefits of being a small farmer.

There is an individual down in Taber that has raised, I believe, eight children on 20 acres, and everyone says that it can't be done. What I think is important is that we recognize we shouldn't say who can and who can't but to allow the free market and that entrepreneur to say: I think I can do this. Perhaps they just want to put in five acres of blueberries or Saskatoons or black currants and realize that they can and will be able to make a living on that. The question is: what are the regulations that we've put in place that allow or prohibit those people from being competitive and being allowed to do that?

There are some interesting points that have been brought up that I want to go back to. I think that most Albertans, if in fact they were given the choice to buy local or foreign, would buy local. As the Member for Peace River mentioned, it is about the cost. Human

nature is that we don't want to pay a prohibitive price for something that is competitive and that we can bring in from another area at a lower cost. I don't believe that that's the root of the problem. I really feel that it's important that we allow the Alberta producers to bring forward their produce and to be able to market it in a way that is economically viable for them.

Too often we set up new rules and regulations. There's always a constant battle at the farmers' market on whether we're going to bring in new rules and regulations and limit them from bringing their produce to town. We've passed a lot of legislation that prohibits people, for example, on how many chickens or turkeys they're allowed to raise without getting a quota, thereby creating a problem for those new entrepreneurs who might want to get into those areas.

I think the important thing for Albertans and perhaps the role that the government might take is on the education side, of promoting a little bit of education on how good our product in Alberta is and to allow the local people to realize that. We're very fortunate in southern Alberta to have Rogers Sugar.

Europe went through a period where they had a food shortage. They realized the problem, and the local people there are more than willing to subsidize farmers because they want assured produce in their country. We don't have that problem here in Alberta. We have a surplus. What we need to do is create the demand because we want better, and I believe Albertans do want better. They want the best.

We have a great drive to be competitive, whether it's in the Olympics or whether it's in food production, but we need a positive campaign to allow people to understand the benefits of buying local. We often hear of the 100-Mile Diet. I'd love to hear the discussion and talk about the Alberta diet or the Canadian diet or the western diet. There are many areas where we could and should be looking at those things.

One of the areas where we suffer, I guess, is when we look at the oil sands. There we had a resource, and we wondered: how do we allow or encourage the development of that? The provincial and federal governments got together, they looked at the problem, and they said: "Well, it's a tax problem. There isn't enough capital to develop this under the current system, so what we need to do is put a tax incentive in there to allow the entrepreneur, the risk takers to put their capital in." It's very much the same in agriculture.

There are a lot of opportunities that we could and should explore. The one that I would like to address today is greenhouses. If someone was to do a little bit of research, they would find that the majority of the greenhouses in Alberta are down in Medicine Hat. The reason – I'm sure the Speaker is very much aware of this – is that there they have their own gas. In the city of Medicine Hat they have their royalties. They own the gas, and they were allowed to use that gas without having prohibitive royalties or taxes on it, so the development of greenhouses inside that jurisdiction was abundant. They were able to have greenhouses there where in other places in the province it wasn't economically viable.

It's interesting, though, the number of wells across Alberta that have been drilled, have been developed. In the old days they'd flare them or they'd test them, and they'd say: "These wells aren't economically viable. We can't put in a pipeline. It would cost too much. There's not enough there." Yet we don't have the opportunity to allow a local farmer to use that gas to heat a greenhouse or to produce a crop, to lower their cost on fuel. I think those are areas where we can be innovative in ensuring that Alberta producers have an opportunity.

5:40

We very much get focused, it seems, here in Alberta and throughout the world right now on carbon. I think what we should be

focused on, though, is carbohydrates, the \$2 billion that we're putting in to look at carbon sequestration when the science is definitely not settled on that. We don't know the results on trying to do that. Yet are we going to put some incentives in for agricultural production? We have to question that.

I think there are a few other areas that we could look at, and that is truth in labelling. Down in the States they have COOL, country of origin labelling. I don't believe that as Alberta producers we have anything to fear in that because of the quality of our product. It's the foreign countries where they don't have high standards and questionable ethics on what's being brought in. We get thrown into that same group because of that, and I think that we can overcome that through education. It's interesting that we produce an awful lot of vegetables in southern Alberta for industrial markets: corn, potatoes, peas, beans, sunflowers, lentils, just to name a few. I think that we should realize that that production is there.

The hon. member talked about, you know, doubling the product, that we're maybe producing too much. I'm not sure. I hope you'll clarify that for me because we are an export nation. We export oil, gas, electricity, forest products, just to name a few. I think that we want to encourage export because a great deal of our economy is brought in through that export.

The real concern here and what we want to do is allow the Alberta producer to be able to be competitive and to be able to compete in a world market. I think what's critical and what the government needs to do in a motion like this is to have that competitiveness review and see what regulations we have put in place that are prohibitive versus what regulations are really needed. What are we allowing the producer to produce? What are our standards if someone wants to say whether they're natural foods, whether they're organic foods, or whether they're just foods that are produced here in the province? I think that by initiating some of these other forms of education and truth in labelling, we can and will continue to grow our agricultural market, we can be competitive, and we can create that demand through our great quality of products.

It's interesting, you know, when you see the different brands that are promoted, whether it's McDonald's, Tim Hortons, Coca-Cola. Brand name has shown in the past that it is very significant when you show the integrity of that product, whether it's sportswear, whether it's food, whether it's a vehicle. We see that. What I would encourage the government to do is to broaden their competitiveness review and to realize and ask: what are we doing here to hurt the Alberta farmer? When we try to protect and pass legislation that protects, we usually end up hurting ourselves. We weaken our productivity, our efficiencies in the world. It isn't a long-term benefit, though it might be a short-term benefit. If we really want to protect our farmers, let's give them the freedom and the opportunity to produce in the most efficient and effective way possible. Let's not place prohibitive rules and regulations that are damaging.

I received a phone call from a butcher in rural Alberta. He's struggling with the new regulations that he's saying are going to be brought in and enforced when all he does is process the local producers' beef as well as the wildlife that's taken in his area . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

I'm looking forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak to Motion 503, brought forward by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. This motion urges the government to explore both the opportunity and the viability of developing substantially diversified local food production. I've always been a proponent of Alberta's agriculture industry and the

preservation of Alberta's agricultural land even though I've never had the privilege of living on a farm.

Prior to my tenure as MLA for St. Albert I was an alderman in St. Albert, and in that capacity I also served as chair of the Edmonton metropolitan regional planning commission. During that time the commission put together a strategy on agriculture, part of which included the concept of preserving the ecoclimatic zone in northeast Edmonton. The microclimate in this area is well known for its agricultural production. I'm very pleased to say that the most recent city of Edmonton municipal development plan, which I understand is still being debated for third reading, designates at least part of this area as an urban agricultural zone.

The preservation of agricultural land is very important to the future viability of Alberta's agricultural industry. Land with class 1 or 2 soil, meaning those soils with good or excellent capabilities, needs to be preserved. Given the importance of the agriculture industry to Alberta's economy, I believe that prime agricultural lands should be used solely for agricultural purposes.

The demand is very high for fresh produce and other agricultural products, and it is growing every day. In my constituency of St. Albert thousands of people visit the farmers' market every weekend. This farmers' market, I understand, is one of the largest in western Canada.

The World Health Organization estimates that the distance a basic meal travels is 2,400 kilometres from the producer to the consumer. Over this distance products have to be picked weeks in advance and have a substantially higher possibility of being damaged or spoiled. Compare this to our local producers' agricultural products, that are picked fresh in the morning and brought to the market that very day. I am sure that anyone who has indulged in vine-ripened, fresh produce would agree that the taste and flavours of these products are second to none.

Mr. Speaker, I support Motion 503 and urge all members to consider the merits of supporting this motion as well. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to close debate.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I wasn't disappointed. Again, my only disappointment is that there's only an hour to debate this, and there is so much to discuss. In the five minutes I have to close, I know I can't address all the questions or concerns or issues that were raised but a couple, though.

I do want to point out in the discussion that there is one sector of the meat industry that produces 200 per cent more product than can be consumed in this province. I'm not suggesting there's anything wrong with that either because we are an exporting nation, but we have to be constantly mindful of what it opens us up to and how vulnerable it makes us when we have trade issues that are sometimes legitimate, sometimes shrouded in health issues. It leaves us vulnerable.

I know I heard some comments that this motion, that discusses the feasibility and viability of diversified local food production, does not necessarily tie to organic. I agree; it's not necessarily organic. There is a notion, there is a tendency that the more localized the food production and the smaller the production, the more organic it typically becomes. Whether it's certified or not is not an issue. It typically becomes more organic. Many people are keenly interested in localized food production because of the notion that it's more organic, that it's more local, that it's more wholesome, whatever. There are more people being tied to that notion.

I don't ever suggest that this should be done or undertaken with government subsidies, but I was glad that the member pointed out that there are other ways to incent more capital investment and more production. We've done it with many other industries in this province.

You know what? In the entire discussion about diversifying our local food production, Mr. Speaker, I didn't use the words "competitiveness review" because, quite frankly, when I wrote this motion, that wasn't a really hip and cool phrase yet, and I hadn't analyzed that. But when you discuss it in that context, competitiveness review can talk about reducing rules and regulations that hinder more localized food production. It could talk about the tax structure, which could hinder local production.

But it's more than just doing a competitiveness review. There really needs to be a larger study, a larger analysis to see what sort of global changes are coming that we may have to address here in this province, issues that arise. There may be more environmental or health issues that arise globally that can impact what we do locally and affect whether or not we can diversify our local food production.

5:50

We definitely need more education – that is critical – to educate consumers about what's possible when it comes to local food production, to educate farmers on what's possible when it comes to local food production. There's oftentimes a mindset that you have to be big, that you have to do something grand, that you have to be an exporter, that otherwise it's just a local garden. Quite frankly, there is a middle ground in between. There is a gentleman that I've talked to who has written four books, Bruno Wiskel, who makes more money on 40 acres than most people do on 1,200 acres, and it's all localized food production. He's a model for what's possible out there.

Anyway, there are a lot of different things to be considered, Mr. Speaker. I just want to point out one last thing before I wrap up. I've read this all over the place. You can find research on the Internet that supports it. In most of the largest European cities the number one economic activity is agricultural production. People grow stuff on their doorsteps, on their balconies. They grow stuff in the windows. They produce as much as they can locally. So there are opportunities for growing more local production, and it doesn't mean we have to export tomatoes to Ontario or that they even have to travel a hundred miles from Forestburg to Edmonton.

It just means that maybe there are a lot of opportunities, and we have a lot of unanswered questions. They really, quite frankly, need to be answered before we can determine whether or not diversifying our local food production is viable and feasible. This motion simply encourages and incents the government, in whatever capacity they feel fit, to explore whether or not it's feasible and viable and answers some of those questions that have been raised by members here and raised by myself. That's why I ask all members to support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour, I would move that we call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Issue 14

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. We give further thanks for the gifts of culture and heritage which we share. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a visitor who is in your gallery. Stanley Gooch is a Camrosian. He doesn't live there anymore, is now retired and lives in Kelowna, but he was raised in Camrose and has had a distinguished career as a Canadian diplomat. He has served as ambassador to Central America, to Mexico, as Canadian High Commissioner to India, served in Vienna with the atomic energy agency. He's here visiting relatives today, and we had the chance to have lunch. I always really enjoy visiting with Stan. He actually put his diplomatic skills to great use back in about 2003, when as chair of Augustana University College he helped negotiate the merger with the University of Alberta. He has a very keen interest in world events, world affairs, and obviously what's happening in Alberta. I'm very happy to have him here today. I'd ask that all members of the Assembly offer him the traditional warm welcome. If he could rise, please.

Introduction of Guests

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Alberta Legislature 68 visitors from Northmount elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They are seated in both the public and members' galleries. Also, I'd like to recognize a number of the teachers that are joining this large group of school visitors: Mrs. Krystal Lim, Ms Janis Greenwood, Mr. Derek Lutz, Mrs. Denna Gates, and Mr. Conrad Lutz.

Mr. Speaker, it says at Northmount elementary school, "Another month has come and gone," just as an expression of how much time has passed, and it says, "Time flies when you are having fun!" It is my hope that the school visitors from Northmount school are having their first experience at the Alberta Legislature and having fun learning about this exciting opportunity and joining us today in the House. I would like all members of the Legislature to join me in giving an absolutely warm welcome to Northmount elementary school. I'd ask them to rise.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. The first group I'd like to introduce is a group who comes here today from l'école Maurice-Lavallée school in the riding of

Edmonton-Strathcona. With the 30 students from the school are their teachers Mme Chantal Grégoire and Mme Marie-Claude Laroche. I'm very pleased that they were able to be here today and also, I believe, to participate in the lovely ceremony that we had earlier today in the rotunda. I would ask that these students visiting today rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly leaders from Alberta's francophone community who participated this morning in a flag-raising ceremony in the Legislature rotunda as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national celebration of French culture and history.

The executives are from the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, or the Francophone Economic Development Council of Alberta. This organization works closely with the province's private sector to develop tourism from francophone regions, encourage and promote business, and promote job opportunities for Albertans. We also have members from the French Canadian Association of Alberta, or the ACFA. The ACFA is the provincial organization representing all francophones.

Le gouvernement de l'Alberta est fier d'entretenir de bonnes relations avec l'ACFA en s'assurant que les francophones de l'Alberta ont accès aux services et aux ressources dont ils ont besoin.

Je demanderais à nos invités de se lever lorsque je les présente: Dolorèse Nolette, Michel Berdnikoff, Jeanne Robinson, Adèle Amyotte, Oumar Lamana, Reed Gauthier, Denis Perreux, Johanne Johnson, Rob Christie, Randy Boissonnault, Frédéric Turbide, Marc S. Tremblay. Se joignant à eux en cette journée spéciale sont des membres de mon équipe au Secrétariat francophone: Denis Tardif, directeur général, et Cindie LeBlanc, directrice adjointe.

Ces individus sont tous assis dans la galerie des membres aujourd'hui. J'aimerais demander à tous nos membres de les accueillir chaleureusement à la Législature.

Merci, M. le Président.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you today to all members of this Assembly members of the board of management and staff of the Lamont health care centre. The Lamont health care centre is a combined acute-care auxiliary hospital and nursing home facility located in the town of Lamont. The centre's proud history began in 1912 with the establishment of the Lamont public hospital and is the result of a unique partnership between local residents and the United Church of Canada.

The board members present today and those who came before them, including the hon. the Premier, have worked tirelessly over the years to preserve a strong tradition of caring for the community by the community. A small cottage hospital with modest beginnings established just before the First World War has grown to become a fully integrated health care centre. Our guests today are in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please stand as I name them. They are Ms Trudy Herrold, Ms Connie Newgard, Ms Mae Adamyk, Reverend Lilley Glebe, and the chief executive officer, Mr. Harold James. I'd ask all members to please join me in extending our traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six film and television professionals who are seated in the public gallery. I'll ask you to please rise as I say your name. We have Lorelei Kuchera, who is the vice-president of film for IATSE, local 210. We have Mr. Don Ast, who is representing ACTRA, but most of you will know him as Nestor Pistor. Indeed, many people remember. We have Michelle Gougeon from the Directors Guild of Canada, Alberta branch; Prudence Olenik, who I was very pleased to work with at one point, also with IATSE; and Linda Bourgon, also with IATSE. I just want to point out that Linda was an Emmy award winner in 2004 for hairstyling. We're also joined by Ryan Halun, who is also with IATSE. Thank you so much for joining us. They are here to press the government for changes to the film and television industry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you two constituents of mine who are seated in the members' gallery today. They represent St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic school district, and they are here to observe question period today. They are the superintendent, Jamie McNamara, and Arlene Hamilton, who is a Leduc ward member and a former alderman of the city of Leduc as well. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Jocelyn Stenger. Jocelyn is a first-year social work student from Grant MacEwan University and is currently doing her placement at my constituency office. She has a strong interest in the health of the community and in helping those in need. She has also developed a keen interest in electoral politics and the way in which government policy affects the lives of people in inner-city neighbourhoods. She is a much-valued addition to my constituency office, and I thank her for the wonderful work she has done so far on behalf of my constituents. I would ask Jocelyn to please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try this one more time. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you two members from my office. The first is Ashley Fairall. Ashley is a social work student. She's in her first year of studies in the social work program at Grant MacEwan University, and she is currently doing her placement at my office. She's also serving on the MacEwan Students' Council, the student program advisory committee, and is active in the students' association. She has a strong interest in government policy and how it affects citizens in the community. I've been personally impressed with her advocacy efforts on behalf of my constituents and her patience with some of my missteps.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, I would like to also introduce Philippe

Johnson. He is my constituency assistant and has been working in my office for almost a year now. Philippe grew up in Lac La Biche, drove truck in the oil patch, went to school at U of T, has done a tremendous amount of international development work, and most recently has been working for the citizens of Edmonton-Strathcona.

I'd appreciate it if both Ashley and Philippe could rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Fallen Four Fifth Anniversary

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fifth anniversary of the deaths of four young RCMP officers in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency was marked with a community candlelighting at the Fallen Four Memorial Park in Mayerthorpe on March 3. It was an honour for me to have the support of my fellow MLAs who attended as well as the Solicitor General – I thank them for that – as we paused with the community to remember our heroes. I was pleased to see that the families, friends, and co-workers of constables Leo Johnston, Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, and Anthony Gordon were joined by family members and friends who came to honour our peacekeepers and other police officers as well.

The memorial society volunteers are to be commended on creating this great memorial and the ongoing events that honour and celebrate all who have given their lives for the uniform. The society volunteers have done a tremendous job in helping the community, the province, and the country turn a devastating tragedy into a dignified memorial park, with ongoing events to encourage healthy minds, bodies, and spirits. As always, a special thank you goes to all that have generously supported the memorial and related events.

On behalf of the society and as MLA for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne I extend an open invitation to all Albertans to share with us the memorial candlelighting of five candles and the annual RCMP memorial hockey team versus the Whitecourt Senators oldtimers' hockey team on March 19 at 6:30 at the Whitecourt Twin Arenas. There will also be a silent auction held to raise funds for the park. All donations are welcome through me.

Thank you.

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

Ports-to-Plains Alliance

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share with the Assembly a brief update on one of our very exciting international trade partnerships, Ports-to-Plains. Essentially, Ports-to-Plains is a corridor alliance which encompasses transportation, energy, and agriculture as well as a trade corridor running from the Texas border with Mexico, through nine U.S. states, and ending up in Alberta's oil sands.

Alberta has been a member of the Ports-to-Plains Alliance for over a year, and the benefits of this membership are beginning to show, benefits like the increase in co-operation between our regional economic development alliances, or REDAs. In fact, our membership in Ports-to-Plains has prompted the REDAs along Alberta's eastern border to work together, rather than competing against each other, and form Alberta's Ports-to-Plains project.

Another benefit gained through our partnership with Ports-to-Plains is the development of strong international connections. Mr. Speaker, through this partnership connections were made with universities in Texas and memorandums were signed to work on research with universities and colleges here in Alberta. Alberta has

also gained an additional congressional advocacy group that is nine states large and regularly meets with all Senators and Congressmen in Washington.

Mr. Speaker, through my work with Port-to-Plains I've had the opportunity to speak with many government and business leaders throughout the United States, and I can say with conviction that all of them are truly impressed and excited about the benefits Alberta can bring to their businesses and to their states. But what is perhaps more exciting is that many of these leaders were really not aware of Alberta before our membership in Ports-to-Plains. They didn't really know what Alberta had to offer.

Mr. Speaker, the good work of this organization is going forward stronger than ever. The Ports-to-Plains Energy Summit in Denver, Colorado, on April 8 and 9 will give us another opportunity along with the energy industry to continue to sell Alberta and the benefits Alberta has for the American heartland.

Ports-to-Plains has proven itself to be a valuable ally in improving Alberta's competitiveness, and I'm excited to continue to work with them to meet the goals set out in Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act.

Thank you.

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

School Closures

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2009 city of Edmonton municipal census reveals that many communities are experiencing an increase in the number of school-aged children as well as preschoolers. In the city of Edmonton the number of preschool children increased between 2005 and 2009 by over 30 per cent.

This 30 per cent increase over the last four years certainly supports the government of Alberta's projections that by 2014 there will be more students than we've ever had in the school system, yet in the latest 10-year facilities plan prepared by the Edmonton public school board the school enrolment for Edmonton is projected to decrease. According to a statement on page 10 of this plan: "This projection is based on an analysis of Federal Census data from 1996 to 2006 and district student residency data derived from historical student information."

Parents demand answers to the following three questions from the school board. Why is it relying on inaccurate and outdated data when making such important decisions regarding public school closures? Why would the school board go against the city of Edmonton's own stated goal of attracting new families into older neighbourhoods to help increase the population density in central neighbourhoods? Finally, is the planning department of the school board deliberately ignoring data which does not support their recommendation to close schools in Edmonton's central neighbourhoods, or are they simply unaware of the latest census information collected by the city?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would urge that in light of this information the Edmonton public school board cease and desist, please, in their actions to close any of the six schools in the city of Edmonton's central neighbourhoods until a proper assessment of the new data collected by the city of Edmonton is addressed.

Thank you.

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

Calgary South Health Campus

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary south health

campus is the new hospital being built in Calgary, and I'm proud to say that it's in my riding of Calgary-Hays.

When completed, the new south health campus will be a 155,000-square-metre facility that serves Calgary and will serve as a referral point for parts of southern Alberta. Not only will it contain traditional hospital resources, but it will combine leading-edge health care with the latest in technology as well as research and education in an environment that focuses on providing a healthy, healing atmosphere for patients and staff.

When phase 1 is complete in December of 2011, the facility will house 11 operating rooms, 30 emergency exam rooms, 65 short-stay beds, 12 intensive care beds, 216 additional in-patient care beds, and space for 200,000 outpatient visits a year. Just to put that in perspective, that's about the same number of beds as the expanding Rockyview general hospital and twice the outpatient visits as the Foothills Medical Centre.

The Calgary south health campus will have a tremendous impact on my constituency, allowing for better access to health facilities. Not only this, but it will bring jobs and an economic benefit to my riding. In fact, when fully operational the south health campus will employ approximately 2,000 people.

I look forward to the opening and what this hospital will bring to my constituency and Calgary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Hospital Construction in Grande Prairie

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently was in Grande Prairie, where the main concern was when they will receive a new hospital, a hospital that's been needed for some years for their growing, thriving community. This was promised back in 2007. To the Premier: with the Premier being so willing to talk of the priorities and concerns of the people of Calgary, will he now speak of the priorities for the people of Grande Prairie? Will the new QE II replacement hospital be started this year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of large projects where the tenders have been closed, which will produce some savings. Treasury Board and Infrastructure are evaluating how much money there is in savings. I've also instructed the minister of health to look at those projects that we have set aside money for, but during the huge inflationary period that we went through, the costs really rose. I've asked him to revisit all those projects. That would be Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Slave Lake, I believe, or High Prairie, and a number of other locations, including some of the long-term care residences.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the people want to have some definite response. Will the Premier give some definite information to the people of Grande Prairie about when they can expect shovels to be in the ground for a new hospital in Grande Prairie? When?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health will be visiting the city of Grande Prairie in 10 days or so. He'll be visiting with the community and with council and will share some information with them.

Dr. Swann: Well, another health concern for the people of Grande Prairie was the deplorable state of the Grande Prairie Care Centre, a long-term care centre urgently needing to be replaced or exten-

sively renovated. Will the Premier commit to providing funding for long-term care needs in Grande Prairie?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that during the period of time of this inflation we did release about \$10 million to the hospital to help support some changes in code requirements. As I said before, the minister will be in Grande Prairie in a number of days and will be able to sit down with the board, the chamber and discuss the situation.

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

Health Facilities Capital Plans

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in the ongoing health care saga the only thing that seems to have been accomplished in this last two years is confusion, frustration, and uncertainty. This is the product of failed centralization without a plan, no cost-benefit analysis, and no checks and balances in place. First to the Premier. I hope we'll get an answer today on this question. What is the explanation for conflicting messages coming from this government and from Alberta Health Services? Who is actually in charge, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are no conflicting messages. We are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has not only removed, paid off the accumulated deficit but has given Alberta Health Services increased funding for five years. That's the only plan of its kind in the whole country of Canada.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'll try to the minister of health, then, Mr. Speaker. Please clarify this: do you have the final decision on whether Calgary will or will not receive the much-needed new cancer centre? Yes or no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated on several occasions in the House, a capital plan for \$2.5 billion over the next three years will be available in a matter of days. I will be sitting down with the Minister of Infrastructure, with colleagues from Calgary and from elsewhere discussing that, and we will roll out the good news at that time.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, another question revolves around what criteria are used for determining the priority of capital health projects. Are these determined based on need or on political expediency?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's such an easy one to answer I thought I'd get up. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition had an opportunity to read the capital plan, the 20-year strategic capital plan, how priorities are set is listed in the whole plan, and that's not only for health facilities, schools but for roads and other infrastructure as well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that ducks died on tailings ponds controlled by Syncrude, but the Premier's policy of maintaining a wilful ignorance of the damage done to our international reputation is not helping. How can the Premier say that he's on top of this file when he hasn't even seen the

photos that the rest of the world is looking at? This is the single biggest black mark on Alberta's oil sands industry ever. My question is to the Premier. What sort of a briefing has the Premier had? Don't ask, don't tell?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. Of course I saw the very same photos that everyone in this Assembly saw when the ducks first perished in the tailings pond. I saw, you know, volunteers trying to remove the oil with cotton swabs off the ducks' bills. However, that was when the incident originally took place. The reference here is to the pictures that are evidence in the trial that is before us. I was very frank to the reporter yesterday. I did not see those pictures at all prior to them being delivered to the court as evidence. This is a serious situation before the court. It's a very good act that we have. We've charged the company that's responsible for it, and let the court decide.

The Speaker: I'm not sure where this is leading, but if this matter is sub judice, I'm going to seek advice from the Minister of Justice. But I don't think so from the first question.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. Mr. Premier, people see these images and ask: what is Alberta doing to stop this? What direct action is the Premier taking to give leadership on tailings ponds reclamation, on hard targets on emissions, on reducing the use of water, and all the other environmental issues that go along with this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have the strictest environmental laws in the nation, and that is why in this particular case under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act the charges were laid to the company pursuant to that act.

With respect to the Fort McMurray area, Mr. Speaker, there is no area in Canada or perhaps even in North America that is as closely monitored on a 24-hour basis 365 days a year for air, water, and soil quality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the Premier again. Spin, spin, spin. Leadership is not about spin. It's not about rebranding. It's about actions taken to achieve a particular result. Is the Premier happy with the result so far? We have dozens of pages in international magazines talking about what a disgrace this is. Are you happy with it so far?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot that has been done in Fort McMurray and, in fact, right across Alberta with respect to the development of resources. There is a lot of attention paid, obviously, to this area because there is a fair amount of production of oil, and it has attracted a lot of attention. But, again, if you go back to third-party evaluation, 98 per cent of the time the air quality in Fort Saskatchewan and Fort McMurray, in those two areas, which have a large oil and gas and value-added presence, is better than or equal to any major Canadian city in North America.

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

Oil Royalty Framework

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Wildrose Alliance caucus released our energy competitiveness strategy outlining what the government should do to assist our energy

industry to recover from the devastating effects of this Premier's new royalty framework. In it we have noted that prior to the NRF coming into effect, the Premier and his cabinet were repeatedly warned by multiple caucus members, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, and dozens of industry stakeholders that this policy would devastate our economy, and indeed it did. To the Premier: why didn't he listen to the warnings of those who actually understood the energy industry far better than he did?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear that we will have the most innovative and competitive economy in North America, and an opposition report does not change that. We are pursuing the competitiveness review on a number of levels: the oil and gas sector – very important – agriculture, forestry, tourism. I'd like to add small business to that and as well look at how we can attract more financial institutions to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Anderson: It was very competitive before this Premier got his hands on it. That's for sure.

By the fall of 2008 the economy was tanking. Prior to that, land sales for oil and gas exploration in Alberta had significantly decreased on fears that this Premier would actually implement the NRF while land sales in B.C. and Saskatchewan increased during that same period. He had so many warnings, hundreds of warnings from people who actually knew what they were talking about. To the Premier: what possible explanation does he have for barreling ahead with this destructive policy despite all competent advice to the contrary?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we will have the most innovative and competitive economy in North America. We are working through the competitiveness review, and that's why we have a bill before this House, which I know will be passed and supported by all sides of the House as we proceed. We will then decide what factors to measure in terms of how we rate in competitiveness not only to other jurisdictions in Canada, North America, but indeed other places around the world.

Mr. Anderson: This study should have been done long before he tampered with our most important industry.

I have hundreds and hundreds of constituents who have suffered a great deal of hardship because of this Premier's poor decision on this issue. I would suggest that most of the members in this room could say the same. Mr. Premier, will you apologize to Albertans for the consequences your decisions have had?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, as oil prices fell drastically from about \$147 a barrel down to \$37 and gas was as low as \$3, what we did was introduced some amendments to the royalty framework, and those amendments were embraced by the hon. member that has brought it up. I also would like to table an appropriate number of copies of a letter he wrote to the *Airdrie City View* that says that he is supporting the changes that we made in the royalty framework.

The Speaker: We'll do the tablings at the appropriate time.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

New School Construction in Beaumont

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Beaumont is recognized as one of the 20 fastest growing communities in Canada.

With a population of approximately 12,000 people, 25 per cent are under the age of 14. [interjections]

The Speaker: Leduc-Beaumont-Devon has the floor.

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, the school-age population is exploding so much that one elementary school has a classroom across the road in the community hall. The separate and public boards have agreed to a joint K to 9 facility, but there is no school in the current three-year program. To the Minister of Education: how soon can my constituents see a school in Beaumont?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a major building program going on in this province with about \$7 billion this year to capital, and that's very aggressive. There'll be 42 new schools being built. There are over 101 major projects going on. But I have to say that we still do not, within all of that, have enough to do all the projects that are needed. There is very definitely a need in Beaumont. We're working very hard. I've asked the school boards to work with me to come up with innovative ways to do it, and I'm prepared to take those innovative ways to Treasury Board and to cabinet to find new ways to get those schools built that we need to build. But I'd have to say that I cannot give the hon. member an assurance today as to a time frame.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. He mentions innovative ideas. The separate board has recently proposed a temporary lease space option. My question to the minister: is this a viable solution that you're willing to support?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if I may say, we had an interchange with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere in the prior question, and I just can't resist the opportunity to point out that in his comments answering the budget, he suggested we stretch out our building program even further. Under his program with his wild and rosy colleagues they would have us even wait longer for a school in Beaumont. But in answer to the question, the proposal made by the school board is exactly what I've been asking for. Now, unfortunately, I don't have the money to finance it, so I have to find a way to do that.

Mr. Rogers: Well, Mr. Speaker, at least I'm pleased to hear that the minister is willing to look at the proposal. In light of that, then, Mr. Minister, I'm just wondering what the possibility is of a P3 solution. What signs of hope can we pass on to the students of Beaumont today?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I have to find and take forward is a way – and we're building a capital plan to do that – to take these priority projects forward within the context of a three-year capital plan that's already committed but where we're finding savings, as we've mentioned earlier in this House, because projects are coming in under budget, so we'll be able to profile those to take advantage of those savings. We may be able to cast it as a P3 project. We may be able to cast it in the innovative way in which the board has with respect to interim lease processes. But in order to give any assurances as to timing, I have to have the money, and right now I don't have the money.

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

Sour Gas Well Blowout Insurance

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A sour gas blowout near Hythe has been burning for almost two weeks now, and regulators are saying that it might take another two weeks to fully put it out. Now, while blowouts are rare, industry is required to take out insurance to protect themselves. Unfortunately, their insurance does nothing to cover the losses incurred by Albertans as owners of the resource. To the Minister of Energy. During a blowout there is an absolute open flow of gas which is much higher than normal production rates. How much gas is expected to have been released over the last two weeks?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Companies are not required to pay royalties on gas that is not produced, so the gas wasn't the only thing going up in smoke for the last couple of weeks. How much money in royalties is the province expecting to lose because of this blowout?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, if I don't have the answer to the first question, I don't have the answer to the second.

Mr. Taylor: Well, then, hopefully, Mr. Speaker, the minister will be able to provide written answers to those questions and perhaps this one as well, written or oral. Albertans are the owners of the resource, so why hasn't this government made it mandatory for blowout insurance to cover the loss in royalties?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that he should put those questions on the Order Paper, and I will respond accordingly.

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

Immigrant Investor Program

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our immigration system needs to attract the best and brightest people to Alberta, including investors and entrepreneurs. Many provinces already have an entrepreneur stream within their provincial nominee programs. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Will Alberta open its doors and its immigration system to investors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All provinces have different needs, and in Alberta we want to make sure that Alberta's needs are met by our immigration program. For a while already Alberta has had a shortage of skilled and unskilled labour. That's what our ministry, this department, has been focusing on, attracting the appropriate workers to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Benito: My first supplemental to the same minister. Now is the time to build up our economy and prepare for when it picks up. Why hasn't this entrepreneur stream actually started yet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the economy has changed, the landscape has changed. We are looking into an entrepreneur stream of immigrants to come to our province. However, we're looking at experiences from other provinces. We know that some other provinces had certain issues with varieties of this program. We want to make sure that when or if we introduce such a program to Alberta, it is right for Alberta and it brings the value-added that we need in Alberta.

Mr. Benito: My final question is to the same minister. The federal government has an immigrant investor program. Why does Alberta not participate in that program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the federal program is a program that Alberta has chosen not to participate in. It requires immigrants to invest \$400,000 into the Canadian economy, giving Alberta really no control over what industries or what genres of industries those dollars would be invested in. We want to make sure that when immigrants come to this province, they give value-added to our industry, they help us diversify our economy, and they will benefit Alberta the way we want them to benefit Alberta. We want to have that final choice.

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

Support for the Film Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last July an open letter to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit concerning the state of Alberta film and TV was signed by a wide cross-section of representatives. This was followed in December by a proposal from the Alberta film and television unions to combine streams 2 and 3, expand the number and description of key positions, implement regional bonuses, and re-establish a recoupable development fund. It is now too late to save a spring or summer shooting season, but with a quick response the minister could save the fall season. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: when can we expect a response from the minister to this proposal?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have the information with my officials, and they are working on some proposals for me. We have in our department over the last two years made a multitude of changes to the film development program with the idea of enhancing business in our province, making ourselves more attractive. Just last November we included \$800,000 for money to promote Alberta stories, project and script development, export market development, training and mentoring along with increasing our cap from \$1.5 million to \$3 million to \$5 million.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister. Well, currently we are not competitive. My question is: why is the minister creating a situation where Albertans trained in Alberta are forced to go to B.C., Quebec, or even New Mexico to work? To put it another way, why are we training talent and crew for our competitors?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're in disagreement. I believe we are competitive. People in British Columbia and Ontario say that we're competitive. Our labour rate as of last September was the

most competitive in Canada. It's probably the third most competitive now. We're not in a race to the bottom. If you talk to the film producers, the people who actually put their money on the line, who actually are out there trying to bring business to our province, they're very enthusiastic about our prospects for the next six months. I'm not sure what the member opposite is listening to.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm looking at how many people are working in this province. That's what's important to me, Albertans working.

Given the Premier's focus on competitiveness and given that for every dollar spent toward production, the film and television industry generates \$10.80 in Alberta, why can't the minister see the film and TV sector as easy pickings for the government's competitiveness checklist?

Mr. Blackett: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has her facts incorrect. The amount of return on investment is \$6 for \$1, not \$10.80. We went through the minister of finance; we went through the department. We sat down with AMPA; we sat down with other industry representatives. We agreed on \$6. If we're going to move forward collectively, let's at least work with the same information, and let's get the facts straight. Let's work together and make sure that we're competitive and attract business to our province.

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

Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity Funding

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent media reports have focused on the province's attempts to reduce rising obesity trends, and many of my constituents are concerned about reports that funds to sport, recreation, and physical activity initiatives are being cut by nearly 40 per cent in the new provincial budget. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Can the minister explain these cuts at a time when a growing number of Albertans are overweight or obese because they're not active enough?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. We're concerned about the obesity levels, no question, as we see the trends that are emerging, but I think it's important to note that this government is investing \$23 million in some 100 sports organizations. I think that the confusion has come in from last year's budget in areas of money that were flowing through. About \$6.6 million was the Olympics, and \$9 million was the final instalment for WinSport Canada, which was redeveloping the facilities at Canada Olympic Park. In fact, it's only about, you know, \$1.8 million out of a \$23 million budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Constituents are curious: what was the process that was used to determine which sport and recreation groups would be affected by these reductions in funding?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always difficult to make decisions when you have to meet budget targets, but we tried to look at this overarching. We looked at all the different sports organizations. We're just doing, basically, a reduction of a percentage of each organization so no organization feels the pain too hard. As well, we've avoided any organizations with persons with disability. We

were able to protect their rent. Where they're housed, at Percy Page, they pay a dollar a year. We felt really good about that. We'll continue to work with these organizations.

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I've had inquiries from a number of people with a number of organizations across the province, and they're very curious about the new provincial policy on sport. They've been waiting for it for some time, a little bit of time anyway, and they're wondering: what's the timeline for the new provincial policy on sport and recreation in the business plan of the minister for this current year?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working with the 10 other provincial ministries involved in developing this policy. It's still early days. We're just at the draft form. We need to go out and consult and get better information from our stakeholders, but we're hoping that we can finalize the policy sometime this fall.

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

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2002 the Endangered Species Conservation Committee recommended that the grizzly be listed as a threatened species. The government ignored this recommendation. Given that there are fewer than 700 grizzlies left in Alberta, my spider sense tells me that these experts will recommend this again on Friday at the minister's scheduled meeting. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that experts state that the grizzly bear is a threatened species, why won't this minister simply list it as such?

Mr. Knight: Well, that's an interesting observation that the member opposite has made. My recollection of what's going to happen here, Mr. Speaker, is that there is a committee that will meet on the 12th of March, and at that point a decision will be made. To my knowledge no decision has been made other than what some folks might have put in the papers or other places, that individuals read and then presume that something is going to happen. I will wait, appropriately, until the 12th of March, until our committee has made the determination and given me a report, and then we will respond.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I misheard the minister last night when I thought he said that he wasn't going to list the grizzly bear as an endangered species. I guess, then, my return question: if this committee, the Endangered Species Conservation Committee, again recommends to you that it should be listed as an endangered species, will you take their advice after their meeting on the 12th?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, it is not my position now nor will it be in the next few days to list any species in Alberta as endangered. We have a process. The gentleman is asking a question now relative to something that went on in estimates last night: a point blank question if I was going to say that bears are endangered in Alberta. I was not prepared last night to say that, and I'm not prepared this afternoon to say that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that estimates is where we have open and candid discussions with a minister. At least, I think that's the process. Last night, again taking the minister at his word, he said that he wasn't in a position to put a moratorium on harvesting bears. If the minister is not in a position to put a moratorium on hunting bears, then who is?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm going to have to go through this again. We have a process in place. We have a grizzly bear recovery program in place, and I'm going to let that process work. Once we receive the information from the committee, we'll be in a better position to be able to determine what the status of this species is in the province of Alberta. At that point we will deal with the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier showed startling ignorance when he claimed not to have seen the images of the ducks dying on Syncrude's tailings lake. These pictures show the world the consequences of this government's environmental negligence in the development of the oil sands. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is your government ignoring this problem instead of implementing a firm deadline for oil sands companies to eliminate these tailings lakes altogether?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the preamble and the question, this government is hardly ignoring the issue. In fact, we have stated very publicly and very emphatically that it is our intention to eliminate the need for tailings ponds in oil sands production over a reasonable period of time, and that's probably seven to nine years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think the government has no such plan.

The photographs and the videos of what happened at Syncrude's tailings lakes are an indictment of this government's failure to develop these oil sands in an environmentally responsible manner. Why does the government continue to ignore the problem instead of requiring oil sands companies to adopt alternative technologies like dry tailings, fluid extraction, or ozone treatment?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the government was ignoring the problem, we wouldn't be dealing with a court case where the photos that the member references were brought forward as evidence. That's hardly ignoring the situation. We are and will continue to be committed to improving the technology that's employed. There are very, very promising technologies. In fact, when I toured the University of Calgary just three weeks ago, the new faculty that has just opened there has got all kinds of very, very promising work under way that will significantly reduce the amount of environmental impact on resource development.

2:20

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government was forced into that prosecution by private prosecutions that were brought by environmental groups.

Albertans can ill afford a government that turns a blind eye to the biggest environmental embarrassment our province has ever witnessed. These images and videos expose this government's inability to balance oil sands development with environmental stewardship. Why won't this minister demonstrate to the world that his government is committed to solving this problem by implementing concrete deadlines to clean up tailings lakes and mandating the use of technology that would make them entirely obsolete?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would advise this member that he should stay tuned. He should watch the progress as we make it, and he may just find that what he requests may in fact become a reality.

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

New School Construction in St. Albert

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The St. Albert Protestant school board has been working with a private developer to provide a new school in Erin Ridge North, a new subdivision in St. Albert, for three years now. The developer is proposing a P3 where there would be no government capital required and would follow the standard 30-year payback. My question to the Minister of Education is: what seems to be the delay in getting the proposal approved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't discuss the specifics of a particular proposal by a developer, but I would say this: there's always money involved, and I don't have any.

The longer answer, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in the House, is that we have to develop alternative ways of developing capital. This is a very good proposal. I've encouraged the developer and the school board to work on the proposal, and I will be working with Treasury Board to get permission to do alternative capital programs as and when they make sense and as and when we can put them into our capital plan.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The private P3 concept seems to be a win-win situation for everyone involved. The school gets a new facility, the first one in 20 years, the developer has a school in this new subdivision, and the government has no up-front capital costs. What is the downside to this proposal?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's a good proposal. In fact, it's an excellent proposal. We need to do some work on sharpening the pencils and getting the numbers into the area where we could go out to the public and say that this has the best value we could possibly get because there's no other way to do a one-off project. It's either an RFP, where everybody gets to bid, or we can clearly demonstrate the value of the project. We can work on that, but there's no point in getting to that stage until I can work with Treasury Board and with government on our capital policy process because at the end of the day it has to fit into the long-term capital plan. It has to be funded.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister. The government of Alberta has adopted P3s for massive schools in Edmonton and Calgary. Is the government not prepared to consider a single, individual, private P3 proposal?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would hope very much that we would

be able to consider those. I just have to find the right process and the right way to fit it into our capital plan so that a project which is a very valuable project, which could be done at considerable savings to government and the school board, which can serve that community very well, can also fit into our capital planning process because at the end of the day, whether it's spending this year or next year or three years out or five years out, it is spending, it is investment, and it needs to be accounted for. We need to align those processes. We haven't quite got it to the stage where we can align those processes, but I'm working on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April 2008 a foster care review report was released. In November 2009 a kinship review report was released. Their recommendations have been widely ignored. A review of the child intervention system was initiated last summer. We're still waiting for the report, but funding to intervention services was just cut by \$27 million. This government initiates review after review of broken systems but then undermines its findings. To the minister: how many foster and kinship homes in this province have more than their approved number of children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not able to give you an exact number at this time. I can get that number and give it to the member. I can tell you this. The foster care review report, the eight recommendations that were put in place – it's very clear about the screening process, about the home orientation, about the training for foster parents. I can tell you as well that there are provisions there for level 1 or level 2 support workers to have more children in their home when it's been identified to be reasonable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to the follow-up information.

Right now it's a first-bed, first-served circumstance for foster children as opposed to placing them carefully. When will this haphazard approach to placing children in foster and kinship homes based solely on beds available end?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, I think that you should apologize for that preamble, for what you're saying about the way that children are placed in this province. I can tell you that the foster care system works very, very well with the people in the field and that they take their responsibilities very seriously. That foster care review report with those eight recommendations: you should read that, hon. member, and you would know the strong screening process that's in place for our foster parents. You'd also know about the good work that's being done in the field by our foster care workers.

Mr. Chase: There is no doubt that there are wonderful foster care parents out there. Unfortunately, not enough.

Was the decision to cut \$27 million from children intervention services made based on preliminary findings of the children's intervention system review? What's the justification?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated to you before, it's a \$1.1 billion budget in this ministry. There is a 3 per cent reduction. Yes, there has been a reduction in the child intervention area of the budget. I will be monitoring that very closely. That reduction was made based on what the staff indicated, that the systems that have been put in place that have changed the way the service delivery is occurring for more placements of children actually create efficiencies. As I said, I will monitor that very closely. I'll ensure that the supports and resources are available, and if they aren't, I'll take the appropriate measures to seek more funding if needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Winagami Lake Fish Management

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every now and then the lakes in my constituency experience a fish kill due to the lack of oxygen in the lakes. This is devastating for all stakeholders relying on this precious economic resource. I am now told that a fish kill is possible in Winagami Lake. This is no way to manage a lake that many people expect some economic benefit out of. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What management plans do we have for Winagami Lake, and who is involved in determining those management plans?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the situation at Winagami Lake, of course, doesn't happen often. The lake is very shallow, about four metres deep at its deepest point, and it's very productive, in fact. Winter ice cover, of course, creates a situation where there's little chance of reoxygenation in the lake, and in the spring, mostly in March, the oxygen levels tend to be low. We continue to work with that. We monitor the lake twice a week. There are a number of fisheries that are sustained there, First Nations fisheries as well as a sports fishery and commercial fishing. We continue to work with those groups to monitor the lake.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really good that we're starting to include all the people that should be determining what happens in that kind of a management plan.

My second question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development as well. What is the allowable, acceptable level of oxygen for Winagami Lake at this time of year?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're monitoring the lake. Currently the levels of oxygen are at acceptable levels for fish to survive. The minimum amount of oxygen that you would expect to have in a lake like that and not have fish mortality is about one and a half milligrams per litre. I believe that's the right number.

Ms Calahasen: If the oxygen level is at one and a half and certain areas in Winagami Lake are at 1.3, why is it that we would not do everything we can to attempt to save a resource that's so crucial to many people in my constituency? Would you continue to ensure that the fishermen can continue to extract the resource so that we can save as many fish as we can?

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we've already actually done that. What we did was instituted a fishery about four or five days early this year, on the 26th of February in fact, and allowed about a hundred thousand tonnes of whitefish, and the margins of other sports fish were caught at that particular point in time. Since that

time the oxygen levels have returned and maintained themselves at around two milligrams a litre. We're watching that, and we will institute a salvage fishery if, in fact, it appears that the fish become in jeopardy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

2:30 Online Government Services

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the provincial budget Service Alberta will have 410 full-time employees cut from its staff, most of them in information technology support roles. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. How can the minister plan to offer more services to Albertans online and cut the IT people needed to manage those services at the same time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated before, part of Service Alberta's budget, which I defended in my estimates, is about transforming the way that we do government. That's what Service Alberta is leading. If you look at the areas of technology and the areas of efficiencies we found, yes, there will be some reducing of employees there; there's no question. But when we can find duplication and have efficiencies in government, that's a good thing for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What assurances can the minister provide that cuts made to IT support staff won't impair Alberta's SuperNet access, that many rural and remote communities depend on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the whole SuperNet and rural connectivity that is something that I've been working very hard on. The ongoing team within Service Alberta is working hard, working with all the ministries that are involved with the SuperNet and making sure that Albertans have access to SuperNet, whether it's through their ISP providers or whether it's through the other services that are available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. Last July the health records of 11,000 Albertans were at risk of capture by a computer hacker. How can Albertans be sure that these massive departmental layoffs won't leave the information that they provide to the government less secure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the security of Albertans' information that is something that we work on very hard, and the Auditor General brought that to this department's attention a couple of years ago. These last two years we've worked very hard in that area to ensure that the information is protected. That's access to information and as well all the good work that the registry agents do when they are working and having access to the information. It's that partnership that we work very hard on as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Foreign-trained Physicians

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent statistics list Calgary's population at over 1 million people. Twenty-five per cent of Calgarians, or more than 250,000 people, don't have access to a family doctor. Many of these people are seniors, children, and new Canadians. To the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness: what action is the minister undertaking to ensure that Calgarians and all Albertans, for that matter, can access a family doctor when they need one?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that if those individuals don't have a family doctor, they are at least accessing doctors in many of the medical walk-in clinics that exist. But I should say, too, Mr. Speaker, that our physician per population ratio of 201 to a population of 100,000 is the highest average in and amongst all Canadian provinces. It's the highest national average, which is at, I think, 195. I would also say that our physician supply is growing faster and is the youngest physician supply in the country and the best paid as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians say that the best place to get sick is either in a taxicab or in a hotel, where either the driver or the cleaner is likely to be a medical doctor who may have tried for years to obtain residency. Mr. Speaker, what is the minister doing to get more of these highly trained foreign doctors, who have met all the requirements, into the medical system so Albertans do not have to utilize emergency rooms for routine health issues?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that between 2004 and 2008 the number of internationally trained physicians increased by about 36.1 per cent. That's an increase of about 575 physicians, which is outstanding. Alberta's medical residency programs also increased in size virtually every year since 2004. In fact, this year we're providing about \$25 million to support the integration of international medical graduates into our provincial health system. Also very good news.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite a doctor shortage in the province and despite the \$1.5 billion increase in the Health and Wellness budget the government slashed the number of residency spots available to foreign-trained doctors from 70 to 40 for this year. What is the rationale for this decrease?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we actually have up to 50 residency positions for which these internationally trained medical folks are able to apply. I can assure the hon. member that since 2001 Alberta Health and Wellness has done its best to provide the adequate funding to accommodate as many of those residency spots as possible. There are complexities such as accreditation and licensing and other equivalency factors that have to be taken into account. Nonetheless, we are making good progress, and we're also providing funding to international agencies to help out.

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

Oil Royalty Framework

(continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June 2009 the Premier promised Albertans that their competitiveness review would be completed by the fall of 2009. Since then industry has gone through another winter drilling season with more uncertainty because this government can't get it done. We are now seeing an increase in speculation related to the acquisition and drilling rights on acreages. Clearly, this government's royalty robbery has cost Albertans billions. They continue to cost us millions. To the Minister of Energy: when will your competitiveness review be published so that industry can possibly move forward with more certainty?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it will be published the day we decide to release it, and that will be shortly.

Mr. Hinman: That's why the industry and investors are so excited about Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have long memories, and people who were here understand the devastation of the national energy program. Albertans will not forget that it was this PC government that yanked the rug out from underneath the oil and gas workers and industry here in Alberta. After the great royalty robbery this minister told the oil and gas industry to suck it up. Is he still telling industry to suck it up as the industry continues to lay off people and cut spending?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure who he's referring to that made those comments because that was not me.

As I said earlier, we will be imminently releasing the competitiveness review, not only releasing the competitiveness review but government's response and actions to it, and I believe it'll be very well received by industry.

Mr. Hinman: Well, they believed they were going to get something last fall, so we'll see.

The minister has a real attitude problem, and everybody in Alberta knows it. He bullied the teachers, and it cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. He bullied the medical profession, and it cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. The government bullied the energy industry, and it cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. Does this minister know how many billions of dollars have been invested outside of Alberta because of this government's royalty robbery?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the absurdity of that question says a lot about the person who's asking it. How could anyone stand here and estimate how much investment has taken place outside of Alberta in the entire world? It tells a lot about this particular member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Syphilis Prevention and Control

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's rate of syphilis infection is double the national average, and the problem is only getting worse with the infection rate continuing to increase last year. To the minister of health: will he now admit that this crisis is the direct result of his government's decision to reject advice from public health doctors given back in 2007?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed a very serious issue. I indicated yesterday that we are very serious about eliminating

syphilis in this province within the five-year window, which is a very commendable and reachable goal. It's all about accessing the treatment that's required right now. It's all about focusing on prevention and generating more awareness to stop the flow.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the five-year window had opened three years ago, we'd be almost there.

Last year six babies were born with syphilis, and three died. The only other jurisdictions where you see numbers like this are developing countries that struggle with provision of basic food and shelter. Will the minister commit today to implementing an antisiphilis campaign for the general population as recommended by his staff three years ago?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I will have the report from Alberta's chief medical officer very, very soon. In the meantime, I would like Albertans to know and I'd like this hon. member to know that we are increasing prenatal screening to help prevent the kind of circumstances that she has just alluded to. We have a larger goal in mind as well, and that's to eliminate syphilis entirely. We'll be looking at other issues such as gonorrhea and chlamydia and so on at the same time.

2:40

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last week the minister's head of public health said that provincial efforts to stop syphilis were delayed by H1N1, yet this Legislature just approved extra dollars for the H1N1 campaign, so that shouldn't have had any impact at all. Your government has known about the epidemic for years, and you've had recommendations since 2007. Why are Albertans still waiting for action?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we got hit by a pandemic which had to be dealt with and had to be dealt with immediately to help protect over 3 million Albertans. I think the group that did that did a very commendable job.

With respect to the syphilis issue, I've already indicated that we have a 14-person team that's addressing this immediately. There will be a further report on it very shortly, and we will stay focused on our goal to eliminate it within five years.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period. Eighteen members, 12 in opposition to the government, were recognized today for 108 questions and answers.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine, and I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill in about 15 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie 2010

Dr. Brown: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui je me lève à l'Assemblée pour souligner le début des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, une célébration nationale de la culture, de la langue, et du patrimoine français qui se déroulera du 5 au 21 mars. Ici en Alberta les communautés francophones ont lancé les festivités le 5 mars avec des levers de drapeaux partout à travers la province, et les festivités se poursuivront pendant les deux prochaines semaines pour les Albertains de tous les âges et d'origines diverses. Voilà une excellente occasion pour nous tous de se rassembler et de célébrer notre histoire et nos merveilleuses traditions.

La francophonie albertaine est vibrante et diverse. Alors que l'on célèbre notre riche patrimoine, nous tournons également les yeux vers l'avenir en accueillant en Alberta des nouvelles personnes, traditions, et cultures. Au cours de la dernière année la communauté francophone s'est agrandie, et les centres d'établissements francophones continuent d'accueillir et de fournir des services bien importants aux nouveaux arrivants. L'apprentissage demeure une priorité clé pour le gouvernement, et ainsi l'éducation de langue française dans notre province continue de prendre de l'ampleur et s'accroît.

M. le Président, je tiens à remercier les membres de cette Chambre pour leur appui continu, et je vous invite tous à participer à ces célébrations afin de souligner les contributions des francophones au riche patrimoine albertain.

[Translation] I rise in the Assembly today to announce the start of Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national celebration of French culture, language, and history that runs from March 5 to March 21. Here in Alberta francophone communities started celebrations on March 5 with flag-raising ceremonies across the province, followed by two weeks of celebrations for Albertans of all ages and all backgrounds. This is a great opportunity for all of us to come together and celebrate our beautiful traditions and history.

Alberta's Francophonie is vibrant and diverse. As we celebrate our rich past, we also look to the future by welcoming new people, traditions, and cultures to Alberta. In the last year the francophone community has seen growth as francophone settlement centres continue to welcome and provide much-needed services to newcomers. French-language education in our province continues to expand and grow as learning remains a key priority for this government.

Mr. Speaker, I thank members of this House for their continued support, and I invite you all to take in these and other celebrations to mark the contributions of francophones to Alberta's rich heritage. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Merci, M. le Député.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Jennie Flett

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week Fort Chipewyan, the oldest settlement in our province and certainly part of my constituency, mourned the loss of elder Jennie Flett. She was 101 years old, often referred to as Mum. She was born in 1908. When her mother died, Jennie took on the daunting responsibility of raising her 10 siblings. She married her husband, Ed, in June 1927, and they had a very large family of their own.

Jennie followed in her mother's footsteps, and at the age of 18 she became a midwife. She taught herself midwifery, gaining her knowledge from her mother. She delivered – and I say this slowly – 450 babies for the province of Alberta. The incredible journey that she had was actually featured on CBC television when she celebrated her hundredth birthday. She never lost a baby or a mother, an incredible feat in today's medical terms considering the conditions she worked in. There was no electricity. There were no vehicles in those days. She travelled from trappers' cabins to wigwams via dog teams in every imaginable weather condition. Husbands came to her in blizzards in the middle of the night on snowshoes. She definitely was the stuff legends are made of.

Jennie, as I mentioned, was often referred to as Mum. She retired from delivering babies at the ripe age of 75. She received a lifetime achievement award from RARA, and on her 100th birthday she was awarded an honorary nursing diploma from Keyano College. She was the oldest Métis women in Wood Buffalo. She dedicated her

life to her community and to helping others in northern Alberta.

Our province is a better place because of Jennie Flett. She died on the fourth floor of our hospital, where she had spent quite some time. Our prayers and thoughts are with her family and all those she has helped over her past 101 years.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill Pr. 1

Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act. I've signed it and dated it.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 2

Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 3

Lamont Health Care Centre Act

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 3, the Lamont Health Care Centre Act.

The Lamont health care centre is a combined acute-care and auxiliary hospital and nursing home facility located in Lamont, Alberta. It is operated by a board of management established as a corporate entity by ministerial order under sections 4 and 5 of the Hospitals Act. The purpose of the Lamont Health Care Centre Act is to allow for continued and uninterrupted operation of the facilities subsequent to amendments under the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, which will remove the opportunity for the board to continue after that bill is proclaimed in force.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, did you have a tabling? The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the article in the *Airdrie City View* by the MLA of December 19, 2008, where the member highlights that the new royalty regime has some positive elements to it, that there was a global economic slowdown, plummeting oil and gas prices, and competitive royalty regimes in Saskatchewan and B.C.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table an appropriate number of copies of a memorandum that I have sent to the chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy. This memo is indicating that pursuant to Standing Order 52.07 I am requesting that this particular standing committee inquire into and report on the issue of minimum wage in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 20 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which has gathered signed postcards from approximately 2,500 Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of photographs of dead and dying ducks from the oil sands. These include some of the pictures that the Premier has claimed not to have seen, so I'm tabling them today for him and other members of the Assembly. These photographs relate to my questions earlier today.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you mentioned in your first statement that you had 2,500, so I take it you're going to table all 2,500 at one time, or are you going to do, like, 20 a day for the next hundred days?

Mr. Mason: I think we'll do 20 a day for as long as we can.

The Speaker: So we're going to need a minute a day or a minute and a half a day for the next hundred days.

Mr. Mason: Well, I won't read them individually, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, thank you.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we begin, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

Ms DeLong: Well, I'm afraid that we've missed our opportunity to introduce Marg Mrazek, the past president of the PC Party. She was here, and unfortunately we've just missed her, so we'll have to do it another time.

Main Estimates 2010-11

Executive Council

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. We have for consideration Executive Council main estimates.

The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you. Mr. Chairman and hon. members, I'm pleased to appear before this committee to discuss the 2010-2011 Executive Council budget estimates and the 2010-2013 business plan. I'd like to begin by introducing the staff that are with me today. We have up in the gallery Elan MacDonald, who is the deputy chief of staff for policy and strategy; George Samoil, up there waving, chief of staff for operations and legislative affairs; Jason Ennis, my executive assistant; Bob Fessenden, who will be here shortly, deputy minister of the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy; Anita Lunden, representing the Agency Governance Secretariat; Cam Hantiuk, director of communications; Jerry Bellikka, director of media relations; and Lee Funke, the new managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau. They're with us.

On the floor would be my chief of staff, Ron Glen; Brian Manning, who is the Deputy Minister of Executive Council; Dwight Dibben, deputy secretary to cabinet; Roxanna Benoit, deputy chief of policy co-ordination; and Elaine Dougan, who is the executive director of corporate services.

I'll begin with the fiscal overview for 2010-11. Executive Council is one of the 13 departments whose budgets were cut this year to enable government to increase its support of key program areas such as health care during a time of fiscal restraint. The budget for Executive Council is \$31.7 million this year. It's down \$3.7 million from last year. This reduction will mainly be achieved by reducing spending in the final year of the brand initiative by \$3 million. We will also do this by focusing on supporting our brand ambassadors in developing products they can use to help carry Alberta's message to the world. We're also reducing funding for the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, which is delaying recruitment to vacant positions and reducing discretionary spending on things like staff training, travel, hosting, and supplies.

I'd like to now turn to a review of the Executive Council's program areas and priorities as outlined in the business plan. The Executive Council includes my offices in the Legislature and in McDougall Centre in Calgary, the deputy minister's office, the cabinet co-ordination office, the policy co-ordination office, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, the Agency Governance Secretariat, the protocol office, the administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Alberta Order of Excellence Council, and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Our 2010-13 business plan lays out the following strategic priorities for Executive Council: strengthening agency governance, enhancing policy capacity, continuing the work of the Council for Economic Strategy, implementing the branding initiative, continuing to implement the strategic communications plan across government, and using new social media and technology to enhance communications.

Mr. Chairman, let me put those activities in some context. Alberta is facing industrial and urban development on a scale never seen before. As a government we've had to raise the bar and develop policies to accommodate this development such as the strategic capital plan, the municipal sustainability initiative, and the competitiveness review. We did this because Albertans want economic growth and all the opportunities it brings but not at a cost to the environment or our quality of life.

Our government has worked hard to put this policy framework in place to achieve Albertans' goals. This work could have easily gone out the window with the recession, with short-term economic and budget pressures trumping long-term planning. But leadership isn't about changing directions whenever the wind does. Our plan positions the province to be ready when growth returns. It recognizes the need for Alberta businesses to be globally competitive to attract investment needed to further develop Alberta's resources and does not rely on tax increases. In fact, there will be no tax increases. It gets us back in the black in three years and continues to save for the future.

A couple of comments with respect to the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. I established the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy to provide advice on how we can ensure that Alberta continues to be an innovative and prosperous province where Albertans enjoy a high quality of life built on vibrant communities and a healthy environment. We can't predict what the world will be like in the future, but we can look carefully at the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead in the next few decades.

The council is a group of globally recognized experts that will provide an external, big-picture perspective on our economic future. Through meetings, individual interviews, and consultation with experts in communities of interest it is now developing an understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing our province in a constantly changing global environment and how they will affect our economy, environment, society, and government. Then it will turn its attention to possible opportunities and responses and start figuring out what conditions government should put in place to ensure that Alberta stays focused on her vision of an innovative and prosperous province for this generation and generations to come.

One of the things we know will be important is continuing to promote our province and manage our reputation globally as we recently did at the Olympic Winter Games. You know, we've been criticized for spending money on this, but you can't reach a worldwide audience without spending money. It'll never be cheaper than when the whole world is already next door.

While the naysayers in Alberta were moaning and groaning, let me tell you what others were saying about Alberta's presence at the Olympics. People were calling the Alberta train, and I quote, the best idea Vancouver never had. The *Vancouver Sun* said that with the train the wily Albertans attracted all kinds of media coverage. In fact, we attracted about \$70 million worth of media exposure. Another article, in the *Vancouver Province*, had this to say: "You have to hand it to the Albertans. First, they stole our Olympic train . . . Then they pinched the premier location for their Olympic pavilion. Alberta's Olympic vision . . . is as clear as it is down-to-earth. It's to drum up business for Alberta." A story in the *National Post* said that when they asked a Swedish man what he knew about Alberta, he replied: spirit to achieve, freedom to create.

Yes, we could have saved some money by not being there, but we would have been missing a huge opportunity to promote our province. We as Albertans will never sit on the sidelines when we could be promoting our province and helping to realize its full potential.

I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman, and I'll prepare to take questions from committee members.

3:00

The Deputy Chair: The first speaker is the Leader of the Official Opposition. You have 10 minutes, and the Premier has 10 minutes to respond. Do you wish to combine that time for 20 to go back and forth or keep it separate?

Dr. Swann: With the Premier's permission I'd like to have an

interactive discussion, a few questions, some brief answers, and back and forth if that's acceptable to him, and written responses if it's too short to deal with a question.

Mr. Stelmach: Sure.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Premier, and welcome to the staff. I'd like to introduce my staffperson also, Ryan Gordey, who is our research officer in the Alberta Liberal caucus on health care and several other ministries, including Executive Council.

Executive Council is a very important ministry in any government, and it's essential to provide leadership to the rest of government and to show the way in terms of both leadership and policy and in management and appropriations for the public interest. This ministry is essentially the Premier's office with the addition of the Public Affairs Bureau and in these past couple of years the branding initiative, policy development initiatives, and the new economic advisory committee.

The overriding question for all government spending is value for money, clear goals, monitoring of results, and evaluation of how we can spend better in the long-term public interest. Albertans continue to have concerns about how this government is managing its budget, how it's setting goals, monitoring the implementation of strategies to achieve those goals, and holding itself accountable, providing evidence of value for money, whether it's in health care, education, infrastructure, or any particular role that government has in caring for people and the infrastructure and the services that care for all of us.

The Premier's office clearly, then, sets the tone and the standard for the rest of government, and how responsibly it's managed is a weather vane for the rest of government. Given that half the budget in the Executive Council is related to public communication, it begs important questions about the goals, strategies, and accountability of spending in our communications budget both within Executive Council and how that relates to the rest of communications and public relations in the other ministries.

One of the fundamental questions that the opposition has continued to raise over the years is the extent to which the Public Affairs Bureau, answering to the Premier, is really an important tool of the public and answerable to the public, that messages are indeed conveyed in the public interest to advise and inform and educate and improve the lives of Albertans. Like the questions around the member benefits discussion and our Motion 501, that called for independence of those kinds of decisions that members benefit from and the question of a conflict of interest, the question around the Public Affairs Bureau and the Executive Council has to be: is there a conflict of interest when the major portion of the budget in Executive Council, that related to communications of government services and plans and policies, is directly answerable to the Premier as opposed to the Legislature?

That's a preamble, Mr. Chairman, to address a very ongoing, persistent question that I think Albertans continue to ask us and ask us to represent to this government. I think perhaps I'll ask the Premier to respond to that specifically since it's a fairly overriding and general question. I'd like to hear how, if anything, he would like to reassure Albertans and all representatives that this Public Affairs Bureau is paid out of the public purse and responds to the public interest as opposed to the Premier and the government's interests.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, the Public Affairs Bureau is nonpartisan. It has the responsibility of ensuring that all Albertans are informed on what policies and laws are agreed to by this Assembly

and by government. Albertans deserve very clear, strong information with respect to what government has done in this Legislature and what policies and regulations are implemented. So I think that there is no conflict of interest in terms of the Public Affairs Bureau giving that information out to the public. It's also a function of the executive branch of government, which is not a branch of the Legislative Assembly.

The one thing that I want to say is that you find as you travel through Alberta, that whether it's in advertising in papers in terms of policy direction or new policy or new laws that are implemented, there are always those that either miss the information or have to rely on phoning government for additional information, and these are some of the responsibilities of the Public Affairs Bureau.

Just for additional information, there are 118 FTEs in the branch. Seventy-two are professional communications staff, and these are people that are assigned to communication branches in the departments. On any given day, as you know, there are news releases to co-ordinate, plan announcements, provide communications advice to department officials, and respond to media calls sometimes totalling in the hundreds in one department, depending on the issue. So they do serve a very, very valuable responsibility in government.

Many departments chose to augment their communications branches by adding staff to meet particular needs such as their internal communications. It is entirely up to each department to make that choice and to resource these positions.

Now, in response further, there are 46 FTEs in the Public Affairs Bureau who fill a number of roles, including co-ordinating government communications to and from Albertans for major government initiatives and during public emergencies; planning, co-ordinating government-wide internal communications to employees; managing the government of Alberta website; co-ordinating cross-government standards for all ministry websites; providing advertising consultation and support to ministries and co-ordinating corporate advertising; distributing government news releases and providing media monitoring service to the ministries; and providing technical support for major government news conferences and announcements.

I think, to be very clear, that there is no connection between the bureau and party politics. Partisan political matters are, of course, those that are the domain of the party and its members and not government employees. Like all members of the public service, our bureau employees are guided by a code of conduct and an oath of office.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a bit hard for us to swallow that this kind of budget, this kind of staff, 180 full-time equivalents ultimately reporting directly to the Premier, has no political affiliation or no political agenda. I guess I would ask the Premier again whether he sees any loss of confidence from a public that sees this kind of spending on communications and, instead of having any kind of an independent committee or any kind of a balanced committee overlooking our communications agenda, whether he would not see any merit in changing the perception that this is a vast resource that very much appears to be, even if not true, at the whim and the will of one man who represents one particular party?

For many in this province there's a real disconnect. When he talks about transparency and accountability and open, honest communication, there's a real disconnect with this kind of money, half of his budget, going to the Public Affairs Bureau without any sense of balance in how that communication is being vetted, apart from his own.

3:10

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, I think the hon. member mentioned 180 FTEs. There aren't 180. There are 118 FTEs in the department.

As I said before, this is nonpartisan. This is communicating the policies of the government. It's not party politics. Various parties, no matter what their political stripe, have their own infrastructure to get their message out. These are policies that are passed by the government. Many are debated here in the Legislature, whether it be information with respect to the budget, information to change in policies in health, transportation, any department. So I don't see where there is a conflict of interest.

Dr. Swann: In connection with numbers, then, Mr. Chairman, I would ask the Premier, including Public Affairs Bureau staff and other communications staff with the rest of government: what is the sum total of communications people in this government? I have a directory here that lists all the ministries, and it suggests to me that it's close to actually 220 people in this government that are charged with communicating this government's purposes and services.

Will the Premier also explain how the reporting lines are between communications staff and the Public Affairs Bureau staff? Do the staff report to their respective ministries or deputy ministers, or does the Public Affairs Bureau staff only report directly to Executive Council?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, with respect to the Public Affairs Bureau, like I said before, 118 FTEs. There are additional communications people in departments. These are people that may not all necessarily be right here in the city of Edmonton but may be working for various departments in locations throughout Alberta. As you know, the province is big, and it's necessary to get the information out to individuals living in different parts of the province. I know that within the regional offices Transportation will have some communications people, especially if, you know, there are some road bans going in or changes, perhaps, to a construction schedule, where some roads may be temporarily closed. Those are all part of departmental communications.

I believe I gave a total listing person by person not that long ago through a question, and we'll do the same thing. We'll just itemize all the people, where they work, and we'll get that to the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Throughout the 2010-11 government estimates – excluding Housing and Urban Affairs, Municipal Affairs, Service Alberta – each ministry has a line item that shows their communications budget. The total for all ministries, including Executive Council and the branding initiative, is \$34.9 million. This is an improvement because it seems the Premier has taken some advice from many of us to reduce government spending on spin. How did the Premier find these efficiencies from the total amount of government spending on communications, and why now? I mean, communications last year went up \$6 million.

Mr. Stelmach: The \$14.3 million budgeted for Public Affairs Bureau represents less than .04 per cent of the 2010-11 spending estimate for the government. If we include the roughly \$15 million that departments have allocated to their communications budgets, that figure is still less than .08 per cent of total spending. If it's less than 1 per cent of total government spending for communications, I think that is pretty efficient given that, you know, every department

has so much to communicate over the course of a year. So I think that has been quite prudent.

Dr. Swann: On page 124 of the Executive Council 2010 business plan under Significant Opportunities and Challenges it states: "Executive Council will enhance policy capacity and cross-ministry collaborations and ensure consistency with overall government strategic direction by facilitating collaboration in strategic planning and policy development." Let me ask the following question, then, using as an example our health care system. Mr. Premier, is there a plan for public health that the public, professionals, and representatives of the public could contribute to, and if so, when can we see an overarching plan for health?

My second question would have to do with the way that health policy has been developed in the last couple of years. There continue to be questions raised about who is developing our health policy. Is it Alberta Health and Wellness? Is it Alberta Health Services? There's more and more confusion around leadership on health and whether we can get access to a plan so that Albertans and professionals can contribute to that plan. In light of the decision not to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton, it seems that this policy decision was made by Alberta Health Services, and the news release that accompanied the decision was released by Alberta Health Services, yet the minister seems to have made a different decision. Which organization is actually responsible?

Again related to health, what measures . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we are with the estimates for Executive Council, not with health.

Dr. Swann: Yeah. I'm referring here to the policy role of Executive Council. How is the policy role in this Executive Council relating to the delivery of a major part of our budget, health care?

The Deputy Chair: As long as it applies to the estimates.

Dr. Swann: Oh, yeah. Very much so.

What measures have been taken through Executive Council to improve and increase policy development capacity with Alberta Health and Wellness? What influence does Executive Council have with health policy decisions? Is the Executive Council briefed on policy decisions before they're made or announced or implemented? How does that work between Executive Council and Alberta health?

Last year in the budget debates for Executive Council the Premier stated: "I'm proud to say that we have the most participation in policy development from our caucus. We have various policy committees. All ministerial recommendations come forward for thorough discussion." Two questions related to that, Mr. Premier: what input did cabinet policy committees have into the decision not to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton, the decision to cut 290 acute-care beds from Edmonton and Calgary, the decision in 2009 to reduce the number of elective surgeries performed in our public hospitals?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're going to have to direct this to the estimates.

Dr. Swann: Go ahead, Mr. Premier, if you'd like to respond to those.

Mr. Stelmach: In response to the hon. member the ministry sets overall policy. Let's say the policy that health care in this province remains publicly funded. That is a policy. That it's publicly administered. That is a policy. But in terms of the overall responsi-

bility for operational decisions, that is up to the Alberta Health Services Board. The board has a budget that's been allocated to them, and they have to live within that budget and all of the responsibilities that are assigned to the board within the operational side. But the general policy, again I repeat – publicly funded, publicly administered – is the responsibility of the ministry and of government.

Dr. Swann: Just a supplementary, Mr. Premier: were all the above-mentioned health decisions that I mentioned presented to the government caucus as a whole for their debate?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, they're operational issues. The Alberta Health Services Board is assigned a budget, and they make decisions based on recommendations that come forward to the board by their staff. The board then looks at the recommendations made by staff, and they make the final decisions, and they implement those decisions.

Dr. Swann: Well, I hate to belabour this, but just one further question.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're going to have to tie this directly to the estimates and not to the policy of the rest of the government.

Dr. Swann: This is Executive Council's role, with all respect.

The Deputy Chair: And their estimates.

3:20

Dr. Swann: I'm asking for clarification about the role of Executive Council with respect to the major budget item in this government. Do you, Mr. Premier, know what the plan is for health care? Did you, for example, make the decision to centralize health through one board and eliminate regional delivery systems?

Mr. Stelmach: Those decisions were made back in the '90s in terms of reducing the number of local hospital boards, health unit boards, et cetera. I think there were about 200 and some-odd individual boards across the province. They were collapsed into a number of regional health authorities. We made the decision to collapse the health authorities plus the other boards – Cancer Board, AADAC; I'm missing one – into one Alberta Health Services Board. That recommendation was brought forward by the minister. It was a policy decision simply to save the overall taxpayer millions of dollars, roughly \$600 million, in costs to the overall government, which streamlined process, removed the need for individual accounting and human relations departments throughout the government.

The Deputy Chair: The time has elapsed for this round of speaking. The 20 minutes have elapsed. Now I'll call the next speaker, please.

Dr. Swann: Is it not true that I have the first hour?

The Deputy Chair: No, you do not. This is estimates. This is not policy field committee. You have the first hour in policy field committee. This is Committee of Supply. You have 10 minutes each, and you can combine the two for 20.

I'll call the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are you going to combine your questions and answers for the two 10s if that's all right with the Premier?

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I will confine this completely to the estimates. I want to talk specifically about some of the specific salaries and specific roles in this specific Executive Council budget, okay? I'm not going to go off somewhere else. I just want to make that clear up front. I need to understand the role of the chief of staff, and I need to better understand the role of the deputy chief of staff, so that means asking some very specific questions.

First off, I guess the thing that strikes me the most when you look at these numbers is that for a government that claims to be fiscally responsible, claims to be fiscally conservative, I just cannot understand how that jives with some of the salaries that are being paid to Executive Council members. For example, the Deputy Minister of Executive Council: just before you came into office, Mr. Premier, the salary that was paid here in Alberta for that position was \$283,000. Today it's \$530,000. It's just short of being double. Comparatively, the clerk of the Privy Council for our nation makes \$427,000. I don't see how on earth that number is justifiable. It's no offence to the people making the salary. It's just: how on earth is that justifiable if we're trying to be fiscally conservative here? I'm not saying that they're not doing a good job, bad job, or medium job.

Secondly, if you go to the chief of staff, \$232,000 in 2004; six years later it's almost \$400,000, a massive increase. If you look at the southern Alberta office director, in 2004 again we go to \$118,000; now it's more than double that at \$252,000. And this is an amazing one. The director of communications used to make \$66,000. We've all heard of the complaints about communications in this government. It's all communications' fault. This year it's \$216,000. That's almost four times the amount – four times. It's just amazing to me that we could even make an attempt to justify that number.

I guess the first line of questioning is: how are these salaries justified, especially given the economic climate that we're in today?

Mr. Stelmach: The question is raised with respect to pay and bonus to Executive Council. For a matter of record with the two positions, Deputy Minister of Executive Council and the chief of staff, in terms of showing leadership, well before other provinces picked up on the idea – and, indeed, the federal government in the latest budget said: well, we're just going to freeze all of MPs' and ministers' salaries this particular coming budget year. The government made that decision two years ago. MLAs' and ministerial salaries have been frozen.

In terms of the Deputy Minister of Executive Council the year before last we said that the bonuses will be eliminated, so for this year the deputy of Executive Council sees the elimination of compensation of \$80,000 – that was the amount of the bonus – plus a 10 per cent salary reduction. The deputy of Executive Council will see his compensation reduced by \$112,000. The chief of staff, a 10 per cent reduction, which is \$25,000, plus the elimination of the bonus, which is around \$76,000: that's a reduction of \$101,000. So the total for the chief of staff and Deputy Minister of Executive Council is \$213,000.

All management salaries in government have been frozen. All bonuses are cancelled. That, in itself, is a reduction of approximately \$1.4 million in compensation cuts. Previous to that as well the Premier announced a reduction of \$12,000 some-odd dollars a year in salary reduction, and cabinet ministers took a salary reduction of about, I believe, \$6,600 a year.

The government has shown great leadership, and in fact, from what I gather, some of the other jurisdictions are following the leadership of the province.

Now, some history in terms of how the compensation was decided. This was decided a number of years ago when our deputy ministers were quite low compared to other jurisdictions in terms of their total compensation. The minister responsible for human resources – and this was a number of years ago – and our previous Premier put together a corporate human resources committee that was chaired by Eric Newell, Charlie Fischer, Gail Surkan, Gerry Protti, and the Deputy Minister of Executive Council. It came forward to cabinet at the time in terms of the salary range and also all of the other items that will be the total compensation package for the deputy ministers.

There is a comparison to other jurisdictions. I don't have it here, but we're in the range of what some of the provinces pay. Obviously, some provinces are smaller, and other provinces have different rates of compensation which are, of course, much more than what we have. We're kind of in the median in that particular range for deputy ministers.

Now, when the member talked about the deputy minister, this position and the numbers he's referring to was occupied by two individuals during that year, and there was an additional cash benefit, which was the vacation payout of \$54,204, which is according to the contract. As I said, two individuals, April 1 to September 28, '08, and the second from the 29th of September to March 31 of '09.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Thank you for those explanations, Premier.

On the question of the salaries I think everyone in Alberta expects, and rightfully so, that as the Premier you're the boss, you're the leader, you're the head of the Executive Council. I think that for a lot of people it's a contradiction and a little unsettling that your chief of staff as well as the Deputy Minister of Executive Council are making so much more than yourself. That doesn't seem to jibe. I mean, I think a lot of us here have been in different businesses. The guy who's making the decisions at the end of the day should be the guy who's the highest paid, and that's not the case in our government. I wonder if the Premier would address that.

I'm not asking that he, and I don't think he would, raise his salary to above what they're making, but at the very least create a hierarchy, that I think the people of Alberta would understand, where the Premier is the leader, is making the decisions. He's the one that's been democratically elected, and therefore he should be making the highest salary and not two or three or four or five bureaucrats.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, that is the same right across the country of Canada. I know that the Prime Minister isn't paid more than his deputies. In fact, he might even be paid less than the assistant deputy ministers and other senior officials in government. I don't know what the remuneration was for some of our municipal leaders across Alberta, but I do know that most of the CEOs and CAOs that operate municipalities were paid much more than the highest ranking elected official, which was the mayor.

Mr. Anderson: Well, would it not be a good example, then, to the rest to rein back? I mean, we spend more in our bureaucracy than any other province per capita in the country. Wouldn't it be a good way to show leadership at this point and lower those higher paid staff, you know, the bureaucratic, nonelected, executive-paid

members, maybe rein those salaries back a little bit to something that makes a little bit more sense to the average Albertan? I mean, we're all in public service. You know, you've set an example. I personally don't believe that the Premier's salary is overly exorbitant for the amount of work that you do, but shouldn't, then, the people that report to you be making less or, at least, on par but certainly less than yourself? If that was the type of leadership we had across the board, I think that we might foster more of a culture of public service rather than a culture of entitlement, which I kind of see existing right now. Is that something that you'd be willing to look at?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not going to ask people that are under contract in this province across all of government to take what would be significant reductions in management positions, in senior positions in government, and get paid less than what the Premier gets paid or the ministers. In fact, I don't know what issues there would be to the current contracts we would have in place. But, you know, that's a matter that we can debate.

I have great confidence and pride in our civil service in this province as a minister over the last number of years, no matter what ministry I served in. I started in agriculture, and I remember attending my first ministerial FPT, federal-provincial, meeting. When it came to policy, all other provinces seemed to look to Alberta to take a leadership role, whether it be on crop insurance, farm programs, food safety.

In Transportation we were the first province – and, again, leadership and buy-in through our civil service – to reduce I believe from 2,100 or 2,200 individuals down to about 700. We outsourced project management. We outsourced engineering. We outsourced maintenance. That was a significant change in the way transportation services were delivered. There was a lot of pride in the Transportation department, and that pride was invested by Albertans. We've made the changes, and in order to attract good quality people, we've got to be in the median at least.

I've always said that we may not be paying the highest as compared to other jurisdictions, but on the other hand we do have the lowest personal income taxes. That, to me, is an added benefit because no matter how much a person earns, they pay a flat 10 per cent. I believe we still continue to have one of the largest personal income tax exemptions compared to other provinces. That, again, is another benefit, but that benefit is for all Albertans.

Mr. Anderson: I didn't really want to discuss the competitiveness of our province right now, and I won't. I would love to have that discussion, but I'm going to try to remain with the estimates here.

We spent an awful lot of money and we're planning to spend \$7 million more, I believe, on the rebranding initiative. Personally, and no offence to the people that worked on it, I think the new brand is terrible. I think that it doesn't reflect what this province stands for. As a people, thanks to the leadership of the previous Premier, I would say, too, we had come up with a slogan: the Alberta advantage. That's something that really defined us as a province. It's something that people not only all over Canada knew but also all over North America.

To come and change that to Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, which essentially no one knows unless they're following politics or following the debate on it, I just don't see how the money was well spent that went into that rebranding initiative when we have so many other ways that it could have been spent; for example, on getting our message about the oil sands out to the world a little bit more. Maybe that could have been spent there. Or, you know, it's obviously well documented the health care issues that we have. It's well docu-

mented the budget deficit that we have. It just seemed to me that not only was this a waste of money or not the best use of money; the product that we got out of it was extremely poor. No one identifies with it. It's a bit of a joke if you go around and talk to people. With that, I mean, could we not save \$7 million or reallocate it by moving on to something else rather than this Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve slogan that we've come up with?

Mr. Stelmach: I expect that member to not agree because he's in the opposition. He's expressed an opinion, and he has a right to express that opinion in the House.

Just a little more information in terms of the spending details on the branding initiative. The budget that was introduced in '08-09, the first year, was \$5 million; the second year, '09-10, was \$10 million; then \$10 million in 2010-11, for a total of \$25 million. We did not spend the full amount budgeted in '08-09 or in '09-10. We reduced the budget in 2010-11, again, \$10 million down to \$7 million.

What is the money being used for? It has been spent in a number of different particular areas. The brand was launched in March 2009. We ran TV and international print ads to support the invest in Alberta message. We've also used some of the funds to develop the brand website. To date there have been more than 160,000 visits to the brand website, over 36,000 viewings of our videos on YouTube, 660 Alberta photos posted on Flickr, and growing numbers, of course, on Facebook and Twitter accounts. Two-thirds of those visitors are consistently from outside of Canada. In total we've had visitors from 148 different countries. So, you know, we can debate whether the money is well spent. I do know that it also includes some investment in contracts that we have with two U.S. firms as well to get the message out in terms of environment and some of our advocacy efforts in Washington, DC. That's all part of the branding process.

3:40

I will say that through a lot of the work that was done, a lot of polling, asking questions of Albertans, the Alberta advantage served Alberta very well for a number of years, but it kind of lost its appeal to many. As a result, we had to rebrand the province of Alberta.

Given the comments we've had in Vancouver at the Olympics and, certainly, the number of hits on the website, I believe that we're on the right track, and we'll keep monitoring. We're going to rely on our branding ambassadors to do more. It's really been picked up by schools, universities, businesses throughout Alberta that are using the logo and are now promoting this with whoever they do business either in Canada or the United States or around the world.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: How much time do I have left?

The Deputy Chair: Twenty.

Mr. Anderson: Twenty seconds? Okay. Well, I'll defer my questions till later.

Thanks.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to go back on some of the questions I asked earlier to the Premier about setting an example of responsible spending. How can he justify in the last several years 200 to 400 per cent increases in his senior staff's

income? How does he respond to people living in poverty, on AISH, women who are unemployed, men unemployed, students who can't get into postsecondary education? This flies in the face of responsible spending and a reasonable leadership style. How do you respond to Albertans with 200 to 400 per cent increases under your watch?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said earlier, I read the numbers into the record, if he wants me to do that again.

We have shown leadership as a government going through a very difficult economic situation. We've asked all our management people to forgo a part of their compensation, which was their bonus, and this is part, quite frankly, of an agreement that was reached many years ago when we fell behind in managerial salaries compared to other jurisdictions. As I've said, it was a private-sector committee that came forward with recommendations to at least put us in the median of other provinces.

Given that we're going through a difficult period and we had to find a considerable amount of money in in-year spending in '09-10 and '08-09, all bonuses were cancelled, and of course all managerial salaries were frozen. That's two years before anybody even thought of doing anything in that particular area in any other jurisdiction, and that in itself is \$1.4 million in compensation cuts. I'll remind this House that that was done on a voluntary basis. There was an agreement in place, and our people did that on a voluntary basis. So, you know, I commend our public sector for doing that, which has allowed us to reach our targets and balance on the operational side, especially when it comes to finding dollars in various departments to balance heading into the year-end.

Every year the compensation committee asks the CHR, the human resource people, to review our compensation across Canada, and as I said before, we are in the median. Again, hats off to all of the managers and the people that had a bonus coming to them that voluntarily said: we will not accept the bonus for the year to try to reach our targets for that particular year during a period of economic downturn.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't think that sits very well with Albertans, and I dare say that the nonconfidence in this government and this Premier is well reflected in that kind of response, that doesn't address the massive increases that he oversaw in his bureaucracy. This is part of what Albertans disdain about public service, that this is no longer public service; it's people at the public trough. A lack of leadership in this respect is part of what you're going to deal with for the next couple of years, I'm afraid.

On page 125 of the Executive Council business plan strategic priority 3 is to continue the establishment of an economic strategy, namely the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. A few questions related to this council. How long is this council going to be in place? What concrete gains has the Premier seen from this council? What decisions have been made? Will the Premier make public any reports and recommendations he's received from this council in line with strategic priority 1, which is accountability and transparency? Finally, how many meetings has the Premier had with the council in the past year?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Sure. With respect to the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, as I said in my opening remarks, we've asked world experts, world leaders in various areas of expertise under the leadership of Dr. Emerson to identify major forces and trends in the

world economy and what Alberta has to do to present itself, position itself in an ever-changing world economy, let's say from the 2010 to 2040 period. The Alberta Economic Development Authority looks at the short term. The Alberta Economic Development Authority will be working with the council in terms of the short term – you know, 2010, 2015, 2018 – but we've asked the council to look much further ahead and see what is it that we have to do in a number of areas, whether it be in education and technology, technology transfer, obviously commercialization of that technology, health, our own personal health, what strategies we can put together.

I've had one face-to-face meeting with the chair. The chair has used, of course, various ways, through the Internet, working with the council members, and they have put together an interim report. They will be getting together in Edmonton at the end of March to review it.

They will be, again, consulting with the public and with people that have good, far-reaching ideas, and they will collate those and bring them forward to government. That report will be made public. It is something Albertans want to see, and they will have, of course, the ability to respond to the report because we're in this together.

We've seen some huge global economic shifts. We're going to see tremendous competition for investment and for people in the world, and we've got to position this province correctly. It may mean, of course, ideas on how we change some of the current policies not only within Alberta but in Canada and offer suggestions on how we can work with other provinces and our federal government to improve Alberta's and Canada's position.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I guess I would ask the Premier: if he was spending a million dollars of his own money, would he have been more inclined to meet with this committee over a year and find out what they're doing and what influence it could have and should have on current decision-making? I'm surprised that there's only been one face-to-face meeting over this period.

In last year's budget the Premier stated that the total amount of funding for this council was \$2 million, which was an increase of a million dollars to cover remuneration, travel expenses, and other costs. I have several questions around this \$2 million. Is the total amount of funding to the council still at \$2 million for fiscal 2010-11? Would this \$2 million in spending be found under line item 1.0.1? What is the reason why there are not more specifics given around this spending, and what accounting has the Premier for this? Is it all on remuneration, travel, and consulting fees? How much of the total funding to the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy goes to consultants outside those individuals on the Council?

3:50

Mr. Stelmach: Perhaps a little bit of background on the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. The council, as I said, is chaired by David Emerson, who actually was born in Grande Prairie, was with the forestry industry, and served as an elected official with the federal government. The council has 12 members, many national and international in stature and each a globally recognized expert in their field.

The members were nominated by community leaders from across Alberta. We had three nomination committees that volunteered their time and brought names forward. Then the committee selected whom they thought, you know, should be appointed to the council and gave their ideas. All people that are selected have global experience, are respected strategic thinkers, and represent a broad

range of experience with the major economic sectors of importance to Alberta.

Remuneration for the council follows the guidelines laid out in the public agencies governance framework.

Now, in addition to David Emerson – and I'd like to put this in the record – in terms of the membership, from the United Kingdom Professor Sir John Bell, who is a professor of medicine at the University of Oxford; Professor Jennifer Welsh, a professor in international relations, University of Oxford; Clive Mather, former president and CEO of Shell Canada, now chairman of Iogen Corp. From the United States Juan Enriquez, managing director of Excel Medical Ventures in Boston, Massachusetts. From across Canada Elyse Allan, president and CEO of GE Canada; David Dodge, who is a senior adviser for Bennet Jones in Ottawa; Courtney Pratt, the former president and CEO of Stelco, now the chairman and CEO of the Toronto Region Research Alliance. From Alberta we have Bob Brawn, who is the chair of the Alberta Economic Development Authority; James Gray, better known as Jim Gray, Brookfield Asset Management; Anne McLellan, a former cabinet minister now with Bennet Jones; and Lorne Taylor, who is the chair of the Alberta research institute.

In terms of the compensation, the chair is paid \$50,000 a year; members are paid \$20,000 a year plus \$1,000 for each day on council business as per the guidelines. I think the question was: is it included in the budget line item? Yes, it is. It's in the office of the Premier and Executive Council.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to know whether we're getting value for money. It's not clear at all from what the Premier has said that we have any capacity for measuring the output from this committee, value for money. What is the total budget this year, Mr. Premier, and are we getting value from this?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, we are getting value. I mean, very rarely do you have people that have dedicated their time for the amount of money that we are paying them, that come from different corners and parts of the world to give advice to the Premier of the province of Alberta. These are people that, I'm sure, get paid much, much more than what they're paid according to our guidelines and are willing to take the time and help Alberta take a leadership role in the country of Canada in terms of where we want to be by 2040. Not very often do you get people like this just by sheer invite, sending them a letter to help and participate in a committee like this.

There is a lot of research that is being done. Many have asked for further research in terms of the background information. I know that this is very, very important for Alberta because, as I said before, there is a huge global shift. We've always relied on the United States as our number one trading partner. We've seen that economy diminish somewhat. Asia, of course, China, India are moving forward in the growth of the economy. There are some issues, obviously, in Europe. We've got to be ahead of the curve, and this is definitely going to give us the advice on how we can reach our full potential.

Now, some of the things, of course, in terms of the council are taking an account of Alberta's current natural resources and built assets, looking at the strengths of Alberta's people and its institutions, identifying the major forces, as I said earlier, and trends shaping the world around us from 2010 to 2040. It's reviewing the implications of major external and internal forces and trends on Alberta's economy, society, and government. Just briefly, Mr. Chair, what's happening in the Middle East in terms of some of the issues tied to oil supply, peace, what could happen between, you know, Iran and some of the other Middle Eastern countries and the

Emirates: there are some very sensitive issues now. We have to ensure that we're in the right position to deal with the ever-changing circumstances.

Now, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, the budget overview. In the first year we had allocated a million dollars; the actual was \$766,000. In '09-10 the budget is forecast to be at \$1.9 million. I don't know what that will be, but it will be less than that. Then for '10-11 it'll be about \$1.6 million, a reduction of \$285,000.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, it's kind of discouraging that we ask for brief answers and clear responses, and we get the same runaround. Albertans want to know how this money is being spent and what value we're getting from it, what decisions are changing as a result of this council. There is also no indication of how long this spending is going to go on. I guess some of us get frustrated by the lack of clarity and the lack of brevity, the discussion around world economics as opposed to answering the questions specifically.

To move on to the branding initiative, page 189 of government estimates shows that the estimated spending for the branding initiative is \$7 million in this year and that \$9.66 million was forecasted for the '09-10 fiscal. None was spent in '08-09. But page 195 of the 2009 government estimates shows that it was forecast for branding spending of \$5 million in '08-09. Can the Premier clarify why this year's estimate does not include the \$5 million that was budgeted to be spent on the branding in '08-09? Was that \$5 million budgeted not spent? Is it included in the Public Affairs Bureau line? What is the reason for that \$5 million discrepancy?

Secondly, of the \$7 million that was budgeted for the '10-11 year, how much of that funding is going towards consulting costs?

If some of these are not readily available, I would appreciate a written response.

On page 128 of the Executive Council business plan there are performance measures for the entire branding initiative under development, stating, "A measure to test awareness and recognition of the brand is currently under development." To the Premier: how is the Premier going to actually test awareness and recognition of the Alberta brand? This performance measure was under development last year as well, with the initiative expected to be finished in the '10-11 fiscal year. Isn't having a performance measure developed for '11-12 a little too late? Isn't this simply a post hoc justification for what was projected to be a three-year spending of \$25 million? Will the Premier commit that this performance measure will be replaced by a complete cost-benefit analysis in next year's business plan? He needs to show tangible benefits from this \$25 million of public dollars investment.

On page 190 of government estimates, line 3.0.1, the branding initiative shows a reduction of \$3 million for '10-11. What was originally budgeted as \$10 million is now \$7 million. To the Premier. I would first like to thank the Premier for taking the advice of the opposition and cutting this spending on a very questionable initiative. Will the Premier explain what was cut out of the plans for that branding initiative, and is this reduction because of a decrease in advertising dollars? Is it a decrease in consulting costs? Where did that \$3 million get cut? If the Premier managed to find \$3 million in savings, could he explain why these were not found in the two years prior in the program? Is the Premier planning on spending the \$3 million saved this year in '11-12? Surely that \$3 million could be better spent on core services and policy development.

4:00

Will the Premier give some examples of the performance benchmarks that are under consideration for measuring the success of the program? Will it be the total amount of investment in the

province? Will it be increases in tourism dollars? How does the Premier propose to measure success of this program?

Will the Premier answer how much of the \$7 million being spent on the branding initiative will be spent through the Public Affairs Bureau? To what extent is the branding initiative handled through this bureau, and has the role changed over the last two years since the initiative started? Will the Premier provide the list of all consultants that have had a part in the branding campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I don't know how good my memory is. There are about 50 questions in there.

Again, I don't know why the hon. member said that I'm going around the detail. I was very clear. I read out the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy budget overview. In '08-09 we budgeted a million, we spent \$766,000; in '09-10, \$1.9 million. The totals come in for '10-11, which will be the final year of the council. We're estimating \$1.6 million, which would be a reduction of approximately \$285,000. All of the council's reports will be completed, and we'll bring the last report and all of the recommendations to government at that particular time. Then the council will cease to exist. I can't be any clearer than that.

Going back to the branding initiatives budget – and I think I answered this in previous questions to the previous member – '08-09 was \$5 million, '09-10 was \$10 million, and \$10 million in 2010-11, for \$25 million. We did not spend the full amount targeted in '08-09 or in '09-10, and we have reduced the budget in '10-11 from \$10 million to \$7 million.

The Deputy Chair: I call the Leader of the Official Opposition for the next set of questions for 20 minutes and after that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I look forward to the written responses to those questions, Mr. Premier. I didn't expect you to have some of those details, but I did expect a few answers.

With respect to board governance page 125 of the Executive Council 2010 business plan states that the number one strategic priority is to strengthen agency governance. In the October '09 Auditor General's report the Auditor recommended that the Ministry of the Treasury Board increase the transparency of termination benefits. Page 160 of the 2010 fiscal plan shows that the government's response to this recommendation is under review. Further questions to the Premier: what is the reason for this recommendation not being accepted from the start, the Auditor's recommendation to review and make more transparent termination benefits?

The implication that the Auditor General outlined if this recommendation is not accepted is that there is a lack of oversight, unawareness of contractual obligations, risk of overpayment, and damage to the corporate reputation of his ministry. Surely the Premier is concerned about this. This recommendation is important across all government boards but especially Alberta Health Services, an organization that controls \$9 billion of spending.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we will work on the estimates. If you can find the line item for Health Services in the estimates, we'll work with that. Otherwise, Health Services will be debated in the policy field committee. They could certainly have a lot of detail in there.

Dr. Swann: Sir, I'm looking for policy direction from this Premier with respect to recommendations for fiscal management.

The Deputy Chair: And we're talking about the Executive Council estimates.

Dr. Swann: And how they are using that budget to direct the spending of other departments, especially the Auditor General's recommendation.

Let me try again. Accepting this recommendation would tie in perfectly with your priority, Mr. Premier, to improve governance, accountability, and transparency of all of government and its agencies. When can we expect to see full disclosure of executive termination benefits, another recommendation related to the importance across all government boards of this accountability and transparency? Does the Premier not see the need for change in this area?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm going to go back to the branding initiative, and then I'll do the question on the response to the Auditor General because there was a comment made that I didn't answer the questions. I'm going to again go through item by item on the branding initiative budget overview, and hopefully there's somebody there taking some notes so they have the answer. If not, then you can read *Hansard* the following day.

Branding initiative budget overview. The budget amount in 2008-09 was \$5 million. The actual was \$3,678,908. Now, spending in the first year of the brand initiative covered the development and launch of the new brand. What did we spend money on? We included extensive research in Alberta, nationally, and internationally; development and testing of the creative elements of the proposed brand; development and testing of the brand campaign; province-wide TV, print, and radio advertising to introduce the new brand.

The next year, '09-10, \$10 million; published forecast, \$9.6 million. Spending in the second year supports implementation of the new brand; support for Alberta's venues at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games; U.S. advocacy consultation; developing videos of Alberta/Albertans to convey consistent messages about Alberta as a place for people realizing possibilities; designing, producing, and installing brand pageantry at strategic locations around the province, purchasing promotional items, all to improve awareness of Alberta's identity; creating and placing ads to support an invest-in-Alberta message; in evaluating brand awareness.

Now, the 2010-11 estimates, \$7 million. Funding for the final year of the initiative will primarily go towards ambassador engagement and community development. It's working with brand ambassadors to identify key opportunities for brand development and promotion; developing high-quality materials for brand ambassadors to support their marketing communications about Alberta's immigration, employment, investment, and tourism potential; directly advocating our story to decision-makers in government, business, and policy leaders in Canada and around the world; promoting Alberta at conferences in targeted markets; creating and running advertising campaigns and telling Alberta's story nationally and internationally; and enhancing albertabrand.com and other online communications. That is the complete overview of the branding initiative budget.

Now, with respect to the Auditor General and the executive compensation, many of the contracts that were terminated, Mr. Chairman – and this is not an excuse, just a matter of record that a lot of these contracts were entered into well before I was sworn in as the Premier. These are contracts that were entered into by various boards and agencies, whether it be Health Services, some of the other Crown corporations that we have, or agencies that receive funding from the government to deliver services. It was up to those

boards to reach reasonable contract negotiations and, I would say, reasonable compensation for those that might have not had their contract renewed or might have been otherwise removed.

The Auditor does make good suggestions, and we're looking at formalizing guidelines and also bringing this forward to government for final approval in terms of how we can put some objectives in place to make sure that within, again, a reasonable amount of dollars boards, agencies, and those that work for government have either in legislation or in regulation terms of choice based on what the responsibility is of the individual, of course, in a particular agency and a reasonable clause in the contract that would be paid upon termination.

There were, I believe, contracts that were entered into in the past that we did not see through government, the contracts, because we left it up to the authorities to make those decisions. That will change, and we're looking at coming up with a model that we can apply to all government agencies and Crown corporations so that we meet the recommendations of the Auditor General so that they would be reasonable in nature in the future.

4:10

Dr. Swann: Well, I think it has become clear over the last few years, Mr. Chairman, that Albertans are quite dismayed by the lack of a systematic, consistent, businesslike approach to managing the public purse in this province, and this is another example of where we're slowly, slowly, slowly facing the reality that we are failing in basic business practices.

Page 126 of the Executive Council business plan has the performance measure: percentage satisfaction of policy co-ordination office clients with products and services. The last measurement here was 85 per cent satisfaction. Can the Premier explain how this measure was actually taken and which clients this measure refers to? Is it related to arm's-length government agencies, boards, and commissions, or does this refer to satisfaction of other government ministries? If it is measuring the ministries' satisfaction with his department, is this measure not misleading? Surely government ministries will be reluctant to show dissatisfaction with the Premier's role.

On page 128 of the Executive Council business plan there's a breakdown of expenses by core business, a total of \$10.3 million for policy development. For "help government . . . communicate with Albertans" there's a total of \$21 million. This \$21 million, again, relates to the Premier's message, the government's message, with only \$10 million spent on good public policy. We're spending more on spin than actually on policy. What is the Premier's explanation for year after year pouring more money into advertising, public relations, relative to policy development and policy spending?

Mr. Stelmach: This government has undertaken a number of items that have been put, perhaps, on the back burner for a number of years, ensuring that we are in the position to see and acknowledge the growth that's happening in the province and moving forward on a number of initiatives. They can be anywhere from land-use framework to issues tied to any of the pieces of legislation that we passed in the House, on transmission, for instance, or some of the changes we made in transportation, education, of course, postsecondary. All of those things require a fair amount of communication with the public, and that is why we continue to give as much information as we can to the Alberta public. We have done a lot as a government over the last three years; there's no doubt about it.

I just want to go back to the other item raised in terms of the Auditor General. Sometimes in the response from the hon. member

it's like, you know, this is a simple undertaking. Well, there are contracts in place at the moment with respect to some of the agencies, and we're looking at a format for guidelines in the final approval process that we could post on the secretariat website. These will be regulations under the Public Agencies Governance Act or a combination of various forms to communicate to our boards and agencies in terms of the private-sector compensation.

Treasury Board is also reviewing compensation for various management positions and the termination benefits and some of the salaries that are paid. We'll continue to work on a disclosure directive that will be posted on the web, and we will achieve the Auditor General's recommendation. But it does take time to get there because, as I said, there are current contracts in place, and we have to work through those to make sure that at the end of the day we've found a balance in terms of attracting the best people yet ensuring that they're paid within a reasonable amount of the median in the country of Canada.

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

Dr. Swann: No more questions.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Premier some questions on his estimates. I think the first question I have has to do with what changes the Premier has made with respect to senior officials in his office since he became the Premier. Can he outline who the senior people are in his office and what they do?

Mr. Stelmach: I believe I gave a total accounting in the questions earlier, but I'll go through it again as soon as I find my notes here.

With respect to the Executive Council we have individuals that have responsibilities in various areas, from policy co-ordination to operation of the office, and of course the office has a number of responsibilities. We have, of course, a very talented team of people working in the executive office. The work they do is essential to the operation of my office. These positions are unique and order in council appointments, which are not subject to the standard recruitment process. We've not added any new positions but have made some changes to the players and to the duties of a number of staff. These sorts of adjustments are made in any office as you move forward and move people around. I know that all members across the way have also made similar changes over time.

The recent changes include updated duties for Elan MacDonald, the deputy chief of staff responsible for policy; George Samoil, who's the deputy chief of staff, operations; the new communications director, Cam Hantiuk; the new director of media relations, Jerry Bellikka; the new executive assistant, Jason Ennis; the new deputy secretary to cabinet, Dwight Dibben; Roxanna Benoit, moving to deputy chief of policy co-ordination; and the new managing director for the Public Affairs Bureau, Lee Funke.

Now, I believe I read into the record – the question, I think, also was in terms of what compensation was paid or the changes in the compensation package. Again, we showed leadership in this area very early as government and as this Assembly. Government MLAs' and all MLAs' salaries were frozen for two years. That was two years ahead of anybody else that took the position to freeze those salaries. When it came to all management salaries, they were all frozen. All bonuses as part of the compensation package were cancelled. That is about \$1.4 million in compensation costs.

For the two senior officials. For the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, once again, a 10 per cent salary reduction, which was \$32,000, and a bonus of \$80,000, which was cancelled, so that's a reduction of \$112,000. For the chief of staff a 10 per cent reduction, \$25,000, plus the bonus elimination of \$76,000, so that's \$101,000. The total for the chief of staff and the deputy, in reduction of just those two areas, was \$213,000.

Once again, the bonuses were part of the compensation package, and all management staff came forward voluntarily in the government's drive to reduce costs. In a year when we really got hit with this totally unprecedented economic downturn, the team came together.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

4:20

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize if that question was redundant, but when there's an hour and 20 minutes of questions ahead of you on a small budget like this, you're going to cover sometimes the same ground a little bit.

My next question has to do with the branding initiative. I was looking in the Executive Council annual report and the business plan and so on trying to determine if there is, in fact, some way to evaluate the branding initiative and whether or not the money that's been spent on it has been successful. I mean, we may each have our personal opinions about whether this is a good brand or a bad brand, but the real question is: is its effectiveness being measured? How many people in Alberta know the brand, like the brand? What does it mean to them? What about, then, outside the province and internationally? How effective is the brand being? The question is: what are the measures of this brand? What are the results?

Mr. Stelmach: A good question from the hon. member. This is a significant initiative in terms of rebranding the province of Alberta. I think that, in all honesty, it's sometimes difficult to measure, especially in an economic downturn, but perhaps it was the best time to rebrand Alberta, when no one predicted this economic downturn, and we came with a new brand for the province to be new, fresh, not only within the country of Canada but within the North American continent and, indeed, the world.

The campaign was implemented in March '09, and the evaluation is critical. There is an evaluation process currently under way to measure the response, and again it comes in various forms: polling, asking Albertans, looking at which sectors of business in Alberta have done better with the new brand, how it's been accepted by what we call brand ambassadors, how they've implemented that in their advertising of whatever particular product.

Now, the other measurement is difficult because it's an open brand. It's not only government; it's open to everyone. You know, a school board can use it. Maybe some trucking firm can use it. Who knows? Maybe there's a sausage maker there someplace that's using the brand in terms of getting their product into other markets around the world. A good example is that Travel Alberta has accepted the brand, and they've used that in the advertising across Canada into North America and indeed some of the markets in the world.

Of course, we wrapped the *Rocky Mountaineer* train in our brand, and it has again proven to be very effective. You know, the fact that *Rocky Mountaineer* has chosen to keep the train wrapped till the end of October is going to give us additional advertising dollars. But it's always difficult to measure, and I will say to the hon. member that we'll have more information on this in terms of the evaluation process.

It's difficult, you know, even when you're advertising in the

paper, to know if it's that particular ad that got you the requested sales, or was there some other means of getting your name out there that has attracted more business? But I feel comfortable in the brand. It's certainly been accepted by so many of our brand ambassadors, and they're using it quite effectively in advertising their product.

Mr. Mason: I would ask the Premier, then, if the criteria for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the brand and the money that's been spent on rebranding the province are going to be made available specifically. I don't want you to get up because you'll take too long to answer that.

The next question I have has to do with Public Affairs Bureau. What I'm asking about: I see on page 194 of the estimates that there are 118 full-time equivalent positions with the PAB, and the Public Affairs Bureau budget is \$14.3 million. The question I have is: how much other communications work does the government do through the contracting of external firms, and where is the budget for that located? Is it located in the PAB budget, or is it located in the various departmental budgets?

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to contracts, I know that for any external contracts that are offered to anybody outside of government, those figures will be in the blue book, and we can certainly get some target numbers for the hon. member. Those are published, I believe, every three months and will communicate to Albertans in terms of what money is spent on consultants, especially in this particular area.

The hon. member was right: there are 118 FTEs. I didn't get an opportunity to compare — there had been some comparisons thrown at us earlier — in terms of what other governments do in this particular area. For our neighbours to the west the 2009-10 budget for the B.C. government's Public Affairs Bureau is \$28.8 million, which includes 223 FTEs, so it's double what our budget is in that particular area.

Now, are there additional people within government that are communicating? Yes. There are those in various ministries that are in different corners and parts of Alberta. I used the example where in one particular area for a transportation network — let's say Grande Prairie — there would be a person responsible for communicating to the public when the highway road bans will be. They might talk about the new weights and measures in that particular area as a result of spring breakup, will be communicating with the oil and gas industry in terms of rig movement and when new bans may be put into place.

The staffing for the Public Affairs Bureau. Of the 118 full-time equivalents, 72 are professional communications staff. These are seconded to ministries who plan and implement communications initiatives. They provide a range of communications services in ministries, including communications planning and advice, writing, editing, responding to media and public inquiries.

Nine staff develop communications for our long-term strategic plan and priority initiatives; co-ordinate government communications for major initiatives, public emergencies; support internal government communications. Six staff provide advertising consultation and support to ministries, co-ordinate corporate advertising, and manage the branding initiative. Eighteen staff provide communications support services to ministries, including websites, news release distribution, electronic media monitoring, technical services for news conferences. Thirteen staff provide corporate services to Executive Council and the bureau, including human resources, finance, administration, business planning, annual reports, records management, and FOIP. This also includes the PAB's managing director's office.

We put the blue book online, so it's definitely searchable. I know the member can look up any of the items, but if you're interested in any one particular area, they can certainly assist you in getting that information. I do want to say that we've certainly moved a long direction positively in being more open and transparent with our airplane manifests, ministerial expenses posted on the website. We also have of course introduced a lobbyist registry.

4:30

All of these things have happened over the last couple of years, again, in consultation with the Assembly here on the lobbyist registry. But the other, in terms of posting all of the information on the website, it was, of course, a move by me to be more open and transparent and just put it out there. It's amazing now that anybody can just pick up who went where, on what plane, and on what day. All of a sudden we don't get the kind of headlines that we used to before.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Open and transparent is good, so is briefer.

I want to ask about the council for economic strategy. I know that this has also been covered, but just for my benefit I wonder if the Premier can tell us what the deliverable is on the council for economic strategy. Is there a specific report with specific recommendations that has been provided to the Premier here?

Mr. Stelmach: The council is chaired by Dr. David Emerson. The council includes a number of very high profile expert people in a number of different areas that we've asked to serve on this council that live in different parts of the world, in Canada, and in the United States. Their role here is to put together an overview of what Alberta has to do to be in the best position by, let's say, from 2010 to 2040 but certainly from 2020 to 2040 given some of the huge global economic shifts and the competition that we're seeing today for people and for investment.

I've had one face-to-face meeting with the chair. Towards the end of the month the council will be here in Edmonton. They've always had meetings but through the Internet so that it would minimize travelling, which saves a fair amount of money. They're building a report in a number of key areas.

Our goal here is to drive Alberta to be a knowledge-based economy. That's part of the mandate that was given to council, to do whatever we need to ensure that we position the province in postsecondary education, technology transfer, technology commercialization, and compete with the best in the world. Because we have the best in the world, people that have a proven background in terms of their accomplishments, we will be getting some very good advice and will set the direction in co-operation with the Alberta Economic Development Authority, which is chaired by Bob Brawn, who is also a member of this council.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to go back to the previous question two questions ago because I thought I heard the Premier say that he would provide us with a list or a summary of the expenditures that are made across all of the departments in government on external communications and so on. I just wanted to confirm that for the record.

Mr. Chairman, I know that with the Premier you sort of overlap into lots of departments and different issues. I want to talk about the

public relations problem, if you want to call it that, around the oil sands a little bit because in question period you only get three questions, and it's a little different format. It really does seem to me that there's a mounting issue internationally with respect to the development of our oil sands and that that is compromised by the current environmental state of the developments that are taking place there. It also seems to me that it's very difficult to just deal with that as a public relations problem.

We could spend an awful lot of money trying to counteract the negative publicity, but it really seems to me that we have to tackle the issues that are underlying this international black eye, if you will. That means cleaning up the tar sands – sorry; I didn't mean to say that; old habit – oil sands, actually cleaning them up and not just doing a PR campaign. I think we have to do things differently in this province if that development and the economic benefits it brings are going to continue. We have to change how we do things, and we have to show that to the world.

I'll just leave you with that, Mr. Premier.

The Deputy Chair: The time limit is up. You can answer it if you wish.

Mr. Stelmach: Oh, sure. Very good point. I agree with the member. We can spend a lot more money on so-called branding and trying to defuse what a lot of the various organizations are bringing forward with respect to the one issue I find that is most easily identifiable, and that is the tailings ponds. We have a goal in mind that we're going to move towards dry tailings ponds, and when we do that, that will remove a lot of the issues. Once the present tailings ponds are recovered, that will, I think, take away a lot of the issues that we're facing today.

I do want to say one thing, though. There's a lot of talk, and yesterday we heard about low-carbon fuel standards, you know: Alberta, your carbon is much higher in the oil sands, and how are you going to meet the new legislation that may or may not come forward from the Americans? Well, presently today there is oil shipped from Venezuela to New Brunswick. It's refined there. We already know that carbon is a lot higher than the Alberta oil sands, and that refined fuel is making its way down into Maine and some of the other states. So are the Americans going to have two, three, four different low-carbon fuel standards? Are they going to be based on the California model that is producing 500,000 barrels a day of heavy oil that, quite frankly, is even heavier carbon?

You know, we can debate this, as you know, Mr. Chairman, with your responsibility in PNWER and the work you do with the American governors, but the best thing is to start picking away at what is the eyesore, and that is the tailings ponds. I know that we're close to having the technology to have dry tailings ponds. There's a whole bunch of new technology that's ready to move ahead. That, in itself, will remove the number one issue that I think most groups point to, and that's the tailings ponds.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to ask the Premier a couple of questions, first of all, starting with the core business of communicating with Albertans, specifically on page 127 of the ministry's business plan. The goal, Mr. Premier, as articulated in 2.3, is to "identify and implement emerging web technologies to enhance communication with Albertans."

I wonder if the Premier would share with the Assembly some of the strategies that the government proposes to increase use of things like the social media channels, the e-newsletter, the webcasts,

streaming video, video conferencing, and so on, and some of the vision on how that strategy can be enhanced given some of the challenges that we have in getting people signed on to those networks online, given some of the challenges that we also have to high-speed Internet access in some of the remote parts of the province, just generally some of the ways in which the budget expenditures with respect to communications might be achieving that objective of enhancing those web technologies.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member makes an excellent point, being that Alberta is third, I believe, behind B.C. and Ontario in terms of Internet penetration. I believe we're at about 85 per cent. One of the provinces is about 89, and the other one is 90, so we're very close to those two provinces. That is why I support what the member has said. We have to use more of the Internet and social media to get the message out.

4:40

I learnt a couple of lessons over the last number of months. One is when we were at the WorldSkills conference, and we had a panel of youth from different corners of the world. These were very, very successful former WorldSkills competitors that won the highest levels in the various competitions. When the question was asked, "How do you get your news?" whether you get it from TV, from print, all of them said that they got it from the social media. In fact, a lot of them said that they didn't get a lot of detail, just a few pertinent facts, because that's all the time they had to receive the news. Obviously, the member is pointing in a direction that we have to take.

I did my first YouTube interview, which I believe was successful, and we're going to have to do more of that. I believe the first one had something like 9,700 views. If we're going to reach out to the younger generation to get the message out in a quick response and maybe even respond quicker to, you know, some policy change or maybe some criticism that may be applied to Alberta perhaps by someone outside the province, by another government or whatever, that's the best way of getting the message out.

The government of Alberta websites are increasingly being used by Albertans. Having the opportunity to spend some time with seniors in smaller communities, who are now very well connected, I find that many seniors now use the Internet not only to connect with their relatives in other parts of Canada, other parts of Alberta, other parts of the world, but they get so much of their information now from the Internet. Sometimes we think it's the younger generation that we have to, you know, find a way of communicating with, but certainly through the social media this is one way of getting our message across.

I think that we've taken a bold step. We've got to do more, and we'll continue to do more. Are there some issues, some sensitivities? Yes, there probably are in terms of the monitoring of information that goes on the social media. But all in all, it's a positive step to take by government, and we'll continue to push in that direction.

Dr. Brown: Well, if I could follow up with a second area, Mr. Premier, with respect to enhancing the government's internal communications and better aligning the internal and external communications, which is one of the strategies under goal 2. Certainly, there is still an awful lot of paper that circulates within the government of Alberta. Any initiatives that could be taken, of course, to increase communications through our electronic media certainly would be much appreciated and I think is a much more efficient way of doing business. I wonder if the Premier could share some of his vision of where we're going with respect to those

internal communications and co-ordinating those things and trying to get us more oriented towards electronic communications in government.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, because we can reach out further to many smaller communities in the province through Internet connections, we're now able to do more and more paperless communication. The internal web-based newsletter that we have in the government of Alberta is one good example. I think it's called MyAgent, which is the human relations site. It puts on the web all of the policies and procedures for all government staff. So rather than sending tons of paper to individuals around the province, we can do it through web-based information.

The other is that, I think it was yesterday or the day before, a former colleague of this House, who's now a judge of the provincial court, Judge Adam Germain, did his first court case using the Internet. I don't know where the accused was or where the judge was, but obviously they conducted the court of law very successfully, which minimized the amount of paper and also minimized moving the accused from one location to another. So if the judges can do it – you know, they don't change very often. I hope I don't face a judge soon.

You know, you can tell that it's being included more and more in the everyday way of doing business in the province.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, if I could follow up with a third question. With respect to the open brand, Mr. Premier, Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, I think it's an excellent initiative to sell the attributes of our province within Canada and around the world. The business plan proposes to have the brand recognized both nationally and internationally, and the Premier mentioned in his remarks an encounter with a visitor from Sweden who actually was able to recite the logo to him, Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, so it shows that that promotion is beginning to take hold.

With respect to the issue of tourism, Mr. Premier, of course, tourism is a really important part of Alberta's future because it brings dollars. It's the same as an export, people buying our oil and gas or our lumber or our beef, because it brings dollars into the province of Alberta. Those dollars then circulate, and they have a multiplier effect on the economy. So a very, very important initiative. I wonder if the Premier could perhaps share with us how that branding will be promoted to enhance tourism in the province of Alberta and to bring those dollars here that can circulate and create jobs here in the province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The value of just using our brand on Travel Alberta promotional products is estimated at about \$50 million. That is significant, building on the rebranding initiative.

The other business that uses the brand and is using it very successfully is Big Rock Brewery. Its brand identity is part of the Untapped Alberta campaign to promote their beer in western Canada. In fact, I could probably use one now. What they're doing is that they're reaching a much younger audience through the campaign, and they've struck really an identity in advertising on their website, on their posters, and also on their CD cover. So this is adding to the ever-growing list of brand ambassadors that are out there, including, as I said before, our universities, all of our public institutions, that also have quite a large web of distribution across Canada.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Well, it's a privilege to have the Premier here. I appreciate the time that you take out to allow us to ask you a few questions about the Executive Council. To start off, he continues to talk, Mr. Chair, about the two-year freeze that we have on wages. One of the problems that Albertans see – again, our actions speak louder than our words. They gave a massive raise of 34 per cent, and then they said we're freezing our wages or a slight rollback. They kind of took three giant steps forward and two back. It's just frustrating for Albertans that see that and look at: well, where's it at?

Just to demonstrate, to follow up on Airdrie-Chestermere's point of questions, again, I guess, to reflect on TILMA and the labour movement that's allowed back and forth, I'm just wondering if the Premier has considered making a trade labour swap on the Executive Council because B.C.'s deputy minister makes \$289,000, seeing as how that's who we're talking about so often, and the chief of staff makes a whopping \$229,000. I'm wondering if he's aware of that inequity between these two provinces?

Mr. Stelmach: Is he asking for a raise, then? That's considerably more than the Alberta chief of staff is receiving. You know, we can debate this back and forth, but as I said before, in terms of across Canada we are in the medium for our officials in government and in management. As I said before, we had other additional benefits in terms of our personal income tax and their exemptions, which are the best in the country of Canada.

I can't remember. What was your first comment?

4:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I don't know if I was clear enough. I started off with: the deputy minister makes \$289,000 in B.C., not \$589,000. It's \$289,000, which is significantly less than here. And the chief of staff makes \$229,000, which I believe is significantly less than here. I just think that we need to really look at: if we want to be competitive, it's not by paying the most for our public service. There are many people that are interested and wanting to serve here in the province of Alberta. Perhaps competitiveness would be to actually say: "I have this opening, a new communications position. Who'd like to apply?" We could even be so competitive as to say: "What would you be willing to work for to have the honour of being here, in the Premier's Executive Council, to do that?" I think that we could put a whole new dynamic on competitiveness if we were to look at it in that respect.

I'm a little bit disappointed with the Premier talking about that we had these signed contracts with these public officials and saying that we couldn't break these contracts, yet he didn't have a problem breaking contracts with the oil and gas, Mr. Chair. So he says that we have to pay these out.

To switch over and to follow up a little bit more about these 180 full-time equivalent employees on page 194, we have a young lady with blond hair that follows our leader around. I was just interested if she is one of the employees on the Public Affairs Bureau or in the Executive Council. If the Premier could answer that.

Mr. Stelmach: We have to compare apples to apples in terms of salary. Knowing some of the comparisons that the member has used in the past, we'll certainly look at comparing apples to apples.

One thing – I have to address this – about the oil and gas, that we broke a contract. For the benefit of this House and for the benefit of the member, contracts were renegotiated with the oil and gas

industry at least 12 times. Those 12 times they were opened at the request of the oil and gas companies as there were different changes in the economy since the '70s. So that is a totally unfair comment, and that is simply not true. If he feels that what I'm saying is not true, he can go right back to that oil and gas community, and they'll substantiate that. That happened in the oil sands. It happened in the conventional oil and gas business as well.

Now let's talk about compensation. There was a motion passed here – and that was introduced by a member of the Official Opposition – to put together a compensation review committee. This Assembly supported it, and we are going to move forward to ensure that we find the appropriate mechanism to ensure that it's fair. The decision is something that we can bring forward to this House or at least to the MLA compensation committee.

The other thing about compensation is that we do have, of course, other benefits that are paid to members, relocation allowances. I'm not quite sure if the hon. member that's asking about this increase in compensation paid back his relocation allowance because he's back in the House.

Mr. Hinman: Well, at this point I haven't even applied for the relocation, so I don't know how I'd give back something I haven't applied for. It's the second time the Premier has brought it up. He should perhaps check on those things. But I guess I should apply. I do feel that people are entitled to their full benefits.

Comparing apples to apples, we have more crabapples here than Delicious apples, and I don't know if we can compare the two.

But he didn't answer my question. There's a young lady that follows our leader around, and I'm just wondering where in the budget she works. Is she under Public Affairs? Is she with Executive Council? If he could report on where she is and what her wages are. Is that part of the nonpartisan money that this government spends tracking and following what the Wildrose Alliance is doing?

Mr. Stelmach: All I know is that it's not the Public Affairs Bureau. I don't know who he's referring to. Maybe he has more detail. If he's seen this blond lady so many times, maybe he has a name that he can bring forward, you know, in the House.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Her name is Jessica Powless. If he could ask if she's under the Public Affairs Bureau or not.

Mr. Stelmach: No.

Mr. Hinman: Does she work out of the McDougall Centre, then?

Mr. Stelmach: During the day I'm sure she works in the McDougall Centre.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are we still on estimates?

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I guess I'd like to go back to the freedom to create, spirit to choose.

Some Hon. Members: To achieve.

Mr. Hinman: To achieve. I guess that's right. That's how well it's working. I guess I can't help but ever get it out of my mind. I was told that there's a European slogan like this: the freedom to procreate, the spirit to choose with whom. I just wondered if that's where it came from.

Going back to the Alberta advantage, where we've been to where we are now, I guess I just have a great concern with the Premier saying that, you know, we're looking at a \$50 million return on investment for this new logo to promote Alberta when, in fact, we've lost billions of dollars of investment because we've lost the Alberta advantage.

Going back to the Public Affairs Bureau and the purpose of putting out a good message, the Premier went through a list of many of the activities. He went through a detailed list. Like, we have 18 people with IT. I'm wondering if there's anyone that's following the papers and the announcements that are being made around the world, whether it's *National Geographic* or the *National Post*, about the problems with the oil sands and if there's actually a department in the Public Affairs Bureau that sends back or if the Premier even sends back rebuttals asking to get our time in there to say: these are the facts about the oil sands. We continue to be attacked, yet I don't ever see any defence. I'm just wondering if they've tried to get articles in there and rebuttals because often when it comes out in the papers, one can say: "Well, that was about me. We'd like to respond." Does the Public Affairs Bureau do that, try and get rebuttals to improve our image?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, we do.

But before I get to that point, there was a comment made with respect to Travel Alberta and \$50 million worth of advertising. In addition to Travel Alberta, in addition to Big Rock Brewery, there are a number of additional ambassadors. There's Prairie Gardens & Greenhouses, that planted a corn maze last summer incorporating the provincial signature that was visible to air travelers. The University of Alberta has installed banners around their main campus. The University of Calgary has banners at the Olympic Oval. The Edmonton Eskimos and the Calgary Stampeders have set up in-stadium signs advertising and featuring the brand. Brewster, the bus line, will keep Alberta buses wrapped through October and have included the original provincial signature on the back of the buses with the Brewster logo.

ATCO used the provincial signature on clothing for Celebrating Excellence, a program where students submitted essays to win a trip to the Winter Olympic Games. We have Chloe Cartwright, a real estate agent with Century 21 in Cochrane, who also travels to England to work with people emigrating to Canada. There's Sirius Creation, creative arts and events management out of the United Kingdom, who now have an office in Alberta. BioAlberta, a biocommercialization association, uses the identity on promotional materials that are circulated globally. Glenn Simon Incorporated is a new ambassador that has blogged about the ambassador program and promoted the brand story video through their web links.

Working with WinSport Canada, we installed banners around Canada Olympic Park. WinSport also featured the signature in their iPhone app for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The University of Alberta Debate Society took Alberta T-shirts to an international competition in Turkey this winter to give to other teams, and the Alberta College of Art and Design has also signed on to the ambassador program.

Those are just some examples of how the branding initiative has taken hold and of our additional ambassadors that are using the logo.

5:00

Now, in terms of the Public Affairs Bureau we do monitor issues relating to departments and correct misinformation. The same is done with the oil sands. We've had a number of articles in papers not only that have been submitted by government, but some have been submitted by our ambassador in Washington whenever

something comes out that is totally incorrect. With respect to some of the speeches we gave in eastern Canada, in Toronto and in Montreal, again, I believe the day before we got to Montreal, one of the institutes there said that, you know, the oil sands threaten to pollute the Great Lakes. So we had a speech in Montreal, talked about the oil sands, how that was a very misleading statement, a misleading headline, because it had nothing to do with the oil sands.

In Toronto, again, we talked about air monitoring 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We said that air quality in Fort McMurray 98 per cent of the time is equal to or better than in any major Canadian city. For more information for the House I believe one of the radio disc jockeys said: well, the Premier comes to Toronto, tells us we've got smog.

You know, we've done a lot in getting the correct information and some of the misinformation, but you can't of course write for a lot of these particular magazines. *National Geographic* did an interview for close to an hour, and none of that interview or any of the reclamation pictures that we gave to the group to put into the magazine were used, so you can't edit, obviously, for that particular magazine or others. If they want to write a certain slant to the story, they will. That's why we have to keep undertaking every opportunity we can to correct some of the misinformation and put ever-increasing new information out there so world decision-makers have some good information to make reasonable and responsible decisions.

Mr. Hinman: We appreciate that answer, and we'd encourage the Premier and the Executive Council and Public Affairs to keep working on that positive message. We think that part of the branding and getting out a positive message is very important because we do continue to get black eyes, it seems like, and the message not getting out there.

I'd like to go back a little bit to Jessica because I'm not sure: if she works out of the McDougall Centre during the day, is she on the Executive Council payroll, then? Is that the accurate place to find her location?

Mr. Stelmach: We'll get your answer back in terms of where her employment is.

Mr. Hinman: Well, again, I guess our employees have to keep a time sheet and a record of where they're at. I'm very interested in how she travels back and forth to Edmonton. For the last two events we've had, she's been here, and I guess my question is: it's amazing how her daytime job seems to have the days off that coincide with ours.

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. Hinman: Well, it's Public Affairs, and you said that it's nonpartisan, yet we have these people that are travelling around, and I think that it's important that we're open and honest. Again, like I say, perhaps the Executive Council would like to put forward the compensation she's getting for travelling as well as the hours of the days that she's actually working. We think that it's important that the Executive Council does a nonpartisan job. I guess my question with Public Affairs and the answers we're getting here: if they're nonpartisan, if we have an important message to get out and can help them, do they work for all caucuses, then, if it's truly in there? We think that much of it is very partisan that is going forward and the message that's going out to Alberta and the rest of the world.

Again, going through the trimming back on the branding initiative to \$7 million from \$10 million, it's interesting that they're paring

back in that area, but we still have concerns whether we're getting value for our money, if that's well spent. I just really feel that it's important, as the Premier has leaned towards, that we need to lead by example, that he continues to, I think, rein in the spending in the Executive Council.

Again, we'd encourage that the most important place would be looking at the wages or the top end. The Ontario government put out what's kind of commonly known as a sunshine list. I'm wondering if the government would take steps forward with the Executive Council and for the Public Affairs to do that, if in fact he would bring that forward where for public-sector employees that earn over \$100,000, their names are on a list, and we can see where the taxpayers' money was going. Would the Executive Council consider such a move?

Mr. Stelmach: I can't speak to the Ontario sunshine list. [interjections]

An Hon. Member: No, not the sunshine girl.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, maybe that's what they're paying attention to.

Anyway, all of that is in the blue book. We don't need a sunshine list. It's on the web, all the contracts, any payments. I'm certain we're the only province in western Canada that's doing that in terms of the openness and transparency.

The other is that, you know, when we start comparing to other provinces, Alberta is the only province that at the end of this economic downturn will not be adding any to its operational debt because we have two savings accounts to work with. Every other province that's driving a deficit is going to have to add to the debt, which their deficits will because, in fact, other than the province of Saskatchewan with a very small savings account, the rest are all adding to their debt. Ontario will be at least \$180 billion, maybe even closer to \$200 billion in debt. I hope they're not comparing to that particular province.

Anyway, the 2010 budget interview by area. Office of the Premier/Executive Council: the budget is \$9.9 million. That's a reduction of \$561,000. Office of the Lieutenant Governor: \$493,000. That's a reduction of \$18,000. Corporate services: \$1.6 million, a reduction of \$191,000. Corporate communications: \$10.5 million. That's a reduction of \$354,000. Communications support services: \$2.2 million. That is the only increase because there are additional staff there, \$128,000. And the branding initiative: a drop of \$2.7 million. That's a budget reduction of \$3.7 million, which is about 10.1 per cent.

Mr. Hinman: Well, we'd very much like the commitment from the government, I guess, on the employment of Jessica and her job and her travelling. We find that that's not in the best interests of taxpayers' money. We'd encourage the government again, though, to go after the news and the media that are publishing untruths about the oil sands as the Premier knows that there's a great story up there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to probably deviate a little bit from what's been happening. I'm going to actually focus on something that's in the estimates.

An Hon. Member: Relevant? Important?

Mr. Rogers: Well, that's what I'm hoping for, Mr. Chairman.
Mr. Chairman, on page 127 of Budget 2010 the Executive Council

business plan outlines the continued implementation of the corporate communications policy for the government. We've heard bits and pieces based on some of the questions or partial questions that have been asked by some of the members across the way, so I'm wondering if the Premier might just give us a bit of a clearer indication of what the intent of this policy is all about.

Mr. Stelmach: The intent of the policy with respect to the corporate communications policy is laudable. We want to ensure that we have open communications across the provincial government and make sure that these are well co-ordinated and effective. They also have to be fiscally responsible but also responsive to the needs of Albertans. This includes not only communicating to Albertans but also actively listening to Albertans and making sure that not only is our message getting across to Albertans but also hearing from Albertans that we're getting the right message from them as well in a number of jurisdictions.

5:10

Now, many jurisdictions, including the federal government, use communications policies to help ensure the public receives timely, clear, and accurate information about the priorities, policies, programs, any changes that may be coming forward, and, of course, the services we offer on their behalf. A few detailed examples of this policy illustrate this. For instance, we try to consistently and clearly identify communications materials from the government of Alberta. That means everything from ads in papers to postings on the Internet, signs on government buildings. Of course, now we have the benefit of our new Alberta brand to help us in that identification. As outlined in the policy, we also aim to communicate with Albertans through a variety of ways, providing information in the formats that are most appropriate and accommodate different needs. We provide documents in large print for seniors or for those that are visually impaired. Again, that's also a part of the policy.

In terms of accommodating needs, we also take care to ensure we are sensitive to concerns of the public and respect privacy and individual rights. We always try to be as prompt, courteous, and responsive as possible.

There was a comment made about a particular staff member. McDougall Centre houses many public functions as a government building: AEDA, Alberta Economic Development Authority; the Calgary Homeless Foundation; and the Premier's office; and it's used for government meetings like caucus. Once again, the person the member refers to does not work for the Public Affairs Bureau.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for that clarification, Mr. Premier. Certainly, I think you have some laudable goals. I'm just wondering, in terms of taking this across all the ministries, how you'll be achieving this. Is this something that the PAB will be responsible for, and how do you expect to achieve that across ministries?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Public Affairs Bureau is the lead in administering this policy to make sure that across ministries we have the same message, concise, and it's ensuring that we're relying on every communications tool to make sure that that happens. Now, as the various branches do their jobs, the Public Affairs Bureau provides guidance. It provides support in a variety of areas.

In terms of cross-ministry initiatives we are moving more and more to cross-ministry initiatives with respect to a lot of the social benefits, whether it be seniors, lower income Albertans, et cetera. How do you collapse all that information that's going forward into a concise package that is presentable, understandable to Albertans that do rely on that information? That's the main priority, the main job of the Public Affairs Bureau, that they manage the delivery of that information and the message.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to raise a few issues. I am on page 125 of the business plans. I have a handful of issues, so I'll go back and forth with the Premier if that's okay.

Strategic priority 1 on page 125 speaks to strengthening agency governance, and it says, "Support the implementation of the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act," and it goes on from there. Mr. Premier, you may well know that there are concerns in the largest Alberta government agency, Alberta Health Services, that there are potential conflicts of interest. That arises in situations where there are physicians occupying positions in a public organization who are assigning contracts or allocating business to clinics in which they are investors. I'm thinking, for example, in Calgary. This has historically occurred – and I expect it's still occurring – around orthopaedic surgeries, for hip and knee replacement. I'm certain that it's still occurring in the cataract surgery industry in Calgary.

It's blatant violation of good governance. It would be not unlike, say, an assistant deputy minister of Transportation being able to channel road-building contracts to a company that he or his family are shareholders in. So I'm wondering if the Premier is prepared in this coming year, given his strategic priority 1, to take a hard stand on conflicts of interest in health care delivery and bring performance there up to the standard that would be accepted generally as a best practice for public governance.

Mr. Stelmach: Sure. Provide the names of the individuals that are in question, and we'll make sure that there is no conflict of interest.

Dr. Taft: I'll start with Dr. Stephen Miller – you can take notes on this – who is a very senior orthopaedic surgeon in Calgary and an investor in Network Health, HRG. For many years he was, in fact, chief of orthopaedics in the Calgary health region and, I suspect, may well still serve in an influential role in orthopaedic surgery allocations in Alberta Health Services.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're on the estimates?

Dr. Taft: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd suggest that you consult your *Beauchesne's* on what's allowed and what's not allowed in terms of relevance. I've cited the page, I've cited the paragraph, and then I quoted from the sentence that I'm referring to.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

Another name would be the Huangs out of Calgary. Their company is called Enterprise Universal. One of the Huang brothers was chief of ophthalmology for the Calgary health region for many years and was actively involved in – well, in fact, we have copies of correspondence – assigning surgeries to clinics that he owns. It's a

real concern to other people doing ophthalmological surgery, cataract surgery, in Calgary because they, frankly, feel like perhaps the Huangs have an inside track.

Those are two names, and I'd urge you to look into that.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Dr. Taft: Again, I would tell the minister who's heckling that I'm referring specifically to page 125 of the business plan, strategic priority 1. The sentence from which I'm working says: "Support the implementation of the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act." Okay? I hope the minister takes some lessons in *Beauchesne*.

Now I'll turn to page 126. Again, it's Executive Council business plan 2010. I'll quote from goal 1 of Executive Council: "Government policy and planning are coordinated and effective." It says under What It Means: "Decision makers need comprehensive and coordinated policy and planning advice and analysis to make strategic decisions."

Perhaps the most fundamental strategic decision that his government has to make is around securing its long-term fiscal security. I know this is an interest for the Premier. I suspect it's a priority. I'm thinking back to correspondence that was submitted to the government from Jack Mintz after his fiscal review indicating that the government needed to have some \$200 billion in reserve if it was to be able to sustain its spending in the long term.

I'm wondering if the Premier, as the leader of the government of Alberta and as the person who is in charge in Executive Council of "comprehensive and coordinated policy and planning," sees a way forward to securing or meeting the challenges of the Mintz report and ultimately obtaining a \$200 billion plus balance in the heritage fund or an equivalent. What's being done now to address those long-term strategic needs?

5:20

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to the two names that were mentioned, I heard the words: was a member. I'd like to know from you: is. Put that in writing, send it to my office, and I'll check it out. But make sure that it is a member. No, no. You've done that in the past, so just put it in writing and send it to me, and we'll get it to you in writing because, you know, using members' names and was a member, not is but was. However, in terms of the implementation of the Public Agencies Governance Act this is an area that we have undertaken through legislation and will be following up on under regulations.

About 50 per cent of the money, maybe even more of the money, that taxpayers give us goes through various boards and agencies to support the various programs through various authorities. The purpose, of course, is to ensure that we have the right people for the right job by requiring competence-based recruitment and appointments; encouraging agencies to improve their effectiveness by providing orientation, evaluation, and training to their members; requiring agencies to have a written statement of their mandate, roles and responsibilities, and code of conduct; clarifying the relationships and accountabilities between government and agencies; requiring periodic reviews of all agencies to ensure they are operating as effectively as possible and ensuring the public knows what steps are being taken to promote agency effectiveness.

This is, I believe, one of the few pieces of legislation that have been passed within the country of Canada. The Agency Governance Secretariat has been working with departments and agencies to develop regulations to accompany the act. The process of consultation has been extensive, and we have close to final versions of the regulations that we can implement.

You know, I can go from so many of the elements, from agency creation and review, agency inventory, mandate and roles documents, competency-based appointments, orientation to public-sector governance, governance fixed term length and maximum years of service for directors, codes of conduct, evaluation processes, agency member remuneration, and responding to the Auditor General recommendations, which was brought up here earlier, in terms of the compensation practices and some of the compensation of senior executives that agreements were entered into with.

The comment made I think it was with respect to the Mintz report. I am actually buoyed by the fact that the member across is serious now about putting some money aside because I remember in the last campaign part of their policy was to spend the money that we had in the sustainability fund on infrastructure within a matter of years. Glad that they've reversed their original policy decision from the last election, and they're going to be working with the government to build a long-term savings policy for future generations.

I guess that's it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Actually, we had a very extensive policy developed in which we took the initiative in the last election and in probably 18 months leading up to the election put in place a formula to save a substantial portion of nonrenewable resource revenues to get us towards a much larger heritage fund, which in the long term could sustain government spending. Is there any work going on in the government's strategic business plan or its other policy initiatives to look at that sort of option? Is there work being done on the feasibility of setting aside a portion of nonrenewable resource revenues into a permanent savings account that would be like an endowment fund for the government of Alberta?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Yes. It's a responsibility of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. He'll be working through the policy discussion both within government but also seeking an opinion from Albertans in terms of how the fund should be built and how it should be retained for future generations.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: I'll leave it at that. Thanks. Give somebody else a try.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just don't want to disappoint the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, so page 189 of the estimates. We're going to be going over the Public Affairs budget and the Executive Council budget and the branding initiative, specifically those first two items.

Again, to the salaries. I just have to get my head around this, and excuse me for not being able to do it sooner, but we want to compare apples to apples, and I agree with that. If you go to the other provinces, what they're paying their Deputy Minister for the Executive Council and their chief of staff, for the deputy minister Alberta's is \$531,000. B.C. is \$289,000; Ontario, \$239,000. If you look at the chief of staff, Alberta is at \$390,000; B.C., \$229,000.

Again, I think those are apples to apples, and just in this time, with the deficit being the size that it is, with having to lead by example, how can we excuse that difference? B.C. is a bigger province than us. It's bigger. It's about a million people bigger. How are we

paying our chief of staff and deputy minister that much more money?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, I'm going to go through it one more time. I agree that B.C. is a bigger province and, in fact, will be at about . . . [interjection] Well, he says better run. I guess with this latest budget their accumulated debt will be close to \$30 billion. So I guess, you know, if we wouldn't have had prudent planning, we would not have a sustainability fund to carry us through some very, very difficult economic times. You know, it's a matter of opinion as to who is better run. If he thinks that B.C. is a better run province with that accumulated debt, so be it. I mean, I'm not going to argue with the individual.

The salaries and benefits disclosure. Again, I read into the record earlier in terms of the amount that the member is referring to. There were two individuals in that position. One was leaving, and a new deputy started, so there were some vacation payouts, et cetera.

The base salary for a senior here is \$320,000; for the chief of staff it's \$253,000. What they've done is they've taken a 10 per cent reduction in their salary plus the elimination of the bonus, so with that, as I read into the record earlier, it's almost, I think, 200 and some-odd thousand dollars. I don't have all of the information in front of me, but that is a substantial reduction, plus the fact that over government \$1.4 million savings resulted from managerial people getting together and saying, "Look, we'll forgo part of our compensation," which was the bonus, and that was about \$1.4 million. That is just for the Executive Council. That is a significant reduction for Executive Council, \$1.4 million.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. It's on the record now.

Returning to the Public Affairs Bureau and the Executive Council office and their budgets, this is important because you said earlier on that the Public Affairs Bureau, nonpartisan, completely nonpartisan. You've established that Ms Powless does not work in the Public Affairs Bureau. Great. She does work out of the McDougall Centre during the day, you've said, so the question is: who pays for her salary? Is it the Executive Council, or is it the Public Affairs Bureau? If it's not Public Affairs, I'm assuming it's Executive Council during the day, her day job, as you referred to it. If so, if that is her day job, why was she up here this morning during the day covering our press conference in the press room downstairs? Did she have a day off today, and if so, why was she given a day off? I don't think today is a holiday.

5:30

Mr. Stelmach: Information is that she's not a member of the Executive Council.

But speaking about Executive Council, when I mentioned that \$1.4 million Executive Council bonus that has been eliminated, the total across government in compensation for management and, again, voluntarily given up in bonuses across government was a saving of \$40 million. That is a substantial saving in the budget.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. That's good information.

Again, she's an employee of the Executive Council. Will the Premier undertake to find out why she was here today covering an event in the legislative media room downstairs when she works out of the McDougall Centre? That's a partisan activity.

Mr. Stelmach: You know, I'm not even aware that a lady with that name was here in the building. I will get some further detail. I don't know what the issue there is. Anyway, we'll get the information.

Mr. Anderson: That's fair. I appreciate that.

Now, just to end off, I'd like to talk a little bit about the chief of staff and his role. I do have a good understanding, I feel, of what the deputy minister does in the Executive Council. I'm a little bit hazier on the chief of staff. What, Mr. Premier, do you feel is the chief of staff's role? You're smiling from ear to ear. It must be an important role. Could you tell me what that role is?

Mr. Stelmach: The chief of staff, of course, takes most of the arrows in terms of issues management with respect to, you know, cabinet and caucus, does similar work compared to executive assistants to ministers. He has a huge responsibility in ensuring that the cabinet is apprised of various issues and situations. It takes a lot of time. It's not an easy job. There are issues that arise, human resource issues to issues that may come forward at any particular time, any time of the day or night. It is not an easy role to fulfill, but he's doing an excellent job.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. So he's paid \$390,000, obviously, it sounds like, to oversee the staff that you have in government. That amount over and above what we pay you as Premier, what the government of Alberta pays you as Premier, is that hazard pay for taking those extra slings and arrows, perhaps? What's the reason for that extra amount?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure what extra amount he's talking about. My salary?

Mr. Anderson: No, no. Sorry. The amount that he makes more than you, Mr. Premier: why is that? Is that because of all the slings and arrows he has to take?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, I think the earlier questioning was that the Premier should be the highest paid official in government. That would be relative to a mayor paid higher than the CEO or the CAO of the municipality, you know, or a university professor paid less than the Premier, all of those things. We're attracting good, qualified people to various management positions, and we are in the median in terms of staffing in those particular areas. If that is the new policy for an individual for that party, then so be it. I guess we're either going to see a huge reduction one way or a huge increase for the position, whether it be a mayor or Premier, which I don't accept.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I think Albertans would feel a lot better. You know, I don't think anyone has a problem with what the Premier makes. I think he's one of the hardest working if not the hardest working person in this House, absolutely. There's no doubt about that. What I think Albertans have a problem with is that his chief of staff and his deputy minister and the people that are supposed to report to him are making that much more when they're supposed to be in the public service. But we'll move on.

The role of the chief of staff again. Is there any policy development role that the chief of staff plays? Is his job to communicate important things to cabinet and caucus, or does he also get himself involved in the development of policy, and to what extent would that involvement be?

Mr. Stelmach: Policy is developed by elected officials. The process is that members, government members have ideas, different policy objectives, maybe something reflecting the wishes of their particular constituency that they bring forward to caucus. Caucus then can take it forward to a cabinet policy discussion, where the minister

then will build a ministerial recommendation. That recommendation comes back to CPC. CPC then has a look at it, whether they support the ministerial recommendation. They may change some of it, may add to it, maybe delete some part of it. Once that cabinet policy committee makes a decision on it, then it goes to cabinet for final approval.

Then the co-ordination in terms of if it's policy, that has to be then announced provincially. That is co-ordinated through the Public Affairs Bureau to make sure that the information is disseminated to all Albertans. The policy may be with respect to an issue, perhaps, in Transportation or in any department, new legislation that's passed and the regulations that follow and how we communicate those with those authorities that will have to implement those regulations, or maybe changes in the Municipal Government Act that various municipalities will then have to abide by. So there's a lot of time spent in communicating all those policy decisions over to the PAB and getting the correct information out.

Mr. Anderson: We're paying the chief of staff this amount of money, so I'm just wondering. Again I go back to policy. I want to understand his role in the development of policy. I guess the problem I have or the concern I have, the thing that's unclear is, for example, in the *Calgary Herald* the other day the chief of staff was quoted as saying that he wants to make sure that the government consults more with Albertans as we go forward on various different topics. What the topics are, that's policy, so we won't go there, but he wants to consult more. I'm wondering: when he said that, I'm assuming the Premier would say in that case that the chief of staff was talking that the Premier would consult more with Albertans going forward on these difficult policy decisions. Or is he talking about the chief of staff consulting more with Albertans as we go forward on these difficult policy decisions?

Mr. Stelmach: We're going to have quite an extensive policy discussion this spring and into summer, and that is with respect to following up on the recommendations that have been brought forward by the health committee, that is chaired very ably, that brought forward a number of recommendations. Those recommendations then go to a policy field committee. We will hear representations from Albertans in terms of: how do we build an act that reflects health provision services in this province for seniors, acute care, emergency? Is the health care relevant, or can we add to it, add a few more principles? All of those things are just an example of the consultation that will take place.

I feel that we're the closest now, in all the years that I've had the pleasure of representing the constituency, to getting full input from Albertans. Initial input was from, of course, the health care providers, the advocates that brought forward recommendations. Now those recommendations are going forward to a full policy discussion, again, something that this government introduced. We never had policy field committees before. It has been, I believe, an improvement and an opportunity for Albertans to bring forward their views on various issues that go before the policy field committee.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Chair, time? How much time left?

The Deputy Chair: You've got over five minutes left.

Mr. Anderson: Five minutes. Okay.

I guess that moving along on this with regard to the executive, I want to understand, too, the Executive Council and the budget that we spend on it and its role with regard to policy-making and how caucus relates to that Executive Council decision. For example, to

put it into context, you have a caucus meeting on, say, the budget, and you approve certain parameters in the budget. After a caucus makes approvals and it goes to Executive Council, are the recommendations of caucus often superceded by Executive Council as that process goes forward? I mean, the budget document I remember before I left the government is very different from the one that was announced in the House, yet there was no caucus meeting in between. I'm wondering: does Executive Council have the ability or the power to change that, and does the chief of staff have any role at all in making those changes? They don't seem to be going through the elected representatives unless you're the one making those changes or approving them.

5:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, with respect to the budget I think we've got to go back to British parliamentary practice. This caucus had an open discussion in terms of the goals and objectives of government and funding their priorities. Definitely, out of that discussion health was a priority; postsecondary education was a priority. I heard good discussion about infrastructure as well. We heard a considerable amount of good, positive information from caucus members, but the final budget document is in the total purview, control of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. The reason I say that is that there may be some budget implications with respect to tax changes, maybe tax increases, maybe tax decreases, maybe new forms of taxation, you know, maybe a tax put on gasoline, for instance, all of those things.

Well, as I said before in this House when the question was raised, I believe, in question period, I would have had to fire the Minister of Finance and Enterprise if he had discussed these changes with a small group of elected government members and given the information well in advance of these changes in the budget. That, I submit to you, Mr. Chairman, is not part of British parliamentary practice.

The information in terms of goals, objectives, where is the priority spending given a limited revenue stream: those generally remain with caucus, but the final determination is always made by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise in delivering the budget in this House.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. That makes sense. I guess the question would be: bringing it back to what we were discussing, does Executive Council have an effect on what the minister of finance would put out in their final budget?

Mr. Stelmach: The cabinet, because it's Executive Council, certainly works with the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, but in terms of delivery the final detail in that budget speech is up to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Cabinet does have the authority to discuss it openly and give suggestions to the minister of finance, but all of those things are maintained in strict confidence around the cabinet table because, once again, in British parliamentary practice Executive Council is the government.

In this particular case in this government and in this caucus we had very extensive discussions in terms of the goals and priorities, on where we want to see increased spending, where we want to see reductions and in what departments, and that was made around the general caucus table. The very specifics, though, still are within Executive Council and within the purview of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Mr. Anderson: I guess I'll just say it this way. In the Executive Council did the current minister of finance bring forward these changes, or were they determined before he came into his current position by Executive Council?

Mr. Stelmach: All discussions of Executive Council are confidential.

Mr. Anderson: That's what I thought. That's it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I would like to go back. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview started by questioning the government priorities on page 126, that again government policy and planning are co-ordinated and effective. I guess the Premier answered a little bit earlier that we are going to come out of this the best of any province. I don't think there's an Albertan that isn't grateful for the sustainability fund, but the key of the sustainability fund and what the Wildrose Alliance and the Liberals were saying is that what we need to do is have a big enough sustainability fund that it is sustainable. The spending is out of control, and the Premier says: well, we're going to come out of this the best of any province. Does he actually have a date when this is going to turn around and our revenue is going to balance the budget?

Currently we're not the best run, in my humble opinion, when we have a \$4.7 billion deficit that's acknowledged and a true deficit of \$7.5 billion. We have, well, a liability to the teachers' pension fund of currently \$7 billion. The next Premier of this province is going to inherit a debt that is going to be enormous. Are we going to be able to pay it off? I guess that with the Premier talking about the importance of renegotiating because of boom times in the oil and gas industry, because the salaries really boomed as well in the Executive Council in that same period, has the Premier considered renegotiating the salary of his Executive Council?

Mr. Stelmach: There was so much there from all over the place. For the matter of the record, we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a large sustainability fund, \$17 billion. We are also the only jurisdiction in Canada that has another, additional savings fund, which is the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, which, I might add, is rebounding very, very quickly, much faster than originally anticipated given the losses and the economic downturn. You know, all of us have lost significant dollars in our RRSPs and our investments during that difficult period. We're going to see the heritage savings trust fund come back, and there are policies that could be changed with respect to the heritage savings trust fund. Do we leave all the money in? Do we just inflation-proof it? All of these things will be discussed by Albertans.

I will say, though, that there was some mention that, well, we should have listened to someone that said, "You put all this money in Alberta heritage savings trust fund to build the fund, and your operational fund should only be 10 per cent of your operating," which would have been a little less than \$4 billion. Well, there is no one in this House or anywhere that's going to come forward and say: "You know what? You should have anticipated the most severe economic downturn since the '30s." Nobody did that.

The reason we put that much money in the sustainability fund, the \$17 billion, is that we already knew the volatility of our oil and gas. You can't go from \$75 to \$147 and then down to \$30. In fact, I remember being questioned in this House by the opposition, who said: well, you know, you capped oil royalties at \$120, and it's now \$147, and you're losing money. Everybody got excited. Well, within months it was down to \$30, and in fact at the end of the year we hit what we thought would be an anticipated average for oil, around \$72, for that particular year. That's good budgeting.

The other thing is that we are debt free. We learned a lesson. We

paid those debts off in the '90s, and I'm one of the members in this House who went through the pain of getting there. It wasn't easy, and we're not going down that road again.

The other thing is that we have the most competitive taxes in the country of Canada. While we suffered through this economic downturn, there was unemployment. There's no doubt about it. It was across areas from forestry to agriculture, oil and gas, tourism, you know, with fewer people travelling. Our small business suffered through all of this. During that period of time this province still contributed \$21.1 billion to Ottawa, and collectively over the last 10 years it's \$131 billion. We're still at \$200 per capita, about \$700 million, short on our Canada health transfer even after contributing all of those. I've mandated the Minister of Finance and Enterprise to start working with the federal government on how we can correct this fiscal imbalance.

All this talk about saving \$200 billion. I've asked the presenter of that particular policy: how are you going to defend it if you have such a large savings account when you know you have people down east that just want to get their fingers on it at some time because they're going to have accumulated debts in the billions? I mean, Ontario's will probably be \$200 billion, Quebec's probably \$200 billion or more. That doesn't include their Crown corporation debt, Mr. Chair, not one dollar of Crown corporation debt.

5:50

What is going to happen to the country of Canada if we don't get on the road to recovery and balanced budgets? We're going to do this in this province in spite of the fact that we took such a huge hit economically. We're going to be balanced and we're going to be back in the black by 2012-13. We're going to be the first jurisdiction to do it in Canada. We're going to have money in our sustainability account. While others are going to be adding to their debt, we're going to have money in the bank. We're going to be able to attract even more investment because we're going to be the most innovative and competitive economy in all of Canada and, indeed, North America. I promise that to every Albertan.

Mr. Hinman: Will the Premier promise not to run in the next election, then, if he's not back in the black? I'm almost amused at some of the statements that he's making there that we're not running a deficit.

There were a lot of nobodies – and I was one of those nobodies – who said that we shouldn't spend more than 25 per cent of our resource revenue on our year-to-year budgeting. We were way over

that. There are many economists that directed that to him. I will agree: this government doesn't have the courage to stand up and defend a \$200 billion heritage trust fund. But the purpose of that is so that if you look at the average return on investment of 6 per cent, it would be roughly \$12 billion, which would replace the revenue that would be lost when our resource revenue is depleted. There are many nobodies, Mr. Chair, who have given instructions, but just like the instructions on not changing the royalty framework – and I was one of those nobodies who said that – this Premier didn't listen to it.

My question on all of that. He talks about the heritage trust fund; he talks about the sustainability fund. The sustainability fund is there when you can sustain your spending. This government is not able to sustain that spending. It's off the chart, whether it's infrastructure and other things. It was burning a hole in their pocket, but thankfully there wasn't enough capacity in the industry to even spend all that money, so they had to save it. But what did he . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now immediately rise and report progress on the estimates of Executive Council. I would invite the staff to leave now.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration resolutions for Executive Council relating to the 2010-2011 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: All those members in concurrence with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

Issue 15

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome. I would ask all members to remain standing after the prayer so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Mr. Thomas (Tom) George Thurber
October 26, 1934, to March 7, 2010

The Speaker: Mr. Thomas (Tom) George Thurber, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 618, passed away on Sunday, March 7, 2010, at the age of 75 years. Mr. Thurber was first elected in the election held March 20, 1989, and served three terms until March 11, 2001. During his years of service he represented the constituencies of Drayton Valley-Calmar and Drayton Valley for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his terms of office Tom Thurber served on Executive Council as Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services from June 30, 1993, to December 21, 1994, and as Minister of Municipal Affairs from December 21, 1994, to March 26, 1997. He also served on the standing committees on Law and Regulations, Private Bills, Public Accounts, and Public Affairs.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family who shared the burdens of public office.

Tom Thurber, in his own inimitable way, has asked that there be no memorial nor funeral for him because he did not want people standing around talking about him.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. member Tom Thurber as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an honour it is for me today as one of the 2.2 million Albertans that are sharing in the rich ancestry of the European Union and one of those states to be able to welcome somebody in our midst to this Chamber who comes representing that wonderful European Union. Our history in Alberta is rich and richer by far because of the association we have of the people that are descendants from one of these countries, and together they form Alberta's fourth-largest market. It's a real honour today to introduce His Excellency Ambassador Matthias Brinkmann, who arrives here as head of the delegation of the European Union to Canada, who has recently with his wife and four children taken up residence in Ottawa. Accompanying him is Luigi Scarpa de Masellis, who is the adviser, economic and commercial affairs, from the embassy in Ottawa. I would ask them to please rise in your gallery so that we can give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 30 young visitors from Aldergrove elementary school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Christine Steil, and by one of the parents, Mrs. Kathy McDonald. We had a good, long chat with these bright young people about what they wanted to do. I was quite impressed and amazed by their understanding of the process. They were asking questions about Committee of the Whole and laws and bills and how long it took to pass a law. In fact, I thought: well, geez, they know almost as much as their MLA if not more. These young people want to grow up to be veterinarians, snowboarders, soccer players, pharmacists, firefighters, and doctors. But to tell you the truth, with their knowledge of the Legislature I think we've got a bunch of future leaders sitting up there. I'd like to ask all of my colleagues to welcome these young people to the House and ask all of my friends to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House visitors from my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They are 14 wonderful students filled with passion for education from St. Matthew school, where with pride they emulate their school motto: Together toward Tomorrow. Indeed, togetherness and unity are needed for all of our tomorrows. The students are in the members' gallery, and they are joined by their teachers, Mrs. Karen Baniak and Mrs. MaryAnn Goetz, and parent helper Mr. Trevor Busch. I would ask that the students of St. Matthew school please rise with their teachers and parent helper to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Alberta Legislature.

Thank you.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce six individuals who are joining us today for a tour of the Legislature. They are participating in the government of Alberta's leadership program, which is a comprehensive 18-month program that encourages participants to develop their own leadership style. Participants experience leadership education, assessment and feedback, developmental experiences, and a chance to build new relationships with colleagues and mentors. I had the opportunity earlier today to meet with these people. They're interested, they're engaged, and they care what we do here. They are Carla Kolke and Anita Sharma from Alberta Justice, Sylvia Lepki from Employment and Immigration, Kathleen Pate from Energy, Kirk Wolstenholme from Sustainable Resource Development, Tyler Wightman from Municipal Affairs. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests seated in the members' gallery today. First, Mr. Amson Saintimé, president of the Haitian Community Services Centre, and Miss Christina Tertulien, administrative assistant from the same organization.

The Haitian Community Services Centre represents over 250 families in Edmonton. It fosters positive development of the local Haitian community and helps and guides them in settling and integrating into life in Edmonton. Since the earthquake in Haiti the

centre has been very active in assisting these families in finding and creating support for loved ones in Haiti.

Accompanying them today is Ms Laura Roberts, communicator and advocate with the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative. This co-op was created and operated by 40 community members and workers from 18 local immigrant and refugee communities in Edmonton. Currently it is the only workers' co-operative in Alberta. The co-op is involved in providing culturally and linguistically relevant holistic family support, community development, system navigation, and advocacy to over 1,500 families.

I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three guests in the public gallery. David Goa is the director of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life. That's at the U of A's Augustana campus in Camrose. He's both a philosopher and a teacher who has spent 30 years of his life teaching religious studies at the U of A and also doing field research work in the study of culture at the Royal Alberta Museum. Along with him are his friends Faris Kaya and Riza Akcali. They are, as I said, seated in the public gallery. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

1:40

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly and especially the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere one of my staff members from government members' communication, Ms Jessica Powless. This lady with blond hair supports all members of Calgary caucus, which once included both of our former colleagues. Ms Powless keeps our Calgary members up to date on current events, news stories, messaging, and media as well as other duties prescribed by myself, her supervisor. Ms Powless is a valued member of our team, and I would ask her to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, each day I've been introducing members of the professional film and television community by name, and each day more of them have been coming to show their concern for the competitiveness of this sector in Alberta. Today there are too many of them to name, so I would ask them to please rise as a group. They're representing a wide cross-section of people who work in the film and television industry in Alberta. I'm very pleased to welcome you to the Assembly. Please, I would ask that you join me in extending that welcome to everyone.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the very talented staff members of the Wildrose Alliance caucus. If they would stand as they are called. With us today are Ms Barb Currie, legislative assistant to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore; Mr. James Johnson, researcher for the Wildrose caucus;

and Mr. Jeff Trynchy, legislative assistant for myself and for the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. They've been of great assistance to us in keeping us on our toes, and we're having a good time up there. I'd like for them to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Seniors' Consultation in Calgary

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an ongoing effort to foster dialogue between government and community, I had the privilege of organizing a function that involved several seniors' groups in my community and the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. This particular function was also attended by the Member for Calgary-Mackay, the Member for Calgary-East, and the Member for Calgary-Fort. As well, parts of the day were attended by the Member for Calgary-McCall. The combined efforts of Marichu Antonio of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary and Lalita Singh of the United Way made this meeting a great success.

I would like to thank all the seniors' organizations for participating and for making our community that much stronger. Bear with me, Mr. Speaker. There are many of them: the Bangladesh Canada Association, the Calgary Hambastagi Cultural Association, the Canadian Hispanic Seniors Society, the Council of Sikh Organizations, the Filipino Christian Fellowship, FOCUS on Seniors, the Filipino Calgarian Seniors Club, the Guru Ravidass seniors' society, INCA seniors' society, the Indo-Canadian immigrant seniors' organization, the North Calgary Cultural Association, the Somali Canadian Society of Calgary, the Tibetan Association of Alberta, the United Sudanese-Canadian Enhancement Society, Portail de l'immigration association de Calgary – I'm sure I didn't do that justice – the Young Once Seniors Association of Calgary, the Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, the Golden Generation club, the Calgary Korean Association, the Calgary Vietnamese veterans' association, the Royal Women Association, and the Indo-Canadian seniors' society as well as the Peruvian association.

Mr. Speaker, it's our seniors that built this province, and quite frankly it's their generosity and their hard work that leads and helps us, really, to ensure that our future generations foster a spirit of caring as they did.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2010 Arctic Winter Games

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week I had the privilege of attending the 2010 Arctic Winter Games in Grande Prairie, which run from March 6 through 13. What an amazing celebration of circumpolar peoples, youth sports, and cultural excellence.

The opening ceremonies were reminiscent of the Vancouver Olympics, with tremendous creativity and talent expressed in unique cultural presentations. Key organizers were the Grande Prairie 2010 Winter Games Society, Grande Prairie city council, and the county of Grande Prairie, with several thousand volunteers as well as support from the provincial and federal governments. I was thrilled to hand out medals to a number of world-class athletes who came to compete in events such as skiing, snowshoeing, dog mushing, high kicking, and many more. In fact, the medals themselves are quite beautiful, shaped like ulus, the traditional Inuit knife. What a thrill

for the young people to earn and a life-changing experience for most of the competitors.

Participating athletes came from the Yukon, Alaska, Quebec, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Greenland, Scandinavia, and Russia. It took three years of planning and effort to transform Grande Prairie into the host city, and all Albertans should be very proud of the results.

Dream, Achieve, Inspire: this was the motto of the 2010 Arctic Winter Games, and the people of Grande Prairie and their guests from across Canada and the world embraced these words with passion. Naturally, I am rooting for team northern Alberta to bring home the most ulus, but no matter the final result, we can all take pride in Grande Prairie and her people for a remarkable achievement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Chester Ronning Centre

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to venture to guess that most of my colleagues here are probably like me. Some days they get up and wonder: "What am I doing? What am I accomplishing?" You know, we come from many different belief systems, many different traditions, and sometimes it's challenging to kind of just maintain a handle on where we're headed.

About four or five years ago the Chester Ronning Centre was launched at Augustana campus of the University of Alberta in Camrose. The centre strives to cultivate a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and public life and faith. The centre was the first research institution in Canada to study this intersection of religion and public life and provide us with a better understanding of these issues. It's vital to have a truly comprehensive knowledge of this intersection of beliefs for us to understand the events that are shaping our world.

Although the Ronning centre is located in little Camrose, director David Goa, whom I just introduced, and his associates realize that the work extends far beyond the walls of that academic institution. Routine meetings with members of various religious traditions are beneficial in providing an understanding of how those traditions are positioning their citizens in this changing world.

The Ronning centre is named after a great Canadian and a great Camrosian, Chester Ronning, who lived in Camrose for years, was president of Camrose Lutheran College, was a member of this Assembly, and also was one of Canada's most distinguished diplomats. His most notable work was bridging communications between North America and China, which facilitated the Canadian government's recognition of the new Chinese government in 1970. He strove for a better understanding between east and west, and now this centre with his name strives for a better understanding of issues where faith and public life intersect.

It's an honour to have that centre in my constituency, and I'd like to thank Mr. Goa and his associates for their work. Thank you.

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

Calgary Vietnamese Tet Festival Celebration

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's Vietnamese community chose a unique and very meaningful way to bring in the lunar new year, or Tet Festival, this year. The Calgary Vietnamese Youth Group, the Vietnamese Students Association, and the Association for the Encouragement of Learning brought together 700 people for a celebration focused on youth education, support, and achievements.

The event started with a keynote speaker, Dr. Kim Nguyen-Lam, who shared her inspirational story of struggle, overcoming barriers, and success. It is also a story of community mobilization, institutional change, and struggle for full participation. From refugee to faculty member, associate director of the Center for Language Minority Education and Research at California State University to state panel member related to teacher credentialing and preparation programs and policies, and on board of trustees of the Garden Grove unified school board district, Dr. Nguyen-Lam is a tireless leader in the promotion of educational equity for racial and linguistic minority students, families, and communities. Her appointment as the chief superintendent of a school district, which was rescinded due to her race, sparked a community movement to examine issues of diversity and institutional discrimination.

This new year gathering also included 17 career mentors who provided advice to students and a presentation from Alberta Advanced Education and Technology's Learning Clicks ambassador, who also distributed interactive Learning Clicks CDs to the 400 youth in attendance. Representatives from the University of Calgary, SAIT, and Mount Royal University were also there to provide information to the youth and their families. The event concluded with scholarship awards given to 276 students from grades 7 to 12, who also received a letter of congratulations from Alberta's Minister of Education.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Member for Calgary-Montrose, who was also in attendance, agrees with me that it was a wonderful event of community connection, reflection, learning, and celebration. I'd like to thank the many leaders and volunteers for organizing this event that benefits the entire community. Thank you.

1:50

The Clerk: Oral Question Period.

The Speaker: Mr. Clerk, would you just hold the clock?

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we commence Oral Question Period today, the chair would like to advise the House that yesterday afternoon the Speaker's office received a copy of a House leaders' agreement signed by the Government House Leader and the House leaders for the Official Opposition, the New Democrat and the Wildrose Alliance caucuses, and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

In brief, this agreement proposes a new question period rotation and the addition of two more members' statements per week. As indicated in the chair's February 8, 2010, statement on the subject of the rotation of questions, which can be found at pages 16 to 19 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, the chair is always amenable to agreement among the caucuses, but it must be acceptable to all of the parties in the Assembly. In the absence of such agreement, which materialized only yesterday, the chair devised a scheme for the rotation of question period to ensure the smooth operation of the Assembly while recognizing the changes in caucus numbers.

The rotation outlined in the February 8, 2010, statement ends today and will be replaced by the rotation provided for in the House leaders' agreement outlined in the memo from the Government House Leader to House leaders dated March 4, 2010, and subsequently sent to the Speaker by the Government House Leader under cover of a March 9, 2010, memorandum.

The chair wishes to advise members that commencing today the rotation of questions during Oral Question Period shall be as

follows. The Official Opposition will continue to be entitled to the first three main questions each day. With respect to the routine on days 1 and 3, the Wildrose Alliance will be entitled to the fourth question, the New Democrats will be entitled to the fifth, and it would then alternate between the Official Opposition and government members until the 12th question, which would be asked by the Wildrose Alliance. The Official Opposition will be entitled to the 13th, 15th, and 17th questions, and members of the government caucus will be entitled to the 14th, 16th, 18th, and any subsequent questions, time permitting.

On day 2 the same sequence will apply except for the 12th question, which will be asked by the New Democrats.

Finally, on day 4 the rotation will shift slightly to accommodate the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. To be clear, the fourth question will go to the Wildrose Alliance, the fifth question will go to the New Democrats, and the independent member will be entitled to the sixth question. The questions will then alternate between the Official Opposition and members of the government caucus until the 13th question, which will be asked by the New Democrats. The Liberals will be entitled to the 14th, 16th, and 18th questions. Government members will be entitled to ask the 15th and 17th questions and any questions after the 18th.

To recap, for our four-day rotation, 18 questions per day schedule the Official Opposition will see their number of daily questions increase from eight to nine. The Wildrose Alliance caucus will get six questions instead of their current eight, a reduction of two. The ND caucus will get six questions instead of their current eight, a reduction of two. The PC private members' number will remain the same, with six questions on days 1, 2, and 3 and five on day 4. The independent member remains with one question per four days.

The chair also notes that House leaders agreed to eliminate preambles to supplementary questions. The chair will continue to undertake a vigilant watch of the clock to ensure that questions and answers do not exceed 35 seconds and will reinstate the rule prohibiting preambles for supplementaries. The agreement makes it very clear that there are to be no preambles to the supplementaries, and the supplementaries are to be on the same subject and purpose of the main question.

One last item noted in the agreement is the desire to increase the number of members' statements by two each week, with one being added to the Routine on Monday and the second on Thursday. This will require an amendment to the standing orders, so the chair would anticipate that this would be brought forward in the very near future by way of a government motion to be debated in the Assembly.

In the light of the new reality brought about by the House leaders' agreement, it seems only fitting that today be considered day 1. The revised schedule is on the members' desks. At the appropriate time in the Routine I will table the agreement, and following Orders of the Day members will receive copies of the agreement that I hope all will read carefully so that they can more completely understand all aspects of the agreement. This agreement is not precedent setting and does not bind either the chair or the Assembly and may change as new realities arrive.

Oral Question Period

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

Review of MLA Compensation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition for years has been fighting for an independent review of MLA salary and benefits. The need for this review was further highlighted when

the Premier and his cabinet voted themselves huge raises after the last election. While we won the battle with the passing of Motion 501, there are still unanswered questions about the scope of review of this committee. To the Premier: will the recommendations of the committee be binding?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I met with the hon. leader the other day, I believe at a social function here in the city of Edmonton, and I asked him if we can get an opportunity to just sit down and chat about the motion that was passed, since it was moved by an hon. member from the opposition. We're going to do whatever we can to work with the opposition parties and put the right committee in place. That information, I believe, goes to a committee that's chaired by you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the MLA pay committee's scope include the extra pay that government members receive for sitting on internal cabinet policy committees?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, I asked the hon. leader to sit down and work through all of these questions that they might have and also have input on what process we follow and what's on the table for review.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: will the MLA pay committee's scope include travel, accommodation, and hosting expenses that are claimed by both members and their assistants?

Mr. Stelmach: That comes out of the Legislative Assembly, so that's a completely different matter. But I will say, though, in terms of ministerial expenses, that I believe we're the only jurisdiction that on a regular basis puts all the expenses on the web on a regular interval. No matter what expenses are incurred in the office, all Albertans know of them almost immediately.

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

School Closures

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Government utilization policy is forcing school boards to drain the city core of schools in favour of the suburbs. At the same time, cities like Edmonton and Calgary, in keeping with the government's own land-use framework, are trying to reduce urban sprawl and revitalize their cores, which is hard to do without good schools to attract people to the core. To the Premier: will the Premier commit to an expeditious review of these contradictory education and municipal policies before real damage is done to core neighbourhoods in Calgary and Edmonton?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not government policy that determines whether a school is closed or not. It's a question of what the most appropriate educational opportunities for students are. School boards have a responsibility to make sure they use their resources well to make sure that they have the best opportunity for students, and they do a good job at it. Edmonton public school board, with the city centre school project, closed some schools, yes, but made sure that the receiving schools provided a better educational opportunity for the students in that area.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the last Minister of Education mentioned reviewing a school closure situation in 2005 and nothing happened, will the Premier end the empty promises and temporarily halt school closures in Edmonton and Calgary until this review is done?

Mr. Stelmach: As the minister mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we're going to do what's best in the interests of the education of the children.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're clearly not talking to each other in the government. Given the government's policies for school utilization are on a collision course with municipal development, why won't the Premier take this issue seriously and put in place a school utilization policy that actually works with our municipalities instead of against them?

2:00

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can let the hon. member know that I have had many, many conversations with school boards and with mayors and municipalities about how we can better use our schools both as a school facility and as a community facility. We're working very closely with them in terms of how surplus school properties can be utilized, how they can be maintained where necessary in order to be reused as a school when the neighbourhood regenerates. All of that work and that communication is actually happening.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Patient Safety Report

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday afternoon the Alberta Health Quality Council and Alberta Health Services released a one-and-a-half-page summary of a 60-page investigation into four patient safety incidents at the Children's hospital in Calgary. The Health Quality Council wanted the full report released; Alberta Health Services is blocking that release. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister exercise his authority and order Alberta Health Services to release the full, unedited report?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken with the Health Quality Council. I've also spoken with Alberta Health Services not long ago. I've asked them to work together immediately to provide as much information as they possibly can and to release a full, detailed report regarding this matter as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Accountability cannot happen without full disclosure, and the Health Quality Council drafted the report so that it could be released without violating privacy. Mr. Minister, why the secrecy?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's no secrecy. The fact is that you have to respect the parameters of the Alberta Evidence Act, you have to take into account the Health Information Act and what its parameters are, and then you have to contact family members. You have to work with physicians. You have to be very careful in these matters, and I'm sure the hon. member knows that. Those issues are being looked at as we speak, and I've asked for the full, detailed report to be released within 10 days.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this report was concluded in October. The Health Quality Council took full account of the issues that the minister has provided. The minister has made himself complicit in this cover-up. Why won't he stand behind the Alberta Health Quality Council and have this report released? Who's he trying to protect?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member didn't hear what I just said. I said that I've spoken with both of these parties. I've asked them to go through this issue very thoroughly. They are doing that as we speak, and in less than 10 days they will have the full report issued to the public as requested by me the minister.

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

Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Isn't this fun? Question, question, question. They never have answers. This is going to be fun.

This government seems to think that the world revolves around them. The government's bullying and cavalier attitude has a direct effect on hard-working Albertans, employers, investors, and small-business owners. This government yanked the rug out from underneath the most significant industries despite repeated warnings from those who actually understood the entire process. My question is to the Premier. Are the elected government MLAs going to have time to review and give meaningful input to the new, new, new, new, new royalty framework?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there was a committee established to review the competitiveness of the oil and gas sector. That report and the recommendations: the two people appointed, working with government and industry, have come to a number of recommendations. Those recommendations came forward to the minister. The minister has apprised cabinet of those recommendations, and then they will be moving forward for further review by caucus.

Mr. Hinman: Well, is that going to be a three-hour review or a couple of weeks?

Again to the Premier. The Department of Energy recently posted an unusually large block of land for bid. We'll know the results later today. Has the government been holding back on the release of this competitiveness review to try and take credit for a possible record land sale today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how holding back a report is going to either increase the land sales or decrease land sales. The companies that are bidding on land will make their own business decisions based on the current environment: the price of gas, the price of oil, some of the new technology that's being applied. But I also have to stress the fact that there are very good incentive programs, that were put in place just about a year ago, that are certainly supporting the increase in land sales over the last few months.

Mr. Hinman: It's interesting that we need to change it, then.

My question for the Premier is simple. What does he tell the tens of thousands of Albertans who lost their jobs and had their life savings drained to survive because the government got greedy and actually shrunk the economic pie with the great royalty robbery? What are you going to tell them?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've gone through a huge economic downturn. I remember sitting in this particular Assembly when oil was \$145, \$147 a barrel, and it dropped down to \$35, natural gas from \$10 down to \$3, and the fact that there have been significant finds in a number of American states, huge, huge reserves of gas in shale that we'll now be able to drill for and frac properly – those are changing conditions within the North American continent, and I said that we're going to be innovative and competitive.

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

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday a federal official testified in court that birds have been landing on tailings lakes and dying for at least 20 years. The provincial and federal governments receive reports on wildlife deaths every year, and I have one such report here, dated March 31, '06, to Alberta Environment. Allowing animals to come in contact with this waste means that industry has been in breach of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act for a long period of time. My question is to the Minister of Environment. How long have you known that oil sands companies were in breach of the act?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well, as I believe that we've even discussed it in this Assembly, that we have ongoing status of the impact that industrial development has on wildlife. Unfortunately, everything that we do as mankind in this world has some impact on wildlife. What we're dealing with here in Alberta is a trial that is dealing with the absence of mitigation to prevent undue harm to wildlife.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this minister should familiarize himself with the act that he's sworn to uphold.

Given that the industry files reports outlining wildlife deaths every year and knowing that industry had significant and recurring breaches of this act for decades, why did this minister not act sooner?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'll simply repeat what I said in answer to his first question. There are instances that, frankly, are unavoidable. Every day there are instances where the interaction of humans and animals results in the loss of life to the animals, whether it's through incidents on our highways or a myriad of other things. There are some instances that are simply unavoidable. What we're dealing with here is whether or not there was sufficient mitigation in place to avoid those kinds of interactions.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. Given that hundreds of birds have surely died at oil sands sites and there are 20 or more just like this one, it's clear that this government is more concerned with protecting its friends than it is with protecting our environment and our international reputation. I want to know from the minister when this government will finally realize that this is damaging our international reputation and that it's the fact that they continue to put their friends ahead of the environment.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, what's most damaging to our international relationships are irresponsible statements like that.

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

Support for the Film Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Film Advisory Council has AMPIA producers, film commissioners, and unions working together to advise the minister. Unfortunately, the minister has not attended even one meeting in the last two years, and the MLA position that was on the council was cancelled. After a three-year consultation the council developed a business case for the minister. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why has the minister abandoned the three-year Alberta film development business case? What happened to it?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to clarify one thing, I haven't been invited by the Alberta Film Advisory Council to a meeting until last week. I will be attending a meeting with them on the 29th of March. I have representatives from my department that attend those meetings on a regular basis.

As far as the business case, it was deemed when we sat down with the film producers and representatives from the guilds that some of the aspects of the business case weren't relevant and weren't going to go forward, so we have moved on.

2:10

Ms Blakeman: Of course you're invited. It's your council.

Given that our film industry needs both indigenous Alberta productions and the work for many Albertans through Hollywood big-budget movies, why is the minister continuing to pit the two sides against one another?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I've never pitted the two sides against one another. If that's the assertion the hon. member would make, ask somebody from AMPIA if I ever did anything disparaging to any member of a guild or union. Our crews, our grips, our camera people, our sound people are some of the very best, hard-working people in the entire world, and they're recognized as such internationally. I would never do anything to disparage that. We need to work together. I've consistently said that we need work together and would continue to work with those people who want to.

Ms Blakeman: You need to watch your Facebook postings, then.

Will the minister show leadership to the industry, commit to attending meetings of his own advisory council, re-establish the MLA co-chair, and work to rebuild this sector?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I as minister responsible for the film and television and digital industry will take responsibility for meeting with the representatives of that group. I don't think it's necessary for us to have an MLA co-chair. I will become active with that, as I have continued to be, and will continue to meet with anybody in the industry who's willing to meet with me.

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

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

(continued)

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the news and the opposition have focused on concerns stemming from tailings ponds in our oil sands region. My question is for the Minister of Environment. What is this minister's response to those who say that we need to intervene and put an end to tailings ponds?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no denying that there are

significant challenges associated with the development of oil sands, not the least of which are tailings ponds. But it's important to remember what the purpose of the tailings ponds is in the first place, and that is to prevent the process water from ever entering into our natural water courses. Safe, alternative ways of dealing with this waste water are constantly being improved, and the bottom line is that we are committed to ensuring that we continually have improvement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In order that concerns on tailings ponds be dealt with, government needs to play a key role and work with industry. What meaningful actions is this minister taking to ensure that the management of tailings ponds continues to improve?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are in fact taking action now. We're well along a path to long-term storage of tailings, and the interim directive 074, that was jointly developed by Alberta Environment along with the ERCB, talks about how we are going to manage tailings on a go-forward basis. There are really two issues. One issue is: how do we prevent the development of new tailings through new technology? Then the secondary: how do we eventually eliminate the existing tailings?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that my family lives very close to the Athabasca River, and the health of that river is very important to all of us. Potential seepage of tailings remains a problem. What actions is the minister taking to protect the environment from tailings pond seepage into the Athabasca River or our groundwater aquifers?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have the most intensive investigation that is known to ensure that we have the ability to detect seepage where it would exist. As I've said a number of times in this Legislature, there is no evidence that there is any seepage that is coming into contact with the Athabasca River. We are confident that the tailings ponds as they exist today are safe receptacles. That being said, we are committed to the elimination of those tailings ponds.

Kainai Community Correctional Centre

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on February 9 the Kainai Community Corrections Society, who operate a corrections facility for Alberta's aboriginal population, were told they would have to close their doors on March 31 because this government would no longer provide funding to the facility. To the Solicitor General. After meeting with the people from Kainai, they indicated that the ministry was pleased with the performance of the facility. Given that, I was wondering why the corrections facility was being closed when so many aboriginal offenders could benefit from its existence.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. It allows me to clarify that there is absolutely no performance issue involved here. It's a simple matter of the fact that our minimum security inmate population has dropped radically as a result of conditional sentences, community

supervision, those sorts of things, and the Kainai centre is around about 50 per cent capacity and continues to decline. I have those resources available in other centres, and we've made a budgetary decision. It has nothing to do with performance.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that the Kainai community corrections facility is designed and operated for aboriginal offenders, who make up 35 per cent of Alberta's prison population, and not only that but it also employs 29 people on the Blood reserve, accordingly, could the Solicitor General please explain to me how closing this facility helps these aboriginal Albertans?

Mr. Oberle: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, my job here is to provide correctional services for the entire population spectrum of the province of Alberta. The fact is absolutely crystal clear. We have very few minimum security inmates anymore. That is a minimum security facility, and I can't fill it.

Mr. Hehr: Finally, Mr. Speaker, why did the Solicitor General give only 50 days' notice to the Kainai community corrections facility that they would be closing their doors within 50 days? Why the short notice?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I am planning to meet – we're trying to arrange a date – with the leadership there, and we'll certainly talk about that. The fact of the matter is that I can't release budget details any time before the budget is actually tabled in the House, so I had no possibility of warning them of what was coming there. I will meet with the community and discuss their concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents and I have been closely watching the progress of the Anthony Henday Drive construction in north Edmonton and are excited to start driving on this new road. The section was scheduled to open in the fall of 2011. My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Will the government be able to deliver on its commitment to have the road completed in 2011?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say yes. Construction on the northwest Henday is on track, and it's set to open in the fall of 2011. The \$1.42 billion road is being built as a P3, which allows the project to be completed two years earlier than conventional delivery, will save taxpayers \$240 million, and this will give Albertans a 30-year warranty on the road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I am very glad to hear that construction is progressing well, my constituents are waiting for the final missing section that will connect Manning Drive to Yellowhead Trail to meet with highway 21. Can the minister tell us when the final section of the Anthony Henday Drive will be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, my department is moving ahead on the final section of the Anthony Henday, and I'm hoping that we can start the P3 process later on this spring. The final nine kilometres will connect Manning Drive with Yellowhead Trail on the

east side of Edmonton, and it will include a new bridge over the North Saskatchewan River. Government has set the goal of completing the Anthony Henday Drive by 2015, and we're on track to meet that goal.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. How much of the capital plan is being spent this year on highway construction?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, a strong transportation network supports all sectors of the Alberta economy. It's vital to our future growth. Our roads are also fundamental to supporting and building strong communities. That's why Alberta is investing \$1.9 billion on the provincial highway network this year. Our continued investment in road infrastructure is an important part of Alberta's economic recovery and our future growth.

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

Distracted Driving

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation would rather make excuses than take the initiative. He failed to fund the airport tunnel by passing the buck to the city of Calgary and so far – so far – failed to bring in distracted driving legislation. His excuse? He's waiting to get the legislation just right. To the Minister of Transportation. Ontario has distracted driving legislation. Why can't Alberta adopt something similar?

2:20

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that he's absolutely right on one thing: I'm waiting to make sure we can get it right. He's absolutely wrong on another. It's not our responsibility to fund the airport tunnel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the minister legislate against electronic distractions now since he could always expand the legislation to apply to other types of distractions later on?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think I've said that to the hon. member a number of times. There are a lot of distractions out there. We want to make sure, when we put legislation in place, that it's effective, and in order for it to be effective, it's got to be enforceable. We're looking at all those aspects to make sure we get it right.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about electronic distractions right now, Minister. Then you can change them later on, add other distractions.

To the minister again. This government has failed to end drinking and driving. Now they won't rein in distracted drivers. Why are safe drivers not a priority for this minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I've said in this House how important safe driving is to this government and keeping our roads safe and protecting all Albertans on our roads.

Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, recently the Frontier Centre for Public Policy published a paper that concludes that the so-called have-not

provinces that receive federal equalization transfers are better off in terms of the service levels that their governments provide than the have-provinces that actually subsidize these transfers. In other words, the real have-not provinces are provinces like Alberta that do not receive equalization payments. While I understand the concept of equalization . . .

The Speaker: We have to have a question in a hurry.

Mr. Dallas: My question to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise is: how are Albertans being disadvantaged by federal equalization?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Frontier centre research confirms what we've been saying all along, that equalization is not working for Canada, and it's not working for Alberta. Last year Alberta sent \$21 billion more to Ottawa than it received back, over \$5,700 per man, woman, and child. Yet as the hon. member indicates, this research indicates that in Alberta we have fewer hospital beds, fewer teachers, higher university tuition than some of the so-called have-not provinces that are receiving these transfers.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my supplemental to the same minister. The Premier of Ontario has said that he has the same concerns yet is reported to have said recently that it isn't important enough for him to pursue. Why is it so important to Alberta, which arguably is in better economic shape than Ontario?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier of Ontario has pointed out in the past that it's not just an Ontario or Alberta issue; it's a Canadian issue. It's a well-confirmed fact, not just by the Frontier centre but by the C.D. Howe and Fraser institutes, that the receiving provinces have higher spending, larger civil services, higher taxes, therefore less investment, therefore a smaller tax base. They then get more transfer. It's a vicious circle. It's not working for Alberta, and it's not working for Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is this government going to do about this flawed system of transfer payments?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the principle of equalization is entrenched in the Constitution, but the quantum, the amount of money that's transferred, is not specified. Since it's good neither for the sending provinces – B.C., Alberta, and Ontario – nor for the receiving provinces, we think it's time to begin a discussion about changes. All of these transfer programs come up for renegotiation in 2014. Now is the time to begin talking about changes to make them good, a program that works for all of Canada.

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

Capital Infrastructure Planning

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of governing effectively entails being able to prioritize between needs and wants. This year the government proposed a capital budget of \$7.2 billion. In order to balance the books, the Wildrose proposes that we rein

that back to roughly \$4.6 billion this year, which still places us at the very top of all the provinces. The government is always asking what we would do differently, how we would prioritize. Our caucus would like to take up that challenge. To the Transportation minister: would you be willing to table in the House the exact order of priority for capital projects?

Mr. Ouellette: We want to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that we build the infrastructure that's needed in this province through our capital plan that's there. And I don't ever remember asking the Alliance what they would do.

Mr. Anderson: Given that the airport tunnel project in Calgary is clearly a top priority of Calgarians and Albertans, will this minister table your department's priority list so that we can all sit down like elected adults and figure out a way to delay a less time-sensitive project in favour of the airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that I really have a hard time believing that people do not understand what different responsibilities different municipalities have. It's been said a number of times that local roads are the responsibility of the local municipality. We supply infrastructure money through different types of grants, and they get to prioritize because that municipality knows what's best for them and what they need. We don't need to micromanage that for them.

Mr. Anderson: You know, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure, Mr. Speaker. Given that waiting to build the Calgary runway until the other runway has gone over will cost taxpayers millions of dollars, why won't this minister allow Albertans to see the exact order of priorities for infrastructure projects as they now stand so that all Albertans and their elected representatives can have a discussion about what can wait so that we can get this key piece of infrastructure rolling?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, we don't hide anything. It's showing on our plan all of the infrastructure that we're going to build over the next three years. We're also saying that we will help municipalities in the best way we can, but they have to deliver what they believe is important to them within the finances they have to do it, and we have to do what we believe is the best for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Local Food Production

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Local food production is about knowing where your food comes from and what products or fertilizers, if any, are used in its production. It's about smaller, family farms, a strong rural community, and a sustainable new agricultural industry. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Six hundred million dollars a year is spent by this government to maintain our agricultural system, yet we continue to lose farmers and prime agricultural land. Why isn't some of this money going to support our local food industry?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, in fact it is. We have loan programs in place for producers that max out at \$5 million, depending on the operation and the innovation that's being proposed. Farmers' markets and local food production is one of the fastest growing areas of the agricultural industry, and I support it all the way.

Ms Pastoor: As the minister has pointed out, it is a growing industry. It's a \$350 million a year industry and growing. Will the minister expand the approved farmers' markets program to increase access to local food and meet the market demand?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, we are working on a continuous basis with the producers that go into the farmers' markets and the farmers' markets. It's absolutely an area of interest to us as it adds some diversification to the industry, and I think it's got great potential. As people believe more in purchasing food within a 100-kilometre limit, I think the potential will continue to increase.

2:30

Ms Pastoor: Organic food is a \$30 billion a year industry internationally, but Alberta lacks a legislated organic standard. When will the minister introduce legislation that includes organic standards?

Mr. Hayden: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the industry itself has the standards and the requirements based on the number of years since the soil had chemicals used in it. I can't recall right off the top, but I think it's something like 18 or 20 years. Nothing can be certified as organic food through these associations unless it meets those standards. It absolutely is a growing market and, I think, something worthy of attention.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the numbers of farms and people in rural Alberta that have been decreasing, it's no surprise to our government. It has been happening since 1910.

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

Incorporation of Financial Advisers

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several financial advisers have expressed concern that legislation that allows professionals such as doctors, lawyers, dentists, and accountants to incorporate as professional corporations does not grant the same privilege to financial advisers. Real estate agents and insurance agents are also allowed to incorporate. My question to the hon. minister of finance: why does the current legislation discriminate against financial advisers?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, currently individual financial advisers are not able to use incorporation to provide investment advice in any province in Canada. The issue of adviser incorporation has been discussed by provincial securities regulators in the industry for a number of years, and no consensus or conclusion has been reached. I can tell the hon. member that the Alberta Securities Commission has recently put forward a possible model of incorporation. Several other provinces have shown interest in it. I've asked to be informed of the progress, and we'll let you know if that changes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister. The problem as I see it appears to stem from the provisions in the Alberta Securities Act. What is the rationale for these restrictions in the Alberta Securities Act?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, registration is one of the core areas of securities regulation. Individuals who sell securities must be registered because of the key role they play in the efficient functioning of capital markets. The primary aim of registration is to ensure

that those engaged in the securities business are suitable; that is, they must demonstrate that they're not only honest and of good repute but also competent, of good character, and have a degree of financial well-being. These standards help foster both investor protection and investor confidence.

Mr. Allred: My final question again to the same minister. Given that TILMA is now in place, financial advisers are not on a level playing field with their cohorts in British Columbia as well as Saskatchewan. How can this situation be rectified with regard to British Columbia?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe the hon. member's facts are quite correct. Under the passport system, of which Alberta is a member, a new national registration regime was implemented in the nine participating provinces last September. This provides standardized registration categories as well as a single set of registration requirements. This new registration regime effectively eliminates any barriers to labour mobility that may have existed under the previous regime.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More children in Alberta are taken into custody by this province per capita than anywhere else in Canada. When children in care are hurt or die, the privacy of the family is paramount, but the details of the incidents need to be released. The sharing of information and solutions is the only way to bring change. We need to know what happened and what is being done to fix it. To the minister: how is it in the best interests of a dead child or their family to keep the circumstances that led to their death a ministry secret? Exactly whose interests are being protected?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will look at the preamble and see, hon. member, if your preamble was correct. I think it is incorrect, but I'll look into that further.

In answering this question, we are governed by laws and regulations, and they do regard privacy for children in various circumstances. For the one that this member is discussing, there is an ongoing police investigation. To respect the integrity of that investigation, we will not be releasing any further information at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Will the minister provide details that led to the death of a 21-month-old child in care last Wednesday and the findings of the ministry's internal investigation when it is completed? We don't need names. We don't need addresses.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated, I believe people have the right to know what has happened in cases involving children in this ministry and not just in this situation but in others as well. That information will be released that is appropriate in accordance with the regulation and the legislation that we have.

There is an ongoing police investigation right now, and I will not compromise the integrity of that investigation.

Mr. Chase: I don't want the investigation compromised, but when it's through, we need the details.

I will ask again. Will the minister take the first step to end the systemic secrecy and require that the children's advocate report directly to the Legislature, as is the case in all other provinces?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The children's advocate and the reporting that the children's advocate does in the ministry is not related to systemic secrecy. It's related to what is right, and it's related to the information. There are four quarterly reports that come to the Legislature through the children's advocate as well as an annual report, and the member is aware of that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Northern Student Supplement

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are concerned about the cuts in postsecondary education, more specifically cuts to the program of scholarships designed specifically for rural students like the northern student supplement. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Could the minister please explain why the northern student supplement program has been cancelled as indicated in Budget 2010?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in this budget we had some very difficult decisions to make with our budget for student financial assistance. What we did was that we chose to focus our resources on the priorities, and one of our top priorities is to ensure that we are able to help as many students as possible gain access to our academic institutions. To accomplish that, we were going to discontinue three grants and shift those dollars into the student loan program because I can give \$1 to one student, but I can use that same dollar and do three student loans.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister. Like many students from rural communities both my children attended postsecondary school in the city and, as a result, were burdened with added living expenses compared to those students who had the opportunity of living at home during school. Many rural students are forced . . .

The Speaker: Okay, okay. No preambles, remember?

Mrs. Leskiw: That's after today.

The Speaker: No, no. [laughter]

Mrs. Leskiw: What programs are in place to relieve the unique financial pressures of rural students?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, rural students do have added issues to face when they have to travel to the cities, and we recognize that. It goes well beyond tuition, and that's something we've talked about a lot in this House and with the students, that the affordability of our postsecondary system is more than just tuition. It's travel to and

from. It's affordable housing. It's all of those things. Today 70 per cent of student aid recipients are considered to be independent from their parents, and that's an important factor to consider when we're looking at our student financial assistance package.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister. The minister is often heard talking about building Alberta's next generation, knowledge-based economy. Isn't he concerned that the increase will deter Albertans, particularly rural Albertans, from pursuing postsecondary education?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we had a good discussion about this exact topic last night in our estimates in the House when we talked about the fact that, you know, some would consider an investment in stocks or something and borrow for that investment, and it's still an investment. We look at the investment that the taxpayers of Alberta are putting in, on average 70 per cent to every one of those postsecondary courses, and the students are putting in, on average, about a 30 per cent investment. How they are able to do that is important to us because we want to help every student have access to that. So if they have their own resources, that's great, but if they don't, we want to help them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

2:40

Patient Safety Report (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question will be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I want to confirm with him what he said earlier today in question period, that the full, unedited report prepared by the Alberta Health Quality Council into patient safety incidents at the Children's hospital in Calgary will be made public within 10 days.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what I believe I said is that a full, detailed report within the parameters of the Alberta Evidence Act and respecting the parameters of the Health Information Act is to be made available within 10 days. I'll leave it up to them to get together and figure that out. I'm sure they will.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, our information is that the report was already written to meet those parameters, so if the report is going to be released unedited, why not just release it today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, I've spoken with the two groups, and I've asked the same issue of them. I said: why not just release it? They said that they have some confidentiality issues that they still have to address, and as soon as they get the green light on those confidentiality agreements, which I know the hon. member himself would respect and know about, the report will be released, as I've just indicated.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Quality Council has said that the confidentiality issues are already addressed. It's as if Alberta Health Services thinks the Health Quality Council reports to them. Will this minister do the right thing and from here on give the Alberta Health Quality Council full independence in releasing its reports?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the first two incidents that were reported on were done within a matter of hours. Immediate action was taken. The third one was done within a very short time period

as well, and so was the fourth one. But as they all came in, it was decided by the Health Quality Council, through their own protocols, to lump all four together in one report. That's what they've done. They are just as concerned about patient quality and safety as we are, and we'll ensure that it gets released.

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

Support for Library Services

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Knowing the importance of library services, especially to immigrants and foreign workers in Alberta, why has the government made a budget reduction to library services?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, immigrants and foreign workers and all Albertans truly value and rely on our libraries right across the province of Alberta. This government is committed to strong, province-wide library systems. The reduction that the member is talking about involves internal programming spending but will not reduce provincial funding to individual library boards. As a matter of fact, Budget 2010 increases library funding for growing communities with a \$600,000 increase.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister: is the funding for the construction of the new library still intact?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, yes, the MSI funding for this project remains intact. This government is committed to supporting and investing in municipalities despite our tougher economic times. Individual municipalities make decisions as to how they spend their MSI dollars. I'm pleased that the province did approve the city of Edmonton for a \$30 million grant to build this particular library, which will benefit the residents living in Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: My final question is to the same minister. When do we expect the construction and opening of this new library in Mill Woods?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, MSI dollars go directly to the municipalities so they can prioritize the funding to meet the unique needs of the people that are living within their communities. It's those municipal leaders that are responsible for choosing the projects and managing their timelines, so it's basically up to the city of Edmonton. They've received the approval. It's up to the city of Edmonton and the councillors to decide when they will build the particular library in the Mill Woods area.

School Configuration

Mr. Bhardwaj: Alberta Education appears to be moving away from separate schools for elementary students and junior high, or middle schools, and replacing them with larger K to 9 combined schools. My constituents are concerned that their younger children will not receive the attention they need in a larger facility. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What is the rationale behind combining the schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question of what configuration, what size of school is really a decision that's made by

local school boards acting in the best interests of their students and their community. There is a lot to be said. We have through the Inspiring Education process over the course of the last year been talking about how we might change the way we do education, recognizing the current situation, current realities, new technologies, so configurations of classrooms and configurations of schools themselves should be the topic of discussion. With respect to K to 9, I mean, there's a lot of evidence to suggest . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister. The needs of a five-year-old vary rapidly from the needs of a 14-year-old. How is combining administration, facilities, and staff going to reflect the disparity in needs?

Mr. Hancock: Well, administration, of course, is something entirely separate in terms of the ability to use administration effectively and efficiently, different from the programming needs. There's a lot of evidence, as I was saying, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that you could make great utilization of combining classes and ages: older students helping younger students, learning together. Quite frankly, we've been doing it. I grew up in rural Alberta. We had K to 12 schools, worked perfectly well. We shouldn't be focusing on specifically any particular type of classroom or configuration but what's in the best interests of the children and the community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: with issues such as violence and drugs and alcohol use facing teenagers, is the minister concerned about the interaction between teenagers and elementary-aged students that will require increased supervision?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, regardless of the configuration of the school we have certain requirements that need to be there for students to be successful. We need a respectful and caring school culture. We need safety and security. We need to focus on teaching and learning. We need positive, caring relationships between students and teachers. We need social and behavioural expectations to be adhered to, and we need community involvement. That is true whether we're talking about a grade 1 to 3 school or a grade 1 to 9 school or a grade 1 to 12 school. Those behavioural expectations and the focus on making sure that it's a safe and caring place for students has got to be our ultimate priority.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period today. Today, 19 different members were recognized – that was made up of nine members of the Official Opposition, two members of the Wildrose caucus, one member of the New Democratic caucus, and seven private government members – a total of 114 questions and answers.

In 15 seconds from now we'll proceed with the Routine and members' statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans can be proud of their contributions to the 2010 Winter Olympics. I'm not just referring to the recent \$100 million injection of our Alberta government in our Olympic heritage venues or the fact that over half of our Canadian team lives and trains in Alberta or the incredible work of the ministries of Tourism, Parks and Recreation as well as Culture and Community Spirit with the Alberta train, Plaza, and House. I'm also referring to the priceless memories which our athletes from across the country have shared with us that will last a lifetime.

I'm sure that none of us will forget when Alberta's own Jennifer Heil won Canada's first medal, when Alexander Bilodeau shared our country's first gold on Canadian snow with his brother and the entire nation, when Virtue and Moir capped a 13-year project with gold, when Joannie Rochette found the podium after her mother had passed on, and when our Canadian men and women won hockey gold.

I also think that Michael Bubl   deserved a medal for utilizing a big, beautiful background of Moraine Lake, Alberta, during his performance during the closing ceremonies.

Mr. Speaker, an American Olympian friend of mine told me Canada did a super job with these Olympics, just like they did in Calgary. It was a great reminder that this record-setting journey actually began with Alberta's Olympics in 1988.

2:50

Canadians won more gold medals in 2010 than any country on Earth has ever won at an Olympic Games, winter or summer. Now, in the minds of some the Own the Podium campaign was controversial at best and arrogant at worst, but in my humble assessment it was simply wildly successful. It was based on a U.S. program which has been in operation since Nagano, and it can be easily argued that the Canadian version was not only much faster; it was far less expensive.

We were on top of the world in 14 different events. While this brought back beautiful memories for me of '99 and 2001, it also brought back memories of this past June, when some great friends and I climbed to the highest point in Russia and Europe. At that time we could not have imagined that in a matter of months a young Georgian from across the valley would perish in an accident on opening day in Whistler.

But we did know that the people of Sochi were getting ready for 2014. Let's get behind our government and all Canadians getting ready for Sochi in 2014.

Oil Royalty Framework

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier tabled an article from the *Airdrie City View* which he said proved that I supported his economically disastrous new royalty framework. I know the Premier is a busy man, but, honestly, perhaps he should have read the article first before tabling it. I do thank him for tabling it for everyone to see. Remember, this article was written in 2008, prior to the NRF's taking effect.

After outlining the key importance of the oil and gas sector in creating jobs and agreeing with the adjustments made to the oil sands royalties, something I've always said publicly and in caucus, I then say the following:

When Premier Stelmach [initially] announced the royalty changes, he left the door open for further modifications . . . I, and many others, have been advocating that given the global economic slowdown, plummeting oil and gas prices, as well as the competitive royalty regimes of BC and Saskatchewan, it is important to readjust royalties downward . . .

As your provincial representative, I will continue, as promised, to advocate for further decreases in royalty rates for oil and gas projects outside of the oilsands. I believe that doing so is essential to the . . . prosperity of our province.

That's quite a smoking gun, indeed.

Mr. Speaker, again, this article was written in 2008, before the destructive NRF took effect. It proves what I and thousands of Albertans told the Premier and his chief of staff for a long, long time: that his energy policy was flawed, that the economy and industry had changed and we would not be competitive, and that thousands of Albertans would suffer if he went ahead with his ill-conceived royalty changes.

I thank the Premier, his chief of staff, and his research staff for reminding me of this article. Not only does it show I've been consistent on this issue; it shows I've been consistently right. It also shows just how consistent the Premier, his chief of staff, and his Energy ministers have been on this issue, consistently out of touch, consistently wrong-headed, and consistently incompetent with an industry so many Albertans rely on for their well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And the hon. member knows what he shouldn't have done.

Mr. Anderson: I was speaking to their actions, only their actions.

The Speaker: No, no. The member doesn't know what he shouldn't have done. He can read *Hansard*.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to give the House oral notice of a motion that I propose to move.

A. Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended in Standing Order 7 by adding the following after suborder (4):

7(4.1) When Members' Statements is called, Members other than Members of the Executive Council may make a statement, each statement to be no more than 2 minutes in duration, according to the following allocation:

- (a) on Monday and Thursday, up to 7 Members, and
- (b) on Tuesday and Wednesday, up to 6 Members.

B. Be it further resolved that

- 1. The amendment in this motion shall come into force on passage and shall have effect until the dissolution of the 27th Legislature;
- 2. Standing Order 7(4) shall not have effect for the balance of the 27th Legislature.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 6(2) of the Alberta Economic Development Authority Act it is my pleasure to table five copies of the authority's 2009 activity report. The Alberta Economic Development Authority celebrated an important milestone last year, 15 years of providing strategic advice and recommendations to the government on key economic issues.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today.

The first is the appropriate number of copies of a report from Syncrude Canada entitled Annual Report of Oil Sands Development in 2005 and Projected for 2006, Mildred Lake Oil Sands Mine. The report includes information on wildlife that has come into contact with tailings ponds and was related to questions asked by my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood earlier today.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of three photographs of ducks caught in the bitumen mat of Syncrude's Aurora tailings pond on April 29, 2008.

The third tabling is the appropriate number of copies of 24 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. These postcards have been collected by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of the letter our caucus has been asked to table in which Sandy Bray of Calgary explains the impossible task of being the only income earner living with and caring for two elderly parents, one with dementia, and a 17-year-old son. The waiting list for a nursing home can be a two- to three-year wait. She asks for help.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the Wildrose Alliance caucus Restoring Alberta's Energy Competitiveness document. It outlines the effect the royalty framework has had on the economy in this province, which has been negative, and goes on to propose some proposals for how we can get back on track.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter that I wrote on March 5, 2010, to the chairman of the board of Edmonton public schools regarding population data that was gathered and tabulated by the city of Edmonton in 2009. In this letter I request respectfully for the public board to cease and desist from any further closures of public schools.

The second document I have is dated spring 2010, Options: Your Guide to Private Medicine. It was a supplement in the *Calgary Herald* a few weeks back, and it asks questions such as why Albertans are seeking private health options.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The chair today would like to table the required number of copies of a March 9, 2010, memo from the Government House Leader which attaches a March 4, 2010, agreement signed by all parties, a revised projected sittings days calendar effective today's date, and a revised schedule concerning Oral Question Period rotation based on the house leaders' agreement dated March 4, 2010. Members will receive copies of the complete package shortly after Orders of the Day is called.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Webber, Minister of Aboriginal Relations, responses to questions raised by Mr. MacDonald, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar; Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; Dr. Taft, hon.

Member for Edmonton-Riverview; Ms Calahasen, hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake; and Dr. Brown, hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on February 10, 2010, Department of Aboriginal Relations main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might be revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you seven special guests who are visiting from our sister province of Hokkaido, Japan. These individuals are part of a delegation visiting our province to learn about our voluntary sector. They are studying leadership in the voluntary sector, international development, youth agencies, citizens' and disability support, senior citizens' facilities, libraries, and health care facilities. I'd like to introduce Ms Keiko Sato, Mr. Koji Takahashi, Ms Tomoko Maruya, Ms Yoshiko Fujii, Mr. Masaaki Noh, Ms Ayaka Tateyama, and Mr. Nobunao Kasai. If I could have them rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to speak to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill contains amendments to both the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Our elections legislation allows Albertans to continue to elect their provincial representatives in a clear and orderly way using processes that are neutral, consistent, and understandable. Hand in hand with the Election Act is the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. They work in tandem. They govern how political entities will collect and use money and require detailed financial reporting to the Chief Electoral Officer.

3:00

This is a complex body of law. We've taken the time as a government to review each change to ensure that it represents an improvement to this essential democratic process. Throughout our review we have held discussions with the Chief Electoral Officer's office, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank that office for their involvement and co-operation in our review.

Now I would like to address some of the more significant amendments included in Bill 7. First, I'll talk about prisoner voting, Mr. Speaker. Currently our legislation does not allow inmates to vote in provincial elections. In a 2002 decision, *Sauvé versus Canada*, the Supreme Court of Canada held that denying inmates the right to vote violates section 3 of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As a result of this clear direction from the Supreme Court of Canada Bill 7 will give all eligible inmates the ability to vote at future provincial elections by way of a special ballot process.

In most cases the inmate's vote won't be counted in the constituency in which they are serving their sentence. Instead, their vote will be counted in accordance with the tests set out in the legislation.

Although we have heard comment that we should use the notwithstanding clause of the Charter to challenge this provision, I want to clarify that this is not a legal possibility, Mr. Speaker. The notwithstanding clause applies only to certain sections of the Charter. It does not apply to section 3 of the Charter, which is the section that includes the right to vote.

I'll now talk about the appointment of returning officers. After the last provincial election the Premier promised to change the manner by which returning officers are appointed. Previously all returning officers were appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Bill 7 authorizes the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers. The Chief Electoral Officer will be able to start the appointment process as early as two years after the previous general election. The Chief Electoral Officer will be able to fill all returning officer positions in a timely manner. This amendment eliminates any perception of political involvement in the appointment process.

With respect to the appointment of enumerators, and in a similar vein, Bill 7 removes the perception of political involvement in the appointment of such enumerators. This bill requires each returning officer to personally hire all the enumerators that are needed in the returning officer's electoral division. This replaces the old process of gathering input from constituency associations in communities as to who should be considered for enumerator positions.

One of the issues that will be very interesting as we go forward, Mr. Speaker, is new technologies. Technology is changing rapidly, and Bill 7 will allow the Chief Electoral Officer to explore and promote the use of new technologies. If there is a way to improve the efficiency of our voting process, we want to know about it. Using new kinds of equipment or developing new procedures to make casting a vote easier may lead to greater public participation in our democratic process. Running an election is a complex process. While we're always striving for an easier and more efficient voting process, we must protect the integrity of the system and safeguard accuracy, secrecy, and political neutrality in the process.

While Bill 7 provides the opportunity to undertake pilot testing in by-elections, it also includes safeguards. Before testing new technologies, the Chief Electoral Officer must make a presentation to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices explaining in detail the procedures and equipment that he proposes to use. If the standing committee approves the approach, the new technologies can be incorporated at a by-election. I'm excited about this opportunity and what this recommendation represents. It provides us the opportunity for a forward-looking, nonpartisan discussion that could result in great benefits for all Alberta voters.

Bill 7 will also add flexibility to early opening of voting stations. It will allow for a pilot project to test early opening of polls. Normally our polls open at 9 a.m. In the interests of making it more convenient for Albertans to go to the polls, Bill 7 would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to run a pilot project where polls could open at 7 a.m. during a by-election. This change was made on a test case basis only, as the extra two hours added to the polling day means that election officers will be working more than a 15-hour day. To help election officers complete all of their duties, including the count at the end of the day, the amendments will allow the use of vote counting equipment. This will help ensure an accurate count of the ballots.

Once the by-election is completed, the Chief Electoral Officer is required to report back to the Legislative Assembly, outlining his

opinion as to whether the extended hours had any effect on voter turnout and whether the vote counting equipment was effective and efficient. The Chief Electoral Officer's report will help inform future decisions regarding whether polling hours should be extended across the province.

We've also dealt with advance polls, Mr. Speaker. To further encourage voter turnout, Bill 7 eliminates restrictions for those who may use an advance poll and makes it easier for voting and more accessible for Albertans with demanding or unpredictable schedules. The legislation would allow Albertans who are eligible to vote to do so at an advance poll without requiring them to give a reason for doing so. This additional flexibility provides one more opportunity for Albertans to cast their votes.

In addition to increasing flexibility with respect to location and time, Mr. Speaker, we've also dealt with identification. Bill 7 contains options for voters to make it easier for them to identify themselves. A person whose name appears on the list of electors does not need to provide ID now in order to receive a ballot. A person can ensure that their name is added to the list of electors in a number of ways, including through enumeration, by registering online with Elections Alberta, or by otherwise contacting the Chief Electoral Officer's office.

If on election day an individual's name is not on the list of electors, he or she must take additional steps to establish their identity and eligibility to vote. Bill 7 sets out how a voter may establish his or her identity. This includes that the voter may provide government-issued photo ID, the voter may show two documents from a list of documents that are authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer, or a voter's identity can be vouched for by another voter whose name already appears on the list of electors. The bill removes the requirement for a voter to swear an oath to accompany the necessary identification. Instead, the voter will be asked to complete a declaration. This would be a faster process and would reduce waiting times for those people who are not on the list of electors.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will also deal with third-party advertising. It deals with the rules for political advertising specifically for third parties. Bill 205, a private member's bill, set out new rules for individuals or groups who engage in political advertising during an election campaign. This bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly last fall, but it is not yet in force. The government supported the principles underlying the private member's bill, but after looking at it in some detail, we have improved it by aligning it more closely with the existing rules in the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act.

Chief Electoral Officer powers have also been dealt with in this bill, Mr. Speaker. Under existing legislation, the Chief Electoral Officer has the power to investigate and inquire into possible violations of the rules under the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Among other things, the Chief Electoral Officer has the power to request production of financial documents. Bill 7 would give the Chief Electoral Officer the additional power to inquire and investigate perceived violations under the Election Act. For example, Bill 7 would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to investigate an allegation that the list of electors has been used inappropriately. Also, the bill gives the Chief Electoral Officer flexibility in determining the size of the fine imposed on a person who donates more than the contribution limits allow. Bill 7 also gives the Chief Electoral Officer the power to address emergencies on polling day by changing the hours that a polling place is open.

We also deal with tie votes in Bill 7, Mr. Speaker. We believe that this is an improvement in that it will provide for a change in the way that tie votes are resolved. Currently if after all the counts are

done, there is a tie between two or more candidates, the returning officer is required by law to cast the deciding vote. The current law treats returning officers unfairly in several ways. First, a returning officer can't cast a vote unless there is a tie. Second, if there is a tie, the returning officer can't necessarily vote for the candidate of their choice as he or she must select one of the two tied candidates. Third, the returning officer cannot decline to vote, as is the right of all other electors. Finally, the returning officer's vote is not secret. To eliminate this, Bill 7 provides that in the case of a tie vote between candidates there will automatically be a by-election.

3:10

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this legislation deals with fundamental democratic principles. Bill 7 strikes a balance. It updates and streamlines electoral processes while at the same time maintaining the integrity and security of the vote. I encourage all members to support Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, and I look forward to hearing and participating in the debate.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate February 25: Mrs. Fritz]

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I want to begin by thanking the hon. Premier for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. As Alberta emerges from the recent economic downturn, the Alberta Competitiveness Act addresses matters that are important to our long-term and ongoing success as a province and as a country and, certainly, addresses issues that are important to my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I have a particular interest in the subject matter that Bill 1 deals with. As a farmer and rancher I know the importance of meeting the demands of a market and of positioning a business to be competitive. Through my previous involvement as chairman of the Alberta Beef Producers and the Canada Beef Export Federation I know the challenges agriculture and specifically the beef industry face related to competing in international markets.

The preamble to Bill 1, Mr. Speaker, highlights priorities that are important to Alberta's future success.

Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans . . . competitiveness is core to the Government of Alberta's plan to position Alberta for sustained prosperity . . . the role of government is to create the conditions for competitiveness so that entrepreneurship, innovation and investment will generate benefits for Albertans . . . better alignment of activities across Government to strengthen partnerships among Albertans, business, industry and Government will support the development of a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, reviewing the mandate of the body created under Bill 1 I think really focuses on the priorities of this government and I believe is a highlight for the focus of our government in this Legislature:

to increase Alberta's competitiveness by

- (i) accelerating the implementation of current Government of Alberta initiatives to increase competitiveness,

- (ii) developing a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness through strengthened collaboration with industry, business and Albertans,
- (iii) developing benchmarks for measuring Alberta's [success];

[Further,] to develop strategies and initiatives

- (i) to encourage innovation and to develop and adopt technology,
- (ii) to create effective regulatory systems that deliver the results Albertans require and that provide clarity, predictability, certainty and efficiency, and
- (iii) to increase Alberta's competitiveness and productivity of individual economic sectors.

Those are important initiatives for all Albertans and particularly for agriculture. But I believe that this initiative will have a positive impact on a whole range of sectors throughout our economy, including energy, forestry, agriculture, as I suggested, transportation, health care, and education.

I want to focus my comments this afternoon, though, on positive impacts that this legislation can have for agriculture, again, based on the experience that I've had representing agriculture producers over a period of many years. Competitiveness is a mindset, Mr. Speaker, one that I think is extremely important for Albertans within the Canadian context. As Alberta livestock and agriculture producers we know that our capacity to produce requires access to markets in order to gain returns for our production that keep us competitive in terms of recovering costs for high-quality products that agriculture producers go to market with in this country.

I appreciate the fact that Alberta has a very high and strong reputation in international markets for the high quality, the food safety standards that we meet, and all of that kind of thing. I particularly appreciate the emphasis that this bill has on a strong collaboration between industry and government. I have had the opportunity to see both remarkable successes with regard to what can be achieved when that partnership works and also some failures when that partnership doesn't work as effectively as it needs to.

I want to just refer to a number of experiences in international markets because I think there's a key and important role that the Alberta government plays together with the industry in ensuring that Alberta and, frankly, that Canada plays the role that it should in international markets. I've had the privilege to visit Alberta's trade offices in Mexico, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Russia, and a number of other countries as well. I've seen first-hand how when industry and government representatives are working together, the end result is better.

I was on a trade mission in 2003 with the federal government as well as beef industry representatives, and at the end of the day we would collaborate with regard to what the situation was on a government-to-government basis. The very key interest at that point was reopening access to important markets for Canadian beef.

On the industry side we were having discussions with our counterparts in Taiwan and China and Hong Kong to discuss what their issues were with regard to marketing and gaining access to Canadian products that at that time were restricted from moving across the border, very effective opportunities to collaborate and ensure that the end result was better because at the end of the day what's required in terms of international trade negotiations is that there's an agreement made that can actually be traded on.

It's possible, when there isn't a proper link between industry and government, that the trade deal you end up with at the end of the day has some quirky detail in it that restricts the opportunity for Canadian and for Alberta exporters to actually get the job done in terms of exporting products. There are various examples that I could cite where because of an effective collaboration, those kinds of

situations have been prevented. But where that collaboration was not or the communication was not effective, we ended up with a trade deal that had to be reworked in order for the industry even to trade on the deal. Then you simply don't have the success that you need.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I had a document presented to me from beef industry representatives that speaks about what it is that's preventing Canada from trading beef products into Russia. It's a very detailed outline of matters that are not within the ability of the Alberta government to influence directly. They're actually federal trade initiatives and matters that need to be addressed by the federal government. But I think there's an opportunity for the Alberta government, through our minister of agriculture, to collaborate with Alberta livestock producers and press our federal counterparts to get the job done. I think that Alberta cattle producers and also our Alberta government have a first-hand understanding of the importance of moving at the right time, of acting when there is opportunity to actually get a deal done.

One of the other things that I appreciate about Bill 1 is its reference to ensuring that we have the regulatory regime in place that works for industry. That's extremely important as well, Mr. Speaker. We all know that costs can be incurred by industry, particularly agriculture producers, if the regulatory regime is not effective. We have to ask ourselves as we review the current regulatory regime that faces agriculture: to what end? Are the regulations that we have in place providing a safer product to market? Are they reducing cost? Are they reducing risk? Those are matters that are extremely important, and we need to ensure as we add regulation, as we encumber agriculture producers with more rules, that we in fact have markets that are willing to pay for the increased costs that are imposed and forced on producers as a result of the regulations.

3:20

One of the things that I think agriculture producers are facing right now that I think this bill can help address is their ability to reduce costs, and that's where an effective regulatory regime very much comes in. If we've got rules in place that add costs that can't be recovered in the market, they really need to be effective in reducing risk, or else they're really impractical. I think those are some of the things that I see as opportunities through Bill 1.

I particularly appreciate that this bill shows Albertans and the world our commitment to make Alberta one of the most economically competitive places in the increasingly interconnected global marketplace. Through travel and communication it's a pretty small world that we live in, and I think it was highlighted in the recent experience at the Olympics, even, where we knew that the world was at our doorstep. That's true for agriculture producers, too, but meeting those markets efficiently and competitively is extremely important.

I believe that Bill 1 shows that the province is committed to creating the conditions that will attract new businesses, innovators, and the next generation of entrepreneurs to be involved in this province. For all of those reasons I would like to again express my appreciation to the hon. Premier for bringing this piece of legislation forward. I think it has a great deal of resonance with my constituents, who understand the importance of effective regulation. It really isn't about getting rid of regulation that we need, but it's very much about making sure that the regulations, the rules, and production standards that we have meet the needs of our production community and also meet the needs of international and domestic markets.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation. I look forward to the

positive results that Bill 1 will deliver to this province and to the way that it positions our government as setting up the framework, so to speak, that will ensure that we have long-term success in international markets and that Albertans – and I’m speaking particularly with regard to agriculture producers – have the opportunity to produce to their capacity and market to their capacity as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a great pleasure to speak on Bill 1, Alberta Competitiveness Act. The object of this bill is intended to increase collaboration between the government, business, and industry to improve Alberta’s competitiveness. The bill will also allow for the establishment of a board or committee with a general mandate to identify actionable areas for increased competitiveness, to quicken the implementation of government competitiveness initiatives, and to establish a benchmark to measure Alberta’s competitiveness.

In essence, all this bill does is allow for the establishment of a board or committee with a vague mandate of increasing competitiveness. The underlying principle behind this bill is to increase the collaboration between the government, business, and industry, but there are so few specifics that it is difficult to determine what, if any, impact there may be by this bill.

The government’s news release on this bill states that throughout the next year, benchmarks and goals will be established. There is no reference to when completion or action on these benchmarks and goals will take place, nor is there any reference to specific action that will be taken now. The only reference to anything specific, both in the bill and in the news release, is to the government’s oil and gas competitiveness review and the western economic partnership between B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan.

Establishing these benchmarks, reporting explicitly through annual reports, collaborating across the ministries and with key players in industry are all important positive steps towards improving Alberta’s competitiveness. But this bill does not take any real action towards making these things happen. There are no details, no time frames, no end goal other than the elusive phrase “increase competitiveness.”

All this bill does is legislate an idea. The government’s own news release states that benchmarks and goals to increase competitiveness will be increased in a year with no indication how long after that year action will take place.

The government already has a Regulatory Review Secretariat with the following mandate: “The goal of regulatory reform is to identify opportunities to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden of government on the people and businesses of Alberta.” This goes on to say, “Supporting the development of good regulation creates the conditions for business to thrive and enhance productivity towards sustainable prosperity.” So we already have something in place.

The Regulatory Review Secretariat seems to be more concentrated on the red tape burden of compliance requirements and regulations whereas the guiding principle behind Bill 1 is more about collaboration. Yet both have very similar mandates and ultimately have the same end goal of allowing for productivity, competitiveness, and sustainable prosperity.

Eliminating red tape is not the only step necessary to increase competitiveness, but it is a very important first step. Other provinces such as B.C. and Newfoundland have set percentage reduction goals and have produced results. Alberta has been reviewing the regulatory burden for over 10 years now and has yet to produce the

reduction in red tape that other provinces have. The CFIB argues that Alberta has actually increased its regulatory burden in that time frame.

Also, the government already has the Premier’s economic advisory committee, a Regulatory Review Secretariat, an oil and gas competitiveness review that we are still waiting to see, a western economic partnership with B.C. and Saskatchewan, and a Canada-Alberta western partnership. How many more committees and partnerships do we need? We keep on coming with new committees and new reviews. Why can’t the goals of Bill 1 be carried out by one of these many arrangements? Why is the government scared of taking action and setting its own goals rather than passing off the job to another committee? This is the kind of initiative that the premise of this bill is intended to eliminate. The government is actually creating more legislation, more regulations with this bill.

Ultimately, this bill is meaningless. The intention of the bill is something that is laudable and necessary, but the bill itself is hollow. There are absolutely no specifics in the bill, and it seems unusual that this act is being done through legislation. Why are we mandating another committee to do the role of the government? Why isn’t the Premier setting up a specific task force?

There are some general questions arising around the vagueness of this bill. Which industries is this bill targeting? How exactly will this bill improve competitiveness? What kind of competitiveness are we talking about? Are we talking about red tape? Is it limited to the oil and gas industry? Do we want to be competitive through a strong, knowledge-based economy by supporting education, by creating a competitive environment for small business by reducing red tape, by diversifying the economy in general, by allowing our film industry to stay alive and competitive? What is the main goal behind this bill? What does competitive mean? What is the end goal of these actions? What is the time frame?

3:30

When we talk about reducing red tape in Alberta, in 2009 the minister of finance released a report on the Regulatory Review Secretariat entitled *Regulatory Excellence*, in which it reports launching an online tool called Alberta’s public registry for regulations, that will provide notice of government regulatory proposals relevant to business. This report also highlights the reduced regulatory burden brought about by TILMA and BizPaL, an online service that gives information on business permits and licences.

Reducing red tape for businesses is one of the goals of the Regulatory Review Secretariat and is also a point that is highly advocated for by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. The reducing red tape argument centres on the amount of time, ultimately lost productivity, taken up on what are considered unnecessary and redundant government regulations. According to CFIB Canadian businesses spend \$30.5 billion a year to comply with obligations from all levels of government.

The election platform of the Alberta Liberals in 2004 called for the creation of a red tape task force to lessen the burden of unnecessary rules and regulations, improve the business climate, reduce government costs, and improve efficiency and competitiveness. In the 2008 election the Alberta Liberals again called for the enactment of a red tape review to aid small businesses.

British Columbia is a much-cited example for its successful efforts to reduce its red tape. B.C.’s original goal in 2001 was to reduce government regulations by one-third in three years. It met the goal, and as of January 2010 B.C. has eliminated 152,000 regulations since it first started in 2001. This is a red tape reduction of 42 per cent.

Newfoundland and Labrador implemented a red tape reduction task force, that submitted initial findings to the minister of the

Department of Business in 2007. In 2005 the goal of reducing 25 per cent of red tape over three years was set. As of now 83,000 unnecessary regulations have been removed, which accounts for a reduction of more than 27 per cent as a result of the government's red tape reductions.

There's an oil and gas competitiveness review. There's a western economic partnership, the Alberta western partnership agreement. When we go to section 2, the section outlines the purpose of a body established under the act:

To increase Alberta's competitiveness by

- (i) accelerating the implementation of current Government of Alberta initiatives . . .
- (ii) developing a shared strategy . . . through strengthened collaboration with industry, business, and Albertans,
- (iii) developing benchmarks for measuring Alberta's competitiveness.

And it goes on.

Why do we need a new board to do the role of the government? Why do we need a new board to communicate to Albertans? The government already has a well-established communications department in each ministry as well as the Public Affairs Bureau in Executive Council. How will the shared strategy with industry and business be developed? How much influence should there be from the interests of business and industry, which are inherently different and even at odds with the role of the government?

When will we see this strategy? When will the benchmark measures be made public, and how will those benchmarks be determined? Is the quality of life the main goal, or is it increased profitability for business and industry? Are we encouraging the latter in the hopes that the former will follow? How far is this taking Alberta into the business of being in business, and how much of this is creating a competitiveness climate? Where is the line drawn between establishing the conditions for strong economic development and propping up the private sector?

Identifying the need for reduced regulation and increased competitiveness is a step in the right direction, but to be effective, there needs to be action, and this bill just legislates an idea. This bill exacerbates the situation the government is trying to improve. The bill itself is adding more regulations and more unnecessary work. This is a hollow bill. Is this bill really the best that the Premier could come up with for his flagship bill?

There are lots of questions being raised by this bill, and for those reasons I'm afraid I cannot support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. You spoke about competitiveness, and I can understand your frustration and your caution regarding this government initiative. Being from northeast Calgary, do you think northeast Calgary, in particular the region around the airport, would be more competitive if there was to be an airport tunnel constructed, as you have suggested earlier?

Mr. Kang: Well, there is a \$3 billion expansion going on at the Calgary International Airport. The International Airport is a hub not only for the province but for the country as well, and to move traffic around the airport, that will go a long way. You know, if we have the tunnel, we don't have any traffic jams, and we won't be putting out any greenhouse gas emissions. Like the Minister of Transportation says: improving the environment. Anything coming out of the tailpipe will be reduced if we have the airport tunnel.

It will help battle the east-west flow of traffic. Right now we only have 16th Avenue, the Trans-Canada highway 1, and we have Stoney Trail way up north. Those are the only major arteries I can say are moving traffic east and west. So having the airport tunnel will be very helpful to move traffic for the businesses coming into the northeast.

CN is just building a big yard, 272 hectares, in Conrich, and other businesses will follow suit. The only access to Conrich is McKnight and Country Hills Boulevard, and Country Hills Boulevard is not going to be a freeway kind of road. For now it's just two lanes each way. So I think having the tunnel will go a long way to help all the businesses to compete. It's going to affect 20 hotels; it's going to cost them \$2 million a year more. And for the guy who's working at the airport for 10 bucks an hour, it's going to cost him \$150 a month more. The airport tunnel, I think, will be the only access for the LRT to the airport.

Then the minister keeps on saying again and again that the airport tunnel is not a provincial responsibility. As I said, the airport land, I think, is the responsibility of the provincial government and the federal government and the city and the Airport Authority as well.

Mr. Snelgrove: Darshan, it's there. The tunnel is already there. You just have to take the dirt out of it.

Mr. Kang: The tunnel is already there. That's what I'm looking for. Let's have the shell in place so we can take the dirt out whenever we need it, and we can connect onto it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand before the Assembly today and speak on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This province and the world have been faced with an economic climate that has impacted all facets of our society. As a result, business and government are seeing the need to adapt to changing economies. Bill 1 acknowledges this and resolves to see Alberta adapt to the shifts in our global economy. Bill 1 will ensure that Alberta is prosperous, successful, and competitive.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 1 will benefit not only my constituents but all Albertans. Essentially, Bill 1 will create a more prosperous province, and all Albertans will be able to prosper as a result. A competitive economy leads to lower prices, higher wages, more jobs, and improves living standards. Not only that, but a more competitive economy grows faster and adapts quicker. My constituents will benefit greatly from the intended outcome of this bill. They will be able to better provide for their families and will benefit from an increase in living standards. Let me be clear: I believe that Bill 1 will benefit all my constituents and all Albertans, including vulnerable Albertans. After all, a more prosperous economy means that they and all Albertans will have the opportunity to prosper.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 1 builds on the success and prosperity that this province has already achieved, success like our savings in the sustainability fund. As a result of these savings this province is in the best financial situation in this country. Furthermore, Bill 1 will build on current government initiatives to achieve a competitive economy. With Bill 1 Alberta can and will be one of the most competitive places to do business, invest, and live.

In addition, Bill 1 will allow this government to better co-ordinate the efforts of the government, industry, and business. This will

allow this province to continue to build on our strengths and deliver both the economic results and the quality of life Albertans deserve.

Most of all, Bill 1 will focus on ensuring new partnerships for the future. This bill shows Albertans and the world this government's commitment to make Alberta one of the most economical, competitive places in the increasingly interconnected global marketplace. I believe that with new partners we can bring innovative ideas and people to this province, and those new partners can only help us be better and build on our current successes.

Mr. Speaker, this past year has shown that we must adapt to the ever-changing markets and the direction taken by our business partners not only here in Alberta but across the nation and around the world. In my mind, Bill 1 is the best possible way to do this. Through Bill 1, the leadership of this government, and the work ethics of Albertans, this province will become one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world, and as a result my constituents and all Albertans will benefit.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in support of this bill. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to join debate on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. Now, I think a couple of previous speakers have already made the point that one might want to think about renaming it. Although they identified some good ideas, I think that what you really ought to do is get right to the heart of the matter in terms of what this bill is about. You could actually call it Bill 1, An Act To Make the Government Sound As Far Right As Possible So They Can Recover Their Lost Support from the Wildrose Alliance.

The neat thing that would happen if you renamed the act is that you then have built-in performance measures, something, of course, which is extremely lacking at this point. You could just simply look at polls and determine whether, in fact, the act has actually brought about the outcome that I think it's clearly designed to achieve. Anyway, that's sort of where I would start with the act.

In terms of what's inside the act, again, a couple of people have mentioned – but I do think it's worth repeating – the very beginning of the act, the whole whereas about what it is that underlies this act and why it is we're bringing it in place: "Whereas Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans." Others have made this point, but I want to say that I think that's a very narrow view of what contributes to Alberta's success. It's one that, unfortunately, then results in a very narrow view of governance and a very narrow view of policy development.

Personally, I think Alberta's success is also founded on the sense and strength of community across our province. I also believe it's founded on a sense of work ethic and a strive for excellence, not an excellence that brings about competitive advantage but simply excellence for excellence's sake. For instance, in our postsecondary institutions we are actually seeking out knowledge for knowledge's sake, not just because some company is looking for a competitive advantage and the university is there as a support for them but, rather, because we think seeking out knowledge is a good thing.

You can see how defining things as narrowly as defined within this piece of legislation will result in losing the point, I think, in many cases of what it is we're trying to achieve in much of the work that we engage in every day in government.

The other thing, of course, about just that first part, the whereas, is that it talks about "Whereas global competition for access to

markets and for investment capital, people and skills is ever increasing." I'm afraid that what this is really about is attracting or thinking you're going to attract investment capital for short periods of time, but it is not at all focused on attracting people and skills to Alberta. Ultimately, when you're looking at trying to present your province as a kind of place for people with great education who have a tremendous amount to offer to the development of our province and who have high skill levels, when you try to bring those people in, they're not so interested in living in, you know, an unregulated, polluted, sprawling suburb right next to Wal-Mart, where their kids can expect to go to work for \$6 or \$8 an hour or whatever it is, unless of course they're younger, and not receive any health and safety protection. This is not the kind of thing that makes people want to come to Alberta and make their life here and invest their skills and themselves in building the province.

Again, the way this bill is defined and described, it's way too narrow, so we miss out on what it is we're actually trying to achieve or what we should be trying to achieve. One of the things that the bill does, of course, is that it sets up this committee or this agency that's going to then, very vaguely, review how to make Alberta more competitive. I suppose the first concern that we have around this is that we have no sense of who's going to be on this committee or this agency and what their mandate will be.

Of course, you know, the act refers to key stakeholders. Well, my question is: who are those key stakeholders? Will we have temporary foreign workers on that committee, the very people who would be protected by the regulation, which is often characterized as being a barrier to competition? Would we have environmentalists? Are those the key stakeholders that will be on that committee, the very people who advocate for the kind of regulation often characterized as being uncompetitive, characterized in error, I would add, but nonetheless often characterized as being uncompetitive?

Would we have children on that committee; you know, the kids that would be cared for in daycares that are safe and government funded and overseen rather than daycares which are structured through government apathy to allow for sort of Wal-Mart international daycare operators to come in with a minimum of regulation and oversight? Would we have consumers, whom we're supposed to be protecting? Of course, people constantly complain that consumer protection legislation is red tape. Are those the stakeholders?

Really, the term "stakeholder" is very, very vague and, of course, intentionally so in this case. Based on sort of the preamble of the bill, we can only assume that the stakeholders that we're really talking about are business. We're going to put together a committee. We're going to fund that committee. We're going to give it lots of authority and lots of support and resources, and then government is going to sit down with business behind closed doors and cut some regulations and cut some red tape.

Now, of course, the other piece of all of this is the whole question of whether it's behind closed doors or whether it's open and how often it reports and whether people can attend. Maybe we could have public competitiveness review committee meetings, and the public could be invited to come. Maybe that would be a good idea. But, of course, that's certainly not provided for here, and what we know from the record of this government is that transparency is pretty much the last thing on its list of priorities. These are the kinds of things that we are concerned about with respect to the legislation as it's currently constructed.

In the throne speech – I believe it was in the throne speech – there was talk about how, you know, when it comes to the environment and oil and gas, we need to move away from all that sort of red tape at the beginning of giving business approvals. Instead, what we'll

do is we'll just sort of let them come on in, and then we'll enforce and monitor once they're in. This, of course, is exactly the kind of thing that we're concerned about because if you don't sit down with business at the outset and say, "Here are the rules that we need you to operate by because our community values safety and the rights of your employees," blah, blah, blah, there's no reason to believe that that's the way they're going to operate other than crossing your fingers and closing your eyes and hoping that it happens. I know this government does use that strategy a fair amount, but we've also found that that often doesn't work.

3:50

Then the idea is that, well, everything will be fine, and then we'll send people in to monitor them periodically. Of course, what we've seen in the budget is that we're cutting the budget specifically designed for those people to go in and monitor. What we've seen just in the last two days is that even when we do monitor and we get reports saying, "Oh, FYI, these things have happened which are in breach of your environmental regulations and standards," not only do we not monitor, but we don't enforce, and we don't lay charges. The only reason we do ultimately lay charges is because private citizens file prosecutions, the federal government does it, and international attention is directed towards the problem in a way that embarrasses business. Then suddenly the government gets involved, but before then, we had absolutely no intention of getting involved.

That's what government's monitoring and enforcement looks like now, and their plan, of course, is to actually reduce the funding for that while at the same time limiting red tape, quote, unquote, for the approval process for various applications. Not good. Not good for Albertans, not good for our environment, not good for workers, not good for consumers. It is, as many people have already stated, clearly something that's designed to become a race to the bottom.

The only thing, of course, that gives me any hope in all of this is that, going back to my original point, this is an entirely political document with absolutely no performance measures built into it and no clarity of any type. I suspect that what will happen is that this bill will be passed, and at some point down the road a few Tory friends will be appointed to the committee, and every now and then they'll have a press conference and roll out some documents that have been carefully prepared by the Public Affairs Bureau. Then we'll move on, and if anyone ever asks them about specifics, we'll just hear about how reports are coming but not quite yet. That's kind of how I would describe most of what happens in this government.

Nonetheless, I think that ultimately this bill is sort of meant to lessen, again, even beyond what we expect to have happen tomorrow, restrictions on oil companies and to give opportunity for more royalty breaks as time goes on. Once again, it will be an indication of government prioritizing big business over the interests of regular Albertans.

I've already identified the concern we have about there being no genuine measures of success within this bill. I suppose, as I said, that's kind of standard for how the government functions in these areas.

As I said, ultimately, the question becomes: what is it that the government intends to use to attract business and businesspeople and a skilled labour market to Alberta? We had talked yesterday in the advanced education estimates about a recent report released I think yesterday by the TD bank predicting that one of the most significant economic challenges facing all provinces in Canada will be the labour shortage and a shortage in particular of skilled, educated workers because so many of them are expected to retire at a certain point. As things look right now, we're not doing a very good job of educating the next generation coming up behind them. The gap

between the rich and the poor is increasing, and the absolute numbers of people who are able to get this kind of training are also decreasing. Then we're going to have a shortage of these skilled labourers, and that's going to be one of the things that is really critical to the economic development of this province.

Instead, what we will have done is we will have embarked upon a strategy to get rid of so much red tape so that we can kind of convince international business that we're more like China than they thought and that, you know, we can compete with China and India. I suspect that the odds are good that those well-educated, high-skilled workers that we're going to be going after aren't going to be that interested in going to China and India either. We will have basically put our money on the wrong horse while at the same time significantly undermining the health and future of our communities here in Alberta.

Ultimately, all that happens when you simply go after investment money is that money comes, money goes, and it turns on a dime. What makes the economic strength of a province more reliable is having a well-educated, committed local workforce that wants to be there. But you're not going to get that if you don't have accessible advanced education, if you don't have a K to 12 system where the class sizes are reasonable, if you don't have child care, if you don't have a place for people's parents to retire and live out their lives in dignity, if you don't have a well-funded and effective health care system. These are the things that bring people to the province and make us competitive in the long run, and these are the things that a bill like this, phrased as it is, is going to completely ignore.

For all of these reasons at this point I have to say that we will be unable, or certainly I will be unable, to support passage of this bill past second reading.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona: I share your concerns regarding this bill, but are you, too, concerned that if this legislation passes, this committee that we're going to set up may turn into nothing more than a patronage plum for government members or members of the PC Party?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I sort of touched on that earlier, but absolutely. Because the act itself sets out no parameters for why or how someone would get appointed to this committee, we know that, of course, that's exactly what will happen, that it will be a group of primarily patronage appointments identified and selected through cabinet. Then the question becomes: exactly how are they paid? How much are they paid? For what are they paid? How many meetings do they have to attend? Do we get into these ridiculous situations where they're being paid thousands of dollars for each meeting? Maybe they get thousands of dollars of pay for each meeting plus getting flown around the province and staying at a really, really lovely hotel, a really nice place. Maybe they can meet every time at the JPL or someplace like that because it's, you know, no one's place. Who knows what they'll do?

The point is that there is a history of unchecked, gratuitous spending when it comes to the discretionary salaries that are applied by this government, particularly when we're looking at government appointments to high-level positions. They've certainly not demonstrated a record that would convince me that this is not

something we ought to be worried about. When we're in the meantime talking about just even relatively small amounts of \$10 million here coming out of programs for kids at risk or a few million dollars there coming out of enforcement, these are things where you need to balance. This is a government that, you know, gave out hundreds of thousands of dollars in iPods to business friends for no apparent reason. I mean, there's not a strong record of sound fiscal balancing by these folks. That's my concern.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. I don't know whether any of the Premier's speeches or any of the government press releases were already on those iPods before they were given out, but that's not my question to the hon. member. Getting back to the competitiveness review and the changes, the sort of odd changes that were made to the minimum wage recently by the minister, how do you feel about those changes whenever you compare our minimum wage to other provinces' and what this government has done with the minimum wage?

Ms Notley: That's a really good question, and that's exactly the concern that we have about this competitiveness review because, of course, it will all be behind closed doors. We'll have business friends and government friends getting together to quietly decide what standards need to be lowered. Of course, we have a perfect example with just an off-the-cuff little decision to walk away from a previous promise made to low-income Albertans, rationalized with the ludicrous explanation that they were going to actually protect jobs by not letting them be paid more, which you could only come up with if you were in a room behind closed doors with one or two of your friends without somebody with more good sense to be in there with you to explain what a ludicrous explanation that was.

4:00

These are exactly the kinds of things we're concerned about, whether it's health and safety regulations, workers' standards, temporary foreign worker protection, environmental standards. There are so many areas where this government has barely met a national standard or in many cases hasn't met a national standard. If you put this process in place, there'll be even more opportunities for behind-closed-door efforts to further reduce protections for regular Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. Alberta is a great province to live in and do business in. We're blessed with opportunities and natural resources, and Albertans know how to turn that opportunity into success and prosperity. As government we also play an important role in this. It is absolutely critical that the legislation and regulations that we put in place serve a purpose, are not burdensome, and contribute to a healthy economy by encouraging industries, not stifling them.

We need to go further than just not inhibiting growth. It is incumbent on us to work with other industries and help create an environment that encourages industry, an environment where it is the competitive place to do business. The Alberta Competitiveness Act seeks to do just that by making our great province of Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America to do business. By creating this environment, everyone benefits. A more prosperous place to do business means our economy grows faster and adapts

quicker. It helps create more jobs, higher wages, and improved standards of living.

Mr. Speaker, in my own department, Alberta Transportation, we have looked for ways to help make industry more competitive. In an area such as this it can be a bit of a balancing act. We need to ensure that our roads and railways are safe, but we must find ways to ensure this safety without overburdening the industry with rules and regulations. Rules and regulations must serve a purpose other than to be another rule. They must make sense and contribute to safety, be effective and enforceable without hindering growth and innovation.

Since I've been the Minister of Transportation, a number of changes have been made to enhance competitiveness. Simple changes like allowing easier access to forms and publications and streamlining processes for industry allow businesses more time to focus on their business instead of spending time trying to navigate a confusing process. We've increased winter weight allowances on selected roads to help reduce costs to forest product companies. We've minimized user cost for the transportation of goods and services to contribute to a more competitive environment. We work with other provinces and the federal government to achieve harmonization in regulation.

We also work very hard advocating to the federal government so they do not overburden industry here with regulations that absolutely do not work for Albertans. We're not always successful, but we continue to focus on working with the federal government. If we aren't successful and national regulations come into play, we do whatever we can to help industry adhere to those regulations with the most minimal impact on their businesses.

We've also implemented an online weights and dimensions permit system called TRAVIS to help reduce costs and minimize administrative steps for carriers and shippers. Right now we're working with industry on pilot projects to reduce cost per kilometre through selective lift axle allowances and evaluating super-single tires.

Creating a competitive environment is only half of the solution. We must also maintain a competitive environment, and that means we need to always be assessing, looking for new efficiencies and opportunities to become more competitive. It isn't a task you do one time and put on the shelf. The environment is always changing. We must look for new opportunities and new ways to make the environment better for business, not just to survive but to grow and prosper, and we must do this by working with the various industries in Alberta. It will increase collaboration between government, industry, business, and Albertans, enhance Alberta's competitiveness, and provide long-term benefits for Alberta families and the entire province. Through this new partnership Alberta will better co-ordinate the efforts of government, industry, and business and continue to build on our strengths to deliver both the economic results and the quality of life that Albertans deserve.

Bill 1 shows Albertans and the world our commitment to make Alberta one of the most economically competitive places in the world. It also shows that the province is committed to creating the conditions that will attract new businesses, innovators, and the next generation of entrepreneurs. The purpose of Bill 1 is to create a focus on competitiveness that brings together government, industry, and other Albertans to implement initiatives and develop a strategy that drives action that measurably improves Alberta's competitiveness. Bill 1 will bring together all of these initiatives under one umbrella so we have a co-ordinated effort and greater success at creating a more competitive environment. It is for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I support Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act.

Thank you very much, and I would like now to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4
Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling
Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate February 24: Mr. Olson]

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's again a pleasure to speak on Bill 4, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act. The object of the bill is to amend the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act so that provincial laws align with the new federal legislation. We are just trying to harmonize our laws with the federal legislation, but while doing this largely administrative legislation, this legislation would also give the dangerous goods and rail safety branch of Alberta Transportation a lot of power.

The concern is the sections on time limit for prosecution and the administrative fees, sections 14 and 15, which are unnecessary to align Alberta legislation with the federal counterparts. There are two problems with these sections. It ties the time limit of prosecutions to when the director learns about the offence instead of on the alleged offence itself. It gives the director the power to order a person to pay up to \$10,000 in administration fees if the director is of the opinion that a contravention occurred. While the alleged offender has the option to pay the fee outright or appeal to the board, there are questions concerning the independence of the board and concerning the potential fee there may be in place to file an appeal.

I saw nothing in the May 2009 federal amendment to the federal Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act that would require these provisions. These sections, I believe, are the result of staffing and funding shortages, and it would cost a lot less time and money to sway the opinion of the director instead of a judge. So this bill, in my opinion, should have been an uncontroversial bill that upholds the government's agreement with the federal government to align the province's regulations concerning the transportation of dangerous goods with federal regulations. However, because they added powers to the director of the dangerous goods and rail safety branch of Alberta Transportation, an amendment is needed, or else I'm afraid we shall vote against this bill.

4:10

When we do the sectional analysis of the bill, in section 3 the FOIP legislation supercedes the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act. On the face of it I don't see any problem with this section.

Section 4 seems okay, and section 6 is okay.

In section 9 in order for the people to be allowed to transport or handle dangerous goods, they have to meet certain conditions. This section adds to the already existing conditions the condition of passing some sort of security clearance. Under the present circumstances, you know, with the threat of terrorism and all that, people should be required to pass some kind of security clearance to be able to transport dangerous goods.

Section 10 standardizes allowing shipping and documentation and safety standards for dangerous goods.

When we come to section 14, the current time limit for prosecution of an offence is two years from the last alleged offence. The time limit will stay at two years, but it will be two years after either the day of the last offence or the day on which evidence of the alleged offence came to the attention of the director – that is, the director of the dangerous goods and rail safety branch of Alberta Transportation – whichever is later. This is controversial. If it is five years after an alleged offence but the offence just came to the

attention of the director, then someone can be prosecuted for the offence.

Do we really want companies or drivers to be liable indefinitely? There could be a problem with proving when the director was alerted to the offence. With the fact that there isn't a maximum of when a person could be charged, the director could learn of an offence 15 years later even. So we need clarification of this clause. Why is it here? What is supposed to be achieved? Is it really fair for a driver or a company to be on the hook for that long a period of time?

The following section of the act deals with penalties for contraventions of the act. This section is adding an entirely new section for administrative penalties. In particular, if the director has the opinion that a person has contravened this act, then the person is to pay the government an administrative penalty in an amount not exceeding \$10,000. A person who pays the administrative penalty or wins their appeal will not get charged for the contravention so will not face those penalties. The time limit for receiving an administrative penalty is either a year after the alleged contravention or a year after the director learns of the offence.

Within 30 days of receiving an administrative penalty, a person can either pay it or appeal it. That appeal will also come, probably, with some kind of fee. The board's decision on the appeal is final. According to the stakeholders the likely motivation of this provision is that the province does not have enough inspectors, and there's a lot of paperwork to file a charge against someone. So by issuing fees based on the opinion of the director instead of penalties decided in a court of law, this will be a lot cheaper and require fewer inspectors.

This section gives the director of the dangerous goods and rail safety branch of Alberta Transportation a lot of power. Shouldn't the standard rule for contravention of the act be greater than merely the opinion of the director? If there are fees to appeal an administration fee, then couldn't this become a tax on people who transport dangerous goods in Alberta? If the director wants to generate more revenues for this department, he will just issue these administration fees so that regardless of whether people appeal or just pay the fee, they will receive the revenue.

This is also a get out of jail almost free card. For people who do contravene the act, they can just pay the much lower administration fee instead of penalties they would have had to pay if they were found guilty in a court. Won't this actually make Alberta's highways more dangerous? Are the people guaranteed to have a fair appeal considering that the appeal will be heard by the Alberta Transportation Safety Board and that decision is final? There is currently a lack of inspectors, and the new rules won't be fair and will offer a get out of jail for close to free card. This is probably a result of the government wanting a cheaper, easier way to enforce these rules.

Also, I doubt that an appeal which is heard by the Alberta Transportation Safety Board would be either independent or fair. What I see is that this bill should have been a straightforward bill to protect the environment and people from possible dangers of transporting dangerous goods. Working with the federal government is important to secure the safety of all Albertans. Instead of a straightforward bill, this government seeks some provisions that give them more power and more money.

This bill would potentially make Alberta's highways more dangerous and the rules less fair, all because they don't want to spend the money to get enough inspectors out there to enforce the rules. How would one like to wake up and receive a notice that you owe the government a \$10,000 administration fee when your only recourse is to pay the fee or appeal? If you appeal, there's also a fee, and now you have to pay for a lawyer as well.

These are the issues with this bill, so I cannot support this bill as is. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to this bill sponsored by the very honourable Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I would like to make a few comments to this. I'm actually quite interested in this bill, as well as my colleague from Calgary-McCall, because I had very a close experience with one of the largest dangerous goods spills I think probably in Alberta's history. That was the railway spill at Lake Wabamun about five years ago, I believe. If memory is correct, it was the summer of 2005. My family had at that time a cottage at the far west end of Lake Wabamun. I had just gotten there for my one week of holiday. Before the day was over, my holidays were totally disrupted because of this terrible spill.

I'm sure everybody recalls it was a train that derailed towards the east end of Lake Wabamun. The train track there runs along the north side of the lake for many miles, is often within very short yards of the lake. In this particular location where the spill occurred, the track was virtually beside the lake. When the train derailed and the several tanker cars went off the tracks, some of them were punctured and drained into the lake and caused a terrific spill. It caused not only a lot of damage to cottages right nearby; it caused serious and long-lasting environmental damage to the water itself.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I was quite dismayed and concerned with how long it took for both government authorities and the Canadian National Railway to respond in a responsible way. Frankly, the first interest of Canadian National seemed to be to clear the tracks so that their trains could continue to roll. They actually pushed some of the cars aside using maintenance equipment and through that process spilled even more bunker C crude into the lake.

4:20

Even worse, Mr. Speaker, a couple of days later it became evident that it wasn't just bunker C that was spilling into the lake. There was something called pole oil, which is a preservative and considerably more toxic than bunker C. Thousands and thousands of litres of that preservative had spilled into the lake, and nobody realized it for the first few days of the spill.

One of the distressing things about that was how long it took officials to respond and how poorly prepared we were. When I say "we," I mean not just the Alberta government but Canadian National Railway. As it turned out, it took several days to bring in equipment and supplies to mop up this spill, and they had to come from places like Montreal and Texas, as I recall. I found that particularly concerning because if you pay attention to the railways in Alberta and, frankly, in many areas of Canada, they follow rivers. It's an obvious place for a railway track to go because rivers follow the lowest elevations, and typically that's where railways want to be going. So we have hundreds and hundreds of miles of railway track in Alberta running beside bodies of water, and we have very, very little preparation.

That was a real eye-opener for me and I think for the people of Alberta and perhaps one of the reasons that this piece of legislation is before us now. If I understand the legislation correctly, it will improve the marking of railway cars that are carrying toxic materials. Hopefully, next time, if there is a next time, people will realize immediately that there is something like pole oil as well as bunker C crude being spilled, and it won't take a number of days for that to be discovered.

One of the questions I have – and perhaps when we're in commit-

tee the sponsoring member could address that. All the evidence around that spill suggested that the spill was actually made worse because CNR seemed to put such a priority on clearing the track so their trains could continue to flow. One of my questions with this spill is: does this bill give anybody the authority to order a halt to railway activities until there's a proper assessment done of the situation? A railway is going to be extremely reluctant to do that if it's a main national line like the one involved at Wabamun. But the simple fact of the matter is that it may be necessary to assess the scale of the damage and the best way to minimize that damage. My question on this point to the government would be: under this legislation would there be an official with the power to order a halt to rail activities until an environmental spill was assessed?

I'd also like to just raise the concern around the proposed section 30.1(1), which is on page 8 of Bill 4, and that's concerning the fines, \$10,000. Now, the Member for Calgary-McCall raised this. I'm going to take a little different approach. Both 30.1(1) and 30.1(2) address the issue. Actually, I'll read the entire section into the debate. Section 30.1(1) says:

Where the Director is of the opinion that a person has contravened this Act, the Director may, subject to the regulations, order that person to pay to the Government an administrative penalty in the amount, not exceeding \$10,000, set out in the order.

Then (2) says:

Notwithstanding subsection (1), where the Director considers that a contravention of a continuing nature continued beyond a single calendar day, the person held to have committed it is additionally liable to the applicable penalty under subsection (1) for each calendar day after the first one on which the contravention is so held to have continued.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my questions are around this and around the scale of this fine and how it would be administered. Depending on the spill, \$10,000 may be a lot of money. On the other hand, in the case of Wabamun I think total damages got into the many, many tens of millions of dollars. In fact, they might have exceeded \$100 million although I'd have to confirm that.

When we're talking about that scale, a fine of a maximum of \$10,000 is trivial, frankly. Even if that fine is applied every single day, I can easily see an argument arising from the defendant, "Well, how many days does it apply?" when the act says, "each calendar day after the first one on which the contravention is so held to have continued." Who is going to argue how long the contravention continued? Who is going to rule that? Is it going to be argued in court? I believe it would end up there. Even if it went on for two months, 60 days – help me with my math – I think that's \$600,000. It sounds like a lot of money, but if you're talking about a \$100 million spill, it doesn't strike me as all that much of a penalty.

I'd ask the government, when we get to committee on this bill, to address that issue and to justify a maximum penalty of \$10,000 or perhaps, if they can't justify it, to amend the legislation. There may be explanations through fines under other legislation, but I'd appreciate if that could be elaborated upon.

I would also just like to reinforce in my final comments how important I think this piece of legislation is. Alberta is the base of operations for extensive chemical production and petroleum production. All kinds of dangerous goods are transported down our highways, through our cities, over our rail lines. I think of the development, for example, in the Industrial Heartland and all the chemicals and the millions of tonnes of dangerous goods that are transported through that area.

I feel strongly as a legislator that we have to have not only a tough piece of legislation, but we need to have the resources in place to back it up. So my final question to the government to raise and address in committee would be on what resources there are going to

be – money, inspectors, people, equipment, and everything else needed – to make sure that this bill isn't just a good piece of paper but that it's actually effectively out there, backed up, and enforced so that the people of Alberta can live in this province without worrying about a disaster from a dangerous goods spill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 4.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate February 24: Mr. Goudreau]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This piece of legislation is intended to protect search and rescue groups from negligence lawsuits, and it allows for the regionalization of emergency management operations. Now, it's kind of appropriate, I suppose, that this would follow immediately on our debate on Bill 4, which was concerning the transportation of dangerous goods because it could well be that a dangerous goods spill would require a major response from emergency measure organizations. That would require the activities under this piece of legislation.

4:30

As I understand it, the object of this bill is to amend the Emergency Management Act to better protect search and rescue workers and organizations from lawsuits and to allow for the regionalization of emergency management responsibilities. One of the things this bill sets out to achieve is to protect search and rescue organizations from trivial or unreasonable or mischievous legal actions, for example around negligence. I'm guessing that perhaps this anticipates that if an emergency organization responds and there's an allegation of negligence and if the negligence is strictly a result of best effort or people responding without full information or otherwise trying to fulfill their responsibilities, they would not be liable for undue legal risk.

There is a rising number of civil lawsuits seeking damages from search and rescue organizations, and it's actually getting to the point where I think it's a serious burden for some of these organizations to continue. It becomes very difficult for them to obtain insurance. They end up spending more money on insurance than on training or on equipment, and that simply seems unreasonable.

I think there are cases in the last couple of years, for example with mountain rescues in the wintertime, where perhaps search and rescue organizations have scrambled and worked hard and put themselves at risk to undertake a mountain rescue, and if things don't go perfectly according to plan or if somebody is inadvertently injured or perhaps the lost person isn't found in time, then the search and rescue organization can find itself liable. Of course, that's counter-productive. These are people, largely, who volunteer their time, go to considerable personal sacrifice to offer their search and management efforts and expertise, and they should not be penalized for doing so. If there's a move in here to better protect these organizations, then I applaud that, and I think you would see us supporting that sort of an initiative. I want to make sure there's an opportunity,

however, for our critic, the Member for Calgary-Currie, to speak to this.

There is a question around this, and that is whether people who suffer from damages caused by a search and rescue operation will no longer be able to seek damages. There's a balancing act here. Where will those damages be sought? How do we strike the balance between protecting search and rescue workers and organizations and still protecting the rights, frankly, of the people who may be being rescued? That's going to be interesting to see how this plays out, and we'll learn more from debate.

I think with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and allow our member for Calgary-Currie to respond, unless there's anything under 29(2)(a). Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much. Not on 29(2)(a)? This is on the debate itself?

The Acting Speaker: No, it's not 29(2)(a).

Mr. Taylor: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and get on the record at second reading debate on Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010. [interjection] Behave yourself, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who has been known to get a little carried away from time to time.

An Hon. Member: No. We don't want to know.

Mr. Taylor: I promise, hon. member, I won't go into details on that.

Now back to the matter at hand. This bill, Bill 6, is a little bit like fixing something that isn't broken yet. I think I'm very supportive in this case of the notion of doing this because it really seeks to do two things: to allow for the regionalization of emergency management operations – and, at least in theory, there should be some efficiencies and perhaps some expertise to be gained from taking that approach – and to protect search and rescue groups from negligence lawsuits by not providing funding for third-party insurance but by stipulating good-faith legislation.

This really, Mr. Speaker, hearkens back to a case a little over a year ago in British Columbia where three search and rescue teams suspended service after a lawsuit was launched by a man whose wife tragically died when the couple got lost in the backcountry near the Kicking Horse Resort in British Columbia. We haven't had a situation like that in this province yet, and I think that this legislation seeks to ensure that we don't have a situation that gets to the point where search and rescue workers very much operating in good faith are liable for legal action.

Search and rescue workers do go out into some pretty hazardous conditions sometimes and do everything in their power to rescue people, to find people who are lost, to save lives. Bill 6 would extend roughly the same protection to them as we extend to firefighters currently, and I think it's a very, very reasonable thing to do for the protection of those people who, you know, often in volunteer situations put their own safety and security of the person on the line to help others who are very much in need of assistance and who would also, without this legislation, be running the risk of putting their own personal financial situations at risk should something go wrong or be alleged to go wrong.

On the good-faith section of this bill what that really does, as I understand it, is say that when search and rescue operators are acting

in good faith, doing everything that they know how to do or that they're aware that they could do to try and find someone who is lost, to rescue someone who is in trouble, if the outcome is not successful, if the outcome is tragic, they did nothing wrong by trying their best to save a life, to rescue somebody, and they should not be held legally or financially liable for that. That, in principle, Mr. Speaker, is something that we on this side of the House can very much support.

On the other issue, which is the regionalization of search and rescue and emergency service providers, again, in principle, that seems to make sense. Regionalization, when done right, makes sense. Emergency planning and response requires collaborative efforts. Smaller municipalities often lack the resources that would be necessary. You really do have to ask yourself, Mr. Speaker, why it would be necessary for every town and village and summer village and hamlet to have their own person tasked with having responsibility for emergency management when, in fact, it might all be more effectively rationalized and regionalized under the municipal district or under a collaborative approach.

Again, in principle, Mr. Speaker, I think that that is something that we can support. Of course, second reading debate is precisely that: it's debate in principle on a bill.

I do have some questions. I will have some questions that I will want to get into when this bill moves to committee. I don't think that I have any huge concerns about the bill. I don't see anything in here, depending on the answers that I get at committee to my questions, that suggests to me that this bill is going to need to be amended, but just so that we make sure that we're clear on the section-by-section intent of this bill, I will be asking those questions at committee stage but certainly pleased to support this bill in principle at second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak very briefly on this bill and, basically, just simply to put out a question. I pretty much agree with everything that's been said up to date, that the intentions, the good faith behind this bill seems to be there, and it seems to make sense to support it.

The only question that I will ask and I'm hoping that maybe in committee or at some point further on in the process I can get an answer to, that I always worry about, is the situation where let's say you have some type of outfitter company that earns money by selling an outdoor package to people. They promise certain safety and all that kind of stuff. People buy that package. They go out – let's just say it's into the mountains, skiing, heliskiing, whatever; it doesn't really matter – into the mountains, and they ultimately get lost, and something bad happens. The search and rescue goes in to try and retrieve them. Then they actually also make a mistake in terms of the retrieval, so some type of very severe personal injury or damage is suffered as a result.

I'm absolutely fine with the idea of the search and rescue people not being held liable for whatever they do in good faith, particularly because so many of them are volunteer based. My concern is that were that person to then try and sue the outfitter, would they run into situations where the outfitter, because of sort of the regulatory infrastructure within which they operate, would be entitled to argue that they had reliance on certain actions being taken by the search and rescue team? Then, of course, you can't sue the search and rescue team.

Effectively, what ends up happening is that you've got a regulatory infrastructure, and the person trying to sue is sort of following the liability trail. Then, ultimately, they get to a point where that trail, for good reason but for a different reason, disappears, and they can't get damages for what may ultimately be very severe personal injury through no fault of their own.

That's more my question. It's not the search and rescue people but rather the other agencies or businesses that may ultimately also have liability and whether they get into a position of being able to shift their liability to the search and rescue groups because then the standard changes dramatically. Then the person who suffers injury, in part because of the negligence of the business owner in the first place, is unable to collect. That's just a question I have. I hope I articulated the question in a sufficiently clear way that at some point the sponsor of the bill can come back and answer that question. Otherwise, for all the reasons that have already been identified, it makes good sense to support the bill, but I would just like that question answered.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, anybody wish to speak? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 6.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010. I would like to begin by thanking everyone for their united support for this bill. This bill proposes two house-keeping amendments. The first amendment relates to section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act, which allows certain surviving family members – a spouse, adult interdependent partner, a child, and parents – to recover damages for the emotional suffering and grief caused by the wrongful death of a close family member. This law ensures that family members do not have to litigate in order to receive damages for their grief.

Presently the act limits the class of family members eligible to receive bereavement damages. These damages may not be awarded to parents if their deceased child was married or had an adult interdependent partner, and damages may not be awarded to a child for their deceased parent if the child was married or had an adult interdependent partner. The passage of Bill 3 will broaden the eligibility for bereavement damages by opening up eligibility to a child that is married or has an adult interdependent partner. This change will mean that parents may be awarded damages regardless

of the marital status of their deceased child and a child may be awarded damages for the death of a parent regardless of the child's marital status. This amendment is consistent with the rule of law and court decisions on this issue.

The second amendment removes the reference to a child as including an illegitimate child. Distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate children is no longer appropriate in legislation. It is also out of step with modern-day family structures and dynamics. All children should be considered equal regardless of the marital status of the child's parents. This amendment is consistent with Alberta's Family Law Act.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, these amendments reflect the rule of law and current demographics in Alberta. I thank all members for participating in this debate and look forward to their feedback.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks so much, Mr. Chairman. There are times when I think it's worth reflecting on history and the way that the decisions we make in this Legislature may be played out in years and decades and even centuries to come. I think we have an opportunity here to reflect on that. This is a small, modest bill that I'm sure our caucus will support. But it's a bill with a very long history, and I think it's worth just getting some of that on the record. The provisions of Alberta's Fatal Accidents Act are rooted in English common law, and as I'll explain in a minute, some of this law goes back a number of centuries.

Under the common law of England and Wales the death of a person causes emotional and economic loss to their relatives, and in general damages cannot be recovered for either one of those types of damage but only for the physical damage to the claimant or to their property. This was a rule that goes back to a court case in 1808, so 202 years ago. It was *Baker versus Bolton* in England and Wales. Scotland had a little different take on the law. Trust the Scots. Anyway, the way the English and Welsh law was 200 years ago, if a person was injured, the wrongdoer could be liable for causing injury, but if the person were killed, there would be no liability. So, perversely, the wrongdoer had a financial interest in killing rather than just injuring a victim. That's how things were 200 years ago.

Then during the 1830s there was rapid development of the railways. That led to increasing public hostility to an epidemic of railway deaths and the indifferent attitude of the railway companies. Can you imagine, Mr. Chairman, a railway company being indifferent to things like safety? But, I guess, it does happen or it has historically. Anyway, as a result of public outcries, inquest juries started to revive an ancient remedy of Deodands as a way of penalizing the railways. The railway accident at Sonning Cutting in 1841 was particularly notorious. This was quite a startling accident. As a result of that, in 1841 legislators, in particular Lord Campbell and the Select Committee on Railway Labourers – well, Lord Campbell formed the Select Committee on Railway Labourers in 1846, and in the face of railway opposition a bill was introduced to change the situation.

4:50

What became law was known in 1846 as the Deodands Act, and it somewhat addressed this issue. What it did is it gave personal representatives the right to bring legal action for damages where the deceased person had had such a right at the time of their death. Compensation was restricted to the husband, the parent, or the child of the deceased and was for such damages proportioned to the injury resulting from such death.

In any case, the law continued to evolve. In 1858 it was amended again and gradually evolved into the legislation that we are amending one more time now in 2010. So this piece of legislation goes back over 200 years and has been amended many times. The amendments we're looking at today are really strictly a matter of language, in effect modernizing some of the language and terminology that's in the legislation. As the Member for Lethbridge-West said in his opening comments, it seems like a simple and appropriate thing to do, so we will, I expect, fully support this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Denis: I move that we rise and report the bill.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 3.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Ouellette]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member – the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know it can be a little confusing having a couple of titles in this Chamber.

I'm rising today just to have a few words on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, as we move it through second reading. I'd like to start by thanking the Premier for bringing this piece of legislation in. I do think that it is important that we actually continue this not

just in our oil and gas, as many people have talked about the competitiveness there. Rather, we also need to talk about competitiveness in other areas and the economy as a whole. We have the highest per capita GDP in Canada but at the same time have to continually ask ourselves if this is a competitive economy, and we must continually ask ourselves what we can do to make us more competitive as well.

Mr. Speaker, as Alberta emerges from the worst economic downturn in over a half century, this shows another reason why we need to continually re-evaluate our competitiveness. We've been taught a difficult yet very valuable lesson about the importance of using all of our resources to create a strong and healthy economy, but right now I think we also have been presented with a golden opportunity to demonstrate that we have indeed taken that lesson to heart. With that opportunity, this government has created Bill 1.

Many may ask: "What is Bill 1? Why do we need this?" Well, this bill proposes to establish a partnership between relevant government ministries and key competitive stakeholders. The partnership would work better to co-ordinate the efforts and resources of the government, industry, and business, which would build on our strengths and encourage that Alberta has a solid economic foundation going forward. As I've mentioned before, it's important to continually evaluate this because the private sector does change, the economy does change, Mr. Speaker, but at the same point of time, likewise, the government must change. We can't simply think that we have something down pat just because we are in a situation in this province as we are.

Mr. Speaker, by legislating this partnership we're demonstrating our commitment to providing Albertans with the type of economy that will ensure prosperity over the longer term. That's something all members here are charged with regardless of their party stripe. We're taking it upon ourselves to assume responsibility for this province's economic future and creating opportunities for future generations.

In addition to this, by creating a legal foundation for economic competitiveness, Bill 1 will hold this and future governments to account for the health of Alberta's economy by creating objective standards by which we can measure our own progress. This bill will also help ensure that the industry-government partnership looks at all aspects of competitiveness. That includes, without limitation, Mr. Speaker, existing partnerships and existing policies and existing regulations. In doing this, we can identify and eliminate any unnecessary regulations that could act as a barrier for competitiveness, and that's something that is quite attractive to me.

Indeed, regulatory pressures in many areas can directly affect an industry's ability to compete in the global marketplace. We have to remember that we're not just competing with British Columbia or with Saskatchewan or with Ontario. We're competing globally with different states and different countries with which we have free trade agreements or not. If we can work with stakeholders to reduce the amount of red tape that these industries have to cut through in order to do business, it will work to the advantage of all Albertans.

I must also say, Mr. Speaker, that this act is consistent with things that this government has done over the past couple of years, including the TILMA agreement a couple of years ago reducing trade tariffs with our neighbours. By creating efficiencies and eliminating redundant processes and policies, we are also demonstrating fiscal responsibility by ensuring that public money is not being wasted.

Mr. Speaker, now more than ever Albertans simply need their government to do everything it can to protect their livelihoods today and to ensure continued prosperity for their children and future generations to enjoy tomorrow. I know members of this Assembly consider this every day, but at the same time this act actually puts it into writing, puts it into stone.

This legislation will not only facilitate competition for Alberta businesses, but it also will oblige and commit governments to maintaining a process by which we can regularly review our efforts and evaluate our achievements. Because of the tremendous opportunities that Bill 1 will create for our province now and for years to come, Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this bill and encourage my hon. colleagues on all sides of the House to do the same.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak to this bill. With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that this House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:59 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 11, 2010

Issue 16

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 11, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three grade 6 classes that came from Ashmont school. Sixty students, five teachers, and three teacher aides have come to visit this Assembly. Just very quickly, I want to say that Ashmont is very proud of their accomplishments, especially their accomplishments in athletics and their participation not only throughout Alberta but throughout western Canada. The teachers that are in the public gallery are Mr. Keith Gamblin, Mrs. Carol Kam, Ms Amber Faganello, Mrs. Doris Vallee, Mrs. Jackie Michaud, and teacher assistants Ms Lisa LeMaigre, Mrs. Debbie Tchir-Houle, and Ms Susan Novosiwsky. If I could please ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to rise on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-West and Minister of Energy to introduce to you and through you this wonderful group of students from Webber Academy that are seated in the members' gallery. There are 53 of them here today, and they are the grade 5 class. Webber Academy is one of the top-rated schools in the province and also the school that my granddaughter Mackenzie attends. Accompanying them today is Mr. Daniel Mondaca, who is also my granddaughter's basketball coach and who just won the league pennant a couple of weeks ago and the bronze at provincial league this past week; Mr. Jason Ash; and Ms Heather Gallagher. I'd like them all to stand now and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Barbara Sriver, Tracy Kennedy, and Megan Lalonde from the Alberta Association of Midwives, who are seated in the public gallery. The Alberta Association of Midwives evolved out of a recognized need for continuity of care in the maternity cycle as well as in response to increasing public support of midwifery in Alberta. Since it was formed, the association has worked very hard to promote legalization and public funding of midwifery, and now that these services are covered, we need to start training more of them here in Alberta. Midwives have a unique and essential role to play in the facilitation of normal birth through the art and science of midwifery, and simply put, we need more of them. I would ask that my guests now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly Dr. Keith Archer and his five senior students in political science 429 at the University of Calgary. These students have been studying the political process which results every few years in the election of this Legislature. They're here to examine the makeup of the Legislature, to develop an understanding of how this happened, and what the Official Opposition's role is. I had the pleasure of meeting with Dr. Archer and his students earlier today and was impressed with their knowledge and interest. I hope they'll find their trip to the Legislature illuminating and that they'll be inspired to continue participating in many different ways in Alberta politics. Alberta needs active, engaged citizens, and I'm so glad to have them with us today. Would you rise and get the enthusiastic welcome of the Legislature.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it is, frankly, a real honour to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a group of nine family members seated in the public gallery who are joining us today to witness the tabling of Dorothea Arneson's tragic story in the Alberta health care system. Dorothea's family are now strong advocates for proper patient care. I would like to ask each of them to rise as I say their names: Carol Logan, Elmer Arneson, Norma Ross, Don Ross, Laryssa Speck, Sarah Logan, Melissa Logan, Dorothea Matter, and Terra Matter. Please give them a warm and respectful welcome.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction today is to introduce to all members of the Assembly a representative from the Kidney Foundation who is joining us today on what is World Kidney Day and working so hard to raise awareness of the importance of kidney health. Our guest is executive director Heidi Erisman, who's working very hard to help fight kidney disease and promote kidney health. I would ask her to please rise, and I'd ask all members to give her a warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a gentleman who travels Alberta on a daily basis. He travels providing service and supplies to coffee shops, that all of us as MLAs are familiar with in knowing what's going on in a community. This gentleman travels highway 63 often. He has some comments he'll provide to the Transportation minister later. Indeed, it's a pleasure to introduce him today. His home is in Vegreville. I'd like to ask the gentleman, Rick Davey, to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ms Luzviminda "Ching" Rodriguez of the Republic of the Philippines. Ms Rodriguez is the president of Arrowhead Manpower Resources Inc. and a staunch advocate for the ethical recruitment of Filipino workers for overseas employment. A few minutes ago she had a courtesy call with the Minister of Health and Wellness and has a scheduled meeting with Alberta Health

Services. She is seated in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask her to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of introduction, there's also an anniversary today for a number of members. On March 11, 1997, an election was held in the province of Alberta, and today is the 13th anniversary for the following members: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Their 13th election anniversary.

1:40

On March 12, 2001, there was also an election in the province of Alberta, and today is the ninth anniversary of the election of the following members to the Assembly for the first time: the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Their ninth anniversary.

And tomorrow will be happy birthday for the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Members' Statements

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

2010 Paralympic Winter Games

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard a lot in the last month about the success of the Winter Olympics, and I think we're all still probably aglow from that experience. But I'd like to remind everybody that there's still lots more excitement to come. The 2010 Paralympic Winter Games begin tomorrow – 7 p.m. is the opening ceremonies – and for the next 10 days people from around the globe will be treated once again to world-class competition.

Games for people with disabilities have been occurring since 1948 in England, when after the Second World War there were games that were set up for veterans with spinal cord injuries. Then the Paralympics as we now know them today began following the 1960 Olympics.

The 2010 Paralympic Games will feature 600 athletes competing in five different sports, which are biathlon, alpine skiing, ice sledge hockey, wheelchair curling, and cross-country skiing. All of these sports are medal events, and the athletes are of the highest calibre. We have nine Alberta athletes who will be representing our province during these games. One athlete you may have heard of is Brian McKeever, a seven-time Paralympic medalist in cross-country skiing from Calgary. He has only 10 per cent vision, but this hasn't stopped him from competing in and winning numerous world events, including the world championships. His brother Robin, who is also a talented skier and competed in Nagano in 1998, races alongside Brian as his guide. Brian is going to be one of the many inspiring athletes for us to follow this year.

Again, if you haven't had a chance, I really encourage you to make a concerted effort to see these Paralympic Games and watch Alberta athletes in action. These Paralympians are phenomenal athletes, and as Brian himself says, "I don't think the public understands how high the level of competition is for the Paralympics." The athletes' courage, determination, and commitment reflect the world-class competitors they are.

So watch tomorrow night. Good luck to all participants.

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

Highland Park Community Association

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize the Highland Park Community Association. This is a community in my constituency of Calgary-North Hill that exemplifies the challenges of an urban inner-city community as well as the unwavering community spirit exhibited throughout communities in Alberta.

I've attended several community functions in this community over the last couple of years, including attending community association meetings, a lawn sale organized last June by several community members as well as a couple of Saturdays ago their winterfest. This community has faced several challenges over the last years, including the siting of the Fresh Start recovery housing and addiction treatment centre, with which they developed a good neighbour agreement that I tabled in the Legislature a couple of weeks ago. They've also had the siting and operation of a methadone clinic without proper consultation and zoning. They also need some much-needed funding for vital repairs and maintenance to their community hall as it's, you know, falling apart as it's a much older building. That includes repairs to the roof, ceiling, and kitchen and landscaping necessary for flood prevention.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that the Highland Park Community Association was recently approved for some community facility enhancement program funding that in combination with funding from the city will go a long way in repairing and revitalizing and reinvigorating the Highland Park community centre and its citizens. Countless hours of hard work have been put in by the volunteers of the association to deal with these issues and for planning for the future vitality of the community. These contributors deserve to be recognized for their hard work and commitment to the community. They are Kevin Bentley, Mike Speta, Wayne Carrol, Monica Curle, Kirsten Sztain, Anne Naumann, Bill Morrison, Kathy Saunders, and Syd Deck. The work of these volunteers has been crucial, as is the funding that they will be receiving for their community hall, in dealing with the challenges of inner-city urban communities such as this. It is an honour to stand today and recognize them and celebrate the tremendous spirit of this community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

World Kidney Day

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 there were nearly 164,000 people with diabetes in Alberta, double the number of cases from just 10 years ago. That's a city's worth of citizens with a controllable but still serious, still life-threatening disease. The cost of the disease, the impact on health and happiness are immense, yet diabetes is just one of a score of medical conditions that affect the kidneys. Infections, inflammation, and inherited disorders such as polycystic kidney disease all have negative impacts on human health. Today, on World Kidney Day, I encourage Albertans to take a moment to think about their kidneys.

The good news is that most kidney diseases can be detected early. If you're obese, if you smoke, if you have hypertension, if you're over 50, or if you have a family history of kidney disease, make an appointment with your doctor or visit a clinic to get screened.

As we consider World Kidney Day, I'd like to acknowledge the many scientists, researchers, health care professionals, volunteers, and organizations such as the Alberta Kidney Disease Network and the Kidney Foundation of Canada. They are all working very hard to fight kidney disease and help people with kidney problems live more enjoyable lives.

I encourage Albertans to consider how they can help join the fight against kidney disease. Volunteer with the Kidney Foundation, donate your old, unwanted vehicle to the kidney car program, make sure you sign the organ donor consent line on the back of your Alberta health care card. Seventy per cent of Canadians waiting for an organ donation are waiting for a kidney. Kidney transplants enjoy a high success rate, between 90 and 95 per cent, and can bestow 10 to 20 additional years of life to the recipient. Your gift of life, our gift of life can make a huge difference.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Volunteer Recognition

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Volunteers are the building blocks of our communities and make an invaluable contribution to our society. One of the highlights of success of the recent Vancouver Olympic Games was the exceptional contribution of volunteers. Within Alberta approximately 2.5 million volunteers contribute approximately 449 million hours to community services. That's almost half a billion hours. Additionally, over 160,000 Albertans serve on boards of directors of organizations ranging from community associations and recreational sports groups to health regions and major cultural and social service organizations. Volunteers make Alberta a better place to live, and many are recognized for their contribution to the province.

On March 5 I had the honour of participating in the Grasslands Regional Family and Community Support Services citizen and junior citizen of the year presentations and celebration. More than twenty 2009 volunteers of the month for Brooks and area were recognized and honoured by the community for their volunteer activity, 20 people who represent a strong network of dedicated people who make Brooks and area a better place to live.

Mr. Albert Zagorsky was honoured as citizen of the year. Albert has been a dedicated volunteer for over 40 years in Brooks and the surrounding communities. As founder of the Brooks Overture Society, director and leader of the Brooks and District Community Band, and teacher to thousands of students Albert has created a musical legacy in our area. Albert is an accomplished ambassador for Brooks and the Newell region, gaining recognition across the prairie provinces, and if you've had the opportunity to hear the Brooks marching band, you'll know what I mean.

The junior citizen of the year is Talon Chandler, a grade 12 student at the Brooks composite high school who has immersed himself in student clubs and community organizations, particularly volleyball. Nominated for the award by his teachers, Talon has made an outstanding contribution to his community and represents many volunteers in the Brooks area. *Talon is positive and outgoing, actively looking for ways to help others. He is the elected president of his graduating class at the Brooks composite high school.*

As is often the case, a host of volunteer activities were some of the highlights of both Albert's and Talon's nominations.

Mr. Speaker, today I join the Grasslands FCSS, the Rotary Club of Brooks as the award sponsors, and the communities of Brooks and area in honouring Albert Zagorsky and Talon Chandler as Brooks' citizen and junior citizen of the year and acknowledge the host of volunteers who make our communities, our province, and our country a better place to live.

*Thank you, Mr. Speaker.**

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Health Services Decision-making

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals have a moral and professional responsibility to advocate on behalf of better patient care. Cancer doctors in both Calgary and Edmonton have from time to time spoken out about the need for expanded cancer care in these centres. Yesterday Alberta Health Services forbade cancer physicians at the Tom Baker in Calgary from speaking publicly about the need for new cancer facilities. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the minister agree with the health superboard forbidding cancer doctors from commenting on capacity problems at the Tom Baker cancer centre?

1:50

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm very aware of what the needs are for cancer treatment and cancer patients in general in Calgary. I was just there and visited the Tom Baker centre, and I'm pretty on top of the issue. I don't know what the hon. member is driving at here. I'm not familiar with the directive that he's referring to. But what I would just say quickly, Mr. Speaker, is that if it's a policy matter, whoever is asking that question should direct it to the Health Services people. If it's medical, ask the doctors.

Dr. Swann: I'm disappointed, Mr. Minister. You know there's a culture of intimidation and fear in this province around health care workers speaking out.

Do you support that gag order, or do you not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know of any gag order. I've been out talking to doctors. They're talking very openly, very freely with me. They're talking very openly with the Health Services people. I've talked with the nurses. I've talked with the optometrists. I've talked with pharmacists. I've talked with a whole bunch of people. There are 90,000 people out there, and I may get to talk to every one of them yet.

Dr. Swann: Denial, denial, denial, Mr. Minister.

This is the same week that the superboard blocked the full release of the report from the Health Quality Council. Does the minister agree that the superboard is spinning out of control and blocking information from Albertans, including that from health professionals?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, nobody is blocking any information whatsoever. I spoke with Alberta Health Services yesterday. I spoke with the Health Quality Council yesterday. They said they had some privacy concerns related to the parameters of the Alberta Evidence Act and the Health Information Act, issues of privacy that are being resolved. I said: well, speed it up, please, so that we can get the report out to the public. They're going to do that in nine days.

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

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

Long-term Care in Grande Prairie

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 this government committed to fund a new long-term care facility in Grande Prairie. It promised \$4.6 million. A total of \$2.3 million was paid to Chantelle Management to get the building under way to replace the outdated and unsafe Grande Prairie care centre. In this facility it takes 45 minutes to get all 60 patients down to the main floor. Families must be praying that a fire doesn't break out in the future. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: why has no work been started on this facility in the four years since the \$2.3 million was transferred?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand there are a number of circumstances around this project, but I believe that they are in the process of getting started. We will follow up with our office to see where they are in this process.

Dr. Swann: Well, how is the minister accounting for the funds distributed through this affordable supportive living initiative when it seems that the residents of Grande Prairie are still waiting for action after four years of this company having 2.3 million public dollars?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we have a program in my department called the affordable supportive living initiative. There are a number of criteria that organizations have to meet in order to be able to get the funding. One of the criteria is that they're able to go into the ground within nine months of receiving the funding, and the second one is that they're finished within two years of receiving that funding. That part of our program has been in process in the last two years.

Dr. Swann: I assume, then, that the minister is acknowledging that she doesn't know what's happened to that \$2.3 million.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness. The Premier stated earlier that the minister is travelling to Grande Prairie. Will the minister commit to visiting this centre and ensuring that he understands the need for urgent change in that facility?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if the schedule allows, I'd certainly welcome the opportunity to do that. We're visiting Grande Prairie. I'll also be visiting High Prairie. We're on a tight schedule so that I can come back here for question period that same day, but we'll do the best we can.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with the third Official Opposition main question.

Funding of Private Schooling

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: why does this government have so much money to pay the private school tuition for the children of elite Conservative appointees, yet it is forcing the closure of necessary public schools in central Edmonton neighbourhoods? [interjection] You may laugh, but it is true.

Mr. Hancock: Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of different ways of delivering education to the children of Alberta to make sure that every child has an opportunity to learn in their best way, in their best place. As we study how we go forward to do it better, we will even provide more options, I hope, for children to be able to learn in the manner and in the place and at the pace that makes sense for them. We pay for students in public schools, and we pay significantly less for students who go to private schools, but they all get educated.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister. That's not true, Mr. Speaker. How can this government justify spending \$100,000 a year on private tuition for Gary Mar's children in Washington and on Vancouver Island at the same time we're closing public schools in central Edmonton neighbourhoods as a cost-saving measure?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in many circumstances both in the private and public sectors contracts of employment are entered into. I'm not aware of the details of the contract of employment intergovernmental relations has entered into to ensure that we have the best ambassador possible in the U.S. to promote Alberta's interests and make sure that Alberta jobs are secure. But I can tell you this: Gary Mar is doing a fantastic job down there making sure that every single state in the United States knows how much they benefit from the work that happens in this province, and the contract of employment is worth it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Education: why does this government value the elite, private education of the children of hand-picked Conservative appointees over the public education of children in central Edmonton neighbourhoods, right here in this city?

Mr. Hancock: The answer is: we do not. The government does a wide range of very important things. One of the most important things the government does is make sure that every child in Alberta has an opportunity to succeed, an opportunity to learn. We do that very well through very good school boards across the province, including the school boards right here in Edmonton, who are among the best in the world. People come from all over the world to see what we're doing right here.

We also do other things, Mr. Speaker. It will surprise the hon. member to know that one of the ways we pay for those schools is by doing business and selling our products around the world and having ambassadors to do it.

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

Oil Royalty Framework

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again this government puts politics ahead of Albertans. They have been declaring how pleased industry would be with the new, new, new royalty framework and, "Trust us." With yesterday's accepted offers for the petroleum and gas rights the industry told this government: we don't trust you. Analysts believed a billion dollars could be raised. We received \$167 million; 17 cents on the expected dollar. To the Premier. Well, the President of the Treasury Board may be able to answer this: why did you choose to fail the people of Alberta and industry by waiting to pay . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we all read the newspapers. We all read the discussion in the papers around what some analysts expected and what some other analysts expected. I recall reading one of the clips saying that one of the buyers in the auction yesterday said: I don't know where that number came from. Simply, that was a projection by one or two analysts who thought, given what was going on in shale gas and given what was going on in some of the other areas which we're very akin to, that the auction might be a little higher.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, the expected money was because, perhaps, they'd know what the royalty rate is going to be. Is the Premier and the cabinet not aware that industry needs to know the royalty rate before they can decide the bonus bid they are putting to purchase offers for petroleum and gas rights?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course we are. Which is why this afternoon we're going to be following up on a commitment this Premier made to ensure that we are the most competitive and innovative jurisdiction in this country.

Mr. Hinman: You're going to do it this afternoon? Mr. Speaker, given that we have had nine land sales totalling \$870 million since they promised last fall a new, new, new royalty framework, did the Premier really believe that industry is going to bid top dollar not knowing what the royalty rate is from one year to the next? Perhaps the President of the Treasury Board will give us a lame excuse for this delayed release.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the second-largest land sale year we've had in a number of years. That shows the commitment and the optimism that our industry has.

I would also point out that most people in the financial sector or even in the oil and gas sector would recognize that you don't make an announcement like the one that we're going to be making before the markets are closed. I think the hon. member should understand that.

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

2:00 Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the so-called competitiveness review is being released in downtown Calgary and is widely expected to recommend slashing royalties further. The government, afraid for its political life, has sold out the interests of Albertans, who own the resources, in favour of its friends in the oil and gas industry. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Why has this government folded like a cheap tent on oil and gas royalties when faced with industry pressure?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all members of the House and all the listeners at home and the members in the gallery will recognize that I just had a question about why we aren't slashing them even more, and now we're getting the question of: well, maybe we should make them higher and not slash them at all. It's about the right balance. It's about creating the right competitive environment, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government does not have the right balance.

Given that industry activity has been affected by dropping prices more than the very modest royalty changes we saw two and a half years ago and that activity is now beginning to rebound along with prices, will the Deputy Premier admit that these changes reflect its fear of political defeat rather than economic necessity?

Mr. Horner: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what I will admit to is that this government will respond to the economic climate of the day. This government will respond to what has been probably the worst global recession since the '30s. We're creating an environment within this jurisdiction that is second to none in North America.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that no one is left defending the interests of the owners of this resource, namely the people of Alberta, except Alberta's NDP, will the Deputy Premier admit that his government has stopped, in Peter Lougheed's words, thinking like an owner and is putting the interests of its friends in the oil and gas industry ahead of the people of Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, every member of this government caucus represents the people of Alberta, that have elected them to this House. It is about striking the right balance. It's about striking the right balance about the value that the owners of the resource get, which are all Albertans in the province. It's about striking the right balance ensuring that the investors who put the money in to get the resource out of the ground or out of the oil sands make an adequate return so that we can make a return.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Swan Hills treatment plant cost Albertans \$22 million to operate. A review of the plant was completed one year ago. The review gives recommendations on what to do with the plant, to close it down or to keep subsidizing it. To the Minister of Infrastructure. The government has been reviewing these recommendations for a year. What has the minister finally decided?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me first tell you that the Swan Hills treatment plant has done an excellent job in helping rid the province of hazardous wastes and PCBs and dioxins. Also, let me make this very clear: the purpose of the plant is to ensure that we get rid of those PCBs. There is no doubt that the government is reviewing the recommendations, as it does every five years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister publicly release the review done on the Swan Hills treatment plant? That's my second question, sir.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're doing a comprehensive strategic assessment. But I need to express one thing: the Swan Hills treatment plant is a plant that is like a utility. It is for the insurance that the dioxins and the PCBs are taken care of in this country and in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the minister is waiting for the next review, scheduled four years from now, to make a decision. While the minister hems and haws, how many more taxpayer dollars are going to have to go to this money pit?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you that we have done a strategic review and a strategic assessment, and at this particular time we are assessing what that assessment is saying and what the recommendations are.

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

Wetlands Policy

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been some suggestion that industry is influencing the development of the provincial wetland policy more than other sectors. My question for the Minister of Environment: is it true?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I would say that industry certainly has an influence on the policy development that government makes but no more so than any other of the sources that we seek to provide us with advice and input as we develop policy. As an example, on the wetlands policy the Alberta Water Council consulted with in excess of a thousand different stakeholders in developing a policy, but I remind the member and I remind all that it's up to the government to develop the final policy and make the decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: will this government adopt a policy that treats all wetlands alike?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's very much the crux of the issue. There are on one side of this equation those that believe that all wetlands should be treated identically, and on the extreme opposite end there are some that believe that some wetlands shouldn't be considered at all. Really, therein lies the problem that we're wrestling with. How do we maintain that balance? Clearly, some wetlands are of differing value. Some support biodiversity. They benefit local ecology. Some are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second supplemental to the same minister. This process has been going on for some time and, as I understand it, has missed at least one deadline. My question: why is this taking so long?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a complex issue, as I've already explained. As an example, it took the Alberta Water Council three years to come up with a nonconsensus recommendation. We're committed to getting this right. At the end of the day we have to protect our wetlands if we're going to turn over an environment that we are proud to turn over to future generations. If we get it wrong now, subsequent generations are going to pay for it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Kainai Community Correctional Centre

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Solicitor General was kind enough to provide some responses regarding questions about the Kainai Community Corrections Society. I'd like to follow up today. To the Solicitor General. This government has worked to scale back conditional sentencing and keep offenders in correctional facilities. Won't tougher laws, the prospect of new minimum penalties, and relying on prisons as a deterrent lead to a larger custodial population?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suppose that's a possibility, but these are issues under federal jurisdiction. I can't really comment at this time what the impact will be, but certainly we will respond to whatever impact is imposed upon us. In the meantime I have to provide the facilities to house the inmates that we do have.

Ms Pastoor: The Solicitor General noted that the Kainai facility's utilization rate was too low and that economically viable solutions needed to be found elsewhere. Did the minister or the department consider other options to closing this facility such as reclassifying the institution to hold medium security prisoners? Has anyone from the ministry ever discussed other options?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, this is a minimum security facility; it's not a medium security facility. The province doesn't own the facility. The province already owns facilities that are adequate to house these inmates. Unless this is a spending day, I think the member would agree with me that I need to utilize those facilities.

Ms Pastoor: The Solicitor General wants us to believe that this is a purely economic decision not to provide funding for a facility that is an essential part of its community aimed at ameliorating the overincarceration of aboriginal offenders. It may sound like good fiscal policy, but in the long run is it really a good social policy?

Mr. Oberle: I believe it is, Mr. Speaker. I don't see how a facility designed to house inmates in that community or any other is going to change the cultural issues around incarceration. We are providing facilities that are culturally sensitive, and I'm required to utilize those facilities to their maximum.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

2:10 Food Regulations for Sale of Home-baked Goods

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans who bake at home sell their products at licensed farmers' markets. However, they cannot sell their items at bake sales or flea markets without having their products baked or produced in a commercial kitchen. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why is Alberta Health Services making it impossible for local people to provide home-baked or home-produced foods for themselves and their friends?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, farmers' markets have a very long-standing and honourable tradition in our province, and we want to see them continue. It's actually Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development that approves farmers' markets, but the Public Health Act, which comes under my purview, looks at and addresses the types of foods that are regulated in the food regulation. Now, there is an exemption for bake sales. In actual fact, if nonprofit organizations are baking things like cookies and cakes and so on and they're doing it for the purpose of fundraising, that is exempted and allowed.

Ms Calahasen: Well, given that the issue may be public safety, Mr. Speaker, isn't it odd that nonprofits can sell food that was prepared from an uninspected kitchen while those making a profit, like a bed and breakfast, need to use a licensed facility or install stainless steel kitchens so that they can serve the people that are there?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the food regulation was updated in 2006, and it recognized the need for some flexibility, not quite along the same lines as what's just been referenced. Nonetheless, she's right. There is a need to strike a better balance between the provision of food in a safe and caring way and the need for community events to do their local fundraising. I'll be happy to review this and see where it goes.

Ms Calahasen: Oh, that's so nice. Those words are music to my ears, Mr. Speaker.

However, given that the minister is trying to protect Alberta consumers, is there any possible way, as you identified, to change those regulations to allow home bakers or home producers whose kitchens have been inspected the same rights or similar rights as a commercial kitchen and tell those pie police to please back off?

Mr. Zwozdesky: It's a very interesting reference. I'm not sure the Solicitor General shouldn't be answering.

Mr. Speaker, on a more serious note, I don't know if we'll ever get to the point where something that is baked in a traditional home kitchen the way we all know it would perhaps be viewed in the same way that stuff that's prepared in a commercial kitchen would be in terms of the safety factors and the regulations and everything else that goes along with it. Nonetheless, I am prepared to have a look at that whole issue. I don't know if any further exceptions or exemptions can be made or not at this stage.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, there are 83 members in the Assembly. When the hon. member returns on Monday, 83 different pies, from cherry to apple, would be acceptable.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Alberta Health Services Decision-making (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions will be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Yesterday cancer doctors at the Tom Baker cancer centre were ordered by Alberta Health Services to stop raising concerns publicly about capacity problems at the Tom Baker cancer centre. This was widely reported. My first question to the minister: is the minister aware or not that this gag order was given?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any gag order, but I am aware, just as of a few minutes ago, of a clipping that just got delivered to me on this subject, so I'd be happy to take a look and see what actually happened.

As I said earlier, I think doctors should feel very free to comment on medical issues, and people at Alberta Health Services should feel free to comment on policy-driven issues.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a medical issue. This is about the capacity to provide cancer treatment in Calgary. Will the minister order Alberta Health Services to reverse this gag order and let the physicians speak about these concerns?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I just said, I'll take a look and see what it is that the member is referring to.

I want to just go back to what I said a little earlier this week, and that was that the whole issue of what kind of health-related facilities are needed and in which part of the province, for what purpose, will be reviewed very thoroughly and is being reviewed very thoroughly as we speak. It will be all announced at the end of this month.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, secrecy is the enemy of accountability. Openness is what's needed here, and it's needed throughout the health care system. Does the minister understand that physicians and nurses need the right to openly advocate for patient care and that the public has a right to know?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I do understand that. I understand it very well. That's why we have the Health Quality Council working with Alberta Health Services as we speak on the release of a detailed report regarding the four unfortunate incidents that occurred last year at the hospital in Calgary. We'll continue that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

School Infrastructure Maintenance

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of our older schools that are well utilized require a lot of modernization and upgrades to provide a safe and effective learning and working environment for many of our teachers and students. Balmoral school in my riding is one example. For example, they can't even have a microwave in their lunchroom because of the outdated electrical system. My question is to the Minister of Education. What are his plans to ensure that many of our older schools, particularly those in the inner city, are maintained so that they can serve us in the years to come?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have an incredible investment in facilities for education across the province, and it's very important to not only keep them in good shape but to improve them so that they can be available for new technologies and have the appropriate wiring that they need. We spend a lot of money every year in terms of grants to school boards for the planned operation and maintenance of those schools, and as well we have IMR funding, infrastructure maintenance funding, so that we can improve and renew schools. There are significant projects on that under way in the province. It's very important to keep our infrastructure up to date.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education. Your department has announced nearly a billion dollars over the next three years for completion of school projects. Does this amount include any allotment to retrofit and upgrade projects, and if so, how much?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes. There are a hundred and one projects on the go in this province as we speak, including, I think, about 42 new schools but perhaps more even. There are 47 modernization projects, involving approximately \$470 million. Those are major modernization projects, where there's a complete overhaul of most or all of a school facility, including upgrades to the building envelope, the environmental capacity of the building, the furnaces, and, of course, the technology upgrades.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Has his ministry looked at any innovative ways to ensure that old schools can be maintained at an acceptable level, if not the best standards, without jeopardizing any future budgets?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of factors that go into that. We work, of course, very closely with the Department of Infrastructure. Infrastructure does audits of buildings on an ongoing basis. I can report that less than 2 per cent of our school infrastructure across the province is rated as in poor condition, but that doesn't mean there's not a lot of work to be done to make sure that it's current. We fund that through the school boards. The school boards determine what their priorities are. They also have to determine what schools we're going to utilize in the future and what schools will become surplus to their needs, and hopefully we can take some of the embedded capital and re-employ it in creating new and modern spaces for students.

Patient Safety Report

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government has a proud record of being the most secretive government in the country. Whether it's full disclosure about the safety of children in care, pictures of unprecedented environmental disaster, or, most recently, the report of the Health Quality Council, this government's first priority always is its own protection over the public interest. Instead of forcing Albertans to learn about their government through the courts or brown envelopes, why won't the minister of health take the first step in transparency and just release the complete Health Quality Council report today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if it's ready to be released today. There are just a couple of privacy concerns that I've alluded to earlier this week – and I alluded to them earlier this afternoon – that have to be addressed. They are being addressed. People who need to give what you might refer to as releases and that type of thing – “permission,” I guess, is the better word – are being contacted, again, and as soon as it's ready to go, it'll be released publicly. That will be just a matter of days, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the council itself has already stated very clearly that the report has been vetted for privacy concerns and given that since government has had it for four months already and the only possible reason you could need another 10 days is to give your staff even more time to censor it, why won't the minister himself stop with the delays and release the report, that's already written, today?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, same question, same answer. As soon as it's ready, it'll be released.

Ms Notley: Well, given that the Health Quality Council CEO said yesterday, “When you bring us in and publicly commit to the release of a report you've got to live up to the public commitment” and given that it doesn't take 10 days to release something that is already written with privacy concerns already addressed, why won't the minister just stop the delay and release the report today in full?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are two parties involved here, Alberta Health Services and the Health Quality Council. They are

working together to make sure that the privacy concerns of both bodies have been addressed. I have every reason to believe that they probably have been, but they are working through that right now. The report could be released as early as tomorrow or Monday, but it will be very quickly released.

Caribou Management

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the woodland caribou is an endangered species, recognized both by the province and the federal government. Development has already shrunk caribou habitat to an unsustainable size. This government's answer is not to protect caribou habitat but to simply cull wolves year after year. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: does this minister have any plans, besides killing wolves year after year, to protect and preserve caribou habitat on an ongoing basis?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what we're going to do with respect to habitat conservation affects more than just caribou habitat. If you take a look at the work that has been done up to this point in the lower Athabasca region and work that will be done in the Peace River region, in the boreal forest areas of the province of Alberta, there's a tremendous amount of effort being put into habitat conservation, particularly for caribou but for all species.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that's good to hear.

Now to jump to my third question, which is on the lower Athabasca region. By your answer are you assuring Albertans that you will be preserving large areas in the lower Athabasca region for caribou protection?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think part of that answer is very obvious already. I don't think that many people would argue with the fact that Wood Buffalo park is a large piece of the boreal forest in the lower Athabasca drainage area that is already preserved for habitat for a number of different species. The issue relative to caribou is actually a specific one that we are paying a tremendous amount of attention to. As the member indicated, predation is part of the problem. We do need to manage these wildlife populations.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I like to hear that answer, that you have to manage these problems, but there seems to be relatively little action on it. The Alberta Wilderness Association has requested, actually, federal intervention. Can your organization give a timeline as to when caribou habitat will be protected in the lower Athabasca or anywhere?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's there now. You know, the “when” is a number of years ago that we started into this program. We continue to work with it. There has been some suggestion that additional real estate should be added to what's already there in protected areas. When the plan comes forward, you will see that there will be a very strong element of conservation in that plan.

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

SuperNet

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government established an extensive broadband network for high-speed Internet access to 429 communities in Alberta. My understanding is that many communities are not making use of the SuperNet because of the local connection costs. My question to the hon. Minister of

Service Alberta: what are the additional costs of a municipality to connect to the SuperNet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently there are approximately 220 municipalities throughout the province that have the SuperNet built directly to them. The cost of connection was paid by Municipal Affairs many years ago; however, there are ongoing fees to support the SuperNet that are required. Basic broadband service is about \$242 a month. If the municipality wants to use the SuperNet to access the Internet, it needs to use a private-sector Internet service provider.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, my second question to the same minister: what does the SuperNet provide that an ordinary Internet service provider does not provide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are three areas. The first area is quality. Videoconferencing is very crisp, and it's better on the SuperNet. Capacity: there are never any slowdown or network traffic peak times. And consistent price: the fees associated with the SuperNet are capped and do not change without government approval.

Mr. Allred: My final question. Again to the same minister: what does it cost for a private-sector customer to get access to the SuperNet?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 80 ISP providers working very hard across Alberta. The cost for service depends on the packages that the ISP providers provide. We know there's good work going on out there. But I fully recognize there are many rural areas that have challenges, and that's what I'm working very hard on with a number of ministers across government, to ensure that we work on the issue of rural connectivity.

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

Funding for Private Schools

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The noble mandate of the public school system is to provide the best education possible for all children regardless of their ability, their economic status, their creed or culture. Under this government's guise of choice the line of demarcation between public, private, and charter schools has been blurred to the detriment of the public school system. To the minister: what is your justification for publicly funding exclusive, tuition-charging private schools and religiously restrictive charter schools?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe we do fund tuition in private schools.

With respect to charter schools there are a number of reasons why charter school exist. As long as they fit the purpose of their charter and meet the requirements to be renewed on I think it's a five-year term, they are public schools, and they're funded like public schools.

Mr. Chase: To the minister again. How is it that Springbank's athletic, elite Edge private school is permitted to receive full public

per-pupil funding and charge restrictively high tuition rates while hiding out under the mantle of the geographically distant Grande Prairie public board?

Mr. Hancock: Well, the short answer, Mr. Speaker, is that it's not. Grande Prairie has announced that they have an arrangement with the Edge school. If, in fact, they do bring the Edge school into the public system as an alternative program, it will be considered as such, and if it fits the requirement to be an alternate program in the public system, it will be funded as an alternate program in the public system. But it's not funded as a private school, and it's not funded now.

Mr. Chase: Again, we're turning around as opposed to coming across with the answers.

Tuition. Can they charge tuition and still be a public school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] Whoa. You had the question and no more preamble. The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not dodging the question at all. The short answer is that we are not paying tuition for students at Edge school. If they are a private school and if they charge tuition, they're not a public school, so they don't get funded like a public school. As a private school they're eligible for either 60 or 70 per cent of the operating funding of a public school, depending on whether they've agreed to adhere to the reporting and accountability requirements. As a private school they're not eligible for the public school funding, but if they become an alternate program in the public school, that's a different situation. Then they're not a private school.

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

2010 Paralympic Winter Games

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Starting tomorrow night, Albertans and Canadians will once again be wearing their red mittens, toques, and Team Canada gear in support of the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games. Because of this, my first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Given the success of promoting Alberta at the Olympic Winter Games, what's Alberta's involvement in the Paralympic Winter Games?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're extremely excited, as was mentioned earlier by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, to see nine of the 55 Canadian Paralympians coming from the province of Alberta. We're excited to be able to support them as they go out to compete on this world stage. We will not be keeping Alberta House and the train open, of course, during the Paralympics, but myself and the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit are going. We're going to be supporting them. We're going to be meeting with the Paralympic Committee as well to ensure these games stay robust into the future. Again, we think that we're doing all that we can to support these athletes.

Mr. Rodney: My second question is to the same minister. Having met a number of Paralympians – and it was a great experience to do so – I'm concerned about them and how our government is supporting them. Can she explain how our government is supporting Paralympians in any specific ways?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we do a lot to support them. We know they're just as high a quality of athlete. They work out, they have the same kind of training, so they're eligible for Podium Alberta, which is what we do with the federal government to support them while they train. They get to use the same facilities that we just put \$100 million into rehabbing so that they have great facilities. We think they do just as good of a job and that they are first-class athletes.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, who was extremely active during the Olympic Winter Games. My question is: will he be exacting similar duties on behalf of his ministry in our province at the Paralympic Winter Games?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are three reasons I'm going out to Vancouver. First of all, we have the Cultural Olympiad, that still continues through the Paralympic Games to support our artists. Two, it's to go out and support our great athletes, as the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation mentioned. Third, Alberta is now a signatory on the declaration of the United Nations on protecting persons with disabilities. Alberta along with nine other provinces and three territories has just signed on to that, and as a representative of the Alberta Human Rights Commission I thought it was important to be there.

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

Support for Museums

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Alberta Museum has been missing in action, on hiatus, mothballed, something. We've had a new plan, and that was put on hold. Then a second, downsized plan, and that was put on hold. And then the persistent rumours of two museums, neither of which has been built. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Clearly, the budget does not contain infrastructure money for new museums, but Albertans would like to know what is wrong. Why has our museum been sidetracked for so long, well before the recession hit us?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, whether we're talking one site or two sites, it is a significant amount of money that we're looking at to be able to put forward. Given the current economic circumstances we don't have in our budget or in our capital plan the ability to finance a \$250 million facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, but you mothballed these before the recession. Back to the same minister. Given that in 1997 the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture replaced the pioneer exhibit and, aside from travelling exhibits, we've had no permanent exhibit of nonaboriginal history, when will it be replaced or a new exhibit be established?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, when the financial situation is such that we have the ability to move forward, then we'll be able to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Can the minister tell us the timeline for restoring funding for the three provincial archivists that the Glenbow Museum in Calgary was forced to lay off in the fall? These are critical staff for a museum.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Glenbow Museum is a private institution. It's not one that's funded by our government. What we do fund is our collection and the maintenance of our collection. Other than that, the Glenbow is a private institution, and they have to respond to their financial situations like anybody else.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Securities Regulation

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The federal government wants to institute a national securities regulator instead of the current passport system. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Why is Alberta opposed to moving to a national regulator?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, for the past 143 years regulation of securities has been a provincial jurisdiction under the title of property and civil rights. This approach recognizes the regional differences, the different regional economies of Canada, and that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. This has allowed the Alberta Securities Commission to serve Albertans well. We oppose a single federal regulator inevitably located in Toronto and reflecting the economic interests of southern Ontario that would hinder investment opportunities to Alberta businesses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. Why is the federal government pushing for this? Are there any problems with the current passport system?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the current passport system is working very well. Since 2004 it has provided a single-window access to capital markets across Canada. Internationally it's consistently ranked as one of the best in the world. The World Bank for the last five years has put it in the top five, ahead of the United Kingdom, tied with the United States. In the prairies there's that old practical bit of wisdom: don't fix it if it isn't broken. It ain't broken; leave it alone.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why is it important for Alberta and Quebec to protect provincial jurisdiction on this matter?

Dr. Morton: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is not just about regulation of securities. It's about the balance of power between the federal government and the provinces. It goes right to the heart of the balance of power in our constitution.

The federal position represents a significant expansion of federal power. It would potentially open the door to federal regulation of financial services. As everybody in this House knows, financial

services is a growth industry in this province as it services the oil and gas sector and other juniors. We're not going to just sit by and let it slip away.

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

Innovation in Education

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Education. As discussed in my Motion 508 of 2009, to better equip students with the skills and competencies they need to succeed in our world, high school students need the ability to pursue real-world learning opportunities while in high school. Minister, can you please explain what you're doing to achieve this objective?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, hopefully, all of our curriculum is designed to ensure that students get a real-world experience, but specifically to the member's question and motion, the work experience program at the high school level helps students get out into the workforce and get experience in the workforce in a safe and supervised manner. The RAP program, registered apprenticeship program, allows students in the trades to actually be prepared to almost a point where they can get their first-year apprenticeship when they graduate from high school. Of course, there are many other circumstances where we have colleges co-operating with high schools and sometimes even co-located.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to maximize their high school experience, I think students should be given the opportunity to pursue postsecondary credit while in high school. Can the minister explain what he is doing to achieve this objective?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, school boards across the province are working with postsecondaries. We have some very exciting places which I could point to where that is actually happening very well. In Cold Lake, for example, Portage College is co-located in the same building as the Cold Lake high school. In Rocky Mountain House Red Deer College is co-located with both the public and the separate high school. In Olds, for example, the learning campus of the new high school is built on the campus of Olds College, so there is that opportunity for integration between high school and postsecondary and to earn those postsecondary credits. One of the exciting programs: SAIT and the Calgary board of education have a pharmacy technician program. High school students can actually get their accreditation for the pharmacy technician before they graduate.

Mr. Bhullar: My last question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Financial literacy is a key component relating to the real world. Minister, are you willing to embed financial literacy in the high school curriculum?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's supposed to be embedded now, but obviously in the recent two years that this has become, in essence, the flavour of the month, we really do have to look at our math curriculum, our social studies curriculum, and particularly our career and life management curriculum to make sure that it is teaching and providing an opportunity for our students to learn the real-life skills that they need in terms of finances, balancing a

chequebook, planning a budget: those sorts of skills. The career and life management course should be doing it. We are in the process of reviewing that curriculum, and we'll make sure that it's there.

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

Online Camping Reservation System

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. As the global economic situation continues to be uncertain and with the summer travel season soon approaching, what specific actions is your department taking to maintain tourism revenues, especially in northern Alberta?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, we were just out at the Olympics, promoting Alberta as a world-class destination. We're going to continue those efforts. But something that we found very successful for the last two years has been the Stay campaign. We would have had not such a great tourism season last year except that we ran the Stay campaign. Albertans loved it. They came out to our campgrounds and our RV centres in record numbers and really helped an industry at a time when it could have been troubled.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, given that you mentioned the Stay program, I'd like to talk about it. It's so successful that you can't get a place to camp in this province. When are you going to start building some more inventory?

Mrs. Ady: Well, this is a good problem to have, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the Stay campaign was successful. But one of the things that we did last year was start the online booking system, 25 campgrounds. This year we've increased it to 50 because it was so popular. Now you can actually find that camp spot, maybe at another campground than the one you go to every time, so it gives you a better opportunity to look around the province and maybe go somewhere different.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, given that the minister talked about the reservation system, I heard that all kinds of people couldn't get on the phone line. You know, the May long weekend nobody could make a reservation. It's so busy that nobody could get on. What's going on with this system?

2:40

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's correct. Last year there was such a rush when they knew it was near the May long weekend that they crashed our systems. I'm happy to say that this year it was more robust. It stood up to it. We've made some 4,400 reservations for the May long weekend already, but remember, we doubled the number of campgrounds that are now on it, and we're still building. I know the hon. member always asks me about Carson Lake. It's on the list, and we're looking at the areas where we need more product.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 120 questions and answers today made up of nine questions from the Official Opposition, one from the Wildrose Alliance, two from the NDs, and eight from the PC private members.

In just a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine, and I'll call on the hon. members for members' statements.

To the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, these are the orders: coconut, blueberry, lemon, apple, and cherry.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Miyo Machihowin Health Careers Conference

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I had the privilege of attending Miyo Machihowin, the National Aboriginal Health Careers Conference and Tradeshow, on behalf of the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. I was especially pleased to attend because the Native Women's Association of Canada hosted this event during International Women's Week. This conference certainly reflected this year's theme – Strong Women, Strong Canada, Strong World – as aboriginal women from Newfoundland to B.C. to Nunavut to Yukon are here to move the agenda of exploring business and career opportunities in the health sector.

To build on their strength, they brought together a hundred youth from across Canada so they can begin to see what is available to them in health. Youth always bring a vitality and energy to any conference, and it was no different this morning. They have, in fact, great role models like Dr. Lindsay Crowshoe describing his experiences in becoming a doctor and, of course, other health professionals to exchange ideas. This conference certainly reflected so many of the needs of the communities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you and congratulations to the Native Women's Association of Canada because with these strong women I'm positive that they will help prepare strong youth so they can become part of a strong Canada and a strong world.

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

Women's Issues

Ms Notley: Thank you. March 8 was International Women's Day. We celebrated the achievements of both women who have achieved fame and also women who live unnoticed outside their own circles but who are vital to the quality of life for each of us. But we need to be wary of the easy use of International Women's Day to look only at our successes. Many challenges for women remain today in Alberta. Nearly 70 per cent of adults in Alberta trying to live on jobs that pay less than \$15 an hour are women, many of them supporting families. Funding for women's shelters is inadequate and leaves many women and children in danger. As well, on child care Alberta has a shameful record, with too few spaces available and costs that are far, far too high.

At the NDP's recent health care hearings we were told that women across the province are struggling to find acceptable birthing options. In rural areas in particular women have no choice in who delivers their baby, and they must often drive for hours for care. One way, of course, to deal with this shortage is to rely more on midwives. Indeed, that strategy would have the added advantage of respecting a growing preference amongst Alberta's expectant mothers. But right now there are simply too few midwives in Alberta. Alberta offers no training locally for midwives, and this is something that must change.

In other parts of the world discussion is under way about substantial measures to improve the lives of women. In Alberta we need to do the same. We can start by addressing the issues I've just outlined. We need a new energy to advance an agenda that is committed to the full participation of women in every aspect of life, not just cheery words of tribute once a year. I hope that we will find substantial changes coming forward from this government in the future.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, March 15, 2010, we will be accepting written questions 1 through 9 inclusive, 11 through 26 inclusive, 28 through 35 inclusive, 38, and 39. We will be dealing with written questions 10, 27, 36, and 37 that day.

I also wish to give notice that on Monday, March 15, 2010, we will be accepting motions for returns 10 and 11, and we will be dealing with motions for returns 1 through 8.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity. I am tabling today a letter that is signed by 10 people who have watched very patiently and attentively from the gallery for the past hour today. The letter is dated September 15, 2009, and it is, frankly, a tragic account of the last days of their mother and relative, Dorothea Arneson. I'd just read one very short quote. At the end of the letter it asks: "What about the protection for the patients . . . do they also not have a right to be treated with equal care and compassion? Do they . . . not have the right to be heard?"

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you have a tabling?

Ms Notley: Yes, I do. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 32 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from a constituent, Roger Ellis, who is blind as a result of a work accident and was struck in the head by the mirror of a hit-and-run driver, pinning himself and his service dog against the truck. He is finding that the \$5,000 is very unfair to him. It does not deal with the damage to retrain himself and his dog and compensate for the long-term pain.

My second is a report to the Assembly with regard to the letters that I received concerning the government's plan to close acute-care psychiatric beds at Alberta Hospital, noting that community mental health care options are needed and that it is a lifesaving institution for those that are in crisis and whose needs cannot be met in the program. It includes the names of those who signed that form letter.

My third tabling is also a report in regard to issues facing postsecondary students. It contains the names of all of those students who wrote to me with form letters. In the letters they raise concerns around the increase and the worry about the effect of these fees on their ability to continue paying for school and ask that the government reject market modifiers and introduce regulation to prevent loophole mandatory user fee increases.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is a letter dated today. This letter is

from myself to the hon. the Premier, and it is requesting information, specifically ministerial order 01/07 as referenced in a letter I received from the Premier's office recently.

The second tabling I have today is, of course, with permission from Geri Spring, a constituent, who is urging that Alberta Hospital in Edmonton not only remain open but that we also fix it up.

The third letter I have is from a constituent as well, and I have permission to table this letter from Sandy McAlear. It is urging this House and this government to continue adequate funding for our schools.

My fourth and last tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is also regarding Alberta Hospital, and it is being tabled with permission from Mr. Paul Ferguson. He is urging the government to make sure that Alberta Hospital Edmonton remains an open and viable institution. He sums up his frustration this way: "This government couldn't organise a rock fight in a gravel pit."

Thank you.

2:50 Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to please share with those assembled the projected government House business for the week commencing the 15th, government business commencing March 16.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would anticipate on Tuesday, March 16, for second reading Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, and Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act; in Committee of the Whole, depending on progress this afternoon, Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, Bill 4, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, and Bill 6, Emergency Management Amendment Act; in third reading, also depending on progress this afternoon, Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act.

On Wednesday the 17th under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, actually, the same business as proposed for Tuesday, of course depending on progress. That's Bill 7 and Bill 8 in second reading and bills 1, 2, 4, and 6 in Committee of the Whole.

On Thursday, of course, we have the scheduled Committee of Supply votes and second reading and third reading as per Monday and Tuesday, depending on progress and as per the Order Paper.

For the interest of the House I would indicate that Bill 9 is on notice and that several other bills will go on notice, hopefully this afternoon, and will be available for introduction for first reading probably on Tuesday, I guess that means.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

Amendments to Standing Orders

12. Mr. Hancock moved:

- A. Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended in Standing Order 7 by adding the following after suborder (4):
 - 7(4.1) When Members' Statements is called, Members other than members of the Executive Council may

make a statement, each statement to be no more than 2 minutes in duration, according to the following allocation:

- (a) on Monday and Thursday, up to 7 Members, and
 - (b) on Tuesday and Wednesday, up to 6 Members.
- B. Be it further resolved that
1. The amendment in this motion shall come into force on passage and shall have effect until the dissolution of the 27th Legislature;
 2. Standing Order 7(4) shall not have effect for the balance of the 27th Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Government Motion 12, which arises as a result of the agreement relative to question period and the order of questions in question period and the agreement around preambles, et cetera, which included, of course, the provision of an additional two members' statements, one on Mondays and one on Thursdays. That needs, of course, to be put into place by virtue of an amendment to the standing orders.

For the information of the members, Mr. Speaker, 7(4), which is being suspended, is the current standing order, which provides for six statements per day. That's, of course, being only suspended and not removed or replaced because this amendment to the standing orders only has effect until the end of this Legislature.

The Speaker: It's a debatable motion. Anyone?

[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, as this is a day dealing with the Kidney Foundation, recognizing the kidney thing, this is one of these little stress things that has been provided to each of the members in the Assembly, that you can keep on your desk and you may use at any time, including during the question period.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

The Alberta Corporate Tax Act is generally amended every year to ensure that Alberta maintains a fair, equitable, and competitive tax regime. While most of the amendments in this year's bill are of a housekeeping nature, I'd like to highlight three specific measures in the bill.

The first measure I'd like to highlight is changes for functional currencies. If a corporation keeps its accounting records in United States or Australian dollars or the British pound or the euro, this is known as the functional currency, and the corporation is able to file its tax returns in that currency. However, changes to federal legislation have required the province to make changes to our own provisions concerning functional currency. There is one policy difference between Alberta and federal legislation. That difference is that when the functional currency reporting was adopted last year, Alberta decided that taxes payable would be converted at the average exchange rate for the year rather than at the spot rate the day

when payment is due. This decision continues to be reflected in today's amendments.

A second change in this legislation brings Alberta legislation in line with the federal fairness provisions that allow the minister to waive interest and/or penalties in certain situations. For example, when a taxpayer requests a reassessment under the fairness provision, the minister will now be able to waive interest in penalties in appropriate circumstances at the same time the reassessment is issued. When the legislation was amended several years ago, the minister's ability to waive at his own volition was unintentionally removed. This legislation corrects that omission.

The third and last point I would put forward concerns corporate refund interest rates. In Budget 2010 refund interest rates were reduced by 50 per cent for all prior periods and going forward. While these rates are set by regulation, the regulation-making authority in the act has been amended to ensure it is clear that the new rates can be made applicable to prior periods. In comparing our interest rates to commercial bank rates, it was determined that Alberta's refund interest rates on overpayments of corporate tax were simply too high. Reducing the rates by 50 per cent is a middle ground between bank rates, which are considered by some to be too low and the full treasury bill rates, which are deemed to be too generous. This change strikes a balance.

Thank you. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate February 16: Ms Woo-Paw]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, as we see it presented before the House this afternoon is not a contentious piece of legislation. [interjection] No, it is not contentious, hon. member.

There has been correspondence between ourselves and the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay regarding this bill. We are told it is an amendment to ensure the professional organizations have the ability or the function to consult with the responsible ministers and update the language in various acts. As I understand it, Bill 2 as it's proposed would amend laws responsible for a series of professional occupations, including architects; agrologists; regulated accountants; the engineering, geological, and geophysical professions; land surveyors; regulated forestry professionals; veterinarian professionals; and any association registered under the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act.

Now, it doesn't look like a necessary bill. I don't know why we need this legislation, Bill 2. It is my view that Bill 2 is a redundant piece of legislation that has been poorly justified by the government. Professional associations, our research indicates, already consult with the government on a routine basis when they amend or alter their academic standards or licensing requirements. Therefore, I would think some of the professional acts amended by this bill are also unnecessary.

Veterinarians, for example, have their own requirements spelled out clearly in legislation. The association representing forestry professionals adjusts its criteria based on a benchmark program; I believe it's at NAIT. I am not certain if there is a similar program elsewhere. Neither association can alter its requirements without going to the minister or to cabinet to change the legislation or regulations.

3:00

There is a danger, albeit a slight one, Mr. Speaker, that this legislation is the latest in a series of attempts by the government — labour mobility clauses are another. The President of the Treasury Board is familiar with that, and I'm sure he's concerned about it as well. If there's a flag to be raised on this issue, it would be that this is another attempt by the government to interfere in the operations of what is supposed to be an independent regulatory association. Now, we all know that the government has a responsibility to work with professional associations to serve the public interest. This government seems to have a poor understanding of professional associations and the way they approach changes to academic standards or licensing requirements.

I really don't think that this bill is necessary, Bill 2 as we know it on the Order Paper. I understand the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay and her interest in having this passed, but I think everything is working well already. I don't understand the necessity for this. We have certainly contacted various professional associations, and they have indicated that there is a dialogue. They indicate that they have a very good dialogue with the government and the respective cabinet ministers. So my question, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion is: why is it necessary at this time that we have this bill before the Legislative Assembly? It seems to be unnecessary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and join debate on Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay. Bill 2 proposes revisions to six acts: the Architects Act; the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act; the Land Surveyors Act; the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act; the Regulated Accounting Profession Act; and the Veterinary Profession Act. In addition, this bill will also update the wording in both the Agrology Profession Act and the Regulated Forestry Profession Act.

These changes will require professional regulatory organizations in Alberta to consult with the appropriate minister responsible for the act itself and the minister responsible for parts 1 to 3 of the Post-secondary Learning Act before they make any changes to their educational requirements. The purpose for these changes is twofold: first, to allow for greater consistency amongst similar legislation; and, second, to encourage a strong relationship between government and Alberta's professional regulatory organizations.

This government has enjoyed a productive relationship with Alberta's self-regulating professions for many years. I personally have been involved with professional associations in one capacity or another for nearly 50 years. I have managed and have been involved in the governance of an association, and I've studied professional regulation in several countries and given papers on Canadian regulatory schemes at international conferences.

Alberta and Canada have a system of professional regulation that is unique in the world, a system that makes professional organizations responsible to the respective provincial governments, a responsibility to deliver a high quality of professional service to the public at large.

As the 1970 Quebec report of the Commission of Inquiry on Health and Social Welfare entitled *The Professions and Society* stated:

As a public service, it [being a professional association] assumes a public role in the functioning of the state:

- 1) a governmental role when it is empowered to control admission to the practice of a profession in lieu of a diploma awarded by the public education system;
- 2) a legislative role when it sets certain norms (regulations, codes of ethics and of deontology) relating to conditions of practice of the profession;
- 3) an administrative role when it is charged with the inspection and examination of professional acts;
- 4) a jurisdictional role when it is judging and, as required, sanctioning acts or failings against existing norms.

Our system of professional regulation saves the government from the responsibility and expense of regulating many professionals that are quite prepared and very competent to assume this responsibility themselves and, in turn, provide a public service that is much more efficient and less costly than if it was provided directly by the government. Mr. Speaker, this system of professional regulation very much falls in line with the principle of self-reliance that has been a hallmark in the development of the province of Alberta.

As the hon. Bert Hohol, minister of labour, stated in 1979 in a review of professional legislation in Alberta: "Self-government is a privilege delegated to a professional group by the Legislature only when it is clear the public can best be served by delegating this authority." This authority has been delegated to many professional bodies by this government over the years, and I would emphatically suggest that the authority has been exercised responsibly and has saved the taxpayers of Alberta considerable funds. It has also saved members of this Legislature much frustration that would have resulted had government not delegated authority to those who understand their respective professional undertakings best.

Through the power of democratic government legislative bodies use a number of means to share certain aspects of their authority while delegating other aspects to the professional body. For instance, the Legislature may grant an exclusive scope of practice or grant protection of the right of title or regulate specific activities under a controlled acts system while at the same time requiring accountability to the public through the legislative body. This accountability is accomplished by means of public members on the council of management of the professional organization who report back to the government, public members on disciplinary tribunals and practice review boards who represent the public viewpoint to these bodies, provisions for government ratification of regulations prior to them becoming operative, regular reporting mechanisms through annual reports, or periodic review of legislative mandates.

Mr. Speaker, in all of the acts that are listed in Bill 2 the government of Alberta has the authority to regulate the academic qualifications of these professional bodies as well as the foregoing attributes through the regulation process, which, as we all know, must be ratified by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Further, as the hon. Catherine Chichak stated in another Alberta report on the professions in 1970:

In establishing entrance requirements a professional body must be very careful not to set those standards so high that persons who would be adequately qualified to practice the profession are barred from that practice. A professional association should not appear to be a closed shop but should set standards at a sufficiently high level to ensure that the public receives an adequate service and that the membership is broadly enough qualified to meet the challenges of technological and societal changes. Educators, active field practitioners and public representatives should be involved jointly, through a formal structure, in the development of educational and experiential standards and programs that are a prerequisite for registration. These standards should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they continue to meet societies' needs.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that Alberta's regulatory framework accomplishes these goals with regard to professional regulation. Bill

2 clearly establishes the authority of the Legislature to regulate the academic qualifications of the professions listed.

3:10

It is significant, however, that in the last 10 years there has been a move in Canada, that has been supported by this government, to standardize professional entrance standards across the country. This has been accomplished through the agreement on internal trade and agreements such as TILMA. One consequence, however, of this move has been the moving of standards to the lowest common denominator. Alberta has traditionally sought to achieve excellence in the delivery of professional services and, hence, has had some of the highest standards across the country in many professional disciplines. Even today there is some resistance to accept the lower standards of qualification that exist in some provinces. I do not believe that that is the case in the professions enumerated in Bill 2. I believe that there has been a move to an agreed standard amongst all professional organizations across the country.

Mr. Speaker, there are several areas of potential conflict between the primary role of a professional association to protect the public interest and the secondary role of serving its members. Self-governing professions were not created for the welfare of their membership. They serve their members by serving the public, and the interests of the public are always paramount.

In closing, I would like to capsule the responsibility of a self-governing profession with a quotation by Everett Hughes. He said: "In place of the cautionary admonition of the market place, caveat emptor (let the buyer beware!), professional practice should substitute the encouraging injunction credat emptor (let the buyer trust!)"

Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to maintain an atmosphere of co-operation between the government and the professional services that are regulated by our professional organizations. We have one of the best systems in the world. Let's work closely with our professional communities to maintain that trust for the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Then I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak in second reading to Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I agree with much of what the previous speaker has outlined, but I think I disagree with his conclusion. I join my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar in wondering why we're seeing this bill in front of us. We can just guess because it isn't made clear from the sponsoring member's remarks why we're seeing this. I do not see the rationale for it.

Two things are going on right now. One, it's not easy to establish yourself as a professional association under our statutes in this province. There are a number of barriers that you have to get over and tests that you have to meet in order to do that. As the previous member has outlined, there is a process, a protocol, and a good reason that we have achieved the state that we have.

The government says: "Okay. You have to meet certain tests in order to be recognized as a professional occupation in this province. Part of meeting that test is that you will establish professional rules of conduct of your members and, further, that you will ensure through a disciplinary process and now in most professions a testing and monitoring process that you will hit those marks, you will achieve the various requirements. If you fail to do that, there is a

disciplinary body that is included in that, and you're responsible for disciplining your own members." And the government stays out of all of this.

Once they've set up the test and the professional organizations have met those tests – they've formed themselves, they've set out the guidelines for behaviour or for professional achievement, and they have their disciplinary body in place – that's it. The professional organization is left to basically carry on its business. Part of that business, by the way, in every statute that I've looked at for any of these professional organizations is a requirement to consult with government, at the very least to notify government if they're going to change anything that they do.

Now we see a bill in front of us that says that if these professional organizations are going to change anything, they have to consult with the government. I beg your pardon? Isn't that what they're supposed to be doing already according to their various pieces of legislation? What is the purpose in duplicating this? That's what I was ruminating on for some time, thinking: why is the government wanting to get involved in this? Why are they trying to kinda, you know, sort of hip-check their way into the scene here?

It's not breaking the protocol that's established, but I would argue that it's bending it. The only specific difference I can see is adding in the requirement of also consulting with the minister responsible for the Post-secondary Learning Act. But I think even then – I mean, that's where we start to talk about the professional requirements that the organizations have set out that a member must achieve before they become a member.

The scuttlebutt that I'm hearing is that the government has a concern that professional organizations might be bumping up their requirements to keep themselves special and to keep others out. And you think: well, who would they want to keep out? I mean, in this day and age there is strength in numbers. Certainly, since most of these associations are self-funding through the membership fees that are paid by their members, why would you want to be smaller and more exclusive? Wouldn't you want to have more members? That gives you more of a budget. So I was really curious as to what this might be about.

Now, one of the things that you hear about is that some associations were very resistant – and I'll say this was in the past – to dealing with people who had foreign training or foreign qualifications, and if they could make themselves sort of exclusive enough, they could cut out some of the people that were moving to Canada with degrees from other countries. I don't think that's the case very much anymore. It might still exist in various pockets, but for the most part I think everybody is looking around and saying: "You know, our membership is getting older; they're getting closer to retirement. We need to rejuvenate." They need those new members coming in. I don't think that argument is valid, if it ever was. So, again, why would the government be worried these organizations might be doing that? I can't see a reason for it, and I don't think there is a reason for it.

I think what's happening here is that the government is looking to get more control over those various agencies. Now, why would they be doing that? Well, one of the areas that we see changing professions and occupations is these various interprovincial agreements. We've always said labour mobility, right? But there have been differences between provinces in the way various professions were able to establish themselves. For example, law: you can qualify for the bar in Alberta, but that doesn't qualify you for the bar in Saskatchewan or in Nunavut. You would have to requalify in those various places.

If the government gets more control over how these organizations, these professional occupations are mandating themselves and

organizing themselves, I think it makes it a bit easier for them to have either legislative sway or a sort of argumentative persuasion in getting groups to accept some changes that make them fall in line, for example, with TILMA, which we've already heard talked about today. I think that pretty quickly what I'm hearing is that it's going to be far beyond TILMA as the government looks to agreements with other countries, not just other provinces.

What I'm seeing in this act is a sort of backdoor way of gaining back some legislative authority. They have ceded much of it, and it's worked very well. As the previous speaker said, that process worked very well for many, many years. I think what we're seeing here is government attempting to have more control. I am really interested in that because this is the very same government that howls over a number of things they consider the nanny state.

3:20

Yet here what we have, essentially, is the daddy state. They've got the boys inserting themselves back into controlling a number of delegated administrative organizations that were working very well. Frankly, I've heard no complaints, nor have I seen any legal reportings. There's nothing in the paper, nothing in the trade magazines that would be indicating to me that agronomists or architects or accountants, that the engineering, geological, or geophysical professions, land surveyors, regulated forest professionals, veterinary professionals, that any of them have done something so terribly wrong that the government would need to sweep in and have them reporting back to them again. So what's this really about?

I've seen too many pieces of legislation come through here with a great deal of government presentation about what a great idea it is and how it's going to do this, that, and the next thing, and then we find out years later: no, no. It may have done that, but it did a whole bunch of other things as well. Because I don't know what this act is ultimately going to do and I have not had the questions answered that my colleagues have requested be answered by the sponsoring member, I'm not willing to accept this. Every group that we have talked to has said: "Well, we already do this. Why do we need another law telling us to do it again?"

So I start to have questions about which one has supremacy. If you already consult under your own legislation, do you have to do it twice? Do you have to do it on the same day or different days? I don't mean to mock this, but what is the point of having duplicating rules that an organization is supposed to be able to follow? I do think that this is government's attempt to interfere in what is supposed to be an independent regulatory body over specified professions and occupations.

I have one question that I would like the sponsor to answer for us. It talks about any association registered under the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act. Could we please get a listing of who all that is? I'm thinking that's everybody else, like all the other professional organizations and occupations that exist in this province. If that's the case, that's definitely what's going on here. [interjection] Well, sure, it would be midwives. It would be everybody. It would be lawyers. It would be physicians. It would be nurses. It would be, well, all of the allied health professionals. It would be every professional occupation in the province, and I think that's who's on that list. So, please, I'm happy to be proven wrong, but I would like that answered, and I would like to see the list of what's captured under that catch-all heading.

This should have been a really simple bill, but it isn't. At this point I'm not willing to support it. I look forward to having some of my concerns and issues addressed, and we will proceed to Committee of the Whole to get that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. Overall, I'm very much encouraged by this proposal. It only makes sense that ministers responsible for the professional legislation and the Post-secondary Learning Act be consulted when it comes to any changes to the academic requirements. I certainly don't envision this as any sort of meddling, Big Brother approach. Rather, it promotes and encourages healthy discussion about the deletion or addition of academic courses for programs that lead to a degree, diploma, or certificate. I know that between the ministries of Employment and Immigration and Advanced Education and Technology there is an incredible source of knowledge among staff that could and should be utilized when it comes to determining these requirements. Bill 2 is an important piece of legislation, and I understand that the two ministries will work closely with all of the associations with its implementation.

If I have one concern, Mr. Speaker, it would be the term "education requirements" referred to in the Regulated Accounting Profession Act. I note that most of the other acts under Bill 2 refer to "academic" requirements, which would be in reference to postsecondary education. The postsecondary component is what government is interested in: degrees, diplomas, and certificates. Government appreciates that there are many other educational activities which are internal to the profession, like in-house training or continuing competency requirements. These educational activities are their own internal business. Is this clear with the current wording of Bill 2?

I'm hopeful that the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, can proceed without delay to ensure that government is involved at the early stages of any revision to postsecondary curriculum. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Hinman: I guess I'd like to ask the hon. member: if he feels it's so critical, how did we get to this point in Alberta with the professional act? I very much see it as: you cannot do anything in your profession until the minister gives his okay. That very much seems like father state saying that we're going to look after you. How did we survive? Should we take it away from those professionals if, in fact, they need to get permission from the minister and just have the minister look after the entire area?

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we were talking about this Bill 2, we were looking at making some of the changes such as I noted earlier in my remarks, the reference to academic requirements. One of the things this bill is talking about is looking towards the future, instead of using words such as "education" requirements, changing that to "academic" requirements, as it is used with many of the other professions which this bill deals with such as the Architects Act, the engineering, geological – other professional acts: Land Surveyors Act, for example, and other registered occupations such as the Regulated Accounting Profession Act. These are the things this bill is intended to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. So the member is saying that you need an entire piece of legislation that gives both of those ministers much more access and control over what appears to be every profession and occupation in the province in order to change the wording from "education" to "academic"? Isn't that sort of overkill?

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish. Others on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hinman: Just, you know, in regard to Bill 1, that says that we need to be more competitive, now here in Bill 2 we're saying that the minister needs to overlook and give the final okay before any amendments are made in a professional act regarding education. I guess I just have to ask: if it's so critical and needs to be there, why do we not just move the entire professional act under the government and eliminate it for efficiency and competitiveness if that's what the government is saying we need?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier may participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a), but I do believe the question in the response was directed to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, who can or cannot respond if he so chooses. But I will recognize the hon. Deputy Premier if he wishes to make a comment under 29(2)(a).

3:30

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That, indeed, was my intention. It was to simply make a comment under 29(2)(a).

Certainly, we value the professional associations that we have in the province to be self-governing. We value what they do in terms of their individual professions, but in some cases the academic qualification is provided by the taxpayers of Alberta through our postsecondary system. In keeping with the Campus Alberta approach we need to ensure that when a change is made to the academic qualifications in a profession, as an example, we are able to transmit that through the entire Campus Alberta so that we ensure transferability for the students, we ensure that there's value there for the taxpayer, and we ensure that we are responding to the economic and societal benefits, which are, Mr. Speaker, as I've said in this House many times, the three clients that the postsecondary system in the province of Alberta serves.

The Speaker: Time is still available.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the original member, but I'm sure that the minister of advanced education will have a comment to make. That still does not strike me as justification for a piece of legislation or a statute to be amended. There are ways to work with those professional occupations and with your academic institutions to say, "These are the standards that we accept," or, you know, to have your communication plan. But it just strikes me that you're changing a piece of legislation to deal with a communications problem.

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

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Kind of following up on that same question, I feel, as the minister of postsecondary education, very much that: co-ordinate that to say that these classes from these institutions all qualify for a profession. I see the importance of unanimity from our education system, but to impose that and say, well, "The profes-

sional system now doesn't know which ones to accept and not accept; therefore, we'll institute that" is still strange.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, but the time has now elapsed for that section.

I have no additional speakers on my list. Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary Mackay to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening intently. As I had alluded to during my comments at second reading, the intent of this bill is twofold. One is to ensure that these regulatory bodies must consult the ministers responsible and must take into consideration their comments, so it's an opportunity for us to formalize the process and also to recognize the currently existing very positive relationships.

Secondly, it is time to update the language and make it more consistent across the board, in addition, after we amended the Health Professions Act.

I look forward to more discussion at the Committee of the Whole next week, and I thank you for the opportunity to respond.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Denis]

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon in Calgary the Premier and the Minister of Energy have released a document from the Alberta government called Energizing Investment that is certainly one of the critical pieces of our competitiveness strategy. As I'm going to be quoting from the document, I'm more than happy to table both that document and the technical report that comes with it as part of my speaking notes.

To summarize from the document, I think it's very important to make note of the principles that were involved in the determination of the go-forward with regard to the royalty framework that we were in. To do that, we used the three guiding principles which were relevant, are relevant, and remain relevant today and into tomorrow. One of them was to

- support sustainable economic development that contributes to a high quality of life for all Albertans now and into the future;
- support a fair, predictable and transparent royalty regime; and
- align Alberta's royalty regime with overall government objectives.

Mr. Speaker, it's important not only for Alberta to ensure that we have well into the future a stable, profitable, functioning oil industry, but it's critically important for all of Canada. I think the development of our energy sector would be considered by our neighbours to the south one of critical importance for the security of their nation. With those in mind, our go-forward will probably contribute not only to our economic benefit but across Canada as we all know how much the oil sands development, for example, contributes to the economies of Ontario and other Canadian provinces and, in fact, Mr. Speaker, all over the world.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, that because of some of the changes that we've made, over the next 25 years upstream oil and gas develop-

ment in Alberta has the potential to add \$2.5 trillion in new economic activity and millions of person-years with regard to jobs. That's really what it's all about. It's about maximizing the opportunities that come from this tremendous resource that we've got. The Albertans I represent and, I think, probably the Albertans that we all represent would rather work than wait. They would rather train, innovate, and be world leaders than just accept the challenges that were dropped on the industry with not only the economic financial collapse but the challenges around the energy sector itself, whether it be environmental or just the practical production challenges.

I've been involved in the development of the oil and gas sector, Mr. Speaker, for many years. As a contractor we built, leased, maintained, moved rigs, dug pipelines. The people that work in this industry are probably some of the toughest, most innovative people I've ever met. They can face the 40 below or 50 below with the wind chill, and you just get it done. You can face roads that are just about impassable with 80,000 pounds of steel behind you, and you just move it.

You know the old saying: well, it's the oil companies here; let's hurry up and wait. There are all the challenges of logistically organizing rig moves and permissions and permits. I think that also is part of our competitiveness, that while they can face all of the elements that Mother Nature and the geophysical challenges give them, they can't beat world prices. They don't have any say in it, they don't have any way to affect it, and they can't get ahead of the regulatory burden that we as well as just about every other government in certainly the modern world have made around their industry. They make it far more challenging than it used to be.

We're not prepared, Mr. Speaker, in any way to compromise our environmental responsibilities or our workplace safety and health of our workforce by being more competitive. We're just going to be better at what we do.

Aside from the effect that this will have on Calgary and the oil industry, for many of us the biggest contributors in our community to really important community initiatives are, in fact, the oil and gas sector. Husky Oil has been in Lloydminster for over 70 years. They are going to break ground for their new officer tower next Tuesday. Very few projects in that community that are built with the partnership of government and private money are done without Husky and other very, very generous oil companies and service companies.

It is an amazing community to attend functions where they'll routinely raise half a million dollars for their health foundation or other worthy causes from companies like Grithog and Universal Industries, people that are always at the plate in good times and bad. When it's really good, they are able to be more generous, and when it's bad, many times, Mr. Speaker, they go without to make sure that they maintain a good presence, a corporate identity that they work very hard to establish.

It really is about making the oil and gas industry part of the fabric that makes Alberta what it is. It's something that, rightly or wrongly, has separated us from many other provinces, and like the challenges our Albertans face in agriculture or forestry, we're not afraid of the challenges. But when we self-impose some of the challenges or we're part of an industry that faces new developments – no one could have anticipated two or three years ago the opportunities to produce shale gas. It became a deal changer, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what we thought to be stable, long-term markets at significantly higher prices than now evaporated virtually in front of our eyes.

3:40

We could do like some of the provinces in the east have done when the fisheries dried up; we could sit on the dock and wait for

our ship to come in for a generation. Or we could take the bull by the horns and say: "Okay. That was then; this is now. What do we need to do to make sure that the resources we've got and the people that we've got to produce them can be put together in such a way that this product can get to market?" The profit that was there probably won't be there in the near future, but what we can do, we need to do is spare no expense to make sure that we get the maximum economic rent, which in many ways, Mr. Speaker, means building a bigger economic pie so that the piece we get is there to support, to make the things that we feel very important about in our health care and our education and the other things that we do as a government possible.

Mr. Speaker, we have spent eight or nine months of extremely focused work with the financial sector. I don't think many people realize how connected the financial sector is to the success of the oil and gas industry. They play with big dollars, and they need to have certainty of return or as much stability as possible. We didn't just take what the gas companies or the oil companies said was their bottom line. We looked to the financial sector. We had a very thorough vetting of what we need to do to move forward.

In the documents that we're tabling, Mr. Speaker, that's all there. While it would have been easy to put together a document on short notice, it was critical for us to make sure that what we've got now is the foundation for the next generation of wealth creation, of opportunity in Alberta. We know we've been very successful in establishing the oil sands regime that's going to be producing wealth for generations of Albertans. We think that with this proper balance the gas and conventional oil sectors can also play a very real and important part in the economic opportunities in Alberta for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I want to sum up in saying that this document of the work that's been done by the former Minister of Energy, current Minister of Energy, and, in fact, many other people in government and the Department of Energy is a true testament to what happens when you put your good minds to work, when you work with industry and the other sectors involved with it, including the service industry. We are keenly aware of the great opportunities and how important it is to all the communities of Alberta, that will see their hotels full again. They'll see their tire shops or their truck stops and their grocery stores once again thriving, prospering, building the life that we're all so very fortunate to have.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Assembly for this opportunity, and I do want to thank all the people that have been involved in the production of these documents. They were truly worth waiting for.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to proceed to 29(2)(a) with the minutes afforded to it, but I'm also going to permit the tabling of these documents today. We have in our Routine a section for tabling, but recognizing that these documents pertain to an announcement that, as I understand, was delayed till 3 o'clock today, when the markets in central Canada closed, this is the first opportunity, I guess, for them to be a part of the Assembly. So proceed with the tabling.

Now 29(2)(a). Calgary-Glenmore first and Edmonton-Centre second.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was quite enlightening, to see the government change its direction, realize that it's wrong, yet still not apologize to the industry or the workers of Alberta for their mistake and the two and a half years of pain that could have been avoided. The minister talked to say that Albertans

would rather work than wait. He talked about listening to the investment world now, when people that worked with Tristone and other areas for three years have been telling this government that this is wrong. Investment dried up, starting when it was announced. Why will you not admit it? Just feel good to say: we messed up; we're sorry.

You revert back from 50 per cent to 36 instead of 33. I mean, we're almost going back. But how can you possibly say that we don't want to wait when we've waited a whole year? There's nothing new in this report, nothing new revealed, only that you're admitting that you were wrong.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, actually, it's quite nice to see that the Wildrose really do appreciate the document. Much of what they produced the other day pretty much comes out of the document we've done.

What they don't seem to understand: every other reasonably intelligent person in Alberta and the world knows that the world went through a commodity collapse. Our Premier, this government didn't cause the price of natural gas to go from \$12 or \$14 down to \$3. He didn't cause the financial sector to lose its way. We're part of it. We've seen circumstances change. We didn't put and hide all that natural gas in the shale deposits in the States and in Alberta and Saskatchewan. It's been there forever. It's now just practically possible to produce.

Whether they want to admit it or not, the rest of the world knows, the energy sector knows, we know, and we've realized that, yeah, we do have to make changes. If nothing else had happened, just the establishment of the shale gas numbers would have resulted in us having to readjust our formula. That's a simple matter of common sense.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully to the presentation from the President of the Treasury Board. Not having the benefit of having a BlackBerry in the House to catch the media that's going on, I take it, then, that the government has announced that it is going to be reducing the royalty rates and giving some sort of incentive around natural gas. Is that what we're talking about here?

Mr. Snelgrove: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is. I think the minister of finance may address some of them, but, yes, we are. We're going to reduce the front end on our natural gas to 5 per cent. We're going to reduce some of the top end benefit that was there from 50 per cent on natural gas down to 36 per cent and conventional oil down to 40 per cent.

This was done in very, very close consultation with the financial sector, who say: for us to get in the game with the oil and gas sector, we need to know that your risk/reward is very close to the competing states and provinces that we're with. We compared the costs to 10 American states that are the ones that are fighting for the same dollars we are and to Saskatchewan and British Columbia, who are obviously our most competitive market.

We are changing it. It will be available to all of Alberta as of this point now, and we do believe it will set the stage for a very viable and stable re-establishment of the natural gas sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you. I find that just amazing, that the minister would get up and talk about the high prices of oil and the

collapse in August of '08. The new royalty framework didn't come in until the 1st of January '09. The collapse had bottomed out in November, December. The investment community had told and told this government as well as industry not to implement them on the 1st of January. The government went ahead.

The Barnett shale was hitting production in 2003; 2001 was when they first started developing that. In 2007, a year before the collapse, the shale gas was going up. We were at 5 billion bcf. They in the U.S. in their production and the punitive royalty rates here drove that business, which was developed . . .

3:50

The Speaker: Alas, the time for this segment has now left us.

Additional speakers on this bill? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and speak in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. The global economy is slowly showing signs of recovery. It's also showing us over the last year to two years that there is a lot of change and a requirement for change in order for Alberta to remain competitive in this new economic climate. We must adapt to these changes. Our government's prudent fiscal saving strategy has afforded Alberta the opportunity to lead the nation out of the recession and excel in this new global economy.

Mr. Speaker, many jurisdictions in North America have seen their debts soar as a result of the economic downturn. As debt increases, so do the challenges of achieving fiscal stability. Not only in North America – we look at Europe, and we only have to look at the turmoil in Greece in recent days to see vivid evidence of this.

In Alberta our fiscal situation is a result of years of strong fiscal stewardship and prudent fiscal planning. By drawing on cash reserves from the sustainability fund and with a plan to return to a surplus position in three years, Mr. Speaker, our government is emerging from this recession in an enviable fiscal position and poised to become not only a Canadian but a global leader. Our province is one of the most competitive jurisdictions in North America, and Bill 1 will ensure that we remain competitive.

Attracting investment is vital to our economic competitiveness, and competition for attracting investment capital is always increasing. Favourable business conditions, including our competitive tax rates, provide the foundation for attracting this investment. Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 builds on this foundation by enhancing collaboration between government, industry, and the hard-working citizens of our province. By communicating with Albertans and industry stakeholders, we're able to gain a comprehensive knowledge of how the changes in the global economy will affect our province.

The report on the competitiveness strategy and the government's response released today is testament to our government's commitment to this task. This ongoing communication will ensure that we can develop the right strategies to see that Alberta continues to flourish and attract investment, to grow our economic pie and create opportunities for Alberta entrepreneurs and families.

One area that stands out in my mind is, of course, technology and innovation. The advancements that have been made in these areas over the past few years have been astonishing. It is clear that enhancements in both technology and innovation are vital to ensuring that Alberta's economy remains competitive. Bill 1 will enhance our ability to both develop and adapt to new technologies. Again, Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta our government's fiscal prudence permits us the ability to adapt to these changes in a timely manner, ensuring that our industries are on the cutting edge. The development of new technology in Alberta is a source of great pride

and a catalyst to spur growth in our economy and improve the quality of life for Albertans.

Within the walls of our postsecondary institutions lie some of the brightest young minds in Canada. These students are indeed the future of Alberta. Our postsecondary institutions, under the umbrella of Campus Alberta, provide these students with a world-class education. An example of this was the announcement that the University of Alberta was ranked fourth in the country and 59th world-wide.

Mr. Speaker, a competitive provincial economy does not solely mean attracting investment. It also means attracting and retaining workers who have the skills and knowledge that are necessary to develop new technologies and drive Alberta's provincial economy. The strength of this province, the backbone of this province, is our people. When students graduate from our postsecondary institutions and are looking for employment, we want them to remain in Alberta. We believe in growing our own, not exporting our best.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 does not focus on a specific industry in which to promote competitiveness. Rather, it seeks to promote competitiveness in numerous industries right across our economic spectrum. Alberta is a province rich in diversity both in our cultural backgrounds and our resources. I believe that Bill 1 recognizes this diversity and promotes competitiveness that will benefit numerous sectors of our provincial economy. Alberta has always been known for being competitive, and Bill 1 intends to build on our great track record to make a great province that much more attractive.

Our province was an attractive place to do business before the global downturn, and I'm confident, Mr. Speaker, that it will continue to be one of the most competitive jurisdictions in North America or, frankly, anywhere in the free world.

Mr. Speaker, the foundation of Alberta lies in our entrepreneurial spirit and the competitive economic climate that our province is known for. Bill 1 will build on this foundation, ensuring that Alberta remains competitive and that Albertans can continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I would sincerely like to thank our Premier for bringing forward this legislation and for his vision and dedication to a prosperous Alberta. I support Bill 1, and I would ask all my colleagues, including the Member for Edmonton-Centre, to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. The member, when he first started up, talked about the importance of Bill 1, that we're the most competitive in the world and also talked about the new competitiveness review of the oil and gas. If in fact we were the most competitive, Mr. Speaker, we would never be discussing any of these things. We wouldn't be having a new change in our royalty. We would have already been competitive. I don't understand how he can say that we're the most competitive when we're putting all these things in and implementing them. Why do you say that we're the most competitive? Yet we're changing; therefore, we're not.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, if you wish.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to respond to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Alberta has been very competitive . . .

Mr. Hinman: Has been.

Mr. Rogers: Has been, and we believe that it will continue to be. That is why, hon. member, we have gone through this process of this competitive strategy: to make sure that we continue to do the right things. This province, like the rest of the country and anywhere else, has not been immune to the global economic downturn. We must make sure that we do everything to make sure that that competitive advantage that has existed here will continue and be there for the future so that this province not only will continue to be of benefit to us but to our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on 29(2)(a).

Dr. Taft: Under 29(2)(a), yes, Mr. Speaker. This would be aimed at, frankly, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore or even the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. It would seem to me that a key measure of competitiveness as it's being debated here is profitability. My question to any of the people I've named would be: have any of them looked at the scale of corporate profits in Alberta as a percentage of GDP compared to other jurisdictions? We often talk about spending as a percentage of the economy and taxes as a percentage of the economy. In doing the background work for their comments, have any of them looked at corporate profits as a percentage of Alberta's economy and how that might compare to other jurisdictions?

The Speaker: Well, the comments will go to the last speaker, which is our tradition. The other two, if they choose to participate, the member will have an opportunity then. The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I certainly don't have those figures handy at my fingertips. The minister of finance might. I might remind the hon. member that in Alberta and particularly the part of Alberta that I represent and, I can assure you, right across this province, profit is not a dirty word. The reason that companies invest in Alberta, have invested in Alberta, and will return to invest in Alberta is because we have always treasured through that entrepreneurial spirit the opportunity to make a profit in this province.

I hope, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member, that opportunities will continue to abound, that our investors will see great returns on their investment in this province of Alberta. Thank you.

4:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Remember my advice a minute or two ago.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I appreciate the question from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. It's an excellent question, but it's not the right question. The question is: what percentage or how much tax are we actually receiving? As we've been lowering the corporate tax here in the province, we've raised it from \$1 billion to \$3 billion of corporate tax being paid. Had we raised it to say, "Oh, we want a higher percentage of the GDP," we would have actually shrunk the pie, as this government foolishly did by saying that if we raise the royalty rate, we're going to grow the pie. It actually shrinks it.

As you shrink and lower it to a competitive tax, more business comes in. There's more economic spinoff, and we actually grow the economic pie. Therefore, we increase the dollars into the revenue of the treasury here so that we can in fact make sure that we have the health care and the education and the roads that we do have and want

to have. We want to be competitive, and that is in looking at the overall tax rate, not the percentage of GDP.

The Speaker: Time is still available under Standing Order 29.

Dr. Taft: Well, again, I guess to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon or perhaps the Member for Calgary-Glenmore: if we accept the logic that lower taxes increase the economy, would it be sensible, then, just to eliminate taxes altogether? Would we all be a lot better off if there were no taxes?

Mr. Rogers: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are probably places in the world where there are very little or no taxes. I'm very proud that our province has . . .

The Speaker: Alas, the time has escaped us.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point, as we all understand Gladwell and *The Tipping Point*: we raised our taxes to the tipping point, where we're destroying our economy. Yes, you can lower them to the point where there isn't enough possibly for what the people want.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, has lofty ambitions like advancing competitive initiatives and developing strategies to encourage innovation, productivity, and adoption of technology, but once again this government is going the wrong way because of its bad ideas. This government promotes one bad policy after another, lurches from one crisis to another crisis, and is constantly having to clean up its own mistakes.

As we have seen with the way the government has handled health care, the energy sector, they mean well, but they keep getting it wrong. I am sure that the irony behind Bill 1 is not lost on many members of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is supposed to be the land of opportunity, where we embrace the entrepreneur and unleash their potential. Now, because of this government's incompetence, they feel that they need to pass a bill and create an agency that will encourage competitiveness. It took them a whole year just to review the competitiveness of the oil and gas industry, where we used to lead.

I also remember, Mr. Speaker, that back in 2005 this government re-formed a new cabinet, and they increased the size of that cabinet. They found it necessary to have a minister of restructuring and government efficiency. I don't know where that minister has gone to. Well, actually, I do know. Now he's working on Transportation and doing a little bit of restructuring. But the point is that they try to be efficient, and they become more inefficient as they do that.

The problem is that this is already the government's role. The government's role is to put the proper rules and regulations in place to protect the health and safety of our workers, to create a level playing field, to protect the environment, and to protect the public and the consumers. But the key to creating a competitive economy is to make sure that the government does not get in the way unnecessarily by putting up too many needless rules and regulations, by making the system so complex that it is hard to figure out the rules, and by wasting people's time and money to try and comply or follow those changing rules, as we're seeing with Bill 2. Mr. Speaker, this just dampens the spirit of the entrepreneur and the real job creator.

But what is the government doing? The opposite. It is getting in the way. It's making doing business more difficult, wasting the time and money of the businesspeople. The result is loss of jobs. With the number of businesses that I have discussions with, they say that compliance and the number of rules, regulations — environmental and on all the other things — are repetitive, they overlap, and they're

just costly and hard to implement. Yet many of the bureaucrats that they report to don't even understand them themselves, especially in the ag industry. This government has cost Albertans thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment and economic activity loss because of their wavering ways.

When the government of British Columbia was first elected, Mr. Speaker, one of their first acts was to eliminate regulatory burdens and to be a partner with business so that it could create the jobs and value-added opportunities that its citizens could rely on regardless of who was in power. The business of government is to be friendly with business. This was a bold step. It's unfortunate that this government could have done this a long time ago. Instead, it is simply copying what another province has done and what every government should do as part of its operations. There is no time to waste. With each passing day businesspeople relocate to projects in B.C. and Saskatchewan. So it's great that that review has finally come out today. We'll see if we can turn the tide. The livelihoods of Albertans are in shambles because of the chronic meddling by this government.

I urge this government to demonstrate real leadership by being humble enough to admit its mistakes, which it seems is unlikely, and to realize its limitations by being strong enough to say no, that it does not need to do things just because some group protests, and by being wise enough to realize that it is business and the taxpayers, who create jobs and who make real and lasting investments in communities, to whom we owe our real prosperity. Mr. Speaker, while I applaud the principles of Bill 1, I struggle to find how it helps the people of Calgary-Glenmore or Albertans to create another government agency to ensure competitiveness.

Competitiveness is created by fewer regulatory hurdles that serve no purpose, competitiveness is created by a government that realizes it is a partner with business and Albertans, and competitiveness is created by having the lowest taxes, reducing unnecessary fees, and limiting the interference of government in our personal and business lives. I do not see how Bill 1 can accomplish this.

When the first settlers came to Alberta and began to trade one with another, I'm sure that they would have scratched their heads if someone told them that the future government was going to push a law to encourage competitiveness. That is why they came here. It was to compete and to make a living. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure they would have wondered what went so wrong that the government would have brought forward something like Bill 1.

While times have changed, basic principles do not. Sometimes the best thing that legislators can do is reflect on the wisdom of those who came before us because limiting government, focusing spending, and empowering communities and individuals to help one another in time of need have stood the test of time. Giving government even more power to encourage competitiveness does not. That is the reason why I am not all that thrilled with Bill 1.

A few other items I wanted to cover. It's interesting, you know, as we just finished the Olympics, that it was a very great time for Canadians. We've come together. We're proud. We had that desire to own the podium. That's world competition at its best, down to the seconds. Probably the most heartbreaking for me to watch was Devon Kershaw, after 50 kilometres of racing being 1.6 seconds behind and placing fifth. Competition is sharp. But I don't think any less of him; I think all the more that he carried on right to the end and was there.

It's exciting to see competition in sports, in industry, amongst the different towns in Alberta, whether it's curling, whether it's hockey, basketball, football, all those things. It brings out the best in us, and we like to compete. Competing is fun, but it's not fun if it's not on a level playing field. It's not fun to have an Alberta business, based

here in Calgary or Edmonton or Leduc, and to have to move your equipment and your workers to Saskatchewan or B.C. in order to keep that business going. It just isn't right.

We've made a huge mistake by becoming greedy and thinking: oh, if we actually take a bigger piece of the pie, we're going to get \$1.4 billion more. It has cost us billions of dollars. Yesterday's land sales are another classic example. If we want to be competitive, we need to have the rules and regulations put in place. We've had nine land sales since they announced last June that we are going to do a competitiveness review. It's very simple for businesspeople to realize that A plus B equals the cost. A was bidding on the lands. B was the royalty that we're going to have to pay if we get that. Why would we say for a year, "We don't know what we're going to do with the royalty rates, but please bid A, and bid the maximum amount"? We will never know the answer on what the dollars would have been yesterday or two weeks ago or for the last six months had those rates been implemented.

4:10

You don't understand the investments. Even your own minister talked . . . [interjections] You're listening to him now? More of you should listen. You don't know what return on investment is. I don't believe it. Otherwise, you wouldn't be mumbling now and grumbling about this.

Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing that we have come to this, where we need to pass a bill to say that we need to review and be competitive. This is as disappointing as having a government minister on restructuring and government efficiency. One has to scratch one's head and ask: what are we really doing here? To think that this government feels that Bill 1 must be legislated is wrong. Albertans are by nature a very industrious and competitive group. Through our struggles of the last 100 years we are stronger. What legislation is this government going to try to pass next? That we need to wash our hands when we leave the restroom? We already know and understand those things. Are we going to have to cover our mouths when we cough? These are common-sense things.

It's human nature to be competitive, and this government is wasting time and money in trying to look at how to be competitive when they should just clear the deck and allow people to compete on a level playing field, one where the rules aren't being changed. I mean, how many times have they changed the new, new, new, new royalty framework? Well, now they have the new competitiveness. It's a sad day that we had to wait this long and lose this much money so that we can get back in the game.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Little Bow, then the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having listened to the comments from the former speaker, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, I'd just like to know who was involved in giving them advice on the energy policy which they came out with. I know he believes in transparency and all the other good things. I'm just really curious to know what sources and resources their party used in developing their energy policy.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I'm surprised. I would have thought that perhaps the government has been following us around to see who we've been speaking with. One thing, Mr. Speaker, that I've learned since I've been elected to this House is that the economic tyranny of this government is appalling. They want to know who they've

talked to because they want to punish them. [interjections] That's the problem. You laugh.

Do you realize that tomorrow our leader is speaking to COADC and that they've received a letter from your Minister of Energy saying: "She shouldn't be there speaking to you. Come and talk to me"? It's comical, but it's wrong. The reports are out there. There are tons of reports. If you want, I'll maybe put a few of them together so that you can read them if you want. But you've got it corrected. You understand. And, no, I will not talk about who we've talked to to share with the government.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member opposite very much talks about: we are changing the focus and direction. Does he not believe and understand that economics in this country, economics in the world have changed? Also, at least as it sounds from his presentation, does he believe that no matter what takes place, they should stay stagnant and in the same direction year after year, generation after generation? I don't understand where this individual is coming from, and I would like him to express it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Hinman: I understand that he doesn't understand. We had a collapse in the equity markets. There was too much money being borrowed. We were fortunate here in Alberta to have some money, but the fact of the matter is that there's a shortage. The spending of this government isn't sustainable. We're going to get in a wreck like we were back in 1992, and to say, "Oh, we're going to have to dig ourselves out of a debt" is wrong. Yes, we maybe have one more year of sustainability, but the spending is not sustainable. That's what you have to look at.

We understand because when you put out your budget, we said that you'd need to balance it. That's the difference, Mr. Speaker. Are we going to realize what causes economic disasters? It's governments that spend more than they have. It's governments that don't know how to prioritize and realize what's important, building things that aren't necessarily needed now or even able to be used, yet they're funding those. Again, they think they're being penny-wise when they're pound-foolish. We need to look at the infrastructure that needs to be done long term, and when we fail to do that and we want to do something that's politically popular to get a few votes, it fails the Alberta taxpayers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to absorb the answer that he didn't give me, so I'm assuming that because I wasn't given the answer as to who they actually used as resource people, he doesn't want to answer that question.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the people who talk to us prefer not to be given out. They say: you don't understand how much we're risking. It's just like the doctors, the nurses. They're not allowed to talk to the press. These people are the same. They put in bids on these lands. They want to get wildcat wells. They want to be able to continue to do business here. This government likes to flex its economic tyranny on people that speak out against them. They won't even listen to their own. We're talking about getting information.

Why are you now listening to the investment world? They said that in January 2007, when the Premier spoke and said that we're going to have the review, the investment into this province started to shrink at that point long before it came out. Whenever govern-

ment says that it's changing its rules and regulations, it creates instability. There's been instability for three years in the oil and gas industry. It's wrong. It wasn't beneficial for anybody other than outside jurisdictions. I think Saskatchewan, the U.S., and B.C. want to nominate our Premier for man of the year because they've benefited so much because of his decisions.

The Speaker: I have one last speaker that I have on my list, I think, the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and join second reading debate on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. A healthy, growing economy requires that Alberta remain competitive. A growing economy creates jobs and opportunities for Alberta families. A growing economy is also the key to government's ability to fund world-class health care, education, and programs that help those who need help. Competitiveness enables us to build the hospitals, the schools, and the roads we need to meet the demands of a growing population. Bill 1 will support our ability to compete on the world stage and increase Albertans' prosperity and quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas industry is the primary fuel of this province's economy. One in 15 jobs is directly related to energy, and that proportion gets even higher when you look at indirect employment related to the energy sector, some estimates being as high as 1 in 5 jobs. The importance this sector has on the provincial economy is critical to our future.

To keep this sector one of the most competitive in the world, this government initiated the natural gas and conventional oil investment competitiveness study. Today the government released the much-anticipated competitiveness review. The review proposes changes to our royalty system that will ensure we remain an attractive destination for investment dollars. This review is about more than just royalties paid by oil and gas companies. It's about Alberta's economy. It's about growing that economy, growing a larger economic pie.

Oil and gas revenues, Mr. Speaker, come not just from royalties but from a variety of other streams, including taxes and land sales. The review will grow this economic pie by adjusting royalties to be competitive. This will lead to more investment, more drilling activity, and more jobs in our communities. This means the government will be creating a larger economic pie by creating a smaller slice of the royalty piece, but that will be more than made up by growth in land sales and taxes. Over the next 25 years we expect this will create tens of thousands of direct, indirect, and induced jobs not just in Alberta but across Canada.

Bill 1, though, our topic today, is more than just about oil and gas, more than about any one sector. Mr. Speaker, enhancing competitiveness in Alberta involves and is important to all sectors: agriculture, manufacturing, financial services, forestry, infrastructure, tourism. Sustainable prosperity won't be achieved unless they're competitive.

4:20

Government taxation plays an important role in all sectors in making them competitive. This government has been widely praised for understanding the key role of taxes. That's why we monitor and adjust our taxes over time. Since 1993 we have reduced personal income taxes, corporate taxes, and education property taxes. We introduced a science and research development tax credit to foster innovation in the province. We also established and enhanced the family employment tax credit. Our most recent budget, the current budget, Budget 2010, complemented these efforts. There were no new taxes or increased taxes. As a result, Alberta does continue to have the most competitive tax regime in Canada.

With respect to the corporate world the province's low corporate tax already helps attract investment from around the globe. Alberta is low, in fact the lowest in Canada. Its low general corporate tax rate supports growth and development in both small and large business. In addition, there is no capital tax, no payroll tax, no general sales tax, and we have the lowest fuel tax of any province. These are factors that are looked at by organizations and investors when they think about opening up business in Alberta.

Let me turn to personal taxes. This province also has the most generous personal basic exemption amongst all provinces, at \$16,825. If Alberta had any other provincial tax system, Albertans and Alberta businesses would pay between \$2,800 and \$4,900 per capita more in taxes each year. In 2001 Alberta replaced its multirate personal income tax with a flat tax. Alberta's single tax rate of 10 per cent helps attract and retain skilled workers, a major asset in the global economy. This taxation system has been one of the keys to our competitiveness. It's simple, it's transparent, and it's a fair way to levy taxes.

Recently there have been some critics who've argued that it is not a progressive taxation system. In fact, figures show that the flat tax is very progressive. Most provincial revenues are collected from higher income earners in the province. For example, the top 10 per cent of income earners in Alberta pay 57 per cent of the total income taxes collected in the province.

Mr. Hinman: Say that once more.

Dr. Morton: The top 10 per cent of income earners pay 57 per cent of total personal income tax. Meanwhile, the bottom 50 per cent of earners pay only 3 per cent. Talk about progressive.

Increasing competitiveness, though, is more than just about taxes. The government is already taking action on a number of fronts to improve Alberta's ability to compete. As well as taxes we've looked at issues like bureaucracy, productivity, innovation. We've addressed specific sectors: forestry, agriculture, and now oil and gas. We've also focused on human capital, the training and education of our workforce to ensure that it is one of the most capable and productive in the world.

With respect to bureaucracy the Alberta government created in the '90s the Regulatory Review Secretariat to focus on reducing red tape. Streamlining regulations results in an environment where businesses can focus on productivity rather than complying with redundant or ineffective regulations. Most recently an example of this type of success was simplifying of the business registry process during the implementation of the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, the TILMA agreement, between Alberta and British Columbia.

Alberta's competitiveness is also dependent on our ability to improve productivity. Alberta's productivity has led the nation for a number of years now, but our productivity growth rate has actually trailed that of other provinces. In response to this, the provincial government has created Productivity Alberta. The staff there help organizations examine and improve their ability to run more efficiently, work smarter, and increase overall productivity. While Productivity Alberta typically helps manufacturers and industrial clients, the help they provide crosses sectors. Interestingly, one of their noteworthy successes has been helping several of our hospitals implement methods that cut down on emergency room wait times.

In terms of innovation Alberta Innovates, the successor to the Alberta Research Council, strengthens the province's role as a world leader in using science to help increase our competitiveness. Specifically, Alberta Innovates focuses on bioeconomy, health, energy, and environment solutions. Through Alberta Innovates the province has positioned itself to foster a culture of innovation that

will support entrepreneurs in technology-based industries.

An example of government addressing a particular sector has been the Alberta livestock and meat strategy, or ALMA. This strategy is a road map for a competitive, profitable livestock and meat industry. The Livestock and Meat Agency, ALMA, the lead organization of this strategy, played a pivotal role recently in opening Hong Kong borders to Canadian beef during a federal Asian mission.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, in this province and this government much has been done on competitiveness, but we cannot rest on our laurels. Government work on competitiveness needs to continue, especially in light of the current global situation. Bill 1 is about partnership, partnership between industry and government, between the private and public sectors. This partnership will improve the province's ability to compete on all fronts. Bill 1, the Competitiveness Act, highlights this government's commitment to being competitive in the past and continuing to improve our competitiveness in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Taft: Under 29(2)(a), yes. Mr. Speaker, I want to make one comment, and then I have a question. The member who just spoke said that a flat tax is actually progressive because the top 10 per cent of taxpayers pay 57 per cent of the taxes, but that's mathematical hocus-pocus. If the top 10 per cent of income earners earn 57 per cent of total income, then that would explain why they're paying 57 per cent of taxes. It would be useful if perhaps next week the minister could table how much of Alberta's total income is earned by that top 10 per cent, and then we'll see how progressive the flat tax really is.

My question to the minister is: how does this government balance taxes and profitability? When does it decide that corporate income is at a point where taxes need to be cut or increased?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this would be a lesson in economics longer than we have time for today. Suffice it to say that it's as much an art as a science, and finding the right spot, the tipping point, as the hon. member said there, is the work of an economist. The metaphor is pretty simple. If you try and take too much too fast, you scare away investment. We see a number of provinces, the so-called have-not provinces that receive the equalization payments that I was talking about, I believe, in this Chamber yesterday, that have the larger governments, higher spending, higher taxes, drive out investment, have lower fiscal capacity, and then go hat in hand looking for transfers from wealthier provinces like Alberta.

Alberta, obviously, has benefited from the natural endowment of hydrocarbon resources, but certainly we watched Saskatchewan for three decades, where ill-informed tax policy and ill-informed resource policy drove out investment. What did Saskatchewan do? They all moved here. A lot of them are in our caucus. So tax policy may purport to be a science, but it's also an art.

I'd say that Alberta's record speaks for itself, and I'd say that this government's record speaks for itself. People vote with their feet, and people have been coming to this province. Even in the downturn we continue to have twice the population growth rate over the national average.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to March 11, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

2 Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft., adjourned)

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft., adjourned)

7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)

First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft., adjourned)

8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)

First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)

- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
- Pr2 Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
- Pr3 Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 15, 2010

Issue 17

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 15, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome. Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen and young people, we will now participate in the singing of our national anthem. Today with us is Mr. Paul Lorieau, who will lead us, and I'd invite all to join in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a thrill it is for me to have the singular honour of introducing our very, very special guest in the Legislative Assembly today. Fresh from his posting in Brussels and living now in Aylmer – just across the river, as it were, from Ottawa – is the ambassador that we greet today from the Republic of Italy. Italy and Canada have had many very special relations. We have 82,000 Canadians of Italian descent living here in Alberta. Over the lunchtime we had an opportunity to have a conversation about many things, but the wise words from the ambassador were that many people in his country expect a great deal from Canada. We resolve not to disappoint him or to disappoint the Italians that are expecting us to do the very great work that Canadians do to be sustainable and to deliver our products to market.

With that introduction, may I welcome and may you join me in welcoming the ambassador from Italy here to Alberta today. A very special welcome to His Excellency Ambassador Andrea Meloni. Please rise.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Athabasca-Redwater it is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 18 students, one teacher, and four parent helpers from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake. They have travelled here to visit the Legislature Building. Miss Chelsea Evans and Mrs. Nancy Senetza, Mrs. Michelle Palichuk, Mr. Rick Anton, and Mrs. Giselle Anton are

here. They are seated in the members' gallery today. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it is also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 28 students, two teachers, and two parent helpers that have travelled two and a half hours from Vilna school to Edmonton today to tour the Legislature Building. With them are teachers Mrs. Rayanna Tremblay and Mrs. Tanya Pelech and parent helpers Mrs. Laurie Shapka and Mr. Ken Krieg. They are seated in the public gallery today, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 36 students and two teachers from one of my favourite schools in the Lauderdale district of the Edmonton-Calder constituency. With us today are teacher Mr. Dennis Ralston and teacher Mr. Mathieu Brosseau Tremblay. I did not have an opportunity to ask Mr. Brosseau Tremblay if he was part of the clan, but he's an awfully good-looking fellow, so I must assume that he is. In spite of that, I would ask them all to rise now and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Chase: Merci, M. le Directeur. Je veux vous présenter et à tous mes collègues dans l'Assemblée deux classes d'élèves de l'école Gabrielle-Roy, qui est située dans Edmonton-Gold Bar. S'il vous plaît, souhaitez la bienvenue aux deux classes, une du sixième niveau et l'autre du neuvième, avec leurs professeurs et leurs parents: Meyranie Giroux, Nicole Hébert-Royer, et Nadia Duchesneau. S'il vous plaît, levez-vous et recevez la réception de l'Assemblée.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you two outstanding Albertans. One is Annie Changarathil. Annie has been a single mother. She's worked for the Alberta government. She is currently working for NAIT. Her greatest success is raising her young daughter, who is in grade 8. Her name is Judy. She's a 13-year-old. She goes to Jean Forest leadership academy. It's a girl's-only, uniform school near NAIT. I recently met Judy at a public event for India Day ceremonies. She said she wants to do something meaningful with her life to help others, so I thought I'd bring her down to the Legislature and introduce her to all of our friends here. She's won many awards in academic achievement, leadership, volunteerism, Indian classical dance. I thought that with bright young people like this we need to mentor them, guide them. This is the future of this province. I'd ask my young friends Judy and Annie to please rise and be awarded the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a group seated in the members' gallery today, joining us from the Academy of Learning and Digital School in Edmonton. Elmer and Audrey Brattberg are the two owners of the two schools I previously

mentioned. Charles Jarvis is an operations manager and a past graduate of the Academy of Learning. Andre Harris is the information systems manager and a past graduate of the Academy of Learning. Luke Wolff is a very successful Digital School graduate with a new career as a CAD technician, and Michael Nagy is also an Academy of Learning graduate and valedictorian with a new career as an insurance adviser. At this time I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly members of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS, representing over 70,000 undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. They're meeting with many members of the Assembly all week. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. I'd ask that each rise as I call their name to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. They are Beverly Eastham, who is finishing her second and final term as VP external of the U of A Students' Union and as chair of CAUS; Kay She, the outgoing VP external of the U of C Students' Union and vice-chair of CAUS; Zach Fentiman, president of the U of A Students' Union; Jeremy Girard, the outgoing president at the U of L Students' Union; Alex Massé, VP academic at the U of L Students' Union; Hardave Birk, the newly elected VP external at the U of C Students' Union; Duncan Wojtaszek, the executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students; Taz Kassam, newly elected president at the University of Lethbridge Students' Union; and River Walton, external commissioner of the University of Calgary Students' Union. They are all standing in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that we to give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Academy of Learning and Digital School

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, February 26, I had the honour and privilege of taking part in the graduation ceremony of the Academy of Learning and Digital School. The Academy of Learning is a career and business college with over 30 fully licensed diploma programs, all under one year in length, training individuals to enter the workforce upon graduation. Their programs generally fall under the categories of office administration, health care, accounting, and information technology. The Digital School is also a career college, specializing in one-year-or-less diploma programs for computer-aided drafting engineering. Graduates from these schools are mostly mature students who opted to return to school to get the postsecondary education that they need to qualify for more lucrative careers.

Mr. Speaker, these schools have seen tremendous success over the years, boasting a consistent employment rate of 90 per cent from immediate graduates. In addition, the Academy of Learning has been a proud recipient of consumers' choice awards for business schools for the past eight years both in Calgary and Edmonton. Congratulations to the dedicated employees who have helped to make the Academy of Learning and Digital School a successful and important aspect of Alberta's education, and congratulations to the

students who have taken these important steps to improve their futures.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Kevin Koe Rink Brier Championship

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud to rise today to celebrate the tremendous performance of Alberta's Kevin Koe rink as the 2010 Tim Hortons Brier champions. Yesterday evening in a thrilling final Kevin Koe's last shot was right on the button, giving him a 6-5 extra-end victory over Ontario's Glenn Howard and making him Brier champion for the very first time.

For more than a decade Kevin Koe's rink honed their skills in the shadows of better known Edmonton rinks skipped by Randy Ferbey and Kevin Martin. Ferbey and Martin not only competed and advanced in the same local playdowns but between them won a total of eight Briers for Alberta.

This year Koe's rink made its own mark in a brilliant fashion, culminating with the championship in his very first Brier appearance. Their path to the championship was a long road as the Koe rink had to win two playoff games against Newfoundland and Labrador and northern Ontario to advance. Now their efforts can focus on representing Canada at the world curling championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, from April 3 to 11.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating skip Kevin Koe, third Blake MacDonald, second Carter Rycroft, and lead Nolan Thiessen on their Brier championship. You have made Albertans very proud.

Thank you.

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

Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This administration made a grave mistake when it declined to show some genuine leadership and long-term planning with regard to the construction of the Calgary airport tunnel. The deadline for action has passed, and the project is dead or, at least, delayed. Should the tunnel ever be built, it will be far more expensive than it would have been had this administration and the federal government acted sensibly or had the Calgary Airport Authority not resisted the tunnel's construction earlier on. Once Barlow Trail is closed, Calgary will face unprecedented gridlock, commuters will be frustrated, emergency vehicles will lose precious time reaching their destinations, more carbon will be spewed into the atmosphere as cars sit idling on Deerfoot, and local businesses will suffer significant loss of revenue, which in turn will impact property values in Calgary northeast.

This administration continues to say that transportation is the key to our future, yet you have failed to see the need for the tunnel and the future LRT expansion into the International Airport. It is ironic that an administration that commissioned a well-hyped competitiveness review doesn't understand the competitive disadvantage they have imposed on Alberta's largest city and, in fact, upon the province at large. The Calgary International Airport's new runway is going to open up Calgary to the world, but the lack of a tunnel is going to create a backlog for the new influx of business travelers, air commuters, and tourists. How is that competitive?

Constituents in northeast Calgary are incensed by this administration's failure to show leadership in this matter. That anger will only increase and spread across the city as Calgary commuters are forced to live with the consequences of your failure.

On behalf of my constituents in Calgary-McCall and all of the people that depend upon efficient transportation links around the airport, I will continue to work with city of Calgary officials, aldermen, MLAs, MPs, and citizens to find a responsible solution to meet the transportation needs of Calgary-McCall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Clean Energy Projects

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Innovation is a focal point as Alberta moves to increase competitiveness and embrace a clean energy future. The Alberta government is supporting research and innovation today to find the clean energy technologies of tomorrow. Using Alberta's nearly \$150 million allocation of the federal Ecotrust fund, we are supporting ideas that can make us more efficient and that support low- to no-emission energy.

We're funding unique projects like turning forest remnants into electricity in Drayton Valley and turning Edmonton's municipal waste into energy that will heat homes in Strathcona county. We've also invested in research in our energy sector with a \$25 million grant to the University of Alberta's partnership with the world-renowned Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres. This partnership will help address challenges facing oil sands development through research into such areas as eliminating tailings ponds.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Minister of Environment announced funding for another Ecotrust project. One million dollars has been granted to Enbridge and its partners for the carbon dioxide slurry pipeline project. The plan is to pump captured carbon dioxide through a pipeline to transport materials such as sulphur and limestone to markets where it can be sold. Normally a slurry pipeline uses water to propel its contents. Using carbon dioxide is a new idea that has tremendous potential. Once materials arrive, the carbon dioxide will be stored underground or used in enhanced oil recovery rather than released into the atmosphere.

Congratulations to Enbridge and its partners for challenging themselves to find new and better ways to do business, ways that demonstrate the commitment of Albertans to seek out innovation, apply technology, and improve environmental performance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The competitiveness review confirms what we all knew, that within two years of taking office this Premier succeeded in eroding trust with the energy sector and in introducing a bucketload of uncertainty to what was one of the most stable oil and gas jurisdictions in the world. The effect was a less competitive oil and gas industry. To the Premier: given this government's track record for changing royalties again and again and again, what assurance can the Premier give that this time will be different and that this time he'll stick with it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the changes that were introduced in terms of the drilling incentive and some of the other changes recently were in reaction to an ever-changing market, new finds of shale gas, and also to deal with the credit crisis and partly, of course, the economic recession. This last competitiveness review was done

with months of consultation with the industry and having that information analyzed and the recommendations coming forward to government.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this competitiveness review doesn't actually speak to Alberta having to have one of the three lowest combined royalty and tax rates compared to similar jurisdictions – this is to the Premier again – does performance measure 1(a) in this year's Energy ministry business plan, which says just that, still hold?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the changes following the competitiveness review are to put jobs back in Alberta, whether it's the local tire shop, to put people back in motels across rural Alberta, and also to keep creating more jobs well into the future. Again, a third party analyzed the report and said that this is building a \$2.5 trillion business over the next 10 years.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, so far two questions and no answers. I'll try this again. How does the Premier intend to prevent his government's new focus on competitive royalties and resource revenues from becoming just a race to the bottom?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the competitiveness review analyzed all information coming forward in terms of the new geological data that's out there: shale gas available not only in the United States but in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Alberta, some of the cardium plays for oil. Of course, this is about introducing innovation and also new technology, new technology that will significantly reduce the environmental footprint the oil industry has put on Alberta.

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

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try my luck with the Minister of Energy this time, and maybe I'll get some answers this time. Maybe. While this report is four months late, it still remains short on details. To the minister: since the new royalty curves weren't done when you released this review last Thursday, why weren't they ready, and who's designing them?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I would like to correct the preamble, as generally is the case. There were a number of initiatives that were announced last Thursday. What we did say, however, Mr. Speaker, was that we did want to get the report and the response to it out so that industry could make its decisions regarding investment. We wanted to also ensure, because of the situation involving natural gas and the low prices for natural gas, that we take a further look at, as the member said, the royalty curves. We're not expecting significant changes, but we did want to have the extra 60 days to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, when we consulted with industry, they were not opposed to paying higher royalties when prices were high, so what is the minister's rationale for lowering the maximum for oil by 10 per cent and the maximum for natural gas by 14 per cent?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I can't comment on the consultations that the Official Opposition had with industry, but if that was what they were told by industry, we were told differently, Mr. Speaker. We were clearly told that, especially in the area with the new deposits in shale gas, there's huge investment up front, there's high risk that's being taken, and the high end of the curve, which was previously at 50 per cent, simply did not make the risk viable. We've made those adjustments, and they've been well received, I would say.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since conditions change and since there's nothing in the competitiveness review about how this government would review royalties in the future, what is the minister going to do, if there is a need to make changes, that doesn't throw the industry back into turmoil? Do you have a process in place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, yes, we do, Mr. Speaker. The process we outlined very clearly was that it would be the process that we've gone through for the last year, which is consultative, collaborative, and working together. We have huge challenges outside our province. With our province being under attack, we need to ensure that as Albertans we are working together, that we trust one another, and I think the announcements of last week will go a long way to rebuilding that trust as Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with the third Official Opposition main question.

Construction and Manufacturing Outsourcing

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta was the only province with a notable job loss in February. We lost 14,800 jobs last month. My first question is to the Premier. Why are we exporting so many construction and steel fabrication jobs to places like South Korea when the unemployment rate for the construction sector here in this province is increasing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, while it's certainly disappointing to see the unemployment increases here in the province of Alberta, over the long term we're going to see the economy pick up and the number of people without a job diminish. Even though the numbers are up, we still have the third highest employment rates in the country of Canada. But to this government even one person that's without a job is serious, and we want to get all people back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that 200 very large production modules for Imperial Oil's Kearn oil sands project will be shipped from South Korea to Portland, Oregon, then moved by barge up the Columbia and Snake rivers, that from there they will be trucked slowly through Idaho, Montana, and Alberta to the Kearn oil sands project, how many jobs were created in South Korea as the result of this bad deal for Alberta, and how many jobs were lost here in this province in the construction industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's why the competitiveness review is so important, to make sure that we compete with other countries. There has been a huge global economic shift. Countries are competing not only for contracts. They're competing for investment, and they're also competing for people. That's why, I believe,

the opposition will support this government in the Competitiveness Act, Bill 1, and get the process moving as quickly as possible.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to compete when this government is selling out the industry.

Now, given that the people of Alberta have provided generous royalty and tax concessions to Imperial Oil for the Kearn oil sands project, how does this deal between South Korea and Imperial Oil benefit the steel fabrication and construction and manufacturing industries in this province, which are suffering through such very difficult times?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's just the issue here: why is it that other countries can compete with industries in the country of Canada and provide the necessary equipment and some of the large vessels that the oil and gas expansion in the oil sands requires? That is why we want to go through the whole regulatory process – the review, the competitiveness – to reposition Alberta to make sure that we can compete.

Provincial Deficit

Mr. Anderson: Last Thursday the government reversed course and adopted many of the Wildrose proposals on energy competitiveness. Let's hope they do the same with the province's finances. On Sunday Frank Atkins, a well-respected economist, and Marcel Latouche of the Institute for Public Sector Accountability released their findings that the true size of this year's provincial deficit is not the government's claimed \$4.7 billion. It is, in fact, \$7.6 billion. Sound familiar? To the Premier: will he admit that this year's true cash deficit is \$7.6 billion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise will take the next two questions, but in all honesty we have the best books in the country of Canada. Nothing is hidden in our reporting. Everything is reported by law on a quarterly basis. There is no jurisdiction in Canada that has the same legislation that Alberta follows.

Mr. Anderson: So the experts are wrong again, I see.

To the Premier: will he accept the recommendations of Atkins and Latouche to annually report the true cash deficit this government is running instead of massaging the numbers to "obfuscate how much of a spending hole they have actually dug themselves into"?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd remind the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere that what professors Atkins and Latouche actually said in referring to our budget was, "Of course, this is following accepted standard accounting principles." If we hadn't followed accepted standard accounting principles, I think we would have heard about that, too.

Mr. Anderson: The professors clearly stated that they were hiding the numbers. That is what the professors said in the report.

To the Premier. Perhaps he could explain to this House how the reported deficit is \$4.7 billion when Budget 2010 projects \$6.8 billion being withdrawn from the sustainability fund and over a billion dollars more added in new debt. That's \$7.8 billion in total deficit financing. It just doesn't add up.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has already indicated, precisely the fact that our books are as clear and as transparent as they are is why you're able to put these things together, as these two

professors did. Let me quote from the TD Economics analysis of the budget, where they say, “The accounting of a provincial government’s capital plan rightly splits outlays into ‘capital investment’ and ‘expenses for capital purposes’” and that capital investment is rightly excluded as an expenditure. I’d be happy to table this.

2:00 Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry
(continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it’s halfway through this government’s first term in office, and they’re in retreat on all fronts: first, a reversal on health care reform and now a flip-flop on oil and gas royalties. Over two years have gone by, and Albertans are wondering what, if anything, this government has actually accomplished. My question is to the Premier. Why has the Premier sold out Albertans by reversing his commitment to higher royalties on oil and gas?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are as a government going through a complete competitiveness review. We started with the oil and gas sector. We are going to include agriculture, small business, and forestry because we’ve got to make sure that we reposition the province of Alberta given the huge global economic shift that we just experienced. We’re going to come out of it stronger than ever, and we are going to lead this country of Canada out of this recession.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier’s royalty framework was supposed to accommodate lower prices as well as higher ones, why won’t the Premier simply admit that his weak and vacillating government has once again caved in to pressure from the oil and gas industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what we’ve done is exactly reflecting the current issue at hand, and that is that since the first royalty framework was introduced, there has been a major shift. We have large, large finds of shale gas, and a new technology that, quite frankly, was developed here in Alberta, is being applied in other jurisdictions. We have thousands of trillions of cubic feet of gas now available. A lot of that gas is very close to the markets, our traditional markets. The other is that we have an opportunity to improve innovation and technology so that we reduce the footprint on the face of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that a recent poll shows that a majority of Albertans did not want the royalties to be cut and a substantial group of Albertans actually wanted them to be increased, why won’t the Premier admit that what his government has done is not in the public interest but is, in fact, a huge retreat in the face of political pressure from special interests?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is all about doing what’s right. As I said in Calgary on Thursday, you don’t get paid royalties on the resource that’s in the ground. This is one way of extracting the resource and finding the balance.

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

Environmental Monitoring and Reporting

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I don’t believe that Alberta currently has a perfect balance between oil and gas development and environmental protection. The problem is that when it comes to environmental regulations, this government has a terrible track record, and while the competitiveness review does recognize and talk about environmental protection, I don’t see anything in here that clearly defines and prioritizes action. To the Minister of the Environment: what was the minister’s part in this review?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this review was an effort that was a partnership between independent third parties, industry, and government, and by government I refer to the Department of Energy, the Treasury Board, Environment. Who else was involved? Technology was involved in the review. SRD was involved in the review. The role of Environment was to work with other ministries and identify areas where there is overlap, where there is duplication, and where we can streamline a process but at the end of the day protect the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: how exactly will the minister streamline the review process for environmental assessments? What has been lined up so far?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the competitiveness review talks about a group that will be chaired by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy. The parliamentary assistants from Environment and SRD will also be involved in this. They will be in fact working with officials within those industries to identify those. They have two objectives, short term and longer term, and we expect the report back from them very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain what it means for environmental monitoring when the report states on page 17: “Stakeholders have also raised concerns about duplicative and overly frequent reporting requirements”? What exactly does that mean?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as you’re well aware, there are a number of jurisdictions that have responsibility for the oil and gas industry: the ERCB, SRD, and Environment. In some cases industry finds itself reporting the identically same data to all three regulators. It makes sense that they should only have to report that data once. Maybe the government could talk to itself rather than industry talking three times.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Competitiveness Review Impact on Employment

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lots of talk today about the past in the oil patch. Everyone can be an expert on items in the past. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. What are you going to do in the future? What are you going to do now for my constituents in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne to get them back to work?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as always, Mr. Speaker, the toughest questions come from the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. You know, it's not government that gets people back to work; it's the private sector that gets people back to work. What government needs to do is create an environment whereby the private sector will invest in this province because there's an opportunity to succeed. We estimate, based on some of the projections that we've made, that it could be as many as 8,000 jobs created as a result of some of the announcements of last week. I'm sure that some of those jobs will be in that member's constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given your commitment to private enterprise what are you going to do to allow them to use the emerging technology to build this oil field and build this province again? When are you going to allow them to get to work?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. You know, a lot has been made by members of this House relative to changes in the fiscal regime, but I think the announcement last week was much broader than that. It relates to changes that we need to make around regulatory streamlining. Maybe as importantly as some of the changes, as the Premier mentioned earlier, we have new deposits not only in shale gas but in oil as well where technology is required, and we need to ensure that we are flexible in order to deploy that technology.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being flexible, my next question is to the minister of finance. What's the finance community going to do to allow this industry to grow and to prosper?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, energy revenues into this province come through three streams. There's the royalty stream, there's the tax stream, and there's the land sales stream. What we're going to do, very clearly, is that we're going to grow two by temporarily shrinking the royalty stream. It's going to attract investment. More money is going to come into this province. We're going to grow those quadrants of the pie. Overall the pie will keep growing. You're going to see 8,000 jobs next year and 13,000 jobs in the years after.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Farm Worker Safety

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last reported year there were 23 farm-related deaths and 757 injuries that required ER visits. While this government supports farm safety education programs, there has been no noticeable decline in the farm injuries or deaths, and paid farm workers continue to be excluded from the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act and aren't covered under workmen's comp. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. A year ago the minister was consulting with the agricultural sector on farm safety. When will the farm safety report...

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We ran out of time for the full question, but with respect to the issue of farm safety, we are

concentrating on reducing fatalities and injuries rather than regulating and legislating what takes place there to the point that this morning I made an announcement that \$715,000 is being invested through ag societies throughout the province to put on farm safety seminars and education seminars in order to make it a safer environment for people to work. So our commitment is there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the same question in a year and see if that extra money has really helped.

To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: when will you be introducing legislation amending the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect the health and safety of paid farm workers, as was recommended by a provincial judge over two years ago?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has clearly indicated that both his ministry and the Department of Employment and Immigration are committed to farmer safety. Indeed, there is a report that in due course the minister may be receiving. It's that ministry that takes the lead on it. But in the meantime I am of the firm opinion that I'd rather prevent accidents from happening in the first place than deal with their consequences. That's what both of the ministries are committed to right now.

2:10

Ms Pastoor: Well, that was a nice answer, but I'm not sure that it really was the one that would match my question.

Why does the minister continue to exclude paid farm workers from workers' comp coverage? What is the rationale behind that decision?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, work environment on a farm obviously differs a great deal from that in any industrial setting. A farm is also a place where people actually live and raise children, and it's a community, so applying strict industrial standards to a farm setting is not exactly comparable. But there are reports that we are looking at. You must appreciate the fact that both the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I had a chance yesterday to take a fresh look at it. Wait and see what we shall do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Competitiveness Review Impact on Employment (continued)

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. In constituencies like Strathmore-Brooks we don't have the big corporate head offices; however, we do have numerous oil companies that provide employment and know the importance of investment in this industry. When will service companies in southern Alberta see a positive boost or see a return to busier times as a result of this competitiveness review?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my previous answers, what government does is create the environment for investment. You know, one of the things that has happened over the past year was that we have brought forward interim measures that have in fact actually got many of the companies that the member refers to back in business. What last week did was make those

programs permanent so that the investment community could look at Alberta with some predictability into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. We hear a lot about how the Alberta royalty framework caused so much of the downward spiral in the oil and gas industry, but we also know there was significant downward pressure impact from the global recession. How is the competitiveness review going to move this industry forward in the face of continued global recession, and how are those two factors connected?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. You know, nobody, including the critics who sit in the right-field bleachers, could have predicted the global recession that we had and certainly not gas prices at \$4 and \$5. Even with the changes that were announced last week, it is going to continue to present a challenge to our industry. But I believe that the history of our industry in this province is one of resilience, and they will persevere.

Mr. Doerksen: Again to the Minister of Energy. Although the competitiveness review is trying to place Alberta in a more favourable position, our neighbouring provinces have surged ahead in attracting investment and even offer a royalty holiday, for example in Saskatchewan. How do we compete with that, and what are our tactics to ensure that we succeed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there's more to competitiveness than just royalties. I mean, Alberta enjoys a number of advantages over some of our neighbouring provinces, like no sales tax, like lowest personal and corporate income tax. Also, we have an infrastructure into our resource fields that is second to none. I saw last week where the British Columbia government had to in fact put in an incentive so oil companies could actually build roads into the northeast shield gas plays. However, as I said earlier, it is Albertans that will benefit as a result of what we announced last week.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Activity-based Funding Model for Hospital Care

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Activity-based funding is a new funding model that Alberta Health Services is going to implement across the province. The reported plan is that it will be implemented for continuing care facilities starting April 1, 2010, just a couple of weeks from now. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the drive to activity-based funding being led under the Alberta Health Services superboard or under the Department of Health and Wellness?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of funding models out there which hon. members here would be familiar with. One of them is block funding, or global funding, which is where we're coming from. Another one, which we're moving a little bit toward in this case, is called activity-based funding, and I think it warrants even further discussion. It's basically based on volume and on type of service. To my knowledge it's primarily Alberta Health Services that is pursuing this, with the intended first target group being long-term care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. According to the organization chart of the Alberta Health Services superboard – this chart was just updated a couple of weeks ago – the lead position for activity-based funding for continuing care is vacant. Apparently, no one is going to run this new funding model. Is the minister aware of this?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what I am aware of is that the board and its CEO, Dr. Duckett, are looking at this matter and hoping to start that particular process as part of the five-year funding plan. Now, if that's different than what I understand it to be, then we'll clear that up in a hurry, I'm sure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Given that five of the six positions for activity-based funding under Alberta Health Services are vacant, how can this minister have confidence that Dr. Duckett or the board is going to begin ramping this up? How do they have any capacity to run this system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, you don't recruit people to those kinds of senior positions overnight. It takes some time, it takes some doing, and there are processes and protocols to be followed. Secondly, now that we know that we have a secure, stable, and predictable funding plan coming very soon, that too will help take some pressures off the system and allow for better planning going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Royalties for Unconventional Oil

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you well know, the oil sands are an important resource, a resource that has resulted in an unprecedented investment, an important driver of the economy in Lesser Slave Lake, so I was so pleased when the government announced the findings of its conventional oil and natural gas competitiveness review as well as the necessary steps to position Alberta as one of the most competitive North American destinations for energy investment. To the Minister of Energy: why didn't the review also address the competitiveness of Alberta's important oil sands resource?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess, two reasons, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the oil sands in Alberta really don't have a lot of significant competition worldwide. We would say that the new royalty framework that was introduced a year ago or so has actually worked very well relative to the oil sands because as you will recall, there were a lot of issues around the 1 per cent royalty rate in the oil sands. That has actually turned around now. As a result of the new royalty framework the revenue to the province actually now exceeds natural gas.

Ms Calahasen: How can the minister then be sure that the oil sands royalties are hitting the sweet spot? I know about sweet spots.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'm not sure of the definition of sweet spot, but I will say, Mr. Speaker, that one of the things that the government will realize at the end of this fiscal year is a significant increase primarily for two reasons. One is that bitumen prices internationally have risen dramatically, thereby higher royalties to the province, but also production has increased significantly more than anticipated in both oil sands and in situ. Those are all very positive factors.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister. Oil sands still face regulatory hurdles. Will the minister please tell me: will the regulatory review be looked at in the future at all?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the member raised a very good question, Mr. Speaker. While the competitiveness review was about conventional and unconventional oil and natural gas, the work that we're going to be starting relative to streamlining the regulatory process will include oil sands and in situ as well because there are a number of hurdles and barriers that were put up that have built up over the years, and we want to ensure that it's as efficient to do business in all sectors of the oil industry in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Centralized Cytology Lab Services

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to create the problems and start the fires and then claim how wonderful they are after they put them out and say: we're here to save you. Alberta Health Services disbanded the council of lab leaders. Is the minister of health aware of the reports submitted by the pathologists in the southern zone of AHS on their request for the proposal?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the important thing here is that cytology services will continue to be provided. In fact, there are some new and improved methods of doing that. What we're talking about is the analysis part, not the actual treatment or testing part. It's the analysis part that's being consolidated. All of southern Alberta is going to be done now in Calgary, and that's what he's referring to. That should provide for faster results and more expedient results.

2:20

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they're undermining our future.

Does the minister feel that pathologists and cytologists of the southern zone are wrong in their concerns on lowering quality assurance, loss of expertise, as well as no correlation plan for future biopsies and treatments in the local areas?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the intention is to actually provide faster access to the results of those tests. That's part of what Health Services is trying to do, a faster turnaround time to get the results back and also at a lower cost, which I know the hon. member would likely support.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, and some of those reports are very much questioning whether it will lower the cost.

Will the minister do the right thing and return the decision-making to the local level and to those who are competent to make the decisions concerning quality and efficient health care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member as I can assure all members in this House and all Albertans that nothing will ever be done that compromises in any way patient safety, patient quality. In fact, quite the opposite: we're working hard to improve where we can and to provide faster, better, more solid services province-wide.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked the Minister of Infrastructure when the review of the Swan Hills treatment plant will be released. All I got was data on PCBs, so I'm going to try again. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why has it taken a year for the minister to assess "what the assessment is saying"?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear again that the Swan Hills Treatment Centre has done an excellent job in treating the hazardous waste of this province. I want to say to you as well that every five years we do an assessment of that treatment plant to see what the future of that plant should be, and that is in the process. We are reviewing not only what is taking place in Alberta but what the needs of Albertans are and what the needs of industry are as far as the plant is concerned. It is a very much-needed plant at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. The minister keeps on saying: we are assessing; we are assessing. When will the minister stop the secrecy surrounding Swan Hills and release this report?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure exactly what the hon. member expects us to do. I want to say to you that it is very important to assess. It is very important to look at what is necessary for the future direction of this province. This government is not going to stand up and say, "Yes, we're going to do this," and then backtrack in a different direction. It is clearly important that the direction that is taken is a well-thought-out focus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister should get off his assessment and provide some action. This treatment plant cost \$22 million to run last year. Albertans want a government that is accountable. So why won't the minister release the review?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what this government is: accountable for what we are doing. It is in our budget. It is in our focus of what is important in the Swan Hills treatment plant. The review is there. We are looking at it; we are assessing what is necessary. I will reiterate again the importance of the plant and the importance of Swan Hills, looking at it as a utility and not as a profit-making institution.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Private Postsecondary Institutions

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have heard a great deal over the recent weeks about the government's tuition caps for universities and colleges. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: does the tuition cap apply to the private institutions like CDI or DeVry or Academy of Learning, for that matter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. The answer is that our tuition fee policy applies only to public institutions. Private institutions are governed under a separate act. They provide

different options than our publicly funded institutions. For some students these institutions offer quick, employment-ready kind of training and provide very focused options for students. It's all about choice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: does the government provide private postsecondary institutions any operational funds?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, again the answer is no. The over 150 private vocational colleges in Alberta do not receive government operational grants like we provide to the universities and colleges or Campus Alberta. However, we do provide financial assistance to students attending private schools in a lot of cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: what role does your ministry play in relation to these private schools?

Mr. Horner: It's a good question, Mr. Speaker, given the funding questions previously. Our role, really, is to ensure that programs offered by private vocational institutions comply with the Private Vocational Training Act. The primary objective of the act is to provide a measure of consumer protection for students that are enrolled in these licensed private vocational training programs. So we review and approve and license the programs of those private vocational providers. We have over 800 licensed programs at the 150 institutions in the province.

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

Funding for Private Schools

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike their public school counterparts, private schools and religious charter schools exclude students by charging tuition or by applying faith-based restrictions. Recently MLAs were recipients of a letter dated February 12, 2010, from Don Zech, public board chair of Palliser regional schools in which he suggests, "The timing is indeed ripe for a discussion about formerly private schools joining the public system as alternative programs." To the minister: does the minister not see this as a case of private schools not only wanting to have their private pudding but eating our public's, too?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, when a private school decides to fold its tent and join the public system as an alternative program, it becomes part of the public system.

Mr. Chase: Does the minister agree with the chairman's justification that "the full instructional grant does, however, help them offer competitive wages and benefits so they can hire the best teachers for the job at hand"?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. When a private school joins the public system, becomes an alternative program under the public system, it becomes part of the public system. In that case, the public

board becomes responsible for the educational opportunities there, responsible for the quality of instruction there, responsible for reporting to the public with respect to the results there. That's a very good thing in many circumstances. Those that choose not to join the public system continue to be responsible in their own way for the funds that are being provided. But when the private school joins the public system, they become public.

Mr. Chase: And they continue to charge tuition while getting full per-pupil funding.

Given that the underlying principle of public schools is inclusion regardless of culture, creed, ability, or economic status, why is the minister permitting "faith-based alternative programs" to hide under the public school banner and receive full per-pupil, taxpayer-funded instructional grants?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm astonished at this hon. member. Normally he's suggesting that we shouldn't be having private schools, that we should be having just a public system. What we have in Alberta is a very strong education system because there's a lot of choice. That choice is very extant in the public system in Alberta. Faith-based alternatives in the public system are working very, very well in Edmonton and Calgary and right across the province.

Where the hon. member goes wrong is when he suggests that you can still charge a tuition fee to somebody who's attending a public school. That's not on in Alberta.

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

Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Program

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are paying interest on top of the principal on the first ASAP project, which will provide 18 new schools in Edmonton and Calgary by September 2010. To the Minister of Education: is our government actually saving any money over the 30 years of this agreement?

Mr. Hancock: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Independent third-party studies by PricewaterhouseCoopers demonstrate that the first phase of our design, build, finance, and maintain K to 9 schools will actually yield a cost savings of \$97 million over the traditional build approach. Similar net present value analysis demonstrates that our design build bundle for the four ASAP 2 high schools will save us \$40 million. We anticipate similar savings for the other ASAP 2 schools. The bottom line is that we wouldn't proceed with building under a P3 unless it was a better deal for Albertans.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister: given the current economic climate is there any possibility that some of the planned projects under ASAP 2 might be cancelled or deferred?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the current economic climate makes it better for building. The prices are better, the cost savings are better on the various capital projects. We have committed to Albertans that we'll build the 14 new schools in time for the 2012-2013 school year, and we will deliver on that commitment. The contract for the four new high schools has been let, and those are actually starting construction as we speak. With respect to the balance of it the bid process has closed. I can tell you that the results are good. I can't tell you those results because there's a time frame to work out the agreement with the successful contractor.

Mr. Benito: To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that these schools are being built as a P3 project, what assurances can the minister give that they will be completed on time and on budget and, more importantly, that quality will not be sacrificed in order to achieve cost savings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to assure everyone that ASAP 2 is on time and on budget. The schools are 80 per cent complete and will be delivered by June 30. The contract includes a penalty clause for completion date. Quality is this government's number one priority, and this is in the contract as well. The standards, designs ensure high quality and equality across the province, and there's a 30-year warranty that guarantees that quality is maintained and also ensures the use of the best material and innovation practices.

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

School Closures

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Waves of potential school closures are washing over communities in Edmonton and Calgary, but this government is looking the other way, claiming that the decisions are for the school boards to make. The truth is that, yes, city core neighbourhoods are losing students to the suburbs, but provincial policies are making the situation worse. To the minister: how are municipalities supposed to keep families in the city core when this government has a utilization policy that pushes schools out of these neighbourhoods?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, under the Municipal Government Act when municipalities plan for their future neighbourhoods, they're requested to consult with school boards serving those neighbourhoods to plan appropriately. One would suggest that that type of consultation and process should also work with respect to the redevelopment of area structure plans in the inner-city neighbourhoods or the areas that are not in the suburbs. That type of consultation has to work between local governments because local governments, the municipalities and the school boards, are the ones that know what's in the best interests of their communities and for their students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The utilization formula is out of sync with the Learning Commission's class size recommendations. One of the Minister of Education's predecessors conceded five years ago that there were problems with the utilization policy. Why is the minister still standing idly by while outdated bureaucratic formulas are being used to hurt communities in Calgary and Edmonton, perhaps permanently?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's outdated is this member's understanding of how we do capital. In fact, utilization is a very minor part of the capital formula with respect to where new capital is allocated and how modernizations occur. What's most important is the health and safety of students. What's next important is the need for spaces in places where students live. Those are the things which go into the question of where we allocate capital. I'd like to say that there's enough capital to do everything we need all at once, but there isn't, so it's very important for school boards to use their

infrastructure in the most effective way possible so that all of their students have a good educational opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The first schools to close are the big ones, whose hallways are considered instructional spaces. Infrastructure grants were tied to student enrolment five years ago, a change that also punishes schools the moment students begin to flow out of the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member. Please, please, please. Remember, you signed the paper. No preambles. You signed the paper.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I will use that in the future, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No. Now. Get to the question.

Mr. Chase: Will the Minister of Infrastructure re-examine this policy before it accelerates the decline of city core neighbourhoods in our major cities?

The Speaker: Perfect.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, school boards should and school boards are making appropriate decisions with respect to where the schools are and what resources they need for their students. I would say that it's very irresponsible to suggest that a school board is closing a needed school because the hallways are too wide. That would be ridiculous, and I don't believe it's happening.

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

Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are livestock producers, and I continue to hear their concerns about the U.S. mandatory country of origin labelling issue and its negative impact on our producers. I understand that there was a recent meeting in Washington: the Council of the Federation, elected officials from the provinces along with Ambassador Doer and Tom Vilsack, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. My first question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Was there an opportunity at this meeting to discuss the negative impact of this mandatory labelling policy, and do you sense any possibility of movement by the Americans?

Ms Evans: It's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. No, I don't sense any movement at all. It was an excellent meeting on a Sunday morning for an hour and a quarter, 90 per cent of which was consumed by talking about the impact on both sides of the border, not only to our agricultural producers but to producers south of the line. The Secretary of Agriculture indicated to us that this Congress was not prepared to move on the country of origin labelling. We're hoping that we'll be able to, through our Minister of Agriculture . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: My first supplemental is for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I've heard talk about a Canadian WTO trade challenge on this issue. Can you advise us of the status, please?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The World Trade Organization is in the process now of selecting the members for the dispute settlement panel that's going to judge this. I think that it's worth noting that Mexico has also initiated a challenge to the same rule, and the panel will hear both cases. I believe that that's going to be helpful, that two countries are actually challenging this as a violation to the North American free trade agreement that we've been operating under.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. For the same minister: what are we doing to help our producers compete in this difficult economic climate – I mean, over and above the challenge – and importantly, what kind of input are we getting from our producers?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I think that this challenge and the situation that we face now points out more than we've ever seen before that we cannot rely solely on the American market for trade and that our priorities need to be focused in other directions. I mean, we need more trade with Asia and many other markets. We also, I believe, can improve dramatically our domestic markets, and I think, even though it's voluntary now, that I would like to encourage Canadian retailers to actually advertise the fact that they have Canadian products on their shelves. Because of the quality we produce, I think Canadians would prefer to buy Canadian.

English Bay Provincial Recreation Area

Mrs. Leskiw: The campground and boat launch at the English Bay recreation area have been closed for almost three years now due to archaeological work taking place on the site. While the boat launch reopened in the fall of 2009, the campground facility remained closed. A constituent of mine visited English Bay several weeks ago and was not able to access because of the blocked entrance. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. If the boat launch is open, why are my constituents still unable to access it?

Mrs. Ady: Well, hon. member, I'm happy to report to you that staff has assured me that the boat launch is now open. They will still find some barricades around the recreation area because we're getting ready, as you know, for a campground redevelopment. I am happy to say that the archaeological work is complete, and the boat ramp is open.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next question is to the same minister. Since the archaeological work is finished and the boat launch has been opened, why does the campground still remain closed?

Mrs. Ady: Well, hon. member, we're in consultation right now. We're redeveloping the campground. It's going to have, like, 185 new stalls – there are going to be new ones that will allow for the larger recreation units that you have today – trails, and a lot of things. It's under consultation right now as to what that should look like.

Mrs. Leskiw: That's really great to hear.

My last question is also to the same minister. How long will it take to redevelop the English Bay campgrounds, and when can my constituents expect to see it open to the public and enjoy it?

Mrs. Ady: Well, we're hoping to have those consultations completed by April, so stayed tuned. We think we're going to begin that redevelopment this spring.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 114 questions and responses today. Nineteen members were recognized. Of the 19, nine were members of the Official Opposition, two of the Wildrose, one of the ND, and seven government members.

Very briefly we'll continue with our Routine and Members' Statements, but first of all, one update. To the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. You were instructed by the Assembly last Thursday to do something today. Have you fulfilled your direction?

2:40

Home-baked Pies for MLAs

Ms. Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I've had many challenges in my political life, and I've usually come out pretty good. On Thursday you challenged me to accomplish a task, a difficult one, yes. Well, I've done almost exactly what the House had asked. I've delivered a pie for every MLA in the Legislature, but because of our strict rules I was unable to get some of the orders that were given – cream, lemon, or flapper pies – because we are not able to transport them that far without having them in a cooler. I would like everyone to have a taste of the home-baked pies, and I'd ask the hon. members here to help me change those regulations so that they are more friendly for our home cooks and our home-baked goods.

The Speaker: Where do the members obtain these pies that you've brought in?

Ms. Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, they're in their respective areas, so you can pick your pie up.

The Speaker: We'll proceed in 15 seconds.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Foster Care

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am excited and honoured to rise today to speak about Alberta's caring and dedicated foster parents. Thousands of children and youth in provincial government care, who often face significant challenges in their lives as a result of being abused or neglected, benefit each year from the love, guidance, and support of these devoted Albertans.

I have heard comments in the past from some hon. members about the training and screening of foster parents and potential foster parents. This is something that is very personal to me and my family. As some of you may know, my wife and I are considering becoming foster parents ourselves. We have already taken part in the initial training required for all foster parents, and I can personally attest to how extensive the training is. Every person who is even considering becoming a foster parent must take eight 3-hour sessions of orientation training. Topics include child development, special needs of children in care, and the duties and responsibilities of foster parents.

All new foster parents must also take additional training covering topics such as guiding the behaviours of children, maintaining a child's culture, and working co-operatively with the birth family. As part of this screening process potential foster parents have to successfully complete a criminal record check, child intervention check, and provide three personal references and a medical reference.

In addition, a qualified professional, usually a registered social worker, assesses the family's dynamics and suitability to parent through a safe home study. Only after potential foster parents have

been fully trained, screened, and licensed can foster children be placed in their home. After that, additional training and monitoring takes place. Mr. Speaker, the training and screening process for all foster parents is extensive and rigorous, as it should be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Capital Region Board

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to bring attention to the long-range plan that will help ensure the continued strength and sustainability of Alberta's capital region. Two years ago our Premier made the decision to create the Capital Region Board and task it with creating a long-range growth plan. The mandate for the 25 municipalities was to formulate a plan to deal with the four areas: regional transit, regional land-use planning, a regional geographic information system, and a regional housing plan.

Mr. Speaker, having a strong, co-ordinated, long-range growth plan is in the best interest of all residents within the metro area. Everyone benefits when you eliminate duplication, plan for essential infrastructure, and attract investment. The board completed its far-sighted plan in December, and now, after a provincial review, it has been approved by government. The region, which expects about 600,000 new residents over the next 40 years, has a solid plan to manage the impacts of development, promote efficient use of land, and, mostly, provide for land conservation and stewardship.

This is a tremendous opportunity to plan ahead in order to get it right, Mr. Speaker. We have seen a united group of local leaders put in a tremendous amount of work to fulfill its mandate. Heartfelt thanks for that. The government, led by Premier Stelmach, is to be commended for wanting to improve long-range planning for infrastructure and services that capital area residents need most dearly. It's about looking ahead and building upon the 21st century collaboration model that can be an example to other jurisdictions within other provinces and across Canada. Now it's time for action to capitalize on current and future economic opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Value of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Energy recently announced changes that will advance Alberta's competitiveness in the upstream oil and gas sector in order to regain lost ground. These changes will ensure Alberta will be the location of choice for investors for decades to come.

After hearing from constituents ever since I was elected as the representative for Calgary-Lougheed, I understand very well the impact of oil and gas industries on the economies of our city and our province. This sector not only fuels our economy; it also defines us as innovators, entrepreneurs, and people who believe in the free market and meet challenges head on.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's prosperity is founded on the abundance of its natural resources, and today Albertans enjoy benefits from discoveries and decisions made decades ago. Energy accounts for 30 per cent of our total GDP, and as of January 2009 Alberta's mining, oil, and gas sector was responsible for close to 150,000 direct jobs for Albertans. On top of that, almost 1 in 7 Albertans is employed in the energy sector, and it's estimated that every job in this sector is supported by two additional jobs in support industries.

Future Albertans, our children and our grandchildren, will be the benefactors of the decisions that we make today. By ensuring Alberta becomes more competitive and remains competitive, even greater rewards await the people who live and work here tomorrow. Every additional dollar invested in energy will increase by close to one and a half times, and it's expected that 8,000 more jobs will be created in 2011-12 and 13,000 more jobs annually thereafter across the economy. Over the next 25 years the Canadian Energy Research Institute estimates that conventional oil and gas development in Alberta has the potential to add \$2.5 trillion – that's with a "t" – in new economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing the improvements in Alberta's conventional oil and gas sectors and, ultimately, the continued prosperity they will bring for all of Alberta. Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on its 2009 activities. Additional copies of the report have also been provided for all Members of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Riverview. This is in regard to questions the hon. member asked earlier in question period. This tabling is copies of the Alberta Health Services organizational chart dated March 4, 2010, showing five of six positions related to activity-based funding as being vacant.

My second tabling today is correspondence from an individual in Spruce Grove, Michele Ford, who is writing to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly, encouraging hon. members to please support Motion 504, the anaphylaxis policy that's going to be discussed after 5 o'clock this afternoon.

My last tabling is a letter I have with permission to table from Colleen McDaniel, a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar. It is regarding Alberta Hospital, and she is writing to encourage everyone to ensure that it remains open and viable.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. I'm tabling a letter from my constituents Robin and Jean Crawford that was sent to the Minister of Municipal Affairs requesting full disclosure of the formula/regression used to calculate their property taxes. They have been told by assessors and the manager of tax assessment north Calgary that, and I quote, the formula/regression is proprietary information and not to be released to the public. End quote. But the Crawfords believe that this provincially approved formula/regression information is essential in order to properly consider their tax assessment and that it be released.

The Speaker: Okay. This is tablings, not Ministerial Statements.

Mr. Chase: My next tabling is a copy of a letter sent to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports by Calgarian Pat Corbett, whose two sons with autism are receiving supports that help them be vital, contributing, successful, and happy members of society. Mrs. Corbett wishes to convey that impacts from what appear to be small cuts on paper make huge differences to people with disabilities and their families, and she is asking that we all be the voice for these Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, my third tabling is the letter I referenced in QP from Don Zech, chair of Palliser regional school boards, to all MLAs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, five copies of an article by Frank Atkins and Marcel Latouche entitled *The True Size of the Provincial Deficit*, in which they say that the true deficit is \$7.6 billion, not \$4.7 billion, and chastise the government for not being transparent enough with their record keeping.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 20 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The second tabling I have is the appropriate number of copies of letters from two Edmonton public school board teachers, Gordon Hepburn and Lynne Kaluzniak. Their letters describe the positive experience they've had in their classrooms recently when their class sizes were low, and Lynne Kaluzniak, in particular, discuss some very negative experiences where they were forced to teach in a classroom where the class size was well above what was recommended. They hope that funding will remain in place to prevent class sizes from increasing again.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Denis, Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, responses to questions raised by Mr. Taylor, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie; Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; and Mr. Chase, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on February 17, 2010, in the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs supplementary supply estimates.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Culture and Community Spirit Consultant Costs

- Q1. Ms Blakeman:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Environment Consultant Costs

- Q2. Ms Blakeman:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Environment on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Advanced Education and Technology Consultant Costs

- Q3. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Children and Youth Services Consultant Costs

- Q4. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Education Consultant Costs

- Q5. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Education on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Tourism, Parks and Recreation Consultant Costs

- Q6. Mr. Chase:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Justice Consultant Costs

- Q7. Mr. Hehr:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Justice on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Solicitor General and Public Security Consultant Costs

- Q8. Mr. Hehr:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Calgary Mental Health Diversion Project

- Q9. Mr. Hehr:
What is the total number of clients dealt with by the Calgary mental health diversion project between February 4, 2008, and February 8, 2010?

Infrastructure Consultant Costs

- Q11. Mr. Kang:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Infrastructure on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Service Alberta Consultant Costs

- Q12. Mr. Kang:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Service Alberta on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Transportation Consultant Costs

- Q13. Mr. Kang:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Transportation on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

FOIP Information Requests

- Q14. Mr. Kang:
For each of the fiscal years 2005-2006 through 2008-2009 what percentage of requests for information under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act were met within 30 days of the initial request?

Employment and Immigration Consultant Costs

- Q15. Mr. MacDonald:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Employment and Immigration on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Finance and Enterprise Consultant Costs

- Q16. Mr. MacDonald:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Finance and Enterprise on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Treasury Board Consultant Costs

- Q17. Mr. MacDonald:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Treasury Board on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Agriculture and Rural Development Consultant Costs

- Q18. Ms Pastoor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

International and Intergovernmental Relations Consultant Costs

- Q19. Ms Pastoor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Seniors and Community Supports Consultant Costs

- Q20. Ms Pastoor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Executive Council Consultant Costs

- Q21. Dr. Swann:
What was the total amount spent by Executive Council on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Aboriginal Relations Consultant Costs

- Q22. Dr. Taft:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Aborigi-

nal Relations on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Health and Wellness Consultant Costs

- Q23. Dr. Taft:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Health and Wellness on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Zoo Standards

- Q24. Dr. Taft:
What is the total number of complaints regarding zoo standards dealt with by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development from January 1, 2003, to February 7, 2010?

Energy Consultant Costs

- Q25. Mr. Taylor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Energy on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Housing and Urban Affairs Consultant Costs

- Q26. Mr. Taylor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Municipal Affairs Consultant Costs

- Q28. Mr. Taylor:
What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Education Sole-source Contracts

- Q29. Mr. Chase:
What was the total number of sole-source contracts the Ministry of Education entered into in Edmonton during the past three fiscal years?

Postsecondary Institution Student Loans

- Q30. Mr. Chase:
For the academic years 2007-2009 what was the total dollar value of Alberta student loans received by students while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school in Alberta, broken down by the last postsecondary institution attended by the student?

Assistance for Pork Producers

- Q31. Ms Pastoor:
What specific programs have been developed to aid Alberta pork producers who suffered economic losses due to the recent H1N1 outbreak?

Mental Illness in Inmate Population

- Q32. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what is the total number of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who suffer from a diagnosed mental illness?

HIV in Inmate Population

- Q33. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what was the percentage of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who were diagnosed as HIV positive?

Hepatitis in Inmate Population

- Q34. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what was the percentage of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who were diagnosed with hepatitis A, B, or C?

Physical Disabilities in Inmate Population

- Q35. Mr. Hehr:
For the fiscal years 2007-2009 what was the percentage of inmates held in Alberta correctional facilities who had a physical disability?

Restaurant Inspections

- Q38. Dr. Taft:
What is the total number, from January 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010, of restaurant inspections performed by public health inspectors throughout Alberta, broken down by month?

PDD Community Board Budgets

- Q39. Ms Pastoor:
Of the six persons with developmental disabilities community boards' budgets what percentage of each of these goes directly toward supporting individuals in need, and what percentage is directed to administration?

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

Long-term Care Wait-lists

- Q10. Mr. MacDonald asked on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.
On February 4, 2010, how many Albertans were on wait-lists for long-term care placement both in hospital facilities and in the community, and what is the age range for these individuals?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a reasonable request, and it is information that certainly would be needed to come up with a good policy or a good plan to deal with the whole issue of individuals in this province who really need long-term care but who are occupying acute-care beds in the hospital.

3:00

Now, whether we look at the annual report of the Department of Health and Wellness, the first volume, with the performance measures in it, or we look at Alberta Health Services' own annual report for 2008-2009, we'll see where this is quite an issue. The government has had a very, very difficult time dealing with it. I believe it came up in question period last week as well. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo asked some questions around it.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, at the end of March 2009 there were 550 people assessed as ALC and awaiting placement for long-term care facilities in acute-care beds and 675 waiting urgently in the community. There were 150 ALC clients waiting for supportive living in acute beds and 400 waiting in the community. All clients

waiting for acute and urgently in the community will be reassessed, according to Alberta Health Services, in two to three months using the new admission guidelines that they have, and it is expected that the numbers will reverse, with the majority waiting for supportive living.

That's information that's provided in Alberta Health Services' annual report, and it's sort of a reminder to us all just what kind of a problem we've had with the lack of long-term care beds. We know it's been an ongoing issue which the government has had a great deal of difficulty in trying to resolve. To find out how many Albertans are on the wait-list for long-term care placement after what is described here, that is not an unusual or unreasonable request. Which hospital facilities in which communities these individuals are also waiting for: that is not unreasonable or unusual information to request. It would be interesting: what is the age range for these individuals?

I know we have a lot of reading material with the other written questions, but certainly Written Question 10 is appropriate, it's in order, and I would respectfully request that the hon. minister of health provide that information to us without any ifs, ands, or buts or any amendments to the written question as we had requested. I think it can be provided. I don't think the February 4, 2010, deadline is burdensome. I do not think that at all.

In conclusion, I would urge the Minister of Health and Wellness on many issues to please provide the information as requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness to move that Written Question 10 be amended as follows: by striking out "on February 4, 2010" and substituting "as of December 31, 2009" and also by striking out "and what is the age range for these individuals?" The new question then would read as follows: "As of December 31, 2009, how many Albertans were on wait-lists for long-term care placement both in hospital facilities and in the community?"

Mr. Speaker, the rationale for this is that the specific information requested with respect to the age range of individuals waiting for long-term care placement is not available from Alberta Health Services. Further, the latest wait-list figures released by Alberta Health Services are from the third quarter of the 2009-2010 fiscal year, and as at December 31, 2009, there were 742 individuals waiting in acute care and 999 individuals waiting in the community for long-term care placement.

I would urge that the House support this amendment as I have tabled it. Thank you.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. With regard to the amendment our concern is that the government has substituted a date as well as not providing us with information requested. Between December 31 and February 4 a ministerial change took place. The Premier seemed to be indicating a different shift with a new minister, a new direction, the possibility of improving our so-called superboard organization. That's why we wanted to see as of February 4, 2010, whether these shifts in ministers and, potentially, shifts in attitude or in ideology were going to equate with a shift in system results. That's the reasoning behind the February 4, 2010.

Now, I appreciate that the hon. minister speaking for the minister of health indicated that, apparently, the system doesn't track age. I

would suggest that given the fact that seniors are considered bed blockers, a very derogatory term, and there are over 600 of these individuals waiting for placement, we should be able to know their ages.

Another concern about not knowing age is the fact that there are a number of individuals with disabilities, young people who, unfortunately, because we don't have the appropriate accommodations for them, find themselves shoulder to shoulder with in some cases individuals old enough to be their grandparents or great-grandparents. The age of the individuals who are caught in so-called transit is extremely important, and that's why we requested those specifics, the February 4, recognizing the ministerial changes, and the ages.

I would suggest to the hon. member that if he could pass on to the minister of health the importance of tracking ages in the future so that that information could be supplied, that would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to rise just briefly, of course, to suggest why it is that we think this information is very important and to express my concern about the second amendment that's being put forward by the government.

For obvious reasons there has been a tremendous amount of discussion in the public about the provision of current and future long-term care placements throughout our province. It is an issue that has reached crisis proportions, so we need enhanced transparency on this issue. It shouldn't simply be a function of written questions in this Legislature. Rather, we should be getting this information updated on a monthly basis on a website. We should be able to track this information as quickly as the ministry gets it because this is how you ensure public accountability, the accountability of the government to the public, whom they serve.

I am quite concerned about the fact that the ministry suggests that they don't know the ages of the folks that are on the waiting lists for long-term care. Our caucus went across the province last fall having public hearings on the issues of health care, and we heard from people in every community about their concerns with respect to long-term care. One of the things that we heard about consistently in community after community after community was that the acuity of the people in long-term care is growing increasingly more onerous in terms of the services that those people require in long-term care.

Now, obviously, age is not a clear indication of the acuity of the long-term care client. However, it is one indicator. I find it really difficult to believe that the ministry is not tracking the characteristics of the people who are waiting for long-term care, whether it be a question of weight – quite honestly, we've heard that the size of patients is actually going up quite dramatically and that that's creating a huge stress on the people who work in these facilities – also the issue of mental health and also the issue of their physical state.

I'm quite shocked at the notion that this information is not something that the ministry has at its disposal, and I think it's very deeply concerning that they don't have that information. I think we should all be worried that the ministry does not have this information because it strikes me as being very unlikely that they're going to be remotely successful at addressing this crisis without some basic information like this at their disposal.

3:10

As we already heard about last week, we had an unfortunate incident north of the city in one particular long-term care facility. We know there are problems in long-term care. Last year our caucus on a daily basis in this Legislature tabled reports from people who worked in the long-term care settings outlining infractions, violations, safety concerns, and patient care concerns in a number of long-term care facilities across the province. Several months later, after we started tabling those concerns, the minister in charge of seniors had still not had any of her staff go out to any of these places to check on these concerns that were being raised.

These are really, really important issues that are facing Albertans every day, not just the number of long-term care placements available but the quality of long-term care that's being provided in the places that are there. How this issue can possibly be managed without this government having access to the information on something as simple as what the age range is for the typical long-term care patient waiting to get into long-term care is very, very concerning for me, and it should be of great concern to all Albertans. I would certainly urge this government to move forward very quickly in enhancing the information that they provide on a regular and updated basis in terms of the demographic characteristics of patients who are currently not receiving the care that they need in the setting that they need in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, shall I call the question?

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 10 as amended carried]

Speaker's Ruling Consuming Food in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go on to the next one, I recognize that a number of hon. members are at a disadvantage today in understanding the pie police problem. Normally the rule is that there's no food allowed in the Assembly, but because of the endurance of the members currently in the Assembly I would invite you to bring in a piece of the pie to understand the issue and have the pie in the Assembly.

We'll continue on with our work. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Provincially Funded Affordable Housing

Q27. Mr. MacDonald asked on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What percentage of affordable housing units that have been built with provincial government funding since January 1, 2007, is currently occupied by low-income tenants?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This, of course, is from my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Certainly, we all know, unfortunately, that the list of individuals with low incomes who are interested in affordable housing units continues to grow and grow and grow. We do know that hardly a Friday goes by, constituency day, while we're in session that we don't get a phone call from one individual, sometimes two, sometimes three, requesting information regarding the list: who is on it and why and how come their names cannot be added to the list of individuals who are looking for affordable housing at a very, very modest price.

Now, we do know that this government has made some strides, to their credit, to make more affordable housing units available not only in Edmonton and Calgary but throughout the province.

Now, when you compare budgets of the last, say, five years with what was occurring 25 years ago by the same party, while they've been in power for close to 40 years, one would see, if my examination of public accounts is correct, that we're actually spending less now than we did 25 years ago on affordable housing initiatives. Certainly, not only is there a need for affordable housing units, but there's also a need for housing that's dedicated specifically for individuals with very low or very modest incomes.

That's why the hon. member who is our Housing critic is requesting this information. Simply put, of all of the housing units that have been constructed, what percentage, if any, has been set aside to be occupied by individuals who are looking at a very long waiting list? Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it's a lot longer than 18 months, and in some cases it's a lot longer than even two years, depending on some of the individual circumstances. Some individuals I have talked to – I've been astonished – have told me that it's over three years for some of them.

So this is an important question. Hopefully, we can get an answer straightaway from the government, and I look forward to reading it. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise just to respond to this question, but before I go ahead, I do want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his comments. While we have some policy differences from time to time, we do have the same goal of combating homelessness and also providing people with low-income housing, and I want to thank him for that as well. I won't speak long, as I do want to get a piece of pie.

This question should be rejected on the grounds that the data, in fact, is not presently available due to the timing in the question. Now, over the past two years, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has funded the development of an additional 6,000 units of affordable housing. Given that the initial allocations to affordable housing projects were approved by my ministry late in 2007 and 2008, it's premature to provide these occupancy statistics.

I further submit, Mr. Speaker, that from beginning to completion affordable housing projects take an average of 2.5 to three years to complete. There is, in fact, that type of lag time there. The majority of funded projects are just nearing the completion stage now, and reporting is required within six months to one year of the said completion date. About 1,250 units have been completed to date, and I can further advise this House that we expect to have meaningful occupancy statistics in time for the Housing and Urban Affairs ministry's 2010-2011 annual report. Data about the occupancy rates will be updated annually thereafter.

I further submit, Mr. Speaker, that Budget 2010 will make a total of \$88 million available through RFP, which is the request for proposals process, to support the development of affordable units for low to moderate income Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the capital grant program is based on a partnership model which leverages private-sector dollars with taxpayers' money. I've always submitted that this is more efficient. Community partnerships allow us to build more units with less money and tailor projects to meet the unique needs of the community. We're on track to add a total of 11,000 units by 2012, something I'm very proud of as the responsible minister.

Having made my submissions, I would recommend that this House reject this motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. While I appreciate what the hon. minister has provided in the way of information, I would have appreciated even more an amendment rather than an outright rejection. If there are limitations, as the minister partially spelled out, on the information that's available, it would be nice to have a report on the information that is currently available. As I said, this could have been amended rather than outwardly rejected.

The other concern in rejecting the number of affordable housing being built is the comment about the proof being in the pudding. It should be in the pie, I guess, today, Mr. Speaker. Without having the details – it's wonderful to hear about projections, and we thoroughly hope that the 17,000 or the 20,000 affordable units will be up and running and that Habitat for Humanity, for example, and the Calgary land trust will be part of the solution. I would also add that it's important that a percentage of these units be not only affordable but accessible. I hope the minister will take these concerns into account.

3:20

Also, the minister mentioned that there are annual updates. If that is the case, I'm not sure, then, why we couldn't at least have had the annual updates for 2007, for 2008, and for 2009. Obviously, we're just into the year 2010, so that would provide some difficulties with completely built structures at this point.

As I say, to outwardly reject the question that was asked instead of amending it provides us with little to no information. So back up the projection with the pie proof, please.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you want to close the debate? Call the question?

Mr. MacDonald: Call the question, please, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 27 lost]

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

Employment of Registered Nurses

Q36. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.

What was the percentage of registered nurses that worked part-time, full-time, and casual in Alberta from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010?

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment suggests that it would strike out "April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010," which is very specific, and substitute the generic "in 2008 and 2009." Now, the reason for this specificity of the dates is that an awful lot has happened in Alberta in terms of the health direction that we've taken. We've gone from 17 boards to nine boards down to one superboard, and with each of those moves there has been a significant attrition rate in nurses. Therefore, getting the specifics is extremely important.

Now, Stephen Duckett has caused a lot of consternation for not only nurses but recipients of health care in this province. He suggested, for example, that nurses were taking too many coffee breaks, and then he turned around and said: well, they had to take those coffee breaks; they were mandated. He suggested that some of the jobs that nurses were doing were below their job description, that they could be fulfilled by LPNs, for example. So Dr. Duckett seems to have gotten very involved in the micromanaging of the nursing profession. You would think, given that degree of oversight

and micromanagement, that the specific request, “from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010,” could be taken into account.

Also, almost a year ago we were looking internationally to fill 1,700 nursing positions. Then, come the completion of our session in June of 2009, all of a sudden we had a surplus. So the mathematics behind how many nurses we have, how many are doing the various positions – part-time, full-time, and casual – in Alberta, given the specified times, are extremely important. We’re at a point now where nurses are entering into contract talks with the province, and the way the province values, accounts for, remunerates, and differentiates the different levels of nurses working part-time, full-time, and casual in Alberta is extremely important.

Recruiting nurses is, obviously, something very important to this government because the postsecondaries – Grant MacEwan here in Edmonton, Mount Royal in Calgary, of course the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, and the University of Alberta – have all increased the number of positions for training nurses. You would think that if we’re going to subsidize their tuition to this degree, we would have a sense of how many we actually needed and in which particular category they fit; hence the time frame of April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010.

Again, this has been a tumultuous time in Alberta’s health care delivery system, and as such those specific details on nurses are extremely important. After the last nursing purge in the 1990s the number of nurses that were working full-time and part-time was drastically reduced, and we’ve been trying to catch up ever since. Young nursing graduates are in a lot of cases favouring part-time work because they are seeing their older counterparts wearing out on the front lines doing double shifts. They want to have a quality of personal life as well as the accredited public service life, so they are looking for that balance.

Things have changed from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010. The dynamics are changing, Mr. Speaker. That’s why my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was so specific in his request.

Thank you for allowing me to point out why that request is important to us as a caucus.

The Speaker: Deputy Government House Leader, you’ve already participated.

Mr. Denis: This is Written Question 36.

The Speaker: Oh, sorry. No, you haven’t yet. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We’ve had some good pie this afternoon.

I’m rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to move an amendment to Written Question 36 striking out “from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010,” and substituting “in 2008 and 2009.” This would make the amended written question to read as follows: “What was the percentage of registered nurses that worked part-time, full-time, and casual in Alberta in 2008 and 2009?”

The rationale for that is that the only database that contains employment status of all registered nurses, referred to as RNs, is the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, otherwise known as CARNA. CARNA requests employment status from its members annually each September as part of their licence renewal process.

Mr. Speaker, CARNA published the following information for 2008 and 2009: RNs working full-time as of September 30, 2008, 38.1 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 42 per cent. RNs working part-time as of September 30, 2008, 42.5 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 37 per cent. RNs working casual as of September 30,

2008, 13.2 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 11 per cent. RNs classified as “other” as of September 30, 2008, 6.2 per cent; as of September 30, 2009, 10 per cent. For the purpose of my comments, “other” is defined as employed in another industry, looking for employment in nursing, not employed and not looking for employment, on leave, or no response.

I would recommend that all members support this amendment to Written Question 36. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, I would have questions. I can appreciate where the hon. member from the government caucus is coming from. Specific to February 4, 2010, again, that doesn’t seem reasonable. The amendment, I think, I would be quite agreeable to if it stated the fiscal year 2007-08 and then again 2008 through 2009, just like the annual reports that are presented.

3:30

Now, I’m a little bit confused here. Is this the calendar year, or is it the year of the annual reports? If we look at the latest information presented to this House by Alberta Health Services, we can clearly see – and I’m looking at the Calgary health region, because they break it down by region. Next year whenever we get this report, I don’t know how they will do it, but I, for one, have an opinion that it will be certainly not as detailed as this, and it should be. RNs, RPNs, grad nurses: in the Calgary health region there were full-time equivalents of 6,329. We know what the base salary was, other cash benefits. We can see also what it was the previous year, in 2008, which would be the fiscal year 2007-08, March 31 year-end, as this year it would be March 31, 2009. So that’s in the Calgary region.

But there’s no breakdown on whether any of these registered nurses worked part-time, full-time, or in casual positions. There seems to be some confusion in the public because certain members of the government maintain that many of the nurses are working on a part-time basis. So the actual number would be very important for the public debate. When you look at what’s provided in the annual reports, it wouldn’t be unreasonable to suggest that this information is somewhere at the click of a mouse because you can get a lot of things in an annual report if you look.

I’ll just have a quick check of Capital health. We can see the number of full-time equivalents or employees for RNs, registered psych nurses, and grad nurses. That’s broken down as 5,813. There is a separate item for licensed practical nurses. It goes on, and they give you the total compensation package, whatever, but again no number on how many worked full-time, part-time, and casual. Certainly, that information, as I said earlier, is very important in the public health care debate in this province.

I think I could possibly be persuaded to support the amendment if I was sure it was fiscal year 2007-08 and, again, 2008-09, year-end March 31, not the calendar year as suggested in this amendment. Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional speakers on the amendment?
Should I call the question?

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 36 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Overtime Hours of Registered Nurses

Q37. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.

What was the total number of overtime hours worked by registered nurses from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010?

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the backdrop for this question is a very tumultuous time back in 2009. There was considerable discussion and worry over the closure of the Alberta Hospital. There was similar concern over the closure of a total of approximately 300 beds in the Calgary and Edmonton areas. Again going back to Dr. Duckett, Dr. Duckett was suggesting that nurses by working so many overtime shifts were costing the system a tremendous amount of extra compensation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I was doing outreach along with my colleagues in Calgary and Edmonton, in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, when we door-knocked, we ran into a number of nurses, and it seemed that the majority of those registered nurses were regularly performing double shifts, which of course would mean that the second of their two shifts was at an overtime rate. It wasn't something that they were doing out of a desire to increase their bank accounts. They were doing it out of necessity and to avoid burnout on the parts of their fellow colleagues.

We haven't asked for the age of the nurses serving, but we are finding that we are retaining a significant number of our nursing population, and there is a fear amongst those senior nurses that the young nurses are not coming on and of the speed to replace them. Out of a sense of lifelong and professional duty of service to their patients and their concern for their well-being the nurses are staying on longer, and because of a nursing shortage in this province they're forced into overtime circumstances.

Now, again, the timing is extremely important because things changed dramatically between April 1, 2008, and February 4, 2010. As I mentioned earlier in the discussion of Written Question 36, a number of nurses entered into the postsecondary system and began their training. A number of nurses, for example, this spring will be graduating but not finding even part-time employment in this province. Therefore, the money we'll have spent to train them, while it will have benefited the nurses to a degree as they head for employment in B.C., Saskatchewan, or, as was the case with the last tremendous exodus, down to the States – we will have lost not only our investment in their training, but we'll have lost their human resource, and we will continue to be in the position of nurses having to do double shifts, which is hardly advantageous to themselves or to their patients.

This time period is key to our request: April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010. So when the amendment is suggested – what was the ratio of overtime hours worked to straight-time hours worked for registered nurses employed by Alberta Health Services in the former Capital, Calgary, and David Thompson health regions for the fiscal year 2008-2009? – while a correction was made noting the fiscal year, because that was one of the problems that we had with the amendment for 36, that does not take us to our current situation, where . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the difficulty the chair has is that you're talking about an amendment that has not been introduced yet. The chair has no idea whether or not the amendment will be introduced. It may very well be that the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity will be so swaying that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader will not bring forward an amendment. We can't really debate something that hasn't been introduced.

Mr. Chase: I very much appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to actually expedite the discussion by referencing an amendment which everyone in this House has a copy of. I would not want to prolong the process, but I do appreciate your clarification and thank you very much for the opportunity.

3:40

Mr. Denis: Without further ado, Mr. Speaker, I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to move an amendment to Written Question 37. The amendment is striking out "total number of overtime hours worked by registered nurses from April 1, 2008, to February 4, 2010," and substituting "ratio of overtime hours worked to straight-time hours worked for registered nurses employed by Alberta Health Services in the former Capital, Calgary, and David Thompson health regions for the fiscal year 2008-2009." Thank you.

The rationale for that is that the total amount of RN overtime hours must be viewed in context. Alberta Health Services employs approximately 75 per cent of RNs, and the remaining RNs work for a multitude of employers who may not report to government. Alberta Health Services is not able to easily pull data for the requested time frame for the entire province, Mr. Speaker, and the RNs that are in fact working in the former Capital, Calgary, and David Thompson regions represent approximately 80 per cent of RNs working directly for Alberta Health Services. RN overtime is 4.1 per cent of the total RN hours worked. RN hours worked: 17,701,730; and RN overtime hours worked: 724,529.

I would urge all members to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I find this a very interesting amendment. I believe the hon. member indicated that 80 per cent of the RNs employed are in Calgary, Capital, and David Thompson, which is sort of the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, essentially. This information is all we need; however, when one looks, again, at last year's Alberta Health Services annual report, you can see where there are significant amounts being spent in some of the other former RHAs on wages, whether it be overtime or straight time, for registered nurses in the Peace Country, Aspen health region, Northern Lights, certainly the Palliser region, and East Central. East Central was the one health region that was to co-ordinate all these events that led up to the formal legal creation of Alberta Health Services. So to provide only three regions I think is unsatisfactory.

Whenever one looks at the David Thompson region – and I'm surprised that the member was so able in pulling out the statistics. I could stand corrected on this, but if you look at the Public Accounts from last year – I brought this up in budget estimates recently, and I didn't get a satisfactory answer – the David Thompson health region, the total grant, Mr. Speaker, was omitted or missing from the blue book. It is there certainly in previous years. It's there, David Thompson health region, each and every year before the last issue of the blue book, but it's not there. I don't know how the amount would fit in, but the member was very quick at providing that information through Alberta Health Services. That is an alarm for this member that that information in Public Accounts is not there, but the hon. minister seems to be able to access this information quite quickly. That's one point.

When you look again at what is suggested here, the ratio of overtime hours worked to straight-time hours for registered nurses employed by Alberta Health Services in three former regions, I think

that is a significant change from what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was looking for. He was looking for the total number of overtime hours. That should be available as well, and it is a request that, hopefully, we will receive other than this amended version for whatever reason the government wants to provide to us. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview certainly asked a valid question, and that we're getting just a partial answer is disappointing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others on the amendment?

Then we'll proceed with the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 37 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Clerk of *Journals*/Table Research read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Edmonton Security Operations Branch

M10. Mr. Hehr:

A return showing a copy of any reports, travel manifests, correspondence, expense claims, job listings, or operational guidelines that outline the day-to-day duties for officers of court and prisoner services, or the security operations branch as it is now called, who provide dedicated judicial security services to the judiciary in the Edmonton Law Courts.

Calgary Security Operations Branch

M11. Mr. Hehr:

A return showing a copy of any reports, travel manifests, correspondence, expense claims, job listings, or operational guidelines that outline the day-to-day duties for officers of court and prisoner services, or the security operations branch as it is now called, who provide dedicated judicial security services to the judiciary in the Calgary Courts Centre.

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

Mountain Pine Beetles

M1. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Hehr that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental or economic impact assessments, relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetles in Alberta forests from fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just for the benefit of people tuning in and wondering about the definition of motions for returns and written questions, I would just suggest that these are pieces of information that are requested because no minister could potentially be expected to have this information, sort of thumb sketches, while standing, and therefore this information is requested.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I hope I'm not going to be causing further confusion by talking about what was asked for versus what was given. But let me read into the record what was asked for. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo requested the following as Motion for a Return 1:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of . . .

This is very important.

. . . all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental or economic impact assessments, relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetles in Alberta forests from fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009.

Now, in making that request, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was not seeking out the proprietary ministerial notes that belong, as I say, completely to the minister. But what the government has offered is that instead of providing all the information . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Once again, nothing has been offered. You are being offered an opportunity to move a motion. I've accepted that. That's what the Assembly is listening to. There is nothing else that has happened yet. So proceed with the offering given to you.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to discussing the amendment, as you suggest, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Motion for a Return 1 be amended to read, "a copy of studies, reports, and environmental or economic impact assessments relating to the effects of the presence of mountain pine beetles in Alberta forests from fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009." The amendment is based on a couple of reasons. First of all, the request for all documents is too broad and consists of a large volume of records, that could be quite overwhelming. The department would like to provide the member with a reasonable amount of meaningful material respecting the intent of his request.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:50

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to the amendment, the difference between all and some is very much open to interpretation. As elected members of this Assembly we need to be operating on the same basis of understanding and information as the hon. members of government. Regardless of which side of the House we are sitting, we're all expected to represent our constituents to the highest level possible, and if we don't have the information necessary to provide that advice or to form judgments, then not only are we left out of the information cycle, but also our constituents are left out of that information cycle.

The pine beetle is a menace, and I am pleased that the government, in managing the pine beetle, has seen fit to place selective logging, cutting, and burning as one of their highest forms of combatting the beetle. They've also used the pheromone way of trying to distract pine beetles and capture them and prevent further damage. I credit the government with the forms of combatting this scourge and attempting to prevent it from hitting the boreal forests to the rest of Canada, east of us.

However, the minister says: "We'll give you some of this information. We'll give you a few studies, maybe the odd report, and, you know, if it's a good day, we'll provide some environmental and economic impact assessments, and you should be happy with that information." The government could save the opposition and the general public a whole lot of requests by simply putting this information on the website. If it is so cumulatively excessive as to be denied in a request, then I would suggest that we have as Alberta taxpayers paid for this research. We've paid for these reports and

studies and the impacts, and that should be common knowledge. It shouldn't be something that has to be requested as a motion for a return. I would encourage the hon. minister, who is new to this portfolio, to follow the transparency and accountability mandate issued to him by the Premier and make as much of this information available through the web to all Albertans.

Thank you. I also, Mr. Speaker, a teacher of a teacher, appreciate the clarification on the amendment process.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now, I can offer the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity an opportunity to close debate, but I suspect I should just call the question.

[Motion for a Return 1 as amended carried]

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

Sour Gas Release in Lodgepole Area

M2. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports and data regarding the environmental impacts of the gas release near Lodgepole on December 16, 2009.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. May I speak to that?

The Speaker: Oh, yes. Absolutely. You have the floor.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We've had a series of gas releases throughout Alberta's history, the most serious ones having to do with the release of hydrogen sulphide. This is of considerable concern to all Albertans and, obviously, the people living in the vicinity affected by that Lodgepole blowout. Now, I don't have anything, Mr. Speaker, suggesting that this was amended, the request. All I have, I gather, is an outward rejection of the request. Therefore, I would ask: why is this information not being provided to the opposition? Why is it not, through the opposition's request, being provided to the residents of the Lodgepole area or to all Albertans?

Our economy is highly dependent on gas. I know the play has changed with the advent of shale, but the amount of gas that we have in Alberta, which is of the highly volatile sour gas nature, is a tremendous concern. Without receiving that background information, how do Albertans prepare for the advent of blowouts?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We've had reason to be concerned. For example, at the Shell plant around Pincher Creek instead of the gas being ignited – this was sour gas – the ignition system twice failed. We are left to wonder what happened with the Lodgepole circumstance. Unfortunately, I gather by the government's response that not only will we be left wondering, but all Albertans will be left wondering.

This is not only an economic issue. It's a safety issue. It's an environmental issue. That's why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre requested those documents. Not only will I be interested; the hon. member will be interested and all Albertans whose livelihood depends to a large extent on the reserve of gas and who want to be able to live in a safe province where we enjoy the fruits of our labour, where we enjoy our God-given nonrenewable resources but don't fear the possibility of blowouts such as the Lodgepole that we have requested information about dating back to 2009.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't say I'm looking forward to the reason for rejection, but at least it'll be on the record.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I wanted to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his comments about this gas release. The gas release obviously is a concern to the government itself, specifically the gas release that occurred at a sour crude well site operated by Daylight Energy Ltd.

A bit of background, Mr. Speaker. The release of gas happened about four kilometres west of Lodgepole, and I'm happy to say that no injuries occurred and no evacuations were in fact required. Of course, the Energy Resources Conservation Board was notified promptly of this incident, and they responded immediately and, in fact, worked diligently with the company and emergency response teams to successfully contain the gas release.

Following this, as is normal practice, Mr. Speaker, the ERCB launched an investigation into this matter. In the course of reviewing this motion, I have consulted with the hon. Minister of Energy, and I have been told that the ERCB is in the process of, in fact, preparing a report about the Lodgepole incident. This is expected to be made public in the summer of this year. I would also expect that issues and information referred to in this motion would also be addressed in this report.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, it would be premature of me to release information on behalf of the Minister of Energy which is part of an in-progress investigation by the ERCB. I would therefore urge all members to reject this motion. I will add, however, Mr. Speaker, that the office of the hon. Minister of Energy would be happy to forward the completed report to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity when it becomes publicly available and table it in the Assembly at the first possible opportunity.

In conclusion, I would urge all members to reject this motion with respect to the gas release. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now call the question.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

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

4:00

Natural Gas Valuations

M3. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any recommendations that were prepared by Alberta finance regarding natural gas valuation for the fiscal periods 2010-2020.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can look at the fiscal plan with the budget, and we can see where there is a natural gas price or a benchmark through to 2013. It certainly indicates that natural gas prices would or should increase to around \$6.59 or \$6.60. That would be a considerable increase from last year at \$3.99 for the Alberta reference price.

We're in a fiscal year where for the first time that I can recall – and it may be the first time ever – royalties from bitumen or upgraded bitumen, synthetic crude oil, will be larger or greater than royalties that are collected on natural gas. We do know that the amount collected in royalties from natural gas over the last number of years has been significant, and this motion would provide information that is necessary, the information that Alberta finance is using not only for its price benchmark through to 2013 but on what exactly is going to happen for the next decade.

We realize that there is a \$4.3 billion deficit. We heard in question period, of course, earlier that it's much higher than that,

over \$7 billion. Time will tell who was right on that, but I do know that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development worries day and night about the deficit and the consequences of the deficit. A lot of this, of course, is not only caused by a lot of wasteful spending by this government but also by the price of natural gas or the lack of a price.

The Americans, what they're going to do. Now, the Premier today talked about shale gas and the implications of that to our province, and the Premier is absolutely right to be concerned about this. There have been significant discoveries of shale gas in various places in the lower 48 states. This motion, Motion for a Return 3, certainly would reveal exactly what Alberta finance has done in regard to the significant discoveries of shale gas in the lower 48 states.

Now, U.S. domestic natural gas production, Mr. Speaker, has increased 6.8 per cent since 2005 despite significant decreases in offshore production. Offshore production is in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. We also know that the share of U.S. gas production from unconventional sources has increased steadily since 1990, and gas shales have been a major contributor to this growth. The Barnett shale production in Texas was 94 million cubic feet per day in 1998, and it has increased by more than 3,000 per cent to over 3 billion cubic feet per day in 2007. There also have been other discoveries: the Haynesville, Fayetteville, Woodford shales, and of course the largest one that I'm aware of is the Marcellus basin, which incorporates much of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York state. It even goes up under Lake Erie through Ohio. I think it catches a part of southwestern Ontario.

But there are reports by Navigant that the total production for these shale plays, these big seven shale plays, in the next decade, the next 10 to 15 years – and that's why it's important that we get this information we're requesting in Motion for a Return 3 – could be between 27 billion and 39 billion cubic feet a day. If that happens, that's going to have a major implication on the price we get here in Alberta when we export natural gas. It's also going to have an effect on natural gas as a feedstock for the oil sands development and also for electricity generation and also for the petrochemical industry. I think they will be positive developments, but whenever you consider how much money has been raised in the past through natural gas royalties, this production valuation, if it does come true in the lower 48 states, is going to have a significant influence on us. Now, certainly, the same corporations that are active in the lower 48 states are busy here as well.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to note that in many of these states, particularly in New York and Pennsylvania, we're looking at a 12 and a half per cent royalty rate for this kind of gas. Motion for a Return 3 could certainly give us an indication, if we were to receive the information, just exactly what the province expects to collect in royalties as a percentage of production or the value of production. I would calculate that on my own if I had to, but those states are looking at a royalty rate of that nature.

Now, things are always bigger in Texas, and whenever you look at royalties, it certainly is true. The royalty rate in Texas on shale gas as a rate and a per cent is 25 per cent. Royalty rates were more common at 20 to 25 per cent about five years ago, but most state-owned lands are not considered to be among the best sites for shale gas development. That's one of the comments that's made in this document I had from America.

Now, the royalty rates on private lands in Texas: again, they're big. Things are bigger in Texas. It's 25 to 28 per cent, and the bonus bid per acre – and this is going back to 2008, at the height of the boom – was between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per acre. In New York state it was \$2,000 to \$3,000, as was it in Pennsylvania. The

royalty rates on private lands there were 17 to 18 per cent for Pennsylvania and 15 to 20 per cent for New York. But that's on private lands; that's not on Crown land.

Just as a comparison, Mr. Speaker, in 2008 if the bonus bid on private land in Texas ranged between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per acre, in the same time period in this province the average price per hectare for 2008-09 was \$420. It would be roughly half, slightly less than half of that for an acre, so we could say \$200. That's a very interesting comparison at this time.

Now, with Motion for a Return 3, if it was to come as we had requested, there is a lot of information that landowners in this province who have mineral rights would be very keen to read and determine for themselves whether they're getting the best deal possible or not. Certainly, whenever you look at the financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any recommendations that are or were prepared by Alberta finance regarding natural gas valuation, I would really welcome that information, and I expect to get it.

Thank you.

4:10

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Many of these topics were discussed at some conferences that I attended last year, when I was parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy. I have spoken with the Minister of Energy, and this broad-ranging motion is requesting all financial forecasts, economic trend data, and recommendations that are involved with natural gas valuation for a specific period in time.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say a few words about forecasting the price of commodities such as natural gas. I wish I could say that this is, in fact, an exact science. We all know that it is not. It is a process that involves large sets of market data well beyond estimation and approximation, but that does play a major factor in that as well.

Mr. Speaker, part of the issue is that much of the information received by Alberta Energy to produce these estimates is provided by parties such as banks, finance-orientated businesses, market research corporations, consultant agencies, and world financial centres. This information is proprietary. It's disclosed to the government under conditions of legal confidentiality, which I can appreciate needs to be respected. One of my concerns would be that this motion as it stands may be easily interpreted so that the door is opened to this data.

As I've spoken to the Minister of Energy, he's indicated to me that he provides information to the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance and Enterprise which is in fact utilized in the preparation of the provincial budget and a three-year fiscal plan. Essentially, this would be an analysis of the aggregate proprietary information that I referenced earlier in this address. This information becomes summarized in such a way that it does not refer to an individual or to a company. Rather, it becomes publicly available in the provincial budget and the Ministry of Energy's business plan. I would suggest, with respect, Mr. Speaker, that if this hon. member is interested in the government's forecasting and trending for natural gas, he should review these documents because that's where the information is.

I would advise all hon. members, accordingly, to reject this motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. While I understand that the nature of sort of the in-house discussions between various companies in the field and the government is of a proprietary nature, unless we understand the premise under which the government is going forward and making its financial decisions on royalties, then how can we possibly move forward? What's the premise upon which we're making our forecasts?

Gas has played such a significant part in terms of billions and billions of royalty dollars that we've received up to this point, and our dependency on our primary source of royalty revenue, being gas, has changed dramatically. Not so long ago we thought that the last easy gas was gone and that we would be encroaching into the foothills, that we would potentially be interrupting our underground aquifers, our basins, and we had to balance how valuable this gas was in comparison to the risks that would be taken to extract it.

Now, we've seen terrible examples in the States – in Wyoming, in New Mexico – where in going after coal-bed methane, which is a type of gas that belongs in the shale group, disastrous circumstances occurred in terms of underground aquifers. No amount of gas revenue will make up for the loss or the poisoning of wells and the loss of those aquifers, so the importance of coming up with a premise, a go-forward, is extremely important.

We are fortunate to have in this province our backup of the Alberta oil sands, and fortunately through scientific technology, innovation, research we are moving away from the traditional shovel method, with its accompanying tailings ponds, to the less environmentally destructive in situ. But we're still involving water, and the balance between the reward and the price of the commodity, which now seems to be in abundant supply, and the risk to our future development and economy in terms of the water risk has to be taken into account.

I think Albertans need assurances given the fact that the government has redone its royalty review six times and seems to have gone right back to the last days of the Klein empire with this most recent result. Yet what are we basing our decisions on in terms of the quantity of available gas and where it will be processed? We've had several members ask questions about, for example, the upgrading of bitumen or the upgrading of gas.

Previously a lot of our gas has been upgraded in Texas and in Illinois. That should be part of the premise, the projection as to what will be our capacity to not only acquire this gas but also to refine it. Instead of Chicago, Illinois, taking out the butane, taking out the propane, taking out the methane, and getting a much higher price for these parts of the natural gas refinement process, we need to know: where is the government going ahead? We basically need to know: does the government have a plan to go ahead, and if so, on what basis are we moving forward?

Gas no longer plays the role it once did. But as we move on, as the request says, towards 2020, it is possible that given our extraction methods and the speed at which governments need to make up for their recessionary blunders, which are particularly obvious south of the 49th, they're going to go after that gas with the greatest of speed possible to pay down their budget deficits in the trillions of dollars.

We have an opportunity to potentially learn from their mistakes, as I mentioned, in Wyoming and New Mexico. But if we don't know what the formula is and what the projections are, then how can the minister of finance or the hon. President of the Treasury Board account for the importance of gas in future budgets. It's impossible, we know, to crystal ball exactly what percentage we're going to get in the future. But it seems that the process has been delayed until 2011 and we can't even get a forecast into what we're expecting to receive in terms of projected gas revenue for the next year, never

mind where we're going in the next 19. If we don't start thinking beyond our recession and our bust-boom scenario, and don't have, "If this happens, we'll do this; if that happens, we'll take these methods" – if we don't have these premises, then how can we possibly make budgetary projections?

I thank the hon. Speaker for allowing me to participate in this debate. I know that with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's extensive experience in industry, he has a much better understanding, but even he with his wide knowledge is looking for clarification from his government colleagues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Hon. member, being a boilermaker doesn't make me an expert, but as a taxpayer in this province and as a citizen of this province it makes me very interested in this.

Now, the Deputy Government House Leader in rejecting this motion indicated that there were many proprietary and confidential estimates made, but I would ask him to respectfully look at page 140, the economic outlook, in the government's fiscal plan for the current budget cycle that we are debating. You can see where there's a natural gas price benchmark in Henry Hub numbers, not Alberta reference price numbers, and it comes from a wide range of national forecasting agencies for a period of four years. They are not concerned about hiding. Their projections are here for everyone to read. It's not a confidential deal between themselves and Alberta Finance or the Treasury Board or the Department of Energy.

4:20

The national forecasting agencies include the Conference Board of Canada, Global Insight, the centre for economics. Again, they go almost halfway through the period which I'm requesting in Motion for a Return 3.

Banks and investment dealers. For instance, we've got BMO Capital Markets, Credit Suisse, CIBC World Markets, J.P. Morgan, National Bank Financial equity research, Peters & Co. Limited from Calgary, RBC Capital Markets, Scotiabank, Toronto-Dominion Bank. These are the banks and investment dealers. The idea that this is confidential and private information is totally wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Industry analysts – U.S. Energy Information Administration, GLJ Petroleum Consultants, Sproule Associates – they're all willing to put their estimates in the public domain. So for them to do that and for the hon. minister across the way to suggest that somehow the information that I'm requesting is proprietary or confidential is flat out wrong, Mr. Speaker. That's no reason in the world to reject this very good motion, and I hope the government changes its mind and presents that information. They're the ones that are running the \$4.3 billion deficit, not anyone else.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now call the question.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton Implementation Team

M4. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports and recommendations prepared by the Alberta Hospital

Edmonton implementation team between October 6, 2009, and January 18, 2010.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I don't believe that there was a more emotional circumstance that rallied people to this cause since, basically, Bill 11, which set to undermine universal health care, that got people so concerned. It wasn't just Edmonton residents that were concerned about the potential closure of Alberta Hospital. There were patients suffering from mental illness throughout the province that had the potential of ending up at Alberta Hospital, which, due to its rural setting, offered healing in just its location, never mind the professional practices which were incorporated in the facility.

This is a very specific, very short timeline request: October 6, 2009, to January 18, 2010. A terrific amount of attitudinal change occurred. To the government's credit they appointed the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to chair the committee to reconsider the wisdom of closing all the beds at Alberta Hospital. I credit the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for doing the research that he did that obviously had an impact on his fellow and female colleagues in terms of reversing a very detrimental decision. Now, that decision hasn't been completely reversed because there is still talk about using that facility partly, I believe, in a long-term fashion and taking some of the more senior individuals suffering from mental illness and removing them from that facility to another facility that is currently being built, of a much more urban nature and closer to the Edmonton hubbub of activity.

As I recall, several thousand signatures were tabled in this House by members of the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition, by the member from the Wildrose – there was just one member at that time, initially – and also by our hon. members from Alberta's third party, the New Democratic Party. The point is that we saw on television ads, we heard on the radio, there were numerous op-ed pieces, numerous articles written about the negative impact of the closure of Alberta Hospital. It was based upon the concern for that potential closure and the relief felt when the closure was not going to be as dramatically carried out that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview requested a copy of all reports and recommendations prepared by the group that was activated under the then minister of health to review what, admittedly, was a bad decision.

Now, we're hoping that the government learned something from that bad decision that could potentially be applied to other institutions. The current minister of health has indicated that he's reconsidering the closure of 300 beds, cumulatively, in Calgary and Edmonton. I wonder: was his decision in part founded on the findings of the Edmonton implementation team for Alberta Hospital?

This government, since our Premier was appointed leader, has emphasized transparency and accountability, yet . . . [interjections] Well, selected. Yes, I should say selected. Selected by members of the Conservative Party to lead the government. He was initially rejected, but in the second round selected, and then he was elected to another term in his constituency.

Anyway, the point being: he has emphasized transparency and accountability. He is your leader. Follow-through with what he has requested. Follow-through with what we've requested. Show us that there is really a plan.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just rise to speak briefly on this motion. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his comments, specifically about teachers. You know, my mother was a teacher for 33 years, and she taught me very well.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, I cannot recommend acceptance of this motion, the rationale being that the team's report with recommendations to Alberta Health Services already is available publicly. It was released as a backgrounder on January 18, 2010, and the news release is available at www.albertahealthservices.ca/1324.asp.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to conclude the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the references to where this information is available. It would have been a whole lot simpler and this debate would have been considerably shorter if you'd just provided that information as requested in our motion for a return.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now call the question.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

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

4:30

Acute-care Bed Closures

M5. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all stakeholder consultations, reports, research, or recommendations that resulted in the recent decision to not close 290 acute care beds throughout the province.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm doing so well today in terms of having motions for returns rejected.

Albertans are suffering from whiplash. They don't know what the next move is from this government. We have one minister that rides a black horse throughout the province, closing hospitals in his wake. Then we have the minister on the white horse saying: "Oh, no, that was a mistake. We are going to reopen. We're not going to close those 290 beds. We're not going to play musical beds anymore at the Rockyview. We're not going to play musical beds at the Peter Lougheed. We're not only going to not close those beds; we're going to keep them open." All hail the new minister of health for having changed the circumstance not one bit. The beds were open; they stay open. We celebrate the fact that they're open, and there you have 300 complements that are currently unstaffed.

It was based on that whiplash reaction that we requested the reasoning behind the change of attitude. So we got a new minister. What happens – heaven forbid – should the minister of health not be able to continue his duties and we get another minister? Heaven forbid that we get the old one back and have: oh, no, today we're closing the beds. We are asking on behalf of all Albertans to give us a sense and give Albertans faith that there is actually a plan, that when the government makes a decision, it's based on research, that it's based on a collaborative preface, that it isn't simply: you know, I got up on the right-hand side of the bed today, and I think I'll close 290 of these complements. What's the reasoning? Albertans want to know. We want to know as their representative.

I look forward to the hon. member enlightening me as to where this information can be found and why we're not being entitled to receive it on behalf of all Albertans looking for this information.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for that rather impassioned speech. I trust that this member doesn't have an issue with new ministers per se.

My comments will be rather brief as well. Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, there are no consultation reports. On January 20, 2010, the health minister announced that plans to close acute-care hospital beds in the Edmonton and Calgary areas would be put on hold pending a review. The same minister indicated that since Alberta Health Services announced their plan in September 2009, progress has been made in identifying efficiencies to reduce costs in administration, and the minister has made a decision based on this positive development.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of the member's comments, with respect, were baseless conspiracy theories. I speak quite often with health care professionals, one in particular in this city, and I see no evidence of that at all. I would ask this House to reject this motion.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

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

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

M6. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Ms Pastoor that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports, studies, and memoranda prepared by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development since January 27, 2009, that contemplate the inclusion of paid farm workers under provincial workplace health and safety legislation.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good thing that I don't take these defeats personally, or I could no longer live with myself or my colleagues.

Now, I have a horrible feeling, Mr. Speaker, that I know the answer. The answer is probably: well, we haven't contemplated anything in terms of protecting farm workers. We're going to, as we heard today, put out I think it was something like \$680,000 in terms of an education program to prevent farm injuries, that are occurring on the basis of two individuals being killed per month and hundreds being injured. You know, I may have actually guessed or read the hon. member's mind as to the answer to this question, but if that's the case, that's a pretty sad answer.

Farm workers – and I'm talking about those beyond the family farm, and we lose a lot of family members on farms as well. More and more of agriculture is becoming commercialized, industrialized, and more and more workers are paying the price of that commercialization with lack of protection for the individuals involved.

We've had a judge in our latest review of the death of an individual, Kevan Chandler, look at recommendations for individuals being covered by compensation. Not only is it the compensation for the injured worker, but the compensation for the widow or the husband and the children left behind is extremely important. Without that compensation it's just absolutely cruel.

In terms of workmen's compensation or legislation, we have pages and pages of fine print of individuals and workers, not only in the agricultural sector but across this province, who are not covered by workmen's compensation. If they're injured, whether it's a repetitive stress injury or whether it's a very traumatic injury, they're not covered. So we said: well, let's start. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said: let's start.

Given the judge's recommendations, given the number of deaths, given the number of injuries, has the government decided to take action and contemplate the inclusion of paid farm workers under

provincial workplace health and safety legislation? As I began, all I've heard is a few thousand dollars on an education program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's concerns. I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to move an amendment to Motion for a Return 6, which reads as follows: by striking out "all reports, studies, and memoranda" and substituting therewith "the report titled Stakeholders' Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety, prepared in November 2009"; secondly, by striking out "prepared by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development" and substituting "for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Alberta Employment and Immigration"; and thirdly, by striking out "since January 27, 2009, that contemplate" and substituting "that addresses in part."

I have a hard time looking at that myself after those amendments, but this would read, Mr. Speaker:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report titled Stakeholders' Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety, prepared in November 2009 for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Alberta Employment and Immigration, that addresses in part the inclusion of paid farm workers under provincial workplace health and safety legislation.

Thank you very much.

4:40

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. To the hon. Deputy Government House Leader: will that amended motion be tabled here in the Assembly in the next day or perhaps Wednesday if it is to be accepted by the House?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on the amendment.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will ensure that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development does so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Also, to close, Mr. Speaker, unless there are others who wish to participate in the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the amendments page has been circulated. You should have it on your desks.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Obviously, we're pleased to receive some of the information, but what the government has done in this amendment is be very selective. We have no idea through their selectivity if they are not just going to simply hand us information that supports their position, that this isn't a concern. We've asked for a variety of reports, and the government has said: well, we'll give you Stakeholders' Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety, prepared in November 2009 for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Alberta Employment and Immigration, that addresses in part – so they're giving us partial information. They admit that they're giving us partial information, and we're supposed to say: well, thank you very much for giving us a small part of what we've requested.

You've changed the date. You've changed the reports that were going to be given to us, that were requested, and instead of providing all the reports and the studies and the memoranda, you're going to give Albertans one. At some point – and it's probably, Mr. Speaker, going to take a minority government to achieve it – the transparency and accountability that this current government professes will actually occur.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment?

The chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 6 as amended carried]

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

Asset-backed Commercial Paper

M7. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any other documents prepared by the Alberta Treasury Board regarding asset-backed commercial paper for the 2010 fiscal year.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, whenever we look at this whole issue of asset-backed commercial paper, we're going back a number of years. We can almost go back to 2007, when there were caution lights on this whole investment scheme. Certainly, in 2008 we look at the report of the Auditor General and some of the questions he had around asset-backed commercial paper at ATB Financial, the treasury management of that. I won't spend too long on the facts that were presented to the public through the Auditor's report, but certainly asset-backed commercial paper is a short-term investment, usually maturing in less than a year but often in as little as a month. Asset-backed commercial paper is backed by a variety of assets, such as mortgage loans, car loans, credit card balances, and other interest-bearing assets, and/or by synthetic assets such as collateralized debt obligations, or CDOs, or credit default swaps. The investor buys the paper for less than the face value and holds the paper until it matures, at which point the investor receives the face value of the paper or the instrument. The difference between the purchase price and the face value of the paper is interest income to the investor.

Now, we do know what's happened at the Treasury Branches, which I mentioned before. We also know that the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta had an exposure to this. We know the details of the Montreal accord, which, hopefully, will resolve this issue, and hopefully there will not be any more significant losses to this province. I hope there are no more significant losses throughout the investment community in North America or internationally, but I'm not so sure. However, I think it's reasonable to request a copy of all the financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any other documents prepared by Treasury Board regarding this issue for the fiscal year 2010.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge the members to reject this motion. The Ministry of the Treasury Board is responsible for meeting the legislative commitment to be accountable to

Albertans through the publishing of annual audited financial statements. Any changes that are coming to the government's investments in asset-backed commercial paper will be disclosed in the government of Alberta's 2009-10 annual report, which will be released in June 2010. However, Treasury Board is not responsible for preparing financial forecasts and economic trend reporting on government investments in asset-backed commercial paper. As such, we do not have any requested information.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We're fortunate in this nation, in Canada, that we did not get bitten to the extent our southern neighbour did by the subprime mortgages, which form an awful lot of the phony finances of asset-backed commercial paper. That said, we did get hit. AIMCo got hit, the independent financial arm of the Alberta government. Alberta Treasury Branches got hit by asset-backed commercial paper. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned what happened to the University of Calgary's endowment fund. In discussions with the hon. minister of advanced education, innovation, and technology he explained that one of the reasons that his colleagues weren't in favour of endowment funds was the lack of security within the investment environment, and he didn't believe that creating endowment funds was even a partial solution.

This province along with the province of Quebec is resisting very aggressively the notion of a national securities regulator, yet the protection afforded to Albertans by our own securities regulator did not prevent the millions of dollars lost in asset-backed commercial paper. The government, which is the backup for the Alberta Treasury Branch – and the government makes the investments for a series of funds, including the heritage trust fund – is reliant on making sound investments.

So when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asks for a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trends reporting, and any other documents prepared by the Alberta Treasury Board regarding asset-backed commercial paper for the 2010 fiscal year, you would hope to be getting something along the lines of: been there, done that. These are the wise preventative measures that we can assure Albertans that their investments, whether their own investments or those by the government, whether directly, as is the case with the heritage trust fund, or through AIMCo or their finances being looked after by the primary rural bank, the Alberta Treasury Branch, are secure. Unfortunately, the hon. member, the President of the Treasury Board, has said: we're not going to provide you with that information.

4:50

Mr. Snelgrove: Ask the right department.

Mr. Chase: Well, I would certainly ask you on behalf of all Albertans to request it from the ministry of finance if that's the right department. But, please, don't sidestep the financial responsibility by saying that you're asking the wrong ministry. If that's the sole reason we're not receiving this answer, then it's a sad circumstance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

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

Long-Term Investment Strategies

M8. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all financial forecasts, economic trend reporting, and any other documents prepared

for the Alberta Treasury Board or Alberta Finance and Enterprise by the Alberta Investment Management Corporation concerning long-term investment strategies for the fiscal periods 2010-2020.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I might be in for more bad news from the hon. President of the Treasury Board, but I certainly would like to move Motion for a Return 8, please.

Mr. Speaker, I think this motion is certainly timely. We look at any number of investments that have been made on behalf of citizens of this province by the government. We look at what has happened with investment income in the past whenever we failed to achieve our targets, and we were basically short of cash and in deficit. We rely, whether it's right or wrong, on the investment return, for instance, from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for a certain percentage of total government revenue.

There are other pools of investment as well. Long-term investments include: the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and the associated endowment funds, global equity markets, interest, and exchange rates. Also hopefully included in this would be the amounts that are held as cash in the general revenue fund and also amounts – and I'm sure they do – in the sustainability fund before that money goes. What exactly are the long-term goals or strategies of AIMCo?

Now, I was surprised to realize that AIMCo wasn't selected by Alberta Health Services to be their investment desk of choice, if you could use those words, Mr. Speaker, to invest any short-term cash that they may have. They are doing their investing through I believe it's a branch of RBC, the Royal Bank of Canada, and it's a decision the board has recently made. I'm quite surprised that they didn't have the confidence in Alberta Investment Management Corporation that this government does. They are looking at a significant pool of cash to manage over the next decade. It would be standing at \$69 billion right now, and I certainly hope it increases beyond that.

Certainly, that is the intent of our motion. I will await the government's response, but I don't see any reason in the world why we should not be able to get that information.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise just to respond to Motion 8. AIMCo was established to be operationally independent, and in order to avoid a conflict of interest, it does not participate in government policy-making. So it would be inappropriate for them to be in fact providing policy advice of this nature to the government or another body.

In the normal course of business AIMCo frequently produces financial forecasts and reports economic trends and analysis, but these are provided to AIMCo's clients, which include without limitation the boards of public-sector pension plans, the government endowment funds, and others. With respect, Mr. Speaker, neither the Alberta Treasury Board nor Alberta Finance and Enterprise has requested any such documents to be provided exclusively to them for any special purpose such as long-term investment strategies for the fiscal periods between 2010 and 2020.

Mr. Speaker, in the normal course of their business AIMCo frequently produces financial forecasts; however, these are intended to be widely used by, again, all of their clients. Moreover, as I mentioned, AIMCo has to be independent. For these reasons neither the minister nor I believe that this motion should pass, and I would therefore ask that all members vote to reject Motion 8.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I'm sorry to hear of this rejection. It concerns me tremendously that the government by having AIMCo as an independent arm may simply be using AIMCo and its management and its expertise for the purposes of deniability, that says that because they're such an independent arm of the government, they don't have to report necessarily to the Auditor General. It sounds like they don't have to report, certainly, to Albertans in general, never mind members of the opposition. So it sounds like they've got *carte blanche* in terms of investment, yet the money they invest belongs to all Albertans, and our future well-being is staked upon the decisions they make.

Now, in this highly volatile time I was pleased to read recently that the approximately 2 and a half billion to 3 billion dollars that had been lost appeared to have been regained. The decisions that were made that led to this regaining would be extremely important, and the decisions going forward that AIMCo makes and how they formulate these decisions I think would not only be advantageous to this House but could serve as kind of a learning process for all Albertans in terms of proper investment.

So it's again with disappointment that this information is considered proprietary, which has been the word of the day if this were *Sesame Street*.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Anaphylaxis Policy for Schools

504. Mr. MacDonald moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation requiring all school boards to establish and maintain an anaphylactic policy that includes strategies to reduce exposure to anaphylactic causative agents, information on life-threatening allergies, annual first aid training on dealing with life-threatening allergies, and a requirement for every school principal to develop a plan for each pupil affected by an anaphylactic allergy, including the maintenance of a file for each anaphylactic pupil.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and present before the Legislative Assembly motions other than government motions, this one specifically Motion 504.

5:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are, unfortunately, many students throughout the province who have a condition, an allergy or a severe reaction to any number of things, including certain foods, insect stings, and products even like latex. These allergic reactions can unfortunately in some cases be life threatening. Motion 504 would require school boards to put in place a policy to protect students with these life-threatening allergies. I have talked to people from across the province – from our own constituency, from people in Spruce Grove, some people in Calgary, an individual from Red Deer – concerned about the lack of standards. All these parents, all these families are concerned about the lack of standards across our province.

Now, Manitoba and Ontario have legislation in place to ensure that there are standards across each and every school throughout their provinces. British Columbia has issued a ministerial order requiring such policies. Alberta does not have legislation, Mr.

Speaker, or regulation and leaves it up to school boards to have a policy in place. We know that a committee was struck in Alberta to create a resource kit on anaphylaxis that was mailed to schools in 2006 and 2007.

Certainly, before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude to the many people from across the province who have given myself and our research staff advice and direction on this matter. I just would like to say that I appreciate their time, their interest in this issue. Hopefully, this motion will eventually end up in a law or regulation that is protecting each and every student regardless of whether they have an allergy or not. I know that our School Act ensures that when students go to school, they're in a safe environment. This is one thing that, in my view, has been overlooked, and we have an opportunity today to correct it.

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction to certain agents, as I said earlier. It can be triggered by a number of agents. The most common and most widely discussed trigger, however, is food. No one is saying that we're going to ban any kind of food or food product from a school or from a cafeteria or from a field trip. No one is saying that whatsoever. A reaction can result from even trace amounts of foods such as peanuts, tree nuts, seafood, and products made with eggs and/or dairy. Anaphylaxis is usually diagnosed in childhood, but it can develop later on in life.

Now, a reaction involves multiple systems, including the skin, respiratory, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal systems. At its most extreme a shock results from a massive overreaction of the body's immune system to a particular agent. Individuals undergoing the shock could experience symptoms such as swelling, breathing difficulties, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, nausea, and circulatory collapse. Anaphylactic shock can also induce coma and can lead to death, unfortunately. A life-threatening reaction can develop rapidly, so every moment is valuable when assisting an individual with anaphylactic shock. That's why a standard such as the one that we are proposing this afternoon with Motion 504 would give schools, whether it's the teacher, whether it's support staff, whether it's the principal, in case there was a condition or in case there was a reaction, time to react because time is of the essence, and it's important.

Now, students with this condition are no different than any other student. They play minor hockey. They play minor soccer. They're in the band in their local school. They're in the theatre groups. They go on field trips. They have sleepovers with their friends. They're no different. They're students. We have to consider that, please. If we could consider enhancing their safety, I think it would be a great step forward here in this province.

These life-threatening allergies appear to be on the rise in western cultures. There are some experts that speculate that this is due to improved hygienic standards. Now, I can't say whether that's fact or whether it's fiction, but certainly it is interesting. Individuals living with this condition, as I said earlier, must avoid contact with any agent or avoid all contacts with risk of a severe or life-threatening reaction. If it does occur, of course, most individuals have the EpiPen. They either have it in their possession, or it's in a locker, or it's in the corner of the teacher's desk. It could be in the principal's office, Mr. Speaker. But we have to know where that is, and we have to be able to find it and use it in a safe, effective manner, sometimes in 30 seconds or less, sometimes in less than a minute.

Now, other jurisdictions. In Ontario in 2003 a 13-year-old girl named Sabrina Shannon unknowingly ate french fries from the school cafeteria that had been contaminated with a dairy product. Sabrina went into shock and passed away before school staff could give her a dose from her EpiPen, which was stored in her locker. This is an example where in 2003 Ontario, of course, introduced

Sabrina's Law, which many of us here are familiar with. It was a private member's bill, Bill Pr. 3, and it was passed in the Ontario Legislature almost two years after Sabrina's unfortunate passing.

Now, Manitoba and British Columbia did it a little differently. Manitoba issued a directive in 2002 that required school divisions to create policies to protect students with anaphylaxis. A registered nurse was hired to assist boards in developing their policies, which was to be completed by 2004. However, Manitoba still opted to formalize this requirement in legislation by passing a private member's bill, moved by MLA Erin Selby, which was endorsed by the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth. This legislation came into force on November 1, 2009. The amendments required all school boards to have policies in place that meet the needs of pupils who have diagnosed anaphylaxis and allowing for regulations to spell out the details in those plans.

It's interesting to note that both Manitoba and Ontario passed this anaphylaxis legislation with all-party support, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Alberta's approach to date has been distinctly different when compared to provinces such as Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia. The dates are fuzzy. Few people seem to know the specifics. But it appears that rather than pass legislation or issue regulations, the provincial government opted to create an advisory committee in 2006 to study the issue of anaphylaxis in schools. The committee was comprised of stakeholders such as the Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta Education, Allergy/Asthma Information Association, Alberta information centre, and Alberta Health.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, there is no specific legislation in Alberta requiring school boards to have policies in place regarding anaphylaxis. Thank you.

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

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 504, brought forward on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. There's no doubt that this is a serious issue. There is not one single member in this House that would ever stand to trivialize the dangers of anaphylactic allergies. Not one single member here. But I do have to take exception to the member who brings forward the motion, that suggests that there is a lack of standards, that there are no standards in this province whatsoever.

5:10

In fact, Mr. Speaker, just for a bit of a timeline, in 2006-2007 the Minister of Education provided a conditional grant to the Alberta School Boards Association, the ASBA, to lead a working group known as the anaphylaxis policy advisory steering committee. The ASBA anaphylaxis policy advisory steering committee included representatives from Alberta Education, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Alberta School Councils' Association, Alberta School Boards Association, Anaphylaxis Canada, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, and parents of children who have severe, life-threatening allergies. A policy advisory was produced for school boards on how the safety of students with anaphylactic allergies can be addressed.

Now, then, the committee also recommended that school boards develop policies and procedures that allow for adaptations – adaptations – not static legislation, Mr. Speaker. The committee recommended adaptations to meet the needs within the local context of each school.

In 2007, Mr. Speaker, a resource was developed that would support schools in implementing the advisory policy. This involved bringing a team together with representation from Anaphylaxis

Canada, Alberta Asthma Centre, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease & Asthma Network of Alberta, Allergy/Asthma Information Association, the Lung Association, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, and the original advisory group that was created to create the policy.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the allergy and anaphylaxis information response, AAIR for short, resource produced in English and in French was completed and distributed to public, separate, charter, private, francophone schools in Alberta in February of 2008. On March 11 of 2010 the AAIR resource was also distributed to First Nations. Now, keep in mind that it was distributed already to in excess of 2,000 public, separate, charter, private, and francophone schools and health authorities within the province of Alberta. That's pretty extensive.

In 2009 one final concern that schools and health professionals shared was in regard to the training of school communities. There were three issues that needed to be addressed. Those were inconsistent training, which was provided at the school level; the availability of health care professionals to go into schools, particularly in rural areas; and, of course, just-in-time training that schools requested.

Now, Alberta Education provided Anaphylaxis Canada with a conditional grant to develop a training program to address those three needs specifically for Alberta. The e-module that was created, Mr. Speaker, was recently piloted by the Canadian anaphylaxis readiness education program and reached over 200 teachers in Alberta. I believe that soon it's going to go province-wide.

The second strategy that came out of that, Mr. Speaker, was to make available training for health care professionals who work in school communities. Anaphylaxis Canada provides face-to-face training for them, all consistent policies throughout our school system. Again, there is not a lack of standards.

On January 19, 2010 – and I'll table this at the appropriate time – there was even a letter that was tabled by Judah A. Denburg, MD, scientific director, and Dr. Diana Royce, education director, managing director, and chief operating officer with AllerGen Canada, the allergy, genes, and environment network to the minister. On behalf of AllerGen research network I'd to congratulate Alberta Education for taking a leadership role with regard to education and training for school personnel on anaphylaxis and potentially life-threatening allergic conditions. AllerGen has been proud to help support some of the research and evaluation.

To our knowledge Alberta is one of the first provinces to embark on such a comprehensive and innovative anaphylaxis education program. In particular, the online training component represents an outstanding collaboration between province, policy-makers, health care providers, medical associations, consumer groups, McMaster University, and the organization that wrote the letter. We understand that other provinces are watching this initiative with great interest, in particular some of the innovative components such as the e-learning module, all designed to set standards in curriculum, in policy within school boards. Mr. Speaker, we in this province lead the country when it comes to anaphylaxis policy in dealing with students who have conditions.

The motion, I believe, includes strategies to reduce exposure to anaphylactic causative agents done at the policy level with school boards; information on life-threatening allergies done at the school boards and through the research programs that I'd outlined; a requirement for every school principal to develop a plan for each pupil affected by an anaphylactic allergy – I'll get to that in a minute; I think that's being addressed – including the maintenance of a file for each anaphylactic pupil. I'm not quite sure if every single principal is maintaining a file on every single student that has anaphylactic allergies, Mr. Speaker, but I don't know that having a file is necessarily guaranteeing somebody's life is being saved. It

might be beneficial. I don't know whether every principal is doing it or if they've adopted some other policy in place that keeps records and tracks them. I don't know if necessarily creating a file makes everybody safer.

The policies, Mr. Speaker, for anaphylactic allergies, students who have them, is in place. If this is legislated, I worry and wonder about the precedents that we're setting sometimes. If you legislate all of this, I don't know if it allows flexibility. The bigger question that you have to ask is: if we're going to put in legislation what's more appropriately dealt with in policy, what else do we need to legislate? Should we be legislating safety practices for football programs? Should it be in legislation exactly what sort of safety practices you're going to have for a football program or a hockey program? Are we going to put in legislation the safety protocols for playing on the playground over lunchtime rather than in school policy? How much do we actually have to put in legislation, and will it make us all safer?

Now, that leads me to one of my final points. I'm worried, Mr. Speaker, that sometimes when we create legislation, we give the impression that we've addressed everything, that it's all better now. We put in legislation the anaphylactic policy. Now no student will be harmed from the allergy that they have. Now, because it's in legislation, policy is obviously not consistent enough; we have to legislate it. I don't know that because it's in legislation, it guarantees anybody is more safe in any context. We legislate against murder, but it still happens. It doesn't stop accidents from happening, and it won't necessarily protect a student whose parents may, because it's in legislation, be less vigilant within the schools about managing their own situation. Principals may become less vigilant in managing the situation of their students. So I worry that as soon as we discuss legislation as being the solution, we may actually create more harm because everyone thinks it will be fixed.

Look. Think of it this way, Mr. Speaker. It is illegal to run a red light. It's in legislation that we can't run a red light. Does that mean that not one single person, when the light turns green, doesn't still look both ways once in a while just to make sure someone's coming? If we just assume that because it's illegal to run a red light, it's illegal to speed, then we don't need to watch anything. It makes everything safe. We can just legislate ourselves right into utopia. It's got to come down to the policies that are in practice in the schools.

We have excellent policies in place already in the schools, Mr. Speaker, and that's because the School Act fundamentally says that schools have to be safe and caring. They have to provide a safe environment. We have to legislate anaphylactic policy. We legislate against bullying. We legislate against – well, you name it. We can just legislate everything and make everybody safe.

The School Act says that we have to create safe and caring schools. Every single teacher, every single principal, every single student, every single parent works together on policies, procedures, and day-to-day operations to ensure that safety. Just because something might or might not be in legislation does not mean that it's weak because it's not in legislation or assured because it is. It all comes down to people and how vigilant they are and whether or not the actual day-to-day policies are in place.

Mr. Speaker, my last concern with this is that we become too rigid in our legislation about anaphylaxis policy. We always talk about how legislation is not adaptive or flexible or responsive to meet quick issues that might arise – new treatments, new policies, new procedures – so if we create legislation that may take two or three years and we have to have public consultations to get it changed, we may actually wind up with legislation in place that's more harmful to students or the situation in schools than it is good.

I encourage all members not to support this motion.

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

5:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm going to take a very personal approach to this motion. I'm going to suggest that if the hon. member's children suffered from these types of allergies and complications, he wouldn't have gotten up and made that statement. I'm going to provide a little bit of background detail first, and then I'm going to very much personalize this debate.

The advisory information resource, AAIR, prepared in '06-07, was simply mailed out to schools and school districts to use as they see fit. Officials from Education could not confirm that the department made any attempt to verify that these kits were actually received by school districts. They also were not sure if new schools constructed since the AAIR was originally distributed would be sent a kit. It was also not clear if the kits had been updated since the original mail-out. The responsibility for ensuring that the information contained in the kits is implemented rests with the school boards or the schools themselves.

A parent dissatisfied with a particular school's approach to anaphylaxis should have recourse to a provincial law to ensure that appropriate protections are in place. A higher standard of protection in our schools would also reduce the risk that school boards could be held liable for deaths resulting from severe anaphylactic shock. Emergency room visits, which cost our health system, could also be reduced.

Now, the argument that we just heard from the Member for Battle River-Wainwright is the same type of argument that we heard with regard to seat belts, the idea being that you can legislate them, but people don't necessarily have to wear them. That type of legislation may be appropriate if you're an adult and you choose, based on your safety issue, to defy the law and not wear a seat belt because you feel that you'd rather die than be crippled in an accident. You have, based on your age – and, I would also add, stupidity – a degree of choice. Children do not have that choice, and I'm going to speak as a grandfather. My grandson . . .

Mr. Lukaszuk: Wisdom comes with age.

Mr. Chase: Obviously, you don't have children, or you'd be more concerned.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, continue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry to be distracted by people who don't seem to care about the well-being of Alberta's children.

My grandson, Kiran Warrior, turned six this past February 22. He suffers from a degree of allergies which are compounded by the fact that he has rather severe asthma. Now, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated, that does not prevent him from participating to his fullest extent possible, but everywhere he goes, Mr. Speaker, the EpiPen accompanies him. For example, if I have the opportunity to take him to his hockey practice, I have to make sure that that EpiPen does not get left in the car because the cold affects the quality of the serum in the EpiPen, which is absolutely essential for my grandson's life.

Now, individuals talk about: you can't legislate the saving of a life. By having a common legislation and a common application throughout the province, which creates common expectations, common responsibilities, there is a better chance of the activities being taken into account. Now, most children, once they reach school age, carry their EpiPens with them in their packs or, as was

the sad case of the young lady in Ontario, Sabrina, may have the misfortune of leaving it in her locker. For the EpiPen to take effect, it has to be immediately available. That's why, as parents and grandparents and protectors of our grandson, we make sure we have that EpiPen always within our sight, whether it's taking our young grandson to the theatre, as we did on Friday night or, as I mentioned, to a hockey practice. That is a life-determining circumstance.

He has been tested for all kinds of allergies, but the tests don't necessarily reflect the severity of the circumstance. For example, he has no problems with almonds or cashews, but get him anywhere near peanuts and the swelling starts. We had no idea, for example, that he was allergic to macadamia nuts till he happened to have some icing which barely touched the macadamia nuts, and that caused his throat to swell, his eyes to swell. Fortunately, we were able to give him Benadryl right on the spot, and the EpiPen wasn't required.

This is life and death. To be as cavalier as suggesting that we could actually damage the protection of children by having universally required legislation across this province ignores the importance of protecting our children. Again, I'm a big fan of the Member for the Battle River-Wainwright region, and I know that he's a good father and a loving husband. I'm sure that he was a very professional teacher, and that's one of the reasons I have such respect for him. But as a teacher he should realize the number of kids that we have in our classrooms and in our schools with a whole series of menacing and, in some cases, life-threatening conditions.

The hon. member mentioned just our desire to have everything absolutely clean and sterile, where kids no longer, you know, put in that mouthful of dirt that builds up the antibodies and so on over the long run. The reality is that our kids are in danger, and more and more are placed in that danger. If you go into any school, you would be absolutely amazed, on the board by the principal's office or wherever it's chosen to be displayed to protect the privacy of the child, at the number of kids who suffer from a variety of things, whether it's diabetes, whether it's anaphylactic shock, whether it's allergies. The number of asthma, pulmonary concerns in Alberta far outnumber any other province. It's a real problem, and the hon. member is trying to come up with a real solution. It's not the end-all answer, but unless we take some form of standardized procedural policy development and enforcement, we're going to lose children.

Now, my wife, myself, my daughter, her husband, everybody in our family will do everything to protect our grandson, and we'll do everything to ensure that when he's on a field trip, he carries his EpiPen with him. We will make sure that we inform the school authorities. We'll make sure that when he's on a sleepover, he has that EpiPen with him. The point is that he's going to be spending a significant part of his day in school, and if the most well-meaning and well-intentioned teachers don't know where his EpiPen is, that could mean the difference between life or death for my grandson. That's the case for thousands of Alberta children.

When you're arguing against the possibility of protecting children, I don't get it, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely essential that we do everything within our power for the well-being of children. Opposing this makes absolutely no sense. I wonder where a person's brain or where their heart is or, in fact, if they have one if they oppose this legislation.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I particularly take offence to the last comment, and I will try and qualify it. First of all, I do want to say that I am an individual who has a severe allergy to all types of nuts. I have EpiPens. I do want to say that the regulations that have been brought forward have probably caused me and many people who have allergies more challenges than if nothing was done.

Now, you say to me: how does that make sense? Well, first of all, I do want to say that the schools do a lot of work as it is right now, and I commend them for that. But let's talk about the situation that we're in as individuals who have those types of allergies.

5:30

The world becomes complacent. How does it become complacent? Because we as a society need to protect everybody, we're protecting people or we're protecting ourselves, if I want to call it that, against situations where we need to be ready for the situation. If we have a school that completely bans nuts, if I was a child, I'd become quite complacent in the attitude of saying: "You know what? There are no nuts here, so I have no worry. Nobody is going to put nuts in somebody's cookies. I can share." We need to teach the individuals who have those conditions that they have that responsibility on their own, and it's critical.

Now, I'm going to give you another example. If you take a look at cereals or you take a look at bars, what happened? In order to protect themselves, companies have stated: this product may contain traces of nuts. If you have a grandson that has an allergy, that's very frustrating. Why is it frustrating? Because those individuals are protecting themselves from liability, and now all of a sudden every product and every cereal that you buy has that sign on it. You become oblivious to that signage because they all may. So you don't eat cereal. You don't eat, you know, certain products. You know that these products don't have nuts, so you eat them anyway. That's what I'm talking about: complacency. Well, cornflakes may contain nuts. You know that it doesn't contain nuts. It's done from the legality point of view instead of the common-sense point of view.

I say to you that when I look at students in schools, when we look at individuals in society, we have to be prepared. We have to be ready, whether we carry an EpiPen or, I guess, whatever type of precautions we take. It's necessary that we educate the individuals themselves. I'm very confident that what's been provided in schools is very adequate. I just don't think that if we take that step further, we are helping. In some cases I think we could be deterring what we're trying to do because of the complacency side.

I can only speak on my behalf and only on what I went through not only discovering the allergies that I do have but also trying to deal with them. You know, I can say to you – and I'll use an example right here, that happened in this building – that there was a situation where there was a meeting, and there was some food. What took place is that they thought it was important that we identify which product has nuts, and the individual who was ahead of me was looking at the food, moved the sign from one to the other. I was right behind him, and I saw it and basically said: exactly what are you doing? He said that he didn't even know he'd done it.

I think I can say to you, hon. member, that no matter what the sign is, no matter what the regulation is, no matter what we're doing, the onus is on ourselves first. Can we support? Yes, there are ways to support, but we can't go overboard because we can't put our children in the situation of complacency.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to stand today and support this Motion 504. I see the points being made on both sides, and I think there are some good points. I don't dispute that they're genuinely held. I've seen, as many of us in this Chamber have seen, situations where we've had friends or family members with severe allergies – it usually seems to be with nuts, but it can be other things – have kind of near-death experiences or real

scary situations happen when they don't have their EpiPen or whatever they're using. It can be really scary.

I remember one scary situation for me. I was in Taiwan at the time. I was with an individual from the United States, and we were kind of going around. We were out for dinner, and we were eating. He thought it was nut free, and then he saw on the bottom of his plate a nut. I remember that he almost went into shock without actually going into shock. It turned out it was a false alarm, but he was just very scared because he didn't have his EpiPen with him. It was a very scary situation.

I know that these things do happen in schools. Things get missed. You know, as a parent sometimes things get left behind, like knapsacks. You can be good 99.9 per cent of the time, but sometimes things get missed. When those situations occur, the consequences can be dire. If there's a way we can increase the safety for these children by doing something relatively simple – I don't think we need to overdo it or overkill it – if we can at least make sure that the school boards and the schools are mandated to have a plan in place and to know who the people are, I think that's just good planning on their part.

I think it can be done with very minimal regulation. I think it's one of those things where, again, when the government does want to regulate and does want to step in, it should be for public safety, for things like this. I do think that the good outweighs the bad, so I will be supporting this bill. I've also had several e-mails on it from constituents with children who have this allergy, and they've been relaying their scary stories to me about it. On their behalf I will be supporting this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to note that there have been some family members and a few moments ago there were several children in the gallery. I'd welcome them. I'm glad they're here to watch the debate and listen to the positions of the various people.

I just want to reread the motion so that we're really clear here. I listened to the comments from the Minister of Infrastructure, and I just want to be clear here. We're not talking about a ban on peanuts or anything like that. Here's the exact wording of the motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation requiring all school boards to establish and maintain an anaphylactic policy that includes strategies to reduce exposure to anaphylactic causative agents, information on life-threatening allergies, annual first aid training on dealing with life-threatening allergies, and a requirement for every school principal to develop a plan for each pupil affected by an anaphylactic allergy, including the maintenance of a file for each anaphylactic pupil.

That's the end of the motion.

When I read this, Mr. Speaker, I'm kind of reminded of fire drills and fire escape plans. This isn't a bill that says: ban all peanuts or all anaphylactic agents from a school. This is a motion that says: "Be prepared. Know who is at high risk. Make sure that once a year that file is reviewed and there's a bit of training in place. Make sure you have the adequate equipment. Take some precautions." That's really what this is saying, and I think we need to keep it in that perspective.

I say this as somebody who, very fortunately, doesn't have allergies, so I personally don't have these concerns, but sadly I know people who do. Very good friends of one of my sisters lost a child to an anaphylactic allergy reaction, and I know a number of people who have similar life-and-death threats. I was a camp counsellor once where a student had anaphylactic shock because, even though we asked him, he never told anybody he was allergic to peanuts.

The camp cook put a tiny bit of peanuts in the Cocoa Puffs squares. He ate them, and he was down. We were an hour from any medical help. We were way west of Rocky Mountain House. That was quite frightening. So I have had experience with this with other people.

5:40

I'm sure that over the years these kinds of debates have gone back and forth and back and forth. I think that as a Legislature it's reasonable for us to say: well, do we really need this law? Is this law really going to be effective? Could it, as the Minister of Infrastructure said, be counterproductive? I have no doubt. In fact, I've been here long enough to remember the debates on bicycle helmets. You know, there was back and forth, and for years and years the government voted down legislation to require kids to wear bicycle helmets. Well, you know what? It was brought forward. It's done. We have undoubtedly saved any number of injuries to kids because they have to wear bike helmets. A similar debate on seat belts: I think Alberta was the last province in the country to bring forward seat belts.

This is an issue that's going to be in a similar vein. One of the concerns I have – and other members have mentioned this – is around liability issues. There will come a point now where it's widely known that there are serious allergy problems and that steps can be taken. When authorities do not take those steps, I expect that they will be increasingly exposed to liability. It may not just be the authorities as the school boards. It could be teachers. It could be other families. Why not take the step now and prevent this from becoming that kind of a big issue?

We're watching the same issue play out in air travel. I believe WestJet has stopped serving any kind of peanut products on its flights. You know what? It's not a big deal. It showed me, when I read this article, that WestJet is being very proactive and responsive to the health needs of their customers. In contrast, Air Canada is dragging its heels and resisting making the changes that are necessary. I think it looks bad on Air Canada, and I wouldn't be surprised if it increases their liability risks.

I think that when we consider our roles as legislators in setting standards and leading by example in protecting children, we have to remember that here we're not talking about adults. We're talking about kids who could be as young as four years old, in kindergarten, kids who don't have full choice, who don't have full knowledge. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East might speak in a few minutes to an example from Vancouver Island, a particularly unfortunate example in a school. These are children. We have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to reduce the extreme risks to our children.

I'm sure this debate will play out over and over and over in this Assembly, consuming all kinds of hours, and probably any number of children will suffer because of these delays. Eventually, at some point in the future the government will realize that, yeah, we should do this, just like we do with fire drills. We require every school to have a fire exit plan, to once or twice or three times a year have a fire drill. No big deal. We all think it's a reasonable idea. Why not do the same with allergies?

I support this motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to weigh in on this debate. Certainly, there have been good arguments, actually, on both sides. But I think that one of the things we have to keep in mind – and this government often does this. They'll have these wonderful programs. They announce them with great fanfare. Then they download those programs onto the stakeholders and those

that are responsible for delivering those programs, but they often don't give them the dollars that are required to have those programs go forward. It is bit of a pattern, and certainly I've noticed it at the municipal level.

In this case it's the anaphylactic program, which I'm sure was launched with the greatest of intentions and knowledge that this type of information must be in all the schools. The question would arise in my mind that you introduce a program without any time frames for evaluations. How is this working? Are all of the schools doing it? The other question that I would have on this is: is this a standard program throughout the schools? Is it being applied in the same fashion? Children move in this province all the time.

One of the arguments was made that children are responsible, you know, for themselves, and they understand that, and I do understand that. Young children who have juvenile diabetes know exactly how to use their needles. They know exactly how much insulin they need. They know that if they're tired, they're going to need some orange juice. Yes, they do know these things. Children with allergies often are aware of what they are as well, but we're talking about kids, and kids sometimes forget. They get themselves into little situations without having thought.

My thrust on this would be that we have to help little children who, yes, may well know what they have to do, but they're kids, and they forget. It is very easy to give an Epi-Pen, and often some of them may have them as they would have their insulin supplies, but teachers are not health care workers. I believe that for them to have basic knowledge is easily taught because what their basic knowledge must be is that they can recognize the signs and symptoms of a true allergic reaction.

The point is that whoever is teaching these children, in the school room or outside of the school room, in the play yard, has to recognize the signs and symptoms and then be able to put in whatever their protocol is. My problem, as I've mentioned, I think, is that the protocol hasn't been evaluated. It's just been sent out and said: well, we hope you do this. And, again, I don't believe that it's standardized across the province. I think it's very important.

One of the other things that can easily happen to children when they're out playing are bee stings or wasp stings. They can be very, very highly deadly for the children who are allergic to those. Again, it's the question of the teacher being able to recognize the signs and symptoms of an anaphylactic shock and knowing what to do. If it's a child that may never have had that reaction before, again, I hope that teacher recognizes the signs and symptoms and gets help right away. It doesn't take long to die from an anaphylactic shock.

One of the reasons I'm saying this is because I think part of the big problem – I can certainly speak from the long-term care side of it – is that each regional health authority had its own version and its own analysis and its own assessment of what was considered long-term care. That care was not consistent across the province, and it was very important because, again, seniors move across this province just as our young children do.

Just before I finish, I would like to talk about a very unfortunate incident that happened at a Vancouver Island school. There was a young man, and kids were bullying. It was a classic case of bullying, where there were four young men chasing another young man. They told him that they were throwing peanuts at him, and he had a very severe reaction to peanuts. It was a clear case of bullying. I think it's most unfortunate that, of course, that was used. I'm sure that these other four thought it was a lark and this kid's going to react when he thought he had peanuts, but if they really understood the life-and-death situation that they could have been putting this young man in, I'm sure they would have thought twice.

Often what I get back from the other side of this room is: education, education, education. Clearly, what you've tried to do is send out kits that are, in quotations, education, but there isn't the evaluation with it. There isn't the fact that anyone knows, and I think that it should be a directive that can go out to the school boards. I realize that school boards are autonomous, and so they should be, but I think that when it's health and wellness, it comes under a different criteria that we should be looking at to protect our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a few words I'd like to say. First of all, I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward because, obviously, it's generated a very valuable debate here, and although members may not be all together on how they see the most appropriate solution, I think it's still been very valuable to raise consciousness about this issue.

I really think that what we are talking about here is the method not so much as the end. As was mentioned by an earlier speaker, there is nobody in this Assembly who would be arguing against the need to have students as safe as can be in schools. But I think my concern about the motion is just that – well, I guess I'll just say that I'm a diabetic. Now, I was fortunate. I got juvenile diabetes when I was 28 years old, but I can imagine what it must be like for a young person, a young child, having to take insulin and being fearful of reactions and so on in school when they're young. I was fortunate to have missed that, but I guess my concern is that there are all kinds of risks, there are all kinds of threats out there, and specific legislation, a specific section dealing with specific risks, as dangerous as they are, I think, may cause some problem.

For example, I don't think we have – and I stand to be corrected on this – a section in the act that talks about fire drills. There is a requirement to keep students safe, and we've already got that requirement. I was trying to listen carefully to some of the other precedents that were mentioned, and if I'm not mistaken, some of them were not done in legislation. They were done by ministerial order. I think, really, what we're talking about is how we implement this process that we all feel is valuable.

Those are my only comments, but if I am to vote against this motion, that would be why, certainly not because I don't appreciate the challenges that people with allergies face.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to, first off, thank all hon. members for their contributions in this debate and discussion on Motion 504 this afternoon. Certainly, we need to, before we vote, clarify some of the previous statements that were made.

I'm not confident that every school board in our province has a well-developed anaphylaxis policy in place as was suggested by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. Now, I was provided – and I really appreciated this from the former Minister of Education – the advice to the minister under anaphylaxis students with severe allergies, which was advice to the Minister of Education at the time on March 14, 2007. For the record, there was \$25,000 granted by Alberta Education to the Alberta School Boards Association to lead a working group on this issue. Now, the working group, or the

committee, was responsible for developing a policy advisory – a policy advisory, Mr. Speaker. A school policy advisory was drafted, and it was reviewed by the committee members. There is a big difference between a policy and a policy advisory. A policy advisory is simply the paper it's written on. It's an advisory. It's not a set standard across the province. I would urge all hon. members to consider this when they vote.

Now, there was talk about self-compliance: it works better than legislation. I would remind you that the Assemblies in Manitoba, Ontario, and with all due respect British Columbia have decided that self-compliance in this matter doesn't work.

The backgrounder that was provided to me also indicates that the policy advisory is the responsibility of the Alberta School Boards Association and, therefore, does not require departmental or ministerial approval. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright suggested that the government had all this under control. If I heard him right, I would certainly take exception to that and point out that section 45(8) of the School Act states that the school boards have the responsibility for providing students in their schools with a safe and caring environment. Developing local policies and procedures is their local responsibility. That's what we're after here, a policy that each school board can implement through this legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we consider what is going on in this province, Alberta needs to pass legislation requiring every school to have a well-developed anaphylaxis policy. Children with this condition deserve to have a consistent standard of protection in each and every school. Currently, parents must choose between enrolling children in schools that meet the geographic and educational needs of their family or risking placing their children in a school without proper safety standards. A parent should not have to lobby an individual school or district to create appropriate policies and practices to protect their children.

Some parents may not even be aware of the danger of life-threatening allergies, and schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students are as safe as they can be. This motion, Mr. Speaker, that we are proposing before the Assembly: we are moving it because we want to provide and build on the good work that's already being done by schools and school boards across the province and make sure that it's a standard across the province.

Now, a school board has the ability to develop policies regarding anaphylaxis, and these policies may or may not conform with this policy advisory that the hon. member spoke about earlier issued by the stakeholder committee. If a particular board chooses not to create a policy – and this is very important – then the responsibility rests with the individual school. If a school board chooses not to create a policy, it is up to the principal of a school to create and enforce policies on anaphylaxis.

Time did not permit us in the Official Opposition a full examination of school districts in Alberta, but it is clear that the absence of provincial legislation has left serious gaps in the school system. For example, the Edmonton school district, with a projected enrolment in this year of close to 79,000 students, does not have a board-level policy in place on anaphylaxis, and this was confirmed in a phone call to us by school board officials. The Calgary board of education, by contrast, has a detailed policy on anaphylaxis that is posted on their website. So it's not all as what was claimed earlier by the hon. member.

I would in conclusion urge all members of this Assembly to please accept this motion. It will be a small step in the right direction towards providing each and every student, regardless of whether they have an allergy or not, that is enrolled in our school system the utmost in safety.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Before the chair calls the question, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to record a standing vote for this motion but to waive the normal 10-minute bell period.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now call the question, and if there is a standing vote, it'll be one minute.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson
Calahasen
Chase

Hayden
Horner
Lindsay

MacDonald
Pastoor
Taft

Against the motion:

Amery
Bhullar
Campbell
Dallas
Danyluk
Denis
Doerksen
Elniski

Fritz
Horne
Jablonski
Jacobs
Knight
Leskiw
Lukaszuk
Marz

McFarland
Olson
Prins
Quest
Rodney
VanderBurg
Vandermeer

Totals:

For – 9

Against – 23

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:06 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

Issue 18

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 10 of the brightest stars from Destiny Christian school in my riding. They're accompanied here today by Mr. Glenn Mullen, who is their teacher and also the principal of the school. As you know, they're going to be our leaders tomorrow. They're in the public gallery, and I'd like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 100 visitors from Spruce Grove, the Woodhaven middle school, along with a number of parents and teachers. They are seated in both galleries, obviously, today. I'm extremely pleased to have had an opportunity to speak with the students this afternoon on the steps. I can tell you that they are very knowledgeable about what it is that is happening in this Legislature and what MLAs do. We have teachers Mr. Moe Teliani, Miss Emily Pearce, Ms Deb Schellenberger, Miss Keri Getz, Mrs. Triena Hoople, Miss Christine Van Natter and parent helpers Mr. Karl Iles, Mrs. Eileen Sherburne, Mrs. Jeanette Chmilar, and Mr. Jeff Gamble. As I said, they are seated in both galleries. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I had the pleasure of taking part in a news conference with the Premier, members of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, and individuals from Edmonton's homeless serving community. There with me were several individuals, some of which have joined us here today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the following people: Susan McGee, member of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, if she could please stand; Mr. Tim Richter, president and CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation; Miss Judi Deslauriers, a former homeless Edmontonian who now is in permanent housing supports; and her follow-up support worker, Miss Samantha Smith. I would ask that you please join me and give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this

Assembly today two of my constituents, Norm and Judy Radomsky from Willingdon. I just want to say that they travelled here today for some meetings and stopped in to see the Legislature. I do want to add a little extra comment. Judy had gone to school with the Premier, but as it looks today, as we can see, I think it was a K to 12 school. I think she was in K, and I'm pretty sure the Premier may have been in 12. If I could ask them to please stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. Firstly, I'd like to introduce my new assistant, Amanda Karlzen. She was raised on the family farm in Carrot Creek, and she's been an accomplished 4-H member and leader in her community. While studying political science at the university here in Edmonton, she still worked weekends running farm machinery, feeding, processing, calving, and other general duties. Amanda, it's now time to put your political studies to work here at the Legislature. Welcome. Please stand and be recognized by this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction, Brock Mulligan, is more of a public thank you to a very bright young man that has served this Legislature for five years. Brock has taken a new job outside government and will be a true asset to his new employer. Brock, thank you for your dedicated service. The door to my office is always open. Please stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week in Edmonton in particular is Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week. There are many women and men working to raise public awareness about issues relating to sexual exploitation. Members may have noticed in both galleries quite a number of people wearing orange. Those are the people who have come forward today to watch us in question period and debate. They are seated in both galleries. I will quickly read their names and ask them to rise as I do so: Kristin Raworth, Kate Quinn, Sarah Ramsey, Danielle Boudreau, Rejoyce Appedoe, Sue Huff, Patti Brady, Dorian Smith, Lou Kinartz, Andrew Fiebiger, Andrea Burkheart, Karen Smith, and there may be others. I see that there are. Anyone involved with this group wearing orange, please rise and receive the warm reception of all MLAs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to introduce to you and through you a group of university students who are at the Legislature today representing CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students. They are – and I would ask them to stand when they're named – Duncan Wojtaszek of CAUS staff; Beverly Eastham, representing the University of Calgary; Kay She from the University of Calgary; Jeremy – I'm going to use the French pronunciation – Girard of the University of Lethbridge; Hardave Birk of the University of Calgary; Lauren Webber of the University of Calgary, who has a direct line of connection to the minister of aboriginal affairs; Zach Fentiman of the University of Alberta; Alex Massé of the University of Lethbridge; Aden Murphy of the University of Alberta; and Keith McLaughlin of the University of Lethbridge. Please give warm welcome to these students.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Edmonton's Common Ground Arts Society. Common Ground Arts Society is an organization that is less than four months old. Its goal is to celebrate the incredible artistic talent in Edmonton and to help existing organizations develop an infrastructure for emerging artists. On March 19 I had the privilege of attending their inaugural Edmonton show, a monthly showcase of local artists ranging from live musical performances and visual arts to theatre and dance. The show was hosted at the newly renovated Avenue Theatre, which is proving to be an instrumental force in the revitalization of Alberta Avenue.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask that my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Nicholas Mayne, the executive director; Patrick Lundeen, the artistic director; Simon Gorsak, the associate co-ordinator; Dawn Ringrose, the board chair; Phil Varley, the Avenue Theatre manager; Kevin McCann, a performing artist; Julie Jonas, a performing artist; Forest Mackay, a performing artist; Sarah Seburn, a visual artist; Rachel Seburn, a visual artist; and Danielle Annicchiarico, a visual artist. Please give them a warm welcome.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly the board members of the Alberta Somali Community Center. The Alberta Somali Community Center works to foster the contributions of Canadian Somalis to the multicultural fabric of Alberta. The centre aims to work with all levels of government on issues of importance to Canadian Somalis in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask that my guests rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: the chairperson, Jama Nur; president Mahamad Accord; treasurer Abdi-Aziz Liban; vice-president Mohamed Hersi; communications director Yusuf Yusuf; membership, Jibriil Osman; secretary Said Hussein. If you could all please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

Calgary-Montrose Awards

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to bring awareness of the Calgary-Montrose awards. For the first time in my constituency individuals will be recognized by this award. The constituency of Calgary-Montrose has been an incredible example of community at a time when it is most important. Together we have embraced safe community initiatives, worked together to make our most vulnerable supported, and moved to become more environmentally friendly to ensure we leave our children with a healthy planet.

Mr. Speaker, all individuals and organizations in east Calgary have been encouraged to nominate deserving individuals for the following awards: the Montrose student award, the Montrose youth award, the Montrose spirit award, the Montrose environmental leadership award, and the Montrose safe community award. In addition, there are three awards for organizations: the Montrose community outreach award, the Montrose environmental leadership award, and the Montrose safe community award.

I'm often inspired by the people of my constituency for their hard work and dedication not just to their own lives and to their children but to the community as a whole. Mr. Speaker, that's what makes my constituency so vibrant, and that's what makes me so proud to be their representative. I hope my constituents will consider nominating their friends and neighbours that make a difference in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Carmangay Centennial

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to call Carmangay, Alberta, my home. On January 20, 1910, the village of Carmangay was formally incorporated even though it had been on the prairies since 1904. C.W. Carman had purchased a large tract of land along the Little Bow River. The village began west of the current site, but before completion of the CPR line to Carmangay those buildings had to be moved by a steam engine and horses to the current townsite. The original wood trestle, two years in construction, was one of the longest of its kind, over 1,040 feet long spanning the river coulees along the Little Bow River.

Carmangay was a growing and booming community until the great fire in 1920, which destroyed many of its businesses. Over the next seven years Carmangay slowly lost many of its remaining businesses: seven elevators became five, then three, then none. Gone are the farm machinery dealerships and fuel distributors, hardware and grocery stores, newspaper, law offices, and others, including our public school.

Today Carmangay is seeing a small resurgence in growth. It's got a wonderful long-term care/continuing care centre and has become home to many retirees and commuters. In its 100 years three of its five MLAs have been from Carmangay. Besides myself two were Speaker of this Assembly, Mr. James McNaughton and Mr. Peter Dawson.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, Carmangay was recognized for possibly having the shortest St. Patrick's Day parade in Canada, maybe the world. Each St. Patrick's day green-clad residents and visitors assemble to follow the local music from the post office one block to the Grange Hotel to have Irish coffee and green beer. All are welcome tomorrow.

This summer the formal celebration of Carmangay's centennial will take place July 30 to August 2. Many hours of volunteer work have gone into making this a year to remember for residents, former residents, family get-togethers, and their history book.

Welcome, all, and congratulations, Carmangay.

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

Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week

Dr. Taft: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Right now a man is on trial for the murder of Ellie May Meyer, a young woman who died in a senseless act of violence. Ellie was, first and foremost, a human being with hopes and dreams and people who loved her. She was also a prostitute, a victim of sexual exploitation. Ellie's murder is one of 31 verified murders of vulnerable women during the last 27 years in Edmonton. Only five of those cases are solved. At least five more vulnerable women are officially listed as missing, and there could be many more.

Sexual exploitation is a common factor in these cases, and Edmontonians have organized Sexual Exploitation Awareness Week to raise understanding of the issues. Edmonton police estimate that our city could be home to 600 sexually exploited people, and there could be many more given that it's not easy to track people exploited

over the Internet, through personal ads, or escort services and massage parlours.

Ordinary people, overwhelmingly men, fuel the demand for these services. The Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton has created a campaign called stop the demand, which aims to curb sexual exploitation by reducing demand through education and awareness. Without demand there's no market for human traffickers, pimps, or profiteers. The foundation's men of honour award complement this campaign by recognizing men who encourage healthy relationships and who speak out to stop the dehumanization of the sexually exploited. I encourage everyone in Alberta to follow the example of these men of honour. We must not tolerate the victimization of vulnerable people. That starts by recognizing our common humanity with respect and compassion for all.

Thank you.

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

Budget 2010

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 9, 2010, this government tabled the 2010 budget, positioning Alberta to take full advantage of the global recovery under way. Thanks to this budget we will have the most innovative and competitive economy in Canada, the best health care system in the country, and the newest and best infrastructure in North America. This budget strikes the right balance between making spending adjustments and ensuring that priority programs are properly funded.

Others agree with the government's forecasting and budget goals. CIBC, for instance, has indicated that beyond 2010 the province is expected to average 3 per cent real GDP growth, with investment remaining a driving force. This province's fiscal performance has bettered expectations from April of 2009, and with the global recovery taking root, fiscal growth will accelerate, and we will meet our goal of being back in the black by fiscal 2012-2013. CIBC also points out that the sustainability fund is coming to good use, having been established to cushion volatility in the resource sector to avoid painful program cuts.

Critics continue to call for less spending and, without basis, state that Alberta's 2010 budget is bad for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2010 continues to provide priority of services for Albertans. We will monitor our spending and our revenues to ensure that we meet our targets and the Premier's goal of being back in the black by 2012. That's responsible fiscal management. That's reasonable budgeting. That's what a responsible government does. It strikes the right balance.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be pleased to later table the CIBC provincial budget brief dated February 9, 2010.

Thank you.

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

Homelessness Initiatives

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak this afternoon about the progress being made to help vulnerable Albertans break the cycle of homelessness. Today is the first anniversary of our government's commitment to end homelessness in our province. Alberta's plan is based on a housing first approach whereby permanent, safe housing is provided along with the supports and services needed to break the cycle of homelessness. This model increases the likelihood that the individual will reach independence and is a more cost-effective way to co-ordinate and maximize resources.

Mr. Speaker, few jurisdictions are immune to the problem of homelessness, and fewer still have a plan of action to address it. In fact, Alberta remains the only province in Canada to put a 10-year plan to end homelessness into motion.

There are as many causes of homelessness beyond those that first come to mind: mental health problems, substance abuse issues, and others. Illness, family breakdown, or job loss can often result in temporary homelessness, and the economic downturn has brought the tipping point of homelessness much closer to some.

But one year after endorsing Canada's only 10-year plan to end homelessness, our province is a better place for so many who previously had little hope. Today more than 1,300 formerly homeless people have a place to call home and the help that they need to remain housed and become independent, shelter use is declining in all major centres – and this is a good thing, Mr. Speaker – and more than 900 housing units for the homeless are being supported across our province. These are encouraging results.

The reality is that we still have homeless people on our streets, and we still have people in need of basic housing. In our world of technological and social change belonging somewhere remains a basic human need.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to offer my thanks to all the stakeholders, which include the government of Alberta, community volunteers, professionals serving the homeless, and private-sector investors, who have made a difference in this particular area. Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Long-term Care in Grande Prairie

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday I asked the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports why the long-term care centre promised to Grande Prairie in 2006 has not been started. She could not provide an answer. She also could not say what happened to the \$2.3 million that was given to Chantelle Management to start this facility. To the Premier: why has \$2.3 million of taxpayer money been sitting in Chantelle Management's bank accounts for four years, and construction has still not started?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to seniors' housing in the province of Alberta we are moving forward with a very aggressive plan to add to the number of living spaces in the province. We want to make sure that seniors can retire in the very same community that they helped build. We're reviewing all of the applications that have come forward for funding, and we'll make decisions on them soon.

Dr. Swann: To the Premier. It has been four years. Is the province going to ask for that \$2.3 million to be returned with interest or not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can get additional information on that particular issue, but overall in terms of increasing the number of spaces, we're looking at at least 800 to 900 spaces. We've been told that with the increasing population in years to come, we would need about 1,200 spaces every year to keep up with the pace of growth in what you'd call the baby-boomer generation, that will be retiring within a number of years.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'm sure the people of Grande Prairie will be very interested in that lack of an answer, Mr. Premier. How do you expect to build trust in a population where you neither answer a question nor have a serious response to 2.3 million public dollars absent from our agenda?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, what is going on in Grande Prairie right now with Chantelle developments is a very important project not only to the people of Grande Prairie but to us. We are in the process right now of learning that they have managed to get all their building permits and to get their contract with Alberta Health Services, and they will be starting the project within the next two months.

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

Centralized Cytology Lab Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One theme that's clear within this government is that there's no long-term plan for health care, including lab services. This past weekend I was in Lethbridge, and the resounding concern related to the impending closure of their cytology lab. To the Premier: why is the Premier closing a lab in Lethbridge which performs necessary tests for cervical cancer?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister recently met with the pathologists, and he'll have more information with respect the results of the meeting. We're working with Alberta Health Services to deliver the best quality of services with the pathologists in the province.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've spoken to pathologists and to public health officials, and they're puzzled also. What's the evidence the Premier can table in the House to show that this change will improve both the timeliness and accuracy of the testing for cervical cancer?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to undertake that follow-up on behalf of the questioner and on behalf of the Premier. The fact is that it's just the analysis of the Pap smears or whatever services are being alluded to here that are being centralized. They are being sent somewhere, in this case probably to Calgary, so that the turnaround time can be faster, and that's what we're working toward, making the whole system more efficient. But I will look more deeply into that on behalf of the member.

Dr. Swann: Well, for such a significant issue it's surprising that the minister is only now looking into this issue. How is it going to save time or money to send all the Pap smears from Lethbridge to Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it could well be the case that Alberta Health Services has put in place some additional precautionary steps to make sure that it will be more efficient, to make sure that the turnaround time is faster. This is not an issue of contracting things out; this is an issue of working within the publicly provided system, which is exactly what this cytology analysis lab is in Calgary.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Erotic Massage Parlours

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The time has come for Alberta to take a strong stand in the battle against sexual exploitation. This government should cut through the confusion, strengthen the laws, pursue prosecution, go after the gangs, support the victims, and educate the public about the issues. To the Minister of Justice: in order to decrease victimization and sexual exploitation, will the

minister and this government develop legislation that will address the proliferation of sexual massage parlors?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This issue is important to all Albertans, and I want to commend the member on his statement today with respect to this issue. We in Alberta Justice and, indeed, this government take this issue very seriously. We believe that it's about more than criminal prosecutions, and by that I don't mean that we're not prosecuting. What we are doing is supporting projects like Project Kare, which are integrated investigative teams that include senior counsel, senior investigators who are ensuring that we're able to resolve these cold cases.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to be in a province where we don't need Project Kare. That's way too many victims. We want to stop the victims from turning up in the streets of this city.

Will this minister work with municipalities, police, health officials, and other stakeholders to develop provincial standards that enable Alberta municipalities to better establish, investigate, and prosecute bylaws related to adult entertainment and sexual services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the pieces of work that we've worked on very closely with police agencies in this province in the last two years is to ensure that their investigative teams are looking not only at what particular acts may be involved in running businesses such as massage parlors but also the environment, the actual, factual environment as to how people are functioning in these businesses so that they're not exploited. We believe it's very important to ensure that we're creating a system where people are talking about this, understanding this, investigating this, and prosecuting.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Well, that sounds like a step in the right direction. Again to the same minister: given the power of public awareness and opinion, will the minister support a broader educational program about the risks and victims of sexual exploitation aimed at the demographic groups most likely to use these services?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's a very good suggestion. We've certainly done a lot of work around this through the safe communities innovation fund. Just this evening one of our Crown prosecutors will be at the library speaking to victim sexual exploitation online. We'll continue to do that work, and I'm happy to work with the member on that.

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

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 the government committed to implementing a tuition fee calculation policy that capped tuition increases at the rate of inflation for a 10-year period. In November 2009 the minister announced that postsecondary institutions could submit proposals requesting tuition increases for professional faculties. This goes against the very commitment this government made to ease the financial burden on students. My questions are to the Premier. Why did your government's promise to postsecondary students by removing the tuition fee increase policy for legislation . . .

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, if I could correct the preamble, this government did not request proposals from the postsecondaries. The postsecondaries indicated to us that there was a problem with some of their tuition levels in 2004, when we froze tuition rates. All we did was indicate to them that we would entertain receiving those proposals. We have done that. We've had meetings with the students. Some of the institutions have had numerous meetings with the students. We're going to continue to look at those proposals as they come forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Given that postsecondary tuition in Alberta is already the third highest in Canada, will the government stay true to their word and support increases based on the consumer price index per year only?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear in my response to the CPI cap as being protected. However, if there were issues around errors that were made under that program back in 2004, I think it's prudent for the taxpayer and for the students to be able to look at that so that we can protect the CPI cap going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that students build plans around policy – they are able to work, save, and get financial support based on government policy – what is the point in passing this policy if you're going to ignore the rules that you've already put in place?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be advantageous if the hon. member would listen to the answers rather than just go back to the script of the question. This is exactly what I've said. We are honouring the policy of the CPI. However, in order to ensure that that CPI is there for the rest of the period of time, we want to make sure that we correct the errors in it so that we don't have to go back and revisit it. We've said very clearly to the postsecondaries: this is a one-time adjustment only. We're not talking about changing across the board. We're not talking about any of those other things, simply correcting an error, which I believe this hon. member would agree is a good thing to do.

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

2:00

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier announced his new royalty framework in 2007, he said that it's "good, it's sound, and it's going to carry this province well into the next century." Wow, that went by fast: 2100 already. Why did the Premier abandon his commitment to a fair share for Albertans just three years later?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the oil sands royalty changes are working very well; in fact, billions of dollars of new investment. There have been changing circumstances with respect to the market for natural gas, especially given the new finds of shale gas, which leads to the need for more innovation and investment in technology. It would have been a real mistake not to revisit this particular area to make sure that we attract the same investment we've had before the market conditions changed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that on the same day in 2007, the Premier said that this "framework was put in place to provide certainty and predictability," and given that the Premier has rolled back royalties seven times since then, why won't the Premier admit that the only certainty he's provided Albertans is that he can't be counted on to stand up for their interests?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, since the royalty framework was introduced in 2007 to take effect in 2009, we have seen major changes with respect to the marketplace: huge finds in shale gas, a world economic crisis, a credit crisis that many companies face. But the biggest issue, though, for so many companies was that natural gas dropped down to that \$3 level. We were losing production, the tariffs on moving gas to the United States almost doubled from what they were before, and as a result we were losing production, which led to less gas being produced and less ethane and less polyethylene produced in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the NDP is the only party standing up for the majority of Albertans, who want fair share royalties, and given that both the Progressive Conservatives and Liberals have changed their position on this issue so many times that you need a program to keep track and given that the Wildrose Alliance is supported by the oil and gas industry precisely to fight for lower royalties, why won't the Premier admit that his government has betrayed Albertans who voted for him based on his promise to raise royalty rates?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a partnership that exists between the government, Albertans, who are owners of the resource, and also those investors that put billions of dollars at risk in searching for the resources of natural gas and conventional oil. I believe that what we've gone through over the last six to seven months was a good process which has led to a good policy, and that policy has been supported by industry, by government, by others who have invested billions of dollars in a basin that is depleting. We need innovation to access new gas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night I attended CAPP in Calgary with many colleagues of this Assembly. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore joined me. In a speech to a thousand people the Minister of Energy mentioned that he consulted with only 68 MLAs. My question to the Minister of Energy is: does he know how many MLAs there are in this Assembly representing all Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: I think the last time I counted, Mr. Speaker, it was 83.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm one of those 83, and I'm very proud as an independent to represent the economic engine of Canada that provides lots of revenue to the minister of finance, who is smiling. My question is: why did the minister exclude from the competitiveness review the oil sands, the economic engine that creates so many jobs for Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, probably because, if the member actually would think about it for a minute, the royalty framework that the Premier referred to has been working very well as it relates to oil sands royalties, and there was no need to review it.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Energy: isn't it true that new political forces and pressures from this very Assembly are what forced this government to do the right thing in treating Albertans fairly, in creating jobs? [interjections]

Mr. Liepert: No, it's not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Boutilier: I still have the floor, Mr. Speaker, don't I?

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Hon. member, sit down. Read the document you signed about preambles. Okay?

Mr. Boutilier: No response?

The Speaker: There was a response.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to properly fund the postsecondary system is causing institutions to look at charging students non tuition-related fees of \$500 or more to fill their financial shortfalls. In Alberta, however, students already have the third highest tuition in the country according to Stats Canada. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: can the minister explain why he thinks students should do the job of this government, which is to provide sustainable funding for the postsecondary education system?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, postsecondary education in the province of Alberta is a partnership between the taxpayer and the students. We have always maintained that an investment in one's future is an investment in education, probably the best investment they're going to make in their lifetime. So it's a partnership. I would say that the CPI cap, which we talked about, is a good way to move forward. Other provinces are removing their caps. We're keeping ours. I would say that in my discussions with the students over the course of this week as it relates to ancillary fees, we're going to continue that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why doesn't the minister move to provide sensible regulations for mandatory fees by limiting the amount that fees can be increased, requiring consultation with students, and ensuring that students aren't being charged extra fees for basic educational services?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that the hon. member isn't listening to what the students probably have told him. We met just the other day, and we talked about that very thing. We are looking at and discussing with postsecondaries how we might be able to deal with one-time issues around IT costs, around various things that aren't necessarily with regard to instruction but might be something that the institution might want to look at in terms of its fixed assets or in terms of supports for students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I met with the students this morning, and one of their concerns was having a referendum on all increases so that students would actually have a say in their fees.

Will the minister admit that his government's tuition cap policy is meaningless if institutions can simply raise noninstructional fees by unlimited amounts?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, currently there are regulations in place that do limit some of the noninstructional fees that institutions can levy. We are, as I said, working with the students and the postsecondary institutions to talk about how we might build some fences, if you will, around things that are outside of those regulations. To suggest that we're moving away from the policy that we've had before is ridiculous.

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

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. One year ago today Alberta endorsed a 10-year plan to end homelessness. Alberta is one year and several million dollars into the plan, and we still have people living on the streets. Why does Alberta think it will succeed in any homelessness plan when other jurisdictions have failed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has made, in fact, a bold commitment to end homelessness as we know it. I fully believe that we can do this. When fully implemented, the 10-year plan to end homelessness will ensure that individuals who present themselves to a shelter will be channelled into permanent housing within 21 days. At the same time, I'd indicate that it's also important to note that this program, unlike any others in any other province, partners with nonprofit organizations throughout the province, who know how to stretch the dollars even further than the government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness has concluded that it's going to cost more than \$3 billion to end homelessness in Alberta over the next 10 years, how can you be sure that the costs will not get out of hand?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I share the same concern about costs. In the previous budgetary year there was an increase in spending in this department. This year there was a 19 per cent decrease in spending in our department, over \$100 million. Why? Because over the last three years we completed a three-year plan to transfer \$100 million in each of these years to municipalities. At the same time, we realize that we've completed this plan, and we have to move forward with other plans, including being compassionate to the taxpayer.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Several members have recently heard from communities that oppose certain affordable and homeless housing projects in their neighbourhoods. What is the minister doing to address some of the community concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. This member raises an important issue about community engagement. It is important, actually, to consult in the communities where affordable housing goes, but at the same time we also have to consider that we don't want to just concentrate affordable housing in one particular neighbourhood but, rather, spread it throughout the city, give people some dignity and actually integrate it into the community at large. That's in the best interests of the taxpayer and those people who are in affordable housing.

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

Environmental Impact Assessments

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has created a catch-22 in the competitiveness review. It is extremely vague on expectations for changes in environmental regulations, yet only a 90-day period is allowed for a response from the task force on how changes are supposed to take place, so no detail, no context, but make changes in 90 days. To the Minister of Environment: is there support for increased funding for environmental impact assessments on the front end? If the government is serious about increasing development in the oil and gas sector, this is where the system bottlenecks.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday we talked about the role that Alberta Environment will play in the regulatory review. The member brings forward a very important point. The whole issue of how we conduct an environmental assessment I think has to be considered in the context of whether or not we are making unnecessary duplication. I do think that that's an area that we would like to move forward on to look at how we do environmental assessments in that context.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Is the minister saying that he's looking at downgrading the environmental impact assessments or somehow lessening the requirements for them?

Mr. Renner: No. I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, that if you do things the same way, you should probably expect the same outcomes. We would like to improve our outcomes. So I'm saying that there may be opportunities for us to do environmental assessments from the perspective of determining what is more global in nature. Can we have 15 volumes of data that are generated in environmental assessment that are more generic in nature and then concentrate our efforts on those aspects of that environmental assessment that would apply to any particular application and do that in more detail?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: what is the factual basis for stating in the review that there can be cost savings without negatively impacting the environment?

Mr. Renner: Well, I gave her a very good example yesterday when I talked about the fact that we can avoid unnecessary duplication. The line of questioning that we just were in is a very good example. Is it necessary to do over and over and over again environmental assessments that cover the same information? Or should we, in fact, be concentrating our energies on those aspects of that assessment that pertain to an individual application and enhancing the amount of background and research information for those aspects rather than duplicating over and over multiple kinds of information that's not necessary?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Queen Elizabeth II Highway Intersections

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has been spending a great deal of money in the last few years on ring roads and intersections to improve traffic safety in urban areas. Queen Elizabeth II highway also is becoming extremely busy between Edmonton and Calgary, at times up to 30,000 vehicles per day on this road. Neither the road nor the intersections have been designed for this volume of traffic. My question to the Minister of Transportation: what are we doing to ensure the efficiency and the safety of the travelling public on the QE II highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're always looking to improve our highways and improve motorist safety at the same time. As for highway 2 we've built some new interchanges during the past few years and have upgraded a number of others. It's all part of a plan to eventually turn highway 2 into a freeway, which means that access will be via interchanges only. This really improves safety as interchanges are the safest way to enter or exit a highway.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: how can you improve the safety of the old cloverleaf-style intersections?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, one way to do that is by converting these into what are called diamond interchanges. The diamond interchange is a much more modern design and handles higher traffic counts. A diamond provides longer and straighter entrance and exit ramps, with better visibility for the merging traffic. It also allows drivers to merge into traffic at highway speed, which is both safer and more efficient. We converted the north Innisfail interchange into a diamond last year, and we'll convert the highway 11A interchange at Red Deer into a diamond this year.

Mr. Prins: My last question is: when are you going to do the one at Lacombe and Ponoka?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we convert those old cloverleafs into diamonds as fast as we possibly can and when the traffic volume at that particular intersection triggers it. I mentioned the highway 11 interchange in my second answer, but there's a lot more to come. In our three-year program we're going to convert interchanges at Red Deer, Ponoka, Olds, and Wetaskiwin. I'm confident this will greatly improve the safety on the QE II.

Kainai Community Correctional Centre

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Kainai community corrections facility, the only correctional facility in the province established for aboriginal inmates, is being closed, and the reason given by the Solicitor General is that there are not enough minimum security aboriginal inmates available to use this facility. To the Solicitor General: now that we had an opportunity to discuss this last week, is it still your assertion that Kainai community corrections is closing because of a lack of minimum security aboriginal inmates in Alberta in need of its services?

Mr. Oberle: Actually, just to correct the preamble, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe I said that the reason that we are closing it is because of a lack of minimum security inmates. That is one issue. I also indicated, I think rather clearly, that we have a budgetary issue, and we also have services available in other locations. If the member would like to attend my estimates tonight, I'll be discussing this in more detail.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if you check *Hansard* from last week, you can refer to your answer there, where it did say that you had a lack of aboriginal inmates for the facility.

Nonetheless, on March 8 the Kainai correctional centre received notice that the Lethbridge Correctional Centre was holding 19 male and 15 female aboriginal inmates that were classified as minimum security. Why were these aboriginal inmates not serving time in the Kainai correctional centre, located a mere, short distance away?

Mr. Oberle: Well, again to correct the preamble, Mr. Speaker, I most certainly didn't say that there was a lack of aboriginal inmates. That's what he said in his second preamble. I did say that the inmate population was changing, and there are less minimum security inmates in our inmate population today. If the member would care to get his facts straight, we could get to a question.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Fair enough. So if we have less minimum security inmates, we have a few more medium security inmates. We have this facility that's being used for aboriginal inmates. Why aren't we using more of this facility to house aboriginal inmates in medium security? Can't you use your powers to make this happen?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I was asked that question before, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind the hon. member that the facility is not ours. It's a lease program, a contracted services arrangement. The facility is not ours, and it's not up to me to reconstruct it, and I don't have funds to do that. So we're seeking solutions elsewhere.

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

Alberta Economic Development Authority

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this Legislature the Minister of Finance and Enterprise tabled the annual report for the Alberta Economic Development Authority, which was created in 1994 for the purpose of bringing together business and government to identify areas where we may enhance our competitiveness and facilitate economic growth and prosperity. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. In what way does the Alberta Economic Development Authority provide input to you and your department for policy development and strategies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-North Hill is correct. Last year represented the 15th anniversary for the Alberta Economic Development Authority, and last week I had the pleasure of tabling its annual report. Over those 15 years AEDA, as its acronym is, has provided us very valuable policy input on a variety of policy topics, ranging from carbon capture and storage, productivity, competitiveness, sustainable water management, and most recently broadband. All of these address the question of growing prosperity for the people of Alberta.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer AEDA presented the government with its report *Restoring Fiscal Balance: Input for Budget 2010*. What recommendations in that report were used as priorities for the development of the 2010 budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill is correct. AEDA did provide us advice on the budget for the upcoming year. In the wake of the economic collapse of 2008-09 we looked to the business community for advice on sound fiscal management and coming out of the recession. Three very specific recommendations they gave us were: we had to cut spending to reduce the deficit, but also they told us not to cut critical services, and that was reflected in our budget; they told us to take a cautious approach to issuing bonds; and finally they told us to focus on competitiveness, which explains why we have Bill 1.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my final supplemental to the same minister: as we move forward with Budget 2010 and subsequent budgets and achieving the goal of our Premier to be back in the black by 2012, will the Alberta Economic Development Authority continue to play a role in policy input?

Dr. Morton: The answer, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely yes. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is one of the key initiatives of the government to get Albertans working again and to become globally competitive. I've met with the AEDA board, and I anticipate they'll play a very co-operative role in developing the policies that come out of Bill 1.

Thank you.

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

Funding for Homelessness Initiatives

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eight years ago the public was outraged when Ralph Klein threw money at a homeless person in a shelter. Upon reflection, at least he was giving money instead of taking it away. This government pretends it wants to end homelessness, but they fail to implement rent controls, they've cut funding to rent supplement programs, and overall they've cut a hundred million dollars from housing. How can the housing minister tell this Assembly that they're going to end homelessness any time soon when the government is actually cutting funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just before I get to the meat of the question, I want to thank the member for her comments. We may have some different partisan views from time to time, but we have the same goal, and that is ending homelessness as we know it.

Looking forward, we are on track. If you look at our spending now versus the last few years, while we have cut spending this year, we have actually grossly increased spending to ensure that we are actually going to make the 10-year target to end homelessness.

Ms Notley: Well, given that the government has cut \$200 million from affordable housing, actually reduced planned affordable housing units by about 800 this year alone, and cut funding for rent support, wouldn't it be more honest for the minister to begin each housing announcement with an apology to the Albertans who are becoming homeless as we speak because this government keeps cutting money from them?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, if anybody owes an apology, it's this member for just insinuating dishonesty in this Chamber.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at the same budget documents that everyone else has in this Assembly, so given that a year ago . . .

The Speaker: Please, sit down. We know that it's customary that the day that the budget for a particular department is being raised in this Assembly, we don't ask questions about it. So frame your question and go forward with the third, please, because his budget is coming up tonight.

Ms Notley: Given that a year ago the then housing minister said that she fully endorsed the \$3.3 billion plan although was only prepared to fund one-third of it and given that so far every dollar for homelessness has been taken away from the affordable housing initiatives, why won't the minister admit that this government is merely robbing from poor and almost homeless Peter to pay already homeless Paul?

Mr. Denis: I didn't really keep track of all of the names between Ralph and Peter and Paul there. But, Mr. Speaker, moving forward, we are the only government in Canada, including provinces governed by NDP regimes, that has a 10-year plan to end homelessness. The Premier is sticking to this. This government is sticking to this.

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

Erotic Massage Parlours (continued)

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Erotic massage parlours in Alberta are incubators for sexual exploitation and human trafficking. The victims are the sex workers, who are often coerced and entrapped by pimps, profiteers, and gangs. They are treated as if they are barely human. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Will the minister and his department investigate the number and welfare of foreign workers working in sexual massage parlours in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. member brings up an issue that I think is important to all of us in this House. Just

like our Justice minister, I would look forward to working with this member on ideas on how we can address this very important issue. But just to let you know, in our most recent federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting the issue of identifying sex trade worker smugglers has been very high on the Canadian agenda. As a matter of fact, my department right now is training our front-line staff on how to identify situations where we suspect individuals have been brought in from abroad for the purpose of sex trade.

Dr. Taft: Great. Actually, that program is a good step in the right direction.

My next question is to the Solicitor General. Given that prevention is far better than treatment, will the minister use some of the \$47 million surplus in the victims of crime fund to support the sex workers who are victimized in massage parlours with a program to help them escape from that business?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will work with all victims of crime in allocating that victims of crime fund. The member will know that we want to maintain some sort of a surplus there so that we can ensure the sustainability of that fund. But we'll certainly look at the proposal.

Dr. Taft: Okay. I appreciate that.

My next question then is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the health risks of sexual massage parlours, including the spreading of diseases like syphilis, which is on the increase in this province, will the minister direct his public health officials to use their full authority to clamp down on massage parlours as a public health risk?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Minister of Employment and Immigration through his staff provide related health coverage or health services or something to that effect. I'll discuss it with him, and we'll figure out where it should go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently there have been stories about certain doctors saying that they have been told that they are not allowed to speak to the media about certain health issues. I constantly seek out feedback from my constituents using our health care system and from my constituents who are the front-line staff of the system. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. As an elected representative who highly values feedback and suggestions, I want to know if there has been a directive from anywhere within the health system that would constrain doctors or any other front-line staff from speaking out about health-related issues.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge there hasn't been any no-talk order issued, certainly not by me, certainly by no one in Alberta Health and Wellness, and to the best of my knowledge neither from anyone within Alberta Health Services. In fact, openness and transparency are two very important hallmarks of our government, and I'll ensure that that's carried through. AHS likely has had some conversations with respect to the so-called code of conduct issue to ensure that trust, accountability, respect, and transparency are reflected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if that is the case, then why did certain cancer doctors in Calgary say that they are not allowed to speak to the media?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what might have prompted anyone to say that. I was recently with the Alberta Medical Association as well as with the United Nurses of Alberta heads, and we talked about various issues related to code of conduct. They seemed to be pretty understanding and relatively pleased with the new code of conduct that has been put in place. So we'll just make sure that it's working as effectively as it should because physicians must feel free to comment on medical issues any time they wish.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. If there is no gag order in effect, then what can you do to ensure that all doctors and, for that matter, nurses and perhaps others are aware of this fact?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there is any uncertainty – and certain stories in the media would lead us to believe that there is – we're going to clear that up in a hurry because nurses, doctors, and perhaps others need to feel free to comment on medically related issues as they might impact services that they are providing or as they impact services Albertans are receiving.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

2:30 Construction and Manufacturing Outsourcing

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred very large production modules for Imperial Oil's Kearl oil sands project will be built in South Korea. Substantial job losses here in Alberta will result from this deal. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Is exporting construction jobs offshore the cheapest way for Imperial Oil to construct its Kearl oil sands project here in Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I should start by saying that not only creating jobs but keeping Albertans employed and creating an environment in which businesses can stimulate employment is this ministry's and this government's number one priority. However, individual companies within this province make business decisions based on cost models or availability of production skills or other variables that this government does not monitor. One of the differences between this government and perhaps governments in different parts of the world is that we don't tell people how to run businesses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of unemployment: what is the total value of the work being done in South Korea, and how many person-hours of work have been lost here in Alberta in the construction and steel-fabricating industries?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if this question is appropriately addressed to me. He should contact the employer and find out. This government is not in the business of business. We don't tell businesses how to run businesses in Alberta. However, we are in the role of making sure that there are workers available in the province, and we always make sure to hire Albertans first, the rest of Canadians second, and then, when you can't find them, export abroad.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of unemployment: how can steel fabricators here in Alberta compete fairly and on a level economic playing field against South Korean manufacturers who have access to cheap, subsidized steel and steel products? How can industries here compete? How can you allow that?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess welcome to the real world would be my answer to this question. The fact is that he identifies a very good point. Alberta is immersed in a global economy. We compete not only against other provinces and states but also against the world, and our job is to make sure that our employers have well-trained and skilled workers in this province. However, that doesn't mean that they will not export some jobs or import workers to this province. It's a world economy, we're functioning in it, and it is our role as government to make us as competitive as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and then maybe the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

School Construction and Renovation

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. There is a large backlog in deferred maintenance of schools, and with classroom space becoming critical in some areas of the province, what is the minister planning to do to address the student space issue and the maintenance backlog when there are no new projects in the 2010-11 budget?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, while it's important to note that there are not any new announced projects in the budget, there are 101 major new or major refurbishing projects under way as we speak or in planning which will start shortly, so there is a significant amount of work happening. The 101 projects will see the creation of more than 30,000 new student spaces and the refurbishment of a considerable amount of space that's out there now. We're putting about \$550 million into renewal of our school system.

Mr. Benito: My final question is to the same minister. I understand that more than half of the capital budget is going towards schools in Edmonton and Calgary. With Alberta's student population continuing to grow, what is this budget doing to address the school infrastructure pressure in the rest of the province, particularly in the communities outside the urban areas?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, of the 101 projects that I spoke of, 58 of those projects are in jurisdictions outside the metro area. The work is being done, yes, to create with the ASAP 1 and 2 projects new spaces primarily in Edmonton and Calgary and the immediately surrounding areas. That's where the majority of growth is happening. There are other growth areas that we need to pay attention to, but there's a significant amount of work being done to keep up and to improve the school infrastructure right across this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Employment and Immigration stated that his number one priority is that every

Albertan leaves home in the morning and comes back to his or her family safe at the end of the workday. In 2008, the last reported year, 23 people died as a result of farm incidents and 19 the year before. These are Albertans who left for work but didn't return home. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why is the minister content taking no action to protect paid farm workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate the fact that my number one priority is to make sure that every worker leaves their home, be it in the morning, and comes home healthy and, obviously, alive at the end of the day. That is my number one priority. It's heart wrenching when I read about accident reports when, unfortunately, something has happened. We're not in the business of pointing fingers. This is a collaboration between employers, employees, and this government to make sure that we have as safe a workplace as possible.

Now, dealing with farms, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're going on.

Ms Pastoor: Given that occupational health and safety legislation increases monitoring and safety in the workplace, which leads to decreased injury and health in every other workplace, when will the minister change the legislation to include paid farm workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I must brag on behalf of our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. He has just significantly increased funding for safety training throughout the Alberta agricultural community. Under the auspices of this department WCB coverage is available to farm workers if they choose to avail themselves of WCB coverage on farms. That has always been available. But we are looking at a balance. Most farming in this province still happens on family farms, where people actually live, not only work.

Ms Pastoor: Given that the farm accident monitoring system is voluntary and that, as a result, farm injuries are widely underreported, how can the effectiveness of the farm safety education programs be accurately determined to ensure that that \$715,000 is well used?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, we are monitoring all injuries that are employment related on farms. But this member actually brings up a very good point, perhaps unintentionally. The fact of the matter is that if an accident happens on a farm, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's a work-related accident. People actually live on farms; they play on farms. Those are not only places of employment, so not all accidents that occur on a family farm are farming related.

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

Highway 27 Interchange

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. The minister has repeatedly stated in this Assembly that the safety of Albertans on Alberta roads is his highest priority, yet the overpass on the QE II at highway 27 no longer meets today's standards as far as access or exit lanes are concerned. Earlier today he spoke of turning cloverleafs into diamonds on other locations on the QE II. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. When is he going to offer me a diamond and turn this very important intersection into a much safer road?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, had the hon. member been paying attention to the answer that I gave earlier to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, he would know that we intend to upgrade this

interchange. So I'll repeat myself. Converting this cloverleaf to the diamond design is on our three-year construction plan. The conversion won't happen this year, but it will be done in either 2011 or 2012.

Mr. Marz: I apologize for not hearing the minister earlier because he's so soft spoken.

To the minister: is the bridge structure going to be replaced as part of this new plan, and if not, why not?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the current bridge structure will be used as part of the upgraded interchange. The bridge may be modified or added onto, but we're certainly going to utilize it. The bridge is still in very good shape, and I don't think this province's taxpayers would appreciate us ripping out a perfectly good bridge.

Mr. Marz: Again to the Minister of Transportation: how many more years of estimated life does the current bridge structure have, and is it economical to wait longer?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, that interchange was built in 1966, and our bridges have a life expectancy of 75 to 80 years, so there are at least 30 to 40 years left in that bridge if we did nothing to it. As part of the conversion to the diamond the modifications to the bridge may extend the life expectancy even further. I can assure this member that we're going to do the best for his constituents.

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

2:40

Forest Industry Competitiveness

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The forest industry is very important to Whitecourt-St. Anne and to many other constituencies around this province. While the industry has gone through some tough times, I recently read in the AFPA news release that shipments of forest products to the United States are up. Will this mean increased employment in the mills in Whitecourt-St. Anne?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that in many of the 50-plus communities in the province of Alberta where there is a reliance on this industry, it is good news, and it very likely will increase the number of hours and shifts that are worked at mills in the province of Alberta, but it goes much farther than that. As a matter of fact, we need to continue to work with the industry to broaden the issues around the use of fibre, generally speaking, in bioenergy, the possibility of fuel production, diversification into petrochemicals, and fuel products.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the same minister. With the Canadian dollar rising, what's your opinion: how will this negatively impact the Alberta forest sector?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I think it goes without saying that there are many factors around the pressure that's on the forest industry today. However, one of the things that's been very negative to any of our commodity production sectors is the fact that the Canadian dollar is strengthening, and as it comes closer and closer, of course, to parity, our market possibilities and our competitiveness in international markets begin to decrease.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister: will this minister commit to working with the federal government to secure an increased market share for Alberta in the American market?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, you know, we do have international trade agreements around the issues, one of them, of course, relative to softwood lumber. I don't believe that in the long term that's necessarily the key for us. I do understand the importance of the U.S. market, but I believe that it's incumbent on us to work with the federal government not only on those issues but on issues that allow us to expand the markets of those commodities and the products from Alberta to other places in the world that are receptive to those types of products.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. In total, we had 118 questions and answers. Twenty different members were recognized: nine Official Opposition Liberal members, one Wildrose Alliance member, two New Democratic members, one independent member, and seven Progressive Conservative members.

We'll continue with the Routine in 15 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008, after consultation with postsecondary students and elected student representatives, the Premier and the government committed to capping tuition fee increases to the consumer price index, CPI, until 2016. In 2009 the Premier wrote to the council of university students.

My government continues to support initiatives contained in the Affordability Framework, including the Tuition Fee Policy. The Government of Alberta would not consider revising the Tuition Fee Policy without consulting with key stakeholders such as the student organizations that you represent.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, the Premier broke this promise just two months later and announced that universities and colleges could submit proposals to hike tuitions for professional faculties across this province. Currently tuition fees in Alberta are the third highest in Canada, and for many students the cost of postsecondary education is becoming unaffordable.

This creates a big problem for many Albertans. Students must work hard to get good grades and to make the most of the very important investment that Alberta's taxpayers make in our education and advanced education systems. All educators must do their best to make sure that students are performing and that we truly do provide them with a world-class education.

The proposed increases create even more uncertainty for the families and students that have made financial sacrifices based on the government's promise to cap tuition increases. Given that this government has introduced legislation to make Alberta more competitive, wouldn't it make sense to look ahead and make the postsecondary system more competitive as well?

Mr. Speaker, we all know that a good postsecondary education will be key to the success of Alberta in an increasingly competitive global market. On behalf of students across this province I challenge the government to keep its promise and maintain the current tuition increases to the CPI until 2016 and allow all Albertans the opportunity for affordable and accessible postsecondary education.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 10

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. This being a money bill, His Honour the Administrator, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This act has been a successful tool to date in suppressing crime and making Alberta communities safer. The civil forfeiture process has allowed us to disrupt street-level drug dealing and residential marijuana grow operations. We've also been able to seize property derived from illegal acts, which will be used to compensate victims affected by these crimes.

The amendments we are proposing will allow us to broaden the scope of our act in accordance with recent decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada. These proposed amendments are aimed at making it easier to restrain and dispose of property and proceeds tainted by crime and to help compensate public bodies such as municipalities who shoulder the costs of criminal activity.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Bill 11

Witness Security Act

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act.

This legislation will establish a provincial witness security program in Alberta. Investigating and prosecuting gang-related crimes is becoming increasingly difficult, especially in cases when individuals are unwilling to come forward and give evidence because they fear retaliation. Alberta's Witness Security Act will provide short-term protective services to witnesses who agree to give evidence; for example, in gang-related investigations and particularly homicides. This legislation will complement the federal witness protection program, which addresses the needs of witnesses who require longer term protection and identity changes. Alberta's law enforcement agencies and the Crown are working extremely hard to reduce gang activity and deserve every tool possible to do their jobs.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 12

Body Armour Control Act

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act.

The proposed legislation would allow police to seize body armour from individuals who do not have a permit for its legitimate use.

Police officers, peace officers, emergency medical service providers, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission inspectors, licensed private security guards, and others who need to wear body armour to do their jobs will be exempt from the requirement to get a permit. Individuals holding a valid firearms permit will also be exempt. Other individuals may be issued a permit on the basis that they have legitimate occupational or personal safety reasons to wear body armour.

2:50

The goal of this proposed legislation is to restrict the ability of violent criminals and known gang members to possess body armour while ensuring that law-abiding Albertans have access to this equipment for occupational or personal safety reasons.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the report from the CIBC titled Provincial Budget Briefs, dated February 9, 2010.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail I received from one of my constituents, Deanna Kayne. She's concerned with the high cost of postsecondary education. She notes that to pay for education, students must either have the support of a wealthy family or incur a substantial debt that could take decades to pay off.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of 28 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Webber, Minister of Aboriginal Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act, the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 2009 annual report.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 1

Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Debate adjourned March 11]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to continue the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, the government's apparent showpiece piece of legislation in this particular session of the Alberta Legislature, although it's not much of a show.

This is a pretty thin bill, and I mean that literally and figuratively. It is only three pages long. Even at that I'm quite surprised that we needed to go three pages and cut down the requisite number of trees to essentially produce a bill as Bill 1 that does nothing more than allow for the establishment of a board or a committee with a vague mandate for increasing competitiveness. I have been in this Legislature now for, I think, five and a half years – that would, I guess, be six years of spring sessions – and this is the flimsiest, most vague Bill 1 that I have seen so far.

I don't really understand the point of this bill, Mr. Speaker. I don't really understand the purpose of this bill. There is no reference in the bill as to when completion or action of benchmarks and goals will take place, nor is there any reference to any specific action that will be taken now. It seems to me that all this bill does is kind of legislate an idea: well, we should be more competitive, and we should set up a committee to figure out how we're going to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I think we can do better than this. We waited long enough for the oil and gas competitiveness review – the Minister of Energy brought that out into the public light last Thursday in Calgary – and at that there were a couple of pieces missing from it. I'm given to understand that part of the reason that the competitiveness review for oil and gas came out when it did was because there was considerable pressure from the investment community to find out what the government was going to do, which direction it was going to take, that sort of thing.

We certainly have, I think, a good broad sense of the direction that the government is going to take. We're still waiting for the royalty curves to be designed, which I asked the minister about in the House here yesterday, and that will come down, I guess, by or before the end of May. That's a pretty key piece of the competitiveness review, I think, to determine what the royalty curves look like because they could make a lot of difference. So there's still a little bit of work left to do on the oil and gas competitiveness review.

This bill does not get anywhere nearly as specific as the oil and gas competitiveness review did. It just sort of seems to want to somehow increase collaboration between government and the private sector to improve Alberta's competitiveness, to allow for the establishment of a board or a committee with a kind of general loosey-goosey mandate to identify actionable areas for increased competitiveness, to quicken the implementation of government competitiveness initiatives, to establish benchmarks, as I said, to measure Alberta's competitiveness. Yet there is really no detail about how any of this is going to be done.

You know, the government already has a Regulatory Review Secretariat, Mr. Speaker, with the following mandate, and I will quote it in part: "The goal of regulatory reform is to identify opportunities to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden of government on the people and businesses of Alberta." That speaks to the red-tape burden of compliance requirements and regulations. Although Bill 1 is more about collaboration, I think you'd have to argue that both have similar mandates, and both ultimately have the same end goal of trying to make business more productive, more competitive, make the province more competitive, make our prosperity more sustainable.

If I can talk for a second about the red-tape aspect of things, which is not specifically in this bill but is, as I pointed out, a means to much the same end, we're still waiting for some significant action on that from this government. British Columbia and Newfoundland

have set and even exceeded percentage reduction goals. They've produced results. We've been reviewing the regulatory burden for a decade or more, and we've yet to produce any reductions in red tape that other provinces have. There is a joke, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, governments always support cutting red tape as long as they can cut it lengthwise. It would seem that that's what we've been doing here in the province of Alberta.

In fact, I'm suspicious that someone in the backrooms of the deep recesses of the machinery of government in this province has pulled the wool over the Premier's eyes here with Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, because it doesn't seem to do anything that would enhance competitiveness. It seems to have done something that would enhance bureaucracy through the creation, the implementation, the facilitation of an ability to study the concept of what competitiveness might look like should we wish to actually look at competitiveness. It doesn't really seem to do anything concrete, anything active, anything actionable, anything that solves problems with a goal to making this province more competitive.

You know, that kind of gets under my skin because while we've been looking at competitiveness in the oil and gas industry – and thank goodness for that – I have a lot of people living in my constituency of Calgary-Currie who make their living or try to in the film and television production business, which continues to be one of those businesses, one of those spheres of economic activity, that holds out great potential yet never, ever actually seems to be able to reach that full potential.

There are a couple of good reasons for that, Mr. Speaker. One, the tax incentive, or film development credit regime, that exists in this province relative to other provinces and other jurisdictions where movies and television programs are made. You have to look at two different arms of that, both indigenous, or domestic, film and television production and creating the climate under which Hollywood producers want to come here and film big-budget motion pictures or film network television series for airing in the United States and other countries around the world. We're getting the pants beat off us by other provinces, who, by the way, are going through some of their own struggles, provinces like B.C. and Ontario, cities like Vancouver and Toronto, because they're now competing pretty much one to one with the motion picture industry's own backyard of Hollywood. The dollar is worth virtually a dollar today, and there's a forecast by one of the big banks that, in fact, we will achieve parity within the next couple of months with the U.S. dollar, so that's a challenge in and of itself.

3:00

Of course, there are jurisdictions all over North America, all around the world who want to attract the film and television production business for the very reason that it creates a lot of jobs, it creates a lot of economic spinoff, it's got a multiplier effect, it's clean, and it's green. You know, you don't really have to reclaim a motion picture set to any great extent. You don't really have to go around 40 years later and deal with a television tailings pond because they don't exist. It's an industry that you can bring in and put a lot of people to work in and create a lot of spinoff jobs and a lot of spinoff business for all sorts of other sectors and businesses that will serve the motion picture and television crews and provide services for them. Then, when all is said and done – and you hope that they don't just pack up and go back to California when that particular show, that particular movie, that particular series is done shooting – you don't have a big mess to clean up at the end, which is kind of desirable in this day and age, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing that the industry doesn't have yet that it needs in order to really take off in the province of Alberta is a world-class,

right-sized sound stage in the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary is the obvious location for it because most film producers and television producers want to take advantage of the exterior scenery in southern Alberta: the mountains, the prairies, the geography of southern Alberta. In fact, what keeps them from doing a lot more business in this province is, in large part, the fact that they do not have the proper facilities to shoot their interior scenes.

Those are the two things that this industry needs in order to be competitive. There's every indication, Mr. Speaker, that if this government just got down to business on that, we could create a really vibrant, going concern in film and television production in the province of Alberta that helps diversify our economy. It builds on a strength we already have because we're using crews that in many cases are the envy of Canada and the envy of North America. They're highly, highly respected and regarded throughout the motion picture and television industry. We train them here. We educate them here. Increasingly, after we finish training and educating them, we're exporting them to Vancouver, where they can find some work, because they can't find it here.

You see, Mr. Speaker, that's kind of what I think we should be doing here with Bill 1. I'm using film and television production just as an example and, I think, a very achievable example. But we should be getting down to business. I think that part of what competitiveness is all about is getting down to business and solving problems and improving the situation that we find ourselves in and taking real steps to make real progress towards a more competitive and more productive business climate in the province of Alberta, taking real steps towards a more productive and more competitive Alberta.

Instead, what we seem to be taking steps with on Bill 1 is a busier bureaucracy and employment for some more – I don't know – friends of the government or whoever needs a job these days, sitting on a board or a commission or a committee, to sit around and study what competitiveness would look like if we really wanted to be competitive.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think we have that much time to waste. We have just come through a very, very serious economic downturn. Luckily, the price of oil, which we have nothing directly to do with – we just benefit from it – is over \$80 a barrel again, and that's going to help pull us out of the recession quicker than some other jurisdictions. But we should be taking advantage of that competitive advantage that we have, by virtue of the fact that we have oil under our foot and it commands a reasonably decent price these days, to get on with the business of getting more competitive not only in oil and gas but in every area that we already have some degree of expertise in. When the world comes out of this recession, all the experts say that it's going to be a very different world and a much more competitive world. We could be part of that, or we could be left behind twiddling our thumbs and studying the thing and debating a bill to allow us to study it and passing legislation to create a committee or a board to do this while the rest of the world is actually making a better mousetrap, maybe filming a half-decent movie about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. What could the government have done differently in this bill so that we are more competitive?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, thank you for the question. Well, what could the government have done differently? The government could have sat down, I think, and worked out in Bill 1 some specific steps that it wanted to take to make us more competitive. Depending, I think, on the sector, on the endeavour, on the industry, on business, it could have involved, well, all the things that the board or the committee will eventually chew over over the next year or two or four or 10, as in the case of the Regulatory Review Secretariat: tax incentives, perhaps tax penalties as well for desirable work not done or not done according to a certain set of parameters, real regulatory reform that cuts red tape across itself as opposed to lengthwise, that does like the province of British Columbia has done, for instance. B.C. set a goal in 2001 to reduce government regulation by about one-third in three years. It met this goal and kept going, and as of January of this year B.C. had eliminated 152,000 regulations since the review started. That's a red tape reduction of 42 per cent.

You know, I think you start looking at areas like that, hon. member, and start looking at specifics. Start looking at what can be done and how the government can partner with the industry or the business or the economic sector in question through regular ongoing consultation, where the government sits down at the table representing the public interest and businesses involved in that industry sit down at the table representing the interests of their shareholders and their various stakeholders, and you have everybody committed to a win-win arrangement through consultation, participation, partnership, negotiation. You work it out so that when people get up and leave the table, they leave the table with a solution that everybody can live with, that leaves the people of Alberta better off than they were when we went in. Those would be some of my thoughts and some of my starting areas.

You know, if you're going to go to the trouble of bringing in a piece of legislation, especially given this government, which for years now has said, "The less legislation the better; you really don't need all these laws," then let's bring in a law about something. When I talked about the film and television business, I was reminded that *Seinfeld* used to be a show about nothing, which is fine. I'd support a law that would support the creation and the filming of a show about nothing, but I can't support a law about nothing, and that's what this law is.

3:10

The Speaker: That was a pretty long response.

Okay. Any additional comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Kang: The way the Member for Calgary-Currie came across: is it like putting the cart before the horse? Is that what they're coming across as by bringing in this law?

Mr. Taylor: I'm not sure that I'd put it that way, hon. member. I think it's more like: we took the horse out and shot it, and we can't get anywhere with the cart without the horse.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes. My question would be: when B.C. got rid of all those regulations, are you inferring that all those regulations were costing someone money? When you're talking about the horse, many of these go back to the horse-and-buggy days. They were just lying on the books and were doing nothing anyway.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a point. If we were to go through all our regulations, whether all our regulations in total or all our regulations in one particular field of endeavour, like the oil

and gas business, we'd find a number of regulations that just no longer apply because people no longer get back and forth by horse and buggy, for instance. We'd find a number of regulations that . . .

The Speaker: Alas, the time has expired.

Additional speakers? Additional participants?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 4

Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Denis]

The Speaker: Additional speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Denis]

The Speaker: Additional speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. VanderBurg in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I call the committee to order.

Bill 2

Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This bill, if passed, would paraphrase the Health Professions Act by requiring professional regulatory organizations to consult with the ministers responsible, namely Advanced Education and Technology along with Employment and Immigration, and consider their comments prior to removing or approving a program of study for registration requirements. This omnibus bill would ensure that this provision is included in the Architects Act, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act, the Land Surveyors Act, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, and the Veterinary Profession Act. If passed, Bill 2 would also update the language in both the Agrology Profession Act and the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, both of which have similar provisions already in place.

Bill 2 also responds to the Alberta government's concern that qualification requirements for an individual to practise in a certain profession are reflective of the actual requirements to do the job.

This proposed legislation would also ensure that the Alberta government is apprised of discussions between professional regulatory organizations and this province's postsecondary learning institutions and is involved at the earliest stage possible regarding any potential changes to postsecondary curriculum.

Finally and most importantly, in addition to providing greater consistency among similar legislation, Bill 2 would continue to enhance the strong, proactive relationship between the Alberta government and this province's professional regulatory organizations. Each organization affected has been advised of Bill 2 and is understanding of the reasons behind these proposals.

Mr. Chair, I would like to address a concern raised by members opposite in second reading. There were a number of questions, but all had a similar theme: why is this necessary at this time, why are we seeing this bill in front of us now, and why duplicate something that's already in place? This government is the first to agree that our working relationships with Alberta's professional regulatory organizations are very strong indeed. Updating legislation and ensuring consistency among several pieces of legislation doesn't have to be a reactive measure. This is about being proactive, about ensuring that government, especially the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, is well aware of any requested changes to curriculum, changes that could affect planning, budgeting, and ultimately the pocketbook of Alberta taxpayers.

In fact, it was the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology who reiterated during second reading that when a change is made to the academic qualification in a profession, we can transmit that through the entire Campus Alberta to ensure transferability for the students and to ensure that there's value there for the taxpayer. So while the opposition is desperately searching for an ulterior motive behind this piece of legislation, I can only say that there is none. I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Centre who requested a list of professional associations affected by Bill 2 and began wondering whether it includes doctors, nurses, and midwives, to name a few. The answer is no. Many of the professions she mentioned are already covered under the Health Professions Act; indeed, that is the act that we're intending to mirror in Bill 2.

To be clear, I will now list alphabetically the professions included within Bill 2 for the members opposite: certified general accountants, certified management accountants, certified management consultants, chartered accountants, community planners, human ecologists and home economists, information systems professionals, land surveyors, local government managers, municipal assessors, professional agrologists, professional biologists, professional chemists, professional electrical contractors, professional engineers, professional foresters, professional forest technologists, professional geologists, professional geophysicists, purchasing managers, registered architects and licensed interior designers, school business officials, shorthand reporters, and veterinarians.

3:20

Mr. Chair, also in second reading last week the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie raised an important question on the use of the term "academic" instead of "education" in the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, one of the acts addressed in Bill 2. We believe, as does the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, that the word "academic" reflects the kind of information required by the government. The postsecondary component is what government is interested in here: degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

There are many other educational activities internal to professions like in-house training or competency requirements; however, these educational activities are not the subject of Bill 2. To make that

perfectly clear, I would like to introduce a House amendment. I propose that section 6(2) of the bill be amended to change the proposed section 15.1 of the Regulated Accounting Profession Act by striking out the word "education" and substituting the word "academic."

I have tabled the appropriate number of copies and will wait a moment while the pages distribute them to all hon. members. Meanwhile, I will add that we've done our homework, Mr. Chair, and we've taken a close look at the legislation involved and look forward to providing greater consistency for all of our professional regulatory organizations.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: As the copies are being distributed around the Assembly, I have an indication from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to be on the speaking list. We'll speak to the amendment first.

We'll call this amendment A1. Any speakers? The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in support of the proposed amendment to Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act. I will make my remarks brief because I believe that this amendment speaks for itself. It was never the intent for this piece of legislation to capture the internal educational activities of professional regulatory organizations, and under the current use of the word "education," the boundary is unclear. By striking out this word and replacing it with the word "academic," I believe that the intent of the legislation will be more clearly reflected in the wording.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay for responding to the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and ensuring that this legislation is as concise as possible.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other members on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll ask the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Chair: We'll move on to the main bill as amended. You've withdrawn?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Any other speakers? The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. An interesting bill. The objective: it would amend a series of laws governing professional associations in Alberta. The amendments are to require the council of the professional association or its comparable governing body to consult with the minister responsible for the act and the minister of advanced education in the event of any changes to the academic or licensing requirements for that profession.

In the government's summary of the bills for the spring session the purpose of Bill 2 was defined as addressing "the potential for over-qualification which may be unnecessary for an individual to perform the work." That in itself, I think, is a very interesting thought behind this and a rationale.

Bill 2 would affect the occupations that have already been mentioned, but I'll go through some of them: agrology, architects, regulated accountants, engineering, geological and geophysical professions as well as land surveyors, regulated forestry professionals, veterinary professionals, and any association registered under the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act.

We on this side of the House will be voting against this, and the rationale behind that is that we feel that it's a redundant piece of legislation that has been poorly justified by the government. Professional associations already consult with the government on a routine basis when they amend or alter their academic standards or licensing requirements.

Some of the professional acts amended by this bill are also unnecessary. Veterinarians, for example, have their requirements spelled out already in legislation. The association representing forestry professionals adjusts its criteria based on a benchmark program at NAIT. Neither association can alter its requirements without going to the minister or to cabinet to change legislation or regulations.

The only objective of the bill is to prevent professional associations from inflating entry requirements, so-called credential creeping. The government has failed to present any evidence of credential creep in many of the occupations affected and noted in this bill. Even if we can substantiate this problem, the proposed bill would not likely resolve the issue as this legislation only requires associations to consult with the relevant ministers and consider their feedback.

I question this part, as I've mentioned before, about the potential for overqualification which may be unnecessary for an individual to perform their work. Now we're calling it credential creep. I have a problem with that kind of thinking because, in my mind, in my opinion, the only way forward both here and abroad will be accomplished with advanced education. The fact that we would even hint at somebody not wanting to further themselves in education, I think, is quite frightening. Why would we always accept the status quo?

I understand, I think, part of, perhaps, being the entry level, but to actually say that it's an overqualification for a person to perform work I find very interesting when, as I've mentioned, in fact the only way forward is through advanced education. We are in competition with India and China; we are in competition with other countries that put high, high emphasis on a highly educated population.

Finally, there's the danger that this legislation is the latest in a series of attempts by the government – labour mobility clauses is another – to interfere with the operations of what is really supposed to be an independent regulatory association. The government has a responsibility to work with professional associations to serve public interests, but it would appear that this government seems to have a very poor understanding of professional associations and the way they approach changes to academic standards for licensing requirements. Every association and every profession that I'm aware of is constantly trying to move the bar forward because many of these associations have research departments. When you do research and put it forward into development, you can't help but move forward.

The stakeholders feel that it is certainly worth having the discussion in the House, and this is what I believe that I have just done. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

3:30

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Are there others?

Seeing no others, are you ready for the question on Bill 2?

Ms Notley: Excuse me.

The Acting Chair: Oh, sorry. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's sometimes hard to see those of us way back here by the back door.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak briefly to this bill. This is an interesting bill. There are both good and bad considerations that I think underlie it, and there is some merit to it, yet we also have some concern about why it is coming forward and what the implications of it are. Generally speaking, of course, the bill sort of presumes and those who've spoken in favour of it presume that there has been quite a bit of consultation with the professional groups that are impacted by the bill. We have heard that that level of consultation has not been consistent across the board. One is then concerned what that will mean and the degree to which it actually represents more of a top-down approach to moving forward with this issue, so for obvious reasons we have some hesitation as a result of that.

The other thing, of course, deals with sort of the competing interests. On one hand I think it actually does make good sense for the minister – typically, I assume, the minister of advanced education – to be consulted on these kinds of changes because, of course, in a perfect world it's necessary for the minister to be able to determine whether the system itself has the capacity to adjust to those changes and whether the resources are there and how those might be rolled out and all those kinds of things. Having credentials increase without necessarily having the capacity to provide those credentials to learners would be a problem, and it would ultimately create a shortage. That's important.

The problem, though, of course, then sort of gets into the issue of: what are sort of the overarching objectives on the part of the government with respect to managing the labour force? There are some professions where I suspect, you know, this term credential creep may be a legitimate concern and where, in fact, the professional bodies have almost gotten to the point where we have a situation of the tail wagging the dog vis-à-vis public policy as well as the funding of the professional services provided.

However, there are other professions where that's definitely not the case and where we've actually seen this government articulate a stated desire to reduce the level of qualification in certain professions. That's where I have a bit of concern about what it is that's driving this particular bill. In particular, I refer to, frankly, a majority of the professions that are occupied primarily by women. Whether you're talking about nursing, whether you're talking about LPNs, whether you're talking about social workers, whether you're talking about child care workers, these are all professional groups who at one point or another in the last two years have come up against resistance from this government towards their either promoting the professional qualifications of their group or at least crystalizing and recognizing the professional qualifications of those groups. In every case that is linked, of course, to a desire to keep their wages lower.

Well, we know that in Alberta the wage gap between men and women is the highest in the country – I believe women right now earn about 67 cents on the dollar – and we know that these professional groups and those that have been previously identified by the government in other contexts are primarily occupied by women. One then becomes concerned about what the overarching objectives of the government are and to what extent they're going to try to manage the labour force in a way to save a dollar and the extent to which that dollar is saved on the backs of low- and middle-income professional women.

That is the concern that I have with respect to this bill, and I do appreciate, obviously, that this bill does not necessarily relate to

those areas that I've identified. I also understand that some of the rationale that has been provided to support this bill is a rationale that applied to these other groups and is very problematic. Again, it's one of those things that requires a leap of faith. Simple consultation between the professional groups and the minister of advanced ed makes good sense in terms of planning – it absolutely does – but only if you've got a government that does not gear towards picking and choosing professions based on whatever their economic interest is and whatever the history is with respect to a particular political party's recognition and appreciation for the work that is done.

With those words, I will end my comments on this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Are there others?

Seeing none, I'd ask members to return to their chairs before I ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

[Mr. VanderBurg in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I call on the Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Having heard the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Little Bow, are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 3

Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with interest to the debate on Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010. As we've heard, this legislation will amend section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act. Bill 3 awards a set amount of damages for bereavement to a surviving spouse; adult interdependent partner, or AIP; parent; or child of a deceased person. The amendment will remove references to marital status currently found in section 8 of the act. This reflects a decision made by the Alberta Court of Appeal and the current state of the law in Alberta.

The amendments will also remove the reference to illegitimacy as the current act defines child to include an illegitimate child. Consistent with current demographics and family law legislation all children are treated as children of their parents regardless of their parents' relationship.

It's now my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 3, the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any speakers? Question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

3:40

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 10: Ms Redford]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to speak to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, an important bill to be sure, an important amendment that's been a topic of much conversation both in and out of the House, especially since 2008, the last provincial election, when there were so many irregularities, so much uncertainty, so many instances of barriers to access to the polling stations, misinformation, in some cases a sense of a bias in those polling stations with some of the returning officers, and then a lack of accountability around some of these issues. It's no surprise we've now seen a court case launched in respect to this and continued pressure on this government to actually step up and make this a more authentic democratic process.

The essentials of a fair democratic process surely are known to all members. It's no mystery that across the world democracy is being embraced at very different levels of implementation. Surely, the essential measures of a true democracy have to be examined, and they have to do with the freedom to vote unhindered, uninfluenced, and secret. They have to do with fairness to all, regardless of the physical ability. They need to be accessible. They need to be accountable for how they're being influenced by money or by political power. They need to reflect the public will.

On all these counts we have been pressing this government for many years, and it's now reached a point where government has finally taken some action. I commend the government for some of the changes that have been made, but they reflect a less ambitious approach than we had hoped to move the ball forward for a leadership role on democracy in the western world. It took a Supreme Court decision and constant scrutiny of the Legislature to get these reforms made.

I guess the question Albertans are asking is: what is it going to take to get some of the other issues addressed such as fixed election dates; the release of information on campaign financing for leadership challenges; the need to reform our campaign financing, where too much money is influencing the outcome of elections; the lack of enforced access to certain buildings and institutions to campaign; the ambiguity around special ballots to remedy some of the inaccurate or inaccessible situations; the need to address inaccurate polling information and contradictory information that people have received in the past; and, fundamentally, the need to reflect the public will? Again and again Albertans have asked: how is it that just over 50 per cent of people support a particular party and the Legislature reflects that party by 87 or more per cent? Clearly, this is not encouraging people to recognize the importance of being involved, voting, and taking the democratic process seriously.

We've made a number of recommendations in these areas and will continue to do so, having recognized that some of the following are positive changes in this bill amendment. It does, for example, make the Chief Electoral Officer responsible for appointing returning officers. We expect that to result in fewer biased returning officers because the Conservative Party has less opportunity to identify and name returning officers that support their particular political stripe.

It does provide for greater investigative powers of the Chief Electoral Officer. We hope that will result in more active and accountable results after elections.

It does provide now for anyone who wants to vote early to get access to advance polls. This is positive. People have very busy lives and complicated lives and should not be restricted from early voting if that's their choice.

It does provide that candidates who run a campaign deficit must dispose of that deficit and report to the Chief Electoral Officer when and by which manner that deficit is retired. This is positive. Wherever money is involved, there needs to be transparency and accountability.

It does seek to improve the safeguards of the list of electors, a positive change.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It does allow the Chief Electoral Officer to test new voting technologies and to conduct pilot projects. We need to find better ways, more reliable ways to get people's views and choices into the electoral system.

Several other innovative concepts include looking at election finance reforms. We hope that will result in significant changes to the way campaigns are financed and will properly reflect the priority of Albertans to see that money does not have such an influence on electoral outcome.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would re-emphasize that we on this side feel very strongly about the need to be transparent about leadership campaign financing and are puzzled why this would not be a priority for a government that says that they want to be accountable and transparent. We still look forward to seeing the leadership information from the last Conservative leadership campaigns. That would restore some level of confidence.

We would again encourage the government to look at fixed election dates, which have been embraced by most other jurisdictions, to try to address the question of fairness and to honour our commitment to fair reflection of the public wishes.

With respect to trying to reflect more accurately the public will in the Legislative Assembly and the numbers of members each party has, we would also encourage the government to consider amending this to include a citizens' assembly to examine other forms of voter procedures, including proportional representation and the single transferable vote and other such options that have been explored across the country. There is an appetite in Alberta to look at other ways to improve the accountability of government, the balance in government, the responsiveness of government to the public wishes. By not holding a citizens' assembly, it appears that this government is entrenched in protecting its own interests, its own party interests, and is not interested in advancing an accountable, transparent, fair, and accessible democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you wish to speak?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak at second reading to Bill 7, the Election Statutes

Amendment Act, 2010. I think it's certainly a very interesting act, and it raises a number of very, very interesting issues that relate to the conduct of elections in this province.

While it's very, very substantive and there's no question there are a number of changes included, it does unfortunately represent what I would suggest is a huge missed opportunity on the part of the government. The amount of work that had to have gone into amending this legislation and rewriting it so significantly probably means that we're not likely to get a similar level of reconsideration of these issues for some time. I think it was an important opportunity for this government to address so many of the democratic deficits that exist in this province.

3:50

Unfortunately, I think that what we have before us, although it's really thick, really represents a huge case of denial on the part of this government in terms of the crisis that we face in this province with respect to the health of our democratic system. I suppose some people might say: "Hey, you know, we continue to get a majority government. That's all that's got to happen, and anything beyond that is not our responsibility." But others might suggest that all political parties have an interest in maintaining the health of the democracy within which they live. Tomayto, tomahto, I suppose, but not quite.

Let me start, first of all, by talking about a couple of the things that are simply not addressed in this piece of legislation at all. I think that it's important to talk about those things. Just because they weren't part of the recommendations put forward by the departing Chief Electoral Officer doesn't mean that they weren't something that required significant consideration by members of this Assembly.

The first issue, of course, simply relates to the issue of spending limits generally in elections. We need look no further than south of the border to see what happens when spending limits are not put into place and what a travesty it makes of the health of the democracy. We know, by looking south of the border, that money is an integral part of the democratic system. One ought not to consider any kind of substantive entry into politics unless one is able to raise millions and millions of dollars, which, of course, means that the vast majority of the country is disqualified from engaging in electoral politics.

We need to be careful that we don't move in that same direction here in Alberta. There's a lot of money in this province, and it's concentrated in certain areas and in certain industries. When it comes to how it is you fight an election on a particular issue, frankly, I think that the people that get to vote should be the people that get — well, I'll talk about donations in a minute. But in terms of spending I think that everybody should have an equal opportunity to make their case and that the people of Alberta, conversely, have a broad range of choices from which to select.

The problem is that when you get into a situation where one group can outspend another group 10 to 1 or, you know, if the problem continues to grow, 15 to 1 or 20 to 1, well, then, once again a serious malaise starts to creep into the democratic system, that we all rely on. We end up in a situation, basically, where people who don't have a lot of money essentially feel like they have no voice. They get frustrated, and they get angry, and they disconnect. When they start to disconnect from their political institutions, they start to disconnect from other things soon after, too, because they just feel as though they have no way of having their opinion heard or reinforced by the community within which they live.

It's really a problem in the long term that we're not looking at spending limits. There are spending limits in other jurisdictions. Obviously, federally there are spending limits. You know, if we can

have spending limits federally, why can we not have spending limits provincially? There's no good reason for it. Other provinces have spending limits. What it does is that it provides for a certain amount of equity.

You still have to be enough of a going concern to raise a reasonable amount of money to be able to communicate with the people whom you want to have elect you, but it's not a question of buying up 30 seconds of ad time for every commercial break on every station for 40 days before an election. If you can start to do that, you're going to let your dollars drive your democracy. That's not what people envisioned when they first put together their democracy, but that's, unfortunately, what's happened. Communication is electronic, and it's expensive, and you either buy the opportunity to give your message or you don't get the opportunity to give your message.

What needs to happen is that there needs to be some equity of access there. As I said, other jurisdictions have considered it. There's been no conversation about that at all in this province, and certainly it's not been included in this legislation. As I say, I believe it represents a huge missed opportunity. Of course, we have a provision in this legislation to refer one particular matter, which, frankly, was a no-brainer, in my view, and should have been included in this legislation, the whole issue of leadership funding. There's already provision for that to be referred to a policy field committee, so why not refer the whole issue of election financing and spending and donation? That is a huge issue that has significant import on the health of our democracy, yet it's not there.

The other thing that, of course, we would have wanted to have seen in this as well is a cap on who can donate. People vote; corporations don't. People vote; unions don't. Again, we have several jurisdictions in the country where the only people allowed to donate to election campaigns are individuals, and this makes sense because they are the ones that get to vote. The same type of limit should be included in this legislation, and it's not. Once again, it's a huge missed opportunity.

I also mentioned, of course, the whole issue briefly about disclosing the funders for leadership contests. In the face of what I've just said, where we have a growing situation where the dollar buys the vote in this province and where we have the Wild West of donation laws right now, one of the few things we have is at least to find out who gave what, yet that's not the case when it comes to the issue of leadership campaigns. That, in my view, is a huge loophole in our legislation, and it's something that I think hurts the interests of the people of Alberta.

As you know, we had a leadership campaign recently for the leader of the third party. Notwithstanding that party's many stated commitments to opening up electoral reform and the whole sort of populist notion that they, theoretically, represent, they soon found the first opportunity to refuse to disclose who it was that was funding the successful candidate's campaign. I think that's something that Albertans have a right to know about. Obviously, the current leader of the governing party also went through that process, as did many members of the current cabinet who also were in a leadership campaign who refused to note who it was that was funding their campaigns.

Again, this is important public policy information. Disclosure is something that can only benefit the health and robust nature of our democratic debate. Again, I see no reason, actually, for hiding that information unless there's something to be embarrassed about. So it's really a tremendous disappointment that that recommendation was not included in this piece of legislation.

There are a number of things, of course, that ought to also have been put into this legislation. One that's close to my heart is the

whole issue around the obligation of the Chief Electoral Officer to provide information about the election process and the right to vote and all that kind of stuff. Unfortunately, we have a Chief Electoral Officer who has been quoted in the media as saying that he doesn't believe it's his obligation to do anything to increase the participation rate of voters in this province, which is absolutely shocking to me. That, to me, would sort of be like the minister of health saying that he doesn't have any obligation to make sure that people can still get heart surgery in the province. It utterly surprised me when I heard that that was the position of this person and that he thought it was appropriate to be considered for the position of Chief Electoral Officer with that position.

4:00

Nonetheless, I think that we have a real problem. We've talked about in this House before that, you know, a 40 per cent turnout for an election is something that is not seen in pretty much any other developed jurisdiction. There are many jurisdictions where people would question the health of the democracy, the human rights of people involved in those jurisdictions, all that kind of stuff, where you would not see a voter turnout as low as 40 per cent. So it is something that we as legislators ought to be ashamed of because it's something that we all need to take very seriously and take some responsibility for.

Since the Chief Electoral Officer reports to this Legislature, I would have wanted to see an Election Act that tells that Chief Electoral Officer that he must focus on the issue of increasing the full democratic participation of Albertans. So that, again, is a huge oversight on the part of this legislation. There are so many smaller pieces that I imagine we'll have a chance to talk about in more detail as we go through this legislation, but I do want to say that those are very, very critical ones for me.

Of course, I have a lot of students who reside in my particular constituency. There were recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer to deal with the confusion around the ability of those people to vote. Basically, we have this ridiculous situation right now that it depends on what time of the year the writ is dropped to determine whether a good portion of the people in my riding are told or not told by the Chief Electoral Officer that they are entitled to vote in my riding. There were several recommendations geared towards addressing the confusion around the right of students in Alberta to cast their ballot, and those recommendations were entirely ignored by this government, as reflected in this piece of legislation.

Again, going back to the previous issue, the fact that we have so very few people voting, study after study shows that if people do not vote in their first election that they're eligible, they are much less likely to vote at all. So here we are again. We're not telling the Chief Electoral Officer to encourage participation, and we're not making any of the changes that were recommended in order to facilitate the full participation of students who are at university or college at the time that the election is called.

Once again, if anything, it appears that the government believes that the best direction is to continue downward, that what we need to do is actually perhaps reduce even further the number of people voting. Personally, I think that if I were over on the other side of the House and analyzing some of the polls that have come out recently, once I got over the fact that I was very likely to lose my position in government, I might want to think about actually increasing the number of people coming out to vote in an effort to save my bacon, as it were. Nonetheless, whether it's self-interest or whether it's for the good of democracy, increasing participation is something that we should all be supporting, and that is not something that is reflected at all in this piece of legislation.

I will say that it is good that the long-standing banana republic-esque practice of having the Premier's office appoint deputy returning officers is finally eliminated. I can't imagine how many decades it's been since it has been eliminated in every other jurisdiction, but thankfully we have at least moved forward on that particular embarrassment.

Again, this is a very big bill, and I would have expected a little bit more than that. So that's where we are at this point on this bill, and I look forward to more opportunity to debate in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. I'd first like to thank this member for bringing forward this beneficial piece of legislation, which serves to reinforce Alberta's democratic principles. Bill 7 amends the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. These pieces of legislation are probably the most important pieces of legislation on the books since they lay down the very foundation for our democratic society.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe in making the system more democratic, and Bill 7 contributes to this. The bill proposes to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers along with changing the way enumerators are appointed, eliminating the need for the involvement of a constituency association or political party. It only makes sense from both a democratic and an administrative point of view to give the Chief Electoral Officer full control of the electoral operation. Additionally, this bill would serve to recognize the broader investigative powers of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Speaker, within the proposed bill advance polls will be open for those who for any reason want to vote early. This will allow anyone who may be working or travelling on election day the opportunity to exercise their democratic right as their personal schedule allows. The opportunity to vote for your choice of candidate is inherent in all democratic societies, and Bill 7 enables all voters a greater ability to do so. My constituents along with all Albertans will find Bill 7 very beneficial.

This bill does not address fixed election dates or allow Albertans to vote at any polling station they choose. I personally would like to see these issues addressed; however, I recognize that at least the first issue has already been addressed in this Assembly. Bill 7 will provide ways for the Chief Electoral Officer to delve into the use of new voting technologies. These technologies could enhance Albertans' options on how they can vote in the future. This is particularly important, Mr. Speaker, in view of the large number of snowbirds who are away for extended periods of time, particularly in the winter months, but still wish to exercise their franchise.

Mr. Speaker, this bill calls for greater accountability in the electoral system. More detailed information will be kept about candidates' revenues and expenditures. Furthermore, the time periods over which records must be kept will be extended to allow for more thorough scrutiny of past election results.

Other amendments in Bill 7 include technical improvements and stricter rules which enable the Chief Electoral Officer to better monitor and enforce financial reporting. These measures greatly increase the transparency in the electoral process. As the Minister of Justice and Attorney General stated, "It is important to balance updated and streamlined processes with maintaining the integrity of the system." This legislation provides all Albertans who vote as well as prospective voters the right to do so in the most accountable, efficient, and transparent system possible.

I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow once again for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. I wholeheartedly support this bill, and I urge all of my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for St. Albert and would like to ask him a question. To my mind, we all have a certain amount of influence in this Legislature as part of our being elected, but I think it goes without saying that the people with the most influence in this Legislature are the people who are leaders. Of course, that would be the leader of the government, the Premier, the leaders of other parties, and all that stuff. I was wondering if he was disappointed that money raised in leadership contests was not made to be mandatorily disclosed in this Election Act like they are in many other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I don't have any strong opinions on that issue. I think it probably needs to be studied a little bit more and some fair rules brought in. I guess I would say that it's not an issue that I feel really strongly about. I don't see any major abuses. I certainly agree with the comments of one of the previous speakers that the system in the United States on leadership and elections in general, where the costs get totally out of control, is certainly not acceptable.

I guess that from my own personal perspective when I ran for city council five times and other previous election endeavours, I've always attempted to maintain a modest election campaign fund, and I think in the end it's paid off. I'm not sure that Albertans or Canadians are particularly impressed with the big-spender concept that is very evident in the United States.

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) still allows for some time. Any other hon. member wish to take that offer?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow on the bill.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to get up and speak to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I, too, agree that although some changes were made that could be seen to be putting us a little bit in the right direction, when I look at the overall substance of this act, I look at this as an opportunity lost. We could have really done so much more to make democracy a more vibrant and more real thing here in Alberta and to really add to an open and accountable not only government but democratic process that would keep us in line with many other jurisdictions who have moved ahead of us in making democracy available to their citizens as well as sending a message to the electorate that our elected officials will be, like I said earlier, open and accountable, that we will have a system where donations are tracked.

As we all know, money influences the game we all play in this Legislature. We can be naive and bury our heads in the sand and pretend that it doesn't, but let's face it: at the end of the day it does. A little further on in my response here I'll go into some of those instances where we appear to be burying our heads in the sand.

As my cousin David Vamrobaeys from Lethbridge says, this is a bill that has a whole lot of feathers and not a lot of chicken to it. You know, you pass a lot of these smaller, innocuous sort of things, but you avoid the real meat of some of the issues that are brimming here in Alberta, some of the real nice pieces of flank or veal that might be available that the electorate could have really bitten into and really seen the system change here. Let's talk about those.

Right now Canadian soldiers are engaged in efforts across the world not only to uphold democracy, but they put themselves in harm's way to establish democracy, to try and encourage a voting pattern that exists, I guess, in this part of the world, yet we miss an opportunity like this to really strengthen our democracy as much as it could be. It's with that dichotomy in mind that we're willing to send our soldiers on and Alberta citizens take part in that effort to protect democracy. Yet that we here in Alberta through this legislation haven't done all that we can to protect and encourage Alberta citizens to get to the polls is really shocking.

I, too, would like to comment. You know, we have hired an individual here in Alberta who is in charge of elections who has openly stated that it's not his job to encourage Albertans to vote. Like the other member from the fourth party, I am shocked and stunned beyond belief that those words would be uttered and outright actually admitted by a person that has been put into a position such as his by this Legislature. It is beyond the pale that a person would consider taking the job that didn't understand that his mandate would be to try and foster democracy, to try to get people to pay attention to what goes on in this House, to pay attention to what happens in their communities, to go out and cast their ballots once every three, four, or five years when this Legislature goes to the polls. It strikes me as being one of those unbelievable things that, I guess, could only happen here in Alberta. Really, it was just shocking.

Nevertheless, let's look at some more of this bill. Like, I asked the hon. Member for St. Albert if he was concerned that people who run for leaders of their respective parties were not required to put who financed their campaigns out for public view. That to me is one of those things that this bill should have addressed. If we look at the recent leadership run of the governing party, many people took part, and many people funded those campaigns. There was an actual winner, and I would be interested to know who financed that campaign just, you know, because it's important to me. It's important to democracy that not only do things appear to be on the up and up but that they actually are on the up and up.

I think a lot of people in our society, rightly or wrongly, look around and they say: those politicians are bought and paid for. By not stopping things like this, by not demanding that we have this information open and available for the public, we're encouraging the public actually to believe that. We had an opportunity here in this bill to say to Alberta people: "No. Here are the contributors who have contributed to a leadership campaign. You can see by the legislation we've brought in that it was not unduly influenced by these campaign donations, and that's the way we do things. These people supported me for being an open and accountable government, to bring in good legislation on behalf of all Albertans, and you can check my donation list to see that I wasn't unduly influenced."

That doesn't happen here in Alberta. We have remained with our heads buried in the sand, which says: I guess a person who becomes Premier of this great province doesn't have to show who donated to his campaign because we're just going to be naive and assume that money wouldn't influence that person, that there's no way in the world that money would influence that person. You know, I think that's wishful thinking.

We missed a real opportunity to send a message to all Albertans and, in fact, people around the world that we do things differently, that we stand for open and accountable government. That was one thing that really disturbed me about this act, that we could have done this and it would have led to a better democracy.

Let's also look at campaign financing. I would agree that we should have certain limits on the amount of money that various parties can spend in any one election. Now, we look at other jurisdictions around the world, and there are many places, such as Ontario and otherwise, who have brought in those rules, that have limited the number and amount of money individuals and groups can give to any one party or candidate. Those are good. I believe they allow for money to do as little damage as possible, I guess, to the electoral process. We all know we all have to run campaigns. Yet at the same time we know that when those forces like are happening down south — when large amounts are given to those campaigns, it's pretty tough for an individual to, I guess, turn a blind eye to those types of influences. We could have closed some of those loopholes there.

4:20

Let's look at the last two provincial elections. The governing party spent twice as much as all other parties combined. It is probably a little bit of sour grapes, but I think it's also a little bit of the fact that democracy is a little different here in Alberta than it is in other places. It ensured that they had more money for television, telephone polling, brochures, billboards. I even heard that some people were paying for door-knockers to go door to door and having polling done from other areas.

Mr. Liepert: Name names.

Mr. Hehr: It's word on the street, word on the street.

Mr. Liepert: Name names.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I could name names. The hon. Energy minister wants me to name names, but I won't.

Mr. Liepert: Then withdraw.

Mr. Hehr: I won't withdraw it either.

Anyway, let's just say that the governing party was spending a lot of money on a lot of different things to get the election results necessary. There we go. I said it and didn't name any names.

Nevertheless, we had an opportunity to do some things better here in Alberta. The names I'll name is that this government didn't do as best they could've to try and stop some of those things that in other jurisdictions in the world we look at and say: that shouldn't happen. Like the hon. member from the fourth party said: banana republics, where, I guess, the political influence on the system of government is not as progressive as it is in some jurisdictions.

Hey, I've been pretty vocal. I would have liked to have seen fixed election dates come into play here. I think it would be a good move, that many jurisdictions have already instituted, that would allow for less gerrymandering with election dates and would allow for, I guess, greater certainty in preparation and allow for our people running elections to do things a little bit better.

If I can comment, I am happy that, you know, no longer will the Premier of this province be selecting the people who are going to be in charge of the polling stations and who are in charge of the electoral districts, those types of things, which should have been changed years ago. I am finally happy that those things have occurred.

Like I said at the beginning, there are a lot of minor things done in this bill that, I guess, eliminated some of the minor troubles that were out there. The government can say: oh, we brought in that electoral amendment, and it straightened everything out, and everything is all in line. It's just that this bill could have been so much more. This bill could have really done a lot more things to have open and accountable elections and encourage Albertans to vote. Needless to say, I'll be putting forward a few amendments in further reading that, hopefully, will maybe bring this bill a little further along, where we should be in Alberta.

Those are my comments at this time, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for questions.

Mr. Snelgrove: The hon. member doesn't want to name any names of how campaign contributions could have affected them. He probably talks in here about why people aren't interested in politics. You don't have to name names. Could you just give us an example of when you or anyone has been able to connect a campaign contribution to a benefit that an individual or group got from making that contribution? You don't have any names to name. I'll grant you that. You can fictitiously make that. What do you base your hare-brained suggestions on that this corruption is going on all over Alberta? Can you give us one example of where someone has contributed to any political party – you might have more knowledge in yours; maybe it's over there – that has received a benefit back because of the contribution they made.

Mr. Hehr: Common sense leads me to the conclusion that political donations can influence the decisions that are made. Call me crazy, but I stand by that decision. I believe you can bury your head in the sand and ignore the fact that money can influence this process. Feel free to do that, hon. minister. I won't be one of those people who will bury his head in the sand and will deny that money influences this process. I guess that's my answer.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps on another topic, then. Is he one of those who's burying his head in the sand when he totally ignores the fact that all the discussion about leadership rules and processes has been referred to an all-party committee of the House, that all parties can participate in the preparation of appropriate rules and legislation relative to leadership? Is he burying his head in the sand when he totally ignores that?

Mr. Hehr: No, I'm not. That was mighty brilliant of the government to do such, but let me tell you something: it would have been just as easy for you guys to legislate it right now.

Mr. Hancock: Obviously, you don't want to have any input, and you'd just like us to make the decision.

Mr. Hehr: No. Because I could input right now and . . .

Mr. Snelgrove: Don't want to be accountable.

Mr. Hehr: Oh, yeah. You're right.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, any comments or questions? Standing Order 29(2)(a) still has some time for questions.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on the bill?

Mr. Taylor: Yes. On the bill, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Anything that's this thick deserves a little more chit-chat at second reading than what it has gotten so far, I'm afraid. So it's a little premature to call the question. [interjection] Did I hear something from the minister there? No? Okay. Let me get back to the point because I'm wasting my time, if not yours.

Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, at second reading. I mean, there's a lot that's good in this bill. About the only thing that you might be able to quibble with there is why it took this government so long to bring these amendments in. I think there are a couple of things that are missing, and I don't quite understand why they're missing. One that is key for our side is the fact that fixed election dates are not in here. I don't quite understand why this government seems to want to run from that concept as much as it does. You know, there are fixed election dates in other provinces in this country.

I will acknowledge that one of the traditional benefits in parliamentary democracies of the government getting to choose the timing of the election call within a five-year window is that the government can choose an election date that it estimates, surmises is beneficial to its re-election chances. That puts the opposition, clearly, at somewhat of a disadvantage if the government surmises or guesses right. The history and tradition of parliamentary democracy is such that there are lots of times when governments clearly guess wrong on the timing of those elections, because they go down to defeat.

However, the coming trend, if you will, I guess, seems to be that more and more jurisdictions are looking at fixed election dates, and there seems to be, I think, some real wisdom in doing that. A fixed election date gives everybody, all participants, whether those are members of the Legislative Assembly currently who would seek re-election or people who are considering getting involved in politics – the hon. President of Treasury Board made a comment a couple of minutes ago about the fact that a lot of people don't want to get involved in politics, and there are many reasons for that. One of them is, I think, the uncertainty of this sort of thing.

4:30

It would give everybody a clear understanding of when the next election is going to be, it would give everybody a clear understanding of how long the mandate of current government is, and it would give the government a clear understanding of how long they had until the next election to get their legislative agenda through. I don't know how this is going to go over on that side of the House, but it might actually lead to some planning. You never know.

Having fixed election dates does not necessarily put the government at a strategic disadvantage simply because they have to go to the polls every fourth year on the 32nd of April, or whatever the hypothetical date is. It does give the opportunity to work towards that. I think that, on balance, the positives to fixed election dates outweigh the negatives. It helps to take care of some of the fundraising issues, I think, some of the campaign donation issues, in that it gives everybody a clear indication of how much time they have to try and raise money for the next election.

On the subject of election contributions, I too would like to see some limits of the sort that many, many other political jurisdictions practise that we do not. I mean, Alberta is the only province that doesn't limit spending by political parties or individual candidates, and it has one of the highest, richest maximum ceilings for what an

individual or a corporation or a union or an organization of any kind can actually donate to a political party. It's a rich enough limit: \$15,000 in a nonelection year, and it doubles to \$30,000 in an election year.

Fixed election dates, again, Mr. Speaker, to come back to that, would give everybody the same amount of time to raise whatever kind of money that they wanted to raise for their re-election bid, their first election bid if they were thinking about it. Obviously, different people would have different levels of success or not and different parties would have different levels of success or not at fundraising. That wouldn't change, I don't think. Again, there's no reason, I believe, not to go to fixed election dates.

The other thing that this bill does not do is allow Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division. I find that kind of curious, Mr. Speaker, because one of the things it does do is it opens up the possibility of voting using the Internet, at least on a trial basis if such a measure were to be agreed upon by a committee of the Legislature. Now, Internet voting has some drawbacks. There is always the possibility that somebody could hack into your system on voting day and elect the Rhinoceros Party. You know, it could happen. Well, you'd have to re-create the Rhinoceros Party, but there you go. There is a danger posed by counterfeit websites, viruses, the possibility that a disruption to Internet service could affect the election result.

Mr. Liepert: Worse yet, the Liberals.

Mr. Taylor: Worse yet, re-elect the PCs. Anyway, we can get into that partisan stuff later, hon. member.

And it's not cheap. In 2006 the Dutch parliamentary election actually experimented with Internet voting, and about 20,000 people took advantage of it to vote on the Internet. The cost worked out to about 90 euros, which would be – what? – about \$120, \$130 Canadian per voter. It's not cheap, but, I mean, things rarely are in their early incarnation, especially when they involve technology. I could certainly imagine that the cost of Internet voting would come down and the safeguards would be built in to the extent that we could in the initial experiment, the initial trial run, and they would get better as time goes on.

You can't help but think that we can't be too, too terribly far away. If we want anybody to vote at all in general elections, we can't be too, too far away from the day when Internet voting is a reality. Well, if Internet voting is a reality, I think pretty much by definition it means that if you are a registered voter and a citizen in the province of Alberta, you can vote on election day from any computer with an Internet hookup. If that's the case, why wouldn't we go to a system that allows Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division?

We are a province of footloose people. We are a province of people who travel a great deal, who move around and travel around within this province for work, for business, for play, for recreation, for a multitude of reasons, and who travel outside this province a great deal as well. Since it strikes me that one of the purposes of Bill 7 is to encourage voter participation – not the only purpose, obviously, but one of the purposes is to encourage voter participation – I'm a little puzzled as to why they wouldn't have gone that route, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I might get an answer. I might get a very reasonable logistical explanation when we get to committee stage on this bill for that issue. I don't know. So I'll put out that challenge right now to see if they can come up with one. But if they can't, then the question remains: well, why not do that?

There are many things that I could talk about that are not in this bill. Certainly, we on this side of the House in the Official Opposition are on record repeatedly as favouring the establishment of a citizens' assembly to look at different ways of electing governments, compare the first past the post system that we use today to differing forms of proportional representation, report back with recommendations, and then put those recommendations out to the people of Alberta in a referendum, as has been done twice in the province of British Columbia.

I would remind the House that the first time it was done with a very high threshold set, it came very close to passing, and the second time that it was put to a referendum, it didn't come within a country mile of passing. The people of British Columbia said: ah, no, we're not interested. So I have no idea, Mr. Speaker, whether the people of Alberta would be interested in going for some form of proportional representation or not, but it seems to me that that might be a worthwhile experiment to go down the road of doing the citizens' assembly.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky is making scary faces right now. Not that he's scaring me with his face, but he's going, "Oh, you don't want to go there, hon. member; that's fraught with danger and problems," and he might be right. He might be right, but I'm just saying that it might be worth considering.

Also, it's worth pointing out that talking about such things as proportional representation is never really in the interest of the party in power because the party in power is doing just fine, thank you. The system works for the party in power. Why change it? The party or parties out of power, when they talk about democratic reform and proportional representation and stuff like that, you know, based on the history of snake oil salespeople in this line of work that we're in who have come down the pike in the last generation talking about the need for democratic reform and as soon as they get within sniffing distance of the trough, they flip-flop and sign up for the government pension plans and all the rest of that – I mean, it does stretch credibility to stand here and talk about the need for democratic reform. Of course, that's what opposition politicians are going to be likely to say because we're not in power, which means that the status quo didn't work as well for us the last time as it worked for you guys on the other side of the House. So it's a bit of a red herring.

Quite frankly, I would love to see a government get into power, or get re-elected for that matter, based on making promises to voters that have to do with the price of eggs and where people live their lives on a daily basis, that, you know, has nothing to do with promising or talking about democratic reform at all, get into power and then, if democracy needs some reformation, just get in there and do it and let the people judge how you did at that.

4:40

Of course, this is an opportunity. This bill is an opportunity to do exactly that. It's an opportunity for the party in power to go down that road of democratic reform should they wish to. Acknowledging that it might be perceived to be in their best interests not to, I'll understand if they don't come back with any amendments along that road, along the road of a citizens' assembly or something like that or something that leads to proportional representation.

I do hope that when we get to committee stage on this we can take a look at fixed election dates and we can take a look at allowing Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division. I think that will take a bill that otherwise, although it may be several years late or several decades late in the case of having the Chief Electoral Officer actually be responsible for appointing the returning officers, nevertheless is a good bill – I think it could make the bill even better.

We shall see what comes down the pipe at committee stage, I guess, Mr. Speaker. With that in mind, I will support this bill in principle, and we will see where it goes from here.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to hear, I think, perhaps some more thought on fixed election dates and the fact that with a fixed election date, although it doesn't particularly work in the United States — it would work better here because I'm thinking of how it's fixed in municipal — you don't have to spend your time campaigning. You know exactly when that election is going to come, so you can work flat out until maybe three months ahead of that election. I wondered if the member might have comments on that.

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

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for that question. She has some experience with fixed election dates as a former city councillor in Lethbridge. Municipal elections, of course, happen as regular as clockwork, every three years in the middle of October. I do note, at least in the city of Calgary, that not much real work seems to happen after about the end of June or maybe the end of Stampede in an election year, but in most election years work gets done up until that point. I think, hon. member, that you're right, that it does shorten down the effective campaign period and lead to more work getting done by the legislators.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I say "the effective campaign period" because, of course, if you want to get technical about this, we have a 28-day campaign period at the provincial level. The writ is dropped, and 28 days later the people go to the polls and decide whether they want to renew our contracts or not for another four years. So, technically, that's the campaign period, 28 days. But I think everybody in this House knows that the campaign period starts much earlier than that when election dates are not fixed and the rumours start to buzz around about, "Oh, it could be this spring; it could be this fall; it could be next spring; we'd best get ready," and all the rest of that.

Part of campaigning is not just physical door-knocking and raising of money and so on and so forth. Part of campaigning is the beginning to angle so that you can get your point of view out to your constituents, take advantage of the fact that, you know, if you're seeking re-election, you already have a bit of a platform, I suppose, to stand on, a bit of a podium to stand behind, whereas your competitors don't. It differs from MLA to MLA, no question about it, but one has to wonder in that last year or so before the election comes along how much work really gets done and how much is just political posturing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional comments? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just got a quick question. I missed most of the speech, and that was very unfortunate, but now we're talking about fixed election dates a little

bit. In one of my fed-prov meetings down east I was visiting with the minister from Ontario at that particular meeting, and we talked about fixed election dates. They have them in Ontario, of course, so I asked her about them. She said: well, when I was in the opposition, that was a wonderful idea, and we did get it. Now, as you know, the Liberals are in power in Ontario, and she made the comment: I don't think that's such a good idea now. I wonder if you have any idea how this Liberal would have that opinion that it's such a bad idea now?

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's because it doesn't really much matter whether you're a Liberal or a Conservative or a New Democrat; when you're sitting on the opposition side of the House, things look one way, and when you're sitting on the government side of the House, things sometimes look differently. But what we really should be talking about here on the question of fixed election dates, hon. member, is not whether it looks favourable from the opposition side of the House or unfavourable once you're in government but how it looks to the people.

The people in Ontario know that every four years or whatever the date is — and I don't know off the top of my head what the fixed election date is for the province of Ontario, but it's about every four years — at a predictable interlude they're going to be going to the polls, and they get to weigh in on the performance of the governing party, whether it's a Liberal Party or a Conservative Party.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, but the time has elapsed for this segment. Additional participants? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to speak on Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This bill will go some way in addressing the issues, the concerns arising from the 2008 provincial election. The election was nothing but chaos. The writ was dropped, and returning officers were even scrambling to find a place for their offices. The returning officer for Calgary-McCall, because I was in the real estate business, approached me to find a place for her. She ended up finding a house out in the industrial park, and that's where she set it up.

This bill will address some of those issues because returning officers will be in place long before the election, and it will make the Chief Electoral Officer responsible for appointing returning officers. Enumerators will also now be appointed in a manner that will eliminate the need for particular constituency associations or political parties. Enumeration will be done earlier. In the last election 27 per cent of the voters were left off the voting list. When they went to vote at their respective polling stations, they were told that they're not on the list, that they have to go to another polling station; that's where they vote. The voters went from polling station to polling station to polling station. Finally, they got frustrated, and they went home.

That, in turn, caused people to wait long. There were long lineups. I talk about Calgary-McCall from personal experience. There were long lineups, and people were just getting frustrated. The word got out that it takes too long to vote, and voters were discouraged. They said: heck, we're not going to go vote because it takes too long. This bill, I think, will go a long way to addressing those concerns if it's enforced properly.

This will provide greater investigating powers to the Chief Electoral Officer because the Chief Electoral Officer will be able to do things on the spot, I believe.

It will allow anyone who wants to vote early. We had a concern on special ballots. Only the people who were travelling or people who were sick or couldn't make it on voting day or were

going to be out of the country could vote. At the advance poll we had big lineups, especially in Calgary-McCall. It was done in the basement. The room wasn't big enough, and there were stairs going down to the basement. People were standing for hours and hours in the lineup to vote at the advance poll. This will go to address that concern when people can for any reason vote at the advance poll.

4:50

It will bring Alberta in line with the Supreme Court of Canada decision. This means that prisoners have the right to vote.

It seems to strengthen third-party advertising legislation at first glance.

Candidates who run campaign deficits must dispose of the deficit and report to the Chief Electoral Officer when and the manner by which the said deficit is retired. In addition, the time period over which records must be kept has been extended. The legislation will also require more detailed reporting concerning revenues and expenses. I was looking here, Mr. Speaker. What if one cannot eliminate the deficit in the time provided? I don't see any provisions for the candidate. How is he going to handle his or her deficit situation? What will happen in that case? Will there be fines, or they won't be allowed to run again? Will there be some kind of deduction they can make when they file their income tax return? That's the concern I have.

It also seeks to improve safeguards to the list of electors – it changes the kind of information voters can present at polling stations; government-issued ID, for example – and allows the Chief Electoral Officer to test new voting technology and extend the voting hours, maybe, in upcoming by-elections.

Several other innovative concepts regarding electoral reform will be deliberated upon by the Chief Electoral Officer along with the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

Bill 7 doesn't create fixed election dates in the province, nor does it allow Albertans to vote at any polling station in any electoral division.

Leadership campaign financing rules are not included in the bill as the government is expecting to have the matter studied by the policy field committee. I think that they should have been included in this.

The impact. Bill 7 proposes many amendments for streamlining future provincial elections. Of particular note is the extension of the right to vote to correctional inmates as per the decision of the Supreme Court.

The change also opens the possibility of voting using the Internet at least on a trial basis. There are concerns with Internet voting: the possibility that disruption of Internet service could affect the election result; the danger posed by counterfeit websites, viruses, and hacks into the election system. Above all, it's not cheap, Mr. Speaker. In the 2006 Dutch parliamentary election the cost of approximately 20,000 Internet votes was 90 euros per voter. That's about a hundred and forty bucks per vote.

Most importantly and more substantially, the government has been forced to eliminate a previously held regulatory power which allowed the cabinet to appoint the constituency returning officers, a post that was intended for the neutral supervisor of election activities in each constituency. This was an issue during the 2008 election, when it was revealed that many returning officers had PC connections. Many of the enumerators, those responsible for assembling voting lists, also looked like political appointments. This will make it more impartial. The perception out there was that that's what was happening. Real or perceived, this will take that perception away.

Campaign financing remains a concern. Alberta is the only province that doesn't limit spending by political parties or individual

candidates. Ontario, for example, utilizes a formula which limits campaign spending by a political party in each constituency to 70 cents per registered voter. Alberta has no similar provisions to limit spending, so the governing party remains free to raise and spend as much money as they feel is necessary. In the last two provincial elections the Progressive Conservatives spent twice as much as other parties combined. This ensured that they had more than enough money for television advertising, telephone polling, brochures, and billboards while opposition parties struggled to make contact with the electorate.

Nothing was done in the Elections Statutes Amendment Act to limit campaign and political donations. Alberta allows for greater contribution amounts than most provinces. For example, in Alberta the upper limit for a party contribution is \$30,000 during the election year compared with \$15,000 in Ontario.

Finally, other provinces and the federal government have banned donations from corporations and unions. Alberta has no such ban.

However, the most glaring omission is the lack of changes to the leadership finance rules surrounding the leadership contributions to candidates of political parties. The Premier has never fully disclosed all the financial backers who contributed \$160,000 to his run for the PC leadership. Interestingly, the leader of the Wildrose Alliance has refused to name her financial supporters even though it is well known that the petroleum industry has reportedly poured \$250,000 into the Wildrose Alliance leadership. Even other leadership contenders haven't fully disclosed their donors from the last leadership. Instead of instituting full disclosure of leadership donors, the amendment will refer the matter to a committee of the Legislature. I think that that should have been included in this bill to put some teeth in this.

It doesn't talk about proportional representation, or PRep. Critics of the proposed reform have stated that many of the changes do not go far enough, that they are not comprehensive enough in their totality. That said, the act adopts the majority of the 144 changes proposed by the former Chief Electoral Officer from the report that was commissioned as a result of the dismal voter turnout of the last provincial election. Although the reforms aren't an exhaustive response to the previous recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer, they do represent a much more ambitious attempt than most would have predicted.

Well, I think, you know, that by drafting some amendments to this bill for Committee of the Whole, we can improve on this bill. My concern is: is this really the best the Premier could come up with for this legislative session? These are just, like, some housekeeping additions. It only took years of public pressure and a Supreme Court decision and constant scrutiny in the Legislature to get some reforms made. What are Albertans going to have to give up for fixed elections and the ability to cast a ballot anywhere they want?

I think this is a step in the right direction, but I'd like to know more about the 52 recommendations that the government chose not to address. This makes it a little less of an ambitious approach than I would have liked, but it gets the ball moving in the right direction, at least. I believe that with this bill, Mr. Speaker, we will not face all the problems we faced during the last election. This will go to address lots of the issues faced by the electorate, by the returning officers, by the polling clerks, and by the voters. I hope it does what this bill is intended to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

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

Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested in Bill 7. In my mind, it is a very small step forward to returning democracy to this province, a very small step. The previous Chief Electoral Officer had recommended 182 recommendations. It's now been watered down to 144 suggestions, which then turned into 92 accepted to be a part of this bill. As I've said, it's a very small step.

One of the reasons that I'm making these comments is because for many years I have had direct experience as a deputy returning officer. I've been in charge of municipal, provincial, and federal elections. I've watched over the years how the integrity of this process has been diminished and manipulated, and it's very disappointing. I was always proud of the integrity that not only myself but everybody that worked on elections displayed.

I'll use an example which can't be used anymore because we don't have the physical manpower to do the enumerations as we used to, and it sort of overlaps what happened in the last election, where the people that worked for the returning officers were all basically okayed by the Premier's office. But in the old days all of the parties presented a list to the returning officer, and we who decided who would be the enumerators, who would be the deputy returning officers, the clerks on the day of the election would choose one from each party, and if there was an enumeration team – and it always was a team – they were never ever from the same party. They also knew that when they became involved in the election process, they therefore did not become political.

I know that the two returning officers that we've had in southern Alberta, both federal and provincial, when they were given these appointments many, many years ago – and they still are there – did not become political. In fact, I'd be surprised if they even had party membership in any party because they took their responsibilities as being nonpolitical extremely seriously.

One of the other things that I'm disappointed to see. Even when I was the returning officer and the deputy returning officer, we did have three parties, and the British parliamentary system really is based on a two-party system, which is why first past the post works very well in a two-party system. But Canada and certainly all the provinces will never ever go back to a two-party system. I believe that without the ability to change the way we vote, we will never truly have a representation sitting in this House of what people really want, and I believe that that's why they're very frustrated and don't bother to vote at all.

I can recall many places that I went, both in this election and the last election, where people were proud that they hadn't voted because it was all such a bunch of malarkey. It wasn't quite the word they used, but I think we all know what they were trying to say. They just had absolutely no interest in voting because they didn't think their vote counted. In fact, in some of the examples that were used to me – and, again, it's a phenomenon in Alberta, and as we all know, Alberta is a phenomenon unto itself – they said: why bother going to the election when the election was won at the nomination? Everybody knew that if they won the nomination, they'd win the election, so why bother voting? In fact, that person could be elected by winning the nomination by a very small portion of the people that were actually allowed to vote.

Actually, Alberta does have an interesting history. In 1921 the Liberal government instituted a block voting system for large cities. MLAs from Calgary and Edmonton were elected. Now, please remember that this was 1921, and the Calgary and Edmonton that we know today certainly did not resemble the cities at that time. They were elected across the city rather than in single-seat ridings. Each city elected five MLAs, and the winners were chosen by polarity; that is, the candidates with the most votes won.

In 1926 the United Farmers of Alberta government maintained at-large voting in Calgary and Edmonton but replaced plurality voting with proportional voting, and the voters ranked the candidates in order of preference. The winners were those with the highest preferences. What B.C.'s citizens' assembly had actually recommended when they went to that vote was the system called the single transferable vote, or the STV. For the rest of the ridings in the province, what we would consider rural at this point in time, a system of majority voting was adopted. A single candidate was elected by preferential ballot, the winner being the one who received 50 per cent plus 1 of the first or subsequent preferences. The system was called the alternative vote, or the AV. This change in the voting system fulfilled a promise by the United Farmers of Alberta made in their successful 1921 campaign.

But in 1959 the Social Credit government abolished the province's mixed system of proportional and majority voting, returning the entire province to the single-member districts with plurality voting. As we know now, it was certainly first past the post. The government of the day changed the voting system without public consultation and was accused of making the change out of self-interest. I can't imagine why anybody would have thought that. As I've mentioned, it's basically that first past the post does work with a two-party system.

One of the things that I've already mentioned is enumeration. As I've mentioned, we don't have the manpower because women are now working and more people are working out of their homes. Also, in those days – and I certainly sound like I'm coming out of ancient history here, but it's not – actually, we didn't have Sunday shopping, and we didn't have as many 24-hour jobs, where the husband babysits, the wife works, and vice versa. It was a totally different society in those days, so it's not really fair to compare what's going on. The enumeration was very important. The people who enumerated also worked that poll, and they knew who should have been on that list and who shouldn't have been on that list and were more than capable of accepting people that could come forward and say: you didn't get me. They knew exactly what was going on in their polls.

But in this day and age all cities, towns, hamlets do census counting in order to receive the provincial dollars based on their population. It's always been a question to me: why are we not using these lists for electoral purposes? They could be turned over to the electoral office, which, in fact, would then be able to adjust those lists to reflect the boundaries in the province. They could use those, and they are updated all the time, so they wouldn't have to rely on old enumeration lists. That was a huge problem in the last election.

We've also talked about fixed election dates. I totally support fixed election dates for a number of reasons. I would suspect that for the feds it should be five years, the province four, and municipal three, which sounds like a lot of elections on top of each other, but it does work at the municipal end.

5:10

The other thing that would work with fixed elections: it would be a much better, more efficient process. The returning officers would know ahead of time when it's going to be. It would help them rent the proper facilities so they're not scrambling at the last minute. They would have lists that were up to date, which, as I've mentioned, didn't happen in the last election. The electoral lists were an absolute mess: a disgrace that a returning officer should have to try to scramble at the last minute to make sure that they're proper so that their deputy returning officers could use them. They would be able to hire the proper help that they need. What those people should know is that once they start working for an election, which is the 28-day period and perhaps a little bit ahead of it, they're not allowed to

be political. The printing that they have to do, the training of the staff: it would be a much more efficient manner to run elections.

I know that we all as politicians have always said that the next election always starts the minute you've been elected and that you're running again for the next time. I suppose that would always be a part of your thinking, but I really believe that fixed election dates would help concentrate the focus on the work that is to be done. I know that it worked well in municipal politics. You'd work, and then it would be maybe the last couple of months ahead of when you knew the election was going to be that it kind of simmered down, and then people would run for election or not.

There was some conversation about the money that can be raised or not raised. Should there be a cap on it? I would like to certainly see a cap on it if for only one reason, that we can give everyone, basically, an equal chance. I think we all know that it's getting more and more expensive to run elections because of the price of television, because of the price of printing. Often the elections turn out to be only for the rich and the connected. I would like to see everyone have a chance, and if they have to raise \$60,000 for a campaign, that's a fair amount of money for the average person on the street. The average person on the street has a great deal to offer to this House in terms of what they would bring to the table and their discussions.

One of the other things that could well happen in the future – and I know that it's been discussed at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities – is the fact that, basically, in Canada we do now have big city states: Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, maybe those three. At this point their budgets are actually larger than their provincial budgets, so they really are big city states. I think that's another reason why we should be perhaps looking at how we change the way that we elect people.

We talked about technology to make it easier. I feel strongly that over the last 60, 70 years we've had military personnel that have died so that we are allowed to vote. We should take it as a privilege as a Canadian to be able to vote in a free vote. Yes, as I've said before, people think their votes don't count, but even if they don't count, even if somebody went to a poll and put in an empty ballot, they have fulfilled what I feel to be the duty of a citizen of this country. Why are we going backwards to make it easier for someone to do what we should consider a privilege and a duty?

Technology, I think, can be too easily manipulated. I still can't believe that somebody in a four-year period doesn't have 20 minutes to go to a polling booth. The polling booths are all very easily situated. It doesn't take long. If the process and the efficiency of the system is there, it doesn't take long to cast a ballot. Even if it's half an hour, half an hour out of someone's four-year life is, I think, something that we should consider to be a citizen's duty.

One of the things that has been talked about is everybody being allowed to vote at the advance poll. Again, I think that's something that is going backwards. Yes, make it easier for people to vote in case that they are going to be away. But I think that people who are going to be away for whatever . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time has now elapsed.

Ms Pastoor: I move to adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I've already called it.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. You mentioned a couple things I'd

like to just comment on and ask for further elaboration. You indicated you felt that technology or computer voting could be manipulated. I guess my question is: do you have a bank card, and do you use the ATMs? Do you have a fear that that is manipulated?

Secondly, you mentioned the municipal census and tying that in with the provincial enumeration. I certainly had some feelings for that as well. I note that I just got my notice from the city of St. Albert that they're going to be allowing you to do your census by computer this year. That will be good.

I guess the third comment is that I believe there was some discussion a few years ago about tying in the provincial enumeration with the federal enumeration, and that seems to have fallen apart.

Perhaps you'd comment on those three items.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, about my bank card. Do I believe that there's any privacy left in this world? No, I don't. Yes, I use it because I have to. Do I trust it? No, I don't. I think all we have to do is look around at any kind of articles that appear in newspapers on how easy it is for really smart kids to hack in. I think they've even hacked into the Pentagon. So, no, I don't trust it too much.

As far as the federal and provincial enumeration lists being put together, I think that's a good idea, but I still think that I would prefer to use the census lists because they are up to date much better than if we relied on the federal enumeration. I think the last federal election wasn't any great shakes either in terms of enumeration lists that were actually up to date. I think it's already been mentioned how much we move in this province, particularly in the northern areas, where people are working in the oil field but actually, say, may vote in Lethbridge.

I think that this is a problem that should be addressed. Again, it would be addressed perhaps in the same fashion as we would address students who are living in a different riding than where they actually reside. Again, our oil workers are working in a different place than where they actually would reside and be allowed to vote.

I'm not altogether sure that the two enumeration lists would be as successful or perhaps as accurate as if we could use our census lists, that are updated, certainly, on a very regular basis.

Thank you very much for those questions.

The Speaker: Additional questions? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just further to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I think I agree with you on the municipal census. It's certainly probably the most accurate method, but it seems like it's always such a waste of money if we do it at three different levels at different times. As I think you indicated, the municipal is usually an annual enumeration. That's likely to be the most up to date. I guess I think that we could really save some money and provide some much more accurate information by doing it once every year at the municipal level. Of course, the province pays for that anyway.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I would totally agree with that thought. Rather than using enumerations as we are now, maybe we should be sharing that census information with the feds instead of going back the other way. I really believe, as I think you do, that that is a much more accurate list, that stays up to date, particularly on the rental side of the enumerations because renters often move.

Certainly, for someone who's done enumerations over a number of years, if you go to a house, you think that there's only one, but then all of a sudden you discover there are these three little sort of secret rooms in the basement, and there are all kinds of people living there. Often the people that are living together probably shouldn't be, but that's another whole issue. You do finally get the numbers if you are very, very diligent in what you do, but as I've said, that can't happen. So I'd like to see the census list being shared at the federal level rather than the other way coming around because I just don't feel the federal lists are of huge value, particularly on the rental side.

5:20

Mr. Kang: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has raised some concerns about electronic voting. What kind of fraud can occur with electronic voting?

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time has now elapsed.

I'm prepared to recognize additional speakers.
Should the question be called?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 11: Dr. Morton]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief in rising to debate the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010, Bill 8, in second reading. This is a very straightforward bill, and we deal with this virtually every year: housekeeping changes to parallel federal amendments; changes to functional currencies to allow corporations to file their tax returns in the currency they keep their accounting records in, so if they keep their accounting records in U.S. dollars or euros or whatever, they can now file their tax returns in that currency; some changes to fairness provisions, which will allow the minister to waive interest or penalties in certain situations; and really the last change that it makes is a clarification regulation regarding refund interest rates, where they're being reduced by 50 per cent for all prior periods and going forward. This is straightforward. We see no problems with this legislation, and we will be supporting this bill at second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in light of the progress today and the hour I move that we adjourn to 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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Issue 19

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Parliamentary Counsel	Stephanie LeBlanc
Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Chris Caughell
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Gordon H. Munk
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I have the great pleasure of introducing Dr. David Carter, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Dr. Carter served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, member 518, for 15 years. He was first elected on March 14, 1979, for the constituency of Calgary-Millican and then subsequently for the constituency of Calgary-Egmont in 1982, 1986, and 1989. He served as the ninth Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for seven years, from 1986 to 1993. He was the second ordained clergyman to serve as Speaker. He is presently the pastor of St. Margaret's Anglican church in the Cypress Hills. I'd ask him to please rise, and I would ask all members to join me in welcoming Dr. Carter once again to our Legislature.

Gracias, Sr. II Moderador. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some important visitors. Seated in your gallery are several members of the Chamber of the Americas. During a visit to Alberta this group has toured through the oil sands and is meeting with business and government leaders in both Edmonton and Calgary.

I would now ask these visitors to rise and remain standing as I call their names: Senator Juan Fernando Perdomo, representing the state of Veracruz in the Mexican Senate; Mr. Gilberto Cisneros, president and CEO of the Chamber of the Americas; Mr. Michael Reeves, president of Ports-to-Plains; Mr. Joe Kiely, vice-president of Ports-to-Plains; Mrs. Gaynelle Riffe, member of the Ports-to-Plains board of directors; Mr. Juan Carlos Gideon, manager of Latin American sales, Continental Airlines; Mr. Cal Klewin, executive director of the Theodore Roosevelt Expressway; from the city of San Angelo, Texas, city council member Mrs. Charlotte Farmer, assistant city manager Mrs. Elizabeth Grindstaff, and director of economic development Mr. Fran Owens; Mr. Carlos Moran, senior partner of Goodrich Riquelme; Mr. John Town, manager of HW Process Technologies; and Mr. Bob Sivertsen, president of Highway 2 Association. Sr. II Moderador, I would now ask for them to receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. However, the Home Educators of St. Albert I do not believe are in the gallery just yet. I hope to have their list of names later.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 45 visitors from Wetaskiwin Centennial school, grades 5 and 6. They're here today to check out the Legislature and see what happens here. For most of them it's their first visit. A few of them indicated to me that they have some interest in being an MLA, so I'm sure they'll be watching with great interest the proceedings this afternoon. Along with them are teachers and group leaders and parents Mr. David Luck, Mr. William Black, Ms Anne Wiebe, Ms Eva Rasmussen, Ms Karen Mason, and Miss Julie Larocque. I believe they're mostly in the public gallery. If they would all please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the schools in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre are wonderful, but this particular school is very interesting because it is both French and Spanish immersion. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly 59 visitors from Grandin school, l'école Grandin. With them today are instructors Michael Leskow, Sra. Teresa Campanaro, Sr. Wilson Gonzalez-Rico and a number of parents and helpers: Sandra Leskow, Nicholle Carrière, Carol Chovanec, Donna Chovanec, Marta McKenna, and Sra. Teresa Talarico. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a group of visitors from Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are from St. Gabriel school. There are 20 students. They're very polite and respectful. St. Gabriel school is another great community school in our constituency. The group today is accompanied by teacher Svetlana Sech and also by assistant principal Jackie Flynn. They're in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly nine members and staff of the Capital Region Board. The leadership shown by all members of the board has been tremendous. When they started drafting this plan, Alberta was fully engrossed in an economic boom. The capital region was experiencing tremendous growth. Alberta had never seen anything like it. The long-range growth plan they have developed will ensure that the capital region is ready when growth returns. I want to thank each and every one of the members for their efforts, for rising to the challenges set out by the Premier in 2008 and exceeding everyone's expectations. The consistent leadership being shown by these members is helping to build a stronger Alberta.

Some members and staff with the Capital Region Board are with us today. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Mayor Stephen Mandel, city of Edmonton; Mayor Greg Krischke, city of Leduc; Mayor Rob Wiedeman, Parkland county. Board alternates with us today include Councillor Ed Gibbons, city of Edmonton, and Councillor Ben Van De Walle, town of Morinville. Administrative staff joining us today are Shari

LaPerle, Capital Region Board; Kathleen LeClair, Capital Region Board; Yolande Shaw, Strathcona county; and Sharon Shuya, Capital Region Board. Please give our guests the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the Alberta government is focused on supporting those most in need, and I'm proud to say that there are many Albertans who are also committed to doing this. Today I have the great honour of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful Albertans who continue to show their dedication to helping those in need. Bruce Murray is the vice-president of the board of directors for the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured, or ARBI, in Calgary, and Judy Stawnychko is their executive director. ARBI is truly a grassroots organization. It's well known for innovative, caring, and individualized rehabilitation programs for Albertans. ARBI was the first community-based rehabilitation program in Canada for people with severe brain injuries, and it began right here in this province. I would now ask Bruce and Judy to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a young gentleman named Jeremy Kulba. Jeremy is the son of Audrey Dutka, who works in our office. They are both in the members' gallery. If I could ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mrs. Phyllis Kocuipchyk and Jane Ke, seated in the public gallery. Phyllis is a constituent of Edmonton-Calder, and Jane is currently in Alberta learning English. Jane is here today to learn about the work that we do in the Legislature and will later be required to give a 30-minute presentation to her ESL class about the experience, so I would encourage her to keep her seating plan handy. I'd ask these two lovely ladies to rise to receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy St. Patrick's Day to you and everyone else.

I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some special guests that are, actually, from Banff-Cochrane and our riding of Little Bow. They're here as members of the Southern Alberta Energy from Waste Alliance. It's a coalition of waste management jurisdictions, representing over 60 municipalities from northeast Calgary down to the American border, from B.C. and halfway over to Medicine Hat. They also represent close to 300,000 people who are committed to researching and

recommending for implementation new technology applications for recovering energy from waste materials, including SRMs.

I would ask them to rise as I introduce them. Included in this group in the public gallery are Mr. David Schneider, who's a councillor with Vulcan county; Mr. Rod Ruark, who's a councillor with Vulcan county; Mr. Paul Ryan – that sounds a little Irish – who's a councillor with the MD of Bighorn; and Nadine Epp, our executive assistant from Vulcan county. I am pleased to have them here. They've been doing meetings at AAMD and C and meeting with some people in the building. It's the first time for a lot of them. Please give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Iftikhar Ahmad, general surgeon, who is working for his sponsorship and assessment for his final registration to be part of the Alberta health care system for this great province of Alberta. He recently moved to Alberta with his wife and five children from Dubai in the belief that this province is the best place to live, work, and raise a family. He is seated in the public gallery. I would ask Dr. Ahmad to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Keith Donlevy, who is seated in the public gallery. Keith, who was born, raised, and educated in Alberta, is a successful small-business owner and operator in the hospitality industry. Keith firmly believes in Alberta's boundless potential and long-term prospects. I'm pleased to have my guest join us today to witness the legislative proceedings. I'd ask that Keith now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly representatives of local 41 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Local 41 represents workers at the Grey Nuns and Edmonton General hospitals. They care deeply about the families and senior citizens who are enduring long wait lists and decreased affordability. They urge this government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care spaces. I am pleased to have my guests join us today to witness the ongoing tabling of their postcard campaign. I'd ask that they now rise as I call their names: Lola Barrett, the president of local 41, Hans Gronau, Pat Clermont, Avril Vigilance, Kathy White, and Darleen Olinyk. I'd now ask the Assembly to join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce Norm Dupuis, the director of lumber grading for the Alberta Forest Products Association. It's his first visit here, and I'd like to welcome him to the Assembly. Please rise and be recognized by all of my colleagues.

Members' Statements

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

Chamber of the Americas

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I had the pleasure of introducing several members of the Chamber of the Americas who are visiting us today. I'd now like to share with the Assembly some background on this group and the important role they play in Alberta's economic development.

The mission of the chamber is to promote businesses in the western hemisphere by supporting free trade and connecting businesses to one another, to investors, and to governments. They achieve this goal by sharing information and cultural understanding across international and national boundaries, and as such, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that they decided to visit Alberta and to see the benefits Alberta can bring to businesses throughout the United States and Mexico as well as to see the role they can play in developing Alberta's businesses. After all, international trade goes both ways.

Mr. Speaker, the trip by the Chamber of the Americas' leaders highlights the value of international partnerships to Alberta's economy. As many might have noticed in my introduction, several of the leaders of the chamber are also board members of Ports-to-Plains, one of Alberta's successful trade partnerships. What this means is that through our membership with Ports-to-Plains we also get access to valuable international organizations like the Chamber of the Americas. In turn, greater access to international organizations means we have greater access to not only international markets but to international information and cultural understanding.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is now in a place where we can work with organizations like the Chamber of the Americas to sell our province internationally. After all, Alberta has a lot to offer on the world stage. We all know this. The key has always been getting the word out. I believe that the partnerships that we develop today with groups like the Chamber of the Americas will go a long way toward improving our economy tomorrow.

I would also like to again thank my guests for coming here today and hope they have an opportunity to see the best of what Alberta has to offer.

Thank you.

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

Deputy Chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to welcome the new deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Since July of 2008 I have had the tremendous privilege of holding this position, and during that time I have been privileged to have a role in communicating to government on behalf of the Premier's council. I have shared information with my colleagues about matters of interest to the disability community across our province.

As a member of the council I have also had the opportunity to provide insight and to contribute to the development of the council's current strategic plan and to begin work on one of the plan's strategic directions, the promotion and implementation of universal design principles throughout Alberta. Another highlight for me was copresenting the council's awards of excellence at Edmonton's International Day of Persons with Disabilities celebrations over the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very grateful for the opportunity to have worked with the council, a truly dedicated group of Albertans from across

the province who have an unrelenting commitment to listening to members of the disability community and acting to concretely improve the lives of Albertans with disabilities.

That is why I'm honoured today to be able to welcome the new deputy chair for the council, my colleague and friend the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. He is currently serving as chair of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Workforce Planning Committee, and he is a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Standing Committee on Private Bills, and the Standing Committee on Health. Like many hon. members, I regularly turn to this member for insight and advice, and I am confident that his experience and dedication to Albertans will be a great addition to the council.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and, again, congratulations to my colleague on his appointment.

Oral Question Period

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

Funding for Long-term Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has demonstrated repeated failures of management of the public purse: major reorganization in the health care system, \$1.2 billion deficit, millions spent at the Foothills and Lougheed hospitals and no new beds, and now \$2.3 million sitting four years in Chantelle Management with nothing to show for it in Grande Prairie. To the Premier: how many more boondoggles with taxpayers' money can Albertans expect before this government becomes a responsible steward of public money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, under my government we are committed to a publicly funded health care system. We're also committed to having the most innovative and modern public infrastructure. This includes facilities both for health and continuing care and for those that, unfortunately, have gone perhaps through a brain injury and that are young and need special residences as well. We'll continue on the path of building those facilities that are necessary.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, people are really suffering out there. That kind of a response is very disappointing. We're talking about financial mismanagement, Premier. Will the Premier stand up and reassure Albertans that he'll put an end to financial waste and mismanagement?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has committed to a five-year increase in funding for a publicly funded health care system – the only jurisdiction. That speaks to health being the number one priority for all Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, how many other projects through this affordable living initiative have been similarly mismanaged, as the care centre in Grande Prairie has? Albertans deserve some answers.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the issue that was raised yesterday. This project is proceeding. The project received a number of different cash allocations from different funds to proceed. They had to get, of course, approval from their municipality. They also had to have a contract in place from Alberta Health Services. All of those now are in place, and they're prepared to start building here in April of 2010.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question.

Centralized Ambulance Dispatch

Dr. Swann: In the last year this government has flip-flopped with helipad closures, acute-care bed cuts, mental health services cuts, and capital funding schemes. This is a ridiculous number of mistakes in a short period of time. The latest fumbled health initiative by this government is the emergency medical services transition. To the Premier: who is responsible for this latest failure in the EMS transition? Is it the minister or the superboard?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the policy itself was debated in this House. It was developed after months of consultation. There was a committee that reviewed ambulance services throughout the province of Alberta, and a decision was made. In some parts of the province it works well, and in some parts we've heard that there are some issues with a centralized dispatch service. We've heard from the locally elected officials. We heard from individuals that work in EMS and the first response. We've listened to them, and we've made the appropriate decision. We're going to review it, and within a few days the minister will work with those municipalities to make sure that it's done right.

Dr. Swann: How many people are going to suffer through delays in action as a result of this mismanagement? Civic leaders are now voicing concerns with dispatch and response time. Can the Premier say how much response times have grown as a result of this EMS debacle?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in some places it's actually been shortened. But there is a goal here to bring all of Alberta to a particular standard beyond basic life-support services. But, once again, Alberta is a big province. There are various municipalities. There are different needs. There are different radio systems in play today. We want to make sure that we have the best system in place, that both ambulance and fire and also the RCMP and municipal police forces are on the same band and can respond immediately.

Dr. Swann: For years municipal people have been saying this, Mr. Premier. This is not reassuring that we're now taking a quick reversal in decisions. Given confusion and policy reversals, Albertans are unsure who's running health care today. Will the Premier clarify who makes provincial EMS policy? Is it the minister or the board?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said before, the policy was decided in this House. It was debated. I believe that there were members across the way that even agreed with it. On the other hand, this is a policy that was decided here. We've asked Alberta Health Services to implement it. We've heard from locally elected officials that there are some issues in some parts of the province; other areas are working very well. In fact, I heard earlier today at the AAMD and C some of the elected officials say: in our part of the province it's working well. There may be others that need some help, a revisit, and that's what we're doing.

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

Renter Assistance

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the direct-to-tenant rent supplement program started in April, and by August the

program's funding had run out. This year funding for that program has been cut, and there are no plans to expand it. To the minister of housing: why is the program capped at helping approximately 80,000 people when the minister knows that 90,000 people in the province of Alberta qualify for assistance right now?

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for that question and his interest in this portfolio. The program is designed to help those most in need. There is a wait-list, and the priority base are those most in need. So a person may come on, and it's much like an emergency room. You help those who are most in need first, not necessarily those who have been in the longest, targeting the money where it's needed the most.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're talking here about 10,000 people on a wait-list who have already qualified. To qualify for housing supports, a person must be spending over 50 per cent of their income on housing and have less than \$7,000 in total assets. How is waiting months, years on a waiting list under these trying conditions in any way acceptable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would remind this member that this program is designed to be compassionate to individuals but also compassionate to the taxpayers. I believe that we have held exactly the right balance as to where we need to be for individuals who are actually in need. It's based on a points system that is objectively decided on an individual, case-by-case basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, if you really want to be compassionate to the taxpayers, invest in people so that they don't end up costing us more in the long run.

Given that 10,000 who qualify for rent subsidies, who are already qualified, are already waiting for assistance, with even less money budgeted this year, how many more people can we expect to be on that wait-list a year from now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We adjust this on a year-by-year basis. Again, I want to thank the member for his comments. I'm always happy to hear from constituents.

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

Senate Appointments

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have three Alberta Senators who will be retiring between 2011 and 2014. In 1989 Albertans sent Ottawa a message and elected Stan Waters as a Senator-in-waiting. He was soon appointed, as was elected Senator Bert Brown in 2007. The mandate of our remaining Senators-in-waiting expires November 2010. My question is to the Premier. Will you commit to holding Senate elections in conjunction with municipal elections this fall?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are three choices here. One is to hold the elections this fall. The other is to look at a separate election in preparation for the retirement of the Alberta Senators. The third is to wait for the 2012 provincial general election. We're reviewing the three different times because there are significant costs that will have to be borne by the government this fall if we're going to do it in conjunction with the municipal elections.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're taking too long to decide. Given that this October municipalities will be holding their elections, why hasn't the Premier let them know so that they can do it in an efficient and effective manner? The mandate is running out this fall. Let's have it done on time.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, if the member wants to agree to a special allocation of funds to assist municipalities to hold the election, then he has an opportunity to state his position in the House right now.

Mr. Hinman: I think that we are stating. But, again, their consultations and listening lack a bit of discipline here.

Given that this government says it's committed to ensuring that Senators-in-waiting are in place when the next three vacancies come open, when will this government do the right thing and let Albertans know we're having an election this fall for our Senators-in-waiting?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, not having heard whether the member wants to support additional expenses in hosting the election, I guess we'll have to make the decision on our own. That decision will be made soon in working with municipalities because there is a process to follow in terms of nominations and also the printing of the ballots.

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

Oil and Gas Revenues

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. On November 7, 2007, in this House, following the Premier's announcement of his royalty regime, he responded to a question by the then leader of the Liberal Party by pointing out the flip-flops of the Liberals on royalties: first opposing an increase, then supporting one. My question is to the Premier. Who's flip-flopping now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that we're not. The competitiveness review was done in light of the fact that there are significant changing circumstances with respect to both shale gas, which is a new resource that requires innovation and technology to reach, but most importantly the changes in the market. We have seen substantial gas finds in the United States, our number one market, trillions of cubic feet. That has put quite an issue at hand, and that's why we reviewed royalties but also the regulatory framework to ensure that we are the most competitive in North America.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Premier doesn't seem to understand what a flip-flop actually is, I'd like to ask him if he thinks that his government has been more consistent than the people that he criticized back in 2007.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when we did the first review, gas was, you know, \$9, \$10, good market conditions in the United States, didn't have the world credit crisis nor the world economic situation.

The circumstances have changed dramatically. I'm just very thankful that as Albertans we set a lot of money aside during those good times so that we can weather this economic storm without going into debt, as other jurisdictions have to, over the short term.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that we now appear to have a case of the pot calling the kettle black and given that both parties have flip-flopped more than a pair of fish out of water, will the Premier do the right thing and flip just one more time and demand the fair share he promised from the oil and gas industry?

Mr. Stelmach: I think, Mr. Speaker, supporting an industry that according to the Canadian Energy Research Institute will contribute \$25 trillion – \$25 trillion – to the GDP of this province over the next 25 years is a good decision. That's a significant contribution.

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

Noise Abatement

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For those of us who live in the centre of our cities or by major roadways, spring heralds the new season of modified mufflers, tuned pipes, and roaring hot rods. Now, the Edmonton police have worked with the Council of Motor Transport Administrators, the Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council, and Alberta Transportation to establish testing procedures and recommendations for new legislation to establish a provincial noise emissions standard [interjections], which could be applied in this House right now. It was expected in this spring sitting, but so far no sign of it. To the Minister of Transportation: please tell me this legislation is coming now.

Mr. Ouellette: No, Mr. Speaker, I can't tell her that. We are working with a national group on that to try to figure out how we could actually know when it's – I guess what I'm trying to say is: how are you going to enforce it? What type of equipment are you going to use to register it?

Ms Blakeman: The minister may not be aware, but this work has been done by the groups that I just outlined, so the noise limit and noise testing equipment has the Good Housekeeping seal of approval from everyone that's involved. What is the holdup? Why can't we get that legislation in time to have it passed before this summer season?

Mr. Ouellette: You know what? That's not what I'm being told. I disagree that people have agreed on whether or not we can use all that equipment and it'll work. In fact, just the other day I was told – this is second-hand, of course – that the police association is saying that they don't know how they would be able to enforce it at this point.

Ms Blakeman: They need the provincial legislation to do it. The municipalities cannot move forward without the changes in provincial legislation. Why is the government holding cities and their citizens hostage? You need to move on this one.

Mr. Ouellette: I don't believe we're holding cities or anybody hostage, Mr. Speaker. The cities can pass a bylaw any time they

want to handle their bylaw stuff. We are working with them, but we're not at the point that we're ready to bring in legislation yet. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Health Care ID Cards

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The health care cards in other provinces such as Ontario have pictures of the cardholders, much like the drivers' licences. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why doesn't the government of Alberta require photos on our health care cards?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I believe the question was about photos on health care cards. I'm sorry; there was so much yelling over here, I couldn't hear. If that's the gist of the question, I want to say to the Assembly that we have explored this idea before, Mr. Speaker, as a department, and what was found is that 97 per cent of Albertans over the age of 14 already carry a form of photo ID. So the idea was left as one to perhaps think about in the future but not one to act on immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: what is the estimated cost to Alberta taxpayers of fraudulent use of health care cards?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that we have very stringent rules and laws in place to help prevent any fraudulent activity when it comes to health care cards. One of the preventative measures we have, of course, is requiring physicians' offices to make patients who arrive show some form of ID. In other cases, if we're dealing with new people to the country or to the province, we also ask them to show their entitlement to be here and their residency and so on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Distracted Driving

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One in four accidents in Alberta is a result of distracted driving. People are dying. There have been studies and policy field committees, but there is no legislation on this. To the Minister of Transportation: when is the minister planning to introduce distracted driving legislation?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I agree that distracted driving has been a problem everywhere across the continent. I will say that most other provinces have done a knee-jerk reaction to one issue of distracted driving, and that's cellphones and electronic texting. We know that there are a whole lot of other distractions involved in distracted driving that cause problems. We're looking at the whole, big picture in order to try to get it right, that it can be effective.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the minister hems and haws, Albertans die on the highways. Now I'm asking the minister point-blank, and he refuses to answer. Again, when will the minister introduce distracted driving legislation?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as soon as we know that we have it right so it can be effective and we can enforce it. I don't know how many times I have to try to tell that to this hon. member so that he understands. When we can do the proper thing and look after the big picture, then we will get it done.

Mr. Kang: I'm asking the minister: why is it taking so long? Again, the minister hems and haws. Given that there was not a single mention of distracted driving in the operational plan for traffic safety, why isn't this a priority for this minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, traffic safety is always a priority for this ministry and this government. There's no sense putting in a law that doesn't cover the actual problem that you have. There are a whole bunch involved with distracted driving, and we have to be able to look after the whole big picture of it and get it done right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Bonnyville Primary Care Network

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bonnyville was the first primary care network, or PCN, in the province. To be a PCN, Bonnyville was required to submit a business plan to Alberta Health Services. This business plan means that Bonnyville is not able to apply for additional funding throughout the year should costs for vital services arise. The town of Bonnyville had a local nurse who recently became a nurse practitioner, but under the PCN they were not able to pay her as a nurse practitioner. As a result, they risk losing her to another municipality in Alberta.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the town of Bonnyville for being either the first or among the first to have a PCN. That's a very positive news story. In fact, the primary care networks that she's talking to operate on a basic per capita budget of about \$50 per Albertan served. The PCNs do have the ability to hire and pay for nurse practitioners in addition to the doctors.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next question is to the same minister. Will the minister compensate the town of Bonnyville the \$155,000 they pay the PCN in order to keep the nurse practitioner in the community?

2:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health and Wellness would not be able to do that directly, but there are a couple of options that you might want to pursue with your local PCN. One of them is to approach Alberta Health Services and ask for that funding that you've just alluded to. The other would be to ask the Bonnyville PCN network to request some additional per capita funding specific to the case you've just outlined.

Mrs. Leskiw: My last question is to the same minister. What action can be taken so that this government will support essential services in my constituency in the future?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. First of all, I want to assure the hon. member that we are always interested in removing any kinds of barriers that might be there that would impede either access to care or that would in some way, shape, or form potentially negatively affect the delivery of it. We're working with the College and Association of Registered Nurses and other stakeholders to eliminate barriers that might exist. I'd be happy to speak with you some more about it.

Anticrime Initiatives

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray has struggled to eradicate crime and the social turmoil that resulted from Alberta's last resource boom. To the Solicitor General. Evidence points to an increase in trafficking of narcotics across provincial boundaries, and unfortunately Fort McMurray has become a hub for this drug trade. What specific measures have been implemented to break ties between Alberta criminals and suppliers and clients across Canada?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suspect the hon. member would know about the ALERT teams, the integration of police forces that we operate in Alberta for specifically that type of cross-jurisdictional crime, that involve partnerships between the RCMP, the Edmonton Police Service, the Calgary Police Service, and Medicine Hat, and some of the great work they do in this province. They're active across the province, not just in the south.

Mr. Hehr: Again to the Solicitor General. *Maclean's* magazine has placed the community as Canada's 28th most dangerous city in 2009, just one spot below Calgary. Given our commitment to policing and community safety, how does the minister justify that Fort McMurray's crime rate is still so far above the national average? What are you doing to lower it?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member would know about ALERT teams. I just had some of the other innovative police work that we do in our province. I invite him to attend my estimates tonight, and we'll talk specifically about that issue.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thanks for the invitation, and I will be there.

Again to the same minister. Alberta's energy booms have created a self-sustaining crime wave in Fort McMurray and some other jurisdictions in Alberta. Given the cycles of our economy, why does Alberta have fewer police officers per capita than other provinces with comparable crime rates?

Mr. Oberle: Well, that's also a topic for estimates. The member will know that on a direct comparison of police officers that may be true, but we have many additional resources and innovative use of those police officers. Just the use of sheriffs, for example, is different than is done in other provinces. Direct comparison is very difficult, Mr. Speaker. I did invite the hon. member to estimates tonight. I didn't mean to speak out loud.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Oil Sands Image

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's the outcry against investment or the recent *Dirty Oil* documentary, we've been hearing increasing concerns lately about the development of Alberta's oil sands from certain stakeholders in certain places like the U.K. To the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: what are you doing to get the record straight in the EU?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, currently we have one of the hon. members, Drayton Valley-Calmar, over with the CCS group, the four providers. Actually, you might call them the winners of the dollars that are going to support their carbon capture and storage initiatives. We have been sharing information very expeditiously, and you would be pleased to know that this morning Ambassador Ross Hornby responded to the European Parliament to decry any kind of

allegation of dirty oil relative to the oil sands and cited the excellent work done on an environmental front to make improvements here. A lot of it's about sharing information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. It does beg the next question, which is: how is this affecting our trading relationship with the EU? Is it all negative, positive, or a combination of the two? Can we have some specifics, please?

Ms Evans: We have not seen an erosion; however, there has been some reduction in trade of exports from some of the 27 countries given the nature of our economy. I would advise a most interesting fact for this House. We've recently hosted the ambassadors from the European Union and from Italy. From afar they have viewed us and said two things about Canada: they wonder about the seal hunt; they wonder about the allegation of dirty oil. It begs the question: how are we communicating as a nation with the rest of the world? Part of what we're doing now is working with our U.K. and German offices to see if we can make sure those countries know fully what we're doing.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is for the same minister. Are we looking at a truly free trade agreement, or is it in name only? Will Alberta actually gain from this kind of an arrangement?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we will gain. It's our intent over the next few months to have a number of targeted missions to go and work with the EU since we know fully that they intend to provide us with a more regulatory framework on the environmental front. You'll see missions that will be targeted with very specific times, places, and people to meet so that we're not over there all at once. Obviously, our Minister of Environment will be looking at this as well as myself.

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

Centralized Ambulance Dispatch

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In its bungling bid to centralize health services and take away local decision-making, this government continues to create problems for communities across Alberta. Airdrie has already been forced by Alberta Health Services to divest itself of its prized integrated fire and ambulance service, and it turns out that so many communities are up in arms over the centralization of emergency dispatch services that the minister has gone into full retreat. My question is to the minister of health. Will he return the delivery of ambulance services and dispatch back to local communities, who were doing a great job?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, nobody is in any kind of retreat whatsoever. We're halfway through the process. It's timely to take a look and see how the first half has done before we proceed with the second half. Some municipalities have raised some issues, which the Premier enunciated earlier. So we're going to do that. On Friday I will listen to the story of Airdrie. My understanding is that last year or somewhere thereabouts municipalities were given a choice: do you wish to continue the way you're going, or do you wish to divest the EMS piece? My understanding – and it could be different on Friday, when I hear it from them themselves – is that Airdrie chose to divest.*

*See page 515, right column, paragraph 9

Mr. Anderson: Sounds like you've been talking to bureaucrats at Alberta Health Services. That has nothing to do with the reality of the situation.

Given that Albertans have already paid for the current call centre's dispatch infrastructure, ambulance units, and staff, how does the minister justify building new infrastructure, hiring new staff, and refusing to compensate municipalities for the money they have invested so that their residents have high-quality and locally run emergency response?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm open to listening to Airdrie's story on Friday; that's why I'm going down there. My understanding is that as this whole issue was being discussed, it was determined that ambulances were more part of the health system than they were part of the municipal system, so the choice was put on the table. I've enunciated that one group chose to divest. There are 20 or more others who are doing something different. We've got a number of different options on the table right now.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this government's commitment to socialistic centralization/control of everything is totally out of control. Given this government's desire to centrally plan and run everything it sees, can he tell this Assembly what will happen to valued locally run organizations, like STARS, who deliver much-needed air ambulance services across Alberta? Are you going to take them over, too?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, STARS is in good shape. They're doing very well. They're doing tremendous work. They're saving lives. They're improving lives. They will continue to do that.

With respect to the ground ambulances, Mr. Speaker, in the previous system, it's important to note, they were restricted by geographical boundaries. Those that have since been implemented now are not, which means that the ambulance closest to the scene of need will be dispatched under the new model once it's fully implemented.

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

Royal Alberta Museum

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, \$83 million in capital funding is budgeted for the Royal Alberta Museum over the next three years. According to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit there are no plans for how that money will be spent, whether it would be a new facility or collections or whatever. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: when will the minister produce a plan, a timeline, something on where the \$83 million in funding for the Royal Alberta Museum will be spent? What are you going to do with the money?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's decision on the Royal Alberta Museum will be guided by our desire to do what's best for museums and for Albertans. Part of the capital plan still includes the federal contribution. Over \$200 million has been committed to the museum project at this time.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much. Back to the same minister: how much of the \$83 million in funding for the Royal Alberta

Museum is from the federal government? The Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre has distributed flyers claiming that the federal Tory government has given \$85 million for the construction of the Royal Alberta Museum. So whose money is this?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we have been having discussions, and there has been extensive discussion of the contribution that the federal government is going to do. That announcement has not come forward, and if the MP from that area is out with brochures, well, I'm very happy to hear that.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Back to the same minister, then: given that the government has been fooling around with our museum long before they could use the recession as an excuse for doing nothing, what is the real problem here?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear, if I have to restate what I have said before. Part of the capital plan very much includes what the federal contribution is. The capital plan includes \$200 million, and we are currently looking at several options for the future of the museum. As I said before, there have been a lot of discussions, and there are still discussions to take place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Emergency Unlock Service Fees

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. I have a number of small businesses that operate in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne who provide emergency unlock services for people who have locked their keys in their vehicles. Your proposed licensing fees that are being considered are regressive. They are very high, and they make delivering this service cost prohibitive for my businesses. Will the minister consider lowering or abolishing this fee?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I don't think I can consider lowering the fees, Mr. Speaker. For the information of this House, they are \$500 a year. Those fees were set in consultation with the industry, and they're designed to be cost neutral to the government. However, I can advise the hon. member that in certain circumstances the registrar can consider an exemption to the fees.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, given that answer, what are those certain recommendations that you may make to these operators that are listening to my question here today? They're looking for the forgiveness of that fee.

Dr. Morton: Make the local MLA pay.

Mr. Oberle: Well, that is one option, Mr. Speaker, offered by the minister of finance.

Again, this is designed to be a cost-neutral program. The fees were set in consultation with the industry, and there is widespread support from the industry for this legislation, for those fees. Small businesses, if they can show that they perform these services on rare occasions, may apply to the registrar for an exemption. For example, this could apply to a single tow truck operator where unlocking vehicles is not the primary function of their business. I think that covers many of the issues that the hon. member speaks of.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for that answer, and that will help. On the bigger picture I think the regulatory burden is antiprogres-

sive, it's regressive, and it doesn't stand for our competitive model that we're looking for. Will you reverse this decision?

Mr. Oberle: No, I won't, Mr. Speaker. This legislation was developed in consultation with the industry. It follows legislation and regulations we see developing in neighbouring provinces. It's designed to provide safety and security to our communities.

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

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mayor of Calgary asked for and received increased borrowing powers for his city and actually for all municipalities because this government failed to make good on their \$1.4 billion infrastructure funding promise. Now, I'm sure the Minister of Municipal Affairs would like to spin that as a good-news story, but in fact this is yet another example of the provincial government happily downloading costs onto cities and towns and counties and municipal districts. To the minister: will the minister commit to covering the interest payments that municipalities will now have to pay to complete their capital projects with their extra borrowing?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that we had a lot of past dialogue on the MSI funding, and we've always been very, very open with municipalities that the funding would flow through. We're still committed to the full \$11.3 billion, but in the agreements with each and every municipality it was always subject to my availability of funding that I could turn over to the municipalities. So the decision that the city of Calgary needs to make is up to them. We've given them the flexibility to make those decisions that meet the needs of their residents.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, since this appears to be a new working relationship between the province and the city of Calgary, I wonder: is the minister also reconsidering his government's lack of support of the airport tunnel?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, last year the city of Calgary received \$115 million. We've added another \$139 million to the MSI funding for a total of \$254 million. They are over the next few years expected to receive \$3.3 billion in MSI funding. Those dollars are left up to municipalities to decide their priorities, and it's up to them now to use that funding for the tunnel if they choose.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in 2005 the Ontario government committed \$30 billion for infrastructure over five years, a funding program that they completed in only four, by the way, why is keeping an \$11 billion over 10 years promise so tough for this government?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the \$11.3 billion is only one program that's used to support municipalities. There are a number of us as ministers here that provide funding to municipalities. To use only \$11.3 billion is not fair. There are considerably more dollars that flow through to municipalities from this province than what he alludes to.

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

Workers' Compensation Appeals

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Industry Task Force, or ITF, represents approximately 40 per cent of the employers in Alberta who are covered by the Workers' Compensation Board. Recently they have been looking to streamline the appeals process and management. The ITF would like to see the role of the employer appeals adviser come to fruition. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. As the Appeals Commission reports directly to you, will you implement the role of employer appeals adviser?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Workers' Compensation Board, as the name would indicate, is designed to compensate workers for loss of income and to rehabilitate them back to work as soon as possible. It's meant to be a nonadversarial process. However, injured workers, even though many encounter the system only once or at a time when they're suffering from an injury, do need assistance with appeals, and there's a very good process for workers to appeal their claims.

Whether there is a need for appeal advisers now for employers I will answer in my second response.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. My next question is to the same minister. I'm told that WCB account managers have been identified as being possible resources for employers during the appeals process. Are the WCB account managers capable of performing the extra function?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, whether they are or aren't capable of performing that function is one question. The second question, the most important question, is whether there is truly a need to create an office of appeals adviser for the employers. It is meant to be a process that is not litigious, that is nonconfrontational and nonadversarial, but it is something that I'm willing to take into consideration and look at whether there is a bona fide need for such.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. My last question is to the same minister. Are you concerned at all that small and medium employers often do not participate in the appeals process as it can be very intimidating for the uninitiated?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult for me to guess how many employers are not participating by virtue of the fact that if they're not participating, I don't know about them. The fact is that the system is not supposed to be intimidating. It is supposed to be, as I said, nonadversarial. But I will look into the need, and if indeed there is a need for such a service to be provided, I will consider it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Education Property Taxes

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, \$316 million in education property taxes was collected in the city of Edmonton in 2009. That is a \$55 million increase since 2005, or an over 20 per cent increase. My first question is to the minister of finance. Does

all the money collected for education property tax in a municipality in any given year stay strictly within that municipality, or is it pooled by the government?

2:30

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows the answer to that question. Of course it's pooled. For the 15th year in a row, I believe – I'll check that – property tax mill rates were lowered, but if the assessment went up, the net amount paid could have gone up in some areas, depending upon higher assessment.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: if taxes were going only one way – and that's down – in this province, why did the education property tax in Edmonton increase by 20 per cent in five years, or over \$55 million? Put it on the record.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm worried that the hon. member may have begun his St. Paddy's Day celebration a little early. I just gave the answer to that. If the assessment goes up and even if the mill rate goes down, you can still get a net increase in dollars paid.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, tax increases are not a laughing matter.

Again to the minister of finance: can the hon. minister guarantee that all the money collected in education property taxes remains in the municipality where it was collected to fund public education? You're collecting more money in Edmonton and forcing schools to close. Answer the question.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, sometimes on St. Paddy's Day, in addition to the green beer, there are scrambled eggs as well, and that's what the member is doing. He's scrambling about 12 different facts. I've already given him the facts. Just keep them straight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Centralized Ambulance Dispatch

(continued)

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past number of months and again today at AAMDC's forum I received a lot of negative feedback from municipal officials, dispatch system operators, and concerned citizens regarding this government's decision to centralize ambulance dispatch services throughout Alberta and especially in northern communities. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are we centralizing ambulance dispatch services given that the decentralized system served the needs of my northern communities extremely well?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, as I think I indicated earlier, we're about halfway through that centralized process of dispatching. What I did was I discussed this matter with the folks at Alberta Health Services. I asked them, now that we're halfway through, if they could just suspend any further consolidations until we've had a chance to do a little bit of a review, see how things are working. I'd be happy to re-review what he's just mentioned – and that is the situation out in Yellowhead – to make sure that the services being provided are being provided safely and on a timely basis and with the greatest of efficiency of care for the patients that might be . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister answered my second question, that he will revisit the decision to return the dispatch service to Yellowhead county. My question would be to the minister. When can we receive a decision on this and proceed as quickly as possible?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I just want to be clear that I don't mind reviewing any situation. I mean, part of the job of a minister is to always look at that. Sometimes things are planned one way; they might come out a little bit differently in the other. We're hoping to not have to reverse any of those decisions – obviously, they were thought through quite carefully – but there are a few bumps that have been incurred along the way.

Now, I think the centralized model needs to be given a chance to work, and that's what we're doing with the first 17. The remaining 18 are where we're going to put a little more emphasis to see what we've learned from the first 17, but it doesn't mean that there can't be a little bit of crossover between the two.

The Speaker: Hon. member, an additional question?

Mr. Campbell: No questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Health Care Workforce Labour Utilization

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many other jurisdictions, we're facing some significant pressures within our health care system, and solutions are neither quick nor easy. It cannot be solved by simply hiring more bodies. One of the challenges at the forefront is labour utilization, particularly with nurses, and their self-regulated professional association has made a number of suggestions. My question is to the minister of health. How are you working with professional associations in the health care community to assess labour utilization and create an environment where the training matches the responsibilities?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is working in a very teamwork fashion. For example, we've recently established an Interprofessional Health Collaborative to look at how to better educate our workforce in terms of interprofessional practices. The collaborative is made up of people from postsecondary, from Alberta Health Services, from Covenant Health, employers. There's another one involved there that I just can't spot. Some private employers are involved as well. Some of the things they're looking at are potential curriculum redesigns and other practicum site issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of health: what changes do you have in mind to better encourage collaboration and integration of the roles of our health care facilities rather than segregation of these roles?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the purposes of the collaborative will be to look at possible propositions with respect to how we might shift the education and the health sectors toward better collaboration and better integration of effort. This is very much just in its initial stages. We're currently developing a specific work plan for the group. There will be more information on this available very soon. Primary care networks would be one of the initiatives, one of

the myriad of issues that different health professionals work very collaboratively on, and there are other examples.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental, again to the same minister: is your department able to measure optimality in outcomes and labour utilization, and if so, what processes are in place to do this?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think everybody in the Chamber and everyone listening, in fact all Albertans probably know that Alberta has been long respected for being a national table leader when it comes to issues like this, specifically with regard to how we can to the fullest extent possible utilize our health workforce's educational capacities better, its skills, and its experiences as a core strategy of moving forward as we work toward the Premier's vision of having the best performing publicly funded health care system in Canada. Next week, in fact, ministry and employer representatives from across the country will be gathering in Vancouver to share some of those best practices and measurements and promoting optimal workforce utilization.

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

Professional Corporations

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year this government made a significant step forward in allowing some professionals to benefit from professional corporations. British Columbia and Saskatchewan allow their professional corporations to have investment companies and family trusts as shareholders in their professional corporations. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: when will we have legislation allowing for investment companies and family trusts to be shareholders in our Alberta professional corporations so that Alberta professionals are once again placed on the same footing as our western neighbours?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think all members on this side of the House would share with the hon. member in the fact that we all want Alberta to be not only competitive but the most competitive province in Confederation. However, I must say that the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, I believe, was proclaimed just some two weeks ago, so I would suggest to this hon. member: let's give this act a chance to even be implemented, see how it works, and if indeed there is a need to modify it sometime in the future, let's consider it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we consider looking at these changes, is there a need for other government departments to work with Alberta Employment and Immigration to effect these changes?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, not only is there a need for all departments, but there's a need for all members of this House. If you're hearing that there are concerns with the act as it becomes implemented, do definitely let me know. Naturally, all ministries that deal with professional bodies such as the ministry of health and our Attorney General, that deals with the legal profession, would be some of the

ministries. And definitely finance. I imagine that, ultimately, there would be some impact on the ministry of finance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. And thinking of the impact on the ministry of finance, my final question is to the minister of finance. Will these changes to the rules for professional corporations have any financial implications for the province?

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I might begin by pointing out to the member that in assessing the competitiveness of Alberta vis-à-vis B.C. and Saskatchewan on this matter, you don't just look at the question of trust. You look at the overall tax structure. I'd remind the member and all members that Alberta's single-rate tax structure is the lowest top marginal rate of any taxes, lower than B.C.'s, lower than Saskatchewan's. We have no provincial sales tax, no capital tax, and no payroll tax. Let's look at the big picture when we talk about competitiveness.

Now, with respect to changes, Bill 53 cost us about a million dollars to implement. We haven't done the calculations yet on the change that the member is inquiring about.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wishes to supplement an answer given earlier in the question period. As per our policy, I believe that it was in an exchange with the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, who will then be given an opportunity for an additional question.

Centralized Ambulance Dispatch

(continued)

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I indicated that the city of Airdrie had divested itself. In fact, the decision has been made to divest themselves, yes, but it doesn't have an effective date until July 1, so it's not to be misconstrued. I want to make it clear, too, that the divestiture occurred after the contract didn't work out between them and Alberta Health Services. They came to some agreement – at least, that's my understanding – but I didn't want to leave a misimpression of the date of the divestiture. The effective date is July 1 of 2010.*

Mr. Anderson: Well, the reason that they've divested, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta Health Services has said that they have to purchase two more fully staffed ambulance units in order to comply with newly imposed AHS regulations. Minister, did your bureaucrats tell you about that? It doesn't sound like it.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that Alberta Health Services has brought in some new standards in some cases, and perhaps that's what's being referred to as regulations by another name. We'll review that, I'm sure, on Friday. It's important that as we look at this whole piece, we don't compromise patient safety or Albertans' safety in any way by putting too much pressure on one staff who are working in EMS and see that we leave somehow inadvertently no staff working in the fire and rescue side. We're working through those issues.

The Speaker: Hon. members, with that last exchange there were 119 questions and answers today. Twenty individual members were

*See page 511, right column, paragraph 10

recognized: nine from the Liberal opposition, two from the Wildrose Alliance Party, one from the NDs, and eight from the Progressive Conservative caucus.

In 15 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I had indicated that the Home Educators of St. Albert were going to be in our gallery, and indeed they were. I wanted to take this opportunity to read the group leaders' names into the record. They were Mrs. Kim Fisher, Mr. Glenn Fisher, Mrs. Adriana LaFrance, Mrs. Dawn Engler, Reverend Garry Engler, Mrs. Sherry Morrison, Mrs. Kathy Put, Mrs. Vivian Long, and Mrs. Barb Duteau. I know that they are still within our building, and perhaps they would hear the thunderous round of appreciation for their visit.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to advise this Assembly today that March 14 to 20 is being celebrated as Agricultural Safety Week across Canada. In Alberta agriculture is our largest renewable industry. I would like to encourage all Albertans to recognize Ag Safety Week and look for ways to participate. Plan-Farm-Safety is the theme of a three-year Canadian ag safety campaign, and it focuses on the importance of having a farm safety plan.

In Alberta we promote farm safety through a number of initiatives and a variety of awareness programs during Ag Safety Week and throughout the year. This week the government of Alberta announced that it is providing \$715,000 to ag societies to help them develop farm safety programs in their communities.

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's farm safety program works in partnership with rural community groups, industry, and other rural partners to deliver prevention programs that address farm safety awareness and workplace safety best practices. For our government farm safety is a year-round priority.

Agriculture and Rural Development's Safety Up! awareness campaign is targeted at new and young farmers. The Farm Safety Club educates children aged four to 12 years of age about safe behaviour on farms and works with 4-H to promote ag safety to its members. ARD provides \$120,000 to the Alberta Farm Safety Centre to support the safety smarts program, an in-class presentation to rural schoolchildren to increase knowledge and awareness of safety issues on the farm. This program, Mr. Speaker, reaches 50,000 students per year.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I call on all Albertans to promote and be aware of farm safety this week and to reinforce good farm safety habits all year long.

Thank you.

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

Fay Meikle

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday Canada lost its oldest veteran. Fay Meikle passed away on Monday at the age of 105. Born in Oklahoma in 1904, Fay was two years old when her family pulled up stakes, headed north, and settled in Regina. Fay moved to Taber in her 20s and enlisted as a Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Service in 1942. In fact, her son, John, joined the navy at the same time, the very first mother-son enlistment in the Canadian navy. Fay served on a number of ships during the war and received the Canadian volunteer service and war medal.

After the war Fay worked as a librarian for the Taber school division for over 20 years. She was quite a Renaissance woman, greeting Prince and Princess Takamatsu of Japan at the opening of Lethbridge's Japanese gardens, participating actively in the Taber arts and crafts club, reading, dancing, weaving, singing, and travelling the world. She spent the last years of her life at the Extendicare in Lethbridge. I was very privileged to have known her.

I feel tremendously honoured to have been asked to speak at Fay's funeral on Saturday in Taber. She was a remarkable woman who made tremendous contributions to her nation, her province, and her local community. As we honour Fay and her contributions, we should also honour all of those who have served in our armed forces from Confederation to today, upholding Canadian values, defending human rights, protecting the innocent, and setting an example with their commitment to honour, duty, and loyalty. We owe everything to Fay and veterans like her.

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

Olds College Partnerships

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Olds College has had some tremendous success in forming partnerships over the years with various businesses, industries, organizations, and individuals, all for the betterment of their students and our future economic prosperity in this province. Past partnerships include Henry Heuver, John Deere Ltd., the town of Olds, Chinook's Edge school division, the Calgary Stampede, the University of Alberta, and the Olds College Alumni.

Each year they celebrate their latest partnership success at their annual gala, which was held just this past Friday. This year's 2010 partnership of the year is the heavy equipment industry. As Chairman Bill Quinney so aptly stated: there are few groups that have had such a powerful, influential impact on Olds College in such a short period of time.

Mr. Speaker, it all started when a local construction firm approached Olds College with a need for a heavy equipment operator training program. It was soon realized that they were not alone in their need, that the need was industry-wide. Since the beginning five years ago over 38 companies and dozens of individuals have helped to expand this program to make Olds College a leader in heavy equipment industry training.

To date 213 graduates have completed their training to help replenish an aging workforce and fill many of the new positions created in Alberta's vibrant economy. Many of these graduates come from a wide variety of settings, including aboriginal and Métis origins as well as both male and female genders. Industry has been a true partner, assisting financially as well as with equipment donations to give students hands-on learning. The Olds College program has now grown to be province-wide, as they are now expanding to northeastern Alberta as well as into the Calgary region.

I'd like to invite all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating the heavy equipment industry as Olds College partner of the year.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been watching and listening to this government for too long, and they are tired of the talk. They say one thing, and they do the other. Albertans are asking: why doesn't this government produce a sustainable budget? Does this government know what it means to be competitive? Do they know what a level playing field is? Does this government know what a true balanced budget is: cash in, cash out? Does this government know what an unfunded liability is? Does this government know what carrying charges are? Does this government have any plan, other than to buy now and let the next generation pay later, for the \$6 billion plus teachers' pension plan, which remains unfunded?

2:50

The situation we find ourselves in is pitiful. This government is not prioritizing and budgeting for our children. They are not building a better Alberta. They are continuing the PC way; that is, pretend to consult, power and control at any cost, centralized power and decision-making and the money. This government's defence on the balancing of their budget has all the drama of Hollywood and its stunts. If the cost of capital infrastructure is revenue neutral, why not build 20 more diamond overpasses? Their excuses are as pathetic as the stars of Hollywood who are arrested and charged with shoplifting, and their defence is that they are not guilty: we have the money to pay for it. This government is not prioritizing and budgeting for our children and their future. This government doesn't just fail to plan; they fail to think.

On a positive note, Mr. Speaker, happy birthday to my daughter, Janna Jade Hinman.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the Capital Region Board's long-term growth plan. This plan was developed with the foresight of mayors and reeves from 25 municipalities in Alberta's capital region. The growth plan for the capital region, which expects an influx of about 600,000 new residents over the next 40 years, will manage the impact of development on land, water, and air; will promote the efficient use of land; and look at conservation and stewardship on private and public lands.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings from constituents today. The first is from Pat Melnyk. She was very concerned about the food quality and hygienic care at the Royal Alex that her mother and her husband received at recent stays there and also concerned about the lack of long-term care beds available for seniors such as her mother. That's the second time I've heard stories like that this week.

My second tabling is from Rayn Fraess, who is very displeased with the royalty framework, feels that the oil industry is based on a nonrenewable, limited resource, and it needs to be done at a good price today or they will be back in the future, with no choice in the long run. He is also particularly concerned about land reclamation.

Finally, an e-mail from Mike Smit, who is a PhD candidate in computing science at the U of A, with great concerns about funding

to universities no longer being competitive Canada-wide, especially for top-notch students. We're having trouble attracting them given the cost of living. He came here four years ago because of the tuition cap and feels that that was a promise that has now been broken or has a large enough loophole to drive an oil tanker through.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Meryl Rowbotham, a teacher with the Edmonton public school board. She writes that the students in her school have recently been involved in several charitable projects, including raising donations for the Food Bank and for Haiti. She asks that the necessary level of education funding be in place to maintain a high level of quality education for the students.

As my second tabling, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 50 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which has gathered signed postcards from approximately 2,500 Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is from Maureen Adachi, and this is a letter that I received electronically regarding Alberta Hospital. Maureen Adachi would certainly like to see it functional.

The second letter I have for tabling today is also regarding Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and it is from a constituent, Sarah Fraser. She also is expressing her concern about the government's long-term plans regarding Alberta Hospital.

I have permission to table these two letters.

My third tabling is information that I have acquired regarding Imperial Oil's plans to move up to 200 modules that are manufactured in South Korea through Montana to the Kearl oil sands project in northeastern Alberta this year and next year.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day Program

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, I just want to remind hon. members that on April 12 and 13 we will be hosting our annual MLA for a Day program for young people in the province of Alberta.

Interestingly enough, although this program is cosponsored by the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, to date we have received 56 applications from 40 different constituencies. There are 83 constituencies in the province, so I've sent a memo to those members of the Assembly from whom we have not received an application. If you wouldn't mind, if you have some time, just check it out with some young people in your area if you're one of those who does receive a letter and basically encourage them to apply. It seems that a number of schools, a number of teachers don't seem to advise their students of these opportunities, which is a strange item, considering everyone's concern for the promotion of democracy.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 10
Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment
Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security on behalf of.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and honoured to rise today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to move second reading of Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, using the civil forfeiture process, this legislation has proved to be an effective crime reduction tool. The act allows the Crown to restrain and seize the illegal profits and property of crime and compensate Albertans victimized by criminal activity.

A recent Supreme Court of Canada decision called Chatterjee recognized the validity of civil forfeiture legislation. Chatterjee involved a constitutional challenge to Ontario's civil forfeiture act. The Supreme Court ruled that Ontario's legislation was constitutional and that it was within provincial powers to enact this legislation. It also recognized that crime imposes substantial costs on provinces and provincial resources. The court determined that it would be out of step with modern reality to conclude that provinces must shoulder the costs of crime but cannot seek to suppress it.

On the heels of Chatterjee, Mr. Speaker, the amendments being proposed will expand the scope of the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. These proposed amendments will allow the act to be used for broader purposes, including compensating public bodies such as municipalities for the costs of crime, allowing for the seizure of property that may generate little or no compensation to victims but that serves other purposes such as depriving criminals of resources, allowing dangerous or illegal property to be modified or destroyed, and expanding the powers to make grants to community-based organizations in order to prevent crime.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments will allow costs to be awarded against the Crown when restrained property is ordered returned to its owner. This follows the advice recently given by the Alberta courts.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments will allow the civil forfeiture process to continue to make crime unprofitable and will expand the range of victims who can be compensated due to the harm caused by crime.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General I urge all of my colleagues to support the bill, and I look forward to hearing comments during second reading.

At this time I'd like to move adjournment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11
Witness Security Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act.

It is my pleasure to rise today to speak about Bill 11, the Witness Security Act. This legislation will complement the current federal witness protection program by establishing a provincial witness security program. This will provide another tool for the Crown and local police agencies to provide security for witnesses.

Investigating and prosecuting gang cases is becoming increasingly complex. When individuals are unwilling to come forward and give evidence out of fear of retaliation, it adds an extra challenge. One of the things that we've heard from police and the Crown is that there is a need for this type of program at the provincial level, where short-term protection could help move an investigation and prosecution forward. Alberta's law enforcement agencies and the Crown are working extremely hard and deserve all the means possible to do their jobs.

3:00

Witness protection is an indispensable tool in the investigation and prosecution of serious gang-related crimes in cases where there is a threat to the safety of the witness. Other provinces have already established their own witness security programs, and a provincial witness security program will help support Alberta's commitment to reducing gang-related crime and to making our communities safer.

I urge all members to support this important legislation, and with that I'd like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 12
Body Armour Control Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading on the Body Armour Control Act.

Rising levels of gang-related violence have recently resulted in heightened concerns about public safety. The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics reports that Alberta had the second-highest provincial homicide rate in 2008, and approximately 25 per cent of all gang-related homicides in Canada occur in Alberta. Because of the inherently dangerous nature of the gang lifestyle, gang members often wear body armour when they engage in various forms of criminal activity, including drug trafficking, drive-by shootings, and even public executions.

The proposed legislation would allow the police to seize body armour from individuals who do not have a permit or are not exempt from the requirement for obtaining a permit. Police officers, peace officers, emergency medical service providers, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission inspectors, licensed private security guards, and others who need to wear body armour to do their jobs would be exempt from the requirement to get a permit. Individuals holding a valid firearms permit will also be exempt. Other individuals may be issued a permit on the basis that they have a legitimate occupational or personal safety reason to wear body armour.

The proposed legislation defines body armour to include garments or other items that are designed or adapted to protect the wearer from a weapon or other object used to cause serious injury or death. The proposed legislation does not apply to safety equipment used in sporting and recreational activities, nor does it apply to safety equipment worn to protect against workplace injuries; for example, safety equipment worn by loggers or meat cutters.

The permit system will be modelled on the licensing scheme contained in the Security Services and Investigators Act. Several provisions in this proposed legislation are modelled on that act.

Applications will be processed by the registrar designated under that act, and applicants will be subject to rigorous criminal record and background checks. Violations of the act will be punishable by a fine or a short custodial sentence or both.

The goal of this proposed legislation is to restrict the ability of violent criminals and known gang members to possess body armour while ensuring that law-abiding Albertans have access to this equipment for occupational or personal safety reasons.

The passage of this legislation would also advance one of the government of Alberta's five strategic priorities, to promote strong and vibrant communities and reduce crime so that Albertans feel safe.

I encourage all members to support Bill 12, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, amendments to be offered? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. We'd been given a different order. We had the order as bills 4, 6, 8, and then 1. This has been changed today? Okay. Let me just dig that stuff out, then. Hang on.

The Chair: You can ask the Government House Leader to change the order.

Ms Blakeman: No. That's okay. I'm pretty fast on my feet.

The Chair: All right. Then we'll proceed with Bill 1. The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. Let me fish the bill out here. When I spoke in second reading, I raised the issue of the current concern about the competitiveness of the film sector in Alberta. Just to recap very briefly the issues that I was raising, really, we have two objectives, or I hope we have two objectives around film in Alberta. One is support for our indigenous productions, you know, support for development of scripts, of story ideas, hopefully our stories but not necessarily. With that are things like the support for the producers – they can get access to workshops at the Banff television festival, for example, and other workshops that are run – plus keeping film workers, including actors, technicians, artisans, here in Alberta so that they're available to work on this generally lower budget but indigenous film stream.

We do have a particular film strategy here which does allow for majority Alberta-owned productions, which are a minimum 51 per cent Alberta ownership and majority financial and creative control, to be eligible for a 27 per cent grant program back on the amount of money that they have spent, and that's capped off. The total fund is some amount that doesn't come to mind. It got cut this year. We just don't have enough money in this fund to be able to give everybody that 27 per cent, for example. There are enhanced eligibilities. If, for example, the production employs Albertans in three or more of the creative positions or two or more creative positions plus trainees, they're eligible for up to 29 per cent. That's what we call stream 1.

The second objective that we have here in Alberta, or at least I hope we have, is competitiveness for the non-Alberta, nonindigenous productions; in other words, the ownership of the production is less than 51 per cent Alberta owned. We've ended up with two streams in that one. One is sort of a hybrid, and the other one is definitively targeted towards out-of-province, generally big-budget Hollywood movies, if I can call it that way.

The hybrid was intended at one point to help us develop Alberta film producers. I would argue that we have done that. We've got very strong Alberta producers with lots of experience behind them now, and I want to continue to support Alberta producers. Don't misunderstand me here. I'm not trying to take anything away from them.

What I am trying to do right now is address the problem we're having with competitiveness with that larger stream in bringing in the Hollywood productions. What they've asked for, basically, is a bump up of the percentage that they would qualify for. The percentage I was addressing earlier, that 27 to 29 per cent, is the highest percentage that would qualify, and then it drops down from that. The stream 2, the equal or minority Alberta ownership, which is that hybrid one, is 25 to 27 per cent, but by the time you get to stream 3, all other eligible productions, you're into the 20 per cent range. If they do the enhanced eligibility, they could get up to 22 per cent.

3:10

We're just not competitive. In B.C. they recently raised their film tax credit from 25 to 33 per cent. I've heard from a lot of people involved in the film sector in the last couple of weeks, and I am shocked at how few of them have had work in Alberta over the last year, and almost none of them have work lined up for the next year. That competitive edge that we had – at one point we were just below B.C. in attracting outside production here into Alberta. Remember that for a small investment on our part we're getting a return somewhere between \$6 back per dollar invested and \$10 back per dollar invested depending on which formula you want to use. So it's great return on investment, but it also employs Albertans.

I just had an e-mail from a friend whose wife is a producer, and this is not small stuff. She was assistant director to Ang Lee on *Brokeback Mountain*. This is not small potatoes. This is big Hollywood stuff. She was assistant director on that, and she's now gone to B.C. to look for work. So there's a highly qualified director, producer, organizer, film worker who has not worked in Alberta and is now going to B.C. to look for work and is leaving her family here to go and do it.

When I look at this Alberta Competitiveness Act – and I know that it was really structured around the oil and gas sector, which we know is really important in Alberta – as I started to go through the technical document, the Project Committee Final Technical Report on Alberta's Natural Gas & Conventional Oil Investment Competitiveness to the Alberta Department of Energy, and the glossy brochure that the government put out called Energizing Investment, I've gone through the criteria there, and a number of things have popped out to me where I went: yeah, well, I would argue that the film community qualifies for that. When I start looking at stuff like, you know, government revenues, the energy industry has been the single largest contributor to government revenues in Alberta over the last 10 years. Well, the film community has been a pretty large contributor as well.

You know, when they move in and shoot a film, especially these big Hollywood budgets, I mean, they're coming in with millions and millions of dollars. Let me put this in context for you. A small budget film, an art film, that won the Academy Awards has a teeny

budget of \$11 million, okay? So even what we would consider – to me, \$11 million, I'll never see that in my life. That's a big budget to me, but that was considered small budget. You look at the budgets in things like *Avatar* or the guys running around, shoot-'em-up, car chase kind of stuff, they're into the \$100 million budget range.

Mr. MacDonald: *Brokeback Mountain*: how much was the budget for that?

Ms Blakeman: I don't know, actually.

When they come into Alberta and we can lure them into Alberta, they are dropping millions and millions of dollars in our economy that came from outside and get left here. The stories I've told of, you know, a props buyer or set dresser who walks into the antique shop in Nanton and basically buys the shop out, drops \$20,000 cash that day and walks away: you know, it really matters to us. That's money that's left in our small-business hands. It's left in our workers' hands, who pay taxes, who belong to their community leagues, who volunteer.

My friend, again, the one that's gone off to look in B.C., volunteers for her community league. She works for some of the charities in town in her spare time. Her two kids go to a local school. She's part of our community.

So what we've been asking for, talking to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, is that there is an enhanced rate that's available to those big budget films. What kind of jobs are we really talking about? Well, it's things like accounting, art and production design, construction, costumes, first aid, craft service, which is essentially food, greens, the grips and the riggers, hair, lighting and electrics, makeup – a number of those people came and sat in the gallery here last week – paint, paramedics, props, script, continuity supervisors, set decoration, sound, special effects, tutors for the kids that are on a set. You get IATSE local 669, international photographers, and you've got all of these lists of people that work in video and electronics and your director of photography, commonly known as a DOP, your first and second camera assistant, your stills photographer, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

You're into ACTRA, which is my union of actors, the association of Canadian television and radio artists.

An Hon. Member: You're still in the union?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I'm on withdrawal. I'm still a member of that union.

The Teamsters, local 362, do a lot of driving around. Just let me stop here and say that the teamsters driving around is the worst that this sector gets in creating greenhouse gases. This sector is green economy jobs. They are creative jobs. They are knowledge-based jobs. So, you know, the worst that they get is the car exhaust from the teamsters driving everybody back and forth, including people and equipment.

Other people that work in that sector are from the Directors Guild, for example.

More than 3,000 creative cast and crew work in this industry across the province, and they're not working. I mean, I met with these people in Calgary. They've continued to send me e-mails and Facebook and Twitter and everything else. They haven't drawn a paycheck in Alberta except for, you know, one or two. They maybe worked for a month in Alberta. You know what? These people are good. They're good enough that they're getting called away to work in other places. So we're training people to go and work for our competitors.

Where are we losing business to? We are losing business to New Mexico, which will fill in for all those westerns that we used to get and draw them in. They've drawn them into New Mexico now. They're offering a better deal. They are more competitive in this sector, so that's where the big-budget westerns are going. All of the big-budget westerns that are being filmed this year are being filmed in New Mexico. We're losing big-budget films to Saskatchewan, and we're losing a whack of business to B.C.

I'm so frustrated with this. It's a green economy. It's making sure that Albertans work and their taxes come back into the coffers of the government. And who's paying them? It's money from outside. When I look at what's important here and what's in this book, they talk about, you know, revenues. They talk about taxes. Well, there you go. We pay people. They pay taxes into this system. We talk about changes and challenges in developing our resources. Well, there's the challenge. We can't compete anymore because of the percentage that's in place.

We've had the industry send a couple of signed letters and recommendations to the minister in which they're suggesting how they could be helped. One of them is combining the streams 2 and 3 so that those big-budget films get a better percentage. It doesn't necessarily have to be combined. It just needs to be a better percentage. You can see what we're up against in B.C. They're killing us, absolutely killing us. So is Saskatchewan, and so is New Mexico. They're wiping us off the planet here. They need the stream 3 funding percentages lifted up into that stream 2 level. Or, if you want more business, raise it even higher than that, and we'll get it.

Now, there's also been funding that has been cut to the Alberta film development fund. That's where we help our local people develop those stories and assist our local producers. There's been a cut in that. I understand, you know, that we all had to take a hit because of where we are with the budget. But this one can make us money. This one can keep Albertans employed. So maybe we need to have another look at that.

I'm just looking for the suggestions that the community had given and what could be helpful here. They were asking for enhanced eligibility for key positions. I listed off a bunch of different people who got work in this sector, and I'd sort of indicated that you could get enhanced eligibility if you hired more of them or included more in that category. But what they're suggesting is that we have additional incentives to hire more Albertans in key creative roles and expanding what we're listing as a key creative role, so adding in things like production manager, costume designer.

We have some really good costume designers here. Here's another example: Wendy Partridge ran one of the biggest costume shops in Canada, and she ran it out of Calgary, and she has closed it and left the province.

3:20

Mr. MacDonald: She didn't move to Edmonton?

Ms Blakeman: No, she didn't. She left the province. Honestly, she was one of the biggest costumers – like, of the films that I shot way back when I was still really active in this community, she costumed every single person in the production. So she was a big, big costume house, a big costume designer. She's gone. That was a lot of money. She hired a lot of local people as well as other artisans to work with her.

Production designer, which is different from – there are all different categories of designers; just trust me on this one – an art director, and increasing the number of performers that they would consider in lead positions from two to three.

Also, to look at a regional bonus. Now, we're aware that often the films that come into Alberta are actually shot in rural Alberta, so they're a huge bonus for some of our smaller towns, like, for example, Fort Macleod. In *Brokeback Mountain* there are a number of scenes that if you know Fort Macleod well, you recognize Fort Macleod. Actually, they have a tourist business now where they take people around to where certain scenes were shot. It really helps us if we can get those film companies to come and shoot in certain regional areas.

They were asking for a regional bonus to see a short-term benefit through the shooting schedule and the amount of money that's spent while they're shooting. But then that longer benefit is for tourism. So a regional bonus would be very helpful, and they're suggesting a bonus of 2 per cent when a production works outside of the established Edmonton and Calgary studio zones. Well, that's rural development. That's exactly what that is. That would be very helpful because there are some really beautiful, wonderful places in Alberta that are very scenic.

As I talked about before, Alberta has some unique things, like the quality of our light. We can compete with other places on a lot of other levels. We're getting killed, absolutely killed, by the incentives that we are not able to provide. So if you can make our incentives the same or a little bit higher, we can compete. We have the talent. We've got the experience. We've got the trained people to do it. We've got the creative stories to do it. We've got the scenes to do it. We've got the light to do it. We compete except that what we've got for incentives now is just tanking us.

The minister has worked a lot with the local producers on the issues, and we thank him for that. I encourage him to work more with the union side and the guild side, which is representing the workers. I've listed a number of different ones. It just strikes me that when we're looking at something like Bill 1 and Alberta competitiveness, you know, here's the future. We've got Richard Florida telling us all the time: creative thinking, creative classes. We've got other future thinkers and futurists that are saying: knowledge-based economies are where we've got to go. Here it is. I'm giving it to you. It's on a platter. They're green jobs. It's money that stays in the province that comes from outside of the province. This is low-hanging fruit. It's low-hanging fruit for green economies. It's low-hanging fruit for competitiveness. We just need the focus and the thinking on it.

I've talked to a couple of the members of the front bench there in trying to get them onside. I flagged it specifically today to the money guy. So I'm hoping that I can convince you to look seriously at this. If you want to ask me questions, please do. I have, as you are used to with me, many, many different documents here. I'm happy to talk about it or to set you up with somebody in the industry. It just strikes me that there's real potential here. You understand that from the oil and gas sector. I just watched you walk through it with your competitiveness strategy for the oil and gas sector. You guys get this, but you should be able to get it beyond the oil and gas sector. I think you can.

Thank you very much for that opportunity to lay this argument out again. I look forward to some pickup on this conversation, and I vote for support.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the hon. member. There's no question that this particular industry is one that you are very familiar with and very passionate about. I respect that.

There's no question that you can make very compelling arguments for just about any industry. We do look at the one side, and we have

seen and I know you are aware of some of the discussions that are happening in the United States right now. California saw a leakage of the movie industry around, and now they're saying: "Well, wait a minute. What have we got to do to get them back?" Yet it is very difficult for a state like California, who's squandered pretty much their opportunities right now, to tell folks: well, we have to send home a whole bunch of schoolteachers, we've got to cut our state staff down to working a few days a week, but we're going to give a little bit to the film industry to get them back.

When the film industry showed up in Hollywood just a few weeks ago, with the megastars and the billions that the movies make, people say: "Wait a minute. Why am I, Joe Q. Public, greeting people daily at the Wal-Mart to give my tax dollars to an industry that seems to do pretty good?" That's a real basic question that you have to answer every time you take tax dollars.

While I can appreciate the argument used, that, well, if you spend one, we can show – I think even our documents agree that the benefit to Alberta is in excess of \$100 million for what we've invested. That argument also can be taken over and show how much we benefit from the arts and the cultural things that we support in a small way and the multiplier effect in a community. So I don't disagree. But every dollar we spend comes from a taxpayer, and when you take a dollar out, it also has the effect of taking a dollar from someone who can't spend it on something that they choose to be directly spending it on.

It is a little troubling to see, you know, that you say that we're losing it to Saskatchewan and British Columbia. I met Premier Wall yesterday in Lloydminster, and I can tell you that the discussions they're faced with in their government right now are extremely difficult. They, too, have seen so much of their potential financial stream disappear that they're going to be faced with a very difficult challenge. We know that Mr. Campbell came immediately back after his election and restated their budget, showing them to be in extremely difficult states. They are some \$30 billion in debt.

While not disagreeing that there's opportunity here, it is difficult for me to understand how provinces can borrow and pick an industry like this to support from that position. It shouldn't be about a race to the bottom.

I had an opportunity years ago to visit a set that was the filming for *Open Range*, a Kevin Costner production. While they appreciated the incentives and stuff they had – and I don't disagree at all on the expertise in the film industry in Alberta and the staffing and that talent. No questions, I think, from anybody on that, that we've got some of the best. He was here because at that time we had a 69-cent dollar. This was a film that he was a shareholder in. He said, "You know, if I had my choice, I'm a patriotic American, and I would far rather film this in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, but for 69 cents on the dollar I've come to Calgary." They loved it. It was a huge selling film for the scenery and that in Alberta, all of those benefits. Obviously, they came back for *Brokeback Mountain*.

Yes, I accept your arguments that there is a multiple benefit to it, but let's just look at some things that we support. Apparently, this has been brought to our attention many times by you as being inappropriate use of taxpayers' money: Horse Racing Alberta. Now, you know, actually, that we don't give them one cent. They get to keep the dollars that they raised as their share of the slot machines on their horse-racing facilities. It isn't supported by the taxpayer by one cent, yet as the hon. members know, it has been raised in this House time and time again: why are we supporting Horse Racing Alberta? They wouldn't argue that it supports 7,000 or 8,000 jobs in that industry. Without going into: how many different spinoff jobs are there from it? We don't know. Obviously, it's politics, and I can accept that. But the fact is that we don't give them a penny;

we let them keep the money they raise in their slots. And for that we're taken to task here by those who wish to remain less informed.

3:30

The other thing that you need to talk about is really kind of: if you like hockey, it's okay; if you don't, it's not. A couple of years ago Mr. Manley, I think, proposed a \$20 million credit for NHL teams. Now, I don't think there's any question that when there's an event at Northlands, I think around 1,200 people go to work that day. Northlands is one of the busiest arenas in North America, so probably 260 days. Now, I don't know if they use all those people, but with hockey games and with parking and pizza cooking we stand up here and say: "Boy, that's a really good thing. We need to give Mr. Katz a little bit of help with his taxes so that he keeps the hockey team here. And the folks that own the Calgary Flames."

Would we get into that discussion about how important the spinoff dollars are around those industries? Or is it easy enough to say: "Wait a minute. That's providing opportunity for multimillion-dollar-a-year players to do what they love to do. We're paying them too much money. People don't have to go see them. It's completely voluntary. If you can pay \$136, whatever the ticket price is, and if you can pay that much for adult beverages and pizza, that's your choice." You know when you go into it that a tremendous number of spinoff jobs are created from having two NHL teams here. I know that if you went to Winnipeg and asked people on the street, "Do you regret losing the Winnipeg Jets?" they'd say, "Absolutely." They'll do anything to get them back.

So the identity of your province, what you sell: yes, it's in the movie industry; yes, it's in the hockey industry; yes, it's in horse racing. You've got to sometimes put the knife on the cake and cut it. You've got to balance things. That's what we can do right now.

I do accept your arguments that we do have the expertise. We do have some of the most talented, the most creative people in the country. We have all that, but I think that you've got to take all of the opportunities we've got, put them in the same shaker, shake out the real facts, then make your decision and go forward.

I'm going to thank you for staying on this and for pushing it. It is a part that I think as we go forward as a province we will develop, but I think we'll develop from a position of being fair, being low tax, creating the environment so that business wants to come and stay here, making sure you have the transportation opportunities to and from Alberta and within Alberta, making sure that we don't unduly hamper productions that want to come to Alberta, really doing the things that we do for all the other businesses. From that point on I think you'll develop a really solid industry that is built on real dollars and not some tax ones.

Is there an opportunity to work within the system? I hope so. I hope that our financial opportunities expand, that we are able to look at these and take a really good Alberta and make it a lot better.

I accept your arguments, but I will say that just because one is very passionate about movies, there are many other cultural and artistic opportunities in Alberta that would think they are more important. I think you have to keep that at the base of the argument.

I do appreciate the opportunity.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you wish to continue?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please. Thank you so much. I really appreciate the President of the Treasury Board listening to me. Just one last pitch on this one. Even if we put no money into this, no extra money, if we change the way it's set up, that will still help us because this is time sensitive. Soon we won't have the people living

here anymore to be able to do this. That makes it harder to attract people. So there is a time sensitivity to this.

If we're able to make some changes, the changes I suggested – upping the percentage of qualifying revenue on those streams, allowing for the key positions to be included in the way it's calculated, and looking at the regional bonus – that's not changing the amount of money. If you can help the minister of culture with this, that will make a difference for us. At this point if that can happen soon, we could probably still land one or two big-budget films for the fall. We're not going to get spring shooting now, and we're not going to get summer shooting. We might get fall shooting if we moved fairly quickly. This is stuff you can do without putting any more money in there.

That's what I'm encouraging. Clearly, I'd like the money. I mean, I'm not kidding you. I'll ask for it officially: I want more money in that fund, and I want the money restored. Really, what they're asking for right now is the change in the percentage for stream 3. They're asking for the recognition of those other key positions to be considered for the enhancement, eligibility, and the regional bonus. That you can do without any more money.

I'll just make one last pitch on that one. I think Alberta needs to move forward with competitiveness, looking for competitiveness advantage in more than just the oil and gas sector. I really appreciate the willingness of the front bench to listen to me on these arguments. I'm . . .

An Hon. Member: Speechless.

Ms Blakeman: Well, no. I'm just wondering if I should argue about horse racing again.

Mr. MacDonald: Just tell him it's in the grants of public accounts. It's not in contracted services. [interjection]

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Why don't you do that?

Well, it is a special deal, right? The horse racing and the way they get the money is a special deal, and they could choose not to have that special deal for that particular sector. Oh, now I will get e-mail from people far, far away chastising me for not being supportive of horse racing. I'm just correcting him. Every time he corrects me on the record, I'm going to correct him back.

This is a special deal to allow them to get that money. Thank you very much for considering that. I'm just going to put the bug in his ear about the changes that can be done without adding money to that fund, and of course I'm asking for more money.

Thank you, all, very much for considering that. I really appreciate it.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on this? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Alberta needs to move forward with competitiveness. Couldn't agree more with that. I was just reading an article in the *National Post* from yesterday or the day before that talked about the competitiveness of Alberta and the lack thereof. It talked about what they termed the Wildrose effect and how this government finally has done one of the first legislative things to increase competitiveness in Alberta, one of the first fiscally responsible things since the 1990s. Boy, is that ever the truth.

This government has really done a job on our competitiveness. It was on cruise control from about 2000 to 2005 or so, and then it just fell off a cliff at the end of that. We've been going downhill ever since. I think of that energy competitiveness review and think about

the number of jobs that were lost. You know, the government's comments on that are: "We need to move on. We need to move forward." They're right. I mean, we do need to move forward. There's no doubt about that. Obviously, we don't want to stay where we are. It's not in a very good place.

What they fail to talk about or recognize still is the incredible damage that they've done to our international reputation on competitiveness, the incredible damage that they've caused the Alberta job sector. These are Albertans that have lost their businesses. You know, I have a friend in the President of the Treasury Board's home riding. He's my uncle, actually. He's a trucker. He did oil and gas trucking. He's on the verge of losing the truck that he owns because he can't find the work in the oil and gas sector that was there. There's no doubt that commodity prices had something to do with that. There's no doubt. There's also no doubt that a huge part of the industry coming to a standstill or falling off the cliff, so to speak, has been because of this government's bungling of the royalties.

3:40

They were warned. They were absolutely warned. They were warned by people in their own caucus, at least a dozen of them. That's a fact. We all know that in this room, you know, who have been in the caucus there. This warning was given clearly. They knew before 2009. On January 1, 2009, when the new royalty framework came into effect, they knew about shale gas, and they knew about the game changer that it was. That was knowledge in the industry at that time, and there was report after report and presentation after presentation given to government, yet they stubbornly moved ahead with an absolutely harmful policy.

Thankfully, they've gone back and are starting to correct their mistake, but they won't admit that they made a mistake. They won't admit that they were wrong. They won't say they're sorry, and they won't promise that it will never happen again. Those things were very much missing from the competitiveness review.

I hope that this Competitiveness Act that we have before us will give the government a chance to make sure that we don't make the same mistakes, that we're actually always going in an upwards direction, always making sure that we're more competitive, not doing things to fulfill some kind of weird socialist dream: you know, everybody is going hold hands, and we're going to take more from corporations, businesses, and individuals, and everything is going to be great.

No, it doesn't work that way. People leave when they're taxed to death. Industry leaves when they're taxed to death, and that's exactly what happened. That means we all suffer. With deficits we can't pay for our health care, can't pay for education and these types of things. We all suffer when we drive out industry that way, when we raise taxes, and that's what this government did.

I do congratulate them for, although they won't admit it, at least coming back and stepping back from their obvious mistake. I would note that they still didn't get it right. I noticed that the president and CEO of EnCana was in the media yesterday. I guess they've done the analysis on the new royalty framework. They still don't have the curve, so there's still some uncertainty, but they've done an analysis, and they've found that even still – even still – Alberta will not be as competitive as B.C. or Saskatchewan or many U.S. states like Texas, Montana, and others.

Because of that, to quote the president and CEO of EnCana, they're increasing their investment this year in natural gas from 4 and a half billion dollars to \$5 billion, so another \$500 million. The vast majority of that will still not be invested in Alberta. It'll be in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Texas because that's where it is more competitive to do business. So of that \$500 million of investment

very little will be spent in Alberta. That's the situation we've gotten ourselves into.

The government is moving in the right direction, but again, hopefully, this Competitiveness Act will give them the tools they need to realize that there is still a lot of work to do. I sure hope they get the curves right, and I sure hope they get it right moving forward.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about the film industry. She's absolutely right: we're not as competitive in the film industry as our friends in B.C. or Ontario. Now, we definitely haven't rearranged the tax rates, et cetera, on the film industry in the wrong direction recently, but we haven't done anything either. I think that what the Member for Edmonton-Centre is saying is: look, if we're going to try to discuss what we're going to do to make the energy sector more competitive, then why wouldn't we do that for all sectors, the film industry being one of those? This province is obviously much more than just energy. We all know that, and we've got to make sure that we're all working to make all industries competitive, including the film industry. So I really appreciated those comments.

Personal and business taxes. We talk a lot about the Alberta advantage, Mr. Chair, and we talk about how proud we are of it, although we changed the slogan of Alberta to freedom to choose – what is it? I don't know. Anyway, we've changed it. It used to be Alberta advantage. Albertans kind of chose that one for themselves. We've decided to change that.

Let's talk about the Alberta advantage. Do we still have the Alberta advantage? I don't think we do. I think it's eroding every day. There's no doubt that we're still more advantageous from a tax perspective than a lot of jurisdictions, but we haven't made improvements in that area for a long time. Because of that we're essentially falling backwards, back to the pack, and we will be surpassed.

In British Columbia, Mr. Chair, if you make under \$115,000, which is – oh, I don't know; what is that? – let's say 90 per cent, 95 per cent of the population, something like that, it is more tax advantageous from a personal income tax perspective to live in B.C. than it is to live in Alberta. Does that help us retain doctors? Does that help us retain health care workers and teachers and people like that? No, it doesn't. So we've got to make sure that we're doing a better job of making sure our personal income taxes are more competitive and more in line with the best in our country, which right now is B.C.

With corporate taxes, same thing. We have not lowered that rate for a long time, and other provinces are catching up. New Brunswick has a plan in place where corporate tax will be coming down to 8 per cent eventually.

Again, we need to be looking at this and making a long-term strategy for how we're going to grow the heritage fund, how we're going to save the heritage fund and use the interest from that heritage fund every year to offset a reliance not only on oil and gas revenues but also on personal and corporate income taxes so that we continue to get people into this province working and paying taxes and growing that pie, as they say, so that even though we're taking a smaller slice, we're taking a smaller slice of much more. That's kind of what we're trying to achieve.

The other problem that we're running into, Mr. Chair, is that we're kind of facing a real big problem here because of this government's financial mismanagement. They love to say how great they've done in managing the finances of this province. Well, there's no doubt that their predecessor administration did have their moments where they did balance budgets, and they did put money away. But the current Premier and the President of the Treasury Board and the finance minister and people who've been in charge, the previous finance minister, seem to be taking claim for stuff that they weren't in charge of and they didn't do.

Since they've taken over this government – and democratically. When I say “take over,” since they've been elected and appointed to the positions where they are now, they can claim nothing in this regard. They have done nothing to make us more competitive. They have done nothing to save for the future at all, zero, zilch. I just think it's funny that they keep saying: we've done a great job. No, no. Some of your predecessors did a good job, some more than others; some years were better than other years. But it wasn't this administration. It wasn't the Premier. Since they've taken over, we've done nothing but overspend, lose our savings, and go down in our competitiveness nationally. You know, I think it's funny that they keep taking credit for other people's successes and then blaming everyone else for their mistakes. That's not something that they should be very proud of.

The other problem is, of course, that if they continue down this road and they continue to overspend and they continue to not save and continue to not have a savings and spending control strategy, there's going to be another cliff that they hit. And when they hit that cliff, what's going to happen is that they're going to have to slash core social programs that we all rely on: health, education, seniors' benefits. That train is coming down the track right now if we do not get our spending under control.

3:50

Who's going to pay the bill? Are the people over here going to pay for it? No. It's going to be my kids. It's going to be their kids, my grandchildren, their grandchildren. They're the ones that are going to have to be sitting with a bunch of social programs that they can't afford to pay for, an infrastructure that they want to maintain that they can't afford the upkeep on.

That's why we're saying over here in the Wildrose that it's a good idea to start thinking about implementing a long-term savings and spending strategy that will make sure that we leave to our kids a better future and programs they can pay for and infrastructure they can pay for. That's the whole point. That's what sound fiscal management looks like. It's not an ideological thing. You know, I credit the Liberals for talking about a savings strategy. They've been talking about that for years. You would think that fiscally conservative people, you would think that fiscally conservative governments would actually try to at least be as fiscally conservative as the Liberal Party, but I guess that's too hard for them. That's a huge problem that we have.

What we need to be looking at is a diversification strategy, not picking winners and losers, Mr. Chairman. I hope this competitiveness bill will allow us to set up some sort of body that will help us look at the question of diversification. It's not about picking winners and losers and throwing money – a hundred million dollars here, \$200 million there – to try to guess what the next big industry is going to be. Things change every day. There was just an announcement today that they've found a way to turn coal into petroleum at \$18 a barrel. I mean, this is big stuff. Stuff changes all the time. We can't be picking winners and losers when things are so fluid.

What we need to be doing is growing the base, growing the base of the heritage fund to the point where the interest thereon will allow us to have less reliance on oil and gas revenues as well as on personal and corporate income taxes. That was the dream. That was the vision of Peter Lougheed. That's why he set it up. We've got away from that vision. We need to get back to that vision because it was the right vision, and it's just as applicable now as it was back then.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll sit down. I've said in the past that I will support this bill because it's going in the right direction. I don't like

the direction we've been, but I'm seeing signs that we're starting to turn the corner, and I think that that's a positive development. So I will be supporting this bill.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Yes, Mr. Chairman. It does bring some questions to the table. I would have to question, you know, that if a government was pretty much destroying a province for the last, oh, 20 years or so, from the '90s on till now, particularly from '93 to 2003, if you were in a province like that and the government was just about doing everything wrong it could possibly do – kicking out business, tripping little old ladies going across, everything the government could do wrong, as a matter of fact so bad that you just can't even imagine all the horrible things that they were doing – could you imagine that somebody who knew all this, who was in that province watching it being destroyed right before their eyes, would want to run for that party? Honestly, wouldn't you say, “Well, if that's all true, if that's all true and the government is pretty much on autopilot – they've completely lost the way, they don't know how to save, they don't know any of that – I don't want to be a part of that?”

That would tell me he had two things in mind. One, a lot of this information isn't necessarily true and it's come to the top of that person's list lately, or it would be one of extreme opportunism. Wouldn't you think: I can't get elected in Alberta on a hundred per cent negative stuff, so I maybe just better kind of think this through; if I can get elected to that party, then I can do something else. Mr. Chairman, I'd ask the hon. members. I think it was Mark Twain that said: I don't want to be a part of any group that wants me. Well, that's true also.

Mr. Chairman, what on earth do you suppose would drive somebody who knows so much about how bad a government is to seek nomination, go out and knock on doors and try to get elected for the very party that they're saying is destroying the province? That's incredible. Maybe other people find that incredible. I find it incredible.

Mr. Anderson: I'd love to respond to that. I don't know what it has to do with Bill 1 – we're talking about competitiveness and tax competitiveness – but that's all right. You know what? As the hon. minister he just has to learn to clean his ears out a little bit, Mr. Chair. What I said is that up until his administration – his Premier's, current Premier, in 2006 – up until that time the PC government had had its moments. It had done a reasonable job or a very good job, depending on the year. It kind of fluctuated back and forth but reasonably more good than bad, for sure. Now, 2006 came, and in came the current Premier, followed by his President of the Treasury Board and the finance minister and his illustrious chief of staff. Since that time this province has been going like this.

Now, when I ran for office, I ran as a Conservative, a fiscal conservative, Mr. Chair. That's what the flyer said: conservative. I'd go and promote for my constituents fiscal accountability, savings for our children. That's what I campaigned on. This government has gone running in the opposite direction, and my constituents were disgusted with them. They're not disgusted with all the backbenchers; there are a lot of good ones, a lot of MLAs or private members. Not disgusted on that but very disgusted with the administration itself and the direction that it was going.

You know, I concede, Mr. Chair, that I was a little bit hoodwinked, for sure. I thought that this Premier would govern in a conservative manner, that he'd be fiscally responsible. Absolutely.

But that is certainly not what happened in the last two years, and it's shameful. I know that the President of the Treasury Board is feeling a little bit uncomfortable in his own skin right now with the job that he has done, but in two years we will see how this all comes out in the wash, for sure. We'll see what happens then.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, I must say that it surprises me not a whit that that hon. member's constituents are disgusted. I would have to ask him: maybe it might not be a bad idea to come clean with his constituents and table the list of school projects and health projects and highway projects and other spending that he asked to have cancelled in his constituency so Captain Regressive over there could save the province and its budget deficit.

This government has done right by the people of Alberta, Mr. Chairman, and there is nothing more to add to his comments.

The Chair: Hon. member, I think Bill 1 is about Alberta competitiveness, so let's focus back.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Competitiveness Act, Bill 1. This is a good question, and it was a very shameful comment that the member made prior to this, but that's all right. He's above that, and it's disappointing to see him lower himself to the hon. President of the Treasury Board's level.

That said, what I would suggest we do as a province to be more competitive, to make sure that we remain competitive is that instead of talking and making arguments like that, which are very left-wing, socialist arguments, that if we can't build everything today, if we can't build everything right now, seniors will be out on the streets, children will be running through the streets unattended by their parents during school hours – it's just unbelievable, Mr. Chair.

Any business owner knows that you have to live within your means. You have to. Any person who does a budget knows you have to live within your means. You can't have everything you want right now. It's just simple. Instead of spending twice as much as the next closest province on infrastructure, maybe only spend one and a half times as much. These are the things that we could be looking at to be more competitive, to make sure our spending was kept in check. We don't need everything right now.

There are multiple roads in the county of Rocky View, for example. We can delay that a year and a half, two years. Absolutely, we can do it. That would save us \$40 million right there. Done. The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration has said: consider it done. I think he's alluding to the fact that now that I'm over here, he would love to make sure that we were punished and that the citizens of Airdrie-Chestermere are punished because of that decision. That's how this member plays politics, and that's fine. The point is that we've got to get back in this province to being more competitive in the long term, and the only way to do that, Mr. Chair, is to have strong fiscal planning for the future so that we don't leave our kids bankrupt. That means that we don't need everything right now.

Thanks.

4:00

The Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you wish to speak on Bill 1?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I listened with interest to the previous debate. I realize that some people may not have linked that discussion to Bill 1, but certainly I did because it is a form of

competition to hear the hon. Member for Peace River and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talk about their views and compare their views.

However, I have some issues around this bill. I am not convinced it's necessary, but when we talk about competitiveness – and we spent a lot of time this afternoon talking about the oil and gas industry – I have some views that are certainly different than previous speakers'.

But before I get to that, I would like to express my gratitude publicly to the hon. President of the Treasury Board for his willingness to always participate in debate and discussion in this House. I think that's important in a democratic institution, and the Treasury Board president is always willing to debate and discuss issues. I appreciate that. I had a question earlier in question period, Mr. Chairman, and I had initially, I must confess, planned to ask the hon. President of the Treasury Board about education property taxes. Then I thought that we've been neglecting the finance minister, and I should ask him some questions about finance. After the response I got, I was disappointed that I had not done what I had initially planned, and that was to ask him some questions.

This is about competitiveness, but it's within the province. Perhaps I can get an explanation from the Treasury Board president before we conclude debate on this issue. Now, as I said earlier, in 2009 the city of Edmonton paid \$316 million in public, separate, and undeclared tax allocations for education property taxes. Five years before, the public, separate, and undeclared portion of the property tax in the entire city was \$261 million. That's an increase of \$55 million over that period of time, or slightly more than a 20 per cent increase, in the education portion of property taxes.

The government's consolidated financial statement indicates that for the year 2008-09 we paid \$1.4 billion in education property taxes across the province. The issue has been raised by taxpayers in the city as we progress through these public school closure debates throughout various parts of the city. Property owners are curious not only about how much tax they pay in their respective neighbourhoods but the total amount that's paid in the city. Are they getting education support from the taxes that they pay in their local public and separate schools within the city?

My question would be, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. President of the Treasury Board: what percentage of the money collected, in this case \$316 million in the city of Edmonton, is going to the separate and public school boards? When it is pooled, if it is all pooled in one pot, what portion of this \$316 million is going to other jurisdictions across the province or other municipalities that don't have the same property value assessments that we have in the city of Edmonton? To cut to the chase: are education property tax payers in the city of Edmonton subsidizing schools in other jurisdictions with this \$316 million allocation for 2009? If the hon. minister would clarify that, I would really appreciate it. Certainly, the minister of finance couldn't – I'm not going to say "wouldn't" – answer earlier.

While the Treasury Board chairman is organizing his notes, I certainly would like to express my gratitude to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Earlier we had a discussion in our caucus about royalty rates and which direction we should go and what we should do. He pointed out that we needed to look at some of the financial statements of various players in the oil and gas industry since 2009, when the new royalty framework was implemented, and what exactly has happened since. I did that. There's quite a range of royalties now being paid. This is before the changes that were initiated last week, Mr. Chairman.

Royalty rates, if you compare them to, you know, percentage of production value, certainly have gone down. There are various companies, and I could certainly list them off, but you can look on

any Internet site, and you can see for yourself that royalty rates have gone down.

Now, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere mentioned EnCana. I think that at this time I would like to note that I looked at the third-quarter 2009 interim report of EnCana Corporation. They're talking about operating upstream. For those who are interested, this would be page 2, I believe, of their interim report. "This reduced production was partially offset by lower royalty volumes in Alberta due to price sensitive royalty rates." The price-sensitive royalty rate that was initiated seems to have lowered the royalty volumes.

EnCana would be one of the companies that's aggressive in their pursuit of opportunities in shale gas, not only, as I understand it, in the Barnett shales in Texas but also in New York state according to information that I have. Some of the rights there are much more expensive than what they would pay in this province, but they don't seem to have a problem with that. Some of the royalty rates that are charged down there are a lot higher than they would be paying in this province. I would like to point that out in a debate on the competitiveness of this province. With its oil and gas royalty rates and the regimes and the overall combined tax take, I don't think we're as uncompetitive as some would make us think.

Now, Cenovus, in the third-quarter 2009 interim report for EnCana, is an offshoot or breakout or spinoff of EnCana. It's their oil business.

Cenovus plans to invest about \$700 million in Canadian Plains natural gas and oil production which is expected to generate strong operating cash flow, estimated in the range of \$1.9 to \$2.3 billion in 2010. These assets are a reliable source of free cash flow that will help fund future growth of enhanced oil production.

Before hon. members get too excited about our royalty rates and our tax structure, we should get an idea of exactly what this group means when they say "free cash flow."

4:10

I could go on here. I would like to point out also that when the competitiveness study was done on the oil and gas sector, there were a number of meetings held back in October. Certainly, the President of the Treasury Board wasn't there. But one of the documents that I got off the Internet from October 1, 2009 – and it was a huge breakfast meeting that occurred in the Viking room of the Petroleum Club in Calgary. There were over 30 senior representatives from the oil and gas industry there.

It was pointed out that "there was concern that there may be proposed royalty alternatives in the report, and it was clarified that this is not the case." So I'm led to believe that in October there was concern that there would be proposed royalty alternatives in the report, and it was clarified that it was not the case. That would lead me to believe that people were satisfied with the royalty rates. Now, I could stand corrected on that, and I would appreciate members' views or opinions on this.

Now, also, at a breakfast meeting on September 29 – and this is the financial sector talking about the competitiveness study. This was in the Presidents room at the Petroleum Club. I'm sure the President of the Treasury Board has been there, and that's part of his job. I've got no problem with that. The views on Alberta's competitiveness in the future: this is one of them:

The royalty structure is viewed as affecting Alberta's competitiveness, but it is not considered the most important factor (commodity prices and capital costs have a much greater effect). There is a need to determine which factors are in control of the GoA and which are not.

So it seems to me that there was a consensus that it's commodity prices and capital costs that are causing us some difficulty at this time, not the royalty rates. Now, that was pointed out to us by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, and I appreciate that.

Before I conclude – and hopefully I can get a chance to get some response from the President of the Treasury Board to my questions on the competitiveness of the education portion of the property tax across this province and who pays what for what reason – I would like to ask hon. members to take heed of this operation that's being planned in Montana to ship these large steel-fabricated modules from South Korea across the Pacific, up the Columbia and Snake rivers to Lewiston, Idaho, to be put on trucks and slowly moved over to Montana, up through Montana to Sweetgrass, and then on to the Kearl oil sands project.

I don't think that is in the long-term interests of this province. I think it's very difficult for us to compete. Hon. members say that we're out of the business of being in business, and then we bring up: well, the horse-racing business is special; we're going to look after them. I think what we have to do in this province – and this government has to do it – is what's in the best interest of the citizens.

Having all these modules constructed offshore at a time of high construction unemployment in this province is bad public policy. We are the ones that are providing the tax concessions and the royalty concessions to these energy companies. As much of the work as possible should be done and completed in this province. Also, Mr. Chairman, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to watch the progress of this project. We need to ensure that this is not a trend. Many of the steel fabricators – I phoned one here yesterday afternoon, and they said that they're slow. That's how they described it: their work schedule is slow. So they could use some of this work.

Mr. Chairman, before debate is adjourned, if the President of the Treasury Board has some answers for me, I would really appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: The hon. member has mentioned the number \$336 million for the public school board support from the city of Edmonton. In context, Mr. Chairman, we collect just about \$1.6 billion in the total year. In '10-11 that was \$56 million more than before. Well, I'm talking overall. So the simple fact is that the assessment increased to do that.

We are projecting 2 per cent growth in that assessment over the next two years, but we're reducing the mill rate 13.5 per cent, so there is no inflationary creep into the school board numbers. There was a discussion over the years. We said that we were going to freeze the education portion, not at \$1.2 billion, at the rate it was. So growth, new homes offer new sources.

Of that \$1.6 billion that we collect in school tax, \$947 million is from residential or farm and \$645 million is from the nonresidential, the factories and businesses. Virtually, you'd have to look at it from the point of view that you're providing the Edmonton public school board probably a fifth of the funding. It's at one-tenth of what we spend on the operational part of schools, not including the capital, just on running the school system in Alberta. The only way that Edmonton public schools isn't getting very good value is if they had less than 10 per cent of the students in Alberta, which you and I know isn't true.

Ms Blakeman: Adjourn debate?

Mr. Snelgrove: Oh, I'll be happy to do that. You bet. Thank you.

I'd be happy to take the hon. member out one day near whatever particular day he celebrates most vigorously and go over some of the tax issues that we may have to settle.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: Shall the progress on the bill be reported when the committee rises? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much. Here we are: committee debate on Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010. I said in debate on second reading that this is a good bill. I just had a few questions that I wanted to put on the record at committee, and depending on the answers to those questions, I suspect – I don't think these are hugely difficult questions; I think I'll be satisfied by the answers – that I would certainly be happy to support this bill.

I do think in principle that it's going in exactly the right direction, but I do have a few questions, if I could put them on the record. I would draw everybody's attention to section 11.3(1), delegation by local authority. This section enables a local authority to confer powers to a regional service commission, a joint committee, or to another local authority as in the case of a summer village.

A few questions around this. What exactly will be the relationship between regional service commissions, emergency management agencies, advisory committees, local authorities, and the provincial government? Whose ultimate responsibility will disaster response be in Alberta if there is a failure? You know, we are dealing with human beings here, so failure is a possibility. If there's a failure to respond adequately to an emergency, who will be held responsible, and what will the penalties be for inadequate response? I'm not expecting that to happen, obviously, Mr. Chair, but we've got to cover all the bases here.

4:20

Given that this legislation offers better protection for search and rescue workers from liability actions, as it well should, what assurances will this legislation provide to Albertans, however, that proper action will be taken to mitigate damage from emergencies? We have seen problems in disaster response when there are too many organizations involved without appropriate leadership, thankfully not in this province, to the best of my awareness, but the most, I guess, egregious and tragic example that I can think of right now on the North American continent is Hurricane Katrina.

Is this organizational structure the best for Alberta? With so many different groups potentially involved in emergency preparations and response, how will co-ordination be guaranteed? I recognize that at some level this holds out the promise there could be fewer organizations involved, but there still are a number, and there's co-ordination needed. Will additional funding be needed for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to try to co-ordinate so many different levels of organization for emergency response?

I wanted to talk as well about liability protection for emergency service providers. This is the section that protects employees of the minister, local authority, and search and rescue organizations from actions in negligence. The condition, of course, is that so long as these organizations and people of these organizations are acting in good faith, then they cannot be found negligent. This protection is already in place for municipal employees. It was extended to include firefighters in the fall session of 2009. Protecting search and rescue organizations and search and rescue workers from lawsuits is clearly important. I don't dispute that at all.

However, with greater protection against negligence lawsuits there is a greater responsibility to be adequately equipped, trained, and financially supported. While not meaning to question the level of training and equipment and support that exists today – we always want to make a good thing better – what will this government do to ensure that these organizations are adequately equipped and their employees trained? Will this government fund these organizations better so that they can be adequately equipped and trained or more adequately equipped and trained? For example, why is the Alberta Emergency Management Agency budgeted to receive almost 1 and a half million dollars less in this fiscal year upcoming than was budgeted for the fiscal year just ending?

There were some rumours kicking around that the province was considering covering third-party liability insurance that's needed for search and rescue operations, so why did the government choose not to fund third-party liability insurance? Possibly the answer to that question is: hon. member, you shouldn't believe rumours, but I'll put it on the record anyway. What are people supposed to do if they are hurt during a rescue due to negligence? Is there any recourse to compensation, or does the good faith provision completely negate that? If it does, then what was the rationale behind that?

Those are the questions that I have, Mr. Chair. I look forward to some answers, and we shall move on from there. I know that may seem like quite a few questions, but in fact I think this is a very good bill in principle, and otherwise I have no problems with it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in this House on behalf of the Wildrose Alliance caucus to speak in support of Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act. One of the things I do believe this government, this House, but especially this PC government has done a very good job on for a very long period of time under the Attorney General, the Solicitor General as well as the Solicitor General's predecessor and going back is protecting the safety of Albertans. They're very much on top of this file and are doing a very good job. This is the next step in that.

Passage of this bill will extend much-needed protection to our valiant search and rescue workers. The noble work they do will be recognized by this bill, and it will also allow for the sharing of resources among our smaller Alberta communities.

The natural world is a wonder to be explored, but it is sometimes, of course, dangerous as well, as dangerous as it is beautiful. Alberta is home to Canada's worst tornadoes. In 1987 I remember very well living on an acreage just outside of Sherwood Park and being very frightened. I was just 10 years old then, and I still remember those big, massive hailstones pounding into the side of our home and the windows. Of course, I was lucky, as were, obviously, many of the people in this room who I know have similar scary stories, but 27 Albertans did die in that horrific situation, and many more hundreds were injured.

In the midst of that devastation, though, Mr. Chair, emerged heroic search and rescue efforts from our search and rescue workers. These brave people act in good faith for the common good and safety of all Albertans. The harm caused by these kinds of tragedies and disasters is minimized by our search and rescue workers. These courageous people are often volunteers, devoting their personal time, equipment, and, tragically, sometimes their lives for their fellow citizens. Who could forget the incredible heroics of the search and rescue workers at the World Trade Center site, for example, and the incredible work they did. Many of them right now are actually

suffering because of those efforts with different health issues, cancer, and lung issues, et cetera. These are very dangerous positions, just as dangerous in many regards as our firefighters and police officers have to face.

But sadly, Mr. Chair, some people are ungrateful for these efforts. Sometimes search and rescue workers, putting their lives on the line for others, are being pursued in court for negligence. Very, very ugly that people would do that, and it doesn't make me feel very good to be a lawyer when I read about some of these things. I see the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs is not here anymore. I'm not implying for a second that he was one of those lawyers but that he is one. Anyway, we must, of course, legally protect . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, avoid mentioning . . .

Mr. Anderson: Oh, he is here. Sorry.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Anderson: It took me by surprise because I was looking, and I thought I was going to see him.

Anyway, obviously, we must legally protect those that save us from danger. Extending the good-faith liability protection already enjoyed by firefighters is one way to do this. Without such liability protection the cost of search and rescue will continue to increase every year, and so will the premiums search and rescue organizations are forced to pay. These premiums are now the biggest barrier for these volunteers. In fact, some of these societies have now disbanded because the financial strain has become too great.

This bill, of course, addresses the gap in this existing legislation, which is why our caucus supports it. We must provide the security to those that give hope and safety to those of us who are in the most dire of straits. That is why I and the rest of the Wildrose Alliance caucus support this legislation and would like it to be noted in the record.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak as well to Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010. This bill would ensure liability protection for search and rescue workers and organizations.

Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that we depend in our society here in this province very much on each other. One of the things that strikes me and gives me hope about the future of Alberta is its history of mutual assistance and co-operation between individuals. Sometimes we forget that Alberta has a very strong tradition of co-operation and assistance. It's not all simply people looking out for themselves and not for their neighbours. It's, in fact, quite the opposite. The fact that Albertans volunteer in great numbers and volunteer even to the point of putting themselves in harm's way in order to protect their friends and their neighbours is, I think, something that's a hallmark of our province.

4:30

I regret very much that sometimes people who do that, acting in good faith, are then seen as a legal target for someone who has suffered an injury or a loss as a result of the tragedy or the difficulty that they got into in the first place, whether it would be, you know, a fire, an accident, or any number of other things. It's not, in my view, fair that people who in a voluntary capacity or in a professional capacity came to that person's assistance should be seen as a financial or legal target of the person who suffered the injury.

I think this change is beneficial. It will eliminate the chilling effect that these lawsuits have had and may have in the future on individuals who want to make a contribution, who want to provide assistance to their neighbours when they are in trouble. I think that this bill actively promotes the spirit of co-operation and mutual aid that has been such an important part of the culture of our province over decades as opposed to the view that we saw in the bill we were just debating, Bill 1, which seems to imply that competition is the only driving force in Alberta society. That may be the view of some members and parties in this House, but in fact the history of Alberta is quite different. The rise of co-operative organizations was a very, very significant part of Alberta's history, and I think that is well reflected in the search and rescue organizations. They're certainly a very important part of that.

I think the bill actually strengthens the parts of Alberta that I appreciate the most and will ensure, I think, that people are more likely to get the kind of assistance they need when they're in times of trouble. I just want to indicate then, Mr. Chairman, that we are supportive of this bill. We think it's a good bill, and I hope that all members of the Assembly will support it as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to make a few comments in response to Bill 6, Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010, in committee here today. First of all, I'd like to thank all the members who participated in second reading for their supportive comments. I'd like to thank the members who just participated in committee as well for their supportive comments.

The importance of Bill 6 to our emergency management system cannot be overstated. The importance of getting this type of system right was tragically illustrated last week, when two Albertans lost their lives and many more were injured in an avalanche near Revelstoke, B.C. Survivors told emotional stories about being swept down the mountain and of the chaos and panic that soon followed. More lives may have been lost if it were not for the emergency first responders that quickly converged on the scene. RCMP, aerial, avalanche, ground search and rescue, dog recovery teams, emergency medical services: they all worked tirelessly, Mr. Chair, together to ensure that survivors were rescued and that the injured were treated.

The incident near Revelstoke clearly shows how first responders provide critical and timely emergency services. It's because we know the importance of the services they provide that we are introducing changes in Bill 6 to strengthen the emergency management system and support our emergency partners across the province. Bill 6 extends the good-faith liability protection currently provided to municipal firefighters to search and rescue workers and their organizations while they're providing emergency rescue services under the act, Mr. Chair.

Alberta search and rescue workers contribute daily to the safety and security of our communities. I know the hon. member for I believe it was Calgary-Currie brought this issue up, and we the Alberta government provide great resources to training search and rescue volunteers, Mr. Chair. Every single year I believe we provide grants for training of search and rescue volunteers.

Another amendment will focus on the language of the act to change the current negligence standard for providing emergency services to one of good faith. This matches the language found in the Municipal Government Act and other Alberta legislation. This will provide an additional legal protection to the minister, local authorities, and their agents and help limit their exposure to lawsuits

because claimants will have to prove bad faith. Again, as the Member for Calgary-Currie talked about, Mr. Chair, this is a deterrent. This will not completely prevent lawsuits. This is merely a deterrent. If somebody has a truly valid lawsuit, they will be able to pursue their legal claim.

Finally, Mr. Chair, changes to the act will focus on enabling regional emergency service delivery and will allow communities to work together where – and this is the important piece – it is effective to do so. Administrative, financial, and training burdens placed on municipalities could be reduced by centralizing service through regional committees or commissions.

Now, again, it's important to mention that that particular piece has come from the communities. There are currently two pilot projects, one in Beaver county and the other in Grande Prairie, to develop a model of regional service delivery. Municipalities in both regions have been working closely with the agency and with each other to develop an effective system. These projects have been of significant interest to other municipalities in the province, who could then consider similar arrangements. Mr. Chair, it's very important to mention that these ideas came from the community, from people that are working in the area.

During second reading a few members had some questions and asked whether people who suffer from damages caused by a search and rescue operation will no longer be able to seek damages. Mr. Chair, I want to make this point again: search and rescue members will be protected if they are acting in good faith in performance of their duties. The onus now is on the complainant to show that the searcher was acting in bad faith to collect damages. They still have their protection, and the individuals that are being rescued still have a degree of protection as well, but they have to prove that the searcher was acting in bad faith. It's important to note that the amendment, as I said, doesn't remove the right to sue. It merely adds a little more protection for people who provide emergency services out of the goodness of their heart and to the best of their ability.

Another member, I believe Edmonton-Strathcona, had a similar question in relation to other agencies and businesses that may also have liability protection, such as guides and outfitters, and whether a person suffering an injury will have any recourse to collect compensation. Any person or organization who is acting under the authority and direction of the minister is protected when they are performing those duties. So there are two parts there. One is that they have to be acting under the authority and, the second, under the direction of the minister to be protected.

4:40

For example, a guide who is asked or directed to guide a search and rescue team into the wilderness would be protected. The broadcasters who air public warning messages would be protected. A firm that is asked to provide equipment such as a bulldozer is protected. The key here is that the government has asked for and knows what services are being provided and what the risks are.

Mr. Chair, these are absolutely important amendments. Further, the Member for Calgary-Currie focused somewhat on the good-faith piece, which I've talked about, and the training piece, which I've also provided some light on, the fact that we do provide resources for training and that every single person, I'm told, that goes out on one of these operations has some training.

On the part of the regional emergency service delivery, folks on the ground are saying that instead of having somebody that has emergency management as a part of their title but only does it at the side of their desk, this will give people – municipalities, summer villages, et cetera – the ability to come together and say: why don't

we have one person that looks after emergency management, on a full-time basis perhaps, for all of the municipalities? But, again, it's up to them to come up with the ideas and work with us to see if there's a fit.

With that, Mr. Chair, again I'd like to thank very much all members that have spoken in favour of this great bill and for their recognition of the wonderful work that is done by our search and rescue volunteers. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Seeing no other members who wish to speak on this bill, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure today to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 4, Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010. I appreciate the support that has been received already for this bill in second reading. Maybe I'll just repeat a little bit about what this bill is about. It's pretty straightforward and simple.

In June of last year the federal government changed some of their legislation which relates to the transportation of dangerous goods. Our government feels as though it's very important to ensure that our legislation in Alberta is harmonized with the federal legislation for a couple of reasons. One reason is to achieve continuity and some standardization across the country. So whether goods are being transported within a province or across provincial borders, those people who have to transport them and comply with regulation have a standard set of rules to follow. Secondly and very importantly, we want to make sure that Alberta preserves its jurisdiction over the handling of dangerous goods. We see it as being very important for our people to be able to interpret and enforce the rules that are in place.

The changes are relatively minor and administrative. There were some comments that were made, some concerns that were expressed in second reading, and perhaps I could just address some of them. One of the things that I heard was that there was some concern and maybe even some suspicion that the reason for some of these changes was to cut costs, to save on staffing. There was also some question about enforcement. How are the rules going to be enforced? Again I just want to say that this is really a refreshment of the existing rules. We already have staff in place who are enforcing these rules. So that's not really an issue, the issue of needing more staffing.

As a matter of fact, it's interesting to note that Alberta is unique in that we have our own inspectors who are interpreting and enforcing these rules. Across the country Transport Canada has 35 inspectors, and those dangerous goods inspectors are responsible for

the inspections and enforcement in all of Canada, all the provinces and territories except Alberta. In Alberta we have seven inspectors and a chief inspector, so a total of eight inspectors, who are dedicated to ensuring the safety of Albertans. So staffing to enforce these regulations is really not a concern. It's already in place. I would submit that we are, really, better positioned than most in terms of resources.

Another issue that was raised in second reading debate was relating to time limitations. There was some concern about the time limitations that are going to be in the new set of regulations. Presently section 23 says that no action can be taken beyond two years after an offence is alleged to have been committed. The change does not exactly mirror the federal legislation, but I would again suggest that there are good reasons for that.

It differs a little bit from the rules that are being used by Transport Canada. They say that the period is five years from the date of the offence, but they seem to interpret and consider the date of the offence to be the date when it is discovered. For the sake of clarity our legislation, this bill says that the limitation will be the later of two years from the time an offence is alleged to have been committed or two years from the day the evidence of the alleged offence first came to the attention of the director. That is a clarification. The other thing that's important to note is that the two years is consistent with other provincial legislation such as the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act.

There was some comment made regarding appeals from administrative penalties. In the bill the Alberta Transportation Safety Board will be handling those appeals. There was some suggestion made that one might not be able to get a fair hearing if they were in front of the Alberta Transportation Safety Board. I just want to say that this board already handles appeals that relate to the Traffic Safety Act and the Railway (Alberta) Act. They are an independent board. Their members have to follow a strict code of conduct. Any suggestion that one would not be fairly dealt with by such a body is really unfounded and even unfair.

On the question of the administrative penalty, that is also something that is new. Some of the comment that was made in debate on second reading was that the \$10,000 maximum is too high. Some suggested it was too low. A couple of things to point out about that. The intent of this administrative penalty is not that it would be used in all cases. It's really meant to be for the day-to-day kinds of noncompliances that often happen. It would be kind of too bad to have people spending a lot of court time and using up the court resources for what would be considered, perhaps, less major incidents, but it's important to note that there are other provisions still in the act – for example, in section 30 – where because of major noncompliances the courts can handle the prosecution.

An example was given of the Wabamun Lake incident by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. A serious incident like that would likely be a situation where it would probably not be appropriate for the administrative penalties but for the more serious penalties, which can still be handled in the courts.

4:50

There was a question about whether or not this legislation gives the authorities the power to stop illegal or unsafe operations. I would refer the hon. member to section 12 and section 18, which do give that kind of power. So there are still plenty of teeth, I would suggest, in the existing legislation. It's not all in the bill. The bill is just making some fairly minor changes, but the existing legislation has that kind of power to make somebody stop an activity that is causing damage or is seen to be a risk.

Again, these rules already exist under federal legislation. We are not increasing regulatory burden.

I should also mention that Alberta Transportation partnered with Transport Canada in consultations throughout Alberta and, in fact, across Canada when these changes were being considered. Industry in Alberta is aware of these changes that are being proposed, and they are in support.

With that, I would just like to thank all members for taking part in the debate. I urge all members to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I was listening to the comments from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I appreciated that he took the time and effort to respond to some of the issues that I and others raised in second reading. I rise today – and I'm not sure if the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose is aware of this or not – to move an amendment on behalf of the Member for Calgary-McCall. That amendment is at the desk with the Clerk, and I'll just wait for it to be distributed.

The Chair: We'll wait for the pages to deliver the amendment, and then we'll continue. This amendment is now known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, continue with amendment A1.

Dr. Taft: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill 4, Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010, be amended as follows: (a) sections 14 and 15 are struck out, and (b) section 16(b) is amended by striking out the proposed clause (u.3). There are, of course, reasons for this amendment, and I want to review those for people to consider as they weigh whether to vote in favour or not of this amendment. What we want to do with this amendment is strike the section that deals with the time limit for prosecution, which is section 14, and the section that deals with administrative fees, which is section 15. Then there's a bit of a housekeeping change that would then need to be made to section 16.

Now, the concern with section 14 about the time limit and the reason that this amendment proposes striking that out is that the time limit will stay at two years but that it will be two years after either the day of the last offence or the day on which evidence of the alleged offence came to the attention of the director; i.e., the director of the dangerous goods and rail safety branch of Alberta Transportation, whichever is later.

We've come upon, as we've done our due diligence on this legislation, some concerns and controversy around this. For example, I'm told that if it were five years after an alleged offence had occurred but that the offence just then came to the attention of the director, then someone can be still prosecuted for the offence. I guess the question really arises, as it's been put to us: do we as an Assembly really want companies or drivers or people to be liable indefinitely? If an offence occurred 10 years ago and it only came to the attention of the director last week, then there would be a liability risk there, you know, and there is a point at which that just perhaps isn't reasonable or isn't fair. It also opens up a bit of a grey area about problems with proving exactly when the director was alerted to the offence. So there are issues here, and it just seems prudent to us to amend the legislation so that those issues don't arise.

One of the background or underlying concerns with this is that this particular branch of Alberta Transportation we consistently hear is inadequately staffed. If they don't have sufficient inspectors, if they're not out there doing their jobs enough, then often they're not going to find offences in a timely manner. If they had sufficient staff to actually be actively policing in a way that would catch

offences, then they don't need the legislation that basically lifts any time constraints on this. We're hearing over and over that Alberta Transportation isn't staffed enough and that this legislation, Bill 4, is trying to sort of work around that by opening spaces or increasing time frames so that a small staff has more opportunity to do a job that they should really be doing in a timely fashion if it was sufficiently staffed.

The second part of this proposed amendment on behalf of the Member for Calgary-McCall is to strike section 15 of Bill 4. Now, section 15 is something that we ought to think about quite carefully. I'm sure the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who is, after all, a thoughtful man, has probably considered section 15. When I look at section 15, the very first paragraph, page 8 of Bill 4, the following is added after section 30:

Administrative penalties

30.1(1) Where the Director is of the opinion that a person has contravened this Act, the Director may, subject to the regulations, order that person to pay to the Government an administrative penalty in the amount, not exceeding \$10,000, set out in the order.

I will stop quoting there because section 15 goes on at some length, and all I need to do is read that one paragraph to raise the concern. There are actually a few concerns here.

This sets up a kind of quasi-judicial process and makes the director, in this case a civil servant, a kind of judge. It says in this legislation – and I want to repeat this for all MLAs to hear – “where the Director is of the opinion that a person has contravened this Act.” Let's think about that phrase for a minute, Mr. Chairman. We're basically creating a kind of judicial power for a public servant. We're not saying anything in here about what evidence is required, what appeals are required, what else is involved here. We're just saying that if it's in the opinion of the director that somebody has broken the law, then bingo, that person can be fined. That's, I think, a worry, something that we need to be very careful of.

5:00

If we didn't have this section 15 – in other words, if we voted to accept the amendment that I've proposed on behalf of the Member for Calgary-McCall – it wouldn't mean that we've gutted the legislation. Under current legislation there are substantial penalties, and there are provisions in there for how to handle offences and fines and so on. So I'm just raising a red flag that we need to be very careful as a Legislative Assembly of creating these kinds of powers and this sort of authority outside of the court system. I think that's the spirit in which this amendment is proposed.

I am also concerned that through section 15 as it's proposed, we are creating administrative penalties up to \$10,000. What, Mr. Chairman, is an administrative penalty? You know, we're telling this director that he can impose an administrative penalty of up to \$10,000. What's the difference between an administrative penalty and a fine? If somebody wants to appeal this penalty, what do they do? Does this mean that maybe somebody can actually trade off and say, “Well, you know what? I'll pay the \$10,000 administrative penalty and then I won't have to go to court” when the risk of going to court might be \$50,000? Maybe they ought to pay \$50,000. In other words, is there a sort of get-out-of-jail-at-low-cost opportunity in this?

There are just a whole bunch of questions around section 15 that we're hearing concerns about, and as we've thought about them, we thought we should bring them to the floor of this Assembly so that all MLAs can give this serious thought. As far as our research shows, there's nothing in the federal legislation that would necessitate administrative fees and penalties and that sort of thing. We feel

that the standard of proof of a contravention of the act should be greater than merely the opinion of the director and that, frankly, a proper judicial process is perhaps wiser in this case. There simply is room for misuse and abuse in both directions here, we feel. Things could be too lenient; things could be too tough. So there is a real concern with this. That's why this amendment proposes to delete section 15.

As a consequence of those changes, we would then have to delete section 16(b)(u.3), which simply says, “respecting administrative penalties.” That would have to be pulled out because if we abolish or strike out section 15, then there would be no administrative penalties. At least, that's my understanding of it, Mr. Chairman.

I think that with those comments I've sketched out the reasoning that my colleague from Calgary-McCall wanted this amendment moved. I know it's brought forward by that member in good faith after consulting with various stakeholders. I look forward to any debate on the issue, and I'll do my best to either respond to or to take note of the concerns that might come forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: On amendment A1. Any other debate? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and also the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall for the thought that they've put into this and for their input and comments although, regrettably, I can't agree with the proposed amendment.

Basically the amendment is addressing two things, the issue of the time limitation and the issue of the administrative penalties. On the issue of the time limitation any time you have a limit by which something has to happen, you know, there can be differences of opinion as to when the clock starts running. Even if we were to accept the amendment and go back to the current wording, which says, “2 years after . . . the offence is alleged to have been committed,” we would still have the issue of: well, when did that happen?

Keeping in mind the nature of what we're talking about here – environmental problems, spills, and so on – I think our government wants to make a strong statement that we will be aggressive in enforcing this legislation. We have a high expectation of people who are handling dangerous goods. I think we want to err on the side of being able to protect the environment. It's quite plausible that there could be situations that would remain hidden and undetected for a length of time, so to have a fairly tight, narrow time frame would not be in the best of interests of protecting the environment.

In the federal legislation my understanding is that the interpretation given by Transport Canada in enforcing their legislation is the same as what we are now going to say in black and white in the bill: when it “first came to the attention of the Director.” I cannot accept that this is an issue of staffing at all, keeping in mind, again, that our resources for enforcement of these types of things are stronger, it would appear, than anywhere in Canada when you compare 35 inspectors for all of Canada, excepting Alberta, and eight for Alberta.

It's a fair comment to say that evidence may disappear or that it may not be available after a longer period of time, but there is discretion in terms of prosecuting. Like with any offence, if you don't have any evidence to go on, you're probably going to be on thin ice in terms of prosecuting. Those would be my comments on section 14.

Section 15, the administrative penalties. Once again, these are intended to be for less serious offences. Some attention was given

to the first line of that section, about the opinion of the director. Well, I would submit that for any prosecution somebody has to have an opinion that an offence has been committed, whether it's a police officer having reasonable and probable grounds or a health inspector. Somebody has got to have the opinion and then carry on with the prosecution from there.

Also, there is an appeal process. If the director has been too aggressive, the person charged with noncompliance does have the right to go to the Transportation Safety Board. My understanding is that there has been good consultation with the industry. It is my understanding that this is something that the industry supported, and I can see why they would. If the only option is to be charged and have to go to court, have to spend a lot of money on legal advice and lawyer representation, we can't have that. You know, it seems like a good option, for things that are more what would be described as minor offences, for there to be another venue to have those issues heard and, therefore, be more user friendly for the industry, I would suggest.

Those are my submissions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity.

5:10

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General on amendment A1.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked a question relating to the difference between an administrative penalty and a fine, which I think is somewhat relevant to how I feel about the current amendment. I'm asking, as the member is a lawyer, if he could clarify that. My understanding would be that an administrative penalty is one levied by an administrator who has determined that you're in violation of an act whereas the fine would be the result of a court case. Because it's an administrative penalty, it does not mean that there's no appeal. There always is an appeal. It's just that an administrator of a program has determined that you're in violation versus a laid charge in a subsequent court action. Am I right there? Is that the difference?

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you. Certainly, there is an appeal from this administrative penalty. Absolutely no question about it. Some people might want to call it a fine. I don't know that really in substance, you know, it makes a difference. The fact is that the bill says that an administrative penalty can be levied and that you have a right of appeal to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board.

The Chair: On amendment A1?

Seeing no other members wishing to speak, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Now back to the bill. Seeing no other hon. members wishing to speak on the bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to get on the record on Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010. I heard the introductory remarks from the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright here, and I appreciate that. I know these are more or less just housekeeping changes to parallel federal amendments. This is an amendment that is done annually in this Assembly. There are some changes, though, that are slightly different this year, changes to functional currencies to allow a corporation to file tax returns in the currency of its accounting records. There are changes to the federal fairness provision which will allow the minister to waive interest or penalties in certain situations and clarification regarding refund interest rates of close to 50 per cent.

Now, we do know that the Alberta Corporate Tax Act is generally amended every year to ensure that Alberta maintains a fair and equitable and competitive tax regime. As I said, there is sort of a routine list of amendments here that are mostly housekeeping in nature, but the minister of finance reviewed the measure and changes that affect a corporation's ability to keep its accounting records in American or Australian dollars or British pounds or euros, whatever. That certainly has been discussed in debate to date, and I think that's an agreeable measure.

A second change that our research indicates in this legislation, of course, is bringing everything in line with the federal fairness provisions, allowing the minister to waive interest and/or penalties in certain situations. For example, when a taxpayer requests a reassessment under the fairness provision, the minister will now be able to waive interest and penalties in appropriate circumstances at the same time the reassessment is issued. When the legislation was amended several years ago, as I understand it, the minister's ability to waive at his or her own volition was unintentionally removed. If that was an error or an omission, this legislation certainly corrects that.

Mr. Chairman, the third and last point I would like to put on the record at this time concerns corporate refund interest rates. In Budget 2010 refund interest rates were reduced by 50 per cent for all prior periods and going forward. While these rates are set by regulation, the regulation-making authority in the act has been amended to ensure that it is clear the new rates will be made applicable to prior periods. I was looking at the fiscal plan. There can be significant changes in amounts refunded. This is, hopefully, an amendment that will strike the right balance.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, corporations will now be able to file their returns in the currency they use in their accounting books, ministers will be allowed to waive interest or penalties in certain situations, as we talked about earlier with the federal fairness provisions, and the refund of interest rates and overpayments of corporate taxes.

With that, at committee, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that I appreciate the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright's due diligence and the fact that he was willing to provide this information to our research staff. I'd like to say thank you for that. Hopefully,

this bill will become the law of the province, and we can continue with some of the lowest yet fairest tax rates in the country.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased today to rise in Committee of the Whole. The hon. member did an exceptional job of, essentially, summing up the legislation. I guess I just want to reiterate for the record that generally every year the Alberta Corporate Tax Act is opened up to bring forward amendments that are typically just to ensure that our legislation aligns with the federal legislation and to deal with any, generally minor, amendments but consequential to the tax act.

Among the three measures that are of significance, of course, as was mentioned by the hon. member, is section 2 of Bill 8, which amends section 4.01 of the Corporate Tax Act. It says that if a corporation keeps its accounting records in U.S. or Australian dollars, the British pound, or the euro, it's known as a functional currency. Changes to the federal legislation required the province to make changes to our provisions this year. The one policy difference, however, that will remain between Alberta and the federal legislation is that when the functional currency reporting was adopted by Alberta last year, the taxes payable would be converted at an average exchange rate over the entire year while the federal legislation chooses the date when payment is due. So we're maintaining that consistency.

The second measure of significance that's being adopted, Mr. Chairman, is section 9(1) of this bill, which brings Alberta legislation in line with the federal fairness provision. The provision that the minister was able to waive interest and penalties under appropriate circumstances was accidentally removed. This is going to be reintroduced into the legislation.

5:20

The third measure of significance, Mr. Chairman, of course, comes out of Budget 2010. Refund interest rates are being reduced by 50 per cent for all pay periods and going forward. In comparing our interest rates with the commercial bank rates, it was determined that Alberta's refund interest rates on overpayments for corporate income tax were far too high. It was a little bit like the old provision that it was sometimes easier to leave your money with the government, that paid you a higher interest rate than the bank would even pay you. It was more like an investment. So reducing our rates by 50 per cent is a middle ground between the bank rates and what we had utilized before, and this strikes a fair balance for the corporations and the tax dollars that will be paid on those interest payments.

That summarizes the bill. I look forward to any questions that may arise here in Committee of the Whole. I will be happy to answer them, and I encourage all members to continue to support this into third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on this bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. One thing that all parties in this Assembly can agree to is the need to modernize how elections are governed. We can also agree that the rules need to be clear, they need to be enforceable, and they need to be nonpartisan. As I begin, I want to point out the parts of Bill 7 that the Wildrose caucus is able to support, and then I can move on to some of our concerns.

First, I believe it is important that the Chief Electoral Officer is the one who appoints returning officers, not the party in power. This change is important.

Second, Bill 7 changes the way enumerators are appointed, and when you also look at the safeguards regarding the electoral list that Bill 7 hopes to put in place, these two combined changes are a very positive step. The quality of our elections will succeed or fail based upon the quality of our voters lists, and we need to make sure that we have the very best people to help us with the development of these lists.

Third, Bill 7 broadens the investigative powers of the Chief Electoral Officer. This, too, is an important step forward although these powers and enforcement capabilities should go further. It is also important for Elections Alberta to open up the advance voting process further. People make so many decisions based on convenience and ease of access to goods or services. Let's make it as convenient as possible.

There are a number of other changes that Bill 7 proposes, Mr. Chair, and I will not go into all of them. I do, however, think it is important to focus the government's attention on areas that will cause Albertans a great deal of concern. In a lot of areas the government did the bare minimum, and the bare minimum is not what Albertans want.

As the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere will touch on, Albertans have been asking for fixed election dates for years. The government believes it should have special rights to call an election when it is politically convenient. As you know, Mr. Chair, municipalities in Alberta have fixed election dates. On the third Monday of October every third year voters go to the polls to elect their local government. This has been extremely effective in Alberta and other jurisdictions because voters know exactly when a municipal election will take place. It is disappointing that this government has not implemented fixed election dates, and it must be part of any changes to our election acts.

It seems strange that this government has not been willing to create a truly independent election office that is fully capable of enforcing the rules. It also seems strange that the new Chief Electoral Officer thinks his role is to simply enforce the rules and run elections but not encourage people to vote.

In terms of accountability, Mr. Chair, it is the position of our caucus that all reports of the Chief Electoral Officer should come to the Assembly. These reports should be presented to you and then given to the elected Assembly. We are responsible for setting the rules that govern elections, and the final accountability for the effectiveness of Alberta's election system ultimately falls on each of us. If the Chief Electoral Officer is not made directly accountable to this Assembly, then this government, or any government for that matter, can decide to remove someone from this important position as they choose.

Mr. Chair, why didn't the government get it right and make sure that the Chief Electoral Officer put new rules in place for scrutineers or to allow for fines and/or penalties to be imposed for breaches of this act?

Finally, Mr. Chair, an issue that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has more recent experience with, which is the formation of new parties and donations to new parties. While the government may say that people have the freedom to set up new parties and to voice their opposition, the reality is that the current political and party system makes it very difficult for people to do that.

Why does Bill 7 not include a provision that allows people to make a contribution towards the formation of a new political party, and once that party is recognized and formed, why can't a tax receipt be issued? People can make contributions towards charities and not-for-profit organizations in advance of their formation, and once the organization is legally incorporated and recognized, the appropriate receipts can be issued for tax purposes. Why is this government so afraid to give people the ability to form political parties that more closely represent their views?

Why does this government ignore democracy by making it virtually impossible for opposition parties to succeed in this province? If this government is truly conservative, then it shouldn't be afraid of the marketplace or afraid of new ideas. If the rules are reasonable and allow people to get together, then they will rise or fall because voters will not give them money. Without support from voters, they will not have traction. Let voters decide, Mr. Chair, not obscure rules or unreasonable barriers.

As members of the committee looking at the electoral boundaries adjustments have noted, they were given orders to increase the number of MLAs. They were not given the ability to ask whether or not more MLAs were needed, whether fewer were needed, or if the solution was simple, to redistribute the boundaries. More MLAs is not the answer to better representation.

I work hard for the people of Calgary-Fish Creek, Mr. Chair, and not once – not once – have I heard people in my constituency say that they want more MLAs. Never. I would be willing to wager that if we looked at reducing the number of MLAs, then there would be massive public support.

In closing, Mr. Chair, we are all here to represent the people we serve. Bill 7 does bring forward some good ideas to improve our election acts and laws, but the government falls short on the changes needed to overhaul our election system. We have laid out the improvements that we believe are important and will provide more openness, more accountability, and more transparency to our election process.

Mr. Chair, a quote that I like from a candidate at the University of Waterloo is about freedom: freedom is when the people can speak; democracy is when the government listens. We're willing to work with this government to improve Bill 7 to be more representative of what constituents and voters are telling us. We can only hope that the government is willing to listen and work with us. Albertans deserve nothing less.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. Matters of election acts have always been of interest to me, particularly in my previous career, where I had the privilege of representing some people in this respect. We've already heard some interesting debate on this bill during second reading and from the previous speaker today, and I look forward to further discussion today as well.

Without a doubt, this is complex and vitally important legislation that we're talking about here, and it deals with a process fundamental to our democracy. It's something I think all of us have in mind when we talk about this, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure my hon. colleagues are ready to discuss, so I'm just going to briefly reiterate some of the main points of Bill 7, as I had discussed with my colleague the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

The Election Statutes Amendment Act will, among other things, give all eligible inmates the ability to vote at future provincial elections by way of a special balloting process. It will also authorize the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers and require each returning officer to personally hire the enumerators, eliminating any perception of political involvement in the appointment process. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, I've already written one constituent of mine who expressed some concern about this during the last election.

5:30

It would also eliminate restrictions for those who may use an advance poll. It will increase options available to voters to identify themselves. It will improve third-party advertising legislation. It will give the Chief Electoral Officer the additional power to investigate perceived violations. It will allow for the exploration of new technologies. Last but not least, it will allow for a pilot project to test the early opening of polls. We all know that people do have busy lives these days, and if we want to increase voter turnout, we need to make it more available to the average person.

Mr. Chairman, this legislation of itself makes rather important changes to this type of essential legislation while, at the same time, it deals with the integrity of the vote and the electoral process. I would encourage all members to support Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I look forward to the remaining debate today and other days if necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise in this House and speak to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act. I've organized my comments today into three parts. First, I want to discuss our province's current democratic deficit, and then I want to discuss how Bill 7 attempts to address this deficit. Finally, I'll suggest some additions to Bill 7 with an amendment that would work to improve our democracy and improve this bill, Bill 7, as we move forward.

Mr. Chair, Alberta has a rich and proud history of producing great men and women to champion the democratic causes of Senate reform, government accountability, and women's rights, just to name a few. It's a history that we can all be proud of. Sadly, however, as a province we have failed to show leadership on this issue in recent years. Politics in our province has evolved into a process that is almost completely undemocratic.

For example, there are very few, if any, real free votes in the Legislature. The Premier and a small group of mostly unelected government officials make almost every decision on virtually every issue in government. The peoples' elected MLAs, on the other hand, generally have little, if any, real input into the decisions that impact the lives of those they represent. If an MLA contradicts the party line, he or she is sanctioned and disciplined. We saw this with the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. We saw it also with the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Most MLAs, I would say, if not all, on that side of the House know that what I am saying is true.

This democratic deficit is bad enough, but it has been made worse by a lack of transparency and accountability by our current govern-

ment. Government documents are difficult and expensive to publicly access. Cabinet sets its salaries behind closed doors. Billion-dollar government contracts are awarded without tender, as in Bill 50. Approval for infrastructure projects is often politicized. Budget deficits and other important financial information is underreported. And a culture of fear and intimidation keeps potential whistle-blowers from stepping forward.

Mr. Chairman, I left the PC Party for many reasons, but none were larger than this: the current state of our democracy is unacceptable. It is shameful. It is a mockery of the sacrifices that have been shed in its defence, and it must change, either by this government or, if they are unwilling, the Wildrose will happily take up the cause. Predictably, this lack of democracy and transparency has resulted in poor government policies, exceptionally low voter turnout, almost universal cynicism towards elected officials, and a feeling that the average Albertan has no voice or influence on issues that affect them personally.

When only two in five people choose to vote in an election, you know we have a very, very big problem. I am assuming Bill 7 is an attempt to address this issue. Frankly, Mr. Chairman, it doesn't do so very well at all. It tinkers with the system. There are some improvements, no doubt. But it leaves out all of the important things that could really make a difference in returning our province to a strong, democratic jurisdiction. I expected more out of this Minister of Justice, and so did Albertans. What we got was very, very disappointing, in my view, with this bill.

One of the left-out recommendations was that of fixed election dates. Our neighbours to the west, in British Columbia, have a fixed election date law. They have been followed by Ontario and Newfoundland, and now many others are contemplating it as well. Our government? Not a chance. Apparently, this government does not see the need for fixed election dates. Apparently, they think it's fair for a sitting government to be able to plan for an election to the very hour it is held but to allow the opposition parties to be kept in the dark. They don't see a problem with that. How pathetic that they would be so worried about maintaining a tactical advantage over the opposition for their own good rather than levelling the playing field for the sake of a more democratic province.

The Chief Electoral Officer also made a recommendation to prohibit government departmental advertising during elections. Obviously, having the multimillion-dollar Public Affairs Bureau working 24/7 to flood the airwaves with ads and communications that make the governing party look good is another unfair advantage the government has over opposition parties during elections. I guess this advantage is also too difficult for the government to give up.

Then there is the long list of democratic reforms the Wildrose Alliance would suggest be added to this bill to strengthen our democracy. We would institute fixed election dates not only for general elections but also for Senate elections. We would implement direct democracy legislation enshrining voter recall and citizen-initiated referenda. We would restore the role of an elected MLA by mandating that all votes, every single one, in the Legislature and caucus be free and transparently reported to the public: no more fear, no more intimidation and decision-making behind closed doors, just total transparency and accountability. Our democracy is hurting, Mr. Chair. The government can deny it all they want. They can justify their actions until they're blue in the face, but it matters not. They know what we all know: our democracy needs an overhaul.

Alberta is the home of Senator Bert Brown, that courageous man and constituent of mine who plowed "triple-E" into his wheat field to help inspire a movement that is only now being realized. This is the home of Preston Manning, a man decades ahead of his time and one of this nation's greatest ever defenders of the wisdom and

democratic rights of the common man. This is the home of the Famous Five – Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, and Nellie McClung – who stood up against what was then the conventional democratic wisdom that only men should be able to vote. Their brave stand altered the course of history for the betterment of our province and for our nation. Ours is a legacy to be proud of, Mr. Chair.

It is time this PC government either commit to follow our province's tradition of democratic pioneering or continue on their present downward course towards replacement by a new group of elected representatives who will.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would propose the following amendment. I believe you have the copies. Would you like me to wait?

The Chair: Yes, hon. member. Wait for the pages to distribute the amendment.

This amendment is now known as A1. Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, please continue on amendment A1.

Mr. Anderson: I'll read the amendment into the record. I would like to introduce to the House an amendment. I propose that section 89 be amended to change the proposed section 44.1(1)(g) of the Election Statutes Amendment Act by striking out subclause (iv).

What this amendment is intended to do, Mr. Chair – again, right now the government departments are allowed to advertise during an election period, so they can put out into the public airwaves and on television and in the newspaper all of the great things and the great announcements on infrastructure and things like that that obviously always seem to come right before elections. Usually they're reannouncements of things that have already been announced.

5:40

In any event, I will say that this is definitely not the only government in this land, this nation of ours, that does this, but it sure doesn't make it right. It doesn't seem right to me that you can have a government basically spending, frankly, millions of dollars on saying how great the government that was just in power preceding that election writ being dropped is. I just don't think that that is a proper use of taxpayer funds. It gives an unfair advantage to the sitting government. We're really only talking about four weeks here. Surely the government can wait on trying to promote what it's doing for Albertans for four weeks while the parties debate the issues and Albertans are discussing the issues.

We have all these campaign finance laws. They're good laws, and we should respect them. This is almost a little bit of a loophole, so I would hope that we could end that practice as we move forward.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The hon. member raised a number of issues in his speech prior to tabling this amendment, as did the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, a number of problems with the bill. Now we have before us an amendment. It escapes me, I suppose, as to how this amendment fixes some of those issues. I wanted to read into the record some of the issues the member alluded to and my concerns with them.

First of all, the member and also the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talked about fixed election dates. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talked about these being very effective in reference to fixed election dates with municipal elections. I wonder if the hon. member would care to share with us exactly how they're being effective because no evidence or numbers were provided in either

her speech or in the hon. member's speech. Maybe we might want to do that by comparing, say, the voter turnout in the last municipal election to the nearest provincial election. You know, that might be a useful statistic to compare. I don't think that "our neighbours have one" is a very compelling argument for why we should have a fixed election date.

It's amusing that the hon. member mentioned the great, great people that have gone further nationally in politics in our country. I've got to tell him that I don't think I'd agree with the list. He did mention one of them that went off to Ottawa that was going to install fixed election dates. I'm wondering if he could share with the House how that turned out.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talked about: no constituent has ever said that we should have more MLAs in our province.

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order, please.

The Chair: All right.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) would be applicable here, but relevance. We're dealing with the amendment, not the bill.

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Chair, I wish to explain to possibly one of the most irrelevant arguers in the House that the member has tabled an amendment for a number of stated reasons. I'm asking for some clarification on how the amendment addresses those reasons. I think it's highly relevant.

The Chair: I've heard the debate from the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and then the hon. Solicitor General on the point of order, and the Solicitor General responded to the point, so there is no point of order, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Back to that, I don't doubt for a second that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek works very hard to represent her constituents, but I'm not at all surprised that they haven't ever asked her for more MLAs or asked her to represent to our government we should have more MLAs. I can tell this hon. member that, in all honesty, my constituents have, and it's not just because of my performance as an MLA; it is because it is very hard to represent one's constituency in certain constituencies. For me to travel from my home in Peace River, never mind getting to my home in Peace River from Edmonton, for a meeting in Rainbow Lake is a 900-kilometre round trip. If I go to Zama, it's about a 750-kilometre round trip; 150 kilometres of that is gravel road. It's hard. My constituents are concerned about representation at Edmonton, and I'm glad we're adding more MLAs.

I want to correct, I think, a misstatement on the part of that member. He talked about cabinet setting salaries behind closed doors. I think he should visit the legislative act and understand the terms of reference of the Members' Services Committee. The cabinet salaries are set by the Members' Services Committee. They're right in the members' services handbook. He may want to look that up.

The last one. You know, plucking some of the democratic tools here, we talked about voter recall. First of all, that has been tried and I think in many instances proven ineffective or unworkable. It was another one of the promises of one of those guys that we sent to

Ottawa that the member mentioned. I just wonder: if we were to implement such a thing in Alberta, would that apply to members who – I don't know – cross the floor, for example? Just wondering.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, responding to those points.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. I thank the Solicitor General for his comments. You know, I don't dispute that he's a good MLA. I know he's a good MLA. He works very hard for his constituents. He's a very good minister. I've always found him to be a competent and articulate member of this House. I don't think that the view of not having more MLAs has anything to do with whether he's doing a good job or not. Some people would say that we need to readjust the boundaries and try to stick as close as we can to one person, one vote, but that's a back-and-forth argument. I see there are good arguments on both sides. I definitely would say that to you.

With regard to voter recall, you know, and citizens' initiatives I think that they're definitely worth a try doing. I don't think that we should look at the California model, where you get 2 per cent of voters on a petition and you can get a citizens' initiative on a ballot. Then you get, like, 20 things on a ballot. I agree that no one wants that type of circus. But I think that if you increase that to 10, 15, or even 20 per cent, if there was really an issue that was just burning Albertans – it was just driving them nuts, and the government wasn't responding to it – they could organize and bring that forward. I think that that's a worthy goal. It would be another way of bringing people into the process.

With regard to my own floor-crossing, I feel that an MLA is accountable to his constituents first and foremost, and I felt that I could represent them and their interests better in opposition. But I'll tell you right now that I have no problem going on the record and saying that if the Premier would like to pick a date, sometime in the fall or whenever, I would be more than happy to step down a month before that election date and hold a by-election any day, any time. He picks, and I will step down the day before the writ is dropped as long as we can come to an agreement. The reason I wouldn't want to step down is because that would leave me – I mean, I know the government, surely, would not hold an election in Airdrie-Chestermere, definitely not right now. They would like to probably draw that out for six months. If they were to hold it right now, I'm very sure what the result would be. I don't think that's very fair.

But if the Premier and the government feel that they would like to take me up on that, by all means just name the date. I'll step down a month before, and we'll have an election. I'd love to do it, just would welcome the challenge.

I would also say that the reason voter recall is important is because, look, we all need to be accountable to our constituents. Every one of us needs to be, between elections as well as every four years. I don't think anybody in this Chamber would be recalled right now because we don't have any criminals among us that I know of. We don't have people that are, you know, doing things that are just ridiculous, et cetera. Well, maybe ridiculous policywise but not in their personal affairs. I would say that I think that people would survive.

Anyway, that's just my response to the hon. minister on those points.

5:50

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It was my understanding that in committee we take turns speaking and that back-and-forth conversations are not part of the rules.

I want to speak to the amendment on the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. Mr. Chairman, this amendment would have the effect of prohibiting government advertising during an election period. I can think of no reason not to pass this amendment. I believe that it is very clear that the temptation to use the taxpayers' money on the part of governments – and not just this government, I hasten to add, all governments – is just too great. To suddenly increase spending on advertising, on television, and through other media extolling the virtues of the government and what it's doing, how great the province is, how everything is sweetness and light is, I would dare say, the norm in this country, not just in Alberta but federally and probably in every other province, and it is fundamentally unfair.

When you use the resources of government, which is the taxpayers' money, to try to tip the balance in the favour of the governing party, it is an undemocratic thing to do. It weakens the democratic process by making it less fair. So, Mr. Chairman, I think that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has put forward an excellent amendment, which I believe we ought to support.

There are a number of other changes to this act that I think could be made to strengthen it and to strengthen democracy. There are steps in here, in this bill, to control third-party advertising. To allow a private or special interest with lots of money to attempt to shift the balance during an election is also undemocratic. The government has seen fit to provide regulations with respect to that, and I would submit, Mr. Chairman, that in principle the two are very similar. Third parties using money to influence the outcome of elections favour those organizations with lots and lots of cash. Normally they would be corporations, but in some cases they could be other types of organizations.

We did see an attempt in the last election by a group of organizations to try and shift the balance in that election to them, and it backfired. It backfired. I'm convinced by that experience that, in fact, it's prudent and democratic to place those restrictions because I think an election period, Mr. Chairman, is between the political parties and their candidates and the voters, and everybody else should stay out. This is a time when we take our message to the voters at the door or through advertising on television or otherwise and try to persuade them that our principles and our policies and our

candidates are the ones that they should vote for. To have some special interest with pocketfuls of cash trying to interfere with that process is wrong.

There is a time when the politicians are accountable to the people that elect them, and that is in an election time, so I think that it's wise to limit third-party advertising. I think that it is wise that we have restrictions on the amount of money that different organizations can donate to political parties. That's become part of our political principles for a number of . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but Standing Order 4(3) requires that I interrupt to rise and report automatically without having to put the question.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 6, Bill 4, Bill 8. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 1, Bill 7.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Those concurring with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 18, 2010

Issue 20

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 18, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. We give further thanks for the gifts of culture and heritage which we share. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chers collègues, j'ai le plaisir de souligner aujourd'hui la présence parmi nous dans les tribunes d'un groupe de 11 élèves de l'école La Mission, une école francophone de St. Albert. Ces élèves sont accompagnés par Mme Micheline Spencer, leur enseignante. Je demanderais à ces deux groupes de se lever afin de recevoir la chaleureuse et traditionnelle bienvenue de cette Assemblée.

[Translation] It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce a group of 11 students from l'école La Mission, a French school in St. Albert. These students are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Micheline Spencer. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [As submitted]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I probably fractured my French in that, but I'll go to English now. It's also my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 45 grade 6 students from Vital Grandin elementary school in St. Albert. These students are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Courtney Hooper and Mrs. Pat Tymkow; two assistants, Mrs. Karen Cabot and Mrs. Diana Yakymyshyn; and three parents, Mrs. Sharryl McArthur, Mrs. Serena Shaw, and Mrs. Gingrich. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My third introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a friend and colleague of mine, the executive director of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association, Mr. Brian Munday. I'm not sure if he's in the public gallery or the members' gallery, but if he is here, I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. M. le Président, c'est un plaisir pour moi to introduce the students, des étudiants de l'école Boréal de la ville de Fort McMurray. Also with them today are professeurs Mme Boudreault et M. Lauzon. I would ask them to rise and receive the very traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a delegation from the Ladies Orange Benevolent Association. They

are at the Legislature today as part of their visit to Edmonton to attend the 89th annual grand lodge sessions. It is an honour to introduce this delegation as it is led by my aunt, the Right Worshipful Grand Mistress of Alberta Mrs. Marie Bradshaw of Innisfail. Accompanying her is a delegation that includes guests from across Canada, including the Most Worshipful Grand Mistress of Canada Mrs. Marilyn Erwin of Frankford, Ontario.

In total there are 27 ladies from Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia joining us today. The Orange Order is Canada's oldest fraternal order. They focus their efforts on helping children and seniors. Their mission statement is: working together for the betterment of family, community, and country. Mr. Speaker, I will now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've had a hard time convincing this person to be present in the Assembly so that I could introduce him. So I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Stephen MacEachern. Stephen has his BA honours in political science and has completed his coursework on his master's degree, also in political science. I'm a bit mischievous because I always like to take political science students and have them work in my constituency office just to show them what really happens. I'm very fortunate that Stephen has been working as the constituency manager in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre since the summer and has committed to stay with me through the next election. At this point I would ask that Stephen MacEachern please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House. God knows, he deserves it.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a number of postsecondary students, who are here as my guests, from the Legislate This! rally that's taking place outside the Legislature. My guests are concerned that increased education fees will create even more barriers for students looking to obtain a postsecondary degree and threaten to undermine the quality of education offered for years to come. I'm pleased to have my guests join us today and participate in our democracy. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the Edmonton Arts Council and the 11 recipients of the award for cultural diversity in the arts. The Edmonton Arts Council is a nonprofit society and charitable organization that supports and promotes the arts community in Edmonton. The cultural diversity in the arts awards program provides 12 awards of \$7,500 each to encourage and support Edmonton artists from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The recipients in this program come to Edmonton from countries around the world and demonstrate a strong dedication to continuing their artistic practice in their new home. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the award winners here as my guests today, and I'd ask that they rise as I call their names. The recipients of the awards are

Valerie Mason-John, Reni Ferreira, Chika Udok, Jinzhe Cui, Punita Chohan, Tsehay Debebe, Gordana Zivkovic, Iryna Karpenko, Jaamac Jaamac. As well, from the Edmonton Arts Council Laurie Stalker, Sally Kim, Katia Michel-Wasney, Alison Turner, James DeFelice, and executive director John Mahon. Would you please join me in congratulating and welcoming these guests.

Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1966 the United Nations declared March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This Sunday our province and nation will join communities around the world to commemorate this important day by recognizing the harmful effects of racism and promoting respect, equality, and diversity. Unfortunately, even in this day and age the reality is that racial discrimination still exists.

While we may not be able to completely rid the world of racism and discrimination, we recognize this special day and every other day of the year as a celebration of our diversity over supremacy and our acceptance over rejection. Our March 21 workshops, presentations, competition, and other activities will help Albertans recognize the important day and identify the role they can play in tackling racism in their own communities. I'm pleased that the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit, through the human rights and citizenship branch, has played a supporting role in some of the events.

1:40

However, it's important to note that although we are celebrating this day in various forms across the province, the movement to eliminate racial discrimination is a year-round initiative for many organizations. With this in mind the Alberta Human Rights Commission offers programs and resources to raise awareness and helps Albertans resolve human rights complaints.

In addition, the commission has championed and promoted the coalition of municipalities against racism and discrimination initiative in Alberta. There are over 30 communities across the country that have signed on. Alberta now has nine municipalities, which makes the largest number of municipalities of any province in the country. This initiative guides municipalities in following key principles to help build communities that are respectful, safe, and welcoming.

The Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit also assists Alberta organizations to undertake initiatives to build inclusive workplaces and communities and to promote equality for all people through the human rights, education, and multiculturalism fund.

Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, March 21, I ask the members of this House to join me and communities throughout the province in taking action against all racial discrimination and encourage fairness for all citizens. We need to continue our vigilance.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is astonishing that even in the 21st century people will judge others by superficial traits like skin colour or the shape of someone's eyes or the sound of their accent or things like sexual orientation, yet such

differences are still used to justify actions from the horrifying to the banal, from genocide to discriminatory hiring practices to social exclusion to hurtful jokes and slurs.

No matter what our ethnic background or skin colour we've all seen racism in action either within ourselves or from friends, neighbours, family members. When someone acts on a racist thought, there's only one correct thing to do: speak up firmly, immediately, and with conviction. Education, acceptance, and understanding are tools we can all use to bring racism to an end one moment at a time.

In recent days I've been fortunate enough to attend a number of events held by organizations who've developed some very on-point, practical ways of ending racism. I attended the interfaith coalition's annual seminar and banquet, for example, which brought together representatives from different religions to hear speakers with a powerful but simple message: treat people of different races just as you treat someone of your own race.

Changing Together, on the other hand, performed a day in the life of an immigrant last weekend, a powerful Ajoka theatre performance that drives home how everyday racism can do lasting damage.

I also helped hand out awards at the Black History Month last weekend and will be attending the Centre for Race and Culture's banquet on Saturday night. I have to say that a number of my colleagues in this Assembly joined me at various events that I've already described. Even as we speak, that organization is running workshops for citizens of all kinds, anyone who wants to end racial discrimination.

I'd like to join the minister in recognizing the importance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The educational and community initiatives he has outlined perform important work. But if we really want to end racism, we need to look within ourselves, to examine our own prejudices, and speak out whenever we see the injustice of discrimination, no matter how small the infraction may seem.

There should be zero tolerance for racism. If we keep working together with open hearts and genuine goodwill, then one day our children will, as the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. hoped, "not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the House for unanimous consent for the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to respond to the ministerial statement.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll ask one question with respect to this request. Is there any member in the Assembly who would oppose recognizing the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to participate? If there is, simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. March 21 has been declared the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. As many members of this Assembly will know, Canada was one of the first countries to sign on to the United Nations declaration, which was established to commemorate a dark day in history. On March 21, 1960, 69 peaceful protesters, including 10 children, were horrifically gunned down as they protested in

Sharpeville, South Africa. Since the Sharpeville massacre the world slowly came together to not only demand an end to apartheid but to root out racial discrimination and heal the divisions that exist in our society.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, racism and discrimination rear their ugly face from time to time. We all know someone who has suffered at the hands of another, whether it is because of our gender, our race, our sexual orientation, our religion. I could go on and on. While our society is built upon the principles of tolerance for different ways of doing things, different approaches to solving issues, or different perspectives based on our human uniqueness, we cannot and should not tolerate racial discrimination. People have lived and died for the freedoms that we enjoy, people have lived and died to change the way society works, and people have lived and died to be treated with dignity and respect.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the day when racial discrimination is a thing of the past. As we near the international day to end racial discrimination, I encourage all Albertans to reflect on what they can do to help build stronger relationships with one another that are based on human dignity and respect.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent from the Assembly to allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to respond.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's a request for unanimous consent to allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to respond. I'll simply ask one question. Is any member in the Assembly opposed to granting unanimous consent? If so, simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be able to rise and speak about the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, on March 21. The United Nations designated March 21 as a day to remember the 200 people who were shot and the 67 who died in what came to be known as the Sharpeville massacre. Those people had gathered to peacefully protest against South Africa's apartheid regime. They died because they confronted the overt racism of their country's political system with a simple act of civil disobedience, a challenge which the state answered with violence.

Thankfully, in Canada we've eliminated these types of overt racism from our legal system and have established racial equality as a Charter right. However, we are still a long way from abolishing racism from our society.

Just as damaging to society as overt, intentional acts of discrimination are the sometimes unintentional consequences of adverse effect discrimination, sometimes known as systemic discrimination. We see it in the overrepresentation of indigenous people in our prisons, we see it in the overrepresentation of indigenous children in government care, and we see it in the overrepresentation of visible minorities in low-income groups.

To address the continuing existence of racism in our society, the system itself has to change. Unfortunately, we move in the wrong direction when we cut support services for immigrants, like we did in the last budget. One of the best tools for creating equality of opportunity in our society is our education system, but we risk cementing the income gaps that already exist when we put higher

learning that much farther out of reach for low-income Albertans by raising tuition rates. Instead of tearing down the walls that divide people, we build them up when we bring in foreign workers on a temporary basis rather than providing them with the opportunity to live here permanently and fully integrate with our society.

We urge this government to make the legislative and administrative changes necessary to eradicate racism and ensure human rights for all. The authority, the remedial options, and the resources of our Human Rights Commission must be significantly increased.

I call on all members of this House to join me in renewing our collective commitment to working with groups such as the Centre for Race and Culture and many others in working to eliminate racial discrimination in our province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your permission and the permission of the House for the independent Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, a multiracial workplace, to briefly express his concerns?

The Speaker: We can do that. We do have one difficulty with respect to the standing orders. The standing orders say that question period must begin at 1:50, but I will ask the question. It deals with a unanimous request to the Assembly to basically permit the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to participate in the response to the ministerial statement. I'll ask one question. If any member is opposed, simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.
1:50

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also want to say today, on the comments that have been made, that it's a special moment for me as an independent member to applaud all elected officials in this Assembly and all four political parties that have spoken on such an important cause. I congratulate each and every one of them for the very positive comments that have been made today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Electoral Boundaries

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September a backbencher stated publicly that Executive Council had determined that there would be two seats in Calgary, one in Edmonton, and one in Fort McMurray. Lo and behold, that's exactly what the Electoral Boundaries Commission report recommended. Yesterday the Premier revealed that the reason for adding four seats to the House was to protect at least three rural seats which would have been redistributed, maintaining an imbalance weighted toward rural Alberta when the population is in the cities. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier promoting a disparity in the value of votes between rural and urban Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Legislature amended the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act to establish 87 ridings.

Speaking to the urban-rural, it is quite ironic because it wasn't that long ago, when I asked the capital region to get together and form a local governance board, that I was accused of the opposite, of supporting urban over rural. This is finding balance in the province, looking at the increase in the population, over a million since 1986.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the Premier. Well, over 80 per cent of Albertans live in cities. Does the Premier not understand that a major reason for low voter turnout is that people feel their vote doesn't count? In Alberta, if you're a city dweller, your vote does count for less than a rural vote.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I disagree. There are rules, as all members in the House are aware, that are established, some in part by previous decisions of the Supreme Court. There are rules established by the Constitution. The commission followed those rules, very transparent. Their report is out there for the public, you know, to bring about their suggestions on boundary changes. It's by law that we have to do it before every third election, and we're following the law.

Ms Blakeman: To the Premier. Albertans have categorically rejected the logic that four new MLAs are worth the millions of dollars of increased costs. Why doesn't the Premier just admit that these new seats are only necessary for maintaining a rural power base?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe we're so fortunate to live in a democratic country and a democratic province. But if that's the case, if it's a matter of cost, then I would assume that the Liberals will be phoning the Prime Minister and saying: "Please don't give three more seats to Alberta. Even though the population has increased and the differences between east and west, please, it's a matter of cost, so don't give us any more representation."

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

PDD Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition has appealed to this government to treat vulnerable Albertans, including PDD, with humanity. The minister says that cuts are not trickling down to vulnerable people, but PDD-funded agencies have notified us that they are facing cuts from \$30,000 to \$140,000. There is no amount of administrative efficiencies that can be found that will prevent these cuts from harming the lives of people on PDD. My questions are to the Premier. Why is this government doing another round of cuts on Calgary region PDD service providers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're fortunate as the province of Alberta that we saved during the good times. We have a cash surplus fund that's set aside to cushion the blow on the significant reduction in our revenue. One of our commitments, of course, is to ensure that we support the most vulnerable. PDD, persons with developmental disabilities, are a part of that group, and we're doing whatever we can to ensure that the services that they have will continue to be provided.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the Premier: given that before the new fiscal year even starts, several Calgary area service providers know they are facing cuts for next year's programming, why does the Premier

continue to deny that government budget decisions will result in less service delivery to vulnerable Albertans? Of course it will.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has all of the detail with respect to region to region. She will be able to answer that question.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our budget that's being debated right now, we have kept our budget level. Certainly, that's going to create a situation where we need to find efficiencies. We have asked our regions to help us find those efficiencies, and I believe that the regions are asking the social agencies that work with our PDD clients to help us find those efficiencies with little or no impact on our clients.

Ms Blakeman: Again back to the Premier: why does this government want to quietly cut the number of people on PDD and leave them with no grounds for appeal? The regulation covering PDD appeals states that a decision to amend a contract with a service provider is exempt from appeal. If the government makes cuts to PDD service providers and the service providers then have to cut support hours, there's no recourse for anyone affected.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of this situation at all. I believe that there is an appeal process. We have special, separate PDD appeal boards to handle situations just as have been described here. I will look into this fact, but it's something that I'm not aware of.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, when someone living with severe mental health issues gets hospitalized, voluntarily or not, they often have to leave their residences and all their stuff: clothing, furniture, teddy bears, dishes, cooking condiments, their pillow, everything. After three months their AISH is terminated, and their belongings are gathered by the landlord and thrown out. Just when they need stability and familiar surroundings, they start over with nothing. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Has the minister considered a need for a trustee-like agency to intercede on behalf of individuals, give notice, pack things up, store them, help people maintain some stability?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When our AISH clients are being served in our hospitals, whatever hospital that may be, their needs are being looked after and taken care of. There is a period of time when their placement in AISH is held, and after a certain period of time in the hospital the AISH itself is put on hold. But when those people are back in the community, we have a quick response for them to regain their AISH status.

Ms Blakeman: No. They lose everything, including their AISH.

Back to the Premier: given that AISH will only cover a one-time moving fee and a one-time damage deposit, would the Premier consider asking the minister to provide additional coverage on a case-by-case basis for those with repeated hospitalizations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget in that particular area has been increased three years in a row. Off the top of my head I don't know the full increase, but we've supported clients very well. There are some issues that perhaps we can look at. Of course, we'll look at what is available and deal with the issue at hand.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the Premier. Well, here's something else for you to look at. Given that after age 65 AISH benefits cease and CPP benefits are lower and do not include a drug plan, would the Premier through the minister consider a top-up for previous AISH recipients once they pass the age of 65?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that just speaks to the program that we have for AISH clients. As a result, if that is true what the member has said, that just shows the size of our program and support for our AISH clients. The other thing, though, is that we are reviewing the whole social area because there are so many different silos there, based on age, based on the community that you live in. We're trying to gather it all together under a one-window approach so that we improve the type of service that we provide for AISH and all those requiring social services.

Senate Appointments

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, my constituent Senator Bert Brown and many other Albertans have long championed the cause of an elected Senate, and that day is now very close. Yesterday the Premier was unclear on when he will call a needed Senate election in Alberta. If he waits until 2012, Alberta will be underrepresented in the Senate starting in 2011. Given all the federal issues we're grappling with, this is not in Alberta's best interests. To the Premier: will you commit to holding Senate elections prior to Senator Banks' upcoming retirement in 2011 to ensure Alberta continues to be fully represented in Ottawa?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in my answer yesterday I said that we have three choices. We either proceed with an election in conjunction with the municipal election this October, we can hold an independent election, free standing, sometime in 2011, or wait till 2012 for the provincial election. I mentioned to the member yesterday that if you want to approve an increase in the budget for Municipal Affairs to put the names on the ballots, then tell us that today, and we'll make the necessary accommodations.

Mr. Anderson: We've got more than enough fat to pay for \$3 million for a Senate election.

Given that holding stand-alone elections prior to 2012 would be far more expensive to the taxpayer than holding them in conjunction with municipal elections and given that waiting until the 2012 general election would mean Albertans would be underrepresented in the Senate, will the Premier commit to holding the Senate elections in conjunction with upcoming municipal elections in October?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is a lot of, you know, demand for the few dollars that we have available, and this is a discussion that we're going to have as a government.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Premier, I think you're stalling.

My final question is this: is this PC government actually considering undermining Albertans' democratic and constitutional rights and all the battles we've waged on Senate reform because they're worried they might lose the Senate election to the Wildrose Alliance? Is that the reason?

Mr. Stelmach: I don't know who is even going to run for the Senate position. There are a number of names that have to be on a nomination list. There are a whole bunch of things that have to happen. This is not in terms of a political party. This is a Senate election, a candidate for Senate, and we want to of course have the best representative for the province of Alberta to represent us in the Senate.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the NDP probably won't be having a candidate in that election.

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Mason: In 2007 the Premier told Albertans, and I quote: the royalty framework is here to stay; \$1.4 billion, 20 per cent. He defended sliding scale royalties because they would capture more money when the market was strong and adjust for a weaker market when necessary. Well, Mr. Speaker, here we are two years later. The market isn't as strong as it was, but what's really weak is this Premier's leadership. Why has the Premier sold out the majority of Albertans, whom he promised he would get a fair share for?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are significant market condition changes on the North American continent; the price of natural gas has dropped substantially; huge, huge supplies of natural gas in shale: these are all issues that have come forward over the last two years. We've taken a lot of time to work with industry, to look at all of the data that was given to us, and we made a decision. It's not just the slice of the pie. It's growing a much larger pie, and that is the intent of the competitiveness review.

Mr. Mason: That's Belinda Stronach's economic theory at work here, Mr. Speaker.

Given that Albertans own the resource and the Premier promised it would bring in an additional \$1.4 billion a year in revenue and given that last week's flip-flop will see that number rolled back by almost a billion dollars, why won't the Premier admit that he cannot be trusted to fight for ordinary Albertans when big oil threatens to take its political contributions elsewhere?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, I think that just the way the question was posed shows a total misunderstanding of how royalties are calculated. As I said before, it's to get the industry back on their feet, to start developing the resource. If they don't develop the resource and the gas stays in the ground, there are no royalties paid. There are none.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the finance minister admitted during his estimates that the province does have a revenue problem and given that the Premier has committed to give \$2 billion to industry for carbon capture and about a billion dollars a year in cuts to royalties, will the Premier finally admit that he has sacrificed the public interest, that he sacrificed billions in revenue, and that he has now broken his biggest promise of all?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the \$2 billion we have set aside for carbon capture and storage is to ensure that we protect our marketplace. As you know, on the issues that we're facing not only on the North American continent but from Europe in terms of amount of carbon produced and all of those things, we positioned Alberta very well. It's not that the money has been spent, but we have set it aside to ensure that we proceed with some of the carbon capture and storage projects and protect our marketplace, and that's very, very important.

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

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education equals economy. Three years ago this government promised stability in postsecondary education for a decade. Instead, students outside this House and across our province are seeing their bursaries dwindling, their debt growing, their fees rising, and could face tuition increases in the thousands of dollars next year. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: how can this minister justify down-loading postsecondary education costs, especially on middle-class families, that are already stretched too thin?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, over the last five to six years our operating grant increases to postsecondaries have been more than 42 per cent. I don't believe there is a jurisdiction in Canada that has put the amount of capital into spaces and access that this government has. In fact, today, even during these economic times that we have, we're over a billion dollars in capital infrastructure going in the ground as we speak, and that is a commitment to education and postsecondary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the lowest postsecondary enrolment, and it will get worse if these hikes continue. When the minister reaches a decision on tuition hikes, will he bring those increases to this Assembly for a vote so that Albertans from every riding in this province know where their member stands on affordable postsecondary education?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is talking about tuitions. Tuitions in the province of Alberta are capped to the CPI. They will be approximately 1 and a half per cent across the board across the province. There are some instances where the institutions approached us and said, "We think you made a mistake when you froze tuition in 2004," another good policy decision by this government taken in 2004. At the time it was the right thing to do. But did we review all of the tuitions across all 3,700 different programs and offerings? We did not, so there may have been some anomalies. We're looking to correct the mistake that may have happened to protect the CPI cap going into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that promises in this province seem to have time limits. Will the minister at long last spell out a firm timeline for when he will make these critical financial decisions, or is he intentionally trying to run out the clock on the spring sitting of the Legislature?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was available at our estimates. I recall that during a couple of the 10-minute periods during our estimates he didn't want to do the banter back and forth but simply read from a sheet a whole list of questions, which department staff are spending a lot of time on looking at how we're going to answer. It would have been a great time for him to ask that exact question, about where we're going with the budgets and how we're doing these things in terms of the market modifiers that have been presented to us. As I've said in this Assembly before, we will be making those decisions within the next few weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Patient Safety Report

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents do not need to be protected from the truth. They know that there are problems with our health system that need to be addressed, yet the Health Quality Council of Alberta released very limited information on the review of serious incidents at Alberta Children's hospital in Calgary last year. Now, the Minister of Health and Wellness said that he would ensure that the full report would be released within 10 days. To the minister. Today is day 9. Are you going to keep your promise?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly am. I said that the Health Quality Council of Alberta, working with Alberta Health Services, would release the full public report within 10 days. Earlier today I actually presented a copy of that full public report to the Clerk of this Assembly, and it will be tabled here today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Our government believes in and has been very vocal in support of open government, so why was the full report not released last week? They've had it for months.

2:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: I believe I indicated last week in this Assembly that there were some confidentiality issues that both the Health Quality Council and Alberta Health Services were still addressing. That is very necessary because whatever information gets released to the public, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, has to combine a number of considerations. One of them is the Alberta Evidence Act, and the other one is the Health Information Act. That has now been satisfied, so the full public report is being released today.

Ms DeLong: To the same minister: can we count on all of the Health Quality Council's recommendations being included in this report, and will they be implemented?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the entire bevy of recommendations from the Health Quality Council is included in this full public report although a few of them may have been combined under one title. But they're all there.

Regarding implementation, I can tell you with great assurance that Alberta Health Services has already taken some very positive steps to ensure that those kinds of unfortunate mistakes do not happen in the future. Patient safety, patient quality of care are two very fundamental goalposts for our health system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MLA Remuneration

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The order in council on April 30, 2008, setting out the pay for Conservative MLAs to sit on internal cabinet policy committees, Treasury Board, and Agenda and Priorities was issued one month into the fiscal year. This should have only made members eligible for 11 months of pay, but records indicate they were paid for 12. To the President of the Treasury Board: why did the government pay last year \$42,000 to give PC government members retroactive payments for sitting on the internal cabinet policy committees?*

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I'll look into the statements made by the hon. member, and I'll report back to the House.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that from the President of the Treasury Board.

Now, again to the hon. minister: given that the government set the fee schedule on April 30, 2008, one month into the fiscal year, why did the government give PC government members one month's retroactive pay also for service as parliamentary assistants, cabinet policy committee chairs, members of Treasury Board and Agenda and Priorities under that fee schedule?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I presume they sat on the committees, and work isn't interrupted. I committed that I will look into it, and I will report back to the House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that cabinet ministers and the Premier did not receive retroactive payments with their deal, which was set up two months into the fiscal year, who authorized these retroactive payments for all these PC government members?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have said – and I have lived up to everything I have said in here before – that I will look into the matter, and I'll report back to the House.

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

Continual Urban Crime

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently there has been a series of violent robberies and assaults committed at all transit stations in Edmonton. It is getting out of hand, and this is unacceptable to my constituents. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: what is the minister doing to ensure that people who have committed violent crimes will not reoffend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a serious matter, and we're finding that one of the reasons that the government needed to introduce the safe communities initiative was to get to the root of some of these causes. While we haven't been able through the police in this city to identify at this point in particular who the perpetrators are with respect to this incident and a few other incidents, what we do know is that very often we find there are

youth who get involved in high-risk activity, they get in contact with the justice system, and they keep being rotated through the system without dealing with the root causes of crime. We've got to find ways, as we are doing through our safe communities innovation fund, to address youth at risk, to develop mentor programs, and to deal with addiction issues in youth.

Mr. Vandermeer: To the same minister. It's my understanding that time and time again it is often the same individuals who consistently are threatening the security of our communities. Can the minister explain this?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, while we can't speak to who may have been involved in the most recent incidents, what we do know is that we do have situations where a number of times we do know that there are prolific offenders who are involved in what is considered to be continual urban crime.

There is an initiative that has been started in partnership with the Edmonton Police Service – and they've been leaders in this, Mr. Speaker – in dealing with prolific offenders so that in cases where we do know that there are people who are repeating the same crime over and over again, sometimes involving violence, we're able to focus our prosecutors, our bail packages, and our police on those.

Mr. Vandermeer: To the same minister. We know that oftentimes individuals committing these sorts of senseless acts are fuelled by a drug habit which is, of course, rooted in organized crime. Can the minister tell the Assembly how her department is addressing some of these issues on a preventative level?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member makes the very good point that very often when we have this cycle, it does involve people that are committing crimes because they have addictions, to try to find money to buy drugs, that are very often being sold to them by organized crime. It's a continual cycle. It's one of the reasons that the government developed an Alberta gang strategy. We look at all the pieces of this cycle. We try to provide education and awareness, we try to provide intervention and assistance for addicts, and where that's not possible, we then enforce and prosecute.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Budget Debate Process

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children and Youth Services must believe that debating the budget at a rate of \$6.1 million per minute is sufficient for holding the government to account for how they spend taxpayer dollars because last night the minister refused to respond in writing to questions that were not answered during the debate. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: how exactly does debating \$6.1 million per minute reflect accountability for how taxpayer dollars are spent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I really enjoy Committee of Supply. It's one of my favourite committees, actually, that happens with the Assembly because you do get to discuss budgets, business plans, the policies. I know that over the years you as well enjoyed that committee just as much as I do. Last night in this committee you'd be interested in what happened. There were 12 pages of questions that this member expected I answer within the

*See page 574, left column, paragraph 6

first 10 minutes. I did explain to the member that he has his process; he can submit questions, do whatever he likes in that manner. I had mine, and I answered the questions fully.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, it is on the record that I asked for questions not completed to be submitted following debate.

How is it a reflection of an open and transparent system when the government limits debate on the budget to three hours regardless of whether or not there are further questions to be answered?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the other processes that I think we all enjoy here in the Assembly is the one where people can provide written questions to the Assembly. I can tell you that this member may do that in the future if he does have questions that he would like to have specifically answered in writing through the Assembly. I will look at that time as to whether or not I will accept those questions. Also, the member can ask me in writing, or, hon. member, you could actually sit down and have coffee, and we could discuss some of the issues that you'd like to discuss.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It would be a very long coffee break.

Given that the opposition asks questions of the government so that we can respond to Albertans and hold the ministry to account, will the minister provide written responses to the questions raised in the budget debate last night, as has been done in the past?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I answered that very clearly last evening to this member. I believe that the questions that were submitted in the way that the member chose to submit them, to that extent – I think there were approximately 100 to 200 questions over three 10-minute periods.

An Hon. Member: It was 75.

Mrs. Fritz: Oh. Whatever it was, it was extensive.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you this: I made it very clear that the questions would be answered fully at that point in time, and I believe that I did do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Water Quality Monitoring

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents, like all Albertans, value the quality of the province's water bodies. They are very concerned about reports that the water monitoring budget in this year's budget is being cut. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. With the focus of many jurisdictions squarely on Alberta's environmental performance, why would this minister even contemplate reductions in water monitoring?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make a couple of things abundantly clear. First of all, there is a reduction in the amount of budget that we have allocated to water monitoring, but

the reason is because we're taking a much more strategic approach to how we do that monitoring. There is absolutely no reduction in the amount of monitoring that is associated with any emergencies, any hydrometric monitoring such as flood forecasting, water supply outlooks, water management, or long-term river monitoring. There is a reduction in the areas where we've seen little or no change over long periods of time.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that every Albertan has the right to expect that their water supply will be of the highest quality, how will the minister ensure that monitoring reductions will not adversely impact the quality of Albertans' water supply.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have extensive water monitoring that takes place in areas that have industrial development or areas that have municipal and agricultural monitoring. What we're dealing with here are very remote areas where the monitoring of water is done to establish whether there are long-term trends. What we're doing is not eliminating the monitoring but reducing the frequency. So if there was monitoring that was done on a six-month basis, it might now be done on a 12-month basis. The long-term trends are still intact.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that monitoring is much more sensitive in certain areas than others – and I'm thinking particularly of the oil sands regions – how can the minister ensure that the necessary monitoring will continue to be done in this area?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member and I can assure all Albertans that this is not one of the remote areas that I was referring to earlier. In fact, we already have in place 11 monitoring sites that are on the Athabasca River. We have a program that audits the monitoring data that's legally required by the operators in that region. That is in addition to the 100 water quality stations that are operated by our partner in the region, the regional aquatics monitoring program, RAMP. There is more than adequate opportunity for Albertans to be aware of the water in that region.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the NDP released government documents showing that 74 per cent of inspected employers who hire temporary foreign workers are violating their rights. The Minister of Employment and Immigration's callous remark that this is somehow good news shows just how out of touch he is and all but sanctioned the abusive employers who take advantage of the vulnerable. My question is for this minister. How many Alberta employers have to get caught violating this government's employment standards legislation before you'll admit that this is actually a bad-news story and that the government has some real work to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first make it perfectly clear that there's nothing callous about my comments. Perhaps what is somewhat unbecoming of a member of this

Assembly is to twist numbers and present them as one thing when they really represent something else. Seventy-four per cent is the number generated (a) following a complaint, where we verified a complaint, and (b) our random inspections of employment are sort of like checkpoints. Our individuals who do the inspections know where to go, and they know where the areas of issues are, and that skews the results.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that with the random checks there was still over 50 per cent violation and given that well over half of those violations against temporary foreign workers involved employers ripping them off by failing to pay them and given that the minister seems to think it's good news if a worker gets shorted \$50 here or \$50 there, why won't the minister abolish this abusive program and tell foreign workers that if they're good enough to work here, they're good enough to live here?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, let's again try to deal with facts for a change. First of all, Mr. Speaker, this is not a provincial program; it's a federal program. This shouldn't even be asked in this House. We have no means of abolishing the foreign worker program. It's a federal program. We have no means of opting out of it either because there is no possibility for provinces to opt out. Now, we also have no choice on whether these workers stay or don't stay over here because visas are issued by the federal government. Perhaps she should speak with her friend Ms Duncan, the MP, and have her ask the question in the House of Commons.

Ms Notley: Given that \$50 might not be much money to a cabinet minister who earns in the neighbourhood of \$150,000 a year and given that it's a lot to a worker who's been lured to Alberta by this ministry with plans to send money home to an impoverished family, will the minister please define his threshold for exploitation and say exactly how much money needs to be picked from the pocket of foreign workers before he considers it a violation of their rights?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to this member, there's nothing that she can teach me about the life of an immigrant and tell me what is and what isn't important to an immigrant. She would have had to live for the last 40 years in my shoes.

Any dollar is important to every worker, and our ministry not only enforces employment standards for immigrants, but we also enforce them for all Albertans. Every employee deserves to be paid every dollar. That's why we're there, that's why we collect the dollars, and that's why we make sure that workers are treated fairly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Lethbridge Health Facilities Security Services

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services is ending the long-term security contract they had with the Corps of Commissionaires in Lethbridge. The commissionaires are a nongovernment, nonprofit organization consisting of ex-military and ex-police personnel who have served their country and communities, and they have been highly respected since 1925. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how many positions will be lost by the commissionaires in the Lethbridge area because of this change?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what Alberta Health Services is doing is trying to ensure that every medical facility that comes under

that particular purview will have some form of security of access to it. Under the current model, unfortunately, that's not the case. So there is a positive side to all of this, and we'll be watching it very closely to make sure it works out that way.

Ms Pastoor: Well, it'll be the same question: how many are going to be lost province-wide? These are people that rely on these jobs.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll try and get that level of detail for the member, but I think what's important to remember here is that the safety of patients, the safety of workers and other professionals in the system has to be respected. When you have a system that perhaps falls a little bit short of that, which is the current case, you have to move to something new and different and better, and that's what's being attempted here.

Ms Pastoor: Ex-military and ex-police couldn't do it.

Why did the Health Services Board choose Paladin Security over the nonprofit commissionaires? Is this another instance of it only being all about money?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the security is of primary concern, and that's one reason why as many security cameras as possible are going to be installed under this system.

With respect to the exact numbers of FTEs I will undertake to provide that information. I assume it's available somewhere, and I'll get it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Agricultural Assistance

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture has faced more than its share of challenges in recent years, including drought, market restrictions, and high costs due to regulations. Beef producers in my constituency are feeling the pressure and asking tough questions. My first question is to the minister of agriculture. Is the AgriRecovery program designed to offset the loss that cattle producers are facing as a result of last summer's drought, and will the producers in my constituency be eligible for AgriRecovery funds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to point out first of all that the AgriRecovery program is, in fact, a federal program, and it's in place to address situations where significant and unique disasters occur. We are, I can assure you, working with the federal government right now on the AgriRecovery assessment for our province. I speak with the minister on a regular basis, and we will try to get a resolution to this as quickly as we can.

Mrs. Leskiw: My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is being done to reduce the costs the beef producers are facing as a result of the added regulations?

Mr. Hayden: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are working on trying to reduce the regulatory burden that producers face. We have allowed grants for specific programs with respect to the transfer of livestock. That is going to help them in some ways. We are also working on a number of areas where we can reduce through good planning and research the cost of feeding livestock. We work with them on an ongoing basis.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next supplementary is to the same minister. Producers in my area are skeptical about the role of ALMA. Has ALMA produced any positive results, and if so, what are they?

Mr. Hayden: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, ALMA is about a year and a half old now, and I'm very pleased with some of the things that have taken place this early in their mandate. One of things that I'm proud of is the work that they've done working with the federal government in opening markets in Hong Kong. They have a number of programs that have been able to help us leverage money for research and for improving the quality of what we provide in this province, something to the tune of \$97 million.

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

2:30 School Utilization Formula

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Early in May officials from Alberta Education will present to school board chairpersons and school superintendents the province's new provincial school utilization rate. These changes are a very long time in coming, and I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Education for coming forward with these new provincial utilization rates. [some applause] It's certainly about time. Now, my first question is to the Minister of Education. How will the new provincial utilization rates work for public schools located in maturing neighbourhoods? These schools were built 50 to 60 years ago.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I'm a bit at a loss to understand what he's talking about. There is a review of the utilization rate happening, and there will be some further discussion with the stakeholders in the system about that utilization rate process, but nothing has been completed in it. I'll check to make sure that something isn't being hidden from me, but I'm not aware of it being presented as a fait accompli to the system in May.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That surprises me because your colleagues are so enthusiastic over these changes.

Again to the Minister of Education: will the minister ask Edmonton public school board to delay the school closure process that's proceeding now until parents and taxpayers can see the full impact of the province's new school utilization formula?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member is following the same tack as his colleague from Calgary-Varsity and, actually, quite misunderstanding the process. The school utilization formula really has nothing to do with the discussion that's happening with respect to schools in Edmonton or other jurisdictions. School boards have to determine what facilities they need and where they need them to provide a good educational program for the students in their area. He probably, actually, should be looking – and maybe I shouldn't tell him this – at the plant operation and maintenance process because that has much more to do with the funding we give them for the operating of the schools than the utilization formula, which is really just one of the characteristics for determining whether new schools will be built.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. Certainly, to the hon. minister, I'm not going to tell him what kind of surplus Edmonton public had

last year in their operating budget because he may want that back, too.

Again, how are communities facing school closures supposed to have confidence in this process when the minister is admitting that the rules will be changed after decisions that affect five central neighbourhoods are made, and these decisions could be the closure of their vital public schools?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, obviously, wasn't listening the last time, so I'll basically just repeat it again. The utilization formula that's utilized has really nothing to do with the school closure process that school boards are engaging with. What has more to do with it, perhaps, is the plant operation and maintenance formula, which gives them the money that they need to keep schools operating. What they're really trying to determine is how they can make sure that they give the best educational opportunity to students in their jurisdiction without running excess facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Capital Region Municipal Planning

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta recently adopted the capital region growth plan. Plans are one thing, but Albertans are more interested in actions. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is this plan really going to help the capital region, and how?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This plan will have lasting benefits for all of the region's residents. It's a very solid plan that will eliminate duplication amongst the municipalities. It will co-ordinate and help co-ordinate essential infrastructure investments and, no doubt, help to attract a lot of investment in the region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second question to the same minister: when the board was first established, our province was in a very different economic climate, so is this plan still relevant?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly, the capital region needs to look ahead. We expect over 600,000 people and new residents over the next 40 years in this region. This plan sets the standards for smart development, planned growth, and a greener, more co-ordinated approach to land use. Our Premier's vision was to create a stronger region that builds on current and future economic opportunities, and that's exactly what the capital regional plan is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question also for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Calgary Regional Partnership is preparing a similar plan for the Calgary region. Can the minister please provide this House with an update on the Calgary metropolitan plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a good question. The Calgary Regional Partnership has submitted its plan, and our

government is currently reviewing what has been presented. I just want to reiterate that regional co-operation is a priority for our government and that these plans will contribute significantly to the success of our communities and throughout the whole province.

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

Energy-efficient Personal Transportation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's approach to energy efficient vehicles such as Segway is out of date. These vehicles are considered to be safe by the federal government but are roadblocked by provincial red tape. To the Minister of Transportation: why have these carbon friendly modes of transportation not been legalized?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think he's talking about Segways, and that's a two-wheeled vehicle. It's also a vehicle with no type of lighting, no type of anything on it, so how do you mix that up with traffic and big vehicles and say that they're safe? We've run some pilot projects. There are some different police departments in Alberta that are using them right now, but when you mix them on sidewalks with people walking – these vehicles go up to 20 kilometres an hour. We just haven't found a safe place to be able to license them to have them run.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seeing that these vehicles meet Canada motor vehicle safety standards and are already enjoyed in other jurisdictions, why hasn't this been a priority for this government?

Mr. Ouellette: Boy, I absolutely don't know where he got that information from because the information that I have does not have them licensed as a motor vehicle anywhere in Canada, Mr. Speaker. But there have been a few places that have done pilot projects, like we have said, and we're a leader in that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given all the rhetoric from this government about environment, when will this government allow these environmentally friendly modes of transportation onto Alberta's streets?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, till they can meet national vehicle standards, we can't allow them on the streets. The only rhetoric that I ever hear is coming from the hon. member over there that doesn't listen to the answers to the questions.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers (continued)

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given that there are questions being raised regarding temporary foreign workers not receiving the wages they are owed, the fact remains that these workers are not being treated very well. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: what is the minister doing specifically to protect temporary foreign workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. Well, first of all, let's get the record straight. A majority of Alberta employers who employ temporary foreign workers are good employers. Many, many employers use foreign workers, so it would be very unwise and unjust to brush all employers with that same reputation. The fact of the matter is that we do audits, but we do targeted audits. We provide information in many languages in writing. Mr. Speaker, you may find this very interesting: we actually take calls in more than 170 languages to listen to complaints.

Mrs. Sarich: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: is it true that temporary foreign workers will be sent back to their home country if they speak up for themselves regarding issues that they may have?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, we encourage them to speak. As a matter of fact, we have campaigns asking not only foreign workers but all Albertans to inform us if there are issues relevant to any abuse of workers. That's why we print materials in several languages. That's why we have telephone lines and websites. So that's not the case. Whether they choose to go back to their country of origin, that's an issue that they have to raise with the federal government. I think that this is the best place to live on the planet. I choose to live here, but I can't be pompous enough to assume that everybody will stay here. They have that option.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that there are questions being raised regarding the cutting of budget to employment standards inspections, how can this minister justify the cuts that are being made in this particular area at this time when we need to ensure temporary foreign workers and all Alberta workers are being treated fairly in the workplace?

2:40

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. We've gone through estimates already, and I can tell you that one department in the ministry that has received zero cuts – zero – is that particular department. Our field officers are out there in the same numbers as they have been in the past, and they are doing their inspections, and they're doing that very diligently. Let the message be clear to any employers who may be listening: if you do not adhere to Alberta laws and rules and if we find over and over that you are breaching the rules, you will find yourself in court, and myself and our Minister of Justice will look into this.

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

Wildfire Season

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this week's rural municipal convention the Whitecourt-St. Anne leaders expressed concerns to me about dry conditions for landowners and managers. My questions are all to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given such dry conditions within Whitecourt-St. Anne, why is the forest tanker base not opened at the Whitecourt airport?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, of course, that April 1 is officially fire season. We do have a situation across the province of Alberta, particularly in northern Alberta, where our

moisture levels are low, about 80 per cent of average. What we're doing at the moment, of course, is exactly as the member has indicated. We're staffing up our 13 forestry bases, where we operate manpower from, and the 14 tanker bases across the province of Alberta, including the one in Whitecourt-St. Anne.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's March 18: five forest fires already in Alberta. Are you ready for a busy season?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely we are ready for a busy season. I have to say that right now, as we're here having the debate, there are a number of young folk – well, not even so young – that are being qualified or requalified to go out as front-line workers to attack these forest fires when they occur. Again, the member is absolutely correct. We've got a 50-hectare fire burning in Swan Hills . . .

The Speaker: I know.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, you know.

. . . and there are a couple of smaller fires that are in the Whitecourt region. We're very aware of this, and we are preparing, and I believe that we'll do a very good job this year on that particular issue.

Mr. VanderBurg: My final question to the same minister. Many fires are caused by landowners that pay no attention to fire bans. Are you going to be recovering the money from those landowners that start those fires?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is yes, under certain circumstances. As we know, particularly if you're looking on occupied public land, if you have a situation where you have occupied public land and the occupier under normal circumstances is not the one – is not the one – who is responsible for a fire, there is some opportunity there, I think, for us to take a look at those situations and be fair about who is the responsible party and who should bear the cost.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 114 questions and responses today. Nineteen members were recognized: nine from the Official Opposition, one from the third party in the House, two from the fourth party in the House, and seven from private government members.

Might we revert briefly to the introduction of visitors?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour and privilege for me to advise the House that we've been graced today with the presence of one of our Olympic gold medal winners, Mr. Marc Kennedy. Marc Kennedy, who I claim to be from Edmonton, Alberta, who curls as the second for the Kevin Martin gold medal curling team, which has made Edmonton, Alberta, and Canada proud, is here with his wife, Nicole. They won the gold medal this year at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics and made us all proud.

I should mention that this is not their first victory, of course. They've won at least two Briers that I'm aware of and a world championship.

I would ask Marc Kennedy and his wife, Nicole Kennedy, who needs to be recognized as well – we all know that in the business we do and, obviously, in the sport they do, to be excellent at anything, you need the help of your family and you need support. [Standing ovation]

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Here I was ready to yell, "Hurry, hurry, hurry" so we could get our Routine in before 3 o'clock.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Fire Services Exemplary Service Medals

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate Mr. Richard Kadlec, Mr. Mel Roberts, and Mr. Tim Vandenberg, who live in my constituency, for being nominated and invited this year to receive Canada's fire services exemplary service medal. This prestigious award recognizes the men and women dedicated to preserving Canada's public safety through long and outstanding service.

Created on August 29, 1985, the fire services exemplary service medal honours members of a recognized Canadian fire service who have completed 20 years of service, 10 years of which have been served in the performance of duties involving potential risks.

Being nominated for this medal is an amazing honour, and these three Albertans deserve all the recognition and praise that this nomination brings with it. Without hesitation these men have risked their lives in order to protect others. I would like to thank these brave men as well as all firefighters for their courageous efforts and dedication to this province. Words alone cannot describe our gratitude.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alberta Land Surveyors Act Centennial

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow, March 19, marks the 100th anniversary of royal assent of the Alberta Land Surveyors Act. Introduced by the hon. Jean Leon Côté, a Dominion land surveyor and MLA for the riding of Athabasca, this legislation established the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association as one of the very first self-governing professions in the province of Alberta.

In 1910 land surveyors applied their skills to mark out the boundaries of homestead lands and the lots of the growing cities and towns using steel tapes and transit, drafting all their plans by hand, and doing their calculations with the assistance of logarithmic tables. Does anybody remember log tables these days? With today's electronic distance measuring equipment, global positioning

systems, and hand-held computers the same job can be completed in a fraction of the time without the back-breaking labour of cutting out every single line and the intricacies of determining direction by astronomical observations.

The first president of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association was William Pearce, from Calgary, known as the czar of the prairies. He pioneered land settlement and irrigation in southern Alberta. Other prominent land surveyors of that era were Lionel Charlesworth, the province's first director of surveys and the deputy minister of public works, as well as A.O. Wheeler, a pioneer of photogrammetric surveying, Alberta-British Columbia boundary commissioner, and founding president of the Alpine Club of Canada.

Land surveying is critical to the identification of properties. The Torrens system of land registration was adopted by Alberta and led to the creation of one of the most secure methods of registering land boundaries in the world. Property owners in Alberta can be assured of the integrity of their property boundaries because of the work of Alberta land surveyors in establishing the cadastral framework so essential to the efficient operation of the Torrens system at land titles.

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

2:50 Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is farm safety week. Every worker deserves equal protection under the law. But paid farm workers are excluded from occupational health and safety legislation, and they're not covered by workers' compensation, despite what the Minister of Employment and Immigration said yesterday, or by labour laws. Farm workers need and deserve these protections. Nineteen workers died in 2007, 23 in 2008, and when the 2009 numbers are released, I have no doubt that the numbers will be comparable. These are deaths that better regulations and legislation could have prevented. Such recent deaths were caused by all-terrain vehicle rollovers; others involved falls, incidents involving livestock and heavy equipment. All of these incidents could have been prevented had health and safety regulations been posted.

Aside from the deaths, there are hundreds of injuries on farms every year, causing avoidable human suffering, economic losses, and additional costs to the health care system. This administration's addition of funds for farm safety education may help reduce some of the danger, but nothing can replace the protections offered by inclusive worker safety legislation, especially considering that the farm accident monitoring system is voluntary, leaving many, many farm injuries unreported. How can we know if these education programs will work if we don't even know how many accidents are taking place?

Alberta's safety legislation must be rewritten to include paid farm workers. These citizens have the same right to a safe workplace, and they deserve the same protections as any other worker. I call upon the Premier to direct his ministers to fix the appropriate legislation. One more farm death is one more too many.

Thank you.

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

Budget 2010

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 9, 2010, Budget 2010 was tabled by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. The budget strikes the right balance between finding savings and protecting priority programs and services. Actions taken in Budget 2010 position Alberta to have the strongest financial position of all

provinces heading towards recovery. We will have the most innovative and competitive economy in Canada, we will have the best health care system in the country, and we will have the newest and the best infrastructure in North America.

The Bank of Montreal has positive things to say about this budget. They call our ability to reduce the budget deficit in fiscal year 2011-12 to \$1.1 billion "an impressive improvement." The Bank of Montreal also points out that there were no new taxes and that Albertans continue to pay the lowest taxes in Canada. Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Montreal also shares Budget 2010's forecast for recovery, notably in Alberta's resource sector thanks to improved commodity prices, stating that the bank also sees that on the horizon. They believe that our real GDP will grow by 3 per cent in 2010, outpacing the national rate, and we will outperform the national average over the medium term. They deem the budget's forecast of 2.6 per cent growth in 2010 and average growth of 3 per cent through 2013 to be achievable.

Mr. Speaker, striking the right balance was not easy. The Minister of Finance and Enterprise has said that everyone has been asked to give a little, but by giving a little today, we are building the foundation for a more prosperous tomorrow.

Thank you.

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

Sylvan Lake Pond Hockey Tournament

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to give recognition to a wonderful event that took place last weekend in Sylvan Lake. This was a true Canadian event. The second annual Sylvan Lake Pond Hockey Tournament took place and was a huge success. A number of special guests joined in this year's event, including the Hanson Brothers and Denis Lemieux of the movie *Slap Shot*, former NHLers Marcel Dionne and Charlie Simmer, and Canada's ultimate hockey dad, Walter Gretzky. The number of teams participating also grew significantly, from 23 teams last year to 55 teams this year.

This was a tremendously successful event and a lot of fun for all those who took part, both players and spectators. It was a great day. This is what Canada is all about. The night wrapped up with an awards banquet, complete with autograph sessions on sticks, pucks, movies, and other paraphernalia. All funds raised from the event go to support minor sports in Sylvan Lake.

Next year the town of Sylvan Lake invites all Albertans to come and enjoy the Sylvan Lake Pond Hockey Tournament.

Thank you.

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

Lyndon Rush

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to recognize one of our local Olympic athletes, Lyndon Rush. Last month Lyndon and teammate Lascelles Brown secured a bronze medal at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics in the four-man bobsled. Lyndon drove the sled that secured Canada a bronze medal and was only one one-hundredth of a second shy of beating the silver medallists.

While all Canadians were extremely proud of these two athletes, central Albertans were particularly pleased to see a local boy win a medal. When he is not bobsledding, Lyndon works in Red Deer as a commercial realtor. We are proud that Mr. Rush calls central Alberta home.

I'd like to extend my sincere appreciation to all of our Canadian athletes but especially our local champion, Lyndon Rush, for his hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence. Congratulations on your extraordinary achievement.

I would ask all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the outstanding accomplishments of Lyndon Rush at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.

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

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2006, before the royalty framework was overhauled by this government, former Premier Peter Lougheed told Albertans that we need to start thinking and acting like owners of our natural resources. He was talking about fair royalty rates for our natural resources, resources that belong to all Albertans, not to oil and gas companies.

At first this government seemed to be listening to the former Premier's advice. They made a commitment to increase royalties by \$1.4 billion per year. They said that they were going to take their time to get it right. But faced with growing political pressure from industry, this government has since retreated on their commitment seven times. First, Suncor got a bitumen rollback. Then there was a deep drilling rollback, followed by Syncrude's bitumen rollback, which was followed by a rollback for new wells. Then royalties were capped at 5 per cent, and previous rollbacks were extended. All together these rollbacks cost taxpayers \$2 billion. Last week's rollback will cost us another three-quarters of a billion dollars in 2012 alone.

Desperate to regain favour with the oil and gas industry, this government refuses to stand up for Albertans. A recent Environics poll shows that 58 per cent of Albertans oppose royalty rollbacks. Clearly, the majority of Albertans are thinking like owners. What they need is a government that will act like owners.

Alberta's NDP is now the only political party defending Alberta's fair share. We will continue to stand up for the rights of Albertans, the rightful owners of these valuable and nonrenewable resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar I am happy to present a petition signed by a number of people who are very much against the transmission line bill and the repercussions from that.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 13

Securities Amendment Act, 2010

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010.

Alberta and all provinces and territories except Ontario made a commitment to ongoing securities regulatory reform under a 2004 memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. This bill will build on this work as well as assist Canada in meeting its international commitments in the wake of the global financial crisis. Bill 13 supports Canada's international commitments in two key

areas: first, supporting Canada's conversion to international financial reporting standards, or IFRS, for public companies on January 1, 2011, and, second, proposing the use of a new regulatory oversight framework for credit-rating organizations that is in line with international standards. Other amendments to the act will strengthen regulatory enforcement and ensure that Alberta's registration regime continues to be harmonized with that of other Canadian jurisdictions.

3:00

As the second-largest capital market in Canada it is important that Alberta continues to show global leadership and keep its legislation as up to date as possible through ongoing reform. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I chose deliberately not to interrupt the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, but under Standing Order 7(7) at 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily Routine shall be deemed to be concluded, and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the House consider granting unanimous consent to complete the Routine today.

The Speaker: There is a motion put forth by the hon. Government House Leader to complete the Routine. If any member is opposed, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Bill 14

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010.

An administrative amendment is needed to correct an unintentional change to section 162 of the Traffic Safety Act. Section 162 of the Traffic Safety Act deals with the allocation of fines. This administrative amendment will restore the previous funding to the Traffic Safety Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of over a thousand letters and messages from parents and children living in my constituency. Due to the volume of the documents they've already been deposited with the Clerk. The majority of these letters are from the Rocky Ridge Royal Oak School Committee, pleading with the provincial government to approve provincial funding for the building of new public schools in Calgary, which will help eliminate the one-hour commuting bus ride that middle school-aged children are currently made to endure.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you. I'm very happy to rise today to table the capital market reports on Budget 2010, which is done by Dr. Sherry Cooper, who is the chief economist of BMO Capital Markets.

Thanks.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two documents from the Ministry of Employment and Immigration itemizing labour standards and workplace safety compliance rates among Alberta businesses that employ temporary foreign workers. These documents relate to the questions asked earlier today by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 34 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which has gathered signed postcards from approximately 2,500 Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Further to one of the questions that I asked in question period today, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a 2010-2011 service provider agreement budget allocation which clearly shows a downward adjustment of \$121,264.47. All that money is not going to people on PDD in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. They're both from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and they're both tablings that I'm doing with permission. First off, Marie O'Brien is writing expressing her concern about the future of Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Carole Aippersbach is also very concerned about the direction this government is going with Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ouellette, the Minister of Transportation, responses to questions raised by Mr. Kang, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall; Mr. Hinman, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore; and Mr. Mason, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, on February 22, 2010, Department of Transportation main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Zwodzesky, Minister of Health and Wellness, a report dated March 17, 2010, entitled Quality Assurance Review of the Three Medication and One Expressed Breast Milk Incidents at the Alberta Children's Hospital, Calgary, Alberta, prepared by the Health Quality Council of Alberta.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Could I ask the Government House Leader to share with us under Standing Order

7(6) the projected government business for the week commencing March 22, with government business commencing March 23?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was thinking that we might run out of time for this today and end up where we were before without having to go on the record.

Bills 13 and 14 were introduced today, and I anticipate bills 9 and 15 being introduced for first reading on Monday. That being the case, I'll make mention of them later on in the week.

On Tuesday, March 23, of course subject to the votes in Committee of Supply this afternoon and the introduction of the bill on Monday, under second reading Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 11, the Witness Security Act; Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act; Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010; and Bill 15, the Appropriation Act; as per the Order Paper; and Committee of the Whole on Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday the 24th for second reading Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010. Depending on progress on Tuesday, in Committee of the Whole Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 11, the Witness Security Act; Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act; Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010; and Bill 15, the Appropriation Act.

On Thursday, March 25, in the afternoon for third reading Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act; Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 4, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 15, the Appropriation Act; and as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Saturday, March 20, will be the anniversary of the election 21 years ago of two members of this Assembly, the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House and the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, so congratulations to both of them.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the committee to order. Prior to beginning, the chair will outline the process for this afternoon. The Committee of Supply will first call on the chairs of the policy field committees to report on their meetings with the various departments under their mandate, Standing Order 59.01(7). Members are reminded that no vote is required when these reports are presented. The chair notes that no amendments were introduced during the policy field committee meetings; therefore, no votes are required.

The vote on the estimates of the Legislative Assembly as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services and the estimates of the officers of the Legislature will then take place.

The estimates of 10 departments will then be voted on separately pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1)(b) and in accordance with notice provided by the Official Opposition House Leader to the Clerk on March 16, 2010.

The final vote for the main estimates will consist of the estimates of any departments not yet voted on.

Finally, the chair would like to remind all hon. members of Standing Order 32(3.1), which provides that after the first division is called in Committee of Supply during the vote on the main estimates, the interval between division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent division.

Committee Reports

The Deputy Chair: I'll now invite the deputy chair on behalf of the chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services to present his committee's report. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(7) I am pleased to report that our committee has reviewed the 2010-2011 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Culture and Community Spirit; Education; Housing and Urban Affairs; Municipal Affairs; Tourism, Parks and Recreation. As you indicated, no amendments to the estimates were introduced during our meetings for the committee's consideration.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I'll now call on the chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy to present his committee's report. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(7) I'm pleased to report that your committee has reviewed the 2010-11 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Advanced Education and Technology, Employment and Immigration, Finance and Enterprise, Infrastructure, and Transportation. No amendments to the estimates were introduced during our meetings for the committee's consideration.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Now the deputy chair on behalf of the chair of the Standing Committee on Health. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Health and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(7) I am pleased to report that our committee has reviewed the 2010-2011 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Children and Youth Services, Health and Wellness, Seniors and Community Supports. As noted, no amendments to the estimates were introduced during our meetings for the committee's consideration.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Now I'll call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(7) I am pleased to report that your committee has reviewed the 2010-2011 proposed estimates and business plans for the following

departments: Aboriginal Relations, Justice and Attorney General, Service Alberta, Solicitor General and Public Security, and Treasury Board. No amendments to these estimates were introduced during our meetings for the committee's consideration.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Last, but not least, the chair of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(7) I am pleased to report that our committee has reviewed the 2010-2011 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Agriculture and Rural Development, Energy, Environment, International and Intergovernmental Relations, and Sustainable Resource Development. No amendments to the estimates were introduced during our meetings for the committee's consideration.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Vote on Main Estimates 2010-11

The Deputy Chair: We shall now proceed with the vote on the estimates of the Legislative Assembly as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5), which requires that the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the question.

Agreed to:

Offices of the Legislative Assembly

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$97,113,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

We shall now proceed to the vote on the estimates of the 10 departments which may be voted on separately pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1)(b) and in accordance with notice provided by the Official Opposition House Leader to the Clerk on March 16, 2010.

Agreed to:

Aboriginal Relations

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$152,554,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? The motion is carried.

Agreed to:

Advanced Education and Technology

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$3,092,832,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$206,700,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Children and Youth Services

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,102,159,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Culture and Community Spirit

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$269,103,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$2,340,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Employment and Immigration

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,104,122,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Environment

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$228,904,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$800,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Health and Wellness

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$15,062,686,000
Capital Investment	\$19,200,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

3:20

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Housing and Urban Affairs

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$510,063,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Seniors and Community Supports

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,992,375,000
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Hon. Members: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Transportation

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,024,043,000
Capital Investment	\$1,490,719,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$8,290,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? The motion is carried.

Those members in favour of each of the resolutions for the 2010-2011 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? The motion is carried.
Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

I would now invite the hon. Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2010-2011 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2010-2011 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, as you said.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2010-2011 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2010-2011 government estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$58,450,000; office of the Auditor General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$23,165,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,888,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense

and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,926,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$943,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,741,000.

Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$152,554,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,092,832,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$206,700,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$645,995,000.

Children and Youth Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,102,159,000.

Culture and Community Spirit: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$269,103,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$2,340,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,149,186,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$6,112,000.

Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,104,122,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$205,615,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$228,904,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$800,000.

Executive Council: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$31,688,000.

Finance and Enterprise: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$116,735,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$36,917,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$15,062,686,000; capital investment, \$19,200,000.

Housing and Urban Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$510,063,000.

Infrastructure: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,183,671,000; capital investment, \$396,319,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$23,977,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$454,947,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,031,513,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,992,375,000.

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$348,927,000; capital investment, \$110,000,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$614,926,000; capital investment, \$24,700,000; lottery fund payments, \$1,294,116,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$297,651,000; capital investment, \$18,425,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$174,028,000; capital investment, \$19,492,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$2,500,000.

Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,024,043,000; capital investment, \$1,490,719,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$8,290,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$53,552,000; capital investment, \$62,200,000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, all those members that concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

3:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The idea of reducing red tape and promoting efficiencies is a wonderful concept. Unfortunately, this bill fails to provide that. Like its predecessor Bill 1, the lobbyist registry, it lacks the mechanics, it lacks the teeth to accomplish the intent.

In the case of the previous Bill 1, the lobbyist registry, it was easily circumvented by having a minister or a member of the government approach the industry whose services were desired and simply not bother to report. In the case of the competitiveness bill there is no timeline, there is no check-off to indicate what progress has been made, and I have great sympathy for our poor finance minister, who has received no funding to ensure that this bill is carried out.

Unfortunately, it does not get any farther than the intent indication and has no ability to actually be carried out. It can be proclaimed, but without the tools necessary to create the efficiencies desired, we have no idea whether the government is getting back into the business of being in business or shortcutting the business of business. It's unfortunate.

I would hope that future so-called Premier's flagship bills will be able to be actually realized and create the efficiencies that this bill fails to create. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a great concern to me that we have as our flagship bill Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I feel that I need to stand up and address it once more. It's interesting that it's somewhat like the Hollywood star, as I said yesterday, who's been caught shoplifting. They want to plead innocent: "Oh, no, no. I've got the money in my wallet. I'll pay for it." The only reason why this government is bringing in the Competitiveness Act is because they've been caught. We've lost the Alberta advantage. We're no longer competitive. Now they're making the declaration: oh, no, we're competitive. They need to make the statement. They're trying to put out the advertisement to say that we're competitive when we're not.

You know, I'm surprised that in the act it wasn't included that we're going to have a new minister, the minister of competitiveness. To expand on that, it goes back again to the time when we had a minister of government efficiencies. I asked the question at that point: well, if there's a minister that isn't efficient, that isn't competent, why not replace them with someone who is?

Again, I'll say the same thing about Bill 1 being the flagship bill. If we're not competitive, let's do something about it. Let's not stand up and say: oh, we're competitive. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has brought up the last three times how much flip-flopping this government has been doing. I want to change that

a little bit. It's not that they've been flip-flopping; it's that there has been one flop after another. It's just flop, flop, flop. We have to ask ourselves: why are they doing this? It just seems that it's more about political pressure and not economics, that the economics are driving the political pressure.

I want to talk about a few of the other flops that this government has had. They put out the message to the different regions in the province that we're looking at a police academy: "Put together your lobbying, your interest groups. Let's see what you can produce, and we're going to select one and produce a police academy." Some of those communities spent a lot of time, a lot of effort. [interjection] I believe I'm talking about being competitive, and I'll wrap it up, and you'll understand here as I go in there. They put in a lot of effort and time, and they were very competitive in their bid on how we can improve our policing in the province and why we're looking at that, only to have another flop with nothing happening.

The reason why I'm bringing these things up, Mr. Chair, is because if, in fact, the rules are always being changed, people don't want to bother putting their money or their time or their effort into competing. Can you imagine if every time there was an Olympics and the host country that's playing hockey knew four years in advance that we're going to change the net size, that we're going to change the puck size, that we're going to change the number of players on the field, and the other countries that are going there don't know about that? They show up at the Olympics only to be told: "Oh, here are the new rules. What we have is a net that's two feet bigger." It's going to very quickly be to where countries aren't going to be bothering to go to compete because they don't know what the rules are.

This is a problem that we're having here in Alberta. The rules are always being changed. The policies are being changed. Their vision is being changed. Therefore, industry, business, workers, all of those people, say: I don't know that I can afford to set up shop there because I don't know what's going to change next. We've gone through it, you know, with performance pay. Duckett says yes; the new health minister says no. Centralized dispatch service: stalled halfway through. Looking back, it's destroying the competitiveness in this province. This is about being competitive, and when we're changing the rules, we're no longer competitive.

To stand up and to pass Bill 1 is a mockery to the competitiveness and the Alberta advantage that we used to have here in this province. We need some real changes. We need to get back on track and to apologize and say: we were wrong; we've done this. The best example and the most crucial at this point is in two areas. Our health care system is in shambles. It doesn't have the competitiveness it needs to be innovative, to change, and to move into new directions because they don't know if the rules are changing.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I appreciate the passion you have here, but we're debating the clauses. During Committee of the Whole we're debating the clauses of the bill.

Mr. Hinman: It's Committee of the Whole, I thought.

The Deputy Chair: We're in Committee of the Whole. Go ahead.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. To go on, what I'm concerned about is that we're passing a bill here stating that we're going to be competitive, but when you look at it from the outside, we're not. I'm going to say that in the health care system innovation is allowed and comes forward because areas can compete if they have a new idea, if they're allowed to make a change.

It's interesting to me that in southern Alberta there's a doctor who's brought in a new technique for dealing with varicose veins. That's very problematic for people that have that, the pooling that is going on. The old way is very painful. It's a long, drawn-out process where people are off work for six to eight weeks. They've got a new, innovative technology that has treatment with laser. People can literally walk in and walk out. That would add to the competitiveness because our workmen's compensation and the cost to workers and people's time off would be enhanced. Yet that area is not allowed to do it because we have to wait for the approval of the central health board now to say whether they can do this or not, whereas at the local level they would bring it in, they'd treat their patients, and we would be moving forward. Mr. Chair, it's just very disappointing that we have a government that wants to use the flagship bill to say that we are competitive. They're denying that we have the Alberta advantage.

I want to go back to something that they've gone back to, and that is the royalties on the oil and gas. The problem that we're still missing on all of this is that people that want to invest and who think things have been corrected here are looking for two key things. One is an apology saying that we were wrong, and two is to say: we're not going to change it again as soon as times get better. This government continues to say: oh, it's because of the economic downturn and the low prices that we're changing this. What message that sends out is: when it gets better again, you can't trust us because we're going to crank it up again. They need to say: "No. We understand that by lowering, we're more competitive. If we lower the royalty rates, we can be more competitive. If we lower the cost and the regulations and reduce the redundant ones, we can be more competitive."

Dr. Brown: How low would you go, Paul?

Mr. Hinman: It is an excellent question: how low should we go? This is like flying. There's a balancing act, and I'll try and do this simple so that you can understand it because it's obvious you don't. It's talking about growing the economy. [interjections] Otherwise, you wouldn't be: flop, flop, flop. If you understood, you would have changed it before January 1, 2009.

The way you balance that is that you look at your income, your revenue from your various sources. If personal income tax is going up, if corporate income tax is going up – and I'm talking the revenue, not the level that we're charging – if our resource revenue is going up, it means that we're being competitive, and what you want to do is grow the economy. But if you tax too much and you see revenue going down, you realize that you're overtaxing. If, in fact, we lower taxes to the point where revenue is not going up and increasing, then you know what? We're a little bit too low here. We need to raise it up.

3:40

We've gone way past the tipping point on overtaxation, and we've affected our economy. We've affected our ability to compete around the world. We're losing industry. We're losing jobs. We're losing the opportunity to upgrade our own resources here. And why? It's because of the regulatory and tax burdens that we've put on our industry and our workers. They can't compete in other areas of the world.

It's a mockery to say that we're going to pass a bill and be competitive when everything else that we pass is not competitive. We need to stand up. We need to look at the economics and realize: how do we grow the economy? How do we ensure that we have an arts program here? As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has

been so passionate about, how do we attract and get the arts and the film industry back to Alberta? We punish them and say: oh, we're not going to give that tax incentive to be here. We need to look at the taxes, realize it's a problem, whether it's in the filming, whether it's in the oil and gas, or whether it's in agriculture, and not do things that are prohibitive to business and workers going forward.

Mr. Chair, I cannot support this bill. If we're really serious here, I'm wanting to see Alberta do better. Bill 1 should have been an important one on accountability of government. They talk the words; they never walk the walk. The only way we're accountable is when we have recall. That's what Bill 1 should have been.

I'll sit down, and I hope that I have a few questions. Throw them at me because accountability is on recall. It's not accountability to say: we're raising taxes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms Blakeman: No one wants to take him up on his invitation? Okay, then.

I just wanted to make a couple of observations that aren't intricately tied to the film or the arts competitiveness. When I first heard the name of this bill, I thought: "Well, that could be interesting. That could be quite hopeful, actually." At one point what we'd been considering on this side – actually, I think we'd put it forward, but it didn't get a high enough draw – was the idea of a red tape commission that would look at how we could get rid of some of the overlap and duplication in the way people that come into the government stream have to deal with it.

I'll just give you one simple example from my sector, which is not the business sector. It's the NGO sector. You know, if you're applying for grants or for program support from different departments, you are doing completely different applications. In most cases they're asking for the money to be reported in different ways. Some of them want advertising included in printing and brochures, and some of them want it pulled out, so you end up producing four, five, six different versions of your financial statements in order to satisfy. Now, that doesn't help you produce whatever it is your producing, whether it's a play in a theatre or widgets in a manufacturing company. You're just spending a bunch of time shuffling paper around, and for what? You accounted for how you spent the money. All you're doing now is playing some game of how everybody wants it differently.

On the other side, the bureaucrats' side, they say: well, we're interested in whether you've met the environmental concerns or whether you've met this and that concern, and that's why we want you to pull things out differently. But I think that's exactly the kind of job that a red tape commission could be looking at, especially if they look cross ministry. There's certainly an opportunity to streamline applications, and I know that the minister of culture has talked about doing that in his department, and if he can do it, the rest of you can do it.

The second observation that I had. I've grown up in Alberta. This is a cyclical economy. We are overly invested in the oil and gas sector, and because of that, our entire financial security swings back and forth with what's happening in that sector. Right from Lougheed's days that's been much talked about, with many attempts to think about diversification. I would argue that the government continues to be too closely tied with that oil and gas sector because all the initiatives they come up with are tied right back into that sector. They're not stepping far enough out to be innovative; for example, my argument about investing in the film fund and the kind of competition that that would allow us to have and to be competitive with some of the people that we're losing film business to.

Recently the dean of the School of Business at the U of A, a former MLA from this Chamber, said: "You know what? We need to quit worrying about this, recognize that we're a cyclical economy, and deal with it."

An Hon. Member: Fair enough.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Fair enough. But I still think we should be diversifying. I still think we're way too closely tied to oil and gas. I still think that that causes trouble for us, not because we're going to run out of it in our lifetime or far enough ahead that we'd be really worried about it but because others are going to stop buying it.

There is a war on carbon. There is a different attitude toward whether we're going to power everything in our lives through a carbon-based source. That's why I think we need to diversify more and to take that seriously. But I think it's an interesting proposal from Dean Percy that we deal with the fact that we're in a cyclical economy and put things in place to help us weather that a bit better and not have to be on the top end of those pendulum swings.

You know, we had an economist as our Leader of the Official Opposition at one point, Ken Nicol, and he's the one that proposed what we called a stability fund and the government now calls the sustainability fund. We owe a lot of thanks to that man because that's why the government has got the sustainability fund that they have in place now. That's where the idea came from.

I just want to refute, with great respect and affection of course, the previous speaker in that I think we're in trouble with constantly racing to the bottom in where we're getting our revenue from.

When you look at where our revenue streams are from for the amount that we expend in our budgets, the money that we collect every year from traditional sources of corporate and individual income tax, from fees and services, supports two-thirds of the money that we spend, and then we supplement the last third out of our nonrenewable natural resource revenues every year. So the arguments fall flat with me when I hear things about, "Oh, we've got to do things for the next generations and our grandchildren's grandchildren," because, frankly, it doesn't stand up. Right now we're sucking stuff out of the ground – be it gas, conventional oil, or oil sands – as fast as we can do it to supplement today's budget, this year's budget, not even anything going forward but now.

And if – actually, not if but when that carbon-based subsidy, the carbon-based economy that subsidizes a third of the money that we spend, disappears or gets less on us for whatever reason, we're in serious trouble. I think we need to be exploring alternate forms. This argument that we've always got to have lower taxes, lower taxes is problematic, especially if we lose that other income source.

You know, where am I getting these ideas from? Well, it's from the people that I represent. They're the ones that come forward to us and go: we're really worried when we see that this is the money that's supporting the government programs and services, that we're shorting it every year, that we can only support two-thirds of what we're spending. What it says to them is that we're going to have cut and cut services even more, even more, even more.

3:50

People consistently say to me: "We don't want our services cut. We expect government to deliver certain services for us, and we want those services provided. We want them provided well. We don't want crappy quality. We don't want corners cut. We want good services, and we're willing to pay good money for them." I was surprised, believe you me, because everywhere I'm bombarded with this: oh, yeah, lower taxes, lower taxes; that's what everyone wants. But that's not what people are saying to me. They're saying:

we want good government programs and services, and we're willing to pay for that, and we understand that we can't keep subsidizing every year with those nonrenewable resource revenues because either we'll get less nonrenewable resource revenue or other people won't buy it from us, and the effect is the same.

Part of that is something that we've currently got before us in a court case, that is turning up in films around the world, that is coming before us over and over again in our daily lives; that is, people struggle with how this government chooses to react to environmental protection issues. Over and over again I've said that what I see is a government that keeps trying to talk their way out of this rather than take action as their way out of this. I'm no happier than anybody else when there's a film being shown in England called *Dirty Oil* and people are flocking to see it. I know the effect that's going to have on my province.

But, on the other hand, I'm hard-pressed to turn around and say: well, here's the concrete action that my government is taking. I mean, the Minister of Environment and I spent most of an hour, almost my entire budget debate, with me trying to draw out of him exactly what the cumulative effects targets are and exact details, and he couldn't give me anything. He could barely tell me how much money there was that was actually spent on different parts of this department.

I think there's a real issue around that. People keep looking to us to see what action we're taking, what we do, not what we say. I think that is included in this bill. Actually, Mr. Chairman, when you look at this bill, it's three pages long. It's a pretty thin bill. In fact, despite what we've all been talking about here now for several at-bats with this bill – we're now in Committee of the Whole – all this bill says it's going to do is put together or establish a board or a committee or a council or something or authorize a provincial agency, and they can, you know, appoint other board members on to it, and they will get additional powers and duties that they need to function to carry out the purposes of this act. Then there's a long mandate that this board is supposed to look at and accomplish and then report back. That's all this Competitiveness Act is.

For all the other things we've talked about here, if you actually read the act, all it's doing is establishing a council. It's giving itself a mandate to, you know, accelerate the implementation of government of Alberta initiatives to increase competitiveness. My little note on the side is: how? Well, I didn't hear that get answered. You know: share a strategy, develop a benchmark, report publicly, communicate. But these are not action words. They're talky words. They're "say" words not "doing" words. There are things like: "develop strategies and initiatives to encourage innovation and to develop and adopt technology." You run through that list of things: "increase Alberta's competitiveness and productivity of individual economic sectors." How? There's almost no detail in this.

You know, earlier today I introduced the man who is the manager of my constituency office. I first met him when I went to a university class, a political science class, and talked to them. I talked about the fact that, you know, all of the bills that were coming forward now were shell bills. There was no detail in them. There was nothing in there that you could really make the government stick to because it basically authorized the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is really cabinet, to do whatever they wanted and then gave them the power to make regulations to do whatever they want to change it.

That means that it doesn't come back into this Assembly. It's not talked about ever again in here. You see, the way it works is that whatever's done by this Assembly has to be undone by this Assembly. But all of the bills that we look at now are two and three pages long, with the exception of the elections act, Bill 7, but that's

coming and then it's humongous. They're two or three pages long, and they basically, you know, empower the Lieutenant Governor in Council or empower the minister as assigned by the Alberta Act to carry on and do whatever they want, and nothing comes back before this House. Soon our sittings get less and shorter and shorter and shorter because there's no business that's required to come back before this House. It just gets done by the government, and do they do that publicly? Well, no. They go behind closed doors.

To me, this is really a number one rhetoric bill. It's allowed the government to give us a lot of rhetoric about what they think competition is or it should be. Frankly, it's allowed us to stand up and talk about what we think it should be, although I think my argument was particularly potent and pithy and I'm expecting that it will be carried through because I was darn good in making my arguments.

That is the fault of this bill. I just don't see the inspiration. You know, this represents to me the government scrambling to try and find its way and to try and figure out how to deliver something. Really, I don't think this is going to help them in the end, and I'm disappointed that this was the best they could do for a flagship bill.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak?

Mr. Hinman: I guess I just wanted to comment on a few of the statements by the good Member for Edmonton-Centre and a few of her ideas because if we really want to be competitive here in Alberta, there are things we need to look at. It's interesting that this government – I don't know that they understood, but they gave the grant to say: you know, if we allow capital cost allowance and capital to come in for our oil sands, that'll be good for the province. Yet they don't seem to understand that if we do that for other businesses, it would be good.

If we want to diversify, as the good member is talking about, the first thing we need to do is diversify the incentives, whether that's the film industry, whether it's agriculture, whether it's new technologies, the computer business, communications. If we want to have the incentive and be competitive here in Alberta, we need to lower those taxes so that people can come in, those jobs can be created, and then we go forward from there.

I think that the good Member for Edmonton-Centre would also agree with our party, the Wildrose, as well as the Liberals in that the revenue that's come from our resources has not been saved at a proper rate. What we need to have done is to set a goal and say: well, there's \$12 billion that we're reliant upon in order to balance our budget each year from these resource revenues. If over the years the average is 6 per cent return on investment, to be competitive and to be able to ensure that we have the revenue coming in, we should have a goal of \$200 billion being in the heritage fund, that would generate \$12 billion that would replace the revenue from our resources.

I very much agree. We've been speaking on this for a long time as well, that we can't be competitive if we're not sustainable. The budget that has been presented by this government I believe the last five times – the finance minister says this spending can't continue, it's not sustainable, and this is a one-time increase of 9 per cent, 12 per cent, 17 per cent. That undercuts our ability to be competitive with other provinces and other jurisdictions because we continue spending more than we have for sustainable revenue. I agree very much with the previous member that we should be looking at what our budget is that we can afford to spend, prioritize and realize that, and not be dependent on a nonrenewable resource with no contingency plan.

Again, their sustainability fund, which to me is nothing more than a political slush fund, where they can use it when they get into trouble – but to think that it's gone in two or three short years to me is the equivalent of someone who's been working for years in a great job. Let's say they've been making \$90,000 a year, maybe \$150,000, but they've only been able to save a small percentage of that, and then because of the industry that they're working in being lost, the best job they can now find is maybe one-third of that level. So they say: "Oh, no problem. I've been saving for the last multiple years. I will continue with my lifestyle, the way I spend money, what I'm doing because I'm sure that within two or three years I'm going to have a great new job again, and my revenue is going to go back up" rather than taking a real close look, realizing we need to be competitive, and saying: "Okay. What nonessential services could I be eliminating?" So such things as: why would I spend \$2 billion on storage when, in fact, we have a problem in health care and education and services and infrastructure?

4:00

We need to prioritize that money and realize that when our revenue has decreased, we need to really take a close look and say: "Okay. What are our priorities? Where do we put those things? Where do we put our tax dollars so that we ensure that we're going to have a vibrant economy when we come out of this?" If we have a major debt when we come out, we're not in a good position. We're not as competitive. We need to make sure that we're looking at those long-term problems and not just the political popularity of spending from a political slush fund, calling it a sustainability fund when, in fact, if things do not turn around, this spending is not sustainable. Many of the areas that they're looking at are not sustainable. The size of government should be reduced.

In committee the other night I was speaking to the minister of housing, and I said that, no, I don't believe in the duplicity that we need on the provincial level and at the municipal level to deal with the homeless and doing those things. We're not being competitive. We're not using our tax dollars wisely if, in fact, we say: oh, we need to have a level of government at the provincial level as well as the municipal level, with both having a 10-year plan to eliminate it. Well, who's really being effective when they're running their own simultaneously?

There are just so many areas that we see a deficit in the true nature of being competitive. That's allowing the entrepreneurs, the people with the ideas, to come in and not be looking at burdensome taxes, not be looking at regulations that don't allow them to set up here, yet they can set up in Saskatchewan or B.C., or it's going to take two years to get an okay to go ahead with a project here in Alberta whereas the other jurisdictions in six months are able to put that through.

Those are the things that are just common sense. It's the role of government. They should be doing those things and not saying: oh, we need to pass a bill to make sure that we're competitive. We should be looking at those things. This idea of rolling back after two and a half years: our royalty was wrong. The downturn in the economy was there in December, October of '08, yet they went full steam ahead and said: "Oh, no. We can go forward on this. We can allow this."

It's interesting that I've had some comments also about being competitive in our education system. I think that this is an area we can turn and look at. Because we allow charter schools and private schools and other ones to compete with our public schools, what we have is an incredible competition to say: okay, what do we have to do to offer people a better education? Because there's competition in our education, I believe the level and the quality of our overall

education – public, charter, private, nonprofit, all of those – is going up. We can't be afraid of competing in saying: oh, all the money, all the monopoly has to be in one area. We have a great opportunity to be competitive. We've got the people. We've got the resources. We've got the universities. We just have so much here in Alberta, but what we don't have is a government that's competitive at the provincial, at the country level, and certainly not on the world level.

Again, the lack of thought is astounding when they go through. I guess I still will go back to the big issues. They announce a new drilling incentive for the 1st of January in November and then wonder why nobody is drilling for a month. Like I say, the lack of thought on their policies is just astounding, whether it's in health care, whether it's in education, whether it's in the judicial. They just do not seem to think: "What are the consequences? What are we trying to achieve? Are we going to be competitive?" It just seems like: "Oh, the wind is blowing this way. It's popular. Let's jump on this. Let's spend some money here, and isn't everybody going to be happy?" Then the money is gone the next day, and they say: "Oh, how are we going to get back? Oh, we didn't think about that."

So we're caught in a hole, and once again we're not being competitive. We've lost industry out of the province in the last year and a half, and I contribute much of that to the tax level in our province and not being able to compete with other jurisdictions. We need to be looking at that. We need to have a sharp pencil.

This is no different than going to put in a bid, whether we want to be competitive, and saying, "Okay; bring forward your plans on how we're going to produce energy and electricity here in the province" versus a government that says: "Oh, no, we need \$15 billion in infrastructure. We're going to give it to these two companies." There's no competition in that. It's just a handover, a declared crisis. Again, are we going to be competitive in four years from now, when we have high-cost electrical lines that aren't serving their purpose? It's going to decrease our competitiveness. Where are we going to be? Is the logging industry going to be able to compete? Are we going to be able to do those things?

Again, I'll repeat that this government continues to pass rules, regulations, and legislation that is undermining and continuing to erode the Alberta advantage that we once had. We need to do better, but we don't need Bill 1. We just need a government with some common sense and some economic understanding.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Very briefly, we cannot be competitive in this province as long as the rules are set outside by the global economy. Unless we get rid of our dependency on oil and gas nonrenewable resource revenues, the rules will be set outside by the global price of oil or the price of gas. The key way to become competitive is through education. It's through diversification. It's through innovation and technology.

The most important resource that Alberta needs to be fostering and supporting is the area of education. Unfortunately, at this point we're hardly competitive. Yes, we have some very select students who do well in science and international math exams. But considering the fact that a third of our students fail to complete high school in the prescribed three years, with larger numbers of ESL students failing, the fact that only 52 per cent of the fastest growing portion of our population, First Nations, manage to pass high school in a five-year period, we're not being competitive either externally or internally.

What this government needs as sort of a backstop for the competition is the notion of a savings plan. The hon. members have previously talked about the sustainability fund and whether it's being

used for its true purpose as a backstop or whether it's just used for political convenience.

It's extremely important that priorities be established if we're going to be competitive. This government chose to make dramatic cuts to advanced education, dramatic cuts to Children and Youth Services, crippling cuts for persons with developmental disabilities. If we do not invest in our significant resource – and that's our human capital – we're going to continue to ride the roller coaster of boom and bust. We can get off this roller coaster if we backstop, as I say, with appropriate saving strategies.

Now, we have long stood by the notion of setting aside 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenues beyond the rainy-day fund concept. We've said, for example, that we'd like to see 35 per cent of that 30 per cent set aside to create postsecondary endowment funds. These would backstop our postsecondary system, whether it be technical or academic, and create the savings account. We'd be able to use the interest garnered to continue to provide stability and predictability for postsecondary institutions rather than looking at large increases to tuition or nonacademic fees.

Also, we've suggested that 35 per cent of that 30 per cent be set aside to build up the heritage trust fund. Until we have a degree of self-sufficiency to weather us past the point of our nonrenewable oil and gas dependency, we're going to continue to be caught up in this cyclical global circumstance.

4:10

Another 25 per cent of that 30 per cent we've suggested investing in infrastructure. Now, the government has acknowledged at this point in time that the cost of labour, the cost of materials is 40 per cent lower. If we're going to be competitive, we should be attracting our own industries to create the needs we have, whether it's large-scale work in the oil sands, which is currently being sidetracked to South Korea, whether it's our failure to upgrade bitumen, which is being sent, along with jobs, south of the border. We cannot be competitive if we don't realize a refinement of our own natural resources.

The last 5 per cent of that 30 per cent set aside would go towards art and culture, creating a predictable, sustainable industry such as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has put forward with regard to the film industry.

These are all realizable objectives providing we have a formula, providing we evaluate, providing we have timelines, and providing we have designated funding.

In the various budget committees at which I either directly participated or served as a vice-chair, there was a reluctance to have markers, to create expectations, to deal with timelines, to evaluate how far we've gone. If we don't evaluate along each step of the way, then we're never going to get where we need to be.

Now, Alaska has provided dividends for its citizenry based on oil and gas. Norway has been extremely successful. In terms of competitiveness, most provinces believe in a progressive tax system, which provides competitiveness throughout the rest of Canada. It's funny that we in Alberta seem to think we've got it right. Our idea of right is punishing the middle class at the expense of the individuals at the top end of the scale. Yes, wealth creates wealth, but if you don't have an educated workforce, if you don't use the potential of the First Nations, with their significant growth rate increase, then we're not going to have that competition.

We have the made-in-Alberta potential, but this business of just continuing to lower taxes, which ends up reducing services – you can't have one without the other. Mr. Chair, this competitiveness bill is ethereal. It's conceptual. It has no mechanical evaluatory system to make sure that we get where it's intending to take us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 1, Alberta Competitiveness Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? The motion is carried.

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there any comments, questions, or anything else to be offered on the amendment to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Why, thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Yes, I do have something to offer on the amendment that is before us, amendment A1. What I'd like to offer is a subamendment which is already at the table, and I'll allow time for it to be distributed.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member has proposed a subamendment to amendment A1, and we'll take a moment to let the pages circulate this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We're in Committee of the Whole, at which point you can discuss the bill clause by clause, word by word, or present amendments. We currently have an amendment on the floor which is an interesting one. Just so this is in context for everybody, we have an amendment, moved by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, in section 89 of the bill, which actually appears on page 70 of the paper bill if you're following along. Section 89, which includes all the stuff about part 6.1, third-party advertising, proposes that in the proposed section 44.1(1)(g) it strike out subclause (iv).

So what the heck does that mean for anyone following along at home? Okay. What we've got here is third-party advertising. Section 44.1(1) starts giving a bunch of different definitions, which you always do – right? – so everybody knows what they're talking about. We've got, you know, (a) is advertising account, (b) is election advertising, and blah, blah down to (g), political advertising. This, my friends, my colleagues, my dears, my wonders, is the heart of it. This is the nub of it. Under subsection (g) we have “political advertising” means advertising, for which there is or normally would be a charge.” Then there are subsections under that, so read carefully. Stay with me on this one.

Then it gives the exceptions, where it wouldn't be considered political advertising, and it includes “the publication without charge of news, an editorial, an editorial comment, an interview,” et cetera. Subsection (ii) is “the distribution of a book” for which there is no commercial value, or it's sold for less than commercial value. Sorry, it's not that there is no commercial value; it's sold for less or given for less than commercial value. Subsection (iii) is “the transmission of a document . . . by a person, corporation or group to its members” who have given permission for things to be sent around to them; in other words, e-mail.

Then here is the good part. Subsection (iv) is “advertising by the Government in any form.” This is the proposal that’s put forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to be exorcized from this, to take it out. That’s the amendment that’s on the floor. Think about it, folks. Sorry; by folks I mean folks at home. You’ve got a government that’s been in place for 40 years. It has developed something called the Public Affairs Bureau, which is its marketing arm, its sales arm. It controls everything. It writes all the speeches for people. It writes a good number of the questions that you hear asked by government members here in the House.

An Hon. Member: No.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I’m getting noes from the other side, but wink, wink, nudge, nudge, now, now. We know it’s different. They do all the media and press releases and that sort of thing. They’re immensely powerful and all-pervasive because members from the Public Affairs Bureau work for every single government department.

4:20

It’s just always interesting how things that most people would consider as the government actually being partisan – we’ve had stuff go on for so long in this province that everybody just shrugs and takes it as normal. Well, doing something over and over again doesn’t make it normal. We have things like the Premier paying for a television spot in which he gets to do a speech, but there’s no opportunity and certainly nothing in the Official Opposition budget – I can assure you of that – that allows the Official Opposition enough money to go out and buy an equivalent spot to be able to negate or talk back or have any kind of public debate or reaction back to the paid statement. Anywhere else that would be regarded as absolutely off the screen, but here in Alberta it’s accepted. The public year after year pays hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Premier to go out and do a special statement that is not able to be countered by anyone else, and that’s considered normal.

So the idea that we would now have a government who during a provincial election can continue to do these kinds of things and advertise itself – and there’s very little distinction in Alberta between the government and the political party which its members come from, and there are very few people who actually are left in government that understand those distinctions. It tends to be just sort of an assumption that it’s going to glide on and nobody will have a problem with it.

We’re very interested in supporting this amendment, but we thought – you know what? – there are a few things that you need to take out of that blanket deletion. Our subamendment that you now all have in front of you essentially strikes out that same clause but substitutes in its place that we would not allow any advertising by the government except to allow “advertising by the Government required to address public safety, the provision of adequate health services” – for example, the kind of notices that we saw around H1N1 or that we would need to see around vaccination clinics available for children and that kind of thing – and, of course, “to communicate employment opportunities to the public.”

This is the subamendment that we’ve put forward because we think it’s a good idea to not have a government, particularly one in

this province, that does not distinguish between government and the political party from which its members come – that’s not distinguished here in this province. Therefore, really, the government and that same political party shouldn’t be doing any advertising during a writ period.

There is a recognition that some things that are important for the health and safety of citizens need to go on, and part of it is continuing to recruit people to work in the civil service, which is an honoured profession and which we do not talk about enough as politicians, how much we value the civil service, because they do most of the work that makes us look good, frankly. We need to be able to continue to recruit people to that through that time period, but also we need to be able to do advertising and purchase advertising so that we can notify people of various health issues that they need to be aware of and public safety: occupational health and safety notices, shutdowns of various things if public safety is involved, et cetera.

So we’re very interested in supporting the amendment that was brought forward, but we think it was just the teeniest bit short sighted and needed to recognize that some things do need to go on. I hope I can get everyone to vigorously support this subamendment when they get an opportunity to speak to it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, it is 4:25.

Ms Blakeman: No, it’s not. One minute.

The Deputy Chair: It is 4:25. Where I’m looking at it, it is.

According to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report on Bill 1 and progress on Bill 7.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 1. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: All those members of the Assembly that concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday the 22nd.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to March 18, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)

First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft., adjourned)

8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (S) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft., adjourned)
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft., adjourned)
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
- 202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
- Pr2 Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
- Pr3 Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 22, 2010

Issue 21

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 22, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen and young people, today we will be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some distinguished Albertans, distinguished leaders in their communities and in our community, leaders of the Alberta First Nations in our province and the president of the Métis Nation in our province. We have with us today Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead, grand chief for Treaty 7; Grand Chief Eddy Makokis, grand chief for Treaty 6; Grand Chief Allan Adam, grand chief for Treaty 8. As well, we have Rose Laboucan, deputy grand chief with the education portfolio for Treaty 8; Audrey Poitras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta; and Gerald Cunningham, president of the Métis Settlements General Council of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, they're with us today because we're having a meeting this afternoon of our First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Partnership Council, a very, very important partnership council that's come together to provide leadership for education with respect to First Nations and Métis and Inuit students in our province. We will be meeting with them this afternoon. Later on today I'll be tabling two historic documents that pertain to that meeting, and I'll elaborate then.

I would ask these great leaders in our province to stand and receive the warm welcome and thanks from this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program, seated in your gallery: from Priority Printing Limited Mr. Tim

Downey, president; from Access TV Mr. Lloyd Lewis, vice-president and general manager, CTV, and Mr. Eric Rice, production and interactive; from CKUA Radio Network Mr. Ken Regan, general manager, and Mr. Paul Moulton, chair of the foundation, and Ms Katrina Regan-Ingram, director of marketing and sales; from the Rotary Club of Edmonton Mr. Jack Clements; finally, Mr. Ron LaFranchise, volunteer. The School at the Legislature program gives grade 6 teachers from all over our province an opportunity to relocate their classrooms to the Alberta Legislature for a week. I would ask all our guests now to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you today to the members of the Assembly 26 grade 6 students from Trinity Christian school in my constituency. They're accompanied by their teacher, Miss Cheryl Barnard, and 10 parent helpers. They got in their vehicles today and came up those icy roads, and they're here to see what we do. I'd ask if they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a special group from Boyle school in my constituency. When I first saw this group a few weeks ago in their class, a young Peter Mischuk asked me the question: what's it like to be in the same room as the Mace? It certainly is an honour and a privilege to be in the same room as the Mace and represent my constituents and my students, and I'd like to thank Peter for reinforcing that to me. Peter is joined by 23 other students and six leaders: Darrell Bergmann, Emily Thomson, Stacey Welsh, Jeff Scammell, Barb Sullivan, and Nancy Amero. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions with your indulgence. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Roger and Jann Beer and their daughter, Victoria. The Beer family own a small farm near Rivière Qui Barre in the Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert constituency. Jann and Roger have educated their two children at home. They enjoy their horses and other pets and are actively involved in the Morinville Alliance Church, which my wife and I also attend. Victoria would like to someday compete in the equine competition at Spruce Meadows, and I think that with this young lady's determination she will do that. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise now and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is one that, in my nine years of being in the Assembly, I believe is the first time I've had the opportunity to do this; that is, the Beer family is accompanied by my partner of many, many years and my partner for many, many years to come. In fact, we're celebrating our 30th year this year.

Mr. Snelgrove: She was five.

Mr. Horner: She was five, yes.

She's also going to be a grandmother in May this year, which I think is fabulous. Of course, it means that I'll be living with a

grandmother, but that's okay. Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour for me to introduce my wife, Rose, who is also in the members' gallery. I'd ask her to please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two Edmonton public school board school trustees, Catherine Ripley and George Rice.

They're both on a new standing committee of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta called the Intragovernmental Political Relations Committee. It's a committee rooted in the strong belief that respectful working relationships between provincial elected officials and local school board trustees will lead to enhancing public education in our local communities. I'm certain that all MLAs will be hearing from the committee and from these two trustees, and I'm sure that they will welcome input from MLAs with respect to that relationship.

I can tell you that after 30 years of knowing Trustee George Rice – he was actually my wife's first school principal when she joined Edmonton public – and a somewhat lesser time Trustee Catherine Ripley, who was the chairman of the Whitemud Coalition of Schools some years back, they have excellent working relationships and excellent ability to promote public education. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a distinct honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and to all members a truly inspirational Albertan. Walter Twiddy is an impressive leader and champion in collaborative efforts to end homelessness in this province. He's the CEO of NeighbourLink and with his staff and associates works miracles for Calgarians and Albertans every day. If Oprah Winfrey got a hold of him, she'd follow him around for weeks, doing a great series on what he does at home and at work. He's a tireless community volunteer, very dedicated to the Calgary-Lougheed PC Association and policy, good policy, across this fine province. If I were to give you his resumé, it would take the rest of question period. I won't do that, but I will say that I would be remiss if I did not admit that he is a real inspiration in the fact that he's an exemplary family man, who hopes to enter law school soon so he can become even more of an advocate for those living in poverty. Most of all, for me he's a very treasured friend. Mr. Walter Twiddy is in the members' gallery. I hope that you will now stand and accept the warm welcome of your Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several guests in the members' gallery today. I'm thankful that these visitors have taken time out of their busy schedules to come and watch question period. They are all involved in fundraising for the relief efforts in Haiti, and I will talk about that in Members' Statements. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Reshamdeep Mundy, Mr. Savi Kachroo, Mr. Inderjit Gill Mullanpur, Mr. Harpreet Sandhu, Mr. Harjinder Singh Ahluwalia, Mr. Navjot Channe, Mr. Gurfateh Brar. I would like to ask these gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly participants and friends from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary's leadership engagement action and development project, the LEAD initiative. The key goals of this initiative include to engage committee members and groups to take active roles in addressing the issues that affect them and their communities; to work with mainstream organizations and promote awareness, respect, and participation of culturally diverse groups in these organizations; and to engage visible minority community members in critical understanding, analysis of public policies, and to facilitate their participation in dialogues.

These members are here to observe the Legislature in action and support Motion 505 this afternoon. I would ask our guests to stand as I call your names: Marichu Antonio, director, Babae Council of Filipino-Canadian Women and executive director of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary; Fromencio Bensing and Sheeba Vijayan, co-ordinators of the council; Junior Coco Kalombo, president of the Calgary French youth society; Artan Ravmanoski and Bukurie Mino, board members of the Albanian community association of Calgary; Jean-Claude Jassak and Pierre Hournou, directors of the Afro-Francophone Alberta Rehabilitation-Integration and Care Services; Lily Kwok, executive director of the Calgary Chinese Community Services Association; Richard Lee, director of the oriental music and arts school and Chinese Community Services; Irene Yi, member of the Calgary Chinese Cultural Society; Rahmat Sai, president of the Calgary Afghan community Hambastagi Cultural Association; Quang Trinh, Calgary Vietnamese Youth Group; Jason Klinck and other members from the Centre for Newcomers. I would like to ask the members in this House to extend to them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise and introduce the second half of the team from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary's project LEAD initiative. I'd ask my friends to rise as I call their names: Bishnu Subba from the Nepalese Community Society of Calgary and Bharat Regmi from the same organization; Funmilayo Aregbesola from the Nigerian community as well as Bukola Okedara from the same community; Maria Mora from the Peruvian association; Evelyne Kemajou from Portail de l'Immigrant en Alberta; Paul Mayen from the United Sudanese-Canadian Enhancement Society as well as Mario Ayudo from the same organization; and my friend, Fowzia Isse, from the Somali community. I'd ask all members to give these individuals the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very distinguished young lady, Her Worship Olivia Hoepfner, mayor of Rideau Park school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, where she is also a grade 6 student. Olivia was elected on November 13, 2009, and like all members of this House, Olivia conducted a campaign. Her proposals included asking students to bring a toonie for the Hogar Llanero Brisas del Canada in Colombia, a home away from home where students from the distant plains live while attending school, and the proclamation of two pajama days per year.

In addition to these campaign promises, Olivia also helped organize an Olympic day to support our great Canadian and Albertan athletes and a bake sale where all proceeds were donated to the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Olivia is accompanied today by her parents, Geoff and Tricia Hoepfner, and I would ask all of them to kindly rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members Mr. Ron Lau and Mrs. Suzanne Clemens. Both are seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Lau is a member of the Canadian Red Cross Central and Northern Alberta Regional Council, and Mrs. Clemens is the operations manager of the Canadian Red Cross, central and northern Alberta. Both are present today to hear a member's statement I will be presenting regarding the contributions of Albertans through the Canadian Red Cross in Haiti relief. I would ask that both Mr. Lau and Mrs. Clemens rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly three special guests who have come here today to show their concern with some of the policies of the special needs assistance for seniors program, which I will ask a question about later. I would like to ask our guests Carol Kotyk, her son Rick Breum, and her grandson Connor Breum to please rise and accept our warm welcome.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly representatives of the Centre for Race and Culture, Siye Abbenstets and Trevor Gladue. Since 1993 the Centre for Race and Culture, formerly known as the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, has worked to foster social harmony and cultural inclusion. The centre organized the 17th International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Edmonton. The campaign includes a variety of events throughout the month of March to bring public awareness to the fight against racism. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature my guests Logan McIntosh and Keely Kidner from the University of Alberta water week working group. The United Nations has designated March 22 as World Water Day. The water week working group is a coalition of various University of Alberta environmental and social justice groups who are striving to highlight local and international water issues this week. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Cancer Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most heart-wrenching moments a person can face in life is when they're told:

you have cancer. They turn to the health care system and count on a co-ordinated, timely, high-quality response. For reasons unknown this government has disbanded the Alberta Cancer Board, which ran Alberta's cancer treatment and research system, including the Cross and Tom Baker cancer centres. To the Premier: given that every other province has an equivalent to the Cancer Board, will the Premier order the Alberta Cancer Board restored in Alberta?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: No, Mr. Speaker. A decision has been made. The Cancer Board is incorporated under the Alberta Health Services Board, and it'll stay that way.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that cancer treatment requires a multidisciplinary approach with pathologists, physicians, surgeons, nurses, why is the Premier standing by while these teams are being dismantled?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the opposite is true. We have under the Alberta Health Services Board a good model where all services are put together under one board, and it's a true reflection of all of our medical providers working together, including all of the cancer specialists and all of the various specific programs that are offered. In fact, because of those individuals we are now doing more cancer therapy in outlying rural hospitals, and that will continue in the province.

Dr. Swann: Well, in fact, the opposite is true, Mr. Speaker. There's chaos in the system, with longer wait times, frustration at both the patient and professional ends. Why have these multidisciplinary teams, then, that work together on cancer been effectively separated and instead of one direction now have seven different directions to report to? How is that more efficient and effective?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, they report to one board. I believe the hon. member is talking about some of the articles in the paper this weekend, where we had some of the specialty individuals speaking, that it would be nice to have a two-week waiting period. The cancer representative responded that that would be great, but the current waiting times for cancer are at about middle of the road for the country of Canada. Can we improve them? Yes, we can, and we will. The minister will be making announcements soon.

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

High-intensity Residential Fires

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A high-intensity residential fire report sat for seven months until this government responded to the recommendations. It took another year for them to update fire safety regulations. Last week we saw what happens when government fails to act in a timely way: 300 Calgary residents are homeless due to a massive fire. To the Premier. Requiring sprinklers on balconies and in attics of low-rise buildings should have been an easy task for government. Why did it take this government over 18 months to enact these fire safety recommendations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our sympathies to all of the families. Thankfully, no lives were lost in the condo fire in Calgary.

I can tell you that we had and continue to have very high standards with respect to the codes, and we will continue to improve the codes. The codes that were in place were already above most of the national standards that were implemented, so we were ahead of other

provinces. We will continue, once the review and investigation into this fire is done, to see how it started and what else we can do in the future.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: how many Albertans are living in potential fire traps that were built during the year and a half that this government sat on these recommendations?

Mr. Stelmach: None. I think that's quite an irresponsible question.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, 300 people are homeless because this government couldn't make changes to safety codes soon enough. What will the Premier do to help the thousands of Albertans that are in buildings now that were built before fire safety was finally strengthened? What will you do now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, building codes are very complex. They require, of course, due process on such matters as technical research, all of the matters relating to building and fire science, and also stakeholder consultation and public consultation. We have done a lot of that in terms of introducing the most recent codes. The other thing is, though, that we don't know how the fire started, what led to this. Let's wait for the full report to make sure that we know what issue we're dealing with, and once that report is in, then we'll be able to take that under consideration.

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

Water Management and Allocation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is World Water Week. When we look at the state of water in Alberta, we see that the communities in southern Alberta have run out of water allocations, the South Saskatchewan River basin has been rated the most threatened river in Canada, and 2010 is projected to be another year of drought, the seventh in the last decade. To the Minister of Environment: why does the minister choose to respect an antediluvian industry-centric system at the expense of the inclusion of new or growing regions?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understand the reference that the member makes, but the fact of the matter is that in the preamble the member stated various obvious issues. We are entering a drought. It wasn't my cause. We do have pressure on the South Saskatchewan. It wasn't a result of the government. What is the government doing? We are taking very seriously our responsibility to ensure that we protect the water in the best available way and that we allocate that water to all necessary users.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: given that more water will be pulled out of the rivers if the FITFIR, first in time, first in right, owners are allowed to sell their allocations, why is the minister moving toward a water market which further entrenches this system?

Mr. Renner: Well, I shouldn't have to remind this member because I think she, above all, should know that there is only so much water in the river, so to suggest that more water can be withdrawn is an inaccurate statement. What we're talking about is sharing in the most equitable way the water that's available while, at the same time

— and I must emphasize this, Mr. Speaker — assuring that the number one priority is the protection of the healthy aquatic ecosystem, and that is a nature conservation set aside.

Ms Blakeman: No, not true.

Back to the same minister: why is the minister playing both sides against the middle with his insistence on keeping the centuries-old I-got-here-first entitlement and pitting it against the threatened water system of the South Saskatchewan and other water basins?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's kind of what politics is all about, isn't it? It's about recognizing and respecting history and putting plans and necessary policies in place to ensure our future. That's exactly what my job is about. That's what I do every day. I balance historical record and future needs.

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

Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government talks about openness and transparency, but when health care professionals bring forward their concerns or problems, they are referred to the Alberta Health Services code of conduct, which is commonly known as the code. The code is at the heart of AHS bylaws, procedures, standards, guidelines, regulations, policies, and directives on how employers are to conduct themselves. My question is to the minister of health. What exactly can health care professionals talk about with regard to improving our health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the new and improved code of conduct that was brought in in December, pretty much anything and everything that deals with health care from a patient's point of view and from a medical needs point of view. Policy matters: they might want to ask me about, or they might want to ask somebody in Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Given that AHS provides health service delivery in response to direction received from the minister, will the minister of health send a memo to all health care professionals indicating that they can speak out with their concerns to their MLA, media, and Albertans without fear of being reprimanded?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, there is a new code of conduct that the nurses have agreed to. They're fine with it. I've talked with the doctors as well. They are fine with this. They can feel free to talk about any medical issues they want and with whomever they want whenever they want.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: All right. Then I'll look forward to that memo going to the health care professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since part of the AHS code tells employees to be open, honest, and transparent, if a health employee believes a policy is harmful to patients, who are they accountable to: Alberta Health Services or the patients in their care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the health professionals in this first-class system do an awesome job day in, day out under very trying circumstances. They should be saluted. If they have an issue with

regard to policy, there's a protocol to be followed just like there is with any employer, and that's very clearly laid out in some of the organizational frameworks. They can talk to Alberta Health Services, or they can certainly write to me if they wish.

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

Cancer Services

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The time between being diagnosed with cancer and beginning treatment is torturous for Alberta families. The government's goal is for wait times for radiation therapy to be no longer than four weeks. Last summer more than 40 per cent of Albertans had to wait longer than that. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier tell the Assembly what the government is planning to do to rectify this situation?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in answer to the previous question on the same topic I said that the minister is putting together not only a capital plan, but now that Alberta Health Services has a five-year increased funding commitment, they're able to plan better, look at the changing demographics of the province, and also will have good input in terms of the capital requirements over the next number of years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Alberta Health and Wellness projections show that approximately 50 per cent of Albertans will get cancer and that half of them will die from it and given that our aging population finds the Cross Cancer Institute with an increase of 4 per cent in its intake each year, why won't the Premier admit that his current strategy is inadequate and cannot keep up with the rapid growth of cancer rates in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister can supplement in terms of his plan.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're putting in place some very effective strategies called performance measures and targets to hold the system itself accountable, we've added to that significant dollars in this five-year funding plan, that's going to be rolled out very soon, and we are meeting with doctors, oncologists specifically, to ensure that we're going to get that all corrected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Setting targets just won't do it. Given that the government previously promised a billion dollars for cancer hospitals nearly five years ago and failed to meet that commitment and given that this government is failing to meet its own targets for oncology care, will this Premier commit to develop a new cancer strategy that includes new capital for cancer hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton and the resources to staff them, making it possible to meet the four-week target for all Albertans who have cancer?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again. I've said it so many times that I have it memorized. We're coming out with a capital plan on or about March 31. That will have a good snapshot into what we're doing with health facilities, including cancer facilities

and others that are able to be accommodated in the three-year capital health facilities funding plan.

We are also bringing in the radiation therapy corridor. There's a new facility for radiation therapy that'll be opening in Lethbridge, for example, in June. There's one that's going to be coming to Grande Prairie. There's one that's coming to Red Deer.

We're doing a lot to address cancer issues. I agree that there's a lot to be done as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Special-needs Assistance for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A man was prescribed meal supplements when he was being treated for cancer, and his family was told that the cost would be covered through the special-needs assistance for seniors program. With this information the wife bought the meal supplements. Unfortunately, the gentleman has died, and his widow submitted the claim for reimbursement. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why is the benefit for special-needs assistance not reimbursed to the survivor when the claimant has passed away?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to express my sympathy for this loss to Ms Kotyk and her family. While I can't comment on the specific client situation, I can tell you that the special-needs assistance program assists low-income seniors with one-time or extraordinary costs such as some medical expenses, appliances, and essential minor home repairs. A special need is a one-time or extraordinary personal expenditure that is required to meet the needs of low-income seniors.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister: why is this department's policy not to make any further contact with the family of the deceased, leaving the family in limbo at a very difficult time?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once again, I can't comment on a specific case. But once a senior passes away, they can no longer directly benefit from the funding as the special-needs assistance program cannot provide funds directly to the estate. Also, if the spouse of a senior who has passed away is not a senior themselves, they are not eligible for funding from the special-needs program.

Ms Pastoor: They had been told that she would receive it, which is why she spent the money.

Will the minister immediately extend this benefit to claimant survivors and order the department to maintain contact with the family until the claim is discharged?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I will look into this policy, and I will review what has been said.

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

High-intensity Residential Fires

(continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week a devastating fire tore through a condo complex in Millrise, which I've visited a number of times since, in my constituency of Calgary-Lougheed. The fire virtually destroyed the building and left hundreds of people looking for somewhere else to live. The residents are left with many

questions, including about code changes requiring sprinklers on balconies and in attics. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Apart from what we have already heard, can the minister give us some more details on the impact the new code may have had on this fire?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My sympathies also go out to those affected by the fire. The investigation is under way, and we are trying to figure out how that fire may have spread. Alberta updated its building code and the fire codes last year, ahead of any other Canadian jurisdiction. These codes are meant for people to buy time to get out safely and for the firefighters to fight the fire as quickly as possible. We had very, very high standards before, and now we even have better ones.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. What is the government of Alberta doing to assist the victims of this Millrise fire in any specific and tangible ways?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we remain in contact with those that have been affected by the fire. The Alberta fire commissioner has also been in contact with the city of Calgary and offered assistance, but no assistance, apparently, is required at this particular time. There's been an outpouring of financial donations, which are also helping provide for clothing and household items and other items that may be required.

Mr. Rodney: My final supplemental is for the Minister of Service Alberta. Why is insurance mandatory for vehicles and not for residences?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Condominium Property Act condominium corporations are required to carry insurance for the overall condominium building, and that will vary from building to building and mainly for specific things, including fire. The insurance for residential units will vary, and oftentimes individuals should as well carry contents insurance with the backup of what the condominium does provide.

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

Education Achievement Testing

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the Minister of Education has catered, cratered to the competitive ideology of the Fraser Institute by releasing standardized test scores from across the province, which have a more punitive than celebratory effect. To the minister: what motivational value or educational relevance does publicizing test results given at the end of the previous year for students who have left their division have for either students, teachers, or parents?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, far from cratering to whatever it was the hon. member suggested, the Fraser Institute accesses the information that they publish through the freedom of information and protection of privacy rules in this province. Information that's

in the hands of government that is not otherwise protected is available for release to people who apply appropriately under the act. I have no ability to withhold that information even though I disagree with the way that they use it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What purpose is achieved by permitting the publishing of rank-ordered school test results, particularly for those scoring below the 50th percentile? Does the minister believe that either embarrassment or degradation is a motivator for future success?

Mr. Hancock: I don't think the Fraser Institute report, Mr. Speaker, has any value whatsoever, and I say so every time I'm asked. I think it's a totally inappropriate use of the data, and I wish people wouldn't read it. But I cannot stop them from publishing it, I cannot stop newspapers from publishing it, and I cannot stop people from reading it.

Mr. Chase: Would the investment in time, effort, and money that goes into the preparation, marking, and evaluation of these one-shot wonder tests not be better spent at the classroom level in addressing both students' confidence and competence?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that our school boards across the province are addressing the issue of students' competence and confidence in their classrooms on an everyday basis and that our teachers are doing that as well. There is very much an appropriate process for assessment of and for learning in the classroom, but there's also an appropriate way – and whether or not the provincial achievement tests are that appropriate way has been the subject of discussion for a number of years and will go on – to be accountable to the public for the \$6.3 billion that are spent on public education in this province every year and make sure that the system is working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Gang-related Crime

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent came to see me last week expressing deep concern for the safety of her family, especially her two young children. This is because her house is located next to a house that was targeted for two gang-related drive-by shootings within a year's time. Her two young children's bedroom is right next to the house that was involved with the shootings. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. My constituent wants to know: what is your ministry doing to provide the needed protection to her family and neighbours?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gang crime is serious and unacceptable to us all, and we're taking actions in our communities to help Albertans feel safe. We've instituted, as you may know, the Alberta law enforcement response teams, developed to combat serious and organized crime, including gangs. They've taken some 2,500 individuals, charged them. They've taken 800 kilograms of drugs, 350 firearms off the street. We operate a SCAN unit underneath the ALERT team, that Albertans can talk directly to. Just visit the website.

Ms Woo-Paw: To the same minister: what programs and initiatives are there to provide information and support to the family members of the gang members?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we have the ALERT and the SCAN resources out there. Constituents are invited at any time to talk to the police. At all times any communications with law enforcement are confidential. I might add that we added the witness security protection program, which will provide short-term protection during the execution of a trial. This could be of assistance to the families. I would also add that the ALERT ITRAC unit can be employed when family violence is an issue in gang membership.

Ms Woo-Paw: My final question is for the Minister of Justice. How is the safe communities initiative addressing the recruitment of vulnerable youth into gangs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the safe communities philosophy and this government need to deal with education, awareness well before we look to prevention and prosecution. What we have done is developed a comprehensive gang reduction strategy that identifies the fact that we very often have youth at risk very early in their life. We have a number of partnerships with social workers, police, and principals, the youth at risk development project in Calgary. We also have a number of SCIF initiatives that are dealing with youth in communities around the province to identify the particular risks in communities that will avoid decisions with respect to gangs.

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

Checkstop Program

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Random roadside sobriety testing in Australia and New Zealand has been very successful in curbing drinking and driving and likely would be in Alberta if it was employed on a more frequent basis. To the Solicitor General. Right now in Calgary it only has one unit to handle its checkstop program. How do you think a municipal police force can hope to make any impact without the proper resources to test more motorists?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know or should know that the Calgary Police Service provides municipal policing, not the department. We work with the department. He will also know that one of the reasons we announced our integrated traffic model to be deployed across Alberta is that it will give us 19 locations across the province, a critical mass sufficient to man checkstop or vehicle safety checks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone agrees that a visible presence for Alberta's roadside checkstops is a surefire way to improve traffic safety, but current strategies are infrequent and episodic. Will the Solicitor General take a strong stance and commit to long-term projects to eradicate drunk driving in addition to regular increases on holidays and other festive occasions?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I think we did commit and we are committing,

Mr. Speaker. As I said, we've deployed units across the province. We are absolutely going to be able to increase checkstops, holiday checks, all of those things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to ask my third question. An increase in checkstops means a corresponding decrease in fatal accidents. When will this ministry and this province provide police with adequate funding to deploy checkstop units on a regular basis throughout the province?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I'm dead convinced that I answered that question twice now, Mr. Speaker. We just announced the deployment of 19 integrated sheriff-RCMP stations across the province, which will provide us with a critical mass to be able to do checkstops, vehicle safety checks, those sorts of things. We will be enforcing impaired driving.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many postsecondary students across Alberta are concerned about their current financial situation and accumulating debt. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Given the current economic recession, job prospects are uncertain. Many graduates are having to continue their studies. What assistance can new graduates get to pay their student debts and tuition fees if they extend their studies?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been working with the students over the last six years, the last three on the affordability framework. As resources have allowed us, we've been ticking off the things around affordability that are important to the students. Obviously, in Budget 2010 we made some improvements to the programs, including higher lifetime loan limits and a new, more flexible repayment assistance program. Really, in answer to the hon. member's question, the new, flexible repayment program is going to be very valuable to our students in the coming years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: what efforts are being made to regulate mandatory noninstructional fees at Alberta postsecondary educational institutions?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have had this question in the House a few times now as it relates to ancillary fees. Most of these fees that we're hearing about are just proposals at this stage. We are keeping a close eye on that situation. We do want to ensure that any fees that are of an instructional nature are certainly kept within the tuition fee policy. If there is a need – and I've said this to the students – to regulate noninstructional fees, we've actually asked the students to work with us and the postsecondaries to draft a possible regulation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: how do the current loan relief program and the new repayment assistance program meet the needs of students with a large student debt?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the focus is on providing all of the eligible students with the assistance that they need to help meet their costs, and that includes the cost of tuition, the cost of living, the cost of books, all of those things. We ensure that the debt above a set of thresholds is actually forgiven for qualifying grads to help ensure that the students have a manageable debt load at the end of their studies. The repayment assistance plan is going to provide even more flexibility to grads struggling to make loan payments as they enter the workforce, and we'll continue to monitor that affordability framework.

High-intensity Residential Fires (continued)

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week 400 Calgarians were left homeless by a disastrous condo fire. It appears the fire began on a balcony and spread to the complex's attic. Thankfully, no one was killed, but residents are asking why this government delayed implementing a 2007 report calling for mandatory sprinklers on balconies and in attics. The Millrise condo complex was built in 2008 and did not include such sprinklers. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why did it take from October 2007 to May 2009, 18 months, to implement these recommended building code reforms?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think Alberta should be commended, not criticized, for being proactive and taking action to protect Albertans. Building codes are very complex and require due process. We have to do the technical research on building and fire science and the stakeholder consultation. That always takes quite a lot of time, and a lot of public consultation is required before those are accepted.

Mr. Anderson: To the same minister: given that it only took this government one month – one month – to accept the recommendations of the 2007 royalty review panel overhauling the regulatory regime of our most important and complex industry, why then did it take seven times longer to accept the few but important recommendations regarding balcony and attic sprinklers in the 2007 fire prevention report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta already has one of the strictest fire codes in the country. There is no doubt that updating our building codes took some time, but we're over two years ahead of any other jurisdiction across Canada. There is no doubt that it took some time, but we wanted to make sure that we were getting it right.

Mr. Anderson: The minister should have acted faster, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: was there any lobbying on government that caused the one and a half year delay in implementing these fire safety building code recommendations, and if so, by whom?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware that there was any lobbying, at least not to me.

Mr. Speaker, it's very misleading to say that 300 people are

homeless due to building and fire codes. Building and fire codes are meant to help slow the spread of fires and protect the individuals. We need to look at what caused the fires in the first place and how those fires spread, and these are the things that we're looking at.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

2:20

Building Construction Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government had an opportunity to introduce new standards for home and condo construction, but instead they chose to do nothing. Now housing starts in Edmonton and Calgary are triple what they were at this time last year, and Albertans have no new protections against shoddy building practices. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why is this government leaving thousands of new home and condo owners at risk of the same kinds of shoddy construction practices that hurt Albertans during the last housing boom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As previously said by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, building codes are in that area. But I can address the issue of the Condominium Property Act, some of those areas that we will be doing consultations on in the spring of 2011. What's really important here is that there are issues across different ministries, and we need to make sure that we look at all the issues and come to a good decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More consultation, more consultation, but there's no action. Why is the minister not moving now to protect new home and condo buyers by speeding up her reviews of the fair trading and condo property acts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fair Trading Act and the Condominium Property Act are both very cornerstone pieces of legislation for this government. Under the Fair Trading Act there are a number of areas where we've been able to go after individuals and charge individuals. The Condominium Property Act has a working committee that is working very hard right now with a number of stakeholders to move forward when we do the consultation in the spring of 2011.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why isn't the minister releasing the results of the study of residential construction practices that his department did two years ago?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we consulted with stakeholders such as builders, municipalities, fire chiefs, building and fire experts, and the public from January through August of 2008. Those final reviews and recommendations by the Safety Codes Council were made to us in September of '08 and accepted in October of 2008. The original schedule for adoption in January of '09 was delayed until March of '09 because of the technical complexity of the regulations. We are looking at the drafting and approval and passage of those amended regulations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Consultation on Employment Agencies

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Service Alberta has launched a consultation on regulations related to employment agencies in the province. Apparently, it is intended to cover issues such as whether employment agencies should be required to disclose to their clients the types of fees agencies are or are not allowed to charge and what extra services these agencies should be allowed to offer. My question is for the Minister of Service Alberta. Is this consultation an admission that your ministry's regulations haven't properly protected the clients of employment agencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this consultation that was just announced today, this is going to be a consultation that will go until the end of April, April 30. What's really important is that there are many examples where we have been able to enforce and charge individuals. What we want to do is improve and update the regulations to ensure that they're effective as we move forward as the economy recovers in the months and the years ahead. This is a really important consultation.

Mr. Xiao: My first supplemental to the same minister: given there have been examples of a worker being charged fees by employment agencies despite the fact that it's against the law, will you address this as a part of your consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta takes allegations of fees being charged to workers very seriously. This consultation will give our investigators even stronger tools to ensure that our regulations are being followed and, as well, encourage individuals to come forward when they are in situations that are untenable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. My last supplemental to the same minister: shouldn't this review have happened several years ago, when our economy was booming and the foreign workers were flooding to the province? Isn't reviewing the regulation at this point too late?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a good time to review it. It hasn't been reviewed for about 10 years. We know the economy has changed in Alberta. We know there are different challenges and different labour areas. We know there are many foreign workers that are working here in Alberta and will continue to come. This is about the future and doing the right thing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Wood Buffalo Municipal Issues

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week while I was meeting with the mayor and councillors from the region of Wood

Buffalo, I was surprised to learn that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has not even spoken with them since taking office. This municipality is home to thousands upon thousands of workers who are indispensable to the health of our province's economy. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It's been almost three months since he took the job. Why has the minister not even met with Wood Buffalo municipal officials?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that answer is rather easy: because they haven't asked to meet with me. I want to indicate that upon becoming Minister of Municipal Affairs, I did meet with quite a number of municipalities across the province. Just recently we concluded the very, very successful conference of AAMD and C where all of the rural municipalities were represented. I will upon request meet with them if they want to talk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that their most pressing need is for the provincial government to accept their census methodology so they can receive the amount of funding they're entitled to, an amount of funding that relates directly to the number of people who actually live in Fort McMurray, why has the minister done nothing to solve the problem?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I need to make it clear to this House that we've got 359 municipalities. Each and every one of them is special in their own way, and each and every one of them has particular issues. As they address those issues to me, I work with them.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I'm only asking about one of them today.

Given that the municipality doesn't have enough experienced planners on staff to develop Parsons Creek so that Fort McMurray can have housing available for the next boom, which could start in, oh, I don't know, six months, what is the minister doing right now to help them fast-track this process?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding – and that's made available through other municipalities – that some of that particular land is available. We work with all municipalities, including Fort McMurray, with the existing programs and support services that we have, and we'll continue to do that with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Supports for Disabled Persons

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're a province that prides itself on independence and self-initiative. Many people believe that if you want a better life, it's up to you to work hard. However, for some Albertans, including those with disabilities, this is a lot more difficult, if not next to impossible. My questions are for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Minister, what are we doing as a government to help Albertans who may have very limited options for earning an income?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I agree that we are a very proud province, and we can be proud of our support for those most in need. This includes the assured income for the severely handicapped program, or AISH, which provides monthly financial and supplementary health benefits to about 40,000 adult Albertans with severe

and permanent disabilities. To support those AISH clients who can and want to work, we have income exemptions in place that allow clients to earn some employment income and still receive a level of AISH benefit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Because mobility is another concern and because a disabled man in my community is struggling to repair or replace his wheelchair, is there any help available to obtain wheelchairs or other assistive devices to help Albertans with disabilities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, our government's commitment to those most in need can also be seen through many of the programs delivered by my ministry, including the Alberta aids to daily living program, or AADL. AADL is a \$113 million program that provides financial assistance to approximately 80,000 Albertans each year to purchase medical equipment and supplies such as wheelchairs. Clients can also receive assistance with repairs to equipment provided by AADL.

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

Patient Safety Report

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services finally released the independent report into incidents at the Alberta Children's hospital. The report suggests a picture of a physician with a chronically difficult personality overruling a nurse and ordering her to give a small child a potentially life-threatening dose of painkiller. The management of the Children's hospital appears to have failed to prevent the situation even though warning signs had accumulated. To the minister of health: if this situation can happen at the Children's hospital, what is the minister doing to ensure that it is not happening elsewhere?

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are about 80 recommendations in that Health Quality Council report which was released on Thursday. I can assure you that Alberta Health Services is doing everything within their powers and in their capacity to address not only those four incidents but other recommendations that will help prevent those kinds of incidents in the future.

Dr. Taft: Well, the minister has said that he has read the report cover to cover. He'll know, then, that this report uses some pretty startling language such as "ineffective," not inappropriate, "not respectful," and on page 28 speaks of "disruptive behaviour by physicians that interferes with the provision of safe patient care." Given that five months have passed, have policies been put in place in those five months to fix the problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if that exact section has yet been addressed and implemented, but I can tell you that immediately upon receiving the report, even before it was made public, staff, professional providers, and others at the Alberta Children's hospital acted immediately on areas where they could, and a lot of those recommendations were implemented almost right at that time.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, given that it's clear from the report that there is a particular physician whose behaviour has contributed heavily to the problems with a large overdose of painkillers to a very small

child and given that this behaviour appears to be ongoing, has the minister ordered any special measures be taken to deal with this particular physician?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no, I haven't. If it's an issue of that gravity, then there is certainly a mechanism in place, and it's called a complaint to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They are the ones who deal with doctor discipline and actions against doctors or comments about performance or diagnoses or whatever it might be.

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

School Closures

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has spoken publicly in this Legislature of the importance of having community services integrated in schools and schools being integrated into the community, yet schools are still being closed in the inner city. The school boards are saying that it's the province that's pressuring them to close. My question is to the Minister of Education. What Alberta Department of Education legislation or regulations are contributing to schools in the inner city being closed?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, actually, there are no legislative policies or regulations which would contribute to that type of decision-making.

Ms Blakeman: It's the utilization rates, and you know it.

Mr. Hancock: Utilization rates do not actually contribute to the idea of closing schools. Utilization rates are utilized with respect to whether or not new schools are needed.

What might actually impact a school board's decision is the plant operation and maintenance funding formula, which funds on a per-student basis. So if you don't have enough students in a school or if the school is larger and more difficult to heat and operate, that might actually impact a decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how can government possibly encourage schools to pursue wraparound service partnerships when the schools that are pioneering such practices in older, often higher social needs communities are the first schools up for closure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm glad that we have the trustees from Edmonton public school board here today so I can say yet again what I've said in the past in this House. The city centre school project in Edmonton public, which was put together a number of years ago, demonstrates exactly how to do it. They created a better opportunity for education for the children in that area. Yes, a couple of schools were closed, but the receiving schools were renovated, and what they've created are partnerships with the community to provide better supports for those students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: what can your

ministry do to encourage services such as children and family services and community health services to be offered within the school walls?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite a lot of work is happening with respect to so-called wraparound services. There are some 35 mental health capacity building projects across the province, which are piloting those kinds of projects. Again, we also should be encouraging – and I have been encouraging – Children and Youth Services, Health, and other community agencies to actually co-locate, where appropriate, with schools. In fact, that can also have another benefit, and that is that if excess school space is used for other public purposes, it actually can be taken out of the utilization formula.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Questions are being raised in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie about how AISH supports Albertans with disabilities; specifically, what happens to AISH clients' benefits when they enter an institution like a hospital for extended periods of time. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Is it true that AISH clients lose their benefits soon after being admitted into hospitals?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad I have the opportunity to provide members of the Assembly with factual information about our support for AISH clients who are admitted to institutions. If an AISH client is temporarily admitted to an institution, he or she continues to receive AISH benefits for three months while receiving treatment, and this can be extended for up to six months in total. This continuation of AISH benefits makes it much easier for clients to transition back to the community and their homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next supplemental to the same minister: what happens then? After the six months does that client get off AISH?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, clients in an institution more than six months stop receiving AISH as they have their basic needs taken care of by the facility. They are again eligible for AISH when they are discharged, and they can be eligible to have their benefits rapidly reinstated. This means the client's file can be reopened without the client having to apply or undergo another medical assessment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: looking at the longer term, what happens to AISH clients when they become seniors? Do they continue to be supported?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we continue to support these Albertans as they become seniors. As it has been for many years, when AISH clients become seniors, they transition to being eligible for both federal and provincial seniors' benefits. In Alberta we have one of the most comprehensive packages of seniors'

benefits in the country. This package includes the Alberta seniors' benefit, which provides a monthly cash benefit to supplement federal income programs as well as the dental and optical assistance programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the close proximity of the University of Calgary to my constituency I've been getting lots of feedback from students about the proposed market modifiers for some postsecondary programs that will result in huge tuition increases. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is driving the postsecondary institutions to come forward with these proposals? Is it because there was already a gap between revenues and the cost of delivering this program, or is it a result of the tuition cap policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposals are being presented to us based on what has happened over a number of years with the tuition fee policy in the province of Alberta. At the outset let's be clear: this is about something that at this point in time is speculative. These are proposals that have come forward; we're reviewing them. Some institutions have put forward proposals where they believe that an anomaly existed when we froze tuitions back in 2004. We're still reviewing those proposals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that answer. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: is a tuition cap policy appropriate when we're competing with other jurisdictions who don't have such a policy while also striving to maintain high postsecondary program standards?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. It is a very difficult balancing act. We look at the affordability framework with our students. We look at the partnership between postsecondary students, the taxpayers, and society and the economy. We have to balance those things. We are as a government fully committed to the tuition fee policy. We have a top-notch, top-quality postsecondary education system. We need to make sure that it's accessible and affordable. By limiting annual tuition fee increases to the consumer price index, we're ensuring that the increases are predictable so that students can plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the minister's comments there, particularly at the end, because I know that a lot of my constituents have come to me lately with some concerns about drastic increases in fees. We've seen that on the Alberta nongroup plan benefits. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology in his capacity as Deputy Premier. What is the overall strategy that this government is doing to protect our constituents from massive increases in one year?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's kind of a mixture of

apples and oranges when we're talking about Blue Cross coverage, but those are costs and fees that are of a different nature. I can only say that as it relates to regular fees that the government has control over, we try to make sure that it's a recovery basis. We try to ensure that it's fair, that it's reasonable. Certainly, sometimes you have to catch up if you don't do it on a regular basis, and that's something we need to take into consideration. The only thing I can say on the tuition fee policy is that we stand by it a hundred per cent. This year the institutions wanted to make cases for exceptional fees. We're going to look at and review those. That's the only thing I've agreed to.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. President of the Treasury Board wishes to supplement an answer given the other day. That will then allow a member on I think it was the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, to raise a question with additional response.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

MLA Remuneration

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked about the authority to fund work on government committees after an election. I want to point out to you, as is stated in the guidelines on dissolution of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, that government committees, boards continue to operate until their remuneration is changed by order in council, ministerial order, or resignation from the appointment, meaning that these continue to operate, as government does, until the day of the election, so they are funded as such.

There is no retroactive payment involved. They simply operate under a new order, and that was OC 187/2008, which identifies if there are changes in the fee schedule or changes in membership. So to his question of retroactivity, there is none. As to paying retroactive payments back to any of these government members, there is not. They simply exist until the new order in council.*

The Speaker: That allows an additional question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the President of the Treasury Board: what we're interested in is the paper trail that validates what the government has been ascertaining. Could we please get a copy of all the orders in council and ministerial orders that track the appointment of the individual members to those cabinet policy committees? You've given us one. If we could get the rest of them, please.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, all orders in council are public. I'll be happy to work with the hon. members and find which one would identify the authority that committed originally to fund these committees that was replaced by OC 187/2008.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were, with those last three exchanges, 121 questions and responses in the Assembly today. Twenty individual members were recognized: nine from the Official Opposition, two from the third party in the House, one from the fourth party, and eight from the government private members.

In 15 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Haiti Relief Efforts

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize the fundraising efforts for Haiti by some Alberta businessmen. As you know, an earthquake hit Haiti, which led to the deaths of many and the loss of homes and essential infrastructure. As always, we Canadians did what we could to try and help this devastated nation. Our Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Stephen Harper, and our Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, supported and provided aid to the people of Haiti. Our own province showed leadership on this issue by donating \$500,000 to the Red Cross.

At the same time, the United Sikhs organization went to Haiti with six doctors and many volunteers to prepare and distribute food to the people of Haiti. The local Sikh community here in Alberta also fund raised for the cause, raising approximately \$60,000. Our first religious leader, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, taught us to give 10 per cent of our earnings to those who need it most, and we take that seriously. The Sikh community in British Columbia also managed to raise \$1.5 million to help the victims in Haiti.

Earlier today, Mr. Speaker, I introduced Rashamdeep Mundy and Shavi Kachroo to the Assembly. They own a company called Bell Connections, and they have 13 locations in Alberta that provide jobs for many. I am happy to say that they are holding an event on April 11 to raise money for the relief efforts in Haiti on top of other charities they are involved in. They're inviting all the Members of the Legislative Assembly to the event. They have invitations for all MLAs. Tickets are \$5, and all proceeds will help the earthquake victims. They will match all funds raised out of their own pockets on top of paying for the entertainment themselves. I would like to thank them for their efforts. God bless them and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

World Water Day

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is the very essence of life itself. No creature on this planet can exist without it. In addition, our industries – oil and gas, agriculture, transportation, recreation, medicine – and every aspect of life in Alberta revolve around water.

On this World Water Day Albertans are faced with a chilling prospect. Parts of our province, particularly the South Saskatchewan basin, will run short as our need for water outstrips supply. Already people in southern Alberta are piping water between river basins. We're now scrambling to revise our century old licensing, based on who got there first. A responsible government would have anticipated this problem many years ago, but this administration doesn't seem to know the meaning of planning for the long term. A responsible government would ensure that water sources are protected and complete an inventory of Alberta's surface and groundwater, establishing a comprehensive, effective water quality monitoring program.

Safe drinking water is a fundamental human right. A responsible government would require more transparent approvals for coal-bed methane projects and require independent scientific analysis of changes to groundwater quality and quantity. A responsible government would act now to deal actively with the risks of climate change, which increases the severity of droughts and floods, with the associated impacts on fresh water supply, management, and treatment. A responsible government would protect wetlands with a no net-loss policy. We would protect our supply of drinking water by always giving priority to basic human needs as well as to ensure in-stream flows. We do not support a water market.

*See page 545, left column, paragraph 3

Albertans, particularly farmers and other rural residents, already know through bitter experience that fresh water is increasingly precious. In recent years they fought against interbasin transfers and demanded that this administration do a better job of protecting Alberta's water. I hope this World Water Day the Premier will follow the advice of Albertans and act to preserve this province's most precious resource.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Kinosoo Performing Arts Association

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, March 20, I attended the 30th anniversary celebration for the Kinosoo Performing Arts Association in Cold Lake. Approximately 300 guests were in attendance to celebrate the success of KPAA and to listen to an incredible performance by the Chevelles from Lethbridge. This celebration was truly a milestone for Bonnyville-Cold Lake because it showed how many individuals are willing to support the arts in my community.

The Kinosoo Performing Arts Association was founded in 1979 with a mission to strengthen and invigorate this community through performing arts, and over the past three decades this vision has become a reality.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta communities benefit greatly from hosting professional entertainers, especially rural areas that only get up to four or five special acts a year. It gives residents of all ages an opportunity to go to a show or concert and take part in a new experience.

I want to thank all the volunteers and members of the community who've supported the arts by helping out in the KPAA organization and by purchasing tickets to the incredible shows that they bring to our area. I believe that performing arts is vital to the growth and development of all communities, and I would like to congratulate them on 30 years of success in the Cold Lake area.

Thank you very much.

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

Red Cross Haiti Relief Efforts

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the work of Albertans who have joined with the Canadian Red Cross to respond to the desperate needs of the people of Haiti following the devastating earthquake of January 12.

From January 13 to February 16 alone dozens of Red Cross volunteers in eight offices across Alberta put in nearly 5,000 hours processing donations. During the early days staff and volunteers worked long hours to accept generous donations from children as young as four, seniors, church and community groups, and the business community. To date donations from Alberta total more than \$3 million, including the \$500,000 donated by this government to the Haiti disaster appeal. These funds will help to ensure critical needs for food, water, temporary shelter, and medical services can be met in this struggling island nation.

2:50

But Alberta's response doesn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. Today some 68 Canadian Red Cross members are among 600 international delegates sent to Haiti to support this massive humanitarian mission, the largest single-country disaster response in Red Cross history. Included in this number are four selfless, caring Alberta Red Cross delegates: Dave Bateman, Iain Logan, Dr. Dennis Filips, and,

departing today, Leslie Leach, who will take on the role of head of operations as Red Cross begins the work of constructing temporary homes for 30,000 Haitians left homeless and facing the fast-approaching monsoon season. This operation is part of a 10-year plan to help rebuild Haiti, and more Albertans will be part of this long-term mission.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Alberta's Red Cross staff and volunteers are grateful for this amazing outpouring of generosity, and they are honoured by the trust that Albertans have shown in them, but I also know that this House and all Albertans are even more honoured and, indeed, humbled by their amazing commitment to helping fellow citizens in need whether here at home or abroad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Brian McKeever

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and recognize Canmore's Brian McKeever, an incredible Albertan athlete who recently wrapped up his 2010 Paralympic participation yesterday by winning a third gold medal.

Brian started skiing at the age of three, was competing at the age of 13, and at the age of 19 this gifted young man began to lose his vision. While some would let this kind of obstacle end their career, Brian persevered. If his participation in the 2010 Winter Paralympic Games isn't a demonstration of his determination, then perhaps his legacy is. He has now participated in three Winter Paralympic Games and won a total of 10 medals.

There is no doubt that many young Canadians have followed his story, resolving to pursue their own dreams of achieving an Olympic or Paralympic medal in spite of a disability or a challenge. Brian is truly an inspiration to any aspiring athlete, and his incredible perseverance and successes are a victory for all Canadians. I know I speak for this entire Assembly as I wish heartfelt congratulations to Brian, his brother and guide Robin, and to all our country's Paralympic athletes.

Thank you. [applause]

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

World Water Day

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Water Day, established by the United Nations to focus the world's attention on our water and encourage countries around the world to take action to safeguard the quality and quantity of this essential resource. This year the theme is Clean Water for a Healthy World.

On World Water Day Albertans can be assured that our province has some of the best and safest drinking water in North America, and we're always working to ensure it stays that way. The water for life strategy is the province's long-term strategy for managing Alberta's water resources. The strategy, combined with the water for life action plan, demonstrates government's commitment to ensuring a healthy and sustainable water supply for the environment, our communities, and our economic well-being.

Since 2004 the government of Alberta has completed 23 key actions set out under water for life. These achievements have totalled about \$600 million. This morning the government announced further investment in Alberta's water sources. A two-year \$500,000 provincial grant will enable the newly formed Athabasca Watershed Council to help build a common understanding of the issues and opportunities within their watershed. This marks the 10th watershed planning and advisory council in the province and yet one

more partner contributing to the achievements of the water for life goals. I commend the Athabasca Watershed Council as its members embark upon the road of leadership, stewardship, and education.

I encourage all Albertans to help protect our precious water resources not only on World Water Day but each and every day. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Budget 2010

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 9 this government tabled Budget 2010, a budget that helps put Alberta in the strongest financial position of all provinces as we head into economic recovery. We have and will continue to have the most innovative and competitive economy in Canada, and we will have the best infrastructure in North America.

Mr. Speaker, some have criticized this government for running a shadow deficit when it comes to capital. Nothing could be further from the truth. The government's capital investment is not hidden. The government publishes the information as part of its annual fiscal plan and quarterly updates. The Alberta government follows accounting standards set by an independent, nonpartisan national body.

Others such as TD Bank Financial Group endorse our reporting methods, as seen in their 2010 Alberta Budget document. TD Bank states that capital investment is rightly excluded as an expense in the year that it is booked but, rather, is expensed through annual amortization over time as the asset is employed to benefit Albertans. This is also the best time to invest in our public infrastructure. Current deflationary pressures mean lower costs for capital projects and present opportunities for additional cost containment in capital projects, meaning that this is the best time to invest in our public infrastructure instead of putting it off like some would like us to do. TD Bank also points out that our sustainability fund was used as intended, to protect Albertans' programs from sudden drops in our volatile revenue.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is good for Alberta. It lays the foundation for our future prosperity by building the infrastructure of tomorrow, and it does so in a responsible and cost-effective manner. I will be pleased to table TD Bank Financial Group's 2010 Alberta Budget document after question period.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Bill 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

This government is committed to promoting integrity and public confidence in the local election process by setting appropriate election standards. These proposed changes clarify and support the fundamental principles of the act. The proposed amendments will assist electors and designate their one residence for the purpose of voting in a general election. The amendments will also help ensure an open and transparent process for campaign contributions and, among other things, extend the in-force date of some provisions related to campaign funds to allow more time for the candidates,

municipalities, and election officials to comply with the new rules, ease restrictions on modest, self-funded campaigns and on donation caps, and ease requirements audits on financial statements. If adopted, the act would make amendments to the Local Authorities Election Act, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, and the Municipal Government Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, from the delivery of the budget back on February 9, 2010, by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise five all-party standing committees of the Legislative Assembly have spent some 72 hours reviewing and debating the budget. This budget truly strikes the balance between focusing on Alberta's priorities while eliminating spending.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I must advise that under Standing Order 7(7) "at 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily Routine will be deemed to be concluded, and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

The hon. Government House Leader.

3:00

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Might I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to suspend the provisions of Standing Order 7(7) for this afternoon?

The Speaker: On the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader I'm only going to ask one question: does anybody disagree? If you disagree, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I had the privilege of introducing leaders in our First Nations and Métis communities in this province, leaders whose purpose for education has been in alignment and people who have made very significant efforts to improve the educational outcomes for First Nations and Métis students in the province. Today I am pleased to table two documents that evidence that kind of leadership.

The first is a First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Partnership Council document, which was executed effective October 13, 2009, involving myself as Minister of Education, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations for the government as well as the grand chief of Treaty 6, Chief Eddy Makokis; the grand chief of Treaty 7, Chief Charles Weasel Head; the deputy chief of Treaty 8, Chief Rose Laboucan; and President Gerald Cunningham and President Audrey Poitras from the Métis Settlements General Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, respectively. The agreement forms a partnership between those parties for the pursuance of First Nations and Métis education in the province.

I also would like to table a historic memorandum of understanding which was executed effective February 24 of this year between the grand chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8, being, again, Chief Alan Adam, Chief Makokis, and Chief Weasel Head as well as myself as Minister of Education and then signed as well by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs and also by the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Chuck Strahl. Again, a historic document where all of these parties are coming together to emphasize the importance of education and particularly of eliminating the achievement gap for First Nations and Métis students in our province.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I haven't been a great fan of the current budget process as we're debating millions of dollars a minute in many cases. At this point I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of questions that I was not able to ask the Minister of Environment during our 2010-2011 Environment estimates due to time constraints. We had an hour and 20 minutes split between us, and I still couldn't get through all questions. I look forward to receiving the minister's written response.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated in my member's statement, I wish to table the requisite five copies of the TD Bank Financial Group's 2010 Alberta budget document.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 21, 2010, marked the 80th anniversary of the designation of the wild rose as Alberta's floral emblem. First Nations and early settlers depended on the wild rose for a host of remedies and other domestic uses. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document outlining the importance of the wild rose in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a single letter written and signed by Gloria Singendonk expressing concerns about the potential closure of Sir William Van Horne vocational high school in my constituency of Calgary-Varsity. This school has served students for over 40 years, keeping them in school and allowing them to graduate because of its special programs. She sent this letter to the minister on March 1 and indicates: "Neither he nor

his office has acknowledged receipt or honoured my request for follow up."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 56 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table copies of the School at the Legislature report card 2008-2009. This is, as we heard today, a Legislative Assembly educational program for grade 6 students cosponsored with community partners Priority Printing, Access Media Group, CKUA radio network, Via Rail Canada, and the Edmonton downtown Rotary Club.

Are there others?

Hon. members, I'm going to call Orders of the Day momentarily, but as Monday is private members' day, there's a request that will be made momentarily by a member to switch a position on motions for returns, I do believe. That motion for a return is under motions. I advised the hon. member when he talked to me some days ago that what he should do is send a letter, a memo, to all members of the Assembly advising them that he would rise on this day and request such unanimous consent.

All members will know that we do have a process. It was outlined by myself in a memo to all hon. members on June 15, 2009. The time frame outlined in that process is now past, so I'm now going to recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert with his request for unanimous consent.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request the unanimous consent of the Assembly to change motions other than government motions 507 to 508 and 508 to 507. I have consulted with the Member for West Yellowhead, who presently has number 508, and I have sent memos to all of the House leaders as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Is any hon. member opposed to this request? If so, simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Orders of the Day

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

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

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

Bill 201

Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll be very succinct. From the first reading through the second reading and now into committee

members of my caucus have supported Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As we have noted for the record, it follows in the tradition of the good work done by a former MLA for Calgary-North Hill, Richard Magnus, in terms of extending protection to firefighters. It takes that protection one step further, acknowledging activities that may have occurred while fighting fires – chemical inhalation, et cetera – that had the unfortunate circumstance of leading to varieties of cancers. By providing firefighters and their families, I might add, with this protection, we are valuing the work they do on a daily basis on our behalf in terms of protecting not only us but our property as well.

I mentioned during the debate during the second reading of this bill that I would like to see the types of benefits that have been provided for firefighters extended to other first responders, including paramedics and police. There is no doubt that when there is a fire, it is the firefighters who have the primary responsibility and potentially put their lives at the greatest risk. In carrying out the support services, whether it be the paramedics or the police officers who are in the vicinity of the chemicals that are unfortunately being let loose into the air, I would like to think that at some point in the near future their valuable contributions and the role they play as team members of emergency services be recognized.

3:10

The government is also bringing forth legislation to protect individuals involved in search and rescue operations. These bills work together extremely well to provide protection, in some cases in the case of liability, in others with regard to medical recognition of injuries suffered.

Therefore, to conclude, Mr. Chair, not only myself but the members of the Liberal Official Opposition are supportive of Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, and look forward to seeing it proclaimed.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was prepared to open debate, but I'm quite pleased that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity opened debate, and I certainly thank him for his words of support for Bill 201. I'd like to thank in addition to the colleague from Calgary-Varsity all colleagues from both sides of the House for sharing their thoughts and comments over the course of second reading.

I'd like to just quickly review the primary components of Bill 201. Mr. Chairman, the bill was designed to provide further coverage for firefighters under the presumptive legislation we currently have in place. Specifically, section 2 of Bill 201 requires that section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act be amended by adding subsection (4.1). It reads:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, section 2 of this bill will add an additional subsection, that being (4.2), requiring that "a regulation made under subsection (4.1) may be subject to the requirements of subsection (4)(b) prescribing periods of employment." That speaks to the length of time that a firefighter would have been exposed over the course of his career prior to being eligible for this coverage. This is important to note as we must follow guidelines that have already been put in place with regard to the length of employment before coverage applies.

The final component of Bill 201 is section 3, which reads: "This Act comes into force on Proclamation." As with other private

members' bills, Mr. Chairman, it is imperative to do this to ensure time for the needed consultation by the department affected, in this case that being the Ministry of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Chairman, presumptive legislation can be seen all across Canada, and as stated in our earlier debate, Alberta was one of the first to introduce such legislation, in 2003. For that I think we have the former member from Calgary Mr. Magnus – I guess I can say that; he's no longer a member of the House – that was the champion of that piece of legislation at the time.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 201 is simply adding to this legislation and to the good work that was done at the time as more scientific research has come to light. To this point firefighters and researchers have indicated links to esophageal and testicular cancer. That is why Bill 201 has come forward: to help assure those that protect us that they will be looked after should their worst fears come true and they are diagnosed with either of these cancers.

Mr. Chairman, according to the International Association of Fire Fighters there are approximately 10 firefighters that lose their lives annually as a result of job-related cancers in Canada. Many have attributed the increase in cancers to the greater use of synthetics in building materials. The risk is not necessarily from the inhalation of fumes; rather, it is the absorption of these dangerous chemicals through the skin. The uniforms that these men and women wear in doing their job are designed to breathe, and as such, although that is a good feature to have, the reality is that it also allows some of these materials to be absorbed into the skin of these firefighters.

I'd like to take this opportunity to address some of the questions brought forward by my hon. colleagues during second reading. I thank the hon. members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Calgary-Varsity for raising the issue of extending presumptive legislation to other professions – the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity just raised that again – including all responders. While I believe that there may be cause for this, Bill 201 is specific to firefighters because of the evidence that has been presented to governments across North America. I might also mention, Mr. Chairman, for the benefit of the hon. member, that what we are doing by Bill 201 is amending an existing piece of legislation that already exists that is specific to firefighters.

Now, at some point in the future you, myself, or someone else may very well want to bring forward another piece of legislation that would address these other responders. I might also add: it has been brought up by many members in this House that it would be desirable to extend this protection to volunteer firefighters as well. I, too, would agree, Mr. Chairman, that that is very desirable because, as we know, a large portion of the firefighting community right across this province is comprised of volunteers. But at this time this particular piece of legislation will be amending what is already in place for full-time firefighters. I'm certainly looking forward to the opportunity where we may one day be discussing something specific to volunteer firefighters.

Cancer is a devastating disease, Mr. Chairman, and I imagine that each of us has been affected in some way by cancer. I believe that by passing Bill 201, we can provide comfort in a time of uncertainty to firefighters and their families. I believe that we all recognize the importance of firefighters to our communities and just how vital these brave men and women are. Many of us have had experience at the municipal level as mayors, reeves, and councillors, and these roles have put us in direct daily contact with firefighters. Many members spoke of personal stories where firefighters were called on to save their homes, barns, businesses, and animals, and as a result those members may have an even greater appreciation of firefighters.

Last year Edmonton lost two of its finest to cancer all in the

course of two weeks. These were two captains, Mr. Chairman. In fact, it was the sixth in the span of a few years. This is an all too stark reality, that reminds firefighters of the hidden dangers of their jobs. Not only that, but one of these fine men passed away from esophageal cancer and was therefore not eligible for WCB benefits.

I believe that each of us in the Assembly has met a firefighter and has seen the immense impact that they have in our communities. These brave men and women have put their lives on the line every day to protect all Albertans. Firefighters do more than just fight fires. They attend medical emergencies, attend chemical spills, aid in natural disasters, and provide educational tools to the community.

Mr. Chairman, the firefighters of this province have been very instrumental in having esophageal cancer and testicular cancer added to the presumptive list of cancers that are currently listed in regulation. They have been advocating for these changes to government for several years. You might remember that during second reading we were graced by some probably 50 members in uniform in the gallery from all across this province. As well, we had a delegation here from the city of Winnipeg, showing how important this is to the firefighter fraternity all across our country. By adding the aforementioned cancers, we're giving firefighters just a little more peace of mind.

3:20

I would like to thank all Alberta firefighters for their dedication to the people of this province. Mr. Chairman, Bill 201 would extend presumptive legislation to include esophageal and testicular cancer. By doing so, firefighters and their families across this province will indeed have more peace of mind.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the committee debate on Bill 201. Again, I thank all hon. members for their concern for these firefighters, and I thank the members for their participation and kind words.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Firstly, I would like to commend the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing this exceptionally important bill forward and having this debate in the House. Certainly, we on this side and I do support Bill 201. It's a protection for those who protect us, and unfortunately some have died in the performance of that duty. They are exposed to all kinds of different pollutants and toxic materials, in particular in the form of inhalation.

My colleagues have also put forward the idea that first responders could be included under this legislation, and I agree. The reason that I do is because in Lethbridge we have a very effective firefighter-paramedic dual service. It is extremely effective, and it should remain intact. The most important part of our emergency service is the dispatch, and to centralize it out of local areas I think is a mistake. I think we need to have dispatch that can act instantly and understand who they're talking to and where they're actually going.

But, Mr. Chair, I have digressed. I'll be very brief. I think this is a very important bill. We should all support it. In passing it, not only will we protect those that protect us, but we also will recognize and respect the firefighters and the job that they do for us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to rise today and participate in Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the

Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, brought forward by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I really don't need a prepared script to speak to this particular bit of legislation because in prior lives I have worked and served on a number of volunteer fire departments. I know the risks and also the rewards that firefighters face when they're looking after the protection of both life and property of those that they're charged to take care of.

Alberta firefighters provide a service to Albertans that, you know, really is vital, Mr. Chairman. It's necessary for us, I think, to talk about what the risks and rewards are that are in place for some of these people. The amendments that we have in Bill 201, particularly when you talk about the presumptive cancers for firefighters, take into account the realities of the work and the realities of the job. My biggest concern with the whole issue – and it's very well identified in the bill – comes from the fact that as a volunteer firefighter you never really know what's burning until you get there. You never really know what's in the flammable materials that you're dealing with.

Standards have changed a lot, Mr. Chairman. You know, all departments, both volunteer and professional, do everything that they can do to protect their members. There have been, in days gone by, times where it was not uncommon for volunteer members particularly to be directly exposed to toxic materials on scene; for example, to enter into a scene without wearing proper self-contained breathing apparatus. They got in, they got the job done, and they got out. Standards today are quite a bit different than they were in the early 1980s.

We have one case that I think we all know of in Saskatoon where a number of firefighters responded to a fire at a dump not knowing that the University of Saskatchewan had dumped radioactive waste at that particular facility. The upshot of that was that since that fire in the 1980s, half of the people that responded to that fire have in fact died of cancer.

You don't enter into a scene and you don't do that particular kind of work thinking about the consequences of your actions, necessarily; you do it for a wide variety of service reasons. At the end of the day we do need to afford these folks protection, and we do need to make it so that they do not have to prove a direct correlation between the particular disease that they have and the time that they served as a volunteer or as a professional firefighter.

Eliminating the requirement for correlation is a huge step forward. Expanding that list of presumptive cancers, you know, to include esophageal and primary site testicular cancer is going to help them all. It gives everyone a little bit of confidence as they're in that particular situation and makes sure that the people who do the jobs that we ask them to, in fact, carry forward and get those jobs done.

Mr. Chairman, it's an important piece of work that is done by firefighters in this province, and I would urge all members to support this particular piece of legislation. Again, I thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for having the foresight and the courage to bring this forward.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just wanted to put on the record, as I have previously done, my thanks to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon not only for bringing forward the legislation but working with the opposition parties in terms of clarification.

I appreciate the fact, as he has explained, that this bill is very specific to firefighters and that it is, in fact, an amendment to a previously established act. I very much appreciate his comments

with regard to the need for legislation follow-up to extend to other first responders. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out that you can't separate the job description for a number of individuals in the case not only of Lethbridge but in a variety of volunteer firefighting organizations in rural areas throughout the province. Hopefully, when that volunteer answers the call, that protection will extend to them.

I also have previously pointed out and just would want to emphasize that as well as looking after firefighters' and first responders' physical well-being, we need to be cognizant of their mental well-being. I would encourage legislation to be brought forward with regard to providing posttraumatic stress treatment for our first responders, which is the equivalent to what the RCMP and our military are already experiencing.

On a lighter note, Mr. Chair, I'd just like to share on the record my firefighting experience that occurred in the summer of 2003 when the Lost Creek fire was raging in the Crowsnest Pass, and all throughout the Kananaskis area fire bans were in place. Now, as one of my responsibilities in working for Cataract Creek, I had a large water tank on the back of my pickup truck. Being a concerned citizen, I noticed what I took to be a raging fire on the Eden Valley reserve. Because I felt that this matter needed to be attended to directly, I didn't stop at the band office. I thought I'd better get there and try to put this out to whatever extent I could. When I got to what I thought was a house fire, it turned out that it was actually a garbage fire. So I stopped by the band council chief's office and apologized for almost attempting to put out their garbage fire, which would have caused considerable confusion for reigniting.

My experience was not nearly as dangerous as those faced on a regular basis, but it is important for the front-line firefighters. At some time in the near future, hopefully, we'll recognize the need to protect first responders through government legislation as opposed to private members' bills.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair, and thanks again to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this very progressive, protective legislation.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As my colleague from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon mentioned, firefighters certainly are among the most highly respected of all of our professions, and I think there is very good reason for that. They're often, of course, the first responders at a wide variety of emergency scenes. They do play an integral part in keeping Albertans safe and willingly put themselves in the path of danger in order to protect our homes, our businesses, and our lives on a regular basis.

Mr. Chairman, during second reading debate on Bill 201 the Assembly heard about the bravery and dedication of Alberta's firefighters. We've heard about many of the hazards that these men and women face in order to keep us as Albertans safe. In my home city of Calgary 21 firefighters have died in the line of duty, and 12 of those died as a result of compensatory cancer. During debate we also heard about career firefighters who have developed esophageal or testicular cancer and who are not covered under the current workers' compensation legislation, and we heard about the added toll that this lack of protection has taken on our firefighters and on their families.

The Workers' Compensation Act is a scheme of legislation that provides Albertans with no-fault compensation for workplace injury

or illness. It does however take away the right of an injured or an ill worker to sue for any pecuniary losses which might have occurred as a direct result of those injuries or illness if it was incurred during the course of their employment and during the course of their duties on the job. The act provides benefits, including money paid for lost wages, health care, and other associated costs. It is a disability insurance system that's designated for those people who have been injured or made ill because of their work-related illness or injury.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's worth noting that eight types of cancer are already recognized in provincial regulations for firefighters with respect to presumption. They are leukemia, brain cancer, bladder cancer, lung cancer in nonsmokers, ureter cancer, kidney cancer, colorectal cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The fundamental problem from an evidentiary point of view is that many cancers arise from many, many different types of causes. Those causes can be both ultimate and they can be proximate. It's very difficult, if not impossible, for us to know exactly what the causes of those cancers were and when they might have arisen. The result has been that it's been extremely difficult for our firefighters to muster the evidence necessary to show that there is a nexus between the various types of cancer and the exposure to toxic compounds that they encounter in the course of their employment, sometimes years and years before a cancer arises.

Bill 201 would amend the Workers' Compensation Act to expand that list of cancers which are presumed to be work related, or presumed, in other words, to be an occupational disease for firefighters. The bill would amend section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act by adding subsection (4.1), which states that the Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Under the proposed amendment firefighters who develop primary site esophageal or primary site testicular cancer would then be assured coverage under the Workers' Compensation Act. The presumption created would be that the dominant cause of these specified diseases is, in fact, the work environment, the work environment encountered by firefighters in the usual course of carrying out their duties.

The wording of the presumption is detailed in section 24.1(2) of the Workers' Compensation Act, which states:

If a worker who is or has been a firefighter suffers an injury that is a primary site cancer of a type specified in the regulations, the injury shall be presumed to be an occupational disease, the dominant cause of which is the employment as a firefighter, unless the contrary is proven.

The upshot, Mr. Chairman, is that the subsection eliminates the burden of proof that had been previously put on the firefighters to show that specified types of cancer are in fact caused by their employment.

Mr. Chairman, statutory presumptions relating to the causation of certain cancers in firefighters were first conceived in this House in 2003 by my Calgary colleague, the hon. MLA for Calgary-North Hill at the time, Richard Magnus. Since that time in 2003 we have accumulated more and more scientific evidence, and more and more research has been done which has shown us that primary site esophageal and testicular cancers may be linked to the toxic substances encountered by our firefighters. Accordingly, I would submit to my colleagues that it is reasonable that they should now be included in the list of work-related cancers. By incorporating the most recent scientific data and research available into the Workers' Compensation Act, Bill 201 will help to protect the quality of life for Alberta firefighters and their families.

The research has pointed to plausible links between the incidence

of these cancers, as I mentioned, and the working conditions of firefighters. The lead study in this was a 2006 meta-analysis that was done by a group of researchers led by a group at the University of Cincinnati. It was published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. What it did was a statistical analysis on a whole number of epidemiological studies showing how various risks of cancer were correlated with various professions.

What the researchers found in this 2006 study in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* was that the incidence of prostate cancer was 28 per cent higher and testicular cancer was 100 per cent higher among firefighters, an astounding number. They also in that study concurred with the finding that the rates of occurrence of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and multiple myeloma were over 50 per cent greater among firefighters than in the general population. Mr. Chairman, these are very shocking numbers.

In my respectful submission, by including these two additional types of cancers in our province's existing presumptive legislation, we would eliminate the onerous burden of proof and ensure that Alberta firefighters who develop cancer as a result of their job will receive the compensation and protection that they deserve.

For firefighters and their families facing the physical, emotional, and financial hardships caused by cancer, WC benefits can make a very significant difference in their quality of life. In my submission, it would be only just and fair for us to update our workers' compensation legislation to reflect this new information. Because the Workers' Compensation Act is founded on those principles of protection and fairness, it's incumbent upon us as legislators to ensure that it is up to date.

Mr. Chairman, this is an important piece of legislation whose time has come. Bill 201, and specifically section 24.1(4.1), would go a long way toward strengthening the Workers' Compensation Act. It will protect these valuable members of our communities and show them that we place a high value on their contributions. I wholeheartedly support this legislation, and I urge all of my hon. colleagues in this Legislature to support the expeditious passage of the bill through the House and to protect our firefighters.

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

3:40

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and join in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. First, I'd like to sincerely thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his work on this piece of legislation.

Bill 201 amends the Workers' Compensation Act to include two additional cancers that firefighters may claim under workmen's compensation. Specifically, section 24.1 of the act will be amended to include subsection (4.1), which reads:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal . . . and primary site testicular cancer . . . to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Mr. Chairman, adding these two cancers to the current list of cancers that firefighters may claim for under workmen's compensation is a continued show of support and respect for all the brave men and women throughout our province that serve in this capacity. Our government has always been a leader in supporting our firefighters with presumptive legislation, ensuring that they do not have to prove that the dangerous environments which they are exposed to over their professional career are the cause of a serious illness.

In 2003, for example, the Workers' Compensation Board, also known as WCB, presumptive legislation for firefighters act received royal assent in Alberta. Alberta was the second province in all of

Canada to pass this type of legislation, which recognized certain cancers as work related. Alberta was the first province to recognize seven forms of primary site cancers which are more likely to develop in firefighters than in the general population. The list of primary site cancers which are deemed an occupational disease by the Alberta government has since expanded to eight. These cancers include brain, bladder, ureter, kidney, colorectal, lung, leukemia, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Mr. Chairman, this government recognizes and appreciates the work of our province's firefighters as they risk their own personal safety to protect Albertans' lives and property. In addition to their personal safety, research shows that our provincial firefighters are also risking their long-term health when they are exposed to the toxic environment of a fire.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Chairman, having met a lot of firefighters that serve right here in the capital city of Edmonton, that when they come out to celebrate the retirement of their peers, there isn't one individual that I have met as of yet throughout the years that said that they did not want to serve in this capacity. In fact, if they had the time and energy and not further responsibilities at home, they would continue their service. But the years of service that they put in are those that are very respectful, and it's a service that has immense impact to the communities all across the province.

Furthermore, according to statistics compiled by the Workers' Compensation Board, approximately 75 per cent of work-related firefighters' deaths have been due to cancer. In the absence of presumptive legislation the firefighters that have already so bravely served the province would have to prove that their work environment was the cause of their illness. This is why presumptive legislation for firefighters is so important. It negates the need for a firefighter suffering from one of the aforementioned primary site cancers to prove that their illness was, in fact, work related. I am so proud to stand in this Assembly and say that this government took a leadership role in providing presumptive legislation for firefighters.

This leadership role was not only displayed in the passing of the legislation but also in the scope of the legislation as eight primary site cancers are included. This government has also recognized that different primary site cancers are more likely to develop with the number of years one is exposed to a fire's toxic environment. Mr. Chairman, section 24.1(4)(b) of the Workers' Compensation Act states, "Prescribing periods of employment for the purpose of subsection (3) which may be different for the different diseases designated under clause (a)." Essentially, this means that as a firefighter's career progresses, they are more prone to different types of primary site cancers. Imagine a firefighter who has served this province for over 20 years developing a terrible illness such as kidney cancer. Our government was one of the first in Canada to recognize that this illness was an occupational disease, that it was due to numbers of years of exposure to toxic chemicals, and not simply to ask the 20-year veteran, "Which fire did you contract the disease from?"

Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the committee's attention back to Bill 201, specifically section 2, which adds subsection (4.1) in section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act. This section legislates that both primary site testicular and primary site esophageal cancers be added to the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim under workers' compensation as a work-related illness. It was already mentioned that as research surrounding these types of cancers that firefighters are more prone to evolves, so too should our presumptive legislation. The study of both primary site testicular and esophageal cancers show that these cancers are more prevalent in firefighters. Thus these two cancers should be added to the current eight primary site cancers that are currently covered under workers' compensation.

As stated, Alberta has taken a leadership role in presumptive legislation. Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, displays a continued commitment to our province's firefighters and continues to uphold Alberta's position as a leader in this particular area. It also recognizes the bravery of the men and women who expose themselves to flames, toxins, and chemicals to protect Albertans and their property from the damaging, potentially fatal effects of smoke and fire. No one can imagine what that is like.

I would like to voice my heartfelt support for Bill 201 in Committee of the Whole stage, and I would like to encourage all my colleagues to support this piece of legislation as well. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the remainder of the debate. I would encourage all to support this valuable bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm also very pleased to be able to join the debate today in Committee of the Whole on Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. As with all of my colleagues, I want to thank the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for bringing forward this very important piece of legislation. As you have heard, if this legislation is passed, it would then include primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer under the qualifying cancers that firefighters may claim for under workers' compensation. Currently the list of presumptive cancers is set by regulation. As such, Bill 201 would amend the regulations to include these two additional cancers.

Our firefighters along with all other men and women in uniform deserve, of course, our highest respect for their service to Albertans. Time and again they put themselves in harm's way to protect our friends and family and other loved ones, so it's our duty, I think, as legislators to do what we can to support and protect them. While the latest equipment and technology help protect firefighters from fire, they can't guarantee protection from esophageal and testicular cancer. However, this will help provide them with some comfort, knowing that they and their families will receive the support that they deserve in their time of need.

3:50

Section 2 of Bill 201 adds the following after section 24.1; the new subsection (4.1) would say:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

We've heard the facts in previous debate about the recognition that there is a linkage between certain types of cancers that firefighters suffer and the fires that they fight. This legislation directs the Lieutenant Governor in Council to cover these types of cancers which have been identified as significant risk factors for firefighters.

As has been mentioned in the debate, Alberta has been a leader in this area, but I thought it might be helpful and provide some context to talk a little bit about what's happening in other jurisdictions. Numerous other provincial jurisdictions and states in the United States have implemented similar measures to formally recognize the link between firefighting and certain forms of cancer.

For example, the government of British Columbia has amended their list of cancers covered under their workers' compensation to include testicular cancer. That was in 2009. The British Columbia firefighters association is working with their government to have esophageal cancer also covered.

In May of 2003 the Assembly of Saskatchewan passed Bill 18,

which expanded the list of cancers that are covered for their firefighters. That list was expanded again in 2005 with the passage of Bill 25, which included numerous cancers, including testicular cancer and lung cancer.

Manitoba has the distinction of being the first province to enact legislation for firefighters to provide them with protection in this area. That was after consultation with firefighters and studies and other research. In 2002 Bill 5 was passed by the Manitoba Legislature, which granted automatic benefits to firefighters should they contract certain cancers after a specific number of years on the job. That act was further amended to include esophageal cancer and testicular cancer just last June, in 2009.

Again, as members have mentioned, there's been some more recent research. I think the momentum of the research is growing, and there seems to be more and more recognition of this linkage. One can go back to the mid-1990s, when the government of Ontario did a study of 5,000 Toronto firefighters: that was for the years between 1954 and 1989. At the time that was a landmark study, and it confirmed statistically that firefighters develop certain types of cancers at higher rates than other workers. That prompted quick legislative action from the Ontario government, and they issued some guidelines at the time for the handling of firefighters' brain cancer and leukemia claims before the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Today firefighters in Ontario who develop esophageal cancer are also covered under the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. Then there have been more recent changes in the fall of 2009, interestingly, which extended this presumptive legislation to part-time and voluntary firefighters as well as fire investigators.

New Brunswick has added testicular and esophageal cancers to the list of cancers, and they did that just last June.

Now, the United States has 43 states that have enacted legislation that allows firefighters and EMS providers who develop certain injuries, illnesses, and diseases to qualify for workers' compensation and other benefits. Of those 43 jurisdictions 26 states have cancer presumptive legislation enacted for firefighters, states like Alabama, Alaska, California, Massachusetts. Of those states 13 have broad or nonspecific language that can be interpreted, really, to cover all cancers. Another 11 states cover site-specific cancers that would relate to specific organ systems. So if you develop cancer in one of those named organ systems, it's presumed that the cause was your job, the firefighting. Another eight states have pending cancer presumptive legislation, including Florida and New Jersey.

So you can see, Mr. Chairman, that many jurisdictions, in fact probably most jurisdictions, in North America have acted in one way or another to cover firefighters should they develop cancer after a certain period of time on the job. I really feel that it's appropriate and it's timely for this Assembly to continue with its efforts and provide our firefighters and their families with the peace of mind that they deserve so that they're not going to have to fight yet another battle to receive benefits should they be stricken by one of these terrible illnesses. This is the least we can do for people who risk their lives for us daily.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this. I encourage all of my colleagues here in the Assembly to support this legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

This act is being proposed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I, too, would like to thank him not only for the idea behind Bill 201 but for the well-thought-out wording of the legislation.

Section 24.1(2) states:

If a worker who is or has been a firefighter suffers an injury that is a primary site cancer of a type specified in the regulations, the injury shall be presumed to be an occupational disease, the dominant cause of which is the employment as a firefighter, unless the contrary is proven.

The subsections stated in this act spell out a scenario where our firefighters are decisively protected from two very real and very deadly forms of cancer, these of course being primary site esophageal and primary site testicular cancer. Moreover, this creates a scenario where these diseases are assumed to be a result of a firefighter's environment.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that the wording proposed by this bill goes far and beyond its literal interpretation. While I recognize that the wording addresses a very specific concern, primary site cancers, I also recognize that this legislative change has many far-reaching benefits. For example, this piece of legislation, specifically subsection (2), reaffirms our commitment to Alberta's firefighters. This subsection can also enshrine Alberta's traditional place as a leader in presumptive legislation. However, I would argue that the greatest benefit of this legislation is how it supports vital, essential services in Alberta. After all, that is what firefighters are: a vital service.

For me personally, firefighters are all heroes in my eyes. Each firefighter knows that when he or she leaves their home in the morning, they may be called on to risk their life to save another. Mr. Chairman, for the most part, when we think about the services provided by firefighters, we conjure up images of brave men and women running into an inferno to save a trapped resident. This, of course, is true; however, it's not the full extent of the services operated by these brave men and women. They're often the first responders to vehicle accidents and are trained to provide life-saving services to people in need. They are front-line rescue workers who regularly save people from harm even if there is no fire, and they also are active members of the community and travel from school to school teaching about fire safety and how to treat fire with respect. In simple terms the services provided by these men and women are vital to the overall health, safety, and wellness of our communities.

Mr. Chairman, this is perhaps why Bill 201, specifically subsection (2), is so important. We as a legislative body need to create an environment that is not only welcoming to these personnel but is actively concerned with their health and welfare. We need to create an environment that recognizes that firefighters can be injured every day on the job even if they don't appear so, and we need to create an environment that looks after those who have risked their lives for our well-being.

4:00

The sad reality is that primary site testicular and esophageal cancers do disproportionately target firefighters, and until we have a cure for these diseases, they will continue to disproportionately kill our firefighters. This is our opportunity to return their dedication and commitment to saving others. Until the time a decisive cure comes, I say that it falls to us to offer supports and protection for those who have done so much to protect us. Extending workers' compensation benefits to firefighters who have contracted these types of diseases is a strong statement that this government will support those who are injured in service to the people of this province.

I would encourage everyone to support Bill 201, that supports those who would bravely support all Albertans. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to stand today and join Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. This bill is being proposed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, and I would like to thank him for this inspired and beneficial legislation.

Bill 201 will amend section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act by adding subsections (4.1) and (4.2). These two new subsections refer to our current presumptive legislation and regulations as well as how this bill will amend them to include two new cancers.

Mr. Chairman, the objective of this bill is to include two new cancers in the presumptive list of cancers that firefighters may claim under workers' compensation, specifically without the trepidation that they would not be covered for primary site testicular and esophageal cancers under the Workers' Compensation Act.

The Workers' Compensation Act with regard to firefighters uses presumptive legislation to determine compensation entitlement, application, and payment. The act protects firefighters who are diagnosed with a cancer where the primary site is among those listed in presumptive legislation by defining the illness as an occupational disease, meaning in essence that their occupation can cause cancer.

Mr. Chairman, without this legislation and the proposed amendments firefighters are exposed to consequences beyond the dangers they normally face. To me, the most important part of this bill is the reference to requirements in subsection (4.1). For the sake of clarity, this section reads as follows:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

Again, in the case of Bill 201, particularly section 24.1(4.1), these illnesses would be primary site testicular and esophageal cancers. With this type of legislation firefighters are no longer placed under the burden of proving what fire they may have developed cancer from, like they would have prior to our current legislation.

Mr. Chairman, there are currently eight cancers recognized by the Alberta government and the Workers' Compensation Board as more likely to develop in firefighters than the general population. These cancers include bladder, brain, ureter, kidney, colorectal, and lung as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

In order to qualify under the primary site cancer regulation, a firefighter must prove a minimum period of exposure to the hazards of firefighting. Mr. Chairman, it is the amount of time employed before a firefighter can initiate a claim, as referenced directly from the bill. For example, to qualify for compensation for leukemia, the firefighter must have been a full-time member of a fire protection service for five years. For compensation for brain cancer it is 10 years. For bladder, lung, and ureter cancer it is 15 years. For kidney, colorectal, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma they must have been working for a fire protection service for 20 years.

As mentioned earlier, there are specific minimum employment durations allotted with different specific cancers. This lets the firefighters know that after prolonged exposure to the harmful effects of smoke inhalation and toxic substances absorbed through their skin, they will be supported. This also gives firefighters peace of mind, knowing that they and their families will be protected. Additionally, this lets firefighters go to work with the assurance that they are supported by their government and that if they were to develop primary site testicular or esophageal cancer, this legislation would ensure that they receive care and compensation.

The idea of presumptive legislation in regard to cancer as shown in section 24.1(4.1) is solidly supported by scientific evidence. Some of the most recent evidence has shown that primary site testicular and esophageal cancers can be caused by lasting exposure to toxins when fighting fires. Essentially, Mr. Chairman, Bill 201 – specifically, the addition of subsection (4.1) to section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act – is an attempt to update our current legislation and regulations to reflect new and ever-emerging scientific evidence and enhances our current legislation, and I believe that this bill succeeds in that aim.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of Alberta's firefighters and applaud them for their hard work and personal sacrifice. They truly put their lives on the line to protect Albertans and their property. The dangers a firefighter faces do not end when their shift or their careers are over. The prolonged effects of their occupation can cause serious health conditions and consequences.

I fully support this beneficial and well-thought-out legislation and would encourage all members to do the same. With that, I will conclude my comments and look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today and join in the debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. This legislation was brought forward by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, and I would like to thank him for his vision and foresight in bringing forward this very important piece of legislation. Bill 201 seeks to enhance the Alberta Workers' Compensation Act by expanding the presumptive cancer list for firefighters.

I find section 2, which amends section 24.1 of the Workers' Compensation Act, adding subsection (4.1), particularly interesting. Subsection (4.1) states that

the Lieutenant Governor in Council must make a regulation under subsection (4)(a) designating primary site esophageal cancer and primary site testicular cancer as primary site cancers to which the presumption in subsection (2) applies.

This means that Bill 201 would expand Alberta's presumptive cancer list to include primary site esophageal cancer as well as primary site testicular cancer. Mr. Chairman, this is significant because in serving our communities, firefighters are the first to respond to emergencies and are exposed to a multitude of known and unknown dangers to their health and well-being. By adding subsection (4.1), it would ensure that firefighters are fully covered under the Workers' Compensation Act.

Mr. Chairman, subsection (4.1) specifically makes reference to primary site esophageal and testicular as research is starting to show that these two cancers can develop in firefighters after regular exposure to harmful toxins over many, many years. In fact, according to the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States there are more than 70,000 substances listed as toxic. When these toxins combine, there are approximately 70 million possible toxic combinations. This is why the addition of subsection (4.1) is also necessary. This subsection would help protect firefighters from these toxins.

The role of firefighters in society is one that cannot be taken for granted. They perform various roles, and our safety is always their primary objective. Firefighting includes specific roles that fall into three categories – preventing, protecting, and responding – not to

mention that their role is expanding, Mr. Chairman. Preventing fires includes conducting visits to schools, colleges, youth and adult groups, actively engaging all community members in order to promote fire safety awareness. They respond to incidents involving fires, road traffic collisions, chemical leaks, floods, terrorist incidents, rescues of trapped people and animals, and rail, air, and marine transport incidents.

4:10

Mr. Chairman, if firefighters are the first on the scene, they may provide emergency medical services as well. Firefighters protect our businesses and our livelihoods. From motor vehicle accidents to forest fires firefighters are always there for us. The role of the modern firefighter is constantly changing to meet the needs of the community. That is why they are held in high regard around the world. They risk their lives in order to protect others, and they do this without hesitation. In this way their role is one that society cannot live without.

Every Albertan and community knows the importance of firefighters, and section 24.1(4.1) highlights this. It is difficult to fully thank firefighters for all their honourable work as words alone cannot describe our gratitude. Their role in society is invaluable. However, designating esophageal and testicular cancers as primary site cancers to which presumption applies is one way that society can show our respect for firefighters and their families. Firefighting is a profession that is exposed to various challenges and risks. Therefore, it only makes good sense to amend the Workers' Compensation Act to include section 24.1(4.1) as written in Bill 201.

Their profession is selfless, to say the least, Mr. Chairman, as they are truly our heroes. Section 24.1(4.1) may seem minor but would be an additional safety measure to protect the lives of our firefighters. Essentially, section 24.1(4.1) would be one way for Albertans to give back to our firefighters and is another way to honour and protect our firefighters as they continually protect what is most precious to us, our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

I look forward to further debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010, and am very pleased to say that I will support this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to join this Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his leadership in bringing this legislation forward.

Mr. Chairman, all members recognize that this bill addresses a very serious work-related health issue for firefighters in our province. Through the amendments proposed in Bill 201, our government will be taking steps to strengthen Alberta's presumptive legislation framework and improve support for some of our bravest workers. We've paved the path to provide these benefits to firefighters, and this bill will extend similar compensation for additional primary site cancers.

We know the importance of safe workplaces to Albertans and Alberta business. Alberta firefighters can rest assured that we'll continue to improve support for these individuals and their families. We will ensure that those who are afflicted by work-related injuries have access to reasonable compensation. However, Mr. Chairman, as with all legislation, it needs to strike the right balance.

Specifically, we can look at section 2, which amends section 24.1

of the Workers' Compensation Act by adding subsection (4.2). This amendment will establish that benefits for designated primary site cancers will respect corresponding periods of employment. Mr. Chairman, the priority here is to compensate firefighters who may be suffering from an illness that was caused from their efforts to protect our communities. While I support extending compensation for the cancers outlined in this bill, I believe it's also necessary to ensure that the benefits go to those who carried out such duties over a certain length of time.

With this section we are enhancing our presumptive legislation for Alberta full-time front-line firefighters because they bear the greatest consequences from their dangerous work. These brave men and women protect the communities that are the foundation for the tremendous quality of life our province affords. Bill 201 aims to compensate those who are ill as a result of engaging in hazardous situations to aid others. Mr. Chairman, we know the hazards that fire scenes present and the consequences that can result from exposure to fires. When it comes to a certain category of occupational diseases that we're looking to compensate for, I think it's only appropriate to respect the period of employment determined by professionals.

The Workers' Compensation Board has appropriate guidelines for the forms of cancers that fall into the category of occupational diseases. These guidelines allow for a degree of accountability and assess those who apply for benefits to determine their compensation eligibility. These guidelines are reasonable, Mr. Chairman. In a case where a firefighter is applying for worker benefits for a serious disease such as leukemia, they can look to the guidelines, which state that a firefighter seeking compensation for this illness must have worked full-time for a period of five years. It's also been noted that a claimant who is suffering from one of the eligible primary site cancers must not have smoked a tobacco product in the 10 years prior to the date of his diagnosis.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta is once again taking progressive action to strengthen our presumptive legislation. However, in doing so, we recognize that there need to be certain parameters set around employment periods for those forms of occupational diseases. I believe that the benefit table that the WCB has established serves as an appropriate guide. With the addition of subsection (4.2) we're respecting reasonable standards for time of employment. If individuals are to be eligible for workmen's compensation benefits, they must have been employed in the profession for an acceptable period of time and also taken efforts to protect their own health.

Alberta has long been known as a welcoming place for workers and will continue to ensure that the health and safety of those who choose to work in our province remains a top priority. However, we know that some of our professionals such as firefighters are exposed to higher risk situations. These risks carry consequences, as many members have noted in the discussion on this bill, but with the amendments that we are moving forward, our government will again be taking steps to support firefighters and their loved ones.

Mr. Chairman, I believe subsection (4.2) sets reasonable standards for eligibility. Therefore, I will be supporting Bill 201 so that it passes the Committee of the Whole stage.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member want to join the debate?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to close the debate.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to offer some concluding remarks for this Committee of the Whole on Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act,

2010. I would sincerely like to thank all hon. colleagues on both sides of the House for their comments and questions throughout this important debate. Committee of the Whole debate grants members of this Assembly the unique opportunity to examine key and fundamental aspects of legislation and, if necessary, propose amendments to improve them.

Bill 201 is clear and concise. It seeks to require the Lieutenant Governor in Council to add esophageal and testicular cancer to the list of eight cancers currently covered under the province's presumptive legislation. Mr. Chairman, these provisions build on the work this government has already undertaken and will ensure that firefighters are protected from the unseen dangers faced on the job. By adding these cancers, Alberta will keep up with other jurisdictions in Canada who have already added these cancers to their legislation. It is very important that legislation is updated as new research becomes available. The reality, Mr. Chairman, is that there has been extensive research, as a matter of fact. I certainly won't try to indulge the House with any of the details, but this is some of the material that we worked from to bring us to where we are today.

4:20

Again, I just can't say enough about the value of the work of these brave men and women who, of course, continually put themselves in harm's way. What I think is remarkable, as many who have spoken before me have said, is the dedication of these individuals. Even in light of this evidence of the hazards of this job, we know that every day these individuals get up and cheerfully go about their business, the business of protecting you and me, our families, our property, our assets, and our places of work. We just can't thank them enough.

I believe that what we have done so far under the original bill and what we seek to do under Bill 201 as we move forward from this point will certainly verify the support and certainly the high regard that we hold these individuals in. I would say that even though it's very significant to these individuals, Mr. Chairman, it's really such a small thing that we can do to add this extra layer of protection for these individuals. They put their lives on the line, certainly, and not only their lives but the welfare of their families, too, as they go through their work every day. Bill 201 would build on what we've done so far.

All around North America in the last five to 10 years there has been an increasing number of long-serving firefighters and veterans who've been unfortunately diagnosed with cancer. Mr. Chairman, the research is showing that there is a strong correlation between their job and these various cancers.

I would sincerely like to thank all the firefighters of Alberta for their service and commitment to their communities and to all of us.

I want to thank you for allowing me to share these concluding remarks, and again, Mr. Chairman, I thank all my colleagues who have spoken so eloquently to this bill from both sides of the House. I look forward to their support of Bill 201.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wanting to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

[The clauses of Bill 201 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 202

Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am grateful to stand in this House in committee to speak strongly in support of Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. I want to thank the hon. members of this Assembly for their thoughtful responses during second reading. To tackle a problem of this magnitude, we must all work as one to achieve our goal.

Mr. Chair, this bill will make the reporting of child pornography mandatory when someone comes across it, adding another weapon in the fight against this terrible woe. It is not a knee-jerk reaction to a dreadful problem but a measured and reasonable response that is increasingly common at the provincial level. It will take measured, deliberate, and sustained co-ordination to stamp out this problem.

As much as I want to see the proliferation of child pornography end immediately, I know it will be a process. This bill doesn't pretend to solve all the issues of child sexual exploitation, but it does reflect my approach in the past: step-by-step progress on the elimination of harm to children. As elected officials we know how complicated the legislative process can be. Even issues with a broad consensus don't lead to decisive action. Care must be taken in response.

Child pornography is a growing menace. It destroys children's lives, and it leads to a lifetime of suffering, of damaged relationships, of heartache. This is an industry, Mr. Chair, an industry with revenues in the tens of billions of dollars annually, and the sexual deviants who sexually abuse children for money or to satisfy their sick perversions are actually on the leading edge of organized crime.

I don't think there's any ambiguity about what child pornography is, but just in case any member of this Assembly is not sure, the Criminal Code of Canada is quite clear. The focus is on sexual material. There is a concern between nudity and sexuality, Mr. Chair, but the fact of the matter is that child pornography is exclusive sexual material involving acts, not poses. We are not talking about innocent family photos here, Mr. Chair. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity can rest assured that his family photo collection is safe, that his family heritage won't be left in tatters. Museums and cathedrals will not be torn down brick by brick when it becomes obligatory to report child pornography.

We are not the first province to propose this type of legislation, and we should not be the last. Albertans are reasonable people. They can see the difference between an innocent family photo and explicit pornography involving children.

Privacy is a cherished value to Albertans and an essential element of freedom and choice, but every principle has its limits. Rights are limited by their effects upon other individuals and the community. For example, sexual offenders do not have the freedom to live wherever they please. The rights of offenders in general are curtailed in terms of travel.

The only question this bill asks of Albertans is to do the right thing: report pornography material involving children and let qualified law enforcement professionals take over. This is not a scourge that we can fight alone. We must all work together. Past cases have met with not only national but international co-operation to bring these children from harm and monsters to justice.

There are great organizations in Alberta fighting this problem together. The ICE, integrated child exploitation unit, is a combined effort between the RCMP and Calgary and Edmonton police. The

child at risk response team, CARRT, is another joint effort for the protection of children. Cybertip is a national effort to curtail online exploitation of children. The federal government has been working on legislation towards increasing protection against child exploitation. In fact, Mr. Chair, they have been working on this issue since 2002. Bills C-46 and C-47 are slowly moving through the committee stage while we speak. As they are national in scope, they require the diligence to get the national execution correct. We do have a partner in Ottawa that understands the issues at stake.

We should not waste any more time. We have the power to do something at the provincial level. We should think globally, and we should act locally. Many Internet companies voluntarily forward information in regard to sites peddling child pornography. We should build on the goodwill in the broader society and take the steps that other provinces in this great country already have. This bill has the support of law enforcement and so many law-abiding Albertans. With the support of the Assembly we can make a difference in this war.

Mr. Chair, I will now table an amendment which speaks to a concern from the government on the coming into force, moving that date from July 1, 2010, to December 31, 2010. The government indicated that they could not get the regulations in place by July 1, and as a former minister of the Crown, delaying till December 31 gives the minister and their staff lots of time to get regulations in place.

The Chair: Hon. member, you have an amendment, so we'll pause and distribute the amendment.

Hon. members, this amendment is now known as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, please continue on amendment A1.

4:30

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chairman, as I noted earlier, I have been pleased to table the amendment, which speaks to the concern from the government on coming into force and moving that date from July 1, 2010, to December 31, 2010. The government indicated that they could not get the regulations in place by the 1st of July. As a former minister of the Crown, delaying till December 31 gives the minister and his staff lots of time to get the regulation in place.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll move acceptance of my amendment A1.

The Chair: On amendment A1, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Speaking to the amendment, I'm speaking in favour of the amendment for the various reasons that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek put forward. If the government's only concern about enacting this legislation was having sufficient time to do so, then the hon. member through this amendment has provided the government with the time to take action. In her explanation the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek pointed out that while the federal government is in the throes of putting forward legislation, it's taking an awful long time for that legislation to work its way through the system. We've had the situation of the proroguing of Parliament, which no doubt slowed down the process even further. I would like to think that Alberta is on the front lines of combatting child pornography.

Now, previously when I spoke to child pornography, I spoke about clearly identifying abusive pornographic imagery. I accept the premise that under the law such imagery – pornography, child abuse – can be identified, that there are not only federal laws but provincial laws which deal with the identification of child pornography.

Because it has such a terrible effect on children, who, obviously, are the ones being abused by adults in a position of power, with no respect for the children they're abusing, I believe that we need to move forward with this legislation.

Canada has laws where it will prosecute citizens who take their pornographic interest, desires, abuses outside the country's borders. If such laws are on the books, surely within our own country we can be more proactive in terms of legislating against pornography. Therefore, at this point I support the amendment and would look forward to speaking to the bill as amended.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity to rise to speak to this amendment. You know, I have to express appreciation to the hon. member, first, for bringing forward this legislation and for her career, which has been devoted to ensuring the protection of children in so many different ways, shapes, and forms. This is, again, just another example of her dedication. I admire and I respect the member and appreciate her bringing it forward.

I do have to say, though, Mr. Chairman, that the member recognized that the government needs time to produce the regulations, to make sure that when the legislation comes into effect, the regulations are in place for the operation of that legislation. It's critical.

But it's not just the timing to make the regulations, Mr. Chairman. Our ministers have indicated that they're working very closely with the federal government, who is planning on reintroducing some legislation that fell off the Order Paper last session. They really are concerned. They want to make sure that our legislation, our regulations will mesh with the federal legislation. As well, we have to make sure that this legislation and the regulations that would support it mesh with all of the other legislation and regulations that we have in our provincial Legislature that help ensure the safety and protection of children.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, always – always – we hear, oftentimes from the opposition members but from Albertans in general, that when we make the legislation, we do consultations. It's equally important to make sure that when we produce the regulations, we consult with those who will be impacted. There are law enforcement officers. There are lawyers. There are all sorts of systems in place that we need to consult with to ensure that this legislation is appropriate and that the regulations around it are operational so that they can still perform their duties.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the member bringing forward an amendment that changes the date from July 1 to December 31, which gives another six months, but I have some personal concern that putting a deadline on it may not allow us to do all of the consultation that's necessary because we may be forced to comply with a deadline instead of forced to get it right. No matter what, whether it's legislation or regulation, the most important thing we can do as members that represent all Albertans is to make sure we get it right the first time so we don't have to continually bring it back. I encourage all members of this House to defeat this particular amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Mr. Chair. On the amendment itself. I don't think there are too many members in this House that would dispute that this legislation is needed. I think we can derive that

from the speeches that have been given on the bill. I guess we're talking about timing here. I would say that, you know, I've read through this act. There are 11 sections in it. These are not very difficult areas to figure out the regulations for. This is not an overly complex statute. This is not an overly complex bill. We're talking about mandatory reporting for child pornography. It's pretty basic.

There is some work to do, for sure, and I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek realizes that. But, I mean, let's go back. It took this government exactly one month to adopt the recommendations for a new royalty framework and a few months thereafter to put in place the regulations, which they have since changed in the last year about six times. If we can do something like that in such a short period of time to our most important and complex industry in this province, surely we can find the time in the next eight months or nine months to do what we need to do to bring in the regulations for this very, very simple bill.

Again, for the fire code recommendations, that were alluded to in question period earlier today, it took roughly seven months to adopt the recommendations, and it took roughly the same amount of time thereafter to put those into place. Well, again, this is far, far more simple than that. Giving eight or nine months for the department, for the Solicitor General's office – it would be the Solicitor General's office, I imagine – to institute these regulations I think is more than enough time, and if they can't, then there is something wrong.

The point is that we cannot wait any longer than eight or nine months. We have got to move this file forward. The abuse is happening everywhere. The proliferation of it has increased, and there is no point in delaying this. We understand the government needs time to put the regulations in. No one is disputing that. But surely eight or nine months is enough time. I hope we can move forward with this business. We obviously need to do this. Everyone in this House seems to agree that we need to do this, so let's move forward, get it done, and have something in place by December of this year.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm astounded at the arguments that are being presented on the time that's needed and the appreciation. I just want to read into the record what the priorities of this government are: Bill 1, Alberta Competitiveness Act; Bill 2, Professional Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 3, Fatal Accidents Amendment Act; Bill 4, Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act; Bill 5, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act; Bill 6, Emergency Management Amendment Act; Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 8, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act; Bill 9, Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Hinman: Just pay attention. It'll be very relevant. If it's taken you that long and you don't understand, that's the whole problem. You guys miss the whole picture day in, day out. Not only don't you act; you don't think.

Mr. Chair, Bill 10, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act; Bill 11, Witness Security Act; Bill 12, Body Armour Control Act; Bill 13, Securities Amendment Act; Bill 14, Traffic Safety Amendment Act.

Here we have Bill 202, a private member's act, who's been working on this for years, Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornogra-

phy Act. This government has failed to act, and this government fails to want to recognize it now and says: we need more time.

We've known of this problem for years. To put it off, to say that they can't in nine months get the regulations in place is appalling. It's shameful to the people of Alberta, but more shameful is that kids are going to suffer the consequences because we failed to act here in this House. It's unacceptable. We need to move on it. We know this is happening. It's not a question of: "Oh, is this something that's going to come up in the future? Is there going to be, you know, a new fire started?" Mr. Chair, we need to take this amendment. This is being gracious. This should have been Bill 1 for this government, not a private member's bill.

The purpose of government is to protect our life, our liberty, and our property. The purpose of our justice system is to ensure that we protect those who can't protect themselves. That's what we're doing as a society. We want to protect our most vulnerable. We want to protect our children from these horrible individuals that perpetrate these crimes that destroy their lives going forward. What could be more important than this, than to refocus this government and get this bill passed?

It's unacceptable for this government to vote against this and say: we can't do it in nine months. We could go on for 50 minutes on the things that they can seem to do and the damage they want to cause. Let's do something that's good, that's going to look out for our children in the future, and send a loud and clear message that we're going to do something.

Every level of government should be working together to get something done and not every level pointing to the other one, using excuses: well, we can't do it; you don't understand. No, I do not understand. Especially, those poor little children that are getting abused will never understand. We need to do something. We need to pass this. To use excuses: we need more time; we need to consult. What? We're going to consult with those little ones to see the impact? We know, Mr. Chairman. We need to do something. We need to do something today and not delay.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I had to think about what I was going to say for a few minutes. I appreciate the Member for Battle River-Wainwright's comments. I'm quite taken aback.

One of the things about Bill 202, Mr. Chair, if I may tell you, is that it's a bill that I actually have been working on for a year, and it was a bill that I was working on when I was a government member. It was a bill that I sat down with with the former Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice, who both said that they supported this particular bill.

I have in my hot little hand, Mr. Chair, a briefing note that happened to come from the government when I brought this piece of legislation forward. At no time – at no time – under the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks on this piece of legislation is it ever mentioned about the regulations. What it does say is that it will enhance the protection of children from sexual exploitation, thereby contributing to ensuring safer communities. The bill could increase the discovery and apprehension of predators.

Weaknesses. It says that it could increase the number of reports made to local authorities, who are limited in what they can do if the materials were not created locally. It would create the burden of a number of unnecessary reports that are made to local authorities.

Opportunities, Mr. Chair. The bill could demonstrate the government's commitment to protecting children. The bill could ensure that Alberta is a leader in child protection. Then it goes on to some issues about some risks in regard to it could be constitutionally challenged.

Well, I've been a member of this House since 1993. I brought a very innovative piece of legislation through this Assembly called the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. The Premier of the day knew that it could be constitutionally challenged and supported having it constitutionally challenged because it was protecting our children in this province.

Mr. Chair, I understand that the July 1 date on the original Bill 202 might have pushed the limit for the department. I accepted and thought about extending it to December 31. I would be more than willing to help the government through the regulations. I would be more than willing to talk to the stakeholders in the community.

I want to reiterate, though, Mr. Chairman, that the stakeholders in the community support this piece of legislation. I have never brought forward a piece of legislation since I have been here, since 1993, without consulting with the people that the particular bill would affect. That's why the private members' bills that I've brought forward in this Legislature have been successful in this Legislature. I work from the bottom up, not the top down. That is why the people in this province have supported the private bills that I have brought forward in this Legislature: the Drug-endangered Children Act, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, the drug-endangered children apprehension act, Amber Alert. All of those have come forward because the stakeholders in this province have been consulted. Bill 202 has been consulted with the stakeholders.

We're giving the opportunity to bring this innovative piece of legislation forward to this government, asking them to accept it. I spoke to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. He explained that the government wasn't and couldn't do the regulations by July 1. I said, "No problem; we'll give them till the 31st of December," which is already – what? – eight or nine months. How many other children are going to be affected while we wait eight or nine months more?

I've been working with Cybertip. Manitoba has this legislation. Ontario has this legislation. While some of them have not been proclaimed, they have also done a lot of work. I've also worked with those provinces that have brought this piece of legislation forward.

I would like to ask every member of this Assembly to support the amendment that we've put on the table.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to stand up and support this amendment. I'm sorry that I have to support this amendment. I'm sorry that the government has not done anything on this when they've known for a year that this Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has been working on it. Surely to heavens this government has been aware of this problem for the last 20 years. This isn't something that cropped up last year; this is something that's been around for 20 years. The fact that we wouldn't be able to move quicker I think really is appalling.

So I am supporting it. I'm, as I say, disappointed that we have to wait this long, but if something will happen, then, yes, it's a good amendment.

The Chair: Is there any other hon. member wishing to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:49 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Pastoor
Chase	Hinman	

5:00

Against the motion:

Ady	Jablonski	Rodney
Benito	Johnston	Sandhu
Bhullar	Leskiw	Sarich
Blackett	Lindsay	Sherman
Doerksen	McFarland	VanderBurg
Goudreau	Olson	Vandermeer
Griffiths	Quest	Weadick
Groeneveld	Renner	Woo-Paw
Horne		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 25
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 201 and progress on Bill 202.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 201. The committee also reports progress on the following bill: Bill 202. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Those hon. members concurring in the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Cultural Competency in Government

505. Ms Woo-Paw moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage ministries to evaluate their cultural competency, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their annual plans to further the government's goals for equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and a high quality of life for all Albertans.

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

[The Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour to rise in the Legislature today and open debate on Motion 505. Alberta has always been a province of great cultural diversity, started first by over 50 First Nations groups, followed by the many pioneering communities, to the recent waves and diverse sources of immigrants. Our province has benefited from having this diversity of people socially, culturally, economically, and politically in the development of this great province. We've benefited from the rich array of experiences, skills, and perspectives these people brought as well as their unwavering determination to overcome the hurdles to their shared desire to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta encompasses 47 First Nations, 134 reserves, three treaty areas, eight Métis settlements, and is now home to one of the largest, youngest, and fastest growing population of aboriginal people in Canada. There are three distinct peoples with distinct histories, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs amongst the 250,000 here in Alberta.

Our province has also experienced a lengthy period of dramatic population growth. While much of that growth has resulted from migration within Canada, the number of immigrants choosing Alberta as a new home has also risen dramatically. According to the 2006 census 16.3 per cent of Alberta's population, about 550,000 people, were immigrants to Canada. Between 2001 and 2006 Alberta's immigrant population increased by 20.2 per cent. According to Statistics Canada this was more than two times higher than the growth of the Canadian-born population, which grew by 8.7 per cent during the same period. The major sources of immigration to Alberta are Asia and the Middle East, followed by Europe and Africa.

Mr. Speaker, as the social fabric of our society evolves, so must our institutions. When population diversity continues to increase rapidly, the capacity of organizations to reflect and respond to these changes must also keep pace. Public institutions need the tools and resources to become more responsive to diversity as they propose law and policy and deliver programs and services. In the coming decade it will be increasingly important that the government implement cultural competency as a core business requirement for effective governance and service to the public.

Motion 505 addresses the government of Alberta's goals around supporting immigration as a means to attract and retain the skilled and knowledgeable workforce necessary for continued economic growth and prosperity in the province. It recognizes that continued effort will be required to ensure that government organizations are able to respond to and leverage our increasing diversity by government employees who bring global experiences and approaches to the workplace; developing work environments that embrace employees' differences and meaningfully use their attributes to enhance the performance of the government; developing government law, policy, and programs that respect and accommodate Albertans' diverse perspectives and traditions; and delivering programs and services to Albertans in ways that acknowledge and respond in new ways to the diverse needs and traditions found in different communities.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 505 is also developed against the backdrop of our government's policy framework on supporting immigrants and immigration to Alberta. This framework was developed in 2005 in order to lay out a more integrated and concerted approach to attracting and retaining immigrants. The framework recognizes that immigrants are vital to sustaining the prosperity and continued development of Alberta's economy now and in the future.

This framework incorporates four key strategic directions for government action: building welcoming communities where immigrants have the opportunity to participate fully in social, cultural, and economic life; attracting increasing numbers of immigrants to Alberta; expanding programs and services to support immigrant integration; and helping immigrants access labour market opportunities. This progressive policy framework recognizes the need for co-ordinated policy and program responses from a number of ministries as immigration issues are interlinked with human resources, settlement services, education, health, economic development, and housing.

The purpose of Motion 505 is to strengthen the ability of ministries of the Alberta government to better include and serve an increasingly diverse citizenry. Government organizations are urged to assess their current level of cultural competency so that we know where our strengths are and where we need to develop plans and strategies to address shortcomings, to share their best practices so there is continued learning throughout this process, and to incorporate evolving approaches to cultural competency into their planning and operations in order to sustain their efforts in development.

Mr. Speaker, cultural competency is the ability to function effectively in cross-cultural situations. It enables people to interact with others with diverse cultural values, beliefs, customs, and practices with respect, appreciation, and effectiveness. Within an organization is the capacity of that organization to work effectively with culturally diverse populations by integrating cultural diversity into all aspects of the organization's values, structures, policies, and practices.

Mr. Speaker, a culturally competent organization is one that recognizes people's culture as an integral part of his or her well-being and that demonstrates openness and acceptance of differences. Employees in such organizations feel that their culture is understood and respected, that their world views and different life experiences are seen as adding value to the performance of the unit or organization. Other characteristics of a culturally competent organization are the acknowledgement of cultural diversity in the community and an organization's ability and commitment to collaborate with culturally diverse individuals, groups and organizations; utilize cultural expertise among community leaders and elders in planning and delivering services; and having its organizational roles and services understood and respected in the community.

5:10

An example of this is the recent Inspiring Education dialogue with Albertans on the future of public education. The committee included membership that reflected the cultural diversity of the population. Hence, some culturally specific sessions were made possible so that the voices and perspectives of diverse groups were included in this very important visioning process. If this type of inclusive practice is incorporated into the regular process of the ministry in future engagement, then inclusion of diverse groups will be a sustained, regular effort rather than sporadic or by chance.

Mr. Speaker, culturally competent organizations also possess the capacity to identify and remove barriers preventing culturally diverse people from having access to services. These organizations develop outreach strategies to ensure participation by culturally diverse people and provide culturally appropriate methods of service delivery, and cultural diversity is incorporated in all aspects of service delivery from assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation.

Many of our ministries and departments have made great efforts to develop culturally sensitive and multilingual information materials, whether these are information on children's services,

housing, family violence, or health services, just to name a few. These efforts would be even more effective if we had stronger working relationships with our growing diverse communities so that we would have greater understanding of the barriers people experience in accessing this good information, which perpetuates a lack of access to needed services and support. Stronger and more meaningful working relationships with our communities would enable our government to develop even more effective outreach strategies. Maybe the best places to leave our brochures are the various community gathering places such as places of worship, restaurants, coffee shops, grocery stores, and where people do their laundry.

Mr. Speaker, the development of cultural competency affects both internal organizational culture and practices and external relations and service delivery of our government. Implementation of cultural competency in the ministries of the government can bring positive results for government in both areas. Our government will improve lines of communication with our growing communities, enjoy a higher retention rate of our newcomers in the province, as well as have the talents, skills, and potential of all employees of the government more fully used to achieve government objectives. More satisfied and loyal employees in government ministries will give us greater retention of skilled workers in a competitive market.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 505 is about strengthening our government's capacity with comprehensive cultural competency development in order to achieve our stated goals and policies of ensuring equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and a high quality of life for all Albertans. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to rise to speak to Motion 505, cultural competency development, brought forth by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay. Cultural competency is a set of behaviours added to some policies and procedures that enable institutions and organizations to effectively work with and serve diverse cultural communities. Motion 505 urges the government of Alberta to evaluate their current level of cultural competence to find new ways to better represent Alberta's diverse population. I believe that this is extremely important to strengthen cultural competency and understand the day-to-day planning and operations of an organization.

Mr. Speaker, as the daughter of a Ukrainian immigrant Motion 505 hits close to home. I saw how my parents were treated in the workforce, and standing here today, I know we've come a very, very long way. We have developed many commendable programs that seek to grant all Albertans equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and the opportunity to receive a higher quality of life. However, I know that more progress can be made in creating a more inclusive approach to cultural competency in government services, workplaces, and communities.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a constituency that comprises many different people from many different backgrounds and cultures. Two of the most prominent ones in our area are the French and the Ukrainians. With the oil sands being one of the most profitable industries in my community, we have many foreign and transient workers who live there. My constituents would benefit greatly from improving how we serve diverse cultural communities.

The major priority of this government is to support immigration by attracting and retaining a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. By having culturally appropriate government services as an incentive to retaining newcomers in the province, we can make them feel more at home. Government will then have the capacity and the reputation to attract employees from immigrant communities that

were not previously recruited, immigrants with a wealth of knowledge that in the past have made this province what it is today.

As a former teacher I believe it all comes down to how we educate our students and staff. In fact, when I applied for my first teaching job, I felt I was discriminated against because I was Ukrainian. This hurt a great deal, but I did not let it stop me from becoming a teacher. I am thankful for the positive developments we have made over the years to prevent discrimination in the workplace from occurring, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay for initiating debate on this very important issue.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta can be a leader in improving cultural competency in this province, and it must start in our own offices and programs. As our population grows, it becomes more diverse. We have not always kept pace with reflecting and responding to these changes. I believe that Motion 505 could be the first step towards strengthening the connection between different cultures and communities. I support this motion, and I look forward to the remainder of the discussion this afternoon.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to speak to this Motion 505, and I want to acknowledge the efforts of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay in bringing this motion forward. I think it's a very worthwhile debate. Just by virtue of the consciousness raising that happens when a motion like this gets discussed, I think she should be congratulated.

The motion reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to encourage ministries to evaluate their cultural competency, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their annual plans to further the government's goals for equitable access to services, a diverse and prosperous economy, and a high quality of life for all Albertans.

It's probably tempting for people, for all of us and, I know, even myself when I saw this motion, to think about immigrants. One right away goes to thinking about people who come from other countries to make a new life for themselves and their families, the struggles and the barriers that they run into as they start out that process, and for good reason. Probably most of us are either children or descendants of immigrants or even, actually, immigrants. I think we probably all have our stories to tell from our own families, the kinds of challenges that they faced coming from another world, so to speak, with a new language, new customs, and so on. They all overcame those barriers and hardships, and Canada is known for that. In fact, it's a uniquely Canadian thing that people came from many different backgrounds and have become part of a country that has welcomed them all.

I had the great opportunity a week or so ago to be part of a lunch with the new Italian ambassador. I was very interested to hear him talk about some of the people he has met of Italian descent in Canada who have managed to be very successful here. They have completely embraced Canadian life, Canadian customs and traditions, yet they've also been extremely successful in preserving their own culture. Again, he described that as a uniquely Canadian trait.

We do live in a multicultural society. It's increasingly diverse. We also have an expanding economy, so we need immigrants. We need skilled people to come from other parts of the world and adopt Canada as their new home. But what about those people who don't come from somewhere else? What about the people who were born here and face the same kinds of barriers that immigrants from other parts of the world face? Of course, I'm talking about our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

5:20

I've had the opportunity in the last year and a half to visit a lot of aboriginal communities, and this issue has become something that I've become very interested in. The reason for my visits is that I'm on a committee that's focused on the participation of aboriginal people in our economy and in our workforce. It's been said that up to 80 per cent of people in some aboriginal communities are unemployed. This is a very complex problem. It has many, many challenges. Among the foremost challenges are education – actually, that was already referred to by the hon. member who led off the debate here – housing, transportation. Many other issues also come into play: child care and so on. But in my discussions with leaders and people from these communities racism comes up a lot. Unfortunately, that's still an issue that aboriginal people are having to deal with in our communities.

This is the youngest, fastest growing population in Alberta, aboriginal people. They are a huge, untapped natural resource, both for themselves and for all Albertans. It's very important for our government to provide services not just to aboriginal people but to all people, no matter where they come from, in a way that is respectful and is sensitive to their particular needs.

Now, our government has done a lot of good work in this area, and one could take quite a bit of time in debate here listing off the various initiatives that various government departments have undertaken, but I won't do that. I'll just say that the motion here really is supportive of those many initiatives, and I very much support the motion for that reason.

There may be some who would say that the motion has the feel of being more involved in institutional navel gazing or that maybe it's going to be something that is going to have cost implications that could be prohibitive. I would just say that my mother always said that it doesn't take any more time or money to be nice to somebody and to be sensitive, and I think that's really what we're talking about here. It's just a raising of consciousness, really, to have our government departments act in this uniquely Canadian way, which respects people no matter what background they come from. That has to be based on an awareness of what their particular challenges and issues are.

I think that our government is leading the way. I would just say that this motion further supports that direction, and for that reason I'm very supportive of this motion. Again, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay for bringing it forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but might I have your permission to introduce some very special visitors to the Assembly this afternoon?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: In the Speaker's gallery are representatives of a number of agricultural societies that happen to exist north of Edmonton. We have representatives from the Barrhead Exhibition Association and Agricultural Society; the Pibroch & District Agricultural Society; PACO, the Progressive Agricultural Community Organization; Clyde & District Agricultural Society; Fort Assiniboine Agricultural Society; M.T.M. Agricultural Society; Westlock & District Agricultural Society; Morinville and District Agricultural Society; Highridge and District Agricultural Society; and Linaria & District Agricultural Society. These are all agricul-

tural societies within the constituency that I have the honour of representing. I'd ask them all to rise. Would you give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Cultural Competency in Government

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to talk on Motion 505, which is sponsored by the MLA from Calgary-Mackay. Cultural competency can be defined as a set of behaviours, attitudes, policies, and procedures that enable an institution or organization to effectively work with and serve diverse cultural communities. Alberta has become an increasingly important destination for skilled immigrant workers in Canada and in my riding of West Yellowhead.

I want to talk particularly about Jasper national park. This is a region which attracts visitors from all over the world and, because of that, has also attracted many skilled immigrants on an annual basis who come and work in the hospitality and tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, culturally competent businesses have been able to attract and retain skilled immigrants, which has been an advantage in a tight labour market, especially in Jasper. Businesses in Jasper have attracted, supported, and promoted a diverse pool of employees who bring global experiences and approaches to the workplace. Many workplaces in Jasper have developed work environments that embrace employees' differences and meaningful user attributes to enhance the performance of their business.

Motion 505 promotes further cultural competency in the ministries of the Alberta government, and I think that's a positive step. As illustrated in Jasper, cultural competency can create connections to new communities through outreach and consultation. Cultural competency in government improves relations with cultural communities through the provision of services that recognize and respond to cultural differences.

New Canadians, Mr. Speaker, see a culturally competent government as respectful and helpful. Cultural competency improves lines of communication between government and diverse communities. Social programs are more effective when services are better able to address the real needs of the diverse clients that they serve. Culturally appropriate government services serve as an incentive to retain newcomers in this province. A culturally competent government provides a positive international image of Alberta as a destination of choice for skilled immigrants, which is important to Alberta's long-term economic growth.

Employment and Immigration has been working with industry stakeholders to support implementation of industry-led workforce strategies specific to each sector. Many of these actions support employers in creating welcoming workplaces and building on the talents of a diverse workforce.

Mr. Speaker, the world has become a small place, and it is important to all of us to understand and welcome all who come to this great province. It is through them that we will continue to grow and be the province that we are today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my privilege to rise today and speak to Motion 505, and I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay for bringing this motion forward. I want to highlight a few aspects of this motion and also, first of all,

point out the fact that this is a motion and that, as such, it raises an issue for us to discuss and urges the government to take some action. In that regard I think the matter of raising this issue as important to our government, as important to our society, is extremely important.

There are three things that this motion basically talks about. It urges the government and its ministries to evaluate their cultural competency, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their ongoing activities. I think that's important, and as the Member for West Yellowhead talked about the definition or a possible definition of cultural competency, I want to repeat that because I think it's also significant in terms of what's important about this motion. Cultural competency can be defined as a set of behaviours, attitudes, policies, and procedures that enable an institution or organization to effectively work with and serve diverse cultural communities.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, that's us, that's Alberta, that's Canada, and will be on an ongoing basis. When I look around this room, whether it's on the floor or the people observing this discussion this afternoon, we've all come from somewhere. We've all chosen to make Alberta our home. We've come here to work, to live, to play, to raise our families, and that's important.

I think the matter of the definition of cultural competency is important to this motion. If it was a bill, we would have to spend a lot more time clearly defining what we meant, but I think that basically what this definition means is that we're going to work together, we're going to communicate with each other, we're going to understand each other, and at the end of the day we're going to push ourselves to the middle. This isn't about each of us standing off in our corner and highlighting our own cultural uniqueness. It is about celebrating what is unique about each of us, but it's also about celebrating what we want to do together as Albertans and as Canadians. I think on that basis this is an important initiative, and I appreciate the fact that the Member for Calgary-Mackay asked me to speak on it.

5:30

My constituency of Strathmore-Brooks, as likely every member in this House could say, is certainly a culturally diverse community and one that has been that for many, many years but has seen that that's ongoing because of the aspects of industry that happen in our community. Certainly, Lakeside Packers, which has been a large beef packing operation in the Brooks community for many years, has drawn a broad range of people from diverse cultural backgrounds to work and live in the community. I say that carefully because that business has been a draw but only an entry point into the community for many people, as are all of the businesses. The cultural diversity of our community has expanded dramatically.

I think this bill really allows us to highlight some of the things we already do well and urges us to continue to do them well. There are many initiatives in the Brooks community that deal specifically with the fact that a relatively high percentage of our population has English as a second language. When I look across this floor, I expect that many of us would say the same and have either ourselves or parents who learned English as a second language.

That's one of the services in the Brooks area that's extremely important and, I think, speaks to one of the challenges, one of the things that's important about being competent culturally. It's extremely important that new immigrants, people who come to this province, come to this country, are able to communicate. The initiative to provide resources to assist people in becoming compe-

tent in the English language, I think, is a very proactive and important thing and one of the services that is provided through a range of services in the Brooks community. The public library has become an important entry point for a range of community services that assist immigrants in the Brooks community.

I think one of the other things that highlights the importance of competency in this area is the fact that, as people come to this country from a range of different backgrounds and other countries, we celebrate democracy in this country. We celebrate freedom. We celebrate the supportive authority that we have through our police commissions, through the police services in this country. But one of the things that I've noticed in Brooks and has been raised with me also in discussions is the fact that not everyone has that understanding.

One of the things that's important is helping communities – and by communities I mean groups of people who may have come from other countries – to understand what it means to be free, what it means to have confidence in police authorities. I can only speak as someone who takes that for granted, but not everyone can. I think some of that kind of reality is why it's important for us to be competent in integrating people into our society.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, this is very much about pushing ourselves to the middle because it's also about encouraging new immigrants into this province and into this country to be aggressive about integrating into Canadian society. Everyone who comes here from somewhere else has something to offer in terms of cultural diversity and an opportunity to better understand what freedom and what democracy mean in this country, what an opportunity there is to work and to work in order to support one's family, whether that's here in Alberta, here in Canada, or the support that for many immigrants also goes back to their homeland to allow families to flourish over there.

The whole matter of cultural competence, I think, is important. I think what I like about this motion is that it raises the issue. It allows us to celebrate diversity, celebrate the things that make our communities strong but also make our economy strong because we recognize that every year we'll have additional people coming to this country who choose to make Alberta home. I think that's one of the things that is similar about all of us, and it's important that we keep pushing each other to the middle in that. It's not about sitting off to the side and being isolated. It's about working together.

For all of those reasons I support the initiative, the spirit of this motion and thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay for bringing it forward.

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

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Motion 505 as it deals with cultural sensitivity and support. I'm not going to go too far back in history, but the reality is that in one of the last ice ages, basically, the first people crossed the Bering Strait and became the inhabitants of this nation. They were the first line of immigrants, as far as I'm concerned. We don't have a whole lot of fossil evidence of individuals being here before, but everyone who has come since is basically an immigrant, and some have adjusted better than others. I think it's an extremely important role of this government to assist with cultural accommodation. It's very important that people's customs and cultures, that are part of adding to the Canadian fabric, be honoured and supported, and of course we would like to think that any kinds of warring or negative interaction is left behind in the country of origin. For a lot of reasons that's why people immigrate to Canada, for the safety factor and the economic opportunity.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the Minister of Education is considerably more excited about a recent memorandum of understanding that has been shared with Chuck Strahl, the federal minister of aboriginal affairs, and with the grand chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8, who were introduced earlier in this Assembly. When I had an opportunity to talk about that memorandum of understanding with the minister and Carolyn Buffalo, who is the chief of the Montana First Nation, which is the smallest nation operating out of Hobbema, there was concern about the speed at which culturally sensitive agreements are made. The minister didn't seem to be at all worried that this was kind of slow moving.

While it was a positive target, it seemed to be going very slowly. I, on the other hand, have concerns because, for example, we had back in 2000, 2001 an aboriginal policy initiative, and there were some very significant members of First Nations and Métis settlements involved in that particular policy. Well, flash forward nine years, 10 years, and here we are at the beginning of a memorandum of understanding that will, amongst other things, create a cultural centre, which will then develop educational policies, which will then produce improvements in terms of aboriginal students moving forward not only culturally but through the education system.

5:40

Now, contrast that principle with the reality of what happened with the Northland school division, where in a very paternalistic, patriarchal way the whole board of First Nations elected officials was disbanded. A person who had previously been in charge – I believe the gentleman's name was Colin Kelly – was sort of given the job, along with three appointed individuals, of trying to improve the educational participation rate of First Nations students. I see this just personally as an extension of – basically, one individual was a representative. He was a First Nations adviser to the minister of aboriginal affairs in B.C., so he had a degree of First Nations background and legitimacy. But I frequently see us not getting past involving First Nations directly in moving forward.

I've talked a lot about First Nations, but I see English as a second language students, who I had the privilege of teaching over a 34-year period, as being in a similar circumstance of isolation, educationally speaking. I'm hoping that Motion 505 is going to address this. Only 52 per cent of First Nations students graduate within a five-year period of entering high school. In terms of English as a second language students we had dropout rates of up to 75 per cent. So it's absolutely essential that when we encourage individuals to participate in the Canadian fabric, we arm them with every possibility to do so.

In the case of successful circumstances such as the turnaround at Hobbema, it was involvement of the children in culturally sensitive programs. Carolyn Buffalo, for example, indicated that there are Cree language specialists and there are Cree cultural specialists that are part of the successful programs operating out of Hobbema. A very successful program is operating out of the Stoney First Nation on the Morley reserve, where children's cultural sensitivities are being embraced, and it's part of the program. As a result, we see the school being crowded to the point that additions will have to be made. That's a statement of success.

For our ESL students to be successful, they need to have more time and more support to learn the English language, and we should not be expecting them, early on in their English as a second language process, to be tested at the grade 3, 6, 9, and again at the 12 levels with standardized achievement tests that are heavily language and culture based. If we're going to provide the support for, first, the children of immigrants because we know that it's easier to learn a language as a child, we have to then move toward supporting the families.

Now, this government has cut back the funding when it comes to First Nations. The government has frozen the funding for ESL, English as a second language, instruction, so we're going in the wrong direction. We've seen, for example, in the Justice department a cutback on First Nations probation officers. We've seen a cutback in FNMI funding in the Education ministry. If we're going to be culturally sensitive and take it a step further to be culturally supportive, then we have to set timelines. We have to go beyond the discussions. While you can't ask for funding in a private member's motion or private member's bill, we can at least have timelines and check-offs knowing that we've been successful. An example of one of the programs the government provided funding for was to help with the Sudanese community: \$85,000 as part of the crime and communities task force was provided to the Sudanese community to help integrate their youth to a greater extent. It's programs like that that have budgets attached and timelines that are absolutely essential to welcoming individuals.

The government also cut back in terms of bringing foreign doctors into our service. They cut back the number of training spots from 60 to 40. If we're going to embrace the world and provide opportunities, whether it's the temporary foreign workers whose rights have been squashed, whether it's adding the 12 cents to the minimum wage where so many first immigrants experience employment, we need to be doing better in this province. We need to be speeding up the nominee process as opposed to just looking at temporary foreign workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise and speak to Motion 505 on cultural competency and development as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay. Motion 505 urges this government to encourage ministries to evaluate their cultural competence, share best practices, and integrate cultural competency activities into their annual plans.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been and continues to be a province built by immigrants. Alberta has been a land of opportunity for hundreds of thousands of immigrants from around the world, myself included. While we may come from many nations and backgrounds, we are all bound by common values, values such as freedom and democracy, a positive and can-do spirit, love for our friends, family, and our fellow citizens, and a belief that if you work hard, you can achieve your dreams.

As an immigrant myself, I recognize the good intentions of this motion. After all, our country is stronger when we share our culture and heritage with our fellow Canadians. However, in return for this acceptance I also feel that it is the obligation and the responsibility of immigrants to learn the language, the culture, the business practices of their new country and share their cultures with fellow Canadians. I always say that Canada is not my country of birth; it is my country of choice.

For myself, when I came to this country, I studied in order to be a better businessman. I chose to go to NAIT while I was still running my business to study all the courses offered in NAIT's business program, and I studied economics at the University of Alberta to learn how business is conducted in this country. That education enabled me to become a better businessman, a better entrepreneur, a better Canadian employer.

A side story, Mr. Speaker. When the election was called, all of a sudden I got a phone call from a former employee. You know, I hadn't encountered her for many years, but she wanted to become a volunteer in my campaign. She told me it was because she really enjoyed the years that she worked for me.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this system has been working very well for Canadians. Through hard work and strong education there is nothing an immigrant to this great country cannot achieve. The goal of the government should be to ensure that all Albertans have the tools to succeed in an environment of cultural understanding and tolerance. Essentially, this means an inclusive attitude that empowers those of all backgrounds. This is particularly important because of the great diversity of our country.

5:50

Government has implemented many policies that provide all Albertans an equal opportunity to succeed and to achieve their dreams. The Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act protects Albertans from discrimination and helps to ensure that we all have an equal opportunity to earn a living, find a place to live, and enjoy public services. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act promote cultural understanding and equality. In Alberta our government continues to work to ensure that diversity and understanding are reflected in the workplace.

The Ministry of Employment and Immigration has led the development of a comprehensive labour force strategy called building and educating tomorrow's workforce. This strategy and other initiatives in our government are helping to support employers in creating welcoming workplaces and building the talents of a diverse workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to live by the principles of inclusiveness. My constituency of Edmonton-McClung is a home to Edmonton's largest Jewish community as well as strong Russian, Ukrainian, Muslim, Turkish, and Asian communities. Before and after the election I spent 13 months knocking on over 18,000 doors, talking to people from door to door, talking to those with different cultures and different backgrounds. This experience has helped me to be an effective representative for my constituents. I simply asked those who I had the opportunity to meet to vote for me if they believed that I would do a better job of serving them as their elected representative.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the intention of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mackay. However, I feel that our government is already making significant progress on a number of initiatives that are working to ensure tolerance and cultural understanding in the workplace. I feel that a government should work to promote policies inclusive of all Albertans. Furthermore, I believe there are many opportunities outside of government for Albertans to promote cultural understanding and tolerance.

Myself, Mr. Speaker, I have been doing this since the mid-90s. Every year I help finance and organize multicultural events. Very recently, last November, I had 3,000 people in the Jubilee Auditorium. We had more than 400 performers on stage. They came from 20 different cultural backgrounds. That's the way to promote cultural understanding, to share our values, to share our differences.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to work to foster cultural understanding and tolerance in our province while remaining mindful of the common values that bind us as Canadians.

Before I end my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I just want to tell a story. I had a conversation with a group of Sikh people today that had been introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. I talked to this gentleman very frankly. I told him I'm going to speak against this motion. I explained my reasons. Do you know what he told me? The gentleman, Savi Kachroo – and he even put his telephone number here – said he totally supports what I am trying to say. Because we came to this country, we have every obligation to make this country a better place by integrating with mainstream society.

And he said: you as legislators should take a balanced approach; you should stay on a higher attitude to make sure that all Albertans, all Canadians are being treated fairly, equally.

Mr. Speaker, I know this is a very sensitive issue and a very emotional issue because I myself have gone through so much. I'm not saying this world is perfect. People say, "David, you should be very proud. You have been very successful in business. Now you are successful in politics." I say, "Yes. I am very proud of what I have achieved, but I'm more proud what I've overcome." There are a lot of issues we need to deal with. There are a lot of difficulties we need to overcome. But for the reasons I just talked about, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting Motion 505.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, do you wish to briefly comment?

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'll be very, very brief. I just want to say thank you to all my hon. colleagues who spoke to this motion. I really appreciate the level of interest and vigour demonstrated through your debate. You spoke with great insights, and you spoke from your hearts, and I appreciate it.

I don't have time to respond to all these great comments. I just want to end by addressing to the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks to emphasize what integration really means. The most democratic and equitable type of integration is the type that is a two-way street, where we come together in the middle, respecting each other's differences and building, actually, our unity through the recognition of our diversity and differences. I really appreciate your point. I appreciate all of my colleagues' points.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other hon. members wishing to speak, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

Issue 22

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a great pleasure it is to rise today in order to introduce to you some very special guests who are here from Blessed Kateri school in the riding of Edmonton-Mill Creek. Accompanying them today are their teachers, Joel Piché, Ray Brooks, and Ms Darlene Payne. There are 61 visitors altogether, three classes. I would ask all of them to now please rise, and let us greet them with some warm applause.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 54 grade 6 students from Brander Gardens elementary school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying the students are their teachers, Natalie Gago-Esteves, Matthew Thiessen, and teacher assistant Cindy Lee. I had an opportunity to meet with the students earlier, and they asked very tough questions, perhaps even tougher than those asked in question period. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you on behalf of myself and the honourable and generous Minister of Transportation a group of very hard-working and forward-thinking municipal representatives from central Alberta. They are here representing the South Red Deer Regional Wastewater Commission as well as the Mountain View regional water system and are seated in the members' gallery. They are Warren Smith, councillor for Olds; Julia King, mayor of the town of Penhold; Judy Dahl, mayor of the town of Olds; Al Kemmere, reeve of Mountain View county; Cody Berggren, mayor of the town of Bowden; Patt Churchill, councillor for the town of Innisfail; and Dennis Cooper, councillor for the town of Penhold. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three ladies from the Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens. Over the past two years I've been fairly involved with this organiza-

tion and have learned first-hand of the great work that they are doing for young moms in need. I'll be speaking more about Terra in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would ask these ladies as I say their names to rise to receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly: Ms Erica Pitre, grade 11; Ms Mellisa Johnson, grade 12; and Ms Laura Slomp Booy, the youth leadership facilitator. They are standing, so let's give them a little greeting.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Gurpreet Gill from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, who is here to observe the question period today. He had the opportunity to meet several of my colleagues earlier this afternoon, and I hope he enjoyed it. At this time I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the media from my constituency who have come to take in the sights and sounds of our Assembly and to meet with the Premier. From the *Athabasca Advocate* I'm pleased to introduce Ross Hunter, Lauren Den Hartog, Chris Cain; from the River radio station Chris Byrne; and from the *Smoky Lake Signal* Nathan Taylor. If there is anything you need to know about our constituency of Athabasca-Redwater, these are certainly the folks who know it. I'd now like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special people, Gary Sampley and Laura Jurasek. Gary is executive director of the Edmonton Epilepsy Association, and Laura has just been named president of that body. Laura has been a special blessing to my family in her role as a dedicated nurse practitioner at the Stollery children's hospital in the pediatric neurology ward. They're here today to help raise awareness for epilepsy, which I'll talk about in my member's statement. Having a child with epilepsy can be hard at times, and I want to sincerely thank Laura, Gary, and all those involved with the Stollery children's hospital and the Edmonton Epilepsy Association and ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly three people from the Mosquito Creek Foundation in Nanton. They are part of the volunteer board overseeing the operation of our local seniors' lodge and two self-contained housing entities. In the past few years this group has gone above and beyond their respective duties. When the local medical clinic was offered for sale, they set about fundraising and bought the clinic as well as the house next door for future expansion. They then stepped up and borrowed to partner with the province to build a 30-bed designated assisted living facility onto the lodge, repatriating individuals who were living away from their friends and family.

Mr. Speaker, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and remain standing as I call their names: Lynne Foden, chief administrative officer; Leigh McNeill, board chair; and Rick Rogers, vice chair. I'll now ask the House to recognize with a

thunderous applause the contributions that these people make to our seniors.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two outstanding citizens of Red Deer, Mayor Morris Flewwelling and, accompanying him, the director of development services, Paul Goranson. They are in the Legislature today as part of their visit to Edmonton to meet with various government officials. Mayor Flewwelling has served the citizens of Red Deer on city council and as mayor for over 25 years. In addition to this, in 1997 he received the Order of Canada, Canada's highest civilian decoration, for his distinguished volunteer service and leadership of national significance in heritage preservation. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North and myself have been fortunate to work with these gentlemen over the years, and I'm honoured to introduce them in the Assembly today. They're in the public gallery, and I will now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

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

Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to talk a little bit more about the organization that I just introduced, the Terra Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens. Since 1971 Terra has provided programs and services to help pregnant and parenting teens gain confidence and develop the skills required to raise healthy and happy babies.

Terra supports approximately 600 clients and their children in the Edmonton area each year with a staff of more than 60 people in three different locations. They offer 12 programs, which include individual counselling, home visitation, parenting support, group activities, services for dads, clothing exchange, childhood development activities, prenatal classes, housing support, and a child care centre at the Braemar school.

Last fall I helped Terra raise some 120,000 diapers for their Baby Heroes campaign. Along with the support of many others in the community our contribution to their campaign gave some 120,000 diapers to mothers in need.

Terra is just an incredible organization that helps young parents return to school, make career plans, have healthier relationships, and helps with the community supports that they need. I would like to thank the organization, especially the young ladies who are here today, for the tremendous work that they are doing in supporting their cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

1:40 International Purple Day

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately seven years ago I awoke in the middle of the night to my wife's screams for help. I found her leaning over our infant son, who, to my shock, was in full convulsions, eyes rolling back in his head. It was terrifying. As a parent at that point you'd give anything to access the best treatment and the most dedicated health care professionals in the world, and I'm glad to say that, thankfully, that's what we have here in Alberta.

Epilepsy is characterized by a number of recurrent and unprovoked seizures that can occur at any age, as was the case in my family. Mr. Speaker, this Friday, March 26, is International Purple Day, which caps off March as Epilepsy Awareness Month in Canada. Purple Day was founded in 2008 by then nine-year-old Cassidy Megan of Halifax, Nova Scotia. The name for Purple Day was taken from epilepsy's internationally recognized colour, lavender. Purple Day was established to increase awareness about epilepsy and has succeeded in a short time. It launched internationally in 2009, and now there are 15 countries world-wide participating in 2010 Purple Day activities. Epilepsy affects 50 million people world-wide and 40,000 here in Alberta. One of the major initiatives that Purple Day seeks to achieve is to demystify epilepsy and seizures in general. They occur when the normal electrical balance in the brain is lost, with cells either firing when they shouldn't or not firing when they should.

I know I have acknowledged their presence here today already, but I want to thank all of the truly amazing staff at the Stollery children's hospital and the people at the Edmonton Epilepsy Association for all their dedication and help and support.

For more information please visit the Purple Day website at www.purpledayer.org. I urge my colleagues to wear purple this Friday in support of this great cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REAP Calgary

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, several days ago I had the pleasure of attending the REAP sustainability breakfast. REAP stands for Respect for the Earth and All People. It's a collection of 20 Calgary businesses that are working toward a more sustainable Alberta. The breakfast was held at Green City Motors, a very cool business that specializes in electric bikes and scooters. REAP encourages citizens to shop locally for the environmental benefits, to keep Calgary's local business scene thriving, and to provide good wages for Calgary workers.

REAP produces an online magazine and holds educational workshops to inform Albertans about the benefits of a sustainable society. Their work to date has been very impressive. I encourage people to visit www.reapcalgary.com to see what these folks are doing. It's exciting stuff. I had a great time learning about REAP and its efforts to promote sustainable living. I'd like to thank Stephanie Jackman in particular for all her hard work and, in fact, I think you could say, visionary work in organizing REAP and keeping it going.

The 21st century has presented humanity with perhaps its greatest challenge yet: learning how to live sustainably in the area of global climate change, maintaining prosperity while being kinder to our world and the biosphere it supports. I'd like to thank the folks at REAP for doing their part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Barons Centennial

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Originally called Blainey, the village of Barons was incorporated and the first council elected on June 6, 1910. This community became the centre for many wheat farms, and at its peak the grain elevators had a capacity of more than 1.2 million bushels. More than a dozen world and reserve grand wheat and durum championship holders were from the village of Barons.

Over the years Barons has been home to many other notables:

John Turner, who built the Paul Bunyan cultivator in 1935; Lloyd Johnson, who manufactured the Johnson blade; and Victor Erdman, who manufactured the Victory blade. All these pieces were designed to help prevent soil erosion during the Dirty Thirties. Then there's Dr. Mark Grant, who helped develop one of the first winter wheat varieties at the Lethbridge research station; and Jason Turner, who along with his figure skating partner Jamie Salé competed in the 1994 Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway.

Not unlike many rural communities the seven one-room schools in the district were combined into a larger school, Barons consolidated school, which was established by this Legislature in 1915. It was one of the last to operate in Alberta. The school was also featured in the film *Superman*, filmed on location in 1977. The 1987 movie *Betrayed* was also partially filmed in both Barons and Carmangay.

Barons No. 1 discovery oil well blew in November 21, 1950, and for years produced oil and employment. In recent years in co-operation with the Alberta government and the Lethbridge Northern irrigation district the new 10,000 acre Keho-Barons irrigation project, a fully enclosed pipe low-pressure irrigation system, became a reality.

From July 9 to July 11 this summer Barons will celebrate their centennial year, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all the hard-working individuals and the community there for their pride and dedication in making this a reality.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Oil Sands Image

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about the environment and, basically, the bread and butter of my constituency, the oil sands capital of the world. We have a very rich history over the past 40 years, dating back to AOSTRA and, of course, the Alberta Research Council in terms of the scientific advancements we have made. But with a two-and-a-half-year-old son it is clear we have much more work to be done.

I often have said in the past that we need to save labels for planets, not for people, because any time that we actually start labelling people, we're disenfranchising them. We're actually pigeonholing them and, really, like a boxer saying: you go into this corner, you go into this corner, come out, and let's fight.

I know that the Minister of Energy's comments when he talks about how we're going to counterattack some comments on what environmentalists have done, are well intended, but I think that in today's 21st century we need to be more strategic. What I mean by that is that rather than wearing a hat with a lightning rod on your head and going over to Brussels, it may be more strategic, similar to the national oil sands task force that we created back in 1997, to build partnerships, working together and lowering the rhetoric because with every counterattack there is usually another attack.

I do believe that that would hurt my constituency in the oil sands, that I'm very proud of. It is the bread and butter of this province and of my community. Let us be strategic as we go forward and not be like a Jethro Bodine. I know the Minister of Energy clearly is well intended, but his statesmanlike approach has been more a little bit of a rumble-tumble type of approach. We need to be strategic as we go forward. This is the message that I've heard from industry. We want to move forward in a strategic way in terms of celebrating this rich resource that we have been blessed with.

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

Helping Hands of Hope

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise today and recognize an incredible new charitable organization here in the city of Edmonton, namely the Helping Hands of Hope foundation. The foundation currently supports individuals across the globe living in poverty in some very unique ways.

Firstly, for seniors in Vietnam who have lost their eyesight, this organization provides the needed funding for them to receive cataract surgery, giving them back their independence and allowing them a renewed chance to assist their families with things like child care and food preparation. These surgeries can actually raise the standard of living of an entire family in Vietnam.

The organization's second project targets those living below the poverty line in Nepal. The Helping Hands of Hope foundation provides clean water to these people by donating BioSand filters, which can remove up to 99 per cent of the harmful contaminants. Further, the organization works with the people to teach them the proper use of filters, along with sanitation and hygiene practices. Altogether, this donation, which amounts to a total cost of \$40, contributes to these individuals' health and well-being and prevents the spread of disease.

Mr. Speaker, last Friday the organization hosted their inaugural fundraiser, the first annual Global Fest, which featured exceptional food and multicultural performances. I had an opportunity to be in attendance at this event as the foundation's first guest speaker. It was a privilege and honour to meet all the compassionate women who are the driving force of this organization, namely Lise Durand, president, founder, and director; Randal Wong, cofounder and director; Debbie Bildfell, secretary; Tam Duong, executive member; Dr. Patricia Sigurdson, treasurer; and Karen Smith, events coordinator.

They have been working tirelessly as a group of women to see that they achieve their goals. Thank you to this organization for their determination and humanitarian efforts. I wish them all the best continued success in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Pharmaceutical Benefit for Seniors

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adding to the increasingly long list of government health mismanagement is the July 1 implementation of the new seniors' drug plan. The government hasn't updated the website since fall, and seniors are left questioning what these changes mean for them. Most seniors are on fixed incomes, and if they can't afford or struggle with the increase, then their families will have to step in and pick up the tab. To the Premier. Seniors want to know: why do they have to pay for their health premiums, for drugs or not, when the rest of Albertans don't?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe 80 per cent of the seniors' drug coverage is carried by the taxpayer. There are some changes with respect to income levels, et cetera, but we're continuing to work through that particular area. We want to make sure that everyone is treated fairly in the province of Alberta. The minister may have some further information on it, but we're working through some detail.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the Premier: how will seniors who already have pharmaceutical plans like the Alberta Retired Teachers' Association or Veterans Affairs be notified to opt out of this program, or is everyone required to opt in? What's happening?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're working through further details. Our main priority here is to make sure that those that cannot afford to pay have a program there that will support them. We're working out the details in terms of some of the other income levels and some of the other issues that come forward in this particular area.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Premier, it's three months away. Given that the average income of seniors living in rural areas is much lower than seniors living in cities, why did the government choose the rural income level as the marker at which seniors will have to pay the new monthly premium? This disadvantages urban seniors, who have a higher cost of living.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure where the hon. member is coming from in terms of rural income levels and urban. I think there's quite a mix. I know that there are a lot of people living in larger urban areas that are struggling as seniors, and that's why we're looking at a much broader range, to make sure that everyone in this province is treated equitably.

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, in 2007 this government signed an agreement with the Alberta teachers. At the time the Premier wrote to ATA, "I pledge to seek the Legislative Assembly's support for the necessary funding to enable the Memorandum of Agreement's full execution." Now the government is sending mixed signals about its willingness to live up to the agreement on teachers' wages, and school boards are more than concerned that they soon will be footing the bill. To the Premier: will the Premier, please, clearly articulate how his government is going to provide ongoing funding for this agreement?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's anything unclear about it at all. We clearly indicated to school boards, in fact just yesterday, that the full 5.99 per cent increase on the average weekly earnings from last year, after arbitration, will be funded in their budgets and annualized. I've also indicated to them that the anticipated increases for September 1 this year and next year, we understand, now have to be calculated based on the average weekly earnings index. Now I have to work with the ATA and the Alberta school boards to figure out how we're going to do that, not on a one-year basis but over the period of time.

Ms Pastoor: Well, to the Premier, but I'm sure it'll go to the Minister of Education. You've answered part of this, but failing that, failing taking the responsibility for the arbitrator's ruling could force districts to reduce staff or cut services. Is that right?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I've indicated to school boards is that we are anticipating, in fact we know, that there's going to be an increase in our student population starting last year and moving forward over the next number of years, including perhaps up to 10 years. We'll see an increase in student population. It would be imprudent to cut back our teacher numbers in that period of time, so I've asked them to plan their teaching staff, teaching ratios, on the same basis as they had last year. I understand that may require them

to draw on operating surpluses this year or even in some cases run a deficit. But over the next two or three years we'll sort out exactly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Ms Pastoor: A good segue into my question. How can the Minister of Education expect school boards to survive off their reserves indefinitely, especially when some boards lack reserves and the Minister of Education has been clawing back money even from those that have it?

The Speaker: There are no preambles in questions.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, school boards across the province are in an excellent fiscal position because of how well they've been funded in the past. We know that they had last year \$440 million of operating reserves. Now that's down to about \$360 million, still sufficient to be able to finance their operations. Some school boards don't. We've said that we will work with them to make sure not that they can run a deficit just indiscriminately, but if they need to run a deficit in order to finance the cost of teachers going forward, we'll work with them on that.

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

High-intensity Residential Fires

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have had at least four massive condo fires in Alberta in relatively new buildings in the last seven years and an untold number of examples where a house catches fire and takes out, oh, six or seven houses with it. In May 2008 the government announced immediate action to require sprinklers for balconies, attics, and crawl spaces in multifamily buildings, but it took almost one year to actually make the required changes to the building codes. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why did it take a year for this government to take "immediate action" to improve fire safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The changes to the Alberta building codes were adopted on March 12, 2009, and came into law just a little later, as they always do. Now, this allowed us time to adjust building and inspection practices and development plans and infrastructure. There are technical complexities that are required of the regulations, and the drafting, approval, and passages of the amendment regulations were completed, and it took time. It was completed, then, by March 2009.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, given that the government made the point on May 23, 2008, of saying that we would not wait until the model national codes were amended because the high rate of building activity in this province made it such a priority to act right away to save lives and property, why did everything then go dark for 10 months? Why did it take so long?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, we were very proactive in taking actions to protect Albertans. We've got the strictest fire codes in the country. We've updated our building codes more than two years ahead of any other jurisdiction. That's two

years over and before any other province. We took time to do a good job with consulting stakeholders and the public and to do the technical work that was needed. We wanted to assure that we would get things right.

Mr. Taylor: Two years ahead of the national code and one year too late for the 300 people who were burned out in Millrise last week.

Was this delay of immediate action because of pressure from the home building industry, and does the government think that pressure was warranted?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there are normal transition periods that are happening out there, and we have to transition and work with the industry to allow that to happen. I want to emphasize the fact that we had some very, very high standards before the codes came into place, and now we have even better standards. Again, I re-emphasize: we're the most stringent standards in the country.

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

Funding for Special-needs Foster Children

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day goes by, and Albertans observe that this government doesn't know whether they're spending or cutting. We hear from front-line workers and service providers about problems in the departments. We read about waste and mismanagement. We know that leadership starts at the top. My question is to the Premier. Why didn't this Premier get the minister of children's services to cut her ministerial and deputy budgets to show leadership instead of asking the department to take cuts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all ministers took the action. There's over \$40 million worth of reductions in ministerial reductions across management positions in government, so that's \$40 million more to put into front-line services.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they continue to scare the people of Alberta. Foster parents, agents, and patients have all witnessed this government's cutting. My question to the Premier: will the Premier assure this Assembly that the highly respected CEO of region 6 is not demoted or fired because this minister claims her directive wasn't followed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, those may be personnel matters. I don't know the background information of what had transpired or didn't transpire. Those are personnel matters and not open for discussion in terms of a policy discussion, and that's what question period is all about.

Mr. Hinman: But there's something that isn't sounding right here.

Some Hon. Members: Question. Question.

Mr. Hinman: "Question. Question." Why don't you listen for a second or two?

If we're to believe the minister's version of the events, she must produce original documentation that confirms the direction that she gave to the staff. When will she table the documents to this Assembly?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, taking this on a bit more serious note.

When we start dealing with the lives of children under our care or those of foster parents, that go out of their way to support children that in some cases have been abandoned by their family, when some of these issues come forward, it's unfortunate that some choose to play politics with a very serious situation. Had anyone who had notice of this, either a foster parent or the member of the opposition, come directly to the minister and raised this issue, we would have been able to deal with it immediately rather than having some foster parents live through agony strictly for a political purpose.

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

Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Conference Board of Canada, a well-respected economic research organization, says that natural gas prices are on the rise, actually projecting industry revenue to increase almost threefold in this year alone, and they made those projections before the latest royalty backdown by this government. Will the Premier admit that the cuts to royalties are completely unnecessary and that growth is dependent on market price, not the very limited royalty increase that his government previously brought in?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the same projections that have come back and forth over the years. I remember that just last year or two years ago projections were that oil was going to be at \$200 a barrel; the very same year it went from \$72 to \$147 and back down to \$35. So projections are projections.

We live according to the best information available, and we're going to use those various pieces of information that come forward to government and make the best projections in terms of our budgets not only for this year but the rollout over the next two to three years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier cut royalties by \$785 million a year – and that's just the latest cut – and given that the Premier is trying to sell his multibillion dollar gift to the oil and gas industry as a job-creation measure and given that it is clear that prices will drive the market, not royalty adjustments, will the Premier admit that his royalty giveaway will not create more activity or more jobs but simply pad the bottom line of oil and gas corporations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that a change in policy will grow a much larger pie, and the slice of the pie that we have will be even larger of a much larger pie, and that is the future income that will support all of the programs and services that all of us enjoy in this province. Some of that revenue will be generated to cover those costs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. His pie is half-baked.

Given that the Conference Board of Canada expects gas companies to see profits of more than \$8 billion a year by 2014 and given that the projection was calculated before royalty rates were lowered yet again, why does the Premier continue to insist that his oil and gas friends needed another royalty rollback when clearly they did not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, misinformation on behalf

of the member. When we look at overall generated profits, he's not saying that all of those profits were generated in the province of Alberta. In fact, we lost competitiveness. Many of those profits were generated in different parts of the world, different countries. So that's why we had to look at the changing market conditions, the price of natural resources, some of the innovation and new technology that's necessary to get at gas that is in an aging basin here, in the western sedimentary basin in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Provincial Deficit

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Education suggested that perhaps school boards may have to run deficits. AHS is running a deficit; universities are running deficits. Does the minister of finance – my question is to him today – plan to have a road map on how he figures out the elimination of these deficits so that future generations will not be burdened with this incredible deficit burden?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we certainly do. The question of the teacher compensation was sent to arbitration, and we're respecting the outcome of that. I believe the Minister of Education reported that in the two out-years there are some challenges. We'll be looking to the Teachers' Association, as we will to all of the public sector, to work co-operatively with us and do what's best for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the minister of finance, in terms of his estimates of the accumulated deficits for the fiscal year 2010-11 for these entities, anticipating relative to their deficits?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I didn't particularly understand the hon. member's question. We projected a \$4.7 billion deficit for this year. That's revenues minus expenditures over revenues. If he has a specific question about a portion of the budget, he'd have to give me that either in writing or as a second question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister of finance taking a similar approach, hope and prayer of gas prices rising and oil sands prices rising, to the Getty era, and is this not a very dangerous precedent for the minister of finance to be following that road map?

Dr. Morton: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, we're doing just the opposite. In the 48 hours after the budget was released, all of the chartered banks and several other financial institutions released reviews of the Alberta budget. Every one of those reviews said that our estimates and our projections on oil and gas were accurate and consistent with theirs and, if anything, a little on the conservative – i.e. cautious – side. So we're on very solid ground there, sir.

Court Service Caseloads

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure the Justice minister is aware, it is extremely rare to hear a sitting judge criticize the administration of justice, as was the situation in Medicine Hat just last week. Judge

Fisher noted that a lack of funds was to blame for the haphazard court service in Medicine Hat. My question for the Justice minister is this: is the judge correct in noting that the justice system is faltering in Medicine Hat?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was an interesting comment made last week by the judge that the hon. member has referred to. We, in fact, did consult as to what was going on that day in court, had a conversation with some of the people who worked there. Our understanding at the time is that the sitting judge had recently spent some time overseas looking at the possibility of implementing a particular docket court model. His comments, we understand and have been advised by the people who work for the Department of Justice, were with respect to the process that he would like to see introduced, that would actually improve the administration of justice, and we're happy to always consider those.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting spin, but Bill Cocks, a former Crown prosecutor, was also quoted in the *Medicine Hat News* as follows about this government: you can talk about being tough on crime and being a law and order government, but if you don't put . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, remember? You signed the document: no preambles. Remember? You signed that. You're a man of integrity, I believe, so let's get to the question.

Mr. Hehr: I hear you.

Well, then, to the minister: why aren't you addressing the gridlock facing the courts in Medicine Hat, Alberta, like all of these people are asking you to?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are. The mean times in Medicine Hat are five days better than in the rest of the province, and we'll continue to improve the administration of justice right across the province.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Crown prosecutors, defence attorneys, and the judiciary don't seem to agree with the hon. minister. So, really, who's right? Are you right, or are these people just talking for the sake of talking?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, my assessment of the day, based on conversations that have taken place in our department, is that there were three people who made very different comments with respect to an incident. I understand that the hon. member is characterizing them all as being the same; in our opinion, they're not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Integrated Land Management

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that over the last few years there's been considerable collaboration between the forestry and the energy sectors to share access roads, thus reducing the environmental footprint of resource development in the green areas of the province. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How much land has been saved from destruction as a result of this co-operation between these two industries?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, to give a definite answer relative to the acreage would be a bit difficult. Integrated land management is an approach that we've been working with for a number of years, and it is used by industry regularly now in the province of Alberta. The idea is very simple. What we want to do, of course, is to work together to plan the operations on the landscape and minimize linear disturbance. We've got about a 45 per cent reduction in the road and linear disturbances proposed in areas like the Kakwa.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how are you and your department able to get these diverse groups working together to achieve this example of integrated land management?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a team approach. Just to give you an idea of some of the associations and so on, the Alberta Chamber of Resources, the Association of Petroleum Producers, and the Alberta Forest Products Association are some of the people that are involved in integrated land management planning, and of course it goes beyond that to a number of the major players that are active on the landscape.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since land-use planning is a major initiative in your department, how does this collaboration fit in with the land-use framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. That is going to be a very key piece as we move forward. Of course, I think that the member knows that the land-use framework discussions and the work that we're doing now with respect to this initiative is a huge piece of business for all Albertans. Integrated land management will be one of the supporting tools that we use in the land-use framework in order to properly manage landscapes in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Distracted Driving

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of other jurisdictions have distracted driving legislation, including seven provinces, 18 states, even China, India, and Russia. The Minister of Transportation explains his lack of action: "There's no [use] putting in a law that doesn't cover the actual problem." To the Minister of Transportation. Places like Washington, DC, saw a 43 per cent reduction in phone use because of their legislation. Why does the minister think that distracted driving legislation doesn't work?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely never, ever said that distracted driving legislation doesn't work. I said that we have to put together the proper legislation in order to address the big picture and all types of distracted driving. If you look at 90 per cent of the other places, all they've done is taken a one-off and said, "Oh, we're not going to allow cellphones," or "Oh, we're not going to allow texting machines." Yes, those are a distraction, and they're a problem, but there are a whole lot of other distractions out there, and we have to address that whole big picture.

Mr. Kang: How long will it take for the minister to get to the actual problem, Mr. Speaker? Given that the minister's other excuse is that there's more distraction than just cellphones, has the minister looked at New Hampshire's law, which includes eating and applying makeup?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, again, he's talking of a one-off. Now we go and address eating as a problem. I agree with him that all these things are a problem. It's to be able to put them all together. If you cannot make it effective and if you cannot make it enforceable, then we shouldn't pass it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's the question I'm asking you: when are you going to make it effective, Mr. Minister? When are you going to make it the law? Given that the distracted driving legislation is not like reinventing the wheel, how much longer will Albertans have to wait before the minister begins to take this seriously? How long?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about reinventing wheels. In fact, there is no wheel in this particular instance because nobody has brought out the effective one that does it right, that makes sure we address it all. We have to get that through that hon. member's head: quit asking the same question, and help us get it right.

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

Affordable Housing in Fort McMurray

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question may not be as exciting, but I'll try. Affordable housing and homelessness is an important issue for the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark. In 1993 I was studying there for about a month, and you could get a house for \$500. A lot of empty houses. Then came the boom and the oil sands activity. There was a big need for housing. When oil was at its peak, there were a lot of homeless in Fort McMurray. Now the oil sands have cooled, and housing has cooled. My question to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: why does your department insist at this point in time on building a big housing unit at Parsons Creek in Fort McMurray?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I have to say that there's no possible way that I could match the last performance in the answer. However, I do have some information for this member in and of itself. We're preparing for the next phase of growth. If we go back, in fact, to 2007, if we look further back, we've had the highest economic output that we've had in a long time. If we wait until we get to that point again, all that is going to happen is that we're going to be two years behind. This is part of the plan. Mr. Speaker, we're ready. By 2012 we're going to have exhausted the amount of land at current rates in Fort McMurray.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the same minister. There's a substantial amount of money that could probably be better spent in some of the major cities, specifically in Edmonton-Meadowlark, to address the issues of my constituents of chronic homelessness. Instead of building fancy new condo communities . . .

The Speaker: Remember the preamble thing we just talked about? The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Phase I of Parsons Creek actually includes about 20 per cent in Fort McMurray of affordable housing, and that's roughly where we're going. This is part of our plan. Fort McMurray is an important part of our economy, and we're looking to ensure that, in fact, all Albertans benefit from this. In fact, through transfer payments all Canadians benefit from our plans here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

My last question is to the same minister. This project was desperately needed three years ago. Does this minister have a long-term housing plan for this province and for the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark, and does he anticipate problems instead of reacting to them?

Mr. Denis: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do anticipate problems. Any issues, any problems that we look at are decided on an individual basis. We're working with the RM of Wood Buffalo to address any environmental concerns and also any housing concerns. This member, if he likes, can go and drive his blue van right up there and take a look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Cancer Services

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Cancer diagnosis and treatment require a tightly co-ordinated team that includes pathology, radiology, surgery, pharmacy, nursing, and other services which the Alberta Cancer Board used to provide. The previous minister of health disbanded the Alberta Cancer Board, and that cancer care delivery system is being dismantled. Cancer pathology is being folded into general pathology, cancer pharmacy is being folded into general pharmacy, and so on. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister do the right thing for Albertans with cancer and restore the Alberta Cancer Board?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Cancer Board, the Mental Health Board, and AADAC were all amalgamated within the bigger picture of Alberta Health Services and the one superboard, as it's sometimes referred to. But I take the member's question very seriously, and I will undertake to have a look at the comments he just made.

Dr. Taft: Well, that was a pretty weak answer, Mr. Speaker.

Given that one of the awful lessons from botched cancer pathology scandals in Newfoundland and elsewhere is that cancer pathology is very specialized, why isn't the minister taking action to make sure that Alberta's cancer pathology team isn't dismantled?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe there's any dismantling in the system. In fact, we're looking to augment it and hire more oncologists. There's quite an active recruitment process going on right now. I think that people in this province have grown accustomed to the fact that the oncologists we have in the two larger centres that treat cancer patients, not to mention the three that are coming on stream through the radiation therapy corridor, provide outstanding service. I think they need our support at this time.

Dr. Taft: Well, those oncologists are calling me, and they're expressing the concern, so this minister had better look into it.

How does the minister expect a fractured system, in which pharmacy, pathology, surgery, nursing, radiology, and all other services are reporting along different lines, to shorten wait times?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, part of that is exactly the point of having one centralized board, so all of that information that was just alluded to can be looked at, can be collected in a consistent fashion with consistent gathering of information so that we can come up with that province-wide plan that will help improve things, not make them worse. We're trying to work hard to get things better. That's why we've added the money to the budget, and that's why we're coming out with a more predictable and stable five-year funding plan. We're going to fix that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20

Cultural Competency Initiatives

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Statistics Canada is projecting rapid changes to our population over the next 20 years. Major growth areas would include the aboriginal population, and it's projected that about one-third of Canada's population would be a visible minority. Learning about effective integration and development of inclusive communities speaks to the need for two-way integration. My question is to the Minister of Education. You have initiated the Inspiring Education visioning process, and you have spoken about transformative change to our educational system. I would like to know what transformative concepts and ideas you or your ministry have discussed relative to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to Inspiring Education, of course, we're engaged in a number of areas: the School Act review, which is ongoing; setting the direction for children with special needs; the FNMI Education Partnership Council—I introduced the chiefs and the presidents yesterday in the House—the tripartite MOU that we've signed with the treaty chiefs and the federal government; workforce planning; and Speak Out Alberta. There are a great number of initiatives. The Inspiring Education initiative has told us that Albertans want an education system that addresses the different learning needs of different communities.

The Speaker: Sorry. We have to move on.
The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: To the same minister. Numerous studies from jurisdictions across the country talk about the need to integrate cultural competency into the operation and practice of institutions. I'd like to know what your commitment is to this requirement.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we want to move beyond acknowledging cultural diversity in creating equality to a more inclusive model that promotes equity and involves all cultural elements in our community in a meaningful way. We have a commitment in the School Act on diversity in shared values. We have guidelines for recognizing diversity and promoting respect to ensure that all learning resources, including visuals, promote respect and understanding for all members of society.

Ms Woo-Paw: What authority and opportunities does the ministry have to ensure that school systems meaningfully and systematically incorporate and implement cultural competency throughout the organization?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, helping students become culturally thoughtful and respectful starts in kindergarten and before and continues right through the system. We have to ensure that our curriculum is infused with the principles of our heritage and the principles of our cultures, particularly with respect to First Nations and Métis students in the province. All Alberta students need to know and understand that cultural heritage, not just the FNMI students. Through broadening their understanding, teachers and administrators are able to see how important cultural competency is to areas of curriculum and development for all students.

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

Foster Care System

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday during Children and Youth Services estimates the minister repeatedly denied there were plans to cut funding to foster parents of special-needs children. She was surrounded at the time by nine senior ministry staff, none of whom uttered a peep about the planned cuts that the NDP subsequently discovered and reported on yesterday. My question is for the minister. How can Albertans trust your claims of protecting vulnerable children when you clearly can't keep up with what's going on in your own ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct: at Committee of Supply I made it very clear that my understanding was that there wouldn't be any reduction in foster support services or resources in that. That was because of the direction that I had given two to three weeks previously not to reduce the supports or services or funding to foster care. I can assure you that I realize, too, and knowing that the buck stops at my desk, there are at times things that are not understood in the way that they're put forward, and this is just one of those cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, notwithstanding that the Premier seems to believe it's inappropriate to discuss some of these contradictions in public, given that the minister has repeatedly assured the House that cuts to her ministry would not affect families when, in fact, that was exactly what was planned at the time, how can the minister fail to see the absurdity of her assurances and refuse to admit that cuts to her ministry will negatively impact the level of care provided to Alberta's children?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, as you know, Committee of Supply is a three-hour meeting. We did discuss this ministry at that meeting for three hours and, in particular, the area of child intervention. As I let this member know and other members at the committee, I trust what my staff has brought forward as to the change and the shift in practice of the way that child intervention is occurring in the field through the good work of 1,600 front-line workers. I trust that. I've assured

you, Mr. Speaker, and the Assembly previously that I'm monitoring this closely. If I see that it's different, I will go back through the right processes if more funding is required.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this ministry has been plagued by repeated cases of negligent treatment toward foster families and their children and given that the minister's tarnished credibility grows darker each time she's asked to take responsibility for a foolish policy she doesn't know anything about, when will the minister launch an independent, public inquiry into the foster care system and do away with the political leash she maintains on the children's advocate?

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's always interesting how somebody can make a quantum leap to where we're into a public inquiry. Simply because there was a direction from me as the minister not to cut resources or supports or funding to foster care, especially for children with special needs, and an individual in the field did not follow through with that direction, now we're into: we should have a public inquiry of the whole system. The answer to that is categorically no.

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

Online Driver Licensing

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans move around a lot. In 2006 in Edmonton alone we had over 97,000 intraprovincial migrants. Each time they change addresses, the Traffic Safety Act requires people to change their driver's licence in person and to fork out \$22.50. In comparison, Saskatchewan folks can update their billing and address information online 24/7, or in Ontario their self-serve kiosks allow people to change their drivers' licences for no charge. To the Minister of Service Alberta: does the minister have any plans to make driver's licence changes more accessible and cost-efficient?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During these past two years this ministry has had excellent discussions with many of the registry agents across Alberta. One of the challenges is to provide better service to Albertans – and that includes online services as well as more locations across Alberta, so it is a very serious concern – and to balance that with the protection of Albertans' information. We are certainly looking at a number of different areas.

Ms Blakeman: Well, yes, it is a challenge, and yes, it's in the private registry system. So what exactly is the minister going to do, and when can we expect the government to deliver service that at least equals Saskatchewan's?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, on the whole issue of online fees, with the registry agents that do provide those services in Alberta, we are on the lower end of the scale. That's something that I've been working on very hard because, again, it's about providing Albertans with better service and making sure they can do things that are convenient from their home, making it more convenient for Albertans but also making sure that the information is protected, whether it's a driver's licence or whether it's any other items that Albertans need to run their businesses or their homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. Blakeman: Okay. Well, back to the same minister. Since issuing changed licences to people who have undergone gender reassignment continues to be done on a case-by-case basis and takes so long, I wonder if there isn't more at play here. When will that process be moved into the 21st century?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is with respect to the Vital Statistics Act, which has not been updated for about 50 years. That is something that we are currently working on, looking at that act and updating it. That's been an important dialogue, too. That is something that we'll be bringing forward fairly soon.

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

Property Taxes

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and this government have both stated that there will be no new taxes or no tax increases, a promise affirmed by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise in his budget speech, yet many Albertans are reporting an increase in their property taxes this year. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: why are these people paying higher taxes when you yourself promised that taxes would not be going up?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we did promise that taxes were not going up, and we have kept that promise. When it comes to the education portion of the property tax, we have actually cut it by 13 per cent, and this would be the 17th year in a row that we've either frozen or cut that portion of the property tax. However, that's only one-third of property taxes. The other two-thirds is municipal, and we have no control over what municipalities do with their portion of the property tax.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental, then, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that property values have generally decreased in the last two years, why are property taxes increasing?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The market value on which the rate is applied is not the current value. Rather, it's the amount that a property might have realized if sold on the open market as of July 1 of the year prior to the taxation year. Mill rates are adjusted to ensure that the revenue remains stable in spite of price fluctuations seen in the housing market.

With respect to education property tax the education mill rate is applied on a province-wide basis and reflects average property values for the whole province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, then, to the Minister of Education: how much is raised through education property taxes, and is this amount guaranteed to fund education priorities in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. All money raised under the education property tax goes to the Alberta school foundation, and it is used to fund education across the province. We raise about \$1.6 billion in property taxes, which is more than 25 per cent of the amount that they spent on education through the provincial spending, and there's an additional \$199 million that's raised by opted-out boards.

U of A Sustainable Development Campus

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, last November I raised some questions in the Assembly on an exciting report done by the Urban Land Institute into the development at the U of A's south campus. The report advocated a bold goal for the south campus that by 2035, if everyone on Earth lived like the proposed community at the south campus, we'd arrest climate change and live sustainably within the limited resources of our planet. To the Minister of Environment: last November 17 he said that he expected to receive the final report shortly, so has he now received it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. And thank you to the member for this question because, frankly, I had forgotten that this report was under way. I'm pleased to advise the member that we have received a draft of the report. It was received a couple of weeks ago. Our staff are providing some additional input, and we should have that complete in the next two weeks. We then would expect that the university would be in a position to release the final draft of the report in three weeks to a month.

Dr. Taft: Well, that's great news.

To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: given that last November 17 the minister said that this report would be circulated widely among Campus Alberta and officials in his own department, has this happened, and has the report had an impact?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the advice from the report actually makes up part of the University of Alberta's institutional access plan and, as such, will be spread throughout Campus Alberta. In terms of the advice that was given and some of the ideas that were there, by all indications it was a very successful symposium to develop the kind of advice that Campus Alberta can look to for sustainable innovation in the future. We will incorporate that in each institution's individual access plan for their capital.

Dr. Taft: Again to the same minister: does the Department of Advanced Education and Technology place any standards for sustainability on new buildings built by universities, and if so, will he make them public?

Mr. Horner: Well, we do, I guess, depend upon the boards of governance and the executives at all of these institutions to work with us in terms of the capital plans. As in the case of the University of Alberta, we expect that they're going to be doing their work in terms of the type of capital plan that they want to put forward as it relates to the access plans that we have. It's about student placement, Mr. Speaker, and it's about sustainable communities for students to do what they need to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Harmonization of Oil and Gas Royalties

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The competitiveness review and the resulting changes to the royalty structure were applauded by industry and are key to our government's economic plan going forward. Some industry voices, though, are calling for the harmonization of royalties between Alberta and its energy producing neighbours, B.C. and Saskatchewan. My question is to the Minister of Energy. During the extensive consultation and development process of the competitiveness review, was the harmonization of royalties between the three provinces considered, and if so, what were the outcomes of this discussion?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the short answer to that, Mr. Speaker, is no. Those discussions did not take place. But we have to remember what we've gone through for the last year: it was a competitiveness review; it was not a royalty review. The competitiveness review concluded that there were a number of areas that we needed to take action on that would frankly make us one of the most competitive jurisdictions in North America. We've announced some. We're commencing others. I'm not suggesting that at some point in time we wouldn't have those discussions with our neighbouring provinces, but that was not discussed at this stage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With TILMA and the western economic partnership being clear indicators of our intentions to reduce barriers to investment and make business investment decisions easier, would it not make sense to extend this to royalties in our largest industry? What is the rationale for not doing so?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have to remember that TILMA stands for the labour mobility agreement. I think that we've made tremendous strides in ensuring that we have the ability not only for labour to move back and forth across provincial borders but for business to actually operate back and forth across borders. There's still lots of work to do there. You know, as I said earlier, royalties are only one part of it. We're always open to discussions with other provinces, whatever will make it easier for workers and also for businesses to operate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental, again to the same minister: with the task force on regulatory enhancement under way, reviewing regulations pertaining to the energy industry, will their considerations include harmonization of regulations between the energy producing provinces pursuant to the goals of TILMA and the western economic partnership?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, I said from the very beginning relative to the task force that's going to commence its work very shortly that there is nothing that is off the table, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that if through the consultations some good suggestions come forward that we could pursue with our neighbouring provinces of B.C. and Saskatchewan, we would certainly entertain that and look forward to some of those recommendations.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Fish and Game Association indicates that there is no reliable province-wide system in place to monitor chronic wasting disease, a disease that, if it spreads, could

be irrevocably detrimental to Alberta wildlife. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: how can the minister claim that there is a reliable province-wide monitoring system in place when surveillance is based largely upon voluntary submission of heads by hunters?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that this surveillance program, in fact, is quite robust. In the last hunting season we had about 4,860 heads submitted that were tested, and out of those, there were 12 that were found to be positive. It still indicates a relatively low density of the disease and still concentrated on the eastern side of the province of Alberta. The program is spread across the province, so I think it's quite robust.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister's budget has been cut this year along with 112 SRD staff and the disease boundaries are expanding, how will the minister be able to ensure that adequate testing will be done?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, as I said, what we have here is co-operation with the hunting community. Mr. Speaker, it's the hunters that actually help us with respect to this issue. It doesn't matter how many fish and wildlife officers there are on the ground. As long as we have and continue to have a good working relationship and the co-operation of the hunting community, the program can continue.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, given that hunt farms are a major cause of the spread of chronic wasting disease, why is the minister expressing support for hunt farms at Alberta Fish and Game Association meetings?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the member gets his information from. I don't recall him sitting at any table where I may or may not have made comments relative to the issue. However, what I will say now to this House and to all Albertans is that there is a ban in place in the province of Alberta relative to hunting cervids on farms. That ban remains in place.

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

Oil Sands Image

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands have again come under attack by environmental groups to give the impression that Albertans don't care about the environment. The other day one such group launched an online video game that shows the oil sands in a very unfair and negative light. The Minister of Energy has spoken recently about fighting back with the facts on a national and international scale. My question to the Minister of Energy: when is he going to launch this much-needed counterattack against these outrageous messages?

2:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo does not want us to be out there publicly defending our oil sands, we're going to. It's not just going to be the government that's going to do that. Later under tablings I'm going to table – I happened to notice just before question period today in the *Hill Times* a number of advertisements put on by the labour council of Alberta, by various companies in Alberta, by the Forest Products Association, all trying their best to counter this propaganda campaign.

Mr. Sandhu: My first supplemental to the same minister. I noticed in the media that a major buyers/sellers conference is taking place in Edmonton over the next two days. There are a number of Ontario and Quebec companies here seeking business, and I would like to know if the minister will be meeting with these companies when they are in Edmonton?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Premier today is addressing this buyers/sellers forum here in the city of Edmonton. I am meeting tomorrow with the minister of industry from Ontario, who is here as part of that mission. I plan to ensure that she has a full understanding of not only how important the oil sands are to Alberta but to the rest of the country. They're important in two ways. As the member says, we have Ontario suppliers here selling to the oil sands, but probably more importantly the federal government has significant tax revenue that comes from Albertans and Alberta businesses that goes to the federal treasury that ends up in equalization payments to other provinces.

Mr. Sandhu: My final question to the same minister: does the minister plan to ensure that employees of these companies that supply goods and services to the oil sands are made aware that their employment is directly tied to a vibrant oil industry?

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important. It's not just governments that have to understand that the vibrant oil patch — a strong Alberta makes a strong Canada. There are many who work in manufacturing in central Canada whose livelihoods depend on exports to the province of Alberta. The oil sands and the oil industry are purchasers of billions of dollars' worth of goods from Ontario and Quebec every year. It's going to be our job to ensure that those who work in these particular facilities understand that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period for today. There were 114 questions and responses from 19 different members. Of the 19, nine were Official Opposition members, one was the third party, two from the fourth party, one from the independent, and six from private government members.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from the Alberta Fish and Game Association and the appropriate number of copies that go through some of the points they bring up on chronic wasting disease and how they believe the disease could be more effectively monitored here in this province.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in the last answer to my question, I have five copies of three particular advertisements that appear in the *Hill Times* that I'd like to table with the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a news story in which the Conference Board of Canada says that any increase in drilling rates will be because of higher prices, not the royalty rollback. This information relates to the questions that the member asked earlier today.

As well, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 24 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds, as part of a postcard campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, response to a question raised by Mr. MacDonald, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on February 17, 2010, Service Alberta main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, responses to questions raised by Mr. MacDonald, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar; Mr. Fawcett, the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill; Mr. Hinman, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore; and Ms Woo-Paw, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, on February 24, 2010, Department of Finance and Enterprise main estimates debate.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010.

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

Mr. Taylor: That was quick, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise and join in second reading debate on Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. This, of course, involves a tremendous amount of money: \$39 billion in operating expenses, \$7 billion in capital expenses, a deficit of \$4.7 billion. I see the President of the Treasury Board is shaking his head at me right now. Okay. [interjection] I didn't hear that, but anyway maybe *Hansard* did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor if he wishes to take it.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, a tremendous amount of money involved in the running of this province for 12 months: \$39 billion in operating expenses, and we are running a deficit this year of some \$4.7 billion. There have been many concerns expressed by many members in numerous parties in this House about the notion that we've gone into deficit spending now, and there doesn't seem to be a clear plan to take us out of deficit spending, just a promise that we'll be back in the black in three years. That's kind of a vague promise in our view over here on this side of the House, a kind of vague, trust-us sort of promise that somehow, God willing and the creek don't rise, everything will be fine again in three years.

Now, I have to do a bit of a balancing act on this, Mr. Speaker, because after all, I recognize and I think most of us in this House do recognize that stimulus spending done at the right time can have a positive impact on an economy that's in recession. There's certainly

some stimulus spending in the capital budget, a great deal of stimulus spending in the capital budget, in fact.

I think the government has done the right thing by putting extra money into health care, although I'm still waiting to see what the plan is around that. Right now it appears more like the minister of health wanted to use his Visa card, and the bank said: no, you've got to clear the outstanding balance before we'll let you use it again. I got a chuckle out of the minister of health on that one. That's where a good chunk of the extra money in health has gone, but there's also money above and beyond that for investment in the system.

I think, Mr. Speaker, it's fair to say that we have a shortage of doctors, we have a shortage of nurses, and we have a shortage of hospital beds in this province, at least open hospital beds. We certainly have a bizarre situation in Calgary, where we have a number of new hospital beds that have been opened over the last year, and a corresponding number of old hospital beds have been closed down because when this government went through its capital planning exercise around money to invest in capital build for the Calgary health region, it somehow forgot, failed, otherwise messed up the notion that when those capital projects were done, in order to operate them, there would need to be a corresponding envelope of operating money, which didn't materialize.

I think there's no question, Mr. Speaker, that in order to overcome at least some of the problems that we have in health care in this province, it's going to require an extra investment of money, as we've seen in this budget. So that's good. But it's also been, I think it's fair to say, a politically expedient thing for this government to do, to find a bunch of extra money to invest in health care, because health care has become a great concern to an awful lot of Albertans, including older Albertans, who are more likely to vote.

2:50

I wouldn't be making this comment, I guess, Mr. Speaker, if we hadn't been through the debate and the turmoil that persons with developmental disabilities and their loved ones and their care providers had to go through earlier this year around plans, that were at least temporarily thwarted, to cut spending to PDD. We've got problems with Children and Youth Services. We've got cuts happening in other areas, and it's interesting to me that the cuts that we see happening in this budget tend to be cuts in areas where people are perhaps a little bit marginalized anyway, unlikely to vote, unlikely to cause trouble for the government if the government cuts their money.

Still we have a \$4.7 billion deficit, and still we have a tremendous amount of money being spent. It really is stunning, the amount of money that we go through in the run of a year. I'm left to wonder whether this government has really gone through its operations with a sharp pencil and done everything that it needed to do, that it should be doing to determine where wasteful spending is happening and where spending could be at least redirected to areas of higher priority.

I don't think, Mr. Speaker, at least not to my satisfaction, that this government has yet succeeded in defining or putting out for province-wide debate what are the core programs and services that are considered to be sacrosanct, beyond being touched, beyond being cut. I think that if you define core programs and core services, you say: "These are the things that Albertans hold most dear. These are the things that are most important in terms of public works and public services for the public good. These are the things that we must – we absolutely must – spend money on. These are the things and the people and the programs and the services we absolutely must invest in."

Then, by definition, by default, the programs and the services that

do not fall into the basket of core programs and services are those where you can go back in and take a second look and say: "Well, when times are tight, when people are hurting, when the health care system is in a mess and needs to be fixed, needs to be triaged at least and, hopefully, made better, when we have some of the problems that we have in this province right now within the context of a sluggish economy, which is recovering, albeit slowly, where are the areas where we actually can cut? Is this an area that we really need to spend money on this fiscal year?" I don't think that's been done yet. I have not seen a whole lot of evidence as we went through the budget debates, the estimates debates, over the last five or six weeks or so. I've not seen a lot of evidence, a lot of clear definition of what is a core program and what isn't.

I will speak entirely personally now, and I'll be very interested to hear what some of my colleagues on all sides of the House say about this. It's been again this year an interesting exercise, going through the estimates debates as we have in the evening in the various policy field committees, because if you are the Official Opposition critic on a particular department, it does give you the opportunity to sit with your counterpart, with the minister, and get into some fairly – depending on the minister, depending on the bureaucrats surrounding him, depending on the time and the tides and everybody's mood – detailed, in-depth discussion about why the money is being spent in the way that it is and what the priorities are. You can actually, from time to time at least, learn a fair amount about what's going on, not always, but from time to time, again depending on the minister, depending on the critic, depending on the time and the tides and the whole shebang.

I do find that a rather interesting way to go about it. However, I can't help but note that we still, when all is said and done, give each department, each ministry, whether it is Health and Wellness at \$15 billion or Service Alberta at about \$350 million, equal time. Three hours of debate for the ministry starting each night at 6:30, ending each night at 9:30, with the Official Opposition critic getting first crack in a back-and-forth exchange with the minister for an hour, a five-minute break for coffee or juice, and then we're back at it with the member of the third party and the critic from the fourth party and then a back and forth between opposition and governing party members of the committee. At the end of three hours we're done.

Now, we have the opportunity, of course, we being anybody on that particular committee or anybody who is sitting in on that particular committee for that department's debate on that evening, to submit a number of written questions and a reasonable expectation of answers back from the minister within a couple of weeks. I haven't been keeping track, by the way, Mr. Speaker, as to what the delivery rate has been on that promise, but I know that a number of ministers over the course of the last few weeks did promise to get back to us with written answers in a couple of weeks, so hopefully if those promises haven't been kept, they will be acted upon with this gentle admonition from this critic on this side of the House.

Still, when all is said and done, you come to a situation where debate on a total of \$39 billion worth of spending is governed entirely by the clock. Nearly half of that budget, \$15 billion in Health, was debated in three hours. We may have debated this budget department by department, ministry by ministry over the last five or six weeks, but the Health and Wellness budget is \$15 billion. The operating budget is \$39 billion. Health and Wellness got three hours just like every other department got three hours. We did a huge chunk of this budget in three hours, and at the end of three hours it was like: well, okay, there you go; that's all the time we have for that.

Now, that approach works just fine when you're doing a radio talk show, I guess. You know, when you're doing a radio talk show, you

are all powerful, and you can decide three weeks hence that you're going to bring the topic back if you feel like it again. But it doesn't work so well, in my opinion, in the public interest. I don't know that the public interest is at all served by saying that we will devote three hours and only three hours to debating the estimates of the ministry of health, especially this year – especially this year – when there's been a significant additional investment of public dollars in health care and especially this year when health care is in such an obvious mess. We have gone through a failed restructuring of the system. I think it's a failed restructuring of the system.

I think the current minister of health spends all his time undoing the work of the previous minister of health. I mean, it's kind of an ongoing process because, of course, the work put into motion by the previous minister of health is carried on by the Alberta Health Services Board and CEO. They're still in place, and they're still, you know, beavering around and doing their little thing reorganizing the health ministry, while the current minister of health is coming along behind, aided and abetted sometimes by the Official Opposition health critic and critics from the other parties, who are pointing out: "Hey, you know what? The way we do cancer care in this province now isn't working anymore. The way we do this isn't working anymore." Nobody knows anything in health care in terms of who reports to whom or who's supposed to be accountable or take charge or make the final decision and have the buck stop on their desk for this or that particular area of health care, and the poor minister of health is running around after Stephen Duckett and the Alberta Health Services Board trying to put a leash on that pit bull that got out of its cage.

For this we're spending \$15 billion, and we spent three hours debating it. I don't think that's enough, Mr. Speaker. I really don't. Now, there are other ministries, the Ministry of Energy, for instance, where I felt as though that was time reasonably well spent. I felt that questions were answered, so I'll give high marks on that to the Minister of Energy. There are other ministries that probably got full and adequate debate within that three-hour time frame.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, it would be better – it really would be better – if we would adopt the approach taken by so many other jurisdictions in this country and simply start debating the budget and keep going on it until it is done. If we need to call the minister of health back for another session in a couple of weeks' time after we've finished questioning him for an evening, we could do that, and we could get supplementary answers to our questions; likewise with the Minister of Education or the minister of advanced education or the Minister of Municipal Affairs or any other ministry.

We have attempted to shoehorn these many billions of dollars into a very tight framework for debate, and the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that when the time has elapsed, the debate is finished whether the public has been served by that debate or not. I don't think that's a particularly wise or proper, appropriate stewardship of the taxpayers' money in the province of Alberta. I don't think we're being proper stewards of the people of Alberta's money.

I think we should take a long hard look over this fiscal year at a different approach to doing this. We spend a tremendous amount of money in this province. We still spend on a per capita basis well above many other jurisdictions in this country. We don't give it the full and complete debate that it needs. We don't know, and we will never know if we continue to debate the budget according to the rules that we have been using, where we're getting value for our money as taxpayers, whether we're getting value for our money as taxpayers, where things can be tightened up, where more money needs to be allocated. There simply isn't enough in the system to

look after our foster children or our elderly or our sick. We don't know.

When you look at the actual budget, the budget for Alberta Health Services is one line. What does that mean? What does that mean? Nine billion dollars, you know, for Alberta Health Services. Well, gee, that's nice. What does that mean? Where is that going? I'm not sure that anybody can answer that question, quite frankly, given the performance of Alberta Health Services over the last year, but it sure would be nice to give it a shot and see if we could find out. It sure would be nice to get a budget document that actually breaks that down.

It sure would be nice to have the feeling that when the nine health regions were collapsed into the Alberta Health Services superboard, it wasn't just an opportunity to fudge the numbers a little bit further. I think fudge, Mr. Speaker, I will freely admit, gets a little close to the line in terms of unparliamentary language, but there is a degree of obfuscation that one suspects could be going on there in that there is this massive amount of money as a line item in the budget, and we really don't know how it's allocated, how it's broken down.

I think that we should. I think that the people of Alberta have a right to know how their public funds are being spent on public health care. Public health care is an extremely, extremely important thing to the people of Alberta, to the people of Canada. But as much as we love our public health care system in this country, in this province, it's also extremely important that we know where our public money is going and how it's being put to use and that we as citizens can look at that and be able to make an informed decision as to whether we are getting value for our money or not.

We may like public health care. We may love publicly funded health care. But that doesn't mean that as citizens we're prepared to stick our heads in the sand and say: "Well, okay, Mr. Minister, government of Alberta; however you want to spend our \$15 billion on health care, that's all right with us. We don't mind waiting 13 hours in emergency. We don't mind the fact that 1 in every 4 Calgarians can't find a family doctor. We don't mind the doctor shortages that exist in so many other parts of the province. We don't mind that primary care networks, PCNs, should have been set up in more locations, I think, than they have been so far, that it seems to be an awfully hard slog and an awfully slow process to get those things set up." We do mind that we have to wait so long for health care. We do mind that we have to wait so long to find out why that thing that is hurting us is hurting us and what to do about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to this Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. You know, every time we talk about this topic, I guess, we come back to the same thing. It's just that the spending of this government over the last several years has been out of control. It's been a long, hard road for sure. I mean, we've been spending more than we should for a very long time. I think everyone in this Assembly realizes that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

A lot of people in this Assembly, certainly on our side and definitely on the other side as well, campaigned on trying to bring our fiscal house back in order and get our spending under control, so this year, this budget, was an exceptional opportunity to make good on that campaign promise to try to get our spending under control and to try to show fiscal leadership. I remember during the 2008 campaign listening to the Premier speak about balancing the budget.

One of the things that he brought forward and he campaigned on was that under his watch we would not run deficits. Under no circumstances would we run deficits. He was very strong on that. I remember going to the doors of the people in my community and saying: this is what this Premier and this government stands for, no deficits. We were going to be good stewards of the books. We were going to be good fiscal managers. That's what we were going to do.

A lot of people in my constituency who were very unhappy with some of the direction of the government at that time with regards to the Royalty Review Panel and things like that said that they would support the governing party at that time but that they needed to get their act together on the financial side and on the energy side as well as on health care and a few other issues or else they would not support the government in the future. So I said that I would advocate those things as hard as I possibly could and have attempted to do so over the last two years both in and outside of the governing party.

As I look at the spending in this bill, the reason I'm so worried about this, Mr. Speaker, is that like many people in this Chamber I have children of my own. I don't have grandchildren yet, but many people here do have grandchildren. I have four kids; they're all under the age of six. The first is just entering kindergarten at Nose Creek elementary in Airdrie.

You know, I look at them – and it changes your perception on life when you have kids, obviously – and one of those things that you think about is what their future is going to look like. You start thinking about some of the advantages that you have in life, some of the good things that you have in life, and the opportunities that I've had in life, which I believe are many compared to other people in the world for sure. I think many people in Alberta have a lot of those same opportunities, so we really live in a blessed land, and we're lucky to live where we live.

When I look at the opportunities I've had and then I look at my kids, I ask: are they going to have those same opportunities? Are they going to live in a place where when they go get a job, they can be assured that (a) there is going to be a good job out there for them if they educate themselves? And (b), when they get into the workforce – say they want to try a business, or they want to save for their retirement or whatever it is, or they want to raise their family and they want to have kids of their own – are they going to be taxed to death, or are they going to live in a jurisdiction that allows them to flourish as a family and allows them to flourish as individuals and as entrepreneurs and as people? These are the things that I think a lot of us, a lot of parents – and I'm not the only parent that feels this way – think about.

3:10

This is why I have such a problem with this bill and with this government right now. They have lost their way on this issue, this issue of generational fairness. They have failed on so many accounts to save for future generations. I mean, they have not invested virtually a cent, if anything – I'm talking about from 2008 on here – in the heritage fund. They have raided the interest from that fund. They haven't replenished it when it went down in value last year even though we had a great year this year investment-wise.

They have saved nothing for our future. In fact, they have been draining the sustainability fund from where it was not so long ago at \$17 billion or 16 and a half billion dollars or whatever it was down to – I believe the number is going to come in at about \$8 billion this year. They're projecting it to be down to \$2 billion by 2013, and that's under some pretty rosy scenarios. That doesn't include the \$6 billion in debt from 2008 to 2013 on infrastructure debt that they're accumulating as well. If you took that out, the sustainability fund

would be no more, and we're back into the Getty years of debt financing. I just look at that, and that's unacceptable to me, and it's unacceptable to parents my age in most regards, I would say, because this is our future we're talking about.

I mean, look at what is going on in the United States right now. What an absolute gong show. Thankfully, we're not at that point, but here is, you know, a situation where you have the largest nation, our biggest trading partner literally spending themselves to death, where very soon they're going to be in a situation – I mean, you already see it with their currency devaluing – where, with the baby boomers retiring, their kids are going to be completely unable to pay this bill, totally unable to pay this bill. The harder they work and earn money, it's still going to be harder because the currency that they're making is going to be devaluing that whole time. They're in a huge, huge pickle.

Thankfully, and somewhat luckily in our case but also thankfully, we've had governments in the past who have been more responsible than that. Obviously, we've had the means of massive oil reserves, which has helped us, and we do not find ourselves in a position where we have massive debt. We're taking on a little bit of debt right now for sure, and it's a problem, but we are still at a point that if we set ourselves aright, if we turn the corner, if we put the proper plans in place, if we rein in spending – we're not talking about massive cuts; we're just talking about limiting spending to inflationary pressures plus growth pressures – and if we started doing that today, we would be able to pull this out of the fire. We would. We are in a position where we can do so. Past governments have put us in that position to do so. The people of Alberta have put ourselves in that position to do so.

However, in this budget and in this bill I don't see any realization of that urgency. I see more of the same. I see more spending on more social programs. I see we're spending two times more than the next closest province per capita on infrastructure. Well, infrastructure is great, Mr. Speaker, but someone has got to pay for it. What right do we have as legislators in this House today to pass that bill on to our kids for the next 10 to 20 years? That's what we're doing.

It's like we're taking out a huge mortgage on a house, and then we say, "Oh, well, we're going to give the kids a house." Well, great. What if the kids can't afford to pay the mortgage because all the baby boomers aren't paying taxes anymore? What are they going to do then? Who is going to buy their house? No one is going to buy their house. They're going to be left in a situation where they can't afford to keep up the infrastructure that has been built. They can't afford to keep the schools open that have been built and hire the teachers and the nurses and the docs and the home care workers and all those people that need to keep up the infrastructure. They won't be able to afford it because they won't have the tax base for it. It's plain and simple. That's why we can't get so far ahead of ourselves on infrastructure spending.

This year the book deficit that the government is proclaiming is \$4.7 billion, cash in, cash out. There has never been an accusation that they're doing anything illegal with their bookkeeping, but as any creative accountant can do, you can make numbers look better than they are using generally accepted accounting principles. You can do it. I would say that I think it's very clear that this year from their books we are spending \$7.6 billion more in cash going out than in receipts coming in from taxes and revenues and oil and gas revenues, et cetera.

So that's the situation we find ourselves in: a \$7.6 billion cash deficit, just an astronomical figure. And that doesn't include the AHS deficit that may be being incurred right now. I assume it's being incurred. It's been incurred. For the last however many years there have been debts in the health system, so I'm assuming there is

more debt there. The municipalities are increasing their debt loads. The postsecondary institutions are increasing their debt loads. You have the teachers' liability; we just took that on. That's not included in that deficit number, nor should it be, but that's another liability that our kids have to pay for. You know, it goes on and on and on.

I guess I would say that if we were serious about tackling this problem, we would address it in this budget and in this bill. I simply don't see it. I don't see any commitment by this government yet, not only to balancing our budget but to do so in a way that is actually proactive rather than cross your fingers and hope to God that natural gas prices increase, that drilling increases, that oil goes above a hundred again, that the dollar stays below 95, or whatever. I think the target was 95. I mean, it's all about hope. It's all about just kind of slowing down the rate of increases to about 6 per cent or 5 per cent, still way above inflation and growth. Slow it down a little bit and hope that the economy catches up.

Well, that hasn't worked for a lot of countries. It hasn't worked for Japan. They've tried that; didn't work. They're still in a stagflation situation. I don't think it's going to work for the United States either. I think they are in huge trouble. I think that in Canada, although we're in less trouble, we too have issues. We basically took on as much debt as we've paid off over the last 10 years of hard work. We've basically taken it all back on over these last couple of years and in the next couple of years.

What are we leaving to our kids? I just don't understand how we can sit here in the most richly blessed, resource-wise, province in the country and maybe even in the world in some regards . . .

An Hon. Member: We could be.

Mr. Anderson: Could be. We're right up there

. . . and just continue to kind of ignore and hope. I mean, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, when this bill comes due, when our kids have to pay for this mortgage, when they have to pay for this massive amount of infrastructure that we're putting on the line right now, when the mortgage comes due, they are going to be the taxpayers. They are going to be the ones with the four kids in school. I am going to be nearing retirement, and a lot of the folks here will be nearing retirement or retired and enjoying themselves, and they won't be paying very much tax, that's for sure.

What are we going to say to them? "Oh, sorry. Oops. You know, it's unfortunate we haven't saved anything from our oil and gas resources that are now obsolete because other technologies have occurred that we're not as reliant on." This is in 30 or 40 years from now. "We haven't saved much of anything there, but we've built all these great schools and great postsecondary institutions. I know you can't afford to hire teachers to teach in them anymore, but at least you've got the building." That's the situation we're going to find ourselves having to tell our kids in 30 or 40 years if we don't get our act together on our finances. Let's not repeat the same mistakes that have been repeated over and over again by countries and jurisdictions.

3:20

Look at Argentina, for example. Look what happened to them. The people don't know this, but a hundred years ago Argentina was actually kind of battling it out with the United States for the second largest economy on the planet. At that time England was first, and Argentina and the United States were going at it for second. They had a very prosperous economy, but they got into subsequent governments. They have rich resources. They had everything. [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

I hope we can take that into consideration as we move forward.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 29(2)(a) for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere if he could just finish his little history lesson on the Argentine economy and its fall from . . .

Mr. Hancock: And how the extremists ruined it.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Was it the right-wing ones or the left-wing ones?

Mr. Anderson: I am absolutely tickled pink, literally tickled pink – pardon the pun – that you would give me that opportunity. Basically, what happened is that they had governments that successively built in huge, massive entitlement programs, huge entitlement programs that slowly but surely the people could not afford to pay. They continued to raise taxes up, up, up, up again. They drove out business, couldn't afford to pay for the social programs. There became huge civil unrest. Obviously, there were a lot of different factors.

The point is that when you get into a situation where you let your spending run out of control, when you build in a group of social programs and infrastructure that you cannot afford to pay, it leads to, well, not only the downfall of economies, but it leads to civil unrest and a whole bunch of other bad things. We're not there at this point in Alberta, for sure. No one here says that we are. But if we continue down this road, that's where we're going.

Look at what is going on with our closest neighbour. These things are happening today. I have family – well, it's on my wife's side – that live in the United States right now. They're in Missouri, and it's not a happy place to be: double-digit unemployment, no real prospects, part-time work for the most part if there is anything new. I mean, it is bad news, and that is happening all over the United States right now.

We have got to get a focus here. I mean, what we should be talking about today is not approving, you know, a whack-load of spending. What we should be talking about today is: what are we going to do to get our province on track for the next 10 to 20 years, starting now, not starting in 10 years? That means controlling our spending, putting money aside and building that heritage fund so that the interest from the heritage fund can eventually decrease our reliance on oil and gas, nonrenewable revenues. Who knows? If we built it large enough, it might even decrease our reliance on income taxes, both personal and corporate, and as those came down – you want diversification? Start lowering your income and corporate taxes. That's diversification. That's where you'd get more business coming in.

Mr. Mason: Argentina is the question.

Mr. Anderson: Well, it kind of led into that.

Anyway, I think that's the discussion that we need to have. I hope that after this bill inevitably passes and this budget inevitably passes, we can start turning our focus immediately to the job of protecting the future for our kids and start thinking a little bit more about future generations rather than ourselves and the here and now.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much. I know that this hon. member often criticizes me that I don't quite understand because I don't have kids yet, but I do know this, Mr. Speaker: when I eventually do have kids, I want to raise them right here in Alberta.

This hon. member has criticized pretty much every government in North America for the amount of money that they're spending over the last couple of years. I want to know from this hon. member: if he's not happy with the United States and not happy with the Canadian federal government, with the amount of money that they're spending these days, where does he want to take his kids to raise his kids? I mean, this is what the governments are doing. This isn't something that's isolated to Alberta. That's my question to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Anderson: Well, the hon. member needs to clean his ears out. He always did have a problem listening. Never once did I say that about him not having kids. I don't know where he gets that from. I never said also that I didn't want to raise my kids in Alberta. You know, where he got that from, I don't know. What I said is that I'm worried about their future. I'm worried about what will happen if we continue down the road that we have continued down.

We've got to start setting an example, hon. member. It's our generation. It's the young guys and their kids and their grandkids that are going to get hammered with this bill. I mean, are you saying by your comments that what the United States is doing is the right way to go? Is that what you're saying?

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be able to rise and speak to this bill and comment a little bit about what has already been said and where we believe that things could be done a little bit better, a little bit differently going forward, comment a little bit about what has happened in the past, and maybe come to some sort of consensus in here as to what will make Alberta not only a better province a year from now, five years for now, 10 years from now but 40 years out.

I believe it was the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie who noted right off the top that the Alberta budget is a very large number nowadays: \$39 billion, I believe, is what were spending. By no small means is that a small chunk of change. A lot of that comes from royalty revenues; some of that comes from personal income tax; some of that comes from corporate income tax; some of that comes from user fees. There's a whole mix of things that we do in Alberta that goes to raise that amount of money.

There's even some of that money that has not been raised from those sources. What is on the books is \$4.3 billion in debt, and if you believe what some other people are saying in this House, the actual number in actual debt is closer to \$7 billion. I would agree with the hon. members who have spoken before that no one is accusing the government of falsifying the books, but there are ways of accounting that make things look rosier than they are. If you look at some of the debt that is acquired, it would probably be closer to \$7 billion. If you look at other debt that's in other areas, if you look at what is owed to the teachers on their liability, well, that's another \$6 billion or \$7 billion. You get the point, Mr. Speaker. We're starting to get to the point where things aren't adding up, where things are getting to the point where we're not able to live within our limits or live within the amount of money that we currently have.

If we talk about some of those things that have been talked about, let's go back to the estimates process, which – I will also follow the lead of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie – is a very interesting process and, I would agree for the most part, is a reasonable process set up to discuss various departments and to allow us to have a one-on-one conversation with the hon. minister about how the various departments are being run, what is going to happen in those departments in the coming year, talk about some of the programs

and directions that they're going to take Alberta in and what they're going to do for the Alberta people with the money they've spent.

I for one have mostly enjoyed those debates. You can learn a lot. You can get into some contentious areas. I think there's a learning process that goes on for both sides. I will say this: I don't believe it's in the best interests of the Alberta people to limit debates to three hours in certain areas. I agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that we may only need three hours for a department like Service Alberta that spends a relatively small amount of the whole Alberta budget. But is three hours reasonable to discuss I believe it was \$15 billion that we spend on health care or whatever large number it is? I don't know.

3:30

I know what other jurisdictions do. They allow the opposition members to take as much time, get as much detail out of the minister as they're able to and ask questions back and forth that, hopefully, lead to a better and more effective way for the opposition parties to understand what the government is doing. When the opposition parties understand a little better, it's helpful for us to do our job and more helpful to the Alberta people in the fact that they will know more about how their governments are running their various departments. I would suggest that maybe we have to look at those ways that other jurisdictions are currently running their debates, and maybe we could go to those types of formats. It doesn't appear that this has been an overly heavy legislative session, where we were forced to deal with a whole bunch of things on the agenda that needed to be done. This way it could have been facilitated, I think, in a very easy fashion, should we have wished to do so, and we could probably do that in the future very easily.

I also note in this little bit of a history lesson given to me by some of the members of my caucus who have been here longer and studied some of the budgetary process that if you look at the detail given, I guess, in the budgets in previous administrations here in Alberta, if we go back years ago, say, to the '70s and '80s, the type of line item you would get from a minister's department was much more detailed than it currently is. Just for those reading along, for instance, right now what we get for a line item in terms of the health budget says that X amount is being spent on health care this year in the province of Alberta. That's what we get. There's no more breakdown of where that money is being spent, what programs it's being spent on, what money is going to XYZ area of the province, what is being spent on, let's say, cancer care and, let's say, other care.

I don't know how to most effectively do that. Nevertheless, I have been told – and I am actually going to go review this stuff at some point in time – that the budgeting detail was much more complete in the good old days, if you want to call them that, where you were able then to ask your minister more detailed questions about various line items that were in their budget. At least, from the people I've talked to, that was much more helpful and led to a much easier time in understanding where money was going in the province and would maybe help both us and the government. Those are some things, hopefully, that we can work on in the future in this province.

I'd like to turn to some of the comments now that have been made on both sides on what we essentially have here, which is the either \$4.3 billion in debt we have or the \$7 billion in debt we have. Whichever number you choose to use, it appears there is a deficit, and it appears to be that if oil and gas prices stay where they are, that deficit would be a structural one. It appears that what we are doing to eliminate this structural deficit is to close our eyes and hope and pray that oil prices and natural gas prices will rise and will allow us to continue to spend in this fashion and go ahead and live in this way. Maybe, you know, I don't know if that's all that wrong. I

believe, following these energy forecasts, that that could in fact be true. But at the same time, we have to realize that budgeting on those things and even relying on those things happening is far from often what happens.

I think we here in Alberta have gone down a path that could be somewhat precarious. We have chosen, I guess, not to raise revenue although there was some speculation that that was going to occur. The means to do that would be either to raise income tax, which would have, I guess, some repercussions around. There was some talk about having an increase in liquor taxes, which got stymied. So we're not going to go down the path of raising more revenue. Fair enough. You know, in the zeitgeist of the time, or whatever it is, it is difficult for governments to do that, and I understand that.

At the same time, then, let's not kid ourselves. If we're not going to raise income tax and we merely rely on oil and gas revenues, we're caught in a box here of just simply snowing through these oil revenues. And, hey, guys, I guess we can look at ourselves and say: if they're coming out of the ground, let's snow through them as quickly as we can, keep things going as well as we can, and that's how it is. Fair enough. That looks to be like what we've done over the last 40 years. We've done that. We're essentially the lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada by a long way. Has that necessarily led to a diversified economy? Not from what I read, not if you believe what the experts have said. That hasn't led to a diversification of the economy. I would disagree with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere in suggesting that that is one of the things that happens. If you look here, what we have is that we're continuing to set ourselves up for snowing through these resource revenues.

Now, I think the way we have to do things in this province if we really want to get better is to, one, get on the savings plan. Let's face it. Everyone knows that, hopefully, we can save in the future. Hopefully, we can set up some sort of savings plan similar to what some oil-rich jurisdictions have, areas like Alaska, areas like Norway, and other institutions who haven't just simply spent every last dime that they brought into the coffers and said: we'll have a big party today and worry about it later. Because guess what? Despite what we think, that doesn't really work.

You know, this government has got to do one thing: realize that we have got to get on a savings plan and do it through having Albertans pay for more on their own or be honest with the people and say, "We're not going to do that; we're going to limit what we spend, only spend what we bring in and run things that way" or, in another case, simply ignore the fact and snow through the revenues. Those are the three options. We can choose to do those things. Herein going forward I think those are some of the things we need to wrestle with.

I appreciate that spending was put forward into health care and that most of our commitments to education were kept and those things. I believe those are two fundamental things that will help Albertans going forward. The two basic things a government should be involved in are making sure people are healthy and making sure people are well educated, so I applaud those budget decisions to do that. At the same time, I recognize that some other decisions were made to cut funding from the area of some of our social supports, some of the people who, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie said, may not be as likely to vote or may not be as likely to rock the boat.

We see some of the cuts to the hon. minister of housing's department, who I see over there – I had the privilege of sitting in on his debates – and some of the other ministries, I guess, indeed, that were being cut. Yes, those decisions have to be made, but those areas that got cut are a little less likely to rock the boat and got cut because of a revenue shortfall primarily made up of an oil and gas

boom-and-bust economy that we continue to ride up and down and go from the ebbs and flows. We find ourselves continually at this point seemingly every 20 years. We go from being very well off. . . [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Hon. member, that was some very good information that you gave there, and I was just hoping that you could expand on those last comments because I think that you were cut off, and I was riveted by that discussion.

Mr. Hehr: Well, actually I thank the hon. member for allowing me to continue, but despite him being riveted, I think I've pretty much said my piece, so I will pass it along to another member unless they would like to ask a question of me. There you go.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. Just a couple of questions or comments. This one always concerns me when I hear from some of the opposition parties talking about debt. My question to the member would be: when you write a cheque from your chequing account, just like we're drawing down our sustainability fund, and you've got cash in your chequing account, are you creating a debt? I'm having some real difficulty with this concept. We've created this fund, the sustainability fund, over several years to cover us off for times of low energy revenues, and we're now drawing down on that fund. How is that creating debt?

He commented that depending on higher energy revenues in the future is precarious and then touched on raising taxes, so I'm kind of wondering what taxes the Member for Calgary-Buffalo would suggest we raise. Is he looking at a sales tax or higher income tax?

He talked about savings plans and Norway. My understanding is that Norway has a 20 per cent sales tax, a 1 per cent net worth tax, among the highest corporate income taxes in the world, all in place to build this giant savings fund. Of course, again, you can't pass on this: they are a country. We are a province within a country that last year, I understand, transferred out something like \$20 billion into the federal system as part of our commitment to the country of Canada.

I guess, just to back up, my question would be: is drawing down on a cash surplus debt? Because I don't understand that. And I'm just wondering what sort of taxes the hon. member would suggest that we put in place if he's concerned about us counting on higher energy revenues on the future.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the hon. member for his question. I guess, you know, if we're looking at the true definition of debt, we wouldn't. We're not sustaining a debt because we have created a sustainability fund. But at the same time, I will point out that I don't know if we've been as diligent as we could be on moving forward on our Alberta heritage savings trust fund. We've had a trust fund here that has been stagnant for years and, in fact, is worth less than it was 25 years ago. So we haven't really moved forward on that.

If we're going to snow through this sustainability fund, like some people say, in the next two years – hopefully not, you know; hopefully, we can get through this without it – then, in fact, we are going to be at square one. So I would agree that temporarily, I

guess, we do have money in the bank to cover this, but like I said, that wiggle room is getting pretty precariously thin – okay? – and I understand that.

I guess you're asking me a pretty good question there on raising revenues. Let's face it. It's never an easy thing to do, but if I were in charge, and if I had a chance to look at the books, and if I analyzed all things and found ourselves in a structural deficit, the way I would honestly do it if we needed the money is go to a progressive tax system that went over and tried to design things where the wealthy in this province, say, people making over \$200,000, would pay progressively more income tax. I believe that is the way most North American economies are running. I believe that that's where the other provinces are going. I believe that it's a fair and reasonable way to go. You know, I'm fair with standing on that principle.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 14 seconds.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate on the bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Athabasca-Redwater I rise today to begin debate on Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I'm moving second reading.

These legislative changes are proposed to improve the processes involved with municipal elections. By way of background, Mr. Speaker, in a 2008 court decision the judge noted that the act is unclear about where a voter is to vote when they occupy more than one residence. A proposed amendment will clarify that when a voter has more than one residence, he or she may designate only one place of residence for the purposes of the act. In addition to the existing rules, the voter will determine one residence for the purpose of voting based on the following criteria: the residence address shown on the person's Alberta Registries identification card or Alberta driver's licence, the residence address where the person's income tax documents are addressed and delivered, or the residence address where the person's mail is normally addressed and delivered. This amendment will promote public confidence and integrity in the election process by requiring specific criteria to be followed.

There are also several additional amendments that would ensure that the new rules and requirements in the act are clear, practical, and workable. One amendment would clarify that a commercial service does not include services provided by volunteers who receive no compensation in relation to their time or services.

Another amendment relates to entirely self-funded campaigns. For these campaigns, which would be up to and including \$10,000, a bank account and public disclosure is not required by the candidate.

There's also an amendment that proposes to change the campaign contribution limit to \$5,000 per year.

Mr. Speaker, we're also proposing in this bill that the current provisions requiring that candidates' surplus trust funds be held by

the municipality will not come into effect until December 1, 2011. This amendment would allow time for candidates, municipalities, and election officials to comply with these new rules.

Another amendment I'd like to highlight is that a bank account for contributions from any person other than the candidate, like a corporation, trade union, or employee organization, is only required if the total amount of the contribution or contributions is greater than \$5,000. This amendment will avoid burdensome administrative processes for many candidates.

Lastly, there is an amendment to remove the requirement to have statements on campaigns of over \$10,000 audited.

In closing, I'd like to encourage all members to support this legislation. I look forward to the discussion that will ensue.

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

3:50

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This is an important piece of legislation because it corrects so many of the mistakes made in a private member's bill last session: Bill 203 from 2009. Although we'll reserve judgment on this until we've been through committee stage, I think that if it turns out that we're satisfied that Bill 9 takes care of the numerous problems in Bill 203, we'll probably on this side of the House be quite pleased to support it as we go on.

Certainly, on first glance it does take care of some of the problems. My hon. colleague who introduced the bill on behalf of the Member for Athabasca-Redwater outlined some of the changes that are being made. I think that those changes, on the surface at least, do make it much more possible for those people who plan to run in the municipal elections this fall to actually be able to somehow figure out how to do that and pay for it and report on it.

In initial checking around with the municipalities involved – and it tends to be the bigger municipalities, Mr. Speaker, who are most concerned about this legislation – their first glance at it is favourable as well. We will be checking further as we get deeper into debate about this. The issue, for instance, that campaign contributions do not include services provided by a volunteer who receives no compensation directly or indirectly: well, that's fairly important. I mean, the nature of a volunteer is no compensation. You know, that's a contribution in kind. That should not be something that anybody tries to put a dollar value on. That meets with the approval of people at the municipal level whom we've talked to.

Also, the point about waiting until December 1, 2011, to amend the timeline for provisions requiring that candidates' surplus trust funds be held by the municipality: it's important that that change has been made.

Now, interestingly enough, and we may get a little deeper into this at the committee stage, according to the government this amendment will allow time for affected parties to comply with the new rules. According to the people that we're talking to at the municipal level, what this should do is allow time for municipalities and organizations like the AUMA, that represent them, and the provincial government to actually consult about these new rules. In the time between when and if we pass Bill 9 in this spring session of the Legislature and a year from December, hopefully the consultation will result in some negotiations that perhaps change or clarify how the heck the candidates are going to access these trust funds before elections because that is not yet clear.

Now, I have one question that I would like to put on the record and get an answer to perhaps at the committee stage, perhaps even later on in second reading debate, on behalf of the city of Calgary.

That's the question about bank accounts. Just give me one second, if you would be so kind, Mr. Speaker, to turn to the appropriate page, which I believe is page 6 of the bill. Yes, it is. This would be section 2(1). The Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 is amended by this section. Under (2) section 3 is amended

- (a) by repealing the new section 147.2(2);
- (b) in the new section 147.3(1)
 - (i) by repealing clause (a) and substituting the following,

And I'll just read part of this into the record.

- (a) a campaign account in the name of the candidate's election campaign is opened at a financial institution for the purposes of the election campaign as soon as possible after . . .

And it continues on from there.

Well, the words in question here, Mr. Speaker, and what I want to get the question on the record about, are "a campaign account in the name of the candidate's election campaign." Now, it has been suggested to me, of course, that that's no problem for us at the provincial level. When we're running for re-election, we have constituency associations behind us, and those constituency associations have boards of directors. So when you walk into a bank branch and you say that you want to open a campaign account for the so-and-so — you know, put the name of incumbent MLA here — campaign, the bank won't have any problem with that because all the i's are dotted, the t's are crossed, and the paperwork is already in order.

At the municipal level, so it was suggested to me, this is becoming increasingly difficult to do, if not impossible, because municipal candidates don't have constituency associations behind them, don't have boards of directors, so the argument goes that they must open bank accounts in their own names rather than in the name of their campaign.

I'm suspecting here, Mr. Speaker, that the answer that I need to get back is probably just a clarification or an explanation of the wording in the bill rather than the necessity to change the bill. I suspect that the research has already been done, since this is a government bill, and that, in fact, at the municipal level it is entirely possible, and there would be protocol to follow, to open a bank account in the name of the candidate's campaign. The only thing that needs to be done is an explanation of what protocol is to be followed. The possibility exists that it will be more difficult for municipal candidates than it is for provincial or, for that matter, federal candidates, so I am going to need an explanation, a clarification around that question if I can.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Many of the proposed amendments to Bill 203 that are contained in Bill 9 I think are solid. They deal with such things as self-funded election campaigns that can include the candidate's own funds up to and including \$10,000 for the purposes of the candidate's election campaign and that that is not a campaign contribution, and the candidate is not required to open a bank account or file a disclosure statement. That applies to many, many municipal election candidates, especially in smaller jurisdictions. There's the clarification in section 147.3 that a candidate who accepts third-party donations does not have to open a bank account until and unless those contributions total in excess of \$5,000. The candidate is still required to file a disclosure statement.

There are other amendments that set out the process for when a campaign disclosure statement is required, what sort of information is required, what the timing is for filing the campaign disclosure statements, all that. These are all things, I think, that not only can

we live with, but they do go a fair distance towards clarifying and correcting some of the problems that were inherent in Bill 203.

Just to close, Mr. Speaker, as I say, depending on what others have to put on the record and what comes back in Committee of the Whole, we may be looking at challenging other aspects of this bill, or we may not. I don't know. We'll get to that in the fullness of time. As a general statement, I'd like to say that the sense that I am getting from the consultations that I've undertaken with municipal people is that we wouldn't even be here today debating Bill 9 if a proper process of consultation had been undertaken before Bill 203 appeared on the floor of the Legislature in the last session. That was Bill 203 from 2009. I'll go further and say that the same criticism has been levelled about Bill 203 this year, which has yet to begin second reading debate. That's the one about municipal franchise fees.

In both cases the feeling amongst municipal representatives is that these things, these pieces of legislation, these private members' bills, although there was consultation to a degree, kind of appeared without much consultation, without enough consultation. Now, I don't know and I'm not going to stand here and propose exactly what enough consultation looks like to municipal representatives although I will freely admit that it's much more difficult to carry out the level of consultation when you're bringing forward a piece of private member's legislation as an individual with a researcher or two helping you out than it would be if the Ministry of Municipal Affairs was undertaking legislation like these sorts of things.

4:00

I think that if we're going to be bringing forward private members' bills like Bill 203 from last year, like Bill 203 this year, perhaps we need to sit down as an Assembly and figure out a better consultative process so that private members can sit down, perhaps at predictable intervals with representatives from a cross-section of municipalities. Whether that's done through AUMA and AAMD and C or how it's done, I don't know; that's a topic for another debate. If we don't wrap our heads at this level around the notion of how we're going to carry out that consultation, I think it's a safe bet, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to continue to run into the sorts of problems that we had with a piece of private member's legislation that require, then, next year a piece of government legislation to go back and solve some of those problems.

I understand there was a unique situation this year in that Bill 203 got proclaimed before, perhaps, it should have been proclaimed, before some of the work had been done on it, and that that necessitated Bill 9. Nevertheless, we are going back and redoing some of the work that was already done, largely because it wasn't done fully and completely the first time around. Bill 9 will certainly take care of a lot of those problems, maybe all of them, but it's too bad that we sort of have to go over this same ground again.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the comments of other members of the Legislature on Bill 9 although I see from the instructions before me that those comments are supposed to come at another time. It says here at the bottom of my sheet that I am supposed to adjourn debate now, and we'll pick this up at another time. So I would move adjournment of second reading debate on Bill 9.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 13 on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, Bill 13 being the Securities Amendment Act, 2010.

Bill 13 furthers the work that Alberta has done in modernizing, streamlining, and harmonizing securities legislation over the past five years under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. This bill includes amendments to ensure Alberta assists Canada in meeting its international commitments that strengthen regulatory enforcement and that further harmonize the registration regime in support of the passport system.

I'd like to start with some brief comments on the federal government's move to a single federal securities regulator to put these amendments into context. Last July the federal government launched the Canadian Securities Transition Office to lead all aspects of the transition to a single federal regulator. This February Alberta filed a reference with the Alberta Court of Appeal to clarify whether the federal government has the authority to establish a federal securities regulatory regime under the Constitution. Alberta is also intervening in support of a similar reference launched in Quebec last summer. Alberta took these steps because this is such an important constitutional question.

This is not so much a disagreement on how to regulate securities. It's more about who should regulate securities, which goes straight to the heart of provincial powers under the Constitution. In fact, since 1932, the first time this issue came up, securities regulation has been a matter of provincial jurisdiction. We believe provincial securities regulation has served Alberta well and that it's in the best interests of Albertans to continue to regulate securities provincially.

Acceptance of federal authority over securities regulation under the federal trade and commerce power would have implications far beyond securities regulation. This could impact many areas that are currently considered to be provincial jurisdiction as matters of property and civil rights, including large parts of the financial services sector such as pensions, insurance, credit unions, and other provincial financial institutions. That's why Alberta is proceeding with its own reference and supporting the Quebec reference as well.

Moving on, the global financial crisis has heightened the importance of international co-operation and harmonization. Bill 13 includes amendments to assist Canada in meeting its international commitments in several areas. These areas include the adoption of a new regulatory oversight framework for credit rating organizations and the transition to international financial reporting standards, or IFRS, in Canada on January 1, 2010.

The proposed regulatory oversight framework for credit rating organizations was developed by provincial securities regulators as part of a world-wide response to the recent global financial crisis. The proposed framework is in line with international standards and is intended to strengthen the ability of provincial securities regulations to protect investors.

Under the new framework credit rating organizations must apply for designation and comply with a recently revised international code of conduct. Credit rating organizations will continue to be responsible for developing the methodologies and assumptions in the credit ratings process, but they'll have to make them publicly available to allow the market to test their validity. This will help us to better protect investors across Canada who rely on credit ratings when making investment decisions.

With the reporting on January 1, 2011, Canada will join over a hundred countries world-wide that have adopted IFRS. The proposed amendments will replace references to Canadian generally accepted accounting principles, or Canadian GAAP, with the new IFRS terms. IFRS is fast becoming the global language of account-

ing for public entities, making it easier to conduct business internationally and raise funds through easier access to global markets.

Increasingly Alberta and Canadian businesses operate and compete in a global capital market in which investors and regulators want the ability to compare financial information across borders. The move to IFRS will mean that our issuers' financial information will be readily comparable with companies in other countries. We must act now for Alberta companies to reap these benefits.

The remaining amendments are designed to ensure that our legislation continues to be harmonized, streamlined, and up to date. These include amendments to strengthen regulatory enforcement to provide a timely means of dealing with issuers that refuse to rectify, clarify, or explain misleading disclosure. This will be done by broadening the powers of the Alberta Securities Commission and its executive director to issue a cease-trade order in instances of faulty disclosure.

A further amendment will address an artificial distinction between costs associated with an investigation and those of a hearing. This will facilitate cost recovery in securities enforcement proceedings.

Finally, further amendments will support the registration reform initiative. Registration is the last significant area of securities regulation to be harmonized. These amendments will ensure that Alberta registration provisions are harmonized with registration provisions elsewhere across Canada.

Alberta was the first jurisdiction to enact many of the legislative requirements necessary to support the new registration regime that came into effect September 28, 2009. The new national registration rule streamlines, harmonizes, and modernizes registration categories and requirements across Canada, including a new indicator for when dealer registration is required and registration requirements for new classes of registration.

As a result of recent refinements to the new national registration rule, additional amendments will be required to ensure that the Alberta registration regime continues to be harmonized with other Canadian jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, these amendments will ensure that Alberta assists Canada in meeting its international commitments and will support Alberta's continued commitment to ongoing securities regulatory reform. I encourage all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support Bill 13.

I'd now like to move adjournment of the debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:10

Bill 14

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit on behalf of the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Blackett: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Transportation I'm pleased to provide some comments and move for reading Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill will amend the Traffic Safety Act. The Ministry of Transportation is not looking to change policy, just to make a correction. Section 162 of the Traffic Safety Act deals with the allocation of fines. The basic rule is that fine revenue will go to the Crown first and then be allocated. This has not changed.

Since late 2005 fine revenue has been allocated to those municipalities that pay for policing in their areas, the who-pays-for-policing model. Prior to the who-pays model fine revenue essentially went to urban municipalities for offences occurring in their areas and to some other areas such as municipal districts, Métis settlements, and

First Nation reserves if the offences occurred on their local roads. This is what we are looking to correct.

In 2004 the Highways Development and Protection Act was passed but not proclaimed until January 1 of this year. That act amended section 162 of the Traffic Safety Act, which simply updated its references. However, during the time between the Highways Development and Protection Act being passed and proclaimed, amendments to the Traffic Safety Act were made to introduce the who-pays-for-policing model. When the Highways Development and Protection Act was put forward for proclamation in late 2009, the 2005 amendment to the who-pays-for-policing model was overlooked, therefore reverting to the prior model based on geography.

This corrective amendment will reinstate the following. Where the offence occurs in an urban municipality that is required to provide its own policing for populations greater than 5,000 people, the municipality will get the fine revenue. Where peace officers are employed by a municipality, the municipality gets fine revenue from offences where those officers issued the ticket. The Ministry of Transportation is running reports to verify numbers. It appears that the impact of the unintentional change will be relatively low in the cities, larger towns, those with populations over 5,000, and urban service areas of specialized municipalities, again, with a population of over 5,000 people such as Sherwood Park and Fort McMurray. They already pay for their own policing and receive the fine revenue under either funding model, so that did not change.

Since the province has been paying the policing for smaller towns, villages, summer villages, municipal districts, Métis settlements, First Nation reserves, specialized municipalities, and the two large urban service areas I have already noted, they were not getting revenue since late 2005, excluding of course the municipalities that employ their own peace officers. We're working with Alberta Justice to determine what the impact has been.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Oberle]

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and speak to this bill called Bill 10, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. This bill attempts to widen the scope of the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act following the Supreme Court finding that it is, in fact, constitutional to file a civil suit to recover some of the costs of a crime. The bill also broadens the Crown's ability to file suit to reclaim costs and to take away the profits of criminal acts so that they cannot be used to commit further criminal acts.

Like I said in an interview a couple of weeks ago when this legislation was being brought forward, I appreciate this act. I believe it is moving in the right direction and this province is moving in the right direction in regard to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. There is no doubt that one can only applaud the civil forfeiture, or the ability of the government to go after criminals who have been able to garner income, garner property, garner wealth from their criminal acts. This act allows the Crown to restrain and seize the illegal profits and property of crime and compensate Albertans victimized by criminal activity. This was

recently legitimized by our Supreme Court of Canada in Chatterjee and Ontario. Like I said, I think it's a good thing.

Another thing I'd like to talk about also is that it allows the province to compensate more and different groups who are victims of crime. It allows the government to be able to make payments to groups who are working in crime reduction, who are working with victims of crime. It also extends the ability of this government to compensate municipal governments who have found themselves having to pay for the costs of criminal activity through whatever various deeds are undertaken. It also allows them to pay out funds to people who need to pay for various things. Like I said, by at least rectifying compensation to cities, it allows them to pay for things like drug cleanups and drug house cleanups and things of that nature, that were starting to add to the costs of city budgets and without access to this fund would have impacted their ability to serve their constituents.

Like I said, this is a good act, one that I fully support. It's another opportunity for this province to stand up and say that crime doesn't pay and an ability for us to go out and take the funds back from people who have gained wealth through illegal means.

I thank the hon. minister for allowing me to speak to this, and that's enough out of me.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and support Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. This bill will allow law enforcement the means to seize proceeds of crime through civil courts. Criminals are more organized than ever, and our law enforcement agencies need powerful tools to match. The roots of organized crime run deep, and we must do whatever we can to help our police enforcement agencies. Taking the assets of a drug dealer or a gang member is and should be a priority. The property seized will be put to victims' restitution and send a clear signal that not only will criminal behaviour not be stomachached, but the wealth generated will be taken away.

Mr. Speaker, as I travelled the province as chair of the safe communities task force, I heard heartfelt messages from Albertans across this province about how they felt that the criminals had more rights than the victims. To those unfamiliar with the criminal world, or the dark side, at the time of my travels there were 54 criminal groups identified, and you can bet that as I stand here on March 23, 2010, there are way more than 54.

Mr. Speaker, recommendation 8 of the safe communities task force report was to develop, enact, and enforce legislation allowing the province to seize money and property gained through the proceeds of crime and use these resources to fund victims' compensation, crime prevention, and crime programs.

4:20

Bill 10, under section 24, indicates:

44(1) Subject to the regulations, the Minister may make payments or grants from money that is paid to the Crown under this Act for any one or more of the following purposes:

- (a) compensation of victims;
- (b) programs that benefit victims;
- (c) prevention of illegal acts;
- (d) provision of compensation to the Crown or prescribed public bodies for costs incurred to protect the safety or health of persons or to protect property as a result of illegal acts;
- (e) other purposes provided for in the regulations.

My only concern with this, Mr. Speaker, is one word, and that would be “may” versus “shall.” While I’m not a lawyer, that one word makes a world of difference and gives the government the leeway on how the proceeds of crime can or should be spent.

Victims of violent crime strive to regain what was lost, either money or psychologically. Recovery from a violent crime can include time off work, meaning lost income, and in some cases victims can become disabled. Victim programs can offer help preparing for court appearances, preparing victim impact statements. The safe communities task force spoke to the importance of stable, long-term, three-year funding for community-based social agencies with proven outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 10 talks to what is important for Albertans. They want the bad guy to pay up and those who have suffered at their hands to be fairly compensated.

Mr. Speaker, I’m going to continue to listen to the debate on Bill 10 and hear what the rest of the members have to say about that. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to speak.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise in the House and speak to Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. I think many of us in this House have family, friends, acquaintances, people that we know, people that we care about that have been victims of crime. I think about some of the constituents that I’ve had the opportunity to consult with and talk with over the last couple of years. Of course, in Chestermere we had – what was that fellow’s name? The name escapes me right now. Anyway, he basically set up this huge Ponzi scheme, and many of my constituents in Chestermere were greatly affected.

An Hon. Member: It may have been Milowe Brost.

Mr. Anderson: Brost. That’s right. Brost was his name. Thank you, hon. minister, for that.

Many of my constituents were ripped off. It wasn’t just people in Chestermere, though. It was other people in Calgary as well. There are, obviously, lots of people who have been victims of various crimes. Just a few weeks ago I had a couple in my office who had been taken advantage of by what looks to be some sort of organized crime rip-off scheme. Then, of course, there’s violent crime. We all have constituents who have had to suffer through that, and many of us have had to kind of see the effects of that on them. Many of us have had friends and family that have seen first-hand just how damaging it is, not only financially but psychologically, to be a victim of a violent crime or a financial crime because of organized groups and the effect that that can have on people. It’s not a good thing; that’s for sure.

I commend the Justice minister for bringing this bill forward. I think it is a good piece of legislation on the whole. I have a few issues I’d like to see addressed or, I guess, a few concerns that I think it would be nice to have some explanation from her on, but in principle this is a very sound act.

What the passage of this bill would give to law enforcement is the necessary tools to seize proceeds of crime through the civil courts. Obviously, criminals have become far more sophisticated than they have ever been, and law enforcement, of course, needs the tools to match that sophistication.

Fighting crime is increasingly becoming a battle that takes place

against the financial infrastructure of the criminal underworld. Of course, proceeds of crime are not socked away neatly in a locker. You know, there’s not a big treasure chest of money and things that have been stolen anymore. Mostly, these proceeds of crime are often laundered. They’re often put into assets. You’ll see them in real estate. You’ll see them in tangible assets. It’s not the old money being hidden in the cave and then come back later and get it. It’s a very, very different type of threat that we’re working against right now. It’s become very sophisticated. Seizing these assets I think should be a priority for the government. The property seized I believe should be used to compensate victims of crime and to send a strong message that not only will the criminal behaviour not be tolerated; the wealth created, down to the last penny, will be taken back.

I had the opportunity of working with the former Solicitor General. It was a good time, and I learned a lot from him and his devotion to cracking down on organized crime. He brought forth a number of very solid, very good, effective laws and initiatives, not just laws but initiatives, that really, I think, have organized crime in this province on their heels quite a bit. So I applaud the job that he’s done, and I would say that the current Solicitor General has very, very, very large shoes to fill, literally as well as figuratively.

People who are not familiar with the criminal world may think the property in question that we’re dealing with here is just guns, drugs, flashy cars. But often the money generated by the drug or gun trade is used to invest in more mundane property that has a high volume of cash transactions, like a bar or a restaurant. This illegal money appears to come out clean, but that could not be further from the truth. In actuality, these assets stem from a tainted trail of violence and corruption.

This means that a method must be put in place for victims of crime to retrieve their property. All too often victims of crime are never made whole again. I don’t think this bill is going to make victims whole again, but it will give victims at least some small victory and some small amount of comfort and financial wherewithal to cope with the financial, psychological, and potentially physical effects of the crimes that they have had imposed upon them.

Grants under this legislation will be made available for victims of crime as well. Victims of violent crime, in particular, often struggle to recover what was lost financially and emotionally. Recovery from a violent crime can mean time off work, meaning a loss of income for extended periods, in some cases victims now paralyzed or on the brink of losing their houses.

Victims’ programs can offer help preparing for court appearances and victim impact statements, which are vital services in the pursuit of justice. They also help to provide financial benefits and the resources to seek restitution.

I do have some concerns about this bill that I would like the Justice minister to address at some point. The danger with any type of legislation, you know, when you’re giving strong powers to the Crown to enforce legislation such as this, is that there can be slip-ups. We have had a situation recently where there was a bit of a slip-up. Property is sometimes seized in haste under this type of legislation, which can create more victims in the process. So we have to be ever vigilant that we do not compromise the civil liberties of our people in the pursuit of our war against organized crime.

4:30

One issue that cropped up recently was with Patricia Thomson, who is an elderly woman in Calgary. She had her condo actually seized by the government when her son had committed a crime. He had used her address in a fraud scheme, but the property itself was never involved in the actual committing of the crime, and of course

Ms Thomson never had anything to do with it. This was a decision by Justice Alan Macleod, who rightly ordered the property returned to her. He did say that we need to guard against allowing this legislation to be used for fishing expeditions by police and law enforcement. So that's key. I think we all understand that, and I would imagine we're in agreement with that. I'd like to make sure that the Justice minister and the Solicitor General are aware that these things are happening and that they'll make sure that it's not being used in order to just basically go on a fishing expedition.

That's important for many reasons. I mean, it's important, obviously, because we don't want bad things to occur, but the assumption of innocence until guilt is proven is a very important part of our legal system. We just have to make sure that we don't find people guilty by association. So as long as we can make sure that that is taken care of, I think this bill will be worth supporting.

I think that one of the things – and I think where we would deal with it is in a bill like this – has to do with the surplus that is in the victims' fund right now. I know that there are some tricky issues that have to be dealt with there, but I really do think that we need to find a way to make sure that those funds are being used as much as possible. I don't think it makes a lot of sense to have a huge, massive surplus of these funds in place at any one given time. Having a big surplus means we're either spending too much on a program or we're not spending enough on it. We shouldn't just have it there. It's not supposed to really be a sustainability fund. I would suggest that those funds should be used to help victims or for victims' services.

I think of, you know, Airdrie, where the local MP, Blake Richards, has a hockey classic. He calls it the Wild Rose Hockey Challenge, Wild Rose as in the federal constituency. It is, indeed, wild rose country, that constituency, no doubt about that. That constituency puts on, basically, a fundraiser for victims' services. So we did that, and many hon. members in this Chamber participated, and we raised about \$10,000 for that cause. This year we want to raise \$50,000, and I would ask the hon. members from all parties that play hockey if they would sign up for that so that we could do a good turn.

But my point is that they are hurting for cash. They always are because there is just so much involved with victims' services. There are so many victims to help, and there is just never enough money to go around for those programs. I think that maybe we could look at using the surplus funds from that to help victims even more and to help the programs that assist victims. So I hope that's addressed and that we look at that.

However, on the whole, as I've said many times, I support this bill. You know, we have to make conducting illegal activities as difficult as possible, and this bill, though not perfect in my view, moves us definitely in the right direction so long as the minister ensures that those aforementioned issues are taken care of.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down.

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

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

Bill 11 Witness Security Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Drysdale]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege to rise and speak in favour of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act. This is legislation that will establish a provincial witness security program in Alberta in investigating and prosecuting gang-related crimes. It's increasingly difficult, especially in cases when individuals are unwilling to come forward and give evidence because they fear retaliation. Alberta's Witness Security Act will provide short-term protective services to witnesses who agree to give evidence; for example, in gang-related investigations and particularly homicides. This legislation will complement the federal witness protection program and address the needs of witnesses who require long-term protection and identity changes.

I think this is great legislation that has been brought in, and I think it comes in a timely fashion, when gangs are continuing to infiltrate Alberta. This will allow our police officers, our men and women out in the field, to use another tool to hopefully get gang members or even regular citizens to report crimes by people who are dangerous offenders, who may threaten and intimidate witnesses to criminal acts. It's my firm belief that that's probably happening out there in some cases. This legislation, hopefully, will go some way in stopping that intimidation process, allowing people to do the right thing and to come forward and give evidence on criminal endeavours throughout the province. It may also help some gang members turn over a new leaf by allowing them a way out of gang life, allowing them to be able to turn their back on criminal endeavours and start with a fresh slate.

It's good legislation. I'm glad that the Minister of Justice brought this in. I'm very impressed with the work the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti did to carry this bill forward, and I thank him for that hard work. I'm proud to support this bill in this government's continued battle against gang-related crime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act. I think this is a bill that's going to complement the current federal witness protection program by establishing a provincial program that's tailored to the particular needs, in my mind, of Alberta Justice. The legislation will allow the Crown and local police agencies to provide short-term security for witnesses who are feeling a little bit apprehensive about testifying in court.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, the Witness Security Act that's currently under the federal act works very well. I remember when I was in estimates with the Justice minister, and one of the questions I had put to her about this particular program was: who is going to pay for this particular act? At that time, if my memory serves me right, I recall her telling me that it was up to the police. I then said to the minister that whether the province pays for it or the police pay for it, it's still taxpayers' money. I mean, as a government we do give money to the provincial police force, and we also give money to the municipalities, who in turn will be paying for the police force. We were trying to get some costs in regard to what this would cost the province to enact this particular piece of legislation. Because it's new, I wanted to find out, you know, if the minister had any idea of how many people would be entering the witness program, if she had any idea who would be entering the witness program, to get some kind of idea of the resources that were required.

There's no doubt that we need to have something like this. I think

it is important that we do protect witnesses who've got some apprehensions or some concerns about going to court. You can tie that into gang-related activities, where you've got one gang member deciding that they want to testify against another gang member. The fear of intimidation amongst the gangs or organized crime is something that a particular individual who has decided to come forward and testify against another gang member, quite frankly, should be concerned about. One just needs to read the papers and see how they are taking care of another gang member when they don't like interference on their drugs or any of the trafficking or prostitution that they're doing. They simply decide to take them out in the streets, which, again, is a problem for the general public.

We support this bill and like what the minister is trying to do. I think she's done an admirable job in trying to do what's important to Albertans and bringing forward what needs to be done, especially when we're dealing with the issue of organized crime and gangs because, quite frankly, they're out of control in this province, and they need to be addressed.

What I think needs to be answered from the minister are some of the things that she's set up on the witness security co-ordinator, on the witness security panel. I'm sure that as we listen intently to the debate, she'll provide us with more information.

Is there going to be any collaboration between what the federal government is doing under their witness program compared to what we will be doing under our witness protection program? We have federal RCMP in this province that are here – and I don't know the exact numbers – that are dealing with some of this criminal activity, so where does the money kick in from the federal government? Where does the money kick in from the provincial government? Is there going to be a co-ordinated approach with the federal government in regard to this witness program, considering that we have specialized teams in this province who are under police jurisdiction that are going after these gangs?

I know that when I was the Solicitor General, I formed the IROC team, which is the integrated response to organized crime. I'm not sure if that's still in place, but it was hugely successful in going after these. I had the opportunity at the time to be able to see some of the takedowns, see some of their plans and actions on taking down organized crime. I know that the former Solicitor General was just as strong in carrying that forward. If I recall – and he may want to respond – I think he expanded it.

So I don't think that we need to have: this is the federal government; this is the provincial government. What is the federal government doing in their witness protection versus what the provincial government is doing in their witness program? Are we going to have a co-ordinated approach with our federal government? I think those are some questions that I would like to have answered to find out exactly what our responsibility is under provincial jurisdiction versus what the federal government's is under their federal jurisdiction. There is no question that we want to get rid of organized crime and gang-related activities, obviously, but for peace of mind for me I need to know exactly the parameters of what's going to be operated on.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down, and I'll listen to the debate. I look forward to the minister possibly in committee addressing some of those issues.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that

whenever we're talking about the justice system, we need to really take a second, close look and see: are we doing all that we need to do to ensure that the people of Alberta are protected in the best way possible? Too often when I go around speaking with Albertans, I hear the common complaint that we're always protecting the perpetrator and never the victim. Too often even witnesses fall into that category. They become the victims.

I'm pleased to speak in favour of Bill 11. We need to have the Witness Security Act, but on the balance of trying to look at justice – and I very much look at that as on the balancing scale, you know – it's supposed to be blind, and we want to make sure that we have full restitution to the victim. Here, though, with the Witness Security Act, one of my concerns is the length of time that we may have to protect a witness. We're concerned, and we need to do that, yet are we looking at strengthening or perhaps increasing the time that we need to have the victim protected from those that have perpetrated such crimes? Too often it seems like the time that the criminal has to pay isn't in comparison to the time that we need to protect someone. I think that that's another area where perhaps the dangerous offenders act – again, I realize that lots of this is federal, but we need to look at that. Why do we let someone out if, in fact, we still have to protect the witness or the victim in those areas?

Again, another concern. The added expense in order to protect a witness, over and above the expense of incarcerating an individual, is something else to look at. Really, what we want to ensure when we're protecting the witness – and, again, we do have to pay perhaps an extra price for that. We want to encourage people to come forward. It's critical in our system. Too often people are looking the other way; they don't want to be involved. They're concerned, you know, about what's going to happen to them if they get involved. This is a step in the right direction to say: "No. We as a society want to ensure that we will protect you. We want you to come forward. We want you to be a witness. We want to reduce the criminal activity and increase that by having witnesses that are willing to come forward." Too often it's very frustrating in our system that those who can and should provide witness will not come forward.

There are a few other areas. Again, I believe that this will help increase the effectiveness of police in their investigations, to have a tool now that's added to their tool box to say: well, look, you know, we can offer you this protection. Then they can give that security to people. It increases the ability of prosecutors to get the job done and put violent offenders, especially gang members, behind bars. That is an increased area that, again, we're just having reference to here in these other bills, that, you know, we're up I think from 54 to perhaps in the 80s now, one of the government members was saying. That's a concern. What are we going to do to step up the justice side in order to prevent these ongoing problems and the growth that continues to go in that direction?

I do believe that, again, this is an important bill. We're sending the message out there that we're willing to pay that price as taxpayers to improve our legal system and incarcerate those individuals that think that they can use the intimidation factor: if you do this, you know, I'm going to get you. Again, we have far too much of that going on.

4:50

There are just so many areas, though, that seem a little bit vague. What kind of investigative powers does the co-ordinator have? What resources will they have to carry it out in section 3 or section 4? That makes it a little bit questionable. Is this all that we need?

Again, with the bills that are coming forward here quickly, we don't have time to do all the research that we want to do. The government has the advantage of doing that research, but as

opposition members we need a little bit more time on some of these issues. I would hope that we just wouldn't bulldoze ahead and vote on this just because the government says: oh, we've got it right. I have a problem with that. Too often the government says that, whether it's on the royalty prices, whether it's putting a cap on tuition, whether it's looking at PDD individuals and saying that we need to reassess them. They say that they've got it right, but there isn't enough thought going into these. The question is: what happens? What's the domino effect? Are there unintended consequences?

I would hope that we just wouldn't push forward and vote on this, that we'd have a little bit more time to do some more research and investigate these things to see, "Are there some other areas that we need to prepare for?" rather than just jump into Committee of the Whole and not have the time to do that research. I would hope that we just don't go off to move on it, that we'd adjourn that debate.

I'll sit down and see if there are other members that have some concerns or some provoking thought that we should be considering on Bill 11. I thank you for being able to address this.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is important legislation. This is legislation that this government believes very strongly in. I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. There is no doubt that since this government was elected, we have made it a priority to address safe communities from a number of different angles. We've dealt with awareness, education, prevention, prosecution.

We have not shied away, Mr. Speaker, not only from the prosecution, but we have also ensured that where possible within our limited provincial jurisdiction we were very aggressive in developing legislation in partnership with our stakeholders, who include members of the public, communities, victims' groups as well as the police, who are very strong partners of ours, around pieces of legislation that will have an impact in terms of stopping gang violence.

The reason, Mr. Speaker, that we have this legislation now – and I would refer hon. members back to my comments with respect to this when I introduced this bill earlier – is that we have a relationship with the police where we have a great deal of respect and trust in the work that they do. What the police have told us is that while there is an existing federal witness protection program, it is very costly, and it takes a very long time to have a person admitted into that program.

Now, Alberta is changing very quickly right now. Criminal investigations with respect to organized crime and gang violence are pieces of work that need to be responded to in a very different way than they have been in the past, Mr. Speaker. What the police have found is that they have the opportunity now to identify people who might be prepared to come forward and provide evidence with respect to gang activity and violence, but very often these people feel that they don't have 48 hours, three or four days, to think about exactly what their choices are and what their options are.

What the police have told us is that they need to have a system in place that allows them to offer protection to individuals while they make up their mind about how they're going to conduct their affairs, Mr. Speaker. They need some time where they can have some protection and think about what choices they want to make with respect to providing evidence. This is usually with respect to investigations that are taking place in the heat of the moment.

Now, the reason that this is so important is that while we have a

federal program that is funded federally and we have provincial activity that takes place right now where the police do, wherever they can, work in co-operation amongst jurisdictions in the province, between the RCMP and other municipal policing forces, and they do very often now have the opportunity to assist people by removing them to a place where they are able to have a couple of days to think about what they want to do, they have not felt that there's been a system in place that actually acknowledges what the activity is, Mr. Speaker.

If we actually look to what this legislation does, it's putting in place a process that ensures that when people decide that they want to avail themselves of the protection of the police so that they can make a decision, there's actually an agency in place and there are people in place who can look to the situation, take a look at the nature of the crime that these people may be providing evidence with respect to, ensure that the people who may be witnesses have their rights protected within the system.

You will see in the legislation – and we can get to that in Committee of the Whole, which, I would suggest to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, is the place to ask some of these questions – that people who may decide to be witnesses have the ability to opt in or opt out of the program. What we're doing is taking it from what it has been, which is a function of policing operations in the province, into a system where a witness can take a look, make a decision, enter the program, and at their choice decide when they may choose to exit the program, Mr. Speaker.

There's a lot of activity that's going on in the province right now with respect to this. Police are always co-operating with RCMP, with other federal counterparts across jurisdictions to ensure that witnesses, where possible, have some protection while they make up their mind about how to testify or whether to testify. What this does is it provides clarity and a framework that is no longer completely in control of the policing agencies, which is what the policing agencies have told us will improve the system, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek under 29(2)(a).

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the minister for standing up and speaking to some of our issues. I think that what's important about democracy is clarity. Some of that clarity wasn't so clear prior to us getting up and asking questions. What the minister has provided is, of course, some clarity, and we appreciate that.

A couple of things. I was madly taking notes. The minister is exactly right that in committee we have the opportunity to take this one step further and ask. Again, some of my concerns – and I addressed that in the beginning when I spoke up – are about the federal legislation. The minister spoke very passionately that the reason why the federal wasn't working was because it was costly and it was the length to get into the witness program, if I understood her correctly. I guess I'm going to ask the minister again to respond to: what is she doing at the federal level to ensure that the federal government has this ability to be tough on crime? How is she going to move that forward and say, "Look, we know it's costly, and we know it's lengthy to get in"? Quite frankly, that's inexcusable if we're trying to protect not only Canadians but Albertans.

If a province like Alberta can come up with a bill or a law that is going to, one, have police identify criminals who are prepared to come forth and, two, the ability to provide them witness protection in a very short period of time, as she indicated, if they need protection for 48 hours to think about it, I am having trouble, quite frankly,

understanding why the federal government can't do that. It makes perfect sense and perfect logic to me.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I want to on the record thank the minister for standing up and speaking very passionately about how much she believes in Bill 11, the witness protection act. I appreciate, quite frankly, her clarity, and I look forward to some more debate when we get to committee. I think it's important as an MLA to be able to answer these questions for my constituents on why we're bringing this forward. I think the debate and the discussion have been, quite frankly, in my mind, very good. I just wanted to thank the minister. I'm sure she'll provide the answers in regard to the federal. I look forward to hearing more about how the police have identified, quite frankly, criminals in this province that have said that they're prepared to come forward but that they just want that little bit of a safety zone so that they can think about whether they're going to testify against their associates.

Thank you.

5:00

The Acting Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'd like to say, just to clarify, is that although this is legislation that is available to the police, if we are fortunate enough to pass this legislation, to protect people who may have been involved in criminal activity and are coming forward as witnesses, it is also a system that's in place for any person who may be a witness to a crime. So I wouldn't want this legislation to be characterized as legislation that's being put in place to protect only people that have been involved in criminal activity but any person who may be a witness and may need to make a decision about whether or not to provide information to the police to carry on with the investigation and the prosecution.

I know that very often people in this House and in this province have heard comment particularly with respect to the passing of federal legislation. I would carry that on to the federal witness protection program, that we do see that as these programs become bigger and are more national in focus that the legislation the federal government may want to pass with respect to a law and order agenda needs to impact more jurisdictions in more ways, that we as a provincial government are quite frustrated sometimes by the length of time it takes to do this. What we can do and what we continue to do is to urge our federal colleagues and to support them wherever possible in improving the system, passing legislation. The hon. member may know that I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity last fall to appear before a Senate committee with respect to two-for-one legislation to deal with some of these issues.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary – or Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Calgary? Oh, man.

Mrs. Forsyth: Hey. What's wrong with Calgary?

Mr. Anderson: Nothing is wrong with Calgary. I just don't want you guys getting any ideas that you're going to be annexing us or anything like that.

It's an honour to stand and speak in favour of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act. I also want to commend the Justice minister for bringing this legislation forward as well as the Solicitor General with Bill 10. I think that this government overall has done a very good job on the Justice file. I think we're moving in the right direction,

and I think that's something that as opposition we will continue to support.

We're going to have some differences on Bill 12, and we'll discuss those because as with anything, we can go overboard, but Bill 11, for sure, is a solid bill. Obviously, for the benefit of my constituents I'd like to speak to why I support this bill and maybe bring some interesting factoids to their attention. This act will complement the current federal witness protection program, which is interesting because the federal program was actually put in place in 1996. Doing research on this bill, I was just amazed that it took until 1996 to have a federal witness protection act, which is really mind-blowing. The one in the United States was brought in in 1970. It took 26 more years to bring in one in Canada. I don't know if that's because we're more safe up here from organized crime or if it's because we're a little bit naive or because our justice system was lacking through the '80s and '90s. I'm not sure. It's probably a combination of things.

It is good to see Alberta take a leadership role in this. You know, everyone has heard these stories. You hear them in the States from time to time where people will be witness to a crime, and they'll just stand around, and they'll not do anything about it, or they're afraid to talk with police. You see this all the time in some of the larger centres in the United States. I'm sure it happens here, too, where people essentially will be afraid. I mean, they will be absolutely petrified to come forward because they know that they will be marked men and women if they were to do that. What happens is that people's hearts almost become cold to some of the crime in those areas. It's almost a survival tool because they have to kind of become callous and cold to witnessing crime because it might drive them crazy if they care too much about it. So they kind of have to compartmentalize it and stick it on the shelf because if they were to come forward, they would die. That's often how it happens.

Even though we have a witness protection program in Canada and the United States, it doesn't mean that it gets used a lot. I mean, it's an expensive program. There are still situations where people are still afraid to come forward, so I'm happy to see that we're taking a leadership role in this. I will say, too, that there are all types of examples in the United States with regard to this program and how effective it's been. Obviously, our program here in Alberta is going to be a little bit different if this law passes than the one in the United States because we have our federal legislation.

Basically, the witness protection program came out of essentially trying to deal with the Mob in the United States, organized crime down there. Everyone has seen, of course, *The Godfather* movies and some of the things that happen there, where basically the government needed to prosecute these criminals, but they just couldn't find people willing to testify against the Mob. Surprise, surprise. You know, you have that classic scene in one of those movies where there's a guy who wakes up, and there's a horse head in his bed with him. It's scary, very scary stuff. That's why they introduced legislation, because of the intimidation that was going on and, of course, the killing that was going on of witnesses who wanted to leave the Mob and otherwise would leave the Mob, and they wouldn't testify against their former bosses because they weren't willing to take the risk.

Since 1970 7,500 witnesses and more than 9,500 witnesses' family members have entered this program and have been protected and relocated and given new identities via the U.S. Marshals Service. It has had a lot of effect, obviously, for those 7,500 people and their 9,500 family members because I don't doubt that many of those individuals would not have survived had they testified against their former bosses or would never have left and would have continued on in the crime. So this is an absolutely essential piece of Justice infrastructure that we need.

There is a problem we have in Canada, and it would be nice to see the Justice minister speak to this because she probably more than anyone else here would understand it because of the circles that she travels in with other Justice ministers around the country. There was a recent Italian mobster named Francesco Di Carlo. He admitted to the media several months ago that Canada was essentially known in the organized crime community as a bit of a safe haven for organized criminals. I mean, obviously, I don't know if we want to take the word of an organized criminal on whether that, in fact, is true. It does seem, though, that organized criminals are taking advantage of our lax laws in Canada on organized crime.

Obviously, a lot of this is not under the purview of the provincial Justice minister, so I'm not laying blame, but I really am curious to see what we're doing to alter some of this federal legislation. I really do believe that it needs to be stronger, that we do need some very low- or no-tolerance policies for organized crime. A lot of these guys we just kind of let run around. I mean, you look at the Hells Angels, you look at some of these other groups, and essentially they're out there, and they're kind of doing their thing.

5:10

We've tied up our police force and our justice system so much and made it so difficult to get prosecutions on some of these individuals or, once we prosecute them, to keep them in jail that it really has brought our justice system into a bit of disrepute. I wonder what the reasons are for that. Is it because our judges are too lax in their sentencing? Is it because our laws need more mandatory minimums and need to be tougher? Is it because we're not putting enough police resources into it? Is it because we're tying their hands with too much procedure and too many loopholes that essentially allow these criminals to walk free early?

The Justice minister talked earlier about the two-for-one sentencing and how that has been a big problem where people will get credit for time served. She has obviously talked a lot about addressing that issue. It would be nice to have a good discussion about some of the things that this government is doing to move that file forward, understanding, of course, the limits that they have. It being mostly a federal jurisdiction, there is very little that we can do as a province, but there obviously are some things we can do.

I wonder if it would be in our interest for the Justice minister to maybe put forth a kind of a plan or a blueprint for the type of justice system that we would like to see in Canada, just, you know, in your spare time, Minister. I know you have so much time. You put something together to that effect and then decide how we would like to arrive at this justice system. So figure out what type of provincial laws need to be changed, figure out what federal laws need to be changed, and really proactively pressure our federal MPs to change those laws.

I mean, maybe we could be a little bit more proactive with the type of justice system that we want to see in Alberta even though we're not in complete control of our destiny on that issue. I would like to see that. Hopefully, if we had a good enough kind of master plan of what we want our justice system to look like in the end, some of the reforms we would like to see, and we got other provinces, B.C. and Saskatchewan to start, to buy into this, it could be quite a powerful thing.

I know that the Justice minister is always talking about working with other jurisdictions. The previous Solicitor General talked about that as well, about working with other governments in pursuit of the same goals on defeating organized crime, gang violence, all those types of things. I think that would be good, but it would be nice to kind of have a blueprint for what success looks like. I mean, we have some recommendations from task forces on some of the things we

need to do, but I don't know if we really know what our goal is. Do we have any goals? What is it going to look like when we come out the other end? What are we trying to achieve? We seem to kind of sometimes run around and put out fires rather than have a proactive approach.

I'm assuming the safe communities task force fits into that. I'm assuming the Safe Communities Secretariat fits in there, but again I don't think the average Albertan, let alone the average member in this Assembly, really knows what the end goal looks like for the justice system in Alberta. Obviously, this is probably a piece of what the solution is, but I think that, again, we need to figure out what the master plan is.

Those are some of the things that I'd like to see answered by the Justice minister either now or in Committee of the Whole. Other good things about other – and I'll bring some of these questions up in Committee of the Whole, so I won't read them out here.

I do want to end by saying again that I absolutely support this legislation. I support the intent behind the legislation. I think that the Justice minister and the former Solicitor General have done an excellent job over the last two years in bringing forth piece of legislation after piece of legislation that is making our communities safer. Again, congratulations to them.

Those are my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, does any other member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to speak on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak very briefly to Bill 11. I think that the goals of the legislation are laudable. The protection of witnesses and particularly those who witness crimes committed by gangs is very important as intimidation is often the cause of people failing to testify and thereby preventing convictions of people who are criminals and dangerous people often as well. Strengthening the witness protection is an excellent goal, and I think that the bill does a relatively good job of doing that. This is, I think, something that is needed.

I note, Mr. Speaker, that previously a similar type of legislation was introduced in Manitoba and I believe also in Saskatchewan. I certainly think that there is a growing body of crime-fighting legislation in this province that was pioneered particularly in the province of Manitoba. Of course, the NDP government there has been a leader in this country in developing stronger legislation to increase community safety, to ensure that the police can do a good job, and to make sure that criminals are constrained from carrying out their activities with impunity. Because of the effectiveness of the program in Manitoba and probably, I think, in Saskatchewan as well, I think that this piece of legislation is a good one, and we're prepared to give it our support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any other members wish to speak?

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Bill 12 Body Armour Control Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Quest]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a great

pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act. On balance this is a good bill that looks to fight some of the criminal element that has been moving into Alberta. It's meant primarily to be directed towards gang members and individuals who are looking to, I guess, seemingly do nefarious deeds across this province with impunity and feel protected from doing their various deeds by wearing this body armour. What we've learned from police officers is that this has become a growing gang symbol that both identifies and serves to be almost a little bit of a machismo sort of thing. They wear it to strut around and throw their nose up at authority and to almost enhance their reputations in the community.

5:20

I also say that on balance it is a good thing because there have been some rumblings from some civil libertarian groups as well as some elements of the criminal defence bar that suggest that this bill is too much of an infringement on civil liberties in the fact that people should have a choice to purchase this body armour, that they should be allowed to buy it, and it should be within their own purview to purchase this stuff and to wear it to protect themselves. I understand those arguments. Still, on balance I believe this bill does more to protect society than it does to erode our civil liberties. In this instance I am not too worried that this is going to do anything to bring down the democratic state that exists here in Canada. You know, one never knows. One has to be on the lookout for encroaching on that civil liberty. But in this case I do not believe that we have that much to worry about.

You know, this bill also gives police another opportunity, another investigative tool. If they find an individual who has this stuff on and they don't meet one of the exemptions, that leads them to believe that this is illegal. They can continue their investigations. They can use this tool as a further means to isolate known gang associates from their communities.

I appreciate this bill and the object of the legislation. It's going to make it more difficult for gang members and other criminals to possess and obtain this body armour. The legislation will allow police to perform search and seizure activities when they believe there will be probable cause that an individual is in possession of this body armour. That's a good thing.

The legislation will still allow individuals who have a professional reason for possessing body armour to have and obtain it. We're talking about some of our security guards, some of our police forces, some of the other individuals who are involved in dangerous activities. I think it allows them a legitimate purpose to have the body armour. I think that's a good thing that we can do.

There was a sense when seemingly jumping to the question phase of this legislation a little earlier – you know, I think I understand why it is there, but there is an exemption for individuals who, merely by the factor of owning a gun permit, are given an ability to, I guess, possess this body armour. Although I understand, I go: there are other ways to identify a gang member a lot of times, criminal records and all those sorts of things here. For a person to order a firearm, a check has to go through many of these things that would weed out gang members. It just seemed to me to be a little bit of a one-off just to have that point-blank exemption.

If there were some of those more valid reasons – I understand people who are hunting. I've heard now from hunters who want this when they're out hunting. Maybe it's the Dick Cheney rule. You know, when you're going out, swinging a bunch of wild turkeys with your buddy, it's better to have body armour on so you don't get shot in the behind. Maybe this is good. Maybe that's why we have the Dick Cheney amendment here. Maybe that's what it is: to protect our hunters from themselves. It was just sort of like some banter

going around in the office, you know. But on the whole if I get some clarification on that, I think it's good legislation.

Actually, I thought the three bills that were brought in here – bills 10, 11, and 12 – were moving in the right direction. I think it keeps us on the offensive on some of these things. The minister is working, seemingly bringing in a lot of things that the police want, which is a good thing. If we can make some changes to the way policing is done and work with the police officers to eradicate or try and limit gangs and crime in our society, I think that is a good thing.

So I'll leave that one question out there. It's a fairly good bill. It was an honour for me to speak on it today, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to add a few comments. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

I actually received a call a couple of weeks ago on this topic from a constituent of mine who lives not far from me. This person was a gun owner, and I fully support the rights of responsible gun owners. He had indicated that he was worried that he would not have access to this. I took some minutes to explain to him what the problems were that we were having with gangs, in particular in the city of Calgary, how these gangs would actually go and wear this body armour almost as a way of taunting other people, almost as a way of status.

I also explained to him that the legislation in British Columbia was very similar, if not identical. He actually understood exactly where I was coming from on this issue. I think that it's incumbent upon all members to go and explain that we're not trying to go and deny someone his civil liberties, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has talked about. Rather, we are actually trying to reasonably curtail the activities of organized crime, the activities of gangs. This is not the be-all and end-all, Mr. Speaker; rather, it is a piece of the puzzle.

I want to just talk briefly about a particular situation that happened in my constituency. We all know of the murder of Keni Su'a and several other people at a restaurant on 94th Avenue and Macleod that happened on January 1, 2009. That really opened up my eyes to the fact that gang activity is not just a downtown issue like in the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's constituency. It's a matter that attracts all attention and demands vigilance throughout all facets of our province, not just in these downtown areas.

I represent a suburban constituency, and we had murders right there, just blocks from where I live. It really shakes a person up, specifically, what's going on. This is a piece of the puzzle, and I wanted to commend the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for introducing this, but I also want to issue a challenge. Where that gang shooting happened on 94th and Macleod is on the border between the constituency of mine and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I appreciate a lot of his comments about crime and justice, many of which I completely endorse.

This is something, clearly, that goes beyond party lines. I am agreeing with a member of the Liberal caucus on this as well, so I'm hoping that I can work with the Member for Calgary-Glenmore just toe to toe on this issue and to do what we can to stamp out gang activity in the city of Calgary and in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, hon. members, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce today in the House somebody I've known most of my life, somebody that was my political adviser in high school as I ran for prime minister of Lester B. Pearson high school. I must say that we succeeded, Mr. Speaker. Our party was the new world order based on the world wrestling federation, at that time the most popular movement. That adviser is none other than Robby "Rabbit" Ravinder Hundal. I would ask Robby to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Legislature.

The Acting Speaker: Next speaker. Anyone wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 12 Body Armour Control Act (continued)

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, right after I just said all these nice things about the Justice minister and all the great legislation that she's bringing forth, I'm going to say that I totally disagree with this next bill, Bill 12, the body armour act.

You know, it's a difficult balance that you need to create in society between fighting crime and maintaining civil liberties. There's a very delicate balance, and you can really get it out of whack if you start going down a certain track. This bill does that. I know that, obviously, the police are asking for this, and I respect that position. I respect that they want that. The police also asked for the gun registry. They're in favour of that as well. We always want to make sure we're giving the police, our men and women in uniform, the tools that they need to do their job and to keep us safe, but we can go over the line, and this bill takes us over that line, in my view.

5:30

We just fought as a province for years along with other governments to repeal the long gun registry, and the reason we did that is because we found that it was a completely ineffective tool for keeping guns out of the hands of criminals. All it did is implement a very onerous and wasteful bureaucracy on your average farmer or gun owner. There was just no reason for it. It didn't take guns out of the hands of criminals, so it was a huge expense and for nothing in return.

This bill essentially does the same thing as the gun registry. You cannot own body armour unless you have a permit. [interjection] You know, it's funny, the Education minister making light: who wears body armour? I actually know a couple of women that do when they go for walks. It's actually true. It's not Kevlar, but it's a stab-proof vest that they use. They're worried, of course, of being taken advantage of and being stabbed. These are people I know, so there are people that do it. If the Minister of Education doesn't know anyone, I guess that's the way it is, but some people do use this.

I guess my point is that, you know, we were so against the gun registry here because of how unnecessary it was and because it did infringe on our civil liberties and the rights of gun owners. We were against that, and that's actually a weapon you can use to hurt somebody, a gun. I think that's pretty clear. We're going to,

essentially, make it illegal to own body armour, which you cannot use as a weapon. What are you going to do? Throw the body armour at somebody? No. It's not a weapon. It's a purely defensive piece of equipment that you can use.

This, I believe, is an infringement on our civil liberties. This goes too far. We have the right in our society to protect ourselves; that simple. In Canada we have a little bit of a different way of doing it than the United States, where they've kind of taken it to the nth degree. We have bans on handguns, and that's good. We have these other things, but there is still a line there. We still have civil liberties here with regard to the ability to protect ourselves.

Now, people say: oh, well, criminals go into bars or gangs go into bars, and they wear these vests, and that just intimidates people. Well, okay. If somebody is caught with a vest while they're involved in a crime, when they're assaulting somebody, when they're involved in a drive-by shooting or whatever it is, or they start a bar fight and they have this on, sure. Put a penalty on that. Increase their sentence by two years. Make it something that aggravates the offence, whatever. You can do that. But you don't ban protective vests from the average citizen. It goes way, way, way over the line.

What are we going to? Just because someone gets intimidated by something, we're going to ban it? Like, the Minister of Infrastructure has got that big beard on, and that's kind of intimidating. Are we going to ban big beards in bars? I mean, come on. It's silly. You know, somebody comes in with a shirt hiked up here, and they're showing off their muscles to everybody. That intimidates somebody, so we're going to ban that? I mean, it's just juvenile to do this.

Ms Pastoor: That sounds nice.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. That would be a good thing. We would never want to ban that – right? – hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Anyway, I do think it is absolutely going over. You know, you're taking a sledgehammer to this when all you need is a fly swatter. It just doesn't make sense. I think that this government needs to think that through a little bit. There are people that this does affect. These are not the types of people that are going to come and march on the Legislature Grounds because some of them are embarrassed that they use the stuff, that they use the equipment, the protection. Some of the people have privacy issues. They don't want to say: I wear a knife vest out. This isn't as small a number of people as individuals in this Assembly might think. So that would be one thing.

In fact, you know, it's funny. The person who invented Kevlar was actually a pizza delivery man, if you can believe it, by the name of Richard Davis in the 1970s. While delivering pizza, unfortunately, tragically – well, it was good that he survived this – he was attacked, and he ended up killing his attackers. There were three of them. He actually had a gun with him and ended up shooting them. I don't know. For whatever reason it was – I would assume because he thought that that was not a very good thing to have to be forced to do – one of his solutions to that was establishing a company called Second Chance. He started it out of his garage in the 1970s, and since then he's manufactured these vests, and they've saved thousands of lives of police officers and other people through the years. The very inventor of this invention did it because he was attacked in a public setting randomly, so he went about and did that.

You know, there are some pretty rough areas in some places in Calgary, in certain areas. If somebody wants to go for a walk and walk their dog and they're worried because they think they might be targeted for whatever reason, should they not be able to wear that type of protection? What's wrong with it? There's nothing wrong

with it, and I think that to ban it – I mean, it's like the gun registry, too. Did the gun registry cause criminals not to have guns? Do you think that a gang member is going to go and register his Kevlar vest? I mean, come on. He's not going to register his Kevlar vest. Why would he do that? [interjection] Exactly. He's not going to do it, so this is just a total bureaucratic waste of time.

An Hon. Member: Soft on crime.

Mr. Anderson: That's right, hon. member. I am soft on crime. Exactly. That makes a lot of sense.

You know, it absolutely goes beyond the line. Let's start bringing things back to where we are discussing what we should be doing that's really going to stop crime. For example, why don't we start talking about – oh, I don't know – mandatory minimum sentences for some of our offences in this country? We're talking about it. Well, let's actually do something about it, okay?

An Hon. Member: That's federal law.

Mr. Anderson: No, it's not all federal. There are mandatory minimum sentences we could do here for certain offences. I'm thinking of drinking and driving, things like that. After you do it five times, maybe you should get some kind of minimum mandatory sentence for that, okay? There are things that we can do. [interjection] Again, the Education minister doesn't seem to know how serious drinking and driving is, which is a little alarming. We'll definitely have to talk about that.

Going back to the subject matter of the bill. I'm assuming that's why you're on the edge of your seat. I think that we've got to realize that self-defence is a basic human right, and having a defensive piece of equipment – I mean, what are we going to do? What if people start wearing helmets into bars? Are we going to say that you can't wear a helmet because it protects you in a fight? There are so many different things that you could say that you could apply this law to on other pieces of equipment. It doesn't do the job. It will do nothing to help the safety of Albertans, nothing whatsoever. All it will do is waste money, and it will cause ordinary citizens to have to go through getting a permit and all that sort of thing: do I fall under one of these exemptions, blah, blah, blah? That's all it's going to do. It's just going to annoy people, and it's going to cost money.

Sometimes I feel I have to wear a Kevlar vest after being in here every day. I mean, it's tough. Sometimes I'm worried. So we all fear for our safety once in a while, Mr. Speaker, and we've got to make sure that we protect that basic human right.

5:40

The money, too. Setting up any kind of permit system costs money. I don't know how much this permit system will cost. If government is involved in it, I'm sure it'll cost a lot. Whether it's \$100,000 or \$1 million or \$2 million or \$3 million, let's spend it on more police officers, or let's increase the number of ICE teams that we have battling child pornography. I mean, let's use the money in a way that's actually going to help protect people, that's actually going to help protect children and real individuals. You know what this is? This is a let's do something to look like we're doing something law. That's what it is. You know: we've got to bring in a law and order agenda; we've got to do something that is impressive. So they bring this in, and it's just painful to watch.

Mr. Hancock: It's painful to listen to.

Mr. Anderson: Well, you can leave. You're welcome to leave,

Minister of Education. There's nothing keeping you here if you don't like what you're hearing.

What I would say, too, going back to that earlier argument that was yelled across the way, is that we can actually spend this money improving our laws here; for example, drinking and driving. Yeah, it's a Criminal Code offence. It's also an offence under our traffic laws. That's where you could actually do something provincially with mandatory rules and requirements to cause people to rethink some of their actions. Doing this just absolutely will have no effect whatsoever.

You know, I would challenge. I would say: can somebody explain to me on that side of the House how this is any different from the gun registry? Just what's the difference other than with one you can shoot someone and kill them, and the other one is a purely defensive piece of equipment? What is the difference between asking someone to register their long gun and asking them to register their defensive vest? Are you in favour of the long gun registry? Come on, Minister. You know you're not. So why on earth would you be in favour of a bill like this, which is essentially setting up a long gun registry for safety vests in Alberta? There's no reason for this whatsoever.

I look forward to some of the questions. I know that the Minister of Education is probably raring to go with some questions. But I absolutely will be voting against this bill. I think it's an infringement against civil liberties, and I think that there's no reason why the average person shouldn't be able to protect themselves using a stab vest or bulletproof vest or anything like that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it funny that earlier on in the afternoon this member got up and was so concerned about what a bad province this was going to be if the government just kept spending money and money and money. I'm just wondering because, you know, it's going to have a huge impact on the future of his children. I'm just wondering if he's less concerned about the amount of money that the government is spending as opposed to some of the stuff that's happening on our streets as far as gangs that are shooting each other.

I'm not sure this member honestly understands why these members wear these bulletproof vests. They don't wear them to intimidate anybody. I don't think a bulletproof vest intimidates anybody. They wear them because they go out there and they shoot and spray bullets everywhere in an attempt to kill each other. Unfortunately, we see a number of examples where innocent bystanders are hurt. I'm wondering: how does this jive? You're talking about wanting to make Alberta a better place for your kids. Tell me: wouldn't this make Alberta a better place for your kids to have this in place so that these guys couldn't run around spraying bullets everywhere and killing innocent people?

Mr. Anderson: That was probably one of the most illogical arguments I've ever heard in my life, but I will attempt to address it. Mr. Speaker, absolutely, we should have . . .

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (continued)

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[The voice vote indicated the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Goudreau	Ouellette
Benito	Groeneveld	Quest
Bhullar	Hancock	Sandhu
Blackett	Horne	Sarich
Campbell	Jablonski	Sherman
Denis	Johnston	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Lindsay	Vandermeer
Elniski	McFarland	Woo-Paw
Fawcett	Olson	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Pastoor
Boutilier	Mason	Taylor
Forsyth		

Totals:	For – 28	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 12
Body Armour Control Act
(continued)

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Anderson speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, there are three minutes left under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Anderson: I notice that the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill is talking a lot about kids lately. He brings them up a lot. I'm wondering if there's something on his mind. He keeps bringing those things up.

You know, what he has to understand is that correlation is not causation. I think it's funny that he would say that outlawing, essentially, or permitting bulletproof vests is going to somehow stop people from spraying bullets at each other in gangs. I mean, I don't understand how on earth he makes the leap there.

You know, hopefully, one day if I want to have more kids, I'll have a daughter. If that daughter was going out for a jog or out for a walk and she wanted to wear a stab vest or something like that, how would it make it better for me to make that more difficult for her to get that vest? I don't understand what the correlation could possibly be between those two, between making Alberta safer and effectively making a vest registry. I'm completely clueless.

Obviously, the hon. member would like to see the gun registry kept in place because, surely, that would help with guns. I mean, those are exactly the same arguments that you hear from the Bloc Québécois and the Liberals. You hear those exact same arguments in favour of the gun registry that you're hearing in favour of this bill. The only difference is that a vest isn't dangerous to anybody, and a gun is. That's the only difference between the two. I think that should answer the question regarding that. We should just be increasing the overall penalties that we impose on people for using those in a crime. That's where we should be focusing our efforts.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it is now 6 o'clock, and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

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Campbell
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Tarchuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Blakeman
DeLong
Forsyth
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MacDonald
Quest

Standing Committee on Community Services

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Horne
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Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney

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Benito	Kang
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Griffiths	

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

Issue 23

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend of mine, His Worship Alan Hyland, who is seated in your gallery. Mr. Hyland served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. He was number 497 for 18 years. He was first elected on March 26, 1975, and re-elected in 1979 and 1982 for the constituency of Cypress. He was re-elected for the constituency of Cypress-Redcliff in 1986 and 1989, and he served until 1993. That same constituency is now Cypress-Medicine Hat, which I have the honour to represent. Mr. Hyland is also currently the mayor of Bow Island. I would like all members to join me in welcoming Mr. Hyland once again to our Legislature.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special guests on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, as she is out of the House today. I would like to welcome the grade 6 class of Mills Haven school, and I'll read into the record the parent volunteers and the teachers. We have two teachers, Mrs. Irene Kolomijchuk and Mr. John Murphy. We have parent helpers Mrs. Sandra Chomyc, Mrs. Roxanne Miskiw, Mrs. Corinne Wiseman, Mr. Neil Ganske, Mrs. Jackie Francis, Mr. David Hauf, Mrs. Jenn Matz, and Mrs. Christine Maletz. Please join me as I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly students from the Abbott elementary school, located in my constituency. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Adele Edmondson and Nicole Christian, and parent helper Cheryl Johner. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I am pleased to introduce to you and through you 15 students here from R.J. Scott

elementary school, which is within the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. They are here today to observe what's going on in our Legislature, and they are sitting, I believe, in the public gallery. They are accompanied by their teacher, Miss Robyn Davies, and I would ask that they now stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you a good friend and a prominent member of the community, Mr. Radhe Gupta, president and CEO of the Rohit Group of Companies, seated in the members' gallery today. At the Canadian Home Builders' Association's annual awards of excellence the Rohit Group was recognized with many awards, including the most prestigious Edmonton home builder of the year. The Rohit Group is also known for being very active in building affordable housing units, as seen in the Greenview community. He is joined today by his wife, Krishna Gupta – please rise as I call out your names – his son Rohit Gupta with his wife, Neelam Kainth, as well as associates Russell Dauk and Dennis Mack. They're good constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud as well. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly two gentlemen who have been very active volunteers in the pursuit of promoting safe and environmentally sustainable recreational trails and trail use in Alberta for all user groups, from hikers right through to snowmobiles. Their vision is to provide the opportunity for people to view and enjoy Alberta's unending beauty and natural landscapes through responsible trail development and use. I would ask them to rise as I introduce them: representing the recreation trail user coalition, from the constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar, Mr. Brent Hodgson; and representing the southwest trails advisory council, from my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, Mr. Glen French. I ask the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to be able to introduce four great Camrose volunteers and community leaders who are seated in the members' gallery. They're here today to have lunch with me to discuss the Bailey Theatre project, which is the restoration of Alberta's oldest performing arts theatre. I'm going to be making a member's statement a little bit later about this theatre, but right now I'd ask that they all stand as I call their names and remain standing. They're the president of the Bailey Theatre Society, Dan Olofson; vice-president, Ross Shuman; director, Gerry Piro; and architectural adviser, David Roth. I'd ask that they receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour today to rise and introduce some wonderful constituents and dear friends of mine, the first of whom is Joginder Brar, who is a resident of the fabulous constituency of Calgary-Montrose; as well as Mr. Lakhvir Singh Brar, who conducts business in Calgary-Montrose; Mr. Jatinder Singh Tatla; Mr. Satish Narang; and Mr.

Harjinder Ahluwalia. They have risen already, and I'd ask all members of the Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two brilliant young students from the University of Alberta. The first is Kevin Tam. He is the outgoing president of the University of Alberta Conservative Association. The second is Adam Risling. He is the incoming president of the U of A Conservative Association. These two young men are fourth- and third-year political science students with aspirations of careers in politics and possibly becoming Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I'm hoping that one of them will take my seat, and then there will be another one of them who will need another seat. These students are our future leaders, hoping to bring change and inspiration to the people of Alberta. With young people like these two gentlemen, our future is bright indeed. I encourage all members of the Assembly to listen to them because they might replace them one day. I'd like the members to give these young people a warm welcome, and I'd ask Adam and Kevin to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40 Members' Statements

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

Lauren Woolstencroft

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is a very proud moment for us. I rise to recognize the recent accomplishments of the daughter of a former Legislature Building staffer. Dorothy worked in Premier Lougheed's office from 1975 until 1979, when she and her family, Mark and Frank, relocated to Calgary. Two years later Dorothy's daughter was born. She was missing her left arm below the elbow and both legs below the knees. Dorothy says that her daughter got her prosthetic arm at six months. "It was always said to us that if she thinks of herself with two equal arms, that's how she'll grow up. The same with her legs. She grew up with that idea. She's very strong." And Dorothy Woolstencroft's daughter Lauren surely is.

At age 14 Lauren started skiing. In 1998 she joined Canada's para-alpine ski team, winning over 50 medals, including eight World Championship titles. In recent weeks Lauren Woolstencroft has been a media hit. Twenty-eight-year-old Lauren triumphantly scored five gold medal wins during the 2010 Vancouver Paralympics. Despite what many of us may view as a challenge, to Lauren her powerful spirit has shown us all that it can be done.

Mr. Speaker, I stand to give recognition to a tremendous Paralympic athlete and offer heartiest congratulations to Lauren Woolstencroft. This is a proud moment for this Assembly. To Dorothy and the entire family: we commend you for your support in Lauren's life accomplishments. Best wishes, Lauren. Maybe we will see you in Sochi in 2014.

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

Bailey Theatre Society

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This coming Saturday is World Theatre Day, something that probably a lot of us didn't realize. Theatres across Alberta have been a vital component of their communities for many, many years, and Camrose is no

exception. I can remember as a kid spending a lot of time in the local theatre, the Bailey Theatre. Besides watching movies, we did stuff like lick on suckers and try to stick them to the screen and dropping popcorn from the balcony. Then there was always going out on a date.

The Bailey Theatre was originally called the David Theatre. It has been an institution in Camrose for over a hundred years. It is actually Alberta's oldest performing arts theatre. In its early days it was home to vaudeville performances, silent movies, and in 1935 it had its first talkie. It continued to be an integral part of the community during the war years, providing entertainment and dances and so on. However, it kind of fell on tough times in the mid-1990s, when a multiplex opened in town. Eventually, it could no longer compete and was forced to close.

But there has been a dedicated group of people working to restore this theatre for years, and they are getting closer. The Bailey Theatre Society is a nonprofit society formed in 1996, and they've been working hard to open the doors again. Due to their tireless efforts this oldest performing arts theatre in Alberta may soon have a new lease on life. It's an Alberta gem, not just a Camrose gem. When it opens, it'll be a tourist destination, and beyond that it will again be the heart and soul of the community.

I want to thank the people who've been working so hard to make this a reality. I'm looking forward to attending many performances there myself, and I invite all of my colleagues to come to Camrose and have a look.

Thank you.

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

School Closures

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fifteen public schools have already been closed in Edmonton since 2002. Almost 7,000 student spaces have been eliminated. Enough already. This afternoon I ask again that the Edmonton public school board halt all actions to close the five public schools in Edmonton's central neighbourhoods that they are contemplating voting on closing next month.

There are two reasons for my request. First, a proper assessment of the new census data collected last year by the city of Edmonton has not been done. This data reveals an increase in the number of preschoolers residing in our city. We have seen an increase of over 9,200 preschoolers, or a 30 per cent increase, in the last four years. The conclusion that must be reached is that there will be more students in the very near future, not less, and not all of them live on the edge of the city.

Second, the province is finally making changes to the flawed utilization rate. These changes could be announced on May 3, less than three weeks after the planned vote on these public school closures. Why use a flawed utilization formula, which penalizes the very schools under threat of closure?

Citizens have asked me directly what they pay locally and what we pay together across the city in education property taxes. For instance, locally Capilano district pays annually over \$1 million in school taxes, but they could lose their school under the Edmonton public school system. Edmontonians last year paid \$316 million in school taxes, an increase of \$55 million, or a 20 per cent increase, in the last five years. Taxpayers cannot understand with these increases why it is necessary to close more public schools. In fact, many are considering as a form of tax protest supporting the separate system.

Thank you.

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

Fraser Institute Elementary School Report Card

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fraser Institute has just released its 2010 report card on Alberta's elementary schools, which rates and ranks schools' performances primarily using grades from standardized achievement tests. This report has elicited applause from some but skepticism from others as to the usefulness of these rankings. Obviously, some schools do better than others, and that's for a number of differences. We cannot just simplify our approach to outcome measurement.

However, it is my personal opinion that this report card is not an end in itself but a beginning of a process that should lead us to ask some very important questions about education in our province and in each individual school no matter whether they're at the top of the rankings or at the bottom. In fact, I believe these questions will be different for each individual school in its unique context and bring to light much broader and substantive information about what works and what doesn't work in our schools and what success looks like for each individual student. Facilitating a comparison is not a bad thing if we maintain perspective. It can help schools and school boards with their decision-making, and it can help students and parents as well.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the many schools that attained a high standard, particularly those in the Calgary region, which comprise 66 per cent of the top 5 per cent ranked schools. Of particular interest for me was the Capitol Hill elementary school, which is located in my constituency of Calgary-North Hill, which was ranked number 9 out of the 642 schools across the province. This is quite an achievement, that could be shared with school staff, teachers, students, and parents. I will not apologize for offering my congratulations to them for their hard work and commitment to academic excellence.

Mr. Speaker, overall this report card suggests Alberta is providing leading-edge education for our children. Again, we should not apologize for that. I applaud the Fraser Institute and similar groups in Alberta that contribute to policy dialogue that provides us food for thought and valuable insights into important issues and an opportunity to celebrate our successes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Honeybee Industry

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the importance of Alberta's honeybee industry. I want all Albertans to understand how vital this industry is to Alberta's economy and to our quality of life. You may ask: what's all the buzz about? The honeybee is considered a keystone species. We eat the food they produce, we eat the food they pollinate, and we eat animals that also depend on the plants they pollinate. Some sources suggest that up to 70 per cent of global food crops depend on the honeybee.

In Alberta our honeybees not only help to feed us; they feed the provincial economy. In 2009 Alberta's industry generated nearly \$45 million in honey production. In fact, we are Canada's largest honey producer. In terms of pollinating canola, clover, and hay, the value is over \$350 million.

However, as important as this industry is, it faces some serious challenges. Unusually cold conditions, mites, and disease threaten the survival of colonies across the province.

But there is good news as well. Alberta's beekeepers and the Alberta government are working together to ensure the long-term success of this industry. This government is studying the causes of winterkill, developing a honeybee pest surveillance system,

introducing an integrated pest management system, and developing effective treatments. In addition, the bee industry has access to several business risk management programs that meet their unique needs. I encourage all beekeepers to participate in honeybee production insurance, the AgriStability program, and AFSC's new winterkill insurance program, the first of its kind in western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, our government will continue its efforts to protect the health of our honeybees and the beekeeping industry. I encourage all Albertans to consider the importance of this key industry when they enjoy their next meal because the success of our agricultural sector and the nourishment it offers owes a lot to the humble honeybee.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Role of Auditor General

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We believe the Auditor General has done everything in his power to be effective and appropriate in his role. A report written by a former deputy minister of Executive Council was distributed this morning, and given the statements in this report, it's hard to believe it's anything more than a partisan attack advocating for the Auditor General to be muzzled. To the Premier: does the Premier agree with the claim in the report that in the last six years the Auditor has overstepped his mandate and impinged on government's policy-making role?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I haven't read the report. I don't know what document the hon. leader is referring to. All I ask is an opportunity to look at it, and I can comment further on it. I certainly haven't seen it, and I'm not quite sure which body put it out.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we'll table the report today. The report blames the Auditor for the government's failure to act on his recommendations. Does the Premier also blame the Auditor General for his government's failure to act on recommendations?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, I'm not sure what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about. The report: we'll have a look at it. But it's written by someone that's not a part of government, not an officer of the Legislature, nor a member of Executive Council. When people leave this office, they're certainly open to their opinions.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'm asking the Premier for his opinion.

Again, Albertans deserve a strong Auditor that ensures accountability rather than being a puppet of the Premier. Will the Premier commit to expanding the role of the office of the Auditor General as opposed to what is being recommended, to reduce its role?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, I can't respond to something I haven't seen. Again, this is a report written by someone who has retired from government. There are many authorities, different think tanks that put out reports just about every second day, and I'm not going to be commenting on all of them. I'll have a look at the report and see what the report says.

Speaker's Ruling Item Distributed to Members

The Speaker: The report in question was provided to my office by a consultant to the University of Alberta who was doing a special report for the department of economics, as I recall. He asked as a courtesy if I would provide it to all members for their information. The author is not related to any agency of government. He did it for the University of Alberta.

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

Pharmaceutical Benefit for Seniors

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, when questioned on the new seniors' pharmaceutical plan, the Premier responded that they're still working on the details, details of a plan that was announced in 2008, changed in 2009, will be implemented in three months, but is still a confused mess. To the Premier. At an income level of \$24,000 seniors begin to pay premiums that total almost \$400 annually. Does the Premier agree there is a program in place to assist those fixed-income seniors that will soon have to pay another premium they cannot afford? Is there a program in place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have, if not the best, one of the best seniors' supports programs in the country of Canada. We will continue to support seniors with respect to prescription drugs, eyeglasses, dentures. We do provide other programs in terms of supporting seniors with improvements in their homes, whether their hot water tank goes or a furnace. They can all apply, you know, as low-income seniors for support. Those programs will definitely continue.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier. Seniors still do not know whether they have to opt in or opt out of this program. Which is it? Or do the details still need to be worked out?

Mr. Stelmach: I know that the present policy is in place, and that is supporting seniors. I believe something like 80 per cent of prescription drugs are covered by the taxpayer. About 60 per cent of seniors are supported through various programs in terms of the cost of their pharmaceutical needs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These changes are going to end up making private insurance companies more money because now they can drive up their rates. How is giving Alberta seniors the choice between paying the government more or paying the insurance companies more a real choice?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. Leader of the Opposition is making a supposition, a prediction that's not based on fact. We will work through these details in time.

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

Economic Diversification

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night David Emerson, the chair of the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, suggested Albertans should be content to be hewers of wood and drawers of

water. From Aberhart to Manning to Lougheed, past Premiers have worked hard on economic diversification with report after report on the benefits. An Alberta Liberal government would be implementing many of these recommendations. Why has the Premier abandoned the long-standing pursuit of economic diversification?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just before I answer the question, that is a misrepresentation of what was said yesterday by Mr. Emerson. It's too bad, again, misrepresented here in the House, a person that many Canadians look up to, well experienced in the business sector, and then to have his words misrepresented here is, well, certainly not the way we do politics in this province.

With respect to diversification, if the hon. member would just look at the whole speech, read what ideas are coming forward in terms of dealing with the huge economic global shifts and what we have to do in terms of adding value to our natural resources, it's not simply just taking a two-by-four and converting it to a door jamb. There are other things we can do on the productivity side to improve our competitiveness.

Dr. Swann: That's what we're suggesting, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's workers are some of the best trained and educated in the world. Don't they deserve better? Don't they deserve better than foraging for other countries' benefits?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that was said by Mr. Emerson is that he was commending Alberta to look to international and national experts in various fields to look 10, 20, 30 years ahead and see what we must do over the next few years to prepare for these huge global economic shifts. As I said, sometimes it's not politically advisable to do that because we might have to look at long-term policy changes to make sure that the best workers, the safest workers that are here in Alberta will continue to have jobs well into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier commit to confirming economic diversification as a basic tenet of Alberta's development and to taking real action?

Mr. Stelmach: It's already started. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is one step in that direction. In order to attract investment from other parts of the world, we must be competitive not only to reach out to more people working but also in terms of the investment that's necessary to drive the diversification in this province.

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

Funding for Special-needs Foster Children

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Premier accused opposition members of politicizing the issue of children in foster care. As a brother to a formerly orphaned sister and as someone who has personally assisted family members with caring for foster children, I take exception to this Premier's insinuation that holding this government accountable for how they are protecting children is somehow out of line. To the Premier: will he commit to Albertans that he will make it his number one priority to clean up what appears to be a very serious problem in the ministry of children's services?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, I don't accept the insinuation by that member of what he said. I was very clear yesterday. There were

further comments made in the media and in the news conference yesterday in terms of when the member heard about this and when it was brought to the floor of this Legislature. All I said was that it's totally inappropriate to have people, foster parents and in this case children with autism, agonizing three, four, five days before this matter was brought to the House. That is not appropriate. You can still bring it up in the House in question period. You can hold news conferences. You can do everything you want, but advise the minister of what's happening there because it's not fair to the foster parents of this province.

Mr. Anderson: To the Premier: given the minister of children's services has said that she had instructed her staff not to cut funding for foster care, which she says was ignored, will he or the minister table that order and disclose any disciplinary action taken against staff on this issue so that this House and Albertans can verify the minister's version of events and be assured that action is being taken to better protect children in foster care?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the front-line staff I have great confidence in Children and Youth Services. With respect to the management my understanding is that the CEO has tendered resignation and will be pursuing other things in terms of opportunities.

Mr. Anderson: To the Premier, last question: will he commit to Albertans today that before this government considers cuts to those who care for our most vulnerable kids or to the disabled or to the mentally ill or any other highly vulnerable Albertans, he will first roll back his own salary, his cabinet's salaries, his chief of staff's bloated salary, his massive office budget, and cut the hundreds of millions in corporate welfare handouts proposed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member I already last year said I'd be reducing my salary by \$12,000; every cabinet member, \$6,600. In terms of the bonuses, that has been eliminated. That's over \$40 million. As per Members' Services we have not accepted the average weekly earnings for the last two years. That has been held down. All those savings have been accrued. I will say one thing, though. There were never, ever any cuts to the services. That is inappropriate. In fact, the budget has been increased close to a million dollars, \$910,000, so the statement made by that member is absolutely irresponsible.

Children and Youth Services Budget

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we have just learned that the CEO of region 6 of Children and Youth Services resigned today. This comes two days after government blamed staff for cuts to foster care and several weeks after government subjected region 6 to an effective rollback of 6 per cent. To the Premier: will you admit that it's your government's refusal to accept responsibility for the unavoidable consequences of your budget cuts that has created the crisis we are dealing with now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are no budget reductions. In fact, the budget has been increased by \$910,000.

Ms Notley: Now, notwithstanding this Premier's failure to understand that it is actually the role of opposition to shed light on matters the government wants kept secret, given this government's fantastic claim that the children's services ministry can absorb \$34 million in

cuts without affecting front-line services to children and given that this has been shown repeatedly to be false, why won't the Premier accept responsibility and admit that no matter how many staff he blames, children in care cannot be properly protected at the same time government cuts funding?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, yesterday I was very emphatic during the news conference that any hon. member – government side, opposition – can bring anything forward to the Assembly. That's not the issue. But to keep it – keep it – under wraps, knowing quite well that this information was given to that member, and holding it secret for five days and agonizing families needlessly is not appropriate. Like I said, just go out and ask the parents. Would you like to sit and have that information and keep people under that agony for five days and then raise it here in the House? You still could have raised it here on Monday. You could have had five news conferences during that period of time, but you should have notified the minister immediately.

Ms Notley: I'd like to raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Now, given that the Premier and his minister remain willfully blind to how a policy to reduce child support actually impacts defenseless children and given the Premier's penchant for blaming outsiders for exposing the incompetence of his insiders, why won't the Premier set an example of responsible leadership and commit to protecting every dollar that is currently funding kids and families served by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to protect and support children of this province in the care of the government. There are over 9,200 children that are under the care and supervision of the government. I can tell you one thing. At the end of the day any report or suggestion that we have cut the budget is not true. In fact, every member is free to have their own opinion and also have their own version of the facts. But at the end of the day the budget has been increased by \$910,000, so it's totally inappropriate to say that we cut the budget.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I've got notice that you want to raise a point of order. Will it be about preambles?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Residential Building Codes

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the 18 months, one and a half years, that this government knew sprinklers should be on balconies, in attics, and crawl spaces in multifamily housing before they did anything about it, over 20,000 housing developments were started in this province. We all know what happened in British Columbia when they had frenzied growth and inadequate building codes: a billion-dollar repair bill to fix leaky condos. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that Alberta was experiencing one of the highest levels of multifamily housing starts in 27 years and the government failed to strengthen building codes at that time, what liability is the province now facing for this government's lack of action?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, previously we had some of the strongest and best building codes of any other jurisdiction. The additions and the changes that we've done, again, were two years ahead of any other jurisdiction as well. I'm very proud to indicate that we have the best building codes in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought this was question period, not storytime. The fact remains that those building codes: you sat on the changes for 18 months.

B.C. provided interest-free loans to fix their shoddy construction. Will this minister enact a similar program for condo boards to upgrade their buildings to improved standards?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are looking at some of the causes of those activities. At this stage I can say that we're not looking at providing any financial assistance towards renovations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then what is this minister prepared to do to keep insurance companies from holding condo boards hostage in Alberta if they don't retrofit their buildings to match the new regulations?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, it's always difficult to go retroactively. Our new building codes are meant for new construction, and as we move forward, we're going to have stricter and tougher standards. We're not going to retroactively look at that. We had done that with the fire alarms and found it extremely difficult to retrofit buildings even to accommodate that portion.

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

Health Facilities Infrastructure

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A Calgary newspaper has raised concerns recently about the physical condition of our health infrastructure. Sure enough, our own government's Infrastructure business plan states that the condition of health facilities is expected to decline in the next year. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. How can you claim that the maintenance of health facilities is well funded when your very own business plan is forecasting a decline?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, taking a long-term strategic approach to our infrastructure planning is what Albertans expect of this government. We are using internationally recognized standards to evaluate the maintenance needs across the province, and this helps us measure our facilities and be able to plan ahead. We need to ensure that our capital plan funds are invested in the proper areas. The health facility maintenance is well funded . . .

The Speaker: Maybe we can move on.
The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: with 2 per cent of health facilities in poor condition should my constituents be concerned about the condition of health buildings and, in particular, Calgary hospitals?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in order to have the best infrastructure in North America, we need to measure the condition of our facilities, and we're doing exactly that. We previously had nine separate health regions which used different evaluations for those buildings. The methodology varied. What we have done now is

taken all of those buildings into one system, an international system, and we have consistent information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: what is the go-forward for the next few years, and are we being responsibly proactive in addressing our maintenance challenges?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we are acting very responsibly by ensuring that the maintenance of our health facilities is well funded. Because of our maintenance investment we're projecting that the condition of our health facilities will improve. This is a goal for our government. It is an evaluation, and we expect that 95 per cent of our health facilities will be in good or fair condition. That is a very positive direction.

2:10

Grizzly Bear Protection

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Endangered Species Conservation Committee has now recommended for the second time that the grizzly bear be listed as a threatened species. This comes as no surprise to anyone except, possibly, the minister. The status report, complete with a DNA study paid for by the taxpayers, is finished. The committee has made its recommendation. There are no more excuses to delay action. To the Minister of SRD: why won't the minister take the necessary steps to save the grizzly bear?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that we are. In fact, we will take the opportunity that has been presented to us now by the receipt of the information from the endangered species committee. We will have an opportunity for all of our government colleagues to take a look at that information and determine the appropriateness of our actions following that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that answer. With that answer are you saying that you'll be listing the grizzly bear as a threatened species?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I said was that I'm in receipt of the report, and we are going to look at the report. The government and government members will have an opportunity to also look at the report, and then we will make the appropriate decision at that point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A similar report was given in 2002, when the science backed the same sort of information this one has given you. When can we expect a decision from your government, then, on if your government will follow this recommendation to make the grizzly bear an endangered species?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, for the third time, I am in receipt of the information, very well done. By the way, this has been going on for a number of years, back to, probably, the late '90s. I have the information, and government members will have an opportunity to advise me with respect to what will be the appropriate decision we will make at that point.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, my first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Many foreign workers who are working temporarily in our province want to stay permanently. What is your office doing to help them become permanent residents of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't blame them; I think anybody who comes to Alberta would love to stay in Alberta.

We're working very closely with the federal government. Right now our government has issued about 4,000 certificates nominating workers, so approximately 10,000 Alberta temporary foreign workers have been allowed to stay here in this province.

Mr. Benito: Back to the same minister. Being a proud immigrant to this province myself, I can understand why a temporary foreign worker would want to stay here. Can you provide clarification on who gets to stay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'm an immigrant, too. The jury is still out on whether I'm a skilled or unskilled worker, but I guess that remains to be determined.

Number one, they have to have an employment contract or secured employment in this province, and for a foreign worker to stay, they have to meet all of the requirements set forth by the federal and provincial governments and meet all the criteria. But employment is the number one prerequisite, and obviously there has to be a need, economically speaking, for this employee to stay.

Mr. Benito: My final question is to the same minister. Are all foreign workers currently working in Alberta eligible to apply for permanent foreign residency under the Alberta immigrant nominee program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, not all, Mr. Speaker. Number one, as I said earlier, they have to have full-time employment. That is a must. They also must fall into the skilled or semi-skilled category. The skilled category would include individuals like pharmacists, accountants, engineers, and plumbers and welders. Semi-skilled are individuals working in the food processing and hospitality industry, truckers, and others. Those are the two large, overarching categories that they must fit into.

Funding for Postsecondary Education

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has been playing word games with information about this government's funding for universities. Well, the game is up. The province's cuts to the University of Alberta will be public in the next few days. To that minister: why hasn't the Minister of Advanced Education been honest with the public and openly told people that the government's funding for the U of A is going to lead to serious hardships?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I take exception to the insinuation that I haven't been honest with this House. That is entirely not the truth, and the hon. member should probably retract that statement.

Dr. Taft: Well, since the minister has already been briefed on the U of A's budget, will he now have the guts to tell this Assembly how many staff positions at the U of A are going to be lost because of this government's cuts?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the University of Alberta's budget, when you remove prepaid amounts from the previous year, when you take the new funding framework plus the EPE that was in there last year, is at a zero base budget from what the granting program was last year. The hon. member is quite aware, as I think it's been widely reported in the media, that there are other, extenuating circumstances that have affected the U of A's budget. Quite frankly, we fund about 63 to 64 per cent of what the operating budget is at the University of Alberta. The hon. member, I'm sure, knows this.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, the word games continue. The facts will be clear by the weekend. Given that this minister knows that enrolment at the U of A is going to be cut because this government has failed to keep its word, how many student spaces will be eliminated at the U of A this fall, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the growth at the university, as per the previous meetings I've had with the provost at the university, is going to be slowed. The growth: that is not a cut; it's slowing down the growth at the University of Alberta because of the economic condition that we're in. We look forward to the years to come to renew the type of growth that we've had in the province, second to none I would add.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government announced that construction would begin on the Cameron Heights interchange. The traffic congestion on the southwest section of Anthony Henday Drive has been a source of ongoing concern and frustration for my constituents and for all Edmontonians and Albertans who use the ring road. My questions are to Minister of Transportation. When will motorists finally see some relief from the gridlock on Anthony Henday Drive?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the province is delivering on its commitment to complete the Edmonton ring road by 2015. I'm pleased to say that construction on the Cameron Heights interchange will begin later this year and that it will open to traffic in the fall of 2011. That removes the final set of lights off the Anthony Henday and makes sure it will improve traffic flow and safety for all of our motorists.

Mr. Xiao: My second question is to the same minister. With the construction already under way building interchanges at Lessard Road, Callingwood Road, and Stony Plain Road, is there a concern with adding yet another construction zone on the Henday at Cameron Heights?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, our contractors have to follow very strict rules on safety standards and keeping traffic moving through construction zones. We appreciate the patience that motorists in Alberta have during construction, and we believe that the small delays will yield large gains. As the Premier has said, investment in infrastructure is critical to our economic recovery, and as the Minister of Transportation I would like to . . .

The Speaker: I'm going to recognize the hon. member.

Mr. Ouellette: Okay.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the minister that, you know, this is a great problem in my constituency. While my constituents are enthusiastic about these new interchanges, they have also expressed a concern over the noise coming from the ring road. My final supplemental is to the same minister.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have raised the question.

2:20

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think he was talking about noise. The noise levels on the Anthony Henday are below all of our levels. The department measured the sound levels near the homes on the southwest section, and the levels are below the provincial guidelines of 65 decibels. These levels are also expected to remain there for the next 20 years, and this member darn well knows that that's the way it is.

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

Residential Addiction Treatment Funding

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was a member of the government, I had the privilege of chairing the Alberta Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. One of the key principles behind this task force was putting a top priority on children, youth, families, and communities. The very first recommendation was to increase the number of treatment beds for alcoholism, drug addiction, and dual diagnosis of both mental illness and drug addiction. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Since the Premier has agreed to implement all of the recommendations from the safe communities task force, why are you limiting the addiction treatment room and board fees to only six weeks?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this member is speculating about what I may be doing. I have not indicated that we will or will not be limiting. However, I am in consultation with our minister of health. We want to make sure that Albertans who require this treatment will receive it. Keep in mind that this ministry only pays for room and board in treatment centres, not for the actual medical treatment of addictions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't understand that addiction treatment takes months to help someone, not a few weeks.

What is the minister doing to resolve the funding questions, as he alluded to, between his department and Alberta Health and Wellness?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister understands it very well. This minister also understands – and I find it surprising that a member of that particular political party wouldn't – that I have to live within the parameters of my budget. It sounds like it's a spending day on the other side. We are proud in supporting Albertans who need help. We are paying for their room and board in residential rehabilitation facilities, but obviously there has to be a limit on how long an individual can stay in a rehab centre.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, it's not about spending. It's about doing what is right for the people of this province.

Since people suffering from addictions need structure and certainty, when will this minister give the agencies and clients the funding they need?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, spending is spending is spending. When they're asking to spend, it's doing the right thing. When I'm spending, they're saying that we're spending too much or spending like drunken sailors.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting Albertans who are recovering from addictions. We are paying their room and board. Obviously, there has to be some form of cap on how long a person can stay in a rehabilitation facility. I will be working with the minister of health to make sure that the limit is adequate for individuals to recover and become productive members of our society.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Education Property Tax

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Page 68 of the fiscal plan for Budget 2010 states that the province of Alberta will collect in education property taxes \$1,592,000,000. My first question is to the minister of finance, please. Does the amount to be collected, \$1,592,000,000, include the \$199 million collected by opted-out school boards?

Thank you.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the answer to that specific question, but I'd be happy to get the answer to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the hon. minister of finance was an elected Senator-in-waiting, and now I can see with that answer that he's not selected as the Premier-in-waiting.

The Speaker: Is that your question? You don't have a preamble. The hon. minister.

Mr. MacDonald: Given that \$69 million more in education property taxes . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise, I recognized you about 20 seconds ago.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, first of all, in response to the first question, on page 128 of the estimates documents the \$199 million that's collected by the opted-out is clearly not part of the \$1.6 billion that's collected on the property tax. Clearly, page 128 of the Education estimates would show that to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. To the Minister of Education, I believe. Given that \$69 million more in education property taxes will be collected in the 2010-11 fiscal year as a result of a new development, why are we failing to live up to our five-year contract that was negotiated with the teachers of this province?

Mr. Hancock: Nobody is failing to live up to the five-year deal that was negotiated. The deal has been implemented through 63 school boards, making agreements with 63 school locals. We went to arbitration on a disputed clause in the section when Stats Canada decided to change the way they formulated the calculation of average weekly earnings. That's been resolved. We have indicated to the school boards that they will be funded for the full 5.99 per cent increase that resulted from that, and as we go forward, I've indicated to the school boards that we'll be working with them to meet the needs of that contract over time but not specifically in one year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Catholic School Funding

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents place a very high importance on Catholic education, feeling that it instills the values which they want their children to grow up with. However, the Minister of Education is now talking about revising and even replacing the School Act. My first question is to the Minister of Education. What assurance can the minister give Albertans that we'll continue to benefit from Catholic education?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course they will. It's a matter of our provincial constitution that minority rights education is there. That's been exhibited across the province with respect to Catholic school education in many, many jurisdictions. I've been asked this question a number of times by school trustees. I've assured them over and over again that we respect choice in education, that we don't have any intention to change the constitution of Alberta relative to that right, and that there will be Catholic education. Instilling hope, respect, dignity, and humility in young people is a task for all educators but particularly true for Catholic educators.

Mrs. Leskiw: My first supplementary question is to the same minister. How can the Catholic school boards expect to be affected by the changes in the School Act?

The Speaker: Is there a School Act before the House, or are we speculating about the future here?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's an appropriate speculation given that I have advised stakeholders and the public of Alberta. We've gone through the Inspiring Education process, and one of the outcomes of that process will lead into a discussion of a new education act or new school act to be introduced sometime in the future in the House. I've asked stakeholders and Albertans for input into that act. With respect to Catholic schools I would hope that they would embrace that discussion and they would look at what's happening in the act as it affects Catholic education.

Mrs. Leskiw: Given that section 9 of the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, comes into effect next fall, what effect will this have on Catholic schools, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns, of course, of Catholic schools or any school that deals with religion is with respect to that section of the act which says that parents must have notice if a teaching or a lesson is primarily and explicitly about religion. Of course, religion permeates what happens in a Catholic school, so we must make certain that, yes, they need to give notice

where a subject is primarily and explicitly with respect to religion, but we also need to look at whether parents could be notified on an omnibus basis that if they're registering in a religious school, they ought to expect that religion will be present.

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

Residential Addiction Treatment Funding

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A coalition of addiction treatment centres is alarmed by funding cuts made by this government to residential addictions treatment programs. These cuts, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has indicated, would impose a one-size-fits-all standard. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration now that he has had time to think about the hon. member's questions. Why is the minister limiting funding to six weeks of residential addictions treatment when best practices in the field suggest that some patients simply need a longer time to recover?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Up until recently this ministry has paid \$15 per day for the cost of room and board of an individual in a residential facility for treatment. That amount has been increased now to \$40 per day. Also, the average length of stay has increased quite significantly. The majority of clients are released for medical reasons out of these facilities within roughly the same time period. We are working right now with the ministry of health to find out what best practice is, what length is required. But keep in mind that we don't determine the length of recovery; we determine the room and board costs, and that's what we pay for.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how can the minister justify these cuts on the basis of cost savings when addiction treatment centres are warning the government that artificial time limits will probably just land patients, unfortunately, right back into treatment in the very near future?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, what this department is doing is not only paying the room and board for the person in treatment, but while that person is in treatment, fully supported by this department for room and board, treatment paid for by Alberta Health Services, we also support his or her family with a full set of benefits for being at home and for their room and board and cost of living. So the benefits are rather generous. We do what we can to support these Albertans who are suffering with substance abuse, and there are limits to what we can do with taxpayers' money.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, speaking of limits to taxpayers' money, how can the minister justify these supposed cost savings when at the same time we can send the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General to New York City at a cost of over \$36,000?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, how do you answer a ridiculous question like that? The fact is that we have very compassionate front-line workers in our ministry that provide individuals with as much assistance as possible. Obviously, being a government, being custodians of taxpayers' money, we have certain limitations, and so

we should have. But to answer a ridiculous question, juxtaposing someone's trip to New York with recovery that costs millions of dollars . . .

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

Driver's Licence Advanced Road Tests

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that in order for Alberta drivers to progress from a driver's licence to a full class 5, they must first take an advanced road test. However, these tests are not available in many centres that you and I represent in rural Alberta. To the Transportation minister: can you explain this regressive policy?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, graduated drivers' licences were introduced in 2003. Advanced road tests were announced at the same time and implemented in 2005. I'd like to be very clear that I fully support the GDL program and the advanced road tests, that the hon. member across here has no idea about. As of January '09 all road tests, with some exceptions of commercial vehicles, must begin and end at registry agents, and the class 5 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Whoa, whoa, whoa. Sit down.
The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems, given that answer, that this is an attempt at centralization, moving services away from rural Alberta. Can the minister confirm this?

Mr. Ouellette: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. These tests are done to ensure drivers are well tested. We have to remember that driving is a privilege in Alberta. This test is a very rigorous test and includes many challenging components to ensure an active traffic environment that includes higher speed zones, a minimum number of traffic lights, marked and unmarked crosswalks, highway entrances and exits, lane changes, et cetera.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this minister is a champion of fairness for all Albertans, can he ensure that this policy does not discriminate against rural Albertans? I think it does.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this isn't about rural versus urban. This program ensures that new drivers have the skills and experience to get behind the wheel and safely operate a motor vehicle. This is about proper education and training. [interjections] I want to say that you can take a basic test anywhere, but if you want to advance test, we have now changed the program. We make sure there's an area somewhere within 60 minutes of any residence in Alberta. We want to make sure that people are safe. Rural Alberta has bigger collisions than anywhere else, and we want to make them be able to drive in the big city.

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

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why do I feel that it feels like the last day of school in here?

Agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries in Canada, with each farm injury costing an average of \$10,000. This is money that comes directly out of the farmer's pocket and the health care system because this government excludes paid farm workers from mandatory WCB coverage. To the Minister of Employment and

Immigration: why does a trucker working for a corporate farm or a farm not have WCB coverage when that same trucker working for a trucking company does have that coverage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister, please.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the simple answer is because a trucker doesn't live in his truck, and a farmer lives on his farm. The difference between farmers and other employees is that there is more work being done on a farm; there are people who actually live on a farm; children play on a farm. Putting an occupational health and safety umbrella over all of that would not be responsible. But we are looking at this with our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and some development will take place.

Ms Pastoor: I'm going to try something else here. Given that in Justice Barley's 2008 report he recommended that paid farm workers be covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, does this minister accept that recommendation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I said a number of times, over and over again, to this member that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I are looking at the report, and we will make recommendations that achieve two things: keep our farmers safe but also keep them in business because the only way to make sure that a farmer doesn't get hurt is just to put him out of business, and we are not willing to do that.

Ms Pastoor: Well, after all of that it actually sounded like a no.

To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: do we have a date for the release of the farm safety report? I need something a little more specific than: in due time.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member and the opposition requested the report, and we informed them that we would release it to them. It's just in draft form. It's expected out fairly shortly.

Mr. Speaker, while we talk about that report on farm safety, it is refreshing to see that the incidents are down dramatically this year, and we're very happy to be able to invest over \$700,000 in future training for safety out there.

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

Calgary International Airport Development

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the proximity of the constituency of Calgary-Mackay to the International Airport in Calgary it is important for my constituents of Calgary-Mackay to be able to access the airport in a timely fashion. One option to facilitate this is the proposed airport tunnel. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the city of Calgary use the municipal sustainability initiative allocation to fund this project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The municipal sustainability initiative gives municipalities the discretion – and I emphasize discretion – to determine which projects and activities will be funded based on their local priorities as long as those

priorities meet and are within the scope of the MSI program guidelines. The program encourages municipalities to take a very long-term approach to planning for capital projects that will have a significant and lasting impact upon their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. Does the province have any role in determining what the local priorities are?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. Determining those local priorities is up to the individual municipalities. That's what the municipalities asked us when the MSI programs were designed. It's up to the city of Calgary to determine how they might spend their \$254 million in MSI funding this year, and it's up to them to determine how they'll spend their \$3.3 billion over a number of years. We've recently approved some changes to the program that will give those municipalities added flexibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Ms Woo-Paw: No.

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

2:40 Summer Employment for Students

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent media reports are predicting another tough year for Alberta students seeking summer employment. Some of my constituents are concerned that they or their children will be unable to find a job at all, leaving them unable to cover the costs of their postsecondary education. My questions are to Employment and Immigration. Is the outlook for summer job hunters in Alberta as bleak as reports suggest it is in other parts of the country when we're comparing them?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, a good question because students probably are gearing up right about now, thinking about summer employment. But we have to put it in perspective. Number one, let's consider the fact that Alberta has the third lowest unemployment rate in all of Canada, which is something to be very proud of. That unemployment rate right now, as we speak, hovers around 6.9 per cent, which really means that 97 per cent of Albertans who are willing and looking for work will find employment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what is being done to help students find summer employment?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, a multitude of things, Mr. Speaker, are being done. This ministry, in particular, has the labour market information centres scattered throughout the entire province not only providing students with technical assistance on how to apply for work, how to look for work, and preparing their resumé's but also linking prospective employers with employees. We also have the Alberta learning information centres and, most importantly, a well-known program, STEP, the summer temporary employment program, which is subsidized by this government, topping up students' wages. So the future is not bleak for our students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: is financial assistance available to students who may not be able to find enough work during their summer and be able to save for their postsecondary education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we do have a very comprehensive student financial assistance program, which we've talked a lot about in this House, that is designed to bridge that gap between the students' resources and what's available. We do expect that students would contribute based on the number of months that they are available for work. Under the student finance system, for a student with three months over the summer the expected contribution would be around \$1,080; for two months it would be approximately \$720. Students with less would still qualify. It's all part of the student financial package that we have under the affordability framework.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. There were a total of 112 questions and responses from 19 members. Of the 19, nine came from the Liberal Party, two from the Wildrose Alliance, one from the New Democrats, and seven from Progressive Conservative members.

In 15 seconds from now we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Oil Sands Industry

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like many members of this House a key part of our learning takes place when we leave the Assembly and meet face to face with Albertans. One of my most valuable learning opportunities came when I was able to visit Fort McMurray and tour the oil sands. The oil sands are truly a marvel of technology, human innovation, and ingenuity, and as each new project comes forward, they change how they operate and how our energy resources are extracted. Can more be done? Absolutely. Is industry making progress? You bet. Do we all want a healthy environment? Of course. Do we want to build partnerships? Yes.

But, Mr. Speaker, we all know that there are some groups who want to play games with some very serious issues. Some groups resort to childish pranks or breaking the law because their views are not resonating with Albertans. Albertans do not like it when outside groups or rabble-rousers try to diminish our accomplishments, our expertise, or the degree to which we care for our energy and environment resources. What truly matters to Albertans is that people do what they say they are going to do and that companies live up to their words and that government sets a fair playing field.

Many of us know the good work that the oil sands industry does and will continue to do well into the future. We know that oil sands operators have reduced the CO₂ intensity by 27 per cent since 1990. We know that oil sands operators are conserving and using energy more efficiently. We know that new projects are going to dry tailings to treat processed waste. We know that reclamation practices are improving. These are just a few of the things we know about our oil sands industry, Mr. Speaker.

While some continue to ignore the facts about one of our province's most significant industries, we should take comfort in the truth, that Alberta's oil sands industry is doing its part to ensure that new technologies, new environmental practices, and new practices come forward so that industry can do even better. That is why not only does industry prosper; Albertans will prosper.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms DeLong: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table five copies of Scotiabank's Fiscal Pulse, that had some positive things to state on this government's prudent budget and fiscal plan, mentioning that the province is better equipped going forward thanks to this budget holding the line on taxes and protecting priority programs. Scotiabank states that the economic assumptions underlying the 2010 budget estimates are generally conservative, especially nominal GDP levels, real GDP growth in 2010 and 2011, and oil prices.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter regarding Alberta Hospital Edmonton. It is from a constituent named A. Willis. A. Willis is very concerned about the government's plans around Alberta Hospital Edmonton. I have permission to table this e-mail.

I also have another e-mail regarding Alberta Hospital Edmonton. This is again from a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar expressing her deep concern about the government's plan regarding Alberta Hospital Edmonton. It's signed by Donna Morrow.

The last tabling I have this afternoon I would encourage all hon. members to read. I appreciate this information bulletin from the Speaker's office earlier today to our office in the Annex. This information bulletin is dated March 2010. It's titled *An Auditor General Who Is Both Independent And Accountable: Working Effectively within Alberta's Westminster Model Democracy*, by Ron Hicks. It's a good read.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. I'd like to start by tabling the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail I received from Matthew Hildebrandt. He's a graduate student concerned with the high cost of postsecondary education. He asks that the government stop allowing postsecondary institutions to use market modifiers and other noninstructional fees as a loophole to cover institutional deficits.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of 63 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. This is part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The two documents I'm tabling relate to questions raised several days ago by the Leader of the Opposition. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a government news release dated April 13, 2006, indicating that the government of Alberta is providing \$4.6 million to help develop 60 new affordable supportive living units in Grande Prairie.

The second is a page from the 2006-07 blue book, the government expenditures, indicating that Chantelle Management Ltd. was in fact advanced \$2.3 million in public funds.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to present the requisite number of copies of an agreement I had with the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, where he agreed under junior A hockey to wear the Oil Barons jersey, which he is proudly wearing today with his suit jacket on. He could take off the suit jacket if I were to get unanimous consent, but I won't ask for that for today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hockey Jerseys for MLAs

The Speaker: To the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, you were both here in the House last week when we had the issue about pies. You noted the generous reflection of the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who, when challenged with the opportunity to bring all members a pie, did. You've also heard in the past when the chair has chastised hon. members for playing dress-up and has challenged the hon. member who wanted to play dress-up and the one who challenged that hon. member to deliver to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a facsimile, or a copy, of the same. There are 83 members in the Assembly, hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. You could return with 83 – a variety of sizes would be fine – and that would be in keeping with the spirit of the whole session. In fact, it seems that the hon. members agree with the chair. There's nothing further on it, hon. member.

2:50

Mr. Boutilier: Will the hon. Speaker recognize the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo?

The Speaker: On what point would that be?

Mr. Boutilier: On the point of the commentary made about this member.

The Speaker: It was a complimentary one. Just deliver all members with a copy of the sweater, and it will be fine.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. Well, thank you. I misunderstood the commentary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Just bring the sweaters, and we'll move forward.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Education, school jurisdictions' audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2008, sections 1, 2, and 3.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I rise on a point of order under section 23 of our standing orders. In particular, I refer to sections 23(h), (i), and (j), and those read as follows:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;

- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

I rose, Mr. Speaker, in response to the comments made by the Premier in question period. I believe it was in response to the questions I put to him at that time. I, of course, as you know, don't have the benefit of the transcript in front of me; however, my recollection is that there were roughly three suggestions or statements made by the Premier.

First of all, the Premier suggested that I made misleading statements to the House when I suggested that funding had been cut to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I would just like to remind the House that records already tabled in the House include the budget documents, which outline a roughly \$34 million cut to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services; an \$8 million cut, roughly, to region 6; and within region 6 a \$400,000 cut to the line item related to foster care services provided by region 6.

The second thing that was suggested is sort of a foundational thing, Mr. Speaker. There were two, I would suggest, inaccurate comments made by the Premier, which subsequently founded a third comment, with which I took the most offence. The second suggestion was that I had information that I somehow inappropriately held onto for five days, during which I could have raised that information in the Legislature.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there is absolutely no way that the Premier could have that information, in part because it's factually incorrect, and that certainly between the time I became aware of the information of which the Premier speaks and the time that I made that information available to the public, there were no sittings of the Legislature during which I could have raised the matter. In fact, I raised the matter before the Legislature next sat, and just as a side note, had I even waited until that first day, I would not have been able to raise the matter because on that particular day, as a result of our changes in question period, I don't have a question. Nonetheless, that's not really relevant.

The point is that between the time I became aware of the information and the time that I made that information public, there were no sittings of the Legislature, and in fact it was not five days that I had that information in the first place; it was roughly three and a half days.

Regardless, all of that then led to a final statement by the Premier that suggested that this member was somehow personally responsible for causing suffering experienced by vulnerable foster children. The Premier went on to specify that I caused suffering on the part of autistic children in foster care. I would like to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that that is, at best, the most outrageous statement that I have heard in this House since I have been here and that there is no foundation upon which the Premier could make that statement based on what I said previously. I would suggest that it is an unfounded allegation that is designed to insult and to bring disorder to the House and that it is false. It amounts to an allegation under subsection (h), it imputes a false motive to myself, and it amounts to being abusive and insulting. As I said before, he had absolutely no foundation for making such a statement.

I would go further, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that it is particularly – how do I say this in an understated way? – perplexing that the Premier of the province, as a result of his role, has unrestricted access to the information that he accused me of withholding and causing suffering as a result of. It's deeply ironic and raises questions, frankly, beyond this particular point of order.

Nonetheless, at the end of the day I would suggest that all three of the criteria under section 23 have been met, and I would ask that you rule in my favour and/or that the Premier return to this Legislature and apologize to me.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on this point.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I can understand the hon. member's concerns that she has raised, I would suggest to her that her concerns arise more because she wasn't listening closely to what was being said than to what was actually said, and I say that for these reasons. First of all, her first point is with respect to the budget. Well, if she looks at page 82 of the estimates, it's very clear from the line with respect to foster care support exactly what the Premier was talking about: a \$910,000 increase in the budget to foster care. That's the number he used. That's very clear, and it's very easy to find. I found it within a matter of seconds, to be able to analyze where he was coming from, saying that the budget had gone up. Very clear in what he said, very clear in what he meant, and very clear to be able to find the supporting document.

You can go to the bottom line of the budget and look for a different number; you can go to one other page to look for a different number. The Premier didn't use that process. He basically pointed to the foster care budget and said that it went up by \$910,000, that it wasn't cut. That's factually correct, and it's evidenced on page 82 of the estimates booklet.

With respect to her second point, that she held the information for five days and didn't raise it, again, it was clear if you listened to what the Premier was saying, the full intent and import of what he said and, actually, what he directly said. I'm going to put it in my words rather than his. What he's saying is that every member of the Legislature has a duty to Albertans, and that duty is to make sure that we do our job and that when something comes to light that we get information on, that we know about, that should be corrected, we should act on it immediately.

If there was a meeting on Thursday morning and the hon. member knew about the information that was exchanged at the meeting on Thursday morning, after the estimates on Wednesday night, where the minister said clearly in the estimates that there were going to be no cuts to service, and then she heard on Thursday morning that there were cuts to service, the first thing she should have done in the interests of those Albertans affected would have been to call the minister's office and ask what was going on because there are vulnerable Albertans who are being hurt by that. That was the import of what the Premier said. That is what he meant, and it's pretty clear. I think that any reasonable Albertan would expect that kind of behaviour.

He didn't say that she shouldn't raise it in the Legislature. He didn't say that it was inappropriate. In fact, I think I heard him say that it was quite appropriate to raise it in the Legislature. What he said was that if you're acting in the interests of Albertans, when you get that information, you should first act to make it right. People should not sit, having inappropriate information or having something that's not supposed to happen, having it remain uncleared up for that period of time.

Now, the hon. member has made it clear that she didn't actually know on Thursday and that that wasn't information that was available. The implication of both the press conference and the exchange in the House on Tuesday led one to believe, led me to believe and I think led members to believe that that information was available to her on Thursday. She has cleared that up. I accept that. She only knew it for three and a half days, not five days. Still, it would have been appropriate for any member of the House getting that kind of information to call the minister's office and say: "You said on Wednesday night that there weren't going to be cuts to foster families, and on Thursday your department did cuts to the foster families. What gives here?" That was what the Premier said. He wasn't saying to the hon. member anything other than that. Quite frankly, I think he's right.

3:00

Mr. Boutilier: Dave, your nose is growing.

Mr. Hancock: There could be a point of order on that, perhaps.

With respect to the third comment, and I think it was a subset of the second one, and that is that the hon. member believes that she was accused of being personally responsible for Albertans' suffering, I think again it was very clear. I was sitting here. I heard the exchange on Tuesday, and I heard the Premier today. It was very clear that what he was saying is that Albertans were put in a position – according to the information that was presented to the House, there was a meeting on Thursday where they were told that their foster care payments were going to be cut, and that was going to cause them undue hardship and concern. That was the issue that was being raised by the member.

The import of what the Premier said was very clear. Why would you let people have that view, if it was the wrong view, for five days when you could have corrected it immediately? Why would you let them stay worried about their payments if you could have sorted it out? That's the clear import of what he said. He's not suggesting that the hon. member caused their suffering. He's saying that she could have relieved their suffering. And she could have.

Mr. Speaker, there's no point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I draw to your attention Standing Order 7(7), but I've ruled in the past that if we're dealing with a point of order or point of privilege, we will just simply ignore that and go beyond 3 o'clock. I'm, quite frankly, prepared to deal with this matter and rule. If there are hon. members who want to participate, I want citation and I want directly to the point and the question at hand, not what members may have thought they heard, which is not what I have heard myself and have in front of me.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who rose first.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I followed the exchange in question period with interest. I would like to point out to all hon. members *Beauchesne's* 484(3).

In the House of Commons a Member will not be permitted by the Speaker to indulge in any reflections on the House itself as a political institution; or to impute to any Member or Members unworthy motives for their actions in a particular case.

In the exchange between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville this afternoon . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member said 48 what?

Mr. MacDonald: I said *Beauchesne's* 484(3), Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. MacDonald: Certainly, it would be my view that the Premier violated *Beauchesne's* 484(3). I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had every right to bring that issue up again in the Assembly.

I would also like to point out, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, page 40 of the fiscal plan, services for children, youth, and families. As I heard the exchange, and as I understood the exchange, I think this is important.

Program expense for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is budgeted at \$1.1 billion in 2010-11, a reduction of \$36 million or 3.1% from the 2009-10 forecast. The Ministry will focus spending

on its most vulnerable clients, including at-risk children, youth and families.

Child Intervention Services and Foster Care Support. The combined 2010-11 budget for these programs is \$545 million, a reduction of \$27 million or 4.7% from 2009-10. A stronger focus on measures such as increased permanency and family enhancement supports is expected to improve outcomes and reduce costs in Child Intervention Services. The budget for Foster Care Support is increasing slightly to \$163 million in 2010-11. This will support about 5,400 foster child placements.

So that certainly recognizes reductions in the budget. For the Premier to get so sensitive whenever questions are asked . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. The chair knows when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona raised the point of order. It did not come after any of what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is talking about. We have to be relevant with these things.

Mr. Anderson: The citation is the Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j), as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out. On the first point if you look at page 91 of the government estimates, clearly there was a reduction in region 6 for foster care. There's no grey area there. That is exactly what the document says. There's no doubt on that first point.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that's not what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona raised the point about. You're talking about an entirely unrelated matter. [interjection] No, no. I have what I have. I know what was said.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Back to the point. There was a direct quote made by the Premier of blame on this hon. member for withholding that information for a five-day period. That is not true. First of all, she knew the information shorter than that, and she gave it at the first possible moment in this House. The Premier also said that same thing, Mr. Speaker, about this member as well. We did not know about this until the Monday.

The Speaker: If you want to raise a point of order, you raise one on your own. Just deal with the one we have in front of us.

Are there additional comments?

Okay. Let's be very, very clear here because words are very, very important. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona rose and said, "I'd like to raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker," for what was said just prior to that, which caused the intervention for the point of order. So here's what the Blues say:

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, yesterday I was very emphatic during the news conference that any hon. member – government side, opposition – can bring anything forward to the Assembly. That's not the issue. But to keep it – keep it – under wraps, knowing quite well that this information was given to that member, and holding it secret for five days and agonizing families needlessly is not appropriate. Like I said, just go out and ask the parents. Would you like to sit and have that information and keep people under that agony for five days and then raise it here in the House? You still could have raised it here on Monday. You could have had five news conferences during that period of time, but you should have notified the minister immediately.

That's what was said in the *Hansard* by the Premier. These are the Blues.

Immediately after that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said, "I'd like to raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker."

So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona gets up and makes three points under Standing Order 23(h), (i) and (j). The first one has to do with budget matters. There's nothing in this response that

I see related to any kind of budget matter at all. The point of order was not raised on a previous question, which it could have been, and then I would take a different view. But I have to deal with the facts at hand. There's nothing in here in the response from the Premier which caused the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to rise.

Secondly, for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to say she did not have an opportunity on Monday in this House is not correct. At one time both ND members were given the choice of having a question each day. They subsequently signed a piece of paper to me saying that they wanted one question per day. That could have been the question of the day. It does not belong to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, nor does it belong to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. It belongs to their caucus. They can make the choice as to who does it.

Thirdly, I see nothing in here about suffering with respect to this. So if there was a point of order, do it on the previous question.

On the other hand, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, how do these phrases play out: "Notwithstanding this Premier's failure to understand," "government wants kept secret," and "given that this has been shown repeatedly to be false"? There very well may have been others who might have risen on 23(h), (i), and (j) with respect to this.

Now, look. The standing orders are pretty clear. All of the documents we have are very, very clear. In the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the second edition, you can go to page 634, and there's a quote there: "A Member may not direct remarks to the House or engage in debate by raising a matter under the guise of a point of order." So on this point at this time, where this is raised, there is no point of order. Maybe a point of clarification.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to kick off debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. It is kind of interesting that in the last five minutes here on a point of order we've debated the budget more than we do in the times we've had before in actual relevance to a budget. It is a little bit surprising that we will come in here and spend more time talking about how much time they don't have to debate a budget than actually debating the budget. But that's their privilege. Or we could spend time talking about Argentina or Missouri, all of the other things that affect Albertans and their budget. But it's certainly within the purview of the opposition to spend their time as they choose. That's all right; it's entertaining reading.

It is kind of interesting. At our estimates, Mr. Chairman, of Treasury Board, where we had an informative discussion with the critic from the Liberal Party, we talked about some issues that were important to him. We had an opportunity to talk to a member of the New Democratic Party. You know, the Treasury Board is a small department. It doesn't spend a lot of money, but it does have a responsibility for looking after the spending side of government, for helping develop a capital plan, you know, for the oil sands secretar-

iat, and corporate resources, so a few pretty important responsibilities on behalf of the people of Alberta.

You know, we never had one question during my estimates from the Wildrose Alliance Party, not one inquiry. I find it surprising that they would want to come here and then debate the budget . . .

Mr. Anderson: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Snelgrove: . . . on a point of order as opposed to actually debating the budget in the process that's been provided. Although I will give the Member for Calgary-Currie . . .

The Deputy Chair: We have a point of order, that I'm going to recognize.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Chair, this hon. member has obviously been a member of this Assembly for a long time, and he should know full well that it is out of order to say that a group of individuals are not at the budget estimates. He knows full well that they have put us on committees, that oftentimes there are conflicts, and we cannot get a member to a budget committee every time. That was the case in this case. It's easy for him with his 68 MLAs to say that, but in this case he is out of line and he should be, you know, ashamed of himself for doing that. But that's what he does. I noticed that he only speaks to the Wildrose Alliance caucus on these things, which I think is very interesting. He was out of line, and he knows he was out line. I just wanted to put it on the record that there was a conflict, and that is why the Wildrose Alliance could not be there that night.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, let's be perfectly clear. I didn't suggest at all that they weren't there. I never said that they weren't there. I said they never asked a question. They can get the Blues, or they can listen. That's exactly what I said.

Back to the point, Mr. Speaker. I take the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie where he says — or you can dismiss this point of order. Do what you want. We'll finish.

The Deputy Chair: On the point of order. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I won't reiterate the points that the hon. President of the Treasury Board has. I just want to talk a bit about a precedent of this House. I recall a speech last year when the hon. Solicitor General, as he now is, talked about empty seats at the other end of the House. He didn't identify the empty seats. The convention is that you do not identify a member if he or she is absent or has been absent.

I would respectfully submit to you that there is no point of order at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I was listening very carefully to this as well. The hon. President of the Treasury Board did not say that they were not there. He said that they didn't ask a question. There is no point of order.

Continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will take the advice from the Member for Calgary-Currie and talk to our colleagues

about the point he presented. Health is hugely important to all of us. To give it the same time as some of the smaller departments is a valid point that I agree with. It's an agreement that was decided upon by the House leaders, but I'm sure that good women and men from both sides of the House can address that issue and be a little bit more reflective of the importance of it. So I'll accept that in that context.

Mr. Chairman, I just look forward to what I'm sure will be a lively and spirited debate through committee on Bill 15.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's going to be quite the afternoon it looks like.

I just thought it was important that I rise to explain my opposition to the budget and the reason that I won't be supporting it. I fully understand that the wheels of government need to continue and that there are huge programs that have to proceed. I fully expect that the budget will pass, but I thought I would raise my concerns.

I would like to see it improved, frankly. I'm the Health and Wellness critic, and I thought I would begin by explaining my concerns with that budget to the Assembly. It's a very generous budget. There is quite a significant increase from last year, in some ways a startling increase. When the finance minister announced the budget, that particular one raised a lot of eyebrows.

I appreciate that the President of the Treasury Board is following here because my single biggest concern with the whole budget is that there is simply one line for Alberta Health Services, base operating funding. I'm on page 240 of the estimates. That one line is \$9,037,593,000. When I think, "Okay; here I am as a critic, as a Member of a Legislative Assembly, and as a citizen; how do I hold the Minister of Health and Wellness and this government accountable for that \$9 billion?" which is, after all, a quarter roughly of the entire provincial budget – that's the money that goes to Alberta Health Services – there is really no way of doing that in a meaningful manner. There is no way, for example, of knowing how much goes to the Foothills hospital or the University hospital or how much goes to preventative care or cancer care or whatever. It's just one line with an absolutely massive amount in it.

When I compare it to history, even a couple of years ago there was considerably more detail. There were lines in the budget for each regional health authority, so you could see how much went to the Calgary health region, Capital health, north, west, wherever they were, and also to the Cancer Board and to AADAC. At least you could rise and say to the minister or the Premier or whoever, "Why is the budget for the East Central health region going up 10 per cent while the budget for Palliser is going down?" or whatever it was, and you could have a discussion. There is no way of doing that with this scale of information. I just feel as an MLA that when it's all lumped together like that, we've lost an ability to hold things to account.

My memory – and maybe it's getting foggy – from many years ago, say from the health budgets of the late '80s, is that there was even more detail and there was an itemization of how much went to long-term care and how much went to acute care and how much went to capital and operating and so on.

3:20

I think I got the idea across to the President of the Treasury Board on that. Of all the single concerns I have with these hundreds of pages, that is the biggest one because it involves so much money and absolutely no level of detail.

I also need to raise a second significant concern with the health budget, and it relates to the first one because we have no detail. I have yet to figure out how the numbers add up. I am quoting from a speech here from the chairman of Alberta Health Services, Mr.

Ken Hughes, from just a couple of weeks ago, to the chamber of commerce. He repeats something in here which Dr. Duckett and I think even the minister has said. I will quote from the speech, page 5. Alberta Health Services has "captured \$700 million annually in cost savings in non-clinical areas." Seven hundred million dollars annually.

I look at these numbers, and I think: "Okay. We've formed Alberta Health Services. They're telling us that they saved \$700 million in operations, yet they need an immense increase of funding, a \$1.3 billion increase in funding, in 2010-11 compared to '09-10." I want to understand: if they've saved \$700 million and they need \$1.3 billion more, what's going on here? It's hard for me to get my head around that. Again, there's no detail here.

I can't help feeling, Mr. President, that the wool's getting pulled over my eyes somehow here because if they've really saved \$700 million, there's no possible way they ought to have needed a further \$1.3 billion to cover their expenses. So that is a related concern. I have asked when I've had the opportunity for Dr. Duckett to explain this, I've asked the minister to explain it, and I've never got anything close to an explanation. So maybe the President of the Treasury Board – and you know what? That would be fantastic if you could explain it.

Could I ask how many minutes I have in this?

The Deputy Chair: Thirteen.

Dr. Taft: Still 13 left? Oh, great. How exciting.

I will also raise a concern as a legislator and a citizen about the handling of capital expenditures, and this has come up most vividly in terms of capital spending on health projects. We're being asked here to vote in Bill 15 on capital spending, yet we're also told that the list of capital projects under health care isn't complete. That just doesn't seem like good budgeting to me. We're being asked to allocate money. I'd like to assume that there's a solid basis to that request, but I'm told in this Legislature by the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness that there isn't because the list of capital projects is a work-in-progress. How the heck do we come up with the numbers for capital spending in this budget when the list is a work-in-progress? Now, you could say: well, we chose a number for capital spending, and then we'll spend to that number. That is a way to proceed with a budget. I'd prefer a budget that was built, as it were, from the ground up. So that's further unease I have with this budget.

I am also the critic for aboriginal affairs, and I am concerned, as anybody on the committee who reviewed that budget will know, that the business plan is written in such a way that, again, it's impossible for anyone to really know if the goals in aboriginal affairs have been met. They're vague. They wouldn't pass, you know, a first-year university course on business planning as goals because there's no way to measure them. They're kind of feel good, "We'll hold meetings, and we'll sign memorandums," but there's a lot of money in there, and I would like to see something that I could really count or hold the government to measure for. An example would be to improve aboriginal unemployment by 1 per cent or reduce poverty by 1 per cent or whatever it would be, just something that was measurable. Nothing in that business plan for aboriginal affairs can be measured, and nothing, therefore, can really be used to hold the minister to account. I am very concerned about that, and I cannot in good conscience support that.

One other detail, and this will not be a surprise to the President of the Treasury Board: this budget contains millions of dollars that are going to go to horse racing. I would ask the President of the Treasury Board or any other members of this government: have they

read George Cuff's review of the horse-racing industry? This was an internal government review, and it is absolutely condemning of what's going on in that industry. It's a dying industry with virtually no hope of recovery. Over the last decade we have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into that. Those hundreds of millions of dollars could have gone into anything else. Fair enough; give them three years to transition to a new model. But those three years are long gone, and we're up into around 10 years and truly hundreds of millions of dollars. I cannot condone or support that anymore.

My last concern, and many members of this Assembly will know that this is dear to my heart: we've got to get off this fiscal roller coaster. You know, if the President of the Treasury Board ever wants to sit down and chat with me, I'll happily chat with him. But somehow or another we as leaders of this province have to figure out how we can get a stable foundation under provincial funding because the roller coaster of surges of spending and then dramatic cuts is counterproductive and it doesn't reflect the reality of human needs. People getting cancer need treatment whether the price of oil is high or the price of oil is low. People waiting for a hospital in Medicine Hat or waiting for a trial in Medicine Hat at the courthouse, their needs are there whether natural gas prices are up or down.

That's true across this whole government. If we want to build a genuine world-class university in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere else in this province, we've got to be providing long-term, stable funding so that when people we might be attracting – who knows? Nobel prize winners some day. Those people are going to look hard: "Where am I taking my family? Why am I moving from Cambridge to Edmonton?" They're going to look hard, and they're going to say: "Boy, it looks great right now, but every five years this boom goes bust. I could lose everything I'm doing when I move there, so I'm not going to move." On the other hand, they could say someday: "Those universities have an endowment fund that secures their future forever. I will move there." And as they move here and as knowledge gets generated and new businesses are started, we diversify the economy.

That's just one example. I just desperately want a government to come forward with a plan that gets us off the roller coaster. We've advocated on this side of the House for many years taking a portion of royalties, bite the bullet, sell the vision to the public, and stream that portion of royalties into endowment funds for government services, for education, or for whatever. I mean, there are many ways to solve this issue, but this budget hasn't, for me, provided any of that vision.

Those are the reasons, Mr. Chairman, that I can't support this budget. I would appreciate any comments from the President of the Treasury Board to engage me.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the hon. member. A couple of things around the statements. I think, you know, it's such a large number with Alberta Health Services – and as we agreed, it's very important – but it's dealt with in the same way that the universities are, for example, where we don't show in our budget what the university would spend line item by line item. We show how much we gave them. Or municipal grants, where to follow up on how it is spent would require work, but you'd have to go through the municipal system to see theirs. Alberta Health Services, you know, is still relatively new. They release their audited financial statement normally some time in June. At that point – now, that doesn't get the same opportunity for debate in here,

I'll grant that – that's where you'll have the opportunity to look through their financial statement and see if their priorities are reflecting our business plans.

3:30

I think that in many ways by establishing and moving to the consolidated statements, it will bring together a better opportunity for you to compare within the same document where those numbers are. It is extremely complicated. I'm not sure how they would include it in our budgeting cycle, but it certainly is reported. I guess that's where we need to be thankful that we have the Auditor General, who takes an independent look at their books, too, and is able to comment.

The hon. member talked about: what are we going to accomplish with our aboriginal policy and our expenditures? I think it's spelled out fairly clearly in what we call the Measuring Up or Striking the Right Balance documents, where we identify the strategic priorities and the business plans of that particular department.

It's also important to not look at the numbers in there necessarily as our dollars. It's much the same as horse racing. I know we've gone through this, and I doubt they're ever going to be happy, but the fact is that in the aboriginal gaming contract the increase in the revenues they generate in their casinos on reserves is pooled and given to them. That has grown substantially over the last four years, more than the other casinos, who have seen, actually, a decline for whatever reason; it's not for me to decide. The fact is that that increase in funding is a commitment on an existing contract to allow them to maintain their increase.

Horse racing is exactly the same. There's an agreement where they're allowed to have slot machines, and the amount that goes to Horse Racing Alberta from the Alberta government is a zero gain to this government. We only return to them what their agreed-to, contracted amount is, and it shows up in our budget because we have to account for every penny we spend. If they go back to the revenue from sources, they would see that, in fact, the taxpayers of Alberta, except when they voluntarily go into a facility and drop their dollar in that machine – it's the only support they get outside of the agricultural part of them that would be eligible for other ag programs they may exist in. But on the line items that they refer to, there is no tax dollar money going to the horse-racing industry. You guys have said it enough; I don't mind. They actually believe it, so it's working with some people, but the fact is that it doesn't happen.

The hon. member's capital plan projections. One thing we need to be able to do is be flexible. You know, when we've gone from the regions, who had their own special interest in promoting their region or developing infrastructure in their region to serve – from East Central we were in a bit of a spot because of not having a large centre, Camrose and Lloydminster being the two largest. It probably wasn't the most efficient use to try and rebuild a centre in Camrose to take the normal trade from Edmonton.

I think, fortunately, we said: let's really look at not what we want in health care, but what we need in health care. Do we have the staff available to run what we're going to build? And there were errors. There were projects that were lofty goals to build billion dollar hospitals in areas that weren't even full. Their hospitals aren't even fully staffed now. I have to give the previous minister credit on this for saying: hold it. A lot of times in political life it takes more to say: no, let's not build it unless it's right.

We've seen the same thing in our seniors' facilities, where we've said that it is just unconscionable now to continue to build facilities where a couple can't stay together because of the different needs of that couple. You could have a mother or father with a stroke or some debilitating disease. It's so much healthier for them to be able

to have their spouse of decades with them, and we couldn't do that before. You know, you have to say: hold it. You've got to suffer the backlash of saying: what are you stopping mine for? It's because I think we truly believe that we've got to build facilities for the next generation, not for the last generation. The last generation are going to be living in them, but they want to live together, and they have different needs.

I respect the hon. member's interest in this. I think it is above board. He has continually offered suggestions about it. The accounting, the reporting, is complicated. I think he would agree that the most important part is delivering the health care system in a practical way. Yeah, let's account for the money, but none of us really wants to be saying that money drives the way we do it. Let's do it right. Let's report it. Let's come back here for the appropriate amount of money.

As you can see from the budget, we've said that they clearly need the room to establish a prudent and go-forward health care system. They needed the stability and the predictability. If you consider wiping out their deficit, moving the starting line to what it would be, and adding 6 per cent, it was a lot of money to clear those up. But if we can maintain – and we intend to – our five-year contract to 6 per cent each year, we will achieve something that you'll see no other area in Canada will achieve without massive downsizing of their system. I don't think that's what Canadians want. Certainly, it's not what Albertans want.

I appreciate the comments of the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the hon. President of the Treasury Board. First off, I would like to say that I have to commend the hon. President of the Treasury Board. Since we've had budget estimates, second quarter for grants and supplies and services in the blue book is now online. I appreciate that. This is a man of his word. He told us at budget estimates – and I don't want to get a point of order here. I'm certain he told me at budget estimates that this would happen, and sometime over the weekend it did happen. I didn't get an opportunity to go through it in a lot of detail to see what was added from the first quarter of 2009-10, but there were a few items in there that were certainly of interest.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was talking about Alberta Health Services in the budget, and I, too, am looking forward to these financial statements, Mr. Chairman. They will be released hopefully not on Canada Day like last year, when they were so guilt ridden that they put it out on a long weekend in the summer, hoping no one would pay attention because, of course, their bonuses and severances and their lavish payments were all included in that. It was certainly an act that I considered of guilt and shame because they knew that money wasn't spent accordingly or the way it should be. Some of it, at least, was wasted.

Certainly, in the blue book, as we're discussing this budget, I see an amount for the Vancouver Olympic organizing committee for \$2.1 million. That's a significant sum.

I see McKinsey & Company, health care consultants or management consultants on any number of issues world-wide, in this province they are invoicing Alberta Health and Wellness in the first six months of the year for \$1 million. Previous years they've also been active with their invoices. I have no idea what would be in the budget this afternoon for Health and Wellness for McKinsey & Company, but it's certainly an invoice of interest because, of course, they were originally the group that was, in my opinion, charged with

developing this long-term health care strategy. We see where it has gone off the rails. We're hundreds of millions of dollars in the red.

3:40

I know that in this budget we are trying to get back to a balanced budget. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about the \$700 million that Mr. Hughes mentioned in his speech at the Chamber of Commerce. Certainly, before this budget is passed, we should have the details on how this \$700 million in savings has been achieved, if at all. I flat out don't believe it. I'm going to need to see that breakdown line by line and where the \$700 million in savings was realized.

Those are certainly some of the questions that I have. This government still has a tendency to spend money in the oddest of places. I would use the million dollars to McKinsey as an example. We shouldn't need them anymore if we're in this cease-and-desist pattern with Alberta health care restructuring.

In the course of budget estimates this year there were some interesting statements from other ministries as well, Mr. Chairman, Service Alberta for example. It was with a great deal of interest that I learned from the hon. minister in charge of Service Alberta that we were gradually getting away from the practice of leasing any number of items, and we were now buying them instead, if I can remember correctly what was stated during the course of debate.

I will use cars as an example. Last year in the blue book I noticed where Londonderry Chrysler had received \$3 million from the government. The minister informed me through the course of debate that this was for a number of cars. The government got a real good deal on vehicles from Londonderry Chrysler, and the Department of Service Alberta was getting rid of a lot of the leased vehicles that they had. I would like to know, particularly with Bill 15, how widespread this practice of buying instead of leasing now is with all the government departments. How much money is going to be saved by buying, not leasing, and how much money have we squandered or wasted in the past by leasing?

Now, we do know, if we look back into Public Accounts – and I would stand corrected if any member has the information – that the Jim Pattison Group was leasing a large volume of vehicles to the government. I think the annual bill was in excess of \$19 million. If these practices are no longer viable, how much money are we saving with this new plan of buying instead of leasing?

Certainly, there are other issues that I would like to bring forward at this time. The President of the Treasury Board, Mr. Chairman, talked about the importance of the Auditor General. Whenever we look at the size of this government's budget and we look at the fact that it was only last year that the government – well, to put it in perspective, I think we should go back to the response to the Auditor General. This is in the fiscal plan, Budget 2010. We can see where there are any number of recommendations by the Auditor General that have been accepted. Most of them have been accepted. Some have been accepted in principle. Some of them are under review. We can see where the Auditor has done a lot of very, very good work.

But when we look at what has happened in the past, there were two suggestions by the government that were rejected because somehow they felt that the office of the Auditor General was straying into policy. I could never understand that, and I could never understand the reasoning behind this. When we look at the size of the budget that we're dealing with here and we look at the size of the budget deficit, \$4.3 billion, I think we need to be encouraging the office of the Auditor General to keep a much closer eye, not a more distant eye, on the books of each and every respective department.

Now, I was astonished to see that a former senior member of this

government – and I should say that this gentleman, Mr. Hicks, was a public servant. He retired effective September 5, 2008. He had served as a deputy minister of Executive Council in the Alberta government for four years. This individual is quite well respected. But I certainly hope, when you look at the back of the fiscal plan and you see the responses to the Auditor General, the good work that the office does, that the government is not contemplating taking seriously any of these suggestions by this former Deputy Minister of Executive Council.

Now, this gentleman feels that Alberta's Auditor General in recent years has broadened his mandate, Mr. Chairman, by pushing systems audits beyond critiques of government systems of evaluation and reporting into criticisms of the policies and programs government meant to measure, even into a medium to propose policy and program alternatives. He has impinged on government's policy-making role. Well, I would certainly disagree with that statement. To suggest that the Auditor General has essentially bypassed the Legislative Assembly and reported directly to Albertans – for example, releasing reports to the media at the same time that he shared them with the Assembly – is simply not true.

Mr. Chairman, you as chairperson of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices are the person to receive the Auditor General's report whenever it becomes available.

The Deputy Chair: Bring it to the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: I certainly am, Mr. Chairman, when you realize that in the fiscal plan we address directly – this is the fiscal plan here for the budget, and the appropriation bill is simply all about the budget all the time. These responses to the office of the Auditor General from October 2009 are very, very important because if the public is to have confidence in this whole budget process, they have to have confidence in the job that the Auditor General is doing.

The chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, which is the hon. member, is the first individual to receive – in fact, I believe you receive it in advance of the press conference or media gathering that the Auditor General hosts to explain the recommendations and the findings of his office. Now, I think it's unusual. I considered this report, Mr. Chairman, a tight muzzle and a short political leash on a very respected office, an independent office of the Legislative Assembly.

3:50

Hopefully, hon. members are going to read this information bulletin and file it away, Mr. Chairman, and let it gather dust like it should because we have to ensure that the Auditor General has scope to do his work. If we look at this budget and we recognize that the \$4.3 billion deficit – if this Progressive Conservative government is to control its wasteful spending habits, we need an office that's going to do systems audits. We need an office that is going to be able to function. It cannot be restricted or limited in its ability to provide its auditing function and reporting through the hon. member to all members. Certainly, the Public Accounts Committee has a great deal of interest as well in the reports and the recommendations of the Auditor General.

I would encourage all hon. members in the course of debate on Bill 15 this afternoon to just quickly have a look. If you only have an opportunity to read the executive summary and the recommendations, have a quick look at them because the author of this report is suggesting that there needs to be immediate discussion, debate, and decision on the role or the mandate for Alberta's office of the Auditor General. I think the office has been doing a great job, just an exceptional job. They should continue without any restrictions

and limitations put on them or even the suggestion that somehow they're not working in an appropriate manner. Even the suggestion is inappropriate.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when we look at any of the amounts – whether it's in Tourism, Parks and Recreation or Transportation, Treasury Board, Service Alberta, Health and Wellness – when we look at these millions and millions of dollars that we are requesting here, we also have to look at the back of the fiscal plan, at the direction, the suggestions that have been made, the recommendations by the office of the Auditor General, the government's response.

We only have to go to the disclosure of termination benefits paid. We are talking in this budget that we've got \$30 million in the budget of the Treasury Board for layoffs. Hopefully, there will be no layoffs. I personally don't think there need to be any layoffs because of the age of the civil service. The average age of the civil service is not getting up there, Mr. Chairman, but certainly there is a large percentage of them over the age of 45. I think that through natural attrition or retirement individuals are going to be moving on to other things, maybe going up the Amazon, touring around the world. Who knows? I wish them well, and I wish them long life and good health whenever they do retire. But I think there is a natural progression there, and there is no need for these layoffs that are suggested.

The office of the Auditor General was discussing the disclosure of termination benefits paid. The Auditor's office recommended that the Ministry of the Treasury Board "increase transparency of termination benefits by adopting disclosure practices for Alberta public agencies that disclose termination benefits paid." This is a recommendation that's under review. It hasn't been accepted; it hasn't been rejected. It's under review. I would have to ask why at this time. We've got a \$30 million allocation there, and I think the government should deal with that.

Now, another one, of course, is electronic health records. This gets back to my first point about buying now instead of leasing. What other audits is this government doing to find some economic efficiencies? Road maintenance is first to come to mind, Mr. Chairman. Down in the southeastern part of Alberta, in your neighbourhood, I don't know who does the road maintenance down there, but there are basically five big contracts throughout the province. The bill is over \$300 million annually. Is this money being well spent? I think it's \$330 million. Now, there may be – I could be wrong – more than five of these privatized road maintenance contracts, but I think that in light of the information that was provided by the Minister of Service Alberta, this would be a good place to start.

Another place that we could look to see if all the money has been used wisely is in electronic health records. We see there are issues in Ontario. We see through Public Accounts that some of the same enterprises that were busy in Ontario with electronic health records are also doing a little bit of work here. Whether it's consulting, I don't know. IBM is a fine example. They have one contract that's at least \$100 million if not more. Are we getting the best bang for our buck with that contract? We could look into those and perhaps save ourselves a lot of money and not have to nickel and dime people who unfortunately have addictions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Is there Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Chair: No.

Mr. Hinman: No. Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to stand up and to address Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010. I would like to go on the record that I'm very much against this. This is a train wreck of a spending spree that this government is going on. We'll continue discussing that and go forward.

We put out our own Wildrose Alliance balanced budget initiative. We put a lot of work into that and have to question how much the government actually put into wanting to have a fiscal balance. I kind of get a kick out of the Budget 2010: Striking the Right Balance fiscal plan. The right balance is balanced. It's not a deficit budget. Again, it's a long-term problem that they worked into this, much like an unhealthy individual who has been overeating or smoking or not exercising for too long and then all of a sudden to say: well, you can't expect me to lose 150 pounds in one day. Well, no. And we can't expect the government to be able to balance in one year.

If we go back again to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and we look at the 2003-2004 budget, which was around \$22 billion, I believe, had we followed that forward at a population plus indexed to inflation, we would have a balanced budget this year. But because of the spending habits – and each of the finance ministers, I believe, if we went back and listened to their speeches, would say that this spending is not sustainable. We're very lucky to have the sustainability fund, but it's a real concern.

On page 2 when we look at the fiscal summary and we go back just to 2008, \$36.6 billion, a deficit of \$850 million, and did they say they were going to do something? "Oh, no. You know, the fair weather of Alberta is going to change and we'll be fine. We won't do anything." In 2009-2010, \$4.7 billion. The real problem with this is that we still continue to have smoke and mirrors about what the true deficit is.

I spoke back in 2003, 2004, 2005 when we were having surpluses. We had a law back then. We had to pay off all of the deficit before we put money into the other areas. The law was that any surplus funding must go to pay off the deficit but because of the general accounting practices, which we all agree are there and we can follow, we can manipulate the numbers. It's kind of like going on your credit card to buy now, pay later in 24 months and saying: oh, no; I don't owe anything. We assumed the entire deficit for the teachers' pension plan back in January 2008, which at that time was estimated at \$6.8 billion. Again, because of general accounting practices we don't need to have this in the budget, yet it's: buy their votes now, and we'll let the next generation in 24 or 40 years from now pay the \$50 billion or \$60 billion that we're going to owe. It's very irresponsible to not have it in our plan how we're reducing that deficit funding for that. Again, we're just not addressing or going forward on those like we should.

4:00

The fiscal – I don't know; how you can even say fiscal in this budget is hard for me to understand. There's nothing fiscally responsible about it. It just goes on and on with the spending. They talk about, you know, the 17 ministries that have a reduced budget. That's great. They've reduced it in 17, and that's important.

The question I go back to – again, this goes back before my time. There used to be a group in this House that was called the Deep Six. From what I was told, those were fiscally responsible individuals. Now we're so deep in debt. The Deep Six are all gone but one, and that one is our Premier. The other ones are gone, no longer here, so you have to wonder if this wasn't a wolf in sheep's clothing saying, "Oh, I'm fiscally responsible" yet thinks nothing of having a \$4.7 billion fiscal debt with a real \$7.6 billion cash to revenue debt and saying that we're being responsible. It's irresponsible, and it's unacceptable.

As we go through the various parts of the bill, I guess I'd like to point out and ask the correction on page 1 of the Appropriation Act, section 1(2):

From the General Revenue Fund, there may be paid and applied a sum of \$34 871 252 000 towards defraying the several charges and expenses of the Public Service classed as expense and equipment/inventory purchases for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, as shown in the Schedule.

Under capital investment:

From the General Revenue Fund, there may be paid [out] and applied . . . \$2 141 055 000 towards defraying the several charges and expenses of the Public Service classed as capital investment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011.

What I find amusing is that they just act like this is a simple, one-line budget, that, oh, it's just, you know, \$34 billion, and, oh, it's just \$2.1 billion in one line. I've never run a \$38 billion budget business, but in the businesses that I have run, when we sat down and went over the budget, we did it line by line, item by item. We had the priorities. I have to ask the President of the Treasury Board: how does he feel that the elected members are supposed to have any real input when, in fact, we just have a line item like that?

Again, several members have referred to it. I'll refer to it as well. We look at Alberta Health, a \$15 billion budget: three hours to go through it and say, oh, that's going to be adequate; oh, we're going to have to come up with some new ideas. I would even be so bold, Mr. Chair, as to say that if we really want to make some difference and to see what we have in the budget, on the Treasury Board there should be the eyes of the opposition so they can look at those things. Again, this is behind closed doors – I want to say smoke and mirrors – where they go through the line items and they bunch them all together and then say: oh, isn't this wonderful? You know, \$2.1 billion being spent here, and then they expect the opposition to be able to go through that. We need a lot more details.

I want to go back and refer again to the 17 ministries that had reductions, which is good. It's interesting that when this Premier came to power, I believe when he formed his first cabinet, he only had 18 ministries, and he said that he was going to, you know, trim down and get things under control. I believe it was six months later it ballooned to 24 ministries.

Mr. Anderson: Well, they have to give Thomas one.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. We need to give them some doubting Thomases, bring them in, add them in here so that we keep everybody happy.

But the problem is that we continue to grow at an incredible rate. The spending is out of control. The behaviour is out of control. But the real problem is the priorities. They always want to stand up and point their fingers, and say: oh, spending; oh, cutting. No, Mr. Chair. It's about priorities. That's how businesses are run. Every business can always spend more, but you still have to prioritize. You have to look at your return on investment. You have to look at where we need to put that money. I'll use a small business. Maybe it's on fire insurance. They look at: do we have the capital to replace this building or this piece of equipment if it burns down? No? Then it's a priority to say that insurance is number one. Maybe it's new technologies that we need to look at and adapt, realizing we're falling behind and can't be competitive anymore. So we need to look at that.

In our big budget here in the province, to look at the priorities, there's no question that for Albertans it's health care, it's education, and it's our legal system to protect the citizens and to ensure that we're doing the right thing at the right time and not falling behind. There are just so many areas.

Our colleague here from Calgary-Fish Creek brought forward Bill 202 about reporting child pornography, and the rhetoric that came from the government was: where would you put that in the budget? You prioritize it, not say that we don't have the budget to do that. Our little ones are our most important people that we protect. It's human nature to protect them, yet this government is so inhumane, they say: "Well, we don't need to worry about them. Instead, we're going to pass a bill that's going to give us protection from gangs by saying they have to register their bulletproof vests." Their priorities, Mr. Chair, are just way out of order, and they don't understand.

Another interesting dilemma that we have is: what are the contracts? I mean, we always hear about P3s and how we're saving money. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview again brought up the Alberta Health Services Board, saying that they saved \$700 million. Well those savings should be line-by-line items to say that this is where we've saved it rather than just a line saying that we've saved that, but we're spending \$2 billion more.

The depth that we can go into this budget is not sufficient. The time that we have to go into this budget is not sufficient. We need to look at these things and go through and say, you know: where should we prioritize?

Let's talk for a minute about infrastructure. Isn't it interesting that now for, I think, three or four years we're spending almost double what any other province in the country is spending? Again, we've got huge amounts that we're going to spend and say that now is a good time to spend, yet they weren't responsible enough to say when it wasn't a good time to spend. So now that we have no cash, they say: oh, we need to borrow to do that. When we were in a race, the government caused inflation, saying: here's \$18 billion in an 18-month time period; if you don't spend it, you're going to lose it. That isn't good budgeting. It's not looking down the road.

I've gotten up and spoken many times about the priorities of the infrastructure and what we should be doing. I'll put it out again because obviously it hasn't sunk in yet that there is another way. It's just: "Spend. Don't worry. Be happy. Someone else will pay in 24 years, and we won't be here." I'd say "two years and we won't be here" would maybe be more appropriate at this time at the rate they're going. But the debt will be, and they're going to pass it on, and that's wrong.

What we really need to do with infrastructure: we need to have a public list and say, "Here's highway 63, and here's what we're going to do in the next five years," have that out there and what the estimates are. "Here are the schools that are needed. Here are the overpasses that we're going to use, that we're going have to have in there." It seems like it always switches gears because there's a new political wind blowing. All of a sudden: "No. We need to have something down in Innisfail" or "We need to have something up in Grande Prairie" or "We won't worry about Calgary now; they're kind of a writeoff, so let's focus on some other area." They continue to prioritize. [interjection] Yes, and they're getting pushed out, and they're not happy about that. So they're redividing the centre of the universe and actually getting rid of some ridings in there, which is sad to see, from the Member for Calgary-Currie. As the barracks went their way, so will the riding. It was a sad demise, again, where there wasn't good co-operation between governments.

4:10

You know, another part of long-term planning – like I say, I'm very grateful that this government wasn't able to spend \$17 billion. They couldn't find the place to put it, so they put it into what I call their slush fund. They call it a sustainability fund, but a sustainability fund is one where you look at the ups and downs. You can cover that, but it's going to be chewed up in two, three years maximum and say: oh, that was sustainable.

Going back to the infrastructure, we're going to go into the same I want to say dive that we went into back in 2003, when all of sudden they said: oh, we need to cut infrastructure. They almost cut it in half. It decimated the industry so that they weren't able to carry on their business, and then it wasn't good. We're going to run into that same wall again because they're spending so much on infrastructure and saying it's a good time to do it, building up business here and the people that are working in that area, only to find out in two, three years max, I would say, that we can't spend \$8 billion, \$6 billion a year. Then all that industry is going to collapse again.

Sustainable and long-term growth is to say, you know, "What can we pay for the next 10 years, and what are our projects?" to have that list there so people are competitive and realize that there's a long-term project that's going to go forward. But again this government just continues to have one flop after another flop after another flop, and the infrastructure collapse is going to be one more flop that the people of Alberta are going to have to deal with because of the way this government is balancing the right balance on their budget, which is nothing but a joke because it's a major deficit that doesn't need to be, nor should it be, so out of balance with our revenue that's coming in on a year-to-year basis.

It's interesting. You know, there's a quote, going back, by Winston Churchill that's kind of applicable here because you might ask why I'm giving this quote: "We contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle." Why would he say that? This government says, "Oh, we're not going to raise taxes," which is good, but the problem is that the reason governments have to raise taxes is because of the spending that they got themselves into and the deficit and then realizing, "Oh, now we have to pay back our debt."

We need to realize that if this government is saying that they're not going to raise taxes, then they need to prioritize their spending. Just because the Wildrose Alliance puts forward a new idea or says we need to fund PDD or education or health care in a new way, it doesn't mean we want to increase spending. It's prioritization. The sooner this government realizes that, the better off the Alberta taxpayer is going to be, the better off our children are going to be, the next generation, our health care, and our education system. We have to do better.

Another paraphrase, by P. J. O'Rourke, a civil libertarian: giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and a car and keys to a teenage boy. This is very applicable here at this point. This government's had a lot of money in the last five or six years, and they've blown it. They didn't follow a disciplined savings plan. It was spend, spend, spend. "Oh, my goodness. We've got a problem. Where are we going to spend more money? Well, okay. We'll put it in a slush fund so we can buy some votes. We'll offer the teachers: you know, we'll take your whole pension plan; we'll pay for all of it." In fact, they wouldn't even pay for their own share, which was the right thing to do, three or four years ago. There should have been \$4.7 billion put into that pension plan to give them and the taxpayers the surety that that's going to be taken care of. That's a major, major debt that's being carried by future generations. That is just simply wrong and needs to be addressed.

"What this country needs are more unemployed politicians." That was Edward Langley, 1928 to 1995. Again, it will be interesting to see who's unemployed in the next election. We'll go forward and see what the people of Alberta want.

Another fun one to go back to, Mark Twain: no man's life, liberty, or property is safe while the Legislature is in session. I will agree that too often the longer this House sits, the more damage they continue to do to the taxpayers of Alberta. I'm looking forward to

the two-week break, where we won't have some more ridiculous bills coming forward at the expense of taxpayers, much like we're going to see with wanting to register more protection equipment, where we've learned so much on just trying to register dangerous weapons. It just never ceases to amaze me what the priorities are and where the spending goes here in Alberta.

In going back again to look at, you know, a few of the line items that we're looking at here in the budget, it's important that we look at those items and analyze them and say: do we need to spend that amount of money? There's an interesting idea about budgeting. It's called zero-based budgeting. It changes the whole dynamic of how a business is run and operated. What zero-based budgeting is: we look at every item, and we say, "Are all of those things needed again?"

The International and Intergovernmental Relations: \$24 million in expense and equipment. What is that expense and equipment that we're spending there? Perhaps that's what we should have in front of us when we go into committee so that we can go through those lines and say: "You know, these are tough times. Maybe we should cut that by 50 per cent this year and do a little bit better."

We've got the Service Alberta expenses. Capital investment: \$110 million. What is that capital investment? Is it really needed? That's what the eyes need to take a look at and scrutinize. Should we prioritize this? Could we put that \$110 million off for another four years? We don't know. I don't know what the \$110 million is that they want to spend it on.

Expense and equipment/inventory purchases under Service Alberta: \$349 million. [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and join in debate on Bill 15 at Committee of the Whole.

An Hon. Member: Now we'll get the opposite side.

Ms Notley: Yes. Now we'll probably end up with a different take on things, no question about it. It makes for very interesting debate, without question. Hopefully, I won't get into too much of a back-and-forth with the previous member. We've been known to do that on some of these issues.

Nonetheless, let me just start by saying that I'm not in a position right now, nor is our caucus, obviously, to be able to vote in favour of this bill and to be able to vote in favour of the budget that it enables. There are many reasons that have already been laid out, but I think that I want to sort of step back just a second and speak more generally about this.

In my view, this budget is really about choices. The question is: where do you get your money? What do you choose to spend it on? You know, I'm not going to sit here and complain about the deficit and then complain about what's been cut and then not bring it all together because I do think that ultimately that frustrates people that are listening. They want to know: "What's your answer? How are you going to do this?"

I will say that I think that ultimately this budget should be different, and the first way it should be different is that the revenue side needs to change. I'm pretty clear on that one. I don't think I quite agree with the analogy that the previous member was referring to. Nonetheless, I think it's a question about where we find our revenues and, in that, what giveaways, I would suggest, are not linked to revenue generation.

I'll just sort of generally speak to those. I'm not going to get into

a lot of detail with it. As has already been stated many times by the leader of our caucus, our caucus does not support the recent change to the royalty rollback, the step back from the previous commitments made by this government and this Premier going back as far as to when he ran for the leadership of the party that is currently in government. At that time he agreed with people like Peter Lougheed and with people who were identified by numerous polls, well over half of the province, who believed that we needed to start receiving our fair share of the royalties generated by the industry which dominates so much, certainly, of the discussion in this province and that, certainly, plays such a key economic role.

4:20

There were, of course, back at that time a number of experts that came together. They were appointed by the government. These were people that the government hand-picked. They were at the time described by the government as experts in the industry, who knew what they were talking about, so we could trust them and we could rely on them to come to us with a report about how best to capture the maximum resources in the best interests of Albertans. That panel came together, and they made recommendations about how best to do that.

Almost immediately the government decided to step back from those recommendations and not follow through on those recommendations because they were asking just a bit too much from the oil industry, notwithstanding that the panel itself, by the government's own description, was a group of very well-informed experts in the area with many relationships with the industry. Nonetheless, the government did go ahead and reluctantly agreed to implement a program that was a modified and watered-down version of that report. So off they went, and they implemented that program.

Since then, not including the most recent step back by this government, there have been six reductions in our royalty collection scheme. Six. The government has backed away from its original promise, that it made in the election, six times. One of the outcomes of that, of course, is that our revenues have come down. Now, of course, we know that we stand to lose, ultimately, about another \$750 million a year as a result of the most recently announced revenue giveback to the oil industry. Clearly, when that happens, you start to have a shortage in terms of where your money is coming in, and there's no question that there is a shortage there.

Now, the next thing, of course, that this government has also done is that they've embarked upon a long process of ensuring that the most well-off Albertans pay the least amount of tax in the country, not all Albertans, just the most well-off Albertans. They introduced a flat tax, that anybody who's ever read anything about tax policy knows is regressive and unfairly penalizes those with lower and middle incomes and at the same time gives the greatest break to the wealthiest and most powerful in the jurisdiction in question. That's what this government decided to do, so we've got a flat tax, and we give up roughly \$4 billion a year, give or take, as a result of that flat tax. We are certainly able to say that rich people in Alberta pay the least amount of tax of anywhere else in the country. We cannot say that about middle-income Albertans, we cannot say that about low-income Albertans, but we can certainly say it about rich Albertans. That's a choice that this government has made. As I said, it goes back to choices. That's not, however, a choice that I support, and I don't ultimately believe it's a choice that's in the best interests of the province.

A final example, not by any means a gargantuan one but one that still irks when we get into talking about tens of millions of dollars, is the fact that the government round about this time last year announced that it was going to collect a hundred million dollars a

year in terms of an increase in liquor tax, and then for some strange, inexplicable reason in the middle of the summer they backtracked on that. There were, obviously, some very effective backroom meetings between the industry and whomever makes these decisions in government. Of course, the details around those meetings were never explained, the rationale for the step back was never explained, yet again we end up with a hundred million dollars less on our revenue side. So we have a problem.

I absolutely believe we need to fix that problem. I don't agree with the previous speakers that government provision of service is all bad and that we must eliminate it in all cases. I think government has a role to play in providing equality of opportunity for all Albertans. Unfortunately, right now in Alberta we have the unfortunate distinction of having the largest gap between rich and poor in the country, and that's because our government takes such a hands-off approach to so many issues and so many matters that would ensure that that gap was reduced. The larger that gap, the lower the overall quality of life for people in that jurisdiction. You know, studies have shown that to be the case quite consistently.

Let me just say, then: what do those choices result in? Well, the first negative thing that they result in is a deficit. Let me just point out very briefly – I mean, people always want to talk about the tax-and-spend New Democrats. But, as has been pointed out, maybe not so much on the record but off the record, by some colleagues on the very other end of the spectrum from myself and my colleague in the NDP caucus, in fact the records show that the history of governance in Canada demonstrates that the greatest number of balanced budgets or surplus budgets have been brought in under NDP governments. NDP governments don't like to run deficits, and I'm not a fan of trying to run deficits. That's not good governance. That's not in the best interests of the people you're elected to serve.

The record speaks for itself. Since 1986 the greatest number of balanced or surplus budgets have been brought in by New Democrats, followed by Conservatives, followed by Liberals. I would refer you to the government of Canada's Ministry of Finance documentation to support that assertion because, indeed, it is true. A deficit is not a good thing, and we're not advocating deficits.

With respect to this budget, because of course we've cut our revenue and we're forgiving revenue left, right, and centre, what does that mean for what we're doing for Albertans? Well, we're making a lot of cuts in this budget, and we've had a lot of discussion about those cuts over the course of the last two months. I'd just like to highlight the ones that I am, well, I won't say most concerned about – I'm concerned I might run out of time before I have an opportunity to go through all the ones that concern me – but some of the ones that jump out at me at this point.

First of all, Education. What are we doing in Education? Well, there was a small increase to the Education budget, but when you take into account inflation and the population growth, it's actually a 2.8 per cent reduction. That was before you take into account the implications of the arbitration award, which has received a lot of attention and discussion in this House, as well as the negotiated agreement for salary increases with the ATA and other school board staff, which exceed the rate of inflation quite significantly. In fact, what's happening is that we're looking at probably closer to a 3.8 or maybe even a 4 per cent reduction in the Ministry of Education.

What does that mean? Well, it means that notwithstanding that the minister has agreed that the cost of the arbitration will be funded for this budget year, he has very clearly said that the cost of the arbitration for the year forward will not be covered, nor will the negotiated increase in salary, which is a much bigger piece. I believe we're looking at about a \$130 million shortfall, roughly; my numbers might be off a little bit. What does that mean? In many

cases that may well mean that class sizes go up and that pressures will be brought to bear on school boards, who are trying to provide an appropriate education for our children. This is a huge problem.

Our education system is probably the single most effective means of addressing that income gap, that wealth gap, that opportunity gap, which is so huge in this province. Public education is the most effective means of dealing with it, and we're going backwards. The government's own report identified that we need to reduce class size. We're setting things up so that we're going to go backwards, and we're going to grow class sizes. That is a problem. That is not good for Albertans. That's not good for the future economic health and prosperity of this province.

I'm also very concerned that these cost pressures are going to be brought to bear on our education system at the same time the government is embarking upon a process with respect to the education of special-needs children that will basically reduce the clarity of the rules, reduce the transparency of the funding models, and enhance the discretionary allocation of resources in order to bring about additional support for children with special needs within our education system. Well, that is a problem.

If you do that kind of thing, if you allow for more discretion and less clarity at a time when you're bringing cost pressures into place, I can tell you without any exception, without any hesitation that what you will do is that you will create a situation where special-needs children receive less support in the classroom. I'm very concerned that that's exactly what this budget sets up within our education system. So that's a concern.

4:30

In terms of things that don't exist now in the education system – and we're talking about cuts. I want to stop talking about cuts for a second. I want to talk about improvements, improvements that aren't even considered in this budget because everybody is pulling their hair out over the deficit and the fact that we don't have enough revenue.

What kinds of improvements? Well, for years and years and years experts throughout the world have said and, indeed, the government's own appointed experts and reviewers have said that full-day kindergarten would have a measurable effect on the educational outcomes of Alberta students. We know that we need to do that because we know in Alberta we have the lowest transition rate from secondary to postsecondary education. Part of that can go back as early as kindergarten, without question. Everybody knows the quality of your early education has huge implications for how it unfolds over the course of the next 12 years. Most provinces have full-day kindergarten. We don't. Many provinces have junior kindergarten. We don't. We should. We don't.

Another thing that we don't do enough of in this province is the provision of hot lunch programs. Time and time and time again we hear about kids coming to school hungry, having not eaten, and they're particularly hungry on Monday morning because they've been home for the whole weekend. Again, the research is unquestionable on this, the import and the merits of providing this kind of support in our school system, yet we had the Minister of Education in budget estimates speaking glowingly of the lovely charities that we have out there that are so kind to occasionally pick up food on their way to school for those extra children. Well, you know what? That's not how you feed kids. You don't feed kids based on the unpredictable, discretionary charity of people who may or may not be in any given community at any given time. We need a fully funded school lunch program to ensure that our kids are given the equal opportunity that should be afforded them through our public education system so that they're not coming to school in a situation where they are destined to do poorly.

That's the kind of thing that I would actually go forward in. I would increase funding to support those kinds of things, and I would suggest that we have to have a budget that would support it. I think that in the long term it would bring about much better outcomes for our province and for our kids and, ultimately, for those adults that they become 15 or 20 years from now.

Children's services. We've had a lot of discussion about children's services in this House over the last few weeks. Thirty-four million dollars has been cut from children's services, \$27 million of that from children's intervention services specifically. Again, the government is making a choice when it chooses to give \$750 million to the oil industry, when it chooses to give a hundred million dollars back every year to the liquor industry, when it chooses to ensure that we have the lowest taxes for the wealthiest Canadians here in Alberta. It makes a choice, and one of the consequences of those choices is that we cut \$34 million from children's services, and children suffer. They don't, by the way, suffer because of political advocacy on their behalf. They suffer because the government has made a choice to withdraw support from a certain area within our purview.

What we're going to see is less support for foster homes, and we're going to see less support for children at risk. I could get into a real discussion about – I mean, I guess the only thing is that we've of course put this issue to the minister, and time and time again we are provided with explanations that are simply not logical. Oh, well, it's not going to be a problem to deal with this funding cut because we're actually going to have more foster parents. Well, then we find out that, no, we have a bunch of new foster parents, but the number of additional foster families is nowhere nearly as great as initially presented to us by the minister.

Or we're going to be able to move children from these very expensive group homes to these so-called new foster homes, and that's how we'll save money, except we know that kids that are in group homes are there because they need them and that it's not in the best interests of children to move them out of group homes as a mechanism of saving the \$34 million that this government has decided has to be cut from this ministry.

Then we're told that, oh, well, we'll be able to save money through the outcome-based objectives and the lead agency plan, except we know that those plans are at a very early pilot project stage, and it is fanciful to imagine that they would be implemented in a way that would actually bring about savings unless they're done so in a way where the directive is to implement savings. The only way that happens is, again, by cutting services.

We've had explanation after explanation, and none of it adds up. It's very frustrating because ultimately, as I say, it all goes back to choices, choices made by this government to put money in some places and not in others.

Advanced education, another critical area which plays a huge role in ensuring equality of opportunity for all Albertans. Without getting into a lot of detail on it, again, we have a budget that has shifted the cost of advanced education from government to students. We have reduced the number of grants, and we've increased the amount we want students to go into debt. We're telling students to pay more. At the same time we're inviting, receiving – who knows what verb we have to use, but applications are flowing in from universities hoping to be able to dramatically increase tuition for certain professional programs.

What's the outcome of that? The outcome is simple. The outcome is that lower income Albertans will not have the same access to these programs. They will be discouraged from fully participating in the advanced education system that we claim to be so proud of because the cost will go well beyond their means. They

simply will not be able to secure the kind of debt that this government believes they have an obligation to secure because we are removing ourselves from the responsibility of providing an affordable university or postsecondary education to our children.

Health. Well, health is an interesting one because, of course, we had the government throw in a whole bunch of money to health at the last minute. Frankly, I think it was probably one of the most political decisions that this government has made since it's been elected, and that's saying a lot because practically every decision is a political decision. Nonetheless, a little bit of extra money for a little while: we'll see how it turns out. The problem is that we still have a huge crisis in health care. There are so many areas that I could talk about, but the one I will talk about since I have, I believe, 30 seconds . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] Oh, not that, even. Okay.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to be able to stand up and debate and get on the record a few things in regard to the budget. I'm going to start off with the question that I asked in question period today to the Minister of Employment and Immigration and was somewhat ridiculed in regard to: are you spending or are you saving?

You know, Mr. Chair, I've been around a long time in this Legislature, and sometimes that's good news and sometimes it's not so good news because it kind of ages you. I will tell you that my previous background was drug and alcohol counselling, so I feel that I know a fair amount about what's going on with that particular area. I can tell you that the fact of the matter is that six weeks isn't long enough, and the southern Alberta group that is concerned about this knows that. They have professionals that deal with this. The minister spoke about the cost for the beds. Well, I can tell you that at the far end of it, it's much more costly if we are having them incarcerated or if we're having them in our health care system because of their alcohol or drug addictions and their mental issues.

You know, it's like what's been bought up before. It's called prioritization. Let's just talk a little bit about prioritization. I'm going to focus just on ministerial staff and minister's budgets and exactly what's happening in some of the budgets. There has to be some credit given to the government and not so much credit on the others. I'm just going to talk a minute – and I'm going to find my budget – about the minister's office in regard to priorities.

Priorities of the minister's office is very interesting because if we look down the line at all of the ministers – for example, Aboriginal Relations' minister's office budget was flatlined. Advanced Education took a deduction, which I think is showing leadership, quite frankly. Agriculture stayed the same. Children and Youth Services stayed the same. Education stayed the same. Energy stayed the same. Finance stayed the same, which I find interesting from the Finance minister because he stood up in this Legislature talking about how he's going to balance the books, and he can't even do anything on his own budget. Health, Municipal Affairs, Tourism's budget didn't change whatsoever in the minister's office. Transportation didn't change whatsoever. So it was interesting.

4:40

I'm going to focus on setting priorities in this government. I'd like to talk just briefly for a minute on Executive Council. I just want to talk very shortly in regard to priorities of the Premier's office in regard to their Public Affairs Bureau, which has stayed the same again, but the spending, which I find very fascinating, is on branding, which is \$9.6 million last year and now is \$7 million this

year. I still can't figure out what we're branding and why we want to brand it and have never really ever been given any sort of rationale behind that so that I could say: "Yeah. I support that. We need to get Alberta branded." Public Affairs Bureau: huge, \$14.3 million. I could go on and on in some of those, you know?

The hon. member behind me talked briefly today about children's services, and it was interesting to hear the debate in the House in regard to the description of cuts and not cuts. You know, Mr. Chair, I was a former minister of that department, had the honour and privilege of being the minister of children's services for two years and, quite frankly, am quite appalled about what's happening in the recent developments. I listened to my colleague behind me, and I don't necessarily agree with the NDP all the time, but I certainly can tell you that she's tenacious. She's like a little dog with a bone when she gets on an issue. We talked about the times, the five days or the three days. Quite frankly, it's irrelevant. The timing is irrelevant in regard to when this issue was brought forward.

As a minister of the Crown – and I was told that under the previous leader – you are responsible for what happens in your department. That particular ministry is 24/7. We spoke in estimates. We talked about some of the things. You know, I'm getting all sorts of e-mails right now in regard to the CEO of region 6, and I want to put that on the record. I had the honour and privilege of working with that particular individual when I was minister, and he's an upstanding employee. I always found that his heart was in the right place, and his number one priority was always the children in this province.

For someone to say that there haven't been any cuts in the ministry, if you go to the minister's budget, no. But then you have to start digging deeper down in regard to region 1, region 2, region 3, region 4, and all the way through. What's always fascinated me is the fact that, you know, it was pointed out to us today about the foster care support, but if you go to region 6 and see the cuts there, it's beyond my comprehension, quite frankly. When I spoke to the minister in estimates, I asked her about her own ministerial budget and asked her why at that particular time she didn't show initiative or, quite frankly, leadership in making cuts within her particular budget.

You know, there are a whole bunch of things that can be questioned in this budget. We talk about the oil and gas. I found that conversation always very fascinating when I was previously a member of the government and for two and a half years was speaking to the previous Minister of Energy about all of my concerns, what was going on in this royalty report. I have hundreds of pages, actually three file folders full of documentation that I sent to that particular minister at the time, saying: "Please don't do this. Think about what you're doing." I have kept that because I think it was important.

I had many conversations with the previous Minister of Energy, and we had some good conversation, and I know he got it. He got what was happening in this province and what was happening to the oil and gas industry. I appreciated the fact that he took the time. You know, I put a group of people together the December of I guess it would have been '08, and they drove down to meet with him. There was a group of them that I'd put together right from the big businesses to the small business to voice their concerns about what was happening.

Two and a half years, Mr. Chair, and the government finally wakes up, and they say: "Hmm. Maybe we made a mistake on the royalty, and maybe we realize all of the money that's leaving this province, going to B.C. and going to Saskatchewan. Oh, wait. We're losing investor confidence. Where's that going?" Two and a half years later they all of a sudden wake up. They have this

competitive review, and they say: "Gee. We get it." There is not an MLA in Calgary that doesn't realize the potential and the devastation that has happened in that economic engine of the oil and gas sector and not only in Calgary; it's all the way through.

I mean, I have a son that started off as a rig pig. He would phone me, and he'd say: Mom, I'm in wherever. I'd say to him: where is that? So he would explain it to me. I think we forget about all of the things that we've been doing, particularly in the regard that they're using their hotels; they're using the gas. [interjection] It's a little hard to try and focus when you've got several conversations going on around you, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, including one of my own colleagues.

An Hon. Member: It's your own member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, I know.

And all that they're doing to these small towns in Alberta. You know, they're eating in the local restaurant, they're in the motels sleeping, they're gassing their trucks up, they're having a beer in the local bar, and all of a sudden that's drying up all over the province. So finally the government saw the light. Two and a half years later they saw the light, which is two and a half years too late.

Now they think they've saved it, but the haven't dealt with the royalty curves. That's very important. They have to get investors' confidence back in this province in that regard. The Energy minister can hobnob with all of the people that they want, but I think that, you know, in any relationship it's building trust back and getting those particular individuals onside. For me it's just priorities, and that priority was lost somewhere in regard to all of the things that were happening.

Mr. Chair, while this budget is going to go through because the government has a majority and we're three of us, we want to get on the record what we consider – and we've been ridiculed again on our balanced budget, but I think it's important to talk about priorities. It's not our priorities, as in the Wildrose caucus. It's Albertans' priorities and what Albertans are telling me.

It's been a fascinating process from sitting in government to coming over to a member of the opposition and something that I never dreamed in a million years, being elected since 1993, would be where I thought I would be. Quite frankly, after a lot of soul-searching and thinking about who am I exactly serving and why am I here and who am I responsible for, it was very clear to me that the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek and, quite frankly, the constituents of Calgary and – let's go one step further – the constituents of this wonderful province that I love so much weren't being listened to. I could give you 101 examples. I could give you 101 examples of waking up in the morning and finding out about decisions that the government has made virtually without any caucus input. I'd be more than willing to put those on the record also.

Mr. Chair, we want a budget that reflects the prioritization of Albertans and what Albertans have clearly articulated are their priorities. I can tell you that there has not been one person in this wonderful province that has come to me and said: "Yes, you need to spend \$7 million on branding. That's important for Albertans." Nine point six million dollars the year before.

I want to say, Mr. Chair, that I appreciated having the time to be able to speak for a few minutes, and I'm looking forward to listening to others.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

4:50

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010, the budget. I talked in

second reading a lot about, you know, some of the things that this government has done or has not done to get us into the pickle that we're in financially. I'd like to focus a little bit more on the types of things I would like to see in this bill as we move forward or at least maybe in future budgets as we move forward. Hopefully, in this budget we could find a way to do it. I doubt they're going to accept these ideas, but we can at least put them on the record. I think that it's important to put it on the record.

I would say, Mr. Chair, that the Wildrose Alliance caucus did put together an alternative budget, some ideas, some amendments, some things that we would like to see in the budget. At the time we didn't have any research staff. It was just three people working really hard and getting, you know, volunteer accountants and volunteer economists to help us with the draft. It took a lot of time and a lot of effort to do it, so I wanted to make sure that it was a matter of public record as things we would like to see in this bill this year and if not this year, next year.

Budget 2010 we feel is a stunning illustration of the profound mismanagement of our province's finances by this PC government. According to Budget 2010 the government of Alberta is expecting to spend roughly \$38.7 billion dollars, as illustrated in this bill, against revenues of approximately \$34 billion. This implies a budgetary deficit of \$4.7 billion. An additional \$2.8 billion in capital investment, as it is termed, which we've debated in this House for some time, is not accounted for in the government's current deficit projection. That is seen on page 18 of the government of Alberta's fiscal plan.

This brings the government of Alberta's real cash deficit to roughly \$7.6 billion, which it plans on financing using debt, which is now estimated at \$4.425 billion over the last couple of years, and draining the province's sustainability fund from roughly \$15 billion last year to \$8.2 billion this year and, optimistically, down to \$2.8 billion by 2012. Virtually all the savings will be eliminated by 2012 according to the government's own rosy projections. This vast swath of red ink, Mr. Chair, is similar to that of Budget 2009 and is evidence that this government has yet again failed to bring spending under control despite repeated warnings to do so or face the prospect of higher taxes, a return to massive debts, and an erosion of the Alberta advantage.

A Wildrose Alliance government would not permit this to happen. Although Albertans expect their elected representatives to protect front-line social programs, health education, PDD while providing critical public infrastructure, they also expect their government to responsibly protect the Alberta advantage, live within their means, and prioritize needs before wants. Although erasing a \$7.6 billion cash deficit in one year is not practically possible without heavy cuts, the Wildrose Alliance opposition caucus believes the government can cut the cash deficit by approximately \$4.7 billion, to roughly \$2.8 billion, a 62 per cent reduction from the government's projected cash deficit of \$7.6 billion, by implementing the following spending adjustments.

Again, Mr. Chair, we are not proposing overall budget cuts; we are proposing an increase. We're just making sure that the increase is within the rate of inflation plus population growth and making sure that it is spread into the areas that are most needed, for the most vulnerable Albertans, while putting off some of the things that can wait a year or two. That is what we feel is important.

How would we do this? As was mentioned earlier by my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore, right now we spend over twice as much on infrastructure in this province – and we have for the last several years – than the next closest province on a per capita basis. You know, it's nice to build infrastructure. We all like good roads. We all like good bridges. We all want lots of different infrastruc-

ture. But we don't need it all at once. It's just not necessary to have it all at once.

It's funny. The government doesn't want to include the infrastructure in the deficit number, the cost of the infrastructure, this year roughly \$3 billion. Well, if that was the case, if it was really a cash-neutral or revenue-neutral idea, then why don't we just build \$40 billion in new roads and bridges or \$100 billion? The reason is because the cash still has to come from somewhere. It still has to be paid. In this case it's being taken out of the sustainability fund through debt financing. But the money still has to come from somewhere, and this government doesn't understand that. They think that the more you spend on infrastructure, it's just great. It's like you can spend as much as you want because it doesn't really affect the end deficit number. What a great deal. It's fantastic. Well, yeah, except that this infrastructure is being paid for by debt; it's being paid for by draining our savings.

Anybody with kids and grandkids who does not want them to have to deal with this huge debt that is going to be put on them in the future, who wants their kids to have savings so that they can offset the decline of oil and gas revenues over the long term: those kids are going to be out of luck. Our kids are going to be out of luck if we do not turn this ship around and change some of our habits.

What we would like to do is spread that massive infrastructure budget over a period, rather than a \$20.1 billion capital budget over three years, and instead extend that \$20.1 billion capital budget over four and a half years. So an additional 18-month extension on that capital budget. This would yield savings of nearly \$2.8 billion in 2010 and – this is important – stretching it over four and a half years as opposed to three years, that \$2.8 billion, would still put us in a situation where we are still spending more. It would put us slightly above that of British Columbia. It would put us way ahead of Ontario. And it would actually put us only behind Quebec, which we're essentially sponsoring right now, and Newfoundland on a per capita basis.

We're not talking about not building any roads or bridges or anything like that. We're just talking about slowing it down for a bit. And I think that that's important because as we come out of this recession, as we have been – we've been coming out of it for a while now, for several months – the bigger danger is going to be inflation. If we keep on driving inflation by these massive infusions of capital expenditure, you know, we're going to be doing a disservice to the population. So we have to be very careful. That's why it's so important to make sure that we have sustainable infrastructure spending rather than breaking the budget and spending way more than the next closest province is. It's just not good for Alberta.

You know what? I remember that a couple of months ago I got a document in my constituency mailbox, and it explained some of the roadwork that was going to be done in the constituency of Airdrie-Chestermere. It was several millions of dollars – several millions of dollars. I looked down the list. There was the finishing up of the underpass. That one is a priority for sure, so good on doing that. Then I looked through some of the other things – and these are good things to have – but there were road widenings, there was another overpass in a less populated area, there was some repaving of roads. Anyway, it totalled quite a bit of money.

You know what? My constituents, I am sure, would rather see a balanced budget and put off that road paving and road widening for a year and a half, for just 18 more months. I think they'd be willing to do that. I'm sure they'd be willing to do that if it meant that if everyone did that same type of thing, had that same type of mentality, we could balance the budget.

If we cannot spend near the top of the provinces in infrastructure spending, if we can't do that and still have good roads, then

obviously the Infrastructure minister doesn't have his priorities straight on what to do. But I think he's a good minister. He knows how to do it. He'll be able to work within a \$5 billion infrastructure building budget. I'd think he'd still be able to make sure that we had good roads and good bridges. We might have to wait 18 months for a few things, but surely we can do that.

It's to make sure that our kids aren't burdened with debt and aren't burdened with a whole bunch of infrastructure they can't afford to pay for or to maintain and to make sure that we're not draining our savings, to make sure that we're saving a little bit more in the heritage fund and building up that nest egg so that we can decrease our reliance on oil and gas as we go forward. That's a very big part of the budget that we'd like to see changed.

5:00

The second major point, major line item is with regard to health care and education spending. If we just kept increases this year in health care and education spending to the rate of inflation plus growth – we'll use the government's number, 3.5 per cent. If we increased the health care budget by 3.5 per cent and education by 3.5 per cent, if we just did that this year, that would save us \$1.33 billion. We're not talking about cutting things. We're talking about increasing. We should be taking advantage of some of the economies of scale as we increase in population. It would save us \$1.33 billion if we would just show a little restraint.

No one wants the '90s-style Ralph Klein slash-and-burn cuts. You know, at the time that might have needed to occur because we didn't have any ability to borrow money at a good rate. Maybe that had to happen. Well, now it doesn't have to happen. We don't have to slash and burn. But we will return to the situation where we may have to slash and burn if we don't get our spending under control. Health care and education is a good place to start. Three and a half per cent is a lot of money. It's many millions of dollars, many tens and hundreds of millions of dollars. If we could just restrain those two departments alone to inflation plus growth, that would yield us budgetary savings of \$1.33 billion. We're already, if you include the infrastructure spread over four and a half years instead of three, getting up to roughly \$4 billion in savings just for this year alone, which is quite an accomplishment and something I think we should do.

There are other things. You know, again, it's needs versus wants. We all want mass transit infrastructure. Very important. It's important to reduce emissions of all kinds, and mass transit is a great way to do it. It helps build the economy. It helps get labour to where it's needed faster and cheaper. It takes cars off the roads, so you don't have to build as many roads. These are all very good things. I think every party in here supports mass transit infrastructure, and to the government's credit I think they've shown that they support mass transit. That's a good thing. No one is disputing that.

We have this Green TRIP initiative, and I don't think there's any one constituency that would benefit more from Green TRIP funds than Airdrie, potentially. In Airdrie, you know, we think that we're large enough and we're connected enough to Calgary with regard to our people working in Calgary. We think that a commuter rail system in the next 10 to 15 to 20 years would be a good idea. We'd like to start planning for that and buying the land for it and all that. We understand that. But, again, we are in a time when we cannot afford that right now. The \$70 million afforded to that Green TRIP initiative can wait a year or two. We don't need to do that right now.

Another idea, of course, is the absolute most wasteful program this government has by a mile, the \$2 billion carbon capture and storage experiment. Absolutely brutal. The people of Alberta don't

want it. It doesn't matter if you're a Conservative or a Liberal. Nobody wants this program. It's just all meant for window dressing, you know, to try to placate environmentalists. It's all to kind of help our image. It does nothing to really help the environment.

What we should be investing in with regard to green technology and that sort of thing is incentives. We should be incenting people to use geothermal and giving tax breaks for those types of things. That's going to do more than this ridiculous stick-hot-air-in-the-ground idea. It has never been tested at this large scale. It has been used for enhanced oil recovery in Saskatchewan and other places for sure. On small scales it has worked, but the scale that this government is talking about will cost tens of billions of dollars to implement. A hundred million dollars this year for carbon capture and storage. We can do without that forever. Certainly, we can do without it for a year.

The venture capital fund. You know, Ralph Klein was many things to different people, but I'll tell you one thing he always said, and he said it over and over again: government should not be in the business of being in business. But that's what we keep doing. Every time I look at a press release from this government, it's about a handout to incent some company somewhere to do something. That's not our business. If you want to incent business, lower taxes, lower regulation. That's how you incent business. What you don't do is go running around the province handing out money. That's not what a Conservative government does. That's what liberals do, not the Liberal Party but liberal-minded folk. That's what socialists do. That's what happens. We don't need these corporate welfare handouts. We shouldn't be picking winners and losers. That is wrong-headed. Governments have no business in doing that.

They talk about wanting to diversify. I've got an idea. Why don't we start growing that heritage fund to the point where the interest therefrom can decrease our reliance on oil and gas revenues each year and eventually lower taxes? Let the private sector decide what the great new technology, the great new idea is. Give them that ability. The way to do that is to lower taxes, not to try to pick winners and losers and, you know: what about this; what about that? You know, it's just simply not the case.

I hear the excuse for it once in a while from government members that, oh, well, the oil sands never would have been developed if we hadn't gotten our noses in that; if we hadn't handed out those grants, it never would have happened. Baloney. It would have happened. It might have happened two or three years later, but it would have happened.

You know, every time I hear about government diversification or our government trying to diversify the province through handing out grants, I can give you a hundred examples where it hasn't worked, and I can't think of more than one or two where it has.

Mr. Hinman: It's like playing the lottery.

Mr. Anderson: Exactly. It's like playing the lottery. Once in a while you hit it, but most of the time it has been an absolute waste of money.

That's what I feel about some of these corporate subsidies. Those equal about \$210 million this year. We could get rid of those permanently. Surely, we could delay them.

And there are others. We could reduce the size of cabinet from 23 to 16. They started with 18. You know, there is no reason to have 23 ministries. I'm not going to embarrass the particular ministers by mentioning the ones that could go. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Mr. Anderson: I might start with the Minister of Employment and Immigration for sure.

An Hon. Member: What about housing?

Mr. Anderson: Housing would be up there. You're right. It could merge.

Anyway, absolutely there are all kinds of things that we could do to merge. [interjections] These ministers are very upset. They got more upset about that last point, Mr. Chair, than any other point. That's hilarious. They're worried about themselves, obviously.

In any event we could merge these ministries from 23 to 16. That would save us \$44 million this year, \$44 million if we did that. That's just off administration alone.

We could end this direct subsidization of horse racing to the tune of \$25 million per year. [interjections] Some of the members over there, Mr. Chair, just don't seem to . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Mr. Hinman: The Liberals look good now.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, the Liberals apparently do look good now, that's for sure. They look good to a lot of people right now compared to these folks.

The other big thing is the Public Affairs Bureau: \$7 million at least we could cut from that. I think it's a \$15 million budget. We could at least cut \$7 million out of that. Then, of course, there are the salaries. You know, I look at guys like Ron Glen, the chief of staff of the Premier, and I think: here's a guy who's making more than his boss. What has he done to warrant a \$400,000 salary? How on earth could he possibly warrant that? I look at the Deputy Minister of the Executive Council, to the Premier. You know, he might be a very skilful individual, but why is he making more than his boss? It doesn't make any sense. The reason is because this government thinks they have their own little personal piggy bank to reward their friends with, and that's what they do. It's shameful – shameful – that the chief of staff, that the deputy minister make more than the Premier. I mean, that's insane. It's absolutely amazing to me. You know, I just don't understand how it's even defensible, but some ministers do believe it's defensible, I guess.

These proposed adjustments are needed, Mr. Chair, very much so. Thank you very much.

5:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just make a motion for unanimous consent of this House so that when we do come to a vote on Bill 15 in Committee of the Whole, if a standing vote is requested, the bell time be reduced from 10 minutes to one.

The Deputy Chair: On the motion as proposed by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader that the interval between bells be one minute when it comes to a vote on this bill in Committee of the Whole, does anyone not want this to happen?

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's important that we get

back to the most important bill that we're passing, the appropriation bill, and the need to speak to that. My hon. colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere has been putting out a few solutions on what we should be doing to balance the budget. I want to throw out a few more ideas. If we had a Treasury Board where the opposition were part of that, there are a lot of innovative ideas that come from Albertans. [interjections] He left. He was so disgusted with the way it was working. Who wants to operate under a code of silence? [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the floor, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore will address the chair.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to go over a few ideas on what we should be doing. I guess I want to go back and refer to a comment about the unfair, regressive tax, the flat tax. There's nothing further from the economic truth than that. What we actually want to do and need to do, which this government doesn't understand, is: what are the principles of taxation that grow the economy?

You know, the Premier has said: oh, we're not going to tax our way out of this recession. But that's exactly what he did: tax our way deeper into this recession by saying that we weren't getting our fair share and that we needed to take more because these guys have made more. When they had an \$8 billion surplus and didn't know what to do with it, he said: well, we should have \$9.4 billion, and if we raise the royalty tax, look at all the extra money we're going to get. People who don't understand economics think that by raising taxes, money comes in.

We had the hon. member talking about missing \$4 billion of tax because we have a flat tax here in the province. It's just the opposite. If you actually go back and look at the revenue to the Alberta government and the federal government, it has almost doubled in the last five or six years since we instituted the flat tax. The reason is because wealthy individuals will move to low taxation areas. Corporate headquarters move to areas with low taxation. That's what Premier Klein envisioned and realized when he announced that we were going to drop our corporate tax from 15 per cent to 8 per cent. But somewhere along the way there, around 11 per cent, they got sidetracked because they thought they needed to spend more money.

We need to continue looking at how we reduce the tax and get it down there so that corporations set up their head offices here, so that businesses are set up here. We want industry here in Alberta. We don't want to be shipping out our produce not vertically integrated, using all advantages of the produce that we have, whether that's wood, agriculture, oil and gas. All those areas should be vertically integrated here in Alberta. Why? Because the tax structure is an incentive for them to come here.

Let's talk about a few of the problems, what we should be doing. We really should be putting pressure on the federal government. I remember a few years ago when the finance minister said that we were going to implement a six-month capital gains exemption period. The reason was that if someone had some capital gains, they could move that over into a new area that had an opportunity to grow.

The most important thing in growing an economy is having capital available. You don't want to punish capital. You want to reward capital by instituting and putting pressure on the federal government and saying, you know: "You talked about a six-month window. Let's go with a one-year window so that the innovative Albertans, innovative Canadians who come up with ideas can actually move their money from something that has worked but is trapped there,

move the entire amount into the new area and grow.” We really should be looking at that. What are we going to do to attract capital? The capital cost allowance is what allowed Alberta to develop their oil from the oil sands. It was a great opportunity for entrepreneurs, big business to come in and to raise capital because they were going to get a fast return on the money.

Let’s talk about an area that I’ve talked about before. We have an RRSP, a registered retirement savings plan, one of the good things the government did going years back, realizing we have an unfunded liability with the Canada pension plan. Let’s get these people excited about helping people to help themselves. What we’ll do is have an income tax deduction for people who want to open up an RRSP. That’s the type of tax incentive that allows people to help themselves and move forward, and that’s what we need to do if we’re going to get ourselves out of this recession quicker.

If we were to have a capital investment and inventory savings plan, when a business might sell a portion – or let’s take a rancher or farmer who because of the drought, the bad times, needs to sell off some of his land, maybe some of his cattle. We made a concession a couple of years ago during the drought and allowed them to have a two-year time span to replace that. If we were to develop a capital investment and inventory savings plan, what people could do is put that in there just like a registered retirement savings plan, tax free, and then when an opportunity comes along, they could draw that capital. Maybe it’s for the film industry, that we have an opportunity here, and you want to draw that capital and put it in there. That’s what we need to look at, some new tax incentives that don’t cost the taxpayer but actually bring in capital so that we can grow the economy.

We should be looking at having a discussion that education isn’t free. It’s very expensive, yet I think everybody here in this House would agree that it’s worth it. We want our children to go. We want ourselves to be able to upgrade and to become more educated so we’re more competitive in the world. But how do we do that? We keep talking about that we need to increase taxes. We need more money to go there. Well, there are actually some pretty innovative ideas out there on what we could do. Let’s take the RRSP concept again. If we were to tell students that after you graduate, you can have an income tax deduction on your income if you pay it off to your student loan, all of a sudden it becomes affordable. When they have the income coming in, when they’ve got their job, they can pay it down at an accelerated rate. Then all of a sudden they realize that, you know: I can take an extra year or two because when I get out, I’ll have the opportunity.

Another interesting idea that’s out there is an actual education trust fund, which members in this House have talked about. Actuaries that I’ve had a little bit of involvement with say that the average cost of your education is about 1 and a half per cent of your income in the long term. So if we were to set up this education savings fund, people who went to university and graduated actually could sign on and say, “You know, I’d be interested in paying a 3 per cent premium on whatever income tax rate I’m at. I’ll pay a 3 per cent premium that would go into the education savings fund.” Then that fund would be available for other people to go, and it would start to grow.

Those are ideas that people, if they can’t afford it, look at. Let’s say that you’re in the arts, and you’re going to become a piano teacher, and there isn’t a great opportunity to earn a lot of money. Maybe their tax rate instead of 19 per cent would be 22 per cent. For a successful businessman at maybe 49 per cent it would be 52 per cent. But the idea is: let’s get some funds in place that keep it affordable.

Another area in order to save money and be more efficient is that

we need to look at a new funding formula with municipalities. We have these cap in hand, where you always have to go and ask, you know, the provincial or the federal government for money because they’ve taken it out of our communities. I just want to go over a few numbers here. Back in 2006 the city of Calgary, the individuals there, paid \$5.1 billion in personal income tax out of the city of Calgary; they paid \$2 billion for provincial income tax: \$7.1 billion left the city of Calgary in 2006. I haven’t been able to get the numbers for how much corporate tax came out of Calgary, but I’m sure that it is one of the higher areas because of the corporate towers and the businesses that are there.

5:20

The other interesting thing though, Mr. Chair, is charitable giving: \$434 million was donated by Calgarians to nonprofit and charitable organizations. That is phenomenal at that rate. Albertans want to give to good causes, and I put forward and truly believe that Albertans will give their money to charitable organizations and nonprofits at a far greater – what would I say? – rate if, in fact, the government would just step back a little bit and say: “You know what? We’ll give you the same tax breaks that we give to political donations.” Let’s even step it up one higher. What if we were to say, “You know what? Ten per cent of your income, maybe 15 per cent, whatever it is, if you’d like to give that to a charitable organization that’s registered and accredited out of the provincial or federal government, that would be an income tax deduction.”

There’s a phenomenal organization in Calgary that deals with youth that have addiction problems. It’s called ARC. They raise, I believe, 70 per cent of their own money, and their success rate is phenomenal. The government does give some, but what would happen if we were to change, where successful businesses, successful individuals could give 10 or 15 per cent of their income to a facility like that? You would see that the great facilities that are working would continue to grow, and we’d actually fill that void and help organizations to help the people that really need it.

We need to step back and rethink: how are we going to run our budgets? How are we going to provide the social services that we need to the people here in Alberta? I think that if we go back and look, government isn’t the answer, though so many in this House seem to think that, “Oh, I can look after housing, and I’m going to be able to help that. Oh, I’m going to look after immigration and employment, and I’m going to be able to help those areas. Oh, I’m going to look after tourism, and all of a sudden it’s going to flourish,” like those things couldn’t happen without these ministers. The bottom line, Mr. Chair, is that we can and we will do a lot better if government was to step a little bit to the side.

There are a couple more quotes here that I want to put out. “The government is like a baby’s alimentary canal, with a happy appetite at one end and no responsibility at the other.” That’s what this government has been like. There’s just been a lot of . . . come out the other end that isn’t in our best interest, and there isn’t a diaper to catch it and do something with it. We have a problem. By the way, that was Ronald Reagan. Who else would come up with something like that? Awesome saying. So remember that you’re not wearing a diaper, and it’s a mess.

“A debt is just as hard for a government to pay as it is for an individual. No debt ever comes due at a good time. Borrowing is the only thing that is handy all the time.” Will Rogers. It’s just a real problem.

I wanted to turn for a minute now to the government’s fiscal plan. On page 3 we have: “2010-13 Capital Plan supports \$20.1 billion in projects.” The first question I would ask: is that sustainable? Can we and do we need to spend another \$20 billion from 2013 to 2016?

I think the answer to that would be no. We need to look at it more. This money that we have, the revenue coming in, doesn't need to be burning a hole in the government's pockets, thinking: if we don't spend it, you know, what's going to happen to this money?

It's not being spent well. You know, we have health, school, and postsecondary facilities: \$4.4 billion. Have we gone through a line-by-line item to see and check if we really need to do that for infrastructure? We have hospitals that we can't open, we can't finish because we don't have the money. It has not been good budgeting. Municipal infrastructure support: \$5.2 billion. We have the Green TRIP, again, an area where we should have tax incentives for people who want to go green, not the government picking and choosing a few that in all likelihood – and of course the big one; we'll get to that in a minute – aren't going to work. It's just wrong.

Other capital expenses: \$4.7 billion for carbon capture and storage, housing, and one that I'm really in favour of that we really should be looking at for the future, water infrastructure. But what that doesn't include – when I've done a little research, it's not about water storage. We don't need to be storing CO₂; we need to be storing H₂O. Why are we not looking at off-stream and on-stream areas where we can and should be developing dams? We're already at a critical stage. There is climate change going on. That is something that we can all agree on. What's causing it is definitely up for debate. [interjection] The hon. member doesn't think climate change is happening? I mean, just what happened with the weather today versus the day before, we see climate change. It's been ongoing since this earth began.

Let's look at this other capital expenditure, though, carbon capture. Why would we spend \$2 billion on something that in all likelihood is just going to be another magnesium plant, that we can say is a government boondoggle. It's a silly thing to be spending money on. We shouldn't be doing that.

Again, I want to go back to water infrastructure, water storage. That's where the budget should be prioritized. We haven't built a dam since the Oldman River dam.

An Hon. Member: Wrong.

Mr. Hinman: A major dam. We've had a few small storage ones, but we need some major water storage. I'll grant, hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, that, yes, we've built a few, but you have to acknowledge that they've been very small in comparison to the Oldman River dam and the need that we have.

The fact of the matter is that we have more and more water coming in a shorter and shorter period. If you look at emergency spending, whether it's Okotoks, High River, the different cities, because of the huge amount of water that's been coming in a short period, if we're going to be wise in the use of our resources, we need to be able to store it. It's critical. It's smart. It's something that we should be looking at. That's a project in infrastructure that would again be looking at people's future and the development of Alberta.

Now we get to the really alarming point, direct borrowing: \$1.5 billion directly borrowed in 2009-2010. Why are we borrowing money? Capital projects is why, they say, which includes an estimated hundred million in Alberta capital bonds. Overall in the three years we have a \$3.3 billion plan to borrow. It's wrong, Mr. Chairman. Those are the things that we should be debating and talking about in this bill. Why are we going out and spending that kind of money? I do not understand other than the fact that there's no accountability.

I want to go back, though, to municipalities and the importance of why we should be changing the way we're redistributing our tax here in the province. We need to be setting an example in working

with the federal government. They're taking the lion's share. Going back to the Calgary example, \$5.1 billion to the federal government in personal income tax, \$2 billion to the provincial government in personal income tax. What I believe we need is to set up a formula, just like the government has now done with the fuel tax. There's a percentage that comes back. What if we were to say that 30 per cent is returned to the area that generates that money, 30 per cent to the province, and maybe 40 per cent to the feds? All of a sudden we have sustainable communities.

You look at an area like Fort McMurray, which has contributed billions and billions of dollars to the Alberta and federal governments in revenue, yet they've got a stranglehold on building the seniors' facility. They can't put the education, the bridges, the roads in there, yet the money came from there. We need to realize that that percentage needs to go back to those areas, and all of a sudden they're sustainable. We really need to address this. It always kind of amazes me how each level of government says: "Oh, we're the only one that's accountable. We can't trust municipal government. They wouldn't spend the money right." We need to set the rules and regulations and say, "Well, here's some money for this road," or "Here's the money for a C-train or an LRT," or "Here's a little bit of money in designating it." What we need to do is to return that money to that municipality and let them prioritize where they need to go.

I kind of got a chuckle a few years ago. I was up in Grande Prairie. They had potholes that were just terrible, and they needed to address it.

Mr. MacDonald: How big were the potholes?

Mr. Hinman: So big that I can't say it. It was embarrassing how big they were. You went over into B.C., they were good. In Grande Prairie I don't think we lost any vehicles, I don't think we lost any people, but we lost a lot of money because of the cost of driving and hitting those potholes and the damage that it was doing.

The problem was they applied to the provincial government, said, "We need some extra money," and they said no. Yet the next year the provincial government comes out with this idea of, oh, we'll have a pothole fund to go to these areas. Well, Grande Prairie had already spent the money, so they didn't qualify.

5:30

The problem, where we're really having the deficit, is the democratic deficit. That's the problem. Let's get to the root of this. Are we as elected representatives accountable to the people who elected us? Are we at the local level, the provincial level, the federal level? No, we're not. We need openness and accountability. If we were to put recall in place, we don't need to worry about the money that goes to Calgary or Airdrie or Grande Prairie. The local people can hold their elected people accountable through recall if they're spending the money wrong. To think that a bigger government that's further away is going to hold us responsible: it doesn't work. They don't understand the priorities. We need to change, and we need to look at that.

What we need to do is have a formula, and we need accountability. Again, what we need are open documents. If you go and talk to a councillor in a smaller town, let's say Airdrie . . .

Mr. Anderson: A smaller town?

Mr. Hinman: Well, I mean, compared to Calgary. I'm sorry. It's a tenth.

. . . with a hundred-million-dollar budget, those people that are

elected there to make those decisions go through that budget line by line, and that's what we need to be doing. We need to make sure that . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. Well, there's just so much. I wish we had more time, and I'm sure the members opposite wish for more time as well.

You know, you brought up democracy, and it was in a different context, hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, but there is some truth to that on our budgeting, actually. Part of democracy, of course, and having a healthy democracy is transparency. How many times have we been sitting in this House and I'll say or somebody will say: "Look, we need to balance the budget. This is what we need to do"? Then you'll have government members saying: "Oh, what schools would you blow up? What hospitals would you blow up? What would you do to achieve a balanced budget here? Oh, it would just be absolutely the worst thing ever if you were given the reins because you'd just blow everything up" or "You wouldn't build a school for the rest of all time" or something like that. It's an amazingly silly argument, and it's one that's made over and over and over again, but we're used to hearing it over here.

Part of a good budgeting process would involve transparency. Part of that would mean making the infrastructure list of projects for education, for health care, for infrastructure, for roads, for all things. If we're going to build something, it should be on a list. It should be on a priority list, a specific one. I know that there's a 20-year capital plan, that there's a three-year plan, a five-year plan, and all that, but those things get mixed up so much. There's got to be a master list of projects and the order that they are going to be built in as capital becomes available for them. If we were able to do that, we could as a government, as a House start having conversations about what things can wait, what things can wait a year and a half or two years or three years or four years or more, and what things we need to move up.

The classic example of that is the airport tunnel. That's a priority project, and this member, the Member for Calgary-McCall, has been just very adamant about that. It's also important to the community of Airdrie. But it's so difficult as an opposition member to have the discussion and have the debate and say: "Look, if we move this airport tunnel up on the capital list, we could do that, but what could we take out, or what could we delay?" It's so difficult to do that because there's no transparency. We don't know what the exact priority list is, so it's very difficult. I mean, there are things, I know, in my constituency that could wait 18 months, 24 months, or even longer. I'd be willing to have that conversation, but it's difficult to do that when we don't have the list in front of us. There's also no accountability.

What happens is that the giving out of infrastructure becomes highly politicized. I know it's highly politicized, and people in this House know it's highly politicized. Now, a lot of times political decisions are made that are good, and they end up being the right decisions. But oftentimes they're not the right decisions, and we have bridges to nowhere in this province. I drive through Innisfail every time on my way to work up here at the Leg. There is literally a bridge to nowhere in Innisfail. It's unbelievable. It's funny because this Minister of Infrastructure even admitted to me once that he didn't know how that got built there so quickly or in front of the Airdrie underpass. But the point is that there's no transparency. There's no accountability. How can we possibly know what can wait and what can't wait?

The Calgary airport tunnel is a priority project. It should be a priority project. But we can't skyrocket the deficit even more than it is, so we've got to find other places that we can delay or that we can wait for. In order to have that conversation, we need a transparent priority infrastructure list. I would really hope that in the future we could do that. It would mean that politicians, regardless of who's in government in two or four years, would absolutely have to be accountable for what they do. They couldn't just slide a project at the last minute into the budget and say: now it's a priority.

I mean, we've seen this already with health care. Some of the priorities have changed a lot in the last couple of weeks. The minister is saying: it is a priority. Alberta Health Services is saying: it isn't a priority.

Mr. Danyluk: How would you know that?

Mr. Anderson: Well, it's in the media, hon. member. The minister of health is quoted as saying that a certain project is now a priority, and it wasn't a priority before for Alberta Health Services.

As we go forward, it's important to have that transparency so that we can know where to give and where to take, so that we can have accountability, so that money isn't wasted.

You know, I'd like to move quickly, with about seven minutes left here before the vote, and talk about the hidden cash deficit in this budget and in this Appropriation Act. Obviously, the government of Alberta is claiming a \$4.7 billion deficit in Budget 2010, but of course that's not the whole story. There's at least one set of expenses that is not included in this budget deficit. The total capital spending is projected to be \$7.2 billion, yet only \$4.4 billion of that in infrastructure spending appears in the budget as a line item expense. An additional \$2.8 billion of capital investment in government-owned assets is not included in the government's quoted deficit number.

Now, what I'm not alleging is that anything illegal is happening by this. They are following generally accepted accounting principles. There's no doubt about that. That's not what the argument is. The argument is that they seem to be saying – and it says right on page 18 of their fiscal plan – that that money, because it's offset as an asset on the books, is therefore okay. It doesn't expand the budget deficit number from \$4.7 billion to \$7.6 billion. Under that logic, again, we could build \$30 billion, \$40 billion, \$50 billion in new infrastructure – and I'm sure that the Minister of Transportation would love that – and we'd still have a \$4.7 billion deficit. We could build not just the ring roads that we're building now, but we could build three more in each city, and we would still be running a \$4.7 billion deficit. If the province wanted the airport tunnel, we'd build that. We'd still be at the same budget number for deficit, \$4.7 billion. It makes no sense.

The only reason we know it's happening, essentially – and we see the damage of it – is the sustainability fund. The sustainability fund is going down by \$7 billion this year. If you have a \$4.7 billion deficit, that doesn't equal the sustainability fund going down \$7 billion. On top of that, there's an additional \$1 billion in new debt. So that's \$8 billion in deficit financing that this government is using not just for the \$4.7 billion stated deficit but for the additional \$2.8 billion, that they're not counting as an expense because it's offset as an asset on the books.

5:40

That, to me, is not as transparent as it should be, to say the least. We need to start having a debate. What happens next year or in 2012? You know, the government, of course, is going to be back in the black. Well, hopefully, they are back in the black. I sure hope

so. But when they say that they're back in the black, are they really back in the black, or will they still be going into debt further and draining the sustainability fund further? If they continue in the current accounting practices even when they get to surplus – let's say that it's a \$100 million surplus – if they're still spending \$3 billion on capital, that actually means that we are still in debt by \$3 billion or that we're still in the hole \$3 billion on a cash basis.

That money is going to come out of the sustainability fund, that money is going to come from debt, and that is the not the legacy that I think this government, any member in this House – who wants to leave that legacy? Who wants to leave that legacy to our kids: no sustainability fund by 2012, or \$2 billion left, having used virtually all the interest from the heritage fund for the last however many years; no building of the heritage fund except by, you know, a few inflation-proofings. We lost all that when the market crashed, and we haven't rebuilt it up. That's the legacy that this government is going to leave to our kids in 2012.

Now, obviously, democracy is a great thing. Now that there's a little bit more democracy in this province, I'm assuming we're going to move towards more fiscal accountability in one way or another. However, the position that this government has put our province in is just totally unacceptable. They take credit for those who went before them, for the parties and the leaders that went before them, for their successes, and they blame everyone else but themselves for the current state that we find ourselves in. There are a lot of fiscal conservatives in this House. There are some in every party, I think. Well, maybe not in every party, but there are in most parties. I looked over my shoulder.

Mr. Hinman: They claim that they'll be fiscal conservatives.

Mr. Anderson: They claim it. That's right.

The point is that we all want to see fiscal responsibility, so let's move towards that. The way to start is to put in place a long-term fiscal plan, Mr. Chair, where we restrain our spending. Obviously, the current ministers are incapable of doing that, or at least their ministries are. Maybe it's a bureaucratic problem. Maybe it's their bureaucrats that are giving them a hard time. I don't know. But they can't seem to restrain their spending. They sure haven't over the last 10 years and certainly not over the last three years. The biggest spending spree has been in the last three years.

If that means that we need to institute a cap on increases and spending at the rate of inflation plus growth, then maybe we need to do that. If we do that, as we recover, we can put more away into the heritage savings trust fund, we can build back up the sustainability fund, and we can build that heritage fund to the point where the interest earned there will reduce our reliance on nonrenewable oil and gas revenues. It will allow us to decrease taxes over the long term and diversify our economy. That's what we need to accomplish. The current methods of running around putting out fires, overspending: it has to stop. I sure hope that we can begin moving in that direction as we move forward.

I'm going to make a motion now, Mr. Chair, to reduce the time of the bells on a standing vote to one minute from 10 minutes, if that's okay, with the unanimous consent of the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. If I can phrase this for the hon. member, pursuant to Standing Order 32(3) the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has requested unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 32(2), which calls for a 10-minute interval between bells, and shorten it to one minute. So I'm going to ask one question. Anyone who is not in favour of that, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation bill referred to the Committee of the Whole.

[The voice vote indicated that Bill 15 was approved]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:45 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Denis	Lund
Allred	Drysdale	Marz
Amery	Elniski	McQueen
Berger	Fawcett	Ouellette
Bhardwaj	Goudreau	Prins
Blackett	Hayden	Quest
Campbell	Jacobs	Snelgrove
Dallas	Klimchuk	VanderBurg
Danyluk	Knight	Weadick
DeLong	Lukaszuk	Woo-Paw

5:50

Against the motion:

Anderson	Kang	Taft
Hehr	MacDonald	Taylor
Hinman		

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 7
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[Motion carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 15.

The Acting Speaker: All those members of the Assembly who concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on behalf of the hon. Premier.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise today and move third reading of Bill 1.

I would like to thank all members of the House for the great debate that we have had on Bill 1.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On third reading of Bill 1, I'm not convinced that this legislation was necessary from the start. I'm not changing my mind and at the last moment going to support this supposedly flagship bill. This bill to me indicates just how light the agenda is on that side of the House. Certainly, we can be competitive with our taxation rates, with our productivity rates, with our royalty rates without having this notion that was provided in Bill 1.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: I'd also just like to go on the record to say that this is

a sad day, to think that Bill 1 is the flagship bill. It's an embarrassment to the people of Alberta to say that we need a bill to be competitive. We used to have the Alberta advantage. It's very sorrowful that this is the first and the flagship bill of this government.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. member to close debate.

Mrs. McQueen: Close debate. Question, please.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Mr. Denis: By popular demand, Mr. Speaker – we are late in the day and late in the hour – I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Issue 24

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
ND Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for
Calgary, Deputy Government House Leader
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology
Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

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Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
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Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 25, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Hon. members, tomorrow is the 50th wedding anniversary of His Honour and Mrs. Kwong. I know that all members will want to join with me in extending to them the very happiest of happy occasions. [applause]

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of our Assembly the students of Gateway Christian school. They're here today to observe the Legislature and observe the members here in the House. I'd like to introduce their teachers, Mr. Jim Driedger, Mrs. Klaaske deKoning, and Miss Nicole Stolte, and dedicated parent helpers Mrs. Burzuk, Mrs. Oosterhof, Mrs. Bouch, Mrs. Loney, Mr. Trost, Mrs. Burke, Mrs. Moca and her mother, Mr. Schultze, Mrs. Stewart, Mrs. Boorse, Mrs. Vander Leek, and Mrs. Rademacher. This is a group of brilliant young children that will make us very proud in the future. I would ask them all to rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you 32 members of the Girl Guides of Canada, Alberta Council, and the 4-H, who are participating in the 39th Alberta Girls' Parliament from March 24 to 28, 2010, in Edmonton. This unique program is modelled on the Alberta Legislature, and the delegates come from all over the province. They are accompanied by their adviser, Melanie Reichle; Cindy Fendall, activities co-ordinator; Shannen Hoffman, registrar; Faye Greenslade, facilities co-ordinator; parliamentarians Shannon Robertson and Caitlin Lyster. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome from our Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you. It is my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly some of the immediate family members of the late Father Michael Joseph Troy. The late Father Troy was a well-respected leader, leaving a legacy of tremendous contribution within the Catholic community here in Edmonton, the capital city of our province. Father Troy's family join us today after travelling from Dublin, Ireland. This is a very difficult time for this family as they are here

for the funeral of their beloved brother, uncle, and friend, and it is with heartfelt compassion that I introduce to everyone here in the Assembly the following family members, who are located, Mr. Speaker, in your gallery. I would ask them to rise as I call out their names: Mary Farrell, Father Troy's sister; Tom Farrell, nephew of Father Troy; Paul Farrell, nephew of Father Troy; Betty Farrell, Paul Farrell's wife; Marie Hogan, Father Troy's niece; Deirdre Rhattigan, Father Troy's niece; Bernie Finnegan, Father Troy's niece; Gerry Finnegan, Bernie's husband; Angela Farmer, Father Troy's niece.

They're also joined by some of my immediate family members and a close friend of our family: Tony Sarich, my brother-in-law; Susan Sarich, my sister-in-law; Nicholas Sarich, my nephew; and Bob Fillion, a close family friend to the Sariches and to Father Troy. I would ask everyone to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure on behalf of my colleague from Athabasca-Redwater to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 19 students, teacher Mike Popowicz, teacher assistant Sharon Lakusta, and three parent helpers who have travelled from Thorhild Central school to Edmonton today. I met with them earlier, and I want to compliment the teachers. They had the students very well prepared on the questions that they asked, and it was something that I'm going to definitely pass on to the member. They are seated in the public gallery today, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations a group of residents from the Silver Birch Lodge in Sherwood Park. I'm not sure if they've actually arrived yet, but if they are here behind me, could they please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you might imagine, it takes a very persuasive woman to get someone like me to do yoga for the first time in public in West Edmonton Mall. Today I would like to introduce to you the team behind the yogathon for Haiti. These ladies held a five-hour yoga event in West Edmonton Mall and raised over \$6,000 for the Haitian earthquake relief. I'd ask them to stand as I introduce them: first of all, my very dear friend and constituency board member, Ms Elissa Scott; and Ms Tiffany Burns, an accomplished documentary filmmaker and the event's producer. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd ask you to please give them the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, sitting in the public gallery. They've come here to witness the tabling of the petition calling for Alberta Health Services to stop contracting out security services. Please stand. They are Cherelyn Stefaniszyn, provincial executive for AUPE local 57 and staff at the Red Deer regional hospital centre, and David Climen-

haga, director of communications, Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Please give them our warmest welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be doing a private member's statement on this individual later, but I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Connor Yuzwenko-Martin. Connor is an active member of Rapid Fire Theatre's famed improv troupe, which plays Friday night Theatresports. He is seated in the public gallery. He is accompanied today by his interpreter, Nicole Sander, and by his friend Ryan Giroux. I would ask them to please stand, and I would welcome them to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

1:40

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my guests from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees: President Guy Smith; antiprivatization chair Karen Weiers; from Calgary local 95, chapter 13, Chair Theresa Crabtree and Secretary-treasurer Cindy Tolley; and antiprivatization committee members Dusan Milutinovic and Lois LaRose. They have come to the Legislature to see the tabling of their petition to end contracting out of security services in health care facilities so Alberta can better protect patients. My guests are seated in the gallery. I would ask now for them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature my constituent Hunter Mulawka, who is joined this afternoon by his mother, Jodi, and father, Brian. Hunter was the proud recipient of a trip to the Olympics that was awarded to him from the ATCO celebrating excellence program, which was partnered with the Alberta government. Hunter's application was selected out of thousands which were submitted from children in grades ranging from 4 to 12 across the province. This is not the first time I've had the opportunity to meet Hunter. He's an extraordinary young man. I commend his parents for spending the time to bring him to the Alberta Legislature to see democracy in action. I would ask that they rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Father Michael Joseph Troy, CSSp

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a heavy heart I rise today before the Assembly to pay tribute to a long-time family friend of 32 years, the late Father Michael Joseph Troy, Congregatio Sancti Spiritus.

He was born in 1917, Dublin, Ireland, and passed away in Edmonton, Alberta, on Friday, March 19, 2010, at the age of 92. Father Troy entered the Spiritan novitiate in 1936 and made his first profession as a Spiritan in 1937. Perpetual vows followed in 1940 and ordination to the priesthood in Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1947. From the moment Father Michael Troy stepped off the ship's

gangway in 1958, he kissed the ground and said, "Hello, Canada," and he never looked back.

Father Troy was a charismatic leader, an academic, legendary, and an inspiration to us all. He was an outstanding missionary and priest. He lived his life making the world a better place for everyone. No mission was impossible for Father Troy. Given all of his accomplishments, from being a founding father of numerous organizations to his tireless work with charities to climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in his mid-60s, Father Troy was larger than life itself. He lived every moment to the fullest extent.

He held true to the proud charisms of the Spiritans' tradition. Father Troy concentrated his work on the social justice and spiritual needs of so many individuals, families, and communities. His arms were always held wide to embrace and love others. Father Troy touched the hearts of many and taught us that we are part of God's family.

A recent example of how he touched my family's heart was during the baptism of my great-niece, Sophie Sturko. Father Troy had gifted a holy picture of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which he had received from his mother and carried with him on his life's journey. His wish for Sophie was to live a life full of love and compassion for humanity and to pass down the blessed image and devotion to the next generation of her family. This act of generosity serves as a subtle reminder to us all of the importance of passing down family traditions.

Father Troy was a humble man who throughout life always put the needs of others before his own. Whatever you may have gifted to Father Troy, he always found a way for that gift to be passed on to those in great need. In his last weeks and days Father Troy had a difficult time accepting care from others. He was always concerned that someone else was more deserving of the time and attention.

Mr. Speaker, Father Michael Joseph Troy passed away on March 19, the day which commemorates St. Joseph. According to the Bible St. Joseph was a man of faith and obedient to whatever God had asked him to do, without knowing the outcome. Father Troy was that embodiment. Father Troy was well known for saying: the best is never over; the best is yet to be. Let the good times roll.

Today it is with heartfelt, great sadness that Father Troy has left us behind, but we honour him by celebrating his life, acknowledging that he has touched the hearts of us all.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Connor Yuzwenko-Martin

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I introduced Connor Yuzwenko-Martin, a smart, funny, cute-looking young man who excels at improv theatre and successfully auditioned to become a member of Edmonton's famous and world-winning Theatresports troupe. Connor is also a student at the University of Alberta, taking political science, and is active in campus life, including the OUTreach group.

Oh, did I forget to mention that Connor is deaf? Well, it doesn't affect his energy, his willingness to participate, or his creativity, so it's not the first thing that you notice. Only when you realize that he has an interpreter with him does the penny drop.

Connor's integration into campus and theatre life illustrates a part of society's struggle with the commitment to barrier-free access. While we have capital budgets to ensure that the infrastructure is built to accommodate people with mobility issues, we often don't have operating monies to accommodate access for people with sight or hearing barriers. Thus, Rapid Fire Theatre and GM Karen get big

smoochy kisses from me for insisting on opening their audition process to Connor and for taking the step to pay for his interpreter so that he could be on stage every Friday for Theatresports, a huge commitment at 120 bucks a pop. Today our very own visitor services has stepped up with their commitment to barrier-free access, and I'd like to thank them and recognize them.

Oh, yeah. Did I mention that Connor is gay? It's interesting that still today an impairment of sight or hearing or one's sexual orientation makes one a member of an invisible minority. They are all still subject to discrimination, to barriers of access, and even to questions of personal safety.

So kudos to you, Connor, and to those who support you.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Earth Hour

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Saturday marks the third global celebration of Earth Hour, started by the World Wildlife Fund in 2007. We are encouraged to turn off our lights for one hour in support of action against climate change. The real value of Earth Hour is the awareness it raises, and its success is a result of how easy it is to take part.

Last year Earth Hour reached more than 1 billion people in 80 countries around the world, and in Canada more than 10 million people switched off their lights. I intend to take part, and so does the government of Alberta. As a symbol of the government of Alberta's commitment to take action to address climate change, all nonessential lights in the Legislature Building and the McDougall Centre will be shut off during Earth Hour. The Alberta government continues to reduce its environmental impact by improving energy practices, promoting recycling, and implementing environmental programs that ensure sustainability. I encourage my colleagues and all Albertans to support the global lights-out initiative by turning off the switch at 8:30 on Saturday evening.

Earth Hour alone, Mr. Speaker, will not accomplish what is needed with regard to our action on climate change, but it is an important step in dimming human impact on the environment.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Funding for Human Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today my questions are for the Premier. Does the Premier accept the fact that the oil and gas industry is a boom-and-bust industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas industry is just like any other. It depends on world markets. It depends on technology and innovation to access some of the more difficult sedimentary basins that we have in Alberta. Of course, it's an industry that has been hit very hard, as have other industries, forestry, and agriculture, because of this unbelievable economic downturn.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier also accept that human services such as health and education are not boom-and-bust industries?

Mr. Stelmach: Protecting the vulnerable is not an industry. It is something that we do for people. It is something that we do to protect the vulnerable in this province out of compassion, and we do it to the best we can given the revenue stream, trying to find a balance in other budgets to provide as much money for taking care of the vulnerable in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our province's largest source of revenue is a boom-and-bust industry and given that services such as health care and education and other human services need stable funding, how does the Premier justify making decisions on which services to cut and how much given the revenue of the past year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, prudent financial planning has not only paid off a huge accumulated debt in years prior, but we have set aside two savings funds. One is the heritage savings trust fund. That is for our grandchildren. That fund is coming back up closer to its original value of \$17 billion. Then we also have a cash surplus fund, which we call the sustainability fund, that we're using today to cushion the blow to our revenues, and that is going to sustain our social programs.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Vancouver Winter Olympics Advertising Costs

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Vancouver Olympics and the amazing performances of our athletes created excitement and inspiration across Canada with a wave of patriotism that still lives. Now we are starting to see some of the bills for this event, created not only by athletes but by politicians and partying. This government has recklessly claimed that \$70 million in advertising benefit has been achieved, as if it was a fact, through the train and other services, yet we all know that this kind of advertising benefit is notoriously hard to measure. To the Premier: can the Premier tell Albertans what metrics were used to determine the number, and if he can't, will he promise to quit using \$70 million until he can confirm it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's amazing. People outside this province have recognized the value of the Alberta train, recognized the value of Alberta House, all of the people that we've attracted from different corners of the world. Again, just to quote:

Alberta Hitchin' Its Hoss to B.C. Games Train.

You have to hand it to the Albertans. First, they stole our Olympic train . . . you know, the sole train now operating on the scenic railway line between North Vancouver and Whistler, wrapped in Alberta's new promotional materials.

That's Jon Ferry from the Vancouver *Province*.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the same question: what metrics are you using to make sure that Albertans got value for that multimillion-dollar expenditure? What metrics?

Mr. Stelmach: I'll give another metric here.

The Hottest Olympic Ticket Isn't the Hockey Final.

What the wily Albertans figured out even before the closing ceremony in Beijing in 2008 is that they weren't going to fork out hundreds of thousands of dollars hosting VIPs at gold-medal events that they are almost certain to watch.

With the train, they not only have their guests' full attention by taking such good care of them, they've attracted all kinds of media coverage.

Media coverage: that's a measurement of success.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we now know that the much-vaunted Alberta train was really a ghost train. It was only around half full, even with the added presence of Tory MLAs and their friends and staff riding for free. Why did the government wait until just days before the games to begin selling tickets?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, misinformation. The train was full. In fact, people were wanting to get on as one of the sole ways of getting from Vancouver to Whistler.

You know, Mr. Speaker, here again we just heard a member's statement about the value of arts and culture to this province. It is a value. It's part of the industry. I think the \$6 million that we spent on culture, advertising Alberta, is money well spent, and it helps the artist that the hon. member introduced in the House earlier. That's where the expenditures and the support are going.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Facilities Security Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is proceeding to contract out yet another service of our health care system with no regard for consequences on patient and worker safety. No proof has been shown that could justify getting rid of in-house security. We have been contacted by a range of people, from nurses to patients, who feel that this change is actually going to provide less public safety and less quality of care. To the Premier: in the interest of public safety and quality of care will the Premier immediately order Alberta Health Services to stop contracting out security services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister is much closer to that file and has more information on it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, under the old model, as it's sometimes referred to, many areas of the province virtually had little or no security whatsoever, and in the new model all care sites are going to have access to the kind of protective services that are important to their area.

Dr. Swann: Well, speaking of the rural hospitals, Mr. Speaker, that's some of the people we heard from. Security staff are an integral part of their health care delivery team. They know the staff. They know the patients. They know the community. This improves patient care. To the minister: why will the minister not take action and reverse this unwise decision?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we're doing in the security operation centre that will help monitor the situation being referred to is having some live feed television monitors put in place. That, too, will help provide the kind of added security that is necessary, particularly in those centres that I mentioned earlier that have little or none.

Dr. Swann: Well, this government doesn't seem to understand health care, and it doesn't seem to understand human security and human relations. Will the Premier come clean and do what his minister of health could not this week and tell Albertans how many jobs will be lost throughout the province with this change?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you if their jobs will be lost or not. All I know is that this will be a better system. It'll be much more efficient. Also, any savings that we can muster in that particular area will go directly into front-line health care services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Children and Youth Services Budget

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government definitely doesn't understand the difference between needs and wants. They are spending billions pumping hot air into the ground while Alberta's most vulnerable are facing cuts. The minister of children's services claims that she gave a clear directive that was ignored by a respected CEO in region 6. Now he allegedly has gone on to pursue other opportunities. To the Premier: when will he table proof in this House that the minister actually gave that direction so that Albertans know with certainty that this staff member isn't being used as the minister's scapegoat?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member was here for estimates, and those estimates were before the House. I can't recall the debate and when the estimates came here, but they were here. He can refer to *Hansard* for all of the questions with respect to the respective areas of her budget.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, Mr. Speaker, you might as well say that we cut off a finger, but we gained two pounds, so we didn't lose anything.

Today we learned of more cuts to vulnerable Albertans. Again to the Premier: given that the agencies supporting the disabled are raising concerns about million-dollar cuts to their funding, can the Premier explain why this government is so intent on punishing community-based agencies that compassionately deliver services to disabled more effectively and efficiently than government does?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise has rolled out exactly how much the budget has increased in all of the social areas. We've had to reduce some budgets in some ministries, but we're maintaining the budgets in PDD and in foster care. Those are part of the most vulnerable, and we will move dollars around within the overall budget to make sure that we do take care of the vulnerable.

Mr. Hinman: He'd better look at the regional budget; it's not the overall budget.

Again to the Premier: how many social agencies in Calgary will be forced to close as this government continues to direct funding to their \$7 million branding initiative, their growing, bloated bureaucracy rather than to community-based organizations and front-line workers?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is really scraping the bottom of the barrel now. He's having to go around and look at different regions to try to play with numbers and confuse Albertans. There was an actual spending growth for the demographic growth in seniors in the budget. I suggest the hon. member look at total figures, not wander around trying to pick out little misleading figures from this region or that region.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Funding for Foster Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 9, 2009, 11 foster parents wrote a letter to the Premier, the minister of children's services, the CEO of region 6, and their government MLA. They were concerned that government had broken its promise to maintain funding levels for foster parents who actually adopt foster children. Nine months later this funding disparity remains. Why won't the Premier admit that by contacting government, these parents got absolutely no help?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't recall the letter from May, I think, of '09. All I know is that on the particular issue that was before this House and that occurred over the last few days, the minister took firm and decisive action in this file. We kept our word. We said that there would be no cuts to foster supports and for those that are looking after children especially with disabilities like autism, which is very difficult on foster parents. That is where we're at today, and the minister will proceed with respect to working with all of the regions.

Ms Notley: Well, given that the Premier has suggested that it's up to foster parents to brief him and his minister about government policies that threaten funding for foster children, why won't the Premier admit that he is effectively blaming foster parents for the fallout of his own decision to cut funding to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, the reverse: I'd like foster parents to come directly to the minister and to their MLA in case there is misinformation given by any service providers out there that we contract. They come to the minister. That is the process. I invite all foster parents that may have some maybe misinformation or wrong direction given to them by the particular region to come forward and advise the minister so the minister is fully well aware of what's happened.

Ms Notley: Well, given the Premier's illogical take on who is responsible for the effects of this government's plan to cut funding for children in care in the Edmonton region, why won't the Premier admit that his blame game has a chilling effect on foster parents and staff and will increase government secrecy rather than promote transparency and public accountability, which presumably we all want?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous respect and admiration for parents who come forward and open their homes to foster children. Those are very, very difficult situations for many. I would say that rather than criticizing some of the foster parents in this House, we all work together to encourage more foster parents because, as I said earlier, we have over 9,200 children in the care of government. That is a serious matter, and that's why we need the support of foster parents and government to work together.

Alberta Health Services Budget

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, for many months the Alberta Health Services superboard has claimed \$650 million to \$700 million in annual efficiency savings since taking over the health regions, but I'm beginning to think these claims are bogus. We've asked in writing, in meetings, in committees, and in the Legislature for details. At

most the replies have accounted for less than 10 per cent of the claim. In other words, Alberta Health Services has fallen 90 per cent short on accountability. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister either provide details on where this \$700 million came from, or will he finally admit the claims are bogus?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm well aware of the comments made by Alberta Health Services regarding the savings that they anticipate will be made. They remain in that estimated figure of \$600 million to \$700 million. As soon as I receive that information in a little more detail, I'd be happy to provide it to that member.

Dr. Taft: Well, will the minister explain what seems to be a contradiction in that the superboard says that it's found \$700 million in annual savings but still needed a \$1.3 billion top-up? Was, then, the total deficit of Alberta Health Services really \$2 billion?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, \$1.3 billion was not a top-up, and the member should know this if he pretends to know anything about health care. It was a deficit.

Ms Blakeman: You won't give us the information.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I've given the information, hon. members. The hon. member over there knows it. If you've read estimates, you'd have it.

The point here is that if you were looking for \$1.3 billion of savings, if we hadn't covered it, I challenge this member to tell me where he would find those cuts because you won't find them, and you know darn well you won't.

Dr. Taft: Well, since we're challenging each other here, Mr. Speaker, if the \$700 million in savings which Ken Hughes of the superboard claimed again just a couple of weeks ago in his speech are not true, I challenge this minister to hold Ken Hughes to account. Will he do that?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that information will come out. It's been offered publicly that there's a commitment to say it. [interjections] If you'd just keep quiet for a moment, I'll finish answering the question.

The point here is that there are savings going forward here as part of the five-year funding plan, and they've identified those areas, and we will see them. So just hang tight. Don't get too excited over there. It'll happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Crowsnest Creek Diversion

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Environment. During the flood of June 1995 the Crowsnest Creek overflowed its banks and took a new route, threatening the Canadian Pacific rail line near Summit Lime Works. To mitigate this threat to the rail lines, CP Rail had contractors divert the flow, which inadvertently cut the flow to Island Lake, turning a healthy, fish-bearing lake into a stagnant slough. What action did Alberta Environment take on this issue?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this is an ongoing issue that I've had discussions on both with the current MLA and the previous MLA for Crowsnest Pass. The history on this is that there was a diversion that

was put in place in about the 1940s that was destroyed by the flood in 1995. What actually happened was that the river returned to its natural course. What CP did was remove the silt that had accumulated over that period of time so that the river could be accommodated. They did so under approval of Alberta Environment.

Mr. Berger: To the same minister: given that this had the effect of taking away the flow and that the water level of Island Lake is now very low, is there anything Alberta Environment will do to rectify this situation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of instances around the province where we have requests from communities to build diversions or protect erosion problems caused by nature. We've taken the position that we don't get involved in funding those kinds of projects. However, we would welcome any application to come forward from the community should they wish to restore this original diversion, which would in turn restore the levels in the lake.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. My third question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Given that your ministry has a day-use park on the lake and an overnight campground immediately adjacent to the lake, will you take measures to ensure that someone makes this lake a lake again?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. We do have about 40 camping stalls and a day-use area at Island Lake provincial recreation area, and re-establishing the lake levels would be a very big enhancement to these campgrounds. We're very supportive of that, and my ministry would be willing to work with Sustainable Resource Development and with Environment to see if anything could be done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Community Grant Programs

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community facility enhancement program and community initiatives program continue to take six months or more before groups get a response despite years of promises from the ministry that that will be fixed. Groups continue to get form letter rejections which give no indication of the criteria by which they are judged, what the priorities are for any given grant cycle, or what they could do to improve their chances next application. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: why does there continue to be an absence of any kind of verifiable and consistent criteria so groups can understand how their applications are judged?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, there are criteria that are obviously given to each and every applicant as they apply for their particular application, whether it's CIP or CFEP. That means that they have financial criteria to meet. We have to look at the viability of the project. We have to look at community support and those interests, and our community liaison officers indicate that right at the outset. There will be 80 per cent of the applications denied because of the tremendous amount of ask that there is out there. We don't have the time to go through each and every application that is not approved and let them know exactly what the criteria that weren't . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: You've got a due diligence checklist, not eligibility requirements.

Back to the same minister: if it's not accurate, then why do groups continue to be told that problems with CIP and CFEP funding applications should be taken to government MLAs to be fixed?

Mr. Blackett: Well, I don't know about government MLAs. There are MLAs there on the opposition benches from each and every party that have come to me and asked for help with respect to a constituent's application, and I have done so. I have government members who come to my office and ask for assistance, and we do so. You know what? We are trying in our department to come up with improvements. We have a quarterly grant processing program that we utilize now.

An Hon. Member: Your nose is growing.

Mr. Blackett: The hon. member who is talking about noses growing: at least that paragon of virtue over there actually went out, had the temerity to indicate on his website how much money he gave out, which was contrary to the rules that are already on there.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: given that schools are the heart of the community and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues supports a moratorium on closures until a comprehensive review can be completed, will the minister commit to meet with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to discuss common interests, please?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that's hardly supplemental to CFEP, but I'll see if I can connect it to CFEP in some way. The short answer is that I meet with . . .

The Speaker: I don't know the connection either, and the hon. member signed a document saying that they wouldn't do that, so I don't get this.

Education System in Finland

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, one of the best ways to enhance Alberta's competitiveness is to maintain our world-leading standing in education. Other countries recognize the extraordinary importance that education will play in their economic future, and their students are leaping ahead of Alberta students. I was pleased the other evening to go to hear an educational consultant from Finland speak in St. Albert. To the Minister of Education. Finland has what is, very simply, the best education system in the world. Notably, unlike Alberta, they have no state testing or school ranking lists. When will Alberta follow their lead?

The Speaker: We have to get a response from the minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Pasi Sahlberg has been on a tour around Alberta a number of times and is quite an expert on education and well worth listening to, and I've heard him a number of times. Finland is actually recognized as one of the best systems in the world, but it's more than just a question of not having tests. In fact, in the opportunity I had to meet with six jurisdictions from around the world who are rated among the top 25 in the world, the common thing that we found about all jurisdictions that are excellent is excellence in teaching. All the rest of the things that

they have are quite different, and we can be strong in different areas, but it's excellence in teaching which draws them together. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Finnish students are in school for far fewer hours than Alberta students yet their achievement is much higher, are you considering reducing the number of hours Alberta students spend in school?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not actually a question of hours. Yes, Finland does have a lot shorter number of hours for their students. Also, their students start later. They start at age 7, which develops a maturity that has worked very well for them.

Of course, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has been shouting at me, they have child care and other things at the earlier ages, which is supported. Suffice it to say that Finland does very well. They have many different things in their system which are different from ours and different from other successful places in the world, and they have some things that other places do which do not give them the results.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why does Alberta's education system not follow the Finnish model, where teachers spend more time collaborating with each other than anywhere else?

Mr. Hancock: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. Again, when I had the opportunity to be in Singapore to look at the Singapore system and meet with ministers of education from around the world, one of the things that became very apparent: professional development, selecting the best teachers, educating them appropriately, making sure that they're well inducted into the profession, and making sure that they have good, solid opportunities for professional development throughout their professional life is what helps to create excellence in teaching. That amount of time that they have in Singapore and in Finland for teachers to get together to learn from each other and to build their professional practice enhances their education system, and we should be looking very closely at that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Residential Building Codes

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs said that he's not looking at applying building codes retroactively because to do so would be too difficult. Well, it hasn't been too difficult for Ontario to bring buildings up to code. Ottawa alone has retrofitted over 2,000 of them. In British Columbia it wasn't too difficult for them to fork over \$670 million in interest-free loans over 12 years to fix their leaky condo mess. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: if it isn't too difficult for other provinces to protect condo owners from fire and water, why is it too difficult for this minister?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, Alberta doesn't have the same types of issues that British Columbia had. We don't have, as far as I'm aware, leaky condos. Certainly, there are some issues with the

envelopes around some of our homes, but we're not dealing with some of the issues that B.C. and other provinces are dealing with.

Mr. Taylor: Whoa. Talk about splitting hairs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in recent years cheaper construction materials have been used in building multifamily housing and the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs claims that that stuff burns faster and hotter, if the minister won't look at retrofitting buildings with sprinklers to solve the problem that we have in this province, what will he do?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are still working on our building codes. As I've indicated all week to this hon. member, we do have some of the strongest and best building codes anywhere in the nation. We continue to review those, and we are well ahead of other provinces and the national building code in doing those things.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, last time the building associations weren't consulted about the changes to Alberta's building codes. Will the minister commit to immediately working with building associations to strengthen fire safety and to tabling the results in the House?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that was part of the whole process. We do consult with industry. We do consult with building individuals as well as individual homeowners. Because of that particular process, it takes us a while to bring in additional codes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Health Services Decision-making

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the creation of the Alberta Health Services Board my constituents have voiced concerns about loss of local autonomy or influence with regard to decisions made impacting rural hospitals. Some decisions are best made locally. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is being done to ensure that the local organizations like hospital foundations have input into how the funds they have raised are spent locally and in a co-ordinated manner?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, health foundations and other fundraising groups at the local level are an extremely important part of what we're doing in terms of delivering the best-performing, publicly funded health system in Alberta. Foundations here locally, for example, have helped build the world-renowned Stollery children's centre, the Mazankowski Alberta Institute, the Lois Hole hospital, which will be opened more vigorously very soon. There is ongoing consultation that AHS is doing with foundations and other local community groups. They'll be doing that over the next few months and working out a plan in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: is there a mechanism in place for front-line health workers to have input into the system with good ideas and best-practice suggestions?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of mechanisms or initiatives in place. In fact, one of them deals directly with employee submissions. There is a program called action your ideas, for example. It's more of an initiative than a program through which

employees can feed in, and I believe that something in the order of 700 submissions were recently received. Quarterly staff sessions with the CEO is another mechanism. Finally, our health advisory councils, one of whom I met with yesterday, rounds out the three that I had in mind.

Mr. Doerksen: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: have there been cost efficiencies or other efficiencies gained as a result of the organizational structure of a single health board for Alberta?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of cost savings. Unfortunately, there was so much yelling and shouting from the opposition that I didn't get a chance to answer this a little earlier. There is a target there, a real one, of between \$600 million and \$700 million due to the amalgamation of nine regions into one. There are huge savings in HR and finance and payroll and other administrative areas, and more information on that will come out when it's provided to me.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Oil Sands Emissions

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a speech on Tuesday the Premier stated that emissions from the oil sands have been cut by 38 per cent since 1990, when the truth is that they've actually increased more than 300 per cent. The Premier's staff rushed to his defence, saying that the information they provided to the Premier wasn't clear. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister explain to the Premier the difference between intensity and absolute reductions before environmentalists, the NDP, and maybe even the roaming peahen are blamed for keeping information from the Premier?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member and all members that I don't need to explain the difference to the Premier. He's well aware of it, and he indicated that when he answered the question.

Ms Notley: Well, given that emissions have actually increased more than threefold over the last 20 years, why won't the Minister of Environment set the record straight and admit that intensity targets don't equal absolute reductions and that any statement otherwise, even if made by the Premier, is pure spin?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the end target, of course, is absolute reductions. How do you get absolute reductions? You get them by advancing technology, by ensuring that the technological advances reduce the intensity, and over time as you reduce more and more intensity, then you can accommodate some additional growth. If we could have twice as much or three times as much economic activity with 10 per cent emissions, we would have absolute reductions.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier claimed a 38 per cent reduction when, in fact, we have a 300 per cent increase, will the minister commit to contacting each of the oil sands suppliers at the National Buyer/Seller Forum, where the Premier gave the misinformation, correct the record, and report the emissions information in absolute terms, not intensity spin?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the record is intact. There is no need to correct the record. The facts speak for themselves. There have been dramatic reductions in intensity in the oil sands regions, and I

suggest to this hon. member that there is not a person at the buyer/seller conference that doesn't understand that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Beach Corner Road Intersection

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Local residents are angry about changes that were made to the intersection of 16A and Beach Corner Road just west of Stony Plain. They claim that changes have caused poor visibility, traffic congestion, and a parking nightmare. To the Minister of Transportation. There's a blind spot at the intersection because of the uneven pavement. Will the minister listen to these citizens' concerns and correct the problem?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, if there is a problem at 16A and Beach Corner, as he's talking about, we will have engineers out there looking at it, I will get a report from them, and we will make sure that we correct the problem if there really is an unsafe problem. I'm not fully aware of the problem, but if there's an unsafe problem out there, we'll be looking after it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did the minister put a roundabout at this intersection that is only good enough for small trucks to turn around and not for semis with 53-foot trailers?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the particular roundabout he's talking about, but let me fill you in a little bit about roundabouts. The same thing happened in Sylvan Lake. We have a roundabout that was put in at the junction of 11A and highway 20. Originally, I got a bunch of letters saying: if you put this roundabout there, we'll never vote for you again, and on and on and on. Since then I've had a whole bunch of letters saying: "Wow. Does this ever work well. It works great. Thank you very much for pushing ahead with it." That particular one, the circles are designed to drag the trailers over . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've got hundreds of residents writing letters otherwise about this intersection. That is poor planning. So far we have only heard that the minister is reviewing this issue. When will the minister finally get around to fixing this poorly planned and dangerous intersection?

Mr. Ouellette: Holy moly, Mr. Speaker. I've heard it all now. Why, oh, why would people give hundreds of letters to the opposition and none to the Minister of Transportation? It doesn't make sense to me.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Clean Energy Research

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of the experts I met with during my recent mission to Europe were very impressed with our government's financial commitment to CCS technology but had questions about how we are funding and supporting other types of green energy research. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: can you explain what other areas, outside of CCS, we are funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, many of our European friends are very impressed with the amount of resources we are putting toward CCS. In fact, the investment in green technology in this province is going far beyond just CCS technology. We're working on tools to reduce energy intensity, as was mentioned earlier. In the oil and gas sector we're working on water and water research. We're working on nanotechnology, which I've talked a lot about in this House, on solar cells and photoelectric cells. We have a demonstration project right here in Edmonton on municipal waste.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how are we ensuring that we address this critical gap between the lab and the street when it comes to clean technology development?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that is something that many jurisdictions around the world are working with and struggling with. We have taken some of the best practices from around the world, like our innovation vouchers, and we've used that to connect to the lab, to prototype the lab to the marketplace. Our new connector service is extremely important for small up-and-coming companies. I mentioned earlier, in my previous answer, about the municipal waste project demonstration and where CO₂ is being injected into older gas wells and older oil wells. We're going to enhance oil recovery. These are business-case scenarios that work for real businesses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, again to the same minister. We are a province of 3 million people, and clearly these are issues that are being looked at all over the world. How are we making sure that we are not duplicating efforts of other research groups around the world who are also looking to solve these technical challenges? Who are we collaborating with?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, very interesting in the sense that we are obviously getting a lot of, you would say, international press on some of the things that people think we're doing wrong. We're also getting a lot of attention about the things that we're doing right, especially in greenhouse gas emissions or the environment and reclamation. This has attracted attention from the University of Hamburg, the Helmholtz institutes, and Rice University in Texas. We have a lot of collaboration around the world that is ongoing. They're coming to Alberta to seek us out so that we are not duplicating efforts around the globe.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, studies, reports, audits, and this government's own information confirms that the temporary foreign worker program is leaving newcomers to Alberta vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: when will this minister end the abuses by ensuring that there are no more second-class citizens in Alberta's workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a good question because it's a matter that's very, very important to me not only as minister but also personally. Resources are now put in place not only allowing but encouraging foreign workers to report any and all conduct that may be unbecoming in the province. Not only are we putting out the information in English, but we are now capable of accepting complaints in more than 150 – that's one, five, zero – languages. Every time a complaint comes in, it is being duly investigated.

Mr. Hehr: The minister claims that he can do nothing about this program, but a suggestion I have is: why doesn't he go to the federal government and renegotiate our immigration accord to eliminate this toxic program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I object to the language. A program that gives people in different countries a chance to come to this fabulous province and earn a good living and, by doing so, assist our economy and its growth is definitely not toxic. There is nothing toxic about foreign workers either. They are individuals that are protected the same way as all Alberta workers are protected. But it is a federal program. Some aspects of it are administered by the province, and I'm doing my utmost and our front-line workers are doing their utmost to make sure that all workers are well protected.

Mr. Hehr: I agree with the minister's comments in that the people are here doing great jobs and great work for our community. They're good enough to serve lunch at our counters, to help me get out of bed, to do other things in our community. Why aren't they good enough to become citizens of this great province right off the hop?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, again a very good question. My suggestion to this member would be that, come the next federal election, he run as a Member of Parliament and raises that question there because the issuance of visas and permanent resident status is federal. However, I will be raising issues within the program to the federal government, the government who created this program in the first place and administers the program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Rural Family Physician Recruitment

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hearing and receiving calls from my rural communities. Community medical clinics are being converted into walk-in clinics in order to accommodate the shortage of doctors for all these patients these offices receive. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why is Alberta Health Services pursuing this conversion when these efforts prevent my constituents from booking appointments ahead of time, especially considering they have to travel long distances to reach those clinics?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as private practitioners physicians have the freedom to choose their style of practice and the office hours that they keep. Some of them are actually deciding to become members of the team approach called primary care networks, and those primary care networks are proving extremely effective. In fact, most of them, if not all, would boast same-day ask, same-day access type of service.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, and thank you to the minister. This just magnifies the difficulty we have in retaining qualified family physicians in rural communities. To the same minister: what are we going to do to encourage retention and attract doctors to rural Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are several things that are being done. There are several incentives within the program that are all part of the rural physician action plan. For example, we do have programs for rural physicians specifically wherein education and research are supported, training opportunities are provided while locum opportunities allow them to take a breather, take a day off, take a vacation, and so on. We also have the business cost program, which provides funding directly to help them run their offices, and in several cases many rural physicians receive a special premium for medically insured services that they provide.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of foreign-trained doctors who are looking for accreditation. I'm wondering what the minister is prepared to do to work with the College of Physicians and Surgeons to get that accreditation so that they can fill the shortage that we face in rural Alberta.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, not long ago I met and have had several conversations recently as well, I should say, with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I raised this very issue. I know that our medical residency programs have actually increased every year since about 2004. This year, for example, there will be 50 of these spots. We also provide funding to help encourage some of these international applications to be filed and to help them navigate the system in Alberta. So we're doing a lot to help with the issue raised.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Manufacturing Outsourcing to Korea

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last October 6 a South Korean steel fabricator signed a deal with Imperial Oil worth \$250 million to manufacture at least 200 production modules for the Kearl oil sands project at Fort McMurray. These plant modules manufactured in South Korea will be provided by July 2011. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. How many construction and steel fabrication jobs were lost here in Alberta as a result of this \$250 million order being placed in South Korea, not south Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to thank this hon. member for setting this up so perfectly for me. First of all, I've been itching to be able to stand up and report to this House that Statistics Canada has reported today that the number of Albertans on EI right now in Alberta has dropped by 14.8 per cent. That is 10,040 fewer unemployed Albertans, and we are leading Canada right now in recovery. That perhaps addresses your question in some part.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of the EI recipients have been unemployed for so long that they have exhausted their benefits, I'd better ask the minister of finance. Does Imperial Oil get to deduct the construction and shipping costs of these modules from South Korea from the royalty payments that they pay here in Alberta?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I have to wonder what world the hon. member is living in. It's called the global economy. Does he want to actually put a wall around Alberta and say there is no procurement? What does that do to a province like Alberta that exports oil and gas, cattle and wheat, coal and timber? We're an exporting country. It's about free trade. Does he want to repeal the free trade agreement, too?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, this is the minister that wanted at one time to build a firewall around Alberta.

Now, again to the minister of finance: does Imperial Oil get to deduct the construction and shipping costs from South Korea from their corporate tax payments?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd be more than happy to provide bus fare for the hon. member to go right down Jasper Avenue to the buyer and seller forum . . .

Mr. Lukaszuk: One way, please.

Dr. Morton: One way, perhaps. There are 500 people from all over the world, Ontario, and Quebec here to do the supply chain into the oil sands. It's good for Alberta. It's good for all of Canada. You want a little wall around it. Welcome to the global economy is what I say to that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Canadian Forces Liaison

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the first time in many, many years Alberta has an elected representative acting as liaison with the Canadian armed forces. That liaison also happens to be the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. All my questions are to our new liaison to the Canadian armed forces. Isn't this role already filled by the MLAs who have a presence in their constituencies?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fitting that this question does come from a member who spent a considerable amount of time serving his country in uniform. I congratulate the member. I would also say that, in fact, the role that MLAs are playing, representing the over 12,000 men and women who create the footprint in the province in Alberta and a billion dollar economic consequence to this province, has raised the point that we should have that kind of liaison to the Canadian forces, and indeed I commend those MLAs for doing that. That's part of the reason why the role that I see as the liaison is a co-ordination effort.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is this an added component to the Deputy Premier's role, or is there some overlap with the government's research or postsecondary agendas?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, because it was new, we did take a little bit of time to try to ascertain exactly what other provinces were doing with their cabinet liaison roles. We've kind of developed this based on what the Canadian forces would like us to have as this kind of a role. What we found during those consultations is that there is a considerable amount of overlap with our department from the perspective of apprenticeship training, the postsecondary system, from leadership training as well as, interestingly enough, on the research side. Alberta companies are working on a number of innovative projects both on the health side and from the Campus Alberta side but really interesting is body armour, Acticoat bandages, and IED imaging.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: when will these potentially life-saving innovations be out in the field helping our soldiers?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we're working on, actually, a first of its kind agreement with the Department of National Defence on trying to bring some of these very innovative solutions to the field. Certainly, the military is very interested in this given the amount of casualties we see from IEDs. We are developing a much closer relationship with the Canadian Forces in the research component as well as the training component. We hope to see some very good results in the very near future, and obviously that's for the benefit of all Canadians.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Health Facilities Security Services (continued)

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we have already heard today, security personnel are an important component of our medical delivery system as they ensure that medical staff, especially emergency room staff, are able to attend to their patients in a safe and controlled manner. My constituents have been telling me that Alberta Health Services is planning to reduce or eliminate security personnel in hospitals in Lacombe and Ponoka. My question is to the minister of health. Why are you pursuing this policy, Mr. Minister, and how will you ensure the safety of health care workers in my community given that they're often under threat of violence from patients who may be suffering from mental disorders or alcohol?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're always concerned wherever the issue of safety of patients or safety of staff and other workers at our facilities comes into question. In fact, as I understand it today, this new model is going to address those very issues in a much more vigorous way. That will include more co-ordination, a more streamlined approach to it, and an equitable securities service provision province-wide. This is a good thing because it should lead to a broader protection for more people. However, I do recognize that every community is different, and I have pointed that out to the Alberta Health Services decision-makers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you. Again to the minister of health: will you

ensure that the level of security offered by the new providers is as good, if not better, than before?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the intention of the new model that will be coming out very soon. We know that safety is of utmost importance to workers and to others involved. We also know that the new protective services model will offer a combination of different types and forms of service deliveries in terms of protective services. People will be able to use a combination of community peace officers and contract security officers, who are supervised by team leaders. The number of positions will obviously vary from site to site, but I will keep that in mind in my future discussions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental again to the same minister: how soon will our medical staff in Lacombe and Ponoka know about these new measures?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services told me last night, I believe, that on or about May 1 of this year they will have this system fully implemented. I think it's important to recognize that there are some spots in the province where perhaps a slightly different approach or a different model might need to be considered, and I think the hon. member has raised two that might be considered in that regard. Again, I will pass that on to Alberta Health Services to ensure that our health facilities and the people working in them feel safe and secure and protected.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 114 questions and responses today coming from 19 different members: nine from the Official Opposition, seven from the government private members area, two from the fourth party, and one from the third party.

Earlier today one of the members participating in Members' Statements extended the time frame from two minutes to three minutes and 20 seconds, which is now going to cause us potentially a problem coming up with Standing Order 7(7). So I will not advise members that it's 3 o'clock when it is 3 o'clock; I would advise members that it's 3 o'clock when it's 3:01:20.

We will proceed with Members' Statements in 15 seconds.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Seniors Advisory Council Chair

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to welcome the new chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. The council is a government appointed body that reports through the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports on matters relating to Alberta seniors. The council gathers information on issues important to seniors, which in turn is used to develop advice on policies, programs, and services for seniors. The council also co-ordinates the annual province-wide Seniors' Week celebrations in June, where Albertans show their appreciation for seniors and their contributions to our communities. In addition, the council participates in research projects and supports community-based workshops for seniors and front-line workers.

Mr. Speaker, during my time as chair of this council I had the opportunity to see first-hand how the work of the council and its

members can make a difference in the lives of seniors in Alberta. This includes the government's decision to increase the income thresholds for financial assistance provided to low-income seniors through the Alberta seniors' benefit and special-needs assistance for seniors' programs. I also had the privilege to chair the provincial Demographic Planning Commission, which met with Albertans to capture their views on the needs of an aging population.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the members of the Seniors Advisory Council, both current and past, for their many contributions and services. As chair it truly has been a privilege to work with the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Her support has been instrumental to the council's success and is deeply appreciated.

I know the Seniors Advisory Council under the expert guidance of the new chair, the hon. Member for Strathcona, will continue to engage with seniors and continue to bring their challenges, needs, and ideas forward to this government.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Fire Service Exemplary Service Medals

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge recipients of Alberta's fire service exemplary service medal awards. I had the pleasure of attending ceremonies in Edmonton last week where the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs presented the medals, and I had the honour of presenting these awards during the ceremonies in Calgary. Presentations were made to firefighters to recognize special achievements or distinguished service.

Mr. Speaker, as we are all aware, firefighting is dangerous and difficult work. Firefighters risk their lives daily so people in communities across Alberta can feel safe and secure. They make tremendous sacrifices. Their selfless dedication is a true reflection of Albertans willing to support and protect their neighbours. Albertans admire and appreciate the dedication and service of these individuals, so on behalf of all Albertans I extend a heartfelt thanks to these individuals for helping make our community and families safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Tartan Day

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share with this Assembly the exciting news that April 6 is Tartan Day. Tartan Day is recognized all around the world as a celebration of Scottish culture and heritage. During these events participants engage in several Scottish themed activities, including highland dancing and pipe bands.

As some of you may know, a tartan refers to the pattern of colours and designs used on Scottish kilts. Each clan in Scotland has its own unique tartan, and they are often treated like a sacred coat of arms. Being of Scottish ancestry myself, my clan's tartan is blue and green. In fact, the famed Black Watch wear the Campbell tartan.

Alberta also has two official tartans, Mr. Speaker, a dress tartan and a regular tartan. Our regular tartan is green, gold, blue, pink, and black, with each colour representing a different part of Alberta's landscape. The green represents Alberta's forests; the gold, our wheat fields; the blue, our clear skies and lakes; the pink, our wild rose; and the black, our coal and oil. The dress tartan includes the same colours as the regular in addition to white, which is in recognition of our winters.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the invaluable contribution of Scottish settlers to our history and our cultural makeup. For example, young highlanders were instrumental in the founding of Edmonton House, which is Fort Edmonton, sited on this very location. Culturally their contributions include sports like curling and golf. It is worthy to note that during the period of 1905 to 1970 of our 432 MLAs that sat, 109 were of Scottish descent.

I would now ask all members of this House to join me in wishing everyone a happy Tartan Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Water Management and Allocation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's World Water Week, and our province is on the brink of a water crisis. In the north the people of Fort Chip and Fort MacKay are afraid to drink the water of the Athabasca River because of contaminants from oil sands development, in central Alberta farmers close to coal-bed methane development can light their tap water on fire, and in the south last year 10 counties declared states of emergency due to drought.

This fall the Minister of Environment will be amending the Water Act to use market-based measures to allocate water. This will expand the current water market system in southern Alberta to cover the entire province. The recommendations we've seen so far will preserve the right for senior licence holders to make decisions about who gets allocated water, remove government oversight and regulation of the transfers, and only allow the public to comment on certain water transfers. Instead of a system that prioritizes water use for ecosystem health and basic human needs, this government will let the right to water be sold to the highest bidder. If there's anything that Albertans know, it's that the highest bidder is not your average, hard-working Alberta family.

By implementing water markets across the province, this government is continuing on with business as usual, commodifying Alberta's resources to promote industrial growth no matter what the cost. Albertans know that the first in time, first in right system is no longer working, and we desperately need an alternative. The government, however, is not planning on consulting Albertans until the summer, when they've already drawn up their plans for the new legislation. The government has already ignored its treaty obligations to First Nations by starting the Water Act review without their free, prior, and informed consent.

Decisions about water are too important to rush. This government needs to involve all Albertans in the water review through a robust and meaningful province-wide consultation process that presents a range of options to Albertans, not just water markets. Most importantly, this government needs to realize that water is not just another resource to be bought and sold on the market. Water is a basic human right. Water is essential to life. Instead of letting money decide where water goes, this government needs to allocate water by priority uses to protect our water for Alberta families, ecosystems, and future generations.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted we still have guests here to witness this. I'd like to present a petition signed by thousands of Albertans who are asking that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Alberta to "direct

Alberta Health Services to immediately stop the contracting out of Protective Services; and to direct Alberta Health Services to maintain quality in-house security services to better protect patients and staff.”

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 12 postcards and the required five copies of them from teachers expressing their extreme displeasure in the decreased funding for education based on class size and the downloading of the extra dollars required from the arbitrary decision for the teachers’ salaries onto the school boards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to present a petition as well on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, which reads similarly to the previous petition.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to direct Alberta Health Services to immediately stop the contracting out of Protective Services; and to direct Alberta Health Services to maintain quality in-house security services to better protect patients and staff.

This petition has 824 signatures from all parts of Alberta.

Thank you.

2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of my written responses of March 19, 2010, to the questions raised during Culture and Community Spirit’s estimates and business plan debate on February 22, 2010.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Do you have a tabling?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail I received from an Alberta foster parent who forwarded to me a copy of a message she sent to several people in Children’s Services and the Premier last May. Her concern is with cuts to funding for adoptive parents. I referred to this in my question earlier today.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of an online petition started by Veronika Muendel, calling on the government to keep the liquid cytology cervical cancer screening labs in Lethbridge, Red Deer, and the U of A hospital. The petition has gathered 1,432 names. Many of these have included comments such as: “If it wasn’t for having this lab, I for one wouldn’t have known that I had cancer cells, and had them removed as fast as possible.”

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, response to Written Question 30 asked for by Mr. Chase on March 15, 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Infrastructure, responses to questions raised by Mr. Hinman, hon. Member for

Calgary-Glenmore; Mr. Mason, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood; and Mr. Allred, hon. Member for St. Albert, on February 23, 2010, the Department of Infrastructure main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Special Areas Act the Special Areas Trust Account financial statements dated December 31, 2008.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the expected government House business for the week following our constituency week breaks, which would commence Monday, April 12, government business commencing April 13.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 13 under government bills for second reading we anticipate Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act; Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010; and Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010, depending on progress. In Committee of the Whole Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010; and Bill 11, the Witness Security Act.

On Wednesday, April 14, under Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act; Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010; and for third reading Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 10, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010; Bill 11, the Witness Security Act, depending on the Order Paper.

On Thursday, April 15, for third reading bills 9, 12, 13, 14, and as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just as a supplement to that, the House reconvenes on the 12th day of April. The 12th and 13th will also be MLA for a Day, so it will be busy with respect to that, but as importantly we will do a special brief ceremony in honour of the late Mr. Babcock, who was the last connection that Canada had with World War I. So there’ll be many military people here as well as we deal with that matter.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 15

Appropriation Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to move third reading of Bill 15, the Appropriation Act, 2010.

Since February 9 we’ve had six weeks of constructive debate on the estimates. I believe that the majority of the members have concluded that the estimates strike the right balance, and it’s time to pass the Appropriation Act so that the government of Alberta can get on with its business when the new fiscal year begins on April 1, which is one week from today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to get an opportunity to speak to the appropriation bill. It's going by so fast, you've got to move quick here, and I didn't move fast enough before.

In third reading we are speaking to the anticipated effect of the implementation of the bill, in this case the anticipated effect of the budget, which is what the appropriation bill is. There are a couple of observations I have about the process this year. In fact, the minister of finance alluded to it in his opening comments, that they felt they'd really spent enough time on this, and they'd like to move on.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Not surprisingly, I have a very different take on that in a couple of different areas. I continue to underline my concerns with the way the estimates debates are set up in Committee of Supply. Although, certainly, some of my colleagues are fans of moving it into the committees and the more informal setting, I'm not particularly a fan of that, but more than that is the lack of time to debate.

Some people could jump to their feet and say: you know, we can prove that you've actually got more time now than you did many, many years ago. I would say: yes, and what was the budget then? We're now debating a total budget of many billions of dollars. I think it's sort of in the \$35 billion range at this point. I think that when I first started, it was \$17 billion. We essentially have the same amount of time, so we're debating twice as much money in the same amount of time. When I started in 1997, there were under 20 departments, and we're now dealing with 26 departments.

The way this is set up right now is that it's essentially one department each time a committee meets, and two committees meet every night, which makes it difficult for people who want to represent their constituents on more than one issue at a time without dashing back and forth between committees. Of course, there's a speakers list, which the committee chair is holding, and your chances of getting on the speaking list in two committees in one night are slim to none.

So we are debating far more money in the same amount or even less time, and now what we've had is – and the government occasionally says: oh, well, if you're complaining about debating the Health budget, which is, again, several billion dollars . . .

Dr. Taft: Close to \$15 billion.

Ms Blakeman: . . . close to \$15 billion in the same amount of time that you're debating a much smaller financial commitment from some of the others. The response is: well, I mean, you could just forgo debating the other departments and split your Health debate into two nights. Well, you know, I'm charged by my constituents to be here and to pay attention to all ministries. Granted, you may not give them all the same weight, but I don't think it's appropriate to not examine the budgets of a department just because the government refuses to give more time to a larger department. So the effect of what we are seeing now is that we're debating the effect, the outcome, of a budget process which is twice as much money in the same or less amount of time, and significantly more departments are being debated.

Then the new process, that I noticed this year, was a reluctance and/or an attempt to influence and/or a flat-out refusal to answer the questions that we were not able to have enough time to get on the record and have a back-and-forth discussion with the minister. It has

become, unfortunately, traditional that certainly members of the opposition and occasionally members of the government backbench will find that the clock has run out on them, and in the last 90 seconds they will say: "Well, here are the rest of the questions I had. I'll just read them into the record." The ministers and their staff would take those questions and would produce them as written answers and mail them to us usually some time in the summer. Seeing as we're supposed to be voting on the final version of the bill today, getting responses to questions in three or four months' time is not incredibly helpful.

3:00

What we were seeing is that we actually had a staffer from a minister's office come over and meet with some of the Official Opposition staff, and he indicated that he really just didn't see what the value of these questions was. He didn't understand it himself, so he really didn't think that we should be asking them, and did we understand that some poor sod in the minister's office or department was going to have to answer these questions? Well, yes, I do understand that, and I'd like an answer. That's why I'm asking the questions. I don't have enough resources, either personally or in our caucus, to be able to be making up questions just as a make-work project for ministerial staff. I ask the questions because I want the answers.

In response to the observation from this individual that he didn't see the value in these questions and didn't understand how it all pertained to everything, I thought: well, am I not remembering things accurately? It seems to me that I'm getting a heck of a lot less information in the budget documents than I used to get. I went to the library and pulled the debates for Health, which is a big ministry, but it's also a consistent ministry. It hasn't disappeared and reappeared. For example, you know, those of us that have been here long enough know that consumer and corporate affairs, the purpose of it and the legislative responsibilities, are now under Service Alberta, but if you were trying to compare the consumer and corporate affairs budget, you'd be hard-pressed to do it.

Education got grouped in with Advanced Ed and then taken apart again. Culture, near and dear to my heart, completely disappeared when it got taken into community development along with seniors and gambling and AADAC and horse racing and a whole bunch of other things. Health was a department that was Health in 1985, it was Health in 1995, it was Health in 2005, and it's Health today.

As I started to compare these, I thought: "No. I am right." There was significantly more information available about where the money was going, how it was being broken down, how many FTEs there were. Way back when it even said how they were distributed, like for each program how many staff worked there. These are some of the questions where I now find myself saying: "Well, what are these programs that are funded under this one line item? How many people worked there?" Well, you can find where the FTEs are if you go to a completely different set of books, and it's in the back of the government business plan. You can actually get a listing of the FTEs by department but not broken down by program.

If you want to know how many people were actually working in a particular program, if you happen to know what the program is, believe you me, you're not going to get it out of these budget documents. We have such a roll-up now that in some of the departments you're getting maybe 10 breakdowns, and that's it. Well, actually, in Health you've got \$9 billion in one line item. No explanation. Nine billion.

An Hon. Member: It's not that much, Laurie.

Ms Blakeman: I'm absolutely serious. In this budget document on page 235, for anyone following along at home, vote 8.0.1, base operating funding for Alberta Health Services, \$9,037,593,000. That's it. No explanation of how that breaks down. I don't know how many people that covers. I don't know what programs or services are delivered under that \$9 billion. It's \$9 billion in one line item.

So back to the nice young man that came over and said that, well, if we could just come up with, you know, five questions that we'd like to write down, he could make sure that they would get answered for us, which rather made our staff giggle, the thought that we would only have five questions. This is what we're now trying to deal with: a lot more money in the budget, more departments, less time to debate it, less information in the budget. Do I really want to be standing up there and begging a minister to tell me, you know, what the programs are that are funded under this particular line item, how many people are working there, and all of the other kind of really plain, factual information?

You know, there's nothing nefarious there. There are no tricky questions there. I'm not going to be able to jump out and sucker punch somebody based on giving me some very straightforward information from breaking down some programs into a number of different line items. There's nothing tricky there, but for some reason there's a big conspiracy theory here that we have to hide all this information and roll it up and roll it up and roll it up in line items until I'm sure the government would be delighted if they could manage to come forward with a budget that had one line item and it was the whole damn budget and that's it, thank you very much, go home.

What's the effect of this budget? The effect of this budget is that we are able to show Albertans less and less information every single year. They're able to access these documents and glean less and less and less information every single year.

You can also roll into this the supplementary supply budgets. Now, it will be very interesting to see in this budget year of 2010-11 if there actually is a supplementary supply budget. Boy, that will tell us some stuff. In the past, you know, as this House has often heard me debate, we've had two supplementary supply budgets – that's been very common – with over a billion dollars allocated in those. That's \$2 billion extra a year, and for that we get a whole three-hour afternoon to debate it. I don't understand why the government is so reluctant to let maybe members of their own backbench – I don't know – certainly members of the opposition, members of the media, members of the public actually look at the budget document and be able to tell what's going on and how the money has been allocated. That's part of the transparency and accountability.

If you won't give us the information up front, it does make it much harder for us to come back to you during one of your wonderful quarterly updates and be able to hold you accountable through that information if we couldn't tell what was going on the first time. This is not for any lack of intelligence on this side. You know, I regularly sit in a caucus with two people who have "doctor" in front of their name, one from an academic background and one a medical doctor. I mean, I'm not sitting here with stupid people, and I'm not sitting here with lazy people.

Mr. MacDonald: You notice I'm not in that group.

Ms Blakeman: No, no. I included you in the second group. Come on.

That's the effect of what I see as the point we've come to with this bill. I don't understand what the problem is. I don't understand what the government is afraid of. The government has an over-

whelming majority here. They're going to get their budget passed; there's no question about that. What is the problem in giving everybody else enough information to be able to verify what the government is saying? Wouldn't that be easier, actually?

If the government makes a statement, we can all look at the documents and go: "Yeah, there it is, right there. No problem." But it does cause people to see conspiracy because we look at these budget documents and go, "I have no idea what's included in that budget," and the minister or the Premier says: "This is the way it is. Just trust us. Take our word. It's in there." Well, no, I'm not willing to trust you or take your word.

I mean, this afternoon we had an exchange between the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who's the critic on Health and Wellness, and the minister of health about: "Verify for us, give us the proof, show us exactly where the claim is being made by Alberta Health Services that they have found efficiencies of \$700 million. Show us where this actually is." We get a very roundabout statement: "Well, don't worry about it. In the five-year plan you'll see where it is." I'm waiting for that one. Maybe that's where we get the one-liner that explains the entire budget and breaks down absolutely nothing.

I continue to wonder what else is going on here, and you guys aren't helping me. You're not assuring me. You're not making it easy for me to believe what you're saying is true. You make it really hard. You know, the media says to me: "Laurie, you know, try and get all your questions spoken out loud during those exchanges with the minister because we're following along. Make sure that they table the responses in the Assembly." In the past, when they've just mailed it to our offices, the media were following along. They saw a question; they see no answer. They don't know what the response was, and they have no ability to dig around and find it because it wasn't made public.

3:10

So I'll give you credit on this one. By having them now tabled in the Assembly, they become a sessional paper, and citizens from Alberta and the media, members of the opposition can get access to the written responses from the ministers. I hope those are good, clear responses because everybody is going to be looking at them now.

That's the observation that I make from this budget, and there have been a number of others. See, this is the other part of this whole process that just strikes me as neutered to the point of silliness. You know, the government has organized to have all of the various estimates debates in Committee of Supply voted on on one day, one big vote. The concession there – and I was one of the ones negotiating it at the time – was to allow any member, actually, to request that a department be pulled out. If we wanted to support the whole budget but just could not support what was going on in Infrastructure, for example, we could vote no to the Infrastructure budget and yes to the rest of the budget. Well, I'm sure that when we did that, it actually didn't cross our minds that we'd end up with a situation where we didn't like what was happening in individual departments but we didn't like the whole budget either, and the government made sure that none of these votes were debatable at the time.

We now have this interesting little exercise that we go through where we pulled out all of these departments. We vote no, no, no to them, and then there is the final budget. In this case, in trying to allow the government to get on with its business and make sure that people get paid and that certain programs that we think are really important that protect vulnerable Albertans and, you know, invest in our economy and things like that could move forward, we supported the overall budget. You know, it really does become a very odd

exercise when you're just pulling these departments out and there's no additional time to talk about it or to talk about why you've pulled it out. It's not as though you've got that time back in that original Committee of Supply estimates debate, in which the Official Opposition is getting an hour of back-and-forth.

I had a situation where I was asking a 30-second question in context, and the minister was giving me a four-and-a-half-minute response, God bless him, but at the end of an hour I hadn't even put half of the questions that I had on the record. You know, nobody was deliberately being obstructive in that particular case. My questions were fairly short, the minister's answers were very thorough, but at the end of an hour I'd managed to get about nine questions on the record. Considering that I'm talking about the Environment portfolio, what is probably, certainly for our rebranding exercise and our image and our economy, incredibly important to Alberta, that's all I could get out of it. Then the third and fourth parties get 20 minutes. Then it goes to any other member that wishes to speak, which tends to be the government backbenchers. So you're not able to get a heck of a lot of information in that whole exchange. This is a flawed process that gets more and more flawed.

Two last things I want to put on the record are both concerned with safety. I've had another request from my snowmobiling buddy Rudi Haak, known as Haakeye, wondering why we do not make helmets mandatory in Alberta for any off-highway vehicle. I agree with him. The rate that we are killing kids riding on all-terrain vehicles because they're not required by law to have helmets I think is truly a huge problem.

The last issue is about . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]
Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and speak to this bill in third reading. I have to say that one of the things that I wanted to do was to talk about the fact of talking to my constituents about the balance that we have in terms of our spending, the balance that we have in terms of, frankly, some of the areas where we've shaved some of the spending in 13 different departments. I think it's important that Albertans understand that if you were to remove the things that we did on the health budget, overall we're well within the population plus inflation type numbers that we hold as a policy for this government. Certainly, Albertans hold health care as probably their number one priority, and I think it's important that we recognize that.

I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member's comments, that environment is very high on the list of priorities for this government and how we are projecting ourselves to the world. I think the budget reflects the priorities of Albertans. It certainly reflects the priorities that I see and hear from my constituents, and I'm very pleased about that. I've had some very positive responses from them as it relates to what we're doing.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill, if passed, would paraphrase the Health Professions Act by requiring professional regulatory organizations to consult with the ministers responsible and consider their comments prior to removing or approving a program of study for registration requirements. This omnibus bill would ensure that this provision is included in the Architects Act; the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act; the Land Surveyors Act; the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act; the Regulated Accounting Profession Act; and the Veterinary Profession Act.

If passed, Bill 2 would also update the language in the Agrology Profession Act and the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, both of which have similar provisions already in place.

I appreciate the participation of Assembly members, and I thank all members for their thoughtful comments and discussion.

I move third reading of Bill 2, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak briefly to Bill 2. We're opposing this piece of legislation. It's unnecessary. It doesn't have support of professional associations if they speak candidly. Frankly, it doesn't have support of all members of the government caucus either. This is an example of redundant, pointless legislation. I have no idea who is driving this or why, but I do know and we do know that there's not much support for this out there in the community; there's not much support for it here in the Assembly either. I'm sure it'll pass because the government will use its heavy hand to force it through, but the simple fact is that this is just an unnecessary piece of legislation.

It feels like make-work activity here. Maybe that's what happens when you have so many members in a government Assembly. This is probably more of a candidate for the eyes and review of the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who I think is going to chair a red tape review or stupid rules committee or something. Maybe this bill should come back next year to be eliminated because it, from all our information, is quite unnecessary, so this will not gain our support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Is any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

3:20

Bill 4

Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South on behalf of the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 4, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010, is an important piece of legislation to industry. It is not adding to the regulatory burden for industry. Rather, it provides protection to industry by harmonizing our legislation with the federal government's, which was amended in June of 2009. These rules already exist as mandated by the federal government.

Matching provincial legislation to federal legislation as much as possible helps to achieve standard conditions for the movement of

dangerous goods within provinces and across Canada. By mirroring the federal legislation, we are able to ensure our place in enforcing the rules and monitoring industry. If we did not mirror the federal government, we run the risk of losing our jurisdiction over industry in Alberta and our ability to enforce the rules as we see appropriate. This legislation actually provides some protection to industry here. The changes are minor and mainly administrative in nature. This legislation will help ensure to industry that it continues to be business as usual in Alberta.

I'd like to thank the members for the debate and support this bill has received so far.

It's now my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 4, Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the bill.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in third reading on Bill 4, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010. When the members of my caucus had spoken to this bill earlier, we had raised a couple of concerns around the time limit for prosecution, and this is a sort of ongoing theme that I've seen a number of times now. It seems that when it's in the government's favour, then it becomes two years at a maximum, but when the government wants to control the process or they prefer it a different way, it flips around. In this case what we've got is two years or when the alleged offence first comes to the attention of the director, whichever comes later. You can end up hanging some people out to dry here for a very, very long time if it comes to the attention of the director some way into the process and they take some time to investigate it.

I'm seeing this particular clause turn up more and more often. It isn't the first time I've seen it. I have a concern about that because I don't see the particular justification for it. You know, this is a petroleum province. We transport that product back and forth across this province all the time, lots of it. We need strong environmental protection, strong cleanup, accountability, the resources to enforce it, the monitoring and enforcement around it. I think some of the clauses in this bill work against that.

The second piece that we had raised at the time was the director ordering the \$10,000 administration fee payout. I really question this. I'm sure it's legal. Well, no, I'm not sure it's legal. It's not as though this government hasn't put forward legislation that, in fact, wasn't legal before. But this is like a get out of jail for free card. It's like, you know, a discount coupon that seems to be issued here because if the director is of the opinion that a contravention has occurred, they can go directly to the person and say: "Look, you can pay this administrative penalty right now. If you don't, then we're going to go through the whole process. If you're found guilty at the end of it, then you're into a much higher penalty." I found that really odd. They can pay this administration fee. It's not a fine. It's not a levy.

What is it they do in the courts where they plead guilty without appearing to plead guilty? No contest or something? That's what's going on here. I mean, either you did wrong or you didn't. Sorry, I don't know what the legal term is, but you know what I'm talking about.

Mr. Hancock: Nolo contendere.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. There you go. I pretty much had it right.

Yeah. They can pay the fee outright, or they can appeal and take

the process. But if that goes against them, well, they're in big trouble.

It's probably, you know: if I got caught with this, no, I wouldn't be saying that. Well, let's say someone gets caught with this, and they look at this on a balance and go: "You know what? This is the cost of doing business. I can far more likely convince the director that this is an administrative error. I'll pay the 10 grand, and I'm out of here."

Those were the issues that we had with this bill. I mean, I'm not going to go to the mat on this one. In particular, the first issue that I raised I'm seeing happening repeatedly in what the government is doing. I raise my eyebrow in question of what the real outcome of that will end up being, not to the good of the Alberta public, I am arguing.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in third reading, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there any other hon. member wishing to speak on Bill 4?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill introduces changes that will help protect Alberta's emergency partners, especially search and rescue teams, from liability claims. Search and rescue groups are an important part of our emergency system, and they need to know that they can do their jobs without worrying about unnecessary lawsuits. The amendments will also support municipalities by formalizing regional co-operation among communities. This will help municipalities provide a cross-jurisdictional response to a disaster, better serving their residents during a crisis. By supporting these amendments to Bill 6, we're demonstrating the government's commitment to providing safe and strong communities.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the support that Bill 6 has received from both sides of the House and anticipate support with third reading. I thank all members for their comments and discussion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on Bill 6.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am, again, pleased to rise and speak in third reading on Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010. Now, this bill I am pleased to support. I think this is designed to better protect search and rescue workers and the organizations from lawsuits. Considering the very close to home tragedies that we've seen with the avalanches in B.C., this particular act probably has much more meaning for us today than it might have when it was first introduced. This had been an issue, I think, that had been raised, certainly, in the media, the protection that was available for search and rescue organizations and their liability. This should allow for protection for them as well as the regionalization of emergency management responsibilities.

3:30

I'm expecting that those organizations will get protected. I'm expecting that we will have better regionalization of those emergency management responsibilities. I know that my colleagues have already spoken to this bill in favour of it. We in the Liberal caucus have always maintained that local decision-making is generally preferable, and this bill certainly enhances that opportunity here.

Just one last plea that I have is around search and rescue. One of the most important things for us living here and tending to play across the mountains in B.C. is avalanche awareness and training.

Mr. MacDonald: Particularly for snowmobilers.

Ms Blakeman: Well, for snowmobilers and others that are going to be in the backcountry where they're in that area.

I'm aware that this government withdrew or minimized its funding to the Avalanche Centre some time ago, and I wish they would reconsider that. I think that's an excellent organization that does excellent work and was more deserving of support. I know that the argument at the time was: well, you know, that's a B.C. problem, and we're in Alberta, and we don't need to be funding that. Yeah. But a lot of Albertans, as we know, go across that Great Divide into B.C., and it does affect us. Our access to that kind of information, training, equipment, and all else that goes with it is very important to us.

I appreciate what's being done here around the search and rescue groups. I know that they will appreciate it. I actually have a dog at this point that probably could do search and rescue, and I don't have the time to do the training, but my hat's off to those search and rescue groups that do work with dogs. It's a tremendous commitment from the owners. I know that they train every single week, and then when they're asked, they get on a plane with their dog and fly all over the world in order to dig through and hopefully find people still alive but sometimes not. I'm really glad to see that organizations like that are getting some support through this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to close the debate.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all members who participated in debate on Bill 6. I'd like to thank members from both sides of the House that have in fact spoken in favour of this bill. This bill will help protect Alberta's emergency partners, especially search and rescue teams, from liability claims. These groups are an important part of our emergency system, and they need to know that they can do their jobs without worrying about frivolous lawsuits. The amendments will also support municipalities by formalizing regional co-operation amongst communities. This will help municipalities provide a cross-jurisdictional response to a disaster, better serving their residents during a crisis.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd once again like to thank everybody for speaking to it, and I anticipate their support.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no others wishing to speak on the bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise for third reading of Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010. I think we've covered most of the issues around this act. I don't think there have been too many significant ones. I'd just remind everybody that this Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act is generally amended every single year. It ensures that Alberta maintains a fair, equitable, and competitive tax regime.

Most of the amendments are primarily of a housekeeping nature, Mr. Speaker. Three of the particular measures that were of more significance than of a housekeeping nature were a clarification of the rules which allowed corporations to file returns in currencies like the U.S. dollar or the British pound in responses to changes that were made to federal legislation; the second one was changes to the regulation-making authority in the act to ensure that new refund interest rates can be made applicable to prior periods; and the third one was a change that brings Alberta legislation in line with the federal fairness provision, allowing the minister to waive interest or penalties in certain situations.

I believe I've addressed most of the questions or concerns. I urge all members to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. We will support this piece of legislation, but I do want to make comments about some things that I wish were in it that are not. That could be because similar kinds of issues have been brought forward in previous versions of this legislation.

The Member for Battle River-Wainwright quite properly noted that pretty well every year this bill comes before us so that we can address a range of corporate tax issues. In the past we've addressed things like royalty deductions and scientific and research and experimental tax credits and those kinds of things, and I wish that roughly parallel matters were in this year's version. Maybe they'll be in next year's. The new parliamentary secretary – is that the right? – assistant for finance might take note of this.

My comments relate to two issues. This member, in particular, will know that this is something very close to my heart, and that's the sustainability of Alberta's prosperity, the sustainability of Alberta's economy. I have a deep, deep concern that we're living on a kind of energy bubble in this province and we're not doing enough to either save for the future or to diversify. I am concerned that initiatives around sustainability aren't there, and I'd like them to be there. Some of those might have to do with how we handle corporate taxes.

I'm just going to ask in the context of this piece of legislation for the parliamentary assistant to perhaps take some initiatives to look at a couple of issues related to sustainability so that when this bill comes before us next year, we might see something different. I think it would be very valuable for this member to actually take a look at the long-term trends of corporate profits in Alberta compared to other provinces and other jurisdictions of the world. We could either look at corporate profits before taxes or corporate profits after taxes. But either way, if the member takes a hard look at this – and maybe he and I can sit down at some point outside of this Assembly and share some information – I think he'll find that corporate profits in Alberta measured as a percentage of the GDP or measured on a per capita basis are absolutely enormous, far, far beyond other provinces'. That's not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, profits get reinvested. Profits create jobs. We'd certainly much rather have profitable corporations than losing corporations. But there is a question of balance here.

The first time I took note of this issue was actually in a report by the TD Bank. It was one of their reports that called Alberta a northern tiger or western tiger. I think it was northern tiger. They made note in there about Alberta's corporate profit to GDP ratio being something like 22 per cent. In other words, 22 per cent of Alberta's whole gross domestic product was corporate profit. They commented on how high that was compared to, say, Ontario, which is a huge corporate centre, or anywhere else in Canada. It caught my eye, and it kind of worked away in my mind. I ended up doing some other research on this, and, lo and behold, the TD Bank is right. We do allow our corporations in this province to make huge sums of money, and they've been doing that for a long time.

3:40

There's a dynamic here that needs to be considered. Big profits are great, and they might indicate really well companies or wonderful innovation or something like that. But if there's an effective marketplace where there's genuine competition, profits are always brought back down to a mean because everybody else starts competing and bringing those profits back down to an average. What we've seen in Alberta, I suspect, is no correction on that. In fact, we've seen corporate profits over the last 20 years rise and rise and rise and rise, not just in dollar terms but as a proportion of the economy.

I'm not sure if I was very clear with the member there or anybody else – the minister of finance might be listening – but I think that it's time to have a debate in this province around corporate profits. I link that to the issue of sustainability because one of my concerns as a citizen of this province is that the incredible wealth of Alberta is going somewhere. We have a GDP here that's per capita way bigger than anybody else's, but I don't know where it's going. I don't see it. I mean, we spend quite a lot on government services, but we're not out of line with anybody else there. Albertans are prosperous, but I'd really like to know where this great huge amount of wealth in Alberta is going. I'm concerned about that, not because I need more wealth particularly, Mr. Speaker, but because we need to be accumulating some of that to save for the future. This is an issue, in my view, of sustainability.

The second question that I wanted to raise in this context of corporate profits is around economic diversification. I did note in my opening comments that when this legislation has come before the Assembly in previous years, we've addressed things like royalty deductions and tax credits and things like that. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar today raised a very interesting issue, which is the fact that we now have Imperial Oil and Exxon contracting to South Korea to build huge vessels, enormous vessels, that will be used in the Fort McMurray area. They're going to be loaded on ships, brought over the Pacific, barged up rivers, trucked through the United States – Idaho, Montana, and so on – all the way to Fort McMurray while we have people in south Edmonton and probably in Red Deer and Calgary who are some of the world's best metal fabricators looking for work.

You know what? Where does that fit into corporate taxes and corporate royalty deductions? We let Imperial Oil deduct the costs of that from their royalty payments, so we're actually paying, as the citizens of Alberta, for hundreds of millions of dollars of work to go to South Korea. I think we need to rethink that. I know that there are metal fabrication shops in Alberta looking for work. I think if we want to build the long-term diversity and strength of this economy, we don't just want to roll over all the time for Imperial Oil and Exxon and the other companies. Sometimes we need to take a stand and say: "Hey. For the privilege and right of doing business in Alberta, there are some conditions. One of those might just be

fabricating your material here, or, at least, we're not going to give you a royalty credit, royalty deductions, and a tax deduction for doing it in South Korea." That doesn't make sense.

Those were two issues. Just to quickly summarize – maybe the Member for Battle River-Wainwright and I can sit down at some point – I would like there to be a debate on the scale of corporate profits in this province. Secondly, I would like there to also be a debate about how much we allow huge corporations to deduct from their royalty payments or their tax payments for work that they're contracting to other countries. It just doesn't necessarily make sense. It needs to be justified to me, Mr. Speaker.

Having said that, maybe we'll have that discussion before this bill comes back next year. For this year I'll tell you that I think we expect to support this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 23: Mr. Olson]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to discuss Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010. [interjections] Shall I continue, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, please. You have the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. This further harmonizes the passport system that originated from the 2004 memorandum of understanding between the federal and provincial governments, excluding Ontario. Certainly, Bill 13 makes amendments to support Canada's conversion to the international financial reporting standards, creates a framework for regulating credit-rating organizations, and allows the Alberta Securities Commission to impose sanctions for late filing of disclosure that are similar to what occurs in B.C., in Vancouver. There are also, as I understand it, amendments to ensure that Alberta's registration regime is harmonized with other provinces.

Certainly, whenever members of the general public or the investment community talk about securities, they always talk about the national securities regulator or what we have or have not worked out across the country. Some provinces have taken their issues to the courts, and that's fine. That's their prerogative. But whenever we think of securities and security legislation, the number one issue is the fact that currently there are 13 provincial and territorial securities regulators across Canada rather than a single national regulator.

Mr. Flaherty, the hon. Minister of Finance in the dominion government, has been quoted as stating that Canada is the only industrialized country without a single securities regulator. The *Globe and Mail* reported that Canada is one of only two countries in the 103-member International Organization of Securities Commissions without a national overseer.

Now, over the last few years all the provinces, excluding the province of Ontario, have begun to implement a passport system which mutually recognizes the rules within each provincial regulator in order to facilitate transactions across each and every border. The federal government has been advocating for a national regulator with resistance, as I said, from B.C., Alberta, and Quebec. British Columbia has recently softened to the idea, but Alberta and Quebec continue to oppose any implementation of a national regulator. This whole national securities debate and discussion will unfold with different legislation.

3:50

Certainly, with Bill 13, as I understand it and our research concludes, these amendments will allow for the harmonization or mutual recognition of securities regulators in Canada. Amendments have been made every year since 2004 to securities legislation across the country to bring the language of the legislation onto a common baseline. I understand there is a lot of back and forth between provinces over legislative changes. As one province would amend their legislation, then others would have to re-amend their own to bring it in line with others and so on. The passport system is continually updated and harmonized as other jurisdictions amend their respective regulations.

Now, the Alberta Securities Commission regulates individuals and entities in Alberta that advise in securities, trade in securities, or raise money through issuing securities. The basic element of a securities regulator is to protect investors. We know through international financial events that have occurred in the last two years that some investors – no other way to put it – have been fleeced by regulations that have not had the interests of investors first and foremost but had the interests of a number of promoters, some of whom now have a chance to consider their actions from the confines of prison. Hopefully, some of those high-profile cases will send a strong message that all laws will be vigorously enforced and that those that break them will pay the ultimate penalty, which is the loss of their freedom.

That being said, according to Department of Finance officials Canada's securities regulations officers are very good at regulation. Canada has a good record on this front, whether it's the banking sector or the investment community. We have a very good record, and we need to maintain that record. All governments as regulators, or the ones that make the law and the ones that are willing to enforce the law, can ensure that both investors and promoters have confidence in the system. To date when we have each province and territory with a commission of one sort or another, each dealing with their own securities regulations, it seems to be working. We'll see what the future unfolds. But, certainly, Mr. Speaker, when we look at Bill 13, it's something that, hopefully, each and every member of this Assembly will support.

I certainly at this time would like to thank the hon. minister of finance for the opportunity that has been provided to our research staff to have a discussion on this bill. With that, I will conclude my remarks. Hopefully, we will see this bill passed, and hopefully in the future there will not be any scandals in this country or this province like what is currently unfolding on Wall Street and some of the other major financial capitals of the world. We have to have a sound regulatory process. Hopefully, everyone can work together and design and implement and enforce the regulatory process. That's, again, good for investors and good for promoters. I'm confident that can be done and this country can continue to be rock solid as far as the financial investment community is concerned.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members to join the debate?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Bill 14

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 23: Mr. Blackett]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker. We are willing to support this bill. It's a minor change but I'm sure one that any municipality that has to pay for its own police force will appreciate because it's correcting a hitch in the git-along that happened when there was some other legislative work done and we ended up with fines.

An Hon. Member: What was that? Sorry.

Ms Blakeman: A hitch in your git-along. You're from Alberta. You know what that means.

It resulted in a situation where fines that were levied upon drivers misbehaving on the highways, for example, were allocated to the municipality in which the deed was done rather than the fine going to the municipality that was paying the police officer or bylaw officer who was issuing the fine. We have a very particular way of allocating finances to municipalities to pay for their police services. I don't know that everyone always agrees with it, but at least it was improved from when I was the Solicitor General and Justice minister critic way back when, in which it was quite unfair.

Anyway, this is a fairly minor change that does tie the fine to the municipality that provides the funding for the police force. It basically realigns the Traffic Safety Act with the Police Act. I know that the minister had approached me, I think, hopeful at one point that it could have been under miscellaneous statutes, which is a minor change. Nonetheless, it is a change, so not appropriate for miscellaneous statutes. I'm very happy to support it in second reading as a stand-alone bill: Bill 14, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

4:00

Bill 10

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that my

colleague the critic for Justice has spoken to this bill. I'm struggling a bit more with it. I had hoped to see something happening under this that would deal with the enormous surplus that has been created in this fund, and that's not being addressed in what we have before us. Instead, it's designed as a disincentive, and it's really meant to increase the power of the province to go into civil court and get the proceeds of crime, which will likely further enhance the victims of crime fund. My frustration for that is that so far we seem to have a government policy of just hoarding money in that fund rather than using the money to benefit Albertans. God knows, there are enough of them that really need the money from this fund.

Now, there seems to be a way of distributing this fund that does deal with the sort of established or – I don't know if it's appropriate to say – more common ways that we think of a victim of crime. For example, my colleague was a bystander and was hurt in the commission of a crime, and, you know, he receives payment out of that fund to assist him. That we seem to have gotten a handle on.

But when we look at things like funding for sexual assault centres, I had to campaign long and hard in order to get the government to provide operational funding to sexual assault centres because at that time they didn't get operational funding. They had to patch together, stitch together a patchwork of different project and program funds in order to be able to pay for what they were doing, with the most bizarre rules and regulations. You know, they could get money to pay for counselling for someone but only if they were going to court. If you walked in and said, "Well, I don't know if I'm going to go to court on the sexual assault that I've suffered," well, then, you know, they couldn't pay for your counselling. It's just stupid.

I'm a little frustrated by this bill in that, you know, it's the result of a Supreme Court ruling where they found in relation to Ontario's Civil Remedies Act that it was constitutional and within the province's jurisdiction and right to establish mechanisms by which to recoup money from crime. They can sell property and seize things, and they can also kind of realize capital gains and things like that. It's expanding the scope of the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, allows for broader purposes. This is more of what I was looking for: that it would allow public bodies such as municipalities to apply for the costs of crime, including recovering the cost of destroying or modifying dangerous or illegal property. Again, that's about getting the money, not about spending the money, and I do not understand why we continue to hoard and gain.

When I was the Justice critic, they had a surplus of \$3.5 million – and I think it went up to \$4 million – in the victims of crime fund at that time. We're now – what? – eight years down the road or 10 years down the road, and it's \$45 million, I think. It's 10 times that amount. Why are we hoarding this money? Now this is going to give the government the ability to go and get more of it.

You know, I understand the point behind it. I know that my colleague is supportive and has put us on record as a caucus as supporting this. I still have not had my questions answered about why this fund doesn't implement some of the things that we clearly need to have implemented and done in this province around victims, around prevention, around bullying, around hate crimes, around education, all those opportunities that could be enhanced through this fund, and still the government sits on it going: "No, no, no. We can't spend it on that program, only on this one." And the money continues to rack up.

I'll support the bill, but I sure don't understand why we can't see something in front of us that dealt with how the money would be expended for the benefit of the province and for prevention purposes and victim support more than what we've seen.

Those are my concerns around that bill. Thank you for letting me put them on the record.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?
Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 11 Witness Security Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Chairman, it would be difficult to disagree with this bill, I think. When we're dealing with issues of protecting people who have the courage to step forward and support justice by disclosing information or otherwise sharing material with the Crown prosecutor or others that will lead to an arrest and then prosecution, I think we need to support those people. If at times those people are endangered because of the stands they've taken, I think that as a society and a government and a Legislature we need to make sure those people are protected.

I think that at a time when we're seeing increasing concern with organized crime in Alberta – with gangs, with related issues, sometimes gangs with national and international ties – we need to make sure that we do everything we can to prosecute those people and to drive them out of this province. If that means supporting witnesses who will testify or share information against them, then let's do it.

The way we look at this bill, this legislation establishes a provincial witness protection program, and it's a good idea. My comments on this are that short and that clear. I can tell you that I enthusiastically support this bill. I think it's the right move, and I'm confident our entire caucus does.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?
Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

4:10

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd move that the committee rise and report bills 10 and 11.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 10, Bill 11.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 25: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've had a lot to say about Bill 15. There are a lot of issues outstanding with how this government develops its budget and what's exactly in the budget. Certainly, whenever we are looking at ways for this government to reduce its deficit, there are a lot of suggestions that could be made. One is the size of the cabinet. We've talked about this earlier. We could also reduce the number of MLAs. We're going up to 87. It's sort of ironic that at the same time that we're going to expand the number of MLAs, we want teachers to work harder, we want nurses to work harder, we want doctors to work harder for less, but we're going to get more MLAs.

Alberta Health Services. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about that yesterday at length and again today, the \$700 million in efficiencies. It's in the speech, but you're going to have to show us.

One thing that we never heard from the government since – and

we had a vigorous debate in budget estimates. We were promised a lot of information in writing from the minister of finance – I'm still waiting – on how we could control our farm fuel benefit programs to make sure that farmers that are eligible are getting the money, not individuals that are ineligible. That's a hundred-million-dollar program. If we could find \$30 million in efficiencies there, that would work.

Biofuels. The megabucks that are going into that: perhaps we could have a value audit on that, Mr. Speaker.

The travel and the hosting. Now, we are looking at the tab coming in for the party in Vancouver. Are we just transferring some of the travel and some of the hosting costs to other people within the department so it doesn't show up in the *Alberta Gazette*? [interjections] I'm sorry, sir? The Minister of Transportation: it's the first time all week I haven't heard him whenever he spoke.

Now, we could certainly stretch out the budget, Mr. Speaker, the budget for capital projects. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talked about that yesterday. I think there are efficiencies in that budget if we were to spend a little less . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, it's 4:15. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(5) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the progress today I would move that we adjourn until Monday, April 12, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:16 p.m. to Monday, April 12, at 1:30 p.m.]

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Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

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The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010]

- 7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft., adjourned)
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft., adjourned)
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-84 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010]
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
- 202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Pr2 Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Pr3 Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, April 12, 2010

Issue 25

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 12, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Statement by the Speaker

End of an Era

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, in place of prayers today the House will in a moment commemorate the end of an era. In the Speaker's gallery today are a number of distinguished leaders in our province. As I call out their names, I'd ask them to rise: Lieutenant Colonel Rick P. Coates, commanding officer, the King's Own Calgary Regiment; the Hon. Daniel P. Hays, honorary colonel, the King's Own Calgary Regiment, and former Speaker of the Canadian Senate; Regimental Sergeant Major Emmett Kelly, the Calgary Highlanders; Colonel Robert J.S. Gibson, honorary colonel, the Calgary Highlanders; Lieutenant Colonel Wayne A. Lockhart, commanding officer, the South Alberta Light Horse; Colonel Stan Milner, honorary colonel, the South Alberta Light Horse; Colonel Dennis M. Erker, honorary colonel, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment; Lieutenant Colonel John Stanton, honorary lieutenant colonel, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment; Mr. Bill Fecteau, command chairman, Royal Canadian Legion, Alberta-NWT Command; Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Bradley of the Edmonton Garrison; Major Timothy Tattrie of the Edmonton Garrison; Chief Warrant Officer Keith Jones of the Edmonton Garrison; Master Warrant Officer Russell Vida, Edmonton Garrison; Sergeant Justin Redmond, Edmonton Garrison; and Corporal Grant McKenzie, Edmonton Garrison.

I'd like to place the significance of their presence and this event in context. On this day 93 years ago a battle that in many respects defined this nation concluded with victory after three days of intense combat. Vimy Ridge evoked in the 48 battalions of the Canadian Corps, who rose as one for the first time on April 9, 1917, a pride in a singular achievement. In our country and in this province that growing sense of patriotism was widely embraced.

To that point and thereafter much was given by a generation that we remember and mourn today. From this Assembly we remember Lieutenant Joseph Emmett Stauffer, MLA for Didsbury and Deputy Speaker, who was killed in action at Vimy on April 10, 1917. Alberta had over 48,885 men enlist; 6,140 were killed, and 20,000 were wounded during World War I. Alberta's population in 1917 was 496,525. Nearly 10 per cent of Alberta's then population enlisted and served in World War I.

In the Speaker's gallery today there are representatives of well-known Alberta regiments: the South Alberta Light Horse, the King's Own Calgary Regiment, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and the Calgary Highlanders. All fought at the Battle of Vimy Ridge and carry that Battle Honour. In the first Great War, of the 18,796 who served in these four regiments, 3,884 were killed in action or died of wounds and 9,960 were wounded. Few communities or families within our borders were untouched in some way by that conflict.

With the death on February 18 of this year of Canada's last World War I veteran, Jack Babcock, the living link with all who served sovereign and dominion in that pivotal event has been severed forever. Many of a generation that was young, confident, and full of promise gave much that we might be here in this place today. They are now all gone. Our direct link with them has ended, but we will remember.

I would ask that you rise for the *Last Post* and *Reveille*, played by the King's Own Calgary Regiment bandsman Master Corporal David

Ramsey of Calgary, and the *Lament*, played by Calgary Highlanders piper Private Cameron Drummond from Strathmore. In the moment of silence that will follow the *Last Post*, would you please privately pray for all of the innocent victims of war, the Holocaust, genocide, and Poland's lost leadership.

[The *Last Post* was played, followed by a minute of silence, after which the *Lament* and *Reveille* were played]

1:40

The Speaker:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Hon. Members: We will remember them.

The Speaker: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I will now invite Mrs. Colleen Vogel to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. She's in the Speaker's gallery.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd now ask our very special guests from the Canadian military to rise and be recognized. I've introduced them all. Gentlemen. [Standing ovation]

The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly His Excellency Justin Hugh Brown, making his first official visit as High Commissioner from the obviously wonderful country of Australia, and with him the honorary consul from Calgary, Paul Nelson, who is accompanying him today. We've had over 70 years of relationship with Australia, and it is noteworthy that Alberta's entrepreneurial spirit is very much the same as the Australian entrepreneurial spirit. Along with some Members of this Legislative Assembly and special guests we were privileged to host them for lunch today. I would ask that they now rise and that this Assembly give them the warm Alberta welcome, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Sewa Singh Sekhwan, Minister of Information and Public Relations and NRI Affairs, from Punjab, India, seated in your gallery today. Minister Sekhwan was the chief guest yesterday at the eighth annual event for *Des Pardes Times* newspaper and is joined in your gallery today by Mr. Gurbhinder Singh Sandhu, publisher and editor-in-

chief of *Des Pardes Times*. Also joining the minister today is his son, Jagroop Singh Sekhwan, who is in the members' gallery today, and two of his daughters, Dr. Jiwanjot Kaur Sekhwan and Dr. Akal Kaur Sekhwan. I ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction is a group of friends and members of the community joining us today as well, beginning with prominent businessman and friend Gurcharan Dhaliwal, Manjot Kaur Sandhu, Mr. Amar Bhasin, Mr. Gagan Vidhu, Sam Pandher, Parap Singh, Kamal Layel, Mr. Amarjit Pancchi from Winnipeg, and, joining us from Calgary, Jagdeep Singh Sidhu. I ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a very long list today, and surely we will come up against Standing Order 7(1), which says that the question period should begin at 1:50. I'm also advised that there are a number of members who want to participate in a ministerial statement. I'm going to ask the question if there's unanimous consent that can now be given to waive Standing Order 7(1), which will preclude the question period from beginning until probably 2 o'clock so that we can continue the Routine with introductions and then process and continue with Ministerial Statements. Is any member opposed to waiving this standing order? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of grade 6 students from l'école Broxton Park school in Spruce Grove. They are accompanied by a number of the parents and their teacher helpers as well as Jen and Ali, the daughter and granddaughter of my constituency assistant, Carol Stewart, in Spruce Grove. In the interests of time I would ask them to rise – they are in the public gallery, I believe – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 18 students who attend school daily in a unique concept of schooling called live online. This program is offered by the Edmonton public school board, but in this case it's home based in my constituency. Grades 4, 5, and 6 come to school by logging in online. This week they are participating in the School at the Legislature from April 12 to April 16. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Elaine Blanton, and helpers and parents Sherri Fraser, Barbara Ek, Jo-Anne Price, Abdulgani Salman, Chris Power, Sandy Mackenzie, Grace Stewart, Carla Feldberg. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in this Assembly and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly nine students and their instructor from St. Mary's University College, located in the constituency of Calgary-

Shaw. I had the pleasure of speaking to their class on March 3 of this year, and I have to say that their political insight and knowledge are incredible. I fully expect to see some of them here as members of this Assembly someday. I'd ask you to please welcome first their professor, Dr. Marco Navarro-Génie – I'd ask you to please stand as I mention your name – and students Amanda Achtman, Daniel Boutette, Laura Carrier, Chelsea Glover, Taylor McKee, Sarah Moss, Laura Reuben-Spear, Melanie Wedel, and Martha Zweifel. I hope I've got all of your names right. I'd ask all of you to please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

1:50

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a couple of introductions to do this afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a number of municipal leaders from the Athabasca, Redwater, and Fort McMurray areas. I had the pleasure of meeting with them through the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater over the noon hour today. I'm very grateful for their dedication and tireless effort in serving and representing their communities.

With us today are Bill Nimmo, mayor of Gibbons; Dave Franchuk, mayor of the town of Smoky Lake; Charles Newell, reeve, county of Thorhild; Karen Melnyk, town of Bon Accord; Jim Neathway, town of Redwater; Brian Bahry, deputy reeve, county of Athabasca; Donna Troyer, mayor, village of Waskatenau; Don Rigney, mayor of Sturgeon county; Paul Sinclair, reeve, municipal district of Opportunity; Roger Morrill, councillor, town of Athabasca; Jim Giancola, deputy mayor, village of Boyle; and Mike Allen, acting mayor of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. They are in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Loreen Morrison and her granddaughter Ms. Stephanie Wertz, both from my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. Mrs. Morrison recently celebrated her 80th birthday. She has had a lifelong interest in politics, and I'm delighted to welcome her on the occasion of her first visit to the Alberta Legislature. I'd ask all colleagues to please join me in extending our traditional warm welcome to my guests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 14 of 102 members of the Edmonton chapter of the Entrepreneurs' Organization, a network of young small-business owners representing a wide cross-section of industries with the goal of growing and learning from one another in order to increase business success and enrich not only their personal lives but the lives of all Albertans. These are young people who have an idea and a dream, a dream to work hard and create jobs for this province and for this province to succeed. Really, the backbone of this province is small business.

They are here today meeting with me and other members of the Assembly, some of whom were also small-business owners prior to getting elected. Taking a keen interest in how our government operates, they are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them

to rise as I call their names: Kyle Powell, Clive Oshry, Ken Nichols, Dwayne Pohranychny, Joe Cairo, John McLaughlin, Michael Bacchus, James Keirstead, Kevin Lang, Wes Patterson, James Ward, Craig McEwen, John Trapp, and Noah Jones. I'd like all of my colleagues to give them a warm welcome to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Sam Johnston from Magrath, Alberta. Mr. Johnston has indicated to me that he wanted to come today as a token of his appreciation on behalf of the council in Magrath for all the support they receive from the government of Alberta. We're happy to have him here. He's seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce you to three constituents from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Heading up the Edgerton clan, of course, I'd like to introduce to you someone you all know, and that's Kelsy Edgerton, who is one of the pages here in the Legislature. With her today, coming again to visit us, is Amber Edgerton, her sister. Amber, would you please stand. Amber is, of course, a young skier. We're joined by elder sister Alyssa, who is also an award-winning skier. I would ask the three of you to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of myself and my colleagues from Lethbridge-West and Little Bow it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the winner of the Lethbridge public library's Caught Reading photo contest, Miss Hannah Forster, who is seated in the public gallery. The intent is to promote literacy and show that reading is a way to connect with the world. Of the 203 applicants this year, whose photos depicted everything from Braille to bus stop signs, it shows how literacy impacts our daily lives. Hannah won this trip to the Legislature, which was sponsored by both the Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West constituency offices, but she is also the constituent of the Member for Little Bow. Hannah's photo, entitled *Anywhere, Any Time*, is a depiction of the gift of literacy, and I will table the picture later on. Hannah's younger sister Shelby is the model in the picture and is here today in addition to their mother, Donna. This is their first visit to the Legislature. I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm welcome and congratulations of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my guests from Parents against Closure of Schools. PACS is a group of people who have been affected by the recent closure, sector, or sustainability reviews initiated by the Edmonton public school board. My guests, who will be rallying at the Edmonton public school board offices tomorrow evening, are seated in the public gallery. I would now ask them to rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of the

Assembly: George Tsoukalas; Dennis Deans; Pam Mollison, Len Mollison, their children Aurianna Mollison and John Mollison; Michael Izard; Douglas Thivierge; and Chantelle Oudshoorn. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my guests Lisa Maxwell and Kyler Tebbutt. Lisa was born in Australia, grew up in Calgary, and is currently working as an engineer in Calgary. Kyler is from Edmonton. He studied mechanical engineering at the University of Alberta and is now working on an MBA at UBC. They are both in Edmonton to celebrate Kyler's baba's 90th birthday. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I'd now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to introduce a constituent of mine who is a long-term resident, a former chamber of commerce president. He also just recently joined with me in presenting to Hockey Canada to host the Royal Bank Cup in the upcoming years. He's an active member of our community. I'd like to ask to rise Mike Allen, representing Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a number of individuals who are here, all of them working with the Parkinson Society in one part of the province or another. I'll ask them to rise as I call their names, and perhaps we could then welcome all of them at the same time at the end: Mr. John Petryshen, CEO for the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta; Myles Rusak, director of fund development; Judy Deverill, client services co-ordinator; Leslie Cleary, volunteer event co-ordinator; Alison Wood, PD client and volunteer; Ed Langlois, PD client and volunteer, and Darlene Langlois, accompanying Ed; Helen Mak, PD client and volunteer; Jim Haiste, board of directors, and Catherine Haiste, who is accompanying Jim today; Marguerite Wieler, who is the program manager; and Sue Vienneau, who is the PD client representative with the Parkinson's Society of Alberta. Marguerite is with the movement disorders clinic. They have all risen. Could we all please thank them by warmly welcoming them here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure as well to introduce one of my constituents who has travelled to be at the Legislature today – she has travelled from Donnelly – Mrs. Rhonda Clarke-Gauthier. Both she and her husband, Daniel, farm a very, very modern family farm south of Donnelly. She is a proud mother of two sons, who are also involved in public speaking and part of TUXIS parliament. Rhonda is very involved in the 4-H club at various levels and is involved as well through her church. I'd ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: I'm going to recognize the hon. the Premier to

participate in Ministerial Statements. I understand that the hon. Premier and the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration will be doing this jointly. There is a translation of the words that the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration will provide in his native tongue of Polish, and all members should have a copy of that.

The hon. the Premier.

Loss of Polish Leadership in Plane Crash

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express the profound sadness Albertans feel at the loss of Polish President Lech Kaczynski and the many other Polish leaders who perished in a plane crash in Russia last weekend.

Many Albertans enjoy close ties to Poland. Over 170,000 Albertans are of Polish heritage, including members of this House and many people here in our capital city, which is home to the largest Polish population in western Canada. In my own family my wife, Marie, is of Polish descent, and I know from experience, as many of you do, the tremendous closeness and strength of the Polish community in Alberta. This community stands united today mourning the tragic loss of life and potential.

In addition to President Kaczynski and his wife, Maria, nearly 100 political, military, and religious leaders were lost in this tragedy. The scale of this loss is nearly unimaginable. It represents so much knowledge and wisdom, the collective experience of a generation of leaders. Recovery from such a loss will be difficult but not impossible. I want the Polish community in this province and our brothers and sisters in Poland to know that Albertans stand with them. We share their loss and mourn their leaders, and we will support them as they move forward from this terrible tragedy.

Poland's history has included more than its share of hardships, including the very tragedy that its leaders were under way to commemorate in Katyn when disaster struck. Poland is also rich in culture and the values of family and faith, values its people have shared with our own province and which remain just as strong today both here and in their homeland. Those are the values that will help Poland emerge from the shadow of this disaster and continue on its path as a valued member of the world community and a treasured friend to our province and country. Poland's lost leaders will never be forgotten, and their legacy will be a country that remains and always will be strong and proud.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration will provide remarks in Polish, the translation of which will be circulated at the conclusion.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shortly after the tragedy occurred, our Premier issued a letter of condolence in the Polish language addressed to the Premier of Poland, and for the benefit of Poles throughout Alberta, Canada, and in Poland thank you for allowing me to read this letter. [Remarks in Polish]

[Translation] On behalf of the families and government of Alberta, we express our heartfelt condolences on Poland's loss of President Lech Kaczynski, the President's wife Mrs. Maria Kaczynski, and the members of the Polish delegation and plane crew who were traveling with them to Katyn.

As families, we can only imagine the sorrow that you must be feeling in the loss of so many of your country's brightest fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters and friends. Their work had impact across your country, and it was followed with great interest by the 170,000 Albertans of Polish origin whose family, business and cultural ties with Poland are strong.

And as a government, we appreciate the challenges ahead as you work to replace the political, security, financial, legislative, and cultural knowledge which these strong leaders represented. We are

confident that talented people will carry on the important work that they had started.

As soldiers in international missions, as partners in security, as colleagues in business and trade, and also as friends, Albertans have been proud to stand with the people of Poland. This is a difficult time for your people and government. Our prayers are with you, now as always. [As submitted]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Premier and the Minister of Employment and Immigration for their eloquent tributes to the Polish government and its people.

This Saturday, as my colleagues mentioned, a tragedy struck the nation of Poland. Ninety-six passengers, mostly senior government officials, perished in the skies over western Russia. It is an especially sad coincidence that such a catastrophe would occur during the first legitimate attempt to heal the 70-year-old wound that resulted from the Katyn massacre.

The tragic events that occurred in the Katyn forest in 1940 and resulted in the murder of 20,000 Polish officers by the NKVD had divided these nations for a generation. Because the Soviet Union refused to admit responsibility for the massacre and the postwar communist authorities in Poland forbade any discussion of the topic, no reconciliation began until Mikhail Gorbachev admitted Soviet responsibility in 1990.

Since that time the lines in the sand drawn by the Polish and Russian governments regarding Katyn have begun to move. Poles have come to view Russia's recent attempts to heal the pain caused by Katyn as a significant step on the road to improved relations. I sincerely hope that this tragedy which has befallen the Polish nation, although it comes at much too great a cost, will promote reconciliation between these two great nations and deepen the meaning and understanding of the underlying events at Katyn.

I ask you my colleagues in this Assembly to stop for a moment and spare a thought for the victims, the Polish nation, and Alberta's large Polish community in the wake of this terrible tragedy. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I anticipate additional members will want to participate. Unanimous request will have to be given. I'll ask one question. Does any member in the Assembly object to additional members participating? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The news of the loss of many of Poland's most senior leaders in a plane crash on Saturday is terrible not only for the loved ones of those who lost their lives, not only for the people and nation of Poland but for us in Alberta as well. This province has been enriched by the important contributions and participation of people of Polish heritage over our history, and there are probably few of us who do not have family or friends with this heritage.

I extend condolences to the Polish people and to all Albertans of Polish descent, personally and on behalf of Alberta's NDP, at the time of this terrible event. It will be a great challenge to move forward in Poland with so many people gone who carried the skills and experience vital to strong leadership, but we know that this is a nation with great reserves of strength, and its time of mourning will be followed by a courageous recovery.

To Albertans of Polish background and to the people of Poland I add my voice to that of the many Albertans who share the sadness and the pain at this time, who say that we care, that our hearts are with you in this difficult time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 10, 2010, will be a day that Polish people will never forget. Polish President Kaczynski and many influential Polish leaders perished in a plane crash in Russia. On behalf of our caucus we would like to express our sympathies to the Polish communities.

We wish that we could turn back time and delete this tragic event from our history, but, sadly, we cannot. With time the Polish people will recover from this devastation. Now it's time for reflection and coming to terms with the pain that we have all recently suffered. Thousands have gathered in mourning, lining the streets, carrying flowers, candles, and Polish flags in memory of those that were lost in this horrible plane crash.

Mr. Speaker, tragedy brings people together, and once again our hearts go out to the family and friends of the Polish people who lost their lives and to those sharing in their loss. Thank you.

2:10

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Decisions

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government flies by the seat of its pants. It has no long-term plans, only reactions to issues of the day. It has flip-flopped on everything from cuts to foster parents, persons with developmental disabilities, ambulance dispatch centralization, Calgary cancer centres, the seniors' pharmaceutical plan, postsecondary tuition, and more. To the Premier: how can Albertans depend on anything you or your ministers say when there seems to be so much confusion and backtracking on the part of your administration?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we just approved a budget before we broke for the Easter break. The budget and the documents with the budget clearly articulate Alberta's position. We will be back in the black in three years. We will be in the best financial position of any province in Canada, and we will lead this country out of its recession.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, with respect, I'm talking about flip-flops, Mr. Premier. Given that the decision to cut critical services profoundly affects Albertans, why does this government continue to release policy before ensuring that it's the right decision for Albertans and you won't have to change it in the next week or month? It's about flip-flops.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've had to make difficult decisions with this budget to find a balance between the loss of revenue that we've seen as a result of this recession. We've also been able to tap into a cash surplus fund, the sustainability fund, to cushion the blow to the revenue and protect the programs that help the most vulnerable Albertans. They're in a variety of programs, including health, and I believe we're still the only jurisdiction in Canada to provide an increased five-year funding commitment for health. I can tell you that we're not changing any position on that.

Dr. Swann: Well, in fact, the reverse is happening, Mr. Speaker. Given that seniors have been left completely in the dark, unable to budget for their future pharmaceutical costs, and postsecondary students still don't know if they'll be able to attend school this next semester, will the Premier admit his mistakes and apologize to Albertans for this consistent pattern of flip-flops?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we continue to have some of the best programs for seniors in the country of Canada here in the province of Alberta.

With respect to tuition fees, we kept our promise. We said that tuition fees would not increase more than the CPI, the consumer price index. There were some adjustments made as a result of tuition fees set much lower going back to 2004. The minister made those adjustments, and the minister may want to speak to those adjustments he made last week.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Cataract Surgery

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With three days' notice this government reduced cataract surgery capacity by reducing the number of publicly funded cataract clinics in Calgary from five to two. This created an even greater bottleneck for people to get access to the care they needed. The cataract surgery system in Calgary has been thrown into chaos. To the Premier: why was there only three days' notice given to some cataract surgery providers in Calgary that their cataract surgeries were going to be terminated?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, because of the decision that was made, I believe over 2,100 additional cataract surgeries will be able to be completed in this province. Again, as to the details the minister may want to supplement.

Dr. Swann: Well, given that the best way to handle this would have been to let the facilities complete the surgeries that had been booked and then not book any additional ones, why did the Premier not order this action to be taken? What's the explanation?

Mr. Stelmach: All I can say is that no surgeries have been cancelled. I don't know where the hon. member is getting the information, but no surgeries have been cancelled. In fact, 2,100 new surgeries have been added.

Dr. Swann: Well, clearly the Premier doesn't know what's happening in Calgary.

Will the Premier immediately order the minister of health to begin plans to start a publicly funded cataract surgery centre in Calgary as a way of bringing stability and consistent cataract surgery to Calgarians?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of facilities in Calgary that are very public that do certain ophthalmological procedures. The bulk of those procedures are cataracts, and they have typically been competed for by facilities who submit bids so that Albertans get good cost effectiveness at the same time as they get good quality and good patient safety. We're working now on the second blitz. As you may recall, we did a preliminary blitz back in February. That included 2,230 additional surgeries, 750 or more of which were cataracts. We're just looking at other ways to shorten the wait times that exist.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last week Alberta Health Services' workforce engagement survey was released. The results revealed what everyone working in our health care system knows: there is no trust in upper management. Only 10 per cent of physicians and 28 per cent of employees responded that they have trust and confidence in senior leadership. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister ensure that this important feedback from front-line workers is taken into consideration when Health Services executive bonuses are determined?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of people who work double time and triple time to help retain the excellent service that we provide to Albertans through our health departments. Now, there are some issues to do with what the member just mentioned. We are looking at those. I've already discussed those with the board chair and with the CEO, and they will put in place strategies to increase and improve their communication if that's where the gap is or to design policies that perhaps better reflect what Albertans require.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly everybody in the system and many outside it know the system is breaking down, so my question to the minister is: why do senior executives in Alberta Health Services, who are already getting paid hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, need bonuses to do their job?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the system is not breaking down at all. For heaven's sake, we just added the best long-term planning capabilities that this province has ever had. There's a five-year funding plan that's coming, which will provide additional 6 per cent increases in the first three years and an additional 4.5 per cent increase in years 4 and 5. That will bring about stability, that will bring about predictability and sustainability, and in the end it will deliver the best-performing publicly funded health system in the country right here in Alberta, just as our Premier said.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the issue right now is the question of bonuses for managers who are clearly failing at their job. Given the abysmal staff survey, the policy confusion, handing this government a \$1.3 billion deficit, will the minister ensure that not a single executive bonus is given to these managers out of the '09-10 budget? Will you just stand up to them and say no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that everything in health care is under one form or another of discussion or review, and I will add to that list the issue that has just been flagged. You have to provide some incentives for people – certainly, you do – but at the same time you also have to provide some assurance that they're on the right track, and that's what our five-year funding plan will do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Cataract Surgery (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the opportunity to meet with constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek and many Calgarians. They wanted to discuss with me what they considered a bad decision made by the government. It relates to the

recent announcements by the government to reduce the number of operating rooms for cataract surgeries from 10 to four. My question is to the Premier. Can he please explain how awarding a cataract surgery contract to a company that doesn't even have approved or accredited operating rooms is supposed to help Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the previous question I indicated that there's actually an increase in the cataract surgeries. The minister can again outline the plan for cataract surgeries in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of people providing fully medically insured ophthalmological services in Calgary. We'll see how the bidding goes, but they will continue to have the opportunity to do that when we roll out the second blitz very soon.

2:20

Mrs. Forsyth: Given that you started with 10 operating rooms to perform critical cataract surgeries and you reduced that number to four, do the math, and you take away six. How does the Premier expect Albertans or Calgarians to believe that this will only have a minimal impact on those who are waiting for surgery to give them proper sight?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've received phone calls from some of the individuals involved at these surgical facilities, and the ones that called: I answered their calls, spoke with them. They said that every patient on their list has been phoned and has now been scheduled with a new time. In most cases they're very close to where they were scheduled before. But let's not make any mistake about it: every suite that is providing medically insured ophthalmological services is fully accredited.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, they've been phoned, they've been scheduled, but it's been delayed again.

Will the government do the right thing and continue to fund the current cataract surgeries, cornea transplants, and eye surgery providers until all of the new providers are accredited in September, Minister – approved, up and running – so that no Albertan is delayed in getting their critical eye surgery?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is probably talking to the expansion of two or three or four or more operating suites that are coming into one particular winning-bid facility. That being the case, I'm told that they're expected to have that completed some time in May or June and that accreditation, which is done by the college, will follow very shortly thereafter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. There's a backlog of people waiting for cataract surgeries in Alberta, and guess what this government's response was? Typically, their response was to reduce the number of facilities where surgeries are paid by the public system for those procedures. The people who were expecting to have these surgeries done immediately were stunned to hear that their long-awaited surgeries were called off and that they're back on a wait list. My question is to the Premier. Why has this Premier been so short-sighted that he has delayed surgeries for those who are living in the darkness with cataracts?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we're actually doing more. As the minister has outlined, we're looking at a process of not only improving the quality but increasing access to cataract surgeries. The minister has worked with Alberta Health Services, just articulated the plan in terms of what will be happening, and this is all part of trying to bring more people access to various health care programs in the province. He has worked very closely and is on his path to increasing the number of surgeries, not reducing them.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, this Premier and the truth are often strangers. How does less become more? Given that hundreds of Albertans are continuing to have their lives negatively impacted by cataracts and given that this government has just reduced the number of facilities performing this life-enhancing surgery, will the Premier admit that he has caused undue stress on Albertans who are patiently waiting to have their vision restored by forcing them to wait even longer?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it is in the best interests of Albertans to seek the best value for the health care dollar. That is what the process has been all about. It's about getting good-quality service, making sure that the costs are comparable. This is what the minister has done. We will continue to look at every other opportunity as to where we can increase access to various health care programs in the province of Alberta yet do it within the dollars that we have to work with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government continues to create chaos in our public health care system by making decisions that increase wait times and given that any increases to wait times will only cause further distress to patients and their families, will the Premier take immediate action to reverse this decision to make sure that people who need cataract surgery to see properly get it in a timely fashion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't see how the hon. member can say we're creating chaos. We're the only jurisdiction in North America that has actually rolled out a five-year increased funding proposal commitment to Alberta Health Services. That's the only jurisdiction in Canada to do so. How in the world – you know, I don't know where the member is coming from, saying that people don't have any predictability or even access to health care. We're the only jurisdiction that's increasing for five years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this government has subjected postsecondary institution students and their families to a six-month-long experiment. Last October a trial balloon was floated to see if tuition could be significantly increased in a number of academic programs, but the government was forced to pull back last week due to sustained political pressure. To the minister: now that the minister has created a precedent for adjusting tuition rates outside of regulation, how can Albertans be certain tuition won't be adjusted again one or two years down the road, perhaps to correct errors from 2010?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of inaccuracies in that preamble that would take me a lot more time than you're going to

allow me to answer. Suffice it to say that the students who worked with us on this process from the start, as admitted to by the president of CAUS during our press release when we announced this, worked with us to ensure that we were only doing this once. That was my comment, and that is the reality.

Mr. Chase: In the former reality CPI was the only increase, so here's our new reality, which changes every day.

Given that in grade school you have to show your work on any mathematical calculations, why is this minister not bringing forward any information about the criteria or evaluation process he used to assess tuition rates?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the hon. member seems to neglect the fact that I spent an hour and a half with the students prior to announcing to anyone else what we were doing in terms of the modifiers. I explained to the students, actually about six or seven months ago when we started this process, exactly what the criteria were going to be, how we were going to assess it, and then showed them that day that that's exactly what we did. They seemed very happy with the process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister of advanced education reduced and delayed the pain, but it's there in 2011. If the minister ever gets around to creating a regulation for mandatory fees, why should students believe that it will be enforced when they've seen tuition regulations discarded when convenient?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to be speaking like he's talked to the students and this is what they are telling him to say. That's exactly contrary to what is actually happening. We're working very closely with the student associations across the province, including those associations like ASEC, which represents about 100,000 students roughly, that had no tuition increase at all other than CPI and, in some cases, not even CPI. The fact of the matter is that the CPI cap on tuition in Alberta holds, one of the few in the country to actually hold with what they had committed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Noninstructional Postsecondary Fees

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several weeks ago the University of Alberta approved a new mandatory fee for students, and now I hear that the University of Calgary is considering to do the same today as the board reviews their budget. My questions today are for the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What value is there in having a tuition fee policy when institutions within Campus Alberta can increase other fees whenever they like?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that actually is a well-worded question for a change, which is good. The tuition fee policy is a policy which we fully endorse and which we're very committed to. It does help to ensure that our tuition rates across the board are only going to go up by the CPI, which is the 1 and a half per cent. That said, I agree that we do need to look at how we regulate noninstructional fees within the system because they do add to our affordability framework, and we are going to look at that.

Mrs. Sarich: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that students are still having concerns, how can the minister reassure students that their concerns are indeed being heard regarding the fees? [interjections]

Mr. Horner: Well, hon. members, we believe in postsecondary. It's unfortunate you don't.

My department is in constant dialogue with the students. We are constantly working with them on the processes. In fact, as I mentioned to the hon. member, we met with them for a good period of time to talk about what we had structured around the modifiers. We've also invited the students to draft a regulation that we might be able to look at. That regulation was presented to me last week, and we've now circulated that to other student associations for their comments as well as to the postsecondaries. It's a collaborative Campus Alberta approach, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Sarich: Again to the same minister: will this regulation be in place for fall 2010?

2:30

Mr. Horner: As I said, Mr. Speaker, we just recently received a draft from one of the student associations. We're going to be working with them throughout the summer to work with the intricacies of the affordability framework, the tuition fee policy, and whatever that new regulation will look like at the end of the year. That being said, it will probably not be in effect for 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Employment Supports

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unemployment rate in Alberta was 7.5 per cent in March, which is 25 per cent higher than the government's projection for this fiscal year in the budget we just concluded debating. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Has the high unemployment rate increased demand for training programs to help unemployed people here in Alberta find permanent work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any time an Albertan loses a job my heart goes out to them. It's obvious that work has not only a monetary value, but there's a moral value to having employment. My department, the Department of Employment and Immigration, is doing a number of things. Number one, we are now linking employers throughout the province who are still looking for workers with unemployed Albertans by way of hosting, through our 59 offices throughout the province, job fairs. We're also providing training, upgrading to individuals who need additional skills.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Speaking of those upgrades to skills, given that there has been a 7 per cent budget reduction in your department this fiscal year, where will you find the money to train these unemployed people so that they can find permanent jobs in this province?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's obviously a spending day on that side of the House. Spending more money is not always the

answer to a problem. What I'm doing right now with the department is reprofiling the dollars that I have, and we are now focusing on skills that actually lead to employment. Again, in co-operation with employers we're finding out what skill sets it is that they're looking for, and those are the practical skill sets that are leading to employment that we are providing to unemployed clients of ours.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Let's put Albertans back to work permanently. Why is this government allowing so much manufacturing like the steel modules for Imperial Oil's Kearl Lake oil sands project to be done in South Korea instead of here in Alberta, where we could put so many people to work constructing those modules right here?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome this member back to Canada, to a country where we don't tell businesses what to do and how to do it. Our role as government is to create an environment where the private sector can prosper and create jobs. We don't tell businesses what they manufacture, how they manufacture, and where they manufacture. We make sure that we are as competitive as we can be so that most of that work is done here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Avastin Treatment for Cancer

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several Albertans suffer from very serious cases of brain cancer, and most of them are nearly desperate for help. One of my constituents feels that based on what he has read and researched, Avastin could be a very effective treatment for his particular case of brain cancer. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why won't this minister fund this drug, Avastin, as part of an approved treatment for brain cancer?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are processes and protocols that every province has that it follows. This is all part of a larger national network. To my knowledge no other province, no other territory is yet able to fund Avastin for purposes of brain cancer treatment, otherwise known as glioblastoma. As soon as that process is completed, then we'll consider it here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is holding up the process for ultimate approval of Avastin for brain cancer patients?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, these are very complex and difficult decisions, obviously. The very first step in the process is for Health Canada to review any particular drug that has been suggested for purposes of safety of use and effectiveness of use. They have just completed that first step. Now it's gone over to the joint oncology drug review committee. That's another process. They look at some of the similar stuff, but they also look at the cost-effectiveness of it. As soon as that step is completed, we then get a recommendation to Alberta Health and Wellness.

Mr. Marz: To the same minister again, Mr. Speaker: given that many Albertans are under the impression that Health Canada has already given approval based on recent announcements this past

couple of weeks, how long will it take for Alberta to eventually fund this?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually grateful to the hon. member for phrasing the question in that very sensitive way. In fact, only the first stage of about a three- or four-step process has now passed with approval at the Health Canada end. It will still take a few months for the joint oncology drug review committee to do its work in this regard, and after that it will take a few months for our local Alberta provincial drug committee to do its work in reviewing, and ultimately within a few months after that we should be in a position to say yes or no.

Funding for Policing

Mr. Hehr: Although law enforcement is an inherently dangerous occupation, violence directed towards the RCMP in Alberta has become a common occurrence, as illustrated by the recent swarming and beating of two RCMP officers from the Peace Country. Mr. Speaker, how can the Solicitor General keep telling Albertans that their communities are both safe and adequately policed despite Alberta's funding for police initiatives being in the bottom third of Canadian provinces over the course of the last decade?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the member will know and should know – it's been explained to him enough times – that the direct comparison of the number of police officers is very unfair. We have additional sheriffs, peace officers that we employ in law enforcement. I might comment that I think it's somewhat irresponsible of the member to draw conclusions about what happened at the Cadotte Lake reserve without having the full facts of the investigation before him.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, an assault like this is shocking and unacceptable. My specific question for the Solicitor General is: does the Peace Country have adequate police personnel?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the police resources of this province are among the best in North America, and I'm very pleased with their performance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is rapidly approaching a 2012 deadline to renew the service delivery agreement with the RCMP. Just for the record, is the Solicitor General planning to replace the RCMP with an Alberta police force, or is this agreement going to continue?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I've said, I believe, in this House before, I've said to that member in estimates, and I'll say it again for the purposes of this House that the contract with the RCMP is under negotiation right now. We will not be replacing the RCMP as a provincial police force in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Affordable Housing

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Whitecourt-St. Anne the economy has slowed down, but still we have some problems with low-income housing. There are just not enough units. My questions are to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Can you tell me how many low-income people in this province you're helping out with your housing strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a good-news story for all Albertans. In fact, we are helping 80,000 people right now with their housing issues. That is three times the amount that we were having over the last three to four years.

Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, that's a fair amount of people to take care of. How are you going to take care of them with a 19 per cent reduction in your budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This member is quite correct. We are being fiscally responsible. I'm very proud of that. It is a hallmark of this government. We have a 19 per cent reduction – why? – because, simply, we have eliminated a transfer to the municipalities, the last three-year commitment. We've eliminated that on a go-forward basis. If the municipalities want to come and ask us for additional funds, it has to go on an individual case-by-case basis and in the best interests of the taxpayer.

Mr. VanderBurg: My final question is to the same minister. With your very aggressive goal of 11,000 units, how are you going to do that with this budget?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, we're on track for 11,000 affordable units by 2012. The transfer to the municipalities had absolutely nothing to do with that specific end of the program. We are in the best interests of Albertans being compassionate to individuals and compassionate to the taxpayers.

Fiscal Responsibility

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week Albertans were again bombarded with news regarding this government's mishandling of our economy. Our unemployment rate is now at 7.5 per cent, a 16-year high. Dropping natural gas production and a high loonie mean coming deficits have likely been underestimated by billions of dollars. We have the second-highest per capita debt of any province. We have the highest per-person spending of any province. I could go on. To the President of the Treasury Board: will you confirm to this House, as the finance minister said last week, that if your government doesn't get its budget balanced by 2012, it will have no credibility with Albertans?

2:40

Mr. Snelgrove: That is coming from the master of no credibility, Mr. Speaker, so I'm happy to respond. If you want to take a look at it and try and pick statistics out of all the negative press you're getting from across the country and the economies that other people are operating in, you can always find bad news. If you want to look for good news, people are coming to this province because they know there's an opportunity in the future to get a job. Very few provinces and hardly any states have that opportunity. They've got a chance to bring their family, to get a job, to raise them in a decent place, with a good standard of living, and they're coming to Alberta. So I don't know where he should go.

Mr. Anderson: I think the minister just said that the finance minister has no credibility. Maybe I was wrong.

To the same minister: given that U of C economist Frank Atkins and many other qualified economists and accountants have found the

true cash deficit for Budget 2010 to be \$7.6 billion, does this minister agree that it is this deficit number that needs to be balanced by his government in 2012? Or is that too hard for you?

Mr. Snelgrove: I don't make up the accounting rules. There are a bunch of very intelligent accountants from across Canada that set out the gold standard for how we have to account for money we spend. Every penny we spend is accounted for. The retiring Auditor General has repeatedly said on this stage and on the federal stage that our books are the gold standard that other provinces hold themselves to. So if the hon. member doesn't understand, won't understand, or won't listen to the budget as it's presented, I can't help that. Mr. Speaker, every dollar we spend is accounted for under the appropriate accounting principles.

Mr. Anderson: The sustainability fund is going down by \$8 billion this year, and he says it's only a \$4.7 billion deficit. Get a calculator. Honestly.

To the same minister: given that this government's own budget predicts our \$16 billion sustainability fund will be drained to virtually nothing by 2012 and given that this government has spent every last cent of interest earned from the heritage fund over the last decade, will this government finally start listening to the majority of Albertans, who want a spending restraint and savings strategy that doesn't involve prayer and luck?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, this province has taken interest from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and invested it in Albertans. We've built over \$40 billion worth of infrastructure over the last eight years. We've paid off \$25 billion worth of debt. We created a \$15 billion sustainability fund so that we don't have to borrow to operate our government. We are in the best financial situation of any province in this country by a landslide. I quite honestly don't understand what's wrong with that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Environmentally Sustainable Oil Sands Development

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In situ technologies have the potential of making the oil sands more environmentally responsible. While some companies are really taking a lead on environmental standards, there are no best practices in place because of weak regulations. With no hard targets, effective monitoring systems, or regional environmental thresholds in sight, there won't be a level playing field any time soon. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. How bad does our reputation have to become for the minister to realize that protecting the environment is good for business?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this minister recognizes that today. There is no need for this member to become concerned that we need to let the situation deteriorate before we act. We started acting yesterday.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister: given that the out of sight, out of mind approach does not protect the environment nor create certainty for business, will the minister strengthen environmental regulations before approving any further in situ projects?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the aspect of environmental regulations, like any other regulation, is ongoing. We constantly are strengthen-

ing our regulations to reflect current technology, and I see no reason why that won't continue into the future.

Ms Blakeman: Well, we have nothing concrete. Okay.

Given that we're hearing of up to 80 in situ projects waiting for approval and given that we are in a slower period of our cyclical economy, why isn't the government seizing this opportunity to get some best practices and stronger regulations in place?

Mr. Renner: We are, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Southwest Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Calgarians and Albertans are very pleased that the southeast Calgary ring road project is going ahead and that the P3 contract has been awarded at a savings of a billion dollars over time. Meanwhile, people have been talking about a bypass or ring road in southwest Calgary since the 1950s. I know that there has been a lot of progress in the recent past on this issue, but I've heard concerns that also recently there has been a stalling in the process. To the Minister of Transportation: how much further ahead are we on this issue than we were half a century ago?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's good to see that the hon. member recognized how great a P3 project we just announced last Friday. It's going to save hundreds of millions of dollars for Albertans and create hundreds of jobs. But I can also sympathize with the member's frustration, and he's reflecting, I'm sure, feelings of a lot of other Calgarians. Everyone knows that the province presented a deal to the Tsuu T'ina, and they voted against it. We respect that, but . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. I know he has more to share with us. Many studies on the southwest Calgary ring road have occurred in the past 50 years; we still have no road. How is the current study going to get us closer to actually driving on a southwest Calgary ring road?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we respect the decision that the Tsuu T'ina made, but we're working very diligently along with the city of Calgary. My officials and my departmental guys and the administration of Calgary are doing a study. Actually, they've started to go ahead with their interchange at Glenmore, which will free-flow Glenmore. Any extra to that, if that's where the study shows a ring road should be, we will contribute to that. I do think we're moving ahead.

Mr. Rodney: My last question is for the same minister, and my constituents understand it is a tough one. The minister hinted at this in the first question. Although the planning is done for the route through Tsuu T'ina lands, will the minister be making another offer to the First Nation to get the project going? If not, what other routes are being considered, and when will they be made public?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we have absolutely no plans to start any type of negotiations. As I said earlier, Tsuu T'ina had made a decision. We will respect that. By the same token, if they need an

explanation, I'm here to listen. But there are no plans to move forward with any of those negotiations. We will carry on with the city of Calgary and work on moving ahead that way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Agricultural Rail Services

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rail lines are essential for the success of Alberta's agriculture industry and the sustainability of our rural way of life, but the cost of agricultural rail services is steep. Services have been cut, and rail lines, like grain elevators, are disappearing across the prairies despite the visionary efforts from groups like the Battle River Railway New Generation Co-op. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Why is the minister waiting for the federal government to conduct a full review of the system instead of taking a proactive approach to protect our rail lines?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I share the concern with respect to the rail lines with the hon. member opposite. In fact, this past year through our rural development fund we funded a process of research and work with the communities in excess of \$500,000 to try and maintain the rail lines. The abandonment of rail lines is a federal area of responsibility, and I, like the member opposite, am very concerned that we keep those rail lines for our residents.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. In addition to that question, to the same minister: I know that you have done that, but what else is in the books as you're going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I met with a representative from the short line in question this past week and met with the president and a board member from the review committee. We are presently looking at the report, and they're working with producers to see what sort of producer car possibilities there are because we all recognize that rail, steel on steel, is the most energy efficient and environmentally responsible way to move goods.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. What else has the minister done to encourage and help the actual producers to take the issues into their own hands as we have the great example from the Battle River railroad and as other producer groups have done in Saskatchewan? They have done these things. What other things have you done to actually help the producers go forward so they can do it themselves?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, we've been supportive with producers, but we've also worked with groups outside of moving commodities towards the viability of these rail lines. A prime example within my constituency is Alberta Prairie Steam Tours, where the tourism opportunities were able to keep rail on the ground. That's one of the areas where I've been in discussion with groups, to see if there are possibilities outside of producer cars to make these rail lines viable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:50 Dental Infection Prevention and Control Standards

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Dental Association and College is working with Alberta Health to improve the standards of infection prevention and control. It has come to my attention that many dentists are concerned that the new rules set for January 2011 are overreactive and unattainable. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What is being done to ensure that infection prevention and control rules are reasonable, practical, and enforceable?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, provincial infection prevention and control standards were in fact implemented in 2008, and they apply quite specifically to Alberta Health Services and to their contracted service providers. Now, we also have the Alberta Health Professions Act, which actually establishes the Alberta Dental Association and College as the governing body of the dental profession here in Alberta, and that includes practice and conduct standards. A lot is being done to ensure that the standards are reasonable, practical, and enforceable to the members involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: who will pay for the initial cost and high operating cost for each clinic to comply with the new set of rules?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite certain it's the clinics themselves because, of course, patient safety and the safety of the people providing the services are at the heart of these standards, and the costs that are associated with providing the best infection and control practices are embodied therein. The bottom line is that they pay those costs, and they also ensure the services are provided safely.

Mr. Cao: My last supplemental question is to the same hon. minister. How does Alberta Health Services co-operate with the dental professional community to develop reasonable and attainable standards that will keep Albertans smiling?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would assume and I would hope that the relationship is good between the two bodies, but we have to respect that there are differences of jurisdiction here. The standards that I just mentioned in the first question speak to that. Nonetheless, I am quite confident that the provincial infection prevention and control standards that apply to AHS staff and services also apply to their contracted service providers, so I'm quite sure that the dental college is doing its best to ensure that those protocols are followed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Foster Care Maximum Placement Levels

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the minister there are 100 foster homes in this province that have more children than their classification allows. The minister has stated that these homes will be reassessed to ensure proper supports and services are being provided to them rather than making a commitment to halt this practice. To the minister. Rather than creating more placements or encouraging family enhancement where possible, this government chooses to disregard maximum placement levels. Why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We don't disregard maximum placement levels. In fact, there are very clear criteria for placing children into homes that are already level 1 or level 2 homes. If the homes for level 1, level 2 each have a licence and if the children are siblings and you'd like to keep them together, if you want to put the children into a licensed home, you need another licence in order to do that. You're right, hon. member: I am re-evaluating the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the minister: what findings have emerged from the reassessment process to this point?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of criteria that I've asked the staff to look at. One is to actually see the exact number of homes. I can tell you that that assessment will take some time. According to the staff it's going to be very detailed. I would think it's going to be at least three to six months in order to do that. When I do have the criteria come back, as I've said to you before, hon. member, I will share that publicly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given the time limit the minister has just put forward, will the minister table information in the fall session showing the number of foster and kinship homes exceeding their approved limits and what extra measures are in place to support these vulnerable children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I consider that to have already been tabled when we discussed it in Committee of Supply. As I indicated – and you were there, hon. member, because you asked the question – the staff have informed me that it is 100 homes. As I said, I've asked for an assessment of the homes that are in place now to be certain of an accurate number and a number of criteria regarding the placements in those homes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Twinning of 50th Street to Beaumont

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Beaumont is a community of 12,000 people in my constituency, located five minutes south of the city of Edmonton. It's the only community of its size not serviced by four-lane access. Secondary highway 814, or south 50th Street, is a narrow two-lane road that serves as the main north-south access into the community. It also serves residents as far south as Wetaskiwin. It's very dangerous and a great source of frustration for my constituents. To the Minister of Transportation: when will your department support the twinning of 50th Street?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the province recognized the importance of twinning 50th Street through the town of Beaumont to highway 625, which is a distance of about four miles. In fact, the province has already provided \$3.5 million to the town of Beaumont for this cost-shared project, and we continue to work closely with the town as they continue with the design and costing of the project.

The province will also provide additional support for the twinning when some funding does come available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents certainly appreciate that there is some progress, but their patience is wearing thin. Can you give me some reasonable timeline, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the southern portion of this roadway falls under the jurisdiction of the town of Beaumont and not the province; the northern section of the road falls under the jurisdiction of the city of Edmonton. It doesn't make sense to have an incomplete project. What we need here is a co-ordinated response between the town of Beaumont and the city of Edmonton. That is why my department will be looking for the town of Beaumont to work closely with the city of Edmonton so they can co-ordinate this project together.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current economic climate and recent experience would suggest that an opportunity exists to get this road built much cheaper than expected. Why can't we take advantage of this timing, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, my department has been taking advantage of the reduced construction costs. The reduced costs have allowed us to stretch our dollar and complete more work. As with all of our highway construction projects, we need to balance the needs of this project with other priority projects across the province. We also have to make sure that we're all on the same team here, that we work with the city of Edmonton and with the town of Beaumont together with our department, and hopefully we can move this project ahead and get it done for the hon. member's constituents.

Fish Creek Provincial Park

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, on the weekend it was reported that a new trail had been opened in the west end of Fish Creek provincial park at a cost of \$126,000 while those who venture off the trail in the future will be fined \$172. Meanwhile, a much more pressing issue for managing the park is maintaining and restoring the very integrity of the natural ecosystems in the park and reversing the rampant spread of invasive species and woody perennials. Native grasses, herbs, and flowering plants need the intervention of fire, grazing, or cutting in order to maintain a stable grasslands ecosystem. My questions are for the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Given the continued degradation of the grasslands in Fish Creek provincial park, what is her department doing to preserve and restore the grasslands in that park?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about a park very dear to my heart, very close to my home. It has 3 million visitors a year, a very popular park. After the flood we were able to go in and renew the infrastructure there and, I think, improve the park.

Relative to the grasslands, though, we took the park over in 1975. The fescue at that time had already been broken, if you will, because it had been used for ranching, so I know there's very little fescue left, Mr. Speaker. We are watching that, and we'll continue to monitor the fescue that's left in the park.

Dr. Brown: Well, the minister is aware that there were 80 million buffalo on the plains of North America before the cattle came along. They were grazing it long before the white man came along to the country. What will her department do? Given the fact that she spent \$126,000 on a trail, how much money is she going to spend to restore the grasslands?

3:00

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the \$126,000 that we spent on the trail I think was very well-spent money. We had a bunch of dirt bikers making trails throughout the park and destroying it. We were able to put barriers in the way so that they could no longer get on some of those trails, regenerate them, as well as keep them on the trails to preserve the very park that they want to enjoy.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, given the ongoing lack of action in protecting that park's ecosystem that's been going on for years now, will the minister make the necessary changes in park management to effect some real change to bring back and restore the native grassland habitats in our provincial parks?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has a good point. I mean, we are looking right now at the Glenbow Ranch, which just got added. It, of course, has got pristine fescue, and we're going to be using it a bit as a classroom, if you will. There's an institute that's been formed that will help us have a better idea of how to manage grasslands in other parks. But the management is only following a management plan, and we do need to review that management plan.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period today. Nineteen hon. members were recognized. There were 114 questions and responses: nine came from the Official Opposition, three from the independents, and seven from the government.

Now, we're up against Standing Order 7(7): "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily Routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I was just sidetracked here. Are we on Notices of Motion?

The Speaker: No, sir. We are on the Speaker alerting the Assembly to Standing Order 7(7).

Mr. Zwozdesky: And have you done so?

The Speaker: I have.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Shall we just carry on with private members' business, then, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Well, sir, that's entirely up to the Assembly. The standing order simply says that "at 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." Usually when that happens, one of the Government House Leaders rises and says: might we have unanimous consent to conclude the Routine?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if we could seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to proceed with the regular Routine.

The Speaker: Well, then the chair will bring such question to the

Assembly, and the chair will ask it in this way: does any hon. member object to the continuation of the Routine to its conclusion? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, may we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to introduce through you to all members of the Assembly a group of firefighters that are here today to witness debate on third reading of Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. We are joined today by the fire chief of Edmonton, Mr. Ken Block, and Deputy Chief Dale McLean as well as firefighters from the Leduc Fire Fighters Association, local 4739; the Medicine Hat Fire Fighters Association, local 263; the Edmonton Fire Fighters' Union; the Alberta Firefighters Association; the Calgary Fire Fighters Association; the Spruce Grove Firefighters Association; and the Fort McMurray Fire Fighters Association. I would ask that our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, do you have a guest?

Mrs. Forsyth: No. I want to start the debate.

The Deputy Chair: We haven't called the committee to order yet. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to reintroduce some of the members who are still here from the Parkinson Society – a couple of others have joined them – and just explain to them that, unfortunately, we're not able to proceed today with the reading of private members' statements to salute the Parkinson Society and also to salute the Holocaust memorial because one opposition member spoke out. I just don't know if he understood the gravity of that or not. I thought they deserved to have an explanation for where we're at in the House proceedings.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.
Do you have a guest?

Mr. Anderson: We did not know that it would mean no members' statements, so we would like to ask unanimous consent, if possible, to revert to Members' Statements.

The Deputy Chair: We are in Committee of the Whole, and I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 202

Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to speak to you and other members of the Assembly regarding Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. I was encouraged to hear the government members express their support to combat child pornography and to give the public and law enforcement communities another tool to rid our homes and our communities of a truly vile and evil form of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

I appreciate the feedback that we have been given so far. One comment that was brought forward was that the government was concerned about a bill that had a proclamation date. Frankly, I cannot see how the idea of a proclamation date has become the issue that the PC government has made it into. If you don't have a plan, you fail. If you don't have a date to focus government staff, law enforcement, and agencies on, then you also fail. As my friend from Calgary-Glenmore is so fond of saying: if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

Without a proclamation date, Mr. Chair, this government is simply trying to look like they are supporting measures that will fight child pornography, but they are not actually committed to putting a law in place. This is the intent of what their so-called concerns are, and that is what Albertans see them for.

Now, I'm sure that they will start to say soon that they want flexibility. Well, I will show you once again that I'm willing to be flexible to get a law passed that Albertans will support. I am willing to be flexible to get a law passed that will protect Alberta's children from sexual deviants. I'm willing to be flexible so that the PC government can show Albertans that it will support a bill that makes sense and can be implemented smoothly, effectively, and quickly. In keeping with this desire to get a law passed that will be implemented, I am coming before you today to propose an amendment to Bill 202. Mr. Chair, I'd like to propose a friendly amendment to Bill 202 that states that Bill 202 will be implemented no later than March 31, 2011. This gives the government no more excuses. It gives the government a full year to put this bill into effect.

Since we last debated this bill, even more cases have come forward, horrible cases where children have been abused for the sexual gratification of some pervert. Recently we learned of an international child pornography ring in 20 countries where 73 people were charged. In the *Edmonton Sun* a Crown prosecutor noted that at any given time in Alberta 10 to 20 adults are before the courts, charged with online luring, for enticing a child to either pose nude or meet for sex. Also, an additional 70 to 80 people are before the courts . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are you moving an amendment?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll have it passed around.

3:10

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, it has been passed.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Hon. member, please proceed. We're speaking to amendment A2.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you.

An additional 70 to 80 people are before the courts for possessing or manufacturing child pornography. This is just in Alberta, and this is just those targeting our children. This is what needs to be known, Mr. Chair. It is time for the government to stop playing games with a bill that is supported by law enforcement, child protection advocates, and, quite frankly, the public. I would like to put the motion on the table, and I'd like to truly see where the government stands.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, speaking on amendment A2.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking directly to amendment A2, what the hon. mover of the amendment has provided the House is the luxury of time. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has noted the concerns expressed by members of the government that in order to properly enact this legislation, more time is required, even though time would have been available over the summer and through the fall as this bill came to the potential of further debate. It is absolutely reasonable that this extension be granted.

The problem is real. In second reading I spoke to my support for the intent. In Committee of the Whole I spoke on my support for not only the intent but the purpose and the need for this bill, given the abuse that happens on a daily basis to Alberta children. This provides the government with the extension they need to do whatever research or take whatever measures are necessary to make sure that the legislation is thorough and enforceable. I encourage members of this government to support amendment A2.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Directly to the amendment I will be very brief. I think that this is an excellent amendment, and I don't think that we can be too fast to get good legislation and good enforcement to be able to keep these kinds of scummy people off the streets and away from our children.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I feel it's very important and critical at this time that we reflect on the purpose of why we're here as legislators and what our first and most important role is. To me, as a government the most important thing is to ensure that each member of our society is protected by the laws and the courts of this country. If there's a problem there where people are not being protected, then it's our first duty to ensure that that law is put in place to protect those individuals.

We've got a number of bills before us – I've read them into *Hansard* already – that this government has brought forward and said: these are our priorities of this sitting. Yet this is an ongoing problem that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has been working on for years, and this government has failed to act to protect the children of the province of Alberta. They've come up with excuse after excuse, saying that they can't do this; they can't do that. They've had years to prepare for this. One year is more than enough. They should have been able to get it done by this fall, but in order to bring them on board, we've made this amendment to give them one full year, which is far too long to leave our children unprotected. We need to act on this, and it needs to be passed in this House.

Starting with the very first bill this government came out with, they said: oh, it's very important that we're competitive; we need to pass a bill for that. In fact, their actions are against that. What we need is action on Bill 202 here. We need to protect the most vulnerable in society, that being our children. We don't reach the age of consent or the age of voting until 18. Consent again is another area in this country – we've been trying to raise it – where it has been very difficult, and it shouldn't be.

Our children are first and foremost in our society. We need to protect them. We understand that, so why are we not getting behind this bill? Why it is still being held back is incomprehensible to me. I would urge all members to stand up, to speak on this if needed, but, more importantly, to vote to get this passed so that we can start protecting our children. The heinous crimes that are going on are unacceptable. We can't say that it's someone else's responsibility. Whether it's federal, whether it's a world-wide situation, we need to start right here in Alberta, right now today, go on to third reading and pass this in order to protect our children. So I would urge all the members in this House to vote for this amendment.

Again, let's not kid ourselves. The reason this amendment is being put in there and why there's a proclamation date is because we have to get it done. If you don't have a date, it's not going to happen. To say, "Oh, well. We've got to look at things. We'll look at it. We'll consider it next year" isn't the solution. We put in a date. One year is more than ample time to get this in place. We need to pass this.

I would encourage all of the members of this House to do the right thing, to vote for Bill 202 in this amended state. Let's start protecting our children, starting March 31, 2011.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the members and their comments about why this amendment should be supported. I would like all members of this House to realize, however, that changing the date through an amendment, to March 31, 2011, gives us more time for consultation and to make sure that the regulations are done properly. Suppose that the regulations are done by this fall, in 2010, and we could proclaim the legislation now; we would be forced to wait for several more months before it became law. The point, that I've suggested many times in this House, is that as soon as you put a date, it puts restrictions on how much time you have for consultation, or if the consultation is done, now you have a certain amount of time you have to wait before it becomes law. We could be protecting children by proclaiming it the second the regulations are done.

This is entirely a focus on getting it done right now instead of it getting done right. That's what we have argued in this House over and over and over again. I encourage all members not to support this amendment.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, the original proclamation date was July 31. During the debate it was said that we didn't have enough time to do that.

You know, Mr. Chair, what I find truly, truly amazing – and I was a minister of the Crown for six years, and I know how easily things can be done. I guess one must ask the Minister of Justice how many lawyers she has in her department. How many meetings does it take? Who opposes it? Who do we actually need to consult? All of that has been done.

You know, I respect my colleague from Battle River-Wainwright. I like my colleague from Battle River-Wainwright. We've had this

discussion. You know what? I have no problem if the Assembly decides to defeat the March 31, 2011. I have no problem with that. Then if he is talking about the summer to consult, we could have the member bring an amendment forward for September 1, 2010. I'll be right up there with you, buddy.

Mr. Chair, I've been around a long time. I'm just waiting to get some stats from my research to find out how many private member's bills have been in this Assembly and, quite frankly, how many have been passed. That has been very, very few.

I know that my colleague the Minister of Justice supports this bill. I sat down with her in November. I sat down with the former Solicitor General at the same time, in November, and they both supported it. At that time they both indicated that this bill was important to have because our federal government has been dicking around with it for months and months, in fact, since 2002.

If my colleague from Battle River-Wainwright wants to bring an amendment forward, wants to make that date September 1, I'll be the first one to stand up and support it. They didn't like December 31, 2010.

3:20

The other thing that's very interesting is that there is nothing stopping an amendment from coming before this House in the fall session, saying: we want to make an amendment on this particular piece of legislation for September 1, 2010. I'm sure we'll all stand up and applaud.

Mr. Chair, we're trying to work with the government. Quite frankly, I don't trust them on their private bill process and getting bills done. I'd be more than willing to work with my colleague from across the way, and if he wants to say September 1 – I know he's a father of two young guys, and I know he in his heart supports this. So if we're going to argue about a date, then have the Member for Battle River-Wainwright bring forward a date, and if he says September 1, 2010, I'll buy him a beer.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, I'd like to comment a little bit about the comment from the good Member for Battle River-Wainwright. It would be a very simple and favourable amendment to say on or before March 31, 2011. We're not against that. Again, it just seems like they're bouncing the ball back and forth to say: now it's too slow; now it needs to be forward. A simple, friendly amendment to on or before March 31, 2011, could easily come forward.

The point is that we need to get this passed, and to keep using dates as an excuse is just pathetic. We need to pass it. We need to get it done. It doesn't mean that it has to be done March 31, 2011. We could proclaim it at any time if the government so decided.

I'd urge all members to vote in favour of this or to make the amendment. Like I say, we can do it down the road, but it should be on or before March 31, 2011, and not excuses saying: "Oh, we need to get the date locked down," or "It has to be sooner now," or "That's too far away." We need to pass this, and then we could amend it just as they have with the Municipal Government Act. We passed one last year, and now we have a government bill that's trying to correct that mistake. I just can't see it. Changing it now and saying, "Well, September is long enough" is a poor reason not to pass this today.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:22 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	Hehr	Pastoor
Forsyth	Hinman	

Against the motion:

Amery	Fawcett	Olson
Bhardwaj	Griffiths	Redford
Brown	Groeneveld	Rodney
Calahasen	Horner	Rogers
Campbell	Johnson	Sandhu
Doerksen	Klimchuk	Snelgrove
Drysdale	Leskiw	Weadick
Elniski	Marz	Woo-Paw
Evans	Oberle	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 27
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright on Bill 202.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak to Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I commend the hon. member for her devotion to the protection of our province's youth. This bill is just yet another demonstration of that commitment that she has always had, and I'd like thank her for bringing it forward.

Mr. Chairman, there are several sections of this bill that make reference to items to be defined in regulation. Section 10, for example, states that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations pertaining to the designation of reporting entities, reports made to reporting entities, and the duty of those reporting entities.

Like legislation, Mr. Chairman, the drafting of regulations takes time and takes full and appropriate consultation with the appropriate stakeholders and co-ordination with existing provincial and federal laws. I couldn't imagine jumping the gun and creating regulations without consulting police, prosecutors, and others in the justice system who will have to operate within those regulations. I doubt that the member who introduced this would approve those measures either for any government legislation.

Almost every single element of the justice system has emphasized how critical this legislation is, and again for that the member should be commended. But just as heavily they have all emphasized how important it is to get this right the first time. They have emphasized how important it is to properly consult in the drafting of the legislation and the regulations with stakeholders and members of the justice system. Mr. Chairman, they have also emphasized how critically important it is to ensure a co-ordinated federal and provincial strategy since the Internet does not know that there is a boundary at the edge of the province of Alberta. We have to consult appropriately to make sure everyone is aware, onside, and that the regulations are drafted effectively.

This brings me to section 11, which reads specifically that "this Act comes into force on July 1, 2010." Indeed, we've had some amendments that have changed the date. The challenge is that it's still a date. We know that the amount of time between now and July 1, 2010, will not suffice to see this bill through the committee and third reading stages let alone carefully draft and approve the regulations.

I'd like to bring forward an amendment to this section. The amendments are at the table, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the amendment is distributed. This will be amendment A3.

The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment proposes to strike out "on July 1, 2010" and substitute "on Proclamation."

As I previously mentioned, it takes time to draft the regulations appropriately. Further, in this case it may be substantially complex because it is somewhat of a stand-alone act. We'll need to ensure that the regulations are therefore aligned with other child protection laws such as the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act as well as their accompanying regulations. In addition, Mr. Chairman, it's important to take into consideration the federal laws and regulations, just as we've been advised by different segments of the judicial system, that along with other provinces' bills are similar in nature and co-ordinated as such. The bill as amended will ensure that we have time to complete the necessary consultations.

The bill's intentions are nothing but honourable, and there is nothing in this amendment that says that anyone in this House does not support the intent of this bill, but in order for it to have the desired result, we need to ensure that all elements that support the legislation are in place before it actually becomes in place. Mandating reporting will only be effective if it's clear to whom the report should be made, what the report should include, and a clear protocol for what happens once that report has been issued.

Mr. Chairman, things would have to come through regulation which come through the consultation with members of the judicial system. These items require time, so I believe it's important to amend the bill to come into force upon proclamation so we don't set a false deadline on when to achieve it; we actually do it right.

The members across the way will probably suggest some strange things, like that we don't care about kids. They may talk about how many children may be hurt because of the time this takes. It's all intended to rile up emotions, Mr. Chairman, and make us look like we are bad guys. That's part of the politics that I've always disliked that often occurs around here, the games.

3:40

They won't mention, however, that changing the proclamation date where you have to have five or six months before you can actually proclaim the legislation even if the regulations are in place could hurt children. They won't tell you that if the regulations aren't drafted right and there are some people who are producing child pornography or observing child pornography, they get off because we don't have the regulations done right. That's equally harmful, Mr. Chairman. It is awful, and it would be equally awful if meeting a deadline became our focus because we might wind up with regulations that, not properly drafted because of deadlines, meant those who are abusing children could get off scot-free.

The debate is fairly over whether this is best addressed right or whether it's addressed right now. That's a fair debate, whether we should hurry up and get it done or we should make sure we get it

done right. I want to get it right. I believe the members across the way want to get this done correctly, too. I believe we all do. To assert that anyone in this House does not want to protect children or that this is some game being played for politics or to suggest that anyone in here wants to delay and just let people who are producing child pornography or observing child pornography and failing to report it and children are being harmed – that we would want to support anybody getting away is absolutely ludicrous, Mr. Chairman. At the risk of getting called out of order, I suggest it's asinine, too.

Mr. Chairman, I encourage all members in this House to support this amendment. I encourage all members to trust that every single person in this House wants this bill passed, wants children protected, and this has nothing to do with politics. This has to do with getting it right to ensure that children are safe, and I encourage all members to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A3 the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I listened very intently, and I find the whole conversation very interesting. Since 1972 we've had 1,411 private members' bills go through this Assembly, with less than 50 per cent of them receiving royal assent.

I guess what is more amazing to me than anything is the fact that how things change when you're with the government and you're not with the government. I had lengthy conversations with the Minister of Justice, and I had lengthy conversations with the Solicitor General, and I don't pull these things out of my head, Mr. Chair, in regard to dates and in regard to support on this. You know, I talked at length to both ministers when I was with the government, and frankly they were the ones that encouraged me to bring the bill forward, and they were the ones that encouraged me and helped me draft this bill. In fact, it's amazing when you have government members' research and you still have copies of that documentation, and they talk about the fact of the length of time it's taken the federal government to get to this serious situation.

We've tried to work within the confines of what you can as a small opposition, and we've tried to work with the government. I remember the Member for Battle River-Wainwright calling me in regard to how the private members' bills committee had actually looked at this bill. They supported this bill. They didn't like the date of this particular bill at the time, which was July 31 in the private member's bill. I said: "Okay. Well, I'm fine with that. How about if we put a date on that particular piece of legislation?" I know exactly how this government works – exactly how this government works.

Mr. Anderson: Or doesn't work.

Mrs. Forsyth: Or doesn't work. If this bill is so important and they care so much about the children in this province, then bring the darn thing through as a government bill. I'll be the first one to stand up in September and support them on this particular piece of legislation, and I'll be going out and telling all Albertans how important it is this government cares about the children of this province.

You know, they talk about the regulations, and they talk about the identity process. I had lengthy conversations with the Minister of Justice and the previous Solicitor General in regard to that process. They wanted that left open so through regulations they could identify who they would use, whether it was the ICE team or whether it was Cybertip or one of those places. Hey, I'm not the minister. That's their responsibility, and I was okay with that. Not having a proclamation date bothers me, but we have a lot of this on

record, so that's good, and I'm going to be after the government. The Member for Battle River-Wainwright said: maybe in September we'll have it. Hallelujah. I'll look forward to that. We will stand up as a member of our caucus and quite frankly applaud them and support them on that. I'll listen to the debate, and I'll continue to hear what they have to say.

We're put in a very difficult position about supporting the amendment in regard to no proclamation date. But you know the government: they're only as good as their word. So we'll listen very carefully to that, and possibly the Solicitor General today will stand up. I've got articles from him when there have been busts about how his number one priority is the protection of children. Maybe we'll see this bill passed in September, or, quite frankly, maybe the Minister of Justice or the Solicitor General or even the minister of children's services will bring this bill forward under a government bill in October, when we come back to the Legislature. I'll continue to listen to some more of the debate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Very specifically on the amendment A3. The hon. Member from Battle River-Wainwright has put forward an amendment that suggests that "Bill 202, Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, be amended in section 11 by striking out 'on July 1, 2010' and substituting 'on Proclamation'." I understand the member's desire to get things right the first time. I would wonder how, for example, it took God six days according to Genesis to create the world, and on the seventh day He rested. In order for God to be acceptable in this Assembly, I would suggest that He should have got it right the first time, on the first day. However, as human beings and speaking specifically to amendment A3, yes, we require time to get things right. But here's a reality: every day it takes us time to get it right, another child or a group of children is going to suffer from the abuse.

Later today we're going to be debating Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. It was recognized that the firefighters act wasn't sufficiently inclusive, so an amendment was brought forward which strengthened Bill 201, which no doubt will get passed. That is what was attempted with the amendment, extending the time period. However, if we extend it forever or until such a time that the federal government gets it right and we concur with the federal government, in the meantime a tremendous amount of potential abuse time elapses.

I, like the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, being a former teacher, very much want to have things done correctly. That's the whole basis of how we approach our classes: we try to set things up so that the students will be successful. But we also realize that as human beings, as Robbie Burns would say, the best laid plans of mice and men "gang aft agley." In other words, we don't necessarily get it right the first time, but we have a parliamentary procedure to strengthen previous legislation.

Now, the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, in proposing amendment A3, stated how important this issue is, how important protecting children from abuse is. I believe that everyone in this Assembly believes that protecting children from abuse is important. But, folks, we have to get on with the job. If we support amendment A3, we've just delayed the job instead of getting on with it. Granted it may not be perfect – and I raised concerns about the need for setting deadlines and dates and putting things into regulation – but how much longer do we have to wait?

3:50

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was formerly, as she noted, a member of this government. She served in two ministries.

She worked with previous ministers of this government in terms of drafting this legislation. Having a good idea should not be relegated to which party you belong to. We are on record – whether it's the Wildrose, the Liberals, or the NDP – of supporting good legislation. Example: Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

I want to echo what the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said. She hopes that maybe the championship will come through the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright in terms of protecting children. I would like to think that maybe it would come from the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services. It could very well come from the Minister of Justice. But this legislation is needed, and if it is brought forward by the government and the government corrects whatever bits and pieces of regulation they feel are missing, or if there is a deadline that they feel needs to be changed to allow the co-operation with the federal government, whatever it is that members of this government believe is necessary, I hope that when we come back this fall, that legislation will be proposed as a private member's bill, even given the number of times private members' bills are not put forward into legislation.

If you truly believe, as I believe you do, that children are important and need to be protected, then I implore you to bring forth the legislation that you feel is necessary to achieve that end this fall. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I'd like to start off with that I don't doubt the hon. member in his saying that there isn't a member in here that doesn't think this is important, but it goes a step past that. It's about priorities. Priorities really are walking the walk, not talking the talk. To say that one is sincere and then not want to put in a proclamation date is not sincere. This is the whole crux of the problem, that they are making these declarations. First it was too soon, July 31. They just all voted against one for March 31, 2011. Now they're making the declaration: oh, maybe it's going to be September. So they do know the time frame that it can be. Why would you get up and say, "Oh, maybe we could do it in September"? If so, I think a simple amendment could have been brought forward: on or before March 31, 2011.

This amendment is unacceptable. It's unacceptable to the children of this province. It's unacceptable to the parents of this province. It's unacceptable and it's shameful that this House is going to pass a bill as important as 202 with no proclamation date. There's no commitment to that. It's just wrong.

I want to read into the record again the priorities of this government and where they feel the importance is on bills and legislation that we're passing. Once again I say that the most important bills and legislation that we should be passing are those that are protecting the most vulnerable, those that are protecting our life, our liberty, and our property, yet if we go through this government's wonderful roster of bills, it's embarrassing. The most important bill to this government after they destroyed the Alberta advantage is to say: oh, we're going to proclaim a bill, Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, and now we're wonderful again. That's the priority of this government, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, when in fact all of their actions are destroying the competition in this province. That's their priority.

Bill 2, Professional Statutes Amendment Act. That's their priority in trying to look after the professionals, not the children of this province. This good Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has been working on this – is it eight years?

Mrs. Forsyth: Probably longer.

Mr. Hinman: Maybe longer. Eight years, and this government has refused to act on that. To say they're sincere – they're not, Mr. Chairman.

Bill 3, Fatal Accidents Amendment Act. This one has some importance here on how we're going to treat those that are from fatal accidents. That's number three. Again, no children's protection act here.

Bill 4, Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act. They say that this is their priority, not protecting the children and those who want to use them for their sexual gratification but dangerous goods. There is no danger with pedophiles or for those people that are bringing in this stuff, but dangerous goods: that's a priority of this government.

Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act. Why? Because they couldn't get their act together. Even though this government said they're going to start presenting the budget in February so that it can be ready by the year-end, they needed a supplemental act. That's the priority. We're talking about the date on amendment A3, and they say that they can't have a proclamation date, yet all of these need a proclamation date.

Bill 6, Emergency Management Amendment Act, needs a proclamation date. Gonna get one.

Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act. I mean, a huge, thick one. This is almost as thick as five other bills, and they're sitting there saying . . .

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Oberle: Point of order. Mr. Chairman, I need to ask what the relevance of this is when he lists, which all of us have, the outline of the number of government bills coming before the House. Is the member aware that we're talking about private members' business, more specifically the actual Bill 202, more specifically than that a proposed amendment to that bill? We're not talking about government legislation, government direction, government planning. At the moment I would ask that you call the member to order.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the chair understands what you're attempting to do here. We're talking about proclamation, and you're equating the proclamation of all bills – government bills, private members' bills – and the time it takes for proclamation and working that way through. I would encourage the hon. member to please stay on topic and stay with amendment A3.

Mr. Chase: May I speak to your encouragement?

The Deputy Chair: No.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate the counsel from the chair, but I think it's critical for the people of Alberta to understand the priorities. They say that they're sincere and that they want this. It should have been Bill 1 if they're standing up and saying they're so sincere about it, that we're going to protect the children. This government has brought forward no bills to protect . . .

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, point of order. Could you please explain to that member the difference between government business

and government priority and private members' bills and the motion, the amendment, that's on the table right now? He doesn't seem to understand it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you do not have the floor.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, it's a question of relevance. We are not talking about government business, government priorities. They have every day the question period, all sorts of avenues. Section 459 of *Beauchesne*, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, a moment ago I talked about what I perceived to be the relevance you were trying to put with government bills and private members' bills and proclamation. We are on private members' bills, and we are on amendment A3, that says to substitute "on Proclamation." I'm afraid it doesn't have anything to do with government bills; it is a private member's bill.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman.

Speaking to amendment A3, that the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act be amended in section 11 by striking out "on July 1, 2010" and substituting "on Proclamation," I'm referring to my specific notes by the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who says: we're sincere; we want to put this in here. He talked about section 11, and he specifically spoke about a date and that we couldn't put one out until we've done all of this homework. He says that all of the members in this House understand it, yet they're not putting a date to it.

I guess I'll go back to a talk show host that we hear so much of on the weekend, that it's about relationships. She always says: if you don't have a ring and a date, you have no commitment. If you don't have a date, there is no commitment from this government, and that's what it's about. Twice we've had standing votes on dates where this government has stood up and voted against it. One they said was too early. Now they're using, to me, the naïveté of saying: it's too far away; we're going to do it earlier. So they do have a time frame in which they say that they can get this done.

This amendment should say: on or before March 31, 2011. To say anything else – and to say that this has nothing to do with government bills: it has very much to do with government bills because this government has failed to protect our children, so a private member has had to do this. That's why I was going through the priorities of this government and showing what their priorities are, whether it's in our budget, where again they lack the understanding of prioritizing and say, "Oh, this is okay; we're going to put \$2 billion into CO₂," and then have a huge deficit. It just goes on and on.

4:00

If you go through and look at the priorities of this government, which are their bills – and I would suggest to the hon. Member for Peace River that if he doesn't think that that isn't prioritizing, then he should go and study a course on prioritizing and find out a little bit about it. There's a huge difference between talking the talk and walking the walk. This government has failed to pick up the banner and say: we're going to protect our children. We have 15 bills. Not one of them is protecting the children.

A private member who worked inside the government struggled to bring forward a government bill and was never able to. Perhaps by an act of providence here she has Bill 202. We're debating this, and this government wants no proclamation date. Make no mistake about it: no date, no commitment. You can't fool yourselves that it's anything else than that. I have to say that I'm astounded when this

government talks about having free votes in the House. You're all of one mind. I would say that you don't mind whether or not you pass this bill. I'm sorry. That's the fact of it. That's how Albertans are going to see this, that you don't mind when or if this bill ever gets passed. That's why your amendment A3 is to have no proclamation date. There is no commitment on the part of this government.

He talks about section 10. Again, he's referring to it taking time in the need of having no proclamation date. This government has passed many, many bills, hundreds of bills. They understand the process. They know what it needs to do. They say: to get it right. Absolutely, we want to get it right. If this government was so good at getting everything right, we wouldn't be here passing any bills because they got it right 10 years ago, five years ago, two years ago. Why are we in here passing all these bills all the time? Because we can't get it right. There are problems. So don't say that we can't pass a bill until we get it right. We might as well not pass any more bills and just live with what we've got.

We need a proclamation date, Mr. Chair. It's critical that amendment A3 gets defeated, because there is no proclamation date. To say anything else is just foolishness, naïveté. Dates are always a challenge. Should we say that we're going to have the next Winter Olympics, but we're not going to declare the date until our athletes are in a position that we really feel they can win, and then we'll call an impromptu date and say: oh, everybody, come back to Canada for another go-round? No. There's always a date. The challenge is to be prepared by that date and not say that we can't have a date because it's too challenging. We need to have a date. No date, no commitment.

It's almost comical that they put out a date when they're going to be back in the black when they don't even acknowledge their deficit. Why bother putting out a date? Back in the black in three. At least they're declaring something. Why? Because they know that the people of Alberta need a date.

I mean, this is just unbelievable to me that we're being challenged on the fact that there's a date: it's too soon; it's too far away. No. What it is is that you don't mind whether this bill gets passed or not. That's the truth of the fact. If that truth hurts, it's supposed to. When the truth hurts, it's supposed to, and it's supposed to act on your conscience. For anybody to get up and vote for this amendment, I hope that your conscience burns every time that you think of a child who has been molested because we have failed to try and do all we can to protect them. [interjections] Moan and groan, but think of those children that aren't protected.

This is just unacceptable. We need to have a date, and anything less than a date just speaks to the fact that they're the ones who are politicizing this. They're the ones who say that, oh, we're politicizing it. No. We brought the bill forward. We're the ones who are working on it. We're the ones that are committed to a date. We want this government to be committed to a date.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, that was quite the speech there and quite the way to get wound up. I wonder if I could just dial it down a tone here and point out that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Member for Calgary-Varsity in their comments praised Bill 201, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010. I wonder if either one of them noticed that section 3 of that bill says that this act comes into force on proclamation. [interjections] I have the floor, Mr. Chairman.

Then the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said in her comments and in feeding comments to her neighbour there that she knows the government process; she used to be in the government. That's true. Then she would have noticed that all of our private members' bills

on our side say that. The member would know this, that the Alberta Legislature is probably the most effective Legislature in Canada for passing private members' bills. One of the reasons that that clause is very effective in private members' bills is that it prevents a mishmash of overlapping and poorly drafted legislation. It allows the government to go back to the drawing board and incorporate good ideas. I think the member has been thrown a huge bone here but is not interested in the fact that we are actually interested in passing her bill.

The other thing the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore said in his comments, fed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, was that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has been working on this legislation for at least eight years. That strikes me as odd because that would take us back to the time that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was actually the minister. So where was the legislation at that time? We're going to stand here and be accused of doing nothing?

I think honestly, Mr. Chairman, that the speech by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright was heartfelt and true. This is a very common process that we use here. I think there are a lot of people itching to support this legislation, and that member is standing in the way. I don't understand why.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the House now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 202. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report, all those in favour of the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to revert to Routine, beginning with Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees and working our way on through there. That would help address some important business of the House at this time.

The Acting Speaker: On the request for unanimous consent, those in favour?

4:10

Mr. Chase: I'm just asking for qualification. Could you list the business and the reports that you'd like to get back to so that I can be supportive of your intent?

The Acting Speaker: There's no debate on the motion.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if I could just quickly, it's exactly as on the Order Paper: Presenting Reports followed by Presenting Petitions followed by Notices of Motion followed by Introduction of Bills, Tabling Returns and Reports, and Tablings to the Clerk.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. There is no debate in a request for unanimous consent. It's quite clear that consent is being made to get back the Routine starting at Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees and going through to the conclusion of the Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Auditor General Search Committee I am pleased to table the committee's report recommending the appointment of Mr. Merwan N. Saher to the position of Auditor General for the province of Alberta. Copies of the report are being distributed to all members of the Assembly today.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. Concurrence in that report is not required.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to provide oral notice of the following motions:

Number 1:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the spring sitting of the Assembly stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

Number 2 is with respect to a FOIP referral.

Be it resolved that

- (1) The Standing Committee on Health be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purposes of conducting a comprehensive review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as provided for in section 97 of that act.
- (2) The committee must commence its review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act no later than July 1, 2010, and must submit its report to the Assembly within one year of commencing its review, including any amendments recommended by the committee.
- (3) No additional remuneration shall be provided to the members of the committee for the purposes of this review.

Thirdly,;

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Auditor General Search Committee and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Merwan N. Saher be appointed as Auditor General for the province of Alberta for a six-year term.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the required five copies of the teen category winning photo from the 2009 Lethbridge public library's Caught Reading photo contest. This picture, entitled Anywhere Any Time, was taken by Miss Hannah Forster, who was introduced with her mother and sister earlier this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk Assistant: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with Office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, responses to questions raised by Ms Pastoor, hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, Mrs. Forsyth, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, on February 17, 2010, Department of Seniors and Community Supports main estimates debate.

The Speaker: We're now concluded that section of the Routine. Shall I now recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader to request that I leave the chair and that you return to committee?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, may I request that of you, Mr. Speaker, so that we can go back to private members' business.

The Speaker: I don't feel slighted at all.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (continued)

The Deputy Chair: We have under consideration amendment A3. Any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't at all believe that there are members in this House that don't understand the importance of child pornography or are not against child pornography. That is absolutely clear. We don't want to descend into an area where we're accusing each other of not caring about that issue or not thinking that it's wrong or whatever. However, where we have a very legitimate disagreement is on the priority or the urgency that this government is showing for this bill. That's where the difference of opinion is.

You know, I just cannot believe that the hon. Solicitor General would stand up and actually, after all the work that this hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has done in the protection of children for years . . .

Mr. Oberle: Eight years, right? Eight years.

Mr. Anderson: Much more than that hon. member over there has done, much more than anyone here has ever done. He has the audacity to stand up and question her on it. It's just beyond belief. The smugness, the arrogance is just, well, indicative of this government, and it's indicative of why Albertans have totally lost faith in this government, that type of smugness.

Mr. Chair, it is with absolutely great sadness that we're going to have to pass a bill that doesn't have an implementation date. It's wrong. I don't care what the history of private members' bills is. I couldn't care less. What I do care about is that we pass a bill with an implementation date – with an implementation date – and get this legislation put into law as quickly as possible. That's what I care about.

The reason I care about that, Mr. Chair, is because I know of children and I know of individuals that have been affected by this scourge that is child pornography and child abuse because of the road that child pornography leads to. I think many of us in this room know of people who have been affected by this and have been absolutely scarred beyond almost any hope of rehabilitation. So I don't understand.

I can understand, you know, if it's a complicated bill. I mean, if it's like the royalties, which took seven months to implement, from accepting the findings of the Hunter report to actually saying: this is what we're going to do. It took them seven months there. Lots of complications there. I can understand that it takes a long time to do that, but they still did it. They didn't get it right, but that's beside the point. The point is that some bills do require some time.

This is a very simple law. It is very simple, and it is very urgent. It is needed. The longer we wait on this law, the longer certain children will suffer. That's just the way it will be. This is another tool that we need to give our law enforcement right now.

Now, I'm not going to sit here and say that these other 15 bills here, that were passed or are going to be passed, are not important. They are important. Well, some of them are important; some of them I disagree with. Some of them were important, and we needed to pass them for sure. What I don't understand is that there's such an urgency to pass those bills, yet there's not an urgency to see this through and make sure that not only is it passed, this anti child pornography bill, but that it is also proclaimed into law as soon as possible. There is no reason not to do this, Mr. Chair.

The former minister of health, the current Minister of Energy, when he was going to reform the health system and centralize services into Alberta Health Services, had a 30-, 60-, and 90-day plan. This is the biggest budget that we have in government, the biggest department: a 30-, 60-, 90-day plan. Well, that's okay. It was quick. Again, not very good but quick. You've got to give him that. They got the bureaucrats in there working, and they got that thing done. And you're telling me that a bill that's about three pages thick, that has very, very few things actually being added – but what is being added is very important – that March 31, 2011, isn't enough time to implement them? Is that some kind of bad joke? I just don't understand this.

4:20

I would like to see the Solicitor General or the Justice minister stand up in this House, one of the two, and tell us when this is going to be proclaimed. If they're going to say that they don't want a proclamation date because they don't want to set some kind of precedent, fine, go ahead, but at least tell this House when we can expect, when the children of this province can expect to have this bill passed. I am sick and tired of politicians sitting on their butts, doing nothing on this issue, Mr. Chair. It is absolutely embarrassing. This is probably the biggest issue we're facing.

Every report that comes out in the media over the last several years on this subject says that this problem is rampant. It is absolutely rampant. It is one of the most disgusting, sickest problems of our time, and it is not a minority problem. It's not like a small, little: oh, a few people do it. It is unbelievable to me and to many people in this House that many people in our society, even in Alberta – even in Alberta – are participating in this stuff, in this filth. We need to be doing everything we can. That should have been Bill 1. If they wanted to take this and soup it up and do even more with it or whatever, then that should have been Bill 1 or 2 or 3 or 15 or 16. Instead, we're going to shut the House down here after this week. We're going to shut it down, and we're going to put this off, and we're going to put a whole bunch of other things off for whatever reason. I mean, this is ridiculous. Let's pass something on this that's effective.

This former minister and current member has been working on this for years. The Solicitor General, of course, makes light of that because he hasn't done a darn thing yet. She has, and he hasn't. Until you do something, then maybe you should just cool it.

The point is, Mr. Chair, that we need to pass this. We need to pass this bill right now and with a proclamation date so that right now, from this point on, at the end of this session, when they read the bills that have been passed, when they proclaim them into law, we can know that the clock has been set on getting this bill implemented. I will be, obviously, extremely disappointed.

Every week I write an article or opinion piece for my local papers. It's like a weekly blog. Many of us in here do. Not once in the whole time I've been here, with the exception, probably, of when I crossed the floor, has one article elicited as much response and definitely as much uniform response as this one. I've never seen anything like it. You post it on there, and all of a sudden there were, like, a hundred responses to it. It was unbelievable. On Facebook. On Twitter. On the website itself. Through e-mails coming in. People saw this in my local community, and they said: "You know what? That has to be passed and implemented right away." Not one person disagreed. I guarantee that if you polled Albertans, I bet you it'd be 99 per cent that would agree that this thing needs to be passed immediately and that it needs to be proclaimed into law probably immediately, definitely within the next few months, because it is that big of a problem.

Now, Mr. Chair, I am, again, not saying that the members on that side of the House are for child pornography or something like that. Definitely I am not saying that. But there is an urgency issue here. There's an urgency issue that needs to be addressed, and I want to see some urgency from this government on this issue rather than some smiles and some snide remarks. That's what I'd like to see. So far all I've heard is snide remarks, and all I've seen is smiles. That's unacceptable, especially on a serious subject, where people are dying and having their innocence stolen from them as we speak. We're going to close the House up and leave. Why don't we sit down here and start having a real debate and start working together as a House and as a team on how to figure out a way to better protect our children? That is what I care about.

It's unbelievable, Mr. Chair, the smugness and the arrogance. It just blows my mind. That's why Albertans are leaving. That's why I left. That's why this member left, and that's why people continue to leave, because of the arrogance and the smugness. Their priorities and their urgency do not match the priorities or urgency of Albertans, and frankly they don't match the priorities and urgency of a lot of the people in that backbench right now. Sorry. Oh, that's an offensive remark. Sorry. The private members.

I know for a fact that there are many private members over there that want to support this bill. They want to support this bill, and

they want it proclaimed immediately. You know, maybe the Deputy Premier doesn't want it proclaimed. I don't know, but I'll tell you one thing for sure: they're not going to vote that way because there's no semblance of democracy over there, and they know it. That is unacceptable.

If there was really a free vote in this Legislature, this bill would be passed. It would be proclaimed within months. But it's not going to be because you're too busy thinking about yourselves and no one else.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was really going to let this go by, vote on the amendment, and get on with the bill because I think there are lots of members in this House who believe that the subject matter of the bill is important.

The hon. member has raised a whole lot of issues and talked about arrogance and smugness and all sorts of things that are quite irrelevant to the fact that this government in this province has done more for the safety of the community, done more for the protection of children, done more on all of those fronts than any other government in the country. I can say that as a former Attorney General and as a former Solicitor General and as somebody who sat with the hon. member when some of the best legislation on child protection was actually drafted and put through this House.

What this hon. member doesn't know because he hasn't got the experience – but his seatmate ought to know – is that passing bills that don't work together, passing bills without the regulatory framework ready to go is not good law. Good law is done carefully and done properly. This is a good bill. I hope that I get the chance to vote in favour of this bill, and I'm going to sit down quickly so that I can, but I couldn't let the hon. member deride the work that's been done by many members in this House, by this government on the safety of our community and the protection of our children, including some good work from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek before she went astray.

The Deputy Chair: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, I'm compelled to get up and speak again because I've listened very intently. I appreciate what the minister is saying. You know, Minister, you and I worked together when I was the Solicitor General and you were the Minister of Justice, and we had some good times travelling the province and pushing through a lot of things. I remember how adamant you were at all of these FPTs about raising the age of consent.

You know, we have now four provinces that have got this act: Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and one other one that doesn't come to mind. So the lessons are learned in those particular provinces, and I've talked to them.

It's interesting that my former colleague from Peace River is in the paper January 28 saying, "Keeping Alberta's children safe from those who would prey on them is a vital function of ALERT." It was after a bust on child exploitation. Then we had the comment about throwing us a bone. Throwing us a bone would have been bringing this legislation forward as a government bill with a proclamation date.

Then he referred to Bill 201, our firemen that are waiting up in the Assembly. Quite frankly, you know, I've been around long enough, when the former member Richard Magnus brought forward the

original bill. We actually, all three of us, spoke in support of Bill 201. I'm hoping that the firemen get a proclamation date in regard to their bill because I think it's darn important, supported at work with the firemen in Calgary on the original bill, I think it was, that Calgary-North Hill Richard Magnus did such incredible work on.

What's interesting to me is for the Solicitor General now to sit and talk about a comment my colleague made about eight years and that if I had been on this issue of child pornography eight years ago, it would have probably been passed. Well, let's backtrack a few years. The Amber Alert I brought forward, first in Canada, and then took it right across the country. The high-risk offender that is in his department right now, doing the thing that was important and monitoring these sex offenders when they're in our neighbourhood and hurting our children. I don't see him coming up with anything. I put together the IROC team, the integrated response to organized crime, to deal with all of these issues. You know, I brought in DECA, the Drug-endangered Children Act; PCHIP, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. This minister has been there since January. I'd like to know what bright ideas he's brought forward.

4:30

Mr. Chair, I will accept the fact that the government of the day does not like the idea of a proclamation date. I will even accept the fact that on the bill originally it said July 31, and that might have been pushing the envelope a little bit. Then we brought forward an amendment on December 31, 2010. The same member got up and talked about: we need to study this. How many lawyers do they have in this government? How many people have to be consulted on the issue of child pornography? We left the regulations open so that the Solicitor General could talk to his ALERT team and use them, or he could use Cybertip if he wanted. Then we said: "Okay. We'll go to March 31, 2011." "No. Can't be done." My Battle River-Wainwright colleague over there said: "Okay. We can have this done by September." I think he said that; I don't have the Blues in front of me.

You know what we're going to do, Mr. Chair? We're going to hold them to their word in September, and I'm looking forward to coming back in the fall session, which is October, I do believe, unless it's changed again. I'm going to look forward to them bringing forward the regulations. I'm going to look forward to third reading on this particular piece of legislation. I'm even looking forward more to proclamation. I'm going to watch and I'm going to monitor and I'm going to talk to the people that have talked to me on this particular piece of legislation to hold them accountable, especially when the Minister of Education talks about the fact that they've done more than any other government in this province.

Well, I was chair of that task force. I know what Albertans were telling me. I travelled across this province listening to what Albertans told us. We brought forward a very good, concise report, and I want to thank the team that I travelled with because they worked very hard to make sure that what we were doing would make Alberta probably one of the safest provinces to live in.

We are probably close to running out of time. I'll look forward to voting on this. I'll even look forward more to the fact that this government has said that they like this particular piece of legislation. They don't like the proclamation date on this piece of legislation. They need to do more consulting. They need to talk to more people; I'm not sure whom they're going to consult. They need to deal with the regulations. Well, the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General at their next FPT can talk to the provinces, and I would suggest that they talk to the minister responsible in Manitoba, Gord Mackintosh, a great guy. I worked with him when he was the former

Solicitor General in Manitoba. He'll tell them how it's done, very succinctly and very easily. They can keep us abreast on that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A3, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a privilege to speak on the amendment by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. Speaking on the amendment, I think that this has been an important bill that should and could have been passed with July 1. I appreciate the history lesson given that, generally speaking, bills passed on the government side were on proclamation. Now, it looks like this bill should be passed, and it could be passed in some sort of time and in some reasonable fashion. I hear the government side indicating that they will work hard on this bill and that they support the intents of this bill and the merits and that they feel they can have it done by the September legislative sitting.

Well, on the record here my only hope is that it comes to fruition, that the government looks at this bill, looks at the merits of this bill, and comes out with a bill of their own making ready to pass in September. I thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her hard work on this, and I hope the government does bring this forward, and in September, given the statements made here today, I'm assuming that that will happen. I can trust that the Solicitor General, who has spoken in favour of the merits of this bill, and the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright will remind themselves of that sort of due date, if we can call it that, and that we'll see this on the Order Paper come September, and I look forward to that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have got to clarify some of the comments that I made since it appears that in this short amount of time since the last time I spoke, there have been a lot of comments attributed to what I said that are not accurate. Never once did I mention the word "September." I talked about the fall, and my comments were that the original legislation calls for July 1, 2010. The first amendment called for December 31, 2010, and then the subsequent one called for March 31, 2011. I'd argued that July 1 was too soon. I had argued that December 31 was perhaps too soon as well. I'd argued that March 31 might give us enough time.

But if perchance it all went smoothly and we were done this fall, which could be September or October, if we were done the consultations in the fall, it would be a crying shame to wait until March 31 – as the opposition claims, kids are being persecuted all over the place – to actually proclaim it as law. It would be nice if the consultations ran smoothly and we were done this fall. It would be nice if we could proclaim it instead of waiting until March 31. Those are the comments I made, not that we would have this done by September.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. I really appreciate the fact that the member has clarified that it would be a crying shame that we'd have to wait for March 31, 2011, on this private member's bill. Yes, it would. So to take away the crying shame, the government can bring a government bill forward in the fall, in October if they want. They can ignore this little private member's bill. They can bring a government bill forward in the fall as one of their number one

priorities come October. They can have it passed and they can have it proclaimed because they've done all the studying that they can on this private member's bill. Ignore my private member's bill completely; take all the credit for it under a government bill. And guess what? Everybody will be happy, and more importantly the children in this province will be safe.

Where I'm failing to comprehend everything is: consult, consult, consult. You know, the government must have a room somewhere in the universe that is full of consulting papers. It must have five rooms. I don't know where they send them. They consult till the cows come home, and the cows are still wandering around somewhere. It's amazing to me how they always use the word "consult." They're consulting. They're consulting. I don't even know how many times we're consulting this session.

To the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, forget the date. Whether it's July 31 or December 31 or March 31, if this is a priority for the government of Alberta, then do the right thing, and the right thing is: bring a government bill forward in October, when we're back in session. We will proudly stand up and support the bill. We'll get it through. I've seen the bills go through click, click, click, click, very quickly from second to committee to third. We'll bring the new Lieutenant Governor in, and we'll get him to proudly sign off the proclamation.

You can forget the private member's bill. I'm sure the Solicitor General cares so deeply about children. He quoted on the 28th of January how deeply he cares about children. He has a wonderful staff within his department, that I had the privilege and the pleasure of working with when I was the former Solicitor General. Not only that, but he has an ALERT team, that can give him all the information he wants in regard to all the hard work that they've done. He can bring the bill forward under his name and show that he's doing something when he's the Solicitor General of this province.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A3, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Just a few more quick comments on why we need to vote against amendment A3. The hon. member obviously has a listening problem because the amendment would be on or before – I'm speaking to you, to the hon. member – March 31, and that puts the whole problem at rest. You need to realize that the people of Alberta will be very disappointed if, in fact, they don't bring it forward by this fall. We should have been able to have this done this spring. They knew about this private member's bill. The work should have been done, and it hasn't been. They fail to recognize that, and they won't admit to their own shortcomings.

4:40

Just to go back to saying that they need to get it right, they didn't get it right with our new royalty framework. They didn't get it right with the new centralized health board. They didn't get it right on all these things, but they passed those bills, Mr. Chairman. For them to use the excuse of having to get it right, it's unacceptable and not there. When we had so many problems with the new royalty framework and they realized that finally, they said: oh, we're going to release the Competitiveness Act, and it'll be this fall. We had to wait until March. It was four, five months after they said: oh, we can get it done. That was critical to our economy. So for them to say, "Oh, we're going to get it done," Albertans question this government on its ability and its priorities to get it done. We need to have a date. On or before March 31 is an easy amendment that could have and should have been brought forward, not saying: no proclamation date.

We should be voting against this. Anybody that votes for this should be ashamed. We need to defeat this and bring it back to the other amendment: on or before March 31, 2011. It's unacceptable to say that we don't need a date and that they're going to work hard. Their record doesn't support it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, I just need to point out that – I don't know – it's kind of a silly debate. We've fallen into a hole here, and we're not gaining any ground. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said that if we bring forward a government bill this fall, we could ignore this little bill. That would be true if we pass this amendment. If we keep the date in the bill, in fact it's not true because at that point the bill is in force, and we have to pass a bill to repeal the bill. So the member is incorrect with that.

The second thing, Mr. Chairman. I would like some example from any opposition member over there – it doesn't matter which one – of any point in time when we were debating a government bill when they said: "You know what? This bill might be a little bit flawed, but we should pass it, and we can fix it later." Or maybe we could have an example of one point in time when the opposition suggested: "You know what? You've probably consulted enough. You don't need to consult any more." I don't think you're going to be able to come up with such an example. It's just simply not there.

It's a silly debate. We're just talking about a bill coming into force on proclamation. If, indeed, the government consumes that subject area into a government bill, done deal. That's exactly what the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was talking about.

Mr. Anderson: I have to answer the hon. member's questions. It's my duty. Actually, Minister, during the debate over the Competitiveness Act I clearly said on the record that the act, the spirit of the act, was needed, that we need to be more competitive as a province. I didn't think it was a perfect bill for several reasons but that we should pass it anyway. So, you know, Bill 1, and you can keep going from there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I'm rising to call the question, Mr. Chair. We have other extremely important bills to deal with, Bill 201. I'm calling the question on the amendment. That's what I'm asking for.

The Deputy Chair: I'll call the question on the amendment, hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. That's what I'm suggesting.

The Deputy Chair: If there are no other speakers, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Deputy Chair: This takes us back to Bill 202 as amended. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I don't want to prolong this because I very much want to get ahead with Bill 201, but I'm looking for clarification. It can come from the House leader; it can come from the chair. Is it possible to delay further discussion of this bill by suggesting that it not be read now but be read six months hence? Is that legitimate?

The Deputy Chair: No.

Mr. Chase: It isn't?

The Deputy Chair: No.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I will call the question on Bill 202 as amended.

[The clauses of Bill 202 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.
The committee to now rise and report.

Mr. Hancock: I would so move, Mr. Chair.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill, Bill 202. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 202.

The Acting Speaker: All those members of the Assembly who agree with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise to move third reading of Bill 201, Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I would just like to sincerely thank all hon. members from both sides of the House for their eloquent support of this bill and for what it means to the members of our firefighting fraternity in this province, and I want to thank the firefighters that have sat through a rather interesting Committee of the Whole debate. It's been said that passing legislation is like making sausage: we do grind through it. I thank you for your patience.

Mr. Speaker, I would forgo the rest of my comments and ask all hon. members to use the time remaining to us today to support passage of Bill 201 for third reading.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Wildrose Alliance caucus I'd like to stand and say that we fully support Bill 201. It is a very needed bill. It's the responsible thing to do, and I commend the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for having the foresight and for consulting with his constituents and with the firefighters to get this moving on. On behalf of all three of the members of this caucus, we support the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To echo the hon. member from the Wildrose, we the Official Opposition of the province of Alberta have supported this bill throughout its second, at Committee of the Whole, and now in its third reading. We see the value of this bill. I am pleased that they, basically our heroes in the Legislature here today, will have the protection that they so richly deserve.

The only comment I would make is that I hope that we push in further legislation, whether it be through amendment or through another bill, the same type of protection for other first responders, including paramedics and police.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to the vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other member wish to speak on the bill?
Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a third time]

4:50 Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to open second reading debate on Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010. I bring this bill forward with the intent of achieving clarification and transparency around municipal local access and franchise fees. To this end, Bill 203 proposes a standardized formula or calculation method for determining municipal access and franchise fees.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, the formula would require that franchise fees and access fees be based on the quantity of energy consumed whereas the rate is charged on a per unit consumed basis. By having all municipalities calculate their fees based on per unit energy consumption, rates would then be more easily compared between municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I must emphasize that this bill would not specify a particular rate for any municipality, nor would it place any limits on a rate a municipality could charge. I recognize that the situation facing each municipality is different, and this does leave the flexibility for municipalities to implement their own rates.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the revenue generated from these

fees serves a purpose for municipalities and that the intent is not to place a limit on the revenue that municipalities may raise. That is an issue between the individual municipality and their specific citizens; however, Bill 203 would simply ensure that these fees are collected in a fair and transparent manner.

Allow me to provide a brief explanation of these fees, Mr. Speaker. Local access fees are, essentially, fees charged by the municipality and collected by the utility operator in lieu of property taxes for land in which utility infrastructure like power lines is located. This would be true for franchise fees except for natural gas and the pipelines that distribute that natural gas. So, in simple terms, local access fees and franchise fees are property taxes for power lines and gas lines. These fees are charged by the municipality to the utility companies through an agreement, who then pass this charge on to the consumer on their monthly power bill.

Mr. Speaker, there has often been some ambiguity surrounding these fees as it can appear that they are being charged by the utility operator rather than the municipality. As a result, constituents have even referred to this to me as a hidden tax.

Bill 203 proposes to clarify the situation surrounding these fees by introducing three amendments to the Municipal Government Act. First, it would create a standardized fee calculation formula, which is, as I have said, based on the quantity or volume of power or gas consumed. Thus, municipalities would charge a set dollar amount for each kilowatt hour of power consumed. For example, a municipality can set the rate at 5 cents per kilowatt hour, and if a consumer uses 100 kilowatt hours of power, their fee would be \$5. This would be the same for a municipality that decided they want to set it at 10 cents per kilowatt hour. At a hundred kilowatt hours of energy consumed, their fee would then be \$10.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 proposes to use this formula because it provides an easy comparability and better equips citizens to assess these fees as municipal voters. Currently in Alberta there are three main formulas used to calculate these fees. The first formula, the one used by a majority of municipalities, is a formula that determines the fee from a percentage of the total delivery or distribution cost. The problem with this formula is that distribution costs can vary significantly from municipality to municipality. One municipality can charge an access fee of 10 per cent, but because their distribution costs are more expensive, the citizens would be paying more than a municipality charging 15 per cent. There is some logic behind this particular formula, but it does make it very difficult to compare across the different municipal jurisdictions. Essentially, this formula cannot easily be compared.

The second formula used in Alberta bases fees off a percentage of the total monthly utility bill or the total cost of electricity delivered. The problem with this formula should be very obvious. It ties access fees and franchise fees to the shifting commodity prices, not exactly in line with the original intent behind these fees. As well, this also provides significant challenges, particularly to small-business owners, when electricity prices increase. Yes, the fee would decrease when electricity or natural gas prices decrease, but when it comes to business and financial planning for that business, it causes significant problems when electricity or natural gas prices go up, and they are not just obliged to pay those increased commodity prices but also get tacked on an additional increase on their fee.

The third formula, Mr. Speaker, in use is the consumption-based formula being proposed by this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment proposed by Bill 203 would require that the local access fees and franchise fee revenues be clearly disclosed on municipalities' annual financial statements. Now, it is true that municipalities must already list total fee revenues. Bill 203 would simply require access and franchise fees to be

listed separately from general fee revenue. Again, this would facilitate transparency and an open dialogue about the revenue generated from these fees.

Mr. Speaker, the final proposal made by Bill 203 is that any rate changes be advertised at least 90 days prior to those changes taking effect. Municipalities would be allowed to do this either in their local newspaper or somehow online. Advance notification would ensure that municipal residents are fully informed of any changes to these fees and give them the opportunity to consult with their local elected representatives if they have any concerns as well as allow businesses and households to plan for the increased fee charge.

All three of these proposed amendments are designed to allow Albertans to better understand these fees and make it easier for all Albertans to be engaged in the discussion and the decision-making process on what the level of these fees should be. At the very least, Bill 203 can lead a productive dialogue about access and franchise fees that I believe is well warranted. After all, if citizens are clearly informed about property tax changes, why would local access fees and franchise fees be any different?

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to touch briefly on the last key element put forward by Bill 203, and that is the coming into force date. As I mentioned, there are several formulas already in place across Alberta, and many of these are the result of multiyear contracts drawn up between municipalities and utility companies. It is not the intent of Bill 203 to nullify these contracts with no regard to the agreement made between these two entities, so Bill 203 proposes to allow municipalities with current contracts a grace period until January 1, 2015, to come into compliance with the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, simply, Bill 203 is concerned with creating an atmosphere of transparency, not creating burdensome scenarios for municipalities.

In closing, I'd like to stress again that Bill 203 will not limit the revenue that a municipality could generate from local access fees and franchise fees, nor will it even require municipalities to collect these fees at all. Rather, this proposed legislation simply aims to create a situation where municipal residents can easily compare their fees with those charged by their municipal neighbours and, as a result, appropriately assess the fees within their own municipality. Bill 203 is in the best interests of all Albertans. I believe that there is a great deal of support for taking a closer look at local access fees and franchise fees.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments. I look forward to future discussion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I see time is running out on further discussion on the second reading of Bill 203. I will look forward to the fact that it survived the process and will continue on into the fall, at which time we'll have the proper time to continue our discussions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: It's 5 o'clock, so we shall not continue the debate on Bill 203. We'll continue on business of the day.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Willmore Wilderness Park

507. Mr. Campbell moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the govern-

ment to not bring forward changes to the Willmore Wilderness Park Act which would restrict traditional land uses such as outfitting, trapping, hunting, and fishing.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to talk about Motion 507. The Willmore wilderness area is in my riding just north of Grande Cache, and it encompasses over 4,600 square kilometres of land. The purpose of this motion is to ensure that the government of Alberta continues to recognize as is the Willmore Wilderness Park Act. This act promotes the management and conservation of resources within the Willmore wilderness park and provides the legislative assurance of traditional activities like outfitting, trapping, hunting, and fishing. Activities like hunting and fishing are key elements of conservation, and it is those who participate in these activities who are the conservationists. By continuing to support their activities, as Motion 507 urges, the Willmore wilderness park will continue to be preserved for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that Grande Cache became the home for a number of aboriginal families in 1905 and 1906 after they were asked to leave Jasper national park, and today, you know, a hundred years later, many of the descendants of these families continue to hunt, fish, and outfit in the Willmore.

The Willmore is still a pristine wilderness area but does have some pressures. The mountain pine beetle has the capability of destroying the old-growth forests that line the river valleys within the 4,600 square kilometres.

Mr. Speaker, this is an area that is for the most part self-governed. Of course, SRD patrols through fish and wildlife officers and parks has their officers patrolling, but it's the people who use the landscape on a regular basis that understand its true value and keep its integrity intact. It is these people that clean the trails and look to see that those using the area do so in a responsible manner and at times help those who are not experienced and get themselves in trouble.

This is a true wilderness area fraught with dangers for those not properly equipped or experienced in outdoor activities. In my own experience of over 25 years of guiding, I could spend the whole afternoon talking about people who've had to be rescued or supported because they were not outfitted properly or were outside of their capabilities. The Willmore is one of those areas, Mr. Speaker, that can provide that.

This area is also located on the Continental Divide. The divide provides many streams and rivers that supply water to the Peace and Athabasca rivers. Other rivers within the park are the Sheep, Jackpine, Smoky, Berland, Sulphur, Muskeg, and Wildhay. In many of these rivers and streams within the park are Rocky Mountain whitefish, rainbow trout, and bull trout.

Mr. Speaker, this park was created in 1959, when local residents were concerned about the amount of roads that the oil and gas sectors were developing through the region. Norman Willmore, who at the time was the MLA for Edson, lobbied for and eventually had the area declared a wilderness park where trapping and fishing would be permitted; however, all motor vehicles were restricted from the area. The only permitted transportation is by foot, horse, or bicycle. These regulations were reflected in the Willmore act.

Mr. Speaker, the current situation we face is that Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation along with Parks Canada and B.C. Parks have been considering a new nomination for UNESCO world heritage status of the Canadian Rocky Mountain parks, which could include the Willmore wilderness park along with other protected areas that are adjacent to the current UNESCO designation. I quote from the Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation website.

Alberta Parks is in early discussions with Parks Canada and B.C. Parks on the possibility of expanding the current Canadian Rocky

Mountain Parks World Heritage Site. Should the expansion have clear benefits, the project committee will consult with the public, affected stakeholders, communities, First Nations and Métis, and government departments in both provinces before proceeding with submission of a re-nomination package to UNESCO.

Parks Canada states:

Four other contiguous protected areas on the Alberta side would also merit consideration in a re-nomination of this site [the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site]. These include the Ghost River and White Goat Wilderness's (IUCN category I), Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, and the Willmore Wilderness Park. All of these offer high quality habitat, equivalent and complementary in value to the existing World Heritage site. The inclusion of these six additional contiguous provincial protected areas would result in a 13-park World Heritage complex and an approximate 25% size increase [in area].

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to understand what the Willmore Wilderness Park Act says.

In this Act,

- (a) "land" means land of the Crown in right of Alberta;
- (b) "Park" means the Willmore Wilderness Park established by this Act.

Under part 3 of the act, Use of Park, it states:

The Park is dedicated to the use of the people of Alberta for their benefit, education and enjoyment, subject to this Act and the regulations, and shall, by the management, conservation and protection of its natural resources and by the preservation of its natural beauty, be maintained for the enjoyment of future generations.

Also, part 4 of the act says under industrial activities:

No person may conduct any industrial activities, including, but not limited to, mining, geological and geophysical explorations, water management, hydro-electric power and pulp and paper mills, saw mills and other forestry related industries, within the Park.

I think that the park and the act as it stands now will serve the province of Alberta well. I know that in my riding there has been unanimous consent by the people in the Grande Cache area to leave the Willmore as it is. I've also attended a number of functions, Mr. Speaker, across Alberta put on by the Willmore wilderness foundation, where people have continued to say: "Leave the park the way it is. Let us be stewards of that land. We use it, we know what we're doing, and we have to look after it as it should be."

Mr. Speaker, I think that when you look at the UNESCO sites, there are a number of things that I have concerns over. One is the protection and management. Protection and management of world heritage property should ensure that the outstanding universal value and the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity at the time of inscription are maintained or enhanced in the future. All properties inscribed on the world heritage list must have adequate long-term legislative, regulatory, institutional, and/or traditional protection and management to ensure their safeguarding. This protection should also include adequately delineated boundaries. Similarly, state parties should demonstrate adequate protection at the national, regional, municipal, and/or traditional level for the nominated property.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I've spent some time dealing with UNESCO sites, being that I live in and represent West Yellowhead. I also live in Jasper national park, which is a world heritage site. I can talk to you about when we were involved in the Cheviot mine and trying to get that mine going south of Hinton, which was an expansion of the Cardinal River coal mine. I can remember the letter I got from the UNESCO world heritage people saying that the Cardinal River mine should not go ahead because of its proximity to a world heritage site. That mine is in production today, employs over 300 people, and is one of the main economies of the town of Hinton. It is also a wildlife sanctuary. There are grizzly bears, there

are elk, there are deer, there are moose, there are wolves, and there are cougars all within that mine site. Sheep: actually, people pay up to \$250,000 for the minister's permit to shoot bighorn sheep, which come off that property of Cardinal River.

The other thing that concerns me, Mr. Speaker, with UNESCO's designation is buffer zones. Wherever necessary for the proper conservation of the property an adequate buffer zone should be provided. For the purpose of the effective protection of the nominated property a buffer zone is an area surrounding the nominated property which has complementary legal and/or customary restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the property.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the size of the Willmore wilderness area, it's 4,600 square kilometres. When you get outside of the Willmore area, especially to the east and the south, you're into Grande Cache and the eastern foothills of the Rockies. One of the important economic developments that is happening across this country now is shale gas. Shale gas deposits are prominent within the Grande Cache and area south towards Hinton, and I can tell you that companies like EnCana, Talisman, CNRL are all working towards developing those areas. Those areas are also a major economic boom to this province. As we see conventional gas prices start to decline and we see oil prices up and down, we need the shale gas. Also, we have coal mines and coal mine deposits all along the eastern slopes of the Rockies.

If you look at a buffer zone, Mr. Speaker, what would be considered adequate? Is it one mile? Is it five miles? Is it 10 miles? Is it 20 miles? In the Grande Cache area the town of Grande Cache butts right up against Willmore wilderness park. You have Foothills Forest Products that, if they were within the buffer zone, would go under. That's 265 people unemployed in the town of Grande Cache. You've got Grande Cache Coal, which butts up right next to Willmore wilderness area. That would be over 500 people out of work in Grande Cache. You have ConocoPhillips, EnCana, CNRL, Talisman, you know, that employ hundreds of people in the Grande Cache area.

5:10

The only thing that wouldn't be affected – and I don't know if that's true or not – would be the jail. We have a federal institution in Grande Cache that employs about 300 people. That would be the only economic employment in this community. Also, it would affect, you know, right down along the eastern slopes.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm talking about the Willmore wilderness park, I'd be remiss to also not talk about Y2Y, which is Yellowstone to Yukon. These areas also employ the eastern slopes. This is something that we as a government and all our colleagues in government should be aware of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to applaud and support the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forth this legislation. I will be voting in favour of it, but I do have reservations that I want to get on the record. First off, if we had the accomplishment of our land-use framework, for which I want to offer a bouquet to our current finance minister, the MLA for Foothills-Rocky View, for getting the discussion going – if we actually had a land-use framework bill in place with all its regulations, then this Willmore wilderness park, that's the subject of Motion 507, would be dealt with under designated land use.

At the same time I'd like to offer a challenge to the Minister of

Sustainable Resource Development, the MLA for Grande Prairie-Smoky, to follow up the work that was begun by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View but has yet to be completed. With the sustainable resources network based on six watershed regions being the basis for land use, I think a lot of the conflicts between land usage will be dealt with.

I'm hoping that at some point this government moves from the concept of multi-use to priority use. You know, without going Roger Miller on you, there are certain activities, roller skating in a buffalo herd being one of them, that you cannot do simultaneously in the same area. Right now in Alberta we have over 350 parks and protected areas, yet only 40 of these have management plans. So for the Willmore wilderness park to be protected, the enforcement has to be there as well to ensure that the traditional usages, as the hon. member has pointed out, since the early 1900s are maintained and protected. What we do need is oversight through a management plan, and we need the enforcement through combination and cross-ministerial co-operation between the ministries of Sustainable Resource Development and Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and we need also, obviously, co-operation through the Ministry of Environment to ensure that the pristine and natural nature of this area is preserved.

Now, the hon. Member for West Yellowhead pointed out what the act states. I would like to add to it. The Willmore Wilderness Park Act also permits the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations increasing or decreasing the size of the park. I hope there is never a thought of decreasing the size of the park. Most importantly for myself and the members of my caucus, it prohibits industrial activity in the park, including but not limited to mining, geological and geophysical exploration, water management, hydroelectric power, pulp and paper mills, sawmills, and other forest-related activities. In other words, it keeps it at its historical purpose, which was the conservation and protection of its natural resources.

The point of this act is to allow First Nations and Métis and, to a degree, guiding outfitters to continue to practise their historically approved activities within the park. I understand, but I will come from the other side of the debate, about making it a world-protected site, because I believe that with the proper enforcement, that would potentially add extra security to the area because there would be a global standard in terms of the protection of this wilderness area.

I do want to raise, however, some concerns that were brought to us by the Alberta Wilderness Association concerning Willmore wilderness park because I want to have them on the record. Hopefully, this motion will address these concerns. Willmore wilderness concerns:

- A management plan that addresses key concerns for the Willmore, including wildlife, watersheds, wilderness protection, fire programs, trail system maintenance and recreation is urgently needed.

As I stated before, we have over 350 parks and protected areas and very few management plans to guarantee that they are kept in a maintained manner. I know you can love a park to death, but in this case the park, to some degree, has not been managed and enforced to the extent that I believe it deserves.

Another concern that the Alberta Wilderness Association brings forward:

- Pressures for inappropriate resource development such as commercial recreational use. Recreational developments including a downhill ski operation, golf course and alpine village, as well as new roadways for off-road vehicles have been proposed in and near Willmore Wilderness Park.

Now, the hon. member talked about a buffer zone, and hopefully that will be part of this motion because it's absolutely essential that we don't have overlap and cross-purposing within this natural site.

The Alberta Wilderness Association also has concerns over

- commercial sales and inappropriate development of registered traplines that include increased and out-of-season use of ORV's and the growth in size and numbers of associated cabins.
- Non-commercial recreational use [is a concern]. Trails must be maintained for the safety of park users and to limit their impact on the park. The rules of the area, including a prohibition on off-highway-vehicle use must be enforced.

In other words, we've got this pristine jewel; let's maintain it in its pristine, natural state.

- Pressure to remove boating prohibitions for the section of the Smoky River in the park.

As I stated to begin with,

- lack of official stewardship is allowing trails to become eroded in some areas and unsafe in others due to lack of maintenance.

I've seen that in my own personal experience working in Cataract Creek. The danger of not maintaining pathways means that you end up closing them, and you limit the recreational experience.

- Backcountry guardianship is almost non-existent and few parks people know the Willmore, except perhaps from aerial overviews.

We talk about police feet on the beat. Well, we need people, conservation officers and SRD, regularly patrolling this area along with the people that usually sit on a regular basis and provide their input and observation and their love turned into enforcement.

- Lack of fire has allowed the former excellent wildlife habitat of the area to become overgrown with shrubbery and trees and poor for ungulates in particular. Fire hazards are also building to the point where conflagrations may be supported once the area burns. A program of controlled burns to create habitat and relieve fuel loads is important.

Fire suppression is also nature suppression.

- Species at risk such as the grizzly and mountain caribou are not receiving adequate official attention.

These are the concerns, and I believe they're just concerns that the Alberta Wilderness Association has put forward. However, it is my belief that by working with associations such as the Alberta Wilderness Association, the government can accomplish this.

I will end as I began. The important work begun by the current finance minister, the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, must be followed up on by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. This is something that is of value to all Albertans, whether we live in the north or not. We need to designate our parks and protected areas, and we need to protect them.

Thank you for allowing me to contribute.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: The chair has a list of speakers here. The first three would be the hon. Solicitor General, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this debate. I thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward this very interesting topic that kind of hits near and dear to my heart as a practising forester in the province of Alberta for many, many years. It's kind of interesting that we've always set aside pieces of land in our province and around the world to protect although it was always poorly defined exactly what protect meant. Certainly, Alberta has a history and examples of protected areas. Jasper and Banff are jewels of our national parks system. Wood Buffalo park: we've had protected areas for a very long time.

The discussion around protected areas and what they should be and what they provide and all those things was refined greatly over the years. Somewhere around the time that the United Nations released the Brundtland commission report, there was a world-wide effort to start talking about protection of ecosystems, functioning ecosystems, functioning populations, those kinds of things. There was a mad rush, you know: Canada's convention on biodiversity and those sorts of things.

We've talked about protected areas more and more. Somewhere along the line we've towed along this very old concept that we can increase the level of protection for a piece of land by being increasingly restrictive of its use. In some places it's a park. We can put trailers and have weekend camping, but nobody is talking about protecting an ecosystem in that case. We might be protecting a scenic view shed or something like that.

By being increasingly restrictive of use, eliminating industrial activity and eliminating hunting, fishing, trapping, other uses up to the point where we would build a chain fence or a wall around a piece of ground: now it's really protected. And that might, in fact, be true if our objective was to protect some static entity; historic rock paintings, for example. It could be very clearly demonstrated that if humans weren't allowed anywhere near it, that's how it's going to last the longest, and if you allow people up to touch it, that's how it's going to last the least. In that particular case, being very restrictive of access does in fact lead to increased or more rigorous protection.

What about if the value we're trying to protect is not static? Ecological values – for example, functioning ecosystems, functioning populations – are not static, and simply putting a fence around them doesn't preserve them for future generations. That's been proven in spades. You know, some of that thinking came out of Cape Breton Highlands national park, where they allowed a system to evolve that was all over-mature spruce and fir. The budworm came in and cleaned it out, just wiped that park out in a matter of weeks at way higher levels than normally would have happened because we didn't intervene and create a population situation there that would have handled a spruce budworm outbreak.

You may be able to make the argument that we're setting ourselves up for disaster from fire or pine beetle in some of our parks by doing exactly the same thing: refusing to intervene. But you'll notice that in Jasper park, for example, they've been quite proactive over the last few years about habitat maintenance or landscape vegetation maintenance. They're doing burns. They're actually doing single-tree logging events. It's wonderful, and they're trying to maintain a condition for future generations. That's the point of protection when it comes to an ecosystem. It's a dynamic system. You have to decide what future condition you want and then: what action and tools do I need to take in order to make that future condition hold true?

In just ignoring it, it isn't going to happen. The only thing that you know is that it won't stay in its current condition. It's going to change. Our forests are dynamic, and the populations that live in them are dynamic. So we require management plans. I agree with the hon. member and the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. We do require management plans because we want to define what condition we want to maintain this protected area in and what we have to do to ensure that it stays in that condition.

The "what do we have to do?" requires some form of intervention. It's often habitat intervention, controlled burns or some other disturbance, that will alter the vegetation pattern on the landscape, but it could be population intervention as well. In that regard, I wholeheartedly support the efforts of the Member for West Yellowhead in that I believe that hunting, fishing, trapping, those activities,

are highly effective management tools and can be used in accordance with a management plan to make a system unfold the way we want it to unfold, which will give us the future desired condition that we want, which is why we protected the area in the first place.

Merrily sticking our heads in the sand, putting a fence around something, and saying that it's protected will not work. We need active management tools, and the tools that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead defined are certainly part of a wide tool box of interventions that we could do in order to achieve a desired condition in a protected area.

I strongly support the member's motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and an honour to rise today to speak to Motion 507, proposed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. At first blush, when I looked at this, it looked like a negative motion, a move that would not bring forward changes. But on a closer look at it, it's apt. It's very apt. This motion focuses on preserving the Willmore Wilderness Park Act. I'll go a step further, then, from what the other hon. members have said. It's been suggested – and I think the suggestion could possibly be true – that by the inclusion of the Willmore wilderness into the UNESCO world heritage site designation, there may be no need for the Willmore Wilderness Park Act once this designation is made.

Therein, Mr. Speaker, lies the problem. As we've been discussing, the Willmore Wilderness Act was passed in 1959. It was an act promoted by locals, introduced in 1959 by Norman Willmore, the MLA for Edson. This act established the Willmore wilderness park, where traditional land uses, including trapping, hunting, fishing, and outfitting, would be permitted and preserved. This act also restricts all motor vehicles from the area, where the only permitted transportation is by foot, horse, or bicycle. The Willmore Wilderness Act was clearly legislation created by the people for the people of Alberta. It was created so that there would be assurances of the proper management and conservation of resources within the park as well as ensuring the perpetuation of traditional activities such as outfitting, hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Alberta has a rich history of locally driven environmental legislation that protects our environment as well as traditional land uses; for example, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act, which became law in the late 1990s. This act defines and preserves significant ecological areas across Alberta. They were divided into wilderness area designations with respective specific regulations. Similar ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangelands had their own distinct regulations as well, with ecological reserves being the most restrictive.

I was a part of the discussions for the areas in my part of the province; namely, the southeast of Alberta. I co-chaired the committee that looked into all the applications and met with stakeholders to determine the significance of each area and then recommended the approved areas for designation. Our committee was charged with not only coming up with appropriate areas but were given parameters that stated there must be a certain percentage of Alberta lands designated in both ecological reserves and in natural areas.

At the beginning, Mr. Speaker, there was no mention of heritage rangelands. This particular designation came up when the committee could not come up with the desired percentage for natural areas. Our committee agreed to the new designation with restrictions: one, that it would remain under Alberta agriculture, as the grazing leases

were then; second, that all existing uses would be maintained. Since then, heritage rangelands, because it's within an all-inclusive act, is now under Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. The mandate of this ministry is somewhat different from the mandate of Agriculture.

5:30

Another example. The Alberta Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act is another example of legislation that protects our traditional land uses and also our cultural values. This act created a statutory right to hunt, fish, and trap that could be defended in court. I had the honour of bringing this act forward and having it proclaimed. Again, this is legislation that many Albertans support, specifically because it's part of their heritage. That's why so many Albertans support the Willmore Wilderness Park Act, not only because it was established by locals but because it has proven effective in maintaining and sustaining the Willmore wilderness park.

The Willmore Wilderness Park Act is a clear example of locals pursuing environmental sustainability in a way that maintains traditional land uses. Willmore park, Mr. Speaker, is considered one of the best-kept secrets, in large part due to the act that regulates it. The land stewardship of this park is exceptional, which may be why some have suggested it be incorporated into a UNESCO world heritage site. If for the past 50 years the Willmore Wilderness Park Act has led to effective management of this park, there is no need to change it. I support the act as it is now. It doesn't need to be amended or abolished to fit in with any international guidelines or regulations. The present act is a strong piece of legislation that will ensure the environmental sustainability of this park as well as the traditional land uses well into the future.

For me, the concerns far outweigh the advantages of being a UNESCO site. I thank our hon. colleague from West Yellowhead for introducing this motion, and I do not have anything whatsoever against UNESCO or the strong mandate that they have and the prestigious recognition that designation as a world heritage site would bring to the Willmore wilderness. What is of concern to me, Mr. Speaker: as I noted in my example of what has happened with the heritage rangeland designation, being now administered by a totally different body from what it was originally intended with a vastly different mandate, these grazing lands are now under parks administration. This is what I fear may happen: to a much larger degree it's an organization – and I'm talking about UNESCO – not located in Alberta and not having the same knowledge of the history and values of Alberta and Albertans who would suddenly be in charge. I'm sure the intent is to have things remain as they are right now, but as my previous example showed, I'm suspicious of management by people who are not from here but, rather, from around the world and with headquarters in New York.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of this House to stand in support of Motion 507. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this very important topic to the floor of the House. I had the privilege of being in the Willmore wilderness along about '57, '58, in that time frame. I was one of those bad guys with industry going into that pristine area.

Mr. Groeneveld: Still are.

Mr. Lund: Okay.

I had the opportunity to be in that area again a couple of times not that many years ago, and I was really pleased to see how little things have changed and how this act actually has protected the area. As the Member for Peace River was talking about with an ecosystem, with an area of that size certainly you are able to protect an ecosystem and have it work. Of course, it's over 50 years since it was proclaimed a provincial park by Dr. Norman Willmore. Incidentally, I believe he was the minister that was killed in an accident between here and Edson on the highway. I remember that situation was a very sad occasion because he certainly knew the portfolio that he had and did a lot of good things with it.

When you look at the activities that are permitted in that area, it's very, very important to recognize that our parks act is a very protective piece of legislation. It does give the opportunity for management plans that can vary some, but it restricts a lot of the activity that would tend to destroy an ecosystem. As the Member for Peace River was talking about, these things do change, so there are times when perhaps we need to intervene. I remember about 15 years ago or so, when rabies was going rampant and a lot of the wildlife was dying from that disease, there was some intervention in that case to try to limit the area that was being affected.

But I'm really worried if we start turning these things over to, say, UNESCO. For the life of me, I don't understand why some Albertans would be supporting this particular move. It's not a lot different than the Y to Y, the Yellowstone to Yukon, concept. That would be taking a strip all along the national parks from the Montana border clear up and through Alberta and on into Yukon. This concept, of course, was something that we dealt with back in the year 2000, even with the national parks. I remember meeting with one of the superintendents. He suggested to me that we should have a buffer zone in Alberta for the park, and they would manage the buffer zone. I said: that's fine as long as we have an area inside the park that we would manage. Of course, that wasn't acceptable. So it was a one-way street. With so many things like this, that's really the way it works.

The people in Alberta that promote this sort of thing: you have to look at where they're coming from and what their ideas are. Quite frankly, they are in the minority, and this is the only way that they feel they could get the opportunity to govern, not just to have input – we provide them input – but actually get the opportunity to govern. When you look at the park act, when you look at what it's done for the Willmore, I don't believe they could manage it any better. I think it's just wonderful the way it's currently being managed.

To think about turning this over to an organization like UNESCO – I remember an incident that we had down at Dinosaur provincial park where an oil company drilled a well just inside the park. If I remember right, it was 70 feet. That was an interesting one. It created a huge, huge incident. Because it's a UNESCO site, it got international play. Quite frankly, it was a stupid mistake that somebody made. If you look at the boundary of the park, it's right along the lip of the valley except for this one little place where there was a quarter section that came up maybe a hundred feet and then back over, just a little triangular area. Somehow the surveyors missed it. The well went in. They drilled. It started producing. Then somebody discovered that, well, really, it's on the edge of the park. It was one of those wells where there was no surface disturbance. The road that came into it: there was some disturbance there. They managed to reseed with the natural grass so that all you would see as you were coming up to it in a helicopter would be this little green strip. That's all you could see. But it was an international event, and that was all because it had been turned over to UNESCO.

5:40

I'm really pleased that we have this opportunity to nip this in the bud. There are areas like the one at Dinosaur provincial park.

There's access to the area. If you'd turned this over – there are some that are saying: well, it's a great thing to do because of tourism. Well, really, that means that you're going to have to have the access in there, and you're going to have a lot more people accessing the area. Of course, they're not satisfied with just leaving it in the wilderness state. There are a lot of things that happen if you have too many people going into an area.

I'm very pleased that we are going to pass this, I would hope unanimously, to send the right message out that this motion is a good motion and that we don't want to change it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to rise and speak to this motion, Motion 507, on the Willmore wilderness park. I'd like to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward this legislation as it looks like good legislation for both the park and the people whom this act is meant to serve and to assist in their way of life. For instance, traditional land-use activities are an important way of life for the aboriginal communities in the Willmore area, and we should not be seeking limitations on these practices without good reason. We heard some of those good reasons brought up by the Solicitor General, that these forests and these areas do not live in isolation, that you don't just put up a fence or a brick wall, that these forests and wild areas don't prosper in that way. It takes interaction in the way they've always been used and have interaction with, I guess, other beings and other activities to make these wild areas flourish.

Now, the second component of that is that although we like to have these areas that have all this activity going on in them to sustain the health of the area, there's a tipping point when there is too much human interaction. That's why conservation organizations such as the Alberta Wilderness Association believe that consumptive activities like hunting and trapping are sustainable, but they have to be managed properly under the values of healthy wildlife populations and biodiversity. That's where this act and our protection of this park have to be co-ordinated with our Sustainable Resource Development department to monitor the effects of any activity in the Willmore wilderness park.

Like I said, I agree with this act. I agree on having healthy, active wild areas such as the Willmore wilderness park. They have to have some of these activities. We also have to monitor these as Alberta is 3.5 million people, heading for 5 million people. Lots of activities with industry are going on in that area and industry that should go on in that area, but with all that activity, with us doing some of these things, it needs continued monitoring and continuing enforcement. The boots-on-the-street analogy by my hon. colleague for Calgary-Varsity was very right. Without adequate enforcement these good things we do in this Legislature become meaningless.

On that note, I would encourage some of these things to be done through our land-use framework and through the development of our policies and practices through that framework and the various divisions that are laid out in there.

There are also some areas that are noted for improvement from those in the park itself. Willmore wilderness park needs an updated park management plan that addresses a number of concerns voiced by environmental and conservation groups. A draft plan was apparently prepared in 1980 but not finalized. Like I said, the government needs to move forward on the implementation of the land-use framework, and consultative mechanisms with aboriginal populations need to be renewed and strengthened in advance of any discussions about traditional land-use activities.

Nonetheless, despite these reservations and despite this advice, if I could call it that, to the government, I think this is a good step forward and will allow for sound forestry management and sound management of the Willmore wilderness park as well as allow for traditional usage by our aboriginal communities of many and much of the wilderness and streams and for trapping and the like.

Nevertheless, those are my comments. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak on the record on this very good motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and honoured today to speak to Motion 507. The purpose of Motion 507 is to ensure that the government of Alberta continues to recognize the Willmore Wilderness Park Act as it is. The Willmore Wilderness Park Act promotes the management and conservation of the resources within Willmore wilderness park and provides the legislative assurance of the traditional activities like outfitting, trapping, hunting, and fishing.

Activities like hunting and fishing are key elements of conservation. Hunters and fishers are true conservationists. By continuing to support their activities, as Motion 507 urges, the Willmore wilderness park will continue to be preserved for future generations. Albertans have exemplified their dedication to conservation, and as such Motion 507 promotes that Willmore wilderness park stay fully within Alberta jurisdiction. The Willmore Wilderness Park Act has proven effective in maintaining and sustaining Willmore wilderness park for the past 50 years and will continue to do so in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I've been going to this park since the 1960s as a boy with my dad on horseback trips, and I can attest to you that this park has been maintained and is in as good a state today as it was 40 years ago. In fact, I have pictures of the side of a mountain from a friend of my dad's from the 1930s, and looking at the same site last year, the site looks better today than it did then because back then it was burnt. The whole side of the mountain was burnt black and didn't look that great, but it looks good today, I can tell you. In fact, it's even harder to find the old trails. Like, there used to be trails from the natives and the hunters from years ago back there. Now you can't even find the trails on horseback. It's grown back into its natural state.

I suggest that we leave the park in the control of Albertans, as it is. It's beautiful back there in the mountains, the intersection mountain where the Alberta-B.C. border is and where it bends to go south. If you get up on that mountain, you can see a long ways, and you can see no sign of man or interference. I'd like to keep this for my children and my grandchildren.

I would like to thank my colleague the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing Motion 507 forward. I fully support it, and I encourage all members to support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

5:50

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my privilege to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 507. I would like to also thank the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this motion forward. I've listened with interest and intently to the presentations that have already been made this afternoon and certainly support the sentiment that has been expressed. I have to admit that I have not

actually been in the Willmore wilderness park but had the opportunity to visit it online to view some of the absolutely fabulous pictures that have been taken and put online with regard to Willmore.

While I haven't actually been to the park, I certainly support the principle that other members have brought forward here this afternoon. When you look at an area that's 46,000 square kilometres and it has been protected by local input and the dedication of local residents of that area for more than 50 years and hearing the other members who have talked about the way that this park has been preserved and protected by the existing Willmore Wilderness Park Act, I see no reason why we would want to further restrict activity that has gone on in that area for very many years.

I had the opportunity to go on the Willmore Wilderness Foundation website. The mission of that organization is to preserve the history of the area, focus on the advancement of education of the park, restore historical pack trails and sites, and enhance the use of the Willmore wilderness park for Albertans and visitors alike. That is a success story that I certainly want to support.

Again, the principle of not adding further restrictions when there is not a need to do that, I think, is something that we need to respect. I want to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing that issue forward. It's one that he certainly knows well and has a great deal of experience with, and I appreciate his asking me to make some comments with regard to this this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly support the intent of this motion and look forward to being able to support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other hon. members wish to speak on the motion?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close the debate on Motion 507.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 507 may not be popular among certain environmentalists who have urged a greater global control over Alberta lands and especially the natural lands, but I can say that Motion 507 will instill confidence in Albertans who are concerned about the ramifications of transforming the Willmore wilderness park as a UNESCO world heritage site.

The Willmore Wilderness Park Act has proven effective in maintaining and sustaining our Willmore wilderness park. The Willmore wilderness act is an example of locals pursuing environmental sustainability in a way that maintains traditional land uses. Mr. Speaker, the Willmore wilderness act is popular among many of the locals in the Grande Cache area as well as many Albertans from all over this great province who participate in activities in the Willmore wilderness park.

I would ask all my colleagues to support this motion, and I would like to thank all of my colleagues who spoke today on behalf of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),
Minister of Service Alberta
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),
Minister of Energy
Lindsay, Fred, Stony Plain (PC)
Lukaszk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Minister of Employment and Immigration
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Leader of the ND Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
ND Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for
Calgary, Deputy Government House Leader
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (Ind)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology
Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 13, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, today in the Speaker's gallery and in the members' gallery and in the public gallery are a number of special guests. The Royal Canadian Legion, Alberta-NWT Command, takes a keen interest in promoting Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. We're very appreciative of both their financial support and their involvement in this annual event, which began yesterday afternoon and will conclude later this afternoon.

In the Speaker's gallery are Mr. Bill Fecteau, the Legion's command chairman. I'm going to ask him and the other individuals that I identify to all rise. Mr. Fecteau is accompanied by the students' chaperones: Rod Stewart, president of the Vegreville branch and past command vice-president; Joyce Stewart, past president and executive committee member, Vegreville branch; Ted Latimer, district 8 commander, Alberta-NWT Command; Donna Latimer, a member of the Onoway branch; Karen Bruens, past district 3 commander, member of the Vegreville branch; John Ferguson, past president, Canmore branch, and member of the Cochrane branch; Gloria Rogers, president, ladies auxiliary of the Alberta-NWT Command; Sharon Fedak, first vice-president, ladies auxiliary of the Alberta-NWT Command.

Seventy-eight students joined us yesterday and today – that's a record number – as participants in the MLA for a Day program. Yesterday the participants spent time with the Royal Canadian Legion, debated a resolution in this Assembly last night, and toured the Legislature Building. This morning they were here in this Chamber sitting in your chairs, and a very special seminar was held for them. They also visited with a number of members in their offices today and joined us for lunch prior to Oral Question Period today.

These young people are seated in the members' and public galleries, and the Legion members are in the Speaker's gallery. I'd ask all of them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special guests: Krys Kunicki-Tadman, a constituent of mine, a wonderful friend, and a tireless volunteer, along with her cousin Krystyna Tichnow, who is here from Poland visiting Alberta for the very first time. Along with visiting a number of places in Edmonton and around the province, they'll be enjoying a tour of this beautiful Legislature Building later this afternoon. Given the tragic events which took place in Krystyna's homeland on the weekend, may we extend to her and her family both our heartfelt welcome and our heartfelt sympathy. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour and privilege of introducing to you and through you to members of the Assembly a hundred enthusiastic, bright, and inquisitive students from St. Mary/St. Monica school in my constituency. St. Mary/St. Monica is a school that I brag about a lot when I'm talking around the province to people about education. We have a hundred students accompanied by their teachers Thérèse Coates, Michelle Armstrong, Jesse Diachuk, Tracee Laba, assistant Amanda Sergeant, and student teachers Brian Vaughan, Stephanie Hay, and Samantha Dudar. I mention student teachers particularly because St. Mary/St. Monica stylize themselves as a professional learning school because they do so much to help educate teachers in our province. They are seated in the members' gallery and the public gallery, and I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a great friend, colleague, and, of course, our leader of the Wildrose Alliance Party, Ms Danielle Smith, and her wonderful executive assistant, Ms Shannon Stubbs. If they could please rise. Danielle is travelling the province meeting and listening with Albertans across this great land, and it's an honour to serve with both of them. I'd ask that the Assembly please give them a warm reception.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to our Assembly parents of our current page Rayleen Nicolajsen. They are here observing Rayleen in her role as a page during her last session here at the Alberta Legislature. Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are her father, Steen Nicolajsen, and her mother, Colleen Nicolajsen. Steen works as a quality control officer and service co-ordinator for Ackard Contractors, and Colleen is the account administrator at North Pointe Community Church, which is in Edmonton-Castle Downs. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly my good friend and constituent Mrs. Patricia Bencz, the executive director of the Our House Addiction Recovery Centre. Our House is a long-term facility for men over the age of 18 who have been in addiction for an average of 20 years. They've spent about 160 days in other facilities before coming to Our House. Often these people come in with concurrent disorders. It's the 25th anniversary of the facility. It's a very tough job. Patricia, I want to thank you very much for doing it and would ask everyone to join me in the traditional greeting.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and a privilege for me to rise today – actually, it should have been yesterday – in commemoration of Yom ha-Shoah, also known as

Holocaust Memorial Day. This year Holocaust Memorial Day fell upon Sunday, April 11, in accordance with the Jewish lunar calendar.

Mr. Speaker, the Holocaust was one of the worst atrocities committed in the history of mankind. The lives of over 6 million Jewish men, women, and children were senselessly ended in addition to countless others who were systematically persecuted and annihilated at the hands of the Nazi regime.

On November 16, 2000, the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act was proclaimed by this Legislature so that we may do our part to ensure that these innocent victims will never be forgotten. While we cannot change history, we must all do our part to learn from the tragedies of the past and never permit them to happen again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Public Service Pension Plans

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Retirement is a critical time for every Albertan. Albertans make great efforts and work very hard to plan their retirement, setting aside funds to carry them through their golden years. Some use RRSPs, some have employer pensions. Members of Alberta's public service depend upon plans such as the Alberta teachers' retirement fund, the public service pension plan, and the local authorities pension plan.

These plans should have provided dedicated public servants with benefits sufficient to ensure a comfortable retirement. The Alberta Society for Pension Reform, however, claims that this government has let them down. In a statement delivered to all MLAs, a statement I encourage all members to read, these pensioners state that the Alberta government promised pension benefits of 60 per cent of preretirement income after 30 years of service and 70 per cent after 35 years of service. Members of the public service pension plan and the local authorities pension plan, furthermore, were promised that cost-of-living increases would keep up with the actual cost of living. Finally, and most importantly, the Alberta government guaranteed the payment of these pensions.

1:40

The society claims that the Alberta government has broken each of these promises. They go on to call these three government of Alberta pension plans among the worst government pension plans in Canada. According to the society the Tories took this retirement savings and used the money as general revenue to pay off the debt and build infrastructure, leaving the pension funds empty. Furthermore, cost-of-living increases were scaled back, co-ordinated benefits were slashed, joint life pensions were reduced, and during the '90s many workers were forced into early retirement, further reducing their benefits, in some cases up to 16 per cent. Now the government will no longer guarantee the payment of pensions.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly and others interested to please visit the albertapensionreform.ca website for more information on this issue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

League of Ukrainian Canadians Anniversary League of Ukrainian Canadian Women Anniversary

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and acknowledge the upcoming milestone celebrations on

April 17 of two very important organizations, namely, the League of Ukrainian Canadians, Edmonton branch, 60th anniversary, and the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branch, 55th anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, the League of Ukrainian Canadians was first established under its original name, the Canadian League for the Liberation of Ukraine, at a founding conference on December 25, 1949. The league held its original name until 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when Ukraine was proclaimed an independent country. The League of Ukrainian Canadians is well known for many political advocacy and public engagement initiatives to increase democracy and human rights for the Ukrainian people and also for raising the awareness of Ukrainian history, of which commemorating the Holodomor genocide in Ukraine of 1932-33 serves as one significant example.

Mr. Speaker, the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women also began at the founding conference on December 25, 1949, then known as the women's association of the Canadian league. The Edmonton branch was established in 1954, and in 1991 the organization was formally known as the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women. Over the past number of years activities have included the promotion of Ukrainian cultural heritage, education, humanitarian activities, and raising the spectre of women's challenges and issues in the Ukraine. The work of the Edmonton branch of the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women includes advocating for the release of political prisoners, organizing the funding and building of the Ukrainian Youth Unity Complex, located in Edmonton-Decore, and the creation of the Verkhovyna Choir, a gem in Edmonton's cultural landscape.

Mr. Speaker, I commend all the individuals in the past, present, and future involved in both of the organizations and Edmonton branches for their tireless commitment and dedication to raising peoples' consciousness as it pertains to Ukrainian history, heritage, culture, challenges, and issues.

Heartfelt thank you, Dyakuyu, and God bless these organizations as they celebrate their milestone anniversaries in the years to come. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Request for Unanimous Consent to Complete the Routine

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier's director of media relations, Jerry Bellikka, posted on Twitter that I had denied consent to recognize the Holocaust. I also got a call from a reporter saying that an MLA of this government was shopping the same story to various media outlets. This accusation is defamatory, it is patently false, and it is disgusting. I would highly suggest Mr. Bellikka retract the statement immediately.

Mr. Speaker, a few short months ago my sweetheart, Anita, and I visited Israel for three weeks. It is a beautiful nation with wonderful people of all faiths. One of the highlights for us was our visit to the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. We walked reverently through that sacred place, taking in the heartbreaking display of the Nazis' evil and barbaric treatment of innocent Jewish men, women, and children. It was an amazing experience, one that Anita and I will cherish forever.

The Holocaust was one of the most horrific events in history. Six million Jews were murdered by Nazis out of blind racial hate and for no other reason. I want everyone to know that I, for one, will never, ever forget.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's communications team has a long history of being inept, but this is something more. I remember the

days when the Paul Martin and the Jean Chrétien Liberals used words like anti-Semitic, racist, anti-immigrant, redneck, scary, and sexist to describe the parties of Preston Manning and Stephen Harper. I never thought that this Premier's office would resort to the methods of Martin or Chrétien. People that have no new ideas or anything of value to add to the public discourse often resort to personal smears and fearmongering, and if history is any indication, Albertans will reject outright any party that resorts to such tactics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Recognition of Slave Lake Constituents

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been said that the heart of a volunteer is their strength, their dedication, and their humility. For this reason I rise today to recognize the tremendous work of five of my constituents. Of course, all of them are really great.

On Friday, March 19, I attended the Alberta Association for Community Living President's Reception, where Barb MacIntyre from Slave Lake was announced to become the president-elect of AACL. Ms MacIntyre truly is one of a kind: always involved, always concerned, always doing something to advance AACL's agenda but also never afraid to give praise as needed to others or to nominate individuals from our community who have done some great things.

One individual at that same time was recognized. AACL presents yearly awards to individuals, organizations, and businesses that promote the concept and spirit of community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities. Mr. Tyler Warman from Boston Pizza in Slave Lake was honoured because of his conscious, proactive decision to hire a staff member with a developmental disability and do whatever it takes to support them. Through his example Mr. Warman has become a leader in our community by proving that people with developmental disabilities can be valuable employees and team members.

On March 27 I was honoured to be joined by the Member for West Yellowhead to help present fire services exemplary service medals to three of High Prairie Fire Department's most distinguished members: Mr. Dan Gillmor, with 24 years of service; Mr. Kenneth Melnyk, with 26 years of service; and Mr. Anthony Belli, with 30 years of service. We are incredibly grateful to have Dan, Ken, and Tony protecting our community, anticipating our most feared moments when we are not able to help ourselves in a dangerous environment but rely on their courage and their strength, putting our lives in their hands.

To all five of my constituents: you are the heart of our community for being exemplary role models and leaders whom we can all be proud of. Congratulations, and thank you for all that you have done and all that you continue to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Organ Donor Week

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize Organ Donor Week, which takes place April 18 through 25 of this year. Organ donation has always been important to me. That is why I introduced Motion 518 this session, which urges the government to require Albertans to declare on the back of their Alberta health card whether or not they want their organs donated.

Becoming an organ donor is not difficult. All you need to do is carry an organ donor card in your wallet and discuss your wishes

with your family. In 2008 there were 4,330 people on waiting lists for organ transplants in Canada, and of those, 215 people died while waiting for their organ transplant. Of the 2,083 transplants that took place, 1,541 were made possible because of organs from deceased donors. Organ donation is one of the last acts of charity you can make. In fact, one organ donor can save the lives of eight people and assist the lives of nearly 50 more. It is a way to turn a tragic event into a miracle for others.

There are more than 4,000 people waiting for an organ donation now, and each week five Canadians die waiting for the organ donation that does not come in time. I urge all members of this Assembly to consider organ and tissue donation and to discuss their choice with their families to declare their intent on their Alberta health card.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd ask all of you to join with me in recognizing the birthday anniversary of one of our members today. It's an anniversary for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, and I do want the hon. member to know that she should fear not: her secret remains with me. Happy birthday.

Clerk, hold the clock. Prior to the question period today I'd like to make a brief statement.

1:50

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair wants to advise members of certain modifications that are required to the rotation of questions during Oral Question Period and to Members' Statements as a result of further changes in the composition of caucuses within this Assembly. Given the number of changes to the rotation and to the seating plan so far this session, the chair has attempted to integrate the new independent member into the rotation of questions and members' statements with a minimum of disruption to the existing order.

The Member for Calgary-Currie is entitled to the same number of questions as the other independent member, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. The Member for Calgary-Currie will be entitled to one question a week. In the rotation scheme used in the Assembly, today is considered day 4, and the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is entitled to ask a question. Tomorrow, April 14, is day 1, and the Member for Calgary-Currie will be entitled to ask the sixth question. This position had belonged to the Official Opposition. To be clear, the only change to the question period rotation will be the substitution of the Member for Calgary-Currie to ask the sixth question on day 1.

Similarly, the Member for Calgary-Currie will be able to participate in Members' Statements on the same basis as the other independent member. Accordingly, his first opportunity to present a member's statement will be on day 31 of this session, which is Wednesday, April 21. This position had belonged to the Official Opposition.

The chair has provided revised calendars and outlines for the rulings just provided to all members.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year Alberta Health Services handed out executive bonuses when they had a

projected deficit of \$1.3 billion. The letters outlining the bonuses said, "Many of the typical individual and portfolio performance measures used to establish this payment were difficult to measure . . . and [not consistent] during this year of transition." To the Premier: how can the Premier defend a bonus of \$129,000 of taxpayers' money for one person when your documents show you cannot measure the performance of that person?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Services Board has taken decisive steps to overhaul the process of executive contract negotiations. The most important step is the establishment of a standardized contract for senior executives, which will cover all of the senior executives in Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier support Alberta Health Services handing out bonuses larger than most Albertans make in a year as a reward for creating a \$1.3 billion deficit while public-sector employees are facing wage freezes?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could address that on behalf of the Premier. We have to keep in mind here that stuff that occurred two or three years ago is a matter of history. What's more important is how we're going forward. When we have individuals who are handling a \$10 billion budget, approximately, we have individuals who are looking after 400 different health facilities in the province, we have individuals who are helping to manage or work with approximately 90,000 employees across the province, it requires us to be very competitive in who we hire and how we hire.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: will the Premier order an immediate halt to the bonus system for Alberta Health Services' executives and restore some semblance of public confidence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to executive bonuses we took a very big decision last year. We cancelled all senior level management bonuses within the government, which is \$40 million. Alberta Health Services is following up on the leadership that this government has shown and is going to renegotiate all of the contracts and look at a consistent approach to all senior executive positions within Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Premier. Given the information he's just given that there will be standardized contracts and given that he did the right thing and cancelled bonuses for other public executives, will these standardized contracts contain bonuses, or will he take a firm stand and ensure no bonuses are paid on any of these standardized contracts as they are negotiated? Which is it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Services Board has a mandate to negotiate senior executive level contracts, and they will look at the most appropriate model used to bring about efficiencies and improve access to health care. That's why we have appointed the board. They have the responsibility. If it's going to be top down all the time to every organization like that, we won't get the kind of achievements that we require in getting efficiencies in the system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My question, then, is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. It's a matter of public record that this minister will sign off on the contracts of senior executives in Alberta Health Services. Will this minister do the right thing and refuse to sign any contract that has a bonus?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the bonus system, as I indicated, is part of being competitive to attract the very best people into the most senior positions. However, in view of the difficult economic times we're in, it should be noted that bonuses paid out at the executive vice-president level or at the senior vice-president level are limited to 20 per cent only of their total yearly contracts.

Dr. Taft: Again to the Premier: given that the public experience of Alberta's health care system is a huge deficit, long waiting lists, overcrowded facilities, and a staff and physician satisfaction survey that is absolutely devastating, why won't he do the same thing he did for his deputy ministers and other public servants and eliminate bonuses in the health services system? Why not? What are they doing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the decision rests with the Alberta Health Services Board. They will look at the best way to manage their senior executives. This is an issue that we dealt with within government. It brought about a savings of over \$40 million. This came as a request from me and our government to our senior officials, who, by the way, did not contest. They just simply said: look, even though there's a contractual obligation, we're willing to give up our bonuses in order to achieve the savings in government that are necessary.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Small Business Assistance

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent numbers show that insolvencies are up 9 per cent in Alberta and that there has been an almost 80 per cent increase in bankruptcy proposals over the past year. Now we find that Alberta is becoming a very minor player in venture capital markets, attracting only 6 per cent of venture capital dollars. We now have a situation where less and less money is going into building the economy. More and more people are suffering through the current crises, and all we get from government is increasingly hollow claims that Alberta will be the strongest economy and the first to recover. To the Premier: what will the Premier do to increase the availability of venture capital in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have taken bold steps to increase the amount of venture capital invested in the province. It first starts with the money that's invested in research. Then it leads to further commercialization of those ideas. In fact, we've set aside a hundred million dollars to attract much of the investment to Alberta. There were recent announcements, and there will continue to be more in terms of money coming to the province. We're on the right track.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we are debt free operationally. We don't have any debt in the bank to pay. We're keeping our taxes low. We're not increasing them. That is what attracts business to this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the Premier doing to deal with the fact that we have the highest per capita number of bankruptcies in the country?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we also had the hottest economy a number of years ago, when oil was \$145, \$147 a barrel. Those are some of the issues that the government, of course, is dealing with, but now the economy has settled down. There are very good green shoots in the economy coming forward, and we're going to see a good recovery not only in the number of businesses moving to Alberta but continued flow of people to Alberta because they do see this as a land of opportunity.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier admit that his do-nothing approach is only causing more and more pain for Alberta families and small businesses?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of doing nothing, here we are a jurisdiction that said: no new taxes and no tax increases, no fee increases; we eliminated health care premiums for all Albertans. Those are all savings in the pockets of Albertans to be reinvested in the economy. I declare that compared to all jurisdictions in Canada, we have taken that leadership role, and we will continue. We will be the first to be in the black by 2012-13.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

2:00 Electricity Transmission System

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government uses words like "consult stakeholders and affected Albertans," but they believe the way to do this is to design fancy brochures, websites, and radio ads set up by their lobbyists, campaign teams, and party executives. Many Albertans describe the PC government as the old boys' club, nepotism, and party patronage. This government is telling Albertans that their Rolls-Royce power plan is a great deal and is needed, but Albertans are saying no. My question is to the Premier. If the Alberta Electric System Operator is an independent . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the question is with respect to the Alberta Utilities Commission. The Alberta Utilities Commission has the jurisdiction to decide where transmission lines are to be located. They also have the jurisdictional ability to work with landowners in terms of reasonable compensation for the construction of the power lines. They also have, of course, control of the cost of transmission because that is still one part that is regulated under the Alberta Utilities Commission.

Mr. Hinman: Well, it's clear that their new needs assessment program is what their party connections need, not what Albertans need. [interjections] Oh, hang on to your horses.

The Speaker: The hon. member signed a document to me not too many weeks ago agreeing that there would be no preambles. Why did he break his word? Proceed with your second question.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: when the companies run ads to promote their power plans, does he believe that it should also be disclosed that the people in those ads are also members of the PC Party's executive?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there was a comment made earlier, I believe, with respect to the fact that there isn't an increased demand for electricity in this province. That is totally bogus. Last March, when most of the province had about minus 35 degree weather, our demand on electricity in this province was in excess of 9,000 megawatts. When we were at minus 52 this last December – and most of the province was under the same weather system – our demand increased just within a number of months to 10,236 megawatts. So what that member has said is totally wrong.

Mr. Hinman: Well, the Premier needs to be informed a little bit better. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Hinman: Given that the Premier knows so much, I'll ask him this question. Since this government takes very good care of its political allies, will this PC government let their campaign manager stick Albertans with a 30-year power purchase agreement so they can build an expensive nuclear plant here in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure where the question is going, but in terms of the nuclear policy for the province, we have not denied anyone any fuel source, whether it be wind, water, coal-fired, or even nuclear power. For any applications for nuclear, decisions will be based on a case-by-case basis, and of course the federal government has the most jurisdiction in this particular area. Really, the province plays a very minor role in terms of nuclear power.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

School Closures

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Parkdale, McCauley, Eastwood, Fulton Place, and Capilano schools are five schools that are on the chopping block tonight. At the same time, the Edmonton public school board is not getting any new resources to support the six schools that they are opening this September. The government is forcing school boards to shift resources from older schools to new ones. I want to ask the Minister of Education why he is forcing school boards to choose winners and losers when the families pay the price.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody is forcing anyone to choose winners and losers. What school boards do is make sure that they provide the best possible educational opportunities for all the students they serve within the resources that are available. It's totally wrong to say that there are no new resources for new schools as much as it's totally wrong to say that the closing of older schools that have lost their student populations is simply a money issue. It's about educational programming, and school boards are in the best position to determine how they can best provide educational programming for their students.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that it's absolutely clear from talking to the school board that they have to shift resources, both financial and personnel, from old schools to operate the new ones and that is the primary reason for these school closures, why won't the minister admit that his government's policy is forcing the school board to close these inner-city schools?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I wouldn't admit that, Mr. Speaker, because it's totally wrong. It's not a given that we're forcing school boards to move their resources. School boards have a number of physical resources, called schools, and they have a number of financial resources, and they have, of course, students that need to be served. They have the job of making sure they provide the best possible educational programming for the students that they have to serve. That's why we have local school boards, to meet that local need.

Mr. Mason: Well, he's going to be the minister of busing, not education, in a minute, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the school board is struggling to find ways to support staff for these new schools, it sure looks like they're going through the motions with the school closure process. I want to ask the Minister of Education to ensure that the Edmonton school board in this case but school boards around the province have the resources to operate new schools so they don't have to close old ones. That's what's happening, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is putting the opening of new schools and the closing of other schools into the same package in a very inappropriate way. New schools have been asked for in areas where there is an abundance of students and where an abundance of buses are moving those students longer distances to go to school. They have the resources. If there are students for those schools, then they have the resources to hire the teachers for those schools. That is not a problem. Where school boards do have a problem is keeping open a large number of buildings, many of them old building envelopes, many of them inefficient, paying for the resources to keep those schools open and provide the broad base of educational programs that are necessary for the students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Education Funding

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't sure if . . . [interjection] To the person across the way who said, "Quack, quack," you look like a duck.

Having said that, I spoke to students today from my constituency, three high school students. We've heard the government say that education is an investment, not an expense. As a follow-up, schools are being closed, programs are being cut, yet there's a contradiction: the government is blaming school boards. To the Minister of Education: can you please explain this contradiction? Why are you blaming school boards for the lack of funding by this government?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. First of all, I don't know of any school in that particular member's jurisdiction that's been closed. In fact, we're trying to open them as fast as we can. The reality is that we have school boards in this province, and we have school boards in this province because we believe that the connection to the local community is a very important part of the educational process. If we're going to have school boards, we cannot be constantly second-guessing the decisions that are in their purview to make and taking those decisions out of their hands just because people don't like the decisions that are being made. They have to balance it, and they have to make tough decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you. Given the comments by the

Minister of Education I want him to commit to this Assembly that he will not cut education in Edmonton or in Fort McMurray or in any one of the MLA's constituencies. Because he believes education is, in fact, an investment, not an expense, why don't you cut somewhere else, such as your own salaries, the 33 per cent you're giving yourself?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this hon. member has been for the balance of the session that's happened so far when we've spent time talking about it. There are only two budgets that I know of – there may be more – that have gone up in this province. One is health, and the other is education, clearly indicating to the public of Alberta where this government's priorities are.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that he says that education is an investment, yet universities are being cut back, programs are being cut back, schools are being closed in his very own constituency, my question is: commit to this House that there will not be any further cuts to schools, laying off of teachers because of the commitment to education to those three young people that are in the gallery.

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: What an absolute absurdity, Mr. Speaker, an absolute absurdity. Will I commit to this member that no teacher will ever be fired? It's just a few short years ago when we heard: how do we make sure that we have the best possible teachers, and how do we make sure that those that aren't the best teachers find other things to do? It would be absolutely absurd to guarantee to this member that there would never be any change in life or any change in the world. What I can say is this: education is a priority for this government. We've increased the funding, and all school boards have had access to that money.

The Speaker: I'm going out tonight to check if there really is a full moon.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:10

Health Services Executive Bonuses (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On October 26, 2009, the former Minister of Health and Wellness addressed the Public Accounts Committee, and he said: "Under the new model that the board chair [of Alberta Health Services] outlined earlier, the board is responsible for hiring, but the final sign-off comes through my office. So I guess it's joint, but the final signature is [the minister's.]" My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will he exercise his authority as minister and refuse to sign any contracts that have performance bonuses in Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the bonus arrangement that may be in place between the CEO and the president of Alberta Health Services is between him and the board. If there are performance bonuses, and I suspect there are, with executive vice-presidents or senior vice-presidents, that's a matter of those vice-presidents and the CEO. What I can tell you is that there are very specific performance measures that are in place right now that deal with increasing access, shortening wait times, and providing Albertans with the

outstanding health care excellence that they are accustomed to receiving.

Dr. Taft: Well, how are those performance measures working so far, Mr. Minister?

Why is the salary of the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness frozen, and why is that bonus frozen but this minister still allowing the senior executives of Alberta Health Services to have a bonus? Why the double standard?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's true that bonuses are frozen for senior members of the government. Alberta Health Services is, of course, an arm's-length organization. They operate very much with their own scenarios, and they're doing a pretty good job of handling some very difficult and challenging circumstances. However, the important thing is that there is greater certainty today, that there is more stability, that there is greater predictability, and the five-year funding plan coming forward will ensure it.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this is the minister who boasted about being hands on and getting in there, and we know he's meddled and interfered and stepped into all kinds of decisions. Will he do the right thing and end this distorting system of bonuses that get paid to one very select, already incredibly wealthy section of the public service? Bring it to an end. Do the right thing.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've indicated before and I want to stress this again: you have to engage the best people you can possibly find when you're administering about a \$10 billion operational budget comprised of taxpayer dollars, when you're managing over 400 health care related facilities and you have a workforce totalling approximately 90,000 people. Those people are working very hard, and so too are these top-level managers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Agricultural Assistance for Drought Recovery

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eight years ago we had the worst drought in the province's history, and quite frankly we've had a lot of dry years between then and now. This is making farmers very nervous, especially this spring, when we've started off very dry. To the minister of agriculture. Every single farmer in this province knows that we've never lost a crop in April, but they're nervous, they need confidence, and they want to know what your department has done to prepare for what may be another very bad year.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has in fact been a very, very difficult year on top of several before it. This past summer, as an example, we experienced the worst drought conditions since the Dirty Thirties, and this past winter, according to Environment Canada, the prairie provinces received precipitation that was at a 60-year low. We are working with the programs that we have to try to assist the farmers in any area that we can with respect to risk management and other areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this may be a very unique situation and another serious drought year, what

programs are in place to help farmers through this now in the spring and in the fall?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, we have in place a number of risk management programs that take into consideration the crop yields, as an example, the financial situation over a five-year period that a farmer experiences, insurance for pasture, insurance for forage. Those risk management tools are in place. We also have programs in place for Alberta producers that are outside of what some of the other provinces offer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the fact that AgriRecovery is specifically designed to help with drought disasters like the one we may have this year and it's being negotiated with the feds as we speak, what assurances are there in place that AgriRecovery will be there this year if farmers need it?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, the drought situation that I spoke about previously shows in many areas in the province the most extreme conditions of drought that we've experienced, as I say, in many years. There has been tax deferral allowed by the federal government in approximately 50 of our rural municipalities in this province, which indicates the severity of this problem. We are working with the federal government on AgriRecovery, and I'm hopeful that we can conclude our discussions with the federal government and move towards helping the producers out there as quickly as possible.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, when this government had a choice to make between scaling back services for the rich or taking away services from the poor, even the least sophisticated observer was able to predict the outcome. In order to save approximately \$5 million, Legal Aid Alberta is predicting that more than 6,000 people will be turned away this year. Will the minister confirm this? Are 6,000 or more economically disadvantaged Albertans going to be denied legal assistance by your pilot project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely not. Legal Aid and the government of Alberta almost two years ago decided that it was time to consider whether or not the traditional model for delivering legal aid in this province was really serving the interests of people that needed legal services but couldn't afford them. We decided that we wanted to launch pilot projects not to completely transform the system immediately but to see whether or not it might be possible to put a system in place where we could provide different levels of legal advice and legal support to people depending on what they needed when they came in contact with the legal system.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the hon. member's limits for an individual to receive legal assistance have now been dropped by \$6,000, how are these people now supposed to get this legal service if they're not eligible to get the service?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that's exactly the

point. What we've done this year in conjunction with the Legal Aid board is that we've developed a system where we're going to support public defender positions, legal aid clinics, enhanced support to law information centres, and two pilot projects around the province which will allow people who need to access a lawyer to come to a clinic to get advice and then to decide how they want to pursue their rights. Now, if they do decide that they want to pursue their rights, then they will fall into the traditional legal aid system, will be able to get a certificate and have legal advice provided.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given what I said before, that roughly 6,000 Albertans will no longer be eligible to even qualify under legal aid, where are these people now supposed to go to get legal services?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's not the case that they won't be able to qualify. It's the case that they will not be able immediately to obtain a certificate because Legal Aid and the government of Alberta have decided in consultation with stakeholders that in some cases people are better served by receiving legal advice and general directional information through courts. The law information centres in Alberta, which were established two years ago, have served over 150,000 people in the past 12 months alone, people that needed legal information, legal direction, and access to a lawyer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Pharmaceutical Strategy

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second phase of the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy that was announced in October 2009 includes expanding the role of pharmacists and introducing a new payment model for pharmacy services. Although many pharmacists welcome the change to providing more professional services, the lack of communication about the new payment model, scheduled to be implemented this July, is causing some concerns. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Where is the ministry at relative to the comprehensive transition plan that is supposed to be in place to support pharmacies to make the proposed changes?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a very solid question, indeed. We are at a very good place with respect to the overall pharmaceutical strategy. Once it's fully implemented, it will save Alberta taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. We've provided a \$75 million transitional fund to help get there. That includes about a \$5 million fund for rural and remote communities. It will also include an additional payment of about \$3 for filling a prescription in the first year, \$2 in the second, and \$1 in the third year. So there's a lot going on there plus the additional services model.

Ms Woo-Paw: To the same minister: when can pharmacists in Alberta expect to hear from Alberta Health Services about the transition plan and the role of the new payment model?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, they're actually hearing a lot about it right now because we have a good program in place to ensure that they're kept up to speed. The transition allowances that I just talked about are effective April 1. As part of that, there is an expanded services model, which is just being finalized right now, that will

compensate pharmacists throughout the province for additional work that they do on patient consultations, on medication reviews, and on things like immunizations.

Ms Woo-Paw: What mechanism is in place to ensure ongoing, timely communication, consultation, and monitoring between your ministry, Alberta Health Services, and the pharmaceutical sector?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we've implemented a pharmacy transition team. This pharmacy transition team deals with issues of identifying how to better serve the public and how to keep more money in the pockets of Albertans, for example, and how to compensate pharmacists for the good work that they're doing. It's a model that we place a lot of faith and store in, and it has built into it things like effective monitoring on a very regular basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Funding for Apprenticeship Training

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the unemployment rate for young men in the province of Alberta aged between 16 and 24 was 15 and a half per cent, twice the rate for the general population. My first question is to the minister of advanced education. Given that labour market analysis is indicating that we're heading for a shortage of skilled workers in this province, hopefully as the economy improves, why did the government allow the number of apprenticeship spots to actually go down here in Alberta last year? We've got unemployed people. Why aren't we training them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that if the hon. member were to look at the statistics in a lot more detail, what he would find is that during the down period, which in some areas of the economy we're still experiencing, companies aren't hiring a lot of new apprentices. So first-year apprentice numbers and second-year apprentice numbers are down. Secondly, we don't choose when that student is going to show up at the doorstep. In fact, if they have their second-year ticket or their third-year ticket, they may indeed not go to school this year. If they were very fortunate and maintained their employment, they may decide to stay working.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an interesting response.

Again to the same minister: given that so many apprentices have built up such a large number of hours towards the completion of their apprenticeship during this last period of high employment, why are you cutting your budget now, when these individuals should be trained so that they can get permanent work whenever the economy turns around? Bad policy.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, knowing the relationship that this hon. member has with many of our tradespeople, I'm sure that he's not advocating that we would force tradesmen to come to school at a certain period of time outside of their selected periods of time when they want to work, and we're not going to do that. Indeed, the apprenticeship program has always been based on the number of apprentices that want to get in that particular year at that particular time of the year. If there are no spaces at that particular time of the

year, they move to another part of the year. We're working with the apprenticeship board and all of our institutions to ensure that those spaces are there.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, this government is forcing many of these apprentices into longer periods of unemployment through bad public policy.

My next question is to the minister of labour. Why is the department cutting . . .

The Speaker: Whoa. Whoa.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes?

The Speaker: Were you unaware of the comments I made earlier about preambles?

Mr. MacDonald: I didn't consider that to be a preamble, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: But I did. I did, sir. So you've asked me the question, and it has been responded to.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Medicine Hat College Degree-granting Status

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A young constituent of mine, in fact a number now, recently shared with me news that the University of Alberta is planning on cancelling the arrangement they have with the Medicine Hat College that has given Medicine Hat students the opportunity to complete their education degree at the college, never having to leave their community. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: if this in fact happens, will students currently enrolled in the program be forced to go to Edmonton or Calgary to complete their degrees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question. We are aware of the issue at Medicine Hat College, and I think it's important to note at the outset that no final decisions have been made on any of the two-year programs that were under discussion. One of the important aspects of Campus Alberta is the ability for colleges and institutions to partner with everyone across the system. There are always opportunities for students to explore to remain in their communities and learn, as the hon. member mentioned, or for the institution to partner together with other institutions to deliver that program. We're confident that that's going to take place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the point that the hon. minister just made, how will you ensure that Medicine Hat College continues to receive degree-granting education programs?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are actively engaged with the partners that are currently delivering the two-year program. We're going to continue to work with those parties to ensure that students are going to be able to follow their dreams on those degrees wherever they may be. That is, indeed, a part of the Campus Alberta process. We are working on a couple of scenarios that are being explored to ensure that the program will be ongoing beyond the 2011-12 date that is out in the media.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As it's my understanding that the U of A has received stable funding from the province, why would they be permitted to remove this program?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, no decisions have been made on the removal of any programs at this point in time. This year we did take the first steps toward introducing a new funding formula that does provide additional flexibility for our institutions across Campus Alberta. It also gives all institutions greater flexibility to collaborate with each other and to meet student needs throughout the province. We certainly hope to encourage that kind of activity and behaviour throughout the system, and we'll be following up with that as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Eastern Irrigation District Licence Amendment

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Eastern irrigation district has applied to change their water licence so they are no longer limited to just using their water for irrigation. Why? Because right now they're breaking the law. In their own application they admit they've already signed several agreements selling rights to use the water for other purposes. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why has the minister failed to prosecute when it's clear that the Eastern irrigation district is breaking his own Water Act?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear that water that is under the licence of an irrigation district is designated for agricultural purposes. The reality that the member needs to understand is that in the areas that are served by the Eastern irrigation district there is very little opportunity for access to off-stream storage other than that provided by the irrigation district. So there are some limited uses for acreages and the like that do not fit the exact law.

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that it's generally the understanding that when there's a law, we expect it to be written well enough for people to follow it and given that there is clearly a limited supply of water in the area and given that the EID is clearly trying to profit off this shortage at the expense of the broader public need for the water through this application to change the law after the fact, why won't the minister act to prevent the illegal use of Alberta's precious and limited water supply and ensure that this application is denied?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we are in the process right now of reviewing the policy with respect to the ability for irrigation districts to expand the use. We will be changing that policy to recognize that in very limited circumstances there are appropriate times that irrigation districts should be able to redesignate the water to appropriate uses in those individual circumstances.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has actually made a number of empty promises to make the water policy public and to consult with Albertans on any changes, at least seven times over the last year and a half, and given that the situation I've just

described highlights the extreme dysfunction of the current system, why won't the minister tell Albertans today exactly when and where his policy will be made public and the time and place of the consultations that will follow?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would be more than happy to advise the member and all members of that exact information. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to do so at this point in time. We do have a process that needs to be followed, and we do have work that is under way. I will advise the member and all Albertans when the time is appropriate.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the lowest postsecondary enrolment rate in Canada, at only 14 per cent. The consequences of this government's cutbacks to postsecondary education can be seen in the budgets recently passed by universities and colleges, who are forced to increase fees on students, cut programs, and run operating deficits. To the minister: is the minister satisfied with the strategy of simply downloading the province's deficit to our universities and colleges, who then pass it on to our students?

2:30

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we haven't downloaded anything. We're working in collaboration with our institutions and with our student bodies. In fact, as I said in the House in answer to questions of this hon. member before, we have been working very closely with the student associations throughout the province to talk about the tuition cap and how we protect it going forward. We had to fix some problems that were within the system dating back to 2004. So working collaboratively with the student bodies we fixed the problem and protected the cap, one of the few provinces in Canada that still maintains a CPI cap. This year tuition levels will be 1.5 per cent as compared to Manitoba, up to 5 per cent, as compared to Ontario, 3 per cent to 8 per cent, as compared to even Saskatchewan, which could be as high as 5 per cent. We think we're doing very well for our students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that the minister's sentiments are shared by students going into pharmacy, engineering, and business.

Does the minister think it is acceptable for universities to charge students mandatory fees ranging from \$300 to \$450 because this government isn't willing to provide sufficient operating funding to postsecondary institutions?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was searching for the letters that I received from, as an example, the Pharmacy Students' Association, which actually requested that we approve the request from the university for the increase as a market modifier because they realized the value of their investment and the taxpayer investment. They requested that we do that. I also have a letter from the engineering students at the U of A Faculty of Engineering suggesting that they believe that it was the right thing to do to fix the error so that we can move forward into the future. So to suggest that we're not collaborating and talking to the students is blatantly false.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I don't think you'll get the same letters if you take that route for medicine, law, and education.

Is the minister going to stand idly by while institutions like NAIT, due to lack of government funding, are forced to eliminate over a dozen programs, some of which had full registration and are unique in western Canada?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, any programs that are going to be eliminated have to get the approval of the ministry. In fact, as we understand it right now, the particular institution the hon. member is talking about is reviewing it, as I would suggest every institution in this province should be reviewing every program they're delivering to ensure that it's meeting the needs of the student, the taxpayer, and the economy, not the institution's, because we serve those three clients, not the institution.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

ProServe Liquor Staff Training

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When reducing the regulatory burden for businesses, the interests of small businesses should also be given due consideration. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission made it mandatory for staff at all licensed premises to take a course called ProServe. Some say that this is an unnecessary regulatory burden. To the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: does everyone working in a liquor store or restaurant have to take this training?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission introduced ProServe in 2004 at the request of liquor industry stakeholders asking for a standardized training program. Effective January 1, 2010, ProServe is mandatory for all staff that are selling, serving, or advising customers on choices of liquor. Yes, it is mandatory, and as I say, it was requested by the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can a business owner, given the fact that so many of these businesses are owned by families, call in a family member to help in the case of an emergency and have that employee serve the public without taking this course?

Mr. Oberle: They can do that, Mr. Speaker. The staff that aren't serving, selling, or advising on liquor don't have to take the course. Certainly, they can call in a family member in the event of an emergency, but I would point out that it's probably in the best interests of the store owner to have everyone trained. There are various avenues of training, it takes less than a day, and it costs as little as \$25.

Mr. Bhullar: My final question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: can a liquor licensee be penalized for employing someone without this training?

Mr. Oberle: Yes, they can, Mr. Speaker. The exception being new employees, who have to take the training within 30 days. Prescribed in the regulations there are penalties and fines up to and including the loss of a licence. I'd point out that the AGLC does not have a history of heavy-handed enforcement but rather one of working with their clients. I believe that they would do so in this case as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government abandoned its commitment to fund a five-year agreement with teachers. Now, with the 2010-11 academic year approaching and no extra money for teachers' salaries on the table, school boards, students, and families are about to feel the crunch. To the minister: with the Calgary board of education considering eliminating 150 positions to cover its \$21 million shortfall, what plans does the minister have to prevent layoffs?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we have not abandoned our commitment. In fact, we're fulfilling our commitment. We fulfilled our commitment to the 5.99 per cent increase after we went through the arbitration process. That's been done. What we haven't done is put in a 3 per cent increase for salaries this year, the September 1 adjustment. What I've said to the school boards is that we need to work that out over a longer period of time and they should work with me, the school boards and the ATA, with respect to how we go into a longer term agreement.

In the meantime I've asked them to consider not laying off staff at the classroom level, the teachers and the support for the classrooms, and to manage it over a longer period of time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You can't extend a five-year contracted agreement and pay people gradually.

How can the minister continue to advocate for student-punishing Band-Aid solutions such as boards running temporary deficits or drawing on small reserves when the real problem is an ongoing funding shortfall from this province?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there's \$340 million of operating reserves in this province among school boards. Not every school board has them, but across the system we have a very healthy financial statement. What I've said to school boards is that we need to draw on those surpluses or perhaps run a short-term deficit in order to help us work on a longer term agreement to deal with not just salaries but also other areas to make sure that the education system is strong for teachers, for the profession, for the school boards, and for the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Clawing back committed surpluses seems to be the new *raison d'être* of this government.

Given that school boards in Medicine Hat are considering eliminating full-day kindergarten programs to cover their shortfall, will the minister admit that by not honouring the teachers' wage agreement, this government is pushing Alberta even further away from meeting the recommendations of the Learning Commission and doing nothing to reduce our one-third dropout high school rate?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker, I won't admit that at all. Again, for the benefit of this member and for the benefit of anybody on school boards that hasn't heard me say it before, I'll say it again: we need a longer term approach. We're working on that longer term approach. That longer term approach will deal not just with salaries

for teachers but also professional development and curriculum and other things that are in the best interest of students, in the interest of teachers as a profession, in the interest of school boards, and in the interest of the province. We'll be working on that over a longer term, and in the short term we're asking them to draw on their very healthy reserves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Special Education Review

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After engaging over 7,000 Albertans, the Setting the Direction for Special Education final report was submitted to the minister over 10 months ago, yet we still have not heard any response from the government. To the Minister of Education: is the delay in the government response an indication that you're backing away from a commitment to a truly supportive and inclusive education system that Albertans obviously demonstrated they wanted?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. I can understand the hon. member's frustration in that he chaired the task force and did an excellent job with the stakeholders in getting that report. But I would also say that it does take time to get policy approval and to put implementation plans in place. We're working very, very strongly interdepartmentally to make sure that Health, Children and Youth Services, and Education work together. This is a major shift in philosophy, from a diagnostic model to a learning-based model, and we need to take the time to do it right.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that there have been no increases to the funding for special education since 2008, how do you explain the Edmonton Catholic school system's recent announcement to integrate every child in every classroom?

2:40

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we should be clear that it's not about integrating every child into every classroom. Inclusive education is about making sure that every child is included in education and has the appropriate learning opportunities for that child. That is different from the concept of any child in any classroom. That would not be possible.

The process that the Edmonton Catholic school board is engaged in, as I understand it, relates primarily to students with mild and moderate needs, and those children very often can be included in classrooms with appropriate learning plans and learning profiles. If they're engaging in doing that ahead of the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: since the boards are taking the initiative to move towards inclusive education on their own, is that a sign that the sector is anticipating cuts to special education?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. They shouldn't be anticipating cuts to special education, nor should they necessarily be anticipating significant increases. What they should be anticipating is that we should look at the resources we have and make sure that we use those resources in the most appropriate way. That's what this design

is all about. It's not the fifth review of a funding formula. It's about looking at how we can do things better with what we have and how we can make sure that every child is included, has the opportunity to move from where they are to where they can be and achieve their full potential.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Funding for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [The members sang *Happy Birthday*] Thank you very much. Actions do speak louder than words, so thank you for that.

The minister of seniors' actions have shown a lack of support for people with developmental disabilities, and the lack of support is directly translating to decreased care. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will the minister immediately reinstate the funding that is needed so that the Calgary area PDD service providers will not have to cut services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the budget for the PDD program this year has not changed. It remains the same as last year, at \$597 million. I understand that there may be some cost pressures that we have to be cognizant of. I would say to you that maybe there's a way that we can do things a little bit differently so that we can make the \$597 million stretch. I'd like to say that \$500 million of that budget goes directly to our service providers for 9,200 people.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister. Part of the reason for the cut is to direct funds toward unfunded pension liabilities. How can the minister justify cutting front-line services and supports for this reason?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there have been no cuts in PDD. The PDD budget remains the very same as last year. Like I said, I understand that there may be some funding pressures, but there have been no cuts. I've asked our PDD boards, I've asked my department and my divisions to look very carefully at their own budgets so that they can find the efficiencies that will help us make that budget stretch as far as we can so that the savings can go directly to the front-line services of our PDD clients.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Are some of those funds going toward unfunded pension liabilities, not necessarily from the PDD but out of your department?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that of the \$600 million that we have in the PDD budget, \$500 million goes directly to our service providers. The other \$97 million goes to direct services, to the PDD boards, and to my PDD divisions. I would say to you that we have one of the very best programs in Canada, most generously funded. If you compare us to B.C. and Ontario, our PDD clients receive more in funding than clients in those other areas.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, that concludes question period, and a rather energetic one, I might say. There were 18 hon.

members recognized today, made up of nine from the Official Opposition, four from the independents, and the remaining five from the government caucus, for a total of 106 questions and responses.

In 15 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a couple who have come about 450 kilometres today. Dick and Izzy Ellis are from Champion, Alberta. Dick is the manager of all the solid waste and transfer stations and recycling program, and Izzy is a small businesswoman and an accomplished singer. They're here today on business. Dick is going to be meeting with some of our colleagues on a significant solid waste energy project that involves 60 municipalities in southern Alberta. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome from all of us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a real pleasure for me to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two outstanding constituents of mine, the hon. Shirley Cripps, past MLA for Drayton Valley, and her lovely daughter Christine Cripps-Woods. Today is an even more special day because one of the two MLAs for a day that I had the pleasure of hosting was Christine's daughter, Shirley's granddaughter, Erin Cripps-Woods. If you would please rise. Let's show her the traditional warm welcome.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that Bill Pr. 1, Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act, proceed in the Assembly; that Bill Pr. 2, Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010, proceed with amendments; and that Bill Pr. 3, Lamont Health Care Centre Act, proceed with amendments. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the recommended amendments to bills Pr. 2 and Pr. 3. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Speaker: Opposed, please say no. The report is carried.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of reports to table today, the first one being that of the Alberta Institute of Agrologists annual report. The appropriate number of copies are here with me.

The other one, Mr. Speaker, is the 2009 ASET, Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta, annual report, with the appropriate number of copies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter I received from the Edmonton public school board regarding the ongoing school closures. This letter, among other things, indicates that the school board was willing to pay at least \$580,000 to hire a consultant to conduct the sector reviews and organize the closures.

The second tabling I have is information provided to me by the Alberta Society for Pension Reform. Again I would urge all hon. members to have a look through that if they could, please.

The third tabling I have is a letter that I received from a constituent, Mr. Marc Ranson, regarding Alberta Hospital Edmonton. It's recognized as a world-class facility, and Mr. Ranson certainly hopes that that continues.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings today. First of all, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Eastern irrigation district to Alberta Environment concerning its licence amendment application. The letter shows the purposes the irrigation district would like added to its licence include municipal, commercial, and industrial water uses. This document relates to the questions asked earlier today by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 78 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which has gathered signed postcards from approximately 2,500 Albertans.

Thank you.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

13. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the following change to

- (a) the Standing Committee on Community Services be approved: that Mr. Allred replace Mr. Johnson;
- (b) the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services be approved: that Mr. Johnson replace Mr. Griffiths;
- (c) the Standing Committee on the Economy be approved: that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. Allred.

Mr. Hancock: A brief explanation, Mr. Speaker. This supports the appointment of the Member for Battle River-Wainwright as a parliamentary assistant for finance and, thus, the desire to put him on the Standing Committee for Economy and the other resulting changes. I would ask for the support of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move an amendment to Government Motion 13. There are copies of the amendment at the table. I move that the motion be amended:

- A. By striking out part (c) and substituting the following:
 - (c) the Standing Committee on the Economy be approved: that Mr. Chase replace Mr. Taylor as deputy chair and as a member of the committee, that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. Allred;
- B. By adding the following after part (c):
 - (d) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Ms Pastoor replace Mr. Taylor;
 - (e) the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing be approved: that Ms Blakeman replace Mr. Taylor.

The Speaker: Just a second, hon. member.
Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the changes in some of our caucus duties and in some of our caucus membership I'm taking advantage of the government motion before us to put those changes through.

I also see on the Order Paper that we now anticipate having Government Motion 14 moved soon, which is anticipating the adjournment of the government business over the summer. Therefore, I'd like to make sure that I can offer some certainty to my caucus members as to what duties they will be expected to be performing and on what committees over our summer break. So I would ask the co-operation of the House in approving the changes that my caucus has put forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in speaking to the amendment, obviously, these changes are brought forward subsequent to the original motion having been put on the Order Paper and thus come forward as an amendment. I don't have any problem supporting this amendment.

I would have to say that I have not heard from the Member for Calgary-Currie with respect to any particular desire with respect to committee assignments in the House. We'll obviously want to accommodate him, should he come forward, in terms of some committee assignment. I would understand the Official Opposition wanting particularly to make a change with respect to the deputy chair position on a committee, et cetera. So recognizing that there will probably need to be additional changes, I would certainly support these on an interim basis.

The Speaker: Look, some might argue that it is inappropriate for the chair to raise some questions with respect to this, but the chair is going to. The chair has to protect the integrity of hon. private members. Where is there an appointment, then, for the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on any of the committees? If I understand, this session may be rising shortly. I don't know that for sure. Notice has to basically be given. If this Assembly rises tomorrow, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is ignored until the fall. There's something in my body that says that this is not right.

Now, I don't want to get involved – I'm sorry – but I've got to get involved to protect the integrity of private members in this Assembly. I can understand that changes are there, and I can understand the desire in certain caucuses to do certain things, but there's always been a tradition in here that every hon. member must be able to

participate in at least one, perhaps two committees. If the Member for Calgary-Currie is not protected here, and there's no opportunity to deal with him until the fall, there is something wrong with that in my humble opinion. I'm sorry. I'll apologize for it. I'll even resign my position for having said it if the hon. members think that the Speaker has gone too far. But there must be a protection for the integrity of hon members.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments. I had some very similar concerns. This motion was coming forward today, and the amendments came forward at the last moment. I would be happy if you would entertain a motion to adjourn, allowing this to go over for another day. Then the Member for Calgary-Currie could participate as he has not to date. I mean, the events have just happened quickly, and obviously people are moving to make changes quickly in anticipation of assignments over the summer. I'm certainly conscious of that and would be happy to move, if you would entertain it, or to have someone else move to adjourn debate on this at this point, and we can bring it back tomorrow with perhaps another amendment.

Ms Blakeman: I'm happy to support that, Mr. Speaker. I can't speak for the Member for Calgary-Currie any longer. He's not a member of my caucus. I certainly did not want to exert power over him and make a choice as to what committee he might choose to sit on, but I do have to move forward and look after my own caucus colleagues, and that's what I've done. If the member needs time to consult with the Speaker and with the Government House Leader to look after his own interests, frankly, that's beyond my responsibility and beyond my power to influence. I need to work with my own caucus colleagues. I'm happy to wait.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Adjournment of Spring Session

14. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the spring sitting of the Assembly stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps we can anticipate more success with this motion.

This is one of those perfunctory motions, which often were moved at the very beginning of a session, to set up the process for ending a session. I'm not sure I understand even the need for it anymore, but I'm told that there is a need for it. I'd ask the House to support it so that when we actually do finish the business of the House, we can adjourn until the fall session.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

FOIP Act Review

15. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that

- (1) The Standing Committee on Health be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review of the Freedom of

Information and Protection of Privacy Act as provided for in section 97 of the act;

- (2) The committee must commence its review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act no later than July 1, 2010, and must submit its report to the Assembly within one year of commencing its review, including any amendments recommended by the committee;
- (3) No additional remuneration shall be provided to the members of the committee for the purpose of this review.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appear to be on a roll. As the motion indicates, there is a statutory review called for by a special committee of the Legislature. We have now in place policy field committees of the Legislature. In looking at those policy field committees, the Health one appears to be an appropriate one to deal with it because of their interaction between the FOIP Act and the Health Information Act and for other reasons. The structure is in place to do this sort of work and, therefore, rather than striking yet another committee, to ask the Health Committee to take on this task seemed to be an appropriate direction.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion.

Ms Blakeman: I certainly understand the need to strike the review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That is a requirement under section 97 of that act, that a comprehensive review be in place and commenced by July 1, 2010, and then its report be submitted within one year to the Assembly. I am less settled in my mind that using the policy field committee, now known as the Standing Committee on Health, is the appropriate vehicle for this. Generally, what we've had when the FOIP Act has been reviewed in the past is that an additional committee has been struck with representation from all of the parties.

3:00

I'm aware that this Standing Committee on Health, in fact, has not been called for any meetings in I think over a year, so its agenda is fairly empty, and it can accommodate the request to take on the review. I have some concerns about whether all members would be able to be notified and that there would be the wider knowledge of the calling of the committee. I'm aware that there have been some adjustments on the secure websites for the various members who are assigned to these policy field committees and that there was an agreement that all members could get access to a sort of general committee, but I think there are still some restrictions about whether members who are not assigned to the committee can get access to information that's to be distributed and agendas and such.

Also, I'm not as confident that the choice of putting this review into the Committee on Health is the appropriate place for the review to happen. The review itself must happen and should happen and is very important to happen as freedom of information and protection of privacy is one of the most critical services that the government offers to citizens, the opposition, and the media in this day and age. I think a number of people would argue that there need to be some changes and recommendations made to that act. I'm just not entirely comfortable with it going to the Standing Committee on Health. Maybe others can help allay my concerns around that, but I wanted to put that on the record.

I understand the need for clause (3), which is about no additional remuneration, which makes sense if it's going to a committee that is currently already staffed by members and that their remuneration is accounted for. I just think that we may have other members who are interested in participating in this particular review, and I'm most concerned not that they be paid but that they get free and open access to the committee. Any member can attend a committee, and

they have a voice but not a vote. I just have some concerns that this is not as open as I was hoping for.

Thank you for the opportunity to put those remarks on the record.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate. What I find somewhat ironic is the fact that we're going to send to the committee the idea of personal information, yet as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, some of our own MLA access to standing policy committee information is somewhat limited or potentially compromised. That's the first issue that I want to echo that the hon. member brought forward.

As for the selection of the Standing Policy Committee on Health I, too, would appreciate some more justification or explanation as to the choice of this particular committee. I agree with the hon. Government House Leader and with my own House leader that, obviously, this has to take place. FOIP is extremely important both for the protection of individuals' information and also for the governance of this province because information is absolutely essential in making decisions.

I am not quite sure, though, as I say, about why the Health Committee. For example, my experience of being a diligent member of the Committee on Community Services has indicated that while we work hard and we collaborate and do good work on behalf of the citizens of this province, it seems to me that that is a committee that could potentially also shoulder that duty. So I look forward to the hon. Government House Leader indicating his preference, based on the amount of duty that committee members have on the four standing policy committees, on why he believes this is the best fit for the FOIP review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's appropriate, perhaps, for you as chair to shed some light on the differences between standing policy committees and select special committees. Contrary to what both of the members from the Liberal opposition have argued, in a standing policy committee, actually, the information that is available to members of that committee is available to any member of this Legislature. Simply show up at the meeting and sit at the table and put your time in, and you will receive any and all information that is available to any member of the committee. The only exception is that you don't get to vote if you're not a member sitting on that committee. But members of this particular caucus, being the Liberal caucus, will be on that committee.

If we were to appoint a select special committee, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that only members of that select special committee would have access to any information that is made available to the committee. Nonmembers of that committee would not be able to sit in on their meetings and definitely, obviously, would not have a vote either.

They're arguing for actually less access to information than they have right now. All you need to do is simply attend the meetings, and you'll have access to any and all information you want. If you get a select special committee, you're neither attending the meetings, nor are you getting any access to information. Mr. Speaker, I guess they have a little confused understanding of the two committees.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to get in on this

discussion. I previously served as a member of the Select Special Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Review Committee, and I would submit first of all that the selection of the Standing Committee on Health as a substitute for this committee is a mistake. The work of that committee was fairly intense, and it had regular meetings for a fairly extended period of time. It was quite a bit of work, and it required people to really focus. We heard from different organizations and individuals, and there was, I think, a considerable amount of effort that went into that process.

The act calls for the creation of a select special committee. I question the appropriateness of or even whether or not, Mr. Speaker, it's in order to place a standing policy committee in the position of what's called for for this review committee under the legislation, so I am going to oppose this. I think that, you know, the Government House Leader has a responsibility to work with other House leaders and with the Speaker to canvass the caucuses and make sure that an appropriate composition is established for a select special committee. I don't know what the Health Committee has done to annoy the Government House Leader that he's going to make them do this, but it's important work. It's stand-alone work. What the Government House Leader is suggesting, in my view, is inappropriate.

The Speaker: Others?

Then the Government House Leader to close the debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of words. I think that any committee we establish is going to have a limited number of members of the House on it. This particular committee has two representatives of the Official Opposition, one representative of the third party on it. As I indicated in my opening remarks, there is a symbiotic relationship between the Health Information Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. There are a number of good reasons to do it in this format.

All members of the House now, as a result of some discussions that we had prior to one of the previous amendments to the standing orders – there was an agreement that I don't think was put in the standing orders but has certainly been put into practice – get notice of committee meetings. I know I get notice of all the committee meetings, and I assume everybody else gets that same notice and has access to the information at the committee meetings. It is actually broader access than we would have in a normal select special committee process. We don't get notices of the select special committee meetings, nor are we invited to participate in select special committees or attend select special committees normally.

This is, in fact, a good forum to do this. I appreciate the remarks from the leader of the third party, but this is a better way, in my view, than adding a number of members to yet another committee. We've got a structure. We've got a process. We've got a research process. We've got a methodology. It will work well. So I would commend it to the House to support this motion.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

3:10

Auditor General Appointment

16. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Auditor General Search Committee and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Merwan N. Saher be appointed Auditor General for the province of Alberta for a six-year term.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Select

Special Auditor General Search Committee reported to the House. It's now my privilege to move the motion.

The Speaker: This motion is debatable if anybody wishes to. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to applaud the committee's choice of Merwan N. Saher for our new Auditor General. Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that Mr. Saher will receive more support from the government in conducting his business.

The week prior to our two-week break for Easter saw us having received pamphlets or a paper, I guess it would be, from the Speaker sort of pointing out that the Auditor General had potentially, according to the paper's author, overstepped his bounds and that he had gone beyond the simple mathematical accounting into potential policy development areas. I personally don't share that concern, and I am hoping that the government will honour Mr. Saher with the support that I have seen eroding for our previous Auditor General, who was forced, unfortunately, by a cutting of funding to either delay or completely avoid certain areas that he had wished to investigate. I'm looking forward to tomorrow's final release from the Auditor General, whom I have great respect for, and of course I wish him well in his retirement.

I'm hoping that in terms of the professed transparency and accountability and the important role of the Auditor General and as a member of Public Accounts, every form of support, including funding, will be provided by this government to assist Mr. Saher and the members of his department in successfully continuing the auditing role that we have grown accustomed to with our past Auditor General, Fred Dunn.

I have had the opportunity to wish Fred a successful and enjoyable retirement, but I would like to take one more opportunity to applaud the work that Mr. Dunn has done on behalf of all Albertans and at the same time wish Mr. Merwan Saher all the best with the hope that all parties, including the government, will support his efforts to hold the government to account on behalf of Alberta citizens.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to the appointment of Merwan Saher in a positive manner. As a member of the audit committee we have the privilege of working with the Auditor General's office as they establish and develop their business go-forward plans. I don't believe that many understand the very complex nature of them developing and coming forward with where they believe their best efforts are and how closely they work with the office of the internal auditors.

It was a privilege to work with Mr. Dunn. I can say, and I think Mr. Dunn would agree, that we didn't always have to agree on issues. The important thing was that he had complete, unfettered access to government books and had the opportunity to fulfill the mandate of his position in a very respectful way.

I can tell you from working with Mr. Saher on the audit committee that he has handled himself very graciously, respectfully, and competently. I think the citizens of Alberta will be well served by him. I look forward for as long as I'm in the capacity of President of the Treasury Board to continuing to maintain a very positive and productive relationship with the office of the Auditor General. I want to thank the committee members for their support of this gentleman.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

[Government Motion 16 carried]

The Speaker: Just as an addendum to this decision, Mr. Saher will now become an officer of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. He will be responsible to this Assembly via the Speaker, and it will be the Speaker who will sign his contract.

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West it's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act.

This bill will establish a new charitable foundation for Lethbridge and southwestern Alberta. It is in fact modelled upon the Calgary Foundation legislation, which our Legislature previously passed as a private bill. I am in full support of it, and I certainly would encourage all of the other members in the Chamber to support this legislation. It is a facilitating piece of legislation which will enable Lethbridge and southwestern Alberta to encourage donors to participate in many, many charitable causes and good works in that part of the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would rise in support of Bill Pr. 1. What it does, I think, is reflect what's happening in our province, that our cities are growing and that we are incorporating the area around us. This would enable that exact thing to happen so that the dollars can be collected for this very, very successful community-oriented foundation. The money has gone to very many worthy causes in Lethbridge and certainly in southern Alberta. For those reasons I would support this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking in support of Bill Pr. 1, I just want to have on the record that this government has been down-loading a tremendous amount of their responsibilities onto nonprofit organizations and in this case municipalities to do the charitable service work that is absolutely necessary.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I would like to see the type of support beyond just the words and the legislation indicated in Bill Pr. 1 in terms of active funding support for organizations and municipalities. We've had a situation whereby the former agreement with municipalities in terms of capital funding has been delayed and placed over a longer time period. Therefore, the cities' and the municipalities' ability to deliver program services has been basically delayed as well.

We've also seen through cuts, for example to PDD, local nonprofit organizations scrambling to provide service for an ever-growing number of individuals. While I understand the intention and support the intention of Bill Pr. 1, it's extremely important that the government's role of supporting especially those most vulnerable be recognized and that an expectation that municipalities or local communities pick up to a larger extent their efforts in supporting

their local citizenry be recognized and shared as a government responsibility.

3:20

So thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak. The balance between government support and subsidies and local initiatives and recognizing the strength of those local initiatives has to be taken into account or we're going to burn out our volunteers, our nonprofits, and the people who do this good work that to a large degree Bill Pr. 1 is destined to support.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to close the debate.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity always manages to find the dark cloud in every silver lining.

This bill is a good-news story. It reflects a community that has already raised \$13 million under their existing act in a community foundation. They distribute over \$400,000 every year to good purposes. This is not meant to replace government services. This is the charitable works of people that are contributing willingly their own money, companies and individuals in that part of the province. It's a good-news story.

They want to modernize their legislation. They want to provide more flexibility to encourage private donors to give to these charitable purposes, and for that purpose they've set up a foundation which enables them to have the flexibility so that a donor doesn't have to go out and set up their own charity in order to provide for a specific purpose which they might wish to donate money to.

This is a very, very good news story, Mr. Speaker, and I would urge all members to support it.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2

Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010, and urge all members of the Assembly to support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several weeks ago, after the 2010 Olympics came to a close, I think that all of us in this Assembly were extremely excited over the result of our team, so I absolutely would support this, which I believe will help our Canadian athletes in the future.

I did, actually, want to give some remarks on what I think this will do for our athletes and kind of bring it back to the 2010 Olympic Games. I wanted to do this in the House after the ministerial statement on the issue but was denied unanimous consent and thought I would put it into the record at this time as it is relevant to the question at hand, and it is a very positive news story.

Like most Canadians I found myself enraptured by the amazing spectacle that was the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games. I can honestly say that, personally, I have never been so proud to be Canadian. From watching Alex Bilodeau win our nation's first gold

medal at home to witnessing the already iconic overtime win of Sidney Crosby to secure a world-record 14th gold at a Winter Olympics, I was amazed by how many of our athletes performed under pressure and how Canadians from coast to coast rallied behind them and behind our country.

I was worried at first, like many of you, when the games opened with the tragic death of a Georgian athlete, malfunctioning equipment at the opening ceremonies, and some early athletic disappointments. Cynics used these early challenges as an opportunity to criticize our Own the Podium program as proof that Canada was too cocky and prideful and was receiving its just deserts. Some international media even went so far as to say that Canada's games were turning into an utter failure.

However, as it is with most things in life, it's not whether we face adversity that determines who we are; it is how we respond to it that matters. Canadians responded. Our athletes performed at levels unequalled by any country at any Winter Olympics ever. Our people ignored the cynicism, volunteered, cheered, e-mailed and voiced support, took to the airwaves to promote, and waved the flag and sang the anthem with enamoured pride.

Some athletes didn't win gold but did our country just as proud as if they had. Who could have been more proud of Airdrie's own Mellisa Hollingsworth, who, in risking it all for a golden finish, lost control of her sled and a medal? She could have safely held back and secured a silver or a bronze, but that wasn't good enough for her. She taught us that it is better to have done all we can to achieve our potential rather than to hold back and settle for something less. From my viewpoint Mellisa's tearful and humble apology to her fellow Canadians was one of the turning points of the games. Her words reminded us that we, athletes and countrymen alike, were in this together, and nothing short of our best would be enough or would do.

And their best was exactly what our athletes gave. The final week of the Olympics was a stunning display of Canadian accomplishment, from the inspired and emotional performance of Joannie Rochette skating so beautifully for her mother, who had just passed on hours previous to her competition, to the fortitude of our men's hockey team, who managed to fulfill the hopes of an entire nation. Canadians piled up victory after victory on our way to a golden world record.

It is often said that it is not how you start in life but how you finish that matters. Maybe there is a lesson in that for our country. Our history has been a mix of good and bad, disappointment and accomplishment. We've seen petty differences divide us and great causes unite us. But whatever our history – and it is useful to be mindful of it – it is just that, history. What matters now is what we become. Will our nation squabble or will it build? Will we settle for mediocrity, or will we devote ourselves to setting an example of excellence for all the world to follow? If Vancouver 2010 is any indication, I think I know the answer. Thank you, Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to speak on this Bill Pr. 2, which will allow for the Canada Olympic Park property tax exemption. I would like to thank the hon. colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere for regaling us with a little bit of a past-performance glimpse at how well our nation did at the last Olympic Games. I, too, will echo his sentiments that the Olympics and athletics in general bring our nation together, our communities together, make not only children and adults better, but I think they provide us with an opportunity to celebrate as a nation.

Sports also provide young, old, and middle-aged people with

opportunities for healthy exercise. The Olympic Games inspire people to get off the couch and get active and get busy in their communities. I think that is one of the things that will be accomplished by extending the tax exemption amendment to Canada Olympic Park. Hopefully, these athletes will continue to train there, strive there, thrive there, become medalists through their training there, and continue to inspire a nation to better itself and to become physically fit and to look at the possibilities.

I'm proud to speak in favour of this bill, and I'd like to thank the sponsor from Calgary-Bow for bringing this bill forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill had indicated my capacity for finding I believe it was a dark lining in a silver cloud. I want to sort of continue in that designation that I've been given but provide a little bit of background. When I was a young boy growing up in Saskatoon, there was a radio show called *Beefs and Bouquets*. I would like to hand out some beef and bouquets associated with Bill Pr. 2, the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010.

3:30

First off, the bouquet. I would like to add a bouquet to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow for putting her name to this bill. I'd like to offer a much larger bouquet to the government in general for its renewed support for the Olympic program. Six years ago there was concern about the maintenance of the Olympic facility. It seemed that the federal government in the last number of years, whether Conservative or Liberal, was not providing the funding for sustaining and maintaining Calgary's 1988 Olympic legacy. I want to provide a bouquet to this government for continuing to provide that support of funding. That was the bouquet.

The beef. The beef, Mr. Speaker, is the way the spending was done towards our Olympic promotion. I wouldn't be at all surprised if one of the several thousand dollars' worth of iPods that were given out on our luxury train contained pictures of the grizzly. Now, what I find ironic is that the grizzly, which is a national object of strength and is found in dwindling numbers in Alberta, would not receive the equivalent funding that the distribution of iPods received as part of an Olympic event.

So the beef and the bouquet of Pr. 2.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, maybe I could draw to your attention that we are talking about property tax exemptions for the Olympic Park. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: The area where we are talking about this property exemption amendment is for Canada's Olympic Park. Therefore, let me continue with why I support Bill Pr. 2, Canada Olympic Park Tax Exemption Amendment Act.

As the Liberal critic for Tourism, Parks and – yes – Recreation it is extremely important that we offer every opportunity for the Olympic Park property to flourish, and part of that flourishing is not being subject to taxing.

However, Mr. Speaker, as with the bouquet and the beef, new plans are being made, to which I hope to offer a bouquet, within this Olympic Park property, and that's the idea of a film studio. Now, here's a big bouquet to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, who is, I gather, supporting and cheerleading and potentially the key person putting this potential into reality. I'm glad he was listening to our hon. House leader, the Member for Edmonton-

Centre, our representative for Culture and Community Spirit, because we need to support the film industry. However, Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that there is no suggestion under Bill Pr. 2, the Canada Olympic Park Tax Exemption Amendment Act, that a profit-making film studio, as opposed to a ski jump or the new hockey rinks that are coming up or the expansion of the gymnastic facilities at Olympic Park, would be subject to that same tax exemption. We want to promote the film industry, but commercial properties need to be taxed in a commercial fashion.

I indicate that reservation. I hope it's completely unfounded. Mind you, I would find it hard to consider that I would bring something that was irrelevant, unfounded, or not directly related to the discussion at hand. But I put that on the record, Mr. Speaker, because while celebrating our Olympic legacy and promoting our parks, including the wonderful oval that is located in Calgary-Varsity, we must be true to our word. Nonrecreational, non sports-related activities should not be exempted, even if they are located within this property designation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for understanding the relevance of the points I have made with regard to supporting Bill Pr. 2.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand up in support of Bill Pr. 2, the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010. I think that there are a few important things to realize. Again, there are times when we step forward and move forward and it's positive, and other times we're taking steps back. This is a bill that's moving forward.

Why I say that is because competition really is important. Canada has been at a disadvantage in the past because of not having the access to money and the facilities that the athletes have needed in order to compete in the Olympics. We have done that and have stepped up and have given them some pretty good facilities and whatnot but often at the taxpayers' expense. It's a sad situation when we have governments that continue to think that we should tax anything that moves, anything that breathes, anything that exists and be able to hold it back. We're kind of digressing that way in Alberta here where we continue to increase taxes – whether it's municipal, provincial, or federal or user fees – and they are not being used in the best way possible. What's important about this is that this is a tax exemption, which allows the cost to be controlled in a better way.

It's exciting that way to realize how well we were competitive at the Olympics. Now we need to put that competitiveness into the fact of being able to build facilities and having more and greater access for our athletes. But we need to continue looking at this and realize, you know: where do we go from here, and how do we ensure that there's more money that is going towards our athletes that represent us? Then the question is: well, should that be taxpayers' money, or should we create exemptions and opportunities for business and athletes to raise that money? It is important. So it's exciting to see that we're looking at some tax exemptions, we're looking at reducing taxes and not wanting to think that governments can try and capitalize or control all these facilities.

To me it's important that we look at this and the fact that we're looking at exemptions and say: where else can we increase some exemptions and charitable donations towards the athletes or to training facilities or to clubs that are wanting to further increase the access for Alberta athletes and Canadian athletes to continue to train? It's exciting that we're moving in this direction. I know it's just a clarification bill because there was some worry that some

capitalists might come in and take advantage of this tax exemption area. This bill definitely clears that up to ensure that it isn't going to happen. Like I say, I'm in favour of this and am looking forward that this will continue to help Alberta athletes compete in the world and that we'll go forward and be able to continue to show that we can be competitive not only in sports but in business as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up and support this bill. I think that as a Canadian I am no different from anyone else who probably, when the Olympics were first talked about a number of years ago, went: oh, yeah, whatever. I think one of the important things that happened, of course, was having the torch relay across the country, that got everyone really involved with this. As time went on and I realized that I wasn't going to go to the Olympics, there was an opportunity for people to watch the Olympics on the big screen at a movie theatre, so I bought what was called the passport and enjoyed, thoroughly enjoyed. In fact, at one point I had the entire theatre to myself, and the theatre manager brought me popcorn and coffee, so it was really quite nice.

3:40

I really am not digressing here. One of the things that did happen was the hockey game. The theatre was much fuller at that point. There were six little guys sitting about four rows in front of me. They could not contain themselves with the excitement that they got over watching the hockey game and screaming and yelling and carrying on. It was wonderful because of just the feeling inside that movie theatre: (a) it was Canadian; (b) of course, it was hockey. But it was also these little guys, that knew that they could grow up to be that hockey player that was on that big screen. It was interesting that at the end we all stood up and sang *O Canada* like everyone else had done across Canada. It was wonderful.

My point is that I think that in this country, where we have a huge obesity problem with our young kids, the more we can provide places for them to play sports – they don't all have to be Olympic athletes. That's not what it's about. What it's about is that people have a chance to join teams and to play different games. There are rec leagues that are highly competitive, but there are also leagues where people just come out to have a good time. What I think of often is the senior men's hockey. Today as I got one year older, I can appreciate that they don't have the same kind of bodychecking that they used to have when they were maybe 15. Nevertheless, they do play. We get our communities going as a community by being able to play sports.

I think one of the other things that is a very important distinction is the fact that the land would be exempt only if a nonprofit facility is on it. I think that's a very important distinction that is clearly put out in this bill.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this forward. I think it's a very important bill and one that for many decades to come will be felt by the citizens of this province for the good of all of us. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Is any other hon. member wishing to speak on Bill Pr. 2?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 3

Lamont Health Care Centre Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, the Lamont Health Care Centre Act.

The Lamont health care centre is a combined acute-care auxiliary hospital and nursing home facility located in Lamont, Alberta. It is operated by a board of management established as a corporate entity by a ministerial order under sections 4 and 5 of the Hospitals Act. The purpose of the bill is to allow for continued operation of the facilities subsequent to amendments under the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, which will remove the opportunity for the board to continue after that act is proclaimed in force. The enactment of Bill Pr. 3 will ensure that the corporation, under the name of the Lamont health care centre, will continue to operate the integrated facility in the same manner as the board of management has done so successfully since 1992.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill. I think everyone knows where I stand in terms of health care centres and, certainly, as people age, how much they need a place to be able to go to, even sometimes if it's just to be able to talk about a small problem. There is a nursing home here and also the acute-care hospital, so it can create that continuum for people who perhaps just need a little bit now. But even if they have moved into the nursing home part, they have access to that acute care that they may require off and on as they age and go towards the end of life.

One of the reasons that I think it's very important that this passes is because if it does not pass, there would be a need to resign all the contracts, rehire all the employees in order for the facility to be incorporated again, and I think that that would be very, very disruptive to a health centre that has been very successful. Mainly for that reason I think it's very important that we all understand how important it is to pass this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9

Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate March 23: Mr. Taylor]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Someone else is going to go.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, then.

Mr. Anderson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to speak in favour of Bill 9. I think that Bill 9 is a very important bill. It's a bill that the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater brought as a private member's bill last year, I think. It had apparently some work that needed to be done on it, and that's fine. That's, I think, a good indication of what the parliamentary process should be like, you know, that we have bills that are referred to committees, they're studied, they're debated, and if we have to kind of reset and make it a government bill and look at it again, I think that's perfectly legitimate. I would like to compliment the Member for Athabasca-Redwater on starting the process forward on this, and then we have this bill in front of us.

Our caucus has some disagreement on this bill. I'm going to be voting in favour of it, and I think there is going to be just one other that's going to be voting against it. I think we have 15 bills before the House, and I think on about one-third our caucus has a split vote. I think that comes from what I like to call the novel idea of having free votes in the Legislature. It's something that we need to examine because out of those 15 bills from the government side I've seen exactly not one of them stand up against them. It's kind of sad.

The content of this bill, speaking to Bill 9, is just definitely – I believe it's needed. It's needed for several reasons, really. You've got to have some controls, I believe, in place with regard to campaign finances for several reasons. First, you don't want any politician to be especially beholden to any corporation or individual.

3:50

We see this in the United States all the time. I mean, the special interests are so powerful there, and the reason they're so powerful is because, honestly, in order to run kind of a standard campaign in the House of Representatives, it takes close to \$500,000 for a competitive campaign down there every two years. So you can imagine how important it is, especially in these competitive districts, for these representatives. They have to have continued support from the same donors for years and years and years and years to make sure that they, you know, can be elected every time, they can be competitive down there. Obviously, there are very noble representatives down in the United States, as there are in democracies across this world, but I think there is a lot of influence peddling that goes on there because of the special interests.

We do see this with a lot of the pork problems that they have down in the United States with little projects and special exemptions and lobbies that affect the final outcome of the bill during the actual bill debate process. It's not to make the bill better generally. It's generally because in order to get a vote, a certain Senator or a certain House member will make a deal and say: well, I really need to satisfy this person or this lobby, so I need this in there, and then for that you get my vote.

Well, that's not, I don't think, the appropriate way a functioning democracy should work. Obviously, we should debate bills and policy based on their merits, based on statistical information, based on facts. Of course, those facts are often disputed. But, again, that's part of the debate, and I think that's healthy. By having campaign limits, I think you take out a lot of those donation limits, you take out a lot of that influence peddling that does go on in other democracies.

I singled out the United States and perhaps unfairly. This does happen in other democracies, obviously, where there are no rules to this effect. A lot of the new democracies out there don't have these rules, and there are a lot of problems that stem from that and a lot of corruption.

I think that, you know, having these types of limits is very, very important in any healthy democracy. We have these types of limits

provincially. We have them federally as well. We also just passed a bill that third parties have these limits as well during election periods. These are all examples of, I think, good legislation.

Constitutionally the province has jurisdiction over the municipalities to kind of provide a framework for municipalities. Obviously, the province has decided to give a good deal of autonomy, almost complete autonomy, to the municipalities to run themselves. I think that's a positive thing. However, I do think that there is a space where, when it comes to the overall framework of how municipalities are governed from an electoral point of view, it is important that the province exercise its authority and make sure that things are fair and that the people are being elected fairly, the process is fair for electing town and city councils, et cetera. That would include, in my view, election finance law for municipalities. I think that this is very important for that reason.

The other reason is this. Even if there is no corruption, even if people were to – say there was no limit on the amount of contribution, and let's say somebody donated a million dollars to a mayoral candidate for Edmonton or Calgary in the next municipal election. Even if that mayoral candidate went on to win and was a sitting mayor, even if that mayor didn't do anything at all based on that donation, I think the public would think that that mayor would be pulled into that special interest. It's kind of like we don't want to bring the administration of justice into disrepute. It's kind of the same. We don't want to bring our democracy – we don't even want the appearance of, you know, impropriety or the appearance of evil or not doing well or whatever. We want to stay as transparent and above board as possible so that people don't get cynical about the political system. They probably will get cynical about the system on other accounts, but hopefully not on this account.

I actually do think that if you asked the average Canadian about our political system with regard to campaign finance and special interests and lobbyists, I think if you compare the reaction – I have seen polls on this, but I don't have them with me, unfortunately – people do actually have a higher degree of confidence in the Canadian-Albertan system of actually putting caps on campaign contributions than the average person would in America, where virtually everyone down there when polled says that: yeah, special interests have an undesirable effect on the politics of the nation. I think, again, having this in there will actually strengthen the reputation of municipal politics, just as these election finance laws strengthen the reputation of provincial politics and federal politics.

Now, there is one difference. I'm glad to see that the Member for Athabasca-Redwater chose to go down this path. I don't think it's wise to make a spending cap on political campaigns. I think there's a fundamental difference between capping what you can spend on a campaign and capping what can be donated to a campaign by any one individual, and I think that's a very important distinction. If somebody can raise a huge amount of money from many, many donors because they have very popular policy and people want to get behind that policy on a massive scale by sending, you know, their \$100 or \$50 or \$500 cheques, that's a good amount of money, but it's not enough, I don't think, to sway a politician, incorrectly anyway. I would say that having that limitation is a good thing to do. But having that ability to get behind something with the kind of grassroots support in that way I think is a good thing.

I think that if someone can raise a million dollars or \$2 million or \$5 million because, you know, 10 per cent of the electorate donates \$50 to them because they think it's such a great idea – you know what? – I think that's totally above board. I think they should be able to spend that on advertising their campaign. I think that's wise because instead of forcing the municipal politicians to try to appease four or five developers or four or five people of a certain group,

they're going to try to have a more broad mass appeal to many different people and many different interest groups, et cetera. I do think that it's an important distinction to make. Again, I really do like the provisions of the bill in that respect.

I do know that there were some concerns expressed by the AUMA and the AAMD and C on this bill, in particular the predecessor to this bill, and I do feel that they have some warranted concerns. Perhaps the House could have consulted a little bit more broadly at the front end with this and maybe alleviated some of their concerns. But I will say this, that last year when the bill was first brought forward kind of as a first draft as a private member's bill, the push-back was quite substantial, and I've noticed that with the second version of this bill, Bill 9, the push-back has not been nearly so acute. I mean, there are some people that kind of have their noses out of joint. You know: why don't you trust us to govern ourselves? That type of thing. Fair comment.

At the end of the day I think for the reasons expressed that it's a good bill, that the government did go through the proper consultation process at the end of the day, and that we should pass this bill into law.

With that, I would again congratulate the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. Those are my comments.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for filling in when I didn't have my crib sheet in front of me. He did a very excellent job, and I was able to glean a little bit from what he said as well. I, too, would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, who brought forward this bill and worked through this bill and has seemed to come up with a fairly decent solution to what we would like to see at municipal elections, which is more fair, more thoughtful, more transparent local elections.

I think this bill goes a long way to ensuring that. It eliminates almost what I call the old Wild West days, I guess, of municipal elections which had very little accountability in terms of how much people could donate to a campaign, how much companies could, how much individuals could, how much developers could, how much architecture firms could. Whatever the company or the individual who had an interest in municipal politics wanted to give to a certain candidate, well, it seemed like the sky was the limit.

4:00

I'm not saying that there was anything untoward being done or whether or not special deals were made. That's not for me to say, and I would hope that none of that happened. But we must remember the Caesar's wife rule, that we here in politics have to follow. We can't only be pure; we must be seen to be pure. That means that it doesn't matter whether we say that no one is buying influence with us, that none of our electoral donors get extra sway with us. If we don't limit the amounts, if we don't publish these amounts, if we don't have some way of limiting them, people just don't believe you. They believe that you are in the pockets of the big-money people, and regardless of what you do or what you say or how you govern or whatever it is, people have the perception that politicians are in the pockets of people with money.

This bill tries to stem people's minds from racing to that conclusion, and I think that's a good thing. I think that for far too long it has been viewed that a way for people to have influence with politicians was to donate large levels of money. I think we'd be naive in here to suggest that that hasn't happened from time to time

in Canada, the United States, or otherwise, maybe even here in Alberta, but this act at least goes towards limiting that occurrence happening in the local election authority.

Like I said, these limits seem fair and reasonable. If people want to contribute to a campaign they can, up to \$5,000. It seems like a fairly reasonable level that wouldn't tempt a politician from doing the right thing. It opens up an individual who is running a campaign to seek a variety of donors and people who would back his or her campaign. It really works on a good basis of fairness.

I think it also allows for an incumbent not to have too great of an advantage. Many times in civic politics we've heard of some campaigns having a large head start on people who want to get involved in the political process. I believe this will go a long way to solving this difference and to narrowing the gap between people who wish to challenge an incumbent for a position. I think that's a good thing. Encouraging people to run in the democratic process is what legislation should be all about. Again, I applaud the Member for Athabasca-Redwater. I believe this is a good step.

There's one thing we could have also just possibly looked at. I've talked to some aldermen in both cities who thought this might be a good idea. It's that we could at some time possibly just adopt almost the provincial rules, where we deem the local municipalities in their local elections in a similar fashion to the way we do provincial elections in that we have a rule that possibly would provide a tax writeoff for those individuals who are donating to political campaigns, with limits on a yearly basis. That may be something for us to explore in the future.

We already have a system in place, but I think that with municipal governments becoming more and more important in the structure of the way Canada and Alberta are evolving — more people are living in our municipalities; it's the local government that touches their lives more so than us up here in Edmonton — it may be something to look at in the future. I leave that for us to ruminate on and to think about for the future.

I thank you for allowing me time to speak on this. Again, it's a good bill. It's a good start.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments.

Seeing none, then the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to be brief in speaking to this bill. I think it is a good bill, but there's one part that does disturb me, and I will speak about that at the end. What this bill does is it clarifies that volunteer services where the volunteer receives no compensation either directly or indirectly is not deemed a contribution for purposes of disclosure, which to me reads in a very backward sort of way because I think that the minute you've paid a volunteer, you've defeated the word, the definition of volunteer. Volunteers aren't paid. It's there, and it does recognize what a volunteer really is.

The other thing is that it clarifies that a candidate whose campaign is self-funded has a funding cap of \$10,000, is not required to open a bank account, file a disclosure statement unless he or she had a surplus from a previous election, which I think is all very fair.

One of the other things is that any person, corporation, trade union, employee organization, et cetera, can donate \$5,000 before it's actually having to be recorded. Now, these amounts sound large, but really for any of us and all of us in this House who have had to pay advertising bills when we are having campaigns even at the municipal level, they're horrendous. Just even trying to get your

name out there, just trying to get a banner on a newspaper is very, very expensive, and I'm not talking about radio and television. I think that these numbers are very fair in terms of starting out without having to be able to disclose them.

It amends the timelines requiring candidates' surplus trust funds to be held by the municipality. I think that's fair as well. I think there's also sort of a good suggestion in here that if there's money left over and you're not running again, you can donate it to a charity or back to the municipality. I would suspect that probably the charities would have a better crack at it than perhaps the municipalities.

One of the things that really troubles me on this — I know that it's been reviewed, and I know that it's been talked about at the municipal level, but I don't think it's been gone into in enough depth — is the fact that it clarifies residency rules in that a person may be a resident of only one place at a time for the purpose of voting. I certainly know that there are many, many people in this province that have lake-front property — in fact, it may just be a block off the lake-front — where their residential tax is probably higher than their house taxes in whichever city they live. I'm not sure how we get around this business of voting twice, but I really believe that if you're a taxpayer in a municipality or in a jurisdiction, you should be allowed to vote in that municipality. You're a taxpayer. You should have a say in how your dollars are going to be spent where you are a resident.

I would like to suggest that that one clause be looked at again. I would just leave it out there for a future date. I certainly recall as a younger person in Manitoba that my parents were allowed to vote in both places because we did have lake-front property, which was outside of Winnipeg.

I would just like to see, I think, this conversation resurrected at the municipal level. I guess I would like it reversed. I would hope that the conversation around this would in fact have that happen. I'll leave that out there.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a very timely bill and would support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, anyone under 29(2)(a)?

Then the chair shall recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

4:10

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak about Bill 9, but I'm not in favour of this bill, with all respect to the good Member for Athabasca-Redwater. I sometimes feel like government just does things to do things, to try and look busy.

I guess what I'm going to start off with as the first thing is that jurisdictionally it's called bureaucratic growth. They think that they need to be busy, so they start to do things, and it's not productive, and again we start meddling in areas that we don't need to be meddling in. To the President of the Treasury Board: you might have a better understanding of that.

The first thing that definitely came up a lot last year with Bill 203 was the fact that there wasn't any government-to-government consultation, and we've heard a lot about that. What Bill 9 was to do was address that. They went out and spoke with various stakeholders to see what the problems were. It's just interesting to me, what I want to call some of the double standards or the idea that we need to have one shoe fit all feet, and it just doesn't work.

The first thing, I guess, that I'd like to address on this bill is the example that we're going to have a \$5,000 limit. If you look at the different municipalities, whether it's a little area that has, you know,

75 people in a small village that are voting, 300 people, or Calgary or Edmonton, approaching a million or 600,000 or 700,000 people, it's a very different campaign for someone who has to run that. If you look at someone who is trying to put out three mailers to everybody in Calgary, what's the actual cost of doing that? It's immense compared to someone who's running in a little community with 300 people, yet we're going to apply the same campaign limits.

The part that concerns me the most, I guess, is: why is it that we as MLAs and our parties are allowed a \$15,000 contribution, yet here we're saying to another jurisdiction, that we're not running in, that we're going to limit you to \$5,000? I don't find it appropriate in this bill for us to impose a limit saying that this is the amount that should go there or the idea that at a certain amount, \$5,000, none of us are subject to bribery and that we wouldn't do anything for that but that at \$15,000 or at \$25,000 we would. It seems like what they're implying is that, you know, while this is the limit — they only want you to receive this much — it's above board, but if it's over that, it's not.

One of the policies that we have — and I think it's a very good one — and what's important in an election is the transparency and the having to record and make that public. That's the balance and check that's in there. If an individual wants to spend an enormous amount of money because they've been blessed and have that and they want to run for public office, I think that should be, you know, something that should be considered. Again, I'm not sure — and I'm sure someone will clarify this for me — but I believe that if, in fact, someone decides to run and they've got a little bit of a campaign war chest and they don't use it all, the provisions are such that if they're still thinking about running, they can keep that.

But I'm a little bit concerned. The real problem with that, though, is if someone wants to support someone to run in a municipal jurisdiction and they get a campaign fund — and some of them have some substantial ones — which other people look at and say, "Well, we can't go up against this individual; look at how much they have." I've certainly run a few campaigns. If you look at your competitor's bank account, you might think: "Holy smoke. Can we accomplish this? Can we go up against them?" I say, "Absolutely you can." Why limit your competitor because of what you have? That's part of the freedom of opportunity and for people to try.

The concern that I have is that if there is a campaign fund, we at the provincial level, most of us, are members of a party, so people can contribute to that party \$15,000. I know that they say: Oh, no; you can only contribute a thousand dollars to an individual. That's not true. You contribute to your party, and it gets funneled over to your campaign. If someone wants to donate \$15,000, it's very doable because we have the legal process of doing that, and it's recorded, you know, as a donation to the provincial party. But we have no mechanism here where we, in fact, can pass that fund, which has been created in that district, on to the next person who runs, and there it is by political party. Who's to say that if someone is running and they say, "You know, I want to step down" and if someone else of that same political philosophy wants to run, they can't acquire that fund and continue on? There is no contingency to pass it on to another person.

I don't see the reason or the purpose in prohibiting that because in political parties, which are above municipal government, we have that ability. Here is another limitation that doesn't allow a group of individuals that maybe are looking to change the political landscape in a community to create a fund where they can give it to different individuals and support them. So it's another what I consider flaw in the bill, where we're being short sighted.

I guess that when we were debating private member's Bill 202 about getting it right and how important it is — well, it's kind of

funny that here, on a subject that's not nearly as important, we could put out a private member's bill and then the government's bill the next year and not seem to be too concerned about getting it right, that if we've got to go at it three or four times, that's okay. But in here the purpose of legislation to me is to protect our rights and to protect those who can't protect themselves. We're falling short, I feel, in this province when it comes to our children and pedophiles and pornographic areas.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Hinman: Very much relevant, although that's the problem, that guys don't see it. That's why I have to keep speaking on it. You don't understand the relevance of passing bills even if they don't get it right. The reason why we're doing Bill 9 is because you didn't get it right with Bill 203, and the relevance will never be understood by you. That's why Albertans are going to get rid of you, because you've lost your connection with Albertans. Anyways, that's another problem.

It's interesting. You know, one politician that I have a lot of respect for, that was a true statesman that put his country before himself, ran six times before he got elected, if my memory serves me right. It's important, like I say, for people to build up those war chests so that they have access to it. That man's name was Abraham Lincoln. Ran many, many times before he finally got elected. Most people will say: well, if you've lost once or twice, that's political death.

Mr. Hehr: I think he might have lost 28 times.

Mr. Hinman: I didn't know it was that many. Churchill was another one who lost several times.

Anyways, we need to look at some of this. We kind of addressed volunteer time, yet some of the pay that this government pays to its political connections – this includes clarification on volunteer time, that it doesn't need to be accounted for as a political donation. A company with all its subsidiaries has a total \$5,000 contribution limit, he said. Again, I look at that. Well, it's the rate that you pay some of your bureaucrats. I mean, if they were to walk into an office and do a little bit of work and help on a campaign, that could be a \$10,000 bill. Should they be banned because of what they get paid working for the government? If they're working on someone's campaign, I would think that that would be a great limitation.

There are just areas in here. Like I say, perhaps the biggest one is: do we really need to be that paternal government that looks down on municipal government and says, "You know, you guys just can't do it right; we need to step in here"? Because then I ask the question: well, then, do we want the federal government to come to the provincial area and say, "You're just not doing it right, and here is the legislation that we want to impose on you"? The federal government has limited donations to a thousand dollars, so should they come in and say to the provincial government, "No, no; you have to live by what we have already passed"? It is constitutional separation of powers, but each level of government should be accountable to the people they represent, not the government above it.

We really need to take a long look at some of these and ask the question: is this really necessary? [interjections] Would someone like to have some time on the floor? I'll sit down and then get up again here.

There are just so many areas here that, though the intent is good – and, again, we all want to improve democracy. I think the key to democracy and improvement, though, is transparency and account-

ability. There is a slight improvement here on transparency, yet there are more restrictions than worrying about: are we completely transparent?

Again, if we really want true accountability, something that I will continue to bring up until we finally bring this to the citizens of Alberta, true accountability is recall. The most disappointing thing when I go and talk . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, therein lies the problem. They laugh about it because they don't want to be accountable. That's a sad day when we have elected people, and they're going to twist it and say by-elections. I don't know of a single person that crossed over to join this government that ever stepped down . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, address the chair.

4:20

Mr. Hinman: I will, Mr. Speaker, but sometimes a person can at least look to change the landscape, to see the foolishness that's going on and the smirks on their faces and the comments that they're making. It is shameful. Hon. minister of housing, it is shameful.

The fact of the matter is that accountability, Mr. Speaker, is the most important thing. I ask the question: how are you accountable, then, if you don't have recall? I'm always amazed that the people say: oh, the next time there's an election, I'm accountable. Well, who gets hired and what it says on their contract – I mean, even when we hire someone, we have 30 days where we can give notice.

The number one thing that I find when I talk to people at the door is that they say: "You know what? It doesn't matter who we vote for. You're all the same. Once you get in there, you do whatever it is you want to do, and we have to wait till the next election before we can do something." I will tell you, hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, that that's why people disengage in democracy, because they don't believe that once every four years is enough. They say: "Why bother? Why listen to your propaganda for 30 days when, in fact, you're not going to honour it, and there is nothing that I can do about it as an individual?" That's what happens.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, address your speech to the chair and the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to. I don't know whether you consider it rude or not, but when they're asking me questions, it's a great opportunity to respond to them. I'll respond to you, then. If you'd like to relate that to the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, perhaps he'll get that and receive it from the chair. It's doubtful, though.

Anyway, you know, a concern that most all of us have here, though, is to say: "Well, we want to engage and improve democracy. How do we get people to get engaged?" Yet I see this Bill 9 as one that's prohibitive because it limits people that want to go in there. It's an uphill battle. They say: "You know what? I can't go up against the incumbent. They've got all this money raised." Sometimes it's only a few individuals that realize that we can make a change. They come together, and they want to fund and help one. Like I say, the hypocrisy where we can receive \$15,000 but on the municipal level say, "No, we're going to limit you" I find hard to swallow, especially when you look at the large municipalities and the mayoralty races that go on. I mean, how do you send out a brochure to hundreds of thousands of individuals and tens of thousands of households when you're so limited?

Again, because Albertans have become more and more, I guess, disconnected from what they believe is a democratic process, we need to bring them back. Two ways are transparency, so people

really can see what's going on, see that when the government is advertising something, who's paying for that, Mr. Speaker, who's involved, what the political connections are on these people – we need to have all of those things, not just the money that's donated but perhaps all of the goodwill that's being donated behind the scenes and the consultation. We supposedly have, you know, a bill that has the lobbyists that are registered, yet it's very easy to circumvent that because you go to an event, and they come up and talk to you.

The long and the short, though, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill isn't necessary. I don't see the point in passing this. Again, it's restrictive on the freedoms of people who want to run. We need transparency. We need accountability. I find that if those two bills were to come forward, I could very much support those, but I'll have to vote against this bill.

I appreciate the time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for questions, comments.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I just want to learn a little bit more about this constitutional division of powers for Alberta municipalities, if he could extrapolate on that, because I sometimes look for entertaining reading to put me to sleep. If I get that *Hansard* later on and read about it, that will just do the job. So can you extrapolate on this constitutional division of powers for Alberta municipalities? That's a novelty to me.

Mr. Hinman: I'd be happy to address that. First of all, one of the things that we need here in the province is a constitution. We need to have one. That's kind of the basis, what democracy is based on. We're a constitutional democracy, which therein puts out the plan and whose responsibility it is to do what.

The best government is always the government that's closest to the people. So if you are writing up new constitutions, the first thing that you would look at is: what's the responsibility of each level of government? One of the problems that we have is the redistribution of tax dollars. I'll speak here on the province of Alberta because we're always upset with equalization payments that we see leave the province and the grief that that causes us because we have a booming economy, yet the money was leaving so we couldn't build the roads, the overpasses, the schools because we just didn't have it. Even with the amount of money that we have here in Alberta, it is a tough job to try to balance the budget.

If you look at the money that's being generated from each municipality, it actually comes from those local municipalities. I mean, we're blessed here in Alberta because of the resource revenue. But in Calgary alone in 2006 \$7 billion left the city in personal income tax. A very small percentage of that came back to the municipality of Calgary to do as they saw fit and needed there. With Fort McMurray, the number escapes me now, but just millions and millions of dollars left Fort McMurray in income tax. The same thing with the resources: the money came to the province, yet Fort McMurray doesn't receive very much in comparison to what they've contributed to the Alberta economy.

If we were to have a constitutional formula on the actual sharing of the tax dollars generated from an area, it would change the whole dynamics. It would take the politics out of governing. In fact, the economic reality would kick in, and in areas that are doing well, that money would come back.

We seem to get a few grasps of these things, for example the fuel tax. We were upset with how much was leaving. Years of lobbying, and finally a percentage of the fuel tax comes back to the jurisdiction that is there.

The reason why you need a constitutional democracy is that you need to outline whose responsibility it is and not have one level of government overstep and step into the next level, saying: oh, we're going to look after you in that area because we don't think you're doing a very good job. Here in Alberta we should understand that better than anywhere because of the number of times that we're subject to the federal area in areas that are not even in their jurisdiction, yet they come in, or we abdicate those responsibilities.

Such things as the pension plan. We've given that over to the federal government. There is an unfunded liability. Again, we're putting an inordinate amount of money in that's not going to be there when, in fact, Albertans need it. So this constitutional division of power is critical. We don't have it. It's not structured right.

Because of that the democratic deficiencies continue, and it's just not in our best interest. It's actually a pothole in that economic road where we can't go as fast as we can and the expansion isn't allowed. It's frustrating to different municipal governments because they not only don't have the freedom to run their own elections how they want to do it, but also the funding, the economic prosperity that an area is generating, leaves that area and doesn't come back. Then you have the next level of government wanting to impose their decisions on how it should be run: "Oh, we'll give you money back, but this is what you have to do; you need to put it into potholes" or "You need to put it into water processing" when, in fact, they don't need that. That's not their priority, yet it becomes that next level of government's priority.

Again, like I say, we're overstepping our bounds, I feel. I think that local people can make their own decisions on how they want to run municipal elections. If they can't, let them learn by their own mistakes rather than having the paternal government step in and say: this isn't good enough; here are the rules and regulations that we're going to impose on you. It would be much better if we had a constitution that outlined those areas in a better way.

Perhaps the hon. minister for immigration doesn't even know what a constitution is. I hope that enlightens him a little bit in the direction where he's going.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just sneak in here. It's a novel idea, this constitutional separation of powers. I just wonder if the member then would advocate, seeing as how we're going to set up an intraprovincial transfer system, that we allocate our schools and hospitals based on the cities that produce those income tax revenues and we don't put provincial facilities in towns that don't produce the income tax revenues. That's what you just argued for. Would you continue with that train of thought, please?

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the five minutes for 29(2)(a) have ended.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on Bill 9.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I know how it hurts, and I feel the hurt of being cut off. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. And what a wonderful, democratic floor it is to have.

Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This is another example of the government realizing that they got it wrong in the first place, so now we're going to try and fix it.

Now, we had this debate yesterday, basically, on Bill 203 and time limits and proclamations and fixing. But specific to Bill 9 what Bill 9 is trying to do is that after the fact, with consultation taking place after the previous Bill 203 was passed, all of a sudden Conservative government members realized that not only had they sidelined the AUMA, but those rural members realized that they had discounted the interests of the AAMD and C, that these whether they were urban or rural municipalities did not want to be treated as though they were children. They didn't want to be patronized. They didn't want to submit to a patriarchal management system in this case, what they were allowed to do and what they weren't allowed to do in terms of the local authorities elections.

Now, we've got a real mixed bag in this province when it comes to elections. Within our own provincial election process we have to be highly accountable in terms of every single dollar that we receive. We have rules laid out as to at what point a constituency association can turn over funding to a provincial candidate. For the most part our monetary system of accepting campaign donations is quite well regulated, but the same could not have been said of our municipal counterparts.

Unfortunately, the government with its previous Bill 203, that Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, is trying to correct – while I'm supporting it, it still does not have the same common ground as is necessary. Whether it's a leadership election for a party, whether it's a municipal election for a school board or for an alderman, councillor, whatever you wish to call it, we need to have all our rules accountable, transparent, and I would suggest the same or have the same validity to them so that the need to fix previous legislation, such as Bill 9 is trying to accomplish, would not be necessary.

I do appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that the government is trying to correct the mistakes made in Bill 203, which almost flipped the accountability of municipal elections on its head. It made it so restrictive that individual politicians would be restricted in terms of their campaigns. They were restricted in terms of the donations that could be provided.

Now, specifically in Bill 9, things that are changing are a candidate's own campaign funds. Up to \$10,000 is exempt from most of the rules pertaining to campaign funds. What that does is that if you have an inheritance or you have individual wealth accumulated through a previous business, you're in a much more advantageous position than somebody who, you know, has a strong sense of social justice but doesn't have as large a bank account. So we're still playing somewhat fast and loose with what people are allowed to earn or bring to their campaigns.

Volunteer services are not considered campaign funds and so do not need to be accounted for in disclosure statements.

Limits for contributions are determined on a yearly basis, not a campaign period basis.

The potentially negative thing about this bill is that it restricts where a person can vote. For example, they'll no longer be able to choose to vote in the municipality of their summer home. For a government that in this latter case believes in democracy and individual rights, prohibiting a person from voting only once in the area that they wish to influence the outcome to me seems to be rather restrictive. I don't believe in the opportunity, obviously, of, you know, not only voting but voting often. That doesn't make sense. But if a person is already contributing, based on their major residence, to the well-being of that municipality and the majority of their taxes are going to that area, they should be able to say: well, I enjoy my experience those months out at Pigeon Lake or Lac La Biche or wherever it is; therefore, I would like to get more involved in the local politics and in the choosing of the representative in my

summer village. But we're saying: no, you don't have that right.

In the same way, Mr. Speaker, we're saying to university students that you only have the right to vote at the address that is attributed to your parent who is paying your tuition. Again, we're not being forthright in offering choice. Yes, you can only vote once, but you should be able to vote where you feel the greatest impact on you personally takes place. If that's on a university campus or if that's a summer village, you're voting once in a municipal election. You should be allowed that opportunity.

Now, last session Bill 203 was passed with great consternation from municipalities, as I've included. We and I'm sure every member here have received feedback from the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, St. Albert along with a number of counties that already have comprehensive disclosure rules in place. Bill 203 basically ignored the good work and the accountability that was already there. So I would ask the minister proposing Bill 9, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater: which municipalities is the individual concerned about that necessitates this particular bill? Or going back last year to Bill 203 in the first place, you know, the old expression, "If it isn't broken, why are you fixing it?" applies.

Going through the various sections of the bill, section 1 amends the Local Authorities Election Act.

Section 3 stipulates which municipality a person can vote in if they have multiple residences. I've noted this restricts their right to choose. They have no right as to their tax designations, but they can be funding both a summer cottage and helping that district as well as helping the municipality where their main residence is. As I say, they don't have a choice. The municipality a resident can vote in will be determined, in order of priority, by their driver's licence, the address on their tax return, or their mailing address. There are concerns about having a lack of choice about which municipality a person can place their vote in. Why did the government not consult about this provision?

4:40

Section 4(a) exempts volunteer services from being considered a campaign contribution. Here we have the unlevel playing field. Whether it's as federal politicians or as provincial politicians, we have the ability through our campaigns to provide tax receipts for goods in kind or services in kind, yet there is no recognition of financial or energy contributions of volunteers. Section 4(b) is simply an administrative change. Section 4(c) sets out the distinction between person and candidate, which is important because it allows for the distinction between a candidate's own contribution to their campaign versus other contributions they receive. These latter changes are positive.

Section 5. This section sets out the rules that govern a candidate's own contribution to his or her own campaign. The candidate will be able to contribute up to \$10,000 to their campaign without having to open either a campaigner account or to have to disclose the amount that was contributed or to disclose their campaign expenses to the municipality. Prior to this amendment a candidate's contribution to their own campaign was treated the same way as any other contribution, which meant that it was limited to \$5,000.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, is resolving that previous problem. The amendment is fair, but then the cap of \$10,000 is only meaningful when a candidate doesn't receive any outside contributions. They could easily contribute \$20,000 to their campaign. There doesn't seem to be a way to make sure that people are being honest. I can't believe that this is an intended or even an unintended consequence of the intention of this bill, which is now attempting to clear up the problems that existed with Bill 203.

Section 6(a). This change effectively raises the limits of contributions. Section 6(b) aligns with an administrative change in section 5. Again, section 6(c) is more in alignment so that there's a flow to Bill 9.

Section 7 does three things. It stipulates that disclosure requirements are necessary only if a candidate's campaign funds include funds from outside sources. It takes out the auditing requirements for campaign contributions exceeding \$10,000. It states that if a candidate doesn't run in the next general election, the candidate shall – in other words, there's a compulsion here – donate the surplus funds over \$500 to a charity of their choice or to the municipality the candidate ran in. This does not apply to a candidate's campaign funds if they were the sole source of those funds, which is fair. Again, in terms of level playing fields, we have as provincially elected officials the possibility of maintaining to a degree a war chest, but it would be my hope that the majority of individuals, whatever funding exists after their campaign is over, I would hope, would put it back into the constituency account to benefit the governance of the constituency.

Section 8 is primarily administrative changes.

Section 9 changes "is" to "may," referring to the application to a court. When charges of noncompliance are made, the municipality may be named.

Section 10 sets the time when these new rules will be in place, not until December 1, 2011.

Section 2 excludes the candidate's contributions, and it adds two clauses to the conditions of a councillor's disqualification from council: failing to file a disclosure statement in the appropriate time or not being relieved from their obligation by a court order. These are good things. In terms of specific enforcement, the requirements of accountability, these are positive changes.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are other members who will wish to address Bill 9. It is a step in the right direction. It goes a direction in terms of correcting the potentially enthusiastically speedy passing of private member's Bill 203 this past session.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for comments, questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow on the bill.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say a few words regarding Bill 9 and essentially refer back to one of my constituent's concerns in this area. I think that I would actually like to quote what he says here, the possibility of allowing part-time residents in another municipality to be allowed to vote there.

Cottage owners who spend up to half the year living at their cottage have no voice or effective representation through the elected councilors if we can't vote there, despite living there for significant parts of the year, paying taxes there and contributing to the local economy and local community.

It doesn't sound like a really big problem until you look at it from the cottagers' point of view. They are there as part of the community, contributing members to part of the community for a large part of the time, and often they have a very emotional attachment to their cottage, way more than the place that they have to live in in the city when they have to work. If it was only a partial problem – in other words, well, if they made a big effort, they could possibly vote there – that would be one thing, but to be totally excluded from the ability to vote where you look at your home being I do believe is a problem, and it could lead to a situation where you've got a council that would be essentially overriding the wishes of a large part of their constituency.

I just wanted to bring this up. There are concerns out there, and I would like us to really look at that. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate your reading into the record your constituent's concerns. I've had constituents who have property just outside of Sundre. There's a trailer park outside of Sundre. They are charged for electricity and water for this recreational property. In their case it's simply a trailer in a sort of recreational area. They have to pay taxes for water that they only receive at best five months of the year because the water table is so high that the freeze of the ground occurs early in the fall, and the ground is still frozen into late spring. While they pay municipal taxes, they're not receiving the value or the service. In order to get around this, they've previously been allowed to move their trailer off the spot, and then this trailer wouldn't be considered a secondary residence taxed at that rate.

It's not right, as you've clearly pointed out, that these people are disenfranchised. What are you recommending in terms of resolution for this disenfranchisement, hon. Member for Calgary-Bow? What should be done?

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Bow if you wish.

Ms DeLong: I am concerned about this, and I think that it is something that we should look at very carefully and possibly reconsider.

Mr. Marz: Just a question for the member. Is the member advocating, then, that if a resident of my constituency, for example, had a residence in Calgary, where he worked part-time, or in Edmonton – for example, MLAs have condos up here – and perhaps has a cottage at the lake as well, they should be able to vote in multiple places, or should they declare what their principal residence is and vote in that one place?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow if you wish.

Ms DeLong: Although, you know, there is a difference in weight of vote in different parts of the province, I do not believe in voting in more than one location. So, yes, I do believe that we should be specifying a location to vote and then be restricted from voting in the other place.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency I have quite a few farmers that live in a house in the country. They've stopped farming, but they own a business in town. They get to vote in the country in the municipality, but they don't get to vote in the town where their business is. Likewise, there are many young families who are farmers who live in town because it's good for the kids, but their farm, their business is out in the country. I'm wondering if the member thinks it's important that we tie where the person votes to their residence, or maybe it should be optional where the business is. It's perhaps, quite frankly, where the member's interest is, not just where they live.

Ms DeLong: I don't think that I could come up with a very valid opinion when it comes to whether a business should be allowed to be a location to vote, but there is a difference when it comes to residence because people do have more than one residence. Just because mail goes to a certain residence, that doesn't mean that that is the most important residence to them, nor does it mean that it is the one that they care about the most or even that has the most value to them financially. I mean, I can understand the residence piece, you know, that we ought to be able to select which residence we vote in, but to go that next step and say – unless you're actually living in your business. I don't really understand that issue well enough.

The Deputy Speaker: We have six seconds. Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing no other, I will call on the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater to close the debate.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just call the question, please.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

Bill 12 Body Armour Control Act

[Debate adjourned March 23]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 12. I don't think anyone can argue that keeping Alberta safe is the number one priority. Yesterday we debated in the Legislature the importance of getting it right, and we talked about the importance of consultation. I would like to get some clarification from the minister on several issues if I may. Hopefully, the Minister of Justice will read *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker, I think what's important about democracy and the opportunity of having the last two weeks to be at home: you move around the province, you move around your constituency, and you have some debates about what legislation is important and other legislation that's not so important. I had the opportunity to talk to people. In fact, it was interesting. For Bill 12, which I honestly didn't think would create that much debate, I've had a lot of calls. We've had a lot of e-mails on that. I've had a lot of discussion on Bill 12. So for me second reading is to get some clarification from the minister. The notes that I've taken are notes that I've heard from across the province. It's from what people have called me about. It's some meetings I've had. So I would really like to get some clarification.

I would like to ask the minister: who have you consulted with on developing this legislation? As I indicated earlier, we talked a lot about consultation. I'd like to know who was consulted on this legislation, how much time was spent on the consultation. One of the things that's been interesting is: did you consult with those selling the body armour? Many of the people that we've talked to to get some clarification from them have not been called. They haven't been consulted. In fact, they haven't even been asked for their advice or their opinion. They heard about this Bill 12 but have not been called, haven't been consulted, haven't even been asked for their advice or their opinion.

It's important to note that there are a number of individuals employed in dangerous industries that are not exempt from the permit application process such as taxi drivers or local shop owners.

If a shop owner or a taxi driver feels unsafe performing their daily duties and wishes to apply for a permit, the bill does not touch on what criteria must be met by that individual in order to be approved or even considered for a permit.

Mr. Speaker, another concern is the registrar and its duties to report illegal activities. Now, I understand the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security will administer the application process. My concern is that Bill 12 does not mention whether or not the registrar is responsible for informing police authorities if an application for a permit is thought to be connected with criminal or otherwise illegal activities. If an individual applies for body armour and is thought to be involved in a gang or crime ring, what requirements are in place for the registrar to report that individual?

Another question relates to the fee an individual would incur to apply for a permit. Bill 12 is very vague in stating in section 6(2)(b), "be accompanied with the prescribed fee."

Mr. Speaker, what or where does the bill deal with Internet sales? How do you plan on dealing with that? If you type on the Internet "body armour" or "bulletproof vest," it brings a host of companies where you can purchase body armour online. What is ironic and to me interesting is how many came up and how easy it is to purchase. What is even funnier is what is under legal terms of sale and website use. I'm just going to quote from one of them.

Legal Terms of Sale and Website Use

We only sell to law-abiding adults.

Body armor is a purely defensive item but, regardless, we are very sensitive to the possibility of vests being misused by criminals.

By buying a vest from us, you certify that you are a law-abiding adult with no felony convictions.

Now, that's ironic. If you go down further in reading that, it assumes no liability. It tells you about the shipping and handling. It tells you all about the bulletproof vest. It tells you all about the body armour. You can even send your size. So a criminal can type in here: yes, I'm a law-abiding citizen; my name is Joe Blow, and I want this. How are we going to control that?

5:00

Mr. Speaker, I also have some questions that I want to have the minister respond to. How many employees will your proposed registry have? How much will it cost? Couldn't these employees and these dollars be put to better use on front-line policing? Another question, and this is from a police officer: is a provincial stat offence going to stop gang members from obtaining body armour? Another one from a police officer: under exemption 4(h) who can set up businesses, and what is stopping organized gang members from setting up the business and selling it to other organized crime gang members?

Mr. Speaker, I know and I realize the importance of keeping our communities safe. I had the honour of chairing the task force, travelling this wonderful province and talking to hundreds of people about what's important to them to keep their communities safe and what they wanted to see. We put forward many, many recommendations on that. I support the concept of the bill; I truly do. But we need to get clarification. We talked about that in-depth yesterday in regard to getting it right.

I'd be more than pleased to have the minister respond to the questions. I think they're important. These are the questions, quite frankly, that Albertans have asked us. These aren't the questions that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek pulled out of her hat and said: "Okay, well, I need to understand this." These are some of the questions, as I alluded to earlier, that the police have asked me to get clarification on. I'm sure other members of the House have received some e-mail in regard to some of the questions, things that have come in with regard to this particular piece of legislation. I can only tell you that it's important to get some answers.

I know that some of the police have written because I've got a copy of one of the e-mails that was sent to us that was addressed to the Premier, and it was addressed to Minister Redford. He says very clearly that he's a police officer. He says: I'm being blunt; this is typical political legislation to make headlines but does nothing to solve the problem and has unintended victims; I'm a cop in this province, and I'm involved in gang enforcement. Basically, he went on to ask some questions, some of those that I've brought forward, in regard to the questions that I'd like the minister responsible to answer if those can be answered, Mr. Speaker. It's what we discussed yesterday. It's about clarity. It's about getting it right.

I think there are some important cost factors that need to be answered in this particular legislation. I don't for a minute believe that in my four years as Solicitor General and in all the years, and I use this lightly, that I worked the streets – I've been involved with police on the streets on the issue of drugs and alcohol and child prostitution. There is no way on God's green earth that anybody is going to convince me that gang members or organized crime are going to willingly go and purchase body armour.

I like some of the things that are contained in the bill: allowing the police to do searches. My concern is, again, the innocent victims that are going to be taking up time in regard to trying to purchase body armour: the taxi driver, the pizza driver that's serving pizza in some of our unsavory districts in this city.

So I look forward, again, to getting clarification from the minister. Maybe this is one of these bills that is perception versus reality, one that it might be worthwhile to send off to one of our policy field committees and listen to what, you know, we hear when we go into one of those policy field committees. I sit on that particular policy field committee, and I would love the opportunity to be able to ask the people that come in front of us, whether it's Chief Hanson, who I have a great deal of admiration for and support, as I do the chief here. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, all of the chiefs in this province and all of the police in this province do an unbelievable job under very, very difficult circumstances. I think it's an opportunity for us to have them come forward. We can ask them some questions. We can ask the legal beagles, that we have a lot of in this government, and get some answers from them.

I think it's important to consult with the people that sell this equipment. As I mentioned earlier, of the contacts that we made with people that sell the body armour, none – none – have been called. None have been asked. They're reading what they read in the paper.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister of Justice in regard to the questions that I've asked.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not the Minister of Justice, but I am a bit of a legal beagle, as this member has mentioned. I first want to commend this member for her complete and total dedication in her time here to law enforcement in this province. That being said, I do want to make just a couple of points. I do believe that we have got this bill right. I would submit to this member, respectfully, that we can't use just the fact that we may not imagine every type of law school textbook view as to what may happen as an excuse for inaction.

This bill does allow an individual who has a legitimate reason to have body armour to obtain a licence. It is not a registry. It does have some bipartisan appeal, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had indicated his support before. Again, I do see a dead horse in front of me, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to flog it.

I, too, have spoken to many members of the Calgary Police Service who have indicated to me that what will happen is that these gang members will actually use this body armour as a way to taunt people, as a way for status, as a way of identification when they have no legitimate reason to actually have it.

As well, there is similar legislation in British Columbia. This is not a registry; it's licensing.

The final comment that I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is that we do not need to ask criminals or consult gang members about whether or not they like this bill. I'm about keeping the streets safe, and I'd say to the members of that caucus that they should be about doing the same.

Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, now he's got me going because not once did I say to consult with gang members or did I say to consult with organized crime, you know, and I want that on the record. I talked about consulting with the people who are selling body armour. I think they should be part of the process.

Mr. Speaker, it's amazing to me that yesterday I listened all day in regard to Bill 202, the mandatory reporting of child pornography, about the importance of consulting, the importance of getting it right, the importance of getting the regulations right, all of that stuff. You know what? I support this bill. I just need some clarification because what's important is that these questions came from Albertans. These are questions that I heard from police officers. These are questions that I heard from people that are involved. In fact, some of his lawyer friends are even confused about this particular piece of legislation. It's just a matter of getting clarification. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think it's important.

We can go back. I can talk to the police officers that brought up to me section 4(h): "a business owner, or an employee of a business, who in the ordinary course of that business or employment purchases, sells, transports or otherwise deals with body armour." This came directly from a policeman about setting up the business: who is managing that business, and what's stopping Joe Hells Angel? Don't ever kid yourself. The Solicitor General knows of all of the businesses that are set up for laundering money and everything as legitimate businesses. The police, that he works for, know who they are. What's stopping the Hells Angels from setting up a business and selling to whomever they want?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it's well and fine that the hon. member has asked some questions of the Justice minister seeking clarification, and I expect that in due course of this debate those questions will be answered. That's reasonable and part of the process here.

I just want to clarify for the House, because my name or, at least, my title was brought up, that actually I don't work for the police forces. I provide oversight to the police forces in this province, and in the course of my duties here not one policeman that I'm aware of has expressed a concern about this.

5:10

By way of seeking clarification, I just wondered if the hon. member is aware that Chief Hanson, whom she mentioned in her previous discussion, Chief Boyd, and Deputy Commissioner Knecht all stood on the podium, as the Minister of Justice announced this bill, expressing their strong support for it. I want to clarify that.

Again, in no way to interject, I believe the Justice minister would provide you with the clarifications that you seek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is well aware . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. The five minutes have ended.

Does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a couple of very brief remarks. I'm not sure that I can really understand what we're doing. What are we doing in Canada, what are we doing in Alberta, what am I doing in Lethbridge talking about body armour, for Pete's sake? Why am I not protected in our country so that I can go out of my house at night and walk down the street and not have to worry about if I can get body armour or not? This is insane. Why are we not safe in our country?

Yes, the baddies might get body armour. But I heard some of the conversations that were going on with this bill before, and they were talking about their daughters wearing body armour. No. This is wrong. We should have more police forces out there. We should be able to leave our houses and be safe and not even have to worry about body armour.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Solicitor General. [interjections]

Mr. Oberle: Stow it, would you? I have a question for the hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member is aware that we're talking about a situation of constantly evolving organized crime here. Quite frankly, I think everybody, including that former Solicitor General over there, would agree: you can't arrest your way out of this problem. It's a very broad problem. It involves several departments in our government; it involves education, social assistance, and all sorts of areas. It also involves being nimble to stay ahead of organized crime, who in every society in the world, not just in Canada, has been very nimble at getting ahead of the police.

So while you may criticize – and you have, and that's fine – the policing element of this, all I ask is that you recognize that you cannot arrest your way out of this problem. For every gang member you put in jail, two more will sprout. You know, it's a very complex problem. [interjections] If those guys would stow it and listen to honest debate . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I can appreciate the Solicitor General's remarks. However, I think my remarks are going to come from the same place as when I stood up the first time: what on earth are we doing admitting that we're losing out to the bad guys? This isn't the Wild West. This isn't John Wayne. Or maybe I should be saying, "Where is John Wayne?" because he did beat all the bad guys. Why are we not beating the bad guys? Why do I have to wear body armour in Alberta?

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I just wanted to ask the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I'm just curious what she thinks about the fact that, you know, members on this side of the House and members on that side of the House at one point or another have said, "We're against this gun registry, and we're against farmers having to register their long guns," et cetera, and rightfully so, and then they turn around and say that we need to register body armour.

Mr. Denis: It's not a registry. It's a licensing system.

Mr. Anderson: It's a licensing system, just like the gun registry is a licensing system. It's the same thing.

The point is, hon. member, that I'd like to know: what do you think about that apparent contradiction? It just seems like a total, bold-faced contradiction that they would be supportive of a body armour registry and the costs involved in that and not supportive of the gun registry and the cost of that. It makes no sense to me.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. It does appear to be certainly a contradiction, but let me just take this the next step further. I mean, if our police officers have lasers, the bad guys are going to have lasers. Now, in protecting someone who is protecting me and my family – certainly, we should be protecting anyone that's in our protective services, and unfortunately that could come down to even ambulance drivers when they're picking up God knows who. The point is: what are we doing admitting that the bad guys are beating us? I think it's wrong.

Mr. Oberle: I'd like to ask the hon. member where exactly it says in the legislation or where anybody said in the debate that we're giving up and declaring defeat to the bad guys. I think you've talked about wishing to feel safe in your community. If you look around, we have, compared to other countries or other jurisdictions, better crime statistics, right? We're certainly not at the lowest end of the totem pole in that regard. What we're trying to do is stay ahead of the bad guys, and we're talking about the bad guy that sits in a bar with body armour on, strutting it, letting everybody know how important he is. That's the guy we're targeting. There are legitimate exceptions for people that require body armour for their work.

We talked about drawing parallels. What is the parallel between this and the gun registry? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere would admit that there are legitimate uses for long guns, and I agree with him. There are legitimate uses for long guns. Where there are legitimate uses for body armour, we're going to allow it. What we're talking about is nailing the organized-crime individual, who does not have a legitimate reason to wear one.

The precedents abound. We have all sorts of prohibited weapons that we do not allow in our society because they're deemed to be a danger to society; nunchuks, for example. [interjection] Hon. member, you're a lawyer, for God's sake. [interjection] You prove it. The hon. member would assert that there are legitimate reasons to own long guns, and I would agree with him. That's why we said that the long gun registry isn't right.

The Deputy Speaker: The five minutes under Standing Order 29(2)(a) have ended.

Any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and speak against Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act. I'm somewhat amazed that the discussion is going on here. You'd think that we were talking of weapons of destruction, and I don't even want to mention that. There are vests that are being used that aren't in the best interests of society, and many Canadians have lost their lives because of those. But we're talking body armour, not an explosive vest where people are going to be walking into facilities and killing other people. I think there's a huge difference between these two.

Let's go back to some basic problems of this government, again,

about getting it right or being intrusive in individuals' rights. That's the basis that we need to be looking at. Again, it's constitutional. We don't have property rights. [interjections] We don't have property rights, and it's a problem.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please address the chair.

Mr. Hinman: I am speaking to the chair. I just had a kink in my neck, and I had to move it. I'm getting whiplashed here from the left.

We have a problem here in the fact that we seem to think that we can somehow have the safety to society by registering body armour: "Wow. We'll register it, and now all of a sudden we're going to be safe." We use the excuse that, well, now if there's someone walking around with it, we have a legitimate reason to stop that person. It gives them the ability to do that, and that's why we pass many laws. I don't always think it's in the best interests of the freedom of society. It's a safety issue.

The gun registry started off with the simple thought and the beauty of having a safe society if we just registered guns, that all of a sudden we're all going to be safe and that this is going to take a giant leap forward. Well, we had handguns registered for a long time. I believe it was in the '30s when we registered handguns. They're still a problem, and crimes are being committed. The problem that legislators seem to get caught up on is the fact that "Oh, if we pass this, law-abiding citizens are going to follow the law," and when 80 to 85 per cent of the people follow the law, it usually works pretty good.

5:20

But the problem is that it's those that aren't law abiding that cause the problem. The bureaucracy said, "Oh, we can do this gun registry for a million dollars." We've spent over a billion now, and it hasn't stopped crimes with guns. Now we're taking this huge leap and saying, "Oh, if we start registering or" – excuse me – "licensing," like it's some big new, novel idea that has nothing to do with registration – it's registration, just in a different cloak. To think that now gangs are somehow not going to wear them for fear of the police stopping them – the thing is, though, they'll probably be the most legitimate ones and be able to hire a lawyer to say, "I have these people that have threatened my life, and I need to get it." They'll probably have legal reasons to wear these licensed vests, where people that maybe live in a neighbourhood where they don't feel safe want to go out and get one. They don't want it registered or licensed because then the police might think: oh, this person is gang related. So the offence is: "Okay. Why would this individual want body armour?" Like I say, all of a sudden they go into questions.

This is just, again, bureaucratic bloat. This is the idea of safety that supercedes our individual rights, and it's wrong. We don't need to register, we don't need to license body armour. Again, there are just so many areas where we look at it, and it's just so troubling to me for us to think that by registering this, we're going to be able to identify gang members or stop them on the street and prohibit them or arrest them or fine them in doing this.

If we want to start to get to the root of the problem, it's when someone perpetrates a crime that we need to act strongly. That's where we're strong on crime, not soft on crime. It's when it's actually happened, when someone is, you know, perpetrating a criminal activity. That's where we want to be strong on crime. In B.C. I believe it's an offence to wear it during or in attempting a crime. That's a bill that is worth passing. It's an offence. Again, we kind of supposedly had this law that if, in fact, you use a gun,

there's an automatic five- or 10-year extension on the crime. That's strong on crime, when someone has actually carried it out. Then you get these individuals and you put them behind bars, and they're not just rotated out to perform another ongoing crime the next day because they can pay a fine and they're making money.

There are just so many areas here where we need to take a step back and realize that this isn't going to solve the problem. It's going to bloat the bureaucracy. It's going to cost taxpayers money, and it's not going to address the problem in any sense. We shouldn't pass this bill. Perhaps that'll be one of the better things. This government seems to be kind of stalling out. The whispers in the halls are that perhaps tomorrow or the next day we're going to recess for the summer, and that'll be a good thing because some of these bills that shouldn't be passed won't go through. It wouldn't surprise me if the government doesn't push them through quickly before they go for their summer break in hoping to establish . . .

Mr. Anderson: Spring and summer break.

Mr. Hinman: Spring, summer, fall. It'll be an extended one, to my understanding.

We need to look and ask the question: why are we passing these laws? Who is it really going to affect, and how is it really going to help? Again, we can't just be passing these laws because of the perception that this is going to make us look good or the perception that, "Oh, Alberta is stepping forward" or so that the police chiefs can say: "Well, you know, this is going to help safety in the city here. We're going to be able to pull over these people that are wearing body armour." Like I say, I think that you'll find that the people that should least be wearing it will be the ones that have the legal licence to wear it.

We're not going to help our situation here, so I would hope that we would reconsider this and that the nays would outvoice the yeas in this for the benefit of Albertans and to realize that we need a bill so that when someone is perpetrating a crime, that's where we're tough on it, not for having a body vest or wearing a body vest for whatever reason they may desire to do that. It's wrong to think that licensing these is going to make Alberta safer. It's not. It's wrong to think that gangs are now going to limit their use. It's not going to happen. They're still going to have them. They're still going to be walking on the street. It's not in our best interests.

I hope that we don't get into licensing this and having to hire a lot more individuals and licensing agencies and tracking and trying to follow through. Like I say, I hope someone who has a legitimate concern and wants to be able to silently buy one because of the area that they live in or something isn't going to go on a list and then all of a sudden be questioned by the police: "Okay. Who are they associated with? Why have they bought body armour?"

Mr. Hehr: Are you a Communist?

Mr. Hinman: Are you a Communist? Again, that brings up another interesting point, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Government seems to love to have lists. I went and listened to some of the Holocaust memorials, and one individual that was speaking said that the Holocaust was the most documented thing in history. They know every person, every area because of a list.

When government has and develops all these lists, it usually isn't in the best interest of the people. It isn't in the best interest of freedom. The government, when they have a list, thinks they have power. They try to use and manipulate those lists. Lists are not good in government's hands. We don't need them. There are a few legitimate reasons: for a census. But why do we ask the questions

we do? We ask far too much. We're intrusive in this country, and we need to be backing off. We don't need one more list of those people that are legally identified to wear body armour.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have one question for this member. He talks a lot about the Constitution. I'm wondering what sections of the Constitution he's referring to.

Mr. Hinman: I would urge the individual to get the BNA Act, 1867; the Westminster Act, 1931; the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, and do a little bit of his own research. That's one of the problems in this House. I feel that individuals are given papers, and they don't even know where they come from. If he doesn't know the Constitution, whether it's section 91 or 92, whether it's federal or provincial or where they are, that's his problem. I suggest that he go home and do a little bit of his own work and understand what constitutions are for and why they're important.

In a democratic Constitution our rights are to be protected. That's the most important thing: to protect our rights and not have lists and safety things and not to write up a Constitution to say that government knows best. That's what happens with a lot of those tyrannical governments. They write up a Constitution, and they say: "You know what? We'll provide you protection. We'll provide you shelter. We'll provide you food. We'll give you safety." That's exactly what we provide to people that we put in jail here, and many dictatorship governments provide that same thing. That's the onslaught, the reasons why they say that if you give us complete control, we'll give all these things. It doesn't happen. It's wrong. We want to have our freedoms protected here, not a Constitution where they take away our property.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we tried to get rid of the gun registry, so we got rid of that. Now we're bringing in the body armour registry. Do we need to bring in a knife registry, hon. member, to make things safe or perhaps a big rock registry or – I don't know – a steel-toed boots registry? You can do a lot of damage with those. At what point do we stop registering things and just spend the money policing our streets and actually doing the things that will keep our citizens safe? Why the need to spend all this money on bureaucracy to register something that can't hurt anyone? The people that would actually use it in a crime would never think to register. Are there any reasons? Can you think of any?

Mr. Hinman: Well, I think the biggest reason, like I say, is the falsehood in thinking that they're going to go forward. Just think for a minute what we could do here in Canada if we had a billion dollars to put police officers out on the street rather than registering a gun. We need to be tough on crime, and that's going after the perpetrators. We protect the criminal far more than we protect the victims. This registry, again, is protecting the criminal. It's not going to protect the victim. The reason why is because we're going to be putting good money into a very poor return on our investment in trying to protect the people of Alberta.

Again, like I say, the biggest boondoggle is to spend a billion dollars for a gun registry. Think what that would do if we had police

officers throughout Canada that were out there going after the perpetrators of crime and being able to do investigations rather than being able to scan through huge, long lists of gun registry.

5:30

Again, you know, you hear so many rumours. I hear, like, over 30 per cent of the lists of the gun registry aren't accurate. Again, how restrictive are we going to be or how careful are we going to be when people go in and register? I mean, right now we have a major problem with our health care, with false declarations and paying out there. It's going to be the same. There are going to be lots of people that will probably go in, say who they are, be able to get a licensed vest, and in fact it isn't theirs.

Again, are we going to pass a law that if someone buys a vest, they've got to track it and report in? I'm not sure that it's in here that they've got to report where that vest is. Is it in the law here that if I buy one and have it, I can sell it on the black market and have to register that? There are just so many things that can and will be expanded. We're just going to create more chaos, more problems, and not solve any.

Trying to register body armour is just wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the hon. member and his colleague have thrown out there some very absurd examples and seem to really miss the point of the difference between a registry and a licence and that sort of thing. I'm wondering if the hon. member is so ideological that he believes that we should not issue drivers' licences or people shouldn't have to register their cars or stuff like that. I mean, ideology can only be taken so far. There are certain realities that set in in society. I'm wondering what the hon. member thinks of that.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) time has ended.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. As a former teacher I can't help but see a connection between the sort of giddy atmosphere in this Assembly today and equating it with children sort of one day out from Christmas holiday or the summer holiday. But at least today there is less confrontation, and there is more give-and-take. Yes, there are some accusatory back-and-forths, but generally it's a better day than it has been on other occasions, so I look forward to contributing to the quality of the day and, hopefully, the quality of the debate.

I am mixed as to the degree that I support the legislation. Beyond a doubt I want to do everything in my power as a legislator to support police forces, and if even in a small manner this Body Armour Control Act would do that, I could see myself supporting it. But we've had some interesting arguments come up from a variety of different parties and individuals as to the effectiveness of this particular piece of legislation. In sort of side conversations from one of my Calgary-Varsity constituents, who's a representative in this Assembly, he seems to think that this is not the instrument to achieve the protection that's necessary, and because he's a Calgary-Varsity constituent, I tend to have great faith in his opinions.

I was rather pleasantly surprised, for example, by the hon. finance minister, who is a member of the Calgary-Varsity constituency. I've already praised yesterday his work on the sustainable land-use framework and hoped that the efforts he put into it were continued. I also am fortunate to have the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs as a Calgary-Varsity constituent. There is value – regardless of

whether you're from Calgary-Varsity, have that honour and privilege – in this House.

With regard to body armour and specifically Bill 12, I can't help but think that there are numerous times when all of us probably wished that we had body armour. I think it might even be more appropriate for my rural colleagues, who, going up to a farmhouse at night, aren't absolutely certain of the reception they're going to receive and might wish to be included in the group that was allowed to wear the body armour.

For example, when I first ran in Calgary-Foothills, it included some outstretched rural countryside, and that German shepherd came bounding up to my father and greeted him with a little bit of a nip as opposed to a lick. I'm sure my father would have wished that he was wearing body armour when he was distributing pamphlets.

I know that when I ran, for example, in 2001 against the former Treasurer Pat Nelson, the 2001 federal election sort of crossed over during the provincial period, and as I was door-knocking in Calgary-Foothills, the question that I was repeatedly getting was: are you a federal Liberal, or are you an Alberta Liberal?

An Hon. Member: They're the same thing.

Mr. Chase: And then there was that kind of comment: they're the same thing. So I jokingly said: well, if I were a federal Liberal, I'd be wearing a blue UN helmet and a flak jacket because I know the reception I might get from an individual such as yourself. I mean, that was in jest.

But the reality, as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out, is: how far do we go in terms of providing safety to our community? I agree with her that we have to take individual initiatives in terms of protecting our own well-being and our own property without aggressively getting in the face of some other individual. I understand the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere are concerned about the effectiveness of a list in terms of being a deterrent.

Where I disagree in terms of the listing is with the long gun registry. That's something that a lot of police forces felt had some value because when there was a call, they at least could look on their computer and on their registry. If it was a domestic dispute or whatever and there was a registered long gun, they had a sense of what they were getting into. I agree that the expenses associated with the registry were exorbitant. I would rather have seen outfits like fish and game clubs, who enjoy the benefits of long guns, doing the registering and passing that information on.

In terms of the listing we could pass this law. I don't know that any police officer would be that much better protected in the carrying out of their duty because the fact that a person is a criminal tends to mean that they disobey the laws. All of a sudden if we make a law against the prohibited acquiring of body armour, does that mean that, you know, whether it's a list or a registry or whatever, somehow they're not going to acquire that armour? Maybe with the passage of Bill 12 Crown Surplus, for example, won't be able to sell flak jackets. I'm assuming that that would be a logical consequence. Or they might have to do some kind of an internal search as to what kind of convictions this individual who wishes to purchase the armour has.

5:40

I mean, we can go to protective measures which we can beyond a doubt agree to. Then we have those intrusion circumstances. For example, at a bar a person has to provide all sorts of identity, indications for a search as to whether they're allowed to come into that establishment. I believe in – and pardon the expression – a just society, but I do not honestly know whether this would serve police.

Now, having said that, it is indicated, and I'll just quote:

"Policing in our province does not exist in a vacuum," said Calgary Police Chief Rick Hanson. "We simply cannot do what we do without the support of the Province. We appreciate the ongoing efforts of [the] Justice Minister . . . and Solicitor General,"

whose name will remain unquoted so that I don't offend our rules, "in providing us with the legislation and tools we need to address the investigative and operational challenges we face – particularly in the fight against organized crime."

"As a police agency, we support any amendments where the goal is to protect citizens and officers who serve those citizens," said [in this case] Edmonton Police Chief Mike Boyd. "We are especially pleased to see the Province expand its efforts in our fight against organized crime across Alberta."

Well, I have great respect for both chiefs Boyd and Hanson, and they believe that this would contribute to their, I would suggest, enforcement or protective arsenal. I gather, you know, my mind should be absolutely clear, and beyond a doubt I would be, without question, supporting the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I value these concerns. I value the concerns of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who worked on the community and crime task force but seems to have reservations about this particular piece of legislation. So I'm left in a quandary, but I don't want to prevent other individuals from expressing their concerns. Please, please do participate.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes comments, questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and I have a question. He made a comment that the police, if there's a domestic dispute or something of that nature where they're called to a house, look to see if in fact there's a gun there. My understanding with the policemen that I've talked to is that they never make any assumptions, that they go in every house assuming that they have a long gun or a gun in there.

So really, what is the value of having the registry when, in fact, it actually presents a form of security thinking – "Oh, we're okay to go in here; there's nothing registered" – when in fact the criminals who have those don't register them? It gives you a false sense of security. Often you let your guard down, and it jeopardizes the policemen's safety because they all might hear on that, "Oh, this house has no registered gun," so they're not quite as vigilant, I guess, in protecting themselves going in. Again, this is this false sense of security that's allowed.

The other problem that happens with registries. I've met a couple of individuals here in the province where a mad neighbour or ex-spouse or something reports and says: "You know what? That individual has unregistered guns in there?" Then they're brought in at 2 in the morning. The SWAT team comes down on there. This one individual's 80-year-old mother was living there with him. So what we do is we actually get into this police state where intrusion into the home is elevated, and we don't have that protection of privacy. I wonder if you've thought of those and the fact that: does that registry actually perhaps endanger the police and other people because of the fact they make this assumption that it's okay and, again, let down their guards? What might be your comments on those, hon. member?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we are talking about armour, body armour, not about gun registries.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. With regard to a registry in general – whether it's body armour, whether it's a gun, whether it's a vehicle – the police, when a call goes out, try to gain as much information as they possibly can as they're rushing to respond. They always have to assume the worst because their lives and the lives of their partners and the lives of the people potentially they're serving are always at risk.

The ability to access that information I don't think lulls or provides a false sense of security, but it does provide them with information. For example, whether they're running a licence plate on a highway stop or whether they're running a background check on an individual whose residence they've gone to, there is going to be a record as to how many other disturbances or how many other calls there have been to this residence. After a fact, it does provide them with some background research, which, if it's possible to be even more cautious, would be helpful.

Mr. Speaker, I realize we're talking body armour, but I can't help but think of the communication breakdown in Mayerthorpe, where because the communication wasn't provided, four young Mounties lost their lives because the information wasn't available. If this information helps the police force in carrying out their duties, then I will probably at the appropriate time support it. But I understand the quandary.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I just have to ask the question. There are two things to look at here. I do believe that it provides a false sense of security because you think you know and you let your guard down. It doesn't increase your check and your guard; it actually reduces it. It's just human nature that, "Oh, there's nothing there," and it actually lowers our guard on that.

The other question I have for the hon. member. We're concerned here. We have a fiscal deficit here, a cash running debt of over \$7.9 billion. Would it not be better for our police force to be able to actually have people that are effective fighting crime than to spend any amount of money on a registry? I mean, we've got to be fiscally responsible here. Where's the best, you know, return on investment for fighting crime? I just don't see that with a vest registry. It just seems like we could utilize it so much better.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) has ended.

Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill Pr. 1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A few comments are in order, I believe, regarding Bill Pr. 1. This bill has been reviewed by Senior Parliamentary Counsel and by the Standing Committee on Private Bills, which has recommended that the bill proceed.

This bill does replace the existing legislation, which was established in 1966, establishing the Lethbridge Community Foundation. As I stated in second reading, Mr. Chairman, the existing foundation has been very successful. It has acquired some \$13 million in endowments and continues to grow. The new foundation established by Bill Pr. 1 updates the legislation. As I mentioned, it is modelled after the Calgary Foundation's legislation. That legislation established our own Calgary Foundation, which has been very successful. It was established in 1955, and presently has assets of some \$270 million.

5:50

There are three areas of change that are encompassed in the new act, Bill Pr. 1. First, and most obvious, is the name change to reflect the area that's actually covered by the work of the foundation, which is southwestern Alberta in addition to the city of Lethbridge. Secondly, it updates the governance. And, thirdly, it adds protection for the donors in the form of additional disclosure and enhancing the information that's provided to donors.

I would like to call the question.

The Chair: Shall the chair call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 2 Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I wish to advise the House that the Standing Committee on Private Bills recommended that the bill proceed with amendments, friendly amendments, by the way. I would ask that the chair now direct the amendments to be distributed.

The Chair: The amendment is now being circulated.

Ms DeLong: While it is being distributed, I thought I might say a few words.

The Chair: Yes. Continue, hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. This Legislature and, in fact, all of Canada owe Canada Olympic Park an enormous thank you. The success that we had in the 2010 Olympics, not just for the regular Olympics but also the Paralympics, was due to the work that was done at Canada Olympic Park over the last several years. Though we owe them an enormous vote of thanks, the Olympics are all about fairness, and it wouldn't be fair if we were to give Canada Olympic Park some sort of advantage when it came to being a profit or a nonprofit. I just wanted to assure you that when we were

putting this bill together, we were simply streamlining the process for defining whether or not part of the park would be profit or nonprofit. That is simply all that this bill does.

I would ask everyone to please support this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I can get another clarification on this. The exemption from the property tax: how is that changing from before you brought in this amendment? Is this not being explicit, that it's only nonprofits that are exempt?

Ms DeLong: Yes, it is. It is very explicit, and that's what this bill does. It just makes that explicit. The process that is being created for analyzing whether something is for-profit or not-for-profit is just being made more explicit. It's not actually changing.

Right now COP actually pays \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year in property taxes, and it will be continuing to pay \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year in property taxes for things like any facility that has alcohol. Anything that is essentially nonprofit is excluded and will continued to be excluded.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Yes, speaking to the amendment. Again, I'm wanting to be supportive, but I'm seeking clarification. Activities of a profit nature take place on the Canada Olympic Park property site. For example, an antique collective from across the province, I gather, rents or leases space in Canada Olympic Park. That is a commercial venture, which I suppose you could say that if the money from the lease goes back to support recreation, then it would probably be a legitimate activity.

Where I'm having concerns would be this line in part A, section 3, section 2.

For so long as the Lands and Improvements or any portion thereof is held by CODA and used or intended to be used by CODA in connection with sporting and recreational purposes inclusive of the cultural, educational, administration, facilitation, support and advancement of sports and recreation, any Lands and Improvements shall be exempt from property taxation.

Maybe this is self-explanatory, but I . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member. It's four minutes to 6. We will now rise and report because of the time limit. Would you like to put a question quickly so that we can rise and report?

Mr. Chase: I would suggest that the strength of this amendment, which I'm sure you want to be included, should be allowed to have whatever further debate. I'll willingly sit down.

The Chair: We will adjourn the debate on this bill, and we'll rise and report.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bill Pr. 1 and report progress on Bill Pr. 2.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill Pr. 1. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill Pr. 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, those in favour of the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

Issue 27

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

[The Speaker is in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and to ourselves. We ask for Your guidance with our deliberations in our Chamber and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members a long-time journalist here at the Alberta Legislature. I think he's still trying to get through the X-ray equipment to sit in the gallery. I'm sure that most members would know Jim Macdonald, who is retiring soon after a long and storied career in the news media. The role of the news media is very important. It's an important one in our society. They are the eyes and ears of the public for all of the lawmakers here in the Assembly. They ensure that we're accountable for the decisions we make. Reporters are also an important part of the democratic process both here and in free countries around the world.

Here at the Alberta Legislature we have a group of reporters in the press gallery whose job it is to report on the activities of the government and of the opposition parties, and of those, Jim Macdonald is the dean of the press gallery in Alberta. He first joined the Legislature press gallery in 1983, just shortly after you did, Mr. Speaker. He's well connected, well informed. As the recipient of many of his questions Jim is one of the most determined reporters I've ever encountered, sometimes finding a half dozen ways to ask the same question.

Jim wears many hats in this building. He's a reporter. He's the guy who has yelled at a lot of cabinet ministers. A social convener, he organizes the annual press gallery golf tournament. He puts together the annual press gallery Christmas party, which is one of the hottest social tickets in town. Indeed, because of the Christmas party Jim is single-handedly responsible for more bad comedy skits on videotape than any other person in Alberta history. I dare say the press gallery and, in fact, the Legislature won't be the same without Jim's booming voice echoing down the halls.

I know all members wish Jim well in his retirement, and we thank him for many years of service in the media and service to Albertans. When Jim's colleagues and friends give him a proper send-off – and I'm sure they will – I'd ask to be invited so I have an opportunity to go off the record with him.

He is seated in the gallery and is joined by his wife, Bernadette DeSantis, and his children, Jake and Erin. I'd like them to all rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of very bright individuals from my constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. We have with us today 90 grade 6 students from Fox Run school in Sylvan Lake, who are seated in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by their

teachers and parent helpers, and I'd like to thank them very much for bringing the children up here today. As I've said many times before, I think it is so important for Alberta children to visit the Legislature. As you know, they will be the leaders of tomorrow. I would ask them to all rise in the gallery and get the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special individuals who this past weekend participated in Alberta's first-ever Stick It to Alzheimer's hockey fundraiser as part of the Scotiabank Pro-Am in support of Alzheimer's research and treatment programs. It was my pleasure to referee the final game on Sunday, April 11, in St. Albert and to have participation as well from the hon. members for Edmonton-Meadowlark, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, West Yellowhead, Calgary-Hays, Athabasca-Redwater, and elsewhere.

Numerous NHL all-stars were there to help glorify the occasion, and I would like to introduce some of them who have joined us here today and earlier today made a special presentation to our Premier. Would they please rise as I call their names, and then we'll applaud all of them at the end: Mr. Brian Benning, Mr. Al Hamilton, Mr. Dave Lumley, and the legendary Glenn Hall. Joining them is an amazing goaltender from the U of A Golden Bears alumni who himself raised an enormous of money along with Greg Christenson and numerous other people, Mr. Derek Shybunka. These good folks and a number of colleagues and other Edmontonians and surrounding area people helped raise a record number for Canada of over \$1 million. Let us thank them and applaud them. Thank you, gentlemen. The game ended in a tie, which calls for a rematch next year.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a number of guests that are visiting Alberta and Canada for the very first time. They are students from the Lviv Classical Gymnasia in Ukraine, which translates as Lviv classical school. They are here as part of an exchange program which Alberta is proud to have with Ukraine and with our Ukrainian bilingual students from Balwin and from M.E. LaZerte here in Edmonton. They are accompanied by their teacher, Yuriy Dzala, who is also the principal, and Hanna Vatsaba, who is a teacher, and by local teachers Luba Eshenko and Tetyana Kachenyuk and local consultant Melody Kostyuk. There are 16 students with their helpers and other exchange people. I would ask all of them to rise and receive a thunderous Canadian and Alberta welcome. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

[Translation] I would ask you all to please rise. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of true heroes seated in your gallery. Although I will speak in a moment in a member's statement about the Honours and Awards Investiture at Edmonton Garrison, I'd like to ask some of the recently decorated soldiers that are here with us today to rise and remain standing while I introduce them: Sergeant Matthew Pronk, who received the Mention in Dispatches, which recognizes valiant conduct, devotion to duty, or other distinguished services; Warrant Officer Derek Thompson, who was also awarded the Mention in Dispatches as well as the Chief of the Defence Staff Commendation, which is awarded to those who perform a deed or activity beyond the demands of normal duty and under exceptional circumstances; Warrant Officer Robin Crane, who is also a previous recipient of the

Mention in Dispatches as well as the Chief of the Defence Staff Commendation and the Medal of Military Valour, which is awarded for an act of valour or devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy.

Others who were also awarded the Chief of the Defence Staff Commendation are Captain Johnathan Hallett, Warrant Officer Kirby Vincent, Sergeant Mike Van Den Broek, and Master Corporal Kyle Ho. Warrant Officer David Shultz is a recipient of the Chief of the Defence Staff Commendation and the Star of Military Valour for distinguished and valiant service in the presence of the enemy.

Accompanying the soldiers are Edmonton Garrison base commander, our friend Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Bradley, and Regimental Sergeant Major Keith Jones as well as Corporal Kelly Thompson, the wife of Warrant Officer Thompson; Maggie, the wife of Master Corporal Ho; and Sharon, the wife of Sergeant Pronk.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased these folks took the time to have lunch today with me and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General along with hockey legend Glenn Hall. I know all of my colleagues will join me in thanking and congratulating these great Albertans and Canadians with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour for me to rise and introduce a great number of people, but I'll start, sir, with two folks that I look up to and respect immensely. The first is Major Harpal Singh Mandahar, who is the regimental major of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry here in Edmonton. The second is Major Harjit Sajjan, who is with the B.C. regiment. They both have risen. I welcome you both to the Assembly and ask members to give them the traditional warm welcome.

Next, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce a series of individuals from Calgary here to celebrate the first-ever Vaisakhi celebration at the Alberta Legislature, the first of which is Mr. Hardyal Singh Mann from the Council of Sikh Organizations, Mr. Avtar Rehill, Mr. Harjit Singh Saroya, and Mr. Joginder Singh Parmar. Next, Mr. Speaker, from different media sources in Calgary we have Mr. Ranjit Singh Sidhu, Jagpreet Singh Shergill, and Suvinder Singh Gill. From the Dashmesh cultural centre seniors' organization Mr. Sukhdev Singh Khera, Mr. Jaspal Singh Sindhu, Jagmel Singh Mallhi, Lachman Singh Pandher as well as Mr. Avtar Klair, Satinder Singh, Sewa Singh, and, lastly but not least, my grandfather Mr. Jagir Singh Bhullar and my father, Baljinder Singh Bhullar. They've all risen. I ask the Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we celebrate Vaisakhi for the first time in the Legislature, which I will speak more about in my member's statement. I have five special guests in the members' gallery. They are members of the police force that I would like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly. The first one is Sergeant Robinder Gill. Please rise. Amardeep Pandher, Namrata Gill, Ravideep Khangura, and Constable Tirth Sehmbi. I would like to ask these five young men and women to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you some of the officers of Advocis, the Financial Advisors Association of Canada. They're here today for Advocis day at the Legislature. I'd like to acknowledge the following individuals: chair of the national board, Ms Terry Zavitz; chair of the Alberta provincial advisory committee; Mr. John Liston; vice-chair of the Alberta provincial advocacy committee; Mr. Kenneth Doll; and president and CEO of Advocis; Mr. Greg Pollock. I believe they are in the public gallery. If they would all stand up. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a rare time when I can introduce to you and through you individuals from my constituency. Today I have the great pleasure of introducing Mr. Brian Holmberg, the economic development officer for the town of High Prairie. He is seated, I believe, in the public gallery, and I'd ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, today with the way the weather is in southern Alberta, the small school from Milo, Alberta, was really looking forward to being here to meet with you and especially to see all of the special guests that have been introduced, but the weather has not permitted them to be here. I guess they're stuck in a snowdrift. I would like to acknowledge and recognize in absentia the school from Milo, who were going to be here and, hopefully, will come see you in this fall session or early next spring.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Les Stahlke, who was here today to have lunch with me and talk about issues of board governance. He's well qualified to speak about that. He's written three books on the subject and has been practising as a consultant since 2000. He represents over 200 organizations world-wide. He got his start as a bush pilot and a Lutheran clergyman in Fort McMurray in the 1960s. He's also worked in east Africa. He's led a very interesting life. Today he's working on board governance issues. Most importantly and the best thing I like about him is that he is the grandfather of my daughter-in-law. If he would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you two individuals who are very well known to everybody here in the Assembly. The first is my former assistant, Brock Mulligan, who is now the communications director for the Alberta Forest Products Association, and his boss, Brady Whittaker. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legisla-

tive Assembly representative women and children and supporting members of the Family Litigation Advocacy Association. The association was formed to advocate for family members who have left abusive relationships and now are trapped in the endless legal nightmares in part caused by inadequate and now reduced legal aid services, arising from further cutbacks. I ask that my guests from the Family Litigation Advocacy Association rise as I call their names: Joan Jagodnik, Iga Speur, Nancy Karvellas, Madina Elamki, Yasmine Elamki and her young children, Ayah and Khaled, as well as Kadyja Assiff and her children, Deeyan Assiff and Yasmine Assiff. I'd appreciate it if they could receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just been informed that two more of my guests have arrived in the Assembly. I'd like to introduce Mr. Ram Chahal and his wife, Surinder Chahal. Mr. Chahal is, I believe, the past president of the World Sikh Organization. I believe they're sitting in the public gallery.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you a hard-working member of the constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. He's a long-standing member. His name is Steve Robson. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My international guests from Lviv, Ukraine, have arrived now with some local hosts, and I would ask that they now rise and be acknowledged by the Assembly. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

[Translation] I welcome you again with a warm and friendly bow of thanks. [As submitted]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Canadian Forces Honours and Awards Investiture

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we celebrated the end of an era, but in many ways that era continues. The legacy of our veterans is one of service, dedication, sacrifice, and freedom. Although all of our WW I veterans have now left us, these qualities live on today in Alberta and in today's Albertans and Canadians.

On March 25 the Deputy Premier and I, at the invitation of Canada's Chief of the Land Staff, Lieutenant-General Leslie, had the great honour of attending the Honours and Awards Investiture for the Canadian Forces at the Edmonton Garrison. I've introduced a few of the recipients today. The stories we heard that night of the dedication and courage of 59 individuals was truly amazing. I'd like to read part of one example from the program, which I will table.

Sergeant Steven Corcoran commanded the lead section of a patrol during an ambush in Zhari District, Afghanistan. Despite injuries from having been shot twice by an insurgent lying in wait, he returned fire that helped disrupt the ambush and dragged himself to a position of cover for medical attention. He continued to direct his soldiers from his stretcher, providing reassurance and instilling confidence in the face of a significant threat.

Mr. Speaker, these heroes and their families and others like them

have made the difficult, dangerous, and sometimes devastating choice to serve, the same choice many of our forefathers made and the same choice that has secured our security and our future and our freedom. Like our forefathers, we owe them a debt we cannot repay, but on behalf of all my colleagues and all Albertans we want them and their families to know that their dedication does not go unnoticed, and we are so very, very grateful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government clearly needs to deal with the rich sense of entitlement that has been created among senior executives in Alberta Health Services. The fact that bonuses larger than the average Albertan earns in a year were handed out at a time when the health care system was in turmoil is something the Premier should be very concerned about. To the Premier: how bad would the performance of the health care system need to be in order for no executive bonuses to be handed out?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we just entered into a long-term funding agreement with Alberta Health Services. The minister is now in the process of entering into negotiations for performance-based measures like improvement in access, quality of care, and many others. The minister is on top of the file, and he'll take the questions with respect to the bonus issue.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, given that the '09-10 bonuses have yet to be determined for Alberta Health Services and the performance of the health care system in the last year has been nothing if not appalling, will the Premier commit here and now that no executive bonuses to Alberta Health executives will be paid out in '09-10? Yes or no, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this issue comes under my purview, and I want to tell the House that Alberta Health Services has responsibility for this particular part of this file. It deals with employee packages, some of which are inherited from previous local health authorities in the province and perhaps some of them that were created under the new Alberta Health Services. Nonetheless, the entire system is under some review by the Alberta Health Services Board.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Your skin is on the line, Mr. Premier. Are you or are you not going to stop this executive largesse to Alberta Health Services executives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday very clearly what the process is going forward with this matter. We are having this discussion between myself and the Alberta Health Services Board on looking into how that review can result in a system that everybody feels very proud of. We have an excellent group of people who are working very hard to deliver health services, and they were delivering them during the worst economic downturn in Alberta's history since 1930. They are working very hard right now, I can assure you.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Public Image

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's reputation in this country and abroad is suffering. While the Premier touts local newspaper articles on the Alberta train as a success in advertising Alberta to the world, the Premier continues to take actions that damage Alberta's reputation for environmental and democratic stewardship. To the Premier. The rest of the world is taking notice. If a few positive articles in B.C. and Alberta newspapers on the Alberta train count as \$70 million worth of success, the cost of 70 Super Bowl ads by the way, then what is the value of all the negative publicity around the world from this government's mishandling of tailings ponds, cancer rates in Fort Chip, and policies like . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a lot of work has been done with respect to the environmental file in all of the oil sands development. There is more to be done, and we are very adamant in working with the ERCB that we deal with tailings ponds. Although there is no evidence of any seepage – and I must say that water has been monitored in the Athabasca River since 1971 – these are issues that we are dealing with, and over time we are going to move to dry tailings ponds, which will remove a lot of the site of the tailings ponds presently.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, in reference to another move that damages Alberta's reputation as a modern democracy, did the Premier or anyone else from his office instruct the PC majority members on the Public Accounts Committee today to restrict and limit the authority of the chair of Public Accounts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of what happened at Public Accounts this morning. If there was a matter that the chair or the opposition is unhappy with, there's a way of bringing it forward. There is a process. Usually those matters are dealt with by the Speaker of the Assembly.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: does the Premier recognize that all of this bad publicity, backtracking, and backroom shenanigans such as we saw today in Public Accounts have effectively cost Alberta taxpayers \$25 million? That is the price of negating the government's bloated \$25 million greenwashing campaign.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta will have a parallel process in terms of working with other jurisdictions around the world to get the facts out with respect to all oil and gas development in the province of Alberta. The fact that we do have the most stringent environmental rules and regulations, the fact that we're the first jurisdiction in Canada to actually be able to measure carbon, the fact that we have a carbon levy, the fact that we've set money aside in a carbon levy fund to deal with issues especially tied to research, we are leading the nation if not, indeed, North America in this area.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Justice minister was playing the role of the ostrich, burying her head in the sand but insisting that

cuts to legal aid funding would not affect service delivery. Well, today the legal community is asking her to come up for air as these changes will deprive impoverished citizens of legal representation, and this will result in wrongful convictions, inappropriate sentencing, and unfair custody and access rights decisions. Accordingly, my question is for the Justice minister. Are these critics right in saying that because of these cuts many low-income Albertans will not receive adequate legal representation?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the hon. member is not right. We have a system in Alberta where we are ensuring that we are able to provide access to justice and appropriate legal advice to everyone that needs it in this province. Now, one thing I know as a lawyer is that lawyers don't like to see a lot of change, but just because change is something that people aren't sure about doesn't mean that it's not a good thing, and we're proceeding.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Justice minister has determined how the Legal Aid Society should operate and oversee aspects of this service delivery. Doesn't this undermine the confidence and the impartiality of legal aid and bring our system of justice into disrepute? Don't forget that you're also responsible for public prosecutions.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the Legal Aid board is an independent board. The Legal Aid board oversees how it decides to spend its money. The Legal Aid board also has a role in public policy discussions about what legal aid should look like. We participate in that discussion. The Legal Aid board makes the decision as to how they will proceed, and it's a fully transparent system.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, given that Legal Aid Alberta has been forced to reduce eligibility requirements to, quote, remain sustainable and legal aid is an essential service provided to Alberta's most vulnerable people, why are we casting them aside for the sake of sustaining a business model?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, legal aid that is provided in this province is much more extensive than in many other provinces in this country. We fulfill our obligations both as a matter of public policy and as a constitutional issue, and we will continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

School Construction in Airdrie-Chestermere

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Rocky View school division and especially the city of Airdrie are at a crisis point with regard to school infrastructure. Airdrie students are holding math classes in the library, the gym, and in some instances in the hallways. Trustees are even considering busing kids into soon-to-be-closed inner-city Calgary schools. The division is now begging for \$5 million for 20 new portables to make a secondary temporary portable school in Airdrie. To the Education minister: would you please reallocate just one of the 32 newly announced P3 schools to Airdrie, the fastest growing city in the province?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the ASAP program, that's a process that takes a significant amount of time to put together. It is at its final stages, and announcements will be made soon. The school division that the hon. member has referred to has a school in that project. Their top priority school is going to be built at Langdon, as they asked.

Mr. Anderson: That is completely out of touch with reality. You need to get your facts straight.

Given that since 2005 Edmonton public has decreased in student population by 1,000 yet has received 10 new schools and given that during that same time Calgary received six new Catholic schools yet their Catholic student population went down by 700 students, why wouldn't Airdrie get another school when their student population has risen by 1,500 students since 2005, yet they've only gotten one public and one Catholic . . .

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a very complex process of determining priorities for building schools. Unfortunately, in this year I didn't have additional capital dollars to build new schools. Quite frankly, if we had followed that member's advice, we would have even taken the capital building program and stretched it out over a couple of more years, and it would be even longer before he got schools.

Mr. Anderson: Thirty-two schools if they're put in the right place: that's what you need. Thirty-two schools in the right place.

Given that Rocky View is projected to add 3,000 additional students in the next three years, most of them in Airdrie, and given that Airdrie's projected population will be 70,000 people by 2025, will the minister commit to come to the table with the local Rocky View trustees to discuss a short-term and long-term strategy for solving what will shortly become an emergency if you don't take action?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, finally, a reasonable question. Absolutely. That's my job, to work with Rocky View and work with every other school board to try to deal with the issues that they have. In fact, there are solutions for Rocky View that we're working on, and I believe that we'll be able to accomplish some great progress in that area. There is no question that there are urgencies across the province with respect to school populations, but that does not decry the need for the ASAP 1 and ASAP 2 schools that have been built. It's not pitting one against the other; it's dealing with all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Signage on Highway Rights-of-way

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On several occasions the Minister of Transportation was asked specifically about why his department removed antinuclear signs on public rights-of-way and private property. Time after time the minister hid behind vague statements of departmental policy. Now we have department e-mails that reveal the truth, that the removal was political and that antinuclear signs were targeted. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Will he finally admit to this House that the signs were removed because they oppose nuclear power in Alberta?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we've said in this House a number of times — I've had a number of questions about it — and our policy has always been exactly the same: if there are noncompliant signs, our maintenance people are supposed to go take them down. As far as I know, that's exactly what happened up there. There were a bunch of noncompliant signs in the right-of-way, and our guys went and took them down.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this minister knows that the Member for Peace River lobbied him to take down those nuclear signs.

Given that the antinuclear signs were removed but other signs that violated the same policy were ignored, why won't the minister admit that there was political interference on the part of the Member for Peace River and that the minister acted to silence antinuclear protest?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I watched the same CBC announcement that he watched last night, and it absolutely had nothing to do with political interference. In fact, it even said in the article that the hon. Member for Peace River had an inquiry from a constituent about a sign, and when he went and talked to someone from our department, that's what happened. That's what they made out of it. But our policy has always been the same: if they're noncompliant, take them down.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that e-mails from the ministry show that antinuclear signs were specifically and politically targeted and given that it resulted in the removal of antinuclear signs by this minister's department, why won't the minister apologize for withholding this important information and set the record straight, that the government tried to silence antinuclear protesters and that this minister is covering it up?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just said that I watched the same CBC — that's where I saw the e-mail he's talking about. It said no such thing. I don't know where he's getting that from.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Foreign Investments in the Oil Sands

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. Let me first say that I can still see him from the back of the room.

I want the Premier to join me in putting Albertans first, and he can start by assuring all Albertans that the recent information they received on foreign ownership of their resources in the oil sands will not prevent value-added job creation in the province of Alberta. Will the Premier tell Albertans that the recent developments will have zero adverse effect on the future potential of the oil sands to produce value-added jobs in the area of upgrading, or is he going to allow Alberta to fall back into Canadian history, where we were drawers of water and hewers of wood?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a good question. I believe the member is referring to a recent purchase of 9 per cent of Syncrude for about \$4.67 billion. We are proceeding with our plan to keep adding value to the production out of the oil sands. This agreement, from what I gather, what I know, has not asked for any of the bitumen to go directly to the country of China. Remember that this is buying a part of a share of an existing operation in the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, can the Premier categorically state that there will be no loss of ownership of the resource and control and decision-making authority around a resource so critical to all Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: I am not party to the agreement, and I haven't read it. Even if I did, I'm not a lawyer. It'll take months before this agreement will be approved by both the federal government and, of

course, I believe, the Chinese government as well. It just shows that we have a tremendous resource in the province of Alberta. A 9 per cent stake in Syncrude, \$4.65 billion: that's a lot of jobs that are going to be created in Alberta as a result.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, since I along with most Albertans these days am not convinced that this government always has our best interests at heart, can the Premier give Albertans specifics as to how he proposes to protect our ability to control the resource of the Alberta oil sands for all Albertans for generations to come?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we just changed significantly the royalty on the oil sands. This is the first time in history, I believe, in the province that the oil sands royalty has exceeded natural gas and conventional oil as well, so that tells us that we are on the right path of creating this additional wealth.

With respect to value-added there will be an RFP that will be completed. I believe the examination of that RFP will be concluded sometime in June, and we will have further news on the value-added file.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Capital Bonds Investments

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've not heard much about the Alberta capital bonds that were being sold to Albertans last February, and my constituents are telling me that this government has had ample time to make some decisions. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure: what's being done with the money collected from the sale of those bonds last February?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the funds are being used to support the capital plan and the government's commitment to increase accommodations options for seniors. In fact, the money from the bond sales will be used to build and upgrade a thousand continuing care spaces. Let me repeat again: a thousand, over a thousand. The investment addresses priorities for this government. We are looking at 13 facilities, and we are helping seniors stay in their communities and age in the right place, close to their family and friends.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. A thousand is great, but I'm sure that's not enough to finish the job. How did you prioritize these projects, and where will they be located?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This announcement reflects the government's commitment to meeting the changing needs of our seniors. After researching demographics and identifying communities with the greatest need, we selected 13 projects in 11 different communities, and that will help develop and upgrade 1,000 affordable – affordable – continuing care spaces. These priority projects cross the spectrum of continuing care and are expected to be completed or well under way by 2012. With this \$105 million investment, the province will have approximately \$520 million invested towards developing and upgrading close to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Seniors in my community want to know how new community continuing care accommodations are actually going to affect the health care system that provides for them.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this will be a very, very positive impact, one of the more significant positive impacts that we've announced for seniors, because more than 1,000 new or upgraded spaces will be provided. That means that about 700 seniors who might at the moment be in an acute-care bed in one of our hospitals could be moved to an appropriate setting in the community. As well, there will be additional good news following as soon as I've completed the Alberta health facilities capital plan. That will come out very shortly as well.

2:10 Health Services Executive Contracts

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, executives at Alberta Health Services are paid large salaries and then bonuses, and now today we learn they are paid premiums on top of the bonuses. Plus, they get gold-plated retirement packages without contributing to them. It's become a private feeding frenzy on the public purse in an organization that is struggling badly to do its job. The Minister of Health and Wellness has reversed policies by Alberta Health Services on pharmacy, bed closures, surgeries, ambulance consolidations, so why won't he reverse the pay policies of Alberta Health Services and bring it into line with the rest of the province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I assume the hon. member is talking about contracts. That's a lot different than some sort of a plan or a policy change or some other initiative. Contracts are contracts. We have to adhere to them.

Dr. Taft: I'm hoping the contracts are in line with some kind of policy, and our policy needs to be changed.

Does the minister buy the line from Alberta Health Services that it's a good idea to pay premiums of up to \$79,000 a year to staff who are already getting huge salaries, bonuses, and retirement plans? Is that a good idea?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think I indicated yesterday that the policy is under review by Alberta Health Services. They are the ones who are responsible for recently created contracts and/or recently created policies regarding those employment contracts. They're also reviewing contracts of the past, those that they inherited from one of the three provincial boards or from the nine health authorities.

Dr. Taft: To the same minister: given that the salary range for provincial deputy ministers, who run entire departments, goes up to \$253,000 plus benefits and a car, if this is good enough for a deputy minister, why isn't it good enough for an executive at Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think that if the hon. member took the time to take a look at health systems across Canada, perhaps elsewhere, he would realize that these salaries are in line with those top-level executives who are outside the government stream at an arm's-length level. But I can assure this member that no bonuses will be paid unless specific performance targets are met in accor-

dance with the recently revised standardized contracts that Alberta Health Services has now put in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents is having difficulty navigating the transition from children's disability supports to adult disability supports. One of the challenges is that when a child becomes an adult, a parent is no longer legally able to make decisions on the child's behalf. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. How can we streamline this process for parents of children with disabilities who require guardianship after they reach adulthood?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, under the former Dependent Adults Act an individual did have to be 18 before the application process for guardianship could be started, so that did create some transitional problems. However, we have improved the situation with the new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, under which an application for guardianship and trusteeship can be made at the age of 17. This is a significant improvement in legislation, and I hope it will go a long way to relieve the frustrations of parents of children with disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Regarding the AISH application process, if an applicant has a cognitive disability rather than a physical disability, would he or she still be eligible for AISH?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, for someone to be eligible for AISH, they must meet both the financial and the medical eligibility criteria. For the AISH medical application it's the physician who chooses and completes the sections of the application form that are most relevant to the individual's disabilities. If an individual meets the program eligibility, they will be eligible for AISH regardless of what type of disability they have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the same minister. Can we do something to reduce the time-consuming and complicated process that parents need to go through to apply for support for their adult children with disabilities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has given me the mandate to lead a review of social-based assistance programs so that services are more effective, appropriate, and easier to access. To do this, we are consolidating the screening, intake, eligibility, and assessment for AISH, the PDD program, and family support for children with disabilities. Currently, for individuals who are eligible for PDD supports, we are working with other government service providers to assist families in the transition from child to adult services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Cabinet Policy Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 18 the President of the Treasury Board stated that he would report back to

the House on the retroactive payments made to Conservative MLAs for sitting on internal cabinet policy committees. He has not yet responded to me with a report. To the President of the Treasury Board: why did the government pay \$42,000 in retroactive payments to Conservative members for sitting on the internal cabinet policy committees, and who authorized that decision?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, for the hon. member to suggest that I did not report back to him on that issue is completely untrue. The next day it was read in here. The exact fact was that those people are authorized under the memorandum that came in October '08 and stays in place until it is replaced by a concurrent or follow-up OC, which may change membership on the different committees. They are all operating under OCs, that are publicly published and announced. For him to suggest I did not report back is false.

Mr. MacDonald: He did not report to the questions that I asked him, and he knows that.

Now, since the government is unable to provide a ministerial order showing the appointment of all Conservative MLAs to the five internal cabinet policy committees, will the President of the Treasury Board explain what was done to authorize these members to be paid? Was there a secret ceremony, a private swearing-in, or what?

Mr. Snelgrove: We put the little candles out around the room, and we sing *Kumbaya* and chant, and it would make sense to him.

Mr. Speaker, there wasn't a ministerial order. In was an order in council. None of the pay involved was retroactive, because the work on committees as well as cabinet members continues whether there is an election or not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The taxpayers are not impressed with your response to date, hon. minister.

Again, will the President of the Treasury Board clarify whether funding for these cabinet policy committees, reported as a line item in various department budgets, is paid for support staff, members' payments, or both?

Mr. Snelgrove: As everyone who paid attention while we went through budget deliberations would understand, the department that has the chairman of the standing policy committee funds the total cost of that policy committee through one ministry to make sure that it is streamlined in the most effective way. It does include membership on the committee, support staff, materials, or travel that might be necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Capital Bonds Investments

(continued)

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government announced that \$105 million is being invested in seniors' accommodation across the province. Fifty million dollars of this funding was made possible by Albertans who bought capital bonds. This is such good news that I thought I, too, would ask a question of the Minister of Infrastructure. Why are the capital bond funds being directed to seniors' accommodations?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, preparing for an aging population is a priority for this government. Investing capital bonds in seniors' accommodations supports that priority. In fact, it was very clear in the discussions in this Chamber, the importance of supporting seniors' housing. Seniors have told us very clearly that they want to stay together as they age and in a more homelike setting than the traditional long-term care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister, and I think he partially answered some of my question. My next question is: what will these facilities look like, and will they actually meet the great need that exists for seniors' housing today?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, each facility is going to be unique. Most of the projects are new facilities. Some of them are renovations. The investment addresses the priority needs of the communities. The details of each of the projects will be announced in the very short future.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the same minister: what assurances can the minister give to this House that this is not just another great-sounding announcement but that these facilities will actually be built?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, today's announcement will allow us to move forward with 1,000 new and upgraded spaces. Providing seniors with accommodations that best suit their health and personal care needs is a priority, as I said, of this government. These projects will be completed or well under way by 2012. That's the assurance, that those projects are starting and those projects are going to be done by 2012.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Cataract Surgery

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night I had an excellent conversation with an eye doctor who is absolutely horrified at the actions taken by the government as it relates to cataract surgeries and cornea transplants. The health minister likes to talk about two arms: one arm is the department, and the other arm is the delivery of health services. My question is to the minister of health. Can the minister tell us if one of his arms inspected all or any of the facilities, and how can you inspect a building that hasn't even been opened yet?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this question was asked of me by a few people involved in the system. I said that I would have a review of that done, and we're looking into that right now. In fact, I'm going to be doing some of it this weekend.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, that's unacceptable. They've awarded a contract, and the building hasn't even been done.

My next question is to the minister of health. Since the government likes to talk about competitiveness, Bill 1, why have they shut down surgical theatres and facilities and given a monopoly over contract surgeries to a small group? How is that competitive, Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's preamble was actually very incorrect. The facilities that have been awarded the contracts do exist, but at least one of them is expanding. There's a fundamental difference there. That expansion is expected to be completed sometime in May or June. It will be inspected by the college, and we hope it will be accredited – we're sure it will be – shortly thereafter.

Mrs. Forsyth: My final question today is again to the minister. The minister has told this Assembly that there is a second blitz coming on cataract surgery and cornea transplants. What does this mean, and how will these procedures get done without all of the skilled professionals who've now been let go because of your decisions?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this was a fully transparent, open, publicly tendered process, that closed on January 15. I assume that the hon. members know that. However, to answer the question about the blitz, we did a very successful first blitz, which added – added – 2,230 new surgeries to the system. About 750-plus were specifically cataract surgeries. That now is going to be piggybacked on by a second blitz, which I will be announcing very soon. In the meantime, between those two blitzes we have the ongoing year-long eye surgeries, that will now continue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Suncor Emission Incident

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government does not protect the people of Alberta from chemical emissions. Instead, they rely on self-regulation by industry and on companies to tell them what it means for Albertans when incidents occur. The government has no idea what and how much toxic and carcinogenic chemicals were released into the air. Government officials are reduced to begging the responsible company for information. To the Minister of Environment. It has been a month. Can the minister tell us the amount of chemicals released into the air that Albertans breathe from the Suncor incident on March 15?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information at hand, but I'm sure that given an appropriate amount of time I could have that information brought forward from my department, and I'll be happy to provide it to the hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister: what is the reason that we lack the expertise in the Department of Environment to be able to tell Albertans the potential effects of a thousand kilograms of a catalyst that was released? We had to go and ask Suncor what it was.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's ludicrous. We have all kinds of technical expertise within our department. What we don't have – and it would be ridiculous for us to have – is our top technical people at every licensed facility in the province 24 hours a day, 365 days a year just in case there is an incident that needs to be recorded. The member is absolutely right: we depend upon industry to advise us of these incidents. At the same time, we don't only depend on it; we require it, and we will hold them accountable if they do not.

Ms Blakeman: You don't know what happened there.

Back to the same minister: why does the government choose to rely on a weak self-reporting policy rather than monitoring and expertise done by ministry staff? Is it money? Is it lack of political will? Why? This jeopardizes the health of Albertans.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I answered the third question in the second question. It's the same reason that we don't have auditors that are employed by the government of Alberta ensuring that at the end of the day people record the numbers correctly in their books so that we can ensure the taxes they pay at the end of the year. We have audits. We have a process where we do unannounced audits, and we have a process where we do regular audits. That's how we hold them accountable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Cataract Surgery (continued)

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services recently announced that there will only be four eye surgery facilities delivering ophthalmological services in Edmonton and Calgary. What isn't clear, however, is what the impact of this decision will be on other parts of the province and Albertans living in other communities. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I've had constituents concerned about delays with regard to their surgeries. Are there surgeries, in fact, being delayed or cancelled, and what is being done to expedite previously scheduled surgeries?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no surgeries are being cancelled. For the surgeries that may have been scheduled in facilities that did not win a bid pursuant to the RFP process back in January, they are phoning all of their patients so that the doctors who were going to perform those surgeries will still perform them, albeit in different and still-approved facilities. The impact should not result in any significant delays whatsoever.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. This was a competitive process, I understand. Now there are only four facilities delivering this service. Will there be adequate service providers in the future, when there may be future bids on this issue?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there were about 10 facilities providing the services. They were all invited to bid. Those who won the bid, which is the customary way this is done, will continue to provide those services. The doctors who were scheduled to perform them in other facilities will now simply perform them in one of the winning bid facilities. In the process, because these were competitive bids, they have saved \$1.4 million for Albertans, which means that many, many more eye surgeries will be able to be completed within this next year. It's very good news for those people.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this process be repeated in other parts of the province for other service providers, or will there be a similar impact in other rural communities in the future?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, eye surgeries in all other locations in the province are not impacted or affected by these four winning bid facilities in Edmonton and Calgary. If surgeries were scheduled in other parts of the province, they are untouched by this decision.

Secondly, I will be having a meeting with the ophthalmologists very soon to discuss related issues and, in particular, what new opportunities will be there for those who did not win one of the bid facilities' contracts. I'll be announcing that as part of the second blitz within a few days.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Rent Supplement Programs

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent on AISH brings home \$1,188 and spends over 60 per cent of it on rent. She applied for a rent subsidy but was turned away because she was, quote, low priority. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: how is it that this woman is low priority for this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not aware of the specific situation, but I will have my department follow up with this particular member with a response in a timely fashion.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, and I will share that information, although I'm sure she doesn't stand alone.

Given that over 10,000 people are on a wait-list for rent support, which means that they spend more than 50 per cent of their income on rent, how can the minister defend the huge cuts made to rent supplements over the past two years when rents are always increasing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This member is actually not correct that rents are always increasing. They have increased over the past couple of years, but we've actually seen a decline to the rents this year. That's why we have budgeted somewhat less, about \$13 million for rent supplements, than we have. This member should also know that we are actually helping 80,000 people every month with their rent, and every month 800 new people were able to transition into this system.

Ms Pastoor: Well, 80,000 plus 10,000: that's 90,000 out there that need it.

Given that keeping people in their homes costs less than having that person become homeless, why is the minister unwilling to properly fund rent supplements, a move that saves taxpayers money in the long run?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I again would challenge that member's last comment. In fact, we do properly fund these items. We fund to the extent that we actually help three times the amount of people that we did only three years ago.

But I would like to welcome this member. I guess she's my new critic.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Twinning of Highway 21

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 21 runs through my constituency, and it's a very busy highway. I'm of course pleased that twinning is taking place. However, it is taking a very long time. It was supposed to be completed last fall, but it's still a construction zone with no final surface and other work not finished. My question to the Minister of Transportation: why is this taking so long?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the province has invested \$115 million to complete 12.8 kilometres of highway 21 twinning. I would like to tell the hon. member that it takes a little while to spend \$115 million. We opened two of those lanes in December, and while most of the twinning is done, the final paving, the tree planting, and the landscaping work can't be done during the winter. As soon as the weather permits, we're going to be getting that done for the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjections] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's good to hear. My next question to the same minister. My constituents are concerned not only about getting the final work done finally, but constituents are raising issues with the timing of the lights and the noise. I'm wondering what you're going to do to address those issues.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the department has been monitoring the four new traffic lights since they were installed last December. We've been making some adjustments through the winter months to try to improve the timing and the left turn signals. The department will continue to closely monitor the operation of these traffic lights and make further adjustments as they're needed. As for the noise concerns, my department completed a study in 2005 that projected the noise levels would be below our provincial guidelines.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just one more time, when will this stretch of highway finally be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we'll be completing the final paving and finishing work on 21 twinning as soon as we possibly can, weather permitting, this summer. We've already seen reduced traffic congestion with the opening of the twin lanes late last year, and we're now into the final stretch of construction on this project. When this \$115 million upgrade to highway 21 is complete, motorists will benefit from improved traffic flow and increased safety.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Water Use by Oil Sands Projects

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. An in situ project's plan to use only brackish water at a 2 to 1 ratio and no surface water isn't working out well. They have struggled with steam shortages since their start and are now planning to make an application to draw 17,000 cubic metres from the Clearwater River just to keep phase 1 of their facilities running. To the Minister of Environment: what kind of approval guidelines are in place when a project can get this far in but be that far out on its water usage? How can a project get this far off base on their water use?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two approval authorities associated with the development of in situ. One is the ERCB, which is responsible for a number of the operational side of things, and one is Alberta Environment, which is responsible for water. We have a policy in place, a policy that we hold very strictly, and that is that there needs to be a total commitment to brackish water, to saline water, before surface water would even be considered for a project.

Ms Blakeman: Well, back to the same minister: given that the volume of water needed and used is key in oil and gas development, what is the government's break point, where it says no, no more water, no more surface water? Where does that point come?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that point comes in conjunction with our in-stream flow needs assessment that is in place and has further development under way, whereby we have in place now, as you know, a series of red, yellow, and green stages of water flow. That is phase 1. Phase 2 will further define and further restrict the ability for projects to withdraw water, and projects like this, should they be using fresh water, would have to have off-stream storage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister: given that an ERCB directive, Requirements for Water Measurement, Reporting, and Use for Thermal In Situ Oil Sands Schemes, finished its public consultation phase a year ago, why has it not been approved?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest she ask the Minister of Energy, who's responsible for the ERCB.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I met with two of my city councillors, and they indicated to me that \$190 million worth of projects over two years may be delayed. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Does city council have the flexibility to move its priorities?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. There's already a lot of flexibility within the program guidelines. We also recently approved changes that give all municipalities added flexibility, and that's greater access to borrowing. Like the province, most municipalities are taking a balanced approach to budgeting, and our government is still a hundred per cent committed to providing Edmonton with its full \$2.1 billion MSI allocation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement to the same minister: has the city of Edmonton received sufficient funding to support projects that make a difference to Edmontonians?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the city of Edmonton has committed over \$618 million of current and future MSI funding to 52 accepted infrastructure projects. In fact, just this past Saturday the new Centennial bus garage opened in southwest Edmonton, and the city estimates that this \$99 million project will use \$89.3 million in MSI funding. That's about 90 per cent of the total project cost. This new

facility is a major investment and the first new transit facility to open in 25 years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement to the same minister: if municipalities such as the city of Edmonton take advantage of current low construction costs, would the money they save still be available to them for additional projects?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The example I quoted, the Centennial bus garage project, met its goal of coming under \$100 million. The city saved \$10 million in MSI funding that can support other qualifying projects. There are also many provincial funding sources such as Alberta Transportation for other projects such as the upcoming opening of key LRT lines in the city of Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Cellphone Tower Siting

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While cellphone towers are certainly a necessary part of our communications infrastructure, they can impose a cost on communities in which they're located. I'm sure that many of these problems could be avoided or minimized if there was appropriate consultation to determine the best site to locate these towers, but if the information that I'm getting from my constituents in Calgary-North Hill is right, this is not happening. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: since the issue falls within both the municipal and federal jurisdiction, is your ministry doing anything to assist municipalities in dealing with the federal government on this issue?

2:40

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I just would like to clarify that Industry Canada has the final authority to approve the location of all telecommunications antennas and towers in various cities and municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Does your department have any standards or guidelines for public consultation by municipalities regarding the siting of these or similar structures that affect communities?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I said, this falls under the jurisdiction of Industry Canada. I do know that new guidelines were introduced by Industry Canada at the start of the 2008 year to control tower locations and to give the public more say. Telecommunication companies must contact the city. I understand the new guidelines say that the public should be notified, environmental laws have to be obeyed, and concerns addressed. In Calgary, for example, community consultation takes place if the location and height are outside the city policies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: since the provincial government is the direct link between municipalities and the federal government, does it not make sense to have uniform provincial standards for community consulta-

tion between municipalities and the federal government in regard to this issue?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, while the member is right that it's certainly an issue, again, between the federal and municipal governments, I'm prepared to look into the process to see if we can gain more information to see how we can move this forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period. Nineteen members participated today. There were 114 questions and responses. Eight came from the Official Opposition, four from the independents, and seven from the government members.

We will continue the Routine in 15 seconds from now with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Western Cup

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Albertans. People are doing incredible work every day to strengthen and grow all aspects of our social, cultural, and political progress.

I am very proud to say that my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo has a very healthy community of LGBT Albertans. Just a few days ago they proved it by helping to organize a terrific event right in downtown Calgary.

From April 1 to 3 members of Calgary's LGBT community hosted the Western Cup, one of the premier gay multisport events on the continent. I was fortunate enough to attend the closing dance. They put on a terrific show, and I had a wonderful time. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that they've been doing this for 28 years now, with 450 athletes participating, making the Western Cup North America's oldest LGBT multisporting event.

Athletes competed in volleyball, running, badminton, hockey, even dodge ball. They also hosted the Canadian Gay National Curling Championship this year, a new milestone. If you'll forgive the pun, they really do rock.

Events like this one demonstrate how Albertans in the LGBT community are really giving back to their province with events that draw tourists, promote physical fitness, encourage healthy competition, and promote universal human rights. I am very proud of these participants, the volunteers, and sponsors and organizers who made this event possible.

I look forward to next year's Western Cup, and I encourage all Albertans to check this event out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Vaisakhi Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share some background information about Vaisakhi, which is celebrated each year on April 13 and all over the world.

Vaisakhi is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar. It is the Sikh new year festival, celebrated on April 13 or 14. It also celebrates the year 1699, the year Sikhism became a religion.

I am proud to say that earlier today we celebrated the first-ever Vaisakhi at the Legislature. All Canadian Sikhs are very, very proud of you, hon. Premier, and all members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, you hosted this event, and a great time was had by everyone who came. I hope you enjoyed the food. The food and

entertainment were great, and I thank everyone who helped make this event such a success.

Vaisakhi is widely celebrated as a traditional harvest festival in several northern states in India. This festival also celebrates the harvest of the wheat crop, which is very important in rural India. Celebrations start before dawn when Sikhs come to their place of worship, which is called a gurdwara. There is a huge parade/celebration in India and around the world each year, and processions through towns around the world are also common. Edmonton's event is taking place on May 23 of this year. I hope all members of this Assembly come and take part.

For Vaisakhi Sikhs reflect on the values and morals taught to them by their gurus and celebrate the birth of the Khalsa. I would like to wish everyone a happy, happy Vaisakhi.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Energy Efficiency Rebate Program

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Improving energy efficiency and increasing conservation are key components of Alberta's climate change strategy. As part of our approach one year ago the province announced a \$36 million investment in energy efficiency rebates for consumers. We expect the program will help us work together to reduce emissions by one million tonnes, the equivalent of taking 200,000 cars off the road for a full year, and we're well on our way. Since the program's inception in April 2009 Albertans have responded with phenomenal enthusiasm and have received more than \$10 million among approximately 50,000 rebates.

Recently our federal counterparts announced changes to the federal EcoEnergy retrofit program. I want to assure Albertans that there are no immediate changes to Alberta's provincial rebate program as a result of the federal government's changes.

I would like to thank our partners at Climate Change Central, who have played a critical role in the success of this program.

Mr. Speaker, as Alberta developed its climate change strategy, Albertans made it clear that they wanted to play their part in addressing climate change, and the success of this program demonstrates that they are. As a result of this program Albertans have become more energy efficient, they're saving money, and they're helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. After all, environmental stewardship is a shared responsibility, and the success of this initiative demonstrates that Albertans are willing to do their part to create a more sustainable future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Educators across our province rise to the challenge and do outstanding work to encourage children and youth to find their passion, to develop their learning abilities, and to enjoy their lifelong learning journey. Alberta's excellence in teaching awards program provides us all with an opportunity to give special thanks to teachers and principals from across the province who have played an integral role in enhancing learning experiences and successes for children and youth.

Nominees for the excellence in teaching awards are teachers and principals who use creativity and innovation to motivate learners to succeed. They show leadership and work collaboratively with their teacher colleagues to create a dynamic learning culture for all students.

This year out of 338 eligible nominations 136 teachers and principals were selected as semifinalists. They will be honoured at a special celebration dinner later this month and have access to \$1,500 for professional development. From the group of semifinalists 23 award recipients will be selected and formally honoured at a dinner and awards ceremony with the Education minister in Calgary on May 29. Of the 23 award recipients 20 will receive a provincial excellence in teaching award and will have access to \$4,000 for professional development to further develop their teaching skills. Three recipients will receive the SMARTer Kids Foundation innovative use of technology award, which includes a comprehensive technology package.

The excellence in teaching awards, Mr. Speaker, have been celebrated since 1989, with more than 8,200 teachers nominated and more than 400 who have received awards. I am honoured today to say special thanks and heartfelt congratulations to recognize all the teachers and principals across the province for the great, tremendous work that they have done. Congratulations to all of the recipients.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

2:50

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. After taking on his latest portfolio, the Minister of Health and Wellness has finally told members of this Assembly that health care in Alberta has two arms. The problem is that they certainly do not lift or work together. Whatever this government touches, it causes disruption, instability, and too often outright chaos. No workable structure, no functioning system – only chaos and confusion – no vision, no planning, no surprise that Albertans are questioning this government's competence and ability to get things right.

This government has centralized decision-making, and their process of awarding contracts is flawed, to be polite. The results will not improve eye surgery for Albertans. The Premier and the minister of health tried to minimize the impact that changes to eye surgery times are having on the people who need these important operations. Too many people with vision problems are waiting and not able to drive and go about their important daily activities.

The request for proposals from eye clinics has worked well in the past. The new process is only driving out surgeons, their equipment, and their talented staff. In a year from now the new bids are going to be through the roof as they add all kinds of true capital costs and equipment costs in their next bids that in all likelihood were not included in this proposal. If they were, then assemble the inspection teams and release the detailed report showing the marks for both the price and the equipment and the facilities that are used.

Does the minister even know what a diamond blade knife is? Which blade would he want to be used on his eyes? Nobody needs an economic and business cornea transplant more than this government.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 30 I'd now like to give oral notice that at the appropriate time I'll be raising the following issue under the Standing Order 30 provision, which is, of course, the emergency debate provision, and that is:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance,

namely that the change to Public Accounts requiring the chair of Public Accounts to obtain the signature of the deputy chair for all correspondence directly undermines the authority and autonomy of the chair and diminishes the established powers of the chair.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have distributed copies of the motion to the table.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Bill 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, commonly called distracted driving.

I'm very pleased to bring forward this important piece of legislation. The increased use of cellphones behind the wheel is cause for concern for many Albertans as it poses a serious safety concern, but drivers can be distracted behind the wheel for many reasons other than talking on their phone. This legislation goes beyond a simple hand-held cellphone ban. Bill 16 amends the Traffic Safety Amendment Act to ban the use of hand-held cellphones, other electronic devices such as GPS, and other tasks such as personal grooming while driving. Hands-free devices or devices that require only one touch will still be allowed. Exceptions include the use of cellphones in emergency situations and for emergency personnel and for commercial purposes. This legislation aims to improve safety on our roads by encouraging drivers to keep their hands on the wheel and their attention on the road.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 16 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee I'm pleased to table five copies of their 2008-09 annual report. I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for his expertise in chairing the committee. It's an excellent report.

The member did indicate that the vast majority of the recommendations and responses from people were positive regarding the services that they received in a social care facility, Mr. Speaker. I know you'll be pleased to know that all of the issues that were identified by the committee have been or are currently being addressed through ministry programs or in consultation with the local child and family services authority.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of my responses to questions that had been raised during the February 16, 2010, Standing Committee on the Economy review of estimates of this department.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Honours and Awards Investiture program for the military presentation of the Mention in Dispatches, the Chief of the Defence Staff Commendation, and the Canadian Forces Medallion for Distinguished Service. There are amazing stories of dedication and courage in these programs. The Deputy Premier and I were very honoured to attend this prestigious ceremony on March 25, 2010, at Edmonton Garrison.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'm pleased to table five copies of the report of the Auditor General of Alberta dated April 2010. Copies of this report have been provided for distribution to all the members.

I have another tabling, Mr. Speaker. As committee chair I'd also like to table five copies of the privacy impact assessment requirements for use with the Health Information Act, prepared by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This document provides new requirements for health care custodians in their preparation of privacy impact assessments.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm trying to retable something that I incorrectly tabled before. It is a letter that does not appear to be signed, but on the back of it is the transmittal requirements on the e-mail. This is a letter from constituent Mike Smit, a PhD candidate in computing sciences, expressing his extreme concern about proposed user fees and how that is going to challenge students even more. He came to Alberta because of the tuition cap, and he is really concerned about the loopholes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, one of which was incorrectly done, and now I'm doing it correctly. I'm tabling the required five copies of the teen category winning photo from the 2009 Lethbridge public library's Caught Reading photo contest. This picture is entitled Anywhere, Any time and was taken by Miss Hannah Forster.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of 12 postcards from Lethbridge teachers, which are only a small part of a larger number for the postcard campaign. These teachers are upset over the reduction in funding related to class size and wish that the Ministry of Education would reconsider that decision.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My tabling consists of copies of letters and accompanying permission to table from Colin Cantlie, a hard-of-hearing Calgarian, and from Snookie Lomow, the national executive director of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, to Dr. Sam Shaw, president of NAIT, regarding the proposed cancellation of the captioning and court reporter services program. They both emphasize the vital importance of this program, which is unique in Canada, extremely successful, and absolutely necessary for

the social and economic benefits of inclusivity not only in Alberta but in all of Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a CBC news story concerning the removal of antinuclear signs in the Peace River area. The story relates to the questions asked by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood earlier today.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of 124 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The third thing I'd like to table, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a petition with 728 signatures calling for an independent review of Children and Youth Services and its contracted agencies.

3:00

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, response to Written Question 14 asked for by Mr. Kang on March 15, 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to questions raised by Mr. Chase, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on March 9, 2010, Department of Advanced Education and Technology main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Redford, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, responses to questions raised by Mr. Hehr, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, Mrs. Forsyth, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and Mr. Elniski, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, on February 24, 2010, Department of Justice main estimates debate.

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Hon. members, I advised the Assembly earlier that I would not draw the members' attention to Standing Order 7(7) if we had a point of order or a question of privilege or a Standing Order 30 application. We have such a one from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. The chair has the authority to limit the amount of debate with respect to these, and in light of the question that will be raised and the research that I've done in the last two hours, I think I will today exercise the option to limit the debate on this question.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Can you share with me what you are limiting it to? Do I have a time limit?

The Speaker: Well, I'm not going to have 48 members participate.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, okay. The number of participants rather than the time.

The Speaker: Yes. No, you certainly have every right. Proceed.

Public Accounts Committee

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Okay. The notice of motion has been distributed. I'll admit that I'm finding this

a bit of a challenge because I've only been able to purchase one of the new versions of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and it stays here in the Assembly, so I'm not able to give you the references in the newer version. If you go online, it doesn't give you page numbers, so the references I'm giving you hearken back to the *Marleau and Montpetit* version. Sorry about that. It's expense.

The Speaker: That's not a problem.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Briefly, Mr. Speaker, this morning the government members on the Public Accounts Committee voted to radically change the independence of the Public Accounts Committee beyond the scope of anything anticipated by parliamentary process or tradition. The committee as far back as I can find has been chaired by a member of the Official Opposition. This is outlined in *Beauchesne* 781 and *Marleau and Montpetit* 768. I found it in the new edition but no page number.

Other than the requirements of tabling the report in the Assembly and, of course, the majority vote that is held by the government members, who are a majority on the committee, no other constraints have been listed or are traditional in a parliamentary process to be placed on the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. This has been changed this morning, essentially assigning voting veto power to the deputy chair, who is a member of the government caucus, regarding correspondence.

When I looked at *M and M* 588 regarding the scope under which Standing Order 30 could be positioned, Mr. Speaker, each legislative committee determines how they operate, but a Public Accounts Committee is unique, and such a change, therefore, is of utmost importance. When we're testing the importance and the urgency that's outlined, I would argue this is very important.

No attempt has been made to contact me as the House leader of the Official Opposition to negotiate institutionalizing this change across all of the committees, so I see this specifically directed at controlling the chair of the Public Accounts Committee, who, as we know, is a member of the Official Opposition.

Under *Marleau and Montpetit* 584 we're testing for whether it's specific, whether it's urgent and important, and whether it requires urgent consideration. I would state, Mr. Speaker, that given that this is the last week of spring sitting – potentially, I suppose, it could be the last day or the second-last day – and that this change, that has now been passed by this committee, affects the operation of this committee over the next six months and there is no other opportunity to address it, it is urgent that the matter get debated now.

The Public Accounts Committee is the venue by which MLAs, the media, the general public, even members of government view the government's spending decisions in action and view the outcomes. So when I looked at the test in *Marleau and Montpetit* 585, "that is immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation," being that this is a customary committee across all of the Westminster traditions, I argue that, yes, it is of attention and concern throughout the nation. I'm sure that others will be watching this.

It's not relevant around chronic conditions or work stoppages, so I'm not going to argue that.

I noticed that there is a prohibition against highly partisan issues, that they're not usually approved. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is to be viewed in a partisan context, but the enormity of this decision demands a public debate and explanation. This was not a negotiation. This was a coup d'état, guerrilla warfare, and it is a pernicious way to silence an opposition voice on government accountability. When I look to the parameters set out in *Beauchesne's* 387 to 393 on emergency debates, it's indicating the

primary issues are urgency and specifically whether there's an opportunity for the debate of this matter to happen under rules and provisions of the House. No, I do not see an opportunity.

We tried to raise a question this afternoon, to which we did not get an answer. This issue is not before the courts, where it could be examined there. It was not mentioned in the throne speech. There's no bill on the government Order Paper that would address it. It's not appearing in any government press releases or backbencher caucus media releases. There isn't a private member's bill on it or a motion. It wasn't addressed in the budget. There is no notice on the Order Paper for any supplementary supply budget that might somehow give opportunity for debate on this, no government motions, no motions other than government motions. So there is no opportunity to debate this in any other context that I can see. It's not appropriate for a written question or a motion for a return.

I notice under *Beauchesne's* 389 that the matter needs to be "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." I draw the Speaker's notice once more to the imminent end of session and the lack of opportunity for this to be discussed in any other way. Section 390 is looking that discussion could take place immediately.

I think that parliamentary process puts the Official Opposition member as the chair precisely so that no government or no Premier's office has direct control over the committee or over the chair. It is intended to be a committee that has robust inquiry, and I would argue further that it has the power to challenge. With the chair being a member of the opposition, it's less likely to take any gentle prodding to silence itself. I think that constraining the chair by instituting a veto power in conjunction with the government member as deputy chair for any correspondence is a major change, Mr. Speaker. It affects both the perceived and the real operation of this committee.

I looked at the new *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* under your criteria for a decision, Mr. Speaker, and I have looked at some of the tests there. I've talked about that it does not fall under the administrative responsibilities of government, nor is it within the scope of ministerial action. It is addressing only one issue, and it's certainly not reviving discussion on a matter already debated. It didn't come before this House. This is a legislative committee, Mr. Speaker. It wouldn't normally come up by means of a substantive motion, and it's not involving the administration of a government department. I've checked the other criteria that you're basing it on, and I don't see that it fails on the basis of any of that.

I would argue that I've shown it does meet the other tests that are required here. I'm aware that you have a limit on the number of speakers, and we're mindful of the time today, so I would argue that it is critical that the Assembly, seeing as no other opportunity is being given, discuss this. It has a profound effect on this committee and its ability to operate without being muzzled or directed by government. Therefore, I would argue that it is debated in this Chamber under the Standing Order 30 provisions.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to raise this.

3:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Government House Leader, do you want to participate in this?

Mr. Hancock: Sure. I was observing. Usually I go second, and then I don't have a chance to respond to others, so I was waiting to see if others wanted to go. I'm happy to participate, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the test for Standing Order 30 is urgent public importance. I'd submit that it's neither urgent nor publicly impor-

tant. It's not urgent . . . [interjection] Well, let me explain. It certainly is an important step, but the question of public importance is another issue. Urgent: is it something that can only be dealt with now, can only be dealt with in this way? No. It's not. In fact, the Orders of the Day are more urgent than this particular issue.

What we have here, Mr. Speaker, apparently, is a situation where a committee which is in control of its own procedure, a committee which is in charge of its own agenda, has obviously raised some concerns with respect to the actions of its chair in setting that agenda or in dealing with its issues. There are a number of ways that a committee can deal with that. They can sanction the chair by motion, they can ask for the removal of the chair by motion, or they can do something short of that to express displeasure with the chair. It would appear that they've done something short of that to express displeasure with the chair. Obviously, the committee is concerned that the chair has used his authority in correspondence that he's sent out and gone beyond what the committee has sanctioned him to do or asked him to do. So this would clearly be simply a committee dealing with its business within its committee.

The hon. member as a member of the House has every right to send out any correspondence he wants to send in his own right, but he does not have the right to send out any correspondence that he wants as chair of the committee, purporting to be acting on behalf of the committee if, in fact, the committee has not sanctioned that action. So the action of the committee in passing a motion suggesting that the chair cannot act unilaterally on behalf of the committee is clearly within their purview, and it doesn't constitute a matter of urgency for this House.

There are other ways in which it could be dealt with. If the chair or the committee had some concerns, certainly, the committee could report to the House and then ask whether the House concurred in its report, and there would be an opportunity there for the House to take other steps if they thought there was a problem.

It's not a matter of urgency, and it's not a matter of public importance, Mr. Speaker. Not that the committee itself, the Public Accounts Committee, isn't publicly important; of course it's publicly important. It's one of those accountability structures of a parliamentary democracy that is very important. It's also very important that it be seen to be acting appropriately. If the committee members had concern about the correspondence being sent out by the chair on behalf of the committee, obviously they have some concern.

So it hasn't met the test of . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You have the floor.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview seems to think that this has something to do with something . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: You have the floor, and the chair is listening to you very attentively. Ignore others.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. I have the chair's permission to ignore Edmonton-Riverview, and I will take that advice.

Dr. Taft: I'm used to it.

Mr. Hancock: You should be.

Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 30 is not the appropriate route to deal with this particular issue. If the committee has concerns about its operation, there are many avenues which it can use to deal with those concerns. It's chosen one relatively minor way to provide a sanction to its chair for stepping outside the bounds of his authority as chair. It's a gentle slap on the wrist, if you will, to a chair.

Ms Blakeman: For what?

Mr. Hancock: For stepping outside of his bounds. Obviously, the chair has been sending out correspondence that the committee didn't like or else it wouldn't be asking for the cosign. [interjections] This is not the situation for bringing forward evidence. People are yelling at me to prove it, and I don't have to prove anything at this instance. If they had a concern about something that needed to be proved, they could bring forward a question of privilege and go to Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing and ask them to investigate the matter, I suppose. That might be one option.

They could have a discussion in their committee with respect to the operations of the committee. They could have a robust discussion as to why the chair should or should not be able to carry out duties unilaterally and do things unilaterally. There are a number of circumstances which have been brought to my attention, which I am not prepared to disclose at the moment because I don't have any written evidence of them and they would just be rumour and innuendo on my part. I'm not going to get into this issue of what the actions were. There would be appropriate places to discuss that kind of action. That appropriate place isn't here and isn't now.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I indicated earlier that I've been studying this matter since a few minutes after 11 o'clock this morning, when the Standing Order 30 application arrived in my office, which certainly met the time requirement with respect to this matter. I'm always also cognizant of the traditions and the heritage of this Assembly and other Assemblies of the British tradition. I arrived very early to a conclusion that I would not put the question forthcoming because of some very important historical traditions with respect to Legislative Assemblies. I am prepared to rule. I think there's a time requirement with this, and I'm going to point out some other things as well. I'm prepared to rule whether the request for leave is to proceed.

I first of all indicated it certainly met the application for the time, but there are several reasons why the request for leave to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly under Standing Order 30 is not in order. First of all, it's very clear that this matter arose in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This issue concerns the procedure of the committee.

It is the chair's understanding that the motion was found to be in order by the chair of that committee. I've read the Blues with respect to this. Further, a vote was held. Then, as far as I can understand in looking at the Blues with respect to this meeting which occurred this morning, there was no appeal of the chair's decision to basically go forward with the call for the vote. The vote was called, and as I understand, there was no appeal reported in the matter of the committee then.

Traditionally what we've always accepted – and I certainly have in the 13 years that I've had the privilege of being the Speaker – is that the committee essentially conducts its own affairs within the committee. There are procedures that could have been followed and still can be followed to challenge the decision of the committee. They may not have been made this morning, but they certainly can be made at a subsequent meeting of this committee. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* expresses this view on page 1047.

The idea that committees are “masters of their proceedings” or “masters of their procedures” is frequently evoked in committee debates or the House. The concept refers to the freedom committees normally have to organize their work as they see fit and the option they have of defining, on their own, certain rules of procedure that facilitate their proceedings.

So they may have a proceeding today, and at a subsequent meeting

they may change that proceeding. They can certainly have the right within the committee to do that and for members to deal with it.

Secondly, there is nothing in here that suggests to me – and, again, I have to be very careful about the words I'm going to say – that this is being raised as a point of privilege with respect to any matter. It would have to depend entirely on what the issue is because once again *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at pages 149 to 152 in the second edition certainly has a chapter on privilege in committees, and we have a Practical Guide: Committees of the Legislative Assembly, which all members have with respect to such matters. I also would like to point out our own standing order of our Assembly, 30(7)(e), which states that a motion in this Assembly cannot deal with anything based on the question of privilege within a committee, going back again to the concept and the belief that the committee is, in essence, master or mistress of his or her own domain.

Thirdly, we did a very, very quick review of minutes of committees of this Assembly going back several years. Now, this is not conclusive, but on June 27, 2007, in the Standing Committee on Government Services there was a motion that was moved and was carried. It said that the chair and the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Government Services “in conjunction with committee staff be empowered to prepare a press release and a list of stakeholders” for presentation at the next committee meeting. There was an event three years-plus ago. I'm guessing that the chair of that committee, the Standing Committee on Government Services, was a government chair and that the deputy chair – I don't know if it was an opposition member or not.

3:20

Then on October 31, 2007, tabling and release of the committee's final reports, there was a motion agreed to by the Standing Committee on Community Services that, once approved by the acting chair and the deputy chair and after tabling the final reports on bills 31 and 41 in the Legislative Assembly, a final news release be sent out and the final reports be made publicly available on the committee's website. That indicates it was agreed to.

We have minutes here from November 2, 2007, printing and tabling of final reports, et cetera: agreed by the Standing Committee on Government Services that the chair and deputy chair be authorized to work with support staff to prepare and approve a news release regarding the committee's final reports on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, and Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007.

In addition to that, I guess there's a fourth issue that I had to raise with respect to this. Standing Order 30(6), the one we're dealing with, provides that “An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly.” In the chair's view, the wording of the application violates this rule when it states that

the changes to Public Accounts requiring the chair of Public Accounts to obtain the signature of the deputy chair for all correspondence directly undermines the authority and autonomy of the chair and diminishes the established powers of the chair [in the end].

Methinks that this committee of Public Accounts will meet again.

Mr. MacDonald: We don't know when.

The Speaker: Well, I suspect there will be another meeting. I'm just guessing.

Ms Blakeman: How do we know? We can't call it without permission.

The Speaker: Well, I tell you what: if in six months hence there's no additional meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, let's have the committee come and visit with me, and we'll arrange to have one.

So I'm not going to put the question today. I've given a number of reasons, but the primary reason in all of this is that I really believe that if committees are to function and if participation on a committee is to be considered important and to be important – and I understand members actually compete with one another to be on some of these committees, and I suspect that a few minutes from now we're going to have a debate about membership on these committees. Committee membership is extremely important. Servitude on that committee is more than just important. I'm going to ask the committee and look forward to the committee looking at this matter as it continues to evolve with respect to this matter.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Committee Membership Changes

13. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the following change to

- (a) the Standing Committee on Community Services be approved: that Mr. Allred replace Mr. Johnson;
- (b) the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services be approved: that Mr. Johnson replace Mr. Griffiths;
- (c) the Standing Committee on the Economy be approved: that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. Allred.

[Adjourned debate April 13: Mr. Hancock]

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been advised that since this matter was under discussion yesterday, there have been ongoing discussions between the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader as well as the Member for Calgary-Currie to facilitate and accommodate the participation of the Member for Calgary-Currie on standing committees. To that extent, I would like to propose a subamendment to the amendment that's currently before the floor.

The Speaker: Okay. It will be circulated as you proceed with it.

Other members might want to just be apprised of this. Look at Votes and Proceedings, which should be on your desk. If you look at page 4 in Votes and Proceedings, you will see the original motion, Motion 13, and then you will see the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre yesterday. That's included on that page. As I understand now, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, you will now introduce a subamendment. In essence, there'll be three items we'll be talking about. Please proceed. That matter is being circulated.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think it requires any explanation. It's self-explanatory. But for the record I will read the subamendment into the record. I would like to move that amendment A1 be amended as follows:

- A. By renumbering part A as part A.1 and adding the following before part A.1:
 - A. By striking out part (a) and substituting the following:
 - (a) the Standing Committee on Community Services be approved: that Mr. Allred replace Mr. Johnson, that Mr. Taylor be appointed to the committee;
- B. By striking out part A.1 and substituting the following:

- A.1 By striking out part (c) and substituting the following:
 - (c) the Standing Committee on the Economy be approved: that Mr. Chase replace Mr. Boutilier, that Mr. Chase replace Mr. Taylor as deputy chair, and that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. Allred;
- C. By striking out part B and substituting the following:
 - B. By adding the following after part (c):
 - (d) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Ms Pastoor replace Mr. Taylor.

That is my subamendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will now proceed with discussion on the subamendment just introduced by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader. If any member would like to participate on the subamendment, we'll take them one at a time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As this is a subamendment to my amendment, I'm fine in supporting what has been put forward here. I was not in a position and it would have been highly irregular for me to have chosen the committees that Calgary-Currie would have sat on, and it wasn't for me to negotiate that. I just had to look after my own caucus, which is what I was attempting to do. It looks like all necessary arrangements have now been made, and I think that the subamendment works out fine as far as we're concerned as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

The Speaker: Shall I now proceed to call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Is that fine with everyone? Okay. On the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and found on page 4 of Votes and Proceedings for today's purposes, will all hon. members please say aye who support it as amended. We'll get to the motion as amended later. Right now we're dealing with the amendment. Everybody knows what it is: what was put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre yesterday.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[Government Motion 13 as amended carried]

The Speaker: Thank you very much for your co-operation, by the way, with respect to this. It solved some issues that needn't become issues. Good work.

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill Pr. 2
Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption
Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: We are dealing with amendment A1. Any comments or considerations or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? May I also remind the Assembly that Pr. 1, Pr. 2, and Pr. 3 were debated fully by all parties at other committee meetings.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A1. Pr. 2 is the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Sorry. We are debating Pr. 2, and it was amended yesterday. Yes. Thank you very much. My concern around this private bill was really to ensure that it was not possible to manoeuvre away from the public ownership of this land and the facilities on it with the protection of the tax status with it and manoeuvre that and roll it over into a private company.

3:30

I know that one of the things that has been talked about around this land – the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit had talked about negotiating some of this land to be used as a film studio, but the understanding is that the film studio would likely be a private endeavour. I think we'd need to be very careful and very knowledgeable before we got to the point where the protected property tax status of this land would be extended to a private entity. Even if it is an entity that we value and would like to see integrated into our film industry in Alberta, I think we'd have to be really careful about that one.

I understand that they have petitioned for the exemption on the new land, and that's fine with me. I'm just looking for the reassurance that it would continue to be protected as public ownership or not-for-profit ownership and that that special tax status would not be extended to a private entity or corporation. Those were the concerns that I had. If that's going to be embarked upon, then it needs to come back here as a very wide-ranging discussion because if we open that door, there's a lot of different things that are going to walk through it that want that same kind of tax status and protection that would normally be considered a private entity or a private industry. That's my concern around this issue.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak to the amendment? Should I call the question on the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back to Bill Pr. 2 as amended. Any comments or questions with regard to this? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I, too, rise with just one or two concerns, of course, about what this bill is seeking to achieve. Obviously, in principle the objectives of CODA are those that we should consider supporting, but it looks to me like we are looking at abdicating our entitlement to significant tax revenue or roughly 70 per cent of what's there right now, based on what is currently exempt and what would become exempt under this piece of legislation.

It appears to me that the limits on ensuring that we're not

ultimately giving the benefit of this tax exemption to those who are utilizing this resource as a means of earning profits in one form or another are not clear enough in that the exemption simply exempts lands or improvements that are for the purposes "solely of a for-profit commercial nature." But it would seem to me that with the inclusion of that word "solely," in essence you could have a development that anticipates or contemplates a partial for-profit component that would still enjoy the benefit of the tax exemption which is being extended under this legislation. That seems to me to be providing a benefit to a particular group of potentially for-profit players at the expense of others, and it doesn't seem to make sense to me, really. I mean, we ask everyone else to either pay property tax or to incorporate that particular cost into their business plans, and I'm not sure why we wouldn't do that in this case.

Quite honestly, probably the biggest problem that we have here is the inclusion of the word "solely" in the exemption from the application of the tax-free status in that it allows for an 80 per cent for-profit development to forgo paying taxes. That seems to me to be not in the public interest, hence our concern with this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to Pr. 2?

Ms DeLong: I just want to take a moment to reassure the people who are concerned about profitable enterprises being able to get a tax-free status under this bill. If you look into the details especially of the amendments, you will see that we have very, very, very carefully and explicitly taken that out.

I ask everyone to please support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed?

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Chair: That is carried.

Bill Pr. 3
Lamont Health Care Centre Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I wish to move an amendment to Bill Pr. 3, the Lamont Health Care Centre Act. With your consent I'll dispense with reading the amendment while it is distributed and just offer a couple of quick comments to highlight the nature of the amendment. This bill was reviewed by the Standing Committee on Private Bills, and I would like to thank the chair of the committee, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, and the members for their very thorough review.

The amendment which is being distributed deals with two issues that arose in the course of the committee's review, Mr. Chair. First of all, the protection from liability clause for the members of the board of management of the Lamont health care centre, which will be continued under the proposed legislation. Secondly, the amendment deals with section 11 of the proposed legislation, which deals with the terms of dissolution of the corporation, again subject to passage of the legislation.

The Deputy Chair: We are speaking to amendment A1. Any comments or questions with regard to amendment A1?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. If I may ask the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, just to be clear here because I was at the Private Bills Committee meeting, where this was discussed: is the amendment that he's brought forward here entirely in line with the discussion at that committee? There have been no changes or anything?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Yes. Mr. Chair, I can confirm that this amendment is identical to what appears in the report of the committee.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Any comments or questions on the bill as amended?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

3:40

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions regarding this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm just confirming: how many minutes do I have to speak?

Ms Blakeman: Twenty.

Dr. Taft: Twenty. Okay. Thank you.

There are many parts of this bill that I have a desire to comment on, but I'm going to focus my comments this time on one particular issue, which to me is of very, very deep importance. That has to do with the part of this bill that allows the piloting of electronic voting . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I wish to advise that we are speaking to subamendment SA1. When we last adjourned, we had subamendment SA1, which was moved – I don't know if you have the wording there – which said to strike out the words that follow “section 44.1(1)(g)” and substitute “by striking out subclause (iv) and substituting the following”:

- (iv) advertising by the Government required to address public safety, the provision of adequate health services or to communicate employment opportunities to the public.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you. It's been a little while since we debated this bill.

This subamendment was one brought forward at our suggestion. We agreed with the spirit of the original amendment, which was to strike government advertising during an election campaign. But as we thought about it, we thought: well, you know, we need to think this through because if there's a public emergency or if the government wants to recruit people or things like that, there are select purposes for government advertising that would be legitimate whether it was an election campaign or not.

That is why we proposed this subamendment. It would allow some of the crucial advertising of government to proceed during an election campaign if it addressed very, very specific, well-defined issues of public safety, health services, or employment opportunities. Otherwise, it would still achieve what the original amendment intended, which was to disallow advertising that, frankly, can be unduly partisan in glorifying the achievements of the government during a campaign, which is simply unfair.

That was the idea of our subamendment, Mr. Chairman, and I would urge all members to support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other comments on subamendment SA1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate being able to stand up to make a few more comments. The amendment and the part that I have a concern with is where it says: anything that the government sees as a threat. It's always tough to make a bill and to see how far we need to expand it.

Do you have a copy that I could see because I don't have mine in front of me.

Ms Blakeman: There are the two pieces. There's yours, and there's mine.

Mr. Hinman: Is the threat there, though?

Ms Blakeman: No.

Mr. Hinman: Did you remove it after I talked to you?

Ms Blakeman: I don't know.

Mr. Hinman: That the government “address public safety, the provision of adequate health services or to communicate employment opportunities to the public.” That's important, and we agree with this amendment in the fact that it needs to go forward, but I'm just not sure if further in the bill, when it talks about things that it can advertise, everything has been struck.

The one other area that concerned me – and we'll do a little bit more research on it here as we're going – is the threat for public safety because one of the things that I've learned in opposition is that this government very much sees the opposition as the threat and

would want to bring that in as advertising and use it as a legal loophole to . . .

Dr. Taft: They don't look too threatened yet.

Mr. Hinman: Well, it is a threat, nevertheless, whether they're aware of that or not.

At this point in the middle of a campaign they could wake up and realize that they have some problems, so I think that we need to be very careful in what the government can and will advertise during an election. It needs to be very limited to addressing public safety in a real sense. You know, like I say, if there's a pandemic coming out, if something happened up north, whatever it is, it's critical that the government does put forward the concerns and the safety of the citizens first in a nonpartisan way.

We see the value of this amendment, to restrict it to be very limited to public safety and not just the whim or the arbitrary decision of the government to think: oh, this will help if we talk about some arbitrary falsehood, whether it's about water or the environment or something else that they seem to try and promote and advertise as "Oh, this is safe; this is a new procedure; it's okay to go forward" or to somehow enhance their campaign along with some public advertising to say, "This is safe" or "This should be promoted" or "This is a new program that we should adopt." It could be anything. For example, right now we see numerous advertisements going out on Bill 50 and the fact that this is a good thing, and it's needed here in the province, when, in fact, a needs process should be going forward. We're concerned about that but think that this amendment is good. We'll be voting in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the subamendment.

Mr. Anderson: On the subamendment. The hon. member keeps saying: we want to vote in favour of this. I just want to clarify that he wants to, and I also do want to vote in favour of this amendment of my own free will. I just came from a caucus where I didn't have that freedom, so please let me express it.

I do absolutely support this amendment. I was confused earlier. This is an amendment to the amendment that I originally brought forward. I think it actually makes my original amendment stronger, so I very much do agree with it.

Obviously, if there's a public safety concern, you know, if there's tainted drinking water or tainted beef or tainted something, we need to be able to get that message out to the public even if it's during an election period. The same, of course, with health services, as my hon. colleague talked about, with regard to H1N1 or whatever possible thing could come up, and opportunities for employment as well. Those need to be out there. Obviously, jobs need to be filled during the election.

Now, as with any statute it could be abused. I know that there are some people over on the other side of the House and on this side of the House — we have a diverse group in here — that believe that some things are a threat to public safety; for example, CO₂. Some people would say that is a threat to public safety. So we've got to make sure that, you know, it doesn't become a campaign issue, and they say, "Oh, well, we're going to put all this advertising into saying what a great job we're doing on carbon capture and storage" or "What a great job we're doing on X, Y, and Z because it's a public safety concern" and therefore find a way around the purpose or the intent of this amendment.

I think the intent of this amendment is public safety, meaning a

real and imminent threat that we need to deal with in the right here and now or else people will be injured, people will die, homes will be lost, et cetera, immediately. If that is the spirit of the amendment — and I'm sure it is — then I have no problem supporting it as it does strengthen the legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

I'll call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back to amendment A1. Hon. members, any questions or comments on amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

3:50

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Yes. As I noted earlier, we do absolutely support this amendment, and since I introduced it, that would make sense. The reason for this is very simple. First of all, there is no one in the province of Alberta, no entity in the province of Alberta that has more ability to spend money than the government of Alberta. It has the most capital and the most money of any entity, organization, or otherwise in the province. It's a huge amount of spending power, and what I continue to see — and you see it in all governments, frankly, across the country — and something I disagree with is when they use advertising to promote something that they're doing, and really it is partisan. I mean, in effect, it is a partisan advertisement, but because they don't put the logo of the party on the site and it's the government of Alberta logo on the site, then it's therefore okay.

It's a tremendous, tremendous waste of money and resources and very unfortunate. Really, in my view, any such public relations exercises should not be allowed. If it's an issue of public safety, as was pointed out earlier, if it's a health issue or whatever, severe weather warnings and advertisements for programs to get over a drought that's occurring, I totally understand that and support that. But I heard on the radio a couple of weeks ago how wonderful Budget 2010 was. "Oh, Budget 2010. It's going to help us do X, Y, and Z, and it's going to cure all ills, and its going to do this and that." You know, of course, many of us in this Chamber, including some on the government side, I know feel that that budget was an absolute disaster. That's a matter of debate, though. I agree with that. Some people think it's great; some people think it's a train wreck. We can agree to disagree.

Why should we be using taxpayer funds to promote a budget? There is no public interest in doing so. No one is going to escape harm because they hear on the radio how great Budget 2010 is. So it's an important distinction to make between relevant government advertising that is being used to promote a public purpose or a public good as opposed to just government spending money on advertising to promote their own interests.

Even in a nonelection period I have a problem with that type of advertising, a huge problem with it. During an election period that is absolutely unacceptable. I'll tell you that I can picture it now, and you can take this to the bank. If we go to an election in 2012, it is probably going to work out something like this. They're going to pass the budget. They're going to claim that it's balanced. It won't be, because they won't be including the cash deficit. Anyway, they may claim it. If they're lucky, they may get back to a book balance, and then they will immediately drop the writ and then charge off. I can just see the advertisements from the government of Alberta: Budget 2012, back in the black; the first jurisdiction to do this.

Whether that's true or not, you know, you can just see it. You can just hear the airways and just millions and millions of dollars being used for that purpose. Well, in my view, that would be, especially during an election period, just a gross misuse of public funds, and it would be extremely undemocratic, even more undemocratic than doing it in a nonelection period.

Mr. Chair, this is all governments. I mean, this PC government does it all the time, but they're not the only government in this country to do that. There are others. The provincial and, frankly, the federal government, both parties, do this. It's something that we need to improve and we need to be an example of in this province, that we will not do that, that public monies will be used for nonpartisan purposes and not for partisan purposes specifically with regard to advertising the wonderful, great things that the government is doing when, really, there is no public interest in doing so. There's no reason.

Obviously, people have to let the public know about different programs and those types of things, and I understand that. Like I said earlier, if there is a drought relief program or if there is some program that people need to access, there is a place for that. It shouldn't all necessarily be on: "We're so great. We're so great. The government is dealing with this problem, and this is the program and so forth." But if you need to put out materials about certain seniors' support programs that are out there and things like that, how to access them, how-to sheets, that's totally legit, totally legitimate. Frankly, that's what an MLA's office and website is for. There are other things to do that, but it just seems that with government they never go halfway. They always seem to, you know, go: "Oh, great. We've got this thing that we need to advertise. We need to tell everybody how great we are." And they go all out. They get it on Hockey Night in Canada. They get it on TSN during the Olympics or something. I mean, it just goes on and on and on. I just don't see the purpose of that, and I think it's wrong.

Again, I would like to see those things cleaned up in this government and also in other governments. There's no place for that type of partisanship during an election period. There's no reason that we're struggling to find health care workers to fill the different pieces of infrastructure that we've built in the health care system when we are, you know, thinking about cutting \$70,000 from Alberta Hospital, although thanks to one of the hon. members across the way who managed to put a stop to it. When we're here trying to make sure that we're cutting and trimming and trying to be efficient, before we do anything, especially to vulnerable Albertans, maybe the first thing we should be looking at is: what's the stuff that's really not helping anybody? This type of partisan advertising is the type of thing that is going to hurt or is completely useless to vulnerable Albertans or to any Albertans, frankly.

You know, again, I think of education. I think of what I brought up in the House earlier with the school issue in Airdrie right now. I mean, it really is something else. I know every jurisdiction has their issues, but this is a serious, emergent situation in a town that's gone from 20,000 to 45,000 people in just about 10 years and continues to grow at an incredible rate. People don't seem to realize that, and that's why I try to bring it up. The point is that \$15 million would build us a school in Airdrie. Meanwhile, we're spending even in my constituency, other than the rathole replacement in the south of Airdrie, we're still spending tens of millions. I think it's something like \$50 million in road improvements in Airdrie-Chestermere. Well, I've talked to my constituents about this. Sure, there are some that want them. I want them. But they would be willing to put that off if it meant \$15 million for a school. They'd be willing to put off 30 per cent or 50 per cent of those road improvements a couple of years if it meant getting a school built in Airdrie.

When we can't even build the amount of schools that we need, that means we're spending money in other places that we shouldn't be. If there's one place, one area where we should not be spending that type of money, it's on political advertising or semipolitical advertising during an election period or before an election period.

With that, Mr. Chair, you're looking at me as if you want to hear from somebody else, so I will sit down and let my hon. colleagues speak to this. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A1? Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, do you wish to speak on amendment A1?

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I just need to be on the record. I was very disappointed that the last amendment didn't pass. Government advertising is a real concern, and it needs to be restricted. I just once more have to go on the record saying that this is wrong. There are just so many areas where they're going to look at twisting the rules a little bit and saying, "Oh, this is okay; we're talking about the health of Albertans and the importance of CO₂ sequestration" or "We're talking about the safety of Albertans; we're looking at needing to spend \$15 billion on a Rolls-Royce power line." Those things are very potential. This is about advertising and who is doing it.

4:00

It's a real concern to me. I think that government advertising needs to be restricted. We've put two amendments forward, are very disappointed that the government has voted those down. I very much see that this is going to be voted down as well because it's going to be even more restrictive than the last one, which was a good amendment to ensure public safety.

I just have to be on the record once more. It's one of these things that really should be a standing vote – but we're not going to go for that – to show the accountability of people saying: "Well, no. We think government should have the arbitrary decision of deciding those things." I just have to speak in favour of this amendment and hope that we'll come to our senses and put Albertans first.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I will attempt to be brief on this because I know there are other speakers that want to get on to other issues. However, I do want to rise to speak in favour of this amendment. This is a government that has been in power, by the time we get to the next election, for 40 years. There are deeply, deeply embedded patterns of behaviour within this government and their relationship with the public service that are very, very poisonous, frankly, to the health of our democracy.

One of those things, of course, is the way in which government will very conveniently use their Public Affairs budget to promote their political objectives, and there's no question that that happens more and more during an election. There are so many different ways that you can identify that. One member has talked about how, you know, we were quite surprised to hear little jingles and ads on radio stations promoting the budget just a month and a half ago. I have to say that I thought that had taken it to a new level.

I look at the government website, and I see that the colours look remarkably similar to the Conservative Party colours, as does the font. Interestingly, the website itself features the Premier. What does the Premier's face have to do with the policy issues that are talked about on this particular public service government website?

Nothing. The reason the Premier is there is because he's their political leader, at this point in time anyway, and that's the person whose profile this money is being used to enhance.

As it is, there's a tremendous inequity, a tremendous malaise in terms of democracy in this province. Of course, we already have election financing rules that ensure that we are the Wild West of vote buying here in this province, and the last thing we need is to also give this government the opportunity to do advertising on political issues over the course of a political campaign. So a limitation on that would be completely reasonable and would be a sound understanding of a level playing field and fairness. Should the government choose to vote this amendment down, then clearly it will be another example of them once again rejecting the notion of a fair playing field and their full commitment to equal democratic participation.

I urge members, as a result, to actually support this amendment because I think it's one that's much needed to improve the equality and fairness of our democratic process. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the amendment?

If not, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:04 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Boutilier	Notley
Blakeman	Hinman	Taft

Against the motion:

Berger	Hayden	Olson
Campbell	Horne	Prins
Dallas	Jablonski	Quest
Danyluk	Jacobs	Redford
DeLong	Johnson	Renner
Denis	Knight	Rogers
Doerksen	Leskiw	Sherman
Elniski	Liepert	VanderBurg
Evans	Lindsay	Vandermeer
Fritz	McFarland	Weadick
Hancock	McQueen	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 33
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: This takes us to Bill 7. Any comments or questions on Bill 7? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I will be speaking in the next several minutes to section 4.1(1) of the bill, which is on page 4.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt, but may we revert to Introduction of Guests for a moment?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some very special people to me: my wife, Pauline Prins, and my son Wayne Prins and my daughter-in-law Renée Prins from Fort McMurray.

Thank you very much.

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, thank you for indulging us. Please proceed.

Dr. Taft: I'm happy to do it.

We'll try again. I am speaking, as I was saying, Mr. Chairman, for the next several minutes specifically to section 4.1(1) of the bill, which is on page 4. This section of the bill allows the Chief Electoral Officer to test in a by-election the use of election procedures and equipment that are different from those which are required by the act.

I know from what I've read and heard that one of the options being considered is electronic voting, Internet-based voting. I have thought about this, and there have been some discussions in our caucus on this. My comments are strictly my own, but I do feel very strongly about this, Mr. Chairman. In this Assembly we have discussions on things that are good or things that are silly or things that are pointless or uninformed or misguided, depending on our feelings. I actually think that in considering this – and this may sound melodramatic – we have to consider evil. I think it's incumbent on us as legislators, when we weigh the pros and cons of electronic voting, that we actually get down to some of the most unsavoury and difficult aspects of human nature, including, as I say, the word "evil." That's not a word I use lightly.

There are, Mr. Chairman, I suppose many views of history, two of which I'd like to mention. One is that things are advancing, that over the long haul we're on this move as a civilization to better and higher and happier levels, that as one generation leads to the next and one century leads to the next, things are just on this constant process of improving. On the other hand, there's a sense that history is actually just an unending struggle. It's a contest; it's a struggle of often many forces at once between right and wrong and good and bad and enlightenment and darkness and however you want to put it. But it is an unending struggle, and the outcome is always in peril.

Mr. Chairman, my particular view is that of the second. I'd like to think that history is on this unending course to paradise, but my reading of history is that, in fact, we are in an unending struggle, a contest. In light of that, I think that the advances and freedoms and prosperity that we enjoy right now require constant vigilance. It requires far-sightedness. It requires toughness and discipline. History is absolutely filled with dead civilizations. We think probably immediately of the western heritage of Rome. For those of us who have been to Italy or many parts of the Mediterranean, you can walk through glorious ruins of a civilization.

4:20

Of course, before Rome in our tradition there was Egypt. Before Egypt there was Persia, and on it goes back. Or you can travel around the world. You go to South America. Go to Machu Picchu, where my wife hiked about three years ago and brought back photos

that are just breathtaking. How was this done? This was a civilization that was actually lost to human knowledge until, you know, a hundred years ago or so. Of course, other places come to mind. Angkor Wat, Borobudur in Indonesia, where I spent some time about a year and a half ago: spectacular civilizations completely gone.

I cannot help but go to those and think: well, what's in store for our civilization? Are we so brilliant, are we so exceptional that all the rules of history that have applied to everybody before us do not apply to us? I can never come away feeling that confident. I feel that sooner or later this civilization that has been so generous to all of us will be lost, and it's our responsibility as citizens and as legislators to keep it alive and healthy and vibrant for as long as possible.

To me, democracy, which really is what is underlying Bill 7, has to be understood in that context. We think that democracy is ancient. We think of ancient Greece, you know, the golden age of Athens and Plato and Socrates and the citizens of Athens, all of whom were male landowners, meeting and hashing out the details in their wonderful temples and stadiums. But that golden age lasted barely a lifetime, really, before Athens was conquered by Sparta and essentially wiped out.

We think of the Magna Carta, and we say: well, democracy as we've known it has been around at least since the Magna Carta, 800 years. But I can tell you that the Magna Carta, the political society at the time of the Magna Carta, bears virtually no resemblance to what we enjoy today. At the time of the Magna Carta that was really just a product of raw political muscle coming to a compromise between barons and the monarchy. Sure, it laid the route for democracy, but to think that democracy as we know it now is anything like what was around 800 years ago is misguided.

What we have today is a representative democracy in which everybody over the age of 18 has the right to vote. That's a remarkable achievement. We have to remember that it's in the lifetime of probably just about every member of this Assembly that First Nations people got the right to vote. Think about that for a minute. It's in our lifetime, the early 1960s, that First Nations people got the right to vote, and it's in the lifetime of the former Lieutenant Governor, Norman Kwong, that Chinese people got the right to vote here. It's not even a hundred years since women got the right to vote here. Our democracy is extremely brief. It's not this great, long, ancient tradition. It's brief. We have a responsibility to nourish it, and we cannot gamble with it.

I did a little bit of math. If we were to imagine about 10,000 years of human civilization since humans began gathering in villages and so on, and if we were to take that as a day, then in the period of time since Alberta women got the right to vote, it's 14 minutes to midnight. It's that brief. In a long, long stretch of human history democracy as we know it now is but a moment.

We need to protect our right to vote, and we need to protect its credibility. That's why I'm opposed to the sections in Bill 7 that allow and encourage and facilitate the Chief Electoral Officer to move to electronic means of voting.

Canadians tend to be naive. We are the Dudley Do-Rights of the world. We go in, and we think: well, everybody is going to play fair, and nobody is going to be dirty, and we'll all follow the rules. I went to a movie the other night. I wouldn't recommend it. It wasn't a very good movie. It was called *Dining with Stella*, and it portrays in many ways the terrible naivety of Canadians in other cultures.

The world is not a nice place. The world is filled with evil and threats and dangers, and we need to recognize that. Even in our own province in the last decade there was a major voting scandal in Calgary, the ward 10 voting scandal. Well over a thousand fraudu-

lent ballots were cast. How was that caught? It was caught because they were ballots. It was caught because an official paying attention noticed that ballot after ballot had a consistent signature, and they were all physically delivered at the same time to the same place. That's how that was caught. To the credit of that official she blew a whistle. The police were called in, and actually a former member of this Assembly very nearly got drawn into that. I believe his house was actually raided. But we don't need to go there. My point is that there are people out there who will deliberately set out even in our own province to cheat an election in the most blatant way.

There are, of course, much smaller examples. We've had them. I bet many members have. The former Member for Edmonton-Decore, Bill Bonner, who was in an extremely close election call in 2001, ended up in a situation where there were dozens and dozens of special ballots, all with the same signature. The former Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was actually a returning officer there, too, and after the election saw documents that were special ballots supposedly signed by one of his constituents. They were dated, and in fact that constituent was in India when the election was conducted. Somebody had fraudulently signed those ballots. So we cannot be naive. We cannot be naive.

The great risk, the potentially fatal risk to democracy with electronic voting is that there is no physical record. There's no opportunity to audit. Everything is just buzzed into this black box, and out comes the result. Who's to say if it's accurate or not? Of course, we'll hear from some members: well, we can do our banking electronically, so why can't we vote electronically? This is where the matter of evil comes into this. I think: let's not be naive. Imagine a situation, again in most of our lifetimes – I'm talking like I'm an old guy here. I guess I'm getting that way. Imagine the cold war and the Soviet Union and the interest those countries might have, if they were still going today, in hacking into an electronic voting system and rearranging the results. It could happen.

In fact, there was just a major story that broke the other day. I brought a copy of it, Mr. Chairman: Internet Spy Ring Uncovered. It talks about a group of Canadian researchers, actually, largely Canadian. They were also working with U.S. researchers. They were able to uncover a spy ring that had hacked into the most secure databases in the world; for example, the Indian military and the Indian nuclear establishment and the United Nations and the offices of the Dalai Lama and several other countries. They were able to trace this spy ring eventually back to a big city in China called Chengdu, but the researcher said there is "no evidence in this report of the involvement of the People's Republic of China or any other government in the shadow network." So we don't actually know who was this spy ring, but we do know that they were able to hack into the most secure electronic systems available.

4:30

We also have to think: well, what about organized crime? I mean, imagine – imagine – a voting system that could be hacked into by organized crime or by a foreign government heavily invested in the oil sands who, for example, is wanting royalties changed or environmental standards reduced or increased. Who's to say that that could never happen? We have to remember – and there's been compelling evidence of this in the Assembly the last few days – that Canada is a nation at war right now. Right now. Well, are we so absolutely confident in our electronic security that we think that our enemies in war might not try to hack in and fiddle around with an electronic voting system?

This is an age, Mr. Chairman, where people deliberately set out to plan to fly fully loaded airliners into skyscrapers. That's the extent that people will go to violate a society. So do we actually think

they're not going to go so far as to try and hack into a voting system, particularly when the stakes are so high? We in the province of Alberta own some of the largest petroleum reserves on the planet. What a tempting target: to hack into a voting system and get control, get a friendly force in place through an election. There are fundamentalists of all types out there, Mr. Chairman, who believe that regardless of the cost, regardless of the rules that are broken or the lives that are paid, they are right, and they will stop at nothing, including, in my view, hacking into electronic voting systems.

Of course, who's the scrutineer? Who's to say if it even happened? What if it's a vote in which, you know, six or eight votes are the difference? Well, how would we ever know if it had been stolen? Or even if it was 6,000 votes or 600,000. How would we even know if the election had been stolen?

What's kind of perverse in all of this is that even if the fraud didn't occur, who would actually trust the system? What if it was a close vote and absolutely legitimate? The question nonetheless would always nag at the public and nag, at least, at the losers: was that election true and honest, or was it stolen from me? Close votes, controversial plebiscites, surprise outcomes: all of that would be constantly in doubt, and that doubt, in my view, Mr. Chairman, would eat away at the public faith and confidence in our entire voting system.

Mr. Chairman, you can tell that I am deeply, deeply opposed to any movement towards electronic voting. It's a cheap way out of what's a pretty straightforward problem. There are much better ways to get people to vote in higher numbers than they do. This is, you know, potentially a deal with the devil. The stakes could not be higher. We're not talking about losing some money or losing some lives. We're talking about losing, potentially, a civilization.

I want to drive home this message. We would only need to lose that election once for everything to be changed. All we would need is for one government to come in here on the basis of a fraudulent election, and all our laws are up for grabs. Our freedoms, our wealth, everything we do is up for grabs and can be rearranged in the course of a single term so that we would never again be able to reclaim them. I don't want to get too dramatic, but there are dramatic examples, shocking examples of that sort of thing happening in history. The stakes are high beyond measure.

I think that we need to rein in any change in legislation that would advance us toward a voting system that cannot be physically audited, that cannot be handled in as concrete a way as counting up ballots, Mr. Chairman. I would ask all members here in this Assembly to think long and hard before they choose the easy option of saying: well, it's Internet voting; it'll increase voter turnout. But what's the risk? I think the risk ultimately is of our democratic civilization.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on Bill 7?

Mr. Hinman: I would just like to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview because it's another area that I also feel very strongly about, and he's been very eloquent in expressing the importance of the physical evidence. This really is a concern to me as well, so I want to speak a little bit on that.

He talked about three key elements here. There is one other one, you know, that is often brought up, that makes me nervous when it comes out. The first one is the traceability. It's absolutely essential in a free and democratic society that we have traceability of the election ballot. The only way that you can have that traceability is with the physical evidence. We need a ballot where one has to actually go in and mark. Perhaps there are some areas where we can

make it more efficient, but we have to have the physical ballot that would come out. You know, some places in the States have used a punch machine so that the marks are even, and I can understand some of those areas. But the point is that there's a physical ballot.

The key that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview keeps going back to and what is so key is that it needs to be tamper-proof. Electronic boxes are not tamper-proof. You could even have it set up and someone could go, "Oh, we tried 10 votes," and you could run it through and see the 10 votes, that they were all accurate, and say, "There's nothing wrong with that." But a computer programmer could go, "You know what? We'll let the first 3,000 votes go through as they are, and then we're going to have a little program in there that's going to kick in and distort it so it comes out with the things that we want." Even if we think that we've got it covered and are looking, there isn't that physical evidence, which to me is so, so critical in having the confidence of the people that it's there. So tamper-proof is just incredibly important.

You know, in our democracy when we get up to vote, one of the blessings that we have is that we can get scrutineers in place. Again, what's the value of a scrutineer if there isn't the physical evidence to watch and know what's going on: when someone comes to put in the ballot, to actually watch them put it in and to know that they're not putting in two or three, that they don't have some code whereby they can go in and put in several. There are so many areas.

Again, if we want to look at as the numbers increase that we can say, "But we want to have a quick tally when it's over," I believe there is an electronic way to do that, much like a parking ticket. If you were to mark it and put it through a machine, the scrutineers can watch that as it goes in and comes out and falls into a box, just one has come out, just like a credit card receipt. There it is, and it goes in. It could be electronically calculated, but the physical evidence is still there.

In order to safeguard democracy, to ensure the confidence of the people, that tamper-proof, physical evidence has to be there in order that one can have the confidence and realize, you know, "I'm going to go vote, and I know that it counts," not thinking, "Oh, there's some corrupt way; maybe they're stuffing the ballot," which we often hear of. Again, the scrutineers can be watching to ensure that that's not there.

There are just so many areas where people are frustrated when it comes to democracy. They already say that their vote doesn't matter. We're not addressing those things in this bill. I think there is actually an amendment coming on how we engage Albertans to say: my vote does make a difference.

There are a few areas that I've talked to people about, and I believe I actually shared this last time I was here, with the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I wasn't successful, but, you know, if at first you don't succeed, try and try again. One of the things that I think Bill 7 – and again it's a bigger scope. If we really want to increase the participation of Albertans so that they think – well, let's use the example of the Green Party, that has now been deregistered. Many people said, "Why should I vote for them? They don't have a hope of getting in." Down in my by-election in Calgary-Glenmore I ran into some supporters of the New Democratic Party, and they just thought, "Well, you know, my vote really doesn't matter." It's important that people feel like their vote counts, and there's nothing in here. But, like I said, I think there's going to be an amendment coming forward saying: "How do we promote democracy? How do we engage Albertans so that it makes a difference?"

4:40

If you believe in a philosophy – and there are several different philosophies in this House, out there. If we were to change the

dynamics to where it's not arbitrarily decided by Members' Services how much funding a caucus gets for research – when I was in here in 2004, had the average been \$5 for every Albertan that voted for a party that got a member in, it was amazing how the research would have worked out. But you look at one party that maybe gets 250,000 voters. They've got some support, yet if they don't get the MLAs in, their research funding is dramatically dropped. If, in fact, we were to engage Albertans and say, "You know, if you vote and a member of that political party gets in, your vote will count for \$5 worth of research funding to go to that party," all of a sudden Albertans would say: "You know what? I believe in the Wildrose party. I believe in the Green Party. I believe in the political party of the Progressive Conservatives. So I'm going to vote so that they get extra research money to promote their philosophy and those that I support." Those areas aren't in here, and then it slows it down.

Again, if in fact we were to have electronic voting, it would be one more area where people – again, that discouragement gets in there – think: you know, my vote doesn't count, and I don't have confidence that, in fact, that black box is really accurate, that my vote went in and it showed there. There's absolutely no physical proof after you hit the button that you even voted. You'd have no confidence. So people would get to think: why should I take the time to go down there when I don't trust the system? We really do need to look at how we are going to engage Albertans, how we get them to come out and make them realize that their vote does in fact make a difference. Electronic voting I think would be a discouragement. The doubt would start to step in. It would grow, and it would be just a real problem for Albertans to get out and say that it's worth the effort.

Again, to follow up on the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, you know, the struggle that he talked about – and it's always enjoyable to listen to him talk about history and what's gone on in civilization. The battle has gone on as long as man has been on the Earth that we know, this battle between communities, this battle between people, this battle between good and evil. One of my favourite writers, Frederic Bastiat, who wrote in the early 1800s, wrote a treatise called *The Law*, and in there what was kind of profound to me is that he talked about that it's human nature that we all want to progress, that we all want to do better, but what's also human nature is that we want to do it in the easiest way possible.

So if, in fact, we don't have the law to protect life, to protect people's property, to protect their freedom – it's terrible to live in those societies where there's anarchy or where there are tribal laws. We have wonderful Canadian soldiers right now trying to give that quality of life to people in Afghanistan and to protect their quality of life and not thinking: some arbitrary ruler from the next town over doesn't like our town, so they're going to wipe us out, or we need to be serfs to that tyrant. Democracy is so profound.

Another one that's often quoted is Alexander Tytler, and I'll just paraphrase him. He said that democracy is doomed to fail. The average democracy only lasts between 200 and 250 years, and at that point the political parties become astute enough to realize that the way to get votes is to promise the most from the public purse to the majority of the people. Eventually with the debt of that country the economy of that country fails, and democracy is lost. It's another area where we need to be very careful. There are areas in South America where the debt is just astronomical, and the struggles that it's put on those people are terrible. [interjection] I mean, it's very important because we want people to get out and vote. The question on Bill 7, which was recommended by the last election officer, is: do we need to do something in order to engage Albertans? Only 40 per cent, 50 per cent are coming out and voting. What's this bill lacking in order to excite Albertans to come out and vote?

Again, if we look back to the birthplace of democracy, which we call Greece, it's in turmoil right now because of the fiscal debt. There are riots. Their quality of life is going to be drastically affected. When the people do not come out and vote, that becomes a problem.

We talked about good and evil, whether it's freedom versus serfdom. You know, do we have prosperity? Those are all important things that we need to look at when we come to the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. What is it that we need to amend that's going to make the next election more engaging for Albertans? As I go through the dozens and dozens of recommendations, those that would really engage Albertans have been left out, that confidence.

Again, going back to the electronic voting, which is in here, I think we need to bring an amendment forward. I thought they were going to bring that so that we could actually come to a vote on this and eliminate it. We just cannot afford to have a trial of something like electronic voting because the problem is that if we have that trial, people will say: "Oh, look. It was successful, so we can go down." Just because it works the first time doesn't mean that with that evil, that desire to have power and control, all of a sudden people will realize: "Ah, now we can do it. We'll let this grow. We'll show that it's successful. It'll move out there." We really do need to remove the electronic voting option in there so that we're not even tempted to go down that route and set ourselves up for failure.

There are so many things that we just need to do here in Bill 7. It's very disappointing to me that we don't have set election dates. At the municipal level we realize the importance of that. It's set. The term is set. People going in know that it's for three years. Those people that want to run in the municipal election this fall know that it's coming up, and they plan. They're making announcements every day, those people that are running, those people that aren't running, and that's critical. Yet the dilemma that Albertans are in right now is: when is the next provincial election? The Premier has said it over and over and over again: oh, it's March 2012. Well, if that's what it is, then pass the regulation, pass the law, and set it for every four years and go forward.

The fact of the matter is that he's being less than fully open with Albertans because what he says is: "Well, I still have my joker, and I'll play it when it works best for us. Retaining power and control is the most critical, and if something was to come up, we need to be able to slap that down on the table and say, 'Wow, here it is.'" For myself, I just see this idea coming out, you know, the feeling or the sentiment of the House that we're going to be dismissed for the break until this fall, and I just have to ask: what is the reason?

I look at the last time they called the snap election, in the spring, when, in fact, he said: we're not going to have one for four years, until the fall. You know, it won't be until November of '08. And what do we have on February 3? He called an election and caught – well, he didn't catch people off guard. But I've mentioned this before, that if at the Olympics we were to say, "Oh, gosh, we've got them up and ready" and tell all of our athletes that we're really going to jump it up six months and we train so that we have peak performance in six months, what advantage do we have over the other athletes to announce to them, "Oh, you've got to come here in 30 days because we're having the Olympics"?

Set election dates are critical, and they're not addressed in this. It was recommended to this government that we have set election dates. Again, you have to ask the question: what are the arguments for not having set election dates? Yes, there are some, but are they good ones? I don't think they carry the weight that we need them to. A lot of people say: "Well, if you have a set election date, that last year is kind of lame. Everybody knows it's coming, and we're just

not going to participate, and the government is going to spend a bunch of money.” But people are aware, and they see that. I don’t see that problem in municipal elections. I think it’s fine to have set election dates. We need to address them. If we were to do that, in fact, I think that would raise the confidence of Albertans in the democratic process and why we should be elected.

4:50

Once again, I just want to go back to engaging Albertans on why they should vote and the importance of changing the way we fund the parties that are represented here in the House. If, in fact, we were to tell them, “You vote; you have a member get in; they’re going to be supported by you,” like I say, with the numbers that I’ve crunched, \$5 for every voter that votes for a party, there would be a reason to get out and vote. Instead, those people say: well, we’re never going to win, so why should I bother voting? Why? Because you’re funding the research that shows people and educates Albertans why this is a better way. Each one of us in here is here because we believe that we can make a difference. We’ve heard from our constituents, from our businesspeople and others that say: “You know, this is a problem that we have here in our society. I’d like to see this changed. How do we do it?” Well, you run for government. You get involved in government and change rules and regulations.

I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. We need to have a system set up where those people that want to promote the arts are able to and do not have to struggle in the tax system to where there’s no advantage. Why do we pick one business and say, “If, in fact, you’re going to develop the oil sands, we’ll give you a credit to do that,” yet we don’t allow it for the film industry? We don’t allow it for wind or green energy. You see them come crawling to the government, and the government picks and chooses, as they did this last year, and says: “Well, ethanol is the way to go. We’ll give \$300 million to ethanol.” You have to ask why.

People run because we think: here’s this wonderful idea on how to improve our democracy, how to improve our safety, how to improve our economy. Yet we don’t excite Albertans with those options with what we currently have here. We just need to somehow reach out and ask the question, “Okay; what is it that we do to promote democracy, to promote the people here in the province?” and say: “You know what? Your vote does make a difference.”

When I went out door-knocking, that was the one thing that I enjoyed the most. I’d ask someone: “Well, do you believe your vote makes a difference? Have you voted in the past?” The ones that would say, “No, it really doesn’t matter who we vote for; once you guys get in there, you’re all the same” got me excited. We could have a debate. “Why do you feel that way?” It inevitably went back to the point that was: “Well, once you’re in there, there’s nothing we can do. You’re no longer accountable in any way or form to me until the next election, whether that’s three years, three and a half, five years. There’s nothing I can do.” So I would tell those people: “Well, no, there is something. You can count on me. I believe in accountability. If you’re not happy with me, if one-third of the constituents sign a petition saying that they’re not happy with what I’m doing, I would step down. I’d allow a by-election.” There’s nothing in this bill for accountability.

Mr. Liepert: How soon?

Mr. Hinman: Always, Mr. Liepert – I apologize – Minister of Energy. I apologize, Mr. Chair. I responded to the heckling; I should have paid attention to the chair.

The Deputy Chair: You’re speaking through the chair.

Mr. Hinman: They’re distracting sometimes. Thank you. It’s always good.

That is one of the other things that I would have done. There are several people in here – the Minister of Energy is one – that I would have gone after and said: “You know what? He’s destroying our health care. Let’s see if we can recall him.” There’s no mechanism, but I believe that his seat would be very vulnerable with what damage he’s done here in the province if, in fact, we had that.

There’s nothing in here to have accountability of elected individuals, Mr. Chair, and we need to put that in here if we want Albertans to be accountable. If, in fact, we have that accountability, all of a sudden people are engaged, and that’s a great blessing for democracy. We need people to be engaged. We need people to believe they can make a difference. If they don’t believe it, they don’t participate.

That’s one of the other things that’s interesting about human nature. To paraphrase Einstein, he said: the definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results. The people have elected this government over and over. They’ve been expecting different results. There are some new parties out there now that are different, and people are wanting to engage. It’s exciting to them that they have an option now to do something different, and they can vote on that. Is the process set up that’s going to engage them? Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, doesn’t address that. It goes over all kinds of little details. They’re looking at the details.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I rise to propose an amendment, actually.

The Deputy Chair: We have the amendment here, and I’ll have the pages pass it out.

Dr. Taft: Yes. I’ll wait a moment.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. This will be amendment A2. Please proceed.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think most people have a copy of the amendment. I’m moving for the Member for Calgary-Buffalo that Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 12 by striking out the proposed subsection (7).

Now, I’m sure that for those of us who have read this act – and I know it’s a hefty act, and it’s not always the most exciting – I bet many of us have been a bit startled by section (7). In case you haven’t read it, I want to read it into the record. It’s on page 12 of the bill, subsection (7), and it says, “For the purpose of tracing the unauthorized use of the list of electors, the Chief Electoral Officer may have fictitious voter information included in a list of electors provided under this section.” In other words, what we are doing here is authorizing the Chief Electoral Officer to put phony names and information on the voters list.

In principle, of course, I have a lot of trouble with that. I’m just really uneasy with us authorizing an officer of this Legislature to put fictitious information onto the voters list. I think it’s just a bad approach generally, and I also think there must be better ways of checking the accuracy of the voters list and of who has voted and who hasn’t.

I think this is a pretty straightforward amendment. I haven't heard any justification for us authorizing an officer of the Legislature to essentially lie. If there is a justification from a government member, I'd like to hear it because maybe it's a good justification. Otherwise, I think that on principle we should be loath to authorize deceitful ploys by officers of the Legislature, especially when it's something like a voters list. I think we should encourage, instead, the Chief Electoral Officer to find other more straightforward and honest ways to confirm the authorized use and the accuracy of the voters list.

This is really a pretty straightforward issue. I hope somebody from the government rises to speak to this issue, for or against, because I'd be curious to know what the justification for that is. I'd be equally excited if somebody from the government actually spoke in favour of us making this amendment.

With those brief comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

5:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I really appreciate this amendment coming forward. I understand the concerns of the hon. members for Edmonton-Riverview and Calgary-Buffalo, and I'm going to address one of those because I've experienced the problems of not doing this. What I think is important in having this and why we do it: first of all, it is announced so that political parties know that there are fictitious names. I've personally been on lists that I know people are using illegally. The problem is that a lot of people want to get the electoral lists. They want to get their hands on them, and they use them for purposes that are evil, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview used, or – what would I say? – the integrity isn't there. Voters lists are very valuable in different areas like that. I think what's important on this, though, is that people realize that and say: you know, these names aren't all guaranteed. When someone gets hold of that list or something, we can trace it back and actually charge them for the criminal act of using a voters list illegally.

I see your point and your concern. To me, I would consider it entrapment if, in fact, we weren't made aware that those things were in there, but being aware that they're there, we're only going to use them above board and for the election. There would be nothing wrong if, in fact, you make that call or you do those things. But it's after the election that we have such people, and there are several. You know the problems going on in Calgary with electoral balloting and phony names. If those people that put in for special ballots used one of those phony things, we can attach it and track them. I understand your concern about entrapment, and I agree with that. Entrapment is wrong. But being aware that they're doing that would hopefully only get those people, then, that are using it for less than proper reasons. So I think that there are some valid reasons in doing that.

It's just amazing to me the mining of lists. I just actually got a phone call today on my BlackBerry from a 505 area code. Well, where on earth is 505? Well, this came from a list of a company that I was dealing with that I know they obviously gave out. There's only one company where it came from. I know that when they gave it out, they assured me that that number wouldn't go out. How do we stop that? I mean, we have passed legislation now for demon dialing and those areas and for people being able to get off the list, yet we're still not able to go after these people that are using it for the wrong purposes.

I don't feel that it's entrapment, because we're aware of it. I think that there are some good possibilities with it, but it's always

excellent to bring up those ideas. That's what's great about this process, that we can think: "Oh, I've never thought about that. That is a new idea, something that we need to consider." With the 83 members in here there's been a lot of experience, and we as a House want to draw on that experience to ensure that we get the best bill forward and, again, that we protect those people on the list.

I really feel that this adds a level of protection to the voters. I'm still amazed that some of the people actually don't even want to vote because they don't want to be on the list. They say: "No. I know what goes on." So anything that we can do to assure people about being on the voters list. Again, when we fill out our income tax, that's one of the questions they ask: will you allow us to update and put you on the voters list? Again, the reason why they ask that is because of a number of citizens who say: you know, I don't want to be on that list because of the abuse of that list.

I really feel that we need to do our due diligence. We want to make sure these lists aren't abused. I think that this is actually a good section in here that will reduce the abuse and misuse of the list, like I say, those people that want to do it for unscrupulous reasons other than for contacting and engaging people in the democratic process. I must say, you know, that that list is so valuable to try and contact people. When there are missing parts in that list and we're not allowed to use it or that list is less than accurate, it's not as effective as we want. Again, we want to reach out. We want to try and touch every Albertan in one way or another, and having an accurate list is so critical to that.

As much as I appreciate the thought going into this amendment in saying that we should strike subsection (7) from section 12, I'd have to speak against this amendment and think that, no, I want to capture those people that are using these lists for less than democratic purposes.

Again, it's just one of those areas where lists are powerful. They're information now. Just like electronic ballots are bad – we don't have it – having an electronic list and people getting out and using it: I want to catch those perpetrators. I want to exercise the full limit of the law, which perhaps isn't even strict enough in here for misuse of electoral lists. I want to protect the elector. I want to make sure it's there, and if this helps it, awesome. I'm excited about that and want to go there. I hope that perhaps brings up and spurs a little more discussion on this amendment and how and why we should vote for it or against it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I am in favour of this amendment although I agree that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore raised some good points. This is the issue. I think that we are trying to balance public confidence in the electors list, the integrity of the electors list, and make it a useful tool to help promote democracy, to draw out voters, to mail to them, to call them, et cetera, to get them engaged in the process. The list itself: we really want it to work for us.

Where is it being abused? Well, in a couple of places. I don't think I've actually been in a place where I saw it, but I certainly heard that provincial lists, for example, were used in federal elections or were used in leadership campaigns, and that's inappropriate. You have heard me stand and speak in this House quite a bit that we must only use personal information – and certainly the information on a voters list is valuable information and valuable personal information – for the purpose for which it was collected, not for a secondary use, not for another campaign, not for a leadership campaign. That's one of the places that the electoral list gets abused.

The second part of it, actually, is people's belief in the integrity of that list and in the use of their personal information. The reason that I support this amendment is that I think we need to get at the root causes of how these lists are being jeopardized or misused. What I see in this legislation is that it's treating a symptom, not the disease.

Let me break this down a little bit. I can remember when electors lists used to be posted publicly. In my community it used to be posted on a telephone pole or an electrical pole near the community league building. It was a sheaf of papers, and it was kind of stapled up there. It actually broke information down in such a way that it described whether someone was married or single. It gave that kind of information and, of course, the address where they were living and their full name and, I think, a birth date as well. People who were fairly trusting and, I guess, hadn't learned by experience would give their full name.

At one time we had a single woman living with us in our house, and she duly gave out her full name. So there it was, Alice Brown, and the address indicated she was single and female. My father took one look at that posted up on that telephone pole and went, "Ye gods, that's a dumb thing to do because we've just advertised that there is a single or unattached woman at this address, and that could really cause her some problems." She learned that lesson, I'm sure, and never did it again. She would start to edit the kind of information that she gave out.

A lot of us learned that we can't control where these lists are going. I don't give out my home address to anybody for any reason now. Even though they say, "Oh, this is your home address?" I say, "That's where you can contact me." I won't give a home address because I can't control how they're going to use that information, and that kind of attitude flows through into whether people are giving us information for an electoral list.

5:10

We need to be able to reassure people that either the way we collect the information or what the information is will not subject them to unpleasantness or danger or difficulty, which is important. We have to try and safeguard against the list being used in ways that the information was not collected for. I see that as the problem, but I think that what the act does in section 12(7) is create another whole problem.

I know that my hon. colleagues opposite go into election campaigns with just buckets of money, and I'm sure that's a very nice experience. I can tell you that those in my caucus and in my party that have run for political office don't go into election campaigns with buckets of money, but they do often go in with a lot of volunteers. We work the electoral lists hard over and over again. You know, you've got to talk to people. So if we end up with an electoral list that now has fictitious people seeded into it, how much time am I going to spend in an election campaign with my volunteers desperately trying to search out Sue Higgins, who is a fictitious name? We will keep trying because in my constituency people move around a lot. Sue Higgins is probably in Edmonton-Centre still, but she has moved maybe twice, maybe three times.

You know, still, 50 per cent of my constituents will not be there at the next election. Anyone who was there and voting in March of 2008 will not be in the same location in March of 2012. They will be either out of the riding or in a different place in the riding. So our campaign works those lists hard. We keep looking. We will keep trying to find our fictitious Sue Higgins because, you know, there are only so many people that we can entice out to participate in the democratic process in Edmonton-Centre. They're pretty valuable to us, and we'll keep looking. To my campaign that's cruel punishment, to make somebody keep looking for a trick that's in there to try and stop me from doing something I wouldn't do anyway.

I know those lists aren't supposed to go anywhere else, and I will protect them because I believe in that. I have spoken so often in this House that we are only hurting ourselves when we wink and look the other way and allow people's personal information to be used for a purpose beyond that for which it was collected, and this is a perfect example of why you don't let that stuff happen. But as my colleague said, evil happens. I think there's a shorter version of that or slightly different words with a more colloquial expression that starts with an "s," but essentially things go wrong. People disobey because it's easy and convenient.

I cannot believe that this is an effective way to stop that. I mean, it doesn't stop it. It doesn't stop people from taking that paper copy and walking out of a provincial campaign office, putting it in a file folder and taking it out and walking it across the street to a federal campaign office. It doesn't stop them from doing that. Supposedly, you know, if Sue Higgins turned up on some federal campaign list, it could then be tracked back to my campaign. But then what? Who was the person that walked it across? That would be very difficult to be able to track, given the number of volunteers we're working with. So, you know, I'm putting up 30 people that are all now going to have a suspicion cast upon them because they might have handled that voters list where this fictitious name has been seeded into it.

One, it takes a lot of extra effort from our volunteers, and we don't have a lot of volunteers. Now, you know, maybe this is a strategy from government because they've got a lot of money and they can pay people. Well, opposition members, I think, for the most part don't have a lot of money and don't have a lot of volunteers, and maybe this is meant to make it harder on us. I don't know. I don't think that addresses our problem with lists being used for things they shouldn't have been used for. Putting a phony name in there doesn't stop the thing from going wrong in the first place. Supposedly it's a way of tracking it back, but as I've just pointed out, you don't actually track it back. You track it back to a whole bunch of people. What are you going to do? Lay charges against all of them? I don't see how this is going to be effective.

The second one is that people won't co-operate. They won't give us information and they won't give us a good electoral list if they don't trust what we're going to do with the information. Again, I don't see how seeding phony names into an electoral list that's distributed to provincial campaigns is going to help us convince people of the integrity of that list and that we will protect it on their behalf. It does nothing to address the original problem there, which is that lack of trust.

I think those things need to be addressed in other ways, not in some weird, after-the-fact action which in and of itself creates a whole other problem, and that's the problem I've outlined, that campaigns try to find these fictitious people and keep pursuing them.

That's why I encouraged my colleagues to bring that particular amendment forward. I heard the arguments that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore raised around this, and I think a lot of what he said is valid. But, again, it doesn't address the problem. It just deals with it after the fact, and I think it deals with it in a bad way.

Actually, when I first got this act way back when and started going through it — you can see all my sticky notes and little notes beside it. When I actually get to this section, what I've written in the side is: "This is stupid. Has it been tested?" I'm sorry; it is. I mean no disrespect to whoever came up with this — and I haven't been able to find it mentioned in the recommendations from the previous Chief Electoral Officer — but I think it is stupid. I think it's going to cause a lot of work for people that are just well-meaning volunteers, and it's not going to address the problems that it was put in there to address. It doesn't actually target the source of the problems.

Thus, I am supporting the amendment that's in front of us, and I appreciate the opportunity to outline why I'm supporting it.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I listened to the hon. member's comments with interest. The first thing I would like to say and I would like to remind members of this House is that our fundamental approach to the amendments to this legislation was to consult with the Chief Electoral Officer and the former Chief Electoral Officer, who are experts at running the administration of elections. What the Chief Electoral Officer told us was that this was a step that would assist the office of the Chief Electoral Officer to manage the control of the lists. It has been used in British Columbia. They have consulted with other systems which have used this and found it to be effective. What the original amendment in this legislation is trying to address is not necessarily the manual management of a particular name or address but the wholesale selling or distribution of lists electronically.

Now, I'd like to just think for a moment about one of the things that the hon. member talks about very passionately, which is controlling personal information, and you did refer to this in your comments. I think that that is the fundamental principle of what we are trying to do. The first thing that the Chief Electoral Officer wants to do is to ensure that these lists are not a commercial commodity. We would be very concerned, as would the Chief Electoral Officer and I think every member of this House, if we found that for some reason someone who was able to obtain a list because they were somehow involved in a political process as a registered candidate did something with that list like sell it to a magazine subscription company. That's the picture of what this is trying to address.

5:20

Now, there's no doubt that as we look at how campaigns are run and how elections are managed, there are a number of volunteers. I think that most people in this House and most political candidates would celebrate the fact that they have well-meaning and solid and trustworthy volunteers. Although there is a possibility that some of the scenarios that have been referred to could happen, I would just like to advise the House that, in our discussions with the Chief Electoral Officer, the recommendation of both the current Chief Electoral Officer and the former Chief Electoral Officer was that they have found, in consulting with professionals that manage elections across the country, that this is an effective approach to ensure that the integrity of the list is protected and that there are ways to track the list back to the campaign who has received the list. I think that's the fundamental principle behind the amendment.

Now, some of the things that have been referred to are certainly pieces that could go wrong. There's no doubt about that. I know that when we're in this House and we're talking about legislation and different scenarios, one of the things that we all like to do is to sort of chase the logical path of activity that could lead to that scenario which is the most unlikely but still possible. However, we as a government agreed to include this amendment because we believe that it gives some further confidence to the process by having people know that the office of the Chief Electoral Officer is actually able to trace those lists back to sources.

Therefore, I would urge the House to oppose this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to participate in the debate on this amendment to Bill 7. Certainly, Bill 7, as it winds its way through this Assembly, needs to be changed. When I first had a look at this bill regarding specifically this section, and we're dealing with the unauthorized use of the list of electors, I wrote: how will this work?

I certainly can understand where the hon. Minister of Justice is coming from with her explanation. I was looking for examples of unauthorized use: certainly, the idea or the notion or the proposal that a complete or a partial electoral list could be sold to a magazine distributor or any number of other data banks, whether they're in this province or country or held somewhere overseas. Voter information should not – and I acknowledge that – be used in any way. Has it been in the past? I suspect so. Is this the best way of dealing with these violations or these unauthorized distributions of complete or partial electoral lists? I don't know. But to have the Chief Electoral Officer put fictitious voter information on a list seems quite unusual and seems a different way of trying to solve the problem.

Now, perhaps in the course of debate the hon. Minister of Justice could tell me and tell everyone in the House: would there be different lists or different fictitious voter information included in a list of electors that's given to a respective political party? Would each political party get a different list? Would different constituencies? I'll use my own as an example. In the next election in the information that's provided to the Wildrose Alliance campaign team, would there be a John Doe and a Jane Doe and a Jack Smith on that list, and would there be a Peter Brown . . .

An Hon. Member: A Hugh MacDonald?

Mr. MacDonald: There would be one, hopefully, on the list. Not two, like there was the last time, hon. minister.

But you know what I mean. Is that how the Chief Electoral Officer is going to trace this to see which respective political party has been given the complete list? If it shows up in Australia or in New York City or in Toronto in a data bank for an unauthorized use, is that how I'm to understand that this section would work so that the Chief Electoral Officer or his officials can identify specifically which party in which constituency sold or distributed that information in an unauthorized manner?

I'll cede the floor if the hon. member would like to respond to that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've had extensive discussions over months with the Chief Electoral Officer. Although I have not had that personal conversation with the Chief Electoral Officer, my understanding is that in terms of the administration of the lists and of the office and the list system that he is prepared to compile with this amendment, there are protocols that have been used in other provinces and other jurisdictions that do apply that principle. Now, whether or not your specific example is exactly the way that that principle would be applied, I can't speak to the detail of that. But it does speak to that.

It's not simply a matter of being able to identify that the name came off an electors list but to actually be able to manage the source of the original list. That's the intent. In fact, I'm not sure that if we were to pursue this further, the Chief Electoral Officer would

necessarily want to provide a tremendous amount of detail with respect to exactly what the security features would be since that would then possibly allow people who were trying to circumvent the security features to do so. But it is our understanding that that is the intention, that is the protocol, and that is the way that this has been applied in other jurisdictions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that from the hon. member.

Certainly, whenever we compare the past to the present, we think that in the past the electoral list for a poll or a division would be displayed somewhere publicly for all to see. The information would be gathered during the enumeration and displayed in the period leading up to the election. With the information that would be available in the past, certainly times have changed, and I think they've changed for the better. The information that would be posted would be personal information, in my view. Marital status, occupation, whatever: it would be listed there. Certainly, with the new voters lists and now that we live in the electronic age, there is more individual privacy.

That being said, I still can't understand why this section is necessary. We look at the Chief Electoral Officer, the gentleman that's occupying the position at this time. There was a reluctance in the past, in my view, Mr. Chairman, to enforce the act to start with. I'm disappointed to have to say that, but certainly there was, in my view, a reluctance. I'm going to mention specifically cases of improper reporting or recording, and I'll use the Progressive Conservative Party's foundation fund. I brought that to the attention of the office. Nothing was done. Absolutely nothing was done. After the last election I was disappointed. I brought forward some information regarding polling and activities at a mobile polling station and the use of—or in this case the voters list wasn't used. So all the information that we're talking about here wasn't used in the conduct of the mobile poll.

5:30

I don't have any confidence whatsoever in the Chief Electoral Officer or in Elections Alberta to enforce the act and also the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. So it has to be proven to me, Mr. Chairman, that there will be a new attitude at Elections Alberta. Certainly, whenever I've brought up these issues, I was audited. A random audit. I don't know if you or your constituency was audited, but I stood up and spoke out, and suddenly I got a registered letter: you are being audited. I had nothing to hide, and that was proven in the audit.

The Minister of Energy is shaking his head over there, so I can only assume that he was not audited. Is that correct?

Mr. Liepert: I have no idea. I couldn't care less.

Mr. MacDonald: He has no idea, and he couldn't care less. Okay.

Well, I will certainly continue with my remarks on this amendment, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview because regardless of the detail of this bill we look at issues around permanent, unique identifier numbers. We look at this idea that we need to have fictitious voter information included in the list of electors provided under this section. There are a lot of questions. There certainly are a lot of questions about this entire act, but this amendment specifically deals with this section. I support, I appreciate the hon. member's response, but I don't think that this is the proper way to deal with the

unauthorized use of the list of electors. I think there are better ways of doing this without going—this could be a witch hunt. I'm not convinced that—and I'm sorry—all political parties will be treated the same.

Mr. Liepert: It's the bogeyman.

Mr. MacDonald: No, it's not, hon. member. It's not like that.

An Hon. Member: Just trust us.

Mr. MacDonald: Just trust us? Yes. I've been around the block once or twice, and that's not going to happen, hon. member. No. Elections have to be run fairly, and each and every party and each and every constituency and each and every voter in those constituencies must be treated fairly.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague. But please, hon. members, consider supporting the amendment as proposed by my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview because it certainly answers the question that I had: how will this section work? In my view it doesn't, and if we amend this and strike out the proposed subsection (7), I think that we're doing everyone in this province a good deed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A2. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There has been some certainly interesting discussion on this, and it has brought up some more questions. I think that seeing as how we're having amendments to the electoral statutes, it's kind of interesting to me to hear the Minister of Justice talk about the Chief Electoral Officer and the past Chief Electoral Officer and the experts that they are, which I don't doubt at all that they are experts. But it's interesting that we had 183 recommendations and so many weren't adopted, yet this is one that was, so all of a sudden we should accept it at face value.

There is a disagreement. I do agree with the Minister of Justice on the importance of protecting the integrity of this list. One of the questions that I'd have to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is—again, I very much agree with her in the fact that we always need to get to the root of the problem—how do we solve it? Because too often we do put things in there that really don't solve the problem. We wouldn't agree on this, but the gun registry hasn't solved the problem of illegal use of guns. So here we're on the other side. Again, registering or licensing bulletproof vests to say, "Oh, now we've registered bulletproof vests, and we're going to be able to squash the gang problem" I don't believe really addresses the problem of gang activity.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're speaking to amendment A2. Amendment A2.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you. We'll bring it back in. My question is: is there a solution for fraudulent use of the voters list that's better than this one? I am very concerned. I said that I've seen this fraudulent use of it happen in the past.

I have another question for the Minister of Justice. Okay, I have a lot of volunteers that have helped me as well. I'm not always there at their computers. Everybody signs a little document saying: I will not use this document for improper uses. But what happens if someone takes one from my campaign and goes out and uses it, and they trace it back and say that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has illegally used this list? Who is actually accountable, then?

Ms Blakeman: You've got to ask her.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I've directed that towards the Minister of Justice, and I hope that she'll clarify that before we vote on this amendment so that we'll know what it is.

Also, I have to admit not knowing everything. What does the actual act provide? What is the penalty if, in fact, you are caught illegally using this? Again, is it the actual possession? I mean, I met an individual the other day who unbeknownst to her received one of these phony hundred dollar bills and went to use it and was denied. She had to pay the price. She didn't know who she got it from.

Again, my concern with this list. Like I say, I agree, but I want to make sure the checkpoints are on this fraudulent use of electronic lists or even whether they have the paper one that they print off and take. What is the penalty, and who would actually be held accountable? Does it go back to the actual member who's running? Is it the person who has the list illegally, or do they have to provide where they got the list from? We want to know where the accountability is actually going to be held ultimately. If that's not in there to protect those people that haven't used it illegally, is that a concern? You know, it's something that's kind of interesting to me.

Another analogy that I look at is if, in fact, you loan your car to someone else, it's your insurance; you're accountable. So if you loan your car, you've got to be careful. Again, because I was the owner and signed for that list and someone else is volunteering and using it – if they voluntarily use your car and go and get in an accident, to me it should be their insurance that would be held accountable, not you.

Some clarification by the Minister of Justice would be wonderful on this to know what is the penalty, who is ultimately held accountable for this so that we could make an informed decision on whether we should vote for this amendment or whether we should allow the bill to go through in the current state and, like I say, hopefully add to the security of that list.

Once again, to both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and also the Member for Edmonton-Centre: do you have any other ideas on how to provide assurance to the electorate that have put their names on the list that there isn't abuse of that list? If so, I would really love to hear it because I think that, again, we should look at an amendment, then, or something to come forward because we want to do it right.

The government says that they want to do it right, so let's continue this discussion and see: well, what do we do to protect the integrity of that voters list? What do we do to protect the candidate from not being held accountable because of someone else who has maybe infiltrated as a volunteer for less than good purposes to try and slander, perhaps, the campaign team and use it to say, "Ah, this team, look at what they've done," when, in fact, we don't know which volunteer took it? Does the Member for Edmonton-Centre or Edmonton-Gold Bar have any ideas on how we could and should protect the integrity of that list?

5:40

Ms Blakeman: I don't actually know of specific examples mostly because I just don't have the resources to get that kind of information for you. I have attended two of the COGEL conferences in order to soak up information like what you are seeking, what are the success stories across Canada and the United States, which are, obviously, the closest ones to what we're looking at.

I think the personal information one continues to evolve as people end up having bad experiences with prohibited use or unexpected uses of their personal information. They are reluctant now to give us full information or to give us unadulterated information. So they change something in their name so that they can tell what, you know, list it came off, literally. It's the same sort of scheme as what's being described here.

I think there are two things to that. One is continuing education of people not giving out personal information as easily as they do now and to be much more careful about it and understand what's important. I would argue that the democratic process is pretty important and the electors list is a good place to have information.

Two, I think we need to be really testing what kinds of information we collect in order to have vibrant, vigorous electors lists. I know one of the problems that we've had across the country when people say, you know: "Why do you guys keep enumerating? Why can't you all share a list? Why isn't there a permanent voters list?" Well, there have been a number of attempts to do that, actually, but each level of government collects information in a slightly different way. For anyone that's ever spent too many long nights trying to make databases go together, it has to be the same. If one group has collected information that includes gender on it, when you put it with the other one that doesn't, you end up with gobbledygook. You have to collect the information and input it in the same way to make those databases work back and forth.

I think that is something that various levels of electoral officers are trying to achieve municipally, provincially, and federally, so eventually we should end up with a sort of living permanent electors lists. But we have to figure out who needs information, in what way, and why because governments use electors lists for purposes beyond elections as well. That still has to be worked out.

Frankly, I think in a number of cases we underresource the chief electoral officer to be able to do that kind of work. When we get budgets brought before us as the Legislative Offices Committee and we restrict – you know, I think this year it was an arbitrary 2 per cent or something. Everybody was limited to that. Those were sort of the instructions that had been given to the government members that were on that committee. Sure enough, they brought forward a motion in every case and said: this is what we're going to restrict the budget increase to. It does not anticipate this kind of need for ongoing work and for the funding of that, and I disagreed with the government's just doing a blanket hold the line on that budget as a result.

The protection of privacy is a longer one. I don't know how you stop the list from being electronically – unless there's some kind of an electronic watermark. Without injecting fictitious information, is there not another way to do an electronic watermark? Which is also what you could do on paper. For example, that's how you work with money. You know, you can test it to make sure that it's the real thing. I mean, clearly, the government is not worried about paper versions of this getting out. They're worried about electronic versions, which is a lot easier. Overall what we're looking to do is trying to stop human deviousness, humans deliberately disobeying the instructions and doing something they're not supposed to do with the list. I'm sure there are lots of criminologists and lots of jurisprudence that would like to deal with that one.

I don't think this is the way. I think it's going to cause a lot of work for innocent campaigns that they didn't need to do. If there is another way to mark those lists beyond inserting fictitious names, I think that's the way to do it. I think they've caused as much grief as they're going to solve with this particular solution.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak on A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly on A2, Mr. Chairman. I was listening to the comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, and I can certainly understand where the hon. member is coming from. I remember campaigning when he was very success

ful in the by-election, and in any campaign that was operating there, it is possible a volunteer – I'll use that as an example – could make a mistake. In that information on the voters list, if we had this bill as the statute from which we conducted the election, there could be fictitious voter information on the list and only on the Wildrose Alliance list. A campaign volunteer could make a mistake, or the campaign headquarter's computer could be hacked. Then what would happen?

I was looking through the act to see what would happen. Is it possible that someone could argue an election result should be overturned? Or could a successful candidate who is not, let's say, a government member or a Progressive Conservative Party member be somehow burdened with defending themselves in the courts because for whatever reason the government didn't want to live by the result? Now, I'm not saying that this would happen, but it's an example.

Another example that I would like to bring up, Mr. Chairman, is the whole issue of demon dialers. What happens if any political party – and many do; I don't. I don't appreciate getting calls at my house from the demon dialers at election time regardless of which campaign it is. There are some things in this world that I will not accept, and demon dialers are one of them.

An Hon. Member: What's your phone number?

Mr. MacDonald: My phone number is in the book, hon. member. You can look it up. You seem to have a lot of time over there. I know the phone book is fine print, but you're young. [interjection] He's distracting me, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize.

Now, the demon dialers. I believe the Wildrose Alliance Party used the demon dialer, particularly in the last week of the campaign there. I know they did. Oddly enough, it wasn't the Conservatives that were the target of their demon dialer; it was us because the Conservatives were, essentially, out of the race by that time. Let's say that any political party or any campaign – and I assume we have to give the voters list to the company that owns the demon dialer operation. What happens when or if – hopefully, it wouldn't happen – the demon dialer then sells that information to a marketing outfit or, the example that was used earlier, a magazine distribution company?

What happens in the case of that information being provided in good faith to a third party; in this case, the operators of an outfit that conducts phone calls, 30-second to one-minute long messages, to each household? Or if we carry on with the practice of putting e-mails on the voters list, which I object to – hopefully, we're going to get a chance to discuss the whole issue of e-mail and how it should or should not be used on the voters list. Hopefully, we'll get a chance after we finish with amendment A2, Mr. Chairman.

5:50

But specifically with the demon dialers, if anyone across the floor or if anyone in the Wildrose Alliance caucus has any suggestions as to how we would deal with this matter, as I explained it, if Bill 7 was to be the law of the province. Who is responsible for the conduct of the demon dialer? I would certainly like an answer to that question before we have a vote, Mr. Chairman, on this amendment.

Now, when we talk about the information that could or should be provided on a fictitious voter information list, would that or could that include an e-mail address? E-mail is a very convenient way of having voter contact with a significant number of constituents at once. I have always wondered, Mr. Chairman – and I know different members do it differently, and different political parties do it differently. The information that is provided and the information that we collect during the course of a term, particularly e-mails: hopefully, they would never be used during an election. They are collected routinely in the course of our business, and certainly we

collect lots of e-mail addresses from constituents. I'm hoping that sometime after we conclude our debate on amendment A2, we will deal specifically with this issue.

This is an enforcement issue. I think we should deal with it. Just as if there was to be a violation of section 12(7) if we were to leave it in, what exactly would happen, Mr. Chairman? Is there a small, modest fine for a violation? Is there a threat that a member could see the election result overturned? I don't know. I've tried to follow this through the act. I think that's a valid question. But if we were to remove that section, as suggested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, then we wouldn't have to worry about it.

I do have concerns, as I said earlier, about election results being overturned. We only have to think of Edmonton-Castle Downs in the 2004 election. I'm still not satisfied with that result. I've had an opportunity to look at some of that polling data . . .

Ms Blakeman: Neither am I.

Mr. MacDonald: You're not satisfied either?

Ms Blakeman: No.

Mr. MacDonald: No? That was quite a little ordeal in Canadian elections history. I think that in another few years historians will have a look at that election and the conduct of that vote.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I don't want to be chastised by the chair. We are dealing with amendment A2, and we are dealing with the issues that the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore was talking about; that is, in the case of a campaign volunteer, regardless of which party, making a mistake or if a computer is compromised and the information is taken. Or what happens in the case of the third-party demon dialer who gets the information in a sincere way from a campaign and distributes or broadcasts the information for a profit?

If we could have answers to those questions . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Pr. 2 and Pr. 3. The committee also reports progress on Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: All those members of the Assembly who concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 15, 2010

Issue 28

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 15, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am pleased to introduce to you today officers of the Salvation Army in Alberta. These men and women represent the front-line leadership of an organization that has given unstinting care, compassion, and spiritual guidance in Alberta since 1883. Their commitment is underpinned by a deep and abiding faith, yet they serve all with utter and absolute dispassion and complete inclusion regardless of religion, creed, or ethnic background. Over the years the Salvation Army has supported individual members, events here at the Legislature and in constituencies across our province, and, indeed, rendered assistance beyond our borders. We are grateful to them for all that they do for those in need.

I'll ask them to please rise as I call out their names, and the recognition should be given after I introduce all. In the Speaker's gallery today: Major Fred Waters, divisional commander for Alberta & Northern Territories; Major Wendy Waters, divisional director of women's ministries and area commander for Alberta & Northern Territories; Major Sandra Stokes, area commander, Alberta & Northern Territories; Major Roy Langer, divisional emergency disaster services director; Captain Pam Goodyear, divisional secretary for public relations and development; Captain Bram Pearce, divisional youth secretary; Captain Gordon Taylor, corps officer and community services director from Grande Prairie; Captain Randy Hale, corps officer and community services director from Fort McMurray; Captain Mark Stanley, executive director of the Salvation Army's Addictions and Residential Centre here in Edmonton; Major Brian Beveridge, corps officer and community services director from Lethbridge; Major Edith Beveridge, corps officer and community services director from Lethbridge; Ms Karen Livick, chief operating officer for Salvation Army community services from Calgary; Mrs. Karen Diaper, communications co-ordinator and government relations liaison; Mr. David Dickinson, executive director, Salvation Army community and family services organization here in Edmonton; Mrs. Louise Charach, Edmonton Citizens Advisory Board chairman.

Seated in the public gallery are members of the Salvation Army advisory board: Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Tom Dixon, Mr. James Tingley, Mr. Don Jones, Ms Emmy Mills, Ms Joan Rossall. If they would rise as well, please.

Also in the public gallery are hard-working staff of the Salvation Army: Major Sandy Langer, Major Bev Call, Mrs. Darlene Burton, Major Harold Aitkenhead, Major Christine Aitkenhead, Mrs. Karen Coley, and Ms Brandie Howey.

I'd like all of our guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of our distinguished members of the Alberta Legislature.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great group of visitors from Alexander First Nation in my constituency. They are representing Alexander skills link, which is a great tie to the future of this province and to the future of aboriginal peoples. They are accompanied by group leaders Ms Sarah Catley, Mr. Colby Arcand, Mrs. Marsha Arcand, and Mrs. Dale Morin. They are, I believe, seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once in a very long while you find a staff member who not only does their job efficiently and has a smile for everyone but also becomes a friend. I've been very fortunate in finding just such a person. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce a dedicated member of my office, Ms Deb Young. Deb has been a valued member of this government for nearly 30 years. Deb followed in her mother's and father's footsteps: Allie Dancey, who worked for the departments of Transportation and Agriculture, and Fred Dancey, who worked with the department of Treasury. Deb has been a valued member of my Legislature office team since I was appointed minister. I know that many members in the Assembly know Deb, and I know that they will join me today in wishing her the very best as she has announced that she will be retiring from government. I want to take a moment to recognize Deb's efforts on behalf of not only myself but the government of Alberta for the past 30 years. Every day Deb has demonstrated wisdom, strength, dedication, and commitment. I know that our office will not be the same without her, and we will miss her. Deb is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask Deb to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a smart and talented young constituent and her family. Kaitlyn Graham was the recipient of the ATCO Olympic challenge award. Alberta students from grades 4 to 12 were invited to submit a composition in their own words on how they will pursue leadership and strive for excellence in sports, arts, culture, education, or community involvement. Two of the award recipients went to the Olympics, but Kaitlyn won the best prize, a laptop computer. In her future she plans to be an animal doctor, a veterinarian. After that, I've asked her to consider a career in politics, so she plans to join me in my constituency office to be a junior MLA on some Fridays to see what we do in our jobs. Kaitlyn is joined here today by her family: her father, Garnet; her mother, Sharon; and her brother, Kelton. They're seated in the members' gallery above, and I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly very special representatives from the League of Ukrainian Canadians, Edmonton branch, and the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branch. As indicated earlier this week in my private member's statement, these two organizations are commemorating the 60th anniversary for the League of Ukrainian Canadians and the 55th anniversary for the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branches. There is no denying that the dedication, commitment, and numerous achievements gained by

these two organizations over the decades were and will remain very extraordinarily meaningful. My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all those individuals from the past, present, and into the future who have truly made a difference for the Ukrainians and the Ukrainian community within Edmonton, our province, and across the globe.

I would now ask my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, that as I mention your name, please remain standing. Representing the League of Ukrainian Canadians, Edmonton branch, are Jaroslaw Szewczuk, past president and political and educational co-ordinator; Hryhoriy Procki, original organization member; Stefan Romaniuk, original organization member; Orest Cyncar, original organization member. An individual, Mr. Peter Dackiw, who has served 21 years as president of LUC, could not join us today, but special recognition for him is well deserved today. Representing the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branch, we have Ivanna Szewczuk, president; Natalia Talanchuk, vice-president, president for 18 years, and original organization member; Vera Kindzersky, treasurer; and Lidia Simcisin, board member.

I would ask that the Assembly please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you two good friends from the United Cabbies Association of Edmonton and constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie, seated in the members' gallery, beginning with Balraj Manhas, who is the president of the association. Joining him is Gurdip Waraich. They are here today to talk to a number of our colleagues about issues with the cabbie association. I'd like them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For my second introduction, once again it's an honour and privilege for me to rise to introduce to you and through you a good friend, Mr. Avtar Kang, from the constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Joining him today are two individuals. Visiting the first time in Edmonton from India are Mr. Prem Singh Aujla and Mr. Hari Singh Aujla. I would ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people from the Realtors Community Foundation: Mr. Curtis Stasiuk, the president of the organization, and my good friend, constituent, and co-conspirator, Ms Jill Didow, the executive director. The Alberta Realtors Community Foundation donated \$394,000 to a wide variety of lesser known organizations last year. This money was largely raised as a result of the contributions and efforts of some 3,200 Alberta realtors. They are a largely unsung organization. I don't see them in the members' gallery; they must be in the public. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a few guests from the seventh floor of the Leg. Annex: my leg. assistant,

Marshall Thiessen; another leg. assistant, Tracy Arnell, who works very hard for the members for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and also Red Deer-South; and a very special guest visiting the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, Monty the bear from Red Deer Sunrise Rotary. Monty is up here today enjoying a tour of the Legislature and spending time with his MLA. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Calgary Chinatown Centenary

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Starting this summer, Calgary Chinatown will start to celebrate its centenary. Chinese immigration to Canada began in the mid-1800s. Many came to work on the unnerving western leg of the Canadian Pacific railway and started settling in Calgary once the tracks were finished. The first Chinatown was on the eastern edge of town, close to the railroad track. The second one was near 10th Avenue and 1st Street S.W. as the community grew in size. Then the community was evicted when property values surged in the area about a decade later. These families had to find a new location as they were not welcome to live in other established communities. Like many other parts of Canada at that time, Chinese faced severe discrimination and violence. The third, the current Chinatown, was established in 1910 at the north end of the current Centre Street Bridge.

While today's Chinatown continues to serve its role as a social enclave, especially for newcomers and seniors, it is also a focal point for cultural experiences for Albertans of all backgrounds. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say that both the city of Calgary and members of over 25 Chinese organizations are actively preparing a growing list of celebrations and festivities that is as diverse as the people who embrace Chinatown as part of their community. The city of Calgary will invest a total of half a million dollars to support Chinatown's beautification; exhibitions, including a digital commemorative project on the Chinese community; a youth engagement initiative; and an expanded Chinatown Street Festival. Other initiatives include the Chinatown historical buildings restoration project and a wide array of cultural programs and probably a banquet or two or three.

Mr. Speaker, I believe many hon. members in this House would agree that we are fortunate to witness this significant milestone for Chinatown, and I encourage all members to try to take in a few events in the months to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Accountability

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These are dark days for accountability and transparency in Alberta. It's incredibly sad that a Premier who once claimed to believe in those ideals has flip-flopped so completely, serving his own personal agenda at the expense of truth, clarity, openness, and fairness to the people of Alberta. The actions of this administration have served to draw a dark curtain over government, hiding the actions of an administration that has lost the trust of Albertans.

Yesterday the Auditor General delivered his latest report, a report that this administration tried to bury with a good-news story about distracted driving legislation. The Tories have been trying to silence

the Auditor General for months. They've ignored hundreds of recommendations; publicly chastised the Auditor General for speaking out; restricted the office's budget, causing the deferment or cancellation of a number of important audits, including occupational health and safety and water quality; and distributed in this House a paper by top Tory Ron Hicks that calls on the government to severely curb the powers of the Auditor General.

Yesterday the deputy chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the Tory Member for Calgary-Lougheed, was granted veto power over the chair's actions, neutering the entire purpose of that committee, whose mandate is to oversee government spending and ensure that public dollars are being used responsibly and in the public interest. Of course, the chair is an Alberta Liberal who tries to hold the government accountable. Yesterday in question period the Premier claimed not to know what went on in Public Accounts, a claim I frankly find unbelievable. I believe that Tory members of the Public Accounts Committee were directed by the Premier to give the deputy chair his new veto power in a deliberate attempt to silence a prominent source of aggravation to the ruling party. Predictably, our call for an emergency debate was dismissed.

Mr. Speaker, these Third World, banana republic tactics are a farce. They shame Alberta. Even former Tory MP John Williams called this administration's restrictions on Public Accounts, quote, shocking, and that was before this latest move.

I'd like to close by thanking the Alberta bloggers who are following the story. They are proving themselves to be a valuable addition to the fourth estate, showing as always . . . [Dr. Swann's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. In calling on the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, may I also wish him happy, happy birthday on his anniversary.

Lacombe Ford Atom A Rockets Lacombe Curb-Ease Pee Wee A Rockets

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hockey season in Lacombe concluded with outstanding results for two highly successful teams, the Lacombe Ford atom A Rockets and the Lacombe Curb-Ease pee wee A Rockets. Both won provincial titles and returned home with gold victory medals. After winning the zone 4 banner for the second year in a row, the Lacombe Ford atom A Rockets are the first Lacombe A atom team to win gold in provincials. They were undefeated in regular season and in playoffs and won provincials 5 to 1 in a hard-fought game against Taber.

The atom A team roster were players Justin Verveda, Dayton Playford, Chase Broderson, Elijah Funkhouser, Tyson Maris, Levi Glasman, Isaac Kingma, Tyler Masko, Matty Parton, Beaudon Rider, my next door neighbour Bradley Hellofs, Justin Paarup, Matthew Stegmaier, Jarrett Brandon, Eric Pecharsky, and Jordan Gill. Their coaches, and their parents, are Troy Rider, Darin Gill, Shawn Playford, Steve Parton, Kevin Broderson, and manager Greg Pecharsky.

The Lacombe Curb-Ease pee wee A Rockets also took home a provincial championship and unforgettable memories, winning the gold medal game 9 to 1 against Wainwright. Lacombe pee wee A Rockets team roster is Travis Verveda, Spencer Otto, Jesse Richardson, Kacey Straub, Zach Knight, Ty Wagar, Ty Glasman, David Luymes, Shae Reynolds, Colby Sissons, T.J. Brown, Cole Leggett Tyler Bell, and Tony Kozak. Their coaches are Allen Brown, Ralph Bell, Dean Otto, Shawn Wagar, and manager Mike Kozak.

Please join me in giving a great round of applause to these

dedicated and prepared athletes and their very supportive coaches and parents for their record-setting seasons.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, during one of the members' statements earlier this afternoon the hon. Government House Leader rose to advise that he wanted to raise a point of order. I'd just like to advise again that we've had this process for members' statements going back to the major reforms that were made in 1994, and we have always agreed in the past that there would not be points of order arising out of members' statements. So I just provide that as advice and see where we proceed.

Mr. Hancock: A point of clarification.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it at the conclusion of the Routine. Hon. Clerk, let's proceed.

1:50

Oral Question Period

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the Premier and minister of health do not realize is that by failing to take action and put an end to the extravagant bonuses handed out to the Alberta Health Services executives, they agree with giving these people handfuls of taxpayers' dollars as a reward for bringing the health care system virtually to standstill. To the minister of health: will you or will you not put an end to the system that erodes public confidence?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I don't know if I've heard such a silly question in this Chamber in all the years I've been here. There are no policies in place to erode the system. What we have is an excellent system of health that we're still trying to improve. We've done that by providing additional dollars, by streamlining some of the processes, and by continuing to provide Albertans with the very best health care possible in these difficult circumstances.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that contracts don't guarantee bonuses, why are bonuses being given out to Alberta Health Services senior executives for poor performance? Why?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's no poor performance associated with any of this. What there is are very specific, targeted performance measures, very specific benchmarks. Everybody is going to be very accountable. That's where we're at today. I'm not going to comment on stuff from the past, which is where the hon. leader appears to be living at the moment.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, why is it that this minister is going to wait for yet another review when he already knows what everybody in Alberta knows and wants him to do? Will he or will he not do the right thing? Put an immediate end to executive bonuses and guarantee that not a single bonus payment in '09-10 will be made in Alberta Health Services.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think I clarified quite clearly that what we're doing is honouring the commitments that were made, contractual commitments from a previous era. That is being done as we speak. I think it's important for people to know that there are a lot of streamlining costs that point to very outstanding performance.

For example, instead of 12 CEOs, now we have one. Instead of 66 senior vice-presidents, we have seven. That has saved millions of dollars, that are going back into providing outstanding care for Albertans across the province.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Services Executive Pensions

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the story goes on. The executives at Alberta Health Services not only have rich six-figure salaries; they also have two pensions. Count them: two, the local authorities pension plan and the supplemental executive retirement plan. The second, the supplemental executive retirement plan, does not require any employee contributions. To the minister: why are these executives so special that they are entitled to two pensions, one of which is totally paid for by taxpayers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated that all of this is under review, as are all the roles, responsibilities, and the very mandates of some of the positions he's talking about. What has to be kept in mind here is that while these individuals have been transferred from previous authorities into the new Alberta Health Services, they have inherited additional work. They are being compensated for that additional work because there's an increased workload, there are increased responsibilities that come with it, and we want the very best people occupying those positions.

Dr. Swann: Well, we know from documents that the Towers Perrin group has been working on this review for 10 months, Mr. Speaker. How many of the executives at Alberta Health Services are entitled to these gold-plated retirement plans paid for by taxpayers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge the SERPs, as they're commonly referred to, are under review, and I'm not sure if they haven't even already been eliminated. But I will look into that.

Dr. Swann: Please do, Mr. Minister.

Given that the old executives who were simply transferred to Alberta Health Services are still entitled to these gold-plated retirement packages, what is the minister going to do to change the policy and this abuse of taxpayer funding?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not my policy, but I am ultimately responsible, and I've said that I will look into it. These are policies that were brought into place by Alberta Health Services. It's the board that reports to me. It's the board that is responsible for overseeing the overall direction that it's going. But I have to account for it, and I will look into it.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 28 marks the International Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured as a result of workplace accidents or diseases. Yesterday the Auditor General revealed that 110 orders for noncompliance with occupational health and safety legislation were suspended during a period when three Albertans a week were dying from workplace-related injuries or accidents. To the Minister of Employment and Immigra-

tion: why did the government suspend 110 occupational health and safety orders at a time when three Albertans a week were dying on the job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the first things I have done as a new minister is that I invited the Auditor General to meet with me some two months ago and give me an overview of what his perception of the department is and what issues he perceives there to be. He has given me an oral report, exactly identical to the one that we have here in writing, giving me a two months' head start on addressing some of these issues. As a matter of fact, I am proud to report to you that for the last two months I have been addressing any and all issues in this report, and I'm taking them very seriously.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. If you're going to address these issues, the first thing I would suggest you do is release the number and the list of all employers who have been allowed to cheat the occupational health and safety . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Well, I am glad that this member brought this question forward because one of the reviews that I'm doing right now is whether I am able to release not only the records of employers who are underperformers but all employers in Alberta so that Albertans can take a look and see how their place of employment is faring and whether they choose to work or not work for that particular employer. There are some complications relevant to getting accurate statistics, and there are some issues relevant to freedom of information legislation, but I am working through it right now. You will get an answer on it very shortly.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that, hon. minister. Again to the same minister: why did the government allow those 63 employers to cheat our occupational health and safety laws for so long, when the death rate in this province at that time was 166 workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I cannot give this member an accurate answer about what happened, but let me tell you about what will happen. As you may know, I spent a good part of my pre-elected life representing injured workers, so I take occupational health and safety very seriously. One thing that I will be doing is making sure that those who willingly choose to ignore the law will be dealt with appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta waiting for cataract surgery as well as those who provide those surgeries have been blindsided by this government with less than four days' notice. Bill 11 required full and proper disclosure of all awarded health care contracts. Will the minister do the right thing and table all the RFPs in the House that were issued for cataract surgery facilities before the end of today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be having a meeting with the ophthalmological surgeons and the ophthalmological facility providers very, very soon, and I'm going to be looking into some of these issues surrounding that RFP. To the best of my

knowledge it was open, it was fair, it was transparent, and it yielded some excellent results that have resulted in lower cost prices for the provision of ophthalmological services in privately held facilities still paid for by the public purse. That means \$1.4 million of additional surgeries will be able to be done in addition to the 30,000-plus already in the system.

Mr. Hinman: Well, his knowledge is not complete, Mr. Speaker.

Given that Alberta Health Services has called an emergency meeting on the cataract foul-up, will the minister immediately issue a 60-day extension so those existing services can resume? Then we'll wait until we know what the right course of action actually is because the current one is wrong. We need a 60-day . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the current system is wrong at all. It provides outstanding services. What occurred here back in January, on January 15 to be exact, is an RFP closed. All service facilities doing ophthalmological surgeries were provided an opportunity to submit a bid. Bids came in from those who wished to participate, and those who didn't obviously didn't have a chance to win the bid. But the point here now is that I'll be meeting with those folks very soon, and I'll be listening to what some of those concerns are, and if there is something that can be done, we'll do it. For example, there is a second blitz coming up at the end of April, May, and June.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, this is a four-day foul-up that's going to impact forever. Given that the eye doctors are telling us that the government's latest health care foul-up has cut competition and choice for Albertans, will the minister do the right thing and let surgeons and staff decide where they best care for patients and those surgeries as they did in the past? The bid was put out, and then they chose whether or not they wanted to perform that surgery, not the minister of health.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, patients requiring eye surgery still have a choice of which physician they want to do it. As long as it's being done in the accredited facility, all of those facilities that are there, be they in Calgary or Edmonton – and let's be clear: we're only talking about Calgary and Edmonton – those facilities in those two locations will still take whichever accredited ophthalmologists can do the surgeries and the patients who choose them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Workers in Alberta know that this is a dangerous province to work in, with a workplace fatality rate that's 16 per cent higher than the national average. In 2008 166 workers died at their job. The Auditor General's report released yesterday shows that this government refuses to prosecute employers who chronically endanger workers, resulting in deaths and ruined lives. My question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What possible explanation can there be for this Tory government to refuse to prosecute rogue employers who systematically break the law, causing injuries and death to Alberta workers?

2:00

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are really two available approaches that the ministry has when dealing with employment,

one being education. Through education, actually, we have achieved very good statistics. Alberta has one of the lowest injury rates in Canada and the lowest workers' compensation premium rates. However, being a teacher I know that education sometimes falls on deaf ears, and there is room for enforcement. I will be very seriously considering right now enforcement on those who choose to ignore the rules.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Auditor General's report shows that the government actually manipulates information to hide the real story of reckless employers who endanger workers. We've had minister after minister who cries crocodile tears about worker deaths, but this department is participating in a deliberate support for continued dangerous workplaces. Why won't the minister stop his empty words about caring and instead take strong action to crack down on these dangerous employers who are instead currently getting refunds . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, empty words. In the last two and a half months I have met with organized labour, with unions. I have met with groups of employers. I have met with my department staff, put in place a task force that will be looking at enforcement, that will be looking at releasing information. This is not an arena where you point fingers at each other. As a matter of fact, employers, employees, and government are in it together. We all have our skin in it, and it's our job to make sure that Alberta is the safest place to work in.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that when people break the law, they are not protected by freedom of information laws, will this minister stop hiding behind FOIP and today release the list of all employers who chronically break the law and endanger their workers? Do it today, Mr. Minister. Stop hiding.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this member is actually asking me in the Legislature right now to break a law in pursuit of those who are breaking the law. I cannot do that. But what I can undertake to the House is that the moment – and it won't be long from now – I know that I can legally release the list, I will definitely release the list.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year the office of the Auditor General deferred an audit on workplace health and safety because this government limited the resources of the office. That happened during a year when 166 Albertans lost their lives as a result of injuries or disease. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. How many lives would have been saved or how many injuries would have been prevented if the Auditor was allowed to do his real work last year instead of having to defer it for a year?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, again I have to thank this member for this question. Read the newspapers for the next few days, and you will be seeing that this department will be releasing ads advertising positions, hiring front-line workers to inspect places of employment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That should have been done two years ago.

Again to the same minister. Of the 166 . . .

An Hon. Member: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you say. These are lives at stake here, hon. minister, and you should be ashamed of yourself.

Of the 166 workplace fatalities recorded in 2008, how many were the responsibility of the 63 employers noted in the Auditor General's report and allowed to cheat occupational health and safety laws?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, nobody is allowed to cheat. Let's make that apparent. Those who are cheating or are perceived to be cheating will be dealt with accordingly.

I cannot release the number of casualties in those particular places of employment because, like I indicated earlier, at this point in time I cannot legally release the list, but I will be releasing the list the moment I find out that it is appropriate for me to do so. When I release it, I will make sure that it is an accurate list, so you will know, hon. member, who are the employers who follow the rules and who don't follow the rules and why.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of following the rules, again to the same minister. Will the minister demand that the employers, the 63 employers who cheated on occupational health and safety laws and received grants, incredibly, from this government for their actions will have to repay the rebates that they were given from their WCB premiums? How is that fair?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, another thank you to the member. Thank you for bringing up the premiums. What the member is I imagine referring to is the COR program. One of the things I have done, having met with the Auditor General two months ago, is that I'm having a thorough review of the COR program because the purpose of this program is to reward good performers and make them more competitive and punish poor performers to make sure that they are not competitive in the market, bidding for contracts against employers who actually follow the rules.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Chateau Estates Access Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have long been advocating for my constituents in Chateau Estates, and through that work the Ministry of Transportation has promised to connect a road between 84th Street and 100th Street N.E. The land has been bought and a promise made. Can the minister tell my constituents when the road will be built?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure this member that I'm very aware of his concerns and intend to fulfill the promise I made to him and his constituents. This member is very much aware that there are issues with gas pipelines that cross the road alignment, and my officials are working with the pipeline companies to modify the pipeline crossing so that we can get going on this road. I assure this member that the road will be built.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell me why these issues have not been resolved after so many months given the fact that I was given the same responses a few months ago from the minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I share this member's frustration, and I had hoped that this would be resolved by now. However, it's a very complex legal agreement that we're working on with the pipeline companies, and it's taking longer than we had anticipated. Perhaps this member can talk to some of his friends in the legal profession and try to get them to speed up a bit. However, I want to emphasize to the member that this road will be built as soon as we can, and that's my guarantee.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take that guarantee to the bank, Minister. Do you have any idea on a completion date?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member and his constituents that this government is addressing their access concerns. The new road will provide reasonable access for the area for local traffic while maintaining all the safety and design standards for the nearby Stoney Trail ring road. I know that this particular member works very, very hard for his constituents, but how many times do I have to keep telling him that we're going to build the road?

Income Support for Emergency Housing

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, we have heard from a number of constituents that their rent support has run out and that the income support has turned them away, telling them to move to cheaper accommodations, but affordable housing is all too rare, and rents have not come down. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: Albertans are not receiving the housing support they need from this government, so how much of the income support budget is going towards emergency housing?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I cannot give the member the actual percentage, and that's something that I would gladly get back to her on if she is looking at percentages from the budget. I can tell you one thing. We do provide assistance for individuals who find themselves in a difficult position, and part of the assistance is a housing allowance that provides for rent. What percentage of the overall budget is the housing allowance? That's a very technical question, and I'll be glad to come back with the actual numbers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I look forward to that answer.

Given that since this minister has taken over control of the homelessness and eviction prevention fund, no one has any idea of how big the cuts have been to the program, will the minister make this information public?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, how much more public can my budget be? I was in estimates. I'm not sure if that member attended estimates or read the *Hansard*, but I have gone through estimates line by line, and members of the opposition could have asked me any questions that they want. I can table a copy of this ministry's budget in the Legislature at the next opportunity, and she can look through it. All the numbers are for public consumption.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Same minister. Given that other provinces like Ontario and B.C. make this information and much more information about income support public, why is this government keeping Albertans in the dark? It isn't always clear in the budget. It comes across just as lines.

2:10

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member comes from Lethbridge, and I understand they had some electricity problems in southern Alberta, hence the darkness. We have a budget that we have tabled in the House. I have gone through this ministry's estimates line by line, open to anybody's questions. I can table the budget of this ministry that itemizes every single expenditure. We also have the blue book that shows every contract expense the ministry has. I'm not sure how much more transparent I can be other than asking the member to come to my office, sit down with me, and I'll discuss it with her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General has reviewed government's health and safety program and flagged a number of concerns, as has been brought up many times in this House. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. In particular, the Auditor General recommends that government take action against employers who repeatedly fail to comply with occupational health and safety laws. Will the minister act on this recommendation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, not only will I act, but I already have acted, and I'm determined to continue to do so. One of this government's priorities is to make sure that Alberta is competitive. Being a safe place of employment makes you very competitive. You attract workers, you retain workers, and your WCB premiums are low. They are already the lowest in Canada, but I know that we can do even better than that, so that's something that I'm committed to and will continue working on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement to the same minister. The Auditor General talked about suspending compliance orders at the end of the fiscal year. Why would officers be allowed to try again next year as a way of enforcing safety?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as I said earlier, my energy as a minister is limited, so I will apportion now and into the future what I am doing and what I will be doing. I know for a fact that education was one of the priorities of this ministry, and I will carry on with the educational component because it has been serving us exceptionally well. There is room for improvement. I accept that. I will never argue with any statements that the Auditor General has made. I take them under advisement, and I will continue acting on them.

Mr. Bhardwaj: No other questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Cataract Surgery (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The uncertainty continues to swirl around Alberta Health Services' decision to consolidate cataract surgeries in fewer clinics. There are serious concerns that the emphasis was more on cutting costs than on protecting public safety. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: is it true that the clinics that won the cataract bids are reusing the equipment they use in cataract surgeries, or are they meeting the same standards as cataract surgery in public hospitals, which is to use disposable equipment?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are very specific standards regarding that particular question, and I discussed it with some ophthalmologists, in fact, on the weekend. In some cases they use stainless steel, and those particular blades are chucked out at the end of the operation. In other cases they might be using diamond blades, and in those cases they can be sterilized and reused. That's my understanding from the ophthalmologists. They are very closely scrutinized in that regard by the college.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Well, when the minister is looking into it, he should ask about the use of cannulas and other equipment in addition to the blades.

What does the minister say in response to reports that Alberta Health Services is planning to close the cataract surgery program in Wetaskiwin? Is this true?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I haven't heard any such news whatsoever. In fact, I'm surprised to have it raised, but I can assure him that it'll be looked into immediately.

Dr. Taft: To the same minister. Given that there are growing reports that Alberta Health Services is planning to save money by charging patients for the lenses that are implanted during cataract surgery, will the minister reassure Albertans that he will put a stop to any such plan?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, again, speaking with ophthalmologists over the last couple of weeks, I've asked some of these same questions. There is a standard lens that is provided and covered, paid for by the public payer. That's us, essentially. If, however, the patient wants or requires an upgraded lens, then they simply are asked to pay the difference, but that is a patient's choice. Otherwise, they have a standardized lens that works perfectly well in most cases. But, again, some of it is patient choice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Employment Supports for PDD Clients

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have been asking me about employment supports for people with developmental disabilities. Employment can give us a sense of pride and purpose and connects us with others and to our communities, so it's very important that all people get to experience this, but it's often very difficult for people with disabilities. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What are we doing to help employers and engage more employers to connect with

people with developmental disabilities who are actually interested in working?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that employment gives us more than just a paycheque, as the hon. member has stated. Our persons with developmental disabilities program through the six PDD regions provides funding to a number of employment agencies and employment initiatives across the province. This supports about 3,000 individuals with developmental disabilities to access PDD employment supports programming. One such initiative is the Rotary employment partnership, which helps to connect employers and potential employees. There are approximately 80 PDD-funded agencies in Alberta, 15 of which are in Calgary, that provide similar employment supports.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and final question is to the same minister. How can we tell if our existing employment programs for these people are actually doing what they are supposed to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to persons with disabilities. This commitment includes helping Albertans with developmental disabilities if they wish to find work. Province-wide about 65 per cent of PDD-funded individuals who want employment have found jobs. I believe the number is even higher in the Calgary region at 70 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Long-term Care Funding

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At last count more than 1,700 seniors were on a wait-list for long-term care. In the last election government promised 600 new long-term care spaces. Instead, two days ago the chair of Alberta Health Services wrote that as of September 2009 there has actually been a net decline of 70 beds since the last election. To the minister of health: why is the government investing public funds in for-profit private facilities that won't offer the care that is desperately needed by at least 1,700 Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is providing thousands of more spaces. In fact, I think it was just yesterday that the Minister of Infrastructure released a headline that said that seniors will benefit from more than 1,000 continuing care spaces. The fact is that there are new technologies. There are new changes that are coming forward, and they're helping seniors find appropriate accommodation in a community care setting.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that at least 1,700 Albertans have been medically assessed as requiring long-term care, not some form of lesser care but long-term care, and given that every extra day or week they wait causes more suffering for them and their families, why won't the minister tell us today exactly how many, if any, of the spaces announced yesterday are going toward the 1,700-bed needs deficit or, at the very least, toward the 680-bed deficit . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has yet to understand is that yesterday's announcement dealt specifically with the capital bonds and, I think, some ASLI, the affordable supportive living initiative, dollars as well, which is in a different ministry. However, there will be other announcements coming out very soon addressing long-term care spaces. If they'll just be patient for that, it will come, and Albertans, I'm sure, will be very pleased with the news that accompanies it.

Ms Notley: Well, given that more than 1,700 Albertans are still waiting for long-term care at last count and given that their needs simply can't be met within a level 1 or 2 or 3 supportive living environment, why is this government investing up to \$50 million of Alberta citizens' money in for-profit companies, who charge up to \$3,500 per month for rooms that simply don't meet the needs of Alberta's most vulnerable seniors?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I assume that's to me. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that for the \$50 million that exists in this year's ASLI budget, the minister of seniors would tell you that parlays into about a hundred million dollars of investment. Other people in the community, the builders, are bringing in their own money to help make those projects a reality, and additional stuff paid for by the health budget will be forthcoming very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Child Intervention Services

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A month has passed since I asked a series of budgetary debate questions, including concerns over the cut of \$27 million from child intervention services. In 2008-2009 less than 260 families of the approximately 13,000 Alberta children in custody received family enhancement services. Last year over 90 per cent of children taken into custody were not reunited with their birth families. To the minister: when will I receive written answers to the budget debate questions?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have addressed that question in the Assembly, and I can tell you that I have not changed my approach with that. I will not be providing any further answers to Committee of Supply. I consider those answers to have been complete at the time, and that's just the way it is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the minister admitted on the record that she will not fulfill her ministerial duties to provide answers to budgetary questions.

Why is so little focus and funding support committed to birth families compared to the financial costs and emotional trauma associated with custody? It's grab first, support second.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's absolutely incorrect. This member knows that. I've addressed that in the

Assembly as well. We had a Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act come into place in 2004, and this member knows that as well. That act is where the caseworker goes to a home along with the support worker, and those workers assess the home with the family. Many children that previously may have been taken into care immediately stay with the family while they provide support to the family. It's a complete new way and approach of handling the child and family and youth care, and it's a good way.

Mr. Chase: That gives very little comfort to the 13,000 children in custody and their families.

How can the minister justify cutting \$27 million from child intervention services when there is \$15 billion remaining in the sustainability fund? How is this cruelly unnecessary cut either in the best interests of Alberta's children or their broken families?

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, honestly, the way that you dismiss the good work that's being done out in the field is amazing. The child, family, and youth enhancement workers are working very hard along with the lead agencies. They have a lead agency model where they go together and where they assess families, they provide the services as they're needed, and they assist children. Immediately they protect children and they care for children, and they're very thoughtful in how they do this. I was on Friday at two case reviews with both the lead agency and the caseworkers, and there were approximately 20 people involved. You know, hon. member, that this is working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Public-private partnerships, P3s, have repeatedly, both in Alberta and around the world, shown to provide value for money, yet the Auditor General released his report yesterday, noting that the province did not demonstrate to Albertans that the ASAP P3 provided value for money. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. What is the province doing about this?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear that the Auditor General very much concluded in his report that, in fact, it did provide value for the money and also that it was the lowest bid and the risk allocated was appropriate. In fact, there were \$97 million of savings in ASAP 1. What was recommended was that a better job needed to be done in demonstrating that value to the public of Alberta. Now, we accept this, and we're going to do a better job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister: speaking of posting a value-for-money report for ASAP 2, are you saying that the second-phase project is providing value for taxpayers?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the value is going to be provided in ASAP 2. The final details from the signing will take place very shortly, and we will announce the cost of the project and the final savings. As I was going to mention before, we are following up with a value-for-money report, and it will be on our website very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister: was it presumptuous of government to move forward with a second-phase project even before we actually had the analysis of the first phase?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, not at all. In fact, we did save approximately \$100 million. We were on track. We delivered the project, in fact, 18 months ahead of schedule, schools to be opened up for next fall. The process has been recognized nationally and provincially and also with the Conference Board of Canada. Why would we not do it again? It is a good process, and it does provide value, as the Auditor General has stated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Arts and Culture Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our arts organizations were told last summer that cuts might be 10 to 15 per cent, but they should hold on as things might change. Yet here we are in the new fiscal year. The budget cuts were 19 per cent, but groups are still holding on and haven't been told and are trying to budget for their 2010-11 seasons without knowing their final numbers. Contrary to the minister's written response, there is a fair notice policy for grant suspension; it's just not being used. So my questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. When will arts organizations be given the final grant numbers reflecting the 19 per cent cut?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I had stated in estimates that we would be working through those through our arts department, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The organizations will be notified of the amount that they will be receiving in short order.

Ms Blakeman: Well, he's the minister of culture. Does he not understand the timelines that most of these organizations are working upon? They have to release their seasons, do all of the media, print brochures, hire people, even choose which shows. How long is he going to make them wait?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, our staff in our department has been in contact with many of these organizations on an ongoing basis. We have said that most of the money that will be found will be realized through savings or efficiencies. It will not go to grant reductions to those organizations. We're trying to work through that to make sure that is the case. Right now my department is giving me no indication that any one of these organizations will not be funded to the extent that they were last year.

Ms Blakeman: I'll be interested in how 20 per cent can be found out of administrative.

Given that the AFA has an actual fair notice policy to inform and work with struggling groups that may see their funding cut, why is the minister not following a similar policy to work with organizations that lose funding because of these government cutbacks? You're not going to find it in administration.

Mr. Blackett: Well, to answer the question, the comment that the hon. member made, last year we had a reduction of \$8.9 million. We were able through efficiencies to realize the savings, and we

were able to fund every one of those not-for-profits to the level that they received a year before, as promised in the budget last year. I see no reason that we won't be able make that commitment to them this year. We'll see in due course if my words speak for themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance (continued)

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I represent Nisku, which is the home of a very large manufacturing workforce. As such, I was very interested in the Auditor General's review of this government's health and safety program. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. In particular the Auditor General notes that half of the employers who fail to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act also continue to hold a certificate of recognition, or COR, indicating that they meet established standards. Will the minister tell us how such bad performers can obtain and, in fact, keep CORs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The main prerogative of the COR program is to enhance and promote safety at a job site. Many employers who are in high-risk categories that naturally had higher rates of incidents would sign up for the COR program. However, then there was an expectation that they would improve their rate of injuries. As long as they were improving their rates of injuries and working with the educational programs, they could maintain that COR status. However, if there is no improvement and if they are not working within the parameters of the COR expectations, indeed they should not be permitted to have the COR status.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: even if the COR holders improve, why would they be given rebates on their WCB premiums for good health and safety performance when they refuse to comply with Alberta's health and safety requirements?

2:30

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the Workers' Compensation Board rewards participants of COR because what it really says is that they are willing to change their practices, that they are willing to adapt their practices and become safe performers. There is some initial incentive for those employers. But as time goes on, the Workers' Compensation Board only rebates the premiums based on performance. So if there is no improvement in performance, there should not be any additional rebates, nor should they hold the status. That is part of the review that I'm doing right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: maybe your review will answer this, but if an employer does not comply, why can't you simply revoke their COR?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I most definitely can. That's something that I am looking into right now. Let's be frank here. Injuries are simply unacceptable. I don't even buy into the term "accidents."

They're not accidents; they're incidents. If you were to turn time back one minute on every incident, it wouldn't occur because they're preventable. Now, my job is to make sure that we reward good performers and definitely not reward those who choose not to comply. That is as simple as it gets. That's something that I'm very committed to, and that's something that I will be working on as time goes on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Royal Alberta Museum

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Getting clarity out of this government can be elusive. We have a federal MP announcing in a mailing an \$85 million contribution to the Royal Alberta Museum, and then we have the Minister of Infrastructure saying that the capital plan does include the Royal Alberta Museum and the minister of culture saying that \$83 million over three years will pay for a building design and maybe collection purchases. Yikes. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: how do Albertans figure out where our museum is, how many will be built, who's paying, and when it will be built? How are we supposed to know?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before in this House, I believe that the government of Alberta committed to the Museum of Nature on the Glenora site in the neighbourhood of \$240 million. We are in principle looking at a two-museum site. The first, the Museum of Nature, is on the capital plan; it has been deferred out a number of years. The federal government has not made an announcement. They have not contacted our office and indicated that they're making any announcement, so I'm not sure what the question is.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, how much of the \$83 million in funding for the Royal Alberta Museum is from the federal government? You have it in print here. Is the province's entire budget really federal money?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reference "you have it in print" is a reference to a publication that is not something produced by the government of Alberta. If it's something that the federal government has produced, ask them the question since they are the ones who produced it.

Ms Blakeman: Is the minister saying that the \$83 million that appears in his budget is 100 per cent money from Alberta taxpayers through provincial government coffers?

Mr. Blackett: As we said in estimates, I believe that \$30 million was promised by the federal government in 2005, and the \$50 million remaining, if I remember correctly, was going to come out of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit of the government of Alberta.

Health Professions Scope of Practice

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Health Professions Act and the Pharmacy and Drug Act amendments came into force last year, giving qualified pharmacists the right to prescribe certain drugs. Nova Scotia has also showed some initiative in this area by allowing nurse practitioners to do some prescribing of drugs. There have been suggestions that Alberta's health care system could be made more efficient if we broadened the scope of practice of some of our health

care professionals. All of my questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister advise the House whether his department or Health Services has any plans for initiatives to expand the scope of practice of our health care professionals?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we in fact addressed some of this through the Vision 2020 document, that was provided to all members and to the public a year or two ago. Nurse practitioners have in fact been able to prescribe medications since the 1990s. Now, in addition to that, we're also doing a review, a pilot, right now with pharmacies and pharmacists across the province to see what sort of expanded scope of services they can have and where we can compensate them for doing that. They already, for example, are able to prescribe some drug treatments, and they're also allowed to extend or continue prescriptions made by other health practitioners. This is very much a timely subject, and I'm grateful to the hon. member for raising it.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister assure Alberta's health care professionals that all of their professional governing bodies would be consulted before he makes any changes in the scope of practice of any of the health care professions?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that's done as a regular feature of the work that we do. In fact, whenever any legislative amendments are contemplated by this minister, we will ensure that people such as those suggested will be contacted. For example, any changes that may come forward are also brought to the Health Professions Advisory Board for their input. They receive submissions, and so do we.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Rural Physician Recruitment

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have recently learned that my local medical centre in Cold Lake will be losing three of its physicians. Losing three doctors in a city the size of Cold Lake is a serious concern for my constituents as it will affect timely access to quality medical services and procedures. Specifically speaking, the loss will mean that the emergency and operating room of our health centre will be short-staffed. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is your ministry doing to ensure that these positions are filled as quickly as possible so that delays in accessing medical procedures can be avoided?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have a very active program, RPAP, which is the rural physician action plan, and through that Alberta Health Services very aggressively does whatever it can to recruit doctors both from local or national sources or from other locations. They offer an extremely competitive compensation package along with other incentives for people to relocate. My understanding is that at least two physicians are currently on the bubble for Cold Lake, and we're working on the third one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. As rural, remote communities have a harder time attracting doctors than metropolitan centres like Edmonton and Calgary, what incentives does this government currently provide to attract and retain doctors to rural communities, and do you think these incentives require improvements?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, having grown up in rural Alberta, I know how important this issue is there, and it's important throughout the province. That's why we provide specific funding, for example, to third-year medical students in order to help them complete their third year of clinical rotations in rural areas. We also fund a dedicated family medicine residency program to train physicians in rural communities. We offer other incentives like that as well.

Mrs. Leskiw: My last question is to the same minister. Given that we have a number of medical graduates from Alberta seeking employment within our province, what is your ministry doing in order to retain and provide employment opportunities specifically to Alberta-born medical personnel wishing to practise here?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we provide additional incentives such as the business benefit program, which sees us covering some of the office overhead for medical grads to situate themselves in rural Alberta. We offer assessment honoraria. We also pay relocation expenses of up to \$10,000. So there's a lot going on. Just recently I also spoke with some folks about a possible bursary program and what could be done to augment that because we understand how important it is for rural Alberta to have the best people possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Access to Laws and Regulations

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having access to the laws of the land is one of the hallmarks of democracy, yet Alberta's Queen's Printer charges copyright fees to organizations that want to reproduce Alberta's laws and regulations. These fees range from \$250 to as much as \$3,000 per year. My constituents and the Canadian Publishers' Council have contacted Service Alberta expressing opposition on behalf of many organizations to these fees. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Why are these copyright fees in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct: access to Alberta's laws and regulations is very important. That's why I've decided to cancel these copyright fees. The copyright will still continue to be owned by the Queen's Printer, but organizations will be allowed to reproduce Alberta's laws and regulations without paying a fee, and the Canadian Publishers' Council is being made aware of this. One thing I want to stress is that despite these copyright fees Albertans have had and continue to have free access to all laws and regulations on the Queen's Printer's website.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will the new policy be in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This takes place immediately. No further copyright fees will be charged. Existing copyright agreements with specific organizations will continue to be in place until they expire, but there will be no new agreements on fees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will changing this policy have any impact on government revenues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The revenues from copyright agreements averaged about \$20,000 per year. This is not a lot compared to some of the other revenue that we get from the Queen's Printer. Regardless of the revenue loss, the most important thing is that this is the right thing to do. Citizens of Alberta deserve to have access to the laws of our province, and this decision helps ensure this.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that will conclude the question period for today. Today 20 hon. members were recognized for 114 questions and answers: nine members from the Official Opposition, three from the independents, and eight from the government caucus.

In 15 seconds from now we'll proceed with the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Kevin Koe Rink World Curling Champions

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to rise today to recognize the tremendous accomplishments of Alberta's Kevin Koe rink at the 2010 World Men's Curling Championship. On Sunday, April 11, Kevin Koe's rink dominated the Norway team at the world championship final in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, from the very first end, finishing with a 9-3 victory.

This world championship win caps off a dream season for the local rink, who curls out of the Saville Sports Centre right here in Edmonton. Over the past year they claimed their first Alberta provincial championship, their first Brier, and now the world championship. The Brier and the world championship wins are even more impressive as Koe, a Grande Prairie resident, is the first skip in 38 years to win both the Brier and the world championship on the first try. They now join an illustrious group of Alberta Brier and world champion curlers, including Kevin Martin, Randy Ferbey, and Pat Ryan.

The achievements of the Koe rink and their amazing run to win a provincial, national, and world championship will be remembered for years to come. They are not just champions here in Alberta but, to quote our good friends in Italy, *campioni del mondo*, which means champions of the world.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all Members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating skip Kevin Koe, third Blake MacDonald, second Carter Rycroft, and lead Nolan Thiessen on their world championship. Albertans are incredibly proud of your efforts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Katharine Hay

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to pay tribute to a young Albertan who passed away too soon but in her short time with us made a real impact on me and on the province. Katharine Hay passed away last month in Edmonton from complications of kidney disease at the age of 24. Katharine served as a chair of the

New Democratic Youth of Alberta, was the NDP candidate in Sherwood Park in the last election, and was an excellent event organizer and fundraiser. She travelled to British Columbia during their last provincial election, working to re-elect Cariboo North MLA Bob Simpson.

In addition, Katharine was a talented biathlete, excellent cross-country skier, and participated in cutting-horse shows as a turnback rider. During the past year Katharine was enrolled in NAIT's radio and television arts program, pursuing a career in radio news. Katharine did all this and more in spite of having to battle kidney disease her entire life. She showed how courage and determination can change lives and, hopefully, can contribute to changing a province.

At a time when young people are often discouraged from getting involved in public affairs and frustrated by a political system that does not speak to their concerns, Katharine showed that politically engaged youth could make a difference. I know her example inspired others to become involved as well.

Before her passing Katharine was preparing to run in the Kidney Foundation of Alberta's annual give the gift of life fun run and walk. Many of her friends will now be running and walking in her memory at Rundle park on April 25. Donations for Team Kat now exceed \$3,700 and can be made online at www.kidney.ca.

Katharine has left an indelible mark on me, on our party, and on our province. I am very proud to have had her on my team.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Parkinson's Awareness Month

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, April 12, each member in this Assembly was presented with a tulip from the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta. As Parkinson's official flower, the tulip reminds us of the importance of research. Much has been accomplished in this field, but a cure has yet to be found.

Mr. Speaker, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month, and I urge all Albertans to do what they can to help raise awareness about this disease and to make much-needed donations. Parkinson's is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease. While Parkinson's has significant effects on the body, it leaves the mind untouched. Approximately a hundred thousand Canadians live with this debilitating disease and are affected by tremors, slowness, balance issues, and muscle rigidity. The average age of diagnosis with Parkinson's is 60, but it can affect people as young as 30 or 40.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Parkinson's societies of southern and northern Alberta and what they do for individuals and families who live with Parkinson's. Supported by volunteers, donations, and dedicated staff, they provide counselling, support groups for people with Parkinson's and their caregivers, learning resources, referrals, peer programs, in-service community awareness programs, and speech therapy. Parkinson's is not easy to live with, but nonprofit organizations make a world of difference for many Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

World Health Day

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to speak about World Health Day, which was celebrated last week on April 7. Alberta's theme for the celebrations was Healthier Communities for a Healthier Alberta.

World Health Day is an opportunity to encourage all Albertans to take an active role in improving their health and making their communities healthier places to live, work, and play. Creating safe environments, taking personal responsibility, and investing in our health and wellness is a core foundation of building strong communities and a vigorous province. Albertans participating in their wellness reduce the rates of preventable injuries and chronic diseases, which lessens the need for future and further treatment and expenditures.

Current statistics tell us why improving wellness is such an urgent issue. Fifty per cent of Albertans are at a higher risk for chronic disease due to being overweight, obese, and physically inactive. More than 20 per cent of Canadian children and youth aged two to 17 are either overweight or obese, and the number of people diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a preventable illness, has more than doubled in the past 20 years.

Last spring I had the pleasure of participating in the Communities ChooseWell awards ceremony recognizing a record 162 Albertan communities that challenged their residents to eat healthy, be active, and have fun exercising. I know these community challenges inspired and motivated residents, Mr. Speaker. In fact, many of these programs and activities still continue.

World Health Day reminds us that we need to have the power to make healthy choices that dramatically impact our lives. I encourage all Albertans to make healthier food choices, incorporate at least 30 minutes of physical activity into every day, and join with family, friends, neighbours, and co-workers to make our communities safer and healthier.

In short, let's get Albertans eating right, moving more, getting enough sleep, having a little bit of fun in a balanced life, and being kind to one another.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30, less an hour, I'd like to give oral notice . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, unfortunately, I cannot permit you to proceed as your application would violate one of the fundamental rules of our Assembly, and that is Standing Order 30(1). The hon. member chooses to submit a proposal for a notice under Standing Order 30. Standing Order 30(1) clearly states:

After the daily routine and before the Orders of the Day, any Member may request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance when written notice has been given to the Speaker at least 2 hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly.

The sitting of the Assembly commences at 1:30 p.m., so the Speaker would have needed to receive in his office by 11:30 such a request. I received the notice from you at 1:10 p.m., and by that time the member had already been notified by at least one table officer that it would have been inappropriate to proceed, so on that basis we are not proceeding with this application.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a report from my constituency office regarding correspondence we've received in regard to Fort Chipewyan. This is essentially a

form letter. I've repeated the central part of the note, and it was sent to me on behalf of the following people: Janelle Morin, Ali Grotowski, Jennifer Taylor, Alicia Hibbert, Shaun Mott, Jason Youngren, Eddie Biggley, Melissa Horner, Ann Hazlett, Jolanda Thomas, and Jade Zalaskyh.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling is the requisite number of copies of correspondence from postsecondary students Nikita Ora Tetarenko, Alastair MacKinnon, Stephanie Maddison, and Julia Rees, all expressing their concerns about the increasing costs to students and their ability to complete their educational plans.

My second set of tablings is from concerned Albertans Irene MacDonald, James and Jamie Hogg, and Erin Stolte, all expressing the same concerns specifically related to medical schools and the reduction in medical school seats.

My next set of tablings is from Albertans Brenda Herring, Khrysty Greif, Alicia Motuz, Lindsay Verrier, and Darlene Abbott, all supporting the proper funding of high-quality education, with Mrs. Abbott particularly upset about public education funding going to private schools.

I'm tabling a letter from Erika Thompson expressing serious concerns about the draft K to 12 arts education curriculum framework and which details a number of those concerns.

My final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is an e-mail from my constituent Janet Castonguay, a dental hygienist who loves her job but who has suffered a work injury only to find that her employer is not required to protect her through either WCB or private insurance. Employment insurance, unfortunately, only covers 40 per cent of her wages for a maximum of six weeks, and Janet doesn't understand why high-earning professional businesses are not required to provide protection for employees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table approximately 2,300 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and are in addition to the 570 postcards tabled by the Alberta NDP caucus in the past few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for your accommodation in us not having to photocopy five copies of all of those.

The Speaker: The chair will make a comment with respect to that last comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has tabled 2,300 documents. Having been advised of this, it seemed prudent on the basis of the protection of the trees of the province of Alberta and the environment of the province of Alberta and the greening initiatives of this Assembly that it would probably be appropriate on this occasion to permit a single tabling of each document, 2,300 as opposed to the 16,500 that would have been required. This is not precedent setting.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it at all. I also have two other tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Alberta Health

Services which includes a breakdown of the province's continuing care beds into auxiliary hospital, nursing home, designated assisted living, and other categories. The document relates to the questions asked by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona earlier today.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an online petition started by Veronica Mundell calling on the government to "keep the Liquid Cytology Cervical Cancer screening labs in Lethbridge, Red Deer, and the [University of Alberta] Hospital." The petition has 1,317 names. These are in addition to the 1,432 names tabled previously. Many of these have included comments such as: I have been personally affected by cervical cancer in my life and was so thankful that I did not need to wait for weeks or months to get my test results back because Lethbridge has its own site.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair cannot let the hon. member go further without further comment with respect to his comment about: perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned this. The chair would like to advise the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that transparency is always more appropriate than surreptitious action and undercover activity, and it's the philosophy of the chair that transparency will be the mode of the day.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Oberle, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, responses to questions raised by Mr. Hehr, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo; Mr. Mason, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood; Mr. Boutillier, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo; Mr. Kang, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall; and Dr. Brown, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, on March 17, 2010, in the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security main estimates debate.

Projected Government Business

Ms Blakeman: Under Standing Order 7(6) I would request that the Government House Leader please share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week commencing Monday the 19th, government business commencing on the 20th.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, April 20, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we anticipate being in a position to discuss Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, in Committee of the Whole. We anticipate that, following today's progress, the remaining bills 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 will be in third reading. We'll proceed in third reading on those bills or as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, the 21st, we would anticipate that bills 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 would be in third reading. We would proceed in that order on those bills in third reading and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, April 22, we would proceed with those same bills as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: During the Routine today the hon. Government House Leader advised that he would want to rise on a point of order. The chair did intercept that and did indicate that the chair had not really been very enthusiastic about receiving points of order with respect

to members' statements. The Government House Leader indicated he would rise on a point of clarification.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 13(2) "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." In order to ask for that clarification, under 13(1) "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and decide questions of order." In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it refers to members' statements.

In presiding over the conduct of this daily activity, Speakers have been guided by a number of well-defined prohibitions . . .

- all questions raised must be on matters of concern but do not necessarily have to be on matters of urgent necessity;
- personal attacks are not permitted.

On page 422 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* there's another provision which indicates, of course, as is standard in the rest of our standing orders, that one should not refer to a person who is not a member of the House and therefore not able to defend themselves.

Now, I understand that our order of precedents and practice over a number of years has been that points of order are not raised during members' statements. In fact, we pride ourselves on having an opportunity for members' statements to allow any private member of this Assembly to have two minutes' opportunity to discuss a matter that's of importance to them or their constituents. Actually, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* indicates some statements. For example,

- congratulatory messages, recitations of poetry and frivolous matters are out of order.

That has not actually been followed in recent practice, and we've certainly seen that in this House, but the others have been.

Mr. Speaker, if your ruling is that points of order can never be raised with respect to a member's statement, then I would ask you to clarify how proper decorum in the House is to be maintained when, as the Leader of the Opposition did today, a personal attack on the Premier's integrity and honesty is raised. As the Leader of the Official Opposition did today raise the question – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues. I asked to see if I could get some transcription, but I couldn't. But he did refer to "top Tory Ron Hicks." Well, Ron Hicks has been a chief deputy minister of the government and a stellar civil servant for a number of years. I don't think the Leader of the Opposition would have any information to ever suggest that he was a member of the Conservative Party or was partisan in any way.

So it was entirely – I could go on. There are other things, but I know that this is not exactly a point of order. It is a point of clarification. There have to be some limits. Mr. Speaker, if you're not going to intercede during members' statements to call people to order when they breach the rules, how, then, are we going to make sure that people cannot do during members' statements what is clearly inappropriate?

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Also on 13(2), asking for the Speaker to explain, I've been reviewing some of the Speaker's previous comments, and I'm very much in mind of the consistent set of comments that he gives us at the beginning of every session in which he makes note on a point of order that a member should refrain from making editorial comments on the matter under consideration. We've had a great deal of editorializing

thus far considering that it's not a point of order. So that door being opened, I'm going through it.

I have a copy of the Leader of the Official Opposition's statement, and I cannot find in his statement where anything was directly attributed to the Premier. We've talked about the actions of his administration. Certainly, the Premier is the head of the government who administers, so I don't see that that is a false statement to make. As I went further through this, it talks about that the leader believes and finds something not believable and, you know, talks about his belief that there may have been instructions from the Premier's office given to the deputy chair around that veto power. Just looking at these remarks, it's not saying that the Premier said anything, frankly. It's talking about his administration. It's talking about his political agenda, which he certainly has and publishes on a regular basis through the Public Affairs Bureau and through press releases and through banners that are put up when he speaks.

Regarding the third party that was mentioned, frankly, I'm a little surprised to hear the Government House Leader saying that he sees it as a bad thing that someone would be named as a Tory. My understanding is that all of the members of government are a member of that party, and I thought he would have been proud of that. I don't know that calling someone a Tory in this province is a bad thing, and I don't think it was delivered by the Leader of the Official Opposition with any malice. It was stated more or less as an observation.

There are so few opportunities for members who are not in the government to have control of the floor for a few short minutes to make statements. I think it's been one of the hallmarks of this particular Speaker's influence on this Assembly that the two minutes granted to private members has been protected by the Speaker and continues to be protected by the Speaker. I'm aware that he has held to that ruling through a number of challenges. I hope he continues to do that. He's certainly taken the opportunity – and I'm mindful of a couple of specific instances – to ask members to be careful of that special privilege that is granted to them in that points of order have not been entertained. He's done that on more than one occasion that I can remember, and I think that's perfectly appropriate.

I would argue that there is no point of order, definitely, and I would not usually require any point of clarification. The Speaker has been pretty clear that he protects that time but it needs not to be abused, and I don't believe it was abused today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we could go on for quite a period of time. However, let me just give a little bit of background with respect to this and make some comments. This was raised as a point of clarification. I would draw members' attention to some statements made by this chair in days gone by with respect to this.

First of all, just a little historical perspective. The concept of members' statements was introduced in this House in 1993 as the result of discussions between the then Government House Leader, who happened to be me, and the House leader of the Official Opposition. The gentleman's name is Grant Mitchell. He became the Leader of the Official Opposition.

One of the agreed-upon principles that we had when this matter was introduced to the House, and these are words that I gave on May 18, 2005:

One of the agreed principles we had was that we would ask all members in the Assembly to deal with the highest degree of civility with respect to these statements, to not bring into question any other member, and to deal essentially with thoughts that they had. [And] in replacement or evenness for that, no member would rise on a point of order or on a point of privilege.

This matter was revisited on April 5, 2006, and then on May 3, 2006.

As I recall, going back to 1993, there have been three interventions with respect to members' statements, today being the fourth.

So if you take a look at all of the members' statements that were uttered in the House and given in the House, in essence, for the most part members have been very, very good about observing these general principles that we had. Every once in a while there is some violation of that. That's really a reflection more of the individual giving the statement than it is on the House or the process of members' statements. The chair will protect the integrity of members' statements, give members the widest possible latitude in dealing with this, and ask them to follow some certain principles.

If anybody should be upset for what was said in the House today, it's me. I quote from the Leader of the Official Opposition, "The Tories have been trying to silence the Auditor General for months . . . and distributed in this House a paper by top Tory Ron Hicks that calls on the government to severely curb the powers of the Auditor General." The government did not distribute such a paper to anyone; the Speaker did. The Speaker did because a former member of the Official Opposition, who is now the dean of the department of economics at the University of Alberta, has a student by the name of Ron Hicks in a course to do a public seminar on public accountability. This one individual, Ron Hicks, came to me, because the audience that probably would most likely want to read this paper would be men and women of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, and said: I would like, as a courtesy, to provide to them a copy of my report, my paper, prior to the seminar that would be held in I think it's the early part of May in which this matter will be raised as an opportunity to hear it first.

It's not any top Tories that distributed this. The chair did it, and he did it as a courtesy to a former member of the Official Opposition, who has a student by the name of Ron Hicks. So, you know, if anybody should be angry, it should be me, but I'm not going to get angry. I'll still recognize their right to say certain things, but I'm going to repeat what I said before, that was arrived at in consort with a person who I believed had integrity and still has integrity, Mr. Grant Mitchell, who is a former Leader of the Official Opposition.

One of the agreed principles we had was that we would ask all members in the Assembly to deal with the highest degree of civility with respect to these statements, to not bring into question any other member, and to deal essentially with thoughts that they had.

Today's statement was a reflection of the individual, and remember that.

Ms Blakeman: Under 13(2) I'm just asking for clarification on your recent statements just so that I am clear because you repeated it in a couple of different orders. The request to distribute the information that was distributed came from a former member of this House?

The Speaker: No. I never said that. I said a "student."

Ms Blakeman: It came from a student but not from a former member.

The Speaker: That's correct. That's what I said.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the clarification.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

**Bill 9
Local Authorities Election Statutes
Amendment Act, 2010**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to make a few comments with regard to Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, in committee today. I want to thank all members who participated in second reading of Bill 9. I appreciate the positive comments during second reading from members of all parties who spoke to the legislation and its measures to achieve fairness and transparency.

Before I respond to specific questions raised during second reading, I'd like to speak about the clarity these amendments will bring to municipal elections. Bill 9 will also address concerns we've heard in conversations with municipal leaders and other Albertans over the last year. They have commended the government for listening to their concerns and responding in a timely manner through this proposed legislation.

Bill 9 recognizes that self-funded campaigns can go up to \$10,000. This provides flexibility in that one size does not fit all, as was suggested by a member opposite. Those campaigns do not have to follow the same guidelines as larger, donor-funded campaigns. For those larger campaigns it sets individual campaign contributions at \$5,000 per year. That means candidates can receive donations from any number of donors. All those donations will be subject to disclosure, and a receipt will be issued for any aggregate donations over \$100.

It's important to note the flexibility for rules around bank accounts, which also recognize that campaigns come in different sizes.

It's also worth noting that there is not a campaign spending limit proposed in this legislation as exists in some provinces and some municipalities. There was a suggestion during second reading debate that we adopt provincial regulations around municipal election campaigns with respect to the carry-over of surplus campaign funds. But as you are aware, Mr. Chair, in municipal elections candidates seek public office as individuals and not as political party candidates. Each candidate has their own philosophy and policies. Therefore, surplus donations are treated accordingly and are required to be donated to charities and municipalities if the candidate is not running for office in the future. This is a fair and reasonable framework for all elected officials and provides accountability for Albertans.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie had raised the question about the requirement for opening bank accounts for candidates. Specifically, he wanted to know whether candidates would be required to open a bank account in their own name rather than in the name of their campaign. Mr. Chair, financial institutions each have individual processes to determine what name is required to open a bank account. That being said, the legislation is workable as it is presently before us today.

Members also raised questions about residency requirements with respect to electors owning more than one home. I'd like to make it very clear that this provision will not affect any voter rights for property owners in summer villages. The proposed amendments will clarify the existing rules that when a voter who has more than one residence in all other types of municipalities other than summer villages, the person's place for voting will be determined on the basis of the following criteria: the home address where the person's

mail is delivered, the address to where the person's income tax correspondence is sent, the address shown on a driver's licence or registries identification card.

This further clarity was required due to a court case in May 2008, when the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench ruled that the election was valid despite 11 voters failing to meet the residency requirements under the Local Authorities Election Act. However, the judge stated that the act does not expressly address the issue of where a voter is to vote when he or she owns or occupies more than one residence. This proposed amendment to the act will resolve that issue. All electors will still have to either be on a voters list or make a statement of eligibility declaring that they are eligible to vote in that election, and an elector's eligibility can still be challenged in the courts, of course, which was previously the case as well.

The definitions in the new legislation also clearly set out what a campaign contribution is, what a campaign period means, and who is a candidate. Bill 9 will clarify that a commercial service does not include services provided by volunteers who receive no compensation in relation to their time or services.

Our election process, as was stated during second reading debate, needs to be open and accountable. This legislation will provide greater consistency and fairness for all Alberta municipalities. Mr. Chair, the proposed changes support the principles of openness and transparency while ensuring practical delivery. Previously it was optional for a municipality to pass a bylaw requiring candidates to prepare and disclose to the public a statement of their campaign contributions and expenses. Now all candidates must file a disclosure statement with the municipality. This ensures consistency in reporting for all Albertans.

In closing, I want to urge all members to support Bill 9 and thank them for their comments. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was beginning to worry that I wasn't actually going to get a chance and be here at the right time to be able to speak to this bill because I'm quite interested in the process and what has happened here. I also see a sort of repeated process or strategy that comes from the government or through the private members who sit on the government side around discussion of issues that affect all of the municipalities in Alberta without a rigorous consultation process that involves them. I think this is the second or third one where that can be argued. We certainly had a situation where last year the 2009 Bill 203 – of course, our bills are all renumbered, so there's now a different 203 – which was around municipal financing, went through the House very quickly and then was proclaimed to the shock of many.

As I looked at some of the things, you know, I went to the city of Edmonton disclosure bylaw, and it is very thorough. It goes on for some 10 or 11 or 12 pages with various attachments that go with it on how and when everything is to be filed, a definition of what is meant by a gift, who is meant as family, campaign expenses, honorariums, how much money has to be itemized, anything over \$300. There was a municipality that in some ways has more thorough campaign finance disclosure rules than we had at the time – there is a bill before us currently – than we have even to this moment for provincial disclosure.

I'm wondering who was supposed to be the recipient of this being put onto the municipalities. Who were they really trying to get at? It was surely painted with a very broad brush stroke. Nonetheless, that's past history. It passed. We now have the amending act in front of us. At least the government recognized that something needed to be done and it needed to be addressed.

Two things are outstanding and I want to make sure are clearly on the record. One is that the larger municipalities have been asking for some time to be able to have legislation passed which would give them the choice of enacting tax-free deduction legislation for municipal campaign contributions – and that was not included in this act – for trying to solicit donations for any of those people that are trying to run.

Let's face it: in the big cities you're not talking chump change. You know, in Edmonton the ward sizes currently are dealing with 120,000 to 140,000 individuals that a candidate is trying to influence to vote their way. That's a lot of money to get things in the mail to them, signs, and all the rest of it to try and make people aware of what you're doing. This is without a party apparatus behind them. So it would be soliciting donations without any kind of an incentive that is enjoyed by provincial and federal politicians but is denied to municipal politicians. I question why that was not included in this legislation, particularly because it's something that has been repeatedly requested.

3:20

The ire of the municipalities over not being consulted was pretty clear, and I probably don't need to go over that again. I think there's another municipal act that's up around franchise fees, and I wonder how much consultation took place around that one. I believe that's also a private member's bill. So I see the pattern being repeated even when the point has been made pretty firmly.

The transparency and disclosure laws. In the city of Edmonton the first one was passed in 1993, and they've continued to operate on that. I did quote to you from it a bit earlier, and I notice that it was most recently revised in 2001. They've kept on top of their legislation, and I think that if I was them, I'd be a little peeved with this sort of Big Brother knows best attitude.

I believe that the audit requirement was addressed in this legislation, which was something else that definitely needed to be looked at. Thank you for looking at the candidate's own campaign funds and allowing that to be brought forward and particularly clarifying the rules around the volunteer and valuing the volunteers' time because, well, certainly as happens on this side of the House, volunteers are really the biggest resource in a campaign. If we had to value their time and not go above a certain limit, my campaign would certainly be sunk on that. So thank you for addressing and clarifying that they are not campaign funds.

As well, thank you for addressing the issues around contributions being viewed over an annual basis rather than on a campaign basis because, as I said, in some of the larger municipalities and cities – Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, for example – I think candidates are trying to raise sizable amounts of money. You usually can't do that in one shot at it, so most of them have some sort of annual fundraising campaign.

I think you got rid of the problem with the surplus. Yeah, you did.

I think those are the issues that I wanted to put on the record right now. Mostly because there seems to be some sort of under-the-waterline battle going on here between the government and the municipalities – and I'm never quite sure who they're trying to get at, who the government is trying to control – I wish that there could be a more consistent approach to this. You know, by far the majority of our population live in urban centres now. To continually go about things where either backbencher legislation, private member's legislation, or government legislation is brought forward without dealing with those people who are representing the majority of our population, who are living in urban centres I think is short sighted and very problematic, so I'm glad to see that at least this bill has come forward which would correct some things.

I'm going to stop talking now because I'm really hoping it's going to get passed today. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity in getting to participate in the debate on Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, this afternoon. Certainly, I have heard from municipal leaders across the province. I have heard their dissatisfaction with this initiative. When I think of this government's feeble efforts to improve our own financial disclosure statements and the laws that govern those statements, I find it quite ironic that we would serve this legislative initiative on various corners of the province and give municipalities these changes without adequate consultation. I'm pleased to hear, or at least I understand, that there will be amendments to this, but certainly I can only gather that the hon. member heard from the same individuals that I did regarding this proposed legislation and is rightfully considering their opinions.

I don't know what happened, but when you consider this bill and what we're trying to do here with improving the accountability of donations to the municipal level of elections, that's a good idea, I think. But in the future I would certainly ask members of this House to consult thoroughly and diligently with our other partner in government, and that's the municipal level.

Again, Mr. Chairman, we look at Bill 9, and we see the proposed amendments. If we're going to be accountable ourselves, that's fine, and if we ask others to be accountable, that's fine. But when we look at the rules that govern the elections of each and every member of this Assembly, I suggest that we fix those rules first, make some necessary changes to those rules. Let's have a look at our own contribution limits. Let's look at who can give us money. Should we look at eliminating donations from corporations, trade unions, entities that are not on the voters list and just limit campaign donations to individuals whose names appear on the voters list? Perhaps we could do that; that would be one suggestion. Limits on the total amount that can be donated during a campaign or a calendar year: perhaps we should look at that as well. Until we do that, I can understand why municipal leaders are so suspicious of this initiative.

Now, there are those – and I realize this is coming out of another private member's bill – that indicated to me that they thought this was a matter of a dispute between the mayor of Calgary and this government, and this was one way of ensuring that the mayor of Calgary listened to or respected this government more. Now, I don't know whether that's true or not, but certainly more than one civic leader brought that up to me. The civic leaders, regardless of whether they're in smaller centres or larger centres, had a lot of questions initially about this bill, and we'll see if they are satisfied with this legislation as it proceeds.

3:30

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to get my comments and my observations on the record. Certainly, in the information that has been provided to me and the commentary that has been provided to me by many different people, they don't understand the tone, I shall say, of this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, it's always a privilege to rise and to debate the various bills that this government has brought forward. Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes

Amendment Act, 2010, is one that I do believe needs more debate and more thought put into. As we too often see, these people won't protect our children from pedophiles and other things and they need to get it right, yet they bring forward many bills like this that I question. Did they get it right? Did they consult the stakeholders? I have to say on this that I don't think that it's right yet, that we need to do more thought on it and more research and, certainly, consult the local authorities on this for municipal elections. Why is the provincial government needing to step in? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just referred to this as being an ongoing dispute between the province and the mayor of Calgary and the things that have gone on there. Again, we're trying to limit them.

One of the things, Mr. Chairman, that I always look at when we're passing new legislation and something that I deeply believe is that the proper role of government is to protect our freedoms, not protect us from freedoms. This, to me, is a bill that is protecting the government from freedoms. Overall, I realize the importance of laws and legislation and regulations, but we need to look at, you know, why we are doing this. Again, it's trying to limit those that want to run for office and constrain them in ways that I don't know that we need to do.

It's just a concern to me. It is addressed in here in several places in the bill, and these are areas where I agree. The important thing to me when people are running for office is the reporting of the money that was spent and the reporting of the money that the individual received and who it came from. That part of the legislation I very much agree with. Then after that, though, on the outside, you know, do all these other little details need to be in there that are there?

The area that I'm probably most concerned about is that when you're going up against an incumbent or a new area, often those other people do have a great deal of money. It's interesting. As I look around the world and see some of the great philanthropists, two of the individuals right now that I just have a world of respect for are Bill Gates and Warren Buffett and the work that they're doing in Africa. I think that they'll do more good than many, many nations all together will do with the wealth that they've acquired.

The relationship with Bill 9 here . . .

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Try and get back. It's a long road. Start walking.

Mr. Hinman: Now, I'm surprised. Even you are questioning me on that.

These philanthropists want to do great work. I think that there are a lot of individuals in society who also realize that there are problems in government. They're willing to run. We've had an individual in Calgary who has spent a lot of money that we saw and know what he did. I just see no reason to restrict wealthy individuals who want to fund their own campaign, to say that you can only put out \$10,000. The important thing is that it's accountable and that we know what money is being spent, that other candidates and stuff can counter that, and that it's an open and honest race.

Why? Because if someone has connections or perhaps has given political promises to thousands of people – and maybe only a few, but they have the influence over thousands of people – we can get a hundred thousand donations of \$1,000. Yet if someone who has their own wealth – let's say that Warren Buffett or Bill Gates was living somewhere here in Alberta, and these are great philanthropists and felt, "I could do a good job," and they wanted to spend their money and not ask other people, why would we want to limit them and say, "You can't do that and spend your money"? I think that this is a flaw in the bill that we really need to address.

Again, going back to the principle of what government's basic

role is, I think that is to protect our freedoms as citizens and how we want to interact or what we want to do in a community. That restriction on philanthropists and money: it shouldn't be restricted. Whether they want to spend it on trying to get elected or put a message out during an election, I don't think that that's wrong. What's critical – and this bill includes that – is, in fact, the openness or the accountability of where the money was spent.

On that, Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 9, which amends sections 1(5) and (6)(b). I will wait for copies to be distributed, then.

The Chair: We will pause for the distribution of the amendment. This amendment now shall be known as A1.

Hon. member, please continue on amendment A1.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am proposing to strike out section 1(5), the candidate self-funded election campaign. Secondly, I am proposing an amendment to section 1(6)(b), which amends the maximum amount of self-funds a campaigner can contribute to their own campaign. The purpose of this amendment is to strike the \$10,000 limit and recognize that self-funding is not a campaign contribution. This means that a candidate can contribute an unlimited amount of money to their own campaign during an election year.

Mr. Chair, some might argue that this amendment excludes a candidate from filing a disclosure statement on the amount to which they fund their own campaign, but this is not the case. Section 147.11(7) and the proposed section 147.4(1)(c) state that a candidate is required to disclose "the total amount of money paid by the candidate out of the candidate's own funds." Quite simply, I believe that if a candidate has enough money to fund their own campaign and wishes to spend over \$10,000 of their own money, they should be free to do so. What's important, though, is that they need to show accountability on where this funding is being put.

Again, when the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was talking yesterday about the problems of evil and them trying to get in and cause problems, there are also those who are for the good. [interjections] You brought up the constant: we need to be on guard. Again, to paraphrase Edmund Burke, all good people have to do is nothing in order for evil to flourish. To me that's a very true statement. That's what we as legislators come in here for, to try and, you know, increase the safety and the prosperity of our community and to get rid of the derelicts. The people that are causing problems we want to eliminate, but we would not ever want to limit philanthropists and their money and the good things that they want to do in our society. One of those things that they might want to do is run for office.

3:40

Now, I realize that this is a two-edged sword. You can say: well, a corrupt individual can also now spend an unlimited amount of money. That is true. But the important part and why I support the other parts is that the openness and accountability of where that money is spent, to me, is what is critical. The population here in Alberta, we're not ignorant of the facts, and if the information is presented in front of us, I have great trust in the people of Alberta to elect those individuals. Like I say, for those who are running against such a candidate, whether they be good or perceived as bad, the critical point is: are they being accountable on where the funds came from and where they're being spent? To me, we don't need near the restrictions that we see in this bill in saying how much can come in and whatnot.

Again, I spoke also a little bit earlier about it, that, you know, it seems kind of ironic that as MLAs we can receive through the loopholes of legislation \$15,000 a year into our campaign.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Hinman: Okay. I'll rephrase that. The way that the legislation is written, an MLA or someone who wants to run to be an MLA can receive \$15,000 a year from a contributor. [interjection] Yes. It's the regulations. We can call it what we want, but we write the regulations to have those things allowed, so why would we not allow that at the municipal level? Especially on the fact that many municipal people run in a much larger area than we ourselves are running to represent, yet we're restricting the amount of money that's coming in to them.

I just feel that we need to take a couple of steps back and look at the reality and realize that one shoe doesn't fit all. Let's at least be fair. If people can contribute \$15,000 to a political party that can then be directed to an individual's campaign and \$30,000 in an election year, why would we limit someone at the municipal level and say, "Well, we're allowed to, but you're not"? I see that as a little bit hypocritical in that area, so I'd like to level the playing field and ensure that all people have that.

Once again, the purpose of this amendment, though, is to ensure that someone that wants to give back to their society, they don't want to ask other people to support them, they've been very blessed, they're wealthy, and they'd like to run and to put that choice forward to the people in our community – I think it's critical that we accept this amendment and go forward and realize that this will actually enhance and perhaps allow people that want to run that otherwise wouldn't because they're not going to go out and ask people to make those contributions, yet they themselves would be willing to give of it. We should allow this.

I'll sit down and listen to the response on this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've had the privilege of serving at both the provincial and the local level, and I'm going to speak a little bit about this amendment, particularly (b)(1.1), the addition of "money paid by a candidate out of the candidate's own funds for the purposes of the candidate's election campaign is not a campaign contribution," et cetera.

In fact, I think the hon. member that spoke is looking through the glass at the wrong end. It is not important to conduct an election for the benefit of the candidate. It is important to conduct an election for the benefit of the voter and for the voting public, and the voting public can be highly influenced by a disparate display of how the candidates are presented.

Mr. Chairman, if the one that has been privileged to invest a million or several funds on their behalf has been able to saturate the media in such a way that they have been able to get elected and the other candidates have not been able to get that same display of media influence, at the end of the day if the one with the greater display of influence through the media or any other source is able to get elected, you are ill advised as another candidate to cry foul, especially if your voting capacity has been that much less. Challenging the vote at that time is going to be very difficult to do because, obviously, the one that has had the most influence in the media has been able to display that they have won.

Then it could be construed by the voting public that the only person or persons that will be elected are those that are able to fund that kind of an election. What the hon. member is suggesting is that the only thing that's important is how you display how you dealt with that money. But when a candidate comes forward and presents that money, as long as the candidate presents that money, it opens the door for the candidates themselves to gather all kinds of monies from their friends and family and put it through because where that

source of money has come from is not important in this amendment. Rather, what this amendment suggests is that as long as I put it forward as a candidate, that's all that matters.

I think what we're trying to do is not establish a playing field that benefits the candidate. We're trying to establish a playing field that benefits the electorate in such a way that the electorate is free to choose, unfettered by undue influence which, in my view, this amendment suggests.

Mr. Chairman, I've gone through several elections time and time again from 1977, over 30 years' worth of elections. It could be too long. But one of the things I'm going to tell you is this. At the local level – and all politics are local – they look very carefully at how clearly one displays how they present themselves.

I think there would be huge distaste if a philanthropist or anybody else with excessive means was able to saturate in a way that others could not to the local media or to the voter. I think they would be offended, not necessarily just by that candidate's capacity but by the people like us that would enable a rich person, regardless of where those funds have come from – a rich person – to better their lot in life or their influence over the electorate over anybody else. That, Mr. Chairman, in this democratic society runs contrary to all the moral and ethical principles that I've always understood good government prevails to provide.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly do want to speak on this amendment, that's put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, because I found much to object to in his speech, quite frankly, and I find much to object to in this amendment.

I share a municipal background with the hon. minister of finance. We served in municipal government in the greater Edmonton region at the same time, so my experiences are similar to hers. Having dealt with some of these issues myself over the course of four terms on Edmonton city council, I can tell you that this amendment would in fact make the situation very, very difficult.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore seems to believe that it is inherently preferable to have people with great wealth representing the citizens in a municipal council and perhaps also in other orders of government. He talked about people who are blessed to be wealthy, that we want them to serve and so on, and then in the next breath he talked about eliminating the derelicts. I don't really know what he meant by that, but it certainly didn't sound good to my ears because I might be considered by some here to be a derelict to be eliminated.

I have fought all throughout my political career for the right of ordinary people to participate in our political process and to represent the ordinary people who elect them. It's something that I find, you know, is very much part of the reason that I got involved in politics in the first place. Everybody from all walks of life has a right to participate in politics and to be elected to political office. In fact, it should be encouraged. Many occupations are overrepresented in politics, lawyers being the most obvious example. There are fairly few lawyers among the population, but there are lots of bus drivers, there are lots of nurses, there are lots of teachers, there are lots of construction workers, there are lots of workers in the arts, and they do not have the same level of representation in the halls of power in whatever order of government you're looking at.

3:50

What the hon. member is proposing and what he is saying gives a huge advantage to those people with wealth because they get a special exemption. They can spend their own money and as much of it as they wish, but people who don't have that money cannot

because they are restricted in their ability to raise funds by the rest of the restrictions in this act, which, in my view, are justified. It creates a special advantage for those who have considerable wealth.

This is based, quite frankly, on the system we have right now in the United States. This is exactly the exemption that exists in the very limited sorts of restrictions and regulations of campaign financing in the United States. The issue of money has ruined American politics and has turned it from something that once represented the people of the United States into something that is beholden to special interests, where politicians spend almost all of their time raising money and in which people with great wealth call the shots. The exemption around personal contributions has led to the case in the United States where most of the politicians in that country are millionaires or billionaires.

I think I saw a report that showed – and I may be overstating this slightly but not by much – that almost every single member of the United States Senate is a millionaire or a billionaire. The ordinary people of that country have been excluded from the political process because, as the hon. minister of finance was saying . . .

An Hon. Member: Intergovernmental affairs.

Mr. Mason: Oh, sorry. They switched them, didn't they? Yeah, intergovernmental affairs.

She said, you know, that money has a real influence on the results of elections. You just have to look at them over there and us back in this corner to realize the importance of money in elections. That's why it's an important part of democratic reform to start trying to level the playing field so that it's the ideas and the character of the candidates that determine the results and not the people that support them.

What I want to say in the strongest possible terms is that I believe that we should reject this amendment. This is an antidemocratic amendment that is dressed up in the rhetoric of democracy, and it's exactly the opposite of what it purports to be. This is freedom for millionaires, and it is undemocratic for the rest of us.

Mr. Chairman, I urge all hon. members to oppose this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to speak very briefly on this amendment. I don't want to extend this debate, actually. I think it's really important for the municipalities that we pass this bill. Really, this is a special exemption but in drag, if I may use the vernacular of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, because that's what it is. It's purported to help everyone but really just helps a very few people. To me the essence of democracy is that the elected representatives are a mirror to the people in our society. This amendment would make it very, very difficult for a number of individuals in this Assembly to be able to get elected.

To me it is a sign of your success as an individual member to be able to get other people to support you financially. Frankly, I've never put any money into a campaign because I think it's about whether I can garner that support from outside, and if I can't, then I don't deserve to be here. I find unlimited self-financing really just opens the door to have this become an even more exclusive enclave than it is. The likelihood that we would have gender representation, racial representation, religious representation in this House, even differences of sexual orientation, becomes much more muted than what we already have. I would argue that what we've got here is not exactly a mirror holding up to our current society.

So I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A1.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly some interesting discussion being brought forward and some need for some clarification. I think that I would start off that very much the reason why I've brought this amendment is for the public good. I believe in a level playing field, so I guess the question that one would have to ask, with the discussion that's going on here, is that if someone has worked hard, has been ingenious in his area and earned a lot of money, and they've said that, well, your punishment is that you're not allowed to use it.

You know, in some parts of the world it's very difficult to have a choice on a vehicle. "No. This is the only one that we build. This is what you have to have." Whereas, in North America people with wealth have been able to choose and buy as they please.

It's limiting freedoms that I'm speaking about. It's interesting that the minister of intergovernmental affairs has said that, you know, it's not in the best interest of the people. I would very much take that on the other side. It's the other way around. We want people to have that opportunity if they so can. I didn't say that the money didn't matter. It very much matters, and receiving money from people and then using it in your campaign without declaring it would be against this act. So it wouldn't be family members and stuff giving people money and being able to put it in that way. The tracing of where that money came from is critical – it's in this bill – and it's also critical where the money was spent. I don't think that she's accurate on that.

I find it very interesting, especially sitting on this side. I think that if you go back to my first election that I ran, people said: "Oh, you can never go up against the big Tory party and win. It's just an impossibility. Don't waste your time. Don't waste your money and other people's." So I ran a campaign that was very fiscally responsible and was able to win. It's not all about money.

The hon. member also mentioned, and I agree, that people are astute. If we have someone that people consider corrupt or they don't appreciate the way they're spending a lot of money, I don't believe that our local citizens are so foolish as to say: "Oh, this is wonderful. We'll vote for him."

If you actually go back and look through the municipal records, there have been a lot of individuals who have spent an awful lot of money compared to other ones, and they weren't successful. It's not all about money. I've never spent more money than those that I've been up against, referring to the government, the Tory-nominated candidates. So you can't say: oh, look how much money they spent, and they won. I do very much agree with the idea she says: well, you know, if they spend enough money and they saturate the airwaves and the paper and everything else, what chance do you have?

If, in fact, this government really wants to do something and we want to create a level playing field, then what we should do is pass legislation that actually limits the amount of money that can be spent on each citizen that you're trying to get votes from. That would make far more sense to me, to ensure there's a level playing field, to limit it and say, "Well, you can only spend \$5 per voter," rather than saying that you can't spend your own money. Again, it's looking at the situation and what the real problem is here.

I guess perhaps it was a poor choice of words when I used the word "derelict." I was thinking more of a huge ship that's taking on water and sinking and is not being of a lot of value than of the human nature. What I mean is those people that are less than quality citizens. People realize that, you know, there are some shady deals going on. Like I say, I don't think that the citizens are so naive as

to not be able to detect that, especially when there's an obscene amount of money being spent on a campaign. It doesn't mean that they're necessarily going to get it out there, yet it's important that often we can put out a message to the people. So I just don't see that that's needed.

Again, talking about the undue influence of the money being spent by a party, I mean, we can just look at the provincial elections and the enormous spread between the amounts of money. So if, in fact, we want to do anything, let's limit it, then – you know what? – to the lowest common denominator. We check with each candidate and say, "How much money do you have to spend?" and limit everybody to that. That wouldn't be the freedoms that we want. It's, like I say, a concern to me.

4:00

The other thing is that I did not say: those with great wealth. I said those that had great wealth, the opportunity to use it if they so desire. I am not an individual of great wealth. Again, I came in; I ran on very tight budgets to get in here. There are those with money who might want to try and buy the airwaves. There are those that, you know, want to put in the effort, the sweat equity, to actually meet the people they're representing. Who should we choose? I believe it's those that have put in the sweat equity, that they meet at the door, that they know. I think that's represented by many of the people in here. They didn't get in because of the amount of money that they spent. It's because of the people that they met, the concerns that they were able to address, the sincerity of the individuals, and the ideas that they had to solve the problems of the people that they met with. I believe in a free and democratic society. That would make the difference. One of the benefits of municipal elections is that people know when those dates are coming up, so they can campaign on that. It's an area to look at.

I think that my motion has been taken in the wrong way. This fear that someone that has more money is going to beat me: I don't think there would be too many people in the opposition that would even run if that was the case because of the intimidation of the war chest that the governing party has in each of their constituencies as well as the deep pockets that the party has as a whole. Like I say, if spending money is wrong and we're saturating the airwaves and everything else, then we should look at legislation that actually limits the amount of money that a campaign can spend on the citizens that actually have the ability to vote, if that's what we're wanting to look at is caps. Perhaps that is something that's of value to look at to ensure that we have a level playing field.

That's really what this is all about, a level playing field, yet not saying that. Too often we have this mentality. I believe in raising the bar and having a standard, but I have a real problem on lowering the bar, saying that we have to lower the bar and prohibit this from going over. That's what we're doing. We're lowering the bar for individuals that may want to spend their own money on what I call a very worthy cause. Let the citizens make that decision.

Full disclosure is the key. Where did the money come from? How is the money spent? Again, the most important thing when it comes to municipal elections, provincial elections, and federal elections is the accountability clause. Here again, to me, the major flaw that we have with democracy here in Canada is that there is no accountability or next to zero accountability after someone is elected, that day after they can change their colours, they can change their party, they can change whatever they want, and there's no accountability to the people. [interjections]. That would be correct.

What we need is recall. I'll always campaign on recall and accountability. Eventually one day I believe that that law will come into effect here in the province of Alberta.

The Chair: Hon. member, we're talking about amendment A1.

Mr. Hinman: There's so much noise that I couldn't hear you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We are talking about amendment A1, that you introduced.

Mr. Hinman: That is correct. Some people are caught up in movie actors and things, and that's fine, but we'll get back to: do we want to limit the freedoms of individuals? If we want to limit them, the real way is accountability, and that is about how much money is spent, where it's spent, and where that money came from. That's the important part in this area.

I'll listen to see if there are any other questions that people might want to bring forward on this, and we'll have the question.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: Seeing no other hon. member wishing to speak on amendment A1, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Now we go back to the bill, Bill 9. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a few comments with respect to this. I've also had discussions with municipal officials who have had concerns with this particular piece of legislation. I want to just raise a few questions.

I think one of the issues that is clarified, that I think is very important, is the question of volunteer work provided to a candidate. In my view, political campaigns ought to be based not on money but on the work of volunteers. Someone who works for their community and is consistently trying to improve the quality of life for the citizens and to improve the communities that they represent is most likely to have people who are prepared to come forward and work on their behalf. To allow any suggestion that volunteer work has to be assigned a value and calculated on the books and limited in some way by legislation I think is wrong. So I want to say that I particularly think that's an important aspect.

The limit on campaign contributions I think is very important. I want to say that the biggest problem, in my view, getting back to the question of money and its corrosive influence on politics, that I have seen is money from the development industry in municipal politics, especially in the big cities. The development community has millions, if not billions, of dollars at stake in decisions of municipalities. For example, a simple zoning decision on a piece of land can increase its value four or five times, so there are huge financial stakes for developers and landowners in municipal politics.

Now, I believe municipal politics is mostly about land. It's mostly about land and its uses, its plans, and services to property. So it's natural that those that have great financial stakes in those things would pay a great deal of attention to it. Not having limits on campaign contributions gives a disproportionate amount of influence to developers in terms of municipal politics, and I think we ought to go further than this bill does and eliminate developer financing of municipal elections altogether, and I think you can eliminate lots of other sources. We've certainly taken the position at the provincial level that corporate donations as well as union donations should be eliminated, that contributions should come from individual citizens and citizens of the jurisdiction. So having an opportunity to limit campaign contributions is very important.

We've already dealt with candidates' contributions to their own campaigns. I certainly think that the limit that's included in this

piece of legislation, this act, in terms of individual contributions to your own campaign is still too high, but it leaves a question of what you do with deficits once you've run a campaign, and I'm not convinced that the bill deals with that adequately. With respect to that, I think that there were some things in the previous bill that created the concern in the first place. It was Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Act, 2009, which was passed, and it was perhaps a little bit hasty.

4:10

I think that by and large this act corrects the problems that existed there, but I do think that it's very important for democratic reform in our province and elsewhere that we establish some real, clear principles about election financing, we recognize the role that finance plays in the outcome of the political process, and we make sure that it's based on citizens rather than on special interests and that everyone in the public has a clear idea of who is contributing to whom.

Provincially I don't think we're there yet in this particular piece of the legislation. We still have, for example, a failure of the government to deal with the whole question of leadership campaign donations. We've got the situation where the Premier and the minister of finance – I mean the real minister of finance; I don't mean the minister of intergovernmental affairs this time – have still not completely disclosed the sources of their funds from their leadership campaigns, nor has the leader of the Wildrose Alliance been prepared to disclose where she got her money from in terms of her leadership campaign. This is a huge loophole, and it will allow special interests to get in there and in an insidious way, and you never know how they've influenced the decision-makers. That's something that has to be dealt with.

In my view, in the end putting some overall spending limits on campaigns, as has been suggested by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, is probably a good idea. That levels the playing field even further. But in the meantime we certainly don't want large, large contributions from special interests to dominate it.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that on balance I think that this bill repairs some of the errors that may have crept in when the Legislature adopted Bill 203. I'm pleased to see that the government has been listening to municipal governments. I do believe very, very strongly that the municipal order of government needs to be respected and consulted when any changes affecting its operations are made. That didn't happen in Bill 203, and I regret that very much, but I think that that aspect has been corrected by the government in bringing forward this bill, Bill 9.

As a result, on balance I think that it's a step forward, and I'm prepared to support it, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for the time.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It would appear that there's going to be more debate and perhaps more amendments to this bill. In the interests of making progress, I would move that the committee now rise and report so we can move on to some other items.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the

Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 9. Mr. Speaker, I'd wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: All agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act.

The Speaker: Should we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 2

Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow I wish to move third reading of the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010.

The Speaker: Additional speakers, or should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 3

Lamont Health Care Centre Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, Lamont Health Care Centre Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?
Call the question?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:17 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to April 15, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cA-14.9]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c7]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c6]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c4]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c5]

- 7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft.), 769-82 (Apr. 14 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced)
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532-33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions; SA 2010 c2]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft.), 735-43 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-804 (Apr. 15 aft., adjourned)
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft.), 743-49 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c3]
- 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 763 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 709 (Apr. 12 aft., passed)
- 202* Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft.), 698-704 (Apr. 12 aft.), 705-09 (Apr. 12 aft., passed with amendments)
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 709-10 (Apr. 12 aft., adjourned)

204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)

First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 732-33 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 749 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

Pr2* Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 733-35 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 749-50 (Apr. 13 aft.), 768 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

Pr3* Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 768-69 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 19, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I am now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a wonderful group of 30 grade 6 students from Westbrook elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Michelle Huot, and parent helper Juliana Shim. This group of students is here for the whole week participating in the School at the Legislature program, which we just celebrated recently in this Chamber. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the typical warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 13 bright and dedicated students from St. Matthew Lutheran school in Stony Plain. They're joined by teacher Gary Skoye and parents Donna Panchuk, Ellen Hoffman, and Richard Archer-shee. This class is here today to learn more about the workings of the Alberta Legislature. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they be given the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we salute our volunteers across the province this week during National Volunteer Week, it gives me great pleasure to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four individuals who exemplify the spirit of volunteerism. These individuals are Stars of

Alberta volunteer awards recipients. This program recognizes extraordinary Albertans whose volunteer achievements have contributed to the well-being of their community and fellow community members. I'd like to introduce Lorne and Phyllis Anderson from Stony Plain, who are the foundation of the volunteer program in continuing care at WestView health centre. If they could rise, please. I'd like to introduce as well Ms Tessie Oliva from Edmonton, who is a well-respected leader in the Filipino community and in the larger multicultural community in Alberta, and, finally, Mr. Bill Diachuk from Sherwood Park, our friend and former MLA and minister, who donates much of his time to a variety of community organizations throughout the Edmonton region as well as internationally. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you an accomplished businessman, a constituent, and a friend, Mr. Ravinder Minhas. Mr. Minhas is the president and CEO of Mountain Crest Brewing and the founder of the Minhas Craft Brewery, so he's got pretty "damn good beer." He has many accolades to his name, some of which include being awarded the Alberta centennial medal, being named one of Canada's Top 40 under 40, and standing as a semifinalist for the Ernst & Young entrepreneur of the year award. I saw Ravinder last Thursday. I had a great visit with him. It's good to see you, Ravinder. I ask that Mr. Minhas please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

OQP on Montana Access Channel

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Legislature has truly gone international. I've had occasion in the course of my duties as co-chair of the Montana-Alberta Bilateral Advisory Council to travel to various cities in Montana and was recently surprised to note that, on the Montana Access channel, question period from the Alberta Legislature is televised for everyone to see. A year ago the directors of the Montana Access channel met with me when I was in Helena and asked about our televised proceedings. I explained that question period was televised, and I gave them our communication contacts, and it is happening now every night at around 10:45.

Mr. Speaker, there's a significant difference between our Legislature process and the Legislature process in the United States. For one thing, all Legislature proceedings, whether in their House of Representatives or their Senate or any of their committee hearings, are broadcast live. Residents in Montana can tune into the Access channel and watch and hear everything that is done in the Legislature from gavel to gavel. I guess we have something a bit similar in our video and audio access to the Legislature and certain committee meetings, but they're not broadcast the same way on television other than question period.

Mr. Speaker, Americans find our question period fascinating. The Americans I speak with are intrigued with the unicameral system we have and our British traditions as well. One thing they also ask about are our rules for House sittings. I've explained that we sit every year in the spring for up to 60 days and in the fall for about 20 days. In Montana the Legislature sits for 45 days once every two years. Some Montanans feel and have expressed that their Legislature should sit for only two days once every 45 years.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, there's such a difference, and perhaps that is one reason why our system is so fascinating. Our audience is indeed larger than some expect it to be. It's true that people do watch question period, and we should be proud – well, maybe sometimes – that people actually do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

An Alberta Liberal Government

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An Alberta Liberal Government. The cornerstones of an Alberta Liberal government are inclusivity, accountability, transparency, and balance. Our central pillar is sustainability. The most important resource to an Alberta Liberal government is our human resource. While our nonrenewable resources have served us well in the past and with collaborative oversight will continue to serve us well into the future, the value of these commodities is set externally by global demand, over which we have little control. What is within our control is the maximization of our human resource potential.

From conception to our final shuffle off this mortal coil every Albertan should be regarded as an investment opportunity. The investment begins with prenatal health support availability and concludes with being able to face death with dignity. Early diagnosis, whether of disease or disability, improves treatment or, at the very least, management of the challenges presented.

Throughout life, access to education is a key predictor and promoter of success. An Alberta Liberal government will make funding for optional half-day kindergarten a priority, followed by the secured investment in optional full-day kindergarten. An Alberta Liberal government views investment in First Nations and immigration support as a key component in achieving economic stability. Working collaboratively, an Alberta Liberal government will reach out through the development of respectfully relevant curriculum to engage students in affordable learning opportunities from junior kindergarten through postsecondary graduation to the promotion of lifelong learning accessibility. An Alberta Liberal government believes that a sustained investment in our human resource potential will result in predictably high returns both economically and in our overall quality of life.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

1:40

National Volunteer Week

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the province, in every community, there are thousands of humble Albertans strengthening our communities with their common act, volunteerism. Every year tens of thousands of Albertans from all walks of life give their time and energy in the hope of building a better and more caring community for us all. Their efforts provide valued assistance for those with physical or mental illnesses, new Canadians, children, seniors, and families. These wonderful and generous people do amazing work and help so many others. We see these people every day, volunteering in our schools, on the playground, in our hospitals and shelters, and on our children's sports teams. These individuals are the true meaning of community spirit.

This week is National Volunteer Week, a time when the spotlight deservedly shines on these humble heroes and shows just how much their efforts contribute to the quality of life we enjoy in this province. I would like to ask this Assembly for its unanimous support in recognizing April 18 to 24 as National Volunteer Week

in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, may this time be a reminder of how we as individuals all play a vital role in our communities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 24 of every year the first genocide of the 20th century, the brutal annihilation of over 1 and a half million Armenian men, women, and children, is remembered around the world. The genocide of innocent Armenian people and the failure of the world to recognize and condemn the actions of the government responsible for this atrocity inspired Adolf Hitler to commit the horrific massacre of 6 million Jewish men, women, and children. Given that the world did not hold the perpetrators of the Armenian genocide accountable for their crimes, Adolf Hitler reasoned that the world would not hold him accountable, and he proceeded to commit unspeakable crimes against humanity with impunity. "After all," Hitler said, "who remembers the Armenian genocide?"

Every year in April we also remember the Jewish Holocaust and in November we remember the Ukrainian famine and genocide, known as the Holodomor, because it is important to remember.

On April 21, 2004, the Canadian government recognized the Armenian genocide. This recognition by the Canadian government is a monumental step towards eliminating future genocide. As long as nations in the world continue to deny genocides and to accept alterations to the facts of history, we will face future systematic annihilations of entire cultures.

Mr. Speaker, it is not enough just to remember. We must also act. As we honour the memory of those who suffered in the many massacres that have darkened the history of the world, we can reaffirm a commitment to eliminate racism, violence, hatred, and persecution. We also can remember that hope survives amongst these atrocities. The world has been blessed with many accomplishments of the Armenian, Jewish, and Ukrainian people in science, medicine, education, arts, and other professions. Today in the province of Alberta we enjoy the many gifts and contributions of those from the many different cultures and countries who have helped make this province what it is today and the world a better place.

Mr. Speaker, if anyone in the history of the world should ever ask again, "Who remembers the annihilation of the Armenian people?" we can say, "We remember."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Calgary Stampede

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Preparations are in full swing for the 2010 edition of the greatest outdoor show on Earth. From July 9 to 18 Stampede Park will become the third-largest city in Alberta as over 1 million visitors take part in the festivities. The Calgary Stampede will bring economic spinoffs to the entire province in the neighbourhood of \$350 million.

People come from all over the planet to experience this authentic western showcase. Whether it's the afternoon rodeo or one of the Rangeland Derby or grandstand shows or one of the hundreds of other activities, there is truly something for everyone.

One of the new events this year that's bound to be a crowd favourite is Cowboy Up. It's an extreme cowboy competition in which the horse and rider run an obstacle course designed to

replicate the ranch environment at incredible speeds. With must-see events like this, the best bet is to plan your Stampede experience with the new online tools to get the most out of this incredible celebration.

The Calgary Stampede is much more than just a 10-day event. The organization is active 365 days a year as it invests over \$2 million annually into youth and education programs which focus on future leaders while promoting and preserving western heritage and values. At the end of May Stampede Park again will host 4-H on Parade, the largest event of its kind in Canada. Over 600 young competitors will be coming to town.

Thanks to funding from the government of Alberta the expansion of BMO Centre was completed last June, realizing the dream of the 2009 WorldSkills competition, which benefited the entire province. Truly, investing in the Stampede is investing in the community.

Just five years into its 20-year development plan, the Calgary Stampede continues to execute its vision of building a world-class year-round gathering place in the heart of Calgary, and I encourage everyone to come on down and be a part of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Seniors' Service Awards

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the thousands of volunteers in Alberta who make our communities a better place to live. April 19 to 25 is National Volunteer Week in Canada. I think it's important that we take time to recognize the many dedicated volunteers who exemplify the true can-do spirit of Alberta.

As the recently appointed chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta one of my first tasks was to chair the nomination committee for the minister's seniors' service awards. I was truly inspired as I learned about the many wonderful volunteers who provide invaluable services to our seniors. These Albertans will be honoured at a special ceremony in June at Government House as part of the week-long Seniors' Week celebrations taking place across the province from June 7 to 13.

Volunteers are a diverse group that span the spectrum of age, nationality, and area of giving, but they all have one thing in common, the desire to make a difference in the lives of others. In doing so, they strengthen our country and the many communities across our province. Today I encourage all members of this Assembly as well as all Albertans not only to thank volunteers for their contribution but to consider how we, too, can volunteer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

PNWER Energy Horizons Institute

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago myself and several other hon. members of this Assembly completed the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region Energy Horizons Institute course.

The purpose of this institute is to educate legislators on the North American energy infrastructure and delivery system. This included delving into complex issues associated with electricity, natural gas, petroleum infrastructure and regulations, and economic and environmental policies and regimes as well as the interdependencies and interconnectedness of the North American energy sector. The requirements of this course were that each participant participate in 60 hours of instructional time as well as four webinars.

Mr. Speaker, the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region and the National Conference of State Legislatures partnered with the University of Idaho and the U.S. Department of Energy to create the institute, which is also supported by Alberta's Energy department and various other industry organizations. I cannot speak for my colleagues, but for me this was a very valuable experience. Even though I have a previous educational background in energy economics, this was certainly very helpful in the emerging trends that we have to deal with here at the Legislature.

Energy policy is very important to our economic competitiveness, Mr. Speaker, and the emergence of environmental policy as a global priority means that legislators and policy-makers must understand these issues to make responsible and informed policy decisions. This is very useful information that I received at the institute, and it will definitely help as we discuss these issues as they come before the Legislature.

I hope that all hon. members will sometime and in some form benefit from such education. I feel very fortunate myself to have been able to participate in such an informative course.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Accounts Committee

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the last couple of weeks we've seen the Tories lobby for undermining the Auditor General. We've seen them attempt to neuter Public Accounts, one of the most important legislative committees that exists. This committee is by definition to provide a public account of the spending and actions of the government of Alberta. Reporters, columnists, and bloggers across the province wrote over the weekend that Alberta is facing a, quote, doomsday because of this decision to neuter the opposition chair of Public Accounts. To the Acting Premier: does the Premier support the decision to allow the vice-chair the ability to veto all correspondence by the chair of Public Accounts?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier neither supports nor doesn't support decisions that are made by a committee of this Legislature because it is a committee of this Legislature that reports to this Legislature. I'm sure they will have more discourse over that in the future.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's very hard to believe that such a major draconian decision wasn't in the apparent awareness of the Premier. Again to the Acting Premier: does the Premier honestly expect the opposition and the public to believe this?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the committee meets. It has a chair; it has a vice-chair; it has members of all parties. They are open to discuss a number of issues. The Premier isn't briefed nor does he brief the chair before those meetings happen.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, does the Acting Premier agree that it was proper for government members to do this, to, in the words of the Government House Leader, quote, slap the wrists, end quote, of the chair of Public Accounts?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there was no attempt, in my view, and not being a member of that committee, it's difficult for me to give

my opinion as to whether or not I agree with the decision of that committee. I'm sure that that committee had very strenuous debate about the motion that was put before them. In fact, I'm sure that it was written in *Hansard*, as the hon. member rightly knows, and I'm sure that they will probably have further discussion about a number of issues that that committee is responsible for.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Education Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government constantly boasts about how much better off Alberta is in weathering the recession while refusing to honour teacher contracts, repair aging schools, or adequately support special-needs education. To the Minister of Education: if this government isn't willing to carry out its educational obligations such as bargaining in good faith with our teachers, will you at least provide greater autonomy to locally elected schools boards so that they can provide for their needs?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this hon. member has been, but we have not breached any contracts. We have not breached anything in faith with the school boards or the teachers in the province. In fact, we've totally honoured the contracts. What we haven't done this year is budgeted for a 3 per cent increase to the school boards' budgets, and I've done that in the context of talking with school boards about how we work on a longer term plan to deal with the pressures faced by school boards in meeting their negotiated obligations as well as looking at how we better utilize the resources within the system.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the combined Calgary school board infrastructure debt now exceeding a billion dollars, why is the minister not taking advantage of the reduced labour and material costs by investing a portion of the multibillion-dollar sustainability fund to correct a decade of government neglect?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member will well know, you can only spend the sustainability fund once. You can't spend it over and over again on every single priority he wants to bring forward. I would be the first to argue that school infrastructure is an important priority for us. We've moved forward on the alternative procurement program 1, where schools are going to be available even earlier than was anticipated and available for opening this fall in both Calgary and Edmonton, nine schools in each jurisdiction. That's pretty good. ASAP 2 is progressing towards a very quick announcement, indicating we've made good use of resources, a good use of the public purse in putting schools where we need them.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that our most vulnerable students are those with special needs, why is this government fostering greater uncertainty by freezing their per-pupil funding grants and recklessly abandoning a coding system for special-needs children?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should go back and read the good report that was done by a task force chaired by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, which clearly sets out a change in

direction that's needed with respect to how we assure that every child in Alberta is included in the education system and that every child in Alberta has the opportunity to maximize their own personal potential. That takes some work to move. Some people would move it ahead of that process, but this is not an easy process. It's going to take time. It's going to take some work to implement. It doesn't behoove anybody to jump ahead of the process, to talk about removing coding or making changes, those sorts of things. Funding is, of course, important, and funding is being provided.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Occupational Health and Safety Compliance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Eight years ago a government press release announced major amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act that allowed for the publishing of names of employers with the best and worst safety performance in the province. Last week the Auditor General flagged a group of 63 employers who repeatedly broke workplace safety laws. To the minister of labour: why has the government failed to follow through on its commitment from eight years ago to publish the names of employers who repeatedly break workplace safety laws?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you for that. The minister of labour: I wasn't sure exactly whom he was talking to.

Mr. Speaker, let me make this abundantly clear yet one more time to this House and for the benefit of anybody who is listening. I have made a very clear undertaking that I will be releasing not only that list of 63, that were randomly identified by the Auditor General, but I will also release a list that has perhaps between 500 and 600 employers, which we consider to be targeted employers, that we are keeping a close eye on. I will release a list of all employers and their statistics very shortly.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that eight years ago Bill 37 was introduced – there were amendments to the legislation – it's clear the government made a commitment to publish the names of bad employers who were breaking the law. Why has this government failed its commitment from eight years ago?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, unlike that member, I will not be dwelling on the past, but I will tell you what I am doing and what I have been doing since I became minister of this particular department. The moment I met with the Auditor General, which was some two months ago, I made it very clear to my department that we will be releasing the list. However, I want the list to be meaningful so that when you look up the name of your employer, you will be able to know how safe or unsafe your employer is. I simply will not throw a copy of the yellow pages onto your desk. I want the names of employers to have some meaningful information attached. It will be done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government fails to enforce the law to protect workers. Again to the same minister: has the minister ordered any of the 63 employers who failed to comply with occupational health and safety orders to establish joint

worker-management safety committees, and if not, will he do so now?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, one thing I can assure you of is that under this Premier's and my watch we will be making sure that occupational health and safety is a priority. It is obvious that I have made occupational health and safety a priority since that was one of the first instructions I gave to my department. Any employer in this province who chooses not to follow the Occupational Health and Safety Act will be dealt with accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Cataract Surgery

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I learned even more troubling information about the government's cataract surgery plan. We have now learned that some of the successful bidders who were given multimillion-dollar contracts to perform cataract surgeries are now trying to get out of their contracts. They did not understand how much work would be required, and they do not want other surgeons using their facilities. My question is to the minister of health. Mr. Minister, have you got knowledge of this development, and if so, what are you going to do about it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I have not heard of that particular complaint or rumour or whatever it might be. What I can tell you, however, is that last week, having spoken to a number of ophthalmologists, I said that I would convene a meeting so that we could get everybody into the same room and talk some of these issues through just to take away any uncertainty that might exist and also provide some hope where it might be needed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question again is to the minister. Since some of the doctors are suggesting that Alberta Health Services has not followed a proper bid and contract award system, will the minister ask the Auditor General to evaluate the cataract surgery contracts to get to the bottom of this matter immediately?

2:00

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty serious allegation. I don't know if it can be substantiated or not; we'll find out. The fact is that we had a very open, accountable, and transparent RFP process. That's a request for proposals. It closed on January 15. In addition to looking at the costs on a per procedure basis, it also included other issues such as the speed with which these surgeries could be done, the quality assurances that could be given, the safety of the patients, the recovery times based on previous engagements, and so on. So there's a lot that went into those contracts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the minister of health. Given that Bill 11 requires that Alberta Health Services must disclose information on awarded contracts, will the minister table the complete cataract surgery RFP facility evaluation and terms of the winning bid so members of the Legislature can get to the bottom of this mess?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, whatever is in the legislation and

doesn't violate the privacy laws I'd be happy to make available at the appropriate time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

School Facilities in Beaumont

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The town of Beaumont is rapidly growing, and their school can't keep up. They've lost their music and computer rooms to provide more classroom space, and they have one portable, but their school still is far too small. Now, grade 3 students carry their desks across the street every day to a fully liquor licensed facility, Club Beaumont, which they are using as classroom space. Why has the Education minister failed these children by refusing to include Beaumont in the three-year capital plan when a new school is obviously needed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation in Beaumont is indeed one that I've been paying very careful attention to. I've instructed the department to work with the school boards serving Beaumont to try and find some early solutions with respect to the growth that's happened in that particular area and to work with us to find resolutions for those students not just this fall but in the longer term.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that their classroom, a community hall, is used for bingos and weddings at night and, therefore, the eight-year-old children are carrying their desks across a busy street twice a day, how can the Education minister possibly pretend that he is striking any kind of balance when children are left to study in a licensed hall because this government refuses to build a permanent classroom for them?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member dwells on the issue of licensing as if it had any relevance to the issue. What's really relevant to this issue is the students crossing the street on a daily basis and not having an appropriate facility for them to engage in in their school. We're working on that issue with the school boards involved and working very hard to try and find both the capital resources necessary to deal with that and working with them in terms of what their space requirements are in the immediate term and how we can maximize the use of the resources we put in so that they're not just stopgap, that they're available for the longer term.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think we're finally getting somewhere with this minister.

Given that all these children are left to carry their belongings back and forth to a makeshift classroom and given that the government keeps saying that education is one of their top priorities, why won't the Education minister put his money where his mouth is and ensure that these kids have a properly equipped school for education so they're not doing this, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The picture that the hon.

member is holding up in violation of the rules as a prop was actually published sometime last fall, so he's very, very current on the issue.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of those challenges that we face. There's a challenge that we face. There's no question about it; I won't back away from it. We need school facilities in Beaumont, and we need school facilities in Airdrie, and I'm working to get those done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Water Act Licences

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's recent report drew special attention to issues regarding water, including a lack of monitoring, serious recurring instances of noncompliance, and an extreme backlog of applications for water licences. The bottom line: the government's systems are weak, and this increases the risk to drinking water, the ecosystems, and finally, use by agriculture and industry. To the Minister of Environment. The minister has repeatedly responded to concerns I've raised about cutting monitoring staff by saying that it's not a problem. Does the minister still stand by this claim?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we're trying to compare apples and oranges in this particular instance. What the Auditor General's report refers to is the ability of our officials to have follow-up from the point of issuing a licence to then following up. In that regard we have accepted the recommendation of the Auditor General, and we will be putting it into play so that there are closer opportunities for checks and balances from the point of licences issued to the follow-up and compliance side.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Department of Environment cannot transfer a water licence until its noncompliance issues are rectified and given that 75 per cent of the backlog of unprocessed water applications are not current, relating directly to compliance issues, how is the minister going to rapidly deal with the backlog of over 3,500 water applications?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the backlog that's referred to is a valid number. What is not clear in first reading is the fact that a number of these applications are unnecessarily open, I would suggest to you, because they haven't been closed. If that's confusing, I don't blame you for not understanding. But the fact of the matter is that applicants will apply, they'll be requested for further information or clarification, we never hear back from them, and then we have a file that's left open.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. And people wonder why we have an issue around water here.

Given that this administration has demonstrated a clear inability to monitor licence holders and, therefore, cannot assess levels of noncompliance, how can the minister even consider compounding these problems by introducing a water market?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact that we are in the process now of reviewing our water allocation policy fits very well into the issues that were raised by the Auditor General. You have to remember that the process, that has been in place for a hundred-plus

years, is one in which there was a presumption of unlimited resources of water. That presumption no longer applies. That's the reason why we are talking about reviewing the water allocation, and part of that review of water allocation will have to be a process whereby we can verify that the licence holders are withdrawing water that is appropriate to their licence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Asia Pacific Trade

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is working hard to tap into the huge economic potential in the attractive Asia Pacific region. However, recent reports have hinted that Canada missed an opportunity regarding a major free trade deal, the trans-Pacific partnership, or TPP. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Why was Canada excluded from these negotiations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Japan is also one other country that is endeavouring to become part of these negotiations. In the initial instance there hadn't been the robust interest of a number of countries to participate. Now that there is, the original countries haven't developed a way to re-enter into renegotiations or the addition of new members. So it's vitally important that our federal government engage and say: "All right. Although there hasn't been a process for adding these countries, we wish to be involved." We're joining another list, including Australia and Peru.

Mr. Rodney: My first supplemental is to the same minister. There must be a list of potential negative effects for Alberta if Canada is indeed excluded from the final deal. Can she give us some details and her thoughts and actions on exactly that?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course Canada, and Alberta in particular, wants to eliminate trade barriers, has been very anxious to see that free trade exists, and we believe very strongly that this has to be pursued. I should point out that we have had bilateral agreements with other countries. We'd like to see that engaged in in a larger dimension. We look with some degree of satisfaction to the addition, most recently, of an Australian consul in Alberta, showing the continued acceleration of trade with these other partners. We're hoping that we'll be able to see elimination of these barriers.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister. Obviously, a sad conclusion would be to see Canada not involved in TPP negotiations at present, but if that indeed was the case, what other trade initiatives is this minister's ministry looking into?

2:10

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're looking at several other opportunities with the European Union, but I should also point out that with our Premier and the Premiers of B.C. and Saskatchewan and a western partnership that we're following up on, we should soon see more expansion in Shanghai. That's targeted for about the middle of May. We're doing our best to develop other markets, looking still further beyond the EU to possible expansion of relations in Brazil and Morocco and in Ukraine as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Gravel Extraction Management

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of proposals for new gravel mining projects currently on the table, including yet another proposal for mining in the Red Deer River aquifers and one at Wizard Lake. There are grim long-term environmental concerns, including contamination of groundwater, which affects drinking water, and loss of habitat for fish and wildlife and the negative effects on communities regarding recreation. To the Minister of Environment: when the province can't currently track the effect of the gravel industry on water in Alberta, why is new gravel extraction being allowed?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that gravel extraction should be unilaterally stopped throughout the province is irresponsible. We build buildings, homes, offices, pave our streets, and build our roads with gravel. What we have to do is ensure that we mine gravel in a responsible way. That is why we have a strict set of guidelines that all gravel operations must abide by.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister: when will this ministry finally step up and provide a strong legislative framework to ensure municipalities have the regulations and resources necessary to fully assess the impacts of a gravel mine on their environment?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's not forget: the role and responsibility of a municipality is a very valid one, and that is to deal with land use and land zoning. Until a municipality makes a decision with respect to the zoning and the land use in a particular area, then it's not appropriate for the provincial government and my ministry to interfere. At the end of the day, once a decision has been made to proceed, it's up to us to determine and ensure that that operation operates at minimal impact on the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. Back to the same minister: why does this ministry continue to take a this-is-not-our-problem approach to gravel mining approvals when they have such far-reaching and dramatic impacts on Alberta's environment and on water and water quality?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that question the first time around. It is the responsibility of municipalities to deal with land zoning issues. Once that issue has been dealt with, it is the very clear responsibility of Alberta Environment to ensure that the operation proceeds in such a way as to minimize the impact or, if necessary, protect the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Immigration Fraud

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people from around the globe are interested in immigrating to Canada and to Alberta in particular. They come for a better life, and they often want to share their fortune with their family members still back home. Unfortunately, there is a case in Calgary where an unscrupulous scam artist is taking money to assist with immigration and disappearing. My first question is the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. What programs are in place to make sure that families can sponsor their family members without the assistance of scam artists?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, of the member asking the question and now me answering the question, both are immigrants. I have to tell you that there are programs that are legitimate, and all Albertans and Canadians should know about them. Aside from the federal side, our province has the Alberta immigration nominee program, the family stream, which allows you to bring into Canada brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, and even nieces and nephews if they qualify. The ultimate issuance of a visa is by the federal government, but we do have a legitimate provincial program. I would strongly advise any applicant to familiarize themselves via the Internet or any other sources with the proper way of doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the hon. Solicitor General. What action is your department taking to protect newcomers from this scammer?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that there always seems to be some fraud artist waiting to take advantage of somebody. My heart certainly goes out to these people. It's almost ironic. We just recognized Fraud Awareness Month and laid out a bunch of tools for people to be aware of fraud in our province. Fraud prevention is really probably the most powerful tool we have. That being said, we do fully investigate and prosecute every fraud event that's brought to our attention, and I would urge anybody that feels they're a victim of fraud to report it to the nearest police.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the hon. Minister of Service Alberta. I understand that you are reviewing the regulations about immigration fees. What steps will you be taking to protect Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, currently we are having consultation with the public on ways to improve our employment agency regulations to make them even stronger. We do welcome input and feedback from Albertans, but it's important to note that it is illegal to charge a person a fee to secure work for them in Alberta. It's even more important that anyone with allegations of recruiter or employment agency issues please contact Service Alberta so we can check into them. That's why we are doing the consultation on this important issue.

Edmonton Remand Centre Admissions

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, last month the Solicitor General wisely reversed the decision to eliminate late-night admissions at the Edmonton Remand Centre and rely on police lock-up facilities to house offenders after an outcry from police and corrections personnel. To the Solicitor General. You indicated mid-March that this issue would be resolved almost immediately. I'd like to know what solution has been reached after a month's time.

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, no solution has been reached right at the moment, which is why we are still operating overnight admissions and discharges, and we will not change until we've reached an agreeable solution with the police forces involved.

Mr. Hehr: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Although nighttime remand admissions have continued downsizing, they still occur at

these understaffed and overcrowded institutions. Are you still planning to eliminate five or six guards at the Calgary and Edmonton remand centres? Is that option still on the table?

Mr. Oberle: We haven't made any changes until we've determined what we're going to do with overnight admissions and discharges, but we're not actually reducing guards on the floor. I'm not sure what the member is talking about.

Mr. Hehr: Given that you told me that you were going to have a reasonably quick decision made in regard to these late-night admissions, have you revised the timetable when something will be done on this issue, or are we going to continue to have overcrowding all through the summer months?

Mr. Oberle: Well, whether we have overnight admissions or discharges, Mr. Speaker, surely the member would recognize, has absolutely nothing to do with overcrowding in our facilities. We manage the levels of inmates very well in our facilities and move them around. We're doing a very good job there. It has nothing whatsoever to do with overcrowding.

Hospital Discharge Orders

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the government has often stated that the health care system should always put patient needs first. However, I have heard suggestions that in some instances patients may have been discharged from hospitals on a Friday in order to free up acute-care beds for the weekend. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister assure Albertans that decisions such as when to discharge a patient must always be done in the best interests of the patient and not as a result of financial matters?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. The policy about discharges is always in the interest of safety and patient care, and those decisions are not made by administrators. So if there are rumours like that, I would hope that everybody here would help correct them. Those discharge orders are only issued by qualified clinical personnel. That's a staple policy of this government and also of Alberta Health Services.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, my second and final question for the minister is: given the concerns that I've been hearing, will the minister also assure the Assembly that the new code of professional conduct will not inhibit health care providers from raising their concerns about health care to either the minister or to other administrators in the health care system?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I can assure everyone here that the new code of conduct is not about a set of rigid rules whatsoever. It's a set of policy statements and guidelines based on trust and respect and dignity and so on. In fact, the new code of conduct does not inhibit people from speaking out and raising concerns such as has been alluded to here.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:20

Cataract Surgery

(continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has slammed the door on cataract patients. Unfortunately, their sur-

geons' fingers are caught in the door. There is no reason for us to wait any longer to fix the problem. Just open the door, and let the current accredited facilities continue to provide surgeries at the government's prescribed rate if they choose. Will the minister make this happen?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, what Alberta Health Services did was conduct a very open, transparent, public request for proposals, which closed on January 15. As a result of that, we've got a much better price for the same quality of care, and we've saved taxpayers \$1.4 million, all of which is going right back into yet more cataract surgeries. There are a few issues that need to be talked about going forward, and that's why we're meeting on Saturday to discuss them.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, it was closed, but it's never been disclosed. That's what we need here.

Given that patients are extremely frustrated and confused about where to go or when to get their surgeries, will the minister do the right thing and provide a 60-day extension to current accredited facilities until this government-created problem can be fixed?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, government did not create any problem whatsoever. What has been created are some wonderful opportunities for people to get on the list quicker and to have their surgeries dealt with more efficiently, more effectively in some cases. At the same time, I've got a guarantee from Alberta Health Services that all the patients that were scheduled in some of the so-called nonwinning bid facilities have now almost all been contacted and rescheduled for a time very close to the time that had originally been set for them.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they're not addressing the problem about being open.

Given that this issue can be resolved before the summer break and given that we should be able to work together to resolve many of the problems here today, will the minister support our motion for an emergency debate on this so that Albertans can receive their cataract surgeries from the surgeons and facilities of their choice?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. Patients can have their cataract surgery or their corneal surgery or their droopy eyelid surgery or other surgeries done by a surgeon of their choice. It's just that the facilities that have won the bid are perhaps different than were originally scheduled. Those particular procedures will be done by fully accredited, fully qualified surgeons who are chosen by their own patients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

PDD Funding Appeals

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 18 we asked a question to the minister of seniors regarding disabled Albertans' rights to appeal PDD funding decisions. An answer was not provided. Calgary area PDD service providers need clarification about their own liabilities because of the cuts that they've had to deal with. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will the minister confirm that under regulation 181/2006 it's true that PDD-funded individuals have no right to appeal to the minister if their supports are cut due to their service provider's budget being cut?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that PDD clients do have the ability to appeal any decision of the community board that affects their levels of services, including the hours of service and the level of service itself. The PDD Community Governance Act makes this very clear. To be clear, if any client is notified about a reduction in services arising from a decision of the community board, they can appeal that decision.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you to the minister for that. But there is confusion between the PDD Community Governance Act and section 2(c) of the regulations. Will the minister provide clarification as to the legal liabilities of PDD service providers if they cut their individual supports because of the changes to their budgets?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly clear on the regulations that the hon. member has cited, so I will check into that, and I will provide an answer to her for that question.

However, a service provider, once they've signed a contract with the community board, cannot appeal the contract itself, but they do have a very clear dispute resolution mechanism to turn to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I hope that this isn't the government's way to quietly cut PDD numbers and leave vulnerable Albertans with no right to appeal, which is, in my mind, a basic principle that anyone should have.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with that. But I would make it clear again that our PDD clients have the ability to appeal any changes to their levels of service or the hours of service that they have been granted as long as they're eligible for PDD.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Southern Alberta Power Outage

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As everyone is probably aware, last week southeastern Alberta and central Alberta were hit by a massive blizzard. This had an impact on the power in the region, and tens of thousands of people were left without power. The service providers in the area have done a significantly good job of returning power to most of these people. To the Minister of Energy. It's my understanding that there are still some people that haven't got power back, and I'm wondering if you could tell me when they may be able to expect to see power.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. Last week, as many of the members of this House know, their constituencies were under a fair bit of snow, not only in the city of Lethbridge but throughout southeastern and eastern Alberta. In total some seven large and many more smaller lines were out of service, and in the city of Lethbridge a major line supplying the city went down. Some 300 employees and contractors from around the province were dispatched, and they repaired more than 400 poles and 200 lines. As of last evening, there were still some 50 residential and farm customers without power, and I know that service providers are working diligently to get them back on line.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all the

residents of southern Alberta, I want to thank those service providers for a wonderful job in having their people do such a quick repair. My first supplemental is to the same minister.

The Speaker: You provided a brief preamble. That's against the rules, so let's go to the Minister of Energy for the response.

Mr. Liepert: Well, the member is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker, that they did respond in a way that I think was around the clock in getting the lines back on time. It really puts in perspective how we take something so essential as electricity for granted and don't really appreciate it until we don't have it. I think it's also a strong endorsement that we need a strong transportation grid throughout the province and a modern distribution network for electricity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without preamble, my final question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Mr. Minister, did the Alberta Emergency Management Agency get involved during this blizzard condition?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to recognize the good job that our communities did in this case with their existing emergency plans. The government emergency operations centre was activated to offer one-window support to anyone who needed help. Field staff from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency went to a number of communities to offer assistance. This agency regularly monitors and prepares for emergency events to help keep Albertans safe.

Land-use Framework Aboriginal Consultation

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, dedicated aboriginal consultation is essential for developing oil and gas and implementing the land-use framework. Aboriginal groups hold that meaningful consultation is not taking place, and some have taken their fight all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and won. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Why does this government continue to put the legitimacy of the land-use framework at risk and provoke expensive legal battles by continuing an inadequate approach to consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. member for the question as well. I would also like to say that it's about time that the opposition asked a question on aboriginal relations. Being a member and sitting here, that's quite frustrating when aboriginal relations issues are important. My department is working with all First Nations, all three treaties with regard to consultation, and we are working forward. We're doing some wonderful things with respect to consultation, anyway.

Dr. Taft: Well, given that this consultation has been going on for years and given that the courts have ruled that the way the Alberta government approaches its duty to consult is contrary to treaties, to reconciliation, and to mutual respect, how and when will this be remedied?

2:30

Mr. Webber: It is something that is ongoing, Mr. Speaker. It can't be fixed overnight. We've been working diligently with all our ministries with respect to consultation in the aboriginal communities. We are moving forward, and we are progressing.

Dr. Taft: Well, it seems whole lifetimes are passing, Mr. Speaker. When will this government finally begin a legitimate process of consultation with the aboriginal groups who are affected by the land-use framework and by oil and gas development?

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, I've been consulting with all of the grand chiefs within Alberta, and we are working positively. We are making progress, and I look forward to continuing our relationship with all the grand chiefs and chiefs throughout Alberta. We will get a consultation process in place soon, I hope.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Education System

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many of the world's leading educational thinkers believe that education systems around North America are systematically draining creativity out of our children by focusing on standardized curriculum, standardized instruction, and standardized testing. To the Minister of Education: what is your department doing to ensure our system is developing and building upon the natural ability and passion of our students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very interesting question. Of course, many people have seen the TED broadcast by Sir Ken Robinson talking about systems of education driving creativity out of the process or out of the students. I'd like to think that in Alberta, as one of the leading-edge educational systems in the world and recognized as such around the world, we are not doing that, but that obviously speaks to what's happening in each and every one of our classrooms across the province. That's why we have an Inspiring Education process talking about what education needs to be for our students to be successful not only today but over the next 20, 30 years into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How does our system ensure that students do not become or feel alienated or disengaged from our schooling systems because of our methods of teaching and testing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Inspiring Education process is about how we make sure that our education system is relevant to our students not only in terms of the competencies, the attributes, the skills, and the knowledge that they need to have to be effective going forward but how they build creativity and innovation into the education process. It's about making sure that our teachers are well prepared for their teaching profession and that they have the opportunity to stay current through professional development and stay passionate about what they are doing. I believe the Inspiring Education process will provide a great platform going forward for us to do exactly that in our education system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister. The minister brought up the role of teachers.

Obviously, teachers have a very significant role in education. How do we assess the performance of our teachers?

Mr. Hancock: Well, first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, we have to respect teachers as professionals. Teachers have an obligation as professionals to keep themselves current and to understand what the challenges are with respect to the students that come before them in their classrooms and in their schools. That's first and foremost. We have to understand and respect the role of principals as curricular leaders and their role to ensure that their teachers are engaging students and are engaged in modern and progressive pedagogy and educational practices. Beyond that, it's a management issue with respect to teaching quality standards. We're reviewing our teaching quality standards act, and we expect that all teachers will fall within the teaching quality standards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Child and Youth Facilities

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Social Care Facilities Review Committee raised a number of concerns in their recently tabled annual report that I have previously referenced in this House. This government should take their concerns seriously and make the necessary changes to improve the children's services system. To the minister: when will the minister introduce province-wide standards for qualifications and minimum requirements for wage levels to ease some of the challenges service providers face in recruiting and retaining staff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take this question under advisement and look into that and see where it is at currently. I can tell you that the recommendations that were made by the Social Care Facilities Review Committee have all been followed through with, but I'll look at your question in more detail and get back to you, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the minister: what specific steps is the minister taking to ensure that children always receive adequate support when moved to a new facility, something that is currently lacking?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you very clearly that that is in place and that it's followed through. There are a number of ways. It's either through our staff, through the good work that's being done through our child and family services authorities, or, of course, on reserve through our delegated First Nation agencies, people that work with the family, work with that child wherever they take that child in whichever way and with what you're involving here, hon. member. Anyhow, that is taken into consideration very clearly by staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Children and Youth Services: how is the minister working with other ministries to ensure that women and families making the transition from emergency shelters to affordable housing are fully supported?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did just recently meet with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, and I can let you know once again – we've discussed this in the Assembly before – that through the housing first program women and children that are leaving emergency shelters either go to second-stage housing through this ministry, or they go on to housing programs, which are through the minister of housing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

PDD Transition Funding

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What will happen to Albertans with developmental disabilities who turn 18 this year?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we have a very good government program for people with disabilities. This program helps these Albertans to be included in their communities, to live as independently as possible, and to be involved in the communities. When a young Albertan turns 18, they can access supports to a residential setting of their choice, they can participate in community activities and events, and they can get a job and keep a job if that's what they wish to do. Right now about 3,000 of our young Albertans who are people with developmental disabilities do have jobs.

Mr. Benito: Back to the same minister. When you receive government assistance, becoming an adult can also mean transitioning between silos such as from children's services to a department like yours. What are you doing to break down government silos for people with developmental disabilities as they turn 18?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the member raises a very good question, and I think that we're making progress in this area. For those who are eligible for PDD supports, staff from our children and family services authorities work with our PDD community boards to help families in this transition from child to adult services. Through the review of our social-based assistance programs we're working on finding solutions to streamline the process to make it easier for families.

Mr. Benito: My third question is to the same minister. Agencies and PDD individuals are asking: is there enough funding in the program to begin supporting these Albertans when they turn 18?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we are very aware that there will be some caseload growth in the PDD program from children with disabilities who reach adulthood. That's why we're committed to managing our caseload growth within my ministry's budget. I've instructed my staff to work with PDD community boards to find efficiencies in the program and direct any savings to the front-line supports. These savings can include sharing resources between regions, reducing discretionary spending, and reduced travel to meetings, for example.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Alberta Health Services Decision-making

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the establishment

of a single health governance board in Alberta in April 2008, Alberta Health Services operates under a rather large and sometimes complicated org chart. Health care professionals have expressed frustration with having decisions made efficiently and getting good ideas implemented on a timely basis at the local level. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is being done to expedite the decision-making process to ensure that local rural health initiatives are implemented on a timely basis?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that there are a lot of very positive initiatives that have been undertaken since we went to a single board system across the province. For example, with respect to the exact question on health administration, it's important to note that the administration of health services has been streamlined under this new process. It has not simply been expanded in a few areas; it has been made more efficient. That's partly because we only have one CEO now instead of 12 and because we only have seven executive and senior vice-presidents instead of 66. So you can see that there are fewer layers to work through, fewer hoops to jump through.

2:40

Mr. Doerksen: To the same minister. Local health foundations have also expressed frustration with regard to projects funded by local health foundations being implemented on a timely basis as a result of a lot of decision-making to get the decision made. Is that process being expedited as well in order that health foundations can get their projects under way on a timely basis?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, local health foundations are a critical part of our health service excellence in this province, and I want to begin by saying thank you to them and to the hon. member for flagging their concern. I also want to assure everyone that funds that are raised locally, be it by foundations, as has been referenced, or through other means, will remain there for local activities. Finally, the approval of projects at the local level is in fact an issue, specifically in rural Alberta, as has been mentioned to me on a few occasions. I've asked Alberta Health Services to make some adjustments, and they are.

Mr. Doerksen: To the same minister. Stephen Duckett recently invited health care workers to bring forward good ideas to improve the health care system through the Action Your Ideas initiative. Are some of those ideas being implemented? There were over 700 responses to that initiative. I'd like a progress report with regard to the implementation of some of these.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the solicitation that the hon. member refers to ended on March 31. Several hundred responses were received. As a result of that, we did have a joint meeting of upper executive management people from AHS with upper executive members of Alberta Health and Wellness and myself just last Friday. The best ideas will of course go forward, but all of them will be given careful scrutiny. One of the advantages now of having a significant five-year funding plan committed to by this government is that ideas like that can and will be dealt with expeditiously.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Today 19 members were recognized, and 112 questions and responses were given. Of these 19 members, nine came from the Official Opposition, three from the independents, and seven from the government caucus.

We will continue with the Routine in 15 seconds from now.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice that at the appropriate time I'll be raising the following issue under Standing Order 30, which is:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the agreement made by Alberta Health Services with ophthalmology service providers is detrimental to patients awaiting cataract surgery and the ophthalmologists who provide cataract surgery procedures.

I have distributed the appropriate number of copies. We have the appropriate number here.

The Speaker: You have another notice? Please proceed.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of a motion.

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the remainder of the 2010 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

The Speaker: This is a notice?

Mr. Hancock: Yes.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it tomorrow?

Mr. Hancock: Yes.

The Speaker: So we can't sit tonight?

Mr. Hancock: No.

The Speaker: Good.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two news photos of students from l'école Bellevue school carrying their desks photos of the street to a makeshift classroom. These photographs relate to questions asked earlier today by my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate amount of copies of a letter from Mr. Larry Stowards on a situation that has come up where he has been denied Blue Cross coverage because of pre-existing conditions after 30 years of service with the city of Calgary, a very tragic situation. I'm going to table this now.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon.

Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, responses to questions raised by Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton Strathcona, on March 16, 2010, Department of Environment main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Travel Alberta business strategy 2010-2013.

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the Standing Order 30 application.

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel that it's a very serious situation that we're in in the government's process of requesting the RFPs. Although the minister has repeatedly said that they closed earlier this year, they were never disclosed to the facilities. The whole process that it has traditionally gone through has been abdicated for some system or process that the ophthalmologists are not aware of. I think that there is enough information that we can provide here that this can be resolved today with just a simple 60-day extension on the old contracts that we had and to work through this. But if we don't have the emergency debate, next Saturday is a long way away for those people that are waiting.

I know the minister says that they've been rescheduled, but there are surgeons that are not comfortable and do not have access to the facilities that the minister is claiming are available and ready to go. We just feel that this is in the best interests of Albertans and something that can and should be resolved on an urgent basis, seeing how they made such a short decision over a four-day period of closing down ophthalmologists and the surgery that they were performing in those accredited facilities. It just seems like the minister has not received all the information. I think that we have enough that we can bring to light to come to a much different conclusion and a speedy change here in our system to help Albertans with this problem.

We feel at this time that it is of great importance to have the emergency debate for the benefit of all Albertans, especially those needing cataract and cornea surgeries to have those in their local communities rather than having to travel a long way for a cornea transplant or those things. We just feel that it's urgent. It doesn't need to be a long debate, but there is enough information that we think it's worth the time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, everything to do with the health system and many other things are of public importance and important to many members of the public and often to all members of the public. In order to be eligible for a Standing Order 30 debate, there has to be a broader test than just a question of whether it's of public importance. Is it of public importance that the Legislature should adjourn its ordinary business to debate that issue?

I think that if you go back to the recent history on this, the questions that have been raised in question period and responded to by the Minister of Health and Wellness have clearly indicated that no surgeries are to be cancelled, that all of the surgeries are to be rebooked. Even today he indicated that they are to be rebooked as close to the time frame that they were scheduled as possible. Certainly, he's indicated that the rebookings will be completed within 90 days and that, in fact, rather than fewer surgeries, there will be more surgeries. So the question of urgency needs to be

addressed from the context of: what will this accomplish? With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, it will accomplish nothing except putting more heat and less light on the subject.

The Minister of Health and Wellness has indicated he's meeting with the ophthalmologists on Saturday with Alberta Health Services so that any of the issues that ophthalmologists raise can be dealt with in that meeting. That's the appropriate place for those issues to be dealt with. It serves no public purpose to scare people with rumour and innuendo about what an ophthalmologist might have said to somebody somewhere. It makes much more sense to have ophthalmologists who are concerned, if any are, attend the meeting with the minister, which has already been scheduled, which he's indicated to the House has been scheduled, and he's given notice that that meeting is going to be happening this Saturday, that notice has gone out to all the affected parties.

The public has been very clearly advised that the process that has been engaged in is an RFP process within Alberta Health Services. So, Mr. Speaker, what would make it urgent for this House to deal with it today? What could this House do? The hon. member, in raising the Standing Order 30, has talked about some resolution. Well, of course, there is no resolution in Standing Order 30 debate. It's simply a matter of raising issues.

2:50

One has to be careful in raising issues that one doesn't raise issues by way of rumour and innuendo that cause, actually, more harm than good. I would submit to you that the most appropriate way for the public to deal with this issue with respect to cataract surgery is through the questions that have been appropriately raised in the House over the course of the last number of days so that any of the issues that might be of concern are raised for the minister's attention so that he can deal with them and for the minister to take action, as he has done, by convening a meeting of the appropriate parties, the ophthalmologists and Alberta Health Services, to say: what more needs to be done? So far as the minister is concerned and Alberta Health Services is concerned, they've engaged in a process which will provide more access to more Albertans to get cataract surgery more quickly, and in the process of transition the rescheduling of those surgeries that were being scheduled is being taken care of.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is not an appropriate subject, not because it's not an important issue but because if this is an important issue, then we will be adjourning the debate of the House every day to debate a health issue because health is very important to Albertans. It has to be what we add to that debate that needs to be determined here, and in my humble opinion we would not be adding anything to the debate. We would be adding fear and innuendo and alarming Albertans rather than resolving the issue.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, would you like to participate?

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the order is Standing Order 30, and I'd like to look at (7)(a). It says:

A motion under this Standing Order is subject to the following conditions:

- (a) the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.

The reason, Mr. Speaker, that this is a very urgent matter – and I do agree with the hon. minister that we can't be debating everything in the health care system on an urgent basis. Of course, health care is a very important issue. It's a very emotional issue for a lot of people, and I certainly understand that we shouldn't be on every single issue shutting down all debate on all bills in order to debate health care issues as they arise.

There's a little bit of a difference on this one. It's a big difference, actually. This House is about to recess for the summer, by all indications that we're receiving in talks with the House leader and deputy House leader, et cetera. By the end of this week we'll likely be gone for the summer. The problem is that what could happen here is we have a situation where if we do not get this corrected, we could go an entire six months, or five months anyway, without being able to address what is a very alarming situation for not only some of the patients involved but also many of the cataract doctors, the eye surgeons, that want to do these surgeries but can't because they've essentially been shut out of this process. They're losing business, and they could lose their businesses, essentially, because they've lost such a huge chunk of the government contracts under this new legislation.

It was mentioned earlier: oh, they can still do them, but they just have to use the facilities of the other doctors, the facilities that have been approved. Well, some facilities don't want these doctors coming in and using their facilities, which is what was brought up in question period today. There's a doctor in Edmonton that won the contract and that is actually thinking now that he didn't know what was involved. He didn't know he had to let his facility be used by other eye doctors in performing these surgeries.

It's a very fluid situation right now, and I don't think we want to blame anybody. We just need to get to the bottom of this. We need to discuss it as a House. We need to figure out what the best way is moving forward so that we don't go over the summer and people can't get their surgeries done, so that doctors aren't put out of business in the interim because their whole business model has been thrown off by this government's decision on this issue. That's the urgency. If we wait another few days, we'll be out of session and we won't be able to debate this very important issue. People will lose their businesses; patients could lose their opportunity to get their surgery. That's why we have the urgency.

I would say with regard to the Saturday meeting that a meeting is great. We're glad that the health minister is going to meet with the doctors involved and try to straighten this mess out, but in the interim we can't bank everything on that Saturday meeting. We don't know what's going to go on there.

Again, this is something that is very urgent, and that's why it's so time sensitive, because we're going to be out of session and because these doctors' business models are failing as we speak because they've been essentially shut out of all of these eye surgeries which just previous to the minister's decision on this they relied on. So it is an urgent matter, and we would ask that we have debate on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's a serious matter, obviously, which is why we've listened with some intensity to the debate thus far. But in my view it does not constitute an emergency in the normal sense that previous precedence in this Assembly has allowed certain debates to go forward on the basis of them being an emergency. What has to be kept in mind here is specifically that there is more capacity being added to the system both physically and in terms of the number of surgeries that will be performed.

I do appreciate that there might be some anxieties amongst some of the ophthalmologists and amongst some of the surgeons and the surgical facility owners as well as perhaps expressed by some of the patients. However, those anxieties are only about the temporary transition of having their particular surgery done in a different setting. Those are fully accredited settings, fully accredited by the

College of Physicians and Surgeons. Those winning bid facilities have to accept the surgeries that are being awarded to them – that was part of the deal – and they also have to accept the accredited ophthalmological surgeons who would perform those particular services to be done in their facilities.

There's no blame being asserted anywhere here whatsoever, and I appreciate the hon. member who just spoke saying that because neither will any doctors be put out of business. These are nonhospital surgical facilities, or private clinics by another name. As such, they perform several other services as well that are not medically insured. If there's a public appetite for those non medically insured services, then they will proceed, and they will presumably stay in business on that basis. However, I also want to indicate that the non winning bid facilities, if I can refer to them that way, will continue to remain open if they wish. In fact, they will be invited to participate in the second blitz, Mr. Speaker, of several additional surgeries that we'll be adding to the system, which I indicated we would do back in February.

We did the first blitz from February 15 to March 31. We added approximately 2,230 more surgeries and approximately 3,500 more MRIs and CAT scans. Now we're going to do a second blitz, and the non winning bid facilities on the eye surgical side will be invited to participate in that process. So we'll have additional capacity through those few mechanisms as well.

That being said, I just don't see that there is an urgency. If there are other issues, that will be, I'm sure, the tone and tenor of the meeting on Saturday which I have called. I invited people last week. I've spoken with several of these ophthalmologists personally, and I will continue to address their concerns in that way. But the big issue here will be to deal with any other anxieties on the Saturday.

As such and given that I've answered a number of these questions in the House – I think I did six or nine questions again today in addition to the ones last week – I don't personally subscribe to the fact that there is a need for an emergency or an urgent debate.

The last point, Mr. Speaker, is that subject to Standing Order 30(6) and directly in response to the previous speaker, "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly," hon. member.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak of two types of urgency. One is the urgency of the patients who have been waiting for contractual services with their eye care, in some cases for months on end, and now are not certain as to whether those surgeries will actually take place, who is going to do the service provision, and where the service provision will take place. That's the first urgency, the immediacy of dealing with the eye operations.

Of secondary urgency but of equal importance is the fact that this kerfuffle, this confusion, is taking place in Calgary, is not taking place in Edmonton. The reason it's taking place in Calgary is because the government in terms of its understanding of universal health care provisions has got stuck with publicly funded but not dealt with the publicly delivered or the publicly administered parts of our universal health care system.

Edmonton isn't facing this problem because the majority of the surgeries are done in public facilities in an expedient amount of time by public physicians. This confusion that has arisen in Calgary is the result of years and years of expensive contracting out of the procedure, and now we've got private clinicians fighting over the funding and the government contracts.

3:00

Eye surgery should be a public service that is delivered in an appropriate time within a publicly administered system. That has fallen apart, and for an Albertan wanting to have faith in their health care delivery, that's urgent for Albertans. For those poor people waiting and wondering, the delivery of their operation is key to the quality of their life. Therefore, I would suggest that it is urgent, Mr. Speaker, and worth at least a small time of our discussion here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on the subject of urgency.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that through my history of being involved and being elected since 1993, this is the first time that I've stood up in regard to the emergency debate.

The Speaker: Did the member hear what I said on the question of urgency?

Mrs. Forsyth: I have to speak up on this issue because of all the calls that we're receiving.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that's fine, but I asked you to speak on the question of urgency – I've already heard from two of your colleagues – urgency of the reason why we should give up the whole agenda for today.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was actually getting to that, so if you could give me a few minutes. The problem that we're facing here is the fact that we're hearing from patients in the system that are calling the minister's office. The minister's office is telling them to call the complaint line at Alberta Health Services. Alberta Health Services is telling them to call the ophthalmologist. So none of these patients that are in the system are getting answers whatsoever.

The minister alluded to that he's been answering questions in the House in regard to the questions that we've been asking him. Well, he hasn't really answered the questions because he doesn't really know the answers, and every time he answers a question, my BlackBerry goes crazy with more questions to ask the minister, which is happening at this particular time.

He indicated to the *Herald* that there are legitimate concerns in regard to what's happening on the contracts, so he's wanting to meet with the ophthalmologists on the 24th.

He talks about the fully accredited facilities. Well, the one, when he talks about the expansion of surgeries that are going to be done in this province, hasn't even been built yet. It's difficult to get the College of Physicians and Surgeons to accredit anything when the facility hasn't even been built yet.

Mr. Speaker, I met with somebody that was waiting for transplant surgery. He was called by his ophthalmologist; his transplant surgery has been delayed. I look at Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, and they talk about Alberta wanting to be the most competitive in this country. Yet the same way they're being competitive, they're striking a monopoly with two people getting the contracts. What do you tell patients that are waiting for a transplant? This particular individual has decided he's going to try and get his transplant surgery in B.C. If he can't get it in B.C., then he's going to try and get it at the Mayo Clinic.

You get calls in regard to tissue transplants, all the tissues that are actually going to waste at this particular time.

Mr. Speaker, there are a whole bunch of unanswered questions.

This is an emergency. We've got people waiting for surgery. Yes, they haven't been cancelled, but they've been postponed. How do you tell somebody that's had their surgery postponed, that has been waiting forever for this, that "Yes, we're going to do your surgery, yes, we're going to postpone it, but we need to find out when we can give you the particular surgery"? Just so many unanswered questions.

Mr. Speaker, this is urgent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has already spoken on this matter. Are there others?

Hon. members, an application for Standing Order 30 is clearly identified in the standing orders that we have. The chair may identify and recognize a number of members to briefly speak and state arguments in favour of the request for leave. The chair did allow everyone who wanted to speak on this particular Standing Order 30 application to participate. The chair also did not restrict the argument to urgency as per the thing other than to give one caution to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek as two of her colleagues had already spoken on this matter. There was wide latitude given to the issues involved, many of which had nothing to do with the urgency of the motion. I am prepared, thus, to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30(2).

First of all, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has met the requirement of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office. Notice was received this morning at 11:18 a.m. Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must rule whether the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration" of the subject. The relevant parliamentary authorities on this subject are pages 689-696 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, and *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387 to 390.

The motion reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the agreement made by Alberta Health Services with ophthalmology service providers is detrimental to patients awaiting cataract surgery and the ophthalmologists who provide cataract surgery procedures.

Now, the focus words are: "be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the agreement." The chair has difficulty understanding and is not certain what makes this an urgent matter today as opposed to last week or last month.

If the chair understands this correctly, the statement with respect to cataract surgery was issued by Alberta Health Services on March 26, 2010.

The Assembly reconvened on April 12. On April 12 this matter was raised in the Assembly by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on pages 689 and 690. The subject in the question period was cataract surgery.

This matter was not raised in the question period or any other time, to the chair's knowledge, on Tuesday, April 13.

On Wednesday, April 14, cataract surgery was the subject of a member's statement made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. In addition to that, cataract surgery was an issue of the question period at page 758. The subject was raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and it also was raised by another member, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

This matter was also raised in the Assembly in Oral Question Period on Thursday last by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and raised twice in the question period today.

In terms of an opportunity to raise this, it cannot be said that this is the first opportunity to raise this matter; it certainly was raised last week on a number of occasions. With respect to this whole question of a Standing Order 30 application, that it's a matter of urgent public importance, it had been raised, has been raised, could have been raised to adjourn the agenda of the Assembly on a certain day.

Certainly, the issue is, with no doubt whatsoever in the chair's mind, an important matter, but let's never forget Standing Order 30(6), which clearly states that even if there was to be a debate today, "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." There would be no decision made; it would simply be talking about the issue for the remainder of the afternoon till 6 o'clock.

The chair actually would have a very difficult time finding this request for leave to be in order under the Assembly's rules to put such a question. If he were to put such a question and the question were to be in the affirmative, that would certainly end the remainder of the business today. Third reading of Bill 202 would not come up. That would be very clear and not be dealt with, and neither would any other matters this afternoon.

In recognizing the availability of members to discuss this matter and to deal with the matter in the last five days, recognizing the importance of Standing Order 30(6), that this would not entail any decision of the Assembly, recognizing the number of opportunities that there were to raise this matter, and also recognizing the very wide latitude that the chair gave to those who participated in petitioning for Standing Order 30, that in essence much of it would have been the many discussions that would have been provided later, the chair does not find the request for leave in order under the Assembly's rules, and the question will not be put.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 202

Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again I appreciate the opportunity to stand in the House to speak in support of Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. While I appreciate the support that Bill 202 has received, I will say that I have been surprised by the reaction from the government.

I've also been surprised with the lack of willingness to confirm a date that this legislation would come into effect. I've heard their reasons for not providing dates, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, these reasons ring hollow with Albertans, they ring hollow with the opposition, and they ring hollow with law enforcement, victims' advocates, and those who suffer at the hands of those who abuse and exploit children to satisfy their sick sexual perversions. I will let them explain their position to Albertans; that is not my job. They can explain why they consistently change their position on the refusal to provide a date that this would actually go into effect.

But please know this: I will not let this piece of legislation go into the never-never land of private members' bills. I think that the government is familiar with the never-never land. It's a place that they have created where more than 1,411 private members' bills have gone. It's a quiet place, Mr. Speaker, because nothing really happens there. You see, this never-never land of private members' bills is a place where each bill has powers, and it's a place where

each bill is supposed to be working and in action. But for a reason that only the government knows, only about 50 of these private members' bills have made it out of never-never land. Bill 202 will make it out of never-never land, and I am determined to see that it comes into effect, whether it is because this government puts it into effect as a revised government bill or because it takes Bill 202 and we put it into effect on our own.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I cannot tell members of this Legislature how horrific images of child pornography are. We can all say the words; we can all imagine it. As the former Solicitor General and minister of children's services I have seen these images that were involved in some of the investigations that unfolded during my time in these positions. I can never get these images out of my mind, Mr. Speaker. I will not describe them for you, but, hon. members, please know this: I can think of nothing more vile, more evil, or more disgusting than the sexual exploitation of a small, innocent child. I hope you never have to see these images for yourself because they are seared into my memory forever.

These images that are sent around the Internet by these organized criminal networks of child pornography and sexual abusers we are trying to disrupt with Bill 202. When someone inadvertently comes across these images, we want them to be able to report this information to the police or organizations like Cybertip without having to fear that they will be investigated. When someone accidentally comes across these vile images, we want it to be clear about the steps that law enforcement agencies or child protection staff must take to investigate and remove children if there is evidence of ongoing abuse.

When someone finds out that a child is being sexually abused by a child pornographer or a predator, we do not want the abuser to be able to hide. Bill 202 is about giving police and those who come across this information the tools they need to be protected and stop the abuse from continuing. Bill 202 provides the framework for these child protection steps to be taken into practice. What we need now, Mr. Speaker, are the actual regulations. With Bill 202's passage it will be up to this government to give police the regulations they need to have clarity, to change their work practices, and to launch effective investigations that will help protect our children.

I extend an offer to work with the government to study the regulations that are needed, to bring law enforcement and reporting agencies together to achieve strong and enforceable regulations which will stop this vile cycle of child abuse and sexual exploitation. I hope this government will accept this offer. I do not care who gets the law passed or the regulations put into practice.

My record as a member of the government and as a member of the opposition speaks for itself. Protecting children must come first. Protecting children must be a shared goal. Protecting children is what I hope we can all achieve through Bill 202.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I encourage every member of this Assembly to pass Bill 202.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking in support of Bill 202, I think it was Marshall McLuhan who suggested that the message was more important than the medium, and that's what the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has put forward. The hon. member has been perceived as a valuable contributor as a minister of this government. She was given the responsibility to head the crimes and community task force, and she has raised over her political career a number of

issues with regard to the administration of justice and the protection of children. Last year she brought forward Bill 206 with regard to bullying, and she has brought forward other initiatives worthy of consideration.

While we wait for Bill 202 to be resurrected in some form, whether as a government member's motion or, better still, as a government motion, children are suffering from abuse, and that should be a major consideration of all members of this Legislature. We have seen – and I've brought this up, so I'm not going to belabour the point again – examples of legislation receiving amendment. In other words, if it wasn't absolutely right the first time, we fixed it. Bill 202 correctly addresses a number of key issues, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek pointed out, that police agencies, parent groups, groups opposed to the abuse of children have raised. If it's not the complete vehicle, then it's gone a long way in the correct direction and is worthy of support.

If the government wishes to amend the legislation, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has been very willing, for example, to have time extensions. She has attempted to deal with the concerns that have been brought to her, the objections of government members. Unfortunately, to date those concerns have not resulted in Bill 202 receiving the support that is required for it to be proclaimed.

The notion of upon proclamation: that's the obvious circumstance at which time a bill is actually put into force. But while we wait for that distant proclamation day, as the hon. member pointed out, suffering continues to occur.

We have seen various enactments of other pieces of legislation. Back in the year 2005, for example, I brought forward a motion on attempting to ban hand-held cellphones, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays has pursued it, pursued it, pursued it. Finally, it has hit the floor in terms of Bill 16. But Bill 16 at some point will probably be amended because in this case hands-free cellphones have the same mental distraction that hand-helds have.

The point I'm making is that no piece of legislation necessarily gets it right the first time, but it should be recognized and welcomed as a stage in the legislative process that will achieve some very important results. In the case of private member's Bill 202 there is a requirement for reporting to the appropriate agencies. It does put an extra degree of oversight and the potential of getting these individuals who are abusing children through the transmission of pornographic images to think twice because they see that this government is serious about dealing with this particular crime.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I believe Bill 202 has good intentions. It has dates. It has sound reasoning for its need to be proclaimed. If the government feels that it can improve upon it, I would urge the government to at the latest bring it forward as a government bill this fall so that it can finally receive the proclamation that is well-past overdue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and join the third reading debate on Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I would like to congratulate and thank the hon. member for her commendable efforts in developing this legislation that will help to fight child exploitation. There's nothing more important than the safety and security of our children.

Bill 202 would require individuals to report child pornography to

a reporting entity, and it would also establish procedures that a reporting entity must take following the filing of a report, including ensuring that a reporting entity performs an inspection. If it is believed that child pornography is occurring, a report is made to the child and family services agency or law enforcement agency to protect the child and apprehend the offender.

Currently Canada's Criminal Code states that the possession of child pornography is illegal although it does not require individuals to report any content they may encounter. Thus, Bill 202 would serve as a useful new tool for law enforcement in the ongoing fight against child pornography and exploitation. While this legislation alone will not eliminate the cases of child exploitation, it should help to reduce the cases of child abuse, and as with any crime it is important to bring those who perpetrate these horrific crimes to justice as soon as possible in order to ensure that they are apprehended. Bill 202 will help us to do exactly that: help bring these criminals to justice.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that those who witness a crime should not only have a moral obligation but also a legal obligation to report to law enforcement in order to protect the victims and apprehend those responsible. For example, a witness to theft, act of violence, or other forms of criminal activities should have the legal obligation to bring them to the attention of law enforcement immediately. By doing so, evidence can be collected quickly, and there's a greater opportunity to apprehend the criminals. Mandatory reporting will provide law enforcement with valuable and timely information to pursue predators wherever they may be.

This legislation builds on current initiatives and efforts on behalf of our government and organizations to report cases of child pornography. One such initiative is the Alberta integrated child exploitation, or ICE, team. It is a provincial integrated unit involving the RCMP, Calgary Police Service, Edmonton Police Service, Lethbridge Regional Police Service, and Medicine Hat Police Service. It is divided into two teams covering territory both north and south of Wetaskiwin. Each team has a team leader, investigators, and forensic technicians that address and investigate child exploitation concerns. These concerns may include accessing, processing, distributing, importing, and manufacturing child pornography and any computer-related sexual abuse. They may also investigate child luring over the Internet, voyeurism involving victims under the age of 18 years, and the child sex trade and tourism. Another reporting entity is Cybertip.ca, Canada's national tip line for the reporting of online sexual exploitation of children.

Bill 202 will through regulation make it mandatory to report to an entity such as the ICE team or Cybertip.ca which, in turn, would be responsible for investigating the tip. Furthermore, other provinces have made it mandatory to report such cases to reporting entities. In 2009 Manitoba became the first province to enact mandatory reporting of child pornography. Since that time Ontario and Nova Scotia have followed with similar legislation. Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 would mirror the intent of these pieces of legislation; therefore, I believe the time has come for Alberta to join these jurisdictions in passing similar legislation.

This legislation alone will not eradicate child exploitation, which is indeed a growing and world-wide epidemic that knows no border or no jurisdiction. However, Bill 202 recognizes the moral responsibility we all have as citizens to join in the fight against child pornography and catch predators as soon as possible before they are permitted to reoffend. With the reporting agencies such as Cybertip.ca and the Alberta ICE team and with the protection of informants, there is no good excuse or reason not to report cases of these horrific crimes to the proper authorities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 reaffirms our belief as Albertans that we

share responsibility for the safety of our children. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this timely and well-thought-out piece of legislation. Her dedication to and passion for the children of this province is valued by all those who serve in this Assembly and, indeed, all Albertans. I would like to offer my full support for Bill 202 and strongly encourage all of my colleagues from both sides of this House to do so as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: I have on my list here the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then the hon. Member for Calgary-East, and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to stand up again and speak to this bill in third. I'm wondering what kind of statement is being made in this House that we are even discussing these crimes that are so despicable by people who, in my mind, have to be sick. It's reprehensible, and it's disgusting what they are doing to young children and the fact that they are actually making money off it, which is the whole point of it, to make money off this behaviour. I don't think there are enough adjectives that could describe who I think are really evil people who would use young children for sexual exploitation and make money off it.

The fact that it needs to be debated in the Legislature means to the good people out there the question: have we become so tolerant that we turn our heads, that we don't go after these people, that we don't say, "This is not acceptable in our society"? I think perhaps we have become too tolerant and perhaps do turn our heads away.

3:30

The other thing that I think can happen is that people who view these really horrible videos, slide shows, computer pictures, et cetera after a while can become immune to what they're looking at. Certainly, there is research to prove this in terms of the use of pornography, that they then need more and more and more, and it gets worse and worse and worse. Even people who are trying to prosecute and have to sit and look at all of this garbage after a while have almost not an acceptance, but they can't see it for what it is because they get immune to it. They get desensitized. I just think that's very sad.

I guess my point is that I cannot believe this debate didn't go one, two, Committee of the Whole, three, passed and that tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock, right after this is passed, something concrete isn't being done, that proclamation isn't instant. How can we possibly wait? How can we possibly have any kind of an excuse that we would wait, that we wouldn't give the money, the funding to the police forces, which, of course, include global police forces, the Interpol, the Mounties, the FBI, et cetera, et cetera? All of these organizations, all of these policing organizations that we want to protect us should have the extra funding. There should be, as there are, but more of them, specific people who are trained to be able to track down this reprehensible behaviour.

The fact that we would even discuss putting off a bill like this to be proclaimed is very surprising to me. As has been mentioned, I'm sincerely hoping that in the fall there would be a government bill that would come forward and make this thing start moving. Let's put money towards it, and let's try to educate the public so that they will be able to say that this is intolerable and not turn their heads the other way when they actually suspect something might be going on. It's a way of protecting our children, but even more so, I think, it is

is protecting our society and allowing people in society to not be so tolerant and have the backbone or whatever it takes to be able to stand up and say: "Count me in. This is very, very wrong."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to speak to Bill 202, Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. It's interesting because this is a bill that has a tremendously positive objective, and we will of course be supporting this bill. You know, I don't for a second question the good intentions that lie behind the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's decision to bring this bill forward, but I want to do two things. First, I want to point out a couple of the concerns that arise just sort of from a more technical point of view. These are not the kinds of concerns that will result in us not voting for the bill, but I think it's worthy simply of note.

It's simply a couple of things. I suppose the bill itself doesn't speak to this, but there's this whole issue of who the reporting body would be that complaints would go to. I think we just sort of need to be aware that it's probably a better idea to have the reporting body be Cybertip or some group like that because right now as much as the police have a specialized unit, we also have a problem with the police being incredibly understaffed, and though – and I will get to this other issue – there's certainly the possibility of properly funding our police force, should that not happen, then Cybertip might be the other place to serve as that body. Certainly, that is the model that we see adopted in, I believe, both Manitoba and Ontario.

The other thing that is a bit of a concern is that as much as we all, I suspect, can completely agree in this House and outside of this House that the people who make and/or use child pornography deserve no sympathy, hesitation, qualification in terms of the way their actions are treated, those who don't report it necessarily right away – that situation is very close to black and white, I will say. It's very close to black and white, and it should be. But there is the scenario, say, for instance, that you could very likely in some cases have the spouse who is the person that is aware of it and the spouse themselves being the victim of an abusive relationship and that kind of thing. We want the focus of this bill to be on the makers and the users of child pornography. We don't want the criminals to become those who don't report it right away. There's no limitation in this bill, so you could genuinely have a spouse charged five, 10 years later, after they've left, say, an abusive relationship, for not reporting in that original period of time.

That's why the federal bill, that was introduced nationally, is in some ways a better bill and a more effective bill. It focuses on the Internet providers and the social networking sites and those places that ultimately make money off the capacity to traffic images of child pornography, and it puts the obligation on them. That's a very effective way of dealing with it.

At this point we've got three other jurisdictions that have a piece of legislation like this. I think everybody absolutely adopted it right away because they were so collectively concerned about this issue. We don't yet have a clear sense of what the outcome has been. We do know that even in places that don't have this legislation, those bodies that currently have the responsibility for reviewing these complaints are overwhelmed with the number of complaints they receive and do not currently have the ability to properly investigate the number of complaints that are currently received.

I guess the point I'm trying to make is that we can all pile on and agree that this piece of legislation helps deal with the problem, that we all agree is an abhorrent problem that should be eliminated

immediately, but we need to understand that this legislation is not a panacea and that it comes attached to the very real obligation to substantially fund the system's capacity to actually respond to the complaints that would come forward. In the absence of that funding what we simply end up with is a piece of paper that allows everybody to pat themselves on the back about how we've done something to deal with this horrific problem.

I am particularly concerned by some of the comments that I have heard made by members on the government side of this House, that are starting to sound to me a little bit like that trend where we pass the legislation, we feel really good that we put legislation in place, but we don't ever fund it adequately. What happens is that we don't actually deal with the problem that the legislation is geared to address. I quote, in particular, from the federal Ombudsman for victims of crime, who commented on the federal legislation. "Mandatory reporting on its own is not likely to make a significant difference in the fight against online child sexual exploitation." As he says, "Law enforcement agencies . . . are struggling to keep up with the number of cases they [currently] have." Then he goes on to say that the problem isn't a lack of reports; it's "accessing information about suspects, identifying children and preventing future abuse." Then he cautions against "acting on mandatory reporting just to be seen to be doing something."

That's what I want to make sure that this government doesn't get away with. I don't want this government to pass this piece of legislation, quote, just so it can be seen to be doing something. Let's be clear: children are abused in this province every day. Children are sexually abused in this province every day. The social workers, who work desperately hard for this government to try and make this stop, are overworked and underfunded and underpaid and don't get the support from this government that they need to make this stop happening.

3:40

Our own children's advocate, who is restrained and stopped from performing his job in a way that every other children's advocate in every other province in the country can, still reported, almost inadvertently as a result of legislative requirements that hadn't been thought through, but nonetheless reported, that in the first six months of last year over 150 incidents of physical and sexual abuse occurred solely to children in the care of this government who had reported to the children's advocate. So let's be clear: that is not the full amount of children that are being abused sexually or physically in this province; that's just those who are in this government's care, who happen to know enough about the system to be able to report to the children's advocate. We know that that is the tip of the iceberg.

That's what's happening in this province right now. What is the answer of this government? To take \$25 million out of this ministry, specifically out of the area of child protection. The last thing that I want to see is this government get away with speaking in favour of this bill and trying to make Albertans think that they are working really hard on this at a time that they are making a choice to take \$25 million out of child protection at the same time that they're giving \$750 million back to the oil industry. These are choices. These are choices that this government has made. You can pass legislation like this and frame it and appoint a day and do a little bit of a press release every now and then, or you can genuinely fund and support the system that's actually designed to stop this kind of abuse. I would suggest that right now the latter is not happening with this government. That is my concern about this piece of legislation. It's good legislation, but it is not legislation that will have any impact if we don't fund the resources necessary to give the people who

actually become aware of these problems the capacity to respond to them.

We currently can't keep up with reports of child pornography. Increasing the number of reports in and of themselves is not going to fix the problem. We have a government that has not moved forward on hiring new police officers as promised in the last election. We have a government that's, you know, cutting services in our courts and not dealing with a number of emerging and pressing issues in our prison system. We can frame this and put out a press release when it passes, but we need to remember that that's not the solution to the problem. Until we make a real commitment to address those issues and to make the kinds of choices that put these at-risk children above our friends who need royalty rebates, we're not going to get the job done.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and join third-reading debate on Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. This act is being put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I would like to thank her for the intent behind this bill. If passed, this piece of legislation will make it a legal requirement to report findings of child pornography. To be more specific, if a person stumbles upon or inadvertently finds child pornography, they would be required to report this finding to either a police service or to a designated reporting entity. In addition to a mandatory reporting requirement, Bill 202 would also designate actions for reporting agencies to follow once a report has been made to them. Finally, Bill 202 would protect the informant from potential repercussions of reporting child pornography while at the same time making it clear that it is not the duty of an individual to actively search out child pornography.

Mr. Speaker, the proposals made by this bill are designed to reduce the creation and distribution of child pornography in our communities. It is a laudable goal. While I believe the intentions of this bill are clear, I am concerned that this legislation may not be as effective as it could be. This is not to say that it would be ineffective but, rather, that more could and should be done.

Mr. Speaker, the greatest concern I have with Bill 202 is that it does not actively target the creation of child pornography, only the distribution. I say this because the vast majority of child pornography in circulation in Alberta is created outside of our province. It is created in other nations, jurisdictions where Alberta laws have no effect. Therefore, in order to target these cases, we may need to take an alternative approach.

What we need are two things, Mr. Speaker. First, we need to work with our federal counterparts to develop a more comprehensive piece of legislation that can encompass all jurisdictions within Canada. After all, if our goal is to stop this heinous act from taking place, we need to target the creation regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. Secondly, we need to expand and enhance the programs and initiatives that we already have in place. This is where I think Bill 202 fits in.

In Alberta we have many programs and policies in place to catch and prosecute creators and distributors of child pornography. The programs are run and operated by dedicated individuals who make an invaluable contribution to the safety and protection of our society, and they are to be commended for their hard work. It is difficult to imagine, Mr. Speaker, the material that they deal with on a daily basis. An example of one of these programs is the integrated child exploitation units, or ICE units. ICE units are made up of police services from all over the province, including the RCMP, Calgary

and Edmonton police, as well as police personnel from Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. ICE teams are dedicated units whose primary task is to investigate and pursue all cases of child exploitation, be they child pornography, child luring, or the child sex trade. These are the people who are on the front lines.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that if passed, the strength of Bill 202 would lie in its ability to assist these groups. If we legislate the mandatory reporting of child pornography, we would be providing these officers with an additional tool to help them combat child pornography. After all, if we provide these officers with more material to look over, they in turn may be able to analyze these pictures to locate and save these children.

As with everything, however, we need to be cautious that we are not putting too much strain on these teams. We do not want a situation where we are overloading our police forces by providing them with an overabundance of outdated and incorrect material. Mr. Speaker, to the credit of the member there is a section of the bill that should help address this concern. As part of this legislation there is a section that addresses the duties and responsibilities of reporting agencies once they have received notification of child pornography from an informant. One of these responsibilities could be to first identify the material to confirm that it is indeed child pornography and, the second, to ensure that it is material that has not already been sent to police teams, like ICE. In this way we would be able to guarantee that our police services are not being overloaded while also ensuring that they have access to all the material they need to effectively fight this horrible crime.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this bill in itself will not stop child pornography in our communities; it is hampered by jurisdiction. However, Bill 202 is a step in the right direction. Ultimately, the effectiveness of this legislation will rest on its ability to complement the programs and initiatives already under way, programs like Alberta ICE teams. I believe that if implemented properly, in a manner that does not overburden police services, this legislation has the potential to provide additional tools to our front-line investigators.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would again like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this bill. While I believe that this legislation may not be the best approach to combating child pornography, I recognize the valuable role that it could play in improving the safety of our communities. I will be standing in support of Bill 202 and urge all members to support this bill as well.

Thank you.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and again convey my full support for Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. I have mixed feelings today because, I mean, this is such an urgent bill. It's one that needs to be passed and proclaimed, and I wish we could have done so in a way that would have seen a proclamation date for the fall. But the good news is, I think, that several members on that side of the House have alluded to the fact that we might be able to see this proclaimed and the regulations put in place some time this upcoming fall.

I sure hope that they find it in their best interests as well as the children's best interests across Alberta to get that done by this fall. I can promise them that if they don't get it done and proclaimed by this fall, I will make it my mission for the fall to remind them of it and to remind them of it in their constituencies.

This is not a bill that should be delayed at all. There is no excuse for it. You know, the groans and everything else: there's no reason for it. It's a bill that is long overdue. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has done countless hours of work on it consulting, getting it right, and although I'm sure we'll need to add even more legislation on this issue, as the last hon. member spoke about, we need to move forward with this.

We have, I believe, four ICE teams. Is it four ICE teams? There might be just two ICE teams in place right now. That's not enough at all. I'd like to see some of that wasted carbon capture and storage corporate welfare handout that they're giving out right now used, maybe a tenth of that or a fifteenth of that, and put it into new ICE teams to tackle this issue.

You know, it's just a matter of priorities. It's like anything else. We spend a heck of a lot of money in this province, Mr. Speaker, and there is no reason why we can't prioritize and put first things first and put needs before wants. If ever there was a need before a want, it would be more ICE teams to enforce the child pornography laws that we have in this province and to put a huge amount of our resources as a government on that side of the House into making sure that the regulations get made for this bill, which is likely going to pass third reading today, making sure that it gets passed and that those regulations get proclaimed and the bill gets proclaimed and receives royal assent as soon as possible. That absolutely should be job one for the Solicitor General, for the Justice minister, and for this Premier. I sure hope that by the fall they will get that done.

I had a constituent come up to me in Airdrie over the weekend at a function. Her little girl had been sexually abused, and they had just been able to get a decision against the criminal who did this. She was very emotional, as you would expect a mother to be in that situation. In that situation there were people that knew about what was going on and didn't say anything. That does happen in our society. There are people today that know what's going on, and they say, "Oh, it's not my business" or "That so-and-so is addicted to it, and I have to help him through it." You know, there's just no excuse for that sort of behaviour. There is no grey area; there's none.

If you know about a child that is being abused, if you know about a child that is involved in child pornography, if you know of someone who is purchasing child pornography on a website or you come across it by some accident or someone brings it to your attention, there is absolutely no reason for any resident, any citizen in this province to turn a blind eye to this. It is totally unacceptable. There's no grey area on this issue. You just do it because there are little boys and girls right now, one as young as two years of age, who are being grossly violated every day. We talk about a lot of things in this Legislature, in this House, but I just cannot think of anything that is more important than what we're dealing with in this bill, which is trying to eradicate one of the most disgusting and serious scourges of our society today.

I again commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the bill. I hope and would ask again that the government and Solicitor General and Justice minister make sure that they make it their number one task going into the summer to get their departments working on the regulations, get things together so that by the fall we can take a big step forward, proclaim this bill, and move forward as a province.

I know that today it looks like we'll probably receive unanimous approval of this bill, which is good. I don't question and never once have I questioned any of the other members of this Assembly as to their views on child pornography. Obviously, we're all very much opposed to it for what it is. But there is a question of urgency. Perhaps the question is really just that we get our minds tied up with other things, and these crimes are so horrific that perhaps at times we

think, "Well, it can't be that big of a problem," because it's just beyond our comprehension to believe that stuff like this occurs. But it does occur, and it occurs lots, more often than I think any of us in this Assembly are aware of. That's why we have to kind of refocus and be reminded sometimes that some things can't wait. This is one of those things that can't wait.

Mr. Speaker, those are my remarks. Again, I support this bill wholeheartedly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward what I think is a very significant piece of legislation that aims to protect our children. Child pornography has become one of the scourges of our age, and I welcome the opportunity to enter the debate on this subject matter today.

As some of you may be aware, the federal government is also working to address the issue of child exploitation. In 2002 the federal government enacted Bill C-15A, which strengthened the Criminal Code by increasing the offence of possessing and distributing child pornography and accessing it. The amendments also made it an offence to communicate with children by a computer system for the purpose of facilitating or committing certain sexual offences such as child luring or abduction.

Parliament then enacted Bill C-2, which included a broader definition of child pornography and increased penalties. On November 24, 2009, the federal government introduced Bill C-58, the Child Protection Act (Online Sexual Exploitation). This bill would have required Internet service providers to report cases where child pornography may be available to the public or if they have reasonable grounds to believe that their Internet service is being or has been used to commit a child pornography offence. While Bill C-58 was dropped from the Order Paper, I understand that the federal government has promised to reintroduce this legislation. Mr. Speaker, Bill C-58 is certainly a step in the right direction. A national initiative would be welcomed on this issue.

However, Bill 202 is in some ways even broader in scope than what the federal government proposed. One way that this bill is broader is that unlike Bill C-58, which states that a person must notify the police after they view what they believe to be child pornography, Bill 202 directs people to reporting entities. These reporting entities may be individuals or organizations that are qualified in determining what the next step of the reporting process should be. This could be by notifying the appropriate authorities or referring the material to another jurisdiction or organization.

4:00

Reporting entities could be integral to police services, especially in regard to authorities' valuable time. In other words, by allowing reports to be issued to reporting entities, who then could sort through the claims and evidence of child pornography and refer it to the appropriate police services, Bill 202 ensures that we don't burden law enforcement officers. Additionally, Bill 202 includes special provisions that would protect the identity of an informant by ensuring that no undue detriment or suffering is caused by reporting suspected child pornography to the proper authorities. Bill 202 clearly delineates expectations for individuals when it comes to the accidental discovery of child pornography and moves a step further to protect the informant, which Bill C-58 does not fully address.

Further, Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 is broader in that it proposes to make the reporting of all materials suspected to be child pornography mandatory in Alberta. It indicates that any material which may be child pornography be reported. Bill C-58 is specific to child pornography and the Internet. This may leave a hole in legislation in light of the fact that not all of this terrible material is viewed and disseminated on the Internet. Obviously, the Internet is the source of a lot of this material, but child pornography is evident in many different media, including drawings, video, and still images traded from one offender to another in person.

While C-58 aims at protecting children, Bill 202 may have a broader effect here in Alberta because it mandates the reporting of all materials. Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 reiterates to Albertans that we all have an important role to play in the prevention of child exploitation. In addition, by passing this bill, we could send a strong message to potential offenders that Alberta does not tolerate and never will tolerate this kind of child abuse. With this bill and the help of the entire community we could continue to ensure that the perpetrators are exposed and punished for the criminals they are.

Mr. Speaker, child pornography is not a new occurrence, but the electronic media has provided new opportunities for criminals to commit these type of crimes, and we must be vigilant in eradicating this blight on humanity. For these reasons, it is important to involve the public in our attempts to discover offenders. I continue to urge the federal government to bring forward a successor to Bill C-58 as I believe the nation-wide legislation will have a tremendous impact on this issue. I would in fact encourage our federal counterparts to consider also broadening the scope of their legislation. However, in the meantime I applaud Bill 202's broad approach.

With Bill 202 Alberta would have another tool to assist law enforcement, which can use it to not only ensure the safety of our children in this province but also to contribute to the global fight against child pornography. Mr. Speaker, this legislation also effectively coincides with this government's stated goals of ensuring safe communities across our province and protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

In closing, I support this legislation, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and speak to third reading debate on Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for drafting this bill as it highlights the importance of child protection laws.

It's unfortunate that we as legislators even have to stand and debate child protection, and I believe it is the right of every child to live in freedom and enjoy their childhood to the fullest. However, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that there are predators out there that obstruct this freedom and submit our children to conditions that will permanently damage and scar them. Child pornography is one of these evils and can cause a devastating emotional toll on children. Not only do these children have to endure the abuse, but they carry this abuse with them throughout the rest of their lives.

That is why it is crucial that we have child protection laws that will act as a deterrent and prevent these horrendous acts from ever occurring. Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 will make it a legal requirement to report findings of child pornography. This will ensure that if a person comes across any images of child pornography, they will be required to report these images to a designated reporting entity. This

is an important measure because it engages the participation of each and every Albertan in combatting child pornography. Adding this responsibility could increase awareness of how these deplorable images are not tolerated in Alberta and that if they are found, they will be reported.

In addition to a mandatory reporting requirement, Bill 202 would also designate actions for reporting agencies to follow once a report has been made to them. This would ensure that the general public knows where to go if they have knowledge of pornographic images of children.

I thank you very much and ask everyone to support this legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member.

Standing Order 8(7)(a)(iii) provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the bill to close the debate. I would now invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close the debate.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I honestly value the time that the private members in this Legislature have to debate private members' bills. I know that there is another private member eagerly waiting to debate his private member's bill, so with that I'll call the question on Bill 202, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act, and I ask everyone in the House to support it.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a third time]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010

[Debate adjourned April 12: Mr. Chase speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to rise today in this Assembly to talk about Bill 203, the title of which, of course, is the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010. Just before I begin my remarks, I think the Member for Calgary-North Hill – I did get that right this time – deserves commendation for taking this bill much further than where I actually could take it when I had to hand it off to him.

Just a bit of background, Mr. Speaker. Bill 203 is quite simply about transparency and accountability to the taxpayers of this province but also to the ratepayers, people who pay their electricity bills, which is most of us in this Chamber and throughout this province. In fact, it's about making sure that when taxpayers see their electricity bill, they know what they're being charged for and how much they're being charged.

I just took a bit of an opportunity to do a bit of research on the weekend on this, Mr. Speaker, and I actually looked at my own electricity bill. Of course, I won't get into too many details about this, but if you look at local access fees, it's defined on Enmax's electricity bill as a surcharge imposed by the city of Calgary and is not approved by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Isn't that interesting? That's right on its own bill. Now, I'm a single individual, and I live half my time in Edmonton, so of course the local access fee on my own bill is only about \$2. But I actually was able to obtain another bill from another constituent of mine, and

when I looked at the local access fee on this – this is for a condominium complex – in one month it was \$685.73. Wow. That's almost \$700 in one month that that one particular condominium complex is paying.

So this is an issue that Albertans want to debate. Some have suggested that we shouldn't even be debating this, we should just put this bill aside. I think, simply, that that is wrong. Albertans deserve more accountability and more transparency in these fees than to simply push it under the rug just because it might serve the convenient political agenda of some individuals or parties throughout this province. And when I say "parties," I don't mean political parties, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

Bill 203 addresses concerns around access fees that municipalities apply to their tax base. What we want to do through this bill is to create a common methodology on how these local access fees are in fact calculated. Specifically, this bill will allow for the calculation of the prescribed franchise fees for each unit of energy a household consumes. This would be uniform, then, throughout this entire province.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the way it is done right now is a little bit disingenuous to me. In fact, I was talking to a friend of mine in Ottawa about this this weekend, and that's exactly the comment that I received back. Municipalities currently have the authority to charge fees rather than property taxes for the use and maintenance of their electricity and distribution systems. Now, some people have said to me that these fees in fact are not a tax. On the other hand, those same individuals also say to me that if we get rid of this, we're going to have to raise the property tax. If this is in lieu of a tax, a tax is a tax is a tax.

The Premier of this province has been very clear that he doesn't want any further taxes as we go through the recession. This is why this is of particular concern to me. This is a tax. In fact, this local access and franchise fees attract a further tax, attract GST, on top of that at a rate of 5 per cent. Existing legislation allows municipalities to charge whatever they think is fair in forming these fees. In addition, Alberta municipalities use three different formulas to create these fees. These can be very, very confusing and convoluted, Mr. Speaker. There is always a taxation practice that, I believe, is unfair. It's unaccountable.

One municipality that has taken issue with this Bill 203, of course, is my home city of Calgary. Now, the city of Calgary has suggested that a system based on distribution only, like many municipalities currently use across this province, could lead the average homeowner to see an increase of about 20 per cent in their local access fees and that industrial consumers could see a rise of 12 to 18 per cent. Now, there is some basis, with fairness to this, Mr. Speaker, but this shows, again, why a distribution-based formula is not what Bill 203 looks at.

The method that the city of Calgary currently uses to calculate access fees is based on a percentage of the total power bill. For example, if the cost of energy doubles, so does the local access fee, and the municipality gets a windfall from ratepayers. I don't think that's right, Mr. Speaker. Under this model delivery charges can vary widely from community to community, and they may also be calculated with different percentages. That's why Bill 203 proposes an alternative to the distribution fee system and to the system used by the city of Calgary. That's what is needed. That's what this bill calls for.

Bill 203 proposes a formula which is to be calculated off the rate of energy consumed based on the kilowatt hour of energy usage. Now, people ask me: what exactly is that in plain English? Basi-

cally, the more you use, the more you pay. So if you have a large industrial user, a large commercial user, of course that particular body is going to pay more than a ratepayer like myself, that uses maybe \$20 or \$30 dollars of electricity per month. Now, this approach doesn't choose winners and losers, Mr. Speaker. It's a fair system in which high energy consumers pay more in fees, and those who conserve energy would pay less. You might argue that this approach would encourage energy conservation. I would argue that it would, but at the same time this isn't the pith and substance of this bill.

Overall, for anybody to suggest that access fees would surely increase with this method of calculation, I say right to their face that I think it's false. After all, the city of Calgary would still be free to set the rate of fees per unit of consumption. They could set it higher. But this is about transparency and about accountability. Research shows that consumers in consumption-based municipalities pay less in access fees, not more. Again, that's less, not more, contrary to what may have been said. Ultimately, it's the consumer that benefits from a formula like this one that Bill 203 proposes. A formula based on this consumption is simple, and it could easily be applied uniformly across municipalities across this province.

Mr. Speaker, the city of Calgary also suggests that an alternative formula could result in less municipal tax revenues, which would in turn be passed on to the taxpayer in the form of rate hikes or service cuts. Well, again, it proves that this is in fact a tax. But even if we do accept that, that's not the case. Municipalities would remain free to set their own unit rate as to make it revenue neutral. The difference would be that municipalities would be setting access fee rates based on a per-unit rate of electricity used, which, I submit, is both equitable and fair. This means that pursuant to Bill 203 the new formula used could be made revenue neutral if that's the prerogative of the city of Calgary or of any other municipality across the province.

This method also allows consumers to accurately compare their local access fee rate with every jurisdiction in Alberta. Let's face it, not everybody goes and scrutinizes their bills. If we have one uniform formula across the entire province, that is most fair, and that is transparent. This will provide a further layer of accountability, Mr. Speaker, for municipalities who might face complaints from residents who discover that their access fees are higher than their friends' or family members' in other parts of Alberta. Indeed, I have received many calls about this issue since the Member for Calgary-North Hill brought it up.

Further, Bill 203 would mandate that access fees be declared within the text of local utility bills. This legislation would also require local governments to include a clear explanation of fee revenue in their yearly financial statements, something which I don't think is adequately done at this juncture, Mr. Speaker. Municipal annual reports would be required to include the amount of money generated by these fees as well as the formula used to calculate the fees. This is a long-overdue reform.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business calls this system hidden taxation. They call it exactly what it is. They further call it convoluted. Couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker. Bill 203 also would bring these fees out of the darkness and would set a fair standard across Alberta. Albertans deserve full information on all fees that they're required to pay, and access fees should be no different. This bill enshrines transparency, it talks about openness, and it talks about accountability, all of which are important for this government.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I also have received some comments, some calls in my office saying that this is one order of government talking to another order of government. At the end of

the day I don't think the average consumer actually has one pocket for what they pay to their local government and one pocket for what they pay to this government and one pocket for what they may pay to the federal government.

We have to go and look and examine these issues. This is a matter that should be debated, and I understand that there is some intention here to refer this to a policy field committee later today. I think that that's an excellent idea. It does require some more study, but at the same point in time we also want to consult with local groups like the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and we want to consult with any other individual citizens as well as the municipalities themselves. Let's bring them in here. Let's have a dialogue as to what's going on. Let's make it open, let's make it transparent just like this whole process that we are actually seeking to do.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my comments, and I look forward to the remainder of the debate on Bill 203 today. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you have spoken, according to my record. You adjourned it last time.

Mr. Chase: Oh, well, if I adjourned it, then I didn't finish. I have to start where I left off.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, you still had some time? All right. But you should have been the first one up, right? After adjournment, you should have stood up.

Mr. Chase: Can I continue where I left off?

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur for the hon. member to continue? If not, then the chair will say no. [interjections] Sorry; you have passed your time to speak.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, no doubt has noble goals. Bringing clarity and transparency to small business and residential consumers is a very important goal and something that I support. However, there is a problem. Yet again this government is going about this the wrong way initially. This government has a terrible track record of shooting first and then asking questions later. They did this with the royalty review, they did this with health care centralization, they did this with the ambulance dispatch system, and they did it with Bill 50.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious to many Albertans that with the way this government has handled health care and energy issues, they mean well, but they keep getting it wrong over and over and over again, so it's time they get it right. That's why I'm pleased to hear some of the members in this Assembly get up and say that they would like to refer this bill to the appropriate committee, to bring stakeholders in and to talk to those stakeholders, and to understand through consultation what the needs and the concerns are of the municipalities and other stakeholders that will be affected by this bill.

4:20

Municipalities, of course, have been given the authority to charge utility companies a fee for entry to municipal land so that they can build, operate, and maintain their electrical and natural gas distribution systems. Sadly, the authority delegated to municipalities has been, as has been alluded to in here, abused in some cases. Rather than charging a reasonable fee for a necessary service, some appear

to be taking advantage of the situation. At the very least, the fees are confusing as they have different names in different cities, called fees in some, called charges in others.

Many municipalities have been proactive on this issue. In Medicine Hat, for example, their council doesn't charge a fee for access. They realize that, ultimately, the cost is shouldered by the taxpayer and have chosen not to burden their citizens in that way. In Calgary their fee, which is a charge for something used, is calculated based on the entire power bill. If the price of natural gas goes up, so does this so-called fee. This, of course, is inconsistent with what the fee is intended for: a fixed access charge by the municipality. The costs to access city property do not go up because the cost of power increases. That's not the point of the fee, and it's not appropriate.

Ensuring transparency and fairness is the job of government, so this is an important issue that we need to address. Again, this gives us the opportunity, by referring it to a committee, to include vital stakeholders that have not been consulted, to consult with stakeholders like municipalities, power users and generators as well as just average, everyday Albertans and consumers. Mr. Speaker, I endorse the principles and sentiments behind this bill, but I fear that if we do not send it to a committee, this will be another bungled attempt by this government to do something that is well meaning but has unintended consequences affixed to it.

In my view, the Standing Committee on Community Services is the appropriate venue for further discussion and consultation on this important issue. As such I would therefore propose the following amendment, and I have appropriate copies of the amendment that I would bring forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The pages will distribute the amendment.

Hon. member, please continue with this amendment.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I'd move that the motion for second reading of Bill 203, Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 203, Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I've already spoken to why I feel that, again, we need the opportunity to consult with various stakeholders, power users, power generators, municipalities, consumers, et cetera. That is the reason for referring it rather than just barrelling on ahead and passing a bill that could have some very severe unintended consequences.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright on the amendment.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member bringing forward an amendment that is referring this bill to the Standing Committee on Community Services. I would like the member and the House to know that I, too, had intended on bringing forward an amendment, which I still intend to do, that refers this bill to the Standing Committee on the Economy. Because of that and because I do believe that there are a lot of members here that would like to have further debate and this is an issue that needs to be debated in this Assembly before it gets referred because there are a lot of comments that people would like to make, I encourage all members to defeat this amendment and carry on with the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, are there any other hon. members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the amendment.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting, and I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. My question is that there are a lot of bills to come forward, and if it's going to go to the committee, wouldn't that be a more efficient place? It's not like this bill is being voted on and gone. It's actually going to a committee, where we're going to have a more informed discussion. We're going to be able to listen to stakeholders and, like I say, raise the level of discussion and the depth to make sure that this bill is correct, again, having openness and honesty to the taxpayers, realizing what they're paying for, not just having a tax loophole where the municipalities can just raise a tax and generate income. It's a need. Almost everybody in the province is on the grid. There are a few people that have gone off the grid.

I just think that we should vote on this amendment as is. I think that going to Community Services is a good area, but I'll wait to hear the discussion from further members on this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, are there any other hon. members who wish to speak?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we go back to the bill.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise in this Assembly to speak to Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. Bill 203 would essentially create a common methodology for calculating local access fees and franchise fees. This is an important issue.

Every month all of us get utility bills which include local access fees. My first question is: what is this fee for? And the second: how is this fee calculated? Bill 203 would address these questions through greater transparency and a common sense approach to calculating local access fees and franchise fees. Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would clarify the method of calculating local access fees and franchise fees by creating a common methodology of calculation at a prescribed rate per unit of energy consumed and prohibiting calculation by other methods.

Bill 203 would also require local governments to include a clear explanation of fee revenue for their yearly financial statements. The purpose of this is to improve transparency. Albertans expect transparent billings for all items that they purchase, including utilities. This would also clarify that it is the municipalities that are charging these fees, not the utility company, as it may currently appear. I believe that there is some misunderstanding and lack of adequate clarity in that regard. This is important as many consumers assume that it is the utility companies that are charging these fees when, in fact, it is the municipality.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would also require that municipal annual reports include the amount of money generated by these fees and the formula used to generate them. Furthermore, Bill 203 would require municipalities to advise consumers of any changes to the rate of

local access fees and franchise fees publicly in the local paper three calendar months in advance of the rate change.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to specifically focus on are the benefits of a common rate per unit methodology as opposed to the current method of calculation that some municipalities use based on distribution charges. This is a crucial element of the bill because currently there isn't a common methodology for calculating local access fees and franchise fees on utility bills. Many jurisdictions calculate local access fees based on distribution costs. Distribution costs are charged to the consumer for the costs incurred by the electricity company when they transmit power from their generation sites to the city. However, under this system the distribution costs can vary widely from community to community.

In addition to this, they may calculate these fees with different formulas. For example, one community may charge 22 per cent on a distribution charge of a hundred dollars, resulting in a monthly payment of \$22, whereas another community may charge 10 per cent on a distribution charge of \$300, resulting in a monthly payment of \$30. This discrepancy makes it impossible to accurately compare percentages across municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 proposes a formula which would be calculated off the rate of energy consumed. Specifically, access fees would be based on the kilowatt hour of electricity used. This would result in a system where consumers would pay more in access fees if they used more energy and less in access fees if they consumed less energy. In addition, these fees would not be tied to a shifting commodity or to a distribution charge that may change over time. This method of calculation provides numerous benefits to consumers over the method used on distribution charges.

First of all, formula-based consumption would be simple, based on a common formula that would be applied uniformly across all jurisdictions. This method allows consumers to accurately compare a local access fee rate with every jurisdiction in Alberta. This could have the benefit of reduced access fees across the province as all jurisdictions would want to have competitive access fees to attract both business and residents. Under the current system, where rates are based on a distribution charge, it is impossible to compare between jurisdictions because different regions are served by different utility firms that charge different distribution charges.

A second benefit would be to the individual's ability to reduce their access fees by reducing energy consumption. With a rate that is based on the amount of energy consumed, it would be in the interests of consumers to be energy efficient. This could involve purchasing energy efficient appliances or just making common-sense changes to conserve energy, both of which benefit the environment and the consumer. Under the current system the access fees are based on a distribution charge which does not correlate with the amount of energy consumed.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, a method based on the energy consumed is much more equitable than a rate calculated as a percentage of the total delivery costs. The current system is not transparent and not uniformly applied. Furthermore, consumers would benefit by implementing a unified format across jurisdictions.

As a private member I embrace open, transparent, and accountable government, and this bill exemplifies that objective. I would again like to thank the Member for Calgary-North Hill for introducing this important bill, and I eagerly look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to

rise to speak with respect to Bill 203. I'll keep my comments brief because I don't really want to get into a long discussion about the merits of the bill and the various and sundry disagreements about funding formulas that the government has problems with, I gather, particularly the city of Calgary engaging in, but I will say a couple of points.

First of all, one of the members across the way got very concerned at one of the other opposition members here suggesting that this was a government bill. Of course, we all know that it is not a government bill; it's a private member's bill. Having listened to the comments made by a number of government members that were clearly prepared by a similar researcher with similar talking points that were written in similar styles, I think we can all conclude that there's a certain amount of consensus on the part of the government MLAs or at least those who access the same research budget.

However, let's just talk a little bit about probably the biggest concern around Bill 203, which is, of course, that the Alberta union of municipal associations is quite opposed to it for the simple reason that they have not been consulted at all on the crafting of this bill and believe, obviously, that it interferes with some of their own authority and the practice and the level of respect that has theoretically developed between the provincial government and municipal governments and the level of deference in negotiation that usually goes on between those two levels of government notwithstanding the provincial government's relationship to municipal governments through the Municipal Government Act. There is, obviously, represented here a clear break with some of that sort of traditional deference and respect.

I have to say that it is a little bit sort of inconsistent and, I would suggest, perhaps even a little bit hypocritical because, of course, where necessary, say, for instance, with school boards, this government is very quick to go on at much length about the importance of those school boards' independence and how all decisions that might potentially offend Albertans, say, for instance, the closing of community school after community school after community school, are clearly within the purview of the school boards, and, oh, how dare we suggest that the provincial government might possibly exercise some level of leadership to stop that particular disaster from unfolding?

Then when it comes to the actions of municipal governments, which have a great deal more independence than school boards because, of course, they still have some control over the amount of funds that are given to them as opposed to the school boards, suddenly the government is stepping in, writing legislation, and wants to get into the minutiae of how these organizations raise their funds, so clearly a certain amount of double standard, depending on what the political objective is to be reached in that case. I have to say, too, that this whole issue of: "Oh, well, we want transparency. We want municipal citizens to understand how much they're actually being taxed, and we want them to understand who it is that's actually taxing them. That's really important, and that's why we're going to go ahead with this legislation" is, well, again, a little bit of a double standard on the part of this province.

We have a government that's constantly going on about how they theoretically have this very, very competitive income tax system in Alberta. Now, in fact, it's only really competitive for those who are the most wealthy. Nonetheless, if you listen to their message box, they'll have you believe that we have very low tax rates in Alberta. Much like the city of Calgary, who's doing the same thing, these guys run around saying: "Look at us. We have such low tax rates." Yet, of course, we have loads of hidden fees all over the place that Albertans need to pay, which are far in excess of what many other jurisdictions have to pay. We have amongst the highest cost for

child care and the lowest quality. We have amongst the highest tuitions and additional fees associated with tuition. You know, we've delisted more things, so people have to pay more out of pocket for services here.

There has been study after study showing that when you add up the basic social services that, essentially, come for free in other provinces and add them to Alberta's, then in fact this is the most expensive place in the country for low- and middle-income people to live. Why is that the case? Well, because they're hidden costs, just like the hidden costs that this particular member is claiming he wants to get rid of through this bill when talking about municipal governance.

4:40

I guess my point is simply: what's good for the goose is good for the gander. If this government truly believes that it's all about, you know, making municipal politicians accountable for how much they're asking citizens to pay, I would suggest that this government ought to maybe adopt the same policy with respect to their own taxation efforts. Until such time as they do, I really have some difficulty feeling particularly sympathetic for the arguments being made here.

Ultimately, whether there does need to be a change to the way in which franchise fees are addressed, that's something that requires more discussion. I would say that at the starting point there certainly needs to be consistency adopted on the part of this government, and there needs to be a greater level of consultation and negotiation with municipalities before Big Brother steps in and starts telling them what to do. For that reason I can't support this bill, and if at some point a motion comes forward to have it referred to committee, I will probably support that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, being put forward by my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would essentially create a common methodology for calculating local access fees and franchise fees. This methodology would be based upon the prescribed rate per unit of energy that would be determined by each municipality. This means that municipalities in Alberta would continue to set the rate for local access and franchise fees. However, they would have to use a common methodology for calculating their rates.

In addition, Bill 203 would require municipal governments to include a clear and straightforward explanation of their fee revenues in their financial statements. This would include listing the amount of money generated by the local access and franchise fees as well as the formula used to generate the fees in their financial statements. In this way the information would be readily available to the public.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities have the authority to charge fees in lieu of charging property taxes for use of and access to their land in order to conduct and maintain and operate distribution systems exclusively within the municipality's boundaries. The Municipal Government Act allows the municipality to charge what it believes is fair considering the local market. Thus, a local access fee is something most Albertans are required to pay. Therefore, the revenue generated from the local access fee is important information, and it should be made available to the public.

Mr. Speaker, when Albertans are required to pay a fee, it is only reasonable to ask that they are provided with some basic information

on that fee. After all, a clear explanation of local access fee revenues, describing what they are as well as the formula used to generate them, is standard information which Albertans have a right to know, especially since it was their money to begin with, and they should know what they're paying for.

By ensuring this information is made public in annual financial statements, Albertans will be more informed and aware of exactly how much is generated by each municipality. This is essential because some consumers would like to compare their local access fees to other municipalities' or at least have that option available to them if they choose. For instance, as of January 1, 2005, the franchise fee in Edmonton was \$21 compared to Calgary, which had a franchise fee of \$40. Under this bill Albertans could compare and then determine for themselves if they are comfortable paying their current rates, and if not, they would be able to contact their municipality to address their concerns.

Not only do people want to compare current local access and franchise fees across Alberta, but they may also want to reference fees from previous years. They would be able to do this under Bill 203 since all financial statements are easily accessible no matter what year. Bill 203 ensures this valuable information is available to the public as this is the only way to ensure that it benefits consumers.

Mr. Speaker, this information is not only important for individual Albertans, but it can also be useful for businesses that would like to know about the local access fees they are paying. For instance, they may want to compare and review different local access fees across Alberta, and as you know, businesses have utility bills as well and, therefore, pay local access fees. Bill 203 will help Alberta businesses plan their budgets since they will be able to review the exact formula that was used in determining the fees. This type of comparison is only possible if consumers and businesses can review the local access and franchise fees for all municipalities across Alberta.

Albertans would benefit from greater transparency if local governments would publish this information in their financial statements. This consistency would make it easier for Albertans to locate the information in a format that is comparable to other municipalities. Mr. Speaker, the information is valuable. More individuals and businesses need to know about the local access fees they are paying and how the fees are being determined. In this way the better they can plan for their budgets and address their own concerns.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will also help municipalities clearly communicate their messaging since they want to ensure that consumers are informed and aware of their local access fees. In this way Bill 203 would create a consistent way to display local access fee information that would be accessible to residential consumers, businesses, and all Albertans. Making certain that Albertans are fully informed is all a part of this government's commitment to greater accountability and transparency, and that is exactly what Bill 203 intends to do.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this subject, Mr. Speaker. I eagerly look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak on the bill. There are certain aspects that I, of course, agree with, but there are others where I have concerns. Seeing as how we're debating in the House and not going to committee, I feel it's important to put those

on the record at this point. First of all, I find it interesting that these government members are saying that there's the importance of having openness and a formula, which I very much agree with. Whenever we talk about good government is when we have formulas. If, in fact, we know the flat tax in Alberta is 10 per cent over and above \$16,000, it's very simple. We see it, and there's no manipulation that can take place.

Again, what I want to address on Bill 203 and where I agree is that this formula is there to address competitiveness, and that's what we want. Right now too often in many areas, when it comes to energy and other areas, Albertans are actually punished for reducing their consumption because they're paying a higher percentage per bill. This is true for kilowatts here. It's true for water usage. There's not a great advantage in many areas because you reduce your consumption, and they have a flat fee and then a consumption after that. So the aspect where we're tying this, actually, to consumption is very good and something that I'm a strong advocate of and agree with. I hope that the members of this government will continue to take hold of that, the importance of a formula that's based on consumption.

I also find interesting, though, the dilemma that we're stepping on here. This is where I need to do more research, and we don't have the research money that the government members and some of the other opposition parties have, so it's a little tougher to address. But the fact is that many municipalities are strapped because of the government's dealing with those municipalities. I want to refer to my own at this point, Calgary. From the latest numbers I have, from 2006, the personal income tax that was paid by Calgarians was \$7 billion. I've been unable to get the corporate tax, but the personal income tax was \$7 billion; \$5 billion of that went to the federal government; \$2 billion went to the provincial government.

What we need to address here is a formula where a percentage of tax goes back to the community where it comes from. If we were actually to go back and have a formula like that, many of these municipalities wouldn't have to look at the few areas where they can raise their money to try and balance their books. The municipalities are given the responsibility to provide many of the things that we as citizens need: our schools, the libraries, the garbage, the water. All of those things are at the municipal level, but very often we get provincial and federal interference in those areas saying: "Oh, we'll give you some grants to do this. We'll give you some grants to do that." But if we go back and look at the actual tax structure and the amount of money that leaves our communities, most individuals would find this quite eye opening, I believe.

Again, the Solicitor General last week made a point and said that I was going to destroy communities because of the change in the tax system. I would say quite the opposite when I don't want the interference of the provincial government in deciding how much money is going to go to which communities for schools, for hospitals, in those areas. It would be just the opposite. If the money actually stayed there, those communities could make the decision rather than cabinet or some level of government like Alberta Health Services to decide what services could be there. Formulas are critical, and we need to come up with a formula. We should be strong advocates with the federal government for having a formula base returned to our municipalities because that would make a huge change.

4:50

The most important principle that's good in this bill is the biggest detriment going forward here in Alberta for business to be competitive outside our jurisdiction, and that is that this government has brought forward Bill 50 and has given the minister the opportunity

to declare this as essential needs and to decide the size and the scope of these power lines around the \$15 billion mark.

What's really lacking in all of this, though – and it goes back to 2001, where this government defeated a transition in how electricity was going to be paid and distributed in this province – is that someone can set up anywhere in the province, and then the minister can decide that, well, we're going to build a power line from that facility to serve Albertans. If we were to use this formula and say that, yes, you can produce power wherever you want, but the actual cost of the grid and to run it – again, if we look at the total cost and then divide it by the kilowatts per kilometre that it travels, that would change the whole dynamics of the competitiveness and what we'd actually generate electricity with.

We've actually got a system here with Bill 50 that just is going to counter any good that Bill 203 does. I'd urge the members of this government who are supporting Bill 203 to look at Bill 50 and realize: "You know what? We have a major flaw here. It's not going to be open, it's not going to be competitive, and it's going to drive industry out." This government is going to spend \$15 billion on power lines because they want somebody to be able to set up anywhere in the province to produce electricity when, in fact, if those power companies had to pay a percentage – and the old motion coming forward on that was, I think, 50 per cent paid by the producer per kilowatt per kilometre – all of a sudden it's not necessarily economically viable to put a power plant or a nuclear facility way up north and then have to build those power lines.

If, in fact, we have a municipal structure that says, "Oh, it doesn't matter where on the grid; you're going to have to pay for this" and it's redistributed through industry and consumers and citizens, then all of a sudden it's economically viable. I think this principle of a formula is critical, it's important, but it's more important that we apply it to the provincial-wide grid than that we apply it to a municipal grid.

Again, the problem of why municipalities are forced to do this in many jurisdictions is because we don't return the tax dollars that are already being generated in those areas. Government pulls it out and then says, "Well, we don't think you need it for this or that," and they make all the decisions with the strings attached, whether it's schools, whether it's overpasses, whatever. We need to go back and have a proper reallocation of the tax dollars with a formula so that each level of government can make their own efficient and wise decisions on how they're going to ensure the basic services are provided for those people in those different communities.

I'd have to overall be in favour of this bill, looking forward to it going to the committee. What disappoints me is that the principles that make this bill sound are not in there. I'm very concerned, though, of overstepping, again, municipal jurisdictions, saying that, you know, "You have a tax problem, but we're not going to allow you to tax in this area" while we're robbing them on the other side, where they should have those tax dollars being returned to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, as was brought forward by the very hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. The purpose of Bill 203 is to establish a common methodology for the calculation of local access and franchise fees. These fees are included on Albertans' utility bills. However, they're not actually a part of the utility companies' revenue, nor are these fees determined by the utility

companies. Rather, all the money collected by these fees is returned to the municipality. The reasoning is that the electric distribution system is located on municipal lands, lands that would normally be charged property taxes. As such, the Municipal Government Act authorizes municipalities to collect these fees via the electricity and natural gas distribution companies for the use of the land on which the distribution system lies as well as the exclusive right to provide distribution access services within a municipality.

This is an important source of revenue for municipalities; there's absolutely no doubt about that. They rely on these fees to fund part of their annual budgets, to provide services to their constituents. However, Mr. Speaker, while these fees are collected by almost all cities across the province, they're not collected uniformly across the province. Each municipality is empowered to make an agreement with the utility companies regarding the charge and the collection of the fee. As such, there are a variety of methodologies, or quite a mishmash, employed across the province's municipalities that direct how the fees are actually calculated.

The variance in the fee calculation methodology can pose several difficulties to local consumers. First, it precludes the comparison of franchise and access fee charges across the province. Second, depending on the method used, the fees paid by the consumer and, therefore, collected by the municipality lack an important degree of predictability. For example, one methodology used to calculate fees is based on the distribution costs of the utility. Using that method, a municipality charges a percentage of the cost of distribution as a fee. For example, if the distribution cost is a hundred dollars, Mr. Speaker, the municipality could have a rate of 10 per cent and, thus, charge \$10 in fees. The difficulty with this method is that the cost of distribution varies from community to community, depending on the distribution system itself as well as the distance the customer is from the generator. Further, generation costs can actually vary, which impedes the consumer's ability to predict cost and the municipality's ability to predict revenue.

Another methodology bases the amount owed for franchise and access fees on the overall cost of the utility consumed. While the formula is transparent, it's important to acknowledge that the values of natural gas and electricity are very variable. At times commodity prices are high, which results in a greater than expected return to municipal governments. In contrast, if commodity prices drop, the expected, not to mention budgeted, revenue will not be realized.

Yet another methodology involves levying access and franchise fees based on the amount of utility that's actually consumed. This is a more predictable and transparent method of collecting fees. This means that regardless of the market commodity prices individuals and businesses will be able to understand and predict the amount they will owe in terms of franchise and access fees. Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 aims to establish the mechanism as the provincial methodology for calculating. However, it does not legislate the rate of charge. That is still left up to municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, regardless, we've heard from many people who have spoken about the complexity of this situation, so it's critical that this bill be sent to committee for further consultation with municipalities. I apologize. I was incorrect in the reference I made to the standing committee that it needed to be referred to. But as such – and my apologies to the member – the amendment still requires a referral date back to this House. At this point I would like to move an amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 203 by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services in accordance with Standing Order 74.2 and

that the committee report the bill back to the Assembly on or before October 28, 2010.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on a point of order.

Point of Order

Amendment to Bill 203

Mr. Anderson: I understand, Mr. Speaker, that mistakes happen, and that's fine. But the fact is that we had a motion, a proposed amendment on the table that essentially did what this member – it's essentially the same amendment. I'm trying to figure it out. I mean, one of the reasons in his comments, when he spoke about the reason to defeat the bill, was because he had another amendment that would refer it to the SPC on the Economy. So that argument, of course, I would say, changed the entire debate. You know, I don't understand. Should we not go back, then, and redebate that . . .

Some Hon. Members: Citation.

Mr. Anderson: Misleading the House probably. It's in *Beauchesne's*. I could look it up if you can give me two seconds to come up with an argument, but that's the argument that I have. This is the exact same amendment that was just shut down.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair recognizes 5 o'clock. The next order of business.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

Underground Utilities

508. Mr. Allred moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require that all future underground utilities be buried at least one metre underground and an accurate as-built location be added to a comprehensive underground facilities registry.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert on the motion.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to introduce Motion 508 and what I believe to be a very important issue that affects all Albertans. This proposal attempts to create a database so that accurate records of buried facilities are available to landowners, other pipeline and cable companies, contractors, et cetera, to prevent the danger and expense of hitting an underground facility. The wording is intentionally broad to include pipelines, electrical and communication cables, underground storage tanks, and anything that is buried. It is ironic that we have better records of gravesites than we do of potentially dangerous gas lines and electrical conduits.

Mr. Speaker, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The onus should be on the party that owns and buries a facility to record the location and to bury it at a safe depth so it will not be struck by an innocent party rather than shifting the onus onto an innocent party who may be developing his own property. The development could include digging the foundation for a new building, plowing a field, excavating for a dugout, landscaping, laying a new pipeline or conduit, or perhaps a major construction project.

Mr. Speaker, it is not reasonable to place the full responsibility on anyone conducting a ground disturbance to locate underground

facilities when the owner of the facility has not taken care to bury that facility at a sufficient depth or place it out of danger of normal operations and has not taken proper precaution to ensure that they are able to relocate that facility. Preparing an accurate as-built record is a normal cost of doing business. Utility companies need to protect their investment by maintaining proper records.

In addition, a proper record of buried facilities will enhance the operation of Alberta One-Call. This proposal is fully supported by Alberta One-Call. This will not eliminate but enhance the operation of Alberta One-Call. In fact, I have received a letter of support from Alberta One-Call, which I will table tomorrow, but I'd like to read it now. The letter is addressed to myself.

Re: Proposed Motion with Respect to Buried Facility As-Built Records

Dear Mr. Allred:

In the interest of preventing further damage to buried facilities, Alberta One-Call supports in principle your proposed motion to the Alberta Legislature with respect to mandating spatially accurate as-built records of buried facilities installed after some date yet to be established. The collection of such records into a secure central repository with limited, pre-approved, web-based access would be both efficient and cost-effective. The platform to contain such data is in place.

Over time, during the normal course of facility maintenance and ground disturbance activities, the records of existing buried facilities could be brought to this higher standard.

Given the extent and complexity of the underground infrastructure in Alberta, the rate with which it increases every year and how essential it is in the provision of goods and services to all Albertans, a requirement for spatially accurate records ought to be considered reasonable and in the interests of keeping our province safe and connected.

Yours sincerely,

Robert R. Chisholm, P.Eng.

President

Alberta One-Call only has a record of the presence of a buried pipeline or conduit on a property. They do not have an accurate location of that line. In many cases they don't even have a record of the presence of many buried facilities. When called, Alberta One-Call advises the operator of any lines that are indicated in their database as being in the vicinity of a proposed construction or excavation and have that operator take steps to mark the location of the line on the ground.

Alberta One-Call will not do locates for proposed construction planning, only prior to an actual ground disturbance. Current legislation is not as thoroughly co-ordinated as it could be in regard to requirements for burying and recording of the creation of buried facilities. For instance, the Gas Distribution Act, the Pipeline Act, the National Energy Board Act, and others all contain loose provisions regarding depth and need for as-built records. Pipelines under the National Energy Board's jurisdiction or communications facilities are not subject to Alberta legislation. Very often, however, if a province has reasonable standards, other jurisdictions will accept them voluntarily.

The broad wording within the motion is intentional. It is a privilege, not a right to bury something, and for that privilege an owner of a facility has the responsibility to ensure that it does not pose a hazard and that an accurate record of its location is available to the landowner and the public. Electrical and gas utility lines are very often buried less than a metre deep, and that is a problem. It is not uncommon for landowners to drive fence posts or iron bars into the ground, Mr. Speaker. Landowners have struck utility lines in the past. Agricultural operations have disturbed shallow lines that were not buried to a sufficient depth.

In 2002 there was an incident in Stony Plain where a man doing

landscaping pounded an iron bar through a gas line, blowing up his house and killing himself and his wife. Last summer just down by the Royal Glenora a pile was driven through a waterline. The waterline location was revised during construction to avoid an obstacle, but the revision was not recorded, and hence the operator of the piledriver was unaware of its presence. The incident resulted in a major flood inside the Royal Glenora.

Mr. Speaker, adoption of this motion will make Alberta a leader in underground planning that will be looked up to by other provinces and jurisdictions around the world. Alberta has over a million kilometres of buried pipelines and conduit, likely more than any other jurisdiction in the world. We have a responsibility to our citizens to set standards for their protection. We need to show leadership in managing our buried infrastructure.

The cost of the \$250 million overpass at Gateway Boulevard and 23rd Avenue is largely a result of the myriad of pipelines that come in from the southwest across that intersection to the former Dome Petroleum facility on the northeast corner of that intersection. These pipes all had to be relocated and moved in order to accommodate the overpass construction.

Very often extensive pipeline facilities are constructed adjacent to urban municipalities only to find that 10 or 20 years later they are right in the heart of commercial or residential development, exposing residents and contractors to unnecessary risk. For example, the Mill Woods pipeline explosion back in the 1980s caused major panic and tied up emergency vehicles for most of a day.

Mr. Speaker, we need one simple system to record the location of all buried facilities. We currently have an accurate cadastral database that could easily accommodate another layer to show the locations of all buried facilities.

Poor records cause problems for those who do not comply, resulting in damage and/or injury which they may be liable for. Compliance is for their own protection. This motion is intended to apply to all utilities as there are many utilities that are buried by private agencies. The importance of the motion is not to address who owns the facility but for the protection of the public.

In most cases private utilities pose more danger than government-owned or -supported utilities. The problem is that very often so-called as-constructed or as-built plans are not as-built but merely a carbon copy of the proposed plans stamped "as constructed." This is usually the problem in that diversions and revisions do not get recorded and the public is led to believe that the buried facility is where it was supposed to be, not where it was actually constructed. The unrecorded location of dangerous buried infrastructure is definitely a safety hazard. Steps can be and are taken after the fact to locate buried facilities, but sometimes this precaution is overlooked or the lines are not found.

Mr. Speaker, one metre is a minimum in the opinion of many groups ranging from farmers to surveyors to Alberta One-Call. Several agencies have good, accurate records of underground facilities, but many do not record an accurate location of those facilities, and very few records are readily available to the public. The intent is not necessarily to capture historical information but to require information to be provided from this day forward. We need to start today to avoid compounding the problem in the future. Historical information can be provided as existing pipelines, et cetera, are uncovered and recorded to enhance the record.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a common-sense approach to this issue which potentially affects all Albertans. Thank you.

5:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to debate Motion 508, future underground utilities regulation, and I appreciate the hon. Member for St. Albert bringing it up. I can't help but flash back to six years ago, when we were talking about a different type of shoveling. At that point it was shoot, shovel, and shut up that was a solution our former Premier suggested for BSE. Well, obviously, cover-up doesn't apply to what the hon. Member for St. Albert is putting forward.

I've had the privilege, the opportunity to work two summers for Alberta Gas Trunk Line. In the summer of 1967 I worked out of Rocky Mountain House, and in the summer of 1968 I worked out of Fort Macleod. I got to see a lot of backcountry, and in the process I covered several kilometres with the old-fashioned witching rods, trying to find buried pipelines. Obviously, the larger pipelines were easier to find, but those that serviced local farms were often quite difficult to find, especially when they weren't well marked in the midst of the field. So from first-hand experience I know how important being able to find that pipeline is and not coming up with a surprise or a tragedy, as indicated, by not knowing where these pipelines are located.

As the hon. Member for St. Albert pointed out, it seems unbelievable that the depth is only a metre, considering how easy it is in some areas to go down a metre very rapidly, an example being when I worked for Keith Construction in terms of developing the area around Lake Bonavista and the subsequent lake developments that occurred. Around the Lake Bonavista area in south Calgary the earth is primarily a sandy soil, and I can remember being down in different areas where we had to go through clay and gravel. We were using a variety of instruments to penetrate into the earth to bury the weeping tiles and so on as part of the process of constructing homes. Then we came beside the lake, and all of a sudden with little effort at all we found ourselves three and four feet down in the basement because of the sandy soil. I'm very grateful that during my experiences with both Alberta Gas Trunk Line and working for Keith Construction and Kelwood Corporation, that did a lot of the maintenance for Keith, that I didn't have any surprises occur.

It's absolutely essential that this information be recorded. Questions that I would have to the hon. mover of the motion. Who would be responsible for the upkeep of the registry? Who would pay for the registration of this information? What about proprietary information? Is that a concern of the central registry? It's important from a safety point of view that this be dealt with. As to the record keeping, who keeps that information that's essential? Also, who pays for it? My experience in working with individuals out of Turner Valley over water concerns in the Sheep River at the site of a former gas and oil refinery just on the edge of Turner Valley and then some crossover concerns not only for the river but concerns about where old well sites, both gas and oil, were located, where the town was building its new reservoir: the town of Turner Valley ended up paying thousands and thousands of dollars because the old well sites weren't recorded.

The first time they did their excavation, they found that right within the area that they were building their reservoir, there were old sites. There was buried equipment and the potential for leaching of contaminants into the water reservoir that they were building. This was a great concern for local residents. Alberta Environment, to its credit, became involved in the discussions, and a resolution was achieved, but in the process of that resolution an awful lot of money was paid out by the town of Turner Valley in order to do things right. Obviously, things should be done correctly, but had this information on well sites been available, these concerns would have been considerably less and less expensive to deal with.

We have to be aware that burying facilities deeper will likely

cause an increase to the costs of installing underground utilities in the future. How those extra costs are borne will have to be determined as well. However, given the importance of safety and the pervasiveness of underground utilities throughout Alberta, the millions of kilometres, as the hon. Member for St. Albert acknowledged, best practices in burying the facility and in record keeping have to outweigh capital concerns.

It's for this reason that I am supportive of the hon. Member for St. Albert's Motion 508, future underground utilities regulation. I appreciate that through the government of Alberta and working with industry the Alberta first call exists. This will only enhance what Alberta first call is attempting to create by, at least from here on in, recording very vital information both for safety and for economy.

Again, I want to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert for bringing forth Motion 508, future underground utilities regulation. It makes sense; therefore, we support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join in the debate on Motion 508, being brought forward by the hon. Member for St. Albert. Motion 508 urges the government to require that all future underground facilities are accurately recorded as built and added to a comprehensive underground facilities registry. For the sake of clarity the term "underground facility" refers to any piece of infrastructure that's buried underground. This could range from pipelines to mine shafts to electrical cables and irrigation systems. In simple terms if something is buried underground, it constitutes an underground facility.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this motion for several reasons. First and most importantly, this motion has the potential to greatly improve safety in and around our construction sites. There have been several cases in recent years of situations where people were injured or killed when they accidentally struck a power or natural gas line. In many cases either the positions of these lines were not known to the victim or the lines were buried in a different location than originally indicated. Sometimes an individual had called ahead to get a map of the underground infrastructure only to hit a line anyway because the map was as proposed versus as built.

5:20

Second, having an up-to-date as-built map registry could dramatically reduce maintenance and repair costs in the long run. Repairing a major pipeline, for example, has the potential to cost millions of dollars and cause untold environmental harm.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 508 is not proposing that we go back and mark the location of our entire underground infrastructure. This would be impossible. After all, Alberta has over 1 million kilometres of underground pipelines, cables, and gas lines. The cost to locate and record an as-built map for all of these lines would unduly burden many industries throughout the province. Instead, Motion 508 is specifically requiring all future projects to be accurately recorded as built. With the advent of GPS surveying technology it is quick, it's easy, and it's affordable to mark down an underground facility as it is being constructed. This requirement does not place an unworkable or unaffordable burden on our businesses. Rather, this requirement is exactly what a regulation should be. It is a policy in place to ensure public safety and welfare without unduly hampering the effectiveness of our businesses.

In closing, I would like again to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert for bringing forward this motion. I believe this is a common-sense solution to a potentially dangerous problem. I applaud the

preparation and effort that went into drafting Motion 508 and strongly urge all members to stand with me in support of it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 508, presented by the hon. Member for St. Albert. I have some experience with the installation and identification of underground utilities, and I must say that any tasks that would suggest that we could readily and effectively identify all of the underground utilities that are out there certainly would be impossible, I think, to say the least.

Two very specific issues come to mind for me personally. One occurred in 1978, at the very start of my construction career. That involved the gas line strike in Mill Woods, where a propane line was hit with a trackhoe. In the resulting fire and explosion two guys were burned up, and we lost the natural gas service for the entire community of Mill Woods in the middle of the wintertime. Part of my role in that particular event was to go back in and start relighting furnaces the next day.

The second incident that comes to mind where identification would have been very useful was on one of the neighbouring farms to our place, where the fellow was subsoiling and had struck the main gas line some seven or eight times before he actually started to note that pieces of yellow plastic were surfacing up around the back end of his machine. That, too, occurred late in the year and resulted, I think, in the municipality or in the gas co-op having to replace about a mile or a mile and a half of two-inch gas line. I don't know how much gas he lost. He was, however, I would say, Mr. Speaker, very lucky that he wasn't smoking in the cab of his machine at the time.

On my own particular facility sites, where, I'm very proud to say, we've never had an inappropriate line strike, the first rule is that if you don't know, you explore. The best way to explore, Mr. Speaker, I would strongly suggest, is not with a fence post or an iron rod, but it is in fact with a device called a hydrovac, which is a wonderful tool for exposing relatively small areas of high-risk and high-exposure utility line. Now, the technology of hydrovacs, I think, was actually created in response to the fact that we don't have a good handle on and we certainly don't have a good spatial view of the locations of all of the utility services that are installed in the province.

Indeed, for many of the people in this room I would suggest that if you were to call Alberta One-Call to come and look at your own backyard at your house, you may in fact be surprised to find that while they can identify, certainly, the municipally and franchise operator installed utility lines, if you have, for example, run a barbecue line or have a power line running out to one of your sheds or, in my case, have a heated garage, you'd be quite surprised to find that, in fact, those lines do not appear anywhere. Those are, I think, probably the more common ones and the more unfortunate ones in this case. I don't know that the hon. member's motion would necessarily capture all of that information because a certain amount of work does occur under, shall we say, cover of darkness, and work occurs that we don't necessarily talk about or don't necessarily know where some of these things are.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, I'd be very pleased to say that passing Motion 508 certainly demonstrates our commitment to the safety of workers, and ultimately at the end of the day that's really what we're here to talk about. The mapping of utility sites from this moment forward I think would be a very positive move. It would, again, be very difficult for us to go back in time, but I think that a good time

to start would certainly be now. I think that the hon. member is on the right path here, and I would certainly thank him for having the foresight to bring this motion forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, do you wish to speak on the motion?

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join in debate on Motion 508, being brought forward by the hon. Member for St. Albert, and I would like to applaud him on his dedication to this matter. Motion 508 proposes to urge the government to require that all future underground facilities are precisely recorded as built and added to an inclusive underground facilities registry. The purpose of Motion 508 is to recommend that the government introduce legislation and policies to create a comprehensive and detailed registry of all underground facilities. This could range from pipelines to electrical cables and irrigation systems amongst a host of other vital buried facilities. In addition, all future underground projects would be required to plot out their exact locations and give them to a centralized mapping agency.

Mr. Speaker, mapping underground facilities could reduce the potential for costly repairs to underground infrastructure. The repair costs associated with the accidental disturbance of underground pipelines and cables can reach into the millions of dollars. Compound this with the lost productivity felt by the owners of such lines, either cable or pipe, and this cost skyrockets. Last year contractors on the outskirts of Jasper national park ruptured the main gas line to the town, disrupting services for many hours. A total of 1,300 residents were affected. With Motion 508 these types of accidents can be made more avoidable. Alberta relies on these vital lines for our gas, our phone, cable, and fibre optic connectivity. Any reductions of these services can severely hamper industry in this province as well as commerce.

With initiatives proposed within 508, we could see a reduction in construction accidents related to underground excavation and building. In November of 2009 a gas line was struck in Airdrie while a construction company was digging a basement for a new home. This led to the evacuation of a whole neighbourhood. If it had not been for the quick action of emergency personnel, the situation could have been fatal. Mr. Speaker, with the advent of new technology like GPS the as-built mapping of future underground utilities can be done efficiently and can be very cost-effective. In addition, passing Motion 508 would confirm the government of Alberta's commitment to the safety of our workers.

Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this motion and would like all members to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak briefly to this motion, a motion that I believe is well intended. I've listened with interest to all the members who've spoken here this evening and, I'm sure, equally well-intended comments relative to the motion that is before us.

I guess I'd want to start off by saying that this is a government that believes that less government, not more, and fewer regulations, not more, is what we should all be striving for. I know that the Member for St. Albert has made those views known on many occasions. I guess I've just got some real concerns with the motion as it's presented before the House today because it will result in more government, and it will result in more regulations and more constraints on doing business in this province.

5:30

Now, I come back to the way the motion is worded. It would be an undertaking that I think would be worth while to have this Assembly encourage the government to do some cost analysis as to what an undertaking like this might entail because there are significant costs associated with what is being proposed here today. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, every cost is passed on to the consumer at the end of the day. In fact, I think we just finished discussion on a particular bill that's before the House where we were talking about increased costs that have been put onto municipal bills, onto utility bills. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this particular initiative, if adopted the way it is worded, will add, I would believe, I don't know how much of a cost, but there would be a cost associated with it. I would feel much more comfortable in supporting this if we were encouraged to do a cost-benefit analysis before we pass the motion that requires that all of these initiatives take place.

Now, it's been mentioned on a couple of occasions by a couple of speakers, including the mover of this particular motion, that there have been experiences that have led to this, and there's no doubt. I know that just about any one of us can pick up the phone on a given day or sign on to our computer and it may not be working. The likelihood is that somebody has cut a line. You know, Alberta is criss-crossed with lines and cables throughout the province, and when you consider how much digging and how much construction and all of the activities go on, really the numbers of instances that are severe, those that have been highlighted in this Assembly today, on a percentage basis are actually pretty small.

Our first-call system actually does work very well, and I would suggest that in most cases when you've got a serious incident that occurs, it is very much because somebody has not used the first-call initiative. I agree that there are times when you would have a situation where something may be missed, and that clearly could happen, but generally the onus is on the person that is planning to go into the ground. If you're planning to go into the ground, you have some obligations and some responsibilities. I think our system works very well today considering, as I say, the extensive network of pipelines and cables that exist in this province.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I know that the mover of this particular motion is very clear about the fact that we're not looking retroactively, that we're looking at the future. It's going to result, I think, in a bit of confusion. If you can put yourself now in a 10-year-out plan, if you're 10 years from now and you're deciding you need to dig: "Do I need to do the first-call, which would cover anything that happened before 2010, or do I rely on the registry, which is post 2010?"

I think that there are a lot of what I would call unanswered questions relative to this particular motion, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, I would feel much more comfortable if the motion encouraged government to do a cost-benefit analysis of this particular undertaking. I cannot support in this Assembly this afternoon the motion as it is written here today.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak on the motion?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the motion.

Mr. Allred: May I close?

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, hon. member, of course you have time to close.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a few

comments. There are a number of points that have been made. Certainly, there are means to locate underground facilities. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity mentioned witching. That's a very crude method, but it works sometimes. There are M-Scopes, there's ground-penetrating radar, and there's also the hydrovac. None of those are a hundred per cent accurate. The only way you can accurately locate it is to actually dig it up. Hydrovacking comes very close to that, but some utilities are very difficult to find. In fact, some utility companies refuse to join Alberta One-Call. Alberta One-Call doesn't even have a record of them. So the poor developer or anybody searching for a line doesn't even know it's there.

I would like to commend all of the major oil and gas companies and the municipalities, most of whom have fairly deep utilities, for very accurate records. Those are not the ones that are causing the problem. The ones that are causing the problems are the shallow utilities and very often, as I said earlier, the dangerous utilities: the gas lines and the electrical conduits. If somebody strikes a sewer line, all that you have is a bad smell for a day. If somebody hits a gas line, somebody may die, or there may be major property damage. If somebody strikes a communication cable, a whole business district could be out of communication for a whole day, and you know how we rely on communications these days.

The hon. Minister of Energy raised a number of points that I'd like to address. Yes, I certainly am a proponent of less government and less regulation. I readily admit that, and I strongly agree with that. This, however, is the type of regulation that we need, the type of regulation that will protect the public. Yes, it's going to impose more costs on the utility companies, but it's a cost of doing business. In comparison to the capital cost of that line and the insulation of that line, it's a minuscule cost. It's a minuscule cost compared to the cost of going out and relocating that line or replacing it if it gets damaged.

Yes, it would be great to do a cost analysis, but I think it's very preliminary in doing a cost analysis. As I understand it, a motion before the House is really just sort of a proposal in principle. If it's approved and the government wishes to go ahead with it, then we do the cost analysis and determine what the costs are.

A lot of the infrastructure for the filing is in place. We have a cadastral mapping system. All it needs is another layer. There may be a small fee required to record it. Yes, that's admitted. But this is such an important issue. We're talking about standardizing our GIS information system through the land-use framework and through the capital region plan and things like that. This is very vital information that needs to be in those GIS systems.

One major problem we have, again, concerning the registry is that there is no registry of incidents. It's very difficult to determine how many incidents have occurred. I was quite surprised by all of the speakers today that referred to incidents, many of which I've never heard of. I've heard of quite a large number myself through personal stories that have been related to me, et cetera. There is no standard registry of incidents, but there have been an awful lot of them over the years. Some of them have been very, very serious and have caused, as I indicated, major property damage or death.

Mr. Speaker, I think the bottom line in this is that we have more buried infrastructure in the province of Alberta, and we're going to have a lot more in the coming years. That is assured. We need to take a step now; we should have taken a step 70 years ago, but we didn't. Now we need to take a step and put in place a registry to record all of those utilities from now on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The chair shall now call the question on the motion as moved by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 lost]

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, may I ask for some clarification?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you wish to ask for clarification?

Mr. Chase: I don't know whether someone else's auditory skills are better than mine, but that sounded rather close. I don't honestly know where we stand. I do not want to take 10 minutes out of this Assembly's time to have the vote recorded.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the Speaker has the ears, and the Speaker already ruled by the voice vote. If you are wanting to do otherwise, that's your discretion, but the voice vote said defeated.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent of the Legislature to go back to the motion that was put on the floor by the Member for Battle River-Wainwright to deal with Bill 203 and the amendment that was put forward to send it to policy field committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you are indicating that you want to go back to private members' bills?

Mr. Fawcett: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. We need unanimous consent on that.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 203

Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010

(continued)

[Debate adjourned April 19]

The Deputy Speaker: There was a point of order, so we'll continue with the point of order. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Point of Order Amendment to Bill 203

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the point of order was against me, I'm pleased to rise to make some comments. The hon. member across the way rose on a point of order without reference and still has not made any reference. Still, in the suggestion that I made, I had incorrectly cited the committee that we were hoping to refer this to, but I immediately apologized at my first available opportunity for misciting the inappropriate committee and also cited that there were other reasons: members still wanted to debate this motion.

The private member across the way, who had another amendment

himself, did not put a referral date in his amendment, which was unacceptable, I believe, by the standing orders of this House.

So there were many reasons for defeating the amendment, and there was absolutely no intention of deliberately misleading this House; I simply read the wrong sheet of paper. Without a citation I'd suggest that there is absolutely no point of order and that we should move on to immediate business.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the point of order.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To try and facilitate some progress, I believe that the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright has the best of intentions. I believe also that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the best of intentions. Rather than, you know, two wrongs not making a right, what is important is that we, I believe, are all in agreement – I have spoken with the representative from Airdrie-Chestermere – on moving this forward to the Standing Committee on Community Services. However we can best achieve that process I would suggest we move forward on. Let's not assign blame; let's move forward, please.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member on the point of order?

Seeing none, the chair shall put his thoughts together here. As the chair understands the point of order, it is on the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright and saying that it's out of order. In the chair's view, the amendment proposes a different question. In fact, when I read the two amendments, the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright introduced an

amendment that included the date. So it's different. It is correct that there could have been a subamendment proposed, but there was not.

Looking at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 532-534, especially at 532, if the point of order is that the member was misleading the House, then the chair would caution the member that the charge of deliberately misleading the House – it's the chair's view that this is a dispute between the members and not a point of order. I would say that the amendments are different and things are in order. So there's no point of order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: On the amendment, which is where we're at. If I correctly understand the amendment – and I want to make sure I have it right – it's that this Bill 203 would be sent to the Standing Committee on Community Services. Is that correct? In that case, I would like to call the question, Mr. Speaker, on the amendment, and then we'll deal with the bill as amended.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other hon. member wishing to speak on the amendment, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 203 carried]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's a referral motion. There is no further debate. That being the case, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:48 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 20, 2010

Issue 30

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. David Mulroney, Canada's ambassador to the People's Republic of China. China is Alberta's second-largest export market. We share a vibrant and multisector trading relationship. Most recently China has become another key investor in our province's energy industry.

Alberta is very pleased with the strong working relationship we have with the Canadian embassy in Beijing. Ambassador Mulroney and his staff do an admirable job in promoting Canada and Canada's priorities in this very important marketplace. We appreciate all the good work as well as their co-operation in the Alberta China office, which is co-located in the embassy.

I had the pleasure of spending some time with the ambassador around noon today. His knowledge and his commitment to helping Alberta and our interests are very admirable, and his knowledge of China and the Asian marketplace is very impressive. He's seated in your gallery. I would now ask our honoured guest to please rise and receive the tremendous warm welcome from this Legislature.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a grade 7 class from Menorah Academy, who will be here later. I just want to get their name on the record in *Hansard*. They'll be here with their teacher, Steve McGowan, from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. They've been taking a tour of the Legislature and will be experiencing the excitement of question period a little bit later. I'd ask that we give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly before they get here.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of young, enthusiastic constituents. There are 80 grade 6 students from Fox Run school in Sylvan Lake. They're seated in I think both galleries along with their teachers and parent helpers. One of the classes is a French immersion class. I always enjoy it when constituents of mine tour the Legislature and sit in on question period. I think it's even more important for our young Albertans to attend, and it is always a pleasure to welcome them here as they will be our leaders of tomorrow. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members here seven very outstanding students who are visiting us from the Aurora Learning Foundation along with two of their teachers, Barb Raymond and Jessica Skinner. This is one of the many outstanding schools in my constituency, and I'm so proud that they are here. Could I please ask all of you to rise in the gallery and the rest of us to greet them with a thunderous applause for the Aurora Learning Foundation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two very special people, two of my bosses from Athabasca-Redwater, Dawn Minns and Sheena Pacholok. I'm very blessed that these two ladies run my constituency office. I've always found that if you want to be successful, you surround yourself with the best people you possibly can, and I'm blessed with that. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three special people, and I'll ask them to stand as I say their names: Mary Phillipo, Janessa DeCoste, and Shirley Johnston. Mary and Janessa are both employees of the Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Calgary, and they have been for a total of five years. They are in the Edmonton area for training and upgrading at the Stollery children's hospital. Accompanying them is my lovely wife, Shirley, of 36 years. I'd like you to give them the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 11 volunteer first aid responders from St. John Ambulance. Each of these volunteers served over a hundred hours in 2009. I'll be discussing their efforts more in depth in a member's statement shortly. For now I would like to call upon these volunteers to rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. With over 100 hours we have Alison Craik, Michael Halliwell, Jason Raymond, Dan-Christian Yeung; with over 200 hours we have Monique Romeo, Kyle Young, Jessica van der Ahé, and Ingrid Sebes; with 387 volunteer hours we have Mr. David Romeo; with 512 hours, Melanie Peters; finally, with a remarkable 638 hours we have Mr. Dean Smith. I would ask them all to receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Balwinder Singh Fidda. Balwinder is a recipient of the prestigious Arjuna award, the highest award for an amateur athlete bestowed by the government of India, for his accomplishment in kabaddi. Albertans may recall the sport of kabaddi when it was showcased for

the first time as part of the centennial celebration right here in Edmonton during the 2005 Masters Games, which was hosted by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, who was then the minister of community development. Balwinder is seated today in the members' gallery and is joined by a number of my constituents. Please rise as I call out your names: Mr. Jarnail Singh, Mr. Charn Dhalliwal, Mr. Parmjit Sanghera, Mr. Laddi Padda, Mr. Karamjit Gill, Mr. Paul Atwal, and Mr. Tony Thind. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

St. John Ambulance Volunteers

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak more about the outstanding St. John Ambulance volunteers I just introduced. Volunteers have such an enormous presence in this province. Each year approximately 1.2 million Albertans volunteer their time and energy for various events and organizations across the province.

The volunteers with us today from St. John Ambulance have all individually volunteered as first responders for at least 100 hours this year. In 2009 St. John first aid response teams provided over 6,000 hours of direct first aid coverage and treated some 342 patients. This number of hours does not reflect the thousands of hours volunteers commit to learning and maintaining their medical first responder skills necessary to provide care.

As a former health and safety professional myself I am so thankful that we have this level of injury support here in Alberta. These skilled and dedicated volunteers provide a valuable and essential service to our communities. I want to thank all those who volunteer for St. John and, in particular, those who are here with us today. Your dedication, hard work, and community-minded spirit help countless Albertans in need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Occupational Health and Safety

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 28 Albertans will recognize the National Day of Mourning for workers who have been killed, injured, or developed diseases at the workplace. Sadly, the Auditor General's latest report shows that this government has done little to offer workers a safer environment.

The report condemned this government for lax enforcement of occupational health and safety rules, finding that 63 employers repeatedly broke those rules and got away with it without punishment. One hundred and ten noncompliance orders from OH and S inspectors were suspended without justification; others were never followed up at all. Some of these bad employers even continued to receive rebates off their WCB premiums despite injury rates three to four times the provincial average. To make matters worse, the government won't publicize the names of bad employers with bad safety records, keeping workers from making informed decisions about where to seek employment. As usual, this government rewards incompetence.

1:40

Eight years ago the Official Opposition proposed an amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act which would have forced the minister to publish the names of employers with the best and worst safety records in the province. That amendment would have

made it a lot harder for some of the employers mentioned in the Auditor General's report to escape their moral duty to their workers and their responsibilities under the law.

The AG's report also revealed that out of 5,700 new cancer cases identified yearly in this province, as many as 760 could be work related. This government should immediately commission a thorough study of the effects of workplace carcinogens on Alberta workers. Furthermore, this government should also legislate mandatory joint work-site health and safety committees. Alberta is one of the few provinces without one. Finally, this administration must recognize the rights of paid farm workers by protecting them with access to workers' compensation and coverage under OH and S. Alberta workers deserve protection.

As we prepare for the day of mourning, I hope this government will at long last take action. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Safety and Underground Facilities

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April has been designated in many jurisdictions across the continent as digging month. No, this does not mean that you should go out and dig your garden, but it does mean that if you are going to be digging for whatever reason, you need to take proper precautions to ensure that all buried facilities in the vicinity of your proposed excavation are marked and exposed if you will be digging in close proximity to those facilities.

Alberta has a very comprehensive and complex underground infrastructure that provides essential electricity, natural gas, communications, water, and sewer to our homes, businesses, and industries. The inadvertent failure of one of these buried lines can be costly to repair, cause considerable inconvenience, and cost millions of dollars in lost production. In addition, the person or operator who strikes one of these facilities can be exposed to serious injury or death from explosion or electrocution.

The Alberta Damage Prevention Council is dedicated to minimizing damage caused to underground facilities from unauthorized contacts and is mandated to promote safe working environments for all agencies involved in development and construction. When an individual or organization is planning any ground disturbance, they must contact Alberta One-Call in advance of construction to have all buried pipes, cables, and other facilities marked on the ground to ensure that they do not come into contact with those facilities, causing damage to the facility and/or danger to themselves. There is no cost for this service; costs are borne by the individual utility companies.

As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, or it's better to be safe than sorry. Be safe: call Alberta One-Call before you dig.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Workplace Health and Safety Awards

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 12 I attended the workplace health and safety awards. Eight employers were honoured for their work in making their workplace safe for their employees. This year's winners in the category of workplace health and safety innovation were Northern Platforms Ltd. for the NP sampler, a device that allows the worker to gather a sample from a truck-trailer without climbing on top, and Colter Energy Services Inc. for the wellhead access safety platform, which allows safe work during wellhead completion.

This year's health and safety leaders were Edmonton Exchanger and Champion Technologies. Both are organizations that lead their industry with top-notch health and safety management practices and proven injury and illness prevention records.

Health and safety performance improvement winners that reduced their workplace injuries and illnesses are Pollard Banknote, Swamp Mats Inc., Van Houtte Coffee Services Inc., and St. Michael's Health Group. I am very proud that St. Michael's Health Group is from my riding of Edmonton-Manning, Mr. Speaker. The names of the employees at St. Michael's who received awards are Ed Hladunewich, the board chairperson; Kay Willekes; and Lynne Connelly. They employ 320 people and are a great asset to the community.

All of these companies are worthy of recognition because they are good examples for other employers to be able to make the entire province safer for working Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Democracy and MLA Representation

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to sit in this Legislative Assembly representing my constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. It's ultimately the principle of our democracy. However, yesterday I was visiting senior citizens in my constituency and having a coffee with some of the seniors. A senior citizen of many years, late in her life, brought me two articles that she read in both the Calgary and Edmonton newspapers, and she said she often reads the *Hansard*, which I complimented her on. It concerned her, she said, that democracy could potentially be in peril. She said: "It's an Alberta value. It's a value where MLAs get freely elected to come and represent the voices that elect them in their individual constituencies." She thanked each and every one of the men and women who serve that value.

However, she asked: when does an MLA say no to the pressures that perhaps are put on them from the discomfort of deviating from an Alberta value? She says that MLAs will go back to their constituencies in not too long to listen to their constituents. However, she said: are they willing to brave the future relative to the discontent they are asked to bring to this Legislature? She said: few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues in order to speak out on behalf of this democracy that we represent, our constituents. She said: I thank the men and women who have not forgotten that Alberta value in representing the constituencies and the electorate that they elected in the very home of the constituencies that we represent.

This lady is over 80 years old, and I thank her. It's a reminder to us all for that important Alberta value.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

George Lamouche

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During this National Volunteer Week we recognize the contributions of individuals who generously give their time and energy to our communities. Today I want to recognize a special individual from my constituency who has not only contributed tremendously to our community in his lifetime but has succeeded in reaching a remarkable milestone. In his 101 years Mr. George Lamouche has been one of the integral movers and shakers in dealing with Métis settlement independence. An elder from Gift Lake, George provided sage advice and volun-

teered endless hours of his time to move along the process which made the Métis settlement accord a reality.

While his volunteer dedication deserves recognition in itself, his greatest achievement is probably a more personal one, his family. George and his wife, Maria Ward, raised 13 children and many of their grandchildren as well. If the secret to aging gracefully truly is to never lose our childish enthusiasm, then George has the right idea. He has a remarkable 202 grandchildren, numerous great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren.

With family and friends at his side this centenarian celebrated his 101st birthday on March 11, 2010, at the Gift Lake Métis settlement. To live past a century seems impossible. To reach 101 years and still have the wit, kindness, and determination to push for things that Métis people need deserves recognition. Congratulations, George, for reaching an incredible 101 years still jiggling and for all that you have done in your life.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Did the hon. member say 202 grandchildren?

Ms Calahasen: Yes. He was prolific, Mr. Speaker.

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're not quite at 1:50, but I've received a letter that I'd like to share with all Members of the Legislative Assembly. The letter is addressed to me, and it comes from the retiring pages.

Mr. Speaker,

As another session comes to a close, we face the regrettable reality that many of us will not be returning in the fall. We would like to express our gratitude for the wonderful opportunity we have been provided to serve in the Legislative Assembly.

We would like to sincerely thank you, Mr. Speaker, the Table Officers, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the women in [Room] 315, the Security staff, and all the other staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. Of course, we would be remiss not to thank all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly as well. All of these exceptional individuals have contributed to the tremendous experiences we have each enjoyed.

Being on the floor of the Chamber has presented a unique perspective that very few others will ever experience. The knowledge and understanding that we have developed about the institution of Parliament and the functioning of democracy has been invaluable. Furthermore, the enriching experience of working alongside a diverse group of people, each dedicated to improving our province, means we leave as more informed individuals with insight that will undoubtedly assist us in our future endeavors.

1:50

The relationships we have forged, the memories we have created, and the skills we have developed are priceless. As we have grown in this environment, our appreciation of this opportunity has grown with us. From our encounters with the influential men and women who help shape our province to firsthand participation in important ceremonies, we will take these experiences with us for the rest of our lives.

It has been a great honour and privilege to be able to work with everyone in this Assembly, and for this, we are greatly appreciative.

Yours sincerely,

Conor Smyth, Justin Forth, Andrea Bailer, Alexandra Bennett, Alexandra Candler, Abigail Huyser-Wierenga, Edward Davies, Rayleen Nicolajsen, Motiejus Osipovas.

Isn't that a wonderful letter? [Standing ovation]

Ladies and gentlemen, hon. members, I'd like to ask the Deputy Speaker to make a brief presentation.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Deputy Speaker I would like to draw to the Assembly's attention that we will send off nine wonderful pages at the end of this session. They are Abigail Huyser-Wierenga, Alexandra Candler, Alexandra Bennett, Andrea Bailer, Conor Smyth, Rayleen Nicolajsen, Edward Davies, Justin Forth, Motiejus Osipovas. I ask you to join me in recognizing the great efforts of our pages, who daily show patience and understanding of our many demands. They carry out the task with attention to duty and in good humour and suffer some very late nights to work with us.

On behalf of all members I present to each departing page a memento gift. These gifts are from the personal contributions of every member of our Assembly. Along with the gifts are our best wishes. We are honoured to have our pages work with us in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Now I would like to ask our Deputy Chair of Committees to hand the nine gifts to Justin Forth, the Speaker's page, representing the nine departing pages.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Accounts Committee

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Public Accounts Committee is one of the most important ways taxpayers have to gain a public accounting of how their hard-earned money is being spent. Given the public outcry over the recent decision to introduce veto power over the chair of Public Accounts, we have heard that your government is reconsidering this change. To the Premier: can the Premier confirm that this change will be reversed at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee is a committee of the Legislature. It does not report to the Premier or to government. It reports to this Legislature. It is within the committee to make any recommendations or changes that they see fit with respect to the operation of the Public Accounts Committee.

Dr. Swann: Well, then, given that the Premier's own House leader said that this action was taken to slap the wrist of the chair of Public Accounts, will the Premier reverse that decision?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the committee itself sets its rules and guidelines, and any change that they may want to make to the operation of that committee is within the purview of the committee.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, then, I would like to ask the Premier, would he say yes or no? Was he involved in that decision?

Mr. Stelmach: If it's in the purview of the committee, I won't be involved because I'm not a member of the committee.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Water Allocation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hearing from across Alberta that this province needs a plan to help Albertans with water

shortages now and into the future. I'm concerned that this government will continue with its fire, ready, aim philosophy, simply reacting to crisis instead of planning for it. If I were Premier, I would have implemented a proper water management framework, including accurate measurements, conservation, and storage in case of emergency, with human consumption the first priority. To the Premier: given that this is shaping up to be one of the worst droughts in years, how will this government's reaction be different than it has been in the past?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right: we are heading into one of the driest years on record, perhaps. Perhaps. To those in the agriculture industry, obviously, a concern. We haven't lost a crop as yet in April ever in my memory, but we have to be careful as we proceed. There are some issues with respect to pasture for cattle. I would submit that every Albertan has a responsibility to conserve water. It's not only good for the environment but in the end it's also good for their pocketbook.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is facing a drought now, how can the Premier continue to dither implementing a new water use strategy?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government has been very open and sincere in our commitment to bring forward a water allocation policy that not only respects the historical water rights that individuals have but that provides for adequate opportunities for increased population and economic development. We remain committed to bring that plan forward this year.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, I'd like to put this question to the Premier because the province is looking for leadership, Mr. Speaker. The continuing drought will mean more people competing for less water. How can the Premier continue to defend an antiquated first in time, first in right principle that removes power from Albertans to control the use of their own water? To the Premier.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, first in time, first in right is a long-standing tradition in law in this province. As I indicated, the issue that we need to deal with is: how do we allow for increased population, increased pressures on water supply and still respect the long-standing traditional rights of licence holders? That is the essence of the water allocation review which is upcoming.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Electoral Boundaries Commission

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this government has undermined the authority of Public Accounts, disparaged the office of the Auditor General, and is now submitting its own 200-page report to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Clearly, in the name of transparency and accountability it was inappropriate for the government to present a position when it has no reason to do so other than blatant political interference. To the Premier: why did the government, which does not represent a constituency, submit a proposal to the Electoral Boundaries Commission?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Boundaries Commission is an arm's-length commission, and all MLAs have an opportunity

to present to the commission the views and the wishes of their constituents. In this particular case what had happened is that two members presented to the electoral commission the collated, collected presentations from what MLAs heard from their constituents in terms of some of the splitting of particular community leagues, et cetera, and that came forward yesterday.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, who decided the Deputy Premier should present a 200-page submission to the Electoral Boundaries Commission? Did this come from the Premier, one of the political ministers, or the Tory party executive? Who?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this is about something that I did last night, first of all, I want to say that I will not apologize to anyone about doing my job. There was a line in one of the documents that was submitted with the compilation of all of the MLA submissions that did say "Government," and I apologize for that. My letter to the commission clearly indicated that this was a compilation of what our members had heard from their constituents. I also made it very clear in my opening comments that it was exactly that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the hon. Deputy Premier for that apology and recognition of his error.

I'd ask the Premier: why does this government continually attempt to undermine and disparage the institutions set up exclusively to ensure accountability, transparency, and democracy in our province?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there was no interference, and there was no attempt by anyone on this side of the House to interfere with the decisions of the commission. You know, sometimes these allegations come from some members of the opposition. I note that there were a number of opposition members that made presentations, and I know that it was done on Legislative Assembly letterhead. It's funny how we have a letter . . .

Mr. Horner: On my letterhead.

Mr. Stelmach: . . . on his letterhead, yet the opposition can use their own letterheads and that's okay. That's fine for them, but it's not fine for this member.

Mr. Anderson: Well, I didn't use any letterhead.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Electoral Boundaries Commission heard submissions from several individuals. One of these was a presentation authored by the Deputy Premier. This 207-page document contains, in his words, "recommendations made by Government Caucus in response to the [Electoral Boundaries Commission] Interim Report." In our view, the submission of this document by the government calls into question the integrity of what is supposed to be a fair and nonpartisan process. To the Deputy Premier: why would he place the commission in the untenable position of having to respond to a partisan submission from the very government that appointed it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, with the last boundary commission, which was in place, I believe, in 2004, many MLAs, myself included, made presentations after the interim report was put out so that the boundary commission could hear from people who represent constituents in those ridings, to hear what the response and the feedback was. Last night my colleague and I presented what was a compilation of the same kinds of things from members of this

Legislature on our side that have been out talking to their constituents. We compiled it and put it into a binder for the ease of the commission's work that they have to do.

Mr. Anderson: You're the Deputy Premier, not some backbench MLA.

To the same minister. Given that the presentation came from the office of the Deputy Premier and minister of advanced education – that's you – and given that government resources are not to be used for partisan purposes, why would this Deputy Premier use government resources to prepare and submit what is obviously a very partisan document? Your letterhead, sir.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the letterhead of the leader of the NDP with an address to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I have a copy of a letter from the Member for Calgary-McCall constituency to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I have a copy from the office of the mayor of Grande Prairie in response to the interim report. The point that I'm making here is that I did write a letter on my letterhead as the MLA for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. I also made it very clear to the commission that this was a compilation of what other members have brought forward to ease the members of the commission's work.

Mr. Anderson: Keep digging, Minister.

To the Premier: since his government and Deputy Premier have placed the commission in a very compromising position, will he do the honourable thing and ask that the submission by his Deputy Premier be withdrawn so the commission can conduct its important work without undue political pressure and influence from this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the commission is independent. It is chaired by a very respected Provincial Court judge, retired. It has two members appointed by the government and two appointed by the loyal opposition. They are all members of integrity. They're there to hear the submissions and make the decisions based on what they hear from Albertans, and in some cases various MLAs brought forward their constituent concerns to that commission. That commission is neutral, and it will make the best decision in the best interests of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Combustion Technology in the Oil Sands

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the oil industry has a new plan for the oil sands. They want to set them on fire. That's right. Excelsior Energy wants to set underground fires in Alberta's oil sands as a way to liquefy underground bitumen so that it can be pumped to the surface. This land is rich with oil and coal, and setting it on fire could result in an environmental and economic catastrophe with grave implications. Will the Minister of Energy put a stop to this ludicrous application now, before industry sets the oil sands on fire?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what this guy is talking about. You know, I do have to come back, though. I'm not sure who this member is getting his information from, but I can tell you he's not getting it from his union leaders, that typically want to support this hon. member and this party, because those members of

those particular trade unions want to see development in the oil sands so they have jobs, not like these two sitting in the corner over there.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the minister states the obvious, and that is that he doesn't know what's going on. Given that I have in my hands a release from Excelsior Energy that says that they wish to deploy a proprietary in situ combustion bitumen recovery process at its Hangingstone oil property, can the minister tell us whether or not he is prepared to allow this company to start underground fires in the oil sands and whether or not he's considered the implications of this process or whether he is unaware of that as well?

Mr. Liepert: What I assume is happening here is that a private-sector company – and let's be clear in this House, Mr. Speaker; there's incredible innovation in technology that is being deployed in our oil sands today. We have a company that has made it known that it would like to apply to the Energy Resources Conservation Board, which examines all of these technologies to determine whether or not it's in the best interest of Albertans. I would suggest that this fear that this member is trying to spread is way premature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the only thing I'm afraid of is that this minister doesn't know what's going on, I ask him whether or not he will use his authority under section 18(1) and 18(2) of the Oil Sands Conservation Act to prevent the approval of such a scheme, that could place not only the environment but Alberta's future economic prosperity at risk, or whether he's unaware of his own act as well.

Mr. Liepert: What I will commit to, Mr. Speaker, is to let the process unfold as it should. There is an independent Energy Resources Conservation Board, which has a lot more expertise in examining these kinds of proposals than that particular member has, and I would trust them before I'd trust him.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Highway 63

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I drove highway 63 today, like the 40 or 50 times I do. Some citizens asked me this yesterday for the Minister of Transportation. The question that was asked by citizens was this. Why were work crews removed from highway 63 in the Grassland area, where no work has been seen being done? As well, not one piece of equipment for over 450 kilometres has been seen. Where is the equipment? Where is the work?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has been around here for years, and he pays no attention to what's going on. If he absolutely knew what was going on – we went in there. Actually, we worked 24 hours a day for a while because we had to vacate it during the migrating birds situation, and we can't go back in till July 15.

Mr. Boutilier: Given that the migrating birds are getting in front of the 400-tonne trucks that were there last year, that the member took off the road, I have to ask the question: do you really believe, through the chair, that migrating birds are the reason why you're not doing work on highway 63 for the workers that travel that highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, now I'm going to add one more thing for the hon. member: it's also calving season for the caribou, and we're not allowed to be in there during calving season for the caribou.

Mr. Boutilier: I have to ask: given these comments about animals, I want to know if the Minister of Transportation is actually running a zoo.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that's about how intelligent this hon. member is. We have to follow the laws and the rules and regulations in Alberta. Absolutely, when we are told that we have to shut down our construction – we're widening a road – because we're in the area where we have protected species of caribou, we can't go in there. I'd love to be there doing the work. We work 24 hours a day for this member's constituents, and we will do it again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Water Allocation Licence Amendments

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are facing real challenges for long-term sustainability of water for human consumption, including drinking water and for agriculture and industry use, but the minister is going ahead with changing the policy on the irrigation districts to allow redesignation of water, something that will remove any need to consult with government or the public forevermore. To the Minister of Environment: given that this is a precedent-setting decision, does this signal that a decision has already been made on the future of the entire water allocation system?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it certainly does not. In this particular instance there was a policy that was established about a year ago that allowed for very, very restricted reallocation of the licence within an irrigation district's purview so that they can continue to provide the needs to municipalities and to small industries within their area where there is no access to water. This is simply the next step, an application under that policy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister: what exactly are the circumstances, the criteria in which it is appropriate – the minister's own words – to allow irrigation districts to redesignate water, and will he table that criteria in this House?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'll be more than happy to table it. It's a policy that was developed in consultation with stakeholders, as I said, about a year ago. I don't remember the exact timing. This particular application is under that policy, and it will be considered. There is opportunity for the public to have input, to make comment, and we're going through that process as we speak.

Ms Blakeman: Well, according to his remarks in *Hansard* from April 13 on page 725 he talks about changing the policy. "We will be changing that policy." Now he's referring to a policy that has already been changed. Could the minister clarify his comments, please?

Mr. Renner: I'd be more than happy to. At the time that the member asked me the question, I couldn't recall whether or not the policy had been actually finalized. I knew that discussions had taken

place. What the member is referring to is an application under that policy. That policy is in place now, and as I indicated, I'll be providing that member with a copy of the policy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday an hon. member raised questions that successful bidders in the Alberta Health Services RFP for ophthalmology surgical services are trying to get out of their contracts. These questions cause concerns for the public and, in particular, my constituents. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Has the minister been able to find any evidence to support these allegations made by the hon. member, and are any of the contracted surgical facilities trying to get out of those contracts?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence to that effect whatsoever. I'm just short of asking the member from the Wildrose Alliance to apologize for those false rumours, those very, very hurtful allegations that they were making. The fact is that Alberta Health Services immediately contacted every one of the four winning-bid facilities, and all of them unanimously said that they are fulfilling their contracts. They will be there as specified in the RFP. I hope the Alliance takes a lesson from that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East has the floor.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: does the Mitchell surgical centre, one of the successful bidders in Calgary, have enough capacity to provide services even though they're undergoing expansion right now?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services is very confident that the number of eye surgeries that were allocated to the winning-bid facilities can and will be accomplished inside the facilities as they exist today. It's true that there are some expansions going on, but that is not related directly to the way in which the RFP was confirmed nor to the way in which the contracts were awarded. There is every confidence in the system. Let's be very clear. The RFP, such as it was conducted and such as it was awarded, was based on current capacity at the time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the minister address any issue related to those facilities that were unsuccessful in the latest RFPs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that will be done very soon, as I indicated in the House a few days ago. We will follow through with that because very soon along with Alberta Health Services I will be announcing the second blitz, as was promised when we announced the first blitz for additional surgeries back in February. During this second blitz, that will come out very soon, there will be a variety of surgeries, and that will include hundreds of eye surgeries. Those facilities that won the bid or those facilities who didn't win the bid can be given every consideration under that process for surgeries in their facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Wetland Policy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's wetlands compensation guide is weak: weak systems, no monitoring, no controls. The ministry has created a system with one organization responsible for restoring wetlands destroyed by development, and according to the Auditor General the Department of Environment still can't manage to monitor restoration standards or how taxpayer dollars are spent on the program. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why does the minister continue to put Alberta's wetlands restoration at risk by applying this weak, lacklustre approach?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is inaccurate in saying that the province has allocated all of the wetland restoration to one organization. The fact of the matter is that there is only one organization because no others have come forward. If they come forward and can demonstrate their ability to reconstruct and to redevelop wetlands, then the opportunity is there for any others. Our wetlands policy is one that, as the member well knows, is in the process of being updated to reflect the current needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, given that the Auditor General has stated that there are no controls in place, no one in the ministry responsible for monitoring wetlands restoration, and processes in the ministry's outdated guide are not even being applied, how can the minister determine if the current processes are effective?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we do have a responsibility for ensuring that the dollars that flow through to organizations such as Ducks Unlimited are fulfilling the requirements. I think what the Auditor General was getting to is: is there a direct correlation value for the dollar? Frankly, that's difficult because it is more expensive in some locations than others. You have to buy the land and do the restoration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: when will the minister release an updated wetlands policy for the whole province that includes a no net loss policy? Mr. Minister, children who were born at the time the current interim policy went into place have now graduated from high school.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've answered that question numerous times in the House. The updated wetlands policy is under construction as we speak, and there's a commitment on my part to bring forward that policy for further consultation as soon as we've got it complete.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Pediatrics for Kids in Care Program

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues and I on the front lines have had the misfortune of seeing much suffering on the front lines. The most vulnerable in our society are children.

Children and youth coming into the care of the provincial government often do so from unfortunate circumstances which contribute to their poor physical, emotional, and mental health. My first question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Are the children and youth being properly assessed by the appropriate health care professionals after they come into care in order to ensure that they receive the necessary wraparound services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year and a half ago the Calgary child and family service authority in partnership with Alberta Health Services, the Southern Alberta Child & Youth Health Network, and community pediatrics came together and established a program known as pediatrics for kids in care. It's an excellent program. We have 15 pediatricians in Calgary who see children and youth that come into our care within eight to 12 weeks, which is quite remarkable. I want you to know that it's the first of its kind in Canada, and it has been highly successful.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. We strive for evidence based on outcomes-based decisions. You speak of successes. What performance measurements does your ministry have in place to evaluate the outcomes of this initiative?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the program is a year and a half old. I can tell you that there have been over 600 children within that time that have received assessments from pediatricians. The assessments cover a wide range of that child's health care needs, but more importantly that assessment then becomes the foundation for a health care plan where there are family physicians and pediatricians, the case worker, support workers, different people involved with the health care plan. The best outcome, I think, is that the emotional and physical needs of the child are being met and they're being unified . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

2:20

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. I'm glad that you've helped the vulnerable children in Calgary through this program. When do the children and youth in care in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark as well as other constituencies in the capital health region and rural Alberta get their health care needs met?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, one program that this member might be interested and maybe even participate in because he is a physician is an excellent one through the Edmonton child and family services authority. That program is for high-risk youth, where a physician will go to the emergency shelter and look after the health care needs of the youth on-site. Also, with the Stollery children's hospital pediatrics we co-locate our staff there. Also, this pediatrics for kids in care program is being modelled for other areas of the province.

Special-needs Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, funding cutbacks are causing boards to eliminate segregated programs for special-needs students. This government's flawed school closure process has targeted a school

for complex learners in Calgary-Varsity. With concerns growing, the government can only gesture to a review of special education two years in the making. Parents, students, teachers, and staff need answers now. To the minister: what does the minister have to say to parents concerned that special-needs students are being pushed into traditional classroom settings prematurely?

Mr. Hancock: It would be quite inappropriate to do so, Mr. Speaker. We have a special-needs review process which has been under way for some time. It's been under way for some time because it's a very important area. We've had extensive consultation. We're now working to do the collaborative processes between health, education, children's services, and then we'll work again with school boards and stakeholders and parents to design the implementation process. This is something that's particularly important, that every student be included in the education process, and it needs to be done right.

Mr. Chase: Special-needs funding has also been frozen for two years. Given the developments in the Calgary public and Edmonton Catholic boards will the minister release any details about his plan for special-needs education, or will he continue to hide behind his ongoing review?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we are actively engaged in the process of getting internal policy approval, and as soon as I have approval to move forward, we will be obviously including the same people and more who were included in the discussions leading up to the setting the directions task force report. That will happen, I hope, very quickly.

Let me be perfectly clear. Nothing is going to change overnight. This is a change in culture relative to moving from a diagnostic process to a learning-needs-based process. It's going to involve a lot of work, and it has to be done right.

Mr. Chase: I hope that when it finally gets done, special ed children will be protected.

Why is this minister spreading even more uncertainty by publicly musing about getting rid of the evaluative practice of coding without indicating what the new system will be? Clarify.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I try to respond to questions when they're put to me, whether we're in this House or elsewhere. People have asked about coding. As late as at noon today on the inappropriately named *Wildrose* program on CBC I spoke directly to the question of coding. The fact of the matter is: we're not getting rid of coding necessarily; we're moving the funding model and the special-needs model to an all-inclusive model. It requires work. Students will still need to be diagnosed. There still will need to be health professionals involved, but they won't necessarily drive the learning process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Sodium Hydroxide Spill

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are concerned about a caustic soda spill that occurred last week in our area. While the community affected is grateful for the support they received from the government, some have raised questions about the response time and the cleanup. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is Alberta Environment's role in the cleanup of this spill, and how quickly did his department respond to the issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were advised of this incident through the Coordination and Information Centre and had our staff on-site within an hour. Our role really is twofold: one, to ensure that all environmental and public safety concerns are effectively addressed and, secondly, to ensure that cleanup meets the strict environmental standards. Now that the emergency itself is over, our role becomes one of monitoring and ensuring that those standards are met.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the same minister please clarify for my constituents: what is caustic soda, and what are the dangers, short- or long-term, that it poses to this community?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, caustic soda is also known as sodium hydroxide, and it's a substance with very high pH levels. It's a base as opposed to an acid. It's industrially used as a chemical base to manufacture products like pulp and paper, and in fact it can be a very dangerous chemical. That's why we took it so seriously. It could cause a chemical burn with direct contact and inhalation.

The spill was contained to an open roadway. Again, no adverse environmental impact or human concerns were or will be on an ongoing basis once the cleanup is complete.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta Emergency Management Agency was also involved, can the Minister of Municipal Affairs please clarify for my constituents which department or ministry actually takes charge on an issue like this? Specifically, whose responsibility is it to communicate to adjacent landowners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All municipalities have emergency response plans in place and activate them when necessary. They are the ones that are responsible for resident information. They're the ones that are responsible for notifying their residents. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency helps municipalities prepare these plans, and they help them test those particular plans. All responses concerning spills must adhere to our provincial and federal environmental laws. In this case Environment was the lead.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The regional advisory council for the lower Athabasca River had their final meeting almost two months ago. Last April the former Minister of Sustainable Resource Development suggested that there would be opportunity for public comment when the report was complete. In estimates the current Minister of SRD said that the advisory council's work was complete. My question is simply this: why hasn't the minister released the report yet?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the program and the process of the land-use framework has been very well advertised and understood by most people. The regional advisory commission has

completed their work, they're working on a draft of the proposal that they're going to give to government, the secretariat are working with them and assisting them to finalize that document, and at that point in time we will deal with it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the regional advisory council was supposed to be pretty much the only multi-stakeholder forum for considering the environmental impacts of different levels of extraction and given that that report was given to government two months ago, will the minister admit that his refusal to publicize this report is nothing more than yet another stalling tactic and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, look, the process is well understood by everybody that's involved in the process, and I believe that the hon. member opposite would understand it as well. The process works like this. When I receive the completed documentation from the regional advisory commission, we will then design a land-use plan, and the land-use plan will go out for consultation. At that point all of the public have an opportunity and all of the stakeholders have an opportunity to comment on the plan before it is finally developed for cabinet.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the regional advisory council report is the only opportunity for stakeholders to have input, will the minister or will he not release the report before it is watered down by cabinet and the land-use framework ultimately developed?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I seem to be having a bit of difficulty of getting the member to understand. There's a process in place. What does RAC mean? It means that it's a regional advisory committee. They are giving advice to the government. It's not a consultation process. As I explained, the consultation process will take place. Once the plan has been in its initial stage of development, it will go out for consultation at that point.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Alberta Treasury Branches

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taxpayers of Alberta guarantee Alberta Treasury Branch deposits of \$23.8 billion. There's no room for mistake or mismanagement. To the minister of finance: why has the minister allowed ATB to mismanage the start-up of its new banking system to the point where it is now \$140 million over budget and a year behind schedule?

2:30

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've already spoken, to the public record, that I'm not pleased at all with that result, a cost overrun of that magnitude. I'm requesting a full report from ATB as to what happened and what's being done to prevent it from happening again.

I would point out to the hon. member that the Auditor General has noted that ATB is already taking steps to correct some of the problems they've experienced.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Speaking of the Auditor General, the office of the Auditor General has 14 outstanding recommendations for the Alberta

Treasury Branches, including one on risk management, one on senior management bonuses, one on internal audit programs, and one on internal control weaknesses. Why has the minister of finance failed to deal with these 14 outstanding recommendations?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we're dealing with all of them. We accept all of them. But I would remind the hon. member that we manage the relationship in terms of strategic direction for the Alberta Treasury Branches. I don't think he or anybody else in this House wants us to get back into the micromanaging of internal decisions of Crown corporations. We're not going there. We want operational independence for ATB.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well that the board of directors is appointed by this government. We have \$23.8 billion in deposits that are guaranteed by the taxpayers. They have to be protected. Again, why has the minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor. I heard two questions there. Deal with the first one. We're moving on.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've met several times already with the chairman of the board. We've discussed these issues. We've accepted all of the Auditor General's recommendations. I'd remind the members opposite that the Auditor General—they're not playing get-you politics the way you guys are pretending. The Auditor General makes recommendations to improve systems. There's always room for improvement. We accepted the recommendations, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Water Supply and Snowpack

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the below-normal snowpack feeding Alberta's river basins this spring, many Albertans, and particularly farmers and ranchers, are concerned about the soil moisture conditions. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. While recent precipitation in southern and eastern parts of the province has improved the immediate soil moisture conditions, I'm interested to know where we're at with the snowpack forecasts and what we can expect in terms of runoff for river basin water supplies, particularly in southern Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure it comes as no surprise to you that our water supply and snowpack are generally below average throughout the province this year, particularly well below average in the snowpack feeding the Oldman and Bow River systems. I do want to remind you and all members that precipitation recently experienced in southern Alberta and, historically, over the next couple of months will really determine whether we have a situation that will become very, very troublesome or not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taking advantage of water storage opportunities is particularly important in times of water shortage. To the same minister: what measures are in place to ensure Albertans' water needs are met for agriculture, industry, and people needs?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we do have a series of provincially run reservoirs that help to store water. These reservoirs are at close to normal levels for this time of year, and tools are in place to increase the level if it's necessary. During dry periods these can be strategically used to divert or release water to maintain flows for human, aquatic, ecosystem, and agricultural needs. I think it's important to note that the water levels as we see them this year are far better than they were in the drought of 2001, so we do have plenty of opportunity to manage beyond now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What programs are in place to help agriculture producers deal with impacts of water shortage, should they occur, and are these also available to producers operating on public lands?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of programs available, but I think that an important point the Minister of Environment pointed out also holds true for our irrigation canal systems and our storage areas. We don't anticipate any problem this year with respect to that. Our levels are high. We do have Growing Forward water management specialists that will work with producers with respect to their water needs for their livestock, and there are a number of risk management programs that are in place. We are also waiting for a response from the federal government at this point for coverage on the AgriRecovery program.

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I've just obtained new information with regard to the bonus system at Alberta Health Services. It turns out that 500 Alberta Health Services managers are eligible for what they euphemistically call pay at risk. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how many millions of dollars are Alberta taxpayers at risk for if all 500 bonuses are paid?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very torqued and distorted question. The fact is that under the new system we have standardized contracts, and in actual fact the people at that higher income level don't even get the full range of pay that they're eligible for unless they perform the specific benchmarks and meet the measurements that have been set for them.

Dr. Taft: Well, given that most people understand that as doing your job.

Given that pay at risk translates into automatic bonuses unless you mess up, and given how many mess-ups there have been in Alberta Health Services, can the minister tell Albertans if any managers at all have not received their bonus for the past fiscal year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I do not manage those managers, but what we'll find out from Alberta Health Services, who does manage them, is an answer to that question.

Dr. Taft: Well, given the minister manages all kinds of other decisions of Alberta Health Services, will the minister confirm that the new standardized severance package for Alberta Health Services managers who lose their jobs is 12 months' pay plus a 15 per cent bonus?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the bonus part offhand. I'll have to look into that. But I can tell you that the amount of severance has been brought down significantly from what it once used to be. It is in fact capped at the max of 12 months, and people find that to be very competitive with other multibillion-dollar organizations across this country. It's what's necessary in the industry to attract and retain the very best people to manage this multibillion-dollar situation in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Wildfire Update

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend there was a surge of fire activity across this province, especially in my community of Whitecourt, where we saw a major fire break out. SRD staff did a great job attacking this fire by ground and by air. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. These fires are expensive. We're 20 days into the budget year. I understand you've burned up your whole budget.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, what's happened here is, of course, we have two parts to the budget relative to wildfire containment. The \$90 million in the first part of that budget is to put people out in place across Alberta to do exactly as the member has indicated: to get on those fires, control them early. That part of the budget has been spent. We are now into looking at additional money from the sustainability fund, as we do annually, to apply to Treasury to manage the rest of the fire season.

Mr. VanderBurg: Given the situation and how dry it is in parts of this province, are you able to make the proper rules and regulations for the thousands of weekend warriors that come on quads and motorbikes out into the forest areas? What are you going to do about them?

Mr. Knight: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, that, again, is an excellent question. It is a situation that we do try to control. What we're doing is go out with advertisements. You see them now. You see the FireSmart. You see the 310-FIRE signs around. What we're doing is asking Albertans to be very aware of what they're doing when they're out and about in Alberta forested areas and to be responsible with respect to any fires that they may have started.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister. Previous ministers have embraced the FireSmart program and then got communities ready and willing to help out with the problem. What are you doing to promote the FireSmart program?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I'm doing is responding to the FireSmart people that came to my farm, in fact. It is an ongoing program, a very valid program. It is being funded through alternate sources this year. Nevertheless, it is a good program; we will continue it. Again, I must emphasize that we need the co-operation of all Albertans with respect to this issue. It's an important issue for us all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:40 Womanspace Resource Centre

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 25 years the Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge has helped destitute

women. Provincial agencies, service providers, including my office, have referred clients to Womanspace for assistance in free ID clinics, interim rent, and, certainly, interim damage deposits, teaching financial literacy and management. The closure has triggered a shortfall of services to Lethbridge citizens. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: given that Alberta has not much more than a . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I know that our ministry has offices located in Lethbridge that are there specifically to help people out. We have offices there that will help people out with their AISH with their PDD and with the office of the public guardian. I know that we provide these services. I'm not quite sure what that question was, but I do want to assure people that if there is a gap because of the closing of an agency that has done wonderful work in Lethbridge, we are there to help and support the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. One of the points that I didn't get out was that Alberta doesn't have much more than a desk and a chair for the status of women.

My next question would be to the Minister of Service Alberta. Will the minister explain how her ministry plans to deal with the fallout of the closure of Womanspace Resource Centre since photo ID is issued through her ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this to the House's attention. While Service Alberta does not provide grants or funding to community organizations, one of the things that we are working very hard on with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is the whole issue of identification cards for homeless and transient Albertans. We also have a wealth of resources to assist individuals in the area of renting, so we're there to assist when we can.

The Speaker: Don't look surprised, hon. member. Thirty-five seconds, no preambles. Proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Oh. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: how is your ministry prepared to fill in the gaps left by the closure of Womanspace as a helping partner for your parent link family violence prevention and family and community support services in southern Alberta?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, what a loss for your community, hon. member, and I know you're a strong advocate for women. The Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge has been known, as you said, for 25 years to empower woman through the provision of workshops and forums providing information referrals and resources for women. What I will do as the minister responsible for woman's issues in our government is write to my federal counterpart on behalf of the agency to ask that they reinstate the funding that you're inquiring about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Medical School Spaces

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An inspirational young Albertan from Calgary-Lougheed is applying to the University of Calgary's medical school. He's very concerned that there may not be a space for him if the university goes ahead with proposed cuts. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. At a time when many Albertans are struggling to find a family doctor, are you allowing universities to cut critical spaces at provincial medical schools?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time I don't believe that any student should not continue forward with the application process that they have. It's premature for any institutions to be talking about those kinds of cuts because we're still working with the institutions on the exact amount of funding for their entire programs for this year.

Mr. Rodney: To the same minister. Some might suggest it's unavoidable that targets need to be set for new doctors. Can you assure Albertans that you, indeed, will meet them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are on record saying that we will continue to strive to meet the targets that we've set. As an example, for doctors that was 295 new doctors graduating from our postsecondaries, and that's still the target we're setting.

Mr. Rodney: My final question to the same minister. I've heard from constituents that they're concerned about accountability, a possible double standard about whether or not you're not actually setting a similar target for nurses as well. What's the minister's answer to that?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we've worked very hard with Alberta Health Services, Alberta Health and Wellness, and Employment and Immigration on the health workforce action plan. We're going to continue to do that and continue to work with all of the facilities and the departments. Again, our target for nurses was 2,000 graduating; our target for LPNs was a thousand. We're going to strive to meet those targets.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. In all 19 members were recognized, 114 questions and responses. Nine of these came from the Liberals, the Official Opposition, four from the independents, six from the government caucus per se.

In 30 seconds we will continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from Alberta One-Call dated March 29, 2010, which I referred to in my debate on Motion 508 yesterday afternoon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like table the appropriate amount of copies of a letter. I tried to do this yesterday; I had the wrong copy, unfortunately. This is from Larry Stowards. He was denied Blue Cross coverage because of some pre-existing conditions even though he had had that same Blue Cross coverage for many decades with the city of Calgary. A real tragic situation.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, responses to questions raised by Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, during Oral Question Period on April 14, 2010, regarding the incident at Suncor Energy's Strathcona refinery on March 15, 2010.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Evening Sitzings

17. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the remainder of the 2010 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, amendments offered with respect to this bill? We are on amendment A2. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Just as a reminder to anybody that's catching up with us here, amendment A2 was an amendment to remove the section that gave the powers to the Chief Electoral Officer to insert fictitious names into the voters lists that were supplied out to candidates. The issue that I had raised around that was that it made it very hard for small and volunteer-based campaigns that really made a concerted effort to locate people that were on voters lists. In constituencies like mine, where people frequently move within the constituency, we would continue to pursue trying to find someone and, unfortunately, could likely spend quite a bit of volunteer time in a 28-day campaign – so you can't exactly be leisurely about this stuff – trying to pursue someone that would turn out to be nonexistent. I had felt that that was a particular hardship placed on small campaigns.

2:50

The sponsoring member, the Minister of Justice, was kind enough to come in and speak to it in which she had pointed out that this was a fairly common practice, that it was being inserted particularly to try and deal with electronic distribution of voters lists as a way of being able to trace back on that electronic fingerprint or footprint, if you want to put it that way. It still doesn't help me. I still think there has got to be a better way of injecting that electronic fingerprint into the distribution of these lists over the Internet or by, you know, recording the list onto some other kind of electronic distribu-

tion method, like the little key fobs and things like that. I still think that something needs to be done to fix this problem, so I continue to support the amendment that is on the floor, although I appreciate the minister coming in to put her clarifications on the table. I think this is a very, very imperfect way of doing things.

We seem to be caught right now in between that kind of electronic world, Internet world, and the plain old volunteer-based foot traffic, hard copy version of things in our election campaigns. I'm just seeing that turn up everywhere. As I explained to somebody the other day, you know, when I first started, I used to produce one paper version of my annual report, which was then sent out in the mail. Thirteen years later I'm now producing one hard copy version, which is still sent out in the mail, but I also have a website, which has to be updated once or twice a week with new information, which is why I talk so much in this House. I also am now doing an e-zine, which goes out about once a month unless there is a really big issue, and then it goes out more often. I'm also doing Facebook postings and, well, Twitter for those that get involved with that.

What was a way of sending out information in one paper version has now extrapolated itself. Nothing ever gets dropped. It's not as though we can stop doing the paper version, so everything just gets added onto. Those two worlds don't seem to be reconcilable at this point. Because we cannot drop the paper version of it and the volunteer-based approach to campaigning, I'm continuing to lean on the government to find some other way to do this than inserting fictional names into our voters database.

There are some other issues that I would like to talk about, but they are not specific to this amendment, so I will resume my seat and turn this over to one of my colleagues.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to speak in favour of the amendment. I have listened intently to some of the members who have spoken on this as well as read their comments in *Hansard*. I, too, am of the belief that having fictitious names inserted into an electoral list leads to much more waste of time on behalf of individuals in campaigning and campaign teams and people who are hitting the phone banks when these processes are already difficult enough.

I represent a downtown riding in Calgary, and this riding is subject to much turnover. Between one election and another there can be upwards of 50 per cent turnover in the area. People are essentially younger, more mobile, and come there to either start their lives and/or finish playing out the string in my riding, so you do have a tremendous amount of movement. With that, any kind of deviation from a standard list, which is generally very incomplete and generally will be hit and miss at best, just adds insult to injury in the process.

I know that when we were using the electoral list in the campaign last election, really for our riding it was not very useful at the best of times. Coupling that with the addition of fictitious names, I believe, would just add to more of a nightmare. Further, if they're really looking to clamp down on electoral fraud, there are always other ways to do it other than slipping in fictitious names.

Anyways, Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity. Having spoken in favour of this amendment, I encourage all other members of this House to do the same.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A2.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Chair, I just briefly want to discuss it again. I understand the concerns of the Member for Edmonton-Centre, but I just want to say, once again, that in this information age protecting lists is critical. No other solutions were brought forward in order to protect the electoral list, and I feel that it is critical. I appreciate that this is going in, and I guess my comment is that, if anything, we should perhaps be raising the penalty or what's going to happen to individuals that are caught using these lists illegally. But I'm against the amendment, in favour of the bills that exist in that we need to be able to ensure the integrity of our lists in not being misused. I'm voting against this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Other members wish to speak?
We'll call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back speaking to Bill 7. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak on Bill 7 in Committee of the Whole. As representatives from our caucus have already outlined, there are a number of concerns with respect to this piece of legislation, most of which focus on what it doesn't do, the many problems that it fails to address, and the very small "c" conservative approach it takes to ensuring that we deal with the clear problems that we have in Alberta with respect to, among other things, voter participation. I'd like to perhaps start my discussion on this issue by introducing another amendment to this bill. I think what I'll do is just have it distributed first and then speak to it.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the amendment is delivered. Hon. members, this is amendment A3.

I'll ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to please begin.

Ms Notley: Thank you. This amendment is a motion I'm moving on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 4 in the proposed section 4 as follows: in subsection (2) by striking out "may" and substituting "shall" and then, further, in subsection (5) by striking out "a breakdown of results and a summary of costs" and substituting "a breakdown of results, a summary of costs and recommendations to improve future elections."

3:00

The reason that we are proposing this amendment is because we are attempting to convince this government to acknowledge and respect the recommendations made by the previous Chief Electoral Officer, who was suggesting that future CEOs provide information to the public about voting in an effort to address low voter turnout. The previous Chief Electoral Officer, the Chief Electoral Officer who was not reappointed by a majority vote of the Legislative Offices Committee, that was not unanimous, had recommended that someone should have the obligation to encourage people to vote. Unfortunately, when it brought forward this legislation, this government steadfastly refused to acknowledge or incorporate that recommendation.

What this amendment would do, of course, is that it would compel the Chief Electoral Officer to promote voter turnout and voter

participation. It would also compel the Chief Electoral Officer to make recommendations after each election, by-election, plebiscite, senatorial vote to recommend improvements should they be necessary. The idea is that the Chief Electoral Officer is tasked by legislation with the objective of always trying to improve our system of democracy and always trying to enhance the level of participation in our system of democracy. I know that it's a revolutionary concept; nonetheless, it is one that many people who are kind of fond of democracy think would be a good idea and at this point remains absent from the proposed piece of legislation.

Why is this something that we need to focus on here in Alberta? Well, as has been mentioned numerous times in this Legislature but just can't be said enough, we had a voter turnout in the last election of roughly just under 40 per cent – 40 per cent of Albertans. That means 60 per cent of Albertans did not bother to cast their ballots. The vast majority of those who did not vote were young Albertans. Research shows that if you don't vote in your first one or two elections, the likelihood of you ever voting goes down, which means that the long-term prognosis for our province's democracy is that voter turnout will continue to go down unless significant action is taken to reverse that trend.

Now, just to be clear, let's look at what the average is across the country. The averages range from, you know, highs of 80 per cent in some jurisdictions, but the average across the country, even including the dismal results in this province, is slightly over 60 per cent. I think that people in this House should be very embarrassed and concerned about the fact that our voter turnout in this province is so low.

One of the reasons why this is a concern, of course, is that our recently appointed Chief Electoral Officer, one who was not appointed unanimously by those involved with the appointment process but one who was appointed by a majority of members that happened to correspond with the government caucus, has publicly stated that he does not believe it's his job to promote democracy or increase voter turnout, which, again, I find absolutely shocking. I find it shocking that the government would have appointed someone who believed that was his role. The head of elections doesn't think it's important to have more people involved in elections? That's sort of like saying that a CEO of a company doesn't think it's important to have more people buy their product, unless, of course, you're trying to undersell your product for some reason, which appears to be the case here.

Interestingly, when that Chief Electoral Officer stated that he didn't believe it was his obligation to increase voter turnout, he actually pointed to the oh so neutral and objective observations of one Preston Manning, who has also advocated that it ought not to be the role of the Chief Electoral Officer to encourage democracy.

Mr. Hehr: He also said that he wasn't going to take his pension.

Ms Notley: He may have also said that he wasn't going to take his pension. I'll believe it when I see it, frankly.

Anyway, the bigger concern that I have, really, is that all of that mirrors a movement that you see in the United States, which goes back to the early '90s under that brilliant political adviser Karl Rove, who, of course, was behind that guy who has since been collectively described as the worst president in the history of the United States. Their view of how you ran politics was to get as few people voting as possible, to reduce your voter turnout as much as possible so that your radical right-wing folks, who are really motivated, will come out to the polls. Then they have more sway and more ability . . .

An Hon. Member: They don't want that now.

Ms Notley: They may not want that now because, of course, we have a new home for the radical right-wing voters, I'm reminded by my colleagues not even across the way, just directly in front.

Nonetheless, the reality is that that's what the genesis is of that notion, that what you do is you don't get moderate or progressive people to be interested in the political process. You keep them away as much as you possibly can from the political process, and then you get the extremists, who typically are on the right, to exercise a disproportionate amount of influence in their vote.

That is the model used by the George Bush administration in the U.S. all through the '90s. It's not at all a surprise to me that someone like Preston Manning would advocate that we don't take many steps to increase the rate of voter participation in Alberta. But I would say that it's really quite disturbing that we would think to actually adopt that approach to our politics in Alberta. I don't think that's in the best interests of Albertans. I don't think that's in the best interests of so many key issues that we need to deal with in this province.

I think that there is much to be gained by enhancing the participation of all Albertans to ensure that we come up with the best solution to whatever the problem is based on the greatest number of opinions and inputs that we can possibly solicit. Yet, clearly, that's not what this government wants. Clearly, they want to keep people home if at all possible. That's why we have a Chief Electoral Officer who steadfastly refuses to engage in activities geared towards increasing participation.

The amendment that we are putting forward today would simply, as I said before, compel the Chief Electoral Officer, despite his reluctance, despite his respect and affection for Preston Manning, to actually engage in the promotion of democracy in our province, to actually increase the number of people who will cast a ballot. That's what this amendment would do.

I heartily encourage all members of this Assembly to support this amendment and take a much delayed step in addressing what is becoming a long-standing problem in our province with respect to our democracy.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's indeed a privilege to be able to speak in favour of this amendment. In the words of Victor Hugo: greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come. This is one of those things that really is a good amendment. We have here a situation in Alberta, that the hon. member brought up, that shows the dismal state of our democracy. We have a low voter turnout, 41 per cent, for reasons sometimes unbeknownst to us. It just is what it is.

Needless to say, any work that this Legislature can do or an office of this Legislature can do to promote and extend democracy, to encourage both young and old to make it out to the polls, to pay attention to this Legislature, to understand the workings of government, to understand what bills are being brought forward, and to take an interest in how democracy is working and how our government is performing I believe would be a good thing. It seems to me to be logical that our people in charge of elections would be those who would carry out that work for us, that those people in charge of instituting our elections would be the people who would develop democracy days or things of that nature in this province and go out and advocate for individuals to participate.

3:10

That's why I like this amendment. It says that the Chief Electoral Officer not only may but shall actually promote democracy in this province. That means actively work to get people to take their democratic responsibility to heart and make it out to the polls.

It really is amazing that we as a Legislative Assembly hired an individual who claimed that that is not his responsibility. Now, it was a committee of this Legislature that did it. I will point out, however, that it was a majority government committee that did set the wheels into motion for this. It just seems strange that we would hire a person for this job when they didn't believe that actively promoting people or engaging and encouraging people to get out and vote was his job. However, that being said, it happened.

Maybe individuals who hired him, recommended him for the job, or individuals from the government side said: "Listen here. We're going to hire you, but let's not worry about this democratic participation thing. Let's just keep things the way they are, and everyone will be happy. Well, at least we'll be happy. We'll go forward like that." I don't know if it was said in the interview process or when he met before the committee of this Legislature to get his position as the Chief Electoral Officer, whether he said that he didn't think promoting democracy was his responsibility. However, needless to say, a couple of weeks after he got the job, he did state this. I thought this was awfully weird.

What this amendment is trying to do is rectify this unfortunate thing that has happened here in the province of Alberta. That unfortunate thing is that we have a Chief Electoral Officer that doesn't believe it is his job to promote democracy. Clearly, there is a breakdown in thinking in this, clearly a breakdown in communication between the powers that be and a person who is entrusted in this body. What this amendment does is that it corrects that. What it does is that it allows us to make amends for a mistake that has happened. It allows us to now change the parameters of this job description, to have this individual who can go out now with our support in this Legislature and promote democracy to encourage people, first-time voters to go out and take part, to do those things.

I think it'd be a great thing if we could somehow in the next election go from a 41 per cent participation rate to a 51 per cent participation rate. That would be a great thing, and if the Chief Electoral Officer could be part of that, I for one would be very proud of the work we did here today in passing this amendment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak. I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this well-thought-out and well-reasoned amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. My colleague for Calgary-Buffalo is being too modest in that he had an almost identical amendment that contained the first part of this, the section that appears as section (a) of amendment A3. That is the part that would now be requiring the Chief Electoral Officer to engage in education and providing information to the public about the election process and the democratic right to vote, section 4(2). In order to make sure that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was able to put forward this whole amendment, including the second part, he nicely gave way. So thank you to the member for doing that. I am in support of this amendment, clearly, as my colleague was going to do half of it anyway, although I think the second half is equally of merit.

I guess my question is: if the Chief Electoral Officer as an

impartial body is not the one that is charged with educating the public, who is? Do we really want government charged with that? I mean, government in this province is highly partisan. Do we really want to hand that over to government and the Public Affairs Bureau to be educating people on the electoral process and the democratic right to vote? I don't think so. Maybe government members do because it would be more likely to kind of go their way and put them in a good light, but I don't think the rest of the citizens in the province and, certainly, I don't as a member of the Official Opposition want to see that be the group that's charged with doing this.

If it's not going to be the government and it's not going to be the Chief Electoral Officer, well, who else? Well, there are some very good not-for-profit organizations that are out there operating on this, like Democracy Watch and Fair Vote. Frankly, I think that at the point that we're going to charge them with this particular duty, it's incumbent on the government to start funding them, and I can't see the government taking that step with any kind of a happy smile on their face. Once again, if it's not the Chief Electoral Officer, who is it? I'm not getting any kind of an answer on that.

I think it's pretty clear that this is the appropriate place to lay the responsibility to take care of that education, and I think that there are a lot of different kinds of opportunities that could be taken up under this particular section. One of the things that I had spoken about with one of the previous Chief Electoral Officers was, you know, a series of posters that could be sent out to apartment buildings, basically multifamily units where they're locked off and there's a security access, a series of posters sent around at the beginning or just prior to the election campaign that essentially said: "We're going into an election campaign. Please be aware that people will be coming into your building campaigning on behalf of candidates. This is part of the democratic process. Please understand that under the Election Act they're allowed to come into your building." You know, some kind of information that's being passed on.

Certainly, in my constituency and I think for anybody that's dealing with gated communities or multifamily units with security access, getting access to the building can be a real hassle, and the poster idea sounded like a really good one to me. That's exactly the kind of thing that is an option for the Chief Electoral Officer to be fulfilling this section if we do pass this amendment and make it into a requirement of the job rather than an option for the job, which is, indeed, what's happening here.

The second part of this, subsection (5), is essentially along the same lines in that, you know, once the election has happened, the Chief Electoral Officer would provide "a breakdown of results, a summary of costs," and it's inserting here, "and recommendations to improve future elections." All of that would be included in the report that goes to the standing committee, and that standing committee lays the report before the Legislative Assembly.

3:20

Now, one of the interesting things that happens here – and a number of you may not be aware of this. In the first number of recommendations that were made by the previous Chief Electoral Officer, that individual did exactly that: gave them through to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, who then went in camera. God bless them; they really like to do this. Then there was a recommendation that that information not be released. So nobody else was aware of the recommendations that had been made. They just sort of became secret. I don't think that was actually the intention of the committee members, but in going in camera and discussing some of these things, one thing led to another, and they were excluded. They got pulled underneath that sort of cone of silence, and nobody even knew that recommendations had been made.

For the longest time, years and years later, I'm getting calls from the media and from others saying: do you have a copy of the recommendations that the Chief Electoral Officer made? I'm, you know, pawing through the binders and binders of stuff that I keep because I never throw anything out from any of these committees – I'll be a fire hazard before I'm done here – and then realizing that it was part of this material that, in fact, I couldn't release. I'd have to say: yes, I have it; yes, I've looked at it, but I can't release it.

Well, we're trying to have a public discussion on this stuff. So the importance of it being set up that the Chief Electoral Officer will – the word we're using here is “shall” – make recommendations for that and in this case that it would be included in the report that goes through the standing committee and gets tabled in the House. That way we wouldn't end up losing any bits of it, like we lost before. Frankly, that set us back a while because we had the initial set of recommendations, and then it wasn't until there was a whole second set of recommendations that the first set was able to become public. So we went for a period of time with nobody knowing that these recommendations had in fact been made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Those were the comments that I wanted to make in support of the amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I really do urge everyone to accept this. It's a fairly mundane but I think very important amendment to the act, nothing for the government to be afraid of. It's all good, happy things, so I hope that you will support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A3?

If not, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on Bill 7.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, that was unfortunate but hardly surprising. There are so many things in this bill that were previously recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, who was so unceremoniously asked to leave his role previously, that were really very, very good recommendations which have been ignored by this government. The most obvious one, of course, is the failure of the government to adopt the recommendation with respect to leadership campaigns and ensuring that donations made in the course of leadership campaigns are made public to ensure transparency to the public. Of course, that one was not followed through on, coincidentally, at a time when I figure we've probably got a 50-50 chance that the government may itself be going through a leadership campaign between now and the next election, so it's very convenient.

Nonetheless, the other thing that they did not follow up on is the notion of fixed election dates, and another thing that they didn't follow up on was the notion of assisting with anywhere voting and advance voting, particularly given the unique nature of Alberta's workforce in many cases, where we often have so many people working away from home, in camps, and who are for all intents and purposes prevented from voting. There were so many things this government could have done to increase and enhance democracy through this bill that they chose not to do.

One of the things that they are putting forward in this act which is a problem relates to how those potential voters who do not have the privilege of having a home and an address would still be able to cast

their ballot. This government makes much ado about their so-called commitment to the homeless, yet we are moving forward on a piece of legislation that will limit and certainly obstruct those people's ability to participate in the electoral system.

On that basis I have another amendment that I'd like to put forward. I will distribute that amendment and then speak to it once it's been distributed.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll pause for a moment while the next amendment is being distributed.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, this is amendment A4. Please go ahead.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment again appears to be on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It moves that Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 31 in the proposed section 95 by striking out subsection (4). Subsection (4) states: “No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election.”

What the bill currently says is that where there is a potential voter who wants to cast their ballot but that voter does not have an address and identification, another person who does have an address and identification can vouch for this person, vouch for who they are and also vouch for the fact that they reside in the constituency in question. That's a good thing. The problem is that section 95(4) would limit that so that the person who is vouching can only vouch for one person. Basically, what would happen is that you would vouch for homeless person A, and then you would be unable to vouch for anyone else.

Now, the problem with that, of course – and it's something that, certainly, we see in my riding and, unfortunately, is a growing problem throughout our province; it has become quite an unprecedented problem, actually – is that when you have someone who is without an address and without ID who wants to vote, they should obviously be able to, but often the people who are most able to vouch for those people are people who work in shelters. As much as we would love for there to be one shelter worker for every homeless person, it's just simply not the case that there is. Frankly, that's probably not the best-case scenario anyway. What it means, then, is that very few people who are homeless will be given the opportunity to vote. This is really a significant problem.

I had the experience in the mid-90s of being very involved in a campaign in a riding that was at the time referred to as Vancouver-Mount Pleasant in downtown Vancouver, which took in large portions of the downtown east side. There were a number of people there that did not have ID and did not have addresses, but those people actually still had a community, and those people still cast their ballots. It was really quite amazing, the number of them who lined up to cast their ballots.

What happened in those situations was that the people working with them in the shelters, volunteers, could vouch for them. But had they been limited to a situation where one person could only vouch for one other person, many, many of those people living in the downtown east side would have had their right to vote taken from them, stolen from them by the election laws that we are putting into place.

3:30

Now, as much as this government claims to be trying to do everything they can to end homelessness, the fact of the matter is that the number of homeless in Alberta has only gone up over the last decade. As much as they may claim to be trying to do something about it, you know, I'm going to withhold my judgment at this

point and suggest that we at least operate on the assumption that the trend that we've seen over the last few years is likely to continue, at least in the short term. If that's the case, we're on the verge, then, of passing a piece of legislation that is going to take away the right to vote from a growing section of our population.

We all remember the pictures just a few years ago of people with their families, you know, living in tents in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray and all over this province, where people were moving to Alberta yet did not have the ability to find a place to live. Those people would have struggled to be able to cast their vote had they been eligible to vote.

This piece of legislation will ensure that this problem continues. I think that there are many other ways that the concerns around people vouching for other people could be addressed in terms of the administration of that right and the administration of that process without at the same time taking away the right to vote from Albertans who at this time in their lives are both without home and without identification.

It's with that in mind that I put forward this amendment and ask that my colleagues in the Legislature support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak on amendment A4, put on the floor by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Oh, boy, this is a really important amendment for, I would say, any constituency that's included in the core of cities, especially anything that's dealing with sort of traditionally disenfranchised voters. People who may be in emergency overnight shelters, transitional housing, may not have what's considered kind of traditional government identification like a driver's licence, a worker ID, that kind of thing.

We have a sort of series of cascading events that happen here. You've got somebody that's homeless or recovering from drug or alcohol rehab. They've been away from home long enough that their ID isn't valid anymore, so in effect they don't really have ID. They want to vote, and in other places we're allowing that if they don't have the two pieces of ID that satisfy, a person whose name is on the voters list may vouch for the individual. The term "elector" is very important here because it's signalling someone whose name is on the voters list. Now, that's a whole other cascading problem.

I'm going to back up one cascade here to just talk about the difficulty that it kind of dumps the load here of one elector vouching for one elector. It dumps that load onto our NGO organizations, that tend to be dealing most commonly with people who may be trying to vote without ID. Okay. So who's that? That's pretty obvious stuff. It does tend to be shelter workers, people that are around those shelters, rehabs, transitional housing, that would know someone and could say: "Yes. I know they were here last night. I can vouch for them." You see, it's even saying that a person who does not have an ordinary residence is deemed to reside at the shelter, hostel, or similar facility that most frequently provides services to the person, but you still have to have somebody that can vouch that that's where they were last night. Right? We're looking for the residency in Alberta bit.

Now, by saying that the elector can only vouch for one person, you basically would have to have – oh, I don't know – a couple of hundred volunteers at the emergency shelters if they can only vouch for one person. I think people haven't thought far enough ahead about what's being contemplated here. We need to be able to have a shelter worker that can say, "Yes, I can verify that" and then go

through pretty much everybody that they know and can verify were at the shelter last night. But to say, "No, no, no, that person can only verify for one person," where are we supposed to come up with the rest of the electors who can verify for the rest of the people in the shelter? I hope that wasn't too convoluted, but that's what's being set up in this section. When you read the actual act, "No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election." That's where the problem is created, and that's what's trying to be addressed by, essentially, striking out that section.

Now, there's a second problem that is created here, and that is that the term "elector" has specific legal standing. An elector is someone whose name appears on the election list. You have to be on the election list already. Well, given the difficulties that we're having in trying to get a permanent voters list – the number of people that got knocked off the voters list in the last election, and nobody can explain why; the issues around enumerating – our fail rate on getting people properly onto the electors list last time was really high, and the percentage of changes was also accordingly high.

I'm just looking for those recommendations because they did give us an indication from the big electoral book of how many changes had to be made to the electors list, how many changes were made between the closing of the possible changes time period, and then how many changes were made following. I mean, it was like 7,000 people. In my constituency there were 7,000 people that were put on the voters list once the election campaign had actually begun, so the official revised voters list – over 7,000 people in my constituency, which is just a staggering number of people. That's the additional complication that's caused by this.

If we do not support this amendment, we're now in a situation of trying to find the people that are actually on the list and may not even know, for example, that they didn't make it on the list or that they got dumped out. Trying to find the person who is an elector, is already on the voters list, is able to verify the individual without the identification really does disenfranchise a very specific group of people, an identifiable group of people because they tend to be – I'm trying to be descriptive here without being discriminatory. I would argue that you're likely to find that that group of disenfranchised people is more likely to be residing in the centre of the cities, where you have the services that they would be seeking; for example, things like overnight shelters, transitional housing, rehab, even the day shelter programs that are available.

That's the problem that has been created in this act that I think needs to be addressed and has been picked up by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I really think that we should be supporting this because if we don't, we've created not one but two problems here. I hope that we can get some support from the government side to make sure that this particular amendment passes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to the debate on this amendment, and I must say that I have some empathy with some of the arguments that have been put forward. If I can get some clarity from the hon. mover of the amendment as to the number of times she believes we would need to have more than one elector doing the verification for someone who would fall into the categories perhaps that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has discussed or perhaps family or some of those other situations that do arise on occasion during the election process. I was curious as to whether or not she could expand on some of that for me just to answer that kind of a question.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I appreciate the question from the member. It is difficult, of course, to do an overall estimate. I think that the most recent count of Edmontonians who do not currently have an address, for instance, is roughly 3,000. I stand to be corrected, but that's what sits in my mind. Now, of course, not all of those people are without ID, obviously. Many of those people, although they might not have an address, might actually have ID, but many would not have ID. Of course, even where you have ID, you may or may not have an address on your ID, so that becomes a problem – it depends on the nature of the ID – because you need to not only swear that you are who you are; you need to swear you are a resident of that particular area.

I would suggest that probably between the riding of Edmonton-Centre, the riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the riding of Edmonton-Strathcona – am I missing any other ones? – maybe also Edmonton-Gold Bar as it currently exists, the vast majority would probably reside in those central ridings. That's more or less the number that I'm speaking about. That's the number that we're looking at.

Certainly, the experience that I had when I was in Vancouver is that the shelter workers might well over the course of a day vouch for up to 25 people, for instance. I think that would be a reasonable number that they would end up dealing with, and then you'd have more than one shelter worker and more than one shelter, but it could easily be up to that many. Also, of course, the shelter itself can't empty all its staff and have them run down to the polling station so that they can all be there. Typically what would happen is that they would assign one or two staff to be at the polling station to then verify if people who are typically residents at their shelter came through. That's how it worked when we went through this process on the downtown east side in Vancouver in the mid-90s, when I was helping to organize their election day process.

I think that's an estimate and a guesstimate for the member. I'm sorry that I can't be more specific, but I do know that if we limit it to one, the problem that we will definitely end up with is that a lot of people will come to vote, and they won't be allowed to vote.

The other thing. I'm not sure if the Member for Edmonton-Centre noted this or not, but I realize – it's perhaps a problem with our amendment – that by making it be an elector that swears for another elector, you could easily have someone who works at a shelter who is themselves not an elector in that electoral district.

Ms Blakeman: It doesn't narrow it.

Ms Notley: It doesn't narrow it. So you just need to be someone that can vote. Okay. That's good. That's not a problem.

But you're still probably looking at having to vouch for, I think, in some cases maybe up to 25, maybe only four or five but definitely more than one. We have the Youth Emergency Shelter in my riding. They can have people residing there who are eligible to vote, for instance. There is just a community that typically resides in my riding that does not have an address.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, it is a privilege to speak in favour of this amendment moved by the hon. member from the third party on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-

Norwood. In particular, we see this bill trying to ameliorate some of the difficulties in the voting process that numerous Albertans have throughout this province, not only in, I'd say, downtown centres, more disproportionately there, but also throughout the province. There are many people who lose their ID, do not have the appropriate papers, are not on the voters list who do from time to time come forward and need to have someone vouch that they are living in that constituency. I think what this amendment does is a very good thing. It allows for an individual to vouch for a certain group of individuals or a number of individuals who may need some verification as to the fact that they are living in a constituency, that they are working in the constituency, that they have been hanging their hat in that constituency for a little while or at least the night before the election. That's what this is meant to ameliorate.

If we want to get more specific, we can. Primarily, we have a homeless problem here in Alberta that tends to gravitate into the city centres, where individuals who are often excluded from the mainstream processes are staying. Currently there are homeless shelters located in downtown Calgary, downtown Edmonton. I know that in my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo there are two shelters. One is the Drop-in Centre; one would be the Mustard Seed. Individuals there happen to be homeless, and sadly they often or sometimes do not carry the requisite amount of paperwork to be able to vote.

Clearly, this bill is meant to allow for an individual who works with these individuals or spends time with these individuals to be able to go down and vouch for them at the voting station, where they can then go forward and say: hey, this gentleman resides at the Drop-in Centre or Mustard Seed or wherever, has been residing here for the last week, the last three days, the last night, and I'm vouching for him that he did this and that he should be able to take part in the election. That seems to be part of what we're trying to do here in Alberta, part of trying to extend the franchise to people who want to vote, who want to take part on voting day, who want to cast their ballot for either an individual or a political party. This should be encouraged and not stifled.

As the legislation is currently written – and the Member for Edmonton-Centre did an excellent job of going through the trouble with the bill, that first you had to find someone to vouch for you and, second of all, that that person then had to be on the voters list. Okay? Then also we looked at the last election, at some of the difficulties with being on the voters list. Voters lists were incomplete. They were shockingly absent of many of the people who lived in my constituency. We all know that downtown Calgary does have a transient or moving around population. Nevertheless, it was shocking how few people actually were on that list.

What we're asking people who don't have IDs to do is, first, find an individual who happens to be on the voters list. That could be an onerous task in the first place. What we're looking for is something that makes it a little easier for that person to go down and exercise his democratic right. It also encourages members of our population who are looking, hopefully, for some means to improve their lives. Maybe on that day in question, when the election is held, they'll say: jeepers creepers, this is going to be the start of me trying to pull myself up by my bootstraps. They're going to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, go down and cast a ballot for their political party, and the rest of their lives they're going to go by this, trying to re-enter their way into society.

3:50

This could be one of those moments in time that gives them what I think they refer to as a moment of clarity: "I know when I turned my life around. It was when I went down and voted at the 2012 election, when I found that person to vouch for me." This could be

that moment of clarity that we'd be providing that individual with in this bill by making this amendment, by saying, "You, too, are going to be a part of the voting process" and making it easier for them. I'll tell you what. If we don't make this amendment, that person can go down there, try and find a way to vote, get frustrated and say: "Well, this society really doesn't want me anyway. Maybe it's right. Maybe it is too hard to take part in things. Maybe I'm better off just sort of not bothering to improve my life. Taking part in this kind of stuff is useless anyway."

I know I'm stretching it a bit, Mr. Chair. However, that's what we're kind of doing here. I really see this as being an opportunity to extend the franchise to some people who maybe need it, maybe want it, and it could lead to us not only promoting democracy but promoting people taking charge of their own lives. The changes put forward by the hon. member are very good, ones that I wish I had thought of myself and that I think would be very good for people in my area in certain situations, primarily the homeless or people without identification.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology on amendment A4.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just trying to get a little more clarity around the intent of the amendment. When I look at the act and I look at some of the discussions that we've had as it related to why that would be in there, it's really a protection of, frankly, somebody coming with a group of people that might not be – and I'm pretty sure that the hon. member knows where I'm going. Also, we have had some discussions. This kind of mirrors what the federal legislation is. I guess I'd be curious as to the member's opinion. If we remove this, the protection for the Chief Electoral Officer against someone who would come in with a whole group of people, you know, where you'd have one person vouching for a busload, is that a fear of the member? By saying yes to your amendment, it's a possibility. I'm curious whether you have another option that we might look at.

Ms Notley: Well, two points to make. First, in response to the question of the hon. minister, I think that the first thing is of course to remove this piece right now because the one-to-one is the problem. But let's just say hypothetically – and I'm making this up as I go along, you know; this is my first attempt at governance – that through regulation one could potentially have a process where the CEO had an application process for vouchers. For instance, for people who perceive themselves as potentially people that would be in the position to vouch, there would be an application process that they might go through. That might be a voucher registrar or something like that. I'm just throwing this out there. Now, I'm sure I could find ways to critique that, too. Nonetheless, in theory, that might be a way to do it, so your vouchers have to apply to be vouchers. Just one possibility. I'm not sure how much more red tape that would create.

I understand the problem with a busload of a hundred people showing up that no one can distinguish – that's fair – but at the same time the answer that is in this legislation creates another problem.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre corrected me that we're probably looking more at a homeless population, for instance, in Alberta that could be as high as 18,000. If you have roughly 6,000 in Edmonton, 6,000 in Calgary, and 6,000 everywhere else, you're looking at potentially disenfranchising up to 18,000 Albertans.

I think there are ways in which this could be worked out. I'm not

suggesting that the way I proposed is the answer. What you could do is eliminate this particular provision and then give yourself the regulatory discretion – and I know you all love regulatory discretion – to find a way to address the problem in a way that doesn't, you know, kill a spider with a sledgehammer.

That's my answer to the question.

Ms Blakeman: You know, I think what we're trying to do here is strike a reasonable balance in protecting the reliability of the electors list. We're trying to make it possible for people who are disenfranchised to have a reasonable access point, to have someone vouch for them, to be allowed to vote, and at the same time protect us from the busload of people that are driven up or the group that walks over from the nursing home – I can think of ones in my riding – and people try and vouch in 200 people.

Really, I think the way to do this is – if we leave it in the legislation, it's not possible. There is a prohibition. You cannot. It says, "No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election." The prohibition is in. If you take it out, you can still go and work with the shelters, go and work with, you know, the Chinese seniors' lodge, go and work with some of those groups that are going to be trying to vouch for people and say: how do we do this in a reasonable way? I'm about to choke – and anybody watching my face will know it – but you're going to end up having to put it into regulations so that you have some kind of a limit. [interjections] See? Unfortunately, that was all on the record, and my grandmother can read that and think: oh, dear, Laurie.

You know, we're trying to strike a balance here and protect the integrity of what we're doing and the integrity of the system and at the same time trying to make it possible for people who are seeking out a route to be enfranchised to get access to that. If you leave the prohibition in there, there is no opportunity to do it, so I think that out it must come.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the hon. members for, really, I think satisfying some concerns that I had with this amendment. Given the discussions that we've had as to why we put that clause into the bill and given the fact that the opposition is very keen to help us work out the solution if our fears become a problem, I think we are certainly capable of creating some regulation around this. I'm glad that they support our making a regulation around this. It's fabulous.

I for one, Mr. Chairman, would probably support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of words here. First off, I want to say that I actually agree with the Member for Edmonton-Centre on something. It is a good day today. She has mentioned to me that it is about creating balance. This is about creating balance between the integrity of the voters lists and people not being disenfranchised.

Mr. Chair, prior to getting to this House, I handled a lot of elections litigation. I have to say that I've seen a lot of problems when you give too much subjective power to the particular Chief Electoral Officer. I'm quite concerned as to what happens when you get a busload of individuals coming in here with one person to vouch for them all, the pandemonium that that can create throughout the entire elections process, throughout the entire voting day. It may be very difficult to actually police, for lack of a better term, what specifically is going on. It may create a backlog for the other people that may be disenfranchised. Everybody has busy schedules in this province. They may not have the time to wait around.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had talked about accessibility issues with the homeless population. I thank her for that, and I share her concern. At the same time, it's again about balance. My department this year is actually going to be experimenting with issuing identification to homeless people, partially to address this issue in and of itself. I would submit to you that that's a better way to actually go and address the issue of disenfranchisement than changing the act in and of itself.

4:00

I'd say that if anything else this amendment should actually seek to raise the amount of people that one person can vouch for, to maybe five or even 10, but not get rid of it entirely. I think this leaves too much potential for an abuse of process in our election in and of itself. This will leave it open to abuse.

The Minister of Education and House leader had mentioned to me earlier that this largely resembles federal legislation, which, to my experience, works relatively fine, and I think that by deviating from this process, we're setting a really dangerous precedent here.

In conclusion, this tips the balance too far away from the integrity of the voters list. I will not be supporting this amendment, and I encourage all members to follow suit.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on amendment A4.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It gives me great pleasure to actually stand up and speak to this because I feel very strongly. I have many, many years of experience running elections at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. We in the old days, when we actually used to have enumerators that would go out on the streets, took a great deal of pride that our lists were absolutely accurate. Then when we sat at the tables as deputy returning officers, you can rest assured that this, particularly in southern Alberta, was run as honestly as it possibly could be. From that experience I have a couple of comments.

Earlier in the day I spoke about the Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge. Now, this would be a perfect example of women knowing other women because they've helped them get their ID. Once they have their ID, they're not too badly off, but if that election is called previous to them getting their ID, there is at least somebody in that organization that could vouch for them. So I think it's very important that these women would be recognized. I think that you can't have all of these people come to the polling stations each with their little friend in hand. There has to be a better way to do it.

One of the ways that I think could be done is that – I don't think this is creative thinking; I think this is what we do already. In fact, I know it's what we do. We just have to recognize that people in homeless shelters or people without ID are actually people that need to be treated with respect. Once we start getting that attitudinal change that these are people that must be recognized, then I think it's an easy thing to do.

One of the ways that it could be done, where one person might be able to vouch for many, is if an enumerator was assigned to homeless shelters, and that enumerator would go and enumerate these people. They would be the ones that were in charge of the list, and in fact the ballot boxes could be taken to homeless shelters so that we don't have to have these people perhaps taking a bus or not having the polling stations close to them.

We do this in nursing homes; we do it for many, many of our other vulnerable people; we take ballots to people's homes if they're

incapacitated because we want to make sure that they can vote. We want to make sure that they're a part of the voting public. I believe that if homeless people had the ballot boxes taken to the shelters with an enumerator that had enumerated and knew who they were, there may be some people that would fall through the cracks that maybe hadn't been enumerated or perhaps there wasn't somebody to vouch for them, but I would suspect that we would get the majority of the people. Now, the enumeration can't be done weeks in advance. It would have to be done maybe a couple of days ahead of time because people are so transient.

When people, particularly those that are down on their luck and either pulling themselves up or they're sliding down further before they hit bottom before they can come back up again – the fact that they would be respected enough to have a ballot box brought to them and actually be allowed to vote I know would be a real push, I guess, for their self-esteem and that, really, they are a part of a much larger society. They're not just marginalized people that people sometimes pity. Instead of working with them as people and working with their great potential, often people do act in a pitying sort of way. Unfortunately, I've seen that kind of behaviour, particularly at suppers like the Christmas dinners or the Easter dinners, where the homeless are allowed to come. It's an attitudinal change that has to be explained, I guess, to some people.

I think there has to be another attitudinal change that would make sure that there was a way. There are many ways that it can be done. All it needs is the will. If there's a will, there's a way. I think the attitudinal change has to be on the part of the Chief Electoral Officer. I think his job is to make voting as easy and as available to every single person in Alberta so that they are allowed to vote. If he had an attitudinal change, I think that maybe this kind of one person being able to vouch for many people could happen. There are any number of ways that this can happen. It's simply a matter of will.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Following the lead of the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, I, too, would suggest that I think the discussion has been useful. Section 95(4), "No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election." There could be abuse of the process if you took that out in terms of having one person vouch for a whole lot of people. But I think if you go up to subsection (2), it basically says that the person who is vouching has to be on the list in that polling station. So there are checks and balances in place. I agree with Edmonton-Centre that if there is a problem that needs to be resolved because that is not there, then we should try and do it through the Chief Electoral Officer and through regulations.

I would encourage people to support this amendment so that we can deal with this particular piece and move on to the next step.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A4.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:08 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Hayden	McQueen
Anderson	Hehr	Notley
Blackett	Hinman	Olson
Blakeman	Horner	Ouellette
Campbell	Jacobs	Pastoor
Dallas	Knight	Quest
Danyluk	Leskiw	Snelgrove
Evans	Liepert	VanderBurg
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Xiao
Griffiths	Lund	Zwozdesky
Hancock	MacDonald	

4:20

Against the motion:

Berger	Elniski	Prins
Denis	Marz	
Totals:	For – 32	Against – 5

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Deputy Chair: On Bill 7 as amended, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: That was very fun. I don't think that has ever happened before, so maybe I'll start a run and go with my third amendment although we'll see how this one goes.

With respect to the Election Act, as I've mentioned several times before, one of the concerns we have is the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer was making recommendations that we do everything possible to expand the opportunity for people to vote. Not all those recommendations found their way into the act. In deference to that fact and the fact that we would like to see ways in which people's opportunities to vote could be expanded, I have the following amendment to propose. I will distribute it and then speak to it.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause for a moment while that amendment is distributed. Hon. members, this is amendment A5.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said, the concern that we had was the fact that we were looking for ways to expand access to voting and to ensure that more people had an opportunity to vote on more occasions. The motion that I'm putting forward on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood reads as follows: that Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended by striking out section 42 and substituting the following. Section 116(1) is struck out, and the following is substituted:

116(1) An elector who is unable to vote at an advance poll or at the poll on polling day may apply to vote by Special Ballot.

Currently in Bill 7 there is a proposal in section 42 to adjust slightly the definitions and the criteria that are currently listed in section 116(1). What we are proposing to do is to eliminate all of the criteria that are set out in section 116(1) and simply allow that an elector who is unable to vote at an advance poll or at the polling day may apply to vote by special ballot. The point of this, of course, is to simply expand the use of the special ballot so that more people have an opportunity to vote.

Now, as has been mentioned, the former Chief Electoral Officer had talked about a number of ways in which we could expand the opportunity for Albertans to cast their ballot, bearing in mind that we

have concerns with respect to students and also voters who may be residing in locations away from their home on election day. The Chief Electoral Officer, for instance, essentially recommended that there be anywhere advance voting. He recommended permitting "electors to vote in any electoral division within the province during the days of advance voting and by Special Ballot, at any returning office, throughout the election period." The CEO also recommended permitting "the establishment of additional advance voting stations in high traffic areas and places where large numbers of electors are located [like] malls, airports, work camps, and college campuses."

Electors were originally restricted to voting at assigned polling stations in order to facilitate control over the list of electors and ensure the security of elections, but now that the list of electors is an electronic document, it is actually possible to take new measures to facilitate voting for people who are living far away from their place of ordinary residence. These measures would have made it easier for students, oil field workers, and other mobile tradespeople to vote as they could simply go to any returning office during advance polling, as opposed to what the situation is right now.

Now, in first reading the Attorney General said that they wouldn't be implementing this recommendation because of logistic issues, although they will be implementing the recommendation to allow people to vote in an advance poll for any reason. However, we see this as a fairly major missed opportunity. What this amendment does is get at that issue because what it does is essentially say that one needn't be, as is currently the case, physically incapacitated, absent from the electoral division on the specific election day, an inmate, someone employed by the CEO during the election, or someone that's subject to other circumstances that may or may not be applied by the Chief Electoral Officer. Instead, it simply says that if you can't be there on election day, you can get a special ballot. The end. Then your ballot will, of course, be counted later and all that other kind of stuff, but you can get a special ballot.

The rules around applying for a special ballot in terms of the opportunities for oversight and checking to ensure that that person is who they say they are and live where they say they live and all those other kinds of things would still be in place. You'd still have all those checks and balances. You would just open the door for more people to vote in more locations at more times for longer periods during the day. This, of course, is designed to do what I've kind of been harping on about all afternoon, which is increase the opportunity for people to vote and hopefully increase the voter turnout of Albertans.

That is what this recommendation is designed to do. It is, effectively, an attempt to get at those many recommendations that were put forward by the former Chief Electoral Officer which did not find their way into this piece of legislation. So I would ask my colleagues in the Assembly to reconsider the decision to not put those many other recommendations into this piece of legislation and to get at the same outcome, enhancing the opportunity for people to vote while maintaining the safeguards in place, and support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's, again, a privilege to speak to this amendment and in fact speak in favour of this amendment. It looks like a good amendment because it follows one of the recommendations made by the former Chief Electoral Officer. It enables more electors who want to take part in democracy to be able to cast a ballot, and it seems to me like all of the safeguards are in

place. Basically, it's ensuring that an elector who is unable to vote at an advance poll or on polling day may apply to vote by special ballot. It just removes the criteria that you be incapacitated or have a disability. I think it just opens up the franchise to more people and more places, and really it can be used and handled with a well-planned, well-thought-out election that will allow more people to take part.

4:30

Again, I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for bringing it forward. It's a good amendment. It will extend the franchise. I think we're more than able to handle this type of amendment here in the 21st century.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I urge all of my other colleagues in the House to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak on amendment A5? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, regarding this amendment A5 if I could have a couple of questions answered before I decide whether I'm going to support it or not, I would really appreciate it. First to the hon. member, Mr. Chairman: how does the process work now? We were having a discussion in this area of the House, off the record of course, around what exactly is in place now regarding individuals who are unable to vote at the advance poll or on polling day, whether they're working in an area of Alberta far from their residence and they're out of town, whether they're sick, whether they're incapacitated in some way and shut in at their house and require a special ballot, whether or not they would be holidaying, for instance, in Florida or Arizona, in the case of an Alberta person who is retired and, fortunately, has a retirement income high enough to take a break during the extreme portion of the winter. This is very important because the last number of elections, as you well know, have been held in March.

If I could have a further explanation as to how this process around special ballots works now. Is an individual representing a campaign allowed to have more than one special ballot per trip? How does this work? I'm confused. I know what the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo told me regarding the special ballots and how they worked or did not work in Calgary-Buffalo. I was under the assumption that a representative from an individual campaign could only deal with one special ballot at a time.

If I could have clarification from the hon. member regarding those questions, I would appreciate it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. I will endeavour to provide as much clarification as I can. I may or may not be able to answer all of the questions. I'm not sure if one agent from one campaign is limited to one special ballot. I think, basically, the idea is that the special ballot is owned by the person who fills it out and signs it. So although a campaign may be able to transport the ballot from point A to point B, it needs to be filled out and signed, and there need to be copies of ID and all that kind of stuff provided by the person who's actually receiving the special ballot.

What happens right now is that you can use the special ballot if, for instance, you're not going to be in the jurisdiction on the advance polling days or on election day. You can go in and get a special ballot yourself, individually, and fill it out. If you are physically incapacitated either before or on election day, you can call up your local deputy returning officer and ask them to deliver a special ballot

to your house, and then you would fill it out. All the appropriate things would be done, and then that ballot would be cast.

There's no question; certainly, I've been on campaigns where on election day itself we've been in the process where we've phoned people who've indicated in the past a desire to support our candidate. They have indicated: well, I can't come because I'm too sick or I broke my hip or yada, yada, yada. Then at that point the campaign might transport the ballot. I believe that the safeguards are still in place so that it's still ultimately the relationship between the voter who is filling out the special ballot and the returning officer. They still have to sign a declaration and provide ID and all that kind of stuff. That's the way it works right now.

Under the current section 116 these are the criteria where you become entitled to use a special ballot: if you are physically incapacitated; if you are absent from the electoral division; if you are, basically, an employee on election day of the deputy returning officer or the Chief Electoral Officer and otherwise engaged in the election; if you are an inmate; if you are a resident of a remote area designated under section 31 — and I'm assuming it's someplace where they can't get a poll to — or any other circumstance prescribed by the Chief Electoral Officer.

The point of this would be simply that if I am planning to vote and I know I'm going to be in town on election day, so I don't qualify that way, but if I also know that I'm working a 12-hour shift and that as much as I have a legal right to leave my place of employment — let's say I'm a nurse — to go cast my ballot but also know that we've been short-staffed for several years and that my supervisor is going to really not be happy with me if I exercise my right under the act to go and vote that day, and if I'm also working on the advance poll days and times, I might just walk into the returning office three days after the writ is dropped because I'm not working that week and fill out a special ballot and cast my ballot there.

That's the kind of extra ease because right now what happens is that you only have the limited days when advanced voting is allowed. Those hours are not all day long. There are specific hours during the day. Then you have the election day itself. The point of this would basically be to allow people to vote at any time during the election period regardless of whether or not they are physically incapacitated and regardless of whether they are or are not there on election day. It's, again, geared towards increasing participation and increasing the opportunity for people to participate.

I hope that answers some of your questions.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A5?

Hearing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to Bill 7 as amended. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, this is an ideal time to bring it up. I have a question for the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and perhaps through the course of debate he could refresh my memory. Is it not the hon. member's bill from last year, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009? This is repealed in this act. I'm curious as to why the House spent considerable time on this last year, and now we find that this legislation has been repealed so quickly. If any hon. member could enlighten me through the course of debate on why this has occurred, I certainly would welcome that.

4:40

Also, Mr. Chairman, I have questions in committee on the coming into force of this proposed Bill 7. Certain sections, of course, are coming into force at certain times, and I would appreciate an explanation as to why this is occurring. Sections 77, 78, 79, and 85(a) and (b) come into force on January 1, 2011. Then how exactly is this going to work? Sections 31, 34, 35, 39, 41, 43, and 49 apply with respect to the next election that is held at least six months after the coming into force of this section and subsequent elections. If I'm interpreting this correctly, parts of this bill, if it was to be voted into law, would not apply if the next election was held six months after the coming into force of this bill.

I'm sort of looking at a bit of history here, Mr. Chairman. Going back to 1989, of course, it was only three years into the term of one of the previous Progressive Conservative regimes, and a snap election was held. I'm not saying this is going to happen, but I'm getting very, very suspicious. I can confidently say that we will be going to the polls provincially before the sustainability fund is drained. Now, how quickly the sustainability fund is drained is a billion dollar question, but I'm certainly going to be prepared myself. Yes. That would be 98(2).

Now, 98(3), sections 21, 54, 76, 83, 84, 86(b), 87, 88, and 94(b) come into force on the day that a writ is issued under section 40 of the Election Act for the next general election after this section comes into force.

Any number of things could happen here. This bill could be debated and passed, and the proclamation date could be – I don't know. There could be a lot of work put into this bill. There could be a lot of changes made to the Election Act, but the changes would not necessarily be reflected in how we govern ourselves in the next provincial election. So I'm curious why we have this coming into force that appears to be in three stages, Mr. Chairman. If the government members or the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General could provide an answer to that, I would be very grateful.

Before I move on, Mr. Chairman, certainly when you look at the back of the bill and you continue on, there's also 98(4), where sections 45, 56(f), 57(a), 58(a) and (b), 62, 63, 89, 90, and 97 come into force on proclamation. I was wrong. There are four stages to this bill, if it was to become law, before it becomes the rules from which we would conduct elections under.

I think those are very important questions, and I think they merit an explanation from the hon. Minister of Justice before we proceed.

Certainly, whenever I read *Hansard*, there has been a lot said in this Assembly about electronic voting. There has been a lot said in our caucus about electronic voting. I think the benchmark would be the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview regarding electronic voting. I think the hon. member summed it up very well.

Now, in the last number of years I've read a number of interesting articles, and this is long after we all witnessed the presidential election in Florida, the election that sent George W. Bush to the White House as President over Mr. Al Gore. [some applause] Wow, I wonder if the former President of the United States, George W. Bush, has things to do, or would he be watching this live on the Internet stream? I don't think he's had a clap like that in quite a while. That is sort of a reflection of that caucus, Mr. Chairman. I'm not going to, you know, be off topic here. I'm not going to be drawn off topic. Certainly not.

Now, when we look at the conduct of that election and the hanging chad, the different districts where there were issues over voting, of course, the final result had to be set through judicial review, as was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs' election in 2004. That went to various levels of the judiciary before

it was finally resolved. When you have a voting system, it has to be accurate. In case there is a dispute, it has to be transparent. The proof of who voted, where they voted: that has to be available if there is to be a mechanism to resolve any differences. Certainly, the number of ballots granted to or taken by electors has to balance with either the number of ballots that are in the box or the number of destroyed ballots or rejected ballots, however you want to look at that.

We have a system in place now. We have a system, as the hon. member points out, where everyone can take a few minutes out of their day, whether it's before they go to work or after they come home from work, to vote. I'm not saying that perhaps we shouldn't change the voting hours to make it more convenient; we can certainly look at that. I find it quite odd that there are people in this country – and I'm talking about the Canadian military, the men and women in the Canadian military – who are willing to sacrifice their lives so that another country, in this case Afghanistan, can adapt, so that they can have a democracy like the one that we enjoy in this country. They're willing to literally risk their lives to support initiatives that support a democracy in that country. We have people in this country that don't even have 10 minutes to get up off the couch and make an effort to go to the local church or the local school and vote. I think this is quite odd. Hopefully, we can educate people and encourage them and give them a reason to get out and vote.

The second thing that strikes me, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that young people, particularly young women, tell me: "There is no reason to vote. What's the sense? It's not going to make any difference anyway." I remind people all the time, if they were to think about this, that their grandmothers, when they were young, probably didn't have the right to vote. Certainly, their great-grandmothers would not have had the vote. Women in the past, less than 100 years ago, went on hunger strikes, were willing to go to jail, and were willing to protest nonviolently to ensure that all women had the franchise to vote. I can't imagine what our country was like before women had the right to vote. Mr. Chairman, at one point you had to be of a certain religion or you had to own property and you had to be male in order to vote. We know that that's just wrong. We know all the arguments that were made to suggest that women should not have the right to vote. Those arguments were wrong.

4:50

I always make an effort to point out, particularly to young women: "It's not that long ago that women had to fight for the right to vote. Why are you dismissing the franchise that people fought for so vigorously so that you could have the right to vote?" It puzzles me why people don't vote. I am of the opinion that political parties – all of us are guilty – are not giving them a reason to vote. There are individuals in this country that are willing to sacrifice their lives so that others can have the vote while some of us sit on the couch, unwilling to make an effort to vote on election day.

If we continue down this pattern of electronic voting – now, I know that there are members in this House that think that they can just hop off the couch, take two steps, take the cushion out of the chair, sit in the chair before the computer, and vote. There are members – and I would encourage them to participate in the debate on this issue – who think this is the answer.

I reject that because I'm not confident that the system is foolproof. When you look at what happened in Florida and you read the op-ed pieces and the opinion pieces in the *New York Times* – and I know the members across the way may consider that to be a Liberal newspaper, but it's a very good newspaper. I would encourage

them, if they have any time on the weekends, to have a squint at it. The *New York Times*, over the years since the incident I described earlier in Florida, has published a lot of articles regarding electronic voting and the potential for voter fraud. It's significant, and it's a significant risk. I don't think we should jeopardize our voting system here.

We have the lists. I know we can improve the lists. I think we should have an enumeration before each and every election. I know that there have been improvements made through the municipal census, through federal income tax information, and the co-ordinating of the different levels of governments with that list, but I think that there should be an enumeration. I don't think it is an unreasonable cost. When we have an enumeration with an accurate polling list, when we have that broken down by poll, and we have trained volunteers to conduct the election, I think it can be fair for every candidate in every political party.

But I am yet to be convinced that electronic voting is not open to fraud. Hon. members will say: "Well, you can make billions of dollars of transactions on the Internet; you can do that routinely. People do that. We are becoming a society where there is less paper. There is a significantly reduced paper trail, and there's more and more information being transmitted between parties electronically." I know that is true. I accept the argument, Mr. Chairman, that banks carry on transactions, and there are electronic contracts. In fact, there is a book I was looking at the other day in the library just on that very subject.

That being said, I am not convinced that for each individual who is listed to vote, even if we have these unique identification numbers – and to me it's frightening that we would even be talking about that – there is no way that we can guarantee that the system will not be compromised or that the integrity of the system will not be jeopardized. That is one reason why I'm very suspicious of this attempt to initiate electronic voting.

We talked earlier, Mr. Chairman, about this identifier, this voter ID, so to speak. I don't think that we need that on the list of electors in each respective poll. If there are any questions, we can just pull out our driver's licence or ID and show that to the election officials and get our ballot. It might take a minute or two longer, and the lineup may be five people instead of two, but that's not much of a price to pay whenever you consider that people are willing to jeopardize or risk their lives to promote democracy in another country. Certainly, I would urge all members of this Assembly to think very, very thoroughly before we open up our election process to electronic voting.

Now, moving on in the time that I have, Mr. Chairman, this is a very interesting bill. I'm looking specifically at section 134. The section 134 that we know is repealed, and the following is substituted:

Printed or electronic advertising.

134(1) In this section, "advertisement" means an advertisement, for which there is or normally would be a charge, in any broadcast, print or electronic media, including telephone, fax, internet, e-mail and text messaging, with the purpose of promoting or opposing any registered political party or the election of a registered candidate.

(2) Every advertisement containing a reference to any election shall include the sponsor's name and contact information and indicate that the sponsor authorizes the advertisement.

I can certainly accept that.

(3) Subsection (2) . . .

This is the identification of the sponsor's name and contact information.

. . . does not apply to a printed or electronic advertisement bearing only one or more of the following:

(a) the colours and logo of a registered political party;

(b) the name of a registered political party;

(c) the name of a candidate.

Does this section allow for a campaign phone canvass, the demon dialer? We talked about the demon dialer earlier in debate, and many campaigns . . . [interjection] The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont seems to be quite fond of the demon dialer.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore utilizes the demon dialer. I guess it depends on how much money you have.

Certainly, I would like to know if this subsection applies to the demon dialer. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments. The hon. member started – and I lost track of what he was talking about after a while, but it was a little bit disingenuous, I think – by provoking Airdrie-Chestermere about the repeal of section 97. If he'd read the act, he'd realize that in the provisions of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act third-party advertising had been built into the act.

Mr. MacDonald: Not all of them.

Mr. Hancock: Well, you could point out some of those, but it's the normal course, when you're revising an act, to bring things into the appropriate sections, and the coming into force sections are clearly transitional provisions.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, earlier today we had discussions with the House leaders, and it was thought that it might be appropriate, once we'd dealt with the amendments that were coming to the floor, that we adjourn debate on this particular bill and move on with other business and come back to this bill later. Accordingly I would move that the committee adjourn debate on Bill 7.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:00

Bill 12

Body Armour Control Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act. I'd like to begin by thanking those who support this bill. The proposed legislation would allow the police to seize body armour from individuals who do not have a permit who are not exempt from the requirement of obtaining a permit. Police officers, peace officers, emergency medical service providers, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission inspectors, licensed private security guards, and others who need to wear body armour to do their jobs will be exempt from the requirement to get a permit.

This bill is drafted to ensure that law-abiding Albertans can continue to own and wear body armour. One of the ways the law does that is by exempting anyone who owns a valid firearms licence from having to get a separate permit for body armour. Recreational shooters, hunters, and gun owners more generally have firearms

licences so will not be impacted by this act. Other individuals may be issued a permit on the basis that they have legitimate occupational or personal safety reasons to wear body armour.

This proposed legislation defines body armour to include garments or other items that are designed or adapted to protect the wearer from a weapon or other object used to cause injury or death. The proposed legislation does not apply to safety equipment used in sporting and recreational activities, nor does it apply to safety equipment worn to protect against workplace injuries; for example, safety equipment worn by loggers or meat cutters.

The permit system will be modelled on the licensing scheme contained in the Security Services and Investigators Act. Several provisions in this proposed legislation are modelled on that act. Applications will be processed by the registrar designated under that act, and applicants will be subject to rigorous criminal record and background checks. Violations of the act will be punishable by a fine or a short custodial sentence or both.

Mr. Chairman, by taking away gang members' sense of invincibility, we hope to decrease the potential for violence in public places.

I thank all members for participating in this debate and look forward to their feedback.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Ms Blakeman: I'm never incredibly keen on things where civil liberties are used as an excuse on either side, but clearly we are up against a societal challenge that we need to give government some tools to deal with, and gangs are one of them. They don't play fair, they don't play by the rules, and they're making it very difficult for well-intentioned organizations and individuals to be able to protect our citizens from being recruited into gangs.

In my constituency I have a number of communities that have escaped from war, have perhaps lived in refugee camps. These people are not unfamiliar with weapons; let me put it that way. We're trying to help them integrate into quite a different society. For younger people who see money and cars and nice stereos and a sense of family or belonging, it can be an irresistible lure. Then to have gang members who can walk into bars with body armour on and be invincible, it's even more difficult.

Sometimes I think we pass laws because we believe this will solve a problem, and all we do is create a whole bunch of other problems and a whole bunch of other work and cost and red tape, which irritates me because it just isn't thought through. I haven't been able to poke the holes in this legislation that I was expecting to be able to. I've looked through the list of exemptions. [interjections] Oh, it's got to be spring. The marijuana people are outside. Yeah, it's a long day. [interjection] Yes, there are many, many constituents of Edmonton-Centre that are currently on the Legislature Grounds. No question about it.

But in looking at the exceptions, it's essentially saying that anybody that would usually have a gun or who has a legitimate reason for having a gun also has access to this without additional permitting. It certainly covers our public employees, which I think should be paramount when we look at protecting firefighters and police officers and EMS personnel and wildlife officers, that my father still calls the fish feds. He has no love for them, I'll tell you. He'll be thrilled to hear that they have body armour. The one that I do find interesting is that the gaming and liquor control people are exempted from the requirement to hold a permit.

I'm aware, having listened to the Tannoy when I was back in my office, that there was a fairly vigorous give-and-take on this one, but I'm not finding what's being proposed here inappropriate. I'm not finding it putting any particular hardship or disadvantage on one

group or another here. I think we struggle to be able to find out how to work with organizations like the sort of new version of gangs that exist in a highly technical, Internet-based world and move about in a way that we find difficult to track and control.

As much as I don't like putting those kinds of restrictions out, at this point I'm willing to support this legislation in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I feel it's important to once again rise and speak against this bill. There are just so many areas that need to be addressed. I understand the intent of the bill, but the question is: what are going to be the results? Are the outcomes going to match the intent? I just have to say that, no, I don't see how they are, any more than gun control and registering long guns have reduced the incidence of guns and those areas with that.

It's interesting. There's no question that we have a dilemma and need some tools to deal with, in fact, the gangs and those members who come into a bar and want to boast or act invincible because they're wearing body armour. I think that we should be able to pass legislation so that when someone comes in making threats or making intimidations and is wearing body armour – we could pass legislation that would allow for some pretty steep fines or some strict penalties, some time in jail for individuals that were wearing it and making threats.

I do not see the value in having to go through a process in order to get hold of body armour, especially when it comes to the question of: is this going to stop gang members from using it? In a small way maybe it might, but I think it just increases the black market, actually adds to their economic activities that go on when we have to register or have to have special – what would I say? – licensing to get hold of body armour.

I don't see how this is going to be a real tool that's going to in fact help the police deal with gangs. That's the number one reason that we hear, that this is a tool in order to address the gang activities. Again, it's been brought up several times by many members here in this House about these individuals that are going into a public place, bragging that they have on body armour, and making those threats.

Like I say, let's address that issue, that problem, not a general one that says: well, you no longer are able to get body armour or wear it unless you have a special licence. Again, you know, I understand the importance, that as a society safety is always a critical issue that we try and look at to ensure that our citizens are safe. Like I say, it does allow the police to have this tool where they can pull someone over to see: well, are you licensed to have this vest?

5:10

I think that this, then, opens up the next problem. I think it'll be amazing how many individuals will be able to go and get a licence and say, "Well, I've had threats on my life," on these other activities or whatever it is, be able to get a licence to get body armour even though their intent and their use are going to be illegal otherwise. Then we're going to be in a situation where it's legally acceptable because they've used the legal process to acquire a bulletproof vest or a stab-proof vest.

I just would urge the members of the House to reconsider the purpose of this bill. Is it in fact going to address the gang problems that we have? Like I say, in my mind, as I try and think through the process and how those people who want them are going to acquire them, I think they're going to have the loopholes to be able to get them. You know, I just have to wonder: what are we really going to

accomplish in this other than restrict people who might for whatever reason want to get body armour and be nervous, not wanting to go and get licensed and going through the questions or whatever else? Again, I just think this is government taking a step that is too far, unnecessary. [interjection] Well, I know you can get one.

Mr. Chair, we just really need to look at it and say: "Is this going to stop the gangs? Is it going to stop someone from going into a bar?" Like I say, my thought process as I go through is that, yes, it might reduce a few, but the biggest concern I have is that it's going to increase the economic activity of those on how to get a vest.

Ms Blakeman: Black market vests.

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

Again, though, the experts are a whole group of people that are going to provide the legitimate reasons in order for someone to get a vest. Like I say, those whom we least want to have them will probably get registered, get licensed, and will be wearing these. I'd urge the members of the House to vote against this bill. It's unnecessary. It doesn't accomplish what we need.

Then the other area to look at. When we start making these lists and the cost in maintaining them and who's going to want to access those lists, again for the poor reasons that they want to do this, we're jeopardizing the system. Again, we have limited funds here in the province. We're not able to fund the police forces the way they want. They're always asking for more money, looking for new tools, new equipment, yet we're going to go sideways here and say: "Well, if we do these things, it's going to be a benefit. It's not going to cost very much."

Again, I'd just go back to what we've learned with the long gun registry: "This will only be a million or two." It's been over a billion. Everybody says: "Oh, no. This is going to be a simple process; you know, the papers. It's not going to be expensive." But the fact of the matter is that we're going to have to hire people in order to process the paperwork to do this. Those could be two people that could be out on the street, two people that could be actually assigned to gang activity. Maybe it's one person; maybe it's 20. I don't know how many it's going to be. It's hard to envision the demand or what's going to happen here. Again, I just think we need to focus. What is it that we want to do? This is a Band-Aid solution. I think the Band-Aid is going to fall off fairly quickly, and we're going to say: well, what have we accomplished here?

Again, I'd just urge the members to reconsider. What is this bill's intent? Is it going to accomplish those things? I don't believe it will. This isn't the tool that we want to give police officers to go after the gangs and those people that are going into public areas and putting on the body armour and making those threats. That's who we want to target. That's where we need a law. Those people that are acting aggressively, making threats in public, and wearing body armour: we want to penalize them. I hope that the members of the House will vote against this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to reiterate my opposition to this bill. Again, I just don't understand. The inconsistency just confuses me. I really do want to honestly hear a response to this from government members if any of them are willing to do it. I mean, most of the members on that side of the House, I would say the vast majority of them, opposed the long gun registry out of Ottawa. I know most, if not all, the rural MLAs certainly did. I'm

assuming most of them over there – I don't have, you know, the record about that for every single MLA, but my guess, my sense was that most of them, if not the vast majority of them, were opposed to that.

Here we have a long gun registry in Canada that we've been fighting as a province against for a very long time. There, of course, you have it brought in by the eastern, federal Liberal Party, and they wanted every long gun to be registered. They thought that that would somehow curb crime and gun shootings in the cities or in the country. As we all know, it was a huge debacle. It was supposed to be just a few million dollars to set this registry up, and it turned into a billion-dollar boondoggle. It was a total failure. It didn't do anything to curb crime, all that sort of thing. So we have this, and rightfully we were opposed to it as a province. Most of the MLAs, anyway, in this Assembly across the way were opposed to it.

Now we move over to body armour. I have absolutely no problem with saying that if someone is using body armour in the furtherance of or carrying out of a crime or a gang shooting or something, I have absolutely no issue with tacking on an extra dollar amount or an extra jail time or whatever to say that that's not allowable. I understand what the police are trying to achieve there, and I would support that.

How do we then jump from that, which is a good goal, a laudable goal, and say: "Look. You know what? In order to enforce this, we're going to make sure that every single person who owns body armour has to license it." It just doesn't make any sense whatsoever. It's the same issue. Criminals are not going to license their body armour. What gang member is going to go and license his body armour? It just doesn't add up. It's absolutely a contradiction to say that you oppose the gun registry, but you're in favour of the body armour licensing registry. You've got, you know, some members saying: oh, the registry is different than licensing. No, it is not. It costs money to do this. You have to set up the process; you have to track it. We're against the long gun registry, but we're for a body armour registry. It makes no sense, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to hear from the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on this issue, why he supports the body armour registry. I'd like to hear from the hon. minister of agriculture on why he supports the body armour registry. I definitely would love to hear from the Minister of Transportation on why he is in favour of the body armour registry and how he thinks this is any different from the long gun registry, which I know he's opposed to. It just makes no sense. The Deputy Premier: I'd like to get his thoughts on it. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills: I want to know his thoughts on that. Obviously, I know he's against the long gun registry. I know that. Why is he going to vote for this bill, or is he going to vote for this bill? The inconsistency is just through the roof.

I understand what they're trying to do. They're trying to make it difficult. They don't want people walking in, gang members walking into bars with body armour and intimidating everybody and all that sort of thing. I understand that. That's fine. The answer to that is not to make everybody, all law-abiding citizens who want to use it . . . [interjection] Well, I know it's difficult for someone like yourself, Minister, to understand, but there are a lot of people that make their living in very dangerous environments. For example, some people live in rough areas of town, and they feel better if they put on a vest because they think their 7-Eleven or somewhere might get ripped off. They might want to wear a piece of body armour. So now they have to register it? Come on. There's no point to this.

5:20

Just because members of this Assembly don't wear it doesn't mean that others don't want to wear it. I mean, there are websites

you can go to and buy this stuff, so there's obviously a market for it. You know, it's not just police officers buying it. But the gang member who buys this stuff is not going to go and register it.

That's not what happened with the long gun registry. With the long gun registry at the very least you could say, well, at least you were registering something that could shoot somebody. Absolutely. A gun can obviously be used to kill somebody. There's no doubt about that. So there was that excuse. It didn't work. It was a bad idea. Most of us here were opposed to it. But at least you had that legitimate excuse that, yes, this is a weapon that can kill someone. But body armour? Mr. Chair, how is body armour going to kill somebody? Body armour is meant to protect people.

What are we going to register next? Are we going to register – I don't know – knives? Are we going to register mace? You know, a young lady who wants to go jogging and likes to bring mace with her – I know my wife takes mace with her in her little pack when she's out on her jog. And many, many people do the same thing. So why would we make that something you would need to register? You wouldn't do it. It's absolutely ridiculous that we're taking something that is essentially a protective device, something that is meant to protect people's lives, and we're making it essentially something that people, law-abiding citizens, have to go and register. That's certainly not the right thing to do by any stretch.

Again, I'd like to hear from the various different ministers. I'd like to hear from the minister of housing. I know he was dead against the long gun registry, so why is he for the body armour licensing registry? Definitely the Member for Battle River-Wainwright was against the long gun registry. What's changed, in his view, that he would support the body armour registry? It doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

It's a boondoggle. It's a waste of money. If we're going to expend resources, we should be expending resources on hiring more officers. If we're going to set aside however many millions of dollars it's going to be to administer this, we should instead take that money and put it into new Internet child exploitation teams, ICE teams, in other words. We should put it into more officers. We should put it into other things. There are about 30 other law enforcement mechanisms that we should be putting money into rather than expending money on registering protective body armour.

With that, I would like to get some answers from the government side. I don't know if they will or not. At least just give me the justification for why you would support this bill, but you didn't support the long gun registry. I find those positions to be very inconsistent.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on Bill 12? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 13

Securities Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 13, the Alberta Securities Amendment Act, 2010. I was pleased to see that there were no issues raised at second reading, so I'd like to take a moment to remind members of the purpose of this bill. Bill 13 continues the work that Alberta has done in modernizing, streamlining, and harmonizing securities legislation over the past five years under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. As such, this bill includes amendments that ensure Alberta assists Canada in meeting its international commitments that strengthen regulatory enforcement and then further harmonize the registration regime in support of the passport system.

In terms of specifics, section 16 of the bill deals with the regulation of credit-rating organizations. What Bill 13 will do is adopt a new framework for regulating credit-rating organizations, the same framework that will be adopted across Canada. This new framework will require credit-rating organizations that want to be able to rate certain products and others that rely on that rating for regulatory purposes to meet the framework's criteria and apply to have the organization designated. This is key to strengthening the Alberta Securities Commission's ability to protect investors.

Bill 13 also contains amendments related to Canada's conversion to international financial reporting standards, or IFRS. IFRS is fast becoming the global language of accounting for public entities, making it easier to conduct business internationally and to raise funds through easier access to global markets. The move to IFRS will mean that our issuers' financial information will be readily comparable with issuers in other countries. The amendments in sections 2, 4, 8, 20, and 21 of the bill will facilitate the move to IFRS by January 1, 2011, by replacing existing terms with IFRS terms where necessary. This may seem like a minor point, but it's needed to help ensure a smooth transition for all involved.

Other amendments in Bill 13 are focused on regulatory enforcement. Sections 6, 7, and 10 to 13 will make sure that our legislation continues to be harmonized, streamlined, and up to date. This includes an amendment to strengthen regulatory enforcement to provide a timely means of dealing with issuers that refuse to rectify, clarify, or explain misleading disclosure. This will be done by broadening the powers of the Alberta Securities Commission and its executive director to issue a cease-trade order in instances of faulty disclosure. Again, this is about protecting investors. Investors need to have adequate, appropriate information on investment products so they can determine the risks involved and if the investment is right for them.

Moving along, section 17 of Bill 13 provides for further registration reform. These amendments will ensure that Alberta registration provisions are fully harmonized with the registration provisions elsewhere across Canada. Essentially we'll be replacing the term "deal in securities" with trading in securities as adopted by other jurisdictions and harmonizing the definition of dealer. We need to be sure we're speaking the same language as our counterparts, which will keep our dealings with other jurisdictions co-ordinated and co-operative.

Finally, section 19 of the bill deals with cost recovery. Currently there is an artificial distinction between costs associated with an investigation and those of a hearing. The amendment will make it easier for the Alberta Securities Commission to recover costs in the case of a person or company who has been found in contravention of Alberta's securities laws.

Before I conclude, I'd like to touch briefly on Alberta's constitutional challenge of the move to a national securities regulator. During second reading the rationale behind why we launched our reference and why we joined Quebec's reference was explained. I'm

pleased to say that Quebec has agreed to join in our reference, sending a strong message of support for provincial jurisdiction over securities regulation. Intervening in support of each other's constitutional reference allows the two provinces to share resources and co-operate in addressing this important constitutional question.

5:30

As you've heard, Bill 13 is intended to help keep our securities legislation as up to date as possible. This requires ongoing reform, and as Alberta is the second-largest capital market in Canada, it's vital that we continue to show global leadership. This is important for Alberta, and this is important for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate this afternoon at committee on Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010. I certainly appreciate the efforts of the hon. Member for Red Deer-South regarding this bill. I appreciate his remarks. Certainly, whenever we look at this amendment as presented by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise – and I understand it, again, to harmonize the passport system that originated with the memorandum of understanding from 2004 between the federal and the provincial governments and that the province of Ontario was excluded in that. Since then there have been changes, changes politically and changes to many different financial regulations.

The amendments in Bill 13 also support Canada's conversion to the international financial reporting standards. We are creating also a framework here, as I said earlier, for regulating credit-rating organizations. We will allow the Alberta Securities Commission to impose sanctions for late filing of disclosure. That is more similar to the model in British Columbia. Also, as the hon. member noted, there are further amendments to ensure that Alberta's registration regime is harmonized with other provinces.

It is our view that we should support this bill. There are some outstanding issues regarding securities regulation that I think we need to discuss. I think we're going to see more changes, more amendments.

These amendments will allow for the harmonization or mutual recognition of securities regulators in Canada through the passport system. Every year for the last six years, as I understand it, we have made amendments to security legislation across the country to bring the language in the legislation onto a common baseline. There is a lot of discussion, a lot of back and forth between the provinces over the legislative changes as one province would amend their legislation and then others would have to re-amend their legislation to bring it in line with the others and so on. The passport system is continually updated and harmonized as other provinces amend their securities legislation.

This bill – and we've got to point this out, Mr. Chairman – does not address the idea of a national securities regulator, but it is interesting to note there are currently 13 provincial and territorial securities regulators across Canada rather than a single national regulator. Now, Mr. Flaherty, the federal Finance minister, has been quoted as saying that Canada is the only industrialized country without a single securities regulator, and the *Globe and Mail* reported that Canada is one of only two countries in the 103-member International Organization of Securities Commissions without a national overseer.

Over the last few years all of the provinces, as I said earlier, excluding Ontario, had begun implementing a passport system which mutually recognizes the rules within each provincial regulator in order to facilitate transactions across borders. The federal govern-

ment has been advocating for a national regulator, with resistance from B.C., Alberta, and, of course, as the hon. member noted, Quebec. B.C. has recently softened to the idea, but Alberta and Quebec continue to oppose the implementation of a national regulator. Over a year ago, in January 2009, a federal report led by a former Conservative minister, Tom Hockin, was released that recommended a national regulator, including provisions meant to accommodate the concerns raised in western Canada and Quebec such as regional offices being established in Vancouver, Calgary, and Montreal and a provision to allow provinces to opt in to the single regulator.

There was also a recommendation for a market participant opt-in for registrants and issuers who could elect to be regulated by the federal regulator. The current Minister of International and Inter-governmental Relations, as I understand it, responded by threatening legal action if national regulation is implemented, claiming it would be an infringement on provincial jurisdiction and that a regulator centralized in Ontario would not understand the unique market circumstances within Alberta. I can understand a bit of that, where the hon. minister would be coming from, particularly with the energy sector, particularly the junior oil and gas sector, in Calgary. They have certainly pointed out where their needs to raise money are unique to Alberta. But we certainly didn't have to wait long, of course, for our province to react and to challenge through the judicial system. [interjections] I believe they're talking about the airport tunnel in Calgary, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Anyway, keep talking with me, Member, and hopefully the other members will sort of quiet down so we can hear each other.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, before Christmas we found out that Alberta is to launch a court challenge over the federal move to create a national securities regulator. It's interesting – I know this is in the courts, and it will be winding its way through the courts – to see the political dynamics of this. You have the Conservative Prime Minister from Calgary. You have the Conservative finance minister in this government also from Calgary. Yet we find ourselves launching a court challenge provincially over the federal government's initiative to create this national securities regulator.

I can remember campaigning during the Calgary-Glenmore by-election. I don't want to keep bringing this up, but I happened upon a couple of houses, and the residents were very, very upset over the changes to some of the income trusts. Those changes, of course, had been initiated by the Conservative Prime Minister. These individuals took exception to that major change to income trusts. They expressed their opinion, as I recall, very, very vividly about this. I thought: hmm, what's this all going to mean?

I know people – and I can appreciate this – watch their investments very, very closely and can be very, very disappointed when for one reason or another, without any sort of formal announcement, there are changes; the playing field is changed. They may lose a significant part of their investment as a result of that. That's why we have to have a regulatory system that people have confidence in.

5:40

Certainly, these investors did not have confidence in the initiative that was originally started by the Conservative Prime Minister. How this relationship with our minister of finance is going to help or hinder further negotiations around whether this is provincial jurisdiction or a federal intrusion into provincial jurisdictions is going to be interesting to see. We know the Alberta government is going to the Court of Appeal here in the province to test the constitutional soundness of the federal government's move to create

a single Canadian securities regulator. It's going to be interesting to see how this plays out.

According to the Alberta Finance and Enterprise broadsheet here, Securities regulation is a matter of provincial jurisdiction, and acknowledging federal authority in this area would have implications in other areas of financial regulation that have historically been provincial responsibility . . . The interests of Albertans and the Alberta capital market are best served by the existing regulatory structure. There is no need for this intrusion into provincial jurisdiction.

We're sort of unique here, Mr. Chairman. We're the only province or state, as a matter of fact, with our own state-owned bank, the Alberta Treasury Branches. I don't know if that's what the hon. minister was referring to or not, but that's an interesting take on this. How do we regulate that? What do outsiders or others think about us? You know, we're known for our free enterprise and independent spirit, yet we have a state-owned bank.

Alberta, as I understand it, is also intervening – and the hon. Member for Red Deer-South brought this up – in support of a similar challenge by the provincial government in Quebec to the Quebec Court of Appeal.

Joining with Quebec will allow the two provinces to share resources and co-operate in other aspects of the two cases. It also sends a stronger message of opposition to the federal plans [of Mr. Harper and Mr. Flaherty].

Alberta will argue the federal move to enact federal securities legislation and establish a single national securities regulator represents an unwarranted expansion of the federal trade and commerce constitutional power, opening the door to the federal regulation of other areas that have historically been regulated by the provinces. This could impact many areas that are currently considered to be matters of [exclusive] provincial responsibility. It could also hinder investment opportunities for small Alberta businesses.

Well, I hope not. I certainly hope that's not the case. I think the best thing we can do to enhance investment opportunities for small businesses is to keep our taxes low and competitive with the jurisdictions around us and ensure that we have a competitive economic playing field.

The federal [Conservative] government has announced its intention to ask the Supreme Court of Canada to confirm that it has the power to enact comprehensive legislation regulating securities. However, as it may be many months before [the federal government gets around to initiating this call], Alberta is moving forward now with its own reference and its intervention in Quebec's reference.

The province here certainly believes that this is an intrusion into an important area of provincial jurisdiction. We will see how this plays out in the courts.

Other than going to court, we certainly have other ways of dealing with this matter, in my view, legislative processes. It is odd – I shall put it to you this way, Mr. Chairman – that there would be this extreme difference of opinion between the federal Conservatives and their provincial cousins here in this province. My heart on this matter is with the provincial cousins because I think they are doing the right thing to just look at what is a provincial responsibility and what is a federal responsibility. This may take time, and it may cost money, but I think it's in the best interests of this province to follow that legal route.

Now, certainly, Mr. Chairman, when we look at the issue of the national securities regulator, it will unfold as these court cases wind their way through. I would think that it'll be next year and the year after that where we will have a similar amendment to what we're dealing with now to the securities legislation to reflect the yearly changes that occur. We know what people in the international investment community say, and we know how they feel regarding securities regulation. Certainly, they want to see a single regulator for this country. I don't know if that's an exceptionally good idea.

I know there are those who say: yes, we've got to get with the

times, and the proposed regional offices will work just fine. But I'm in the wait-and-see mode because there are those, whether they're in London, England, or in New York City or in Hong Kong, that would take exception to the idea or the statement from any individual that securities regulation has been working smoothly, that investors' interests are being looked after.

Certainly, that is not the case. We only have to look at the newspapers in the last couple of days and read about the activities at Goldman Sachs. We look at these activities, and we look at the accusations that have been made. That erodes investor confidence, Mr. Chairman.

You know, whenever someone from Brussels or someone from London or anywhere else, as a matter of fact, suggests that, well, maybe because we have this system that has one regulator here and another regulator there instead of a nationally co-ordinated regulatory body – maybe that's not as bad as it sounds. The economic storm that was caused because of inadequate or lax regulations or regulations that were not being enforced by the authorities in the financial sector created many problems, as we all know, but in this country we have been luckier than most.

I can remember vividly in the mid-90s, when the neo-cons were talking about deregulating the financial sector in this country, Mr. Chairman. Fortunately, it was Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin who thought: no, we have to keep a regulatory regime that is tight and is enforceable. I think history has proven them to be right.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. I will cede the floor to another hon. member. I believe that Bill 13 is a bill that should be supported. There are routine changes in this, but there are also some very interesting amendments. We will see how they work in the future. We will also see what happens as the province of Quebec's initiative winds through the courts and also the federal government's reference to the Supreme Court. We'll see how all this works out, but we'll probably be back here this time next year to make additional changes as necessary to the securities law.

Thank you.

5:50

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hearing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 14

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hearing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

**Bill 9
Local Authorities Election Statutes
Amendment Act, 2010**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, as proposed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. Certainly, the passing and proclamation of the private member's Bill 203 stirred up a frenzy among municipalities. That frenzy, in my view, was justified. This legislation is intended to avoid some of the problems that municipalities identified, in particular a candidate's own campaign funds up to \$10,000, the volunteer services, the question of campaigns funds, and the limits on contributions on an annual, not a campaign period, basis. I certainly heard last year from various municipal leaders. They weren't satisfied with that private member's bill, and we have this bill before us now.

I had an opportunity to talk about this bill earlier. I had some questions around the consultation process regarding that private member's bill. We can see clearly where, you know, the government is making an effort. This is a legislative repair job. Hopefully, if the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, as we see it, is passed, it will be viewed as fair by municipal levels of government and all those individuals who would care to run for an elected position in any one of those elected governments.

I'm of the view, Mr. Chairman, that we in this Assembly should ensure that our own financial records and our own contributions are completely above board. I would like to see all the financial statements before we tell civic politicians what they can and cannot do. We should be ensuring that our books are in order. I brought this up many times in this Assembly before.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would just encourage, advise all hon. members of this Assembly that at any time they can go to Elections Alberta, go to the reading room, and they can have a look through the files that are there for each year going back, I think, into the '70s. Certainly, the records that are there, the financial statements, the disclosures that are there: we should read them. We should ask ourselves some questions after we read those disclosure statements because, in my view, going through some of them, there are outstanding questions.

For instance, Mr. Chairman, we're telling civic politicians what they can and cannot do. At the same time, we can have some constituency associations for some parties and some members that during the year have budgets. I can't imagine what that's like. We usually raise money and try to save as much as is possible for preparations for the next election. Some constituencies have

expenditures in the thousands of dollars a year. Some constituencies have sums in excess of \$50,000, \$60,000. Some of them have a hundred thousand dollars that are invested. I have no problem with that. Some of it is in GICs. Some of it is in trust accounts.

Exactly where does the money go that's spent, Mr. Chairman, by a constituency association? Some sums are quite large. I can see \$1,500 to rent a hall and have a volunteer party for constituency volunteers, the ones that are working on the association, something like that, but there are amounts in the thousands of dollars in some constituencies. We have no idea where it's going, and we should have a process that outlines where it goes. Does it go for travel expenses for the member? Does it go for travel expenses for the executive? Is it going to send people to political conventions? Is it paying for their registration? Is it paying for their hotels? All this money is made through donations. Many of these donations have a tax break associated with them, so it wouldn't be unusual to ask for the details of where this money goes, but we don't do it.

The Progressive Conservatives' foundation fund is another example of a fund that for a number of years wasn't reported accurately and according to the act, yet we can see fit to tell civic politicians what they can and cannot do. I think it's a double standard, and I would just like to point that out.

At some time, hopefully over the summer, I'm going to get an opportunity to go back to Elections Alberta and have a look at some of the disclosure statements. I would love to sit down with the new Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta. Hopefully, he can address some of my concerns because there are some issues there that either I'm not understanding, or we have a very, very lax process. I think we should fix our own books before we tell others what they can and cannot do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. members, it is now 6 o'clock. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) we are in Committee of the Whole at this time and there's an evening sitting, so the chair now rises and leaves the chair until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, April 20, 2010

Issue 31e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, it's 7:30. The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Very briefly, I'm pleased to hear that an amendment was accepted this afternoon to allow the disenfranchised or the homeless to actually participate in the important enfranchisement of having a vote. I think that was very progressive legislation, and I'm pleased to hear that it went forward.

Briefly, my concerns are what is not in this particular bill such as fixed election dates, concerns over leadership financing. However, I do want to note and I am very pleased that the issue with regard to leadership financing rules, disclosure, accountability, and transparency has been passed along by the Minister of Justice to committee – I believe it's the Standing Committee on the Economy – to come up with solutions and improve the transparency and accountability process. Therefore, I think that's a major step in the right direction.

What I would have liked to have seen also in Bill 7 would have been moving toward a citizens' assembly with the thought of at least having for discussion proportional representation because this first past the post system is not involving a sufficient number of Albertans. The fact that only 41 per cent participated in the last election was an all-time Canadian low as well as a provincial low.

So Bill 7 is a start, but with Lorne Gibson being basically summarily dismissed and his 189 recommendations, very few of which appear in this bill, not being taken into account, I believe that democracy in Alberta could be better served.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hon. members, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you. Mr. Chairman and hon. members, it's my pleasure this evening to introduce to you 29 students from various high schools across Alberta who are participating in the Forum for Young Albertans program. They are accompanied by their seven chaperones. The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan political learning opportunity for Alberta high school students. The program provides a wide variety of experiences for participants, including insight into the judicial system, the role of the bureaucracy, the function of interest groups, and the legislative process. The Speaker met with the students this morning in the Chamber, and this evening the Deputy Speaker enjoyed a dinner together with these students. These students will be meeting with many other members throughout the week. I'd ask the students and chaperones

seated in the members' gallery to rise and please accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Bill 7

Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

(continued)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferalo on the bill.

Mr. Hehr: I'll speak in third. I'm okay.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the bill.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, is all about the democratic process and about how we can make our democracy more transparent, make it stronger, make it more fair. I understand that, and I do actually applaud the government on several of the amendments in the bill as I think they are a step in the right direction. Of course, there are many things that we think are omitted. In order to put that into context, I feel that it is necessary to talk a little bit about the state of our democracy from my perspective. I know very clearly that there are hon. members of this Assembly that will disagree with my assessment of the state of our democracy. That's fair. Thankfully, we have a democracy that we can debate in and that we can have differences of opinion in, and this is all good.

There are things that I do not think are very healthy in our democratic system, and there are things that need to be addressed. I felt so strongly about that, Mr. Chair, that I left the governing PC caucus and became a member of the Wildrose Alliance caucus a few short months ago. I did not do this on a whim. It's something I thought about very deeply, and it was, without doubt, the hardest, most difficult decision in a lot of ways that I've ever had to make. I wanted to comment on that, and I wanted to talk about that in order that I could put on the record for this Assembly and for people listening and for my constituents the reasons why I made the decision that I did. This, of course, will set the context for the rest of the discussion, the points that I want to bring up later on Bill 7.

With that, I'm going to read excerpts from my statement on why I made the decision that I did three short months ago so that we can better understand some of the flaws that I think should be addressed in Bill 7 and should be addressed as we move forward as a Legislature. So here we go.

As has been reported, I have made the decision to join the Wildrose Alliance [caucus and] Party.

Leaving the PC Party was a very difficult decision for me and my family. We value the friendships we have with many of our former caucus colleagues, party members and their families, and know that some may feel upset with [this] decision.

Ultimately, however, my political loyalties reside with the people of . . . Alberta and especially with those in the constituency of Airdrie-Chestermere who elected me to represent them. And it is principally to all of those that I wish to explain my decision to cross the floor.

Most Albertans will be disappointed to know that [in my view] politics in our province has evolved into a process that is almost completely undemocratic. Not only are there [rarely] free votes in the Legislature, there are very few free votes [from my point of view] in caucus. Virtually all legislation is created and developed by various unelected government appointees with direction from the Premier and a small cadre of Cabinet Ministers whose distinguishing attribute is unconditional allegiance to [their leader]. All other elected MLAs [in my experience] generally have little, if any, real input into the [major] decisions that impact the lives of their constituents.

Final government decisions are highly influenced by the Premier's chief-of-staff . . . This unelected [government appointee] is now paid more than the Premier (nearly \$400,000 per year) and has effectively been given the power to override the views of the elected caucus [in some situations]. As a result, [Albertans] essentially have governance [at times] by bureaucratic fiat rather than by [the people's] democratically elected representatives.

Predictably, this undemocratic system has resulted in policies that are contrary to the small-c conservative sensibilities of most Albertans. From massive royalty hikes on our energy entrepreneurs, to awarding untendered transmission line contracts worth billions of dollars, [to the return to debt financing], to failing to protect the rights of free speech of our citizens, to behind-closed-doors salary increases, to the highly questionable \$2 billion carbon capture and storage experiment (I could go on) – the advice and words of warning from many caucus MLAs have been largely ignored and dismissed, and extremely poor policy decisions have resulted.

7:40

Equally disturbing is that [the Premier and his inner circle] considers it a serious offence if elected MLAs speak up publicly for their constituents. By way of example, [the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo], a former Cabinet Minister . . . was ejected from . . . caucus . . . for simply speaking up [on behalf of] his most vulnerable constituents.

In response to publicly suggesting the need for improved fiscal responsibility, I and [some of] the other so-called "Fiscal Seven" had our positions within government [at the time] threatened . . . Even behind closed doors, MLAs who contradict the . . . chief-of-staff, the Premier, or a prominent Minister [in my experience were] often derided, shouted down, and threatened with having their political careers limited in some fashion.

Simply put, [it is my belief that] our system of governance has become entirely dysfunctional and is not something I can continue to be part of. Over the past two years, I committed myself to trying to make a positive impact within the government caucus [by advocating for the views and needs of my constituents, both in private and in public]. This is what the citizens of Alberta pay me to do.

That is what my constituents expect of me. I believe that defending poor public policy that has been developed by a small band of [largely] out-of-touch government appointees [and insiders, would be a poor investment of my life and of taxpayers' money.]

I . . . entered public life to try to make a difference for our province. I believe, with the right leadership, Alberta can become an example to the world of the unparalleled success that [comes from] protecting economic and individual freedoms, adhering to principles of fiscal and personal responsibility and remaining true to authentic democratic values.

These are principles I believe in. They are also principles held by the majority of my constituents who entrusted me with the honour of representing them. I have therefore determined that I will support the political party that best reflects and respects those principles.

In the Wildrose Alliance, I see a party which understands [and a caucus which understands] that the role of elected representatives is to vote in the best interests of their constituents, rather than to inform constituents of their [political] party's talking points.

I see in [the Wildrose leader] Danielle Smith a leader who is articulate, competent and committed to the modern, small-c conservative principles that I and the majority of my constituents hold dear.

And it is for [this reason] that I have decided to leave the Alberta PC Party [and caucus] and join Danielle Smith's Wildrose Alliance.

I, again, Mr. Chair, feel that this is an extremely important decision that I had to make. There were many that felt when I crossed the floor that I should resign and a by-election should be held in my constituency. I considered that a lot, and of course I've

issued a challenge to the governing caucus, to the Premier, on that matter, which I'll talk about in a second. I wanted to address why – and this actually directly affects Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act – our system needs a little bit of work and why we've kind of gotten the role of an elected representative mixed up and turned around a little bit. So I again would read into the record excerpts of a piece entitled: why a by-election would not be in the best interests of my constituents. I will let them decide whether to agree with it or not.

Last week [at the time] I decided to leave the PC Party and join the Wildrose Alliance. As I explained in my public statement, I did this because I feel by doing so I will be able to more effectively represent and advocate for the needs and views of my constituents.

I did not make this decision in isolation. Over the past six months alone, I have had many hundreds of active PC Party members express to me that they had completely lost confidence in the current government. A significant number of these encouraged me to consider a different party affiliation – one that would more closely reflect small-c conservative values.

In the first two days after publicly announcing my decision, I received over 500 emails and phone calls from constituents on this matter. The vast majority of these have expressed agreement with my decision. Extensive polling conducted in the constituency over the last week has confirmed this overwhelming support.

However, some of those who do not support my decision have suggested that I should resign my seat and hold a by-election. Others feel I should sit as an Independent until the next election is called.

I carefully considered both of these options in the days and weeks leading up to my decision to cross the floor and came to the firm conclusion that both options were unacceptable. I wish to explain this conclusion.

On one level, I would be happy to contest a by-election. As stated earlier, constituent feedback and polling point to the likelihood of an overwhelming Wildrose Alliance victory should such an election be called.

The problem is that if I were to resign my seat, election law states that a by-election would not need to be called for 6 months. Assuming the Premier would likely delay the date as long as possible in hopes of recovering his Party's failing popularity [in this area], this would mean my constituents would be left without an MLA for 6 months. I receive hundreds of inquiries each week from constituents with a diverse range of concerns, varying from needing to access programs for the disabled to providing input for a Government Bill before the Legislature. To deny my constituents this representation (especially during the critical spring budget session of the Legislature) would be undemocratic and irresponsible.

I also felt that sitting as an Independent would be a mistake. My job is to represent the needs and views of my constituents in the most effective way possible. As an Independent, I would not have the opportunity to ask daily questions in question period. I would have less government resources at my disposal to fight for the infrastructure, policies and other initiatives those I represent wish me to advocate for. I therefore determined this option would also not be in my constituents' best interests.

And that brings me to my last, and potentially, most important point. As I've explained, one of the key reasons for my leaving the PC Party was due to the unacceptable concentration of decision-making power in the Premier's small (and largely unelected) inner circle. It is a widely accepted and unfortunate fact that Canada's Premiers and Prime Ministers hold more executive power than almost any comparable elected office in the world; even more than the Office of the President of the United States [for example].

We saw this power used a few months ago when the Premier ejected [the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo] from caucus for simply defending the needs of his senior constituents. On this basis, it would appear that the government feels that kicking out an elected MLA against his will (and without a vote by caucus) is

democratic, but an MLA voluntarily leaving his Party in order to better represent his constituents is not.

One of the few checks on the power of the Premier's Office is the ability of an elected MLA to leave the caucus and sit with another party that better reflects the views and desires of his constituents. Whether it be incompetence, a lack of democracy, repeated poor policy decisions [or any other reason], an elected representative in our system needs to be able to say to the government, "You have failed my constituents – and on their behalf, I will sit with another group that allows me to better represent their rights and their views."

Under our system, we elect individuals, not political parties, to represent our interests in government. And representing my constituents' interests above that of a party is precisely why I have made the decision to cross the floor to the Wildrose Alliance.

Mr. Chairman, those are a couple of the statements that were made after that difficult decision, and I felt that they needed to be put on the record just so that there was a record of why I conducted the activity and why I did what I did.

Since that time, of course, there have been government members, specifically ministers, that have again asked that I run in a by-election. So my final piece – and, I'm sure, thankfully, for many of you – is my challenge to the Premier on that. I'll leave with this, and we can move on to fixed election dates and other fun things.

My Challenge to the Premier.

Democracy in our province is hurting.

[In the] last election Alberta had the lowest voter turnout in Canadian history. There is almost universal cynicism towards elected officials and their intentions [which is unfortunate and untrue.] And there is a prevailing feeling that the average Albertan has no voice or influence on the provincial issues that affect them personally.

We need democratic renewal in the worst way.

A couple of months ago I crossed the floor to Danielle Smith's Wildrose Alliance – a party I feel will, if elected by Albertans, usher in an unprecedented wave of democratic reform and government transparency.

Although I am confident the vast majority of my constituents support my decision to cross the floor, several individuals (including Cabinet Ministers in [the Premier's] government) have challenged me to step down and run in a by-election.

Initially, I chose not to do so because it would mean leaving my riding (the second most populous in Alberta) without representation for 6 months; and frankly, because I think an MLA should be able, on behalf of his constituents, to leave a party that [he or she feels] is incompetent and failing those that MLA represents.

That said, I wish to issue a challenge to the Premier and his government should they feel so strongly about the need for a by-election.

I will agree to resign and hold a by-election under the following conditions:

- First, so we don't waste taxpayer money, the Premier needs to announce the by-election on the same day as municipal elections to be held this fall (Oct. 18th). I will resign my seat exactly one day prior to the Premier dropping the election writ (this date must also be mutually agreed to) so he can call the election under current by-election law.
- Second, in order that Alberta retains full Senate representation in Ottawa starting in 2011 when Senator Tommy Banks retires, the Premier must call for a Senate election on that same day (Oct. 18th). This will also save taxpayer money. So far the Premier has refused to commit to Senate elections in the fall which means Albertans will be underrepresented starting in 2011 – this is unacceptable; and
- Lastly, we need to start addressing the democratic deficit in this province. I would therefore request the Premier fix an exact election date in 2012 (whatever date he wants is fine).

I'll give the Premier until the end of spring session to take me up on this deal – so he's got [a lot] of time to think about it.

Hopefully, at least some good for our democracy (i.e. senate elections and fixed election dates) will come of this.

Mr. Chair, I thank you for this opportunity to put these things on the record. I know that they're not the easiest things for some people in this Chamber to listen to, so I do thank the members opposite for grinning and bearing it. They are things I feel very passionately about.

It should be noted, too, that despite all that has been said in this Chamber back and forth and despite what many people may believe, I actually do have a great deal of respect for members opposite and members of all parties as I believe that we are here for the right reasons by and large. We're here to try to make a difference for Albertans and for our constituents. Although I do not agree with the methods employed by the government at this time – I don't condone them – and I think they are out of touch and they need to improve in the way that they conduct our democracy, I don't for a minute want anyone to feel that I think of them as any lesser people or anything like that. I know they're here for the right reasons and they're good folks, even the hon. minister over there, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, although it's a little shaky from time to time.

With that, I will sit down, and we can get back to the debate on Bill 7. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I feel that we need to go over a few more things one last time as we're debating Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I think the most important thing in a democracy is having a fair election. There are many things in this bill that set out and clarify some of the situations that have been in question before or challenged, and those are all good, but there are still some areas that concern me, and I feel that they need to be addressed.

One that I spoke about earlier – and many members have, but I want to address it once more – is the concern under section 4.1(1), test of new equipment and procedures. I'm very concerned with the latitude that's allowed in this area. I think that one of the things that really needs to be in there – and I hope that being on the record, the Chief Electoral Officer will look back and look at this. There needs to be a mechanism of tracing the actual vote. When we talk about electronic voting, you know, whether we're going to be able to do it in the future with our cellphone or other things, the problem and what we need to make sure that we avoid is, in fact: is it traceable? Is there evidence of the way people actually voted?

I know over in Europe it's quite amazing that the cellphone is becoming almost their lifeline. They can go up to vending machines; they can go golfing. They just literally dial in, and they're able to buy their pop, buy a sandwich, go to a movie. It's quite interesting how they're transforming into an electronic world.

Ms Pastoor: Every marketing firm knows what they've done.

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

The problem with voting is that there's no evidence, and we need to know that when someone goes in and votes, there is a scrutineer, that they can challenge it, that they can check it and make sure that it's right. This is a real concern to me going forward, that this bill still allows the Chief Electoral Officer to make that option and say: well, we want to go strictly electronic. If it's not traceable, to me it's not acceptable. We need to be able to track that back, and the individual should be able to know that their vote is going to count.

If we want electronic counting, that's very different. Whether you use a punch card, whether you have a reader and you want to blacken a box, whatever it is, and you can literally put it through a machine, kind of like swiping your credit card or your debit card, and then you have it there, and then you put it in a box for evidence so it can be checked on after I feel is very important. An area of great concern to me is that we would possibly go down that route saying: "Oh, no. It's foolproof. You don't need to worry about it." There's nothing foolproof if there isn't evidence in a tracking system that you can go through.

Another area that we see at municipal levels and in many provinces and countries in the world: set election dates. Very disappointed that that hasn't been set into this bill. Set election dates are quite important when it comes to people wanting to look at running and knowing when it's going to happen. One of the toughest things, if someone is running a business or has a job, is to not be able to know when it's going to be called. They can try to gear up only to find out that it doesn't happen. If we really want to involve more people – if they know that in March 2012 there's going to be a provincial election, people can gear their business. They can gear their life to prepare for that. But if, in fact, tomorrow the Premier decides that we're calling an election, it's very hard, especially for opposition parties because for some reason the government party always seems to have a little better knowledge of when that's being called. They're told to get everything ready and to get their signs printed, those types of things. So you can kind of observe and be prepared.

Set election dates are really important, in my mind, if we're going to have a greater participation and people wanting to run and people perhaps even planning their vacations knowing: I'm going to take a week off in March 2012 because I want to help the candidate of my choice and to spend maximum time. There are a lot of people that are really dedicated and want to see the democratic process go forward. There are just thousands of volunteer hours that are given. So it would be a huge advantage if those people could actually plan and be prepared for those things and, again, involve more people because they know that it's coming and they prepare and they're excited because they get to participate and can plan for it. So it's something else that I hope, as this government continues sitting, they'll continue putting through the debate inside their caucus, hopefully, and say: "You know, it's the right thing to do. Let's bring in set election dates."

There's been a lot of discussion and debate about how we involve Albertans: how do we get them to really come out and vote? As I've said before, door-knocking is a great privilege, to get out and to meet Albertans: "What are your concerns? Why do you vote the way you do? What would you like to see government do different?" Probably the most discouraging thing that I've heard – again, if you take that cloud, there's always a silver lining – is the number of people that say: "You know, it doesn't matter who we vote for. You're all the same once you get in there. You don't represent us. The biggest thing is that you say one thing when you're here at my door, but then if you go and do something different or start supporting something else, what am I supposed to do? What can I do to stop you from not keeping your word on something that you're supporting?"

To me, if there's one thing that we could engage Canadians, Albertans, the municipal level, even our school boards, and everything else is to know that the people that we elect are always accountable to the people who elected them. There's only one process that I know of on accountability, and that's recall. To me, if recall was to be in the Election Statutes Amendment Act – I know many people say that should be a separate bill, that we can't bring

in an amendment to add something to a bill. So that's a little bit disappointing. Recall is the ultimate accountability. If someone decides to do something – and we'll use the example of centralizing health care – and the people look at that and they disagree, there's nothing they can do. And human nature is such that when there isn't anything that we can do, why should we bother worrying or wasting any of our time or energy fighting against something: "There's nothing we can do. The government is going to pass this. We're going to have to wait three years or four years. They just came forward, and there's nothing that we can do."

8:00

Many people just feel, you know, that once every four years or every three years – the democratic process isn't democratic for the other 900, 1,200 days. I believe if we really want to engage Albertans and know that it makes a difference, if we really want to be accountable, recall is something that we need to look at. There are just so many areas. We need to look at the Election Statutes Amendment Act and say: what do we do so that Albertans are engaged, so they think that their voting makes a difference?

Another area that I've spoken on and I feel is important to bring it up again. If you talk about these things enough times, you know, you start to think through it and think: "Well, you know, maybe that is okay. That does have some credibility. That might involve more Albertans, and they'll have a desire to engage and be part of that." But being a small caucus, not having official party status, the way it's set up makes it very difficult to do the research, to get to ask the questions and hold the government accountable. I don't feel that our system and our set-up right now is really one where people say: "You know what? I'm going to vote for those parties because it's good, and I like to see the government being held accountable." They look at it as, "Well, my vote doesn't count."

It's interesting with the new Electoral Boundaries Commission, the big debate that is out there. So many individuals are saying: "Is it one Albertan? Is it one vote?" They are saying, "Well, you know, we're only a .97" or "This area actually is a .67, and this one actually is a 1.34." We're so concerned, and rightfully so. Is it one Albertan? Is it one vote? Again, I see the importance of that, the merit of that, but to take it one step further, if in fact 250,000 Albertans have voted for the Liberal party and their seats go down from 16 to nine, has there been a dynamic change in the desires of Albertans? I would say no, it hasn't, that we need to look at the actual number of votes.

To me, if in fact Albertans were to realize, you know, "If I vote for the Wildrose Alliance, the Liberals, or whatever the new party might be, I know that if they get an elected member, there's going to be \$5 of research money going to that caucus," all of a sudden people will say: "No, I want that research. I want them to be able to get the message out and to send that to Albertans." That's really what it is. What's our goal? What do we want to achieve, and what are we trying to do? Are we trying to make a better health care system? Do we want more access for kids to get into universities? Do we want universities to be affordable, or do we want kids to think that it's free?

There is lots of discussion that we have on those things, yet we don't really tie it in often to elections. There's no tie-back, and there's no discussion, so when you fund the different parties by the number of Albertans that actually vote in that area, that's the philosophical debate: the research money, if we want to talk, that goes into that. Research money is invaluable. If you talk to, you know, a lot of the different companies that are moving forward, they look at it and they say: well, there's a percentage here that needs to go into research to make sure that we're always current and we're keeping up on things.

The democratic process is no different. We need to stay current. We need to be looking at the new ideas and having that research money going there. I think that that's something that would address and, again, would engage Albertans to say: my vote will make a difference. Whether there's 60,000 or 600,000 who vote for that party, it makes a difference, and it's the voters that are driving it rather than some Members' Services Committee who has a majority of government members and says: well, we're going to pick this party or that party; we'll give these ones extra funding but not those ones for partisan reasons. I want to engage Albertans and make them realize: no, you need to get out and vote because our votes are going to count so that more research can be done.

There are so many areas, Mr. Chair, where the Election Statutes Amendment Act is looking after some of the penny thoughts, the small ideas. How do we make sure these elections are fair? How do we do that? Those are all important, but I feel like we're missing the big picture. How do we engage Albertans? How do we ensure that what goes on in this House reflects the will of Albertans the best? How do we have a debate?

I was very disappointed in the emergency debate discussion that we had the other day. The Speaker got up and read all of the questions and the members' statements that had gone on, but there is no opposition party date, where you get to pick a discussion and do that. There was no discussion on cataract eye surgery. There were more questions that were attempted to be asked. The answers were more propaganda than answers. There was no discussion, and there's no way to do it.

Albertans, again, those that were contacting us, said: we just want a debate in there; let's have an open debate. That was the only way of doing that. Those are all different areas. Are we going to change our thoughts and, you know, look at a way of ensuring that the opposition parties can pick some debates and bring them forward? Like I say, this Bill 7 addresses a lot of the smaller issues, which are always important, but have we addressed the big issues? Are we moving forward?

One area, I guess, that I'd just like to share a little bit of thought on is that if you look back 50 years or a hundred years here in this wonderful province of ours and you see how things have evolved, whether it's in the aircraft carriers or the telecommunications, it's amazing the progress that we've made. Yet when it comes to the democratic process, have we evolved and gone forward in any direction? I would say no. We're stuck in that same old process of 1905, 1920, 1960, 1970, 1990, and nothing has changed.

We just are going through an Electoral Boundaries Commission on how we're going to change things, and many, many Albertans that I run into say: "Why do we need four more MLAs? What's the sense in that? There are already too many of you. There's got to be a better way of reducing that." I think there is.

You know, we're all shareholders. We talk about one Albertan, one vote, but how do we actually get to vote those shares? Why should I go out and vote those shares? When you're a minority shareholder, even in a corporation, and you get the annual report and they're saying to vote on who's going to be on the board and what their awards are going to be, you just think: "Oh, there are 27 million shares out there. I own 500 of them. Is there any point in me submitting my vote?" That's what Albertans often ask: "Is there any point in me submitting my vote?"

Another idea that I think is worth discussing and, again, we don't do enough is two ways to engage Albertans. Again, these are just ideas for discussion. I think that's the important thing; you always throw the idea out there. There's no question that in the urban area, where it's more concentrated, it's far easier to be able to represent those people. They have much more in common than in a rural area,

where they might be spread over hundreds and hundreds of miles and very diverse in what's going on in that area.

Let's say, for the sake of the cities, we were to amalgamate every riding into two ridings. We'd take two and put them into one and reduce the city MLAs by half. But your voting authority: again, this is where if you want to be electronic in areas where you can do it, you can show that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore voted this way on this vote. But the votes that I would have voted actually represent whether there are 30,000 or, as in Airdrie-Chestermere, 65,000. You'd actually be voting for the number of people that you're representing, just like we do as shareholders. That's the type of electronic voting that, to me, would add great value and efficiency in how we're representing the people that we're asked to represent.

It doesn't have to be just one mouth that represents 40,000 people. That one mouth might do, as in the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, for 90,000 people. So when he pushes his button on voting, there's a huge vote there. Boom. All of a sudden it makes a difference. That would engage Albertans to say: well, no, I want to get out and vote.

Again, you just take your whole area or, if we really wanted to put in another novel idea, the number of people that actually came out and voted in your riding. If that was 12,000 people that voted, then you'd be representing 12,000. Then people would say: well, no, I want my MLA to have some clout. So maybe instead of 12,000 voting, 18,000 would or 25,000 would because you'd know that that MLA would be representing the number of votes they have. Or if we really wanted to take the next leap, say that you only vote for the number of people that actually voted for you, whether that was 4,200 or 6,000. You could do that.

8:10

Many people say: "What about the bicameral system? We need a Senate here in Alberta." There are some interesting, novel ideas on that as well, where the acting leader or the leaders of the different parties could actually vote a second time on a bill, representing the number of votes that that party received, yea or nay. It would have to go through a double vote, the first one by the members, the people on that level, but the second one by the parties to say: you know, well, there were 250,000 for the Liberals; there were 80,000 for the Wildrose Alliance and 90,000 for this one independent. You'd have a double check, where Albertans could really be in a much more democratic process, where you'd be representing them. There are a lot of interesting ideas.

Bill 7, like I say, is looking at the ground level. But to me we really need to expand the election statutes act. How are we going to engage more Albertans? How are we going to represent them? How are we going to be able to stop the government from doing something that the people really don't want, like the new royalty framework, the centralization of health care, billions of dollars on CO₂ wish thoughts, or \$300 million on ethanol production because they decide that's the energy program that we want to go with, where they leave out windmills or biomass or geothermal? They're picking winners and losers. That isn't government's job, to pick winners and losers. We don't have a democratic system where we're able to send that message to the government.

I hope that as we continue working in this House, we'll expand our thoughts and our ideas to say: how do we engage Albertans? How do we actually make their vote count? Most important of all, how do we ensure that we as elected representatives are accountable to the people that we represent and not the party that we represent? Are we looking into all of those things? I would say that we're falling short on that. We can do much better.

I'll look forward to listening to further debate by other members on this bill.

The Chair: Any other hon. members? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the bill.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, on the bill. I wanted to talk a little bit about: we've heard a lot of comments over what would improve our democracy the most. Everyone knows that we have a 40 per cent voter turnout roughly, and I don't think anyone is proud of that number. I don't think you can blame it on one or two or three or even four things. There are numerous reasons why we have such a low voter turnout.

I've also noticed that there's really a disconnect. I mean, many people in this Chamber had the opportunity to have dinner tonight with some young Albertans. You know, you talk with these young people. They're so engaged in the democratic process, and they're so excited to be there. It's just a breath of fresh air. But they're the exceptions to the general rule. Generally, when you talk to young Albertans or any Albertans about democracy and about politics and that sort of thing, their eyes kind of glaze over.

There's also a lot of cynicism towards politicians. You know what? Some of that is earned. No doubt about it. Some of it isn't earned, though. I mean, some of it is just simply not true. No one in here is corrupt or is taking money under the table. I sure hope not. I sure don't suspect anyone is. Maybe that's naïveté on my part, but I don't think that's the case. I hope it's not. People don't understand that the average person going into public life really does just want to contribute to their society and to contribute to their community and to their province and to their country.

We've got to start thinking about what would engage Albertans. What would get Albertans excited about democracy again? There are all kinds of gimmicks that we can throw out there, you know, like you see in the States, Rock the Vote and all these funny things. I think there's a fundamental underlying problem, and it's one of many. I don't think this is a panacea. This isn't going to solve everything. But if there was one thing that we could do in this Legislature that I think would contribute the most to getting Albertans engaged in the democratic process and giving them more faith in our democratic process, it would be the concept of enshrining mandatory free votes on all legislation and restoring the rightful role of an elected member to represent his constituents first and foremost over any other consideration. Party line, all these things: none of these things would matter as much as just representing your constituents on a base level.

When you go in and you vote on a bill in the Legislature, it should be because you honestly believe as an MLA that that is in your constituents' best interests and it's what they want, or if they're not engaged and they don't understand, you've analyzed the problem for them and you think that this is what they would want if they had analyzed it and done the background work on it. When we go into the House, that's all we should think about. We shouldn't think about what the party talking points are or anything like that. We shouldn't think about anything other than what is in our constituents' best interests.

People always say: well, okay, that sounds really great. Right? Everybody believes: yeah, sure, an MLA should be his or her constituents' voice to Edmonton, not their party's or Edmonton's voice to his or her constituents. I think everyone believes that or thinks that that's how it should work, but in fact it doesn't. We all know this in this Chamber. Everyone knows this, that that's not how it works.

I mean, sure, there's no doubt that many MLAs in the governing caucus and otherwise go and in caucus and behind closed doors and in private meetings and these sorts of things advocate for a viewpoint of their constituents. There's no doubt that that happens. Absolutely. But at the end of the day when they go into the House

and actually put a vote down, actually stand up and vote on something or say yea or nay on something, they are essentially voting the party line. They are essentially voting what their party wants them to do, and then they're given talking points to take back and explain it to their constituents.

This isn't just Alberta in our country. This unfortunately is the case across Canada federally. We have an opportunity in this province. I mean, I look at some of the members over there, and I know that they're reform minded, that they want to change the system. I know that. I've had discussions into the wee hours of the morning with many of them on how we could make democracy stronger here and really get constituents engaged and totally reform the system so that we had free votes and representatives were empowered to represent their constituents first and foremost above any consideration. There's such an opportunity over there to do that, to spearhead that change, because the governing caucus does have a massive majority right now: 68 seats.

I tell you, if they would enshrine free votes as a mandatory staple of Alberta politics in the Legislature, I believe that the electorate would reward them handsomely for doing that. Sure, does it cede a little bit of power from the Premier's office? Obviously, it does. The Premier still has lots of power in that situation, lots of things that the executive does still and has the power over, but yeah, there's no doubt that the Premier and the cabinet would lose a little bit of power. They'd have to go do their groundwork. They'd have to go out there and have a good ground game and convince MLAs that this is the way it needs to work and that this is why it benefits the various constituencies, et cetera, et cetera. They would have to do that.

If people believed that they were sending somebody to Edmonton that first and foremost had their interests top of mind when they voted on a bill or when they voted in any committee, if that is what they thought they were voting for, I really think that would improve our democracy greatly. People would actually believe that they were voting for something. They would actually examine the policies of the individual candidates and look at their resumé's and look at their track record.

I mean, when I was a government member – I'll just use myself as an example; I won't use any of the government members – how on earth would my constituents know how I voted in caucus on Bill 50, for example? They all know now, but how would they know that? They couldn't possibly know it because I wouldn't be allowed to go out and tell them how I voted on it, and I certainly wouldn't be able to vote against the bill because it was decided in caucus otherwise. In some cases it is decided in the Premier's office otherwise. I just think that it's wrong.

8:20

Every election you should go into that election as an incumbent and be able to put your record before the people and say: "This is how I voted on a bill or on a motion or whatever. This is what I did. Yeah, I know that's what the party was saying and that's what the Premier was saying, but I voted this way." If we did that, I really think that the reverence for democracy and the opinion about elected officials would be greatly increased. Right now, unfortunately, it's just not the case. No one knows how their MLA votes on things.

I mean, there are people in every party that range on the spectrum. Obviously, we have different opinions on things, and we've voted against each other on a couple of things.

Mr. Hinman: Which one, for example?

Mr. Anderson: Well, don't even get me started.

In the governing caucus, I mean, there are people that are very conservative, absolute small "c" fiscal conservatives. Then there are

others that, frankly, in any other province would be Liberals or New Democrats. It's a huge spectrum. I know. I was two years in that party. It's a huge spectrum. It's a big tent, as they say, and that's fine. I personally think that you can make a tent so big that eventually you don't stand for anything, but that's a debate for another day.

The point is that if I'm somebody in Edmonton – I don't know. Just pick a riding anywhere. I don't want to pick on anybody. If I'm a constituent in Edmonton-Whatever and my Tory MLA is running in another election as an incumbent, how the heck do I know what that Tory MLA voted on? I know what the party's record is. I know what the Premier's agenda is. That's pretty clear in the media. The Premier and his cabinet, obviously, are on the record on virtually everything, but how do I know what that individual MLA advocated for? Caucus meetings aren't published. The votes in caucus aren't published. The results from votes aren't published. I mean, you can't have democracy without transparency and accountability. You just can't do it. You can't have it as strong as it should be anyway.

I just really believe, you know, very strongly that if we empowered the individual MLA and we made sure that every vote they took was on the record – it doesn't mean every discussion has to be on the record. I realize that in order to get things done, you've got to have private discussions and private debates. I get that. But at the end of the day an MLA has to cast a vote, and when they cast that vote, the only thing on their mind should be that after getting all the evidence together, after hearing from the Premier and the cabinet and the caucus and the opposition parties and my constituents and reading the research and doing all these things, this is the conclusion that I think is in the best interests of my constituents, not what's in the best interest of my party or what's in the best interest of me personally, politically, or in the best interest of anything or in the interest of caucus solidarity or any of these other funny excuses that we use but just in the interests of my constituents.

If we could do that, if we could restore that level of trust with the electorate as elected officials, I really think that things would change. Albertans would get more involved because they would know they could go to an individual MLA and could advocate to that MLA. You know what? Your individual constituents would actually feel that they could sway your mind, and maybe they could, and you could take that message to Edmonton. But right now it doesn't work that way. Why bother to go see your MLA? I mean, sure, you can go and talk. But I know how these things work. Constituents come in, they go and talk, the well-meaning MLA goes and tries to find the minister or brings it up in caucus, but it's so busy, and it gets swept under the rug. There's not really time to debate it, and all kinds of things happen. In my view, it's just not true democracy.

Again, I don't blame the governing party for it. It's the way our system is set up in Canada, frankly. But that doesn't mean we need to always have it this way. You know, some people say: "Well, how would you do this? How would you enshrine mandatory free votes? You know, you can't have the government fall. Right? The government might fall. If somebody votes against the government's budget in their own party and the party falls, then you call an election. That's no good. So you've got to have whipped caucus votes, party line votes."

Well, you know what? I look at Quebec. They have a constitution, and their constitution, unless it conflicts with the federal constitution, takes precedence and is the binding law. Well, why don't we start looking at maybe an Alberta constitution? Why don't we start thinking about enshrining mandatory free votes in Alberta so that just because a government loses a vote on a bill, that doesn't trigger an automatic election? You have to have a vote of nonconfidence that is completely separate and stand-alone in order

for the government to fall. In other words, opposition parties and government members can vote on something, can vote on an issue according to what they think their constituents want, and if the bill doesn't pass or if it's not going to pass, then the government and the opposition parties have to go back and make it work until it's got the majority of free votes in the House. That way the government won't feel threatened that: oh, we've got to pass it or our government will fall. I think it'll make for better legislation. I really do. Again, I think it will re-engage Albertans a lot more.

If we enshrine that principle in the constitution, in an Alberta constitution, I think it's sound to say that that would override any conventions that might be in place and that it would be allowed and would be constitutional and would be democratic. There's no reason why we have to continue to use the exact same system in the exact same way that's been around for 200, 300 years if you go back to, you know, talking about the Westminster system. We can change it. We can evolve – it is possible – and we should. I mean, we can set our own course in democracy, and we should.

We've got some great minds in this House from all parties, so let's put them together, and let's figure out a way to make mandatory free votes something that Alberta pioneers. We could do that. I'm really convinced of that. People say: well, if you have mandatory free votes, then situations might occur where you might break the budget. In other words, you have a budget set, and then someone brings a bill and through horse-trading, et cetera, you have another monetary bill that comes forward, and all of a sudden you've broken the budget and you've, you know, screwed up everything and, oh, the whole system would fall apart.

Well, that's again easily solved. It's called pay-as-you-go legislation. It's been implemented in many different places, of course, the United States being the foremost before the current administration. During the Clinton years they had pay-as-you-go legislation. If a new initiative came forward and was passed by a free vote in the House, if it cost something, it would have to be offset by a corresponding tax increase or cut to some other program area. Of course, that kept the pork barrel and the horse-trading and all that in check, and as you know, they ran huge surpluses during the Clinton administration. That was mostly from 1994. You had a Democratic President and a Republican Congress that came together and actually got something done on that front and controlled their spending.

You know, the little things that people say: oh, we can't have free votes because of X. There are ways that we can institute a system that would allow for these free votes without mass chaos or huge spending increases or governments falling every five minutes. I mean, we can do that, and I think that the people of Alberta would want us to do that.

It's something I feel very passionate about, obviously, and it's one of the reasons I left the government caucus. I didn't feel that this principle was top of mind. In fact, I didn't think at the time that it was anywhere close to top of mind. I feel that now that I'm in opposition I have the ability to advocate very freely the viewpoints of my constituents. I feel my constituents want this. I bet you most of our constituents want this. Sure, it's not their number one concern. I understand that. A lot of times people, especially our constituents because they're not in the process and they don't understand government like the people in this House do, know the system is broken, but they just can't put their finger on it. If you ask them, they know something is wrong, that something just doesn't feel right about this system. We've got to be big enough and smart enough to realize why certain things are broken. What's wrong with the system?

I think that, honestly, the reason why people feel their vote has absolutely no bearing whatsoever is because when they go into a

voting booth, they know full well that even if they really like the local MLA or they don't like him or they like somebody, it doesn't matter because it's all going to come down to what the leader of the party says. Period. That's all that's going to matter. That, essentially, disenfranchises them, and in fact I would say that it disenfranchises all Albertans. It disenfranchises them all except for the ones that live in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Those are the only ones, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, where the MLA really, honestly does have a huge say in what laws are passed and in what things happen.

8:30

There are a few other cabinet ministers where that would be the case as well, but the vast majority – the vast majority – of MLAs have very little input. Sure, they have a little. You know, they can suggest, but at the end of the day, if they don't vote along the party lines, they're punished in some way and in some fashion, and that's just the way it is. We saw that with the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and we've all seen it in the internal party politics and internal party discipline that occurs on that side of the House and that, I'm sure, occurs in all kinds of parties across Canada.

We have a chance to change it. We've got the minds in here to do it. We have a lot of new MLAs in here that have only been on the job for a couple of years, and I think we even have a few of the veterans. You know, they've been around. I think there are some reform-minded people among our veteran bench as well. Why don't we get together and actually re-engage Albertans, restore the role of the MLA, restore the role of the elected representative? If we do that, I really believe democracy in Alberta will be stronger than it has ever been in the recent past.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the bill?
Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 7.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 12, Bill 13, Bill 14, and Bill 9. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Those in agreement with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 10

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to move third reading of Bill 10, but before I do, might I suggest that the House give unanimous consent to amending standing orders to shorten the duration of the break between bells to one minute in the event of a division for the rest of this evening?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, too, hon. members. It's my pleasure to move on behalf of the Minister of Justice third reading of Bill 10, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 10, as a reminder to everyone, will allow the civil forfeiture process to continue to make crime unprofitable and will allow us to fund a wider range of victim and crime reduction programs. It's important legislation that will help to address the growing issue of gang crime and keep our communities safer, and for that reason I encourage all members to support Bill 10 in third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I speak in support of Bill 10, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010. It accomplishes two main goals. One, it supports the victims by forcing the criminal to pay restitution, and it also takes away that funding that criminal organizations would use to their benefit to further their own devious demands. Therefore, I believe that it should go forward, and I support it in third.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke on this extensively in second and in committee. I, too, would like to speak in support of this bill. It does a couple of good things. It takes away some money and illegal profits, property of criminals who have gained access to their largesse by victimizing or by criminal activity here in Alberta. It gives the government the ability to do that. It also is going to allow more people to benefit from victims of crime funding. This is a pool of money that has gathered for some time now, and this will allow more people and more organizations to be able to apply for it and to be able to get compensation.

Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak in support of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

8:40

Bill 11 Witness Security Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is now my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a privilege to rise and speak in support of this bill. It establishes a province-wide witness protection program tailored for witnesses requiring short-term protection. It seems to me that this is a good bill because of the elements of organized crime that are moving into this province. It allows us to do more of our Alberta's-own solutions to our own criminal enterprises that are going on, and it gives us some more flexibility to do some good police work here at home.

I'm glad to support this, and I hope this takes a bite out of crime, I guess. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Very briefly speaking in support of Bill 11, the Witness Security Act, what it does is parallel our federal system, it provides support for individuals who feel threatened, it encourages them to come forward and testify without fear of retribution, and therefore it is well worth supporting. It improves the carrying out of justice in this province by protecting individuals who are in a vulnerable position and allows them to testify with the assurance that they will be protected.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Bill 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010.

As was covered during prior debate, Bill 13 represents Alberta's commitment to ongoing reform of our securities regulatory system under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. This bill builds on the work that Alberta has done since 2004 to further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's securities laws and also to ensure that Alberta supports Canada in meeting its international commitments. At their heart these amendments will ensure Alberta investors can continue to have confidence in our securities regulatory system.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again, speaking in support but with a degree of measured concerns over Bill 13, Securities Amendment Act, 2010, it seems that Alberta and Quebec are the holdouts in terms of a national securities commission, and interestingly we, or at least this province, frequently criticize decisions Quebec has made and accuse Quebec of being the recipient of Alberta's largesse when it comes to transfer payments. We're going to have to work somewhat more diligently across this nation.

While we're in Bill 13 agreeing to the passport system that exists across the nation, tightening of security is going to be extremely important. We have seen in this province billions of dollars lost because of weak regulation for asset-backed commercial paper. We haven't got hammered to the same extent that our southern trading partner has, but we definitely need to tighten up security regulation.

ATB suffered several million dollars in hits. AIMCo likewise suffered hits. We have the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta, who lost significant millions of dollars on their endowment funds because of investments in very risky asset-backed commercial paper.

One of the principles of the Alberta Liberal Party is that 30 to 35 per cent of all nonrenewable energy gains would be set aside in a fund. Approximately a third of that fund would go to supporting postsecondary endowment funds but with the proviso that the Auditor General would have strong regulatory powers over how investments are made because while endowment funds are private donations, to a large extent, from universities, the fund we're talking about would come directly from nonrenewable resource revenue.

Also, all Liberal constituency associations across the province are submitting resolutions for our policy convention here in Edmonton on May 15 and 16. With the importance of saving for the future to avoid this recessionary boom and bust, one of the resolutions that's being put forward by Calgary-Varsity under the name of Kurt Hansen, who is a director – he'd actually like to see between 40 and 50 per cent of nonrenewable funds put into the heritage trust fund so that we could build it up to a faster extent and have kind of an insurance policy against the ebb and flow of surpluses.

I do support this legislation, and it is, as I say, in keeping with other provinces. Therefore, it's extremely important that we maintain our relationship, especially our financial and trade relationship, with other provinces. Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2010, goes a long way to that establishment.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

Bill 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Transportation I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I hope members of the government are keeping track of the support that they're receiving on a wide variety of

legislation. I want them to note that that support is not just restricted to the Liberal Official Opposition, but for the most part you've seen the support from the Wildrose party and previously from the ND Party.

The point I wish to make in referencing Bill 14, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010, is that when the legislation makes sense, we embrace it; we support it. Bill 14 makes sense because the fines that are realized within a certain geographic location go back to that location that is paying for the police enforcement. It makes absolute sense, and therefore I am supporting Bill 14.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

8:50

**Bill 9
Local Authorities Election Statutes
Amendment Act, 2010**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's now my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. While I can't cheer as loudly for Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, as I have for other legislation, it does move in the right direction. It does correct mistakes that were previously made that shut out the local authorities. It does address concerns that were brought forward by both the AUMA and the AAMD and C. It is attempting, as I say, to correct the mistakes previously made in Bill 203.

There is, beyond a doubt, a need to equalize, to have a common set of standards, whether it be municipal or provincial, in terms of how financing and how authority is given with regard to campaign funds. We as provincial legislators have the advantage of being able to offer a tax return for our campaign donations, and through that process there is a great deal of scrutiny and oversight, as there must be. The local municipal politicians do not have those advantages, but the same strict rules as to campaign financing need to apply not only to municipal elections but also to leadership elections. It is my hope that through the standing committee, as we review the legislation about leadership campaigns and financing, we'll finally in this province have a set of rules that apply universally, whether it's on leadership, whether it's municipal, or whether it's provincial.

Bill 9 isn't the be-all and end-all in terms of accountability, but it's a step in the right direction, and therefore we support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege for me to stand up and speak in support of Bill 9, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I think this bill is a good start to bringing more autonomy to local elections. It sets some limits on donations that can be given and how they can be tracked. I think it clears up some of the misconceptions that were in the first attempt at this bill, and I think it'll go a long way to start bringing some clarification to our municipal elections.

I would like to add, though, that I hope this is just the first part of this bill, the Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act. I'd like to see in the future them possibly going to a system like we have with the provincial government, with the Chief Electoral Officer overseeing all elections here in Alberta, with a tax receipt being involved and some scrutiny. The tax receipt would also encourage more individuals to run and more individuals to give as well as have a uniformity of rules that go forward between different bodies and different elections in this province.

Like I said, I'm supportive of this bill. It's a good start to bringing some of the Wild West days of municipal elections sort of in line with election standards and election principles.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions or comments.

Seeing none, any hon. member want to join the debate on Bill 9?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

**Bill 7
Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be pleased to move on behalf of the Minister of Justice third reading of Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to touch on, since this is the last opportunity to speak to this bill – and I've talked, obviously, a lot about the different aspects of democracy that I'm concerned about. But there are a few points, almost a laundry list – well, five or six things – I just wanted to comment on briefly. I really do feel that as we go forward with this bill and with other bills, we need to be looking at these issues.

I want to first just quickly talk about the Public Accounts issue. If we're going to have a functioning democracy where there's accountability in this Legislature, we need to make sure that we have a transparent and accountable Public Accounts Committee. What went on there, with the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed being given, essentially, veto power, having to sign off on every committee move, is not appropriate, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose wants to be on the record for that. I hope that in the coming days that will be reversed.

There should be broad powers. I can't tell you how many times – and I've only been in opposition for one session – I've asked for documents from departments, and I've gotten a snow job on it. You know, "We can't do it for this reason," or they just ignore the request. It's just wrong. We've got to be able to hold the government to account. The government has all the resources in the world to defend their decisions and to defend their budget.

As an opposition and on behalf of the Official Opposition, I guess, I would say that all we're asking for is the ability to summon the documents that we need to see in order to hold the government to account. If they're making good decisions, if they're making decisions that don't have ulterior motives, they should be able to put those documents on the table, and we should be able to summon witnesses and documents. The chair, which is a member of the Official Opposition, should be able to ask for those documents, and

they should be given, plain and simple, unless there's a national or provincial security issue or whatever. Those are the only times where they shouldn't be given, especially to members of the committee.

That's one thing I wanted to get on the record. If we're going to improve our democracy going forward, it can't just start at Bill 7 and end at Bill 7. We've got to make sure that that harmful decision is reversed.

The second point. I want to be fair to the Deputy Premier. He's been listening throughout this discussion, and, you know, he's been very thoughtful as he's been listening. I want to be on the record as saying, though – and it could have been anyone: the Deputy Premier, the Premier, any of the government cabinet ministers – that I do not believe that it is right for a government to on behalf of the government caucus submit what they feel the electoral boundary should be changed to to what is supposed to be a nonpartisan commission. That is just wrong.

It's one thing for an individual MLA or a party constituency association or someone else to do it, but when the government does it, when it comes from the office of the Premier or the Deputy Premier or a high-ranking minister, that puts undue influence, in my view, on that boundary commission. They are extremely compromised right now. You know, it's easy to say: oh, it's just a submission. It's not just a submission. It's a submission from the people that appointed them.

Again, this was a decision of government, you know, and I feel that it should be corrected, that it should be withdrawn. The commission should be allowed to do its work without having that pressure of having to deal with this submission. It's not right. It shouldn't happen. I mean, in my electoral boundary, for example, in Airdrie-Chestermere, it's quite funny. Foothills-Rocky View now starts on the west, Mr. Speaker. It goes to Airdrie. It's cut in half by Airdrie-Chestermere and Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Then it actually starts again on the west. In other words, it's cut into two completely separate land masses without any kind of continuous border. That's what they're suggesting. I had a reporter tell me: oh, I don't think I've ever heard of anything like that before. Well, he's right. It's because it hasn't happened before. These are some really silly things.

9:00

We've done the analysis on Calgary-Glenmore. They've added polls that went Liberal in the last election and taken away Conservative ones. I understand, you know, that we all want to do well for our different constituencies, and we all want to be re-elected, but it is absolutely wrong for the government on behalf of government to do this. I really hope that the government will reconsider taking that off the table and making it absolutely, abundantly clear to this commission that there's no pressure whatsoever to implement the changes that they're proposing because it's not right, and it's undemocratic.

Thirdly, opposition caucus allowance. Right now the New Democrats, with two seats, have what's called a leader's allowance. It's not a leader's allowance; it's a caucus allowance. It's used for caucus research. It's used for caucus activities. The NDP gets it; the Wildrose, with three members, doesn't get it. It's so difficult. We have two researchers. I've got to tell you that every day I'm here, I'm up till 1 or 2 in the morning, trying to work through everything that's going on, trying to research the bills and look at it because we just do not have what we need to put a support staff together.

Again, the pattern here is democracy and a little bit of the lack thereof. All we're asking is that we be treated the same as our New Democratic friends so that we can put the resources – they have

eight or nine staff; we have four. Two of them are assistants for three people, and then we have two researchers. It's so difficult to do this. I mean, I'm not trying to cry anyone a river. I'm just saying that if we're going to be able to do our job as an opposition, which is to research the bills and research the background information on those bills, we need to be able to have the ability to hire people to help us do that. If the government members think that some of our arguments are off base, well, then hopefully these researchers can help us to have arguments that they feel are better.

The point is that we've got to be able to have those resources available to us and be treated at least as fairly as the NDP caucus. It's only democratic. It's only fair. We'll talk about that in Members' Services Committee, but I wanted to get that on the record since we're about to close for the session.

I also want to make sure, going to the bill, that we need to be very, very, very careful when we start playing around with electronic voting. That is a very dangerous thing to do. I'm, obviously, one of the youngest members of this Assembly – I think third youngest – and I understand the need to be proactive with new media and new technologies. I get that. But there has got to be a paper trail. There have got to be scrutineers. There's got to be a way to verify voting.

If we allow it to go to electronic voting, yeah, you know what? The first, the second, the third time might go well, but it's just a matter of time before some really smart guy who is corrupt – and I'm sure no one in this room would think about doing it, but there are people out there that have no problem looking into ways to rig elections and to do different things that would bring our democracy, frankly, down. That is a slippery slope that we've got to be very, very careful of, and I sure hope that the hon. members opposite will not consider moving in that direction as we go forward.

On the issue of government advertising during an election, which is in Bill 7, again, I think that we need to start looking at making sure that the government, other than for public health emergencies and other emergencies, should not be able to advertise during an election period. That's not the place for the government to be spending government resources telling Albertans how great a job they're doing. It's not just this government that does it; governments across this country do it. It doesn't make it right. Again, we need to be leaders on this, and we can start in this House and make sure that we lead by example, that the government doesn't advertise during elections.

Finally, the concept of fixed election dates. It's not the cure-all. It's not the thing that's going to make it so that we have 70 per cent voting or 80 per cent voting turnout. It's not going to cure all ills, for sure. But it's not democratic. It just simply is not democratic. Everyone here knows it's not democratic. The government has total control on when they call it. They can prepare for it. They can roll out their programs all in line with it. The opposition can be caught completely flat footed. Of course, we do our best. All the opposition parties always do. But when I was in government, I advocated strongly for this, and I know there are members over there that believe in this, that in order to have a truly democratic election race, there has got to be a fixed election date. It is just not fair. It's too rigged in one direction if we don't do that, or too biased to the governing party if we don't do that. It's just the right thing to do. You know what? It's not as convenient for the government, for sure. That's life. But it's the right thing to do.

You know, Alberta has been a leader on so many different things that haven't been convenient: reforming our financial affairs in the early '90s to mid-90s, where we went from a province on the verge of insolvency, frankly, to one that got out of the mess and started to save for a time. Now we've fallen back into the same traps again, but the leadership we showed as a province in the '90s, for that

period of time, was something that spread to the rest of Canada and became, actually, the *de facto* way that governments ran their finances. We can do that with democracy. We can do it with fixed election dates, we can do it with making sure that the opposition is given the resources that they need to be effective, and we can do it by what I talked about earlier, which is enshrining free votes as an absolute staple of our democratic system to restore the role of MLAs.

There are some good things in this bill, Bill 7. There are things that are being left out that should be in there. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we have come up short with this bill, by and large. We can do way more. In the next year and a half or two years or – who knows? – six months or a year before the next election, whenever that is, I just hope that the MLAs, some of the more reform-minded MLAs in this government, whoever they may be, can really sit down and try to push the agenda of democratic reform so that they can leave that as a legacy.

Frankly, I think the voters will reward them for it. This is not in the Wildrose's best interests for them to do this. But if they would show forethought and the pioneering spirit on the issues of democratic reform, I believe the people of Alberta would reward them handsomely for doing so. I really do. So I hope they do it because it's the right thing to do, and it will make us a stronger democracy as we go forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Assembly for their time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In speaking in third to Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, I want to comment very briefly about what works. This evening we're seeing an example of what works in terms of parliamentary tradition. Our House leaders, through communication, established what would be the agenda for tonight. Agreements were made, and part of the agreement was that tomorrow we would have our question period. I'm very grateful that tomorrow we'll also have our regular Public Accounts because, as the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out in his previous discussion, a correction has to be made in Public Accounts.

This past Wednesday, a week ago, the Westminster parliamentary tradition was overridden by a private member's motion from Wetaskiwin-Camrose. He has an opportunity tomorrow to correct the mistake that was made. For those members who aren't aware, not only does it go against Westminster parliamentary tradition, but it flies in the face of our own established regulations that say that only the chair of Public Accounts can sign the correspondence.

9:10

Now, speaking, again, as to what works with regard to Bill 7, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. After a fashion, we do have a record of how we vote in this House. Possibly the methodology is used to a greater degree by members of the opposition, not because government doesn't necessarily want to be involved but because of the size of the government. The opposition has the opportunity to get on record how they are going to vote on a particular bill, and we've seen examples of that tonight on five bills already. While each bill does not have a personal record, *Hansard* does provide the record of the direction that members have, whether they support a piece of legislation or whether they're opposed to it.

One of the largest improvements in the democratic process that I will give the hon. the Premier credit for is the all-party standing policy committees because there is a transparent, accountable record of where members stand within the committees. While there may be differing opinions, those opinions are recorded, so while it's not an

actual vote or a check-off assigned to various constituencies, there is that democratic opportunity of getting on record for the direction that you're supporting.

With regard to the free vote, again, maybe this is, to quote the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, the silver lining in the dark cloud. But as a member of the opposition and as whip for the opposition I view my role more as a facilitator than as a disciplinarian. I do not dictate to my membership, whether it's in a private member's bill or it's in a regular piece of legislation, how they should vote. I'm very proud as a member of the opposition that members are free, based on their conscience and their constituents' desires, to vote how they feel they should to be true to themselves and to be true to their constituents. So while that vote may not be individually recorded, it is there, and it is free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure to come and speak regarding Bill 7. I can say that there are some positive initiatives in this bill, yet it does fall short. Theory is: go big, or go home. I certainly suggest in terms of go home as one option. The other is to look and see what can be changed and amended to make this a better bill for Albertans.

I find it really quite interesting that perception is reality for those of us who have served at municipal councils or provincially or even federally. For that reason, perception can become reality. That's why we need to be concerned about this bill, Bill 7.

Presently the Alberta Legislature is not allowed to advertise during elections, and properly so. One has to ask the question: why should the government be allowed to advertise during elections? The Alberta Legislature is not allowed; why should the government be allowed? I think that is a shortcoming that needs to be addressed.

Second of all, it's important to recognize fixed election dates. The reality of it is that fixed election dates truly do provide certainty. For all in this House, especially on the government side, which I sat on for 13 years, there is quite a lot of upheaval in the last year before an election: "When is he going to call it? When do you think? What's going to go on? Is he going to shuffle the cabinet before he calls it for those who are not running again? You know, we'd better get those things all fixed up before the next election."

There's so much uncertainty within the government when this takes place. I think that for members on the government side, that would certainly provide greater certainty, knowing that on March 11, 2012, there will be a provincial election. I think that's healthy for democratic reform, considering that so many provinces do that.

Another issue may be this: what is the leverage of the Premier? Often within caucuses knives occasionally come out for those interested in becoming the next leader. I find it interesting that the Deputy Premier put in a 209-page report in terms of electoral boundary review. That's very well intended, but speaking of those who may be interested in being the Premier in the future.

Think of the upheaval that actually takes place when it comes to the next election. If a lot of knives come out within their own government party, there's certainly one way for the Premier under the existing system to fix that. He can put away the knives by just simply dropping a writ, because there is no fixed election date. So I'm operating under the fact that by this time next year we'll be into an election.

Ultimately, my theory is that in protection an amendment to this bill can ultimately provide certainty to not only people across Alberta; it will provide certainty to the government members

because then they know. There can be no games played, and all Albertans know. It's not like: "Let's do a poll and see how we're doing. Well, we're only down by 20 points now. We're going to do it now because, ultimately, you know what that means? We could be down 30 points next month, so we'd better go and cut our losses when we are here." All of those things are whoever the governing party is, whoever the opposition is, but clearly it's not a level playing field.

I want to say that to keep to the spirit of democratic reform, why wouldn't we go ahead and have a fixed election date so that the head of Executive Council could not come forward to his cabinet and simply say, "I want to drop the writ today, and all you ministers are going to sign the writ because this is what we want to do"? Can you imagine if there was a large number of members on the opposite side who thought, "Maybe we want to change the leader"? That leader, who right now is called the Premier and the President of Executive Council, has the authority to say: "Well, I can quiet all of you down. I don't even have to kick you out of my caucus. I'll just drop a writ and call an election." No matter how many people are over there on the other side. My view is that under the existing system prepare for an election about this time next year. The issue would be – why? – because of discontent within their own governing party.

You know, in all fairness to the members on the government side it's not just discontent from them. They are just simply mirroring what their constituents and voters are telling them. That's exactly how democracy should work, and that's exactly how democratic reform should work. So at this time do the right thing. I would strongly suggest to the Attorney General that this bill, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, I believe, can best serve all Albertans. No matter if you're on the government side, no matter if you're on the opposition side, no matter where you sit as an Albertan, I think this is healthy. This is something that reflects not a 20th century way of thinking but, rather, a 21st century way of thinking.

The future is really about those who are not content with the existing system we have. Let's be bold. Let's be persistent. Let's be determined as we go forward. Let us go forward. It's a level playing field for everyone to feel comfortable that the good job you do as MLAs, in no matter what political party you represent or even as an independent, no matter what you do, at the end of the day it is the voters who will determine if you've done your job or not to deserve the honour and the privilege to return to this House.

Under the present structure this time next year we'll be wondering who will be invited back based on what voters think. Why don't we end that uncertainty and simply amend, simply say that in March 2012 there will be a provincial election? That would be the honourable thing and the most democratic thing in terms of reform in this 21st century.

I might add: who knows where the polls would be at that time? It could be good for the government; it could be bad. It could be good for the Wildrose or the New Democrats. Who knows? Maybe the New Democrats would be leading the polls. Who knows? They may not. Who knows? Maybe it would be the Liberals who are leading the polls. Who knows? It could be the government leading the polls. Who knows? It could be the new independent party leading the polls. Whatever that is, let us not forget that in politics perception is reality, and the perception of what we witness here is something that is not fair. It is something that is not on a level playing field, and that, I believe, is an Alberta value and an Alberta value that we all cherish.

9:20

I know members on the other side agree with what I'm saying, but right now they cannot speak out because of the fear of repercussion.

Election democratic reform is a positive initiative no matter what political party, and at the end of the day it will serve the very voters that elected each and every one of us to this very office and Legislative Assembly that we sit in. I know it is an honour and a privilege for all of us to sit here, so why don't we do the right thing and, in doing the right thing, have a fixed election date?

One final question would be to the Deputy Premier, who filed under the electoral boundary issue 209 pages. That's a busy night for one person, 209 pages. I must admit, I ask the question: would the Deputy Premier have by chance checked with Elections Alberta on all of the poll locations, of how they were and the results of those poll locations in the last election? To the Deputy Premier: I'd really like to know if, in fact, he's had the opportunity to see what the poll results were from Elections Alberta in the last election.

What it would do, then, if he comes back and says, "I haven't seen them," is that would be actually quite something because it would say that polling stations and divisions of electoral boundaries then, really, are more pure. It's more what I view as democratic reform in terms of viewing. But I have to ask: did the Deputy Premier actually go and has his office in his Spruce Grove constituency gone and asked for the polling stations? Does he know the results of the polling stations in Airdrie-Chestermere? Does he know of them in every constituency here? I think we all know where I'm leading relative to the perception of the next number of seats and how the boundaries would look.

I actually believe – and I'm going to quote and conclude with Joan Crockett from the *Calgary Herald* and Rob Breakenridge from QR77 in Calgary, who were on *Alberta Primetime*. I'm sure many of you might have watched *Alberta Primetime*. They're on there tonight. They said that of the five members of the committee three of them are Conservative, and there are two Liberals. What they find interesting about the Deputy Premier's submission, 209 pages, and a majority of members appointed by the government, is that it appears that the government's ideas may be very different than the Electoral Boundaries Commission's, the perception being that the government would go forward to submit under the perception of suggesting: we don't agree with the commission. Yet they appointed the majority of the members. One has to ask the question. Tonight on *Alberta Primetime* Rob Breakenridge and Joan Crockett were really, really quite perplexed by what they viewed as an assault on democracy based on the 209-page submission.

I'm quite certain now that the Deputy Premier will withdraw that at the proper time. I'm also quite certain that perception is important, but I think fixed election dates are an absolute necessity to reflect on the 21st century. The Legislature is not allowed to advertise during elections, so consequently why would the government be allowed to advertise during elections? Because there's a fear, in fairness to the government members, that it might be perceived that you're doing something to try to potentially buy votes. None of you would want to have that perception. I certainly wouldn't. I'm really suggesting to you another favour, to take on my free advice tonight.

To the Deputy Premier. The question that I ask – and feel free to use part of my 20 minutes to stand up and say if you are aware. Has your MLA office, in fact, contacted Elections Alberta relative to polling results of the last election? I would appreciate that answer because it will be even more pure if he were stand up and say: no, we have not requested that information from Elections Alberta. I think that perception will help the Deputy Premier and the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

On that note, I want to say that we are in the 21st century. Let us move forward with democratic reform. Rather than all of that uncertainty and speculation of what the President of Executive

Council will do in the third or fourth year, especially with those interested in becoming Premier in the future, potential leadership hopefuls from whatever political party, I think it would be really, really interesting to avoid that tool to be used by one person in terms of as we go forward. It'll be a level playing field. It'll be more democratic. And guess what? Welcome to the 21st century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair now shall recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the bill.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. They really hit the nail on the head here. A lot of the stuff we do in this House and our legislative changes should follow the Caesar's wife rule; that is, Caesar's wife should not only be pure but be seen to be pure. That takes a lot of what's in the Legislature, a lot of the legislation that we do here above and beyond what is necessary to give the voting public the assurances they need that everything is above board, that their politicians are playing by the rules, that everything is fair and balanced.

Rightly or wrongly right now in this country and in this province we have an electorate who is disengaged. They think about all politicians: "Shake them up in the bag. It doesn't really matter. They don't care anyway, or they're all in it for themselves." We know that's not true, but we really have to go, then, above and beyond what is necessary to try to win back the support of Joe and Jane Albertan, the average citizen, to restore their faith in democracy.

I think we could have done a lot better on this bill than we did. I would give the government a C minus on this bill. They implemented roughly one-half of the old Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations, and really that's not quite good enough. We were looking for a whole-scale change to the way things have always been, the way things always have been done. Well, we could have gone a lot further.

We hear tonight, you know, lots of discussion on fixed election dates. That's one of those things, Mr. Speaker, that could have and should have been done. It would have removed the political gerrymandering, the political opportunism when a party in power can select a date to go to the polls. It would have made things free and clear for people to understand, when they are going to the polls, that elections happen as a regular occurrence in this province and not as a matter of expediency for one party or another to go to the polls.

I would also suggest that we could have moved right away on having leaders report their donors right to the Chief Electoral Officer. There was no need to send it to committee. Nevertheless, I wish it was so right now, but at least it's a start. At least it's getting the ball rolling to have this eventuality.

I for one am interested in who donates to leaders' campaigns. That to me would be one of those things where if an Alberta citizen didn't know, well, they might assume the worst. They'd assume that something untoward is going on there if politicians don't want to reveal who, in fact, has donated to their campaign. I'll tell you what; that's one of those Caesar's wife rules we should do. We should be posting that stuff to assure Joe and Jane Albertan that there is no chicanery or hijinks going on in the backrooms, that no Premier or no politician has been bought. That's one of those things that can happen.

There are a few other things that I could go on to, but I discussed these quite extensively in both second and committee. I really hope

that this bill, although it starts off okay, will continue to be revised and revamped and that over the course of time many of the rationales for change put forward by the former Chief Electoral Officer are implemented and that we move to some of these things that appear obvious to rank-and-file Albertans, to make democracy not only pure but seen to be more pure.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this bill tonight.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and answers.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

9:30

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege once again to rise and debate Bill 7 at third reading in this House. Again, there are some small details, you know, the 189 recommendations that have come forward. It's good to see them coming forward, but again I have to comment that we are missing the big scope of democratic reform, and the Election Statutes Amendment Act is falling short.

It's been spoken to at length by many members, and I just need to bring it up again briefly. Fixed election dates are so critical in taking that level of what we want to call election gerrymandering out. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo certainly addressed that. Why would we want the Premier to be in a position where in order to maintain his power and authority, he has the ability to say, "Step in line or I'm going to call an election"? It's just wrong to be able to use something like that on the Alberta electorate in order to maintain power and authority and control over the people.

Again, many people have discussed the importance of banning government ads. There's a necessity for emergency announcements and job applications. There are a few legitimate areas, but there is no question that the government in the past has had a bad record of promoting their policies by saying, "This is a wonderful thing for Albertans" and promoting that. It's just not right. It needs to be banned during an election.

Another area that I believe for some reason I've missed on the list, the donations for new parties. There has been nothing made to accommodate for new parties to be able to get up and running – and it's very difficult and a challenge to do that – to be able to put money into a trust, in fact, so that once this party is up and running, people can get those political donations that allow grassroots people to be part of that. Again, why are we not allowing, you know, for those people who want to start a new party a method and a way of doing that?

Some of the democratic deficits that we've been looking at and mentioned many times tonight: what happened on the Public Accounts Committee. Again, it's just so backwards to think that a government member, the co-chair, has to sign off before a letter or a request can be put forward there.

You know, setting that election date, again, like I say, whether it's the third Monday in March or the third Monday in October or something, gives people the ability to plan and to set forward and to want to be able to work on those.

Again, you know, I've just got to make a comment that the manipulation that's going on, it seems, in wanting to give – well, speaking as a government person, let's make sure that we're in our best position to go into this; let's be able to call it on a date, and at this point let's make sure that we change the boundaries. I personally have been very disappointed in the attempt at the boundaries redistribution and even what has gone forward on the first one in that the number one consideration in my mind – of course, we're looking

at representation by population, but you need to look at it geographically. To want to make leaps across rivers, reservoirs, or major roadways such as Macleod Trail and say, "Oh, we'll link this one community over across," when the problems in that community really have no relationship – I'm just so disappointed to see the Deputy Premier put forward his 207-page report and say, "You know, this is what we think needs to be adjusted." Again, you look at it, and there's just no question that gerrymandering is going on. You look at that, you can analyze, go look at the poll results and realize that this is what's going on.

You know, just to look at my own riding of Calgary-Glenmore, why wouldn't you adapt Kingsland in? That's a part of the community of Southwood. Why would you annex that out and put it across Macleod Trail into Acadia? What we're going to call the new riding we don't know, but it just doesn't make sense for the areas that you're representing to be pulling a little area out; you know, like Chestermere getting thrown all the way over into Calgary-Foothills. There's just so much of that. The people look at that, and the blogs are saying: "This is unbelievable. It's so blatant. Why are they doing that?"

Again, the democratic accountability on what this government has been doing in the last year and a half is just astounding to many people that I talk to. Bill 50 empowering the minister to make a declaration to say: "You know what? We need power lines, so therefore I'm going to be declare it, and they're going to be made." There are no needs tests anymore. It's just shocking. The centralized health care decisions. You know, we're going to say from Edmonton what's going on, and we'll say what's going to be in Calgary, what's going to be in Lethbridge, what's going to be in Fort McMurray or Grande Prairie or Red Deer. Again, that's centralized decision. And such things as the royalty framework fiasco . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, if you have private conversations, please go outside the Chamber. Thank you.

Hon. member, continue.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that, as we see, as we break for the summer, there's been a great democratic deficit. Bill 7 is not addressing it. The other bills are there. I guess perhaps the most important thing to me is that some of these bills should remain over the summer so people can comment on them. We shouldn't be closing off and passing Bill 7. There's a lot missing there. Again, it's kind of being pushed through. We have to accept that with the way our current system is set up. I believe that the people have been speaking to the MLAs, and they're not listening. It's going to be interesting as we go through the summer.

Like I say, what interested me the most were the comments from the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo in his 13 years in government about the things that go on inside caucus. It's just quite amazing to think that the Premier is going to be left in a position that he can call an election at any time. This fall he can come forward and say: "You know what? Our health care, like our new royalty framework, is a failure. We've got a new idea. Here's what we're going to present. By the way, people, we want your mandate to do it, so we're going to call an election."

That's what I see coming this fall. They're going to be bringing forward a big bill and then say that they need to go to the people because of the failure of this government. It's sad that we've lost the Alberta advantage, that we've regressed to this point to where our number 1 bill, Bill 1, was: let's be competitive. To pass all this legislation saying that now we're going to be competitive: we're not

going to be. Based on the principles of sound economics, based on the principles of a free market, we're not going to let entrepreneurs who have good ideas on how to develop energy go out and do that. Instead, we're going to pick \$300 million for this type of energy, or we're going to put \$2 billion into CO₂.

We're lacking in so many areas. Again, Bill 7 is just one more example of that. I get a strong feeling that it's going to pass here in about the next 30 seconds, so I'll sit down and see how the vote goes. I'm very disappointed with this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: On the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill?

Mr. Horner: Yes, please.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have sat here for a couple of hours listening to some hon. members in this House essentially accuse this member of doing something akin to gerrymandering, akin to dishonourable conduct. I find that reprehensible. [interjection] Hon. member, I have the floor. I listened to your ramble; you'll listen to mine.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier has the floor.

Mr. Horner: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talk about a report from government. There is no report from government. There was a compilation of individual maps drawn up by individual MLAs talking to their constituents, compiled in a binder for the ease of reference of the committee. That was submitted several weeks ago, prior to the written deadline. I, like many other MLAs from the Liberal opposition, from the ND opposition made an appointment to go and see the boundaries commission. The research for those private members that compiled that document was not done by government employees; it was done by our caucus. Our caucus is also called the government caucus because we form the government. The hon. member should perhaps look at the submission. I doubt that he has. He would see that it is not a report that flows to a conclusion. In fact, there are a number of errors where there is confrontation, where the maps don't match up.

Mr. Speaker, before levelling such erroneous and, I would say, reprehensible charges, he might want to look at the *Hansard* from the public discussion that we had with the commission last night. He might want to read the comments that I gave to the commission that outlined that this is for their benefit, for their information but that they had a very tough job to do, and we were going to accept what they had to do because there was conflict within the compilation that we gave them. I find it incredible that the morning after I was there, after a number of other MLAs have been there, they would have a press conference because they think they have found something.

The compilation, Mr. Speaker, that was submitted was submitted, as I said, prior to the deadline.

9:40

Mr. Liepert: Sleazy.

Mr. Horner: That would be one term I would use, hon. member.

Many of the MLAs in the past boundary reviews have presented. I presented in the last boundary review. In fact, the discussion in our

caucus was that after the interim report MLAs should present because we represent our constituents. The hon. member has made some comments, I understand, to the press on what he thought happened in caucus. Obviously, he was wrong.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo had quite a ramble. He did talk about a lot of things, and he talked a lot about stuff that didn't make a lot of sense to me. He asked me whether or not I knew the poll results. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I know the poll results from my constituency. I would suggest that the hon. member knows the poll results from his constituency. I would guess that the hon. members, all private members, know the poll results. As you well know, those poll results are public information. It's a report that's presented. It's open to the public.

Did I phone up the boundaries commission and ask for poll results? No. I didn't have to. Nor did I look for them, because I didn't do the compilation. I did my own, and I would suggest that the hon. members might want to do their own work, too. But, Mr. Speaker, I didn't put in poll results. I didn't put in any of those sorts of things.

The hon. member is just trying to make some publicity for himself. The accusation of gerrymandering I find reprehensible.

I think this act goes a long way for democracy in this province. I fully support it, and I believe my members should, too.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for comment or question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the clarifications made by the hon. Deputy Premier. My single question is: will you honour the results of the electoral commission's findings?

Mr. Horner: Let me talk a little bit about what happened last time. Last time the commission went around the province, they did a similar type of process. We had a commission that was set up. We had some very honourable gentlemen and, I believe, two women, if I'm not mistaken, honourable Albertans that served on the committee last time we did this process. They did the process of going around the province. They went around the province and did the public meetings.

They prepared an interim report. We all got a look at the interim report. I noticed, Mr. Speaker, that in that interim report the Alexander reserve was carved out of the constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert for some reason. I also noticed that there was a section of St. Albert that was added into that constituency. When talking to the mayor and talking to the chief of the Alexander band at the time, they suggested that they didn't want to be in a different constituency. What were they supposed to do? How were they supposed to remedy this? I said: "Well, you make a presentation. I can make that presentation as your MLA and talk about the various things that are going to happen in the future with that." So we made that presentation.

I'm very happy to say that the change that we suggested to the commission at that time of bringing the Alexander band back into the riding of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert ended up coming into the new ridings. It came in, Mr. Speaker, because when people turn left out of their driveway to go into town, when they turn left out of their driveway to go and vote, or they're part of a community like Morinville, where they do all of their trading, that makes the most sense for that to be a part of the community.

Hon. members would be interested to note that at the presentation we did the other night, we talked a lot about community leagues.

We talked a lot about keeping community leagues together where they belong to communities of interest, which really are the principles that the boundary commission used.

We talked a lot about natural boundaries, in my case the Sturgeon county boundary. Why wouldn't we use the Sturgeon county boundary? I know that in many of the submissions, part of the compilation that I put together and gave to the commission several weeks ago, a lot of the private members said: you know, we want to have boundary lines that are rivers or trade corridors or community leagues or whatever they might be. That was put into our submission.

Certainly, when we talked about . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Come on, Doug. Sit down and take another question.

Mr. Horner: Let me answer, Member.

When we talked about the last boundary review – and, Mr. Speaker, you'll know because you were in this Legislative Assembly – we actually lost a couple of ridings in the last boundary review. They were, I might add, PC ridings that were lost. They were rural ones. We had a lot of submissions, and yes, we honoured whatever the commission came out with.

Again, if hon. members would take the time to read the *Hansard*, which will be available from the public meetings that are a part of this process, they would find that what we told the committee was: here are the reasons why and the principles that surrounded all of these discussions; this is why we're putting these forward. We will obviously accept whatever the boundary commission submits to this Legislature for debate in this Legislature because that's what happens. That's the process. We'll honour that process.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. Really quickly because I know we're short of time. I respect that the Deputy Premier has to rise up and defend himself. I'm sorry if he felt that that was defamatory or disingenuous, but the fact remains that there was a letter sent out on his letterhead on behalf of the government caucus from the office of the Deputy Premier that specifically laid out in a very co-ordinated way – all the different maps co-ordinated with each other, and it showed very specifically the way that this government wanted the boundaries to be redrawn. That is unacceptable, totally unacceptable.

The other thing. In the same letter, Deputy Premier, you asked for a meeting at the bottom of the letter. You asked for a meeting. Was that a private meeting? What kind was it? Was it just a presentation? Why didn't you say "presentation"? The question I have for the Deputy Premier is to explain this. How does he not think that this proposal that they're putting forward will not cause immense pressure on this commission, that the government appoints, to gerrymander – the answer is that it will create a lot of pressure.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) time has ended.

Back to the bill.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other hon. member wishing to join the debate on the bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

9:50

Bill 12
Body Armour Control Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move third reading.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Strathcona I would like to move Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Having previously participated in second and also in committee, I understand why there is objection to this particular bill. However, as I declared during the committee stage, I support and our caucus supports the fact that Chief Boyd and Chief Hanson, respectively the chiefs of Edmonton and Calgary, believe that this will provide them with one more tool in terms of fighting crime. The Liberal Party is on record as being tough on crime, and if this will accomplish that in the chiefs' minds and will provide their members a degree of support as they go about the doing of their duties – the Liberal caucus has met with the chiefs and fully supports their intention to uphold the laws of this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the bill.

Mr. Anderson: Sure. The good thing about third reading is that there's 29(2)(a). I asked these questions in committee, and I want to ask them to the government members now or to any government member who is willing to take this up. Please explain to me – please explain to me – why in this bill . . .

Mr. Liepert: He can't do that. He's got to refer to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Bill 12.

Mr. Anderson: No, no. This is Bill 12. Calm down, Energy. Calm down.

Is this 29(2)(a) for Calgary-Varsity?

The Deputy Speaker: No. For the first two members it's not 29(2)(a). After you are speaking, it will be 29(2)(a).

Mr. Anderson: That's right. Get your facts straight, Minister. Good grief.

Anyway, we're on the bill, Bill 12. What I'd like to know from these individuals – and I hope that they'll talk about it – is: why would you support disbanding the gun registry, yet you support what essentially is a body armour registry? It's one thing to support a bill that is going to add an additional penalty to using body armour in the perpetration of a crime. I understand that. I can agree with that. That makes sense. It's entirely another thing to say that we've got to take this body armour and that we've got to register it, for law-abiding citizens to register it. It's a waste of money. It's a waste of resources.

I just do not understand how a government on that side of the House can say over and over and over again, almost every time I've heard them talk about it, that they're against the gun registry, that it's a boondoggle, that criminals don't register their guns, that it doesn't cut down on crime, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, on and on and on. Great. I agree with all that. Then they turn around and they

say in the same breath, "Oh, well, we're going to support, essentially, a body armour registry," where you have law-abiding citizens that need to register their body armour. They say: "Well, the police support it. The police support it." Well, great. The police supported the gun registry, so what's the difference?

I would like to know from this government: why the contradiction? It's a clear contradiction. There's no difference between registering and licensing; it's the same blinking thing. You still have to go to the government and say that you have it and register it. It's the same thing. So what's the difference? Why do they not support the gun registry, yet they support a body armour registry? That's the only part of the bill we have a problem with. That's the only problem. No one in here is saying that we think gang members should be able to wear body armour around. We're not saying that. We disagree with it. If they're using it in the perpetration of a crime, a shooting, whatever, we totally agree. Why not outlaw it or ban it in nightclubs? If that's a problem, ban it in nightclubs. Fine. I understand the reasoning behind that.

But then you go the next step. You take policing resources, that should be used for many of the initiatives that the hon. Justice minister has put forward, that are good initiatives – she wants to increase police on our streets. Fantastic. I agree with it. She wants to, you know, make sure that we have more sheriffs. Well, that's the Solicitor General. That's great. We want more ICE teams. That's great. These are all great things. So why are we using money, especially when times are tight financially, to essentially create a body armour registry? Of course, it's going to be integrated, but it's still going to cost money. There's no reason.

Criminals and gang members aren't going to register their body armour. It's ridiculous to think that they will. They won't. They absolutely will not do that. The only people that this affects are law-abiding citizens that for whatever reason feel they would like to, whether it's in their job or whether it's a woman that wants to wear a stab vest for whatever reason. Perhaps she has a hostile ex. I don't know. There are a hundred reasons. The point is: why do we take that liberty away?

You know what? The government is right. There aren't tens of thousands of Albertans that wear body armour. No one is saying that, but it does affect our personal liberty and a little bit more. It takes away an option that law-abiding citizens have, makes it more difficult for law-abiding citizens to protect themselves and to make a choice, to just make a choice. That's not right. It's also, like I said, a waste of taxpayer money. That's the other issue. So there's a liberty issue, and there's also a waste of taxpayer dollars issue.

I keep asking the other members on that side, and I have yet to hear any excuse other than: oh, the police want it. Well, police wanted the long gun registry, too. We agree with the police, I think, in this House on lots of different things, on most things. We want to give them all the tools that we can to fight crime, but there is a limit. That's why we didn't support the long gun registry. There's a limit to what we want to do because at some point it becomes burdensome and wasteful for taxpayers, and it starts taking away our liberties. The long gun registry: why should we have law-abiding farmers register their guns, their long guns, their hunting rifles? It's stupid. It's a silly law, and that's why we didn't support it.

It didn't create the intended effect that the government at the time, the federal Liberal government, was trying to get, so we fought it, and we're still kind of fighting it. It's now officially kind of gone, but now we have to dismantle the bureaucracy, and it still has to get through the Senate and all that stuff. The point is that it's moving. We spent all that time trying to get that out, and it took over a billion dollars before we realized the mistake there. Now we're going to duplicate it in Alberta, of all places, with a body armour registry?

I'm sure it won't cost as much, but it will still cost something. What if it costs \$80,000? Say that it's really cheap and we get it done for \$80,000. Well, that's a police officer. What if it takes \$160,000? Well, that's two police officers or a new ICE team or something.

The point is that it takes resources out of effective policing resources, and it puts them into something that is absolutely ineffective. It's just totally ineffective to have a body armour registry. I would ask that the Justice minister and this government review that policy, and before they go and put it into regulation, I would hope that they would find a way to get it out. Leave the rest of it in there. Make it illegal to use it and run around with it in a nightclub and intimidate people. That's fine. I don't know how you'd word it; that's the Justice minister's job. But figure that out and slap a big penalty on them if they're using it in a crime, in a gang shooting, or make it an asset that can be seized when it's found with other illegal weapons or illegal narcotics or whatever. That's fine. We can all agree on that. But let's not take this to the silly step, to the silly level, where we start making law-abiding citizens register body armour. It's expensive. There's no reason to do it.

I know that 29(2)(a) is meant to question the speaker, but I would welcome the opportunity of two or three members of this government explaining the contradiction of why they support, essentially, a body armour registry and why they do not support a long gun registry. Hopefully, they can find a logical explanation for that because I think that Albertans would like to know. We certainly would like to know. That's the point of this House. That's why we're here, to debate these things. So somebody explain it to me. It's an open question, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) there are five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing nobody taking on 29(2)(a), the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the bill.

10:00

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak in favour of this bill. Obviously, you can see that there are tensions in every legislation like that between civil liberties and, again, protection of the average citizen. I think in this bill it strikes the right balance. It doesn't seem to be logical that this is interfering with many Albertans' rights, if any. It allows for the police to do their work more efficiently and effectively. It is targeted primarily at gang members, and they are the ones currently using this stuff to do their nefarious deeds. It allows people who actually need the body armour legislation a process to get it and to use it effectively so that they can perform their jobs. Again, this bill tries to cut through that and tries to strike a balance between those two equations and I think does an effective job of doing this.

It does weigh on me that both of the police chiefs spoke very in favour with it. I realize that from their perspective they're having a real war out there on gang crime infiltrating the Alberta scene. If we can give them tools like this that can help, well, I'm supportive of it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was a privilege to speak to this this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing no other hon. members, I shall now recognize the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo on the bill.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act, I think there are some very good points in the bill that have been recognized from members from all corners of this House. I say that there certainly is probably more positive than there is negative.

The issue, though, that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere had mentioned relative to the contradiction I think is a fair question. It's also possible, as I know in my time on the government side, that sometimes when bills are introduced, there are contradictions and sometimes the question relative to, you know: what are the costs versus the benefit? As we know, we have to do a cost-benefit analysis, the cost of five more police officers for the bureaucratic red tape of a registry. Who would prefer five more police officers than the bureaucracy, especially in light of the fact that, certainly, I know in my time on that side of the House we supported the idea of government being out of our face when it came to ridiculous registries such as the long gun and others? I'm pleased to say that under the federal government and Prime Minister Harper that is being rectified.

I'm going to give the benefit of the doubt on Bill 12 to the Attorney General, recognizing the important points that have been raised by many members of this House but specifically on the contradiction referenced by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I think in all due fairness to provide the Attorney General with an opportunity to have a reflection of what has been discussed in here and to make the appropriate change relative to this because at the end of the day I think the destination of where we want to get to most of us in here can agree with. It's sometimes that the journey of getting to that destination may require a few changes or detours or even pulling over to the side of the road.

At this point the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has raised, I think, reasonable, measured questions on the contradiction that exists, and I'd welcome the opportunity for the Attorney General to clarify or at least give a better understanding for me on that contradiction that I don't have the answer to as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was interesting today that the one New Democratic member had an amendment passed, and she says that never has that happened before. So with Churchill's hope of never, never giving up, I will stand up once more to speak against Bill 12, the Body Armour Control Act, and to give my reasons why I feel that this isn't in the best interests of this House to pass this bill.

First of all, to kind of look at a different angle, this really is giving a false sense of security or else possibly just the perception of action to appease those people that are upset about it. The problems with body armour are occurring and happening in some of our cities, so it says: oh, we need to do something and react. We've got too many bills that come forward, though, where a year later we have to bring amendments to or do something different to or let them kind of fall by the wayside.

We tried to get a proclamation date on child pornography reporting but failed to. Seeing that there's no proclamation date on this one, I hope that this one, if it does pass tonight, which I'm fearful that it will, will sit on the side, and government will say, "Well, we passed the bill; we forgot to proclaim it" or whatever so that we don't have to allocate manpower, allocate taxes, and allocate other resources towards actually registering or licensing, as they like to say, which is another sense of registering, body armour. It just isn't going to be in the best use of their – I mean, the point that I brought up before and again on a last hope of this bill not passing is that it's fines and penalties that we want to impose on perpetrators of crime.

That's who we want to focus our bills on, those that are actually endangering the lives of citizens. For someone to buy and wear body armour isn't a danger to others, but if they're using that and they're becoming bold and brash and making threats, then that's an opportunity where we can pass legislation to say that for someone who's wearing body armour and making threats, we're going to increase the fine, we're going increase the penalty, and we're going to go after those individuals.

To just go after the idea that if we set up this registry, this licensing agency, somehow Albertans are going to be safer I don't think is going to work. The criminals that want this body armour are going to circumvent it. They're going to get people that will argue and debate for them to show why they legally need it. You know: "I've had threats on my life. Therefore, I need it." And they say: "Oh, are you a gang member?" "Oh, absolutely not."

I mean, this is just this false sense of—ordinary Albertans, yes, are going to answer that, but those that are perpetrators of crimes, those that are part of criminal gangs are not going to respect this law. It's not going to accomplish anything. It's going to take up tax dollars, it's going to take up resources, and it's going to take up manpower in order to function on these things.

We don't need to do this. I hope that we'll have a vote against this, realizing that we can spend our time, our resources, and our manpower in better areas and go forward. Let's restore the Alberta advantage. Fortis et Liber, strong and free. Albertans want their freedoms to do these things and the opportunity to make that choice for themselves.

That's all I'll say. I hope that we'll have a vote against this. It's my last chance to speak against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Is any other member wishing to join the debate on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:08 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

10:10

For the motion:

Amery	Griffiths	Lund
Berger	Hancock	Marz
Blackett	Hayden	McQueen
Campbell	Hehr	Mitzel
Chase	Horner	Pastoor
Dallas	Jacobs	Redford
Danyluk	Klimchuk	Renner
Drysdale	Knight	Rodney
Elniski	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Evans	Liepert	Xiao
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	

Against the motion:

Anderson	Boutilier	Hinman
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Totals:	For – 32	Against – 3
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[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:14 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 21, 2010

Issue 31a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk
Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services
Clerk of *Journals*/Table Research
Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Senior Parliamentary Counsel

W.J. David McNeil
Louise J. Kamuchik
Micheline S. Gravel
Robert H. Reynolds, QC
Shannon Dean

Parliamentary Counsel
Sergeant-at-Arms
Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Managing Editor of *Alberta Hansard*

Stephanie LeBlanc
Brian G. Hodgson
Chris Caughell
Gordon H. Munk
Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce a fabulous group of students from Caernarvon elementary school. I had the pleasure of attending their social studies class not that long ago and discussed with them what goes on in this particular Chamber. I have to tell you that they were so well prepared and had a good understanding of what goes on over here, but I'm not surprised because their teacher, Mrs. Susanne Venaas, happens to be the cousin of Mme Micheline Gravel, who is our Clerk of *Journals* here in the Chamber. They are also accompanied by Ms Bobbi Jo Hollingsworth and Mrs. Line Johnston from Caernarvon elementary school. I would ask them all to rise and accept the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 22 students from Blessed Sacrament school in Wainwright. They are accompanied by one student teacher, Amelia Medeiros, and she has the distinct pleasure of having as a mentor Ms Michelle Folk, who is one of the greatest teachers I've ever met. I always aspired to be as good a teacher as her. They're also accompanied by parent helpers Laurene Kennelly, Bev Babcock, Cheryl Heier, Brett McDonald, and Angela Lee. They are in the public gallery behind me, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine, Mr. Ben Thorlakson, who, in addition to running several very successful cattle feeding operations and being involved in a broad range of beef industry research, is the past president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the Canada Beef Export Federation, and the Alberta Beef Producers and is one of the people who I conferred with before I agreed to do this job. He is accompanied today by his daughter Dr. Lori Thorlakson, who is a professor of political science at the University of Alberta and actually has some students in the building here today. I would like to ask them both to rise and enjoy the very warm traditional welcome of this Assembly, please.

The Speaker: The hon. deputy Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today that I'm very pleased to make to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. First of all, I would like to introduce one of my former colleagues, Dr. Bruce Miller. Please stand, Dr. Miller. He's joining us in the public gallery. Of course, he has served the public for many, many years as a church leader and educator and as a community activist. He served as the member for Edmonton-Glenora from '04 to '08, and he is now leading a congregation at Garneau United Church. Please join me in welcoming him back to the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a very accomplished young woman that I am pleased to be engaged with as part of the Equal Voice mentorship program, Lyndia Peters. Lyndia, please stand. Lyndia is originally from southern Alberta, graduated from the University of Lethbridge, and is employed with the city of Edmonton as a Youth Council co-ordinator. She also volunteers in the youth sector on the Youth Advisory Group to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and is involved with a number of arts organizations near and dear to my heart, including the Edmonton Poetry Festival. Lyndia is here today at my urging to see how question period works. I would ask you all to please welcome her to the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, do you have an introduction today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members here Executive Director Bev Walkner, senior manager of the intergovernmental and integrated health strategy policy branch, and Lara McClelland. They are both here with a number of staff members. I just want to say thank you to them for coming today and paying attention to what we do in the Legislature. The intergovernmental and integrated health strategy branch is responsible for federal-provincial initiatives, strategic policy, and aboriginal programs among several other duties. I would ask Bev and Lara and all of their staff to please rise, and the rest of us could perhaps welcome them with a warm round of applause. Thank you very much.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Nonprofit and Charitable Organizations

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Volunteer Week provides an excellent opportunity to acknowledge Alberta's more than 19,000 nonprofit and charitable organizations, with approximately 2.5 million volunteers and over 100,000 employees. These organizations are vital to the strength and well-being of our communities, contribute to our quality of life, and are essential to attracting people to our province and keeping them here.

A report produced by the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations entitled *Stretched to the Limit*, an economic survey with responses from about 500 nonprofit groups across Alberta, revealed that many nonprofit organizations are under enormous strain, the result of greater demand for programs and services from clients with ever-growing complex needs, decreased funding, and increased operating costs.

Declining revenue sources for the nonprofit sector include foundation grants, individual donations, corporate donations and sponsorships, earned revenue, gifts in kind and stock, and government grants and contracts. Faced with these decreases, organizations have no capacity to absorb further cutbacks. Respondents indicated

that the cumulative impact of even modest reductions of between 2 to 5 per cent can have huge impacts. More than 60 per cent of the survey respondents reported an increased demand for programs and services, and at the same time 65 per cent said their general operating costs have gone up substantially for things such as rent, utilities, insurance, staffing, supplies, and equipment.

The report affirms that Alberta's nonprofit sector is resilient and adaptable. While these groups have been adapting to changing circumstances, they are stretched to the limit. In fact, some have already cut programs and services in the communities they serve. According to the survey it's a situation that could become worse in the months ahead despite predictions of economic recovery.

One of the key suggested actions is continued dialogue and ongoing consultation between government and leaders in this sector to better understand the challenges.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Government Shortcomings

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a pattern of bad decisions this government continues to make. Just in the last few weeks two new problems have come to light, the political interference in the Electoral Boundaries Commission and awarding the cataract surgery contracts. This government does not have respect for the rule of law, for property rights, or for democracy. It is displaying the worst of human traits. With its desire to centralize power and control over others, they have created an atmosphere of envy and jealousy between regions, between business sectors, and between Albertans. Many Albertans are discouraged with loss of employment and business opportunities that once flourished here.

This government is showing politics at its worst, and in doing so, they are failing Albertans. They have failed our energy sector, first, with a punitive new royalty framework and now by creating ongoing uncertainty by delaying the release of the details of the competitiveness review changes. They have failed hard-working entrepreneurs, who are trying to compete on a level playing field, by rewarding friends of the PC Party with corporate welfare like carbon capture, ethanol plants, and billion-dollar power lines.

They have failed rural landowners with the trampling of property rights under Bill 36, the land-use framework, and bills 19 and 50, to build power lines we probably don't need. They have failed students by allowing postsecondary institutes to skirt around the legislative tuition increase caps. They have failed health workers and patients with a centralized health board that is causing costs to balloon while services deteriorate. They have failed taxpayers with a \$7 billion plus cash deficit, the biggest in our province's history, and the return to deficit financing. They have failed voters with the democratic deficit. There are no fixed election dates, no set election, no free votes, no recall, and with the Legislature closing early, no accountability of question period for six months.

Former Premier Ralph Klein use to say: welcome to Ralph's world. This government has rolled up the welcome mat. Albertans want to know: what world does this government live in?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

1:40

2011 Solar Decathlon

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate a group of students from the University of Calgary who have been asked to participate in the 2011 Solar Decathlon. The University of

Calgary is the only team from Canada chosen to participate in this prestigious honour.

The Solar Decathlon is a biennial competition hosted by the United States Department of Energy. Student-led teams from around the world are invited to design, construct, and showcase solar-powered net zero homes. These homes are displayed at the National Mall in Washington, DC, and are judged by experts in 10 different fields. The Solar Decathlon attracts enormous attention from media, the public, governments, and industry leaders. In 2009 a Calgary-based team placed sixth out of 20 competitors. Next year's team will show approximately 200,000 spectators in Washington, DC, and the world what Alberta technology can achieve.

Alberta and its postsecondary learning institutions are dedicated to finding innovative solutions to today's toughest problems, including problems like productivity, energy efficiency, and competitiveness. Solutions to these problems are found right here at home in Alberta and at the University of Calgary. Team Canada's solar home is cutting edge; it's attractive, affordable, marketable, and above all it's sustainable. It's designed specifically for and with the collaboration of First Nations communities in southern Alberta.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, my hometown of Calgary is leading the country. These bright young minds are the future innovators of our nation, and I offer them sincere congratulations and support for their endeavours. I would ask all hon. members to join me in wishing the team from Calgary, Team Canada, good luck in Washington, DC.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

SAIT Trojans Men's Hockey Team

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the SAIT Trojans became the second team in the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference history to win four straight men's hockey titles with a 4-1 victory over Concordia in the fifth and deciding game. Coach Ken Babey is now the winningest coach in postsecondary men's hockey history and hit the 400-win plateau.

SAIT Trojans players and staff are as follows: Jonathan Malin, Bradley Plumton, Travis Bradshaw, Mike Ullrich, Clayton Goodall, Ryan Hyland, Kyle Dorowicz, Sean Bassingthwaite, Robert Nocera, Geoff Rollins, Blake Robson, Sean Goodwin, Brock Michalsky, Garret Watson, Brady Mason, Shane Lust, Jessie Tresierra, Kevin Lessard, Thane Wood, Brennan Strang, Marco Guercio, and Shadoc Stoodley. In goal Landon Kroeker, Thomas Tartaglione, and Ryan Nieszner. Coaching staff: Head Coach Ken Babey, Jim McLean, Rob Sweeney, Jason Edwards, T.J. Babey, Ray Herrington, and Timothy Lees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Democracy and MLA Representation

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to you and through you to all members of this House that I have gained a new appreciation in the last week and a half for what an honour it is to be able to represent the constituents of Calgary-Currie in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I want to thank the members of all parties and, above all, to thank the staff of the Legislative Assembly Office for the many and varied kinds of assistance and co-operation they've given me to aid in my transition from where I was to where I am.

There exists a lot of goodwill in this Assembly, and while occasional bits of it may be driven by political expediency or schadenfreude, I believe that it is in the vast majority of instances real and genuine and that it springs from our common bipartisan

bond that we share in this House. Each one of us put ourselves and our names forward for public service, and most days I believe and hope each of us gets out of bed, gets dressed far better than I ever had to when I was working in radio, and goes to work because in our heart of hearts we want to do our small part to do some good, to make a difference, to leave this province better than we found it on behalf of and for the sake of the people we represent.

Mr. Speaker, I know that goodwill exists, and I'd like to see us all put it to work more frequently on behalf of and for the sake of the Albertans that we all represent. You know, in my experience, it really doesn't matter how far apart you and I or this person or that person may be politically on quite a number of issues. If we share a concern about some other issue, when we have a common concern, we have common cause, and we can work together to solve the problem for the common good. I believe that approach puts Albertans first.

Mr. Speaker, in short order this House will rise, and we'll all go home to our respective constituencies for the summer. No matter whether we call ourselves PCs, Liberals, New Democrats, Wildrose Alliance, or independents, let's remember that our bosses are none other than the Albertans who elected us, and let's come back in the fall determined to work in their interests. Where that means working across or around party lines in common cause to put Albertans first, it is my hope that we will all be prepared to do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge National Volunteer Week and all the amazing volunteers in my constituency, across our province, and across our great nation. This annual celebration recognizes the efforts of nearly 12.5 million volunteers across Canada. It is estimated that each year these volunteers donate over 2 billion hours of their personal time to the benefit of our communities. Our volunteers work tirelessly to make our province and our communities a great place to live, work, and raise our families. Their dedication to making a difference in our communities is truly remarkable.

There have been several volunteer appreciation dinners held throughout my constituency this week. It is a great honour for me to attend dinners in Calmar, Leduc county, Wetaskiwin county, and Drayton Valley-Brzeau. This week I along with the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose attended a dinner that honoured the recipients of the leaders of tomorrow awards for the youth in Wetaskiwin county and city. These outstanding young volunteers ranged in age from six to 21, and we were very impressed to learn about the contributions they are making in their communities, schools, churches, and hospitals, to name a few examples.

We would like to congratulate all the winners and, indeed, the youth who were nominated. These leaders of tomorrow are in reality leaders of today. The nominees represented some of Alberta's best and brightest, and it is important to have events like this to truly recognize and thank our volunteers for the work they do. National Volunteer Week reminds us to take time to thank our volunteers in our constituencies for their hard work and dedication.

Thank you to all our volunteers, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, would you join me as well in extending a very happy birthday to Her Majesty the Queen.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present two petitions. The first petition of 90 signatures from the Calgary area urges the government to "introduce a bill to amend the Alberta School Act to designate in legislation the identity of the party who is primarily responsible for ensuring a child's attendance at school."

The second petition, 119 signatures from the Calgary area, urges the government to "increase the number of Attendance Officers available to Alberta School Boards in order to enhance the enforcement of school attendance."

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to table for the House some petitions from students and parents in central Alberta. Government officials from my office and department met last Thursday with a group of students to discuss their concerns with diploma exams. The conversation was thorough and positive, and I appreciated the students exercising their citizenship and thoughtfully bringing their concerns to the government's attention. They provided me with over 450 signatures of students from Lacombe, Delburne, Caroline, Ponoka, Sundre so that the Assembly might be aware of their concerns as well.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Services Executive Bonuses

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's growing evidence that shows that past a certain point in a salary more money does not mean better results. In fact, a healthy, trusting, positive work environment provides the best incentive. In light of the current bonus system at Alberta Health Services and the fact that their own staff survey shows an almost toxic work environment, it's clear that Alberta Health Services is missing the point and putting their faith in money. Again to the Premier: will the Premier immediately put an end to a flawed bonus system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in response to the same question a couple of weeks ago I said that the minister of health is reviewing the situation with Alberta Health Services. Alberta Health Services itself is looking at a new system for remunerating their senior officials that sit as vice-presidents and other management positions. Any other information the minister has with respect to the progress on the file.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that 30 per cent of the total bonuses for the 48 vice-presidents in Alberta Health Services will be determined by "adherence to values," can the Premier explain how any system can possibly measure an individual's adherence to values in an objective way?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak to the piece of information that the hon. member just gave, but I can tell about what we did in government, and that is that we eliminated, with of course the support of our senior managers, \$40 million worth of bonuses going forward, and we worked it out with those officials. As I said, the

minister of health is working with the Alberta Health Services Board to deal with the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, taxpayers surely have a right to know where their money is going. Will the Premier give his word that immediately on receiving this information, it will be made public to all Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we do have a very open and transparent system of communicating with Albertans in terms of the level of compensation for all senior officials, including those that are elected. There is a range of salaries that go into the annual reports from all of the organizations that report to the various ministries.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Hydroelectric Dam on the Peace River

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The B.C. government has just announced they're going to go ahead with a massive hydroelectric dam on the Peace River, adding to the two huge dams that are already in place. The flow to the Peace River delta has already been compromised, and all this Premier is willing to do is to seek intervenor status and offer weak platitudes about mitigating negative impacts. To the Premier: given that so much is at stake for Alberta if B.C. goes ahead with the dam, what specifically is the Premier going to do to protect Alberta's interests?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we will be protecting Albertans' interests. As I told the media yesterday, I had a conversation with Premier Campbell on Saturday morning. He apprised me that they will be proceeding with the applications. Those applications, of course, will go to adjudication, and a quasi-judicial authority will make the decisions. We will of course be delivering our position. The Northwest Territories and First Nations have some issues. There are a considerable number of questions that have to be answered.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That anticipates the next question which is, really: why has the Premier not been seeking government-to-government negotiations instead of going cap in hand merely as an intervenor in this application?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Premier has called and given us advance notice of the application is a good step on his part and has also given us an opportunity to dialogue on this particular matter even further. As I said before, we will protect the interests of Albertans. There are numerous concerns. The Department of Environment, Department of Justice, and SRD will be involved, and it may include other departments in terms of delivering evidence to the quasi-judicial authority.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the run-of-river Dunvegan dam is downstream from B.C.'s two massive dams and a key renewable resource for Alberta, what effect will B.C.'s latest development and dam have on our ability to generate our sustainable energy resource?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is no development; it's being proposed. That is one of the questions that will be asked by the province. Again, it's the first part of a long process. This is discussion, of course, delivering the evidence to the committee that's going to take a number of years to deal with it and make a decision. But in the meantime we're going to ensure that the interests of Albertans are protected.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workers' Compensation for Occupational Cancers

Mr. MacDonald: Thirteen per cent of new cancer cases identified each year in Alberta could be work related. However, only 31 cancer-related claims were accepted by the Workers' Compensation Board in the last reported year. My first question is to the Premier. Given that there is over \$300 million in the WCB's occupational disease reserve fund, will the Premier ensure that all Alberta workers have the same protections that firefighters have for work-related cancers? I believe the government did the right thing when they enhanced protection for firefighters.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's a technical matter, and the minister will respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, with pleasure. The Workers' Compensation Board makes decisions based on the facts, facts presented to the Workers' Compensation Board by the medical professionals. That is how cases are adjudicated. That is how entitlement is being adjudicated on files. When a worker gets injured, there's an obligation for either the employer, the worker, or the medical staff to report the accident. Reports are filed. Decisions are made by the WCB.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the Premier, and this is not a technical matter; it's a matter of health and safety for Alberta workers. Why is the government reluctant to bring in legal protection so that Alberta workers such as welders have WCB protection if they are exposed to cancer-causing agents in their line of work?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister just answered the question. WCB makes the determination. They're a quasi-judicial authority separate from government, and they make those decisions on behalf of Albertans.

Mr. MacDonald: I would remind the hon. Premier that it's this government, his government, that writes the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Now, again to the Premier: given that there are as many as 2,500 Albertans who could possibly die of occupational cancer by the year 2015, how can the Premier justify waiting five years before cutting exposure rates to cancer-causing agents in the workplace by half?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It should be known to Albertans that aside from insuring Albertans following an unfortunate work accident, the Workers' Compensation Board also provides our department of occupational health and safety with a significant amount of money for mitigating accidents. One of the areas where

the funds are being spent is on making sure that our workers are informed properly and that laws relevant to the occupational health act are being enforced. We are focusing on preventing accidents by education, by putting the proper rules around workplace environments. But when accidents occur or when occupational diseases are developed, decisions by the WCB are made based on medical evidence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Cataract Surgery

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has severely eroded what was the Alberta advantage through its incompetence. The health minister has announced that since the handling of the cataract contract process has caused so much confusion and outrage, he'll be hosting a meeting this weekend with most of the stakeholders. This government fails to realize that they should consult the stakeholders before making major decisions. Given the damage this sudden cancellation has caused patients and providers, will the Premier step in and extend the old contract for 60 days so that this issue can be properly resolved? Will you step in, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the question has been asked two or three times by the same member, and I've clearly indicated that there was a request for proposals that was put out with a closing date of January 15. Those who wished to be part of that process were. It was open. It was public. It was transparent. It was all done accordingly. However, there is a second blitz coming up, and that will include additional opportunities. That's one of the reasons why we're meeting on Saturday; it's to provide everybody with that information.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, that's why I asked the Premier.

Given that this government continues to make flawed decisions behind closed doors, will the Premier clear the air on this process, and will he have his health minister table those RFPs, as the health care act legislates, so that the right decision will be made rather than the bad political ones behind closed doors?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that question was also asked by one of the opposition colleagues, and I indicated then the same thing that I'll indicate now. I will look into this matter further.

Mr. Hinman: He needs to table and make it open.

You know, all good things come to an end but, thankfully, so do the bad ones. Given that the only procedure that will fix this government's vision is one that the citizens of Alberta will perform at the next election, can the Premier promise that this appointment will not be rescheduled from the spring of 2012?

Mr. Stelmach: All I know is that I'm not going for cataract surgery as yet. Hopefully, I don't have to before March of 2012. I really don't know where the poor fellow is going.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:00

Health System Governance

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Almost two years ago the government decided that Albertans needed a health care villain to continue the government's privatization agenda and to

shield the Premier from responsibility. The superboard was struck in order to distance government from accountability when it came to decisions to cut public services and staff. They in turn set up their villain, Dr. Stephen Duckett, and his 50 vice-presidents. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why won't the minister stop hiding behind Alberta Health Services and take responsibility for the health care system once and for all?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've answered questions about this before as well, and I would encourage the hon. questioner to please read *Hansard*. It was very clearly indicated why we went from 12 different boards, including nine provincial ones and three others. It seemed appropriate to streamline them down to one central board. There have been a number of efficiencies as a result of that, more consistent information gathering as a result of that, and taxpayers are saving money and will be getting better service as a result as well.

Mr. Mason: Well, since Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness are two bureaucracies stumbling over each other to shield the minister from any responsibility and since the salary and bonus payments to two bureaucracies overloaded with at least 50 top officials are obscene and will cost taxpayers millions, why won't the health minister show real leadership and financial accountability by disbanding Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I've answered this question before as well, Mr. Speaker. The issue is that there are two arms in health care. There's one arm that does strategic policy setting, that is responsible for the budget, that is responsible for legislation, that is responsible for regulations, responsible for doctors' services, and so on. That's called the Department of Health and Wellness. On the other side, the other arm deals with the specific delivery of acute services, of long-term care services, of cancer services, contracts with nurses, and so on. That's the delivery arm. Why would he want the delivery arm shut off? It makes no sense.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister knows that we want health services delivered, just not in the crazy way that he's doing it.

Given that Alberta Health Services' survey showed that less than 30 per cent of employees were optimistic about the future of Alberta Health Services and given that Alberta Health Services has created chaos in the health care system, which is made even worse by the minister's constant political interference in their decisions, why won't you tell Dr. Duckett to pack his bags, dissolve Alberta Health Services, and finally step up and take full responsibility for Alberta's health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that kind of a torque and inflammatory question barely deserves the dignity of a response in this House. That's just absolute nonsense, and the member knows it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

High-intensity Residential Fires

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, another month, another high-intensity residential fire. It was four weeks ago yesterday that I brought this up the last time in this House. Today we're talking about the big fire in Airdrie, another Alberta classic, where one house catches fire, takes out three other houses with it,

and damages another 14. That isn't normal anywhere but this province. Since Alberta's firefighters are as well trained and capable as any on the planet, I wonder if the Minister of Municipal Affairs might be willing to finally fess up that there's something terribly, terribly flawed in Alberta's building codes.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, a couple things. One is that our mandate is to save lives and as much property as possible. The other one is to reinforce what we already have, and that's a safe building code, with one that's even safer. Again, it's a very, very difficult time for anyone involved in fire, and that in fact motivates our staff to look at some of those issues and allows us to review what's happening and then to reinforce things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister please acknowledge that Alberta's climate, windy and dry as it is, is unique and distinct from the rest of Canada and that we need unique and distinct fire prevention and abatement measures built into Alberta's fire and building codes?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are doing all of that. Alberta should be commended for the work it has done and not necessarily criticized for proactively taking some action by protecting Albertans. We've got some of the strictest building codes in the country. We've actually updated our building codes two years ahead of any other jurisdiction across Canada, and we're continuing our consultation process with our stakeholders and the public and making sure that we're doing things right.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that those claims don't do any good when people's houses keep burning down several at a time, all at once, and given that you can't put any more space between the homes that are already built, will this minister at least admit that vinyl siding is about the next best thing to lighter fluid in a fire and ban that stuff as a building material?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, our codes have changed to address some of that, and those are coming into effect as we speak. I think we need to remind ourselves that our fire standards are important to slow down the spread of fire. The whole idea is to give people more time to escape, to get out of their homes, while firefighters take the time needed to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

School Construction in Edmonton

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 this government announced plans that it would build six new schools in the Edmonton region and that two of them would be built in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. One is a K to 9 Catholic school, Sister Annata. I'm happy to report that this school is under construction and will be open for business this fall. Another one is the K to 9 public school in the Grange area. My question is for the hon. Minister of Infrastructure. Can the minister assure my constituents that this Grange school is still on track?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the

18 schools being built under the Alberta schools alternative procurement program are on track. They are being built two years ahead of schedule. We will turn over those schools by June 30. One of the schools that was started two years ago in the hon. member's constituency is one of those schools. In September these schools will serve over 12,000 students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 the minister announced they would build 18 schools through the ASAP initiative, which is the Alberta schools alternative procurement program. I would like to ask the minister: is this process quicker than a traditional process, and has this lived up to this claim?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, yes, it is. In fact, it's two years ahead of schedule. Students in the ASAP 1 will be in their classrooms September 30. We're expecting the same with ASAP 2, and he has one of these schools. Yes, it is faster; yes, ASAP 1 saved \$97 million. Stay tuned for the announcement of the next go-round.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. My final question is to the same minister. Can you tell me the specific date when the Grange school is going to be built?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to say that we go through a very stringent evaluation of the school projects. That announcement is going to happen I believe tomorrow. I'm hoping that with the speed of the first go-round – it took two years shorter – the same thing will happen with this one. It is a good program. It is a good directive to keep our students very much educated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Use of Rocky View County Brand

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Freedom of speech doesn't seem to be a priority for this government. They took down only the antinuclear signs in Peace River, and now they are failing to protect the residents of Rocky View county's right to free speech. In January of this year cease-and-desist orders were issued by the town council to individuals running a website which was critical of the council's policies. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: does the minister agree with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association's criticism that the council infringed on the residents' right to free speech?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with those particular details. If the member opposite would want to give me more information on that, I would do the research and get back to her.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Perhaps the minister at the same time could tell me why nothing was done by the ministry to protect the rights and the freedoms of those same citizens of Rocky View.

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: As I indicated, Mr. Speaker, I've got no details as to what may or may not have happened and the reasons why they might not have released some of that information. I'm going to wait for the member to send me that information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, given that freedom of speech is only the most recent problem that the residents of Rocky View county have had with their council, could I also get the minister to agree to meet with these constituents to address their concerns?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, my role is to work with the individual municipalities. I think there might be other ministers in this room that might be more appropriate to respond to the issues that those particular individuals have. At this stage those are just allegations. Unless I get more information, I can't say yes or no that I would meet with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Medical Residency Positions

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have heard from my constituents that medical students are being denied access to residency spots at Alberta's teaching hospitals. Given our shortage of doctors I sincerely hope that this is not the case. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How many medical graduates and/or foreign-trained doctors are being denied residency training spots?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no Alberta medical graduates are denied any training spots because there's a spot for every one of them. Funding for postgraduate medical residency training has in fact increased rather dramatically over the last five years, and that includes a spot for every Alberta medical graduate. Alberta, in fact, will train about 1,300 medical residents this year. That's up very significantly from 886 residents in 2004, and that's about a 47 per cent increase. That's more residency physicians than we've ever had in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. What is the selection process or policy for Alberta's medical residency program at teaching hospitals?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, our Alberta international medical graduate program offers medical residency training positions to successful international medical graduate candidates who are residents of this province. The program begins with the screening of the applications and the applicants, and then a more detailed assessment is done regarding the applicants' knowledge, clinical skills, and abilities. Finally, those international medical graduate students who satisfactorily complete the four-month assessment period are then offered a full-time paid residency position.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: when an approved medical residency applicant drops out in the middle of their program, what happens to that spot? Does it remain vacant, or is it filled by another student?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's some built-in flexibility with

respect to that circumstance, should it occur. There are also occasional dropouts precipitated for a variety of reasons, and that requires not only some flexibility but a less formal approach to seeing whether or not it's possible to put someone else into that program midway through an existing one. That is an important issue that is being looked at right now.

Charitable Gaming Model Review

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, last fall this government dispatched three MLAs from the backbenches to canvass charitable organizations about possible changes to Alberta's charitable gaming model, and they were supposed to deliver their final report by March 31. Obviously, this deadline has come and gone. My question is for the Solicitor General. When will this report be tabled in the Assembly? After today we adjourn for five months.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that the committee, in fact, met its deadline, and I'm in receipt of a report, which I'm reviewing right now. The AGLC is reviewing it as well. I have an internal process to follow, and upon completion of that process if it's determined that the report will be released, I'll do so.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General keeps setting and missing these deadlines, so let me just ask: why was this deadline missed?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I have done no such thing. The member himself just said that the committee is required to table a report, and they did so on the deadline. I haven't missed any deadlines.

Mr. Hehr: Well, this Assembly just debated legislation that would see revenues dedicated to jurisdictions they originate from. Why were you considering redistributing gaming revenues raised in one jurisdiction to some other community?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, all good stuff for debate, but we'll wait until the report comes out and determine how to proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

School Transportation Funding

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within Whitecourt-St. Anne Northern Gateway school division spans nearly 375 kilometres from end to end, further than the distance between Edmonton and Calgary. Each day 4,000 students in this division are transported over 12,000 kilometres. My questions are all to the Minister of Education. Pembina Hills school division receives \$64 per weighted passenger more than Northern Gateway. They have fewer square kilometres, fewer weighted passengers, fewer routes, and a more compact school jurisdiction than does Northern Gateway. Mr. Minister: why the big difference?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, rural transportation funding is actually quite complex, I've discovered. School jurisdictions receive part of their transportation funding based on a density grid as well as distance funding and special transportation funding. At the heart of it is the density rate and Northern Gateway's placement on the transportation density grid. The density rate is multiplied by the

jurisdiction's total number of eligible weighted passengers and eligible transported ECS students to determine their funding. Based on the fact that Pembina Hills has fewer weighted eligible passengers, they occupy a different spot on the grid, a higher rate, even though their division covers nearly the same area as Northern Gateway.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll make it even easier yet. Within my own riding Grande Yellowhead received \$73 more than Northern Gateway per weighted passenger but has 700 fewer square kilometres, 1,500 fewer eligible passengers, 37 fewer routes. Why the big difference?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'm given to understand that while Northern Gateway covers a greater area than Grande Yellowhead, for example, they do serve a greater number of eligible passengers and therefore are considered denser based on the density calculation, hence the difference in the result.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on about the injustices on this issue. Will the minister just meet with my staff and board members of Northern Gateway and get this issue resolved once and for all?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have been working with the division to review its transportation service area to ensure that it accurately reflects their jurisdiction profile. I'll be more than happy, once we have that review, to sit down and work with them to ensure that they're appropriately placed and have equitable funding based on the grid.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the next member to be recognized is the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. This doesn't follow the exact rotation that was outlined, but it's the result of an agreement between the member who had placement 4 and the member who had placement 12 today in the question period.

Health Services Executive Bonuses

(continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have shown their displeasure with the former minister of health's handling of health care. The new minister was like Superman, coming in, meeting with editorial boards in Calgary and Edmonton, picking up his cellphone and calling, saying: what's going on with the Tom Baker centre? That got to be a priority. It was quite impressive. I have to ask the minister: will he pick up his cellphone today, call Stephen Duckett in the same leadership approach and, in fact, go and tell him to stop the bonuses that have been mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the people who are involved in managing the delivery of health services in this province work extremely hard at their jobs to ensure that the best level of care is provided, that the best level of service is provided. When you're managing about a \$10 billion budget and you're looking after, one way or another, 85,000-plus employees, when you're looking after responsibilities for over 400 health facilities, you have to attract the best people. It is common practice in both the public and private sectors to pay some form of bonuses in that respect.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. Given that the minister obviously didn't hear my first question, let me repeat it. Under the leadership style he used with the Edmonton and Calgary editorial boards, picking up his cellphone, calling to make changes, getting hands on, which we applaud and Albertans applaud, will the minister pick up his cellphone and call Stephen Duckett and cancel the superboard's bonuses for, in fact, 48 vice-presidents, that will cost Albertans millions of dollars?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think most of what the hon. member is asking about goes back more than about a year or perhaps even two in some cases. What we're doing is taking a look at all of those contracts, and I shouldn't say "we" because I'm not doing it; Alberta Health Services is. Nonetheless, those contracts are being looked at right now. There are obligations under contract, and some of them called for bonuses. What I can tell you is that going forward, all of these issues have been flagged for review, and that includes bonuses, that includes severances, and that includes pensions.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. Given the comment by the minister, I hope his cellphone battery isn't dead. I have an extra cellphone battery here today.

I would ask him to join me along with the Alberta legislative press gallery and take the same approach with them, where you cancel the bonuses, roll up your sleeves, similar to the approach that you used with the Calgary editorial board, where you said: let me . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's a tempting offer, but as all members know, cellphones aren't allowed in the Assembly, so I could hardly do that. But I understand the anxiety, and I hope I've explained sensibly and rationally that there are processes in motion. Thank you.

Research and Innovation Funding

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this government dissolved one of Alberta's most successful organizations, the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. AHFMR is being replaced by something called Alberta Innovates. Last Friday the chairman of Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions sent out a memo openly admitting, "We do not know the exact nature of Alberta Innovates . . . new funding programs." To the minister of advanced education: why did this government shut down AHFMR when it didn't have a detailed plan for what would take its place?

Mr. Horner: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would peruse the rest of the letter, I think what he would find is that in this current year the competition that the fund did was actually \$4 million more into health research than what happened last year. In fact, next year that amount and potentially even more, dependent upon the endowment, will also go out into the research programs of health research in the province of Alberta, more attuned to what the Premier of this province at the time, Premier Lougheed, wanted the Alberta heritage fund for medical research to do.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a mess.

Given that Alberta's medical researchers have been told that the

September application process for funds is being cancelled and the new funding structure won't be in place until the fall, what are medical researchers who depend on applying for funding this September supposed to do? What's your guidance to them?

Mr. Horner: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, I believe – and I was looking for the confirmation – that the competition that closed today was for moving forward in the fall. What is at issue here are a number of salaried employees of the universities, if you will, not just in Edmonton but also in Calgary, that are potentially not going to win the award. Whether or not they would win an award the next year and whether or not they would win an award under the program that the new Alberta Health Solutions board is going to design is the question.

The statement that the Alberta heritage fund for medical research is no longer there is a false one because it is. The statement that we're going to continue to do what it used to do is a true statement.

Dr. Taft: Well, again to the same minister: given that this minister has been in charge of this reorganization for longer than a year, actually, why is it that according to the chairman of Alberta Innovates in this memo Alberta Innovates is only now embarking on a strategic planning process? How could we be so far behind?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is forgetting a little bit of 18-month history here, and that is that we brought not only the Alberta heritage fund for medical research board but the University of Alberta's representatives from the health and medical fields, we brought researchers from across the province, we brought researchers in the innovation community from across Alberta together 18 months ago, and this is the culmination of their recommendations. Alberta Innovates was not written by this ministry or this minister. It was written by all of the stakeholders within that research continuum.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Volunteer Contributions to Safe Communities

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a lot of discussion recently about screening and background checks to help ensure that vulnerable people are safe and that predators are kept away from volunteering with children. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. What programs are in place to help nonprofit and voluntary organizations address this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this is a problem that's been ongoing for some time. Not-for-profit and voluntary organizations as well as individual volunteers spend significant money obtaining police information checks every year. This important step in the volunteer screening process often results in the funding being diverted from core services and can act as a barrier to recruiting new volunteers. The volunteer police information check program covers the costs of police information checks for volunteers engaged directly with those vulnerable populations such as children, seniors, and the disabled. This \$2.4 million, three-year program is jointly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. What role do volunteers and nonprofit organizations play in helping to create safe communities in Alberta?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, volunteers play an integral part in Alberta. It's part of our rich history. For over a hundred years volunteers have always helped one another build stronger, safer communities and helped one another always take care of the less fortunate. Volunteers help coach sports teams. They help serve meals to seniors. They help take care of the disadvantaged. [interjections] If the hon. member would have some respect during National Volunteer Week. We have thousands upon thousands of volunteers in our province, who do a great job to make Alberta the great province that it is.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Water Allocation

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's water allocation system is out of date. It was designed to provide for the irrigation districts first but also has to balance the water needs of our growing population and industry. Instead of dealing with the problem up front, the government is allowing irrigation districts to reallocate their water for commercial use. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: how does this move towards commoditization of water do anything but jeopardize the province's ability to protect water for agricultural use?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the licensing is handled under the Minister of Environment, I am pleased to report that with the new methods that are used now and the new approach that is used with irrigation, we're able to cover far more acres with less water than we did in the past, which is going to open up opportunities, I think, in the future for other uses by Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Has this minister considered what other countries' approaches are to water conservation, particularly, and to irrigation, and might they work here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in fact, we have. Our agriculture industry is using the most modern technologies. The changeover is actually quite advanced, whereby we're able to irrigate crops with far less evaporation and far more of the water actually going to the growth of those crops.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Given that this shift could take away farmers' rights to hold a plebiscite on water allocation, how can the minister be certain that farmers are really willing to permanently give up their water rights?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that farmers are wanting to give up any water rights with respect to the requirements that they have for their agricultural operations. It wouldn't make sense.

There's no common sense in an approach that would reserve water rights beyond those that are required to grow the crops that these agricultural producers grow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Pension Reform

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As in all of Alberta, a fair number of my constituents are either retired or are approaching retirement age. Recently there has been a considerable amount of media attention around remarks made by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise that seemed to indicate that Alberta is no longer interested in pension reform. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Has Alberta changed its position on pension reform?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is no. The Alberta government has not changed our position. What we are saying – and it is what most pension experts are saying – is that the system is not broken. The question is: how can it be improved? It's working well for most Canadians. There does appear to be a problem for those Canadians in the middle-income bracket, so the question is how to tailor a solution that matches the problem. What we don't want to do is adopt a solution that punishes young Albertans. We don't want to do that. We will not do it.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Reports indicate that Alberta is going to let the next decade pass before it looks at this issue. Is that true? Will the Alberta government not look at this issue for 10 years?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we all know not to believe everything we read in the newspaper. There was a little misreporting on that. There is a spectrum of possible solutions to the retirement income issue, ranging from voluntary private-sector solutions to more coercive government solutions. I was down there with a group of pension experts, and I asked: would it make sense to try the voluntary private-sector solutions first before moving to the more coercive and more expensive public sector? And I said: if so, would 10 years be an appropriate time length to try those private-sector solutions first? I'm looking forward to their answer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. It isn't exactly clear what the government is going to do. What is the Alberta government going to do about pension reform next and when?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, our department staff is working with their counterparts in other provinces. We've also just finished a public consultation with Albertans and received some very worthwhile information and advice there. I will be going to a federal-provincial-territorial ministers' conference in June to meet with my counterparts to bring this information together. We, in turn, will issue a report that will go to all of the Premiers that meet at the Council of the Federation in August.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Noise Abatement

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago I raised the issue of loud vehicle noise in the cities and the efforts of the Edmonton Police Service, the industry, and Alberta Transportation to establish testing procedures and recommendations for new legislation which would establish a provincial standard for noise emissions. We need to give officers objective noise emission levels and approved equipment. So far no legislation. To the Minister of Transportation: why is the desire of government to hit the summer barbecue circuit early more important than the eardrums and a quality night's sleep for many urban Albertans?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely don't know where this hon. member ever got the idea that we were bringing legislation forward on vehicle noise. The province has never ever indicated we'd do that, and no other jurisdiction in Canada is doing that. Yes, we've done preliminary research tests. We've been doing static tests on noise of motorcycles. Contrary to what she believes, there's no real way to prove the tests while they're moving.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since the minister's ADM is well aware of this issue, if the minister hasn't asked for a briefing, will he ask for a briefing, which would explain to him the need to establish a workable noise limit and approved noise-testing equipment and to understand that this was developed using automotive engineering test procedures?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm very aware of what she's talking about. That's why I'm telling her the real truth of the matter. The fact of the matter is that municipalities can give out and are giving out violations right now on noise with motorcycles. It's being done today.

Ms Blakeman: Given that the police service is having trouble getting this through the courts because it is not verifiable, it's not an objective way of dealing with this. Will the minister, since he wouldn't bring it forward this time, guarantee us that this House will see that legislation next fall?

Mr. Ouellette: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. I told her we have no intention of bringing it forward because it's not testable.

I want to reiterate that the Edmonton Police Service issued 383 tickets between May and October of last year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

East Calgary Health Centre

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The completion and operation of the east Calgary health centre is urgently required to meet the growing need for health and wellness services for our constituents in Calgary-Fort, Calgary-East, and Calgary-Montrose constituencies. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. When will the centre be put into operation to serve our waiting constituents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Basically, the project referred to is nearing completion as we speak, and I'm expecting that

centre to open very, very soon. That's very important because once it's opened, it will consolidate a number of services for people in that location and bring those services all together into one specific area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since its first schedule many people are anxious, waiting for the centre's completion. Why have there been so many delays?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, that particular health facility was readied, and then it was shelled in and was awaiting completion, which is now imminent. At the same time, they were still awaiting some details with respect to operational funding. As that was being done, some of the planning was also being finalized. The centre will consolidate a lot of services that were formerly provided at other facilities. It will bring them all under one roof. The really good news is that there are no more delays, hon. member, and the majority of those programs will be up and fully functioning later this summer and into the fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

School Board Advertising to Attract Students

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was driving into the city the other day, and I saw a Strathcona county school bus with a big sign on the back advertising Elk Island school division. I've seen other school divisions advertising on billboards and TV. To the Minister of Education: given the need for accountability why in these tight fiscal times are school boards spending precious education dollars on advertising rather than on students and programs?

Mr. Hancock: Well, it's a good question, Mr. Speaker. Locally elected school boards do have autonomy over their funds and get to direct them. They are restricted to 4 to 6 per cent on administrative funding, which is where advertising would come from. Spending on advertising comes out of that process, but it's within their budgetary discretion. It's a good question, though. All last fall we talked with school boards about whether the funds that we're using in the education system are helping us to achieve our outcomes and looking to say: can we cut back in areas where we're not achieving our outcomes? That being said, the school boards do get funded on a per capita basis, so they try to attract more students.

Mr. Griffiths: They try to attract more students. To the same minister, then: given that they're trying to attract students through advertising, have any of them done a business case in their business plans to show that spending money on advertising attracts enough students to offset the cost of the advertising and improves the students' education?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't be privy to that information. That's within the purview of the school board. We try not to collect more information from school boards and put them through more reporting processes than they absolutely have to do, so I don't have that kind of information. However, we do have a system of choice. Again, school boards do compete for students, unfortunately – that's part of the system – so they do engage their advertising dollars, but they have to be accountable to their electorate for the way they spend their dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that social media, the Internet, word of mouth, and great programs for students are the best ways to advertise and are free or improve education, will the minister begin discussions with the school boards to talk about curbing this policy so all dollars go to actually educating students?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that's precisely the kind of discussion we engaged in last year and we're going to continue to have. The resources that we have are substantial, but they're never going to be enough to do everything that people want to do, so we have to focus on making sure that as we use the public's resources, we're achieving the outcomes in the system that we want to achieve. We need every school board, we need everybody involved in the system, we need every teacher in the school to look at every dollar that's being deployed to determine whether we're getting the best value for the money. So that discussion will continue, the value review that says: are we achieving outcomes with the investment we're making, and is what we're doing adding value? Every school board should be doing that, the provincial government should be doing that, and every school should be doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

911 Emergency System

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's 911 system is an important part of keeping Albertans safe during times of emergency. Whether a call is made to an ambulance for a medical emergency, to police to report a crime, or to a fire department to report a fire, citizens need to know that the system is reliable. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what portion of the 911 fees that we pay on our local phone bill goes towards the operators of the system?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, a reliable 911 system is an important part of keeping Albertans safe. The CRTC approves the fees, and under the current structure Telus charges 44 cents per line for each land line phone on a monthly basis. But more people are using cellphones now, and those 911 fees collected by the wireless providers are kept presently by the companies.

2:40

Mr. Allred: My next question to the same minister: since the issue falls within both municipal and federal jurisdictions, is your ministry doing anything to help municipalities ensure that these are used for 911 services?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, municipalities provide 911 services to their residents or through contracts on a regional basis. We are presently talking with our government colleagues to discuss the needs of Albertans and the 911 services, and we're also working with the municipalities and Telus to improve that system as well as reviewing how other provinces are handling these charges.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: since the provincial government has a role to play in ensuring that Alberta has the most reliable 911 system possible, is there anything the minister can do to make sure that all operators are adequately and fairly funded?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, even though we aren't the regulator, we're always looking at ways to co-ordinate resources so the 911 system is efficient and properly funded. We recognize that wireless services are not available everywhere, and we want to make sure that Albertans have access to wireless 911 across the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Today 20 hon. members were recognized. That was 116 questions and responses. Of the 20 members recognized, eight came from the Liberal Official Opposition, four from the independents, and eight from the Progressive Conservative governing caucus.

We will continue the Routine and conclude it rather quickly. We were at Tabling Returns and Reports.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a publication entitled *Stretched to the Limit: Economic Impact Survey, Alberta's Nonprofits & Charities*.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to table on behalf of an individual, Grace Irons, from Sherwood Park, Alberta, who contacted our office on behalf of her father, who is a constituent. She has issues around cataract eye surgery being taken away from the Gimbel Eye Centre and moved to the Royal Alex. She has given me permission to table this correspondence, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, response to a question raised by Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, during Oral Question Period on April 20, 2010, requesting a copy of the document entitled *Water License Change of Purpose: Administrative Licencing Criteria*.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Oberle, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, responses to written questions 32, 33, 34, and 35, asked for by Mr. Hehr on March 15, 2010, and return to orders of the Assembly MR 10 and MR 11, asked for by Mr. Hehr on March 15, 2010.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I can call Orders of the Day or give you some statistical information with respect to this spring. I'll give the information. I'm sure you'll all enjoy it. Some of these numbers

are to the end of last evening's sitting on April 20, and some of them are to now.

The number of sitting days this spring was 30 as compared to 48 last year. The number of minutes in the Assembly to this time last night was 6,973 compared to 12,934 in the 2009 sitting. The number of hours was 116 hours and 13 minutes, not counting today, compared to 215 hours and 34 minutes for the 2009 spring sitting, and the number of words spoken was 990,361 compared to 1,704,611.

Interestingly enough, though, in terms of the number of words spoken in standing committee meetings this spring, despite the difference of the 30 to the 48 days, including this morning's Public Accounts Committee, in committee 677,650 words were spoken compared to 878,459 in 2009 committees. That's rather large in proportion to the number of meetings.

The number of hours of committee meetings for this spring, also including this morning's Public Accounts Committee: 84 compared to 107 last year.

With respect to Oral Question Period, 18 sets of questions and answers or more for the current session, 11 times we had 18 sets of questions and answers, 14 times we had 19 sets of questions and answers, and on five occasions, including today, we had 20 sets of questions and answers. Compare that to the 2009 spring sitting. In 2009 we had 11 occasions with 18 sets and one occasion with 19 sets.

The total number of questions and answers for this spring was 3,359. That's an average of about 108.2 per day, keeping in mind that day 1 did not have an Oral Question Period. The total number of questions and answers for the spring of 2009 was 4,663. That was an average of 99.21 questions and answers per day, so that's almost a 10 per cent increase in questions and answers in 2010 as compared to 2009.

The number of government bills that will receive or have received royal assent is 15 compared to 46 a year ago. The number of government bills left on the Order Paper is one compared to five a year ago. Private members' public bills that will receive royal assent: two compared to one a year ago. And I do believe that this is the first time in the history of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta that an opposition member's private bill received third reading.

Private members' public bills that have received or will receive royal assent since 1993, when the standing orders affecting this item of business were amended: 48.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: After that exhausting list, Mr. Speaker, I would have to advise you that the business of the session has been completed. Therefore, pursuant to Government Motion 14, which was agreed to on April 13, 2010, I would ask that the House now stand adjourned.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 2:46 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 14]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to April 21, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cA-14.9]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c7]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c6]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c4]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c5]

- 7* Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft.), 769-82 (Apr. 14 aft.), 850-62 (Apr. 20 aft.), 869-76 (Apr. 20 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 878-84 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions; SA 2010 c2]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft.), 735-43 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-804 (Apr. 15 aft.), 868 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 878 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 876-77 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft.), 743-49 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 862-65 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 885-87 (Apr. 20 aft., passed on division)
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-67 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 867 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877-78 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c3]
- 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 763 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)

- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 709 (Apr. 12 aft., passed)
- 202* Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft.), 698-704 (Apr. 12 aft.), 705-09 (Apr. 12 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 819-25 (Apr. 19 aft., passed)
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 709-10 (Apr. 12 aft.), 825-32 (Apr. 19 aft.), 836-37 (Apr. 19 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 732-33 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
- Pr2* Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 733-35 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749-50 (Apr. 13 aft.), 768 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
- Pr3* Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 768-69 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, October 25, 2010

Issue 32

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 25, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back. I would ask members to remain standing after prayers and the national anthem so that we may pay tribute to former colleagues who have passed away.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

I would now ask Mr. Paul Lorieu, who is in the Speaker's gallery, to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Mr. Dave Broda

September 17, 1944, to June 13, 2010

The Speaker: Hon. members, Mr. Dave Broda, former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the 682nd MLA sworn in, passed away on Sunday, June 13, 2010, at the age of 65 years.

Mr. Broda was first elected in the election held March 11, 1997, and served two terms until November 21, 2004. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Redwater for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Dave Broda served in the following committees: Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Committee on Public Affairs, Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and the Select Special Health Information Act Review Committee. Mr. Broda served as chair of the Long Term Care Policy Advisory Committee, which authored *Healthy Aging: New Directions for Care*, commonly known as the Broda report, in 1999.

Mr. Nigel Ian Pengelly

May 29, 1925, to July 3, 2010

The Speaker: Mr. Nigel Ian Pengelly, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 536, passed away on Saturday, July 3, 2010, at the age of 85 years.

Mr. Pengelly was first elected in the election held March 14, 1979, and served three terms until March 19, 1989. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Innisfail for the Progressive Conservative Party. Mr. Pengelly served on the following committees: Select Committee on Recreational and Commercial Fishing Industries in Alberta, Select Special Committee to Examine the Role of the Upper House in the Canadian Federal System, Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, Standing Committee on Private Bills, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Committee on Public Affairs, Standing Committee on the Alberta

Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, Special Committee to Prepare and Report Lists of Members to Compose the Select Standing Committees, and the Special Select Standing Committee on Members' Services.

Miss Wilma Helen Hunley

September 6, 1920, to October 22, 2010

The Speaker: Miss Wilma Helen Hunley, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 475, and a former Lieutenant Governor, passed away on Friday, October 22, 2010. I will provide more words on Miss Hunley tomorrow, on Tuesday, October 26, 2010.

The Speaker: Family members of Mr. Broda are here with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I would ask you all to remember former hon. member Dave Broda and former hon. member Nigel Pengelly as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm honoured today to introduce to you all family members of our former colleague Dave Broda, who passed away since we last sat here in the Legislature. The family members are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask, as I introduce each family member, that they stand and at the end receive the warm welcome of the House, please. The family of the hon. Dave Broda: Mrs. Eileen Broda, spouse; Cindy Broda, daughter; Trina Broda, daughter; Susan Broda Olesko, daughter; Taylor Olesko, granddaughter; Mary Tachynski, sister; Kathy Tachynski, niece; Danny Tachynski, nephew; Patty Tachynski, niece. I would now ask all members to join with me in welcoming the family members of the hon. Dave Broda.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. First, it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 60 enthusiastic and inquisitive grade 6 students from George P. Nicholson elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, in fact from my neighbourhood of Twin Brooks. The group of students is participating in the School at the Legislature, at least half of them are this week and half of them will be later on. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Maxine Sprague, along with parent helpers Mrs. Karen Brese, Mrs. Yuning Cui, and Mrs. Woytkiw. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent from Edmonton-Whitemud, Lori Simon. Lori is interested in the processes and proceedings of the House, and as her MLA I'm pleased to have her attend today. She is seated in the public gallery, and I'd like her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce Mr. Kevin Pizzey, a grade 5 teacher at C.P. Blakely elementary school in Sylvan Lake. Kevin is a resident of the Red Deer-South constitu-

ency, he's an active volunteer in the constituency in Red Deer-North, but he's here today as president of the ATA local in Chinook's Edge school division. I can always count on Kevin to keep me apprised of what's going on in the schools in Red Deer and its surrounding areas on issues relative to the profession and to education. Mr. Pizzey is in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and to introduce to you and through you a very large group from Innisfail middle school. We have with us today 80 grade 6 students from Innisfail middle school, who are seated in the members' gallery. They're accompanied by their teachers and helpers. I think it's so important that Alberta children visit our Legislature. As you know, they will be our leaders of tomorrow. I would like to introduce the teachers and the parent helpers. We have teachers Mrs. Dale Jensen, Mrs. Tanis Klymyk, Mr. Tom Stones, Mrs. Dawn Peters. We have Mrs. Denise Lester, Mrs. Leona Marshall, Mr. Tim Donald, Mr. Len McCook, Ms Gail Vander Vliet, Mrs. Jenna Grant, Mrs. Liana Jackson, Mrs. Ronda Leonard, and Mrs. Lisa Allan. I would like them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to defer it until after question period if I may.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of individuals from the office of the Ombudsman. These individuals are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to ask them to rise and remain standing: Gordon Button, the Alberta Ombudsman; Jolene Morin, executive assistant to the Ombudsman; Suzanne Richford, director of corporate services; Diane Smith, assistant to the director of corporate services. I'd like to ask the Assembly to greet them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some of Canada's finest: staff and students of the Edmonton Garrison official languages centre. The Edmonton Garrison Language School and Official Languages Centre provides second-language training in English and French to the military community. We have with us here today Corporal Yan Landry, Private Eric Barbeau, Private Sebastien Toussaint, Private Dave Levesque, Private Nadia Lamoureux, Private Maude Loisele, Private Michael Owen, Private Jean-Sebastien Roy, Private Jeremie Tremblay, Private Mathieu Paré, and our teachers Deborah Stasiuk and Crystal Fraser. I welcome them, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Richard Andersen. On August 3, 2010, Mr. Andersen began his tenure as the

president and CEO of Northlands. As a former general manager of Petco Park in San Diego and the executive vice-president of the San Diego Padres Mr. Andersen brings a wealth of experience to Northlands and to the city of Edmonton. Mr. Andersen is joined here today by his daughter Kathleen Andersen. Kathy is director of government and public relations at Northlands. At this time I'd ask my guests to please rise, and I'd ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce an Albertan who has demonstrated the forward thinking and intelligence of our former Premier Peter Lougheed, has demonstrated the charm and the Alberta advantage of former Premier Ralph Klein, and also the grassroot democracy and the principles associated with Preston Manning. Please join me in welcoming the leader of Alberta's newest official party, Danielle Smith.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly two guests from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. The first one is Guy Smith, the president of AUPE, representing staff at Valley Park Manor and Red Deer nursing home, and also Philipia Bates Renouf, vice-president of AUPE assigned to central Alberta. They've both come to the Legislature to see the tabling of the AUPE petition to save the Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor from being closed this fall by Alberta Health Services. I'd ask my guests to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 19 students from the Concordia College business and government class. These students are accompanied by their teacher, a constituent of mine, Liam Connelly. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. They may still be on tour. I'm not sure. They were doing a tour of the Leg. If they're in the audience, please rise.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you want to introduce your guests now or at the conclusion of the Routine?

Ms Notley: I'll defer until after question period.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Brendan Fitzgerald and his mother, Anne Fitzgerald. Brendan and Anne are here today from CCSVI, a short term used to describe compromised flow of blood in veins. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, our Standing Order 7(1.1) indicates that exactly at 1:50 we shall interrupt and proceed to Oral Question Period. If I recognize the hon. minister now who wants to move with a ministerial statement, there is also recognition then afforded to a member from the Official Opposition to participate, and I suspect the Assembly will have a request from the Wildrose Alliance caucus and the ND caucus as well to participate in this ministerial statement.

I'm going to put forward a request to you. We're going to require unanimous consent, and the unanimous consent will include two things; first of all, that we proceed with Ministerial Statements time now, which means that the opening of question period will be deferred, and that at the same time approval will be provided to a spokesperson for the Wildrose Alliance Party and the ND Party and also to the Member for Calgary-Currie. Is anyone opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Tobacco Reduction Strategy

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address a serious health issue for Albertans. Tobacco consumption is the leading avoidable cause of premature death in Alberta. It is responsible for approximately 3,000 deaths each year in Alberta, ranging from cardiovascular disease to cancer to lung disease. Tobacco use has a significant impact on our quality of life and places a substantial burden on our health care system.

For these reasons in 2002 our government set out a comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use by Albertans. This strategy included two tobacco tax increases, a province-wide smoking ban, and restrictions on tobacco displays and places where cigarettes can be sold. It also includes a provincial tobacco reduction strategy, in which we have invested \$9 million. These efforts have had success, and I am pleased to report that tobacco use is now at an all-time low in Alberta. The decline in tobacco use points to a strong cause-and-effect relationship between effective tobacco control policies and reduced consumption.

While we are heading in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, we know that we are far away from being able to declare any sort of victory. Tobacco use continues to impact Albertans. Our memories of Barb Tarbox continue to remind us of this impact. Her courage and the journey with cancer that she shared with all of us remind us that we need to persevere and that we need to do more, more to reduce the harmful effects of tobacco use on our society and more to lessen the burden that tobacco use places on our health care system.

That is why I am pleased to announce today that we will take another step to move our tobacco reduction strategy forward by initiating legal action to recover health care costs from the tobacco industry. Last year this Legislature passed a bill to facilitate litigation against tobacco manufacturers. We will now move to join British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Ontario and commence litigation. We are confident that this action is the right thing to do. Some of the most costly illnesses to treat, such as cancer and heart disease, are caused by smoking. The litigation that we plan to commence will seek to share this burden with the manufacturers of this product.

This move is a necessary and important part of our tobacco reduction strategy, a comprehensive strategy with a clear focus to

lessen the impact that tobacco has on the quality of life of Albertans and the burden it places on our health care system and also with the clear goal of reducing smoking in the future, especially amongst our youth. This government is committed to continued action on the tobacco reduction strategy, and I am pleased that my ministry is able to play a part in that.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Justice minister for rising today to inform us about what this government has done and continues to do in order to reduce tobacco consumption in Alberta. The Justice minister indicated that since 2002 this government has set out a comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use by Albertans that included two tax increases, a province-wide smoking ban, restrictions on tobacco displays, and restrictions on places where cigarettes can be sold. Further, the hon. minister will begin initiating legal action to recover health care costs from the tobacco industry. I applaud this government for these actions.

The question remains, then: are we as an hon. House doing everything possible to reduce people's consumption of cigarettes? Sadly, I believe the answer is no. This government could do much more to lead by example and continue the battle against the use and abuse of cigarettes. There is a better way.

Here are a couple of examples of how we could do more. First, it is my understanding that this government continues to invest approximately \$60 million in tobacco-related companies. In all seriousness, how can this government claim to lead by example against the insidious nature of the tobacco industry when it is, in fact, a stockholder? If you truly wanted to lead by example, you would immediately divest this government of its shares in these companies. It's simply the right thing to do.

Secondly, I believe this government should look at banning the use of cigarettes in vehicles where children are present. We all know that second-hand smoke is deadly, and it's the government's first responsibility to protect Alberta's children. I don't know how many times I've seen individuals smoking with young children in the car. Governments should look at protecting these individuals and bring in legislation to stop people from smoking when travelling with kids.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud the government on today's announcement, but I implore them to do much more in the continued fight against the insidious nature of cigarettes and the tobacco industry.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as at 1:30 this afternoon the Wildrose Alliance receives official party status in the Assembly of Alberta.

I now will call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We echo the sentiments of the Justice minister. The government needs to play an active and ongoing role in reducing tobacco consumption, and we do support the action being taken.

All Albertans remember very vividly the important advocacy work that Barb Tarbox did to speak out against tobacco use. I don't think anyone could forget the dramatic images of Barb's battle with cancer and the tremendous courage she displayed in travelling the country and putting herself front and centre as an example of the toll that tobacco can take.

Fortunately, thanks to the work of people like Barb and other advocacy groups, smoking in Alberta is on the decline. The smoking rate among Alberta youth aged 15 to 19 dropped from 24 per cent in 2001 to 15 per cent in 2006. The proportion of Alberta youth under 18 exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes is also down, dropping from 22 per cent in 2001 to just 10 per cent in 2006.

But as the minister said, more can be done. Far too many Albertans are still suffering from cancer, cardiovascular disease, lung disease, and other tobacco-related illnesses, adding even more of a burden to our already malfunctioning health care system. That is why it is critical that we continue to drive home the message of preventative health care not only to improve lives for Albertans but also to alleviate the mounting pressure on our hospitals and emergency rooms.

As we will discuss later today, emergency rooms across the province are jammed and backed up to a breaking point. Every single day critically injured and ill patients are being denied the care they need partly because the message of basic preventative health care just isn't getting across.

The reduction we've seen in tobacco use is a positive example of what can be achieved with good advocacy, and the Wildrose caucus supports any action that shifts focus from treatment to prevention.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On behalf of the New Democratic caucus, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government deserves the sort of commendation that typically comes when you say, "Well, at last you've done the right thing" for this announcement that they will pursue litigation against the tobacco industry to recover health care costs. Thousands of Albertans have died and tens of thousands more have begun to smoke during the years that the government has procrastinated. With this issue as with so many others they have delayed action until the merits of the action were almost beyond obvious. Today, desperate to find anything to show that they are doing something positive in relation to the health of Albertans as their ineffective behaviour in relation to emergency department problems is exposed, they announce that this legal action is getting under way. Alberta should not be straggling in after other provinces on these matters. We should be setting the agenda in smart ways to ensure good health for Albertans.

Yes, it is appropriate to go after big tobacco for the costs resulting from their product sales; meanwhile, the need to adequately fund good health care, including a commitment to address the social determinants of health, is something that remains the responsibility of this government. As part of that, a good government would increase the investment in tobacco reduction actions from what is currently a million dollars per year so that the rates of use in the province would drop far more and the health care costs that this action today is designed to recoup would never be incurred in the first place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all hon. members for granting me the opportunity to respond. A little over three years ago I lost my mother to cancer seven weeks after she was diagnosed with three inoperable brain tumours. She was 82, and while nobody can say for sure, given that her sister is hale and hearty today at 84, her mother lived to the age of 99, her mother's sister is still alive at the age of 93, my mother's grandfather lived to the age of 98, and my mother's great-grandfather did as well, I can't help

but wonder if mom would still be alive today if she hadn't been a smoker. While the brain tumours killed her, the doctor said that her primary cancer was the lung cancer that they thought they'd caught early a year and a half before, the lung cancer that showed up several years after she quit smoking.

Mom was never a heavy smoker. She only smoked about six or seven cigarettes a day, and this was back in the day when people smoked anywhere, any time. When she did quit, she was able to give it up without much in the way of withdrawal symptoms. Probably she could have quit at any time, but she went on smoking six or seven cigarettes a day for 50-plus years, and she never exhibited any of the health problems normally linked with smoking until they found that tumour on her lung.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. minister for doing the right thing today. Predictably, the argument will be made that tobacco manufacturers are engaged in a legal business, making a product that is legal to manufacture and sell to consenting adults. The tobacco industry and their spin doctors have hidden behind that claim of legal status for far too long, using it as, if you will, a smokescreen to manufacture and sell a highly addictive product that, if used as directed, will kill you. Every time that it costs a smoker's life, in the lead-up to that it burdens our health care system. The minister is right. It's time that burden was shared with the industry that's responsible for causing it.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Legislative Assembly Proceedings Broadcast

The Speaker: Hon. members, last week I provided to hon. members a sheet identifying the rotation for question period today. I won't go through that now, but later during the Routine I will table those documents once again and make a comment at the conclusion of the Routine for the records of our Assembly.

Two other items as well. Over the summer and the spring the Legislative Assembly Office has been involved in a major project here in this Assembly to update our broadcast equipment, including robotic cameras, recordings, graphics control systems. We now have five cameras instead of two cameras, which will provide us with an improved final product, including more options for shots and camera angles with improved picture quality and, hopefully, sound quality as well.

I would like to advise all that live coverage of the question period will be broadcast daily on Access TV and rebroadcast on Shaw TV at 5 every afternoon with a repeat broadcast to major centres at 10:30 p.m. Your ratings have actually been quite good to attain three broadcasts a day. In addition to that, we'll continue to provide live gavel-to-gavel broadcast coverage of all House proceedings through our website through a new program called Assembly Online.

I'd like to advise members that we now have also arrived at the continuation of an agreement between the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and Television Montana, TVMT, to broadcast and rebroadcast proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in Montana. This agreement started today at 1:30 on Television Montana cable television channels. It was, as I said, 1:30 today and will broadcast Monday through Thursday to the end of the daily Routine when the Assembly is in session.

2:00

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: We will now commence for today. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For years now this government has promised Albertans they would fix health care. They've done report after report, shelving them one after the other. They've ripped money from the system and then thrown money at the problems they'd created. Now new reports say that we don't have enough beds. Once again we're putting lives at risk, and the emergency departments and doctors and nurses are at the end of their ropes. Mr. Premier, for years you have promised the best health care system to Albertans. We don't have the best health care system. When is it going to be delivered?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the key priority of our government is to have the best performing publicly funded health care system in Canada. We know that there are emergency room pressures. Patients don't want to see that, doctors don't want to see that, health care professionals don't want to see that, and neither do we. The minister has a plan in place that will alleviate some of the pressure, and he'll be able to answer the rest of the questions with respect to his plan.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, it's unclear to every Albertan, including us, what that plan might be. I expected excuses, but please give us the respect due to Albertans in this most vital service. Emergency rooms around the province are crowded, crowded to the hilt. Mr. Premier, why doesn't every Albertan have a family doctor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has indicated that I will take these questions that deal with details and specifics. What I would like to do is start by directing the hon. member, who himself, of course, is an acknowledged and respected doctor, to the press release that was put out on October 20 wherein a four-point plan for addressing these pressures was clearly outlined. That is part of the larger plan, the five-year funding commitment, that will surely help address and reduce some of those pressures in emergency departments.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to be unwilling to answer the question. Why doesn't every family have a family doctor?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of ways to answer that question. Some people that I've met with may not want a family doctor or feel they don't need one, but that's not the main thing. We do have a shortage of doctors in some areas of the province. This is true. Some people have indicated that there are doctor shortages in some areas of the province, and that's why we have a very active physician recruitment plan, probably the most active plan on a per capita basis in Canada. We are recruiting some of the youngest people into the system. We pay them to settle in some of the remote areas. We have an active rural physician action plan, and that is starting to yield some results. It's very difficult to recruit to some areas for the numbers we'd like, but we are getting there.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Additional Beds To Relieve Emergency Wait Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan to add 250 beds to

Calgary and Edmonton hospitals was rushed and provides no details. No specifics were given for the number or type of beds or what the total cost would be. If there are no specifics, then there is no real plan. Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. Again to the Premier: was this announcement of new beds simply to deflect attention away from the fact that the proposed Alberta Health Act won't actually fix any of the problems Albertans care about?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are the only jurisdiction, the government of Alberta, that has provided predictable, five-year funding to the Alberta Health Services Board. That means that the board can plan over the next five years: the first three years a 6 per cent increase, and the other two will be a 4 and a half per cent increase to an ever-increasing budget. We also eliminated their deficit, and we topped up the operating funds for Alberta Health Services to meet what they said at that time were the pressures that they were experiencing. The minister and the board are working out a plan. They have announced part of that plan. There's more to come to alleviate the pressure.

Dr. Swann: Please, Mr. Premier, you talk about predictable funding. There is no new funding under Alberta Health Services to go along with the 250 beds. Please, what areas are going to be cut in order for these beds to be open, or was Alberta Health Services sitting on cash that they haven't spent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, why is it that any time we want to improve performance, the opposition always calls for more money? Can we not improve performance within the envelope that's provided, not only paying off the deficit but also topping up their budget and then adding 6 per cent onto the top of it? That's a substantial increase. I've asked them just to deliver the plan. First thing they go is: how much more money? You look for better performance by Alberta Health Services given the dollars allocated.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, it's one thing to announce new beds, but it's another to tell us where the money is coming from. What is the plan, Mr. Premier? Where is the money coming from for these beds? Why was that not made clear at the time of the announcement?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, a 6 per cent increase over a budget that was increased to meet the demands that Alberta Health Services brought forward to the table when we entered into a five-year funding agreement. The money is there, 6 per cent funding today. They can move money around. I know – I have trust in the board – that they will deliver on not only opening more beds immediately but looking after some of the other pressures that we have coming forward.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans support the Liberal policy for a moratorium on the sale of Crown-owned land. Unfortunately though, we have a government hiding behind a loophole in legislation and selling our land to a private owner, a friend of the government, behind closed doors. While this has become common practice with this administration, there is a better way. To the Premier: has cabinet approved this sale?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our government's policy has always been, whether it's in the oil sands or whether it's in agriculture or any other industry, to balance the needs of economic growth, of increasing jobs in the province, balancing those needs in terms of landowner rights and also the environment. There's an application before the Minister of SRD. He is reviewing the application, and he will be able to provide the details in terms of the process of any sale of Crown lands.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even if there isn't a legal obligation to consult with Albertans on the sale of their land, isn't there a moral obligation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a process that is followed in terms of accepting any application from any landowner in terms of the disposal of any Crown property, and that's land that's owned by the people of Alberta. As I said, there is a process, and we're following that process. The minister may have other details.

Dr. Swann: Well, can the Premier confirm that this land is being sold for pennies on the dollar?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the situation as it stands today is that we have a proposal – a proposal – from a group of individuals that want to take a look at an agricultural prospect in southern Alberta. The idea that we are selling, have sold, or are going to sell: pure speculation. What's happening here is that there are members opposite who are watching TV ads and reading newspapers and deciding that that's government action based on what they read. There is a proposal that we're dealing with. We're assessing it and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I will table a letter from February of 2008 in which the Premier acknowledged that the province's emergency rooms were overcrowded. In it he promised to direct the then minister of health to establish an expert panel of emergency physicians to develop a plan to address this situation. To the Premier: why didn't you live up to your commitment in forming an expert panel?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I know which letter the member is referring to because she was on the other side when she received the letter. The letter stipulates in terms of what government is committed to do; that is, to increase the number of spaces for training physicians, increase the number of spaces for training nurses in the province, increase the number of spaces for other health care professionals, and work with all in the system, including doctors and nurses, to ensure that we improve the performance, that we reduce waiting times, and improve access to health care in this province.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's why I'm on this side and not on that side.

Given that the Premier and the minister of health spent a lot of time talking about putting patients first, why has it taken so long for the Premier to keep his two-and-a-half-year-old promise to create this critically needed expert panel and, for that matter, plan?

2:10

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has consulted with physicians. He has consulted with physicians not only in terms of bone and joint surgery but also eye surgery and has consulted with emergency room physicians as well. They are part of putting a plan forward in terms of reducing the access time. At the end of the day we do have to train more physicians in Alberta, train more doctors, and we are well under way on that plan.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've seen what's happened with the bone and joint, and we've also seen what's happened with the eye care.

My final question is to the Premier. Given that emergency room overcrowding has now reached a critical breaking point – and I'm not asking for more money, Mr. Premier – will the Premier redirect funding from what should be lower priority initiatives such as your provincial branding, which no one can remember, in order to address this situation immediately?

Mr. Stelmach: In fact, we already have. We never spent all the money that was put into the branding initiative. We never did spend that money. That money will always move to the highest priority within the operation of government. I believe that there's about \$10 million or \$12 million that was not spent on the branding initiative.

On the other hand, it's bigger than just trying to find some quick, easy solution. Some of it is long term in terms of more doctors and more beds. The other is in training. It's constantly looking to other ways of providing that care. I'm proud to say that the physicians in this province have got together with other allied health care providers, and we're up to now 32 primary care networks. That's a step in the right direction.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For two and a half years this government has known that there is a dangerous crisis in health care, and it has been hiding this from Albertans. In February 2008 the Premier promised emergency department doctors that his government would take action to end the crisis in emergency rooms. Two and a half years have passed, and people have continued to suffer and even die in emergency rooms, yet this Premier has done nothing. Will the Premier admit the obvious, that he has failed utterly to protect Albertans when they need help the most?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've seen improvements in many areas of the system: 3,000 additional surgeries just done here recently. We are moving positively, progressively on the emergency room access. Part of the difficulty there, of course, is to find spaces for the seniors who require continuing care. We've added considerably more beds there, but we have to do more, and we're continuing to do more. That's why I thank all of the groups like Bethany and Good Sam that have come together, Covenant Health, partnering with government to provide more spaces in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the shortage of long-term care beds is a major reason for backed-up emergency rooms and given that the Premier promised 600 more long-term care beds in the last election and given that the government has since been steadily reducing them instead, will the Premier admit to misleading voters in the last election about his government's intention for long-term care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, actually, according to Alberta Health Services we will meet a target of something like 1,333 additional beds for seniors, so we're going to go far beyond what we thought we would be able to put in place in a short period of time.

The other thing. Rather than focusing on what the opposition wants to do – that is, traditional long-term care beds where we would split married couples after 50, 60 years because the system dictates it – Mr. Speaker, we're putting the senior first. We're putting the patient first, not what the opposition wants.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier continues to throw sand in the faces of Albertans about his real plans for long-term care beds, which are medical beds and which are necessary in order to clear up the backlog in emergency rooms, will he come clean with the Assembly, come clean with Albertans, and admit that he's reducing long-term care beds and he's part of the problem as far as increasing the waiting times in our emergency rooms? You're the problem.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that most Albertans disagree with what the opposition member has said. Our plan here is to build continuing care beds. As the need of the senior increases – meaning that maybe they lose more mobility, maybe a bit more dementia, or maybe that more health care is required for that particular senior – we can add the additional services to the room. Why keep moving the senior from a traditional lodge setting to an auxiliary hospital or a nursing home, keep moving them around, when you could add the services to the very same space that they have? To me that makes very good common sense.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Long-term Care Facility Closures

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are several guests from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees in the gallery extremely alarmed at what's happening to long-term care in Red Deer, as many of us are. Alberta Health Services' annual report shows that there are 252 people waiting for both acute care in the community and continuing care in the region, yet this government is closing 200 public long-term care beds in the Red Deer area. There's a better way. To the minister of health: is it not a mistake to be closing 200 public long-term care beds when there are 252 people waiting for them?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I recall being in Red Deer for that opening with the minister of seniors. There's a brand new, state-of-the-art facility there. The people who are already in it say that it is just incredible. That's Extendicare Michener Hill. It's 280 brand new beds, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition should know that 220 of those are, in fact, long-term care beds.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that the whole plan is a mistake? It's clear that only 60 per cent of the staffing needed for that long-term care setting is in place. What does he say about that?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the recruitment process is very thorough. It requires people to apply. It requires them to be interviewed. In a few cases it may even require them to be trained or upgraded in their training. It will vary. What I would like the hon. member and all Albertans to know, especially members in this House, is that in that brand new Extendicare facility 65 additional net new added capacity beds were also put in.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, he is defusing the problem and avoiding the question, which is really, fundamentally: will the minister immediately order that the Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor remain open and provide the necessary beds there?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer nursing home is one of our service facilities that has served Albertans extremely well, but it is aged. When the decision was made, it was looked at from the standpoint of whether or not it was more economical and better for Albertans to put money toward upgrading or to building new. The decision was made, clearly, to build new and to expand capacity at the same time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Relief for Emergency Wait Times

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been dire concerns about emergency room wait times in Alberta's hospitals for some time. Reports say that patients are waiting up to 5, 10, 12 hours in ERs. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is being done to address this problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, a number of things are being done. I think the first and most important thing is actioning the five-year funding commitment, the first of its kind, which this government brought in a few months ago. Secondly, we do have a four-point plan, that I alluded to earlier, which includes looking at a new discharge protocol. It looks at more beds, obviously. It looks at increasing and expanding services for Health Link and also addressing additional monies that are needed for home-care services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement to the same minister: can the minister be specific about what is being done in Edmonton?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, in my meeting at 8 o'clock this morning at the University of Alberta hospital, where I dropped in unannounced to see how things were going in emergency, I can tell you that they told me that there are 18 more transition beds, which are part of the emergency bed and acute-care bed protocol, that are being opened up as we speak. In fact, four of them are operational, fully functioning, today. Another nine will open on Monday, Mr. Speaker, and the remaining few will be open by mid-November. And that's just one example.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. Health needs can be very unpredictable. How can a discharge date be set for a patient upon their admittance to an ER?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is part of Alberta Health Services' multipronged approach to addressing ER pressures is not only to take a serious look at how patients are admitted but also to provide them with a plan on when they can go home. That's welcome news for everybody. What they've said is: let's take a look at this and talk with the family, talk with the patient

and say that on this-and-this date you can expect to be discharged, assuming your condition warrants it. What they've added to that is to say: let's try to get it done by 11 a.m. to free up that space for others who might need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

2:20 Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use
(continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks we have heard outrage from across Alberta regarding the sale of Crown lands for a potato farm. Instead of protecting Albertans' land, this government is selling it without public consultation. A moratorium on the sale of public lands would be a better way until debate can take place. To the minister of agriculture: is it true that Alberta Agriculture has concerns about this sale and that assessment for irrigation suitability has not been completed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department has stayed in close contact with sustainable resources. This is a proposal that's being looked at by that ministry, and they can comment on that. We want agricultural land to be used for its best and highest use to the benefit of all Albertans, and I'm sure that will be the guiding principles that that department uses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case, to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what is the minister's response to Albertans who have referred to this deal as a breach of public trust?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, firstly, let's be clear that what we have in front of us is a proposal, as I had indicated earlier. This is a proposal. We have not sold anything. There is no sale agreement, no documents that would indicate that, and the idea that somehow or another there's been no consultation, no discussion ongoing with respect to this issue is false. I have met with county councillors, county reeves, the representatives from the grazing association that's involved in this thing over the last six months. There's nothing secret about this. We do not hold public consultation currently in the province of Alberta to sell land for agricultural purposes. It's served us well for a hundred years. A third and more of this province has been put into agricultural service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. However, this is the 21st century, not a hundred years ago.

Again to the minister of sustainable resources: given that other established ag operations in the region have been denied access to increased water allocation, where will this potato farmer get his water and at what cost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't give those details because I'm not privy to the information or the contracts that he may or may not have made. However, part of the

proposal that's come forward is to develop about an 800-acre lake and wetland on this real estate. God Himself may provide the water. I don't know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Relief for Emergency Wait Times
(continued)

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many, including emergency room doctors, have told us that wait times in Alberta hospitals are reaching potentially crisis levels. They say that the main cause of this is a severe shortage of continuing care beds. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what are you doing to tackle this very important issue?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, among the strategies are things like opening more continuing care beds and also opening a lot more acute-care beds. Now, we've got approximately 800 new beds that have been opened for continuing care purposes since April of this year. That's a tremendous number of new beds, and that's welcome news to all Albertans. We do have the other protocols that I mentioned earlier with respect to discharge, with respect to home care, and with respect to the expansion of Alberta Health Link. There are a number of things happening like that, and tomorrow night when I meet with the head of emergency services, I expect I'll hear a few more ideas from him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a proud Calgary MLA may I ask the minister what he's doing to deal with this situation specifically in Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, specific to Calgary there's a combination of things happening to help deliver over 100 additional beds there. This is a combination of different types of beds – let's be clear – some of which have been alluded to or referred to in previous announcements and a lot of which are brand new added capacity. That includes more hospice beds, more acute-care beds, more subacute beds, more transition beds, and more continuing care beds. There's a lot that's going on right in Calgary as we speak, and there's more coming.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again, specific to Calgary, Minister, what are you doing to relieve pressure on the continuing care system around Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the big pressures being faced in emergency, as we know, is acute-care beds that are occupied by people who ought to be, should be, or could be in a continuing care setting. So in addition to building more continuing care beds, we're also looking at other overcrowding protocols. Some of that would require people to be moved from the emergency area up to an acute-care level, taking a look at which ones are in more serious condition, which ones can stay on stretchers, which ones need the beds. That particular protocol is very active here in Edmonton as well as in Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The airport tunnel continues to be an important issue for Calgary. The Alberta government's failure to assist with the tunnel will strand commuters in Calgary, increase congestion on Deerfoot Trail, and harm the businesses in the area. With the current administration refusing to seriously consider supporting the Calgary airport tunnel, the city faces a difficult choice of forgoing other infrastructure projects or going without the tunnel. There must be a better way. To the Minister of Transportation: Calgarians strongly support this project, so why has the minister not supported the airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this government supports all municipal infrastructure to the best we possibly can. In fact, Calgary alone this year will get around a half a billion dollars in grants to be able to work on their priority infrastructure projects. I'm sure that we are all here to help support them with that, but we have to follow our processes. We have to do what we're responsible for, and we have to let the municipalities do what they're responsible for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the minister had the will, the airport tunnel could get off the ground.

Given that Deerfoot Trail is already over capacity, will the minister finally acknowledge the importance of this project and support the city of Calgary in getting the airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just have to keep repeating myself to this hon. member and keep telling him that we're here supporting things. Deerfoot Trail doesn't go on to the tunnel. The tunnel comes from the other side of the airport. I'm sure that this hon. member wants to get it done, and so do we, but he has to deal with his municipality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the minister unable to effectively lobby the federal government to support the need for the Calgary airport tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I lobby the federal government all the time trying to get support for all of our big projects in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

ID Cards for Homeless People

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government recently announced a program to help homeless Albertans obtain government-issued identification. While this is, no doubt, a great photo op for the government, some question the logic behind the program. My first question is to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Even though we're in an era of fiscal restraint, how can this minister rationalize making homeless people, those who are most in need, pay for the ID card?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to this question. This member had asked, realistically, about why we are charging this \$12. Well, first off, assistance is available on an individual basis from Alberta Works for individuals who

cannot afford the \$12 fee. There are two reasons, though, that we went with the \$12 fee, one being that there is an intrinsic value to identification, and secondly, for those who are able to afford it, that's roughly the break-even cost to the taxpayer. We wanted to be compassionate both to the homeless individual but also to the taxpayer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Many homeless Albertans are living high-risk lifestyles and cannot properly maintain their own independence. How can this minister reasonably assure Albertans that this program will not create more identification fraud and violate the personal security of these already vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta ID cards are among the most secure documents of their type in North America. This program will not change that. These ID cards are the same ID cards that all Albertans can apply for as well. It's about enabling these individuals to have access to ID and to make sure that if they want to store it, they can store it. It will not jeopardize the information and security of the current ID card that we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Using identification cards to track the homeless seems a bit Orwellian to me, but it just seems to be fine to this particular minister. How can the minister assure this House that tracking the homeless is in line with the privacy laws of Alberta, particularly if the card identifies the person as homeless?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question, but I can tell you that there is no intention to follow or track homeless people through this identification card program. It does provide Alberta identification cards to individuals, the same as individuals would get if they did not have drivers' licences. On top of that, this is strictly a voluntary program. It's designed to recognize that it can be difficult to get on your feet without identification.

Over the next few months I'm really looking forward to stories from the hundreds of Albertans who I anticipate are going to sign up for this program and will be able to go to banks, sign up, and get bank accounts. And when they're working, they can cash their cheques there as opposed to going through a cheque-cashing place and paying fees through the system.

I'm very proud of this program, Mr. Speaker, and I think every member of this Assembly should be.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Standards for Addiction Treatment Centres

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At least a hundred and twenty thousand Albertans suffer from addictions, but we have treatment beds for less than 1 per cent of those Albertans, and the ones we do have are unregulated, unmonitored, and not even accredited. Given that a public inquiry concluded last week that 17-year-old Taylor

Argent's death at a treatment centre was associated with a profound absence of professional standards, will the minister today issue an apology to the Argent family and commit to implementing minimum standards in these addiction treatment centres across the province immediately?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I assume she's referring to a private facility just outside of Red Deer or Lacombe, in which case that is not under my direct sphere of responsibility, but I am concerned about all Albertans, and I am deeply saddened by the tragic death of this person referred to.

However, accreditations and standards and so on are being reviewed right now for public facilities, and perhaps as part of that we can also look at how we can work more closely with the private facilities, who probably have accreditation or licensing or some sort of an agreement, perhaps through United States standards.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Taylor Argent was referred to the CARC by staff at Alberta Health Services, and as of last week this centre was still advertised on the Alberta Health Services website, as were many other unaccredited centres, both private and public. Why won't the minister take responsibility for his government's role in this tragic incident and demand some transparent accountability before the safety of even more Alberta teens and adults suffers or they are put at risk?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, when you go to a doctor, it's my understanding from having spoken with literally hundreds of them, most of them one on one, that the doctor's obligation is to make you aware of every possible treatment, whether it's covered and funded publicly or not. That is what they must do. That was the circumstance that we had with Avastin, for example.

Now, in this case I'm sure Alberta Health Services folks, whoever they are, were acting in the best interests of the people who were asking the questions: "Where can we get some treatment? Where can we get in the quickest? What kind of services are available?" I'm sure they acted in the best faith to help that family at a time of great need.

Ms Notley: Indeed, they probably acted assuming, like most Albertans do, that the government actually monitors people who provide health services.

Since we have treatment beds for less than 1 per cent of those who are addicted in Alberta and since ER doctors have told this government that there's a serious crisis in ER caused in part by people with addictions and mental health issues, why won't the health minister fund an adequate number of regulated addictions beds so these Albertans can stay out of the ER and get the help that they need?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this government spends \$600 million, approximately, every year helping people with mental health circumstances, a lot of them due to addictions. We are also responding with a mental health strategy, a province-wide strategy. As part of that, the accreditation protocols, the licensing protocols will be reviewed starting with the public facilities that are under our purview, and we'll look at other possibilities as well. By the end of spring we'll have it all sorted out, with a new strategy that people will surely embrace.

First Point of Contact for Special-needs Children

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, the system for recognizing and supporting special-needs children in this province is not working. There is,

however, a better way through stronger ministerial co-operation, which would involve the first ministry contacted overseeing the provision of services to ensure that the needs of children and their families are met. To the Minister of Education: with coding on the way out how will the minister guarantee that special-needs children are identified and provided with the supports they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be my hope that we consider each and every one of our children and youth in this province special and that we would understand, when they come to school, that all of them have learning needs and that many of them have barriers to success that need to be overcome.

When we talk about getting rid of coding as a funding mechanism, it doesn't mean we would get rid of assessment of those needs and the ability to provide educational and other support programs for students as they need them to improve and help them with their learning process. It's not about coding a child to pigeonhole them and to provide funding; it's about understanding the learning needs of the child and providing the resources needed to achieve that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: for vulnerable special-needs children in the province's care will the minister accept full responsibility for every child whose first point of contact is her department?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question because I know this member cares very much about this area of special-needs children in schools. This member was at that news conference. I can tell you that I am working closely with the Minister of Education and the minister of health along with Justice as well regarding it, just across ministries that relate to special-needs children and first point of entry. There's not a definitive answer to give you today, but it's very much in the works.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now to the minister of health: given that special-needs children are often first diagnosed by a physician or a psychologist, will the minister accept full responsibility for every child whose first point of contact is his department?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned about all Albertans regardless of their age, regardless of any other circumstances. If the member has a particular case that he feels hasn't been attended to, I would ask him to bring it to our attention. Otherwise, I was just talking about mental health needs, for example, and I can tell you that out of that \$600 million we provide an additional \$50 million just to help young people with mental health situations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Water Quality of Athabasca River

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few months concern has been raised over Alberta's monitoring of the water in the Athabasca River. Albertans deserve to have a clear understanding of oil sands development. My question is to the Minister of

Environment. My constituents understood that there had been a very thorough water monitoring of the river for decades. Can the minister tell us what kind of monitoring has been done and by whom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right. We have in fact been monitoring this river since the 1970s, we being government and our partners in monitoring. That monitoring includes the Alberta Environment long-term river networking program, the regional aquatics monitoring program, or RAMP, and recently we've initiated a containment load study to address any impact of emissions from land and water as well as the ecosystem on human health development. The bottom line is that we are constantly seeking the best information possible so that we can make appropriate decisions to protect this river and others in Alberta.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we've been criticized for the discrepancies between our water monitoring data and those of other scientists. Can the minister tell us why there are discrepancies and what governments are doing to address these discrepancies?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to an incident, a report this summer that indicated that there were conflicting opinions with respect to interpretation of data. The Premier indicated at that time that he was confused. Frankly, I'm confused, and I expect Albertans are confused. The Premier instructed me, and I have since formed a third-party committee of scientists, some of whom were recommended by Dr. Schindler and others by Alberta Environment, just to answer that very question.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we know that the federal government has also created its own review panel to look at water monitoring in the oil sands. Can the minister tell us if the government is actually being redundant in the panel that we've got here and if we're wasting resources by forming a provincial review committee that's doing the same thing as the federal government?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we are committed to using the best information possible. My understanding is that the federal panel will be looking specifically at RAMP and at the monitoring system. The panel that I asked be put in place is to have a look at the 30 to 40 years of data and help us to understand why there's a difference in interpreting that data. At the end of the day both of those groups will come together and, I'm sure, be making some strong recommendations on how we can improve not only our data gathering but our interpretation of that data.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

2:40 Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week on *The Rutherford Show* the minister of health said that he had visited 23 emergency rooms across Alberta since becoming the minister of health, in order to talk with doctors, nurses, front-line staff to understand the needs of the province's emergency facilities. The next day he responded to a letter from Dr. Parks on the emergency room crisis, saying that the dire situation was a new revelation to him. To the minister of health: did you really visit 23 emergency rooms and see no evidence of the escalating crisis?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is taking a little licence with what I said back to Dr. Parks, but I'll let that one go.

The fact is that I have visited these emergency departments – I visited another four or five on the weekend – and I'll continue doing that because I'm of the opinion that the way an emergency department ticks or doesn't tick gives you a snapshot of how the whole hospital works, and that's a fact. I've gone out and met with these folks – I'm meeting with some more tomorrow – and we're making improvements as we go. It doesn't fix itself overnight, as we all know, but fixes are in the works. A lot of it has already occurred, and more of it is coming.

Mr. Hinman: No. It's been two and a half years, Mr. Speaker, that they've been aware it, but they've done very little.

Given that it is now painfully clear that the Alberta Health superboard experiment has been a complete failure, will the minister agree to disband the superboard and decentralize the administration of our hospitals and return it to the local communities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are many advantages to having one centralized board, not the least of which, of course, is a more efficient system of delivery that is saving hundreds of millions of dollars, which we can put right back into health services on the front lines, which is where it is needed. There are no plans to disband this board. They've worked hard under very difficult circumstances. They now have a golden opportunity, with a five-year funding plan to work with, which is infinitely different than the \$1.3 billion deficit they were looking at last year.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly questionable. Given that Dr. Grant Innes, the superboard's own head of emergency medicine for Calgary hospitals, said last week that it's the worst that it's ever been, how can this minister defend and keep the superboard in place? It's compounding the problem. It's about procurement and letting people out early. We don't need a superboard that says one size fits all. They need to address it at the local level.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's one reason we brought in a five-year funding plan with a 6 per cent assurance in the first year and in each of the next years, unlike what the Wildrose put out the day after our budget, saying that they would only offer 3.5 per cent. You show me where you're going to cut 2.5 per cent out, as your press release said, and then, hon. member, we'll talk. Okay?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Trade Dispute on Vegetable Oil Products

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province recently won a long-standing trade dispute with Ontario over policies that have restricted Alberta's vegetable oil producers and refiners from selling in Ontario. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Could you provide details about why Alberta filed a trade dispute over this matter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been very frustrating to have these interprovincial trade disputes that have mitigated against producers in Alberta marketing their product. Canola, for example, could not be shipped to Ontario and then put in through any other

dairy-blend processing in Ontario. Ontario put up a barrier. In March of this year we took another stab at getting the government of Ontario to see whether or not they'd change their minds. They didn't, so we presented to the agreement on internal trade panel. They ruled in Alberta's favour, and as of February 1, 2011, it will be imperative that Ontario follow through.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. My first supplemental is: being that we had already filed this same dispute and we hadn't won it, why did we have to file it again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason was, according to the panel process, that without an enforceable regulation attached to their strategies and their outcome deliverables, we weren't able to actually enforce any of their decisions. Now an enforcement provision has been added, similar to the TILMA provision for dispute reconciliation, and because it is part of this agreement – it's integral with the agreement – Ontario must comply. If they don't, they will be subject to fines of up to \$5 million to actually address the matter. We are very hopeful this time that with all of the i's dotted and t's crossed and with the agreement of other provincial Premiers, we will get support from Ontario.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the minister of agriculture. How does this announcement benefit Alberta agricultural companies as well as producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canola represents about 17 per cent of our ag exports out of Alberta. It's a hugely important part of our agriculture industry. It totalled about \$1.3 billion last year, and it's hugely important that we're in the domestic markets, too. This will be of great advantage to our producers, to have access again to the Ontario market.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, every time the Minister of Justice tries to justify her changes to legal aid, the answer seems increasingly confused. Members of the Law Society of Alberta have mobilized against the draconian cuts in provincial funding to Legal Aid Alberta. What was the point of this pilot project? To restrict access to justice for Alberta's most vulnerable people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two and a half years ago we as the Department of Justice, one of three parties to a legal aid agreement with the Law Society and the Legal Aid board, decided that we needed to provide Albertans with more than one model for legal aid. Therefore, we launched a principle-based approach to change delivery of legal aid in this province so that there were a diverse number of services available to people, including advice through law information centres, community law clinics, family law clinics, and in some cases certificates.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 12 the media reported that you stated, "I want to make it very clear that if there is a person who is in criminal court, who is charged and needs representation, legal aid funds that." Do you stand by that statement?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in that interview there were a number of points made by the reporter. One of those points was that people were being wrongfully convicted in this province. The first thing I said to that reporter was that I challenge him to provide me information because that would certainly be something that I was concerned about. We know that we have a constitutional obligation to provide legal defence to people who appear in criminal court in this province, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear that we understand our constitutional duties because the Provincial Court recently stated that changes to legal aid are forcing defendants to "look elsewhere for assistance." Wouldn't that mean that we're falling down on our constitutional obligations?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it appears to me that before we start attributing quotes to people, we might want to make sure we know exactly where they're coming from. I will tell you that in conversations we've had with the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench, the position of the government of Alberta has been very clear. The courts understand fully that we are meeting our obligations. The courts understand that it is important to provide legal services to people who are charged with criminal offences in a number of forums. For many years we have had youth criminal defence offices and duty counsel in this province, that provide people with legal advice when they are charged to appear in criminal court, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Funding for Training

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. There are thousands of students in Alberta who are still waiting to find out if they are approved for funding for training even though these classes started some two months ago. My question to the minister: why are these students still waiting for their money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, a very unfortunate situation, a situation that in part resulted as the computer system simply failed, a new computer system put in place to process these applications. Ironically, it was designed to serve these clients better, and as technology does from time to time, it has failed. However, this department has responded immediately by hiring additional staff, by appropriating staff from other departments, and they have been literally manually processing applications seven days a week.

Mr. Speaker, any application . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I really appreciate these technical challenges, but my question again is: what

do you say to the single mother who needs to feed her children but has yet to receive the funding and your ministry says that the funding is coming? What is she supposed to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to finish my initial answer, every application filed before September 27 now has been processed, and overall we have received over 7,600 applications. That mother who is in dire straits simply has to come to one of our 59 offices throughout the province, and if indeed in financial crisis, we will be issuing emergency benefits forthwith. We have issued over 500 emergency benefits to date, and we will continue to issue them as situations demand.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Mr. Minister, I certainly appreciate these measures that you're taking, but how can you assure Albertans that this situation will not happen again?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's put it this way. This particular department issues somewhere between 50,000 to 60,000 cheques every month – every month – and you never hear about any problems arising. From time to time technology will fail, and if it does, we do have emergency procedures in place to supplement technological failure. I cannot give such an assurance because no one can give you an assurance that technology will not fail in the future. But I can assure you of one thing. There are processes in place that if technology were to fail in the future, we will be able to respond to it adequately and make sure that no one is in financial dire straits.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Eighteen members were recognized. There were 108 questions and responses.

Before the Clerk calls Members' Statements, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you a group of individuals from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and the Alberta Council on Aging. They've come here today to witness the tabling of petitions concerning the closing of Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor, two publicly funded and delivered seniors' care facilities in Red Deer, plus staff shortages at Extendicare Michener Hill. I will ask them to rise as I mention their names: Tammy Graham, AUPE chair; Angela MacArthur, AUPE chair; Wendy Kicia, AUPE chair; Ray Tweedle, AUPE chair; Sam Denhaan, president of Central Alberta Council on Aging; Margie Lunt, board member, Alberta Council on Aging; Doug Janssen, director of the Alberta Council on Aging; and Jules Noel, AUPE provincial executive. Let's give them all a round of applause for 3,575 signatures on the petition.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my guests who are here today as well because they are concerned

about the closure of seniors' facilities in Red Deer. I ask them to rise as I say their names. They are Jerine Johnson, Alberta Union of Provincial Employees local 44 council representative and Valley Park Manor employee for 37 years; Jaime Urbina, AUPE local 44 council rep, former Red Deer nursing home staff, and now employed at Valley Park Manor; David Eggen, executive director of Friends of Medicare; Brenda Corney, chair of the Red Deer chapter of Friends of Medicare; Ken Collier, chair of the Red Deer chapter of the Council of Canadians; Bev Hanes, treasurer and board member of the Central Alberta Council on Aging; David Climenhaga, communications director of AUPE; and Tyler Bedford, communications officer with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. They've come to the Legislature to see the tabling of the AUPE petition to save the Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor. My guests are seated in both the public and members' galleries. I'd now ask the Assembly to provide them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there really is no need to introduce the same party twice or three times in the one question period.

We have standing orders, and at 3 o'clock Standing Order 7(7) is due to kick in. It says, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." There is no way that this Routine will be concluded in less than perhaps 30 minutes from now, so I prefer to speed the process up. Rather than asking a member to move unanimous consent to go beyond 3 o'clock to conclude the Routine, I will just ask the question: is any member opposed to us not seeing 3 o'clock when we arrive at 3 o'clock and that we continue to the conclusion of the Routine? If you are opposed, say something.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

First Nations Economic Partnerships Initiative

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is privileged to be home to one of the largest and fastest growing aboriginal populations in the country. This government is committed to increasing the participation of First Nations people in the diverse economic opportunities our province offers.

On August 24 this year our efforts were nationally recognized by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada. The First Nations economic partnerships initiative, or FNEPI, received a national bronze award for innovative program management and generating positive outcomes in aboriginal economic development. FNEPI is the first program of its kind in Canada. It is delivered by the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations in partnership with Alberta Employment and Immigration to develop sustainable partnerships among First Nations, industry, and government.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen some really great successes. This initiative helped produce 100 partnership projects, and some of the successes include the Paul First Nation securing a \$1.5 million electrical utilities contract; a trucking company in Hobbema with lucrative contracts thanks to strong ties between industry and First Nations; school camps where aboriginal children learn about careers in science and technology; and a partnership that will help First Nations in central Alberta tap into contracting opportunities in oil and gas.

Many of these success stories share some of the following commonalities: building long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships; leveraging existing networks; creating new business opportunities; and creating jobs and developing entrepreneurs. These are crucial elements in growing our province's competitiveness, and we know

that a quarter of a million aboriginal people living in this province play an important role in this growth.

Recognition by IPAC is an honour and allows us to further share this successful partnership model with our public administration peers across the country. I congratulate the two ministries.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As if we needed more evidence that the Tories are no longer fit to govern, along comes Potatogate, the backroom deal to sell pristine, irreplaceable Crown land near Medicine Hat for a mere \$75 per acre to friends, the kind of practice that has sadly become commonplace in this administration. For a song this Premier is going to allow the destruction of 16,000 acres of irreplaceable wildlife habitat, home to 70 per cent of Alberta's at-risk species. In return Alberta will see a privately owned commercial potato patch, a water-intensive crop where water is already fully allocated, in one of the most drought-prone regions of the province.

Once this sale goes through, the people of Alberta won't be able to control how the land is used even though the government has not yet completed its regional land-use plan for the area. It's mind boggling, but this short-sighted administration is eager to sell off public lands even before they've figured out the most effective use for these lands or the critical water issues that are already limiting other developments. Why are they even bothering to develop a land-use strategy if they're determined to pull stunts like this?

There's a better way. For years Alberta Liberals have demanded an immediate halt to the sale of public lands. Since this government won't do that, they should at least establish a transparent and honest process to determine how public lands should be sold. Only after the people of the region ratify a land-use plan would an Alberta Liberal government even consider allowing new commercial or industrial developments in the area.

Mr. Speaker, we demand that the Premier halt the sale of this grassland, establish a public consultation process for disposition of any such public land, strengthen provisions in the Public Lands Act to conserve prairie land, and enact legislation to protect environmentally significant native grasslands on public lands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Waste Reduction Week

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week marked the 10th year Albertans have celebrated Waste Reduction Week. Canadians from across the country took part in activities to help reduce waste and keep it out of landfills. Fortunately, many Albertans took up the challenge, including a large number of grade 4 students. Participating classes registered and conducted a five-day waste audit in the classroom and pledged to reduce waste in their classes for the rest of the year. During the week I had the privilege of visiting classrooms across Alberta, and I found the students' knowledge and enthusiasm for reducing waste truly refreshing. I came away from the visits confident that the next generation is ready and willing to do its part to reduce waste.

Of course, just because the week is over doesn't mean we should stop thinking about waste reduction in our homes and workplaces. There are many easy and practical things we can all do. Albertans should choose products with little or no packaging, buy in bulk, consider items that are durable, and practise the three Rs of reduce, reuse, and recycle to help to lessen waste in our province. Instead

of throwing unwanted household items and used clothing in the garbage, donate the goods to community organizations.

I encourage everyone to take a close look at how they can reduce waste throughout the year. The choices you make, big or small, really do make an impact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

3:00 National Child Abuse Awareness Month

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, it's often important to reflect on that which causes so much pain in our society. Unfortunately, I would ask us all to reflect on the fact that much of the pain in our world is caused by one human being hurting another, one human being purposely performing acts of either abuse or neglect that hurt another human being.

October is National Child Abuse Awareness Month. Nothing is more frightening than knowing that some children are at risk of abuse by those in positions of authority, those meant to protect them, those that we've entrusted with our most precious. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we all have a role to play. Everyone involved in a child's life shares in the responsibility to report any suspicions they have about potential abuse or neglect.

Every day concerned Albertans do this; they act on this responsibility and call the confidential child abuse hotline. Mr. Speaker, each of these calls represents a child or youth who may have been harmed, or his family may need help in dealing with or coping with some of the challenges they may be facing. Each of these calls has been critical in ensuring that children and youth are protected and kept safe. I would say that some of these calls could potentially have saved someone's life.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to continue to be vigilant, report abuse or neglect, and help support families to create positive, nurturing environments for youth and children.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Dr. Gary McPherson

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I rise today to pay tribute to a great Albertan, Dr. Gary McPherson, who passed away earlier this year. If you knew Dr. McPherson, you are well aware of the influence this man had on the disability community in Alberta. Although Dr. McPherson had a permanent disability, and some might say it was because of that disability, he was a tireless advocate on behalf of people with disabilities.

Dr. McPherson's efforts on behalf of Albertans with disabilities began over two decades ago. In 1988 he was instrumental in the creation of the Premier's council, and he served as chair of that council for 10 years. His ideals of equality and citizenship for all people still influence council activities. Dr. McPherson was so influential that following his retirement as chair, they named the council's first citizen recognition award after him. This award is presented annually to an Albertan who demonstrates outstanding leadership in enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities.

Dr. McPherson was also a writer, a public speaker, a professor and an adviser at the University of Alberta, and president and chairman of the Steadward Centre, a health, fitness, lifestyle, and research facility serving people with disabilities. His achievements didn't stop there, however. For example, he was also inducted into both the Edmonton and the Alberta sports halls of fame.

It's fitting that we continue to honour him even after his passing. At a memorial for Dr. McPherson last June our Premier announced

a scholarship in his name as a way to commemorate his lifelong dedication as a leader, advocate, and role model. I hope that as a province we will carry on honouring Dr. McPherson and his legacy by continuing the work he began.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

National School Library Day

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, October 25, marks the eighth annual National School Library Day. Across the province school library staff will be celebrating excellence in school library programs, hosting guest speakers, and linking up with community organizations to highlight the vital role of school libraries in the lives of our students. I think everybody in this House has a fond memory of visiting their school library to choose their favourite book and that special pride that we took in being able to take that book home and share it with our family and friends.

Mr. Speaker, October is also Canadian Library Month. I'm very pleased to rise today in honour of National School Library Day and Canadian Library Month and the many people who work tirelessly to support our libraries, including teachers, parents, principals, and community members. Alberta has benefited from the deep dedication of these people. Their dedication is matched by this government, which is committed to a strong, province-wide public library system.

Mr. Speaker, today's recognition also gives me the opportunity to talk about two important considerations when thinking about the future of our school and public libraries. First, in these times of fiscal restraint it is imperative that we make the most of our financial resources. We need to continue to look for ways in which our public libraries can partner with our school libraries. By doing so, we can make more efficient use of our resources and provide better access to both students and the public.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, libraries of today and the future should look much different than libraries of the past. Technology has significantly changed our society and our way of life, and libraries are no exception. Our libraries must recognize and adapt to these changes in order to sustain their importance and relevance in today's and tomorrow's world.

Finally, I'd like to recognize the Canadian Association for School Libraries and the Alberta School Library Council for their hard work in promoting awareness of the importance of libraries in our schools and communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Small Business Week

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, October 17 to 23, was Small Business Week, which, as we all know, means celebrating the successes and contributions of small and medium-sized businesses all across Canada. Here in Alberta Business Link and the Chambers of Commerce held events across the province that saw businesspeople come together to learn, to network, and to socialize in the company of their peers. In pursuing their dreams, entrepreneurs and small-business owners show a great deal of courage and resilience, and their success benefits us all through jobs, economic activity, and, yes, tax revenues so that we can provide services to Albertans.

I'm pleased to be able to say that this innovative entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes small business is alive and well here in Alberta. With just over 10 per cent of Canada's population, Mr.

Speaker, Alberta is home to about 14 per cent of all of the small businesses in Canada. Small businesses, those employing fewer than 50 people, account for 95.7 per cent of all businesses with employees in Alberta. That's over 150,000 businesses. The small-business sector is also a vital contributor to our provincial economy. Alberta's small-business sector was responsible for 31 per cent, almost a full third, of Alberta's gross domestic product in 2008.

Finally, while a vibrant small-business sector is important to the economic health of every single community in this province, it is much more than that. Small business and small-business owners help build their communities right at the grassroots level, Mr. Speaker. They are very much a part of the communities where they operate, and they make themselves known beyond the bottom line and beyond the balance sheet. They sponsor kids' hockey teams. They donate to local charities and community drives and serve on school boards as well as many other community groups. Our communities are more vibrant and inviting thanks to their contributions.

On behalf of my colleagues, this Assembly, and Albertans in general thank you to small business for all that you do for Alberta.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on – and it's been a few months since we've been here – three members in their members' statements today highlighted a week or a day. I'd like to now bring you up to date about October so that all members will be able to say that we have recognized these events in our Assembly, and nobody will come under criticism for failing to recognize one or the other.

October is Autism Awareness Month, Brain Tumour Awareness Month, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Canadian Library Month, Car Safety Month, Child Abuse Awareness Month, Community Living Awareness Month, Denturist Awareness Month, Eye Health Canada Month, Healthy Workplace Month, Influenza Immunization Awareness Month, International School Library Month, International Walk to School Month, Islamic History Month, Learning Disabilities Awareness Month, Lupus Awareness Month, National Occupational Therapy Month, Psoriasis Awareness Month, Renovation Month, Stamp Collecting Month, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month, Women's History Month.

Now, October 1 was International Day of Older Persons, as it was International Music Day, as it was World Smile Day, as it was World Vegetarian Day. October 2 was International Day of Non-Violence. October 3 to 9 was Animal Health Week, as it was Fire Prevention Week, as it was Mental Illness Awareness Week. October 4 was World Animal Day, as it was World Architecture Day, as it was World Habitat Day. October 4 to 8 was International Walk to School Week. October 4 to 10 was National Family Week, World Animal Week, World Space Week. October 5 was World Teachers' Day. October 6 was International Walk to School Day. October 8 to December 31 is the Christmas Seal Campaign launch. October 9 was the World Hospice and Palliative Care Day, as it was World Post Day. October 10 was World Day against the Death Penalty, as it was World Mental Health Day.

3:10

October 10 to 15 was YMCA Week without Violence. October 11 was National Coming Out Day, as it was Thanksgiving Day. October 12 was World Arthritis Day. October 13 was International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction. October 14 was World Sight Day, as it was World Standards Day. October 15 was Global Handwashing Day, as it was International Day of Rural Women, as it was International White Cane Day. October 15 to 24 was National

Science and Technology Week. October 16 was World Food Day. October 16 to 22 was Protect the Human Week. October 17 was International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

October 17 to 23 was National Foster Family Week, as it was Co-op Week, as it was National School Safety Week, as it was Small Business Week. October 18 was Persons Day. October 18 was also World Menopause Day. October 18 to 22 was National Infection Control Week, as it was School Bus Safety Week, as it was Citizenship Week, as it was Waste Reduction Week. October 20 was National Microfinance Day, as it was World Osteoporosis Day, as it was World Statistics Day. October 22 was International Stuttering Awareness Day. October 24 was National Psoriasis Walk, as it was United Nations Day, as it was World Development Information Day.

October 24 to 30 is Cervical Cancer Awareness Week, as it is Disarmament Week, as it is National Block Parent Week. October 27 will be World Day for Audiovisual Heritage. October 29 will be World Psoriasis Day. October 31 will be Halloween, as it will be National UNICEF Day, as it will be World Thrift Day.

Next week we will move into November.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't tell you how impressed and thrilled I am to present a petition signed by 3,575 people from Red Deer and the surrounding area which is urging the government to "direct Alberta Health Services to immediately stop the closure of Valley Park Manor and the Red Deer Nursing Home." This is a lot of signatures. It's not easy to do that kind of work, and I really, really respect the people that did it.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have copies of the same petition, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly . . . to direct Alberta Health Services to immediately stop the closure of Valley Park Manor and the Red Deer Nursing Home.

This petition has 3,315 signatures.

Thank you very much.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 30 application.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I wish to inform the House that on completion of the daily Routine I will move to

adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance, namely the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the state of emergency medical services in the province.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you also have a Standing Order 30 application?

Ms Blakeman: I do, sir. Thank you for recognizing me. According to Standing Order 30 I'd like to give oral notice that at the appropriate time, that is the conclusion of the Routine today, I would be raising the following issue under the Standing Order 30 provision:

Be it resolved that we adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the urgent matter of the sale of approximately 16,000

acres of environmentally significant Crown-owned land near Bow Island for commercial agricultural use in a region with no open water allocation, without public consultation or adequate valuation, which will adversely affect protected and endangered species and habitat.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Bill 18

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I'm pleased to introduce Bill 18 for first reading, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will bring monetary enforcement provisions to the agreement on internal trade and extend the existing provisions of TILMA to the New West Partnership trade agreement, that includes the province of Saskatchewan.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bill 19

Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to support implementation of the province's renewable fuels standard in 2011. Amendments will help ensure Alberta's renewable fuel producers are at a level playing field, for fuel tax purposes, with those outside the province of Alberta. Amendments will also allow information sharing between Alberta Finance and Enterprise and Alberta Energy to support efficient administration of both fuel tax and renewable fuel programs and allow for the reduction of reporting burden for the industry. Other minor technical changes are made to support the renewable fuel standard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 19 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 205

Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act.

The objective of this bill is to curb the theft of metal in Alberta by providing additional tools for law enforcement.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter written to Dr. Peter Kwan, president of emergency medicine with the Alberta Medical Association, from the Premier of Alberta regarding emergency service standards and access to health care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings here, and I have the appropriate number of copies of the following documents: a letter dated February 22, 2008, from Dr. Paul Parks on behalf of the emergency medicine physicians at the University of Alberta hospital to the minister of health, describing significant overcrowding in emergency departments; a letter to the Premier from Peter Kwan, that was just tabled by the previous member, so I won't table that; a letter dated July 3, 2008, from Dr. Paul Parks to the minister of health, warning of systemic overcrowding in emergency departments; and a letter dated September 30, 2010, from Dr. Paul Parks to the minister of health, describing severe systemic overcrowding in emergency departments. Attached to this letter are documents from 2010 and 2008 listing cases of suboptimal health outcomes compiled by triage physicians at the University of Alberta emergency department.

Thank you.

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood tabled the same thing, so we won't table it twice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon, and both of them are with permission. The first is a tabling from a constituent, Rick McEwen. Mr. McEwen is expressing his concern about the government's plan to close acute-care psychiatric beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The second tabling I have is an open letter to the president of the University of Alberta. It's from the Justice for Janitors campaign, which is in full swing over at the university. Hopefully, this letter will encourage the university to meet with the janitors directly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have several tablings as well. Pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the 43rd annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period of April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010.

As well, hon. members, I am tabling with the House today a copy of the projected sitting days calendar and members' statements routines for the months of October, November, December 2010.

As well, I'm tabling with the House today a copy of the Oral Question Period rotation routine, effective October 25, 2010.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon.

Mrs. Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, pursuant to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation 2009-2010 annual report and the Travel Alberta annual report 2009-2010.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2010 annual report, Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2009 annual report, ATB Financial 2010 annual report, and Alberta Investment Management Corporation annual report 2009-2010.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we get to the Standing Order 30 application, I indicated earlier I'd be making a brief comment with respect to question period and members' statements. This need be part of the record, and *Hansard* is the only record that we have, so this will be there for future reference.

Hon. members, the chair would like to advise members of some changes to the rotation of questions during Oral Question Period and the rotation of members' statements. These changes were agreed to by House leaders and the independent member after a consultation process that we undertook mid-summer. The chair provided the information concerning these changes in a memo to all members dated October 19, 2010. The changes were necessitated primarily by the move of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to a new caucus association. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo advised of this change in a letter dated generically August 2010 and received in the Speaker's office on September 7, 2010. The member's letter indicated that this change would be effective, and I quote, at the commencement of the fall sitting of the fall Legislature 2010, which is today, October 25, 2010, so as at 1:30 p.m. today that change came into effect.

The rotation of questions remains the same for what are days 1 and 3 in the four-day rotation as announced earlier in the year 2010. On day 2, which is what today is designated as, question 15 is no longer a position held by the Official Opposition but moves to the Wildrose Alliance. The 19th question will belong to the Official Opposition and not the members of the government caucus for today.

On day 4, which will be Wednesday, October 27, this week, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is no longer entitled to the sixth question as an independent member; he's now part of the Wildrose Alliance caucus. Accordingly, the designations for questions 7 through 14 advance one place. The 15th question on day 4 belongs to the Wildrose Alliance, the 16th question belongs to members of the government caucus, the 17th question belongs to the Official Opposition, and the 18th question and after belong to members of the government caucus.

For today, day 2 in the rotation, the Official Opposition was entitled to ask the first three questions; the Wildrose Alliance the fourth and 15th questions; the New Democrats the fifth and 12th questions; the Official Opposition the sixth, eighth, 10th, 13th, 17th, and 19th questions; the government members' caucus the seventh, ninth, 11th, 14th, 16th, 18th questions and after 19 questions.

For Members' Statements the position held by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo as an independent member, every second Tuesday, will go to the Wildrose Alliance. Today saw government members entitled to six members' statements and the Official Opposition to one.

The House leaders have also requested that a member from the opposition be recognized each day for the second member's

statements. I would ask the three House leaders of the three opposition parties, who are in the House today, to try and determine who that person will be on a daily basis because the paper just provided to me says: you choose. Well, I would like to be more definitive than that, so you choose and advise my office by 12:30 p.m. each day who that person is, please.

The chair would like to emphasize that this order in questions and members' statements gives effect to the agreement reached by House leaders and the sole remaining independent member, and the chair provided the information concerning these changes in a memo to all members dated October 19, 2010.

Earlier in the proceedings the chair tabled copies of the Oral Question Period rotation effective October 25, 2010, and the projected sitting days calendar of the fall sitting as well as the schedule for Members' Statements.

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please proceed with your petition under Standing Order 30.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 30(7)(a) states that motions under this Standing Order "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." The section of emergency medicine of the Alberta Medical Association recently sent the minister of health a letter which indicated that emergency doctors are deeply concerned about what the letter called severe systemic overcrowding in emergency rooms in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, emergency room doctors are concerned that the overcrowding in emergency rooms is severe enough that patients are not receiving the care they need in sufficient time to prevent their condition from deteriorating. The letter to the minister says that overcrowding in our province today is worse than it has ever been, and front line emergency physicians continue to express grave concerns regarding their inability to provide safe or timely care to patients presenting to our Emergency Departments . . . we are routinely failing to meet even the basic recommended times to assess and treat acutely ill patients arriving to our hospitals.

The report goes on to say:

We feel compelled to continue to advocate on behalf of our patients, and recently members of our section have met with yourself, Deputy Minister Ramotar, as well as Dr. Duckett, in order to inform our healthcare leaders that Albertans continue to suffer and receive substandard emergency care as a direct result of a lack of capacity within the system. Again, our data and feedback from Emergency Physicians throughout the province indicate that our overcrowding problem continues to worsen and we anticipate the potential catastrophic collapse of timely emergency care delivery in the upcoming months. There must be an intervention immediately.

So says Dr. Parks.

Beauchesne's 390 states that a motion for emergency debate must meet the test of urgency, meaning urgency of debate. That is "when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately."

Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that there is a government bill on the Order Paper titled the Alberta Health Act. The information that the government has released to us about the bill indicates that it does not address the crisis in emergency health services in the province. I know of nothing on the Order Paper that would allow this House an opportunity to address this issue. I believe that this is a most urgent matter which requires the full attention of the Assembly. We should

debate emergency department overcrowding today in this House so that the public can see where this Legislature stands on the matter and to advance possible solutions that will lead to better health outcomes for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my submission. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, then the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on this. We're dealing with a Standing Order 30 application; we're not having the debate yet, okay? The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has articulately explained, Standing Order 30 as well as what is in *Beauchesne's* clearly indicates that in order for a matter like this to be debated, it must be of urgent importance. I just wanted to on behalf of my colleagues say that I don't think that we could honestly have a more urgent matter come before this House. Truly, we are dealing with a matter of life and death. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood stated, Dr. Parks is very clear. The system, the emergency care system, is on the verge of collapse. Dr. Parks says in his letter that it must be dealt with immediately. There's a long list that has been tabled today – it was released to the media earlier today – of the incredible situations that have occurred in our emergency rooms: people having heart attacks and dying while waiting for care, receiving very distressing exams in public places, very private examinations in public places. This is serious stuff.

3:30

There is nothing on the Order Paper that's going to give us an opportunity to debate this, and if we don't debate this, if we don't find a solution to this, Mr. Speaker, people's lives are truly at stake here, and I think everyone in this Chamber knows that. So I would ask that you rule that we do get to have the opportunity today to debate this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to support this motion, and I will speak briefly to the urgency of it. I'll begin by reflecting on the minister of health's comments at a news conference last Wednesday, I believe it was, when he indicated that he himself had called around to the emergency rooms in Edmonton and Calgary to see how overcrowded they were. In total, there were something like 160 people at that moment waiting in Edmonton and Calgary emergency rooms to be admitted for beds that were not available, and that's pretty typical. So as we are standing here today at this moment, it's reasonable to assume that in Edmonton and Calgary alone there are about 150 people waiting in emergency rooms for beds and unable to get them.

Now, I would just like to briefly give you some specific examples, and these are taken from 25 pages of detailed notes given to me by emergency room doctors about their concerns. Every line refers to a case. I obviously won't read them all, but these are people at this moment who are in emergency care. Let me rephrase that. There are people just like the cases I'm going to read who are at this moment in emergency care.

Here's an example, documented events: "Significant cardiac ischemia, only place to assess was triage assess, admitted to [cardiac care unit] direct from waiting room." Next one: "COPD'er with

heart rate of 150 . . . in waiting room for 3hrs before bed available.” Another case: “Multiple chest pain patients in [waiting room], no beds available for exam.” They can’t even be properly examined, Mr. Speaker. Imagine: what could be more urgent than going to the emergency room with clamping pain on your chest and not having any space to be assessed? It doesn’t get more urgent than that.

Here’s another real-life example:

Recorded by 0600 shift Doctor: arrived at 0600, multiple patients in [waiting room] with prolonged waits, and in capital letters,

No Free Beds In Entire [emergency department] to see patients. Saw two complex elderly patients with significant pain who filled the two existing triage assess beds (so had no area to even do triage ECG’s, [electrocardiograms]). Assessed five patients from a chair in the alcove beside E-pod (a non patient care area with no curtains or equipment).

That’s happening in our emergency rooms as we speak.

Saw my first patient in an ED bed at 0845 . . . A patient with drug overdose and seizure arrived with EMS at 0549, and finally got into an ED bed at 1100 for assessment and treatment.

I’ll just read one more, Mr. Speaker, because I know how much you value time. I need to show the members here 25 pages of detailed cases. I could go on for hours.

A patient with a seizure was in the [waiting room] >5hrs awaiting assessment and treatment.

A seizure in a waiting room waiting five hours for assessment and treatment.

When I finished my . . . shift, patient was still not in a bed. It was a miserable day. On that day there was an [emergency in-patient] in the department who had been . . .

Get this, Mr. Speaker.

. . . an admitted patient in the [emergency department] for 1 whole week!

I don’t know what could speak more clearly to the urgency of this issue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwodsky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for bringing the matter forward at this time for discussion and those who have spoken before me. At the same time I don’t want to in any way, shape, or form detract from the seriousness of the situation although we do need some clarity on that, which I’ll get to in a moment.

Emergency room care is extremely important. We depend on it. We rely on it. That has been eloquently phrased by other speakers before me. I just want to endorse that I, too, recognize how important this particular issue is. That’s why they call it emergency.

However, I think what we need to deal with right now at this particular stage of the discussion, Mr. Speaker, following the presentation is: what constitutes urgency as defined or as has become the traditional definition in a House of Parliament such as we sit in today? More specifically, what are the criteria that would persuade a Speaker such as yourself or someone else to consider this a genuine urgency in terms of Legislature process?

Typically people will turn, as members have already, to *Beauchesne*, the sixth edition, 390, which has been cited. I just want to cite it again because it’s important for the public and for all members, particularly some who are new members and maybe don’t have as much experience with SO 30s as others here clearly do, to understand what 390 says. It says:

“Urgency” within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means “urgency of debate”, when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be

brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

You yourself have commented on this particular ruling on a number of occasions. One of the more recent ones, Mr. Speaker, obviously, was April 19, 2010. I know I need not remind you of that, but in your ruling on that day, which, by the way, was also health related – it dealt with ophthalmological services – you cited what some of the requirements were that talked to urgency as defined by our parliamentary system. As part of that definition you and others on previous occasions would look at urgency in terms of whether or not there are opportunities, specifically other opportunities than today, to discuss, debate, question, or otherwise refer to the subject at hand.

We have already heard today, for example, more than 20 questions in question period that talked about health care related issues, and many of them were focused on the emergency care circumstance. Previous speakers have already also read directly from some of the letters and quoted people who have written in. So I want to say that there have been opportunities. There will be more opportunities for question period, for example.

Secondly, there will be additional opportunities as well as we introduce the Alberta Health Act, which, by the way, is on the Order Paper. Thank you, hon. members; someone did refer to that. It is on page 13 of our Order Paper under Leave to Introduce a Bill, Alberta Health Act, and my name is cited there as well. So there are opportunities to discuss under that act care, health care, and access to that care, and that is partly what this is all about.

Again, I do not in any way, shape, or form want to diminish the importance of emergency care and looking after it, but I have taken action immediately, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services has taken action immediately. I will be meeting with the person who authored the letter tomorrow. Fortunate for him, he had a holiday booked and had to honour it. I respect that, so the soonest we can get together is tomorrow.

My last point, Mr. Speaker, is simply that adjourning all of the important business of this House will not result in a specific decision or a specific action to be taken by this House. Debate here will not culminate in anything new or different by way of specific action. Now, that is not to say that specific action is not under way. It is. We’re already opening 250 more beds in Edmonton and Calgary, for example. It’s a combination: acute-care beds, transition beds, subacute beds, and other continuing care beds. All of this is important. We’ve opened over 800 continuing care beds alone since April of this year.

3:40

We have a lot of things that are going on right now. I answered some of those questions earlier, Mr. Speaker. I will not take the time of the House other than to say that the issue of understanding what urgency is in terms of legislative process is a lot different than understanding urgency in terms of the matter itself as clarified in *Beauchesne*.

I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’ve given opportunity for all groups to participate with respect to this. It’s 19 minutes to 4 o’clock on a private members’ day. I am prepared to rule on whether the request for leave to proceed is in order.

First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has met the requirement for providing at least two hours’ notice to the Speaker’s office. Notice was received in my office this morning at 8:39 a.m.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed could be put to the Assembly, the chair must rule whether

the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to “a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.” Needless to say, members have already pointed out parliamentary authorities on this subject, *Beauchesne*’s in paragraphs 387 to 390 and pages 689 to 696 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and we know what the motion is.

I’ve been listening intently to the arguments put forward to the Standing Order 30 application, and I certainly would like to thank the hon. members who participated for participating. There’s no doubt in the chair’s mind that the issues concerning emergency medical services are of considerable importance to Albertans. The last time that the Assembly met was, I believe, April 21 of 2010, nearly six months or so ago. Today there were 18 hon. members recognized in the question period. Ten of the questions basically related to health-related matters, emergency related matters and the like.

This is normally a private members’ day. I heard that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere indicated that this was probably one of the most vital and one of the most important items that one could look at, and it’s his bill that would be scheduled for today, so I presume that on private members’ day that hon. member would be quite prepared to have his bill moved down the Order Paper to be dealt with another day. That gives you, I guess, an indication of the seriousness of what this is all about.

I heard the minister indicate that he’s visited some 23 or more emergency rooms in recent days, and there’s always an opportunity for new ideas to be generated.

If you look at page 695 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the chair may also “take into account the general wish of the House to have an emergency debate,” and the chair did hear that from a number of people. The reflection of 10 questions out of 18 earlier this afternoon, including questions on health from government members, would suggest that there is a general willingness to proceed with the debate on this matter.

As a result of all of that, I do find that the request for leave is in order, but there is a process we have to follow. I have to put forward a question to you on this, and there are some ways that this can go. Before putting the question to the Assembly, I would like to remind you of the rules governing the procedure once the chair finds a request for leave in order. I’ve found the request for leave to be in order. Standing Order 30 requires that the question be put to a vote of the Assembly.

If there are any objections to the question, then the chair will ask those members who support the motion to rise in their places. If 15 or more members rise, the debate will proceed, and each member who wishes to speak will have 10 minutes to do so until all who wish to speak have done so until the normal House adjournment. Okay? If 15 or more members rise, we go immediately; I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to proceed.

If at least five members rise but less than 15, the question of whether the member has leave to move adjournment of the ordinary business is put immediately and, if necessary, is determined by division. So if five to 14 members rise, we have a vote. If fewer than five members rise, the motion will not proceed despite the fact that the chair will ask: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

[There being objection taken to the question, the Speaker requested that those members who support the motion rise in their place. Ten members rose, which under Standing Order 30(4)(b) required the Speaker to immediately put the question whether the member has leave to move the ordinary business of the Assembly]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a division with respect to a question arising out of a Standing Order 30 application: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed? Because of the very nature of the rules a certain number of people rose, which automatically clicked in the procedure for the bells. The bells have now rung. Ten minutes have gone by. This is a simple majority vote.

For the motion:

Anderson	Hehr	Mason
Blakeman	Hinman	Notley
Boutilier	Kang	Taft
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Amery	Horner	Prins
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Redford
Brown	Knight	Renner
Calahasen	Liepert	Rogers
Campbell	Lund	Sandhu
DeLong	Marz	Snelgrove
Denis	Mitzel	Vandermeer
Doerksen	Morton	Weadick
Drysdale	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Fawcett	Olson	Xiao
Griffiths	Ouellette	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 13	Against – 33
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The Speaker: That application has not been approved by the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you also had a Standing Order 30 application.

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today at the appropriate point in the proceedings I had given oral notice of my desire to move a Standing Order 30 to adjourn the regular course of business to debate what we felt and still feel is a very urgent piece of public business that requires debate. I am very aware that this is private members’ day today, and I will move as quickly as I can through this as I wish to have this considered as quickly as possible.

The motion, which has been delivered to the table and which I read into the record earlier, is to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss the urgent matter of

the sale of approximately 16,000 acres of environmentally significant Crown-owned land near Bow Island for commercial agricultural use in a region with no open water allocation, without public consultation or adequate valuation, which will adversely affect protected and endangered species and habitat.

4:00

Under the urgency argument, Mr. Speaker, again referring you to the usual sections in *Beauchesne* and in the new Canadian *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, this development requires irrigation. We have been given an indication, both in this House today but also from those that are more closely affected than I am, that cabinet is considering this decision imminently. This truly

brings into sharp focus the urgency of the decisions that are being made here, particularly around the fact that this development will require irrigation. There is no public knowledge of where the water will come from. The South Saskatchewan and Bow rivers have been closed to new water allocations, so that public question of water, everyone's fresh glass of drinking water, remains unanswered. The urgency for a discussion before the government makes a final decision is very relevant to my motion.

The concern throughout the nation is that water allocation is a critical issue. Water crosses our borders to other provinces and flows downstream, or not, to municipalities. Concern over availability of drinking water for residents is high. There is a question about real oversight regarding the sale of this public land owned by all Albertans because the government is refusing to have a public consultation on it and is falling back under the regulations. Given that they are selling this as agricultural land, they are allowed not to have public consultations, but that does mean that there's a very short timeline. The economic, environmental, and social impacts on people of that community and further is definitely urgent. So there is an issue of urgency around limiting public oversight.

The parameters in *Beauchesne* 387 to 398, whether there is opportunity for debate under the rules and provisions of the House, just very quickly. There are no other opportunities available to us, Mr. Speaker. It's not before the courts. It wasn't mentioned in the throne speech. There's no government bill on the Order Paper. There's no private member's public bill on the Order Paper. It wasn't outlined or any discussion of it alluded to in the government media release of October 19 that outlined the government's legislative session for the fall. The release date of a supplementary supply budget and what opportunity there might be for debate is also unknown at this point and also not expected. There's no notice for anything else on the Order Paper, written questions or motions for returns, that might satisfy that requirement for debate. We did ask a leader's question in Oral Question Period today and tried to set the issues out in a private member's statement, and we have been rebuffed by the government in attempts to get answers to our question.

Given that this is being reviewed today – we'd heard that it was going to be reviewed on Friday, now perhaps today or tomorrow. This is a decision that's being made without public consultation. It very much affects the land, the wildlife, and the habitat, and that has an effect on generations to come. Our ability to have any input on this decision, to have any public scrutiny and oversight on this decision, is very limited in time in that cabinet is deciding, and once that decision is made, it's moving on.

Again, I underline how urgent the issue of water allocation is. We have long awaited changes to the government's water management plan. We've not had anything in that, and especially relevant is the lack of the South Saskatchewan land-use plan. There seems to be a race to get this done by the government before that land-use plan comes into play. That, again, is the urgency of making this a full and public debate.

Given those concerns that I have raised, the moratorium on the issuance of new water licences over the basin for a number of years because of the water scarcity, where's that water coming from? It's also stressed the aquatic ecosystems there. There is no environmental assessment that we're aware of. There was no information coming from government on an environmental assessment around this land sale, with the fact that it is being rushed through before the South Saskatchewan regional land-use framework would come into effect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on this point. It's the Standing Order 30 application we're talking about.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We stand as the Wildrose caucus to support this urgent debate on the sale of 16,000 acres of Crown land. The reason why it's so urgent is because of all of the information that has come out in the news. The minister has even gone on to say that they would donate the proceeds from this to an environmental group, which just shows the problems in the whole situation.

In a democracy we allow an open debate. If this isn't brought forward now, at any date it's imminent that this could be signed and pushed through without any debate here in the House and certainly no input from those on the outside. A democracy also allows for competition, and there is none allowed. If we don't have the debate today, it's too late. If the minister signs off and sells this land, there's no opportunity for these other groups to even bid and purchase that. It wouldn't surprise me one bit if a wildlife group would come up and bid more money than perhaps the group that's put the proposal forward.

It's so critical that we have this debate today because of the news that's been leaking out there with this government saying that they're going to sign this off and that it's okay: we've been doing this for a hundred years. It isn't okay. We need to have the public debate. I would urge every member in here to vote in favour of this so that we could have the open debate.

The idea that we have question period and that allows for a debate: that's a 30-second question. There's no debate. There are no ideas. There are no proposals allowed to be put in there, and there certainly are no answers. As you often say, Mr. Speaker, it's question period, not answer period. They were asked earlier, and they weren't in there.

We need to have a debate. It's urgent because of the fact that the government has said that, yes, they're looking at it, and they could sign it any day. We'd urge all members to support this so that we could have an emergency debate and have the proper democratic process here in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Other members to participate on the Standing Order 30 application? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Knight: Yes. Mr. Speaker, this clearly is not a matter of urgency. What we have in front of us and what this is all about is a proposal. It's a proposal that has not been and may never be concluded. The opposition is clearly predicting a future course of action of the government, and as usual I would suggest that the opposition is determining government action based on newspaper articles, headlines, and TV ads. In reality this proposal for ag development will be assessed for its merits relative to conservation, environmental protection, wildlife habitat, and the economic impact in the region.

Mr. Speaker, the standing order, I believe, does indicate that in order for a motion to proceed, it needs to meet conditions. "The matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency." I would submit that this is not an emergency of any sort, genuine or otherwise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: That's it? Okay.

Hon. members, thank you very much for your position with respect to the Standing Order 30 application. The application was

received in the Speaker's office this morning at 10:54, and it certainly fulfills all the requirements in terms of the administrative side of this. Standing Order 30 clearly indicates "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

It has to do with a matter dealing with

the sale of approximately 16,000 acres of environmentally significant Crown-owned land near Bow Island for commercial agricultural use in a region with no open water allocation, without public consultation or adequate valuation, which will adversely affect protected and endangered species and habitat.

Needless to say, the discussion had nothing to do with the motion at the moment but the urgency of it all.

4:10

Based on the arguments put forward, particularly the arguments put forward by the minister in this case, who highlights that this is only a proposal, that this has not been advanced and may never be advanced, the chair has to listen very attentively to those kinds of words and presumes that this matter will be coming back in by way of debate in the question period and other activities in the days to come.

In this case I'm sorry, but I don't find the request for leave in order, and the question will not be put.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204

Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010.

Bill 204 proposes to limit year-over-year increases in overall government spending to the greater of either the rate of inflation plus population growth or to where total government per capita spending is equal to or lesser than the average per capita spending of Canada's remaining nine provinces, whichever number is greater.

This bill is necessary because our province currently is spending beyond its means and has been doing so for a very long time. Despite record-high revenues over the past five years, despite a recession that although difficult was not even remotely as deep or as long as the last two to hit Alberta, our financial picture has become very bleak. Our sustainability fund is, by the government's own rosy predictions, set to expire in roughly two years. We are not only burning through our savings but accruing billions in debt for future generations to pay. Sadly, any interest made on the heritage fund over the past decade has been spent on the here and now, leaving not one cent for our kids and grandkids during a time when our natural resources have never been worth more and may never be worth this much again.

[Mr. Mittel in the chair]

This government's per person spending has been first or second in the country for a very long time. Not only is this unsustainable but Albertans are not getting sufficient value for this spending. We see this with a health care system on the brink of collapse, as our emergency docs have said this past week, and we see this with a

massive school shortage in many municipalities, like Airdrie and Chestermere, while perfectly good schools in other communities are closed and unnecessary new ones opened.

We are building billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure with no money left over to staff it. We may be building a lot of buildings and roads, but how can we expect our children to staff and maintain it all 20 years from now if we can't even afford to do it today? What kind of legacy is that? The temptation to impress constituents with unnecessary frills, the knee-jerk reaction to solve societal problems with public spending, and a general desire to be seen to be doing something regardless of how effective it is have become far too ingrained in our political culture.

We owe it to our children to change this culture of waste and government largesse. In my view, spending away our rainy-day fund within a short few years and piling up billions in new debt on the backs of future generations to dull the pain of a self-inflicted spending hangover is the height of irresponsibility. So, too, is expanding the size of government entitlement programs to the point where the only way to adequately fund them is to substantially raise taxes and to increase debt on future generations.

Bill 204 is the first step in a spending addiction recovery program. If we can take this first step as a province, the road back to fiscal sustainability is achievable. Not only does this kind of spending guideline make intuitive sense, it is not a new invention. Similar initiatives have proven to be very effective in other jurisdictions, and this plan is endorsed by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Fraser Institute, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, among others.

Let me take a moment to head off some misconceptions that I've heard surrounding this legislation. First of all, Parliamentary Counsel has confirmed that it is not a money bill and is therefore suitable for introduction as a private member's bill.

Some are concerned that if we fall behind other provinces in spending, we will not be able to deliver some of the core government services as well as other provinces do. To this I would point out that the formula calls for a limit in spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth or a spending increase equal to the average per capita program spending of Canada's remaining nine provinces, whichever number is greater. Accordingly, when this legislation eventually brings us back into the middle of the pack in terms of per capita provincial spending – and given our lead, this will take some time – we will be able to remain there and not fall behind other provinces.

Others have wrongfully pointed to problems in California. As we know, California is dealing with program cuts required to meet their balanced budget legislation. Balanced budget legislation is not the same as spending limitation laws. They are two entirely different pieces of legislation.

As we know too well in Alberta, revenues can swing wildly from year to year. This may mean that in a severe downturn revenues may plummet so dramatically that achieving a balanced budget is impossible without substantive cuts. That's not what this law does. Bill 204 limits year-over-year spending increases. It actually insulates governments from the need to drastically slash spending because it guards against massive overspending during good times so that when revenues do drop sharply – and sometimes they do – the need for cuts, if any, will be much, much less.

For a better comparison we should look to the state of Colorado, which passed a taxpayer bill of rights in 1992, that included a provision that government spending cannot exceed inflation plus population growth. Because of this law Colorado taxpayers enjoy a robust economy at lower tax rates than most other states. Their deficit during the past recession was very, very small compared with

other states. In fact, the success of their innovative move in 1992 prompted many other U.S. states to pass expenditure limitation laws of their own.

Bill 204 will also make our long-term fiscal planning much stronger. By knowing what our expenditures will be down the road, we'll be better able to engage in long-term tax and debt reduction planning. This bill will also allow for a more manageable long-term saving strategy to be put in place. This is due to the economic fact that over the long term GDP and the tax revenues generated therefrom will outstrip the rate of inflation and population growth. This means we can save more and that we can tax less over time. What a legacy that would be. We could turn a sea of volatile, nonrenewable oil and gas into a mountain of permanent investment capital accruing with interest each and every year.

Another benefit of this bill and one that should appeal to the members opposite is that it will help moderate the expectations of the public as well as public-sector workers when it comes to how much the government is able to spend. Politicians will be able to use this legislation to help stiffen their resolve when it comes to saying no to things that are not priorities or to saying no to massive wage hikes that taxpayers simply cannot afford. While I believe the stability this bill offers will be positive for our social programs in the long run, making them far more efficient than they are today, it will still have the effect of curtailing the size and the scope of government bureaucracy. Departments will look for innovative ways to provide more efficient and better services by reallocating existing resources rather than simply asking for more funding while perpetuating outdated and wasteful programs and practices.

The bottom line is this. If our federal and provincial governments of the day had controlled spending in this way starting in 2000, both would be running surpluses this year despite being in the midst of a global slowdown. According to the calculations of CFIB inflation and population growth have increased by 72 per cent since 1997. Program expenditures, on the other hand, have increased 159 per cent, more than double that rate. Infrastructure is not even part of that calculation. That's just program expenses like staffing and overhead.

If Alberta's government had adopted this initiative in 1997, our financial future would be something we could be proud of. The \$852 million deficit of 2008 would have instead been a \$9.85 billion surplus. Even if we had only adopted it in 2002, our surplus in 2008 would have been \$6.36 billion. This year, instead of projecting a record \$7.6 billion cash deficit that is wiping out our emergency savings, we would be running a small surplus, one backed by a large sustainability fund and a heritage fund much larger than the one we have today. Instead of letting our heritage fund run down with stock prices and raiding its gains when investments rebound, we would have been making substantial contributions to it over the last five years. This would be a legacy we could have been proud of. It is a legacy that we can still build, but we have to start now, and passing Bill 204 is a first step in the right direction.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere because clearly this bill, that is put forward by a private member, really is about guarding against waste. It allows for better planning in the long term and also in the medium term, not to mention in the immediate short term. Factoring in the key components of inflation and population growth I think is clearly an example of what Martha

and Henry have been doing in their homes. It is an Alberta value. It's a value of how we care for our home. Do we go forward and spend like drunken sailors, or do we go and try to manage within the economics of what we're faced with today? Martha and Henry, who ultimately are all of our bosses in our constituencies, where we live, have told us: government, you need to operate like we operate in our Alberta households.

4:20

This bill really is a road map, and it's anchored by the pragmatism of Alberta values, Alberta values that talk about: spend within reason; don't spend more than what you have. No matter how good the times are or how bad the times are, we want to ensure that our future is looked after.

It's interesting. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, I know, has a family of four boys aged one to six years old. This is really not about today; it's about tomorrow. It's about our future and about our children. Earlier today the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake said about the grade 6 schoolchildren he introduced: our future leaders. Well, this very private member's bill is exactly about what the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake talked about in terms of our children. It is about putting a fence around spending.

I see the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster; I see the member from Bragg Creek. Clearly, the Treasury Board president and the minister of finance have demonstrated in past years the importance of putting a rein on spending. Really, I'm sure they'll probably go out and consider buying the hon. member a ginger ale after this because of the motion of this. I see the hon. minister of finance shaking his head in agreement, so I can assume from that that he will be supporting this actual private member's bill. I'm glad to see that, and I will continue on since this is my time at this time.

The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's four boys: clearly, it is about our future and the economics. As the OECD countries have mentioned in the past, Canada in its spending, in terms of what's taking place in health care today and in this private motion, is an example of a train wreck ready to happen. Let's avoid it. Let's keep this on the rails. I believe this road map the hon. member is talking about is a very helpful road map. To the Minister of Transportation: a road map is always good because it sets the path in terms of where we go in the future. This will be for protecting those very children that he introduced today and all of our children.

I ask the hon. members in this Assembly today, clearly, to support this important economic road map in terms of laying a foundation and putting a fence around some of the needless and wasteful spending that has taken place before.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, as sponsored by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Essentially, this piece of legislation aims to place restrictions on current and future legislators by limiting annual increases in government spending. It would amend the Fiscal Responsibility Act by limiting spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth as determined by Stats Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member's intentions in bringing forward this piece of legislation. After all, fiscal prudence and responsibility are the cornerstones of this government. Fiscal responsibility allowed this government to eliminate the deficit and pay off nearly \$23 billion in debt, and it allowed us to save billions of dollars in the sustainability fund in the event of future economic

downturns. These policies have positioned Alberta to weather the current economic downturn better than most any other jurisdiction in North America. Furthermore, this government has committed itself to eliminating the current deficit within three years. We'll do so by controlling the growth of spending, which can certainly be accomplished without legislation.

Mr. Speaker, while I agree with the spirit of the intent of this legislation, I don't believe that it should be the law, and that was a clear message that we got from our party membership a year ago, when they defeated a similar resolution brought forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I will respect the message that we got from Albertans that day after a very healthy debate.

While limiting spending to inflation plus population growth is one method to control spending, it's not without flaws and limitations. For example, annual population growth does not necessarily match the practical demand on government for services, programs, and infrastructure. We all know that the requirement for government to spend money does not always come in small, predictable, bite-sized pieces, as was certainly evident in recent years, and it's impacted by many factors, including changing demographics. As an example, in the years to come, Alberta's seniors population will grow faster than our average population growth. For our government and for future governments this will mean a significant increase in the needs for seniors supports and medical services, that I do not want to hold from those people.

Other examples are postsecondary education, whose enrolment may not coincide with total population growth, and employment services or community supports, whose needs are more closely tied to global economic factors than local population increases.

Another real example is the 6 per cent increase allocated to Alberta Health Services over the next three years. Mr. Speaker, this certainly would not fit in with this formula. As calculated by the Minister of Health and Wellness, this 6 per cent comes from 2 per cent for inflation estimates, 2 and a half per cent for demographic changes in health care, and 1 and a half per cent for changes in innovation, pharmaceuticals, and different types of treatments. Certainly, that does not align with this kind of formula, but I think most Albertans agree that that's very prudent.

Essentially, total population growth is not an accurate reflection of the financial demands on government. Furthermore, a large component of government spending is comprised of wages, and these contracts can often be influenced by the demand for and supply of skilled labour and wages in the private sector and in other provinces, and they're often negotiated in multiyear terms. For these reasons government settlements may not be in line with general inflation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 does not reflect the need for government to be responsible to acute regional challenges or to plan ahead for economic growth. The oil sands area and the community of Fort McMurray are a beautiful example of that. Periodically larger investments and infrastructure, transportation, and other social services are required and are indeed prudent. Currently Alberta is investing large amounts in infrastructure. This flexibility enables us to invest at a time when the value for money is at its peak and at a time when we need to keep Albertans working. Furthermore, this investment positions us for economic recovery, and frankly it responds to the demands of Albertans.

This member may want us to reduce spending, but according to his comments it seems it only applies to other constituencies and not necessarily his own. We should remind ourselves that today our revenues do in fact exceed our expenditures for operating costs. When you have a close look at the budget, the current deficit is actually created by a measured and aggressive investment in

Alberta's infrastructure. That's a strategic and deliberate decision, that this member actually contributed to, and by funding those capital assets through our savings, our sustainability fund, we are not accumulating debt like other jurisdictions are doing. This member claims we are piling up billions in new debts on the backs of future generations. Well, Mr. Speaker, piling up savings at the expense of not spending on infrastructure would leave an infrastructure debt for future generations, which is indeed a debt for future generations.

I would encourage all members to go and ask their constituents if they believe we should cut our current infrastructure expenses. I believe we all know the answer to that question before we ask it. A law restricting spending would obstruct the ability of government to make any significant strategic periodic investments in infrastructure or programs when it makes the most sense.

Albertans are no strangers to volatile revenue conditions, and this recession has been no different. Years of unprecedented economic growth quickly gave way to the deepest recession in decades, but Alberta is exposed more than most to the ebb and flow of a resource-based economy, and it is due to this economy that Albertans must have the flexibility to soundly manage its fiscal framework in times of both economic prosperity and recession. Budget 2010 outlined a responsible and measured path to deal with our current difficulties without drastic sacrifice of the essential services that Albertans depend on.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, and most important to me, is that this bill restricts the ability of future legislators and future generations to budget as they see fit. As a wise man once said, it's easy to predict the past, but we do not have a crystal ball, and we don't know what challenges may lie ahead for us or for our children or our grandchildren. Why would we think we know what's best for the Alberta of 2030 or the Alberta of 2050? Why would we want to set up even more challenges for future generations by implementing this legislation, which would restrict the choices they can make and the tools that are at their disposal to enable success? Do we not have confidence in our children to make wise choices? I also have confidence that the legislators of today and of the future will make the best possible choices based on the requirements and the direction of Albertans.

4:30

While I understand why the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere would bring this bill forward as one possible method of ensuring predictable expenditures, I do not believe it's the right fiscal plan for Alberta. Bill 204 may make sense on paper, but when you have to deal with real-life people and real-life challenges and real-life demographics, it's not practical, and it does not reflect the realities of budgeting and planning for Albertans. It would hinder this government's ability to be accountable to Albertans, it would make it more difficult to save and invest according to the needs of dynamic Albertans, and it would obstruct this government and future governments from adequately responding to unforeseen challenges and opportunities. I agree it's good policy, but I believe it's bad law. The allocation of resources is one of the most difficult and important jobs legislators have, and I am not prepared to abdicate that responsibility or to strip it from future generations.

For those reasons I will not be supporting Bill 204, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 204. When my children were young, my husband and I didn't have a lot of money. What money we did have went to

paying the mortgage, making sure the utility bills were paid, and buying food. These were what we considered the essentials in life. Because we set out a plan and budgeted for these expenses, any money that was left over went into our savings account. We knew that sometimes there would be unexpected spending emergencies or temporary shortfalls in our income, and this way they would be covered. When we got raises or sometimes unexpected amounts of money in a given year, we tried to keep our budget basically the same because we knew we could live just fine this year on the budget that worked for us last year.

There were two things that made us have to increase our budget, and one was inflation. Obviously, when the cost of gas or groceries goes up, you have to adjust your budget if you can afford to. The other thing that made it necessary to increase our family budget was having children.

This makes obvious sense, and I believe it works as well for government as it does for family. This is what fiscal responsibility means to our family and many other families. To us fiscal responsibility meant that your outgo did not exceed your income. What this meant to us as a family was that one could use credit or have debt to some degree but the challenge was deciding what was permissible debt and what was luxurious debt. For my husband and I there was only one good reason to be in debt, and that was to pay for a house, as there are not a lot of people who can purchase their house in cash.

Mr. Speaker, we have spent many decades operating our household with the understanding that sometimes I can't have what I want when I want it just because I want it. The point I'm trying to make is that because my husband and I budgeted, we knew exactly how much money we had to spend. Just because we made more money one year didn't mean we had to throw last year's budget out the window.

Knowing what you need to spend money on and sticking to it is the key to fiscal responsibility, and that is essentially, in my mind, what Bill 204 is trying to accomplish. Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, will allow the government to curb the kind of runaway spending that we have seen in recent years by implementing a spending cap of inflation plus population growth or the average spending of Canada's remaining provinces, whichever is higher.

What does fiscal responsibility truly mean? Does it mean eliminating the deficit, or does it mean getting the deficit under control? Better yet, Mr. Speaker, what do Albertans want to see? Well, I can only tell you what I have heard over the last many, many months. Albertans want us to establish a tradition of planning, which means they want departments to run efficiently, and they want departments to run with clear outcomes. They want the government to clearly assess needs, and they want the government to clearly set priorities.

Albertans believe effective budgeting and long-term planning is key. Albertans have clearly told us: it is very easy to say no to everything; it is harder to evaluate our province's responsibilities, look at past performances, assess the needs of each department, and decide where the money should go.

Let me give you an example of what I mean, Mr. Speaker. As an MLA I have spent a lot of time talking to the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek. Not once do I remember any constituent in Calgary-Fish Creek telling me to come up with a new slogan for Alberta. They quite liked Alberta advantage. They liked what it meant, and they liked having Alberta advantage as their slogan. Yet the government went ahead with \$25 million over three years on rebranding our province. What a waste of money. The money that was spent on this foolish initiative could have been used for – let me think. How about home care for a few thousand seniors to free up acute-care beds?

Mr. Speaker, we must be fiscally responsible and live under spending restraints in the same manner that our Alberta families do. The government members will stand up and talk about the downturn in the economy – and, you know, I truly understand that – even though it was made a lot worse in the province because of the government's poor policies.

The Member for Athabasca-Redwater speaks about how members from their Progressive Conservative convention did not support the motion from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Well, Mr. Speaker, as someone who was on the other side, I saw hundreds and hundreds of motions or resolutions go through the convention floor when I was a member of the Progressive Conservatives. What happened to them? One of the biggest criticisms from the Progressive Conservatives who went to the convention was: what's happening to the motions and resolutions that hit the floor?

We also know that resource revenues in this province are subject to fluctuations which make it nearly impossible to forecast a specified revenue level. That's why our spending should be more independent of nonrenewable resources. We have seen this before and, quite frankly, should have learned the lesson already. Mr. Speaker, I love the Boy Scout's slogan, and I think it's a good one: Be Prepared.

I'm like many Albertans; I want us to restore the Alberta advantage. Alberta should be leading this country in fiscal responsibility, not in big government and not in huge debt. I urge everyone to support the bill so that our fiscal future will be on solid ground.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess this is what private members' business is for: to have an idea, and you can kind of dance around the facts a little bit and try and get across your point. And that's fine. The hon. member has his turn at the draw, and he's made it.

The problem I have with putting in a significant policy such as one that would limit your government's opportunity to look after its citizens, whether it be population plus inflation or whatever formula you want to jiggle around and come up with, is that in private members' business and committee we'll have roughly two hours to talk about the ramifications of what that might mean to health care or to seniors or to children's services: all departments that have tremendous stress, even more so in times of a downturn.

In the House, Mr. Speaker, we bring the budget in, and we spend roughly 70 hours in committee questioning the departments and the different ministries on where their priorities are. I don't think that it's practical for a private member to suggest that two hours in committee would set the tone for a government as compared to 70 hours every year to talk about the priorities.

The other flaw, and there are many, is in saying: well, you know, we don't have to deal with disasters; we can deal with them separately. That's true, but we also have other departments that have funding that they must account for, that they have no choice in. Environment, for example, maintains the carbon fund. That is an industry fund that revolves through their department, counts against their targets, but they really have no say in how much is contributed. It depends on the amount of buy-up there is and how much is to be spent back out. So if you're going to limit overall government spending, you may in a way be actually stopping some of the really good environmental initiatives that we have.

4:40

Some of the funding we're owed by the federal government, for example, health care. If we were to receive, finally, the roughly

\$800 million that Albertans are rightfully owed by the federal government on behalf of health care transfers, if you were to limit our spending to population plus inflation, we wouldn't be able to take it. We could take it, I guess, and put it in the bank, but the people that they've talked about all afternoon waiting for emergency room service probably wouldn't appreciate that very much.

Mr. Speaker, it also is important when they talk about: well, we can cut back on infrastructure. Like the Member for Athabasca-Redwater said, it's funny when you have your infrastructure how easy it is to suggest that others don't need it. For the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to suggest in any way, shape, or form that the area that he pretends to represent can possibly build the infrastructure and provide the services they need for the next ten years on population plus inflation is to suggest that he's not in touch with what's going on in his own backyard. To suggest that the growth areas like Airdrie, Lloydminster, Grande Prairie, and others will be able to just manage on population plus inflation: "Oh, well, just take it from someone else. As long as we get our own, we're good. As long as we make a headline, it appears that they're happy."

Mr. Speaker, the budget of Alberta deserves the full and complete attention of this Assembly for the time that's allocated at this point, and the people will continue to make decisions on that budget. For as long as they have this government they will be the ones in charge of where the priorities are in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't hear you there with the roaring applause that we got for this government for wanting to have no constraints on its spending.

It's interesting in these tough times how they spin the story. It wasn't too long ago when this government had huge surpluses, and thank heavens they had the foresight or, should I say, the problem that they couldn't spend enough money, that they were forced to have a sustainability fund. Back earlier, when for the first time in years we were running surpluses, in 2005, they changed their attitude. Rather than saving any surplus, it was to spend. It's interesting that the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater said, you know: well, in tough times we have a great opportunity to increase our spending because the price is down. But the real problem was that we spent \$18 billion on infrastructure in about an 18-month period when the price was double what it currently is.

Government constraint is the toughest thing to do when you have free access to spend other people's money. It's very easy, and this government has fallen into that problem, that when something starts to come unfolded and there's a problem in front of them, they say: well, throw money at it. Yet they don't look at the consequences.

Let's just talk about the emergency room dilemma that we're being faced with right now and the shortage of beds. For two and a half years the Premier, the Executive Council, everybody knew that there was a problem, but we hadn't had a crisis yet, so it was ongoing. We've spent hundreds of millions of dollars building new facilities to shut down old ones that were still functional. To think that there's no way that we could move forward without spending a lot of money just simply isn't true. There are many, many good ways of planning to have that sustainability.

Let's go back and realize that in 2005 going through to 2008 a tremendous amount of money was spent on infrastructure. They were chasing the dollar and those people who could provide those services right up the ladder of expenses. We were spending an enormous amount of money. We even had bids put out where no

bids were accepted because they couldn't do it, so we had a real problem. What does it come back to? It's fiscal restraint. Had there been restraint, where they couldn't increase their spending because the inflation and the population hadn't jumped that much, we would've had a lot more money in the sustainability fund. More important is that you'd have that gradual increase that is sustainable.

We continue to ask and press this government for what their 10-year sustainability plan is. They say that they have one. What's their infrastructure plan? Put that list out, and show this highway 63, this highway 3 to Medicine Hat. Prioritize it, and let us see where it is and what the estimates are on those. But, more important, if this government really wants to ensure that the tax dollars are spent right, that restraint needs to be there where they don't cycle and say: oh, we got some extra money; let's bid high and get all this done this year. This is about the boom years. That's when the restraint needs to be kept in. Had we kept that restraint in during the boom years and not spent our money foolishly, then we would have had lots more in the kitty right now in the heritage trust fund and the sustainability fund. More importantly, we could have had sustainable growth through our infrastructure. We could have addressed those areas.

It's interesting that the member says that Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, and Airdrie wouldn't be able to address their needs. They're correct. They wouldn't with the current formula that this government has. They suck a huge amount of money out of these communities and refuse to send any back. We need to change the political scene and the way we divide the dollars up.

If we were to change and acknowledge that we have three levels of government and only one taxpayer and to turn the three levels of government into, let's say, a think tank and say, "Okay; how are we going to divide up our responsibilities? How are we going to divide up our spending?" we wouldn't get the overlap that we have. Currently the federal government can take money from the taxpayer, the provincial government can take money from the taxpayer, and the municipal government gets the last dibs at it on property taxes and a few other local access fees and other things that they might throw at us. Then the taxpayer is left in this dilemma: you know, for the infrastructure that we need here, there aren't the tax dollars here.

If we were to just take two steps back and look at the pool of money that leaves an area and say that a percentage was to come back on a formula base, then you'd see that boom areas like Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Calgary, all those areas that were booming – the capital is leaving. It's just not coming back because greedy government grabs hold of it and says: we're going to spend it on our pet projects. And that they do, whether it's \$2 billion for a CO₂ plant that isn't proven yet and jumping ahead on those things. But the point is that the government grabs it. We need to have that restraint.

This government has spent billions of dollars during the boom years at a very poor valuation for the taxpayers. Now they're saying: oh, we can spend billions of dollars now, which is going to help the taxpayers. But the problem is again going to happen. I don't know. There are still quite a few members here that were here back in 2003-2004, when the government decided that we wanted to be out of debt by 2005. They actually cut the infrastructure spending from about \$3 billion down to \$1.5 billion, and it absolutely destroyed the industry. All of a sudden there was twice as much capacity in the industry than the government was spending because they wanted to save at a time when they needed to be spending or to have that steady growth.

What this bill is about is the Fiscal Responsibility Act. That's why we need to pass this bill, to restrain government from uncontrolled spending, that they're always tempted to do when a problem

arises: “Oh, we’ll throw some money at it. We can make this area happy; we can appease this area.” The truth is that this government wants to be able to increase its political slush funds and spend them on areas where they deem the problem is in order to try and buy the votes, to bring those people in.

It’s interesting, though. You know, the groups – and again, people will say that these are conservative groups. I’d call them sound economic think tanks. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce has brought forward that we need to have this restraint on our spending to population and inflation. The Fraser Institute, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation are among the many that realize the importance of this bill.

This isn’t something to scoff at lightly and say: “Oh, we don’t need it. We don’t want to be restrained. We can’t respond to an emergency.” Those emergency aspects can and should be kept in a separate silo. If, in fact, we have a major problem with the pine beetle, forest fires, whatever it is, that’s very different. Everybody understands that when their house is burning, you throw all your resources at it. We’re not talking about those things. We’re just talking the day-to-day operations of this government saying: “Oh, we need to respond here. We need to respond to this one. Let’s spend some money here.” There’s no thought even to what the cost of building this building is, let alone what we’re going to have to spend to operate it or if we actually have the nurses and the doctors to operate this.

4:50

I found it amazing in question period today that the question was asked many, many times: where are you going to get the money for the 200 extra beds in order to appease the problems in the emergency rooms? Yet they seemed to say: oh, we put out a five-year budget. They can guarantee it. It’s going to be 6 per cent these next two years, as if the opening of 200 beds isn’t going to cost anything new. Here they are speaking to that when we already have a cash income deficit of over \$7 billion this year. The health boards had an over 13 per cent increase, I believe, to address their past one. They’ve already got every dollar allocated and spent. Then to say that we’re going to spend money on 200 more beds but just reallocate it from somewhere – they’ve already got a huge debt; they cannot reallocate the money.

This is the reason why you need to have fiscal restraint. It’s why you need to put it and pin it to something like population and inflation growth so that the money just isn’t wildly spent like drunken sailors, and then they look back and say: well, where is the money? They haven’t even looked at the fact that we’re going to open up 200 more beds. Do they have the nurses and the doctors to even fill those? Did they look at all of the costs? They’re not doing that.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker – and I think that it’s very relevant because they’re saying that we’ve discussed the budget. This is what it’s about. This government is throwing out new solutions daily that are costing hundreds of millions of dollars, and we’re not getting good taxpayers’ money. We need to do a better job. We need to have fiscal restraint. We can’t have this bulge in spending. Every time an extra dollar comes in, they don’t even think of the costs of being able to maintain those facilities or those people, keeping them hired, when we run out of money.

I will leave it at that. This is an important bill. It would serve the government well and would serve the taxpayers even better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to stand here today and share some thoughts on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, which is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. The central theme of Bill 204 is fiscal control and responsibility. This is a theme that this government knows quite well and a theme that I have personally taken to heart throughout my life. This government’s fiscal control and responsibility has propelled Alberta into arguably the best fiscal position in North America. Alberta has no debt and the lowest taxes in the country as well as long- and short-term savings for the future. We are the envy of our neighbours across North America. I would say that this shows that we have been incredibly fiscally responsible, especially when compared to other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of Bill 204 is to improve upon this already enviable scenario. However, I would argue that the proposal made by the proposed legislation might not address that goal. Specifically, Bill 204 proposes to limit government spending to a formula where total spending increases are equal to population growth plus inflation. In this formula both the rates of population growth and inflation would be determined by Statistics Canada and then would be multiplied by current government spending to determine the spending limit in the next year. It is also worth noting that under the proposed legislation spending exceptions would be made for disaster relief efforts.

My concerns with Bill 204 are twofold. Firstly, enacting legislation to control government spending effectively hampers the government’s fiscal flexibility. Secondly, tying government spending to a formula may not take into account Alberta’s volatile, resource-based economy. In short, governments must have the flexibility to act on economic changes and be accountable for those actions. Therefore, I believe that the ideals proposed in Bill 204 are well intentioned, but I am not convinced of its practical application.

The place for a government to exercise fiscal responsibility is through time-honoured vehicles like the throne speech and the annual budget process. Zero-based budgeting gives the opportunity to examine programs to see if they are still required or if they should be modified or eliminated. A standard formula for increases does not provide this incentive.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, my first concern is that Bill 204 would dramatically limit the government’s ability to be flexible in its year-to-year spending. Flexibility is important to every decision-maker, be they business leaders, governments, or households. In the household concept people need to be able to spend more money as they need to and save when they don’t. For example, it might be advantageous for a person to spend above a spending cap when goods are on sale or at bargain prices. This can help ensure getting value for your money.

This example holds true even if we take this example to the provincial level. As we have seen, during a period of economic slowdown the cost of commodities and labour may decrease. The cost of infrastructure, for example, can drop significantly. A wise government would use this decrease in cost to invest in public infrastructure projects. A bridge, roadway, or building could be built for far less than during a boom time. Essentially, this means that taxpaying citizens would be getting more for their tax dollar.

Mr. Speaker, if we were to enact proposals brought forth in Bill 204, we would not be able to reap benefits such as this. An economic downturn would come, and building prices would drop, but we would be unable to invest when prices are low. Now, some may argue that we would be able to simply shift funds from one department to another to take advantage of low construction costs. However, I would argue that initiating short-term cuts to programs

in order to pay for infrastructure at an opportune time may in fact do more harm than good.

The second concern I have with Bill 204 centres on how the proposed restrictions might not work with Alberta's volatile economy. Mr. Speaker, as we all know, Alberta's economy can change quickly. For example, during periods of economic boom Alberta can see a huge influx of people move into the province. These people all require government services such as education and health care, and it is our responsibility as a government to provide these services to them. Providing services for this influx of people could mean spending more than our budget allows for.

Now, it is true that the formula proposed in Bill 204 takes into account population growth. However, I would argue that during a period of economic boom the population of Alberta could rise at such a rate that this formula, which takes into account the population of the past year, might not be responsive to rapid population growth. Moreover, a budget based on population growth would not take into account Alberta's large shadow populations. After all, centres such as Fort McMurray can experience a huge influx of people that may not be taken into account by Statistics Canada's population figures. These are people that need services provided by the government of Alberta; these are people that need health care and transportation networks. These are people that must be budgeted for. The measures proposed in Bill 204 do not allow government the flexibility it needs to effectively provide services to Albertans in periods of economic boom.

Now, this is not to say that fiscal control and responsibility is a bad thing. As I said initially, I'm a strong proponent of fiscal responsibility. Rather, Mr. Speaker, sound financial management has always been a cornerstone of this government, and I would argue that our track record of debt elimination and tax reduction speaks for itself. This government has proven itself to be a wise steward of Alberta's wealth. Therefore, I would call into question the need for Bill 204. Government spending should meet the needs of Albertans now and into the future. This includes fiscal sustainability, which this government has practised in the past and will continue to practise in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I will state again that the intention of this bill is good. After all, fiscal restraint is something that most of us can agree on. However, I am unconvinced that the measures proposed in Bill 204 will effectively achieve its objectives or lead to any improvement in our already enviable fiscal situation.

The place for a government to exercise fiscal responsibility is through the time-honoured vehicles of the throne speech and the annual budget process. This government will show its accountability through these vehicles and be judged on its delivery of services to Albertans within its own fiscal guidelines.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it is 5 o'clock. Standing Order 8(1) requires that Motions other than Government Motions be called. Therefore, the time limit for the consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Child and Youth Health Charter

509. Mr. Rogers moved on behalf of Dr. Sherman:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health

charter sponsored by the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and begin debate on Motion 509 on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The intention of Motion 509 is to urge this government to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health charter. I believe that adopting this charter would contribute to the government's continuing goal of ensuring that all children in Alberta are provided with the right tools to maintain a healthy and secure livelihood.

I would first like to discuss how Canada's child and youth health charter was developed as well as to describe the promising framework that this charter provides. Mr. Speaker, the charter was developed through a collaborative process between the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada. These groups are driven by a strong commitment to create a new health legacy for the children of Canada. They hosted a workshop that brought together 40 experts, stakeholders, and key influencers in the area of child health in an effort to establish the framework of the charter.

The framework of this charter is dissected into three main categories. These categories are key to creating an environment where children can reach their full potential and grow up happy, healthy, and secure. Mr. Speaker, the three categories are as follows: children need to develop in, one, a place with a safe and secure environment, both environmental and social; two, a place where children and youth can have good health and development, providing the best child care and educational opportunities; and three, a place where a full range of health resources is available, providing state-of-the-art medical practices and research.

In addition to these three categories, five general principles are applied to each one, which are universality, limiting financial burden on our youth, barrier-free access, measuring and monitoring all progress, and providing safe and secure communities. Mr. Speaker, because this charter was authored by physicians who have first-hand knowledge of these issues, the framework is constructed in a way that will best ensure a child's healthy development.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to turn to and discuss the positive way in which our government is facilitating objectives to improve child and youth health and how adopting the Canada child and youth health charter would be yet another tool at our disposal to help us meet many of our established government programs. Our government is doing its part to ensure that child health and well-being is of the highest quality in Canada. Although Alberta does not have a child and youth health charter, the government of Alberta strategic business plan as well as business plans for ministries such as Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Wellness make similar commitments that are relevant to the charter.

For example, Mr. Speaker, the first commitment of the charter, stating that children need a place with a safe and secure environment, matches with goals 3, 6, and 7 of the Alberta strategic business plan 2010 to 2013, which ensures that, goal 3, the high quality of Alberta's environment will be sustained; goal 6, Albertans will be independent, and our children will be well cared for; goal 7, Alberta will be a safe place to live, work, and raise a family. Because motion 509 is aligned with our government's priorities and objectives for the health and well-being of children, it should be an easy transition to adopt this charter.

In addition to what our government already has in place, this charter will reaffirm with Albertans as well as the international community that the province of Alberta continues to make children's

health and well-being a top priority. Alberta has always been renowned for being a global leader in innovation and setting the pace for the quality of life for its citizens, and adopting this motion would be a clear continuation of this tradition. Since it has been endorsed by over 80 established organizations, including the United Nations, this further emphasizes our leadership in this area.

Another great opportunity that we gain by accepting this charter is that it places additional emphasis on such areas as childhood obesity, child mortality, injury, and mental health rates, areas of health care that are especially important to our government. Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that issues such as childhood obesity and child mortality rates are an ongoing concern in our province and in our nation. However, since this charter's introduction at the federal level there has been a positive decrease in these areas.

Finally and arguably, Mr. Speaker, it would be yet another tool that this government could use in order to ensure that child and youth well-being in Alberta remains sustainable, accountable, and transparent, values that Albertans have come to expect from this government.

I encourage all members in this Assembly to support Motion 509. Our children have a right to access the best possible care, and it is our responsibility to provide it to them. Government and all Albertans must work in a constructive manner to ensure that our children continue to enjoy the highest quality of life in Canada.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to speaking to Motion 509. First, I want to recognize the appropriateness of this motion coming from a physician, a man of integrity, a man who cares very deeply about the well-being of all Albertans but especially that of children. I also want to give a nod of support to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who so aptly outlined the importance of our House accepting this motion.

I am aware that a motion is basically a call for a direction. A motion suggests action but doesn't actually require action to be taken. A case in point: when this House unanimously accepted a motion that I put forward in terms of calling for a unified family court, with the help of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright changing that motion to calling for a unified family court process, there was unanimous agreement in the House that this is a direction that we should be pursuing. Unfortunately, that was the last we heard of it. I'm hoping that this will not be the case for Motion 509. For a motion to proceed to action, we will need a government commitment for a timeline and a funding commitment to ensure that the five principles that are enshrined in the goals statements include universality, without financial burden, barrier-free access, measurement and monitoring, and safe and secure communities.

A recent Stats Canada figure indicated that the number of children in Alberta living below the poverty line is approximately 78,000. We cannot deal with children's needs unless we first start to recognize the problems associated with poverty. We also in dealing with children's needs need to recognize such issues as child care, such issues as investing in their education. This government has yet to fulfill its requirements for the 2003 Learning Commission. It agreed seven years ago that it would be important to establish funding for full-day kindergarten. The government agreed back in 2003 that it would be important to establish half-day junior kindergarten.

When we compare our child care system or the support we provide for parents who choose to stay at home, for example to that of Quebec, we are so far behind in terms of providing support for families and providing support for children. We have to go beyond

the well-intentioned motherhood of this statement and enact it. There's no point in us patting ourselves on the shoulders and backs, saying: yes, we as an Assembly unanimously endorse this motion. We have a duty as elected representatives of our constituents to translate direction into action. That is extremely important to me.

5:10

We have other examples that this government was very reluctant and late in agreeing to. For example, there was the United Nations universal charter on the rights of children. Now, this government's reason for not endorsing it to the extent other provinces did was that, well, this was a federal matter, that the UN is talking about countries as opposed to provinces. However, that did not prevent other provinces from recognizing universal rights of the child.

I cannot imagine this motion not being accepted. But, again, the call to action is why I'm standing up today. Today in question period, for example, I talked about special-needs children and their needs not being met in this particular province. When I asked the hon. Education minister the question about "Well, now that coding is gone, what is it going to be replaced with so that we can be sure to recognize children's needs and then provide the necessary support to see that those needs are met?" the hon. minister had a very good observation. He said: well, all children are special. I agree with the idea that all children are special. I've devoted over half my life to advocating on behalf of children, 34 years in the classroom, and I'm particularly proud of being a grandparent the last six years.

Advocacy for children is extremely important, but again action is required. If we simply agree to the niceties, the necessities of Motion 509 but fail to act upon them, to bring them into the reality of our Alberta circumstance, where, despite being Canada's wealthiest province, we have the highest dropout rate in high school, we have the lowest postsecondary participation in the nation, we have the highest rates of suicide, the highest rates of divorce – these are not enviable statistics. Therefore, if we take Motion 509 first in accepting it as a direction but then actually put timelines to it and we say, for example, as was discussed in our deliberations over minimum wage, that we go forward with a poverty reduction strategy that takes into account the needs of families, then we'll have gone beyond just providing a nod, and we'll actually get to the point where we need to be for providing a direct action.

The previous bill that was debated was about sustainability and fiscal responsibility. I've put out two buttons in terms of trying to boil down the children's message to its lowest common denominator. One button for Children and Youth Services says Safe Kids Save Dollars. Another button message, which I tried to put into its most simple form, is Education Equals Economy.

What I'm calling for is the next step. When we as a House unanimously accept the positive directions that are being suggested as being necessary for a developed country with a conscience to implement, then we have to go the next step. I very much appreciate that this has been brought to our attention, but it has to get beyond a suggestion; it has to get to action. I hope this government initiates the action which will see the suggestion realized.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Motion 509 as sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Essentially, the motion urges the government of Alberta to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health charter with the goal of improving child and youth health throughout

Canada. The charter would commit Alberta to doing its part in ensuring that Canada becomes a place with a safe and secure environment. Isn't that what all of our children want, a safe and secure place, a place where children and youth can have good health and development, a place where a full range of health resources is available to all the youth in our country?

Mr. Speaker, these are goals that this government has and continues to support. After all, the health and well-being of our youth are critical to the future prosperity of our province. In fact, these goals are supported in the government of Alberta's strategic business plan as well as in business plans for the ministries, including Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Wellness. Furthermore, the recently released report from the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health, a foundation for Alberta's health system, recommends the creation of an Alberta patient charter in a newly created Alberta health act. This patient charter would outline the rights and responsibilities of citizens in health care and services.

Mr. Speaker, while many of these goals are already enshrined in government policy, I believe a child and youth health charter could be useful in addressing the unique health challenges facing Alberta's youth. The charter was developed through collaboration between the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada. Together these groups produced a charter to address issues such as childhood obesity and mortality rates as a result of workshops that brought together 40 experts, stakeholders, and other key stakeholders in child health.

The result was a document crafted by physicians who have expert, first-hand knowledge of child and youth health issues. Therefore, I believe the adoption of this charter could help shape even more beneficial and effective government policy on child and youth health in years to come. As such, I offer my support for Motion 509 in the hope that we can continue our efforts to improve the quality of life for our Alberta youth. Mr. Speaker, they deserve no less.

Thank you. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join debate on Motion 509:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to formally adopt Canada's child and youth health charter sponsored by the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

I can quite easily support this motion. In fact, I would be very surprised if everybody in this House doesn't support this motion. But as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity pointed out a couple of speakers ago, the key here is turning words into action. This is a motion by which, if we pass it here today, the Legislative Assembly will urge the government to adopt a charter as a policy document, and that certainly can lead to action. But I would be very intrigued to hear from government members opposite how much thought they had put into the action that they're prepared to take around this if the motion does pass today.

The Canada child and health youth charter was created in 2007 as a collaborative effort, as the Member for Lethbridge-West pointed out. Its goal is to provide our children across the country the ability to reach their full potential, growing up happy, healthy, confident, and secure, and to ensure that Canadian children are among the healthiest in the world.

5:20

It aims to achieve its goals through some 16 statements catego-

rized into three main headings which dictate that Canada must become:

1. A place with a safe and secure environment.

That means:

- (a) Clean water, air and soil;
 - (b) Protection from injury, exploitation and discrimination; and
 - (c) Healthy family, homes and communities.
2. A place where children and youth can have good health and development:
 - (a) Prenatal and maternal care for the best possible health at birth;
 - (b) Nutrition for proper growth, development and long-term health;
 - (c) Early learning opportunities and high-quality care, [both] at home and in the community;
 - (d) Opportunities and encouragement for physical activity;
 - (e) High-quality primary and secondary education;
 - (f) Affordable and available post-secondary education; and
 - (g) A commitment to social well-being and mental health.
 3. A place where a full range of health resources is available:
 - (a) Basic health care including immunization, drugs, and dental [needs]

because tooth decay is the single biggest health problem for children in our country;

- (b) Mental health care and early help programs for children and youth;
- (c) Timely access to specialty diagnostic and health services;
- (d) Measurement and tracking the health of children and youth;
- (e) Research that focuses on the needs of [our] children and youth; and
- (f) Uninterrupted care as youth move to adult health services and between acute, chronic and community care, as well as between jurisdictions.

That's a big chunk of things that the Canada child and youth health charter promises our children and that it defines as the things that we should be working on for our children, which we would buy into at least as a group of Legislative Assembly people here today if we pass Motion 509. We need to think about what actions we're actually prepared to take to move that forward because if we're not preparing an action plan to follow this or if we don't urge the government to prepare an action plan to follow this or if the government doesn't just go ahead and prepare one on its own, then these are just nice words on paper, on a charter, in *Hansard*, and they don't really, really mean much.

The Canadian child and youth health charter has good intentions, and its goal is to aim to improve the level of care for children in Canada. But it's pretty easy to argue that individually all 16 of the proposed points are already currently being achieved or don't specifically need to be worked toward, and there may be little or no change that comes as a result of this commitment. I'm not suggesting that I'm arguing that, but I'm suggesting that there is a series of easy outs and loopholes here for those who should be developing an action plan around this charter to use it to say, "Well, look, it's in our business plan; we're already doing this over here; we're already doing that" and point to the number of things that are being done without a coherent, cohesive, perhaps holistic approach to all 16 of these points to make sure that we're moving the ball down the field. In order to be effective, a motion like this needs to be accompanied by a plan of what each of the 16 points aims to achieve in Alberta, some sort of action strategy to go along with this charter.

It's also worth noting that the 16 points brought forward here also coincide with a lot of the goals that a poverty reduction strategy might be formed around. As the guy who proposed that we add a recommendation around that at committee when we were putting

forward recommendations on a minimum wage policy in this province, I would suggest that beyond this we do need to look at a poverty reduction strategy in the province of Alberta. This is one of only three jurisdictions in Canada that are not at least working on a poverty reduction strategy at this point.

Fighting poverty requires a strategy that involves co-ordination across all government departments. Many of the goals outlined in this charter are relevant to reducing poverty. Poverty is certainly relevant to reducing child health. This charter, if we adopt it or if we urge that the government adopt it, needs an action plan that involves a lot of co-ordination across government departments as well.

This is an interesting challenge and opportunity that we've presented ourselves here with Motion 509. I think it will pass this House. The challenge is not to get support for a motion like this. It would truly be challenging to vote against a motion like this because you wouldn't look like a good guy if you did. The challenge, though, Mr. Speaker, is to make sure, once we've actually recommended that the government do this, that we follow up as an Assembly, continuing to press the government to develop an action plan that will put these points into real practice on a daily basis for the benefit of our children.

You know, Mr. Speaker, just to close, one of the most frequently mentioned things I hear from my constituents and from people in other parts of Calgary is: what a great city Calgary is to raise a family in, to raise children in. I think that if I lived in Edmonton or Grande Prairie or anywhere else in this province, I would hear much the same thing. It is in principle and by and large it is very, very true, but we're not perfect. The fact that we're not perfect, I think, is part of the reason why we're here, to leave this place a little better than we found it. This charter, I think, has the opportunity, this motion has the opportunity to move us a little bit of the way along those lines. If we develop an action plan, then we'll have even more Calgarians and Edmontonians and people in the rest of Alberta saying: this is the greatest place in the country to raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Motion 509 urging the government to adopt Canada's child and youth health charter in the province of Alberta, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. In Alberta we value the notion that our children are being raised in the best possible environment to flourish in their development. To reach their potential, children and youth need to grow up in a place where they can thrive spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically, and intellectually and get high-quality health care when they need it. This charter will be another practice in which our government continues to improve the health and security of our future generations.

Mr. Speaker, one of the main reasons why I support this motion is the fact that it was developed and endorsed by such commendable organizations. The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the College of Family Physicians are established organizations that bring impressive resumé's to the table in regard to improving the well-being of Canadian children. These physicians provide first-hand knowledge of the issues the document addresses. It is also very impressive that over 80 organizations, including the United Nations, have endorsed this charter as being extremely beneficial to the children of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the principles of this motion are also very significant as they align nicely with our government's goals of achieving a

healthy livelihood for all Alberta children regardless of race, ethnicity, creed, language, gender, physical ability, mental ability, cultural history, or life experience. Along with our government's already solid platform on this issue it will help to build a coalition of children and youth health initiatives that will create our best framework yet in improving our children's well-being.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, once again, I believe that Motion 509 is very valuable in improving child and youth health and development here in Alberta, and I fully support it in this Assembly. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise like all other members in this Assembly to speak in favour of this motion. As has been outlined already, I would be quite surprised to discover that anybody would not speak in favour of this motion. Part of the reason for that, of course, is where some of our concerns lie, in that we're talking about a charter. But, as is the case often with this government, we seem to have a new trend towards overusing that particular language, talking about a charter but then putting a little asterisk at the bottom of it saying that it's not a legally enforceable document; rather, it's just a statement of high-minded principles.

I think we can all agree to sign on to an unenforceable statement of high-minded principles, but the concern then is: if we're going to talk the talk, are we ensuring that what we're really doing is trying to get credit for walking the walk when that's not what we're doing? Certainly, my observation over the last two and a half years is that when it comes to promoting children's health, this government has not walked the walk. There have been critical decision-making points in the last two and a half years where they have made the wrong decision, and they have not made a decision that would ensure the greatest and best outcome for the health of children in the province of Alberta.

5:30

There are, of course, a lot of areas where we can identify that that's the case. I could be here for much longer than the few minutes that I have allocated to me to speak about this. I mean, in the last two years we have cut funding to aboriginal suicide prevention programs. We've embarked upon a wholesale review and revision of special-needs education in our education system, which I am quite convinced is going to lead to tremendous hardship and lack of opportunity for special-needs students.

We have at a variety of different times had the opportunity to look at income rates for families that are currently in poverty who have children. Whether that's with respect to the minimum wage issue, whether that's with respect to income replacement and income support programs, whether that's with respect to AISH, in all those cases we set those amounts at a level that is well, well below the poverty line. Of course, the children of those families live in poverty, so of course, as we know, that results in a deterioration in the health of those children.

In 2000 the federal government considered an antipoverty program, and several of the parties signed on to that antipoverty program. One of the elements of that antipoverty program was that we need to ensure that we have income for families regardless of the source and regardless of the rationale for those families having income, whether it be earned income or pension income or program income or whatever, but that that income not drop below the low-income cut-off measures. That was something that was signed on to by the majority of parliamentarians in, I believe, 2009, yet clearly that is not a set of principles that we've adopted here in Alberta. We

continue to have one of the lowest minimum wage rates in the country, and we continue to have a scheme of user fees that very negatively affect those low-income families, whose children are most impacted by those kinds of programs. Unfortunately, in our province it means they're impacted negatively.

We have a profound lack of mental health services in this province, something that has been identified repeatedly to this government and something about which they have done absolutely nothing in the last two years.

We earlier today talked about the fact that we have addictions treatment programs, which the government spends no time monitoring or regulating or trying to improve the quality of. We've done absolutely nothing about those children who are most at risk, who suffer from problems that have the most profound impact on their health outcomes.

We have refused as a province to consider moving towards a comprehensive child care program. Child care is so fundamental to these issues. We know – the research is incontrovertible – that the better your child care program, your public, high-quality, accessible child care program in your jurisdiction, the better the health of those children, the better the education of those children, and the better the income of those children 10 or 15 years later. It is the single most effective tool to eliminate and eradicate poverty and to generally increase the well-being of everybody in society, whether rich or poor, yet it's something that this government repeatedly rejects.

We have, you know, half-day kindergarten when we've had a Learning Commission recommendation that's six years old now saying that we need to increase educational opportunities for our children, and we need to have full-day kindergarten. We don't have that yet.

We have a patchwork – well, I don't even think I can call it a patchwork because that implies more school lunches than we actually have. We have more of a scattering of school lunch dots, shall we say, across the province. In most cases we don't have a comprehensive school lunch program. We have kids across the province going to school hungry. The Minister of Education talks about: aren't we lucky in certain schools that certain principals stop by Costco on the way to school in the morning to see if they have any extra food that they're not going to put on the shelves that day, and maybe they'll donate it, and that principal can take it to the school, and isn't it great that we have such great periodic volunteers in our system? Well, that's not how you get healthy, well-fed children to school every morning, let me tell you. It's quite ridiculous that the Minister of Education would even talk about such a thing. I mean, we have all of these problems that exist within our system that are not actually moving toward supporting any of the goals in this charter, that we're being asked to vote on today.

One of the fundamental components of this charter is the notion of ensuring that children have no barrier to pharmaceutical care and drugs regardless of their income. But we know that that absolutely doesn't exist in the province of Alberta right now, that many families simply forgo getting prescription drug treatment for their children because they can't afford it.

We know that right now children who leave their home because of abusive or problematic situations, who are 14, 15, 16, who want to try and stay in school, have to, as a result of systems put in place by this government, couch surf for three to four months before they get any kind of income support from this government. That's the system that this government has put in.

We know that there are a lot of things that are not actually supporting these goals and which, in fact, confound the goals of this charter. As much as I think it will be wonderful that members of this Assembly vote to support this charter, I think the real key is that in

so doing, they actually make some element of a commitment to bringing about the objectives which are reflected in the charter, because right now there's very, very little that the government does that is really, truly focused on bringing about those objectives. I wouldn't want to see us all pat ourselves on the back for signing a document which is unenforceable and effectively meaningless, particularly in the face of the government's record at this point.

My hope is that by voting in favour of it, we might actually see the government change their position on any one of the many programs I've just identified. With that optimistic hope in mind, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening to the debate. It's pretty much what I would have expected. I want to make some comments and then take a bit of a different tack. I notice this is a charter. I commend the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing it forward. The term "charter" is a bit misleading because "charter" suggests, to Canadians at least, something that's legally enforceable, that has legal standing. This does not, and that disappoints me. It's a bit like the Alberta health charter, or patients' charter of rights or whatever it's going to be called. It's not likely to have any meaning.

I've listened to some good comments: the Member for Calgary-Currie talking about poverty reduction and the members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Calgary-Currie talking about the need for action and resources and commitment. I think that was reinforced by the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

I noticed in here, Mr. Speaker, in this proposed charter of child and youth health, a reference to child nutrition. I'll just quote from the charter because this got me thinking of it. The charter commits to "a place where children and youth can have good health and development," including "nutrition for proper growth, development and long-term health."

Now, at first I thought, you know, this is a good thing. This is refreshing. It's a sign that we're advancing when a member of the government caucus brings forward a proposal to support a charter with that statement in it because, Mr. Speaker, you and many members of this Assembly will know that I have fought in here repeatedly over several years for the Alberta government to come forward with some funding for hungry children in Alberta.

People in this province, certainly in this Assembly, don't seem to realize that every day in Alberta, one of the wealthiest jurisdictions on the planet, thousands of kids sit in classrooms hungry through no fault of their own, and this government alone among provincial governments doesn't provide any specific funding to address that problem. I've raised that over the years repeatedly here. I've had heated exchanges with members of the cabinet. I've brought in kids. We've fed them at the Annex and brought them in here and introduced them and challenged the government to act. Over and over it's failed to act and lets the situation continue where in such a wealthy province so many children go hungry through no fault of their own.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, that then got me to thinking about the broader track record of this Assembly and of this province and, indeed, of this country on how we treat children. I know that for many years it was the case that this government refused to sign the UN charter on the rights of the child, and I'm not sure that it has even done that as of today. In my mind, a great embarrassment as an Albertan and as a

Canadian that we would have a government that deliberately refuses to sign something as fundamental as the rights of the child. Then I try to square that position with this Motion 509, that has come forward from a government backbencher, and frankly I can't square it. I'm not sure. Maybe one of the government members can advise me whether Alberta has yet signed that UN charter on the rights of the child or not. I don't believe it has. I stand to be corrected.

Not just to pick on this government, I remember years ago – and, Mr. Speaker, I'm thinking it might have been 20 years ago – that the parliaments of Canada came together in an all-party motion to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Now, I may have the details incorrect, but I believe that at the beginning of the 1990s the Parliament of Canada made a commitment to end child poverty in this country by the year 2000. You know what? We never came close. In fact, the ink on those commitments was barely dry before the excuses and the deferrals and the backpedalling began.

We have a county where child poverty is all too common. The Member for Calgary-Currie talked about what a great city Calgary is, and it is, as long as you have some money. I'm still struck by the very convincing evidence brought forward by, of all sources, the TD Bank that not only does Calgary have the highest percentage of high-income people of any major city in Canada; it has the highest percentage of low-income people as well. Child poverty exists by the thousands in a city as wealthy as Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, as much as I can personally get excited and support this charter, I have to tell you that I'm reluctant to support it. I'm reluctant to support it because I'm reluctant to participate in hypocrisy. I think that's the kind of exercise that this Assembly is embarking on. We're full of fine words, we're full of good intentions, but we can't even find the money to feed hungry kids in our own schools. Come on, people. Where do you get the nerve to take a stand like this, to stand here in this Assembly talking about how wonderful this charter is, how much it means to you as a member from Lethbridge or wherever, yet stand aside when there is a call to provide money for school hunger programs and do nothing? What could be more hypocritical?

I don't want a specifically pick on the Member for Lethbridge-West. I think it's true of this government generally and perhaps some members of some of the opposition parties as well. I'm specifically thinking of the Wildrose Alliance. I've had conversations with one of their members who thinks that it's not the government's business to worry about hungry kids. Well, I think it is, and I stand here very uneasy about supporting something that I know is little more than an empty exercise in rhetoric and a bit of grandstanding hypocrisy. I'd rather at least be honest and vote the thing down because this government is not going to do a darn thing about it.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said here a number of times that if we don't have the resources, that if we don't put some money and muscle and commitment behind this charter, nothing is going to happen. I think it's pretty clear that that's the intention of this

government, to sail this through, to go out tomorrow, give out the news releases, pat themselves on the back, "Oh, aren't we good citizens; we voted for this charter" and then walk away from the challenges. I predict that's what's going to happen. I hope all the members of this Assembly prove me wrong.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

I'll call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close debate.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it was my privilege on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I would like to thank all my colleagues who participated in the debate on this motion. I'd like to conclude by making a few more remarks and observations.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring the healthy well-being of our children is one of the greatest challenges facing not only this government but governments right across Canada. As my hon. colleagues and I have discussed today, the government is certainly providing support to facilitate child development and deal with the challenge of improving its standards of life for all of Alberta's children. However, there can always be improvement when this issue is our future generations. I strongly believe that a key improvement we can make is to adopt Canada's child and youth health charter. Along with our already sound platform to sustain children's healthy development, the addition of this charter will further demonstrate our government's commitment to child and youth health. It is aligned quite well with our government's priorities, which will make adjustments and modifications to our current system a very smooth process.

Also, this motion will ensure improvements in areas of child health that may need more focus. Mr. Speaker, this can be yet another area in which Alberta excels past other jurisdictions and serves as a leading example for child well-being in Canada and, indeed, around the world. Our children deserve the best possible quality of life, and once again our government will do whatever is necessary to make that happen.

I would again like to thank all hon. colleagues for debating this motion in the Assembly today and urge all members to support the motion. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, October 26, 2010

Issue 33

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 26, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome. I would ask hon. members to remain standing after the brief prayer so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away.

Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Miss Wilma Helen Hunley

September 6, 1920, to October 22, 2010

The Speaker: The Honourable Wilma Helen Hunley, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, sworn in as member 475 in the history of Alberta, and former Lieutenant Governor passed away on Friday, October 22, 2010.

Miss Hunley was first elected in the election held on August 30, 1971, and served two terms until March 13, 1979. During her years of service she represented the constituency of Rocky Mountain House for the Progressive Conservative Party. She served as minister without portfolio, chair of the Alberta Human Resources Research Council, and as Solicitor General as well as Minister of Social Services and Community Health. She was the first woman to be given full ministerial status in the Alberta government with her appointment as the first female Solicitor General of Alberta. She served on the select standing committees on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Public Accounts; Public Affairs; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; and the special committee to make a recommendation to the Assembly for the position of Ombudsman.

The Honourable Helen Hunley was Alberta's 12th, and first female, Lieutenant Governor, serving from January 22, 1985, to March 11, 1991. Helen Hunley was also the first woman mayor of Rocky Mountain House, here in Alberta. She served as a Lieutenant, Canadian Women's Army Corps, from 1941 to 1946 and served overseas in Great Britain from 1943 to 1945.

Helen Hunley received the Order of Canada, status of Officer, in 1992 and the Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002. She was Dame of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in 1985 and received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws degree from the University of Alberta in 1985. She also served as an Honorary Lieutenant Colonel of the 20th Field Regiment of the Royal Canadian Artillery, starting in 1991, based in Red Deer, Alberta.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of her family who shared the burdens of public office. Family members of Miss Hunley are with us here today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I'd ask all to remember former hon. member and Alberta Lieutenant Governor Wilma Helen Hunley as you may have known her or known of her. Rest eternal grant unto her, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon her. Amen.

Albertans will have the opportunity to pay their respects to the Honourable W. Helen Hunley, former Lieutenant Governor and former Member of the Legislative Assembly. Books of condolence are available to the public at a memorial table in the rotunda of the Alberta Legislature Building in Edmonton as well as McDougall Centre in Calgary. These books are available for signing between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday until November 5, 2010.

Those who are unable to pay condolences at either of the memorial locations can do so online at www.gov.ab.ca. A memorial service will be held on Saturday, November 6, 2010, at 1:30 p.m. at the Christian Reformed Church, Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. This service will be open to the public.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery today are family members of the Honourable Helen Hunley, and I would like to introduce them, please. I would ask them to stand. Please hold your recognition until we've concluded them all: Mrs. Arlene Miller, niece; Mr. Ron Miller, nephew-in-law; Mr. Kent Liang, nephew-in-law; Mr. Jim Bowhay, nephew; Tonya Olson, great-niece; Tabatha Brouwer, great-niece; Kalyn Hunley, great-niece; Rory Kirkpatrick. I would ask all members to join me in welcoming the members of the family of Helen Hunley.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly another bright young group of individuals visiting our Legislature today from my constituency. We have with us, again, another group of over 80 students, grade 6s from Innisfail middle school, who are seated in the members' gallery, and they're accompanied by their teachers and parent helpers. As I indicated yesterday and many times before, I think it is so important for Alberta children to visit the Legislature. As you know, they will be our leaders of tomorrow. The teachers that are with us are Mrs. Rosemarie Pierzchalski, Ms Jill Kenway, Ms Becky Burbank, Mr. Cody Pivert. Our parent helpers are Mrs. Cheryl Janssen, Mrs. Linnea Thompson, Mrs. Dixie Ouellette, Mrs. Jody Bilton, Mrs. Nicole Pillman, Mrs. Janette Charlton, Ms Brenda Beagle, Mr. Bruce Layden, Mrs. Stacey Greig, Mr. Victor Hagglund, Mrs. Julie Ramrattan, and Mrs. Kim Vandermeer. I would like them all to rise in both galleries and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It also gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 16 students from Strathmore high school. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Rob Pirie, and one of their parents, Tracey Rogers. They drove down from Strathmore this morning and will be driving back today. I also am very privileged to have them here today, and I think it's an excellent thing that they've come to visit us. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of individuals from the office of the Auditor General. These individuals are seated in your gallery. I would like to ask them to rise and remain standing as I call their names: Merwan Saher, Auditor General, and Assistant Auditors General Brad Ireland, Ed Ryan, Jeff Dumont, and Jeff Olson. I would like

to ask the Assembly to greet them with the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce one of my bosses, a constituent of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. He has been there for quite a few years, along with his wife. He's sitting in the members' gallery. It's my pleasure to introduce through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Bill Nahirney, who is joining us in this Legislature for the first time in the history of Alberta. I'd ask him to rise.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Miss Wilma Helen Hunley

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to honour and pay tribute to an outstanding Canadian, an exceptional Albertan, and a wonderful and caring citizen of Rocky Mountain House, the late Helen Hunley.

The Honourable Helen Hunley was the eighth of 12 children. She was born in Acme, Alberta, in 1920 and moved to Rocky Mountain House in 1933. She knew the value of education, travelling some four miles one way from their homestead to the Crimson Lake school. She was raised to be a hard worker, hauling railway ties and mine props by horse-drawn sleigh to railway cars about eight miles away and then, later, working as a telephone operator. She had a tremendous memory for numbers, and she memorized all the telephone numbers in the town of Rocky Mountain House although she was always quick to add that there were only 55 of them.

She enlisted in the Canadian Women's Army Corps and served overseas from 1943 to 1945. Upon returning, she was a partsman and later became the owner-operator of an International Harvester dealership, the only woman that had a dealership in North America. She established and managed an insurance agency, Helen Hunley Agencies Limited, which still operates today.

Helen Hunley was always active in her community. She served as a town councillor and mayor of Rocky Mountain House and in 1971 was elected to the Alberta Legislature. During her time as an MLA she was the first woman to hold a cabinet portfolio, serving as Solicitor General and Minister of Social Services and Community Health. In 1986 Helen Hunley became Alberta's first woman Lieutenant Governor. Being the first female to hold this position, she did not have any robes or official uniform of her own. To make sure that she was properly attired for her position, then Speaker Dr. David Carter offered to pay for her robes at his own expense, an offer which she cherished.

Part of Helen's philosophy about life was that all of us owe rent for the space we occupy on Earth, and that rent is paid by public service. I remember the advice she gave me when I entered into politics, which was that a promise made is a debt unpaid. Helen Hunley worked all her life to try to repay that debt. Her life is an example to all Albertans of how one can be dedicated to the service and well-being of others.

Helen celebrated her 90th birthday on September 6 and passed away this past Friday, October 22. On behalf of the Members of the Legislative Assembly I would like to extend condolences to the family of the Honourable Helen Hunley and thank them for her years of selfless service. Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Democracy in Alberta

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I salute the hon. member's comments about our former Lieutenant Governor.

I rise today as the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, the oil sands capital of the world, and as the newest member of the Wildrose caucus. It remains an honour and a privilege to serve Albertans and to be a strong voice for my constituents in the oil sands capital. My responsibility as their MLA is to bring their voices to this very Assembly because those voices are my bosses', and those voices all across Alberta will decide in just over a year who will be their voice as MLA, who will be their voice as the next Premier.

Alberta has a rich history when it comes to change and the seismic shifts that have taken place over a rich 100 years. At the forefront of that change are Alberta values: the value of hard work, the value of honesty and looking Albertans squarely in the eye, the value of fairness as we sit here with four members as Alberta's newest official party, and the value of respect, never forgetting who our bosses are. I hope all MLAs will never forget that. Finally, the value of direct democracy. Be it in the town halls or in coffee shops, this is the foundation of our great province. Albertans raise their families on these important values. They know that I will always be a strong voice for my constituents because it is my responsibility as their MLA to be their voice.

History can be an important teacher, as an independent MLA for the past year and now as a member of a 21st-century party with a 21st-century leader. Yes, history is a great teacher, and school is in, and class is about to get a whole lot more interesting for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Alberta Tourism Awards

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the strategic tourism marketing commission I'm proud to rise today to celebrate excellence in Alberta's tourism industry. Last night our Tourism, Parks and Recreation minister presented the 2010 Alberta tourism awards, or Altos, to organizations and individuals who have made outstanding contributions to our tourism sector. Every region of our fine province was represented in the list of finalists this year, and the winners showcased the talent and expertise in this \$5 billion industry. From the Alberta Pond Hockey Association doubling the size of its annual tournament in a few short years to sustainable business practices at Mount Engadine Lodge that respect the environment, the Royal Tyrrell Museum, the Canadian Badlands, the Remington Carriage Museum, Tourism Red Deer, and visitcalgary.com, all of the 2010 winners have set the bar very high indeed.

Mr. Speaker, one individual in particular was recognized last night as one of Alberta's great tourism ambassadors, Mr. LaVerne Erickson. Mr. Erickson is the founder of the Rosebud School of the Arts and the founder of two signature Alberta attractions, the award-winning Rosebud Theatre and Canadian Badlands Passion Play. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join me now in congratulating LaVerne Erickson and all of the 2010 Alberta tourism award recipients and finalists for a job very well done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

National Autism Awareness Month

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and recognize October as National Autism Awareness Month. Autism is a condition that affects the normal development of the brain, and it can have significant impacts on human behaviour. Children with autism suffer from a wide range of symptoms ranging from lack of speech to difficulty interacting with others.

Mr. Speaker, autism is a fairly common condition, and it is estimated that 1 out of every 90 kids have some form of this disorder. The month of October gives us the opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced by those dealing with autism as well as to recognize those organizations and individuals that have done so much to support families affected by this condition.

Mr. Speaker, the Maier centre for autism in west Edmonton will be a world-class autism support facility. Much of the funding for this facility has come from community donors. One of them is my constituent, Mr. Klaus Maier, whom the facility is named after and who donated not only the land for the facility but also \$1 million towards the project. I'm very pleased that our government has recognized the invaluable role of the Maier centre and has recently presented a 1 and a half million dollar grant to assist with its development.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very truly proud to live in a province where people are so generous and committed to helping those in need. On this day I would like to ask all the members of this House to recognize the challenges that families with autism face and to consider: what can we do to enhance the quality of the lives of families affected by autism?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province is facing a crisis of leadership. This administration has failed to protect the environment or demonstrate leadership in our energy industry since today we heard about a second, undetermined as yet, loss of ducks in our tailings ponds. I'm at a loss to explain the Environment minister's confusion and frustration over how this could happen when these are built directly in migratory bird patterns. To the Premier: will the Premier confirm that the estimated number of ducks killed last night is over a thousand?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the event is being investigated as we speak. I'd say that this is sad and disappointing in light of the conclusion of the court proceedings and the judge's decision last week, but we will update the House and all Albertans on the progress of the investigation and the findings of that investigation.

Dr. Swann: Well, since it's only a few days since that sentence was handed down in a similar case, will the Premier finally use common sense and state publicly now that he will strengthen regulations to protect ducks and other wildlife in relation to our tailings ponds?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the regulations are there. Obviously, we not only enforce them, but we, with the federal government, took Syncrude to court. A decision has been made by the judge. It's both a fine and money invested in further research and also deterrence.

Unfortunately, like I said, it just happened last week, and now we have this other incident, which not only is frustrating, you know; it makes one angry. On the other hand, let's get the full detail of the investigation, and then, as I said, we will make that known to the House.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier be holding the Minister of Environment responsible for the repeat of the death of waterfowl at this pond and, if necessary, call for his resignation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let's be just a bit more pragmatic here. Let's see what the investigation brings forward. Rules are rules, and we're there not only to make the rules but also to enforce them. There are many rules with respect to the environment. For any company that does not live up to the rules, we will enforce the legislation, but let's first find out what the investigation will bring.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Villa Caritas Long-term Care Facility

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Internal documents from Alberta Health Services show that the plan to convert Villa Caritas, a long-term care facility in Edmonton, into a psychogeriatric facility escalated from \$12 million to \$51 million. This change actually reduced long-term care beds in Edmonton by 150. To the Premier: why did the cost of this project increase to \$51 million, 400 per cent, in just over a year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to Villa Caritas and the discussion that occurred as a result of not only the resident psychiatrists but also staff at Alberta Hospital, Covenant Health had made some changes reflecting the needs of the residents that were transferred. But I will say that I will defend any of the additional changes to the living accommodations for our seniors. These are individuals with some mental health issues. They lived in multiple-person wards. They will now have individual beds, individual bedrooms. They will have a nice, large green area, and they will have all of the services available in a much kinder setting. You can't just add more beds without putting more investment in it and bringing it up to the 2010 standard.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, \$51.4 million could have funded 500 nurses for a year while this decision actually reduced long-term care beds in Edmonton. Is that your idea of good management, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the investment was very worth while in terms of improving the quality of life for seniors that were in the Alberta Hospital facility, and I will stand upon that statement. It's about time we started thinking about the quality of life in those institutions rather than bringing this forward and talking about how much it costs. Of course it costs. We're spending about \$7 billion in infrastructure, and we're going to continue to do that because that is what improves the quality of life for all Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this is about responsible use of the public purse in the long-term best interests of Albertans. Villa Caritas could have taken 150 people out of acute care and eased the emergency room crowding in Alberta. Does this Premier see this as an outrage, as most Albertans see it? Do you see how outraged we are at this decision, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to speak to the family members of those individuals that were for a large portion of their time in Alberta Hospital and now are in new facilities in Villa Caritas. Talk to the family members, and then come back to this House and report directly what the family members said in terms of the improvement of quality of life and, most importantly, improvement of services.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since doctors blew the whistle on unacceptable conditions in Alberta's emergency rooms, this government has been practising management by panic. A plan for new beds was rolled out before they even had nurses to staff them. Sixty-eight of the total 79 RN positions advertised for Calgary by Alberta Health Services were posted by the minister just last week. To the Premier: why has the Premier ignored the problem until doctors in emergency rooms finally risked their jobs to speak out and protect their patients?

Mr. Stelmach: The minister has had consultations with all physicians, as I said yesterday, from eye doctors to bone and joint physicians, in improving access in those particular areas. He's also had discussions with emergency docs. He'll have one again today with the emergency physicians to work together – AHS, Alberta Health and Wellness, and the physicians and nurses, I may add, as well – to make sure that we continue with the plan to improve access to emergency rooms and free up more beds for those that can be admitted to our hospitals.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the same in Edmonton. Forty-six out of 75 RN positions advertised were posted just this past week. How does the Premier defend this?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, because we need more nurses. That's why it's posted.

Dr. Swann: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, he doesn't get it. We're talking about two years of underfunded emergency and long-term care, and they're lurching to solutions this past week. An Alberta Liberal government would ensure there were sufficient staff and funds immediately available to open more beds before making promises – before making promises – that take months to fulfill. Why has the Premier not acted responsibly and taken this course of action over the past two years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have acted responsibly. We not only paid off the accumulated deficit for Alberta Health Services; we also topped up the amount of funding to Alberta Health Services, reflecting what they told us would be the increase in needs, plus to that we added another 6 per cent. There'll be another 6 per cent added to this year's budget and 6 per cent after that plus 4 and a half and 4 and a half further down the road. So that's five years of committed funding. That is the best funding commitment there is in the country of Canada, and it speaks very well for the publicly funded health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this government shamefully shut down an emergency debate on the crisis state of our

emergency rooms in Alberta. Albertans we have heard from are incensed that this government stonewalled this debate given the litany of horror stories that they have heard. There are pregnant women in triage and seniors with broken hips waiting hours and hours for care. To the Premier: will he explain why he directed his MLAs and his minister of health to deny Albertans this critical debate?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday in the House during question period, plans are in place to take away a lot of the pressure in the emergency room service: adding additional long-term care beds, adding additional continuing care beds, and increasing the number of staff. We have, you know, at this particular time good co-operation with the physicians and nurses. The nurses came to the table earlier this year with a contract that's going to help us meet the challenges. I do commend the nurses' union for that. I know the doctors are continuing to negotiate with the government, and we're going to continue to work together to improve the performance of our health care system.

Mr. Hinman: With due respect to the Premier, he didn't answer the question. Given the hundreds of examples of emergency room horror stories and the escalating issues over the last two and a half years with nothing being addressed, why did he and the health minister say no to this important debate yesterday in the House?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, nobody said no. This is a practice in the House. They made a motion that it's an emergency; we said that it's not an emergency. We're continuing to work with the health care professionals to make sure that we're constantly improving the system. Chatting about it and debating about it here in this particular Assembly is not going to give us more beds, it's not going to get more nurses working, nor is it going to attract more physicians to the province. That's the plan we have, and we're tackling it right now.

2:00

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they've had two and a half years to address it. They didn't, and it's in an emergency state now.

I see they have no good answers, so let's try something else. Given that these horror stories were only from one emergency ward in Alberta, will the Premier show some leadership, do the right thing, and release the full list of suboptimal outcomes for every Alberta hospital so Albertans have a real, full picture of the crisis that exists in this province? Release the lists.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that yesterday there was a debate, and the decision was made. There is a provision in the standing orders that if there are sufficient members to rise in the House, then they can call a vote. Guess what? There wasn't the sufficient prerequisite number of members in the House to do the vote.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In a letter to emergency room doctors dated February 23, 2008, the Premier assured them that more nurses and other medical staff will be hired and trained, yet just one year later, with the Premier's support, Alberta Health Services paid \$24 million to buy out 448 nurses and imposed a hiring freeze. Today the government again says that staff shortages need to be overcome before we can fix the emergency room crisis. When will the Premier get off this merry-go-round of

incompetence and put a stop to the unnecessary suffering of critically ill people in emergency rooms around the province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we have added more money, considerably more money, into the system. We're hiring more and more people every day, and that's not only nurses but other health care professionals. Professions are coming together and forming partnerships through the primary care networks. As the minister said yesterday, not necessarily everyone needs a doctor every day, but they may need a dietitian; they may need a respiratory therapist; they may need a physiotherapist. That is improving the efficiency of the system. I commend the people in health services for coming together with government and working towards a common goal, and that is constantly improving the system.

Mr. Mason: Constantly improving the system? Given that on March 23, 2009, Calgary hospital officials warned that the median wait time for emergency room patients who needed a hospital bed had grown to 16.6 hours and given that the government ignored the warning and given that the problem has continued to worsen since then, will the Premier admit that the government's failure to act on the emergency room crisis has cost lives and imposed great and unnecessary suffering on critically ill patients?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, nobody wants to wait in an emergency room. Everybody wants to be admitted as quickly as possible if the need is there for admission. Some people in emergency, obviously, are there because we do need more either primary care networks or doctors in communities to deal with some of the matters immediately. On the other hand, there is improvement, and there will be continued improvement in this particular area. We have added more continuing care beds to the system. We will continue to add more. Presently we're adding about 2,000 seniors to the seniors' list, to the demographics of this province. You know, in just a year that'll be 24,000 people. That's just showing how quickly our population is aging, and that's how quickly the system has to move forward.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if it wasn't so tragic, it would be hilarious. The Premier has to take responsibility for this scandal. Why does the Premier refuse to own up to his government's failure to take this crisis seriously two and a half years ago? Why won't he take responsibility?

Mr. Stelmach: I will take responsibility for additional funding, especially the five-year commitment, and responsibility for working with all of the health care professionals, working towards agreements that will ensure that we have stability in the system and, most importantly, the good health system that we have today. It needs some improvement, but I can tell you that our number one goal is to make sure that it is sustainable for future generations. What a lot of those people are talking about will never get us there to the next generation so that our youth in this province can enjoy the same good system we have today.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Additional Beds to Relieve Emergency Wait Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this Premier has a strange way of measuring improvements in the health care system. I hope he can explain it to Albertans better than he has today. Alberta's health care system is run based on political need, not on the needs of its people. Emergency room overcrowding has been

ignored for two years. The Premier stated yesterday that Alberta Health Services will open new acute-care beds in both Calgary and Edmonton within their current budget. To the Premier: if Alberta Health Services could open these beds with their current budgets, why did it take brave doctors and public outcry before the government acted last week?

Mr. Stelmach: The Alberta Health Services Board had plans in place. They're continuing to add more long-term care beds and continuing care facilities within the budget. Within the budget. Like I said before, not only did we pay off the accumulated deficit; we topped up the budget to what they thought would be reflecting the needs of Albertans plus another 6 per cent over and above that, and that is the budget they're working with. I believe there's enough there to sustain the system and grow it and meet the growing demands.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, every Albertan knows that the announcement made last week was made on the fly. That means the money to open the beds will have to come from somewhere. What's going to be cut, Mr. Premier, to allow these beds to open?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the same question was asked by the same member yesterday. I said that there won't be any cuts; there's additional money on the table. That's why we paid off the deficit, added the dollars plus 6 per cent over and above. There is enough money in the system. Albertans know that there is enough money in the system. All they're wanting is greater efficiencies and better co-operation amongst all those that deliver the services.

Dr. Swann: On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, what Albertans want and what the opposition is looking for is some transparency. What money is being spent to open these beds? It wasn't listed in the budget. What money are we talking about, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that every bed that opens in this province is not going to be identified in a budget document. There is a large amount of money going to Alberta Health Services. They take that money, and they make the best decisions for Albertans. To say that we're going to go and add every bed is nonsense.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Protection of Landowner Rights

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans deeply treasure their land, and they take its stewardship very seriously. Landowners in my constituency have a lot of questions about recent legislation and how it will impact them and their property. My questions for the Minister of Infrastructure are about the former Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. Can the minister reassure my constituents that there were essential reasons for bringing this legislation forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right. Landowners have a very strong connection to the land. As our province continues to grow, it is critical that we protect our land and our rural way of life for our children and grandchildren. That is why Albertans have asked us to plan for future development, to consult well in advance of any

projects, to protect sensitive areas, to use transportation and utility corridors where they make sense, and to minimize the overall impact.

The Speaker: And we'll get to the answer right away.
The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have been advised that Bill 19 extinguishes their landowner rights. Can the minister tell us what legal protections are in place for landowners under Bill 19?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this legislation is entirely about the protection of landowners. It does not extinguish any existing rights. In fact, in addition it requires government to consult with landowners if the land might be used for future large-scale projects. It gives landowners the option to continue to work their land before the project is built. If they would rather sell the land, the government is required to buy it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. If through this act land owned by one of my constituents is designated for a long-term transportation project, will the government freeze or prevent development on that land?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a farmer I strongly believe that landowners need the freedom to work their land. The legislation does allow that. If a farmer wants to build a barn or wants to build a shed, he or she certainly can. It is true that major industrial development could not go ahead on the site of a future highway. This only makes sense, Mr. Speaker. We must protect rural landowners as development occurs into the future. To do that, Albertans have asked us to plan . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:10 Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is in the process of making a decision regarding the sale of land for a potato farm without public input. We have land swaps and apparent decisions regarding water allocation taking place without the involvement or knowledge of the public. The minister has stated that there's nothing secretive about the deal, so to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: where are the consultation notes from the meetings with municipalities and individuals in the area, and will they ever be made public?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the matter of meetings that are attended by ministers of the Crown and representatives from municipalities, other individuals in the province of Alberta, representatives of associations across the province, I believe that there's an understanding that has been in place for an awfully long time that that information is privileged information. The member opposite may very well be right that notes from my meetings with people may not ever become public information.

Ms Pastoor: The minister stated yesterday, "God Himself may well provide the water." Now, I haven't spoken to God lately, but my understanding is that he's counting on us to conserve it. Will there be a public water assessment report before you approve this deal?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would suggest perhaps the member take the opportunity to do just that and have a little conversation.

But with respect to what we're dealing with here today, we have in front of us as a government a proposal – a proposal – that has been brought forward to my department with respect to some public land that the proponent would like to develop. That's the sum total of what we're dealing with today.

Ms Pastoor: Do we know how many acres of tax recovery land is included in this proposed purchase?

Mr. Knight: Again, Mr. Speaker, there's a proposal. It covers approximately 16,300 acres of land in south-central Alberta. The situation as to how this land breaks down on an acreage basis: again, I'm afraid I cannot stand here today and say that I understand acre by acre how this land breaks down, which pieces of it may or may not have been recovered or retrieved by the government at some point in tax recovery; some of it was.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Transmission Line Compensation

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the past few weeks I have attended a number of constituent meetings concerning the new proposed high-voltage DC power lines. My constituents are concerned with many issues related to this line. One of the main issues is the amount of compensation being paid to landowners for access to and use of their land. My question is to the Minister of Energy. How are the compensation rates for access and disturbance established for transmission lines?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it needs to be stated that the Alberta Utilities Commission will hold a public hearing on the transmission lines relative to the siting of such lines. The proponents of those transmission towers along with the landowners will negotiate a compensation, and if there is no agreement reached, it goes to the Surface Rights Board. I think at this particular stage it's important to point out as well that the compensation is attempted to be a fair balance between the landowner and the consumer that ultimately pays the cost of those.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and last question is again to the same minister, and that is: can the government, through regulation, set a minimum value for land based on industrial values rather than agricultural values?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that's an interesting concept, Mr. Speaker, because when many of these regulations were put into place, the province had not developed to the point where it is today. One of the reasons why the upgrade to the transmission system is required is because of the significant industrial development that's taken place in Alberta over the past 40 to 50 years. The concept of valuing it at an industrial base is something I'd be interested in discussing with my colleagues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Manufacturing Outsourcing for Kearl Lake Project

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Kearl Lake oil sands project is being supplied with over 200 large steel modules from a South Korean metal fabrication firm. This deal is worth over \$250 million. In a letter dated June 2, 2010, to the Official Opposition the Minister of Transportation writes, "Alberta Transportation has been working with Imperial Oil on this project for some time." My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. Why was the government working with Imperial Oil on this project when the steel fabrication industry in this province and the workers formerly employed in it were idle?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, whenever we have people come to us and say that they have products that have to be moved, then we have to work with them on how they're going to get them there.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why did the department not say, "If we are giving the tax concessions and the royalty breaks here in Alberta, this work should be done here in this province, not transported across the Pacific Ocean, up to Lewiston, Idaho, and then from there trucked to Fort McMurray"? Create jobs here in this province.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we have to be competitive. We try everything. We can create jobs in this province, but I'm not going to be a dictator and tell people where they have to buy the product. I just have to make sure they can get the products to where they need them to do their business in Alberta.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the minister of finance. Given that Imperial Oil plans to spend over \$40 million to improve the bridges and the roads in Montana, will that \$40 million tab for those infrastructure improvements be written off their royalty bill here in this province?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that the hon. member was opposed to NAFTA and the free trade agreement in the 1980s, like his Liberal counterparts. The oil sands in this province are built on free trade, and until that party gets that message, they're going to sit in opposition.

I think my hon. colleague would also like to say something.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to briefly supplement the answer to this question because this particular member has raised this issue in the past in this House. The time when that particular contract was let was back in the boom times in Alberta. A contract needed to be let by Imperial for the construction of these vessels, and it was not able to be met in this province.

The Speaker: We'll come back to this, I'm sure, at another point in time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Villa Caritas Long-term Care Facility

(continued)

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I met with two patients from Alberta Hospital who were concerned with overcrowding. We have recently heard about long-term care patients in hospital beds who are blocking up ERs in Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Wouldn't this problem have been avoided if Villa Caritas had remained a long-term care centre as was originally proposed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. I'm not one who likes to speculate at all on what-if scenarios. What I can tell you, though, is that we have done a lot, and I've announced a lot of that, and so has Alberta Health Services. Issues that are perplexing the emergency room departments that relate to continuing care are being addressed and dealt with. We have opened more than 800 continuing care spaces that are new since April, and there are more on the way between now and the end of December, for example.

Mr. Sandhu: Again to the same minister: what's being done to address overcrowding issues in the adult mental health program at Alberta Hospital Edmonton?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services, which is responsible for the general management of Alberta Hospital Edmonton, does have protocols in place that deal with overcrowding or the fluctuations of bed needs. For example, they are looking at how to accommodate these people more quickly into the new Villa Caritas space. At the same time, let's keep in mind that about a year ago there were 20 bed vacancies at Alberta Hospital Edmonton, I'm told.

Also, I'll just conclude by saying that we have a province-wide mental health strategy that is coming forward very quickly, and I'll have that in a matter of months.

Mr. Sandhu: My final question is to the same minister. Are additional mental health beds being added to the health system any time soon?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, the short answer, I'm happy to say, is yes. In fact, the original projection for 106 of these mental health beds at the Villa Caritas has been increased by 44, so there will be almost immediately now an additional 44 mental health beds specifically to help out with the crowding situation that was alluded to earlier at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Those new beds will go to the Villa Caritas site, a state-of-the-art facility, by the way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in the *Calgary Herald* it was reported that emergency room waits in Calgary hospitals had increased 54 per cent since last year. That is on average 14 to 20 hours longer than a year earlier. This is the track record of this minister of health's superefficient Alberta health superboard. To the minister of health. The superboard experiment has failed. When will this minister disband the superboard and return control of our emergency rooms to the doctors and front-line staff, who actually know what the needs are?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the doctors and the nurses and so many other administrators are an integral part of the system. They provide input very regularly. I'm going to get a lot of that input tonight, in fact, and I got some of it just a couple of hours ago when I dropped in at the Royal Alex hospital and had a visit and a chat there. I learned about some exciting new programs that they are bringing on stream. Those are all at the behest and in many cases at the direct leadership resulting from Alberta Health Services, who are

working very hard to address some of these difficulties that have been flagged recently.

Mr. Anderson: We need less chatting – that’s for sure – and more doing.

Given the list released by our caucus yesterday of 322 emergency room horror stories over the past year in just one hospital, including men having strokes and heart attacks while waiting hours for a bed and pregnant women having cervical examinations in an open triage, when will the minister accept the fact that the superboard experiment has failed? It’s not working, Minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you what we’re not going to do: go back to having 300 health authorities out there, like was the case, perhaps, in some jurisdictions. I can tell you that we’re not going to go back to having hundreds of payroll departments or dozens of CEOs. We’ve got one centralized system now that is in its infancy still. Of course, there are some bumps and bruises and blemishes to be experienced along the way, but improvements are there, and cost efficiencies are there. Better health service access is coming, and it’s all part of this five-year funding plan that was just announced a few months ago. It’s working. It just takes a little time to take shape.

Mr. Anderson: You call a 54 per cent increase in emergency wait times more efficient? Serious? Mr. Speaker, is this minister honestly trying to tell Albertans that the extra 14 to 20 hours of waiting that each Albertan is facing in our emergency rooms today is somehow a justifiable result for the superboard’s first year? Honestly, is that what you’re saying, that it’s efficient enough?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what I’m trying to explain to this hon. member is that we have for the first time in Canadian history a five-year funding plan that allows for a 6 per cent increase in each of the first three years, 4.5 per cent increases in years 4 and 5. That 6 per cent is what’s necessary to fix some of the kinds of problems that have been referred to. Had people followed what the Wildrose Alliance Party is talking about, they would have only seen a 3.5 per cent increase because that’s what they released the day after our budget. You tell me how that’s going to fix the problem.

Online Gaming

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Gaming stated in August that it intends to ante up and take a seat at the virtual table to provide sanctioned online gaming. B.C.’s Housing and Social Development minister stated unequivocally that online gambling will increase rates of addiction. To the Solicitor General: since this government dismantled AADAC last year, how are you planning to deal with this influx of gambling addicts?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member would know, we have a number of programs that provide services to problem gamblers. I think, first and foremost, I need to ensure that the hon. member is aware that the province of Alberta is not going to venture into the arena of online gaming.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I guess I’ll follow up that question again. We are not going into online gaming here as they have done in B.C.?

Mr. Oberle: I think that’s what I just said, Mr. Speaker. We have no plans at the moment to venture into the arena of online gaming. We will, as we always have, monitor developments in that arena, but we do not intend to proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dual High School and University Enrolment

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2009 this Legislature passed my Motion 508 urging the government to develop programs to offer real-world learning opportunities like dual enrolment, which is enrolment in postsecondary courses while in high school. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What has your ministry done to implement recommendations made by Motion 508, specifically postsecondary instruction while in high school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of circumstances around the province which would provide those sorts of opportunities to students, and in fact they’ve proven to be very successful and very good projects. The paving health pathways initiatives, a three-year pilot specifically supported by \$10 million in funding, resulted in dual enrolment opportunities for students in a number of jurisdictions in the health field specifically. Students that are interested in pursuing careers in health care are accessing colleges and universities in their jurisdictions to attain some credits towards their degrees while they’re still, of course, in high school. We have a number of campuses, for example, which I can go on and mention a little later.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that dual enrolment has been shown to increase overall graduation rates for even high-risk students, will the minister commit to extending programs like these to more Alberta high schools?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we’re encouraging school boards right across the province to look at programs that I would call programs of engagement; in other words, ways to help students with their transition not only throughout their K to 12 school career but transition to postsecondary.

As I was going to say, in Cold Lake, for example, the Cold Lake high school is co-located with Portage College; in Rocky Mountain House Red Deer College is co-located with the high school there; in Olds the high school is co-located with the college, opportunities there for students to avail themselves of postsecondary opportunities while they’re in high school, and it’s very successful in those circumstances. We’d look for more opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you, Mr. Minister. I’m glad they’re successful in those circumstances. The point is to make those circumstances available everywhere. Would you commit to starting such programs in, let’s say, five schools in the Calgary area with the lowest high school graduation rates in an effort to increase those high school graduation rates?

Mr. Hancock: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, local programming in Calgary high schools would be something that the Calgary board of education or the Calgary separate board would be responsible to do, but we’re certainly collaborating with school boards, encouraging

school boards to look at these sorts of opportunities, find better ways to do them. Not every school can be co-located on a college campus or a university campus, but there are ways to integrate those programs into the high school programs and allow students to take those courses ahead of time or at the same time as their high school courses, and it's proven to be successful in those places that have used it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Special-needs Education

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents, students, and teachers have been anxiously waiting for a better way to provide special education in Alberta, but the government's review of special needs has been two years in the making with another year to go. Meanwhile special-needs grants have been frozen, parents are facing the same delays getting supports for their kids, and the government's plans are at best unclear. To the Minister of Education: what is the minister going to do to help families that are having trouble accessing special services for their children now?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, any parent that has a child with special needs now should be working with their school boards and with their schools to get access to the services that they need. If they have problems doing that, of course, they have the opportunity to call our office, and we'll assist them in working with their school boards to make sure that those opportunities are there. There's no excuse for students who are entrusted to a school board to not have access to the programming they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This is a case of not passing the buck to the school board so they could actually initiate the plans. Under his plan the minister says that separate classes will stay available for students with severe disabilities, but without some kind of coding system what is to prevent these students from being shuffled into regular classrooms without the necessary support to ensure their successful inclusion?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, inclusion is not about every child being in any classroom; it's about finding the appropriate educational opportunity for each child included in the educational system. That means that the parents and the teachers, the educators, the principals, the health support, and the support staff have to work together collaboratively to design the best educational program for that child. In some cases it will be complete inclusion in a classroom. In some cases it'll be a partial inclusion in classrooms and partial special programming. Some parents will choose or perhaps the circumstances are such that a child needs separate programming.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inclusion without the necessary aids to support teachers is not working and will not work. With districts attempting to integrate classrooms according to the minister's directives, where are the extra resources for teacher support and training that the government has been promising but has failed to deliver?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we haven't directed school boards to include students in classrooms. That's just a fallacy. What we have done is a very careful program of redesign of special education programming in this province, working with stakeholders, working with parents, with school boards, with teachers, so that we can do a number of things. One is to make sure that teachers are well equipped to deal with the students that come into their classrooms. One is to make sure that they're supported by support staff that work with them as learning coaches and in other capacities to assist. It's not about coding and pigeonholing a child and labelling a child; it's about the learning needs of the child and supporting those learning needs. We're in the process. We'll get there.

Education Consultation

Ms Woo-Paw: My questions are also to the Minister of Education. On June 11 I was honoured to attend the announcement made by the ministers of Education, Health and Wellness, and Children and Youth Services on the Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response, which addressed how government would work together to support children and youth through the implementation of an inclusive education system. I know this will take some time, but Albertans have some questions still. The vision of the setting the direction framework is for an inclusive education system. Does this mean that every student will be in every classroom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, an important question from Calgary-Varsity, supplemented by the question from my hon. colleague, because setting the direction is a very important process. It's not about being speedy; it's about getting the process right and doing it well. In doing that, there are a number of important things that we need to do. First of all, an inclusive education system in Alberta is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of and belonging for all students. It's a value-based approach, and the starting point for this should be the child's home, school, community. It's not an assumption that every child can be in every classroom. It goes beyond that, and it talks to what the capacities are that we need.

Ms Woo-Paw: So how are you and your colleagues beginning to implement the proposed recommendations resulting from this framework?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have a very important cross-ministry committee that's led by Dianne McConnell in our department, working with Health and with Children and Youth Services to make sure that our ministry departments are aligned in the service delivery because a lot of supporting students with special needs is making sure that we use most effectively the health resources we have and the support resources we have. That's first and foremost. Secondly, it's about putting in place programming so that teachers can have access to the skills that they need for the children that they have in their classroom. There are a number of other projects that are ongoing.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, specifically for teachers what are some of the short-term priorities that Education is focusing on?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of items in that area. I think there are 13 specific short-term items that we need to work on. One is making sure that we have professional develop-

ment for teachers so that they can supplement their professional capacity to deal with the students who come into their care. One is setting up support resources like learning coaches and collaborative coaches to work with the schools and with the school boards to make sure that they identify the learning needs of the children and identify the support resources that those children need. A third is to work on reallocating the support resources so that they're available on a more effective basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Funding for Training

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the House the Minister of Employment and Immigration described a software failure as merely an unfortunate situation that was quickly handled. This unfortunate situation, however, threatened thousands of students who ended up going to food banks, facing evictions from their homes, not able to afford their tuitions and to continue on with their education. Alberta Works did not work. Those on the front lines found the response from the minister's department uncaring, unco-ordinated, and inefficient. To the minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister can proceed now.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that fabulous question. Well, obviously, the member has difficulty with my using the term "unfortunate." I cannot think of a better term. I know that member would probably like me to use the word "tragic," and I imagine that for some individuals who found themselves in financial dire straits, it was tragic. We had a plan in place. Emergency cheques were issued to individuals who needed emergency services, and they can rely on that plan to be in place if such an event was to ever occur in the future.

Mr. Chase: That was cold comfort to the students at Bow Valley College that I spoke to.

If the same minister is so confident in his department's handling of the situation, will he table all documents in the House related to the transition to the new software system so that the public can see what contingency plans were in place? It was a screw-up. How are you going to fix it?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, my priority is to address the needs of Albertans. We found ourselves with a cohort of Albertans who obviously did not receive funding. A plan was put in place. Funding is being issued. Emergency funding has been issued. If the opposition is more interested in auditing our software program, they can have the pleasure of doing that, but we will be focusing on Albertans who need help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. That's cold comfort for the students who are waiting three and a half months to get the cheques.

My final question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. As the ministry responsible for information technology leadership across government, will the minister investigate the software failure in Employment and Immigration to make sure this never happens again because it's the same program for AISH and other special-needs programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, commenting on this unfortunate incident with respect to the students and the challenges that the families are facing, as Minister of Service Alberta we take a lot of pride in the technology and the information we protect to make sure that Albertans are served well on a day-to-day basis. That is something we're working on with Employment and Immigration, with the minister, to ensure that we can move forward and learn from this as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Natural Gas Prices

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents have been following the price of natural gas closely over the last few months. On June 7 the price was \$4.84 per gigajoule, and today it's only \$3.39 per gigajoule. This is good news for our heating bills but is not so good news for government revenue. The minister has changed the fiscal forecast to \$3.75 per gigajoule. I'm just wondering if this is a change that the minister sees for the long term, or is it just a short-term change?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the change in the prices for natural gas can be summed up in one word: it's called U.S. shale gas. For the past couple of decades the United States had less and less gas of their own. They were imbalanced between supply and demand. They depended upon imports from the rest of the world but primarily western Canada and particularly Alberta. With the advent of shale gas, which is the result of new technology, horizontal drilling and multiple fracking has unlocked trillions of new cubic feet of gas. That's not good news for producers in the western Canada sedimentary basin.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So what do sustained low natural gas prices mean for the overall financial picture of the government's revenue?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's not a good-news story. Just to give you an example from my tenure here, from 2005, when I first became a member, to 2008 the natural resource revenues to this government averaged in the vicinity of \$12 billion. Starting last year, this year, next year, post shale gas if you like, the average revenues to the government of Alberta will be in the vicinity of an average of \$8 billion. So there's suddenly a \$4 billion gap between what existed under the old regime and the new regime.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister. Obviously, lots of talk today about health care and education. Albertans have relied on this robust revenue source in the past to fund these programs. What is the minister doing to replace this loss due to natural gas prices so that Albertans can continue to enjoy the same high-quality health care and education they have in the past?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there are some good-news stories on the revenue front. There's lots of shale gas in western Canada and in

Alberta that will be produced using the new technology as well. Also, this new technology of horizontal drilling and multiple fracking is allowing the redrilling of old fields, Cardium and other fields like that, which were no longer producing at economical rates, but the combination of horizontal drilling and multiple fracking is allowing reaccess of that. Then, of course, there's the dramatic growth in bitumen production from the oil sands that will gradually fill that hole.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Eighteen members were recognized. There were 104 questions and responses.

Please join me in congratulating the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who is celebrating an anniversary today, a rather young anniversary, I might add, but an anniversary nonetheless.

In 30 seconds from now we'll go back to the Routine with two additional members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Grande Prairie Entrepreneurial Award

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to advise the members of this Assembly today about a special honour earned by the bold and innovative entrepreneurs of Grande Prairie. Their talents and efforts have resulted in Grande Prairie being named Canada's most entrepreneurial city by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Grande Prairie, in particular, earned top scores for the number of self-employed people, or entrepreneurs, in the city. Whether it's in agriculture, forest industries, oil and gas, mining, or high tech, entrepreneurial opportunities abound in Grande Prairie. While Grande Prairie is the top-ranked city, I'm also happy to tell you that it's joined by four other Alberta cities in the top 10.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business makes its rankings based on three categories: presence, perspective, and policy. Policy is, of course, the category where our government's actions have an impact. Mr. Speaker, our government's Competitiveness Act, our action plan for Bringing Technology to Market, and our Campus Alberta and Alberta Innovates systems all work together to support an innovative and responsive economy in Grande Prairie and throughout our province.

For example, Mr. Speaker, Grande Prairie entrepreneurs have earned a number of innovation vouchers from Alberta Innovates: Technology Futures to commercialize their unique technology-based products and services. The Grande Prairie Centre for Research & Innovation reports that the Mighty Peace region is responsible for many of the patent inquiries made in Alberta last year. The city of Grande Prairie has adopted the BizPaL system to make it easier for businesses to start. It's obvious that bold initiatives, backed with effective programs, policies, and an entrepreneurial business climate, create an opportunity that benefits all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating the entrepreneurs of Grande Prairie and all of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Education for Special-needs Children

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Official Opposition critic for Children and Youth Services as well as Education and Advanced

Education and Technology I've been contacted by families from across the province that have extreme difficulty in accessing services. As just one example, Roseanne Ledingham, a tireless advocate for her daughter Ashley, has been trying since the last school term to ensure an effective transition for Ashley in moving from elementary school, in which she progressed with supports that included speech-language therapy, resource teachers, and an IPP, to junior high.

Ashley is a child with severe and complex needs. The June 2010 report for her learning team IPP included the old form of coding of 44, 58, and 57: severe physical or medical disability, mild and moderate physical or medical disability, and severe language delay. AHS school speech-language services report that Ashley has a history of significant medical and learning problems, delays in her fine motor skills, expressive, and receptive language skills, ADHD, FASD, severe behavioural disturbance, anxiety syndromes, partial complex seizure disorder, sleeping disorders, allergies, and asthma.

There is a cross-ministry policy framework for children and youth with special needs and complex needs and their families. It's an excellent concept that unfortunately appears to be collecting dust on shelves. There was undoubtedly funding invested in consultations, task force meetings, et cetera, and the design and production of the actual documents. Yet Ashley's mother and advocate, Roseanne, had never heard of it until yesterday. Ashley is now 12 years old. She is not receiving the necessary aid in the classroom, has no IPP, and has been denied funding for speech-language therapy. Roseanne's respite allowance was cut to one hour a week.

Premier, your government can help Albertans now. This policy framework needs to have the actual policy developed. It has to be resourced, staffed, implemented, and supported by the government now.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 735 Albertans from around the province who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to ban the motocross raceway development within the current Blue Rapids Provincial Recreation Area boundaries as the addition of a raceway would interfere with public peace, current and future residents of the area, and the environment.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of the introduction of Bill 26, Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and chair of the Leg. Offices Committee.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 19(5) of the Auditor General Act I'd like to table five copies of the report by the Auditor General entitled Report of the Auditor General of Alberta, October 2010.

As well, I'd like to table five copies of the report by the Auditor General entitled Report of the Auditor General of Alberta: Results

Analysis, Financial Statements, and Other Performance Information for the Year Ended March 31, 2010. Copies of these two reports are being distributed to all members today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, and they both relate to my questions earlier today. The first is a letter that I received on behalf of the Official Opposition, dated June 2, 2010, from the Minister of Transportation, and I quoted this letter earlier regarding the Kearl oil sands project.

The second tabling I have is from the *New York Times*, and it's dated October 21, 2010. It details what's going on in Montana and Idaho regarding the shipments that we discussed in question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the government's Policy Framework for Services for Children and Youth with Special and Complex Needs and Their Families. Excellent reading, which obviously needs to be implemented.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the e-mail and fax notice for the Standing Order 30 motion that I introduced yesterday, which our office sent to the Liberal House leader at 8:39 a.m. yesterday.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Alberta Innovates technology futures 2009-2010 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, responses to questions raised by Mr. Hehr, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo; Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; Mr. Jacobs, hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner; and Mr. Mitzel, hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, on March 8, 2010, in Department of Sustainable Resource Development main estimates debates.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Electoral Boundaries Commission Final Report

18. Ms Redford moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that pursuant to section 11(1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission entitled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names for Alberta, which was tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly as an intersessional deposit on June 24, 2010, Sessional Paper 225/2010.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:50

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and make some comments

regarding Government Motion 18. Certainly, we see this process as it follows through with the redistribution of the electoral boundaries. Since the last time it was done, of course, we've had shifts in demographics, and some areas of the province have grown significantly while others, unfortunately, have not. You have this balance between large rural areas of the province, where it's obvious there are difficulties for hon. members to get to each and every community regardless of their size, and you have the other side of the issue, which is the urban areas, where there may be a much larger population in a concentrated area.

Certainly, there are difficulties in representing those neighbourhoods, or those communities, as well. You are dealing with a lot of problems. You are dealing with a lot of constituents, or citizens, who want access to government programs or want to give advice or express concerns on government policy. Regardless of where a respective member would have had the honour or the privilege of being elected, there certainly are issues.

I think the issues of representation, that we all face regardless of our communities, have been helped in the last number of years by the changes in electronic communication. It's much, much easier to contact members regardless of how they decide to, whether it be by e-mail or by Twitter. Certainly, that has been a means of communication that has come up in the media as recently as last week. But we do have our ways of communicating almost instantaneously now that we didn't have, say, 20 years ago.

I don't understand, with the increase or the improvement in communication, why we would need this motion to go from 83 to 87 seats. Certainly, if taxpayers or citizens were to stop and think about how this government has changed even since this Premier took over from his predecessor, people would realize exactly how much or how big this government has grown. There is the perception, which is not reality, that this is a small, disciplined government. It's not. It's a myth.

When the Premier was elected – now, I could stand corrected, and perhaps the hon. member can correct me – there were 18 members in the cabinet. There could have been 16. [interjection] Eighteen members? We count them now: there are 24 ministries. So that's definitely an increase in the size of government. If we increase the number of seats from the current 83 to 87 as proposed in this motion, we're going to see bigger government at a time when I don't think we need to see more representatives in this Assembly.

Getting back to what I had said earlier, because of the changes in communication, Mr. Speaker, 83 representatives is sufficient for this province. Other provinces, British Columbia and Ontario of note, get by. Their MLAs have much larger constituencies if you just take a look at population alone. We look at a province like Prince Edward Island, which actually reduced the number of MLAs that sit in their Legislative Assembly. The reduction of MLAs in this constituency was considered, but it was rejected. The idea that we would have 83 representatives here and that we would remain with that number was rejected. So in these difficult economic times we see the government growing in size.

The government deficit is growing; there's no doubt about that. This will be the third fiscal year in a row where we have seen a government deficit. The public eventually is going to connect the dots, and they will realize that this is a government, regardless of how disciplined they think they are, that is big; it's bloated. By expanding the size of the Assembly to 87 members, Mr. Speaker, we are just reflecting that trend.

I think a smaller government – certainly, we could start with having 16 ministries. We've talked about this before, and I'm not going to bore the House with our observations, but I think they're valid. They were almost good enough for the current Premier when

he took office, but that discipline didn't last long. In March of 2008 we saw the cabinet grow in size.

Now, when this motion becomes a bill and then eventually, in some form or another, becomes a law, how will this reflect the economic times that we're going through? We're seeing a larger Assembly at the same time that we're requesting that people do with less.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I'm looking forward to this debate. I understand there will be amendments to this Electoral Boundaries Commission Act as we saw it, as it was presented to the House. Certainly, the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar will be following it with interest, to say the least.

I had made a suggestion earlier – and we have to be realistic here. The city of Edmonton lost a seat in a central neighbourhood the last time there was redistribution. That constituency still has not been restored. We are going to get one seat, but when you look at the population growth, the city of Edmonton and, certainly, the city of Calgary is where the growth has occurred. It's also occurred in Fort McMurray. Those points were accepted by the commission but, in my view, overlooked, and I must express my disappointment in that. Essentially, what this motion and the bill to follow will give to the city of Edmonton is the one seat that was taken away the last time this occurred. At the same time the population increased significantly.

We're looking at this. It's a balancing act, I know, between the interests of rural areas and urban areas, but I think that can be satisfied, Mr. Speaker, without increasing the size of this Assembly by four seats.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to propose an amendment, but there was a delay in the publishing. I hope the Clerk maybe has the copies we need. Indeed, I don't even have a copy of the amendment that's at the Clerk's desk.

The Speaker: Well, just a second. We'll have them circulated and see what this amendment is.

Hon. members, just be a little patient. These first few days we have a whole new crew of pages, so they're learning the system.

Hon. Member for Highwood, you can proceed, please.

3:00

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still don't have a copy.

The Speaker: Oh, you don't have a copy either.

Mr. Groeneveld: It's coming. Here we go.

Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to propose an amendment by adding after "Sessional Paper 225/2010":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Okotoks-High River be changed to Highwood, and be it further resolved that the Assembly direct the Chief Electoral Officer to revise the DVD forming part of the final report by incorporating all the amendments to this motion and to transmit the revised DVD forthwith to the Speaker for tabling in the Assembly.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, sir. I'm going to do this very briefly. First of all, I'd certainly like to recognize the hard work of the boundary commission. Highwood, as I know it, certainly have

accepted the changes to the boundary; it's the name that we have some concerns about. The Highwood district came into being in 1971, Mr. Speaker. The constituency name really has some historical significance and portrays the nature of the landscape to the people of the area, which is dominated, of course, by the Highwood River.

The name Highwood itself, of course, has real local familiarity and support in the community, so the municipalities within this constituency support keeping the name as Highwood. I have letters of support here from the town of High River, the town of Okotoks, the municipality of High River, the municipality of Okotoks, and the MD of Foothills, which are the only ones left in the Highwood constituency, Mr. Speaker. I ask my colleagues to support me in retaining the name as Highwood as we know it.

The Speaker: The Assembly has before it an amendment to Motion 18. Further debate, discussion?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: Just sit down for a second, please, because there's one interesting little nuance that comes out of all of this. Under our Standing Order 29(2)(a) we allow for a five-minute question-and-answer period. The hon. Member for Highwood gets up, puts forward a motion. We approve the motion. When does he get to do his five minutes of penance with respect to his arguments?

An Hon. Member: At 6:05 tonight.

The Speaker: At 6:05 tonight. These interesting things cause great consternation for the chair.

The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also wish to propose an amendment to Government Motion 18 and have copies distributed.

The Speaker: Let's have them distributed. We'll have one delivered to the hon. Member for Strathcona pronto, please, as well.

Hon. Member for Strathcona, please proceed.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to propose an amendment to Government Motion 18 concerning the names of the electoral divisions by requesting a name change to the riding that I represent.

Mr. Quest moved that Government Motion 18 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 225/2010": "except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Strathcona be changed to Strathcona-Sherwood Park."

I propose that the name of my riding, Strathcona, be changed to Strathcona-Sherwood Park for a couple of reasons. This constituency was renamed Strathcona in 2004, and since that time there's been some fairly significant confusion between my constituency of Strathcona and Edmonton-Strathcona for obvious reasons. As well, it'd be appropriate to rename the constituency Strathcona-Sherwood Park. The Strathcona constituency does now include approximately 17,000 residents in the urban Sherwood Park area. The proposed boundary change will reduce the rural area of the county, so that will significantly increase the urban population of Sherwood Park as a percentage of the constituency.

Thank you for your consideration, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Speaker: While we wait, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Not on this amendment. Is this back to the motion?

The Speaker: The amendment is closed. We've concluded it. We're waiting to see what else happens, so the next speaker up is the one I'll recognize. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the motion as amended twice.

Mr. Hehr: I'll speak on the motion. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just following in the footsteps of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who reminded me of a certain circumstance about the motion put forward by the hon. Justice minister and some of the nuances contained in it. I agreed with much of what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said and would like to reiterate, possibly, a few of his comments and add a few of my own, and we'll see where this goes.

Looking back at what has happened not only since the last time we adjusted the constituency boundaries here in Alberta, much has changed here in Alberta. We've had what has no doubt been an explosion in population growth. This has occurred in many areas throughout Alberta. It's happened in Fort McMurray, it's happened in Edmonton, it's happened in Calgary, and it has happened in other jurisdictions as well, but primarily the growth has occurred in our cities. I think it's fair to say that, and in my view that is essentially what has happened. We see some of the redrawing of the electoral maps. I'm not so certain it reflected that growth primarily on a representation by population basis.

Now, I do know that that is not the test that was looked at by the good people who were in charge of redistributing our boundaries. The hon. Justice minister will correct me, but it's something to the effect of: what's best suited to provide effective government? Effective government. Nevertheless, I believe, whether it would have been Edmonton to get another seat or Calgary to get another seat or another rural district, if we were going to add any seats at all to the current boundaries, which is another issue that I'll touch on later in this debate, you know, it would have been more suited to be in one of those urban districts. Primarily, that is where the population has gone, and in my view it would have been better on a representation by population basis.

Now, there are arguments going forward that it is more difficult to represent a rural community. At the same point in time I put forward that it's difficult to represent an urban constituency. The point is that we've moved on from that. The fact is that with technology – you see it all over the place with BlackBerrys, with computers, with all these devices – I would maintain that it's getting easier, not more difficult, to keep in contact with your constituents. Those traditional cleavages that have existed between ridings in representing rural districts are beginning to disappear. I don't believe those arguments were fully reflected in the redrawing of the constituency map, but that's neither here nor there. We're seemingly going ahead with the redrawing that is going to play out this way.

3:10

I guess one of the more important questions – I should have started with this; nevertheless, I'll end with it – is: what was the

necessity for adding four more seats to this honourable House? In my view, it was something that was unnecessary, something that will add approximately \$50 million to the provincial coffers over the course of a four-year cycle, which is over the course of time no small change.

If given the times, given the work that we do, which is necessary work – democracy has a cost, and democracy should be well funded. I understand all of those arguments. Nevertheless, with technology the way it has gone, with continuing improvements on that front, in my view, we could have done just fine leaving the number of seats in this honourable House the way it is. I believe it would have led by example. If we're not hiring civil servants, why are we hiring more MLAs? All those cross-parallel arguments of what we're expecting our citizenry to go through we should in fact do in this House. Now, you can't do that in all situations, but this would have been an excellent opportunity to show that we were leading by example, and in my view it should have been done. I believe we put forward numerous amendments on that front to limit the number of MLAs to be added to this honourable House.

Nevertheless, those are my comments. I applaud the work of the committee members who were named to redraw the electoral map. It is not easy work, and they did their best and, in their view, came up with appropriate compromises. We are just here to comment. I'd just like to thank them for the work they did to the best of their abilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll let someone else take the floor.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, though, we do have Standing Order 29(2)(b) available, which affords five minutes for questions and responses. Would any individual member in the House like to raise a question of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo? Yes, hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with interest in the last eight or nine months to a fairly wide public discussion with respect to technology and the use of technology for elected representatives and how having this technology certainly does help elected representatives represent their constituents. However, I would appreciate the hon. member's thoughts on not only the speed of communication and the quantity of communication but, from my own experience as an elected representative, the importance of the quality of the communication.

I think we do spend an awful lot of time on cellphones, on BlackBerrys, perhaps on Twitter, on Facebook coming up with well-crafted phrases that are an important part of communicating in this new age. However, I still believe that there is nothing that can duplicate sitting down face to face with a constituent and having a real conversation not only about what they've written to you but about how they came to that conclusion, why they feel that way, what their own personal experience has been. I think those conversations, which in this age of technology become not as frequent as they used to be, are a very important part of what we need to do as elected representatives. I'd certainly appreciate the hon. member's views on that.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you for the question. How can you argue against something that sounds as rational as meeting with your constituent over coffee and discussing bills and going through the Orders of the Day. You can't, okay? Simply put, you can't. Nevertheless, there are ebbs and flows to these things and decisions that have to be made from time to time that are in the best interests of good government, best interests of, I guess, the financial realities that exist in this world. Okay? So I guess we could chop up our constituency even

more and, let's say, double our MLAs. That would allow for even more conversation, for me to go over to the Calgary Co-op more and say hi to more people and talk about more bills. Simply put, there has to be some sort of limit to what we can do as a democratic institution. In my view, we are hitting that number pretty right on at what we have currently.

Now, I'm not a cabinet minister – I'm pointing out the obvious, yes – and I don't have maybe as many people clamouring at my door as the hon. minister does. Nevertheless, I would consider downtown Calgary-Buffalo a fairly busy riding with numerous individuals who may actually use government services more often than some other jurisdictions. In my view, I'm able to communicate fairly effectively with anyone who wants to get hold of me at any time.

I realize that the arguments put forward by the hon. member are very solid, and I can't argue against them. Nevertheless, there is a balance to these things. I appreciate her comments.

The Speaker: Additional questions or comments? None?

Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would move that Government Motion 18 be amended by adding something, and I guess they will distribute the motion at this point.

The Speaker: It has not been distributed yet, Clerk?

Just a second, sir. Okay. Hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, please proceed. I think the distribution is just about complete.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As noted, I move that Government Motion 18 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 225/2010": "except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-Montrose be changed to Calgary-Greenway." This is something proposed by the Calgary Parks Foundation and supported by community leaders.

In June 1986 my predecessor the hon. Rick Orman, first-ever MLA for Calgary-Montrose, said in his maiden speech that he hoped that the northeast would have a park. It's with great pleasure that I speak about the east Calgary greenway, which is a large network of parks and green spaces that follows along the east Calgary ring road. This park is planned to be over 100 kilometres long, and the first phase of this development stretches from Airport Trail to 17th Avenue S.E., bordering every one of the five communities that will form the new boundary.

Along the greenway there are recreational destinations like playgrounds, dog parks, and even a 3.1 hectare interpretative wetland. This park is quickly becoming a dominant feature on the east side of Calgary, and it will be a major geographical marker of the east side. It's used by many residents in my constituency and beyond. With the proposed changes to the electoral divisions even more of this park will be incorporated into the riding. Renaming the constituency Calgary-Greenway would reflect the growing importance of this park and serve to unify the residents in east Calgary.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, as you know, there are precedents in other areas of our province for such proposed changes. The constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek is named after Fish Creek park, and Calgary-Nose Hill is named after Nose Hill park.

In addition to being a dominant feature in east Calgary, naming a constituency after a park has the added benefit of not excluding any residential community. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think this name, Calgary-Greenway, is reflective of the citizens of east Calgary. As

I mentioned, community associations are supportive, and I strongly encourage all my colleagues in the House to join with me in supporting this name change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Mr. Speaker, could the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose provide more details in his historical vignette on the proposal to go to Calgary-Greenway?

The Speaker: Hon. member, we'll be a little flexible here today. Go ahead.

Mr. Bhullar: Sir, I must confess that I am not as good at historical vignettes as the hon. Speaker. Members of this House would all, I think, concur with me that you, sir, are the master of that.

The Calgary greenway is a project that will run along the perimeter of the city of Calgary, around all of its outer borders. At present the first phase of this project is being completed on the east side. That's a big win for my constituents because, usually, when great things happen in Calgary, we've got to fight to make them happen on the east side. The first phase is happening on the east side. From 17th Ave. S.E., which is my southernmost boundary, it will run all the way up to Airport Trail. This is a unifier of all five communities that will be within the new boundary of the present Calgary-Montrose.

This is more than merely a trail system. It's a building block of community in many respects. We have a great deal of seniors within our communities that use this as a meeting place, and quite frankly the work is not even fully completed yet.

I'm incredibly excited by the east Calgary greenway. I'm proud of the fact that the first phase of this project is happening on the east side. I'm incredibly proud that the communities are supportive of this project. Quite frankly, I think it'll become a major geographical marker for the east side of Calgary.

The Speaker: We're on an amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. With the comments that have been proposed here in the House, I can't help but ask a question. This greenway is going to go around the entire city. If you talk about Nose Hill or Fish Creek, those communities are there. Is it not going to be somewhat confusing down the road when this takes place and the greenway is the whole area? I wonder whether it's appropriate to take Greenway. Then someone will wonder: "Well, is that northeast, southeast? Where in the city is it?" Geographically I don't know that there's going to be any connection to your riding 10 years from now, let alone in five.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the point is that at present it will have connection to the community. It will for the next number of years, but it will also be a marker to say that east Calgary was first with the greenway. That's why this is absolutely instrumental.

East Calgary will have access to the greenway project long before other quadrants of the city. That's why this is something that the residents of east Calgary are very proud of, sir. I would invite you to come along with me and take a walk along this pathway system, and you will see that in these communities, where people from a vast number of nations around the world reside and where people making extremely large amounts of money and people just surviving live,

this particular project is something that unifies them. So this is something of significance to the people of the east side. With all due respect, I believe that for the next five to 10 years at the very least, sir, this project will be a very significant marker for the east side of Calgary.

It's something, as I said, the communities are supportive of, and the Calgary Parks Foundation has proposed this in writing. Quite frankly, I'm a big champion and supporter of this project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. We're still on the amendment.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't as interested in this amendment as I am now. My interest has been piqued. It sounds to me like the Calgary greenway project is almost like Central Park now, the way we've had a discussion of this.

The Speaker: I've got to just tell everybody now. We're talking about an amendment to a constituency name. We're not talking about building parks. The subject of this amendment is to change the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-Montrose to Calgary-Greenway. That is the subject of the amendment.

Proceed.

Mr. Hehr: I guess I'm still hedging my bet, whether I'm going to be supportive or against it, until I've heard a little more. Is this greenway project more like a large series of parks, or is it like Central Park? It sounds like quite a system here that you have. [A timer sounded]

The Speaker: Go ahead. Proceed.

Mr. Hehr: I guess that it's more just that my interest has been piqued here as to what exactly it is. I'm getting a fair representation from you, but just to sort of, I guess, broaden my scope and my knowledge, is this one large park? Is it a series of links? I'm just really trying to picture this and the relevance to the community.

The Speaker: Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Bhullar: Thanks for the opportunity to explain. It's a pathway system that runs, as I said, from 17th Avenue S.E., Elliston park, all the way up to Airport Trail. So that's the pathway, hence the name east Calgary greenway. Then throughout the pathway there are locations where there are meeting places. There are ponds. There is an interpretive centre. So it's a pathway system with a series of small parks incorporated into it. There will be playgrounds. It's a pretty significant piece of recreational infrastructure. I think that's the best way that I can put it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose was allowed to get up several times because he was part of that five-minute question-and-answer thing. When the buzzer went when he was speaking, I should have had him sit down. But, well, it's only day 2. So it was a nice thing.

We're still now on the amendment. If somebody wants to participate in the debate on the amendment, we'll allow it, but then we're going to bring this thing to a head.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Speaker: I said earlier that I would recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the debate of the motion now, which has been amended three times. Then we'll go to the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for permitting me to speak to Bill 18, as you pointed out, thrice amended. I must admit that I have a little bit of difficulty with the title of Bill 18, which says Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, sir. We are on Motion 18, not the bill.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Motion 18. Thank you.

The Speaker: It's not the bill. It's not the government reorganization act.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate it. We're talking about electoral boundaries, not government organization. Thank you for that clarification. It was the numeracy that caused me some initial confusion, now corrected.

With the establishment of electoral boundaries and the addition of four new electoral boundaries, I recognize the need to balance our increasing population in Alberta. But I have to wonder in the name of efficiency how it is that our cities have considerably fewer aldermen or alderwomen or councillors or Reeves to carry on the same local business and they seem to do it quite well. And we now require 87 individuals to carry out the governance of the province.

3:30

I appreciate the fact that my constituents call me on a regular basis. One of the methods I've used for contacting constituents, that has worked extremely well, is basically hanging out at the Grassroots farmers' market in Calgary-Varsity. When people seeing all the other vendors ask me, "What are you selling?" I simply reply: "I'm giving away democracy. It's in short supply in this province." We have some interesting discussions.

Electoral boundaries – for example, the change was made, I believe, in 2003. Originally West Dalhousie, where I resided, was part of Calgary-Foothills. It was changed to Calgary-Varsity, which was a large help to me because that's where I taught for 21 of my 34 years. So I see the need to accommodate population shifts, but as a member of the Liberal Party, and having stated this clearly, we believe that in this case more is not better in terms of the governance of the province.

In terms of the electoral boundaries and the commission as it represents improving democracy and governance in this province, it concerns me that the electoral officer Lorne Gibson . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we have a point of order.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hesitate to interrupt the speaker, but I would do so under Standing Order 23(f). This speaker and a number of other speakers have referred to the number of seats, and of course that wasn't within the purview of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. They had to abide by the law which had previously been passed by this Legislature, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which increased the number of seats. So it's not relevant to be speaking about the number of seats in the debate about the acceptance of the boundaries commission report because the

boundaries commission could not do but design 87 seats as directed by this Legislature.

The Speaker: Quite frankly, that's a very valid point. I think we should deal with the motion that we have in front of us.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much.

The Speaker: That matter has been dealt with in the House.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for the clarification, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Government House Leader, for pointing out the relevance.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: I realize that the Electoral Boundaries Commission was basically regulated by the discussion in this House, and I attempted to point out that this discussion on increasing and directing the boundaries commission to come up with four new electoral districts was not unanimous. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that that historical record and its relevance is worthy of note.

What I am concerned about is what now takes place in the four new electoral boundaries, that we're in the process of approving today. My concern is how we best improve the efficiency within those electoral boundaries. How is it that we can potentially improve, for example, voter turnout in these new regions?

One of the problems in previous electoral boundaries was the census. I'm hoping that the census information for these new boundaries will potentially be shared between the municipalities and the federal districts where there are overlaps. Having the numbers of voters, particularly in a new constituency, identified so that they can participate in the next election, whether it be 2012 or at some time earlier or later, is extremely important, and I'm hoping it's viewed as relevant.

I would hope that as we go forward with this larger, expanded democracy, we can gain greater participation than we have to date. The 2008 election was highly disappointing. However, I take some hope in the recent turnout, for example, in Calgary. Calgary, of course, is a recipient of two of these new electoral boundaries; call it timing or call it a reward for due diligence in Calgary and recognizing population growth. We just recently had a municipal election, Mr. Speaker, where we had over 50 per cent voter turnout. That is my hope not only for our four new electoral districts but for this province.

Thank you for allowing me to participate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(b) is available for five minutes of questions or comments should members choose. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Sure. I'd just like to hear more from the hon. member about his general feeling about the need for more MLAs, if we need more MLAs. Or do you think that should have been part of the report? I frankly think it's very relevant. This is a democracy, and we do like free debate and free speech, so I'd like to hear a little bit more about that if you could.

The Speaker: Well, unfortunately, the hon. member may wish to do that except that we are going to stay within the context. I mean, the motion is very, very clear. The Assembly has dealt with all of these other matters previously. We can waste five minutes of time, you know, whistling, but let's be relevant to what we have at hand today.

Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, do you want to try again?

Mr. Anderson: Well, may I get clarification? What are we allowed to talk about, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Well, let's take a look at Motion 18. It says:

Be it resolved that pursuant to section 11(1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission entitled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names for Alberta, which was tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly as an intersessional deposit on June 24, 2010.

This report follows a discussion in the House about what the parameters would be for the Electoral Boundaries Commission. It followed a process whereby leaders of the government, leaders of the opposition parties were to convey to the Speaker names that would then subsequently be appointed to form the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission then was created. It went out and held meetings. The document came back to the Assembly. It was reviewed by the Assembly. The committee went back out again and came back. So we're dealing now with the final thing.

In the meantime, we had a debate on a bill, in particular, that increased the number of ridings from 83 to 87.

What we're dealing with now is the conclusion, the report. We've done all that other stuff. It's now the 21st century, as I heard somebody say today. We'll stick with that.

Mr. Anderson: I'll be brief. Could you tell us a little bit about whether you like the report's boundaries for Calgary-Varsity, hon. member? Are there any communities that you think you would like to see in there, any ones that are not in there that, you know, you think should be in there, et cetera? What are your feelings on your own boundaries?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely proud of the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. The reason for that pride is very similar to the pride I felt when Calgary voters turned out in the municipal election. I'm sure you're aware of this, but Calgary-Varsity had the largest voter turnout in this past election, which indicates the engagement of Calgary-Varsity constituents. It had nothing to do with myself. I was one of a number of very capable candidates running for the position of representing Calgary-Varsity constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I understand fully that the boundaries commission was given very strict parameters. They did their work, they went throughout the province, and they came up with what they believed was their best recommendation. While I support the effort and the methodology in arriving at these suggestions, I do not support the conclusion.

3:40

I understand and am appreciative of the fact that Fort McMurray's population was finally represented, especially with its satellite communities. I understand that Calgary's population has grown significantly. If I were in favour of expanding electoral districts, which, Mr. Speaker, I have clearly indicated that I'm not, if that were my reasoning in terms of population and representation, then I would suggest that Edmonton lost out because they previously had one of their constituency boundaries eliminated and the population has grown considerably since that was done. If I were a person who believed bigger is better, I would suggest that Edmonton was shortchanged; therefore, I cannot concur with the proposal of Motion 18 and the electoral boundaries findings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We still have time if there are additional questions or comments under this segment.

If not, are there additional speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to propose an amendment to Government Motion 18. We'll have those distributed.

The Speaker: Okay. Let's have it circulated.

I think there's been circulation of this amendment now, hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, so would you kindly proceed?

Mr. Fawcett: Sure. Yeah. I would like to move that Government Motion 18 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 225/2010": "except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-North Hill be changed to Calgary-Klein."

Mr. Speaker, it truly is an honour to be able to move this amendment. I do concur with the Electoral Boundaries Commission report except in this one instance. Before I go on to explain the rationale behind the name that I'm proposing, I just want to point out to all members a particular problem I did have with the report, and that was around the name of two constituencies in Calgary that were so similar, I believe, and many of my constituents led me to believe, as to cause confusion within the city.

I think the way the process went is that during the second round of consultations the Electoral Boundaries Commission did with the public, a number of communities in the constituency of our hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay indicated that they would like their constituency to be renamed after their community association. The communities of Harvest Hills, Coventry Hills, Country Hills, Country Hills Estates, Panorama Hills, and Panorama Hills Estates have a community association called Northern Hills Community Association. I think that's an appropriate name for the constituency. I don't think the hon. member for that constituency has a problem with it, and I think the Electoral Boundaries Commission did see that there was some merit behind naming that constituency that particular name.

However, I'm not sure whether they contemplated – this is obviously a very complex process that they have to go through – that there were two names that were similar. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, that presents the opportunity that I have. I received a number of comments from constituents about this and the closeness between the two constituencies, and I started thinking: well, what may possibly be the solution?

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure many in this Assembly are aware, but the former Premier of this province and hon. member of this Legislature from Calgary-Elbow, Premier Klein, was born and raised in the community of Tuxedo Park, which resides right in the middle of my constituency. That continues to be a source of pride for many people in that community.

Mr. Klein has had a distinguished career of over 25 years of service as the mayor of the city of Calgary and as Premier of this great province. He was elected as mayor in 1980 and served as the mayor for nine years, which included serving as mayor during the time when Calgary hosted the 1988 Winter Olympics, again, which remains a continued source of pride in the city of Calgary and something that we always look back on very fondly. The former Premier and the mayor at the time was certainly centre stage as being that gracious host to the world.

Not only that, Mr. Klein then moved into provincial politics and sat in this Legislature as the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, as I mentioned, but also held the portfolios of Minister of Environment

and minister of I believe at that time it was called federal and intergovernmental affairs, at which time in 1992 he won the leadership race of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta and as such was sworn in as Premier of this great province on December 14, 1992. Subsequent to that, that Premier then led the PC Party in victories in elections in 1993, 1997, 2001, and 2004 and served this great province in the capacity of Premier until the fall of 2006.

Mr. Speaker, we do have precedent in naming constituencies after significant Albertans and in particular those that served as Premier of this great province and as mayors in our two great cities. We do have a Calgary-Lougheed. There's some discussion whether that's actually named after former Premier Lougheed or a family. But we also do have an Edmonton-Decore, an Edmonton-Manning, and an Edmonton-Rutherford.

I have had some questions about: "Well, why Premier Klein? There are other great Albertans." I agree. There are lots of great Albertans, thousands of great Albertans. But the fact is we don't have a thousand constituencies to name after them. I think there are certain thresholds, and obviously this particular precedent of naming constituencies after former mayors and Premiers is certainly one that would make sense in my area because of the source of pride that the community members that I represent have in having someone that has risen to prominence in the position of mayor and Premier come from their particular community.

There's no doubt that there may be some people out there that might have disagreed with the policies of the former Premier. That's what is so great about our society, that we can have those disagreements. But I think we should all stand in solidarity when it comes to recognizing those individuals that sacrifice so much of their personal life to give back to our society in the way that Premier Klein did. I think we're all very grateful for the fact that we are one of the only jurisdictions without any long-term debt, and I think that is certainly owed to the leadership of former Premier Klein, who was able in 2004 to announce that this province was debt free. I know that I'm grateful for myself. I also believe that I'm grateful for my future kids and grandkids that they don't have to have that burden put on them when they're born into this province.

Mr. Speaker, these are the reasons why I proposed this amendment to Government Motion 18. I look forward to having all members of this Legislature endorse and honour a great Albertan. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: We're on the amendment, the debate on the amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:50

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very specific to the amendment. I have no doubt about precedent: Manning, Lougheed, Decore. I do recognize the fact that we don't have an Edmonton-Getty, for example, that somehow in terms of recognizing contributions, Premier Getty was left out.

One of the concerns I have is the feelings of the constituents. I'm sure, possibly, that in 29(2)(a) this will come out, but I would like to get a sense of what kind of plebiscite or questioning process or involvement of the constituents in this particular selection of a name occurred. For example, Mr. Speaker, in the community newsletters – in this case they sometimes overlap our two constituencies because they border on each other – I have frequently asked constituents their opinions on a variety of issues and how I could better represent them. I would hope that the hon. MLA for what is currently named Calgary-North Hill and is proposed to be changed to Calgary-Klein has done the due diligence in terms of getting at least a strong poll of his constituents as to whether this is where they want to reside.

There is no one in this House, I would believe, that does not believe that Premier Klein was a controversial figure, and based on that controversy, people might feel uncomfortable. I'll give you an example of a district that felt uncomfortable. There was a proposal to name one of the schools Pierre Trudeau school. Well, we've got examples of prime ministers' names being placed on school edifices to recognize accomplishments, and I would suggest that probably Pierre Elliott Trudeau shared equally in the controversy that Premier Ralph Klein did. The community was consulted, and they said: we want a name on our school that more closely reflects our community. That was reflected in the name they chose.

I don't have any problem with the precedent. I don't have any problem in the notion of honouring former Premier Klein. I am extremely appreciative that Premier Klein, when asked to have his name placed on the Children's hospital, declined. I thought he showed great humility and great foresight in not having the Children's hospital named after him.

I would assume that the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill has shared this idea of honouring our former Premier with the Premier. I would be interested, Mr. Speaker, if the free flow of ideas that proceeded with the former amendment on changing to Calgary-Greenway, formerly Calgary-Montrose, would be provided to the representative, the MLA for Calgary-North Hill, because I would like to think that his constituents in large numbers were involved in this process and would feel comfortable with this naming.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the responses.

The Speaker: That free flow will come under Standing Order 29(2)(b), which now permits any member to ask questions or make comments of you. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill if you wanted to. Did you want to participate in it? We have that five-minute item.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to address some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, I'm not going to stand here and suggest that his opinions aren't valid or that sort of thing, but I want him to know that I tried to talk to as many constituents as possible over the fall. Some suggested proceeding with caution. You know, at times was Premier Klein a controversial figure? Certainly he was. I don't think there is anything that we bring forward as elected members or holders of public office that is going to have one hundred per cent unanimous agreement. But I want to allude for this member to a statement made by his former leader and the current hon. member Dr. Taft on the last day that . . .

The Speaker: You can't use that name.

Mr. Fawcett: Oh. Pardon me. Sorry. I retract that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the Premier's last day in the House said: "The Premier has never been afraid to wear his humanity on his sleeve, and I think everyone in this Legislature and in Legislatures across Canada should learn from the Premier's example."

Mr. Speaker, this is a gentleman that has left public life to go on to a private life. I don't think this is an opportunity to debate where he stood on issues and what policies he had. It's an opportunity to recognize the exemplary service that he provided Calgarians and Albertans over the last 25 years. That's what we're here to talk about today, and I'm hoping that all members can understand that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I did go out and talk to as many constituents as possible. Just in the last week and a half I hit three community meetings in which I probably was in front of

300 to 400 constituents – a couple of them were AGMs in the community association; another was a contentious meeting about the siting of a facility – and mentioned this potential change to them and asked them to provide their feedback. I got not one comment back saying that this was a bad idea. Therefore, I think that this is something that should be supported by all members of this Legislature.

The Speaker: Okay. We're under Standing Order 29(2)(b) as a result of comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. Did you want to . . .

Mr. Chase: Yes. I believe I have the opportunity, now that the explanation has been given, to inquire further, do I?

The Speaker: Indeed so, sir. This is a bit of a reversal from the norm, but go ahead.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I guess I'm envious, Mr. Speaker, of the turnout at AGMs that Calgary-North Hill has had. When I've attended a variety of AGMs, whether it be Calgary-Varsity or Calgary Dalhousie, Triwood, et cetera, Banff Trail being another, I have never seen that great a turnout at an AGM. I'm assuming that the greater turnout was at the controversial meeting because there's nothing like controversy to bring out the electorate.

I will take the hon. member at his word that he did the due diligence in consulting a variety of his constituents. The instrument that I suggested that might have been used and provided a greater feedback was the community news. It'll be interesting as to whether the hon. member hears back from the people whose voices to date have been silent but may get a tremendous, in both senses of the word, surprise when this name change takes place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Infrastructure, did you want to raise a question or make a comment with respect to the comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity?

Mr. Danyluk: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do. The hon. member made comments to say that, you know, he didn't really agree with the direction of naming a constituency or schools. I recently attended a school opening that was named after a member that sat in the Liberal Party, Don Massey. I just wanted to know exactly what his feeling was because he did have a lot of colleagues there that very much supported that.

The Speaker: Okay. Who else would like to participate in this debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. We are on the amendment as put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. Proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this amendment. I note, as other speakers have already noted, that there is certainly a tradition in this House as well as in many Houses across the country to name constituencies after high-profile and well-respected historic figures, many of whom happen to coincidentally also be political figures. Certainly, that has occurred in the past.

4:00

I do, however, agree somewhat with the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. First of all, I think the current political figure that has been identified has been out of office for all of two and

a half years. [interjections] Okay. Two and a half, three and a half, four: the point is that it's not long enough to suggest that he is part of history.

An Hon. Member: Do you want him to die first? Is that it?

Ms Notley: I wouldn't go there.

Indeed, I think that with the number of times that I've seen members of this government try to in fact distance themselves from some of the rather unfortunate policy decisions made under that previous Premier, we see that he is actually still an active part of our political discourse in this province.

More to the point, I think it speaks to the problem with this process. We have an Electoral Boundaries Commission, which consists of partisan appointments from two of the parties in the province and is not representing those who are not one of those two parties. As a result, the names that are identified are those that reflect particular partisan backgrounds. And while, you know, there comes a time when you can respect the historical integrity that comes from someone's role, I really think that the two, three, four years, however long it's been, that we've had since the former Premier has played an active role in our politics is simply too close.

I also think that it's not enough for the Member for Calgary-North Hill to come here and say: I talked to a few people, and no one disagreed. I, frankly, think that he should have been prepared to make his case better. I think he should have been prepared to come with letters of support from members of the community, from community leaders and community residents, so that it's not a question of a partisan group of people imposing their partisan agenda onto a community without black-and-white evidence of support with respect to that. So I think that that is a problem.

I think that ultimately – no question – we've seen Liberal caucus members recognized and we have seen Conservative caucus members recognized and leaders recognized, and that, of course, reflects the makeup of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, which, of course, is the underpinning of why the whole process is somewhat flawed.

I think that in this case it's just too close. As was identified, this was a very controversial figure. There are a lot of significant concerns about some of the actions of that figure that still are alive in vulnerable communities across the province. I think that it's simply too soon to suggest that this would be an appropriate decision, and I think that it would cast a rather partisan shadow across all of the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission should this decision go forward without extensive evidence that members of the community are seeking that outcome. That is why I will not vote in favour of this change.

The Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(b). Does anybody want to raise a question or make a comment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East under Standing Order 29(2)(b). Proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly cannot claim to know the former Premier as well as, certainly, some of his caucus and cabinet. However, it had been noted that he has already turned down the opportunity to have a hospital named after him. Believe it or not, despite all the controversy and despite what appeared to be flamboyancy, really his personal personality was not that flamboyant. My question would be: has the former Premier actually been asked if he would accept this if this is passed?

The Speaker: Okay. Just a second here now. Be very careful. It's the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona whose five-minute question thing is involved. Now, if there's a way that the hon.

Member for Calgary-North Hill can get involved in this five-minute segment to answer that question, go for it. I presume that you're going to be going through the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona via the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. I'll try to answer her questions, Mr. Speaker, and answer some others at the same time.

I do want this House to know that I did speak with Mr. Klein on two occasions, one – I believe it was the month of August – when I mentioned the possibility, and I did speak with him last night. He was certainly humbled by the gesture. Therefore, that consultation and agreement has taken place.

It really is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that we have some members of this Legislature that want to question the policy stances of an elected official that left office about four years ago. We're in today and now, and the only thing that I think is important about the history is recognizing those that gave exemplary service to our province.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I think I will just leave it at that.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, did you want to get into this Q and A section? You can't get back to the main motion; you've already spoken. I recognized you at 3:07. The only way you're getting back in is through this mechanism. Go for it.

Mr. Hehr: Well, then, if I'm allowed to make a quick comment, I am actually differing from some members on this side. I think it's a reasonable motion to recognize a man who has spent 25 years in public office. Say what you want about this or that, he gave up significant portions of his private life to serve, and I see this as a reasonable way to recognize those contributions.

The Speaker: Anyone else on this Q and A portion? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you've got a minute and 48.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. Something, Mr. Speaker, that we pride in ourselves as Liberals is the capacity to allow divergent thinking. I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for having the forthrightness, the conviction to state his points and his recognition of the hon. Premier Ralph Klein and his various contributions to this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. With that, I take it that that concludes this segment.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you wanted to get in on the amendment?

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

The Speaker: Please, sir, proceed.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have no question that he's been an outstanding Albertan. He's served us well, a phenomenal individual. My question is with the precedent. Do you just pick an area and allow that to happen? I know you said that he was born and grew up there. Is it more relevant to put him in an area like Calgary-Elbow, where he served for a long time? Is there a precedent in deciding what riding might represent that name and why you picked it: if it's his birthplace, where he grew up as opposed to the years of service to an area he actually represented? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hold on. Hold on. Let's be very careful, please. If the hon. member has concluded his comments, we will now, then, go to 29(2)(b). All right?

I'll recognize first of all the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, who wanted to say something, then the Minister of Energy, and then Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member probably brings up a valid comment, but I don't think there is any precedent. There are no rules about how these sorts of things happen. It was probably unlikely that the opportunity would have presented itself had there not been some changes. Maybe it would have presented itself in a different form sometime down the road. But when an opportunity presents itself, I think it's incumbent on us to step back and do the right thing, and I think this is the right thing.

Like I said, this is a source of pride in the community. I think that if you went back and looked over the historical voting records, this was a Premier and mayor that was pretty popular in the area where he grew up, and that helped shape who he was.

4:10

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, it's still your five-minute segment.

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate that answer. I guess, like I say, this is an opportunity to name any place in the province. That's why I was wondering if he actually asked the Premier if there's a place that was near and dear to his heart that he would have liked to represent, you know, one over the other. Like I say, he spent a great deal of time in Calgary-Elbow. I'm just wondering. This opportunity is for 87 ridings, not just Calgary-North Hill.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as I understand 29(2)(a), it's to ask questions.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(b).

Mr. Liepert: Or (b), whatever it is. I'd like to ask the Member for Calgary-Glenmore: if we're debating the electoral boundaries bill, which by my read of it will now have the former Premier Klein as a constituent of this particular member, is he prepared to face his constituent in the next provincial election and face him on the doorstep? I'd ask him if he's prepared to say that he supported this motion in the Legislature when it came for debate?

The Speaker: This is 29(2)(a), by the way. The (a) and (b) sometimes get me confused. Go ahead.

Mr. Hinman: I think that I said that I have supported the idea that Premier Klein deserves recognition for the service that he's done in the province. Actually, it would be my opportunity perhaps to represent him if Lakeview community was in the riding of Calgary-Klein. I don't know whether he's trying to be cheeky or what his point is. The point is for Calgary-North Hill, and I'm asking: is that the most appropriate place? I recognize that it is, I think, a very humbling thing for Premier Klein to be recognized in this nature. Where he wants to be represented: in fact, was that presented to him?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, did you want to participate in this section?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: I have a question if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I was listening to the discussion here about the constituency to be named Calgary-Klein. Of course, it will be up to the voters in the next election to determine who will be the first person and from what party they will come to represent that constituency. Has the hon. member given any consideration, in the length of time we've had this discussion, to whether or not his party will be targeting that constituency? I think it would be kind of ironic if the first MLA elected in Calgary-Klein was a Liberal or maybe a Wildrose Alliance. My question is, very quickly: have you given any consideration to targeting Calgary-Klein?

Mr. Hinman: The Wildrose believes that Alberta is a great place. We're honoured to serve Albertans wherever they are, and we're focused on all Alberta ridings to give them an opportunity to vote for a better party with better ideas with better government for the people.

The Speaker: Additional comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. We're still under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much. Again, in the interests of clarification, when I was explaining Premier Klein's humility and his desire not to have the Children's hospital named after him, a heckle arose from the current Minister of Energy suggesting that I was possibly making this up, that there was no historical relevance to Premier Klein turning down the honour of having the Children's hospital named after him. I just would like to put it on the record that his statements are a part of the historical record, and I would encourage the hon. Minister of Energy to do his homework.

The Speaker: Okay. We've got 10 seconds left.

Mr. Hinman: I'm not sure how to answer that question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. We're back to the amendment. Is there an additional speaker who would like to participate in the debate on the amendment? I'll call the question, then. Is that correct?

Well, then, hon. members, we have before us an amendment to Government Motion 18, essentially the fourth amendment that's come forward this afternoon, and it's put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. It basically calls for a provision under the motion that the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-North Hill be changed to Calgary-Klein.

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Speaker: We're back now to the motion. Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, are you getting involved?

Ms Calahasen: No. I was going to call for a vote, Mr. Speaker, a standing vote.

The Speaker: Well, you need more than one person. We've passed that. It's been dealt with.

Okay. We have a motion before the Assembly. Four amendments have been approved. Shall I now call the question that the motion as amended be approved?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Government Motion 18 as amended carried]

The Speaker: Okay. This matter is concluded. What will happen is that subsequent to this, a bill will have to be introduced in the Legislative Assembly. A new DVD, which will outline the actual boundaries, will have to be produced, and there will be a mechanism, outlined to all hon. members here in the last few days, where there will be someone taking members through, should they want to deal with specific amendments to the bill as it comes forward. The motion has now been dealt with.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 I introduced Bill 204, a private member's bill, which proposed to prohibit the use of hand-held cellphones while driving. The Standing Committee on the Economy reviewed Bill 204 and recommended that it not proceed and that a new offence of distracted driving be created. On April 14 the government introduced Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, which proposes to prohibit distracted driving.

As a former police officer I've witnessed first-hand the dangerous consequences of distracted driving. If there's one thing I know for sure, we have to do something about this. So many collisions and tragedies could have been prevented if drivers were simply more attentive and careful when they were behind the wheel.

I am pleased to speak to the merits of this bill and how it will benefit Albertans by improving traffic safety in our province. I also know that there is strong public support for this type of legislation. In a 2008 Angus Reid poll 89 per cent of Albertans said that they supported legislation that would ban the use of hand-held phones while driving. I wish the process could have been a little faster, but I think it's also important that we take the time to get it right.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Talking or texting on a hand-held cellphone while trying to drive is dangerous. Just look at the phones that are coming out these days. They allow drivers to access the Internet, send and receive e-mail and text messages, watch TV, listen to music, take photos, navigate using GPS, and, oh, yes, call someone.

Hand-held cellphones are just one piece of the puzzle. There are many other driver distractions that jeopardize traffic safety. Other distractions include personal grooming, using a laptop, writing, using an MP3 player, even reading. We need to go beyond simply banning the use of hand-held cellphones while driving and address the bigger issue of distracted driving.

International research indicates that 20 to 30 per cent of all collisions involve some form of driver distraction. Technological advances in recent years have added to this problem. Police want and need a tool to deal with more than just cellphone use while driving. Based on consultations with law enforcement representatives, they also want something that will help manage and reduce other driver distractions.

The challenge we face is to create a law that is comprehensive, practical, effective, and enforceable, and I think Bill 16 strikes the

right balance. This bill will give law enforcement another tool to better address distracted driving in Alberta. I am proposing a new, comprehensive offence that restricts drivers from engaging in distracting activities, including, but not limited to, using hand-held cellphones or other wireless electronic devices, programming GPS units while driving, reading, writing, or grooming.

4:20

A driver who chooses to put everyone else at risk by driving distracted would face a fine of \$172, which is in line with other moving violations. There will be no demerits attached to the distracted driving ticket. In the event that a distracted driver also commits a moving violation, demerits for the moving violation could apply. The distracted driving offence would complement, not replace, the current driving without due care and attention law, which is a more serious offence. The penalty for this offence is a fine of \$402 and six demerit points.

Now, will there be any exceptions to these provisions? Yes. Hands-free phones are not covered in the legislation. I know that there's a question of: why not ban hands-free? Well, it isn't that simple. Enforcing hands-free is very difficult, and no other jurisdiction has included hands-free phones in their legislation.

The use of radio communications such as CB radios will be allowed for industry when used as a part of their direct duties and for search and rescue operations. This legislation will not interfere with the official duties of emergency services personnel, including enforcement, fire, and medical services. While driving, drivers will only be able to use a hand-held device to contact emergency services.

Like the consultations with law enforcement, the consultations with our many traffic safety stakeholders found that they, too, support this type of approach to the issue of distracted driving. I think it is important to acknowledge the effort of law enforcement and our traffic safety partners, for their input and commitment to this issue of traffic safety. Because of our positive relationships and co-ordinated efforts in addressing traffic safety, we are making a difference, and I know we will continue to move forward.

Since the introduction of this legislation last April, Albertans had an opportunity to review Bill 16 and provide comments. I am pleased to tell you that the majority of the feedback received from law enforcement, stakeholders, and the general public share positive comments and support for this bill. They are eager to see this bill become law.

Mr. Speaker, over the past several months Alberta Transportation received many letters, e-mails, and phone calls regarding Bill 16, and I know that many of us received feedback from our constituents as well. Many people wrote in with questions. Of the people who indicated support, 72 per cent are in favour of the bill. Information about Bill 16 is on Alberta Transportation's website, and it has received more than 7,000 hits since April, which indicates there's significant interest in this legislation. People want to learn more about this issue and are engaged and, I believe, want to be part of the solution.

Proceeding with this proposed legislation will give law enforcement another tool to help make our roads safer. We are also sending a strong message to all Albertans: when you are in your vehicle, your focus must be on your driving. We must take action on this important traffic safety issue. Traffic collisions impose enormous costs on our society, and anything we can do to improve safety provides tremendous benefits to all Albertans. This law is fundamental to good driving practice; however, I do recognize that this law alone will not reduce collisions but is a key part of our strategy to take action on this dangerous trend. Safety is a choice, Mr.

Speaker, and this bill combined with education, awareness, and enforcement can help Albertans make the right choice.

I want to thank my colleagues in the government caucus for supporting a very comprehensive piece of legislation. Once again Alberta is taking a bold approach to address an important issue, one that I am very proud to be part of. I trust my colleagues will support the proposed Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010.

I look forward to the upcoming debate on this subject, and I do have an amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to be the first up to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I respect his history of being a front-line police officer who I am sure had the unenviable job of being the first on an accident scene. He probably knows better than any other member in this House the carnage that occurs in road collisions. I appreciate his bringing this bill forward as a government bill because it bears more weight. I'm assuming that because it is a government bill, his government colleagues will be supportive of it.

My major concern is that it doesn't go far enough. In consultation with emergency physicians and having had this discussion on several occasions with Dr. Francescutti, who is an Edmonton emergency physician and newly elected chair of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, it has been indicated by a variety of emergency physicians and other experts in injury that it's the cognitive action of discussing on the phone that is the major area of distraction as opposed to the simple act of holding the phone in your hand. Doctors from emergency departments have encouraged me personally to take this discussion further. It'll be interesting. I'll look forward to hearing another emergency physician's take on this particular bill, and that's the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark who, again, has had that front-line experience and realizes the importance of being proactive in creating our legislation.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is long overdue, and I must admit today to having a type of déjà vu experience. I want to recount and explain. If you want to take it as a historical vignette à la the Speaker, you can. I want to bring people's memories back. Many of us were here in the House on Monday, April 25, 2005, when I introduced Motion 506, Hand-held Cellphone Use while Driving. I moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to prohibit the use of hand-held cellular phones while operating a motor vehicle.

I felt that that was an important issue in 2005. Nothing has been done since, and we find ourselves in 2010 still talking about it. I really hope for the hon. mover of this motion, the representative of Calgary-Hays, that this gets approval. As I say, I think it's a very large step in the direction.

What I want to point out in my vignette is that there were conflicted feelings about distracted driving legislation. The conflict had to do primarily with the hand-held nature. I want to share some of the comments that were made with regard to this, that show the conflict members had at that time. My hope is that those conflicted members have changed their minds in the interval.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West, the current Minister of Energy, began his debate stating:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased tonight to participate in the debate on Motion 506. This is an important debate because in many ways it tends to differentiate those who believe that government should be regulating more and more individuals' lives and freedoms and those, like myself, who feel that individuals need to accept responsibility for their actions.

That stated, here's where the conflict came in:

Mr. Speaker, science does not agree that banning the use of hand-held cellular phones will effectively eliminate the dangers of driver inattention. Furthermore, according to scientific studies driving and talking on a phone is not necessarily dangerous because of the physical act of holding the phone but, rather, from the mental act of having a conversation.

Now, while we rarely agree, in this particular case I fully agree with the hon. Minister of Energy when he stated – and I'll emphasize it again – that

talking on a phone is not necessarily dangerous because of the physical act of holding the phone but, rather, from the mental act of having a conversation. To legislate against the physical act of holding the phone, then, seems to be somewhat counterproductive.

I sincerely hope he has changed his mind.

4:30

He concluded:

Motion 506 is not prudent. In fact, it goes against reason and science, and that is why I urge all of my colleagues in joining in voting against this motion.

I hope those sentiments have changed. I believe that education is not limited to the first five years of life, that we all have the potential of growing, and that is my hope.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort indicated:

From what I understand, this idea is not new in this House. In fact, in 2002 the former member for Lacombe-Stettler introduced an identical idea in the form of a private member's bill which, if passed, would have banned the use of hand-held cellular phones during the operation of a motor vehicle. But this Legislature at that time felt that such legislation was flawed from the beginning.

Again, I hope this member has seen the light.

It's important in this historical vignette that this was first proposed in 2002. How many lives, how many intrusions into families might have been prevented had this legislation been passed in 2002? I'm hoping we get on with the process.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort went on.

I realize that the use of hand-held cellular phones by careless drivers has caused traffic accidents, some of which have been extremely tragic. However, I also realize that passing laws every time we have an issue in our hands is not the best or the most appropriate way for us to govern. It is very reactionary for us just to jump on the bandwagon and argue that Alberta needs legislation banning cellular phone use in motor vehicles because it can cause accidents.

He goes on to say:

Does this mean that we should ban passengers from vehicles since they assuredly could distract the driver or cause a collision? Perhaps we should also consider banning radios, CD players from vehicles because they, too, can be distracting to drivers.

He was getting quite excited at this point.

Maybe we should also ban drive-throughs as they promote eating and driving, which can be as distracting as talking on a cellphone. So where would this end, Mr. Speaker?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope it comes to an end with Bill 16.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort went on to say:

I trust that the majority of Albertans do drive responsibly, pay attention to driving conditions, refrain from using their phones or other devices in situations when their undivided attention is most required. Albertans don't need this government constantly looking over their shoulder and telling them what they can and cannot do. I trust their judgment to do the right things, and I don't think that the poor judgment of a few should spoil it for the rest of us.

Well, I disagree, and I would gather that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays disagrees, too.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North stated:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to join the debate on Motion 506 tonight. I guess the

old saying that there are no new ideas, just new politicians, holds some truth. I believe this idea was last debated in the House in 2002. It was voted down at that time, and I hope it will be voted down again tonight.

However, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North had a vision. She had a vision of this distracted driving legislation, Bill 16, eventually coming forward, and I give her credit for her vision. She stated:

Passing this motion would be an example of poor lawmaking, and as it has been pointed out in this Assembly on many occasions, we are not in the business of making bad laws. I applaud the hon. member for his intentions. I share them and know that he will provide valuable input in future discussions regarding the general theme of reducing preventable injuries.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, that's what I'm doing right now. But here's the insight that she indicated:

But unless we are willing to legislate against all distractions while driving, I would encourage all members not to support this motion.

So back in 2005 the hon. Member for Red Deer-North had a great idea, and I'm glad to see that it's surfacing in today's discussion.

Now, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat said:

I do not feel that it's this government's job to legislate against common sense. Pulling over and having a long conversation on a cellphone makes sense, and many Albertans do so.

I agree with that, of course. That's the preferred option.

We should be encouraging Albertans to do this more often and increasing the use of hands-free devices as well, not dictating to them what they have to do when it hasn't been universally proven to be any more dangerous than having children fighting in the back seat of a car.

And I'm sure our fathers shared: "That's one. That's two. That's three." Then we waited for the car to pull over, and we would have a talking-to.

Albertans should have options like hands-free devices brought to their attention. As responsible as Albertans tend to be, I am confident that the majority of Albertans will make a common-sense decision to use hands-free devices more often.

So there's a vote in terms of hands-free being acceptable. I do not share that view. He went on to conclude:

I will not be supporting this motion, and I encourage all of the members to do the same.

Now, I don't want to restrict my debate to one party, so the former Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner currently representing Calgary-Glenmore had this to say:

I also feel that we've got far too many laws on the books already, so I have to ask the question. If we really are concerned about safety – and this always seems to be the intention of government in its bills and its regulations: safety, safety, safety – well, then, perhaps we should ban vehicles altogether and go back to horses. There weren't so many deaths. Or go back to the '20s and '30s and perhaps lower the speed limit to 30 miles per hour. How many accidents are fatal over 30 and under 30? There are many things that we can look at.

The fact of the matter is that we're supposed to be responsible when we're behind the wheel of a vehicle, and I expect each and every person to be that way, and we have laws in place. So I'll sit down, and I'll vote against this motion, though I understand the good intentions of it.

Again, where I'm coming from, Mr. Speaker, is that five years have passed. People's opinions hopefully have changed, and I'm hoping that we're going to lead the world in terms of recognizing that the mental distractions caused by hands-free are equally deadly to those of hand-held.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to participate in debate. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays: I wish you well.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased to be part of the debate on Bill 16. As Minister of Transportation I know

how important this piece of legislation is for all Albertans. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the MLA for Calgary-Hays for his efforts in bringing this legislation forward. Throughout this process he educated us all on the dangers of distracted driving, and his passion for improving safety is truly commendable. I'm happy to speak to the merits of this bill and how it will benefit Albertans by improving traffic safety in our province.

Distracted driving is an issue all across North America and around the world. Many factors have contributed to this situation: tremendous technology advances over the last 20 years; a perceived need to be connected to work and home at all times; a perception that driving is an unproductive, second-nature task; and people trying to accomplish more in less time. As a result, there are many activities that people do behind the wheel that take their minds off the wheel and their attention off the road. This legislation addresses cellphones, but it also addresses additional distractions. These are activities such as texting, personal grooming, using a laptop, writing, using an MP3 player, reading, and a number of other things. Nowadays there are just too many things competing for the driver's attention.

4:40

To put this in perspective, international research shows that 20 to 30 per cent of all collisions involve driver distraction, and that goes way beyond just hand-held phone use. This is not acceptable, and clearly we have to take action. While other provinces in Canada have simply banned hand-held cellphones or electronic devices, we need to go beyond that to effectively address the bigger issues of driver distraction. I'm proud to say that this comprehensive approach to driver distractions is the first to go this far.

Our goal is to make our roads safer by changing driver attitudes and behaviors. The challenge we face is to create a law that is comprehensive, practical, effective, and enforceable, and I think Bill 16 strikes the right balance. It gives law enforcement some discretion to take action on unsafe driving behaviors in a reasonable manner. If you are just taking a sip of your coffee or simply touching a button on your car stereo, you won't get a ticket. However, if you're putting on makeup, texting, or playing on your laptop, you're obviously distracted. Any of these activities would be considered an offence under the proposed bill. Make no mistake; you cannot drive safely when you are distracted. You cannot multitask and drive at the same time. Bill 16 will give law enforcement another tool to better address distracted driving in Alberta and ultimately make our roads safer.

Since the introduction of the legislation Albertans have had an opportunity to review Bill 16 and provide comments, and I'm pleased to tell you that the majority of the feedback received from law enforcement, stakeholders, and the general public shared positive comments and support for this bill. They are eager to see the bill become law.

As the Minister of Transportation and the MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake I can tell you that many people have said to me: glad you're doing something about this. Then they give me an example of something crazy that they've seen on our roads. I know that my department has received many letters and e-mails and phone calls. Albertans are curious about this proposed bill and want to know what it'll mean, and I'm so pleased to say that the majority of Albertans who have contacted us are in favour of this bill.

Proceeding with this proposed legislation will give law enforcement another tool to help make our roads safer. We are also sending a strong safety message to all Albertans: when you are in your vehicle, your focus must be on driving.

We must take action on this important traffic safety issue. Mr. Speaker, even one fatality on our roads is one too many. We are

making improvements in reducing fatalities and injuries on our roads, and I'm pleased with the direction that we are going, but I also know that we can and we must do better. Traffic safety is a complex issue, and changing behaviors requires a comprehensive, focused, ongoing strategy. Our province's traffic safety plan does just that. Our strategy of public awareness campaigns, co-ordinated enforcement, effective legislation, working at the grassroots level, and the great work of our safety partners: all of these things are making a difference.

This is about all of us, every Albertan, and the role we play in making our roads safer. Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 16 will be a great addition to our strategy. I want to thank all Albertans for their support and for talking and educating themselves and others about the importance of focusing on the road. You've heard me say this many times: all of us want to get home safe to our families at the end of each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to give their full support to the proposed Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act. I look forward to its passage and becoming law.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. My question is: as minister of transport do you recognize the need for exemptions? Obviously, police and emergency services; take it a step further, public transport, whether that be school buses or city-type buses, Greyhounds and so on. Do you also see the potential need for an exemption for transport trucks? When I say this, I'm also saying it could be the hands-free exemption as opposed to the hand-held because safety is extremely important.

Where I'm coming from is that for these individual drivers who fall into professional designations, whether emergency services or transport, do you recognize the need for them in their commercial endeavors and in their public safety provisions to be exempted from the legislation? Should it go the direction that I'm hoping, and that's hands-free, would these individuals be exempted? Do you think this would be a legitimate exemption? Personally, I do. I'd like your feedback as minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Absolutely I do. I think the simple way to answer that is: stay tuned. I think we will be seeing it when we go into committee. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays will be bringing forward some amendments on feedback that we heard through the summer, and some of the things you spoke about just might happen to be in those amendments.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Marz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the summer I, too, heard a lot about this bill, and I got an awful lot of feedback, mostly positive.

I did get some concerns from ham radio operators. They have a lot of expensive equipment in their cars. One of the things they felt was that if they weren't allowed to use them all of the time, just on the occasions when they participated in search and rescue and at accident scenes – and they do provide a terrific service to the people of Alberta just by having that equipment in their cars – it probably wouldn't be worth their while to continue to have that equipment if they had too many restrictions on the use of it.

So I hope that going forward – and the minister can comment on this if he wishes – we recognize the valuable service these people

provide for the people of Alberta with the equipment that they purchase and install in their cars.

Mr. Ouellette: I think you'll find that we have a lot of very good people in Alberta that do devote their time to emergency services and all different aspects of that. I think that when you see the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays bring his amendment forward, you'll see that part of that and the ham radio situation will be addressed in his amendment tomorrow or whenever we get into Committee of the Whole.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays brought some interesting statistics. I thought that it would be higher than 30 per cent of all collisions that are from distractions.

I'm wondering if the government is going to bring forward some reports or documents on why they've chosen to allow hands-free versus hand-held not being allowed. If we could see that. Also, whether they have any research that they can provide us about other areas that have implemented hands-free but have banned hand-held, whether there's been a change in the accident rate. Will the government bring forward a bunch of these reports or information on where we should be drawing the line on distracted driving?

I'm personally very concerned that we all understand that there are many distractions, and we're just basically forming a list that says: but not limited to. I just think that if safety is really what we're trying to address here, it should be a broader bill that just says that the peace officer could pull anybody over that is obviously distracted and driving in an irregular or erratic manner, to bring those people in as opposed to being found guilty because of something you're holding instead of what your actual driving is on the road.

Mr. Ouellette: In this country there is no one that's banned hands-free. So in this country there is no way to do a test on whether it's made any difference with hand-held or not hand-held.

4:50

The Acting Speaker: The next speaker is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak about this important piece of legislation, originally introduced last spring by the government. I want to start by complimenting the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his exceptionally well-researched soliloquy to the concept of: I told you so. I have to say it was really very impressive having him read back all these previous positions that had been so passionately taken by members of the government. You know, it raises a good point, which is simply that there is no question that there is safety to be achieved through this legislation. And it is heartening to see that the government has come some way in recognizing that and moving forward on that basis.

I think it's fairly clear that the research is out there that we can reduce the number of fatal and disabling traffic accidents by putting this type of legislation in place. Of course, the arguments against it are the same kind of arguments that people used to use against seat belts. You know, we'd always hear: why do we have to legislate common sense? Well, ultimately, someone finally made the point that – you know what? – with seat belt legislation you reduce injuries. The same is the case for this legislation, so it's a good piece of legislation.

I have some concerns with respect to the exclusion of hands-free communication from the application of this bill and the degree to which we might want to consider including the prohibition against hands-free into this bill. I appreciate the fact that there is no other jurisdiction in Canada that has gone that far yet, but that doesn't of course mean that on occasion this government couldn't actually be a leader in providing for public safety. So I think that's something that needs to be considered, and I suspect we'll receive more debate over the course of the passage of this bill.

The other issue I have, which, quite frankly, is a genuine question because I'm looking at the legislation and I'm seeking clarification on this piece, is the exemption in the legislation under section 2 that talks about exempting people who are required to have two-way radio communication for the purposes of their employment. I'm not actually sure if the use of that phrase "2-way radio communication" actually limits the scope of that exception or if, in fact, the government is exempting anybody who is required to use a cellphone for the purposes of their employment. If it's the former, well, then, I'm very interested in hearing why that exemption is there and how it's configured. If it's the latter, then I think we would advocate very strongly to have that exemption removed because many, many, many people are on the road because they are in the scope of their employment, and if all that is necessary is for the employer to say, "I need Joe to be available by cellphone" such that Joe has to have the cellphone with him, well, then, we're not getting anywhere with this.

What we're doing is saying: "Yeah, we recognize this is a huge public safety issue. We really want to get a handle on this unless your employer would rather that you not conduct yourself as safely as the research shows us you should." I appreciate the obvious exceptions that need to be in place with emergency personnel and police personnel and that kind of thing, but my concern is whether this exemption would ultimately be applied much more broadly than that group of people. So that's something that I'm actually seeking more clarification on from the sponsor of this bill because, obviously, that would be a concern for us.

Notwithstanding that, I'm at least pleased that we've taken this first step. I look forward to getting more information from the sponsor of the bill on these questions and look forward to ultimately having this bill passed in some form in the next couple of weeks.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the generous amount of research money that your party has been allocated, your caucus, I'm wondering if you've actually – you're usually very diligent in coming up with figures and numbers, and you made mention that you would like to see those numbers. So I guess my question for you is: has your caucus come up with some numbers to show that in jurisdictions that have passed this ban, there's been an actual reduction in accidents? And is there anywhere in the world where they've banned hands-free?

Are we really identifying the proper problem with distracted driving, or are we limiting it to just one area when, in fact, it needs to be much broader in going after the actual cause of distracted driving? It just seems like we're maybe going after one or two areas because they're popular. Do you have any research? Could you provide it? Like I say, even in the areas here in the country that have now banned hands-free, has there actually been a reduction in accidents? Could that be presented or tabled here in the House to have as information to make decisions?

Ms Notley: Well, although, certainly, our research budget is absolutely, gloriously generous compared to the research budget afforded to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, I will suggest that I suspect the research budget for the Ministry of Transportation is a touch bigger than ours, perhaps a hundredfold.

Certainly, I'm aware that some very important organizations have endorsed this move: the Alberta Motor Association, the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, the Insurance Brokers' Association. These are all groups that typically do a lot of research, so I expect they probably do have the research. I don't have it in my notes, but I suspect they probably do have the research to show the compelling public safety objectives of even this legislation.

However, you are also correct that there is research out there to show that unless you include hands-free, you're not going to see the kinds of safety improvements that the legislation is pursuing at this point, that, in fact, you actually need to include hands-free as part of the ban in order to enjoy the accident-reduction statistics that the studies out there show. That's one study I'm aware of. Certainly, that's not an exhaustive list.

Mr. Hehr: I have a question for the hon. member. I, too, am concerned somewhat about the exemption for employees who are in the course of business. Do you think having that exemption would lead to difficulties, say, for our police officers in writing fines or enforcing them or court challenges if that exemption is allowed?

Ms Notley: Well, as I stated, my view is that I think there are some good, reasonable, sound reasons to exempt people like police officers, emergency personnel, those kinds of people from the application of this act. I might actually want to see it exempted and then refined through regulation so that there wasn't a full blanket exemption but, rather, some more legislative persuasion for ensuring that the employer of police and emergency personnel have to do all that they can to have the least distracting communication mechanism with those people.

My concern around the way the legislation is written right now is that it just talks about all employees who are required by their employer to have two-way radio communication. Depending on what that means – and that's why, of course, I've put the question out, to find out exactly who that actually covers. My concern is that if, you know, a real estate agent or – well, the list of people who are required by employers to be available by cellphone when they're on the road is endless. If that's simply what we're exempting, then that, of course, probably exempts half the people on the road on any given day. That's obviously (a) not good for public safety, and (b) I just don't think that there's any justification for treating the safety of employees differently than the safety of people who don't happen to be at work. Why should you lose those rights if it's not absolutely necessary for you to do your job? So the question becomes: what does that legislation and that exemption mean?

As I say, I continue to wait for more information from either the minister or from the sponsor of the bill because it may well be that I'm interpreting the exemption more broadly than is intended.

5:00

The Acting Speaker: Next speaker, the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 16. Just before I begin my comments, I want to give credit to the Member for Calgary-Hays as well as the hon. Minister of Transportation for their good work on this file. This has been a while coming, but I feel that we have struck the right balance here. I feel that we have got this right.

I just want to begin my comments, Mr. Speaker, with an act of contrition to this House in the fact that I have actually been an offender, using a cellphone while driving, believe it or not, as have many other people here, obviously.

An Hon. Member: Resign.

Mr. Denis: No, I'm not going to resign. I'm not going to resign, hon. member.

All kidding aside, people's attitudes have really changed on this topic over the last few years. In fact, I was just talking to a constituent on the phone. He picked up the phone and said he was going to pull over. Several years ago people wouldn't think twice about just continuing to drive. In fact, attitudes are changing, but attitudes are not enough, Mr. Speaker.

Currently under the Traffic Safety Act a person can be prohibited from careless activities. It's a very subjective test, Mr. Speaker. Section 115 reads: "For the purpose of this section, a driver of a vehicle is driving carelessly if that driver drives the vehicle . . . without due care and attention." Now, some people have suggested to me in the past that this is enough, this is a catch-all, this subjective test is enough, and we don't need this legislation. I'd have to beg to differ.

Interestingly enough, a while ago, through a friend of mine I used to practise law with, I read about a judgment that happened in Calgary. In fact, a gentleman was found texting while driving, and the justice said that to be texting while driving may come close to the crime of dangerous driving. Now, of course, careless driving is a civil standard; dangerous driving deals with a criminal standard as well. This person was fined \$2,000, he was sentenced to 90 days' driving prohibition, and he had to pay a \$300 victim of crime surcharge. Now, at the same time, Mr. Speaker, that's the exception rather than the rule. Very seldom does careless driving actually make it that far. It's usually pled down. Again, it's a very cumbersome process for the courts to go and undertake, to go and move forward with this type of charge when you have a subjective standard.

I read through the bill as well. Of course, this bill does more than ban hand-held cellphone use; it actually looks at banning texting devices, texting machines. Section 115 deals with that as well, but it also, I'm pleased to say, bans reading or viewing printed material. It bans writing, printing, or sketching, engaging in personal grooming or hygiene, or any other activity that may be prescribed in the regulations. Now, a couple things that are important there. First off, it allows for further amendments by way of regulation. It recognizes that devices or distractions that we don't know of today at some point in the future may actually pose a significant risk, and it allows the minister to go and make those steps through regulation.

In addition to that, it has both an objective and subjective test. You have the objective test banning certain devices and certain activities but also a subjective test if a person is found to be driving carelessly, and that could be a whole myriad of other issues. Let's also remember that most Albertans, Mr. Speaker, are law-abiding citizens, and the fact that we do have this objective test prohibiting these certain activities will in fact offer a significant deterrent to drivers on Alberta roads.

I have to say that this has not been a knee-jerk reaction. There has been significant study that the Minister of Transportation has undergone, and I believe that we have struck the right balance, that we have got it right, and we're not going to have to come back in the future with amendment after amendment after amendment.

I do want to share with this House, Mr. Speaker, a bit of a story. When I was a child, quite often my family and I would drive from

Saskatchewan to Alberta, and my father, who worked in insurance, would start laughing over and over that Alberta actually didn't have seat belt legislation. We thought that this was funny. Well, of course, Alberta did get seat belt legislation in 1987, but later that came to me, and I was very happy that he had instilled in me the importance of safety and the importance of seat belts because I was almost killed in a traffic accident in 1990.

At the same time, I can tell you that very few people today question seat belt laws in Alberta or throughout Canada, and I'd put to this House, Mr. Speaker, that very few people five, 10 years from now are going to question this type of legislation. In fact, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays has pointed out, this is becoming accepted throughout North America and, I would argue, throughout the world as well. Again, few people will question this, looking ahead five or 10 years. I would put to this House that very few people would not question it if we failed to do so and if, in fact, we were the only province without cellphone legislation as we were without seat belt legislation.

I do want to mention, just in conclusion, the issue of enforceability and why non hand-held devices were not included here. It is an issue of what we can reasonably expect our police and sheriffs to actually be able to enforce.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity had made a comment that there are some studies indicating that it's the mental act of having a conversation. The question I would put to this House is: as the next step, then, do you want to ban all conversation in vehicles? Is the driver not allowed to speak, then, to other passengers in the vehicle? The point is, Mr. Speaker, that we have struck the right balance in this legislation.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I also did put this on my Twitter as I do often ask for comments. I have to say that in jest somebody said to me: hurry up; I'm trying to watch the streaming video while I drive. Of course, this was in jest, but this underpins the need for this type of legislation. There has been a significant amount of technological advances over the last five, 10, 20 years. There will be more in the future as well, and we have to act now. We also have to train the drivers of today and tomorrow with good driving habits, and that begins with Bill 16.

I'm very proud to support this, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments that the hon. member has just made. He made the comment that he didn't expect that we'd be back having to add anything to this piece of legislation. I appreciate that probably it's enabling, which means that there could be some additions through regulations.

I'm curious about your take on these bright headlights and the fact that if you have to do as much driving on a two-lane highway as I do, those bright headlights are really more of a distraction, I believe, than a cellphone, not only those lights but also these four-wheel-drive vehicles that they build up. I know I parked by one in Rocky Mountain House the other day, and the headlights were above my eyes. Even if they've got their dims on, they're still going to be coming into the vehicle. To make matters even worse, those so-called fog lights, the ones that are down lower: they have the bright lights in those as well, and those you cannot adjust. So they're shining right in your face.

I'm curious what your take would be on adding those kinds of things to this bill because, quite frankly, they're getting very dangerous.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House for his comments. I do have a tendency to agree with him that some of the new bulbs in vehicle headlights can be an issue. In fact, my personal vehicle back in Calgary has xenon headlights, and they're very, very difficult at night. I can see how they can be very grating on a person's eyes.

The one distinction there, Mr. Speaker, is that that is a matter for regulation, for the hon. Minister of Transportation to look at. It doesn't necessarily deal with distracted driving. The pith and substance of this bill, Mr. Speaker, deals with distractions primarily in hand-held devices, GPSs and cellphones, and again the subjective standard as well.

While I respect his comments and think maybe that's something that the hon. Minister of Transportation should look at, I do not think that this fits in the pith and substance of Bill 16.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question for the hon. minister. Maybe I'm barking up the wrong tree here, but it pertains to one of the exemptions. It says in 115.1(4) that it allows the use of cellphones and other electronic devices in the course of employment. I was wondering whether in his view this was just an amendment that appears to me at first blush to be very wide and whether this is going to cause difficulties for our police officers and our courts to actually enforce. Are we now going to have to drag in phone records, all of that stuff, if someone is going to go to court? I'd just like to hear his contributions on that question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

5:10

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's comments. I do think, first off, that there does have to be a certain number of exemptions in the bill; one of them, for example, dealing with police. One of my best friends is a police officer, and I know some of the things that they go and deal with. They also have a significantly greater amount of driver training than the average person – and I'm sure the Member for Calgary-Hays would smile – to deal with that as well.

At the same time, I would also put to this member that as a matter of evidence if somebody is charged with this, a cellphone record could actually be used on a person's phone to indicate that they were using or not using a cellphone because sometimes it can be difficult to see if a person actually is using that phone, in and of itself. Of course, we will see some jurisprudence on this issue, as other provinces with similar bans have. Again, I really feel that we have struck the right balance here between an individual's liberty and also safety on the road. Let us all remember that driving is not a right; it is a privilege.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, about 27 seconds.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate your concerns. I do not equate speaking to electronic ethereal voices with having a conversation in the car. That said, I would like to ban back-seat drivers. I also want to acknowledge and connect with your stories of driving through Saskatchewan as I had a grandmother in Meota and one in Saskatoon.

The Acting Speaker: On the bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join in debate at second reading on Bill 16. I more or less agree with the hon. minister of housing that we've got the balance just about right on this bill, I think, and we should have, too. I mean, this bill started out life as a private member's bill seeking to ban the use of hand-held cellphones, and that's basically all that it sought to do. This House in its wisdom saw fit to refer that private member's bill to one of the standing committees of the Legislature. That committee, having conducted public hearings, taken written submissions, brought forward a recommendation to the House, which the House followed, that the private member's bill should go no further but that the ministers of I believe it was Transportation, Justice, and Solicitor General, if I remember correctly, should collaborate on coming up with a government bill that would in fact address the broader issue of distracted driving.

I sat on that committee. We felt that it was important to go beyond just the issue of cellphones because there are any number of distractions that we can all fall prey to. The most distracted driving event that there is is if a wasp, a hornet, flies into your car. That pretty much distracts any driver. The statistics show that that's the most dangerous distraction that we can face. We can't very well ban hornets, but there are a number of distractions over which we do have control as drivers.

The minister was right: driving is a privilege, not a right. This bill seeks to address, I think, some of the most obvious and common sense of those distractions and say: lookit, we're not trying to be really heavy handed here. We're not saying that the police are going to pull up alongside every car on the highway, every car on the street, peer in the window to see what the driver is up to. What we're saying is that if the officer essentially has probable cause to believe that you are doing something that is distracting you while you're in a moving vehicle and in control of that moving vehicle, he has the right to pull you over and now, if we pass this bill, to ticket you for \$172, I believe the fine is. Yes, it is \$172 and no demerit points.

There was some logic that went into that, too. Without this bill the Traffic Safety Act forbids driving without due care and attention, driving without reasonable consideration for persons on the highway, and driving a vehicle on the highway in a manner that constitutes driving carelessly. If you're ticketed for that, you're issued a fine of \$402 and six demerit points. Guess what? It's worth it for most people to challenge that ticket in court.

As we heard in submissions and hearings to the committee, police are very, very reluctant to lay those kinds of charges even when they feel that it would be justified to do so because it is very, very difficult to get a conviction in court. A lot of people fight the charge. A lot of times the charge gets plea bargained down. You know, it's not really, in the final analysis, worth their while to do that. So you have a situation where in order to address the problem of distracted driving today, we have to take a fairly draconian approach that people will fight in court, so nothing gets done.

This seeks to create a fine that is big enough to hurt a little bit, you know, big enough that you'll notice if you get ticketed but not so big that it's probably worth taking a day off and going and fighting it in court. I think in that instance we've got the balance absolutely right. In fact, I think this is one of the better bills that I've seen in my time in the Legislature in terms of the thought that has gone into it. I congratulate those involved in crafting the bill.

There are just a couple of things that I'm concerned about. One, I would like some clarification when we get to committee stage

because the bill refers quite specifically to cellular telephones or other communication devices, and it also refers in other sections quite specifically to two-way radio communication. Now, I'm taking that to mean that we're talking about the old-style, old-school two-way radio in a vehicle with a hand-held microphone that's hard-wired into a radio set, probably mounted in the console or something like that. I'm not taking that to mean that two-way radio communication is a synonym, is interchangeable, with cellular telephone. I think the purpose of this bill here was to differentiate between the two, and I'm looking for some confirmation of that when we get to committee stage. If that's confirmed, that resolves that problem.

The other two issues, though, that are very important to me are these. There needs to be a public education strategy that goes along with this bill because there are enough instances now in jurisdictions around this continent and around the world where the banning of cellphone use has resulted in fewer drivers using their cellphones while driving, but in other jurisdictions it's proven to have no real effect on the percentage of drivers using cellular devices. So no matter how we word this bill, we need to be prepared to launch into a public education, advertising, advocacy campaign that goes along with the enforcement because what we really want to do with this bill, Mr. Speaker, is change behaviour for the better for the safety of us all.

The other concern is that the bill does not address hands-free cellular phones. Well, it does in effect in that it exempts them. I have a real problem with that because the research that I've seen and the research that came across our desks at committee clearly showed that you are just as distracted talking on a hands-free cellphone while driving a car as you are on a hand-held phone. It's not the act unless, of course, you drop the phone while you're driving down the Minister of Transportation's new stretch of pavement on southbound highway 2 or, worse, one of the old stretches of pavement. Unless you drop the phone.

It's not the act of holding the phone that's the distraction. It's the act of talking to someone not in the vehicle with you, someone who can't see out the windshield and see the same things that you can see sometimes before you see them and warn you to slow down or can back off the conversation because he sees that you're getting into a bit of a tight spot. No, the person on the other end of the phone is, you know, perhaps half a continent away, and they're just interested in getting a better price from you. They have no way of knowing whether you're in a driving pickle or not.

We do need to find a way, I believe, to ban all cellphone communications by drivers in a moving vehicle, with the obvious exception – and I'm talking for civilian drivers now – where there's a necessity to call 911. Okay? That exemption is, I believe, in the bill.

The safety issue and the distraction issue are the same. I understand that there's a bigger difficulty with enforcing the hands-free angle than the hand-held angle, but I think the minister of housing touched on it there a few minutes ago. It's a matter of degree of difficulty. I think it's a difficulty that we can overcome if we mate this legislation to a good, strong, effective public education strategy. That's the main flaw that I find with the bill. I'll be interested to see what comes of that as we get into the bill at committee stage.

5:20

In principle I have no problem supporting this bill. It is a significant step forward from where we are today. It is a significant step forward from where many jurisdictions have specifically addressed the hand-held cellphone use issue, like Ontario, for instance, which is celebrating, I believe, the one-year anniversary today of banning hand-held phones in their jurisdiction.

This is a step forward because it doesn't just deal with cellular phones. It deals with eating and drinking and combing your hair and reading a novel. I will never forget the day when I was driving to Mount Royal University back when it was a college when I was a sessional instructor there and I had an 8 o'clock class. I'm driving down Glenmore Trail in a snowstorm at 7:45 in the morning, traffic is moving at maybe 75 kilometres an hour, and here right in the middle lane is somebody in a great big honkin' Cadillac Escalade or a Ford Excursion or something like that . . .

An Hon. Member: Maybe that was me.

Mr. Taylor: No, it wasn't, unless you were in drag, hon. member, that day.

. . . driving down the road reading a novel when it was snowing. This bill takes care of ridiculous, irresponsible behaviour like that and gives our law enforcement officers the authority to do something realistic about it.

So in principle I'm absolutely delighted to support this bill. I think the committee did good work. I think the hon. member who brought this bill forward did good work. I think there was good work done by the ministries involved, and I look forward to this bill passing second reading and getting down to some of the details in committee.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think that whether this bill passes or fails will have potentially something to do with the exemptions. You also mentioned the importance of public education, and I agree very much with the need for public education. I think probably the organization that is going to equally need that education will be our law enforcement officers because unless they've got a sound case – if they're using possibly their webcams in their vehicles and they can record it just the way photoradar records licence plates and drivers with great detail, then I think the chances of enforcement will be better.

Also, we know that there are a number of companies who are way ahead of our provincial trend, and they've already banned individuals from talking while driving. But the lack of clarity, as you pointed out with CB radios, and the need to pull over in emergent circumstances: you and I have both had the pleasure or the danger of driving up highway 63, and there are very few pull-offs. I'm just wondering about drivers of transport trucks having the opportunity to communicate with their station about weather concerns as they're going past the lakes and so on. How do you see us defining those exemptions so that we capture the right balance?

Mr. Taylor: Well, hon. member, first, I think that what you're asking here involves a number of issues that we have to get to in committee, and we should all tackle those issues. Secondly, I think that these questions perhaps are best put to the sponsor of the bill or to the Minister of Transportation as opposed to an opposition MLA, who has only limited authority in this area. But, third, hon. member, the true answer to your question is that if the Minister of Transportation would just get on with the job of twinning highway 63, your question would be rendered irrelevant.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate the many good points that the hon. member has brought forward. I have one other question, though, on clarification. Again, many members have talked about this, but it hasn't really been addressed. The minister of housing talked about it. I have a concern that we're making a list, and then because of that list we're excluding a lot of distracted driving. Again, it just seems like if a policeman is driving behind a vehicle and they see them driving erratically or poorly, that should qualify to pull them over to give them a ticket because they're obviously distracted and not paying attention.

In all your committee work, hon. member, that you were able to participate in, was that never brought up and discussed? Actually expanding the latitude of this to ensure that a policeman can pull someone over who's driving poorly and just give them a ticket as opposed to having to say, "Well, I saw you grooming your hair," when, in fact, the person argues, "Well, no, I was swatting at that hornet." It just seems like we're opening up this Pandora's box.

The other question is: in all of your exemptions when you talked on that, are you looking at an exemption for professional drivers with a class 1, 2, or 3 driver's licence, and someone with a regular driver's licence does not have that?

Mr. Taylor: Hon. member, the bill that is in front of us today is the result of a committee recommendation that the three ministries that I mentioned earlier – Transportation, Solicitor General, and Justice – get together and design and craft a distracted driving bill. Now, I assume that tomorrow or in the fullness of time – and the Government House Leader will be in control of this agenda – we will get to this bill in committee study. At that point we all have a crack at deciding what exemptions should or should not be in this bill. I've already indicated to you, hon. member, that I think one exemption that is in this bill we should perhaps consider taking out, and that's the issue of hands-free.

As far as addressing the issue of the bad driver who is just driving poorly as they drive down the road . . . [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired] Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the bill the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening with interest for the last hour or so to the discussion and debate on Bill 16. Certainly, I would like to express on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar our appreciation to the hon. member from Calgary who has brought this bill forward. I spoke to a number of people over the summer in our constituency, and the vast majority of them instructed me to vote in favour of this legislation, which I'm only too glad to do. I think we will have safer highways as a result of this. It's a long time in coming, as has been discussed by previous speakers, but it is here, and it's certainly time that we get on with it.

It covers a wide range of distractions: cellphones, texting, computer screens, personal hygiene, reading, writing. Everyone has witnessed in the course of travelling across this province some of the driving habits of licensed motorists, and some of those habits, Mr. Speaker, as we all know, are very, very unsafe, everything from having pets over the steering wheel to reading books, as the hon. member has witnessed. A lot can be done. This is a start, and we should, again, express our gratitude to the hon. member.

Now, there are some exemptions to this, such as emergency personnel. The specific language of the bill includes an emergency vehicle. I would assume that that would include a tow truck driver. I hope we can get some clarification on that. There are concerns

around this bill about how it's going to be enforced, but, again, this is a good start.

5:30

I don't think we can overlook the comments from the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, who earlier in the discussion suggested we could go a little bit further with some of the headlights that can now be customized into vehicles in this province. Certainly, constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar have expressed an opinion on this very similar to what the hon. member has suggested or articulated here this afternoon. I have corresponded with the Minister of Transportation regarding this matter on behalf of one constituent in particular on 46th Street and 105th Avenue in our constituency. This gentleman goes into rural Alberta frequently for recreational purposes, and at night it is not only a distraction; it's a dangerous distraction whenever he is approaching a vehicle with these customized headlights. I agree with the constituent. I agree with the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House that we need to work on this as well. Hopefully, some control put on the intensity of the illumination from those lights will not take as long as what we heard regarding the response, or the lack of response in this case, to cellphone legislation in this province.

The Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act. The hon. member earlier talked about how technology is changing. Well, certainly, it is. On most if not all new vehicles, whether it is standard equipment or it can be purchased for \$500 to \$800 as an extra, there are many devices now that are fitted right into the car. There are buttons that are on the steering wheel that can require a person, if necessary, to answer a call hands free. Those devices exist. Microsoft has a system. I think it works with Ford. General Motors has a system. There's a real improvement in the technology, and those technological improvements are a reflection of other jurisdictions which have already passed laws similar to what we are proposing here with Bill 16. So the automotive industry has stepped up to the plate, and it's about time that this Assembly does as well.

Hopefully, this proposed bill, Bill 16, will be passed by this Assembly, and we won't waste a lot of time before it's proclaimed and it comes into force because I'm confident that it will improve highway safety. I'm an individual who has to curtail my own personal habits with cellphone use, Mr. Speaker, just like the hon. member across the way. It is a good thing, this bill, not only for my own safety but for the safety of the province.

In conclusion, I would like to remind all hon. members of Oprah Winfrey. I forget what her slogan was, but it was worthwhile in America to promote public safety through the restriction of cellphone use. I must admit that I don't get an opportunity to watch Oprah, but I certainly heard from our constituents what her opinion was, what their opinion is.

Mr. Speaker, again, thank you to the hon. member for bringing this forward. I think we're going to have safer streets and roads. On behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar who contacted us over the summer, thank you very much, sir.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. We talked about the difficulty of enforcement and the two levels of fines. My question to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has to do with: does he think that \$172 is a sufficient fine? For example, a sheriff is driving down the highway, and he sees ahead of him a person that seems to be making unsafe lane changes. He puts on his lights, he's proceeding up to the driver, and at that moment the driver whips out his

cellphone. The sheriff says, "I notice that you were distracted driving." He replies to the sheriff: "Yes. I saw the flashing lights, and I contacted my lawyer." Does he get the \$172 fine, or does he get the \$450? Do you have an opinion on whether this \$172 fine is going to be sufficiently strong and financially punitive enough to get across the message?

Mr. MacDonald: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly think that a fine changes people's habits. I can only speak from personal experience here. I was going to one of our caucus meetings in Calgary that the hon. member called, and I was looking at that development in Balzac. It's just on the left-hand side of the road as you're going south on highway 2. I was going too fast, and I was apprehended by one of Calgary's finest. I don't think the ticket was \$172, but it was enough to curtail my speeding habits. If it's a deterrent for me, I'm confident that whatever fine that's administered or enforced or written will change the bad driving habits of other Alberta drivers.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to Bill 16? We are now back on Bill 16. Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to speak in favour of this bill. It is a bill that has been a long time coming. I believe it will lead to public safety and a lessening of the dangers to both people who use cellphones as well as those who don't. It will just make our roads much safer. Productivity time lost in this province, in fact this nation, due to traffic accidents is immense, and this will no doubt lead to increasing some of that productivity as well as keeping people generally safer.

I recognize that the bill does have a few exemptions. While we're there, I'd just like to ask a couple of questions of maybe the mover of the bill, who I would like to commend for his efforts on getting this bill through, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, who has worked very hard to educate people on this and to bring forward a very good bill. But I have a couple of questions. It's primarily due to the exemptions, and maybe if I get them on the record, we can get an answer at some point in time.

For instance, we have an exemption here – I believe it's (c) – that says, "an individual driving or operating a vehicle who is using 2-way radio communication." Oh, that one is fine. Okay. It's the one when we're using a two-way radio device to communicate with an employer. I'm just wondering if that would be a blanket exemption for anyone who uses a two-way radio device or a cellular phone or something to that effect. I'm just looking for a little more clarification on that. If we could do that at the appropriate time, that would help me out in whether or not we could do something a little more to refine the bill even further. I believe that's in 115.1: whether that allows the use of cellphones and other electronic devices in the course of employment, what activities are contemplated by this exemption, and whether there is a list of those coming in the regulations or whether you can provide some clarification on that front. That would be greatly appreciated.

5:40

Just backing up a little bit, in my short time in the House I believe we've asked numerous questions on this going back to 2008, when we were going to see this type of legislation. I believe we first started out asking for a ban on cellphones, and now it has gone to distracted driving, which is, of course, a better bill, but it has taken some time. I appreciated the comments by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, who pointed out that he brought in legislation although not

exactly like this but similar to this way back in 2005, and I can't help but imagine.

I've heard this a time or two in this House that we can't legislate common sense and that type of stuff. You know, I understand that sentiment. But at the same point in time, you have to protect people, okay? If people were just using cellular phones and driving themselves off a cliff, fair be it. Some people might even say: thanks for thinning the herd. Nevertheless, it's not that simple. The simple fact of the matter is that people use cellphones. We have to make rules and laws that protect individuals. Other people use the road, and sometimes we have to look at the fact that sometimes we have to legislate to protect people from other people's inanity or lack of common sense. So I'd just like to put that on the record.

Nevertheless, I think this bill is a great move, and I believe it'll lead to safer streets and allow people to move forward with some clarity on what the law is here in Alberta. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, and I appreciate the comments from my hon. colleague for Calgary-Buffalo. Hon. colleague, I don't believe the law you practised was of a criminal nature. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but there are so many organizations, a number of them run by former policemen, whose business is dependent on getting people off tickets and so on. Do you think that at this point, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned, the education of the public, the \$172 ticket will be enough initially to create the drivers' change in attitude that we're hoping for in Bill 16?

Mr. Hehr: I thank you for the question. I did hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie's explanation that it may actually clear up our court systems, allow us enough of a deterrent to keep people from fighting this bill and keep them from missing a day of work and having a police officer have to miss a day of work to come defend this. Prior to coming in here this afternoon, I hadn't really even thought about that angle, but \$172 is around the range. Whether that can be fine-tuned to \$250 I'm not sure. I'd like to do a little more research on that, but nevertheless it's in the ballpark, whether it's an exact figure. I'm not sure if putting it up to a \$500 exemption – maybe that would be better.

I understand that oftentimes the higher the fine, the greater the compliance. That may be something to consider. I may actually go away and look at something on fines and their connection to laws and people filing and find out whether it would actually be too big of a pain to do it in that respect. It's a very good question and one that possibly the mover of the bill could discuss with us later on, the selection of \$172 and his experience as a police officer or what the actual implications are for the legal system.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo raises some interesting points, especially around using a communication device in the course of your job. I can see some pretty innovative ideas of getting around the law by saying, "Well, I'm talking to my boss," when, in fact, you're talking to your wife. How is an officer going to make that judgment call out there?

I would recommend to the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays that he be a little bit more restrictive in these job definitions in the amend-

ments that are being brought forward to perhaps restrict it to things like pilot vehicles, where there's evidence that it has to be used. I've noticed bumper stickers on corporate vehicles that say: "This vehicle does not use a communication device" and "How is my driving? Phone this number." More and more companies are recognizing the danger of this, and they are advising their people not to use it while they're driving.

On the issue of fines that was just discussed, I, too, was on this committee, and the whole idea of this is to keep the fine down to a minimum level to educate the public to comply, not to be punitive. We already have a fairly punitive law in the \$500 range for driving without due care and attention. You want to have something that's not going to tie up the courts. You want to have something that's going to get people's attention when they're disobeying the law, that they're going to be angry, they're going to be upset, but they're going to think about what they did. Are they going to take another day off to go to court? Likely if it's \$500, they would. Likely if it's a minimum fine, they'll pay it and say: I don't want to do that again, so I'll pay a little more attention to my driving. That was the whole intent of the committee bringing this minimum fine forward on this. You know, through regulation, if it doesn't work there, we can always change it and add to that at some point in time.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. The time is closed on that.
On the bill, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to commend the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this bill forward. Again, I would like to point out that the government has finally realized that great, good, and sensible ideas can actually come from the opposition. Take them, and then run with them.

One of the reasons that I think some of the ideas that come from our side are a little different from yours is because some of the people that we talk to are perhaps more open in their objections and their critiques of some of the government actions or, in fact, the things that they would like the government to do, which I think this is a good example of. Certainly, we've been talking about this and hearing about this from our constituencies for a very long time.

I do believe that this is a good first step, and one of the reasons I'm saying that – and it has been mentioned before – is because I am not really worried about where your hands are. It has been many, many, many years since I've had to worry about where the hands are and what they're doing. What I'm worried about is: where is your mind? What I really want to know is: where is your mind, and is it distracted?

I don't need research to tell me that distraction is distraction. I know that we've talked about the radio being a distraction. I don't find it necessarily a distraction unless I'm listening to a specific radio station with a specific host who definitely distracts me, and I will often change the station because I disagree with almost everything that he says. [interjection] Actually, it has just been drawn to my attention that there are two of them, that if I listen to them on the radio, I am very distracted.

5:50

One of the points that I'd like to make, that we have talked about, is the fact of the \$167 or \$178 fine. Actually, for people with money I don't believe that the fine will perhaps do what we want it to do, educate their behaviour. What really will change their behaviour are demerit marks. As they get closer – perhaps I shouldn't share my personal letters from the ministry of wherever that sends them out and says that you're close to your demerit marks total. I think that demerit marks really, especially because it affects your insurance,

are a much quicker way of educating and changing the behaviour of drivers. I believe that it would be a much quicker way.

As I've said, I'm worried about where your mind is, not necessarily your hands, so I'm not particularly in favour of having the hands-free driving. Having said that, even GPSs can be very – I believe that there is some information that has actually said that if you take your mind off the road for a certain percentage of time, you actually have driven the distance of a football field, so what it does is the distraction cuts down your reaction time as well. So although I think this is a very good first step – and everyone that I have spoken to is certainly in favour of it – I've heard nothing other than the comment that I made that they think that even the hands-free driving can be distracting.

I had occasion to do some sign waving. Again, I know that I'm going to hear a lot of conversation about: well, that's distracting as well. But I was by a highway, and the traffic was coming. It was two solid hours. Needless to say, after even 10 minutes of sign waving, you try to think of something else other than just smiling, so I started to count. Every third person was on their cellphone as they went by me. That was a tremendous amount of people on cellphones within the two hours that I was watching. One of the other things that was interesting – and this is certainly where I'm going to get the talkback on the distraction – was that somebody actually took their hand off the wheel to wave at me while their other hand was using a cellphone. So it doesn't take much to distract drivers.

The other thing is that I think we would have to be very clear on what is an employee. As has been mentioned, I can see some pretty creative ways of saying that they're employees. I know that some companies are saying: "No. You cannot use cellphones. You have to pull over."

There's a broad range of people that we count on to get to us very quickly. I'm thinking of EMS and fire and police. These types of employees that we count on, by the time they get there, they have to have the information. Again, say an EMS situation, they have to be able to transmit all of that information to the hospital as they're transporting someone. Usually they don't transport alone. They're not driving and transporting. However, there is the occasion where that may happen. Again, they would be considered the employee.

The GPS is the one that I think is certainly the most useful and that we use a lot. If it was voice directed, I think that's better than having to actually look at it. Even if you're being voice directed to a direction, you are being very, very focused on that direction and where they're telling you: "Turn left. Turn right on such and such a street." You're very focused on what you're doing.

I think it's a little bit different than when you're arguing with whomever at the other end of the phone, particularly young teenage drivers, who won't be allowed to text, but they're talking to someone, and they totally get distracted. So even if they are hands-free and they're arguing with a girlfriend or they're arguing with their parent or they're arguing with whoever, you can rest assured that their distraction is very acute.

The other place – and I don't agree with it, but you see it all the time, too – is that when you're driving on the highway and you're alone, pretty much have the road to yourself, and you're talking with somebody on the phone, it's a whole pile different than if you're going bumper to bumper or you've missed a red light because you are on the phone. I'm not saying that we should do it, but it is a different scenario.

I think that B.C. and Ontario have sort of already got what we've got, and, again, they are allowing hands-free use. The other thing that we know is that all the car companies are coming out with hands-free equipment that I'm sure will probably be standard in not too long a time.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that I would leave it at that because I know that there will be further discussion as we go forward with this bill both in committee and certainly on third. But a good step forward, a long time in coming. Again, kudos to the Member for Calgary-Hays, who finally brought this forward and brings it with his experience as a police officer, which I think gives it a tremendous amount of validity. As a one-time emergency nurse I understand some of the things that he's talking about because car accidents are pretty horrific no matter what's caused them, either drunk driving or distracted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What I want to note, Mr. Speaker, right off is the varied opinions of members throughout this House in terms of how far we take this legislation, but I think we've noticed unanimity in the need for this legislation to go forward. I'm just wondering: a question I have for my hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is that with an officer's interpretation of distracted driving, whether it's hands-free or hand-held, do you think that's going to change the officer's interpretation if he's seeing distracted driving occurring?

Ms Pastoor: Well, no, I don't. If need be, I'm sure that regulations will be able to define clearly exactly what these police officers are

going to be charging someone with. I don't think there's anything more frustrating – and I know that many of our police officers go through this, particularly on the drug side of things. I think there's nothing more discouraging to the people that we hire to look after us than actually being able to charge people under the law within the parameters of the law that's been given them, and the next thing you know it's been beaten because of some loophole or perhaps some interpretation that has been different than the police officer's, that is doing his job. So I think that it must be very clear. Again, the educational part of it for the drivers will make it very clear what this officer is charging you with and how you've broken the law.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. Anyone wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I'm just interested that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East mentioned many times that she was very concerned on where the mind was and not where the hands are. Again, I just have to ask: does she find in distracted driving . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, according to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Third Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Yvonne Fritz	Minister of Children and Youth Services
Jack Hayden	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Ray Danyluk	Minister of Infrastructure
Mary Anne Jablonski	Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Lindsay Blackett	Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Service Alberta
Cindy Ady	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Hector Goudreau	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Len Webber	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Employment and Immigration

Parliamentary Assistants

Evan Berger	Sustainable Resource Development
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Municipal Affairs
Cal Dallas	Environment
Doug Griffiths	Finance and Enterprise
Fred Horne	Seniors and Community Supports
Broyce Jacobs	Agriculture and Rural Development
Jeff Johnson	Treasury Board
Diana McQueen	Energy
Janice Sarich	Education
Dr. Raj Sherman	Health and Wellness
Greg Weadick	Advanced Education and Technology
Teresa Woo-Paw	Employment and Immigration

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Tarchuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
DeLong
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
Allred
Anderson
Benito
Bhullar
Chase
Johnston
Notley
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Sarich
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Standing Committee on the Economy

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Griffiths
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Lund
Marz
Taft
Taylor
Weadick
Woo-Paw

Standing Committee on Health

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Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor
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Lindsay
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Hinman
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Marz
Notley
Quest
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
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Rogers
VanderBurg
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Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery Kang
Benito Lindsay
Bhardwaj McQueen
Boutilier Olson
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Drysdale Xiao
Hinman

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
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Amery Lindsay
Berger McFarland
Calahasen Mitzel
DeLong Notley
Doerksen Pastoor
Forsyth Quest
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Dallas Sandhu
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Fawcett Xiao
Griffiths

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

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Boutilier
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Cao
Forsyth
Johnson
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Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman
Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 27, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'm truly delighted today to introduce a very special friend. He's back to reacquaint himself with Alberta in a brand new position. His Excellency Andrew Needs is with us today representing New Zealand, a proud Commonwealth partner. New Zealand and Alberta share many things in common, trade opportunities and much more. We had a chance to chat – he will be meeting with our Premier this afternoon – not only on the trade opportunities that we're familiar with like the imports of lamb, New Zealand lamb being, we believe, the best in the world, but the exchange of technology, the work that our postsecondary institutions do together, his special interest in carbon sequestration, and the other kinds of technology that Alberta is hoping to become even more famous for in the years ahead. Ladies and gentlemen, here representing New Zealand, currently living in Canada, back again to hopefully enjoy Canadian hospitality, is His Excellency – and he likes to be known as Andrew – Andrew Needs. Would you please rise.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you'd agree, I'm sure, it's always a good day for an MLA when you have schoolchildren from your constituency visit, and that's the case for me today. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of grade 6 students from C.B. McMurdo elementary school in Wetaskiwin along with their teacher, Dawn Werner, and teacher helper Marnie Boyles. I'm very proud to have these great young Albertans and future leaders come and see how the Assembly works. They also had an opportunity to meet with the hon. Minister of Education. They're seated in the members' gallery, and if they'd stand, I would ask that my colleagues give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a great pleasure to introduce students from around Alberta to the Assembly through you. Today I'm introducing a class from one of the many fine schools in Edmonton-Riverview. It's a class from a francophone school, l'école Notre-Dame. There are 30 of them here today. They're seated in the public gallery, and they are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Larochelle. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members 20 exceptional students from Sweet Grass elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They are accompanied by teacher Nicki Gardner and group leaders Gwen Koch and Emmy Oben. They're here to observe the legislative process in action, and I'd ask all members to please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark it is with pleasure that I introduce to you and through you a group of grade 6 students from the Meadowlark Christian school. I hope the students are enjoying their afternoon at the Legislature. At this time I'd ask the students, the parents, and the teachers to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and inform you that I had a wonderful meeting with the public service orientation team from my department just this afternoon, and they're here in the gallery today. I have Lesley Kelly, Krystal Therien, Cheryl Friske, Genieve Simpson, Angela Wilson, Leanne Mathewson, Vivian Yeung, Karen Hayny, Ruth Gero, Jennifer Andressen, Isobel Lawson, Linda Gatzka, Jodie Buksa, Lenda Fisher, Ronald Mulick, Susanne George, Judy Chou, Claude Coupal, Jessica Smith, and John Lashley here. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly and my thanks for the great work that they do in the department.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly my constituency assistant. Emily Plihal has been working with me for a number of months now, and prior to this, she was editor of our local paper, and in her spare time she helps her family in their guiding business. I would like to ask Emily to stand – Emily is in the members' gallery – and receive the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House guests from my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. There are six members of the Killarney Community League present in the members' gallery today, not only to watch the exciting happenings of the House, but more importantly they proudly represent a large community of people who celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Killarney Community League. I would ask each of them to stand as I mention their names. We have Ernest Pawluski, president of the Killarney Community League, Terry Baumgartner, Bill Maxim, Lorne Niehaus, and Mary Ellen Pawluski. I would ask all members of the House to give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to do. My first introduction. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Giani Pargat Singh. It is a great pleasure to see Giani Pargat Singh here in the Assembly. The last seven to eight years he has been teaching and preaching to Sikhs across Canada, the U.S.A., the U.K., and spreading the message of love, peace, and brotherhood in the Sikh community. He belongs to the village where I was born in India and has always called me Uncle Peter. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The second introduction. I have known Mohinder Singh Cumo and Zora Singh Jhajj for the last eight years. Both are very dedicated members of the Sikh community. Every month along with other Sikh members from the community they prepare hot meals and serve them to the people in the Bissell Centre. They also devote a lot of time to the newcomers. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Baumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special friends who are joining us in the members' gallery today. Michael Groves has been a friend of mine for some 20-plus years, and we're such good friends that we often introduce each other as brothers. This is a very special year for Mr. Groves as he celebrated the birth of his first grandson, Daxton, and also met for the first time his son Terry. Michael is joined today by Terry Groves, and I would ask them both to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a constituent of mine in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, Mrs. Dagmar Lofts. Dagmar is a 17-year constituent of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and a 20-year resident of Alberta living with multiple sclerosis. Dagmar received liberation therapy for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI, in Frankfurt, Germany, on August 20 and would like every Albertan with MS to be given a second chance at life. Dagmar is a member of CCSVI Edmonton, which is an advocacy group whose mission is to achieve timely approval of CCSVI research and treatment through an objective consideration of all available evidence. I want to welcome Dagmar, who is seated in the public gallery, to the Legislature, and I would now ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Kevin Barlow. Kevin is a Mi'kmaq from Indian Island First Nation in New Brunswick. Kevin has dedicated more than 20 years of his career to improving the health and wellness of aboriginal peoples, and he is currently the inaugural chair of aboriginal programming with the Kaiser Foundation. He is the former executive director of the Canadian aboriginal AIDS network, and in 2006 Mr. Barlow received an award of excellence in aboriginal programming for his work in harm reduction by the Kaiser

Foundation. I want to welcome Kevin, who is seated in the public gallery, to the Alberta Legislature, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Maurice Fitzgerald and his wife, Anne Fitzgerald. Maurice and Anne are here from CCSVI Edmonton. Anne has been afflicted with MS for 35 years, and they are looking to achieve timely approval for CCSVI research and treatment from our government. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Killarney Community League Anniversary

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I rise today to honour and commemorate the Killarney Community League's 50-year anniversary of operation, which was celebrated on September 18, 2010, in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore.

Fifty years ago a number of Killarney residents met in the basement of the Church of the New Jerusalem to develop plans for the establishment of the community league for the area residents. With great determination community neighbours mobilized an ambitious plan to purchase land, and on January 20, 1960, the community league was established. Killarney Community League was named after Killarney, Ireland, and it was the first subdivision in Edmonton to be given an Irish name.

Over the past 50 years, Mr. Speaker, this community league has developed into a multipurpose centre for an abundance of activities and programs which foster strong community support. Activities include hockey, bowling, baseball, broomball, soccer, and basketball.

The Killarney Community League has also taken great pride in keeping the streets safe for their residents. In 1995 the Killarney residents started Edmonton's first community-wide foot patrol with the help of Constable Steven Chwok from the Edmonton Police Service. Today this foot patrol continues to serve the community very well.

Each year Killarney Community League residents continue to come forward and join the volunteer movement to keep the community league growing and vibrant for all to enjoy. Heartfelt thanks, Mr. Speaker, and an abundance of deep gratitude to all those volunteers from the past, present, and into the future who contribute to the bountiful success of the 50 years of the Killarney Community League.

Once again, congratulations on this historical 50-year milestone achievement, and best wishes in the days and years to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Immediately upon being elected, Calgary's new mayor said that the construction of the Calgary airport tunnel was his top priority. Mr. Nenshi's words instilled great hope in the hearts of Calgarians, who understand the vital importance of the tunnel. As the MLA representing the

northeast communities who are most affected by the expansion of Calgary's airport, I consider it a solemn duty to continue pushing this government to do their part to make the tunnel a reality. Our new mayor clearly understands that the tunnel must be built to avoid unbearable congestion in the northeast and on Deerfoot Trail, with all of the economic harm, environmental damage, and safety concerns that come with inadequate transportation links.

It is all too easy for this government to claim that Calgary alone should bear the cost of the tunnel. But that is fundamentally unfair, for the new runway at the airport that is causing this whole controversy will serve all Albertans. The airport expansion will boost Alberta's economy and quality of life as a whole; therefore, the province has a stake in the tunnel just as Calgarians do. I urge the Premier and his administration once again to step up to the plate for Alberta to help build this vital transportation link.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Conflict Resolution Day

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October 21 last week was Conflict Resolution Day, an international day of awareness held to promote peaceful means of resolving conflict. The Association for Conflict Resolution designated the third Thursday of October as Conflict Resolution Day in 2005. This day highlights the importance of public awareness and practice of alternative dispute resolution. By working in collaboration with other organizations and international groups, the Association for Conflict Resolution has successfully organized day- and week-long celebrations in communities to celebrate this international day of awareness.

Mr. Speaker, the logo of this significant day is a tree. Similar to a tree Conflict Resolution Day will continue to grow, much like a tree does, supporting and improving alternative dispute resolution. In fact, the use of conflict resolution has grown in Alberta over the past 30 years and now is a routine and accepted part of the conflict resolution process in most fields of endeavour.

I encourage all Albertans to recognize those who work in conflict resolution, who have contributed to our society in peaceful means of mediation, arbitration, and conciliation. I also encourage Albertans to continue to practise these peaceful means in their schools, businesses, communities, and even within their families.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues sitting here today to promote the use of diplomatic conflict resolution and to continue to raise awareness of the different resolution methods available to Albertans. In addition to helping create safer and stronger communities, conflict resolution allows disputes to be settled more amicably and reduces the strain on our overworked court system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Trade Winds to Success Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in recognition of the Trade Winds to Success Training Society apprenticeship award banquet, which I attended on September 25, 2010. The banquet was a celebration of the achievements of the graduates, who have been successful in their apprenticeship towards their journeyman status. The event was particularly memorable for me as I remember the excitement and pride I felt when I became a journeyman auto mechanic in 1983.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is pleased to have been a supporter of the Trade Winds to Success project from the very

beginning. In 1999 the Union Trading Trust Funds began talks with the federal government, the provincial government, and aboriginal communities to find ways of increasing the number of aboriginal people working in the trades. Trade Winds to Success is the outcome of this unique partnership, a partnership which has to date supported more than 350 apprentices towards their goal of achieving journeyman status. The Alberta government shares their vision, supporting aboriginal participation in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, one more time I would like to congratulate all of the apprentices who have completed their training and the Trade Winds society for helping them reach their goal.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Alberta Health Services Financial Operations

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ministers change, deputy ministers change, chief executive officers change. That leaves only one person completely responsible for the chaos that Alberta Health Services has experienced for the last two years. To the Premier. The Auditor General found that Alberta Health Services lost track of some \$900 million. Is that the definition, Mr. Premier, of sound management?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has done what is his role, to look at the financial records of not only the province but all of the authorities that receive money from the province. The Alberta Health Services Board has met or will meet all of the recommendations in the Auditor's report.

I know there's a lot of detail to it, and the minister of health can respond to the other questions.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to hear from the Premier since you're the primary author of our health care reform.

Yesterday the Premier was boasting about all the money the government is throwing at health care, but isn't the Premier a little nervous when Alberta Health Services can't accurately say where the money is going?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has indicated that I will deal with some of these details, which the hon. member should already know, but in case he's not in the loop, I'll bring him up to speed. The fact is that we had 12 different health entities for the period in question, and the Auditor General indicated that each one of them had their own accounting systems, their own payroll systems, their own budgeting processes. Because they were independent silos, if you will, when it came to amalgamating them, people had to take the time to look at how to do that, and unfortunately some expenses were categorized in different areas. That's all it is.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's been two years since Alberta Health Services took over, and the Auditor General highlighted that Alberta Health Services had no plan to track where funds were going when it was created and still isn't fully implemented. Will the Premier take full responsibility for rushing the centralization without a plan and call it what it is, a failure?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's actually the very opposite. It is a tremendous success, but as I've indicated, looking at the past is always 100 per cent in 20/20 vision. Looking forward to the future, let's look at what some of the benefits will be. We no longer have as large an administration. That money now is going into health care services, which Albertans need. At the same time you have only one CEO, with a centralized reporting system, and having good controls in that regard is very important because it gives us better efficiency and better outcomes. This is what we're striving for. It's too bad the opposition doesn't like it.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Villa Caritas Long-term Care Facility

Dr. Swann: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said in the House, "I would ask the hon. member to speak to the family members of those individuals that were for a large portion of their time in Alberta Hospital and now are in new facilities in Villa Caritas." Well, I tried, but Villa Caritas will not open until November 30, so there was actually no one to talk to. To the Premier: how can the Premier claim to be on top of an issue when he doesn't know whether the facility is open or not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have to refer to the annual meeting of Covenant Health, where we had members of all of the hospitals that Covenant Health operates in the province meet in Edmonton, and there was a presentation made by one of the families. It was quite, you know, heartwarming to see the improvements in the amount of services offered but also the compassion and love shown to the people in Villa Caritas. I can only speak for the people that work in that facility and their compassion for their seniors.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the Premier was feeling the love.

What is the Premier's excuse for this health minister handing over 40 million extra dollars for completing Villa Caritas when there wasn't even a contract signed?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I spoke with the Premier about this over the last few weeks, and I'm happy to tell you that the Villa Caritas site has now been upgraded. There are more final touches still being done so that this particular category of resident can be better accommodated and so that the people working in the facility can feel safe. Going from a long-term care or a continuing care type facility to what will now be a state-of-the-art facility for geriatric mental health patients required upgrades to nursing stations, to doors, to walls and windows, and that's been done.

Dr. Swann: Smoke and mirrors, Mr. Speaker.

We're talking about financial mismanagement to the tune of \$40 million. Still no contract signed, Mr. Health Minister. What's that about?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the important thing is that a lease agreement is now in place, contrary to what the member is saying. It's true what the Auditor General said. He could not find a contracted piece of paper per se, but there were understandings, and he pointed that out. In fact, Alberta Health Services had already pointed it out as well. They've worked together on that to resolve that. It goes back to a previous administration, perhaps as far back as the Capital health authority, but it was an unintentional oversight.

It's been admitted to, it's been corrected, and today we have a signed lease agreement in place.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. More ducks are dead because of the tailings ponds. As long as there are tailings ponds, there will be dead ducks, but it's clear that this government does not have high enough standards for deterrent mechanisms, nor is reclamation of the tailings ponds a priority. The animals, birds, waterways, and environment are always going to lose up against tailings ponds and fast-paced oil production. My questions are to the Premier. Why has government given approval to any company when their cleanup plans do not meet the requirements of the ERCB's directive 074?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to this current situation, which is sad and certainly disturbing, our job here is not to speculate. Our job is to regulate, to investigate, and, if necessary, to enforce the rules of the province.

Ms Blakeman: And you failed at doing that.

Back to the Premier: given that allowing oil sands and other development along wildlife and flight corridors will inevitably lead to the results we saw yesterday, why does this government continue to allow development and even expansion of existing ponds in those areas?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that we are moving very aggressively to new technology that will fundamentally change the way mining operates in the oil sands. Directive 074 that the member refers to has to do with the existing operators. As new operators come on, they will be implementing technology that minimizes the use of tailings ponds and maximizes recycling of water.

Ms Blakeman: Well, we'll wait a long time for that.

Back to the Premier again: why does the government separate environment and wildlife protection? In separate silos, separate ministries, we will continue to get the results we see today. Why?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we don't separate any of these issues. They're all important to the province of Alberta. As I said, this matter is under investigation. Let's hear the full investigation report. We'll bring, as I said yesterday, all of the evidence, what we heard through the investigation, to the House and communicate that with the rest of Albertans as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Anderson: From ducks to human beings. Yesterday, when asked why he and his caucus voted against a debate on the emergency room crisis, the Premier answered, "It's not an emergency." This after tabled documents show 322 horror stories over a six-month period in 2008 from just one of Alberta's emergency rooms. New statistics show the situation has only gotten worse. To the Premier. It has come to my attention that a large portion of these

documents in question were sent to the Premier's office roughly four days after the last election. Can he please confirm this? And why did he not do anything about it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of what documents or what information has been sent, but I can tell you that in this province – and this is last year's experience – 5,300 people every day admitted to hospital, 165,000 lab tests, an average of 140 babies born every day, the number of ambulances dispatched across the province of Alberta: that's a system that is working. Yes, there are improvements to be made to the system, but I can say that of the 5,300 people that are admitted every day, not every one is the horror story as that opposition always claims it to be.

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjections] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Anderson: Again to the Premier: given that I've also been informed that the then minister of health, the Member for Calgary-West, also received this document four days after the election, did nothing about it, and given how this government mishandled the H1N1 immunization debacle, is ignoring warnings from doctors of imminent health care emergencies the standard operating procedure of you folks over there?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, four days after the election the member that he referred to wasn't the minister.

Mr. Anderson: Given that what is transpiring in our emergency rooms is clearly dangerous to the health and well-being of Albertans, will this Premier immediately call in the Health Quality Council to independently investigate the situation? Why on earth wasn't this done two and a half years ago, when the Premier and his future health minister first became aware of it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I have permission to take this question because I have spoken with the Health Quality Council. We had a couple of informal chats earlier this month and a couple before that about a variety of issues. The bottom line is that today I issued a number of directives for Alberta Health Services to follow that will help ameliorate this situation, that is being somewhat exaggerated on the other side. Nonetheless, it will be addressed. As part of that, I also said that if and when a more formal review process by the Health Quality Council is necessary, then I will certainly consider it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health has just held a joint news conference with the ER doctors who have raised concerns that we've been dealing with in this House. Instead of real commitments to solve the tragic overcrowding in our emergency rooms, we heard vague words about accountability measures. How these will be achieved was not explained. My question is to the Premier. If these targets are not met, will you be accountable? Will you put your minister's job on the line? Will you put your job on the line?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister of health was part of the news conference, he'll be able to inform this House of what was said earlier this afternoon.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. There was a lot said. I'll try and be as brief as I can, Mr. Speaker. Today in response to the meeting that we had last night with the emergency docs, which went very well, by the way, I directed Alberta Health Services to adopt some very specific performance measures.

The Speaker: And I'm sure the minister will get to that following the next question.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, the question was about accountability. I don't know why the Premier refuses to make himself accountable. Perhaps because he has made these promises before and never lifted a finger to keep them. My question is to the Premier. Why are you refusing to hold your minister and yourself accountable? Is it because you have no intention of keeping your promises again?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about that side of the House, the opposition, but this side is accountable every single day. We're accountable to Albertans. We listen carefully and attentively to what they say, and we act on the suggestions that we can to improve things.

For example, today I issued some directives, six of them in total, for Alberta Health Services to follow. Here are a couple of them: the maximum time in an emergency room for a nonadmitted person – in other words, someone who does not need an overnight stay – should not exceed four hours; the maximum time in an emergency room for an admitted person, one who does require an overnight stay, right from triage through to bed placement should not exceed eight hours. Those were accepted by the emergency docs because they are national standards, and we will have the protocol in place by Christmas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We've heard promises before, two and a half years ago. Given that the Premier has promised more long-term care beds and then reduced them, promised more nurses and then laid them off, can he tell the people of Alberta one thing: why should we trust you now?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a number of exciting initiatives have occurred and will continue to occur. You know why? Because we now have for the first time in Canada a five-year funding commitment from this government. Never before in the history of Canada has that been done. What will that do? That will allow us to have longer range planning, improved planning, predictable and stable funding to open up 1,300 additional care beds this year; 800 are already open.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, King Canute couldn't stop the tide with the wave of his hand, and this minister won't be able to solve overcrowded emergency rooms with just a wave of his hand and a signed directive. Is this minister aware of the fraudulent reporting practices in Britain relating to emergency room wait-time protocols? How is he going to prevent that from occurring here?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the example that has been brought in from a foreign country.

I want to just continue with something that is relevant to this. As part of the directives I issued today, I asked and directed Alberta Health Services to report publicly the actual performance of emergency departments by individual site in relation to the targets I indicated a little bit earlier. I also asked and directed Alberta Health Services to closely track and monitor and report on the progress being made toward the other protocols.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I think we all know that reporting and monitoring isn't going to help the person having a heart attack who can't get service in an emergency room. Given that 60 per cent of emergency room beds in urban hospitals are already backlogged with patients waiting for hospital rooms, what is this government going to do when winter flu season swamps emergency rooms?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I also this morning and this afternoon directed Alberta Health Services to immediately improve processes for hospital site leads – the vice-presidents, the medical directors, and the site directors – to respond to these periods of peak pressures in emergencies by ensuring that the delegated authority is there at the local site level on a per hospital basis so that immediate action can be taken to address issues like the hon. member has just brought up. We are acutely aware that a flu season is coming, and we're preparing for it.

Dr. Taft: You know, Mr. Speaker, wait time protocols and monitoring just doesn't cut it. It's not going to fix it. Is this government considering, for example, setting up all-weather tents to provide enough capacity for hospital emergency rooms? Are they going to do something real?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the fifth item that I directed today toward Alberta Health Services was in fact to accelerate new or additional bed openings where possible. At the same time, number 6 was to explore additional strategies on what could be done in concert with the emergency surgeons to deal with these sensitive issues. That's why we're opening 18 more transition beds at the University of Alberta hospital in the member's riding, as I recall, or close to it, and 21 new medical assessment unit beds at the Royal Alexandra, for example. There are other strategies that they've been commanded and directed to work on as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Federal Transfer Payments for Health

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are all well aware, the federal government under the mandate of the Canada Health Act provides funding transfers to all provinces in Canada to help pay for a portion of our health care costs. My question is to the Premier. Is Alberta currently being treated equally in terms of funding transfers in comparison to all other provinces in Canada?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of great importance to all Albertans. Last year the federal Finance minister unilaterally changed the 10-year agreement all provinces signed in 2004 to fund health care across the province. Our issue is that Alberta has been singled out as not receiving the same amount of funding as every other province and territory in Canada is receiving. In fact, it means that over the course of the agreement we may be paying billions

more twice for health services that are being received in other provinces. I say that is definitely unfair because cancer is cancer. It doesn't matter. It's just as devastating in Ontario as it is in Alberta.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Minister of Finance. Can the minister advise the Assembly: how much money does the federal government in Ottawa send to Alberta for health care versus what other provinces receive, and if we are not being treated equally, what is the government of Alberta doing about this?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I can provide that information. We receive \$548 per person in Canada Health transfer. The lowest any other province receives is \$772. That's the lowest. The difference is \$224 per person. You do the math. Alberta is receiving \$850 million less than the next lowest province. This is clearly unfair. The previous finance minister raised it, I've raised it, and the Premier has spoken with the Prime Minister about it. Albertans send more money to Ottawa than any other province, and when it comes to health care, we get less back.

Mr. Dallas: My final supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. I've always believed that the Canadian federalism system was supposed to treat all provinces equally. Clearly, this is not the case when it comes to Canada Health transfers. To the minister: what steps is she taking to raise this issue with the federal government?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard a lot of chirping on the other side. Today people should be lining up with this government in support of our striving to get equality, being recognized by the Constitution as the terms of . . . [interjections] Excuse me, guys. I mean, really.

Under the terms of Confederation we deserve that equality. In my previous portfolio as the finance minister at the time, I wrote to the Hon. James Flaherty to talk about this. I have now followed up and will table a letter I have recently written to the Hon. Josée Verner talking about the importance of the federal government stepping up to the plate and treating us equally.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on June 23 the Law Society of Alberta met and overwhelmingly decided that Alberta's new financial eligibility guidelines for legal aid were not adequate. Further, the Assistant Chief Judge of our Provincial Court stated that student legal services and law information centres can't handle the increased demands caused by cuts to Legal Aid. If that's correct, how can the minister say that Legal Aid adequately funds criminal defendants in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the Law Society did have a meeting. The Law Society did make a decision. The Law Society and the government of Alberta and the Legal Aid board have been discussing whether or not there need to be changes to the governance agreement. It's my understanding that the Law Society benchers have not yet decided what position they will take based on the recommendations of the members, and I leave it to the Law Society to decide what they'll decide to do in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you. Given that the Law Society members have given a pretty profound judgment that the system is failing, will the minister admit that her pilot project has been a mistake and restore adequate funding to Legal Aid?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the Law Society I'm sure that the hon. member understands exactly what procedure is taking place in the Law Society. His characterization of the process is simplistic. It is not accurate in terms of the way that the Law Society governs itself. There are a number of steps that the Law Society will need to go through internally. I understand that they are having discussions as to how they might like to approach this issue.

The Law Society is one of three partners in legal aid, Mr. Speaker, and we're prepared to discuss with them whether or not we need to make some changes. I've always said that what we're doing with legal aid is taking a principle-based approach to changing the system that will serve Albertans better, and we'll continue to study that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the hon. minister inferring that my analysis might be simplistic, but how about the Assistant Chief Judge's assertion that people are not receiving adequate funding? Is his assertion simplistic as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we actually listen to the preliminary comments that this hon. member made in his opening remarks, that was not actually what the Associate Chief Justice of the Provincial Court said. The Associate Chief Justice, according to the hon. member's own remarks, said that law information centres were not an adequate substitute for criminal representation in provincial criminal court, and we agree with that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Alberta Health Services Financial Operations

(continued)

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Auditor General released his fall report. This report outlines several accounting and financial management issues related to the formation of Alberta Health Services. These questions raised by the Auditor General are very serious and, I believe, beg some clarification. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the cause of these financial issues? Has this money been properly accounted for?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll talk about the cause in a moment, but rest assured that the monies have all been accounted for. Nothing is missing, and the Auditor General said that. They were put into some incorrect categories because of the large transition from 12 entities down to one. It's important to stress that it was actually Alberta Health Services that first brought this issue to the attention of the Auditor General and said: please have a look into it. They did.

Secondly, let's remember that this is the largest merger in Canadian history; 90,000 employees and a number of different accounting systems had to be amalgamated. It's a complex process. It's now done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I'm pleased to hear that this money is safe.

Again to the minister: can you tell this House what is being done to address these issues to assure Albertans that this will never happen again?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing that happened is that Alberta Health Services agreed to and accepted all of the recommendations. Secondly, they're going to be implementing them as quickly as they can. Thirdly, they came up with an action plan, one that calls for the consolidation of all major business systems into some common platforms. It also calls for the development of a plan to streamline year-end financial statements; it calls for the hiring of additional financial staff, where necessary, to help ensure this doesn't happen again; and it calls for a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities of the staff who do the financial reporting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final supplemental to the same minister: given the Auditor General's concerns, can the minister assure Albertans that this decision to move to one health region was the right one?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely the right decision to move to one central entity. I don't want to put too much of a fine line on the money side of it, but let me just tell you that in the first year, as reported in an Alberta Health Services annual report not that long ago, they cited about \$500 million in savings by going from 12 down to one. Were there some bumps and bruises along the way? Of course. They could be anticipated. Again, the single largest merger in Canadian history has now occurred. But the bottom line to all of that is that those savings went straight back into the system that's helping address some of the pressure points, so the services are going to be more consistent and more equitable across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Daycare and Day Home Regulatory Compliance

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General had some choice words about child care facilities in Alberta: inconsistencies in monitoring and enforcement, documentation was lacking when warnings were given, could not determine if verbal warnings were followed up with remedial actions. And these are government-approved facilities. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: how can the minister ensure our children are getting the best possible care from the best staff when proper documentation and follow-ups cannot be tracked after verbal warnings are given?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we have daycares and day homes in our province that are providing excellent

care in the community for children whose families are working or are not able to be at home at the time. The children are, as I said, placed in our daycares or our day homes. We have a well-established system with good, solid regulation standards. The Auditor, you know, very much agreed with that. I can tell you that I did appreciate what the Auditor did identify for this ministry because it simply related to noncompliance for issues that are very minor such as posting a menu or not documenting when a child came into the daycare.

Mr. Chase: Well, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure didn't see the peanut warning, and he ended up in a hospital, so there's an example of the importance of warnings.

How much weight would the minister place on understaffing, change fatigue, and lack of training among staff as reasons for these criticisms?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was not a good analogy. I happened to be there in that situation, and that doesn't even relate to what the Auditor General's report said. I can tell you what the Auditor did say, though, and I feel very pleased about this as well, that families can be confident that our day homes and our daycares in the communities are very, very safe. Also, I appreciated, as I said, that the Auditor identified noncompliance for very minor, minor situations in the daycares and in the day homes. I agree with the improvements required, and we will be implementing the recommendations.

Mr. Chase: Well, I'm concerned that you're taking these recommendations as being minor, because children's lives and their well-being are affected. My question is: what specific steps will the minister take now to address the issues raised by the Auditor General? Or are you just going to pass them off as minor?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I'm concerned about how you're overstating them, because you are, and what that will mean to the public as a whole. The Auditor said they're very low-risk infractions, and I can tell you, as I said, that I will be implementing changes to what the Auditor has identified for the staff out in the field, and the staff will work toward that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in your riding, if a staff member went to a day home and saw that there wasn't a menu posted or it hadn't been entered into the log what time a child came in, that staff member would then speak to the provider of the day home or daycare, and they would then drive back to the community, and that number of hours would – the staff member now, perhaps, would have the provider fax that they had done that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20 **Emergency Medical Services** (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from many constituents for some time about mounting pressures on emergency rooms in Alberta. The issue, of course, flared again recently in a letter written by the head of emergency medicine to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I understand that the minister had an important meeting about this last night, and I wonder: can the minister tell us what the outcome of that meeting was?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, we had an excellent meeting, which the emergency docs commented on today. The purpose was to meet

face to face, open up the important lines of communication, and develop a work plan that would help accomplish some immediate solutions to alleviate the overcrowding issues that are very important to Albertans and, obviously, to the doctors. In that context, we developed some medium-term goals and some longer term goals. But make no mistake about it, we're doing some things immediately as well.

Mr. Rodney: To the same minister. It appears that members of the opposition are interested in this as well, and I'm certain that they would want to know, Mr. Speaker: what details and what commitments did the doctors ask specifically of you, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the most important commitments the doctors asked for was a stated set of benchmarks, performance measures, targets, what have you. This morning I announced what those were, with the four-hour time slot and the eight-hour time slot, which is already in *Hansard*. They also wanted a reporting back type of system, where we could track and monitor things in two weeks, in two months, and so on. I've offered that to them as well; I've committed to it. In the final point they also said: just give us greater accountability with on-site authority and management response capabilities. We've offered that to them as well, and I directed AHS with the challenge to deliver it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister. It's great to hear about commitments, but we need some follow-through, for sure. So I think it's fair to ask on behalf of Albertans: what specific action is this minister going to take along with Alberta Health Services to deliver on those commitments?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, now that we have a framework, if you will, of action in place, we're going to watch very carefully to ensure that it is adhered to. That's called holding the feet to the fire for Alberta Health Services, and we're going to do that. In the meantime, we're opening 250 additional beds, many of them in Calgary and Edmonton, obviously. We're looking at other parts of the province as well because we need a multifaceted approach that deals with more beds, the new discharge protocol, improved services with Health Link, and increased home-care funding. We're doing all of that right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds (continued)

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we learned about another serious environmental tragedy in the Wood Buffalo region. The impact on migratory birds is only one of the many threats that toxic tailings lakes pose, yet this government has already allowed them to cover a hundred and seventy square kilometres, and they're growing as I speak. To the Minister of Environment: why won't this government take real action to force companies to stop the growth of tailings lakes and eliminate them as soon as possible?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member should have a look at the facts. The facts are that we are taking real action, and the evidence is in the retirement of Suncor's tailings pond 1. Directive 074 clearly enunciates the responsibility of industry to implement technology that is going to severely restrict

the growth of tailings ponds in the medium term and reduce the overall tailings pond legacy in the longer term.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that, at best, the ERCB directive 074 will see toxic lakes grow well beyond 1 trillion litres of toxic waste and that they will be with us for at least another 50 years – that's in the directive – and given that the ERCB has waived its weak-kneed measures 7 out of 9 times in the last year and a half, why won't the Minister of Environment admit the truth, that his current half-hearted measures will never get rid of these toxic lakes?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I won't admit it because it's not true. The fact of the matter is that the ERCB has not, as this member characterizes, waived the directive. What they have done is allowed for additional time to implement. Let's be absolutely clear to all members of this House and to all Albertans that it is a complete commitment on the part of the government and on the part of the ERCB to implement directive 074. It will happen.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, since this government's paltry penalty scheme has done nothing to force industry into cleaning up the ponds and keeping wildlife away and since industry's job is to make money for their shareholders while government's job is to ensure that jobs, people, water, air, and wildlife are prioritized and protected in that process, will this government commit to throwing out directive 074 and bringing in meaningful requirements that force industry to eliminate the toxic lakes and that they will enforce fully?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been engaged over the past four months in developing a tailings management regime that will do, in essence, what the member is asking for. No, we're not going to throw out directive 074, but by no means should anyone assume that directive 074 is the be-all and end-all. It clearly is not. We are committed to constantly improving the performance of this industry, and we will do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't have to read in the newspaper about the Crown land sale for potatoes because I wrote the article on October 8. There have been numerous e-mails, letters, phone calls, and personal consultations from the public, who complain that this is not a transparent process. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In 2007 the Auditor General recommended that guidelines for the leasing and selling of Crown land, that include when and whom to consult, must be developed. Why after three years is this recommendation still outstanding?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that all of the recommendations that have been forwarded from the Auditor General to the Department of Sustainable Resource Development are being dealt with. Most certainly, the one that deals with the transfer of public land and leases is a very serious matter for a number of Albertans. We do continue to move forward, and progress is being made with respect to that issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister: is the sale of Crown land for agricultural use part of that discussion, and will it be a transparent process?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, I would suggest that all of the transfer of public land in Alberta, whether it's for leases relative to aggregate, whether it's dispositions for cattle grazing, whether it's sale disposition for the use of municipalities or for the use of agriculture, is open and transparent now.

Ms Pastoor: You may be one of the few that believe that.

Do you agree that this proposed land sale should not go ahead before the completion of the South Saskatchewan regional plan, which, unfortunately, has already been delayed?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that, from my point of view, is no. We've been working on a land-use plan in different regions of the province of Alberta for at least 20 years, and during that period of time the province has to continue to develop the resources. The land base that we have in Alberta belongs to the people of the province of Alberta. It is our responsibility to be sure that it is developed in accordance with good practice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Villa Caritas Long-term Care Facility

(continued)

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the report of the Auditor General, the Auditor General has raised concerns that Alberta Health Services is expending money without proper funding arrangements in place regarding Villa Caritas. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister please explain how funding arrangements were allowed to happen?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier, and I'll stress it again, that the important thing now is that the complete lease agreement is in place. It has been signed, and it's gone through.

Secondly, I want to just indicate that Covenant is a great partner to work with. They were going to build a long-term care facility, as you know, but when the need arose for a geriatric mental health program and for those residents to be accommodated in a new facility, the deal was made with them to proceed. We now have a state-of-the-art facility there, that'll be open soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: if there have been cost escalations on this particular project, what exactly are the causes of the cost escalations?

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's not so much about cost escalations in this case as it is about repurposing, as it's known in the trade, of the facility. Repurposing of the facility means upgrading it or changing it in some way to accommodate the new use. I indicated before, and I'll indicate again that we need to have safe nursing stations designed and built in a different way for mental health patient needs than for long-term care patient needs, and there are other improvements as well.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. In light of the current discussions and current situation in our emergency departments within hospitals, does he think it was advisable to change the scope of Villa Caritas?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think it was a good decision. I've looked at it very carefully, obviously. The new facility will offer a very modern, enhanced environment with large private rooms and bathrooms for all the patients, with dedicated space for recreational activities and for therapy needs and for social activities. It's also important to note that over 70 per cent – I believe that's the latest figure – of professional staff from the geriatric mental health program at Alberta Hospital Edmonton are now transferring to the new Villa Caritas site to continue providing outstanding care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to take this opportunity to compliment – I said compliment – the Minister of Energy because he was the only, the only one, who didn't throw the oil sands industry under the bus yesterday with the unfortunate duck situation. The Premier and the Minister of Environment clearly did. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. Will you apologize to the workers who are at the Mildred Lake site, working 24 hours a day, and, rather than being a judge and a jury and an executioner, wait for the findings first rather than the inexcusable tone that you used yesterday?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which media this member has been watching, but that is exactly what I have been saying. I have been doing my very best to turn down the rhetoric from members on the other side of the House from the media and point out to them that we have an investigation under way, and until that investigation has been concluded, we should not be jumping to any kind of conclusion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the Minister of Environment can communicate that to his leader because the headlines today read that the Premier demands answers – he demands – yet here are the companies working out there, extraordinary lengths with technology, working 24 hours a day. They fail to talk about the motherhood that took place yesterday. It's inexcusable, his tone and the Premier's tone. So will you apologize for the Premier for what he had said in the media yesterday?

Mr. Renner: Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this member is doing his research. The Premier is saying the same thing as I am saying: yes, we do want some answers. That's why we're conducting an investigation. We want to know – the Premier wants to know; I want to know – whether or not there were infractions of our regulations. That's what the investigation is all about.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister is reassuring all Albertans that they're not going to be inflammatory as they continue to put gasoline on fire, why hasn't the minister, in fact, visited on-site that very situation? Why hasn't he been there? Why hasn't the Premier been there relative to the situation? Clearly, we hear about the oil sands. We hear about how important it is, but it's not important enough to go and visit.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the only person inflaming the situation in this House is that member over there.

I have expressed very publicly my disappointment that despite the fact that we have had significant progress and improvement in the

way we deal with bird deterrents over the past two years, we are now having to live through this one more time. I am waiting with great anticipation to find out what the results of this inspection will be.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Landowner Private Property Rights

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I raised some of my local landowners' concerns with respect to Bill 19, and my constituents appreciate the minister's reassurance. However, another recent bill that has caused some confusion with some of my constituents is Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. My questions today are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister tell us why Bill 36 is so important for Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, most certainly. Over the last number of years the government of Alberta has heard through a number – a number – of consultation processes that Albertans believe that we have need for better co-ordination, better planning, better policy, and better decision-making with respect to activity that's on the land base in the province of Alberta. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act allows regional plans to provide this leadership for the government and for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a constituent who was advised by a self-proclaimed land rights expert that Bill 36 will allow the government to extinguish existing rights, and this includes land titles, and that it restricts the right to compensation, thereby allowing the government to do with land as they see fit. Can the minister assure my constituents that this is not the case?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I categorically can affirm that, number one, the Alberta Bill of Rights protects property rights in the province of Alberta. It has done so and will continue to do so irrespective of any other act that we have in place. The Land Stewardship Act does not – and I will repeat: the Land Stewardship Act does not – take away any existing private property rights. The act does not provide the ability for expropriation or the removal of land or mineral title.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: That's all, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Protection of Personal Information

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School files, electronic health records, financial aid applications, drivers' licences: government handles a lot of personal information, but the Auditor General reports yesterday that this government is still not doing its job in keeping that information secure from hackers and fraudsters. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how can the minister justify leaving the personal information of citizens so insecure when they have had two years to fix the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Auditor General's report I'm very pleased to respond on this. At any time of day in the week we have the Auditor General's staff working with us on a regular basis to ensure that we are protecting Albertans' information. This department does protect Albertans' information. That's indicated by the number of recommendations that have been brought forward. We have supported all of his recommendations that he's given thus far.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister's department is laying off hundreds of employees, isn't the cost-cutting putting the personal information of Albertans at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we did establish was that there is a chief information officer resident in Service Alberta. There are chief information officers in all departments across the government. Every November there's a review of the plans that we have in place to ensure that their websites and all their systems are on track and secure.

Mr. Kang: To the minister again: is the failure to adopt uniform IT security policies the fault of the minister's department alone, or are the other ministries refusing to follow Service Alberta's lead? If so, which ones?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is indeed a uniform policy across government, which is why the chief information officer process was set in place two years ago. Two years ago there were 12 recommendations from the Auditor General. Two we have completed, nine we've made significant progress on, and the one that was presented in his report most recently: we are working with him on that with respect to making sure that Albertans' information is protected.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that will conclude the question period for today. Today we were able to recognize 17 members, and there were 100 questions and responses provided.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with Members' Statements.

2:40

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Calgary Municipal Election

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to thank and congratulate the thousands of Albertans involved in October's municipal election. Candidates' staff, volunteers, and supportive family members make great sacrifices of time, money, and sometimes reputation in order to preserve our democracy. As an MLA from Calgary I would especially like to commend all candidates running for mayor, alderman, and school trustee in Calgary for their efforts in the hard-fought competition for votes.

At a time when public apathy challenges our democratic process, the excitement in Calgary's election was tremendous. Voter turnout was a whopping 53 per cent. This is Calgary's highest participation rate in more than three decades.

I applaud Calgary's new mayor, Naheed Nenshi, and his team for their successful campaign, their ability to tap technology, stir social media, and land a vibrant victory. Mr. Nenshi together with a steady stream of volunteers was able to broadcast his ideas, skills, and passion to the masses. With 15 people competing for the mayor's seat, Mr. Nenshi managed to take over 40 per cent of the total vote.

I also congratulate five new members of the city council: Gian-Carlo Carra, Peter Demong, Shane Keating, Gael MacLeod, and Richard Pootmans. I also congratulate the nine returning aldermen: Andre Chabot, Diane Colley-Urquhart, Druh Farrell, Dale Hodges, Ray Jones, Gord Lowe, John Mar, Brian Pincott, and Jim Stevenson.

We optimistically look forward to success as the new team works with our provincial government to improve the quality of life of all Calgarians and Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Daycare and Day Home Regulatory Compliance

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer a daycare near Edmonton had to be closed for the safety of the young children after allegations of physical discipline, shaming, and forced feeding. We learned that investigators had noted less severe concerns of the same nature in the previous two years' inspections. However, it was not until the ministry received specific complaints that they stepped in with a proper investigation. It's difficult to think about the risk to which children may have been exposed over the course of that two-year period.

Yesterday we learned from the Auditor General that the ministry responsible for ensuring the safety of children in daycare centres hasn't taken its responsibility seriously. We are told there's a lack of consistency in how licensing officers monitor child care programs, that where an inspector can't observe some criteria they are asked to inspect, they may not follow up to assure themselves that the issue is being addressed safely, professionally, and with the high quality that parents have a right to expect from those caring for their children.

The Auditor General went on to say, "Without adequately documenting the results of monitoring and enforcement activities, Authorities and the Department cannot demonstrate that child care programs meet Statutory Requirements or applicable standards." In other words, documentation is not adequate, and we cannot rely on the minister's assurances that child care centres are safe. The AG outlined that one of the common enforcement measures used by licensing officers is the verbal warning. He says that there is little documentation to show that improvements are ever made after these warnings are issued. He says that officers may wait months or even up to the next year to follow up.

In short, young children and babies are being allowed to stay in daycare centres that don't meet basic minimum standards perhaps for extended times. The Auditor General says, "Consistent failure to correct areas of seemingly low-risk non-compliance increases the probability of negative impacts on the health, safety, and well-being of children."

For years this government has ignored research that supports the value of high-quality, affordable child care. They have compromised the future of our children. Albertans and their children deserve better, and it is time for this government to act.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks in his capacity as chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the committee's report on Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill and referred to the committee on April 16, 2010.

I would like to extend the committee's sincere appreciation to the organizations, municipalities, and the individual Albertans who made written submissions and presentations on the bill. I would also like to thank the officials from Alberta Municipal Affairs for sharing their expertise during the review process and acknowledge the support provided to the committee by the staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. Finally, I would like to recognize my fellow committee members, representing all parties in the Assembly, who have worked together over the past six months to complete a thorough review of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the report recommends that Bill 203 not proceed. I request the concurrence of the Assembly with respect to the report on Bill 203, Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All those members who concur in the report, if you agree, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those who are opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Speaker: Okay. The report has been concurred in. Carried.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 26 Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave today to introduce Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation contains three major provisions. One, it provides coal-bed methane ownership certainty by declaring that coal-bed methane is and always has been natural gas for both Crown and freehold minerals. Two, it recognizes that existing agreements entered into by the natural gas owner or their lessee that specifically granted coal-bed methane rights to the coal owner or coal owner's lessee will not be affected. Three, it protects coal owners and their lessees, surface owners, and the government from being sued by natural gas owners or their lessees for extraction, reduction, or removal of coal-bed methane prior to enactment of this legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of my letter to Minister Flaherty on the Canada

health transfer. The letter asked three basic questions on why Albertans are being treated unfairly by the federal government on this issue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I too would like to table the appropriate number of copies of my letter that I referenced in my response to the question from Red Deer-South, the letter to Hon. Josée Verner discussing the fair and equitable treatment of Alberta under the terms of the Canadian federalism system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is a tabling which I have permission to provide to the hon. members of the Assembly. It's a letter from a constituent, Laurent Godbout, who is deeply concerned by the government's plan to close or change the psychiatric care beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The second letter I have is also regarding Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and it is from a constituent, Catherine Jevic. Catherine expresses the same concerns as the first letter that I tabled.

Also, I have a public notice here. This is quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. It is a notice inviting people to a breakfast with the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. It has also listed here the hon. member as the Political Minister for Calgary. The details are here for everyone to see, and this event is taking place Friday, October 29, in the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill's constituency.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit under tablings.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of annual reports for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the historic resources fund, and the Wild Rose Foundation as well as the annual review for the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

The Speaker: Before I call the next item, hon. members, today is the anniversary of birth for the hon. Member for Peace River and the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

[Debate adjourned October 26: Mr. Hinman speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, are you participating?

Mrs. Jablonski: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Bill 19
Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to move second reading of Bill 19, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

I want to point out first that this legislation does not introduce any new taxes, nor does it change any tax rates. It is essentially changing the timing for when tax is payable. This legislation supports the implementation of the province's upcoming renewable fuels standard in 2011. Without this legislation the renewable fuels standard program could see tax distortions that would have Alberta's renewable fuel production industry at a disadvantage compared to producers outside the province.

This is because currently fuel, including renewable fuel, can be imported to a refinery or terminal in Alberta without being subject to fuel tax. This contrasts with the sale of fuel by an Alberta renewable fuel producer, which, even if delivered to a refinery, is currently taxable. As such, an unfair tax situation exists where renewable fuel produced in Alberta is taxed while renewable fuel from outside the province may not be.

Alberta's fuel tax system inadvertently creates an incentive for fuel suppliers to purchase renewable fuel from outside Alberta. This legislation corrects this, leveling the playing field for tax purposes. It would allow renewable fuel from an Alberta producer to be sold to a fuel supplier here in Alberta without being subject to tax. Note, of course, that fuel tax is still charged later, when the fuel leaves the refinery or terminal or is sold into the marketplace.

This change also eases the administrative burden for both industry and government by ensuring there is not a mixture of taxed and untaxed fuel at a refinery or terminal, which could be difficult to track. This amendment also authorizes information sharing between Alberta Finance and Enterprise and Alberta Energy. Information sharing will improve administration and verification under both the fuel tax and renewable fuels standard programs. It also allows efficiencies to be developed under both programs to reduce the reporting and compliance burden for industry.

Finally, there are also a number of minor technical amendments to remove references in the act to blend stock and blending. Currently the term "blend stock" in the act refers to a nontaxable fuel. However, there are no blend stocks in Alberta, so this term has no real effect. Further, the term "blending" is commonly used by industry to describe the mixing of traditional fuel with renewable fuel, an entirely different meaning than the meaning of the term used in the act. Thus, the references in the Fuel Tax Act to blend stock and blending are removed to avoid confusion.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will help ensure Alberta's renewable fuel producers are on a level playing field for fuel tax purposes with producers outside the province. Amendments also allow information sharing between Alberta Finance and Enterprise and Alberta Energy to support efficient administration of both fuel tax and renewable fuel programs and allow for the reduction of reporting burden for industry. Other minor technical changes are made to support the renewable fuels standard.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that explanation from the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. Certainly, I think this is a bill that we on this side of the House will support as it proceeds through the Assembly. As I understand it, these amendments to the Fuel Tax Act will remove the disincentive, that the hon. member talked about, for traditional fuel suppliers to purchase from Alberta-based renewable fuel producers. This amendment will also provide a more consistent method of taxing fuel with Bill 19.

Now, certainly, from what I can understand – and I'm looking through public accounts when I say this, Mr. Speaker – Alberta Finance and Enterprise tries to be consistent with the purposes of the renewable fuels standard established by Alberta Energy. One only has to look through there, and you can see the individual distributors who are receiving money or having a rebate for one reason or another from the government as they provide or distribute fuel to various users.

The bill, as I understand it, in a very modest way provides support or a contribution to climate change by removing this disincentive for Alberta businesses to produce renewable fuel. Hopefully, this bill is part of a larger strategy to address climate change targets by promoting the use of renewable fuels and also cleaner fuels, in my view. I would consider natural gas to be a very, very clean fuel. As I understand it, Alberta's renewable fuels standard will require an average of 2 per cent renewable diesel in diesel fuel and 5 per cent renewable ethanol in gasoline sold in Alberta.

Now, I think that we should also in the course of the debate and discussion on Bill 19 have a look at natural gas and how we should incent natural gas as a fuel for the transportation sector. Certainly, we would need a few dollars for a promotion like that, and, Mr. Speaker, I even have a location within the province's current budget where we could find a few dollars to do that.

I brought up this issue quite some time ago in the House regarding the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Alberta farm fuel benefit program. There are actually two programs, one of them in Alberta Finance and one of them in Alberta Agriculture. Of course, I was criticized, not by the current minister of agriculture, certainly, but by a previous one, that this has just been hard on farmers and to not worry if we happen to have a little bit of leakage in the government program. In this case the farm fuel benefit program, when you total it, was close to \$100 million as an amount in the two programs. If there were invalid permits issued, then they should be retrieved by the government, and those individuals who are not valid farmers under that program should not have been eligible for any money.

3:00

Now, I was interested to read on page 121 in yesterday's report of the Auditor General that in December 2008 the department started a three-year continuous Alberta farm fuel benefit program renewal process. I applaud the minister for that effort. Each year the department contacts one-third of Alberta farm fuel benefit program registrants to renew their registration number and update all the information that is necessary. The renewal information is used to determine if the producers are still eligible to use marked fuel in their farming operations. Renewals for 2008 and 2009 are substantially complete, and they resulted in approximately 5,000 producers, or permits, as I understand it, being cancelled. The Auditor goes on to say that his office has reviewed the renewal and verification process, and they're satisfied that the process ensures the eligibility of recipients. So there have been up to 5,000 permits pulled from that file.

Certainly, that would indicate or conclude with this member that there has to be or should be a surplus in the amount of money that

has been rebated from Alberta Finance. So a portion of this money, I think, should be used to incent particularly our trucking sector to convert from the use of diesel, whether it's mixed diesel or not, with a renewable fuel, a renewable manufactured fuel. We should be encouraging more and more of our trucking companies to convert to natural gas. I think it can be done. It's certainly being done in other jurisdictions. I don't know. Maybe the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne could update us. I don't know if on the truck routes – and there's a lot of trucking on highway 43 – there would be such a facility, if such a facility would now exist along that commercial stretch in Whitecourt. I know there would be for propane. I think in the discussion of this bill, Mr. Speaker, this is part of the solution to improving our climate change targets, having natural gas as a fuel for the transportation sector. I think we should be encouraging and, to a certain degree, incenting that to happen.

There is a conference going to occur in Calgary on this matter quite soon. I would like to see an increase in the domestic consumption of natural gas in this province for transportation. I know the price of natural gas has to climb significantly, even from what the minister of finance had targeted in the budget. We're 75 cents, I believe, below his initial target, and I know that target was revised in the first-quarter update. However, that being said, natural gas as a transportation fuel, I think, would be a real alternative to diesel whenever you compare conversions, if we could incent the location of some fuelling stations. Let's start on major trucking routes where a lot of freight moves by truck and see what happens. When we further discuss fuel taxes, I would like this House to consider that now is the time – particularly, we could say that the price is right because of the cost of natural gas – that we provide an incentive to some of the larger users of diesel fuel to consider natural gas as an alternative source of fuel.

Certainly, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright and also the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for their work on Bill 19. It'll be interesting to see how this proceeds through the House, but I have one question, that will hopefully be answered as we proceed through committee, and that would be: did the treasury lose any money as a result of the past practices that are being corrected with this amended legislation? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be uncharacteristically short. The reason for my supporting Bill 19, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, moved by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, is that it's doing what I've been asking for and been basically harping on this week in terms of achieving cross-ministerial co-operation and co-ordination. Amendments to the Fuel Tax Act will remove a disincentive for traditional fuel suppliers to purchase from Alberta-based renewable fuel producers. The act will provide a more consistent method of taxing fuel, and it's that consistency that is very important to me. Having Alberta Finance and Enterprise moving their practices to be more consistent with the purposes of the renewable fuel standards established by Alberta Energy, to me, is a step in the right direction.

I also appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the sort of made-in-Alberta solution to this in terms of removing an existing incentive for traditional fuel suppliers to purchase renewable fuel from outside Alberta, which is not taxed when delivered to a refinery in Alberta. The bill in a small way provides support to a very modest contribution to climate change by removing a disincentive for Alberta businesses to produce renewable.

There does not appear to be any reason why we would oppose it; therefore, Mr. Speaker, we are in support, and thank you for this opportunity.

The Speaker: Well, that one minute 40 second speech, though, does provide an opportunity for a five-minute question-and-comment period under section 29(2)(a), so would anyone like to participate?

There being none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to speak in support of Bill 19, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act. The amendments to the Fuel Tax Act will remove a disincentive for traditional fuel suppliers to purchase from Alberta-based renewable fuel producers, and that's good news. We can only hope to encourage more of the renewable fuels and the like within Alberta. It is actually one of the ways we can possibly diversify our economy, not only through these renewable fuel products, but hopefully this will lead this government to follow the lead of other jurisdictions and look for other opportunities in developing other renewable fuel sources such as solar and wind.

I'm hopeful that this act is just the beginning of a broader based climate change policy and a broader based look at how we're going to diversify our economy from one that has primarily relied on our oil and gas supplies to possibly look elsewhere. We haven't had a ton of success on that over the last 40 years, but maybe this bill is sort of signifying that we see a change coming, and that gives me hope. It also looks that this is going to ensure that the fuel tax framework administered by Alberta Finance and Enterprise is consistent with the purposes of renewable fuel standards established by Alberta Energy.

I would like to echo the comments made by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity. It shows some good cross-ministry work that is looking at: if the left arm is doing something, let's check out what the right arm is doing; let's see if they're working together. That is evident on this bill. I've alluded to this earlier. Transactions between renewable fuel producers and traditional fuel suppliers will no longer be taxed until the fuel enters the consumer distribution system. This will remove the existing incentive for traditional fuel suppliers to purchase renewable fuel from outside Alberta. Removing that barrier just makes common sense for many of the reasons I brought up earlier.

3:10

Simply put, we have to get into this renewable game and the game where we're moving our energy forces from the traditional use to some of the stuff that people are saying is going to become in vogue over the next 30, 40 years: solar, wind, and the like. Of course, there will always be a need for our energy industry, and I hope it produces for a long time and allows us an economic engine and advantage that we can rely on. Nevertheless, we have to do our part to not only diversify our economy but also to take climate change seriously. That is both very important at least to members on this side of the House and, I'm assuming by this bill, to many members on the other side as well.

I would also like to comment on the comments made in connection with this bill and possibly looking at how we can use this bill as sort of a template for moving more into utilizing our vast reserves of natural gas. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar so wisely pointed out, they are at a low in terms of price, and it may be an opportune time where we can use some of that cleaner burning fuel for possibly our trucking industry, possibly our buses in Edmonton and Calgary.

I know a local mayoralty candidate, Craig Burrows, former alderman, actually came up with that policy of converting the bus force to natural gas, and I think that was a very good idea. Possibly maybe some tweaking by members in this House could allow for municipalities or we could assist municipalities to sort of move in that direction by providing a little bit of the framework and the necessary legwork that's going to go into providing some of these opportunities to use natural gas more in not only our city centres but, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out, some of our busy trucking centres that are no doubt moving forward. It would also save them a great deal of money. Allowing people to make a few more extra dollars while they're saving the environment is a pretty good thing.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright for bringing forward this bill. I think it goes a long ways in trying to remove some of the disincentives for renewable fuels to be produced here in Alberta and to be worked on and to be refined and to hopefully get Alberta into the game of what much of the rest of the world has already embraced.

On that note, I will cede the floor to someone else. I thank you for the opportunity in allowing me to speak to this bill.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you have a question?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask a question to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. He referred a number of times to environmental benefits of renewable fuels. I wonder if he is convinced, I guess, or has strong evidence that the environmental benefits overall – that is, the potential carbon emissions of biofuels – are, in fact, substantially less than regular petroleum fuels and also whether or not he has concern that the conversion of agricultural land away from food production into the production of fuels will tend to drive up food prices and whether or not that's a concern.

Mr. Hehr: I thank the hon. member for the question. Of course, I have read numerous articles, and in fact I was up late not the other night but a few nights ago watching some Charlie Rose, where they were discussing exactly this issue on biofuels. I'm of two minds on that issue. There's no doubt we have to feed a growing world and a growing population and try to understand that we have some humanitarian standards throughout the globe. Of course that's a concern. It's a concern not only for people throughout the world, but there are also people here in Alberta who need an adequate food supply. There's no doubt that growing food locally and supplying our citizens with that food is very important. That said, we are at the beginning of biofuels, okay?

What biofuels we are producing now, although there are significant problems with them – they have not been seen so far to reduce greenhouse gases; in fact, they have been seen almost to do the opposite and to take up a lot of land and take agricultural land away. Some people are of the view that since we're just at the start of this, we should be doing some of this experimentation so we can refine our biofuels so they can play a part in our overcoming our addiction to fossil fuels, which, of course, are running out, and to help global warming and CO₂ emissions.

I understand the question. I am very concerned about being able to feed a population that is growing, but at the same time there has to be some room for at least some experimentation and some development of a biofuels industry. That's going to take some heavy monitoring by government. Government is going to have to do some heavy lifting in terms of monitoring what is the right

balance on that and ensuring that this is not going to be an easy answer.

I'm still of these two minds, and hopefully I'll be able to work through it further, but I don't have a definite response, just a little bit of both there.

I thank the hon. member for the question.

The Speaker: Others?

Other speakers, then, on this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I just want to elaborate on the points that I raised in my question to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I think there are a number of reasons why this bill may be necessary in order to, I guess, level the playing field, as it were. Essentially, I think that it's important that we raise some questions about some of the basic assumptions about the benefits of biofuels.

In the first instance, when you count in all of the emissions that are produced – for example, in the planting, the fertilizing, and the harvesting of these crops, the processing, and so on – plus the fact that they are still carbon-based fuels, you'll find that the environmental benefits relative to petroleum are not as great as many people assume. These are carbon-based fuels that are produced, and they release carbon into the atmosphere when they're burned. There's a considerable amount of carbon that's released into the atmosphere in the production of these fuels. You know, I think that that's one concern.

A real concern for me as well is the price of food for people. Now, I understand and have read articles relative to the production of biofuels in other countries, for example in Mexico, where serious shortages of corn, for example, which the low-income agricultural workers depend on, created hunger and some unrest. I think that there are instances like that around the world. Now, we're obviously not in that position, but we are in a position where the price of food has continued to rise and represents a significant burden for many people.

3:20

Now, set against that is the increased profitability for certain producers who want to get into the production of biofuels in a larger way. This will then provide some tax breaks for agricultural producers and to agribusiness, so it may well perform its function of stimulating the production of more biofuels. I don't want to say that I'm condemning biofuels as a whole, but I think it's important to raise some of these concerns.

The other thing that's apparent as sort of the fad of biofuels is past, probably closer to 10 years ago, was research that showed that in order to replace the entire production of petroleum fuels in transportation and other areas, you would basically need to convert all of the food production on the entire Earth perhaps several times in order to produce the amount of fuel that is currently derived from petroleum. It's certainly not an answer to the depletion of world oil stocks if anyone thought that that might be the case.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to say categorically that I think this is the wrong direction, but I do just want to simply put on the record a few of the limitations and concerns around biofuels and to indicate that, in particular, I think we need to be concerned about making sure that we are in fact providing food in an affordable way to all Alberta families and that we also do our share to combat world hunger. I know that many farmers around this province do work with – I'm trying to remember the name.

An Hon. Member: The Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Mr. Mason: The Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Thank you very much.

I know that they are doing great work, that farmers throughout Alberta are growing crops specifically to help people who are going hungry in other parts of the world. I think that's a trend we need to support.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make those comments. This is not a categorical opposition to Bill 19 but simply to put some very I think important reservations on the record.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the comments that were made by the hon. members about the concern over biofuels. Currently it takes about 20 per cent more energy to produce the biofuels in terms of the amount of fertilizer, the amount of water, the cultivation of the crops, and so on. So it's a bit of a lose-lose circumstance.

I do have a question for the hon. member as to the new methodology. For example, we've talked about separating the wheat from the chaff and just using the chaff part for the production of the biofuels as opposed to taking away from the grain, whether it be corn, whether it be wheat, oats, et cetera, whether that might be a little bit more acceptable.

The second question I have for the hon. member is: would he like to see a larger portion of this fuel tax being allowed to the municipalities as opposed to provincial revenues so the money could be used for infrastructure, social support programs, and so on in the local areas?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity for those questions. Certainly, the use of agricultural waste products as a stock for fuel production is an excellent idea, and I'm glad he brought that point up because I didn't really distinguish that from the use of food. If that's a cost-effective process, the use of waste products for fuel production is a great idea, but I think it's mostly where the sugar is in the plant that is the most useful for biofuels.

The other question, about more money for municipalities, is something that I strongly believe in. I think that fuel tax revenue should be used to support transportation primarily, and I think that municipalities need more support for that. I don't necessarily think that it has to be a bigger share of the fuel tax, but I do think that the province needs to work out an acceptable formula for revenue sharing with the municipal governments, who deliver many critical services directly to the public.

The tax base that they operate from, being the property tax, is not always the most suitable or sufficient in order to meet the needs of modern cities. In particular, property tax was designed originally for services to properties; that is to say, roads and streetlights, policing, fire protection, and so on. But modern rapid transit systems, some of the social services, and recreational programs that modern municipalities, especially large ones, are called upon to provide are difficult to operate and fund just based on the property tax.

Yes, I am a strong proponent of greater revenue sharing with municipalities to give them a reliable, predictable, and guaranteed source of revenue. Those things are all important. It shouldn't just be going up and down like a yo-yo so that every time the price of gas drops in the province of Alberta, the arrangements are changed. I think it's got to be something that they can plan on in order to make good long-term decisions.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others under 29(2)(a)?

Other speakers?

Then I shall call on the hon. Member for Red Deer-South on behalf of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to close the debate.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I'd just call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

Bill 18

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise today and move second reading of the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010, as introduced.

We have a real enthusiasm for this new partnership. I want to say, first of all, that the opportunity for this amendment act to expand the horizon of the pioneering that Alberta has done in breaking down trade barriers does not in any way detract from the affiliation and the affection we have for the country of Canada. This does not in any way anticipate that this New West Partnership that has been formed will replace or even supplant in any fashion the kinds of things that we do as a Confederation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

However, it is to take advantage of the fact that together the three provinces have 9 million people and a GDP of \$550 billion per year. It's worthy of note that this is the epicentre in the global economy of some of the most incredible underdeveloped resources that are just waiting in all three provinces to be developed and expanded with the proper plan, with the proper partnerships, and with the proper affiliation. We started the process by breaking down trade barriers with British Columbia. Now we have Saskatchewan on board, which clearly shows how the west is leading the way.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments are required for two reasons: first of all, to bring monetary enforcement provisions into the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade, the AIT, as it's commonly referenced, and secondly, to extend the existing provisions of TILMA to the New West Partnership trade agreement, that includes the province of Saskatchewan.

The AIT is the national agreement that governs domestic trade and labour mobility across Canada. One of the flaws in that agreement was that a jurisdiction could break the rules without any consequences, and just very recently, in the last few days, we've heard about that rule-breaking and consequences that now can be applied.

3:30

In 2009, when all the provinces, territories, and the federal government agreed that an enforcement mechanism should be added with monetary penalties, they were incorporated into the AIT, the agreement on internal trade. These monetary penalties are up to \$5 million if a jurisdiction does not comply with an AIT panel ruling. This is the teeth that Alberta has long been advocating for and is consistent with what we put in the TILMA agreement, or the trade and labour mobility agreement, that we've had in effect with the province of British Columbia. In fact, the AIT dispute mechanism is modelled after TILMA. We're already seeing its effects with the recent vegetable oil ruling over Ontario.

What we're proposing would update our legislation so that we're compliant with the new AIT rules. Mr. Speaker, we fought for those rules to be changed on a national level. They have been in the AIT agreement. Now this puts us in harmonization with those rules. All provinces, territories, and the federal government have agreed to make these changes to legislation. It just makes sense to be in perfect alignment so that we have everybody playing by the same rules.

Now, in the second part of this particular amendment act we have the New West Partnership trade agreement. It is part of a vision that this Premier has held ever since he thought years ago as Transportation minister: "Why do we have weigh scales on both sides of the Alberta border? Why would we on highway 1 try to duplicate on the Alberta side or the British Columbia side the same kind of activity, the same kind of regulatory enforcement as the other province?" So he fought for and won the right to make sure we streamlined and had only one weigh scale, only one office, only one delivery centre to make sure that this barrier was broken down between the two provinces and that we were working simultaneously, in effect, with partnership.

This kind of fundamental principle has been the underlying principle now of the New West Partnership trade agreement. The change that we're bringing in, in effect, does not add any new obligations for Alberta or British Columbia. The amendments will, however, allow for a common set of provisions covering all domestic trade agreements that Alberta may be party to. This will ensure that Alberta can provide timely, consistent implementation of its domestic trade agreement obligations, especially if more provinces want to join the Alberta-B.C.-Saskatchewan free trade region, and, Mr. Speaker, we're hearing rumours of just that kind of interest from other partners.

Full implementation will improve interprovincial trade, investment, and labour mobility in the west and provide seamless access for businesses and workers with a range of opportunities. It will also increase our competitiveness in the global economy.

Mr. Speaker, breaking down trade, investment, and labour mobility barriers is important for our economies and our citizens. It has been part of our Premier's leadership both in the Competitiveness Act and in all the facets of the way we are thinking and reviewing how we can become more economic. It is imperative with a group like our economic council, in fact, that we find new ways, and this is one of the best new ways, we believe, that we can support not only our businesses but sensible approaches to governing between the various provinces. I encourage all hon. members to support these amendments.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be prepared to answer any questions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Am I speaking to the bill, or is this 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: To the bill.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a delight to stand up and speak to this bill. I'm sure that everyone knows that on this side of the House we certainly hammered hard at some of the agreements in TILMA that we felt probably wouldn't be as successful in light of the fact that the AIT was in place. However, I think we also knew that the AIT wasn't as effective as it probably could have been. I think that I can remember speaking about one of the most important things, about being able to, as the minister has referred to, weigh trucks on each side of the border because they had to drop off the beer cases before they could get them across, which

was one of the things that they really wanted to do. So that was successful.

Back to this Bill 18. It does bring Alberta in line with recently established monetary enforcement provisions contained in the newly established dispute resolution. The minister has referred to that, the one that we won with Ontario, which now allows canola products to actually be sold in Ontario. It also would rescind the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement established by Alberta and B.C. because the agreement can be superseded by the New West Partnership trade agreement, but what it's done is move it to schedule 6 when, in fact, TILMA had been in schedule 6.1.

Partly what this bill has done is consolidating and, I think, probably making it a little easier for other entities that would be interested in joining to be able to have their legislation perhaps go forward to be able to meet some of the legislation that would have to be put together for all the different provinces. It actually reflects the reality that domestic trade units like the New West Partnership trade agreement are becoming increasingly common and are likely to emerge more frequently during the near future. I think that we have seen this way back when. When we look at the European Common Market, it's the same sort of principle, and I think we can look at that market and say that certainly some portions of that have been very successful.

As I said, the recent changes to the AIT make it stronger, and more importantly its enforcement now makes it directly parallel to the provincial and regional trade labour agreements that have already been signed between British Columbia and Alberta. The impact of this could be that the act recognizes agreements to which Alberta is liable and a participant, and it deals broadly with enforcement measures that have recently been addressed, as I've said before. I think it's very important because I believe that one of the reasons that AIT didn't work was because there wasn't any enforcement. I don't care how many rules you make; if they're not enforceable, they're not worth the paper they're written on. I think that when we make rules, when we make legislation, let's have some way to enforce it so that, in fact, the playing field would be level for everyone.

It's also important to note that these changes reflect only domestic trade, and it's good for all Canadians when we can get our domestic trade going east-west instead of always north-south. The international aspects of the New West Partnership trade agreement and their importance in the overall agreement really are not considered within the scope of the amendment. I'm sure that some of the agreements would fall under NAFTA if we were going south.

In addition, the members of what had previously been the TILMA panel, which adjudicated complaints and awards, will not change to the New West Partnership trade agreement and will stay. I'm assuming that with Saskatchewan joining, they would be allowed to nominate people to be on that adjudication panel.

I think, as I've mentioned before, that since its inception we on this side haven't really supported TILMA because it was developed and implemented outside of the Assembly and without adequate public consultation in other democratic forums. I think that this was probably one of the strongest arguments that we felt was legitimate when we talked about TILMA. However, the acceptance of this concept on a national scale will likely have many beneficial effects.

3:40

The measure is really a common-sense approach to economic diversification. I'm going to go back to something that we've looked at in southern Alberta and I've discussed with the minister as well. We're looking at getting thebaine, which is a product that is making pharmaceutical heroin, for lack of a better word, but it's not

really heroin. It's a very, very important new crop, and of course, again, that's a diversity that would be going right across our country, particularly to pharmaceutical firms.

For Alberta and B.C. the New West agreement really changes very little. As you know, we were already on the inside sort of looking out.

I think, as the minister has said, that the Premier has always asked for – and I think I see that his minister is doing it – going to the new markets, that clearly we're going to have to look at, which are China and India and, certainly, in that Pacific Rim. The expansion of our domestic markets and the Asian markets is crucial. Because of the severity of the recent economic downturn in the States, which has traditionally been our largest trading partner, and the changes to the regulatory structure in the U.S., Alberta must look further afield for economic and trade opportunities. I realize that this has sort of gone off on a tangent because, truly, Bill 18 is strictly for domestic use. However, a strong domestic product, even if it's with two or three provinces together, will have that advantage of going to the Pacific Rim or the Indian countries and being able to sell our products.

The Alberta government has always come out as a strong advocate for breaking down barriers to trade and labour mobility. I don't think that we on this side ever had any objection to that. Again, as I say, the only objection was that it was done in the backroom, so to speak, but TILMA has been a good example of this going forward.

I think the minister is really very good because I think she read my mind. One of the comments that I would like to make, which is a philosophical observation, is exactly what she mentioned, that I see Canada perhaps being regionalized. I think that, first and foremost, I am a Canadian, and I want to see Canada remain a very strong country. When I see what's happened with the agreement between B.C. and Alberta, clearly a lot of the action is in the west and has moved. It's an evolution within Canadian history. All of the action was in the east, which is where we were founded, and we're not that old a country. Compared to the European Common Market and some of the European countries, truly we are probably a country still in diapers.

I would hate to see us regionalize, where we fight against each other, but I believe that the start of TILMA, I'm hoping, is the start of something bigger that will unite the country in terms of being able to trade amongst our provinces and, in fact, where the provinces will work together for the betterment of all of Canada.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to say that I support Bill 18.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members to speak? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in support of Bill 18, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010. I was a strong supporter of TILMA, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, and I am now a strong supporter of the New West Partnership trade agreement, that this bill considers.

Alberta and B.C. were pioneers in working collaboratively to remove redundant barriers and enhance the movement of goods, services, and people across our borders. This work was noticed across Canada, and it was truly a historic day earlier this year when Saskatchewan joined B.C. in forging the New West Partnership and, specifically, the New West Partnership trade agreement. Bill 18 will extend the existing provisions of TILMA to the New West Partnership trade agreement, including Saskatchewan with B.C. and Alberta.

TILMA has been very successful for this province in reducing government red tape, contributing to job creation, and stimulating

economic growth, and through this bill that will now extend to Saskatchewan, which will create a larger, stronger, and more dynamic region here in western Canada. I believe it really does kind of broaden our opportunity to have influence within Canada. Certainly, I'm a nationalist in terms of the importance of international trade and Canada taking strong, strong positions with regard to ensuring that we have open access to international markets, but I think this regional partnership will help us in international markets as well. This partnership creates the largest barrier-free trade and investment market within Canada, representing over 9 million people and a combined GDP of \$555 billion.

I have for many, many years in my involvement as an agriculture producer, as a beef producer, seen the importance of removing barriers to trade. There are clearly the restrictions that we've seen, inappropriate restrictions to access to several markets, particularly in the beef industry, that have created a great deal of economic hardship for Canadians but also for Alberta cattle producers. I guess I see this partnership as helping us to have a stronger impact in international trade agreements, that are often led by our national government but are of particular importance to western Canada with our heavy dependence on the production of raw materials, whether that's in agriculture or oil and gas or forestry products. So that's extremely important in western Canada.

It was my privilege in the years prior to becoming involved as the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks to travel internationally as the chairman of the Canada Beef Export Federation as well as the Alberta Beef Producers, and I very clearly saw the importance of regional trade agreements or the importance of reducing interprovincial trade barriers, that have existed in Canada for many years. While you wouldn't think that's a direct connection, very often those interprovincial trade barriers impact how effective we can be in international markets, repeatedly in Asian countries, particularly, but also in Mexico. We saw situations where the fact that we hadn't gotten things resolved within Canada had some bearing on how well we did in some of those markets in terms of smoothing the way to keep products moving back and forth efficiently.

I guess that since becoming involved as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I've also seen – particularly through the discussion of the TILMA that we've had over the last several years, two years in particular, I've understood in broader terms what some of these agreements mean to a whole range of other industries and small business across our province, and I appreciate the broader understanding that the discussion in this House has brought to myself. As I said, my understanding was primarily in agriculture, particularly the beef industry.

One of the things that I do appreciate about our country is the fact that we have a national animal health and food safety position, a national set of regulations. That's also important to get into markets and see products move freely into other markets. We just have to look down to the U.S., where there is, I would say, a more extensive regional set of regulations for a whole range of movement of goods and services state by state, and that makes it very difficult to move products even from, say, Alberta into various states. There isn't a uniform animal health and food safety standard in a number of the U.S. states, so that adds some complications. I think the fact that we have this national standard for animal health and food safety, then as we work to break down the barriers of interprovincial trade, we'll see better results internationally. I think even some of the more recent trade missions that have happened as a result of this partnership developing will bear good results for our province.

3:50

Not to extend my comments, Mr. Speaker, but I'm just very pleased to see us moving in this direction. I look forward to the

success that we'll have in agriculture and in a wide range of products and goods and services for Alberta as a result of this initiative. I'd like to applaud the minister for bringing this forward, and I look forward to the success that we'll appreciate as a result of that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I'd like to speak briefly on the bill and express some of the concerns which I have. These concerns, I think, fall into three categories: the broad concern about free trade agreements generally; the concerns about TILMA, which we're repeating, because that was debated in this House some years ago; and then specific concerns relative to this act.

Mr. Speaker, our party opposed TILMA and continues to do that. We are not going to support this piece of legislation even though it doesn't change very much. We're not comfortable with the status quo of TILMA, so certainly extending it to one more province in general is not something that we're wildly in favour of.

I want to talk about one concern I have specifically. Members of this House may know that I was at one point, for a number of years, a member of the municipal council here in the city of Edmonton. One of the things that the TILMA act does is to severely limit the ability for municipalities to have local procurement programs. Over certain thresholds, which are fairly low – \$75,000 for goods and services and \$200,000 for construction – they have to accept competitive bids from anywhere in B.C. and Alberta, and now Saskatchewan will be included in that as well.

I support local procurement policies. I think that municipalities should have the authority, if they wish, as an economic development strategy to have a buy-local campaign. Why is that important? Well, Mr. Speaker, if you really look at it – of course, this is a broader concern with the North American free trade agreement as well – in other areas it really limits the capacity of local governments to have local procurement. When you have local procurement, you are going to be dealing with a greater number of small businesses, and they're going to employ more people locally. When you have to accept bids from somewhere else, they're going to tend to be larger companies with less local employment. This is a policy across the board in all free trade agreements – and it's a policy that tends to reduce the number of small businesses in your community – to become dependent on much larger corporations. It's an intentional strategy, in my view, which is behind this from large corporate entities in the world and Canada and the United States and Mexico and the governments, that are joined at the hip with those companies.

I've always been a strong supporter of local employment and small business, and I don't see the benefit to our communities, generally, of going in this direction. If you're a big company, I certainly see the benefit because it certainly removes any limitations there may be on your ability to get labour or capital virtually anywhere you want. I know that's something that the government members opposite believe in, but it's not something that I believe in. We've been fairly consistent in our opposition to this particular direction on the part of the government.

The bill has one very good point, something that we fought very hard at the time, which is what they call the Lieutenant Governor in Council's override position, which is schedule 6.1, section 7. Now, that is what's known as a King Henry VIII provision, and it gives the cabinet through regulation the authority to change legislation if that

legislation conflicts with the directions set out in the TILMA bill. It's being eliminated, and I'm very glad of that, Mr. Speaker, because it's a very, very dangerous direction for any government to take, to give itself the power, without reference to the Legislature, to change laws. It has proven unnecessary, apparently, and has not been used, so the government has come around on the issue and is eliminating it here in this act. That's one thing that I'm very grateful to see.

I guess the other principle that I want to direct members' attention to is the whole question of sovereignty of Legislatures and parliaments and how these free trade agreements undermine that. If any law that we pass or any measure that we adopt contradicts these acts, it may in fact be overturned by different panels. Of course, with the free trade agreement in North America there are panels that can overturn the decisions of the Parliament of Canada or of this Legislature, and those have the effect of reducing the democratically-elected members' rights and the ability of parliaments and Legislatures to act in a sovereign manner in the areas of jurisdiction which they have.

I want to just point to one serious issue with relation to this and, obviously, not directly under TILMA, as an example. It's the export of unprocessed bitumen from our province. There are a number of economic analyses that show that a large number of jobs, both construction jobs and ongoing jobs in the industry, are essentially being created in the United States, where this bitumen is being upgraded. Now, it would certainly be our view to support what the Premier said at the time of his election as leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, which was, you know, that we want to get away from that. He likened the export of unprocessed bitumen to scraping off the topsoil of a farm and selling it. I agree with that characterization. I think it was accurate. But now with the massive development of upgrading and refining facilities in a number of states in the United States dependent on our bitumen, we're losing that. The difficulty is that the free trade agreements will make it very difficult indeed to go back and repatriate our jobs and make sure that we are in fact processing our raw materials as much as possible here in our own province. It's an example to me of the dangerous slippery slope that is presented by these free trade agreements.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, to summarize, I think this bill interferes with the autonomy of municipal governments. I think it undermines the position of our provincial Legislature. It undermines our ability as the people's elected representatives to make decisions. It undermines small business. It creates a system in which international capital is making more and more decisions about what happens in our province and we are making fewer and fewer decisions about what happens in our province. So it's not the direction that we support.

I expect that at some point in the province to the west of us and the province to the east of us there will be political change again, and we may find this western partnership reduced maybe to this province. I expect that at some point there's going to be political change in this province as well, and then they'll all be out, and I'll be happy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize on my list the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to commend the minister for introducing this bill. She knows and I know that in the 21st century jurisdictions that don't look beyond their own borders will find themselves working in isolation, and they'll struggle to compete in an increasingly global marketplace, sir.

I think the New West Partnership agreement is critical. I think that, you know, you've heard that our neighbours in B.C. and Saskatchewan have come together to improve the internal trade and labour mobility agreements, but more than this, the New West Partnership reflects a commitment by western provinces to collaborate as a single region in promoting the west internationally. I think that's where the big payoff comes for our province, Mr. Speaker.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we can break down the barriers between our provinces. It's not a political barrier. These are good, common-sense business barriers that need to be worked on collaboratively. You know, we're better positioned to market the west internationally. We can attract businesses, foreign investment, and we can increase trade. It makes sense. It makes business sense, and I don't think that if one government changes or another government changes, it'll affect that.

Sir, once businesses are attracted to our part of the country, this legislation will allow them to move between our provinces with greater ease. In Whitecourt-St. Anne right now I have companies that are based in B.C. that tell me every time I meet with them of the frustration that they have, you know, working between the provinces, whether it's moving labour or goods. They're telling me through our discussions in the last year through TILMA that it's improving, that things are getting better. So if we can enhance that relationship, why not? It makes business sense. It employs people in my constituency. It makes my industry folks more competitive on not just a local basis but an international basis. It's good for all of us.

That's why, once again, I support this bill. I support the minister's initiative and know that this is just the first step in many steps that this Legislature can take to become stronger as a region in Canada.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must admit to feeling the same conflicted feelings as I did when we talked initially about the TILMA bill, and part of that conflict comes from how we do it. I'm concerned about the lowest common denominator in terms of practices, the potential of undercutting labour agreements, and so on. If it turns out that some contract achieved in B.C. is lower than that in Alberta, then we would import that lower agreement, and to me that's part of the problem.

I also have similar concerns to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood with regard to the potential loss of local determination and the effect on local economies, the equivalent of the Walmart moving in and knocking out the hardware store, the grocery store, and a series of small businesses.

On the other side of the coin, I believe in collaboration. I believe in co-operation. I believe in the vision that was put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview of the notion of the western tiger. As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East indicated, I don't see this as regionalism, a firewall, a border circumstance, where we put a moat around our western provinces, but I see some commonalities that could be achieved.

I must indicate that I consider myself to be a Canadian first and an Albertan second although for over 50 of my 63 years I've lived in

this province and have strong roots in this province. My sort of national identity was formed by the fact that my father was in the Forces, and I was born, for example, in Saskatoon. From there we moved to Aylmer, Ontario, to Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, just outside Montreal. I moved temporarily back to stay with my grandmother in Saskatoon for a portion of grade 1. From there our family moved to Winnipeg, where I finished grades 1 through 3. Again I was back with my grandmother for a little while for grade 4. From Winnipeg the family moved to Namao airbase, just outside of Edmonton. From Edmonton to Toronto, from Toronto to Ottawa, and finally from Ottawa in 1966 we moved back to Alberta. This is why I celebrate the fabric and I feel connected to the various regions of Canada.

It bothers me when I hear talk of firewalls, when I hear certain Albertans complaining about equalization payments. The way I view that is that we're fortunate to be in this economic driver province, that we have money that can go on equalization payments. I can't imagine anybody wanting to trade places with a province that's the recipient of these transfers.

As I say, I view things from a national perspective, but I also see the potential of co-operation; for example, the bulk buying of certain products that would be of benefit to each of us. I'd like to see a national pharmacare program, but until such a time as that becomes possible, I'd like to at least see Saskatchewan, B.C., and Alberta buying drugs, generic preferably, at a reduced price so that we could all have that economic benefit. I don't see that as undercutting anyone's bottom line, but I see it as a sharing.

In terms of co-operation I like what I've seen at PNWER, the Pacific North West Economic Region, but also I would say that that E stands for "environmental."

4:10

The notion of working with those around us for our better and larger good makes tremendous sense to me. For example, I would much rather be in some cases importing timber from B.C. rather than using some of the B.C. practices of clear-cutting that have been adopted in this province, especially close to water bodies. The justification of the pine beetle for unsustainable practices instead of selective logging and burning, for example, would not be a practice I would want to import from B.C., and I know there are a number of people in B.C. that regret the type of logging that's been done there. Yes, B.C. has suffered from the pine beetle infestations. We're taking measures to avoid that spread farther east, but the measures that we have to take must be based on science. I'm not a proponent of large dams to the point where we're flooding timber and we're flooding farmland, so there are certain practices within B.C. that I would not necessarily want to import.

For example, Premier Brad Wall of Saskatchewan has expressed concerns about the takeover of the Potash company, and Prime Minister Harper has said: "Well, what's the problem here? You're going from an American owned to an Australian owned." He doesn't see that as a problem. The problem is the loss of local say, local control. In this case it's the entire province of Saskatchewan. Now, I'm not sure because I don't quite understand whether our AIMCo's potential investment in Potash, up to a 30 per cent share from what I've read and heard, is viewed by Saskatchewan as being as hostile a takeover as is being suggested as coming from Australia. I'm somewhat conflicted in terms of: we're wanting to be more co-operative, yet we're talking about large shares of Potash or taking over part of Saskatchewan's local control.

I also think that there are a number of practices that Saskatchewan or B.C., for that matter, would not want to borrow from us. That's, for example, the tailings ponds issue. We continue even though we

know that tailings ponds, beyond dead ducks, are a threat not only to wildlife but also to our human well-being. I'm sure that's not a practice that we would want to be adopted.

Also, in terms of sustainability we have to be careful about the practices. For example, in situ SAGD, while it is in some ways less harmful than the mining, still cuts up the backcountry to such an extent that it does put animals and birds, especially of the migratory variety, in danger. We have to be sharing best scientific practices amongst Alberta, Saskatchewan, and B.C.

We've talked about, for example, the need to expand and diversify our economy. I agree with that. While I am not a wall builder, I see the advantage of the east-west trade, as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East indicated. You've seen me stand up in previous TILMA debates and talk about the need to twin highway 3 so that we go from our eastern border to our western border with a twinned highway, which will promote commerce and trade. I think, obviously, that if we're going to bring Saskatchewan into this larger TILMA agreement, then the standard measures that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East had in terms of the tolls that we charge transport trucks and the safety inspections and so on I would hope would be the highest standards and the highest expectations – I didn't say the highest levies or highest taxes but the highest safety standards – and we would have a quality road system for connecting.

I am concerned, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood put forward, about the export to the south of our jobs. Again I talk about being conflicted because I believe that our water should be first used for human consumption and also for the benefit of our natural situations. I am worried about the amount of water that gets used up in irrigation, for example, the current practices, and the need to protect that water, yet it makes absolute sense in a TILMA circumstance to realize the direction our water flows. We have agreements on a national basis – for example with the Athabasca or the North Saskatchewan or the South Saskatchewan or, for going down to the States, the Milk River – as to how much allotment we're allowed to have in order to make sure that our receivers have what they need to carry on their livelihoods.

The idea of an extended treaty: I understand the benefits; my hesitation comes from the limitations. I do not believe, for example, in contracts like division 8, where the first group in determines the wages and the conditions for the rest. I believe that contracts should be negotiated in a fair way, and I do know that, for example, in B.C. and Saskatchewan the idea of unionized labour seems to be better accepted than it is in Alberta.

I also share the concerns that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated about the lowest price and, in some cases, a lower standard or quality, of having so much of our work for the oil sands being shipped long distances at great fuel costs: first from Korea, across the ocean, through the States, including Montana, where the companies are paying the States for the wear on their roads. But I'm not sure to what extent that compensation is coming our way in Alberta. I appreciate our economic drivers. I'm looking for a sustainable balance between our economy and our environment. I believe in co-operation; I believe in collaboration. If we all reach for the highest standards, then Bill 18 is going to satisfy my concerns.

I guess the adage think globally, act locally applies in terms of: what's good for Alberta should theoretically be good for the rest of Canada. Hopefully, Bill 18 will achieve that, and if that is the case, then it will probably receive my support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to try and go around all sides of the argument in trying to come up with a decision.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for comments or question.

Seeing none, any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

4:20

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour and a pleasure to speak on Bill 18, Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010. Essentially, this bill will try to bring Alberta in line with recently established monetary enforcement provisions contained in the newly established dispute resolution chapter of the agreement on international trade, or AIT. What it does in the process is rescind the TILMA agreement established by Alberta and British Columbia just recently. The act aims to bring Alberta in line, like I said, with the monetary enforcement provisions established in the AIT.

In addition, this does replace TILMA. This agreement now becomes the New West Partnership trade agreement, or NWPTA, which has essentially expanded the previous TILMA agreement between Alberta and B.C. to include Saskatchewan. In essence, Bill 18 takes specific references to trade agreements out of the Government Organization Act in favour of generic language that focuses more broadly on trade agreements.

The central motivation for this change is twofold. The first reason is to reflect the reality that domestic trade units like the NWPTA are becoming increasingly common and are likely to emerge more frequently in the near future. It seems to be the direction of the world. The recent changes to the AIT now make it much stronger, and its enforcement now makes it more directly parallel to provincial and regional trade and labour agreements. That's essentially where the world is going, and Alberta is joining in and reflecting these changes and breaking down barriers to trade where they exist.

There seems to be a lot of commonality between British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, so in the main these are probably good things. That's something that's going to have to be monitored from time to time by this government and other organizations to ensure that it is running smoothly, that the agreements still make sense, and that it's not simply a matter of dogma, that it's actually working for Alberta citizens.

The act recognizes agreements to which Alberta is liable and a participant and deals broadly with enforcement measures that have been recently established. It also sets in motion a move to create legislative structure for the New West Partnership so as to harmonize this legislation, so we can move to actually have some enforcement provisions to harmonize this legislation among the three organizations.

I was also present in this House when we previously argued against TILMA, and that was essentially for a couple of reasons. First off, we felt that it was being rammed through without a fair and full hearing of our partners at various municipal governments and other areas of the province who were uncomfortable with bringing it in. Essentially, it was not that this caucus is against trade or reducing barriers. It's not. It was simply that there was not a full and fair consultative process in place.

That's sort of where we're going. A lot of this stuff is good stuff. Let's look at this. The three provinces of the New West Partnership combine to form an economic unit representing 9 million people with a combined GDP of more than \$550 billion. The driving concept behind the partnership is to increase the level of trade and to increase investment and labour mobility and allow people more opportunities. As a by-product of this partners are attempting to attract and retain talent from a broad spectrum of industry, business, and education and capitalize on a combined buying power in foreign markets. These tend to be good things. As we become more

competitive and reduce these barriers, hopefully a lot of these things the bill is trying to accomplish will become evident. I am hopeful that they will lead to more prosperity here in Alberta without any of the necessary baggage or any corresponding weaknesses. Let's hope that is true.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill. It looks like a move in the right direction. I do recognize the point that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood brought up, that local procurement practices of cities are impacted by this, and that made some pretty good sense to me. Cities should have some sort of direction on how they're allowed local procurement, and there should be some provisions in there for cities to develop themselves or to spur economic development or to utilize the levers that are at their control. That is a concern for me.

I think, also, that a drawback of this bill may be the fact that it encourages buying products from a long distance away. I realize the theory is that having open markets reduces price and people get the best deal and competition happens. I understand that argument. At the same time we're moving at a time when there are concepts – as the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up: think globally, act locally. We're looking at times when in this world we have a fisherman in Norway catching a fish, that fish is then being sent off to China to be canned, and that can was made in a smelter in Canada. It all comes together, and then it's sent three-quarters of the way around the world, to Australia, to be sold.

Now, I understand this could add to some future problems. I understand that. Nevertheless, those are things that we will have to keep an eye on in this bill, and it's outside the scope of this. I just bring up that those are some of the ramifications of the direction we are going in here. Although I understand it and generally support it, there's another side that looks at local procurement and local development as being also necessary. Maybe there are ways to do both of these things with this bill, to not only encourage trade and development with our partners but also to look to develop local sourcing for things. But, hey, Rome was not built in a day, sir.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, then I would call the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak on Bill 18, which will bring Alberta in line with the recently established monitoring enforcement provisions contained in the newly established dispute resolution chapter of the agreement on internal trade and rescind the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, TILMA, established by Alberta and British Columbia. That agreement is superseded by the New West Partnership trade agreement, which has recently expanded the previous agreement between Alberta and B.C. and Saskatchewan.

4:30

When we look back, we look back at NAFTA. There were concerns that NAFTA would be damaging for our economy for Canada because we were negotiating with a much bigger economy, but NAFTA turned out to be good for Canada. I think that breaking down the barriers between different provinces or different countries, you know, it is the era whose time has come. I'll give you an example. Like, in India if a trucker was to go from one state to another state, he had to have a permit for every state. Even there they are breaking down the barriers. The trucker could get just one permit, and he could go right across the country.

Bringing Saskatchewan into the fold I think would increase competition. Who knows? Our prices may come down with more competition. You know, if the plumber from B.C. could come work here, we're going to have more competition. Maybe, you know, we will pay less for plumbers, and maybe electricians will be cheaper.

The objective is to reflect the reality that domestic trade units like the NWPTA are becoming increasingly common and are likely to merge more frequently. In the near future there will be more agreements. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview talked about the western tiger. The world is becoming like a global village, and there is no way that we can build firewalls around ourselves. We have to have these agreements in order to prosper.

This act also recognizes the agreements to which Alberta is liable and deals broadly with enforcement measures that have been recently established to address the dispute resolution issues stemming from AIT. It also sets in motion a move to create a less legislative structure for the New West Partnership, as to harmonize the legislation already created for TILMA compliance in order to bring Saskatchewan into the new agreement.

The only change for the government of Alberta will be that material which used to deal separately with AIT and schedule 6 and TILMA and schedule 6.1 will now become combined in a new schedule 6. Since its inception we have not seen TILMA because it was developed and implemented outside the Assembly without adequate public consultation in other democratic forums. However, the acceptance of this concept on a national scale would likely have many beneficial effects. This measure is a common-sense approach to economic diversification, in my opinion.

The agreement covers all public sector entities, including government ministries and their agencies, boards, and commissions, Crown corporations, municipalities, school boards, and publicly funded academic, health, and social service organizations. The three provinces of the New West Partnership combine to form an economic unit representing 9 million people and a combined GDP of more than \$550 billion.

The driving concept behind the partnership is the removal of barriers to trade and to increase investment and labour mobility. As a by-product of this agreement the partners are attempting to create a much bigger negotiating bloc. This doesn't mean that, you know, we will be pitting east against west or north against south, but this will improve trade between different parts of the country, and we can capitalize on the combined buying power, even in the foreign markets. I was yesterday talking to some home builders in Calgary. They have banded together and they have gone to China so they could negotiate better deals on all kinds of home building supplies.

I think this agreement, if implemented properly, will benefit all the provinces. For those reasons I support Bill 18. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. Any hon. member?

Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to close the debate.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've had a very robust discussion. I'm very pleased that the other members have taken advantage of the opportunity to speak. If I could please conclude with calling the question on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 16
Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving)
Amendment Act, 2010**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today and join the debate on the distracted driving legislation that's before the Committee of the Whole this afternoon. Firstly, I would like to commend the MLA for Calgary-Hays for all his diligent work in bringing this forward in a private member's bill a year or so back and all the discussion that took place there.

Mr. Chairman, out on Alberta's roads today there are more distractions than ever before. This is undoubtedly a very important bill, and the purpose of this bill is to reduce traffic accidents and save lives on Alberta's roads. I want to talk for a moment about why I think this bill is especially important.

Firstly, today's technology is moving forward by leaps and bounds. Increasingly this technology is more and more mobile, and we can bring it with us in our vehicles. New apps are being introduced every day. These improvements have greatly increased the number of activities we can undertake, and many users will attempt to use them while driving. People can bring not only cellphones with them but MP3 players and a large number of other devices that can all be distracting to the driver.

Second, people are busier than they have ever been before. People today feel the need to be connected to their friends, to their family, and to their co-workers at all times. This adds to the first issue because people are under a lot of pressure to multitask and maximize the amount of work they get done during any particular day. Unfortunately, this includes multitasking while driving, completing tasks that would otherwise take their attention off the road.

Mr. Chairman, research has shown that between 20 and 30 per cent of all collisions are caused by distracted driving. More than ever before people are forgetting that as long as you're behind the wheel, your sole responsibility is to focus on driving. The intention of this legislation is to remind people of this principle and ensure the safety of themselves as well as other drivers, pedestrians, and other users of our public roadways.

This legislation will do a number of things. Most importantly, it will ban hand-held conversations on a cellphone and texting while driving. Further, this legislation will ban other activities such as personal grooming, reading printed material, using a laptop, or the indiscriminate use of GPS-like devices as well as e-mailing.

4:40

Now, Mr. Chairman, some have suggested that they could be penalized for taking a sip of coffee. This is not true; it is a myth. This bill does not propose penalties for those who have a simple sip of coffee or are having a conversation with other passengers or having a pet in their car. This bill targets those individuals who engage in activities which distract their attention from the road and could lead to unsafe driving.

Mr. Chairman, the government has ensured that the approach to this bill was balanced and that a degree of common sense would be taken into consideration during implementation. This bill makes

exceptions for those who work in professions where it is very important that the individual be able to talk on their cellphone while driving and also states that drivers will be able to use hands-free devices while driving. It has been suggested that the bill should go further in banning distracted activities. It would be near impossible to enforce a total ban on all activities that may distract a driver from being attentive to the road. Through consultation through the all-party Committee on the Economy I believe we have struck a balance that will increase safety on Alberta's roads.

I support this bill because not only does it restrain people from engaging in distracting activities, but it also raises awareness of the dangers of distracted driving, educating Albertans and helping to make them safer drivers. Will this legislation stop all distracted driving? Sadly, it will not, but it will prevent a significant amount of distracted driving and make our roads safer for our families and our children.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to note that this legislation does not prevent drivers from being penalized for other dangerous acts. If a driver is observed driving in a dangerous manner while distracted, that driver can still be charged with dangerous driving in addition to distracted driving.

Previous to this legislation we had received feedback that the distracted driving legislation did not adequately deal with the types of distractions found on the road today. This government is giving law enforcement officers and courts another tool to have flexibility in dealing with the complexities of distracted driving. The bill was drawn up with careful input from our enforcement partners, and their input is seen in this legislation. Those who enforce the laws on Alberta's roads obviously have a very difficult task, and any legislation which does not take into account this difficulty will not effectively achieve its purpose.

Since this legislation was crafted with the input of law enforcement officials, this legislation will be effective. Some have expressed concerns about the potential for enforcement of this legislation. I was in Australia in April and put on a fair number of miles driving through four different states. In all those miles I did not see one, single individual using a cellphone while driving. Why is that? Australia has a law prohibiting cellphone use, and it is observed by the public.

I think my most important point, Mr. Chairman, is that this bill has the full support of Albertans. Certainly, I have received a lot of calls, e-mails, and other support from my constituents in St. Albert. Everybody in Alberta wants safer roads, and most Albertans drive in a responsible and safe manner. This legislation is not intended to inconvenience or harm those drivers who already drive in a safe way. This legislation is intended for those who ignore safe driving practices or are obviously distracted by other activities while driving. This legislation is an education tool and will provide an incentive for everyone to drive safer.

Mr. Chairman, let me be clear. Most individuals do not make a conscious choice to drive in an unsafe manner or choose to be distracted. Most individuals use these devices because they are so convenient, not because it is a matter of life and death. We have made sure that the fine for contravening this law will not overly penalize the offender but give them the proper motivation to drive more responsibly.

I have no doubt that as more people comply with this legislation, lives will be saved. Not only will it save lives, Mr. Chairman, but this legislation aligns with our common sense. Those who drive while obviously distracted will be punished, while those who drive responsibly will be safer on Alberta's roads.

For all of the reasons previously mentioned, I support this legislation fully. It will save lives and is a practical and enforceable

law. Mr. Chairman, I encourage all of the members of this House to support this legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, has gone through second reading. I appreciate the debate we had on this important piece of legislation. Over the summer Albertans had an opportunity to review Bill 16 and provide comments, and I'm pleased to tell you that the majority of the feedback received from law enforcement, stakeholders, and the general public was positive and in support of this bill. Albertans are eager to see this bill become law.

Mr. Chairman, that said, we have identified a few points that require clarification, and these are being addressed through a House amendment. I want to be clear. These amendments provide clarification. They do not change the original intent of the legislation.

One of the points that came up this summer was related to the use of two-way radio communication devices, also known as citizens' band or CB radios, while driving. Some Albertans interpreted the exemptions for certain groups of drivers to use two-way radios as though these specific drivers could use any kind of communication device, even a hand-held cellphone. This was not the policy intent, so sections 115.1(3)(a), (b), and (c) of the bill should be amended to make it clear that these three specific groups of drivers can use two-way radios only for work-related purposes or while participating in an emergency management situation.

These specific drivers include those who are required by regulation or by the individual's employer to maintain two-way radio communication or for drivers who are participating in a search, rescue, or emergency management situation. For example, these specific drivers could include drivers of escort, pilot, or trail vehicles, taxi drivers, truck drivers, and couriers. Also, these specific drivers can only use other communication devices, including a hand-held cellphone, in the event that their two-way radio is not operational and, again, only for work purposes or an emergency management situation.

Mr. Chairman, the other point regarding radio communication is that technology now allows these devices to be used in hands-free mode. Currently the bill does not restrict Albertans from using a cellphone in hands-free mode, so it should be clarified that a radio communication device can also be used by Albertans in hands-free mode and that the minister may make regulations respecting the manner in which a radio communication device may be used in hands-free mode. This will provide clarification and consistency. These amendments would be addressed in sections 115.1(2) and 115.5(c) respectively.

Mr. Chairman, another point is the need to clarify in section 115.4(1)(a) that the restrictions on reading while driving apply to printed materials inside the vehicle. Examples would be newspapers, books, and magazines. This, of course, would not include reading or viewing things outside of the vehicle such as road signs, and it would also exclude vehicle instruments and gauges.

4:50

Proceeding with the House amendments to Bill 16 will strengthen the proposed legislation and reinforce our efforts to provide safe communities for Albertans. I'll now read the amendments to Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010. The bill is to be amended as follows. In part A section 2 is amended

- (a) in the proposed section 115.1

- (i) in subsection (1)(a) by adding “, radio communication device” after “cellular telephone”;
- (ii) in subsection (2) by adding “or radio communication device” after “cellular telephone”;
- (iii) by striking out subsection (3)(a) and substituting the following:
 - (a) the use of a 2-way radio communication device, only for the purposes set out in the regulation, by an individual driving or operating an escort, pilot or trail vehicle who is required by regulation under this Act to maintain 2-way radio communication, or the use of a cellular telephone or other communication device by that individual for those purposes when 2-way radio communication is not functional or is unavailable,
- (iv) by striking out subsection (3)(b) and substituting the following:
 - (b) the use of a 2-way radio communication device, only for the purpose of maintaining communication with the individual's employer, by an individual driving or operating a vehicle who is required by the individual's employer to maintain 2-way radio communication while the individual is acting within the scope of the individual's employment, or the use of a cellular telephone or other communication device by that individual for that purpose when 2-way radio communication is not functional or is unavailable,
- (v) by striking out subsection (3)(c) and substituting the following:
 - (c) the use of a 2-way radio communication device, only for the purpose of participating in a search, rescue or emergency management situation, by an individual driving or operating a vehicle, or the use of a cellular telephone or other communication device by that individual for that purpose when 2-way radio communication is not functional or is unavailable, or
- (vi) by striking out subsection (3)(d) and substituting the following:
 - (d) the use of a cellular telephone or other communication device, only for the purpose of contacting an emergency response unit, by an individual driving or operating a vehicle.
- (b) in the proposed section 115.2(2)(b) by adding “or radio communication device” after “cellular telephone”;
- (c) in the proposed section 115.4(1)(a) by adding “located within the vehicle other than an instrument, gauge, device or system referred to in section 115.2(2)(f)” after “printed material”;
- (d) in the proposed section 115.5(c) by adding “, radio communication device” after “cellular telephone”.

The Chair: We have the amendment distributed. It shall be known as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A1.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. On amendment A1 I see this as strengthening and setting out the exemptions. The only sort of lack of clarity I see is with regard to an “individual's employer, by an individual driving or operating a vehicle who is required by the individual's employer to maintain 2-way radio communication.”

For example, I totally understand the need to exempt taxis. I understand the need to exempt public transport, buses, and so on. I also don't want to hinder the emergency communication that a truck driver – I used the highway 63 analogy yesterday – needs to make. But I'm just wondering how many loopholes might be enacted by someone who suggests: well, we need to have this 2-way communication in order to run our business.

Obviously, Canada Post, you know, would need to connect with main post offices. You sometimes wonder: could they pull over to do that? What kind of communication is acceptable versus unacceptable? For example, from my own experience working for High Country Camping in the Kananaskis area, I required the use of a 2-way radio because the coverage was so poor from tower to tower. In order to do my business, which often involved reporting an accident or an emergency circumstance, I needed to be able to use that 2-way radio.

I don't know enough about the satellite radios. For example, the RCMP: I'm assuming that in order to have them function in the wilderness areas that I operated in, they would have to stop and actually set it up to get the signal and the location they needed because the regular GPS that we see like OnStar and so on, there wouldn't be sufficient towers to allow that communication.

Obviously, for emergency circumstances, which includes tow trucks, this type of greater specificity would be required. I'm hoping that when the legislation is said and done, our enforcement organizations – our police, sheriffs, RCMP, et cetera – will clearly understand what is and isn't allowed. I believe the bottom line of all of this is: was there a distraction in the driving of the person who, in theory, is permitted to have the radio or the two-way communication but is using it inappropriately? In some cases that applies to police officers. Like, I can't imagine a police officer rushing to an accident scene typing on his computer. That to me would potentially put that police officer and the public in danger.

It will be interesting to see how tightly this amendment can be applied. I do believe it heads in the right direction, and after the vote has taken place, I will be offering an amendment which takes us even further.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss amendment A1. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. At this time I would like to move a subamendment of my own. If I can just briefly explain. This is an amendment that I believe should be moved and should be considered by this House, but because of the nature of the government amendment, amendment A1, we need to do it in this particular fashion and move my amendment as a subamendment to amendment A1. I will give it to the page to pass out now, and then I will speak to it momentarily.

Thank you.

The Chair: This amendment shall be known as subamendment SA1. Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, please continue.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Before I get into the meat of subamendment SA1, just a little bit of procedural explanation as it has been explained to me by Parliamentary Counsel. This would have been an amendment that stood on its own but for the fact that it seeks to amend sections of Bill 16 that the government amendment will amend as well. Of course, the government amendment, as it should, takes precedence. My amendment refers very specifically to one idea, and that is that I want to extend the ban on the use of cellphones while driving to include hands-free devices, and I'll speak to that in a moment.

5:00

The subamendment itself goes like this. I move that amendment A1 to Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in part A by striking out clause (a)(i) and (ii) and substituting the following:

- (i) by striking out subsection (1)(a) and substituting the following:
 - (a) holding, viewing, manipulating, or otherwise using a cellular telephone, radio communication device or other communication device that is capable of receiving or transmitting telephone communication, electronic data, electronic mail or text messages, or
- (ii) by striking out subsection (2).

Sub (2) in the bill reads:

An individual may drive or operate a vehicle on a highway while using a cellular telephone in hands-free mode.

Now, the first part is necessary in order to do the second part as well. There are two other parts to this subamendment: in part B by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:

(b) by striking out the proposed section 115.2(2)(b) and in part C by striking out clause (d) and substituting the following:

- (d) in the proposed section 115.5(c) by striking out "a cellular telephone or" and substituting "an."

Basically, that's a lot of words and a lot of detail and a lot of protocol and procedure to get to one very, very simple concept, and that is that this subamendment seeks to extend the ban on the use of cellphones while driving to include hands-free devices.

Now, why would I want to do that other than to cause grief for our law enforcement agencies, who, admittedly, will have a tougher time enforcing this part than they will with hand-held cellphones? Well, the reason is very simple. There is a lot of research. We considered this research at the committee level when we were studying the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays' original private member's bill to ban hand-held cellular phones while driving. There is a lot of evidence that pretty clearly, in my mind, not only suggests but confirms that the act of talking on a cellphone while you are in control of a moving vehicle is in itself the distraction. It's not whether you're holding onto the phone or whether you're using a Bluetooth or a Ford Sync or an OnStar or any other form of hands-free device.

Yes, you do have the added complication that if you are on one of these while you're driving and you hit a pothole, not that the Minister of Transportation would ever allow that to happen in this province, the BlackBerry or the cellphone flies out of your hand, and you lunge for it, take your eyes off the road, and the next thing you know, you're in the ditch.

There is that added danger with a hand-held phone, but the evidence indicates that the real distraction is the fact that you are engaged in a conversation while in control of a moving vehicle with someone not in the vehicle with you, someone on the other end of the phone who is not capable of seeing changing traffic patterns in front of you, not capable, as a passenger in the passenger seat of your car would be, of anticipating problems up ahead, not capable of easing up on the conversation to allow you as the driver to deal with the more complex situation on the road but is, in fact, in an office 5,000 miles away just trying to get you to give him a better price on the thing he wants to buy from you. He has no context for his conversation that lines up with the driver's context, so the driver, in effect, is committed to whatever level of intensity that's involved in that conversation with the person on the other end of the phone on a hands-free unit the same way that he would be if he was talking on a hand-held unit, and that is the fundamental distraction.

Now, I will grant you that this is going to be a tough piece of the bill, if this subamendment passes today, for our traffic officers to enforce. How are they to know if you're driving down the road at 10 K under the limit in the fast lane and speeding up and slowing down and weaving and so on and so forth and doing those things that will be the usual triggers for a police officer under this bill and wanting to enforce this bill should it become law? How is he to know, when he sees you moving your lips, whether you're talking on

a hands-free unit or you're just singing along to the radio or you're yelling back at the talk show host on the radio or something like that? It's a bit difficult. It's been suggested to me that it would in fact be so difficult that the officer would have to get a search warrant for your cellphone records to determine whether you were actually talking on the phone or not when he pulled you over. Otherwise, it's kind of your word against his.

Well, if there was an accident, if you were involved in an accident, there would probably be the desire to get a search warrant anyway to check to see if you were on your cellphone. There might very well be. There are a number of other provisions in our Traffic Safety Act right now that would allow the officer to lay the appropriate charges. You as the accused offender have the right, of course, to contest those charges in court, as you always would have.

But I'll remind the Legislature that the purpose of Bill 16 is not to deal with laying charges after an accident or a critical event. It's to give police officers the tool to intervene when they can see that you're not paying attention while you're driving, to intervene before you precipitate a critical event. It's entirely possible – I would suggest it's likely – that if you or I get pulled over by a police officer after this bill becomes law, amended as I'm proposing or not, we will not only be charged under the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act and subject to a \$172 fine; we'll probably be facing another charge as well for an improper left turn or running a red light or impeding traffic or speeding or whatever. There are likely going to be two tickets issued every time a police officer pulls you over because he suspects you of distracted driving.

Quite frankly, I'm issuing a challenge here to the House to extend the ban to hands-free units because that is also a dangerous distraction. I can understand if you have some struggle with it. If this subamendment were to go down to defeat, then I think we have still served a purpose here in at least getting it onto the record.

I would suggest to you there's a very good chance that two or three or four or maybe five years down the road, after we've had experience with this piece of legislation, real-world experience in real time, and as we've been able to study the experiences that other jurisdictions have had with bills that merely ban the use of a hand-held cellphone but don't deal with some of these other distractions that we're dealing with in this bill, we will quite possibly want to come back, whether as a private member's bill or a government bill, with an amending piece of legislation to Bill 16 that actually extends the ban to hands-free units. That's what the research is indicating is the likely thing to happen in the future. I'm just suggesting that maybe we deal with that now and do a complete bill here that completely deals with distracted driving by also taking the exemption for hands-free cellphone use out of the picture and do it now rather than later because I think we'll be doing it eventually.

Mr. Chairman, that's my pitch for my subamendment. I will take my seat now and listen to the debate on this subamendment. Thank you.

The Chair: On subamendment SA1, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has been channelling me because we're in total agreement on this subamendment. He was faster on the draw than I was because I thought that this was a sufficiently different amendment that it had to be introduced by itself. But that said, I'm totally supportive of it.

I indicated yesterday that I wanted to see Alberta being a world leader in terms of driver safety, and I indicated that that would be going the hands-free route, as a number of emergency physicians,

including Dr. Francescutti and others from the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary medical schools, have indicated to me.

The evidence is in, and it's overwhelming that the distraction caused by cellphones is as serious as alcohol or speeding. Whether the driver is using a hand-held or a hands-free cellphone, driver distraction caused by the use of cellphones is serious, and it can be fatal.

5:10

Mr. Chair, we can safely walk while chewing gum in a city crowded with motor vehicles and other hazards. That is because one of those tasks, chewing gum, is not a cognitively demanding task, I would suggest, for most of us. But research clearly shows that people do not perform as well when trying to perform two attention-demanding tasks at the same time. The brain is behind all tasks needed for driving: visual, auditory, manual, and cognitive. A lot of the research that has been done comes from *Understanding the Distracted Brain: Why Driving while Using Hands-free Cell Phones Is Risky Behaviour*. That's the title of the document, a white paper produced by the U.S. National Safety Council in March 2010. That was one of the most recent pieces of research.

Mr. Chair, the amendment, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, divides things into sections. Section 2 of the amending act: the first part of the amendment would relate to section 115.1(2) from this bill. This is the provision that makes an exception to the general rule that no individual shall operate a vehicle on a highway while using a cellphone or other hand-held electronic device. Subsection (2) states that an individual may operate a vehicle on a highway while using a hands-free cellphone. The first amendment, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out, removes this exception. The use of hands-free cellphones would be prohibited except in the cases listed in subsections (3) and (4). These are the exceptions for emergency personnel and so forth.

The second part of the amendment would delete section 115.2(2)(b). This is a provision that makes an exception to the general rule that no individual shall operate a vehicle on a highway while a display screen is activated. The exception to this general rule in subsection (2)(b) is that the rule does not apply to a hands-free cellphone. If the bill prohibits the use of hands-free cellphones, this exception is not needed. Using a mobile app is prohibited whether the driver is using a wireless computer or a smart phone.

The third part of the amendment would remove the power of the minister to make regulations on the use of hands-free cellphones and other hands-free electronic devices. If the previous parts of the amendment are accepted by this Assembly, there would be no ability for the minister to make exceptions in regulation.

Mr. Chair, the time to take action on the use of all cellphones while driving is now, before another Albertan is injured or killed by a distracted driver. I encourage us not to delay. I understand, as does the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, that this is taking a large leap forward that some members may not be comfortable with, but I believe that Alberta has been and can be a progressive province. I think that getting ahead of the game, supporting our law enforcement in the carrying out of this legislation as proposed in subamendment SA1, is what the people in the emergency departments are calling for, and I strongly support their intentions and the advice they're providing.

I believe in sort of flipping the Marshall McLuhan message that it's the medium rather than the message. In this case it's the message rather than the medium. The Member for Calgary-Currie and I are in full agreement that the hands-free direction is the way to go.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to share in the debate on SA1.

The Chair: On subamendment SA1, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We must remember that the goal of the proposed legislation is to be practical, effective, and enforceable. While we recognize that some research concludes that hands-free cellphone use while driving is no safer than hand-held cellphones, provincial law enforcement representatives whom we consulted with expressed concerns around the enforceability of a hands-free ban. Some of the things mentioned were mentioned by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

I want to remind members that Alberta takes lawmaking very seriously and does not pass unenforceable laws, and this is what law enforcement personnel said to us: they feel that it would be unenforceable. Can we expect that law enforcement officers would be able to effectively distinguish hands-free cellphone use from, say, someone conversing with a passenger, a small child in the back seat, or from a driver singing or talking to themselves? How do you distinguish that? If you saw an infraction, you would have to stop that person and effectively have to seize the cellphone, and that goes contrary to what we're doing here today. Like I said: practical, effective, and enforceable.

Police resources are limited, and if we put officers in the position of having to subpoena cellphone records every time, then basically this legislation would not be utilized. With the existing legislation the driving carelessly would still be there, and that could be a result. If a police officer pulls someone over who they see weaving in and out of the lane, going through a stop sign, possibly speeding, then the undue care and attention or careless driving comes in, and if I'm not mistaken, that's \$402 and six demerits. So that is always there.

So I must speak against the subamendment and encourage my colleagues not to support it.

The Chair: On subamendment SA1, the hon. Member for — let me see here — Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Edmonton-Calder. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rodney: It's all in Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. That's very good, hon. member. It is, indeed, all in Calder.

The hon. member made a comment very early on in his pitch for the bill in that the conversation in a vehicle presumes that the passenger is in fact paying attention to what's going on around them. I would argue that that is seldom, if ever, the case with respect to children, who typically are not aware of this particular type of thing. So to use that particular means of logic, would you seriously consider extending a ban on driver distraction to whether or not a person should have children in a vehicle? If you think about it, they're not generally aware of their surroundings. They typically tend to be very, very distracting. As a result of that, you have to ask yourself the question: where do you want to draw the line? Anyone with children is aware of how distracting they can be in a vehicle.

Mr. Taylor: My children are better behaved than yours.

Mr. Elniski: Well, that may very well be.

You know, then you ask yourself the question: what do you do with a pet, right? When you go back to the question about a cognitively demanding task, that also suggests, then, ultimately, no discussion in a vehicle, no music in a vehicle, and a driver's complete and total focus and attention on the road. Frankly, it

becomes infinitely unenforceable because fundamentally, Mr. Chairman, the act of moving your lips in a vehicle should not be supported or regarded as potentially criminal behaviour or, in this case, behaviour that's in contravention of this legislation. You have to draw a line somewhere with respect to where you want to take this. I believe that the legislation as it currently stands has in fact drawn that line, and I cannot support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on subamendment SA1? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to just make a few comments on the subamendment. I have some sympathy for the mover of this subamendment. He is certainly correct in that the research indicates that the act of speaking on a phone, whether it's hands-free or not, is what is very distracting. Certainly, the research supports that. He's indicated that we should be a world leader going ahead. I don't believe there's any other jurisdiction in the world at present that has a hands-free ban, and I would suggest that our present legislation as proposed is being a world leader in that we've looked at a number of distractions other than pure cellphone use, and we have given the law enforcement officials the discretion to determine if the action is in fact distracting.

5:20

I think we've got to take baby steps in this and go ahead with the legislation as it is proposed. I think the mover of the subamendment has proposed the solution. He has put forward the subamendment. We're debating it. I'm suggesting we should defeat it but that maybe in four or five years from now there will be other provisions, and there'll be more support for going for the total ban. So I would urge members to defeat this, but let's keep in mind that perhaps four or five years later we need to revisit it. Maybe at that time there will be public support for it, and maybe there will be even some technology that will allow us to enforce it a little bit more fully.

I certainly support the comments of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, that it's got to be practical, effective, and enforceable. I think the bill with the first amendment, without the subamendment, is practical, effective, and enforceable. This causes a further problem.

Thank you.

The Chair: On subamendment SA1, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wasn't going to join in the debate, but the comments by the Member for Edmonton-Calder have woken me up from my unwillingness to partake in this debate and to participate, at least in part, and give my reason and rationale behind why I think this amendment makes some sense and why the comments of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays also make sense to me. Then after sort of playing it out in my mind and, hopefully, discussing it through, I'll be able to give a reasoned approach as to why I am supporting or not supporting this amendment.

I do hear the views of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. He sat on the committee that investigated the use of cellular phones. I take him at full value, as many of the other people in here did as well on that committee, that cellular phones are a distraction. Now, so are cellular phones that are hands-free. I accept that. I accept that the research indicates that, and I have a fundamental understanding of that provision.

Now, where the argument, I guess, went a little off the skids there was when the Member for Edmonton-Calder maybe went a little bit

overboard to make a point or went from the sublime to the ridiculous, depending on what you want to call it. Cellular phones in the main are not necessary implements of having a car, okay? We all know that driving children to the park or to the rink or to a thing, well, is why the motor vehicle was invented. So to suggest that banning one thing necessarily means we have to ban all others is ludicrous, and I would just like to point that out here now. We shouldn't take opportunities to make these incredulous leaps to the absurd. I have probably done it a time or two myself in the House; nevertheless, I have probably been told when I have done that as well. So I would point that out.

I appreciate the fact that this amendment does attempt to deal with a problem that research indicates is out there. I also know that government should lead, but how far out in front can governments really lead – that's the question – if your population doesn't really want it, is not ready for it? A great man once told me that you can't lead from too far out in front. By implementing this piece of legislation, we may in fact be too far out in front, where the population is not ready for it. I generally feel that they may not be.

I also heard the comments from our Member for Calgary-Hays, who has been a police officer, that the law enforcement agencies have spoken out very clearly on this. They do not believe that this law is enforceable. It would cause them a considerable amount of grief, may actually tie up our court systems, and I take those comments at fair value as well.

You know, although I appreciate this amendment and I understand the reasoning for it, I also have heard the comments. At this time, I believe, after talking it through, I'm not going to support the amendment. It may not be an idea whose time has come. That said, should the research head this way? Should we do a continued monitoring of this situation? Should it be found that four or five years from now the hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferlo was completely out to lunch by not supporting this amendment, then we make that change.

We as an honourable House recognize that this is something that we need to show leadership on, but I think at this time we should take baby steps, and this is a significant step, this entire bill, towards showing care and attention to the road. For those reasons I won't be supporting the amendment although I do understand its merits. It's a 55-45 thing for me at this time.

I thank you for allowing me to speak on the amendment.

The Chair: Do any hon. members wish to speak on amendment SA1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: On amendment A1?

The Chair: On amendment A1.

Mr. Marz: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I do have some questions for the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays on the amendment. Perhaps he can enlighten me. He talked about laws that are unenforceable, and I'd like to just read section A(a)(iv)(b) at the bottom of the first page.

The use of a 2-way radio communication device, only for the purpose of maintaining communication with the individual's employer, by an individual driving or operating a vehicle who is required by the individual's employer to maintain 2-way radio communication while the individual is acting within the scope of the

individual's employment, or the use of a cellular telephone or other communication device by that individual for that purpose when 2-way radio communication is not functional or is unavailable.

Over the course of my lifetime and in my experience I've found people to be quite innovative in trying to get around laws, and I'm sure the hon. member in his experience as a police officer has experienced that as well. I can see every small businessperson or family business that has a small sideline business basically using this to exempt every member of their family. Every farm pretty much will be exempt in this thing because they all have two-way radios and/or cellphones in every vehicle and self-propelled implement that they have. So I have some questions about that.

I know police officers can also be very innovative in enforcement. The example I'll cite is back in the day when there was a rear-end collision and the practice was to ask the person driving the vehicle in the back if he was following too close, and if he said no, which was a certain first impulse to do, then you charged him with driving without due care and attention. So perhaps the same thing could be applied here, where if you're using a cellphone or a communication device in an improper manner and you say no, then you could charge them with driving without due care and attention. Perhaps that would work. I see this as an out to make this virtually unenforceable in a lot of situations.

In second reading yesterday I also raised the issue about professional licensed ham radio operators that had communicated to me personally that they didn't feel the investment to have this equipment was worth while if they were only going to be able to use it there. Their argument is that they are professionals in the use of the equipment, and they do it safely. Those, I guess, that have a business can continue to use it if they basically state that their wife and their children are employees of their business. They could probably get around it that way. Perhaps you could shed some light on that particular issue for me.

5:30

The Chair: On amendment A1, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Regarding your first point, you're right. People are creative and innovative, and I've seen many situations where the police are, too.

Actually, I'll use your number 2 example first. I'll do that one. Under the regulations there would be exemptions for the ham radio operators, but that is going to be under the regulations. That's number 2.

The first one. It's only going to be used, basically, for the purposes outlined. They're at work, okay? There's a specific purpose that's outlined. I suppose if it's a pilot vehicle and he's not ahead of a vehicle that he's piloting, the exemption would not be there. That's one example. But if they were involved in the specific purpose outlined for their job, then they have the exemption.

To just respond to the creativity, no doubt it could happen. I suppose if it's nighttime and the officer couldn't see someone on there, it is possible. There could be instances where someone may get to – well, let's say they wouldn't be charged by the police. That can't be avoided. I'm looking at the greater good for this bill, not people that get away with something once in a while.

I hope that answers your questions.

The Chair: On amendment A1, any other hon. member wishing to speak on it? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A1.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I appreciate the hon. member bringing up that concern. To the mover of the government amendment: I want this

legislation to pass regardless of wanting to leap ahead with the hands-free. As a police officer and as the other concerns were brought up to you, do you think it's enforceable in terms of the specifics? For example, a ham radio operator participating in a sanctioned search and rescue operation is different from a ham operator cruising down the highway. Is there a chance or possibly a further amendment that would tighten up the legislation to make it easier for law enforcement officials to be accurate?

My understanding is that the common denominator is the distracted driving that would alert the enforcement officer to this. In other words, if a person was humming in their car or talking to their children and they were still managing to drive safely down the highway, chances are it wouldn't come to the attention of an officer. If you could provide any qualifications so that people don't have the loopholes as the hon. member from Olds-Didsbury, I believe, mentioned . . .

Mr. Marz: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Chase: Okay. I left out three of the hills. Sorry. And they're important, especially to the people farming in that area.

If you can further expand on your explanation that makes it clear enough for enforcement, that would be appreciated.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can give an example of a search and rescue situation that could be escalating, and updates would have to be given on an ongoing basis. That is one example.

Distracted driving: there could be one offence; there could be many offences. I would suggest and I would say to you that many times a police officer will stop a vehicle for things I mentioned earlier, whether it's occupying two lanes, stop signs, speed, many, many other things, and there will be other charges as well.

As I mentioned in search and rescue, the idea is the updated information has to be ongoing, whether to save a life or save lives. It could be an airline crash or whatever it would be. That's why the exemptions are in there for these emergency vehicles.

The Chair: On amendment A1, any other hon. member wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a point of clarification to the member. Your amendment exempts two-way radio communication between people that are doing this as required by their employers. I just want to clarify whether or not individual contractors – for example, perhaps a semi or a dump truck driver who is self-employed but is working on contract with, let's say, Lafarge – would be exempt as well.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, that's correct. I'm aware of contractors and the way they work. I know many of them, and they require direction from a dispatcher, from an employer, even if it's a contractual situation. Yes, you're right. They would be exempt.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on amendment A1? On amendment A1, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Okay. I'm bringing it up again, sir. There are these amateur radio guys. How would they be affected by this amend-

ment? Will they be exempt? They are certified under the federal Radiocommunication Act. You know, there are about 67,000 of them holding a certificate of proficiency in amateur radio. That's issued by the federal government. How will they be affected?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I understood your question, they would be exempt. You mentioned amateur radio operators. Yes, they would.

Mr. Kang: Thank you.

The Chair: Any others?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We'll go on to the bill. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on the bill.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure for me to speak on this bill. I'd like to thank also the Member for Calgary-Hays for being the inventor of this bill and bringing it forward. I'd also like to thank all the members on the all-party committee that brought forth what I think are some fantastic recommendations. It's an example of how good things can happen when all members of this House work together co-operatively.

I'd just like to say that there was extensive consultation done with members of the public, also members of the enforcement services, and we seemed to get some real good support over the course of the consultation and also over the course of the summer. As everybody knows, this bill was introduced in the spring, and the public had ample opportunity over the summer to provide input.

5:40

I don't know about everybody else, but I certainly got a lot of discussion about it. By and large, people were pretty much in favour of what we were trying to do, and they felt it was a good starting point. It doesn't cover everything. I don't think with something like distracted driving you can possibly cover everything. Through the discussions we heard of all sorts of different things, different distractions that are out there. I don't think you could possibly cover everything. There are new distractions being invented every day.

I see new billboards up that are designed specifically to distract you. They're on intersections where there are traffic lights. Some of these are new digital electronic billboards, and at nighttime the lights can become quite bright quickly, and it does divert your attention away. At some point in time we may have to address some of those things. Like I said, we can't address everything in this bill to start with, but it is enabling legislation. It will allow the minister through regulation to add or subtract from this as necessary as time goes by.

Also, the bill isn't intended to be punitive or to be a revenue generator. It's intended to be an educational tool, and that's why we looked at the fines to be a bit of an inconvenience, to make people stop and think about their actions. Most people have the inclination to obey laws. Albertans are generally law-abiding citizens, and we found that with the seat belt legislation once it was put in place. We tried a lot of educational tools prior to the legislation, and compliance was really down. After the legislation came in, even though you can't have enforcement officers checking every vehicle all the time, compliance went up just because we basically had a law.

I'm hoping the same happens here although this situation deals with something totally different than seat belts because this is communication, electronic devices, and our society is addicted to them. If you don't believe that, watch your grandchildren or your children and try to take that little Game Boy or whatever electronic device is in front of them. It's about as close to an addiction as I can describe. I see my grandkids with these things all the time. This is going to be a little tougher, I think, to enforce as we go forward, but I do support the bill.

Getting back to some of the distractions, GPS was mentioned, and I can tell you that I think a GPS device, as long as you're not programming while you're driving, is actually a safety tool and not a distraction compared to—I think we can all relate stories about our spouses reading a road map for us as we just missed the last intersection.

Ms Pastoor: Men never ask for directions – never. Women know where they're going.

Mr. Marz: To the Member for Lethbridge-East, I did say "spouses." I wasn't gender specific on that, so please calm down. I think GPS, when used properly, can actually be a safety tool.

Billboards, as I mentioned before. There's actually a song from, I think, back in the '60s that mentions the distraction of billboards, something about a girl wearing nothing but a smile and a towel in the picture on the billboard near the big old highway. Yeah, we all remember that one.

Children misbehaving can also be a major distraction, and I've seen some fatalities based on people tending to children in the back seat while they're driving. That's very unfortunate.

Pets is another one. A lot of common sense has to be used here. I actually saw a guy go to the auction market with a couple of goats in the back of his car. It may not have been a distraction to him, but it certainly would have been to me.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that I think the committee did a real good job, as did the Member for Calgary-Hays in bringing this forward. I'm certainly wishing to support this.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move an amendment to Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, and I'd like to have it distributed.

The Chair: We shall pause a moment for distribution of the amendment. This amendment shall be known as amendment A2.

Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, please proceed.

Mr. Kang: I move that Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 2 by adding the following after the proposed section 115.5:

115.6 The Minister shall

- (a) collect statistics on motor vehicle accidents involving the use of hands-free cellular telephones and hands-free electronic devices, and
- (b) provide a report to the Legislative Assembly on the operation of sections 115.1 to 115.5 within 3 years of the coming into force of these sections, including recommendations on whether this Act should prohibit the use of hands-free cellular telephones and hands-free electronic devices while driving or operating a vehicle on a highway.

Mr. Chair, I agree with the Member for St. Albert that we may be looking at this four or five years down the road. The Member for Calgary-Varsity brought in a motion in 2005, and here we are in 2010 having a distracted driving bill. We are debating this, and it will establish that distracted driving is a serious problem for traffic safety.

I think there was agreement that hands-free cannot be enforced. Bill 16 goes a long way to addressing the problem of distraction caused by hand-held cellphones and other electronic devices; however, this bill takes no action on hands-free cellphones and other electronic devices. There is ample evidence that driving while using hands-free cellphones increases the risk of accidents, but since the enforcement issue comes into the picture, and at this time I know it maybe cannot be enforced, this law may stay on the books. Maybe if it's not enforced, it may be thrown out in the courts.

My amendment would require the Minister of Transportation to collect evidence about the way hands-free cellphones and other electronic devices contribute to motor vehicle accidents; in addition, the minister would be required to report back to this Assembly with that information within three years of the coming into force of this Bill 16. The Assembly would then have the evidence needed to make an informed decision on the question of expanding the current bill's prohibitions to hands-free devices as well.

As Albertans are overwhelmingly for Bill 16, I feel certain that if the evidence is there, they will support further changes to reduce the risk of motor vehicle accidents. This bill will go a long way to improve safety on the highways.

With this, I adjourn the debate on the bill, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

5:50

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Ted Morton	Minister of Finance and Enterprise
David Hancock	Minister of Education, Political Minister for Edmonton
Lloyd Snelgrove	President of the Treasury Board
Iris Evans	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Ron Liepert	Minister of Energy
Luke Ouellette	Minister of Transportation
Mel Knight	Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Alison Redford	Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for Calgary
Rob Renner	Minister of Environment
Gene Zwozdesky	Minister of Health and Wellness
Yvonne Fritz	Minister of Children and Youth Services
Jack Hayden	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Ray Danyluk	Minister of Infrastructure
Mary Anne Jablonski	Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Lindsay Blackett	Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Service Alberta
Cindy Ady	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Hector Goudreau	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Len Webber	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Employment and Immigration

Parliamentary Assistants

Evan Berger	Sustainable Resource Development
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Municipal Affairs
Cal Dallas	Environment
Doug Griffiths	Finance and Enterprise
Fred Horne	Seniors and Community Supports
Broyce Jacobs	Agriculture and Rural Development
Jeff Johnson	Treasury Board
Diana McQueen	Energy
Janice Sarich	Education
Dr. Raj Sherman	Health and Wellness
Greg Weadick	Advanced Education and Technology
Teresa Woo-Paw	Employment and Immigration

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Tarchuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
DeLong
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
Allred
Anderson
Benito
Bhullar
Chase
Johnston
Notley
Rodney
Sarich
Taylor

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Bhardwaj
Deputy Chair: Mr. Chase
Amery
Fawcett
Griffiths
Hinman
Lund
Marz
Taft
Taylor
Weadick
Woo-Paw

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. McFarland
Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Horne
Lindsay
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Hinman
Lindsay
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell
Anderson
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
Pastoor
Rogers
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery Kang
Benito Lindsay
Bhardwaj McQueen
Boutilier Olson
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Drysdale Xiao
Hinman

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
Amery Lindsay
Berger McFarland
Calahasen Mitzel
DeLong Notley
Doerksen Pastoor
Forsyth Quest
Groeneveld Sherman
Hinman Tarchuk
Jacobs Taylor
Leskiw

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney
Anderson Groeneveld
Benito Kang
Calahasen Mason
Chase Olson
Dallas Sandhu
Elniski Vandermeer
Fawcett Xiao
Griffiths

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. Drysdale
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang
Boutilier
Brown
Calahasen
Cao
Forsyth
Johnson
MacDonald
Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman
Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, October 28, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and to ourselves. We ask for Your guidance with our deliberations in our Chamber and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the honour of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Legislature two very special guests, and they are the new mayor of Calgary, His Worship Naheed Nenshi, and also the mayor of Edmonton, His Worship Stephen Mandel. I had the honour of hosting both for lunch today. As you know, Mayor Mandel recently won his third term as mayor of the city of Edmonton. He has brought to the city of Edmonton a lot of the common-sense, down-to-earth approach to local governance. Of course, Mayor Nenshi fought a very exciting, hard-won campaign bringing new ideas and new energy to the city of Calgary.

Our government and all of my colleagues here look forward to working with the two mayors and their colleagues and councils, working towards a more prosperous Alberta, continuing the good growth that we're enjoying, and working together so that we can set an example for the rest of Canada. With that, I would urge both of them to rise, and let's all receive them with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was a very nice welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to also welcome the mayors and someone else who's very special to us. I want to introduce to you and through you Mr. Ken Hughes, who is the chair of the Alberta Health Services Board. He was appointed in May of 2008, when we created the single province-wide health services organization. He has a distinguished public service record, which includes serving as a Member of Parliament for the rural riding of Macleod and as chair of the former Health Services Authority. He's also a certified member of the Institute of Corporate Directors and holds a master of public administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of people in the community know him and respect him as the president of Alpine Insurance & Financial, based in Calgary. He was born in High River into a family that has been in Alberta for more than 100 years. He is the spouse of a very dedicated and understanding wife, believe me, named Denise, and he has three school-aged children in French immersion in the community of Springbank. Please rise, Mr. Ken Hughes, and enjoy the applause of the Assembly for your great work.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 120 visitors in both the members' gallery and public gallery from a community that is growing in leaps and bounds, and that's Spruce Grove. Our guests today are from the Woodhaven middle school, and I must say that they are an extremely excited and very knowledgeable group of youngsters who do represent the future of our province. They are accompanied today by teachers Ms Deb Schellenberger, Mr. David Hardman, Miss Keri Getz, Miss Ashley Lyster, Ms Joanne Fuminger and parent helpers Mrs. Maureen Gunning, Mrs. Stacey Chadwick, and Mrs. Brenda Koch. As I said, they are in both galleries, I believe, in the Assembly, and I would ask that they rise and our members give them the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 23 of Alberta's brightest and best students from Linsford Park school in the city of Leduc in my constituency. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Derrick Beach, and parent helpers Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Schiewe. They're in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from two well-known organizations who recently received very prestigious awards of recognition. The Zebra Child Protection Centre was honoured with the gold Laurel award and \$3,000 for organizing an exceptional holiday celebration for our most vulnerable children. The Youth Emergency Shelter was honoured with the silver Laurel award and \$2,000 for their innovative creation of the Armoury Youth Centre program for at-risk and homeless youth. I would ask that they please rise: Barbara Spencer, executive director; Kim Wheaton, board member of the Zebra Child Protection Centre; Shelly Chamaschuk, president; and Sue Keating, acting executive director of the board of the Youth Emergency Shelter. Please join me in giving them very warm congratulations. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents from my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Charan Khehra and his daughter Nina Khehra. Mr. Khehra is a former senior economist with the Alberta government, and his daughter Nina is a psychologist. Twenty-five years ago Nina was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and she will be travelling to the United States for treatment later this year for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, a treatment currently unavailable in Alberta. I recently met with Mr. and Ms Khehra. I have a great deal of empathy for what Nina has experienced over the last 25 years. I certainly wish her the very best. I would ask them both to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the House

three new Liberal caucus staff members that I have the great pleasure to work with. I'll ask them to stand as I introduce their names: John Santos is my new executive assistant; Jann Lynn-George, our new director of research; and Kenton Betts, our new researcher at large. Our team of staff are among the brightest and most dedicated people I know, and our caucus is truly blessed to have their support and expertise to call on in our role as Official Opposition. I would ask all members to extend the traditional warm welcome to our new staff.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent whose family and several friends have been ravaged by multiple sclerosis. His name is Warren Stefanuk, and he is a member of the CCSVI, chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, advocacy group in Edmonton. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of representatives from the advocacy group Stand with Fort Chipewyan. They have joined us today to help raise awareness of the health and environmental concerns expressed by Fort Chipewyan residents. They raised money through efforts and wanted to send the Premier to Fort Chip and hope that with their help he will make that visit. They're joining us in the members' gallery. These are the executives of the group. I would ask Richie Assaly, Saima Butt, and Aaron Samuel of the Stand with Fort Chip group to please stand. I would also ask to join them the former chief of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, George Poitras, and residents of that area Agnes Simpson, Evelyn Simpson, and Marie Marten. They are residents who've come to support this group. Thank you very much. Please welcome them to the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND caucus.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Tom Kehoe, a representative of the Canadian Labour Congress. Many members may recognize Mr. Kehoe as a frequent visitor here. He was for a number of years a cameraman for CTV and covered our Legislature on a regular basis. The Canadian Labour Congress is concerned that most Canadians can't save enough to live with dignity in retirement. The labour movement along with retiree and community groups are calling for a gradual doubling of future Canada pension plan benefits. Mr. Kehoe is here to witness the tabling of a CLC report on pension reform. I want to welcome Tom, who is seated in the members' gallery, back to the Legislature, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature my two new staff members in my legislative office – it seems a bit pretentious to call it a caucus office for a caucus of

one – here in Edmonton, who have proven already in the brief time that they've been working with me to be a tremendous help to me, and I'm grateful for them both. Jacquie Lycka is my new office and legislative assistant. She is a recent graduate of the U of A's political science honours program, where she completed her honours thesis on voting behaviour here in the province of Alberta. Evan Galbraith is my research assistant. He is from Calgary originally. He's a recent graduate of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, which pleases the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, who has already been down to my office to compare rings, with an honours degree in political science. He wrote his thesis on intergovernmental relations pertaining to the oil sands. I asked them both to put a little something in their bios, something personal, like you like puppies or something like that. Then they found out I was a cat owner, and they didn't want to go there. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish that you would all give them the warm, traditional welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Zebra Child Protection Centre Youth Emergency Shelter

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in recognition of two organizations that help children and youth facing extremely challenging circumstances in their lives, the Zebra Child Protection Centre and the Youth Emergency Shelter Society, both recipients of Laurel awards for their outstanding work. Edmonton's Zebra centre, which opened in 2002, helps over 1,000 children each year. It was the first of its kind in Canada and a pioneer in assisting children who have tragically suffered physical or sexual abuse. Working in partnership with police, Children and Youth Services, and Crown prosecutors, the Zebra centre helps children to share their stories in a nonthreatening setting and begin the healing process.

Since 1982 the Youth Emergency Shelter Society has supported thousands of at-risk youth to achieve success. They help young people to overcome challenges such as drugs, alcohol, and sexual exploitation and successfully transition into adulthood. Through programs such as the new Armoury Youth Centre, youth are provided with a supportive environment where they can access a wide variety of programs and activities such as skills development, health services, counselling, and educational opportunities.

The efforts of both the Zebra centre and the Youth Emergency Shelter are truly appreciated. They are outstanding examples of how community groups made up of caring and dedicated individuals can make a tremendous difference in the lives of our province's greatest resource, our children.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All week Albertans have been hearing about the crisis in hospital emergency departments. Most shocking has been the revelation that the Premier and his health ministers have been sitting on details of hundreds of examples of the problems for 32 months, hidden this from the public, and done nothing. Last week this government took what was supposed to be a feel-good news conference to brag about their vacuous Health Act

and meaningless charter to hurriedly talk about new acute-care beds. They knew the latest letter from emergency room doctors was about to become public.

Yesterday they bragged about measures to ensure accountability for wait times. This whole sorry spectacle makes clear the real accountability problem. The Premier of Alberta is unable to provide leadership on this critical issue. In this House he has ignored my direct questions about his personal responsibility. Now, after a couple of days of heat, he's going to get out of the kitchen and hide from NDP questions and an angry public by going on a junket halfway around the world.

There is nothing new to what we are hearing this week. A year ago the NDP revealed plans to reduce long-term care resources and shift to costly private care. This was being kept secret from the public. Months ago the NDP criticized the foolishness of building new facilities and then leaving them vacant. The government does not take responsibility to deliver excellent public health care seriously. Mr. Speaker, people are dying and suffering unnecessarily. Dedicated health care professionals are becoming discouraged and disillusioned. Loving family members are struggling to provide care no longer available from the health care system.

It is time for the Premier to stop ducking and running. It is time for the Premier to look Albertans in the eye, admit he has let them down, and put his job and his health minister's job on the line if he fails again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Canadian Anaphylaxis Readiness Education

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to bring to all the members' attention a very serious situation that affects us all, including a number of my esteemed colleagues, anaphylaxis. As the Assembly learned this week when our colleague the Minister of Infrastructure became ill during a caucus meeting, anaphylaxis is an extreme allergic reaction involving the whole body. After initial exposure to a substance like nuts or a bee sting, a person's immune system becomes overly sensitive to that allergen. On subsequent exposure a severe allergic reaction occurs.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this month the government of Alberta and Anaphylaxis Canada joined forces to create Canadian anaphylaxis readiness education, or CARE, a web-based training program for teachers and school staff. Increased anaphylaxis knowledge and awareness can save lives and will contribute to safe learning environments for all students. This innovative collaboration can literally mean life or death for some of the estimated 22,000 Alberta students who have potentially life-threatening allergies.

Mr. Speaker, a school cannot guarantee allergens will never enter a school environment; however, they can implement policies and procedures to ensure that the school community knows how to prevent, react to, and treat someone suffering from an anaphylactic reaction. Knowing what to do and how to do it can mean the difference between life and death for these vulnerable students.

The new care module complements the allergy anaphylaxis information response resource kits that were introduced to all Alberta public, separate, charter, private, and francophone schools in 2008.

I believe most would agree that the safety of schoolchildren and youth in our schools across the province is of the utmost importance to everyone involved in the education system, and this government indeed is taking action. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Someone needs to be accountable for the long-standing emergency room crisis in this province, and everyone seems to be dodging the political bullets. The Premier won't take responsibility; the minister of health won't take responsibility. So taxpayers are left wondering why the only people they can hold accountable are ducking for cover. To the Premier: will the Premier and minister of health accept that this is their fault? Six years. No one else. Will you take responsibility?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we'll take responsibility for increasing the budgets for the Alberta Health Services Board. We've increased, as I said, the budget 6 per cent this year, 6 per cent into next year. We paid off the accumulated deficit, and we also topped up to what the board thought would be reasonable, reflecting the ever-increasing demands for health care. We will take responsibility for that. We also take responsibility for dealing with the issues on a day-to-day basis, the increase in population. We're just simply doing more in terms of services in health, and the minister has a plan to alleviate the pressures in emergency.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Well, the Premier talks about taking responsibility for everything, except the wait times are not improving, Mr. Premier. People are suffering. The change is not happening.

Yesterday the Premier said that he thought Alberta Health Services has been a success. Is the Premier honestly telling Albertans that 20-plus hours in wait times is a success? Wait times, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've just seen the largest merger in Canadian history of a number of regional health authorities plus the Cancer Board into one authority. This has brought down the cost of administration considerably. All of those dollars are going to go back into service delivery. The minister articulated a plan yesterday in the House. If the same question comes forward, I'll ask the minister to articulate the same plan that he brought forward yesterday.

Dr. Swann: No, Mr. Speaker. I'd like the Premier to answer for this. Clearly, the CEO of Alberta Health Services is being set up to be fired, and we'll move on to another one as the plan continues to fail. Will the Premier put his minister of health on the line and make him accountable for this failure to improve wait times?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous confidence in my minister of health. I think also that for someone sitting in the position of Leader of the Official Opposition, it brings it to an all-time low to start to talk about someone else's future in this particular House and speculate about somebody's future. That is just totally inappropriate.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Talk about empty promises. The minister of health yesterday held a big news conference to tell the world he will be publishing four-hour and eight-hour

benchmarks for wait times in emergency rooms. These benchmarks were published early in the year under Alberta Health Services' performance report. To the Premier again: since the four-hour and eight-hour targets have been published since March, how is your announcement yesterday going to produce different results? Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the minister respond to all of the detail in terms of rolling out the plan for emergency room response.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that in some hospitals those particular benchmarks are only being met at the 20, 30, 40 per cent mark. As this member who's asking the question should know, because these are national guideline standards, we're looking at the 90th percentile. We're looking at something being met at a higher rate. That's what the target is all about. It's going to be improved upon immediately.

Dr. Swann: This is not about targets, Mr. Speaker; it's about results. These have been the same results for several years, Mr. Health Minister. When is it going to change?

An Hon. Member: Good theatre.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we had a very good meeting with the emergency docs. The hon. member asking the question might do well to have that same meeting, because what they told me is that they're very happy with what we've arrived at as an action plan. They're very pleased that this government is listening and responding and reacting to the concerns they've expressed. I'm quite sure that Albertans will also follow suit, and they'll be happy once all of this is done and accomplished. We're getting there.

Dr. Swann: For those chirping over there, try sitting in an emergency department for 20 hours if you think this is theatre.

To the Premier: since the Premier is not willing to hold his minister accountable, will the Premier commit that these benchmarks will be posted in every emergency room in Alberta and the minister of health's phone number will be under the sign so Albertans themselves can hold him accountable for these changes?

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, in all honesty let's just cool down and apply some common sense to the approach. Nobody wants to wait in the emergency room. Nobody wants to wait for a bed. We do know that we have an ever-increasing number of people that have to be placed in continuing care. We're doing whatever we can. We've already built well beyond our target of 800 beds for this year. I believe AHS says we'll reach about 1,300 new continuing care beds. That's the real issue: moving people that need continuing care out of acute-care beds, and we're doing that.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Trade Mission to India

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The health impacts of oil sands development have long been a concern of the people of Fort Chip. However, even though these concerns have been proven by

studies of health care professionals, the Alberta Cancer Board, and independent scientists, they are not a priority of the Premier, but a trip to India mid-session is. To the Premier. Today the Premier was presented with a cheque to buy a flight to Fort Chip. The Premier can find time to travel to India. When will he find time to visit Fort Chip?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are two components here in terms of the answer. One is with respect to the students that are here from the University of Alberta. You know, travelling to Fort Chip: we're waiting for the last signature on an agreement in terms of doing even further research and study into Fort Chip and its residents with respect to all of the health effects the public is saying that they're experiencing.

Secondly, if we were to meet the constant demands of every increase in spending that all opposition members want in this particular House, we have to open up new markets around the world, and we have to do that because that is a priority. We have to pay for whatever they're expecting us to pay for.

Dr. Swann: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, we are expecting you to pay for health investigations for the people of Fort Chip. That is an expectation all Albertans have. Do the research and follow the science.

Mr. Speaker, given that a recent study authored by two UBC professors found that no noticeable increase in trade resulted from Canadian trade missions between 1993 and 2003, why is the Premier spending \$84,000 and two weeks away from his duties here in Alberta on such dubious value?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't need anybody from UBC or wherever he's quoting from. I can tell you that constantly today there are people moving here from B.C., from Ontario. They're moving into Edmonton. They're moving into Calgary. You know why? Because there are job opportunities in this province like nowhere else in the country of Canada.

Dr. Swann: Since trade experts believe that a regional presence in foreign markets, shopping, and grocery outlets may be more effective than a splashy trade junket, why isn't the Premier marketing products from the Athabasca River fishery in India?

Mr. Stelmach: I guess that's the best the opposition has to offer, and that's why we have to be ever so diligent not to get caught up in that kind of dialogue, you know. Here we are trying to attract more investment to Canada, to the province of Alberta to increase trade, to build a larger economy, and they're just dragging the whole system down. I don't know how you can live with yourselves every morning when you get up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thought, in light of the fact it's a World Series going on, that Rick Bell, a Calgary columnist, hit a home run in his column today. He described the government as either people who know, people who don't know, or the third, people who don't know what they don't know. My question is to the Premier. Did you know about the letter that went to your office over two and a half years ago about the emergencies? Why did you fail to act on that very letter that was given to you? Will you admit, yes or no, to that letter? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think they've brought this letter up – what? – a couple of days now in the House, and I don't know if it's been tabled. If it has, I'd like to see the tabled letter because I really don't know what exactly they're talking about. It could be any letter. [interjections] Now they're chirping again. It could be any kind of a letter. That's in their question, a letter. Okay?

The other thing is, in all honesty, if it is with respect to emergency room response, as I said before, the minister has met. We've set benchmarks. We're continuing to work. It's not only reducing the waiting times in emergency, but it's also increasing the number of spaces for seniors in continuing care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He refers to the minister. Is that the minister who really wasn't the minister or the minister who wasn't the minister then? We need to know.

Given that and the non-answer that he just provided – and all the folks in emergency rooms watching Access television are watching for the answer – do you know, do you not know, or do you not know what you don't know?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that will be on YouTube everywhere around Canada.

In all honesty, if it is to the emergency room response and to the letter that was written, we're very clear in terms of the targets that we're meeting: more nurses trained, more doctors, and also more continuing care facilities in the province of Alberta. We're on the path to achieving all of those goals that were written in the letter.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given the non-answer once again, the folks that are watching on television in emergency rooms now can see that it's not column 1, I know, not column 2, I don't know. Clearly, the minister and the Premier don't know what they don't know. To the minister of health. You knew about this. Why didn't you act at that time?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I received the e-mail over the Thanksgiving weekend. I replied immediately, and I took action immediately.

Let me just clarify what's going on here. Let's talk about some of the good things going forward here. Alberta has nearly 8,000 more beds today than a decade ago. Alberta has the fastest-growing physician workforce in Canada. We have the fastest-growing nurse workforce in Canada. We have 37 PCNs here. We have MRIs and CAT scans that outnumber anyone else on a per capita basis. And over here we're dealing with the past. Let's deal with what's going on that's good, that gives people confidence, knowing that we have one of the best health systems in the world right here.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, I recognized an hon. member to raise a question, and it was pretty quiet when the question was being delivered. Then I offered an opportunity for the minister to respond, and unfortunately there was a whole bunch of catcalling coming along. Let's just try and lower the temper here now, please.

We'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood so that everybody in the House can hear the question and hear the response.

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Instead of staying to accept responsibility for the emergency room crisis, the Premier is running away on a junket to India, something that could have been scheduled when the Assembly was not in session. He's leaving his health minister to attempt to deflect the anger of Albertans with more empty promises. This time it's wait-time targets, another promise waiting to be broken. My question is to the Premier. Why does he believe these wait-time targets will actually be met given the serious shortage of staff and long-term care beds that his government has created?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to an increased number of nurses trained in the province, an increased number of physicians and other allied health care professionals, and together with that also increasing the number of continuing care spaces in the province. We targeted about 800. We may be on track at the end of this fiscal period to reach about 1,300 spaces, which will take away a lot of pressure. That's the kind of long-term planning that we're working on. We always know that we will have an increasing aging population, and we've got to meet those demands. It's about 2,000 seniors a month now. It'll be 3,000 here in the next couple of years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Yesterday the health minister announced that he had today directed the Alberta Health Services to implement wait-time targets, but what he didn't tell people was that the same targets had already been set over a year ago by Alberta Health Services itself and were in place. Will the Premier admit that the government is at it again, still just recycling meaningless promises, and that his minister has failed to be honest with the people of Alberta about that?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, about this time last year we were looking at how to deal with the ever-increasing demands in all ministries. Originally we were looking at having the health budget hold similar to the previous year's expenses. After looking and reviewing all of the ministerial budgets, we did find some year-end savings within other operations of government, which went to health care spending. We also knew that we were going to have more pressures. That's why we paid off the deficit and gave the health board an increase.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the health minister failed to tell people that since the targets were implemented over a year ago, things have gotten steadily worse and given that your own hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's father spent four days recently in an emergency room and given that a doctor was on the radio yesterday talking about a woman who had to undergo a miscarriage in the waiting room of an emergency room, will the Premier admit that without more long-term care beds and more staff the wait-time targets are meaningless?

Mr. Stelmach: The hon. member made one statement that I agree with. We do need more continuing care beds. So we're looking at all options, working with nonprofit organizations, for-profit, looking at additional land and space with municipalities. In fact, part of the discussion today with the two mayors was in terms of how we can

use some of the land that the two cities own. This is all working in the right, positive direction. Next year we will work towards increasing even further the number of beds for our seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that we all get that the crisis in our emergency rooms is ultimately caused by insufficient continuing care beds at the discharge end, which backs up the whole system, and we all know that will take some time to solve. But so what? The sick people waiting up to 22 hours in Alberta's ERs need solutions now. Here's the thing. Even after 16 years of mismanaging health care, this government hasn't completely managed to stamp out the collective memory of those who used to run health care when it did work. To the health minister. Here's a thought: will the minister direct the Alberta Health Services Board to bring all staff, current and retired, to available status and to offer full-time shifts to all nurses who want them so that we not only have more health care professionals available, but they're available not at quadruple time but at straight cost, lower cost, straight time?

Mr. Zwoddesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm open to any and all suggestions. In fact, when we met with the emergency docs a couple of nights ago, we heard some other innovative ideas. So we'll be taking a look at anything and everything that can help improve the situation so that we're meeting more than the 20 or 30 or 40 percentile mark. We're aiming at a target of 90 per cent, and that, to my knowledge, is a new percentile for this particular suite of targets.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just don't spend too long looking at things.

Again to the minister. Another thought: since several hundred net acute-care beds could be open if only he could find the staff and since I've just given him a clue for how to do that, will the minister order AHS to open those beds and commit to have those beds fully operating and fully funded, all several hundred of them, within the next six weeks?

Mr. Zwoddesky: Mr. Speaker, when we met with the emergency docs a couple of nights ago, we talked about four time frames: immediate actions, things that could be done today, literally today and tomorrow; a short-term time frame, which would be within weeks, before Christmas; a medium-term time frame, which would be within a year; and a long term, which is within the five-year funding framework that we've discussed. Now, as part of that, certainly, they're looking at where and how more acute-care beds can be opened, where and how more continuing care beds can be opened because we recognize where the backlog is. There are too many people in acute care who ought to be in other settings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're still waiting.

Okay. One more try. To the minister: since he's always going to meetings, will he actually start listening and acting on the ideas that he's hearing from physicians and their colleagues at each hospital and take specific advice? One size does not fit all.

Mr. Zwoddesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not only meeting; I'm also listening carefully, and I'm acting as immediately as possible. This

morning I visited the emergency room at the Grey Nuns hospital, picked up some ideas there. I've been now to about 26 different emergency rooms, listening carefully to what their solutions are because they're all a little bit different; they're all quite unique. You can't have a simple, one-size-fits-all approach, nor can you have a single, silver-bullet approach. It's a complex issue, and that will be told to you in identical words by the emergency docs as well. Yes, we are working . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Home-schooling

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within Whitecourt-St. Anne my constituents are concerned about the challenges facing home-schooled students as they seek admittance to Alberta's postsecondary institutions. While government approves and even regulates home-schooling, my constituents find that postsecondary institutions are less open to the idea and lack consistent policies for accepting home-schooled students. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Minister, it's easy for every foreign student across the world to come to Alberta; there are policies. When are you going to create a policy for our own Alberta students, for our own home-schooled students?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an important issue that all of the postsecondary institutions across the province are addressing. I wouldn't categorize it as being easy for international students to come from abroad, because every international student comes from a particular institution or some other schooling jurisdiction that has already worked with that institution to get the clearance or to get the entrance requirements done. Each postsecondary handles that on their own, dependent upon the curriculum or the course that that student may be applying for and what he may have taken in the other areas.

2:10

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I think, Minister, that you've missed my point. You're the big wheel here, and the home-schooled students are watching you. What are you going to do to help them prepare for postsecondary institutions?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, while I may be the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, I do not run every one of the 26 postsecondaries. They are board-governed, autonomous institutions who set their own entry requirements. We have guidelines in place for those things as it relates to the curriculum that is attended to in the K to 12 system. I might add that home-schooled students who are taking the Alberta curriculum don't experience a great deal of difficulty because they are actually taking the same exams that other students are taking. The important factor here is that home-schooled students need to do their homework as well. I would recommend Clicks as a great program to do that with.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I think the minister is passing the buck, so I'm going to move over to another minister, the Minister of Education. How does this minister ensure that those students being home-schooled are adequately prepared for postsecondary schooling and can compete with their public school counterparts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We won't allow the minister of advanced education to pass the buck. We need adequate resources for both education and advanced education.

I want to say that home-schooling is an appropriate choice for many students and their parents if it's done appropriately. If it's done appropriately, they're registered with the school boards for oversight, they need to meet the standards of other Alberta students, and they can challenge exams if they want to have the Alberta diploma, which gives them that ready access to the postsecondary world. There are accountability structures built into our system for home-schooling, as there are for private schools and for public schools. If they do it right, they'll have the accreditation they need.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are serious problems underlying Alberta's electricity system. The government has served the interests of everyone except consumers, ratepaying Albertans. Bill 50 has not only bypassed the process of government accountability at the Alberta Utilities Commission and raised electricity costs; it has removed landowner rights. To the Minister of Energy. Bill 50 off-loaded the costs of unnecessary infrastructure onto consumers. Does he believe that consumers are willing to pay for increased transmission costs?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, one has to ask the question: in the end, ultimately, who does pay for all of the costs that are associated with upgrading a transmission system? We have a transmission system in this province such that the youngest of the transmission lines is some 37 years old. It needs significant upgrade. We went through an extensive debate in this Legislature, we passed Bill 50, and now the Alberta Utilities Commission will hold public hearings open to all parties in Alberta to determine siting, costs, and all of the other issues. Nothing there has changed.

Dr. Swann: Well, I beg to differ. With all respect, Mr. Speaker, this administration has taken out of the hands of their own commission the right to assess and have a public hearing on a need for these lines. Will you make it mandatory to review the need for these lines? That is the question.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we went through that debate extensively last year, and I'm sure the hon. member had every opportunity to participate. Now, you know, when it comes to need, this government is going to be responsible to ensure that every part of this province has the opportunity to have economic development, that we have electricity where it's needed when it's needed, and that we will not stand by and see the lights go out in this province.

Dr. Swann: More and more Albertans are asking, Mr. Speaker, that this minister and this government rescind Bill 50 and return basic rights to landowners and citizens of Alberta.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. Bill 50 took away no rights. This is a fallacy that seems to be out there, that somehow property rights were taken away. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing has changed in Bill 50 relative to property rights. What we have done, though, is identified where the need was, and now the Utilities Commission will hold the appropriate hearings.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Oil and Natural Gas Land Sale Revenues

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The province recently set a new record for petroleum and natural gas land sales, earning \$1.86 billion. This surpasses the record of \$1.83 billion set back in 2005. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Can the minister tell me what land sales mean in terms of our overall budget impact this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, land sales have been the bright spot in our revenue forecast this year. When I tabled the budget in February, we were predicting land sales of \$630 million. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow just indicated, as of the last land sale that's now above \$1.8 billion, so three times what we anticipated at budget.

There's more good news, Mr. Speaker. Land sales are the best predictor of future exploration development, and drilling rigs in July were 150 per cent greater than they were a year ago.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister confirm if this increase in land sales revenue was the result of changes to the royalty structure?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what industry has asked for is that we have a regime in place that encourages investment. I think we've found that right balance, and industry is responding accordingly. We had a session over the noon hour with a presentation from a number of the industry groups, and clearly they indicated to us that they have confidence in the Alberta economy. Natural gas prices are a concern, but as was identified, our land sales have been very encouraging.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. A further supplemental to the same minister: what do land sales mean in terms of Alberta's competitiveness?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think that maybe a better way of putting it is that it's confidence in the future in this province, Mr. Speaker. It's industry that makes these decisions of when and where to invest, when and where to purchase. I would suggest that all the indications we're getting from industry are that this will be the highest activity in the drilling sector in some three or four years in this province, and that's despite the fact that natural gas prices are troubling today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's toxic tailings ponds are now the size of the Sea of Galilee. The minister has stated that tailings ponds will be reduced in the long term, but the ERCB has already approved plans that do not meet directive 074's requirements for reducing fine tailings in the ponds, and the timelines for final cleanup are still unknown. To the Minister of

Environment: how long is this long term that the minister is talking about? Are we talking one generation? Two generations? Will the grandchildren of today still be looking to deal with tailings ponds?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess my crystal ball isn't quite as clear as hers, and I'm not able to predict the future quite as well as she thinks that I should. This is a technical issue that the answer to will derive over time. But I can assure this member – I can absolutely assure this member – that we're not talking decades. We are, however, talking in the time frame of years. We're looking at full implementation of directive 074 within this decade.

Ms Blakeman: No. Actually, when you look at all the deadlines, I think it's closer to 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, industry is innovative, and they have the resources and the minds to make change happen, but the minister is not requiring this of them. When will the minister bring in targets and standards that push industry to clean up this legacy now?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned in answer to one of the questions yesterday or the day before that we are currently in the process of developing a tailings management program. That's in combination with the whole issue of mine reclamation. I am encouraged by the tremendous amount of progress that has been made on that, and I encourage the member to stay tuned because we should have much more specific answers for her in a very short period of time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this is the second time this fall that the federal government has stepped in and started their own investigation into either dead ducks or other issues around the oil sands, my question to the minister is: why does Alberta keep getting trumped by the feds?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's simply not the case. Alberta Environment and Environment Canada have been partners for quite some time. Any kind of major environmental issue is commonly dealt with from a joint perspective. The member is well aware that the issue that was recently settled with Syncrude from the ducks landing a couple of years ago resulted in a trial where charges from both the province and the federal government were involved. It's not unusual in the least to have joint . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

2:20

Human Trafficking

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Canada and North America, unfortunately, there has been a rise in human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This despicable crime has even crept into our province, where it preys on our society's most vulnerable individuals, usually women and children. To the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: what action is your department taking to crack down on human traffickers and those who profit from these despicable activities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. My mandate and the commitment of our

Premier and the government is to provide communities where Albertans may live and work and play and pursue their dreams without fear. We take the crimes of sex trade and human trafficking very seriously, hon. member, and we've got local law enforcement teams and ALERT teams, integrated policing teams, working together on prevention programs, on arrests. Certainly, we're enforcing laws against traffickers wherever we can, and we're providing training to police officers to recognize the crimes and to aid in prosecutions. We need the help of the community, though.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. The promotion and advertising of human trafficking is done mostly online, specifically through websites such as Craigslist, who allow advertisements to appear under a thinly veiled cover for human trafficking. Can the minister explain what action her department is taking to shut down these activities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the hon. member is correct, and that is currently happening on Craigslist. At our most recent federal, provincial, and territorial ministers' meeting we were able to share our experiences across the country with respect to investigation and prosecution. We're having some great successes. However, besides the work that we do with the integrated child exploitation team and our working groups on human trafficking and the work that our police do, we do think it's important to begin an effort to ask Craigslist, which is the first step that we have to take, to shut down that service. We've been very clear that we believe that it does involve human trafficking, and we are now beginning that discussion in concert with other provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is also to the same hon. minister. Is your ministry working with any other levels of government to put an end to human trafficking in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've taken a very strong stand on the issue. We're working in conjunction with our prosecutors and our police. We're also working with the federal government and with other provincial governments. I'm also very proud of the leadership role that Alberta has taken with the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers not only with respect to human trafficking in the way we've been talking about publicly in the last couple of weeks but also with the leadership work that we've taken on the task force report with respect to missing women, which we believe is another component of this. There are 52 recommendations in that report for jurisdictions to follow so that they can have the same success as us in prosecuting these.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Alberta Health Services Board

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. History has taught us that central planning and big bureaucracies do not work, and that's

precisely what the superboard is. The proof that it is failing continues to mount. The Auditor General said this week that the board can't keep track of its budget. Yesterday even the superboard's CEO confessed that the inefficient AHS has continued to put people in the wrong beds. To the minister: given that patients have no confidence in the superboard, staff have no confidence in or support for the superboard, and now even the CEO is admitting doubts, when will the government dismantle the superboard and return control to our local communities and hospitals?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I've stood in this House and indicated that the centralized, single province-wide board is working very hard as a new entity in bringing information in a more consistent fashion so that we can make important decisions to improve health outcomes such as a five-year funding commitment, such as a five-year action plan, that's coming out very soon, such as performance measures and a host of other things.

Also, having said that, please let's note that the Alberta Health Services Board has actually reduced the number of CEOs and others who are part of that bureaucracy.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, that answer was farcical. It's unbelievable.

Given how ineffective the superboard is, the minister's new ER wait time targets are just empty rhetoric. Given that this government only responded this week because the public were made aware of the crisis by ER doctors, the AHS needs to be open and accountable to Albertans. The only way to do this is to publicly disclose all the ER horror stories like those released last week. Will the minister commit to putting all suboptimal triage reports online immediately?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if the member had been listening yesterday, I directed Alberta Health Services to report on a per-site basis what's going on in the emergency rooms with respect to the protocols that are forthcoming. Albertans want to know how the particular hospital in their area is performing. They have a right to know that. They've told us they want to know that, and that's why I announced yesterday that we will be doing that. What more accountability can you have than to look at each hospital on a per-site basis and be accountable for those results?

Mr. Hinman: That's excellent, Mr. Speaker, so long as it's the full triage reports and not just that the wait-times are four hours.

Given that the ER problem has been escalating for years now – this government has known since March 2008, but it's only getting worse – how much longer will the minister go on defending the superboard while withholding the documents that enable Albertans to see the true state of affairs of our emergency system and why the superboard must go? When will he put the full triage reports online?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I agreed to follow up within two weeks, perhaps even sooner, with the emergency docs regarding a number of their issues. What we're talking about here are the tier 1 performance measures. There will be some tier 2 performance measures, which people on the other side, I'm sure, understand. As part of that, we will be reporting back to Albertans with what it is that Alberta Health Services has in mind and what they have accomplished by way of providing better health services in the emergency rooms and in other parts of the system as well. It is working, it's coming together nicely, and it's all because of the five-year funding commitment that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Bee-Clean Building Maintenance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been reported that 122 former and current employees of Bee-Clean are now being paid \$155,000 in overtime accumulated over the past two years for work at the University of Alberta here in Edmonton. My first question is to the Deputy Premier, please. How many of these 122 workers at the University of Alberta are temporary foreign workers who, as we all know, unfortunately, do not have the same rights that Canadian citizens or landed immigrants enjoy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I will take the question under advisement and endeavour to have the appropriate minister respond to the member.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier is the minister responsible for the University of Alberta.

My second question is to the Deputy Premier. Given that this government has helped a former Premier with his problems over plagiarism at an Alberta university in the past, why does this government not now try to help the janitors resolve their differences over fair pay and working conditions at the University of Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, you know, aside from being a rather ridiculously stated question, my understanding is that the minister of the appropriate department is handling the situation with the employees and with the employer. To suggest that the University of Alberta somehow manages contract employees that they have as janitorial staff is like asking how many employees work at the bank branch that they deal with. It's kind of a ridiculous connection.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, it is not ridiculous that these individuals in this province deserve fair wages and good working conditions, and you know it.

Now, again to the Deputy Premier: given that this government has a contract that over the last four years has paid Bee-Clean \$2.4 million, will you make a commitment that employment standards will review all the pay stubs for the employees of Bee-Clean in the Department of Infrastructure, in particular, over the last four years?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify for the hon. member that I wasn't calling the situation ridiculous; I was calling his question ridiculous.

Obviously, we're always monitoring the workforce standards that are in place, and the minister has an obligation to do that for all Alberta workers, including temporary foreign workers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:30

Chateau Estates Access Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After two years of lobbying, the Minister of Transportation moved forward with an access road to connect 84th Street N.E. to 100th Street N.E. in Calgary for the residents of Chateau Estates. Minister, construction has started. When will this access road now be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that those constituents in that area should be very, very thankful for having an MLA that

just gets out there. I still have the scars from all the lobbying he does. I have to tell you that I have very good news for this member. The road is under construction as we speak, and we are expecting it to be completed by October 31, weather permitting, of course. I think this hon. member can tell his constituents that the wait is over.

Mr. Bhullar: Wonderful news, Mr. Speaker. Wonderful news.

Would the minister mind telling me why the project did take so long to complete?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just told the hon. member that this road is near completion, but for some reason – he must be getting older or something – he wants to go back in time. This member knows very well what the issue was and why this road took so long. It's because we had issues with pipeline companies, and we had to get the crossing agreements in place. This particular member knows that very well. It'll be just mere days before the road is complete.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you. I did know that, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted him to say it so the pipeline companies had other people to blame, not just me.

Mr. Speaker, my final question to this wonderful minister, who built this one-kilometre stretch of road that we finally have two years later: once the road is complete, Minister, who is responsible for maintaining it?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, Rocky View county will be responsible for the 243A road once it's completed. This is about providing reasonable access for local traffic while maintaining safety and design standards for Stoney Trail N.E. I must say that this project is a wonderful example of our government responding to concerns of local residents.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Justice conceded that law information centres are not an adequate substitute for representation by defence counsel in criminal court. Given this admission I would like to ask the hon. minister if her ministry will quit expecting litigants to use these services and, instead, properly fund legal aid for individuals to be able to access a lawyer and not a pamphlet.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has never been our contention that law information centres were supposed to replace counsel or legal advice for people who are appearing in criminal court. I will say that this government has had a commitment to legal aid, has not cut legal aid funding, has actually doubled legal aid funding continuously over the past four years, and we will continue to ensure that people who need to go to criminal court are getting adequate representation through duty counsel whenever they need it.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat surprised if not shocked at that answer. Just recently Judge Wheatley's decision in Frick has been interpreted differently by this minister than it has been for me. That Assistant Chief Judge believes that underfunding to legal aid has limited services to criminal defendants. Do you disagree with this characterization by the Assistant Chief Judge?

Ms Redford: I couldn't hear the last part of the question, but what I do know is that as the Ministry of Justice we work with the Legal Aid board on a weekly basis to ensure that people in this province are receiving adequate representation not only in criminal court, Mr. Speaker, but in civil court.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, "for an accused without the means to pay for a lawyer, the current situation in Alberta is troublesome." I didn't say that; the Assistant Chief Judge did in Provincial Court. I was wondering: is he right or is he wrong here?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in this province we fund over \$58 million a year toward legal aid. We have maintained that commitment through difficult economic times. We have talked to the federal government about increasing their contribution. Unfortunately, they at this time are not prepared to do that. But every year, when federal and provincial ministers get together, we raise this issue, we talk about the importance of this issue, and we renew our commitment to this issue. We care about this issue. We have not cut our funding, and we will ensure that people who go to court are provided with proper representation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Provincial Achievement Tests

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The results of the provincial achievement tests and diploma exams were recently released, and in most cases the news is very good. However, there are some results that cause me and the parents in my constituency a great concern. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister tell us why these more troublesome results, particularly for language arts 30, continue to decline? This exam, after all, is the basic entrance requirement for postsecondary institutions.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An important question, but first of all let's focus on the success of Alberta students. The results on our provincial achievement tests at both the acceptable level and the level of excellence have gone up. The results in our diploma exams have increased. There are some troubling areas. English language arts 30-1 is one of those troubling areas, and we need to be very closely monitoring that and figuring out with teachers and others in the system how we can do better on that because, of course, literacy and communication skills are fundamental. We're working with them. The standardized test will tell us what direction we're going.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister. The results for aboriginal learners also remain a subject of concern. What is being done to improve these statistics?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's happening with respect to FNMI students is actually quite exciting. Although the results are still way too low, the trend lines are very good, and the increases in each are very strong. We're not there yet by any stretch of the imagination, but we've gone up five points in one particular area. I can tell you that although we have a high rate of students dropping

out, we also have an above-average rate of students coming back. So there's good news in the FNMI area: the work we're doing with our partnership council, with our MOU, with the treaty chiefs and the federal government, and the good things that are happening in the school system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: why are students with special needs who may be working on IPP tested on material they have not learned yet?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, all students are taught the same curriculum. What we do expect is that teachers will differentiate their instruction based on the capacity of students to learn, their learning styles, their learning needs. In terms of standardized results we want to know what the system is doing, and therefore it's necessary to be able to include as many students as possible in provincial achievement tests so we know how the system works. That doesn't affect the students' individual marks. Students are working on the same curriculum, just differentiated instruction for their abilities and for their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Protection of Personal Information

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Virtually all government databases are web applications, everything from land titles to corporate records to environmental data to judicial fines, but Service Alberta is slashing its IT budget and laying off hundreds of IT workers even though the Auditor General is saying that information security in government is still alarmingly weak. To the Minister of Service Alberta: will the minister admit that the budget cuts are a higher priority for her department than information security?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated yesterday, the security of the information of Albertans is very important to me and this government, and working with the Auditor General, as I explained yesterday, is important as well. When you talk about the web applications, some of the things that the government is involved in, it's critical that we protect the integrity of that.

With respect to employees that have moved on to other areas, when you can standardize technology and do things with technologies, there are always savings, and those are reflected across government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister didn't answer the question. By cutting \$11 million, it's not going to help the security very much.

Since the Auditor General asked for the new timelines two months ago, when will the minister get around to acting on these two-year-old recommendations?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated yesterday, there were 12 recommendations, of which two are done and then

nine that we're working on with significant progress, as the Auditor General has reported. The fact that the chief information officers for each department work with the chief information officer with Service Alberta, design their plans and present their information security plan for the year, is absolutely critical. That's something we were not doing two years ago, and we are doing that now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With compliance being the biggest issue with other government departments, will the minister commit to auditing each ministry and make public the ones dragging their feet on IT security?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to what the departments are doing and the good work that all the chief information officers are doing across government, it's really important that, working with us, they do their work so we can communicate to Albertans that their information is secure and their information is protected. That's why, working with the Auditor General, we are certainly on the right track.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Seventeen members were identified and 102 questions and responses.

Statement by the Speaker

Retirement of Clerk Assistant

The Speaker: Just a brief announcement before we move on. Our Clerk Assistant and director of House services, Louise Kamuchik, has announced that she will be retiring at the end of this year after more than 27 years of service to the Assembly, and we'll be recognizing that service at a reception on November 24 of this year, to which you will all be receiving an invitation. [Standing ovation]

On Monday, Dr. Philip Massolin, our committee research coordinator, will commence training as a table officer in addition to his regular duties, and you will see him at the Clerk's table on Monday next.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Pastor Doug Webb

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a dear friend and community leader within my constituency, Pastor Doug Webb of the East Church of the Nazarene. Last year with the help of 98 volunteers Pastor Doug initiated a project in my constituency that connected the community on a grassroots level. This was the first Faith in Action event, a day dedicated to cleaning up the community of Penbrooke Meadows, the community in which I was born. This event was more than just picking up waste. It was about service in the community, about building bridges within a community that often lacks people who step out from their individual institutions and connect.

Mr. Speaker, this year I once again had the privilege of partnering with the Calgary East Church of the Nazarene and the Penbrooke Meadows Community Association for the annual Faith in Action

community cleanup. Faith in Action is just one example of the steps Pastor Doug takes to encourage supportive initiatives within our community. He is someone that has found countless opportunities to bridge communities together and bring down the barriers of faith, that far too often in our world divide people.

Unfortunately, Pastor Doug is leaving Penbrooke Meadows and moving to Grande Prairie to look after a new church. Pastor Doug is an inspiration not only to myself but to many residents of Penbrooke Meadows and all who have met him. I extend my best wishes to Pastor Doug as he pursues new challenges, and I have every confidence that he will inspire others in his many future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Minister's Workforce Forum

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 27 I had the privilege of attending the Minister of Employment and Immigration's workforce forum here in Edmonton. More than 130 officials were there representing employers, industry associations, labour and professional organizations, educators, and government, who all gathered to discuss how Alberta's labour force can contribute to our province's competitive position in the global economy.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday's minister's workforce forum had its roots in the building and educating tomorrow's workforce initiative that was launched in 2006. It was about recognizing our changing workplaces and the need to plan for the next evolution of Alberta's labour force development strategy. As our Premier has said, competitiveness is about more than just reducing the cost of doing business. Developing our human capital is an important part of increasing our competitiveness.

I had the honour of moderating the first half of the forum, focused on attracting and retaining talent, that featured insightful remarks from Glen Hodgson, the vice-president and chief economist with the Conference Board of Canada. Some of the issues that stuck out in my mind include: approximately 15 per cent of Alberta graduates leave the province to pursue employment opportunities elsewhere and the increasing recognition and support for workplace training. There was also a strong message that government and industry share the responsibility in building and developing an innovative and creative workforce that will maintain our level of prosperity from now into the future.

Mr. Speaker, the forum was incredibly productive. I want to thank all the participants for giving their time and ideas to building a strong workforce in our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Canadian Citizenship Week

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. October 18 to 24 marked Canadian Citizenship Week. Last Saturday I had the opportunity to address over 150 Sikh seniors as well as Judge Sonia Bitar, one of Canada's immigration judges and, in fact, an immigrant from Lebanon.

Mr. Speaker, my Canadian citizenship is dear to me, and as an immigrant I know the value the rest of the world places on the freedoms we often take for granted. I remember eagerly waiting the three years needed to apply for Canadian citizenship, and in fact I was ready to apply after only two and a half years. Every day I am reminded of how blessed I am to live in a nation as free and tolerant as Canada.

However, I am also reminded that the rights we enjoy come with responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, it is our duty as Canadian citizens to uphold our rights and take an active role in shaping our communities. I moved to Canada in 1979, and since that time I have been blessed with a home, a family, a dedicated community, good weather, and beautiful nature. On top of that, I moved to a land of opportunity. I remember being asked by a student in my constituency during Read In Week if I would have been an MLA in India if I had stayed. I said no. It was more likely that I would be a soldier or a police officer. I said this because there are few places in the world where a person can achieve success through hard work, and Canada is one of those places.

I ask all members to join with me today and take time out to think about Canada and the rights and responsibilities we have as citizens. Thank you very much. God bless.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Distracted Driving

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whenever anyone gets behind the wheel of a vehicle, their full attention should be on the task at hand: getting from point A to point B without getting into a collision. In the early days of the automobile the task was relatively simple. There were fewer vehicles, fewer gadgets on the dashboard to play with. But today drivers can bombard themselves with a wide variety of dangerous distractions. Chatting with passengers, fiddling with the radio, eating breakfast all take the eyes and ears off the road.

Among the most dangerous distractions is the cellphone, a near universal accessory beloved by entrepreneurs, salespeople, teenagers, and, yes, politicians. Smart phones are even worse, with multiple ways of distracting driving: texting, music, games, social media applications. Despite reams of evidence showing that using cellphones while driving is dangerous, many people persist in doing so.

Alberta loses 400 citizens at least per year and has 20,000 injuries per year at least, many due to distracted driving. As custodians of the public good, how many deaths, how much suffering will Albertans endure if we fail to ban cellphones, including hands-free devices, while driving? We mustn't take another 50 years to wake up to the dangers. I urge this government to move ahead with strict distracted driving legislation, with hefty fines for infractions. A vehicle is a deadly weapon in distracted hands. Let's protect our fellow citizens, our families, our children before another life is lost.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to the standing orders I would give notice that under Standing Order 34(3.1) I would advise the House that on Monday, November 1, 2010, written questions 40 and 41 will be dealt with.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise to request leave to introduce a bill, that being the Alberta Health Act.

In rising to introduce this historic act, I note that it is our first Alberta Health Act. Bill 17, as it will be known during debate, was promised in our Speech from the Throne earlier this year. It is the product of more than a year-long conversation with Albertans about our publicly funded health system. It began with the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health last year, and it continued with me on behalf of our government accepting all 15 recommendations of the recently authored Putting People First report on October 20, a report, I might add, that I want to sincerely thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for having provided to me a short while ago.

More than 3,000 Albertans were consulted on the Putting People First report. It included 1,300 people in 23 different communities across the province. It included over 1,500 surveys that were completed online and however else. It included more than 80 organizations, representing tens of thousands of Albertans, who provided written submissions or other forms of communication.

This bill demonstrates that we listened to health care professionals and to many others because the advisory committee included leaders of Alberta's doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and numerous others. Those professions and several others, in fact, submitted written input and gave us their views in a stakeholder forum together with the Health Quality Council of Alberta and others. That collective input has given us a greater understanding of what Albertans expect from their publicly funded health care system, and that is reflected in this new act. It also shows us what we as a government can do to make it stronger.

More specifically, Mr. Speaker, Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, proposes a set of principles that describe the health system Albertans want. The bill recognizes and states our commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act by word and by deed while also respecting and clearly stating an additional set of our own made-in-Alberta principles. These are principles that describe the health system Albertans want now and in the future.

It's important also to note that this bill does not do certain things. For example, this bill does not change any of the existing important health legislation pieces our province already has. This bill does not and is not purporting anything to do with privatization in any way at all. This bill recognizes, on the other hand, what Albertans' aspirations are for our publicly funded health system.

Some of the highlights in Bill 17 and what specifically the Alberta Health Act proposes include these. The minister will establish a health charter that sets out principles and responsibilities within the health system. It also states that we will establish a health advocate office to resolve citizen concerns with the health system as they relate to the health charter, and it will provide for public input in the development of health regulations. Bill 17 is the next phase of our important, ongoing work to build the best performing publicly funded health system in Canada, as mandated by our Premier and as committed to by our government.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we committed to Albertans that we will keep them involved in decisions and actions about their publicly funded health system. Therefore, this act will allow us to live up to that commitment. During debate I will offer yet more explanations and comments than I can do at the moment given that we're only in first reading.

I would ask all members to support Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, and allow it to move on to the next stage. Therefore, I'm proud to once again move first reading of Bill 17, our first Alberta Health Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: Yes?

Point of Order

First Reading of Bills

Ms Blakeman: Under *Beauchesne* 640 it reads: "The purpose of each stage is as follows: (1) First reading – The first reading of a bill is a purely formal stage as it is decided without debate or amendment. This stage is coupled with the order to print the bill." We in this House have a precedence of two fairly brief sentences, perhaps three, to introduce a bill. We have just enjoyed or endured a four-page speech from the minister introducing the bill, which is a rather unfair way to take up time when there's other business to be done today. Perhaps it could be subtracted from his opening speech in second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sorry. Was that a point of order?

Ms Blakeman: That was the point of order.

The Speaker: Well, okay. I'll refer members to two phrases with respect to first readings. The hon. member chose to reference 640. If the hon. member would look at *Beauchesne* 645, *Beauchesne* 645 says:

At this stage it is not permissible to argue the bill. This is dealing with first reading.

Discussion of the bill's merits might take place on the motion for the second reading. The Member is only permitted to explain the provisions of the bill in order that the House will understand its purport.

If the hon. member would go to the House of Commons on page 740, if my memory serves me right, there is a reference at the bottom of the page that basically says: "A minister seldom provides any explanation when requesting leave to introduce a bill, but may do so."

The intent here would be in first reading, in introduction, to highlight the bill. It's very clear to me that the hon. minister did more than highlight the bill; he gave the history for the first couple of minutes. It would have been entirely permissible to provide highlights for the bill because members are asked to concur in first reading. They can actually vote it down if they wanted to. There's no point of order, but four minutes is a bit longer than I would have anticipated would've been appropriate.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Under 13(2) I'm wondering if the Speaker can clarify for this member. He referred to one section in *Beauchesne* that referred to other members and one that was specific to ministers. So is it only ministers that are allowed this leeway, or may any member introducing a bill enjoy the four-page speech that the minister was able to do?

The Speaker: Well, actually, under the rules a private member is given even more lenience. That's clearly within the rules, always has been. There's nothing new there.

Ms Blakeman: We'll take advantage of that.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Bill 23**Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010**

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010.

Two amendments are being proposed, both of which concern authority for parking bylaws and enforcement. The first amendment gives comprehensive academic and research institutions, Campus Alberta's four universities, retroactive authority to collect penalties for the violation of their parking bylaws.

The second amendment gives the baccalaureate and applied study institutions, Mount Royal University and Grant MacEwan, the retroactive authority to create parking bylaws and to collect penalties for the violation of these bylaws.

The proposed amendments will help both types of institutions control parking on their large urban campuses and will help to protect them from potential lawsuits concerning past parking tickets. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 23, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

This is one of the procedures here now with a private member's bill.

3:00

Bill 206**Utilities Consumer Advocate Act**

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act.

The objective of this bill is to ensure Albertans are provided with adequate consumer protection and that they are not overcharged for utilities or related services. Bill 206 would also provide greater access to clear, reliable information for utilities consumers and ensure that they are represented at regulatory hearings by an officer who is independent of this government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move first reading of Bill 206.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we now have a situation. I did not interrupt the last member in introducing the bill, but we've now gone beyond the time allocated for the Routine with respect to this. If we're going to go on, we're going to need a request for unanimous consent. If somebody wants to raise that, we'll put it to the vote.

Orders of the Day**Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading****Bill 26****Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane)
Amendment Act, 2010**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, this particular bill deals with an issue that is very complex, deals with an issue that for some is very emotional, so I want to take a few minutes to try and give some history and background on the bill. I hope that we can get all members that feel strongly about this particular bill to participate in the second reading debate.

The amendments in Bill 26 provide coal-bed methane ownership certainty by declaring that coal-bed methane is and always has been natural gas for both Crown and freehold minerals.

Mr. Speaker, what is coal-bed methane? Simply put, it is natural gas found in coal beds. According to the Alberta Geological Survey Alberta's coal-bed resource could contain up to 500 trillion cubic feet of coal-bed methane, which is also commonly known as CBM, although it's not known how much of this 500 trillion cubic feet could be produced. I'd like to put that in perspective. Remaining established reserves of conventional natural gas in Alberta are about 36 trillion cubic feet.

In Alberta the Crown owns about 81 per cent of the province's mineral rights by land area. The remaining 19 per cent is freehold mineral rights held by the federal government, large corporations and organizations, and individuals, who hold about 1 per cent. During the 1800s and early 1900s some mineral rights were split in part between coal and natural gas. For example, railway companies, which were provided land from the Canadian government, might have kept the coal, or coal and petroleum, and new settlers might have received other mineral rights, including the natural gas rights.

When the mineral titles were originally split, CBM ownership was not generally addressed. Both natural gas and coal mineral rights owners claim they are entitled to the CBM in the coal seams. Now, without examining titles individually, rough estimates suggest that there are approximately 70,000 mineral titles separating ownership of coal and natural gas in Alberta. Approximately 500 different coal owners and roughly 30,000 different natural gas owners are affected by this split-title legislation.

The issue of split-title ownership came up in the CBM multi-stakeholder advisory committee process, which concluded in 2006. In response to one of the committee's recommendations the government conducted a consultation process. In 2009 a freehold oil and gas issues consultation was completed that involved various stakeholders representing individual freehold mineral rights owners, oil companies, natural gas companies, coal companies, and associations.

The consultation considered several freehold issues, including split-title mineral ownership. These stakeholders did not reach a consensus on a legislative approach to clarifying the ownership issue. Some companies have initiated court action to clarify ownership; however, these court cases have been in progress for four years and may take several or even many more years to resolve. Also, a court decision, Mr. Speaker, may only apply in certain circumstances. Therefore, clarity is needed now to help development of Alberta's CBM resources.

In fact, back in 2003 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stated that Alberta needed to take a lead role in the development of our CBM by removing the uncertainty that surrounds entitlement to coal-bed methane underlying Crown and freehold lands in this province. I'm pleased to say today that we are pretty much doing what the member suggested back in 2003, so despite what he might say from time to time, we do take their words and advice seriously, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010, clarifies CBM mineral ownership by indicating that CBM

is and always has been a natural gas for both Crown and freehold minerals. CBM is therefore owned by the natural gas mineral owner and not the coal mineral owner.

I want to also be very clear on a couple of other points. Existing agreements that have been entered into by the natural gas mineral owner or their lessee that specifically provided CBM rights to the coal owner or the coal owner's lessee will not be affected by this bill. The bill also states that natural gas owners and their lessees cannot sue coal owners or the coal owner's lessees, the surface owner, or the Crown for compensation for CBM that was extracted, produced, or removed before the legislation came into force.

There have been precedents for this type of legislation in Alberta, previous Alberta declaratory statutes enacted to clarify ownership rights, including declaring that sand and gravel belonged to the surface rights owner in 1951, declaring that clay and a fine-grained carbonate-rich mud known as marl belonged to the surface rights owner in 1961, and declaring that a large list of natural substances belonged to the mineral owner, also in 1961.

Now, an amendment to the Mines and Minerals Act in 2003, which I mentioned earlier, stated that the Crown co-lease did not grant any rights to the natural gas, including CBM, and this indirectly clarified ownership of CBM on Crown land but did not apply to freehold land. In 2003 the British Columbia government passed the Coalbed Gas Act, legislating that CBM must be considered to be and always has been natural gas and is therefore owned by the natural gas owner.

In 2007 the Energy and Utilities Board, or the EUB, which is now the Energy Resources Conservation Board, held a hearing with respect to certain well licences. When determining approval for well licences, they provided the following information but did not make a determination on coal ownership: "Coal is a rock composed mainly of solid carbon materials, in which the CBM is stored," that CBM has a relatively weak molecular bond to coal and is not an intrinsic part of coal, that CBM is a gas in situ, and that CBM development uses similar practices to producing other gases. This in part led the EUB to conclude that the natural gas rights owners were entitled to produce the CBM from the wells in question.

3:10

By passing Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010, we will be able to remove a potential barrier to the development of CBM on freehold land, which in turn may encourage additional development of Alberta's abundant CBM resources.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank members of the multistakeholder committee led by our colleague, now the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, who helped with the development of the Freehold Oil and Gas Issues: Stakeholder Consultation report. I'm also happy to announce that further to the recommendation in the consultation report we have provided a grant of \$250,000 to the Freehold Petroleum & Natural Gas Owners Association, which is to be used to inform and educate individual freehold owners.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time to help clarify this particular bill in second reading, and I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 26.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: We will continue consideration of Bill 16, and we are at amendment A2. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am very pleased that I was able to participate in the debate in Committee of the Whole on the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010. I understand that what we are currently debating is amendment A2, which was proposed by my colleague from Calgary-McCall. Essentially, he's asking that the act be amended in section 2 by adding the following after a proposed section, 115.5, which would then become 115.6:

The Minister shall

- (a) collect statistics on motor vehicle accidents involving the use of hands-free cellular telephones and hands-free electronic devices, and
- (b) provide a report to the Legislative Assembly on the operation of sections 115.1 to 115.5 within 3 years of the coming into force of these sections, including recommendations on whether this Act should prohibit the use of hands-free cellular telephones and hands-free electronic devices while driving or operating a vehicle on a highway.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to think back. I believe it was in the early 2000s that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar first raised the issue, and in fact, I think, brought forward a motion, if not actually a bill, to ban cellphones while driving. I'll admit that the reception that my colleagues gave him at the time was not vigorous, but he has certainly proven himself right, very much so. He was ahead of the curve on that one. He saw what was coming and what was needed, and he was right. I have learned to respect his intuition on things like that.

I've certainly seen a difference, too, but I'll tell you what my experience in Edmonton-Centre is. I am really blessed in Edmonton-Centre to have 16 seniors' facilities, most of them independent living. They have their own apartments. They're very active seniors. They just live in a building that was built for seniors, and often there are meals that are offered with it as well. Several times a year I go out and talk to them about what we're doing in the Assembly and what advice and guidance they'd like to give me.

One of the things we talked about when I went around in September was distracted driving because we knew that it had been referred to a committee – or, at least, I thought it had been – so I was bringing it up. I was very interested by the responses that I got because most of the seniors that live in Edmonton-Centre don't drive. They make very good use of public transit through the Edmonton Transit service. They walk, some of them have scooters, lots of them have those wheeled walkers, and you see them out on the trails in the river valley just going at a clip there.

What they said to me was: you get that bill passed. They were pretty clear in the instructions that they gave to me. Because they are people who walk a lot, they were very aware, and everybody had a story of how they were waiting at a corner and ready to cross and that somebody came whipping around the corner and that when they looked at the driver to see why the driver hadn't noticed them ready to step off into the street, well, they had that familiar one hand up to their ear pose, which indicates they're holding a cellphone up to their ear. So my seniors were very clear that they wanted hand-held devices banned.

We also talked about the rest of the distracted driving issues, and frankly they were less alarmed about that. I think the number one problem is swatting at a bee or a wasp that gets into your car. You know, to be fair, that happens probably several times in your life, but it certainly doesn't happen every single time you get in your car.

For people who do talk a lot on their cellphones, they do talk on their cellphones every time they get in the car. So cellphones and the frequency with which they are used have really moved up that list of concerns that people have with distractions in a vehicle.

Now, the second part of the argument here. I did say to them: "Okay. Well, you guys are really clear that you want the hand-held cellphones banned. What about the hands-free?" Most people weren't aware that there were these hands-free devices because you can't see them. Frankly, I don't know how the police would be able to enforce this unless somehow they're checking cellphone records after the fact. That familiar position with somebody's hand up beside their ear: you're not going to see that when it's a hands-free device.

I, in fact, bought a second-hand vehicle that has the cellphone built into it, and it will not allow me while the vehicle is in gear to change any of the settings or to dial. So when the car is in gear, I can't dial. Now, if somebody dials in, you've got controls on the steering wheel where you can hit a button and it becomes live. It comes through the radio and through the speakers, and you're talking to someone. Or you can just not answer it, I suppose, and it goes to the regular voice mail. For a police officer looking at me driving down the road, they would have no idea that I was talking on a cellphone. I could be singing along to the radio, the way people do, and they wouldn't be able to tell that.

I think there's an issue with the hands-free version that could be creating some problems for the police. As I said – sorry; you don't say second-hand anymore – the preowned vehicle that I purchased that had this particular feature in it won't allow me to dial or adjust the GPS unit or any of that sort of thing once the car is in gear, but I don't know that that's true on all other vehicles. Maybe it is possible to do it on other ones.

There seems to be a lot of uncertainty around the hands-free version of things, and that's why I'm very supportive of the amendment that's been brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-McCall to collect some statistics on this. We are now able to collect the statistics. You know, clearly, if there's an accident and the police come to the door of the car and look in and there's a cellphone and it's still on and it's been thrown down on the passenger side, it's pretty clear somebody was on the phone. That would not necessarily be the case with a hands-free one.

3:20

I think what we need to do is find out whether it's an issue or not. I'm a big proponent of evidence-based decision-making. We can all get anecdotal stuff. Many times you hear the arguments in this House of, "Well, that makes sense to me," and I've said: "It sounds like that could happen. I'm concerned that that could happen." But I always try and step back and go: "Hmm. Well, how many people does it happen to? Are we going to create a whole program for four people in Alberta?" or "You know, how frequently is this an issue?" or "Are we going to be spending money on something that just doesn't happen very often?"

I think this amendment is a really good one because it's saying: "Okay. Let's run this act for three years as it is and empower the police and others" – I'm thinking of the AMA here – "to collect statistics on whether hand-held phones in cars are an issue or not." I can just imagine how the car manufacturers are going to deal with this one when you've got: it's okay in Saskatchewan; it's not okay in Alberta; it's banned in California; it's all right in Montana. Ye gods! You know, what are they supposed to do? Every car that comes off the line has almost got to be tailor-made for where they're going to end up, and that adds to the price of the car, which nobody is happy about.

Obviously, we're looking for safety, but we're also looking for practicality here. I'm a pretty pragmatic gal. If we don't need it and it's not causing accidents, I'm okay with it. If it is and that's costing money – and more than money. I mean, collisions often cause death, but more often they cause injury. As someone that was injured in a car accident a long time ago, I know how you don't get reported, right? You're not a statistic. You're not a fatality. But, boy, those injuries stay with you your whole life. And as you get older, they really start to be a problem. Those broken bones start to get arthritis, and that bothers you when you're older, and you need medication for that. One way or another, traffic collisions cost the individual, their family, and very often society.

You know, I'm fortunate enough to be on a drug plan through the Legislative Assembly, of which the employer, the people of Alberta – thank you very much – pay a share. I'm receiving a benefit here with lower cost drugs that I need because of injuries that were sustained in a traffic accident a long time ago. So this all starts to roll together.

As I say, if we knew that we would save money as well as lives and injury and inconvenience and grief, it would be worth it. But I'm not interested in putting something in place just because we think or we worry that it might be a problem. I'd rather have the proof. I think that what's been proposed by my colleague is reasonable. He's not asking that the statistics get, you know, collected over a year, which just wouldn't give us enough to work with. A three-year time period sounds like something where you'd be allowed to collect enough information to give you a baseline reading on it.

They're also talking about hands-free electronic devices. Sorry; I just want to grab the bill itself and check the definition of electronic devices. That's why they give you the definitions in the bill, so that everybody is straight on exactly what you're talking about. They do talk about a cellular phone or a communication device that's capable of transmitting cellphone communication, electronic data, electronic mail, or text messages. Oh, my God, can you imagine if people could text message on those things that are built into the car? That's insane. I know some people watch movies, which also strikes me as a bit insane, but hopefully that's going to be addressed in here.

I'm just looking to see whether we are getting a definition of – yeah, they've taken the GPS stuff out. I'm not getting something specific to that. I'm just trying to think of the stuff that's in my car. It's giving you the data on the litres that you've used, your mileage, and oil and gas that you've used. It can display a map. It can also give you a GPS. Then the phone function, I think, is about all that I can access through that.

I know that there has been some consideration from my hon. colleagues on the government side to supporting this amendment, and I hope that they do. I think that this is worth while. It's going to help us because if we have constituents asking us next year or the year after or the year after, "What the heck; Why didn't you do hands-free?" we've got a reasonable response in saying: "You know what? We didn't know. We've made a commitment to study it. We can look at it three years from now, and if it's warranted, we'll do it, and if it's not warranted, we won't." I think that's a very reasonable, pragmatic approach to take.

I would urge all of my colleagues here on my side and others to please support amendment A2. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: On amendment A2, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I'm also pleased to speak in favour of this particular amendment. I think it advances this issue probably as much as our society is prepared to have it advanced right now. Typically when decisions about things like public safety are made, whether that's seat belts or helmets or whatever, the evidence tends to be years ahead of where public opinion is. I think that in this particular case public opinion has not caught up to the evidence. From what I've seen of the evidence, we should be every bit as concerned about hands-free electronic devices as we are about hand-held electronic devices, but I don't think that the public is there yet. I would argue that it's the job of MLAs sometimes to lead and help the public come to a particular conclusion, but I don't think that's the tendency of this particular Assembly.

I think what's being proposed in this amendment is actually, you know, the next best thing. What the amendment will do, because it says that "the minister shall," is it will require the minister to "collect statistics on motor vehicle accidents involving the use of hands-free cellular telephones and hands-free electronic devices." Then the amendment goes on – I won't read it verbatim – to have the minister provide a report to the Legislative Assembly on the operation of this act within three years and make recommendations on whether the act three years from its passage should then be further amended to prohibit the use of hands-free cellular phones and electronic devices.

What we're doing here is, I guess, being cautious from one perspective. We're not being cautious from the perspective of minimizing risk to public health. We're being cautious about overreacting and overintruding and, certainly, overintruding into how people operate their cars. It's not the position I would hold, but I think that's the position where we'll end up. I have heard it said many times that the evidence on this issue is divided about whether hands-free cellphones are a hazard or not. I'm not convinced that it's divided, and I'll speak to that more when we have voted on this amendment. I know many members of this Assembly are convinced, and they want to have more proof. I guess that being somebody who likes to base decisions on evidence, more proof, up to a reasonable point, is better.

I think it will be interesting to see how this evolves and how the issues of enforcement and incentive might be played out. My colleague from Edmonton-Centre raised the question which many others have: how would you possibly enforce this? As the Member for Edmonton-Centre said, if somebody is driving down the highway and you're beside them and you look over and their mouth is going, how do you know if they're talking on the cellphone or just singing away to their favourite song on the radio? That's a good point. These are complex issues.

3:30

On the other hand, I think that with a bit of creativity some of those can be addressed. I suspect the insurance industry will end up thinking hard about this. I could imagine the insurance industry coming up with various ways to help police this issue, perhaps by adjusting deductibles or, frankly, by putting provisions into auto insurance that if you're in an accident and it turns out that you were talking on your cellphone, regardless of hand-held or hands-free, the coverage is restricted, that kind of thing. I wouldn't be surprised if the insurance industry starts getting thoughtful and creative about how to enforce hands-free regulations as well as hand-held.

As it was put to me by a group of very well-spoken, well-informed university students just yesterday, Mr. Chairman, if it isn't the law, it cannot be enforced. So if we don't make this the law, well, it doesn't matter what we think we can enforce; nothing is going to happen. On the other hand, if it becomes the law, then as ideas develop around enforcement, those can actually be implemented.

Given the realities of this Assembly I hope that we can pass this particular amendment, brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-McCall. I know that I will be voting in favour of it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to speak to this amendment. Like many amendments that have come forward, I still don't know that it's quite complete. There's no question that those people that aren't paying attention while they're driving create a lot of accidents. We know that accidents are usually something that we could control if we were paying more attention.

My concern with this amendment, though, is that we're narrowing it on a very narrow focus. From the reports that I've read and understand, one-third of all accidents, the highest in any one area, are from fatigue. The problem that we're focusing on – human nature is that if we can see something that we can immediately point our finger at, we grasp at that. As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East talked the other day, I think she said that in 2 out of 3 cars that were passing her the people were actually speaking on their cellphones, which is an incredibly high percentage.

The problem that we have is that we don't know where the accidents are going up. I have not even been able to read reports, that I'm aware, of where they've actually passed hand-held cellphone laws and the accident rates have in fact gone down. In some states in the U.S. they have actually gone up. They feel the reason why the accident rates have gone up is because now people are trying to hide them below the dash while they're driving so that they're not seen, trying to mask what they're doing. It's actually exacerbating the problem, and accidents have gone up.

I have two or three questions. Perhaps what we really need to do is have a report on all accidents and see whether it's fatigue, whether it's someone not paying attention. It seems like in our world there is an ever-increasing amount of diagnoses of children with ADD. I think that it's human nature that we have ADD, which is an attention deficit disorder while we're driving. It just seems like it's a monotonous activity. There are lots of things going on, and if it's not our cellphone, it will be something else that we're engaged in while we're driving.

As much as I want more information gathered – I think that's important so that we could actually look at it – the problem with this amendment and with the bill itself is that in our justice system traditionally we go by innocent until proven guilty. Here we're saying that people are guilty without having done something wrong. I would like to see a lot more latitude in this bill to where if someone is driving erratically or poorly, they're just pulled over and given a ticket rather than saying, "Oh, I see you're holding a hairbrush, so I'm going to give you a ticket," or "Oh, look, that person is eating" or "They have that newspaper in their hand," though they were swatting a bee, but they're saying, "Oh, no; you're not allowed to hold something."

It seems like we're trying to make a narrow-focus law against cellphones when distracted driving is a much broader law. I think that that's what we should really be looking at. If a police officer is driving behind someone who is speeding up and slowing down, swerving left or right, it doesn't matter what's causing their distraction and poor driving. They're going to get pulled over and given a ticket, whether we want to call that distracted driving or poor driving. I think that we should be looking at a much broader bill that actually points to someone doing something wrong and risking other people's lives while they're driving.

Like I say, this is a nice thought, but if we're going to pass it, I feel that it would be far better if we were to actually take statistics

on all accidents and look at that and realize that human beings have this ability to become distracted easily while they're driving. Cellphones are just one of many items or pictures or things that are in our vision that cause us to be distracted.

I hope at this point that this amendment will perhaps be amended. I didn't realize it was coming forward; otherwise, I would have had an amendment to increase the latitude of it, that this report would look at all accidents and not just report back on hand-held or hands-free cellphones.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to make a few comments with regard to this amendment. I certainly support the principle behind it, but I do have a number of concerns with regard to the amendment. Firstly, I think this kind of detail probably shouldn't be in the legislation; it should be in regulation form or really just a directive to the minister, perhaps. But I guess my major concern with the amendment, Mr. Chair, is that the amendment talks about "within 3 years." If I remember right, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie yesterday talked about a period of something like two, three, four, or five years.

I think we need a period, at a very minimum, of three years to provide statistics, and I think five is probably more appropriate. But the amendment doesn't say to provide statistics for three years but to provide a report within three years, so that really means that you're only going to be able to gather statistics for about two years in order to provide the report within three years. I think the intent of the amendment is excellent, and I would hope that if this doesn't pass, the minister would take the intent under advisement and compile the statistics in any event.

The way it's written now, I'm afraid I just cannot support it even though I believe in the intent. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays on amendment A2.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had originally spoken to the Member for Calgary-Varsity last evening and the Member for Calgary-McCall today saying that I could see some good in the amendment and that I could possibly support it if there was an absence of direction in information by the Ministry of Transportation. They already have a number of initiatives that they do related to this. So I can be accused of flip-flopping, but I'll give you the reasons why.

They cannot provide stats for the hands-free. It's not done at this time. Any information that starts to be gathered probably would be towards the middle of next year, so he felt that they would need probably five years. They already produce an annual report on collision statistics, and they have to track the causes. They presently have what they call an A form, or accident form, that the police use, and they're looking at putting another category in there. So that would have to be done. You'd have to use up all the accident reports that are in Alberta, and then the new ones would actually have that area for the statistics. That would be a neutral cost, basically.

3:40

So there is no need to put into legislation a review of our collision stats and various causes. It is already done on an annual basis, like I mentioned. Three years is too short a time period. There's an ongoing review regarding the effectiveness of many of the traffic safety initiatives, and that applies to legislation as well. They have formal evaluations also in Transportation.

In summation, there is no need to put this in the legislation. I think it was mentioned earlier that there could be a directive to the

minister or in the regulations. Based on that new information, I could not support this amendment.

The Chair: Is there any other member wishing to speak on amendment A2?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on amendment A2.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We shall go back to the bill, Bill 16. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's the first chance I've had to rise to speak to this bill, and I've been looking forward to it for quite some time. I always pay close attention to issues of highway safety because of a painful experience through my life and the lives of people who I care for as a result of car accidents and fatalities.

Quickly to list, in my case one of my sisters' husbands died in a car crash, my wife's mother was killed in a car crash, my wife's grandfather was killed in a car crash, and one of her uncles was killed in a car crash. As I think about friends and neighbours, some of the fatalities have been absolutely horrendous; you know, a large part of families killed. A couple of years ago there was a terrible crash south of Edmonton. It involved a neighbour family of mine. The grandparents were both killed, the mother was killed, and the daughter, who was in high school at the time, was left permanently paralyzed. This daughter now has made the best of recovery. Her father was left a widower, a single parent, and lost both his parents in this crash. Another neighbour: about three years ago their family was in a terrible collision out towards Radium. The grandparents were both killed, the parents were both killed, and the two children were left as orphans and are now in the care of my neighbour. So I take these issues very seriously, and I think we all should.

Traffic safety is often spoken of in terms of the costs and the lost time and so on, but I think the biggest cost in many ways is the heartache and the emotional pain felt by families and friends who see lives ripped apart in a single instant. These are closely felt issues for me, Mr. Chairman.

I also reflect on my immediate experience: August 2009, so just about 15 months ago, the middle of the day, perfect driving conditions, not a cloud in the sky, nothing that could possibly go wrong. I was in my constituency, stopped at an intersection, and a car plowed into me at full speed. It totalled the car of the woman driving it and did I forget how many thousands of dollars of damage to my car. Now, she admitted at the time that she hadn't even touched the brake. She thought maybe she was going 40 kilometres an hour at the point of impact. That's a lot of impact. I had my foot on the brake because I was at an intersection. Ever since then I've actually been in physiotherapy and other treatment. I had to go to the doctor, get X-rays, all of that kind of thing because of the lingering effects of that impact.

I reflect on a situation from just this last March, which could have been so much worse. I was with a friend. We were driving on a narrow highway north of Calgary, a secondary road that has some hills on it, through that beautiful country just north of Calgary. We came over the crest of a hill, and just as we got there, an oncoming car was in our lane. The shoulders are narrow, and it was a very frightening moment. As the guy wrenched his car back into his lane and went zipping by at high speed, we could see that he was holding onto a wireless device and texting as he was driving. That probably could have cost us our lives and him his life. So I actually think advancing this issue is very important for this Legislature to do.

This is not, in my mind, about intruding into human rights to speak on the phone and to drive. If somebody wants to be stupid enough – and I'll admit to having done it myself many times – to talk on a cellphone while they're driving, if the only person at risk is yourself, well, I wouldn't really care. The problem is all those innocent people who are stopped at that intersection ahead of you or who are in the middle of a crosswalk or who are on the highway and are doing their best to be good, safe drivers and who innocently get caught in a collision. This isn't about the right to talk on the phone while you drive. Those are privileges, Mr. Chairman. They're not rights.

The real right in question here is the right to a safe driving environment. We give people licences to drive because we understand as a society that it's a privilege, and if you violate that privilege by being impaired or getting too many demerits or for other reasons, you actually have that privilege revoked. That's what a privilege is about. So I don't buy the argument that this is big government intruding into the rights of people. This isn't about laws curtailing individual freedoms, and it's not particularly about individual responsibility. It's about protecting innocent people from being maimed and killed through no fault of their own. That's the perspective from which I approach this legislation, Mr. Chairman.

Now, like all of us, I expect, I've had quite a lot of correspondence on this bill, and I just thought I would mention some of it to you. I had a meeting yesterday with a group of students who are in a public health master's program at the University of Alberta. They've done a lot of work on this particular issue and gave me some very helpful information. I've had correspondence from the Alberta Motor Association supporting the idea of restricting the use of cellphones while people are driving. I've had correspondence from the city of Edmonton on it. This dates back to the spring. They also support the whole notion of this legislation, and I think they actually advocate that it go further and include hands-free devices. I've had correspondence from Students for Cellphone-Free Driving, who have put together a really good fact sheet. I'm hoping that all MLAs have had this kind of correspondence because it's, after all, how democracy works.

The students that met with me yesterday brought forward a couple of substantial studies, which I think are pretty interesting. There's one in particular from New Zealand. I'm not sure if it's being tabled during the debate or not, but I'll refer to it carefully so that it's easy for people to track down. It is from, I guess, the journal *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, volume 41, 2009, pages 160 to 173. The home page for that journal, in case people want to get the electronic copy of this, is www.elsevier.com. The title of the particular article of this research is *Driving While Conversing: Cell Phones That Distract and Passengers Who React*, and it's authored by Samuel G. Charlton.

3:50

I won't read the whole abstract into the record, Mr. Chairman, but it's quite fascinating to read because they actually did a range of studies. They were testing the conversation patterns of people when they've got a passenger in the car beside them or if they're on a cellphone and whether this cellphone is hand-held or hands-free. They did a pretty thorough job of testing in laboratory situations, good mock-ups of real driving situations, what the effect of all this distraction was. What they found – and I'm sure many of us have heard this – is that when there's a passenger in the car in conversation with the driver, the actual pattern of conversation, when it's carefully studied, is quite different from a conversation with somebody who's on the end of a cellphone. What they found in this quite significant research when they tracked the conversation pattern is that something they label as conversation stalling occurs if there's a real live passenger in the seat.

I think that as soon as you think about it, you realize this is true. If you're driving along, talking to your kid on the way to the hockey game or something and suddenly there is a tense moment in the intersection or somebody is coming into your lane or something else happens, the passenger stalls the conversation. The conversation actually stalls, and both the passenger and the driver pause to address the situation, and then the conversation gets picked up again. Even beyond that, the passenger will sometimes point out the risk before the driver sees it.

I know this has happened to me. I'm sure it's happened to many of you. Driving down the highway – say it's a late summer evening, and there are lots of deer out on the road – I'll actually ask the passenger: gee, do you mind keeping an eye out for deer in the ditch? Sure enough, my wife has done this for me many times, or I've done it for her if she's driving and said: oh, watch out ahead. That kind of thing happens all the time.

That is in marked contrast to when you're in a conversation with somebody on a cellphone, because the location of the person you're talking to is entirely remote, is entirely disconnected from the situation the driver faces. So that conversation continues, and it creates something that in this study and elsewhere is called inattention blindness.

Again, I can identify with that. You're driving along, your eyes are open, they're on the road, but your brain is somewhere else completely. Sometimes I marvel; I frighten myself. I'll get to work and sit down in my office, and I can hardly remember how the heck – you know, what route I took to get here. It all happens so automatically. Well, the risks of that happening are even higher if there's somebody on a cellphone because they have no awareness of what's going on for the driver behind the wheel. So they just keep right on chatting. It doesn't matter whether everything is okay or whether there is a deer standing in the middle of the road or a semi-trailer coming head-on or you're in the middle of an intersection; they just keep talking away. And because they're talking away, you as the other end of the conversation are engaged more in that than you are in driving, and that creates something called inattention blindness.

I would urge everybody to have a look at this particular study. It's really quite interesting how they arranged it all. What they found was that cellphones actually are considerably more dangerous, whether they're hands-free or hand-held, than other forms of distraction. They also talk about things like adjusting the stereo. Well, if I'm adjusting the stereo, like I was on my way to work this morning – I was listening to some pretty vigorous rock and roll . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Seventies rock.

Dr. Taft: . . . '70s rock that my son had given me. But if something comes up on the road, I can just stop turning the dial. I was turning up the base, actually, this morning, getting fired up for question period. But if there's something going wrong on the road ahead of me, I can stop doing that. There's nothing about that stereo that forces me to just carry on. I stop. Likewise with many other distractions. Not all, though. The Member for Edmonton-Centre spoke about, you know, a bee or a wasp in the car. They don't stop for anything, so there are some things we cannot legislate against.

I think these things all have to be considered very seriously, Mr. Chairman. I know that there's a reluctance in this Assembly to step into these kinds of issues. I think that philosophically we're nervous about government getting too far into people's lives. But I can tell you that if somebody in this Assembly ends up losing a family member or a loved one to a distracted driver, that's going to be extremely painful.

Mr. Chairman, I did want to make those points. I support this bill. I wish it went further – I really do – but I guess we're going to have

to take what we can get. I wish the previous amendment had passed, but it didn't. I would like to have seen this bill brought forward again by law for review within three years, which is what the previous amendment proposed, but that was unsuccessful as well.

I've been cautioned that the politics of this are dangerous, that if we're seen as being too aggressive, being too far ahead of the public, there will be a political backlash. I guess that's a chance I'm prepared to run, Mr. Chairman. I'm reluctant to have this bill proceed out of committee so quickly because I know there are other members in the public who want to wade in.

I know my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar is passionate about speaking on this bill, so I will cede the floor to him, but I may have other comments later. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. member, you said previously about tabling your report. Do you wish to do that on Monday, not today?

Dr. Taft: Yeah. It may well have been tabled previously. I'll check. Thank you for asking, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have been listening to the discussion so far this afternoon on the bill and the proposed amendment, that was unfortunately defeated. I certainly hope that a lot of members on all sides of the Assembly thought: well, we should have a look at this within a three-year period. Hopefully, it will go to a standing committee or one of the policy field committees, and they can have a look at it and hear directly from members of the public. When you consider what some people are suggesting, that this bill does not go far enough at this time, well, this would give those individuals an opportunity to speak.

Now, certainly, there are people who are suggesting that we are not going far enough, that this is an opportunity for the province of Alberta to be a leader in North America by removing the exemption of hands-free cellphone use from this bill, of course, and they have the view that it would certainly prevent even more injuries and save the lives of even more members of the motoring public. In my view, they would be right.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays has started something here that probably should have been started a decade ago, when cellphones were larger than a pound of butter. Now they're so much smaller and, of course, a lot cheaper, and everyone uses one. Unfortunately, everyone would include members of the motoring public, particularly drivers, and this bill is a good first step in changing the habits of all Alberta drivers, including this member.

4:00

I said in second reading that members of my constituency, the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar, had given me clear direction over the summer that this bill was to be passed. They were satisfied with the direction they were going in. I expressed their gratitude to the hon. member earlier this week, and certainly they appreciate this legislation.

Now, I've heard from a lot of citizens over the course of the summer, Mr. Chairman, but I didn't hear directly from anyone in the automobile insurance industry. I heard from the AMA about Bill 16, and of course the AMA does write some insurance policies for some Alberta drivers, but I didn't hear from the insurance industry. The insurance industry in the past has been very active. Is that the right word, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview?

Dr. Taft: I would say that they probably even lobbied. I hope they're registered.

Mr. MacDonald: They've probably even lobbied for legislation to suit their industry. I'm sure they're registered under the lobbyist registry, whatever that means, but I'm not going to be distracted and get into the Lobbyists Act, which I think is an act that, hopefully, will be reviewed and strengthened.

With Bill 16 I'm surprised. The insurance industry has a lot at stake here. I'm confident that the hon. member is absolutely right. This legislation will start to reduce not only the fatalities but the number of accidents that are occurring on our roads and on our streets in this province. If we can make our roads and streets safer, with fewer collisions, hopefully it will mean our insurance rates will go down as well.

I haven't heard from the industry on this, and I will be watching as this proceeds, just like, Mr. Chairman, I'm watching the province of Quebec and the mandatory use of snow tires in certain months of the year. I could stand corrected, but I believe it's November through April, or it could be December through March. If an hon. member has the right answer for that, I would appreciate it.

Certainly, that's a law. It's been very good for the tire shops in Quebec, yet we should start seeing very soon if it is reducing the number of collisions and vehicle accidents in Quebec. I think this is the third winter since it's been implemented, and it'll be interesting to see how that has changed the accident rate in the province of Quebec. It'll be interesting to see in three or four years in this province our accident rates, our insurance rates. Hopefully, all drivers through cheaper insurance will benefit from this legislation.

Now, some individuals are questioning the exemptions. We'll see how this works out. The hon. member has certainly provided a satisfactory explanation to me regarding questions I've had around the exemptions. This law will be like a lot of others. Hopefully, it will be improved as we go along.

When we look at Bill 16, Mr. Chairman, I do hope that as the regulations come out, there will be an advertising campaign. Now, I don't know whether this would be under the direction of Alberta Transportation or if it would be under Service Alberta. I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was thinking about the Public Affairs Bureau in this, but I don't think they are the ones to organize this. They'll spend a lot of money – there's no doubt about that; he's right about that – but whether the job will get done is another question. I know why he would have those concerns.

As this bill proceeds through the Assembly, hopefully we will see this proclaimed and enforced very soon, and Albertans will be alerted. I don't have any problem with money being spent on a program like that to promote public safety. Before anyone can complain about not knowing and getting a fine, we could have a good program available to educate the motoring public as to what is directly going to happen with this bill.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore talked about the county of Strathcona, and certainly it doesn't seem to be an issue there anymore. I drive through there frequently, and I feel safe; I certainly do. I have trouble with that rolling four-way stop they practise in Strathcona county, but certainly their cellphone use, I think, has been controlled. The public that I talk to seem to feel safe, and they seem to feel comfortable with the law, and they seem quite willing to abide by that law.

Mr. Chairman, hopefully, this Bill 16 will proceed through the House, and by springtime, by the time the snow melts, we will have to curtail or control our use of cellphones.

Mr. Liepert: Start now. Get used to it.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I'm probably very, very guilty of that, and I have done some rather stupid things while I've been driving and on the cellphone. I won't deny it – I won't deny that – and this will certainly help.

In conclusion, again, Mr. Chairman, I would like to also thank the Minister of Energy for his kind remarks when he was talking about Bill 26 earlier. I appreciate that.

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on the bill.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Ironical that I follow my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. I was going to surprise members today by saying that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar a decade ago raised this issue in the House.

Dr. Taft: He's ahead of his time.

Dr. Swann: Very much ahead of his time, and many people thought he was nuts. We know now that he was prescient and very clearly calling for something that would have saved lives – would have saved lives – over this decade if it had been in place for this last decade. One distracted driver can decimate a whole family.

I was a medical officer in Pincher Creek for a number of years. I sadly remember certifying five teens and a mother coming back from a ski hill who were involved in a collision by a distracted driver, not by a cellphone at that time but a distracted driver nonetheless. It's, indeed, so tragic that many of these are so preventable. I certainly want to acknowledge the member opposite for introducing this bill and for pushing us on a very critical public safety issue.

This has the potential to save thousands of lives. I said earlier in my member's statement that over 400 lives and 20,000 injuries a year are happening on our highways. When you think about the suffering and the loss of life and the cost to the health care system, you realize that what we're talking about here is so fundamental, that anything we can do to reduce distractions is going to reduce death and suffering.

4:10

As it stands right now, it does not go far enough. My colleague from Calgary-Varsity has proposed solid amendments to the bill that would make driving in Alberta even safer, and I urge the Assembly to pass these amendments. As I say, I'm all too familiar as a physician with the carnage that is wrought by car crashes. We have a chance to greatly reduce such tragedies but only if we heed the scientific evidence. That includes evidence that hands-free devices are just as distracting as traditional hand-held cellphones.

We must not allow ourselves to believe that hands-free cellphones are a safe alternative. The brain cannot safely handle attention-demanding tasks such as driving and talking on the phone at the same time. We're simply not wired that way. Just because you're holding the phone pressed up against your ear doesn't mean you're not just as distracted by the same conversation held over a speaker. According to studies using a cellphone while driving, whether hand-held or hands-free, delays reaction time as much as if the driver was under the influence of alcohol.

Surely, we know in the 21st century that our policy must be grounded in good science and the precautionary principle: where there is reasonable evidence of human risk, choose the policy that assures health and safety. Our duty as legislators and leaders is to encourage drivers to pull over to a safe place if you have to talk, and we need to provide real disincentives for people who fail to follow that common-sense advice.

Alberta's rate of cellphone use while driving happens to be double that of the national average. Clearly, the longer you're on a cellphone, the more the risk of an injury. If people are more likely to listen and talk on a cellphone that is hands free than one that is hand held, they're still increasing the risk of injury and accident.

Clearly, the province is in dire need of more comprehensive

distracted drivers legislation and the enforcement to go along with it. We have an opportunity this week to significantly reduce the death toll on the roads. I urge the members of this Assembly to do the right thing and support this bill, including the opposition amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you very much. I did, as I indicated earlier, want to make some more comments on the record on Bill 16, and I will start by tabling, as the chairman suggested, a couple of the studies I referred to.

The Chair: Hon. member, table the report at the Routine time on Monday, not today.

Dr. Taft: Even if I refer to it in debate, I can't do that? Okay. Then I won't table it.

The Chair: You can refer to it in debate today, but you table it on Monday.

Dr. Taft: Okay. It used to be that we could table things as we use them. Far be it from me to question that. I'll handle it on Monday. That's okay. That good old Speaker of ours keeps us on our toes, doesn't he, Mr. Chairman? Then I will table these on Monday.

But I did want to discuss some other issues here. One of the questions that's been put to me – and it's a reasonable question – is: well, if cellphones are so dangerous, why haven't we seen accident rates climb as the use of cellphones has spread? I think that's a very reasonable question that's worth exploring. I've made some inquiries around this. I wish I had absolutely clear evidence on it. The explanation that has been put to me is that accidents have not increased but that the rate of accidents has not declined as much as would be expected from the improvement in the quality of roads and in the performance of motor vehicles. You know, I think that's an interesting way to try to understand that. If you think of a modern car, say a car built in the last two or three years, compared to one from 20 years ago, there's a dramatic improvement in the safety of those vehicles, with airbags, antilock braking systems. In fact, the more recent ones have all kinds of warnings about ice detection on the road ahead, much better tires, all kinds of things that have been improved in cars to make them safer. As well, of course, the interior is designed with safety in mind.

It's kind of interesting to appreciate this. Once or twice a year I end up at one event or another where there are old cars there. It's part of, you know, an antique car day. You get into a car from the 1960s, and you think: "Oh my goodness. How did people drive these?" There are big pointy steel dashboards, and there are no seat belts, and there are no airbags, and they take about half a block to stop because the brakes are so weak.

So we've seen a real improvement in cars, and we've also seen a real improvement in road safety. I think that's evident in the design of the major roads in Alberta, where instead of intersections you have highways being connected through cloverleaves and interchanges, which are much, much safer. Even little things that we may not appreciate.

I mentioned earlier the loss of one of my close relatives in a car accident. I don't need to name who it was, but it was a close relative. She was driving alone down a secondary road early in the evening, fell asleep, drifted into the ditch, slammed into the abutment of an adjoining driveway – this would have been about 25

years ago – broke her neck, and died instantly from the impact. In the ensuing years those road abutments were redesigned and rebuilt so that instead of a solid wall when you hit them, they're actually sloped so that if a car drifting into the ditch hits one of these, it's not just a solid impact into earth or concrete; it's actually a sloped rise. That's had a significant impact on lowering accident rates and fatalities. If that had been the case, the woman I'm speaking of may well still be alive today.

We've seen improvements in road safety, improvements in car safety, but we haven't necessarily seen the reduction in fatalities and injuries that we might expect. That may well be explained by the widespread use of cellphones and other electronic distractions. I thought that was an important point to make, which was made to me by one of the groups I met with.

I also thought I would refer at a little bit greater length to some of the correspondence I've had from others. I need to correct myself, Mr. Chairman. I referred to a letter from April of this year from the city of Edmonton. In fact, it wasn't an official city of Edmonton letter. It was a letter from one of the city councillors, Dave Thiele, who didn't run again in the most recent election, so he's not a councillor now but was then.

Councillor Thiele wrote to me with quite a widely cited study attached by the National Safety Council, a study titled: Understanding the Distracted Brain: Why Driving while Using Hands-free Cell Phones is Risky Behaviour. What Dave Thiele suggests in his letter is that

Bill 16 must include a total ban on hands free phones. Not to do so will yield little in the way of meeting those goals.

Those goals are reducing crashes and loss of life. Mr. Thiele goes on to refer to efforts he made in 2006 to research the issue, and he says:

What hands free devices do not eliminate is cognitive distraction (taking your mind off the road). The attention that ought to be focused on the driving responsibilities is elsewhere.

4:20

So I wanted to be clear in the record, Mr. Chairman, that that letter was not from the city of Edmonton per se. It was from one specific city councillor. But it is a very good letter, and he did attach, as I said, this well-known study to it, which is one important piece of evidence in this debate.

I also wanted to elaborate a little bit on a very well-put-together handout, I guess, a double-sided handout from Students for Cellphone-Free Driving. It gives various figures in here about the number of Albertans who die or are injured in motor vehicle collisions every week. Roughly speaking, depending on the figures you read, somebody dies every day of the year in Alberta from a car crash, and many, many more, many, many times that, are injured. I would count myself among one of the injured.

This particular handout claims – and it cites a study on it, a study from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in 2006 – that “driver distraction, including the use of cellphones and other electronic devices, is responsible for up to 80% of these collisions.”

Ms Blakeman: How much?

Dr. Taft: Eighty per cent. Not just cellphone but driver distraction overall.

Ms Blakeman: So that includes the bugs and the makeup.

Dr. Taft: That would include all forms of distraction.

It goes on, and I think this is important to read into the record. I quote from this handout from Students for Cellphone-Free Driving.

If you drive while talking on your cellphone:

- You are four to six times more likely to be involved in a collision
- Your reaction time is slowed by 18%
- You double your risk of having a rear-end collision
- You increase your risk of running red lights
- You may be more impaired . . . than a legally intoxicated driver.

I won't read this whole study, Mr. Chairman, but there is one particular note I want to make about this. This handout includes several photographs down one side of it, and one of these is a photograph of a car that's come into obviously extreme collision with a large truck. I recognize that photo because it was circulated to me on the Internet. However, what was circulated to me was a complete series of photos from that accident that include shots not just of the accident, which was from a distracted driver losing track of which lane he was in and colliding head-on with a large truck, but the photos show that the bumper of the truck actually goes right through the driver's compartment, right through into the back seat of the car.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. That's good.

Dr. Taft: Well, it's important to hear this because when I saw these photos, it was quite shocking. It was almost enough to make you sick to your stomach because as the photos unfold – and I guess it was an accident scene investigator who took them – you see them ending up removing the remains of the driver from the collision. It shows a human body in multiple pieces, a human body literally pulled into parts from this collision.

I can tell you it's shocking when you think about those kinds of consequences from distracted driving. I think we need to take this legislation very seriously. So I did notice that particular photograph on this handout, and those images come to me often when I'm driving. I will move on from there, but if anybody would like to see those photos, I will forward them to you.

I want to also cite from the Alberta Motor Association letter that was sent out to me and I believe to all MLAs. I know the hon. Member for . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member. According to Standing Order 4(3), as it's 4:25, the chair shall now call to rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? The motion is carried.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, November 1.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to October 28, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cA-14.9]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c7]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c6]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c4]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c5]

- 7* Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft.), 769-82 (Apr. 14 aft.), 850-62 (Apr. 20 aft.), 869-76 (Apr. 20 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 878-84 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2010 c8]
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions; SA 2010 c2]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft.), 735-43 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-804 (Apr. 15 aft.), 868 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 878 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c9]
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 876-77 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c12]
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cW-12.5]
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft.), 743-49 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 862-65 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 885-87 (Apr. 20 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cB-4.8]
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-67 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2010 c10]
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 867 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877-78 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c11]
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c3]

- 16* Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnston)**
 First Reading -- 763 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 956-67 (Oct. 26 aft.), 980-81 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 991-98 (Oct. 27 aft., amendments agreed to), 1013-20 (Oct. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 17 Alberta Health Act (Zwozdesky)**
 First Reading -- 1010-11 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
- 18 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010 (Evans)**
 First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 984-90 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
- 19 Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
 First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 981-84 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
- 23 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)**
 First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
- 26 Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010 (Liepert)**
 First Reading -- 980 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1012-13 (Oct. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
 First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
 Third Reading -- 709 (Apr. 12 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 c13]
- 202* Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
 First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft.), 698-704 (Apr. 12 aft.), 705-09 (Apr. 12 aft., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 819-25 (Apr. 19 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cM-3.3]
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
 First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 709-10 (Apr. 12 aft.), 825-32 (Apr. 19 aft.), 836-37 (Apr. 19 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services), (Oct. 27 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
 First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 922-28 (Oct. 25 aft., adjourned)
- 205 Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act (Quest)**
 First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
- 206 Utilities Consumer Advocate Act (Kang)**
 First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
 First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 732-33 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 749 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
 Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010]
- Pr2* Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)**
 First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 733-35 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 749-50 (Apr. 13 aft.), 768 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 31, 2009]

Pr3* Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)

First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 768-69 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, November 1, 2010

Issue 36

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Ted Morton	Minister of Finance and Enterprise
David Hancock	Minister of Education, Political Minister for Edmonton
Lloyd Snelgrove	President of the Treasury Board
Iris Evans	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Ron Liepert	Minister of Energy
Luke Ouellette	Minister of Transportation
Mel Knight	Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Alison Redford	Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for Calgary
Rob Renner	Minister of Environment
Gene Zwozdesky	Minister of Health and Wellness
Yvonne Fritz	Minister of Children and Youth Services
Jack Hayden	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Ray Danyluk	Minister of Infrastructure
Mary Anne Jablonski	Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Lindsay Blackett	Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Service Alberta
Cindy Ady	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Hector Goudreau	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Len Webber	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Employment and Immigration

Parliamentary Assistants

Evan Berger	Sustainable Resource Development
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Municipal Affairs
Cal Dallas	Environment
Doug Griffiths	Finance and Enterprise
Fred Horne	Seniors and Community Supports
Broyce Jacobs	Agriculture and Rural Development
Jeff Johnson	Treasury Board
Diana McQueen	Energy
Janice Sarich	Education
Dr. Raj Sherman	Health and Wellness
Greg Weadick	Advanced Education and Technology
Teresa Woo-Paw	Employment and Immigration

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Tarchuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
DeLong
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
Allred
Anderson
Benito
Bhullar
Chase
Johnston
Notley
Rodney
Sarich
Taylor

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Bhardwaj
Deputy Chair: Mr. Chase
Amery
Fawcett
Griffiths
Hinman
Lund
Marz
Taft
Taylor
Weadick
Woo-Paw

Standing Committee on Health

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Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor
Forsyth
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Horne
Lindsay
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Hinman
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MacDonald
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Notley
Quest
Rogers

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell
Anderson
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
Pastoor
Rogers
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery Kang
Benito Lindsay
Bhardwaj McQueen
Boutilier Olson
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Drysdale Xiao
Hinman

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
Amery Lindsay
Berger McFarland
Calahasen Mitzel
DeLong Notley
Doerksen Pastoor
Forsyth Quest
Groeneveld Sherman
Hinman Tarchuk
Jacobs Taylor
Leskiw

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney
Anderson Groeneveld
Benito Kang
Calahasen Mason
Chase Olson
Dallas Sandhu
Elniski Vandermeer
Fawcett Xiao
Griffiths

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. Drysdale
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang
Boutilier
Brown
Calahasen
Cao
Forsyth
Johnson
MacDonald
Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman
Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 1, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join in in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly His Excellency Manuel Schaerer Kanonnikoff, the ambassador of the Republic of Paraguay. Also accompanying the ambassador is Mr. Branislav Popovic, the honorary consul in Calgary. This is His Excellency's first official visit to Alberta.

As the minister in charge of advanced education I was very pleased to discover that Alberta and Paraguay share a number of relationships based on learning as the Alberta Research Council has partnered with Paraguay's Moisés Bertoni Foundation to apply expertise in land planning. As a result of this partnership they've developed a land management process and a plan to improve the ecological, social, and economic capacity in one of Paraguay's most sensitive areas. We had a delightful lunch this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, where we were able to speak of a number of things, including the agricultural sector, the energy sector, and a number of the things that we are looking forward to working together on.

I would now ask that His Excellency and the honorary consul please rise in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled today to introduce the members of the EU delegation that are with us. In most of their homelands they would be going to bed about now, but they're coming here to take part in this Legislative Assembly and to observe our processes here. I'm thrilled to introduce the chair for the delegation for relations with Canada, Philip Bradbourn; Elisabeth Jeggle, who is vice-chair for the delegation; as well as Sebastian

Bodu, Ioan Enciu, Antonyia Parvanova, Anna Rosbach, Timo Soini. Accompanying them are Mr. Giovanni di Girolamo, and we have other members of the party that are here today. Mr. Speaker, they've come all this way to answer an invitation to come up and see Canadian oil sands and judge for themselves, and I give them full marks for all their meetings and their initiative today. Please join me in honouring our delegation. If they would please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today of people here to help build awareness of prostate cancer. I would like all these people to rise in the galleries following the introduction so they may receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

First of all, in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce Mr. Steve Jones, president of Prostate Cancer Canada; Mr. Irv Kipnes, co-chair of the leadership team for the Edmonton Campaign for Prostate Health, supporting the University Hospital Foundation and the Alberta Cancer Foundation. There is also Arni Goodman, chair of the Edmonton Prostate Cancer Canada network, and with them our former colleague and current Edmonton city councillor Ed Gibbons, who has successfully won his battle with prostate cancer.

Mr. Speaker, also in the members' gallery are Craig Macdonald, president of the Alberta Firefighters Association, and Brad Hoekstra, the association secretary, who are here to show their support of Movember, which I will speak about later. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, these guests are joined by more than 30 prostate cancer victims, survivors, and advocates who are here to add their significant voices to the fight against the disease.

I would ask all our guests to rise in the galleries and receive our traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 45 students from the Almadina ESL charter academy located in my constituency, Calgary-East. Mr. Speaker, the Almadina school is home to students from over 30 countries around the globe. Almadina has come a long way since its creation, producing good results, and was rated in the top 10 by the Fraser Institute. Mr. Speaker, the students are accompanied today by their teachers, Mr. El-Masri, Mr. Elladen, and Mrs. Nagassar. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to introduce some students from Wetaskiwin who are here this week for School at the Legislature. They're here from Centennial school, and they are making a significant investment of time this week to be here and learn about how government operates. I'm really happy that they can be here and see us in action. I think that in doing that, they are going to become leaders of today, not only tomorrow. They're going to go home and apply some of the things that they've learned here, I hope. They are led by their teachers, Mrs. Joann Murphy, Mrs. Dianne Zielke, Mrs. Joan Fitzner, and parent leaders Myrna Peters and Trisha Wildcat. They're in the public gallery. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members a group of 24 grade 9 students from the Ponoka composite high school. I met with them earlier today, and they are a very bright group of kids that ask good questions and tough questions. I would say that they are very well taught. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Brady Teeling and Miss Courtney MacMillan. They're in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

1:40

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 15 students and four teachers from Airdrie's own Airdrie Koinonia Christian school, or AKCS for short. They are led by their teachers Mrs. Beth Griesel, Mrs. Laura Driedger, Mrs. Dorothy Martin, and Mr. Al Strohschein. AKCS is consistently one of this province's highest performing schools, and the calibre of the graduates it produces is second to none. The middle-class Alberta parents of these students sacrifice much of their time and finances so their children can learn in a faith-promoting environment, which helps these students become highly contributing citizens of our province. I'd ask these students and their teachers to now stand, rise, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House another new Liberal caucus member, Tyler Mudrey. He joins our team this fall as administrative assistant. He's been a great help to us already this week, and our staff always do their best to support our caucus in their role as the Official Opposition. I'd ask Tyler to stand and receive the warm greetings of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the New Democratic caucus.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the NDP caucus sessional researcher, Mr. Dashiell Brasen. Named for famous detective novelist and activist Dashiell Hammett, Dashiell was born in Toronto and raised in Edmonton-Strathcona. He received a bachelor of arts in philosophy from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver this past May. He is interested in global art, culture, food, film, music, social justice, and sustainability. He remains, despite all, a lifelong fan of the Oilers. I want to welcome Dashiell to the NDP caucus and to the Legislature. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Prostate Cancer Awareness

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members may have noticed something a bit different about me today for I have temporarily abandoned the moustache I have had for years. It was

shaved off this morning on live television, on *Breakfast Television*. I have done so for an excellent cause. Today is the beginning of Movember, formerly known as November, when men start with a clean shave and grow moustaches to raise awareness and funds for prostate cancer. I would like to thank hon. members for wearing Prostate Cancer Canada's ties and scarves so that you, too, may show your support. I have to say you look wonderful.

Prostate Cancer Canada funds research and support groups all over the country and is the beneficiary partner of Movember in Canada. Today is also an opportunity to support the Edmonton Campaign for Prostate Health, which is in support of the University Hospital Foundation, the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation, and the Alberta Cancer Foundation. They have been working diligently for three years to raise enough money to build a world-class research and clinical facility right here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, prostate cancer affects 1 in 6 men, statistically about eight of us in this Chamber. No one knows that better than the hon. Member for Little Bow, who has been successfully battling this affliction. As he will tell you, it is critical for men to understand the merits of early detection through PSA blood testing and for women who have men in their lives to remind them to do so. In my role as chair of the Cabinet Policy Committee on Health I know that prevention and early detection save lives and save money in our health care system, so I am taking up this challenge today. I am going to grow back my moustache, and I'm taking pledges to do so. On behalf of all the victims, survivors, and advocates gathered here today, I hope you will wear your ties and scarves with purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Alessandro Simpatico

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago Albertans gathered to celebrate the remarkable achievements of our young people. The Great Kids awards recognized 16 great kids from ages 5 to 18, passionate and generous young people from all across the province. Today I'd like to give special attention to one of the award recipients, 11-year-old Alessandro Simpatico, who lives in our constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar and attends Holyrood elementary school. Alessandro was born with kidney disease and has been taking medication to control the condition all his life. He's been operated on 13 times, with more surgeries to come.

Alessandro has faced his disease with incredible courage. Even more impressive is that at a young age he understands the importance of helping others. Every year Alessandro puts together a team of family and friends, known as Alessandro's Peeps, to participate in the Kidney Foundation's fun run and walk. This young man's team, now close to 60 members, has raised \$20,000 for kidney disease so far, an astonishing accomplishment for such a young man.

Alessandro isn't even a teenager yet, but he's already inspired dozens of people to work together in pursuit of a cure for kidney disease. I have no doubt that Alessandro will grow up to become an even more amazing adult. I wish him, his parents, family, and friends all the best in the years to come. I'm sure they'll meet every challenge.

I would like to thank the Premier and the minister of children's services for presenting the awards two weeks ago Saturday. It was a very special occasion for the 16 winners and their families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

One Book, One Calgary Program

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reading is an essential part of our lives. It teaches, guides, encourages, informs, entertains, soothes, and connects us to each other and to the world. Calgary public library is launching One Book, One Calgary, a monthlong city-wide book club to create a shared experience through the celebration of reading, literacy, and civic engagement. To quote Mary McGrory of the *Washington Post*: “The idea is that the city that opens the same book closes it in greater harmony.”

Starting this Thursday, November 4, Calgary public library and author Aritha van Herk invite Calgarians to read *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* and to come together to share their passion, opinions, and civic pride in this city that we all call home. One Book, One Calgary is one of the most ambitious programs ever undertaken at Calgary public library, engaging civic partners, leadership organizations, artists, and entertainers to create city-wide maverick celebrations.

On the 17th of November Cowtown Creativity presents Alberta Ballet, Calgary Opera, One Yellow Rabbit theatre project, and EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts to show how their creativity fuels original works and to discuss the essential role of creativity in building a great city. Heart of the City will celebrate the importance of Calgary’s nonprofit sector. Maverick Leadership: Framework for Future on November 26 features Volunteer Calgary, the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, Youth Central, and other individuals. One hundred years of Calgary’s Chinatown, past, present, and future, on November 30 celebrates our city’s cultural diversity. Mavericks in the 21st Century Economy looks forward from three distinct vantage points: Calgary Economic Development, Calgary Chamber of Commerce, and entrepreneurs.

One Book, One Calgary is how we’re going to create a shared experience amongst Calgarians, so come join the conversation this November.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

KidSport Calgary

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m honoured to rise today to share the incredible story of KidSport Calgary, which helps families overcome barriers that prevent some children from getting into the game, gym, or studio. Focusing on economic, social, and educational needs, KidSport Calgary promotes sport as a tool to develop strong and healthy communities.

Since its inception in 1995 KidSport Calgary has never denied support to any qualified applicant. It has distributed well over \$3 million to help more than 15,000 young athletes to play in more than 50 organized sports over the past 15 years. Of the 175 chapters across Canada it is the most successful in terms of funds distributed and families assisted. However, since 2007 the number of young athletes supported has doubled while donations have risen by less than 6 per cent. Despite the challenges of balancing services and support with the need to raise more funds, I’m pleased to announce that KidSport Calgary is committed to getting more young athletes off the sidelines, building community and social relationships to make programs more readily available, and reaching new levels of financial stability.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, I’m proud and humbled to serve as honorary chair of KidSport Calgary, and I’d like to publicly thank our staff, Mark Kosak and Kaisa Christie, as well as our board chair, Ryan Proce-

viat, along with our directors: Bill Hopkins, Melina Dharma-Wardene, Simon Brockett, Beth Gerrard, Chris Protti, Devon Smibert, Joe Tucker, and Amanda Stastook.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly encourage all Albertans to visit to whatever extent they can kidsportcalgary.ca. You never know which contributing citizen, Olympian, professional athlete, or community leader you might be assisting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Additional Beds to Relieve Emergency Wait Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While Albertans wait for 20 hours in emergency rooms to get a hospital bed, there are hundreds of closed beds sitting empty, the result of this government’s mismanagement. Albertans are frustrated because they see new hospitals being built, new additions, but the number of beds does not change, and the wait-lists only get worse. My questions are for the minister of health. Is opening the emergency ward at the East Edmonton health centre included in the minister’s plan to reduce emergency room wait times?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that’s a very good question, and I’m happy to take it under direct advisement and have a look at if things can be accelerated there. At the moment the East Edmonton centre is scheduled for a phased-in approach. That’s always been the case. We know that building today with shelled-in space is a far better way to plan for the future, and we’re looking at that in the medium term of the four different phases I explained last week.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, given that there were 140 beds boarded up at the Peter Lougheed hospital last year following an expansion, how many of the beds at the Lougheed is the minister going to order opened?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ve had that discussion as well with Alberta Health Services. In fact, it goes back a few months now since we started that particular discussion because there were some beds that closed as the same number of beds opened in the east wing, as it’s called, at the Peter Lougheed Centre. What I’ve asked them to do in the immediate and short-term time frames, which are between now and Friday for immediate and going on into the middle of November and up until Christmas, is to take a look at whether or not we could open up more transition beds exactly at that site. I said the same thing about the Royal Alex.

Dr. Swann: Well, I’m not sure about transition beds, Mr. Speaker. We do need in-hospital beds.

Again to the same minister another suggestion. There is space for over a hundred beds at the closed women’s pavilion at the Royal Alex. Will the minister order that these be opened to reduce pressure on the emergency room?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Transition beds are something in the immediate zone. What I mean by immediate time zone is things that can be done within days, where you might

be able to recruit faster or you might be able to divert nurses, LPNs, and other types of care to a site. That's exactly what I've asked them to do at the Royal Alex. It's a good thing that the Lois Hole hospital opened, and it's a good thing that we have some beds there that we might be able to work with. AHS is exploring that possibility right now and has been since last week.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Nursing Recruitment

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year Alberta Health Services paid out \$23.6 million in severance to 448 nurses; \$23.6 million to buy out nurses, and now we're short-staffed and hiring again. This is the definition of mismanagement. To the minister: what is the total number of nurses that will have to be hired to staff the mysterious 250 beds that he announced two weeks ago?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's make it clear that things have changed very significantly since last year. Last year Alberta Health Services was looking at a \$1.3 billion deficit, so they had to take a look at a number of different areas. Then in January, February, and since my time, I'm happy to tell you, in fact, our government has taken over the full responsibility for that \$1.3 billion. We've brought in a five-year funding commitment, and Alberta Health Services has a whole new set of parameters under which to work going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many of these positions will be permanent, full-time positions so that Albertans may know that two years down the road these beds may still be open?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's precisely the point. Now that we have a five-year commitment of funding with predictable, stable dollars, better longer range planning is able to occur for the first time ever. Typically it's been on an annual basis. That's no longer the case. We now have a five-year funding plan. We're going to stick to it, and we're going to make sure Alberta Health Services sticks to it. In terms of the specifics you might want to put in a motion for a return, hon. member. I'll be happy to answer it.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, you didn't even answer the question. How shameful. Come on, you guys. Yap, yap, yap, and no answers.

Dr. Swann: That's why it's called question period.

What is going to be the cost of nursing overtime due to this minister's rushing out a plan to open more beds? What is going to be the cost of nursing overtime?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to take a look at that and see if we can get the exact dollars and pennies involved. The important thing is that we are responding quickly. Alberta Health Services is reacting and responding equally quickly so that we can help emergency doctors and, in turn, help patients who deserve, require, and will get the immediate care that they need. Let's keep in mind that there are a lot more good things in the health system today than some of those things that are making the press lately.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bitumen Upgrading

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan's potash resource company faces foreign takeover, and Premier Stelmach has publicly opposed the sale. Saskatchewan's potash community thanks the Premier for all his support. Albertans, on the other hand, are still left waiting for this government to support the bitumen industry upgrading in Alberta. According to his own party the Premier has failed to encourage bitumen upgrading in the province of Alberta. To the Minister of Energy: why has the government failed to meet its own targets for bitumen upgrading in the province so far?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know who the Leader of the Opposition is quoting when he makes those statements because that, in fact, is not correct. I haven't seen anywhere where anyone is saying that this government has failed. What people are saying is that we need to ensure that we get maximum value out of our resources. We are currently in the midst of negotiations with North West Upgrading, as most members of this House will know. That, I believe, Mr. Speaker, will set a template to determine what the going-forward process is under our BRIK program.

Dr. Swann: Well, since he didn't answer the question, I'll ask it again. Why have you failed to meet your own targets, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: The reason I didn't answer the question, Mr. Speaker, is because the question was irrelevant because we are meeting our own targets. It's a question of whether we're going to meet our targets 20 and 30 years down the road. As I said in my first answer, the Leader of the Opposition is basing his question on misinformation, so I'll answer the question based on information that's true.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will this government increase the proportion of upgrading done in Alberta this year? Yes or no?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we have to recognize that a significant portion of our bitumen is already being upgraded. It's being upgraded through upgraders that were constructed by the private sector over a number of years. Now, the economics have changed in the last few years. Yes, a number of investments that were going to go into upgraders are not going ahead, but that's a decision made by the private sector. If the hon. leader is suggesting that the government should go in and build upgraders in this province, we philosophically have to disagree.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Health System Governance

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our biggest mistakes in life are often the ones resulting from our failure to admit and correct our first mistakes. Our long, drawn-out royalty fiasco is a prime example. We cannot afford to do this with health care. This government has been focused on centralizing control when it should be focused on outcomes through accountability. Failure to reverse the new royalty framework before its implementation cost Albertans dearly. Failure to give decision-making authority to our hospitals is costing people their lives. To the Deputy Premier: how much more pain and suffering will Albertans endure before you correct the mistake of centralizing health care and return administration to the local level?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you. There have been a number of very positive outcomes from what we have been working on over the last several years in health care, not the least of which is having a living laboratory to increase the results from research and as well to increase the delivery mechanisms that we have for patients in Alberta. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't agree with the hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Again to the Deputy Premier: will you see that there is one manager in charge of every hospital who has authority and the mandate to make decisions about a true team delivery of health care in their own facilities?

2:00

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the current structure that we have across this province already has a system in place for that.

I'm sure the hon. minister of health would like to respond with some more of the positive things that are happening in our health care system.

Mr. Hinman: To the Deputy Premier again: will you set some real performance measures for these hospital administrators, that they will be held accountable through publicly available performance reports? Answer the question.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm quite certain that the minister of health would like to answer that question about the performance reports.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've indicated in this House and I'll indicate again that we have the five-year funding commitment. The five-year action plan is coming out very soon, and the companion piece to that will be specific performance measures. Secondly, I've already sent a directive to Alberta Health Services, after speaking with them and so on, to make sure they understood what I was asking for, to get exactly what the hon. member is looking for: some public reporting on a per individual site basis of EIPs and other numbers relative to emergency care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

East Edmonton Health Centre

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The crisis in ER wait times has continued to grow even as the government failed to act on a number of promises it made to improve the situation. One such unkept promise was the establishment of an urgent care centre in east Edmonton, which would take the pressure off the Royal Alex hospital ER, one of the busiest in the province. Given that the urgent care centre would divert up to 34,000 cases from the Royal Alexandra emergency room each year, can the minister tell us why nearly two years later the urgent care centre is still not open?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated at the time that we were there cutting the ribbon – and I know there were a few members from other parties that were there as well – that this was planned as a staged, phased-in approach. The additional services that are required will be coming, but they'll be coming in that medium to longer term basis; in other words, over the next year to maybe two and a half years. In the meantime what we're dealing with are some immediate strategies. That's why we have the four-pronged

approach that looks at things like the discharge protocol and increasing home care funding and so on.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it was not planned as a phased-in approach. I was involved with the people that were planning and building this because it's in my constituency. It was supposed to open nearly two years ago. The minister is wrong. He's wrong. What happened is they cut the funding. They didn't open it. In the meantime the Royal Alexandra hospital emergency room is backed up to the gunwales, and you have failed to take action. It was not planned, Mr. Minister. Why don't you tell us the real story?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the real story since Alberta Health Services took over. That's the only plan that I'm aware of, and that's the plan that we're proceeding under. There are a number of projects that had to be staged, phased in, or delayed because of the global economic downturn, the worst to hit this province, I might add, since 1930. But we've survived it thanks to the brilliance of the sustainability fund as brought in by our Premier and this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed frustrating when the minister is not aware of this. Given that it would only cost \$9 million to fully staff this urgent care centre, that was designed to take the pressure off the emergency room at the Royal Alex, can the minister commit to coming up with a mere \$9 million and get this thing open before the new year? Yes or no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have a facility there today that's valued at well over \$43 million. It does provide a number of services. It's approximately 80 per cent occupied today. It's performing great work for the community because that was deemed to be the first priority: provide community-based health-type information services, family clinics, and so on. So that's what's going on there. Now, as part two we'll look at the urgent care needs, the types of things that the hon. member is asking for. That's the commitment, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Manufacturing Outsourcing for Kearn Lake Project

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has failed to protect the competitive advantage of Alberta's steel fabrication industry and the workers in it. They have allowed local jobs to be exported overseas by Imperial Oil to South Korea while we've had idle shops and workers here in this province. To the minister of finance: can Imperial Oil deduct the \$250 million cost of this deal and the total cost of transporting the steel modules from South Korea through the U.S. north to Fort McMurray for . . .

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, this is the same question that the hon. member asked a week ago. The answer is the same. When that bid was let, there were not idle shops in Alberta. Everyone was fully employed here. You couldn't find anybody to even give a contract to. As I said last week, apparently he's still opposed to the free trade agreement and free trade in general. This is an exporting province. We supported the free trade agreement, and we do it because it keeps people working in a strong economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is not true.

Again to the same minister: can Imperial Oil deduct the cost of necessary upgrades to roads and bridges in Montana and in Idaho from the royalty bill here in Alberta? Yes or no?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just said, "That is not true." What's not true? That we weren't at full capacity from 2005 to 2008? That the economy of this province hasn't almost doubled since the adoption of the free trade agreement? I recommend the hon. member freshen up on economics.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of finance. At the time that deal was set, unemployment in Alberta in the steel fabrication industry was at an all-time high and our shops were idle, and you know it.

Now, my third question is: when you were running for leader of the Progressive Conservative Party in 2006, did you get any donations from Imperial Oil for your leadership campaign? Yes or no?

Dr. Morton: Those questions shouldn't even be asked, much less answered, but just for the hon. member, the answer is no.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Provincial Sales Tax

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every few months or so the issue of a provincial sales tax arises, and this is especially true as budget deliberations are taking place. I've spoken with many constituents over the last two and a half years and again this past weekend at our AGM in Calgary. I spoke with many delegates who have heard time and again that the Premier has said no to the possibility of a provincial sales tax. They do not want it, and I do not want it. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Can you clearly, once and for all tell Albertans now whether you or your ministry is considering the implementation of a provincial sales tax in Alberta?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no, the medium answer is no, and the long answer is no. The Alberta government has no intention whatsoever of introducing this. The Premier has been unequivocal on numerous occasions: there's no such intention or plan. This is just a desperate fundraising trick by the fourth party, or whatever they are, to raise some money. They have to cancel their own fundraising dinner, so they're using tricks.

The good news here, Mr. Speaker, is that the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act ensures no sales tax until a referendum. Albertans will have the final word on whether there will ever be a sales tax in this province.

Mrs. McQueen: Finally, Mr. Speaker, to the President of the Treasury Board. I understand that last year and again this year you met with stakeholders to discuss budgeting and spending plans for the future. Have you been hearing from them about the idea of a sales tax? The folks that I speak to are not in favour of a provincial sales tax in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have in the last couple of years engaged a process of bringing in a diverse groups of stakeholders from across the province to talk about our budget. We talk about more spending. We talk about less spending. We talk about more taxes, less taxes. More importantly, we listen to them, and through that process we brought forward a budget that Albertans overwhelmingly supported. Only two groups, as the finance minister has said, seem to be determined to talk about a provincial sales tax: media that are desperate for a story and a wild Alliance party that's desperate for money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2002 this government agreed to develop a plan for maintaining its schools, hospitals, roads, and other infrastructure. Five years later the Auditor General reported that the government had not developed any plan. In 2007 the Auditor General recommended developing objectives, timelines, and targets. Three years later the Auditor General is reporting no meaningful progress on this and no objectives, no timelines, no targets, no public reporting. To the President of the Treasury Board. One of the priorities in your mandate letter from the Premier is building tomorrow, but it seems that this government is badly stuck in yesterday. How can Albertans trust this government to build for tomorrow when it cannot get its house in order today?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, one thing that Albertans can be very proud of is one of the few provinces that actually has a long-term capital plan, a fully funded long-term capital plan with input from all over Alberta. The Auditor General has stated that there is more work to do to make sure that our members have all the information needed to make sure that we're getting the best value for our money, but our Premier has committed the ministers of Infrastructure and Transportation, and all the ministers spending capital have committed to a process that recognizes the requirement for long-term sustainability, maintenance, and dependability.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's why we've got long wait lines at the emergency hospital. I'd rather have infrastructure like airport tunnels not being built.

To the minister again: what kind of example are you setting for the rest of the government when there is no meaningful progress to maintaining the infrastructure that drives Alberta's growth?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it is not just as simple as build a hospital and open immediately. It takes millions of dollars in staffing and training to do it. If the hon. member would just take two minutes off his fixation about Calgary tunnel and go drive around Calgary or drive anywhere in Alberta and see the hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in health infrastructure, he would have to change his tune.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about the tunnel vision on their side of the House, not with me. That's a very vital project for Calgary and for southern Alberta.

Now to the Minister of Infrastructure: why is this government

continuing to neglect recommendations of the Auditor General with regard to its reporting obligations? Do you have some kind of hidden agenda, sir?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, this government and our ministry have a consistent message in tracking the physical condition of schools, health facilities, and postsecondary institutions. Secondly, we agree with the Auditor General's report, and we have taken over the tracking of those facilities in 2009. In a five-year period we do track and monitor the buildings on a consistent basis, and we will continue to do that. It is our job, and we will do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Wetland Policy

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Environment. In 2008, after extensive consultation with almost a thousand stakeholders, the Alberta Water Council submitted recommendations for a wetlands policy that included a nonconsensus goal of no net loss, meaning for every wetland loss one must be replaced. What is this government doing with this wetlands policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, just this past weekend we had an opportunity to talk with a number of the significant stakeholders that will be working with us to fully flesh out this policy. We had a recommendation that came from the Alberta Water Council that provided us with a tremendous amount of detail and advice, and we have accepted all of the consensus recommendations. On one of the nonconsensus recommendations we have asked for some further review and further study.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Is this government developing a wetlands policy that considers economic impact to business over protection of wetlands?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this is one of those subjects that tends to take on a black-and-white or an either/or focus. Frankly, that's not the case in this instance, nor is it the case in most instances. What we are looking at is a way that we can maintain that kind of balance. How can we continue to have economic growth and protect the environment at the same time? That's why we're focusing on the functionality of wetlands and trying to develop a policy that will protect wetlands based upon function.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Wetlands losses continue. We need consistent provincial direction for effective wetlands management. When will this government take meaningful action to protect Alberta's wetlands?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear to all members of the House that we do now have a wetlands policy. What we're doing is improving and increasing the value of that wetlands policy, so I can assure this member that there is ongoing protection of

wetlands. There will be ongoing protection of wetlands. What we're doing is developing a policy that will do it even better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

School Board Governance

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has created governance confusion regarding appointing school trustees. Over the past decade this government has undermined local school authority by firing the Calgary public board, formerly chaired by the sitting MLA for Calgary-Mackay, which included Danielle Smith, who is hoping for better electoral luck second time out. Most recently the entire board of the Northland school division was fired by this minister. To the minister: what's to stop you or a faction of a closely divided board from tipping the scales in their favour by stacking the board with short-leashed, subservient lapdogs?

Mr. Hancock: The public of Alberta, who looks for openness and accountability and transparency and process and understands the political process and the governance process, obviously, far better than this hon. member.

What we're talking about, really, is transforming education. When we're talking about transforming education, we're talking about what good governance looks like, not good government, not just the election of a board, which is one level of government in education, or the provincial government, which is another level of government in education, but a community governance model which will bring all voices to the table in understanding how we create the best opportunity for our students.

Mr. Chase: More and more we're seeing appointments, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to elections. Electoral process in this province is undermined. Who will decide which groups are sufficiently underrepresented to require an appointed trustee: school boards or the minister?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody has yet decided that there will be any appointed trustees. What we're talking about is: what's the right kind of governance model which involves all those people whose voices should be heard to ensure that our children get the education they need? I would point the hon. member to the fact that right now you can appoint members to a board in certain circumstances. For example, where First Nations students are educated by a provincial board, there's an opportunity for that board to have a First Nation representative on the board if they wish to do so, and there's at least one board in this province that has taken that opportunity to do so.

Mr. Chase: And there's the Northland school division, where 24 First Nations or Métis representatives were fired by this minister.

To the minister: would the government support further undermining the democratic process by appointing people to municipal councils to speak for supposedly underrepresented interests? How is education any different?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely surprised because just before this question from this hon. member questions came from the other hon. members about what the Auditor General said about capital. What the Auditor General said about capital in Education is that he's surprised that a school was built that the school board

didn't own. I don't know what the hon. member would have expected me to do to a school board who built schools on property they didn't own and didn't open them for a year. I don't know what kind of accountability that hon. member wants, but if we need to have appropriate representation on boards, we'll have a discussion with the stakeholders, with the public, and with this House before anybody is appointed to a public board.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Harmonized Sales Tax Payments by Albertans

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July of this year the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario replaced their provincial sales tax with the harmonized sales tax, or HST. Constituents are suggesting to me that some services purchased in Alberta are actually subject to this tax even though it's not an Alberta tax. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Is this true, and to what extent are Albertans being affected by the HST in Ontario and B.C.?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, it is true, and we're taking steps to remove it. Overall, most Albertans will be largely unaffected by this change in the HST in Ontario and British Columbia, but there are two areas where the HST is potentially being levied on Albertans. The first is when Albertans mail a parcel over \$5 to a province in which HST is being collected, such as Ontario or B.C., and the second, even more serious in my view, is that when an Albertan is purchasing a mutual fund or other financial service through a financial institution, the cost of HST to that financial institution may be passed along to the purchaser, including a resident of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Isn't it true that there are federal rules surrounding mutual funds that protect Albertans from having to pay HST?

2:20

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the federal rules allow mutual fund companies the flexibility to avoid passing on HST to residents of non-HST provinces like Alberta, but they do not require it. The fact is most of the brokers, most of the institutions are not doing that. It's important to consider this also in the larger context of retirement savings. Here we are working with the federal government to try to encourage Albertans and other Canadians to save money for retirement, and all of a sudden now they're going to start taxing it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister: given that there are situations where Albertans are clearly and unfairly impacted by HST levied in other provinces, what is the minister going to do about it?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've sent not one, not two, but three letters to the Minister of Finance protesting against this effect on Alberta. I've indicated that it's completely unfair, that it's an accountability issue. You can't have taxation without representation. Many elections are fought on taxation. Is it too high, or is it too low? The principle of our government is that the government,

the tax collectors, have to be accountable to the people, the taxpayers. Here we have a situation where one government is collecting taxes from people in another province who can do nothing about it. It's unfair, and I'll continue to work to make sure it doesn't go any further.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

No-net-loss Wetland Policy

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The range and frequency of this government's capitulation to big industry's every whim at the expense of long-term community sustainability is awe inspiring. After two years an expert panel came up with the plan aimed at protecting provincial wetlands, but at the eleventh hour reps from mining, oil, and gas balked and resorted to the tried-and-true method of going behind closed doors to their friends in the PC government. To the Minister of Environment: why have you sold out the majority of Albertans by abandoning the wetlands no-net-loss policy that the vast majority of your own panel recommended?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this is always a difficult situation, to develop a policy that will serve all parts of the province. I think the difficulty that we faced was that we were asked to implement a policy that was, in effect, one size fits all, and one size doesn't fit all. So in that same report they indicated that in the long term they would like to see a function-based management system put into place, and we have agreed. We're now suggesting that we should be working with the stakeholders to determine how we would implement a function-based rather than a simplistic one for all.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that 23 of 25 expert representatives from industry, community, and environmental protection groups endorsed the plan and given that they reached this conclusion after studying the issue for over three years and consulting with over a thousand stakeholders, why won't the minister admit that he has backed down once again to his friends in big oil and mining and that his plan will compromise Alberta's water protection regime for generations to come?

Mr. Renner: Because it's not true, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that we had a report that came from an organization that is asked to try and reach a consensus. A consensus means that all of the affected parties are able to live with it. Some recognized that in some instances it's not everything that they wanted, but in other instances it is. In this particular case there was a nonconsensus. Not all of the parties could live with the results. It's up to us now to try and figure out a system that will allow all of the parties to be involved.

Ms Notley: Given that industry announced that it had successfully lobbied government to allow for continued industrial destruction of Alberta's wetlands last March, seven months before the minister had the courage to go public with this shameful decision, will the minister now admit that regardless of the majority acceptance of scientific evidence citing the need to maintain wetlands for Alberta's water sustainability, when mining and oil say, "Jump," the minister's only response will always be, "How high?"

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there was a total unanimous agreement within the room that I spoke to on Friday – it included industry; it included environmental organizations; it included municipalities –

that we need to do something. In the absence of a policy that would be a no-net policy, working towards something that is better than what we have right now is a laudable goal and is something that we can achieve. I think we need to move in that direction.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Fort Chipewyan Health Research Agreement

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier was handed an air ticket to personally visit, I think for the first time, Fort Chip. In response the Premier said that he hasn't visited Fort Chip because he's waiting for a local chief to sign an agreement on health research. This is the first time I've heard of the Premier waiting for a local signature before he visits a community in Alberta. What involvement has the Minister of Aboriginal Relations had in developing this agreement, and would he table it in this Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question. It's not too often that I get questions from the opposition on aboriginal issues, so thank you for that. I've been up to Fort Chip on a couple of occasions, and I've met with Grand Chief Allan Adam regarding the LOI, the letter of intent, with respect to the health study. It's an ongoing process. There's a lot of debate, a lot of discussions over it, and we are working toward some type of an agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. Some type of an agreement. All right.

Let's try the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that health concerns are the number one issue for the residents of Fort Chip, what role has the Minister of Health and Wellness played in drafting this agreement that we just heard about, and will he table it in the Assembly?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to make that available once it's fully signed, but clearly we're not releasing something – and I'm sure they aren't either – until it has that final signature in place. In response to the first question, because I have the lead role on this file and have had for the past couple of years, I've been up there myself I think six times now. I've met with that leadership on a number of occasions, and a lot of progress has been made. But in fairness they wanted a little bit more time so that the chief could maybe sign off if that's his wish. He wanted to check with some elders. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations was integral to that meeting as well, as were the Minister of Environment and others. So good progress is in the works.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations since he wants some more questions. Reflecting on what we've just heard, it would seem to be that it's this government's position that the ball is in the court of the First Nations to sign this agreement and that they're actually delaying and dawdling and being unco-operative. Are they?

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, these are complex issues, and it takes time for us to develop some type of a baseline study. We continue

to work with the grand chief and with all the chiefs up in that area. Hopefully, in a short time we'll have something resolved there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Disaster Recovery Program for Flood Damage

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past summer the province experienced a number of severe weather events that hit residents hard, resulting in seven active disaster recovery programs across Alberta. I'm particularly interested in the largest disaster, across southern Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I can say that emergency management responded immediately, but still my constituents are asking: why does it seem that the government just doesn't seem to understand or care about how they're being impacted by the floods during the emergency?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, southern Alberta was clearly the hardest hit, and we're very, very fortunate and relieved that no lives were lost. The government quickly activated its operations centre to co-ordinate the emergency response during the critical first hours and days after the event. There were a number of ministers that toured the area to see the damage first-hand so that we could get a sense of what needed to be done. Of course, we immediately began work on our disaster recovery program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: as it's been over four months since the event and \$203 million was announced for southern Alberta, why hasn't all that assistance reached the people hardest hit by the flood?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, residents and farmers and our small businesses are our priority, especially in the hardest hit areas, areas like the community of Irvine. They do come first. To date 85 per cent of the residential applicants have received payments. As with most disasters we'll follow up with the municipal costs that are involved. Recognizing the severity of the situation, again in certain parts, under my direction we opened up an office in Irvine to deal directly with those affected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:30

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've heard from constituents that the disaster recovery program needs to be more responsive to the needs of flood victims and given that the standards and guidelines for recovery were never set up to address this never-before type of flood, will the program be reviewed?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we always review our programs and have already made some very positive changes when it comes to the flood and flood damage. We didn't wait for the program to end. As an example, we removed the \$300,000 cap for assistance. We've eliminated the 20 per cent income requirement for farming operations. These changes are retroactive to July 1 and apply to all of our current applicants right across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Medical Procedure Wait Times

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wait Time Alliance was created by Canada's leading medical association to address concerns the medical community had about growing wait times. In its most recent report card two provinces received a failing grade, Alberta being one of them. Why? Because this government failed to provide any data to the group. Not only is that an insult to the medical community, but frankly it's an insult to all Albertans. My questions are to the minister of health. Why didn't you provide the data to the Wait Time Alliance when you continually talk about being open and accountable to Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to take a look into the details. I'm not sure what period in time is being requested or referred to here, but I will tell the hon. member that I'll have a look into that matter as soon as I leave the House.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I just don't know what to say.

Again to the same minister: when will you table a comprehensive list of wait times in Alberta so Albertans will have the real picture on how their health care system is performing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. That's a good question. Mr. Speaker, as people here would know, we did have a wait-list registry that was up on the website, where people could go and look, for example, to see how quickly they could get in for a hip operation. Unfortunately, there were some computer difficulties, I'm told, that developed about a year ago, so the site had to be taken down, but one of the priorities for Alberta Health Services is to get it back up and functioning.

Secondly, I've also asked for public reporting on, specifically, emergency room wait times from Alberta Health Services on a per-site basis, and that is in motion as we speak.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, again, we knew about the wait times. We knew about the computer glitch. That should be an emergency because it's urgent for Albertans to find out.

To the same minister: will you commit right here and right now to participating in the 2011 Wait Time Alliance report card?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as soon as I have a chance to read it through and discuss it with the people who are delivering the service, I'll be happy to undertake the proper response to that question. But I want to make it clear that we have just gone through the single largest amalgamation in Canadian history, of 90,000 employees, and there were some bumps and bruises along the way. Those are being sorted out, including the wait-list registry.

Market Access to China

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, in June the federal government announced that Canada had secured an agreement with China on staged market access for beef and tallow. I know Alberta's industry is trying to reduce its dependence on its beef trade with the U.S., and China is considered a priority market in our efforts to diversify. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Could the minister tell us what our provincial government is doing to advance our trade with China?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are right now working with our federal government in negotiating trade protocols with China. We have been working through a trade mission with the New West Partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan to advance the interests of our agriculture industry in Asia. A number of meetings with Chinese government officials, meat-purchasing agencies, and retailers have shown that there is an amazing market available for us, and we're there developing it.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the agriculture minister mentioned his New West Partnership Asia mission. Was it just about beef, or did the minister highlight any other products while he was there?

Mr. Hayden: No, Mr. Speaker. There were a number of products that were highlighted, and it was very interesting to see the Asian market's taste for our honey out of northern Alberta, as an example, the huge business that we do with them on canola and a number of other products. Of course, along with our partners there was salmon from British Columbia, the fruit industry. There are all kinds of opportunities.

Mr. Drysdale: Again to the same minister: in addition to advancing the trade of our commodities, are there any other benefits to these international relationships between our industry and the industries in China and Japan?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely. There are other opportunities, Mr. Speaker. We have industry people from China and Japan that are actually in our research centres in Leduc right now testing Alberta products and building them to the taste preferences of their market. It creates all kinds of opportunities when you meet in communities with people whose cities are as large as our entire population in Canada. The opportunities there are wonderful, and the people really want to do business.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

No-net-loss Wetland Policy

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've had the interim policy on wetlands in place for approaching three decades, we've had the minister's own Water Council give recommendations two years ago, and here we're hearing the minister today explaining the current stall to a lack of consensus on wetland issues. Well, the opposite of consensus is hostage taking. To the Minister of Environment: why is the minister abdicating his leadership and allowing CAPP and the Alberta Chamber of Resources to be the hostage takers and derail this process?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be very, very clear. There is a significant amount of consensus already in place. There were a number of recommendations where we are in fact proceeding along the very lines that were outlined. The report that came from the Water Council suggested that there needed to be more emphasis on the functionality of wetlands, and they were almost talking about interim. They said: in the interim no net loss.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Exactly my point: hostage taking.

Given that cumulative effects do not mean protecting one aspect

of an ecosystem while neglecting another, why is this administration moving forward with the land-use plan with accelerated development before implementing a wetlands policy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's just face some realities here. When we're talking about a no-net-loss policy in a region that already is more than 50 per cent wetlands, there could be some instances where someone would be expecting to replace a wetland by eliminating a much more valuable upland. That's why you have to have a policy that talks about functionality, that talks about protecting wetlands of the highest value. Not all wetlands are the same, and that's why we need a policy that recognizes that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. To the same minister. Here's a reality check for you. We've lost 60 per cent of the wetlands in this province while this minister has been dragging his heels on this policy. Why does the Environment minister always default to the Department of Energy when it comes to environmental protection? Why?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the Environment department defaults to the Environment department. I can guarantee the member that that simply is not the case.

As to her assertion that there has been a 60 per cent decrease in wetlands since I have been the minister, it's absolutely ludicrous. Why would she make a ridiculous statement like that?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Canadian Dollar Value

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian currency exchange rate was forecasted back in the first quarter, but ever since the loonie has continued to climb in value, hovering around parity for the past few weeks. Many people consider this a good-news story, but in certain respects this is terrible news. My first question is for the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. How drastically has this affected the Alberta budget? Is it to the point where the minister needs to go back to the drawing board?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. The loonie has appreciated vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar, and it does have a significant impact on government of Alberta revenues. A 1-cent change in the exchange rate translates into a \$215 million drop in government revenues – 1 cent equals a \$215 million drop in revenue – and with the loonie getting towards parity recently, obviously it's a concern. It's on our radar. That's why at first quarter we readjusted our projection from 95 cents to 96.75 cents and projected that that will cost us approximately \$375 million in lost revenue.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Some of those numbers are alarming, and it's indeed possible this isn't just a volatile, short-term issue. It may become a long-term trend. What is the minister doing to counteract this?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, on the recent trip I made to New York and Toronto, meeting a lot with many of the banks and banking agencies, we discussed this at length. The general consensus is that the Canadian dollar is going to range between 95 cents and \$1.05 over the next number of years. That's the new range. Again, when we do our second-quarter update at the end of this month, we'll be looking at that and making the appropriate adjustments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. Albertans deserve some details. What specific actions is the minister taking to offset pressures of the high dollar value on our government's fiscal plan?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated when I tabled the budget back in February, we're an export-based economy, and what happens in the rest of the world affects what happens here in Alberta. I also pointed out at that time that while we cannot control revenues, we can control expenditures. That's what we're working on right now as we prepare the budget for Budget 2011.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-answer period for today. Eighteen members were recognized. There were 106 questions and responses.

We will return to the main Routine with additional members' statements momentarily, but in the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Jason Bedard and his beautiful wife, Leslie Bedard. Leslie ran for alderman in ward 4 in the last civic election in Calgary. The Bedards are very close friends of the family – that is, my family – and they've been a great help to me during my campaigns and elections. I'd like Jason and Leslie to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we'll revert to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Grimma-Alberta Flood Damage Fundraising Exchange

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2003 due to a heavy rainfall crisis in the republic of Czechoslovakia and in Poland decisions were made to open floodgates on many dams in order to save their structures and prevent local flooding. As a result water gathered and flowed down the Elbe River and in a short time totally flooded the city of Grimma and the surrounding province of Saxony in Germany. The province of Saxony is twinned with the province of Alberta, and the Elbe River flows right through this 1,000-year-old city.

Mr. Speaker, the German consul, the hon. Bernd Reuscher, along

with officials from Leduc were in the Saxony area very shortly after the flood in 2003 and saw the devastation for themselves. Upon returning to Edmonton, Consul Reuscher organized a benefit concert, and over \$30,000 was raised. This was then matched by the Alberta government through the Wild Rose Foundation. Alberta was the only province and Albertans were the only people from around the world to come to the aid of the city of Grimma.

As fate would have it, Mr. Speaker, the very same mayor and council of Grimma were in Leduc very shortly after the flood this year in June in Medicine Hat and in Irvine in southeast Alberta. Upon hearing about the flood and seeing the devastation on TV, they immediately set in motion the required process to provide a donation by way of a cheque for €15,000, approximately \$21,000, for the victims of the flood here. On October 15 this cheque was presented by Consul Reuscher to the Medicine Hat community foundation to address such things as mid- and long-term financial burdens of victims of the flood.

On behalf of the citizens and, in particular, the flood victims I wish to express our sincere and heartfelt thanks to the city of Grimma in the province of Saxony, Germany, for their very kind generosity. Thank you as well to German Consul Bernd Reuscher for his initiative and work on this. It is so much appreciated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Building Trades of Alberta Courage Centre

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the opening of the Glenrose hospital Courage Centre. The centre is an initiative of the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation and the Building Trades Council of Alberta. The Courage Centre has been established to create an environment where new beginnings are born and nurtured using the latest and, I must say, somewhat amazing advances in rehabilitation technology.

Mr. Speaker, since its opening in 1964 the Glenrose rehabilitation hospital has made significant strides towards enhancing rehabilitative care in our province. The province has established itself on an international level as a place for excellence in neurological, orthopaedic, cardiac, geriatric, and pediatric rehabilitation care. Serving over 20,000 families a year, the Glenrose is one of the largest free-standing tertiary rehabilitation centres in North America. The Glenrose hospital is unique to Alberta. Staff at the Glenrose are committed to the provision of complex and specialized rehabilitation care for all ages. They know that rehabilitation helps to restore a person to the way they were prior to their illness or injury.

The foundation has raised close to \$10 million towards projects like the Alberta Courage Centre. For two years the foundation focused its efforts on funding this new state-of-the-art facility in the hospital, and on November 4 the Building Trades of Alberta Courage Centre will open its doors. Mr. Speaker, for most people technology makes things easier, but for someone with a disability technology makes things possible.

Thank you to the Glenrose foundation and all the generous donors for making the Alberta Courage Centre a reality. You give people with disabilities a chance, but most of all you give them hope. Your dedication to helping those who deal with the daily challenges of disabilities is truly inspirational.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Lethbridge College and U of Lethbridge Achievements

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As parliamentary assistant

to the minister of advanced education and innovation I've had many opportunities over the past several months to tour and meet with people from many of Alberta's excellent postsecondary institutions. Today, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about a couple of recent milestones from my own neck of the woods, Lethbridge.

First, I'd like to recognize Lethbridge College for receiving a business of the year award from the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce in the innovation category. The college received the award in recognition of its commitment to excellence and innovation. Its recent collaborations with industry have challenged the college to find solutions to real-life problems. The award cited the college's partnership in the living home project, a partnership with Cedar homes in Lethbridge, and its patent application for Simleggings, a medical training innovation. Applied research is an integral part of college programming and often comes with groundbreaking results. This award recognized the advanced efforts of students, faculty, and staff towards building a knowledge-based economy. I'm sure Lethbridge College President Tracy Edwards is very proud of this award.

It's also my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to speak about another event. I was able to join our Premier and a number of our southern MLAs at the grand opening of Markin Hall at the University of Lethbridge on October 21. Markin Hall is a \$65 million project that boasts western Canada's first commodity trading laboratory, a nursing skills lab with simulated patients, and an addictions counselling lab with the latest digital recording technology for individual, family, and group sessions. This government invested \$50 million of the cost with another \$3 million coming from Dr. Allan Markin, the chairman of Canadian Natural Resources and part owner of the Calgary Flames. Markin Hall provides better teaching space for about 550 health sciences students, giving them the opportunity to learn by doing in the simulated health field. Markin is also home to western Canada's first commodity trading lab and provides students with hands-on experience in derivatives trading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:50

Bill 20

Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce for first reading Bill 20, the Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010.

This legislation will amend the existing Class Proceedings Act. This act facilitates the efficient handling of cases of mass wrong, commonly referred to as class-action lawsuits. It also provides improved access to justice for those whose claims may not otherwise be brought forward and can encourage actual or potential wrongdoers to change their behaviour. These amendments will improve and update current legislation and are consistent with the recommendations made by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada and the courts.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 20 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Bill 21
Wills and Succession Act

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to request leave to introduce for first reading Bill 21, the Wills and Succession Act.

This act will amalgamate five pieces of legislation into a single statute that covers wills, intestacy, beneficiary designations, survivorship, and family support, making it easier for Albertans to use and understand. This legislation will also modernize and update the law to reflect the current financial and social realities of Albertans, and it will provide Albertans with clear, easy-to-find, and easy-to-understand rules for estate planning.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 21 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 22
Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 22 will incorporate amendments to three different enactments in the family law area: firstly, the Family Law Act; secondly, the Maintenance Enforcement Act; and thirdly, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act. Through Bill 22 we will update legislation to ensure that children born using assisted human reproduction have certainty about their legal parents, establish parents as guardians of their children, and abolish the status of illegitimacy, which is no longer relevant in Alberta law.

Bill 22 will also enhance administrative fairness and increase efficiencies and regularity of payment for Alberta's maintenance enforcement program. It will also address contact information requirements for clients and how insufficient funds payments and overpayments are treated at law. Also included in this bill are amendments that will benefit families by making child and spousal support orders between Albertans and parties in other jurisdictions easier to establish, to vary, and to enforce.

Mr. Speaker, these changes increase service, improve efficiencies, provide clarity, and streamline process. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 24
Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes
Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to request leave to introduce Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage

Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, carbon capture and storage, or CCS, technology is fundamental to Alberta's clean-energy pursuits in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Passage of this act will clarify poor space ownership, ensure that the province accepts long-term liability for injected carbon dioxide, and creates a stewardship fund, financed by CCS operators, which will be used for remedial and ongoing monitoring costs.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 25
Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I also request leave today to introduce Bill 25, the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, the current act needs to be updated to align with current industry practices, and these proposed amendments will ensure that business practices comply with freehold mineral tax legislation, recognize the electronic transmission of documents, update auditing provisions to be consistent with the provisions of the Mines and Minerals Act, and update appeal provisions to be consistent with other tax legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Bill 208
Recall Act

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a pleasure to request leave to introduce Bill 208 for first reading.

I'm very pleased. Bill 208 is a recall act, a true accountability act. Recall is based on a very simple principle. Elected officials are not only accountable to voters on election day but every day. Being elected does not generate an entitlement. It is a privilege that must be revokable if the voters are to be truly empowered. Four or five years is a long time for citizens to have to wait if their MLA suddenly promotes their own hidden agenda or acts in some way that dissolves the trust and respect of the voters. This is even more the case when a politician is not planning to run for office again. When this is the case, the threat of election day becomes meaningless, and an MLA can accordingly misrepresent constituents to an unacceptable degree without fear of any consequences.

Some no doubt have fear of an act like this bringing instability to government. To this I counter that it does not do so in many jurisdictions in North America in which proper recall provisions are in place. The threshold in this act is high enough that there will not be any frivolous attempts that will succeed in triggering an election. In this act 33 per cent of the eligible voters must sign a petition that clearly explains why recalling the member is warranted. Canvassers are required to be residents of Alberta for six months and cannot be paid for their efforts. This helps to ensure that the recall effort will be a grassroots movement and not something paid for by a wealthy minority or interest groups outside of Alberta. The signatures must be collected within 60 days. This is about as short a window as one would expect a campaign like this to work but ensures that the political uncertainty is minimized.

In conclusion, this bill is about ensuring that the people of Alberta are the ones holding the power and that when elected representatives no longer represent the people, they have a process that allows them to remove politicians with hidden agendas who are not putting the interests of the people first. Recall is the only 24/7 way to hold elected people accountable and in check. If we want people to be engaged in politics, then they must be empowered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition and a letter received in my office over the summer months. This petition states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to inform the Health Minister along with the provincial health . . . board to give Dr. Wardell's pain clinic in Medicine Hat . . . the adequate funds to keep it from closing as of July 1st 2010. Also those funds need to be budgeted for in up coming budgets so he along with his patients do not experience this hardship again [past 2012].

The letter also reflects this opinion and thanks the minister for addressing this with the two-year interim funding.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've now arrived at the point of 3 o'clock. It's been the practice that if we are in a part of the Routine that we've already started, we'll go to the end of it before I come back to the standing order provision.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

3:00

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. All of them, I think, are important and interesting. The first is copies of a ruling written by Judge Wheatley in the case of Frick versus Her Majesty the Queen. I particularly draw members' attention to paragraphs 19, 20, and 21, where, for example, it says: "For an accused without the means to pay for a lawyer, the current situation in Alberta is troublesome." It goes on to elaborate on this. I am doing this on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

My second tabling is perhaps for the enlightenment of the Minister of Health and Wellness or for all members and to make sure that it's in the record. The minister announced a couple of weeks ago that he was establishing benchmarks and so on. What I'm tabling today are simply copies of the same benchmarks that have been published by Alberta Health Services going back two years. So his announcement was really something that's been in place for a long time and shows no improvement in that time.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, a tabling that may reinforce my reputation as an egghead; I'm not sure. Last week I referred to King Canute, and very few members of the Assembly knew who King Canute was, actually, to my dismay. Some members of this Assembly whose heritage might even stem from King Canute didn't know who he was, so I am tabling a brief history of who King Canute was. He was a very important man.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today documents that, in fact, I was prepared to table last Thursday.

This is a copy of the letter that was signed by over 300 individuals in person and an additional 300 people online. It is the letter from the Stand with Fort Chip group directed to the government of Alberta and specifically to the hon. Premier. It lists their concerns and, of course, accompanied the round-trip plane ticket that the students and the Stand with Fort Chip group delivered to the Premier. Later he agreed he would indeed be visiting this area. This is a copy of the letter and the signatures supporting it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a letter from constituent Susan Wright, who has written a letter to the health minister detailing the ordeal that her daughter spent twice in the health care system when she had a gall bladder attack and subsequent complications because of the first ordeal.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report by the Canadian Labour Congress titled How It Works (for Everyone). This report refers to the advantages of a modest increase in CPP contributions that would result in extra benefits for workers when they retire.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter received from over 50 parents of special-needs students from across Alberta. The letter outlines their disagreement with the government's plan for students with special needs and the lack of adequate funding they receive. They do not support the initiative of forcing special-needs students to attend the same classrooms as regular students unless it is clearly beneficial to all students involved.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure today to introduce you to the new pages that we have by way of a brochure that we've just recently produced called Page Biographies: Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 27th Legislature, Third Session, Fall 2010. Take a couple of minutes just to go through this to see these remarkable young people.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Sour Gas Well Blowout

Q40. Mr. Taylor asked that the following question be accepted. How much gas has been released as a result of the sour gas blowout near Hythe that occurred on February 24, 2010?

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By way of background on the 24th of February of this year a sour gas well belonging to Canadian Natural Resources blew out very near the community of Hythe, about 19 kilometres northwest of Hythe, and it continued to burn for,

I think, some 13 days before the ERCB approved a plan to regain control of the well. The plan, as I understand it, was successful.

This is not a question, Mr. Speaker, that seeks to determine the degree or the level to which the health of nearby residents may have been affected by release of sour gas because it was pretty clear at the time that there was a fairly insignificant amount of sour gas that may actually have been released into the atmosphere. It's more about how much gas went up in smoke, if you will, during those 13 days. The follow-up question is going to relate, as I will discuss at the appropriate time, to what they may have cost the province of Alberta in forgone royalties.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The kind of information that this hon. member is attempting to seek is impossible to provide, and it's for that reason that I would ask the Legislative Assembly to reject the question. As a bit of background this was a flaming gas well that blew while in the drilling stage. Measuring the flow from an uncontrolled gas well at that stage is impossible. The measurement comes after the drilling has been finished and has gone into the test stage. As a result, there is really nothing that I can table to assist the hon. member. What I can say is that the ERCB investigation into this blowout is continuing. I would hope that within the next couple of months we would have that report. That report will become public, and if there is anything that the ERCB during its investigation could add relative to the amount of gas that may have been lost as a result of this blowout, we're more than happy to provide it. But I would have to ask that the Assembly reject the question primarily because the information is not available.

The Speaker: Others to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that perhaps sometimes when we ask a question it opens up another door, and we see the reverse side of the question. Perhaps the other side and why this is a valid question to answer is because of the numerous applications that are sitting in front of the ERCB, where those wells are not allowed to be drilled because we're not processing it in a timely manner. I think to see what happens in the 13 days when a well has run wild and got out of control – what would it be like to see the other side, where a company has waited six months or a year or been denied access just because they don't have their act together or there isn't clarity in it. I mean, I've spoken to companies that have made application up in the Lloydminster area. It has taken a short six weeks in Saskatchewan, and we're waiting up to two years here in Alberta.

I think it's significant to see how much royalty we are actually losing not because of the little bit that is being lost to a blowout like that but because we're not drilling. I think it would also be interesting to show the world the amount of flaring that takes place in other jurisdictions and to show how environmentally responsible we are here in Alberta with restricting the flaring and that it is taking place right now. The amount of flaring that is going on in other nations is incredible. If we want to talk about the CO₂ production and that aspect of it, we should be able to compare Alberta to those other jurisdictions to show what a great job the drillers and the people of Alberta are doing in developing our resources.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:10

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What this question brings to mind is a concern over sour gas release and the types of remediation we have in this province to limit the dangerous effects. In 2005 in a measurable circumstance the Shell plant near Pincher Creek released sour gas when their ignition system twice failed. Now, that's probably an example of a measurable amount of gas because it was from a refined circumstance.

The problem that occurred when Compton proposed having sour gas wells right on the outskirts of Calgary, very close to the soon-to-be-completed, long-awaited east hospital, indicates how we need to be able to hold companies to account and ensure that, whether it's in the drilling stage or somewhere along in the refining stage, sour gas isn't either flared or released. So this question by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie creates a series of questions about the release of sour gas, the effects on both individuals and the flora and the fauna in the surrounding areas. I understand the minister's inability based on the fact that the gas escaped before it was measured, but my concern is that the gas escaped, and what we are doing to ensure that it doesn't continue to go into the air for 13 days after the initial loss.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That sounded, actually, like a plausible explanation from the Minister of Energy, and I'm inclined to accept the explanation. I look forward very much to the ERCB investigation report due in a couple of months, and hopefully we'll have a further conversation with the minister about that at that time.

Thank you.

[Written Question 40 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Sour Gas Well Blowout

Q41. Mr. Taylor asked that the following question be accepted.
What is the total amount of royalty revenue that the province expects to lose because of the sour gas blowout near Hythe that occurred on February 24, 2010?

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The same explanation, the same background goes for this question as for the previous question, so without further ado I'll allow the response from the minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, unfortunately, that type of information is not available because, in essence, it wasn't a producing well, and you only pay royalties on a producing well. So the question as it's phrased would be a guesstimate on the part of anybody because the real question would've been phrased: how much did the province lose in royalties during the time when the blowout took place? The answer there would be none because we only collect royalties on a producing well.

Again, as I said in respect to the first question, the ERCB is reviewing this particular blowout. The report should be available within the next couple of months. I'd be more than happy to share with this hon. member any information or hear his suggestions relative to how that process could be improved going forward, but for this particular written question I'm afraid I have to suggest that the Assembly reject this question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again, I understand and appreciate that if something isn't measurable, then how can you, therefore, determine the value of something that wasn't measured in the first place? However, the question does prompt concerns about royalties, and our predecessor to Merwan Saher, Auditor General Fred Dunn, brought up the concerns about how it is that we measure and collect royalties. He pointed out that the government had the potential of losing over a billion dollars in gas royalties because of its measurement system.

One individual at that time when he did his study was the gatekeeper for all the incoming measurements of gas upon which royalties would be determined, and this person was swamped. He was basically receiving input from the various companies involved. As opposed to having an independent accounting, he was totally reliant on the information that he was receiving. What he was basing his royalty measurements on were the highest outflows as opposed to any kind of consistent monitoring of individual production measures. My concern, even with the improved royalty measurements that we have out there, is that to a large extent we're reliant on companies and their reports as opposed to accounting separately and measuring the flows and, therefore, an accurate accounting of the royalties that we're due.

Thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie for raising this question. I don't believe the royalty collection has been completed to the new Auditor General's satisfaction, but that will remain to be seen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to comment a little bit. Again, the question is worded such as to say, "Well, how much royalty revenue does the province expect?" or, to me, "Can it calculate how much it actually did lose?" I would venture to say to the minister that, actually, we can fairly accurately measure that because we know the size of the pipe and the pressure at which it blew out. The volume is just a correlation between volume and the pressure. I think that, again, the important thing to realize with this is that we have a smear campaign pointed at the province. I think questions like this need to be answered, but we need to go the next step further.

As I mentioned a little bit earlier on Question 40, on this one here, Question 41, we had some CO₂ production because of it being flared and it being allowed to continue on for 18 days. I think this is an opportunity where we can showcase to the world and show the amount of CO₂ that's being produced per volume of gas in the province. Once again, if this is what the real concern is for many of these environmentalists, then actually look at other jurisdictions, where they don't care about their natural gas, where they flare it all the time and produce the oil. Yet if we were to actually use natural gas to extract our bitumen and upgrade it, we'd be ridiculed.

I think this is a great opportunity for the province and the Energy minister to do some calculations and answer these questions and to go a step further and show the amount of CO₂ production per barrel of oil produced in many of the other countries of the world that just constantly flare and burn their natural gas because they don't want to make the effort of liquifying it or pumping it or whatever else. They just want the oil, and they burn the gas, producing a massive amount of CO₂ per barrel produced.

I think this is an opportunity for the government to look at and report on this and, more importantly, report on other jurisdictions, on how they handle these things, to once again show the expertise of

those companies that operate here in Alberta and also to point out that it seems like people don't realize that those companies, that have invested millions of dollars in drilling, absolutely have their best interests at hand in making sure these blowouts don't occur. They probably do the best job of scrutinizing why this has happened to ensure that it doesn't happen again in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Question.

[Written Question 41 lost]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate October 25]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, if you want to proceed, go ahead and then the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Chase: I didn't want to interrupt the person who had adjourned debate or take away their opportunity to continue, but thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak.

A lesson I learned very early on came out of Sunday school. I had an Anglican grandmother living in Meota, Saskatchewan, and a grandmother who followed the Christian Science faith in Saskatoon who taught me a variety of Sunday school lessons, but my favourite lessons always came through stories.

3:20

One of my favourite stories, that relates directly to Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, is the story of Joseph. One of the reasons the story appealed to me to such an extent was that Joseph had a coat of many colors, and that actually attracted the attention of a rather bad element. They not only stole Joseph's coat of many colors, but they dumped him into a pit, and they left him. Fortunately, as the story goes, God provided for Joseph, and Joseph went on to be the financial adviser for another very famous Biblical story individual, and that was David of the slingshot, who later became a very wise King David. Joseph's advice to King David was to set aside in times of good to cover times of famine, so he recommended that in the royal storehouses there be the equivalent of seven years of grain stored. And it came to pass, as the Bible would say, that the king on behalf of his loyal citizens set aside and was able to manage seven very devastating years.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

To bring this Biblical analogy to Alberta reality, the sustainability fund, that the Alberta Liberals put forward as the stability fund, is that tide-over situation. It's very important that while the government operates within its means, it has the ability to tide us over in situations like we're now experiencing with this recession.

I agree with the hon. mover of Bill 204 that the government has a spending problem, but I also am aware of the different attitudes that a Liberal policy would bring to the table versus that being put

forward by members of the Wildrose Alliance. The difference between the Liberals and the Wildrose Alliance is that the Liberals see government as having a role in intervening on behalf of the citizens. That's why, for example, governments collect taxes. If this government relies completely, as it unfortunately does, on oil and gas revenue, which makes us slaves to the global economy, seconded only by the revenue from gambling – from slots and lotteries, et cetera – then Alberta is going to continue to be held hostage.

Simply saying that the government must always only spend according to inflation and population means that there are going to be, as I started out in my Biblical reference, years of the equivalent of drought and years of plenty. If the government is not allowed to dip into that buildup, which is being called the sustainability fund, and invest that money – for example, in Children and Youth Services, in Health, in Education – then we're going to see what happened to us in 1993 through 1998 with the Ralph Klein government, where education suffered tremendously. And it hasn't recovered, Mr. Speaker.

In Calgary alone, for example, the infrastructure deficit, because building has not caught up over a period of almost the last 20 years, has risen to a billion dollars. The government has never gotten to the point where the class size initiatives of the Learning Commission of 2003 can actually be put into place because there is not sufficient space. So we see schools cutting up their libraries and turning them into classrooms, using workrooms, using staff rooms, taking the stage away from being a performance area to being an extended classroom.

If Bill 204 tied the government's hands to inflation and population, then these years of recession would be extended, and as I say, the last thing I want to see is a repeat of the Klein administration. In Ralph Klein's time it was convenient to say that we'd never run a deficit. But shortly after, when the Stelmach government came into power, they considered running a deficit a requirement. I understand the need to cover the expenses.

In the case of health care we saw the beginnings of our emergent circumstance that we're facing right now. We had over twice as many operable, staffed beds in '93, with a considerably lower population than we have now. We had three more hospitals operating in Calgary at that time. Unfortunately, Premier Klein decided to blow up the General. He sold off the Holy Cross to friends, basically, for a song, approximately \$5 million after \$32 million of renovations had taken place. He sold the Grace hospital to the HRC, which has now had their contract taken away. It's well time that was done, but the point is that we had that extra operating room to work with. Now we have the new McCaig centre basically replacing the two operating rooms from the HRC, so we're no farther ahead.

The point I'm making, Mr. Speaker, with regard to Bill 204 is that when Premier Klein made these cuts back in '93 through '98, it had a devastating effect. Through the cuts, and with the help of Messrs. Dinning and West, we lost 10,000 of our civil servants that provided the services, and we have not yet gotten back to the point where we have sufficient front-line child and youth services workers. We have a shortage of legal aid. This famine, this lack of services, that was created in 1993 and going forward, would simply be repeated if the government had no ability to temporarily dip into the stability fund.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the government could make much wiser investments than it's currently making. For example, the government basically bailed out the superboard with \$1.3 billion, and when the hon. minister of health talks about providing stability for five years, \$1.3 billion of that was made to cover up mistakes. In terms of investments, instead of gold watch send-offs like Jack Davis is receiving, \$23,000 a month in pensions, the \$44 million

given out to top officials within the various government departments in terms of bonusing: that is where I share the Wildrose concern.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand today to share some thoughts on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, which is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. The main idea of Bill 204 is fiscal restraint. Broadly speaking, I do agree with the member's premise that government should practise fiscal restraint – too often we see governments from all over the world act as if the money is theirs to spend and not the taxpayers' – but limiting yearly spending increases to the rate of inflation plus growth is where I differ from the hon. member. That type of formula is way too simplistic for what is a complex, complex process in allocating resources, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

In certain circumstances the bill would allow for government spending to exceed inflation plus population growth so long as spending per capita is lower than it is in nine other provinces. You can see, Mr. Speaker, that we're already starting to make exceptions. Why stop here? Well, the simple fact is that that's why we elect governments, to have the flexibility to meet the needs and priorities of those that elect them. In fact, this exactly shows that in this respect we would actually not be leaders; we would be followers. What if in this circumstance the situation indicated, you know, that it was appropriate to keep spending to inflation and population growth?

I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker, that the de facto effect of this bill, at least in the short term, would be that the inflation-adjusted government spending per capita would be constant over time, again a noble goal but one that does not necessarily need to be legislated by law. One problem with using inflation to limit government spending is that there is no right measure of inflation to use when it comes to delivering government programs. This is because government spends on different items than does a consumer or producer, and inflation indices do not account for expenditures that are typical for government such as health care and education.

Mr. Speaker, I remember, when I was just elected to the school board in Calgary in 2004, being sent a report or a news article that indicated that education inflation was way over and above the regular inflation rate right across this country. Another example is that this government spends nearly 40 per cent of its budget on health care because it is important to all Albertans. Yes, population growth does have some sort of influence on the health care budget, but I would suggest that some of the biggest drivers in health care have nothing to do with the regular inflation rate or population growth. These drivers are changing demographics, particularly an aging population, as well as the drivers of technology and innovation. Again, this is not reflected in such a simplistic formula.

The result is that inflation in the government sector is not accurately measured by normal inflation indices. To link government spending to an index that does not accurately describe inflationary pressures in such services as health care and education is simply irresponsible. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's the exact opposite of what fiscal responsibility is. It just does not make sense. It does not make sense to many of my constituents that I have heard from. It may make sense only to those who think that policy must be strictly ideologically based and strictly held to a narrow point of view on how we address our challenges.

Mr. Speaker, proponents of this bill often cite the apparent successes of similar legislation in the U.S. states to bolster the case for this bill, and there are two problems with that. One, state budgets are a poor analogy for the Alberta budget. In particular, states spend a significantly smaller portion of their budget on health care than Alberta does. Most states spend around 30 per cent of their budgets on health care and related expenses, primarily through insurance vouchers and similar provisions rather than by directly providing health care. The budgetary pressures faced by Alberta, therefore, are different than the budgetary pressures faced by many U.S. states.

The second thing is that spending caps implemented in U.S. states have not been as successful as the proponents of this bill claim. Of the states with spending limits, which is a total of 22, all but two of them will face a budget shortfall this year, Mr. Speaker. Furthermore, in Colorado, which in 1992 implemented a spending cap very similar to the one proposed in this bill, the spending cap was suspended in 2005 by referendum. Not only was this suspension supported by teachers and health care providers but also by many business organizations. Among these organizations was the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, which is the state chamber of commerce for Colorado, and even the chamber of commerce for Colorado Springs.

Mr. Speaker, it was the chamber of commerce of Colorado Springs which originally proposed this legislation in 1992. Even the governor of the state, a Republican, supported the repeal, citing concerns on the decrease in quality of education, health care, and roads as a result of the legislation. So the efficacy of spending caps in improving the fiscal position of certain states has not even been established, nor have spending caps improved the quality of services provided by these states. Even businesses in Colorado realize that such legislation places a fiscal straitjacket on government, which impairs its ability to improve the services which citizens expect.

Mr. Speaker, my final critique of this bill is that it may weaken the ability of the government to provide better services to Albertans. Okay. I do recognize that, yes, some of my constituents do have some concerns with the amount that government spends, and again those concerns seem to be generalized between all levels of government. But what is regularly identified by my constituents is not so much how much the government spends but their concern about the types of revenue that government spends.

Again, this bill does not address that very, very important and specific issue. I know that the Minister of Finance and Enterprise has promised to bring forward a fiscal framework for this province that will address that very important issue that my constituents are speaking to me about, and that's the amount of the nonrenewable resource revenue that we spend on an annual basis, not so much how much money we're spending on an annual basis. The fact is that other means such as limits on how much in nonrenewable resources we spend or how much of that revenue we need to save actually can act as a mechanism that will help government limit some of its spending while providing the flexibility needed by government to address the needs that Albertans identify as their priorities. Albertans expect their government to respond to their ever-evolving needs, Mr. Speaker, and this bill hinders the ability of government to do exactly that.

Overall, the budgeting process is a complex one, Mr. Speaker, and ultimately the goal of budgeting is to satisfy the priorities of Albertans in a fiscally prudent manner. That's what governance is all about, developing policies and priorities, then following it up with an allocation of scarce resources. In my opinion, this bill reverses that process. If this bill was passed, rather than a budget reflecting the priorities of Albertans, the budget would come first,

and then the priorities of Albertans would come second. Our mandate as a government is simply not to spend according to a formula and claim responsibility. Rather, our mandate is to evaluate the priorities of Albertans and then budget according to these priorities in a responsible manner.

In its credit analysis for Alberta released a month ago, Standard & Poor's stated that "the province's budgetary performance has benefited in the past 10 years, not only from the robust performance of its resource revenues, but also from prudent fiscal management and an extremely low debt burden." It is quite clear that Albertans are in an enviable position due to fiscal restraint on the part of this government's fiscal management, and we don't need such simplistic formulas to address this particular issue. The needs of Albertans and the context of our fiscal position and framework are way too complex for such a simplistic formula. Mr. Speaker, this is why I'm standing up to not support this bill, and I urge all members not to do so for the same reasons.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and join debate on this interesting piece of legislation. You know, I start somewhat conflicted because I certainly understand that the member moving this motion has some intentions which I share, particularly his intentions with respect to establishing a certain amount of fiscal responsibility and a certain amount of government discipline when it comes to ensuring that we treat taxpayers' dollars or taxpayers' lottery donations or the paltry bit of revenue that we receive from the oil and gas industry with the respect that it deserves and that we ensure that we spend wisely.

3:40

Certainly, the measures that the member put forward seem quite reasonable at first glance. Indeed, I have a habit, when I'm looking at a government expenditure or a government budget or something, to use as shorthand the population and inflation numbers to assess what's happening at first glance with whatever government proposal is coming forward with respect to budgetary issues. But the problem, I think, is that if we stop the analysis at that shorthand place, we run the risk of, first of all, being rather naive at best and also, more likely, creating big problems and ultimately reducing the ability of government to meet the needs of citizens, which I think is very important. It's not actually an objective that we are very successful at meeting in the province these days, but I still don't think that just because we're doing such a bad job of it now, we should abandon all hope to ever be good stewards of our environment or good providers of health care or effective educators.

The question then becomes: why is this measure perhaps not the best measure? Well, there are a number of examples. Some people have talked already about the concept of the infrastructure deficit. Quite frankly, I think that when you talk about the infrastructure deficit, what you actually have to recognize is that when you don't spend money on maintaining a building, you are in fact spending money. You're creating a liability to the taxpayer, which is ultimately going to come home to roost sooner or later. So it's not as though you've suddenly saved that money and you've done this great bit of management. It's not the case because, of course, that roof is one year closer to collapsing, for instance.

We've had a situation in Alberta over 10 or 15 years under the leadership of the former Premier where we played this game of language, and we tried to pretend we were balancing the budget when, in fact, we all knew that what we were doing was just moving things into different areas and pretending something was happening

that wasn't. So while we didn't spend the money on maintenance or on infrastructure, in fact we created a liability for Albertans. We created a liability that any sound financial manager would have had on their balance sheet at the time that we refused to spend the money on that and something that is now a liability in terms of what we have to spend because, you know, we need roads, and we need our kids to go to schools where the roofs don't fall in on them.

We need to now start spending a certain amount of money on infrastructure. If we'd had good governance for the last 40 years, I might feel more comfortable saying, "Yeah, you know, at this point I think we've got all the pieces in place, and we've been doing a good job up to this point, so now I'm kind of at the point where I could contemplate doing a population/inflation measure of expenditure increase." Unfortunately, I don't have that faith in the governance that has preceded us for the last 20 years. We have huge gaps in what the government has done, so if we're going to address those gaps, we need to in some cases spend more than population versus inflation. That's the problem with the kind of legislation that the member is putting forward. That's one example.

Another example of where it maybe doesn't work is when you look at population increase. That should all be fairly reasonable, but then, of course, you have to look at: what type of population increase? The perfect example, of course, is in the area of seniors' care. Our population is growing in that area, and the needs of that population are growing. We all know and any kind of government planner knows that demographically when your population is a certain age, they tend to invest more or give more back to the community through their economic activity, but there are other times in their lives when they need more back from that very same community. We know that this government anticipates that 10 years from now there are going to be roughly 15,000 more seniors in Alberta who will require some type of supported living arrangement, and we've done almost nothing about it at this point. We are just barely chipping away at that growing liability.

You know, as we talked about earlier in question period today, the government is just fabulous at cutting ribbons and staging and reprofiling and – what was the other one? – phasing in openings so that they get maybe three or four ribbon cuttings at one event and all that kind of fun stuff. We're really good at that, but when you actually add up the numbers, there is a huge infrastructure deficit facing Albertans in terms of seniors' care. If I thought that the government had planned reasonably up to this point, I could see population and inflation being a good measure by which you would limit government expenditure, but because the government has ignored this looming problem for such a period of time, it's not now a measurement of limiting government expenditure which is going to serve the best interests of Alberta seniors or their families or the people who are going to have to take care of them in their homes until such time as we create those 15,000 spaces, which we are not on track to do, by the way. So that's a problem.

Another kind of thing that is not, for instance, covered by population and inflation is the issue of environmental protection. Population and inflation doesn't measure the nature of industrial activity in any given place, and it may well be the case that we embark upon a brand-new or an accelerated level of industrial activity which is going to result in the need for environmental protection which far exceeds an increase on the basis of population plus inflation. The fact of the matter is that we are threatening our environment at a rate which is far greater than the rate that is represented by population plus inflation. If we were to limit our spending to that level, then we would have a problem.

These are just a few examples of why I feel that, on one hand, you know, it's a good shorthand place to start in terms of measuring

government expenditure and controlling it, but it is a superficial analysis. It negates other important roles and obligations on the part of government, and it hamstring government to deal with stuff that they should have done all along. Or, God forbid, if we ever have the situation where we get a new government that actually tries to roll up its sleeves and address the issues that have been ignored for so many decades, in those cases there may be some fairly major ticking time bombs of unexpended liability sitting there.

Now, having said that, though, I really want to reinforce that as a member of the NDP caucus I fully commit to and believe in the importance of balanced budgeting. I believe that it is important, as I've said before, to respect the money of the taxpayers and to be very careful in how you expend that money and establish priorities. You know, people often try and suggest that that's not the way it is with the NDP, but I'm sure that at least some of you have heard that the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Officer came out with a report less than a year ago that identified that the most responsibly expending governments in the country over the last 20 years were in fact the NDP and that the NDP was more likely than any other political party to run a government that resulted in a surplus.

So I agree with the principle, but I do believe that we need to be mindful in terms of how we get to that outcome. We need to do it thoughtfully, and we need to do it with reference to the goals that certainly I have with respect to ensuring that we get the best outcome in the public interest: protecting the environment, preserving our health care, developing a quality education system, and taking care of our seniors. These are important things that we need to achieve, and we won't achieve them if we put some sort of thoughtless rule that we bind ourselves with and make it impossible to manoeuvre within.

I do believe, as well, that in some cases there is an obligation to look at issues of revenue, and this is another thing that – you know, certain parties at certain ends of the political spectrum like to essentially negate the role of government, have government have as little to do as possible with building community, helping the more vulnerable, developing our population in a way that would make us continue to be leaders in the world in education and health care and those kinds of things. Those things require government, and some people would rather not have government involved in that. If we put an arbitrary . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today and join the debate on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, which is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and I would like to thank the hon. member for doing so. Bill 204 is centred on fiscal restraint, using a formula based on inflation plus population growth, as has been said.

Fiscal control is something that this government has been practising for years; however, I do see some challenges with the proposed formula. First of all, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this government's dedication to fiscal control and responsibility has put Alberta in the best fiscal position in Canada and, arguably, in North America. In 1993 the provincial debt was approaching \$23 billion, but since that time our government has eliminated the debt and amassed billions of dollars in savings. I'm sure that the majority of other jurisdictions in North America would be all too happy to trade their current financial fiscal position with ours here in Alberta. I'm convinced that they'd appreciate not just words but actions such as those of our Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, who has

reduced his budget by 19 per cent for this budget year alone, and he is only one of a number of ministers doing exactly that.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, like so many Albertans I'm very proud of our current financial fiscal position, and I'm very proud of how it was achieved as well, without tax increases. It's well known that Albertans pay the lowest taxes in Canada. We have no provincial sales tax, and our government has taken measures to eliminate initiatives that take money out of Albertans' pockets such as health care premiums alone, which has been pivotal.

Alberta's tax advantage is striking when you compare it to other provinces in Canada. As an example, Mr. Speaker, if Alberta had adopted another province's tax system, our citizens and businesses would have paid at least an additional \$10.3 billion in taxes last year alone. That's over \$2,000 per Albertan put back in their jeans and their bank accounts. Given our competitive tax rates it's clear why Alberta continues to attract investment and remains the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 seeks to limit year-over-year spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth, and I'm sure that many Members of this Legislative Assembly and those beyond would agree to this principle as an ideal, but under certain circumstances and democratic shifts that could put this government in a very difficult place, if not an impossible place, if this concept were actually to be legislated.

The everyday person can think of this from a family's perspective. Take, for example, a family that's practised financial responsibility and has been growing their savings for years. Now, let's say that family has to limit its yearly spending increases to a predetermined formula. For a year that might not affect the family at all; they might be able to continue to live comfortably while growing their savings. But in a given year there are numerous instances in which the family may have to spend over the limit for a number of reasons.

Perhaps there are a number of positive reasons. Perhaps construction costs are down, and they choose to undergo home renovations, which will increase the overall value of their home. Perhaps interest rates are so low that they decide it's time to purchase a new home to support their growing family. In cases such as these the family would have to make a decision. It would have to spend above that formula for that year, or if they follow the formula exactly, they'd need to include this in the unforeseen expense category in yearly spending, which might be impossible. The problem with this unforeseen expense or investment, as many of us would choose to see it, would impact the rest of the family's budget, so they'd have to cut. Where do they cut? Do they cut groceries, take the kids out of clubs or sports, or do they simply not make that very wise investment at that time?

Mr. Speaker, when looking at this formula from a family's perspective, it's clear that while Bill 204 provides a good guideline to follow, legislating predetermined spending increases has the potential to cause a host of problems. Our government, like the family in the example, has practised fiscal responsibility and employed a prudent savings plan for years. A part of this fiscal responsibility includes engaging in what we know as smart spending. In any given year when construction costs are low, it would make sense to build necessary infrastructure projects. Albertans demand a government that provides them with the best value for their hard-earned tax dollars. If we put off infrastructure projects during a favourable building climate due to the constraints of a legislative formula that dictates our spending, we're not managing Albertans' tax dollars wisely.

Mr. Speaker, these infrastructure projects are necessary. Just ask

Albertans about their schools, roads, hospitals, and more, especially under current circumstances with our shifting demographics here in this wonderful province. Next year there will be over 400,000 seniors living in Alberta, and in 2020 there will be over 600,000. Therefore, our seniors' population will increase 50 per cent in the next decade alone. The fact is that the population growth factor in Bill 204 does not take into account that Alberta's aging population is growing faster than the overall population. That's just one of the shortcomings.

Our government is committed to providing essential services and facilities to all demographics but especially this ever-important one. A fixed-spending-based formula that does not account for the age of our population means that our government could potentially have to make massive cuts to other vital areas just to provide seniors with the infrastructure and care they deserve, which would be unfair to people of other generations. I really believe that Albertans would agree that this is not in everyone's best interest. [interjections] Thank you for the support, members, on that.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are interested in a favourable business climate fuelled by low taxes, and they're interested in a government that responds to changing needs. I agree with the hon. member that fiscal accountability and restraint are ever important. However, Bill 204 seeks to implement a formula that is not as flexible as it needs to be, especially here and now. I believe that legislating spending increases to population growth plus inflation does not provide Albertans with the fiscal leadership and essential services that they have come to expect from this government.

Mr. Speaker, I'll state again that the intention of the bill is good. But I remain skeptical of the formula based and proposed in this bill as it does not wholly respond to the year-by-year needs of Albertans. Therefore, I am withholding my support for Bill 204 and encourage others to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a pleasure to rise and to address and put my full support behind Bill 204. I must say that I'm quite astounded with the discussion that's going on and the excuses that are being used on why this government doesn't want to be fiscally responsible. You know, it wasn't that long ago, less than a year ago, that I was sitting in this Legislature listening to the so-called PC Fiscal Four. It's obvious that there are no more. There hasn't been one government member who has stood up to speak on fiscal responsibility, but there are four fiscally responsible individuals in the Wildrose caucus.

It's interesting how people's attitudes speak out and want to spend other people's money. This is the case. In today's discussion it appears that they want to spend other people's money and that in no situation should they be restrained in any way, that they should have a free ability to spend as they want.

It's also interesting the amount of I want to say gossip – it's not even gossip – that is being thrown out there by this government about a PST. I think that maybe the confusion is that the finance minister says today that we're not going to have a provincial sales tax. I think that what the PST stands for in the PC caucus is the provincial spending theme. That's what they're continuing to talk about: their spending theme and how much money they want to spend.

It isn't about having the freedom to spend money when all of these so-called emergencies arise. It's about the discipline of being

able to prioritize and spend the amount of money that you have. That's why this is so important.

Actually, it really is sad when you look around at the number of jurisdictions in the world, countries and states, that are so-called fiscally responsible, yet they couldn't restrain their spending, and they ran into deficits. So then they voted, just as this government did a few years ago when they paid off the debt. They're going to run their first – what would I say? They want to not save their money. They passed a new law saying that all surplus dollars will no longer have to go into savings all of sudden because their debt was paid off. This again goes back to reflect on the situation.

4:00

The most important thing is that if we really want the Alberta advantage, if we want to spur on and have strong economic growth, we have to constrain our spending. We're in a \$7 billion plus cash deficit this year alone. For the infrastructure that they talk about wanting to build, the rate that we're spending is not sustainable. In two or three short years – mind you, they won't be here that long, so I guess we won't have to look at that problem – we're going to see this government create another crisis because they're going to have to cut back on the infrastructure spending because it's not sustainable. What you really want to have a strong economy is a sustainable budget, and that's what this is about. You get into that, you prioritize, you spend your money accordingly, and you don't have that problem.

It's also interesting to me that this government continues to speak against this when the biggest problems are growth and population and inflation. This bill would actually help such areas as Fort McMurray and Airdrie address their population and corporate growth, which this government refuses to recognize. It would actually turn the table and address those problems.

The reality is that government is no different from people. It's just that it's not held accountable like people are on a short-term basis. They have this ability to continue to borrow money, spend money. The fact of the matter is that if we look at areas like Greece, France, California, many areas like that have a major deficit, they aren't fiscally responsible, and the number of dollars that they have to spend to service their debt is unacceptable. They can't get out of that hole. That's why you want to restrain that.

The other interesting thing, though, when you actually restrain it to population plus inflation, is that as your economy grows, there is actually more. This government finally learned that with the new royalty framework. If they reduced taxes, they would increase the revenue, not reduce it. It's the same here. If we were to actually reduce the spending, in the next year you'd actually have more because you'd have economic growth.

All of the debate, all of the points they're bringing up are very shallow, short-term excuses, saying: "We don't want to be disciplined. We don't want to be restrained. We want to be able to buy votes on a minute's notice, to be able to just throw out a new project, whether it's spending \$2 billion on CO₂ or \$15 billion on power lines that we don't need." They don't want any restraint. This bill would upset their plans, their provincial spending theme, or PST, to buy themselves a new mandate from the people. But it's not going to work, Mr. Speaker. It just isn't going to happen.

What we need to do and why this bill is so important is that it's about setting priorities as a family. Every family has to be fiscally responsible. We're a family here in the province of Alberta. We need to be fiscally responsible. Restraining the spending is critical if we want to bring back the Alberta advantage.

I'm very grateful that we had that windfall of revenue from the oil and gas business in 2006, '07, and halfway through '08, but that's

gone, and this current spending increase is unbelievable. Just this last year, I believe, it was a 16 per cent increase for health care, yet the results have been . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: Abysmal.

Mr. Hinman: Well, abysmal, as my good colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek points out. It's just sad.

To think that spending money is going to solve our problems doesn't do it. You need to have the restraint in there. We need to have the accountability, where we sit down with our budget.

It's always amazing to me, too, how the budget immediately talks about: "We're not going to have health care. We're not going to have education." No, it's other areas that we don't have. We don't need to spend \$2 billion to pump plant food into the earth and claim that we don't have any money now for health care. We don't need to spend \$15 billion on power lines that, looking back, were necessary, but today we don't need to have big coal power plants or a nuclear facility thousands of miles away and put in a power line.

What we have is a priority problem of where we want to designate the tax dollars. We have a spending problem on where we're going to spend those tax dollars. If we don't acknowledge our problems, we're going to continue to have to pay an extraordinary price that we can't afford when we look back. That's the key to all of this. When are we going to really look at the true facts and realize the problems that we're facing?

We have a huge infrastructure problem. There's no question about that. How are we addressing it? We hear over and over and over again about a 20-year plan, yet that plan has not been tabled. It's not evident to Albertans. It doesn't say highway 63 to Fort McMurray or highway 3 to Medicine Hat. It just says that we have a plan. But there is nothing that has been presented to the people of Alberta. What a real plan would be is if you say: "Here's the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Here's what we're going to spend. Now, here with our infrastructure if we have \$6 billion this year, these are the projects that will be addressed first." That's a plan, to actually have the proposal written down where people can see, where people can debate, and it can be changed openly, not tweaked by some minister who wants to change things.

Another problem that we're facing is because this government continues to say: "Oh, we're not running a deficit. Oh, no, we've got the cash in the bank." We do for this year. Nobody debates that. But what about the unfunded liabilities that we have? It wasn't that long ago that this government signed a contract with teachers for five years – I believe it was January '08 – saying: here's the five-year funding. We're hearing this about health now: here's the five-year funding. It wasn't even two years into that when they wouldn't accept their own rules and contracts that they wrote, but they spent an extra \$2 billion of taxpayers' money because they failed to pay the original two-thirds that they owed those teachers. So in order to bring them back onside, they say: well, we'll pay the last third. Those are unacceptable. That's where if you were limited to inflation plus population growth, you couldn't make these types of deals and be held unaccountable.

Once again, it's always about using other people's money. This government needs to be personally responsible. We need to balance our budget. We can prioritize and spend properly and address the growth in the areas that we need to. It's about prioritizing properly, not saying that we're limited to the amount of money that we can and will spend. That flexibility is there. It's just whether we have the discipline or not to follow our spending and to prioritize it in a way that best meets the needs of the taxpayers.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, being brought forward by my learned friend the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and House leader for the Wildrose Alliance Party. Bill 204 proposes to limit these spending increases by the government at the rate of inflation plus population growth. I think as my colleagues have said already, we in the government caucus recognize the need for fiscal responsibility. I guess the difference would be what we define as fiscally responsible and what my colleagues on the other side would.

I can assure colleagues that the reasons that we're opposing this is not because we're not fiscally responsible, but we need some flexibility to allow governments to govern. Governments cannot be tied to a rigid formula. They can't always be expected to be in a straitjacket when it comes to government policy. One of the reasons that we can't be tied in a straitjacket is the ability to adapt to changing economic circumstances. We live in a world, Mr. Speaker, that is constantly changing. Most often those changes are not predictable even by the most skilled economists.

Two years ago our world was rocked by a financial crisis that was precipitated by events beyond our control here in Alberta and here in Canada. There was a mortgage and banking crisis in the United States. There were a lot of investment houses that failed in the United States and became insolvent. Confidence in capital markets was shaken. Many people saw their life savings substantially diminished, and many taxpaying Canadians and Albertans lost their jobs as a result of things which were far beyond our control. There was a loss of investor and buyer confidence reinforcing the economic decline, and some analysts feared, in fact, Mr. Speaker, that we would suffer a complete collapse of the world financial system, which would have led to even greater unemployment and instability and perhaps even a serious and long-lasting event such as the Great Depression of the 1930s.

4:10

Though none of this could be predicted with any degree of certainty by even the most competent economists, governments at the national and provincial level took action to ensure that the situation was stabilized. For that reason, all jurisdictions in North America were facing deficits. They undertook stimulus spending in almost every case. The objective of the legislators was very simple. It was to keep people employed, to stabilize the economy, and to ensure that an economic catastrophe like the Great Depression did not happen here.

Here in Alberta we had nonrenewable resource revenues drop from \$11.9 billion in 2008-09 to \$6 billion in the 2009-10 fiscal year. Personal tax revenues dropped from \$8.7 billion in 2008-09 to \$7.8 billion in 2010-11. Corporate tax revenues dropped \$250 million in one year from '08-09 to '09-10. But, fortunately, due to government foresight here in Alberta we had the sustainability fund to rely upon, so we didn't have to go into debt. The implementation of the spending limit proposed by my learned friend would prohibit the government from using funds set aside from past surpluses such as the sustainability fund or from reinvesting budget surpluses into additional needs such as infrastructure. Fortunately, in Alberta we did not have to make draconian cuts to services that Albertans expect, services like high-quality health care, education, and services like those provided to seniors, the disabled, and children in need.

Had Bill 204 been law two years ago, the consequences would have been grave for Albertans. The proposed spending limit in Bill 204, if it had existed in the 2010-11 budget, would have been

calculated using a combined consumer price index change of approximately zero per cent, or 0.1 negative, or at the Alberta population growth of 2.2 per cent for '08-09 to '09-10. That's data for July 1. Therefore, roughly speaking, the spending limit would have been a maximum budget increase of around 2.1 per cent more or less, or an increase of about \$770 million.

By contrast, in the government's fiscal plan the total net spending in 2009 to '10-11 increased from \$36.58 billion to \$38.71 billion, and that excludes the \$577 million in disaster and emergency spending in that category. That represented approximately a five-point increase in total expenditures of \$2.12 billion. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that that was after the budget cuts in many of those departments, which have been alluded to by some of my friends.

The health care budget increased by \$1.966 billion, including \$759 million to pay down the health system's accumulated deficits, \$96 million in capital grants, and \$80 million in amortization, including the consumption of vaccines. Six hundred and twenty-seven million dollars in the Infrastructure budget is related to health capital facilities. These priorities and necessary expenditures would have been impossible under a spending limit like the one proposed in the bill. Therefore, spending on health care alone would put us over the spending limit without looking at other priorities such as roads and infrastructure. So the difference between the actual increases the government of Alberta made of \$2.12 billion and what the increase would have been capped at, \$770 million, would have equated to approximately \$1.35 billion that would have been chopped if Bill 204 had been in place.

Now, although Bill 204 would not set a spending limit on any specific government programs or ministries, there would have been grave implications to major ministries. Under the proposed bill even with the same serious cuts to those departments which were already cut by the government, it would have been necessary to make cuts to those big ministries like health, education, seniors and community supports, and social services. Somewhere the cuts would have had to be made to make up for that \$1.35 billion.

It's all very well to say: "Cut, cut. Live within your means. Limit increases to population growth and inflation." But where would you cut? Those cuts would have meant in the case of health care less doctors, less hospital beds, less teachers in classroom, less continuing care beds, less support for seniors. Alternatively, we could have completely cut out the infrastructure spending. But consider what the consequences might have been longer term: less employment for Albertans in a time of economic uncertainty, more people losing their homes, less people paying personal taxes. All of that would have been resulting in a downward economic spiral.

Mr. Speaker, fiscal control and responsibility have been a cornerstone of the government, but this responsibility would be highlighted by such things as paying down \$23 billion of debt and by accumulating nearly \$25 billion in savings over recent years. In a resource-based economy like ours in Alberta revenue streams are often volatile. The sustainability fund was part of the savings plan, and it was conceived as a way to even out provincial revenue when our cyclic, resource-driven economy causes income declines.

While provincial income may fluctuate, the needs of the people do not change in parallel. For example, when the economy was in decline and people became unemployed, we had a greater need for social services and for education and training. Our government recognizes that fiscal responsibility and controls are laudable goals; however, a government could never lose sight of the commitment it has to the welfare of its citizens.

A formula based on inflation and population growth might be a good target. It might be a good goal for government. It might also serve as a good measure to track and compare overall spending.

However, I would respectfully submit that the proposed formula fails to recognize the need for flexibility and adaptability required of governments in changing economic and social circumstances.

With respect to health care, Mr. Speaker, we all know that health care represents around 40 per cent of our yearly budget, and we all know it's almost every Albertan's greatest priority. Why wouldn't increases to inflation plus population growth work in health care? First of all, we know that our population is aging. Demographics tell us that our population is getting older and the needs are getting greater. [Dr. Brown's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to join the discussion on Bill 204, the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010, sponsored by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. The bill proposes measures for limiting year-to-year increases to government spending, an issue that our government has taken a planned and prudent approach towards. Prudent budgeting is a timely topic for families, for businesses, for governments in the midst of a recession that's been global in scope.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to remember the problems that other economies are facing, in particular those of our largest trading partner to the south, the United States of America. They're reeling from the effects of a financial crisis that was brought on by years of irresponsible fiscal behaviour. Although those types of financial practices were not undertaken to such an extent here, our economy still bears some of the consequences.

Alberta is a part of an increasingly interconnected global marketplace. When other economies suffer, so too can Alberta. While we're not able to control the policies and practices of other jurisdictions, we are able to take strides to secure a more sustainable economy by planning effectively against economic volatility here at home. We can plan ahead just as families and businesses do, and that's exactly what this government has done, Mr. Speaker. In fact, due to our prudent planning Alberta entered the recent recession with no debt and over \$25 billion saved in order to protect our key programs and great quality of life.

4:20

We are now using some of this money to cover revenue shortfalls, keep taxes low, and invest in infrastructure to help grow our economy. We're continuing to build the roads, the schools, the health care facilities that are the foundation for economic growth and important to all Albertans. We're investing over \$7 billion in infrastructure just this year alone. This investment will build needed infrastructure, helping to keep Albertans working and setting the stage for economic recovery. We will remain committed to future job creation; that's a priority for our hon. Premier and every member on this side of the House. It's a part of our plan to move our province forward, a plan that will see us live within our means while continuing to invest directly in our province's future.

Due to our government's planning Alberta was prepared for changes in the economy, and we will emerge in better financial shape than any other jurisdiction in North America. Almost all provinces in the federal government are forecasting deficits this fiscal year, and while other jurisdictions grapple to deal with deficits, our government has laid out an attainable plan to balance our budget in three years. It's a plan that works for Alberta. It takes into account the uniqueness of our situation and builds on our greatest assets, our natural resources and our people.

Alberta is ahead of the rest. To cover their deficits, the federal government and the other provinces will have to go deeper into debt

while we have provincial savings to draw upon. These savings were built up in the sustainability fund to be used during hard times to protect against deep cuts to priority programs like health care and education. As demonstrated in our budget, we'll continue to support the core programs that strengthen our communities, and we will take measures to limit spending in areas where we can tighten our belts and be more efficient.

In the wake of a recession that's had a significant impact on economies around the world, Alberta is positioned to rise above and once again lead Canada and the world as an economic driver. The foresight and discipline of our government is enabling us to guide Alberta businesses and people through our economic recovery. Albertans can be confident that we'll emerge from this period with a great investment climate and a strong infrastructure.

We know these times have been tough on families and businesses. Our government will continue to support the programs that help them, and we know how to pay for the programs that make our province successful. The recession didn't happen overnight, and the recovery is not going to take place in a single day. We need a forward-thinking approach to strengthen our long-term fiscal picture, and that's what we put in place. That's why I strongly support our government's plan to move Alberta forward. It reflects the principles of the Premier, our government, and Albertans. The plan rests on four priorities that guide our decisions. They will ensure Alberta is in a strong financial position coming out of the recession and that we have advanced infrastructure, an innovative and competitive economy, and a strong health system with supports for all vulnerable Albertans.

With difficult times come tough choices; however, we're in this together with all Albertans. We made a commitment to pay for what we spend and be responsible stewards of their dollars. Our economy and our people will benefit from this approach. We've worked hard over the last year to consult Albertans on ways to address our fiscal challenges, and we will continue to work with them. We've also taken actions internally to address the fiscal challenges with a focus on keeping people working, and our government's management through this recession has protected tens of thousands of jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we've addressed spending, and we've budgeted prudently to ensure Alberta continues to be one of the best places to work, live, invest, and visit. While Bill 204 proposes an interesting budgeting tool, I don't believe it's necessarily . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hate to interrupt the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's bill to close debate, I'd now invite the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to close debate on Bill 204.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to close debate on second reading of Bill 204. This bill is all about stable and predictable spending. It is about fiscal responsibility. We know very well in Alberta that our revenues fluctuate considerably. We cannot base our spending on these cycles any longer. Global oil prices will long determine our revenue. They do not and should not determine our spending.

Alberta used to lead the country in fiscal responsibility. Incredibly, in this decade that reputation has been totally destroyed. Bill 204 will help our government recover from its obvious spending addiction. This legislation will ensure that we restrict spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth. This government should embrace this bill. It is shameful that a party claiming to be fiscally responsible stewards of the public purse refuses to acknowledge the need to live within its means.

The Wildrose is not alone in our belief that the spending constraints in Bill 204 are good for current and future generations of Alberta. In a poll conducted by Crestview research just a few weeks ago, 80 per cent of Albertans expressed support of this spending limitation initiative. Only 14 per cent – 14 per cent – were against it. Albertans understand how tempting it is for government to try and spend its way out of political problems. They know the natural inclination of government bureaucracies to expand themselves and their power.

There is also support for this legislation from respected public policy think tanks like the CFIB, Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Fraser Institute, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and others. In fact, in the most recent OECD survey on Canada, written this last September, there is a substantial section dedicated to Alberta. In the OECD's analysis of what they describe as "the rapid deterioration in public finances in recent years" in Alberta, the OECD report says that our spending is "being squeezed in typical boom-bust fashion."

They add that "the province exhibits a clear pattern of pro-cyclical fiscal policy whereby spending is ramped up . . . in good years followed by spending contraction in bad ones. Instead of stabilising the economy," the report says, "the government has thus frequently exacerbated macroeconomic volatility." In other words, while this government complains that this legislation would be too much of a constraint on them, the OECD says that that's exactly what is needed so that they don't make our already volatile economy even more unstable.

The OECD report goes on to endorse the principle of Bill 204, arguing that "a legislated spending-growth rule, rather than the current in-year spending rule, would help anchor fiscal policy and, if respected, would avoid another acceleration of spending when the budget is finally balanced." Maybe the OECD is too simplistic.

We should not need the OECD to remind us that it's wrong to rob future generations of Albertans just because it's easier to spend more than it is to make priorities and to be disciplined. Not only is this unfair in terms of our future; it's not even good policy for this generation because it destabilizes our economy now. A spending-growth rule is the best step we could take towards ensuring that we are banking the nonrenewable royalties necessary to counteracting our boom-and-bust business cycle instead of amplifying it.

What would our fiscal picture look like if this bill had already been in place? According to figures recently updated by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, if this government had this legislation in place since 2005-06, we would have a \$2.67 billion surplus this year instead of a record \$7.6 billion cash shortfall. That is fiscal irresponsibility. In other words, instead of raiding our savings and leaving our kids with debt – yes, hon. members, you claim there's no debt, but we just took out \$3 billion in debt this year, so we are back into debt – we could actually be adding to our heritage fund. We'd have something to be proud of today instead of the record deficits that we're racking up.

Don't talk about how this kind of restraint would have hurt our infrastructure and social services. This is a tired and socialistic argument. Restraint promotes efficiency. It promotes frugality and thrift. It causes governments to put needs before wants. It causes them to prioritize, to pool money with partnerships and invite private and nonprofit investment into the economy. Frankly, spending restraint facilitates wise choices. Perhaps this kind of fiscal restraint would have resulted in decades too late health care and other reforms that would have saved us from the health crisis that we're having today. Our government spending has grown too fast and too much for far too long, and we risk leaving our children with a mountain of debt.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:30 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Hinman
Boutilier		

Against the motion:

Amery	Groeneveld	McFarland
Berger	Hayden	Oberle
Blakeman	Horner	Ouellette
Brown	Jablonski	Prins
Campbell	Jacobs	Quest
Chase	Johnson	Renner
Dallas	Kang	Rodney
Danyluk	Knight	Snelgrove
Denis	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Elniski	Liepert	Vandermeer
Fritz	Lindsay	Woo-Paw

Totals:	For – 4	Against – 33
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 204 lost]

Bill 205

Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act.

Bill 205 is an important piece of legislation that aims to set specific standards for scrap metal dealers and recyclers when they engage in transactions with private individuals. Currently an individual can exchange metal for money without having to produce any identification, and the details regarding the transaction are not recorded. The ease of selling stolen metals for cash coupled with their accessibility and recent increase in value has led to scrap metal theft emerging as a serious issue in Alberta. This piece of legislation will protect businesses and communities by detecting and deterring metal theft in Alberta.

The theft of metal victimizes businesses, municipalities, and taxpayers all around our province. Law enforcement in the provincial capital district electronically recorded the value of scrap metal stolen in 55 instances over a 21-month period in 2007 and 2008. In 20 of these 55 instances the value of the metal stolen was estimated to be in excess of \$5,000. It seems completely unreasonable to me that a thief could sell over \$5,000 worth of metal and in many cases drive away with cash in hand and leave law enforcement with nothing but perhaps a vague description to aid in their investigation.

Mr. Speaker, if individuals had to walk into a scrap metal dealer with thousands of dollars of stolen metal and have their identity recorded prior to the sale being completed, this may deter these crimes. In 2008 a theft in Fort McMurray involved over \$300,000 worth of copper wire being stolen. If the scrap metal dealer or recycler was required to record this information for their files along with specific information regarding the transaction, I believe many

thieves would be deterred from committing these acts of theft.

Bill 205 also places the onus on the scrap metal dealer or recycler to inform law enforcement if they receive scrap metal over a certain weight. This would help discourage large thefts of scrap metal that have been occurring around our province since the prices of scrap metal began to increase.

While the value of the metal being stolen is extremely troublesome, perhaps more troublesome is the amount of damage a thief can inflict on both private and public property in the process of stealing the metal. This victimizes both businesses and government as they incur not only the lost metal but also the costs associated with fixing the damaged infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, in some cases the damaged infrastructure can affect thousands of people. As a case in point, this spring a copper cable was stolen that effectively left municipalities around Big Lake without phone and Internet for a whole day. Phone and Internet services provide Albertans, of course, with access to our emergency services, so potentially, if there had been a medical emergency in a community whose phone access had been disabled, the consequences could have been deadly.

The theft of copper wire can also be detrimental to a company's bottom line. In the 20-month period during 2007-2008 that I referenced earlier, 14 companies in the provincial capital district were repeatedly victimized by 51 separate acts of metal theft. I believe this bill not only aids law enforcement but will also give Alberta's businesses further opportunity to deter theft from their companies. If Bill 205 was in place, perhaps businesses who were repeatedly targeted would take steps to mark their metal, making it more easily identifiable if it was stolen. In this case the metal could be returned to the company, and the individuals who stole the metal could be charged.

Mr. Speaker, in discussions with law enforcement they've indicated that organized crime has been increasingly involved in the lucrative, relatively low-risk act of metal theft. Organized crime is a blemish on our society and one, I am proud to say, that our government has aggressively targeted. I see this bill as another tool to assist law enforcement in their effort to curb illegal activity in Alberta.

Law enforcement has been extremely supportive of this legislation. This government has placed a high emphasis on crime prevention and promoting safe communities. I'm proud to say that the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police passed a resolution earlier this year supporting this legislation, that creates standards for scrap metal dealers and recyclers.

Numerous government initiatives have been extremely effective in reducing the amount of funds these groups have access to, and I believe that Bill 205 would certainly be an additional tool for law enforcement to curb scrap metal theft and aid in our government's efforts to ensure that Alberta remains the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day Bill 205 is about protecting our province's infrastructure and businesses and providing additional tools to law enforcement in deterring metal theft. The standards that this bill sets for scrap metal dealers and recyclers are not burdensome; they are very reasonable. I believe this piece of legislation will be a valuable tool for law enforcement and an effective deterrent. In addition, I believe Bill 205 will complement this government's continued efforts to promote safe communities and a thriving business climate in Alberta.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my comments. I sincerely look forward to the valuable input of my colleagues.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join in the debate on Bill 205, sponsored by the Member for Strathcona. You know, when I look at legislation, I think: is there a problem? Sometimes people imagine there's a problem, or it makes sense to them that there's a problem, but we really don't know if there's a problem or not. We've heard the sponsoring member describe that there is a problem and that it's manifesting itself in many different ways.

The question that always occurs to me next is: does the problem need fixing? Let me explain that. Sometimes we do discover things, but you find out that they affect, you know, 1 per cent of the population. At that point I think it's responsible to say: "What kind of a program are we going to develop?" or "How much money are we going to spend if it's affecting 1 per cent of the population? Is there another way to go about this?"

4:50

I would agree that there is a problem, and I would want a bit more investigation about how many people this is affecting, but I think it's reasonable even to give the benefit of the doubt to the sponsoring member and say: "Okay. Yes, it needs fixing." The next question is: would legislation fix it? Possibly. Then, of course, the last question is: would this legislation fix it? I have a problem with what is being proposed as the solution in this act. It's because, essentially, the solution that is being prescribed is to collect personal information from any individual that comes in with scrap metal that is going to be accepted by either a depot or a scrap metal dealer.

I listened to the member describing this. He said that this legislation would detect and deter, but in fact there's nothing in the legislation that does that. What it's doing is, you could argue, a prophylactic action in that it is taking personal information and hanging onto it so that if there does prove to be a problem, they could track down an individual and supposedly turn them over to the authorities to pursue it from there. But there's actually no other action that is prescribed in this legislation except for collecting personal information.

Now, we have three acts in Canada that cover the collection of personal information: the FOIP Act, which covers government and the public bodies; the PIPA act, which is the made-in-Alberta version for those companies and organizations that are not government but operate in the province and do collect in some way personal information; and then you have PIPEDA, which is the federal version of that. Anyone that was operating across provincial boundaries would also fall under PIPEDA, and it is possible for different parts of your business to be subject to different acts, depending on what you're doing.

When I read the legislation that is here – I'm at 3(2) under Requirements – it says, "A scrap metal dealer or recycler who purchases or receives scrap metal shall obtain and record information respecting the transaction prescribed by the regulations." Now, the obvious question is: what kind of information? Well, it's pretty clear as you work it through the rest of it is that they're looking for personal information. Well, personal information is exactly what the law has set out to protect, and there has to be a good reason.

The concept of consent is very important. There are all kinds of business transactions that go on, but it's about an individual saying: "Yes, I'm going to give you my personal information. I agree and I consent to give it to you, and we agree between myself and you how you're going to use it and to whom you're going to disclose it." There are a few exceptions in all three of those acts I described about the circumstances under which it can be used and disclosed without

the person's consent, but generally speaking, the intent is: with consent.

Well, there's no consent that's being contemplated by this legislation. It does say that they "shall inform a person entering into a transaction that the information obtained under this section is being collected." So they're informing them, but they're not asking consent. They're just saying: I'm going to take this information, and it may be handed over to the police. But it's not asking for consent, and I think that's a problem here. It may be provided to a peace officer or a law enforcement agency. Further, the recycler or dealer has to hang on to this personal information "for a minimum of one year after the transaction."

It can be quite onerous to set up a system in which you can properly collect people's personal information, hang onto it, because you're now responsible, and everything in the PIPA act says that you're responsible for that personal information. If you're going to put it on a disk and give it to a private company that's supposed to hang on to this for you and they somehow, you know, leave it in the back alley or mail it out to their grandmother or whatever, you're responsible. That scrap metal dealer or recycler is responsible for that personal information. You are asking them to now engage in a whole process they may not have been involved with at all except for if they had employees, I suppose.

Then the rest of the act is really about how law enforcement can come in and take information and go about their business with it. If people won't do it willingly – I'm assuming the scrap metal dealer won't do it willingly – then they can compel them to do it through the use of court orders, and that's all laid out in the legislation as well. I thought: well, you know, maybe there's a way. How do you deal with the situation where consent is sort of implied, but it's not sought, and it's not particularly given? It's not really a choice. You know, if you're going to give or sell this person your scrap metal, you're going to have to give them your personal information. Is that fair?

Well, when I look at the PIPA act, it actually speaks exactly to that point. It says:

An organization shall not, as a condition of supplying a product or service, require an individual to consent to the collection, use or disclosure of personal information about an individual beyond what is necessary to provide the product or service.

With any scrap metal dealer or recycler now, if you went to them, you know, what you're doing is saying: "I can write you a receipt. I received so many tonnes of this from you. There's a receipt. What's your name? Maybe put your name on the receipt." But they're not requiring any more additional personally identifying information at this point.

I think this is a problem for the purposes of this act. I understand what the member is trying to get at. I understand what problem he's trying to fix. I don't think this is the fix because the PIPA act specifically says:

The purpose of this Act is to govern the collection, use and disclosure of personal information by organizations in a manner that recognizes both the right of an individual to have his or her personal information protected and the need of organizations to collect, use or disclose personal information for purposes that are reasonable.

But nothing in Bill 205 is talking about how they are going to work with the collection, use, and disclosure of that. There's nothing in here that spells out how it's to be kept in a secure place or any of the other kinds of rules that you would expect to have when someone was collecting personally identifying information essentially without their consent. I would argue that I don't think it's much of a choice saying: if you're going to sell this to me, the only way I'll take it is if I get all your personally identifying information.

The other relevant parts of the PIPA act that I picked up. Under

section 6(1), policies and practices: "An organization must develop and follow policies and practices that are reasonable for the organization to meet its obligations under this Act," in other words the PIPA act. The PIPA act is quite clear to businesses that they have to develop a whole protocol to do with this. All of a sudden we've said to a small businessperson, a scrap collector or recycler: "Okay. Not only are you trying to get on with business now and all the other red tape and licences and such and so on that you have to do as a small businessperson, but you're now going to have to develop this whole other protocol around the collection, use, and disclosure of this personal information that you're now collecting." I really wonder how willing these scrap metal dealers and recyclers are going to be to have to develop this whole protocol. The member and I are still sitting together on the FOIP Act review, and it can be an onerous task.

Thank you for allowing me to speak in second reading.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it is so close to 5 o'clock that I'm going to call it 5 o'clock. The debate on this item of business is adjourned for today.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Promotion of Entrepreneurship

510. Mr. Dallas moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to enhance supports available to community stakeholders who engage in delivering education programs that develop entrepreneurial skills and promote the value of entrepreneurship in our society.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 510, which, of course, urges the government to enhance support to groups delivering education programs that develop entrepreneurial skills. In addition, Motion 510 proposes to support programs that highlight the value of entrepreneurship to our society.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, Motion 510 is about recognizing the invaluable role that entrepreneurs play in our economy and in our society and taking steps to develop the entrepreneurs of our future. After all, entrepreneurship and small businesses are the cornerstones of Alberta's economy. I'm proud to say that Alberta has one of the best climates in North America for starting a small business. For example, Alberta has low personal and corporate income taxes, no provincial sales tax, and of course we have world-class infrastructure. All of these advantages have in turn prompted exceptional small-business growth.

Alberta is without a doubt the Canadian leader in small-business development. In 2009 alone it was estimated that for every 1,000 Albertans there were 89 small businesses. To put that into perspective, the national average was only 68 per 1,000. In addition, our businesses tend to outperform their Canadian counterparts. For example, in 2009 the GDP per business in Alberta was \$891,000, which is \$190,000 more than the national average of \$700,000. Mr. Speaker, it is clearly evident that Alberta leads the way in entrepreneurial spirit and development.

The question then becomes: why do we need to support entrepreneurial education programs through Motion 510 if we're already in such an enviable position? The answer to this is quite simple: commitment to improving ourselves. Just because we have the best

education system in Canada does not mean that we stop looking for teaching innovations, and just because we have the best entrepreneurial climate does not mean that we stop developing programs that support this important skill. Motion 510 will recognize the success of entrepreneurs in our communities while, at the same time, helping to develop the next generation of business and community leaders.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the best way to understand the intent of Motion 510 is to look at an example. In my constituency of Red Deer-South the Chamber of Commerce joined with Red Deer College to put on a 10-day entrepreneurial training course. Throughout the 10 evenings students learned about business management and development as well as receiving a basic understanding of business skills like marketing and accounting.

Perhaps the most influential aspect of this course was not what the students learned but who they were taught by. Using this program as a forum, the Chamber of Commerce, Community Futures, and the Red Deer College were able to attract national and community business leaders. These are people who are entrepreneurs themselves and fully understand the risks and rewards that face a new business venture. In essence, these community stakeholders created a program where up-and-coming entrepreneurs can have a chance to learn from the successes and failures of today's business leaders.

The role of Motion 510 is to prompt the development and continuation of projects like this one, projects not run by the government but, rather, by community stakeholders like businesses, chambers of commerce, and educational institutions. The government's role would be to co-ordinate those stakeholders and help share best practices between groups offering similar programs across the province. In addition, Motion 510 was developed to recognize and encourage community stakeholders to share the programs they offer with the support of the Alberta government.

After all, Mr. Speaker, Alberta boasts several innovative programs designed to encourage entrepreneurial development. One of these programs is the youth 'technopreneurship' program, or YTP, offered by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology. This program does two things. One, it helps encourage the development of new, marketable technology, and two, it helps train our youth in the skills needed to be an entrepreneur in the technology industry. To accomplish its goals, this program offers cash rewards to high school and postsecondary students who aspire to build innovative technology that can be marketed.

Motion 510 encourages the government to develop more programs like this and, perhaps, look at other business fields beyond technology development. One could argue that a similar program could be set up to help foster tourism development or spur on development in medical sciences. In addition, Motion 510 encourages collaboration between government programs and the ones offered by community stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, the final goal of Motion 510 is to simply draw attention to and promote the value of entrepreneurship to our society. As I've already highlighted, Alberta is a haven of small businesses and people committed to entrepreneurship, but oftentimes we may not fully realize just how big a role entrepreneurs play in our daily lives. Not only are they the drivers of our economy, but they are our innovators and our inventors and the people who provide employment to the majority of our population. That is why Motion 510 also encourages the government to provide supports to groups or stakeholders who promote the value of entrepreneurship to our society. These people play an incredibly important role in our communities and should be recognized for their contributions.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to stress the value and importance that entrepreneurs play in our day-to-day lives. I believe that the measures placed in Motion 510 serve to promote and

develop this important skill. If we wish to remain competitive on the world stage, we need to highlight and advance the role of entrepreneurs and small business in Alberta. Motion 510 gives us the opportunity to recognize the programs that already develop the business leaders of tomorrow while at the same time helping us to develop new programs.

With that, I'll conclude my comments and eagerly look forward to the input and ideas of my colleagues. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm going to take sort of a middle-of-the-road approach to this Motion 510, enhance support for entrepreneurial education. It would be dismissive to suggest the government adage of the government not being in the business of being in business, but that doesn't mean that under certain circumstances the government shouldn't promote good business practices.

Now, having taught for 34 years, one of the programs that worked very well in the school systems to promote entrepreneurial skills involved mentorship of individuals within the business community: the Junior Achievement program. With the Junior Achievement program junior high school students and high school students created a product, marketed that product, and then sold the product. Some of Alberta's successful entrepreneurs went through that Junior Achievement program. The Junior Achievement program to a large extent occurred outside of class time. Some class time was devoted to it, but the majority of it came through volunteers and mentors. Mentorship is an extremely important teaching tool. Having somebody that has the knowledge and can deliver that knowledge to students is extremely valuable.

Where some of my conflict comes in is that while Motion 510 is calling for greater government support for entrepreneurial education, what we saw with advanced education was a movement away from supporting a business degree by making it financially impossible for a number of students because tuition was increased, for example, at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta to such a large extent. So for people that were seeking business degrees going through advanced education – and the ministry is advanced education, innovation, and technology – that particular movement suggested that the government was sort of giving in this motion and in that other actual action, as opposed to direction, taking away. That's where some of my conflict comes from in terms of how we can actually support this.

5:10

Something else I have a concern about in terms of entrepreneurial visions and investments is this government's viewing unions as antibusiness or antientrepreneurial. To me, the most successful entrepreneurs are those that involve their staff: as part of their compensation, for example, shares in the company. It provides a direct incentive for the employee to get involved. A case in point: the very successful airline, which basically had its roots in Alberta, WestJet, where employees not only have a direct economic investment, but they also have a direct say in how their business is run. To me, that provision of incentive within the company is a major driver. For example, WestJet has increased its share tremendously in the market. When other companies were trying to sell their planes, WestJet, a good example of entrepreneurial management, was purchasing planes.

Another concern I have, where my conflict comes from, is the remuneration of the individuals who work in small businesses. I realize that there's a tremendous amount of sweat equity. The mom-

and-pop shops, where they're the primary workers, have sometimes difficulty attracting further employees. As the vice-chair of the Standing Policy Committee on the Economy I am concerned that just simply moving the minimum wage from where it exists right now and where it's been since April of 2009, \$8.80 an hour, to our committee's recommendation of \$9.05 will see us as the second-lowest jurisdiction in terms of the minimum wage, yet Alberta has the highest per capita economic benefit.

My concern is that as we advance in our entrepreneurial endeavours, it needs to be with the support of employees as opposed to potentially being on the backs of employees. When New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island increase their minimum wage, we'll be a laggard in terms of providing never mind the idea of a living wage, which would be in the area of \$12.00 plus, closer to \$13.00 an hour, but in terms of taking the entrepreneurial spirit to a higher level by having employees who are earning above the low-income cut-off, the LICO standard. Let's, by all means, promote the idea of entrepreneurial spirit.

Another concern I have is: what is it that we're willing to sell? I'm very concerned, for example, about this potato farm. I think it's something like 13,600 acres of Albertans' land, Crown land, being turned over. In this Motion 510 we're talking about entrepreneurial spirit. Now, if the government is going to encourage entrepreneurial spirit, fairness, transparency, and accountability are part of entrepreneurial spirit.

We have to decide as Alberta entrepreneurs or future entrepreneurs what is for sale in this province. I've mentioned land. I've mentioned Crown land. Mr. Speaker, under entrepreneurial spirit I would hope that water never becomes commodified and something that would be sold to the highest bidder. We've got first in time, first in right legislation, which is part of our entrepreneurial protective nature in this province. The first in time, historically speaking, had the water licences. In terms of the first in time, first in right, again, an entrepreneurial undertaking, in forestry we see companies because of their historical connection having large shares of forestry development in this province.

If we're going to have successful entrepreneurial relations, we have to have a balance between the value of the product and the sustainability of that product. If we're going to, for example, encourage entrepreneurial spirit, we don't want to have conflicting interests. Unfortunately, that's what we've got, Mr. Speaker, in terms of multi-use. We have the value of, for example, lodgepole pines as they are on the back of a lumber truck versus the entrepreneurial spirit of tourism, parks, and recreation.

When we're talking entrepreneurial, as we are with Motion 510, to enhance support for entrepreneurial education, we have to balance what it is we're selling, what it is we're leaving for a legacy, and the sustainability of the endeavour. Whether it's entrepreneurial activities such as this motion is all about, there has to be balance. Is the price that we're selling too low for the benefit we're getting?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to participate in the discussion on Motion 510.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to offer some additional comments on Motion 510. I first want to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-South – and I hope I got that right because I often confuse the two constituencies – for bringing up this motion.

Entrepreneurship is really one of the backbones of this province, I put to this Assembly. Many people from other provinces, other

countries decide to come to Alberta for many reasons, but one of the biggest reasons why, I would say, entrepreneurs decide to set up shop in Alberta is because of our favourable climate towards business. Now, the previous member, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, had indicated that it's about balance, and I would agree with that, but where I think he and I would differ is as to where that balance lies.

I spoke with the sponsor of this motion a while ago, and he clearly indicated to me that the purpose of this is to promote and support programs in Alberta that develop entrepreneurship. Now, a particular distinction between this and other arguments that I've heard in the past is that this doesn't seek to have large subsidies for new business per se. I'm not saying that all subsidies are bad, but one thing that we need to remember in this Chamber is that we're always dealing with taxpayers' dollars here, and whenever we subsidize businesses, we basically increase the tax bill of everybody else. Again, I'm not saying there can be no subsidy, but at the same point in time we have to be very careful about the quantum and the type of subsidies that we do offer. So I'm happy that the mover of this motion has not advocated subsidies but, rather, is talking about education, talking about a proper climate.

Motion 510 proposes that the government work more closely with community groups that offer educational programs to teach entrepreneurial values and skills. I like the fact that he talks about it being a community group because different types of entrepreneurship may be conducive in different areas of the province, and when you have that type of local input, obviously, there are some things that will do better in Calgary or in Red Deer that may not do well up north or in other rural areas. These community groups, of course, can include high schools, postsecondary institutions as well as business groups like the local chamber of commerce. I have to say that, again, it is a good idea to be talking with these groups from the grassroots level up.

I first got involved with Junior Achievement when I was in high school, and I learned a lot about business and about relationship building that I was able to carry later when I founded two businesses: one a communications company and the other a real estate company, the latter of which still operates today. Motion 510 recognizes that entrepreneurship plays a very critical role in our economy and in our programs, and developing this skill set in people and inspiring them at an early age is something that we need to encourage.

Now, entrepreneurship and small businesses are some of the cornerstones of our economy in this province. Developing and recognizing this skill set talks about our future economic growth in this whole province. I have to say as well that Alberta is a leader in small business development.

5:20

Mr. Rodney: Agreed.

Mr. Denis: I'm happy the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed agrees with me.

I was able to grab a couple of stats here. For example, in 2009 it was estimated that for every thousand Albertans there were 89.2 small businesses. Now, that doesn't seem like a lot, around 8, 9 per cent, but at the same time when you compare to the national average of 68.1, that gives testament to the importance of small business entrepreneurship to our economy in Alberta.

In addition, it's worth noting that the GDP per business in Alberta was \$891,000. Again, the national average was \$700,000. Now, between 1988 and 2008, Mr. Speaker, about 22,000 small businesses were created in Alberta. This is an increase of 22 and a half per

cent. I think this is something that we need to consider, that these people, whether these businesses succeed or fail, are taking a significant risk with their own capital and their own time throughout this entire province. Contributing with these risks, whether they succeed or whether they fail, does help bolster our economy, particularly in a challenging time.

I have to also indicate, as we mentioned earlier, that Alberta has very low personal and corporate taxes. Alberta has no PST, and as long as the Premier is the Premier, he has indicated that there will be no PST in this province. We also have highly developed infrastructure and transportation networks and a government committed to trade and openness through things like Bill 1 in 2008, which dealt with TILMA. But the most important thing to note here is that we have a very strong climate for wealth creation in this province, and that's where I think the balance is important.

We also have some current programs as well. We offer several programs designed to help people start or expand their own business. Motion 510 would work with and support these programs as well as draw attention to programs offered outside the government. This is important, too, because I often have many people who will call my office, and I'll indicate to them something that we actually do, and they have no idea. Not everybody actually goes and looks at every program like we do under the dome here. So this is important to increase this awareness.

We have things like the Business Link, which is a nonprofit organization funded by our government and the government of Canada. We have things like Employment and Immigration's self-employment program, another joint program with the federal government. We also have our own programs like the youth 'technopreneurship' program, which I wasn't aware of before I started researching this. It's run by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, and it aims to develop entrepreneurs dedicated to technological information. This program, again, targets youth in high schools and postsecondary institutions, offering large cash rewards to youth who develop innovative technologies.

Another one that's interesting, Mr. Speaker. We also have the Alberta youth entrepreneurship camp. The Alberta youth entrepreneurship camp is a week-long summer camp that is offered to Alberta youth. At this camp learners learn basic business skills, and campers own and operate their own small business community using real money, interestingly enough. This program is an example of how Motion 510 hopes to promote entrepreneurship in this province. It's an educational entrepreneurship program put on by both the government and community stakeholders.

I do want to respond just briefly to a couple of comments made by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. He talked about tuition, and he talked about how tuition is high. It's true. Education, Mr. Speaker, is expensive, and I paid some of those tuition bills in my youth as well, but at the same time we must understand that there also is a cost to education. It's already subsidized highly by the taxpayer. It's about creating a balance. For those who cannot afford tuition – and I do have some sympathy, being a former student leader myself – many of these people can go and seek assistance on an individual basis through scholarships, bursaries, and loans. We have to strike the balance between the cost of education but also the cost that the taxpayer pays for this education. I recognize that there is an external economy dealing with postsecondary education. We need to educate the leaders of tomorrow, but also they must share in that cost of the tuition with the taxpayer. I think that this government has endeavoured to strike a balance there.

The other thing the Member for Calgary-Varsity mentioned was that many businesses who actually go and share the profits through options, what have you, with their employees are, in fact, successful

businesses. I'd have to agree with him there. He cited the example of WestJet. Well, I have to say, Mr. Speaker, for this member's edification and information, WestJet actually doesn't have a union. In fact, I'm not against unions per se, but at the same point in time WestJet provides an example out of my home city of Calgary that you don't need to have a union to have responsible business. They have an association. They share their shares with their individual employees. In fact, several friends of mine work there. They keep on telling me that their slogan is: because owners care. Everybody is a member of that organization. WestJet has been very profitable for our city and for our province, but at the same time just because you don't have a union doesn't mean that you're having irresponsible business practices.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that every member support the Member for Red Deer-South's Motion 510. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was really interested to see this motion brought forward by the Member for Red Deer-South because I think it's a fine idea. I think there are a couple of areas that really drive our province and make it better, and one of them is entrepreneurial skill, including that understanding of risk taking. I mean, that's the deal, right? You venture your capital, you risk it, and if you've got a good business idea and you run it well, you're going to reap the benefits big time. I think that appeals to a number of people, and they may not necessarily have the skills.

Now, according to the previous speaker there is a considerable number of agencies that are available to help teach or mentor individuals who want to pursue that line. I know that the Member for Calgary-Varsity also mentioned a couple of organizations.

I certainly have no hesitation in supporting what the member is recommending here. I've had a little bit of experience with this because one of the schools that I have in Edmonton-Centre – and I don't have a lot of them, so I have the privilege of being able to spend more time in my schools than most MLAs can just because I have fewer of them – got involved in a project called MicroSociety, which was actually a project out of the States. This particular school really went for it. They ended up raising money to redo some of their hallways. They had signage and storefronts and things like that.

It really was a project that was very focused on having kids involved. Every Friday afternoon they did MicroSociety. Their other classes were suspended. This was their learning experience. On the Friday afternoon they were each assigned a task. They might be a member of the government, which would be making decisions and rules about things. They had a police force, or a security force. They had a post office, and they had tax collectors, interestingly enough. Everything else in MicroSociety was about entrepreneurship; it was about making and selling. The hallways were filled with kids that did bookmarks and things to eat and all kinds of opportunities for them to buy and sell.

I was always really interested that there was so much focus on the business side and almost no recognition of how much of our society is and should be involved in the public side of our society. MicroSociety did recognize government, and it did recognize policing – I would put taxation under the government side, so I'm not going to make that a separate one – and the post office. So they really recognized three parts of what is in our public sector, but they didn't recognize all the rest of our public sector.

Government, obviously, is a huge employer of people and a big

part of our public sector, but so are schools. The admin staff, teachers, janitorial staff, even the people who built schools until the government started doing P3s would also be involved in that public sector.

People involved in hospitals are involved in the public sector. The nurses, the technicians, the doctors, the administrators, the porters in the hallways: all of those people are employed in the public sector.

In the universities, again, it's a public body; it's public sector. Most people involved in recreation are involved in the public sector. They're working for a not-for-profit generally. People involved in the arts: individually, yes, they are entrepreneurs because they're selling their work or attempting to, but generally they come together in a co-operative agreement and will often be working for a not-for-profit theatre or dance company or art gallery.

5:30

The charities that we have are also huge employers if you look at United Way or all the ones that are involved in the health sector: the Diabetes Foundation, the Kidney Foundation, the Schizophrenia Society, the cancer-supporting agencies, those charities that work with the poor or the homeless or, for example, with HIV research and offering services to people who are living with HIV, all of those organizations involved in child welfare and protection and safety. Those are all in the public sector, as are those that work in the parks sector that aren't government parks, in the environment, in many cases churches, for the most part research and development, philanthropy, all of those involved in the justice system, in the jails, that whole spectrum from policing through the judiciary and to the jails and then on to those not-for-profits that deal with people in resettlement in halfway houses coming out the other side.

There's such an emphasis in our society on the business sector. I mean, it's far more valued to have a bachelor of commerce than it is, for example, to have an arts degree. We already put a lot of emphasis on the business side, the private corporate side of our society, and not very much respect or value on that whole side which employs an equal number of people, which is the public sector. So I have no problem in supporting what the Member for Red Deer-South is suggesting here. I think that's always a good idea. Certainly, education is never going to hurt.

The other area that I would suggest needs a little beefing up these days in the schools and a little bit more help is civics, the whole idea of being a citizen and participating in our society, including participating as a voter. We seem to be struggling with that right now, and a number of people just have no idea of how this whole system works anymore. We touch on it very briefly in grade 6 and grade 9, and that's about it. So anybody that wants to come up with a motion to increase civic participation would certainly get support from me.

As I said, I'm more than willing to support what the member has proposed here. I'm just trying to put forward that there are other parts to our society that do make it a good place to live, to learn, to work, to play. We're looking for a quality of life. That does involve a balance, and the balance is more than just the corporate sector and entrepreneurship. It can certainly bring us great wealth and great ideas in many cases, but all of us could probably name more well-known entrepreneurs than we could name well-known artists, for example.

I think I'll support this, but I want people to also be thinking about the other parts of our society that are just as deserving of attention and support. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to also join the debate today on Motion 510. I've very much enjoyed listening to the comments of other speakers, and I think this is a very important topic for us to debate because it's so essential to Alberta and to what Albertans are.

I have attended a number of events where I've run into people who have come from outside the province and have offered, unsolicited from me, an observation that they find Albertans to be very optimistic people with a can-do attitude. I would submit that that's what you need to be to be an entrepreneur. You know, I think Albertans are optimistic people, and that's what makes them good entrepreneurs. I certainly would acknowledge that small family-owned businesses in Alberta are the cornerstones of our economy and, certainly, the Canadian economy as well.

Some of the other speakers have offered some statistics to support the strength of Alberta entrepreneurship. They have kind of scooped me on some of those, so I won't repeat them, but I do have a few other ones which come from the Alberta Business Family Institute. Family-owned business generates approximately 60 per cent of Canada's GDP. It employs 6 million workers in Canada, full- and part-time, and creates 70 per cent of all new jobs in North America. It also provides – and this I find very interesting – 55 per cent of all charitable contributions. So family businesses, entrepreneurial groups are people with a public conscience, certainly, and a social conscience, too.

I mentioned the Alberta Business Family Institute. That's one of the many organizations supported by the taxpayers of Alberta, this one through the University of Alberta, that does great work in building and supporting entrepreneurship. Attached to the Alberta Business Family Institute is a project called creating pathways for entrepreneurial families. That group actually is based in Camrose, in my constituency, associated with the University of Alberta. Their focus, their initiative is rural development.

Now, even though we have great support for entrepreneurial activities in Alberta, we shouldn't think that there's no work left to be done. There are still great challenges, and that's the reason I think this motion is so important. A couple of sobering statistics also come from the same organization, the Alberta Business Family Institute: 70 per cent of family-owned businesses fail before they're passed on to the second generation, 88 per cent fail before they're passed on to the third generation, and 97 per cent fail before they're passed on to the fourth generation. Obviously, there's still lots for us to learn about how to sustain a good idea over generations.

No community can really be whole without a healthy local economy, and to have that, you need businesses and entrepreneurs, you need a skilled and educated workforce, and you need infrastructure. It's kind of a package deal. Just having people with entrepreneurial spirit does not create a healthy economy. We need all of these things together. That's where I think government support and encouragement can also come in.

We live in a competitive world, where it's very important for us to maintain and even redouble our efforts in supporting business because business creates jobs and wealth. I'll just give an example of where there's great potential for us to do good, and that would be in aboriginal communities, the youngest and fastest growing segment of our population in Alberta. If you think about many aboriginal communities, they have challenges in terms of economic development, and there may be less entrepreneurial activity than they would like. That, certainly, is an area where I would like to suggest that government could devote some resources and support.

We do have, actually, some initiatives such as the aboriginal entrepreneurship certificate program on eCampus Alberta, which assists with marketing, communications, accounting, law, and so on.

The creating pathways project, that I mentioned earlier, also is active in that area. But lots more could be done to help train our young people across the province in all areas. From my perspective, certainly, it's important for rural areas.

I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward. I think it's important for us as an Assembly to make a strong statement about our support for this topic. With that, I encourage all members to support the motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Motion 510, sponsored by the Member for Red Deer-South. Enough has been said about small businesses creating good jobs in the economy and that small business is the backbone of any economy. There's no doubt that small and medium enterprises are the engine for growth. Whatever it takes to increase entrepreneurship will be great for Alberta's economy. It will go a long way to setting up more small businesses and improving not only the health of the economy but improving the quality of life for Albertans as a whole.

5:40

It will not only create much-needed jobs; if the entrepreneurs are trained at a younger age, then the likelihood of them setting up businesses will be greater than somebody who has no insight into small business, and they will most likely succeed in the small business they set up. I can give you the example of my son. He started working at a Subway because he wanted to do something on his own. He ended up buying a Subway franchise, which he is selling now. He's moving on to something else. He has been employing 10 to 12 people.

I can talk about immigrants coming from India. This gentleman never even walked behind a school, never mind going to school. He came here and worked hard, and then he started building homes. I think I mentioned this before. I called him. I wanted to build a deck on the back of the house. He came and he told me, "We will use teeter wood." I didn't know what he was talking about, and I've been here 40 years. You know, I said: "Yeah. Yeah." I didn't want to look like someone who didn't know what he was talking about. I told him: "Yes. Okay. You come tomorrow, and we will go and get whatever you need." I was wondering what "teeter wood" was. I went to bed that night, and in the middle of the night I woke up, and all of a sudden it came to my mind that he was talking about treated wood. He was talking about treated wood, but he was saying, "teeter wood." Up until today he still calls it "teeter wood." This guy has a small business. He's a businessman. He's building homes. He's a small home builder, and he's been employing 25, 30 workers. This is the spirit of small business, you know. It goes a long way to creating those jobs, which we need.

There are some benefits to entrepreneurship education. The benefit to elementary schools is that it increases attendance. There is a whole list of benefits: fewer discipline problems and an increased sense of self-control, awareness of career and entrepreneurial options. Then it goes on to say that benefits to middle school students continuing on to high school are to improve academic skills; to experience entrepreneurship across the curriculum; to improve economic literacy and understanding of capitalism; to improve financial literacy and develop workplace literacy; to demonstrate conflict resolution, negotiation, sales marketing, and persuasion skills and learn how entrepreneurs give back; and to learn how to make money. All these things will shape a young person's life.

Then the benefits to high school students, it goes on to say: creation of entrepreneurial thinkers who also have the skills and tools to start their own business, write a business plan, and apply economic principles. It further goes on to say: manage risk – risk is a major factor in setting up a small business, and if they can do their business plan, most likely they will know where they want to go with their small business – engage in ethical business practices, demonstrate financial management. Then it goes on further: provides benefits to postsecondary and adult students. So there are lots of benefits in having an education in entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship has been a defining feature of Alberta's history and is a cornerstone of our economy today. If Alberta is going to maintain a high standard of living compared to the global economy, we are going to need entrepreneurs and lots of them. Entrepreneurship education needs to focus on young people as well as communities that haven't shared in Alberta's prosperity as much as they should have, such as aboriginal communities.

We can go on to add new immigrants because it's very hard for them to start their new life. You know, some people were doing business, probably, in their respective countries, and when they come here, they are just shocked, you know, about where to go, where to start. If they are trained to set up a small business, I think that will go toward helping our economy as well.

Our higher education institutions and our cities have been doing a good job creating entrepreneurial cultures, but further government support for education would go a long way. I think this motion will, you know, strengthen that argument. For those reasons I'll fully support this motion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to speak to Motion 510, brought forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. The motion urges the government to enhance supports to community stakeholders who engage in delivering educational programs that develop entrepreneurial skills and promote the benefit of entrepreneurship to our society. It doesn't get much more positive than that.

Prior to being elected, I was self-employed as a General Motors dealer. I took that business over in 1995, and I pretty much had to learn by trial and error in the first years that I owned that dealership. Mr. Speaker, things have changed since then. From 1988 to 2008 Alberta led this country in small-business creation. In this 20-year period over 22,000 small businesses have been created in this province. Numerous programs have aided Albertans in their business ventures and helped ensure that Albertans are leaders in small business and in entrepreneurial enterprises.

One such program, the Business Link, has supported business development in Alberta since its inception. The Business Link provides services to small-business leaders on a variety of topics, including basic business planning, taxation, and legal planning. I'm proud to say that in my constituency the Strathcona county economic development and tourism branch has done great work in aiding small businesses and entrepreneurs. This branch regularly holds consultations for starting a business in the county and conducts visitations for existing businesses in our county. Mr. Speaker, this branch also works closely with the Sherwood Park & District Chamber of Commerce and assists businesses who are expanding or diversifying by providing business opportunities and information and additional resources that are available to them. The Strathcona county economic development branch and the Sherwood Park & District Chamber of Commerce have done a great job in promoting healthy

business in our community. I think back to my early days of self-employment, and I really would have appreciated the guidance of groups like this in a number of different areas.

As stated earlier, the number of small-business creations in Alberta is the highest in our country. Our government has a solid record of providing educational tools to small businesses and entrepreneurs. I commend the Member for Red Deer-South for recognizing that the demand for these tools is increasing, as is the value of entrepreneurs in Alberta. I fully support Motion 510 and encourage all members of the Assembly to join me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know my time is short, so I'll shorten up my remarks, but I want you to know that I am a very strong supporter of this Motion 510, urging the government to enhance supports to groups delivering education programs that develop entrepreneurial skills. In fact, I'm very excited about entrepreneurship in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I remember the day 30 years ago when I crossed the border into Alberta with my family and the feeling of freedom that I immediately felt. I came from a manufacturing province with well-established business, industry, and corporations, with a lower percentage of small businesses than Alberta. I soon realized that I had moved to a province that would give me and my family the freedom to create that would match our spirit to achieve. Thanks to the support of entrepreneurship in Alberta my family and I were encouraged to plant our entrepreneurial roots and to grow two very successful small businesses.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, 95 per cent of all business in Alberta is small business. While small business is the backbone of our economy, entrepreneurs are the backbone of small business. That's why it's so important to support entrepreneurship in this province. In fact, the city of Grande Prairie was recently named Canada's most entrepreneurial city by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Red Deer has also been identified as one of Canada's top entrepreneurial cities. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business ranked Red Deer as number 7 in its study Communities in Boom: Canada's Top Entrepreneurial Cities. Thank you for that.

Mr. Speaker, we have a tradition of entrepreneurship in Alberta, one that this government is proud to support. As I promised, I will keep my remarks short because we did talk about some of the programs we already have in place to make entrepreneurship in Alberta successful. Since we've heard about some of the programs that we already have, I won't repeat them. I'll just conclude by saying that it's evident that there's a lot of entrepreneur training offered in Alberta, and as a province we will continue to rely on the drive and innovation of entrepreneurs to advance economic strength in Alberta.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing forward this motion. I ask this government to continue to support

opportunities in this area so that Alberta can continue to offer the freedom to create for those who have the spirit to achieve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? There are two minutes left.

Then I will ask the hon. Member for Red Deer-South to close debate.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it was a pleasure to listen to the comments of all hon. members that weighed in on Motion 510 this afternoon. I really enjoyed the perspectives that were shared, and I think there were some excellent thoughts that came out of this. We started with some discussion around education and the importance of education in our society and, in particular, access. I think it brought to light for me the good work that's being done with Campus Alberta and the laddering opportunities. No matter where you start, where you are in our province, whether you want to achieve a diploma, a certificate, a trade, and you want to continue to progress to a different level of education, those laddering opportunities are provided through access that's created around our province. Our president at Red Deer College often is quoted as saying, "If you're qualified, we'll take you; if you're not qualified, we'll get you qualified," and that access leads to many opportunities for our youth.

We talked a bit about the importance of wealth creation and how it really is a function of our outlook on our society, the encouragement that's provided by mentors, the educational opportunities, the variety of financial instruments that can support a venture in our province, the ease of entry into business – we didn't talk today about BizPaL, which is a great new program supported by Service Alberta throughout the province – and, of course, the importance of mentoring opportunities.

You know, whatever sector of the economy you're in, if you're in the arts sector or you're in agriculture, there are entrepreneurs. In any geography, if you're in Milk River or if you're in Zama Lake, there are opportunities in this province. Any age: we talked about youth, but also we have senior entrepreneurs in our province and some great ones. Finally, whether you're new to Canada or you're a fourth- or fifth-generation Albertan, the opportunities are equal.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of the members of the Assembly to support Motion 510. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is 5:55, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, November 2, 2010

Issue 37

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 2, 2010

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. Let us ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two people who are very dedicated to making our communities stronger and safer, Chief Mike Boyd and the Edmonton Police Commission chair, Brian Gibson.

Mr. Gibson has been a member of the Edmonton Police Commission since 2005. He's also the current board chair of the Alberta law enforcement response teams. Mr. Gibson has been on the boards of many community organizations. He has an extensive background as an entrepreneur and philanthropist. He's committed to ensuring the safety and security of Edmonton neighbourhoods, and he is a valuable partner with my ministry in that regard.

With him today is somewhat of a guest of honour, Chief Mike Boyd, who has been with the Edmonton Police Service for the past five years of a longer than 40-year career in policing. During that time he's proved himself to be both a leader and a community builder, Mr. Speaker. Chief Boyd has worked hard to enhance the professionalism of the Edmonton Police Service, and he has raised the profile of the EPS and of the city as a result. He has received many accolades in his career, including being invested as a commander of the order of merit of the police forces by the Governor General of Canada. Chief Boyd appears here today on the eve of his retirement. He will step down from his position as chief of the Edmonton Police Service at the end of this year.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that we join and offer our thanks and our traditional warm welcome to our two special guests today.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 47 students from Deer Meadow school that comprise two grade 6 classes there. What could be better on a beautiful fall day than leaving the classroom on a field trip and coming up and visiting their Legislature? As I pointed out, they do own the place. I also ask a question to each of my classes: "Who all wants to be an MLA in the future?" I have to say that out of all the classes I've introduced over the years, there are more aspiring MLAs in this group than any of the others that I've ever introduced before. Not only that, if you look at them seated in the public gallery, you'll notice some very fresh haircuts. These are fantastic students who volunteered to raise funds for cancer. I'd like all the members of the

Assembly to welcome them here today and give them the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose it is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you a group of 15 grade 6 and grade 9 students from the Eastside Christian Academy in Calgary. The students are joined today by Mrs. Marie Poulin and principal Frank Moody. I had a chance to meet with them very briefly earlier this afternoon. It is always a rare pleasure to receive students from the Calgary area, so I ask that they all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me today to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly a group of 46 students from Westpark middle school in Red Deer. This is the school that our children attended. In Red Deer we're very proud of the work that's done in preparing our future leaders, and Westpark middle school has an excellent reputation for advancing the ambitions of our future leaders. The students are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Lana Beierbach and Mr. Dave Cozens and parent helpers Mrs. Mariette Williamson and Mrs. Patti Stinson. I'd invite members from the Westpark middle school delegation to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through to all members of this Assembly Mr. Matt McFadyen. He's accompanied today by my wife, Shirley. They're in the members' gallery. Matt is a second cousin to my wife. Although Matt is a born and bred Edmontonian, he cheers for the Stampeders, he tells me. He works for Trans Am pipeline, and I'd like you to give him the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my previous life as a lawyer I had the good fortune to meet a lot of clients who became friends. That's right: clients who became friends. There are two people here today who I count as very good friends although they are no longer clients. They come from northern Germany. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature Peter and Evi Schröder. They're from Bremervörde, which is about halfway between Hamburg and Bremen. They are experts in municipal infrastructure. Peter is a civil engineer, and Evi works with him. They are experts in water management and environmental issues. They are here touring the Legislature today, and it was a great pleasure to have lunch with them. They're in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that all members give them the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Edmonton Police Chief Mike Boyd

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier the Solicitor General

and Minister of Public Security introduced Chief Mike Boyd of the Edmonton Police Service. I am truly honoured to rise today and have the privilege to congratulate Chief Boyd on his achievements during his time with the Edmonton Police Service and to extend best wishes as he will be retiring at the end of this year.

Chief Boyd was officially sworn in as the chief of police on January 1, 2006. This followed 35 years of illustrious and distinguished service with the Toronto Police Service, leading into a short retirement. Our city and our province are very grateful that he was willing to reconsider retirement in favour of an opportunity to provide additional dedicated service and leadership to the one of the finest policing organizations, the Edmonton Police Service.

Initially I invited Chief Boyd to join us at the Alberta Legislature to celebrate receiving the national exemplary service medal bar on April 23, 2010. This award recognizes his 40 years of exemplary police service in our nation, which is characterized by good conduct, industry, and efficiency that serves as a model for others. Mr. Speaker, this recognition is important to acknowledge since to date Chief Boyd is the only member of the Edmonton Police Service to have received this award. Chief Boyd received this award in 1989 for the first time to mark 20 years of exemplary service, and the bars are subsequently awarded at 10-year intervals to honour the service to the community.

1:40

Chief Boyd has also been awarded several other honours, including his investiture as commander of the order of merit of the police forces by the Governor General of Canada, the Queen's golden jubilee medal by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and the medal of merit by the Toronto Police Services Board.

Since his arrival in Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, Chief Boyd did not waver on his commitment to intelligence-led policing, combatting organized crime, and building proactive, safer communities for all to enjoy. He has served on many task forces and committees to promote safe community initiatives, including the Premier's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force.

*Recently Chief Boyd announced his retirement from the Edmonton Police Service. After 40 years dedicated to policing and service, he will truly be missed by many. On behalf of our province and our city we are grateful for Chief Boyd's strong leadership and exemplary policing service.**

Congratulations and heartfelt wishes to Chief Boyd and his wife, Margo, as they continue their life's journey.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our biggest mistakes in life are often the results of refusal to recognize and admit our mistakes. This government continues to jeopardize the lives of Albertans with its centrally controlled health superboard. They started out with a totalitarian gag order, forbidding our health care providers from speaking out. They threatened disciplinary action to any who dared speak out, then claimed to rescind the order a year later, but the reality and perception from our health care providers is that the code of silence hangs over their heads.

Over the past several weeks it has become public and clear that emergency room care in Alberta is in crisis. Several highly respected emergency room doctors have graphically described our ER system as on the brink of collapse. Leaked documents have detailed hundreds of ER horror stories. The Wildrose caucus has listened to

and met with many health professionals across the province in order to formulate a series of proposals aimed at immediately addressing the ER crisis in a practical and time-sensitive manner.

The Wildrose Alliance proposes that the government of Alberta implement the following measures. One, ensure a chief medical officer is assigned at all times in every hospital with an emergency room. The CMO should be given unilateral authority to make decisions concerning all units in the hospital. The CMO must be able to open beds in non-ER units, reassign staff, activate additional staff, and if necessary override AHS directives, regulations, and regular staffing ratios in order to alleviate ER blockages that are endangering lives. Two, immediately activate the nurses needed to deal with the ER crisis. Three, immediately increase all necessary support staff. Four, open up additional acute-care beds by moving healthy seniors waiting in hospitals into temporary living accommodations such as senior-friendly apartments and other lodging arrangements. Five, work to greatly accelerate the building of long-term care and assisted living facilities as well as home care.

In closing, I want to thank those health care providers who have bravely spoken out and all front-line workers, without whom the crisis would be worse.

Family Violence Prevention Month

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, black, blue, and white pins are being worn by all MLAs today. These pins signify our support to end family violence. Since November has been considered Family Violence Prevention Month, I thank all for that courtesy.

We all know family violence is a complex issue that is present in all our communities and affects more people than many of us realize. That is why Alberta continues to provide strong leadership and supports to help individuals and families facing family violence. The prevention of family violence and bullying initiative has made important strides in increasing our understanding of this issue. Through public awareness campaigns attitudes are changing, and people are learning how they can help someone who is affected by family violence. The toll-free family violence info line is available at 310-1818. This 24-hour resource offers help in more than 170 languages and can also give concerned Albertans information about how to help someone who may be in a difficult family situation.

Alberta also provides other resources like emergency shelters for women like Northern Haven in Slave Lake, safe visitation sites, victim support programs, domestic violence courts, help with establishing new households, treatment for offenders, protection orders, specialized police teams, and services for high-risk situations.

Mr. Speaker, the more we know about family violence, the more we can do what the pins say, and that is: End the Silence, Stop the Violence. Thank you.

School Board Trustee Elections

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to extend the Assembly's congratulations to the school board trustees across Alberta who are newly elected or re-elected to the position. Everyone acknowledges the importance of education to Alberta's future, but these individuals have shown the depth of their commitment to the educational success of Alberta's children.

Trustees have a pivotal role to play in the transformation of the K to 12 education system in Alberta to enable it to meet the educational demands of the 21st century. Their challenge will be to continue to engage Albertans in the discussion of the future of education that was created through Inspiring Education, Setting the

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

Direction, and Speak Out and to help shape the response to those initiatives, the results of which are contained in the Inspiring Action report, released in June of this year. The information gathered from these initiatives will be used to help determine just how we begin to build the foundation for a K to 12 education system that will meet the needs of the 21st century.

Government has listened and responded to Albertans' wishes for the future of education. The focus of trustees is likely to change as a result of public engagement and education we have undertaken. Student success, community engagement, and fostering collaboration will be top priorities. Trustees will have the biggest impact by directly engaging their communities in the education of their children and by fostering collaboration with other organizations that have a hand in assuring student success. Parents, relatives, neighbours, mentors, and the general public have a role, too, in making sure our young people take care of themselves and others and contribute back to their community. Trustees can help enable that to happen.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Gifts for Government MLAs and Cabinet Ministers

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Politicians and pundits these days spend a lot of time wondering why voters feel increasingly disconnected from democracy. The answer is simple. People don't trust politicians anymore. Why should they? It becomes more and more obvious every day that government MLAs in this province are compromised by a plethora of free gifts they receive from special interests. Everyone knows that gifts come with an expectation of access to power and influence. If these gifts are allowed in the ethics guidelines, then it's time the guidelines were changed.

Free trips, concert tickets, rounds of golf at exclusive resorts, fishing expeditions: government MLAs are really living it up. When the people that create our laws are seen to accept gifts from big donors and big business, it casts a pall over our entire democratic process. The vast majority of Albertans receive no such perks for doing their jobs. They put in a solid day's work for a day's pay and feel rightfully proud of themselves for making a contribution to Alberta.

Government MLAs not only receive a very generous salary and benefits package – the 30 per cent plus raise a couple of years back is more than an average salary in most of Canada – including bonuses for sitting on committees, additional compensation for being ministers, but on top of it all they feel it's okay to accept large gifts. You can afford to pay for your own Lady Gaga tickets. You can afford to play 18 holes on your own dime. You can afford to take a fishing trip to B.C. You can afford your own hotel rooms. What you can't afford is to erode your own integrity and the trust voters have placed in you, when many of them can't afford to care for their developmentally disabled children or their infirm parents, who languish in a continuing care system that your government has allowed to fall apart.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I could say that I'm surprised; instead, all I can do is join my fellow citizens in disgust.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

National Pain Awareness Week

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to draw the attention of the House to National Pain Awareness Week, recog-

nized across Canada each year during the first week of November. Chronic pain is a serious issue affecting approximately 6 million Canadians, 1 in 5 Albertans, and many of my constituents in Edmonton-Rutherford. Generally defined as pain persisting for longer than three to six months, chronic pain often accompanies chronic diseases such as arthritis, diabetes, and various neurological disorders. In addition to the devastating impact on the lives of individuals and their families, recent studies indicate that direct health care costs associated with chronic pain are estimated at more than \$6 billion annually and lost productivity costs relating to sick days and job loss are at more than \$37 billion nationally.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take the opportunity today to recognize the Canadian Pain Coalition. The coalition is a partnership of patient support groups, health professionals who care for people in pain, and scientists studying better ways of treating pain. The coalition develops educational programs and raises awareness in order to find solutions and treatment for people living with pain. As we commemorate National Pain Awareness Week in this House and in Legislatures across Canada, I would like to thank the members and volunteers of the Canadian Pain Coalition for their hard work and dedication. They have called for a national pain strategy to be developed in accordance with a charter of patient rights and responsibilities with respect to pain. We thank them for their continued efforts to raise awareness of this most important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, first question.

Gifts for Government MLAs and Cabinet Ministers

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier is off on a junket to India with his entourage. We've got ministers accepting gifts of fishing trips in B.C. and rounds of golf in luxury resorts. Other ministers are taking free tickets to concerts: Rod Stewart, Fleetwood Mac, and Lady Gaga. We have a government MLA who didn't pay property taxes until the debt became public . . .

Mr. Oberle: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I recognize a point of order. We'll deal with it after question period.

Dr. Swann: . . . and we see the recent Progressive Conservative conference awash with advertising by corporations that do business with this government. To the Deputy Premier: how can Albertans have any faith that this government is not beholden to special interests?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner is an officer of this Legislature. The Ethics Commissioner is the one that this Legislature has set in place to manage the rules that this Legislature has put in place around gifts, around donations, around all of those things that MLAs go to the Ethics Commissioner to talk about. Despite what the opposition and many pundits claim, there's no scandal here. All MLAs are routinely invited to various functions and various events, where we have the opportunity to build relationships and we have the opportunity to interact with our stakeholders. That's what our job is intended to do.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, how can Albertans have any confidence that this government's decisions are based on good judgment and not on returning favours?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate. The rules that are set are set by this House, including the hon. members across the way. The rules state very clearly that MLAs are allowed to accept gifts as a result of social obligations or protocol up to a limit of \$400, and if it's above that, the Ethics Commissioner must approve it. All of the items that have been listed in the report as well as what the hon. member is bringing forward have been discussed with the Ethics Commissioner, and he has not ruled that there's anything unethical or scandalous there. I would suggest that the hon. member might want to take his report to the Ethics Commissioner.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's been argued by this government that there's a connection between taking a golf trip to B.C. and being a public champion for physical activity. Really? Can the Deputy Premier explain how the interests of Albertans are advanced by ministers travelling out of province to play golf and go fishing, specifically?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I didn't advance that argument. I'm not sure where he got it from. But I can tell you what we need to do as MLAs. All MLAs need to build relationships with their constituents and with stakeholders, and we also have to go outside of our borders.

The hon. member mentioned the trip to India. Where does he think Alberta is going to export the massive amounts of productivity that we have? Where does he think we're going to get the customers that are going to allow us to create the tax revenue that's going to generate the type of social programs Albertans have become accustomed to and deserve?

The Deputy Speaker: Second question from the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again my questions are for the Deputy Premier. Over the last couple of years we've seen example after example of this administration's personal greed, from giving themselves huge raises to paying big salaries for committees that do not work to paying political appointees huge bonuses and giving sweet patronage appointments, with all the trimmings, to ex-MLAs. The government seems to ignore any limits to good taste and the bounds of propriety. To the Deputy Premier: today Albertans are once again angry over government ministers and MLAs accepting all kinds of free gifts, gifts that could not be described in any other way except as bonuses, more MLA bonuses. Can you explain why MLAs are still claiming bonuses?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was here during the Members' Services discussions and all those other things that brought that to the House in this Legislature and is obviously grabbing a little bit at straws. I would say that we might want to look to the Ethics Commissioner's comments in the report, including the newspaper article that they love to quote, where the commissioner's office said that the MLAs in Alberta are really very ethical, an ethical bunch of people. So we are fortunate as Albertans that we have the rules in place, that we're as transparent as we are that we're having this discussion today.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Looking at the record of

prosecutions and sanctions for breaching the ethics rules, we find that in the 20 years of the existence of the legislation not one breach has been prosecuted – not one. Does this not show, Mr. Deputy Premier, that the legislation is woefully inadequate?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would say that's because of the fact that we're transparent in the sense that we publish these things that we're required to report to the Ethics Commissioner, that every member of this Legislature sits down with the Ethics Commissioner on an annual basis and has discussions about things that have happened and that might happen in the future. The Ethics Commissioner is the one that gives the ruling and says that it's either within the realm of the rules or it's outside of the realm of the rules. If it's outside of the realm of the rules, we cut the cheque.

The Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ethics Commissioner finds that the government is keeping to the straight and narrow, but normal Albertans are outraged by this trick-or-treating by government MLAs. When will the government give real strength to the ethics rules so that the rules are no longer a joke to average Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's obviously looking for ghouls and goblins under the pumpkin patch. I think that what we have is a discussion around the rules that this Legislature has set, the rules that are set by all members of this Legislature, by all parties. There's been no breach of those rules. One of the reasons why we haven't had those kinds of breaches is because we've had great communication with all of the ethics commissioners in the past, and I believe that this Ethics Commissioner has the true appreciation for Albertans and the true feelings of Albertans in his heart.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services in Red Deer

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next set of questions is for the minister of health. Red Deer regional hospital has the longest wait times of all the regional hospitals in Alberta, three and a half times longer to be admitted than if that patient was in the Medicine Hat hospital, for example. Yet this government is closing 200 long-term care beds in Red Deer and doing nothing to help reduce the wait times in emergency. To the minister: why is the minister ignoring the simple solution of keeping these beds open to help move patients out of acute care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what I've asked Alberta Health Services to do is take a look at what they can do in the immediate time frame there. I am aware that there might be a crunch coming in the emergency rooms in Red Deer, and we're looking at alternatives. For example, possibly the Valley Park Manor might come into play here. Residents have been moved from there over to the Extendicare Michener Hill centre, as they have been from the other nursing home. So there are some opportunities there that I've asked them to explore.

Dr. Swann: Seriously, Mr. Speaker, physicians from Red Deer and the surrounding area have said that even temporarily keeping those 200 long-term care beds open would seriously reduce the pressures on acute-care beds and emergency room times. If the minister won't listen to us and won't listen to the health care professionals, who is he listening to on this?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago the emergency docs who represented Edmonton, Calgary, and Medicine Hat but provincially in a way as well, obviously, because the chair from the AMA was there, brought to my attention what some of the difficulties were, specifically in Edmonton and Calgary. I believe that there's a similar meeting that will be coming up with respect to Red Deer.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the people of Red Deer want some action on keeping the Valley Park Manor and the Red Deer nursing home open, do they have to book a game of golf with the minister at a private course in Victoria just to get the minister to listen?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I addressed the issue of Valley Park Manor in the first question. I won't take up the House's time to do that. But I think physical activity is a very good thing, and I stand by helping out junior golfers. I'm president of the Alberta Friends of Golf. We helped start the U of A Golden Bears golf program, and I'm very proud of that for the youth of this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

2:00

Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Wildrose caucus hand delivered a letter to the health minister and to the Premier's office outlining proposals we've gathered from ER doctors and health care professionals across this province to address the ER crisis and other health care issues. Unlike the minister, who talks about how many ERs he's been to and who he's talked to, we don't talk, Minister; we listen. We're proposing some real ideas from the professionals who work in the trenches. Minister, my question to you, firstly, is: will you immediately . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I don't think she quite got to the question. But I did receive the letter that she's referring to. I find it really interesting that in this particular letter they're talking about spending more money, adding more staff. Whereas two months ago they were talking about cutting staff, cutting \$1.3 billion to health and education, today they're talking about spending. You know, blowing and sucking is something reserved for other parties.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the minister should read the whole letter. We talk about prioritization.

To the same minister: will you immediately designate chief medical officers for every hospital in Alberta who have the authority to make decisions about care in every hospital ward, including the authority to override Alberta Health Services' directives?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that people would find it quite offensive if the letter they suggested here were to be enacted, where they say, "if necessary, override AHS directives, regulations or regular staffing ratios." Clearly, they don't know what they're talking about because you've got collective agreements, you've got bargaining agreements, you've got protocols that have to be adhered to. I think they should do a little bit more homework before they

offend all of the nurses and others that are tied to collective agreements.

Mrs. Forsyth: You know, Mr. Speaker, he has a good point on some of the things that he's brought up in regard to the regulations and the ratios.

Again to the same minister: given that the health care professionals have warned us there is a shell game going on in respect to beds – in other words, Mr. Minister, you open two beds; you close two beds – what is the net increase of beds in Calgary since January 1 of this year? The net increase. [interjections]

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that today AHS is opening 12 transition unit beds at the Foothills. Twelve new transition beds will be opened at the Rockyview in about 10 days. Fourteen new transition beds will be opened at the U of A within a week. Two new medical observation beds will be opened at the Royal Alex within a week. On November 29 an additional 20 new hospice beds will be opened at the Peter Lougheed. [interjections] Wait; there's lots of good news here. The new Villa Caritas will bring on stream 46 more geriatric psychiatric beds. [interjections]

Could I have permission to continue?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, when there are questions and answers, lower your noise level, please.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

East Edmonton Health Centre

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of health told this House the provision of services at the East Edmonton health centre was a planned "staged, phased-in approach." The minister is utterly wrong in this claim. I have documents from Alberta Health Services going back to 2006 that show the urgent care centre was planned for the spring of 2009. Will the minister apologize to the House for his incorrect assertions yesterday and admit that it was government cuts that ended the plan to bring in the urgent care centre in 2009?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services did not exist in 2006. What I stated in the House yesterday was that I was not aware of anything other than a staged or phased plan for the East Edmonton health centre as advanced to me by Alberta Health Services. The reason that it had to be staged is because of the economic recession and, secondly, because we had to bring in a staged approach to address how many staff members were needed there. I can tell you right now that there are 136 staff members approximately at that facility providing outstanding community services needed there.

Mr. Mason: I'm sure they are, Mr. Speaker, but the point, really, that we're dealing with now is wait times in emergency rooms. The ER at the Royal Alexandra hospital is one of the most crowded in the entire province. Given that the urgent care centre was intended to handle up to 34,000 cases that would no longer go to that emergency room, will the minister fund the urgent care centre immediately to ease the strain on wait times at the Royal Alexandra emergency room?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the member is doing a very good job of confusing things here. He knows full well that an urgent care centre is coming there and that it's not going to have overnight stays for so-called admitted patients. So let's get that straight. Urgent

care is about nonadmitted patients, about helping those people with more minor injuries. Those are not the kinds of people that are blocking beds, as the medics would tell you, over at our acute care centres. So let's get some facts on the table here. That urgent care centre will come in as part of phase 2.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister is trying to clear up confusion by creating even more confusion. This urgent care centre was designed to keep 34,000 people from going to the emergency room at the Royal Alex in the first place. It's only \$9 million to fund it, Mr. Minister. Will you please fund it and get it up and running next year as soon as possible?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's no confusion whatsoever. We're talking about minor cases, typically a few broken bones that are non life threatening, okay? Those are the kinds of things that urgent care centres tend to be focused around. Now, the \$9 million, if that's what the correct number is for current costs, is being looked at as part of phase 2. When we get along to phase 2 – that'll take about a year to two years, perhaps slightly more to build that added capacity into the system, to hire the staff for it – it will be done. It's in the plans to do it. So I don't know what the member is confused about over there. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Again I want to remind hon. members in that corner to please keep the noise down.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

PDD Administrative Review

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people supported by PDD and the service providers who give the needed supports have been unfairly treated by this government over the last year. First, it was the cuts to service providers' budgets. Then this summer the minister had KPMG do a review of the PDD community boards and service providers, and the future of PDD is still hanging in the balance. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: the terms of reference for this review show that the final report was supposed to have been received on September 15, so why hasn't it been released yet?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, on June 16 I announced a PDD administrative review. The review is about a more effective and efficient administration of the PDD program. I'd like to make it clear that the review is not about reducing funding or changing the PDD program. I have received the report, and the report is under review.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Taxpayers' dollars went to pay for this review, so Albertans and the people who rely on PDD services have a right to know what the minister is planning for the program. When will the full report, complete with recommendations, be released?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I know that we all share the same goal of having an effective and efficient PDD program for our people with developmental disabilities. This administrative review focuses on how we administer the services, and everything is on the table. The report is now proceeding through the government process. When I have finished reviewing it, I will be releasing this to the public.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps a couple of questions: could I get a timeline on that, and will the minister commit right now that the PDD community boards will not be centralized, when the example from the health care system leaves much to be desired?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important review. It's about delivering services the best way possible so that we have the best results for our people with disabilities. We've put everything on the table. When the review is ready to go forward, we will bring it forward to everyone in this Legislature.

2:10 Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I and many of my colleagues in the House have been receiving messages from Albertans who are concerned about the proposal to purchase 16,000 acres of public land in Cypress county. The lands under consideration are largely intact parcels of native grasslands which are important to many wildlife species, including most of Alberta's species at risk. Only 14 and a half per cent of Alberta's grasslands are still in their intact state and remain in the public domain. Hunters, conservation groups, farmers, ranchers, and ordinary Albertans are asking questions about the potential loss of this precious resource. My questions are all for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will the minister do the right thing and assure Albertans that there will be no sale of this public land unless . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As has been explained in the House previously, our department has received a proposal to buy a parcel of public land. The department reviewed the proposal for wildlife and conservation values and also for the economic value of the proposal. The question remains of the maximum value for Albertans being received on a direct sale versus an open tender process. That question remains. However, I must point out that the proponent has requested that this application be withdrawn, and this has been done.

Dr. Brown: Well, that's very good news, Minister. Will the minister ensure that any future proposals to purchase public lands in the white area will be subject to a public consultation process to examine the merits of any proposed scheme and to preserve the wildlife?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, it's an important question and needs to be answered. We do not at this point in time and I do not anticipate that the transfer of public land for agricultural purposes would require public consultation.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister and his department develop a policy to ensure future protection of Alberta's remaining publicly owned grasslands?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you know, the truth of the matter is that what we are talking about here is that there are about 10.4 million acres of native grassland that remain in the province of Alberta. This particular proposal, although it seemed large, was about .15 per cent. We're talking today with groups of people in municipalities in northern Alberta about the transfer of 30,000 to 40,000 acres of

public land to put into agricultural production. This province believes that agricultural production is extremely important, and we will continue to deal with it.

Tailings Pond Emergency Response Plans

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, an aluminum tailings pond failure in Hungary, a mercury tailings pond failure in B.C., a copper tailings pond failure in Quebec, a lead and zinc tailings pond failure in Macedonia: things do go wrong with tailings ponds, and when they do, the effects are catastrophic. The oil spill at Wabamun exposed government emergency response plans as pathetically unprepared, and government response plans continue to be shrouded in secrecy. We're expected to take their word and trust them. Well, I, for one, don't trust them. To the Minister of Environment: why aren't Alberta Environment's dam safety emergency response plans publicly available?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member referred to the incident at Wabamun. I was not the minister at the time, but my colleague across the way was, and I think he did a very intelligent thing at that point in time when he formed a rapid-response emergency response team within Alberta Environment. That is ASERT. It's a system that has worked very, very well. It is ASERT in conjunction with the operators of any kinds of these facilities as well as municipalities that are responsible for those emergency plans.

Ms Blakeman: They're not publicly available.

Back to the same minister: given that it is reasonable to keep critical infrastructure and the security around it private but not what the community can expect in case of an emergency, why does the government keep tailings emergency response plans confidential and away from the neighbours that are affected by it? Why? This is no terrorism thing.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member has identified one of the significant issues. If we are in fact going to have an emergency response team to deal with these kinds of issues, one of the things that we don't want to do is let someone who may want to be subversive, may want to be able to create a situation be aware of all of the plans that we do have in place.

Ms Blakeman: That's phony, and he knows it.

Back to the same minister: given that the oil sands are located in a challenging northern climate and a leak during the winter under the ice may not be discovered until months later, what effort has government put into a concrete, detailed plan on winter breaches of tailings ponds, and would he make it public?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there is a rigid requirement for ongoing monitoring of these dams and dikes that are there. The fact of the matter is that we are confident that there are the necessary checks and balances in place to ensure that the scenario the member describes is remote in the extreme.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Medicine Hat Pain Management Clinic

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I tabled a petition in the House on behalf of my constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat urging the government to adequately fund the pain management clinic in Medicine Hat, operated by Dr. Wardell, beyond the current

two-year contract program. In follow-up to this petition I would like to direct all my questions to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Number one, given that Dr. Wardell's clinic provides reputable and cost-effective pain management services to the citizens of Medicine Hat and area, why did it take so long for Alberta Health Services to commit to the current contract with Dr. Wardell?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, as members here would know, contracts are negotiated instruments, and they can take quite some time to get down to the nitty-gritty details. I think the important thing is that there is now a new contract in place for two years so that the important service for pain management that Dr. Wardell and his staff provide is available to the community. This is very good news. It took a little longer to negotiate perhaps than people had hoped, but the job got done, and the services are continuing on.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental: given the fact that the current contract is for two years only, what assurances can this minister give my constituents that funding for this vital clinic will continue beyond the two-year contract period?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that Alberta Health Services did was to immediately create a steering committee that would take a look at the entire south half of the province, roughly from Calgary down. That includes, obviously, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and other places in between. As part of that, Dr. Wardell will be lending his expertise so that perhaps they will be able to come to a longer term solution. That's what's been requested, and I hope that's what they will deliver.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Will Dr. Wardell's clinic be part of the future pain management program that you're planning, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can only say that I would personally hope so. I visited Dr. Wardell's pain management clinic. It looks like an excellent facility, and the services they provide are equally excellent because we've heard from some of the people receiving services through that pain management clinic. I can't predict the future, but I would certainly hope that with Dr. Wardell providing his expertise to this steering committee, those points of view would come forward and be addressed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Child Intervention System Review

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ministry of children's services has finally released recommendations from the Child Intervention Review Panel. The panel made 14 recommendations that point to layers of mismanagement in the ministry. In response the ministry has rejected four central recommendations, some of which I've raised in the past. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: it is clear that the minister is unable to single-handedly solve the numerous problems within the ministry, so why not accept the recommendation to empower the Child and Youth Advocate to provide individual support?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important report that this member is referring to. You've heard here in the Assembly over the past year that we've been looking forward to the report. I can tell you that it has been recently released. There were 14 recommendations, as you know, hon. member, and we did accept 10 of the recommendations and did not accept four, as the member has identified. The one that he is referring to is the Child and Youth Advocate position. But if you look at the next recommendation, recommendation 8, it relates to the child and family service quality council, which will report publicly at arm's length through this ministry.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The problem is the shortness of the arm.

Why does the minister refuse to accept the recommendation to improve off-reserve service delivery for aboriginal children and youth, who account for only 9 per cent of Alberta's population but make up over 63 per cent of children in government care?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This recommendation that the member is referring to is recommendation 4. You're correct. There are 64 per cent of aboriginal children in child intervention. We know that through our experience, through our research, and that is trending upward to 70 per cent, which is a very sad situation. The reason I did not accept this recommendation, hon. member, is because I did hear from aboriginal leaders – elders, chiefs – in the community that they would like to be very much a part of the solution that would empower aboriginal people to look after their children and to protect them, and I respect that. I will be meeting with them once again at the end of November. They have said that this is not the right model for them, and I will look to see what is the right model.

Mr. Chase: Seventy per cent of children and youth in care being aboriginal: how long can we tolerate this? How much longer will this minister stand behind the excuse of needing more consultation before actually taking action to improve care of aboriginal children in the system? This panel has already consulted for well over a year. Action.

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that I am hearing this member say that aboriginal elders and leaders in the community should not be a part of responding to the needs of their children and how to protect them in care. That's what you have just said. This recommendation is a recommendation of principle, but I can tell you that I will be listening to the aboriginal community in the formation of what is the right model for their children off reserve.

Mr. Chase: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll deal with it at the end of the question period.

The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Highway 21

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see that the

twinning work on highway 21 just east of Sherwood Park has finally wrapped up. More than 10,000 cars a day use this stretch of highway, and my constituents are looking forward to the enhanced access and safety of this new four-lane highway. My questions are for the Minister of Transportation. Although this is good news, my constituents continue to raise issues regarding the light wait times. It takes a long time to get through those intersections, Minister. I'm just wondering what you're planning to do about that.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to tell this hon. member and all his constituents that the taxpayers of Alberta have invested \$115 million in that stretch of highway, and that's about quality of life for Albertans.

About the lights. Yes, the Transportation department has been monitoring those four new traffic lights since we installed them last December, and there have been some adjustments made during the winter to improve the left turning lane. The department will continue to monitor the operation, and we will do the adjustments as needed . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order. We'll deal with it after.
The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agreed, it is good news, and our constituents, obviously, really appreciate this new highway.

My first supplemental to the same minister. Constituents also do have some concerns, though, Minister, about the noise levels on that section of highway as it passes alongside Sherwood Park. I'm wondering what's happening to address those concerns.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to remind this hon. member once again that the noise levels from that particular section are below our provincial guidelines. The province measured those sound levels along highway 21 in the spring of '07, and those levels were way below the guidelines of 65 decibels over a 24-hour period. Those sound levels are not expected to exceed provincial guidelines till at least 2040. That said, the department will be making sound measurements again now that the twinning is complete.

Mr. Quest: Well, it's good that we're taking another look at it, Minister.

My final supplemental to the same minister: the speed limits on this new stretch of highway are also a concern, so I'm just wondering what the minister is doing to address those.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member should be happy to know that the speed limit has been reduced already to 80 kilometres per hour from north of highway 16 to south of 628. All of the new signals have prewarning flashing lights on them. The reduction in speed is necessary to accommodate the new configuration, that allows for smoother traffic flow. This is a significant project, and we will continue to invest in our highways to keep Alberta moving.

Medical Procedure Wait Times

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House – and I quote – the minister of health said to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek:

I don't have the answer on why I have not been able to provide wait times; however, I will get the answer when I leave this House. To the minister. Today I'd like the answer on what he found out.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm not sure which wait times you're referring to, but I can tell you that in Edmonton and Calgary we have EIP wait times. Are you talking about admitted patients or nonadmitted patients?

Mr. Boutilier: There are so many wait times, how many answers do you want me to give you in terms of wait times? It's happening all over Alberta.

Given that the minister doesn't have an answer today, as he committed to this House, does the minister of health realize that he could jeopardize the millions of dollars from the federal government because of his failure to report wait times in Alberta hospitals as a benchmark?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are many different types of wait times. If the member would just tell me exactly what he's looking for, I'd be happy to oblige. I'll get Alberta Health Services on it right away. We keep track of and we report wait times at various facilities. I mean, there are 400 different facilities in the province. If you could just sharpen up your question, hon. member, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health, to all Albertans who are watching in emergency rooms, is failing to answer the question. He's not aware of the Wait Time Alliance relative to the question yesterday, so clearly he's not actually listening, again, to the question. You're jeopardizing millions of dollars from the federal government. You talked tough at the PC convention about: we're going to fight Ottawa. Yet your failure to report wait times federally is costing Albertans millions of dollars. Explain this, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the member is clearly off on some other tangent in some field of his own because we do report. That information is available. If he's talking about wait times in emergency rooms, that information is available on a per-site basis, and there is going to be more of it coming forward. In fact, I'm going to be doing more of it with the docs when I chat with them on Friday. That information is already there. It's already being reported. Perhaps the member could tell me exactly which site he's interested in. I'd be happy to give him the specific details. There's no problem whatsoever. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. members, we need to hear the answer. Please, when the answer is given, don't make too much noise.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, due to the reductions in legal aid eligibility guidelines Albertans who receive assured income for the severely handicapped, the poorest of the poor here in Alberta, now have to make a down payment or pay monthly for assistance in court. Albertans who receive AISH already live beneath the poverty line, and now they have to pay extra for help in court. Does the minister really call that access to justice?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If people come within the financial eligibility guidelines, then they will certainly be eligible for legal aid. Based on the circumstances the member has just described, I see no reason why that wouldn't be the case.

Mr. Hehr: Well, the CTLA believes your pilot project has created a two-tier legal system, one where the wealthy get first-class legal services and the poor get denied access to justice. What is your response to this?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'm very aware of the CTLA's view. I'm not quite sure what the member's view is. He may have an independent view, or he may simply be quoting other people. We have not cut legal aid in this province. We have doubled our commitment to legal aid over the past four years. People that require legal representation in criminal court and civil court, family law in this province get it.

2:30

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what I'm hearing.

How can the minister say that she's meeting commitments when Legal Aid Alberta is clawing back money from Alberta's most vulnerable people to provide services that she concedes are both a legal right and a natural right?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if the member should really be characterizing any action of the Legal Aid board. We're in touch on a weekly basis with Legal Aid. We manage legal aid in conjunction with the Legal Aid board. We're fully aware of what Legal Aid is doing. Legal Aid is continuing to do what we as Albertans want them to do, which is to ensure that people who are going to court are getting legal advice and legal representation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

CCSVI Clinical Trials

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Multiple sclerosis patients have experienced some relief from their conditions by the so-called liberation treatment invented by Italian Dr. Zamboni by going out of the country for treatment. In Canada an MS patient cannot even get a scan to determine if there is a blockage in the veins leading to the brain. The provinces of Saskatchewan and Newfoundland have recently agreed to go ahead with clinical trials to study the effectiveness of the liberation treatment. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Are you proposing to join these other two provinces in conducting clinical trials? If not, why not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, just for clarification, I believe Saskatchewan is exploring the possibility of clinical trials once they have received ethical approval, whereas Newfoundland is doing observational studies. Last week I met with a number of neurologists here in Alberta as well as patients who have had the Zamboni treatment and with advocates for MS research in general.

With respect to the question, however, specifically, please know that we are looking at some strategies that would help move this along to fill what the Canadian Institutes of Health Research called a void or a shortage of clinical evidence that would support the safety and efficacy of proceeding. Once safety and efficacy have been addressed, at that point we can consider the next steps, including possible clinical trials if that's what's warranted.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that the test is commonly administered for other blockages of the veins, what can possibly be the downside of allowing the test to determine if there is a blockage in the veins of an MS patient?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my understanding of the Doppler test is that it's noninvasive, that it's an ultrasonic diagnostic test. I did speak with some people who actually had it done in Vancouver I believe it was. I also understood that some had something similar done in Ontario, but I don't know that that practice is still continuing there. The point here is that the particular test being referred to is not typically conducted for possible blockages of veins leading from the brain. At least that's my understanding. We'll find out more for you, hon. member, or your constituents on whose behalf you're asking in terms of the technical medical descriptions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further question, that again is somewhat technical, to the same minister: given that a blockage exists in a person's veins, does it not seem like common sense that the relief of that blockage would improve one's health?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that is part of the thesis advanced by some. I want to indicate, however, that the Zamboni research only came to light, the preliminary research in that respect, in 2009. Again I have to stress that safety and efficacy have to first be satisfied before doctors will endorse it, embrace it and before the world-renowned experts who met in Ottawa at the end of August would also endorse it. But work is progressing, and we are doing our part through the Hotchkiss Brain Institute study, which is being undertaken by Dr. Costello, and as soon as we have that information plus some other information that we're actively working on, I think we'll see some good progress in this regard.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Building Construction Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shoddy workmanship continues to put homes and condos at risk of rotting from moisture penetration and mould. Two years ago a municipal study warned that if the government did not do a better job of protecting Albertans from shoddy builders, the results could be, quote, disastrous. This report was the latest in a series that goes back almost a decade, but the Minister of Municipal Affairs thinks we need more studies. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why is the government of the richest province in Canada powerless to protect homeowners from high repair costs and the health risks caused by mould and moisture?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ministry and our staff are looking at a range of solutions to address the individual concerns that are out there. I need to point out to the Legislature here that we are the ones that initiated the reports following the complaints that we were getting from citizens right across the province of Alberta, and we're the ones that are following up on it. Nobody else had initiated those particular reports. We're spending

time now to analyze the reports and look at the various solutions that might be available to us.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been 10 years, Mr. Minister, and Albertans are still waiting for some action.

How can the minister claim that poorly built outer walls affect only a small number of homes and condos when we know that the government does not collect any data on rotting buildings?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we have done some surveys, and we've got an indication of how extensive the damage is. Certainly, in the late summer of 2008, for instance, the parliamentary assistant led the first broad review in consultation with various stakeholders on various construction practices to address the particular issues.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: will the minister take some responsibility and actually investigate complaints that municipal inspections are not finding shoddy workmanship before it's passed on to the buyers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are looking at potential solutions, and we are working with industry. We're working with our inspection services to try to find solutions that will satisfy individuals. We recognize that the purchase of a home or a condo is probably one of the biggest investments that individuals will do in their lifetime, and we want to ensure that that investment is protected.

Grande Prairie Hospital Construction

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, Grande Prairie is one of Canada's fastest growing cities. Its population has nearly doubled in 20 years. The people need another hospital. In July the Premier announced that a new health facility would finally be built in Grande Prairie, which is great news for my constituents, but they want to see signs that the project is really happening. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. How do we know that the project is actually moving ahead?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are making excellent progress on the Grande Prairie hospital. I'm very happy to report that soil testing is complete. We have completed the request for qualification process, that closed on October 19. We did have 29 submissions, which really showed a strong industry interest, and I'm very confident that the consultants will be selected in December.

Mr. Drysdale: To the same minister: when will we actually see construction happening?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the zoning of the land acquisition is moving ahead. Health along with the college officials and the municipal officials are working together to include a postsecondary component at the hospital. I am very confident that next summer we will see the initial construction under way, that we'll see some earth being moved. By fall I expect that the concrete and steel will begin to be part of the project.

Mr. Drysdale: To the same minister: what will happen with the existing facilities at the Queen E II hospital?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. I want to say that the existing Queen E II has served the Grande Prairie area and will continue to serve the people of Grande Prairie. The existing hospital will be renovated, and we will expand the ambulatory care. I also say that the needed renovations for the emergency room will be completed so that emergency services can continue while we build the new hospital. I think it's very important for the people of Grande Prairie to know that the hospital that is being built is a hospital that is going to include acute care . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:40 Medical Procedure Wait Times
(continued)

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. On page 79 of the 2009-10 annual report from that minister's department it itemizes under transfers from the government of Canada the wait times reduction. It itemizes about \$27 million in funding coming from the federal government to reduce wait times. The Wait Time Alliance, that's being discussed here, is telling us that your government is not reporting information to them that they require, the only province not to do so. Why aren't you?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Wait Time Alliance is a group of physician specialty associations who publish their own monitoring of wait times. As such, they do this by looking at publicly available wait times on websites. Unfortunately, as I indicated yesterday, our wait-list registry, the public site, is down right now. We hope to have it up fairly soon. It's not a question of us wanting to or not wanting to; it's a question of that site simply being not available. However, basically the same information is available through Alberta Health Services in their quarterly reports.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's apparently news to this minister, but his department committed to file information on one wait time. Each province took on one. Alberta took on cancer wait times and has failed to report to the federal government. Is this because cancer treatment wait times are chronically and continuously getting worse in this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker. I would hope not. In fact, we have a very aggressive cancer strategy, and the people that I've met with and spoken with have requested that we accelerate some of our plans in that regard. That's why we opened the radiation therapy corridor a couple of months ago in Lethbridge. That's why the new Grande Prairie hospital will have another radiation therapy corridor. That's why Red Deer is also going to have one. And that's why we're stepping up our recruitment processes for more GI oncologists, which has now yielded two more people in that field.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. My last question, Mr. Speaker, will be to the minister of finance, who has raised concerns in this Assembly about unfair federal transfers to the provincial government. How can this government complain about federal transfers from Health when its own department of health is failing to report on current federal programs? Where's the accountability?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we can complain about federal transfers

to health. If you take out the Alberta portion, which is a couple of billion, the total value of that program, the Canada health transfer, is \$23 billion; \$21 billion is, in effect, paid by Alberta. We pay \$21 billion out of the \$23 billion, yet we get less than any other province in Canada. No equal treatment.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes our question period this afternoon.

We have a note from the Minister of Health and Wellness that he would like to clarify an answer he gave yesterday to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I've just given the clarification in answer to the question from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. It was simply to point out that the Wait Time Alliance is a group of physician specialty associations who get most of their information from publicly available websites. So I won't need to clarify anything any further.

The Deputy Speaker: That entitles the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to a question.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has clarified now that he knows what the Wait Time Alliance is. I would like to know why he's willing to jeopardize \$27 million from the federal government because he won't comply with an agreement that was signed by your government in 2007.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, nobody is putting anything at risk or in jeopardy. If there is a compliance that needs to be adhered to, I can assure the hon. member and all members of this House that it will be adhered to. End of story.

The Deputy Speaker: This concludes our question period. According to my count we had 105 questions and answers.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have something to table?

Mr. Mason: Oh, I sure do, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of several documents which show clearly that the minister was incorrect yesterday when he asserted that the plan had always been to phase in the urgent care centre at the East Edmonton health clinic. They are comprised of two documents from Alberta Health Services . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just briefly table.

Mr. Mason: Okay.

. . . and a photograph of the sign outside the East Edmonton health centre clearly showing at the top of the list that urgent medical care is part of the package. This was taken some years ago.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you have some material to table?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings that follow along the lines of Motion 510, encouraging entrepreneurial education. The first is Thrive: Advancing Community Economic Development for Calgary, Calgary's Community Economic Development Network.

Also, Thriving: Critical, Calgary's VitalSigns 2009 Citizens' Report Card, Taking the Pulse of Calgary, from the Calgary Foundation for Calgary Forever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you have something to table?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, I certainly do, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today regarding Alberta Hospital Edmonton. The first one is from Sandra Glor, the second one is from Heather Macri, and the third one would be from Matthew Cuvilier. They're all constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They have given me permission to table these documents. They're concerned about the government's plans regarding psychiatric care at Alberta Hospital.

My final tabling. I do enjoy and anxiously await correspondence from the President of the Treasury Board, and this is a letter that I received from him on July 22, 2010, regarding the cabinet policy committees and whether or not the chairs are paid correctly. I appreciate that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other tablings?

Well, the chair has some material to table here. Hon. members, in accordance with the amendment to the Government Motion 18, approved Tuesday, October 26, 2010, regarding the 2009-10 Electoral Boundaries Commission report, the chair is pleased to table five copies of the revised DVD prepared by the Chief Electoral Officer which incorporates those amendments and which is entitled Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names for Alberta, As Approved by the Legislative Assembly on October 26, 2010.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2009, and the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the Safety Codes Council 2009 annual report; pursuant to the Special Areas Act the special areas trust account financial statements dated December 31, 2009; pursuant to the Capital Region Board regulation the Capital Region Board 2009 annual report. Pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2009; the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Ride Safety Association annual report, April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010; the authorized accredited agencies summary 2008-2009; and the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report 2009.

2:50

The Deputy Speaker: Let's deal with the points of order now. The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security has withdrawn?

Mr. Oberle: I withdraw. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you have a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to refer first to our standing orders, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 23(h), which states: "makes allegations against another Member." I asked the question – and hopefully you have the Blues to provide the answer that was given – "How much longer will this minister stand behind the excuse of needing more consultation before actually taking action to improve care of aboriginal children in the system? This panel has already consulted for well over a year." The minister in her reply stated, implied, alleged that I didn't value input from First Nations elders.

I would also like to reference *Beauchesne* 409(7), wherein it states, "Imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it." I'll also refer to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 618, under the section entitled Unparliamentary Language: the use of "personal attacks, insults and obscenities." Well, obviously the minister did not swear, but she alleged that I did not take into account the interests of First Nations elders. How she came across that information I do not know. But instead of answering the question, Mr. Speaker, an allegation was tossed back. Hopefully you have the Blues and you can read them and share what the minister stated and clarify this matter for the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that the member is really trying to explain the comment more than bring forward a point of order. He suggests that allegations were made by the minister in answering the question. The minister was simply pointing out that the aboriginal community had requested additional time for further consultation that would be specific to the child care issues related to the aboriginal community. The member made a rather – I won't call it rhetorical, but there were inferences in his question that somehow the minister was avoiding dealing with an issue under the guise of further consultation when, in fact, the minister had indicated that she had heard very clearly from the aboriginal community that they wished to have an opportunity to have more input into designing a system that would better meet their needs.

There is no point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I have to echo the comments of the last speaker. The member quoted the Blues and indicated in his question that somehow the minister is hiding behind things. Somehow that is absolutely fine to say in this House, but for any similar comment back – and I don't even believe it was anywhere near as egregious – this member takes offence to that.

Mr. Speaker, there is no point of order here. If the member can't handle the heat, he should get out of the question period.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you share the precise comments that the Minister of Children and Youth Services provided in the Blues where an allegation was made that I did not value the opinions and the recommendations of elders. Would you please read the direct information so that a decision can be made as opposed to what we thought we heard or what we might have heard?

The Deputy Speaker: Is any other hon. member wishing to join in? Seeing none, in fact, in contemplating a bit and trying to recall the situation at that time, there are two things in here. I have a sense

that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity wants to clear the record, and he has had that opportunity. He has explained now about the situation. My judgment is that there is no allegation of any sort of point of order. The member has had an opportunity to clear the record on his statement, and there's no need for further debate on this as a point of order.

Thank you.

Another point of order.

Point of Order

Oral Question Period Time Limits

Mr. Anderson: I'm sure the members opposite will be very excited about this point of order. In 2010, last session, Mr. Speaker, the House leaders met to discuss how question period was going to be dealt with. In a ruling in 2010 that is in *Hansard*, this is what the Speaker at the time said: "The chair will continue to undertake a vigilant watch of the clock to ensure that questions and answers do not exceed 35 seconds."

I personally love when questions and answers go a little longer than 35 seconds. I like to hear the long – even if it's 40, 45 seconds, I like that. However, there's got to be some consistency, Mr. Speaker, between the questions and the answers with regard to the time that those answers and questions are cut off. Clearly, throughout the question period today if you look at the answers given from the members for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, from Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the health minister, certainly the member's statement from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, that time constraint, at least in our opinion, was not enforced by the chair.

Our questions. If you look to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, in their members' statements and in their questions clearly they were cut off immediately at that time. Now, that's fine. They can be cut off at that time. However, it needs to go both ways. It's very unfair, and we felt that throughout the question period they were given flexibility and were able to finish their members' statements and questions and answers, and we were not.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I know that it's not parliamentary tradition to do a point of order on a point of order, necessarily. However, there is an agreement that was made, and it should and it ought to be lived up to. I think that the Speaker made it very clear to these members that we're trying to stay within the 30 seconds. Occasionally you might have to go over by five seconds, as they do with some of their questions, so this knife cuts both ways. Nonetheless, the point has been made. We will ensure that our members try a little harder to stick within the 30 seconds that we're allowed to answer a question, and I would hope that the people asking the questions would give the same abidance.

Secondly, I think it should also be made clear that if we had a little more co-operation and tolerance from the other side of the House during the questions, it would make it clearer and easier to understand what they are. That would help in terms of preserving decorum in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I appreciate that what the health minister was saying is absolutely true – it should be on both sides 35 seconds, 35 seconds – we're not arguing that you're not doing what you're supposed to do. We're arguing that the chair did not enforce both sides. According to the standing orders, chapter 2, section 13(2), it says, "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." I just would ask the

Speaker to please explain the reasons why those were cut off. If you look back at the tape, it will be clear. You were cutting off members on this side at the time limit, as you should, but you were not doing so for the government side.

The Deputy Speaker: First of all, your point of order about the 35 seconds in responses and answers over the time limit. I received notes here from both sides of the House saying that I cut them off, okay? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere said that I favour one side or the other. That is factually not true, so I want to clarify that.

Also, I try to enforce the rule of timing, okay? Within that, we need to have co-operation, less noise so that we can hear the question and the answer. The time is kept strictly by the table officer here, so I just follow their indication, and I enforce the rule.

Thank you. I rule that there is no point of order.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20

Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 20, the Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010.

Passed in 2004, the Class Proceedings Act established procedural rules enabling one or more persons to advance an action on behalf of a group of people who have suffered the same or a similar wrong. The existing act serves three important purposes: increasing efficiency, improving access to justice, and modifying behaviours. While the act is procedural in nature, it is a powerful tool in accomplishing these three purposes. Efficiency is gained by joining together a number of lawsuits that might otherwise be brought separately. Access to justice is created by grouping together many small claims in a larger proceeding in which the legal costs will be shared. Behavioural modification is obtained as claims that might otherwise go unprosecuted will be brought. The prospect of these class actions removes the comfort zone for those who might assume that minor wrongs would not result in litigation. It is also important to remember that while accomplishing these purposes, the Class Proceedings Act does not create any new causes of action.

Since Alberta's Class Proceedings Act was passed, three changes have been recommended by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada and the court. The first is that nonresidents should be treated in the same manner as residents for the purpose of participation in a class proceeding. The second is that criteria should be adopted to assist the court in determining whether Alberta or another province is the most appropriate jurisdiction for a class action to proceed. Third, their recommendation is to expand the requirement for the court approval of settlement, abandonment, and discontinuance of proceedings to include a situation in which a certificate application has been brought but has not yet been decided.

These amendments seek to reflect these recommendations in the existing legislation. The first proposed change will align Alberta with the majority of other provinces by shifting from an opt-in to an opt-out regime for nonresidents. Currently residents of Alberta who meet the requirements of the class are automatically participants in a class proceeding brought in Alberta. Nonresidents may participate only if they take the steps to opt in. The amendments proposed in Bill 20 would allow nonresidents to participate in class proceedings

in the same manner as residents. Both residents and nonresidents who meet the requirements of the class would automatically be participants in that class proceeding unless they opt out.

Many times the same or similar class proceedings are brought in more than one province. The proposed amendments in this bill would resolve issues around jurisdiction by establishing criteria to guide the courts in determining whether Alberta is the most appropriate venue for the class action to proceed and requiring notice to be given by those bringing a class proceeding in Alberta to individuals who have brought similar proceedings in other provinces. These individuals will then have the ability to make submissions to court.

In instances where class proceedings brought forward in Alberta overlap with class proceedings in other Canadian jurisdictions, the court will decide whether it is appropriate for the lawsuit to proceed as a multijurisdictional class proceeding in Alberta or whether it is more appropriate for the court to defer to the jurisdiction of another court. Several objectives will be considered when making these decisions. These include but are not limited to ensuring that interests of all parties are given due consideration, ensuring that justice is served, avoiding the possibility of irreconcilable judgments, and promoting judicial economy.

The third proposed amendment to this bill will expand the requirement for court approval for settlement of actions. Currently court approval of settlement is required in two situations. The first situation is when proceedings have been certified as a class proceeding. Court approval is also required in order to abandon or discontinue a class proceeding. The second situation is when certification is sought as a condition of settlement for the purpose of imposing the settlement on persons who will be class members.

The proposed amendments would expand the requirement of court approval for settlement, abandonment, and discontinuance to include situations in which an application to certify a proceeding has been brought but has not yet been decided. This change will allow the court to protect the interests of prospective class members.

In conclusion, shifting from an opt-in to an opt-out regime for nonresidents will align Alberta's Class Proceedings Act with legislation in other Canadian jurisdictions. Expanding the requirement for court approval for settlement will increase the protection for plaintiffs in class proceedings. These changes together with adoption of criteria to guide the court strengthen the existing act to better reach the goals of increased efficiency, improved access to justice, and behaviour modification.

I urge all my colleagues to support Bill 20, and I look forward to hearing feedback from the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21 Wills and Succession Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 21, the Wills and Succession Act.

Our family and property interests are considerably different today than in the 1920s, which was the last time there was a general review of Alberta's succession laws. We're living longer, we're seeing more nontraditional family forms, and over our lifespans we are holding many different jobs. We become involved in many different financial interactions, whether personal, family, or business-related. Alberta needs a modernized law to reflect the changing social realities for Albertans. This is the purpose of Bill 21.

Bill 21 does not change the underlying principles of our succession law. Succession law continues to be about balancing property, family, and contractual rights and responsibilities. The traditional principle of succession law will continue, and that principle is, with certain exceptions, that a person should be free to dispose of one's own property as one wishes. This is the principle of testamentary freedom, or freedom of disposition. The exceptions include that one's legal and contractual obligations must be met and one's family should be looked after. A related principle also remains constant. If a person dies without a will, after legal obligations are met, it's reasonable to assume that he or she wants family to inherit the estate. However, the purpose of the new legislation is to allow these principles to operate in the evolving family and economic context of Alberta.

The new legislation refocuses succession law. To be clear, there's no evidence that Albertans care less or will in the future care less about their families. Family comes first when Albertans think about what happens to their property when they die, but there is a change in the possible ways that Albertans carry out this intent. This legislation attempts to do this in several ways. The statute is intended to allow development of succession law in a modern and evolving family context. For example, recent Supreme Court of Canada cases established presumptions about gratuitous transfers of property from parent to child. These cases are based on current family values and practices. This modern common law should continue, and evolution of the law should be fostered.

In recognition that a family business deal and a disposition in a will may intersect, the statute allows for application of basic business or property law, including limitations rules, the law of gifts, or contract law, to the circumstances of a family transfer. For example, if a court finds a deal between a deceased and an heir is a valid loan agreement, it can direct an appropriate remedy.

3:10

The statute is designed with settlement of disputes and efficient use in mind. This is demonstrated in three ways. Firstly, there was a conscious attempt to harmonize with existing law both in succession law and in relation to other areas such as trusts, pensions, adult guardianship, contracts, and general property. Secondly, the bill removes hurdles to finding the law. Outdated terminology is removed, and five statutes are consolidated into one and modernized. Those five statutes are the Wills Act, the Intestate Succession Act, the Survivorship Act, the Dependents Relief Act, and section 47 of the Trustee Act. Thirdly, although the legislation is drafted in terms of what courts can and cannot do – for example, it directs how a court must interpret a will – this is not to suggest that Albertans will take all their wills or estate matters to court. Most people do not do this, and there's no reason to believe that that will change.

Some have referred to succession law as family law for the deceased, and in some cases conflict is inevitable where property and family issues mix. With the new statute Albertans and their advisers can look to the act to see what a court may do and use this information to predict court outcomes, thereby resolving disputes. As you can see, clear rules found in a single statute will make resolution of estate matters more efficient and less costly.

All of this said, the courts remain integral to the operation of succession law. The legal principles we are working with can be traced back two centuries. If history is a predictor, the fundamental principles of this law will not change for a long time. The statute is a principle framework. The court applies it over time and as Alberta society changes.

Take, for example, family support on death, formerly called dependant relief. It's important to note the name change, which

signals a modern trend away from describing people as dependants. In future family support cases it will be for the court to apply cases such as the Stang case, which sets out how the principles currently operate to the new and evolving community and legal standards.

I've just provided a general overview. I'd like to now provide you with the specifics of this legislation. The content of the changes was strongly supported in public and technical consultation. I'll begin with modernizing the definition of child. The new act defines child as all children of a person as defined in the Family Law Act and including children in the womb at the time of death. This harmonizes with Alberta's family law, including the changes proposed to the Family Law Act in Bill 20.

Regarding survivorship, this is an example of a reform designed to match modern values and create efficiency. It eliminates the need for double probate and creates consistency with insurance law. Current law is that if two people die at the same time or in circumstances where it's unknown who died first, all the property interests flow as if the youngest person survived. The new act will provide that for the purposes of property each person is deemed to have died first. If they owned property jointly, the property is deemed to be split among them.

Regarding wills, the current Wills Act is repealed, but certain basics such as formalities for making wills are continued. New provisions modernize the way wills are interpreted and validated. Recognizing current social realities, Bill 21 removes the rule that marriage revokes a will. It adds a rule that a gift to an ex-partner or ex-spouse is void unless the will says otherwise. The bill provides for minors' wills. We recognize that some minors may have considerable estates and may have the maturity to decide about its disposition. Focusing on determining testamentary intent, the principle that a person is free to dispose of his or her property as he or she wishes, in addition to codifying common law for interpreting wills, the bill allows extrinsic evidence of a deceased's intent to aid in the interpretation of a will. The courts will have new powers to validate a will, and the court will be able to rectify mistakes by adding or correcting words if it is clear that there was a mistake. Witnesses who are disqualified from inheriting can qualify if they prove there is no undue influence.

The new act will also help resolve uncertainties in a will. Now if a named beneficiary is unable to inherit, there is a clear list of default beneficiaries. In addition, the act defines certain words such as "kin" or "child" if they are not defined in the will.

Regarding intestate estates there are two significant amendments in the legislation that reflect current values and will increase efficiency when there is no will. If a deceased person leaves a spouse and the children of the relationship with that spouse, everything goes to the spouse or partner instead of being shared between the spouse and children. This allows the surviving spouse to decide how to look after the children. Secondly, if a person leaves no living descendants or parents, the estate will be split between the maternal and paternal side of his family rather than just going to the closest living relative.

Regarding beneficiary designations, the beneficiary designation rules allow properties such as pensions or RRSPs to be disposed of on death by a written designation rather than by will. The law will be moved from the Trustee Act and will be easier to find. Otherwise, there is no legal change here.

Regarding family maintenance and support, this part of the act maintains the current law, allowing certain family members to apply for support from the estate. There are two major changes. The first is a new provision. An adult interdependent partner or a spouse of a deceased person will have an automatic right to stay in their shared home for three months after death. This provides a temporary right

of shelter for spouses or partners who are not registered on the title of their home or named on the lease. This reflects the fact that a home is required for compassionate reasons and prevents individuals from changing the locks on a grieving spouse.

In addition to cleaning up some wording and updating procedure, we are also adding to the list of family members who can claim support from the estate to include minor grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well as adult children under the age 22 who are in school full-time. These changes reflect the strong support we received during our public consultation, which was in favour of broadening the group of family members who can apply for support from the estate.

Regarding advancement and appeal in aid of modernization a number of outdated presumptions and doctrines are repealed. To replace some of these ancient rules, if there is a dispute about whether property transfers made during life impact inheritance, the court can decide what the party's intention was and make a direction. Again, this is intended to better reflect modern realities and to ensure that individuals settle their legal obligations.

Regarding the Matrimonial Property Act amendments, the new Wills and Succession Act will amend the Matrimonial Property Act to entitle a spouse to matrimonial property whether the marriage ends due to death or due to divorce. As the law now stands, married people who divorce are entitled to more or less half the property acquired during marriage. However, couples who lose a spouse to death do not have this same entitlement. It's worth noting that Albertans leave most if not all of their estates to their spouse in most cases. Similar to the other changes made by the bill, this was well supported in public consultation and is consistent with the law in other provinces.

In conclusion, the work through this bill will not be entirely done. In the coming years, further reforms are planned for the rules for estate administration; that is, the role of executors or others who administer property on death.

Mr. Speaker, family comes first, and Bill 21 affects all Albertans. For the future this law provides modernized means to achieve the accepted principles, freedom of disposition, support of family, and fulfillment of legal obligations. The amendments I discussed today will result in a relevant and accessible law that will better serve Albertans, providing for a more prompt resolution to issues concerning family and property matters so essential during times of bereavement.

I urge all my colleagues to support Bill 21.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:20

Bill 22

Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs on behalf of the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Speaker, this bill proposes to amend three family law acts: the Family Law Act, the Maintenance Enforcement Act, and the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act. Changes to these pieces of legislation reflect the needs of Alberta's changing families and will help increase service, improve efficiencies, provide clarity, and streamline processes.

The first piece of legislation that Bill 22 purports to amend is the Family Law Act. This is the legislation that contains the core of family law in this province. It deals with parent-child relationships and the rights and obligations of guardians. When the Family Law Act was proclaimed on October 1, 2005, it consolidated, harmonized, and updated provisions from many provincial family law acts and contained substantial changes to government policy. The act has been well received; however, some amendments are needed to ensure that it provides answers to the legal issues relevant to Alberta families today.

Amendments to the Family Law Act will complete the groundwork with regard to the parentage of children being born using assisted human reproduction, it will clarify certain aspects of law relating to parents' guardianship of their children, it will eradicate the status of illegitimacy, which I will touch on later, and it will clarify some matters of core jurisdiction and procedure as well as tend to housekeeping matters.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the assisted human reproduction issues and solutions that were identified, there's been extensive work done by the federal, provincial, and territorial deputy ministers of Justice and the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. The work was conducted by a national committee of senior family law officials upon which Alberta has played a significant role. We also consulted with the bench, the bar, and service providers and explored case law at all levels of the court. As well, independent evaluation of the Family Law Act was performed by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family.

Infertility is a real barrier to many Albertans who wish to create a family, Mr. Speaker. There's an estimated infertility rate of 7 to 8 and a half per cent in Canada. This could translate to 25,000 couples in this province alone. Advances in assisted human reproduction technologies have created new opportunities for infertile couples to become parents. The demand for this technology may increase as more couples seek infertility services as costs of these said services decrease and fewer children are available for adoption. The medical aspects of assisted human reproduction such as what technologies can be practised are within the jurisdiction of the federal government. However, the legal role for provinces and territories is to establish parentage status when children are born as a result of this technology.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta currently has the most advanced law in Canada with respect to these children. Our parentage law has not kept up with the advances in this technology. Not all the combinations of parents and children are covered. There are a number of consequences to this, including Charter deficiencies in the current law, the need for some couples to resort to adoption to be recognized as parents, and judges being required to make decisions without clear policy and law in place. Adoption law is important, but it does not fill the need identified in assisted human reproduction situations. The changes we are looking at are aimed at facilitating parentage at the birth in situations when the intended parents cannot produce a child by natural means. We must of all things remember that in this province the interests of the child are paramount.

For their protection and best interests the parentage of children born through this technology needs to be certain at the first possible moment subsequent to their birth. In Alberta unless a statute or a court says otherwise, the legal parents must both have a biological connection to the child. Our current assisted human reproduction provisions are built in on this idea with a small exception allowing for a person to be a parent if they consent to their spouse or their partner's use of artificial insemination or surrogacy. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, this quickly become very complex. But this alone does not cover all the possibilities.

In developing these amendments, we are working on the basic policy premise that for any couple using any form of this technology, a biological connection to at least one of the intended parents and the consent of their spouse or partner will substitute for the traditional requirement of biological connections to both parents. This allows expansion of parentage law to assisted human reproduction situations, including those where surrogates may be involved.

The law will continue that a birth mother can only lose her status as the parent if she consents after the birth of the child, and surrogacy agreements will continue to be unenforceable. This is in order to encourage surrogacy for altruistic and not economic reasons. The law will continue to provide that a person who donates reproductive material – that is, who provides it purely for someone else's use – would not be a legal parent of the child by reason of donation alone. These amendments would provide the same level of legal certainty for parents and children regardless of the method of conception.

Pursuant to the proposed amendments the child's legal parents must fall under one of the following categories, the first one, where assisted reproduction is not used, the birth mother and the biological father; the second, where assisted reproduction is used but does not involve a surrogate, the parents are the birth mother and the spouse or common law partner of the birth mother who at the time that the pregnancy was started consented to be a parent of the child; or where a surrogate is involved, the parents will be the person who provided the genetic material and their spouse or partner, as long as the surrogate consents after the birth to relinquish the child, confirmed by a special order of the court. Of course, if the child is adopted, the parents are the persons specified as parents in an adoption order.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta legislation will continue to be based on the principles that a child can have a maximum of two parents and that a child may have multiple guardians. Dealing with guardianship, under Alberta law the power and responsibility to look after a child is attached to the guardianship status, not the parenthood status. In Alberta both parents are guardians of their children although exceptions need to be made for this role such as when a parent cannot be located or when the pregnancy was the result of a sexual assault.

Mr. Speaker, we currently base guardianship partly on the residence of the child, and this has created some uncertainty. Bill 22 will make the standard for determining a parent's guardianship the parent's willingness to be a guardian. If there is a dispute about a parent's guardianship, the court will have the ability to make a determination on individual circumstances. Where it is in the best interests of the child, the court will continue to be able to appoint other individuals as guardians.

Dealing with the matter of illegitimacy, Mr. Speaker, amendments to this bill will also abolish any distinction between the status of a child born within marriage and a child born outside of marriage. Most of these distinctions have already disappeared from the law. Consequential amendments to a number of statutes are required, including the repeal of the Legitimacy Act.

There are some other amendments, Mr. Speaker. Other amendments to the Family Law Act contained in Bill 22 include providing for applications to vary the support orders and support agreements that bind the estate of a payer parent after that parent's death so that the estate could be wound up; also, changing the reference from "primary home" to "family home" to coincide with proposals in the Wills and Succession Act that are also before the House, as referenced before the House by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose; clarifying that the obligation to provide spousal or adult interdependent partner support is not absolute and depends on a variety of factors; and clarifying that the court's jurisdiction to grant a guardianship order, a parenting order, or contact order pursuant to

the Family Law Act continues unless and until a court makes an order with respect to custody or access in divorce proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, I will now turn my comments to amendments to the Maintenance Enforcement Act, which are already included under Bill 22. Alberta's maintenance enforcement program, or MEP, enforces child and spousal support orders and certain agreements to take action in a fair and unbiased manner. The program continually examines its policies and procedures to ensure it is providing the best possible service to all clients as well as monitoring trends in family law cases and legislation. The MEP has identified areas that require amendments to increase efficiency, fairness, and service to its clients.

One area we're looking at is contact information. Currently, there's no legislative requirement for debtors or those who owe support to keep their contact or employment information current. The MEP is currently not able to require creditors or those who receive support payments to provide their contact or financial information. It is important for the MEP to be able to contact clients for a variety of reasons, including, without limitation, advising clients of changes to the program, verifying the eligibility status of the dependents, and collecting fees and penalties that may be owing. Mr. Speaker, the MEP uses a great deal of resources to gather this information, and the delay in having up-to-date information impacts certain collection activities.

Amendments in Bill 22 require debtors to keep their employment information current as well as requiring both creditors and debtors to keep their personal addresses and contact information up to date. Mr. Speaker, amendments will also require that persons, businesses, and government entities release the information in their possession regarding the location of creditors, allowing the MEP to communicate with creditors in a timely manner pursuant to the information in their files. This will also put Alberta's legislation in line with Manitoba's and Ontario's maintenance enforcement legislation in those two respective provinces.

3:30

Bill 22 also seeks to update the definition of business organization to ensure that the MEP will be able to communicate and gather information from new and emerging corporations and entities. By ensuring that these entities are covered pursuant to the act's definitions, it will allow the MEP to demand enforcement-related information from an expanded group of business organizations. It will also ensure that the MEP is able to locate and place the appropriate enforcement tools, allowing them to collect maintenance payments on a timely basis and, ultimately, getting these payments to the vulnerable Albertans who count on them.

Confidentiality is also addressed in this bill, Mr. Speaker. The Maintenance Enforcement Act places tighter constraints on the release of information than the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Bill 22 proposes a shift towards aligning the release of the client information with the principles contained in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This will ensure that the maintenance enforcement program is providing transparency while still maintaining a high level of confidentiality for client information.

Mr. Speaker, the Maintenance Enforcement Act would then be able to release information in a number of important situations that were previously considered confidential, including releasing information to a reciprocal jurisdiction to enforce a maintenance order, releasing information to any law enforcement agency in Canada to assist in an investigation, releasing information in certain situations if the director of maintenance enforcement considers it appropriate and the individual has so consented, disclosing the

necessary information to understand changes added to a file pursuant to a court order to both parties to the court order, releasing necessary information to the surviving spouse or adult interdependent partner or relative of a deceased individual if the disclosure is not an unreasonable invasion of the deceased's personal privacy, and releasing information if the director reasonably believes that the disclosure will avert or minimize an imminent danger with respect to the health or safety of any person. These changes will increase intergovernmental co-operation and allow the MEP to better meet the needs of more Albertans.

I'd also like to comment about administrative fairness, Mr. Speaker. Right now the MEP is not able to charge a nonsufficient funds penalty to creditors who remit payments that do not clear their bank accounts. In the interest of promoting fairness in the treatment of all clients Bill 22 contains a specific provision that will allow the MEP to charge creditors the same penalty charged to debtors when their payments do not clear their bank accounts. In the further interest of fairness, Mr. Speaker, Bill 22 will also allow the MEP to enforce the collection of money owed by creditors.

The overpayment of maintenance to creditors such as when the parties fail to advise the MEP that the dependants are no longer eligible to receive maintenance continues to be an ongoing issue. The proposed amendment would allow the MEP in very specific circumstances set out in the legislation to collect these repayable amounts from creditors rather than force debtors to take their creditors to court. This would allow the MEP to take enforcement action against creditors when there is money owed to the MEP as a result of fees, penalties, or overpayments or when there is money owing as a result of fees pursuant to the child support recalculation program. This amendment will help keep both clients from being needed to go to court and treat all clients in the system fairly.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 22 also provides more clarity with respect to dealing with stays of enforcement. The Court of Queen's Bench may issue an order suspending enforcement proceedings for a maximum of nine months unless otherwise stated by the court. Collections actions granted pursuant to federal enactments such as the denial of passports or the attachment of federal funds or driver's licence suspensions or restrictions remain unaffected. The previous wording used the word "suspension" while the court generally uses the word "stay," which can cause confusion as to whether or not the stay is granted under the Maintenance Enforcement Act or the *Alberta Rules of Court*. A change in wording will ensure clarity in interpreting the court's rulings.

A change will also be made to the requirement for debtors to attempt to make a payment arrangement with the maintenance enforcement program prior to a court application being granted for a stay of enforcement. This change will encourage debtors to first try to work out a payment arrangement with the maintenance enforcement program such as by setting out legislative requirements that the court may consider to grant a stay of enforcement, placing the onus upon the debtor to establish their attempts to make a payment arrangement and establish why they cannot pay their arrears for the period of the stay, and clarifying the maximum time necessary for relief from enforcement as well as the monthly amount payable during the time of the stay.

Mr. Rodney: Go faster.

Mr. Denis: I take it that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed would like me to speak a little faster, and I'll do my best.

It is anticipated that this will reduce the number of court applications and avoid breaks in maintenance programs.

Mr. Speaker, the maintenance enforcement program works hard

to ensure vulnerable Albertans are getting the support payments that are due to them.

Mr. Hehr: Hear, hear.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo also supports this initiative.

Changes in Bill 22 will help them do this more effectively and efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, the remaining piece of legislation Bill 22 addresses is the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act. Amendments to the act included in Bill 22 are housekeeping changes that will facilitate better access to justice for Alberta families who are dealing with interjurisdictional family support orders. The Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act is a model statute that all Canadian provinces and territories except Quebec use in order to facilitate the transfer of child and spousal support orders across provincial borders. This act allows parties residing in different jurisdictions to obtain and vary maintenance orders pursuant to provincial legislation more quickly and easily. This benefits families by increasing the likelihood of entitlement to maintenance and facilitates speedier enforcement of Canadian maintenance orders.

Mr. Speaker, the amended legislation will clarify the existing sections of the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act to allow for further client service, to increase efficiencies, highlight due process, and simplify questions about the applicable law for Alberta courts. Specifically, the amendments will recognize more categories of support orders, require faster provision of information, offer uniformity of language, and clarify which law applies to orders involving more than one jurisdiction.

I will briefly address each of these changes. Alberta's child support recalculation program has the authority to annually recalculate child support amounts. There are a number of jurisdictions that have reciprocal agreements with Alberta who have established administrative child support recalculation services that generate family support orders, which are in turn sent to Alberta for enforcement. The recognition of more categories of support orders will ensure that the administratively recalculated orders made in other jurisdictions can be enforced in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will also reduce court costs for Albertans. Recalculation programs help parents keep child support levels in line with incomes so that families can avoid the time and expense of asking the courts to review their child support orders. The amended legislation will allow Alberta to enforce on these recalculated child support orders.

Mr. Speaker, currently in Alberta if the Alberta court requires further information or documents from the claimant to make the support order, the information must be received within 18 months. This is a long period and can cause undue delay. Amendments in this bill will reduce the time period to 12 months, benefiting families as earlier intervention leads to timely establishment and enforcement of child support.

These amendments also change the phrase "ordinarily resident" to "habitually resident" and amend the phrase "ordinarily resides" to "habitually resides." The legal meaning of the terms is similar. However, these proposals conform to the language used in the Hague convention on the international recovery of child support and other forms of family maintenance. [interjections] Although Canada has not yet signed this convention, a number of jurisdictions – okay. Apparently, the minister's speech has been a little long, so I'll just wind up here.

The courts would only apply foreign law if there is no entitlement that can be found under its own law. This would remove ambiguity.

The legislation would also clarify which law, Alberta or the foreign jurisdiction, governs the duration and the amount of child support. As such, when deciding the amount of support to be paid for the child, the Alberta court must apply the law of Alberta, the onus being on the reciprocating jurisdiction to provide proof of the duration of child support. This encourages collaboration among jurisdictions and promotes compliance with support obligations in interjurisdictional cases. This legislation will also help the courts and the maintenance enforcement programs identify the duration of a support obligation granted in another jurisdiction where the duration is not specified in the order.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will result in effectiveness and efficiency increases in our government and also will ensure our legislation is up to date.

I never thought my rapid manner of speech in my life would ever be an asset.

Thank you. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:40

Bill 23

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to be a little briefer than the previous speaker on my introduction. It's my pleasure to rise today and request leave to move second reading of Bill 23, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010.

This bill is largely housekeeping and clarifies the roles and legal authority for on-campus parking at some of Alberta's postsecondary institutions and the creation of parking bylaws and enforcement.

The first amendment gives comprehensive academic and research institutions, also known as the universities of Alberta, Calgary, Lethbridge, and Athabasca, retroactive authority to collect penalties for the violation of their parking bylaws. Universities in Alberta have had specific powers to create parking bylaws on their properties since 1968. The amended legislation would grant retroactive legal authority to universities to collect penalties for violations of their parking bylaws, something we always intended for them to have.

The second amendment gives baccalaureate and applied studies institutions, specifically Mount Royal University and Grant MacEwan University, the retroactive authority to create parking bylaws and to collect penalties for the violation of these bylaws. As baccalaureate and applied studies institutions, Mount Royal and MacEwan are governed under a different section of the act, and they currently do not have parking authority. However, giving them this authority is a natural extension under the act as both institutions also have large urban campuses with significant parking areas, and they are viewed by the public as being similar types of institutions.

Currently several universities and one baccalaureate and applied studies institution, MacEwan, already issue their own tickets for violations of their parking bylaws or policies. This leaves these institutions at risk of lawsuits as they do not have the legal authority to issue their own tickets and, in the case of MacEwan, to have parking bylaws or policies at all. The proposed changes would retroactively allow these six institutions to impose and collect penalties such as fines for the violation of their bylaws and thus provide more legal protection against potential lawsuits.

In B.C. the provincial government made similar types of changes, which protected institutions from lawsuits by giving them retroactive powers to collect penalties for the violation of their parking bylaws. It was the B.C. legislation that actually led to our review. However,

in the B.C. case the government was already responding to a legal challenge against one of their institutions and the ruling of the courts that found their parking fines were beyond the powers given to institutions under their legislation. We want to make these changes prior to a lawsuit as they are reasonable authorities for these institutions to have in order to control parking on their campuses.

This is a very important clarification and amendment to the act because if Alberta institutions were subject to a lawsuit, they might approach the government of Alberta for financial assistance to repay fines. The financial impact on institutions could be significant if they were subject to a lawsuit in order to repay fines, which is why we could expect requests to the government to assist them should they end up in this type of position. Particularly, given the extended period of time that universities have had parking bylaws, this proposed bill will help both types of institutions gain clarity and formalize the authority of their parking while protecting them from potential lawsuits concerning past parking tickets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would adjourn debate at this time. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: We have a motion on the floor.

Mr. Weadick: I'll withdraw that motion to adjourn. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much first to the hon. mover of Bill 23 for putting forward this legislation and again to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for withdrawing the motion to adjourn so that we could have an opportunity to speak.

The reason for Bill 23, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010, is basically that Alberta's postsecondary institutions were caught, metaphorically speaking, with their parking pants down and their illegal fines up. Therefore, we have to correct this error. Under normal circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I would not support retroactive whiteout or wipeout legislation which rewrites history. But as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West pointed out, if we do not rewrite this particular piece of history, individuals' class actions going back to 1968, both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta and, by extension, MacEwan and Mount Royal could be facing millions of dollars of liability for the placement of illegal tickets.

Now, this government has not been overly kind to postsecondary institutions, particularly of late when they haven't kept up funding for operating costs, where staff members have basically taken unpaid leave to give back to their universities and where students have been forced to make up the difference in terms of a \$450 utilization fee for nothing. So this is the absolute least the government can do in terms of waving its magic wand and retroactively providing parking power to the universities going back to 1968.

Now, the universities have not unfortunately just been victims in this circumstance. For example, when it comes to boards of governors of both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, they have made some very poor decisions in terms of gambling their endowment funds on risky asset-backed commercial paper. Having said that, the government provided them with that example of investing in asset-backed commercial paper and allowing the Treasury Branches to make similarly bad investments. So the universities weren't alone in being suckered on asset-backed commercial paper.

The universities have tried a number of desperate measures, which the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has approved, in terms of dramatic increases in professional faculties' tuition along with, as I say, the allowance of that \$450 fee for nothing that was imposed upon students in an effort to bail out their institutions

because the government has not been keeping pace with grants to our postsecondary institutions. However, the government has come up with this whiteout bill, which does provide forgiveness. As I indicated earlier, I do believe in forgiveness in this particular case.

Alberta has the lowest postsecondary enrolment of any province in the country, and the dramatic effects of the loss of revenues dating back over the past 42 years would be sufficient to basically close those institutions. Obviously, that would be a terrible circumstance. So the Member for Lethbridge-West, where the wonderful University of Lethbridge is located, has provided a bailout option in the form of Bill 23. It's an unusual circumstance, Mr. Speaker, but in this case it's a small step in terms of forgiveness, and hopefully we will see other examples of government support and forgiveness for postsecondary institutions in this fine province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

Dr. Taft: Yes, on Bill 23, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to it, and I'll speak in favour of it. It's one of those sort of loopholes, I guess, that we're having to close, something that crept up on the universities and the government and needs to be addressed and needs to be plugged. It is a little bit unnerving to speak in favour of the university parking police when I represent the University of Alberta. This one may cost me a few votes if word gets out that I'm supporting maybe the scariest people on campus, the parking officials, but I'll run that risk.

3:50

I think that it's one little bit of funding that we can bring some stability to because I expect that year after year after year there is a pretty predictable amount of money collected through parking tickets. Any of us who has encountered the university's parking force knows that they're quite ruthless. They're actually the toughest parking police I've had to encounter. I do suspect there may be some of us in this Assembly who have children who have maybe borrowed dad's or mom's car and driven to university and then driven home and just given the keys back, the tank a little emptier. Then a couple of weeks later this little treat arrives in the mail addressed not to our children but to us as car owners with an unexpected fine in it. Maybe there's a shrug of the shoulders: "Oh, I forgot about that." Anyway, I think this bill will help the university address an issue. It keeps a small issue from getting large.

I also want to make one other note, which is that it may help the universities discourage driving. Certainly, at the University of Alberta the university works hard, on its main campus at least, to keep people using public transit and to encourage them to use public transit. One of the ways they do that is through strict controls on parking. I hope this helps stabilize a tiny little slice of the university's revenues.

I only wish that we had brought in some kind of legislation that offered the same sort of support for electricity deregulation when we brought that in. That cost the universities tens and tens and tens of millions of dollars over several years, but that's a different story.

I'm glad the Member for Lethbridge-West has brought this in, and I look forward to it being passed. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the bill.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be speaking in favour of this bill. I thank the MLA for Lethbridge-West for

bringing this forward at this time to straighten out what was a pretty big loophole, where parking that had been administered by universities for some time – they had fines going out on cars and trucks and what have you on campuses since 1968 – could have been exposed to lawsuits like we saw in British Columbia in their Queen's Bench jurisdiction, and legislation was brought in to rectify the problem before it went to their Court of Appeal.

As was noted by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, this is a challenging time for Alberta universities. It was brought up that we have the lowest enrolment in our postsecondary institutions, at that level, something that I think can be worked on and that, in my view, we have to look at seriously as a Legislature to try and correct to allow individuals the opportunity to go to school at home, to stay here, and to become better students, better learners, more equipped to deal with the challenges of a quick-paced world which recognizes that learning and the ability to think and to react and to change job positions is the new currency of finding jobs. You get those skills by going to school.

I guess we're talking about parking here. If this would have happened, if we didn't correct this, it could have – hey, life would have gone on, but it would have been another minor detail that universities would have had to deal with that would have taken some precious funds, that would not have gone, then, to keeping the postsecondary institute alive and running and providing education to many of the young minds who are going to our universities, both now Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal University.

I do note on the story of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview that at the time I went to Mount Royal College, it was 1990. I was somewhat recalcitrant and lackadaisical back then and often running late for class and a dollar short and a day late on having any money in my pocket because it might have got spent at the pub or somewhere else the night before and I couldn't fill the meter or whatever it was and received one of those tickets. Now, if allowed to sign up for that class-action suit, I may very well have done that, but now that this has been rectified, I won't have to bother doing that to try and get some of my money back. I think Alberta citizens will be better off for not having that lawsuit go forward.

Nevertheless, after that trip down memory lane and a brief discussion of parking and universities in general, I'm glad we brought this Bill 23 forward. I support it wholeheartedly and support the betterment of education everywhere in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 23. It's called the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, but it should be the postsecondary parking amendment act, I think. It really leaves me kind of torn because, of course, when I attended the university, they were able to collect their parking fines by threatening to withhold my marks. They never really have had that hammer on me ever since.

With some reluctance I can see the point of the legislation. I think that ultimately a strong regime for parking at the university is the right thing to do because they have a huge population that comes and goes every day that they have to manage, and if, in fact, there was a class-action suit similar to the one in British Columbia against UBC, it could be very, very expensive. I think the university and the city worked well together in order to make sure that there are transportation options other than driving a car, and the extension of the LRT has certainly been very helpful in that regard.

I think that giving the university the authority to levy fines and to collect fines is probably in the best interest of everyone, so for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall call on the hon. member to close the debate.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a pleasure to hear the comments of the opposition members and their support for this. It is a great move for our universities. We'll ask for the question at this time.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

4:00

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am, indeed, very pleased to rise on this great afternoon to move second reading of Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act.

Bill 17, as described, is the product of more than a year-long conversation with Albertans about our health system, a dialogue, I would like to add, that told us what Albertans expect from their publicly funded health care system, a dialogue that told us what we as a government can do to help make the system more cohesive and more focused on them, our Albertans. I want to thank once again the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for leading that consultative dialogue. I think he did an outstanding job with his advisory committee, and I want to applaud his efforts right now for doing a great job. [some applause] Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, consistent with the Putting People First report, which I just referenced, Bill 17 is principles based as well. It recognizes Alberta's commitment both to the Canada Health Act and to the aspirations Albertans have for their health system. Bill 17 includes overarching principles that will provide ongoing guidance for the operation of the health system and the development of future health legislation. The purpose of having principles-based legislation is, of course, to help guide policies, organization, operations, and decisions throughout the health system.

Bill 17 also introduces the concept of a health charter that will set out principles, expectations, and responsibilities that apply across the entire health system. The minister will be required under the proposed act to establish such a health charter and to specify basic elements that must be addressed in the health charter. Bill 17 directs that the charter must recognize that health is a partnership, acknowledges the impact of a person's health status on their capacity to interact with the system, specifies that the charter will not be used to limit access to health services, and further specifies that the charter not be subject to or be the basis of litigation within the court system. It is important to note that the principles, the expectations, and the responsibilities set out in the charter will apply throughout the health system, from doctors' offices to dental clinics and from hospitals to home care.

The charter will be about building and reinforcing trust and respect across the health system. Work to develop the health charter will begin once the proposed act has been passed by this Assembly, I hope. The charter will apply to everyone, and it will guide the actions of Alberta Health Services, of health facility operators, of health providers, and of professional colleges.

Now, to enable the charter to apply across the spectrum of the health system, there is a proposed regulation-making power that enables the definition of health provider to be expanded. This may be done to include people who are not part of the so-called regulated health professions. This may include, for example, health care aides or massage therapists, who play a very important role in keeping Albertans healthy, but they are not at this stage regulated professions.

The proposed act will require the minister to review the health charter at least every five years.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to another important area of this Bill 17, that being the health advocate, Albertans told us that once a health charter is created, they want meaningful ways of raising concerns about how the charter is applied. They do not want their concerns to be bogged down in litigation. Costly court challenges take energy and resources away from health service delivery. However, it's important to note that Albertans have and will continue to have the right to sue if they wish.

Bill 17 provides for the appointment of a health advocate, who will be accessible to the public, responsible for receiving complaints relating to the charter, and who will have the ability to address these complaints. If the health advocate finds that a person has not honoured the charter, the advocate will have the authority to make recommendations as required to address the issue. The health advocate may also report to the minister on any further action that should be taken. In fact, the health advocate must report annually to the minister, and the minister is required to table this report in the Assembly, similar to the current reporting structure of the Mental Health Patient Advocate.

Now, in order to avoid duplication in the health system, one obligation of the health advocate is to refer complaints to another body that has authority to more appropriately address the matter. In this way the advocate will play an important navigation role. For example, this would mean that a complaint about the conduct of a particular health professional would be directed to the appropriate health profession college so that they could address the issue directly. The specific scope of the health advocate will be developed in regulations so that as the role of the office of the advocate evolves, the regulations can be updated in a timely and just manner.

For example, regulations could be made that will enable the health advocate to access information and require health services providers to co-operate with the advocate. In these respects, Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 and the health advocate specifically in this case are based on the model currently in place for the Mental Health Patient Advocate, a very successful model, I might add. As well, the health advocate will work at arm's length from government in the same way that the Mental Health Patient Advocate does today.

Now, in order to reinforce the importance of the health charter, Bill 17 also makes provision for the minister to act on recommendations of the health advocate. The proposed act enables the minister to direct Alberta Health Services, hospital operators, and other health providers to comply with the health charter. The minister may also direct a health professions college to modify its bylaws, its codes of conduct, or its policies in order to make them consistent with the charter so that their members will better understand its application.

With respect to reporting, Mr. Speaker, Bill 17, the proposed Alberta Health Act, will enable the minister to require operators of health facilities and health providers to publicly report on health system issues such as charter compliance, health service outcomes, and health system performance. Through the development of regulations the minister may require further reporting on such things as wait times or patient safety. This provision provides for accountability across the entire system. Currently the existing reporting

provisions in legislation apply only to specific areas, such as to Alberta Health Services, for example. This new provision will enable more comprehensive reporting.

Now, with respect to roles and responsibilities the proposed new act provides a high-level reference to the roles of Alberta Health Services, Alberta Health and Wellness, the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and the professional colleges. Provision is also made for the health minister to clarify and co-ordinate the roles and responsibilities of these major players in the system if required. There are regulation-making powers to support this. Mr. Speaker, through this provision we will enable steps to be taken as may be required to better co-ordinate and integrate the health system.

The proposed act has also been based on and benefited from extensive public input, as I indicated earlier. We want this public participation to continue because that's what Albertans have asked for, so we have included a role for ongoing public input into the development of regulations. The proposed act includes regulation-making powers related to such things as the establishment and review of the health charter, the powers and duties of the health advocate, the use of confidential information, and clarifying roles and responsibilities of the key entities in the health system.

These regulations, however, will not be made in isolation. Before a regulation can be made under the proposed act, a notice must be published on the public website of the Health and Wellness department. That notice, Mr. Speaker, must contain a summary of the proposed regulation and the wording of the text. A minimum of 30 days must be provided for the public to comment on the proposal. The minister must report on any feedback that is received to cabinet. Exceptions may be made to the 30-day notification period in the case where the proposed regulation addresses a matter that is urgent or if it is simply a technical or what we call a housekeeping matter such as if the minister is simply clarifying a provision of the act. If the notification period is shortened, the minister must advise the public about that decision.

4:10

I look forward to receiving more input and to ongoing dialogue and great conversation with respect to how the public can be involved in the regulations aforementioned.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 is fundamental – absolutely fundamental – to building greater public confidence in our wonderful publicly funded health system. Albertans need to trust their health system and have confidence in how the health system is governed and administered. Establishing a new Alberta Health Act is an important part of our ongoing work to build the best-performing publicly funded health system in Canada.

I want to thank all members for their anticipated support of Bill 17 as it moves through the various stages of discussion, debate, and, I hope, final passage in this House.

With that, I'll look forward to additional comments from other members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the minister. Unfortunately, the more I listened, the more I found I disagreed with the positions he was staking out. He concluded by describing the Alberta Health Act as fundamental. I actually think it misses the target quite completely. I find myself wondering: what's the point of this bill? This bill is going to take up hours of time for this Assembly. I think there is too much theory here and not enough reality. I think we are looking at a piece of legislation that tries to pretend issues away or simply misses the mark completely.

A lot of effort and a lot of noise and a lot of money is being spent on preparing this piece of legislation. It's being trumpeted as historic and fundamental and all kinds of things. I think we should look at this as a doctor might look at a medical condition. We should ask ourselves if this is the right treatment for the particular problems that Alberta's health care system has, and to do that, I think we need a diagnosis. My feeling is that this government has for 16 or 17 years now, actually, had a whole series of misdiagnoses about what's up with the health care system.

You base a diagnosis on symptoms, Mr. Speaker, so let's talk for a moment about some of the symptoms that the Alberta health system is showing that things are wrong. Well, one of those symptoms, that's had a lot of attention in the last few days in this Assembly, is long waiting lists. In fact, that may be one of the top two or three most obvious symptoms that something is wrong in the health care system. Those waiting lists have been debated in the last few days in terms of emergency rooms. As the minister has said – and I would agree with him on this point when he said it at other times – emergency rooms are kind of an indicator of how the health system, at least the hospital side of the health system, is running generally. We do know from both anecdotes and genuine data that emergency rooms are plugged up, and there are very serious waiting list issues in emergency rooms.

Of course, it's not limited to emergency rooms. If you need cancer treatment, it can be not only a terrifying and frustrating time; it can also be deeply troubling when you have to wait weeks and then months to get proper treatment. I will tell the minister that I had to work with a constituent this summer on treatment. He was diagnosed with a particular kind of cancer. He went without getting any calls back from the Cross Cancer Institute and ended up seeking treatment and receiving treatment in a timely fashion in, of all places, Prince Edward Island. In other words, Prince Edward Island could deliver more timely cancer care than Alberta.

Of course, if you need knee surgery or orthopaedic surgery, there's been some improvement, but wait times there can be frustrating as well. In fact, I could consume all the time I'm allocated for this particular stage of debate just on waiting lists, so let's look to some other symptoms that things are not right in the Alberta health system.

An obvious one – and it relates to wait times – is shortages of staff. This is an issue that's been building for 15 years. In 1994 and '95 over 10,000 health professionals in this province either lost their jobs completely or had their jobs downgraded. As well, we saw the training programs cut dramatically. The predictable thing happened. As the years went by, we ran into more and more severe shortages of staff. That contributes to problems with wait-lists, but it brings in other issues as well. I'm sure many of us have heard the figures put out by the government itself that in Calgary, for example, over 200,000 people can't get a family doctor. So there's a symptom there, shortages of staff.

There are overcrowded facilities. We've heard about that as well. Certainly, the big cities – Calgary and Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Red Deer – have some of the most overcrowded hospitals in the country. I don't know about other MLAs, but I know I get quite a lot of correspondence from people who end up the third person wheeled into a two-bed ward because there are no beds available. We've seen beds open – fair enough – but it seems that for every bed that's opened, another one is mothballed, so we are short of facilities. Of course, that goes back. The most dramatic examples are in Calgary, where the Calgary General, one of the proudest hospitals in this province, was destroyed, the Grace was sold, the Holy Cross was sold, and it's just led to one debacle after another. So another symptom, overcrowded facilities.

Related to that, insufficient long-term care. We've simply failed to build enough long-term care facilities, and we've failed to staff the ones we have to an adequate standard. People might be out there thinking, "Well, we can't afford to build long-term care facilities and staff them," but the thing is that if we don't build those sufficiently, then the people who should be living in those end up in our acute-care hospitals. As we're speaking today, it's pretty reasonable to think that if today is like every other day, there are somewhere between 300 and 500 people at this moment in acute-care hospitals waiting for long-term care. The average cost of each one of those beds: let's say \$1,000 a day. It just doesn't make sense. We could actually save money and improve efficiency.

Behind those kinds of symptoms is turbulent management, something I've tried to bring attention to. In the 16 or 17 years since the regional health authorities were created, the last count I had – and I've kept track – is that there have been 13 deputy ministers of health. I've got the list on my computer in my office. Think about that for a minute: in 16 years 13 deputy ministers. That's not unlike a \$10 billion corporation changing CEOs every 15 months for 16 years. Anybody looking at that would say: well, that organization is in crisis. Well, surprise. This organization is in crisis. Who is to be accountable for that? Well, the board of directors; in other words, the cabinet of this government.

It doesn't just stop with the deputy ministers. We've seen regional health authorities created. We've seen them merge. We saw one or two suspended. We've seen elections, and then we saw the elected officials suspended, even, I think, within 18 months of being duly elected. Now, in the most recent devastation, I think a genuinely – genuinely – poorly handled process, we've seen all the regional health authorities plus the Cancer Board, which had been a jewel of the system, plus AADAC all wiped out and consolidated in a process that has been a mess, I think, by anybody's assessment.

There are cost pressures. Well, is it any surprise that the system is inefficient when there are not enough staff, there's not enough space, the management is on a revolving door, and the organizational structure is in constant turmoil? There are cost pressures. These have to be understood a little bit, and they have to be penetrated a bit.

4:20

I did some work last spring looking at Statistics Canada figures over the last 20 years on health spending, and they tell an interesting story. I'm interested in the facts as they stand, and one of the things that surprised me is that on a per capita basis, once you adjust for inflation, spending in Alberta is not up particularly much at all over the last 20 years. Now, there are lots of ways to measure this. Some people, like the Parkland Institute, will say that it's actually down because the economy has grown so much. Others will say that it's higher once you adjust for age. There are a lot of ways to cut these costs, but I don't think any legitimate measure tells us that health spending is out of control.

But there are cost pressures. Interestingly, when you go further into the Stats Canada data, the cost pressures aren't from hospitals, and they aren't particularly from doctors, and they're certainly not from prevention. They're from that curious category called "other," which includes lab services, pharmaceuticals, contracting out. If any member is interested, I'd be happy to go through that data with you.

Finally, I think one of the signs that our health system in the broadest sense is really struggling is the broader health of the population. I would love to see more emphasis on things like health promotion and prevention. We need to address issues of diet, hunger. How many times do I have to raise this in the Assembly? It's a good health policy to feed our hungry kids because they're

going to grow up to be healthier. You think I can get that through to this government? No, but the evidence is overwhelming.

Mr. Speaker, there's a list of symptoms if we were diagnosing this patient, if we think of the Alberta health system as a patient: long waiting lists, shortages of staff, overcrowded facilities, inadequate long-term care, not enough investment in health promotion, complete turmoil in the management system, and cost pressures. If you look at those symptoms, then what's the diagnosis? Before we bring in a treatment like Bill 17 or some other treatment, some other bill, what's the diagnosis?

Well, my particular view is that from about 1985 till about 1993 Alberta probably had about as good a health care system as you're going to ever be able to achieve. It wasn't perfect. I suspect it was the best in the country and was probably one of the best run in the world. Interestingly, if you follow the cost trends on that, through that period costs were actually quite flat.

We had a very healthy system, and then it began to get sick. My view is that it began to get sick because of 16 or 17 years of poor political decision-making, rash decision-making based not on any understanding of how a health care system works or what the real issues are but on the political posturing of the given moment, and that has carried on without relent for 17 years. There were some utterly foolish cuts in the 1990s. Beds were cut; training programs were cut. There has been, as I said, the constant turnover at the top.

One footnote I want to make to this is that we often say: well, the health system should be run in a more businesslike fashion. I haven't actually done this, but I would wager that it's a safe bet. If you were to go around to the major energy companies in Calgary, let's say Suncor and Nexen and Encana and so on, and you looked at the qualifications of the CEOs of each of those companies – I don't need to name names – you would find that those people running those outfits were experts in the energy sector. They've worked their way up through the industry, typically have spent their careers there. Many of them are engineers or MBAs or both.

Let me ask you: what have been the qualifications of the people in charge of Alberta's health care system in the last 16 years, aside from the one completely fraudulent one? Who will remember the woman who applied and was hired from the U.S.? Go through and look at the qualifications of the deputy ministers of health. How many of them have a background in running a health care system? Precious few. While we have a health economist there running Alberta Health Services right now, what's the biggest organization he's ever run? What are his real qualifications? How well does he know the intimate detail of how an emergency room works? Has he ever actually spent a year or two getting into the depths of that sort of operation? You can raise that question with him next time you see him.

I also think part of the problem has been budgeting by the quarter. Every quarter for most of the last 17 years the health care budget has been jiggered around, and I sat here as an MLA while that happened a lot. That led to a whole series, an unending series it seems, of stupid decisions where, when the times were good, we had money to build the East Edmonton health clinic, the Sheldon Chumir health centre, and on and on. We put a kidney dialysis facility into I think it was Lac La Biche, and it goes on and on. Then the doors open. "Whoops, the budget is tighter. We can't staff it." So it sits there empty. That's happened a lot, and it happens because we got into what I think was a very poor process of budgeting.

My diagnosis is that there have been 16 years of poor political decision-making. That's the real disease we have here. Is this the treatment for that? No. I don't think it is. I think it's amazing that the health care system is still running as well as it does. I don't think that bringing in this particular piece of legislation is going to fix

anything very much. In fact, I'm concerned that with Bill 17 this government is prescribing a multivitamin for what's really a raging fever.

We can now talk for a moment about the bill. I do want to pause for a minute, Mr. Speaker, and give this government credit for one significant good move. This is important, and I'll give you credit for this. I just hope you stick with it. The five years of predictable funding: don't give up on that. Let these guys, these men and women, who are running the system right now have five years to know where they're going and what they can do. That's a significant step forward. But that, of course, doesn't have anything to do with this piece of legislation, and I think that speaks volumes.

If I look through this bill carefully, I see an unusually long preamble, and I rather like the preamble. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford might have had a hand in drafting it – I don't know – or the minister did. It's long, but it does state some broad, good positions, some of which I'm glad to see in legislation although I'm skeptical of any real follow-through.

For example, the fourth paragraph, as it were, in the preamble says, "Healthy policy across Alberta Government ministries should recognize the social determinants of health." Well, you should read and see what you're agreeing to there because there's a very substantial body on the social determinants of health that addresses things like inequality. Are we going to see a return to a progressive income tax? Believe it or not, that's probably important health policy. Are we going to see feeding of hungry children? That would be really good health policy. I won't go on like that, but I'm glad to see some of that stuff in here. It's been in Alberta Liberal health policy for many years now.

The preamble is pretty good. Actually, I was quite excited, and I'm not just saying this as rhetoric. I was quite excited when I read the preamble.

Then when I get to the charter, I see a piece of legislation that's really asking for a blank cheque. I know there's a draft charter in one of the documents that the government has developed in the last few months. This bill doesn't commit to that specific charter. It leaves lots of wiggle room, and I think it does raise the question, which others have raised, that since the charter is going to be in the regulations, the way it's worded in this legislation, the health charter will have no legal effect. So then you have to wonder: well, what's the point of it? As one person has said, it's more like a mission statement or a wish than a charter. I'm disappointed that we're not putting the charter in here.

4:30

Because I'm running out of time, Mr. Speaker, I need to keep my comments brief on the health advocate. I will have more comments on that position in the future. This feels like a complaints office. Well, we don't need a piece of legislation to set up a complaints office for the health care system. Goodness knows, in the last couple of years we amended the legislative framework for the Ombudsman to include regional health authorities, we've got the Health Facilities Review Committee – and I'm not sure what they're up to these days – and, lo and behold, we have the minister here. This feels actually like an insurance policy or a protection office so the minister has somewhere to punt the tough questions that come to him or her. I'm pretty disappointed in that as well.

We'll be bringing forward some amendments. Who knows? Maybe we can convince government members to improve this legislation through our amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise and speak to Bill 17. First, I want to commend the hon. minister for bringing this forward. I also want to commend my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford for his work on this act and his work on health-related issues. While I'm talking and commending people, I want to commend the many doctors and nurses and professional health care workers that work in our hospitals. This past Sunday I took my father to the hospital, to emergency, in Lacombe. It was a very busy morning, yet they were able to see him very quickly. I spent a few hours there and observed what was going on inside the hospital, and I just want to say thank you, and I want to commend the nurses and the doctors that work there. He got excellent care in very good time.

There have been many questions raised about the proposed Alberta Health Act and how it will benefit Albertans and improve our health system. The one key question is: how will the health charter principles be maintained? I will touch on this one question and add some clarity and support to these principles.

Albertans have said that for the health charter to be meaningful, there must be a way for people to raise concerns when their experience in the health system does not align with the charter. The effectiveness of the health charter will depend on how it is implemented and lived up to. Albertans do not want valuable health resources tied up in legal battles, but they do want to know that they have somewhere to go for assistance if the health charter is being ignored. I'm glad to see that the Alberta Health Act strikes a balance between liability and transparency by establishing a health advocate.

I'm also pleased to note that the health advocate's role is not intended to duplicate resolution processes that are already in place. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there are already many regulatory bodies charged with addressing concerns in our health system, and these include the 28 regulatory health profession colleges, other entities such as the Health Facilities Review Committee, the Public Health Appeal Board, patient concerns resolution officers, the Mental Health Patient Advocate, and the Alberta Ombudsman, just to name a few. Despite these resources, there may be issues with the health charter that fall outside the mandate of these organizations. In that case, the health advocate will be able to respond.

The health advocate will address health charter complaints directly or will forward their complaints to other responsible bodies, depending on what is most appropriate. The scope and powers of the health advocate will be defined in regulations. This will best enable the advocate's role to evolve over time. A public notice requirement will give all Albertans the opportunity to comment on the health advocate's role as it develops.

I want to discuss the powers of the health advocate. I see some real potential for the health advocate's role. Let me briefly discuss some examples. According to the Putting People First report, part 1, page 17,

many Albertans may not know how to access these mechanisms, or which mechanism would be most appropriate for their concern. Albertans would benefit from a resource to help them navigate the resolution system.

In this case the health advocate could raise awareness about the health charter and help Albertans better understand where they should go to have complaints resolved.

To avoid duplication in the health system, the health advocate will refer complaints to another body such as the professional college or the Health Facilities Review Committee that has the authority to more appropriately address the matter. In this way the advocate will play an important navigation role to resolve concerns. Often people that need an advocate simply need a little help to find their way to

the appropriate body or desk or person that can help. For example, this means that a complaint about the conduct of a health professional could be directed to the right or appropriate health profession college to be addressed.

If there is no appropriate authority to address a health charter-related complaint, the advocate will review the concern and will have the authority to make recommendations to address this issue. If the issue is not addressed, the advocate can report the matter to the minister along with the health advocate's recommendations for action.

The minister is authorized under the proposed act to direct health providers and organizations to comply with the health charter or require them to develop and adopt their own charter that is consistent with the health charter.

Albertans have asked for greater accountability and transparency in how well the health system operates. The health advocate will promote greater accountability by submitting an annual report to Albertans. The annual report will set out the activities of the health advocate related to the health charter and will be submitted to the minister for tabling in the Legislative Assembly.

I also want to briefly discuss some limitations around the health advocate. The advocate is not a duplication of existing complaint resolution processes. The health advocate will not supersede the roles of professional colleges and others under current legislation in terms of resolving concerns. The health advocate will not be responsible for assessing system-level issues, and the health advocate is not a litigation system. Albertans say that they do not want their concerns to be bogged down in litigation. Costly court challenges take energy and resources away from health service delivery.

The health advocate provides an important resource for charter concerns, and because the advocate's powers and duties will be more fully developed in regulations, the advocate will be able to respond to emerging issues effectively. This means that regulations could be made that will enable the health advocate to access information and require health service providers to co-operate with the advocate. In these respects Bill 17 proposes that the health advocate will be similar to the current Mental Health Patient Advocate model. The health advocate will work at arm's length from government in the same way that the Mental Health Patient Advocate works to address mental health concerns.

In conclusion, the health advocate is about making our health charter real. Bill 17 proposes that the health advocate will be the most effective way to address Albertans' health charter concerns. I ask all members to support Bill 17 and move it to the next stage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, in fact, I have a list that people send to me.

Dr. Taft: What about 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, yes. Sorry. Standing Order 29(2)(a), five minutes for comments or questions. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, five minutes.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that, and I won't need five minutes. I listened to the hon. member discuss the merits of this legislation, and particularly I was interested in his remarks regarding the health advocate. Given that we have an Ombudsman who as recently as two years ago, I believe, made some recommendations or some comments regarding out-of-province medical payments in this ministry and that we already have the Health

Quality Council of Alberta – in fact, the CEO of the Health Quality Council was one of the very few people that I can find in government that had an increase in salary between 2009 and 2010; the total compensation package would have increased by 10 per cent to \$482,000 – my question to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, is this. Do you think the health advocate is a duplication and a waste of our really precious and valuable resources, that could be used, for instance, to ensure that everyone has access to emergency care?

Mr. Prins: Well, Mr. Speaker, he asked me if it's a duplication, and that's exactly what my speech was about, that this is not a duplication. It's just another angle. I'll also tell him that during committee we can go through the entire act clause by clause and have those discussions.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

4:40

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) to the same member. I'm trying to think of a kind of complaint that this advocate might take on. Let's say that you go to an emergency room and you're unhappy with the way a nurse or a physician treats you. If you make that kind of complaint, well, that's going to be directed to the professional association. If you're treated incorrectly, the wrong surgery or something goes wrong, well, that'll be taken up in the law courts. Let's say that the food is bad. Is that the kind of complaint that the patient advocate will do? In the nitty-gritty, real-world life of people experiencing the health system, what kind of complaint is a health advocate going to address that isn't already being addressed? I need an example.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much. That is a question that I believe is reasonable. I would think that if anybody was a client of the health services and had a complaint, the first person that it would go to is the local person or the local hospital, wherever they have the complaint. So you talk to the people there, and if that's not being resolved, then you go to the advocate. If the advocate can't get you to the right body, like the right professional body, and actually get an answer for you from the professional body that's providing the service, then you would go back to the advocate, and the advocate would enforce the charter. If that doesn't help, then they go right to the minister, and the minister will order these people to provide the services that are within the charter.

If somebody's complaining about food, then I think the reasonable thing to do would be to go to where the complaint originates, talk to the people that are cooking the food and ask the right questions and ask them what the problem is. They should be able to answer the question long before they ever go to an advocate or to the minister or any other professional body.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. If I can put a similar question to the hon. member, in the example of someone who found that the waiting times didn't meet the requirements of the charter in an emergency room, could he then ask the advocate to direct the minister to change the long-term care policy of the government or, for example, to staff the urgent care centre at the East Edmonton hospital? I mean, could this advocate actually get at the root of the problems we're facing today?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you're talking about waiting times, I'm not sure if the waiting times are in the charter or in the regulations. I don't know that. I think, once again, that if there's a problem with waiting times, you need to talk to the doctors or the nurses that are providing the service in that place to find out what the problem is. I'm just going to refer, once again, exactly to what I said at the beginning of my speech. I was in a hospital this Sunday for many hours. It was very busy. It was being operated very professionally, and the service was, I would consider, very good – reasonable to very, very good.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list here, and the next speaker would be the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the comments by the colleague across the way. I know his family. One of them is a doctor, a very good doctor, and certainly I appreciate his work and also some of the good work that he performed in my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I know that he will be successful.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, and I do speak with a heavy heart. Albertans had high expectations for a change in our health care system, and I can actually empathize with the minister of health in terms of this mammoth task that is required. Needless to say, as was referenced earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the fact that there have been something like 13 deputy ministers, one has to really ask the question: who are the administrative experts dealing with this massive undertaking in terms of the number of employees?

I think that the preamble, as was mentioned earlier, would clearly indicate that the intent in the preamble talks in very general terms but overall talks about motherhood and apple pie, that I think we all can agree with, that we would like in terms of the best care for our grandparents, the best care for our moms and dads and our children.

Yet it is somewhat, shall I say, disappointing because I do believe, as was mentioned earlier, that it does miss the mark, and let me say why I believe that. The government, I believe, really has failed to deliver health care for this fine province of ours. This government over the past many, many years really has not delivered change, inasmuch as in reading a newspaper about a week ago, the headline in the *Edmonton Journal* said: historic – historic – health charter. I can only comment as I went through the detail of the story – and I know the reporter, who actually tried to do a very good job, also says: "I don't make the headlines. I just write the story. It's editors who write the headlines." Clearly, it was historic, but historic in rhetorical comment. Historic in rhetoric. Historic in rhetoric that really is saying a lot of absolutely nothing. That's what concerns me because it isn't a real discussion.

Mr. Anderson: It's a Seinfeld law.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. In fact, it truly is a Seinfeld law.

That is what's disappointing when I go through Bill 17, which I've spent a considerable amount of time going through because I was willing to give the minister of health the benefit of the doubt. In fact, as we look at this historic charter of rhetoric, I believe that it is really demonstrating the gap that exists between this ministry of health and Albertans, and that is very unfortunate. In fact, at one point I even thought that maybe we should bring back the former

minister of health, but I can clearly see the scared looks of colleagues from all sides of the House if that were to happen. It would be something that could be remarkably even more scary than what is taking place today.

Now, I believe that Alberta was promised a health charter – I gave the minister of health the benefit of the doubt – but they won't be getting one any time soon. It'll be in the future. When? We don't know. We will do it perhaps, based on the comments I've seen, over the next five years, over the next 10 years, over the next 15 years – who knows? – maybe over the next 20 years. That simply is not good enough for Albertans. It has no power. It's a guarantee that really can't be guaranteed. I do believe that it is another example of the government talking the talk and not walking the walk. I believe that it is truly an entirely empty promise.

This government said it needs to make small changes to health legislation: if only the legislation was consolidated, health care would be delivered more efficiently. Well, under the superboard that is in place today, with the over 85 vice-presidents – 85 vice-presidents – that are under this organization today, with the change of 13 deputy ministers I believe that it does scare Albertans in terms of the state of flux. Even though there are excellent people on the front lines – doctors such as the hon. member's son, nurses – so many people that are on the front line, that truly are seeing what's happening, are talking about what is happening in lunchrooms each and every day, yet their message is not getting through. I would encourage the minister of health to truly sit down and listen, not actually talk but listen, to people on the front line, our doctors and our nurses and so many people that are committed to the very best health care that is possible.

4:50

Over this past period of time we truly have seen some very scary revelations come forward, revelations about the wait times. I believe the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere had brought up the fact that over this past year the increase has now gone up by 54 per cent. Those numbers are not good enough. The question. Can you in fact go and complain to the health advocate relative to the fact that: hey, did you know that our wait times now are 54 per cent longer?

The question would be: what would even be the role of going to complain to a health advocate about that? We can hear that in this Legislature each and every day because constituents, who are ultimately our bosses, go to their MLAs. All of those MLAs who are listening to those complaints, I know, are equally frustrated with what is going on, and ultimately they bring those concerns forward. The questions that are being asked of the minister of health are being asked in this House. This, I believe, is a direct connection back to democracy and to our bosses.

Now there is going to be a barrier: this health advocate, someone so the minister can be protected. In fact, MLAs perhaps in the future may not be able to talk to the minister of health. They may have to go to the health advocate. So one would begin to question what the roles of MLAs are. Are they not allowed any longer to bring forward health issues based on MLA constituency work that we do each and every day? Would we not be allowed to be able to bring forward those issues? No, let's go ahead and take it over to the health advocate, which really is another level of red tape and another level of regulation and bureaucracy.

Actually, I believe that it really is regulating Albertans to death, perhaps even literally. Regulating. We don't need another level of bureaucracy. We have 85 – right now 85 – vice-presidents within the superboard. Perhaps they should have made it 88, one for every new MLA after this next election . . .

Mr. Anderson: Eighty-seven.

Mr. Boutilier: Eighty-seven. Sorry. It's 87, as was mentioned.

I have to ask this question. This superboard under the purview of this government and the minister of health has lost community capital. What I mean by community capital is that people in our constituencies know how the hospital is being run better than some centrally controlled bureaucracy and monopoly here in Edmonton. What I mean by what has been lost in terms of community capital, I speak to people often within the hospital, and they have answers, but they have to go through literally 10 if not 20 examples of red tape and bureaucracy. That's what really has to be streamlined. That's what Albertans are telling us. I find that this, quote, unquote, historic health charter has missed the boat because it is not historic. It is historic in rhetoric, but it is not historic in terms of outcomes.

From now on does it mean, "Don't complain to your MLA; go and complain to the health advocate"? Then one has to ask the question: what is the role of an MLA? I personally believe that we have to remain rooted in our bosses. Our bosses are the people within our constituency. I compliment MLAs from all sides in terms of MLAs who bring to the minister of health actions and concerns that need to be dealt with. Unfortunately, the question is: will that role be taken away? That would be a question that I would have for the minister of health: what about the role of an MLA in launching concerns on health care issues brought forward?

For instance, yesterday I had some people that were watching question period on television. They were aware of this Bill 17, the new act that was coming forward, but they still wanted to have questions relative to the minister of health's responses when it came to wait times, wanting to know why the wait time lines, why they were in an emergency room for almost 18 hours. Now, I want to commend the minister of health when he said he's going to reduce that time to four hours. I think that is quite noble. But as the person who was watching on television yesterday said: I didn't fall off a turnip truck yesterday. They said that with the utmost of respect toward democracy, but they had some real concerns, saying: what are you going to do tomorrow in this new health act that is going to help me reduce times from 18 hours down to four?

Clearly, we have not received answers to those questions. This bill, I believe, which I thought would be about getting the transparency and accountability that patients deserve, does not provide this. This has provided another level of bureaucracy added to the 85 vice-presidents that are in there now.

We continue to lose the community capital that we have in each and every one of our communities. That's the strength of Alberta, the community capital of people who know what is going on, not controlled by a monopoly in Edmonton. That is what has been lost. It has been an approach just like this bill, from the sky down as opposed to from the roots up. For anyone who is in agriculture I can say that I think we can all trust that from the roots up builds a solid foundation as opposed to the superboard's sky-down approach.

Let's never forget that our bosses are not up there. Our bosses are with us on the ground each and every day. I commend MLAs who are listening to their constituents. I'm convinced that they'll be rewarded in the next provincial election in March of 2012. However, I do say that for those who will not listen, for those who are following the direction from the sky down as opposed to from the roots up, if you forget who your bosses are, I do believe that you will pay the price in the next provincial election. We will be judged on our actions today and yesterday and tomorrow relative to this important piece.

I will conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that I believe that this bill, basically, has indicated that – the preamble, I think, is fine, but unfortunately when it comes to the meat, there is no meat on the bones of what this health charter is all about, and that's where it has missed the boat.

I must interpret from all of this that as emergency room waits get longer and longer – from last year to this year they're 54 per cent longer. Those people watching today on television, those people in waiting rooms today as they watch questions being respectfully asked of the minister of health are not getting answers.

I can say that, clearly, democracy is in jeopardy when the MLAs' roles and responsibilities are going to be replaced by a health advocate. Is that intended, quite simply, to insulate the minister of health? He loses that community capital that is there, that we see truly having answers relative to doctors, nurses, and so many health professionals.

Rather than getting it from the sky down, from the 85 vice-presidents that ultimately appear to be controlling what's going on here, I applauded the minister of health when he said: "I'll pick up my phone, and I'll call Stephen Duckett. I'll call the head of the superboard." But when I asked him to do it outside of the Legislature, he didn't. That concerns me as well. I even offered him new batteries for his cellphone. I know that just a week or two before, when he was in an editorial board in Calgary and in an editorial board in Edmonton, he was able to pick up the phone and call the health superboard CEO czar in a second. But when I asked him in this Legislature, deeply rooted in the trenches of that community capital, he said he couldn't do it in the Legislature. I waited for him outside. He still couldn't do it outside. Why?

Mr. Mason: His batteries were run down.

Mr. Boutilier: His batteries were not run down. He didn't do it because of the actual bureaucracy and red tape that is going on.

The Deputy Speaker: On Standing Order 29(2)(a) do you want to use the five minutes? Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for that contribution, I think one of his first major speeches as a new caucus member here on our side of the House.

I guess I want to ask the question of him about the whole approach of picking up the phone, you know, and calling the CEO of Alberta Health Services. It doesn't seem to happen anymore, even though the problems are, if anything, getting worse, or at least we're becoming more aware of the problems that exist. He's ruled out the possibility that the minister's batteries had just run down. Would he, then, offer an alternative explanation, perhaps that what it was was a stunt in order to try and show some accessibility and hands on and going to change things, and whether or not he also thinks that it's been replaced of late with the more typical approach of this minister, dithering and not really doing anything and just fiddling while the system burns? That was, frankly, what I expected. I'm beginning to see this now as a much more predictable behaviour.

Thank you.

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, a very good question. I must admit that I had given the new minister of health at the time the benefit of the doubt because the minister of health, actually, is a pretty likeable guy. He usually picks up the phone and gives you a call, in comparison to the previous minister of health. But as we heard in question period, he really wasn't the previous minister of health. We're not really quite sure who was the

minister of health at that time. Someone, obviously, must have been. Actually, I think it might have been the member on the front bench right across the way.

Having said that, you brought up some important words. How come the minister of health in his original start as a minister of health could stand up in an editorial board at the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal* and pick up the phone and call Stephen Duckett from the superboard and just get to the bottom of it and make some changes? Yet when we asked him about the issue of bonuses, "Oh, no, that's an independent board; that's off to the side." which really, quite frankly, contradicts his picking up the phone and calling in front of reporters. So it appears to me that he'll do it not in front of MLAs; he'll do it in front of reporters. The term that was used was "stunt." The question is the word "dither." Not only that, but he doesn't even pull that stunt on MLAs anymore, and he certainly doesn't do it to the editorial boards of the *Calgary Herald* or the *Edmonton Journal*.

I would like to go with him and have other MLAs go with him so we can see what he actually would do. I'm not even quite sure today if he's speaking with the CEO of the superboard. He knows so well that the superboard has failed. It has failed because the community capital of our constituencies, the 83 constituencies that we bring democratically to this House, has been overruled from the sky down, not from the roots up. We are from the roots up. We are not from the Stephen Duckett superboard top down.

I think the words are very appropriate to the hon. member when he says "dither." I don't see the minister picking up his phone anymore. I don't see him going to editorial boards. Quite simply, he appears to have lost his superman status and, in losing his superman status, really wonders that he can't fly anymore. He can't fly anymore, and he can't phone anymore. His batteries are dead.

I think it really speaks of Bill 17 that this truly, if anything, is about dithering. It is about a stunt. I would ask that the editorial boards who first embraced the minister of health, as we all did, as a refreshing change from the previous minister of health – I can say that the previous minister of health would go into a garden, and rather than coming in with some kid gloves, like the now minister of health, he would come in with a bulldozer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 17. Albertans have been very clear about what they want from their health care system. They want to be engaged in important decisions about their health care system. They want to know the basis for those decisions, and they also want to know what they can expect from their system.

As this Assembly knows, more than 3,000 Albertans expressed their views about our health care system and health care legislation during the recent Alberta Health Act consultation. The quote from the Putting People First consultation report, part 1, page 14, says:

Albertans want deliberate, transparent decisions made about the health system, its future direction, and policies to support that direction . . . Albertans also want to know where the system is headed. They know the health [care] system is continuously evolving and will never reach a "final" static point, but they want reference to desired outcomes clearly spelled out.

I'm pleased to see that the fundamental guiding principles set out in Bill 17 reflect the needs and desires of Albertans. I'm even more pleased to see that the proposed act will require the minister to establish a health charter. A health charter is a series of statements that clearly spell out responsibilities and expectations for our health

care system. There's also a commitment to review the health charter at least every five years to ensure that it will be a living document that can evolve with time and technology.

Bill 17 requires that the health charter will recognize that health is a partnership amongst individuals, families, communities, health professionals, organizations that deliver health care and services, and the Alberta government. It also will acknowledge the impact of a person's health status and other circumstances on their capacity to interact with the health care system, not be used to limit access to services, and not be subject to or be the basis of litigation within the court system.

Albertans said that they expect a health charter to reflect a broad outlook on health. We all have a part to play in the charter. This includes everyone who relies on our health care system, including the health professionals, organizations and individuals who deliver health care and services, and the government of Alberta.

Albertans recommend that the charter be called the health charter and not a patient charter, as was originally proposed by the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. I support this recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, health is about more than patients and acute-care services. Health is about promoting wellness, caring for the vulnerable, and monitoring the health status of our citizens. The health charter needs to be broad enough to address all of these concepts.

For the health charter to be meaningful, there must be ways for people to raise concerns about their experience in the health system. Bill 17 proposes a health charter that will define principles, expectations, and responsibilities that apply across the health system. I'm pleased to see that the health advocate will also be established to receive complaints related to the health charter.

The advisory committee made specific recommendations about what the health charter would include. These recommendations included a commitment that all Albertans will have access to primary care services through primary care teams. The advisory committee reflected what they heard during the many weeks of public consultation. Albertans said that they supported that the following statements be included in the charter.

When I interact with the health [care] system, I expect that I will:

- Have my health status, social and economic circumstances and personal beliefs and values acknowledged;
- Be treated with respect and dignity . . .
- Receive information on the health system and education about healthy living and wellness.

Albertans also supported including a set or responsibilities in the charter. Some of the statements that were consulted on included:

Taking my circumstances into account and to the best of my abilities, when I interact with the health system, I understand I will be asked to:

- Respect the rights of other patients and health providers;
- Ask questions and work with providers to understand the information I am being [given]; and
- Make healthy choices in my life.

I note that the act indicates that no Albertan shall be denied health services because of a failure to comply with the charter, and that principle is entrenched in the act.

I'm pleased that the charter will focus on a broad spectrum of health and wellness issues. I'm concerned that we don't focus enough attention on factors that promote wellness. Albertans want to make healthy choices, and I believe the charter and the discussion that will be generated as the charter is being developed will help Albertans understand the choices available to them and respond accordingly. This discussion should encourage Albertans to consider their own responsibilities in using the health system appropriately and looking after their own health.

I understand the general public and stakeholders will be asked to validate a draft health charter. I look forward to this discussion. I'm also pleased to note that government has accepted the recommendation to have the Health Quality Council of Alberta play an important role in the health charter. The council will monitor and report regularly to Albertans through the minister on whether the health system is performing in accordance with the principles of the Canada Health Act and the health charter. This is the type of transparency that Albertans are looking for.

In conclusion, the health charter is about building accountability across the health system and describing how Alberta Health Act principles will be realized. I ask all members to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 17 at second reading. This is an interesting piece of legislation. I've had the opportunity to read it through carefully, and I have a number of comments.

First, I want to set the stage a little bit for the development of this piece of legislation. I'm going to go back to something that our caucus did late last year. In November and October we conducted some public hearings around the province, and that was in the face of a government that was introducing major changes to the health care system that were causing havoc, causing chaos. There didn't seem to be a clear plan, and we had repeatedly challenged the government to go out and ask people. Tell people what you want to do; ask their opinion; find out what they want you to do before you continue in this direction. The government under the previous minister rejected that approach because, of course, the previous minister knew exactly what to do, and he was going to do it no matter what anyone said.

We went to a number of cities, and of course we listened carefully to what people said. We produced a report which is called *What People Want*. It had, I think, a number of very, very practical recommendations that were quite specific.

Now, the government then decided that they would consult after all. The minister's advisory committee on the health system conducted a much more extensive program of public consultation than we were able to achieve with our much more limited resources. They went to a lot more places, and they heard from a lot more people, but of course they were a lot more structured as well in terms of how they wanted this all to happen. I was at a couple of them. You know, it was interesting because not everybody really felt that they were really getting the kind of consultation that they wanted to have. It was fairly structured.

That committee then produced a report, and I'll just read some of the recommendations. The charter will "acknowledge the impact of a person's health status and other circumstances and their capacity to interact with the health system" — I'm not sure what that means — "provide assistance to Albertans in accessing appropriate resolution mechanisms in the health system through the use of education, guidance and referral . . . [and] pursue policy opportunities in primary care, continuing care and mental health." Mr. Speaker, I was amazed that, having listened to so many people, these were the kinds of things that they think people wanted because we heard something very, very different indeed.

I know that the chair of this committee, the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Rutherford, said that what people wanted was a high-level document that sets out roles and responsibilities in the health system. Mr. Speaker, if most people in Alberta had that for their first priority, then I'll eat the report. What people really want is better access to health care. They want wait times reduced for cancer surgery. We heard, you know, that six months before you can get the treatment that you need is too long if you've got cancer, that 20 hours average time in a big emergency room in Edmonton or Calgary is too long. They want a family doctor. They want to have seniors' care for their aging parents, where they get the care that they need and they're taken care of respectfully and that there is enough staff to make sure that they get bathed on time and that they eat their meals at regular times and that they're well treated.

These are the kinds of things that we found people wanted. They didn't want a health charter or a health advocate. These are things that were inserted into this process by the government, by the chair. These are not things that sprung up spontaneously from the people of this province.

We have this bill that comes out of it. One of the things: it sets up a health charter. It sets up a health advocate. You know, I read the bill quite quickly, and I can summarize it as follows. There's a charter that's going to be set by the government. The draft that they have has a number of nice-sounding sentiments in it but doesn't commit to specific waiting times or commit to having a family doctor or commit to being able to afford the drugs that people need, things like that. It's not about that. So there's a charter, and it's not enforceable in the courts. Then there's an advocate. Now, the advocate can look into complaints, and if he or she wants to, they can conduct an investigation. If they want, they can submit a report to the minister. If the minister wants, he can do something about it or not. That is, in fact, the summary of this little piece of legislation.

You know, maybe that's not a bad thing, but it really shows me that the government has missed an opportunity in a major way. This government has had a chance to listen to people and has a chance to address their real concerns in the health system. Instead, they've come up with something that is almost superfluous to the real needs of Albertans with respect to their health care.

Some who might be uncharitable might think that this is to provide additional cover for the minister, as if he doesn't have enough. He's got his health superboard. He's got a Stephen Duckett that can catch all kinds of flak. If he doesn't want to answer a question in the House or from the public, he can always say: well, that's the jurisdiction of the health authority. He can bring in a budget to this Legislature that is about one-sixth of the total budget of the province, billions of dollars, to fund Alberta Health Services, you know, and it's one line in the budget. You can't ask detailed questions about that budget, and that's a sixth of the entire budget of the province of Alberta, billions of dollars.

He's already got all of these structures in place in order to deflect any serious demand for accountability, and now he's got a health advocate. So if you've got a problem, maybe it fits the charter; maybe it doesn't. You know, maybe the advocate can do something about it. What it's going to do is just divert more attention, more energy away from the government. It's not going to really make sure that people are well taken care of.

I've looked at the draft of the health charter. I asked the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka about this, and he said that he didn't think the draft charter really dealt with the whole question of whether or not you have a right to be seen in an emergency room within a period of time. So the real measures that people want have not appeared in the draft charter, and I have no expectation that they will.

5:20

If we were putting forward a draft charter, one, we'd make it

enforceable; two, we'd make it deal with real issues facing people as they confront the health care system so that you've got a guarantee in an emergency room of being seen and getting a bed if you need a bed within a reasonable time. These guidelines right now are already in place and have been for over a year as part of Dr. Duckett's accountability package for his compensation. Those are part of his objectives for the health system and have been for over a year, when the minister announced them as some new initiative just the other day after meeting with the emergency room doctors.

It's not getting us anywhere fast, Mr. Speaker. We're going backwards because the government continues to fiddle and dither and spin and not deal with the real issues. I say that if we're really going to have a health charter, let's make it enforceable. Let's put things in like: you have the right to a family doctor. Let's put things in like: you have a fixed amount of time in emergency rooms. If you've got cancer, you get treatment within a fixed period of time. If you've got an relative that's chronically ill, they won't be shuffled off to something called continuing care by the government when what they really need is nursing care and medical care. And if you've got multiple illnesses and you require a lot of medications, for example, the charter should say that you're not going to have to pay through the nose in order to get the drugs that you need in order to get better. Those are the kinds of things that we would like to see.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say really, really clearly that this piece of legislation is not significant. It's far from historic. It won't deal with the real issues. This piece of legislation is more smoke from the government, which is failing to address the basic health concerns of Albertans. The real tragedy of it is that it's a tremendous lost opportunity. The government spent so much time and so many resources getting out and actually talking to Albertans, yet it forced their input into predetermined moulds to come out with a charter and an advocate instead of letting them have freer rein in order to describe for themselves what they needed.

The recommendations don't follow from the comments. I looked at the comments carefully in the second part of the report called Putting People First. I found that when you really sift through it, you'll find that they did hear the same things we heard. They did say that you've got to improve the performance of the health system. They didn't talk about high-level documents. They didn't talk about, you know, the kinds of things that we've heard are supposed to be here. "Align decisions and policies with principles-based legislation and monitor and report on how well the system is doing." That didn't come from the people; that came from the committee. That came from a predetermined direction, as far as I can tell.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that the government just doesn't get it. It doesn't get it. We presented to the minister yesterday and today that for a very small amount, considering how much we put into health care, they could substantially reduce the waiting times at the Royal Alexandra hospital simply by funding an urgent care centre at the East Edmonton health clinic. The minister finally blurted out today at the end of question period that it will be one or two years before this goes online. So the question I ask is: what is the government actually going to do differently, something that they do that they weren't going to do all along, in order to address this ER crisis? The answer, I think, quite simply, is nothing.

You know, the guidelines, the timelines for emergency room care, that the minister so proudly announced after meeting with the emergency room doctors, have in fact been in place for over a year and have yet to produce any significant impact. You've got empty spaces, not just at the East Edmonton clinic, and you've got a serious problem that is only compounding this issue in the government's secret plan to build continuing care. They're very careful to avoid talking about long-term care.

But I ask you, Mr. Speaker, if someone is blocking an acute-care

bed and you need to move them to someplace else, they need a medical bed. They're in a hospital in an acute-care bed because their doctor knows they need a high level of medical care, so you can't put them into a lodge. You have to move them into a medical bed. That's what a long-term care bed is, but the government will not admit that. They still want to have private delivery of continuing care. They still want to avoid the whole question of long-term care, and it's time that they changed their direction.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for some excellent points. One of the key points that he had raised is the issue of long-term care and our seniors. Our seniors have truly been the architects of building this great province of ours. I do know that on numerous occasions in here and again today under this bill he's made reference to the issue of long-term care in terms of what is taking place. In fact, at one point I believe the hon. member had referenced the point that there actually are fewer long-term care beds today, under the new administration of this government. My question, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member is in terms of long-term care. Do you feel that this act today in any way, shape, or form will help when it comes to the issue of long-term care for our seniors, the very architects of this great province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. No. I don't think that this deals with it. I looked at the charter. There's no guarantee in the charter that if you need long-term care, you get it. Of course, we all know that in the last election the Premier promised 600 new long-term care beds and 200 replacement long-term care beds, when, in fact, what they did right after the election was change the direction and start reducing the number of long-term care beds.

We released a document earlier this year that showed clearly that a committee of senior bureaucrats in the government was working to a strategy of cutting the number of long-term care beds substantially, potentially up to half, that had never been disclosed to the public. It had never been reported here in this Legislature. It was directly contrary to the Premier's commitment in the last election, yet they were working to a strategy of reducing long-term care beds, which are medical beds, where your drugs are covered and you get nursing care and you get a higher level of care because you need it, because you've been medically assessed as requiring that. This will only compound the waiting time problem in emergency rooms because many doctors are keeping patients who need long-term care in acute-care beds because they know they need the drugs and they know they need the nursing care, so they block the beds from emergency room patients.

The Premier says, "Well, you want to split up couples," and, you know, all of these kinds of things when he tries to dissemble and distract from the real issue. But, no, you can't move somebody who needs nursing care and needs drugs from an acute-care bed into a lodge, into some continuing care bed, where you have to pay for your drugs and you have to pay extra for nursing care. If you need help to go to the washroom or to get your meal, then that's extra, too. It's all delivered on a profit basis, so they have to double the price of the accommodation fees in order to make it profitable for their friends in the private sector to build.

None of this – none of this – is in fact going to solve the problem. It's in fact going to be worse. It's outrageous that the government should have a secret plan to reduce long-term care beds and mislead the public about it, keep it secret, and keep blathering on about continuing care and trying to confuse the definition so that nobody really knows what they're doing, and they deny the connection to that strategy. The worsening position in our emergency rooms is doubly unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. member for the question. I want to say that the broken promise in Fort McMurray about long-term care beds, which led to your departure from the government, is just one example of multiple broken promises about our health care system since the last election. I think that the government will pay a price for that.

Thank you.

5:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the hon. member is referring to when he talks about a broken promise because there's about \$40 million or so going into Fort McMurray. So I think we should maybe just correct that for the record. In fact, there's going to be a 48-bed continuing care facility built there.* The \$3 million has already been advanced for purchasing the land.

I mean, I would like the debate to stay at a high level and pertain to the act specifically; however, they keep talking about certain things that they've done. I don't want to discount the 64 people that the hon. member met with. I'm sure they had valuable input, and we'll look forward to hearing more about that, but at this time let's stay at the high level if we could.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to join in this debate regarding Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act. Health care is a complex system of partners who all must work together to meet the health needs of Albertans. Albertans have told us that they find it difficult to understand the leadership and accountability in the health system. It's important for Albertans to understand who the key health players are, what their roles and responsibilities in the health system are, and what recourse Albertans have to resolve health care concerns.

Albertans want clarity in how their health system works and in who's responsible for doing what. We need better understanding of the relationship of the major players in the health system such as the relationship between the government of Alberta, as represented by Alberta Health and Wellness, and Alberta Health Services. The Alberta Health Act provides a high-level reference to the roles of Alberta Health Services, the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and the professional colleges. I'm pleased to see that the act does not try to duplicate the mandates of these entities, which are already established in other legislation.

The Alberta Health Act recognizes that because roles and responsibilities of key health organizations are addressed in various pieces of legislation, there is a need for the minister to be able to clarify and co-ordinate these roles and responsibilities from time to time. Albertans want their health system to work in a co-ordinated and integrated manner. Bill 17 proposes a provision that will enable the health minister to clarify and co-ordinate the roles and responsibilities of the major players in the system if required. There are regulation-making powers to support this. This provision will help to remove confusion about roles in the system where required.

I'd like to now provide a brief overview of the roles of the major players in our health system. Alberta Health and Wellness. The Ministry of Health and Wellness under the direction of the minister develops strategic direction and leadership that guides the provincial

*See page 1130, left column, paragraph 4

health system through its accountability of health services and its fiscal responsibilities, in other words, policy.

Alberta Health Services. The mandate of Alberta Health Services is established in the Regional Health Authorities Act. Alberta Health Services is the province's single health authority, that is legislatively mandated by and accountable to Alberta Health and Wellness. Alberta Health Services manages and delivers health care services and programs that are consistent with policy and program direction provided by Alberta Health and Wellness. Alberta Health Services assesses health care delivery needs, sets priorities for the delivery of service and the allocation of resources, and monitors health system performance. In other words, it actually provides the services.

The Health Quality Council of Alberta. Now, the mandate for the Health Quality Council of Alberta is established in the Health Quality Council of Alberta regulation. The Health Quality Council of Alberta is a provincial health board that works to identify and develop improvements to the quality of health services delivered to Albertans and to patients' safety. To accomplish this, the council works with Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness, health professions, and other relevant stakeholders on an ongoing basis. The Health Quality Council of Alberta develops health service quality indicators and conducts patient experience surveys, patient safety reviews and assessments, and other quality assessments. The council is accountable to the Minister of Health and Wellness, and members of the council are appointed by the minister.

Professional colleges. Most professional colleges get their authority from the Health Professions Act, and they are responsible for regulating the activities of their membership. The legislation governing the colleges requires that they carry out their activities in a manner that protects and serves the public interest. This includes establishing, maintaining, and enforcing standards of practice and codes of ethics that govern their members. Colleges are responsible for ensuring that their members have the appropriate educational training and meet the requirements to practise in Alberta. Most importantly, colleges receive and address complaints from the public about their members. Examples of colleges in Alberta include the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Alberta College of Pharmacists, and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta.

A college is required to submit an annual report to the minister, who will table the report in the Legislature. Each college's annual report provides information about such things as complaints and their disposition, registration, continuing competence programs, committees and tribunals established under the Health Professions Act, and audited financial information.

According to the Putting People First report, Albertans want to know that there is sufficient oversight to ensure that Alberta Health Services is administering public resources in a way that is consistent with established policy direction and which achieves desired outcomes. Albertans also said they want to see clearly established policy directions and outcomes. The public consultation indicated that government needs to set out broad policy directions and health outcomes in ways that Albertans, Alberta Health Services, and other health providers can understand.

To conclude, our citizens want more clarity on how well our system is working and who is responsible for leading us down the path of continual improvement. Bill 17 will help to define the roles and responsibilities of the key players in the health system.

I ask all members to support Bill 17. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening with a great deal of interest to the debate this afternoon and, certainly, the initial remarks by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Dr. Taft: The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster just arrived to listen as well.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I'm sure the hon. President of the Treasury Board is very concerned about how the consolidation of the regional health authorities has derailed his budget plans. But I will not be distracted, sir.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness in his initial remarks spoke about the year-long conversation with Albertans, that preceded this legislation, and the need for extensive public consultation. I listened with interest, of course, Mr. Speaker, and I have this question for the hon. minister. Why did the government have this extensive public consultation, or this year-long conversation, to come up with this bill, which is simply political distraction, and not have any public consultation when there was this internal discussion within the government to consolidate the regional health authorities and the Cancer Board and the Mental Health Board into the Alberta Health Services Board? Why the contradiction here?

5:40

Why have this elaborate public relations exercise for this legislation, yet take an \$8 billion plus portion of the Alberta Health and Wellness budget and have no public consultation whatsoever? And not only have no public consultation, but also, Mr. Speaker, there was no cost-benefit analysis done to determine if this Alberta Health Services organization would at least control health care costs and improve service. Nothing was done, yet the minister makes this statement this afternoon about how important conversations and consultations are. When we think about what has happened since 2008, when we consolidated into Alberta Health Services – and I know the President of the Treasury Board doesn't sleep at night worried about the budget and where they're going to get the money to pay for all the mistakes that they have made.

This is what this bill is essentially about. It's to try to distract the public from the real issues in health care. The minister of health and the government certainly hope that the public focuses on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, but what the public should be focusing on is the annual report of the department for 2009-10. If you look at some of the performance measures – we look at what the government wanted to do and what is actually going on with wait times. Whether it's wait times for surgery or wait times for an emergency room visit, we look at the urgency, the level.

Now, there are wait times for urgency level 1, level 2, and level 3. In level 1 – and I'm not going to in the time that I have describe these urgency levels – the current actual is two weeks and the target is two weeks. In level 2 the target is six weeks, but the actual reality for the government is that there is a wait time of 21 weeks. In urgency level 3 the target is 26 weeks, and the government has an actual wait time of 17 weeks. With hip replacements, unfortunately, Albertans have to wait an additional, on average, nine weeks longer. For knee replacement surgeries it goes from 26 weeks, Mr. Speaker, to 49 weeks, which is a considerable wait. That's 23 additional weeks.

These are some of the wait times that the government doesn't want Albertans to think about or to talk about in the coffee shops across the province. The government wants to get the public to talk

about this bill. This bill is just legislation that has come about as a result of this government's incompetence in dealing with the real issues in health care. They have failed. They have completely failed with their changes from regional health authorities, where some, not all but some, got national and international awards for their management and their administration. We just wiped them all out and went to this superboard, and our priorities – and I'm going to talk about that in a minute – have changed completely.

Not only have our priorities changed but how we account or report – there's nothing in this bill that suggests that the minister is going to change how we report where the money, the \$8 billion plus, is being spent in this province. Now, before, of course, we could have a look, and we could see, for instance with emergency services, how much was being spent in the Edmonton region through Capital health, how much was being spent in Calgary, how much was being spent in Peace River, how much was being spent in East Central or the David Thompson region. I could go on. There was a breakdown of where the government was spending taxpayers' money to provide public health care. But now with Alberta Health Services, of course, it's just a global amount. This is not in the spirit of this bill. It certainly isn't.

Now, there has been a lot of discussion in the last couple of weeks about emergency services. In 2007 the provincial government spent – and I could give you a breakdown, Mr. Speaker – close to \$880 million in facility-based emergency and outpatient services. In 2009 the budget increased to over \$970 million. The entire health care budget has gone up and up.

It is interesting to note that now we are spending \$270 million more in facility-based emergency and outpatient services. We're spending \$270 million more than we did four years ago. How can that be? Why is it necessary? Are there that many more visits because we don't have family physicians? Is it an aging population? Is it an increase in population? Certainly, these are some factors, but they're not all of the factors.

One of the main factors, in my view, is the mismanagement of our health care budget by this government, the mismanagement of health care policy by this government, and they're trying to divert public attention with Bill 17. Now, also in 2007 and 2008, before we had this consolidation, there would be a breakdown. We could see how much money was being spent on emergency and outpatient services across different communities. We can't do that anymore.

I'm not confident that this health advocate is going to have anything to say about that. The health advocate will be at the pleasure of the minister and of the government. If this health advocate is appointed – I don't think it's necessary to appoint this person, but this is a government that likes to spend money, in my view, very, very unwisely – will this health advocate release, give us a detailed breakdown of what money is being spent in what regions of the province? I'm not confident that that will happen, but maybe it will.

Now, certainly, we do need more beds. If I could go back to one of the measures that the government talked about discreetly in their annual report which they do not want to talk about publicly, their target is to have 505 people waiting in acute-care hospital beds for continuing care placement. At the time this annual report was written, there were 200 more people waiting, 707. Why could we not have more beds? The minister said earlier in question period that he's been forced into opening more beds. There is this issue that, well, we don't have any money. Certainly, there was a budget surplus in the overall budget of the ministry, over \$200 million last year. I realize there was a deficit within Alberta Health Services of \$340 million. Today the minister gave a list of 10 beds here, 14 beds here, and that's welcome news, but why did they wait so long, and why are their priorities so different?

Now, whose priorities is this government meeting, Mr. Speaker? Well, one only has to look at the fine print of Alberta Health Services to see the supplementary executive retirement pension plan, or the SERP pension as it's called by some people. In 2009 the government was quick to find over \$21 million to top up that executive retirement pension plan, and this is for a select group of individuals that were hired, hand-picked by this government, maybe not by this minister but certainly by his predecessors. These are hand-picked folks. This \$21 million certainly wouldn't include the \$22 million that was paid in 2009 in severance.

5:50

When you look through this report, you can see why this minister and this government don't want taxpayers to read this. This was, again, at a time when Alberta Health Services had an accumulated deficit of \$343 million. Taxpayers ask me all the time: how come there's no money for any more beds? Well, this is one reason. Last year this government and this minister – and the minister is certainly in charge – found an additional \$21 million to top up not the employees' contribution but the actual employer contribution. This is taxpayer money. This is an additional \$24.9 million going to top up the supplementary pensions of 119 people, 64 of whom are active within the government and 55 of whom have been retired or terminated. So there's \$45 million.

This is why I say that the priorities of this government are completely out of perspective and out of order from what the taxpayers and those who want a good public health care system in this province demand. We can be quick to find \$45 million in two years to top up this executive retirement pension plan, where a lot of the employees if not all of them don't have to make a contribution. It's all from the government. We've got to always be mindful that these individuals are also probably eligible for a local authorities pension plan.

This is an example, yet again, of this government failing the interests of those who want a well-funded and a well-managed public health care system. The focus seems to be on these lavish perks for a few select individuals.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the due diligence of the good MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He chairs Public Accounts, and you know that he goes through these numbers in great detail. I'm just wondering if the hon. member had a few more points of government waste that he's found as he scrutinizes those books that he could share with us on how this government isn't focused and prioritizing its spending, especially when it comes to health care.

It's just fascinating – or maybe I should say discouraging – to see the number of contracts that this government enters into and says: "Oh, there's nothing that we could do about that. The previous minister signed this contract." These lucrative contracts, these golden parachutes continue to be signed, yet when they sign contracts with the teachers or if they sign contracts with oil and gas companies, they see no problem in saying: "Well, we can't honour those ones. We'll tear them up." Yet with all of these other ones that they've appointed, they seem to honour and have great delight in writing those cheques on behalf of Alberta taxpayers. Perhaps you could share a few more numbers with us.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on Bill 17.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, certainly, I appreciate those comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, but I would urge him to have a look at page 150 of the Alberta Health and Wellness annual report and also on page 138 of the annual report. The hon. member can see for himself where we quickly had \$45 million for a select group of people whose track record in operating this \$8 billion plus enterprise is not good. If they were a hockey team, they certainly wouldn't have made the playoffs.

Now, if we also look at Alberta Health Services' annual report – and this is directly related to Bill 17 – you can see where the fees and the charges are outlined. You can see where there is quite a difference or quite an increase between the private health service providers and the voluntary health service providers between 2009 and 2010. I don't know how this is going to work.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, point of order, *Beauchesne* 459. We've put up with this off the track, off the beat, nothing to do with the bill business now for much of the afternoon. I don't mind a little bit of that. There has got to be some leeway, but come on. We're talking about the Alberta Health Act, Bill 17, not about certain specific pages of certain accounts. I wonder if they could save those things for question period or for motions for returns or written reports or something else. Let's get on with the debate of Bill 17, please.

The Deputy Speaker: For the expediency of the debate on the bill, I already said: on Bill 17. Stay on the health care bill, Bill 17. Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That point of order that the hon. minister suggested certainly confirms to me that the hon. minister wants the people to look at this bill and see it as a public relations exercise. The hon. minister is embarrassed by what's in the financial statements. The financial statements, hon. minister, are directly related to what's in this bill. You're talking about having the health advocate. You're talking about having the health charter.

Well, what's going to be in that health charter? Are people going to have access to this information? Are they going to know? Of course, they're not going to know if you have your way. They're not going to have any idea.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, address the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Now, with the health advocate. The health advocate perhaps should report – and it should be mandated; it shouldn't be in regulations – why there has been an increase of 9 per cent in fees and charges from private health service providers between 2009 and 2010. Who knows what it'll be after this minister is there for another year? The voluntary health service providers – these are the public ones – had an increase in their fees and charges of .6 per cent. Perhaps that's where the health advocate could, if it is going to be appointed, this office, start to work because certainly the Friends of Medicare would be interested in knowing why there is, Mr. Speaker, such an increase in private fees and charges and not in the publicly delivered system.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to note that all this is related. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given the time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate and have the opportunity to continue in first place tomorrow.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the time, which has nearly run out for today, I would move that we recess until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Third Session

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Issue 38

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)

Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC)

Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)

Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)

Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),

Leader of the Official Opposition

Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)

Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)

Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (Ind)

VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)

Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)

Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)

Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)

Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)

Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),

Deputy Government House Leader

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Brian G. Hodgson

Interparliamentary Relations

Robert H. Reynolds, QC

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Chris Caughell

Senior Parliamentary Counsel/

Shannon Dean

Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Liz Sim

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Alberta Liberal: 8

Wildrose Alliance: 4

New Democrat: 2

Independent: 1

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Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 3, 2010

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Before we sit, we need to honour the Assembly and all people with a prayer. Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated now.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege and an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 48 students from Westpark middle school in Red Deer. We had a group here yesterday from Westpark middle, and another outstanding group of young citizens is joining us here today for a tour. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Laurie Shapka-Thiel, Miss Kim Toth, and Mr. Norm Howes. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of students from Neil M Ross school in St. Albert. We have a total of 80 visitors in the gallery today. They are accompanied by seven teachers and parent helpers: Mr. Brett Arlinghaus, Mrs. Kelly McConkey, Mr. Jamie Robertson, Mrs. Arlene Wagner, Mrs. Elza McCartney, Mrs. Kristin Klatchuk, and Mrs. Lori Walklin. I'd ask them if they would please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwoddesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today some very special guests who are seated in your Speaker's gallery. They are representatives of the Campaign to Control Cancer organization. Today is the second annual Cancer Day of Action. A number of us MLAs were pleased to meet with them earlier today during the lunch hour. I would ask them to rise as I call their names and to remain standing until all have been introduced. Then perhaps we could greet them with the accolades that they are so due.

Dr. Glenn Hundley, chair of the new Wellspring Edmonton, whose mission is to provide a comprehensive range of cancer supports; Mr. Harley Ast, board member of the Canadian Prostate Cancer Network; Jill Zaparyniuk, who is a nurse in oncology at the Cross Cancer Institute; Mr. Bill Holt, who's the treasurer of the multiple myeloma society in Calgary; and, finally, I'd like to introduce Ms Carol Westberg, a mother of three, a grandmother of seven, who was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in September of 2004 and whose cancer drug is now covered by Alberta health care due to the efforts of this campaign to control cancer in 2008.

God bless you all for being here and for the outstanding work

you're doing for so many people in our province and elsewhere. Thank you, all.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Bailey Jason. Bailey has come to the Legislature today to participate in take our kids to work day, an annual program where students are hosted by parents, relatives, and volunteers at workplaces across the country. Bailey is accompanied by his mother, my constituency assistant, Josie Jason. Josie has been my constituency assistant since 2008. I know that my office would not be running smoothly if I didn't have her there. I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for all of her hard work. I would now ask Josie and Bailey to rise and receive thunderous applause from the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Adriana Gentles and Kate Wightmore. They are both grade 9 students spending the day here for, as noted, take your kid to work day. Adriana attends Father Michael Troy junior high school in Edmonton and plays on the senior girls' volleyball and senior girls' basketball teams while maintaining honours. She also played basketball in the Alberta Summer Games in Peace River, and their team brought home the bronze. Adriana is the youngest of four daughters of one of my staff, Lisa Gentles, who is also accompanying them.

Kate Wightmore is a constituent of mine who attends Sainte Marguerite d'Youville junior high school in St. Albert. She's involved in musical theatre and performs at the Citadel, is an avid softball player during the summer, and has a keen interest in politics, which led her to ask her uncle if she could spend the day at the Legislature today. Kate is the niece of my executive assistant, Tim Schultz. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask that they rise and that we give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special guest who joins us in the gallery today. I'd like to ask Sarah Ellis to please rise. Sarah is a grade 9 student at St. Rose junior high. She's participating in the take our kids to work program, where grade 9 students spend a day job shadowing a parent, relative, friend, or volunteer host. Please extend a warm welcome to Sarah.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am most fortunate as the MLA for the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre to be able to gain advice and, I hope, wisdom from some of the constituents that live in my riding. Today three of them are joining me in the public gallery, and I'd like to introduce these wonderful people through you to all of my colleagues in the Assembly. John Zyp is an artist and an activist with very firm opinions on health care, on seniors, on the environment. He is very ably assisted in all of his activities by his wife, Bettie. Also here is

Danielle Zyp, who is an artist in her own right – I'm most blessed – a mental health advocate who has been very helpful to me in understanding some of the issues that affect people, and a very proud downtown dweller, I might add. I would ask John, Bettie, and Danielle to please stand and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of great people from Lethbridge called Team Lethbridge. They're up here this week representing 15 different organizations and meeting with government ministries, departments, and MLAs to talk about some of the issues in southern Alberta. I'm going to introduce some of them now, and then the Member for Lethbridge-East is going to introduce the rest later. If they could rise in the gallery as I call their names: Wayne Brewer, Jean Greer McCarthy, Peter Portlock, Brad Cook, Don Young, Blayne Janssens, Colin Ward, Don Lussier, Suzanne Lint, Rick Braden, Sarah Amies, Rudy Friesen, John Machielse, Rob Miyashiro, Brooke Culley, Randy Tremel, Dr. Mike Mahon, Richard Westlund, Dr. Daniel Weeks, Bruce Primeau, Mayor Rajko Dodic, Alderman Faron Ellis, Alderman Ryan Parker, Jody Nilsson, Jan Foster, Chief Tom McKenzie, Stan Coxson, and Lenze Kuiper. We'll give them our warm welcome.

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's really an honour for me to be able to introduce two friends from my constituency. Mr. Rick Wierzbza from Ponoka is the incoming president of the Ponoka Stampede association. The Ponoka Stampede is celebrating their 75th anniversary this year, and we would invite all members and all Albertans, of course, to attend the stampede. Also, Mr. Dave Douglas of Lacombe is the area manager of the southern prairie region of Ritchie Bros. Auctioneers. They have been in the House this afternoon to meet with a couple of ministers and myself. I would like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

National 4-H Month

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and wish all of you a happy Show Your 4-H Colours day. Today I want to acknowledge this incredibly valuable organization. November is National 4-H Month, and 4-H unites people: rural and urban, professional and student, young and young at heart. All are positively impacted by the Alberta 4-H organization.

The 4-H has been shaping the lives of youth and adults for 93 years and is one of the longest running youth organizations in Alberta. Many 4-H members and leaders have gone on to become successful and accomplished members of society. Because of this, 4-H is also one of the most respected and admired youth programs in Canada, with over 250,000 alumni.

Since 1917 Alberta 4-H has been building communities by developing leadership, interpersonal, and technical skills in its

members and volunteers, giving youth the skills they need to succeed in life and helping them build a network of friends across the entire country.

Mr. Speaker, 4-H plays an important role in developing tomorrow's leaders for our agriculture industry and for our rural communities. The 4-H motto is Learn to Do by Doing, and members take part in activities that meet their interests, increase their knowledge, and develop their life skills. Through these opportunities they develop professionalism, strong leadership qualities, and build the confidence they need to succeed. Our youth want to be involved, accepted, valued, and heard, and 4-H provides that opportunity. In 4-H youth are handed the reins, and they run the show.

In honour of National 4-H Month I want to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Alberta 4-H clubs and extend a warm thank you to all the volunteers, the people who tirelessly volunteer their time, energy, and talents to help these young people succeed.

Now I ask you to join me in showing your 4-H colours.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know there's a reason why it's called question period and not answer period, and I know that if ever in history it did have a higher purpose in holding government to account, over the last 30 years or so it's evolved into theatre. The opposition's only goal is to make the government look evil or stupid or preferably both, and the government's only goal is to make the opposition look ill-informed and un-Albertan.

Mostly, the public seems to think it's all pretty childish, but both sides keep doing it because, well, that's what we do: opposition, anger; government, indignation and obfuscation. All heat, no light, which might be good enough in most cases, Mr. Speaker, but it seems to me that in times of crisis the last thing the people of Alberta want from us is more hot air and smoke. They need some light. They want solutions.

Make no mistake. Alberta's ER crisis is real. Sick and injured Albertans are sitting in ER waiting rooms for 10, 20 hours, sometimes days. What's more, Albertans wait months, sometimes years for tests and surgeries, and many do not have family doctors.

Mr. Speaker, last Thursday I stood up in question period and asked Alberta's minister of health: "Will the minister direct the Alberta Health Services Board to bring all staff, current and retired, to available status and to offer full-time shifts to all nurses who want them?" A solution proposed in question period? Quelle surprise. Perhaps I've started a trend.

On Monday my team and I watched as similar propositions were put forward by one opposition party, and yesterday we listened as my exact proposal was suggested by another party. And it's about time, Mr. Speaker, because I suggest that anyone following question period beforehand would have been hard-pressed to believe that either side cared as much about solving the problem as about using other people's pain to score political points on each other.

Now, I don't care where the good ideas come from. I would suggest that neither my constituents nor yours do. They just want us to do what they're paying us to do: work together to solve the problem.

Yesterday in question period we were promised 51 new beds by the end of the month. I challenge the minister to double that, and I challenge every one of us here in this House to propose practical, workable solutions to the ER crisis that put Albertans first. Like the bumper sticker says, "Wag more, bark less."

Opposition Comments on Ethics of Government MLAs

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. Leader of the Opposition made a member's statement in this House which was clearly unparliamentary and which cast aspersions on the ethics of me and every one of my colleagues in government caucus. The hon. leader stated that "government MLAs in this province are compromised by a plethora of free gifts they receive from special interests" and that those gifts came "with an expectation of access to power and influence."

Such statements are untrue and are unbecoming of a gentleman whom we have come to believe respected the decorum of the House and the privileges of members. I and many of my colleagues were inclined to raise a point of order. However, the chair has ruled on previous occasions that members may not raise these points of order on speeches made in members' statements. This leaves members' statements open to abuse and to flaunting our long-standing rights to have the chair temper the speech of members when points of order arise.

As the Deputy Premier stated yesterday, we have strict rules regarding the acceptance of gifts, which are contained in the Conflicts of Interest Act. These rules were formulated and agreed to by members of all parties in this House. There was no dissent on recommendations regarding acceptance of gifts as an incidence of protocol when they were adopted several years ago. The hon. leader was silent on that issue when the new conflict rules were adopted.

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. leader has evidence of impropriety or believes that any one of us in this House has breached the provisions of the Conflicts of Interest Act, then he should and must bring those to the attention of the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should apologize to members of this House for his actions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Adoption Awareness Month

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in recognition of national Adoption Awareness Month. This is an opportunity to celebrate the many dedicated families who open their hearts and homes to children and youth and welcome them into their families. November is a time to raise awareness of the children and youth in government care who are waiting to be placed in a permanent home with a loving family.

At any given time Alberta has 200 children and youth ready to be adopted by families who will ensure they have the support they need to reach their full potential. Last year Children and Youth Services had tremendous success finding 579 permanent homes for children and youth in care through adoptive and private guardianship agreements, but there are still many children and youth across our province who need our help. The area of greatest need is for children seven years of age and older.

There is no better time or better place to adopt a child than right now in Alberta. Many families who have adopted say that the experience has made a positive difference in their own lives. To all of those families who have opened their homes and their hearts to a child, we say thank you. I encourage all families interested in adopting to first consider the children in our province and visit our adoption website at www.adoption.alberta.gov.ab.ca.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to congratulate the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations in celebrating their 10th anniversary this year. This is a council I am honoured to chair. It was founded in 2000 thanks to the leadership of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who was its first chair and is currently my co-chair, to advise the government of Alberta on its relations with Ukraine. Since its inception the council was also chaired or co-chaired by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul and the late Dave Broda, former MLA for Redwater.

The important projects the council has provided influential advice on include things like former Premier Ralph Klein's historic 2002 and 2006 missions to Ukraine, the Alberta-Lviv memorandum of understanding signed in 2005, the Alberta-Ivano-Frankivsk memorandum of understanding signed in 2004 and renewed in 2010, and the enhanced K to 12 educational linkages between Alberta and Lviv schools, including twinning.

For over 100 years the bonds of history, culture, and friendship between Alberta and Ukraine have only grown stronger. We have enjoyed a long, warm relationship with Ukraine. Through the council we have worked to strengthen and grow our relationship through ties in agriculture, education, culture, and business. The council has been essential in helping us better understand and manage the issues and opportunities related to Alberta-Ukraine relations and to work with Alberta's Ukrainian community on these matters.

To start our next 10 years, the council will be working more closely with our Saskatchewan and federal counterparts. Our first joint meeting with Saskatchewan's council will be held tomorrow evening at Government House. Being of Ukrainian descent, I am especially proud of the work this council has done and continues to do. I am very proud of the cultural, political, and economic ties between Alberta and Ukraine. I look forward to many more years of friendship in the years to come.

[Remarks in Ukrainian] Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go on to Oral Question Period, I just want to emphasize that we have 35 seconds for questions and 35 seconds for answers, so stay within that limit, please.

First opposition question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Foreign Investments in Alberta

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The list of Canadian-owned resource companies taken over by foreign companies includes many icons of corporate Canada: Inco, Falconbridge, Alcan, and now, if the announcement comes as expected, Potash Corporation. This trend is inevitably going to sweep into Calgary, where many companies make inviting targets for foreign takeovers. If Canada can lose its largest nickel, aluminum, and potash companies, there's no reason to assume it won't also lose its largest oil and gas companies. To the minister of finance: is this government monitoring the situation, and if so, what is it finding?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, a very timely question from the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, we are monitoring it. In fact, I happen to have a file here, that's about half an inch thick, of documents concerning exactly this. I would indicate that our leader, the Premier, has stood up very publicly and very vocally and defended the interests and the rights of the people of Saskatchewan, and we're proud of him for doing that.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like the minister to focus on Alberta for just a minute if he would. Has the government done any assessment of the impact that foreign takeover of major energy companies would have on Calgary and Alberta such as the relocation of head offices, exodus of critical knowledge, and loss of jobs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have the happy circumstance of sharing the international piece with the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, who looks after a good part of the same file. We have on every instance and every example of all the companies, like the Korean oil and gas company, done due diligence, been in consultation with Ottawa, made sure that the appropriate rules were being followed for progress and process. We have done those kinds of assessments. In one of the recent acquisitions there was considerable dialogue with the company as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the government actually have a position on the ownership of Alberta's resource companies by foreign corporations or, indeed, foreign governments like China?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we try to maintain a barrier-free trading environment. Alberta has had that in place for decades. We don't intend to move from that. We're very interested when, for example, one of the companies may sell off a piece of its company to a foreign interest, and in our experience so far the sales have not been materially sufficient to raise any concern.

The Deputy Speaker: Second question by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

AltaLink Electricity Transmission Line

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, from helicopter rides to free concert tickets the perks just keep on rolling in. AltaLink, which owns half the electricity transmission lines in the province, gave more than \$16,000 to this Progressive Conservative Party in 2009, Rod Stewart tickets to the Minister of Education. AltaLink, on the other hand, got paid for a transmission line never built, and consumers were forced to pay the \$35 million tab, this payment highly inappropriate with the prospect of a second attempt at building the line from Wabamun to Calgary. To the Minister of Energy: was the payout to AltaLink on December 31, 2009, appropriate? Yes or no?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows full well that the transmission business in this province is a regulated entity, and if a proponent wants to build transmission lines, they apply to the Alberta Utilities Commission, which is a quasi-judicial, arm's-length body. Those hearings take place. There's ample opportunity for public input, and then a decision is rendered.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, whose interests is the government serving here, the consumers' or AltaLink's, when there's no open bidding process?

Mr. Liepert: The government is serving all Albertans' interests, Mr. Speaker, by establishing a quasi-judicial, independent body that looks at these proponents and these proposals. I don't know if the hon. leader is suggesting that we should change that structure and maybe have cabinet ministers independently approve these transmis-

sion lines. I don't think that's the right way to go. I think the structure we have in place has worked well.

Dr. Swann: Well, back to the minister. Why is there no open bidding process for these transmission lines?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the unique things that Bill 50 actually did was that it is proposing that on several of the lines there will be an open bidding process. That will be outlined as time progresses. But, you know, the reality of it is that we have determined through Bill 50 that there is a need to upgrade our transmission system. We have put in place the process that is to be followed, and we intend to follow through on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Third question of the Official Opposition. The hon. leader.

Cancer Services in Calgary

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the minister of health. Will the people of Calgary receive the urgently needed new cancer facility to relieve some of the pressure on the Tom Baker centre? Yes or no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, cancer, as evidenced by today's guests and by the hon. leader's attendance at the luncheon, is a very important subject for us to address. We do have a provincial-wide cancer strategy that will be coming out very soon, and as part of that, we're looking at all parts of Alberta, not just Calgary. The short answer is that we are looking at that need in Calgary as we speak.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we have needed cancer care capacity in Alberta for at least five years and in Calgary more specifically. How can the minister claim that improving cancer care is a priority? He can't even say whether a cancer facility for Calgary is in the works.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as soon as I'm in a position to provide the details with respect to what we're doing for cancer care in Calgary or in Edmonton or in Medicine Hat or with the radiation therapy corridors that are planned for Grande Prairie and Red Deer and the one we just opened in Lethbridge, more of those details will be coming out soon.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we've been waiting seven months for the capital plan for Calgary and Edmonton. How can the minister deny that he's been lurching from failure to disaster and that this is the reason why this important long-term planning has been put on the back burner?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's no shortage of important issues in health, I can assure you. This is one of them, and it's one that we're committed to discussing, looking at thoroughly, reviewing, and coming forward with a plan as part of the overall approach for the whole province. We'll be doing that, and we are in the middle of it right now.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Anderson: Yesterday the Wildrose proposed reducing ER waits by designating a chief medical officer for every hospital with authority to override superboard regulations, when necessary, to reduce dangerous ER blockage. In response the minister pooh-poohed the suggestion, saying that "people would find it quite offensive" to suggest overriding "AHS directives, regulations or

regular staffing ratios.” Wow. That’s putting patients first there, Minister. Is this minister so married to the superboard bureaucracy that he is willing to put AHS regulations ahead of patient health?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that just in the last few weeks and going forward for the next few weeks, more than 71 new beds will be opened in acute-care hospitals in Edmonton and more than 70 beds will be opened or have already been opened within the same time frame in Calgary acute-care hospitals. Over and above that, we’re adding 1,300 continuing care spaces outside the acute-care hospitals. That’s just one part of the strategy.

Mr. Anderson: That wasn’t the question.

Given all the horrific revelations – patients dying in hallways waiting for care, pregnant women having their cervix examined in open triage, people puking up blood in the emergency room for seven hours before even getting assessed, people calling 911 from the emergency room, 54 per cent longer waits in just one year – is this minister going to stand there and defend his precious AHS regulations and bureaucratic decisions? How do you justify that, Minister?

2:00

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it’s a very complex area, and we’re definitely serious about this. That’s why we’ve sped up things. That’s why I gave the directives that I gave. Included in those directives were things like accelerating the need for more care beds, and they’re doing that. I have to tell you that overall the numbers are starting to come down, not in large numbers, but they are starting to improve. Let’s give this a chance. I’ve indicated that opening more beds is one part of the strategy, but so, too, is increasing home-care funding. So, too, is a new discharge protocol to pre-empt those beds.

Mr. Anderson: Given that this minister keeps saying that he’s listening to ER doctors and given that every line in the Wildrose proposal yesterday stems directly from the mouths of multiple senior, high-ranking, and very respected ER doctors who have grown tired of waiting for this minister to actually stand up to his AHS bureaucrats and make our ERs safe again, why would this minister simply dismiss their proposals? I mean, I know you don’t listen to the ER doc in your own caucus, but will you at least listen to others?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, such a bunch of ‘balderbunk.’ I mean, no wonder they’re having trouble attracting people to their fundraisers with nonsense like that, having to cancel fundraisers because you can’t enunciate anything that makes any sense.

If there are people out there that have good common-sense suggestions, I’ve always listened to them. I’ve responded. I’ve acted immediately to help patients who need the care. That’s what we’re talking about. [interjections] They can sit there and talk about privatization all they want. We’re talking about five-year funding. We’re talking about action to help right now.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to please be less loud.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Premier’s Mission to Abu Dhabi

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Premier was hosted and entertained lavishly by the Crown Prince of

Abu Dhabi. A few weeks ago the Premier went to bat for the prince when he supported the United Arab Emirates’ demands for more flights into Canada for Emirates airline. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Can you explain the connection between the Premier’s acceptance of the lavish hospitality of the Prince of Abu Dhabi and his public advocacy on behalf of the prince’s airline?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no connection between the hosting and the policy decision. The province of Alberta does business around the globe, and we look forward to having businessmen from around the globe come to our province. It’s an International and Intergovernmental Affairs issue, and I’ll have the minister respond.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the open-skies policy signed in 2006 has seen over 90 agreements signed in the U.S. and only 11 in Alberta. We’re pursuing and the Premier is aggressively pursuing on behalf of China, India. The Middle East is obviously a part of it, the kind of open skies, we believe, that’ll open trade.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier had a friendly get-together and a smiley photo op with the ambassador of the United Arab Emirates. Given that just a few weeks ago the United Arab Emirates unilaterally closed the Canadian base used to support our troops in Afghanistan, can the Deputy Premier tell us why the Premier of Alberta is giving support to a dictatorship that puts Canadian lives at risk?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think that, one, that’s an irresponsible question. There is no Premier in this country that supports our Canadian troops more than this Premier. If he needs proof of that, as the minister liaison to the Canadian Forces in this province I challenge him to go and ask them himself.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. United Arab Emirates has been demanding additional deep discount flights to Canada. These are the equivalent of trade dumping tactics specifically designed to eliminate Air Canada’s business to the Middle East and Asia. The government of Canada has rightly refused to bow to the extortion tactics of the government of the UAE, but our Premier has supported the dictatorship in Abu Dhabi. Could the Deputy Premier please tell the Assembly why he wants to help the government hurt Air Canada’s business?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that’s a total distortion of the facts. A study published in July out of Winnipeg suggested that on average-haul flights over 3,300 miles the UAE flight costs were about 16 cents a mile, the American flight costs were about 28 cents a mile, and ours were over 40 cents. We have been pursuing an active open-skies policy that does not compromise us, and we are asking for fair and reasonable negotiations between the Canadian government and UAE so they sit back at the table and do the best they can for Canadian troops and for Canadian tourists.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Green TRIP Incentives Program

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation

continues to brag that this government is serious about cutting greenhouse gas emissions, yet transit and traffic woes remain a dominant issue for Albertans. The Green TRIP money expected to boost public transit still remains in government coffers. To the Minister of Transportation. Buses and LRTs are the priorities for Albertans but clearly not for this administration. When will the Green TRIP money be sent to Edmonton, Calgary, and other cities in Alberta for public transit expansion?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I've got to make one thing clear to the hon. member over there. The Alberta government is not in the transit business; we're in the transportation business. With that said, we're here to help municipalities do everything they can to get people riding transit. As we speak, we are taking applications right now. I think the deadline for our first round of applications for Green TRIP monies is the end of November, and at that time you'll see some money go out.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are tired of the delays. It has been over two years already, Mr. Minister. Why hasn't the minister sped up this process already?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, needless to say, this hon. member hasn't been listening to what I just told him. I'm telling the hon. member that there will be stuff flowing out. We're waiting for applications right now. I don't know what Albertans he's talking about because the municipalities are happy to hear that we're open to applications right now.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are we talking about the airport tunnel here, too? Is there money for the airport tunnel in this? How can Albertans trust this government to build for tomorrow when it cannot follow through with commitments made years ago?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to give this hon. member accolades for how strong he is on the Calgary airport tunnel. But I have to say that the Calgary airport tunnel is – is – a responsibility of the municipality of Calgary. We do everything in our power to get them all of the necessities to be able to go ahead with their infrastructure. There's not another jurisdiction in Canada that gives municipalities . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mid-term American Election

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday millions of Americans went to the polls. I know that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, as many others in this House, has been doing a lot of advocacy work in the United States. I would like to know from the minister what impact the election results might have on Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to many representa-

tives in our government we've had a combination of ways we look after American relationships: through PNWER, through the Border Trade Alliance, through the Western Governors' Association. We don't expect relationships to change much. However, I will say that immediately our Washington office will be very busy contacting the new representatives and looking at strategies for informing new people. We actually have 15, 16, perhaps, new Republicans that will not have been informed, and it would be wrong to just make any assumptions that any partisanship would lead to any particular trade policies.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for those comforting comments because I know that the energy industry particularly has a major concern with what might happen in the U.S. I'm wondering if they particularly have something to worry about.

2:10

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this morning I met with one of our major oil companies, who noted with considerable pleasure the fact that both Ohio and Michigan as well as Pennsylvania had elected governors who were Republican, who had been openly stating support for the kinds of products that we ship south, which is good news in our export market.

I will also say that the meetings on behalf of the Premier with the West Virginia governor who is now a member of the Senate, a Democrat, who is very strongly and robustly supportive of the oil sands – we'll build on those relationships. We'll keep in touch with old friends.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I know that in California there were a couple of propositions that were voted on. One that was of primary interest to Alberta, I would think, would be the one on the climate change. I'm curious. What happened to that proposition, and what effect might that have on Alberta?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. California has a piece of legislation on climate change. The effect of this proposition, if passed, would have directed the state Legislature to suspend the climate change legislation until unemployment figures were less than 5 and a half per cent. Because that proposition failed by about a 6 to 4 ratio, we assume that those climate change provisions are in effect. With a Democratic governor we can make an assumption that most of them will be in place. We'll still have a lot of work to do on low-carbon fuel standards.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Carbon Capture and Storage

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has one set of emission targets. The feds have a different target. The idea this administration is fixated on is carbon capture and storage, the most expensive method for reducing emissions ever at \$200 to \$500 per tonne of CO₂ that even the most optimistic agree will not come close to reaching either of these targets. So to the Minister of Environment: since the government is rapidly approving

oil sands development again, so clearly no reduction coming from there, which other . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's just clarify this whole issue of carbon capture and storage and whether or not the economics are in play. Clearly, when you involve new technology, there is at the outset a significantly higher cost that tends to come down over time. If someone doesn't take the initial impetus to get these projects under way, to prove up the technology, then we'll never get to the point where we can actually rely on this kind of technology to dramatically bring the kind of reductions we need in place.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, back to the same minister, then. What is this ministry's plan B if carbon capture and storage doesn't pull through in achieving 70 per cent, because that's the target, of our emission reductions?

Mr. Renner: Well, the fact of the matter is that Alberta is not an island. It will be extremely difficult for Alberta to achieve targets if the rest of North America, indeed the rest of the world, is not on the same page. It doesn't do any good to Alberta to impose the kinds of restrictions that would be necessary if we simply drive the emissions offshore. So, Mr. Speaker, the plan is very clear. We need to continue our efforts to get . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I don't think you can claim leadership and then blame everybody else if it doesn't work.

Back to the same minister. Another minister mentioned deadlines to apply for Green TRIP, but I'm wondering around what the government's drop-dead dates are for making decisions on the progress of carbon capture and storage. In other words, at what point does the government decide it's not working or not economical?

Mr. Liepert: Storage falls under my ministry. You know, this particular member of the House likes to ask the question: what if? What if the sky falls? Are we supposed to have a plan for: what if the sky falls? Mr. Speaker, we believe very seriously that carbon capture and storage will be an integral environmental and economic benefit to this province. I'm going to speak in second reading on our bill today, and I encourage the member to be here to hear it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Electricity Costs for Large Industrial Users

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. West Fraser mill operates nine wholly owned forest products manufacturing facilities in Alberta and has a 50 per cent joint ownership in Alberta Newsprint in the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne. Their operations spend 12 and a half million dollars on transmission costs per year. My question is to the Minister of Energy. West Fraser claims that their transmission bill will double if the Alberta Electric System Operator's current plan to overbuild transmission occurs because of Bill 50. Is that true?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is no overbuild. What we are doing is that we are putting in place a transmission

policy: go to the landowner once. It will have the provision to expand as the economy of the province expands, but when that expansion is needed and that extra expense is about to be incurred, we won't have to go back and renegotiate with landowners to put more towers on. That infrastructure will be in place.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Again, West Fraser claims that without changes to the province's transmission plans or policies, their facilities will be forced to close or build on-site generation. What will you do to continue to champion this industry so it can remain competitive, sir?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that this government continues to provide improved competitiveness for our forest industry, especially with respect to the energy part of their business. We provide funding that encourages companies to become involved in bioenergy production opportunities. This will decrease their electricity costs, of course, and their heat costs as well. The member's own riding provides a number of very good examples of bioenergy production.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Given that transmission expansion is needed for the future – and no one will argue that – will you find a way for the province to put some major dollars up for this expansion to ensure that we don't drive Alberta's business leaders away from our province?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the policy of the government on this matter is pretty clear. Users pay for transmission. Industrial, commercial, residential, and agricultural users pay for that. Under this policy electricity costs in the province of Alberta remain competitive. In fact, they've dropped a bit in the last couple of years. We've certainly heard the concerns of large industrial users, indicated by my colleague here, and we're taking steps to make sure that Alberta remains competitive not just for residential and commercial but also large industrial.

Aboriginal Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, yesterday when I questioned why the government rejected recommendations from the child intervention report that would improve services for aboriginal families, the response was rather defensive. When it comes to their record on aboriginal children in care, this stalling government has much to be defensive about. To the minister: given that aboriginal children made up 50 per cent of children in care 16 years ago, a number that has risen to over two-thirds today, why hasn't this government already delivered a collaborative plan to bring these numbers down?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to address this question with this member. We all know the historical situation with the aboriginal community. Much of that relates to the socioeconomic conditions that are in the community, and it has grown. As I said, the trending has grown for aboriginal people on reserve and off reserve in child intervention for the care of their children and youth. I go back to that it relates to poverty; it relates to housing

issues. There are a number of issues on reserve that are historical and socioeconomic.

Mr. Chase: Some of those historical issues go back to residential schools, and those issues three generations later have not been resolved.

Given that Albertans waited for over a year for the release of the last review, how much longer is the minister going to take before she delivers this new model for aboriginal children in care that she vaguely alluded to yesterday?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to address that question as well. As I indicated to you yesterday, there are 18 delegated First Nations agencies on reserve delivering child protection services for the province. There are 10 child and family services authorities off reserve, who are co-chaired by a board, one aboriginal person and one nonaboriginal. The model this member would like to see put in place is one that mirrors our child and family services authorities in the middle, and I can tell you that aboriginal people would like to be involved in that solution as what I've heard from them is that that is not the right model.

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's time historically that we stopped taking Alberta's aboriginal children into custody. Why does the ministry continue reacting to the crisis of the day instead of investing in sustainable measures that will keep aboriginal families intact rather than placing their children in custody?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I'm almost hesitant to answer that question in this Assembly. To say that we should not be involved as a Children and Youth Services ministry with assisting in the protection of children that are at risk in families, whether they be aboriginal or nonaboriginal: this department works very hard with staff that are eminently qualified to assist families. They either keep families together in their homes when their children are at risk by offering resources and funding or they take children into care and place them in placements that will benefit the child and, ultimately, the family overall – and I go back to it – whether they're aboriginal or nonaboriginal.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Heartland Transmission Project

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are very concerned about the proposed heartland transmission line, a 500 kV line with 20-storey towers potentially being routed through the east TUC in Strathcona county. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What is the current status of the heartland project?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that this is very much an issue that this hon. member and others in that part of the province are dealing with. The heartland transmission line was one of the four projects that was identified in Bill 50 as one of the needs. The proponents have made application to the Alberta Utilities Commission. The Utilities Commission has done extensive publication of the hearings process, that I believe is due to take place early in the new year.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same minister. Last year a detailed study concluded that it's technically feasible to bury the heartland line. As a businessperson I couldn't make decisions without knowing what the costs would be. Can the minister confirm that accurate cost estimates are available for undergrounding this project?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that as part of the application process the proponents will offer some options there, and it will be up to the Utilities Commission to make a decision. We have to remember that what is being proposed by the proponents – there are two separate options. Certainly, one of them is in the transportation utility corridor, which the member is quite familiar with. There is another option. One of the options could be the burial of the line, but there are significant cost factors associated with that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: No supplement.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Carbon Capture and Storage

(continued)

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January the respected *Journal of the American Medical Association* warned of health risks from CCS. They said that "inadvertent release of carbon dioxide (as must be considered in a . . . full-scale CCS program) would pose significant risks for asphyxiation to humans," and that "widespread use of geologic formations as storage for [CO₂] could compromise . . . aquifers on which future generations may depend for drinking water." My question is this. Why is the Minister of Energy making Albertans bankroll this liability only to ensure that Albertans are the ones put at risk?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, like any subject matter, I guess you can find a varied view of opinions out there. Certainly, the sequestration of carbon has taken place across the world for many years. We believe, as I will outline in second reading of the bill today – and I hope the member stays and listens – that Alberta has the appropriate geological formations to ensure safe capture and storage of carbon.

Ms. Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that government has already put taxpayers on the hook for up to \$15 billion by failing to collect adequate reclamation security from industry and given the scientific consensus that we do not have enough information to predict the likelihood of a CCS breach or its damage over time and given that insurance companies world-wide are refusing to underwrite CCS liabilities as a result, why is this minister so set on making our children's children pay the price for his recklessness?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I lost her about halfway through that preamble. What I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that that particular member has demonstrated on numerous occasions that we in this province and elsewhere need to ensure that our industry is cleaner and that we do something about emissions, and that is exactly what we're doing.

Ms. Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd really like to see that happen, but it's not.

Now, given that the minister admitted publicly last month that, quote, there are real questions about whether it will ever be economically feasible, will the minister admit today that this government is gambling with taxpayers' dollars and jobs to promote an unproven technology doomed to failure as long as this government refuses to establish aggressive hard caps for CO₂?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always interesting how the members of the opposition like to take what you allegedly quote. What I said is that today it is not economically feasible, and that's no revelation. We all know that. I can tell you that the members who sat in this Assembly 50 years ago did not believe the oil sands were economically developable, but look what we've got a resource of today.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Fort Chipewyan Health Research Agreement

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On Monday when asked about delay after delay for the health study in Fort Chip, the minister of health said he was giving one of the chiefs more time to sign a letter of intent, but the chief has made it clear that until there is a proposal from this government with a firm research plan and funding, the letter of intent will go nowhere. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that he has been personally working on this file for years without any substantial progress, will he just admit the obvious, that this government is deliberately stalling?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We've made great progress. Both chiefs from that area as well as the president of the Métis local would tell you that we did have verbal agreements, and two of the verbal agreements crystalized into written agreements. They're asking for an outline, first of all, of what they want addressed. They don't want things done to them or without them. They want things done together with them, which is why the Minister of Environment and I have travelled up there and met with them here as well in order to deliver on what they want done. That's what we're doing.

Dr. Taft: It's taking way too long, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: is it the role of this minister to be an advocate on issues like health and safe drinking water for the First Nations and Métis people of the Fort Chip area, and if not, why not?

Mr. Webber: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've worked quite diligently with the First Nations community up in that area. I've met with Chief Allan Adam, both up there and down here at the Legislature, on numerous occasions along with the Minister of Environment and, of course, the Minister of Health and Wellness. We're working together to provide advice to the chief regarding the letter of intent and to indicate to him that we are willing to work with him to get this health study going.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, so far we have the Premier working on this, the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Health and Wellness, and the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, and nothing is happening. It's stalled. Serious issues are getting dragged out for years. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: when is he going to start taking the lead for the people he's responsible for and advocate aggressively and, if need be, publicly on this issue?

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know how many times I have to tell the hon. member here that I have been working hard and diligently with all the chiefs up there along with my colleagues, and we are making progress.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Southern Alberta Transmission Reinforcement

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several constituents in industries in Lethbridge have raised concerns over the proposed transmission plans in southern Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister assure residents in southern Alberta and all Albertans that there is, in fact, an urgent need to invest in transmission reinforcement?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that was the whole essence of Bill 50. The reality is that there has not been major investment in our transmission upgrades for almost 40 years now. The southern Alberta portion of that line, however, is very important for two reasons. Primarily, as we need to on almost a daily basis bring power in from British Columbia, we need the ability to bring likely more power in the future. But, most importantly, that's a source of great renewable energy in southern Alberta, and we need to move it to where the market is.

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. What's the current status of the southern Alberta transmission reinforcement project, and when will it be completed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm going from memory, but I believe that the hearing process has been completed for several stages of this project. I think that the first stage is due for completion in about two years, and stage 2 is somewhere another two years beyond that. I think what this does is that it shows that you cannot build these transmission projects overnight. It's a long-term project, and that's why the urgency is there to get moving.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. The proposed costs for this project have increased significantly in just the last year. Do we know how much higher this could go and what impact it will have on rates for customers in the area?

Mr. Liepert: Well, there are some misconceptions out there, Mr. Speaker, relative to cost escalations. You know, when proponents go before the Alberta Utilities Commission, they are asked within a 30 per cent range one way or the other what the cost would be. So you've got a lot of fluctuation there. It allows for things like increase in material costs and others. Very few industrial projects, whether they're public or private, at that part of the process can be accurate on their cost predictions, but there's one statistic that we need to remember. Residential consumers will pay \$1 per month for every billion dollars invested.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I called for an empowered chief medical officer in every hospital as part of the Wildrose plan to address a temporary ER crisis. It is critical that local hospitals have local decision-makers with the authority to deal with these issues quickly and efficiently. To the minister of health: will you commit in this House to designate someone truly in charge at every hospital, who can open extra beds, move patients between wards and out of the ERs, and call in extra staff when these crises occur?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. The answer is that that's already happening now. Every hospital has what we call a site administrative lead, or words to that effect, or a site medical lead, or words to that effect. At each spot along the spectrum there is that local authority to work with certain situations such as some of the ones that have been described.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, is the minister actually saying that there is someone in our hospitals who can move ER patients out and into other wards that are more appropriate, call in extra staff, and stop these unacceptable backlogs? If there is, why aren't they doing it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, they are doing that, and as I indicated earlier, there are a number of beds that have been opened or will be opened over the next short while, and a lot of those were made by some of the people that they're talking about.

Mr. Hinman: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll recognize the point of order.
Hon. minister, continue.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Before I was so rudely interrupted by the member asking the question, if he wants some specifics about which hospitals are opening how many beds, I'd be happy to provide that to him. I have it with me, and I'd be happy to read it into *Hansard*.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they're allowing bureaucratic protocols and ridiculous regulations to sentence people to 12- and 24-hour terms. Again to the minister. [interjections] We have 35 seconds. Will you take this simple first step in our health care and dismantle your complex superboard and its stifling bureaucracy and regulations and allow decision-making in our hospitals to be accountable to patients instead of bureaucrats and ridiculous rules?

Mr. Zwozdesky: You know, Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that a party over there that calls itself so fiscally responsible wants to go back to a system where health care expenditures were growing by 10, 11, 12, 15, 20 per cent in some cases, and we're talking about capping the delivery system at 6 per cent increases. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, slow down.

Mr. Zwozdesky: If they could just not be so rude, that would be helpful.

The Deputy Speaker: The minister has the floor.

Mr. Zwozdesky: So we're talking about a guaranteed funding plan of five years with specific targets in place, and those will be adhered to.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Heartland Transmission Project (continued)

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Some of my constituents remain very skeptical over the need for the heartland transmission project. Given that there has been a global economic slowdown and given that many potential upgrader projects are put on hold or even cancelled, can the minister tell my constituents why this project is still necessary?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I know the member has heard from some of his constituents that somehow the only rationale for the heartland transmission project was because there were going to be 10 upgraders built in the Industrial Heartland. That was never the reasoning behind the heartland transmission project. It is a very critical node between both the north-south lines and the line to Fort McMurray. We have significant cogeneration that is either on or coming on the system, and it's stranded as we speak here today, so it's a critical node for moving power around the province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. With respect to the same heartland transmission line project, self-proclaimed land experts have told my constituents that Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, will allow the government to take their land to construct this project. Can the minister tell us what Bill 19's role is in regard to this project? Is it going to be used to take land for the heartland transmission line?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The heartland transmission project does not involve the Land Assembly Project Area Act. Let's be clear. There are two separate processes in place here: the process for the new transmission lines through the Alberta Utilities Commission and the process for large-scale transportation projects through the Land Assembly Project Area Act. Our law cannot be used for utility transportation projects. Please let it be clear.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the same minister: can he respond to concerns I hear from some of my constituents that Bill 19 overrules the Expropriation Act and will eliminate landowners' abilities to go to expropriation, making the compensation principles laid out in the Expropriation Act no longer available to my landowners?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, our province continues to grow, and there are competing demands on the land. Our legislation does not take away from landowner rights. Landowners continue to have fair compensation, and if I can say, the difference is that now government must purchase land as soon as the landowner wants to sell it. Most importantly, however, if landowners want to go through the expropriation process, they can. The expropriation right is there for all landowners.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

PDD Administrative Review

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports said that she has received the final KPMG report of the persons with developmental disabilities administration and service provider review. The minister said that it will be released when she has reviewed it. Albertans are aware of the slow process that this government can come up with. It could well be over a year before it's released, and vulnerable people and their caregivers are left in anxiety while they wait. To the minister of seniors: will the minister commit that the unedited final report by KPMG will be released before the House ends this fall?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the PDD program is a very important program to this government. Our Premier has said over and over again that vulnerable people are one of his greatest concerns. I'm very proud of the PDD program that we have. I've been to Lethbridge. I've been around to many locations in this province to hear what the stakeholders have had to say. Yes, they're the ones that directed me towards having an administrative review. We had that report. We're going through that report now. When we're ready to respond to the recommendations, we will release that in due course.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'm hoping that that meant that it will be the unedited version that will be released as well.

Given that the blue books show that KPMG has received over \$340,000 from the ministry of seniors in the first quarter of this year, will the minister tell this House specifically how much this particular report cost?

2:40

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we have 9,300 vulnerable Albertans accessing the PDD program at a cost of \$600 million. In that \$600 million 20 per cent of the cost goes to the administration of the program. One of the things that I think is very important is to ensure that we're always having an efficient and effective program. The price that we're paying for this report from KPMG is \$185,000.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that answer. The minister and I are certainly on the same page about why this review was so necessary.

Will the minister confirm in this House that the persons with developmental disabilities system will not be put through chaos by centralizing the community boards?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I have great concern for people in the PDD program. It is of paramount interest that we ensure that we don't disturb or upset the people in the program because of their vulnerabilities. I have said over and over again that this review is not about taking anything away from the program or taking anything away from our people in this program, but it's about improving the program. That's what this administrative review will do, and that's what we will aim for.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we go further, I just want to remind the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and the

hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo that when you have a conversation, there's a hall out there.

Hon. members, may we revert to a brief introduction of guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this esteemed House on behalf of myself and my colleague from Lethbridge-West the remainder of the esteemed Team Lethbridge members. They are the leaders of our community. They are our aboriginal community, our vibrant and talented arts community, our entrepreneurial business community, social programs, and our college educational community. I will ask them to rise as I say their names: Jacinda Weiss, Robin Little Bear, Treena Tallow, Ian Randell, Christopher Babits, Melody Garner, Steve Baines, Del Allen, Larry Lux, Dianne Kotkas, Dr. Tracy Edwards, Peter LeClaire, Simon Griffiths, Cheryl Dick, and Shilpa Stocker. Thank you, and will you welcome them to the House.

The Deputy Speaker: We shall now continue with our members' statements. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Health Care for Seniors

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We hear horror stories about our emergency departments. They are not made up but come from experiences that our dedicated, caring health professionals face on a daily basis. They are incidents that emergency doctors have documented. They are real stories, and they are real people.

Why do I say "real people"? Because I was one of them. My mum is 86 years old, and she fell, so our journey began. After spending hours – and I mean hours – in the emergency, we were finally admitted. Now, we already knew my mum's elbow was fractured, and we already knew that she would have to have surgery. What we didn't know was the length of time it would take to get there. Not only did we wait hours in emergency, but we waited days to have the surgery. You have a vibrant, active senior who is now confined to bed for days, not eating and on an IV, and guess what happens? You get other complications: heart problems, fevers, and a senior that ends up in a hospital for six weeks. Now, we hear about our seniors and how they're tying up the acute-care beds. Well, it's no wonder why some of them are doing that.

I do want to commend the wonderful doctors, the nurses, the LPNs, the NAs, the pharm techs, and all the unbelievable other people that touched our lives when she was in the hospital. There is good news and there is bad news in these stories. On the good side are the dedicated, compassionate health care workers that work hard under unbelievable conditions. On the bad side is Alberta Health Services and the government who just doesn't get it.

Ten months ago I stood in front of reporters explaining why I was crossing the floor. There were numerous reasons, Mr. Speaker, health care being a major one. A broken system can be fixed. It can be fixed by providing the right care at the right time at the right place by the right health provider in the right period of time.

Mr. Speaker, no one could have quoted it better than my mum

when I asked her about our health care system and she said: it's the pits.

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Bill 27

Police Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Police Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, this act will modernize and streamline the existing police complaint and discipline process, which has been largely unchanged since 1973. The proposed changes come about as a result of considerable consultation, and their implementation will improve our processes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 28

Electoral Divisions Act

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act.

Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, will update Alberta's electoral boundaries to reflect recommendations made by the arm's-length and independent Electoral Boundaries Commission.

In June 2010 the Electoral Boundaries Commission's report was presented to this Assembly. The commission was tasked with reviewing the existing electoral map and making recommendations for placement of new electoral boundaries in the province. The commission was directed to incorporate this increase of four electoral divisions for Alberta. The four new electoral divisions were necessary to reflect the fact that Alberta's population has increased by more than 1 million people since 2002, the last time that the electoral divisions were changed.*

On October 26, 2010, the recommendations were debated, amended, and approved with changes to the recommended names of four electoral divisions. Bill 28 reflects the commission's report as amended by this Legislature.

The new Electoral Divisions Act will repeal and replace the existing act of the same name. Mr. Speaker, Bill 28 will bring Alberta's electoral boundaries and divisions up to date with its population and current needs.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with the Gaming and Liquor Act and the Government Accountability Act I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of the 2009-10 Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission annual report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to table five copies of an article that came to me from somebody I introduced last week, Mr. Warren Stefanuk. They are from *Sociology of Health & Illness*, by Malcolm Nicolson and Cathleen McLaughlin, and the title is Social Constructionism and Medical Sociology: A Study of the Vascular Theory of Multiple Sclerosis. I should note that Mr. Stefanuk is with the CCSVI group in Edmonton. It looks like an interesting article, actually.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. My first tabling is a letter from Shirley and Nick Mushey to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation which says that they believe that "the focus of TPR should be on committing resources to completing the province's protected areas network, and fulfilling existing commitments" and that information provided for the parks consultation does not provide "enough information to participate fully and meaningfully." They ask the minister to take their comments seriously and "do what is right for Albertans, the environment, wildlife and for future generations."

My second tabling is also to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, this time from Jacob Herrero of Canmore outlining his opposition to redesignating ecological reserves, wilderness areas, and wildland parks because he feels "the term 'provincial park' . . . implies a recreation bias." He makes a number of other suggestions, ending by stating his support for the exemption of Siffleur, the White Goat, the Ghost River, and the Willmore wilderness areas as they are each unique and deserving of special protection. He adds that protection of species at risk and their habitat must be protected. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do the tabling.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Can you deal with the heckling, please?

My third tabling today is a letter to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation from Robert Smith of Canmore, who says, "In a world with steadily disappearing wild lands, species, declining air quality . . . we should be doing everything possible to preserve what we have left."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, something to table?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an article from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* entitled Health and Safety Risks of Carbon Capture and Storage. I referred to this article in my questions to the Energy minister today.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you have a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Hinman: Yes, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). It is very clear that the minister of health was trying to excite the Assembly. But what's most disheartening is the misleading in that he was specifically being asked if he has a chief medical officer who is in charge. He says that there is, and there just is not

one. There isn't one that's in charge of the whole hospital that can actually move and say that we need to open up some beds here or there. It's a process that isn't working. It's crippling. People are being sentenced to stay in the emergency room because there is nobody in charge. He is misleading to continue after three days to say that there is someone in charge, yet nothing is happening, and that would not happen. He needs to apologize and not mislead the House with his answers.

Mr. Renner: There is clearly no point of order here. The member refers to our Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Mr. Speaker, (h) says that a member shall be called to order if he "makes allegations against another Member." I heard no such allegations by the minister of health. Standing Order 23(i) says "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." I heard the minister of health do no such thing. There was no allegation of imputing motives on behalf of the member. Standing Order 23(j) is "uses abusive or insulting language," and again I heard no abusive or insulting language.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Currie in his member's statement quite eloquently talked about some of the realities that we all face around this place with respect to question period. Historically, the Speaker has on many occasions, as I have been a member of this House, reminded members that the purpose of question period is to give the opposition and in fact give private members an opportunity to hold the government to account. There is not an obligation on the part of the minister to supply an answer that is to the satisfaction of the member. I would suggest that it is up to all of the members in the House to come to their own conclusion with respect to the adequacy or lack thereof of the answers that are given by the ministers.

So, Mr. Speaker, clearly there is no point of order here.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I wish to call a point of order at the conclusion of this matter.

The Deputy Speaker: This is not a debate, so I shall make a ruling now. I have the Blues here, and these are the words of the Minister of Health and Wellness. "Mr. Speaker, they are doing that, and as I indicated earlier, there are a number of beds that have been opened or will be opened over the next short while, and a lot of those were made by some of the people that they're talking about." That was when the point of order was raised. I don't see any point of order.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, interesting that the hon. member would rise and quote 23(h), (i), and (j) as citations when under 23(h) it clearly says that a member shall be called to order if he "makes allegations against another Member." Then, in presenting his point of order, he accused the minister of health of misleading this House, which is unparliamentary language and an inappropriate allegation in this House. I ask that you call that member to order.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on this point of order? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: I don't think the hon. Member for Peace River was listening to the discussion the last three days in question period. The point of all this is on (j). It says, "language of a nature likely to create disorder." The minister very much has given an answer that is inappropriate and misleading. The question is, "Is there a chief medical officer?" not whether or not there are beds that are open. Those beds aren't open; those people aren't being moved. If it was, Mr. Speaker, they would have been moved out 24 hours earlier.

They're totally missing, not answering the question, and they're exciting the House because of the misleading answer.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. I have some references here. First of all, I let the hon. member raise a point of order, and I let the other hon. member have some input. But my ruling is this: you can't call a point of order on a point of order, *Beauchesne* 318(1). Period.

Thank you.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 24

Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so happy that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has found time to stay and hear some of the facts and also the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona because we're going to have a little fun here for the next 10 or 15 minutes.

I do want to first of all move second reading of Bill 24 before we get too far into having fun. This is the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, this act proposes three main amendments to facilitate large-scale carbon capture and storage technology. First, the legislation clarifies that the province owns all pore space in Alberta. Pore space is those tiny holes in porous rock, but in particular the ownership of pore space has never been defined in any legislation in the province. This amendment does not in any way change ownership of mines and mineral resources, nor does it affect activities such as enhanced oil recovery. Mineral ownership is still maintained by the current mineral owners, and nothing will change in that regard.

Secondly, this legislation enables the province to accept the long-term liability for injected carbon dioxide. Mr. Speaker, I need to be very clear on this, and this is important for the questions that were raised today. The province only accepts long-term liability once an operator has scientifically demonstrated that the CO₂ has been properly injected and long-term monitoring shows it is completely stable. As a prudent measure the government will ensure a fund is created and financed by CCS operators. The money will be managed by the province and used for ongoing monitoring costs and any required remediation, so it'll be similar in many ways to the orphan well fund, which has been operational for decades, and it ensures that wells that are abandoned by defunct companies are fully remediated.

Thirdly, this act creates a new fund which will be financed by CCS operators and used for ongoing monitoring costs and any required remediation.

These amendments are necessary to establish the regulatory groundwork which is required to facilitate large-scale carbon capture and storage projects. These amendments were the result of recommendations made by the provincial-federal EcoEnergy Carbon Capture and Storage Task Force and Alberta's Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council. These people, Mr. Speaker, are experts; many of us in here are not. They have spoken, and we have listened.

Alberta is just one of the many jurisdictions around the world that is reviewing the legal and regulatory requirements for CCS. In

October the International Energy Agency, the IEA, released a review showing that 16 countries around the world are making significant progress towards developing legal and regulatory frameworks. Alberta is the only jurisdiction and the first one in Canada to move forward with legislative amendments, so while others are talking about tackling climate change, we are acting.

CCS is a new technology, and quite simply it is a game-changing technology in the fight to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Without regulatory clarity companies cannot pursue this technology. Let's be clear. The government is not doing this alone. It is both government money and industry's money that will move the technology forward, and it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Large-scale carbon capture and storage projects are ideally suited for our geology. They are ideally suited for our very experienced industry players, who have been honing and refining their technological expertise for decades.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, these amendments are required for Alberta's continued leadership in CCS. Energy demand continues to rise. We know it's not a question of whether energy will continue to be developed. Rather, it's a question of how energy can be developed in cleaner ways. Carbon capture and storage is one of the solutions. This is an initiative all Albertans can and will be proud of. As a safe and secure supplier of energy with a growing presence on the global stage, our focus on CCS is not only good for Alberta and our investors; it's essential to our future.

Industry, government, and consumers need to tackle this problem together. We need to invest in clean energy technologies and new and greener sources of energy. We need to reduce emissions and reduce energy use. We expect our \$2 billion commitment to these four projects to be reducing emissions by 5 million tonnes annually beginning in 2015. That's just the beginning. Alberta's economy and much of Canada's, in fact, is largely reliant on energy development. This act will give Alberta a powerful tool with which to meet the unique set of challenges that we face and further cement Alberta's leadership in this area.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've spent a few minutes talking about the environmental benefits of carbon capture and storage, but Alberta is fortunate. As I said, we not only have the geological formation to store the carbon under CCS, but there are also verified data that can tell us that some estimated \$20 billion in royalties may be derived over time by using CCS to extract oil from hard-to-get-at conventional reserves. This is one potential economic benefit from our investment in this technology.

I know there are some elected officials in this House, Mr. Speaker, who scoff at our CCS initiative. They say, and I quote: we're pumping \$2 billion into a hole in the ground. Now, I say that this is a narrow-minded view, and it's a narrow way of looking at this investment. Let me correct some of those comments. First of all, the \$2 billion is an investment over some 15 years. In fact, I would state here today that by the time the last quarter of these funds is being expended, government will likely be receiving more money than those annual expenditures on new royalties from enhanced oil recovery.

If government of the day took that same Neanderthal view some 40 or 50 years ago, as I said in question period today, development of the oil sands that is taking place today would not be anywhere near as developed as it is. We would not have the billions in royalty revenues that are accruing annually to this province through the oil sands. We would not have the tens of thousands of jobs in the oil sands, Mr. Speaker, that we have today. Canada would not be in as strong an economic position as it is today if it were not for the oil sands. If we listened to these individuals, who actually call themselves a party, we wouldn't have an industry today in the oil sands.

If we listen to them today, we run the risk of depriving Albertans of some \$20 billion in future royalties, not to mention a much cleaner environment and, in all likelihood, an ability to market a technology.

Part of our development of this technology is through the legislation that is being introduced in this House through Bill 24. Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members to support this bill.

I adjourn debate on Bill 24.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 25

Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move and begin second reading on Bill 25, the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

This act will ensure that business practices used by industry comply with freehold mineral tax legislation. First, it will do this by recognizing the electronic transmission of documents. It will also update auditing provisions to be consistent with the provisions of the Mines and Minerals Act. This includes increasing the penalty provisions to ensure industry complies with requests for audit information of \$200,000.

The act will also update appeal provisions to be consistent with other tax legislation. In the event that there is a disagreement, Mr. Speaker, regarding the amount owed, appeals by industry are currently referred to an appeal board. The appeal board was made up of members knowledgeable about the freehold oil and gas sector and appointed by the minister. There were three members in total. Members of the appeal board cannot be in conflict of interest with appellant, and as a result selecting qualified individuals to serve is difficult. Significant appeals that warrant a hearing have only occurred twice in the past 20 years. The use of an appeal board is not consistent with other Alberta tax programs. Under this amendment act industry partners can appeal directly to the Minister of Energy with a further ability to appeal to the Court of Queen's Bench.

To be clear, there are no changes to the overall program itself. Alberta Energy and industry engaged in a four-year project to streamline business practices between industry partners and Alberta Energy. Tax statement distribution was automated in 2008, and over 90 per cent of the FMT is assessed to freehold mineral rights owned by oil and gas corporations. All FMT reporting is done by industry. This also includes remittances on behalf of individual freeholders, and it does not change the act. The tax revenue averages \$300 million annually. It is recorded in the general revenue fund and contributes to the programs and services that benefit Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this act is outdated. It needs to be updated to align with current industry practices, and passing Bill 25 will provide this.

I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 25.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:10

Bill 20

Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 2: Mr. Drysdale]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and privilege to speak here today in favour of Bill 20, the Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010. I would like to thank my hon. friend

the hon. MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for bringing this bill forward and bringing it forward for the people of Alberta in their pursuit of justice in streamlining the justice system. To look at what benefits Bill 20 brings, we're going to look at establishing procedural rules that enable one or more persons to advance an action on behalf of a group of people who have suffered the same or similar wrong.

The existing act serves three important purposes: increasing efficiency, improving access to justice, and modifying behaviours. While the act is procedural in nature, it is a powerful tool in accomplishing these three purposes. Efficiency is gained by joining together a number of lawsuits that might otherwise be brought separately. Access to justice is created by grouping together many small claims in larger proceedings in which the legal costs will be shared. Behavioural modification is obtained as claims that might otherwise go unprosecuted will be brought.

The purpose of these class actions removes the comfort zone for those who might assume that minor wrongs would not result in litigation. It is also important to remember that while accomplishing these purposes, the Class Proceedings Act does not create any single new causes of action.

If we look at that and extrapolate it, it enables more people to access our courts and seek justice. It really is a tool that allows for individuals who have had seemingly minor injuries or harms against them to join together and possibly pursue a larger claim against a government or a large corporation and, in some instances, when it would not be feasible to otherwise. Further, it's a case where individuals who have all suffered the same wrong can bind together and go get justice at a court and seek similar damages.

This will also save time for courts. Instead of hearing 500, 600 cases separately, they can hear all the actions at once and give a judgment in a case that would take less court time. It'll be an advantage for people using the legal system, and for the legal system itself it will save time. This will be definitely a help to our legal system.

There are also going to be situations with applications for a certificate to bring a class action suit where certification has been sought and the settlement will need the approval of the courts even if the application has not been completely addressed. At the moment the approval of the settlement by the courts is required, and the proceeding has to be certified a class action, where certification is pursued as a condition of settlement, to impose that settlement on individuals who would be members of the class. In simple terms, the change is aimed at protecting the interests of individuals who become members of a class or have joined a suit and are taking part in a class action.

The proposed amendments are simply an attempt to harmonize Alberta's legislation and the court system. The outcome of these changes will be greater efficiency, both provincially and nationally, and greater protection of potential members of class proceedings.

These are good changes to our court system, and it will enable Alberta's citizens both to participate in lawsuits here in Alberta and in other jurisdictions more easily. They are good amendments, and it was good to speak in favour of them here today, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't repeat what my hon. colleague has already said. One of the things that I think about class action suits – and it may be off on a tangent – is that when the average citizen feels that they really haven't got a hope going up against large corporations, this will give them some sense that they

can actually partake in the justice system. I'm trying to perhaps think of the fact that cars in recent years have been recalled because of problems with brakes or acceleration pedals, and people could well be killed or have very serious car accidents, so I believe that sometimes the ability to have a class action suit can be proactive in terms of having large corporations recall and fix the problems before someone has lost their life or just has very serious injuries that would follow them for the rest of their life.

As has been said, this is sort of housekeeping, trying to put together the harmonizing of the legislation and the court system, so I would support this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a), allowing for five minutes of comments and questions.

Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that there are a couple other members who would like to participate in debate on this bill, so at this time I would move that we adjourn debate until a future opportunity arises for those speakers to participate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21 Wills and Succession Act

[Adjourned debate November 2: Mr. Olson]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise and again speak in favour of this act, Bill 21, the Wills and Succession Act. It was actually very interesting to listen to the mover of the bill, who is a lawyer, go into great detail about the changes to the Wills and Succession Act that we're bringing forward and give us a history of what in fact has occurred and some of the changes that this legislation brings forward. He noted that much has changed since the last time we did an update of the Wills and Succession Act.

We can see that the history of the Wills and Succession Act goes back a long way, almost to when our courts were invented, and they've been dealing with wills and succession and what happens to people's property, its intersection with the law, its intersection with contract. These rules and what happens to people who write a will, who have children, who have legal obligations and how they all intersect is really a bit of a commentary on our legal system as it has evolved as well as our family relationships as both individuals and the state are deemed to supercede or have the most importance. It was really neat to hear some of those things yesterday.

3:20

It also took me back to law school a bit, where in second year I had the privilege of taking a wills and estates course. Although I haven't always been the greatest student, I will say that I did receive a very good mark in that wills and estates class. Very good, very good. You know, I just sort of remembered that. I point that out. My mother was very happy about it anyway, needless to say.

Back to the merits of the bill. If we look at some of the changes that have occurred to this bill, it's really a pretty good piece of legislation. The Wills and Succession Act, as I indicated, seeks to update the law. Really, when this bill passes, it will consolidate five

other acts: the Wills Act, the Intestate Succession Act, the Survivorship Act, the Dependents Relief Act, and then section 47 of the Trustee Act. Really, this is doing a favour to family law practitioners, people who use the courts themselves independently, and for judges and clerks and the like, who have to go to use all these acts and bring them before the court of law to find people the truth, justice, and the Canadian way. They're trying to find out ways to get assistance, and it just makes it easier to do.

These are essentially the fundamental principles that were employed during the development of these proposed reforms. I stated some of them earlier. An individual is free to transfer their property to others upon their death, and any interference with a person's wishes must be justified. A couple of those reasons would be public policy or other family obligations.

When a person dies without formally indicating how their property is distributed, it will be presumed that they wanted it to be divested to their family members. That's simply the way the law has evolved. I think common sense dictates that if somebody dies without a will, they would want it to go to their families, and that is representative. Common sense is the way that law has evolved and, hopefully, will continue to evolve.

A person's freedom to transfer their property at their death is subject to the fulfillment of legal and family support obligations. That also shows that the court is cognizant of some of the deals and debts outstanding and support obligations that are out there. All these changes that have been made and proposed and publicly consulted upon were supported by stakeholders.

I'd also like to note that some of the language in the act has been updated to try and look at situations that have been modernized. One particular way is that the definition of child has been changed to update the numerous ways society has evolved and moved on and now deals with things. I think that's a positive change that we see in the act.

Also, a neat little thing. I, too, remember this. The hon. minister of housing might remember this. I'm not sure if he took wills and estates when he was in law school. In the survivorship laws when two people were deemed to have died at the same time, it was the younger one who was deemed to die last. That was always one of those little tricks that you had to employ in the law school thing, and I always thought that that was a little bit strange. Nevertheless, it was how the law had evolved. Now they've looked at that rule. Obviously, people had been asking that question, not only me, and they've now changed that rule.

If two or more people die at approximately the same time in a car accident, plane crash, in the same accident, for example, their property will be distributed as if each of the parties died before the other. In cases where property is jointly owned, it will be deemed to be split amongst the owners equally. This is consistent with public opinion on the matter as established by the government through this public consultation, and it harmonizes the principles regarding testamentary dispositions with those contained in the Insurance Act. So we're getting some consistency across different acts and bringing some more common sense into the legal system instead of harsh rules that may or may not reflect what exactly people wish, what is in the best interests of society.

The bill also, in my view positively, allows courts to rely on outside evidence, corroborate the intentions of a testator. So they can look at the situation and interpret wills more easily. Other rules have been brought in that appear to do the same thing.

The bill also breaks down things into other distinct parts that allow for a designation of beneficiaries under plans, a part that deals with family maintenance and support, and another part that just deals with any questions or concerns like gifts between couples or gifts between

members of a family. And the bill has I guess gotten rid of several outdated common law doctrines that have been around for a long time, which is a good thing.

All in all, this has been a good bill. The changes here reflect a laudable effort by the people involved. It was good stuff. I'm hoping it passes. It harmonizes existing legislation and brings Alberta's testamentary laws into the 21st century, and it's a good bill. There we go.

It was a pleasure to speak on it, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the sections in this bill is family maintenance and support. The changes would be that now a spouse or an adult independent partner of the deceased person will be automatically provided as a right the ability to continue inhabiting the home that the parties shared for a period of up to three months.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

I personally would like to see that increased, and I'll explain why in a moment. It's a compassionate change made to reflect the emotional strain that death has on the surviving partner and ensures that they are adequately sheltered and they can't be forced out of the marital home by the children's wishes to sell it. The reason I'm thinking that three months isn't long enough is that sometimes you can't even get the house of the person who has passed cleaned out of their personal belongings. It's very, very traumatic.

But, more importantly, what I think that this will help do. We know that seniors' abuse is mainly because of financial reasons. Because of my previous occupation as an RN in geriatrics I really did see some very, very ugly situations where the elder parent was basically just steamrolled in this exact situation, that has been quoted as: they moved them into a nursing home or into some sort of care centre and then sold the house long before that elder person was ready to move. They never ever really settled down to the new place that they had been moved to, often knowing full well that they didn't have the money that would have come out of that house.

3:30

In fact, I've seen people moved, and they'll cry almost every single day because they know that their family has really not treated them well. There was one instance, in fact, where the woman didn't even have enough money to have \$4 haircuts. It was really quite pathetic. So I'm glad to see that this now will help protect, and there'll be some breathing room for these people that are left behind.

One of the others is consequential and related amendments, repeals, and coming into force. The proposed changes would require amendments to the Matrimonial Property Act in order to provide for the division and distribution of matrimonial property. Unfortunately, sometimes people die at very inconvenient moments, and they sometimes are changing partners. This is the sort of thing that perhaps that second partner is going to fight over when, in fact, it really should go to the first partner. So I'm glad to see these new ways. I think that they're using a new — I think the words were: reflecting the changing social values. Certainly, we realize that in Alberta there are changing values. The changes are consistent with the property rights that arise when the marriage is ended by divorce.

Finally, the bill would allow for a coming into force date that would permit the ministry, the courts, estate planners, legal practitioners, and the public to educate and prepare for this new approach. On the death of their spouse the survivor may make a claim for the

value of their share of the matrimonial property. This claim on the matrimonial property is to be paid from the assets of the estate, and only a living spouse may commence claims with regard to matrimonial property. The claims mentioned above will have no direct effect on the right to inherit from the estate of the deceased. The act, if passed, will come into force upon proclamation, which will be approximately one year following its passage, likely on January 1, 2012.

The applications that are proposed in this bill are an attempt to modernize existing practices, as I've mentioned, to reflect Alberta's changing social values. Another very unfortunate incident that happened was the death of a partner in a same-sex relationship, and the family had never really recognized that relationship. The person, who had actually been a partner for over 20 years, received nothing because the family, I guess, challenged, and they lost that. So it will reflect our changing values.

Mr. Speaker, just one more comment. The changes here reflect the laudable effort by the sponsor of the bill, the ministry lawyers, and various law reform institutes to harmonize existing legislation and bring Alberta's testament laws into the 21st century. I think that this bill is very important.

One of the other things that I'm sure lawyers would remember to talk about with people when they are making out their wills is that they actually have the personal directive that would go along with that. Often personal directives can protect the person in terms of where they're going to live, and it also would protect the spouse, where they want to live. So it all becomes part and parcel of the law.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22

Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 2: Mr. Denis]

The Acting Speaker: Is there anyone that wishes to speak on this? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to get up and again speak in favour of Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I was here yesterday during the presentation of this bill on behalf of the hon. Justice minister, and there was a very detailed account of what is happening with the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act. From that review as well as from what has been put forward before me, it is a bill that is heading in the right direction in that it has modernized government policy regarding three distinct areas: the parentage and guardianship of children, the maintenance enforcement program, and interjurisdictional support orders.

All three of these areas are obviously of great concern to Albertans, families and people who are sometimes going through some strife. If there's one thing that our court system needs to try and address and to keep in front of, it's relationships. In any type of relationship, whether they're going great or they are having difficulties or the relationship has ended and there are children involved, there has to be a way for people to get help and direction and an ability to have the best interests of the child and some fairness and equity brought into those situations. Bill 22 is an attempt to make it easier for individuals who are going through some of these situations, to at least have the rules and regulations clear or as clear as they can be so that they can go into situations with their eyes wide open.

Let's just talk about some of the things under the parentage and guardianship of children. As it stands right now, the current Alberta law states that the parentage of a child is shared between two legal parents. We know that in most cases there's a biological father and mother. At the moment there is a somewhat limited recognition of exceptions for individuals to be recognized as legal parents in situations where parties are a same-sex couple or where nonbiological parents have relied upon assisted human reproduction. So in order to address the growing reliance on this and the recognition of children who are the products of a same-sex couple, the ministry has proposed through this bill the following policies in order to provide greater clarity regarding issues of parentage.

3:40

Where assisted human reproduction is used and there is a proper combination of biology and consent, couples using AHR can become the legal parents without any added need to begin adoption proceedings as long as one partner or spouse can show a biological connection to the child and the other individual consents to be a parent. In the case of a single individual using assisted human reproduction, that person may become the legal parent without another legal parent being recorded. As a result of these changes, same-sex couples who use assisted human reproduction will receive more complete recognition as single parents in close accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights.

I believe my colleague from Edmonton-Centre will give a much more detailed account of this as I received a look from her that I may not be getting this 100 per cent correct. Nevertheless, I look forward to her adding some comments to this bill when I am done.

This policy change will result, hopefully, in a paradigm shift here in Alberta, where we can look forward to more people focusing on parents as just being people who love and care for children rather than being reliant on what their sex is or whether they've used AHR. Hopefully, we can continue moving in that direction and get there in due course.

The maintenance enforcement program has also been enhanced in this bill. It allows that for maintenance recipients that owe money as a result of fees, overpayments, and penalties, the money can be collected more frequently and with greater speed. It means the enforcement program would have the increased ability to demand information from government, businesses, and other organizations about creditors. The maintenance enforcement program can hopefully assist individuals in receiving their monetary orders in a much more speedy and expeditious fashion.

Also, a debtor will be required to have sought the negotiation of a payment arrangement with maintenance enforcement before an application to suspend an enforcement action can be brought to the courts. The maintenance enforcement program will have greater scope for information-seeking practices when attempting to locate debtors and their assets.

This is all good stuff for people who are involved in disputes. We all know that relationships break down; it's not a perfect world out there. People believe they have been aggrieved in one fashion or another or don't believe their responsibilities go as deep as they actually do, and people need to access and have the ability to get a hold of finances when they are just and deserving. These are good changes to allow individuals to access some justice, access some money, and to keep both themselves and their families afloat in situations where it's just and deserving.

We can also look at a positive in this bill: interjurisdictional support orders. Interjurisdictional support orders refer to the model statute currently enforced in all provinces and territories, except Quebec, that allows parties residing in different jurisdictions to

obtain and vary family maintenance orders quickly and easily. This seems like a reasonable thing, where individuals, if they are living here or were living here and go to other areas and need to get the help and assistance of courts, can bring applications there and get application changes made more quickly, where we can look at the applicable law that has been established by Alberta courts and simplify the processes for all parties who are involved in these difficult situations. I think this is a good thing.

In conclusion, sir, really, on all of these acts they've been positive changes to the way Alberta law will be organized and structured, allowing for more people, I believe, to get legal assistance in a more sound way and, hopefully, in a way that makes their lives better and to assist people in a more just fashion than may have been accorded to people prior to this legislation being implemented.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today, and I look forward to hearing other people and, in particular, the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, staff in the Department of Justice have been working hard over the last while, and we're seeing the product of their work in a number of bills being brought forward this fall session, including class proceedings, wills, and this bill, Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

This is an important act, and it's an important act because it helps to legislate and regulate the most intimate relationships in our life; that is, those relationships of family, of parents to children, of spouses to each other. I spent an awful lot of time on this bill when it was first brought forward and, indeed, passed in 2003. That was the sort of huge reshaping of all of family law in Alberta. It was pulled together under this new Family Law Act. In fact, I spent one very, very long afternoon on November 27, 2003, as we worked our way through the government amendments – and they had a lot of them; I can't even remember how many, but it was dozens and dozens – to their own act and then my subamendments to the government amendments.

The situation that I was trying to address then is even more relevant today, and that is the situation when we look at families and who is in families today. We have a couple of different combinations and permutations. We can have married heterosexual couples, we can have common-law heterosexual couples, we can have married homosexual couples, and we can have common-law homosexual couples. We can have single people with children or single people without children. What's happening in the first section of Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, is that there are some adjustments being made, but they do not capture all of the categories that should be captured.

I suspect that we are going to see this bill back in front of us again because if we continue with this, it remains Charter challengeable. You cannot make distinctions between, essentially, the same groups of people or people that are performing the same functions, and that's what we have here. The courts have been very clear in the way that that is being set out, yet with this government's personal philosophy – and I don't doubt that anyone here would deny it – there's a squeamishness there about addressing this issue head-on, and they won't do it.

For example, we talk about the best interests of the child, which was a very good philosophy to apply in this case and very helpful to the courts and anyone else that was making these decisions, but the government's view of the interpretation of best interests of the child does not include that child being in a same-sex parents household,

so they don't include that under the definition of best interests of the child. They must, and they should.

3:50

Those amendments that I was bringing forward on that November 27 afternoon in 2003 were all about trying to make sure that we were not assigning a gender to the roles that were involved under these family law statutes, yet the government insists on doing that. They insist on using genderized language like "mother" or "father" rather than "parent" or "husband and wife" instead of "spouse."

As I said, we have legalized same-sex marriage here. What do you do? You don't have a husband and a wife in those situations. You could have a husband and a husband or a wife and a wife, but you don't have what my hon. colleagues on the other side feel more comfortable with, which is that traditional heterosexual marriage. You're fixing a little bit of it, but you're not fixing the whole thing, so it's going to be back in front of us again.

The amendments that I was bringing forward back on that November day were trying to help that. You can't set up a situation – but the government has set up a situation – where you're dealing with surrogacy, where you have a biological connection from one person but not from another. The idea then and now: I maintain it has to be available to both same-sex and heterosexual couples, and the government maintains it doesn't. If you're going to say, "Okay; we recognize a birth mother as being biologically important in this combination, and then the other person we're going to presume is the father, and we're going to make it through these changes possible for them to just be assigned that father role and not have to go through court and literally apply through the courts to be designated as the father," good. That's exactly what you should have done and what I tried to make you do back in November of 2003.

The problem with this is that you're not making that applicable to same-sex couples, and you have to because you cannot distinguish that stuff, and the law has said that. We have married couples that are both orientations in this province, and you cannot say that it's okay for these ones but not for these ones because the law recognizes both of them. It is discrimination, and this is now making it institutional discrimination against a group of people who by law are perfectly entitled to be what they are and should be able to have the same rights and responsibilities and privileges.

There are things in here. At one point it talks about: a child can have a maximum of two parents. Well, an interesting way of dealing with a legal argument, but the fact of the matter is that you can easily have more than two parents. In the case of, as I've said, same-sex parents, you're going to have to deal with the fact that you've got more than two parents here, but once again the government refuses to recognize that. Again, you know, you may not like it, and I understand that. I know that lots of people are not comfortable with this concept and don't want to see it and don't want to see it for anybody else. I understand that. You still as legislators have to write the right law, and this is not what's happening here. We're writing bad law, we're writing challengeable law, we're writing law that can be brought before the courts, and we will lose.

Guess what? The taxpayers are going to pay for this, too. I maintain it's not responsible for us to knowingly pass bad law that can and will be challenged in the courts and forcing our taxpayers to have to pay the bill for somebody being intransigent in the government's philosophy. You may not like it, but it is the law.

I've talked a little bit about that concept of the best interests of the child, and I'll come back to that as we get into Committee of the Whole.

I'm delighted to see that there is a formal abolishment of the concept of illegitimacy. I can remember years and years and years

ago, when I was with the Advisory Council on Women's Issues, having those women from many different backgrounds – and, frankly, most of them reflected the government's political philosophy – being adamant that no child was illegitimate. How offensive to be able to label a child illegitimate because of the marital status of their parents. We recognize that now, and we've moved far beyond it, and finally the law is catching up here. That's very welcome and appropriate, but I cannot say timely because I think we're way behind the times.

But, you know, it's happened in our lifetimes. I remember my father, who grew up in a small town in southern Alberta, telling me about kids that he knew, and literally "illegitimate" was stamped right on their birth certificate. Can you imagine that? Some of those people, unless they've changed their birth certificates, could still be going and applying for passports and all such with that stamped on their birth certificate. Good Lord. What does that matter when you're trying to get, you know, a passport or a driver's licence or insurance or even get on a plane. Honestly, how could we possibly be judging someone and their character based on whether or not their parents were married. It's just a shameful time in our past. Glad to see that's happening.

I at one time was the expert on MEP, and I can't tell you how glad I am that I no longer am. For years and years, including when I was elected in here and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was the Justice minister and I was the critic for it, we had long, drawn-out battles about maintenance enforcement. All credit to this government for continuing to strengthen the maintenance enforcement laws that we have and to give more tools into the hands of the director. We finally did get enough work space for them, we managed to get the computers to talk to each other, and we managed to get to the point where we could actually calculate and the government could report on how much money was being collected on each account at any given time. It used to be that when you asked for that, they could say: well, you know, 40 per cent of our accounts were active. Well, that meant somebody could have paid a dollar, but the account was active.

We had no idea of how much money was out there to be collected. Remember, folks, that this money, maintenance enforcement money, is not spousal money. It's money for the kids. Every time we get drawn into those accounts about that gold-digging witch and that jobless good-for-nothing and all of the various nasty names that parents would call each other, it wasn't about them. It's about the child. This is maintenance money for the child. It pays for their school fees. It pays for their clothing. It pays for the family to live in a place that's big enough that children would have their own bedrooms, or at least differently-sexed children would have their own bedrooms. It was very appropriate money. It was important that this money was collected.

We had a society, and we still do, where it's considered okay to shirk from those responsibilities, and we had to keep finding more and more tools, actually bigger and bigger sticks, to use against nonpaying, usually noncustodial parents to fork over the money to pay for their kids. Anything that strengthens that Maintenance Enforcement Act is good in my books. We did go a little over at one point. It was a bit like every time they got a person, usually him, they turned him upside down and shook him until all the money came out of his pockets, and then they were trying to pry out the gold teeth and everything else. We did manage to come through that. The pendulum has swung to the centre, as appropriate, and I don't think we're quite so abusive as we could have been accused of being some time ago.

There are shifts in definition around the maintenance to enable reciprocal agreements. Oh, my goodness, thank you so much for

that. Trying to help someone get a reciprocal payment from another province or, worse, another country was a nightmare. The province's staff did tend to take those files and put them on the bottom of the pile because they were just so difficult to work. That doesn't matter. It's still a child in Alberta that is not getting something because a parent somewhere is not paying, and we should have every possible tool to be able to gather that money on behalf of that child who's living in Alberta. Glad to see that one.

The wording around "suspension" versus "stay" and "stay of enforcement" is fine. You know, part of what I was talking about earlier is reflected exactly in this, Mr. Speaker, because it talks about debtors and creditors. It does not make distinctions between mothers and fathers, male parent/female parent. It says: debtor and creditor. They could be either, and that's the point. It's about what this legislation is there to cover, yet we can't seem to move that understanding to the earlier part of this act and look at parent and spouse rather than mother/father, husband/wife. We still need to do that, and I will look at bringing forward that same series of amendments when we come back to this bill in Committee of the Whole.

4:00

Interjurisdictional orders, to be able to obtain and change them quickly and easily: again, really important because we're trying to get money to look after our kids. That's the point of this.

I'm very happy with two out of three sections in this bill; that is, the maintenance enforcement changes, the interjurisdictional order changes. I am not happy with the stage at which the work was left rather than taking it to its legal completion. That has not happened in the first section, which is around – I can't remember the name they're calling it now – the assisted human reproduction. We do have to deal with the issues around surrogacy. We do have to deal with the issues around parents and that definition.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available.

Ms Pastoor: I would like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre how we might be able to handle the children of donated sperm and how that may come forward in terms of what we're considering new families in the 21st century. To take it further, should there be some way for children of donated sperm to actually know who their father is? It is becoming more and more and more important in society today and certainly controversial to people, who really want to know where they come from.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you, Lethbridge-East. That was opening a whole other chapter, but she's right. We are starting to understand some of the consequences of decisions that were made some time ago, particularly in the States, where this has been a more common procedure, more readily available for a longer period of time. We're now finding out that there are groupings or clusters of offspring of sperm donors, and they number in the hundreds from one donor. [interjections] I know. They had a different way of doing things. In Canada I'm very proud that we've always approached donation as a charitable act. [interjections] Hang on. Oh, the minds in this House. Truly, the minds in this House.

There is no payment. There is no exchange of payment. That certainly was the case in the States. Gentlemen were paid for the donation or, rather, sale of their sperm, so there was great encouragement for them to do it often, and as a result we now have hundreds of people that are related as a result of sperm donation.

This is an issue. To be perfectly honest, I had not looked through this legislation with that issue in mind, and I will undertake to do it before we are in Committee of the Whole.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move adjournment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 26
Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane)
Amendment Act, 2010**

[Adjourned debate October 28: Mr. Liepert]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for my first opportunity to speak to Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010. I appreciate this opportunity as it's been one of the issues that has certainly exercised us and other Albertans over the last five or six years since coal-bed methane became so prominent on the Alberta scene and has contributed significantly to our energy mix and also created challenges, I think, for this government around environmental protection and other aspects related to water management, potential impacts of fracking, and some of the questions of reclamation in this unique new technology around gas in coal.

This bill classifies coal-bed methane as a natural gas subject to all statutory requirements. It clarifies ownership of coal-bed methane in split mineral rights situations, and I think that's important and significant.

As I indicated earlier, there are serious concerns around the environment which this bill, of course, does not address. At some point we certainly need to come to grips with, in particular, I guess I would have to say, the December 2008 scientific review panel that submitted their final report on the Alberta environmental standard for baseline water testing, giving 16 recommendations regarding processes of testing and recording, including the following, that "the ERCB and [Alberta Environment] need to develop an audit process to ensure all tests committed to in [directive 035] are conducted and the results submitted" and, secondly, that "the accuracy and precision of gas sample concentration analyses . . . need to be assessed." We have yet to hear further about that and certainly would be interested in hearing from the Energy minister or the Environment minister on those recommendations.

To the point, it's Alberta Energy's current position that where there is a split title, natural gas and coal, ownership is a matter to be determined by the parties involved. Where the parties are unable to reach an agreement, the matter is to be ruled on by the courts. There is currently no formal process to resolve this kind of an issue, so the conflicting owners' negotiator ultimately looked to the courts to resolve the issue.

I think, on our side, that this is progress. Since we raised the issue in 2003, when the bill was initially debated, we've tried to amend the legislation to address this issue. I guess this legislation is consistent with our expressed wishes back in 2003, and it is consistent with the legislation in British Columbia, so it is consistent with what we think needs to be done to clarify some of the uncertainty around this issue for those who have the freehold ownership.

Indeed, the issue is the question of: who owns the coal-bed methane? Under the split title question it clarifies three situations: one, where the coal rights are with the Crown and the petroleum and natural gas rights are freehold; secondly, where coal rights are freehold and the petroleum and natural gas rights are the Crown's; and the third situation, where coal rights are freehold, with petro-

leum and natural gas rights being freehold, held by a different party than the coal rights.

Coal-bed methane is governed by the same royalty system as all other natural gas production on provincial Crown land, and energy companies producing on Crown land must pay a royalty to the province for oil and gas, the overall objective being to ensure that the Crown retains a fair share of oil and gas production as royalty for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, given some of the concerns that we've raised, I think it's fair to say that we have no serious concerns about this bill and will generally be supporting it. There are still some questions around, especially, southeast Alberta and some of the central coal-bed methane deposits, about who is responsible for the large volume of water that's produced. That's still unresolved. The legislation still does little to rectify the current issues surrounding well density, which is a big issue for some of the landowners as there are significant numbers permitted under the existing act that have raised real concerns with some landowners.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker. I think that, in general, we'll be taking these issues under advisement and will likely be supporting the intent and the content of this bill.

Thank you.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in second reading on Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010. I did approach the concept of this particular act with some trepidation because when I realized that what it was trying to do was settle the issue of who owns the coal-bed methane, I thought: well, gee, if I was a landowner somewhere and I had mineral rights, I'd be a little PO'd if all of a sudden I found out that the government had sort of scooped any coal-bed methane that might lie in that by just passing an act. I'm sure we'll be hearing from some people who feel exactly that way.

I felt like I had some personal interest in this. I no longer do, but when I first bought my property, not that far from the Legislature, it actually had original title from Donald Ross on it, and I had mineral rights when I bought the property. It was actually right on the title. Here I had a piece of property in the middle of downtown Edmonton with mineral rights. Well, gosh, that was fun. There was a whole bunch of reorganization in that particular area, and it was – what's the word they use for it now? – revitalized or rehabilitated or something, infill. I ended up purchasing a small slice of land that got added to my lot. Of course, because we had to go right back and do a new linen – it actually was changing, and I had a new piece of property – as happens, as soon as I changed it, I lost the mineral rights under it. So even if we did find coal-bed methane under my little 33-and-a-third foot lot, I wouldn't obviously own it anymore.

The more I thought about this, I thought: "You know what? This is a nonrenewable natural resource in this province. Even though it lies under some particular person's property, it actually probably doesn't stay underneath that one piece of property." No matter where you stick that pipe in and get at the particular product, it probably actually lies under many more properties, so in the end it is appropriate that it's owned by the people of Alberta and administered by the government of Alberta.

What I would like to see come out of this is that maybe we could just start small, just a little pilot project, just a little test run for the government, and take the royalties that would be earned or any money that would be earned off this coal-bed methane, as the government now would own it, take that money and put it into

endowment funds for the future because anything we pull out of the ground now and sell or use is gone except for the money that it turns into. It's that old phrase from your physics class that, you know, matter never ends; it just turns into something else. Well, in this case it turns into money.

I still really believe in the concept that my colleagues and I brought forward, many years ago now, about taking nonrenewable resource revenue, a significant percentage of it – at that time I think we were saying between 30 and 50 per cent – and directing that revenue into several endowment funds. We had one endowment fund that was to help us catch up with needed infrastructure in the province. When that was done, then that money would flow directly into the heritage fund.

We had another one for postsecondary education. My dream was to be able to have that endowment fund reach the point where students in Alberta didn't have to pay for university or college, that we would be able to fund our universities and colleges from that postsecondary fund.

There was a fund for the arts – well, no surprise if I was in that caucus – again, to help fund new and forward-looking needs of our artists and arts groups, and then the heritage savings trust fund. Money would go into that fund as well.

I really still believe that that is an excellent idea. I know it's been pooh-poohed and that everybody said: oh, you know, it's not going to happen. I still believe in it, and I would still like to see it happen. Here's an opportunity for the government to take the revenue derived specifically from the coal-bed methane that they are now taking ownership of and to direct any profit, let's call it, whether that be in the form of a royalty or whatever else, into some endowment funds for the future.

It's just not right of us to be taking so much nonrenewable resource, that belongs to all Albertans, and spending it. Whether we're spending it on, you know, wonderful operational things like the provision of doctors in hospitals, for example, or new environmental provisions or whether we're spending it on infrastructure, which, in fact, is an asset, we're still spending the future's money. They have a right to be very critical of us by the time it passes on to the people that are pages, for example, working with us. They have a right to be really, really – well, let me pick a nice word – irritated with us if that wealth, that immense wealth, is gone because not only did we take it out of the ground, but we spent the money that it turned into. They have a right to be supremely irritated with us.

Here's what I'm hoping we can look forward to. I have wrestled with the idea that this is assigning the government, the Crown, the people of Alberta as the owner of coal-bed methane, a new, essentially, natural gas. Here is an opportunity for us to take a step along that road of endowment funds and start to look at that.

The other issue I had around this bill – again, I need a bit more time to read up on an absolute mountain of material – is the connections between the production of coal-bed methane and related environmental concerns. I'm not that interested in saying that the sky is falling – it's not productive – but I am interested in saying, "Look, if we know that there is a likelihood" – now, you'd want to be defining that likelihood. Is it 3 per cent, 10 per cent, or 25 per cent? In pulling this coal-bed methane out by whatever process – and I think that in some cases you're using fracking, aren't you, to get it out; you're fracturing the coal bed in order to release the coal-bed methane – that does have a repercussion on aquifers, on underground waterways, on well systems.

I think it's irresponsible for us to go: oh, whoever is complaining about that is imagining it. No, they're not. I mean, honestly, the effort you have to go to to try and bring something to the attention of government or any politician is enough to make anybody wilt. If

any landowner, you know, gets as far as coming to someone in this Legislature and saying, "I've got a problem with my well; you can light the water on fire," we need to be paying serious attention to that. [interjection] Yeah, if anybody didn't hear the thing about lighting on fire, it happened in Rosebud. They were here, actually. They brought a sample and lit it on fire for anyone that wanted to go to the rotunda and look at it.

4:20

I have concerns that the bill does not deal with the repercussions of the development and harvesting of that coal-bed methane. It may not be appropriate to put it in the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010 – fair enough – but it has to go somewhere. I think many times that you leave your colleague the Minister of Environment in a very bad situation by not paying more attention to what can go wrong. You cannot fool around with Mother Nature or any other way you want to designate that equilibrium that we have in the world.

What we're doing here is not a natural process, and therefore you are going to be creating unnatural results from it. We have to recognize that and have ways of working with it going in, not just pretending that it's not happening and trying to trivialize and defeat people that bring those issues to our attention. I think we need to treat them as legitimate and give fair investigation and, frankly, give the tools to the Minister of Environment to be able to investigate that. Give him enough money to monitor. Quit taking money away from him every darn year so that he has to cut more and more monitoring staff. I mean, unless you guys want to get on your overalls and get out there and do it, you've got to be paying for some professional to be able to do it, and I'd rather have a professional, thank you very much.

Those are the two issues that I wanted to bring up in second reading. In principle, clearly, I do support what is being suggested here, but I also clearly have reservations about that environmental side, and I'd like to hear a bit more. Oh, good. Then it's the Member for Calgary-West, the Minister of Energy. I'm so looking forward to how he's going to respond to the issues I brought up. But I think it is something we need to address. It might not be appropriate in this legislation, but it is appropriate to be dealing with it somewhere.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 18 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yesterday I read and watched the robust debate over Bill 18. There were some concerns raised from the other side of the aisle, and we had support and agreement that breaking down barriers within Canada is a positive step in the right direction. As outlined yesterday, these amendments are required for two reasons: first, to bring monetary enforcement

provisions into the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade and, second, to extend the existing provisions of TILMA to the New West Partnership trade agreement, that includes the province of Saskatchewan.

The enforcement mechanism under the AIT gives us the teeth that Alberta has been asking for. Like the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said yesterday, one of the reasons the AIT did not work was because there wasn't any enforcement. That has changed and changed for the better. Also, by bringing Saskatchewan into the fold of the New West Partnership trade agreement, we are supporting the role of the west as Canada's economic powerhouse. Collaboration is key in the 21st century, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Now, yesterday there were some concerns raised, and they stem back to previous debates that we've had in this House over the TILMA agreement, so I'd quickly just like to touch on a couple of those. First, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood questioned how these types of agreements would limit municipalities. Specifically, he questioned the procurement thresholds. It is important to note that since 1999 municipalities have had to operate under the AIT and have open procurement policies. The thresholds were \$100,000 for goods and services and \$250,000 for construction projects. For the last year and a half under TILMA municipalities have been operating with slightly lower thresholds, \$75,000 for goods and services and \$200,000 for construction. Nothing is going to change with respect to procurement thresholds because of this bill. They will remain the same.

We also have to remember the real advantage of this agreement. It represents an expanded market for Alberta businesses, especially small businesses. Mr. Chairman, let me also assure all members that the New West Partnership trade agreement does not affect a municipality's ability to make decisions that they believe are in the best interests of their residents.

Another concern that was raised yesterday was over the fact that the trade agreements in general supersede the work that we do in this House. That is not the case. The AIT actually states, "Nothing in this Agreement alters the . . . authority of Parliament or of the provincial legislatures," and provincial governments are still able to pass laws that are in their best interests. These agreements just say that we have to be fair and nondiscriminatory in our trade practices with other provinces.

Mr. Chairman, I think we had some productive debate yesterday, and I hope that we've been able to add a little bit more clarity this afternoon. Passing this bill will improve interprovincial trade, investment, and labour mobility in the west and provide seamless access for businesses and workers with a range of opportunities. It will also increase our competitiveness in the global economy. The New West Partnership trade agreement creates the largest free trade and investment market in Canada, representing over 9 million people and a combined GDP of approximately \$555 billion. The enforcement mechanisms in the AIT will increase this agreement's effectiveness. I encourage all hon. members to support the bill in committee.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've already spoken to this bill, but I'd just like to add maybe a couple of more things. It really is bringing Alberta into line with recently established monetary enforcement provisions contained in the newly established dispute resolution chapter of the agreement on internal trade, and I think that we know that Alberta was successful in the recent past in terms of winning their dispute with Ontario in terms of being able to sell canola products in Ontario.

I think that probably the problem with TILMA – and we will hear it again – was that it was actually done before anybody even knew that it was going on. At least, this time it's come to the House before. I'm sure everything is in place automatically, but at least it's out here before. I do support it for a number of reasons. I would like to see and have always seen, even under the AIT, that a lot of our trade can go east-west within our own country as opposed to going north-south and going out of our country. In fact, some of our products leave Alberta, go to the States, and then come back into Ontario as a finished product. I'm not sure that we couldn't finish it somewhere along the line between Manitoba and Ontario before it becomes a product in Ontario. Of course, I'm basically referring to meat products.

The New West Partnership trade agreement could well precipitate other agreements between central Canada and then perhaps Atlantic Canada. I would be able to support that sort of an idea when, in fact, the Atlantic provinces can trade with different people. We are closer to the Pacific side, and of course we'll be looking at China and India. But where I would hesitate is that we cannot divide our country up into regional areas. If these regions are going to be separate in terms of trading partners, I want to see that there are some kinds of standardized rules, that the regions would then come together so that we still go forward as a country. I think I've already mentioned that; I'm sorry.

4:30

I guess I would just quickly sum up by saying that I think it is a good bill. I think that we must get together if we are going to be competitive in the global market. I think we all know that our Premier at this point in time is on a junket to India. I'm not sure what will come out of that. But the point is that I'm assuming he isn't just representing Alberta. He may well be representing this New West Partnership or at least being able to explain the principles behind it and who, in fact, they would be dealing with if they wanted to do business with this country and this province and this partnership. My understanding is that there is another province also interested in coming in under this partnership, which again would add some more strength and more products to be able to compete in that international market.

With that, Mr. Chair, thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. There's just one thing that's occurred to me around this. Maybe someone could explain this to me or put on the record what the answer to the question is. I was recently made aware that with the harmonized sales tax, the HST, coming into effect in additional provinces in Canada, that was having some effect in Alberta. I think the original news story that was heard was that an Albertan ended up paying HST because of a Canada Post or express post package, which is their commercialized division, I think. But then I, in fact, saw our very own provincial finance minister in the news also talking about HST issues affecting Albertans.

Here we have, basically, a trade agreement that is meant to harmonize and liberalize exchange of goods and – I don't know; there's a phrase that you guys always use there – labour mobility and a few other things. I thought: hmm, I wonder if by expanding this now to include Saskatchewan, because that's essentially what's happened, somehow we will end up with Albertans now paying an HST from B.C. or Saskatchewan because we now have this agreement in place.

I thought, well, maybe it's just me that has this question. But then

I had a couple of other people raise it, and I thought: “No. If other people are questioning this and trying to figure out how this all works in, it’s worthwhile raising it in the House and seeing if we can get an answer from the sponsoring member – we’ve got the Deputy Premier here today – and just explain whether we think this is going to affect us.” According to the information that the minister of finance was talking about, it seemed to be also affecting financial services, which, I’m assuming, would be covered as well under these TILMA acts. I can remember having some acts in here that were around credit unions, I think, that had to do with how TILMA was going to work.

It seems thus far that TILMA has worked pretty well. I’ll be honest. I mean, I’m on record. I was not incredibly keen when the government tried to do it, but, again, mostly not because of the product but the process in that this was already organized and signed on before it ever came to this House. I just think it’s an incredible affront to Albertans to have a government go and negotiate and sign such an important agreement, never consulted or talked to Albertans about it at all. B.C. did, so it’s not as though it couldn’t be done. They definitely did. The only say that Albertans had was through their MLAs as we negotiated a couple of peripheral bills here in the House. As I say, I think one of them was around the credit unions and how they were going to operate between the two or insurance companies or something.

An Hon. Member: Insurance.

Ms Blakeman: Insurance companies. Yeah.

That’s the only issue that I can see. I’m just trying to figure out how that goes together. We’ve got the – I’m sorry, is it director of the Treasury Board? God of the Treasury Board? Minister of the Treasury Board? – President of the Treasury Board here. I knew it was close to God. Maybe he can answer my question about whether this is going to put us more in line to have Albertans end up being hit with HST because of this. I can’t see why it would, but I’ll ask the question.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to give some clarity to some of the comments that were made, first of all, I wanted to kind of take a little bit of issue with some of the phraseology around a junket to Asia or India, as it was described. The reason I want to do that as it relates to this particular piece of legislation is that it is about trade, and Alberta and Saskatchewan and British Columbia are dependent on trade. We’re dependent currently on a market to the south of us of some 250 million, 300 million people. But the reality is that that marketplace is not going to be large enough to sustain the kinds of markets in the next generation economies that we want to have in our province.

I know from discussions in the New West Partnership that that’s a similar issue for them, which is why the three Premiers went to China together to investigate areas and market opportunities in trade, which is why eventually down the road I’m sure the three Premiers will probably investigate the opportunity to take a trip to India as a joint area that represents, you know, close to a \$600 billion GDP.

This province is dependent upon trade. The Premier is actually helping us develop that trade market in an area that is one of the fastest growing markets in the world. It would be folly and irresponsible for this government not to have representation at senior levels in the nation of India, and I can tell you and tell all members of the House that the Premier’s agenda has been extremely packed. Senior

leaders of India’s states and the national government are coming out to meet with him, so they see it as very important, too, and those connections are building.

As it relates to the hon. member’s question around federally imposed taxes or other jurisdictional taxes that are related to the federal harmonization, really that comes under more of a tax jurisdiction nationally than it would under this three western premiers’ agreement. Obviously, we’re going to look to those Premiers for assistance in our efforts to recover those kinds of taxes in our discussion with the federal Minister of Finance. But in terms of whether or not that’s going to have a factor in this agreement, I believe that it does not. We can verify that, but I’m pretty sure that it isn’t.

The hon. member mentioned some credit union issues. They weren’t necessarily tax issues. They were around delivery of service and delivery of other products that some jurisdictions would allow, other jurisdictions didn’t. We’re working to some harmonization under this agreement as well on that.

I would also like to applaud the hon. member for recognizing that what we did was the right thing to do and that it’s working. I appreciate that. I think it’s a recognition that trade is important to this province, and trade is going to be more important to our next generation economies.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It’s a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this bill at Committee of the Whole. Interesting points have been made up until now but still not ultimately changing our caucus’s concerns around this piece of legislation. Generally speaking, our objection to it is relatively simple in that it represents an extension of the application of TILMA, and that remains a regime with which we have some significant concern.

I guess just to start out, you know, we’ve had this conversation about how markets are good and expanding markets are good and trade is good for the economy. You know what? I don’t object to or disagree with any of those statements. I do, however, believe that as members of a democratic society we should always ensure that trade is seen as a vehicle for promotion of the public good and that we’re not, instead, looking at the public as being a vehicle for trade. That’s, I think, something that sometimes gets overlooked when people get lost in the sort of uncritical pursuit of trade agreements.

4:40

I do believe that there are occasions when government has a role to play to temper trade arrangements and/or to redirect them or to do the kind of thing that is necessary to ensure that the public represented within a particular trade jurisdiction get the best deal and have the best outcome collectively. I don’t buy that the free market is ultimately always going to be the best adjudicator of the public interests.

There have been, of course, a couple of points: “Oh, well, we’ve had TILMA now for a couple of years. It doesn’t seem to be a big problem. Therefore, let’s carry on and expand it to another full province.” Of course, the problem with these kinds of agreements is that if there are going to be problems with them, you’re not going to find them out right away. They need to wind their way through the adjudicative process and the negotiating process and the legal process and all that kind of stuff. There’s absolutely no reason to believe at this point, after two years, that because we’ve seen nothing, we won’t see anything, particularly given the two provinces that have currently been administering TILMA, the very right-wing

Liberal government of Gordon Campbell in B.C. and this government. No one here will be surprised to hear me characterize them as right-wing. I'm sure you'd like that in terms of, you know, helping to win back support from the third party at this point.

Nonetheless, with those two governments in play – these are not governments that are particularly active in terms of initiating legislative moves to, as I say, temper trade for the benefit of the public interest. Were there to be challenges of government action through TILMA – we would not be likely to see it in terms of the legislative history that we have seen through the Alberta government under the Premier and the B.C. government under Gordon Campbell. As a result, I am not prepared to say that the jury is in and the decision is made, and TILMA is not a problem.

I raise the same concerns that I had before, that TILMA is crafted in a way that is much more concerning than NAFTA, that it has a language that includes and grows its application rather than limiting its application, which is very different from how NAFTA is constructed. From a legal perspective down the road it could become more of an impediment to government action.

The other concern I have, of course, as has been acknowledged by the Deputy Premier, is that this action will definitely exclude local procurement policies and ensure that there is a very low ceiling over which municipal governments are unwilling or unable to engage in local procurement policies. It's interesting. Just as an aside, you know, I had an acquaintance who moved to Alberta a couple of years ago from another province and bought himself a plot of land out southeast of the city. Rather than hire a local contractor to build his house, he discovered that it was much, much cheaper to just buy a prefab house in Saskatchewan, throw it on the back of a truck, drive it over the border, and plop it onto his new land because things were just that much cheaper in Saskatchewan. I think we have to be concerned about what the implications are going to be to the jobs that you maintain we're going to be able to create through this process.

Ultimately, though, that's sort of the overarching concern that I have with this act and that we will continue to have. Thus, we will not support it. I believe my caucus colleague already made this positive comment, but I'd like, again, to echo it in that I am pleased to see that this legislation removes the Henry VIII clause. It was quite astounding to see that the government had made the decision to include it in the first round, and I'm certainly pleased to see that they have seen fit to remove that clause. That is certainly an improvement.

Ending on that positive note, those are my comments on this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would just like to take a very quick moment and point out to the House that I happen to have the Random House dictionary in my hand. The definition for junket is a trip by an official made at public expense. I don't consider the definition to be derogatory.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I spoke in favour of Bill 18. You know, it's just a good bill.

Since we are talking about the junket here, our Premier, I think we are coming out of the tunnel vision, and instead of looking just south of the border for business, we are going to make trade deals with other countries such as India, China. I mean, Southeast Asia has the

fastest growing economies. The Premier's trip is costing \$84,000, and I hope he comes back with \$84 billion worth of deals. My concern is only about the timing of the Premier's trip because this is the festival season in India, and it's the festival of lights, so I hope our Premier comes back enlightened and with all those trade deals.

On this here this is a good bill. It will break down the barriers between the provinces. I hope that this will increase our trade between the provinces and with other countries.

Thanks very much.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to make a few comments, if I might, on Bill 18. I certainly support this bill. I think it's another example of Alberta showing leadership in this country, firstly, with TILMA, with the agreement with British Columbia now expanding to Saskatchewan. Over the last 10 years, I think, in this country we've made remarkable progress with some of the mobility agreements, and we've started to break down some of these many trade-related barriers that we have.

The fact is, though, that we have freer trade with our neighbour to the south than we do between some of our provinces. Mr. Chair, I would suggest that this protectionist attitude is really a deplorable situation in this country. To have 14 jurisdictions – being the 10 provinces, three territories, and the feds – all with different rules and regulations on many issues but especially trade-related issues I think is a real problem in this country that causes more big government, more bureaucracy, and more expense at the expense of fairness and efficiency. Sometimes it reminds me of some of the silos that we have within our own departments, which, again, is a problem that we're trying our darndest to break down, but there's always this problem with turf protection. Everybody wants to do their own rules.

We're moving in this world to a more global economy, and again Alberta is a leader. The Premier is now in India trying to get some trade agreements with India. We have a lot of our private corporations that do deal with India, and that's good, but we need to continue to break down these barriers and start working together, whether it's within our own government or between provinces or on the international scene. Alberta has shown leadership, firstly, with TILMA, as I said, and now Saskatchewan, but we need to keep expanding, and hopefully we'll get the whole country working together for everybody's benefit.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is a privilege to speak in favour of this bill at the committee stage and talk about the bill in a little more depth. I've had an opportunity to think about it a little more and how we've sort of been in line now here. This is going to extend our trade agreement not only to include B.C., as it did in TILMA, but to try and get things lined up with Saskatchewan.

I do note today from question period that it was kind of strange. When we asked today the minister of finance what his position was in regard to the sale of PotashCorp, I noted with great interest that the finance minister sort of stated he stood with Saskatchewan and their right to protect what is considered a crown jewel of the people of Saskatchewan and how PotashCorp came together by government funds and was started as a government-run enterprise and was then sold off to private interests now possibly selling PotashCorp to foreign interests.

4:50

I'm glad the hon. finance minister came back in because I was talking about the sale of PotashCorp. I was going through that. I was surprised at his answer when he said that he stood with Saskatchewan in agreeing that this sale to foreign conglomerates and other things was sort of against what principles he believed in or that our province believed in or whatever would be the case. I was expecting that he would say something like that he understood the free flow of capital and that markets are really the only thing that should dictate a company's price, not foreign ownership, and all this sort of stuff. So I was surprised at that answer.

I wonder if this agreement that we're going into is going to affect our stance on things like the sale of the Potash Corporation and other Alberta assets to foreign countries or possible foreign takeovers as the finance minister indicated that he was in support of Premier Brad Wall's stance against the sale of PotashCorp. Anyway, it surprised me. I'm not sure if this act will have any bearing on that; nevertheless, as we're talking about the relationship between British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, I thought it was sort of neat to go through that.

Mr. Chair, I speak in favour of this bill, and we'll go from there. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 18 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 23

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 23 and introduce it at Committee of the Whole. We've had good discussion around Bill 23 over the past few days. Members of the opposition were very supportive of this bill, and we had a great discussion. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview told us that even in spite of the fact that this will probably have a personal impact on him, he still feels it's the right thing to do to benefit our universities across the province. So far I very much appreciate the support we've had from our opposition members, from our government members. This truly is a piece of legislation that will deal with a problem within some existing legislation around parking on the campuses for our universities.

I would propose a House amendment to amend Bill 23, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act. I'd ask if the pages could pass that out for me, please.

The Acting Chair: We'll mark that amendment as A1.

Mr. Weadick: Section 5 is amended in the proposed section 129.1(3) by striking out "section 3" and substituting "section 4." Currently section 129.1(3) contains the transition provisions of the bill that retroactively confer parking authority to baccalaureate and applied studies institutions. This makes references to section 3 of the bill. This is not the correct section as that section refers to our comprehensive academic research institutions. This is simply to line up section 4, referring to the baccalaureates, to match up with the existing part of that piece, to put the appropriate section in place. It's strictly a typo. I would ask the House to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I thank the hon. member for bringing this change to our attention because without this change things can unnecessarily get mixed up, messed up, and the like.

It reminds me a bit of a situation on how these things sort of happen. My sister Kristie Smith, who is a lawyer, articulated with a firm called Blake, Cassels & Graydon. She was putting together a legal brief similar probably to one that we see on this bill, where numbering, in fact, occurs. I know the chair is a lawyer, so he knows the numbering of different bills and passages and sections and all that sort of stuff and how you bring it to the court's attention.

Well, anyway, my sister went over to Blake, Cassels & Graydon. She was working away at this stuff and thought she had done an amazing job. When she sent it over to her principal, they took him to court. Needless to say, the numbering and the paragraphs were all mixed up, and the partner who took it to court was not very happy. He came back, slammed it down, and said: "Yes. For all intents and purposes, that was a decent legal brief, but the devil is in the detail. Get your numbering right so you don't make me look like a jerk in court."

Needless to say, we didn't want that to happen in a situation like this, like happened to my sister when she was an articling student at Blake, Cassels & Graydon. This will no doubt save people time, frustration, and inclination. I'm glad for the hon. member straightening out this bill. I, too, am happy to support this amendment on that basis.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on the amendment?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Chair: We'll return to debate on Bill 23 as amended. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Continuing on, I'd like to again sort of speak on this bill and again thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing this forward, just noting that our universities and now our expanded universities with Mount Royal University and Grant MacEwan University are being incorporated into this act. They have many people who park there on a regular basis who are facing fines and the like when they park illegally or when they stay over time. This could add up to significant fine revenue, and if we did not change this bill in the manner that we

have, the province and the universities could have been susceptible to a court challenge. This would have no doubt been a costly venture that would have cost the universities money to hire lawyers to go out and defend this lawsuit, and by all accounts they very much could have lost. So it is important for us to do this.

5:00

We all know that university funding here in Alberta is arguably not as solid as it should be. You can point to the fact that Alberta has some of the fewest university spaces per capita of any province, and this is a concern. If we were going to add to the financial difficulties that our universities have by making them defend lawsuits of this nature, it would have been a shame. So I'm very glad that we caught this, that we have updated our legislation to protect our universities in this way and can go forward in that fashion.

I would also like to say that I know the University of Calgary and word on the street is the University of Alberta are very proactive in getting their students to try to take public transportation. One of the ways they do that is by sort of increasing the price of parking so that people are encouraged through the supply-demand curve to take transportation. Also factoring in there are the high fines you get for parking on university parking lots. Where you don't feed the meter or get your credit card out and get the proper thing, you are accorded a substantial fine, and if you do it again, you get your car towed. This inevitably leads to another financially punitive measure that also encourages citizens to say: "Hey. Well, I don't have money to pay the meter or for the \$20 for parking. I'm going to take public transportation." This helps alleviate the use of our roads; it helps eliminate CO₂ emissions, all that sort of stuff. So there's good reason why the universities have such a tenacious parking authority that goes after violators in such a fashion because it's with a public purpose at hand.

This bill, speaking on the bill, ensures that those people not only continue to monitor the parking that is going on at the universities but keep on going on with their public policy purpose of trying to encourage young students and people who are coming to the university to get to the university on some form of public transportation.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak again on the bill and previously on the amendment. I look forward to hearing more comments and questions on this bill going forward.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you. I don't want to take up a lot of time in debating this bill; I just have one little concern. As you know, I don't drive very much, but being a downtown MLA, when I do have to drive, everywhere I go I have to use a parking meter because that's the way parking is downtown. There are these little creatures that exist in my world and probably in yours called parking fairies. As you're driving up to a meeting late and desperately praying that there will be an open parking spot right in front of the building that you need to go into, you look through your front windshield and start praying to the parking fairy that that spot will open up and, better yet, that it'll be plugged; there'll be time left on the meter. You can't do it every time, and you can't count that the parking fairy is going to come through for you, but it's always worth praying to the parking fairy.

So I just want to reassure any parking fairies that are out there, particularly the BASI fairy godmother parking fairy, that we don't mean any disrespect by this, but it has to be done. We're going to retire the BASI fairy godmother, who was looking over all of those

postsecondary institutions and enabling them to not be able to legally collect the fees. She can retire now because with the passage of this, they will be able to collect the fees and assign them and have dispute resolution and all the rest of it. But whenever I next drive a vehicle and I'm desperately praying to the parking fairies that that spot opens up right in front of the building that I need to be at, it doesn't mean that I've shown any disrespect by supporting this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Are there any others? The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: I, too, will be brief. I rise to tentatively support this bill and just raise a couple of concerns beforehand. Essentially, this whole notion of giving the universities the opportunity and the ability to collect their parking fees is important. And do you know what? It's possible that in saying this, I could actually sort of get myself in trouble because I, of course, have probably had various marks and things withheld from me for not necessarily having paid my parking fees in the most timely of manners.

Ms Blakeman: Library fines.

Ms Notley: Library fines. Absolutely. That was embarrassing. I still recall my mother being so irritated at me for not getting my diploma the day I was supposed to.

Anyway, all that being said, I do actually think that, I mean, this is a resource that universities have. Many universities are in central areas. I, frankly, think parking is something people should have to pay for. I think most of the people that are using parking in universities are people that can afford a vehicle, you know, when most of the students are actually relying on public transportation. Frankly, the more we can get people to rely on public transportation to get to universities the better. So as much as parking fees are desperately annoying, and I will undoubtedly fall victim to this repeatedly in the future, I think that it's an important thing to give universities the ability to collect these fees.

I raise some concern about the fact that this is a piece of legislation that seeks to retroactively create different legal rights. I will acknowledge that I've been unable to listen to all of the debate on this issue up to this point, so I'm not sure of the degree to which this has been fully canvassed by members of the Assembly up to this point. But I raise concerns about this because, you know, this seems like something fairly minor.

Mr. Hehr: I'm interested in this, how you're going to pull this off.

Ms Notley: How I'm going to make this all work?

Right now we're retroactively creating a right that did not exist up to this point. Right now it's parking fees, and we can all agree in principle on the public policy objective of that. You know, a decade ago it was the retroactive elimination of legal rights with respect to sterilization. You just never want to be going back in time to create or eliminate legal rights at a different time.

As I say, I'm raising the concern. That's where I will leave it at this point, but I certainly put the Legislature on notice that in future we'll take a look at this sort of retroactive application process with a great deal of scrutiny.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on the bill?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 23 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

5:10

Bill 16
Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving)
Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I know the Minister of Transportation, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, is astutely listening to my comments this afternoon with interest. With that in mind, I would like to say that I realize that my good friend Luc, who happens to be a constituent of mine, provided me with some interesting comments. He mentioned the comment: I realize that it is harder to fight tickets when there is no question of judgment. That's why many want the list of offences so that it reduces the burden of proof.

Now, let me articulate on that. As my good friend Luc, my constituent, had said: whenever you make penalties easier to levy, there is always a trade-off. And, particular to this issue, while in many ways we want to do things that make the jobs of law enforcement officials easier, we should also be vigorous in balancing out the rights and the freedoms of individuals and all Albertans.

In particular, I do have a real concern about pulling people over, as my good friend Luc said, and basically giving them tickets when they're not obviously putting anyone in danger. It made me pause for a moment as I listened to my constituent. We were having a coffee at the doughnut shop last weekend, actually, and in doing so, we paused to think: will this Bill 16 be a good bill? Will it help? Will it help families and drivers? Or is there a good reason to have the judgment of police officers involved in these things? I certainly value the judgment of police officers, especially when they've stopped someone else and are giving them a ticket as I drive by. But if the driver was not driving in a way that raises any suspicion, I'm reluctant to criminalize their behaviour because the issue of judgment does play a role there.

In many ways the Minister of Transportation perhaps should be considering a more prescriptive area to assist our law enforcement officers in, ultimately, the destination I think we all want to get to. That destination is safer highways, safer driving, and for those who have the privilege of having a driver's licence in Alberta – because it truly is a privilege to have a driver's licence and to use the roads and the highways and transportation devices that are provided.

Mr. Anderson: Unless you're the Transportation minister. Then it's a right.

Mr. Boutilier: So the question is: is this a privilege, or is it a right? Some may have a variety of views on this point, but if citizens are driving in a way that shows they are not being attentive enough, I'd like to have a ticket with demerits attached because that's a driving infraction that should be penalized.

Now, it's important to recognize that I'd like to provide some general qualified support. I recognize that there are people out there who are driving dangerously because they are too distracted by things they are doing in their cars. I think we've all seen examples of text messaging. It is, certainly in my judgment, absolutely the most extreme example. I'm mostly in favour of this law for that reason because we've had a personal experience, that I would like to share with you, and citizens have talked to me about this issue in my great constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo – you may not be aware, but it is the oil sands capital of the world – and I hope that any proposed law or bill will drastically reduce the frequency of that happening.

I want to use the example of the heavy equipment that travels through the oil sands capital. In the situation that we experienced, both my wife and I and also our three-year-old son, who was travelling in his car seat, properly secured, were almost killed by a driver who had been texting. In fact, we were in the intersection, and the vehicle basically did not see the red light and was coming through the intersection at quite an intense speed. I think all of us in this Assembly can agree that the safety of our families and our loved ones and the safety of all Albertans is foremost.

I would like to say today that I recognize that there are people out there who are driving dangerously. I'll even go so far as to say that my wife actually slapped me on the side of the head. Yes, she did. I was backing out of my driveway, and she hit me on the side of the head because I dared to pick up my cellphone at the time. I had to stop and put the car in park as the rear end of the car was over the sidewalk. I can only apologize to my wife and my son because it was fundamentally wrong. Actually, for anyone who has never seen the movie *Seven Pounds*, I think it is a wonderful example of scaring the living daylights out of anyone who does believe that it's okay to be doing certain things in terms of what took place in that movie, that I thought was really quite educational.

I want to thank my wife for slapping me on the side of the head and reminding me that I should not have been picking up my phone to hold the phone to my ear at the time when I was backing out of our driveway. It made me pause. I am once again learning from Gail and what she did, and I can only say that I hope others, if they are ever in the same situation, will learn quickly.

I would like to offer my general qualified support for the bill and also on behalf of my constituent Luc. He clearly indicates that he believes this is important because of situations that have taken place in the past.

Having said that, it was for me a teachable moment, and I will say and commit here that if this does become a law and is approved – and I encourage members to support this. I do believe in individual rights, but I also believe that we need to learn. I would ask all members of this Assembly here today: who, in fact, has felt distracted because they were texting or has used their cellphone and it distracted them from driving? I'm going to look now and ask: who will put up their hand and admit that they were distracted by texting? And to my good constituent – Luc is his name; that happens to be similar to the name of the Minister of Transportation. I think he spells it with a C not K-E. Having said that, who in here was ever distracted by a cellphone? Put up your hand now. I see other members putting up their hand.

When my wife hit me on the side of the head, it really was a teachable moment for me that I had to do better. I think this law, in fact, needs to be approved by this Assembly. We need to do this not only by the law, but the spirit of the law, which I do believe the Minister of Transportation is attempting to create. I tell that story as much as it is a personal story. I don't like getting hit on the side of my ear by my wife, but I tell the story because of the fact that she

said: Guy, stop. I had to put my car in park. Consequently, I do believe in natural law, and that was truly natural law. As much as this may be legislative law, natural law truly does work, and it trumps everything else.

5:20

I believe that the burden of proof – the more prescriptive we could be I think would be helpful. Overall, I do believe that we will have to examine very closely over the next few years, if this bill is approved, to see if it does improve road safety because there really is a trade-off in personal freedom, which, of course, we all enjoy. I also want to feel comfortable. Perhaps this law is just simply too blunt. I'm willing to give it the benefit of the doubt. If it turns out to be ineffective, which is one option, I'll certainly be looking to the Minister of Transportation to look for other alternatives to it, that he will not hesitate to revoke it and replace it with something that better addresses the problem in terms of the destination we all want to reach.

Now, at this point only time will tell if, in fact, we will reach that destination. To use transportation philosophy, you know, sometimes the journey itself is the destination. I do believe that the journey of not being allowed to text, not being allowed to be distracted because of the potential new law that comes forward is something that I will look at very closely.

I would ask that the Minister of Transportation, if this bill is supported in this Assembly, review the situation in a year's time to see the evidence. I hope he can come back and offer to the members of this Assembly concrete evidence. I actually sat in the PC caucus when this very discussion came up. I sat in the caucus when the Minister of Transportation was there. Clearly, in a question and answer I really wonder if, in fact, he believes that this bill will achieve the destination that we all hope will be the outcome in terms of the trade-offs of giving up personal freedom for something that will protect Albertans. Only time will tell, but I'm willing to give the Minister of Transportation and this Assembly my qualified support for this bill at this time.

When I go back and talk to Luc in my constituency – that's L-u-c – I'm going to be sharing with him that the Minister of Transportation was listening intently to my comments this afternoon. I see that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is nodding in agreement. I am going to say to him that qualified support is something that I offer. I would ask that the minister a year from now report back with the statistics so that we can be even more convinced that this bill was the right bill to make Alberta's highways safer.

Now, in making Alberta's highways safer, I do have other friendly advice, and that is, perhaps, to put some pavement on highway 63 going to the oil sands capital of the world since we did not get any pavement in the last two years.

Mr. Anderson: Highway safety. You can be distracted by the bumps on the road.

Mr. Boutilier: Highway safety. Well, one has to ask the question, you know, the detours, the incredible amount of – there is some work going on there, but we haven't seen any pavement in the last two years.

I see the member from – I think he's the Solicitor General. He wants to offer some comments. I would welcome them, but I'm only going to respond to intelligent comments at this point, so consequently I would only say that I will provide general qualified support at this time.

To the good folks up in Peace River country, I can only say a beautiful part of the country, I would strongly suggest that the

member get out and start door-knocking because he's going to require that when it comes to the next election.

Having said all of those things, I believe that I want to say that the Minister of Transportation is trying to reach a destination that is good for all Albertans and for my three-year-old son and for his sons, and I think that is to be applauded. As an opposition member, having served as an independent and served for 13 years with the PC government, I know the Minister of Transportation will do his level best, and I look forward to him reporting back to this Assembly in a year. Now, in a year's time, hopefully, he is still the Minister of Transportation and hasn't moved on to become the Premier. Having said that, I will say that I will look forward to his findings on trying to reach that destination of making Alberta's highways safer.

I can only apologize to my wife and my three-year-old son for being distracted on our driveway and not, I'm proud to say, on the highway to avoid any potential danger taking place. That's why this afternoon I offer my general qualified support, recognizing that there are people out there who are driving dangerously because they are too distracted by things they are doing in their cars. They are text messaging, which is absolutely the most extreme example of this. I'm pleased to say that many members of the House recognize that they, like me, have made mistakes when it comes to this. Fortunately for me it was only in my driveway, and thank God for my wife reminding me of what is safe versus what is not safe. I hope it will drastically reduce the frequency of what is taking place.

Mr. Chairman, I know my time is coming to a close.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, no. You've got lots of time.

Mr. Boutilier: As it turns out, I have a bit more time, so I will share with you, having said that, that maybe there should be a law about distracted seatmates in the Legislature. That would also be very helpful.

Some Hon. Members: Relevance.

Mr. Boutilier: The relevance of that is that it's important to keep your mind on the focus of the issue, and that is Bill 16.

Having said that, I give qualified support, and I thank the university students and others who also are very engaged in this. I want to say that earlier we were talking about the previous bill on parking, there being one or two members here who teach at the University of Alberta, and the issue of transportation is something that is so important. I'm giving the Minister of Transportation, one of the few ministers of the government I will give it to, the benefit of the doubt. There are a few others I would.

I hope that this bill will serve Albertans well if it's approved by this House. Only time will tell. Consequently, I look forward to him reporting back, and I'm sure the minister will commit to reporting back on statistics indicating that this will be a good bill if, in fact it is proclaimed. Only time will tell.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

5:30

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I made a couple of comments in second reading on this Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010. Now, I realize that there's a clause in there about distracted driving, but I'm really concerned that maybe in some areas this bill doesn't go far enough. I know it's trying to deal with the distractions, but there are some

other things that I think are going to yield probably even better results.

The one big thing is the attitude of drivers. Now, I'm just not sure how we would get at that when you see the way people will dodge in and out of traffic travelling faster than the speed limit. They cut you off; they seem to often think that if they put their signal light on, that gives them the right-of-way, those kinds of things. There's no defensive driving, and I believe that that should be a major part of the driver training that is provided by a number of different venues.

We had an interesting situation down at the Sundre high school about five years ago. There were three young people in the high school killed in a very short period of time, and the community got together trying to figure out: what can we do? Every one of them was a situation with speed, in one case alcohol. But the fact was that the kids, when they got behind the wheel, didn't realize the power of the weapon that they had in their hands at the time and abused that right of being able to drive.

I think that it is real interesting to take a close look at driver training. When you look at it, the organizations do a good job of teaching the rules of the road. They do a reasonable job of teaching an individual how to handle a vehicle, but unfortunately the cost of going to a simulator, for example, would be prohibitive. If we could do something like that, that certainly would give people the opportunity to realize how a vehicle reacts on ice, for example, or taking corners too fast, all of those sorts of activities that do lead to a lot of accidents. So the training side is the one area that I think we need to spend more time on.

The other areas that I mentioned earlier. We're getting an ever-increasing number of these real bright headlights. Now, if you drive on a two-lane highway as much as I do, they are a problem, and they're getting worse. To make matters worse, there are a lot of people with four-wheel drive vehicles that are jacking them way up. There's one in Rocky that I pulled up beside the other day just to see where those headlights are. The fact is that they were up higher than where we sit, so even if they had their dims on – well, actually, it's probably better if they didn't have their dims on because that's going to shine right into your face.

To make matters worse, they put those real bright lights in. I guess people call them fog lights. They're the ones below the headlights. Those you cannot adjust, so they're shining straight out into your face. Just the other evening I met one of those vehicles. You go through an area, then, where your eyes just simply cannot focus. You don't see anything. You hit a blind spot, and I think that is absolutely ridiculous.

Those vehicles that are pumped up like that: actually, what they're doing is lifting their centre of gravity. So they're probably even more difficult to control, particularly if you ever start to swerve or are going around a corner, because that centre of gravity is up very high. The interesting thing of it is that in most cases they did not put higher tires on the vehicle. The fact is that if they are trying to do it so that they can go through softer ground, it doesn't make any sense because their differential and the axles are still at the same height as the vehicle. The only way they could lift it higher would be to put higher rims on them, and that would get them up even worse.

I think we need to take a hard look at particularly the lights – actually, I think we should be passing some legislation to ban those fog lights, especially when they put the real bright lights in there – and, of course, like I mentioned earlier, the driver training.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It gives me a great deal of

pleasure to stand up and actually make a few comments on Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010. I had the honour of speaking in favour of the bill when the Member for Calgary-Hays first brought this forward in the Legislature. I think it was probably about a year and a half ago. I spoke in favour of it because of the fact that when he brought the bill forward, I supported it then, and I support it now.

At that time when I was debating, I spoke about some of the things that I had encountered as I drive highway 2 every week to fulfill my role as the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek. I was also at that particular time a member of the Progressive Conservative government and went through all the debate on this particular piece of legislation and the government not supporting this piece of legislation. So I am actually going to give them some credit by coming now and bringing this piece of legislation forward and recognizing the severity of the problem and the seriousness of it. You know, it disheartens me when I think about all of the accidents that have occurred and the time wasted not bringing this piece of legislation forward.

What I want to talk about, where I have some concerns, Mr. Chairman, is under section 115.4 when they talk about:

Subject to this section and the regulations made under section 115.5, no individual shall drive or operate a vehicle on a highway while engaged in an activity that distracts the individual from the operation of the vehicle, including but not limited to . . .

And then they talk about:

- (a) reading or viewing printed material,
- (b) writing, printing or sketching,

which makes perfect sense to me,

- (c) engaging in personal grooming or hygiene.

My spidey senses start going off when I read something like that. You know, you talk about clarity in legislation. For me one wonders what personal grooming or hygiene is. Hygiene can go any way. I mean, is it blowing your nose if you have to while driving down the highway? Is it putting some lip balm on while driving? To me it's just, you know, not clear enough.

Then they go on to say:

- (d) any other activity that may be prescribed in the regulations.

I have a big question mark by that. You know, what are they talking about? Any other activity? It could be a host of other things.

What I would like to have seen in this particular legislation, Mr. Chair, is letting our wonderful law enforcement agencies make those decisions without having all of these, one, two, three, four. I had the great privilege of being the Solicitor General several years ago and have a huge amount of respect for the law enforcement agencies – the police, the RCMP, the sheriffs – that work in this province on a daily basis under at times very, very life-threatening situations. You know, I think it's more important, as far as I'm concerned, when we start listing these, to let the law enforcement agencies make the decisions. Heather is driving down the highway. She decides to grab her lip balm and put it on her lips. Is that distracted driving?

5:40

I can tell you that, speaking on this particular piece of legislation, that the Member for Calgary-Hays brought forward, I can remember one time driving down the highway, and I passed a driver who had a coffee in one hand, had a cigarette in another hand, had a cell-phone, and still somehow managed to give me the birdie as I was driving. I thought: well, you know, you talk about octopuses; that definitely was an octopus when you can do all of those things at once.

Since this legislation was brought forward, I have paid particular attention to some of the things I watch and I see as people are

driving. Quite frankly, that is distracted driving when I'm watching what other people are doing to try and get an idea of what distracted driving is. I thought: "Geez, Heather. You know, you're looking at what other people are doing as distracted drivers, and you're watching to make sure so that you have some points in regard to what other people are doing to be driving distracted."

Mr. Chair, I've seen a host of things over the last few weeks when I've been driving down highway 2. I'm sure everybody in this Assembly can share what they consider a story. I mean, I'm sure my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore will elaborate about how he was driving and wished he had a video camera when he saw a colleague, not one of us but a colleague, driving down highway 2 – and I'll let him elaborate – with a cellphone in one hand, a pop in the other hand, and driving with their knees. I still have trouble actually trying to even visualize that concept.

Mr. Danyluk: If you were watching that closely, you must have been distracted yourself.

Mrs. Forsyth: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul had some comments to make on the distracted driving, so I'll look forward to him making his comments during this debate in the Legislature.

You know, social media is a wonderful tool. We saw what happened recently with the mayoral campaign and how he utilized the social media. I'm old, Mr. Chair, and I'm trying to get used to all this social media, this Facebook, this Twitter. So I thought: well, why don't we just engage the public on Bill 16? You put the message out on your Facebook saying: "Debating Bill 16. Give me your comments." I tweeted that, and I was overwhelmed at the comments that I got back from people. It's just an example that people are paying attention to what's happening in this Legislature. We provided a link, and I have comments that were posted on my Facebook. I had comments that were posted to me directly, and people say and ask all sorts of things. Here's one from one of the Facebook messages: "Truth is drivers are distracted just by driving, too many times looking at the scenery and not enough attention to what is going on on the road. The fewer distractions the better, especially on high-speed roadways like QE II." And that's where I see all of these distracted drivers when I'm driving.

We and I'm sure everybody in the House have received an e-mail from the students at the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta. They were doing a paper in regard to this particular piece of legislation. You know, they e-mailed, and they wanted to know, first of all, if we supported Bill 16, which we do. Then they went as far as to say: well, do you support hands-free cellphones? Well, Mr. Chair, one of the things that I've noticed when I've been driving is the people that are talking on their hands-free cell. It's quite amazing how all of a sudden when people are on hands-free, their hands are going, and they're talking like crazy on the phone. They've got this hands-free; they're pointing, and they're gesturing, and there are no hands on the wheel.

You know, I guess what I'm trying to say here is that we support this particular piece of legislation. I'm just speaking for myself on behalf of Calgary-Fish Creek because the constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek have overwhelmingly told me that they want me to support Bill 16.

The section that I refer to is under the prohibited activities, 115.4, where we talk about, as I explained earlier, reading or viewing printed material, writing, printing, engaging in personal grooming or hygiene, and any other activities that may be prescribed in the regulations. My questions, then, go to the minister about what is going to be included in the regulations. How does he determine what should be in there? Is it someone stopping at Tim Hortons, like

I do when I drive every week? I stop at Tim Hortons, and I get my coffee. I usually get my breakfast sandwich, or I get my bagel, and if I need to be in Edmonton for some event, I start driving. Now, am I distracted when I'm chomping on my bagel as I'm driving because I have one hand and I might be eating my bagel?

Again, Mr. Chair, who determines what a distracted driver is? In my mind, let's let the law enforcement agencies, the police in this province, that do an incredible job, determine what exactly a distracted driver is instead of having this in the legislation and saying: well, we believe that Heather is engaging in personal grooming or hygiene because she's driving down the highway trying to wipe her nose, maybe putting some lip balm on. Or, for example, I have a headache and I've decided that I'm going to drive, and I'm going to take two Tylenol.

I mean, you know, these are all things that we've done, Mr. Chair, and I'm not innocent. I'm one of those people that had to get everything done, talk on my cellphone when I had three hours of driving time. I'm sure there are not very many members in the Legislature that haven't done that, and I'll be one of the first to admit that I have done that and have now ordered my Bluetooth. If something happens where I have to take a call on an emergency, at least I'm reaching for the Bluetooth. I am conscientiously now driving up to Edmonton having the cellphone in my purse, leaving my cellphone in the purse, and really trying to break that particular habit.

To finish, Mr. Chair, I would like to hear what the Minister of Transportation is going to say when he talks about the prohibited activities. I know that we have an amendment that was received, which was about sections, I believe, that didn't have anything to do with 115.4, and maybe he can correct me. He put in an amendment to Bill 16, and it deals with the proposed section 115.1. It's all 115.1 and some of 115.2, and he's made some changes there.

You know, I always shake my head that when the government has staff and more staff and more staff and wonderful staff, I must say, that work for the government, far more staff than we would ever hope and dream for with our two little researchers, they can't bring a bill forward and get it right the first time.

I really have a great deal of respect for the Minister of Transportation, and I'm wondering why he has brought forward the amendments to Bill 16 that are dealing with 115.1 and why they haven't even looked at 115.4 because, quite frankly, Minister, this is the section that we're getting all the calls on, all the comments on.

I would love to have the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security maybe speak on behalf of the police, that he represents, to see what they have to say about this. I can tell you that the police officers that I've spoken to have said that this is far too restrictive. They would like the ability to make the determination in regard to what is a distracted driver and what isn't a distracted driver. It's something where I would like to hear, quite frankly, what the government has to say.

I will be supporting Bill 16. Hopefully, we'll be able to bring an amendment forward to maybe talk about the prohibited activities. My colleague from Calgary-Glenmore, I hope, is going to bring something forward, and we can look at that.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words I want to thank you.

5:50

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] I am enthused, very enthused.

This bill is a bit of a funny one. This is like a classic example of doing something for the purposes of looking like you're doing

something useful. I don't understand it, too. The Minister of Transportation has, I think, a good reputation for being someone who doesn't like government interference very much – let's put it that way – who doesn't like government ruling every aspect of our lives. That's why I was very surprised to see him in the end introduce this piece of legislation because it just doesn't seem like him at all. I'm just curious as to the reasons why he would do that.

You know, it's kind of like that vest. What was that bulletproof vest act that was passed by the Solicitor General and the Justice minister a while back on the vest registry? I'm trying to figure out, you know, why these more, I guess you could say, libertarian, don't-get-in-my-way types of people have all of a sudden decided that they want registries. They don't like gun registries, but they like bulletproof vest registries. They'd like protective vest registries. They now want officers on the street running around looking for people on cellphones, running around looking for people – who knows? – changing the dial, putting on whatever certain people put on in the car, eating, whatever.

It just seems like kind of a big-government bill. I mean, this is just common sense. We talk a lot about legislating common sense and how you just can't legislate common sense. You either have it or you don't. That's just the way it is. But you can't legislate it. You can't force people not to, you know, have one arm on a cellphone, one arm eating a hamburger, one leg trying to steer the stick shift, and one trying to steer the steering wheel. Have you ever tried that? I've never tried that. I mean, it's just so obvious.

One of the things, too, as we've talked with police officers about this, is that there is a little bit of a burden of evidence problem. For example, it's very difficult to prove that somebody is on a cellphone. It almost becomes a he-said-she-said thing. A police officer is actually going to probably need not just himself but his partner to see this. In other words, in order to really do this, unless there's an actual accident, you're probably going to need more than one person to see it happening.

I know this because it's like the seat belt law. I don't know if the hon. Housing and Urban Affairs minister has ever fought a seat belt ticket or been involved in a seat belt ticket case, but if he has, because I have, he'll know that it's very difficult for police to prove that, very difficult.

An Hon. Member: If it's not on camera.

Mr. Anderson: It is very difficult unless there are cameras – that's right – unless they get the camera out, unless they get the camera and they film. Then, of course, you're putting somebody out on the street for the purpose of filming seat belts or not using seat belts, whatever. I mean, it just seems like a complete waste of taxpayer resources and policing resources to be running around, "Oh, look, that person has a seat belt; that person doesn't have a seat belt," et cetera, et cetera. Unless you're going to bring . . .

The Acting Chair: I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the Committee of the Whole shall now rise and report.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 18. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 23. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, November 4, 2010

Issue 39

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 4, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, today I would like to introduce guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. There's one individual that I am absolutely, totally fascinated with. This man was born in 1923 in Saint John, New Brunswick. His name is Don Murphy, and I'd ask him to rise, please.

Don joined the Royal Canadian Navy volunteer reserve as a boy seaman before the onset of the Second World War. From 1942 till 1945 he was assigned to combined operations with the Royal Marines. His wartime record includes the fighting withdrawal from Burma in the Pacific, amphibious landings in North Africa and Sicily, a submarine raid on Norway, and the D-Day landings in Normandy. His decorations include the star for service from 1939 to 1945, the France and Germany Star, the Africa Star, the Pacific Star, the Canadian volunteer service medal with clasp, and the War Medal for service from 1939 to 1945. Upon demobilization in 1945 he studied hotel management and catering before embarking on a 30-year career in this field in Canada, particularly in the north during this period.

In 1975 Don joined the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires here in Edmonton and has held a variety of field and headquarters positions ever since. From 1993 until 2008 he worked here at the Legislature, usually the night shift, arriving at 11 or 12 and working until the morning. Then he would drive to his home in Morinville, where he and his wife live. Don is now 87 and still works full shifts at the Edmonton Garrison and attributes his longevity to the fact that he has never retired but, rather, has kept active, continuing to serve his country and his fellow countrymen. He plans to work until he turns a minimum of 90 or when his wife, Toni, says: enough is enough.

Joining Mr. Murphy, a man who absolutely fascinates me, is his spouse, Toni Murphy – I'd ask her to rise – and Colonel John Slater, chief executive officer of the Commissionaires of northern Alberta, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut; and Adriana Cavaliere, the executive assistant to Colonel Slater. Please welcome our guests, in particular our hero. [Standing ovation]

And all those who think retirement is an option, please see Mr. Murphy.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 15 students who are attending Norquest College. Of course, that is located in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and every one of those students lives up to that moniker of fabulous. They are joined today by their group leaders, Mrs. Carol

Spence and Ms Brenda Chwyl. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 45 students from Bow Valley College, which is located in my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo. They are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Susan Jolliffe and Ms Erin Holmes. I'm pleased to say that I've been in the Bow Valley College numerous times, where these individuals are taking social studies, and they're from all walks of life, all parts of the earth. I can tell you that it's an honour and a privilege to represent them and to go into their school. It's great to have them here. If we could have the traditional warm welcome of this House for our honoured guests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this House 91 friends of mine from the beautiful city of Airdrie: three teachers, seven parents, and 81 grade 9 students from my old school, George McDougall high school. I'd like to introduce their teachers really quickly: Mr. Scott Sharun and Mrs. Devon Sawby, who I went to school with. Her mother is now the trustee of Rocky View, and she was the former vice-principal. I was in her office all the time. Surprise, surprise.

Constable David Henry is also with them and parent helpers Mrs. Shannon Mauro, Mrs. Stacey Henn, Mrs. Danelle Richards, Mrs. Anna-Jane Warren, Mrs. Michelle Pirzek, Mr. Darren Buell, and Mrs. Sherri Koenig. I'd ask all of them and all of the students to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four very special guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask them to stand as I introduce them. Mr. Paul Grod is national president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Mr. Grod has led several election observer missions to Ukraine over the past five years. He recently travelled to Ukraine with Prime Minister Harper and was a member of the Governor General's delegation to Ukraine. The second one is Taras Pidzamecky, national president of the Ukrainian National Federation. Mr. Pidzamecky is also the chief executive officer and general counsel for the Ukrainian Credit Union. The third person is Olya Sheweli, president of the Council of Ukrainian Credit Unions of Canada. And the fourth is Daria Luciwi, national vice-president and president of the Alberta branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and chair of the Congress of Ukrainian Canadians, which is taking place, for the first time in 70 years, in Edmonton this weekend. I will be saying more about this in my member's statement later on. I would ask all my colleagues at the Legislature to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the president of the Edmonton Social Planning Council, Ken Stickland; the council's executive director, Susan

Morrissey; and also John Kolkman, their director of research. Many of you may remember John from when he was the research director for the Alberta NDP caucus. On behalf of our caucus and the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I'd like to take this opportunity to extend to all of them and everyone at the social planning council my sincere congratulations on the council's 70th anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent nonprofit social research organization. The council is an integral aspect of progressive social research in Edmonton and has done a great deal of great work for many people in our city. This is truly a landmark occasion for the ESPC and one well deserving of the acknowledgement and praise it has been receiving. I wish the Edmonton Social Planning Council, the board, and staff all the best.

Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly John Buterman. John is here today as my guest and is representing the Trans Equality Society of Alberta. The Trans Equality Society of Alberta, also known as TESA, was formed in the wake of Alberta Health Services' decision to delist funding for gender reassignment surgery, or sex reassignment surgery, in 2009. TESA's mission is to be a witness to and a voice for matters concerning transidentified Albertans. My guest was waiting right outside the gallery on my way in here and was to be seated in the public gallery. I would now ask John to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Remembrance Day

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time stands still for no man. These words we know to be true. One exception surely must be Remembrance Day. On that day and for those who observe, a minute of silence seems like an eternity. The quiet of the moment and the dignity that it gives to great and good sacrifices only gives a greater measure of effect.

On Remembrance Day we celebrate the unwavering will and commitment to humanity so freely given by the men and women of this nation in times of war. This includes the gallant men and women currently serving in our Canadian armed forces and, of course, our cherished veterans, to whom we pay even greater homage at this time of year. The peace and prosperity that our province and our country enjoys today is possible because of their sacrifices. Remembering their sacrifices, tremendous bravery, and commitment to duty helps us to better understand and appreciate our place in the world and how we can continue to build a better future.

Across the province Alberta schools will be honouring Veterans' Week and Remembrance Day with assemblies, poetry competitions, art displays, and guest speakers. Students will learn about Canadians who sacrificed and served their country in unimaginable circumstances so that we would have the opportunity to live full, secure, and peaceful lives. They will hear the stories of lives lived and lost and will be reminded that duty often comes with the highest price.

This is one of the great ways that we can live up to protect the freedoms that they have worked so tirelessly to protect. Mr. Speaker, we can give the highest honour to all of our veterans by continuing to value the freedom that they gave us, but we can also continue their work to secure a better future for our province and country.

To all members of our military, to their families past, present, and future: we thank you for all that you have given in the name of your country and in the name of duty. Their valour forged our country's identity. Their lives bought our freedom. Their sacrifices humble us and make us proud. We will remember them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Coach Don Phelps

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to reflect a little bit on the word "coach." As a former hockey player the word conjures up a pile of pleasant memories. To be a coach is a synonym for mentor and friend. It signifies trust, sacrifice, education, fair play, and the pursuit of excellence.

My coach, my mentor, my friend is Don Phelps. I had the honour and the privilege of playing for Don in the 1989-90 hockey season for the Alberta Junior Hockey League champion Calgary Canucks. Don has spent 60 years in hockey as a player, as a parent, as an executive, and, most importantly to me, as a coach. Don is both an exceptional strategist and knows how to motivate young athletes to do their best. Undoubtedly, Don could have coached in the Western Hockey League or the National Hockey League, but his commitment to both his community and his family was too important to him. He stayed for the sake of young, often misguided athletes like me, who benefited so tremendously from his support and guidance.

Don has coached over 2,000 hockey games in the course of his career, winning more than half of them. He has coached over a thousand boys, was named Calgary sportsman of the year, has travelled over 500,000 miles on buses, and has the most wins of any junior A coach in Canada. As if that weren't enough, he's running in the 2011 Boston Marathon. Don is the kind of community leader that inspires everyone around him to do more, to be more, to reach their own potential, and to help others to do the same.

Today I'd like to offer Don my personal thanks for the lessons he taught me. I'd also like to thank all the coaches all over this wonderful province who spend countless hours with kids helping them grow into responsible men and women.

For those who don't know it, this is Don's last season coaching the Calgary Canucks in the Alberta Junior Hockey League. However, as the season is still in its early stages, you can catch Don in hockey rinks from Fort McMurray to Lloydminster, from Sherwood Park to Canmore, from Brooks to Bonnyville.

Thanks, Don, and thanks to all the coaches and mentors out there. You're all champs in my book.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Ukrainian Canadian Triennial Congress

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the 23rd Triennial Congress of Ukrainian Canadians, that will be held this coming weekend in Edmonton. This is only the second time this conference will be held outside of Winnipeg in the 70 years since it began.

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress was founded by fraternal organizations established by early settlers, including the Ukrainian

Catholic Brotherhood and the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League. The congress is a national organization representing the Ukrainian-Canadian community. The UCC has evolved into a leadership position representing the Ukrainian community to people and the government in Canada.

Ukrainian organizations in Canada realized long ago the importance of the concept of multiculturalism. Perhaps one of the most outstanding contributions Ukrainian-Canadians have made to the wider culture of Canada is the concept of multiculturalism, which was promoted as early as 1964 by Senator Paul Yuzyk. Ukrainian-Canadians have developed their own culture in Canada showcasing world-class Ukrainian dancers, singers, and cultural groups, including performing and fine arts.

The Ukrainian community has traditionally regarded the retention of the native language as key to the preservation of its heritage and identity. For a number of years Ukrainian was kept out of the school curriculum, until the 1960s, when the Ukrainian language returned to the public schools in the prairie provinces and later in Ontario.

The conference is entitled Honouring the Past, Inspiring the Future and will feature dignitaries such as the Canadian ambassador to Ukraine, Daniel Caron, and the Ukrainian ambassador to Canada, Dr. Ihor Ostash. The congress will celebrate both the 70th anniversary of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress in addition to the 120th anniversary of Ukrainians in Canada. It will also serve as a forum to develop the vision and mandate for the Ukrainian-Canadian community in the near future. There will be three full days for delegates and participants to connect with other members of the Ukrainian-Canadian community. The Shevchenko medal, the highest form of recognition granted by the congress, will also be presented.

Many members of the House are Ukrainian, and this event is undoubtedly an important one as it strengthens the ties many Albertans have with their heritage.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. members of this Assembly to join me in welcoming the Ukrainian Canadian Congress for the first time to Edmonton. Thank you. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Calgary-North Hill Fundraiser

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last June the Calgary-North Hill PC Association held a fundraiser at the Calgary Vipers baseball game. In conjunction, I decided it would be a great opportunity to raise funds for two charities, KidSport Calgary and the Art Smith amateur sports legacy endowment fund.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the generosity of community members and organizations, hon. members of this House, and the Calgary Vipers, all of whom either donated silent auction items, bid on them, or made cash donations, we raised \$3,326. I'm sure this money will be appropriately and effectively used by these two charities to enhance amateur sport opportunities for all Calgarians.

I want to thank the Calgary Vipers' president, John Conrad, for his willingness to be involved in this event. Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Vipers provide families in southern Alberta with affordable and quality entertainment throughout the spring and summer months. I would encourage all members of this House and all Albertans to pick out a day next summer and head down to the ballpark to catch a game either with the Calgary Vipers or the Edmonton Capitals.

I would also be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't take this opportunity to congratulate Vipers pitcher Brant Stickel, who hails from Veteran, Alberta. Brant is a great success story for the Alberta baseball community, having played four years for the University of Calgary Dinos baseball program. This past spring he was invited to

try out for the Calgary Vipers, and Brant took full advantage of this opportunity and parlayed it into having his contract purchased just a couple of weeks ago by one of the most storied professional sports franchises, the Los Angeles Dodgers.

I want to recognize all that the Calgary Vipers and the University of Calgary Dinos baseball program do for young Albertans who are passionate about baseball and who aspire to pursue their passion at the interscholastic or professional level. Without their existence the story of Brant Stickel would be nearly impossible.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. ministers of Tourism, Parks and Recreation and Culture and Community Spirit for their presence at the event. Although he was not there, I also would like to thank the Minister of Environment for such great weather that evening.

Thank you very much.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services Response Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's emergency room crisis is also an EMS crisis, and we're hearing from paramedics. A paramedic that takes a patient to the emergency room must stay with their patient until he finally gets admitted. That means that for every paramedic that's tied up in an overcrowded emergency room, there's one less EMS unit on the road to respond to life-and-death emergencies. To the health minister: given that the time paramedics in Edmonton are spending in emergency rooms has increased to an hour and a half in the last 12 weeks, how much longer are the people of Edmonton now waiting in their lodges or homes for an ambulance?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the issues related to EMS providers are symptomatic of larger issues that we've discussed in this House and that I discussed with doctors a week or so ago. However, I am happy to tell people that whereas the September average for people admitted into emergency waiting for an overnight bed was 63, last week it came down to 56, and today it's down to 49 over five hospitals in Calgary alone.

Dr. Swann: An hour and a half of EMS time waiting in emergency is not efficient use of our health care resources. Surely, you can do something about that. The problem is not limited to Edmonton; it's throughout the province. We're backed up because of a bed and nursing shortage, with growing red alerts, meaning that at certain times no ambulance is available to respond to a 911 call. How many red alerts in the last six months, Mr. Health Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the confirmed number, but I believe there was something like 10 hours' worth of red alerts since the beginning of this year. I'll have to verify that number because I probably got it from the same source the hon. member did.

But what's important to know here is that we have opened at least 70 new beds in acute-care facilities in Calgary and approximately 70 new beds in acute-care facilities in Edmonton just in the last few months, not including continuing care in the community.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister is so confident that he's making progress with the crisis, why are the EMS response times not reported to the public?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is a list that's available on the AHS website. It reports information related to this issue, and I would encourage the hon. member to please have a look at it.

Secondly, I'll be talking with the emergency room docs again tomorrow. We're having a little telephone chat, and I'll get some fresher information from them. I think the strategy is in place. There is a plan, and it is working.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Cancer Services in Calgary

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The health minister is frantically running from crisis to crisis, forgetting that he also needs to plan for the future. Yesterday the minister said that he's looking at Calgary's need for cancer care. Well, the minister has been looking for years. To the same minister: the need for this expansion has been clear for five years, so what more does the minister need to know to act?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I haven't been looking for years. I've only been in the position for nine months. It might be fair to say that I've been looking at it for months – that would be true – but certainly not years, so please let's not exaggerate with a lot of falsehood here.

The important thing is that there is a plan that is being developed right now. Alberta Health Services is working with Alberta Health and Wellness on a good, provincial-wide strategy to ensure timely care and faster access to cancer care. That discussion and those meetings are going on right now, Mr. Speaker, and it will culminate with a very good plan.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services gave the minister their capital submission seven months ago. What is the minister's excuse for not yet having an Edmonton and Calgary capital plan finalized?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday and I'll indicate again today that we're working on the province-wide cancer strategy, and as part of that province-wide cancer strategy it's important to not only announce that new facilities will be built but to also ensure that we have the financial resources to staff them, to recruit for them, to pay for the operating. That's a fundamental part of our government's accountability.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it looks like it's going to be 2011 before we have the 2010 capital plan, or will the minister commit to providing that plan while the House is sitting?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's put this in perspective. We have over 1,000 health facility capital infrastructure projects on the books right now, totalling over \$5 billion, so please don't tell me that we're not doing anything because we are.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Foreign Investments in Alberta

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the finance minister. Yesterday the federal government made an unexpected decision. It did not approve the takeover bid for Saskatchewan's Potash Corporation. As the finance minister said

yesterday, Alberta's Premier came out publicly and vocally in support of Saskatchewan's Premier in opposing the takeover. On the other hand, the minister of international relations talked about Alberta's long-standing commitment to a barrier-free trading environment. This administration is sending mixed messages. To the minister: who are Alberta businesses and foreign investors supposed to be listening to? The Premier, the minister of finance, or the minister of international relations?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd repeat again today that I congratulate our leader, the Premier, for standing up for provincial rights, standing up for resource ownership by the people of every province, including Quebec. Quebec defended Saskatchewan as well. So let's hear it for Alberta standing side by side with Saskatchewan.

Dr. Swann: The Premier has taken the position that the resources of Saskatchewan have to be protected. Could the minister explain where this government stands on protecting Alberta's resources? Where does this government draw the line between being open for business and giving away the store?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition says that they're mixed messages. The reason there are several different tiers of the message, sir, is that the Alberta petroleum and gas economy is completely different than the Saskatchewan resource. There's one source of potash there, dominated by one company. In Alberta you have an open oil and gas economy with multiple ownership by Canadian-based firms with U.S. investment. Direct foreign investment is an important part of the success of this province's economy.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, foreign governments are investing in Alberta: South Korea, United Arab Emirates, China. Foreign governments are not businesses. They are not subject to disclosure. They sometimes hoard resources, as in the case of China and the rare earth minerals. China also ranks quite highly on the corruption perception index. Could the minister tell the Assembly in what circumstances Alberta would oppose investment by foreign governments?

Ms Blakeman: Oh, he passed it off. Look at that. You didn't want to take that one, did you?

Mr. Horner: Well, contrary to what the chirping is over there, Mr. Speaker, there was no pass-off of the question.

In fact, what the hon. member is talking about is what the Premier's position is on this. On behalf of the Premier I'd like to reiterate that we stood up for our fellow partners in the New West Partnership. We stood up for fellow partners across this province about the ownership of these resources. In Alberta we have a very diversified resource; we have a very diversified investment in that resource. Some of them are Crown corporations invested in our province. I'm sure the hon. member would probably like to have the debate about whether or not we should be investing in them as well. Perhaps we'll have that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health has become the Minister of No Answers. His statements have gone from meaningless to downright confusing. Today he tells the

Calgary Herald that he doesn't see a lot of new things in our Wildrose health plan. To the minister of health: given that it's quite obvious your government doesn't have an independent health ombudsman like the Wildrose, medical savings accounts and publicly disclosed wait times like the Wildrose, a kinship palliative care program and decentralized service like the Wildrose, how can you say, Mr. Minister, that there is nothing new?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is: because there isn't anything new, other than some musings about privatization. They want public funding to follow patients. We already are doing activity-based funding models in continuing care. At least, they're being looked at. They talked about hiring more front-line staff. I can tell you that our physician head count grew by 23.1 per cent just within the last few years. I can tell you that we're hiring 1,100 new nurses, and I could go on with that, so that's not new. They call it a health ombudsman; our act calls it a health advocate. That's nothing new.

Mr. Boutilier: Once a Liberal, Gene, always a Liberal. He gives us no answer.

To the minister: when you say that there is nothing new in our Wildrose health plan, is it because your government has seen and ignored these proposals in the Mazankowski report, the Graydon report, the Kirby report, all of which are collecting dust on this minister's desk?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

2:00

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I could hardly understand a word being said because the member himself was trying to shut down his own colleagues, and that's unfortunate. I'm very proud to be a member of the PC caucus. I've run three times as a PC member, and I have the full support of my constituents.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the nonanswer, I'll ask the Minister of Infrastructure, who may actually give a straight answer. In your press release, which I have here and which I'll table, on June 15 you confirmed a hundred-bed long-term care facility for my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, and I thank you, sir. Yesterday the minister of health in this House contradicted you, bragging about only a 48-bed. To the minister: can you clarify this confusion? Has the minister of health cut the number of beds in half, or is he still just simply confused?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, hon. member. I do want to say to you that it is a hundred spaces in Fort McMurray. Mr. Speaker, this government has invested \$13.8 million in Fort McMurray, ensuring that we do have a hundred beds, which include long-term care beds and affordable supportive beds. The process now is in the RFP. We have it down to three consultants, and we hope that that consultant will be chosen by the end of the year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It was very interesting to hear the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo criticize the minister of health for being a floor crosser.

Telus Consumer Health Platform

Mr. Mason: Telus has announced plans to market a new high-tech electronic medical records system. Presumably, Alberta Health will be an important target market. Can the minister of health tell us whether or not he has had any discussion with Telus about this new electronic medical records system or any other product or service marketed by Telus to Alberta Health or to Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Does the minister feel that his acceptance of Telus's generous gift to him, specifically a weekend at a golf resort, should disqualify him from considering Telus for future contracts with his department?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated, I flew in on a Sunday night. I spent a few hours there on Monday morning. I flew straight back. I spoke about possibly getting somebody to come out here and help talk about physical activity because the night before I had spoken with Gary Player and he, unfortunately, wasn't available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In order to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest on future contracts between his department and Telus, will the minister agree to pay Telus back the entire cost of this generous gift, and if not, why not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's get this into perspective here. There was a hotel room, valued at something like 200 bucks or 2 and a quarter or something, and nine holes of golf, which was valued at about 140 bucks or 150 bucks. It's within that \$400 range or very close to it. I just felt that it was important to report it in the openness and transparency mode.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Poverty Reduction Strategy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear about an overburdened health care system, and now we hear that Alberta has the third-highest high school dropout rate in the country. It's well documented that those individuals unfortunate enough to be living in poverty are more likely to visit our hospitals and more likely to drop out of high school. Last month when the Standing Committee on the Economy met, I proposed that along with increasing the minimum wage, the province should recognize the need for a poverty reduction strategy, which was unanimously agreed to by the committee members. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: has the minister had a chance to review those recommendations yet?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, yes, I have had a chance to look at the documents. I will be reporting in due course. I appreciate the member raising this particular issue; it is an important issue. I will be reporting not only to the member but to the House in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that individuals who

break the poverty cycle are less likely to get sick, to drop out of school, to rely on government services such as employment insurance and given that these same individuals are more likely to pursue a postsecondary education, find long-term employment, and invest their time in community involvement, not to mention contribute taxes whereas before they were a destination for tax dollars, is the minister aware that financially it is actually less expensive to make an initial investment to bring an individual out of poverty than it is to leave them in poverty?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, a very similar question to those before to my colleague in Health. The fact of the matter is that this province has a poverty reduction strategy. We simply don't call it that. In a nutshell our poverty reduction strategy is employment. We have many programs that lead Albertans towards employment. Frankly, that member would be very hard-pressed to find Albertans who want to remain on government programs and who don't want to be employed. Do we have a strategy? Yes, we do. We have 59 offices that provide support to Albertans. That all leads towards employment. If this member insinuates that we should be providing . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, employment is a key part of any good poverty reduction strategy, but it is just one key factor out of perhaps 10 or 12. Will the minister commit to engaging in broad-based public consultations involving all sectors of Alberta's society – business, the not-for-profit sector, the faith community, and on and on, especially people experiencing poverty – to create a poverty reduction strategy, much the same as was done in creating the various 10-year plans to end homelessness in and around this province?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, again, the member is behind the eight ball. I'm the one who reviewed the low-income benefits and literally met with thousands of recipients of low-income benefits. Very recently I met with municipal leaders who are engaging in addressing low-income issues in their municipalities. The fact of the matter is that I will be reviewing the report of the legislative committee. I will be making an announcement on minimum wage. If the member is only interested in my announcing a name of a strategy that already exists, I find that pointless. We have strategies in place under a different name.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Wait Times for Cancer Treatment

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week in question period some opposition members alleged that \$27 million in federal funding tied to cancer wait times is at risk of being lost. This accusation alarmed me, and quite frankly it scared some of my constituents because we've all been touched by cancer, and we know how important every single dollar is in going to fight cancer. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why are we not providing Ottawa with the information they require regarding wait times for cancer treatment?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely false to think that we're not. I know that opposition members tried to make an issue out of this. They were absolutely, completely wrong. There

has been no lapse and no failure on the part of the Alberta government or on the part of Alberta Health and Wellness or Health Services, for that matter, regarding any required reporting of cancer wait times. That's all there. The official monitor of wait times is CIHI, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, and we have supplied them with the data required.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I want to confirm that the \$27 million provided in federal funding is not at risk, then, that we're meeting any contractual agreement.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you with great assurance that the \$27 million referred to is not at any risk. It was actually a part of a larger sum of money, \$62 million, that was received as part of an agreement we have with the federal government. We are in full compliance with the cancer piece. There is absolutely no risk of us losing that \$27 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then I'm wondering if the minister can explain what our wait times look like right now. What measures is the department undertaking to improve cancer wait times?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, there will be a province-wide strategy coming forward, which I referred to earlier. But let's not lose sight of what has already happened here. We have already opened the radiation therapy corridor in Lethbridge. We broke ground on the one that's coming forward in Red Deer, and we have another commitment as part of the 500-plus million dollar project up in Grande Prairie, where that new hospital will have a radiation therapy corridor there as well. So there is a lot that's going on to help address the situation.

Legal Aid

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has jeopardized the section 10 Charter rights of Albertans through cuts to legal aid funding. The president of Alberta's Criminal Trial Lawyers Association believes that changes to legal aid have created, and I quote, two-tiered justice where the disadvantaged cannot protect their rights when others can; this is a disgrace. End of quote. Don't you agree that this situation is disgraceful?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can only say that the question does sound a little familiar. I think perhaps we had this discussion last week in the House. I want to make it perfectly clear that the provincial government has not cut legal aid funding. We've maintained our commitment to legal aid. We ensure that everyone who needs to have legal representation in court has that. Courts are fully aware of what our obligation is. Courts are certainly able to direct us to do something differently. They have not done that. We are completely confident that we're providing the support that we need to provide in this province.

2:10

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what I'm hearing. In this 2009 review Legal Aid Alberta reported that the judiciary, the Crown, community service agencies, and the private bar all felt that further funding reductions to legal aid result in higher costs to the justice system. Are all these people wrong?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, that may very well be the case, but as I have said in this House six or seven times in the past two weeks, we have not reduced funding to legal aid.

Mr. Hehr: To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Albertans receiving aid already live beneath the poverty line, and now they have to pay extra for courtroom assistance. Does this not shock the conscience of the minister?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that we do have a legal aid program that many of my aged clients can access. I'm not aware of a situation that when an aged client is in need of supports, those supports are not available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Electricity Transmission Line Compensation

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Land values vary greatly from one end of this province to the other, and many landowners don't feel that one price fits all situations regarding compensation for electricity transmission installations on their property. To the Minister of Energy: is there going to be recognition of the varying market values for land taken into account when determining compensation for these proposed transmission lines?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's very important to point out to the House that the government of Alberta is not involved in the negotiations relative to the siting of lines. It's a negotiation between the transmission line proponents and the landowner. I've had the opportunity in the last couple of weeks to have discussions on the two north-south projects with both ATCO and AltaLink, and it's my understanding that those negotiations are going very well.

Mr. Marz: Well, I'm getting a bit of a different story, Mr. Speaker. My reported compensation offerings still don't compare with compensation already established for other industrial installations such as oil and gas. So what options do landowners have if they're not satisfied with what they're being offered by companies like AltaLink, other than just not signing an agreement?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that you're always going to have situations where there may be disagreements on what the value of the land is, but it's my understanding that the amount that is being offered has substantially increased from previous negotiations. I guess the thing we always have to remember is that there is a balance because those costs are put back into the rate base through the Alberta Utilities Commission to consumers.

To specifically answer the question, there is the Surface Rights Board, which falls under the purview of my colleague. That is the option when you can't reach agreement.

Mr. Marz: My last question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Mr. Speaker, when you start out with next to nothing, a substantial increase is still next to nothing. Does the Surface Rights Board use different criteria in determining compensation for transmission towers than they do for well sites even though they occupy and have similar effects on the land? If so, why?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the Surface Rights Board does not distinguish between power transmission lines, well sites, or any other use with respect to dealing with compensa-

tion issues in front of them on the right-of-entry order. The board makes its decisions on compensation in accordance with the Surface Rights Act, and it's based on evidence and argument presented by the parties on each specific case.

Violence in the Somali Community

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Somali community has been caught in a deadly crossfire. The community has lost 30 young men to gun violence since 2005. Little help has been forthcoming. To the Solicitor General. Alberta ranks 12th out of 13 among provinces and territories in police officers per capita. Is this ongoing violence towards members of the Somali community a result of the province's failure to provide adequate policing?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, no, it's not as a result of our failure to provide adequate policing; it's a result of gang activity. If you include the spectrum of law enforcement that we use in this province, we do not, in fact, rank the way the hon. member points out. If you've noticed the recently released crime statistics, Alberta's crime rates are going down. We are having an impact. We're going to keep going.

Mr. Hehr: To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Most of these murders are unsolved. In the few cases that are going ahead, witnesses are too frightened to testify. This Assembly passed the new Witness Security Act in April. When will this act be proclaimed and the protection for witnesses put in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we know in this situation through our meetings with the Somali community and the work that we have done under our safe communities initiative, these are very complicated cases to investigate. We know from what we've heard from police services who are investigating crimes that it is sometimes difficult in gang-related homicides to get people to come forward to testify. We know that there are systems in place within municipalities to ensure that if victims do want to come forward, if witnesses want to come forward, there is the opportunity for them to do that and to be protected in the course of the investigation. We wish the police success with their investigation.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Mr. Speaker, the Somali community has called on the Alberta government to form a task force to find ways to solve the problem and prevent more deaths. The answer: it would be too expensive; it would be too long. The cost in lives has been too expensive, and the deaths have been going on too long. Will the minister finally appoint the task force that this community has been asking for?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have had discussions with people in the Somali community across this province about some very difficult things that are happening in that community. The answer is not that it's too expensive or too long. The answer is that we in this province believe in safe communities. We partner with our police, we partner with community leaders, and we ensure that everything is in place to make sure that people can live safe lives. Unfortunately, things happen. We will ensure that we continue to work in partnership to support community efforts, to deal with diversion programs, to ensure that there are mentorship programs so that people don't make wrong choices.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Affordable Housing for Rural Alberta

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of housing has been all over the news in the last little while, a month or so, cutting ribbons, announcing affordable housing projects but all in big cities. It appears to me that this minister does not recognize the dramatic shortage of affordable housing in rural Alberta. With no plan for rural Alberta what will this minister say to the people in my area who cannot afford housing? Move to Edmonton? Move to Calgary? I'd like an answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first thank the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for that question, but at the same time she can actually look at where we have been. We've actually been from Lethbridge to Fort McMurray, from Edson to Vermilion, and everywhere in between. In fact, there are about 8,800 affordable housing units pursuant to the Premier's plan that have been built. About a quarter, 2,200, involve housing in rural Alberta. I'm very proud that we have a cost per door of about \$97,500, and we have been able to find a 19 per cent savings in our budget this year.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge, Fort McMurray, et cetera, do not qualify as rural Alberta. To the same minister: how can you assure this House that the RFPs that you will be providing for those opportunities are for developers in rural Alberta, giving them the same opportunity as those in big cities like Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I get calls from this side of the House to do the right thing. Well, we are doing the right thing. As part of our RFP about one-third of our RFP applications this year have been outside the province's seven major centres. Some of the qualities include sustainability, the need for the project. But, most importantly, affordable housing must be affordable for both the taxpayer and the client.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, the RFP isn't enough to address the shortage of housing in rural Alberta, like my constituency, and this minister knows it because we've spoken. What other options can this minister of housing provide for my constituents rather than just an RFP that takes too long to build and doesn't even provide enough support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As this member knows from conversations that we've had, we have an RFP, but we also have a capital funding program. I give this House a bit of an example: 5,100 of 14,000 seniors' self-contained units, again part of our capital funding program; 1,465 of 10,000 community housing units. Again, this is in the four corners of the province on a per capita basis. But I remind this member that it's a balance between individual responsibility and what we can provide as a government because we're dealing with taxpayers' dollars here.

2:20 Attendance at Remembrance Day Ceremonies

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, next week MLAs in this House have the opportunity to participate in local Remembrance Day ceremonies. In my view, these opportunities to remember those who paid the ultimate price for our freedom and prosperity are vital to our national and provincial fabric on several levels. Unfortunately, not every Albertan has the opportunity to take part in these events because of conflicts with their employment. To the Minister of Service Alberta: is this government willing to legally ensure that every Albertan can attend a Remembrance Day ceremony if they so choose?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to attending Remembrance Day ceremonies, in many cases most employers will let their employees go, and I'm just a little bit confused as to where this question is coming from.

Mr. Anderson: Well, to be clear, there are provinces that have designated Remembrance Day as a statutory holiday or prohibit stores from opening during that morning. That's not what I'm asking for. I'm asking the minister: just as we allow people a mandatory period of time to vote on election day if they choose, would the government be willing to do the same thing for employees wishing to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to that request, if there's any particular situations that we need to be aware of as a government, we're more than happy to look into them. Any services like that are open to the public, and we always encourage everyone to go if they can attend.

Mr. Anderson: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration looks like he'd like to answer this question. Tell us: would you like to look into this and see if there's a way that we can allow people who want to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies to attend them when they otherwise wouldn't be able to, just like we do with voting?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the reason I'm pointing it out here is because if the member is asking a question, he might as well know whom he should be asking the question to. Our employment standards legislation right now does not designate Remembrance Day as a holiday; however, I have to tell you that we are not receiving any complaints from Albertans advising us that employers are not allowing them to go and participate in this holiday. If this was a problem and if employees definitely would be raising that as an issue, we would look at it, but at this point it doesn't appear to be an issue other than in that caucus.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of investing in postsecondary education, this government's only solution for students in institutions is piling on debt. Nonrepayable financial assistance widens access and encourages students to finish, but in

Alberta the ratio of loans to bursaries is 14 to 1. The government-imposed debt craze is spreading to institutions as the University of Calgary has sunk into a \$47 million deficit. To the minister of advanced education: with student loan rates up by one-fourth and projected to increase another 20 per cent next year . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting that the hon. member says that we're not investing in postsecondary. I can tell you that in the roughly four years that I've been the minister of this department, we have already created more than 14,000 new seats for new access for students.

An Hon. Member: I didn't hear that. How many?

Mr. Horner: More than 14,000. Close to 15,000.

Indeed, our capital plan continues because a lot of the construction is still ongoing. We will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker, broadening the base of our support, utilizing all of the tools in our tool box, which includes bursaries and scholarships. Frankly, I would stack our scholarship program up against any other province in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate the creation of seats. Absolutely necessary. However, the attendance is a problem. How is Alberta going to raise its 14 per cent, subpar postsecondary participation rate when the only option is debt, and the most debt-averse students, those with low incomes and from rural areas, are the ones we need to reach? How are we going to help them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would challenge the hon. member and his research that, simply, student loans are the only deterrent to raising our participation rates in postsecondary. There is a list of items that come into play, the economy being one, where students are perhaps going out into the workforce and then coming back. One of the things that we've noticed is that the average age of our students is actually going higher because they're going out, getting some dollars in their pockets, coming back into our system, and we have to be responding to that kind of reality.

Mr. Chase: Well, the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that it's getting harder to go to university full-time because it's unaffordable. If massive layoffs, tuition hikes, and extra fees couldn't stop our second-largest university from sliding into a deficit, isn't this a sign that cuts to postsecondary operating grants have gone too far?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is referencing the University of Calgary's current deficit situation as was reported in the Auditor General's report, as has been recently reported in the media. We recognize that the University of Calgary is going through some difficult financial times, and the management there is taking the reins to create a new system of accountability within their system. They are tackling the problem with vigour. We're supporting them in every way possible, which means they may have to carry a deficit for a small period of time. We're going to support our university, not criticize it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Highway 63

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Numerous Albertans use highway 63, widely regarded as a busy and dangerous highway, yet some constituents claim that there does not seem to be too much activity happening with respect to twinning that highway. My questions are for the Minister of Transportation. Can he please explain why more work is not being done on the highway when there are so many safety concerns?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, although the collision rate on highway 63 is below the provincial average, one collision is still too many, as far as I'm concerned. We have and will continue to make improvements to this highway to help safety. Safety is everyone's concern. Twinning a highway plays a role in the safety plan, but we all have a role to play in making our highways safe.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments, but I don't think the minister answered the question. Could the minister explain why more work was not done on highway 63 this year?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to tell Albertans exactly what we're doing on highway 63, and it's a significant investment. This government invested \$147 million on highway 63 this year, and the federal government is also providing funding. [interjection] If the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo would actually quit his yipping and listen for a minute, he might learn something about his riding. Twinning north of Wandering River . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll let the minister take a breath while I ask the next question here. I want to ask the minister about the bridge in Fort McMurray. I know constituents driving in Fort McMurray are curious about its status as it looks like it's finished but it's not open yet. Can the minister tell us what the status is on that bridge and when it'll be commissioned?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. The bridge does look like it's finished, but there has to be a realignment made there for the highway to connect to that bridge. We also have to move some of the utilities and different things from the existing bridges. But I'd like that hon. member to know that construction is being done on time. That bridge will open in 2011.

To answer a little bit of his last question, Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the hon. member that of the \$147 million we invested this year, we did some twinning north of Wandering River.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Fort Chipewyan Health Research Agreement

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This week the Minister of Aboriginal Relations has faced a few questions, but rather than answering, he's decided to duck and cover. The First Nations and Métis people in Alberta deserve better, so I'm going to ask a question again to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Does the minister think it's his responsibility to publicly advocate on issues like health and safe drinking water for the First Nations and Métis people in Fort Chip? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government acknowledges the concerns and frustrations of the people of the Fort Chip area, and we remain totally committed to working with that community, with the chiefs up in that area to resolve a number of their issues. I feel as a minister that I have a duty to listen to their concerns and to bring them to my caucus to inform my caucus of the issues up in that area. That is what I feel is my role as the minister.

Dr. Taft: Well, the minister of health's and the Premier's names are all over the correspondence with the chief in reference to the Fort Chip health study. Given this Minister of Aboriginal Relations has claimed to play a central role in these negotiations, why is this minister mysteriously absent from correspondence on this issue?

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not the truth. This letter of intent that we're trying to get signed up in the Fort Chip area has my signature right on that document, so I'm very much involved with the issues up in that community.

Thank you.

Dr. Taft: Well, I'd like him to table that, then. That would be very helpful. I'm sure you'd agree, Mr. Speaker.

Why is this minister ignoring requests for a clear plan on how the health study will be done and instead, as he says, merely providing advice regarding a letter of intent?

2:30

Mr. Webber: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a physicians' working group up in the area right now talking to the community, and we're developing some type of community health study. Yes, some type of community health study. The options were presented to the Nunee health board in Fort Chip in August.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

High-speed Internet Service for Rural Alberta

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been way too many reports generated over the last number of years regarding Internet connectivity or, in the case of Whitecourt-St. Anne, the lack of it. In 2009 the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties brought forth a report recommending an increase in high-speed connectivity in rural Alberta, and this year similar recommendations were being presented by the Alberta Economic Development Authority. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Ma'am, what are you doing to help this cause in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is fully committed to ensuring that Albertans have access to high-speed Internet wherever they live. We know the SuperNet has built the fibre, the infrastructure to get that going, but we are hearing about challenges in many other parts of Alberta. This past summer Service Alberta issued a request for information, asking industry to help identify the best ways to address the challenges for unserved and underserved areas of Alberta, and we are reviewing that as we speak.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. To the same minister. I don't need any more reports, and I don't need any more promises. I just need to know when you're going to fix this for the remaining mile in rural Alberta. There's 30 per cent of us that have no Internet service to our homes.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it's about 34 per cent that do not have access to Internet service. Currently we are looking at the strategy and moving forward. Once we have reviewed the industry responses to the request for information, of which there are many, we fully intend to move towards a request for proposal and ensure that Albertans have access to high-speed Internet. This will be done within two years of awarding that contract.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. To the same minister again. I've got counties in my constituency that are willing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on this last mile. Can you give them some advice? I don't know if we're going to duplicate the work here, but what I heard from your answers is that you're going to take this on.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend the communities within Whitecourt-St. Anne for proactively moving forward to access high-speed Internet. Now, we know that many of these community initiatives are important pillars in our overall strategy. Moving forward, our provincial strategy is going to negate the need for these piecemeal approaches. We are fully committed to a comprehensive Alberta solution addressing all the areas of our province. Again, we want this work done within two years of awarding the contract.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Highway 3 Coalhurst Intersection

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The egress to highway 3 from Coalhurst and highway 509 has long been a very contentious and dangerous intersection. There is even a Facebook group about it. In fact, just within the last few weeks there's been a fatal collision and a collision with serious injuries. To the Minister of Transportation. I know this minister is aware of the serious concerns regarding this intersection. Is the minister considering some solutions, and is this a priority?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this is about working with the town to find solutions and provide access to the town while enhancing safety features on our highways to make sure that everyone gets home safely. I did meet with the mayor of Coalhurst last year, and my department officials continue to work with the town to improve the situation. There have been several options that have been proposed, and we're still waiting on the town to come back with those decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that an overpass is probably prohibitively expensive, but could a traffic light be a solution?

I'm just going to go into my third question, and then I'll have two. There could be a better way, and this is my suggestion. Would you consider lowering the speed limit from Kipp until an appropriate position past the Coalhurst intersection, lowering it to 70 when at this point in time it's 110?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a main highway on one of the national highway systems in Alberta. It's highway 3, going to the Crownsnest Pass. It's a twinned, four-lane highway. When I sit down with our safety engineers and we talk about speed limits and how they put the speed limits on highways, they say that it's very, very unsafe to lower a speed on a major highway because then all traffic doesn't go the same speed, and it makes it more dangerous for the people sitting there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Elizabeth Métis Settlement

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent article in the *Cold Lake Sun* indicated that some of the members of the Elizabeth Métis settlement have serious concerns with how the settlement is being managed. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Relations explain what he has done to respond to these concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for that question. We do have a Métis settlements ombudsman office that works with the settlement members and with the settlement councils to investigate and to resolve issues and make recommendations to my office if needed. Now, the concerns brought forward by the Elizabeth settlement were investigated by the ombudsman this year, and recently I received a report from the ombudsman in regard to this investigation. I did find this investigation to be unacceptable, and at the time I spoke privately with the ombudsman as to why I did not accept the report.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister. I agree; the report was unacceptable. Does this confirm the rumours that I've heard from some of my constituents that the ombudsman office has been shut down, and there's no one available to hear their concerns?

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the Métis ombudsman did resign for reasons that do remain private. However, the ombudsman office was never shut down, and in fact it is currently operating under my direction. There are still people there to answer the phones, and any settlement member can call at any time with any of their concerns. I hope to have a new ombudsman in place within the next week or so.

Mrs. Leskiw: I am pleased to see the minister is committed to the Alberta Métis people.

My final question is to the same minister. The Elizabeth settlement has been working very hard to develop a gravel pit in south-west Edmonton. Can the minister tell me if he's willing to champion the gravel pit to the city of Edmonton and help this economic development opportunity become reality for the people of the Elizabeth settlement?

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that I do support economic development in any Métis settlement or by any

Métis business to help them become more self-sufficient. However, this gravel pit that the hon. member is referring to is really out of my hands. It's the city of Edmonton. They have decided not to grant the municipal approvals needed for this gravel pit to operate. It is a municipal issue, and I will respect the city of Edmonton's decision.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Securities Regulation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several Canadian provinces are supporting the federal government's plan for a single national securities regulator; however, Alberta is joining Quebec in court action to prevent exactly this from happening. Some suggest Alberta is wasting its time and resources on a matter that is already a fait accompli and in a realm that would be better regulated by the federal government in any case. My first question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Considering all of this, why is Alberta still proceeding full speed ahead in opposing a single federal securities regulator?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the time and money that's being wasted is being wasted in Ottawa in trying to set up a new national securities regulator. We have a system that works, and Albertans know that if something works well, you don't waste the time trying to fix it. Why does it work? Because the Alberta Securities Commission understands and knows how the Alberta economy works. It has local expertise. The last thing we need is a bunch of faraway bureaucrats in Ottawa who don't have that local knowledge and have the Ottawa one-size-fits-all view of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that proponents of a single national securities regulator suggest Canada is a laughingstock – on the world stage, that is – for having a disjointed system of 13 different regulators, is Alberta not also open to the suggestion that we're a laughingstock for attempting to prevent attempts to make it better?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, that line is just the standard line of the federal finance bureaucrats in Ottawa. They're the ones that get laughed at when they show up and pretend they're the SEC from the U.S.

The Canadian system, the passport system that we have, is recognized internationally for the two things that securities regulators are supposed to do, efficiency of raising capital and investor protection. For the last two years the Milken Institute has rated Canada the best, most efficient at capital-raising, and the World Bank has ranked Canada the best in the top five for investor protection. In fact, just yesterday, so it's six years in a row, once again Canada was ranked in the top five, tied with the U.S. ahead of the United Kingdom, for investor protection.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. We've seen the experience of our neighbours to the east, Saskatchewan, and their experiences in potash, how it has competed both on the local level and internationally and how messy it can be. Now, to compete in a global marketplace, do we not need a national system to represent our national interests?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the story out of Saskatchewan and Ottawa yesterday was a positive story. It's a good story. It's about the protection of provincial resources. As far as our system, we have a national system already. What we don't have is a centralized system in Ottawa. We have a system that works, the passport system. You register in one province; automatically you get registered in the other nine. We have a national system, and it does work.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness would like to supplement an answer, I believe, which will allow a further question to be raised.

Fort McMurray Continuing Care Facility

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to clarify an answer with respect to the continuing care facility that is being constructed in Fort McMurray. If you take a look at *Hansard* through this week, you would see numerous spots where interjections were being given during my attempts to answer questions, and I may not have completed a thought here. What was intended to be said was that a new 48-bed continuing care facility that was projected for construction in Fort McMurray is actually going to be replaced with a new 100-bed continuing care facility.* With all the interjections and all the interruptions, it was difficult to complete that train of thought. If I said 48 – and I don't have *Hansard* in front of me – then I just want to clarify that that was the original intention, but in fact it's been replaced with a 100-bed facility.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, I believe that was in response to a question of yours.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much. Of course, I got kicked out of the PC caucus, Mr. Speaker, for, in fact, representing my bosses, the constituents of Fort McMurray, on this very facility. I'm very pleased that the minister has clarified, as the Minister of Infrastructure already had in question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, that concludes the question-and-answer period for today. Today 19 members were recognized, and there were 114 questions and responses.

We will move back to Members' Statements very, very quickly. In the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Speaker's Ruling Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I take it, Edmonton-Strathcona, you want to re-introduce someone, which is highly irregular, and it's not something that I'm going to permit. Today we will do it once. If a person has already been introduced, they don't have to be re-introduced. You've requested to proceed again, but I'm not doing that in the future.

Introduction of Guests (continued)

Ms Notley: As I say, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your generosity. As I had mentioned before, my guest was unable to be in the public gallery when he was introduced, so I'd like now once again to

introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Jan Buterman. Jan is here today, as I said, representing the Trans Equality Society of Alberta. It's a membership-based organization whose purpose is one of advocacy and education on trans-related issues for both government and others who do not know or understand the numerous challenges faced in living with this condition. I would ask that Jan now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, an introduction as well.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two outstanding young high school students that are here to watch our proceedings today. Miss Leah Wagner is an exchange student from Germany who is studying at W.P. Wagner school of technology in Edmonton. She is keenly interested in politics back home in Germany and is here today to learn more about our political system. She's joined by an outstanding grade 11 student from W.P. Wagner. Miss Avery Bellikka is an honours student who is very interested in what happens here in the Legislature. She is also planning an exchange visit to Japan. The ladies are joined in the gallery by Avery's parents, Jerry and Lorraine Bellikka. Jerry is no stranger to the House. I used to work with him in my department, and now he works in the Premier's office and does a very good job for the government of Alberta. I ask all the members to give them a great traditional warm welcome. Would they please stand?

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to revert to Members' Statements now.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Property Rights

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Property rights are something that Albertans and Canadians value deeply. In Alberta these rights are enshrined in legislation and promoted by this government. That is why I'm concerned by recent comments by an individual in a southern Alberta newspaper which stated that the land-use framework is Soviet-style legislation and that it repeals landowner rights. I would like to clear up this misrepresentation of the truth.

First of all, the Alberta Bill of Rights is clear in stating that landowners have the right to the enjoyment of their private property. Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, passed by this Legislature, will assist in implementing the land-use framework and does not compromise property rights. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act does not authorize the government to extinguish land titles. Section 11 does allow a regional plan expressly to amend or cancel a statutory consent if doing so is in the public interest. Although both are instruments of an enactment, under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act a land title is not a statutory consent and cannot be cancelled by a regional plan. Land titles can only be affected through the due process of law such as through the Expropriation Act, in which case appropriate compensation would be payable.

Existing property rights continue to be protected by the Alberta Bill of Rights and are not compromised by the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, and I know the hon. Member for Airdrie-

*See page 1082, right column, paragraph 4

Chestermere would agree. On May 13, 2009, this hon. member stated that the Alberta Land Stewardship Act is an “unprecedented victory for the rights of landowners in this province” and that “no other jurisdiction proposes to protect the rights of landowners the way Bill 36 does.” Mr. Speaker, this hon. member is absolutely correct in emphasizing this province’s commitment to preserve our right to private property.

In light of that, one week from today I urge all hon. members to participate in honouring . . . [Mr. Berger’s speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. [interjections]

Ms Notley: Water is at the heart of life. [interjections]

Speaker’s Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Airdrie-Chestermere, just cool it, okay? One of the things I’m going to look at – and I want to look at the deputy leader of that party and that caucus – is that in the last number of days we’ve been getting a lot of complaints in my office from people outside of this Assembly about the noise coming from there. One of the items I’m looking at for the spring session is to actually move the chairs and the desks here so that you’ll be right close to me.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Water Allocation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is at the heart of life. Everywhere throughout history when people have failed to protect water, the results have been devastating. I urge this government not to treat this matter lightly but to ensure that water is a priority so that human and ecosystem well-being can be assured long into the future.

Tragically, this PC government is in the pocket of big business. They put corporate interests ahead of families and the environment when business friends apply political pressure. They are on the brink of making major changes to water allocation rights throughout our beautiful province. They’re looking at deregulating water and giving control of this essential resource to people who want to make a buck. That’s wrong. That abandons their duty on behalf of all Albertans to be good caretakers of this treasure. The government is proceeding without consulting First Nations, as our treaties with them require.

All orders of government have an important role to play in protecting water for this generation and the next. The government has cut funding for water monitoring by 25 per cent since 2007 and cannot even ensure that those with licences are in compliance. A promised wetland policy has just been compromised, and comprehensive and open consultations about water are at best delayed and more likely abandoned.

Meanwhile, our water supply continues to shrink. We already see evidence of failure to take care. Fish from the Athabasca River are developing extreme deformities. People in some parts of this province are afraid to drink tap and well water. Floods and droughts are becoming more and more common. The Minister of Environment is working on amendments to our Water Act and has signalled that the government is open to using for-profit, market-based means for water allocation. We know what happened when they deregulated our electricity. Prices went through the roof. We know that they’ll put profits before people and that Alberta’s families always pay the price.

We need to learn from such mistakes. Our water is too important to sell off. All other options have not been explored. We need an

allocation approach that is not based on ability to pay but, rather, on public interest.

It’s time the government stopped acting like henchmen for private interests. It’s time we rally together to put people first in practical ways. Water is not for political manipulation; it is our very life. Our water is not for sale.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Victims’ Services Memorandum of Understanding

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 28 I was joined by the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security in Drayton Valley as he signed a memorandum of understanding with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, K Division. Also joining us were victims’ services units from Drayton Valley, Leduc, Wetaskiwin, and Rocky Mountain House. While our police throughout the province work very hard to protect us and those we hold dear, the sad reality is that Albertans are still victims of crime each year.

Last week the MOU was extended to ensure that victims’ voices are heard and that they receive the services they require to get through their time of need. The victims’ services branch works to ensure that Alberta’s Victims of Crime Act is carried out in our communities. This act has allowed for changes to help victims of crime such as the ability to collect surcharges on provincial statute offences, defined principles respecting the treatment of victims, and introduced financial benefits for victims. Our government works with those who are hurt and victimized by crimes of all types and levels of severity to ensure that their emotional and financial needs are met. Mr. Speaker, those who have been impacted by crime can have a long process of physical and mental recovery, and our government and our police services are taking steps to help them in their time of need.

I know that our Cardium victims’ services branch in Drayton Valley and surrounding area and all victims’ services units along with our RCMP detachments work tirelessly to reduce and prevent crime in our communities and to help us feel safe in our homes. I would like to thank the many volunteers who believe so strongly in helping victims of crime, who give so many hours of their time to help others in need.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Cardium and Wetaskiwin victims’ services units for the awards they received from the minister for their outstanding work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Bill 29 Alberta Parks Act

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This bill will align the legislation with the plan for parks. It will consolidate and modernize three pieces of existing park legislation into a single act, simplifying the parks system by reducing the number of classifications from seven to two, and will allow us to achieve a balance between conservation and recreation goals. The Willmore Wilderness Park Act will remain unchanged.

I am confident that this bill will serve the public and our parks

system and our government well for a very long time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 16(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act as Chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table the 2009-2010 annual report of the fund.

Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act I would also like to table the 2010-2011 first-quarter update on the fund. Copies of these reports have previously been distributed to members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, and it is the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Update: The Importance of Being Pro-Active from Fraser Milner Casgrain. I would encourage the hon. minister of labour to have a quick squint at it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a research paper from the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy. The paper, which was published last month, is titled Expanding Canada Pension Plan Retirement Benefits. It analyzes various proposals for CPP reform and concludes that mandatory and universal coverage with higher benefit rates than the current CPP are essential to ensure adequate benefits for all Canadians.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of documents signed by over 50 people who would like to see a law passed to amend the certification of guide, service, and assistance dogs. The letter proposes an amendment to the guide dogs qualifications regulations under the Blind Persons' Rights Act that would allow any person with a disability who requires the service of a guide dog to obtain certification through testing and proof rather than through the federation, as it currently reads.

Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Official Opposition House Leader, according to Standing Order 7(6) I would like to ask the Government House Leader to share the projected government business for the week commencing November 15.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question. As is our tradition, I'm pleased to provide the answer.

On Monday, November 15, in the afternoon we will of course deal with private members' business. That evening we'll do second reading of Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 25, Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act; Bill 26, Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act; Bill 29, Alberta Parks Act; and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, November 16, in the afternoon we'll be dealing with second reading of Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, and in Committee of the Whole we'll be dealing with aforementioned bills 24, 25, and 26. That evening we will continue with second reading of Bill 17 and Committee of the Whole on aforementioned bills 24, 25, and 26.

On Wednesday afternoon we'll be dealing with second reading of Bill 17, Alberta Health Act; Bill 27, Police Amendment Act; Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act; and Bill 29, Alberta Parks Act. That evening we'll be dealing with second reading of aforementioned bills 17, 27, 28, and 29; third reading of Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act; Bill 18, Government Organization Amendment Act; Bill 19, Fuel Tax Amendment Act; aforementioned bills 24, 25, and 26 as well as Bill 23, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act; and otherwise as may be indicated on the Order Paper.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on Thursday afternoon in Committee of the Whole we'll be dealing with Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, and otherwise as may be indicated on the Order Paper.

Statement by the Speaker

Canadian Royal Heritage Award 2010

The Speaker: Hon. members, we still have a couple of minutes before the standing order kicks in. I'd like to advise members today that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta was the recipient of the 2010 Canadian royal heritage award, presented to a person or institution in recognition of their efforts in preserving, presenting, or enhancing Canada's royal heritage. This award was presented by the Canadian Royal Heritage Trust at a special dinner held in Toronto last week.

The award citation reads in part:

For Alberta's centenary in 2005 and the visit of Her Majesty The Queen to the province that year, the Legislative Assembly installed in glass over the exterior central front door of the Legislature in Edmonton, the cypher of Queen Elizabeth II surmounting the Canadian Golden Jubilee garland of maple leaves, and over the interior front door the Queen's arms in right of the province. At the same time, the cyphers of King Edward VII, King George V, King Edward VIII and King George VI were also installed in glass over the two other exterior doors and two interior doors on each side of the central ones. Together, the royal cyphers provide the Legislature with a collection, aesthetically pleasing and prominently visible, of the cyphers of all the Sovereigns of Alberta's history as a province. When the District of Alberta, named after Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, became a province in 1905, it was described by the Governor General, the Earl Grey, as "a new leaf to Your Majesty's [King Edward VII's] maple crown." The distinctive addition of the Monarchs' cyphers to the royal heritage of Alberta and Canada is a commendable model for all the provinces.

Although presented to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, this award recognizes the contributions of the participants in this project, including Alberta Infrastructure, Alberta community development, the Alberta protocol office, the Legislative Assembly Office, and the

creators of the commemorative stained glass windows, Winter Art Glass Studio. I want to especially acknowledge the leadership of the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, who was the Minister of Infrastructure at the time we approached this file and as we took it to conclusion.

In order to further highlight the work of Alberta stained glass artists featured in the Legislature Building, we have produced a brochure featuring not only the royal cyphers but also the stained glass window in the public gallery donated by the city of Edmonton in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and the stained glass window installed in the Legislature Library to celebrate the centennial. Copies of this brochure, a very, very nice and historically sound brochure, will be available to all members momentarily.

3:00

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Evening Sittings

19. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the remainder of the 2010 fall sitting unless, on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I note this motion is not debatable. Thank you.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 4(1) it is not, so I'll call the question.

[Government Motion 19 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move second reading of the Police Amendment Act, 2010.

The Police Amendment Act modernizes and streamlines the police complaints and discipline process. It supports the government of Alberta's priority to provide safe communities for Albertans by ensuring adequate and effective policing throughout the province. Except for some minor process updates, the existing police complaints and discipline process has been largely unchanged since 1973. It has become legalistic and time consuming because of rising caseloads and lengthy wait times. As a result, it is no longer efficient. At the same time stakeholders' and the public's expectations of police accountability have been evolving. They want and deserve a police complaints and discipline process that is more timely, fair, and effective.

Public confidence in the police complaints system is of paramount importance, Mr. Speaker. It is also critical that there is a proportionate and reasonable response to allegations of misconduct. We all

want effective oversight of our police. To refine the process, we held consultations with stakeholders and asked for public input via an online survey. Stakeholders included police services, police associations, police commissions, policing committees, the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, the Law Enforcement Review Board, and the Alberta Justice criminal division. In addition, we received over a thousand responses to our online survey.

Consultation showed clear overall agreement on the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the police complaints and discipline process. Improving the process requires changes to the Police Act, which will in turn require amending the police service regulation and Alberta's policing standards and guidelines.

I'd like to take a few minutes to go through what we are proposing in Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, Mr. Speaker. By expanding the definition of complainant, the bill provides that when police officers make complaints against other officers, they will have the same standing, rights, and responsibilities as other complainants. They will be able to make complaints like any member of the public. Currently they have fewer options and rights than public complainants.

Some aspects of the Law Enforcement Review Board, or LERB, process are addressed in the bill, Mr. Speaker, to enable more appeals to be heard on the record as opposed to oral hearings, which are like trials. This will result in less time- and resource-intensive processes and allow a greater number of appeals to be heard in a shorter period of time. Again, it makes the process more efficient. The board will still be able to conduct oral hearings in circumstances that warrant it such as when new evidence is brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, the bill also gives the LERB additional powers and authorities to manage their process. For example, it allows the board to dismiss matters where the complainant does not comply with the board's direction or where individuals refuse to participate in the process. It also allows the board during an appeal to resolve a matter where both parties agree. The bill requires the Law Enforcement Review Board to issue its decisions within 60 days, and if they are unable to do so, they must advise the parties as to why this cannot be done.

Bill 27 reflects the need to develop experienced, productive commission and committee members and allows for a total tenure of 10 years. Especially important to Albertans are the provisions of the act that relate to public complaint directors. The act clarifies who can serve in this position and sets out the roles and responsibilities of the provincial public complaint director, an employee of my department. The amendments also allow regions to come together to hire a public complaint director to serve more than one committee.

The act clarifies who can and cannot lodge complaints and what information needs to be included in the complaint. We want to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that only those that are witnesses to the action, directly affected by the action, retained by or acting for a complainant, or related to a complainant can lodge complaints. This will prevent people who see something in the news that disturbs them from lodging complaints. They were not witnesses to or impacted by the event, nor are they related to or acting on behalf of a complainant. They are true third parties. Complaints of this nature eat up both time and resources, and this proposal will prevent these types of complaints from going forward. However, true third parties can still bring a complaint to the chief of police, who may then decide to initiate a complaint.

The act allows complaints to be received via e-mail, Mr. Speaker, just catching up with modern technology, and it defines when a complaint is considered to have been made. Also addressed in the act is the limitation period or time frame in which someone can

bring forward a complaint. Currently complaints can only be made within one year of the alleged misconduct. These new provisions will allow for discoverability. That means that if someone learns of misconduct after the one-year time limitation is up but they could not have reasonably known about it during the one-year time period, they can still bring a complaint forward. For example, if today I learned that an officer had made an unauthorized police query about me two years ago, I could still bring a complaint forward.

The bill also makes it mandatory for alternative dispute resolution to be offered in appropriate circumstances, Mr. Speaker, to support the informal resolution of complaints. In some cases all that is needed for resolution is a simple apology or acknowledgement of the complaint. If cases can be handled informally, this saves a lot of time and resources. It still gets satisfactory results. We will develop a provincial standard that will provide guidance on what is appropriate for informal resolution. For example, if an officer is seen as disrespectful during a traffic stop, that might be a good example of where alternative dispute resolution would work, especially if it's a first-time offence. However, if there are multiple complaints against the same officer for the same offence, alternative dispute resolution may not be appropriate because it's clearly not an isolated case and the problem is not being dealt with. Additional action may be necessary in that case.

With respect to complaints and discipline the bill makes the chief of police's decision final on matters that are not of a serious nature. This prevents the use of extensive resources at an administrative tribunal for minor complaints. I should point out, Mr. Speaker, that in the event that the complainant is not satisfied with that resolution, he could still file a complaint against the chief.

The Alberta Serious Incident Response Team is also addressed in this bill, Mr. Speaker. It gives ASIRT jurisdiction in serious incidents involving the military police in Alberta, which is new. This actually was at the request of the military police in Alberta, and ASIRT agrees with this proposal. It also allows the director of ASIRT in narrow circumstances to start an investigation without getting the approval of the director of law enforcement, who is an employee of my department. What this means is that if during the course of an ASIRT investigation the director uncovers additional criminal conduct not previously brought forward, the ASIRT director can begin investigating. The director must advise the director of law enforcement and my department of this investigation, but they don't have to wait for direction or approval to go ahead.

3:10

The bill allows for the dismissal of complaints in certain circumstances, Mr. Speaker. This would include situations where the complainant is not participating, they may have moved, or they don't show up at a hearing. It is not efficient to spend time and resources on abandoned complaints. They should be dismissed.

Mr. Speaker, the bill addresses the use of evidence by ensuring that both voluntary and involuntary statements given by officers are protected and cannot be used for other purposes such as civil suits. Currently only voluntary statements are protected. Exceptions include cases of perjury or other wrongdoing.

Finally, the bill requires that all existing complaints come under the new process effective on the proclamation date. This is necessary because as things stand now, some of these complaints can take years to work their way through the process.

To sum up, Mr. Speaker, Bill 27 provides a modern, efficient, and transparent police complaints and discipline process that effectively meets the needs of law enforcement and the expectations of Albertans. It ensures we retain Albertans' trust and confidence in law enforcement.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today to provide these comments. I would now like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 27.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 28 Electoral Divisions Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act.

This bill sets out the names and boundaries of Alberta's electoral divisions. Periodically reviewing and updating electoral boundaries is necessary to ensure the electoral map continues to properly reflect the province's changing population distribution and densities, community interests, and other factors.

Bill 28 is the result of almost a year's review by the arm's-length Electoral Boundaries Commission. In May of 2009 the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act was amended to establish an Electoral Boundaries Commission, an independent body of five individuals who were charged with reviewing all of the provincial electoral boundaries in Alberta. Over the course of a year the commission conducted its review, travelling around the province and consulting with Albertans in public meetings. The commission reviewed the existing electoral map and made recommendations on the areas, boundaries, and names for 87 electoral divisions based on the input they received, the applicable legal principles, and the latest census and population information. This review was done to ensure that Albertans have effective representation in the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the commission was directed to divide the province into 87 electoral divisions, four more than are currently in place. Since the last time the number of electoral divisions was changed, in 1986 – and I think yesterday I inadvertently said 2002 by mistake – Alberta's population has grown by approximately 1 million people.* It is important for our province's electoral divisions to reflect the realities of the province's population.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the commission's report was tabled in the Assembly in June of this year. On October 26 the resolution was made in this Assembly, and the contents of the report were debated. All of the boundaries recommended in the commission's report were approved by this Assembly as were the majority of the names of the electoral divisions.

There were, however, changes to the suggested names of four electoral divisions. Mr. Speaker, these suggestions were made in order to better reflect the history and character of those divisions as well as the desires of their constituents. Specifically, the Assembly approved the following name changes. The proposed electoral division referred to by the commission as Okotoks-High River will retain its existing name of Highwood, the electoral division of Strathcona will now be named Strathcona-Sherwood Park, the electoral division of Calgary-Montrose will now be named Calgary-Greenway, and the electoral division of Calgary-North Hill will now be named Calgary-Klein.

Bill 28 reflects the commission's report as amended by the Assembly. This act will repeal and replace the existing act of the same name, and the new electoral boundaries will come into effect when the next general election is called in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, Bill 28 will bring Alberta's electoral boundaries and divisions up to date with its population and current needs.

I now move that we adjourn debate on Bill 28.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

*See page 1098, left column, paragraph 13

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 16
Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving)
Amendment Act, 2010**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Chair, how much time did I have left when we adjourned last time? How far into it was I?

The Chair: You have 20 minutes.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I ended right after I stood up last time, I want to talk a little bit about Bill 16. Again, as I said, this is one of those bills where I feel that, obviously, people are very concerned about distracted driving, and rightfully so. No one likes to see, when they're driving down the highway, that someone is texting or doing something that's not safe, that they're swerving around or they're cutting people off or they're running lights or whatever.

I understand the intention behind the bill, and it's a good intention. It's to stop distracted driving or to keep it at a lower level or at least decrease it. I understand the intent, but I just really feel it was a bill designed to be looking like we're doing something about it. It's not really accomplishing anything, just a bill to kind of be seen doing something when, really, it's not going to do much of anything for safety. In fact, what it might honestly do at the end of the day – and I guess we'll see; I'm sure it'll get passed – is that it could just lead to more waste of very needed police resources, and I would really hate to see that because we're already very much strained as it is.

Our police, our men and women in uniform, have a lot of things on their minds: a lot of laws to enforce, a lot of things that they need to enforce, a lot of things they need to be looking out for. The thought of having any of these officers spending any time of their very precious time on the road looking for people on cellphones or looking for people eating or looking for people writing or reading a direction off a note on where they're going to – I don't know if under this bill a GPS system is permitted. If it is, for those who don't have it, they might have a note that they're reading, or they're making a note. Is that going to be something that we want our officers spending their time on? If I thought for a second that this would in some way improve road safety in Alberta, I wouldn't need to stand up for more than a couple of seconds to say: "Yes. This is great. Let's go." But I just don't feel this bill in its current form is going to do much of anything.

That said, democracy is a funny thing. I talked earlier about it, and I'll be making a member's statement, probably, on it in the near future. We do things sometimes for interesting reasons in our system. I know that I voted for bills in the past, when I've been on the other side in the PC government. Bill 36 was alluded to. I absolutely did vote in favour of that bill, and I absolutely did speak to it, in fact. I did that because I trusted the minister at the time very much, someone who I thought of at the time as a political mentor and friend, so I thought I should vote for that and that I should read the speech that his department prepared for me in that regard.

You learn hard lessons in this job sometimes. There's a bad

reason for doing something. What I should have done is taken more stock of what was in that document, and I did not. It's one vote that I very much regret and that I will work very hard to undo over the next two years. That's definitely not a good reason to vote for something, but sometimes there are other reasons to vote for something.

3:20

One of these things is when your constituents so overwhelmingly want to see something done even though I don't think this bill is a very good one. I don't think it's going to do very much at all. I think it's a nanny state bill. The Minister of Transportation across the way: I know that deep down in his heart of hearts – I mean, I'm certainly not in his heart of hearts, but I sure doubt that he's very pumped about this bill. Maybe he is. Maybe he had a change of heart over the last six to eight months or the last year that I wasn't aware of.

When our constituents want something and they are essentially demanding it and polls show overwhelmingly that they want some kind of distracted driving legislation, that they don't believe people should be on their phones talking, sometimes you vote for things not because you necessarily agree with them but because your constituents demand it, period. That's what they want, much like me crossing the floor and joining the Wildrose Alliance. That was one thing my constituents wanted me to do. [interjection] Well, we'll verify that in 18 months. Don't you worry about that.

We do things for different reasons, and this is one that I'm going to eventually probably have to vote for because the mail that I've been getting on the issue is probably about 3 to 1 in favour of passing the bill. That's not to say that I'm not going to try to make some amendments, and I will bring an amendment forward on this bill today. It's just one of those bills where, you know, if the people want it, they're going to get it. I think they're going to find that this is going to lead to nothing more than a few more tickets, a little bit of a cash grab, and I don't think it's going to solve the problem at all.

I don't think there's anyone in this Chamber, frankly, that is going to change their behaviours because of this bill. I could be wrong. Maybe there will be, but knowing the group in here, I doubt it very much. We'll see. I mean, if you do, if the Solicitor General is going to keep to that hands-free device, if he thinks he can pull that off for his entire next two years, God love him, you know. Go for it. If the Minister of Transportation doesn't think he's going to eat a burger for the next two years on the road when he's running between events, okay. We'll see how that works. Now, I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. I know he'll follow this law. That I am confident of. He will be consistent. He will follow this law, not because of the law but because he already does it. He already has common sense that not many of us in here have, and he has that ability to do that. This will be definitely difficult for me to follow.

Now, as I've read through this document, I found it amazing that there were that many amendments from the government side on this bill given how short it was. They almost amended every section. We weren't aware of those amendments. There were a lot of subamendments that we would have brought forward, but we weren't aware they were bringing a whole bunch of amendments. Unfortunately, with our small caucus we weren't here at the time those were brought forward, and a lot of these sections have been cut off to us because of that. So we'll have to stick to the few that weren't dealt with previously.

What I want to do – and I believe I can keep the remaining time that I have after we get through the amendments. I can come back and still have my 12 minutes, 15 minutes, whatever, left. [interjection] Oh, still? Absolutely. Fantastic.

Okay. I will bring forward an amendment now on that. Well, no. I'll talk for a couple of more minutes on it.

The Chair: Hon. member, are you going to introduce?

Mr. Anderson: No, not yet. I'm just prefacing it.

The Chair: Okay. Continue on.

Mr. Anderson: Section 115.4 says that
subject to this section and the regulations made under section 115.5,
no individual shall drive or operate a vehicle on a highway while
engaged in an activity that distracts the individual from the operation
of the vehicle, including but not limited to.

And then there's a list of stuff.

(a) reading or viewing printed material.

Again, you can't look at the directions that you've gotten legally, which is beyond belief.

(b) writing, printing or sketching.

Probably not a good idea to be sketching. That's for sure. But writing? I don't know. If you're on your hands-free and somebody says, "Turn right at Johnson Lane" and you want to write that down on the seat next to you, you're not allowed to do that anymore.

(c) engaging in personal grooming or hygiene.

That's very vague, it seems. You know, I don't know what that exactly means. Grooming: does that mean picking your nose or something? We're going to pull people over for that? Some people in this Assembly are going to have a problem if that's the case. You know, it just depends what kind of grooming we're talking about.

I mean, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you're going to have trouble with this one. You know that. Come on.

Mrs. McQueen: No trouble with it.

Mr. Anderson: That's all right. You're already well groomed. Then

(d) any other activity that may be prescribed in the regulations.

Then it jumps down to 115.5.

The Minister may make regulations . . .

(b) prescribing prohibited activities for the purposes of section 115.4.

In other words, it's not just these things up here. The minister can change the rules. If a future minister feels that, for example, a Bluetooth or something, or let's say a GPS device – it's unwritten material. It says, "Reading or viewing printed material." What about nonprinted material? If they want to say that a GPS is distracting, then the minister could unilaterally, without the consent of this House, change that rule, and I don't think that makes very much sense at all. I just don't think that it would make a whole lot of sense that the minister would be given that kind of unilateral authority to interfere in our lives even more than they already have.

This is something I just didn't understand as I read the bill, and I'm going to bring an amendment to it, so let's do that now. I'll pass it out first, and then we'll get to that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. We will pause a moment for the pages to distribute the amendment. This amendment shall now be known as amendment A3.

Hon. member, please start on amendment A3.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Amendment A3. I received a note here from you folks, and I'm not really sure what it means. You're going to have to come and chat with me, or else I'll chat with you after. I just

can't understand the handwriting. That's the problem. There are a couple of words I can't make out.

The Chair: Just go on with A3.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I'll go on with the amendment. The amendment is to Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010. I move that Bill 16 be amended in section 2 in the proposed section 115.5 by striking out clause (b). That would be taking out the line under regulations on page 4 of the bill, for those of you watching at home, 115.5:

The Minister may make regulations . . .

(b) prescribing prohibited activities for the purposes of section 115.4.

3:30

Then if you flip up to 115.4, again it talks about:

(1) Subject to this section and the regulations made under section 115.5, no individual shall drive or operate a vehicle on a highway while engaged in an activity that distracts the individual from the operation of the vehicle, including but not limited to

(a) reading or viewing printed material,
(b) writing, printing or sketching,
(c) engaging in personal grooming or hygiene, and
(d) any other activity that may be prescribed in the regulations.

Then in subsection (2) the interesting thing is that subsection (1) does not apply in respect of a vehicle that

(a) is not on a highway, or
(b) is parked in a manner specified in a regulation made under this Act.

I guess that if you're not on the highway, you can potentially be on your cellphone while you're driving. That one I'll have to get clarification about. There are so many vague parts to this bill.

Hon. member, we're just talking about the amendment that I brought forward to get rid of section 115.5(b). You can take a look at that.

The reason I was thinking that it would be a good idea is that I just think, you know, that any time we're talking about an intrusion into people's personal liberties or lives, with government saying that you cannot do something, that should come through the Legislative Assembly, especially something like this, which is so personal. I don't know.

I'm thinking of distractions that the minister would have unilateral control over adding here. I'm thinking of maybe turning the radio on or off, adjusting the radio to change the channel perhaps. Some of our cars use satellite radio now. My truck has satellite radio in it. There are all these buttons on the console, so you've got to fool around, and you're trying to find the hockey game or trying to find CNN or Fox news or something for election results. [interjection] The CBC. You'd be surprised, hon. member, that I do listen to the CBC a lot. I have to shower afterwards, of course, but I do listen to it from time to time. I really do. You've got to know what the other side is saying. But I do that.

I just hope that in the future if you had some, you know, wacko cabinet minister out there – that would never happen, I know. But if you ever did, they could say: "You know what? It's just as dangerous changing your radio or changing your satellite, so I'm going to add this by regulation to the list of prohibited activities and not bring it through the House." Now, granted, in our party system if a minister was to do that, most likely the trained seals would probably get up and vote for it in lockstep as usual. But when we do eventually reform this House – and, hopefully, we have free votes and free debate on a matter that's actually worth while – what we'll have is representation. When people are represented, when an MLA

is the voice in Edmonton for his constituents back home, not the government's voice, the government PR person back home, when that occurs, I would be very confident that the will of the people, the will of the House would be to say: "Forget that. That's way overstepping. We should be able to change the radio." They would defeat that amendment.

If you leave it to just a minister to be able to stand up and – or not even stand up. He wouldn't have to stand up. That's kind of the point. He wouldn't have to. Just an order in council. Good grief. How many orders in council do we see come through? Every day they're doing some orders in council. That's fine. I understand there's a need for some of those things. But on something that's obviously going to be intrusive into our personal lives, I would think that it would be important to bring that to the Legislature.

Now, of course, that might mean that if we're bringing more of these things through the Legislature, we would need to sit longer than the three months we've sat here. We get paid quite a large amount of money to be here as MLAs, and I would think it would be okay to be here longer than the three months we're going to be here this year, whatever it is: 12 weeks, 13 weeks. What is it going to be? It's got to be 14, 15 weeks. Not much, though. We would have to work a little harder to approve these things and take some of the power away from Executive Council and away from ministers and actually put it in the hands of the elected representatives of the entire body of this House, which is where it should be.

But that's not where we're at today. One good thing about the system that we do have today is that ideas that have to be legislated do still have to come through this House. It gives the opposition an opportunity to point out to the government party voting in lockstep, regardless of how they feel about things, that they're going to have to defend it, at least in the public. Now, they still pass it usually, but it at least gives the opposition a chance to point out the flaws, and there's a political price. [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

That's all right. I'll say some more stuff later.

The Chair: On amendment A3?

Dr. Taft: Yes, on the amendment. Do we have 29(2)(a) at this level?

The Chair: No. You have 20 minutes to talk about A3.

Dr. Taft: Okay.

The Chair: On amendment A3, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, I was listening with interest to the hon. member. It reminds me of two evenings ago, Mr. Chairman, when I was listening to CBC television. I think Mr. Solomon was interviewing a professor from the University of Calgary who was holding an elephant, a little baby elephant. Not only was he holding the elephant – he was very pleased, of course, with the results of the U.S. mid-term elections – but the elephant was interfering with his microphone. The young man from CBC headquarters in Toronto asked him to remove the elephant so that the Canadian listeners and viewers could hear his remarks more accurately. The gentleman went on to talk about Fox and CNN.

Dr. Taft: He had a fox and an elephant.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, he was getting all his information almost up to date, in real time from Fox, and the CBC commentator aggres-

sively said to him: I do not appreciate you promoting those networks on our television station. I thought that was quite interesting.

The hon. member here was talking about CNN and Fox, and it reminded me of that, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, the elephant was in the television studio that night. I thought the gentleman from Calgary looked a little bit ridiculous clutching his stuffed elephant. Babar I think he called it.

An Hon. Member: Better than a donkey.

3:40

Mr. MacDonald: A donkey. That would be a very appropriate mascot for this government caucus. I agree with you, hon. member.

Now, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is proposing in the regulation section of Bill 16 to simply remove 115.5(b). When you look at the prohibited activities that are mentioned in 115.4, just above the regulation-writing power, you can see, you know: individuals shall drive or operate a vehicle on a highway while engaged in an activity that distracts the individual from the operation of the vehicle, including but not limited to reading or viewing printed material; writing, printing or sketching; engaging in personal grooming or hygiene; and any other activity that may be prescribed in the regulations. I don't understand why we would want to remove that section.

I'm not a fan of governing by regulation. In the years that I have been in the Assembly, there has been an unfortunate tendency by this government to do more and more by regulation and less and less by statute, just these bills that enable the government, or in this case the cabinet, to write rules as they see fit, quietly and without public scrutiny. Certainly, this is a government that is unwilling to have a great deal of public scrutiny.

That being said, Mr. Chairman, when we look at many of the activities that people, unfortunately, do while driving distracted, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays has certainly made a good start with this bill towards at least trying to control distracted drivers. Does it go far enough? I'm not convinced of that, but it certainly is a good start. In this case if we're not going to take the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall's idea to have an overview of this entire legislation within the next three years, I think that to allow the government in this case a little bit of rope with their authority to write regulations is needed.

Last Friday, during our constituency day, I was very pleased to see for a short period of time two students from the University of Alberta. They visited our constituency office. They were polite. They were very concerned about public safety. I sat there listening to what they had to say regarding this bill. They don't think it goes far enough, and I would agree with them. But I told them why I think we have to allow this bill to proceed in this manner, the reason being, Mr. Chairman, that we have a government that has been slow to react in the past, whether it's helmet laws for children, in some cases seat belts. There are still members that suggest that that is unnecessary. There are lots of valid examples of this government being slow to act to enhance or to ensure public safety. It has taken them this long to go this far. I think it's about encouragement. Should we restrict and limit cellphones and electronic devices even further in the future? We might have to. Let's see how this works.

Now, we know that Albertans – and this was pointed out to me by the students – are the worst offenders in Canada. At any given time 10 per cent of us are using our cellphones while driving, compared to the national average of 5 per cent, I'm told.

You look at hand-held cellphone legislation in Canada – and it was the students who were pointing out to me the different legislation in different provinces. The fine in British Columbia is \$167. I

believe in Saskatchewan it is \$280. Of course, ours is around \$170 here in the proposed legislation. In Manitoba it's \$200. Quebec has a range. Interestingly enough, in the provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan, if I am busted there under their laws, I would have demerit points. I would have in B.C. three demerits, in Saskatchewan four demerits. Quebec also has three demerits. P.E.I. has three demerits, and their fines range between \$250 and \$400. Now, Nova Scotia, to compare, Mr. Chairman, would have no demerits issued, but it's \$164 fine for your first offence, and if you're pressing redial and get caught, it can go up to \$337. So there is a wide range of laws across the country. I would surmise that each and every one of these jurisdictions has significant ability to make regulations.

I think it may be comforting for the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere if the government was willing at this time to – maybe they already have and my BlackBerry hasn't given me the information. Maybe they have already tabled or made public the regulations they have in mind for this statute. We could have a look at them. Certainly, people in the media could have a look at them. The individuals who are very concerned about public safety and reducing the number of accidents could have a look, and perhaps they, too, would be satisfied with the government's regulations. Maybe they go far enough; maybe they don't. But perhaps I would encourage at this time, Mr. Chairman, the hon. members across the way, or in this case the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, to consider doing that.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, on this debate on amendment A3, I certainly have heard not only from the University of Alberta students. In fact, I had an individual from our constituency phone yesterday afternoon. We had quite an interesting conversation regarding this bill. She did not think it went far enough. An individual who has had a letter published in the *Edmonton Journal* today outlining his concerns spoke over at the Royal Alex hospital, and my constituent had the pleasure of hearing his speech. This individual made some excellent points about cellphone use and how we should restrict it to ensure public safety on the roads. She thought she would phone and express her opinion to our office on behalf of her family, and I appreciate that.

Hopefully, this bill is going to be a step in the right direction. I am not convinced that amendment A3, as it has been explained so far by the hon. member, has merit, but hopefully there will be some further details on this.

Dr. Taft: I'm going to actually engage in a serious discussion here on the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: My colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview wants to have an opportunity to get some questions on the record regarding this proposed amendment A3, Mr. Chairman, so we will cede the floor to the hon. member. Perhaps the dialogue that results will convince me one way or another regarding the merits of this, but right now I don't think it is in the public interest or in the interest of public safety to delete that regulation-making ability.

Thank you.

3:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on A3.

Dr. Taft: On amendment A3. I'd like to engage the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere in a little bit of clarification here on this. When I first heard the issue of cellphone restrictions while driving raised – and I suppose that would be a few years ago now – I was ambivalent initially because I thought of the reasons that the member outlined here, that it's government intrusion into personal affairs.

But as I thought about it more and as I, frankly, experienced a couple of real scares myself from other drivers – well, in fact, I don't think the member was here, but a year ago last August I was rear-ended in broad daylight at an intersection. The person behind me who hit me was clearly not paying any attention to what was going on. And last winter I was nearly driven off a narrow two-lane highway by somebody coming on who was texting and was driving up the hill in my lane. You could see them texting away as they were driving, and it was scary.

Then I listened to other material and I thought, well, okay. I reframed that, in fact, driving is a privilege, and we do license it, and we remove that privilege from people for various kinds of offences. Then I saw having a safe place to drive or, indeed, to walk across the street as a right. So I ended up coming to the point where safety was a right, being protected from the stupidity of other drivers was a right, and driving and being able to use a cellphone while you're driving is a privilege. So then, when I came to that conclusion, I began to frame the whole issue of cellphone restrictions a bit differently. When I saw the evidence that I've seen, I actually ended up supporting this legislation. I wouldn't mind if it went further.

Your amendment also addresses an argument within an argument, which is the shift from legislation into regulation, which I'm not in favour of, and I think the member would agree with me on that. So I guess I'm putting to the member two questions. One is if he sees driving and using a cellphone as a right or a privilege. Well, that would be the main question because I think he's already made it clear he doesn't want to see more regulations; he'd rather see things in legislation. So do you want to reflect on that, hon. member, in this debate?

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Very good points. With regard to whether or not driving is a privilege or a right, I think we can all agree that it's a privilege to be able to drive. I don't think anyone disagrees with that. I guess we also have the privilege, we have the right, or whatever you could say, to be able to do a lot of things. A privilege and a right. The thing I'm trying to get out here is this: I think that if you're going to pass a law, there should be a natural effect of that law. In other words, it should achieve something.

Although I do believe that, you know, obviously we have the right to have and we should have safe roads. There's no doubt about that. We should be able to go out and know that when the light turns red, people stop, right? We get that. When it's green, we go. When we come to a stop sign, a four-way stop, it's going to go in an orderly flow around there and it's all going to work and people are going to follow those laws. But I think that if you're going to have a law that is going to – the reason for those laws or the laws of the road is just so that there can be an orderly way of driving so that people don't get in accidents and so forth as much as possible.

Now, I guess I would just say that we know what would happen if we didn't have those laws. If we didn't have red lights – I'm really trying to do a lot of reflecting while I talk here, which is difficult for me to do at the same time – we know what would happen. There would be carnage. There would be accidents all over the place. Same thing with no stop signs. Same thing but to a lesser extent with speed limits. So I do understand that.

However, I don't see how this bill is actually going to save lives. The reason is because I don't see how it is enforceable. I don't see how this law is going to cause people to change their behaviour. I mean, what are the demerits on this?

An Hon. Member: Zero.

Mr. Anderson: There are no demerits? See, there are no demerits. How much is the fine?

An Hon. Member: A hundred and seventy bucks.

Mr. Anderson: A hundred and seventy bucks. That's just not going to change any real behaviour. A hundred and seventy bucks might change somebody's behaviour, but it won't change the behaviour of very many at all.

I think that what should be focused on, and what I do like, is the careless driving. We have the right to go down the street and not see people swerving back and forth out of the lane. That I think we all want to not see on our streets. So I think that if people are doing that and they're on the phone or they're doing that and they're eating a burger or something like that, if there's an offence being carried out and the officer can see that the person is weaving because, you know, they are drunk – we have drunk drivers – or they are eating a burger or they are combing their hair and you can see it and they're weaving all over the place, hammer them, absolutely hammer them. That's careless driving because of whatever reason. I don't care why they're being careless. Maybe they are listening to the radio. Maybe they're on hands-free, you know, and they're not paying attention.

Some people have the cognitive ability to do more than one thing at the same time.

An Hon. Member: Especially women.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. Especially. Many in this House have that ability. I'm one of those. I mean, I really can do a lot of things while I'm driving, and I've never been in an accident. Well, not since I was 14, but that was a different story. We'll leave that. That's a different story for another time. There are people that are able to be safe and do some of these other things whereas other people can't. They're swerving around, and they're being careless, and they're not paying attention and so forth. So for those people I think the trick is: let's hammer them.

If people are swerving all over the road because they're doing something when they shouldn't be doing something, let's give them, you know, five, six, seven, eight demerits. I think that's what it is for careless driving, if I'm not mistaken. I think it is eight demerits. Give them a large ticket. Give them demerits. If they're in an accident, let's strengthen the liability penalties and say that if you cause an accident and you're on your cellphone – that's where you nail people. That can take away your driver's licence. It can cost you a fortune. That's the stuff that, in my view, would be more likely to keep people from being distracted.

For me it's not really, you know, a privilege/right thing. Yeah, it is a privilege. We all have the right right now, if we want, to have a Swiss Army knife in our pocket. Sure we could use that knife to do something bad, to damage something. [interjection] That's right. You've got the Swiss Army knife in your pocket right now. You could use it to hurt somebody. But we have laws against that when the actual hurting occurs. It doesn't mean you outlaw the knife. It's kind of like this whole gun registry debate in a lot of ways. You don't make it difficult for law-abiding citizens who are able to use guns safely, et cetera, et cetera. You don't burden their lives with all this excess regulation when, really, what you should be doing is going after the people that are actually abusing firearms. They likely are completely unregistered because that's what criminals do; they don't register their firearms. I think it's a similar argument. We don't need to necessarily regulate everything that could be used as a weapon, and I think that that includes a car.

4:00

Now, I understand that there are speeding laws, and I understand that there's a balance. Where is that line? With the same logic you could say: well, then, you shouldn't have speeding laws, right? Some people can drive at 150, and they're safe. The hon. Transportation minister: good grief; there's a prime example. Safe as you could be; 160 kilometres an hour, though. I mean, that's absolutely amazing. Not all of us have that ability to be safe going 160 kilometres an hour. Surely I know. There are a lot of individuals I won't target right now, you know, in my own family. Going 160 is not safe for them.

We have these laws, but I just think this one is a little bit too far on that scale. I understand that a lot of members in this House believe that it's not. You know, if driving is a privilege, if part of driving is not being distracted, that's fine – we can debate that; we are debating that – but I just think it goes over the line. Also, I think a law needs to be enforceable. You've got to be able to enforce a law. I mean, with seat belt laws I know for a fact that it is very difficult to prove a seat belt infraction unless you've got it on camera.

An Hon. Member: Affidavit evidence.

Mr. Anderson: No. Affidavit evidence, hon. member, generated from one police officer can or can't. I've seen it both ways. In a seat belt violation it's not actually that good. [interjection] Well, yeah, I do, unfortunately. Anyway, I don't think it's effective. First-hand experience. I think, generally speaking, you need two officers to verify it by affidavit, or you need a camera or you need some kind of independent – that's why with speeding, the laser is enough of a sure thing. It's recorded, so they can prove it.

Just in talking with some people from the Edmonton Police Service recently, they told us that this is going to be very difficult to enforce in court. I guess time will tell. We'll see what judges do with it. I mean, people can just say: "Look, what do you mean I had my cellphone up? I was scratching my head when I went by. I was scratching my head. What do you mean: burger? It wasn't a burger. I was wiping my mouth or picking my nose or something like that. I wasn't eating anything." There are a hundred different excuses that one could use, and rightfully so. Like, it's very difficult for a police officer to see something fly by that quickly and actually say: yeah, that definitely was a cellphone. Very difficult. I just don't see how this would be very enforceable in that regard, but I do see the other side.

As I said earlier, at the end of the day I have to begrudgingly defer to my constituents on this. You know, it's a better reason than deferring to the party line. That's for sure. My constituents, like I said earlier, 3 to 1 at least want this bill – you know, positive to negative mail and positive to negative discussions – although I don't think it's going to be effective at all. I'm going to try to amend it, try to make it better. We're going to have another amendment here at some point that will hopefully make this an experiment law to see if it actually works. So an experimental law, kind of like – what do they call the sports at the Olympics? A demonstration sport? – a demonstration law. Let's see if this thing works. I don't think it will. You know, democracy is one of those things where if enough people say that they want something, then they get it. People are going to get it, but I don't think this is going to do a thing.

Really, the one problem I did have and the reason I brought the regulation forward, hon. member – and I know I've heard you speak to this many times – is the issue of ministers having kind of these orders in council. You have these bills where they list a few things,

and then they say basically that the minister can do whatever the heck he wants to amend the bill. We've got these things, "reading or viewing printed material"; in other words, not electronic material. So if you had, say, a GPS, like a TomTom or something like that, on your dash, it doesn't include that. What if one day somebody says: "No. That's off. You can't look at your GPS"? Well, I'd want that to come through the House.

I think you can agree with the bill, and I think you are agreeing with the bill overall, but this one part – I would think that that would give you a little bit of pause to say: "Look. You know, if you're going to outlaw something else, if you're going to prohibit something else, perhaps you should bring it to the body of this House to do, just like you're doing with this bill right here." Why should a future minister have more ability to change the law than the minister who now introduced this legislation? That's the problem.

I could see the other side's point, though. I mean, the other side is saying: "Well, look. You know, we have whipped votes on everything. It just saves time because whatever the minister says, at the end of the day we're going to do it. We're going to put up our flippers and do it. It's not a big deal." That's unfortunate. It shouldn't be that way in a democracy, but that's, generally speaking, what they do. I understand they think that's efficient, but for the rest of us and I think for average Albertans, we'll see. Obviously, this will be part of the upcoming election campaign. Most of us would say: "Look. You know what? When you're doing something that's going to affect people's lives, that's going to be an intrusion into people's lives, let's bring it to the body of the House. Let's all talk about it, let's all have a free vote on it, and we can all be accountable for it."

You know, maybe there are MLAs on that side of the House that actually are against this bill, but none of their constituents know that, none of them. So a hundred per cent are going to vote for this bill, and those who are against it – and I have some idea of who those might be – are not going to vote against the bill. They're going to vote for the bill. How is that democratic to one's constituents? I will never figure that out.

Nonetheless, even in a whipped vote, which they all are, they still have to be accountable for the way that they stood up. At least, you would make them come to the House and say: "Yeah. You know what? We're going to ban the TomTom; we're going to ban the GPS." They have to be responsible for that. They're going to have to be responsible to that old lady down the street because she couldn't use her TomTom and she got lost in a back alley, and she's just mad about it. They're going to have to be accountable to that old lady if they do that. They're going to have to be accountable because that old lady couldn't read the directions that her daughter gave her. They wrote it down: here are the directions to my house, Grandma. She goes out, but she can't read it because under this law you are not allowed to read or view printed material.

So Grandma is not allowed to read the directions, and she goes and gets lost, or she has to pull over. But, you know, it's tough sometimes. You're driving away, and then all of a sudden you come up to a sign: "Do I turn here? I can't remember if I turn here. Oh, where was it? Oh, yes. That's right, Johnson Avenue." And you make a turn. But you can't do that anymore. You'd have to pull over in traffic, which, if it's heavy traffic, is often more dangerous than driving with your cellphone and eating a burger at the same time. Pulling over, you're going to get nailed by someone coming behind you and, you know, just blow everything to smithereens and the whole bit.

I just really think that the minister in the future should have to come to this House and explain why they're taking away yet another liberty, yet another thing. I think that's important; you know, just

like I have to be accountable for the fact that in the past I voted for the land-use framework, something that I will regret for a long time.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, you voted for that.

Mr. Anderson: I know. I spoke to it. I spoke to the land-use framework. It just ticks me right off.

That's what happens when you're a trained seal. You've got to get in there. You get a speech handed to you, "Here's the speech; read it," and you've got to read the speech. You've just got to do it. "Okay. Minister of finance, you're a good friend of mine." [interjection] Well, the former Minister of SRD, the current minister of finance; it's his bill. You're like: "Absolutely. I'm going to do this. I trust you." You give the speech, and then you realize: "Oops. Maybe I shouldn't have done that." Absolutely. I will work for the next two years to reverse that mistake. You can count on it.

Anyway, that's how I feel about it.

4:10

The Chair: Hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration, you wish to speak on amendment A3?

Mr. Lukaszuk: That is correct, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much. I imagine that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and yourself and a few in this House would probably remember our debate on bicycle helmets. I remember it very vividly because every time I attend a grade 6 class and I talk to them about how a bill becomes a law, I always use the bicycle helmet as an example because kids can simply relate to it.

The reason I'm bringing up that particular bill, now the act, is because some of the arguments against bicycle helmets were almost – almost – as ridiculous as the arguments I'm hearing right now against this particular bill. Mr. Chair, even though no member would actually rise and claim on the record that he or she is special and can drive while doing many, many other things and do it safely and safer than anybody else, members would rise and raise the very same issues, saying: "Are you expecting the police to be chasing kids on bicycles? How are you going to take in a child who doesn't have ID? If you take in a child, the child doesn't have a job, so at the end of the day it'll be the parent paying for that ticket, anyhow." And the list went on and on and on.

Thankfully, Mr. Chair, that particular bill was passed, became a law, and now some seven, eight years later you will hardly find any young person that would get on a bicycle and ride without a helmet. As a matter of fact, I can use my daughter as an example. Because of this bill she never had the opportunity of riding a bicycle without a helmet. When she grew up to the age where she could ride a bicycle, a helmet was a natural piece of equipment that we provided her with, so she rides her bicycle with a helmet. Now what she does, consequently, is that she makes me wear a helmet. Well, I wasn't raised with a helmet, but she makes me wear a helmet, which obviously was an unintended positive consequence. The fact is that you will never ever catch her on a bicycle not wearing a helmet. Police officers don't have to worry about chasing her and her classmates or ticketing her.

The fact is that most Albertans, most Canadians will respect the law if a law is on the books. They don't go through every day challenging every law to see whether they will get caught, whether they can avoid it. The fact is that it's a social understanding that if there is a law on the books, a majority of us will follow it. With time it becomes a social norm, and we simply adhere to the regulations.

Mr. Chair, no one – no one – in their right mind could say that I

have some special skills gifted to me by God that allow me to do more things simultaneously and still be as good at every single one of them than any other person or than most people. The fact is that even though some may argue that they're special but in a different definition of the term "special," no one is special in that definition, where they can actually speak on a hand-held cellphone while changing the radio and still be an exceptional driver and not cause any risk.

Mr. Chair, for those who drive on highways and weave in and out of lanes, if you were to pull them over and ask them, "Can you drive safely while speaking on the phone?" I would bet that they would be the first ones to argue that they can drive very safely and that they should be allowed to continue driving. I know for a fact that, especially while looking at the phone and dialing and driving, you are not as attentive to the road, and law enforcement officers would be the first ones to inform you of that. Yes, there will be arguments, and some will try to convert those arguments into some other ideological debates, but there's simply nothing ideological about it. The fact is that you cannot be attentive in the ever-increasing traffic in a province that is becoming more populous and with more and more vehicles on the road and be able to drive safely and be doing other things, engaging things, at the same time.

Let's go back to the arguments. Perhaps for those of the members who weren't here at that time, look at the *Hansards* on bicycle helmets. Learn some lessons from that debate so that perhaps we don't have to take significant time of the House, and vote accordingly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We had some comments in the last couple of days. I made some notes. People talked about education, so I'm going to begin an education process here for one of the hon. members, maybe more. Not that I'm an expert in any way . . .

The Chair: On amendment A3.

Mr. Johnston: Oh, A3. Okay. Regarding amendment A3, I don't support it, and I would like my colleagues to defeat it. It was said that amendment A3 would be a waste of police resources, a waste of time. There were many other things that were mentioned. The amendment says: shall not drive while distracted, may operate a vehicle on a highway, and the minister may make regulations.

Regarding some of the comments I've heard . . .

The Chair: On amendment A3.

Mr. Johnston: Okay. I don't support it, then. I'll leave my comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on amendment A3.

Dr. Taft: Yes, specifically on amendment A3, which would have the effect of removing the authority or the ability of the minister to make regulations relating to section 115.4(1). I want to make it clear to the member that I actually support this bill. I think driving is a privilege, and we would disagree on that. I don't think eating a hamburger or using a cellphone while you're driving is a right. I think it's a privilege, and as such it loses out to my right to have a safe driving environment. So we disagree on that.

However, on the amendment, I actually am inclined to support the amendment. I want to be clear here. The section that it would amend, 115.4(1), has a very important clause that concerns me. I'm not going to read the whole section, because the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere did, but the important part is the preamble: "Subject to this section and the regulations . . . no individual shall drive or operate a vehicle on a highway while engaged in an activity that distracts the individual from the operation of the vehicle."

This is the important part that has changed my mind and leads me to support the amendment. The important clause is "including but not limited to." Then it goes on to list four specific things. When it says "including but not limited to," it means that the minister could do all kinds of things there, and I do have trouble with that.

If we are to take this Legislative Assembly more seriously, I think those issues should come back here. If the minister wants to add whatever it might be – and I think we have to be sensible here. He might add "eating" here, or he might add "watching video screens" because those are increasingly standard features in cars now. Those would be legitimate concerns to have, but there's no reason that the minister couldn't bring those to the Assembly, and if they are legitimate, then I'm sure we would all support the minister.

For that reason, for the principle of defending the integrity of this institution, I will support the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A3.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you. I would like to rise in support of amendment A3, again because of the importance of the democratic process, that is being bypassed with the current bill the way it sits. It's to me paramount that we bring back legislation to the House rather than continue to increase the authority of ministers to be able to change whatever it is.

4:20

It's interesting that many of the bills that this government has brought forward and the activities that this government is doing are more and more out of order in council or at the minister's discretion. Bill 36 and property rights is a good example. With Bill 50 it's again up to the minister's discretion. With the potato farm, which now, thankfully, has been withdrawn, again it was up to the minister's discretion. These are just three relevant, current ministers' discretions that we have in this House, that cause a lot of concern for Albertans from the north to the south. This is exactly what 115.5 is about. It's about saying: well, the minister can just add or subtract on a whim.

Another concern when we do that. I believe one of the most important things that a government does, you know, in our Constitution, in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms is talk about respect for the rule of law. To me what that means is that the precedents are there, you know what the ruling is, it's pretty clear, and there's not an arbitrary decision. When you have respect for the rule of law, you actually start to have peace and prosperity because people know what the results are going to be, whether it's an investment, whether it's a driving act, or any of these areas. It's just so critical that we bring these things back to the House to pass new legislation and not just have someone who can sit in the minister's chair say, "You know, I'm concerned with this; a tragedy has happened; therefore, I'm going to change the regulations" because of that one incident that happens.

There's no question that when we look at the records out there by the AMA – and there are a few bodies in the States – 80 per cent of vehicular accidents are from driver distraction. We realize that this

is happening. We don't know why it's happening, but we need to be looking at that and saying: "That's the focus of this bill. It is driver distraction. It's the safety of the people." As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview said, I want to know that other people are paying attention.

It's interesting, though, because just recently, this last month, a young lady really got nailed in the courts. I believe it was a \$2,500 fine, and was it three demerits? We have laws on the books already that we're failing to utilize, so it's not always about having more bills. It's not always about having more control. It's about having better laws, better understanding of those laws, and the education process of realizing that when we're behind the wheel of a vehicle, we are responsible for where that vehicle is going and for sticking in our lane, signalling properly, going the right speed, not accelerating because we're in an exciting conversation or decelerating because we're concerned with something and slowing down. All of these things need to be looked at.

Having the arbitrary decision of the minister is not in the best interest of this law. Because of that, I strongly support this amendment. I'd ask the members of this House to support this amendment because it would clarify and assure Albertans that this is where we are going to go and not have all these regulations.

People say: well, I didn't know that was against the law. Well, it isn't. It's a regulation that the minister passed. The classic example, that we've been using constantly in here, is that you're eating, and the minister could decide a week after this bill is passed: "You know what? We don't want anybody eating anymore while they're driving." Therefore, someone is pulled over and does not realize that there's a new law. "Well, no, we've just changed the regulations and the descriptions on that law." There are just so many

important things that we need to look at.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member. It's 4:25. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Those who concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is 4:25, I move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, November 15.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:27 p.m. to Monday, November 15, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to November 04, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cA-14.9]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c7]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c6]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c4]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c5]

- 7* Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft.), 769-82 (Apr. 14 aft.), 850-62 (Apr. 20 aft.), 869-76 (Apr. 20 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 878-84 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2010 c8]
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions; SA 2010 c2]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft.), 735-43 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-804 (Apr. 15 aft.), 868 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 878 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c9]
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 876-77 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c12]
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cW-12.5]
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft.), 743-49 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 862-65 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 885-87 (Apr. 20 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cB-4.8]
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-67 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2010 c10]
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 867 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877-78 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c11]
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c3]

- 16* Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 763 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 956-67 (Oct. 26 aft.), 980-81 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 991-98 (Oct. 27 aft., amendments agreed to), 1013-20 (Oct. 28 aft.), 1113-17 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1135-42 (Nov. 4 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced)
- 17 Alberta Health Act (Zwozdesky)**
First Reading -- 1010-11 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1072-85 (Nov. 2 aft., adjourned)
- 18 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 984-90 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1107-11 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
- 19 Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 981-84 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
- 20 Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 1032 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1065-66 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1100-01 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 21 Wills and Succession Act (Olson)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1066-67 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1101-03 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 22 Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1067-70 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1103-06 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 23* Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1070-72 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1111-13 (Nov. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
- 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1099-1100 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 25 Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1100 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 26 Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 980 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1012-13 (Oct. 28 aft.), 1106-07 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010 (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 1098 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1133-34 (Nov. 4 aft., adjourned)
- 28 Electoral Divisions Act (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1098 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1134 (Nov. 4 aft., adjourned)
- 29 Alberta Parks Act (\$) (Ady)**
First Reading -- 1131 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)

- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 709 (Apr. 12 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 c13]
- 202* Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft.), 698-704 (Apr. 12 aft.), 705-09 (Apr. 12 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 819-25 (Apr. 19 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cM-3.3]
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 709-10 (Apr. 12 aft.), 825-32 (Apr. 19 aft.), 836-37 (Apr. 19 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services), (Oct. 27 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 922-28 (Oct. 25 aft.), 1036-44 (Nov. 1 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1044-46 (Nov. 1 aft., adjourned)
- 206 Utilities Consumer Advocate Act (Kang)**
First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
- 208 Recall Act (Hinman)**
First Reading -- 1033-34 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 732-33 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010]
- Pr2* Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 733-35 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749-50 (Apr. 13 aft.), 768 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 31, 2009]
- Pr3* Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 768-69 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 15, 2010

Issue 40

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 15, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, would you please remain standing now. We'll be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you today a class from Ashmont: 43 students, three teachers, instructional assistants, and one student helper. They have travelled two hours to be here today to tour the Legislature Building. I was very much informed by the staff that when they had a mock Legislature, they were so well prepared. If I could ask Mr. Keith Gamblin, Ms Amber Faganello, Jacqueline Michaud, Susan Novosiwsky, Alison Newby, Carol Kam, Debbie Tchir-Houle, and Teresa Ouellette to please stand with their students, that they are so proud of, and accept our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce some special guests as well. They are here from Julia Kiniski elementary school. There are 23 of our brightest students, who are here for an entire week of School at the Legislature. The group includes Mr. Dale Mandryk as their teacher and parent helpers Mrs. Karin Moses and Mr. Vik Shankar. I would ask all of these guests from Julia Kiniski to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 30 grade 6 students from John Barnett elementary school from within my constituency. John Barnett school has recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. It was an important event,

and I was fortunate to support the celebration. These students are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Peggy Wright, Mr. Anthony Reid, and Mr. Glenn Newby, and parent helpers Mrs. Cecilia Pires and Mr. Bill Plican. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Constable Mike Ellis of the Calgary Police Service. Mr. Ellis has been a constable in eight districts since 2003 and has worked closely with the homeless population and related agencies over his time with the CPS.

Mr. Speaker, in the time I've observed Mr. Ellis, I can tell you that being a police officer is not simply a job to him. He really works hard to improve his community. We're lucky to have him in Calgary, and we're also lucky to have him as a member of the Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. Mr. Ellis resides in Calgary-West with his wife, Hollie, and his young children, Simone and Keaton. I would ask that Mr. Ellis please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ginger MacQueen, seated in the public gallery. Would you stand up, Ginger? Ginger is a Calgary-Hays constituent. She's a vital part of a group that formed the CCSVI, which stands for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency. That was approximately one year ago. At this time the group is raising money and awareness and is awaiting charity status. Ginger and the group look forward to the day when CCSVI treatment can be done at home.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate introductions today, and of course I'm thrilled with both of them. The first is to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two really wonderful young women, the kind of young women that we want to see in this Assembly and that, I hope, will each work in their own country to get themselves elected at some point. The first is Miss Kim Miller, who has a flair for languages and is most of the way through teaching herself Japanese. Try that one on, anyone. She is quite the world traveller and is the daughter of our chief of staff, Rick Miller.

Today she has with her a very special friend – they met online through an anime club – Sara Nyhuis. She is a young Australian who is also touring the world at this point: Canada, Europe, and Japan. They have been through a tour of the Legislature. They are both standing in the public gallery, and I would ask the House to please welcome them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also absolutely delighted and relieved to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members our newest caucus staff member, Andrew Fisher. Andrew, would you rise, please? Andrew has joined our caucus team, and that's why I said I'm relieved; we need the extra help. He has assumed the role of public affairs co-ordinator for us. I'd really like to welcome him and wish him all the best. Please join me in welcoming him to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members Sam Gunsch from the advocacy group Sierra Club Canada, who has joined us to help raise awareness of Save Our Parks Week, which they launched today. The purpose of this week is to call on Albertans to save their parks and have Bill 29 withdrawn by the Tourism, Parks and Recreation minister. This group has a long history of protecting and preserving our natural environment through a wide range of environmental projects, from scientific research to environmental education.

In addition, we are very honoured to be joined by two members of Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association: Alison Dinwoodie and Patsy Cotterill. Their group has invested years of work in Alberta's protected areas, and they want to ensure that the integrity of protected areas is retained for future generations.

Please stand to be recognized. I would ask all members to extend the traditional warm welcome of this House to our special guests in the gallery.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you a good friend of mine, Wendy Fulton, who has been guiding me through my political career for the last 10 years or so. She's someone who doesn't mince any words and will give you the straight facts. I'd like Wendy to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there additional introductions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly six guests from the Canadian Diabetes Association who have joined us today for question period in honour of Diabetes Awareness Month. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise as I call their names and to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Jessie Atkins, Corrina Jossy, Ray Marshall, Katie McLaughlin, Charles Rees, and Linda Smith.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Women in Elected Office

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on the subject of women in elected office. First, a little bit of preamble. Canada is lagging behind South Africa, Rwanda, Iraq, Afghanistan, most of Europe, and Australia with just 22 per cent of our national Parliament comprised of women and 21 per cent of our municipal and provincial governments. Our current ranking of 47th out of 110 countries risks falling even further behind with legislative changes being implemented in countries such as Kenya and India.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to attend the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, or CWP, Canada outreach program and the Campaign School for Women in British Columbia last week, which introduced me to groups dedicated to increasing the number of women in elected office. The CWP Canada is a network that provides the opportunity for sharing experiences and seeking solutions to the special challenges faced by the female minority in

parliaments. CWP has a goal to have 30 per cent of Canadian Legislatures occupied by women by 2015.

The 2010 outreach program engaged members from Equal Voice, which organized round-table discussions between young women and women parliamentarians from five provinces. Others include community-based groups focused on making changes through law reform, public education, and litigation, and the city councillor with the Engaging Women, Transforming Cities initiative, which transforms cities into places where women are more involved in the elective process and local governments are more responsive to the priorities of women and girls.

The Canadian Women Voters Congress is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to encouraging all women to become strong, effective voices at all levels of government. Their 2010 campaign school included topics such as marketing and financing as well as barriers that women candidates face in nominations, communications, and managing home and public lives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Preservation of Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Paradise lost. Alberta's current Premier ran on a platform of transparency and public accountability. That promised train, unfortunately, never left the station. In stark contrast to responsible government Albertans have been subjected to a covert, concerted effort to move decision-making out of the people's parliament, in the form of debatable legislation, to behind-closed-doors regulations, subject only to ministerial whim.

Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act; Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act; and Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act are 2009 examples of this regulatory expropriation of public land and recourse. Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, a wolf in sheep's clothing, under the guise of simplification of the rules for parks and protected areas actually compromises what little protection was previously afforded to ecological reserves and wilderness areas such as Siffleur, White Goat, and Ghost River.

Under Bill 29 previous legislative protection has been tossed into the minister's whimsical blender along with parks and recreational areas. What comes out is a yet-to-be-defined ministerial version of Alberta government toxic Kool-Aid, which Albertans will not swallow. When it comes to dos and don'ts, Roger Miller suggested that you can't roller skate in a buffalo herd, to which I would add: except possibly in Alberta.

In Alberta public hearings and due legislative process have been replaced by online government workbooks. When the public relations blanks have been filled in, you have the option of pressing send or delete. The government can say that your input was sought. Bill 29 also offers a citizens' advisory council appointed by the minister, of course.

If you value what remains of Alberta's rapidly diminishing democratic process and vanishing pristine wilderness, please contact the minister, your MLA, and myself as the Liberal critic at calgary.varsity@assembly.ab.ca.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Career and Technology Studies Program

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every student in Alberta deserves access to high-quality learning opportunities that provide them with relevant skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Alberta has developed a high-quality career and technology studies, or CTS, program, which introduces students to careers in trades, health,

natural resources, media, and business and can enable students to receive both high school credit and credit towards a postsecondary education program. Benefits for students include the opportunity to receive hands-on, real-world experience, which can motivate them to finish high school and continue on to postsecondary studies, into apprenticeship, or into the world of work.

CTS courses can make a difference for students, especially when taught by teachers who can impart relevant, real-world knowledge and passion. Unfortunately, the supply of qualified CTS teachers remains low, and teacher attrition rates remain high as teachers retire and student enrolment grows.

To address these changes, the government of Alberta initiated the CTS bridge to teacher certification program. The program aims to attract certified journeypeople from various trades such as carpentry, welding, culinary arts, and cosmetology as well as health professionals and information technologists to the teaching profession. These professionals are needed to teach advanced dual credit CTS courses, those courses that allow the students to receive high school credit as well as credit towards a postsecondary education program.

Last week a front-page story in the *Journal* told of journeyman baker Kelly Hobbs, one of 21 tradespeople participating in the new program, which began in September. She is working in the classroom, sharing what she loves and is passionate about, while completing a teacher preparation program offered by the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education. This unique initiative is a creative approach to meet the needs of students, and it is students who will benefit the most as they gain the skills and experience they need to be successful.

I am pleased to rise today to acknowledge the promising collaboration between the government and education stakeholders and to celebrate this new, exciting opportunity for professionals and students across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

National Bullying Awareness Week

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Words like "freak," "loser," "idiot" are not just cruel, but they are daggers to the heart, especially the heart of a young person. They are but a few words associated with the act of bullying, which has become an increasingly more serious issue. We have heard some very tragic stories of youth so severely impacted by the act of bullying that they saw no other recourse except suicide. Bullying of any kind humiliates and intimidates the victims, often with painful and long-lasting consequences. This week, National Bullying Awareness Week, from November 14 to 20, is an important time for all Albertans to think about the harmful effects of bullying.

One of my constituents, Austen Radowits, was bullied but turned his bad experiences into hope for others. Austen was a 14-year-old boy when he was involved in a freestyle motocross accident which left him with a severe brain injury. Upon his return to school he was bullied by kids. It was out of this experience that Austen decided to become a motivational speaker in schools. He has spoken to over 3,200 students and has been in newspapers and on television to share his story. I am truly inspired by Austen and how he has turned his own personal adversity into an opportunity to help other youth. He is an outstanding Albertan.

Our government continues to be committed to helping create a more tolerant society and is working hard towards a culture shift when it comes to bullying. That is why our government created the prevention of bullying strategy. The strategy focuses on working with children, youth, parents, educators, community leaders, and

other role models to help prevent bullying and not just in our schools but in every corner of every community in our province. Bullying is a global issue, and as we do on so many other fronts, Alberta leads the way on the issue of bullying prevention.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What is clear to Albertans from this emergency room wait times crisis is that nobody actually knows who's in charge of the health care system. There is obvious disagreement between the minister and Alberta Health Services. Alberta Health Services is saying that they won't meet their emergency room wait times until 2015. To the Premier. What is your commitment? How long do you think Albertans should be waiting to fix the emergency room crisis?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm just as frustrated as everybody else in terms of the waiting times in emergency rooms. Albertans deserve better, and we are working on reducing those wait times. The minister has outlined a strategy, and Alberta Health Services and the minister are working on it. The minister can further elaborate on what he has already done.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. How long do you think we should be waiting for these emergency wait times to improve? How long, Mr. Premier? It's on your head.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our goal here is to either meet or exceed standards in terms of emergency waiting times. We have to keep in mind that Alberta Health Services is doing more every day in terms of surgeries: bone and joint replacement, eye surgery. Also, the pressures are in emergency rooms. We need more long-term care beds, and we have added those, I believe, 1,300 by the end of this year. Things are happening. We're hiring more nurses, and the minister can elaborate even further.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, back to the Premier. How long do you think Albertans should wait, Mr. Premier? How long?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, our goal here is to meet or exceed the national standards. I don't know as to who is meeting them currently because these are pressures right across the country, but I can assure you that the minister is doing whatever he can in co-operation with Alberta Health Services to meet those guidelines.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Oil Sands Tailings Pond Containment

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, yet another story on leaking tailings ponds came out today, giving another blow to the reputation of Alberta, another blow to the environment, and another blow to our economy. To the Premier: was the Premier aware that this tailings pond was leaking and easily accessible to wildlife?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this was a story that broke in one of the news organizations. They certainly didn't call ERCB,

nor did they call Alberta Environment. However, when the story became public, we had staff both from Alberta Environment and ERCB investigating. The minister has further details. We'll hear more from the investigators on-site.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely anyone in Alberta with an education knows that we need barriers to prevent water and animals from going in and out of a toxic site, something this pond lacks. Will the Premier admit the current standards are weak, inadequate?

Mr. Liepert: Maybe I could answer that question. First of all, the Leader of the Opposition raised an issue that the ERCB takes very seriously and on a regular basis does inspections as regulations are outlined. That most recent inspection was two weeks ago. But as a result, as the Premier mentioned this morning, of the story that appeared, an inspector was out there today and found that everything is in compliance, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. How many times does the Premier think that the federal government will allow Alberta's mishandling of tailings ponds to pollute federal waterways before they step in and take control of our environmental management?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I just heard the minister say that the report back from the ERCB investigator was that the operator is in compliance with the standards that are issued by government.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Trade Mission to India

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier splashed out \$84,000 taxpayer dollars to jet off to India while Indians were enjoying their major holiday of Diwali. He didn't, unsurprisingly, seem to accomplish much except keeping up with his blog site. To the Premier. I didn't see any trade deals signed or any other measurable gains in India. How did the Premier expect to accomplish anything during this holiday season of Diwali?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the trip to India was quite successful. We are of course meeting with not only ministers but also oil and gas companies. India is the world's largest English-speaking country. It is democratic. It has a good justice system. Their oil and gas companies are cash rich and are looking to invest in Alberta. They've also asked to work with a number of companies that are in India today to expand, especially in enhanced oil recovery, and also to learn from what we've already accomplished in many of the environmental areas, especially when it comes to water.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has fewer sitting days in the Legislature than Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, even the Yukon. How can the Premier justify this further insult to the people of Alberta, abandoning their Legislature when it barely meets anyway?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have to learn from this latest unbelievable economic global shift is that the economy is shifting to Asia. We can no longer depend on a market of 350 million people in the United States to maintain the kind of standard in quality of life that we enjoy today. Over three billion

people, a marketplace that we can tap into. The middle class is growing in size. They need energy, they need food, and they also need fibre. Alberta can provide all three.

Dr. Swann: In September the Premier dropped everything to meet James Cameron. However, when he should have been at work meeting with the European Union trade delegation, he toured India instead. What does this say about the Premier's priorities for the government of Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I know that following my visit to India, Prime Minister Harper visited with the Prime Minister of India. They have opened up negotiations on a Canada-India free trade agreement. When we were in Europe a few months before, we did talk to a number of elected officials in terms of opening up their borders, especially for agricultural products. Canada and the European Union are in the middle of serious negotiations. I've asked the Prime Minister to keep us informed of all of the tables. The one table that we're not involved with as yet is around the financial table. That is disconcerting because we will have to administer the agreement once it's reached in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Health System Acute-care Beds

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Long waits in our emergency departments are just one symptom of many problems the health care system is facing. Fixing the ER issue and getting patients in the right bed in a timely manner is critical. Research tells us that a long-standing metric for acute-care beds is 1.9 per thousand people. To the Premier: what is the number of acute-care beds per thousand in Edmonton and Calgary, where the major pressures are being felt?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the opposition is centred on the number of beds per thousand. We went through this discussion a number of years ago. There are other services that have to be provided for patients other than just the bed – that is, kidney dialysis, radiation vaults – not only just in Edmonton and Calgary but in outlying centres like in Grande Prairie and Red Deer and Lethbridge so that people don't have to travel hundreds of miles on a weekly basis to be able to access that kind of treatment. Those are the kinds of improvements that have been made already. We will keep making those improvements not only based on the statistics that they want to look at but to make sure that the patient comes first.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer is 1.2, below the national average.

Acute-care medical and surgical beds are desperately needed. Now, Mr. Premier, I'm not talking about rehab, I'm not talking about palliative care, and I'm not talking about transition beds. To the Premier: how many additional acute-care beds has your government opened since January 1 of this year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I know we have to do more is to open up more continuing care beds. We have a number of acute-care beds that are tied up by individuals that have to move to the next level of care, which is continuing care. That is why we're well into our goal of building 1,300 additional beds this year, and we'll continue to build at least a thousand a year in order to keep up with the ever-increasing aging population.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, he didn't answer that question, but let's try this one because it's going back into what he just finished saying. Mr. Premier, how many net new nursing home beds – and I mean nursing home beds – has your government opened? When I say nursing home beds, I mean real nursing home beds, not continuing care or assisted living, nursing home beds.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I find it kind of ironic. Just a few months ago they were talking about taking \$1.3 billion out of Health. Then they were musing about this two-tiered, European style of health care. All of a sudden today they're asking for more spending and more beds. Actually, even with the additional new spending they want to do, they're on the right track to begin with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:00 Emergency Room Wait Times
(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see the Premier back with us again.

A couple of weeks ago the Minister of Health and Wellness proudly announced that he was setting new standards for emergency room wait times. Last week, clearly embarrassed by their dismal performance, Alberta Health Services quietly cut the standards, hoping no one would notice. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will you instruct Alberta Health Services to quit lowering standards for our emergency room wait times and start meeting national standards within one year, and if not, why not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as Alberta Health Services' website indicates, these performance measures are being worked on right now between Alberta Health and Wellness staff and Health Services staff. New figures will be coming out. Some of them may stay the same, some may move up, and some may move down. It's a floating document because it's a work that has to be adjusted sometimes from month to month, certainly from quarter to quarter, and most certainly by year-end.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's a floating minister. Gone are the heady first days of this Minister of Health and Wellness, when he would phone up Stephen Duckett in the middle of an editorial board meeting to demand answers. Now we see the return of Mr. Dithers, just another PR flunky for an entrenched bureaucracy. The minister makes a big show of setting ER wait time standards and then lets his subordinates lower them. Why won't the minister admit that he isn't really in charge and that he's avoiding his responsibilities while Albertans desperately seeking help sit huddled in emergency rooms for hours on end?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member couldn't be farther off base. The fact is that significant improvements have occurred at many sites. I had that discussion with the head of the Alberta Medical Association two Fridays ago, and he as well indicated that, yes, there are improvements at some sites. Thank you for that. There are a few other sites that still need additional work.

With respect to the earlier part of the question, I have given Alberta Health Services until Christmas to come up with the improvements that we need to see.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this minister and Alberta Health Services are both failing Albertans.

This minister announced that national standards would be met, and Alberta Health Services is making a fool of him. When will this minister take some responsibility for a change? When will he put his job on the line if he can't deliver national standards quickly?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the percentiles that are being met today are inadequate, and that's why we're reviewing these performance measures. That's why I gave the direction to Alberta Health Services to come back with a plan on where and how those improvements would be made. They've started that plan. They've opened 70 more beds since September in Edmonton and going forward and similarly in Calgary. That's a start, and that's at the major acute-care sites in those two cities. On top of that 1,300 additional continuing-care beds are being opened: 800 already are; 500 left to go. That will help take away some of the crowding pressures as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Certificate of Recognition Workplace Safety Program

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 this government's own study found that a work-site safety certificate program saved \$15 million in injury compensation. In the same year the WCB issued rebates totalling almost \$76 million to companies holding this safety certificate, whether they had safe sites or not. My first question is to the Employment and Immigration minister. Is spending \$76 million to save \$15 million the hon. minister's idea of value for money in trying to keep Alberta work sites safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One, the COR program is being reviewed as we're speaking. As you know, our Auditor General has pointed out some bona fide issues within this program with which I agree, and we're reviewing this program.

Relevant to compensation this member, frankly, is barking up the wrong tree. That decision is made by a board of directors of the Workers' Compensation Board. He should be contacting the board. They manage their own finances.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the record, the COR program was initiated by this government, not the WCB.

Again to the same minister: does the minister really believe that the government here should be spending five times more on rebates than it is actually spending on trying to enforce the safety laws of this province?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that in a question one doesn't lead a listener to a false conclusion. Not one single government dollar is being spent on COR. COR is funded by the Workers' Compensation Board, which is, truly, 100 per cent funded by employers of Alberta. Not one taxpayer dollar goes into WCB or the COR program, and the member well knows that.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows perfectly well – at least, I hope he does – that the COR program was initiated by this government. Again, why is the minister allowing the Workers' Compensation Board to use bonuses to encourage their own employees to sign up even more companies for this flawed safety

certificate when it doesn't even save money or make the work sites in this province safer?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say it slower. One, the COR program is being reviewed as we're speaking right now. The Auditor General has identified issues with which I agree. We're reviewing it. Two, the program is funded exclusively by the Workers' Compensation Board, which is fully funded by employers of Alberta. They seem not to be raising any concerns, and they are the ones funding it.

We're reviewing the program. We're not spending any government dollars on this. It is an employer-funded program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Provincial Taxes

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The B.C. government recently announced a 15 per cent personal income tax reduction. They claim this means that B.C. taxpayers now pay the lowest provincial income tax in Canada on incomes up to \$130,000. My first question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Has Alberta lost its tax advantage?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by congratulating the government of British Columbia for lowering taxes. We're happy to see taxes lowered anywhere in Canada but particularly by our partners in the western partnership. Now, if you compare income taxes in British Columbia and Alberta, certain brackets now in British Columbia will have a lower tax, but if you look at all taxes – sales taxes, gas taxes, all the other taxes – Albertans pay \$2,650 less per capita than our friends in British Columbia.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us what tax advantages Albertans continue to enjoy?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. Let me count the ways. One, health care premiums: no health care premiums in Alberta; \$121 a month in British Columbia. Two, personal and spousal exemptions: much lower here. Three, we have the Alberta family and employment tax credits for lower income families. Fuel taxes: 9 cents in Alberta; 19 cents per litre in British Columbia. How about provincial sales taxes? How much provincial sales tax in Alberta? Zero. Seven per cent in British Columbia.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the same minister. Does the minister have the numbers to back up his claim that Albertans remain the lowest taxed in Canada?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I do have a number. It's a simple number, but it's a very big number. The number, for the opposition, is \$10 billion. That's how much less we pay in Alberta than if we had their taxes here.

Hate Crimes

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, last week the people of Alberta were shocked by a serious assault in Calgary that was motivated by hatred

and racism. To the Minister of Justice. According to Statistics Canada Calgary and Edmonton experienced double – yes, double – the national average of crimes motivated by hatred, and this is only getting worse. What is her ministry doing to prevent this scourge?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an area where we have particular concern. We work very closely with police services across this province with respect to hate crimes. In fact, just within the past 12 months when we were asked to intervene and to recommend that charges be laid, the Attorney General did agree to do that, and we were successful in our prosecution. We will continue to work very closely with the police to ensure that these horrendous crimes are properly prosecuted.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. The assault on Mr. Devine, coupled with the attack on Ms Shannon Barry this summer in Edmonton, indicates that this minister needs to do more to educate Albertans about tolerance. What is this ministry planning on doing to reduce these types of crime?

2:10

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not my responsibility nor the responsibility of our ministry to stop these types of crimes. We continue to work through the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund to provide funding to organizations who go out and promote the need for tolerance, the need for respect. We work through our Human Rights Commission to ensure that Albertans every day are able to live their lives free of prejudice and have access to jobs, to accommodation, and to government services free of discrimination.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of children's services. The Alberta government's response to the most recent hate crime was to further victimize the Devine family by questioning their ability to parent because of their social activism. Will the minister apologize for shamefully victimizing this family a second time?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that statement is entirely inaccurate. I'm surprised that this member is bringing this forward to the Assembly as you're indicating that there are children involved in this situation, and how we assist families with children is very confidential. I have to tell you as well that our very first and foremost principle is to keep families together, and that would not be any different in the case that this member is mentioning.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's nonprofit and charitable organizations are part of the remarkable formula that makes our province such a great place to live. Without the programs

and services they provide, our society would literally crumble, yet a number of nonprofits in my constituency are struggling with multiple challenges, including increased and diverse needs from Albertans. Can the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit please tell me what he is doing to help this critically important sector during these tough economic times?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the government remains committed to Alberta's not-for-profit and voluntary sector community and to the goals of providing safe and healthy and vibrant communities. In addition to the \$86 million in our department, there's well over a billion dollars provided through grants, services, and programs to those less fortunate across our province. But there are challenges beyond just money. In our department we're trying to help with professional development, and we're helping with the facilitation of workshops and services and programs to encourage volunteer screening. We're also streamlining our grants to make them more accessible.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the same minister. Can the minister please tell me what he is doing to ensure that this sector remains healthy after the economy has recovered?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we have to do when the economy is not healthy is the same thing we have to do when it is. The government helps over 20,000 not-for-profit organizations, and over 5,600 of those are directly funded through us. We're working to meet with the representatives of the different sectors all across the province to identify their needs and to streamline our programs to more effectively help the people that they're trying to service to make sure that Albertans and those most vulnerable Albertans are getting the services that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: That's it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Oil Sands Tailings Pond Containment (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Leaking tailings ponds is the new political hot potato. No one is doing their job, not the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, or the Minister of Health and Wellness. No one is around to take responsibility when fish grow tumours, wildlife drink toxic sludge, or cancer rates rise in First Nations people in the area. To the Minister of Environment: why does this government have such weak standards that a tailings pond that is clearly damaging the surrounding area can meet approval guidelines?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll respond to this member, but I also need to point out that this is a joint responsibility between ERCB and Environment. I want to point out to this member that while we are following up on the allegations that have been part of these media stories, initial reports indicate that there is no release of water from this pond, that the design of this pond is working as it was appropriately designed to work, and if there is any issue, we will be dealing with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: since there are dozens and dozens of releases, contraventions, spills, and failures of control structures reported on the Horizon tailings pond since it opened, why did the government do nothing about it? Given all of these reports, this should not have been a surprise to the government; it should have been an expectation of what was going to happen. Why are you surprised?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have not determined whether or not the allegations that gave rise to the line of questioning are, in fact, accurate. We have, as we speak, our staff on site to determine whether or not there have been any breaches of the approval. But I can assure you that there is ongoing requirement for monitoring, there are inspections from time to time, and up until today those kinds of issues have not arisen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, this will go to the Minister of Energy, then. This tailings pond's cleanup plan did not meet the requirements in directive 074, yet it was approved. Why is that, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the member is not any more correct in her preamble in this question than she was in the previous two. What, in fact, did occur with directive 074 is that the ERCB issued the directive, asked all of the various companies to respond. They did. The ERCB took a look at all of their plans and I believe to date has approved all of the plans with, I think, two still to be approved, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Aging Population Framework

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is common knowledge that Alberta's population is aging. In just 20 years 1 out of every 5 Albertans will be a senior, including myself. This significant change in demographics is going to be a real challenge to Alberta and our government. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is your ministry doing to ensure our government is prepared for a population with such a high number of seniors?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, meeting the needs of present-day and future seniors is a priority for our Premier and for our government and for myself. With the changing needs of an aging population, our programs and our supports serving current seniors must be affordable, they must be sustainable, and they need to be flexible for the changing needs. The aging population policy framework ensures that we meet those needs and that they are sustainable and affordable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. Well, that's all well and good, but my constituents want to see results. They're not just satisfied with policies and guidelines. They'd like to see something that they can see and hold. To the minister: what would this framework actually accomplish?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, before you can build any house, you have to have a foundation and you have to have a framework.

That's exactly what the aging population policy framework is. It's a guide for all of government so that we're on the same page when we make any plans or programs for our seniors. Part of the framework outline includes the Alberta government's roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of an aging population and key directions for government policy-makers, including those in the areas of financial security, housing, and transportation.

Ms Woo-Paw: My final question to the same minister: can you please tell the Assembly what some of the tangibles could be?

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, Mr. Speaker, the framework establishes goals that government will pursue to address the needs of an aging population. That includes assisting seniors to financially prepare for their senior years, it includes supporting seniors to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible, which is something that we all want, and it also provides seniors with more options so that they can have a home to meet their changing accommodation and service needs. All sectors along with individual Albertans have a role in achieving these outcomes, and I look forward to working with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:20 Oil Sands Tailings Pond Containment (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public had no clue that an apparently unsecured tailings dam was being built across traplines in northern Alberta, and there was no public consultation after the ERCB conditionally approved the strange three-walled tailings pond in 2004. First it was ducks put at risk by toxic tailings soup, and now animals are reportedly free to wander into this three-walled pool. To the Minister of Environment: how could this government possibly approve such a seemingly nonsensical strategy for containing liquid toxic sludge?

Mr. Renner: Well, let me again remind this member that the approval process is one that is jointly through the ERCB and Environment. In this case the ERCB was the one responsible for approving the actual plan. But, Mr Speaker, there is an allegation that somehow this tailings pond is not operating as it was intended. It is built against a natural wall. There is no indication at this point that that natural wall is working any differently than the three artificial ones.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the ERCB and the Minister of Environment are all on the same side, so I think they should all answer for each other.

Now, given that CNRL was initially asked by the Ministry of Environment to provide groundwater monitoring results from pond 1 in the spring of this year and given that the ERCB subsequently approved a delay in the provision of that information until this September, can the minister now tell this House whether he's received that report and whether he will table it in the Legislature to prove his claims that his three-sided pool is not leaking into the water supply?

Mr. Renner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to a report that was requested by the ERCB. I remind her one more time that the ERCB reports to the Minister of Energy, not to the Minister of Environment.

Ms Notley: Wow. Duck and dive there.

Well, could the minister please advise the House whether he has received any scientific reporting on the impact of having several natural watercourses flow into the tailings dam, thereby losing that fresh water, and whether there is any way we can guarantee that they do not continue to flow underground through the toxic sludge right back into the Athabasca River, where they were flowing before?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong. There are not natural watercourses flowing into this tailings pond. That's the reason why there's a compensation lake that has been put in place to gather the water that flows into this pond. It goes into a compensation lake and around the pond. What the member is referring to is a footprint for a pond that is not yet full. Like any other pond or any other water body, the last I heard, water flows downhill; it doesn't flow uphill. The pond is rising. It is not going beyond the footprint that was designated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Confidentiality of Name Changes

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A mother and a daughter in Alberta endured years of moving from shelter to shelter in fear of a violent family member. They finally took the desperate step of erasing their identities. This involved a confidential change of name under Alberta's Change of Name Act. To the Minister of Service Alberta: is it true that your department authorized the confidential name change and then, contrary to the privacy provisions of the act, published information about their name changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to note that we take the privacy of Albertans' information very seriously. I am very well aware of this particular situation. One of the first things that I did when I became minister, when I became aware of this, is that we have a process in place where we will be having a second person verify whether it should not go in the *Gazette*.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it also true that the official explanation for this breach of confidentiality was that no one is perfect? If so, how can Albertans trust this government to protect their most sensitive personal information?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a regular basis there are about 12 of these situations that take place every year, where it's a court-ordered situation where a person's identity is protected. So we do know on a regular basis that things continue to go well. With respect to this situation a mistake was made, we have verified it, and we have worked together with the individual in question to make sure of her security and that she is safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mother in this case said that this kind of official failure is the reason why women go back to abusive relationships. In a life-and-death situation how could "No one is perfect" ever be an acceptable response?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I'd like to say that we take the security of Albertans' information very seriously. It's a very serious situation. Part of the challenge is to make sure that this woman is safe and that moving forward, in the further changes that we make to support other Albertans, we have the system in place to ensure that this does not happen again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Legal Aid

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past Albertans have enjoyed great service from their Legal Aid system, but lately I've been contacted by many constituents who are genuinely concerned about changes that have been made to this important program. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Why are you making these changes, and how can you assure my constituents that these changes will not be detrimental to their services in the future compared to those of today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work very closely with the Law Society of Alberta and the Legal Aid board to ensure that we're providing services that Albertans need through Legal Aid. We've developed a number of targeted pilot projects to ensure, particularly in the area of civil legal aid, that we are providing the services that people need to have. I congratulate the Legal Aid board for their leadership in this. We work in very close co-operation with them, and we've been ensuring that if there are possible services that people need that may not include a comprehensive plan, we'll continue to provide those services so that Legal Aid can be sustainable into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. That's good information to have, but for the record can the minister verify whether the government has or has not cut Legal Aid funding, and if so, by how much exactly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have not cut our funding to Legal Aid. We support Legal Aid with a substantial grant each year. In the 2010-2011, 2009-2010, and 2008-2009 fiscal years this grant was \$53.8 million. Previous to that it was \$45.3 million. We've not only maintained our commitment to Legal Aid; we've increased it and tried to make it sustainable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. It's been several months since these changes were made. How much longer are Albertans expected to wait before they can see the results of these pilot projects?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Legal Aid program and the Department of Justice decided that over this year of transition we would monitor the change in programs on a monthly basis. I will say that I had very productive meetings with the Legal Aid board last week, and we're already seeing those successes. The full reports

will be available within that 12-month period, April of next year. However, we are already seeing very good results.

Patient Safety Investigation

Mr. Anderson: Last week more health care horror stories were brought to light showing that our emergency room crisis is deepening. Just one of the many latest examples is from Edmonton where a young man struggling with a mental illness committed suicide after waiting for help in vain for hours and hours in Edmonton's emergency rooms. To the minister: will you call in the Health Quality Council to investigate this tragedy as well as the thousands of other poor health outcomes stemming from the ER crisis to ensure these tragedies are not repeated?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is a history on this file. I want to go down on the record saying that any death is a tragedy for a family to deal with. I did speak with the family over the weekend, and they explained a few more of the extenuating circumstances. I want to express my sincere condolences and sympathies to the family that is suffering the loss of their stepson in this case.

With respect to the overarching question there are a number of other procedures that we are putting into place right now, Mr. Speaker, to do the best that we can do as a team to ensure these kinds of tragedies don't occur again.

Mr. Anderson: All right. Let's try this again. Given the gravity of the ER crisis and given that it was known to the Premier and the ministry of health just four days after the 2008 election, as shown by leaked documents several weeks ago, why wasn't the Health Quality Council called in to investigate the crisis at that time, and why have they still not been called in, Minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if Alberta Health Services is contemplating that particular strategy or not. Perhaps they are. I don't know the details of something that goes back to 2008 as alluded to, but I can tell you that since the time that I took over, we have made some significant strides and significant improvements to address exactly the issue being talked about here; that is, opening up more beds. I could give you the entire list if you want. We are opening them in acute-care hospitals as well as in the community, and that's one of the key points.

Mr. Anderson: Minister, people are dying. Now would be the time to act. Given that the legislated mandate of the Health Quality Council is, on request of the minister, to assess, inquire into, or study matters respecting patient safety and health service quality in Alberta and given that there is no greater current threat to the public safety of Albertans than the current ER crisis, I'll ask him again. Will the minister call on the Health Quality Council to investigate the tragedies happening in our emergency rooms and table recommendations to permanently solve this crisis?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll give that some consideration, but in the meantime I think people should take some comfort in knowing that there are other quality assurance types of reviews that are already under way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:30

Long-term Care in Red Deer

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS has now completed the transfer of 215 long-term care residents from Red Deer nursing

home and Valley Park Manor to the new Michener Hill Village in Red Deer. Constituents in Red Deer insist on learning why AHS has closed these facilities when there are seniors in acute care and struggling at home waiting for placement in the continuing care system. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why did AHS close both long-term care facilities when there is need for more continuing care?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that the Red Deer nursing home was built in 1964; the Valley Park Manor was built in 1969. They've both seen better days. However, in response to the question, a decision was made that said that it's more cost-effective to move these residents to a brand new 280-bed facility called Extendicare Michener Hill, and that resulted in a net increase of 65 additional spaces.

Mr. Dallas: On Monday, November 8, Alberta Health Services reissued layoff notices to staff at Valley Park Manor and Red Deer nursing home. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: why are the staff at these two facilities not being transferred to Extendicare Michener Hill Village?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that it's a different employer, and it's also a different operator, so you can't just transfer them unilaterally like that. However, my understanding is that the people working at the two facilities referenced have been asked, if not encouraged, to apply for employment at the new place, and I believe a number of them have taken up that offer.

Mr. Dallas: To the same minister. Red Deer nursing home and Valley Park Manor have served the community well. What does Alberta Health Services have planned for the future of these two buildings, and when will these announcements be made?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a number of months were spent studying that issue, and in the end it was concluded that it just wasn't cost-effective to keep both of them going when a new facility was going to meet the new standards in a better way.

However, the short answer to the second part of that question is that Valley Park Manor, which is newer, may require some major renovation, and I've asked for that concept to be reviewed, just to see if it could be repurposed and used down the line. The first one, the Red Deer nursing home, is probably beyond that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

English Express Literacy Program

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year many were surprised and disappointed to hear of the cancellation of English Express, an inexpensive, \$300,000 investment in improving literacy that was distributed to 60,000 Albertans. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. With studies showing that 4 out of 10 Albertans lack basic literacy skills, how can the minister justify cutting this valuable, low-cost resource investment for adult learners?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, English Express served us very, very well for more than 20 years, but based on the new direction that we have set out in our Living Literacy

framework, which I know the hon. member has had occasion to review – this was developed in consultation with literacy providers – we need to work more collaboratively with those providers, and more innovative delivery programs were also designed to be online and to get better use of the dollars.

Mr. Chase: From English Express to English regress.

Was English Express targeted for cancellation because users of the newspaper do not have the resources or the guaranteed rights of citizenship to speak out?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not, and that's a ridiculous statement. The funding from English Express is going to be used for exactly the purpose that we have, for literacy in the province of Alberta. It is very important that we reach out collaboratively to all of those literacy networks. That funding is not cut. It is going to be redeployed within the funding literacy framework so that we can help more Albertans.

Mr. Chase: So once you've got a good thing, cancel it.

Given that the minister points to short-term cost savings as the reason for cancelling English Express, what will the long-term price be for Alberta taxpayers for ongoing illiteracy?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I wish the hon. member would listen to the answer rather than make an inaccurate statement. The funding was not cut. The funding was redeployed within the literacy framework. The hon. member should get his facts straight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Continuing Care Facility in Didsbury

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A continuing care centre in Didsbury has been my top priority and a top priority for my constituents for a number of years now and, hopefully, also a high priority for this government. This spring \$10 million was committed by the government to see a facility open by 2012. We're fast closing in on 2011, leaving little more than a year to build this facility. To the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: does she still see this facility up and operating in 2012?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can assure the hon. member that there will be progress. You know, over the past decade our government has provided over half a billion dollars towards the development of close to 10,000 affordable continuing care spaces. This year we allocated \$105 million for 13 affordable seniors' projects in 11 Alberta communities, including the project in Didsbury.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The request for proposal for this project was to be completed by the end of July of this year. Why is this process taking so long if the requests were to be in by the end of July?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. This summer we held a request for proposal for the projects in Didsbury and Stettler. This resulted in 13 project applications for the Didsbury project alone. Each of these applications is undergoing a very thorough review to ensure that they're viable and that they meet the

needs of the community. I expect to make an announcement for the successful proponent in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Until I hear otherwise, I'm assuming that no news is not good news.

My final question is to the same minister. If this project is going to be opened in 2012, it's going to have to get started pretty soon. When can my constituents expect to see some action on this facility? When is the start date?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, with the announcement of the successful proponent coming in the very near future, we expect that the developer will proceed in a timely manner. The Didsbury project is receiving up to \$10 million in provincial funding for the construction of 100 affordable supportive living spaces. As per the agreement we expect that construction will be well under way by 2012.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Oil Sands Tailings Pond Containment (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to follow up on discussions we've had on this tailings pond at the Horizon site. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can he tell us if there is anything in place to stop wildlife like moose or muskrats or whatever from freely wading into the tailings pond at the CNRL Horizon plant?

Mr. Knight: What I can tell the hon. member and all Albertans is that the operations at CNRL and, in fact, all of the other installations that currently have tailings ponds and mining operations in the Athabasca oil sands region, Mr. Speaker, operate under a set of regulatory guidelines, and to my knowledge they follow those guidelines.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I guess that illustrates the concern here. We're told over and over by different ministers that everything at the CNRL Horizon plant meets ERCB standards. To the Minister of Energy: does anyone in government review the ERCB standards such as this one, that allows tailings to be poured onto open ground? Does anyone in government review this?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, in a number of questions today there have been allegations made. I would question where the allegations came from, how they would substantiate these. The ERCB is recognized as a leading regulator globally, and for these members here to insinuate somehow that they're not doing their job is an insult to a leading regulator in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I'll go back to this same minister. There's so much at stake here, not just the environment but the economy. The forestry industry works with environmental groups to reassure investors and customers, to get a sort of independent stamp of approval. To the Minister of Energy: will the government submit the ERCB's tailings pond standards for third-party independent review by recognized experts?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd take a look at that. I don't know if it's something that would add any value. If it would, I'd take a look at it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period for today. Nineteen members were recognized, with 112 questions and responses.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue the Routine with Members' Statements.

2:40

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Diabetes

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today in order to help draw much-needed attention to the serious condition of diabetes. Diabetes can be a painful, debilitating disease that, left untreated or improperly managed, can result in a variety of complications such as heart disease, strokes, peripheral vascular disease, amputations, kidney failure, heart attacks, and blindness, just to name a few. More than 20 people are diagnosed with diabetes every hour of every day. It's estimated that in 2010 alone 217,000 Albertans have been diagnosed with either type 1 or type 2 diabetes, and that number is rising drastically. The majority of those patients are maturity-onset type 2 diabetes patients. Over the next decade that number is expected to increase by 67 per cent, which represents the highest increase in Canada.

Of particular concern are our children. Diabetes is a childhood illness. We have record numbers of young people getting type 2 diabetes, which is an adult illness. In Alberta and across the country the Canadian Diabetes Association is working hard to lead the fight against diabetes by helping people with diabetes live healthy lives while working to find a cure. This November, Diabetes Awareness Month, I encourage people to visit diabetes.ca to see the faces of people with diabetes, to learn more about what's being done in this community, and to connect with local activities.

Mr. Speaker, this disease affects everyone that we know. My own father himself has diabetes. One day I may have this disease. I know that there are probably a number of members in the Legislature that have this disease. We have to do something about this. Finally, to reduce the risk of contracting diabetes, let's start investing in our wellness today by adopting healthier lifestyles: by eating less, eating right, and moving more.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Agri-Trade 2010

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the farm calendar November stands out with the annual Agri-Trade exposition. This year's event was another great success in bringing the world of agriculture from around western Canada to Red Deer. From November 10 to 13 at Westerner Park exhibitors and events included equipment manufacturers, modern farm home products, and the agri-trend stage presentations. The ag industry is ever changing with research and development as exhibitors demonstrate excellence in innovation and agricultural applications.

The ag innovation awards is a growing agri-trade program which rewards new product inventions and improved industry processes. Ag innovation awards 2010 highlighted new ideas and practical

achievements with prestigious recognition at the awards ceremony on November 10. Award recipients received show-booth banners, preshow and award banquet recognition, and ag innovation publicity. The 2010 finalists for the highly sought awards included technology processes, wheat products, and geosolutions. The vibrant and meaningful dynamic at this ag event is organized by a partnership between the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and the Westerner Exposition Association.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the agriculture industry in our province as well as organizers and participants of the 27th annual Agri-Trade for their leadership, hard work, and dedication.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Eid al-Adha

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to recognize Eid al-Adha, or the festival of sacrifice, which will be observed tomorrow by nearly 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide, including 100,000 here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, Eid al-Adha is celebrated annually on the 10th day of the last month of the lunar Islamic calendar. This important religious event is recognized by the three major religions of the world. Eid al-Adha acknowledges Abraham's obedience to God.

This festival is a very joyous occasion for Muslims and includes special prayers, visits to family and friends, gifts to children, and, of course, good food. Many Muslims also take this opportunity to invite their non-Muslim friends, neighbours, co-workers, classmates to their Eid festivities to better acquaint them with Islam and Muslim culture. The regular charitable practices of the Muslim community are demonstrated during Eid al-Adha by concerted efforts to see that no impoverished person is left without an opportunity to partake in the special meals during these days.

This festival comes every day at the commencement of the hajj. The hajj is an annual pilgrimage in which millions of Muslims from around the world make the journey to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Dressed in white clothing to represent human equality and purity, the pilgrims gather to perform rites dating back to the time of Abraham. Hajj is considered one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims are required to make the pilgrimage once in a lifetime if they are physically and financially able to do so. Many Albertans every year are fortunate enough to make this journey.

Mr. Speaker, Islam is the religion of peace. In fact, the word "Islam" means peace.

At this time I would like to wish all Muslims, and especially those in Alberta, a very joyous and happy Eid al-Adha. Eid Mubarak, Assalamu Alaikum, peace be unto you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow as the chair of the Standing Committee on Health.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Health I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on the review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, dated November 2010. All members will receive copies today.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of the terms of reference and the membership of a so-called secret committee that

I established to get ongoing advice from the oil and gas industry. It seemed to create some real interest by certain members of the opposition, so I'm more than happy to table in the House today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 28 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked a question relative to employment standards, which was addressed by our Deputy Premier. I would like to table with the Legislature more supplemental information that I have sent to that hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta I'm pleased to table five copies of the 2009-10 annual report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a letter on letterhead from the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta making what I think is an important point, that the role of nurse practitioners in this province is much too limited and that, in fact, nurse practitioners are a tremendous resource that we should be tapping into on a much larger scale than we are.

The second tabling is a lengthy letter. It's kind of a good-news, bad-news piece of correspondence. The good news addresses a very good experience the writer had at the Sturgeon hospital in St. Albert. The bad news is that then they got transferred to the Red Deer hospital and had an extremely disappointing experience there. They've asked me to table this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter I received from the President of the Treasury Board on September 29, 2010, and this provides additional clarification as to how under the Government Organization Act the members of the cabinet policy committees, particularly the chairs, are compensated.

My second tabling is with permission from a constituent, a letter written, of course, by Sheldon Pierce. Mr. Pierce is concerned about the government's plans regarding acute psychiatric care beds at Alberta hospital.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings today. As it is Family Violence Prevention Month, my first set of tablings is a special issue of the English Express covering healthy and unhealthy relationships, different kinds of abuse, the cycle of family violence, how abuse affects adults and children, where to get help, preventative measures, et cetera.

My second tabling is the English Express teaching notes for same, which includes a caution to the teacher about talking about family violence as well as tips on introducing and using the special issue and what to do if a student reveals abuse.

My third tabling is an e-mail from Julia Melnyk, who feels that cancelling the unique resource of the English Express is a mistake because other government departments use it to communicate important information on topics like human rights, H1N1, employment standards, and workplace safety.

Mr. Speaker, my second set is just a tiny portion of correspondence I have received expressing serious concerns about Bill 29 and asking for more and better protection for Alberta's parks, natural areas, rangelands, and other sensitive areas. From Bragg Creek I received communications from Peta Stuart, Troy Delfs, Simon Weekley; from Calgary Ian Berard, Tom Fabijan-Waddell, Alison Cole, Deborah Bobrow, Lisa Isley, Tye Martel, Geoff Hardy; from Canmore Janine Giles, Stephen Legault; from Cochrane Michele Hardy; from Edmonton Koel Reed, Mark Hill, Heather McPherson, Rhiannon Bury; from Slave Lake Colleen Courts; from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Lynne Fitzgerald; from Montreal, Quebec, Nilia Berkin; and from Ingersoll, Ontario, Suzanne Crellin. Concern over Bill 29 goes way beyond our borders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a set of five documents referred to in my questions in question period today from CNRL. These include the 2004 decision of the Energy Utilities Board, which includes a diagram of pond 1 that does not show that the dam only has three sides, and an excerpt from the 2009 submission to the ERCB, which shows among other things that the dam has several creeks of water running into it.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Pat Wishart of Edmonton in which she outlines her concerns about Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act. She writes, "It looks like Tourism, Parks and Recreation wants to abdicate its responsibility for ecological integrity."

Thank you.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: As hon. members on some days provide recognition for an event and on other days provide recognition for other events, it's probably incumbent upon us as the Legislative Assembly to provide recognition for all of the events in any particular month, so I will now draw to your attention the events we have to celebrate in November.

November is Adoption Awareness Month. It's Amaryllis Month; that is, the month for recognition of Huntington syndrome. It is Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Awareness Month, or CPR Month. It's Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Month. It's Diabetes Awareness Month. It's Family Violence Prevention Month. It's Incontinence Awareness Month. It's Lung Cancer Awareness Month. It's National 4-H Month. It's National Crime Prevention and Community Safety Month. It's National Health Food Month. It's November, the month of recognition for prostate cancer. It's Osteoporosis Month. It's Pulmonary Hypertension Awareness Month. It begins the Christmas Seal Campaign, that extends through to December 31.

November 1 was Skilled Trades Day, as it was World Vegan Day. November 1 to 5 was Canadian Patient Safety Week, as it was Canada Career Week, as it was Media Literacy Week. November 1 to 7 was Down Syndrome Awareness Week, as it was Skilled Trades and Technology Week. November 3 was Take Our Kids to Work Day. November 5 was the day for Diwali, the festival of lights, which is celebrated by the Hindu, Sikh, and Jain. November 5 was International Volunteer Managers Appreciation Day.

November 5 to 11 was Veterans' Week. November 6 was the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict. November 7 to 13 was National Pain Awareness Week, as it was Medical Radiation Technologists Week, as it was National Senior Safety Week. November 8 was World Town Planning Day. November 8 to 14 was Youth Appreciation Week. November 9 was the International Day against Fascism and Antisemitism. November 10 was World Science Day for Peace and Development. November 11, of course, as we all know, was Remembrance Day, as it also was World Usability Day. November 12 was International Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Day. November 14 was World Diabetes Day.

November 14 to 20 is Bullying Awareness Week, as it is Geography Awareness Week, as it is National Addictions Awareness Week, as it is National Marfan Awareness Week, as it is Restorative Justice Week.

November 15 – that's today – is International PEN Day of the Imprisoned Writer. Tomorrow is International Day for Tolerance. November 17 is National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims, as it is World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day. November 18 is World Philosophy Day. November 19 is World Toilet Day. November 20 is Africa Industrialization Day, as it is National Child Day, as it is Sir Wilfrid Laurier Day, as it is Universal Children's Day.

November 20 to 27 is YMCA Peace Week. November 21 is World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, as it is World Hello Day, as it is World Television Day. November 24 to 30 is National AIDS Awareness Week, as it is National Home Fire Safety Week. November 25 is International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. November 25 to December 6 is White Ribbon Campaign week. November 26 is Buy Nothing Day. November 27 is Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day. November 28 is the 2010 Grey Cup. November 29 is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. November 30 is Computer Security Day.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East reminded us about Eid as well.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 205

Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act

[Debate adjourned November 1]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to participate.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to join the debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act, and I'd like to begin by applauding the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing forward such an important bill, the intention of which is to prevent scrap metal theft by setting out comprehensive responsibilities for scrap metal dealers and recyclers in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would require that certain information regarding scrap metal sales be recorded by scrap metal dealers, including the identity of the seller and information regarding the transaction. Why is this so important? Why do we need legislation in this respect? Well, these provisions could give law enforcement officials greater resources for solving instances of scrap metal theft and preventing future instances from occurring in the first place.

This is a serious problem. Bill 205 would help curb scrap metal thefts that burden businesses and private citizens alike by causing

damage to their property and financial losses, not to mention huge inconvenience. In the past decade the value and price of common scrap metals has progressively risen, and that has of course led to increased occurrences of theft, and the resultant unnecessary costs to Albertans and their businesses and their neighbourhoods as well.

This problem is now present in almost every jurisdiction across North America. Scrap metal yards, electrical power lines, maintenance shops, and even private residences have all been targeted by thieves. I know members of this House probably have examples even close to their homes. Not only that, but these thieves are going after unconventional sources of scrap metal as well, clear across the country.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Just a couple of examples. Aluminum billboards have disappeared in Vancouver. Stainless steel tanker trucks have been stolen in Quebec. Just a couple of months ago thieves targeted a manufacturer in Surrey, British Columbia, and stole a unique aluminum mould without which the company has been forced to shut down a good segment of its business, putting a number of jobs at risk. This stolen aluminum mould would only garner a few dollars in scrap metal, but it has the ability to severely impact the company and its employees with thousands of dollars in losses. The effects of scrap metal theft can be deep and widespread, and Bill 205 could help reduce cases of scrap metal theft in Alberta.

3:00

What we would do well to note is that copper found on private property is also being targeted since it's used in electricity lines, computer components, data and phone transmissions, plumbing, and various household appliances. The price for copper has been setting historic highs for the past five years, fetching between \$2.50 and \$4.50 a pound. These prices have made thieves more aggressive in their efforts to steal copper wire, and people have been caught in the crossfire.

This past August Precision Drilling, which has a large presence in Alberta, was the victim of a major copper wire theft at one of its maintenance yards in Odessa, Texas. Electrical wiring was removed from several drilling rigs, rendering them inoperable. Obviously, we can see what could happen here in Alberta if we don't enact this legislation. Mr. Speaker, total damage to the rigs in that case was estimated at over \$2 million and has halted production. The rigs are still awaiting new copper, which has not yet been shipped to the drilling sites, and has resulted in untold loss of production.

Scrap metal thieves often also attack utility companies for their copper wiring, causing thousands of dollars in damage. These businesses must pay for replacing that stolen wire by themselves, out of their own pockets. That, of course, drives prices up for the consumer. This is an issue that we all need to be concerned about, Mr. Speaker. When thieves steal scrap metal, they often trespass and destroy private property to remove their treasures. The repercussions of this are far reaching and can affect thousands of people.

Yet another example. In April 2010 phone service to hundreds of citizens in Big Lake, near St. Albert, was disabled after thieves dug up and removed 500 metres of copper cable. Obviously, severing electrical and phone lines removes access to essential services, and these crimes often impede power supplies, causing outages which can be devastating to computer networks, which businesses and individuals are reliant upon. In November of last year brazen thieves in Hamilton broke into a power station and stole thousands of dollars in copper wire, cutting electrical service to thousands of customers. Scrap metal theft, Mr. Speaker, wastes thousands of

hours for utility companies, private businesses, law enforcement, and individuals as well. Bill 205 is a tool which aids law enforcement, the scrap metal industry, and Albertans in curbing the destructive act of scrap metal theft.

I'd again like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing forward this very important bill. This issue of scrap metal theft is rapidly evolving into a significant concern, and all methods of diminishing this curse should be put into practice. I ask all members from every corner of the House to join me in fully supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today to join the debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act. The hon. Member for Strathcona has put forward a piece of legislation that I believe addresses an issue of growing concern for police services, businesses, and many communities throughout our province. Bill 205 focuses on deterring metal theft, an increasing criminal problem that in many cases may not be receiving the attention it deserves. There have been many recent cases of copper wire being stolen from construction sites at various stages of installation.

As our Premier has stated many times, our government remains focused on our goal of creating stronger communities by mitigating crime in all its forms. Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta continues to work with communities to develop crime reduction and prevention strategies. These strategies include our support for increasing the number of front-line police officers, who are on the ground protecting our communities, and funding crime reduction and community partnerships through the safe communities innovation fund. Albertans deserve safe communities, and we will continue to take steps that address the root causes of crime. To address crime on all fronts, we must also have effective, timely legislation that complements these other efforts.

Mr. Speaker, our government has been successful in implementing legislation that supports safer communities such as the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010, which is helping to support many victims of crime. I believe that Bill 205 would also serve to this end by setting detailed responsibilities for scrap metal dealers.

A recent history of scrap metal theft illustrates the growing prevalence of this problem. The RCMP have noted that theft of metals is now very common throughout many Alberta communities, and these items, Mr. Speaker, are readily sold for cash at various scrap metal dealers. There has been a steady upward trend in the price for copper and aluminum, making the theft of these metals increasingly more lucrative for thieves. In the current situation those businesses that choose to purchase metals of questionable origin are under no obligation to assist authorities in their investigations. In some cases these businesses even refuse to co-operate with authorities.

In an effort to address these challenges, Bill 205 would provide additional tools to law enforcement, making it easier for authorities to solve these crimes. The bill would require scrap metal dealers to obtain and record the identification of any person selling scrap metal. It would also require dealers to provide these records to law enforcement agencies upon request, thereby eliminating the anonymity that many perpetrators of this crime currently enjoy, Mr. Speaker.

The RCMP are supportive of the measures proposed through this legislation. They expressed their challenges under the present

legislative framework and noted that these reporting requirements would be useful in reducing the theft and subsequent sale of these metals.

Our government is always supportive of measures that implement reasonable regulations on various industries in order to reduce crime. Mr. Speaker, appropriate legislation in this area has the potential to protect consumers, maintain the integrity of the marketplace as well as detect and deter illegal activity. As with all criminal matters in our province there's no easy fix when it comes to reducing crime and enhancing the safety of our communities. However, with effective legislation we can help to ensure that we are taking every step to mitigate these criminal acts.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve to live, work, and raise their families in safe communities. The prevalence of any form of crime is felt across our province in communities large and small, and these crimes have disastrous economic effects, in some cases delaying vital construction and driving up the costs of these projects.

It is not only the act of metal theft that is at issue here, Mr. Speaker. The profits generated from this theft often go towards supporting other criminal activities. Illegal proceeds can work to grow and expand criminal networks, gang activity, drug dealing, and other forms of behaviour that put all of our communities at risk. Whether we're aware of it or not, these activities affect us all. Crime in any form impacts our neighbourhoods. Criminals thrive on anonymity, so by taking measures that will force thieves to identify themselves prior to the sale of stolen goods, we are exposing them and the acts that they are perpetrating.

Metal theft is also putting pressure on our authorities entrusted with securing the safety of our communities. Law enforcement officials have an invaluable role to play in our crime reduction efforts, and they require the appropriate tools to conduct investigations and solve crimes. We have an opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, to get a handle on this growing form of criminal activity before it further impacts our province. Implementing this legislation will support our efforts and complement our broader crime reduction strategy.

Our government is continuing to work with police agencies and community organizations to discuss and establish courses of action that suppress criminal activity. Reducing crime in a meaningful, long-term way requires collaboration. It is a priority for our hon. Premier, the Minister of Justice, and all members of this government, and this priority led us to develop one of the most comprehensive crime reduction strategies in Canada.

3:10

We all know, Mr. Speaker, the importance that reducing crime plays in building the types of communities Albertans have grown to enjoy and, frankly, that we hope that they will continue to enjoy. We'll continue to tackle crime in our cities, towns, and neighbourhoods for now and for years to come. This government has made a firm commitment to the safety of our province, and we all have a stake in keeping Alberta safe. Bill 205 will help authorities to do this important work, and I believe it supports our efforts to reduce crime and to create stronger and more vibrant communities.

I commend the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing Bill 205 forward. I believe it will enhance our efforts in building a crime-free Alberta and, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all hon. members to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share some of my comments on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal

Dealers and Recyclers Act. This act is being proposed by the hon. Member for Strathcona, and before I begin, I would like to thank him for this piece of legislation. It's very timely.

Essentially, Bill 205 proposes measures that will combat the growing issue of scrap metal theft. After all, scrap metal theft is a real and growing issue. Now, in order to combat this form of theft, Bill 205 proposes three clear legislative requirements. The first requirement is that Bill 205 would define what metals constitute scrap metal. After all, effective legislation must begin with comprehensive definitions of the issue at hand. Second, Bill 205 would require scrap metal recyclers and dealers to collect and record proof of identity from individuals selling scrap metal. The reasoning for this requirement is straightforward as at many scrap metal dealers an individual can walk in with stolen metal and walk out with cash in hand. Requiring them to submit information at the point of sale gives our law enforcement officers additional tools to combat this growing crime. This leads us to the third change proposed by Bill 205: allowing law enforcement to view scrap metal that a recycler has obtained to aid in an investigation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that all three of these measures will complement each other and work together to reduce scrap metal theft in our communities. Scrap metal theft is not a victimless crime; rather, it poses serious risks to business, communities, and individuals. Street signs stolen from the side of the road could cause serious traffic accidents, even leading to death. Likewise, as we have seen in other jurisdictions as well as in Alberta, the thieves themselves could also be electrocuted by pulling copper wire from a transmission box.

While I applaud Bill 205 for addressing these serious issues, I believe that the greatest benefit of stopping scrap metal theft is its connection to larger social problems. By this, Mr. Speaker, I mean drug use and organized crime. Now, I'll be the first to admit that when I think about scrap metal theft, I normally do not tie it directly to drug use and gang violence. However, the reality is that drug use, gang activity, and scrap metal theft are closely interconnected. Metal is a relatively easy commodity to steal and often is left unguarded in abandoned buildings, industrial yards, or power transmission boxes. In addition, public property like street signs and billboards all contain large quantities of these valuable metals. Because these locations are also unguarded, they make easy targets for organized crime and gangs.

Compounding this issue is a dramatic increase in scrap metal value. In recent years commonly found metals like copper and aluminum have witnessed an increase in price. Essentially, we have a situation where large quantities of increasingly valuable metal are left in unsecured locations. Gangs have seized upon this opportunity and have been using money from scrap metal theft to finance their operations.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that gangs are a blight on our communities. They spread fear and violence, and their presence can be felt by everyone. They also are responsible for spreading drugs and the problems associated with drugs into our neighbourhoods. This government has recognized that gangs and gang-related activity cannot be tolerated in our communities. This is why this government has initiated the gang reduction strategy and has added over 300 new front-line police officers in the last three years. These initiatives highlight this government's commitment to safe and secure communities.

Mr. Speaker, in my mind the proposals made by Bill 205 would complement this commitment and add to our current initiatives. After all, the best way to eliminate crime is to target its source of income, and increasingly this income is coming from scrap metal theft. If we can enact the measures proposed by Bill 205, we can in

effect create a scenario where thieves would be unable to sell their stolen goods without providing identification. Law enforcement could then use this identification to track down thieves and their gangs. I believe that if we can decrease the level of scrap metal theft in our communities, we can also decrease the presence and impact of gangs.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the government's commitment to reducing organized crime in our communities, and I applaud our commitment to safe and secure communities. The proposed bill fits perfectly with the priorities of this government and Albertans as a whole. Scrap metal theft is a serious crime that has the potential to threaten the safety of not only the thieves but all members of our community. After all, in many cases the proceeds used by scrap metal theft are used to fuel gangs and gang violence.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like again to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for not only identifying the issues associated with scrap metal theft but for actually putting forward a proposal to stop this crime. I'll be voting in support of Bill 205 and strongly urge all members of the House to join with me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today and join debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing forward legislation that would see our government continue its fight against crime in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 proposes to require certain information regarding scrap metal sales to be recorded by scrap metal dealers and recyclers. This information includes proof of identity and specific information regarding the transaction. This information would then be used to inform authorities as they investigate the many instances of scrap metal theft that occur in our province each year. In addition, should this information lead investigators to a particular suspect or a group of suspects, Bill 205 would give law enforcement the authority to seize materials held by a scrap metal dealer or recycler relevant to the investigation.

This legislation would be an effective tool that law enforcement could use to conduct investigations into allegations of scrap metal theft, which will in turn hold individuals involved in these crimes responsible for their actions. Currently scrap metal recyclers in Alberta conduct their business in the absence of any local bylaws and provincial or federal legislation that sets specific responsibilities for these businesses. The absence of regulations in this industry has made scrap metal theft and related criminal activity extremely difficult to investigate and prosecute. This has led to the increased prevalence of scrap metal theft in Alberta, as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed indicated.

For example, in the capital region there were 138 reported instances of copper wire theft between January 1, 2007, and September 30, 2008, with losses amounting to approximately \$1.8 million. One incident in Stony Plain saw over \$700,000 in scrap metal stolen from one site alone. One site, Mr. Speaker. It is simply unacceptable for this industry to remain unregulated when crimes of this scale are being committed.

Unfortunately, we are not able to keep accurate records on the number of scrap metal theft instances that occur in our province each year for two reasons. One reason is that many instances of scrap metal theft often go unreported. The second reason is that metal theft is often reported simply as theft, leaving it difficult to pinpoint the scope of this specific problem.

Mr. Speaker, those who steal scrap metal know that the likelihood that they will be caught is low, and as such they continue to victimize hard-working Albertans. Bill 205 would provide a much-needed deterrent for scrap metal theft by making it easier for police to track down stolen scrap metal and the individuals responsible for such crimes. Because scrap metal theft affects not only recyclers but also home builders, commercial and industrial construction, and community residents, any effort made to address this issue will serve to make our province safer.

3:20

In fact, reducing crime and ensuring the safety of Albertans has been one of this government's highest priorities. Our government has made a commitment to provide funding for 300 additional police officers, as the Member for Calgary-Hays indicated, to address issues of crime. As new and lucrative criminal enterprises emerge, we need to ensure that we have the legislation in place to give these additional resources the tools they need to deter crime and punish offenders. It is important for us as elected representatives to ensure that Alberta remains a safe place to live, work, and raise a family. I believe Bill 205 is another tool that we can use to achieve this.

Over the last several years the costs of scrap metal such as copper and aluminum have grown exponentially, which makes scrap metal theft an attractive option for funding organized crime in our province. While scrap metal theft is only one facet of the inherently complicated nature of organized crime, Bill 205 would help to take away that option for gangs in Alberta by making it much easier to identify the individual who sold it. This bill attempts to create a set of standards and best practices that would go a long way towards deterring scrap metal theft.

Standards that would also help to minimize the economic and social cost of these crimes in our communities are another plus. Each year countless Albertans are victimized by scrap metal theft, and this crime has been steadily growing in popularity amongst criminals. Whether it's the aluminum siding on your neighbour's house or copper wire at a construction site, these metals are readily available and worth a considerable amount of money. The only way we can begin to take control of this problem is to put effective legislation in place that will make it easier to keep track of scrap metal and those who sell it. By giving our police officers the proper tools to address all aspects of crime in our communities, including scrap metal theft, we are promoting a safe and secure Alberta.

I support this bill because I believe it is one step to stopping scrap metal theft. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act. I would like to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing this legislation forward, legislation that would further support Alberta police officers in their efforts to deter crime, particularly as it relates to the theft and trade of scrap metal.

Mr. Speaker, instances of scrap metal theft have become increasingly prevalent in Alberta over the past several years. In fact, statistical data collected from police services across the province indicates an alarming trend involving the theft and trafficking of scrap metal, including copper and aluminum. Even with the dramatic increase in these crimes the scrap metal industry remains largely unregulated, making it extremely difficult for police to investigate these crimes. Oftentimes the offender remains at large and free to move on to their next victim.

These crimes produce countless numbers of victims both directly and indirectly as a result of scrap metal theft. Directly, there are the

individuals who must bear the costs of replacing the materials that have been stolen and making necessary repairs to their property. In the case of damage to public property this burden falls to the taxpayer. Indirectly, many more serious crimes are fuelled by the proceeds of scrap metal theft such as the drug trade and gang activity. These crimes cost our society a great deal. They jeopardize lives and destroy communities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 proposes necessary regulations on the scrap metal industry in order to combat the growing issue of scrap metal theft in our communities. It would do so by requiring all scrap metal dealers to keep records of their daily transactions with private citizens, including information about both the seller and the transaction. Currently no such record keeping is required, and this allows thieves to operate under a cloak of anonymity, so to speak, with little threat of being caught. By making it mandatory for personal information to be recorded and kept on file, this bill would make scrap metal theft less attractive to would-be criminals. Further, these records can serve as evidence in a court of law when offenders are brought to trial.

Another challenge that Alberta law enforcement faces when trying to deal with scrap metal theft is that dealers are currently not required to co-operate with criminal investigations unless ordered by a warrant to do so. This renders the majority of police investigations effectively useless as those who could possibly have custody of stolen metals are not required to share that information.

Bill 205 would compel dealers to turn their transaction records along with all relevant information over to law enforcement upon request. Mr. Speaker, this stipulation would greatly improve the ability of police to track down and charge offenders. The process for obtaining a warrant is a lengthy one, and in the time that it takes for police officers to complete the process, the thieves are often able to slip away. With timely access to such critical information law enforcement can ensure that those who steal scrap metal are swiftly brought to justice. In addition, this measure will increase the chances that offenders will be caught and thus serves as an additional deterrent, helping to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, oftentimes police are not made aware of instances of scrap metal theft in a timely manner if at all. This poses a challenge for authorities because by the time a theft has been reported, the offender is likely to be long gone. Bill 205 would address this challenge by requiring dealers to report any transactions involving more than a certain amount of scrap metal, measured by weight. This will serve to alert police of suspicious transactions in a more timely fashion. Further, this stipulation would help authorities find material that may have already been reported stolen.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation addresses many of the challenges associated with investigating instances of scrap metal theft and prosecuting offenders. Currently police do not have many options when it comes to curbing scrap metal theft in this province. The most effective deterrent would certainly be increasing the likelihood of being caught. As it stands right now, gaps in industry regulation make these crimes much easier to get away with. In order for law enforcement to be able to effectively investigate scrap metal theft, they need to be able to access complete and accurate records of scrap metal transactions. Requiring dealers to not only maintain these records but to turn them over to law enforcement when asked will provide new avenues for these investigations.

Mr. Speaker, these crimes have a significant impact on businesses and individuals across our province, and over the past several years the losses have been significant. Between January 1, 2007, and September 30, 2008, in the capital region it is estimated that nearly \$2 million worth of scrap metal was stolen in 138 separate incidents.

This is an astonishing amount of material to be stolen in less than two years, and Albertans are looking to us as their representatives to ensure that businesses and communities remain safe.

Bill 205 addresses a specific problem in our communities and provides practical and reasonable solutions that will surely help to reduce scrap metal theft in Alberta. It is imperative that we give law enforcement officers the proper tools for the job. The measures proposed in this legislation will not only help with criminal investigations but also deter future crime.

In closing, I would like to again thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for identifying a problem in our communities and proposing a highly effective solution. I support this piece of legislation, and I encourage all of my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and join second reading debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act. This piece of legislation is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona, and I would like to start off today by thanking him for introducing this well-thought-out bill.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 205 effectively addresses a problem that may not always be in the forefront of public thought: scrap metal theft. This form of theft is becoming a growing concern in our province. After all, the prices of scrap metal have risen dramatically in recent years, and it has led to an increase in scrap metal crime. Moreover, scrap metal theft is not a victimless crime. Scrap metal is not garbage or waste metal. Rather, it is often metals scavenged from construction sites, industrial compounds, or public infrastructure. In many cases scrap metal is taken or ripped out of functioning buildings or power boxes.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 proposes to address this serious issue by placing some responsibility on scrap metal dealers and recyclers. Scrap metal dealers and recyclers are individuals or businesses who collect quantities of scrap metal and then recycle or sell them for industrial purposes. In addition, they are often the people who in most cases inadvertently purchase metal from thieves. Under the proposed Bill 205 scrap metal dealers would be required to record the identity of anyone selling them scrap metal as well as information regarding the transaction. These records would be stored and made available to police officers investigating cases of metal theft. In the end, aiding police officers is the best way to stop metal theft in our communities.

Now, for the sake of clarity, I think that it is worthwhile to look at the types of metals commonly stolen as well as where they can be found and what they are used for. To this end, I would like to focus on three commonly stolen metals: copper, aluminum, and rhodium.

Copper is probably the most commonly stolen metal, and upon investigation it is easy to see why. Copper is found everywhere and sells for a relatively high price. For example, in 2006 the price of copper was over \$3 a pound, so a 10,000-pound spool of copper could bring in over \$30,000. In addition, smaller amounts of copper can be found almost anywhere. After all, copper is used in a tremendous amount of building applications. Copper serves as wire for electrical systems, pipes for household plumbing, and tubing for natural gas systems. All of these uses make copper an incredibly accessible metal. One can imagine the ease a thief would have in ripping pipe out of an abandoned house or taking a spool of copper wire from an unguarded industrial yard.

The second type of scrap metal often targeted is aluminum. Mr. Speaker, like copper, aluminum can be found almost everywhere,

and like copper, the price of aluminum has increased dramatically in recent years. For example, in 2006 a pound of aluminum could fetch over \$1.15. Now, this might seem like a small amount, but we again need to look at quantity. If a thief scavenges 500 pounds of material, this could translate into over \$575. Moreover, scavenging 500 pounds of aluminum could cause significant damage to a great variety of both public and private infrastructure. Things like doors, household siding, and street signs are all made out of easily accessible aluminum, and it would not take a thief too long to disassemble and take these common and unguarded objects.

The final type of metal I would like to talk about, rhodium, varies significantly from the previous two. Mr. Speaker, unlike copper and aluminum, rhodium is not a common metal. Rather, it is a rare commodity but one that is found in many everyday objects. Most notably, rhodium is found in catalytic converters, which are standard on most vehicles. Just as an aside, a catalytic converter essentially filters exhaust and reduces car emissions. Rhodium can also be found in jewellery, mirrors, search lights, and electric connection points. While these objects are more difficult to steal than copper or aluminum, the rewards are far greater. For example, in 2006 one troy ounce of rhodium was worth over \$4,300. Just for clarity, a troy ounce is around 31 grams and about 10 per cent heavier than a standard ounce. What all of this means is that a small amount of metal is worth a fortune.

Mr. Speaker, what these three metals show us is that scrap metal theft is a significant concern. Metals like copper and aluminum can be found everywhere and are essential for our day-to-day lives whereas metals like rhodium are rare but their value could prompt thieves to steal large objects, like vehicles or buses, just for their scrap value.

I believe that the measures proposed by Bill 205 could go a long way towards addressing this serious concern. Requiring scrap metal dealers and recyclers to keep detailed records of their transactions could help investigators track cases of metal theft. Currently law enforcement officers would almost have to catch someone in the act to place them under arrest. Often scrap metal has no identifying marks or records, so once it is stolen from a home or work site, it becomes difficult to identify. However, with accurate identification records, investigators would have an additional tool to track scrap metal thieves and catch them before they do any more harm to our communities.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank the hon. Member for Strathcona, and I would encourage all members to join with me in support of Bill 205. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to speak to Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Strathcona. The goal of Bill 205 is to reduce crime in Alberta and one particular type of crime, that being the theft of metal. In particular, the proposal is that dealers would be responsible for collecting information from individuals who are selling metal for cash.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is not a trivial one. It's a burgeoning problem due principally to the rising price of base metals, things like steel, aluminum, tin, copper, and lead. Those have been driven, of course, by the rising demand for those metals from developing countries such as China and India. As a result, individuals are turning more and more to pilfering these metals to get cash. While this seems like a petty crime to many of us, oftentimes it's tied to larger scale crime. Particularly, the police have indicated that it can be tied in many instances to the drug trade, where users are stealing

metal and using it to feed their drug habits, and that, in turn, is providing a source of cash for those who are dealing drugs.

When we're talking about metal theft, Mr. Speaker, let's make it very clear that we're not just talking about scrap metal here. Perhaps one of the most common places for thieves to find scrap metal is at a construction site, and no, it's not just scrap metal. Oftentimes it's new metal that's a merchantable product, particularly things like construction supplies, conduit and copper piping for plumbing, and copper wiring in homes. And, of course, security is a problem at construction sites. Whether they be residential or industrial, you just can't watch all of these construction sites all the time. So it's easy prey sometimes for those who are up to no good. In addition to the things that I mentioned, electrical wiring and pipes, we often have other things like roof metal and aluminum sidings and so on.

3:40

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that these thefts add to construction costs, and ultimately it's the consumer or, in the case of a public project, it's the taxpayer that ends up paying for these types of thefts. I want to emphasize that it's not just outside people. Sometimes these thefts are perpetrated by insiders, those people who actually work on the construction sites and have easy access to the construction materials.

Mr. Speaker, the city of Calgary has already acted to stop the proliferation of metal theft with bylaw 32M98, and that bylaw provides that a salvage yard is required to keep a record of the transaction and its details. Those details would include but are not limited to things like the name of the employee receiving the salvage; the time and the date the property is acquired; current information of the person bringing in the salvage, including the complete name, address, telephone, a description of the person, and two pieces of identification, including one piece of picture ID that is issued by government. The Calgary bylaw is also clear about who cannot bring in an item for salvage. Those would include individuals who are intoxicated, people who do not establish ownership of the salvage, persons under 18, and persons who cannot meet the identification requirements.

Here in Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, I'm informed that besides construction supplies there are also reports of other types of items being taken, things like aluminum beer kegs, which contain large amounts of aluminum and are stored oftentimes out behind drinking establishments, gas fixtures and appliances and other things that contain valuable metals. Older buildings sometimes also have metals in their structure. For example, roofs and drainpipes may be made out of lead or copper or stainless steel, all of which have a decent price in the scrap metal market. I even understand that there have been problems at some of the landfills with individuals intruding and trying to get scrap metals out of the landfills, and that has required additional security and created problems for the landfill operators.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I believe it's important that we try to deter this particular crime, and I would suggest that following the lead of the city of Calgary by requiring sellers of metals for cash in all parts of the province to have records of the transactions, including the identify of the sellers, is a good idea. For those reasons, I would support the bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, do you wish to speak?

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona. The

purpose of this legislation is to address the growing problem of scrap metal theft in our province and in our communities. To this end, Bill 205 would establish specific responsibilities for scrap metal dealers and recyclers. It would require all information regarding scrap metal sales, including the identity of the seller, to be recorded by scrap metal dealers and recyclers. Furthermore, Bill 205 would determine the materials included in the definition of scrap metal.

Mr. Speaker, these measures would help address the growing problem of scrap metal theft. Since 2003 the value and the price for scrap metals have steadily increased, leading to an increase in the counts of theft in the province and our communities, as some of my colleagues have highlighted. While comprehensive statistics on the thefts of these materials can be difficult to find, there's no question that it represents a growing and dangerous problem for our communities. Indeed, examples of such theft include a 48-year-old man who was caught attempting to steal \$14,000 worth of scrap metal from a Syncrude work site. This is just one example of numerous instances of copper wire theft in the provincial capital district alone. In Stony Plain over \$700,000 worth of material was stolen from one site.

What is perhaps most troubling is that most cases of copper wire theft go unreported. I believe the provisions of Bill 205 would go a long way in supporting this government's ongoing efforts to prevent crime. It would provide greater resources to police to thoroughly investigate instances of scrap metal theft. Recording details of the sale of scrap metal could provide police with the information they require to investigate a case of theft. For example, police could cross-check the sale of scrap metal around the time of a reported theft. Furthermore, police would be able to determine the names of those involved in a suspicious sale of scrap metal. I believe that these measures alone will go far in helping this government fulfill its commitment to reduce crime and ensure safe communities throughout Alberta.

In 2007 under the leadership of this Premier this government established the safe communities task force, which consulted with Albertans province-wide on the effects and the sources of crime. After accepting most of its recommendations, the government moved quickly to implement several measures that are producing real results for Albertans. In 2008 this government pledged \$30 million to the Safe Communities Secretariat to fund 300 additional police. These were additional police officers to be funded over three years throughout our province, and I'm pleased to say that our government is fulfilling this promise. This year in February Premier Stelmach and the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security announced that the final 100 officers would become active over the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, I know I have the highest appreciation and respect for the work police officers do to provide peace and security for our communities, and our government is working to provide additional tools to police officers to fight crime. These measures include the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, which is a powerful new tool in the fight against organized crime. It provides courts with the authority to seize the tools of crime or any property that has been used to commit any type of crime in addition to seizing property and profits gained from unlawful acts. The proceeds from the sale of these items are used to financially compensate victims of crime for their losses and for their injuries. To date police have successfully used this act to recover millions in proceeds, all in an effort to dismantle and hamper organized crime. I believe that Bill 205 will provide another tool to law enforcement in their ongoing efforts to reduce crime.

Other initiatives this government has implemented to reduce crime include a \$60 million safe communities innovation fund, that many

communities are accessing, and we've gotten some great new best practices out of those initiatives. This unique program supports community-based pilot projects designed to reduce or prevent crime. In its first year of operation the program funded 30 pilot projects, including a neighbourhood development team in St. Albert and the Edmonton Coalition of Crime Councils. After all, Mr. Speaker, crime prevention begins at the local level, in our communities, in partnerships with law enforcement and community organizations.

Scrap metal theft, although not new, is indeed a growing problem in our province and in our communities. As a government we must adapt by providing new tools to law enforcement that can better solve and deter cases of scrap metal theft. For these reasons I will be supporting Bill 205 and encourage my colleagues to vote accordingly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak on Bill 205? The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join in Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing forward this piece of legislation that we're contemplating today. The purpose of Bill 205 is to deter any metal theft in Alberta by setting out specific responsibilities for scrap metal dealers and for recyclers.

3:50

Currently there is actually no legislation that deals explicitly with theft related to scrap metal dealers or recyclers in this province. However, jurisdictions across Canada and the United States have recognized that there is, in fact, a problem with scrap metal theft; for example, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act proposed in Nova Scotia in 2008. Under this proposed act, Mr. Speaker, scrap metal recyclers would have to confirm the identity of any person selling scrap metal in that province. The scrap metal recycler would then be required to record the information regarding the identity of the seller and to store it for one year. This information is then provided to peace officers if it is, in fact, required. In addition, a recycler must also inform local law enforcement agencies within 24 hours of purchasing scrap metal over a predetermined weight. Finally, the recycler must not purchase or receive scrap metal from anyone who appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, similar restrictions on scrap metal dealers and recyclers have been brought forward in the United States, as I previously mentioned. For example, in Wisconsin they passed number 64 in 2007, a little bit different terminology with bills in the States. Provisions of this act centre on three basic requirements. First, the seller is to provide a licence or other government-issued photo identification while selling the scrap metal. Secondly, the scrap metal dealer is required to record and maintain the seller's identification information as well as the time and date of purchase and a description of the items received, including without limitation the weight and a visual description of the said metal. Finally, the dealer must obtain a seller's signed declaration that the seller is the owner of the items being sold. This act also goes on to outline penalties for both scrap metal dealers and for recyclers who violate the established provisions.

The state of Michigan also has legislation addressing scrap metal theft, specifically the Michigan Senate's Bill 720. Pursuant to this bill, Mr. Speaker, the scrap metal dealer is required to display personal property on a website for viewing by the public. The Michigan bill also requires that scrap metal recyclers maintain the

records of sale, purchase, consignment, or trade of personal property for the last two years. In addition, within 24 hours subsequent to a request from a local law enforcement agency the recycler is required to provide an electronic copy of the seller's name, address, telephone number, driver's licence number, and issuing state.

Another jurisdiction enacting scrap metal legislation is Kansas, where, interestingly, I had the chance to travel last year. U.S. Senate Bill 237 became effective on July 1, 2009. This statute makes it unlawful to sell scrap metal unless the seller provides the scrap metal dealer their gender, date of birth, and a number from an official United States government document such as a driver's licence. Last time I checked, we do have those here, Mr. Speaker. In addition, the statute requires scrap metal dealers to record and store information on the transaction for all of the parties involved. The statute also makes it unlawful for any scrap metal dealer to purchase scrap metal without obtaining a signed statement from the seller that the seller is, in fact, the owner of the scrap metal.

Mr. Speaker, the statute goes on and makes it unlawful for any scrap metal dealer to purchase junk vehicles – I suppose this includes vans – from sellers without first inspecting the vehicle and recording the vehicle identification number and bill of sale. Finally, this statute would make it unlawful to dispose of, alter, or destroy scrap metal when notified by any law enforcement agency that there is reasonable cause to believe that the regulated scrap metal was, in fact, stolen. If this is the case, the scrap metal dealer would then be required to hold the item or items for 30 days.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the last jurisdiction I'd like to touch on is New York State as I believe they have proposed some of the most stringent scrap metal legislation. New York Senate Bill 6035 was referred to the Rules Committee on June 21, 2009, and seeks to impose strict regulations on salvage dealers and scrap metal processors who purchase illegal scrap metals. Essentially, this bill recognizes that when thieves steal property from an owner, they cause damage to the owner's property and that the value of the owner's loss should in fact include both the property taken and the incidental damage caused to the said property. The bill also requires salvage dealers to obtain a copy of government-issued identification from the seller of scrap metals, who would require the sellers to provide written verification of their authority to sell any such scrap metal. Finally, the bill restricts the sale of certain items, including without limitation street signs, propane containers, fuel markers, or any metal items bearing markings of a government entity, utility company, cemetery, or railroad.

This, of course, is the point that I find most interesting. Not only does the New York bill require identification of scrap metal sellers, but it also actively recounts the types of property that can be considered scrap metal.

Mr. Speaker, as stated, many jurisdictions in the United States have taken action on scrap metal dealing, and I believe Bill 205 is an opportunity for Alberta to once again be a leader in our nation. Scrap metal theft is a serious concern that requires serious restrictions and serious penalties, and I'm very happy that we have focused on this particular issue of relevance. [interjection] This has already been recognized in other jurisdictions, just like the chirping from the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is noticed by me, and I believe that the measures proposed by Bill 205 would go a long way towards stopping this from growing to a serious form of crime in this province.

With that, I will conclude my comments and urge all members to focus with me on the support of Bill 205. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak on Bill 205? The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act, brought forward by our friend and colleague the hon. Member for Strathcona. Scrap metal theft in Alberta is on the rise, and Bill 205 aims at reducing it by setting out detailed actions and responsibilities for scrap metal dealers and recyclers. Furthermore, Bill 205 would determine set parameters for what materials should be included in the definition of scrap metal. These steps would help address the increasingly prevalent problem of scrap metal theft. Since 2003 the value of numerous scrap metals has risen, leading to increasing occurrences of theft. The effects of this problem are being experienced throughout Canada.

Mr. Speaker, scrap metal theft is not a victimless crime. Not only is theft a morally irresponsible act; the theft of scrap metal can often lead to injury or death of both the perpetrator and in some cases innocent bystanders. The places where scrap metal commonly is located can often be very dangerous, from scrap metal yards to live electric power line corridors and transformer yards. People do not realize how dangerous these areas can be. Many of the different metals that are taken from these dangerous places are not the types that commonly come to mind when people think of expensive metals.

Some thieves will take great risks for a few metres of copper wire. For example, in January a man was killed in Texas after he was shocked by 69,000 volts of electricity while standing on top of a substation transformer cutting off one of the wires. Earlier last year a 32-year-old man was found dead after he had broken into an electrical substation and was electrocuted, cutting power to 800 customers in the process. Another example occurred in Riverside, California, in June of 2009, when two men were found electrocuted near a utility transformer trying to steal wire and blacked out the city for two hours. Even closer to home, Mr. Speaker, in 2008 police suspected that a deceased man found in the bottom of an Enmax electrical vault in Calgary died in the act of scrap metal theft.

These people put the lives of others at risk as well. After all, our society is heavily reliant on electricity, and oftentimes these crimes affect the power supply, causing brief surges which can wreak havoc on computer networks, on which we rely more and more for banking, shopping, and research. Mr. Speaker, many of these crimes also lead to severe power outages, which are a risk to a community's essential services. Traffic lights could be affected, which could cause vehicle accidents. Phone and 911 services could be limited, causing serious implications to emergency medical services. A power outage goes far beyond the inconvenience most of us feel.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, scrap metal theft not only harms individuals but whole communities. Organized crime has gravitated towards stealing scrap metal because of the rise in value, the ease in which it can be stolen, and that the chances of being caught are relatively low. Gangs looking for quick money have targeted scrapyards, unguarded maintenance shops, and businesses. Organized crime is a threat to our communities, and whatever can be done to curb its existence is a step in the right direction.

Our government has placed a very high emphasis on an initiative called the safe communities initiative. This initiative strives to help eliminate organized criminal activity, which is such a detriment to our society. Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 truly aids in these efforts. Bill 205 would greatly benefit all Albertans by helping to ensure all communities, individuals, and businesses are safe from the effects that scrap metal theft can cause.

Once again, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for putting forward this piece of legislation. Scrap metal theft is

quickly becoming a major issue, and all methods of curbing this epidemic should be explored. I fully support Bill 205 because it protects Albertans, and I would encourage all members to join me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to Bill 205? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. Over the past three years there have been numerous instances of metal theft throughout Alberta. Comprehensive statistics on scrap metal theft are difficult to find as copper wire thefts do not have their own code for statistical purposes. In many cases they will be classified as oil field equipment thefts. If the theft is not tied to the oil field industry, it would be categorized simply as a theft. Statistical data that has been collected indicates an emerging criminal trend involving the theft and trafficking of metals, including copper wire, aluminum, and rhodium, which has steadily increased since 2003.

Scrap metal theft damages both public and private property and poses safety risks for communities. As of now scrap metal dealers are not required to obtain photographic identification from anyone who exchanges scrap metal for cash, and scrap metal dealers are not required to provide any written records to police outlining sale/purchase transactions between clients and their business.

Now, Bill 205 would require a private individual to produce identification to a scrap metal recycler prior to the completion of the transaction. The information would be recorded and held by the recycler. Bill 205 would require information regarding scrap metal sales to be recorded by the scrap metal dealer or recycler. This information would also be available to authorities investigating a potential scrap metal theft. Bill 205 would allow a peace officer to search or seize material held by a scrap metal recycler which is relevant to an investigation. It would also afford a peace officer the authority to make copies of records taken by a recycler concerning individuals about whom an inquiry is made.

The Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act provides additional tools to law enforcement agencies to aid in their efforts to curb metal theft in Alberta without unduly burdening scrap metal dealers. This legislation is supported by the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, who passed a resolution that supports legislation that creates standards for scrap metal dealers and recyclers. There's also a letter of support from Chief Superintendent P.W. Hourihan, K Division RCMP.

I also find it very interesting that Bill 205 would not apply to a corporate body that's duly authorized to conduct business in Alberta. In other words, if you're dealing directly with a corporation, then they, I assume, don't have to give individual ID: bottle depots, who I understand have bottle caps that they need to recycle.

Though I tend to not like legislation which creates more overhead for businesses, I do believe that because of the way this legislation has been minimized in terms of the amount of paperwork that needs to be taken, the amount of overhead that is expected with this is very minimal. I urge people to support this legislation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to Bill 205? The hon. Member for Strathcona to close debate.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to close debate on Bill 205, the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act. I would like to thank all of the members of this House for debating this issue and would like to reiterate some of my important points.

Bill 205 aims to reduce theft of scrap metal in Alberta, which

harms businesses, municipalities, and, ultimately, taxpayers. This legislation is necessary because scrap metal thefts have increased rapidly in recent years as the price of commodities such as copper has skyrocketed. Copper wire that's lying around job sites is especially prone to theft, and this increases the costs associated with doing business in Alberta.

Scrap metal thieves currently are able to cash in their thefts with little fear of prosecution. This is due to the fact that thieves can simply walk into a scrap metal dealer, sell large quantities of metal for thousands of dollars, and walk out of the dealer's leaving very little evidence behind. Mr. Speaker, the intention of this bill is to eliminate the anonymity that scrap metal thieves currently enjoy by requiring those selling scrap metal to produce valid identification. This would serve as an effective deterrent for criminals and would not unnecessarily burden business.

It's important to remember that this legislation was crafted with input from law enforcement officers throughout the province. Indeed, the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police passed a resolution earlier this year supporting this legislation, that creates standards for scrap metal dealers and recyclers. The feedback from other law enforcement officers throughout the province was strongly in favour of implementing this legislation because it would make it easier for them to track down scrap metal thieves. This would be another tool that they could use to reduce crime in this province, thereby making our communities safer and our businesses more productive. We all know how difficult the job of a law enforcement officer is, and this bill would make it easier for these men and women to carry out their duties.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 will target a specific crime that undoubtedly hurts Albertans, and it will do so without unnecessarily impacting businesses and law-abiding individuals. This legislation fits into this government's plan to promote safe communities and to reduce crime, and I think we can all agree that this is a worthwhile goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a second time]

Bill 206

Utilities Consumer Advocate Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce for second reading Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act.

Bill 206 is based on important principles: first, the interests of Albertans must be protected when they purchase utilities such as natural gas and electricity; second, Albertans deserve reliable information about utility issues; and finally, Albertans need strong representation at regulatory hearings that involve utility-related issues.

Based on these principles, Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 calls for the creation of a Utilities Consumer Advocate that is independent of government to represent consumers in this province. This officer would review consumer complaints about the provision of electricity and natural gas by public utilities to ensure that their practices are fair and ethical. This officer would represent consumers at regulatory hearings, including hearings of the Alberta Utilities Commission. This includes reviewing government action on decisions of the commission. This officer would inform and educate consumers about utilities issues, and this information would be impartial and independent. This officer would have the ability to commence investigations either on his or her own initiative or by the recommendations of the Legislative Assembly or Executive Council.

4:10

Some may wonder why this legislation is necessary, Mr. Speaker. After all, there is already a Utilities Consumer Advocate located in the Department of Service Alberta. I have nothing negative to say about the current Utilities Consumer Advocate or any of her staff. I'm sure she is committed to serving consumers as best she can. All Bill 206 would do is empower the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate by giving them more tools to do their important work for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, right now the Utilities Consumer Advocate is an employee of the government. The staffers are employees of government, specifically Service Alberta. Until just recently the Utilities Consumer Advocate was not even a full-time job but one of many hats worn by a deputy minister or an assistant deputy minister; in other words, someone who directly worked for the Minister of Service Alberta. As an officer of the government the position of Utilities Consumer Advocate can be eliminated at any time, their staff can be let go, or their budgets severely cut. Their reports can be edited by government bureaucrats, if they are allowed to release reports at all.

They can be blocked from speaking to the media or to the public. A spokesman from Service Alberta even said last year that the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate does not involve talking to the press. Given these kinds of constraints, how is the Utilities Consumer Advocate supposed to provide consumers with impartial information? How are they supposed to point out flaws in government initiatives or programs, specifically consumer protections approved by their own boss? How are they supposed to represent consumers at regulatory hearings against another more powerful government department such as Energy?

Without an independent, empowered Utilities Consumer Advocate serious consumer concerns will continue to go unaddressed. Mr. Speaker, these concerns are not new and have gone on far too long: pushy door-to-door energy marketers who bully people into signing long-term contracts, complicated contracts that do not tell consumers what they can expect to pay for their utilities; large administrative fees that are not justified; sizable cancellation fees that keep people stuck in bad contracts; huge security deposits that make electricity unaffordable for low-income customers; credit checks that can cause seniors without a credit history to be turned down by utility providers. The list goes on and on. An independent Utilities Consumer Advocate will not solve these problems overnight, but at least consumers would have somewhere to go when they are not being treated fairly.

Mr. Speaker, for anyone that doubts that an independent Utilities Consumer Advocate would better serve Albertans, I would ask the following questions. Would public money be better accounted for without an independent Auditor General? Would the privacy of Albertans be better protected without an independent Information and Privacy Commissioner? Would elections be more fairly administered without an independent Chief Electoral Officer? Of course, this government has tried to undercut the independence of these positions whenever they can, but these officers have saved Albertans money, helped to bring important information to public attention, and tried to maintain faith in the democratic processes. At their best, independent officers gain credibility with stakeholder groups, the press, and Albertans of all political sides because they can be trusted to be fair and impartial.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing missing in the utilities sector in this province is trust. It has been one thing after another: a botched deregulation experiment that sent power prices skyrocketing, a government agency caught spying on its own citizens, and a bill forced through the Legislature that shields new transmission lines from public hearings.

Mr. Speaker, projects that far exceed their initial cost estimates with higher sticker prices are passed on to the consumer. Albertans do not trust the government to be honest and open with them on electricity issues, and they are not sure that they trust the industry either. That broken trust will not be fixed until Alberta changes its course on electricity policy. An important first step towards more transparency and accountability would be to support Bill 206 and give Albertans a Utilities Consumer Advocate independent of government and free from political interference.

For those reasons, I urge all my colleagues from both sides of the House to support Bill 206. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, do you wish to speak to this bill?

Mrs. Sarich: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. The objective of the bill is to create an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. This office would be under the purview of the Legislative Assembly and would be tasked with providing information and advice to small electricity and natural gas consumers in the province. In addition, the UCA would be tasked with investigating consumer complaints regarding natural gas or electricity.

I sincerely believe, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Calgary-McCall had the consumer in mind when he drafted this particular bill. However, consumers currently within the province of Alberta are already protected and have been for some time. As such, I do have some concerns with this particular bill in that the government already has in place a very strong legislative framework and processes for consumer protection.

Specifically, we have the Utilities Consumer Advocate. This role is currently mandated in section 19, schedule 13.1 of the Government Organization Act. The Utilities Consumer Advocate currently represents consumer interests in the energy industry. Also, the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate is the voice for small energy consumers within Alberta, and the current advocate, Karin Gashus, is there to aid and support the consumer.

I would also like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is contacted by an average of 250 consumers every day, and that number alone indicates the importance of this particular office. So why change the structure when consumers are already using this particular office? The office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate adequately deals with consumers' concerns regarding the utility companies and helps consumers make the right decisions and choices by providing information about their energy options.

In addition to the day-to-day interactions with the public, the Utilities Consumer Advocate participates in approximately 100 regulatory proceedings annually. Perhaps more importantly, Mr. Speaker, is that the Utilities Consumer Advocate already mediates between the consumer and the utility companies.

It is for these particular reasons that Bill 206 is, quite frankly, unnecessary. What the Member for Calgary-McCall is proposing is already in place, and I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that it is working very well.

Mr. Speaker, I also question why the Member for Calgary-McCall is asking for the Utilities Consumer Advocate to report to the Legislature as this also has some implications. How would doing this particular reporting structure make the Utilities Consumer Advocate more effective, and how would this provide greater protection for consumers? I believe that placing the Utilities Consumer Advocate under the Legislative Assembly would mean

that the Utilities Consumer Advocate would in fact lose a bit of authority as well as power that is already within that legislative framework.

4:20

Section 14 of Bill 206 would give the Utilities Consumer Advocate broad powers to inquire and investigate along with seizure powers and powers to hold public hearings and compel witnesses. These powers affect the rights of a person, and it is unusual to give such powers to a body or an organization that is not carrying out quasi-judicial functions. As such, the effectiveness of the Utilities Consumer Advocate would also be eroded by placing it under the Legislative Assembly. The Utilities Consumer Advocate already generates MLA constituency reports that outline consumer concerns in each particular constituency.

Section 12(1) of Bill 206 directs the Utilities Consumer Advocate to report annually to the Legislative Assembly. I would also like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that currently the activities of the advocate are reported in Service Alberta's annual report, which is also available to the public. Any further annual report to the Legislature would in fact be repetitive and, quite frankly, redundant.

Mr. Speaker, I've raised these several points that highlight the redundancy of Bill 206. The question in the debate on Bill 206 can be summed as follows. Why create another legislative framework that would be repetitive to the one that already exists with the government of Alberta? In keeping with that, Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is really not needed at this particular time.

Also, Service Alberta is already mandated with consumer protection through the Fair Trading Act, and the Utilities Consumer Advocate is also mandated under the Government Organization Act. Furthermore, Bill 206 would really present additional problems in the regulatory frameworks that balance the interests of the consumers with the utilities.

With the Utilities Consumer Advocate already in place, Bill 206 also aims to duplicate an already-existing organization, an organization that is very effective and very credible to the consumers who access that particular service and program. Bill 206 creates unnecessary duplication and additional bureaucracy at a cost and would create an office that would be, again, repetitive and ineffective in this case.

As such, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support Bill 206 and would encourage all my colleagues to vote this bill down. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I must say I am very disappointed in the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I disagree fundamentally. I admire her putting her position out on the table, but I wonder how many of her constituents are really happy with their experience with electricity deregulation. Perhaps it should become an election issue in Edmonton-Decore.

I think the bill brought forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall is a good piece of legislation and deserves our support if we are actually here working on behalf of the voters and not on behalf of just those few who have benefited from deregulation.

I think it's worth just briefly reflecting on the experiment in Alberta with electricity deregulation. Alberta got caught up, swept up in what was for a while a continent-wide fad to deregulate electricity systems. It broke out starting in the States, and it got some traction in, oh, places like Indiana and Pennsylvania, if memory serves me correctly, and then ran into a huge scandal in California, which contributed to even larger scandals involving

companies like Enron, which was found to be guilty of manipulating electricity pricing in markets and, in fact, did some of their early experimentation with these manipulations right here in Alberta under the nose of this government through a project well known as Project Stanley. While that scandal has been pursued in the courts and in various other forums in the United States, here in Alberta this government just turned a blind eye to it.

How has deregulation played out? Well, pretty much the way one would expect. People were promised lower prices, better service, and more choice. Prices have been much more erratic and in many cases are worse than they used to be, there's not a lot of meaningful choice, and frankly service is lousy.

I can tell you that just recently, within the last two weeks, a neighbour of mine had gone to bat to get a single lamplight installed on a post in the back alley, disconnected by EPCOR because the charges for this one light bulb, Mr. Speaker, just administration costs alone, were running, you know, a hundred dollars a year or something to administer one light bulb. Maybe there's a joke in there somewhere. How many EPCOR employees does it take to administer a light bulb? Apparently, a huge number of them. He ended up having to speak to a number of different people because under deregulation we've shattered, we've dismantled what was once a coherent system.

Consumers initially and for several years were genuinely and rightfully angry about deregulation. I think they've sort of resigned themselves to it now. They've seen that the government is not going to budge on it, that the government is serving its ideology, as confused as that is, and is serving some investors but isn't serving consumers.

I think that's the motivation behind this piece of legislation. The Member for Calgary-McCall and, I bet, all of us in this Assembly have heard from constituents who are sick and tired of electricity bills they can't understand, sick and tired of getting bills on properties where they don't even use electricity and they still get significant bills every month. They want an advocate, and they want an advocate with teeth, not an advocate that reports up through cabinet ministers and government channels and is subject to all the controls that government employees are, but an independent advocate. That's what this piece of legislation is all about. If we're going to be stuck with deregulation – and it's probably too late to put that dragon back in the cave – then at least let's do something for consumers, something genuine.

The Member for Edmonton-Decore mentioned that there are 250 contacts a day to the current advocate, who's a government employee – 250 a day. That speaks to the volume of discontent and confusion on this. If there are over a hundred regulatory proceedings annually, that again speaks to how big this problem is.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to take that problem seriously, and I think this bill proposes that. The Member for Edmonton-Decore and probably others, as we hear from them, will criticize the idea in this bill in section 2(2) to make the advocate an officer of the Legislature. I think that's crucial. I disagree respectfully with the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I disagree. I think that making this Utilities Consumer Advocate an officer of the Legislature gives that position the independence that's needed. We know from various public policy research that the public trusts officers of the Legislature and independent bodies more than they trust government spokesmen, and if we're looking to build confidence and consumer trust, then we need to make this person an officer of the Legislature.

I think, for example, continuing through the legislation at section 3(1)(a), I'm going to quote here because it's a good line to quote. Responsibilities: "to represent the interests of residential, farm and small business consumers of electricity and natural gas in Alberta."

Mr. Speaker, surely that's something we can all support, and surely it's something we all understand needs to be done with the independence that would come with this advocate being an officer of the Legislature.

4:30

You know, time and again, actually, I feel like this government serves corporate interests above consumer interests. My view of government is that it should be an independent representative of all citizens. Whether it's in utilities, whether it's in auto insurance, whether it's in so many other fields, this government defaults, it seems to me, to the interests of big business rather than the interests of the consumer. There used to be, actually, a minister of consumer affairs, and now I think there's maybe a desk of consumer affairs or something in this government. That shows you how far this government has dropped the priority it places on ordinary people. This bill is an attempt to build that back up.

Section 3(1)(c) says, "to receive, review and investigate consumer complaints." Well, I think that's a good idea. I think that's a great idea. I think we need that capacity. It's kind of ironic that this government is bringing forward a health charter that has a health advocate in it, albeit a completely toothless health advocate, but it won't support a piece of legislation that advocates for a Utilities Consumer Advocate that's actually independent. Maybe it's because this legislation would give the Utilities Consumer Advocate some real clout, some real authority, some real credibility, and that's what this government is so frightened of.

I also want to refer, Mr. Speaker, to another paragraph under section 3. It's paragraph (f), and it reads, "to inform and educate consumers about electricity and natural gas issues." I think that's vital. How many of us – I bet all of us – have had constituents talk to us about their confusion around electricity issues? Obviously, some of those relate to how complicated the billing is, but there are questions around the electricity industry itself and the pricing of electricity: how is my electricity priced? How many people realize that it's a price set hour to hour? Well, people should know that, and we should have a mechanism in place to help people learn that. How many people know how natural gas is priced when it goes into their monthly bill? How many people understand what the impacts are of transmission and other costs?

Mr. Speaker, this is a good piece of legislation, important for the people of Alberta, and I hope everybody supports it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, being proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. The intent of this legislation, from what the member has put forward, is to improve consumer protection for users of natural gas and electricity. The member proposes to do this by creating the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. This office would be charged with providing information and advice to small businesses and home consumers.

Mr. Speaker, while I agree with the intent of this member's proposal, I would argue that the provisions proposed in Bill 206 are not needed because, frankly, we already have them in place. Currently under the Government Organization Act we have an existing Utilities Consumer Advocate. So as you can see, we have a proposal to do the same thing again. Laudable but, frankly, I think very unnecessary. This advocate is already entrusted with the same powers as the advocate proposed in Bill 206. The question then becomes: what does this bill really do?

When reviewing the bill, it quickly became apparent that the biggest change proposed by the legislation is, of course, making the Utilities Consumer Advocate an officer of this Legislature rather than its current position under the Ministry of Service Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this would mean that all of the funding for this office would come from the budget of the Legislature rather than from its current source, the Balancing Pool and the gas utilities. So we have a proposal to go from an industry-funded office under a government ministry to one directly reporting to the Legislature and funded by the taxpayer.

In addition, this would mean that the consumer advocate would need to be appointed by the Legislature every five years. When we look at the legislation, it states that the Utilities Consumer Advocate can only serve two terms, so at a maximum we would see an individual serving for 10 years. I'm very concerned with this arrangement for one reason: a 10-year maximum term limit could potentially force the government to remove a qualified individual from this office. After all, Mr. Speaker, a skilled Utilities Consumer Advocate could be hard to find, and arbitrarily removing them based on a term limit could, I believe, harm consumer advocacy.

This is a very important office, and as such every effort should be made to retain on behalf of the consumer an effective advocate. Mr. Speaker, under our current system the Utilities Consumer Advocate is not restricted by term limits; thus, their skills can be retained as long as they remain qualified in the position. In addition, the current structure allows the government to fill vacancies in this position quickly, without having to go through the Assembly. This creates a scenario where we can keep qualified individuals longer and appoint new ones quicker. I would argue that changing this structure would in the end do more harm than good.

The case will then be made that making the consumer advocate an officer of the Legislature will increase the accountability of the office and could ultimately improve consumer protection. Again, Mr. Speaker, I must disagree on both of those points. First, the office is already viewed with respect and credibility. In fact, in March of this year an Ipsos-Reid research project revealed that Albertans were very happy that the Utilities Consumer Advocate was a part of the government. They felt that this arrangement boosted the credibility of the office and that the government provided adequate oversight.

Second, I fail to see how altering the structure of the office would lead to any improvement in consumer protection. The Utilities Consumer Advocate is already a successful advocate for consumer needs. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this body currently assists an average of 250 consumers every day, working out to some 54,000 people every year. In addition, since 2007 there have been over 170 investigations launched against door-to-door energy retailers. These figures tell me that this office is already operating very effectively. Changing the current structure and imposing new obligations on the office of the advocate may actually weaken consumer protection.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps most importantly, I disagree with the proposal to make the Utilities Consumer Advocate an officer of the Legislature because it increases costs for no real gain for our public. Not only is this proposal coming at a time when it falls on all governments to look at controlling spending, but it seems to run contrary to some of the opinions voiced even by some of these members of the opposition. Time and time again we have heard from that side that the government needs to limit spending or only spend on areas that are maybe of concern to a particular member or that we should spend better rather than spending more.

When I look at Bill 206, I see an item of unnecessary expenditure. We already have a body that performs this very identical function. The Utilities Consumer Advocate is effective in what it does. It is

effective when hearing and responding to consumer complaints, it is effective when investigating energy providers, and it is effective when viewed from a cost perspective. Turning this body into an office of the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, will add no real benefits to the consumer. Frankly, I don't believe that consumers care how; they just want the job done and done well. This proposal is change for the sake of change only. It may sound cute under this dome but has no relevance to most Albertans.

4:40

To sum up, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again highlight that this government is committed to consumer protection for all of its utility customers. After all, it is important that small consumers have a voice. As government we have recognized this need and created an effective body to act as that voice. This body has always functioned in an accountable and credible manner, and I see no reason to change its current set-up.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-McCall for introducing this piece of legislation as it gives us an opportunity to talk about our successful programs, but I will not be supporting this bill because I believe that, frankly, it's not necessary. With that, I would conclude my remarks and urge members to not support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise and speak in favour of Bill 206, which calls for the creation of a Utilities Consumer Advocate that would be an independent body that would present its findings to this hon. House and allow for a more independent body that would be seen not only by this Legislature but also by other individuals in Alberta as truly representing the interests of consumers. I have been listening intently to the debate in the House and was particularly impressed with both the comments of the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, who brought this bill forward, as well as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

We look at what's happened here in Alberta over the course of the last 10 years and the change where we've gone from a regulated electricity system, which was seen to be understood by consumers, and governments could monitor and regulate the activities of the electricity business. For all intents and purposes it was doing very well at that. Albertans at the time were receiving some of the most competitive electricity prices anywhere in the world. You can't argue statistics.

I appreciate the comments by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that this was merely that at the time you changed to a private system, it was the flavour of the month. It was simply: hey, it looks like the cool kids are doing it, so let's jump on board. It was halfway through what was, I guess, being called the right-wing revolution here in Alberta. Oil money and natural gas money was coming in, so we thought about privatizing it. It was the right-wing agenda that was bringing the wealth into this province, not merely the fact that we sit on 25 per cent of the world's oil resources. Nevertheless, it's easy to get swept up in believing that you're all that and a bag of chips, which I think is what happened here in the '90s. If you look at that, we did privatize an industry that was working well.

I'm brought back to our discussions on Bill 50, that got sent to committee. I believe that we actually were at that time allowed to speak to the new Minister of Energy, who is not here in the House this afternoon. I was interested in the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Centre when she asked the minister about deregula-

tion. He was frank on the matter and said: "Well, our analysis of that was wrong. At the time we did it, we thought there was going to be a whole bunch of synergies at play, that have never evolved." It was a candid admission from someone who is still involved in this government, a recognition that what they did at that time hasn't turned out to be in the best interests of Albertans.

I think what would happen here by the introduction of Bill 206 is that with an independent advocate we may have an individual who reports to the Legislature who can look out for the best interests of the Alberta consumer and may, I guess, protect the Alberta citizen from some of the extremes of government, whether they're on a right-wing agenda, a left-wing agenda, or a centrist agenda, and not get caught up in the hype of the moment, not get caught up in the hype of going forward with something that sounds interesting, that sounds cool, that sounds like everybody is doing it when it may not in fact be in the best interests of the Alberta people. I don't believe this position would now fundamentally add many costs to the current administration that is going on. What is a real difference here is that you're going to transfer a system right now that reports to a minister. She decides what to report. She decides the final information that goes in the report. She decides the final information of what's going to be presented to the public. It can be massaged in any number of different fashions and ways to present a picture that the minister wants.

What the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is proposing is something different, something that open and transparent governments are supposed to be doing: creating independent systems like this that report to the Legislature, that allow us in to look at the information presented in a clear fashion, not torqued by rhetoric or not torqued by protecting a government or not torqued by an opposition trying to make hay with whatever arguments they wish to on the day. It just merely presents the information as it is to the people of Alberta.

If you look at the public policy debates that have been out there, individuals or citizens of Alberta prefer independent commissions who are reporting to the government. Institutions like the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Ethics Commissioner all present their information to the Legislature, and they're seen to have a greater respect amongst Alberta people when these things happen. On the simple fact of openness and transparency, on the simple fact of having a person separate and apart from government that is seen as bringing the truth, not seen as just delivering spin, I would support the hon. member's motion. I think it's a good motion, that we should be enacting. Really, I can see very little reason besides rhetoric that is out there saying: appoint this to have simply what is available now transferred to an independent body. Have that independent body run similar to the way it is now, but just have the information presented right to this Legislature. I don't believe it would cost more, and secondly, I believe the Alberta people would be better represented, and on a simple trust factor it would go a long way.

I thank you for allowing this, and again I'd like to commend the Member for Calgary-McCall for rolling up his sleeves and putting this forward. It's good legislation that leads us down a path to openness and transparency.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, being brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. The

purpose of this bill is to create the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. This would be done in the interest of consumer protection for users of natural gas and electricity in the province of Alberta.

The Alberta government already has a functioning Utilities Consumer Advocate under the Government Organization Act. In addition to the UCA, the government has established the Alberta Utilities Commission, the AUC. The AUC is a quasi-judicial, independent agency established by the government of Alberta. The commission is currently responsible for regulating the utilities sector, natural gas and electricity markets in the interests of social, economic, and environmental protection. It ensures the delivery of Alberta's utility services in a manner that is fair, responsible, and in the public interest. The AUC's fairness, openness, and transparency in the regulatory process have delivered and continue to deliver sound decisions.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 implies that the current Utilities Consumer Advocate is not carrying out to the full extent the functions it was intended for. This is not the truth of the matter. In the first 18 months following its establishment in 2003, the Alberta Utilities Consumer Advocate represented consumer interests in more than 30 regulatory proceedings, resulting in more than \$85 million in reductions to rates requested by utility companies.

Presently in Alberta an average of 250 consumers contact the current Utilities Consumer Advocate every day. This is a clear indication that Albertans are seeking the help of the Utilities Consumer Advocate and that it is in place to provide utility consumers with a voice. The UCA has remained committed to providing support to all Albertans. Earlier this year as part of a survey Albertans were asked how familiar they were with the UCA. They told us that the UCA's position inside the government provides credibility and oversight.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, currently the Utilities Consumer Advocate functions under Service Alberta. If Bill 206 is supported, the proposed UCA would be an officer of the Legislature and would be required to report annually to the Legislative Assembly. Being independent from the department, it would require the hiring of more support staff. The process of acquiring new staff and preparing them for the job would take time and financial resources away from the day-to-day functioning of the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Furthermore, it's not in this province's best interest to create a new legislative officer because it would demand more spending in general. It is always important to control government spending, and during a time of more limited means this becomes crucial.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 would require funding over and above what is currently being spent on an already efficient system. As a responsible government one of our main priorities is to allocate resources efficiently. I do not believe this bill merits the amount of funding it would require simply because the current consumer advocate is doing a good job, and there is no need for changes.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the grounds for Bill 206 are based on good intentions and introduced to improve consumer protection. However, creating the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate would only add an unnecessary layer to our bureaucracy. This bill would impose a layer of duplication, uncertainty, and regulatory burden that would be detrimental to both consumers and utility companies. In addition, this bill upsets a hundred-year regulatory framework that balances the interests of consumers and utilities.

Another apparent problem with this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that the consumer advocate would hold office for a term of only five years. Moreover, he or she would be restricted to serving only two terms. This restriction would make it impossible to keep an efficient and experienced consumer advocate for longer than 10 years. As a result, it may be difficult to attract individuals who are experienced and qualified to fill this position. If there is no need to select a new consumer advocate due to the term restrictions, the experience and knowledge of the acting advocate would be carried over year after year.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, spending resources to select a new consumer advocate simply due to the term restrictions may not be the answer. I have to wonder: is this the best way to use Albertans' money? Having read about all the great work that the current Utilities Consumer Advocate has done since its establishment, the answer is clearly: no, this is not the best way to spend Albertans' money.

Mr. Speaker, it is in this government's best interest and in the interest of all Albertans that we keep the operations of the UCA as simple and efficient as possible. I do not see how the changes proposed by Bill 206 would greatly enhance the way Albertans receive support with regard to their utilities. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall for introducing this legislation for debate. It has allowed us all the opportunity to further discuss possible improvements in services to Alberta's utility consumers, and exploring ways to improve Alberta's public services is in everyone's best interests.

I believe that the current Utilities Consumer Advocate is working hard for Albertans who require their assistance and will continue to do so in the future. For this reason I do not support Bill 206, and I encourage all members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you wish to participate at this time?

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will participate. I'm afraid I don't have too much time left before we change to the next topic.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you will have your maximum allocated 10 minutes of speaking time but only three minutes today.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I will attempt to get some thoughts in in the first three minutes and then not repeat myself next week, when I get back to it.

I want to start by congratulating the Member for Calgary-McCall for bringing forward this piece of legislation. I think it's an important piece of legislation. It's important maybe not because it's perfect in its construction – I think there are a few concerns that I have about it – but it certainly is important in terms of identifying an issue which, contrary to the points made by some of the other members who have spoken thus far today, I believe is of critical importance to Albertans.

Albertans suffer from really quite crazy fees and costs associated with electricity, and that is because of a clear, ideologically driven political decision made by this government almost a decade ago now, I guess. Consumers have clearly paid the price for it, and they pay it all the time. To think that they don't care about it is really quite something, and I was quite surprised to hear members opposite suggest that. I find it ironic to hear members opposite say: oh, we ought not to clean up or attempt to clean up our mess because it might cost money.

When you consider how much money the former Premier of this province kicked out the door in the form of rebates year after year to try and distract Albertans from the fact that his misplaced plan was costing them extensive amounts of money that they would not have had to pay had the government not embarked on the strategy to deregulate the energy market, I find all of that rather ironic. When you look at the cost of those rebates, let me tell you that the cost of having a truly independent utilities advocate pales – pales – in comparison to the almost bribe-like expenditures that went out the door to distract Albertans from the costs imposed upon them by this government's decision to deregulate.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time for this matter has now elapsed on today's agenda. The hon. member will be invited to return next Monday, and she will be the first person identified to participate.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Oversight of Provincial Sheriffs

511. Mr. Hehr moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a civilian oversight body, modelled on the Law Enforcement Review Board, to investigate all public complaints lodged against provincial sheriffs.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a privilege to rise and speak in support of my Motion 511, independent oversight of provincial sheriffs. What I'm going to attempt to do is give a little background on the philosophy of civilian oversight, try and tell a little bit about how currently the system works, and compare it to the law enforcement review agency, looking over our sheriffs and their performance, which is the direction that I think civilian complaints should go. Without further ado I'll try to piece together all that, and no doubt, hopefully, we'll have some debate on this.

5:00

As background, police oversight refers to the ongoing monitoring of police activities with a view toward holding each police service accountable on its service provision, its policies, and the conduct of its members. The term "governance" is used to refer to the process and structures used to direct an organization's operations. It defines the division of power within an organization, establishes mechanisms to achieve accountability between stakeholders, the oversight bodies, and the police service management.

Civilian oversight of law enforcement is an essential component of our democratic society. Effective civilian oversight and governance of police is essential to ensure that the police service uses its power and authority in a manner reflecting respect for the law and individual rights and freedoms. Ultimately, the essential task is to strike a balance between police independence to conduct investigations and to maintain order without undue political or other influences with the need for accountability to the public.

In Alberta civilian oversight of law enforcement begins with the Solicitor General and Public Security through legislated authority in the Police Act. In Alberta the police complaints, discipline, and appeal process is stipulated through legislation found in the Police Act and regulation. Under the Police Act the primary bodies providing oversight and governance are the police commissions appointed by the local municipal government. For municipalities who engage the RCMP as their municipal police service, official policing committees are established with a similar mandate.

Police commissions and policing committees provide a vital link between the community and the police, with their role being to balance the requirements of public accountability and those of police independence and provide an interface between the police service and elected officials. The Police Act of Alberta gives a commission responsibility for appointing the chief of police and a role in selecting a detachment commander. Both work in establishing policing priorities, allocating funds provided by a city council, and establishing policing policies. The day-to-day operation of the police service is the responsibility of the chief of police or detachment commander, and the commission or committee does not become involved operationally.

As a means to sort of take us to where I believe we need to go, I'm going to go through a little bit about what is the adjudication of complaints regarding personnel of our sheriffs branch and where I think our current oversight measures are falling short. Right now when a complaint happens, the conduct of the Alberta sheriffs is monitored by the professional standards unit. The professional standards unit is not part of the sheriffs branch. The unit, though, is housed within the law enforcement and oversight branch. The PSU's mandate is to investigate public complaints against Alberta sheriffs as well as the investigation of all internal sheriffs branch matters. Simply put, the mission objective of the PSU is ensuring that Alberta's sheriffs are providing ethical, effective, and professional service, so you can't argue with the mandate.

The unit is also supposed to receive general feedback from Albertans, both positive and negative, to ensure the sheriffs branch is improving its policies, training, and service delivery. As a function of this relationship with the community the PSU requires that all formal complaints, those requiring a code-of-conduct investigation, be submitted in writing to the PSU. Most of the public concerns that are received by the unit are handled informally with the consent of the complainant and the sheriff involved and through participation by a member of the professional standards unit.

On occasion formal mediation processes may be relied upon. These would include the complainant, the member of the PSU, the supervisor of the sheriff who is the subject of the complaint.

The investigation outcomes process. Within 30 days of the PSU having receipt of submission, complainants are notified, acknowledging the receipt of the complaint, and will receive updates every 45 days on the progress of the investigation. Upon conclusion of the matter the individual is notified concerning whether the complaint has merit. At this point of the investigation the sheriffs branch is provided with the findings, and it is left for them to determine what action, if any, will be taken. Finally, the complainant is notified in writing of the sheriffs branch decision regarding the appropriate remedy.

Now comes the appeal process. Any complainant who is not satisfied with the decision has a right of appeal to the director of law enforcement. This must be submitted to the sheriffs appeals delegate within 30 days of receiving the initial decision. Like the initial complaint the appeal must be submitted in writing and contain the findings of the investigation, where the complainant disagrees, as well as the reasons why. All correspondence and matters are managed by the police officer program.

Now here is where it gets interesting. The sheriffs appeal delegate is a member of the public who is appointed to the position by the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. During the course of the appeal the sheriffs appeal delegate may direct either the public security peace officer program manager or the program investigator to contact the complainant for further details. A review of the appeal will be undertaken, and the person will be notified within 45 days as to the progress of the decision. The decision of the sheriffs appeal delegate is final.

If we look at that and how that compares to how the Law Enforcement Review Board is run, if we look at the sheriffs appeal delegate under the Peace Officer Act, where that decision is final, when we look at the process that is involved in the PSU, the information shows that some level of oversight does exist; however, it falls considerably short of the kind of independent adjudication provided by the Law Enforcement Review Board.

Let me just go through what that Law Enforcement Review Board does. The Law Enforcement Review Board is an independent, quasi-judicial board established under the Police Act. The principle activity of the board is to hear appeals from citizens and police officers alike, but these are separate and apart from the police service involved. The principle objective of the board is an independent and impartial review. At the request of the minister the board may also investigate any matter relating to policing. Individuals who can appeal are a citizen, a police officer, a private security investigator, or a peace officer. Once the board has made a decision about an appeal, it is binding. There is a further appeal process, and that can be made to the Court of Appeal only if the board has made a legal error in its decision or is called upon by a point of law.

The ultimate object of this motion will be to create something more akin to the LERB or perhaps local police commissions. If we look at the makeup of what this would hope to establish, it is that it would be establishing an independent civilian auditor with the power to call witnesses and who has unfettered access to sheriffs' records and other evidence. Such a body would be able to spot systemic conduct problems and do internal investigations. Part of this would involve creation of an independent law enforcement oversight board consisting of, for example, three civilians with legal and civil rights backgrounds that would hear misconduct complaints brought against individual sheriffs from citizens and internal whistle-blowers. That panel would be located outside of the sheriffs office and outside of the ministry. [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

5:10

The Speaker: I'm sorry, sir, but I have to move on now.

I'll recognize the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, and then the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I truly appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this motion. I wanted to thank the member at the outset for raising the issue and for the sentiment that lies behind it, which is effective public oversight of police or peace officers in our province. I happen to agree that's an important thing.

There's interesting wording in the motion that calls for a parallel – in fact, I'll read the exact wording – “to establish a civilian oversight body, modelled on the Law Enforcement Review Board, to investigate all public complaints lodged against provincial sheriffs.” Just let me visit very briefly the actual process that the Law Enforcement Review Board follows, which the member partially covered but, I think, glossed over in a very important way.

First of all, in the event of a serious criminal activity on the part of a police officer or an event that involves the death or serious injury or injury to a civilian, initially the investigation would likely be moved to another police force or to ASIRT, possibly, the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team. So that's an important distinction there. Nonetheless, once a civilian or another police officer, if you look at the current act before the House, files a complaint, that complaint is not owned by the police commission; it's owned by the police chief who does the investigation. The member said himself that the police commission does not involve itself in operational issues. That complaint is investigated by the police chief of the force of that offending officer unless it's a serious investigation moved somewhere else already.

Once the police chief determines the outcome of that investigation, that complainant or the police officer involved can appeal that to the Law Enforcement Review Board, which does not investigate the complaint. As you said in your introduction in your speech, the Law Enforcement Review Board adjudicates appeals. It doesn't independently investigate. So the Law Enforcement Review Board can in fact find that the investigation was incomplete and send it back, or they can uphold the investigation. The decisions of the Law Enforcement Review Board are final unless an error was made in a point of law. Right?

Given that process, an exactly parallel process exists today for the sheriffs as near as I can tell. That process would be: first of all, in the event of a criminal activity or serious incident, that would automatically be moved to another police force or to ASIRT. Sheriffs cannot investigate or recommend criminal charges, so that would require the activities of a police force. Typically the complaints that the sheriffs would get that would be investigated internally would be, you know, using profanity during a traffic stop or disrespectful behaviour during a traffic stop. So the complaint is investigated by that sheriff's employer, in a sense, quite rightly. The unit that investigates those, although independent of the sheriffs branch, still operates under this minister's department. It's the same thing in the police force. The original complaint is investigated by that officer's employer, really.

In the event that the complainant does not agree with it, they can appeal to the sheriffs delegate, who is independent of this ministry but appointed by this ministry, as the member pointed out. I'll point out that the quasi-judicial board or any quasi-judicial board is also appointed by that same ministry, so I also appoint the Law Enforcement Review Board members. Yes, they're appointed, but they are independent. The current delegate is not a member of the sheriffs, is a former RCMP officer, actually, and has done some independent work on behalf of this province before to rave reviews, if you will.

Again, I think the sentiment is good, but it creates some problems. First of all, the Police Act is currently open before this Legislature. This cannot be done under the Police Act. Sheriffs are not police; they're peace officers. It requires changes under the Peace Officer Act.

The member made a couple of interesting comments that the sheriffs branch applies the discipline in the event of an investigation. So does the chief of police in the initial incident, and that could be the subject of appeal. It's the same with the sheriffs branch. But as for anybody with employees, typically it's the employer that determines what the discipline is going to be. In the case of sheriffs, you know, they're members of the public service union, and there's a collective bargaining agreement in place, which the government has to adhere to. That initial discipline has to be meted out by the employer in accordance with that collective bargaining agreement. So not only would we have to change the Peace Officer Act but also the public service bargaining agreement, which would be difficult.

While I understand and agree with the sentiment, I question the methodology of installing an external board that does nothing different than the process that's in place today and does not in fact do what the motion suggests it does, which is investigate. The Law Enforcement Review Board does not investigate. We could have a couple of options. We could maybe leave it as is with a couple of tweaks, and I'd certainly over time be willing to talk to the member about that. We could appoint an additional sheriff delegate and call that a board, which in my mind would be adding cost but little value. The delegate has overseen something like four complaints since the position was established. It's not a busy shop.

The other thing is to establish a full civilian oversight board to investigate, which is what the motion implies, although it compares

it to the Law Enforcement Review Board. That, I would suggest, would require significant changes in legislation, would also require changes to the Police Act because we'd likely have to do the parallel thing for the Police Act and provide unimaginable utility at the moment. I have real trouble seeing how we would improve the system by doing that, at least without adding very significant cost of establishing a full civilian investigative board. How would you do that? It would have to be police officers who provide investigation, which we've discovered in ASIRT. Led by a civilian, there are police investigators in there because they're the guys that know how to investigate. So you build in checks and balances, but you don't go to a full civilian oversight board. It would be too difficult to do.

I suggest that, first of all, the fact that the appeals delegate is appointed is not at all scary. You know, there are checks and balances about how people are appointed and how they do their jobs, and we accomplish that with the Law Enforcement Review Board. The fact that the sheriffs branch metes out discipline: that's true in any case with any employer.

I'll raise one other possible issue, and that is that this can't be done under the Police Act. It would have to be done under the Peace Officer Act. Sheriffs aren't the only peace officers in the province nor the only peace officers that interact with the public. There's a broad array, fish and wildlife officers and others, that interact with the public out there. Where would you draw the line?

I see this motion as calling for a costly oversight process adding limited, if any, additional value to the process. I wholeheartedly agree on the sentiment. Given the flow of how sheriff oversight and discipline is done today, any time that member wants to talk about ways that we could do that better, residing within that principle, I'm more than open to doing that. I have great respect for the sentiment that that member has laid out here, but to depart significantly not just from the current sheriffs process but also from the process that we have established for our police services is quite a leap for me and one that I can't support.

Again, while I strongly support the member's sentiment here, I can't support the motion that calls for such significant change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to begin by commenting that I really appreciated that exchange between the minister and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I learned something from it. It felt like a really genuine exchange, and we don't get all that many of those in here, so that was very helpful to me. I noted the minister's concerns, but I also noted, you know, that he is indicating support for the sentiment if not for the details and mechanics of this particular motion.

5:20

Partway through the minister's comments, when he talked about some of the complaints like the use of profanity by a police officer giving out a ticket, it made me think of a story I read years ago – it was out of the United States – of a police officer who was called in by his supervisor and was dressed down because they'd had a complaint that he was too rude and gruff when he was giving out traffic tickets, and the officer was instructed to spruce up his manner. Then a couple of months later he was called in because they'd received complaints that people he was ticketing felt like he was really enjoying the process of giving them the ticket because he was so happy. So it's sort of a you-can't-win kind of story. Who knows? That might happen here.

I want to begin this debate by reflecting on the principles behind this motion. I think the basic principle that we're all concerned about here is protecting the rule of law. I think the rule of law is one of the real hallmarks, certainly, of a modern, civilized society, where the idea is that the law applies equally to all members and that it's enforced equally. I think that's absolutely vital to anything approaching the kind of society that we've come to cherish in Canada and in what I would call the developed world. There are still many countries in this world where the rule of law is not respected, so we cannot take it for granted.

A big factor in whether the rule of law is sustained in this society, I would argue, is the competence and credibility of the police. Our police forces are fundamental to the success and prosperity of our societies, and that competence and credibility of the police also has to correspond with public trust. Those two go hand in hand. If the public has confidence and trust in our police and the police are competent and credible, then we are much more likely as a society to enjoy the rule of law. I think that's really what this motion comes down to.

One of my sons in May was actually travelling in Ukraine. He was walking with some friends down the street one evening, and a police car came by and stopped. It was actually like an SUV sort of vehicle. Several officers got out with guns and proceeded to stop my son and his friends, who were doing nothing but walking down the street. They were clearly westerners. There was a prolonged exchange. The police took their papers into custody and gave these young Canadians a real scare. In the end what were they looking for? There were no laws broken. They wanted money. At the end of the episode they ended up taking cash from my son and his friends and drove away. That's the extreme, but we need to watch out and protect against that. Certainly, the history of the Canadian west versus the history of the U.S. frontier illustrates that in Canada we cherish and value and have a remarkable history concerning the rule of law and competent police who earn public trust.

There is some concern about what's happening with public confidence in our police forces these days. Everybody knows, I'm sure, of too many examples involving the RCMP, a police force that has a very glorious history but right now is struggling, I think, to maintain public confidence: the episode we saw with the Robert Dziekanski tasing at the Vancouver airport, where the police investigation into their own activities was proven to be very suspect. That hurts the police. That hurt the RCMP when that information eventually came out in the big public hearing. The public confidence in our police force generally and the RCMP, in particular, took a real blow. If those blows continue – and it's not limited to the RCMP – then we risk something very fundamental in our society.

I know there are concerns in Edmonton with some activities of certain officers in the Edmonton police force. There have been a few cases just in the last month, two that I can think of, that undermined our confidence in the police. We must be diligent, and we must be vigilant as MLAs, who make the laws that we ask the police to enforce. We must be diligent and vigilant to protect police credibility.

Now, the minister used the phrase "checks and balances," and I think that's crucial here. He did speak about the mechanics of police discipline and sheriff discipline, and it helped me understand a bit more clearly the different process involved in disciplining a police officer or investigating a complaint against a police officer versus investigating a complaint against a sheriff. I appreciated the minister's explanation there.

Nonetheless, I would like to reinforce with the minister the spirit of this motion, which is to beef up the civilian oversight concerning

sheriffs. I would argue that in the end that's good not only for the public but for the sheriffs themselves. We're lucky, I think. As the minister said, there have only been, if I understood him correctly, four complaints brought against sheriffs. If that's what I understood, that's a remarkable record and a commendable one.

But times will change, and cultures will change. As the sheriff organization in this province grows and, shall we say, ages and gets a longer and longer track record, the baggage will build. If we don't address that baggage – in other words, those controversies, those potential abuses – very clearly and effectively, it will accumulate, and the people who will suffer first will be the sheriffs, who will go from being respected peace officers to being, you know, open to suspicion from the public.

This particular motion, Motion 511, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, is intended to protect the public by strengthening public oversight concerning complaints about sheriffs. I would make the point that that doesn't just protect the public, but in the long term that protects the sheriffs themselves because if the public sees complaints against sheriffs being effectively dealt with, openly and fairly dealt with, then the public will accept that: okay; in every organization there are a few mistakes made, but overall I have confidence in my sheriffs. If, on the other hand, a case arises in which a complaint against a sheriff is handled badly and it looks like it's concealed or there's something underhanded about it, then all the sheriffs will be cast under the same light.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would urge the minister and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue that dialogue and to do what they can to strengthen public oversight of our peace officers in Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Before I call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, might I have your approval to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: This week is the annual fall convention of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and it's being held here in the city of Edmonton. Of course, October 18 was the last municipal election, so I've invited some friends to come today to join us for a few minutes, and I'd like to introduce them to you. As I call them out, I'd ask them to rise. Please withhold your approval until you've heard from them all.

First of all, from the county of Barrhead Reeve Bill Lee and members of his council and administration, from Westlock county Reeve Charles Navratil and members of his council and administration, from Woodlands county Mayor Jim Rennie and members of his council and administration, from Sturgeon county Mayor Donald Rigney and members of his council and administration, and from the municipal district of Big Lakes Reeve Alvin Billings and members of his council. They're all here for the convention this fall. If they'd all rise, please, and be warmly welcomed. Very nice. Thank you very much.

For our guests, what we've got right now is a motion under debate, and it's presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Each speaker has 10 minutes to speak, and we've had a number of speakers speak. I'm going to now introduce the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to give his remarks.

5:30 Motions Other than Government Motions

Oversight of Provincial Sheriffs

(continued)

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to welcome our guests.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Motion 511, which is being proposed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. For the record, this motion proposes to "urge the government to establish a civilian oversight body, modelled on the Law Enforcement Review Board, to investigate all public complaints lodged against provincial sheriffs." Now, I'm very excited to speak to this motion because it gives me the opportunity to highlight some of the amazing work done by our provincial sheriffs.

It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that our provincial sheriffs are not police officers. They are, in fact, peace officers. As peace officers they are tasked with certain powers that are considerably different than those given to our police forces, but this is not to say that they do not play a critical role in the law enforcement continuum for the protection of our communities.

In fact, of the approximately 680 sheriffs, 411 work in security operations protecting government buildings and personnel throughout Alberta. Many of them can be found around the Legislature, around the Annex building, as well as government facilities across the province.

The second major detachment of sheriffs is the section dedicated to traffic enforcement, and this is without a doubt the section of the sheriffs department that is best known and, I'd say, loved by many Albertans as they interact with most of our public. Connecting back to Motion 511, these are the sheriffs who are most likely to receive public complaint. In fact, the vast majority of complaints levied against sheriffs deal with traffic-related issues. Now, that is not to say that they're not doing an outstanding job. In fact, since their inception we have seen a significant drop in traffic-related fatalities.

In addition to their roles in traffic enforcement and protection services Alberta sheriffs also help our police forces in areas such as fugitive capture and the transportation of prisoners.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, sheriffs play an incredibly diverse role in our society, and we need to be conscious of this when we design an oversight body like the one proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. After all, the Law Enforcement Review Board was designed to oversee police services, who have a relatively well-established role in society. With sheriffs engaged in such a wide variety of tasks, we must step back and make sure that the model that works for police services would also work for peace officers like sheriffs.

Mr. Speaker, we need to create a system that provides effective oversight while at the same time is not financially burdensome. I believe that establishing clear oversight for our provincial sheriffs will improve this already very professional force. It will raise their respectability and credibility in the eyes of the public at large and will give us the opportunity to reflect on all the valuable work sheriffs perform in our day-to-day lives.

I do not think that the motion proposed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is perfect, Mr. Speaker, but I do understand and recognize his intent, and as such I will be supporting Motion 511. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to get on the record as speaking to this motion, and actually I'd like to perhaps

narrow it down to private security firms. I know that we're speaking of rule of law, but I think we're also speaking of perception. I want to see a perception, as has already been mentioned, of a person in uniform giving a feeling of protection, safety, and trust.

I'm going to go off on my tangent again about my seniors. All of our hospitals now have private security firms, and I can only speak for two that I actually saw. A large portion of people that go to hospitals actually are seniors. I'm not talking about the ones that are being treated; I'm talking about the ones that visit. I've just seen such rudeness. People aren't moving fast enough, and they're not hopping to just because someone in a uniform has told them to. I'm really concerned about the power of intimidation that private security firms have. Frankly, I'm not sure who they actually answer to. If they have a contract with the Alberta Health Services, maybe that's who overlooks them. I'm not sure. I would like the minister to perhaps address that concern.

The other thing is that I really feel that – maybe it's my age, Mr. Speaker, but I was in the House of Commons in May. The House of Commons, as we all know, as this building is, is absolutely gorgeous. To walk down the halls of this beautiful, magnificent building and see nothing but these scanners all the way down the hall, I mean, yes, security is one thing, but I think sometimes we overdo it, to actually have the House of Commons, this gorgeous building, ruined in my mind, to be able to enjoy it, because of all the scanners.

I guess those are just a couple of things. It's got really nothing to do with this House, and, big surprise, I went off on a tangent. Big surprise. But I am really concerned about perhaps the training that goes on. [interjections] What? Oh, you guys, don't leave. I'm just getting wound up.

I really am concerned with how we can oversee the perception of people in uniform because a uniform is intimidating. Perhaps the minister could address it in terms of the private guards. Some of these young people that I see are actually quite young, and I'm not sure what kind of training they get in terms of the psychological attitudes that they should create when they approach people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, this is a motion put forward by your colleague, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. This is not a motion that the hon. Solicitor General is in a position to respond to. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and share my comments on Motion 511, which is being proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. This motion proposes to “urge the government to establish a civilian oversight body, modelled on the Law Enforcement Review Board, to investigate all public complaints lodged against provincial sheriffs.”

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I must say that the intent of this motion is laudable. It is important to have firm oversight of law enforcement officers in order to ensure that the public at large have confidence in their security services. This is not to say that I don't have some concerns with Motion 511. First and foremost, there needs to be recognition that sheriffs are not police officers. Rather, they are peace officers, and as peace officers they are restricted in the actions they can take to uphold the law. In addition, there are many types of peace officers currently working in Alberta, and it may not be necessary to have civilian oversight for all of them. People like fish and game officers and inspectors are all types of peace officers who have worked successfully for years without an oversight system like the one proposed in Motion 511.

Secondly, sheriffs play a very diverse role in our society, and some of them do not interact with the public at large and may not need the same level of oversight as those who deal with the public on a daily basis. Many sheriffs provide security services to government buildings and personnel, while others work internally, helping police services. These sheriffs by and large do not interact with the public and may not need the level of oversight proposed by Motion 511.

Mr. Speaker, this is not to say that I disagree with the hon. member about the need for oversight of the sheriffs that do interact with the public. Far from it. Oversight of security services lends them a sense of legitimacy in the public's eyes, and this is something that our sheriffs have earned time and time again.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, sheriffs are a crucial part of our province's security services. They play a crucial role in the safety of Alberta's roads, and they should be recognized for their contributions. Yes, sometimes recognition comes with additional responsibilities and oversight. It now falls on us as a government to decide how to create an appropriate oversight body. We need one that effectively handles civilian and internal complaints while at the same time does not create an expensive layer of bureaucracy at a time when it doesn't make sense to spend needlessly. I am not convinced that creating a system modelled after the Law Enforcement Review Board, as advocated by Motion 511, is the most effective way to create an oversight body for this diverse force, but I do recognize the need for some form of oversight. Therefore, I will be voting in support of Motion 511.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

I invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to reiterate what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview stated earlier. I really appreciated the dialogue with the minister and his pointing out some of the successes and possible failures of the motion that I have put forward in this case. Nevertheless, I think the motion as it stands is to try and establish a civilian oversight body that is modelled after the Law Enforcement Review Board. By that, if we look at the Law Enforcement Review Board, we have people with skill sets, have an actual board assembled to look at complaints that are coming up through a system. It's not simply an individual who is the final arbiter of any appeal process that goes through to the sheriffs department.

I think that's necessary for a couple of reasons. Our sheriffs are doing more than they ever have before. They are being entrusted to monitor not only our streets but enforce our liquor violations when people are over the legal limit. They are now being charged with doing some of our drug enforcement and looking after grow ops and things like that in the city. In my view, although I'm not the Solicitor General, I have a feeling those duties may be expanding as we continue to go along. I also know that if a sheriff were to come up to a member of the public, they are often given the same level of credence as a police officer and have a lot of ability to influence the public in what they do.

There is a concern by the honour and privilege that we give them in our society as well as the rightful opportunity they have to represent the rule of law. Like we've discussed, it is our obligation as an honourable House to try and provide the independent oversight, to add legitimacy to our sheriffs and to continue down that path of policing. You've got to have the separation where the police

and our sheriffs unit need the power to conduct their own operations and own investigations while at the same time an independent civilian arm has an opportunity to go through and investigate complaints.

I really appreciated the comments of the minister. I think that with his comments and with the sentiment of this motion and his skill and understanding of what some of the problems are that maybe with the passing of this bill the minister could work with it and stickhandle some of those problems that he identified. With his ability to see some of those pitfalls, yet have an understanding of the intent and where the system could be improved, this could go on the books as one of those things that gets passed, and the minister, I trust, would go to work on it and in due course come back with a better system than what's already there.

I thank the minister and the other members of this hon. House for discussing this issue. It's been a pleasure to take part in this debate. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 511 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Benito
Hehr
Kang

Pastoor
Rogers

Swann
Taft

Against the motion:

Bhullar
Blackett
Brown
Calahasen
Campbell
Dallas
DeLong
Denis

Drysdale
Groeneveld
Johnson
Johnston
Klimchuk
Knight
Mitzel
Oberle

Renner
Rodney
Sandhu
Sarich
Snelgrove
Tarchuk
Xiao

Totals:

For – 7

Against – 23

[Motion Other than Government Motion 511 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we now adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 15, 2010

Issue 41e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Notley
Quest
Rogers

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell
Anderson
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
Pastoor
Rogers
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery Kang
Benito Lindsay
Bhardwaj McQueen
Boutilier Olson
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Drysdale Xiao
Hinman

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
Amery Lindsay
Berger McFarland
Calahasen Mitzel
DeLong Notley
Doerksen Pastoor
Forsyth Quest
Groeneveld Sherman
Hinman Tarchuk
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Leskiw

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney
Anderson Groeneveld
Benito Kang
Calahasen Mason
Chase Olson
Dallas Sandhu
Elniski Vandermeer
Fawcett Xiao
Griffiths

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. Drysdale
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang
Boutilier
Brown
Calahasen
Cao
Forsyth
Johnson
MacDonald
Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman
Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 15, 2010

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated. We'll start our first evening session of this week.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 25

Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Liepert]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 25, the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010. The bill changes the administrative rules for freehold mineral rights. It specifies the appeals process, times and procedures are changed, and it changes the punitive structures for nonpayment, increasing the potential fines. Really, this is an administrative bill and very little to take issue with.

The freehold mineral tax is an annual tax on non provincial government owned petroleum and natural gas mineral rights within Alberta. It's assessed on revenue derived from production from freehold oil and gas properties. It's assessed annually based on calendar year production, and it's levied on each owner of a petroleum or natural gas mineral right as shown on the estate fee simple certificate of title.

I won't go into details about how it's calculated, but I did want to get on the record saying that we support this. It's a reasonable amendment. It clarifies a number of administrative issues relating to freehold tax, and we will be supporting this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'll be brief. The Liberal Party has long supported the mineral rights of individual property owners. This is a bill that possibly we could look at as having 110 years of work preceding it to get it to this stage. I think Bill 25, the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010, recognizes ownership but also recognizes the importance of contributing to the well-being of the entire province. The 4 per cent figure that is being suggested seems extremely fair, and therefore I lend my support and that of my party to this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and answers, comments.

Seeing none, the chair shall now call for speakers on the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just make a few comments with respect to this. This bill changes the appeal process for freehold mineral rights tax assessment. Previously objections to the tax were appealed to the minister, who could then go further and refer complaints to an appointed appeals board. Under our proposed amendments objections are made to the minister

or by appeals to the Court of Queen's Bench. Maximum penalties for noncompliance are raised from \$5,000 to \$100,000, and various regulations would allow for the transmission and storage of electronic records.

Mr. Speaker, there are restrictions here, stiffer fines and restricted access to appeal them, and that in conjunction with the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010, restricts the ability of freehold coal-bed methane rights holders to appeal taxation just after clarifying their ownership of these rights.

I just want to get on the record here and suggest that this is a bill which is . . . [interjection] Mr. Speaker, you know, someone is in the back there. I just want to indicate to the members that this is a bill which we have some objections to and will not support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On Bill 25, five minutes for comments or questions.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to stand up and speak in support of this bill and, I guess, the process that the government has gone through. Our understanding is that they actually consulted the freeholders and got the input and went in that direction rather than springing a bill on them that nobody was aware of. We think that that's important. It's amazing, as we can see in here this evening, that when the proper procedure and process are gone through, passing a bill can be quite simple and straightforward. We wish that this was a process that was taken on more bills. It won't be that way for the rest of the evening, I think, but on this one the freeholders are in support of this bill, and the Wildrose caucus is as well. We'll be voting in favour of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) five minutes for comments, questions.

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to put in my support on this bill. I was very proud to take through legislation which clarified gas and coal for the government, and I'm very glad that we have moved forward and clarified this when it comes to the freeholders. I'm very pleased to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to comment? Questions?

On the bill, any hon. member?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

Bill 26

Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 3: Ms Blakeman]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I see that you wish to speak on it.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 26, which is the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010. This is a piece of legislation that has been discussed – or at least the ideas behind it have been discussed – and

argued over and debated for years, and it's good to see something come out of all that sound and fury. Sometimes sound and fury signify more than nothing, and in this case that would be the case.

I think that probably the history of this issue has been laid out by previous speakers. You know, depending on how you want to look at it, it's something you could trace back probably a hundred million years, to when coal was formed and when it began producing methane gas. Essentially, it's an issue of clarifying the definitions and who owns the coal and who owns the coal-bed methane that the coal produces. I think it's important to separate those two, and I think this moves very much in the right direction.

It doesn't address all the issues. There are issues, you know, such as water and saline production, which so far, luckily, in Alberta hasn't been a big issue, but in some of the coal-bed formations that will probably be tapped in the future, we will have to expect a lot of concern around the production of saline and toxic water out of those wells. That's not the main concern of this piece of legislation, and I guess we'll have to wait for the future to deal with that issue. Let's hope we don't leave it too long because they've discovered in other jurisdictions, I think most famously Wyoming, that these things need to be thought about in advance.

7:40

I think this is probably an issue that's going to attain broader national and international attention as we look at jurisdictions that have historically not been gas producers suddenly discovering that perhaps they will become gas producers. But we won't worry about that tonight. I think tonight there are bigger discussions to be had, so I will leave my comments like that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It's interesting that we're talking about Bill 26, mines and minerals and, specifically, coal-bed methane gas. Tonight gas seems to be a reoccurring theme. I don't want to add too much to that gas discussion, but I do want to get on the record the importance of principles that we have long espoused, and that's the need for isotopic testing and creating records prior to fracking. When water is intruded upon, whether by a natural process, as is often the case, or by the inappropriate chemicals used in the fracking process, we need to have that historical record so that we can determine whether or not compensation is due to the individual whose land and water are interfered with.

There's been a terrific amount of controversy with regard to how we can potentially interfere with aquifers, and Bill 26 recognizes the fact that coal and gas are separate entities. It does not talk to the degree I would like to see about the importance of water and the effects that coal-bed methane could potentially have on it. Coal-bed methane is one of those gift horses. You don't want to look into its mouth because while it can provide benefits, it can also provide a very detrimental circumstance to our underground aquifers, whether they're in the Horseshoe basin formations, as is the case from central Alberta down, or as we get closer to Fort McMurray and find that the gas is that much farther below the surface and less likely to interfere in the water table.

This is an important recognition that coal and coal-bed methane are separate entities, and for that clarification I appreciate Bill 26 and its intentions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

See none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is certainly one of those bills that I have to speak against. It's sad when the government says one thing and then jumps and changes direction. I mean, just in 2009 the consensus was that they weren't going to do anything on this. There are court cases going through. The precedent of this government in the past has always been that when something is in the courts, we'll wait, that we'll see where it's coming from and where it goes. [interjection] Yes, it's going to come up the 1st of March of '11. This has been going on two years, lots of consultation going forward, and here we are stepping in to pass legislation to pre-empt a judgment.

But probably the most concerning thing when it comes to Bill 26 is that this is an extremely complex question and problem. There are two jurisdictions, to my understanding, in the world right now that have made legislation. B.C. was leading. I don't know that they've got it right. It concerns me. To bring a bill like this and announce it, you know, on the 27th of October and then put it in front of the Legislature saying, "Oh, this is the way we need to go" — I've had too many people contact me saying: look, this is too complex to debate and push through in short order with night sittings and saying that this is the direction to go.

It's interesting the take on the government saying that, you know, this is going to open up these areas and allow us to develop these resources. But it's an extremely complex issue, and to just say that it doesn't have any domino effect down the road is very inadequate. I would say that it's just naive to think that we should be able to put this out there and say, "Oh, we've solved the problem," when in fact we could be creating a much bigger problem as we look forward to how we're going to develop the coal in this province. There's lots of talk, you know, about clean coal, the liquification of coal and using that for gas. I mean, they've been doing it since the 1800s. If you go in and actually start fracking and drilling in these areas, we could be compromising in situ processing down the road.

I just think that this is the wrong time to be passing this legislation. We should be looking at it in the spring. At the very most it should be one of these bills that's presented in the spring; then you have a year to look at it and the consequences. Like I say, the biggest and most concerning thing is that we don't have the expertise here in this Legislature to say: "Oh, this is the way to go. We see the future, here. It's crystal clear. Let's jump on it."

It's interesting because, again, this really is a question and a case of ownership, the ownership of property. Who actually owns that property? In my own mind, when I look at that, you know, we know that if a person owns the surface rights, they own that top 12 inches or wherever that organic matter in the soil is, and they can do this. For someone to come in and say: "Well, you know what? All we really want out of the surface is the organic matter, less than 5 per cent. We're just going to take it out of the soil, and we'll leave you with sterile soil. No problem. But we have this great use for this organic matter." That's what we're looking at.

There's a very small amount of energy in comparison with the methane that's trapped inside the coal versus the total reservoir. I think we need to be very careful and let the experts, the EUB or someone else, have a much better presentation, go through and make an expert decision. But for us to ram this through here in the next two weeks with the consequences that we could be facing over the next hundred years as we continue to use carbon fuels could be extremely detrimental.

Like I say, on the first reading of this bill and in discussion on the second one, I have to speak against it. We're not in a position to pass this. We're making a knee-jerk reaction to a complex problem. I would hope that as we go forward and discuss this a little bit more — if there are some expertise reports that the government has, I

would sure like to see them. Like I say, the biggest and most disappointing thing is how blindsided the industry was on this and the precedent that it's going to set when, in fact, there's been two years of preparation going into a court case to try and settle this. Everything up until the 27th of October showed that what we're going to do is that we'll let the experts and the courts settle this and then go forward because this is a property rights issue. Anyway, I just feel that this is the wrong direction to go. [interjection] A light just went on with my colleague here.

It is about property rights and the fact that we need to respect them and not just pass legislation to annex out or allow people to go in and trespass into another area. This is about zone development. It's interesting, too, when different developments go forward to the EUB. If you've got gas over top of an oil reservoir, they'll allow the oil to come out first. There's always a proper process to extract our energy, and I don't know that going in and allowing this is going to be the right order.

I would hope that we would let this bill die this fall, that they wouldn't pass it through, and do a lot more research and let the experts do it rather than rush a bill through for I'm not sure what purpose or intent.

I'll sit down, and perhaps there will be a few questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

7:50

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I, indeed, do have a couple of questions for the hon. member. The first one is to be prefaced with just a comment that I attended the freehold property rights group in Red Deer about nine or 10 months ago. There were Conservatives there, your leader was there, one of the Liberals was there, and I was there. I heard your Liberal – sorry; your leader, not “your Liberal.” I'll get used to the night sittings, Mr. Speaker. I heard your leader talk about the property rights of the freehold owners.

Now, it seems to me that what this bill does, simply, is to say that where there's natural gas occurring as a result of coal-bed methane, the freehold owners have the rights as if it was just regular, conventional natural gas. So it would seem to me to be to the disadvantage of the coal companies, the big, big companies, and in the interests of the small freehold people, who of course the NDP have always supported and I thought you supported. But by your comments it sounds to me like the Wildrose Alliance is taking the position of supporting the big coal interests over the small freehold owners' interests. That would be my first question.

The second one is with reference to your comments about waiting for the courts to make the decision. I always thought that it was a conservative position that the courts should not be making legislation, that the people's elected representatives should be making the legislation. So why, then, do you want to have the courts lead this decision?

Mr. Hinman: Those are two excellent questions that I'm happy to answer. The first one is that the freehold rights were very much proponents, as you are of the freehold owners and wanting to protect that. But the way you protect that is by following the precedent of rule of law, not arbitrarily, where you jump one area or the other area. It's just critical that we get it right on who actually owns it, not necessarily just going politically and saying: oh, there are a lot more votes here or there. It's always about the rule of law and ensuring that we're setting a proper precedent and not something that's a trap that we're going to go back to fall into several times going forward.

[interjection] Well, because it's setting a precedent by not actually following the rule of law.

Again, he says that we set legislation. We do, and that's my whole point. There is legislation in place now, and it needs clarification by the courts. Then if there's a problem, that's where we as legislators would come back in and say: “You know what? We see that we've made a mistake here. The courts have misinterpreted it or it's wrong, and therefore we need to pass new legislation.” You don't pre-empt the courts when there's a case going forward. The legislation is in place. It needs to be clarified in the courts, and then if there is a problem, that's where we would step back in as legislators and say that this needs to be addressed.

Absolutely we're a huge supporter of the freehold mineral rights. Our leader has spoken to them many times. But this is about precedent. It's about rule of law. It's about property rights. You can't infringe on one area and say, “Oh, a big owner owns this; therefore, it's okay to go after it,” and then not go after a small owner later. It's about following the rule of law, not arbitrary political decisions that are just about votes.

I hope that answers your questions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, five minutes.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Under 29(2)(a) just to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you've mentioned property rights quite a number of times, but this is surely an issue where two parties are claiming the same property rights. Why are you saying that this is an issue? You're stating the obvious. This legislation moves to resolve that issue. What's your problem?

Mr. Hinman: The whole problem is the technicality of it. Is this just political? What's the expertise? Why did they come up with this decision? With this government I'm always very concerned when they pass a law that there's someone to benefit or something else rather than rule of law and making sure that we're following, you know, the actual law and the property rights issue. Here they're just coming in and saying: this is who it belongs to. It's a very technical question. It's about zone and infringement. Like I say, if you were to say to the surface owners, “Well, now we want to come in and mine the organic matter from the soil; you can have your 12 inches, but we're going to take that 3 per cent organic matter,” what does that do to what you own? I think there's some jeopardy here on what we could possibly do.

My point is that this is extremely technical. I don't think we've thought about what the repercussions are in the next 10 to 20 years.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Very good. Well, it's interesting that this would come up. In my previous life as a lawyer I actually worked on the decision that the EUB made on this case in 2007, and it was very interesting. It is very highly technical, over the heads of probably, maybe, everybody in this Assembly, frankly, which is why this obviously needs more time and thought.

Obviously, we can see that Bill 26 clarifies the ownership of the coal-bed methane. What it's saying is that it's the gas owners, the freehold owners, not the coal owners.

You know, I had a gentleman in my office just to talk a little bit about who this is affecting. This is not just an issue of big coal. I had a man in my office last week actually who was just beside himself over this legislation because he was part of the consultation that this government did in 2006, I believe he said. The outcome of

that, the recommendation, was to leave things how they were and then see how it would play out in the courts before coming back to it with more consultation. So he was beside himself because this broadsided him.

He's just a landowner. He's got a very accessible coal deposit on his land, and he wants to make the most of it. Of course, coal-bed methane could obviously be a very lucrative product that he could gain a lot of money from. As a landowner he's furious because he feels like he's been – without any consultation the government comes in and arbitrarily decides: "You know what? You're out of luck. The gas belongs to the freehold owners, and that's just the way it's gonna be. Sorry. No compensation for you." I think he has a very legitimate claim.

I do understand completely the precedents in this area. There's no doubt that there have been court cases from the United States as well as from Canada, including our own EUB, although that was a very, very fact-specific case. I don't think you can say it's a precedent for the whole area. But there is case law out there that this bill does conform to. That doesn't necessarily make it right. It's certainly not well-spread case law.

I can remember hours and hours researching this area and finding almost nothing on it, with a few minor exceptions. So it's a very new area of law, and it's something that is extremely technical. I'm glad I'm not doing that anymore because it makes your head spin. In all honesty, I don't think I can say that I fully understood it when I was going over it. I mean, we had experts in on both sides of the issue that made very compelling cases for why the coal owners should have the rights to it, why the freehold owners should have the rights to it.

That's the whole point here, that as a Legislature and as lawmakers we have to understand that our decisions affect people a lot. Sometimes we can devalue their land and do things to them that will cause major heartache and major missed opportunities. We have to understand that when we come in and we decide or a bureaucrat decides or a set of individuals decide that they're going to make a change this substantive, there are consequences. I'm not convinced that the proper protocol, the proper consultation has been done to make sure that the coal owners, whose rights are going to be essentially extinguished under this legislation, are being adequately heard, and I think that that's wrong.

I think that there is no doubt that there does eventually need to be clarification around this issue, but we should do a proper consultation process and make sure that – you know, there could be ways that we could make sure that the coal owners are compensated in some way for essentially extinguishing their claimed right to the coal-bed methane and also arrive at more certainty. We can do that, but it takes consultation. It takes some hard work to find a way to make sure that all people's property rights are respected.

8:00

It goes back to what the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was saying. This isn't about, you know, clarifying who owns what. Yeah, that's what this legislation does, but that's not the argument he was making, and it's certainly not what I was making. We all understand the need for clarity, but we also have to understand that this is a new area of law, and this decision is going to have effects on people's existing property rights, so let's take some time. Let's talk it through, maybe not even in this Legislature. Maybe we go back and do a proper consultation first with all partners involved, all stakeholders involved, to make sure that everybody comes out at least with some compensation – yeah, I guess the best word is compensation – for the property rights that they hold. I think that's a very fair point that the hon. member made.

Again, we can do both. It's not mutually exclusive, what I'm talking about here. It's not like we're saying that we can either have clarity on this issue or we cannot have clarity on this issue; the coal guys win or the gas guys win. It's not about picking winners and losers. It's about trying to make sure we arrive at a fair decision, where everyone is compensated.

Just a few years ago or a decade ago coal-bed methane wasn't even on the radar screen to these guys, so to just come in and arbitrarily make a decision like this, I think, is certainly beyond the expertise of this House currently. Certainly, that's not to say that we shouldn't eventually debate and pass a law on it, but to ram this through in a week or a week and a half or whatever we're going to do without having the proper technical explanations of what this matter is about is really doing a disservice to this House, hon. members.

You know what? This is a perfect place if you want to keep this purely in the Legislature, if you don't want to go back and do a proper consultation with all the stakeholders before bringing it forward, to at least punt this out – punt is the wrong word – send this to a committee of the House, of the Legislature, and allow that policy committee to sit down and invite stakeholders in to hear their different arguments and to get some technical analysis from some experts and scientists on this subject. You're going to find, as you peel back the layers of the onion, that there is a ton to learn about this subject. That would be a much better process. You know, perhaps we should bring in an amendment in Committee of the Whole to that effect. That would be a much better process than simply just ramming this through: oh, we've got to have clarity; we've got to have clarity. This isn't the way to do it.

Although I applaud that we want to try to bring clarity to this issue – that's the final goal – you want to make sure you do it in the right way. You don't just want to jump to a conclusion and then look stupid and affect people's property rights down the road. You know, some of the issues that haven't been resolved here are things around deep coal deposits and the gasification of coal. As one coal owner said, if you go and frac the whole thing up down there, it brings some unsettled new legal issues into play that maybe you haven't accounted for. Maybe there will be a lot of legal disputes that come into play because we jump ahead without thinking.

That's basically all I had to say on that. I just hope that as we go into Committee of the Whole that we'll think about it. You know, I'm not going to support the bill at this time because I don't think the proper consultation process has been done, but in Committee of the Whole I sure would like to see a little bit more sober second thought and move this over to an SPC, at the very least, if not just delaying the bill until a proper consultation is done.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood-Northlands.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've listened to two Wildrose speakers on this bill so far, and I still am really struggling to find out why the position is as it is. It surprises me. Maybe we could take the fellow that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere referred to, that's very upset. If this person has some land and on the land is some coal and on the land is some natural gas and on the land is some coal-bed methane, how does this change what his rights are with respect to those things? Does he have freehold mineral rights? I assume not. That means that he doesn't control the mineral rights, so a coal company could come and dig up his coal, and a natural gas company could come and drill for gas. If this bill was passed, then the gas company could come and take the gas because he doesn't own the mineral rights. Are you proposing something that would

actually give mineral rights to the people who own the surface land? Is that what you're proposing? I don't understand how this fellow is negatively affected by the bill. I don't think you made that clear enough.

Mr. Anderson: Fair enough. You can own coal rights without owning the gas rights. That was the case with this fellow. He doesn't own the gas rights, but he owns the coal rights to this certain parcel of land. If he wants to develop the coal, he's going to get an awful lot of money for that coal. If some company who already owns the natural gas that he doesn't own wants to drill for it, he's not going to get compensated even a fraction of what he would get compensated if he actually owned the gas rights. You know, that's the difference. You do have separate rights to these commodities. It does make a huge difference with regard to the amount of compensation that the landowner will receive depending on what rights he holds.

Again, this is about property rights. This isn't about picking winners or losers or favouring the little guy over the big guy or the big guy over the little guy. It's about doing the right thing, making sure that people's property rights and their expected property rights are compensated and respected. I don't think that this House has done the adequate due diligence necessary to say that we actually have made a just and well-thought-out decision.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Two quick questions. One, how does this affect in situ development of coal in the future? We have in situ development of bitumen. Well, maybe I'll just let you do that because there are lots of people that want to ask some questions here. Does this affect the in situ development? If, in fact, you own the coal, who has precedence to go in? If someone wants to take out the coal-bed methane yet you want to mine your coal, does that mean you don't have access to your coal? Is that clarified?

Mr. Anderson: It's not clear. That's one of the points where we need to do more consultation because that issue in itself could raise a whole whack-load of legal issues that this legislation clearly does not address. The problem is that when you pass legislation that isn't well thought out on every issue – for example, this in situ development of coal – you have a situation develop where in order to solve one legal problem or clarify one legal area, you end up opening up Pandora's box in another area.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much. I'm still wondering who it is that the member is hoping to consult. I'm wondering if he's been talking to, for example, EnCana or if that's who he thinks we should be consulting. There we have a situation where CP Rail had the coal rights on either side of the tracks. That's what they got to be able to develop the coal and use it on the trains. That company, CP Rail, eventually goes and becomes PanCanadian. It merges with Alberta Energy, becomes EnCana. Now EnCana has all the coal rights on either side of the tracks. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we still have the opportunity to talk about it later.

On the bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr Speaker. You learn a great deal

on this side of the House. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad, but I tell you, you sure . . . [interjections] Do you guys want to take that argument outside?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the floor.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, anyhow, I'm pleased to stand up and debate Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010. There's no question here that when you become a member of the opposition, you go through a steep learning curve. That steep learning curve takes you from, you know, having two or three things that you're interested in, and all of a sudden you're learning about legislation.

I always have to say how when I was on the side of the government, I admired the opposition and wondered how the heck they were able to stand up and debate every piece of legislation and, for that matter, some of them for 20 minutes at a time with a bill in their hand. Well, guess what? We've got the Wildrose caucus. We've got a limited budget. Like I said to the leader, it's like going from the castle to the outhouse and hoping you have some toilet paper with you because that's exactly what we have. We have two researchers. We've got I forget how many ministries over on the government side, I think 23, that we have to try and keep up on. So it's been an interesting challenge.

I find it interesting, and I'm looking forward to the Member for West Yellowhead standing up and debating this piece of legislation because it's the coal companies in his area that, in their words, feel that they are getting screwed. They feel that there's no recollection of their claim to the byproduct of their coal. Again, it emphasizes, I think, what my two colleagues said, the lack of the industry consultation. In fact, a lot of them were totally blindsided by the announcement on October 27.

This harkens me back to the times when I was on the government side and the royalty framework. I don't have to remind anybody in this Legislature about the royalty framework. I see the former Minister of Energy watching and listening to what I have to say. At that period of time, when we brought the royalty framework forward, we heard a lot of the oil and gas companies talking about their lack of consultation. We saw what the lack of consultation did on the royalty framework. I think we've got – what? – seven changes we've gone through so far. I've lost track of exactly how many changes.

You know, the government is rushing the legislation on this bill. I think the in situ gasification from coal is not clarified, and I think that when my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere was questioned, my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore asked him that. The natural gas may belong to a gas tenure; however, the value-added from the coal gasification is not recognized. Without clarification of this value-added process and rushing this bill through legislation, we just feel that Albertans will be losing a great opportunity, similar to the oil sands, and we will be caught in litigation seeking assets which we know must be defined.

The Premier has said that the clean coal has a big role in Alberta's energy future. He's made that one of his priorities. I'm just very, very concerned about what we're hearing from Albertans and what we're hearing from those in the coal bed about how they feel that there has been no consultation. They feel blindsided. They feel the lack of industry consultation and yet another case of ramming through legislation, and they feel that two weeks is not enough for legislators, us as MLAs, to be able to make a fair analysis of what's happening.

This is second reading. I'm going to be listening to what some of

the colleagues from the government have to say on this particular piece of legislation. I'll be particularly interested in those colleagues that have some of the coal companies within their constituencies because I think that'll be interesting to hear what they have to say. I can't imagine the coal companies coming to us and explaining their displeasure, then going to the government member if the company is in there and saying how much they like the legislation. I always find it fascinating when there are things going on that the MLA supposedly representing the constituents in their riding is not speaking up. That sends a very, very bad message, to me. But I guess it's not surprising, when we haven't heard any of the government MLAs talk about the crisis that we're in in health care.

With those remarks, I'm going to sit down. I look forward to again speaking in committee. I imagine that we'll be continuing to meet with the coal companies that have expressed their displeasure in this piece of legislation as they take the time to educate us through the process. There's nothing like going back to school and getting energy 101. Now we're going into coal 101 and all of those others.

Mr. Speaker, I will sit down after those remarks, and I look forward to hearing what the government has to say during the committee process.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to clarify for the benefit of members. Some of the members in the House are under the impression that this bill affects in some way all freehold lands. It does not. There are somewhere around – the estimates are around 30,000 freehold titles in the province of Alberta, and the only ones that are affected by this bill are the ones in which coal is designated separately; in other words, there's a split title of coal. If your great-grandfather got a piece of land and homesteaded it, this is not going to affect that piece of land because he got the whole title. If he bought the land from the Canadian Pacific Railway, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre said, for a dollar an acre probably, as my grandfather did, you might have an issue with the split title.

My information is that there are about 4,200 freehold owners that have titles in the Horseshoe Canyon zone of Alberta, and of those 4,200 approximately 3,100 have a split title. That's what we're talking about here: about 3,100 titles that are going to be affected by the bill.

I hope that clarifies a little bit.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Just to clarify as well, you know, there's this love affair that certain people have that aren't in our party. They're married to the idea that somehow there are big companies that are behind the motives of the Wildrose at every turn. It's very sweet, but it's very untrue. Honestly, the reason we're against this is because we feel that it improperly infringes upon people's property rights.

In fact, I can only speak for myself, but I've never had EnCana or any of the larger coal companies come to me on this piece of legislation. It has been smaller owners with split titles, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill had talked about, that have come. The owner from my area is from a little place called Keoma, and he's very concerned about it. I've had several letters, and our energy critic I know has been receiving some letters on it as well. We have talked to a few people.

Certainly, in my case when I speak to it, it honestly is because I feel that, you know, we're rushing through the process. Maybe it's because I worked a little bit on the case and I saw first-hand how incredibly difficult and technical it was that I feel we need to do more work on this issue.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Any other member wishing to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

8:20

Bill 24

Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Liepert]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and speak to Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This bill was created to set up a legislative framework to support an industry that doesn't yet exist but is in its early development in Alberta, generally paralleling the existing framework for exploration, extraction, and shipment of minerals. The bill covers clarification of ownership of pore space, and this means a fundamental change to fee simple title. The bill ascribes long-term liability for injected carbon dioxide to the government – in other words, the public – once the operator provides data showing that the stored CO₂ is contained. Thirdly, it establishes a fund financed by CCS operators for ongoing monitoring costs and remediation, and fourthly, it does not change ownership of mine and mineral resources.

To be clear, the government is not only funding here carbon capture and storage projects in Alberta, up to \$2 billion as announced; they're also assuming long-term liability for all CCS projects in Alberta. The government of Alberta has stated that they are accepting the long-term liability because of the nature of captured carbon, in effect forever. The proposed legislation ensures that carbon capture and storage will not change mineral ownership or mineral production, and the carbon capture and storage operator will be responsible for mitigation work during operation and up until a closure certificate, like the reclamation certificates in surface disturbances. The transfer of long-term liability remains undefined. That is a concern for us.

Carbon capture and storage operators will also pay into a postclosure stewardship fund, which will be managed by the Alberta government. In theory the fund will cover ongoing monitoring and remedial work that may be required in the future, but as we have seen with other security funds associated with upstream oil and gas, it may well not cover the full liability, another concern for us.

As a starting point the bill takes away landowner rights to or ownership of pore space. That surely needs to be discussed and proceeded with carefully. This is a retroactive decision vesting those rights in the Crown. In addition, it moves more issues regarding private land up to the level of the provincial government, leaving less space for municipalities to have decision-making powers.

With respect to the first issue, fee simple title, in the amendments this bill changes the definition of fee simple title and changes a fundamental principle of what title to land means in Alberta. Others have raised concerns in other opposition parties. It is retroactive. It is without compensation. Surely, this needs to be discussed and

carefully proceeded with. The change is that the government plans to define pore space and vest all rights in the Crown except that which is owned by the government of Canada. For example, even if one received one's land a hundred years ago, the government is now taking it away and saying that one never owned it, and the landowner will not receive compensation.

With respect to the Surface Rights Act, that's also being amended in this, there is a permit that grants the right-of-entry orders either for drilling or pipelines or collateral installations.

The second key issue, the assumption of liability by the Crown, I think also raises concerns that we should have a vigorous debate about. It includes, in addition to an assumption of liability, an indemnity of the company; that is, it releases them of all liability forever. Essentially, at this time the lessee washes its hands of all future issues and downstream an undefined risk is therefore assumed by us the public. The assumption of liability and indemnity is triggered by the issuance of a closure certificate similar to the reclamation certificate of upstream oil and gas. The preconditions to issuing a closure certificate are set in section 120. They, too, need to be carefully examined, and clearly the regulations relating to these need to be examined. We'll be suggesting some amendments that address questions around proper abandonment, proper reclamation, captured CO₂, and the period of time established by regulation. The devil is in the details as always, Mr. Speaker.

The third key issue is that it creates a postclosure stewardship fund, and we've seen something similar in the upstream orphaned well fund. The fund is intended to permit monitoring behaviour of captured carbon, fulfilling obligations that the private sector has not or that the Crown has assumed or paying costs in relation to the orphaned facilities. Of key interest is that contributors to the fund are only those who participate in carbon capture and not those who create the carbon in the first place, again, ultimately falling to the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, we are cautiously approaching this particular legislation. We feel that it's an important decision to make. It's one we have to move forward on. This is an opportunity for Alberta to lead in North America, perhaps elsewhere, in this important new technology, but we feel there are a number of amendments that would protect the public interest long term, prior to the approval of regulations.

We're supportive of carbon capture and storage as at least one component of a rational approach to climate change, but a small component, certainly not the silver bullet that this government seems to see it as. In addition, the bill is in line for the most part with the closest existing legislation, which is in Australia, and follows some of the similar principles identified here. We need to have this debate, especially regarding the postclosure security fund, and the timeline for government accepting liability needs to be part of this debate. I look forward to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I don't think we have 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to speak on the bill.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope to use my time tonight to provide a background of the legislation that this government has passed concerning property rights. It really has been one of the black eyes of this government. This is just the latest in a long list of pieces of legislation that show a total disrespect for the principle of property rights, a belief that the minister knows best and that Albertans should trust the good nature and good will of their government to look after them, a desire to pursue megaprojects that will earn them short-term PR points, without any thought as to the

long-term welfare of this province, and a willingness to cast aside long-standing traditional principles to make the implementation of these megaprojects easier for them to conduct.

The protection of property rights is one, if not the most, fundamental role of government. Disturbingly, property rights have been severely eroded in this province since December 2, 2006. I'm going to review some of the most egregious examples in the last four years to demonstrate this.

We had, of course, Bill 19, which turned into the Land Assembly Project Area Act. In this one the government granted itself authority to freeze large tracts of private land for public purposes without having to compensate landowners for relocation costs, losses incurred due to business interruption as well as other related damages. We were told to trust the minister, that the government knows best. We were told this bill wasn't about confiscating anything; it was only about putting restrictions on your land, encumbrances that might almost make it useless and for an indefinite period of time, but there's no need for compensation.

Oliver Wendell Holmes in the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a famous ruling 90 years ago, which made clear that overregulation was a form of government confiscation; that is, if the government implements restrictions that diminish the value of your land, then you deserve compensation. But this government knows that despite the Alberta Bill of Rights citizens of Alberta these days don't really have any meaningful property rights. That's why in bills like the land assembly act they only have to pay lip service to being fair and not worry about actually being held accountable to the principles that they talk about, like fully compensating landowners for government interference.

8:30

Who knows what megaproject this government might decide to approve in the province next? Whatever it is, they know best, and that's what's important, that there are no independent boards or individual rights that might get in the way. Over and over they've been passing laws that expand the prerogative of ministers. In fact, if you look at the Order Paper right now, there are many more of them than just the one we're debating right now.

Now, the most extreme example of this and one where I personally got burned, I feel, was Bill 36, the land-use framework. This was a bill that at the time was brought forward, and we were told in the caucus that there would be proper property rights protections involved, that there was nothing to fear from this piece of legislation, that everybody's local government autonomy would be respected. We were told this. I was told this, and naively I believed it, and I went ahead. That was my fault and something that I will use the next 16 months to try to undo.

Nonetheless, I actually spoke in favour of this bill. The problem was that it was the wrong thing to do at the time. It was wrong. It showed a naïveté of trust that I had that the bureaucracies and the government of the day would have their act together and would at the end of the day protect the property rights of its citizens. That's a lesson that I learned the hard way, that it's not, in fact, always the case.

This act, Bill 36, authorizes cabinet to implement regional plans for each area of the province. This means that central planners at the Legislature rather than locally elected and accountable municipal councils will specify what types of activities are going to be permitted or prohibited on private land. I saw this first-hand as we went from the legislation to implementation, seeing the discussions that were had between MLAs and ministers regarding MDs around my area, including the MD of Rocky View, seeing the discussions that went around about how we may have to impose upon these local

governments these regional plans that were being developed and that centres such as Calgary and others were going to be given essential veto power over where these compact urban nodes, as they're called, would go.

It was very disturbing, and at first I thought: well, surely the minister in charge wouldn't ever think about doing something like that. In fact, that wasn't the case. We don't know where that is right now. We will see what happens going forward. If the discussions that I had with the ministers involved when I was over on that side are any indication, I'm not hopeful. We'll be looking to see what they bring forward in that regard.

Obviously, the most infamous of all is Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, which mandates the construction of billions of dollars' worth of massive transmission lines criss-crossing private lands up and down Alberta. This bill's main objective is to bypass the requirement of an objective Alberta Utilities Commission needs-based assessment, which probably would have shown that the degree and the amount of build that was being contemplated was not, in fact, needed and that much of it could have been locally generated and that much of it could have been avoided and ratepayers wouldn't be on the hook.

It is also resulting in the government offering billions of dollars in untendered, uncompetitive transmission line building contracts to large companies, some of which have obvious ties to the sitting government. The cost of this boondoggle will be passed on to residential, farm, and industrial ratepayers for years. It is an absolute black eye on this government.

Then there's the other multibillion-dollar megaproject that this government decided was a good idea, which is its motivation for this latest piece of legislation, carbon capture and storage. Environmentalists, of course, have been attacking Alberta for the oil sands in light of the theory that environmentalists have that carbon emissions are the largest contributor to global warming. This government decided it would be cute and a good PR stunt if we stick this carbon dioxide into the ground, pump it right into the ground.

Mr. Mason: Stick it where the sun don't shine.

Mr. Anderson: Stick it where the sun don't shine; that's right.

When we were raking in record levels of royalties, they decided we could afford to devote the staggering amount of \$2 billion to establishing the infrastructure to capture, transport, and store this CO₂ underground in what are called pore spaces or – what are they called? – subterranean aquifers or whatever they are. Alberta has a geological makeup that makes it especially suited for this, they said.

Then they realized that while the Crown owns a lot of the resources under the ground in this province, these spaces, meaning the pore spaces, were never considered resources. In fact, pore spaces themselves hadn't really been considered at all. The gases in them had, but that's a resource, not a space.

Now, they could have said, "Well, let's focus on the pore spaces under the Crown land," but that's a limitation that this experiment probably can't handle. Then they could have said – well, they could have said a lot of things. What they did say was: what we'll do is that instead of assessing what property rights people have to this space under the ground, we're just going to come in and say that we own it.

So here we are today debating Bill 24 for a grand total of one or two or three days before the government declares that all pore space anywhere in the province belongs to the Crown and that ministers can inject whatever they want whenever they want and that there's nothing anyone can do about it. With this bill the government is

pretending that landowners never had a claim to pore spaces under their land.

We believe that if the government has not specified otherwise, people do own that space. We've heard from them. This is just a difference in philosophy between us. This is what one of the ministry's bureaucrats, which I will not name, said to our researcher twice in the briefing, "It's just a difference in philosophy between us," as if he meant that there is no right or wrong answer.

Well, it certainly is a different philosophy. We recognize that individual rights are not in place at the pleasure of government. If anything, they are actually there to make the government uncomfortable. When there is uncertainty between individual rights and government prerogative, we're inclined to respect the individual. These folks on the other side, we feel, have been in power for far too long and have forgotten that important fact.

Only recognizing rights when it's convenient for the government is not what rights are about. There's a Latin legal phrase that can be translated as follows: whoever owns the land owns it all the way to the heavens and to the centre of the Earth. It is a legal maxim in legal systems based on English common law that still stands today. As it does with all major projects that benefit the public interest, the government ultimately can confiscate or appropriate whatever land it needs to, but citizens have the right to the demonstration that it is necessary and the right to fair compensation.

Besides the dubious premise that carbon capture is in the public interest, which we won't talk about today, this bill ignores any claim by landowners to own their land. That is the core problem with this bill. Once again, the government views individual rights as a speed bump that they can steamroll with legislation. Their idea of accountability is putting up with complaints from the opposition for a couple of evenings and maybe a negative story or two in the papers the next day.

I've only provided the background of eroding rights and the disrespect for citizens that this government seems to show with virtually every bill they bring forward concerning property rights these days. I will leave the remainder of the time to my colleagues to raise specific concerns, and we will try to put forth some amendments in Committee of the Whole that, hopefully, will make this bill, if we cannot defeat it, at least more palatable and respectful of individuals' property rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you. Just a quick question for the member regarding the Land Stewardship Act. The member makes the argument that his naiveté caused him to vote for that bill. That is probably a compelling argument, but I want to sort of carry on to the logical outcome of that. The member was so naive in his understanding that he was actually duped into speaking for the bill, not just voting for it. Carried to its logical conclusion, that would mean that either the member didn't read the bill or didn't understand it. He is a lawyer, is he not?

Mr. Anderson: Wow, we have a real sharp one there in the Solicitor General's office. Yes, I am legally trained, and, yes, I did look over the bill, Bill 36, but as anybody with a modicum of legal training will tell you, simply reading a bill is not enough in and of itself. You have to research its effects, what it will do in practice. Usually you see that in the legal realm, in the courts.

8:40

The other thing, too, is that a lot of Bill 36 left a lot of discretion to the ministers, and you should know that if you had read the bill or if you understood it. It leaves a lot of leeway to the minister in charge to make decisions. The problem with that is that you get people like yourself who don't understand jack squat about property rights and who don't have any respect for property rights, clearly. People like that, ministers like that, will use this legislation to trample on the property rights of individuals. That's why it was naive of me to always think that there were going to be people in government and in the ministries that were going to be respectful of individual property rights.

Absolutely, I should not have spoken to that bill because it wasn't the right thing to do. I know that it's difficult for certain people that haven't spoken against the government their entire careers because they don't know what it's like to be able to actually say what they're thinking or what their constituents want them to say. They just kind of chirp the party line. I know that's difficult for some members to understand.

Mrs. Forsyth: He was the whip, Rob.

Mr. Anderson: Well, that's right. He was the whip. You've got to give him that.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the Wildrose Alliance does understand property rights. We do understand that government is beholden to the property rights of individuals and that they must respect them. Even when they do have to take them, expropriate them for whatever reason, there needs to be fair compensation, and there needs to be proper consultation. Bill 36 does not do that. Bill 50 certainly does not do that. Bill 24 certainly does not do that. It's been a pattern. Bill 19 does not do that.

It's a pattern with this government to continue to pass legislation over and over and over again that shows absolutely no respect for individual property rights. Some of them think it's almost like some kind of game. I think some of them don't. I think some of them genuinely probably do at least understand the importance of protecting property rights. The fact of the matter is that actions speak louder than words, and this government has just failed repeatedly on this file. I don't understand for the life of me why a government who claims to be conservative or claims to believe in the concept that the rights of individuals need to be respected continues bill after bill to pass legislation that does the opposite.

This issue is going to cream them in the rural constituencies over the next year and a half – and it should – because people are tired of it. They're tired of a party who's conservative in name only acting like a bunch of, you know, big-government progressives, running around taking people's property rights without fair compensation. That's not fair. All for the public good. It's always for the public good, whatever the heck that's supposed to mean. They don't seem to understand the concept that the rights of individuals need to be respected and properly compensated.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry; I wanted to speak to the act itself, not under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: This conversation is getting interesting. In the vein

of the question asked by the Solicitor General, I would ask whether this naïveté was selective to this bill, or was it across all bills?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, on the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. Where do I start on this bill? I listened carefully to what the minister said as he introduced the bill, and I disagree with him on a couple of things, but I'll come back to that.

To begin with, what we have here is the concept of carbon capture and storage that's brought forward in the bill. I'm responsible for the environment policy put forward by the Official Opposition, and we do have it in our environmental policy under what we call Powering Long-term Growth. We talk about an energy sector, that Alberta needs an energy sector that includes petroleum and renewable energy, and it names some of those sources. That sector talks about the need to diversify Alberta's investment in carbon solutions by supporting renewable energy, energy efficiency technology, and conservation and that we would look to grow our dependence on solar wind and geothermal by a number of different incentives that could be taken, including using that technology fund to create clean energy jobs. We certainly recognize this. It's in our own policy.

I'm going to differ a little bit with some of my colleagues. I'm not quite ready to get on this horse and ride it into the sunset because I think there are some issues around it. Let me talk first about one tool in the tool box. I'm just going to sort of go off on a small tangent here, sir, but it does relate, so bear with me. My father was a welder, so he never had the zen of wood, and he didn't teach me how to use those kinds of tools. Welding I know. How to work with metal I know. With all of that stuff, acetylene torches, yeah, I'm good, but he failed me as a father because he never taught me how to use the rest of the tools in the tool box.

I'm reminded constantly when I look at this concept of carbon capture and storage that it's one tool in a tool box. I can't think of anybody that would have one tool in their tool box, that you'd open it up, and there would be a wrench, and that's it. That's their whole tool box. I can't imagine that because I'm sure that if any of you have ever tried to take the only tool you had – let's call it a wrench – and hammer a nail into a wall: not very effective, not the tool that you needed to do that. If anybody else was around that really did use tools, you were in big trouble for using a wrench to try and whack a nail into a wall. You're supposed to use – well, it's true, isn't it? – the proper tools.

I can't imagine having just one tool in the tool box, and persistently I see that as the approach from this government: no hammer in your tool box, no screwdriver in your tool box, no lever, no pliers or wire strippers or tinsnips, just a wrench. I don't think that's the way to have a good tool box to be able to deal with all the complexities of life and/or of our province.

My issue here is that carbon capture and storage is about getting rid of greenhouse gas after it's been produced. What I see is this government – it hasn't actually said this; let me be fair about it. But I'm concerned from what we're seeing here that carbon capture and storage must not be used as an excuse to continue business as usual, to continue, you know, using and encouraging more and more and more use of petroleum-based products, more cars on the road, more transport. You know, you can see the backlash against this, where people are trying to grow local and eat local food and buy locally produced items. Part of that is to cut down on transit. Why?

Because we've got all these honkin' trucks out there on the highway driving back and forth, burning petroleum products, which does what? Yes, indeed. It puts greenhouse gases into the air, and then we've got to deal with them.

The other thing is that a lot of people seem to assume wrongly that carbon capture and storage is somehow going to fix the oil sands. No. Wrong. It has very little to do with the oil sands. If we are really going to direct carbon capture and storage in this province, then it probably has to be directed towards coal-fired electricity plants because that's where most of it comes from in this province, not the oil sands. That's why there are no projects taking place up in the oil sands and why nobody bid on it. It really just doesn't affect them very much. I'm just trying to put in the context of what I'm saying by placing it around that.

We do have the ownership of the pore spaces, which the members of the Wildrose are clearly not happy about because of the property rights issues involved in that. I see it as creating certainty, and perhaps that ownership would flow to all Albertans if there's a way to make it pay for all Albertans. That to me goes hand in glove with this issue of long-term liability, and that's where I start to have a bigger problem with what's going on here.

8:50

Usually when you have an entrepreneurial spirit, the entrepreneur is putting risk out there, but they gain the benefit from the risk. If it goes right, they make a ton of money. If it goes wrong, they lose their money. But that's the deal. They take the risk. They get the benefit from it or occasionally the downside of it. I'm not seeing that in play with what's being proposed here. In assuming the long-term liability, what I see is that someone else gets the payoff from this. The taxpayers and the citizens of Alberta assume the short-term risk – they're paying out the \$2 billion to help industry develop this technology – and they're assuming the long-term risk here. Where exactly is the super payoff for the citizens of Alberta here?

Let me go back. Maybe that ownership of the pore space is the payoff. Nobody has talked about it in that way, so I've got to assume that that's not really what's happening here, but I'm happy to have someone explain that or put it on the record. I have concerns about the acceptance of that long-term liability because it's a long-term risk and because the government has now made it Albertans' long-term risk. Where is our payoff? What are we going to get for this?

Is our payoff that we can continue to drive cars and use electricity from coal-fired electricity-generating plants and pollute as much as we want? Is that the payoff that we're getting from carbon capture and storage? That doesn't seem like a very good idea in this day and age. I can't believe that's what you want us to accept. I'm getting that sort of slightly raised eyebrow from the previous Minister of Energy and current Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, so I know he's going to have something to say to me, which is great. That's one of the issues for me. What's the payoff there? Is it to be able to continue to pollute as usual, or are we somehow gaining a positive payoff for Albertans through this?

The other thing is that mediation fund that's being created, which is being sold to us like the orphan well fund. Well, that one hasn't quite worked out the way it was supposed to either. I am sorry that I did not come with the stats that I was looking for, but I will find them and either table them or bring them up in a later debate. I know that there is a really nice comparison between the amount that is collected from those companies that pay into the orphan well fund sort of per acre of reclamation and the amount that Syncrude spent on its one acre of officially reclaimed, re-remediated ground, and they are vastly different amounts of money. I think: "Well, okay.

This is what the government did before. What are they likely to do?" Pretty much the same thing.

There's a second concern that I have around this idea, that if we're going to collect money from the operators that is such a minor amount in comparison to how much it would cost us to actually clean this up if something went wrong, again I see the government putting Albertans in a place of great risk without the commensurate payoff. But I'll allow the government to get up and correct me on that one.

How many of you remember the Wimpy character in the *Popeye* cartoons? He always wanted to pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today. That's a bit of what I'm seeing here.

Mr. Snelgrove: Two hamburgers on Tuesday.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, he would pay two hamburgers on Tuesday for a hamburger today. See, I knew someone on that side would get it right. There you go. Thank you very much, President of the Treasury Board, for that correction.

Thank you for that because here's what we get. We've got the minister telling us with great pride that by 2015 5 million megatonnes would be sequestered yearly, but when I looked it up, in the year 2005 we produced 240 megatonnes of the very thing we're trying to stuff underground.

An Hon. Member: Two hundred and forty million?

Ms Blakeman: Two hundred and forty megatonnes compared to five megatonnes yearly that we'd be able to stuff underground by 2015.

I'm thinking: how many years is it going to take us just to deal with what we produced in 2005 at the rate of five megatonnes a year when we're trying to deal with 240 megatonnes from 2005? Are you starting to get a sense of how this is not adding up?

A connected issue to that. I've seen it in health care, and I'm seeing it around energy development and around carbon capture and storage. It's two things: the horizon that we get from the government on how far out they promise something will happen by. Here we have 2015. That's not a far horizon when we're sitting almost at the end of 2010, but when you look at a number of the other targets that the government is trying to hit here that are around environmental targets, protection targets, that kind of thing, we're looking at horizons of 2030 and 2050. Well, given how fast things are going here, I'm sure these government members three years ago had no idea that they would be facing a four-member Wildrose opposition party a short time later.

You see how fast the world moves today, yet the government wants me to believe that they're in control of something that's going to happen on a 30-year horizon out or a 50-year horizon out. I'm having trouble believing that. We heard this same thing happen around health care, so it's not only in this particular field that that happens. The minister of health is promising us that, you know, there are going to be enough long-term care beds and all kinds of stuff. What the heck was it where they had three different rates, and by the time you actually added it up, it was 30 years? It was a 30-year horizon to get all of this stuff done.

Then the part that goes hand in hand with that is how much the government puts for later, not right now, not the target of what we're going to do in 2011, 2012, 2013. We get: well, that's all going to move really slowly, but then it's going to pick up speed, and it's going to move a lot faster the closer we get to 2030 or 2015. And you think: I'm not believing you.

I also really have a concern. I know this is the enabling bill for carbon capture and storage. It's got some detail in it, but it also

leaves a lot to regulation. In my definition this creates another shell bill, in which a very loose definition or a very loose outline is in the bill of what's supposed to happen and everything else is put onto the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make decisions during those meetings. Of course, having just come off that FOIP review committee, I can tell you that none of us get to look at that stuff possibly ever but certainly not before 10 or 15 years from now, so trying to find out how decisions were made or what was going on when that all happened is a long, long, long way away from us. I'm not keen on stuff being made by regulation or ministerial order, and there's a lot of that in this bill.

As I listened to the minister, he referred to an International Energy Agency review of 16 countries and how glowingly they spoke of ours. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] I'll get to come back to this in Committee of the Whole, but there's a story behind that one. Oh, maybe somebody will ask me what it is.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a).

Mr. Snelgrove: Could she elaborate on that story?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much. I did actually ask the minister for a copy of that International Energy Agency review, and it really didn't do what the minister had led me to believe it was going to do. I got a copy of it, and I actually read it. In fact, all it does is very briefly refer to the fact that we have a framework, and that's all it says. It doesn't comment on whether it's an effective framework, whether it's a complete framework, about the timelines around the framework, nothing. It just says that there's a framework. Not quite what the minister had led me to believe was a complete blue-ribbon, gold star with a stamp in the middle of it blessing from the IEA. Not quite. That was just a bit of a slip.

9:00

You know, I can believe, as I heard the minister bring all of this forward, that he was in communications in his pre-elected life because he sold it very well. I'm used to the more sort of pugilistic form that he tends to take with me. [interjection] Yeah. Exactly. So I was a little surprised due to his tone. But then when I went back and looked, I thought: oh, he was just smoothing that one through. At the very end then he talked about how we should all be overjoyed because we could use CCS as enhanced or deep-well oil recovery and wasn't that the bee's knees. Again, not quite what I had expected to get out of this bill.

Just to put it all in context, Mr. Speaker, my caucus is in favour of this. We recognize carbon capture and storage is one tool in a very large tool box. There are a number of hesitations around it. I'm very cautious about the risk and the long-term risk and liability the government is asking Albertans to assume on behalf of this decision especially when it's unclear to me where the payoff from that risk actually comes. We can certainly see the downside. Where's the upside for Albertans in that? Also, where is the rest of the encouragement around conservation, energy efficiency, and alternative forms of energy?

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this is going to be a really interesting discussion. I can see the engagement on the faces of my colleagues opposite, so I'm really looking forward to the rest of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you stood up before. Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hinman: Under 29(2)(a)? No. She was able to elaborate on the question I had.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Perfect, Mr. Speaker. You got it perfectly. Thank you very much.

Ms Blakeman: It's the time.

Mr. Mason: No. I wrote him a note.

Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. Mr. Speaker, this is a bill we've been waiting for because this gives us a chance to debate the stupidest idea that this government has had in a long time. I'm telling you that there's a big, long list right there, and for this to top it out I think is a real accomplishment on the part of the government.

This carbon capture and storage is going to be, in my view, one of the biggest boondoggles ever facing the Alberta taxpayer, \$2 billion of taxpayers' money going into the ground to subsidize this government's friends who are the big producers of CO₂ so that they can bury their carbon instead of having to do something serious about reducing the actual emissions that are there. I want to just lay out that our objections to this legislation and to this approach go very deep and to the core. This is a piece of legislation and a program that is misguided and which I think is going to dog this government for whatever time it actually has left, Mr. Speaker, as a government.

First of all, the cost of this program. Because it is so uneconomic, the government, in order to get it moving, is forced to put in place \$2 billion in subsidies. The previous Auditor General warned about the high cost and the lack of clear objectives and the lack of clearly defined measurements of success, of results, and I certainly agree with the Auditor General.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it was really interesting. When this was first announced, the government talked about how this was a solution to the growth in emissions from our oil sands, which are the source of the greatest increase in CO₂ emissions in the country. But they didn't talk about the fact that the concentration of emissions that are released as a result of oil sands operations was insufficient for this technology to be effective.

We released, in fact, or someone released a briefing document to the government that showed that while it might be possible to gather and collect and concentrate and bury CO₂ emissions from coal-fired generation, it would be very difficult and certainly uneconomic to even try to do that in terms of the oil sands. Now, the government was embarrassed by that, Mr. Speaker, and well they might have been because they were touting this as a plan that was going to help us deal with the increase in emissions as a result of oil sands development going forward into the future, and their own briefing document put the lie to that.

Now, then, that leaves the question of whether or not it's going to be useful in a couple of other areas. One is the carbon capture and storage with respect to conventional oil recovery. The government again has played a game with people, confusing people. It's a kind of bait and switch. There's a difference between long-term storage of CO₂, for which geological formations in Alberta are well-suited, perhaps, and its use to replace water as a way of forcing out the last 10 or 20 per cent of oil in depleted fields, which is not the same as long-term storage. There might be, in fact, a use for CO₂ to replace

water, whether it's fresh water or brackish water, for the recovery of depleted oil fields, but that is not the same thing as a long-term strategy.

Mr. Speaker, the risks of this are unknown, but most people who have some knowledge in this area have identified potentially very serious risks of either long-term seepage or a catastrophic release. The risk is so great that these massive international oil and gas consortia, private corporations, are unwilling to undertake the liability. So the government, then, has generously – generously – on behalf of the people of Alberta undertaken the liability for any accidental release. Now, there have been historically releases of large amounts of CO₂ suddenly, which is one of the potential risks here that's been identified. These have occurred naturally, but of course the CO₂ is heavier than air, sticks to the ground, and asphyxiates all life in the area where it is present in large concentrations. Those are the kinds of liabilities that the government's not really talking about but is assuming on behalf of the people of Alberta, on behalf of the taxpayers.

Very little is known, Mr. Speaker, about the migration of CO₂ underground, its effect on groundwater, and so on, and a lot of research needs to be done in order to find out more about that sort of thing. I'm looking at a report now by the Pembina Institute, Carbon Capture and Storage. It identifies a number of areas where more work needs to be done: the way CO₂ migrates underground, the risk magnitude and time frame of leakage, and to clearly identify who is liable for cost and remediation if a leak occurs. They also talk about

- high costs and energy penalties of post-combustion capture and separation;
- high capital costs of converting coal-fired power plants . . . [and]
- limited experience with large-scale geological storage, including "proving" the estimates of storage capacity.

There is real doubt, according to the same report, as to whether or not CO₂ storage can really be made permanent.

The other concern that's raised here – and I think this is a good one – is a continuing dependence on fossil fuels going forward into the future. This is an attempt by the government and some of its friends in industry to postpone the day when we have to make adjustments and make changes in how we invest and do research in energy. It's a continuation of dependence on fossil fuels instead of shifting and investing money in renewable energy.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, this is really a question, from my point of view, aside from all of the other issues, of: where's the best place to invest your money? Where's the best place to put your resources with a view to the future? What we see is that the government is refusing to go down the road of investing in renewable energy. Alberta is falling farther and farther behind the rest of the world in developing renewable energy notwithstanding the fact that we're ideally suited in a number of areas – we certainly have a lot of untapped wind capacity – and the government's failure when a European consortium came calling wanting to invest in Lethbridge in actually manufacturing wind turbines. They sent them back to Europe. Of course, they're being built there, and we're paying to import them. There's just a lack of appetite on the part of the government to really embrace wind energy.

We are, of course, the sunniest place in Canada, Mr. Speaker, and that makes us ideal as a solar producer. We also have geothermal capacity in this province. So we're well suited for renewable energy. But, you know, just a few years ago it was just the European countries that were ahead of us, but now the United States is ahead of us, and certainly China is investing in renewable energy. This province has failed to grasp the real reins that it needs to lead this province in the direction that looks to the future. Two billion dollars

was also the amount that was allocated to Green TRIP, but that of course was cut almost immediately after the government announced it a number of years ago, and only a small amount has been put forward ever since.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that what we have is a real lost opportunity. It's the opportunity cost that the government is ignoring. There are far greater dividends to be paid not from burying our carbon but from investing in renewable energy and energy reduction. So investing in public transit, investing in programs to reduce energy consumption for government, for business, for homeowners, and for farmers are real areas where the payoff is much greater in terms of reduction of overall CO₂.

I think that the real problem with respect to that is that the government is not forcing the industry in the oil sands and in power production to sort of face up to the reality internationally that we face. I suggest that this is a false direction, a dead end, if you will, with a potential to waste a massive amount of public money.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to conclude by saying that even if it were shown to be safe, even if we were able to demonstrate that it had some value, the wrong people are paying. If the government could be convinced and industry could convince us that this was a safe and responsible step to take, it still leaves the question of why the taxpayers of Alberta are subsidizing the people who are producing the CO₂ instead of asking those very, very profitable corporations to pay themselves. That would be an approach that we would find possibly more acceptable. But this is again the government getting involved in business, using taxpayers' money to subsidize private industry instead of making sure that private industry pays its own way to act in a responsible fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I can unequivocally say that we in the Alberta NDP will not be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'd like a point of clarification from the hon. member. Is he for or against CO₂ sequestration? I know that you talk about public transportation, but I'm just not sure after that speech on sharing and all that with all of the liabilities, which I'm very concerned about and I have questions on. Are you wanting some CO₂ sequestration, or are the liabilities not there, and what you're really saying is that we can't use carbon fuels anymore and that we've got to go to wind and solar or geothermal? Could you clarify a little bit? I'm a little bit confused now.

Mr. Mason: I'm happy to do that, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to start the transition to an energy economy that's based on renewable energy. We're behind the rest of the world, and we need to catch up. I'm not saying that we are going to get rid of fossil fuels or that we should bring an end to development in the oil sands or other aspects of a fossil fuel economy in this province at the present time, but we must prepare for the day when that is necessary. The government is failing to do that. That's really what I'm saying.

I thought I clarified his first point at the end of my speech, which is to say that if we can solve some of the problems in terms of the effectiveness of this technology, the liability issues, and the cost issues and we're satisfied that it's safe to use and that industry wants to use it as part of its plan to meet targets that are set by government, then we wouldn't have an objection. But we do object to the massive use of taxpayers' dollars to subsidize private industry in this regard.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), hon. members?

The chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Earlier in this fall session I spoke about my enjoyment of stories. I referenced during the debate on promoting entrepreneurial education how much I enjoyed Biblical stories from my grandparents, who were both Sunday school teachers. But there comes a time, Mr. Speaker, when you have to move beyond stories. I remember being nine years old and liking the idea of Never-Never Land and of Peter Pan and the lost boys. I remember as a child enjoying stories about magic beans, and now we're talking about magic bullet solutions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about a single tool in a tool box, that while it may have some functional use, as she pointed out, using a wrench for a hammer often results in bruised walls and bruised knuckles. So the idea, as much as we'd like it to be the case, that carbon sequestration will be the ultimate answer to pollution and concerns in the oil sands is just too much for a grown person to believe. Another way of looking at it is: all eggs into one basket.

Now, the Beatles wrote a song, *Can't Buy Me Love*, and the government is banking that \$2 billion spent on carbon sequestration will buy international love. The government has previously spent \$23 million in a greenwashing effort, which included blond British children romping on a beach, and when that was pointed out, there was a terrific amount of embarrassment associated with that exercise. So if money can't buy me love, then the government is going to have to take real action, and it's going to have to take action beyond just carbon sequestration. As long as there are tailings ponds, whether they're the three-sided – oh, we missed a side – box variety, as we asked about in question period this afternoon with CNRL, or whether they're the large toxic lakes that can be viewed from space, until we clean up those tailings ponds, we're not going to get a whole lot of credit for carbon sequestration, as this bill is calling for, because it is only one tool, and we have to use a variety of tools.

9:20

Now, the idea of carbon sequestration, while it's been tried in other places in the world, closest to us it's the Weyburn, Saskatchewan, model where CCS is piped up from North Dakota. But this is such a small-potatoes circumstance. For us to say, "Well, we'll just increase the size; we'll use the same principle and make it a much larger project, a \$2 billion project," that's oversimplification.

One of the hopes I have is that because I represent the University of Calgary, which has very notable scientific research in the form of the ISEEE, Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy – experiential learning is sometimes the third E. Now, at the U of C there's been a terrific amount of research done on, for example, in situ, on carbon sequestration. They've looked at the possibility of converting wind power into compressed air that can be then stored. I'll give the government credit for requiring the equivalent of an emissions credit being paid into the research fund. I think that's a very smart idea. But until we can come up with a methodology that guarantees that the sequestration works, then we've got a long way to go.

Now, a person who has scientific credentials and has been employed by the government for his research understanding and information, Dr. David Schindler, has spoken about minimal requirements in terms of scrubbers. It was his understanding that in Fort McMurray the minimal standards in terms of scrubbers that were required to be placed on coal-fired power plants weren't even

being deployed in the oil sands. So before we get to sequestration at a \$2 billion price tag, how about putting some scrubbers on those stacks belching out the CO₂ and a variety of other chemicals in the Fort McMurray area? Dr. Schindler showed slides of black snow, never mind the fish with the various deformities and so on, and showed the intensity of the chemical compounds, CO₂ being probably one of the least worrisome, that we're planning on sequestering and how it affected the wildlife in the area, the flora and the fauna.

A Liberal policy would go farther. Instead of intensity caps, what we're talking about is, within very few years of forming either part of a coalition government or forming government, the idea of going after complete caps. In order for those complete caps to take place, there would be a carrot-and-stick methodology where industries who were successful in their sequestration efforts would reap rewards and those that failed to live up to the expectations that Albertans have for industry development in order to be sustainable would be punished and would have to pay into the fund.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out the shortcomings of reclamation funds. She pointed out the shortcomings associated with orphan wells. My understanding is that what we require from industry is less than 10 cents on the dollar, so Alberta taxpayers are stuck with that 90 per cent liability.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre also referenced how the government is basically using taxpayers' money to invest in private industry's sequestration efforts without a requirement that there be equal investment on the part of industry and then assuming the liability if the sequestration doesn't work.

Now, sequestration, in theory, could provide terrific benefits. It's going to have to be compressed, and it takes an awful lot of energy and power and fuel to do it. But if the idea of using that compressed CO₂ to pump out oil fields that had reached their mature date can actually be realized, then maybe we can start getting back some of our \$2 billion investment. Hopefully, with this \$2 billion gift come some expectations in terms of industry achievement, and if we can make industrial development and the extraction of bitumen or conventional oil and gas more efficient, then hopefully we're going to share in the profits of that improved efficiency.

The need for a solution is, no doubt, out there, but I question whether we couldn't have put a billion dollars, for example, to carbon sequestration and kept a billion dollars for what the government had talked about, and that was the Green TRIP. Now, originally the government was going to set aside \$2 billion for carbon sequestration, \$2 billion for Green TRIP.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that in terms of tangible improvements if we were to put that money into Green TRIP, which some municipalities are attempting to do – sort of a small version would be the buses from Airdrie that run into Calgary or the buses from Leduc – while we're taking more cars off the road and we're putting people on buses and we're reducing our carbon output and our carbon footprint, how much better would it be if we were to be using our rail lines, for example? We could transport considerably more people; for example, bringing people from High River to work in Calgary on already existing train lines.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, carbon sequestration is just one of many tools that we need to explore. Hopefully, the Green TRIP will be brought up again.

Dr. Brown: This is about pore space, Harry.

Mr. Chase: Carbon sequestration is one of the solutions the government is offering. Hopefully, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill can realize the importance of a variety of methodologies in

terms of achieving a healthier environment and a sustainable industry at the same time.

My conflict is the singular solution, Mr. Speaker. I think carbon sequestration has a role to play. But, as I began, all the eggs in one basket I don't think is worthy of a \$2 billion investment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

9:30

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I guess, to the hon. member, my question is that there are some who believe that the sky is falling and that the CO₂ is going to be the end of us and that we're on a very short timeline. The government is following up on that, spending \$2 billion. Again, it's a long time out there, but where is your actual stand, then? Do you feel that government should just legislate and tell these people that are emitting through these stacks that they have to shut down in a certain time period? Where do you actually stand on this? And the fact that we have CO₂ coming out: do we want to eliminate that? Do we want to legislate it to go in the ground? What is your actual view? You've opened up some questions in different areas, but what about the immediate action on CO₂?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore's question. As a Liberal what we're looking for are sustainable solutions. The carbon sequestration, hopefully, is part of the solution for coal-based power plants, which are eventually being phased out, but while we wait for them to be phased out, eliminated, I would like to see that type of sequestration potentially being applied to it. We've talked about turning coal into liquefied gas, and in that process there still has to be sequestration involved in the production of the liquefied gas.

There is so much speculation associated with this, hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, that I cannot definitively say that I support a single solution, which is carbon sequestration. I hope, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, that this turns out to be a useful tool in a multifaceted tool box, but again I question the \$2 billion investment.

Mr. Hinman: Just to expand on that a little bit more, I think too often we look at knee-jerk reactions. You talk about these coal plants, the generation. I mean, we're talking billions of dollars to try and capture CO₂ put down as this government's plan. It would be far cheaper just to buy the coal plants and eliminate them than to put in the infrastructure and put the CO₂ in the ground when we don't have the technology. We don't know if it's going to stay there. There are all of these liabilities. Wouldn't it be cheaper just to buy the coal plants and move to a different energy than to go through this elaborate charade game?

Mr. Chase: Well, I agree that the faster we get rid of coal-fired power plants, the better off we'll be. This is part of the farce, hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, of the idea of having transmission lines running from Wabamun all the way down to Calgary.

Gary Holden, with his most recent faults of sort of entertainment excesses, has talked about local gas-operated plants that serve the area. So when we're talking investment, we should be looking, considering how cheap gas is and its availability through coal-bed methane, at alternative energy sources which aren't as heavy carbon dioxide producers.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: I give way.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

Dr. Taft: On the bill, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the gesture from the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I will keep my comments fairly succinct in anticipation . . . [interjections] I'm getting heckled from my own colleagues here.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have the floor.

Dr. Taft: I will start from the big picture, which I'm sure if I don't, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore will press me on anyway later, and that's my view on climate change. We differ fundamentally on this. I accept what most people would say is the mainstream science on this, represented by the UN Panel on Climate Change and lots of other people. I think there's a significant risk that the globe is warming and that that warming is driven by human activities, the most significant of which is burning fossil fuels that put carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, creating the greenhouse effect. I accept that science, and I think that if we don't act very quickly and very forcefully, we, and more specifically our children and grandchildren, will pay a heavy price. What does that mean? To me that means that as a society we need to aggressively adapt.

A few years ago I was giving a speech, and I did some background research and came across a comment from Charles Darwin, who may not be a source that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore reflects on. What struck me is that Darwin said that it is not the species that is fastest, strongest, or smartest that survives; it is the species that most readily adapts. I think we have to adapt, and we have to adapt quickly. That means, in my view, that we need to address issues of greenhouse gas emissions, particularly carbon emissions. So that's the background from which I approach Bill 24.

Now, the members for Edmonton-Centre and Calgary-Varsity and even the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood have made the point that there are lots of ways to address the issue. We've heard at length about supporting public transit and Green TRIP. There are many other ways to reduce, well, what would be called demand-side management, to reduce how much energy we consume in the first place. I actually wish we were much more aggressive on that file. I wish this government was much more aggressive on things like building codes and even supporting programs at NAIT, for example, around the construction of much more energy efficient housing.

There are so many ways we could be moving aggressively to reduce the amount of energy we consume. But is that going to be enough? No. Like it or not, we're going to keep using electricity. We're going to keep burning coal. We're going to keep putting the pollution, as it were, from fossil fuels into the atmosphere. So how are we going to deal with that end of it? How are we going to deal with what comes out of, as it were, the giant tailpipes of our electrical system, the ones that are pumping away out at Wabamun and Sheerness and Forestburg and so on?

How are we going to do that? Well, one proposed way is what this bill is helping to address, and that is carbon capture and storage. Are there a lot of issues and questions around this? Of course there are. It's a new technology. It's not brand new. It's not unproven. But on the scale that's being proposed in Alberta, there are lots of technical issues that have to be resolved. Is it expensive? It's

terrifically expensive, particularly at this stage, when we're having to invent everything new. This is, like it or not, the kind of thing that corporations and private investors will not undertake. That's not rocket science. That's not a new insight. It's a common approach to solving very complex problems.

Many of the most important inventions that underlie our modern world were actually invented with public investment, whether it's the World Wide Web and the Internet, whether it's all kinds of research into our electrical systems, whether it's GPS or all kinds of things. All of that was done exclusively or largely through public investment. So we're doing that again. It's a lot of money. Do I want to see \$2 billion going to this and not \$2 billion into Green TRIP or energy reduction? No. I'm frustrated with that balance, but I believe that as a province and as a society we need to take this step forward.

9:40

There are significant risks, but there are also significant risks – and I think they're more significant – in doing nothing. I happen to be of the view, informed from some of the reading I've done, that Alberta has an opportunity to become a real world leader in what is potentially a significant new technology. There are a handful of other places in the world also looking seriously at this, but we do have an opportunity, if it's managed well – and that's always vital – to see some benefits from this.

We also are in a very unusual position to actually enhance our oil recovery if we capture the carbon and inject it into our old oil reserves. There's a certain paradox to that in that we capture the carbon to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, and then we use it to increase the production of fossil fuels, which will produce more greenhouse gas emissions. It is paradoxical. Can that paradox be resolved? We'll wait and see.

There are a lot of legal and financial obstacles to this work as well as technological ones. This bill, as I understand it right now – and I hope to learn more about it as the debate continues – addresses some of those, some things that have to be put in place before this technology can begin to be developed and implemented.

I don't want to give this a blank cheque. I've got concerns. We should all have concerns. But what worries me more is doing nothing, Mr. Speaker. So I expect that when we're done with this debate – and I will give myself the out here – pending a lot of what I'm going to learn, I suspect at this point that I'll support this legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I just want to thank the member for his succinctness. I've got a few questions, though, especially when it comes to Darwin and the fact that we need to adapt and that adaptation is the key to survival. If, in fact, we need to adapt because global cooling hasn't come in – and I'll say that the science is very controversial on whether we're still warming or entering into a cooling period. Sorry to make you have to tip your eyes so far. But if it's about adapting and we're going to spend \$2 billion, are there not so many more efficient ways?

I mean, look at the overall scope of this. If you add \$2 billion or \$4 billion or \$6 billion, would you seriously look at it and say, "You know what; we're going to put 5 or 10 per cent of CO₂ into the ground" versus actually addressing so many other areas in the world and ensuring that they have, you know, LED lights and hand cranks

in developing countries. There are so many areas where we can use renewable resources that would be so much better to get energy in those areas that can't afford the carbon. Wouldn't you say that that would be a better use and that we should be looking at that rather than burying \$2 billion, which might become a bottomless pit that continues on with CO₂ storage?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that in two parts. The first part is the so-called controversy, I think he said, about whether the planet is cooling or warming. I don't think that the credible scientists of this world would actually accept that position. There is a large consensus. If the members want to learn more, I'll invite them to come with me to my constituency. We'll spend some time at the university, and we'll sit down with some of the scientists, and you can actually go through the issues with them. So come on with me. Anyway, I'm going to dismiss that part of the position. I disagree. We'll just have to agree to disagree.

On the second part of it, I mean, I found your comments a bit confusing. I'm not in favour of spending \$2 billion giving LED white lights to underdeveloped countries or things like that. But I think more generally the spirit you were meaning is that if we have \$2 billion to spend, is this the best way to spend it to address the issue of global warming? I think that's a good, tough question. This is where I return to my frustration at the cancellation or the deferral of things like the Green TRIP fund. I'd love to see an increase in mandatory fuel standards for vehicles. I think, you know, much as the Wildrose people might see that as an intrusion into property rights, I see that as a cheap way to reduce emissions. I think we could improve building codes. I think there are all kinds of things we can do and should be doing. Does that mean we shouldn't be doing this? We are, in Alberta, in almost a unique position in the world to take on this particular challenge. Again, at this moment in this debate I am prepared to say, yeah, let's see if we can pull this off. Let's see if we can take advantage of our specific, unique circumstances of geology and technology to rise to this challenge.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't know about the efficacy of trying to demonstrate climate change as human-caused by the Wildrose quoting Charles Darwin. I don't know if it's the right approach.

But I do ask this question. If you have only \$2 billion to invest, do you really believe that the best investment, the most bang for your buck, comes from carbon capture and storage, hon. member?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. The point I'd like to make to this government and to this member is that we don't only have \$2 billion to invest. We should be investing more, not in carbon capture but in other issues such as public transit, which this member supports, I'm sure. All kinds of other things. We do have the resources, and I think we should be investing them.

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand up and speak to Bill 24. I guess that right off the bat I'm against this bill.

I don't see it serving the best interests of the taxpayers of Alberta. I don't see it in the best interests of any pollutant problems that we might have. There are just so many areas here that really concern me.

If we were to go back 50 years, to 1960, we could have two options in the world. Do we want to fly to the moon, or do we want to journey to the centre of the Earth? The U.S. president said: well, we want to be the first ones on the moon. We know that that was an extraordinary outspending of taxpayers' money, but they achieved the dream.

But the question here is: are we going to drill to the centre of the Earth? Calgary-Varsity loves stories and knows I enjoy reading Jules Verne and his outlook from the 1800s on where he thought the world would end up. The only novel I believe he wrote that hasn't come about is *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. We've learned a lot more. We know the core temperature down there, and the bottom line is that we would be incinerated if we were to try to journey to the centre of the Earth.

The question that we've got to ask with Bill 24 is: is this achievable? What is it? I really regret that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre couldn't put forward some of her research dollars in showing the numbers that she's got. I'll look forward to when she presents some of those later on the percentage of CO₂ that we're going to actually put in the ground versus the amount that we're producing here in the province.

Ms Blakeman: I gave them to you.

Mr. Hinman: Oh. Then I got disturbed. I thought it was only 5 per cent. You had some other numbers, but anyway, you did refer to the 5 per cent.

Ms Blakeman: Five megatonnes.

Mr. Hinman: Five megatonnes. Yes. So that's not even 2 per cent of the 240 megatonnes.

Ms Blakeman: There you go.

Mr. Hinman: I remember now. We got going on so many things.

When you look at that, we're talking 5 megatons out of the 240 currently being produced, and we're going to ask now: by spending \$2 billion on that, what have we really achieved other than possibly a feel-good bill? We can supposedly go out to the rest of the world and say: "Oh, look at what we're doing. We've cleaned up 2 per cent of our CO₂, and we've spent a huge amount of our budget in order to achieve that." We've just got to step back and look at reality. Is this achievable? Are we going down the right road? Is this a dream that can be achieved, or is this a bad dream, where we're going to wake up in a cold sweat realizing that we're in trouble?

9:50

I would say that it's the second one, Mr. Speaker. We've got some real challenges ahead if, in fact, we're going to say that there is no question that CO₂ is the problem and spend all of our money saying what we have to achieve with CO₂. The first question asked should be: can we possibly capture 80 or 90 per cent of the CO₂ that we're producing and put it in the ground? When we ask that and look at that, if we're trying to be energy efficient, immediately that puts us on the side that we're not energy efficient because it takes 25 per cent more energy just to compress it, to put it down somewhere. We're going to actually increase our energy consumption by 25 to

30 per cent in order to put that CO₂ into a black hole in the ground.

This is where all the discussion is coming from. Once we put it in the ground, is it going to come back to haunt us? Are there going to be leaks? What are the liabilities? Again, the government is taking action here by saying: oh, we'll remove all liability from the companies. A little quote that the Energy minister said is that the government will take responsibility but only after the private-sector operator has delivered scientific evidence that the carbon it has stored underground is safe and stable.

Well, our tailings ponds, that are 40 years old, have finally been — one area has been given a reclamation certificate. One. I'd like to know: when is the reclamation certificate? After one year that it's been in storage? Oh, it's good; we've checked it. Is it going to be 10 years? Forty years? A hundred years?

Ms Blakeman: Regulations.

Mr. Hinman: But again the devil is in the details on regulations. To accept that liability is unacceptable for the taxpayers of Alberta. I do not believe it's an area that we want to go down.

Again, when we look at the big picture, this \$2 billion knee-jerk reaction is that they've realized all of sudden: "Oh, this isn't going to happen. We'll pump in \$2 billion because we want to capture this carbon and store it." So they're trying to have this happen, and again they're not looking at the big picture, the money transfer that's going to be accumulating and transferred as we try to capture CO₂ if they continue through on this bill. I hope that we'll see the light of day and realize that this is not what we want to have happen. We need to kill this bill and to have a long-term plan and say: "You know what? This can be done, and here are the prototypes, the first sections that we've done to show that it is viable." That isn't going to happen for a long time.

You know, we have no idea what the long-term consequences might be of jamming all this acidic gas into the ground. It's never been done, it's highly speculative, and it doesn't matter how deep those caverns are. It's interesting. At this point we might say that this is an area we're not ever going to use. We're not going to need to drill down there again. So we put all this in there, only perhaps we might find that — you know what? — another 5,000 metres below that is more gas again, more natural gas, the best carbon fuel that we have, the cleanest, best burning.

I think the Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about raising the fuel standards, saying that raising those standards would be a good way. Well, actually, the Wildrose program would be to switch over to a cleaner fuel, which is methane. We can have compressed methane. We can have liquefied methane. There are companies that are doing that. Europe has a high percentage of cars running on that. We shouldn't be looking at trying to change the gas or the diesel; we should be looking at what's an actual cleaner fuel. We have an abundance of it, and that is gas — natural gas, methane, or CH₄ — a one-carbon fuel as opposed to a multicarbon fuel, and it burns much cleaner and doesn't have all of the pollutants that actually come with these other fuels.

We need to be looking at the really big picture. That's where this government continues to fail. Where this bill fails is to think that we can and will capture all of the CO₂ that's being produced, whether that's in 20 years or 30 years or 40 years. Boy, nobody is taking a real look at it, crunching the numbers and realizing, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, that there's a huge amount. If we actually wanted to spend taxpayers' money on anything, like I say, you could look at, you know: what's the cost of buying these old clunkers? What's the cost of buying some of these old pollutant plants and shutting them down and allowing for combined-cycle natural gas electrical production?

Again, we're off base. The vision of this government is to put up huge coal factories – I'm not sure what they're going to use – and huge power lines to transmit power, when in fact we have power lines, and those power lines are pipelines in the ground, where we move the cleanest carbon fuel that we have in abundance here in the province and are able to bring that forward.

One of the other problems is that this act provides an overriding provision for all other and previous laws, another area that is just very, very concerning. The minister has sweeping powers to evacuate areas without compensation in other emergency evacuations. The government is not compensating landowners for their property. Just like bills 19, 36, and 50, this is further erosion of property rights in Alberta without any recognition of landowners' rights and saying: "You know what? We own that underneath you. It's our obligation to capture this CO₂. The consequences really don't concern us at this point. We just want to move on this. We want to move on it fast."

So these are all areas, Mr. Speaker, that we seriously need to look at addressing before we pass this bill. We haven't adequately done that.

I would move to adjourn debate on this bill at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The Committee of the Whole is now in order.

Bill 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: On amendment A3, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Well, to review, for those of you following at home, the amendment that I brought forward is that Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 2 in the proposed section 115.5 "by striking out clause (b)." What that would mean is that it would strike out the ability of the minister to make regulations prescribing prohibited activities for the purposes of section 115.4. And 115.4 is the section where prohibited activities while you're driving are included. So included in there is reading or viewing printed material; writing, printing or sketching. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said that she saw someone reading printed material, actually reading a book, on her way down the highway coming here. That was brutal.

An Hon. Member: Was it you?

Mr. Anderson: It wasn't me. But she saw it. She was distracted by it, by someone else reading.

The other one was engaging in personal grooming or hygiene and then any other activity that may be prescribed in the regulations.

10:00

The problem I have with this section is that it again goes back to what we talked a little bit about earlier. You know, ministers come and go. The Minister of Justice is a very reasonable person, but she won't always be the Minister of Justice. Who knows what minister

will come after? So I think it's disrespectful to the House to give this type of latitude to a minister, to allow something that's so intrusive. I mean, when you're talking about something someone cannot do in the privacy of their own vehicle, that's quite an intrusive law. It's not to say that we shouldn't have laws that govern things like that, but it is very intrusive when it happens. You're changing, you know, someone's ability, what they can and can't do in the privacy of their own vehicle, which is a piece of property that they own, while driving, of course.

I think that it would be wise – if you're going to change the rule surrounding something so intrusive, it should come back to this House and have a discussion on it and bring an amendment for it. Say: "Well, you know what? We want to add." I mean, it says that reading or viewing printed material is prohibited under these. What if the minister one day says: "You know what? Printed material is not good enough." You know, you have that Kindle. That's electronic, so really that doesn't fall under it. It's not written; it's electronic material. You can't read or view printed material, but you can read or view electronic material. Would that include a GPS system? What would that include? What wouldn't it include?

The point is that the minister could come at a later date and say, "We're not going to allow people to read their GPS because that's distracting" or "We're not going to allow people to turn their radio off and on because that's distracting" or whatever. The point is that if there's going to be something changed in the law like that, the minister should come before the Assembly and explain why she or he feels that that needs to be done. Otherwise, I think we shouldn't pass it. It shouldn't be allowed to be just thrown into a regulation. Why would we pass this?

You know, we talk about prohibiting reading or viewing printed material, writing, printing, or sketching, all these other things. Why do we even have them in here? Why don't we just say that we'll just leave it to regulation, let the minister decide what's prohibited or not? Essentially, that's what they're doing. You're naming some, and then you're saying: but the minister can add or subtract as many prohibited activities as he or she wants. I think that's an unreasonable amount, an excessive amount, of ministerial latitude and power, and I just don't think that it's right.

I guess I would say, you know, that the amendment we're talking about illustrates this, but this bill really is of an intrusive nature. I just wonder if this is really going to do anything to stop people from actually doing these prohibited activities anyway. I mean, honestly, what would really make more sense, you would think, is that instead of saying that you cannot do something and that we're going to slap a small ticket on you if you get caught doing it, what you should do is hammer them if they're weaving all over the rode, if they cause an accident, or something like that. You just nail them with liability. You know, their insurance skyrockets. They lose their car for a period of time or their right to drive for a period of time if they actually are swerving on the road or if they're actually running stop signs while looking at their PDA or whatever. You hammer them if they actually do something wrong on the road because they're distracted, not just because they may have glanced – because I worry, too, Mr. Speaker.

Usually if you are making a phone call while you're driving, I know that when I do it – and obviously I can't do it here pretty quick – I'll usually do a quick 403, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, so I can keep my eyes on the road as much as possible. If I were to put that phone down here so that the police or the person viewing me couldn't see me, then I'm doing this; I'm starting to tap and stuff, and I'm even more distracted.

I don't think people are actually going to follow this law, predominantly. There will be a few who do, but I think, generally

speaking, that it's just going to be like any of the other traffic laws, unfortunately, that are ignored. I think that a lot of them wouldn't be ignored if it would be a stronger penalty if they do something wrong. For example, you can think of when someone's drinking and driving and they hit somebody or they get in an accident while they're drinking and driving. That's when you just have to absolutely hammer the individual, make sure that they're losing their licence, that they get in trouble. That, I think, would be more effective in keeping dangerous drunks off the road than any other activity.

I think that we've got to go more towards a system where we are punishing people who are actually being a menace on the road as opposed to somebody, in this example, who's driving and maybe looking at some printed material, maybe at some directions while they're driving. Maybe they're not sure what turn to make, so they take a look at the piece of paper so they can make the right turn at the right street, and then they're in violation of the law. That just doesn't make any sense. It's too intrusive. Now, if they're looking at something and they're swerving or they're talking on their phone and they're swerving around or they're in an accident, you can document when they were on the phone. You can document that, and you can punish them accordingly with a very serious penalty.

Again, I just don't see how this is really going to help anything. I mean, I think everyone agrees that we shouldn't be distracted while we're driving. I don't think anyone disagrees with that. We should be paying attention, but think of all the things that do distract us while we're driving. I mean, there are the passengers in the car next to you.

Dr. Brown: What about all those kids?

Mr. Anderson: Exactly. Those four kids in my SUV going crazy back there. I mean, you wonder why I'm a little tense in question period sometimes. It's because I've got four kids in the back of an SUV all the time. That's a lot of pressure.

There are lots of things that distract. Does that mean that we should ban kids from our cars, you know, that we shouldn't have kids in our cars? They're distracting. They're very distracting. You should hear my little guy, my two-year-old, when he drops his bottle or something. I'm driving, and he's just going nuts because he can't find his bottle. I mean, there's nothing more distracting on Planet Earth than that. Well, maybe a few things, but it sure doesn't feel like it at the time. [interjection] Yeah. Well, I don't have to watch them while I'm in my car. Thank goodness.

There are all kinds of distractions. We don't ban kids from our car. We don't ban the GPS from our car. We don't ban radios and CDs and audio books. We don't ban those things. We haven't banned eating a hamburger here. Is eating one of the prescribed things? I don't think it is. No, it's not. So you can still eat. What's the difference between holding a cellphone to your head and chewing down a Big Mac? Honestly, in some ways the Big Mac is far more distracting. It's slopping all over you. There are pieces of food going all — I mean, it can be very distracting. A milkshake, a Diet Coke: all these things are very distracting things.

We're banning a few things; we're not banning other things. I just don't see how this is really going to help safety. Even if you banned all that, even if you decided to ban the hamburgers and you ban your kids from vehicles — you're going to ban all those things so you have no distractions whatsoever — you take the radios out and the headsets out and everything out, you know, there are all kinds of studies out there that say that wireless phones and hands-free phones are just as distracting as the ones that you hold up to your ear. If we're not going to ban every possible distraction, then why even pass a law

about it, especially when people aren't going to listen to it? They're just not, by and large. A few will, but a lot won't.

10:10

I think education would be a much better thing to do. I mean, we don't ban cigarettes. Cigarettes are by far more harmful than distracted driving, but we don't ban them. We educate. [interjection] Well, that's right. We do ban them in public places for second-hand smoke, but we don't ban it in other ways. We do give public education. We do make sure that we educate the public about how bad smoking is for them, and because of that the smoking rate over time has gone down.

It's the same, I believe, with texting while driving and the use of cellphones and other things while driving. If you have good public education on it, over time people will make, generally speaking, rational decisions. Those who choose not to make rational decisions you can absolutely hammer with fines and all kinds of bad things when they actually do something that is illegal or dangerous on the road.

There was a member across the way, but I forget which one, who took exception to the fact that some people are very safe when they drive, that they can hold a phone up to their head and drive very safely compared to somebody who isn't a very good driver and has both hands on the wheel. I think we all know that. It's true. You know, not everyone has the same abilities. It's just like, you know, you've got some people who can skate and stickhandle the puck really well at the same time, and then you've got others that can't do that well, so they're not very good hockey players. Some people can do two things well at the same time; that's just kind of a gift. I'm sorry that not everyone has it in this Assembly, but that doesn't mean you have to take away the use and enjoyment of my gifts, hon. member. That's right: the use and enjoyment.

Anyway, I want to just make it clear that I don't think that it is proper for the minister to have such discretion because, frankly, she or a future minister could add kids into this legislation. Kids are distracting; you're not allowed to have kids in your car. Or dogs: dogs are distracting; can't allow dogs in your car. Hamburgers: can't have hamburgers. Radio: you've got to take the radio out. I think that that is too much discretion to give to a minister.

Mr. Hinman: What about doughnuts?

Mr. Anderson: Doughnuts are very distracting. You go by a Tim Hortons or something like that, just that in itself, you know, you have to turn your head and, "Man, I'd really like to have a doughnut and a coffee or hot chocolate." [interjection] Or a taco from Taco Bell, that's distracting: "Man, I could use one of those."

So we just have to make sure that we don't give the minister so much discretion. Again, it goes back to the larger problem. The reason I don't want to give the minister so much discretion is because this is an overly intrusive bill. Unfortunately, it's one that the public seems to want. I think what they want is more safety; they want less distracted driving. I don't think they want more intrusion. I don't think that this accomplishes what the public wants. The public might say: "Oh, good. They're passing something on distracted driving." But they have to realize that that's not going to solve the problem that the public is concerned about.

Hopefully, we'll talk about some clauses later that I think will address that issue, and we can maybe make this bill a trial bill to see if it works for a couple years. Then, hopefully, it will be proven. If it works, great. I mean, if it does decrease distracted driving, great, but if not, then we can put it on the shelf for the future and can remember it just as a history lesson about why big government solutions and intrusive government solutions don't work.

With that, I look forward to hearing any questions or comments on the amendment.

The Chair: On amendment A3, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that. You know, I listened with interest to most of my hon. colleague's speech, and I guess that while I was prepared to consider his amendment, I am quite unconvinced by his arguments.

First of all, the attempt to liken this bill to an intrusion into property rights is most unconvincing. It's true that your vehicle is your personal property, Mr. Chairman, but it's a piece of your personal property that you load other human beings into, take out on public roads, and drive around with other people's private property all around you, in which if you are not driving carefully, you can kill people. So there have to be very strict limits on this. You know, to just call it a private property issue I think is vastly overstating it and ignoring the much more important aspects of ensuring safety. As our hon. Minister of Transportation loves to say in this House, safety is our first concern. We have to keep that in mind when we frame this bill.

I also recall, as I was a member of the standing committee that conducted public hearings on the original private member's bill that was brought forward, that we called the police to testify. We had the Alberta sheriffs, we had representatives of the chiefs of the Calgary city police and of the Edmonton city police, and they described some of the issues that they're dealing with. In terms of the hon. member's contention that we just wait till something really bad happens and then just hammer people, this flies in the face of what we heard, actually, from the police, which is that there is legislation that is very severe, and because it's so severe, it's rarely used. They were looking for something with some lesser penalties that they could impose.

That gets to my other point, which is the whole question about education. The hon. member suggests that it's education that has reduced the smoking, using that as an example. Well, you know, there's education and there are different degrees of enforcement, and I would submit that in addition to education a very significant component in the reduction of smoking is due to the fact that it's no longer legal to smoke in most public places. I think that's had a greater impact because, you know, there have been lots of studies to show that the extensive advertising that was being directed at young people to get them to not smoke has not been effective. You know, they just don't buy it.

What I've seen in my observation is that the increasing degree of restriction on where you can smoke has in fact had a very significant impact. When you have to go outside in the cold and huddle around the corner of a building, you know that it's not socially acceptable anymore to smoke, and you're smoking not because you want to, I don't think, in a lot of cases but because you have an addiction, and you'd really rather not be there. So I think to suggest that just education on its own is effective is not correct.

I do think that we need to have this bill. I accept that there are other distractions besides cellphone use. The original private member's bill was to talk about the use of cellphones alone, and the argument was put forward by government and transportation officials and others that, you know, it's not the only distraction; therefore, we can't legislate it. That's a logical fallacy. That's fundamentally bad logic to say that one thing is bad and because you can't get everything that's bad, you know, you shouldn't deal with the first thing. That's just nonsense. You should get the things you can deal with and try to deal with them, and if you don't get it

perfect, it's no reason not to start. It's no reason not to pass some legislation. I think the bill actually does that.

Now, I do admit to being somewhat tempted by the hon. member's proposition that you shouldn't allow a minister on their own to designate new categories of offence. I think that's an argument that is somewhat persuasive, but I'm not convinced that this is a massive government plot to take away the rights of our citizens. I'm not saying that I don't believe that the government does have some of those plots, but I don't think this is one.

So I am not persuaded in the end by the arguments. Of course, if the provision is abused, then I certainly think that we will need to revisit it in the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on amendment A3.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise on the amendment that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has brought forward because when I spoke on this bill previously, that's one of the things that I had brought in my speaking notes in regard to the prohibited activities in 115.4. I want to get it on the record that I do support this bill. The constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek have indicated very clearly by phone and by e-mail and on my web page that they want me to support Bill 16, and quite interestingly enough in the Twitter world they're also twittering us. We're finding it quite interesting because we obviously have some followers that are following some of the comments of my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere and giving us some examples in regard to some of the things that they've seen.

As I indicated when I was speaking before on this particular section, you see a lot when you drive highway 2, or the Queen E. I spoke in support of this bill when the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays brought this forward in his first attempt, and I talked about some of the things that I had seen when I was driving. Then it was punted into committee, and now it's back. It's interesting how quickly the government can change because at that point in time there was no way at all that they were going to support this.

Things have been interesting, Mr. Chair, as I was telling my colleagues after we were coming back from the AAMD and C reception that we attended, hosted by the minister. We went to grab something to eat, and I was driving up early on Sunday. I had been watching, actually, because I indicated when I was speaking on this that I was one of those people trying to break my cellphone habit while I was driving down the highway and only using it if there was an emergency.

Anyhow, I'm driving, and I'm watching this individual in front of me as they're weaving on the highway, and I thought: ah, cellphone user. So I catch up, and I'm watching, and I honestly drove off the highway. She was reading a book. I thought I'd seen everything. She had her book on her steering wheel, open, and there she was reading and occasionally bringing her head up as she was reading the book. I know that's contained in the legislation that they've brought in, reading or viewing printed material, and I can certainly see why they've brought that forward.

What I'm finding under this section and why I would like to see it taken out as per the amendment is that I just think it's too prohibitive. I think if you let our police department and our sheriffs and the peace officers that are on the highways that do an incredible job make the decision and let them decide what they think should be prohibited – you know, it could be a host of things. I talked about the personal grooming, and I talked about the hygiene, but it could

also be – and it's not in here – that you attempt to drive down the highway with a coffee in one hand, and you might have an Egg McMuffin or a doughnut in the other hand. That can be dangerous on the highway.

What I'm finding quite interesting now is that newer cars have got movies in them. Now, I do realize – and I'm not a car girl – that most of the movies are contained for the passengers in the back, but I'm not sure if there are movies allowed if you're sitting in the front. You know, you have to be careful if somebody is listening attentively to this movie in the back and not paying attention to the road.

I will support my colleague's amendment in regard to striking out (b) under Regulations, but I will also again put on the record that I do support Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010. I just think that our police and our peace officers on the highway need to use the discretion.

My only other concern is that from driving that highway all the time, the majority of the time when I'm seeing peace officers, it's because they're pulling somebody over for whipping down the highway at 150 or 160 kilometres an hour, and I'm just trying to rationalize: if they're going to be taking a casual drive down highway 2, just look for somebody who will be talking on their cellphone or could be reading a book or, for that matter, reading a map. I mean, I don't have a GPS in my car. I carry Lucy, as I call her, in the car with me, and if I need to go somewhere, then I'll hit her, and she'll direct me all over the place.

Again, I support the amendment that's been brought forward, and I look forward to any discussion.

The Chair: On amendment A3, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very concerned about safety on the roads. There is no question that Albertans are concerned. The frustration continues to grow, and the question is: are we going to address the problem, or are we going to pass feel-good legislation? At this point Bill 16 is still feel-good legislation. I don't believe it's going to decrease the amount of accidents on the road.

What this amendment is about is that under section 115.5 "The Minister may make regulations." That's what this amendment is about. Should the minister be able to just ad lib new regulations at will when he deems it in his best interest for whatever reasons, political, whatever the gain is?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood-Highlands – Highlands-Norwood. It's been so confusing this evening, I'm confused on that. Gosh, I've lost my train of thought on that now.

Dr. Taft: It means it's time to go home.

Mr. Hinman: It is.

Dr. Taft: Send us home.

Mr. Hinman: How do I do that?

Ms Blakeman: Stop talking and vote it.

Mr. Hinman: We can't do that on such a bill, to serve the interest of the people.

What we want is safety. The question is: is giving the minister the carte blanche ability to add something into the regulation going to solve the problem?

Again, I'm very disappointed that the government hasn't stood up

– it's got millions of dollars for research – to say: "This is why we should be doing this. Here are the answers. Here is the guidance. Here is what we've learned in other jurisdictions. This is what we need to do." In the research that we're finding, this isn't solving the problem. Traffic accidents have been in place. Since the first car was developed and the Model T, there have been accidents. We've got all kinds of safety devices, from seat belts to air bags to warning of a sudden manoeuvre, backup cameras so we don't run over things. We've got all kinds of safety devices, but the question is: are we addressing the real issue?

What is the number of cars that are on the road today versus 10 years ago, when we weren't using cellphones so heavily? What's the percentage of accidents that are happening that actually go back to cellphone use, and has that changed, or is the human factor in there that 80 per cent of accidents are caused by distracted driving and they're going to continue?

10:30

What's the new distraction? Right now it seems like the scapegoat is someone holding a cellphone in their hand while they're driving, and that is what's causing all the carnage on our highways. I don't believe that that is the sole problem here. We don't have the numbers to do it. I spoke earlier, you know, about some jurisdictions in the U.S. that have passed the cellphone ban, and now people are hiding it below the level where people can see it and actually increasing the number of accidents in some of those jurisdictions.

Is the bill adequate the way it is? No. Is it proper that the minister should be able to pass new regulations the week after the bill has been passed because something new has come to light and we're going to start going after it?

Oh, that's what it was, hon. member. What was the plot of the government on this bill? I would say that perhaps the backdoor plot on this is that they have a \$7 billion cash-to-revenue deficit, they need more money, and they're saying: "You know what? This is an easy target. All we need to do is empower our police officers and our sheriffs. If they see someone holding a cellphone, if they see someone holding a book, if they see someone doing one of these on the list of five things, we can ticket them, and then the world is going to be a better place." But it isn't. That is not going to solve the dilemma, what the policeman does or doesn't see.

Again, to me, the whole problem is that what I want those peace officers and sheriffs and policemen doing when they're out there patrolling the roads is to be looking for poor drivers. I don't want them to be focused on: "Oh, let's check every driver to see if they have a seat belt. Let's check every driver to see what they're holding." I want them to actually be observing and seeing people that are driving poorly. I want them to be going after people that are speeding up, slowing down, that aren't signalling their lane changes. It would increase safety if we actually penalize people who are driving poorly.

That isn't what this bill is about. This bill is about a cash cow, where we can start to look for people that are holding objects that the minister can automatically say that this is a new regulation. Like I say, it could be that they're holding Tim Hortons coffee cups, and now they start watching and boom, whatever they're holding, they go after that.

You know, it's interesting that perhaps what we should be doing, then, is saying that the ticket is going to be for anybody who takes their eyes off the road ahead. We've got mirrors, but we still need to do a shoulder check. It's always amazing when you're in the heat of three- or four-lane traffic and you're trying to merge and come everywhere together. You've got to be watching ahead. You've got to be doing your shoulder checks. You've got to be looking back

and forth. You've got to be very keen and observant on that. When you're travelling over the Glenmore Reservoir and merging, whether you're going to go Glenmore west or Crowchild north, it's a little bit chaotic there. Again, the lane changes and things are not well designed. That would help improve the safety if we looked at some of those areas.

The problem that we're looking at here with Bill 16 is that it's not really addressing safety. What it's addressing is the anger that people are having, the frustration people are having on the road when they want to drive. As the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek mentioned, I was passing this individual, I was sure that they were going to be texting, and, no, they were reading. And, yes, that is covered in this bill. Reading is wrong.

But my point is that the policeman shouldn't have to be driving up beside, getting a visual, and then saying: "Aha, it's a book. I can pull them over." She was driving poorly. The light should have gone on. That person should have been pulled over. They should have got a ticket. "You know what? You were driving erratically. You were lane changing, you were speeding up, slowing down, and that's not in the best interests of society. We need people that are paying attention." That, to me, makes sense. That tells you to be focused on the road. But this idea that you're holding something and therefore thou shalt be ticketed just is not addressing the safety on our roads.

I just want to go back again. I can't emphasize it enough. One of the problems that we see in this government on many of the bills that they bring forward is that they say: "You know what? The problem is that we just need to give the minister more power." Then we're going to all of a sudden create this perfect society where – I don't know – all-powerful Health Minister: no deaths. All-powerful Environment Minister: no problems. All-powerful Attorney General: no accidents on the road. It doesn't happen. Human nature is that we get distracted. We have accidents. It's happened from day one, since cars have been invented, that there have been accidents. We've got rules of the road.

Again, if it's the carnage and saying that we need to do that, reducing speed and saying that nobody could drive over 30 kilometres an hour would reduce the carnage. Is that what we need for efficiency and productivity? No. Again, this bill in this current state does not address the efficiency and the productivity of people. There are many people who can and are able to function, when you're not in heavy traffic, to carry on business.

I mean, one of the other problems in this bill even in its current state is: no writing, printing, or sketching or reading or viewing printed material. So what this really is is that in a car you're banned from having a map anymore. You can't look down. That's printed material. No maps are allowed. You have to pull over and stop or know, and I don't know that that's serving the public interest.

Mr. Chair, it's critical that we get this right. We need to address the hazards on the road, but let's address that actually in the bill and not focus on what somebody is holding. That's the problem with this bill, and I'll continue speaking on that as we go through more amendments.

The minister does not need the power to be able to make regulations at the whim of a bureaucrat, the whim of the minister, and say: oh, this is what we need; this is the new gadget that can't be held. Or, like I say, no more eating. It just seems like they're missing the big picture. What is the problem with the safety of our roads? We need more lanes in many areas. We need synchronized traffic lights so people aren't so frustrated with stopping and going. There are so many other areas that we could or should be addressing if we're after the safety in there.

Mr. Chair, I would urge people to vote in favour of this amend-

ment. It's important that we get it right. This is not right in its current state, so I would ask that we would consider this and remove the power of the minister to make regulations at the whim of his thoughts or whatever the complaint of the week is and add it to the details. It's not good legislation. It needs to be amended. I hope all will vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: On amendment A3 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. I hesitate to stand again, realizing the hour, but I just think that, you know, the characterization of how the enforcement under this act would take place is not correct. It is the observation of an erratically driven vehicle or a poorly driven vehicle that will draw the officer's attention, and when the officer then finds the distracting evidence there, he is able to then issue a ticket where he or she might not otherwise have been able to. That's how it would actually be enforced. It's not like they're driving up and down looking for people reading or on their cellphones, but when they see a vehicle that's not properly driven, it gives them the basis on which to issue a ticket. That's all.

Mr. Hinman: I think the hon. member missed it totally. That's the problem. If the policeman observes that someone is driving erratically or there's a problem, that's when they pull them over. The lights go on, and they give them a ticket for driving erratically, lane changing. You have to stay in your lane. We actually have legislation, and we need to change it a little bit. That's the whole problem. If they're driving poorly, that's what we want to address. I can't believe it, that we'd see someone driving poorly and then need to drive up and see what they have. I mean, if I was driving poorly and all of a sudden I see the policeman and then I put it down, then he can say, "Oh, we're going to let you go." Or he pulls you over, and you say, "Oh, actually, it was because I was disciplining my children. I was talking to them." "Oh, okay. Well, just keep on going, then. There's nothing wrong with what you've done. It's okay because you didn't have a cellphone. You didn't have a book. You didn't have a hairbrush."

This is the problem with the bill, to say that we're just going to see someone driving poorly, drive up, and see what they're holding in their hand? It doesn't make any sense. We need to vote against this bill in the current state by putting in this amendment.

10:40

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on amendment A3?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on amendment A3.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There has been a lively debate this evening, and I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the lateness of the hour I would move that this House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:42 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 16, 2010

Issue 41a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. We further give thanks for the gifts of culture and heritage which we share. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of introductions today. The first is of two classes from an exceptional school in Edmonton-Riverview called Stratford, which has a number of special programs in it. I can tell you that I've gone there a number of times, and Stratford routinely produces some of the brightest students in this province. There's a total of 52 both in the public gallery and in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by two group leaders Mrs. Rhonda Tarapacki and Mrs. Deb Sitter. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

Mr. Speaker, I have one other introduction. I think these guests may be here. They are two members from the Alberta Federation of Labour visiting today as part of a campaign: Joanne O'Hair and Trudy Grebenstein. They are here speaking about things like pension issues and government finances. If they are in their seats, I would ask them to please rise and receive our welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions to make today, and I'd ask each individual to rise as their name is called. First, I'm pleased to introduce my friend and Airdrie's newly elected mayor, His Worship Mayor Peter Brown. He should be sitting in the Speaker's gallery. Mayor Brown is a long-time Airdrie resident who has made a name for himself as one of our community's most active and generous volunteers. He can also put on one of the funniest stand-up comedy acts that you'll ever see. In my view, he will do a wonderful job leading a community with so many unique needs and challenges. I ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

A second introduction. It is my pleasure to introduce Airdrie's elected school trustees, Mr. Don Thomas and Ms Sylvia Eggerer, as they are also here to advocate for new schools on Airdrie's behalf. They were also my principal and vice-principal at the same time while I was a student at George McDougall, and I spent many an hour in their office trying to explain to them why I had a problem following certain rules, something I know that you can identify with, Mr. Speaker. The patience and dedication of these two individuals has made a huge, positive difference in my life and the lives of hundreds in my community, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart. I now ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce through you to this House – and I hope that they're in the public gallery – an exceptional group of Airdrie parents, teachers, and students who are here to advocate for schools in our community. This includes members of the Airdrie Council of School Councils, in particular Donna Pearce and Stephen Goodall, who organized the Airdrie rally for schools last week and have done a wonderful job advocating for our community; as well as Mike De Bokx, a great citizen and president of the Airdrie Chamber of Commerce; Ron Chapman, a newly elected alderman; Al Jones, a dear friend and amazing community volunteer; and, of course, grade 8 student Leah Moore, who aside from being a straight-A student found time to put together a petition of 3,300 Albertans asking the government to build more schools in Airdrie, which I'll present later on. Also, Leah's family and many other Airdrie parents, teachers, and students are here to advocate on our community's behalf. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Terry Alston and Mrs. Pam Wilson, who braved the winter storm to come to question period today. Terry is the president of the Association of Alberta Registry Agents. In addition, he is also the vice-president and managing director of Crowfoot Plates Registry Inc. He's a very positive individual with great enthusiasm for the future of Alberta's registry agent network. Pam is the new CEO with the Association of Alberta Registry Agents. I'm pleased to welcome her and look forward to working with her. I would now like to ask Terry and Pam to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent of mine from Edmonton-Whitemud, Mr. Aaron Thompson. Aaron has been living with multiple sclerosis for most of his adult life and is here today to show his support for and to advocate for the timely approval of chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, CCSVI, the research treatment. He received this treatment this past October in California. Mr. Thompson is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he wave and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a surprise guest today, and I'm very honoured to introduce Jerry Iwanus. He's a dear friend of mine, and he's the former mayor of Bawlf. I'd ask him to rise. This is one man who has always dedicated himself to growing our rural communities. He's taught me that the sacrifices we make for something larger than us are the greatest gifts we can give back to Albertans. I thank him for attending today and ask the Assembly to give him the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today 12 colleagues and fellow council members as well

as individuals who assist and support the council. They are council chair Marlin Styner from Red Deer, council members Dan Bojarski from St. Brides, Bryce Clarke from Ardrossan, Mike Hambly from Calgary, Dr. John Latter from Calgary, Austin Mardon from Edmonton, Diane Ridley from Thorsby, Brad Robertson from Calgary, Amber Skoog from Picture Butte, Kuen Tang from Edmonton, Pam Wagner from Medicine Hat, and Carmen Wyton from St. Albert.

The staff who support the Premier's council are Helen Stacey, Louise Butler, Diane Bergeron, Bonnie Edwards, and Audrey Walton. Also accompanying the council members today are Diane Gramlich, Sandy Tancowney, Bill Taylor, and my assistant, Lindsay Cooke. They are seated in both of the galleries, and I'd ask that they now stand, as they are able, or wave and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives from the Alberta Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress. They are here as part of the campaign for improved pension benefits. These guests as well as other labour leaders and activists participated in meetings today with MLAs to discuss the pension crisis and Alberta's role in solving it. The joint AFL-CLC efforts are aimed at encouraging the Alberta government to back CPP expansion when Canada's finance ministers gather to discuss the issue in December.

Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask them now to rise as I call their names: Sherry McKibben, who is a member of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta; Christina Doktor, who is a member of the United Nurses of Alberta; Kevin Galley, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees local 37; Trevor Alway from the Canadian Auto Workers' union; and Kevin Partridge from the Canadian Auto Workers' union. I would ask that they now receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40 Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Louis Riel

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. This is a revision of a speech given by president Poitras.

The historic origins of the Métis people in Canada began during the fur trade. They were connected through the highly mobile fur trade network, extensive kinship connections, a common culture, and language. As our population grew, so did our ethnic awareness of who we were. Métis leaders rose from within our own nation who saw this commonality and sought to promote and defend our identity and our existence.

The man whose sacrificial death we honour and commemorate today was such a leader: Louis Riel. He was born in 1844 at Red River Settlement in Manitoba. In 1870 he relocated to the U.S. as a result of his exile from the Canadian government. From 1873 to 1874 he was elected three times to the Canadian parliament but was never able to take his seat.

Even in exile Louis Riel believed in the Métis saying, "Pray that God may preserve the little Métis nation and cause it to grow and remain faithful to its mission; during five years that I must pass in exile, I have only this to say to the Métis: remain Métis, become more Métis than ever."

In June 1884 Louis was asked to come back to Canada to lead the Métis people. He returned to defend the interests of Métis, believing in a people having self-government with their rights, land, and culture preserved. In March of 1885 shots were fired at Duck Lake. The battle with the Canadian army had begun. In May 1885 the battle continued in Batoche, with Louis Riel leading the charge. The battle lasted a mere four days. On May 12, 1885, the last shots echoed through the Saskatchewan valley, and Métis soldiers lay wounded and dying on the battlefield. Louis Riel gave himself up. He was found guilty of treason and sentenced to hang 125 years ago this very day.

The Métis as a distinct aboriginal people helped shape Canada's expansion westward through their ongoing assertion of their collective identity and rights. From the Red River resistance to the battle of Batoche to other notable collective actions undertaken throughout the Métis nation homeland, the history and identity of the Métis people will forever be a part of Canada's existence. Louis Riel was a man of great vision. He did not waver from his belief of a future for Métis people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

School Services in Airdrie

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week hundreds of parents, teachers, and students held a rally in Airdrie calling on this government to immediately address our city's school shortage. Many of them are with us here today. The number of public students in Airdrie has increased by roughly 1,500 in the last five years, yet in that time not one new school has been announced. However, during that same five-year period six new schools were announced for Edmonton public despite their enrolment decreasing by roughly 1,000 students. How is this discrepancy explained? How are 10 schools supposed to satisfy the needs of 6,500 public students in Airdrie, yet Medicine Hat has 20 public schools to satisfy the same number of public students? How did 32 schools get announced just prior to the 2008 election, yet not one ended up in Airdrie?

Here are some numbers from this government's last budget: \$2 billion dollars budgeted for grants to Alberta's largest corporations to pump CO₂ into the ground, an amount that could build 133 new schools; \$200 million dollars budgeted for subsidies to businesses, enough to build 13 new schools.

You see, it's not about spending more taxpayer money. It's about spending the money we have wisely. It's about putting needs before wants and priorities before pet projects that government has no business being a part of. It's about making decisions objectively, based on the needs of Albertans, rather than making political decisions based on favours owed to politicians.

Mr. Speaker, my community is tired of these excuses. We just want enough schools for our kids. This minister and this Premier have a chance to correct the mistakes of the past and begin the process of winning back the trust of Airdrie voters. Please, Mr. Premier, the ball is in your court. Please don't play politics with our kids.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I am proud today to say a few words about the good work that the council

does for Albertans with disabilities. It works to improve the lives of Albertans by advising, reporting, and making recommendations to government and other stakeholders on issues, including accessibility and the removal of barriers to employment. My council colleagues are great Albertans. They're active participants in their communities, where they engage and connect with local Albertans.

Later I'll be tabling the council's 2009-2010 annual report, that outlines the activities undertaken by the council during the last fiscal period. I am proud to say that we have met all of our targets, and we've stayed within our resources. One of our goals is to promote universal design, and to this end we've pulled together a stakeholder group to do just that. We've also completed our first internal evaluation, identifying strategies to help us to be even more effective resources to our communities and to our government.

Every December 3 the council sponsors International Day of Persons with Disabilities, a chance to honour people with disabilities and those who support them. On this day we also present the Premier's council awards, which encourage and celebrate the support and commitment of individuals, organizations, and governments for persons with disabilities. Last year the number of award nominees doubled.

The council is also available as a resource to our government, and just this past year we contributed to the consultation of the advisory committee on health and also to the government of Alberta's response on the ratification of the United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. In my role as deputy chair I feel privileged to be part of the discussions and initiatives that this council is involved in, and I look forward to our plans for the coming year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Pension Reform

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Federation of Labour understands that Canadians, and Albertans in particular, face a very serious issue, that being the need for pension reform. They understand that society is a lot better off when seniors have enough funds to live with dignity. No one wants to see seniors suffering through what should be their golden years. That's why the AFL has been promoting the need for pension reform.

Albertans place dead last in Canada when it comes to retirement savings. Less than a third of workers have private pension plans and half have no retirement savings at all. Of course, almost all Canadians will enjoy the CPP benefits when they retire, but those funds simply aren't enough to live on. This paints a dark picture for seniors. Clearly, some kind of pension reform is needed. The AFL suggests that reform should begin by expanding the Canada pension plan.

Later this year Canada's finance ministers will meet in Kananaskis to decide the future of pension reform. A huge majority of Canadians and most of Canada's finance ministers approve of the simple, low-cost solution promoted by the AFL, double CPP benefits by slightly increasing premiums today. Your paycheque today will take a slightly larger hit, but your benefits as a senior will double, a significant step toward a dignified retirement. Unfortunately, Alberta's finance minister doesn't see the simple wisdom of reforming CPP. He is one of only two holdouts blocking this needed reform. I hope he'll change his mind before the conference in Kananaskis because Canadians, most especially Albertans, need pension reform.

Here in Alberta we like to pay a lot of lip service to seniors: how

important they are, how much they've contributed, how they deserve our support. Well, here's a chance to do something real for seniors, to provide a solution that will make a difference in their quality of life. Do the right thing, hon. minister. Support pension reform.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Canada November 17 has been designated as a National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims. On November 17 Canadians are asked to remember those killed or seriously injured on Canadian roads and those left to deal with the sudden and unexpected loss of people they love. Nearly 2,800 Canadians are killed each year on Canada's 900,000 kilometres of roads and highways. This means eight avoidable deaths every day. That's one every three hours. In Alberta 351 people died and more than 19,000 were injured in collisions in 2009. The tragedy is that most of these injuries and deaths on our roads are preventable.

Here in Alberta we've developed a comprehensive traffic safety plan that focuses on education, enforcement, communications, engineering, community engagement, and legislation to help make our roads safer. From 2007 to 2009 traffic fatalities in Alberta dropped 23 per cent and injuries dropped 22 per cent, which indicates that this co-ordinated approach is helping to save lives and reduce injuries.

Our efforts are making a difference, but while these reductions are encouraging, we must be vigilant. We can and must do better. This is about all of us, every Albertan, and the role we play in making our roads safer. On November 17 let's take a moment to remember those killed or injured in traffic collisions and encourage everyone we know to make a commitment to becoming a safer driver.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Long-term Care Beds

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the health care bumbling of this government continues to cause preventable suffering and loss of life. The litany of failure continues in mental illness as it does in clogged emergency rooms due to the long-standing deficit of long-term care beds. The government's inventory of major projects published just last month shows that an expansion of the Norwood Glenrose long-term care facility, planned between 2008 and 2010, was cancelled. To the Premier: how many additional long-term care beds would the Norwood Glenrose have created?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've already added 800 new beds this year, and our goal is 1,300 by the end of this year. So there will be 1,300 by the end of this fiscal period.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's unfortunate the Premier is misleading Albertans with comments about solving bed problems with continuing care. We're talking about long-term care. The Premier said yesterday, "We need more long-term care beds." He's got that right. We need more long-term care, not supportive living. Does the

Premier deny that the continuing care strategy has contributed to the ER crowding?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the time has come in this province to start paying attention to the needs of our seniors and not talk about long-term care beds. We're talking about continuing care, giving our seniors choice and not splitting up married couples after 50 or 60 years of marriage because the system says so. It's about time we take their needs into account.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. And there was a point of order as well. Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: How is it working for you, Mr. Premier? How is it working?

Mr. Stelmach: It's actually working quite well. In fact, we're showing leadership right across the country. We're looking at the needs of our seniors, and rather than putting seniors into facilities that perhaps may have, you know, four people to a ward, we're giving them individual rooms. We're giving them choice in terms of whether they want to cook their own meals or not or live in a more communitylike setting. There has been a tremendous amount of improvement in this province. One just has to travel to small communities to see the number of beds that have been opened.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Oil Sands Tailings Pond Containment

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to see the buck being passed from minister to minister but receive no clear answers regarding recent reports of unsecured tailings ponds. Meanwhile, Environment Canada is arriving at the Horizon tailings pond because, frankly, they don't believe this government either. To the Premier. The government claims there is no water flowing in or out of the pond. The ERCB says there's a stream which flows into the tailings pond. Which is it, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, clearly, the information that was given out — one of the news organizations in this province didn't do its due diligence. There are no tailings ponds that are leaking, especially this one that is the subject of this question. The three ministers — SRD, Energy, and Environment — met today with the ERCB. In the next question the Minister of Environment may give further detail.

Dr. Swann: Well, again back to the Premier. Does the Premier understand that if toxic tailings are in fact leaking into surrounding waterways, the federal government won't care if the pond is in compliance with our guidelines or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reiterate the answer that I gave yesterday. There is no water that is entering this site. The water has been diverted around this industrial site. There is runoff. It rains otop of this area just like it rains anywhere else, so there is some runoff that will originate. It is on a hill. It's running into the river.

As for the involvement of the federal government, Mr. Speaker, this was a joint approval that was based upon a joint hearing in 2004. The federal government has the responsibility, the same as the provincial government, to ensure that their regulations are being met.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, first the federal government created a water panel, and now they're checking on our tailings ponds. Is the Premier trying to manipulate this crisis so that he can stand up for Alberta against big, bad Ottawa?

Mr. Stelmach: No. Actually, as Premier and leader of this government our duty here is to protect the environment not only for today but well into the future, and we have a good record.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parks and Protected Areas

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 30 years the importance of untouched wilderness areas in our province has been reflected by the fact that they are protected by law. Today Albertans are deeply alarmed. This government plans to open up some of our most cherished parts of the province to inappropriate activities, including clear-cutting, motorized recreation, and industrial exploitation. To the Premier. In a recent survey by the parks minister 70 per cent of Albertans said that their top priority was setting aside more land in an undisturbed state. Why is the government ignoring the wishes of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're not ignoring Albertans in terms of the need for more recreational space, more protection of Alberta's pristine environment. We're doing that. We're doing that in consultation with Albertans. The minister has held a number of consultations across the province. Legislation is before the House, and it'll be debated over the next few days.

Dr. Swann: Well, I guess the question for the Premier is: which Albertans are influencing? Which is he listening to?

This government's own Plan for Parks, released just last year, says, "Albertans want more involvement in decisions about parks." Why is the government trying to do exactly the opposite by shutting the public out of decisions about parks in favour of special interests?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just simply not true. You know, we have consulted. We'll continue to consult. It's kind of ironic because sometimes the opposition accuses us of consulting too much, and then today they're saying: not enough. Sometime maybe they'll find their own balance.

But in this particular case we're continuing to consult with Albertans. It is an important issue for Albertans. As more people move to the province, some of these spaces will be cramped, and we want to protect a very pristine environment for future generations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's catalogue of failures grows by the day: hours in emergency departments, dangerous tailings ponds, botched flood relief efforts in southern Alberta. What do Albertans have to do to make the Premier understand that they don't want their parks and protected areas added to the list?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding all of the dire consequences that the opposition brings forward, especially during question period, we're continuing to see people net migrate from Ontario, from British Columbia to this great province. They see

opportunity. They see opportunities for jobs, to raise their families, educate their children, and live in one of the best places in the world.

School Services in Airdrie

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, as I explained in my member's statement, Airdrie is in desperate need of new schools to cope with the explosion of growth in our school-age population. We have fewer schools per school-age child than any city in the province by a mile. Every school is at or above 100 per cent capacity. Libraries are being turned into classrooms, we have elementary classes approaching 50 students, and school cores cannot adequately accommodate more portables. To the Premier: will you commit today to immediately address Airdrie's school shortage by announcing funding for at least three critically needed schools?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, my appreciation to the grade 8 student who initiated a petition, got her community interested in this very, very important area. Even though there were about 2,400 new spaces added over the last five years, we have a lot more to do, and we'll continue to do that. I'll be meeting with the mayor later this week as well.

I just wanted to correct one misinformation. In the member's statement the hon. member talked about \$2 billion this year allocated to carbon capture and storage. That's simply not true. That \$2 billion will probably bring us about \$25 billion in enhanced oil recovery for the next number of years.

Mr. Anderson: This government has budgeted \$2 billion over several years in grants for companies to pump CO₂ into the ground. I did not say this year. That amount of money could build 133 new schools. Airdrie is not asking for 133 new schools. We're asking for three, sir. To the Premier: will you retask a fraction of that \$2 billion for CO₂ and instead spend it on Airdrie's kids, whose education, one would think, would be a higher priority for taxpayer dollars than pumping CO₂ into the ground? Yes or no, sir?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the request from Airdrie is a priority, and we're working through the capital plan. But I'm not going to back off the investment in carbon capture and storage. It is a good investment. I can't turn down the possibility of \$25 billion in new royalties over the next number of years.

Mr. Anderson: Well, let's put it this way, then. Given that prior to the 2008 election funding for 32 new schools across Alberta was announced and given that placements of many of those schools were based on political considerations rather than objective need, as admitted to me by multiple government officials when I was still with that PC government, will this Premier commit to instructing his Education minister to publicly release his ministry's priority list of school projects and the criteria used to arrive at them?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there's simply no question that Airdrie is on top of our priority list. I'm not sure why he needs a released list to hear what we've said publicly in this House before. That hon. member, however, should in his commentary remind the House what he said when the budget came out last year, and that is: we could balance the budget if we stretched out our capital spending over another few years, if we reduced the capital bill from \$7 billion this year to \$4.6 billion this year.

Schools in Airdrie, Rocky View, Fort McMurray, and other places in this province are a priority for this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. [interjections] Well, we have recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I'd like to hear her.

2:00

Mental Health Services

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this week's numbers show that once again some hospitals, including the Royal Alex, are unable to meet wait time standards even a third of the time, yet at the same hospital the government has permanently closed an eight-bed, quick access mental health section. Several mentally ill patients waiting for any attention have committed suicide in hospitals across Alberta in the last few years. To the Premier: will he reverse this shameful closure and direct his minister of health to start fixing the crisis in Alberta's mental health care system now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a good question with respect to mental illness and the programs offered in the province. Even though we're investing \$500 million this year in mental health, there's a lot more that can be done. That is why I'm so positive in looking at the number of primary care networks that have been opened, 38, most of which have some psychologists. They're the people who can intervene at the right time. It's a symptom, obviously, of the number of people that are waiting in emergency rooms, and personal care networks will deal with some of it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta has less than half of the mental health beds per capita than the Canadian average and given that experts say that mental health cases are the primary source of ER delay in many hospitals across the province, why are the Premier and his health minister continuing to ignore the crisis in mental health, that, among other things, is so clearly linked to their failure to fix the ER crisis for years and years and years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to increase the number of community-based mental health programs. As more people move to the province and as more people require additional help with respect to mental illness, we'll do whatever we can. I do know that personal care networks are a start. They're part, of course, of opening up more beds by moving more people that require continuing care. All of these things are in process, and we will see results soon.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've seen no new mental health care beds. Indeed, last year the plan was to get rid of a bunch. Now, mental health patients suffer when they're stuck waiting in the ER without treatment, families suffer when they can't get help so desperately needed for their loved ones, and our health care system suffers when these Albertans can't get the help they need. Again to the Premier: why do you refuse to act? Why will you not invest in more beds now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are. There are over a thousand health projects, construction projects, in the province as I speak. I believe it's over \$5 billion of infrastructure spending in health. It's adding more acute-care beds, it's adding more continuing care beds, and of course in other areas, as I mentioned yesterday, some new cancer treatment, radiation vaults, in Grande Prairie and Red Deer and Lethbridge. That's, you know, moving in the right direction. Unfortunately, I just can't build them overnight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Oil Sands Tailings Pond Containment

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's response to new reports of an unsecured tailings pond is that everything is in compliance. This government just doesn't get it. When the rules allow for tailings ponds with missing walls or without barriers or removal of vegetation to prevent wildlife access, this government's rules are too weak, literally full of holes. To the Minister of Environment: given that over 50 per cent of the reported incidents from this particular tailings pond had impacts on water, why hasn't the government done anything to improve the standards?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. This is an industrial site. The site is completely isolated from all of the natural water bodies and watercourses in the area. There are pipelines on this site. There are fluids on this site that from time to time are released. They are not released off the site; they are contained within the industrial site. These are the instances that this member refers to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Uncontrolled release of settling pond water above approval limits, treated water particle counts and turbidity, missed readings, a storm that caused the pond to overflow because there was too much water: I mean, come on. These are the incidents. They reported them. So why do you keep insisting that there's no problem with the water? What exactly is holding the government back from doing a better job here?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, again, there is movement of water within the industrial footprint of this operation. When there is a release, there is a requirement that there be an appropriate cleanup and appropriate reporting. These are not releases of water into the environment; these are releases of water that cause issues within and on the industrial footprint of the operation itself.

Ms Blakeman: Well, there are 69 of them.

Okay. The next question, then, goes to the Minister of Energy, responsible for the ERCB. Given that the CNRL Horizon application under directive 074 states, and I quote, that Canadian Natural is unable to achieve the fines capture required by directive 074 and the phase-in schedule is not achievable, why was this plan approved? They couldn't do it.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in the answer to the member's question yesterday when she said the CNRL plan had been approved, it's my understanding that it has not yet been approved. It is one of the two that I mentioned yesterday that are still under review.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Arts Funding

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we all agree that the arts enrich our lives and give us a quality of life here in Alberta. We overlook the fact sometimes that it's also an important economic driver. The recent funding reductions have brought some of that into question and are hampering arts organizations, and I hear regularly on this from my constituents who want a reassurance that we

continue to hold the arts as an important priority. Can the minister offer that assurance and tell us specifically what he's doing to support the arts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Blackett: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to share with the hon. member and everyone else in this House that the government of Alberta is entirely committed to supporting the arts in Alberta. Over the last six years we've increased arts funding by 55 per cent. Last year because of the economic circumstances we had a reduction. We're meeting with the arts community on a semi-annual basis. I'm in the midst of going through eight different cities, and we're looking at ways that we can resolve through dialogue some of the problems that they incur. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. We should expect Alberta to be a leader in the arts in this country. That's certainly my expectation, but there is a concern that we're falling behind. Can the minister tell us how we're comparing with other jurisdictions?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the barking on the other side of the House over there, Alberta's funding of the arts is number three in the country, second only to Ontario and Quebec. We have provided \$29.2 million this past year. If you look at other jurisdictions, the B.C. Arts Council's budget is \$9.4 million, and the Saskatchewan arts council's is \$13.6 million. We are very proud of the commitment that we've made. Irrespective of what the person on the other side says, we have lived up to our commitment. We have a cultural policy, and we will continue to support the arts in this province.

Mr. Olson: Arts organizations in my constituency are starting to budget for the coming year, and they're looking for some guidance because they feel that there might not be a long-range plan. Can the minister tell us anything about planning for the future in terms of budgeting?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know, as the opposition members should know, that we are in tough economic times. Our Premier has mentioned repeatedly that we are going to maintain our spending and control our spending. Right now as I see it, there is no reason for anybody in the arts and cultural community to worry about funding decreases for the next fiscal year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

2:10

Parks and Protected Areas

(continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All powerful, all knowing, ever present, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent are attributes not normally associated with mere mortals, including Alberta's Premier and his appointed cabinet ministers. Moving from legislation to regulation assumes such ministerial infallibility. Does the minister of parks believe that online workbooks, private meetings, and an appointed advisory council are democratically acceptable replacements for public hearings and legislative debate?

Mrs. Ady: Mr. Speaker, I have to take exception to what the hon. member just said. This department has spent a considerable amount

of time doing extensive consultation with all Albertans, and we will continue. That is our practice, and that is what we will continue to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without qualifying legislation, what is to prevent either an undebatable order in council or ministerial whim from permitting further industrial or inappropriate recreational intrusion into our existing parks and protected areas?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a policy in this government that we do not make moves in parks until we have consulted. We always consult. If you look at the plan for parks that we've generated over the last few years, I think that what we do is very telling. We always consult. We do not make moves in parks without checking.

Mr. Chase: The government's pattern, Mr. Speaker, is consult, first; insult, second; ignore, third. Would the minister please explain how moving from the checks and balances of debatable legislation to unilateral ministerial discretion is in Albertans' best interests?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is referring to legislation that will be on the floor of this Assembly, and I think that's when we should have this debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing a lot about emergency department wait times recently. Media reports said that Alberta Health Services had aimed to admit seriously ill patients within eight hours of their arrival at hospital 48 per cent of the time but has now changed it to 45 per cent. It was also reported that the goal of four hours to treat and discharge patients who don't need admission was 80 per cent but has now been changed to 70 per cent. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why were these wait times reduced?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, some of the percentages that were reported by the media were neither targets nor were they performance measures. Some were, indeed, actual results from a year or two ago. Secondly, some of the numbers that were reported were for all emergency rooms in the province whereas others were only for the 15 busiest acute-care hospital sites in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: well, then, what are the wait time targets?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, for the larger hospitals, including those in Edmonton and Calgary, they are supposed to be admitting people for overnight stay at the 45 percentile. In other words, 45 per cent of the people should be in and admitted within eight hours by the end of this year. Secondly, they are also to be discharging 70 per cent of the people who do not require an overnight stay within four hours. Both of these targets, it's important to note, will actually be increases from actual results.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. When we talk about four hours or eight hours in the emergency department, does that mean patients do not get any help for that period of time?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker. The point here is that emergency department length of stay for the eight-hour period is defined as the total time spent by a patient in the emergency department. They are indeed seen and helped during that time. Emergency department length of stay includes everything from the moment of triage to diagnosis to treatment to bed placement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Injured Worker Claim Duration Rates

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the annual report of the WCB in 2008 an injured worker spent an average of 32 days off work. A report from the Employment and Immigration department for the same year states that on average an injured worker was off the job for 41 days. This claim duration difference is nine days. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: who are injured workers and their employers to believe regarding claim duration rates, the department or the WCB?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, the person to ask how long he's staying off work would be the person who actually is off work. That will give you the most accurate answer. But the fact is that our department gathers all information, Mr. Speaker, from the Workers' Compensation Board. They are the collectors of data. Any data published by this department stems from the Workers' Compensation Board. So if this member, again, much like yesterday, wants to get accurate information relevant to WCB, I would strongly encourage him to contact the board of directors of WCB, and they will gladly share that information with him.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. I would urge him not only to read his own information that he proudly posts on the Internet but also, hopefully, read the WCB annual report. Why is there a nine-day difference in claim duration between the statistics that you produce and those that the Workers' Compensation Board produces?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, we do not produce statistics. We simply publish them for public consumption. We want to make sure that Albertans have access to any pertinent information relevant to injury rates and types of injuries, and we will be publishing more and more information. Where there are inaccuracies, indeed, if there is a difference between rates published by the WCB and what we made available, I'll look into this. But at the end of the day all information comes from the Workers' Compensation Board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given that the hon. minister has time to look at Lady Gaga, I would suggest that he needs to look after injured workers in this province a lot better. Now, are you telling this House that the statistics that you so proudly posted on the Internet are inaccurate, and they're wrong, and employers and injured workers can't rely on those numbers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, any Little Monster would have understood it by now. If he wants accurate, relevant, and timely information from the Workers' Compensation Board, he should contact the Workers' Compensation Board. But if there is, indeed, a discrepancy between the information the WCB publishes on this one particular item and that published by this department, I will look into it and see why the difference occurs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Elder Abuse Strategy

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Up to 10 per cent of Albertan seniors have experienced some form of elder abuse, and in many cases elder abuse goes unreported. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. We have the knowledge, we have the facts, we have the statistics, but what is your ministry actually doing to protect our seniors?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, seniors, like all Albertans, deserve to live in dignity and be respected. We work to prevent elder abuse through collaboration with other government and community partners and through key pieces of legislation like the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act and the Protection for Persons in Care Act. But we need to do more. That's why today I released Addressing Elder Abuse in Alberta, a strategy that calls for governments, community partners, and all Albertans to work together to prevent and address all forms of elder abuse.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. With the work that we're already doing, why do we need this new strategy, and what do you hope this strategy is going to accomplish?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the strategy builds on the work that we're already doing. Addressing Elder Abuse in Alberta outlines four specific goals. One is improved awareness of the abuse, two is to have knowledgeable and skilled service providers, three is to have co-ordinated community responses, and the fourth is to have protective laws and policies. The strategy also outlines the roles and responsibilities of all sectors of society and builds on all the successful relationships that we now have in our communities.

Mr. Quest: Final question to the same minister: you're speaking about these partners and relationships, but can you elaborate on who these partners are?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, as I said, preventing and addressing elder abuse is a shared responsibility. Government cannot do it alone. We definitely have a role in supporting and facilitating the work, but we need the help of front-line staff, we need the help of our communities and community members, the people that know our seniors, and we also need the help of municipal governments, family members, and friends. We all need to work together to help prevent elder abuse.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:20

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The emergency room crisis continues as this government fails to respond to the challenge in a meaningful way. The minister talks in years and percentage reduction times while our facilities and staff are not being fully utilized. Hospital administrators must be able to override perceived system limitations in order to move patients and respond to ER overcrowding. To the health minister. Our ERs continue to burst at the seams with patients to care for while beds are closed in those facilities. Can you tell us how many beds are currently closed in Calgary and Edmonton?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the number of beds that are open and the number that we'll still be opening and the successes of that plan, which is a wonderful plan now that we have five years of funding. I can tell you that in September in Calgary Alberta Health Services opened 52 additional transition beds at the Rockyview and at the Peter Lougheed Centre. By November 5 they had opened 12 more transition beds at the Foothills, and just last week they opened an additional number of beds at the Rockyview, 12 more transition beds later this month. By the end of the month 20 more will open at the Peter Lougheed.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, that answer was pathetic.

We've been told by some AUPE members that there is at least one ward with 26 beds closed in a Calgary facility. Again to the same minister: will you immediately conduct an audit province-wide of all hospitals so we know how many beds there are that are currently closed that could be opened in those facilities and report to this Assembly by Thursday?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in total 70 new beds have been opened or will be opened before December 15 in Calgary – 70. That includes beds in acute hospitals, and that would include transition beds, hospice beds, and the like. Similarly in Edmonton we have about 71 more beds that will be opened in acute-care facilities. That doesn't include 1,300 new beds in the community. There is so much good stuff happening right now. It's wonderful.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, that answer as put out there was insulting.

There's no consultation. We need an audit province-wide to know how many current facility beds are closed that could be opened if we empower chief administrative officers to do that. We want an audit in the next 48 hours. How many current facility beds are closed in the province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why they continue to dwell in the past. They keep talking about taking money out of the system, and now he's talking about putting probably more money into the system. A few months ago they were talking about cutting \$1.5 billion or thereabouts out of health care, out of education. I wonder how they would intend to open any of those beds that might have been replaced if they pursued that strategy. Unbelievable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Food Bank Use

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2010 HungerCount was released this morning, and food bank usage in Alberta is up 10 per cent. Unemployment remains at double the prerecession rates, and

the lowest income group earns less than they did 30 years ago. Glaringly clear is that our most vulnerable populations are being left behind. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Food security is an essential piece for keeping families together, but 43 per cent of those accessing food banks in Alberta are children.

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. This is a national report, and that report did indicate that food bank usage is up for all provinces across Canada. I believe that poverty is one of the underlying factors of that. The way that we assist with this ministry in breaking the cycle of poverty is through the many good programs, supports, and services that we have. For example, we assist our families through child care subsidies, and we also have 46 parent link centres that we refer parents to in our local communities, that thousands of parents access, where they learn about nutrition and they learn cost-effective ways in which to prepare their food.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next questions will be to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that 16 per cent of those accessing food banks also depend on disability-related income supports, it's clear that support to vulnerable people isn't keeping pace with the costs of the times. Why not?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to supporting Albertans with disabilities, especially those most in need. This includes support through our AISH program, which provides a comprehensive list of health-related benefits in addition to a monthly income of \$1,188 per month. There have been five increases in the AISH program since 2005. AISH financial, health-related, and supplementary assistance provides one of the highest combined benefits to persons with disabilities in this country.

Ms Pastoor: Ah, an excellent segue. Thank you. Will you commit to indexing AISH payments, as MLA salaries are, to ensure that the vulnerable are not left behind?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would repeat my answer that I just gave, and that is that we have one of the highest benefit packages for people with disabilities in the country. We have increased the AISH benefits five times since 2005. We continue to monitor and review the income benefit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Pension Reform

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Labour Congress and Alberta Federation of Labour released a poll that seems to indicate that Albertans favour an expansion of the Canada pension plan. These two organizations have come out today calling for Alberta to stop "acting as a spoiler and standing in the way of real reform." My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Why is Alberta opposed to reforming the retirement income and pension system?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, let the record be very clear about this. Alberta is not opposing pension reform; we started the pension reform movement. Three years ago Alberta and British Columbia undertook a comprehensive review of the adequacy of retirement income security. It was the feds that got on board only a year ago and now have come up with sort of a quick fix across the board that simply won't work. We want a solution, but we want reforms that work, and across-the-board CPP reforms do not help those who need help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for that clarification. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Why doesn't this government support the federal move to expand the CPP?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian retirement income system is not broken. Three weeks ago one of the leading pension institutes in the world, the Mercer Institute in Melbourne, Australia, ranked Canada in the top five, the top five in the world. There is not a crisis in the Canadian income retirement system. It's a narrow system. It's not the upper income brackets. It's not the lower income brackets. We have OAS and GIS to look after lower income. It's a certain sector of the middle income, and we need a targeted solution for a targeted problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: if CPP expansion is not the right solution, then what is?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is looking to fix what's broken, and that is ensuring income adequacy both from CPP but also from other types of income support. We value, we think Albertans value freedom of choice and responsibility for choice in planning their retirement income. In doing that, we're looking at private-sector pension plans facilitated by government action that are called smart defined contribution plans, that have voluntary automatic opt-in and reduced administration rates.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Residential Construction Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From home warranties to building codes to condos this government's response to the growing crisis in residential construction has been the same for the last 10 years. First, ignore home and condo owners; second, huddle with industry to water down any real consumer protections. To the Minister of Service Alberta: given that consumer reps on other committees have been ignored in the past, why should Albertans trust that the input of condo owners will be included in the new condo act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to looking at the Condominium Property Act, we do indeed have a working committee that's been working for the last year. We'll be moving into the consultation late spring, and it's really important that we do this. We'll be looking at a number of areas with respect to gover-

nance, how condo boards are run, and anything with respect to the building codes and those issues are with the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the weakest recommendations made by the home warranty review committee four years ago have not been implemented, will the minister admit that even the weakest protections are too strong for this government?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, one of the huge focuses of this portfolio is consumer protection and consumer information, giving consumers the right tools to make the best decisions. With respect to the Condominium Property Act and the responsibilities that are implicit when you do purchase a condo, those are the things we want to make sure that consumers know they're getting into. The review of the Condominium Property Act will look at that area and many other areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that this minister's reviews have also excluded homeowners, why should Albertans have any confidence in proposals he says that he will bring forward next spring?

2:30

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, my ministry is always working very hard to find solutions to ensure that the integrity of new homes is maintained. You know, there's no doubt that building concerns have been raised for a number of years. We continue to look at the various issues that are being brought forward and have adapted some building code changes and will continue to do so.

Online Employer Records

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, it's been just over a month since this government posted the safety records of 140,000 employers in Alberta. Lots of information posted; however, some employers are questioning the accuracy of the records. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given these complaints which have been received, regardless of the source of that information how confident are you that the information posted is actually correct?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll let the member conclude for himself. We posted information about 140,000 employers that included some 3 million data points of interest or sections that you can search, and 50 or so employers have called with inaccuracies, and most of them were not. The employers simply were not aware of the fact that their employee died some 20 years later as the result of an occupational disease that he perhaps wasn't even aware of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: wouldn't it have been better to potentially delay the release of this information until you really had a sense of confidence about these records?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm very confident: out of 140,000 employers and 3 million pieces of information, 50 complaints and

most of them actually resolved. They weren't inaccuracies. Alberta right now is the only province in Canada that releases full information about safety records of all employers, and up to now we've already had about 15,000 hits on that website. It is information that is available to Albertans. I'm proud of it, and I'm glad that we released it as soon as we did.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I've got constituents that are suggesting that posting the information is great but that it doesn't go far enough, that we need more data to be better informed. What does the minister say to that?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, those are great suggestions. Keep in mind that we're pioneering here, that no other province releases information of this type at all. We have released the first generation, shall we call it, of this website. As we monitor now the usage and see how different groups use this information and for what purposes, we will be updating it, and perhaps more, additional information will be released in the future.

Hate Crimes

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, today happens to be the International Day for Tolerance, so I thought the Minister of Children and Youth Services might tolerate another question regarding answers she gave yesterday regarding the Devine family. My question to her is: did Alberta Children and Youth Services tell Mr. Devine's mother not to allow the parents to retrieve the children because the couple's social activism created an unsafe environment for the children?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to answer questions with this member. I did invite the member yesterday to speak with me after question period, but that didn't occur. If this question was framed in a way in which I could answer it, hon. member, I would. In the way that it's been asked, though, I won't be giving confidential information regarding the family to the Legislature on the floor of the Assembly.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'll keep going with this because I think they're fairly answerable questions. To the same minister. My office spoke with the Devines, and they indicated that a social worker visited his mother's house in order to keep the children away from their parents. Yesterday you said that you were in the business of keeping families together. Doesn't the situation with the Devines prove otherwise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whenever our department through our child and family services authorities is involved with families and when it relates to children that are in need, that may require assistance through our department, as I said yesterday, our first priority is to keep families together. We have the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, which, as you know, very much has the basic principle of assisting families with resources so that they can stay together.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary police say that the Devines broke no laws and that there was no clear reason to remove the children. If that's true, why did your staff victimize – and I'd say that: victimize – the family a second time by calling their

parenting abilities into question, and when do you plan on apologizing to the Devines? Can you at least tell this honourable House that you have at least done that?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to you yesterday, the statement is highly inaccurate. It's incorrect, and it is inaccurate. I don't know if there's a ruling in the Assembly in regard to situations where somebody brings children to the floor of the Assembly, basing it on the name of a family, with information that is incorrect, but it is, and the person that should be apologizing is this member.

Affordable Housing in Calgary

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, there's a serious crisis in the city of Calgary in the lack of affordable housing, including persons in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill who are unemployed or working for minimum wage. The tendering and funding of a recently opened project, the Louise Station in Calgary, has far exceeded the budgeted amount. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Given the fiscal realities of today and the limited funds available to remedy the problem, how can the minister ensure that taxpayers are getting good value for their dollar?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for that question because, in particular, my number one priority is to deliver value to both clients and to taxpayers in our affordable housing plan. The municipal block funding plan was announced in 2007. It was \$100 million per year for three years, and it reflected the reality of the time. During the boom time we needed to get as much affordable housing out as possible. I cancelled this program earlier this year because there are better ways to deliver affordable housing during this time. I can confirm the particular item he's talking about: \$136,000 a door.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to promise that the government is going to construct 11,000 affordable housing units across the province by 2012. How many of these units are going to be built in the city of Calgary, and will the minister ensure that the tendering process is going to be competitive with those other projects in the public and private sectors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must correct the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. It's not the government that actually builds these units; it's a partnership that we have with local nonprofits, for-profits, community organizations, and municipalities. The government can't do it all alone. I've seen projects where these local associations have in fact put up 25, even 35 per cent of the money themselves. We're acting in the best interests of the taxpayer and the best interests of the client.

Dr. Brown: Given that the municipal block funding program has ended and given that most successful brownfield developments in Canada do not include affordable housing, how does the minister propose to press ahead with plans for badly needed affordable housing in the city of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. Again, that is a good question because we actually have been mandated in my department to create

11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. We're at about 8,700. Calgary's amount: I don't have a specific number for this member, Mr. Speaker, but we are acting there on a per capita basis. I can tell you that on a go-forward basis we have an RFP process that ensures that these items are not sole sourced. In fact, taxpayers are getting the best value for their dollar. Our cost in the entire province is around \$100,000 per door.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nonprofit organizations in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie and all over the province are feeling the pinch during these tough economic times. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. I'm sure that you're hearing similar concerns, Mr. Minister, during your regional dialogues as well. What are you doing to ensure the operation of these nonprofit organizations continues to be viable?

Mr. Blackett: Well, let me start off, Mr. Speaker, by saying thank you to the many Albertans who give their time, their skills, and their dollars on a regular basis. These are challenging times for everybody in the not-for-profit world, the private sector, and government alike, but we continue in our department to provide \$86 million in grants to these great organizations. We streamlined the programs to reduce duplication and ensure that the available dollars are going to the people that need them. As a ministry and part of our government we're making sure that those dollars go to the most vulnerable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. The ministry's website says that the community spirit program's goal is to "increase individual charitable giving." How will this help the nonprofits struggling to operate?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, in 2009 our government created the community spirit donor program, and that was \$20 million a year to encourage individuals to give more to our not-for-profit organizations. Over the last two years we've been able to give about \$39 million to 3,200 organizations that help them do the great jobs that they do.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. My final question to the same minister: what kind of tax credits are available to encourage continued growth of nonprofits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Blackett: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As it is on our website, we have the community spirit enhanced tax credit, which is unlike any other in the country. It is \$80 million, which allows those individuals who give an amount in excess of \$200 to get a 50 per cent tax receipt. That means 21 per cent comes from the province of Alberta; 29 per cent comes from the federal government. It's a chance to give for Alberta's charitable organizations and take that money from the federal government, which is Albertans' money coming back to work for them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 19 members were recognized today. There were 114 questions and responses. My feeling is that there are a few in the House that are feeling a little bit frisky today or aggressive today or enthusiastic today. We'll stop for 30 seconds, and then we'll continue with the Routine.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests before we continue?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you today and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two guests who attended the chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency rally on the steps of the Legislature today. The first one is my youngest brother, Don Mason, who lives in Spruce Grove. He's here today in support of efforts to provide a full range of treatment options for every Albertan with multiple sclerosis.

My other guest is Mark Power. Mark was recently diagnosed with MS and also attended the rally today in an effort to increase the awareness of CCSVI treatment as an option for citizens who have MS.

Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome both Don and Mark, who are seated in the public gallery, to the Legislature, and I would now ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly the South Asian Canadian Association members who are here from Calgary. This association has worked hard for the past two years to provide opportunities for educational, social, and recreational activities that promote the well-being of seniors, particularly in the communities of Pineridge, Monterey Park, Temple, and Whitehorn in Calgary. They've been tremendous assets within east Calgary. I'd like to ask them to rise as I announce their names: Mr. Harmohinder Plaha, Mr. Sam Sahota, Mr. Hardip Sidhu, Mr. Mohinder Singh, Mr. Harbhajan Kalkat, Mrs. Surinder Sidhu, and Mrs. Manjit K. Plaha. I'd ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, did you have an introduction?

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Really quickly, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three very special people that weren't here earlier: Leah Moore, a grade 8 student from Muriel Clayton school, and her parents, Melinda and David. If they could please rise and receive warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll return now to Members' Statements, and I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

International Day for Tolerance

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 the United Nations General Assembly declared November 16 as the International Day for Tolerance. The purpose of this is to educate, discuss, and bring awareness to issues relating to prejudice and tolerance.

Mr. Speaker, our province is committed to creating a society where people are all welcomed and included in all aspects of the province. The government of Alberta works with other organizations, the community, municipalities, and many other organizations to help implement programs and services to combat discrimination and support the goal of creating welcoming and inclusive communities and workplaces. The Alberta Human Rights Commission works to foster equality and reduce discrimination. It offers resources about rights and responsibilities related to human rights and helps Albertans resolve human rights complaints.

Our province is supporting our communities and taking concrete steps towards being more inclusive in a number of ways. Two examples are the Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination and the multiyear welcoming and inclusive communities partnership between the government, the Alberta Human Rights Commission, and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. CMARD aims to have municipalities follow key principles in order to build communities that are respectful, safe, and welcoming. I'm pleased to announce that 10 Alberta municipalities, most recently Wetaskiwin in September of 2010, have joined the Alberta network of CMARD. These initiatives have been made possible in Alberta through funding support from the government's human rights and multiculturalism education fund. These assets help Alberta organizations build inclusive workplaces and communities and promote equality for all people.

Mr. Speaker, as Alberta becomes ever richer in diversity, our government is committed to communities that are inclusive for all Albertans. Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately abandon plans to increase the role of private insurance in the [public] health care system, and instead, commit to strengthening the single-payer, public system.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise to present a petition that was delivered to me on the steps of the Legislature this morning – it's a biggie – by elected officials, parents, teachers, students, and Leah Moore, whom I introduced earlier, a determined grade 8 student who joins us in the House today as I present to this Assembly on her behalf a petition urging the government to build more schools in Airdrie. Leah is currently a student at Muriel Clayton middle school and has been personally affected by an overcrowded classroom caused by a critical shortage of schools in Airdrie. After learning that more students in Airdrie were facing the same problem, Leah took action. She collected signatures from across our community, and today I present that petition, which has been signed by over 3,300 Albertans. It's an honour and a privilege to call Leah Moore my constituent and friend, and on behalf of all students, parents, teachers, and citizens in Airdrie I thank her for her dedication.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to table five copies of a report entitled Alberta's International Strategy: Global Advocacy for Alberta. "Alberta will maintain a strong presence on the world stage, defend our export markets and promote our province and its products to a global market," our Premier said.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the Victims Services status report for 2009-2010. Last year more than \$9.2 million in grants were provided to programs and organizations that help victims of crime, and \$10.5 million was provided in financial benefits to eligible victims of crime. More than 1,800 victim advocates and board members contributed 177,000 hours of volunteer time in 2009-2010.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the following annual reports: the 2009 report from the College of Dental Technologists of Alberta and the 2009 report from the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta and, finally, the 2008-2009 report from the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta called Expert Caring: RNs Make a Difference. These groups all make a difference, and I thank them very much for their work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and on behalf of the council's chair, Marlin Styner, I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of our 2009-2010 annual report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter that I received from the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise regarding questions I had about ATB's financial risk achievement notes, which is another form of management bonuses.

My second tabling this afternoon is a letter from a constituent, Sheila Oliver, which I certainly have permission to table. Sheila Oliver is as concerned, of course, as a lot of people are about the government's plan to use Alberta Hospital Edmonton and their plans with the acute psychiatric care beds there.

My final tabling is also a letter. I have permission to table it in the House. It's from Mervin Prediger from Edmonton-Gold Bar. Mervin is also very concerned about the government's plans regarding the psychiatric care beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to table numerous letters brought to my attention by Mr. Trevor Alway, the president of the CAW local 4050. These are letters addressed to our hon. finance minister and the hon. Finance minister of Canada. It's calling on the "Minister of Finance for Alberta to support the initiatives laid out in the Canadian Labour Congress 'Retirement for Everyone' campaign which states that the doubling of CPP benefits would be financed through a modest and gradual increase in contributions over seven years." Interestingly, all of these letters were received from Alberta residents, and here are some of the locations: Acme, Airdrie, Alberta Beach, Beiseker, Bowden, Beaumont, Bocket, Calgary, Calmar, Canmore, Carstairs, Chestermere, Cochrane, Coleman, Cowley, Devon, Drumheller, Edmonton, Exshaw, Fort McMurray, Fort Saskatchewan, Hillcrest, Hinton, Langdon, Leduc, Lethbridge, Lundbreck, Millet, Morinville, Pincher Creek, Red Deer, Ryley, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Thorsby, and Wetaskiwin.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Calgary-Varsity, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two categories of tablings. I am tabling five copies of the May-June 2010 edition of English Express, a free literacy learning newspaper for adults that also includes informative information about various communities in Alberta and incorporates actual life experiences and items.

My second tabling is five copies of the English Express teaching notes for the same edition for evaluation of comprehension and retention and improved understanding of Alberta culture and life.

My third tabling is a letter from Patsy Price, who is very concerned about the cancellation of the English Express and explains that special issues and inserts are funded outside of the \$300,000 annual budget of this valuable literary resource.

The Speaker: You have more?

Mr. Chase: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, then, proceed quickly, please.

Mr. Chase: I will, Mr. Speaker. I indicated the categories. Thank you.

My first Bill 29 tabling is from Shaun Fluker, a law professor at the University of Calgary, who instructs the first-year law course in drafting legislation, asking to have Bill 29 withdrawn and stating that the bill would have received a failing grade in his class.

My second tabling is an article written by Shaun Fluker for the University of Calgary law blog noting the most significant changes to the existing framework that Bill 29 will make and that the bill will delegate most legal authority over protected areas to cabinet or the minister as the act will contain no rules on allowed or prohibited activities.

My next tabling is a letter from a psychology professor at The King's University College, Heather Looy, who lists a number of goals that should be paramount in the drafting of legislation to achieve sustainable land use, pleading that this act be redrafted and advising that many of her friends and colleagues are also disturbed about Bill 29.

My next tabling is a letter to the Premier from Catherine Shier of Edmonton, who was involved in the recent plan for parks process, indicating how far from the wishes of Albertans consulted Bill 29 is and asking that the legislation be withdrawn and that the public be consulted and listened to.

Next I would like to table a letter to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation from the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association, many of whom have worked with parks for years as volunteer stewards, who specify significant failures in the proposed legislation and make many suggestions for changes.

Next is a letter to the minister from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, CPAWS, who represent thousands of Albertans who prioritize the ecological health of Alberta's wilderness and protected areas while recognizing the desire to recreate and feel connected to wilderness areas, providing a thorough analysis of problems with Bill 29.

Finally, I have a sampling of the hundreds of e-mails, none of which are form letters, I keep receiving from citizens disturbed and upset about Bill 29. From Airdrie Aaron Holmes; from Bragg Creek Ken Lukowiak; from Calgary Eric Lloyd, Tony Daffern, Jennifer Weihmann, Reagan Brown, Alison Seekra, Garry Shepherd, Darlene Brown, Ian Berard, Jean Fisher, Kim Parkin, Bob Saunders, U of C professor Dr. Pat Brennan, Siobhan Williams, Dr. David Cebuliak in the U of C Faculty of Medicine, Bruno Steppuhn, Rick Young of the Alberta Hiking Association, representing thousands of hikers, walkers, et cetera, Andrea Battistel, Don Harms, Sara Jordan-McLachlan; from Canmore Rosemary Power, Lin Heidt, Joe Kadi, Tracy Jacobson, Rosemary Langshaw Power, Eric Langshaw Power, Colin Ferguson; from Cochrane Marina Krainer; from Edmonton Sheelah Griffith, Ted Nanninga, Ron Ramsey, Deborah Hobbs, Margaret Fisher, M. Joyce, Peter Chapman, Linda Rosenstroem Chang, Jason Melnychuk, Eva Radford, Jamie Thompson, Niobe Thompson; from Red Deer Jean M. Kline; from Sherwood Park Harold Jacobsen; from Stony Plain Katelyn Kuzio; from Golden, B.C., Maryann Emery and Rob Wilson; from Montreal, Quebec, Danette MacKay; from Nimes, Quebec, Marianne Jarras; from Toronto, Ontario, Jay Macpherson; from Ottawa, Ontario, Laine Johnson; and from Shorewood, Wisconsin, Heather Henrickson.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following on the issue identified by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the results of a public opinion poll by the Environics Research Group taken in October. The poll asked several questions about Canada's pension system and found overwhelming support for expanding CPP benefits.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a point of order to deal with this afternoon. The hon. Deputy Premier.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a point of order on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the Leader of the Official Opposition, with the citation of Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) and *Beauchesne's* 489. In the run-up to his question to the Premier this afternoon he clearly stated the phrase: misleading the public. The hon. member well knows that the Premier of this province did not mislead the public, nor does he mislead this House, and that under *Beauchesne's* 489 the phrase is clearly unparliamentary and out of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader on this point.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I certainly heard something said.

The Speaker: I can help. Would you like me to tell you the phrase?

Ms Blakeman: I believe I heard the word, so thank you very much.

The Speaker: Okay. You've heard them, then. You don't need them. [interjections]

Ms Blakeman: Don't get me in trouble here.

I've looked at the questions. The difficulty that's created here is that there's a specific term that is being used in long-term care and that has a very specific, recognized designation to it. Long-term care is a level of care, Mr. Speaker. It includes a copayment from the individual for room and board and a government copayment for medical care. It includes a designation of staffing ratios. It includes a number of very specific criteria that are tied to that phrase, and it is recognized in legislation. Long-term care means something very particular. That was the phrase that the Leader of the Official Opposition questioned the minister on.

3:00

What we're getting back from the Premier is that he is using, replacing, a different terminology like supportive living, which does not get people out of hospital. It is a higher level of functioning. It has different accommodation. It has a different payment scheme with it. It does not include a government copayment. It has different staffing ratios with it.

I knew there was a point of order coming. I'm sorry; I didn't look at *Beauchesne*, but thank you for the citation. I looked under the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 503, chapter 11, on questions, detailing the criteria for it. We certainly satisfied the urgency, the best possible behaviour. We didn't yell. We didn't throw things. But we were trying to seek information. There was urgency for it. It was under the administrative ability of the person who answered the question. And it was brief; we didn't exceed the time limit.

Now, misleading the public: is that specifically listed in *Beauchesne* as a prohibited phrase? Indeed it is, Mr. Speaker. The Speaker himself is very kind in supplying us before every session with a long list of phrases which have and then later have not been ruled by various Speakers as prohibited language and now allowable language. So although it does appear in 489 under prohibited language, it appears in other lists as acceptable language. I would say that the leader of the Official Opposition should have said "sleight of hand" or "a shell game" or "a switch" or "knowingly replacing one term for another."

Therefore, on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition I will withdraw his statement of misleading the public. He should have used other terminology. My apologies to the Premier.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. That settles that matter.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

[Adjourned debate November 2: Mr. Chase]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you have a full 15 to go, I believe.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, is the prescription or the solution, we need to look at the problems that preceded this prescription and this solution.

It's important to go back to approximately 1993, when there were very severe cuts taking place not only in health care but also in education, postsecondary as well as public education. Among the most detrimental effects of the cuts that led to Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, being proffered as a solution was the closure of three hospitals in Calgary. Half our hospitals were gone, and with them 1,500 beds. This compromise occurred in the late 1990s although the instigation of this solution happened much earlier.

Now, in concert with the closing of three of our hospitals, half our Calgary hospitals, the then minister of advanced education also closed down a number of medical training seats at universities throughout Alberta. Nurses were driven out of the province to seek employment. Those who remained were frequently hired only to be fired to be rehired. A number of them basically said, "I can't take this anymore," and went down to the States, where their qualifications were recognized.

Mr. Speaker, what happened was that, basically, our existing health system, particularly in Calgary, was compromised tremendously. The number of specialists who left from what remained – and that was at that point the Foothills, the Peter Lougheed, and the Rockyview, the only hospitals that remained in function along with the much smaller Children's hospital – caused a terrific drain on the individuals who could perform the necessary medical support.

Another function, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, is supposedly attempting to correct is the fact that the red alerts, the burgundy alerts, occurred particularly in Calgary – and I'll move to Edmonton as well – because the distances to emergency centres were increased significantly because the options were reduced. In other words, ambulances, paramedics had to respond and deliver to considerably longer distances, putting patients at risk.

Mr. Speaker, along with the paramedic problem it seemed that one thing occurred on top of another. More recently the former minister of health attempted to standardize ambulance services across the province. The problem that was run into was that – again I'm using the Calgary example – in the case of Calgary the city of Calgary had budgeted to continue the responsibility of maintaining the ambulance systems. However, in other centres such as Medicine Hat and Lethbridge, and specifically in Lethbridge, where paramedics and firemen were one and the same and operated out of the same facility, there was confusion about dispatch and designation.

Basically, Mr. Speaker, since 1993 health care has been in an uproar. In Edmonton in 1993, as opposed to in Calgary, we had a very strong, in fact the strongest in the province's history, Liberal representation. Not to give credit completely to the Liberals, there was also a significant number of New Democratic Party members representing the city of Edmonton. The result of that championship of universal health care was that no hospitals in Edmonton were closed at that time, unlike the circumstance that occurred in Calgary, where with the exception of Gary Dickson waving the flag on behalf of Calgarians, other sitting MLAs basically allowed the closures to occur.

One of the largest monuments to lack of sustainability or long-term thinking was the blowing up of the General hospital, which contained wings that were newer than those currently existing in Foothills.

So this problem that Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, is attempting to fix has its origins going back a long time. What the government is attempting to do at this time is provide some sort of sustainability to the health care system. The minister of health has indicated that providing secure funding for five years for health will provide the

sort of foundation, the security for moving forward and improving the health care delivery which Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, purports to achieve.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as a teacher I've heard of these five-year promises; for example, the agreement with the Alberta Teachers' Association that wages would be indexed to the weekly earnings and that the funding would continue to occur, yet the government clawed back \$93 million in educational funding. Basically, until they were threatened with . . .

An Hon. Member: What? Check your facts.

Mr. Chase: Was it \$83 million? The correct figure I'm willing to hear, Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: About \$53 million.

Mr. Chase: Oh, \$53 million. And where did the other \$36 million come from?

3:10

The Speaker: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Through the chair. I do appreciate the Minister of Education indicating that a significant clawback of funding occurred from numerous school boards as well as lack of funding. This was one of the problems with the medical system. Given the example of what happened and the failure to follow through with the educational system, how can they have the trust that similar promises will be carried out over the five-year period?

Mr. Speaker, what we've seen very recently is Dr. Paul Parks putting out, basically, an emergency cry. He put it out in 2008, but in 2010 he released the personal horror stories of individuals who had not received timely treatment in the emergency departments in hospitals throughout this province.

As a former Alberta chair of Friends of Medicare that believes in universally funded, publicly funded health care – then that takes it back further. Not only publicly funded, but a key point is: publicly delivered and publicly administered. Mr. Speaker, Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, does not guarantee that health services will be publicly delivered.

We have been given promises of funding for five years, but we have seen, for example, the situation where the Grace hospital was bought out by a private company, HRC, in Calgary and was purported to have delivered more efficient hip and knee surgeries, not of the overnight-stay variety. Any complications, of course, came back into our health system. But somehow that health delivery that was touted as being top-notch was very dramatically cancelled, and Albertans do not know how much, somewhere between \$4 million or \$5 million, was involved in that out-of-court settlement. If that's part of the solution that Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, is proposing, then we're no farther along than we were before in terms of pursuing the improvement of the public delivery and efficiency of delivery of health care in Alberta.

The beds business, Mr. Speaker, I refer to as musical beds. When the hon. minister of health talks about eight beds here and 12 beds there and future beds here and so on, what we need is the staffing for those beds. I'm very proud of the service the Children's hospital, that is now located in Calgary-Varsity, provides, but that hospital was built with only 12 beds more than its predecessor had when the population of Calgary was a third of what it is. The idea is to service individuals and get them out of hospital as quickly as possible – and I appreciate that – but, especially with vulnerable children, waiting

times of eight hours and more because of a lack of service providers and a lack of overnight bed stays is a concern.

This musical beds, Mr. Speaker. As I began, prior to the closure of the Grace, of the Holy Cross, of the General we had 1,500 more beds in Calgary. There was a priority placed on long-term care beds as opposed to assisted living beds. The former Auditor General, Fred Dunn, in 2005 did a study in terms of the delivery of long-term care in this province, and he found it woefully short. He raised the alarm. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, whom I am extremely grateful was included, toured the province. They heard the long-term care horror stories.

Mr. Speaker, it's 2010. We realize that seniors deserve better care; they deserve publicly funded and publicly supported care as opposed to being nicked and dined for every Depend, for every tube of toothpaste, for every wheeling down to the cafeteria. And if they want the luxury of more than one bath a week in assisted living, that doesn't have the professional support that long-term care has, they're expected to pay for that privilege of having a bath.

The long-term care facilities are trying their best, but when the term "bed blockers" is used to describe seniors who, out of no will of their own, are forced to take up space in acute-care beds because there's no provision for them in long-term care, then we need a solution, which I have not seen provided in Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act.

Since the centralization, since the development of the superboard, that has very few medical professionals on its advisory board, health care has been in a terrible flux within this province. Mr. Speaker, back in 2005, for example, Premier Klein promised a half a billion dollars, \$500 million, for the extension of the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary. He promised similar funding for cancer centres in Edmonton. In 2010 with the Alberta Health Act, Bill 17, we don't have a solution for those individuals who are trying to seek treatment for cancer in a timely manner.

With regard to Bill 17, it does not resolve the 75 vice-presidents of health that are currently in the top echelons. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar under this section.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was just getting to the point in his speech regarding 75 vice-presidents, I believe the hon. member indicated. In the health charter that's proposed in Bill 17, would the hon. member consider supporting the bill if there was a mechanism in that health charter that mandated chief executive officers of, for instance, the Alberta Health Services corporation and all senior management to post their expenses online as an initiative to try to rein in some of this excess spending that seems to be apparent at Alberta Health Services? How do you feel about that?

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you very much, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Something that I hope we're all trying to achieve and strive for in every piece of legislation we put forward is transparency and accountability. We have seen the Jack Davis settlements: on top of millions of dollars in bonus he receives \$22,000 a month for the rest of his life. These excesses, unfortunately, are still there in terms of the number of vice-presidents, in terms of the bonuses for meeting targets, Mr. Speaker, targets that keep being lowered. So it's now considerably easier, for example, for Dr. Stephen Duckett to meet his emergency delivery times because they've been reduced.

Mr. Speaker, what we need is a surety. We need sustainability. I'm not saying to throw money at it, because the government threw \$1.3 billion at the superboard to bail it out of its deficit as part of its reorganization. It's not the money; it's stability, and it's efficiency. In order to have that efficiency, we have to have medical representation on the advisory councils as part of the superboard. Doctors know their business. Economists can help, but medicine has to be the primary concern.

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have another question for the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. It relates again to what perhaps should be in the health charter as described in Bill 17. Certainly, in the past the President of the Treasury Board has taken this side of the House's advice and posted online the complete blue books of the Legislative Assembly. It's helpful to taxpayers if they are interested in tracking government spending. Would the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity like to see Alberta Health Services follow the Alberta government's lead and commit to reporting all grants, expenses, contracts, and payments in the government blue books considering that the budget is in excess of or close to \$9.8 billion in the last fiscal year?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a member of Public Accounts and as deputy chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy accountability and transparency are absolutely essential. The government cannot say that they're spending 40 per cent of our legislative allowances on health care and then not account for where those dollars are being spent.

Now, a website is one way of accounting. Audits are another form of accounting on a regular basis, whether it's our current AG, Merwan Saher, or our former AG, Fred Dunn, both men for whom I have tremendous respect. But the accounting processes have not been resolved, Mr. Speaker. It's not a matter, as they say, of throwing money at the problem; it's a matter of accounting for the money that is being invested in health care. Albertans deserve the best.

The Speaker: Others under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and join debate in second reading of Bill 17, Alberta Health Act. This is certainly an interesting proposed piece of legislation but not, unfortunately, one that I can be particularly supportive of. In general I, certainly, and the NDP caucus see this bill in many ways as a big distraction. It's as though it's been crafted by a government which is living in a bubble somewhere thinking: "You know, we have some issues in health care, so we're going to rewrite some legislation and create this framework, for what we don't know exactly but for something, because that's what Albertans are calling for. That's what they're reaching out to government for. That's what they said to us in hearings, that we need more legislation; we need another restatement of our framework." Yet I really think that that's not what Albertans have asked for. I do know at least some of the people that the government met with, although the process for consulting was nowhere nearly as transparent as we would have

liked. Nonetheless, I'm pretty sure that this is not what they asked for.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Instead, what we have here is a bill which seems to me, too, is essentially divided into two parts. What we're dealing with today, in this session, is part 1 of a two-part process. Part 1 here is the sort of, for the most part, rather meaningless, empty assurance of the government's so-called commitment to health care, that really has no impact on the crises we are facing on the floors of our hospitals in our communities today.

That's what part 1 is. It's an attempt on the part of this government to assure Albertans that, really, the train has not gone off the rails. It's a somewhat hapless attempt, I would suggest, but I think that's what really generated this particular piece of legislation. The difficulty with it, of course, is that it is part 1 of a two-part process. The second part of the process involves eliminating and replacing the current legislative regime which governs the provision of health care in our province. That is the point at which the shoe will drop, as it were, where Albertans will be once again very disturbed to discover that the government is playing with yet more experimentation with their cherished health care system.

Of course, I also expect that we can rest assured that we will not see part 2 until after the next election because the government has a tendency as it gets closer and closer to an election to become much more soft around the edges and lots more sort of stuffed-animal looking and friendly and that everybody can kind of trust them.

Then we get through an election, and things happen. The former health minister is appointed, and he runs around saying things, and I quote: I expect that sooner or later other people are going to have to pay the costs of health care; it won't all be publicly funded. That's the kind of thing that we know is being considered by this government. Of course, even in Alberta the enthusiasm with which that particular minister went about his job – you know, eliminating the regional health boards, threatening the need for more private funding of health care – created a backlash, so of course he had to be removed. We were then presented with the softer, fuzzier version of the Tories and their pre-election self. Ultimately, what we are left with right now, then, is part 1, which I would simply suggest is the preparation for part 2, which we won't see until after the next election.

In this particular act what do we have? Well, we have a preamble that does not commit to maintaining or growing publicly delivered health care services. We have a preamble that commits in theory to the principles of the Canada Health Act although the fact of the matter is that most of those principles are protected through current pieces of legislation, which this particular piece of legislation threatens to displace at some point in the future. We have a charter, which sounds lovely – I mean, we all like charters – except that, you know, it has no legal force and effect. Again, it's just part of this attempt on the part of the government to assuage fears on the part of Albertans that they really are intentionally destroying our public health care system.

You know, it's no big surprise that Albertans would think that because if you look at how our public health system is being managed right now, it's really hard to think that anybody intended the level of chaos that we see right now. It's really hard not to expect, or suspect anyway, that part of the chaos is being allowed to occur in order to build what they hope will be a public appetite for more private services, privately funded as well as privately delivered. I don't think that Albertans will fall for that, but you have to wonder how it is that we've managed to get ourselves into such a

poorly, poorly managed situation within our health care system. It just can't be something that anyone actually planned or intended. It is just too bad for that.

As well, of course, this act talks about having a health care advocate. Well, you know, I just don't know that there is anybody out there begging this government to replicate the dysfunctional model that we see demonstrated day in, day out through reliance on the children's advocate or the utilities advocate, these advocates who are forced to report through the minister about who they are supposed to be reporting, which is the most ridiculously conflicted process. You simply can't expect the person in that role to be able to truly provide transparent accountability or advocacy on the part of Albertans with respect to how that service is provided.

3:30

It's the creation of another little office that the government can put out a few press releases on because, you know, every now and then they run short of the ribbon that they use for all their various announcements for buildings which never actually materialize. If they need something else to announce, well, they can announce that the advocate has done something, but of course that's only after the advocate has consulted fully with the Public Affairs Bureau and the minister's office and yada, yada, yada. Anyway, it's all about creating a certain impression. It's truly not about providing a transparent or meaningful mechanism for Albertans to assert their right to an affordable, high-quality system of public health care.

In addition, the new act will give, as does almost every piece of legislation that this government brings into this House, additional regulation-making authority to the minister. I suspect that if the government keeps up this way, they will just stop sitting altogether. We'll have an election. Oh, I guess they'll have to bring in the budget. Well, we'll wait and see when exactly it is they give themselves the ability to budget through regulation. That probably is an E plus one manoeuvre for next term. Nonetheless, until then we're going to see ourselves having less and less need to come in here as they devolve more and more authority to their cabinet table. That's what's happening again in the regulations in this act.

One example, of course, is that they are giving themselves more authority to play around with the role of the professional colleges that govern the staff who provide health care within our system. I'm a little nervous of this because I know that sometimes the only barrier to drastic cost-cutting efforts within our health care system will be the professional code of ethics of the health care professionals who work within that system. Where a nurse, for instance, is told that she should be able to provide medication to and take blood from 50 patients, there is a point at which she can say: "No. You know, I really can't. My professional code of ethics prohibits me from attempting to do this." The same kind of thing exists with doctors, and it exists with many other professionals within our health care system. So I get a little worried when the government expands its ability to play around with the colleges' role in that regard and to do it all behind closed doors, along with everything else that they do.

There are a few things that we should be worried about, but again, as I say, I think most of this becomes relevant once we see part 2 of this little communications parade here, which I suspect we will not see until after the next election.

What is it that the government is distracting Albertans from? Well, we've had a lot of conversation about that, but ever so briefly, you know, we have emergency room wait times which are just growing, growing, growing every day, and it seems as though the government is completely incapable of addressing the problem. We have people, as a result, dying and suffering in our emergency rooms, the place where you should expect the most comprehensive

care, but that's not happening in our emergency rooms. We have wait times for surgery across all types of surgery. We have gross discrepancies and disparities within our regional provision of health care. We have people in rural areas of the province who have to drive three hours one way once a week to get dialysis because they can't get it in their own communities.

We have, as we talked about today in the House, a shocking and shameful failure to provide anything bordering on comprehensive mental health treatment to the 1 in 5 Albertans who will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their life. A huge portion of the population will suffer from a mental illness, yet we have wait times in every aspect of providing treatment for that concern. We have done nothing to deal with it, and we have fallen well behind the rest of the country in that regard. This government has done nothing about it even though they've known about it for decades.

Then, of course, we have the problem with long-term care and continuing care for our aging seniors population. We had discussion about that again today, and the government steadfastly holds on to its little message box mantra: let's just talk about continuing care, and hopefully no one will notice that we're actually talking about putting people in places that don't actually have health care professionals around, where they don't actually get anything bordering on the kind of care that they need, so we'll just use that cute language, continuing care, and stop telling Albertans that we're not really going to build any more beds that have nurses and LPNs attached to them to give them the kind of medical treatment they require in order to leave the acute-care beds that they are currently occupying. That's a problem that's been going on for a long time.

Of course, again, in their standard process, their standard way of operating, leading up to the last election the government promised to build 600, 800 – I can't remember which – new long-term care beds, and immediately after the election they, quote, reprofiled them and decided to make them into something else. They never built those beds, tried to close some other ones – I think the net situation that we're in right now is a slight decrease from where we were after the last election – and instead want to replace them with privately run multistar hotel type scenarios, where if you need someone to help you to get to where you might try having a meal, you'll need to pay extra. This is the kind of process that the government envisions for our growing seniors population, and this will have profound impacts on our health care system. This is why the government wants to move away from clearly delineating what is health care and what is not and what is publicly funded and what is not, because they think we need to make sure that citizens pay more for their health care out of pocket.

The NDP last fall did do a tour on health care. We spoke to Albertans across the province, and we created a report as a result. I won't get a chance to speak about what our recommendations were in great detail because I see I have about 45 seconds left within which to speak. We spoke to Albertans across the province, and as a result of that we came up with a number of recommendations that would actually see significant improvements to our health care system, some of which could actually have been addressed through legislation but clearly are not in this case. It's really hard to go through them all at this point, but let me just say that were one to go to our website and look for that report, you would see a report that consists of roughly 30 recommendations to substantively improve our public health care system.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you want to speak on the bill?

Mr. MacDonald: I would like to ask the hon. member a question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, under 29(2)(a), of course. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's speech regarding Bill 17. Certainly, I was very interested to get more details on her opinion on why this bill is a deflection or a diversion from the real issues around health care, particularly with emergency room wait times. We all know that it seems to be getting worse and worse. The government doesn't seem to be able to solve that problem along with many other problems that they themselves have created through their policies and their lack of management and direction towards our public health care system. Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member: given that the Norwood Glenrose long-term care facility, that was supposedly to be up and running and operated by Alberta Health Services, has been on hold – this is a \$68 million facility; it was originally scheduled for between the years 2008 and 2010, as the hon. member correctly mentioned earlier – does the hon. member think that if this facility was built like it was supposed to be built, we would not be facing the emergency room crisis that we're currently facing at this very moment?

3:40

Ms. Notley: Well, I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for asking that question because I think, you know, he certainly identifies one of several critical reasons why we have this gross example of mismanagement with respect to our ER wait times and acute-care bed shortages right now. There's no question that, absolutely, what we see right now is that there is a ridiculous number of seniors who are in our acute-care hospitals receiving treatment because they cannot get the treatment that they require in other parts of the community.

You know, every time we raise the issue of continuing care versus long-term care, the Premier falls back on this empty mantra that somehow we're begging for people to be institutionalized, which I actually think is quite insulting. When I've talked to seniors about how that's the Premier's response to the call for long-term care beds, they get very, very angry. They talk about how while they're sitting in their apartment waiting for their home-care nurse, who they only get to see once a week – and they're paying extra for home care to come in there – they can't move around their apartment; they often aren't able to eat adequately; they're often spending hours, days, you know, suffering from incontinence. All these things are happening, and all these things contribute to their repeated trips to the hospital, the circle of trips to the hospital, because they don't have the treatment that they need to keep them out of the hospital.

Why does that happen? Because there are no beds with higher levels of treatment available to them. Why are there no beds? Because the government promised them and then broke their promise and continues to break their promise and, instead, is trying to build hotel rooms where people will buy extra care, and many people simply can't afford that. Certainly, our current seniors cannot afford that.

Instead, they go back to places where they don't have adequate medical care, and they get sick again, and they go back into the hospital, and they take up a bed in an acute-care hospital trying to recover from the illness that arose from the lack of care and the neglect that they suffered as a result of this government's mismanagement of seniors' health care, that has been going on systemically for years and is only going to get worse. The government's own figures show that it's going to get worse because our seniors population is booming, and they have made no plans to increase our home care, to increase long-term care and extended care settings, where people get the medical treatment they require.

Back to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, we would have far fewer problems if the government had kept any of its many promises to provide the care that our seniors need, but since they did not keep those promises, we have the crisis.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on the bill.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and join debate on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, at second reading. I want to acknowledge the contributions of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to the debate. I thought that that was very well argued, and I didn't see anything in there that I would argue too strenuously with.

I do want to try and walk a bit of a fine line here as we debate Bill 17 because out in the real world, Mr. Speaker, one of the realities is that the debate over health care has become so polarized that we're not getting anywhere with this. I think a bill like Bill 17 is one of the results that you see of the reality of the polarized debate on health care. On the one side you have the people who say that the system is broken and it's got to be, you know, reformed, changed, lock, stock, and barrel: throw the baby out with the bathwater, privatize this, change that, and so on and so forth. On the other side you have the people who cleave to the bosom of the status quo. The people of Alberta know that neither approach is going to solve the problems that we face in health care in this province or, frankly, in most of the world. So we can't just stick with same old same old, but we have to stick with the parts of same old same old that work. When we look at the administration of same old same old, that's where we see that there are some real, real problems.

Now, the minister of health, in introducing the bill at second reading, made a comment – and I'm quoting from *Hansard* of November 2 – that “Albertans need to trust their health system and have confidence in how the health system is governed and administered.” So I'll give the minister some marks for that. He at least recognizes the crisis of confidence that exists in this province around the administration of our public health care system. You go out, you talk to most Albertans, and they'll tell you that you can still get excellent care in our acute-care system or in our primary care system if you can just find the magic password, the magic key that actually gets you access to the system.

What we've been talking about primarily in question period since we came back into the House this fall has been the access problem, I think most acutely demonstrated in the ERs of this province right now. But that's a symptom, Mr. Speaker, of what's going on and what's ailing the health system throughout. The access problem is a failure of administration. It's a failure of the bureaucracy around health care in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I went looking for that very famous medical phrase that is a cornerstone of medical ethics, that all medical students are taught in medical school, that is a fundamental principle for emergency medical services in this province, in this country, around the world. It is: first, do no harm. First, do no harm. I was surprised to find out another way to state that. I think that normally we who are not doctors, when we hear that phrase spoken, think that what that means to a medical doctor is: first, don't do anything that's going to make the situation worse. But it actually goes a little deeper than that.

Another way to state it is that given an existing problem, it might be better not to do something or even to do nothing than to risk causing more harm than good. I sort of go: “Whoa. Okay. What does that mean, really?” Well, you think about it, give it a few seconds, and you realize that there is logic in that. The patient

presents, and, you know, this is not the patient presenting in the waiting room at ER at the Rockyview and you promising to see him within the next 24 hours or so. This is when the patient has gotten in front of at least a triage nurse, hopefully a doctor, and there's been some attempt at medical diagnosis here. What it's really saying is that if you don't know for sure what's wrong here but you're pretty sure that there may be something more wrong than what is obvious from the outward symptoms, then maybe you just need to hang on for a bit and not do anything until you can better diagnose the situation.

I think that works in the practice of medicine as it relates from the doctor to the patient, from the medical professional to the patient. I don't think that it should have any place in the administration of health care. When I look at a bill like Bill 17, I'm afraid that this is what we're being given. Well, okay; it might be better to do nothing than risk causing more harm than good. It might be better to do nothing than to do something, because this bill does nothing, absolutely nothing. Well, I won't say “absolutely nothing.” It does a couple of things. It's clear that there was some consultation with Albertans by the governing party, not just by the third party, and congratulations to both of them for doing that. Albertans were consulted, and there's always some merit to that.

Ms Notley: The fourth party.

Mr. Taylor: Sorry. The fourth party. The member of the fourth party corrected me, which is good.

Guiding principles can serve a function over the long term – there's no question about that – but this bill fails to address any of the imminent issues with Alberta's health care system. However, I'm willing to grant that it may provide a stepping stone to creating a more holistic approach to health care in the long-term future. Unfortunately, that doesn't do anything for the hundreds of people who are stuck today in the waiting room at the Rockyview and the Royal Alex and all the other hospitals of this province that have emergency rooms. They need help now.

3:50

This bill may have a long-term function and a long-term purpose, and that purpose and function may be positive, but it doesn't do anything to deal with the situation as we face it now. Establishing a health charter: well, maybe that's something that Albertans want. Certainly, the report Putting People First argues that they really do want that, that they really heard that.

I know that the fourth party, when they went out and did their consultations, didn't hear from anybody saying: hey, give me a health charter, and I'll be a happy Albertan. They heard, like I hear when I door-knock, like I hear when I talk to constituents, like I hear when I talk to Albertans who are concerned about health care: “I want a family doctor; I can't find one. I want to be able to get timely treatment when I'm sick or when I think I might be sick. I don't want to have to wait for a day or more in emergency to be seen by somebody. If I'm having psychiatric, mental problems, I want to be assured that they will be addressed. If I'm old, I'm sick, and I need long-term care with appropriate medical components to that, I want to know that I can get that. I want to know that my parents can get that. I don't care how fancy the hotel is. I don't want them in a hotel when they need medical care. I want them to be able to get what they need and have it covered by the Canada Health Act.” I think those are fair things to ask.

Okay. Let's assume that the people of Alberta really do want a health charter. You know, frankly, the health charter as it's spelled out in Putting People First is not earth-shattering, but I suppose it

ain't bad for a health charter. But we don't get a health charter out of Bill 17. What we get is a commitment that if Bill 17 passes, the minister will have to go out there and do some more consultations and come up with one. I would have much preferred to see a health charter as part and parcel of this bill. If the health charter is as important as this bill and the public hearings, the public consultations that led to this bill purport to argue that it is, I think it should be in the legislation. I think it should be part of legislation. The big charter in this country, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is even beyond legislation. It's constitutional. It is the law to which all other laws must abide and respond and obey. That's good, I guess.

But this charter: I mean, it doesn't exist yet. I'm not really sure how it's going to be brought in or when. There doesn't seem to be any particular deadline to say: we must have a charter by this time. The charter has next to no authority. The health advocate, which is created to ensure that the charter is followed, has the power to make recommendations, has the power to report issues if the health advocate wants to or if the minister asks, and if the minister wants to, the minister can take action or not. I think that to be an effective position, the advocate needs the ability and the requirement to take some action. I understand that Albertans don't want to have to go to court every time they've got a problem with the medical system — that's good — but they need a more concrete, more definitive way of seeing that their complaints are dealt with and dealt with effectively and dealt with in a timely manner.

I think the desire to define the role of those few health authorities we have left is also valuable. For instance, with Alberta Health Services and the Health Quality Council of Alberta kind of tussling right now, trying to find their respective roles and responsibilities after the significant overhaul of the health care system, the ability to inject some clarity would be helpful. But I think this, too, is vaguely worded within the bill, and it doesn't ensure that clarity and co-ordination will be provided. A guaranteed review in order to clarify roles and responsibilities in the health care system would certainly provide more certainty and direction to a system that is on the edge of faltering.

That's what we really come back to, Mr. Speaker, the notion that this health care system of ours, of which most Albertans, most Canadians — I won't say all — are justifiably proud, is in rough shape these days, and the crisis in ER is the most outward, most visible symptom of that. The crisis in ER is caused by an incredibly bad case of constipation in the system. You have beds blocked by seniors who need long-term care, not continuing care but long-term care, and they can't find it. You know, if you move them out of the hospital into a continuing care arrangement, into an assisted living arrangement, they're just going to be back in the hospital in a few weeks or a few days because they're still sick, and they'll be tying up beds again. You've got beds in ER tied up by homeless people, by people with mental health issues, by people with all sorts of issues that our society, our province is not sufficiently addressing.

We have people accessing our health care system, whether that's our emergency rooms in our acute-care system or our primary care networks or whatever they can find, a walk-in clinic in the middle of the night, who are accessing our health care system more than average because of poverty issues, because they didn't have enough to eat as children, because of issues related to their socioeconomic condition that simply render them less healthy than people who are doing better, and this bill in its current form doesn't really seem to address any of that.

I don't know if the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has got it absolutely right or not that this is part 1 of a two-part conspiracy. I don't know whether this is conspiracy or incompetence or a little bit of both or a milder version of either. Every time this government

tries to do something, no matter how ill-informed or ill-advised that may be, to reform the health care system in this province, I'm not sure that it necessarily follows that they're trying to set us up for privatization.

I think that when we merged the nine health boards and the Cancer Board and AADAC into the superboard, that looks a lot more like something that Moscow would have come up with in the '60s or '70s under Khrushchev or Brezhnev than any kind of setup to privatize the system, quite frankly. It's central planning, central control, bureaucratic control taking the authority of doctors and nurses to make the right kind of front-line judgment calls, because they're there and can see what's going on, away from them and investing it in some bureaucrat parked who knows where. It might as well be on Mars or 40,000 feet over Red Deer for all it matters because they're that remote from the doctor-patient relationship.

I think this bill on the face of it isn't going to do any harm if we pass it. I don't think it's going to do any good either. I don't think that it necessarily sets us up for a part 2 that's going to be any more conclusive than part 1 was because I don't see a lot of conclusiveness. Oh, I see some decisive action from time to time. Certainly, the creation of the Alberta health superboard was decisive action. It was one of the most boneheaded decisions I have ever seen in my life, but it was decisive action.

This bill doesn't do anything. I don't know, as we get into committee, whether we're going to be able to amend this bill, propose amendments that will in some way add some meat to the bones of this bill, in some way bring it down to a point where it intersects with where people live their lives, but I hope we can do something about that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, 29(2)(a)? Five minutes.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has been a champion in this Assembly for pharmaceutical treatment, particularly in the case of rare forms of cancer. We know that the rapidly rising costs of pharmaceuticals are one of the biggest concerns faced in this province.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there has been a recent case of a woman in Edmonton who, again, has a rare form of cancer and whose pharmaceuticals and treatments are not covered by the Alberta health plan. My question to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie would be if he has thoughts about drug coverage and the possibility of either a national pharmacare program or at least a regional Saskatchewan-B.C.-Alberta pharmaceutical program that could potentially buy in bulk and reduce drug costs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Varsity for that question. I think it's a good one. Yeah, Member, I can't keep running to the health minister asking for coverage of this drug and that drug and the next drug for rare forms of cancer when those drugs are very expensive and expect that we're actually making the system better with each one of these one-offs.

4:00

I'll give the nod to Bill 17 for trying to take, at least in broad principle and broad theory, a holistic approach to health care reform and health care delivery in this province. We do need to take a holistic approach to it, and a national pharmacare program, ideally, or certainly at minimum a regional pharmacare program is, I think, a fundamental part of that. I absolutely support that idea. National

would be better, in my view, than regional simply because if there are savings to be had by buying in bulk on behalf of four provinces, then there are greater savings to be had by buying in bulk on behalf of 10 provinces and three territories. It's the old volume discount approach that many furniture dealers have yelled at us about over the radio time after time after time in commercials. It's a good idea. It's an essential idea.

We know that the cost of pharmaceuticals is one of the fastest, if not the fastest, drivers of health care cost escalation. In part, what we're seeing happen here is that health care and our ability to diagnose and treat very complex conditions with very sophisticated medicine and very sophisticated treatments of various sorts has massively outpaced what the architects of public health care in this country envisioned 50, 60 years ago when they came up with the concept. Tommy Douglas did not know when he came up with the idea for medicare that it would ever be possible to perform heart transplants. He did not know that there would be drugs like Abilify and the one that was in the news today – I forget the name of it – that would perform the miracles that they seem to perform in some cases yet would be as costly as they are.

Yes, I come back to this notion that we can't just keep going back with one-offs and saying: "Okay. Now we need to improve this drug. Now we need to absorb the costs of that drug." We have to take a more holistic approach to it. It makes sense to team up with the other provinces and territories and try to do this on a national basis, I think.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Again, through the Speaker, I'm wondering if the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie would support the notion that if a particular health service delivery, for example gastroparesis, that is currently not treatable in Alberta – should Alberta pay the bill if that treatment could be delivered in another province of Canada? Failing that, if our system lacks the expertise, do you think that the cost of treatment should be provided for, say, travelling down to the Mayo Clinic, if that's what it takes? Obviously, first, I'd like to see the expertise encouraged through both secondary training and the hiring of physicians in Alberta. Failing that, would he consider accounting for patients' services? [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise for my first occasion on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, an important act, to be sure, one that emphasizes a key element that Albertans have come to expect and pay for in our current province, in our country, and one with a long and proud tradition in Canada, unique perhaps in North America in its basic principles, the five principles that many people still champion and some across the floor are less sure about but that we on this side of the House continue to endorse and support: comprehensiveness, universality, public administration, portability, and accessibility. These five principles are really so ingrained in the Canadian ethic that all attempts to try to subvert these and undermine the principles of public funding and public delivery have failed in Alberta, and this particular government has tried on numerous occasions to do so to their shame and to their failure.

This legislation I think does in a practical way bring together some loose and somewhat connected health acts, which is perhaps helpful

from an administrative point of view. But I think most Albertans are wondering: why now, and how is this going to really improve the most fundamental questions around access and quality and cost-effective spending? Alberta is renowned in the country for spending more money per capita than any other jurisdiction. "What are we getting for it?" I guess people are asking. How is it that we can spend so much money and get so little in terms of improved wait times, in terms of the quality that both professionals can be proud of and patients can appreciate? There's a reassurance that the dollars spent are actually maximizing the opportunities on investment both in terms of prevention of conditions and education around some of the issues that really are preventable.

Much of the illness in our society is preventable. In terms of treatment are we getting the best bang for the buck? In terms of evidence-based treatment programs and in terms of long-term care and rehabilitation how do our investments here in these key areas, including palliative care as the end point in life, compare to others, the best in the world? Are we actually looking at the best in the world and learning from the best in the world as opposed to simply experimenting in our health care system and, in the case of the last health minister, the current Energy minister, blowing up the old system and starting with a totally new experiment that pushes us, in fact, to the edge of a precipice?

Indeed, we're right over the precipice now, seeing tremendous stress and strain and suffering and preventable deaths in our emergency departments because of the basic incompetence and arrogance that led to one man basically deciding on the basis of his own experience, what experience we don't know, that we were going to make a grand experiment in Canada and unify all nine health regions into one and somehow manage this largest merger in Canadian history – if one were looking at other mergers that have happened, this actually, as I understand it, is the largest merger in Canadian history – without any evidence, without any plan, with no transition plan, and without a clear sense of how we were going to spend the money more wisely and get better results at the end of the day.

That's the past. We have to go forward. We have to make things work. I'm sure the other side is tired of our ranting and railing against what we see as gross incompetence and arrogance and the huge price, not only a material price but a human price, that we're hearing about every day not only from my colleagues in the medical and nursing and paramedical professions but also from patients who see family members suffering for lengthy, lengthy periods in emergency departments or languishing on wards where they don't have sufficient staff or hanging out in hallways, waiting for testing, waiting for appropriate therapy.

So that's the backdrop, I guess, to thinking about a bill that is ostensibly about improving our health care system. Indeed, it does bring together the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Hospitals Act, the Health Care Protection Act, the Nursing Homes Act, and the Health Insurance Premiums Act. There is some logic and some efficiency in doing so. There is also some interesting work done in relation to a health charter, which basically sets out what every individual and their family members could expect from a health care system today and what they must demand if it's not provided.

The irony, of course, is that you can demand all you want. The system is incapable of providing some of the basic services in this province now. We have gone back 30, 40 years, even before medicare, as a result of some of the changes we've seen today. In terms of health outcomes, in terms of access, and in terms of cost benefit we have lost ground significantly in Alberta. Understandably, many people look with some skepticism at this new health act and ask the questions: why now, and how is this going to improve

access, quality, and cost effectiveness? It certainly remains to be seen.

4:10

Under this new act the minister will also have the authority to order all the bodies mentioned above to create and adopt the health charter. The Alberta Health Act does not contain a draft health charter; that still is in the works.

The idea of a health advocate is a good one. Who doesn't want someone to speak up for them and to challenge a system that's not working. I guess the question is: what power will that individual have, and what recourse do people have when the advocate and their voices go unheard and unheeded?

The Alberta Health Act will also allow the minister to collect information on the health service, the hospital and clinic operators, the health providers, the professional colleges, and that is certainly going to improve efficiency in terms of a database and the ability to monitor the activities and the outcomes of the various players in the health care system. But we're a long way off from seeing that pay dividends in terms of the three priorities: access, quality, and cost-effective spending.

I will say that one of the most distressing parts of the changes we've witnessed in the health care system these last few years has been the cuts to prevention programs. It seems to have been lost on the former health minister, not so much on the current minister, that prevention actually costs something, and it actually returns on the investment significantly. When you deal with children in poverty and you get their bellies full and you get them into school and you deal with any emotional and learning problems, when you help single mothers who are struggling to create the conditions for a healthy environment, when you help that individual and others with disabling conditions or those with mental illness or addictions, when you actually help these people to move beyond that condition to a place where they feel a sense of clarity and purpose and satisfaction in their life and start giving back to society, that's when you start to see returns on investment.

Unfortunately, this mean-spirited government has decided in its wisdom to cut the kind of services that would bring people to a level of capacity and satisfaction and contribution that would give them a level of health that would cost us nothing. It's an investment in people; it's not an expense. Unfortunately, what I witnessed in the last six years of my time in the Legislature is a government that's bent on cutting costs, not recognizing that people are an investment that will return three, four, sevenfold in terms of the investment.

The Perry preschool project out of the U.S. back in the '70s followed the poorest children in a community for 25 years. Those poorest children were broken into two groups: a group that was given enhanced support, nutrition, opportunity to learn, early intervention into problems; and the other group, where no extra supports were given. The cost for the principle was \$1 per child to improve this, and the return on investment in terms of educational success, less criminal activity, employment, and lower mental illness rates was a return of \$7 per that \$1 investment. That was the seminal study out of the U.S. that showed the importance of investing in early childhood, investing in poverty reduction, investing in families.

Those fundamentals around health seem to be lost on this government, who has invested so heavily and so inappropriately in high-tech medicine and fails to understand that we need to get back to basics. We have abandoned prevention. We have all but abandoned home care. We have all but abandoned seniors and active-living programs to keep them well. We have not supported people in terms of their optimal learning environments, and we are

paying a deep price for that. As a result, we are seeing the highest rates of family violence, depression, anxiety, addiction, including alcoholism, and suicide in some age groups. So very short-term thinking, Mr. Speaker, that many, many Albertans are fed up with and certainly frustrated that there's a lack of willingness to use evidence to make decisions in this government.

While this bill brings together some wonderful principles and values, where the rubber hits the road is the question.

Mr. MacDonald: Where does the rubber hit the road?

Dr. Swann: The rubber hits the road on extended wait times in emergency, frustrated professionals, some of whom are leaving the province, some of whom are retiring early – certainly, they're leaving work as soon as they can get out of the place to reduce their own stress levels – greater rates of illness and absenteeism among our professionals, and a growing chorus of patients who are saying: "This is not good enough. This is not what we pay for. This is not acceptable in 2010 Alberta."

Certainly, we on this side of the House will be looking at this bill very closely for very practical ways in which we are supporting people in reaching their own health and then providing the necessary services to intervene early when something breaks down and then following up with those who have a chronic illness or disability, to make sure that they are maximizing their physical and mental and spiritual capabilities, to keep them well, to keep them satisfied and contributing members of our society.

There's a real recognition across the health literature today that the Perry preschool program, which looked at the whole array of supports for people, relates to what's called the social determinants of health. Again, it is incumbent on a government that says it's acting in the public interest to learn about the social determinants and invest in the social determinants, that include recognition of special challenges, economic supports where needed, the importance of early childhood experiences, both the physical and mental environment for children, the critical nature of employment and fair wage with employment to ensure that people have a dignified standard of living, and of course the issues of gender and culture and how those impact in specific cultures in specific parts of the province, how those may impact people's health practices, their beliefs, their values, and their need for different kinds of support.

Essentially, it's looking for a health system that looks beyond the fix, looks beyond the treatment after the breakdown but looks at the conditions in which people live and the degree to which communities are encouraged to develop the skills themselves to support each other, to identify environmental threats to health, to identify social and economic barriers for people's well-being, and to address those in a systematic way that recognizes that we are saving money in the long term, saving lives, and saving the quality of people's lives and their productive ability in our economic system if we address some of these determinants of health.

We've not seen that. Instead, what we've seen in this government is a cut of almost 50 per cent to the prevention services available to people in this province. And with the loss of family physicians and the cuts in home care services this is a triple whammy that leaves people too often vulnerable, seeking help in emergency departments and going to the wrong place for the wrong conditions instead of allowing for the basic primary care, what we call getting back to basics, to ensure that people have an early recourse and early intervention before something becomes a serious problem.

I had a colleague, in fact, a medical colleague, who because of the strains on the system was not able to get in to see a heart specialist at a time when he started having symptoms. Three weeks later,

when he finally got in, he of course had some heart damage from a blockage in his coronary artery. And this is a physician. That illustrates to me that when someone who has as easy access to the health care system as a physician can't get in because of barriers that this government has basically created, we are in serious trouble. The average person on the street, the average worker, the average mom has a tremendous set of hurdles to jump through to get appropriate or timely care. If he had gotten in within a day or two, this damage to his heart would not have happened. He would have had a stent put into his coronary artery, and the damage would have been averted. That story is all too common in this province.

4:20

Another friend had progressive gallbladder problems and tried repeatedly – went to emergency, was put on the wait-list, waited six weeks to get in for his gallbladder surgery. It had started to leak and rupture at that time and ended up infecting his whole abdomen. He spent, I think, roughly six weeks in hospital on intravenous antibiotics, developed complications from the antibiotics, and could have died. Fortunately, the medications and the care pulled him through, but that's another example of where if things are not working, we compound the cost, the suffering, and the risk to people's health.

I have very little else to say about the Alberta Health Act except that it follows, for the most part, the principles and values of the Canada Health Act. At the same time, we recognize that privatization of this health system goes on apace. We saw recently with the Health Resource Centre out of Calgary, a private deal, private assurances that they'd have all the surgery they wanted. Suddenly the rug was pulled out from under them, and they ended up in bankruptcy, an illustration of a government that doesn't know where it's going in health care, that is dabbling with a number of different private providers at the same time as saying that it honours the principles of the Canada Health Act and basically snubs its nose at Albertans and the federal government in doing so.

I suppose the principle here is that if you mismanage the public system badly enough, people will accept private delivery of health care services. That's certainly what I've witnessed in the last 10 years I've been involved in health care: a growing trend to privatization because the public system is not working. And it's not working because we have incompetent management of our health care system: 11 different deputy ministers over 10 years, three major disruptions in the system in 15 years. Just when teams and lines of authority and communications plans and work plans were set in place, this government has blown up the system again and created the kind of chaos that is severely undermining the morale of professionals in the system.

Regardless of what we do and the merits of some of this bill, Albertans in the main and certainly the professionals that I talk to are asking these fundamental questions: will this improve the efficiency of flow of patients and the quality of care? Will we spend money more wisely after this bill is passed? I can't reassure them that that would be the case.

The Alberta Liberal caucus has consistently argued that the health advocate should be independent of the government, and that's one of the areas of concern that, clearly, we will be raising and suggesting for amendment. We've seen evidence that the children's advocate reporting to the minister has failed to address the best interests of Albertans, and that's certainly an area where we think there should be change in the Alberta Health Act to ensure independence and reporting to the Legislature so that people can have confidence in both the role and the actual functioning of that individual.

The section on roles and responsibilities for the organizations that are already extant and reiterated in this bill are already there under existing legislation and certainly do appear to be entirely redundant.

The last issue that we have with the bill is the exemptions that the minister can make to having public input on proposed legislation. If the government truly wanted transparency in the way the health care system is governed, then they would not have the possible loopholes to public input. Surely, if there's anything this government has learned, it is that people are pretty cynical about public consultations that don't result in change. In response the government will most likely state that if a regulation is created without public input, then the minister must post notice of the decision. But in the end what good is posting after the decision has been made?

The political cynicism has to be part and parcel of what we deal with today in Alberta politics, and a government that's been in place for 39 years clearly has lost a sense of connection to key issues that Albertans care about. I think that's the message that more and more Albertans are giving us on this side of the House, that the nominal approach to consultation has not been appreciated. It's been seen as window dressing and lacking any meaning or not translating into real decisions in the public interest. There's a strong sense that people don't see a vision in this province not only for health care but for an economic, environmental, or social future. I guess what we're hearing in terms of Albertans is a very passionate plea for a longer term commitment to the public interest, that includes most fundamentally the basic services of health care, public education, and supports for people who can't support themselves.

Again, the underlying theme here is the recognition that this government has stopped doing its work, stopped listening to evidence, stopped listening to the professionals and the science, gone ahead without even following the most basic of business principles, which would put in place a plan that could be reviewed and debated, a set of monitoring benchmarks to which it could be held accountable and an oversight mechanism that says whether we're meeting those benchmarks or not and what the consequences of not meeting those benchmarks would be.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 has lots of good phrases, lots of good principles. It reiterates a lot of issues that are already covered in some of the other acts. It recognizes the need for a patient charter and a patient advocate. Who could argue with that? But what I think most of us, including Albertans and the professionals involved in the health care system, want to know is: how is that going to change the reality on the ground? That's where people fail to get attention when they need it, where they need it. They fail to get access to the testing facilities appropriately and in a cost-effective way. The treatments often come late, with significant cost and complications because of the failure to understand the complexity of the system and the interconnections of the prevention, the primary care, the diagnostic, the treatment, and the rehabilitation parts of the system, that all have to work together. They have to communicate, and the different parts of the province need to be able to make some of the choices around provision of services and investigations and treatment programs and support in the community that are appropriate to those regions.

My final comments, I guess, would relate to the re-disorganization that has been foisted upon us and the attempts by a single health services board to manage a massive organization with many, many variables, many unique needs in different parts of the province and fundamentally approach it as a cost-cutting exercise, without recognizing the extreme complexity, the importance of teamwork, good planning, and timely action where changes are needed, not action that comes a month late through a single health board that is reviewing too many issues and trying to micromanage, and a failure,

really, of acknowledging the broad roots of health and our need to invest in health as opposed to a sickness care system, that has now itself become sick and is creating as much illness as it is solving.

So I have great reservations about the bill. I think it's important that we have some of these debates here, and I hope the government is listening not only to us on the opposition side but to the many, many citizens in this province who are saying: not good enough.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd like to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his many words of input there. I have one question. You made comments on the problems with the centralized health board and the importance of local community. Would you agree with the Wildrose that the superboard doesn't function and that we need to disband that and go back to a more local system? What are your thoughts? We see that as one of the major problems, the centralization, the bureaucracy, the decision-making, just absolutely bringing everything to a stop. Even good ideas can't come forward because they don't want to allow that. Whereas if the different regions had that – what are your thoughts on the superboard and where we should go with that?

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you for the question. It's a critical question at this time, particularly since there's so much chaos still in the system. I guess I would have to say that I disagree with the Wildrose on this issue not only because we've had such major disruptions in the system to this point and it has created such chaos and such adjustment problems and pain and suffering and we need to stay stable – stability is what the system needs at this time – but also because there are efficiencies to be gained from a single Health Services Board: a single set of standards; a database; a single point of managing human resources and salaries; a monitoring system, if it's consistent across the province; and presumably an enforcement system that would get out to hospitals or communities that weren't meeting a standard, saying: you're not meeting the standard. So from a database and human personnel management point of view it's possible to do this from a centre.

However, delivery of services is a totally different issue. There needs to be much more autonomy in the delivery of the service at regional or zonal levels so that individuals can make decisions in a timely way; they can recognize the teams that are there and use them and organize them in a way that's most appropriate for that setting; they can deploy resources; they can make changes to procedures that suit that area; and they can focus their resources on, for example, more seniors in an area as opposed to an area where it's all young professionals or young workers like the Athabasca region, for example, where a different mix of health services is clearly needed.

There are strengths and there are definite weaknesses to the Health Services Board. Blowing up the system again would be terrible for the professionals, and it would create much more suffering for the individuals in the system. We need stability now, we need to make the system work, and the Health Services Board has to devolve some authority and some responsibility to the zones of the province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I would like to know from the

hon. Leader of the Opposition how important the environment is in terms of proactive and preventative health. Are the ideas of a healthy economy and a healthy parks system or a healthy environment mutually exclusive?

Dr. Swann: Well, that is often the way it's portrayed, unfortunately, in the political debates that we see: environment versus economy. Of course, they're both sides of the same coin. We have to make the economy work, and we have to have an environment that will sustain the economy.

Having said that, the economy and the environment are critical factors in health. If you have income, if you have a steady job, if you have some stability in your life, your mental health and your well-being are going to stay high. If we sacrifice one on the back of the other, then not only is there going to be a sacrifice to health, but there's going to be a sacrifice to the social well-being in the community, and that's going to come back to bite people.

In terms of the environment – the indoor environment and the outdoor environment, the work environment, the wonderful wildlands and parks that we enjoy here – all of these are critical for ensuring that we have the kind of healthy activity, the healthy opportunities that create the conditions for what we all want in our lives: happiness and well-being and community growth.

So critical interdependence here. I think that part of what has been missing in some of the policy is a recognition that everything we do impacts our health. If we're not thinking long term as opposed to short term, if we're making short-term economic decisions – for example, allowing industrial development in our eastern slopes, where it's going to affect our water supply for the future, at the same time as climate change is cutting down our water flow from the eastern slopes – we are maybe gaining in the short term, but we are sacrificing hugely in the long term.

The Deputy Speaker: On my list here, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the bill.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I feel like we're back at the first day of spring session. It's almost like déjà vu with this bill. Back then the government finally came to the conclusion that everyone else in Alberta had already come to, the conclusion that we as a province had fallen behind the rest of the country in the area of competitiveness. Our investment climate, of course, had taken a big hit thanks to the ill-conceived royalty fiasco, our businesses were being hammered with overregulation, and the cost of doing business was going up and becoming uncompetitive with other provinces. Alberta was and still is losing its competitive edge.

Then I look and I remember that this government's response to this problem was not to lower taxes or to implement stricter spending rules or to cut wasteful and ineffective government programs; they just made a new law. They even called it the Competitiveness Act, hoping that Albertans would mistake it for real, effective action on the issue of competitiveness in Alberta or the lack thereof.

Mr. Hinman: Bill 1.

Mr. Anderson: Bill 1. Albertans did not buy it.

The Competitiveness Act was rightly panned as a do-nothing piece of legislation intended more as a PR exercise than a serious attempt at fixing a major and real issue. In many ways it typified this government's statist approach to governing this province. There is no issue that more laws and more government cannot fix, which brings me to Bill 17.

Everybody knows, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta health care is in crisis right now. During the first week of fall session the Wildrose caucus released hundreds of emergency room horror stories, the details of which painted a graphic and disturbing picture of the sorry state of health care in this province: broken bones being treated in hallways; pregnant women getting cervical exams in open triage units; patients vomiting blood in the middle of emergency rooms while waiting hours and hours for care; people dying in hospitals before even seeing a doctor; a young man leaving hospital in a desperate and suicidal state only to commit the tragic act soon after not being able to receive care. As our caucus leader, Danielle Smith, often says, these are the types of stories that you would expect to hear in a Third World country. You would not expect them to happen in this province, in Alberta.

In the days and weeks that followed we heard from more and more doctors and other health care professionals about just how deep the entrenched issues in health care have become. The government promised more beds, but the Alberta Health superboard said that there wasn't enough money to staff them and operate them. The government announced new ER wait times, but doctors said it would take a Christmas miracle to meet them. The government claimed the centralized superboard is working, but the Auditor General found nearly a billion dollars misallocated and criticized the superboard for building facilities with no funding agreements in place. They said we'd have more beds, they said we'd have more health care, but what we got was a bunch of empty buildings and no staff to staff the beds so desperately needed.

So the government is doing what it always does when confronted with an issue of monumental concern to all Albertans: it makes a new law. The Alberta Health Act has all the hallmarks of a PC government bill designed to try to persuade people, to try to convince Albertans to believe that they are actually doing something to fix the problem. It's even got "health" right there in the title, just like the Competitiveness Act. But even a cursory read of the bill reveals that it has very little, if anything, to do with actual health care delivery and it will do little, if anything, to help our health care system.

The centrepiece of the legislation appears to be this so-called patient charter. The health minister has twisted himself into a pretzel over the last couple of weeks trying to explain what this patient charter would actually mean for patients. Albertans were probably pleased when they first heard of the idea of a charter – I know I was: "Oh, good, a charter; this ought to help" – an entrenched document that would guarantee them rights when it comes to health care delivery and legal recourse should those rights be violated. After you scratch the surface of this bill a little bit, you discover that this so-called charter is not legally binding in any way. It doesn't entrench any rights, it doesn't guarantee any level of care, and it doesn't give Albertans legal recourse for anything. It's a deliberate attempt by this government to fool Albertans, and it's a pretty poor attempt. All it will end up doing is shielding the minister from the real issues that Albertans are facing in their health care system.

4:40

Then there's the health advocate. Again, it sounds like a pretty decent idea on the surface, somebody whose job it is to act as a voice to government on behalf of patients who experience difficulties in the system. But it didn't take long for the gloss to come off that promise. We soon found out that this advocate isn't accountable to Albertans through the Legislature; it's accountable to the minister who appoints him or her. Given how this government treats those who have dared to shine light on the incompetence and mistakes this

government has performed in the past – the recent dismissals of the Utilities Consumer Advocate and the Chief Electoral Officer, to name two examples – it's hard to believe that this so-called advocate will have any real impact whatsoever on patient care.

It's kind of ironic, then, that the report this act is based on is called Putting People First. I think it would be most appropriately titled Putting the Minister First or maybe even Putting Headlines First because it clearly has nothing to do with putting Albertans first or certainly will not accomplish that goal. Beyond protecting and empowering the minister and giving the appearance of taking action, I'm at a loss to describe what this bill accomplishes for anybody.

Fortunately, there is a party in this province that is actually endeavouring to come up with a plan for reform of this health care system, this tired and outdated health care system that we keep clinging to as if it's going to one day work if we just pump more money into it. There's one party that is actually going to propose some ideas that will reform the system into one that works and one that will fix health care or, at the very least, improve it greatly from where it is right now. Unlike this government, which can't seem to do anything beyond commissioning reports that they put on shelves and let collect dust and task forces and studies that do nothing, we are putting forth real ideas.

First of all, there absolutely needs to be more patient choice and competition in the health care system. We have some already. Our doctors are private. They compete with one another for patients. So we do have some competition in our health care system, but we need a lot more. We've seen what this government does to private facilities that perform procedures faster, better, and cheaper than public hospitals do. They put them out of business.

That's what happened at the HRC. Some of our best doctors at our highest performing health care facility surgical centre in the province for hip and knee replacements were told one thing by the government. They relied on that representation and acted on it. The rug was pulled out from underneath them once they did so, and they found themselves insolvent. An absolute disgraceful performance and something that is causing even longer waits for people with hip and knee surgeries: we just shut down our most efficient and effective hip and knee replacement centre. It is absolutely nonsensical.

It is no wonder that we've seen ERs that are bursting at the seams, that we see waiting lists continue to increase. This government is actively shutting down health care providers and funneling everybody into an already overcrowded system. One of the examples of this is the McCaig centre, where they opened up was it two surgical rooms. Well, they just shut down six at the Grace hospital under HRC. How does that help anybody? It doesn't.

This type of mismanagement is simply not sustainable. The system itself is not sustainable. The massive hikes in health care spending over the last few years prove it. Eighteen per cent last year. Think about that: 18 per cent. How on earth can we justify spending that much money in year-over-year increases? Are we going to fix the system or not? It's not about plowing billions and billions and billions more into health care; it's about making sure that the billions that we're already spending are spent prudently and properly, that people are competing for those dollars, putting patients first, getting the patients to come to them, and trying to offer the government the lowest price possible for completing those services.

What this government and the other opposition parties, for that matter, fail to realize is that Albertans don't care how their health care is delivered as long as it's safe, it's timely, and they don't have to take out their credit card to pay for it. They don't care who delivers it. They just want good health care. I don't know why we devolve every time into this stagnant debate and start fearmongering,

throwing out that we want to privatize everything, that we want a two-tier system. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about what doctors across this country are talking about, what the Liberal MP just put out. What was the Liberal MP's name in Ottawa, the former Reform MP?

An Hon. Member: Keith Martin.

Mr. Anderson: MP Keith Martin.

We've got to put these tired arguments away. There are some people in all parties, Keith Martin being one of them, Danielle Smith in this party being another, in this debate. We've got to put it behind us, this idea that we can't change, that we've got to stick to the old-style, monolithic way of delivering health care. It's not working, guys, and people are suffering because of it. So let's put that old argument away because it's not doing anyone any good.

Now, that's exactly what our party and our caucus are proposing. We would open up the system to greater competition to allow for more patient choice within the five key principles of the Canada Health Act. That's the only way our health care system will deliver the care Albertans need at a cost to the taxpayer that is both reasonable and sustainable.

We will also dismantle the health care superboard and gradually return delivery of health care to local decision-makers. There is no doubt that you can create some efficiencies for purchasing prescription drugs, for example, on a bulk basis. We can definitely have that as an option for regionally run hospitals to use. However, that doesn't mean you need a massive superboard to run everything. You pick the parts where it makes sense to have, you know, a more centralized decision-maker or centralized entity helping out, but you don't put it all under the centralized decision-making when so much of it would be much better run locally.

Alberta Health Services was ushered in to replace health regions two and a half years ago with promises of streamlined delivery, less administration, and lower costs. It is absolutely beyond refute – there's no argument – that it has not worked. It has not resulted in those things. They may have cut bonuses somewhere or the number of executives they've had with certain titles, but the cost of health care went up 18 per cent last year, and there were no positive improvements in the system. How is that more efficient? It's not. Centralizing delivery of essential goods and services doesn't work. It never has; it never will. We don't allow the state to dispense food or clothing for the precise reasons we see in our hospitals today: long lines, high prices, and shortages of supply.

The Wildrose will end the health care monopoly in Alberta by decentralizing decision-making and entrenching patient choice as the cornerstone of our health care system. A Wildrose government would redirect more of the health budget to expand home-care services, make it easier to build and operate assisted living and long-term care facilities, and introduce a kinship palliative care program that would compensate family members for giving end-of-life care to loved ones in their homes. We would track and publicly disclose waiting lists and costs for all procedures as well as the treatment outcomes for all health facilities openly and transparently. Empowering patients with this information will allow them to make better choices and will provide incentive for doctors, surgical centres, and hospital administrators to provide better service. These are just a few of our ideas, and they will draw a stark contrast between the Wildrose and what this government does if it continues to act in this way, in this do-nothing way.

We will be putting forward several amendments to Bill 17 later on, and I certainly look forward to debating them in this House, but I have to make myself as clear as possible for my constituents and

for Albertans. If we do not start getting this right, we are going to continue to see Albertans unnecessarily suffer and unnecessarily die in some tragic cases. It's happening. This is not some kind of alarmist view. It's being documented everywhere. We need to fix it, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I have a question. This government was withheld federal transfer payments when doctors were extra billing, so I would like to know from the Wildrose representative where he stands on extra billing, the idea of a voucher system, and competition, private health care delivery as opposed to the tenets of medicare, which talk about publicly funded, publicly delivered, publicly administered.

Mr. Anderson: Well, as the hon. member knows, that's not what the Canada Health Act says. It says: publicly administered. It does not say: publicly delivered. There's a big difference.

But I will say that we're not talking about a two-tier system here. That's the big scare card that goes out. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about: the money goes in from the taxpayer to the government. Okay? Then people, when they get sick, have to make choices about where they want to get their health care done. They would go to the place of their choice, and the money would follow them to that hospital or surgical centre or doctor or whatever.

It's all public money, so we're not talking about skimming and two-tier, where somebody can bypass the queue. It's all the same queue. People all have to line up in the same queue. We're just talking about making sure that there are more options on the end of health care, delivery options, so that people can make their choices, so that private deliverers and nonprofit deliverers can come into the system with their money and invest it in the system. I mean, look at the Health Resource Centre: tens of millions of dollars invested from private money making a piece of infrastructure that was doing fantastic work.

Ms Blakeman: Only when subsidized.

Mr. Anderson: That's not true, hon. member. The building was not subsidized. It was the Grace hospital, but it was changed and altered and renovated by private money, and that's a fact. You can sit down with Dr. Miller and talk to him about how it went. The fact is that they were delivering those services for 40 per cent cheaper and 40 per cent faster than the public system. Now, in every case is that going to happen? Is private delivery always going to be more efficient to the government than public delivery? No. There'll be some cases where that's not the case, clearly, but the point is that you let them compete. The government says: "We've got 5,000 hip and knee surgeries, replacements that we need done. Public hospital, public surgical centre, private surgical centre, nonprofit surgical centre, compete. What can you do? Who can deliver this at the lowest cost and still do it most effectively?" Let them compete for the business.

You'll find that although there is a profit margin in private delivery of sometimes 5, 10 per cent, depending on what you're talking about, there's a massive waste margin in the public system. That's 30 per cent or 40 per cent, as we see with the HRC example. There's waste. There are margins everywhere. Sometimes it's

waste margins; sometimes it's profit margins. The point is: make them compete. Make them compete for the public dollars. That makes the deliverers of health care accountable. It makes public managers of health care accountable. It makes doctors, nurses, and everybody involved in the system accountable.

I respect very much the hon. Leader of the Opposition and what he said earlier. This is the big difference. They think, the Liberals and the PCs, that you just need to get a better central planner, a central manager, that you just need to manage it better, and it would all work out. But on what planet? Where is that the case? Look at Europe. Is that what they do in Europe? No, it's not. They don't have one monolithic public deliverer of health care. They don't. They have multiple, competitive delivery, and it works for them. It's still universal health care, but it works for them because they have competitive delivery.

We're one of the most monolithic systems in the world – certainly, in the developed world we are – and we have some of the worst health outcomes and waiting lists. That has to change, but it's not going to change if we continue to go down this path of, you know, fearmongering and “privatization is going to kill the whole system” and agendas. No one wants to see the ridiculousness that is going on south of the border. No one wants that health care system. It's a joke. No one wants to see people dying because they can't afford to pay for it. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about making positive changes.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Mr. Anderson: I'd like to adjourn the debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You cannot. You have already finished speaking.

Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move to adjourn debate on Bill 17. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 25

Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity to rise and say a few words regarding Bill 25. Certainly, we're looking at some changes to administrative rules. This bill, as I understand it, specifies the appeals process in that times and procedures for that process are to be changed, and the bill changes the punitive structures in nonpayment, increasing potential fines. From what I can understand from talking to members of the community who are lucky enough to have a few freehold mineral rights, they seem to think that this is a good bill.

I had an opportunity late last spring to attend an event in Red Deer. Actually, it was slightly west of Red Deer. There were, Mr. Chairman, over 500 freeholders in attendance, and they heard from various political parties, starting certainly with the Progressive Conservatives, who were very well represented by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. Johnston: I thought you said freeloaders.

Mr. MacDonald: No, no. Freeholders, hon. member. Don't get that confused. There are a lot of freeloaders in that Progressive Conservative Party – there's no doubt about that – but certainly not at that meeting.

Now, from the freeholders' association, as I said, there were close to 500 or maybe more in attendance. We had a nice lunch, and then we got down to business. The Wildrose Alliance was represented. I think the hon. members over there were calling them the fourth party, but the New Democrats were represented as well. The government caucus was very well represented. There was one member speaking, of course, on this panel. I was representing our caucus, too. I counted at one point nine Progressive Conservative MLAs in attendance. Nine. [interjections] It wasn't the free lunch. No, it certainly wasn't.

I don't know whether the MLAs from the government caucus were reluctant to have lunch because of what they might hear from the citizens, but there were nine, and then there were eight because one hon. member left, as they would say in the movies, in a bit of a snit because that individual didn't appreciate that the freeholders . . .

5:00

Ms Blakeman: What did you say?

Mr. MacDonald: It wasn't me. It was the freeholders who suggested to this individual that they needed to respect their interests. I think in a small sort of way Bill 25 is a reflection of the direction that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne got that Saturday afternoon in the church west of Red Deer because many of the freeholders want the same rates for the product, in this case energy, that they own under their properties.

If you look at how freeholders in the past have been treated in this province, I'm not saying necessarily by the government but certainly by the energy industry, the industry, hon. Member for Calgary-Hayes, could in this case be the freeholders because they are the ones that are getting the royalties for significantly less than what they pay south of the border in the lower 48 states. If you look at freehold mineral rights and rates in any jurisdiction south of the border, whether it be Texas, Pennsylvania, New York, Louisiana, the royalty rates in some cases would be double – double – if not triple what some of these freehold owners are getting here in Alberta.

So, Mr. Chairman, it was a very interesting Saturday afternoon in Red Deer, and this bill certainly, I think, would be appreciated by the freeholders. I hope it is. The ones that I have had contact with have thought that as a result of their efforts and the work they have done advocating for themselves, this is a baby step in the right direction towards meeting their needs and concerns. Many of us may forget that there's a lot of land in this province that is owned by individuals who had this land handed down to them from their pioneering grandfathers and grandmothers and in some cases their pioneering great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers.

The energy industry is changing. Some people would think it's coal-bed methane that would be of significant interest, Mr. Chairman, but it is interesting to note that we may get a second chance.

All of us may get a second chance in this province, all of us maybe deserve a second chance every now and then, but in this case it would be around tight oil. Alberta has a lot of oil in place in mature fields that have been in production in some cases for 50 to 60 years. There's a lot of that tight oil remaining, and with the new technology involved with fractionation, or fracking, that oil can now be produced. In many of the mature fields, whether they're Pembina, Swan Hills, Bonnie Glen, certainly Leduc, all the areas around central Alberta where some freeholders would have the rights, they should watch this unfold very carefully because there could be an additional amount, 1.5 billion barrels, to be lifted from those wells, or produced, I should say. [interjection] I'm sorry hon. member?

Mr. Snelgrove: I think that's CO₂ enhancement.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, CO₂ enhancement is part of it. Certainly, Mr. Chairman, at some point – and I know I don't want to be distracted by Treasury Board – we're going to have to have a rather robust debate in this Assembly on what sort of royalty should be collected either by the citizens of the province or by the freeholders on this second-chance oil if the experts are right and there are 1.5 billion barrels of oil that now can be recovered from these mature existing fields in the central part of the province, where the infrastructure is already in place, whether it's power to run the oil fields, whether it's the roads to service them, or whether it's the pipelines to collect and distribute the production.

We have a lot of issues here, but the freeholders, I'm sure, are going to pay attention to this. They're going to get on the Internet before they sign the deal with the land person and see what the same company is willing to pay in Texas or New York state or Pennsylvania or Louisiana for royalties. In Texas it's 25 per cent. So we will see what happens with this, Mr. Chairman.

Ms Blakeman: Say that again.

Mr. MacDonald: In Texas the royalty rate on freeholders, or private property, is in some cases 25 or it could be as high as 27 per cent. Now, I met freeholders in Red Deer that certainly were not getting that.

When we look at the chance we're going to get in Alberta, the marginal oil pools of yesterday have become very attractive. They're the jewels of the future development in western Canada. We can thank technology for this. Of the 98 billion barrels of discovered oil in place in the western Canada sedimentary basin only about 20 per cent has been discovered to date, leaving 77 billion barrels of already discovered oil trapped in tighter reservoirs that can now be unlocked with this technology that I talked about before.

Hopefully, if we were to get this, even if it was a billion barrels of additional production – and the hon. President of the Treasury Board is correct in stating that some of this would come from enhanced oil recovery from CO₂ sequestration. That's going on, as he knows, in central Alberta in a pilot project and down in Estevan in southeastern Saskatchewan. This fracking technology, hopefully, is going to be put to use, and many of the companies that have picked up some of these sort of assets at a very modest price from some of the big players because they thought they were worthless – these are leases where there's an environmental liability to them and nothing else, so we're going to sell them to the junior players. Well, the junior players may be really on to something here, and they're going to have to in some cases approach the freeholders.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Bill 25, the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, will in the future benefit the freeholders, who have fair and square legal title and legal right to the energy under

their land in all forms. Hopefully, this bill is a step in the right direction and is what they want completely.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members who wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question. Are you ready for the question on Bill 25, Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

5:10

Bill 19

Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Any hon. member wishing to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased today to stand in Committee of the Whole to speak to the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010. Before getting to the bill itself, I would like to acknowledge the yeomanship of the Member for Red Deer-South for his assistance in bringing forward this bill through second reading. He did an excellent job, and I appreciate his assistance.

Now, the amendments to this bill, Mr. Chairman, will help ensure that Alberta's renewable fuels producers are on a level playing field for fuel tax purposes, and it will support the upcoming renewable fuel standard that will be implemented.

Second reading, Mr. Chairman, provided for interesting discussion and debate, notably on the topic of the renewable fuel standard and biofuels in general. I'd like to thank the hon. members for their comments and discussion, but one question did come up that needs to be addressed promptly that I would like to address now.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked if the Treasury lost any money as a result of the past practices that are corrected with this amendment. This is a critical question, Mr. Chairman, because it would be important to understand if we had forgone revenue because of some irregularities or some changes that needed to be made in regulations. The short answer to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is: no, the Treasury did not lose one single dime as a result of the past practices of the previous regulations that are now going to be corrected by this legislation. I'd also like to add that this bill is revenue neutral, and it's not aimed at correcting any loss of revenue.

Mr. Chairman, renewable fuel producers outside Alberta currently are exempt from charging tax in some circumstances when they sell fuel to a full direct remitter. A full direct remitter is any entity that refines fuels or transacts large volumes of fuel in Alberta while Alberta's renewable fuel producers are not exempt from charging the tax.

Now, section 3 of Bill 19 amends section 4 of the Fuel Tax Act to allow Alberta's renewable fuel producers the same tax exemption as fuel producers outside of the province. By providing the same treatment for both Alberta and non-Alberta producers, it ensures

consistency and fairness. In essence, it levels the playing field for tax purposes, and it removes the disadvantages that our own domestic fuel producers were faced with when competing against outside-the-province fuel producers. It will also ease the administrative burden for both industry and government, Mr. Chairman, by ensuring that there is not a mixture of taxed and untaxed fuel at a refinery or at a terminal, which could be difficult to track and monitor.

The next measure, of course, Mr. Chairman, involves information sharing. Section 7 of the bill authorizes Alberta Finance and Enterprise to share information with Alberta Energy for the purposes of both tax administration and administration of the renewable fuels standard. Since many entities will report similar information to both ministries, this will allow each to use the information collected, which helps ease some of the administrative burden and helps to ensure that both programs are being monitored and reviewed equally. It reduces the duplication of reporting burden of ministries to each other and the private sector to two different ministries. This section also authorizes both ministries to collect and use the information for public policy formulation, which is a critical step. This brings the Fuel Tax Amendment Act in line with all of the other commodity tax statutes that the province currently has, so these changes do support the efficient administration of both the fuel tax and the renewable fuels program.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, there are a number of minor technical amendments to remove references in the Fuel Tax Act to blend stocks. Currently the term “blend stock” in the act refers to a nontaxable fuel; however, there are no blend stocks in Alberta, so the term has no real effect. Further, the term “blending,” which is also used in the act, is commonly used by industry to describe the mixing of traditional fuel with renewable fuel, an entirely different meaning than the meaning of the term that’s used in the act. Thus, sections 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 of the bill remove the references in the Fuel Tax Act to blend stock and some of the instances of blending. However, the term “blending” will not be completely removed from certain sections. In those sections the term can refer to blending in the renewable fuels context standard and will still have application.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I ask all colleagues to support this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Just a question for the hon. mover of the bill. Do you believe it’s a good idea to basically require a certain amount of blended fuels through government legislation in order to subsidize renewable fuels? My second question is: are the actions in terms of sort of putting Alberta on a level playing field consistent with our Bill 18, Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010, with British Columbia fuel producers and, obviously, with Saskatchewan now included? So, first, should we be requiring a certain percentage of blended fuels, and secondly, are Bill 18 and Bill 19 working together to create not only a level playing field for Alberta, but by creating a more level field for Alberta, are we subject to any argument from either B.C. or Saskatchewan that we’re potentially tilting the table?

The Chair: Any other hon. member? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would just like at this point in committee to express my appreciation to the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright for getting that information. I appreciate it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the bill.

[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d move that the committee rise and report bills 25 and 19.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 25, Bill 19.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

5:20

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 18

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move Bill 18, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010, for third reading.

The bill itself has had good discussion, but just to recap, it’s a bill which allows us to move forward with the New West Partnership. It’s a bill which recognizes the advantages that have been received by Alberta in engaging beyond our borders with our neighbouring provinces to really enhance the work of the internal trade agreement but to move it forward at a faster pace so that it reflects the strength of the western Canadian economy and the strength that we can have in an Alberta economy in Albertan society when we partner.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 18. I listened to the hon. Government House Leader. I’m not going to say that it was glib, but it was certainly a sales presentation on this bill that I’m not convinced is in the best interests of Albertans.

I would like to know why, before we proceed any further with this, it is necessary that we have the provision to grandfather this legislation going back to April 1, 2007, as I understand it. I certainly would like to know why it’s in our interest to go back over three years with this amendment to the Government Organization Act. In some cases here with this legislation there doesn’t appear to be a

legal recourse. I would like to know through the course of debate how and why this is necessary.

Certainly, some of my other colleagues talked about this earlier in debate, but who has the government consulted with regarding these amendments? In the past we heard from various organizations that they were unhappy with TILMA because it didn't lift provincial standards; it reduced them to the lowest level. In this case, trade certification, many different labour unions had expressed concern about that end of TILMA. Some professional associations also expressed concern about that reduction or diminishing of standards.

I know we need to have closer trade ties. I see the importance of having significant co-operation between the western Canadian provinces. I can understand that, but I'm not convinced as of yet of all the merits that have been proposed by the original TILMA legislation or this amendment to the Government Organization Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of the House 4.4(a), and that is the ability of the respective minister, in this case the International and Intergovernmental Relations minister, to make regulations "defining words or expressions used but not defined in sections 2 to 4.3." There is considerable language that could be, in my view, a lot more specific in sections 2 through 4.3. This is another reason why I certainly would have concern with this.

Reading *Hansard*, there was a discussion earlier about the Arbitration Act and why the Arbitration Act does not apply to a domestic trade agreement. I guess I have to accept that as it was discussed, or at least my interpretation of that.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, with those comments I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this House. I'm not convinced that the government has talked to the organizations that have had previous concerns regarding our internal trade agreements, and if they have consulted with these groups that I identified earlier, I sure would like to know what those discussions were about and what issues were talked about, what issues were addressed, if any.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. members for their questions and the discussion from the discussions we had in committee. There were some questions, and I would like to respond on behalf of the hon. minister to some of them and some of the comments.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had questions on tax implications under the agreement and, in particular, the new harmonized sales tax in B.C. We said we would look into that, and we have, Mr. Speaker. We can tell you and all hon. members that there in no way will be any tax implications under the New West Partnership trade agreement. Taxation is specifically excluded. Provinces are free to pursue tax policies that are determined to be in the best interest of their province.

In addition, the hon. members also raised concerns regarding the consultation process with Albertans prior to the signing of TILMA. Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that this government recognizes that co-operation, collaboration, and communication are key to any successful agreement, certainly interprovincially, and Albertans were indeed consulted through a variety of methods, which included website updates, news releases as well as consultations with various groups and organizations.

This government met with more than 200 representatives from the MASH sector and countless labour groups and businesses. In fact, the president of AUMA was quoted in a news release from June 25 of last year saying, "The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association

is now satisfied that municipal concerns which the Association raised on behalf of its members have been addressed in the negotiation process regarding the MASH provisions."

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* also raised an interesting point during Committee of the Whole. The hon. member asked if this bill would have anything to do with foreign investments such as the current discussion over Potash Corporation in Saskatchewan. In fact, this bill deals strictly with domestic trade and investment. It has nothing to do with foreign investment.

Mr. Speaker, we have had a productive debate in this House, and I hope I have clarified some of the concerns the opposition had raised. There's no question that this bill will improve interprovincial trade.

As someone who represents Canada's only border city, I can tell you that this approach of our three western provinces is going to be absolutely essential if we're going to compete not only with our near neighbours to the south but with our global competitors around the world. In fact, we have over the past few years allowed so many different regulatory differences to creep in between our provinces that sometimes you would think we are different countries: little things such as harmonizing standards for trucks and the movement of goods and services that are essential to build our economy and the little differences that happen from the ports in B.C. into Winnipeg.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, the importance of this agreement can not only be measured by what it's going to do for our three provinces but by how the other provinces approach it. I think we've already seen across Canada other provinces indicating that they, too, want to talk to the importance of removing trade barriers. This is very critical. We don't have to start with all of the provinces agreeing on everything, but when the three western provinces can put to work such an incredibly good opportunity, that we all have here with the resources and the people we've got, it won't be long until our neighbouring provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, and, indeed, the Maritimes will be looking to those kinds of agreements to enhance their opportunities for their people, too.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a privilege to address Bill 18, and I would hope the House would support it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Varsity*.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In terms of a little bit of lightheartedness, I'm just wondering if the hon. member, the President of the Treasury Board, who lives in the border city which bears his name, has divided loyalties or feels conflicted at times with his location.

But on a more serious set of questions, I'm wondering also, more seriously, if Bill 18 has the potential, because of our agreement with British Columbia, of reducing the price we pay for imported hydroelectricity. My feeling is that I'm extremely grateful that we have got hundreds and hundreds of years of coal ahead of us, but I'd like to see that coal liquefied as opposed to our coal-fired generation, which we currently have, which, unfortunately, has large, belching smoke stacks, that do not contribute to Albertans' health. While it's a less expensive form of electricity, I'm hoping that Bill 18 might see us getting better prices on electricity.

The other problem is that when one of our large coal-fired plants goes down, we're paying a premium price for the electricity we get out of B.C. I'm hoping that the damage done on their river systems, the dams and the hydro, can potentially through Bill 18 be turned to our advantage.

Also, in terms of sort of reciprocal agreements I'm hoping that the Prince Rupert . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we have five minutes for comments or questions. Are you using the five minutes?

Mr. Chase: Here's my last question, and I would look forward to an answer. Thank you.

Through Bill 18 have we come to a stronger agreement with our container ports and our co-operation with Prince Rupert?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the utilities agreements between the two provinces are not part of or changed by the TILMA agreement as to the opportunity to strengthen our opportunities for the container ports. Any time that you have governments agreeing on a common purpose in trade, it strengthens your opportunities. I think that what the hon. member would be suggesting is the fact that it's essential for so many of the goods that we produce in Alberta to have that west coast market outlet. I would hope it does. I cannot tell you unequivocally that this agreement changes that, but it certainly enhances the opportunities to do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) still allows two minutes and 10 seconds. Any hon. member wish to use that time?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize hon. members to speak on the bill.

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

Bill 23

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 23, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010.

The bill clarifies the authority of postsecondary institutions to create parking bylaws and impose and collect penalties for parking violations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Without going into echoing or repeating what I previously said, I support this bill. It is the sort of lowest level of support for advanced education and technology going, and I'm hoping that this is maybe signalling a new move in this province in terms of valuing advanced education, innovation, and technology and that instead of just forgiving parking fines, we'll actually get into investing in postsecondary institutions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16

Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. With regard to Bill 16, just for the record and in summation, I would like to have it noted that both the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie and myself had matching subamendments encouraging the province to go a step farther with distracted driving legislation, and that would be to follow the recommendations of numerous physicians in this province of regulating hands-free as well as the hand-held cellular phones. Unfortunately – and I say: unfortunately – the majority of government members felt that this was not the direction to go.

My colleague from Calgary-McCall attempted to provide a sort of bridge amendment which would suggest that we do our due diligence, study the potential effects of collisions, accidents associated with hands-free, do this over a three-year period, report back to this Assembly with the potential of further strengthening the distracted driving legislation by including hands-free as part of the regulation and enforcement. Again, I consider it unfortunate, Mr. Chair, that this sort of backup compromise position was rejected. I do realize that the government is going to be collecting these statistics as it relates to collisions involved with hands-free, and for that I am grateful. I just wish that we had put a timeline on when this legislation would be updated to include a ban on hands-free.

5:40

Companies throughout this province have taken the lead in terms of numerous fleets requiring that their workers pull over when it's safe to do so to carry on any kind of conversation. Bill 16 has already allowed exemptions, rightfully so, for a variety of transports, taxis, et cetera, which would basically kill their business if these exemptions weren't allowed. But it is my hope, Mr. Chair, that at some time we take the lead.

We had an opportunity in this province to lead the world with a ban of hands-free cellular phones, and I'm sorry that we didn't take that opportunity. At least, Mr. Chair, I am hoping that there will be some commitment over the next three years, as my hon. colleague from Calgary-McCall suggested, that in reviewing the scientific evidence, if there is sufficient direction that the distraction is more of a mental nature than a physical nature, this bill will be amended.

I want to make sure it's firmly on the record that I do support the steps that have been taken in terms of distracted driving. I understand the need to go simply beyond the hand-held cellphone to recognize other distractions, some of which are impossible to prevent. I do believe that we need more children in this province, especially of the quality of my two grandsons, so we cannot ban children from riding in vehicles. I suggested earlier that I would like to ban back-seat drivers, but I know that's not possible. So I will be supporting the legislation. I would like to have seen it take a bolder step forward, but I'm definitely in support.

I very much appreciate the hon. mover of the motion, who has had that front-line experience and wants to continue to be proactive and preventative. Therefore, I thank the mover of the bill, the MLA for Calgary-Hays.

Thank you very much. I would think that this will be universally accepted.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to take this opportunity to express my support for this bill. First of all, I would

like to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this bill forward. To many people this bill might not be perfect. I got a lot of e-mails, I got some phone calls, and I had a lot of my constituents talk to me about this bill. Some people feel this is long overdue, and some people feel we haven't gone far enough, that we should ban all electronic devices completely.

I think this bill is not perfect. There's no such thing as, quote, perfect. But I would like to see this as a very significant first step in the right direction. I would also like to acknowledge the fact that this is the first bill in Canada. Basically, you know, it's such inclusive legislation: not just the hand cell, the mobile phones that I'm talking about, but it also includes many other distractions. I feel as an individual that we cannot rely on legislation completely because there's no such thing as legislating human behaviour. As citizens we all have to take the responsibility for our own lives, for the lives of others.

So no matter what we do, in this case driving, we've got to concentrate on the road, and we shouldn't do anything else in the cockpit. That's why I feel it is very important to have this bill passed. This would send a strong signal to all the people who are driving, who are on the road. You know, we have to follow the rules and also drive carefully and responsibly. When we talk about distractions, I realize, as many members have already mentioned, that raises many other issues. Given today's technology we have a lot of gadgets in the vehicles. We have a navigation system. We have an entertainment system. We have many other things. I think we cannot just rely on the legislation to eliminate the possibility of causing traffic accidents by distractions. I want to put this on the record.

I'm very happy to see the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays bring this bill forward. As a member of the Public Safety and Services Committee I feel very proud of the fact that the minister and the members of the committee are supporting this bill. I encourage all

my colleagues to support the bill. I definitely will vote to support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to move to adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report – I would say progress, but . . .

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16.

The Deputy Speaker: Those hon. members who concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m.]

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Issue 42e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Hector Goudreau	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Len Webber	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Employment and Immigration

Parliamentary Assistants

Evan Berger	Sustainable Resource Development
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Municipal Affairs
Cal Dallas	Environment
Doug Griffiths	Finance and Enterprise
Fred Horne	Seniors and Community Supports
Broyce Jacobs	Agriculture and Rural Development
Jeff Johnson	Treasury Board
Diana McQueen	Energy
Janice Sarich	Education
Dr. Raj Sherman	Health and Wellness
Greg Weadick	Advanced Education and Technology
Teresa Woo-Paw	Employment and Immigration

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
DeLong
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest

Standing Committee on Community Services

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Allred
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Benito
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Chase
Johnston
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Sarich
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Mason
Oberle
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Rogers
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Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20 Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Renner]

The Acting Speaker: Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be going here. I'm just winding up. There we go. Now, this brings my memory back right to where I left off on this. I thank the hon. House for waiting through my disorganization, and I'll try not to let it happen the rest of the way through although I cannot make such promises that it won't.

I would like to speak in favour of this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you have already spoken.

Mr. Hehr: That is why. A light goes off. Thank you very much. Perfect.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, I'll ask the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

Bill 21 Wills and Succession Act

[Adjourned debate November 3: Ms Pastoor]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposed Wills and Succession Act really is to update the law. This side of the House, at least this little section of this side of the House, is in support of this bill. It currently stands to reflect changing social values in Alberta as well as evolving estate planning practices.

Certainly, as an RN working in geriatrics I could see the importance of actually having a will very, very early, having it updated as you go along. In fact, the personal directives, which should be a part of when you write your will with your lawyer, actually probably should be signed at the age of 18. There are reasons for that. Say a young man or a young woman is in a car accident, and they're 18 and a half. They are now adults, and there is no one to make decisions on their behalf or to look after them if they're in a serious car accident and seriously injured. So it's very important that at the age of 18 one not only has a will but, more importantly, that personal directive so it's very clear who is to make decisions on their behalf.

I think the other thing that it sort of clarifies is that if two or more people die at approximately the same time in the same accident, their property would be distributed as if each party died before the other. But now it'll be that in cases where property is jointly owned, it

would be deemed to be split amongst the owners equally. This is consistent with public opinion on the matter as established by the ministry through a public consultation and harmonizes the principles regarding testimonial dispositions with those contained in the Insurance Act. When these accidents happen, certainly, there are lawyers involved, there are insurance companies involved, and in the case of deaths there are all families involved, usually from both sides. It's very important that these are very, very clear.

This is part of a housekeeping bill, really, just to make these things brought up to the 21st century in the number of things that can actually happen and also the different ways that we recognize families and who would be entitled to the disposition of properties and monies.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will sit down and say that we are in favour.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment or question.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I would move that we adjourn debate on this bill at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22 Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 3: Ms Blakeman]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 22. The highlights of the bill are that it will reflect several changes to Alberta family law policies, specifically in the following areas: parentage and guardianship of children, maintenance enforcement program, and interjurisdictional support orders.

Mr. Speaker, the current law states that parentage of a child is shared between two legal parents, which would be in most cases the biological father and the mother. At the moment there is somewhat limited recognition of exceptions for individuals to be recognized as legal parents in situations where the parties are a same-sex couple or where nonbiological parents have relied upon assisted human reproduction.

In order to address the growing reliance on AHR, Mr. Speaker, and recognize the children who are a product of this birthing method, the ministry has proposed through this bill the following policy in order to provide greater clarity regarding the issues of parentage. Where AHR is used and there is a proper combination of biology and consent, couples using AHR can become the legal parents without any added need to begin adoption proceedings as long as one partner or spouse can show a biological connection to the child and the other individual consents to being a parent.

As noted previously, this policy change will result in a paradigm shift from the arbitrary exercise of parental guardianship, particularly where the child resides, in favour of focusing completely on the willingness of a parent to be a guardian. The ministry has made certain exceptions for situations where a sexual assault has occurred or that individual has no interest in being a guardian.

It further goes on and talks about the maintenance enforcement program, Mr. Speaker, which is responsible for the collection of court-ordered payments from debtors after an order has been made. In an effort to further the goals of increasing the regularity of

maintenance payments and making systems more efficient while keeping the level of service to Albertans consistent, the ministry has introduced several changes through this bill.

In addition, there have been amendments to the current model to increase procedural fairness to all parties. These changes include some of the following: charging penalties to maintenance recipients that owe money to MEP as a result of fees, overpayments; penalties would be collected far more frequently; and debtors will now be required to keep employment information current. Now a debtor will be required to have sought a negotiation of payment arrangement by the maintenance enforcement program before an application to suspend an enforcement action can be brought before the courts. The release of information governed by this act would now be more closely aligned with the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

This will be providing powers to search for parties to applications as well as prospective applications and revising the way in which the applicable law is established by Alberta courts in order to simplify the process for the courts and the parties involved.

The revisions to guardianship will certainly have positive effects for Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and reflect the changing values of the time as well as the role that technology has played in influencing the law as it relates to parenthood and guardianship. The changes that the minister has made will improve the administration of the maintenance enforcement program and provide enhanced procedural fairness for creditors essentially by levelling the playing field in relation to the way that the maintenance enforcement program deals with debtors. The outcome here will likely be greater client satisfaction, and, hey, if anyone could use that, it would be the maintenance enforcement program.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the bill. Thank you.

7:40

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment.

Any others?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 4: Mr. Oberle]

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I probably had a problem with this right from the very beginning because despite the fact that we have an increase in population, I'm not convinced that we actually need 87 ridings in this province.

An Hon. Member: Police Amendment Act, Bill 27.

Ms Pastoor: Oh, I am sorry. I believe that my hon. colleague is up on this one. Sorry.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I could go?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My apologies for the difficulties here tonight.

I am pleased to rise and discuss for my first time Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010. I must say that I have some concerns about this bill. I believe that the Police Amendment Act could be better, and I believe that it may in fact be limiting what we have in some rights of individual citizens to go forward and have their situation investigated by a proper review agency in regard to police misconduct or an incident that involves a police officer or the justice system.

If we look at the Police Act, we're primarily looking at an act that has been in force since 1973. The police complaint and discipline process has remained largely unchanged since the 1973 Police Act. As noted by the minister, the amendments are a result of several consultations with stakeholders over the past 10 years and, most recently, consultations for the law enforcement framework. The law enforcement framework was designed to reflect and respond to, apparently, the current realities of policing and to position Alberta's law enforcement as a modern, flexible, and professional system that can continue to meet the policing and public security needs of the public.

Now, I would also like to advise that although that is the stated goal of this bill and it attempts to streamline and modernize the police complaint process, much of what is being done in this act appears to actually be, at least at first blush, limiting some of the abilities of an individual to appeal their outcome or to get a reasonable hearing in front of a board or to investigate some complaints, which is essentially why this board has been set up. We had a frank discussion yesterday about sheriffs, and we're having a discussion now about police officers in order for police officers to be seen as legitimate to be enforcing the rule of law and to be really strong guardians of not only our personal safety and our personal property but also strong guardians of our democracy and our justice system. With that power and privilege comes a role by the state to oversee their responsibilities, to appoint boards and citizens to look after complaints that stem from police issues that occur in Alberta.

Although I've only been an MLA for roughly three years, coming from a downtown riding oftentimes I hear stories, rightly or wrongly, about some incidents that occur in the community. I'm not saying they're correct or not, but at least we need to have an avenue where these complaints are heard, where they're heard by people who are seen to be open and accountable and who are listening to what, in fact, a person's complaint is against the police officer or police organization or whatever you may have. Whatever an individual's complaint is, we have to give them the opportunity to speak and to be heard and for them to legitimize what the policing role is in the community, which is our protection. It's also protection of, like I alluded to earlier, our entire system of rule of law, of no one being above the law and the government not seen to be using too much of its power to buffalo someone into doing things or being railroaded into situations that they have not been in.

I think I've outlined in a rambling sort of fashion how these commissions and complaints processes are supposed to go. This bill, in my view, is contrary to the public interest as it will water down the public complaints process to a point where ordinary citizens are offered no recourse should they fall victim to some form of police misconduct. This bill is an attempt to serve what police officers believe are the best interests of police officers. In my view, it goes some of the way to taking away somewhat. Maybe we can go to the other things where some legitimate concerns are not being heard.

If we can talk about it here, if we look at section 19.2:

19.2(1) Prior to scheduling an appeal for a hearing, the Board shall, within 30 days of receipt of written notice of the appeal,

review the written notice of appeal and the record of the hearing and may

- (a) dismiss the matter if in the opinion of the Board the appeal is frivolous, vexatious or made in bad faith, or
 - (b) notwithstanding section 20(2)(b), make a decision in respect of the appeal based on the review of the record and consideration of the factors set out in the regulations respecting appeals, without conducting a hearing.
- (2) Where the Board is unable to dismiss or conclude an appeal in accordance with subsection (1), the Board may schedule a hearing of the appeal.
- (3) The Board may give directions to the affected parties in respect of a review or a hearing and may extend or modify its directions on reasonable request by a party.

Stakeholders have voiced concern regarding the proposed powers conferred on the LERB to dismiss an appeal outright. Groups maintain that the Law Enforcement Review Board should require the parties to make submissions on whether there should be an appeal. This should be on the record before the relative appeals of the merit are considered and any decision to dismiss the issues. I think this would be a valid way to decide whether an appeal would go forward. It would allow for justice not only to be done but to be seen to be done, and it would allow for opportunity for a victim to express their opinion or their concerns as to why they should have an appeal. I think this is an important step. Should a person get a decision that they disagree with and they are not afforded this appeal, their confidence in the system may be shaken, and I think that in situations where police are involved, we should as a government, as a state extend that opportunity even in what are at first blush possibly some very sublime or even ridiculous circumstances.

7:50

It's one of the situations where we must go further and at least allow for people to discuss issues, to hear why they think they weren't given the opportunity the first time to get their, I guess, facts on the record and to at least give them that opportunity. I realize it will often be a bureaucratic nightmare and possibly make some people do some extra work on some stuff that has little opportunity to succeed. Nevertheless, having that opportunity, in my view, would allow the situation to go forward and allow our citizens to have more confidence in the system.

We also look at section 20 and its amendments. I'll just go through them here in subsection (1) by adding the following after clause (e):

- (e.1) if a complainant fails to . . . answer questions or to produce an item as required under clause (c) or (d), is unable or refuses to participate or to follow processes or conducts himself or herself in an inappropriate manner, the Board may dismiss the matter;
- (e.2) if a witness fails to attend or to answer questions, is unable or refuses to participate or to follow processes or conducts himself or herself in an inappropriate manner, the Board may dismiss the witness and continue with the matter.

The proposed changes of section 20 are difficult for me to fully comprehend. In situations where the complainant or witness is unable to respond, their inability should not be used as a pretext to dismiss what might in fact be a valid claim. I don't believe that an individual's inability has much relevance at this stage. Even where a complainant or witness falls into one of the behavioural classes provided above, it should simply be assessed against that witness's credibility rather than used as a means to expedite the disposal of the appeal.

This type of power is not available in criminal matters, civil trials, administrative tribunals, or almost any other professional discipline system. In almost any other adjudicated setting if a complainant or witness is guilty of behaving in the ways listed in (e.1) or (e.2), the

hearing would simply proceed to its conclusion and be based on the available evidence.

If there is no available evidence to back up their claim, well, it'll be dismissed and you go from there, whether they have the ability to appear or not or whether their behaviour dictates that they shouldn't be there. But if the evidence still suggests that something was wrong – and I realize that there are situations where by reason of their inability to show up, the case will be dismissed because the other evidence won't be substantial enough. But there may be cases, in fact, where this is. Simply by having that put in there, I think that is taking too much away from the process and disrespecting the process for what it is. Allowing for people at the LERB to do their job and review situations at face value, in my view, would be a wiser course of action.

If we look at section 9:

9 Section 28.1 is amended

- (a) in subsection (2) by striking out “or” at the end of clause (c), adding “or” at the end of clause (d) and adding the following after clause (d):
 - (e) a former police officer if the position of Public Complaint Director is not in the same municipality where the former police officer was employed.
- (b) by adding the following after subsection (2):

(2.1) The Public Complaint Director shall not be a currently serving police officer.
- (c) in subsection (3)
 - (i) by repealing clause (b) and substituting the following:
 - (b) act as a liaison between the commission, policing committee, the chief of police, the officer in charge of a police service and the complainant as applicable,
 - (ii) in clause (c) by striking out “public complaints” and substituting “complaints”;
 - (iii) by adding the following after clause (c):
 - (d) review the investigation conducted in respect of a complaint during the course of the investigation and at the conclusion of the investigation.

People I have talked to associated with the Police Commission are afraid that this above amendment will allow the public complaint director to possibly second-guess an investigator during the course of an ongoing investigation. The proposed change could result in the public complaint director overseeing and unnecessarily scrutinizing the investigator and the investigator's actions. [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to comment or question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes, please. I'd like to ask the hon. member if he would like to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Hehr: Well, certainly. I thank the hon. member. This is one of those bills that I think we'll be bringing forward some amendments on that may help clarify what was no doubt a bit of a scattergun approach to what my comments are.

Finally, I believe the commission has expressed a concern that the complaint director could attempt to insert himself or herself into the investigative process. We know from the simple fact of police independence that we want those police officers to have their independence to complete a review of a situation, to go about their actions in a reasonable fashion, where they can report to their supervisors and to the powers that be on what the situation is.

We know that as public officials we are not supposed to interfere

in a complaints process, and in my view it wouldn't be appropriate to interject a public complaint director into a situation like this. We hold the value of our police officers' investigation officer discretion as even a cornerstone of policing, and by allowing this, the public complaints director could be seen to be actively engaged in the process. In our view, that doesn't appear to be correct. Possibly that's not the case, and maybe that is going to be clarified later on, but that's at least my reading.

This amendment may breed some hostility between the service and the oversight body and create an adversarial relationship. I think at all times we have to respect police independence while at the same time walk a fine line between allowing people to have their say when it comes to making a complaint to the appropriate bodies. Investigators must be trusted to do their own investigations, or else they should not be in the role, and the public complaints director should not be thrusting themselves into a situation.

We look at some of the issues that are involved in section 43 and some of the things that have been changed in the act. Several stakeholders have complained that this is a new narrowing of the class of eligible complainant and that it runs counter to the public interest. Advocacy groups feel that these changes are aimed at eliminating complaints by groups or organizations that represent and protect our civil liberties, the CTLA and other organizations and concerned citizens. The CTLA feel that they are the main target of the proposed measures. In my view, that could be the case.

8:00

If such a restricted definition of who falls into the prescribed class of a complainant was in place previously, there would be, for example, situations that would not have been brought forward in the past. I think that would limit what type of complaints could go to the LERB and would limit the ability of people to obtain what in their view was a full and fair hearing of their complaint to a board.

Like I said at the start, we should err on the side of caution when we limit individuals' ability to make a complaint or we limit who can make a complaint to a board that serves the public interest. This act essentially disenfranchises.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before continuing, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a large contingent of the Friends of Medicare who have taken time out of their evening because they feel very strongly that there should be a vocal opposition to Bill 17, and they're here to offer their support. I would like to ask them to stand and ask the House to give them the traditional welcome.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 27

Police Amendment Act, 2010

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and make a few comments with respect to Bill 27, Police

Amendment Act, 2010. This is another in a series of very, very bad bills that are coming out of the government in this fall session. A lot of the bill has to do with the hearings into the conduct of police. We've had some discussions with some of the legal community in our province, and I'd like to make note of some of their comments with respect to this. It is, I think, a real cause of concern.

Section 20 of the bill, for example, stipulates a wide range of circumstances whereby a complaint could be dismissed. An action can be dismissed if the complainant fails to attend, fails to answer questions, fails to produce an item as required, is unable to participate, refuses to participate, fails to follow processes, or fails to conduct himself or herself in an appropriate manner. Mr. Speaker, this gives an enormous range for a complaint to be dismissed on very spurious grounds. It gives enormous latitude to people who can characterize behaviour of the complainant in such a way as to lead to the dismissal of their complaint.

For example, Mr. Speaker, someone who is agitated bringing a complaint against the police may behave in an unruly manner, but an unruly complainant may nevertheless have a highly valid point that they wish to bring forward. They may have an extremely legitimate grievance, yet their complaint can be dismissed under this legislation. To dismiss a justified grievance simply because a complainant somehow offends a government tribunal or falls into error adhering to process is antagonistic to the notion that the conduct underlying the complaint ought to be determined on the basis of all available evidence. It is, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the duty of these tribunals to look at the behaviour of the police, not of the complainant. So this is a very bad piece of legislation just for that reason alone.

Section 42 unreasonably restricts the class of complainant. A complaint may now be brought only by a person who was the subject of the conduct complained of, an agent of a person who was the subject of the conduct complained of, a person who was present at the time of the incident and witnessed the conduct complained of, or a person who was in a personal relationship with the subject of the conduct complained of and suffered loss, damage, distress, danger, or inconvenience as a result of the conduct. This class limitation unduly restricts other persons or organizations acting in the public interest from launching a justified grievance.

For example, Mr. Speaker, the government employs Crown prosecutors to act in the public interest. What if a Crown prosecutor became aware of information justifying a hearing into police misconduct? By the operation of section 42.1(1), absent of authority to act as an agent, Crowns are incapable of filing a grievance because they do not fit into the class of persons entitled to make a complaint under this act if this is passed.

Similar logic might apply to any other groups acting in the public interest. These groups could include police and other law enforcement officials, civil liberties organizations, a city alderman or a mayor, even the Attorney General of Alberta, the Solicitor General of Alberta, or the Prime Minister of Canada. None of them would be entitled to bring forward a complaint under this section if this bill is passed. So the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association says that there is no basis for this amendment other than to disenfranchise those who are powerless to complain or afraid or who otherwise will not complain.

Section 43 stipulates that if a complainant "refuses or fails to participate in an investigation, the commission may dismiss the complaint." Although, you know, it's possible that dismissal due to nonparticipation can happen, the amendment is nevertheless impractical. It just goes too far, Mr. Speaker. There might be any number of reasons that are justified which would explain a complainant's nonparticipation in the complaint process.

Mr. Speaker, the act goes on to address the question of discoverability. There is a one-year limitation to complain of police abuse. That's half the period for almost any other litigant who has a civil grievance. There are many good reasons to extend the limitation for launching a citizen's complaint against police from one year to two years. You know, for example, anyone participating in criminal justice understands that straightforward criminal cases routinely take more than a year to complete.

With this in mind it's also important to recognize that the party complaining of police misconduct may also be an accused in criminal proceedings involving the very same police officers he or she complains about. So I think it's worth noting that an accused may have a large number of legitimate reasons to refrain from lodging his or her complaint until the completion of the criminal proceedings. For example, the complainant may have been instructed by his counsel to exercise his or her right to remain silent. Obviously, bringing forward a complaint with the time frame that they've put in place makes that very, very difficult.

8:10

I want to talk about section 45. Section 45(4) provides that the chief of police may dispose of a complaint if he or she is of the opinion that the grievance is not "serious." Now, I remember a case here, in this city, where the son of the police chief was accused and, I think, later admitted to taserings repeatedly a man who was passed out, and it took a really long time to get any sort of justice at all in that case. Of course, you know, if the chief of police has the broad power to dispose of a complaint because they are of the opinion that the grievance is not serious, it gives enormous latitude and something which we ought not to invest in the chief of police or any police officer whose own members may be subject to a complaint.

Aside from the fact that it appears the Alberta government is prepared to legislate this approach, the practical reality is that there exists a reasonable apprehension of bias in circumstances where the subjects of complaints are essentially authorized to dismiss complaints about themselves. What a citizen or an independent tribunal might view as serious might be markedly different from what the police chief views as serious. I really wonder whether any aggrieved party could ever feel that they received a fair hearing when their complaint was dismissed by the leader of the very group of which they complained. That would be, Mr. Speaker, like trying to bring a civil suit against the government for some omission on their part or some civil wrongdoing on their part and having the Premier decide that it's not serious. Well, how many cases would actually get to trial in that case? I would say very, very few.

So I really wonder what the motive is on the part of this government for bringing forward these amendments. I think that it is inconsistent in our free and democratic society to enact laws shielding law enforcement from accountability, but that, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010, accomplishes. This is a shield for the police to protect them from being brought under scrutiny for any potential wrongdoing that might exist.

This bill is a bad bill. This is one of a series of very bad pieces of legislation that this government is bringing forward in this session, and I urge all hon. members to defeat this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Kang: Yes, sir. Under section 45, where it goes on to say, "by

adding the following after subsection (4): (4.1) Where the chief of police disposes of a matter under subsection (4), the decision of the chief of police shall be final," what are your views on giving police chiefs that much power?

Mr. Mason: The question, Mr. Speaker, for some that might not have heard it, is: what is my opinion of section 45, that says that the chief's decision to reject complaints as not serious is final? Of course, it makes it a travesty. If anyone wants to bring a complaint against the Edmonton Police Service, for example, and the chief of police decides to use his authority to declare it not serious, it's over and done with. You know, it's a joke.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 27.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 28

Electoral Divisions Act

[Adjourned debate November 4: Mrs. Redford]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The object of the bill is the end product of the June 2010 report of the independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, which was appointed under the auspices of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. This was based on the submissions, available census data, and other factors affecting effective representation. The majority of the commission decided to maintain the allocation of the divisions proposed in its interim report, allowing for the following increases: Calgary by two additional divisions, Acadia and Hawkwood; Edmonton by one; and the rest of Alberta by one.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, several of the proposed electoral divisions from the final report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission have been amended since the resolution was debated, and it goes on further. We on this side of the House have advocated repeatedly for some time that Albertans are adequately represented by 83 electoral divisions and the addition of another four would simply be an increased financial burden for Albertans. Secondly, as noted by several members of the Assembly, the move to recognize a living public figure who is regarded as both a controversial and divisive figure could pose considerable difficulties.

This is going to increase the burden on taxpayers, Mr. Speaker, by creating four more seats for the Legislature. Albertans don't need four more electoral divisions at this time because times are tough and it's going to put more of a burden.

For those reasons I don't think I will be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak to Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. I'm going to hold my nose and vote for this bill. There's a number of problems with it, not the least of which was the blatant gerrymandering that took place in the development of the second report, the final report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

We had some problems with the original report by the Electoral Boundaries Commission – we appeared and made presentations to them – but there was some rationality to it, Mr. Speaker. Then, of course, the Progressive Conservative presentation to the commission, when they had their hearings on their preliminary report, demanded a number of changes.

I'll just use one example. I'll use the example of Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Calder. There was a rational decision that met all of the criteria to simply draw the boundary along the Yellowhead, which is a natural dividing boundary between Edmonton-Calder in the north and Edmonton-Glenora in the south. But, of course, when this came forward, the members of the commission, who are Conservatives and Liberals, found that this was not in their interests. If you look at the boundaries now, Mr. Speaker, you'll find that it looks like a big bowl of spaghetti: the lines are all squiggly, and it intrudes into one community, and a neighbourhood is attached here, and so on. That's a clear indication that there's gerrymandering going on.

I think that we need to address the whole question of how these boundaries are drawn and the political, in fact partisan, nature of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. What we have now is that the governing party appoints two people; the government appoints a third, the chair; and the Official Opposition, allegedly in consultation with other opposition parties, appoints two more. So what you effectively have is three Progressive Conservatives and two Liberals on the commission drawing electoral boundaries which affect all political parties.

8:20

Now, I want to talk a little bit about the whole question of the opposition members on the commission. The act clearly intends the Official Opposition to operate in consultation with the other opposition parties in making the two selections that they're entitled to make on the Electoral Boundaries Commission. But the Liberal Party in this case apparently viewed this as a mere formality, requesting our submissions, to which we went to a great deal of time and effort to find people that would be acceptable not only to New Democrats but to Liberals as well, but it was ultimately – I shouldn't say ultimately ignored; it was completely ignored. The people that the Liberal leader wanted to put on the commission were put forward, and our submissions were ignored. I don't know if the Wildrose was asked for consultation or not.

This is our experience, and it's not the first time. What we have is a partisan group that makes deals to set electoral boundaries. I don't think that this is the way we should be determining our electoral boundaries in this province.

We've made some progress, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the appointment of deputy returning officers. Up until this upcoming election the Progressive Conservative Party selected the deputy returning officers throughout the province. Whether it was an opposition riding or a government riding, it didn't matter. That's where the names came from. One of the things that the previous Chief Electoral Officer recommended was that we do away with that system and that the Chief Electoral Officer, who is an officer of the Legislature, should hire the people who are the deputy returning officers in each constituency. That's been done, so that's progress. But we can make more progress by eliminating the partisan basis for selecting the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and it would go a long way to ensuring that the kind of gerrymandering that we've seen does not occur again.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding what I've said, we're prepared to live with this. We know the futility of trying to make amendments in the face of politically determined boundaries. By and large, I

think it's something that we're going to have to live with, frankly.

I want to bring up one other question, and that's the question of the renaming of Calgary-North Hill to Calgary-Klein. Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a tradition in naming some ridings for outstanding leaders of different political parties: we have Edmonton-Manning; we have Calgary-Lougheed, although I think that's named for the family rather than for the former Premier; and we have Edmonton-Decore. So you have someone who led the Social Credit Party, the Progressive Conservatives, and the Liberal Party.

We put forward a proposition that Dunvegan-Central Peace should be renamed for Grant Notley, which was the riding that he represented, and should be called Central Peace-Notley. We went through all of the processes. There were, in fact, a number of submissions from groups within the community, within the constituency itself, that this should be done. This was rejected without comment by the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

I'm not aware that any submission was made to change the name of Calgary-North Hill to Calgary-Klein. But at the last minute the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill jumps up, evidently with the full support of caucus already determined, and says: you know, we're going to rename this Calgary-Klein.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's an imbalance or an injustice, an inequity in terms of that decision and the lack of process that was followed relative to the process that was followed properly by us and by other people who supported the renaming of Dunvegan-Central Peace to Central Peace-Notley. I think Grant Notley was an outstanding leader of our party, an outstanding parliamentarian, and well respected throughout the province for his work.

I think that the lack of balance, fairness, equity, and the partisanship that's been shown by the Progressive Conservative caucus in this matter is deplorable. We certainly don't support the renaming of Calgary-North Hill after Ralph Klein, who remains – and I'm being charitable and polite, Mr. Speaker – a very controversial figure in our province, not a unifying force, I would say.

That concludes my comments with respect to this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I will speak to Bill 28, as I sort of got started a few minutes ago. We are against this for a number of reasons. I think that it's already been mentioned that we don't believe that we need four. But I think my problem is that when the commission was appointed, the commission was told to make 87. The commission should have been mandated to look into seeing if we need 87 and what that would be based on. They shouldn't have been told to make 87. It's certainly an expense to the taxpayers of Alberta that I think at this point in time is certainly unwarranted.

One of the other things that was mentioned already that I'd like to speak to is the appointment of returning officers and election clerks. I think that we know that last time around was probably not as undemocratic and as fair as it probably could have been. I'd like to share what we used to do in the old days, and I think this could be done again. All of the parties submitted names to the electoral officer, who would then share them with the returning officers. If someone was a returning officer or a deputy returning officer, then their staff would be somebody from the opposite party, so a member from every party. They were all mixed up, and people worked as a group instead of working as only one party represented. I believe that it really helped keep – when people walked through that door, they left any sort of partisan hat at the door and actually ran good

elections, asked questions, and worked together as a team to provide a really good election experience. They did not try to play politics, sometimes making it very difficult. I think we do know that there were certainly some problems in the last election.

Just one other comment. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood spoke about perhaps it being a little skewed by the Liberals on that commission. Well, I for one have had my boundaries changed. I have probably picked up maybe two polls from my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-West, who proceeded to tell me with great pleasure that every one of those polls, of course, he had won. So I don't think that the Liberals on that boundary commission helped me at all. However, I did point out to my hon. colleague that probably they had gone PC because I wasn't running in those polls. I didn't think that it was a surprise that the polls that they had chosen to add to my constituency had all been won by the PCs. However, we shall see what happens the next time around.

I think maybe those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. The one that I feel the most strongly about is that every party should be represented in terms of the jobs that are given out during an election period.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Snelgrove: Would the hon. member just give us one instance in the last election or any election before where a returning officer has shown a bias to one or another? It's okay for the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to slander all of the returning officers in Alberta, but you have normally shown a little more class. Would you give us one example of where it's happened?

8:30

Ms Pastoor: It wasn't within the returning office. It was when people were coming to the polls. I wish I had it at my fingertips, but you know what? I am going to share that with my hon. colleague across the aisle. In fact, I think there was actually a lawsuit that had gone to court, so I will share that.

I do know that some of the people that were hired – how can I say this? – were probably past their best-by date and sometimes weren't always exactly cognizant of what was going on and weren't quick enough. People were sent away to different polls because they had come to the wrong place. They weren't receiving the kind of help that they should have gotten to ensure that they actually voted. Some of it was, I think, training and the fact that these people are there to help people vote, not discourage them or say: go somewhere else. There are any number of little things that happened, and I certainly will share the instance.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members under 29(2)(a)?

Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to stand and address, I guess, a few concerns that I have with the Electoral Divisions Act but knowing full well that it will be passing, and I accept that. This is a democracy, and that's the way it works.

One of the biggest concerns that I have, as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East mentioned, was the directive given to the task force in dividing up the Electoral Divisions Act. You know, we're going into the 21st century, and the question is: do we need so many people elected? Was 83 sufficient? Did we need to go to 87? To what lengths and where do we go, and at what cost to the people?

Are we not able with 83 people to represent all of Albertans in this province? Being a representative from Calgary-Glenmore, we now have 25 representatives coming from the awesome city of Calgary to sit in this House and to bring the concerns from Calgary here, but I have to say that at the municipal level, where they have a lot of details that actually go on in the local community, they don't have 25 members to represent them.

It just seems like we've lost sight of this democratic representation here, and it seems like it's more about the numbers or, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said, that gerrymandering is going on to say, "Well, how do we retain another seat so that we can have that vote and ensure that we have the power and the decision-making?" like it's some critical event that they don't have quite enough in the House. We all acknowledge very well the strength of the provincial PCs here in this House in being represented. Do we need to continue to elect more members?

I think that what we should be looking at is: what are ways that we can improve the democratic representation here in the province? We had a great opportunity here in having to respond to the 10-year mandate and ensure that the electoral divisions are set up right. I think that we need to be a little more innovative. There have been lots of discussions. There's even been a commission in B.C. that went out to look at: how are we going to change representation to ensure that people are engaged?

But this bill, you know, has come forward. We've divided up the different areas, and it really is disappointing when you look at some of the divisions in the different ridings. Geographically and communitywise you look at it, and you have to ask: why would you divide this community? Why would you take this one that's over the Yellowhead or across Macleod Trail or Glenmore Trail or some other one and drop it into the neighbouring one and take one piece out of an obvious block in the city and move it over across something like Macleod Trail, which is a major division in Calgary with, again, very different concerns?

I would hope that going forward, and, again, a very slim hope, we would do a better job in looking at the geographical representation, in looking at the number of people that actually need to be sitting in this House as elected representatives, and seeing, you know: can we streamline government in a way that's beneficial to the citizens? There are so many interesting concepts that we could and should look at. I'll just mention a few that will be put down, and maybe over the next 10 years, before the next one, some people will think of that.

One of the interesting concepts that I feel that we could move forward with because of electronics and the way that we can calculate and vote and everything else is to actually try to engage people on why they should actually come out and vote. Is there really a difference? Lots of people say, "Well, it really doesn't matter, you know; they're going to win" or "This person is going to win, and it doesn't affect us."

What would it do if we were to perhaps change the thought? Let's just say that in the city of Calgary we were to cut the number of ridings in half and meld half of them together so that we only had 12 or 13 ridings, but in each riding when they were elected, you'd record the actual number of votes. If there were 11,000 or 15,000 or 25,000 votes, that's what that individual would actually come and vote with here in the House, and each representative would be kind of like a shareholder. The number of people that voted for them in that riding would be what they would actually represent.

I realize that it's a little bit out there for some people who would think: well, how would that possibly work? It would actually work, I think, quite efficiently when you came in here. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and the hon. Member for Airdrie-

Chestermere are two that have huge representations in their ridings, yet they were, I guess, divided because they needed more representation from those areas. If, in fact, we were to change that and calculate the vote on the number of people that voted in those other areas, that would engage people, one, to say: well, I want my representative to have full voting authority, so I'm going to go out and engage and vote for them. But, two, we could really reduce the number tremendously because we would have a fair and weighted ballot according to the people that came, whether it's from Calgary or from rural Alberta.

It's engaging because when you look at the different areas, there are some areas that have very high turnout. Even though a member might represent a smaller area or perhaps a vast area, there might be 10,000 people that come out, out of a total of 15,000 in some of our more remote areas, so they have good representation. Then we have some other densely populated areas where there might be 40,000 or 50,000, yet only 10,000 people come out. This would be a way to actually engage Albertans to say: no, my vote does make a difference because when it comes into the House, it's going to be weighted. Right now, you know, like I say, it's one MLA, one vote, and we can tabulate those very quickly. I think we could tabulate just as quickly if people were to push the electronic button, and that number would be in there right off the bat, and it would go.

I really hope that the next time around, when the electoral boundaries act is being relooked at, we'll be a little more innovative and not say: oh, we need four more MLAs here in the province. Eighty-three was more than enough. I think we could have cut them down on this one tremendously, and I hope that next time the government will look at that. I'm quite confident that by the next time there is a revision, a new government will look at it, and we'll have a little more fair representation and more geographically directed. That will be to the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we now adjourn debate on Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Doerksen]

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act. As you know, health care has been the number one concern for Albertans not only now, but I think it goes back to the 1990s, since the cutbacks started. It relates to the wait times in the emergency rooms, a shortage of long-term care beds, a shortage of staff.

8:40

We didn't get to this situation of the backed up ER rooms at the hospitals and the red alerts with EMS in one night. It took a long time, I believe since the '90s cutbacks. It has been building, say, for 15 or 16 years. Health care lost 10,000 health care professionals in

the 1994-95 cutbacks, I believe, and those health professionals either moved to the U.S. or moved to other jurisdictions, and we haven't been able to catch up. There were lots of beds cut. Lots of programs were cut. [A fire alarm sounded]

The Acting Speaker: It sounds like a fire alarm. We will recess until this is straightened out.

[The Assembly adjourned from 8:41 p.m. to 8:46 p.m.]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we'll call the Assembly back to order. That was the fire alarm. As a couple have mentioned, this is the first time he's heard the fire alarm since he's been here. It was in the sound room in the basement – that's the subbasement – and it's a false alarm.

The Assembly is back to order. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act (continued)

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most of those employees – I was talking about 10,000 of them – moved to the U.S., or they moved to other provinces. For example, there are 200,000 people in Calgary alone that don't have a family doctor. That is according to government figures. So there we go.

It is a shortage of staff, not only the doctors: nurses, support staff, housekeeping staff. When I was in the hospital this summer, the biggest complaint they had was the shortage of staff. I applaud the front-line workers for doing their best to keep their patients in as much comfort as they can. Under the circumstances they are really stretched. Time and again – time and again – they said: I'm working overtime today. They were really stretched to the limit.

Mr. Speaker, as we keep hearing, you know, the health care expense is the biggest expense, but over the last 20 years per capita health care spending has not gone up when we take into consideration population growth and inflation. I've been living here since 1970, and our health care was working just fine up until maybe the '80s or early '90s. It all started to go downhill with the '90s cutbacks, when our population continued to grow, but we lost four hospitals in Calgary and all the support staff, like I mentioned before. How could you expect the system to keep up when, on one hand, we lost about 10,000 health care workers – now we're able to catch up on that – and we lost about, I believe, 1,500 beds alone back then?

Now, we look at urgency level wait times. For level 1 the target is two weeks, and the actual is two weeks. For level 2 the target is six weeks, and the wait time is 21 weeks. When we go on further, for knee replacements the target is 26 weeks, and the actual wait time is 49 weeks. Mr. Speaker, that's 23 weeks more than the target.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, things are not getting better. Things are getting worse every day, but here every day we hear from the minister of health, you know, that it will be done by the end of the year, done in three months. Ever since I've been here, like two years, we've been hearing that we will be meeting our targets in a short period of time, but it's not happening.

It's good to have five years of predictable funding, but even with

the five years of predictable funding the patient is getting sicker and sicker and sicker. Red alerts and yellow alerts are becoming common, and the whole system is backed up. People are lying and bleeding in the hallways, Mr. Speaker. I was at the Peter Lougheed emergency department, and this girl was walking up and down the hallway bleeding. I don't know what her problem was, but I think she had a miscarriage or something, it looked like.

The shortage of acute-care beds and the shortage of staff are the biggest concerns in health care today. Patients are being put in storage rooms, in the hallways, and they're waiting in the emergency rooms for sometimes 40 hours to be changed to a room.

When I was in the hospital when I had bypass surgery, I was moved four times, and I ended up in the TV room. Finally, I got a private room, and that took about a week. We were put in a big room. There was no privacy for the patients, and this reminded me of the situation back home, Mr. Speaker. We are still lucky to have health care as we know it today, and if we don't do something about it, I think we are in for a big, big surprise.

Coming back to the Alberta Health Act, Mr. Speaker, the principles of the AHA are that health care is a co-operative between individuals, government, and the health care providers in recognition of social determinants of health; that all ministries and service providers have a role in healthy Albertans; that Alberta is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act; that Albertans have access to safe, quality health care; that the health care system is built on long-term planning; and the transparency of the system and the decisions made.

The goal is that all the pre-existing health legislation will be examined and amended to bring it into alignment with the principles that are established in the Alberta Health Act. Originally it was expected that five main pieces of health care legislation – the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Hospitals Act, the Alberta Health Care Protection Act, the Nursing Homes Act, and the Health Insurance Premiums Act – would be consolidated into the Alberta Health Act, but this was not pursued as one of the recommendations from the report Putting People First. It was stated that in consultations Albertans were opposed to proceeding with consolidation of these five acts into the Alberta Health Act without further consultation with Albertans.

Then it goes on to say that the Alberta Health Act will allow the minister to collect information from Alberta Health Services, hospitals, clinics, health providers, professional colleges regarding their compliance with the health charter and other health care system information. The reason for this power is so that the minister can report this information back to the public. This is an improvement, Mr. Speaker. However, there is also the ability for the minister to disregard this provision for public input if the regulation is urgently needed, if the proposed regulation clarifies the intent or the operation of the AHA, or if the regulation is of a minor or technical nature. Why have this provision included in the framework legislation that all other health legislation will be viewed through if there's such a large loophole through which the government can avoid public input?

In fact, the Alberta Health Act will entrench some of the progressive principles in the preamble of the AHA such as social determinants of health – social, economic, living conditions, physical and mental environment, employment, gender, and culture – and the need for a healthy policy.

The AHA also says that the minister of health will establish a health charter that will provide direction to Alberta Health Services, Alberta Health Services Board, operators, health care providers, professional colleges, and Albertans on what every organization and

individual can expect from the system or what the system expects them to do. One problem with this is that the Alberta Health Act does not provide any timelines on when the health charter will be created, nor does it provide any specifics regarding the public consultations that there will be for the health charter.

Then it goes on further. The AHA will also provide the minister with the power to clarify the roles and responsibilities of different organizations involved in the delivery of health care in Alberta. This will include Alberta Health Services, Alberta Health and Wellness, the Health Quality Council of Alberta, and the health professional colleges. This is all in line with already existing legislation that defines the roles and the responsibilities of authorities, but there are also stipulations that the minister can clarify the roles and responsibilities of the bodies mentioned above.

Mr. Speaker, the AHA also stipulates that when regulations are being drafted, there must be public input by posting the regulations online, that the public can submit comments, and that the comments are reported to Executive Council. There are also sections that allow the minister to almost completely ignore the section that demands public input into the regulations if the regulations must be made urgently.

Much of the detail in this act is left to regulation, Mr. Speaker. This poses a large problem in that if this is supposed to be the framework through which all other health legislation will be viewed, it follows that in any other health legislation to come, a large part of the details will be left to regulation.

Section 8 of the AHA outlines the minister's ability to order public bodies to provide him with information regarding the health status of Albertans, health service outcomes, and health system performance. There is also the ability to expand the scope of this information through regulation.

What is left out of this section is, then, how the minister will communicate this information with the public when the section explicitly states that the minister is allowed to collect this information "to report to the public on the status of the health system." How is this collection of information any different than what is already provided in the ministry's annual report, Alberta Health Service's annual report, Alberta Health Service's performance report, and the publications by the Health Quality Council?

Another issue with section 14 is with regard to how the minister will report on recommendations regarding proposed regulations to the Executive Council. All reports to Executive Council are subject to censure under FOIP. There's no way to know exactly what the minister's recommendations to Executive Council were until the regulation is declared.

Then in both the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health report and the report from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford there is mention of creating an independent, evidence-based steering committee to support decision-making; however, there is no mention of creation of this entity in the Alberta Health Act.

While the preamble of the Alberta Health Act contains many principles that the Alberta Liberal caucus agrees with, the rest of the act doesn't contain nearly enough detail for us to support it completely. There is no specific health charter that is outlined in the legislation, so the main question surrounding the issue is what type of public debate the health care charter will receive if it's not specifically outlined in the Alberta Health Act. There is no mention of timelines for the creation of the charter, and there is no indication of how the public consultation on the charter will proceed before the charter is put into force. The draft health charter is given in the report Putting People First, but as it is not contained in the actual legislation, it cannot be debated.

Thank you.

9:00

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, anyone else wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albert Einstein gave a definition some time ago that the definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results. This government is doing just that with this bill. They pretend to consult with patients and doctors and nurses. They promise meaningful changes, and like a bad soufflé it falls flat. Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, has lofty ambitions like a patients' charter and a patient advocate, but once again this government is going the wrong way because it has no direction. This government promotes one bad policy after another, lurches from one crisis to another crisis, and is constantly having to clean up its own mistakes. As we have seen with the way the government has handled the energy sector, they mean well, but they keep getting it wrong. With this government every time they take a step forward, they inevitably take two steps back.

Mr. Mason: They don't mean well.

Mr. Hinman: You have a valid point there.

Albertans expected real change, real results that could be seen with their own eyes. After years of consulting the people, or after a year, I guess, and after being told Albertans are finally getting their own act, all they have to show for it is an imaginary patients' charter and an invisible friend to enforce it. The charter in question won't even have legal force. The people are not only disappointed; they are frustrated. This feels like a bait and switch. All this government has to show for its work is a preamble, a statement of principles that Albertans already agree with. There was no reason for the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to travel the province at considerable taxpayer expense to draft a laundry list of motherhood and apple pie. Now, because of this government's incompetence, they feel they need to pass a bill to look busy rather than being busy. While emergency rooms overflow, cancer patients wait longer than they should, and seniors wait in hospital beds, this government dithers.

The biggest problem in our health care system is centralization. It does not work. A collectivized solution is just a bigger problem waiting to happen. It doesn't work in agriculture, and it doesn't work in health care. There is no shortage of funding and resources in our health system. Alberta has one of the highest levels of per capita spending in the country. Canada has one of the highest levels in the world. The problem is management.

Mr. Speaker, our health system is clogged with bureaucracy, and we need a bypass now. What does work is local control and autonomy. Empowering front-line staff like doctors and nurses rather than rewarding faraway bureaucrats will help alleviate the stress in our health system. Like school trustees, local decision-making has been removed, and as a result quality is suffering.

Successful European health systems are highly decentralized. In Switzerland health care is managed at the local canton level. There are 26 jurisdictions across that small nation, with a population only twice the size of Alberta, providing responsive care as they see fit. Alberta used to have a similar model, and this government has unwisely created a tragically sluggish monopoly. The track record of centralization in this province is littered with failure: cataract surgeries, emergency dispatch, and a disaster known as Alberta Health Services.

No matter what the issue this government acts the same, and the

results are just as predictable. A better performing system was dismantled and consolidated, putting hope for cost-cutting ahead of quality. The best way to keep costs down in general and in health care is to allow competition. The fastest way to find inefficiencies and room for improvement is through competition. For too long the health care system has been sheltered, needlessly putting patients' lives at risk. This government has stamped out any competition. We've seen this with the Health Resource Centre. The HRC provided hip and knee replacement faster, cheaper, and better than any other clinic in the province of Alberta. The proof was provided by the government itself. How did this government react? It shut down HRC. What we need is a government that protects patients, not bureaucratic turf.

When you bring in competition, you bring in something everyone wants. That's choice. In most parts of life if you don't like what you are being offered or how you're treated, you find something better. Choice is something our health care system does not have. You can choose a different family doctor in theory, but in reality there is a shortage, and you have to take what you can get or hold onto what you have.

I believe our health system should be publicly funded, publicly administered, and competitively delivered. This government acts as if wait times and staff shortages are a mysteriously unsolvable problem. They are not. Many European countries like Switzerland and France have found solutions that keep coverage universal and at the same time keep costs and wait times down. The system runs smoothly so that you can see a specialist without a referral in a timely manner. Imagine that: seeing a specialist without a referral in a timely manner.

Anyone should be able to go to any provider with their Alberta health card and receive treatment, whether that provider is a public hospital, a private clinic, or a nonprofit like Covenant Health or the Shriners. They will all receive the same fee from the government. The most efficient, innovative, and productive clinics will treat the most patients, and those with the best results will continue to attract more patients.

The old saying goes that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I think it's really important that we shift focus to preventative care. As we stand, we have a system that treats sickness instead of promoting wellness. We keep treating instead of curing. We address symptoms instead of causes. Far too often we are spending precious health care dollars on preventable illnesses caused by drugs, smoking, or plain old lack of exercise. Chronic conditions like diabetes are the most expensive to treat, more than cancer or any other life-threatening illness. If people have a strong relationship with a family doctor, they can work together as partners to improve the patient's health and reduce the burden on the system. Right now our system is too short term, where people end up at a walk-in clinic or an emergency room, clogging our hospitals and not getting the proper care they need.

I urge this government to demonstrate real leadership by being humble enough to admit its mistakes, which does seem unlikely, and to realize its limitations by being strong enough to say that, no, it does not need to do things just because staff inside the Premier's office say that this is what we need to do.

Mr. Speaker, while I applaud the principles of Bill 17, I struggle to find how it helps the people of Calgary-Glenmore or any other jurisdiction in this province to create a more sustainable system. All I see in this government's report is lip service to sustainability. The government is spending over 40 per cent on health care. In other Canadian provinces it's now over 50 per cent. This government was warned eight years ago by Don Mazankowski. Real priorities are being brushed to the side because of this government's political priorities.

Albertans are creative, successful, and entrepreneurial. I'm sure there is plenty of opportunity to be more efficient in health care delivery. The problem is that Alberta Health Services is a black hole of information. We haven't had wait time information, or it was withheld for 18 months. If Alberta Health Services were more transparent and released detailed information rather than PR brochures, we'd have a much more efficient system than we do now.

We need a more innovative and efficient system. A key to that is the electronic health records. This government is woefully behind the times in this regard. In nations like Australia and Holland nearly a hundred per cent of the doctors use electronic records. In Canada the average is 37 per cent. EHRs give the right person the right information at the right time so a patient's health comes first. If we had a stronger information system in place, we'd know how much each procedure costs, we'd know the cost benefit of treatments, and we could develop a more efficient and effective health care system.

If we are going to have a sustainable system, we need the staff to run that system. We need sufficient doctors and nurses. We need them doing the jobs that they're trained to do. We have doctors not being able to work because of lack of nurses. Often those nurses are doing manual data entry as well as the doctor. We have nurses changing sheets. We need the right staff doing the right job that they were trained to do.

9:10

If we're going to have a fully staffed system, we need fully staffed medical and nursing schools. We need educational stability. This past year medical school spots were cut, and at the same time we were having a family doctor shortage. It just doesn't make any sense. In the nursing field, Alberta Health Services put a freeze on hiring and laid off nearly 500 nurses. Our system needs stability if we're going to have sustainability.

If we're going to look at sustainability, we must take into account our senior population. Those who have worked so hard in life need the proper care and support as they age. The government's record on senior care is a disaster, the reform of the drug plan was a failure, and the lack of proper beds is appalling. Seniors want to live at home whenever possible. Alberta has the second-lowest level of home care spending in Canada. Too often seniors end up in a hospital bed while they wait for a bed in assisted or long-term care. When seniors can't get the right beds and end up in a hospital, it creates problems in our emergency rooms. Seniors want to be near their loved ones and, when possible, close to home.

Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing that we have come to this, where we need to pass a bill to state the obvious. One has to scratch one's head and ask: what are we really doing here? To think that this government feels that Bill 17 is a priority in health care is just wrong. Of course, we think health care is important and that patients should be respected. It's obvious that the government should seek public input on a regular basis. That's the bedrock of democracy. We already know and understand those things. These things are common-sense things.

What this bill seems to be is much ado about nothing. One might say that thou dost protest too much for an innocent person: way too many statements about how well everything is going to be with this new act. These are all promises and declarations that one would never think about saying or stating, other than the fact that there are so many problems with no cures in sight, so we must state that we're going to have one.

If we were truly to run health care properly, it would be a major step to bring back the Alberta advantage. There should be an economic and social advantage to be here in Alberta. Do not get me

wrong. We are very blessed and fortunate here in Alberta. The problem is that like many family businesses that were focused on service with a great reputation that is lost by the third and fourth generation, they lose the family business because they do not understand the values and principles of those who founded it and worked hard to build up a successful business. We are falling far short of our potential and the excellence that we shall have here in Alberta. We can do better, but this bill will not turn around the continuing decline of our health care here in Alberta. The front-line workers are amazing and do a wonderful job given the workplace atmosphere they must work in. They deserve better, and our patients deserve better. This bill falls far short of any improvement here in the province.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I just have a few comments with respect to the speech of the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. It has the refreshing aspect of honestly stating the intention to bring about competition through private enterprise into our health system. I think this is a severely mistaken point of view, but it's refreshing to see a party that's at least willing to admit what their underlying objectives and strategies are for the health system, unlike the party opposite, who hide what they're doing at election time, and after the election they make a renewed attempt to try and bring about the kind of system that the hon. member here is talking about.

I've seen it at least twice, Mr. Speaker. In the 2004 election I challenged Ralph Klein in the debate and said, "You've got a secret plan to privatize health care," something he hotly denied in the election and in that debate, but it was only a matter of a couple of months later that he unveiled the third way, which, of course, was a plan for a privatized second tier of health care. It was two-tier health care using private delivery as a key ingredient. In the last election, of course, the Progressive Conservative Party said almost nothing about health care. When asked, the Premier said: well, you know, the third way is DOA, dead on arrival. There was nothing on their website or in their policy statement which would have given us any indication of what was to come with the appointment of Ron Liepert as health minister, and we've seen the results of all of that.

The Acting Speaker: Well, hon. member, you know that you can't use names.

Mr. Mason: Oh. Did I use somebody's name?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, you did.

Mr. Mason: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. It was completely inappropriate. It was the previous health minister. I take your admonishment, and I apologize to you and to the House.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: So we've seen how the government tries to operate along the same policy lines as put forward by the hon. member from the Wildrose Alliance but to do so with stealth. They back off because the people of Alberta stand up against it. They don't want private health care, including rural Conservative voters, and that's something that I think the Wildrose Alliance is going to find out to its disadvantage in the next election.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Just to respond to that because, you know, there are always those who jump to conclusions, that don't want to look into the details. The Wildrose Alliance is very much for staying within the Canada Health Act. There's a big difference. I mean, I would suggest that for most all members who go to their family doctor, that's a private clinic that's publicly administered and publicly funded, and that's very much what we're focused on. We do agree with you that Albertans want a publicly administered and publicly funded health care system. It's very different.

Albertans do not care if they go to the HRC and can be treated six months earlier than waiting to go to another facility. The problem is that . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the debate is through the chair.

Mr. Hinman: Sure. I'm just referring his answer through the chair so that he can get that.

The Acting Speaker: Through the chair. Yes.

Mr. Hinman: So it's a misguided idea to think that privatization is some evil thought that's going to take over health care. What we want is the administrators to have the choice and to look at various ways of appealing and putting out requests for proposals. If they would do that in an open and honest sense so that we know what is being proposed, then the competition can come in, and we can even allow areas such as Calgary to compete with some areas that Edmonton might be given.

I remember that during the by-election one of the hot issues was that the superboard said that, you know, for prostate cancer, which I'm proud to be wearing the tie and the pin for today, they were going to remove the green light laser technology from the Rockyview. They said: "We don't need one down in Calgary. We've got two in Edmonton, one in Grande Prairie, one in Medicine Hat, and that's enough for the province." So we weren't even going to be allowed to compete and say that we've got this here, and the money would follow only where they decided to give this facility money; it might be for hips or something else.

So when we talk about competition, we mean that even in one jurisdiction – whether it's Grande Prairie, whether it's Red Deer, or it might be Calgary – that wants to move into a new area, that funding would follow that procedure and not be trapped in one centralized area, saying that everybody in the province must come to Calgary or to Edmonton to receive that because the superboard says that that's the only area that's going to provide that service.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to discuss Bill 17 here tonight in this honourable House. I was present in this honourable Legislature when I heard the preamble and first reading of this bill. I listened with hope. I guess, you know, that like many citizens in this province and like, hopefully, many members of this House we are rightfully concerned about our health care system and the state that it is currently at in this province. So I listened with a great deal of interest when the bill was introduced.

You know, one of the funniest guys I know is my cousin David Vanrobacys from Lethbridge. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East knows him. He and I were discussing this, and he said: you know,

that Bill 17 is a whole lot of feathers and not a lot of chicken, don't you think? Mr. Speaker, I bring that up because I think it is really a good analogy by an extremely funny man, my cousin. It is. This bill is a whole lot of feathers, but at the end of the day you don't get much of a meal out of it. There's not much chicken left.

9:20

When I was listening to this wonderful stuff, this new health care act, what it was going to prescribe, all I heard was that we're going to have a health care charter that might be put into play sometime in the future and in regulations. Then I heard that we'd have a health care advocate, who might be able to make recommendations and who might be able to tell you that your concerns won't be as evident next time or point you in a direction where maybe you can get some answers, because, hopefully, this person will deflect you away from the real problem or from directing a call to the minister or someone else. It is just, it seems to me, an act that is trying to act like it is doing something when it is in fact doing nothing.

I think if you look at health and – I listened intently, too, that day to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who is our health critic, and I believe he did a very good job of looking at what in fact some of the problems are. If this government is serious about looking at what the problem with health care is, it would have to look into the situation and make a diagnosis. That diagnosis would have to go back. We'd have to go back in Alberta's history and look at what has happened to a health care system which, in my view – I was born in 1969 in the Holy Cross hospital, and some of the research that I've done and our caucus has done leads us to the view that Alberta had one of the best health care systems bar none in Canada, if not the world, up until the time I was 15, up until approximately 1985-86. It might even have extended all the way into the early '90s, when it was still a pretty good day for Alberta citizens in terms of health care.

At that time what did we see our government do? We saw our government go off for political reasons on a tangent of sorts that began by tinkering with a system that was arguably the best in the world. It made fundamental decisions on political idealism that really had no rational basis as to what, in fact, an adequate health care system looks like or what a productive health care system looks like. What did you see at that time? You saw, one, where about 15 years ago, in 1994-1995, 10,000 health professionals in this province either lost their jobs or were declassified into some other structure, and you had university spaces that were simply nonexistent for nurses and doctors to go to school. So is it any wonder that in Calgary now statistics are that 200,000 people don't have a family doctor? Okay? We did those things, and I think those decisions have a direct correlation to what we see now. But I guess as many people accuse us: that was then, this is now, and we have to deal with it now.

You know, those are some of the decisions that find us where we are today, and I don't think to have then gone from that decision – and look at some of the decisions we've made since then. I believe it was in the late '90s that we went from some number of health regions down to nine regions. Sure. A decision was made. It was made probably for political expediency like many of the decisions this government makes. It looks like it's doing something when it may not actually be prescribing a diagnosis to what the problem is.

We see, again, what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood brought up in I believe it was Bill 11, which tried to bring in the third way, which again was based on nothing but ideology in the early part of this decade, which saw this government spend time and money and invest dollars into monkeying around with a system, continuing to tinker with a system that was starting to falter from some of the earlier decisions, that were made in the '90s, a system

that was beginning to show cracks there but still was puttering along from some of the good work done probably by the Lougheed government to put in place a very good, strong public health care system. But they kept on tinkering. So now where does that leave us? Where are we now?

An Hon. Member: Right here.

Mr. Hehr: Oh, I know we're right here. Yes. That is the one thing I do know. That is the one thing I do know. But thank you for reminding me. Don't ever say that I don't pay attention to what you guys say. Okay? I do know where we are.

We have many of those symptoms, that have really come up over the last 15 years. I'm glossing over some things. Don't let me rush myself. I got sidetracked there for a second. We have access problems today. We have closures of hospitals. You know, I don't like to belabour this, but they blew up a hospital in Calgary, the Calgary General, which serviced people. It was not in Calgary-Buffalo but one block away. They sold a hospital, the Holy Cross, which I think is actually in the new Calgary-Buffalo electoral district. They sold that. Those facilities could have in some fashion maybe handled some of the emergency lines, some of the pressures that are building today. But those facilities were shut down and sold and their staff let go, and it left a problem.

There's also the fact – and this was brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview – that over the last 16 years we've had 13 or 14 deputy ministers in charge of our health care system. He paints a very clear picture. If you consider that, we've had 13 or 14 people in charge of a \$10 billion a year corporation that have been changed every couple of years: "Let's just move this out. We have a new minister coming in. Let's bring along his buddy." Or maybe he knows someone in Calgary who types his letters the way he likes them. I'm making light of the fact; nevertheless, word on the street is – and primarily I trust my friend from Edmonton-Riverview – that many of these deputy ministers had never been doctors, had never worked in a health facility, had never run a corporation of that size.

Let's fast-forward things to the Alberta health superboard. Where did Mr. Duckett work prior to this? Had he ever run a health system? I don't know that. Nevertheless, we've appointed some people to a superboard. Have they ever really worked in hospitals? Yeah, they were good businesspeople, things like that, but in a hospital system you need expertise.

We say that our hospital system should be run like a business. We look at, say, Nexen, for example, in Calgary or – what's it called? – Canada oil sands development, something to that effect. God forbid I'd say Petro-Canada. My goodness. Government intervention at its worst. Nevertheless, I would assume they've had a person who's worked in that organization for years, has risen to the top, an engineer or MBA or something, that would have some knowledge of how an oil business runs. I think it would be wise to have a deputy minister who has that, who has worked in a hospital. This seems to make common sense. These are things that have been absent from our health care decision-making, and I really hope that going forward they're not. That may make things better.

9:30

I did listen, and I was actually very consumed by this. There was one positive thing that came out of this: looking at the social determinants of health. Now, there's the thing, a recognition, of all things, that poverty and disease and health are interlinked, that people who maybe don't get access to certain things or have a bad diet or maybe are malnourished or are exposed to certain things may

not be as healthy and may cause more concern for the health care system. That would be really a remarkable thing, for this government to look at the social determinants and how maybe they can make things better for some elements of this society who are not getting by quite as well as the others, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview also said. I'm essentially ripping off his speech, but those who were here don't mind that. There you go.

He looked at things like a school lunch program for kids going to school hungry. Are these kids going to grow up to be healthy and productive? You know, probably not. Those are things governments do to try and play in those fields that maybe make things better. Are we going to bring back a system that really recognizes that governments have a role to play somewhat in those things? I think that at one time a Progressive Conservative government maybe with a different philosophy, one that may come back at some point in time – who knows? – the Lougheed government, believed they had to play in those fields. They were part of that progressive element of government that actually makes lives better. That element has actually left, left for quite some time, and it doesn't appear headed back for town any time soon.

Nevertheless, those are things, at least from the limited wording in there, that to me had a positive light: government looking at the social determinants of health. If they really want to get active and busy on that, there are many ways to do things for the citizenry that I believe would augment things.

On that note, you know, I guess to sort of sign off again using the words of my cousin, this bill really has a lot of feathers, not a whole lot of chicken. I think, to be honest, that this government should be a little bit embarrassed about it. I think there is more to be done in the health care system than what has been done in this act. I think it's merely window dressing, which makes you look like you're doing something when you're not. Everyone knows that a health care system is there to make you feel better when you're sick or when you need it.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Hinman: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo started off with an eloquent delivery of his remembrance of history, but he is somewhat younger. It's interesting. He, you know, referred to the years '87-88 to '92, and to me the lesson that I learned watching the government and our health care system at that time was the fact that we had a growing debt. It escalated to \$25 billion, and it was just unsustainable. By allowing that debt to escalate to such an area, the government felt that the only area where it could make cutbacks was in health care, and it made the very poor decision of saying: well, you know, we don't want to be picking and choosing, so what we're going to do is go 5 per cent across the board.

Anybody who has ever managed a business and looked at those types of things: when you've got tough times, you look at those things that are critical and those things that aren't. You would never in a business take the idea of 5 per cent across the board. You'd look at: actually, we need to increase 10 or 15 per cent here and make maybe a 30 or 50 per cent cut here or eliminate some other programs.

What would be the member's comment regarding that we were hitting a debt wall? We've got a government that has spending out of control again, and if we don't control that spending, then you start pointing the fingers at important things like health care and saying: well, we don't have any choice. I was just wondering if your view on that was a little different from your view on history, realizing that we were in a real dilemma there with a \$25 billion accumulated debt, that was continuing to escalate. That had a major effect on our health care because of irresponsible spending.

Mr. Hehr: Well, first off, I'm not going to agree with everything you said there. Nevertheless, here is my view of society as a whole. When we look at our society, at least as it exists right now, as a society we say that we can't afford health care, yet my parents, who are retired teachers, can take a couple of vacations a year. We have people living in extraordinary opulence here in this province, many of them doing wonderful things, which is fair. I like that. I like that about our society. But if we as a people, as a province can't get our heads around the fact that we can afford a health care system that treats everyone in our public to the best health care system in Canada if not in the world and that we as a citizenry can afford it, then I think we're in trouble.

I realize the government has – I would be naive to believe that it is easy being in their shoes. If they one time all of a sudden said, "Guys, we have got to go to the polls, and we've got to charge 5 per cent more taxes to run a proper health care system," I would probably support them on that. The thing is that we have many members of our society who say: oh, my goodness, governments have a money tree in the backyard. Okay? I think the hon. President of the Treasury Board accuses me of believing that there is a money tree in the backyard sometimes. I may be one of these people who hasn't stood in their shoes.

I believe, probably without looking at blaming here and just answering the question – really, I'm rationally taking the politics out of it – our society has to get its head around the fact that we are wealthy enough to afford the best health care in this world and that it's going to take us contributing to it at some point in time to see that happen. We can't simply rely on the vagaries of the oil and gas system and hope that enough royalties come in one quarter and that if they're not in another, well, we're going to cut things indiscriminately from what they are. Simply put, our society has got to get their head around the fact that it's going to take contributions to pay for it.

Thank you very much for the question.

The Acting Speaker: There's still time left for questions under 29(2)(a).

Any other members wish to speak to the bill? Hon. member, you have spoken to the bill.

Mr. Mason: I have?

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Anyone else wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that a lot has been said, so looking at the hour, I won't repeat many of the things, but I guess I'll get on my horse that I always get on and talk about staffing. Clearly, it's one of the main things happening that is creating, in my mind, some of the huge problems that we have in health care.

We talk about needing beds. Yes, but some of the things that happened when senior care was deregulated was that they went overboard on the other side for housing, and they didn't create the staffing that should go with it. Par for the course, I think, was to try to get rid of long-term care. Of course, as time goes on and certainly as it's being proven, we do need long-term care. Had they looked at the Nursing Homes Act, in fact, many of those people that were in acute-care beds could have been moved to long-term care had the nursing scope of practice been allowed to go to the very highest level. I know that when I was in the industry, there were many things that we couldn't do that any ordinary nurse would do. Those people could have come in.

9:40

I think the other thing that I'm probably annoyed about is that they took hospitals and they blew them up. They got rid of acute-care beds. All of a sudden there is a problem. Whoa. Wait a minute. Who should we blame? Certainly not the guys that made the decision to blow up the hospitals. Who should we blame? Let's blame the seniors. They're the bed blockers in our acute-care beds. I really resent the fact that seniors who needed care, who probably deserved to be in long-term care – granted, we did not have designated assisted living, et cetera, at the time, and home care was certainly almost nil in terms of keeping people in their homes. But I really resented that somebody needed to pay the price for the mistakes that were made. Unfortunately, it was the seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this particular bill, although there has been some good work done on it, is a vision. But, you know, it's a vision without action and certainly without timelines. We need health care, and Albertans want a health care that they can trust now. We can't wait any longer. We have to move.

We tentatively oppose it for several reasons. The preamble of the Alberta Health Act contains many principles that the Liberal caucus agrees with, and the rest of the act does not contain nearly enough detail for us to support it completely. When I say detail, I want time frames, and I want actions. When is it going to happen? I think one of the things we have to look at is that although we talk about beds, we absolutely have to have the trained staff that will go with that particular level of care needed in that bed.

There is no specific health charter that is outlined in the legislation, so the main question surrounding this issue is what type of public debate the health charter will receive if it's not specifically outlined in the Alberta Health Act. We have a couple of things going here that don't appear to be meshing. There is no mention of timelines, as I've said, for the creation of the charter, and there's no indication of how public consultation will proceed before the charter is put in force. A draft health charter is given in Fred Horne's Putting People First report, but as it is not contained in the actual legislation, it can't be debated.

The office of the health advocate will be created to ensure that the health charter is enforced, but it's difficult to support the creation of an office to enforce a charter which, in fact, in itself is undefined and has no legal force. The advocate should be independent of the government so that they can more effectively lobby the government on behalf of the Albertans that they are representing. That's what Albertans want. They want to know, when they go to somebody, that they're not going to be intimidated and that it really will be somebody who is looking after their interests, not the government's interests.

The whole section on the roles and responsibilities for organizations, that are already covered under pre-existing legislation, is completely redundant. This is a sign that Alberta Health Services has turned into an organization which the government is seemingly having more and more difficulty controlling or at least working in tight partnership with.

The last issue with this bill is the exception that the minister can make to having public input on proposed regulations. Regulations, as we all know, are often done in the backrooms and certainly don't come through this House. This is very, very wrong. This is a health act that will affect every single Albertan from birth until death. They must be able to have input into this. We must have input into any regulation and any charter that would come forward that will affect us.

Certainly, every single portion of our life is affected in some way by health. If the government truly wanted transparency in the way

that the health care system is governed, then they would not have had the possible loophole to public input. If a regulation is created without public input, then the minister must post a notice of this decision. But in the end what good is posting the exception after the decision is made and the public input was not solicited nor considered? I think that's one of the most important things, that we do have the public, and when I say the public, I want to see more – and it has been mentioned previously – actual front-line workers being part of the decisions and part of the input. The front-line workers, as far as I'm concerned, have been ignored to this point. They are the ones that are on the ground, they're on the front lines, and they really understand what is needed. More often than not it isn't a big study. It isn't money being spent. More often than not it is tweaks in the system that only front-line workers can actually recognize and be able to bring forward.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, I would like to give notice of an amendment, and I present this amendment on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Hon. member, we'll pause and have it delivered, and then you can speak to it.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very brief because I believe that we've had a fairly good discussion, and I think there have been many points of view brought forward on this. I have to read the motion. It is to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

I will be brief. As I've mentioned, I think that there has been a good discussion up to this point. I feel very strongly that we need a timeline. We need action, which, I believe, should be staffing to go with all of these extra beds that they're saying that they're creating. We certainly need more transparency. We need Albertans to be able to trust what's going on, but they have to know what's going on before it goes on. I believe that a lot of these discussions that will go on in regulation truly should come back into the House and be put in. I think that there are overlaps between this. I'm not sure that it's totally understood how this would fit in under the Canada Health Act, and for that reason I'm bringing forward this motion.

I think one other thing is that Albertans want good health care that they trust now, not two years from now, not after charters are made, et cetera, et cetera. They need it now, and they want it now.

9:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: On the amendment, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. I want to indicate to the House that I support this amendment. I think it's an excellent amendment, and I don't think we should read Bill 17 at this time but six months hence, when it's unlikely that the House may actually be meeting, in which case the bill is dead. That would be the best outcome, as far as I'm concerned, to kill Bill 17 altogether, and this amendment would have the advantage of doing that, in my opinion.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I did speak to Bill 17 earlier, I talked about it really as a question of misplaced priorities. There are so

many difficulties with our health system at the present time that I'm amazed the government would think that this particular bill would be a priority.

The bill is very clear as to what it sets out. It sets out a charter, a patients' charter, which, in our view, is not the best policy. It's going to be set later by regulation, so we don't even know what the charter is although the government has given us some indication of what they might put in it. It won't be enforceable by law. Nobody will be able to go to the courts to require the health system – Alberta Health Services or the ministry or the government – to act in a way that's consistent with the health charter.

Then it sets up a health advocate, and the health advocate, if he receives a complaint that the health charter has been breached, may choose to conduct an investigation. If he or she does conduct an investigation, then they can give a report to the minister, and the minister at his or her discretion may or may not decide to act on the report.

That's really all this act says. We've looked at it carefully because I know there have been a number of concerns raised that this, in fact, gives a great deal more latitude to the minister and to the government to change a whole bunch of things about the health system; specifically, health authorities and professional organizations within the health system. We don't believe that this is extending the power far beyond what currently exists in existing legislation.

But what this represents is misplaced priorities on the part of government. Let's take a look at the emergency room crisis. Just two or three weeks ago, when the ER doctors released the letter describing the crisis that exists in our emergency rooms, the minister was quick to announce that he was going to enforce new standards in our emergency rooms. These are national standards, and they had quietly been sitting on Dr. Duckett's compensation evaluation on the website for over a year, but the minister announced them as if they were his initiative and that they were new and that he was taking tough action.

Well, just today, in response to a question from a government member, the minister admitted that he has watered down these objectives very, very substantially, massively. Only 45 per cent, in one case, of patients are expected to get care in the time frame that exists for the national standards, instead of 90 per cent of them, 45 per cent of them, and that's the scope of it.

Well, this was a change that was quietly announced on the Alberta Health Services website just a few days ago, apparently without the minister's knowledge, but he has now endorsed this, so his tough talk that we're going to have national standards for emergency room wait times has just evaporated, you know, like a spilled drop of water in a hot desert. It's just gone.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order
Factual Accuracy

Mr. Boutilier: Under what citation?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Under 23(h), (i), (j). Take your pick. The allegations that this member is making against me as the minister of health are completely off-line, off-base. They're not true, and I think we should clarify that and bring him to order on it.

The fact is that I have not admitted to any watering down of any performance measures. What I did today was clarify that a reporter

in the media had made a wrongful comparison of mixing together different statistics, Mr. Speaker, and took some licence by misapplying some of those numbers to all emergency sites across the province versus some that were attributed to only the 15 busiest sites across the province. As a result of that, he created some unfortunate confusion, and I was simply trying to clarify that.

At the same time I also clarified, Mr. Speaker, that on Alberta Health Services' website it clearly states that the performance measures are being worked on jointly by Health and Wellness and by Alberta Health Services and that they will be released soon in their proper full form. So I would ask the hon. member to please correct himself and not mislead the House any further in that regard.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would hold that the Minister of Health and Wellness does not have a valid point of order. It is clear that in this House he announced, following the release of the doctor's letter indicating the severe crisis in our health care system, that the health system and he as minister would be enforcing emergency room wait time standards that were established as the national standards. Today, in response to a question from one of the government members, he announced that he was working on new standards with Alberta Health, which was just repeated today. The figures that he used were very much lower than previously said. I would submit that the minister does not have a point of order, but he has unfortunately contradicted himself with respect to what the emergency room wait time standards will be.

If I could continue with my comments, I want to just indicate . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I've listened to this. I've listened to the points made by the minister, and I've listened to the comments that you've made here as well. I also was here in the House today listening to the question and the answer as it was brought forward, and I think that perhaps there's been just a little bit of levity given by you, hon. member, when you were talking about watering down. I think that the term "watering down" was used incorrectly. If you would put a different point in, we can carry on.

Mr. Mason: Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw the use of the term "watered down," but it does seem apparent to me that there has been a dilution of the changes that exist that were previously announced.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: I want to just indicate that notwithstanding this severe crisis in our emergency rooms, there exists a health centre in my constituency, the east Edmonton health centre. When it was opened, it was opened without two critical components. The first component is a family medicine centre where six doctors were going to be employed in order to provide services to a very underserved area. The second component that has remained vacant is an urgent care centre which was designed to divert many cases from entering the emergency room at the Royal Alexandra hospital, one of the busiest in the province. That could be reopened for a very small amount of money and would divert I think the number is 34,000 cases from the Royal Alex ER on an annual basis. These are cases that don't need to go to emergency, Mr. Speaker. What I see is the government not addressing these issues.

10:00

Mental health beds are another huge example. The Premier today in question period, when he was asked about this by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, said: well, we've got all

of these community-based mental health programs. But, Mr. Speaker, they're not beds. They're not staffed beds. So if people with mental health issues are in acute-care beds and preventing them from being used by people who have cleared emergency, putting them in a community health program is no good because they need a bed. The Premier has double-talk going on. Instead of saying, "Yes, we need more mental health beds," he talks about community-based programs.

Similarly, when we talk about the whole question of long-term care beds, again the Premier dissembles, and he talks about continuing care. Well, continuing care may be a range of care, but long-term care is a medical bed. It has nursing care, it has drugs that are paid for, it has a higher level of care, and people are medically assessed as requiring that. Now, that's not the same as a seniors' apartment or a lodge at all. You can't take people who are in an acute-care bed because they're chronically sick and put them in a seniors' lodge. There's no nursing care, they don't get their drugs covered, and so on. The disingenuousness of the government around the whole question of emergency room care is the real reason why we need to view this particular act as an enormous diversion and, frankly, a complete waste of time. Mr. Speaker, what they're setting out is nothing that is going to solve the problems.

In my experience, when I talk to people around the province and in my own constituency, what they want is not a patients' advocate and a patients' bill of rights. They want somebody to fix the emergency room problem. When they have parents that are ailing, they want to know that they're going to get good care and that it's going to be affordable and that it's not going to bankrupt the family to make sure that they're well taken of. If they've got someone in their family with mental illness, they want to know that there's a bed for them and people that are going to care for them. Those are the kinds of things that people want. They want family doctors, Mr. Speaker. They want the government to stop lurching from problem to problem without ever finding a solution.

We've seen the government, for example, say for a number of years that we have a severe shortage of nurses, and then all of a sudden last year a whole graduating class of nurses couldn't find jobs in Alberta because they put a freeze on it, and in fact they were eliminating nursing positions. Now, again, we have a nursing crisis, and we need to find more nurses. Is it any wonder, Mr. Speaker, that we can't staff these beds? This government is so inconsistent in terms of how it attempts to address the problems in our health care system that no solution is ever reached.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at some length about the whole question of long-term care and the private delivery that this government keeps attempting to access as a solution to long-term care, glossing over that the long-term care private providers have told the government that in order for them to be able to invest in long-term care and in seniors' housing, they're going to have to double the charges that are currently in existence. Of course, this is just going to drive more and more families towards bankruptcy, whether they have to pay inordinate amounts of money or they have to give up a job to themselves care for a loved one who requires constant care.

I think that the motion that's been put forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is an excellent one. I think we should approve it so that we can get rid of this atrocious piece of legislation, just one in a series of some of the worst legislation I have yet to see in the 10 years that I've been in this House, Mr. Speaker. The legislation that has come forward in this session I think is dreadful and truly indicates to me what I hope is the last gasp of this tired, old Progressive Conservative government.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. You want to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Boutilier: That is correct, Mr. Speaker. My question through the chair to the hon. member is on the issue of long-term care, something that is close to all of our hearts. You know, when you made reference earlier – and I look here in *Beauchesne*, and nowhere in here are the words “watered down” unparliamentary – it clearly captures watered down when you talked about long-term care. Through the chair to the hon. member I would have to say: do you not believe that it is truly a watered down system in terms of what is being amended, in terms of what Bill 17 is all about?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I spoke earlier about him not using the words “watered down.” You can check *Beauchesne* or wherever you want. I made a ruling that asked him to use some other words, and you are now using the same words. I’d ask you to do the same as well.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I look here in *Beauchesne*. Nowhere are the words “watered down” in here under parliamentary language. Nowhere have I made reference to the issue of speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, it was in the term and it was in the context that it was used. I made a ruling on this, and I would hope that you would respect that.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I certainly respect your decision. However, the context of what I am saying here regarding this amendment, which I am speaking to, is the issue of long-term care.

Through the chair, Mr. Speaker, my question to the hon. member on long-term care. Clearly, long-term care and what has been committed to versus what has been delivered relative to this bill and the amendment which is coming forward right now: do you not feel that, no reference to any individual in here, that actual policy is watered down?

Mr. Mason: Well, I wouldn’t use the term “watered down,” Mr. Speaker, but I would say it’s terrible. I would say that, you know, it’s very, very hard to follow this government’s strategy. Let’s not forget that last November we released an internal document of senior bureaucrats from a number of departments that showed that they were working to a plan to reduce the number of long-term care beds in this province by up to half, a plan that had never been shared with the public or this Assembly by this government. So I would say that that’s not watered down. That’s not even diluted. I mean, that is a strategy on the part of the government that is deceiving the public, that is not telling them what they’re really doing and leading them to believe that there’s going to be an expansion in care for seniors.

Of course, they use a confusing array of language like continuing care and so on. They don’t really define what it is. We redefined it and redefined it for them. Long-term care is in the health care system. People are covered under medicare except for their housing payment. They get nursing care, they get drugs, and they get the treatment of someone who is chronically ill. They are nursing home beds or auxiliary hospital beds. And there is no reason that you can’t design those beds so that you don’t have to separate couples, which is the other red herring that the Premier throws out every time to try and confuse things and make it sound like they’re the humane ones and we’re the ones that want to break up couples that have been together for 50 years, and that’s just nonsense.

Thank you very much, hon. member, for the question. I don’t think that the appropriate word is “dilute.” I think the appropriate words are “incompetent” and “less than honest.”

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I just wanted to ask the member. He had referred to mental health, and I just would like his comments on the importance of having a counsellor always available in emergency so that at least people with mental health that come in are immediately seen. Even if they have to wait for a while, at least they’ve been contacted by somebody with the proper training to be able to help someone with mental health.

10:10

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much. I think that the background for what the hon. member is saying is the recent revelations that there have been mental health patients in emergency rooms that have committed suicide in Alberta hospitals in the last number of months and the fact that they’re not able to get the beds. You know, let’s not forget that the government recently closed a number of mental health beds in Edmonton hospitals.

I agree that this is an urgent priority that needs to be addressed. The staff in those emergency rooms are professional, they’re excellent, they’re good humoured, but they are also at risk because we don’t have the proper staffing and facilities and beds in our emergency rooms. Mental health is one of the biggest reasons why we have the emergency room crisis because there are not active beds, and you need to put someone in a bed to take them out of an acute-care bed to free it up.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak to the amendment, that “Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.” I wish I could actually in this amendment talk about maybe not six months from now but perhaps 12 years from now or something even further because it is full of irony. Clearly, the irony and also the rhetoric that goes with Bill 17 – at one point the *Edmonton Journal* called it historic. Nothing could be further from what is accurate. It is historic. It is historic with rhetoric, rhetoric that is, I believe, meaningless to the people of Alberta. The people of Alberta deserve much, much better.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands earlier talked about long-term care. I can only say – and I’m embarrassed to say – that the city that I proudly call home in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, with over a hundred thousand people, to this day does not have a long-term care centre. We have emergencies where the emergency room is clogged. We have over 55 seniors in acute-care beds that are costing at this point a thousand dollars a day.

In actual fact, the commitment that this very government made over two years ago, that they failed to live up to at the time – I would not toe the party line when it came to the fact that I was representing the voices of Fort McMurray on health care and specifically to honour a commitment of an election promise. Even though the economy had turned down, the fact was that there were over 50, almost 60 seniors that were still in acute-care beds. Acute-care beds, if you can believe that.

The then minister of health talked about: we want to keep seniors in their homes. Well, there is not one person, not one member in here who does not want to keep seniors in their homes. Their families and their loved ones have cared so deeply for their seniors.

For me to go and tell a lady 102 years old that, by the way, the minister of health thinks that you should stay in your home for another four years while we break a promise that we made to you is absolutely bordering on ludicrous, for anyone to even consider going back to their constituency to say that. To the senior that is 99 years old who has been in an acute-care bed for over three years and still is there today while other seniors – and I applaud the other seniors in constituencies that have long-term care facilities that can enjoy a quality of life in their last years of life. Unfortunately, don't come to northeastern Alberta because there is no long-term care centre.

Ultimately, I believe the amendment that you bring forward is an honourable one, but I just wish that it was not for six months. I actually wish that perhaps we'll consider at one point an amendment to the amendment of making it more than 12 years.

I really appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, who makes reference to the fact – and I can see him nodding his head in agreement with me – that he does support seniors, and he supports that, yes, you can care for your loved one, and you can. But to go and tell a 104-year-old lady that, in fact, the minister of health says that you're going to have to wait another four years for committed long-term care – a broken promise. I can't think of anything that is more diluted in terms of the importance.

An Hon. Member: Distasteful.

Mr. Boutilier: Distasteful I think is a very good word.

I can only say that I can proudly look myself in the mirror. I can look myself in the mirror and know that I have been a good voice and a strong voice for the seniors in my community. I think every MLA that looks themselves in the mirror when it comes to this act, Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, shall never forget the fact that this is not historic. This is historic in rhetoric and does not in any way, shape, or form – my advice is that perhaps they should listen to their emergency doctor, who actually has experience in dealing with emergency room things, so that long-term care beds are not clogged. Because of the fact of what's taking place up here, it also then impacts other stages of our health care system.

Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, does not address either the long-term care issue or the ER issue, and that really is an important component that's been identified by health care professionals. I also think of the health care professionals that had the courage, that came to the Wildrose and came to other opposition parties to talk about what is fundamentally wrong with this bill. The actual – the actual – distastefulness in terms of what is being purported as historic is nothing more than historic in rhetoric.

Mr. Mason: Histrionic.

Mr. Boutilier: "Histrionic" is a very good word, but I would prefer to keep to my own words at this point. I appreciate the comment by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

I do believe that as we go forward, let us do what's best for Albertans. Let us do what's best for people going to emergency rooms. Let us do what's best for seniors that have been in acute-care beds now for over three years, still waiting for a commitment that this government broke over two and a half years ago. I can look myself proudly in the mirror each and every day knowing that I've been that voice and that I asked the government to honour a commitment that they failed to do. When I see Bill 17 and I see the amendment that is put forward tonight, I can only wish and hope that it wouldn't be for six months.

Let's deal with something that is real. Let's deal with something

that is not historic in rhetoric. The comments that we saw here earlier today in question period from the minister of health – clearly, question period is about getting questions. I had, actually, citizens ask me: why is it that the minister of health never answers your questions? I said: that's something you can only pose to him.

But I do know that the former minister of health indicated at one point that we want to keep seniors in their homes for a longer period of time. I wasn't willing, nor do I believe any single MLA in this Assembly would be willing, to go back after the government made a commitment during the election time and tell a 104-year-old lady: oh, by the way, the minister of health thinks you have to wait four more years before you get your centre. A community of a hundred thousand with no long-term care centre: how can anyone look themselves in the mirror? I know I proudly can, knowing that I've represented and continue to hold the government's toes to the fire to honour that very commitment. I will be the first to say thank you if, in fact, that ever comes to be. The senior, who has been an advocate for over 30 years, a lady from Fort McMurray, in fact met face to face with the Premier of this province and indicated: honour your commitment, your commitment that you made.

I believe that with this amendment today, as much as it says "six months hence," I really wish that it would be a longer period of time. It says that "Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months [from now]." I will support the amendment, but I do believe that it could even go further.

To the hon. members that have any other advice on the issue of seniors, I welcome it because I can look myself proudly in a mirror and say: honour your commitment to the seniors, who are truly the architects of this very province that we enjoy and that our children enjoy and that our grandchildren enjoy. Consequently, I do believe that today this amendment is a good start to postponing the rhetoric that we have seen, the historic rhetoric that we have seen, and I do believe that as we go forward, seniors and the people of Alberta deserve something better.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

10:20

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand and speak in support of this amendment to Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, which reads that it "be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence." The reason why I feel this is an excellent amendment is because this bill really is, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo said, all feathers and no chicken. If, in fact, we were serious about the problems that we're faced with in the health care industry, we would actually be doing it. This is no different than a magic act where you have this side movement to take you off the real issue and say: "Well, let's talk about the advocacy now. Let's talk about, you know, the charter." What we need to talk about is the emergency room crisis. We need to talk about the bed shortages. We need to talk about the centralization of the superboard and not having actual administrators that are running our hospitals in an efficient and effective way. Instead, there's a total disconnect from the services that are being provided and no one in a position of authority to make decisions.

I've spoken with emergency room doctors. I've spoken with front-line nurses and even some facility housekeepers. There really is a problem. In our hospitals we have beds that are closed at the current time, and they're not being opened even though there are people down below in the emergency room that need to be moved up there. We're not getting the answers we need, Mr. Speaker.

Even today I asked the minister to do an audit and to report back to this House on how many actual empty beds we have in our current operating facilities that are closed that could be opened if we just had a functioning system that responded to the emergency situations, and he wouldn't even answer the questions, Mr. Speaker. Because of the fact that we're not even responding to the current ones, why would we pass a bill like Bill 17, which doesn't address any problems?

I want to read to you, Mr. Speaker, the table of contents of Bill 17, and I think that by reading that, it would help one understand and realize that this is just a smokescreen and that there's nothing of any quality in here that's going to change the health care system. We shouldn't allow this smokescreen to be brought forward so that we can say: "Oh, we're working on the charter. Talk to the health care advocate. He will return his comments to the minister, which may or may not be accepted."

Here's the table of contents to Bill 17, 2010, the Alberta Health Act. Section 1 is the definitions, which we always have. Section 2 is the health charter, which is a lot of wonderful words that shouldn't have to be in there if we even were to address the problems. Section 3, the appointment of the health advocate. Section 4, complaints. Section 5, findings following a review. Section 6, the annual report, that's supposed to come back to the minister from the health advocate. Section 7, roles and responsibilities. Oh, gosh. You know, we've been running the system forever, but we need to start defining some roles and responsibilities. Yes, we do, but what we need is a chief administrator's roles and responsibilities to run a hospital efficiently. Section 9, directions by the minister. Section 10, proceedings not subject to review. Section 11, liabilities. Section 12, Lieutenant Governor in Council regulations. Section 13, ministerial regulations. Section 14, public input. Section 15, coming into force. And then we go into a wonderful dialogue of preamble.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the contents of this bill and what's actually in here, there is nothing that addresses the actual problems. What it says is that we're going to look at the problems. We're going to have a declaration that people can make to the health advocate to say: "Oh, we're going to address this. We're going to do this." When these crises are here, the minister talks in terms of years instead of actual. We need to do this in weeks or days or perhaps even minutes in emergency, where a system is set up that actually can respond. Bill 17 isn't going to help any of those things. All it is is another layer of bureaucracy to say: read this charter if there's a problem with what you've received in health care. Then we'll go through a whole new area of process rather than fixing anything. There's nothing worse than just having a process.

You know, one of the things that's often said is that there's nothing worse than no legislation, but there is something worse than no legislation, and that's bad legislation. That's what Bill 17 is. It's bad legislation. It doesn't address the health care act. I would urge all members in here to take another read of Bill 17 and ask the question: is there any reason why we should pass this? What would really happen if we allowed this to be debated six months from now? We would realize that this isn't going to do any good, that it's of no value. So why would you pass the bill in six months? This is a knee-jerk reaction to a major crisis that's happening in our health care system and trying to create that magical image going over here so they can continue with their show over here of poor performance and say: well, let's just focus on the health act, the advocacy act, the new charter, and see if that's going to solve all of our problems in the future. Mr. Speaker, it is not.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has brought forward on

behalf of her colleague a very important amendment at this time. Let's not have any distraction to the real problem. Let's not have legislation that's passed here in the next week or two that is going to do nothing for the patients and those people who are needing health care services in the next six months. There's just zero help in here. For that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that other members would look at that, review it, breeze through it quickly, and realize that there is no reason to pass this bill. We should be readdressing it in six months because at that point we'll realize there's no need to readdress it.

I'm very much in favour of this. I would ask all members to consider it and to have some deep thought on what is the real purpose of Bill 17. Is it a smokescreen? Is it poor legislation? Is it distracted legislation? We're talking about distracted driving and trying to solve that, again with another poor bill. This is distracted health care.

We need to focus on the problems. We need to have some solutions to the problems. There is absolutely nothing in here that's going to change the way our emergency rooms are being run or operated. There's nothing in here that's going to change the administration in our hospitals and put the power and the authority back to a local administrator, that can make actual changes when the crises arise, that has the authority to open up closed beds that already exist. We don't need to build new ones. Let's use them.

Most importantly, I would urge the health minister to do an audit and come back to this House. That would be something that we could see in the health care act. What are the numbers of beds that are closed down? That would be something that's productive that we could talk about.

In closing, I'll urge everyone to please support this amendment, and let's read this bill in six months' time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Anyone wish to speak to the amendment?

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 17 lost]

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

10:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for his hard work on this distracted driving bill. I think we can deliver the support of this side of the House to improve the safety of Albertans on all roads.

I'm a little disappointed in the member for not supporting my amendment mandating the minister to provide statistics associated with injuries from hands-free devices. This was a very small amendment but would provide a clear picture of the necessity of future reforms.

In 2005 there was a motion proposed by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I believe, to prohibit the use of hand-held devices while driving; however, that bill was defeated by the members opposite. Since then the times have changed, and many more hand-held devices are now used today, which pose a significant danger to Albertans.

This new bill is much stronger than the one which he initially proposed and addresses many of the new challenges which have emerged since that time. These include texting, computer screens, personal hygiene products, reading and writing, and grooming. At the same time it allows for sensible exemptions such as the use of electronic devices by emergency personnel. However, hands-free exemptions may pose significant risks to the public, and anything that diverts the attention of the driver away from actually operating the vehicle is very dangerous, Mr. Chair.

While it seems that most Albertans have heeded the warnings, it still seems that there are a considerable number of Albertans who have not heeded the warnings. This new law, Mr. Chair, does not unjustly infringe on the freedoms of Albertans, as some members have suggested. This law is a necessary law to protect the safety of Albertans on the road. To Albertans who feel the need to text, to use an electronic device while driving, please be clear: just pull over, or it can wait. My hope is that once Bill 16 is law, it will have a positive effect on the lives of Albertans.

Mr. Chair, there are concerns that the bill doesn't go far enough. I have concerns with hands-free devices as well, but I believe it would be very difficult to enforce hands-free devices. No other jurisdiction has a ban on hands-free devices. Alberta could be the leader in banning the hands-free devices as well, but it would be difficult to enforce.

Using hands-free devices may give a false sense of security. It is not the device that is the distraction; it is the conversation that is the distraction. Most of the new vehicles are coming out with Bluetooth built in, and all of the new gadgets in vehicles make it virtually impossible for police to enforce this ban without co-operation from the other orders of government.

When we look at history, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought forward a motion in the year 2000, I believe, to ban cellphone use in cars, and many people thought he was nuts at the time. I also believe the member opposite from Lacombe-Ponoka in 2002 and the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought this motion, too, in 2005 to make amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to prohibit the use of hand-held cellphones. Everyone thought these gentlemen were crazy, but they were ahead of the times. Here we are five years later debating and likely about to pass a bill not only to prohibit hand-held cellphones but to ban other driving distractions as well.

Mr. Chair, laws do save lives. For example, MADD estimated that in 2007 there were 12,039 people who died due to impaired driving, and 73,000 were injured. We know for a fact that without drinking and driving prohibitions, this number would have been far higher. It took decades for people to realize that seat belts save lives, but still people think that they only have to use the seat belts in the front seat, not in the back seat.

In British Columbia since the distracted driving legislation came into law, since February there have been 20,000 fines issued by the police. Mr. Chair, driving is a privilege, and drivers should not abuse that privilege. It should be taken away if somebody is driving in a manner which is unsafe and could result in an accident resulting in death or serious injury. Injury, death, fender-bender accidents: they cost money to our health care. They cost money to our society. They cost money to our economy.

Mr. Chair, this is a good bill, but it doesn't go all the way. As I said, we should have found a way to ban the hands-free as well. Had my amendment been accepted, we could have come back to revisit this legislation three years down the road. It's unfortunate that the amendment was not accepted, but I will still support this bill since this is a step in the right direction and we have been fighting for distracted driving legislation for years. While it is good to see that a multitude of distractions are covered by the legislation, it is unfortunate that the penalties don't even come close to B.C.'s or Ontario's. We will likely seek to strengthen the legislative penalties maybe in the future. So I will be supporting the bill, but I've still got my reservations about the bill.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, Mr. Chair. Again, we're in the same dilemma with Bill 16. There's no question that we have, you know, as was stated earlier this day, I think, 300 and some-odd accidents every year on the road here in Alberta. AMA has been tracking these for a long time. With Bill 16 the attempt here is to increase the safety on our roads. I think that everybody will agree and has read the reports that 80 per cent of all accidents are from people that are being distracted. They might be under the influence as well, but they lose their concentration on the road, and we have an accident.

The problem that we're faced with in Bill 16 is: what do we do to actually solve the problem of human nature? You know what? The little flags, the different billboards, the people that are walking along the street, the nice little dog that they're walking with, whatever it is: there are just thousands and thousands of distractions out there that are going to continue.

At this point what we're looking at is the frustration of drivers. I've been guilty myself when I'm behind somebody and they've slowed down, not keeping up to the posted speed, whether that be 60 or 80 or 100. It's frustrating when every lane is filled with traffic and somebody slows down in the one lane and we can't keep up. The immediate reaction in today's world is: ah, that person has got to be on their phone. Granted, some are, but it surprises me as I drive by how many aren't. They could be talking to their other passenger. They could be talking to their children. Some seem like they're just singing along with the song they have going out of their speaker system and enjoying life and not paying attention to what's going on around them.

With Bill 16 what we have is a list of a few items that say what you cannot do. You cannot be "reading or viewing printed material." You cannot be "writing, printing or sketching." You cannot be "engaging in personal grooming or hygiene." Does that mean that if one needs to blow one's nose, that's hygiene, and we shouldn't be doing that? If someone has a Kleenex or a handkerchief while they're driving down the road and the policeman is driving by, they're going to get pulled over and ticketed because they're blowing their nose?

10:40

Mr. Kang: What if the policeman is blowing his nose, too?

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Well, that's interesting. There are many dilemmas out there.

"Any other activity that may be prescribed in the regulations." Again, that's very concerning to me, just any other activity that may be described in regulations. If you read the preamble to that:

"including but not limited to." What I'm reading here is section 115.4(1)(a), (b), (c), and (d). We've got this list of things that we're not supposed to do. Supposedly, the root of all of our accidents is this list of four things that are in there. It just isn't the case.

As I said earlier about another bill – and I really was preparing that for this bill – the only thing that is more discouraging than no legislation is poor legislation. We look at a lot of the problems that we have and the infrastructure that we haven't been building over the last 10 years and prioritizing our money right. I'm not saying that we haven't spent billions and billions of dollars; it's whether we've spent billions and billions of dollars on the proper priorities. This government continues to point fingers and say: "Oh, we're going to cut a billion here, a billion there. We're going to extend it out." But what they still fail to seem to understand is the importance of budgeting and using priorities. They talk about lists, but they never put them out. Yet they've put out a list here on a few items that shall not be done, and if so, they're going to be ticketed. I just can't help but wonder if this isn't again another smokescreen to try and say, "Oh, look at what we're doing for the safety of Albertans" when in fact they're not really addressing the safety of Albertans. This is a concern.

One of the techniques that's used when bad legislation has been put forward is that too often we never remove it, and we just say: well, we're not going to enforce it. I think that one of the key things that we can and should do is to put sunset clauses in legislation when we don't know how this is really going to turn out.

When you look at the process that we're going through with this bill, I'm disappointed that the government didn't bring forward more reports or reasons why they're passing this. It seems to me that the biggest reason is that they want to increase their revenue from traffic tickets but not from poor drivers, just from drivers that are holding a cellphone.

Mr. Campbell: That's nonsense.

Mr. Hinman: I would absolutely have to say that I would disagree with the Member for West Yellowhead that that's nonsense. This bill is nonsensical in the fact that it doesn't make sense that you give someone a ticket because of what they're holding. We should be giving someone a ticket, Mr. Chair, because they're driving poorly. This bill doesn't address that.

There's been lots of discussion in the committee that looked at this bill saying that the reason why we're bringing this bill in is because the police said that the test for dangerous driving or not paying attention is too high and the penalty is too high, where a young lady was fined, I think, last month \$2,000 for texting while she was driving. So we do have legislation in place that doesn't allow that.

If we were to change this legislation to where a policeman who is driving behind a vehicle and sees that they're driving poorly was to pull over and give them a ticket, that would be a reason for giving a ticket. But it is misguided to see the poor driving, to speed up beside them and look at that and then say: "Oh, they have a cellphone. Oh, they have a hairbrush. Oh, they have a map in their hand. Now it's okay to give them a ticket."

What do we want to do in the future? Pass legislation that we can read someone's thoughts and say that we're going to ticket you for your thoughts because we don't agree with them? That isn't the way common law was set up. Common law was set up for when you do something wrong, when you impose a loss or something to another person, whether it's their property, whether it's a hate crime. You've done something wrong. Then the law kicks in, and we try to have the justice system do that. But this law is a feel-good law. It's not going to accomplish what we want. There are actually a few

states that have passed cellphone bans and texting bans only to find out that accident rates have continued to rise in those jurisdictions.

So this government again is failing to pass proper legislation that is actually about the actions of someone doing something that is causing possible harm or driving dangerously. I don't think that this bill should pass in this state, so I would like to put forward an amendment at this time, if I could, to this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll have the amendment passed out, and then you can speak to it. This will be amendment A4.

Hon. member, you can proceed.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So to read this amendment, I move that Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 2 by adding the following after the proposed section 115.5:

115.6 Sections 115.1 to 115.5 expire 4 years after the date on which the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, comes into force.

Now, the reason that legislation has sunset clauses is because many times we pass things that we're not completely sure are going to actually do the job that we're hoping that it's going to do. I would argue, Mr. Chair, that after we've gathered some information, we're going to realize that the accidents have not gone down here in the province, that we won't have 300 accidents a year; it will probably be 350 or 400. We'll see it going up. As we analyze the real problem and look at that, we'll realize that human nature is predictable; it's powerful. People do not pay attention when they're driving. It's just human nature. The fact is that our roads aren't constructed properly or we don't have enough lanes, and people are frustrated, so the accidents will continue.

This is a bill that, again, is going to be a cash cow for the government because, I believe, many citizens are going to carry on with their habits of speaking. I, myself, have a hands-free device; I use it. It goes back to the other question that many hon. members have brought up. Is my driving any better hands free versus holding the cellphone in my hand? What we're going to have to do is either have an amendment and ban hands free, or we're going to realize that accidents are continuing, human nature is continuing, and we haven't been able to accomplish what we want. Perhaps the minister will make legislation saying that anybody who takes their eyes off the road is subject to a ticket because they're being distracted by something in their peripheral vision. All of these things are human nature. They're a constant problem.

10:50

As I said, I just don't feel that this bill, the way it's currently written, is going to serve the purpose that we're hoping it will. It's going to be a cash cow. It's going to cost a lot of people a lot of money because of their habits, yet it's not going to address what we really need to address in here: the reckless, poor driving of people that are being distracted, whether it's texting, talking on the phone, playing with a new gizmo that they just bought at the hardware, or whatever it is. Like I say, if we really want to address this, what we want is legislation that says that when a police officer is following a vehicle and realizes that they're driving erratically and poorly, they have the authority to pull that person over and give them a ticket.

Again, one of the forces that I really admire in the province is a small force – I think it's a hundred years old now – the Taber police force. There the chief of police had a lot of vision, understood the importance of good policing in a community. They put video cameras, back in 2000-2001, in all of their police vehicles. So if, in

fact, they were actually following another vehicle, it's recorded and shows it, you know: this is the poor driving that they're doing.

If we take it one step more, which really is what we prefer in the court of law, some actual evidence and not just one man's word over another person's word, saying: oh, they had a cellphone in their hand. That to me would be good legislation. But what we have here is feel-good legislation, to be able to say, "Oh, look; we've done something," when, in fact, we haven't. It would be my hope that four years from now, when we analyze this bill, we'll realize . . . [interjection] Four years. Do you have a problem with that? [interjection] You're probably right. I've gone too long on this, but some people would ask, and maybe I'll be lucky enough that someone has the foresight to make an amendment with a shorter time period.

This amendment at this time is to expire in four years' time, when we've collected more data and know what the causes are and not attribute something to: well, it's got to be the cellphone that's in someone's hand that's causing all the accidents. The accident rates really haven't gone up astronomically like cellphone use has. It's amazing how many people – I think the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said that it was 1 in 3 or 2 in 3, when they were driving by, that had a cellphone in their hand. If, in fact, that was the real problem, I think we would have seen a jump in accidents from 300 a year to 600 a year or something like that, and that that's the real problem. We're not addressing it.

I prefer to see legislation that is there for when someone actually does something wrong, not because someone is holding something. We're pointing at the wrong area. So I'd hope everyone would look at this, evaluate it, and realize that – you know what? – let's look at this bill again in four years and see if it's actually serving the purpose. But my fear is that even at that, the government is going to say: "Well, we're generating millions of dollars. It's wonderful for our revenue. We want to keep it in place because of the cash cow that it is."

With that, I'll sit down and see if anyone has any questions or comments on the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In terms of the amendment being put forward, I have to truly question the issue of four years because four years seems to me to be somewhat of an extended period of time to be able to make a determination of whether, in fact, Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, is working or not. I think the intent of what you're doing is reasonable, but I actually believe that the four-year period of time and the extended period to make that determination could be done in a shorter period of time.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to move an amendment that I have here.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause while subamendment A2 is passed out.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this is subamendment A2 to amendment A4, moved on behalf of the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can I continue on at this point regarding the amendment?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. In the amendment that has been circulated, I move that amendment A4 to Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, that has been brought by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, be amended by striking out "4 years" and substituting "2 years." Actually, Mr. Chair, I say that because I do believe that the Minister of Transportation and his officials clearly do not require four years to make a determination if, in fact, the prescribed bill is and has become effective in its intent and its spirit in protecting Albertans. Consequently, therefore . . . [interjection] I might say I appreciate the nice comments by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill when he makes reference to my amendment. I see that he probably agrees with it. I'll obviously look for his voice or his vote when he stands for this amendment.

We don't need four years. I'm quite certain the Minister of Transportation would be able to make a determination in two years. Two years allows a sufficient amount of time to determine, in fact, the strengths and the weaknesses that would be intended regarding the spirit of this bill.

I made reference to the fact that my wife hit me in the ear when I actually was being distracted backing out of my driveway. I couldn't hear for a day or two, but I deserved to get hit in the ear by my wife because I had my three-year-old son . . . [interjection] I see the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod – clearly, I can see he's shaking his head – got hit in the same ear by his wife, I think is what he is intimating. I can only say that we quickly learn, and we do not in fact make the same mistake twice.

I think the intent of this and the spirit of this bill is to ensure that doesn't happen, but we don't need four years to determine this. I believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who made the original amendment, which is a noble one, can join me in agreement with other members of the House to say that two years should be a sufficient amount of time to determine if, in fact, this is working or if it is not. We proceed accordingly in protecting Albertans, in protecting our children and our grandchildren and all Albertans who travel Alberta highways.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I believe that this amendment is a reasonable one, moving from amendment A2 to subamendment A4. I believe that I'm willing to give distracted driving a chance, but I don't need four years to give it a chance. I believe Albertans are very thorough. I think Albertans are quick-minded when it comes to determining if, in fact, a law can work or not work; therefore, I put forward the subamendment of two years, replacing the four years that was originally submitted by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will welcome debate on this important subamendment and certainly welcome the comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. Thank you.

11:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members who wish to speak to subamendment SA2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the subamendment.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm more than willing to accept this amendment to my amendment. I had those who argued that four years was too long.

Mr. Boutilier: What? We're agreeing?

Mr. Hinman: Yes, we're going to agree on that, hon. Member for

Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. We do not need to take four years to look at this bill and see whether it's being effective or whether it's just impacting the dollars of the people of Alberta and revenue for this government, that it will spend irresponsibly and on poor priorities in all likelihood.

I would encourage all members to stand up and speak on this. Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who's jiggling in his seat, you need to put in a little more effort. You can stand up and speak on this and share your thoughts on why you believe that two years is enough time or whether you think that the sunset clause is inappropriate.

The bottom line, Mr. Chair, is that as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said earlier tonight about a previous bill, this is indicative of this government desiring to pass a stream of poor bills that are not going to serve the best interests of Albertans. I've said it so many times. I'll say it one last time. On this amendment, though, what we want is to reduce accidents and increase safety on our roads, and the way we do that is by actually giving tickets to people who are driving poorly. Whether or not they have two hands on the steering wheel or some other area is not the determination of whether or not one is driving safely.

I think that if we look at history, class 1 drivers have quite a good driving record. Most of them are driving big vehicles with gear-shifts, and on top of that they're busy talking on their CB radios. Those came in, I believe, in the '60s and '70s. They've been using them forever. We didn't see a major problem with traffic accidents and didn't ban those devices. They're useful.

The point of all of this is that if we actually analyze this bill over the next two years to see whether or not it's effective, we'll be able to make a determination on whether or not we need to leave this bill on the books. More importantly, if in fact we're kind of lackadaisical about it and don't want to do anything, which is often the case with a lot of poor bills – they just kind of go by the wayside – this one will have a sunset clause, and it'll be removed from the books, and the people of Alberta will be free to be responsible in their driving, which is the proper situation. When one has a driver's licence, it's not a right. It's a privilege. It's a benefit. It's determined by good driving.

What we want is a sunset clause, two years where we can analyze and look at the data and see: is there an increase in accidents? Is there a problem? I would hope that all members would be willing to support this amendment to put a sunset clause in place. It doesn't do anything to change anything else in the bill other than the fact that we will review it in two years and replace it or let it die in two years because it really isn't what Albertans want or it's not serving or increasing any safety on the road.

With that, I hope to hear some other discussion on this amendment, that this will pass, that we can have a sunset clause in here. Perhaps we need to be implementing sunset clauses in a lot more of the legislation that we're passing.

The Deputy Chair: On subamendment SA2 to amendment A4, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think there must be some lack of communication between the deputy leader of the Wildrose and his House leader. If he thought that there was going to be a need for a two-year sunset clause instead of a four-year sunset clause, why didn't they get their heads together and do it in the first place?

As far as his comments that we need to accumulate data in order to see whether this thing is working, he well knows that these acts could be amended at any time. We always have fall or spring

sessions. We can amend the legislation at any time. We don't have to wait one year or two years or four years. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has the floor.

Dr. Brown: Therefore, I'm against the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to subamendment SA2?

If not, I'll call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to amendment A4. Any other comments on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: I would like to address the comments by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill saying that we have to get together. I think what he should really do is look at the bills that this government brings forward and realize that the government can bring forward a bill at any time. Opposition parties do not have that discretion.

The Deputy Chair: You're speaking to amendment A4.

Mr. Hinman: He made reference to four years and two years, so I'm discussing the change, why it's there. The fact is that opposition is not allowed to, but by putting in a sunset clause, it forces the government to. That's why the four years in a sunset clause is important to have in the bill. This government doesn't seem to realize the problems that it causes by passing a bad law that sits on the books for years. A bad law is the gun registry. Had it had a sunset clause, chances are it would never have been renewed. There are many other bills like that, that are bad, that should have an actual sunset clause so we don't need to address it.

You're missing the point when you say, "Oh, we don't need that; the government can address it." The government can, but chances are it won't. There's going to be lots of debate. By placing sunset clauses in, it is critical to the law that it has to be readdressed to be reinstated in four years. That's why this is important.

If we want to go through a long list of poor regulations and legislation, we could maybe do that another evening. I get the feeling that the House is wanting to move on. Well, then, maybe they shouldn't bring forward so many bills that aren't going to serve the interests of Albertans so that we don't have to try and filibuster. Maybe the hon. member hasn't heard about that, but we're very limited now on the discussion that we can have to stop bad bills from passing. In older days in the parliamentary process they would filibuster and could carry it out. The intent of this is to carry out the discussion until the government comes to its senses and realizes that – you know what? – this bill isn't in the proper sense.

Four years is a very good determinant time for the government to have to review and pass new legislation, and the purpose of this amendment is to have a review time that has to be put in place instead of letting it stay on the books going forward, like the gun registry has for years and years now. We need a four-year sunset clause. That's what amendment A4 is about.

I'd urge the government members to change their nays the first time, not the second time, so that we could pass this. The legislation will pass in its entirety, the way the government has presented it, refusing all amendments by the hon. members in the opposition.

You'll just have to be accountable in four years. So please vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has hit the head, hit the nail right on the head when it comes to the issue. [interjections] He hit the head right on the head. Believe me, there are a few heads over there that have to be hit. There is no doubt in my mind about that.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the difference between being in the government – I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has forgotten that democracy . . . [interjection] Nose-Hill or North Hill? It's Nose Hill. [interjection]

He knows quite correctly that every four years is a period of time that really becomes a clogging of bureaucracy. A sunset clause is able to eliminate bills that are not serving the purpose of Alberta. I think the intent and the spirit of this bill, actually, by the Minister of Transportation are noble in terms of protecting our children and protecting Albertans on highways. That is good, and as a member of the opposition I salute the Transportation minister for that. However, that being said, the idea of protecting Albertans, be it in two years or in the amendment that I'm speaking about, Mr. Speaker, four years – clearly, it is my observation that in any business an operational review is that they review the normal operating procedures. They look at the strengths. They look at the weaknesses. They look at what is good and what is bad. They listen to customers. This amendment that is put forward, that four-year period, is a period of time that, in fact, does achieve that objective, and that is very important.

11:10

For those who do not have business skill and do not have the operational review tactics of being able to look at the strength, the weakness, the cost-benefit analysis – we should be asking that each and every day in this Assembly on behalf of Albertans in terms of any proposed bill that comes forward. That is exactly what this amendment is attempting to achieve: operate similar to a business, do an operational review, take a look at what is working well and what is not working well. But that sunset clause provides an opportunity for a business to look internally. Perhaps this government needs to do exactly that even more when it comes to looking internally at what is taking place after 40 years.

Clearly, I believe that this amendment that is put forward is a good one. I believe it is intended in the spirit of what the Minister of Transportation has put forward in terms of, "I'm willing to give this bill a chance, but am I willing to allow it to continue to build up in bureaucracy and red tape for four years?" I don't believe that Albertans should allow the inmates to run the asylum. I think this amendment will be a counterbalance to that impact to ensure that the spirit of what the Minister of Transportation is doing is upheld, and

ultimately Albertans will be better served by supporting this amendment.

I'm sure tonight, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of members will support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to Bill 16 as amended. Anyone wish to speak to this?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour, being 11:15 on this Tuesday night, I would move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:15 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Third Session

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Issue 42a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 17, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 26 students from Annunciation school as well as their teachers: Mrs. Maureen Ostrowerka, Mrs. Maria Joy, Mrs. Yoga Gaffoor. If I can ask them to please stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce two groups today. I have three classes from the Three Hills school, 76 visitors in all. They are seated in both galleries, and they are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Christina Hoover, who also has the distinction of being my niece, Mr. Jamie Keet, Mrs. Carmen Reece; Mrs. Susan McNeely and Mr. Brad Luijckx as parent helpers. Also accompanying them today is the head honcho of the school itself, the principal, Mr. Lloyd Boody, and he tells me he also drove the bus. I would ask that they would all stand in both galleries and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Another introduction today, Mr. Speaker, if I may, is a close friend of mine and also the deputy reeve of Kneehill county, up here for the AAMD and C convention and a meeting later on today with myself and the minister of health. I would ask Mr. Bob Long if he would stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly some employees from the Utilities Consumer Advocate within my department. I am very pleased to introduce Mr. Alan Flemmer, Mr. Perry Gray, Ms Kelsie Acton, Ms Lourdes Castillo, Shirley Wilcox, and Karin Gashus, the Utilities Consumer Advocate. The staff at the UCA work hard every day on behalf of Albertans to provide information and advice and represent their interests in Alberta's electricity and gas markets. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to make two introductions. The first one is a number of students who are here from Velma E. Baker school in my constituency. They are here as part of the seek-and-find information mission with respect to how democracy works in the province, and I'm very pleased that they have joined us today. They are seated in

our galleries, and I would ask that all of the students, their teachers, and their parent helpers from Velma Baker please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you for coming.

I have one second introduction if I might. I also want to introduce a constituent, Denise Baillie. She's a member of the CCSVI Edmonton group. That's people suffering with MS. She was diagnosed with MS a few years ago, and she would like to be able to get testing and treatment for CCSVI here in Alberta. That is her main mission. I want to welcome her and thank her for coming. Thank you, Denise, and welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent of Calgary-Hays, Joylynn Matheson. She's in the public gallery. I'd ask you to stand, Joylynn. She was raised on a family farm in Saskatchewan, and community involvement comes naturally to her. She relocated to Calgary in 1988 for schooling. Joylynn, Rudi, and their dog, Tucker, moved into their first home in Copperfield in 2008. A daughter, Isabella, joined their family in July of '09. This new family prompted Joylynn to get involved on the Copperfield Public School Committee. She also volunteers time to the community association and is a full-time, at-home mom. I'd like you to give Joylynn the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to let the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo introduce one of his guests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much. To follow up with the Minister of Energy, you can see we're getting along today.

It's indeed my pleasure to introduce the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce president, Jon Tupper. He's sitting in the public gallery. I'd like to ask him to rise, representing the oil sands capital of the world. Jon, please rise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first introduction I would like to do is to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a spectacular woman, Penny Ritco, who is the executive director for the Citadel Theatre. I'm going to do a private member's statement on her a little bit later around a recent award she's received. She has been at the Citadel since 2003. She is a member of the Theatre Advisory Committee of the Canada Council, is on the board of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres as well as on the steering committee for the Canadian Arts Summit and sits on numerous juries and panels. With her today is a colleague, Marianne Bouthillier, who is the associate executive director of the Citadel Theatre. I'd ask them to both rise and please accept the warm welcome of my colleagues.

My second introduction I'm making on behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview. He asked me to introduce – and I'm delighted to do so – to you and through you to all members four representatives of CCSVI. Joining us in the public gallery today we have Brenda Requier. Brenda has recently returned from Poland, where she received the treatment and is feeling better. Along with

her today is Lorraine Bodie, Warren Stefanuk, and Tanja Allen. Tanja would like to get the treatment, but it's not available. She's asking for us to keep that in mind. I'd ask everyone to please welcome this group to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members Bryn MacDonald from the environmental group the Sierra Club, who has joined us to vocalize his opposition to Bill 29. Bryn has served our country as a UN peacekeeper in Cyprus and now, as a proud father of a two-year-old girl, has chosen to serve the environmental cause. Bryn has done volunteer work for the Sierra Club for more than six months and has brought to the Sierra Club a strong background and experience in detailed planning and organization, chemical engineering, and many other areas. Bryn, if you could please stand, I would ask all members to extend the traditional warm welcome of this House to our special guest.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my guest and good friend Lorne Dach. Lorne is a realtor and has made his name with the adage: call Lorne Dach and start to pack. I met with Lorne earlier today to discuss remediation and recertification issues surrounding real estate that has suffered the consequences of grow op or drug house activity. I would now ask Lorne to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Canadian Finals Rodeo

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. From November 10 to 14 83,936 fans, including many of my colleagues, attended the 37th annual Canadian Finals Rodeo at Rexall Place. The event saw 106 of the world's best rodeo athletes competing against world-class stock and the clock for a share of a record \$1.32 million.

One highlight of the CFR was Red Friday, honoured on November 12 as a special opening ceremony, with 60 members of the Canadian military taking part. Rodeo fans responded by wearing red as a show of support as Wrangler and Lammle's Western Wear & Tack teamed up to sell the national patriot shirt and donated \$40,000 to the Edmonton Military Family Resource Centre and the hero fund.

1:40

I want to congratulate Northlands for all their successes this year at CFR and also to recognize the incredible impact they make on our great city year-round. Mr. Speaker, with 2,500 events each year, attracting over 4 million visitors to Alberta's capital city, Northlands is vital to putting Edmonton and Alberta on the world stage. Aside from the wildly successful CFR Northlands also hosts events like Farmfair, Capital EX, headliner concerts, international events, and dozens of trade shows. I'm extremely proud to have an organization like Northlands right here in the city of Edmonton and honoured to serve on their board. Once again, congratulations to the board of Northlands.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Penny Ritco

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Penny Ritco is a woman with style. She has a unique style, both in how she presents herself and also in how she works, and that management style has worked very well for arts patrons here in Edmonton and in Alberta. Penny is co-CEO of the Citadel Theatre along with Bob Baker, and Mr. Baker is no slouch in the style department. Bob is smart, cool, talented, and successful, and Penny gives him a run for his money every single day.

I have asked Penny Ritco to be present in the gallery today as it is important we celebrate her success as a CEO and the recognition of her success by the Rozsa awards for excellence in arts management. Created in 2002 to honour the philanthropic efforts of Drs. Ted and Lola Rozsa, these awards are the only ones of their kind in Canada. I want to particularly thank the Rozsa awards for recognizing how complex arts administration is today and how high the stakes are.

Today is about Penny Ritco, and we are here to celebrate that. Earlier this fall she was named recipient of the Rozsa innovation award. This award is presented for extraordinary innovation in financial, human resource, governance and business systems, partnership development, community engagement, and sound business practices in all areas of a company's endeavours. Penny runs a company with an \$11 million budget and the large facility the company operates from.

I know that a recent project she is very proud of is creating the Robbins Academy at The Citadel. This is Canada's most comprehensive program for creative development under one umbrella. Five different programs: new play, artistic, collaboration, young company, and the Foote Theatre School. She does all of this while trying to cope with a 16 per cent budget cut. Pretty stylish in my books. Penny is also the proud mom of two daughters, one a budding playwright and one an actor, and is married to the fabulous Brian, a successful actor and director.

Thank you and congratulations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

International Education Week

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks Alberta's seventh year of participation in Canada's celebration of International Education Week, which runs through November 15 to 19. This year's theme, Building a Society for the 21st Century, reflects on the long-term view that we need while competing in a global marketplace. As we engage in the transformation of our education system, this week provides a wonderful opportunity for Alberta's education system to promote the benefits of cross-cultural understanding in our rapidly changing, interconnected world. One of the government's objectives is to help create global citizens preparing and equipping Alberta's youth, who will graduate into a global economy that will require them to interact with the rest of the world.

Mr. Speaker, international education programs and activities in our schools expose students to an international dimension that enriches their learning and prepares them to become world citizens. I would like to add that this special week provides all Albertans with the opportunity to reflect on the importance of our province's international relationships such as the 30th anniversary of our international collaboration with Hokkaido, our sister province in Japan.

At the local level our education partners play an extremely vital role to support international education: the Alberta Teachers'

Association for the delivery of Alberta teacher and student exchange programs, the creation of the Handbook for International Education Administrators with our International Education Advisory Council, and participation of school administrators in a highly successful study tour in China last month. All of these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, demonstrate that when it comes to international education, truly Alberta is a leader. This is the time to showcase our wonderful province of Alberta to the international community and to promote global citizenship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Métis Week

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise proudly in the House today to draw attention to Métis Week in our province. This is an annual celebration of the Métis people, their rich history, culture, and outstanding contributions. Alberta is proud to be home to the largest Métis population in Canada. Métis people have deep roots in western Canada and were vital to the early social, political, cultural, and economic development of Alberta.

Alberta is the only province in Canada with a legally recognized Métis land base. Two of these settlements reside in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The Fishing Lake and Elizabeth Métis settlements play an integral role in the fabric of our community. They add to the diversity of our community, and they continue to maintain the proud traditions of the Métis people.

The Alberta government works closely with the two main organizations and their leaders representing the Métis people: the Métis Nation of Alberta Association and the Métis Settlement General Council.

Mr. Speaker, 2010 is also the Year of the Métis Nation and the 125th anniversary of the death of Louis Riel.

There are events during Métis Week as well, including a flag-raising ceremony, an open house, artistic displays, Métis Fest, and Métis Youth Day. I also had the privilege last night of speaking at the Delia Gray Memorial Gala, which commemorates the life of Delia Gray, the first provincial elder and adviser to the Métis Nation of Alberta Association. The gala is a flagship event for the Métis Nation of Alberta and draws a large number of individuals from the Métis community.

I encourage all Albertans to take some time over the next few days to attend an event and to learn more about the Métis people and their pivotal role in our history as well as our future success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

National Child Day

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today in recognition of National Child Day, to be celebrated on November 20. National Child Day is celebrated in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world as a reminder of our shared commitment to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. The convention has been ratified by 192 countries, more than any other human rights document in history, a clear indicator of the importance of this issue. On Saturday we honour our commitment to ensure that all children are treated with dignity and respect, are given the opportunity to have their voices heard, are protected from harm, and are given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, children are Alberta's most precious resource. Supporting their development and providing them with opportunities to pursue their dreams helps brighten the future for all Albertans. The government of Alberta is committed to strengthening and

supporting families so that children can grow up in safe and caring communities, where they are protected from abuse, neglect, and exploitation; where they have access to basic necessities such as food and shelter; and where they have a say in matters that affect their lives. It is a responsibility that we all share.

In the words of Reverend Jesse Jackson, and I quote: it is often said that children are our future, but I don't accept that premise; they are our right now. Whether you are a parent, teacher, friend, or neighbour, I encourage you to take time today and every day to make sure that the children in your life have the support and encouragement they need to grow up to be strong, healthy, and happy people. Together we will create a bright future for our children and our province right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mental Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has neglected people with mental illness for years. From a scathing Auditor General's report in 2008 to a shocking list of 12 mental health patients dying preventable deaths after seeking care from mental health services, the failings are wide and deep. To the Premier: will the Premier accept my challenge and expand rather than shrink Alberta Hospital Edmonton?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's more than just talking about the expansion of infrastructure. It's talking about providing mental health services, community-based places across Alberta, increasing the funding over and above the \$500 million to deal with the matter. We see this as one of the causes of emergency room waiting list increases because it's more continuing care beds that are necessary but also having the right staff in the right place to deal with people that are coming in with some mental health issues.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Well, the Premier talks and talks, and the health minister talks and talks, and we do not see change, Mr. Speaker: 10 of the major recommendations from the Auditor General's report from 2008 on mental health services still ignored by this government. Mr. Premier, how can you justify any delay at all when people with mental illness have such tragic outcomes?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is a topic where if a person does have a mental illness, there still is a bit of a stigma, unfortunately, in society. It makes it much more difficult for people that are suffering from mental illness. That's why I feel that, you know, more community-based programs spread out across Alberta – and, yes, there will be additional infrastructure required – more people specifically trained to deal with this very critical issue is the answer.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wonder why the Premier refuses to answer the question. Ten major recommendations from the Auditor General have been ignored by your government. Are you going to address these and when?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what recommendations the hon. member is talking about because we have honoured or are working on all of the recommendations in the Auditor General's report.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Long-term Care Beds

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier likes to talk about not splitting up senior couples when they need long-term care, but the much bigger problem we're hearing about is three people squeezed like sardines into rooms built for two. We're not talking about the remand centre here; we're talking about our public health system. To the Premier. It's become common practice in Alberta Hospitals today to squeeze three patients into rooms built for two. Is the Premier aware of this? How does he justify it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a bit of an irony here because when we were attempting originally to move patients from Alberta Hospital, from multiple patients in one room to a facility that gave individuals their private bedrooms, more green space, better accommodations, that party opposed it. Now they're saying that, well, that's not the right thing to do.

Dr. Taft: Oh, come on, Ed.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, they'll have to decide where they stand on this particular issue.

Dr. Taft: You know perfectly well that in acute-care rooms people are squeezed in three to a two-person room.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker . . .

Dr. Taft: Don't evade these life-and-death issues so badly.

The Speaker: Hon. leader, would you just tap the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the shoulder? You have the floor.

Dr. Taft: It's offensive. This Premier is offensive.

The Speaker: The hon. leader has the floor.

Dr. Taft: He's offensive to the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader has the floor. Edmonton-Riverview, if you want to take over, you go and fight that out behind these doors, but the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Dr. Swann: The Premier continues to dismiss these issues and talk around the issue rather than addressing the question. Albertans are not fooled. This Energy minister is the cause of the problems in the health care system today. Unbelievable. His arrogance and incompetence created such suffering in this province, and he sits over there and laughs. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Why don't you staff the beds that are needed so that we stop this squeezing of three patients into two-bed rooms?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as of this January we will be opening our thousandth long-term continuing care bed in this province. That is a sign in the right direction. We originally thought we should be able to build about 800, but we're going to meet a target of about 1,333. They will all be staffed, and it will take some of the pressure off emergency waiting lists.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has hundreds of beds sitting empty, unstaffed. How can the Premier defend the mismanagement of health care staffing these last two years, the real reason why we have an acute-care bed shortage?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, we are training more nurses, more LPNs. We opened up more spaces in the province of Alberta for training, and we're seeing improvement in the number of people working in the health system. So it is continual improvement. There are, as I mentioned, some issues in emergency rooms, but we'll continue to add staff as much as we can over the next number of years.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Pension Reform

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, next month provincial finance ministers will meet to consider expanding the Canada pension plan. The proposal that's on the table would increase the amount that workers contribute by 2.75 per cent, phased in over seven years. This modest increase, no more than a few dollars a week, would double the benefits of retirees. To the minister of finance. An expansion of CPP at a very modest cost to employers would allow small businesses, that can't offer big paycheques and benefits, to compete for talent with big business. Why doesn't the minister want to help small business in Alberta compete in the marketplace?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the last thing we should do to small businesses and enterprises in this province or anywhere in the country that are trying to create new jobs is add a new payroll tax. That's what CPP is.

Dr. Swann: Well, the minister doesn't seem to know the difference between a tax and a premium. Is there a difference, Mr. Minister?

The Canada pension plan covers 93 per cent of Canadian workers. It's portable across this whole country. It keeps up with the cost of living. It's financed at no cost to government. Why would the minister want to bypass this very affordable program and, instead, make Albertans gamble their savings for retirement on private funds with confusing terms and high fees? What's the problem?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I refer the hon. member to my remarks yesterday, where I explained that we are ranked in the top five countries in the world in terms of pension coverage – the top five. He talks about the CPP covering 93 per cent of workers. You're right; it does. The problem is limited to about 10 per cent of workers. The solution is to target a solution that works for the 10 per cent that need the help and not saddle everybody else with additional payroll taxes.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, to change the Canada pension plan requires support of the provinces. There is broad support across the country. Why is Alberta's finance minister refusing to support doubling Canada pension plan retirement benefits for all Albertans?

Dr. Morton: In case the hon. leader hasn't noticed, we're still in a recession. Unemployment is high across the country. Increasing CPP premiums is a job-killing tax, and it won't solve the problem where it exists.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the Wildrose revealed a document, which will be tabled later, regarding the superboard meeting on Friday to deal with the ER crisis. Hospitals truly need the authority to override superboard bureaucracy from the roots up, not from the sky down. To the minister of health. Keeping in mind patient care for all Albertans, will the minister, if he has a choice between listening to a doctor or a health care professional versus a bureaucrat . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing new about some of the information that the Wildrose folks seem to think they have here. There were some overcrowding pressures. I think everybody is abundantly aware of it. I congratulate them on coming into the present tense. That's good that they've caught up to the rest us. Now we're dealing with it. That's the point: we can't change something from the past. What's important is that we've given specific directions on improvements we expect to be made, and that's what they're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question was: who would he listen to, health care bureaucrats or doctors and health care professionals? I'm assuming the answer is that, no, he will not listen to doctors. Will this minister listen to the people on the front lines, who are caring for Albertans, as opposed to bureaucrats? Will he listen to them?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. Part of my job is to listen to everyone. I'll even listen to him. [interjections] Sure. I will. I will listen. I may not agree with what he says, but as minister I have a responsibility to listen to every single soul who lives in this province. I'm doing that. Whether they're a doctor, whether they're a patient, whether they're an administrator or a family member or helping some of his own constituents, I'm there to do that service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel like saying that you're going to be the saviour for Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, given what the minister has just said, this document, which will be dealt with tomorrow or on Friday, management by closing doors: he doesn't want to see that happen any more than I do or anyone in this Assembly does. Will the minister, though, go to the front line and go to the doctors and the nurses, who have the solutions, as opposed to listening to this bureaucracy that he has created?

2:00

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've already done that, and I'll continue to do more of it despite accusations by that party that I shouldn't be doing it.

The fact is that there are solutions that are being worked on, and we've listened carefully. That's why I issued the direction document, the direction requests, to Alberta Health Services to make these improvements, to make these changes. Every hospital that is a major hospital with a major ER department has overcapacity protocols. What AHS is doing is that they're bringing together a number of those people for a sit-down chat on the 19th of this month to help address those issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Northeast Edmonton Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The northeast part of Edmonton is seriously lacking in medical services and professionals, including family doctors. The results are devastating. The infant mortality rate in the northeast part of the city is three times higher than in wealthy neighbourhoods in the same city, the equivalent of many Third World countries. My question is to the Premier. What steps has he taken since becoming Premier to improve access to health services and professionals for the citizens of northeast Edmonton?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there have been improvements in the number of spaces and the number of people working in the system throughout the city of Edmonton, including northeast Edmonton. However, there is an issue in terms of having more prenatal work being done with young mothers. We also need to have more people out there, not necessarily a physician but someone assisting families in terms of some issues tied to diet, perhaps to addictions, and to work with folks to make sure that the baby that's being carried in the womb has a good start once it's introduced.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier is incorrect. The situation is not markedly improved in the northeast part of the city.

On 112th Avenue there's a shiny new building that was to house new family doctors and badly needed services for northeast Edmonton residents. It sits half empty. Tomorrow at noon there will be a rally to demand that the provincial government finally keep its promises to the people of northeast Edmonton for better health services. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier finally keep the promise of adequate medical services for the northeast and fund the family health centre today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take that question because I think it's important for this member and everyone here to know that the East Edmonton health centre now has 136 staff at the facility, and that number is going to continue to grow. That staff includes 57 public health staff, five registered nurses providing support for high-risk pregnancies, nine staff members for pediatric development and mental health, and five additional mental health therapists. So there's quite a bit going on right at that site, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's certainly true that they did move the Eastwood public health clinic into that facility, but the badly needed additional doctors have not been funded, and the minister knows that. The question is: when will he take action? Will he commit today to fully fund the medical centre at the East Edmonton health centre, that remains empty, and get the services that the people in northeast Edmonton need and deserve to bring down the infant mortality rate among other things?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I agree there is more to be done, and that is part of the second phase. In the meantime 85 per cent of the

East Edmonton health centre is currently occupied with programs like child health clinics, community perinatal programs, early childhood oral health services, chronic disease management programs, immunization services for adults, infants, and schools, pediatric development and mental health services, speech and language services for children, home care for adults and children, and the list goes on. There are a lot of good things happening there. I acknowledge more can and will be done.

Hate Crimes

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I spoke with the Devine family again last night. They assured me that they are comfortable with my raising in this honourable House the issue of the unsavoury actions of the minister's department. The only thing that makes them uncomfortable is the minister of children's services' refusal to take responsibility for this fiasco. To the hon. minister. Just to be clear, I don't want to have tea about this issue or chitchat about this issue after QP. I want to know if you'll apologize to the Devine family.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have answered this question over the last two days. I can let you know today that the family that this member is referring to has not contacted my office with any complaints. They've not contacted the office of the child and family services authority in Calgary with any complaints. I continue to question the motivation of this member for raising this family's issue on the floor of this Assembly.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason I'm bringing this up is because after they were attacked in the dead of night, the Devine family were harassed by Children and Youth Services – I believe that's the minister's department – who demanded to see them and made belligerent statements regarding their political advocacy. Please explain how this falls into your stated mandate of keeping families together. That's why I'm asking.

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I continue to assure you that this information is incorrect, and every day that this member reaches into his backpack and shoots poison arrows at my staff for the good work that they're doing out in the field – it's uncalled for. That's exactly what you're doing with this particular situation. This did not occur in the way that this member has described.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I actually find it absurd and, frankly, a little bit comical that she's castigating me in this Assembly for trying to do my job. I'm trying to stand up for a constituent who's been bullied by members of your department. You should be apologizing to this honourable Assembly, to me, but, most importantly, to the Devines for the actions of your ministry. Will you do that?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, this member should be apologizing to my staff in the field that are ensuring that children that have experienced any violence in any home are safe. We have many good programs and services that are being offered by our staff for individuals. You have accused my staff of victimizing a family. That is uncalled for, and you should be apologizing to my staff.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Affordable Housing Community Consultation

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several communities in Edmonton have repeatedly raised concerns over housing projects in their communities and have come to the realization that these concerns, quite frankly, are not making a lot of progress. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. What will the minister do to slow the growth of government-funded housing projects in Edmonton communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first have to say that I disagree with the hon. member's sentiment that somehow affordable housing is creating ghettos. In fact, it's many times just the opposite in a particular situation. We are in the process of building 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012; we're about 8,700 along the way. I can tell you that we're already looking to address this issue by promoting things like mixed-use housing and projects that do not contribute to overconcentration in any community, including this member's.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Given that it's not very appropriate to ignore community concerns, the community would like to know: why won't this minister recognize that there seems to be a growing disconnect between the concerns of the community and the wishes of the residents and the will of government to have a concentration of low-income housing in Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I thank the member for that question, I do again disagree with its premise. Most people, if not everybody, involved in affordable housing or housing for the homeless do intend to be good neighbours. We do address issues on an individual, case-by-case basis. The reality is that with this government's commitment to increase affordable housing and deal with our homelessness problem, there is going to be some throwback, but at the same time we will continue to deal with this through individual community consultation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Given that there is a request for proposal process and it's ultimately the minister's responsibility to look after this particular area, what will he do to ensure that project developers step up and appropriately address community concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I thank the member for that question. Realistically, as we move forward, there is going to be some opposition, and we deal with that through our RFP process, which we're very proud of. It keeps our costs down but also ensures that developers with whom we partner have to engage in active community consultation in most of the projects that we have, particularly in the high-needs one in this member's constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

2:10 CCSVI Follow-up Treatment

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My question today regards a treatment for multiple sclerosis, and I'm asking it on behalf of the guests in the gallery upstairs and many, many others. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why are people with multiple sclerosis who travel out of country to receive the treatment for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency being denied follow-up ultrasound tests when they return to Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday that we're looking into this issue right as we speak and that I had met with a number of neurologists and a number of MS sufferers, some of whom have had the Zamboni treatment. I met with patient advocates for MS folks, and we came up with a few ideas that we need to pursue to help fill that evidence gap that was identified by the Canadian institutes of health information and by the federal government and, for that matter, by all ministers of health at our federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting in September. I'm pursuing that strategy as we speak.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, that didn't answer anything useful, actually.

This minister has been looking into this issue for weeks and months. When will he have a decision for the people who return from out of country, having received this treatment, on whether the province will fund ultrasound follow-up or not? When will that happen?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a major medical issue that Albertans here could be facing. As Dr. Zamboni himself pointed out, this is an experimental procedure, and right now no government in Canada covers the CCSVI treatment. There is nothing that we can do until we get all of the information. That's one reason why there's a major study going on between vein drainage and MS activity in Calgary, one of seven North American sites chosen for it. As soon as we have some of those answers, we'll be in a much better position to address the issue that's been raised plus a number of others. This is a serious issue, and I thank him for raising it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, ultrasound is not some big, exotic, new treatment, and this minister knows it. He also knows that other provinces have allocated substantial funds for clinical trials for MS, but Alberta is just blowing hot air. Will the minister show some leadership and commit to providing the necessary funding and urge the fast-tracking of trials and include the MS patients and their advocates?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I indicated in the first answer that I'm already pursuing that strategy. We are working very aggressively, very fastidiously, and I indicated that to folks from the MS societies and folks who have MS at their rally yesterday. I will continue to advocate on their behalf to get the best care, the best

treatment possible, but we have to observe medical protocols here as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, would you also join with me in acknowledging an anniversary for him, the anniversary of his arrival on Planet Earth a few years ago.

Panhandling

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs was very outspoken about the panhandling issue this past spring and promised action by this fall. Since then, the Calgary Homeless Foundation released a report saying that panhandling, according to the research, is not an issue. My questions are to the minister. How long has this minister been out of step with one of the biggest stakeholders, and why does he pick on such a disadvantaged section of society?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just before I answer, I also want to wish the member a happy birthday. But that's where my smiling ends because, in fact, that report does not indicate that panhandling is not an issue. It indicates that instances of it have gone down. This is a good thing, but we also have to monitor the panhandling issue through the entire province just to ensure that it, like our homeless problem, does not get out of hand and that we have a good handle on the problem but also the root causes that individuals may be having to actually end up on the street as a panhandler in the first place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister promised action this fall. It's now mid-November. To the minister: are you doing anything about panhandling, or are you planning more grandstanding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite this member's unduly caustic and self-serving comments I want to assure him that I've actually met with the mayor of Edmonton on this issue, and I'm looking forward to meeting with the new mayor of Calgary as well on this issue. He has been a little bit busy. Overall, I want to assure him as well that we are dealing with municipalities because they are the people that we'll deal directly with and who are closest to the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: if he has nothing planned, whether he has a real handle at the provincial level, and instead is dumping this issue on cities to address it, what will he do if the cities have no plan or intention to address panhandling?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had some difficulty understanding this member's question, but I want to assure him that we are working with municipalities. At the end of the day

there is one voter; there's one taxpayer; there's one person who is on the street. I don't think that they look at which level of government is addressing the problem. They want action. That's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Environmental Hazards of Drug Houses

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When an illegal drug operation in a home is busted by police, the first response team handles any immediate dangers. Secondary issues such as building code violations and poor quality are up to each local community to address. As a result, a homebuyer can be left with a dwelling that poses serious health and safety risks. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why should the standards of restoring houses used in illegal drug operations depend on where the homebuyers live?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, individual municipalities have individual standards, and those are often set in their land-use bylaws. If I understood the member's question correctly, often it's up to individual municipalities to ascertain what quality and how much inspection will go on in new facilities that are being built.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health: given that the exposure to chemicals, mould, or other defects can have serious health consequences, why isn't Alberta Health Services working with Municipal Affairs to give Albertans uniform protection across the province from these risks?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the folks at AHS are in fact doing that. I'm not sure what the member feels isn't being done. To my knowledge there are a number of programs and services that Alberta Health provides under community and population health to address issues just like that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: will the minister direct Alberta Health Services to increase standards for environmental health consultants so that they can properly assess what needs to be done to make these homes habitable?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to bring that to their attention. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Homelessness in Calgary

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. This minister has stated publicly that his 10-year plan to end homelessness is working because, according to his numbers, shelter use is down. This is hardly enough evidence to make such a statement. Besides shelter use, what other empirical evidence does this minister have to make the claim that the plan is really working?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I did not have trouble understanding that question. This member is correct that one indication that the plan is working is, in fact, that shelter usage is down month over month, down 6 per cent from 2009. In addition, we've also created 940 homeless units, 400 in Calgary. Also, a third-party verification was released this week by Homeward Trust showing a 21 per cent decrease in the homeless population in Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, to this member: we're on the right track.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that he understood the question.

My next question is to the same minister. Some Calgarians see this minister's plan as a plan to hide away homeless Albertans so that they can live their destructive lifestyle out of the public eye. How can this minister assure my constituents that homeless Calgarians are getting the supports they need besides a safe place to live a destructive lifestyle?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this Assembly and the public at large that our first priority is getting people off the streets, not putting them away in shelters. We are focusing on permanent housing.

In addition to that, we also recognize that there is not one cause of homelessness; there is also not one solution. We look at things like homeless identification, that can help people get off the streets and get bank accounts and start feeling like everyone else does in society, treating people like individuals, and also showing that you don't always need a good government outlay of a lot of cash to get people . . .

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The plan to end homelessness will require funding support for years to come. How can this minister realistically commit to funding this plan at its current rate in the midst of the province's tightening fiscal situation?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I remember the Member for Edmonton-Riverview talking about how governments set goals, set regulations with no plan on meeting them. We are meeting the 10-year plan to end homelessness. We've constructed 1,700 homeless units throughout the province. We are going to be moving forward and working harder because we realize that homelessness doesn't just affect those who are homeless; it affects communities. We will be helping all Albertans through this process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Pension Reform (continued)

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The research is in, and the research is conclusive. There is a looming crisis for Albertans nearing retirement. Now, the research also says that expanding the CPP is the best way to address this growing danger, and polling shows that most Albertans support this strategy. Again to the minister of finance: will the minister try a new word in his vocabulary and just say yes to support for CPP reform to ensure a reliable and adequate retirement income for working Albertans?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say yes, yes to policies that create jobs for people that need them and yes to pension reforms that help the people that need them. The hon. member there is looking for across-the-board increases to CPP. The people she's being pushed by, the public-sector unions, already have the highest, best pension plans in the country, most of them badly underfunded, and she wants to increase more for that. We're not going to do it.

Ms Notley: Well, 50 per cent of seniors living below the poverty line is the real job killer, and you ought to know that.

Given that private-sector plan fees are triple that of CPP and given that CPP is the only plan to offer portability and a 93 per cent participation rate, why won't the minister of finance take off his ideological blindfold, admit that an expansion of CPP is the most sensible way forward, and actually work to reach a solution that will help regular Albertans?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd suggest the hon. member take out her ideological earplugs and listen to the answers. One of the answers, which I repeat once again: Canada just received top five in the world for pension coverage. Are there some problems? Yes. But the coverage is limited to a small segment of the overall population.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that small segment is everybody but he and his rich friends.

Given that current saving rates means that the number of seniors living in poverty will only increase, will the minister admit that his stubborn refusal to pursue this reasonable solution is really just based on his desire to deny the choice of retirement to low- and middle-income seniors, force them to keep working long past the age of 65 while he and his wealthy friends go salmon fishing off the west coast?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I repeat: any changes to CPP that we make today have absolutely no effect on people that are already retired. The effect is 25 years down the road. Again, she's purposely trying to confuse listeners.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Southern Alberta Flood Disaster Relief

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is outsourcing its responsibilities with, apparently, no accountability. A flood in southern Alberta means millions of dollars for LandLink Consulting; however, flood victims are still struggling to recover while they wait for their claims to be settled. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: Minister, is the LandLink contract public, and if not, why not?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the LandLink contract was done by and through an RFP process, and the RFP is available publicly. It certainly provides a detailed overview of our expectations in terms of the services that LandLink has to provide. We've been very, very open about the terms and the process and the outgoing outcomes of that particular contract.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Given that the victims have been displaced for months, what does the minister believe to be an acceptable time frame for a resolution for these people?

Mr. Goudreau: I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for asking that particular question. It gives me the opportunity to indicate that this particular summer, the summer of 2010, has been a very, very difficult season for a lot of individuals. We've had severe weather across the province, and we've identified several disaster programs throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, LandLink has met their requirements in terms of evaluations within . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister: given that a hundred per cent is the only acceptable number when helping disaster victims, has this consulting firm informed your ministry when they will finally help the last 15 per cent that have been waiting so long?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, probably of the outstanding files in almost all cases we are waiting for additional documentation from the applicants, and as soon as we get that documentation, we'll process them as quickly as possible. To date in southern Alberta we've received over 2,900 applications, and the hon. member would know that. Out of that, we've issued about 2,350 cheques, and there are well over a hundred applications where we're waiting for additional information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Calgary Copperfield School Services

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education. I delivered 1,391 letters to your office yesterday, and today a page delivered a document to you with 1,615 signatures from concerned parents, citizens, and community members from the Copperfield community. There is clearly an overflow of families that reside in southeast Calgary whose children spend anywhere from one to two hours in transit to get to public schools outside of the Copperfield community. First question: can the minister explain why the children of the Copperfield area who want to attend a public school must endure these long bus rides when they live in an area of Calgary that has the highest rate of suburban residential growth according to the city of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question, and it comes after the question from Airdrie yesterday about the same type of issue. We need to make sure that we have schools where the children are. The issue in Calgary is a bit different in that there's not a lack of capacity, but it is about the demographic shift and the children in the suburban areas that have long rides to school. I can say that 10 new schools opened in Calgary, so it's not that we're ignoring the problem. We're doing something about the problem. Ten new schools opened this fall, and I think there are another six schools expected to open by the start of next year.

Mr. Johnston: To the same minister. The minister is not at the ground level and does not have first-hand experience with the unique needs and priorities of every community. How does the minister prioritize which communities get schools and which don't?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, we work very collaboratively with school boards. School boards put together their

capital plans with their highest priorities, and the school boards determine which neighbourhoods should come next. The Calgary school board, as I indicated, will be opening schools in Coventry, Panorama, Taradale, and Tuscany in the next year. Those were their highest priorities. We're working on the next list of priorities for schools across the province. But, of course, there are more places than Calgary that have needs for schools, so we'll have to look at that in the context of the whole provincial need.

Mr. Johnston: Final question for the same minister. With approximately 700 children under the age of five in the Copperfield community we can anticipate a great need for school space in the coming years. What is the long-term plan of action to accommodate Copperfield students in the community?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first plan of action would be for the Copperfield parents and families and community to work with their school board to determine the priority of the Copperfield neighbourhood school on the Calgary public school board's priority list. I might say that we are opening a school next year in Copperfield with the Calgary separate school board. That was on the top of their priority list, and there is a school opening in that community with the Roman Catholic separate school board. But it's about getting on the priority list of the local school board. Then we have to work it into our capital plan provincially, and the priority will depend on the highest level of need, health and safety issues, and of course availability of capital.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Amazingly enough, the health minister accuses the Wildrose of being behind on the ER issue. The only one behind and in denial is the government. What is shocking is that the minister believes he can get away with these accusations. The document that we received discuss widespread failure in the system, and it goes on to say how a young patient died after a six-hour wait in the ER. How very, very sad and tragic. My questions are all to the minister of health. Daily demands for hospital beds are not being met, Minister. When are you going to open . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the tail end of the question was about opening more beds. I've indicated before that there are a number of beds opening, so I'm going to talk about additional beds that are being opened in acute-care hospitals. I've mentioned them before. I think I gave out the Calgary stats yesterday. Today I'll give out some Edmonton stats. In October 55 more beds were opened at the Royal Alex and at the U of A. This current week about 16 more were opened at the U of A and at the Royal Alex. By the end of November 44 more seniors' mental health beds will be opened, and in December about 12 more detox beds will be opening.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not talking about palliative care or rehab or continuing care. I'm talking about acute-care beds.

Since the minister has stated in the House that fixing the ER crisis is your priority and a top priority, will he legislate the waiting times that he aspires to?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that in some places around the world they try to legislate that, but I'm also aware of what her colleague to her right there, from Calgary-Glenmore, said yesterday when he was talking about so-called successful European health systems. He cited France, where patients might be subject to copayment charges for basic services such as hospital care, and he's making it sound like that's one two-tier system we should follow. We're not going to follow that. We believe in a single payer here . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, Albertans want answers. They don't want your BS.

The Speaker: I believe, hon. member, you want to rephrase that. I'd withdraw that and rephrase it.

Mrs. Forsyth: They don't believe it, Mr. Speaker.

The government continues to state that they are open, and they state that they're accountable. Will the minister table in the Legislature on Monday the minutes from the Alberta Health Services meeting this Friday on their strategy to deal with peak pressures in the ER?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's not my meeting. That is a meeting of a number of specialists that Alberta Health Services has invited. Let's be clear on what the purpose of that meeting is. The purpose of that meeting is to look at the very issues that were expressed to me and to others with respect to overcrowding in some emergency rooms, in some major acute hospitals. That is why that meeting is occurring, to address those issues. It's time to get on with it and to focus on what's going forward, and that's what they're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Primary Care Networks

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has made great strides in developing primary care networks to provide Albertans better access to primary health care services. However, I do have concern that rural PCNs such as the one in my constituency, the Bonnyville-Aspen PCN, are disadvantaged by the current funding model, that focuses too much on the number of patients physicians see rather than supporting other health professionals who provide services in a PCN. All my questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

The Speaker: And we'll hear from him now.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I visited Bonnyville, and I spent some time with this member. I know that she might not know that we have 38 PCNs in the province today. They are funded based on the number of patients that the family physicians actually serve. We have about 2,200 family docs who are serving those patients as we speak, and the funding that they receive is calculated on how many patients the physician has provided service to in the past three years. That's about \$50 per patient.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister. The current method of determining funding for PCNs doesn't appear to support team-based care. What is being done to look at models that support the work of nurse practitioners and other health professionals in the PCNs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the budget that physicians receive for their PCN can be used and is often used to hire additional health care providers. Some of those might include nurse practitioners, for example, a group that I'm particularly fond of because I know they're doing good work. But there are also different funding arrangements that can be looked at. I've asked our department, in fact, to look at that as part of our trilateral master agreement, which is under discussion right now. The current one comes to an end in March, and we hope to have a new one in place very soon.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister: when can communities like Bonnyville expect to see changes in how the primary care networks are funded? Presently we feel we're being shortchanged.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of different things that are being looked at right now by PCNs throughout. This is a fairly recent concept in Alberta, but as we go forward, I think you'll see the improvements that you seek. In the meantime let's, please, thank the PCNs that are out there because they are serving about 2 million Albertans right now, and there will be more added to that system as we go forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Water Allocation

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been four years since a moratorium was placed on water allocation in southern Alberta, four years and no action despite government claims that changes to the Water Act are coming. The public consultation phase has seen delay after delay, as has the regional plan. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. When does the government find some courage and put human need, in-stream flow, and long-term land use ahead of FITFIR and the highest bidder?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I might suggest that the discussion around water allocation is one that is absolutely critical, but I would suggest to this hon. member that she ask the same question of some of the groups that are engaging in fearmongering and in raising the level of fear in the public so that having a real and informed discussion on this critical matter is almost impossible.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, the minister is not afraid of some grassroots organization, Mr. Speaker.

Well, let's talk about Balzac. As demonstrated in Balzac, where water allocation was purchased in a private deal for over \$15 million, this government views a water market as a suitable option for dealing with our water shortage. Why is this minister considering allowing the sale of our water?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I have said it about a million times, but if a million and one will serve her needs that much better, this government will never consider the sale of our water. Our water belongs to all Albertans and will always belong to all Albertans.

Ms Blakeman: Ah, the importance of words and the specificity of words, because you are certainly considering allowing the sale of water licences. Maybe the minister would like to explain how the sale of a water licence is not the sale of water, please.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as the member pointed out in the preamble to her first question, there is a moratorium in place on the issuance of new licences. That's not because we enjoy putting difficulty into the lives of people in southern Alberta. It's because there are some realities that we face, and one of them is that the river is fully allocated. If we are, then, going to allow people to more effectively use that water, we have to have a process in place that will allow for the transfer from one user to another user.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Group Home Placement

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of Edmonton-Manning, especially in the Fraser community, are worried they are not being told that group homes are being made in their neighbourhoods and that they are not being evenly spread out. My first question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: Mr. Minister, can you explain the process of the placement allocation of the group homes within the municipality?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our municipalities set out the specific standards for land development in their land-use bylaws. Their municipal development plans may also provide general information on suitable sites for things like group homes. Ultimately, the location of a group home or any other development is based on whether the site meets the development requirements that the municipalities have set.

Mr. Sandhu: To the same minister: can you explain what options residents have to make their concerns heard about the placement of the group homes and the treatment of the residents?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, someone who wants to build a group home needs to first find the site, and if that particular proposal is not permitted by the municipality, the applicant may apply to amend the land-use bylaws. When bylaws are amended, that's when the public needs to be informed and given a chance to speak before their individual councils. If the use is permitted then or discretionary, a development permit is issued. That particular approval can be appealed to the local subdivision and development appeal board.

Mr. Sandhu: My next question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Can you explain what the province's responsibility is with regard to group homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The responsibility of my ministry is to license group homes that have four or more residents who are receiving care and supports. We inspect each group home or each licensed residence at least once a year. Before a licence is issued, an operator must receive a zoning permit from the municipality. They must meet provincial building codes, and they also must have passed an inspection both by the fire department and the health inspector.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-answer period for today. Eighteen members were recognized; 108 questions and responses were given.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine and be back to Members' Statements.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health System Governance

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans, the true owners of this province, do want answers to important health care questions. We get these questions posed to us as MLAs, and we try to find the answers through question period to the minister of health. They deserve no less, especially our seniors.

Today we found out from the superboard itself that there are widespread accountability failures in the health care system. The accountability failure extends to this House because I believe that the minister has not been answering the questions that MLAs have been asked by the true owners of this province, the Alberta voters. They are the bosses. Doctors and nurses and health care professionals are talking to us, and I appreciate that, but they're not afraid to talk to us because they've had enough.

So far this session the minister of health has refused to answer over 30 of our questions as MLAs when it came to issues regarding the 2008 state of emergency rooms. Will the minister, I ask, call on the Health Quality Council to investigate the situation? Will the minister allow hospitals to override superboard bureaucracy and red tape in order to give better care to Albertans? Will the minister answer: how many beds have been closed this year in active hospitals around Alberta? Will the minister table a comprehensive list of wait times in Alberta and report online like other provinces do?

It's time for Alberta to catch up. Will the minister take charge and do the right thing and ultimately eliminate the superboard and return decision-making authority to local hospitals through chief medical officers, that the Wildrose suggested, from the roots up, not from the sky down, in capturing the true community capital of answers within Alberta?

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are getting tired of this act, and clearly we need some answers from this minister.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka in his position as chair of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report, dated November 2010, respecting presentations to the committee by various groups within the electric industry. These groups are the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations, Canadian Wind Energy Association, Capital Power Corporation, Enmax Corporation, Independent Power Producers Society of Alberta. Copies of this report are being distributed to all members today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Child and Youth Advocate's 2009-10 annual report. This report summarizes the activities and achievements of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate over the past year. The advocate does have an important role in representing the interests of individual children and youth and making observations on how the system can be improved. My ministry's response to the advocate's report will be made publicly available on our ministry's website once we've thoroughly reviewed the report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the following annual reports: first, the 2009 report from the College of Licensed Practical Nurses, or LPNs, of Alberta; the 2009 report of the Alberta Opticians Association; and the 2009 report from the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter here, which I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of, from Ken Georgetti, the president of the Canadian Labour Congress, making an argument on a point-by-point basis outlining the flaws in the Alberta government's opposition to reform of the Canada pension plan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of the November-December 2009 edition of *English Express*, a free newspaper for adult learners, that incorporates information on Alberta grasslands, the Grey Cup, and a real-life CPR situation among other topics.

My second tabling is five copies of English Express teaching notes for the same that allows teachers and learners to check their reading and informs learners of literacy resources on the Internet.

My third tabling is a letter from Enerys Jones, an instructor, who states, "My students and I look forward to each issue of this high quality newspaper" because it contains "topical, relevant and interesting subjects that we use for discussion, reading and writing."

Mr. Speaker, my first tabling regarding Bill 29 is a letter from Bryn MacDonald of the Sierra Club, who I introduced earlier this afternoon. He points out that despite the claim of Alberta's parks protection, attempts to remove those protections from Alberta parks in 1999 were stopped due to public outcry and that passing this bill would be an unprecedented step backwards.

Next, I have a letter to the Premier and minister from Peter Poole of Banff, whose family has invested much in parks and protected areas in Alberta. He spoke to the minister on the shores of Big Lake at the expansion of the Lois Hole provincial park, for which he is thankful, but he is concerned that either the proposed act was written in haste, or it is an attempt to weaken our parks protections and expects . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please table. This is not the debate time. Please just table the documentation. This is not debate we're into here now.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: No. Just table.

Mr. Chase: I have tabled that document, Mr. Speaker. Am I permitted to . . .

The Speaker: Would you table the document with the name of the individual? Anybody who wants access to it can get it. This is not a debate right now. Yesterday you took up eight minutes of the Assembly's valuable time. Please sit down. We've had this discussion before with tabling. You've heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who is a great example of how to table something and get his message across. Check the *Hansard* tomorrow. You'll see how to do it appropriately, okay? You can't spend eight minutes debating something in tablings. Short, sweet, to the point. Let's move on.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, am I allowed to mention the names of the individuals who have expressed concern?

The Speaker: I think I said that a minute and a half ago.

Mr. Chase: I am allowed?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I wanted clarification.

I have a sampling of the hundreds of e-mails I keep receiving from citizens opposed to Bill 29: from Banff Thomas Willock; from Bragg Creek William Hoyne, Gaynor Hoyne, Jennifer Sadee, Brett Gilmour, Shannon Bailey, Colleen Seto; from Airdrie Linda Dragon; from Calgary Andy Goodspeed, Barbara Hatt, Richard Collier, Richard Kover, Christina Pickles, Mike Cousins, Carol Armstrong, Mike Jones, Darlene Jones, Stephen Herrero, Alison Lennie, Linda Vaxvick, Jane Roberts, Zofia Zgolak, Tamara Chik, Mark and Roxanne Krizan, G. Bellary, Danielle Dufour, Dave Lovekin, Howard Thies, Lorraine Thies, Danile Thies, Logan Thies, Richard Thies, Carol Spring, Laurel Robbins, Peter Santink, Leila McDowell; from Camrose Maggie McBride; from Canmore Sarah Hutchison and Kate Rive; from Cochrane Margie Davenport; from Edmonton Chelsea Flook, Koel Reed, Bronwen Mason, Maxine Epoch, Tim Willson, Annika Nicholson, Rhiannon Prince, Isabelle Nash, Candice McMillan, Jesse Hitchcock, Ronald Ball, Katherine Thompson, Devin Goodsman, Elaine Butler, Jamie Thompson, Bernadette Blakey, Patricia Clayton; from Edson Carl Hunt, Christine Westerveld; from Exshaw Daniella Rubeling; from Grande Prairie Brenda Termeer; from Lethbridge Marie Matkin, Rob Taylor, Selwyn Craig; from Medicine Hat Nicola Gunter; from Pincher Creek Wendy Ryan; from Red Deer Brent Gavey; from Spruce Grove Iren Bartok; from Stony Plain Katelyn Kuzio; from Spruce Ridge Peter McClure; from Wetaskiwin Brenda Blakely; from Water Valley Tim Clinton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, the reason there was an interjection by the chair is that in virtually every parliamentary system like ours in the world there is only one provision provided for under tablings, and that is official documents. Alberta is a total exception to this.

I defend what we do here in Alberta. I just don't want it abused so that the members will decide one day to revert to become like everyone else and disallow members to do tablings, but we have to be responsible.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, you had a tabling?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of an Alberta Health Services superboard document titled Accountability Framework for Access and Flow.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:50

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 29 Alberta Parks Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move second reading of Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act.

I'd like to take a few moments to outline why this legislation is necessary and the process that brought it to us today. The purpose of this act is to foster an Alberta parks system that conserves unique and represented lands in Alberta's natural regions, balancing environmental conservation, recreation, and tourism opportunities. I want to be clear about what I mean when I talk about the word "balance." I mean a balance of conservation and recreation across the entire parks system, not just in individual parks. We know and science confirms that some parks contain such rare and special features that our primary objective must be preservation. Our wilderness areas – the Ghost, the White Goat, and the Siffleur – come to mind. We also look at features like wildlife corridors. For instance, we're currently consulting on adding lands for additional protection of a wildlife corridor in the Bow Valley wildland.

On the other hand, there are lands that are best suited to recreation. They have been used that way historically, and they don't have ecological features that would be endangered by families spending time there, like a day on the beach at Sylvan Lake. I want to make a point about recreation. I sometimes hear that recreation should be secondary to conservation goals. In my mind they are naturally linked in a parks system. I encourage the hon. members to remember that recreation for many Albertans is hiking or backpacking with the kids or birdwatching or enjoying, as I do myself every morning, a walk in Fish Creek park.

Outdoor recreation is essential to our well-being, to our health, and to our quality of life. It is vital to nurture a stewardship ethic in our children and in their children. I believe it was Robert Bateman who said that kids need to get to know the land as a first step to caring about it. We see the truth in that statement in the history of our parks. In the 1930s provincial parks began to satisfy our need for outdoor recreation. Subsequently, in the 1990s with special places, parks evolved as we saw the need to preserve our natural heritage.

With the land-use framework, the plan for parks, and Bill 29 we are conscientiously and scientifically managing our land base. Bill 29 is intended to align park legislation with the goals stated in the plan for parks. The plan for parks was developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders, aboriginal groups, park users, academics, and experts over three years, Mr. Speaker. We worked

very hard to make sure that we got priorities right. Those priorities include involving Albertans in parks, conserving landscapes, providing recreation opportunities, and offering modern facilities, policies, and programs.

I'm committed to fulfilling the plan for parks and to achieving the vision of our Alberta parks system, that our parks will inspire people to discover, value, protect, and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations.

The consultation process was open, transparent, and fair. It was also very comprehensive. We've listened carefully to the many ideas and concerns and suggestions brought forward by the public and special interest groups during the consultation on the plan for parks, and on this proposed legislation it aligns with that policy. We, like many Albertans, want a robust, sustainable Alberta parks system. I believe we're well on the way to achieving that with the land-use framework and the plan for parks and this enabling legislation.

First, I want to talk about proposed changes to simplify the park classification system. During the consultation Albertans told us that rules around the park aren't clear and it can be difficult to understand what is allowed in parks. With three pieces of legislation, seven different classifications, dozens of exceptions over nearly 500 parks, that's not surprising. Bill 29 streamlines three acts: the Provincial Parks Act, the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act, and the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangeland Act.

I want to assure the Assembly that this bill will maintain current levels of protection and recreation access across the parks system. What we will remove is the current complexity and lack of clarity that leads to confusion and all of the consequences associated with that confusion. We will reduce the number of park classifications from seven to two, provincial parks and heritage rangelands. Further to Motion 507 in the spring session the Willmore Wilderness Park Act will not be affected and will not change.

We will focus on communicating the main intent of each park, whether it is conservation, recreation, or a combination of both. Within the provincial park classification up to four zones will be used to describe how visitors use various areas of a park. Zones will clearly set out what activities are allowed, whether, in fact, when you step in the park you need a camera or perhaps a fishing pole, whatever the recreation that is allowed. There could be more than one zone in a provincial park. The names and descriptions of the proposed zones will be created in regulation.

This will be a subject of a lot of discussion. I'm very pleased that we've been hearing from respected conservation experts, and they've offered to help us set up zoning. We anticipate that zones will be determined based on current practice and on science and on the input from additional consultations over the next year. I don't think I can stress enough that our intent is to maintain existing levels of protection in recreation activities across the parks system. Bill 29 will fix some of the confusion that visitors experience.

This legislation is enabling, not prescriptive, and it will give us the ability to manage our land base more effectively. For instance, some natural areas are used almost exclusively for recreation while others have higher conservation values. Currently they're in the same category, and it's creating confusion. We will address these anomalies and apply zoning consistently across the province. The new classification and zoning structure will make it clear to Albertans what kind of activities they're allowed to do in parks, and it will clearly identify which parklands need to be protected so that future generations will be able to experience our province's treasured natural heritage. As our population expands, Albertans need access to more recreation opportunities. At the same time, protecting our environment is an important priority. My mandate

with the plan for parks was to ensure that our parks are protected and accessible to Albertans.

I want to now talk about how Albertans can become more involved. In the plan for parks and with Bill 29 Albertans will have more opportunities to get involved in parks and play an active role in the planning of their future. A parks advisory council and a parks conservation foundation will offer new forums for Albertans to help them play a larger role in parks. For example, the parks conservation foundation will accept donations of land, money, and gifts in kind to benefit the parks system. We know there are advantages for Albertans to donate through a foundation rather than directly to government, and often that is their preference. The parks advisory council will have broad representation and will advise the minister on park policies and initiatives.

Another aspect of Bill 29 and an important recommendation from interest groups during consultation is the commitment to notify the public about changes to parks land base. Currently there is no requirement to notify the public of changes to provincial parks, recreation areas, or wildland provincial parks. With this bill we're making a commitment to provide 60 days' notice on changes to a park land base. Examples range from minor boundary changes to rerouting a road to establishing a new provincial park. Currently we're consulting with local communities and stakeholders. You'll see about 20 consultations over the last year on park websites. On a range of changes like the addition of new campgrounds we'll continue to do so, Mr. Speaker. We're developing guidelines for future consultations and community engagement, and we will communicate them clearly to the public.

We developed this bill through consultation with the public, aboriginal groups, stakeholders, and other government departments to ensure that we'll meet their needs. It's also critical that the bill align well with other pieces of legislation such as the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. Bill 29 will streamline the way we manage Alberta's provincial parks and strike a responsible balance between conservation and recreation across the entire parks system.

Last year in the plan for parks we committed to getting back to Albertans with specific actions, including in legislation a clear, simplified classification system and opportunities for Albertans to have more say about what happens in their parks. Under Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, we can achieve these goals. We will continue to protect our province's natural heritage and to ensure access to unspoiled natural spaces for recreation and the healthy outdoor activities that are important to the quality of life of all Albertans.

I want to be clear that this legislation will not immediately change what is happening in parks. We will not proclaim this act until we have worked with Albertans to develop a strongly supported group of regulations and a strong zoning system to better manage what happens on the land. I believe we're doing the right thing in the right way for the right reasons, and I think our approach of creating enabling legislation supported by strong regulations is the most effective way to manage the Alberta parks system.

Bill 29 is good for the Alberta parks system, it's good for our province, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill to help us create a stronger Alberta parks system. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would now move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, your vote will be removed from the record. You were not sitting in your appropriate place. We couldn't account for you. I see you've moved again. Do you want to move to the other chair? I can do

that, you know. It's just that you're getting farther and farther away from me all the time.

Mr. Mason: Actually, I'd like that one.

The Speaker: Okay.

3:00

**Bill 27
Police Amendment Act, 2010**

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Zwozdesky]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. We're on Bill 27.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010, is getting a bumpy ride here because, as my colleagues who have spoken before me have already noted, this act seems to be not achieving the balance that we need to achieve whenever we assign powers to the police force.

We're in a consent position with policing. We the people agree that we will abide by the rules, and we will consent to the police enforcing those rules upon us. Therefore, it's important that we always have that balance and that respect from both sides, from the people that what is being asked of them is not unreasonable and from the police that it's enough to actually do their job and protect the officers. Protection of the officers is a key part of this. We ask those individuals, who are civil servants, to take on a difficult, complex, and many times dangerous task on our behalf, on behalf of the public. I very much respect that.

I also, as I'm sure many of you have noticed, push back pretty hard because I see that the police – let's call them law enforcement agencies – always want to make their job easier. Fair enough; we all want to make our own jobs easier. But they have a particular place in our society and have very far-reaching powers that will limit our freedoms, essentially, so we have to be very cautious about adding to those far-reaching powers. You know, they're trying to do a better job. I feel sometimes that they would like to microchip us all because, heck, it would be so easy to keep track of everybody. Then they'd know where each one of us was at any time of the day or night. I say that with a great deal of fondness for the law enforcement agencies. It's probably true, but I'm standing here to make sure that that doesn't happen.

One of the issues that has come up quite a bit in the past was the issue around how the police investigate themselves. Actually, at one point among my many portfolios I was the Justice and Solicitor General critic. At that time there was a very imperfect system available, that I believed suited nobody's purpose very well. It was police services investigating complaints against their members, and they would do their own investigation of the situation. I feel it was imperfect because nobody ever walked away from that one in a clean way.

What do I mean by that? Well, essentially, if you had an officer that was cleared, they very often were regarded by others in the community, including the media, as not quite cleared because, you know, they'd been investigated by their buddies. That was not a pleasant experience for an individual officer to be in, I'm sure. On the other hand, for members of the police institutions if one of their members was found to be in an infraction, they felt that maybe people had been overcompensating to try and make a point that would make the public happy that somebody had been punished. So nobody ever liked that system, and I, in particular, didn't like it.

We have addressed that, and we do now have better legislation that recognizes an independent body being able to investigate

officers. What I believe was trying to be achieved in Bill 27 was to look at the new officers that we've created and figure out how we are going to be involved in that same kind of investigative and disciplinary process with them because we have a number of new categories now that we didn't have back when previous amendments to the Police Act were made in 1973. I'm sorry; the complaint and discipline process has remained largely unchanged since 1973.

We have had consultations with stakeholders over the last couple of years and particularly on the law enforcement framework. It was intended to deal with these current realities that we have. One of those realities is surveillance. You know, that's another area I think we as legislators have to push back against, the ease with which surveillance can be put in place and used. To me it flies in the face of believing that we live in a society of essentially decent people who are going about their lives and should be able to go about their lives without scrutiny from persons unknown.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Part of the whole thing is: exactly where do those tapes go? How long are they kept, and who else is looking at them? Do they turn up at somebody's, you know, retirement party? Are they spliced together to make a joke for a roast for somebody? You never quite know. I'm sure that our law enforcement agencies wouldn't sanction anything like that, but I bet you it happens. The temptation is just too great to do that. I am very cautious about use of surveillance, and that was one of the realities of modern enforcement that we were talking about here.

Ms Pastoor: Private security companies do it all the time.

Ms Blakeman: My colleague is mentioning private security companies. I know she's eager to speak on this bill, and I'm sure she will raise that point when she does.

I think what has concerned me most is that the different perspectives aside from the ministry's objective are taken into account with this bill. I remember I heard one of my colleagues on the other side speaking enthusiastically, saying: "But don't you see? This is just going to be great. It's exactly what we wanted." But we have to be careful who else is caught. What are the unintended consequences of legislation? Part of our job is to make sure that we've looked at that. What are the additional risks that we've created for others that we hadn't anticipated? What else could happen as a result of this?

I have questions about the public interest in this bill, and I have hesitations because I think the bill may be contrary to the public interest. I think it has the potential to water down the public complaints process, and I also really am concerned about how the definition of who can participate in this is very narrow. That's part of why I think it's not in the public interest.

If we start to say that only these certain people are allowed to express a concern about police behaviour, given those immense powers that the police do have over individuals, I think we create a very – dangerous isn't the right word – untenable situation. Someone who, you know, is under the control of the police – let me put it that way – may be allowed to complain, but frankly they may be quite frightened about complaining and may be worried about other things.

3:10

We had a case in the Assembly recently where a couple was picked up by the police, and therefore their children were picked up by children's services. That's not uncommon, frankly, but an individual may be concerned about pursuing a complaint because of those additional consequences that flow from that.

When you have organizations in the community like the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association or some of the others like E. Fry or John Howard, which are organizations that move a lot between all of the different sides that are involved in policing and enforcement and the judiciary, we need to be able to bring them into the discussion and have them participate in a complaints process. It may be that they are the ones that end up bringing forward the complaint, and I don't want to see a situation where we narrow too much who is able to bring those complaints forward.

I'm sorry; my next thought just escaped out of my head. I should have written it down. Sorry about that.

I've heard my colleagues talking about this, and I know that there are some real concerns about it. I'm not sure if we're looking at bringing forward amendments. I think we do want to see something change around the disciplinary and complaint process. We don't want to simply abandon this bill, but I would expect that my colleague will be bringing forward amendments to be able to try and address some of what is in the act that we have concerns about.

I'll wait until Committee of the Whole to be able to do the commentary on more of the sectional analysis, but that is my observation at a first glance. We're debating in second reading the principle of the bill, and you can see that I'm struggling with it. I mean, clearly, I believe that there is something that needs to happen in this process. Do I think this is what needs to happen or that what's in this legislation is the right way to approach this? That's what I'm struggling with because I think it's not.

We need to be very, very cautious. We write the rules here. We expect someone else to enforce them and to lay charges according to what we've done. If there is a discrepancy or an argument about whether that was appropriate, it moves into the judiciary, and at that point a judge is trying to figure out if everybody did the job they were supposed to do.

It often flows back to us. I know that there tend to be complaints about judge-made law, but frankly whenever you hear that argument, it means that we didn't do a very good job as legislators because we didn't make it clear enough what we were intending, and we didn't write the legislation well enough to get rid of those inconsistencies and unintended consequences. So that's what I'm asking for here, a very careful look at this.

I'm a nice middle-income gal. Very plain household. My parents were teachers. Nothing special there. You know, I had a good upbringing, went to public schools. I'm a pretty average Albertan, and I obey the rules. I obey the rules until I perceive an unfairness in them that is so one-sided that I'm going to start to fight to change the rules. I think that's what we need to make sure that we're not creating, that kind of situation. [interjections] I'm being heckled, I'm sure with great fondness, from the other side. I appreciate the heckling. Thank you for listening to what I'm saying because it is an indicator that you were.

I think we need to be very cautious with what we're going ahead with here. I look forward to the debate around this bill because I think it's an important one, and I encourage as many people to get involved as they can.

Thank you very much for allowing me to put my concerns and outline the context of where I think the act needs to be very careful while we're in second reading.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to comment or question.

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security has moved second reading of Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010. Does the Assembly agree with the motion for . . .

Ms Blakeman: No, no. There's a speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I asked if there was anybody for comments and questions, and no one stood up.

Ms Blakeman: You said: 29(2)(a).

The Acting Speaker: Yes, I did, and I had no one standing to ask questions after.

Ms Blakeman: But how about another debater?

The Acting Speaker: I've called the question on this.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

Bill 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 15: Mr. Hinman]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise and speak about Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, brought forward by the hon. Minister of Energy. This bill sets up the legislative framework and regime to support an industry that doesn't even exist, the sequestration of carbon, and generally parallels the existing framework for exploration, extraction, and shipment of minerals and pipelines. This is a pretty important piece of legislation that is going ahead here. Alberta has a lot of hope riding on this. It has a lot of money riding on this. It affects our use of land and how we traditionally viewed ownership of land in this province going forward. So I'll try to touch on a few of those things.

The government is currently funding the development of carbon capture and storage projects in Alberta to the tune of \$2 billion. That's a lot of money for any jurisdiction, even one as wealthy as ours. They are also assuming the long-term liability for all CCS projects here in Alberta. The rationale, I gather, for the province assuming the risk is because the risk is too high and long term for industry to want to lay themselves on the line. So the government has picked up this risk or incented the market or whatever you want to call it to hopefully allow carbon capture and storage to go forward in this province and, hopefully, be successful. I use the term "hopefully" because it has not yet been proven.

The carbon capture and storage operator would be responsible for mitigation work during the operation and up until a closure certificate has been issued by the province. The period of time between closure and the transfer of long-term liability remains undefined in this bill. The legislation provides regulatory powers to the governing board to define these aspects of when and how the liability transfer will occur.

The CCS operators will also pay into a postclosure stewardship fund, which will be managed by the Alberta government. In theory – and again I use the words "in theory" because this whole act has a lot of theory to it – the fund will cover ongoing monitoring and any remedial work that may be required in the future. We've seen some of the troubles that have occurred sometimes in the oil and gas

industry when abandoned wells have happened or other incidents have occurred where industry is done with their work. Sometimes there has to be a cleanup, and that cleanup is left to the government to do on behalf of the people. Sometimes private industry hasn't left any money in the kitty to cover that loss. Hopefully this stewardship fund, when the details emerge, will actually bring in the money to cover some of this reclamation work that, it appears, is going to be part of the ongoing nature of us developing our CCS business.

3:20

Once the government of Alberta has the legislative framework in place – you know, the regulations are still to be determined – Alberta Energy in conjunction with the stakeholders will begin a review of the framework to apparently ensure they facilitate carbon capture and storage. Hypothetically, this carbon capture and storage is supposed to start as early as 2011.

There are some serious issues out there, as I alluded to earlier, Mr. Speaker. As a starting point this bill takes away landowners' rights to ownership of pore space. I'm no scientist, but from what I understand, pore space is holes in rocks and spaces below the earth that allow for carbon to be drilled in. It puts in place a legislative framework that is similar to that in oil and gas drilling, in that it allows for putting carbon below the earth much like the oil and gas regulations allow us to extract oil and gas from the earth.

If you look at this, this bill retroactively changes the way landowners own their land. Simply put, prior to this bill becoming an act, landowners owned the pore space below their properties. This was evident in the fact that no other body or jurisdiction had claimed they had owned it, so by the fact of them owning the land, an individual who owned the property was entitled to everything below it, of course, unless the government had reserved the oil rights or if it was within five miles from a railway track, which the government of Alberta then owned, at least in the old days or something to that effect, where all landowners in Alberta owned the pore space below their lands. Well, that in one fell swoop changed. So on people's lands they will now have this carbon capture and storage happening. It will have, notably, some impact on their land and may even have some detrimental effects.

I bring up the fact that governments are usually loath to retroactively introduce legislation that takes away rights, going backwards not forward. It's something they generally don't want to do because it interferes with what people have thought was the lay of the land, what they thought was their own property and what they thought they could do on it. What is interesting on this front is that not only is the government taking the land, but people will not receive compensation for this. Hey, the government by all means is allowed to do it, but like I said, governments generally err on the side of caution, generally only affect landowners going forward and not past.

This is definitely a change from business as usual and one that we have heard from many stakeholders about, many landowners. Rural landowners have contacted us saying that they're worried about this. They're worried about what impact this will have on their land, what impact this will have on future agricultural use of their land. Hey, I think those are legitimate concerns. Right now, given where we are in the carbon capture and storage game, I don't think everything has been answered for us to just say: oh, nothing is going to happen. I think that may be wishful thinking. I hope it's correct and all that stuff, but who knows?

A hundred years ago we got into the development of our oil and gas industry. I don't think we foresaw some of the ramifications on the environment back then, and this could be the case in terms of this carbon capture and storage bill. I think it does affect those individual landowners and their peace and quiet and enjoyment of their

land. They are taking away some property rights that were there before, and it's something to be pointed out.

The second component of this is the assumption of liability by this government. Like I said before, it's essentially a way to incent the marketplace or take expense away from industry or is basically a bit of a handout or a hand up to them, whatever you really want to call it, in that we are encouraging the markets to go ahead and do what they want, and we'll cover the damage. I don't know right now if we know what the damage is going to be. That worries me in this case. Hey, I'm no expert. I'm hoping that this is covered. Nevertheless, I think it's something to be concerned about. How much is the Alberta government going to be on the hook for in the future should something go wrong with this? Given that we're relatively new in the game on this, it's something to be concerned about, and I bring that up in at this time.

We also look at the assumption of liability and indemnity as triggered by the issuance of a closure certificate, and the preconditions to issuing a closure certificate are set out in section 120 of the act. Some of the things that it may include are proper abandonment of wells and facilities, proper reclamation, that the captured CO₂ is behaving in a stable and predictable manner "with no significant risk of future leakage," and that the period of time established by regulation has passed.

Hey, if you look at that at face value, the fact that industry is not viable without assumption of this risk by government begs the question of whether the Crown, through the Crown landowners, is giving up too much to create a viable industry in an uncertain business and in an uncertain scientific climate in order to kick-start carbon capture. It's a question that I hope the experts and the scientists we've consulted on this have been able to answer. Nevertheless, we need to keep an eye on this.

I also note that this is a major component of our CO₂ reduction strategy. The government assumes that to reach our 2050 targets of reducing the CO₂ we emit into the environment – we are going to reduce that by over 200 megatonnes – this carbon capture and storage is going to be the solution for 70 per cent of these reductions. That's right; 70 per cent of our reduction in fossil fuel use or, at least, in our production of CO₂ is going to come from carbon capture and storage. That seems to be putting a lot of eggs in one basket, and I'm not sure if that's going to be doable given the state of this technology, given that it is at best experimental in nature in the Alberta landscape and all those things. Do I think we shouldn't be trying this? No, that's not what I'm saying. But I'll tell you what. In my view, I believe global warming is real and we have a responsibility to do something about it.

3:30

This highlights to me that we should also be looking at other strategies. I know that some members of this honourable House are actually bringing forward private members' bills on emission standards this legislative session. I think they're actually coming up next week. I think it might be time for those procedures to actually be looked at in conjunction with our carbon capture and storage bill that is being passed, the burying of our carbon underground, and look at some other ways to actually lower reductions. Emission controls may be part of that. We have to be always looking for other ways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to speak.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I just want to be very quick. One of the things that really bothers me is that the government would accept long-term liability for injected carbon dioxide once the operator provides data showing that stored CO₂ is contained. My understanding is that there really are no long-term scientific studies to say what is safe or not safe. What happens to the water in aquifers that may be permanently damaged? I think it's just not going to be good enough to be able to say, "Oops," because it'll be too late then.

We do know that we have had earth tremors over the years in Alberta even as far north as Edmonton. What happens if there is an earth tremor and rocks are moved, et cetera? I don't think that there's nearly enough information on what's considered safe, when the taxpayer should take it over. The other thing is that the period of time between the closure and the transfer of long-term liability remains undefined. That period of time has to be based on scientific studies, which, as I've mentioned, I don't believe exist.

I think the other thing that would tie in with the assumption of liability by the Crown, i.e. the taxpayers, is that the industry is not viable without an assumption of risk being taken by the government. It begs the question of whether the Crown and, through the Crown, landowners are giving too much to create a viable industry in an uncertain business. My question would be: has any insurance company been willing to take this risk? If not, why should the taxpayers take the risk if an insurance company won't take the risk? Why can't developers take out the insurance? I mean, after all, they can write that off as a business expense. Most insurance companies do a tremendous amount of work on risk assessment and those sorts of informational things before they'll even dream of providing insurance, and even if it is very high risk, they're willing to take it if the dollars are right.

So until some insurance company tells me that they're even remotely interested in providing insurance on the liability that the taxpayers are going to get stuck with, then I think a lot more work has to be done towards this. Certainly, taxpayers cannot write off tax increases as easily as businesses can write off business expenses.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you. This is the part that I think really needs a lot more work done on it.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to put a comment and a question to the hon. member, and hopefully she'll respond. She's raised the question about why insurance companies shouldn't provide the insurance. I guess I will suggest to her that the reason that they don't, even though that's their business, is that, believe it or not, they're risk averse. They don't like to insure things like nuclear power plants and so on, where there's a potential for catastrophic damage. I just wonder if the hon. member feels that that may in fact be why insurance companies are not prepared to insure carbon capture sites and that's why the only people who are left is the government, with its deep pockets.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, I think he's basically summed up exactly what I was thinking. I don't know whether insurance companies have been approached, but I think in this day and age one walks down the street with their insurance company and their lawyer. An awful lot of what we do is based on an insurance company saying that you can do it. I go back to the very simple example of a soccer mom. In the old days you packed your car with kids and off you went to the game and had a grand time. Now you are worried about the liability. That has now spoiled it for having kids go in the vans together because you have to make

sure that your liability is for the kid in the van and the kid getting out of the van. I mean, it's really taken a lot of the joy out of life.

Having said that, I would like to know if insurance companies have been approached, if they're even remotely interested in insuring this. Certainly, I think that if an insurance company isn't willing to take the risk, why should taxpayers?

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

Bill 28 Electoral Divisions Act

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Zwozdesky]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't think I'm pleased to be able to be up and debating this, but I'm certainly grateful for the opportunity and the freedom of speech to be able to get up and talk about what has happened around electoral boundary changes in this province given the last Electoral Boundaries Commission.

I want to be very clear that right from the get-go I and members of the Official Opposition caucus did not agree with the government's move to add four new electoral divisions to the map, and I will speak very specifically about why I disagreed with this. It was because that was a magic number for the government. Adding four new electoral divisions gave the Electoral Boundaries Commission the ability to move some boundaries around and to cope with the increased growth in metropolitan and urban areas without ever having to reduce the number of rural ridings. I really disagreed with that, and I think that the map should have been drawn differently.

That's not to say that I particularly have it in for any given rural riding, but what I am a champion for is the fact that Alberta is an urban province. Most of our residents live in urban areas, and that is not reflected in the distribution of seats that are in this House at this time. I think that's wrong. What it does is create a different value of votes, and it entrenches a different value of votes between someone living in a rural area and someone living in an urban area. Let me be clear again. I'm not picking on any particular rural riding. I don't care where it is.

It's very convenient for the members on the other side that they are able to protect their status quo and protect the likelihood of their re-election in exactly the same way. The urban ridings are not getting the representation and the number of votes that they should be getting. Mr. Speaker, that matters. So we have . . . [interjections] Oh, I'm so glad that the Minister of Energy is beaking off; the Minister of Infrastructure now has joined in; I think maybe we've got Grande Prairie. Yeah, lots of folks want to join in.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Centre has the floor.

3:40

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm always excited when I can manage to engage the hon. members opposite, so I don't mind the heckling, but I do want to see them get up and defend some of this because, frankly, I don't think it's defensible. I went to the Electoral Boundaries Commission twice, once before the interim report and

once in reaction to the interim report, and I put the same concerns that I'm raising here today and more, actually, on the record with the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

I am fiercely proud of this province, and I really hate it when I see stuff happen here that I think diminishes us, and I think that what happened with the distribution of seats diminishes Alberta, particularly because it diminishes the people that live in urban areas. Two-thirds of us live in an urban area in this province, and that is not reflected in this House. So that's where I start from.

Now, let me keep going now that I've got started. Who cares? So what? There is an entrenchment of rural voting privilege in this Assembly. So what? Well, it matters to me because those votes matter on things like the allocation of resources, the allocation of budget, the way we put a priority on various government initiatives. If you don't have enough seats in here that are voting on urban concerns and you have more than the share voting on rural concerns, then those issues are the ones that get the funding and the priority.

We do end up with things like FITFIR, which is something that I've talked a lot about in this House – first in time, first in right – which is a very archaic water management system that's been in place in this government for a very long time. The government is hesitating around a new water licensing or water allocation system. We're looking at whether we can grow some of the cities. Okotoks comes to mind. Because they've had to stop allocating new water licences, we have some urban areas that are really struggling with their growth choices because of those decisions.

That allocation of seats and votes matters because the decisions that come out of this House matter in all of Alberta. The allocation of resources and the prioritization of those issues matter. So it's really important.

Let's have another example. You know, it's important to me that as part of moving forward in this province and as part of balancing our environmental concerns against the economic growth, which in this province means oil and gas development, I've talked about trying to enhance walking and cycling infrastructure in the cities, not just for recreational purposes but for commuting purposes. If we can get more people that find it easy to be able to commute in an urban centre, you have fewer people driving cars, which is going to cut down on our greenhouse gasses, and that's going to help us all the way around. But if you can't get that balance of votes, then you're not going to have the priority put on those kinds of choices in here.

The other thing that Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, deals with, of course – and it was certainly brought up a lot during the boundaries commission – is voter participation. We are all struggling with voter participation in this province. We're all trying to figure out, you know, how to do it. How do we encourage more people to vote? Again, you look at that distribution of seats and the distribution of votes and, well, how many people are going: "What's the point? What's the point of voting in an urban centre? My vote is not going to count anyway. For a lot fewer people in a rural riding, their vote counts more, so why would I even bother?" I have had people say that to me. I hope that is not the reason, genuinely, why they are not voting because if that's true, then we just entrench that kind of lower voter turnout. I wonder sometimes if it isn't just a pat way of answering the question, but they said it to me, so I have to take that seriously.

When you look at the electoral boundaries report that is encompassed in and put into practice through Bill 28 – and for anyone that needs to see it, this is Sessional Paper 225/2010, the 2009-2010 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission's Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta – one of the interesting things that happened was the way that the boundaries commission decided to divide things up.

With a tip of the hat to one of my previous colleagues in this House, which was the previous member for Brooks – he held various ministerial portfolios, and he loved to average things – at a certain point he said: well, there are no poor children in Alberta because if you average the children in wealthy households and the children in impoverished households, it comes out to kind of the midpoint, so there are no impoverished children in Alberta. You've got to love that one because then you didn't have to fund, of course, any kind of program.

That same logic, the Oberg principle I'll call it, I find in play here because what we had was a way of thinking about this – here it is; I think it first shows up on page 5 – that talks about how many seats in Calgary, how many seats in Edmonton, and then the "rest of Alberta." So outside of Edmonton and Calgary, everything else in Alberta got mixed into one, the rest of Alberta. It shows it, when you look at their various graphs, to be kind of more or less in the same mix.

Well, when you actually look at how that breaks down, there is a massive difference in how many people are in those ridings. Mixed into the "rest of Alberta," you've got some ridings that are the percentage of variation off that average. What they do is take the population of Alberta, they divide it by the number of seats, and say that this is the average number. Now, is riding A above or below that average, and by how much? This is how they start to figure out whether they need to move the boundaries around to either add more people into the riding or take them away or whether what they've done is indeed fair. Okay?

If you look on page 16 of the electoral boundaries report, here you've got some ridings. I'm going to save embarrassment here by not reading out what they are, but you've got one, for example, that's 15 per cent under the variation. Fifteen per cent under. Eight per cent under. Seven per cent under. Going down here, 12 per cent under and another one 12 per cent under. Fifteen per cent, 11 per cent, 23 per cent under that average: that's one heck of a variation.

Those are all mixed in together with a number of cities because, remember, they just said: Edmonton, Calgary, and the "rest of Alberta." These rural ridings that can be that much under, 23 per cent under that average, are mixed in with ones that include the city of Grande Prairie or the city of Lethbridge or the city of Red Deer. Those are all in the mix with the rest of Alberta. It's exactly the Oberg principle. If you take ridings that are very, very low and you mix in a bunch of urban centres with them, well, gosh darn, you're going to come up with more or less around that average, that looks pretty acceptable to everybody else, and that is wrong, in my opinion.

When I look at the other side of that mix, when I look at the divisions in Edmonton and Calgary, what has happened there? Well, look: 12 per cent over, 14 per cent over, 9 per cent over, 10 per cent over, 16 per cent over, 10 per cent over, 15 per cent over. That's in Calgary alone. Those are Calgary ridings. Those are Calgary ridings where people in this House are trying to represent more – 10 per cent more, 15 per cent more, 12 per cent more – people than what that average is. Okay?

That matters because they're representing more people, and when they try and talk about extra money for constituency offices to pay for translation services or dealing with poverty issues or casework or anything else, they're representing way more people, and they don't have the seats that reflect that.

3:50

When you look at Edmonton, we've got 8 per cent over, 10 per cent over, a bunch of 5 and 6 per cents over, 12, 8. You know, once again, more people. It was an entrenchment of the status quo, that

favours the government. Do I think that's right or fair? Nope, I don't.

Okay. I talked about voter participation and whether that happens, I talked about that Oberg averaging principle, and I just want to go through some of the things that were brought up and, therefore, get incorporated into Bill 28 and that were presented to the boundaries commission.

Now, just let me stop here and say a small prayer of gratitude for the members who served on the boundaries commission. This should be an exalted position, but, oh, my goodness. I mean, basically, we took some citizens and we said to them: "You're going to have to forsake your job. You're going to travel around the province for extended periods of time."

Is the Speaker wondering how talking about what's in the electoral boundaries report reflects itself in Bill 28? He's not.

They travelled all over the province. They were away from their home and their families for a long period of time, even their work. They may well have lost money. So thank them. This was not an easy job.

Now, the composition of that Electoral Boundaries Commission also matters.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Anyone wish to comment or question? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much. I do have just a couple of questions on the presentation because I'm just having a little bit of difficulty understanding. I feel like it's a narrow-minded approach, and I can't quite figure out if it's the narrow-mindedness that comes first or the tunnel vision.

I believe that this is a democratic country, and what happens is that the aspect of democracy very much revolves around equitable representation, but you look at it completely as equal representation. There is not equal representation. It takes someone in rural Alberta to be able to see their representative possibly four hours, such as it is in mine, to get from one end of the constituency to mine in order to have a face-to-face opportunity to discuss an issue. In the hon. member for Dunvegan's that might be eight hours. In your constituency, hon. member, it may take you – and I think you've said this before – 13 to 14 minutes to walk across it.

Ms Blakeman: Forty-five.

Mr. Danyluk: Okay. Forty-five minutes to walk across it. What ends up happening is that your office, as I saw it, is across the street from the Legislature. We have to talk about the opportunity of representation. It isn't equal because this country is not equal. This country is not a country that only has urban development. It has different types of development. Could you please tell me how you would address that aspect? It is access.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Thank you for that question. It does flow into what I was talking about as I ran out of time, which was the composition of the Electoral Boundaries Commission itself. Essentially, you have two members that are appointed from opposition parties or with co-operation – yeah, the Official Opposition with the other one knowing as well – and three, therefore the majority vote, appointed by the government in power. Yes, officially one is appointed by the Speaker and two are appointed by the Premier, but that is how it shakes down. We all know the Speaker is a member of the government caucus. That's a majority vote right there. If you

want to talk about equal, equitable, the majority vote is the way this place works, and I think that matters. So the composition itself of the boundaries commission is important in all of this.

Now, there were a number of presentations made, and some of the points from the public that were made indeed are captured in the boundaries commission annual report, and I encourage people to go and read it because that matters, too. One of the things that really bugs me is somehow this assumption that some ridings are better and some are worse. That just offends me. I think all parts of this province are important. How the count works is a different matter, but to say that because I represent a central riding within, literally, walking distance of the Legislative Assembly I get less money to fund my constituency office – the factors that are counted here tend to be factors that favour an older system.

What's in an older system? More rural seats. There's a lot of consideration given to how much time is spent for an MLA to move about their constituency. True, but this is also modern times. We just spent a lot of time talking about whether or not you could have a cellphone in your car and communicate with your constituents that way. I think all of us as MLAs talk to our constituents on the phone. Some of them we meet. Does that mean that it can only be this way or only face to face? No.

My colleagues spend time driving back to their constituencies on a Thursday night, and that's no fun, for anybody listening. I remember that a member, Mr. Taylor, said: "That's it. I'm quitting because I'm sick and tired of getting in my truck and driving five hours to get home every week and five hours to get back." I understand what he's saying. He did work while he did it, but he was driving every day. What did I do in that five hours? I went back to my office and worked.

So it's not as though either one of us is better or worse. It's just different.

The Acting Speaker: On the bill, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the bill.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to get up and speak to this bill, as it always is. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated, it is really a privilege to be here and to be able to discuss these democratic principles. I, too, will follow up a little bit on what the Member for Edmonton-Centre said and maybe try to engage the hon. member's question that was just asked and try and pick up, from my point of view, on the difference between equitable representation as it says in the Electoral Boundaries Commission and what goals we are balancing off and try and get a little bit of an answer from at least my perspective. I'll try and do some justice to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre although I doubt I will do it. We'll continue on with that conversation.

Nevertheless, I too am of the view that when we started this process, there was no need for an additional four members to be added to the House. I don't know whether there was a magic number to keep rural ridings together. All I know is that there was no need for an addition of four more seats. Why is that? Simply put, we are in recessionary times here in Alberta. Everyone is clamouring for money, and the addition of these four more MLAs will cost the taxpayer approximately \$50 million over a four-year term in office. That's not a small chunk of change. It could be used for many things. I'm sure the hon. minister of housing could use that to help some of our homeless individuals in both Calgary and Edmonton, to speed up the 10-year plan to end homelessness a little quicker, or a number of things where that \$50 million could be used instead of having four more MLAs here.

There are other jurisdictions who do it, Mr. Speaker, with fewer MLAs. Ontario does it with fewer MLAs per population than we do. So does British Columbia. There are examples of jurisdictions who manage to survive with fewer people in their Legislatures working on behalf of their citizens. From a straight optics point as well as a financial point I don't believe that was wise.

4:00

I've stated that for the record. I believe we would have been much better served, all of us here, leading by example, rolling up our sleeves, working a little harder, adding a few more constituents in our communities and saying: all right; we're going to carry the ball and do the best we can. I believe we are all very talented individuals in here. We could have served our constituents very well in that regard.

I will follow up some of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Centre as I, too, am of the view that urban constituencies were not treated in the same respect as many of our rural communities in this new electoral boundary redrawing. I know we've had some numbers bandied around here, whether it's 66 per cent or, as I've heard recent statistics say, closer to 71 per cent of our people that live in cities in Alberta. Whether we're arguing over 5 per cent, I think, needless to say, we're all cognizant that Alberta is moving towards more people going to our city centres rather than our rural townships.

Now, what does that mean for the redrawing of this electoral map? It means that if you look on a straight representation-by-population basis, the urban constituencies are disadvantaged. Using my 71 per cent number, 71 per cent of the individuals in this province live in cities, yet they only receive approximately 50 per cent of the seats. That is a striking imbalance, one that you don't see in all other jurisdictions. It is really an imbalance, I think, that is more unique to Alberta than it is to other provinces that find their equitable representation closer to a number that reflects actual people in their urban sectors. I believe that's a uniquely Alberta situation due to probably some history of the way the province developed, some history around recent electoral victories. Well, recent; let's go back even further, to the last 40 years' election victories. The current zeitgeist of what is happening here in Alberta may have some implication in that. But that may be reading too much into it.

If we get back to what is equitable representation, under the act it means that not all communities or constituencies are easy to represent. I think the hon. minister made a good point in the fact that in some areas it does take a rural member of this hon. House eight hours to get across that constituency to visit with a person. Okay. I accept that. I say: yeah, that happens; from time to time that happens. I don't know how often that happens; I don't represent a rural community. But I know that if he's driving eight hours to see that person on a Monday, he's probably not going to go out there on Tuesday and see that person the very next day. I don't know for sure. I know for sure that that guy eight hours away isn't going to stop in three times in a week every week for the remainder of their session. Believe me – maybe I'm just too nice a guy; maybe I'm so helpful – I have constituents who by nature of my community stop in two, three times a week, not really with an issue, but they still want to talk to me.

Mr. Danyluk: You should solve the problem the first time.

Mr. Hehr: Yes. Exactly. Maybe it is my fault. I have to solve the problem the first time. That may be it. I'm getting to that. Maybe I've got to get better at solving these constituents' problems; that's it.

Nevertheless, there are different ramifications for different communities, you know, so we can point to these differences in representing different geographical communities. I know I can list some of the joys of being a representative from downtown Calgary and just some of the things that I find not so joyful. Believe you me, I love every one of my constituents, sir, just not always the ones that come in as often as they do. I still love them, but nevertheless a little absence makes the heart grow fonder. You guys know where I'm going with this.

Anyway, back to the point. The big thing that I see that is really the great equalizer – it's a great equalizer for us in this Legislature – is the use of technology. We handle much on the phone, much on the computer, much through our ability to simply communicate better with individuals. Is it a perfect world? No. But we have the means, the ability to do that. Okay? I believe technology is a great equalizer in this forum, that is going to make representation by population much more the norm than equitable representation that we brought out.

We see the differences. We have a 23 per cent difference in one rural riding compared to a 12 per cent overrun in another. Let someone do the math. That's a 36 per cent difference in the number of people that are being represented. That's a lot. Their vote counts more. Their vote on a straight representation by population counts more. That is supposed to not happen to I think the extent it did in this electoral map redrawing. I believe it has to happen a little, but I believe that because of some of the things the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought up – the nature of the people selected to the committee, the nature of the redrawing of the map, our rural constituencies having the power they do – it happened.

For better or for worse, those are my thoughts. I believe and hope that in the future even more technological advances will be made that allow us to communicate more effectively with our constituents. In my view, if we can get as close to votes equalling the same in this province, the better off democracy is. I believe that was what Canada tried to be founded on, with a recognition that our geography has a place in that.

I think the day is coming to a conclusion when we're going to accept such a wide variety, and that may be settled through our courts. You saw a narrowing in our court decisions recently on what equitable representation actually means. I believe there will be a court challenge that even limits it, that instead of a 25 per cent deviation, you'll see it down to an 18 per cent deviation. I don't know. I brought that number off a skyhook. Nevertheless, I believe it will be decided through the courts, and I believe that at the end of the day it will happen more in the manner I am suggesting than in others. Nevertheless, that will be happening at another date.

I thank the hon. Speaker for allowing me to have this discussion and to participate.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess I wanted to direct a question to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. It relates to the comments earlier by the Minister of Infrastructure about distances. I wonder if the hon. member – I'm sure he's aware that the act permits, I think, up to four special constituencies to have significantly less population, and they are normally assigned to the far northern constituencies, which are vast and thinly populated. It's just two constituencies.

4:10

Don't you think that that really takes care of the minister's concern? There are very vast northern parts of our province, and

there are special transportation problems for MLAs, which, I guess, are addressed. I would ask if, in his mind, that constitutes a justified reason for systematically assigning greater vote power to rural constituencies over urban constituencies in the sense that you consistently have rural MLAs representing fewer constituents than urban.

A second question also relates to this point, and it has to do with the change between the first report of the commission, the preliminary report, and the final report with respect to the constituencies around Grande Prairie. It has to do with the original report, which adopted what I would call the Medicine Hat model, which is that the bulk of the city forms a single urban constituency, and the fraction is then joined with a large rural area surrounding the city, which gives at least one urban constituency in Medicine Hat. This was adopted for Grande Prairie, but the objection in the Conservative Party report resulted in reverting to a situation where you split Grande Prairie down the middle and then joined that with large rural areas. That seemed to me to be an example of the self-interests of the Conservative MLAs up there prevailing over the principle that some of us discussed with the commission when we appeared before the commission.

I just wondered if I could get your comments on that as well.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. I'll try to deal with the second issue first. Make no doubt about this; this is a political process that is used or should be used to the best advantage of the government of the day how it is. I don't know whether it should be used; I think it was used for that purpose. This is a political map you're redrawing. I believe the government used its powers to draw it in the best political way possible.

The goal of these election redrawing maps is not necessarily to create ridings that you can lock up and win for sure. What you're supposed to do is create competitive ridings. Let me give you an example of how that was done in Calgary. What happened in Calgary is that there's a new Calgary-Buffalo. The new Calgary-Buffalo was stuffed – 54 per cent of the people in my riding now voted Liberal in the last election, for better or worse. Bully for me. But what has happened – what has happened – is that this electoral committee through the process of stuffing all those votes into my electoral district has created very viable, winnable races for other parties, namely the government, in both the new Calgary-Currie and the new Calgary-Mountain View. They said: all right; let's create some competitive boundaries. That happened there. Okay? That's what is supposed to happen if the government is using this for a political purpose, and that's what happened.

If we look at what happened up in Grande Prairie, I believe that was also a political purpose. [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I was really intrigued by the concept and the process that led us to having Bill 17 in front of us now, as I'm sure speakers previous to me were, which was the report from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Putting People First: Recommendations for an Alberta Health Act. A number of physicians worked on that committee, and I think there were some patient reps, et cetera, et cetera. After some initial criticism that the stakeholders were individually chosen, that process got opened up, and I think in the end a fair number of people did participate despite the challenges of trying to participate over the summer months when it's very difficult to get people together and to be able to inform them that something's happening because people's attention is in other places and they're often out of town for periods of time.

From that we get this new act. Essentially there are three pieces in this act: the preamble, the concept of a health charter, and the concept of a health advocate. Overriding all of this is the change from having several health acts because they would now all be repealed. We're repealing a number of them. Sorry; I'm just trying to find out which ones we're repealing here. It's not popping to mind, so I'm going to move on.

What's happening in this bill is that aside from stating a number of motherhood statements in the preamble, the idea of the charter and the health advocate, all other future decisions will be made by the minister or cabinet, known in legislative language as the Lieutenant Governor in Council, or could be made by ministerial order. So it doesn't come back in front of this House again. It makes it very, very hard for Albertans to find out what's going on, to find out that a change is being considered, and to find out how they would give input into that change.

I started to look at a couple of things. The first thing was that I was really intrigued by the idea of a charter because, as you know, I'm a real constitutional and administrative law amateur and I'm really interested in how, when you set something out in that kind of a system, things proceed from it. I was very interested in how our new Canadian Constitution came into being and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that came with it. So I was trying to figure out if you could have a charter that didn't confer any rights and wasn't able to be challenged in court.

I looked for a couple of different definitions, and all of them talk about rights. From the *Oxford* dictionary we get that a charter is "a written statement of the rights of a specified group of people." Again, the word "rights" is right in it: "the rights of a specified group of people." Something is being conferred upon them that is very finite, and you can compare against it. They have it. There are a number of other definitions if you care, but it's about, you know, you can hire something or you can grant a charter or make a chartered corporation, for example. So there are a couple of other definitions, but when you're actually talking about creating a charter, it confers rights. That's the *Oxford*.

4:20

But some people don't like the *Oxford*, so I went to the *Merriam-Webster*. *Merriam-Webster*, well, more or less the same thing: "charter . . . a grant or guarantee of rights, franchises, or privileges from the sovereign power of a state or country." Then it talks about

the civic charter again, which I mentioned previously, and then the thing about hiring a ship or some part of it or a travel arrangement.

I may have checked one more because you know how thorough I am. No. You don't get anything else. You get those two. That's the English and the American versions of charter. Clearly, a charter and calling something a charter is supposed to have rights with it. What we have here, there are no rights. There's nothing in here that confers a right.

When we look at what is called a health charter here, it says it's establishing a health charter to guide. So, again, it's not enforceable. A guide is not something that you can say: you didn't do this right. A guide is a suggestion, but it's not an order. This is to guide these various groups that are listed. It talks about recognizing that health is a partnership between – and then it names a number of different groups – individuals, families, communities, et cetera. Also, this health charter, that isn't a charter, should acknowledge the impact of an individual's health status and other things upon interacting with the system, but it can't be used to limit access to health services.

I've gone through the other parts of this – there are five sections on it – and none of this talks about conferring any kind of a right nor does it confer any kind of a guarantee. It actually specifically does not allow a cause of action or other legal enforceable claim or a proceeding in any court to be brought as a result of this charter. So it's not a charter; it's a guideline that isn't enforceable. My goodness. That's not exactly a step forward in health care delivery. A guide that isn't enforceable: frankly, I just have a hard time taking that seriously, and it's clearly not meant to be taken seriously. It's not enforceable and doesn't grant anything.

Then we look at the health advocate. You know, I have met with a number of seniors' groups over the years that had great plans for a seniors' health advocate or a seniors' advocate. They had it all set out, and they involved volunteers that were going to offer services in the community. It was very low cost, volunteer driven, some great ideas. Every time we brought it up to the government, they got blown off. So I was very interested to see the idea that there would be an appointment of a health advocate in here.

Again, when I look at it, what's the job of the health advocate? Okay. To look at complaints and to perform any other duties that are set out in regulations. Well, again, everything is going under regulations. This is completely a shell bill. It allows that there could be employees that are able to assist this health advocate or, one presumes, be this health advocate. Then it talks about the kind of complaints they can take. But, well, what can they do with it? Can they adjust it? Can they enforce it? Can they make something happen? No. They can review it. Wow. They can review the complaint. Okey-dokey, then. Well, that wouldn't take it very far, would it?

If they find in their review that someone has failed to do what they were supposed to under a health charter that's a guideline and doesn't have any guarantee of enforcement or any legal standing – that would be interesting to watch – then they can do what? They can demand. They can enforce. They can move something. Well, no. Wait. They can make a recommendation. Okay. So when you've seriously had a problem with the health care system and you go to the advocate, the advocate reviews it.

Isn't there a song from a musical, something about reviewing the situation? It's Fagin, whose response to everything was to review the situation. I sometimes think that he might be the mascot of the current government administration, to have Fagin reviewing every possible situation. It is, however, a catchy tune, so maybe everyone can hum it.

Once they've reviewed the situation, if they do find that there is a problem here, then they can make a recommendation. They may

make a recommendation, not that they must but may, and they may submit a report, may but not must, on the matter to the minister. What does the minister have to do? Nothing. They don't even have to respond to it. So that's not very effective either.

We have a charter that's not a charter, a health advocate that reviews, recommends, and makes a report but doesn't have the power to make anything happen. And then there's the matter of the preamble. Now, this I'm very interested in. Let me just see if I brought the – oh, I didn't. Okay. The next time I'm here, I'll bring back the specific language about preambles. Essentially preambles are set as a context, as a lens through which you view and understand what is set out in the rest of the act, but preambles are not enforceable.

Here we have this preamble in which there is a lot of good stuff, you know, a lot of careful statements and pithy observations and some real hand-on-your-heart stuff. Unfortunately, it matters not. Nothing in that preamble can actually be used to make anything happen or to make the government do anything because it's actually before the act. The preamble comes before the act. It's not part of the act, and you can't use a preamble to make the government do something.

So we have three components to this act. None of them are enforceable or give any kind of concrete direction on how to make the Health Act better. The worst part of it all, sort of the shading of all of this, is that everything now gets referred to the minister and is all decided by regulations, ministerial order, or by cabinet and does not come back before this House again, before the people essentially.

You know, this act actually raises more questions than it answers. What I've written on the first version of the bill I got is: which principle receives priority? Well, the answer is none of them. Which preamble is most and least important? You don't get anything out of that either because the preamble is not enforceable. How is any conflict resolved in between any of these things? None of those questions are answered in this.

The complaints process, you know, talks about if a complaint is frivolous or vexatious or is without merit. My notes say: well, what is the test? Is there an appeal process in place? How does this work? Nothing. There's nothing that indicates that there would be an appeal process or the test or the criteria that would be used to say that a complaint is frivolous or vexatious. When you look at other acts where that's defined, it's clearly defined. You want to look at the Privacy Commissioner. Boy. Vexatious and frivolous are defined so that everybody knows what they're talking about. It's got, like, "repetitious" and that kind of language in it.

Here we had things that I think a lot of people had hopes about, and it's not going to be resolved by what's put forward in this act. We're all getting mail on this, I know. I certainly am. I've been through the grandmother of Bill 11, which I think was Bill 39, and I think that was in 1999. Is that possible? Yeah. Then I was through Bill 11. I've been through the third way and Aon. I've been through all these different tries at different health prescriptions by this government, and always what people say is: don't privatize the system, and make it work. There's a lot of leeway in there for government to do stuff.

4:30

Some of the specifics that have been brought forward by people are: where do seniors fit into this plan? Where does access to ER fit into this plan? I know that they're asking really specific and current issues about a piece of legislation, which is in effect – well, clearly, this one is a guideline, but it's supposed to give you a roadmap of how it would all be implemented. There's nothing that you can grab onto here. This is a cloud.

You know, my motion, which my colleague kindly brought forward on my behalf, was to hoist the bill because it's not doing what it should be doing. More than that, I think it will make people believe that there is a commitment from the government that is in fact not there. I find that particularly devious. So we'll have an Alberta Health Act that doesn't do anything. It's completely a cloud. There's nothing enforceable about it, and it doesn't answer any of the questions that people had about how to make the health care system better.

Every day there is something else in the paper about what's going on in our health care system. You know, I was the critic for the Official Opposition for health care for four years, so by the end of that I had a pretty good handle on what was happening in the health care system. I'm three years past that now, so I wouldn't claim to have immediate knowledge of stuff. But I'm tired of the chaos. As a citizen I'm tired of opening up that paper and watching the minister point his finger at the administrator of Alberta Health Services, and then the next day you open the paper and the executor from Alberta Health Services is pointing their finger back at the minister. It just isn't helpful, and there's a lot of chaos that goes with it. That's one of the things that I am most disturbed by, that lack of stability and consistency in the system.

So I look at Bill 17 and I go: will those questions get answered for me? No, they won't get answered for me. Will this create stability and consistency in the system? No. Will this answer the questions we all have about who's the boss, Alberta Health Services or the minister? No. And frankly, you know, I more than most people in here, I suspect, understand how quickly this can all turn around again. All we need is another change in health minister, and then there will be another year of: just wait; I'm getting on top of this. You know, the current guy likes to go out and meet with people and tell us how many meetings he's held. The previous guy just said, "Do it" and turned the system on its ear. The one before that – I'm sorry, I'm trying to remember who the one before that was. I could have been through, like, half a dozen health ministers and 11 deputy ministers, I think, in about 12 years. So the person that actually runs the system has changed over and over and over again.

Some of the people that I talk to said: I don't know what form I'm supposed to fill out anymore and who it goes to. You know, we're all supposed to be tracking all of this stuff in the health system so we can get better, but people are spending so much time trying to figure out the new system that in some cases they're really pressed to actually get the work done. These people went into health service to help people, to deliver health services. The delivery of health services.

My colleagues in the Wildrose, the third party, fourth party . . .

Mr. Mason: Who's counting anymore?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, who's counting?

I remember listening to their part of this debate the other day, and they were very insistent that nothing in the Canada Health Act talks about a public delivery system, that it talks about a single payer and talks about publicly administered, but nothing says publicly delivered. I understand where the impetus comes from to look at having a mixed delivery system. If we're going to compare apples and oranges, let's compare apples and oranges, but having people stand up and tell me that the system – well, actually, we just watched it today. The health minister got up and said: don't tell me that the French system is better because the French system is in trouble because, and then he named something. That's, indeed, what I started to figure out, that every system is just different enough that it's very difficult to make comparisons across. What we can do is

make some very general statements about: is the system delivered by a mixed system? [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] Wow, I can't believe how fast that went by.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I know there will be other speakers that follow me as we consider Bill 17 in Committee of the Whole. I've made some notes based on the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. My understanding of the purpose of Committee of the Whole is to consider a bill on a clause-by-clause basis and that statements with respect to support or nonsupport for the principles of the bill are properly reserved for second reading. I guess because of that I will leave the comments that the hon. member made about the delivery system and concerns with respect to roles and responsibilities and other matters that are not related to the bill for the minister to answer during question period, as he does on a daily basis.

A couple of things were raised by the hon. member that I would like to take the opportunity to talk about. First of all, Mr. Chairman, the basis for this bill. The hon. member spoke about the consultation process but not in a lot of detail. I think it bears repeating that the consultation prior to the development of this legislation was, in fact, one of the broadest consultation dialogues in recent history in Alberta.

Over 29 workshops were held across Alberta in 23 separate communities over the spring and summer months. Over 1,300 Albertans participated in that process. It was a three-hour commitment on the part of people who came out to the consultations. We were assisted in hosting the consultations by the 12 health advisory councils that have been set up by Alberta Health Services, and they did a very good job of providing good venues and good links to the community so that we could get the word out about this opportunity and ensure that people came and had the opportunity to have their say. A public survey, Mr. Chair, which involved similar questions that were discussed during the workshops resulted in over 1,500 submissions. Finally, over 85 organizations across this province provided detailed, thoughtful, well-considered submissions on the questions that were raised.

Mr. Chair, as I'm sure the House is aware, the consultation dealt with proposals for an Alberta health act. It also provided an opportunity for citizens across the province to talk about their concerns about the health care system generally. I suppose that in fairness to the hon. member I should point out to the House that, in fact, the second volume of the report *Putting People First* is devoted to a thorough, unabridged summary of the concerns that we heard across the province during the consultation. These comments, the ones that were included, are not reserved for accolades, positive comments about the health care system – there were certainly many of those – but they also present in a fair bit of detail some of the specific concerns expressed both on a provincial basis and, more frequently, with respect to challenges in local communities.

The hon. member also in her comments suggested to this House that Bill 17 would in some way repeal existing legislation. That is simply not true, Mr. Chair. It's certainly unfair, I believe, for any member to suggest such a thing. A simple review of the bill will reveal to the reader that it is a guide, in fact, for making future decisions about changes to legislation, regulation, and policy, sound decisions that are based on principles that Albertans have had input into and have expressed support for: a health charter, not a patient charter but a health charter to guide the system, to clearly delineate

expectations of Albertans about their health system, to talk about issues like roles and responsibilities, including the responsibilities of individuals and families and communities and, thirdly, to support decision-making on the basis of consultation or dialogue.

Quite contrary to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre suggested, the bill contains a very specific provision, Mr. Chair, that the minister of health would be required to provide public notice for any proposed changes to regulations under the act, that Albertans would have a minimum period of time within which to provide their comments to the minister, and thirdly and perhaps most importantly to all members of this House and, I would say, all residents of Alberta, a legal requirement that the minister must consider those comments in the course of making and announcing a decision on a proposed change in regulation.

4:40

Now, while I can certainly agree with the hon. member that the simple mechanics of this I think are somewhat unprecedented in previous legislation in the history of this province, although we see some elements of that in Bill 29, also before the Legislature, it is in fact the spirit in which those processes of dialogue are put in place that is what is most important. For that, Mr. Chair, I have no difficulty at all in standing up for the integrity and the thoroughness and the comprehensiveness of the consultation process that's been undertaken not only in the last few months but, in fact, in the last year, including the work of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health, which I had the privilege to co-chair.

So for an hon. member to suggest that this bill in some way would result in fewer opportunities for consultation and dialogue, I challenge any member of this House to find evidence to support that contention in this bill.

What I'm more concerned about, Mr. Chair – and I think there were a number of comments brought forward by the hon. member that would lead me to have these concerns – are her remarks about the proposed health charter.

Just by way of background, when we began this process we went out initially to talk to people about the concept of a patient charter. The reason that this is not a rights-based document that is proposed is quite simple. Albertans, the citizens of this province, are in fact not interested in more legislation, more litigation as a result of health care. They're not interested in the establishment of enforceable rights. What they are interested in, quite frankly, is improving the performance of the health system and providing a true framework for decision-making for the future, a framework that would reflect priorities that have been established by Albertans that go far beyond the acute care system and recognize the social determinants of health, which are talked about extensively in this bill, which recognize the role of our publicly funded health care system in improving the health status of our population. By that I refer to reducing the incidence of chronic diseases like cancer and diabetes and many other chronic diseases that are, in fact, front and centre in the day-to-day business of providing publicly funded health care in Alberta. They are interested in the role of citizens in making decisions in the future.

You know, although I would hesitate to suggest that any member of this House has an interest in seeing us continue through an air of conflict over health care, which in my humble opinion has represented much of the public discourse in Alberta over the last few years, the bill represents an intention and provides a mechanism for dialogue about health care, Mr. Chair, that would help guide us in the future. Albertans are, I think, much more informed about issues in our health care system than perhaps the hon. member gives citizens credit for. While, of course, they are interested in the day-

to-day challenges in the system – and those have been properly raised in this House by all members and will continue to be debated and answered for by government – they are also very interested in the question of how we plan for the future.

We, of course, Mr. Chair, are in a position to do much more for people in health care than ever before as a result of technology, as a result of additional health professionals playing roles in the system, working as teams in many cases. Albertans want to ensure that we make the best quality decisions that we can make going forward, and they see a very significant role for themselves in doing that. This, of course, ranges from broad issues involved in legislation, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre referred to, right down to the establishment of community-based priorities and some input over the allocation of resources. This report and this bill make provision for that.

For those that are interested or perhaps have a vested interest in further conflict and in enabling more litigation over health care and in looking to establish rights and generate activity around those sorts of discussions, I can tell you from my first-hand experience that Albertans are not interested in that. In fact, they are quite tired of that sort of dialogue. I think it's good instruction to all members of this House that we should be looking to involve citizens in decision-making, to give them an opportunity to set priorities for the future and to actually have a say in things that are as important as the preamble to this legislation, Mr. Chair.

For those that are familiar with health legislation across the country, they will know that most of our health legislation dates back to the 1960s or earlier. If you look across the country – it pretty much doesn't matter what province – one thing that all of the legislation has in common is its focus on things like the transfer of money, the role of institutions, and the role of providers. Albertans have clearly stated, Mr. Chair, that they want a health system that is focused on the needs of citizens, of families, and of communities, and we can't do that if we go forward without a bill to guide some decision-making that takes us away from that focus on the needs of those institutions and the flow of that money as opposed to meeting the needs of our fellow citizens on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Chair, those are some selected responses to some of the matters brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. With all due respect, you know, for members that are looking for specific changes in service areas of the delivery system, the consultation exercise in this bill has not been and has no role in making changes to those specific services. More importantly, it provides a framework which I think would be of use to all of us in this House to guide decision-making and to guide constructive, informative debate about health care issues in the future.

If members opposite have issues with specific principles that have been included in this bill or if they would like to take issue with the role of a health advocate in terms of supporting and assisting Albertans and helping them navigate the system, I'd love to hear some of those arguments, and I'd love to hear why those things would not be a good idea and not worthy of consideration and debate in this House. If members opposite want to dwell on specific day-to-day issues within the health care system and are not prepared to engage in discussion about more future-oriented items and, frankly, have no interest in reflecting upon the comments and, quite frankly, the wisdom that was put forward by Albertans throughout this exercise, then perhaps we don't have a lot to talk about.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair, at this time. We'll do our best to respond to some of the other points that may be presented during Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we continue on, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members present in the Assembly four of my constituents who are also all municipal councillors. Just out of interest, each one of their divisions is probably larger than the division of Edmonton-Centre, so they have a larger area to travel as municipal councillors. We have Reeve Henry Van Hierden; Neil Wilson of division 6; Glen Alm, division 4; and Ian Sundquist of division 7 in the MD of Willow Creek. Thank you for showing up, fellows. Glad to have you here.

Government Bills and Orders **Committee of the Whole**

Bill 17 **Alberta Health Act** (*continued*)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do want to make some comments with respect to this bill and certainly with respect to some of the circumstances which have given rise to it. I've spoken previously in the House about the difference between the report produced by the minister's advisory committee, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and the recommendations that it made and the report that was produced by the NDP caucus as a result of its much smaller public consultation process, What People Want, the distinction between what I consider to be quite abstract recommendations that don't really touch on the kind of concerns that we heard in the report from the minister's advisory committee and contrasting it with some very specific and concrete recommendations in the report that our caucus produced.

4:50

I'm not going to repeat that, but I am going to talk a little bit about what I see as a real dichotomy or a real difference between part 2 of the minister's advisory committee's report, a summary of Albertans' views, and the recommendations in the first part of the report, which gave rise directly to this legislation, on which the hon. member opposite has just spoken.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when I look at this report and look at the account of what they actually heard from the public in their quite extensive consultation process, I find more similarities with the recommendations and the results of our report than I do with the recommendations in the first part of the minister's advisory committee report, and I just want to go through some of them. On page 18 of part 2 of the report it talks about the comments of the participants. It says:

People commented on the scope of services covered by the publicly-funded health system, including the observation that these services do not include the range of initiatives, providers and options they see as important to support their health and wellness.

That corresponds very clearly with what we heard, Mr. Chairman, and it is also related very directly to the practice of the delisting of services, which is an ongoing, chronic issue in the health system. Often things that are delisted are not reported or known for some time.

Under timely access to care the committee said that "a great number of participants said that wait times are still too long." That corresponds with what we heard.

Under accessing health professionals it says, "Participants in many communities noted that their communities had more local physicians than in the past" and that it's clear that there's "still a lack of health professionals in many rural communities." That also corresponds to what we heard.

Under seniors' health issues the report says in part:

Many participants, regardless of their own age, worried about the lack of designated assisted living and long-term care spaces in their communities, and the consequences this would have for themselves or aging family members.

People were worried about costs, people were worried about stress and burnout from caregiving, and they "raised concerns about the impact of for-profit organizations delivering continuing care." This also corresponds with what we heard, Mr. Chairman.

Well, there are a few others. Emergency room pressures: "Participants across the province expressed concerns about long wait times in hospital emergency departments, especially for those with less serious health issues."

There's a section here on the scope of services that are available locally and a lack of recognition of the complexities in rural communities, something we also heard.

There was concern about for-profit delivery of publicly funded health services. We heard that in a very strong way, Mr. Chairman. According to the advisory report, the summary of Albertans' views, from which I've been quoting, it says that people "expressed concern that more and more, the health system seems to be 'nickel and diming' patients and families."

Here's one, Mr. Chairman. This report says:

One of the most frequently raised issues was the Alberta government's decision to move to a single health authority. Participants from virtually every community said that the move has resulted in a less responsive, less transparent, less collaborative and less accountable local health system.

There are lots more, Mr. Chairman, but I think that we can conclude from this that when the committee actually went out and talked to people, they heard very concrete concerns about the health system: emergency wait times, being able to afford long-term care, making sure that their aging parents had a place to go where they'd be properly cared for, emergency ambulances, lack of access to physicians, all of the same things we heard.

So what did the committee, then, recommend? Well, they made some recommendations that led directly to the adoption of this legislation. According to the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford they want dialogue, and they want a "responsive and transparent public engagement framework." They want, under the health charter, to "acknowledge the impact of a person's health status and other circumstances on their capacity to interact with the health system." They want to "provide assistance to Albertans in accessing appropriate resolution mechanisms in the health system through the use of education, guidance and referral."

Mr. Chairman, there isn't anything here in these recommendations to create a health charter and a health advocate, to create this act, that really acts upon what the committee heard about the real problems that people are facing in the health system. I have not adopted the view of this act that it is an insidious Trojan Horse to give the minister the power he needs to destroy our public health care system, as some may have done. What I see this act as being is a diversion, once again, from tackling the real problems that ordinary people face in accessing our health care system. This is really spinning our wheels.

A famous story about the emperor Nero comes to mind, Mr. Chairman, where Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Well, the health care system is in trouble. I won't say that it's burning, but there are a lot of problems that need to be addressed. The emergency room crisis is just the most recent one. We see a health minister who's not tackling those issues and, in fact, is backpedalling from his earlier commitments to enforce some much stronger standards in terms of timeliness.

We've been talking for some time now about the government's misguided strategy with respect to long-term care and how that affects not only the ability of families to ensure that their aging parents are well taken care of, well cared for at a cost that a family can afford but how it actually affects the whole health care system and blocks acute-care beds, which in turn creates multiple problems. So wait times not just in emergency rooms but for other surgeries and particularly for cancer surgeries are an ongoing problem. We've heard this from people, that people don't think that six months or even a year is an acceptable waiting time to get surgery for cancer.

We have certainly heard from people that there's a serious problem with respect to family physicians. Just today I raised again the question of the East Edmonton health centre in my constituency, where two key new components have not been funded even though the cost is quite modest, and that is an urgent care centre, which could divert 34,000 cases a year from the Royal Alexandra emergency room – that would make a very substantial difference to people in that waiting room, one of the busiest in the province – and a medical care centre, where six doctors were to be hired because there's a severe shortage in that part of town of emergency room physicians. We have infant mortality rates that are three times what they are in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's constituency, for example, and are equivalent to Third World infant mortality rates. That has not been funded.

5:00

What has been done is that they've transferred the public health clinic and put it in that space, and it is operating and doing very good work, and some of the scope of their work has indeed been expanded. But those two key components: something that could be done concretely and is very affordable. In fact, the cost of operating that is about equivalent to the severance packages that the CEOs of the old regional health authorities received and is easily affordable and would make a big difference.

Mr. Chairman, why I'm against this bill is that I think it's largely irrelevant, and I don't think it's going to do anything. It allows the government to claim that it is doing something when in fact the system is in crisis and they're failing to take the appropriate steps in order to rectify it. We have been positive. We have been putting forward suggestions and ideas that would improve the situation: more long-term care beds; make your strategy with respect to long-term care or continuing care, as the government would have it, public instead of keeping it a secret from the people; make sure that you keep Alberta Hospital open so that you have enough mental health beds. You need to expand that as well.

I know the government will turn around and say: well, you just think that we're made of money, and you have to be realistic. But let's not forget that in this budget the government reversed the direction from the last budget and added a billion or a billion and a half dollars more to the health system, so they have recognized that you need to invest in health care in order to fix the problems. But that doesn't mean that you need to waste money. The government in funding more acute-care beds has failed to recognize that acute-care beds are blocked by a lack of long-term care beds and mental health beds, which are both very substantially less expensive than

acute-care beds. It's more economical not to build more acute-care beds but to free up the ones you have with less expensive mental health and long-term care beds. Those are the kinds of things that the government should be doing.

Mr. Chairman, just to conclude my comments here, I believe the government is missing an opportunity. It doesn't get it that there are some real, concrete things that can be done and need to be done in order to improve our health care in the way that both the people that the minister's advisory committee heard from and we heard from want to see. They want to see a better health care system, with reduced waiting times and better access to family physicians, and those solutions are available. They're not necessarily cheap, but I think the government has already recognized that if we're going to fix our health care system, we do have to invest money. It will be an ongoing cost to government, and it will be a significant cost. The sooner we can just get on with the appropriate steps, I think, the better.

I don't think that the health charter or the advocate or the way the legislation is written is going to advance us in the direction that we need to go. So for that reason, I don't support this bill and would hope that the government would reconsider what steps actually need to be taken so that people who need access to health care can get it and can afford it and get it in time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A few comments to offer in response to the remarks by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. First of all, I did take the opportunity prior to the design of the consultation exercise that led to the Putting People First report to actually take a look at the report that was prepared by the ND caucus. Once we completed the consultation and I looked back on what Albertans had to say, I was very pleased to see the degree of alignment between the comments that were heard in the consultation conducted by the ND caucus and some of the feedback that we received from people across the province.

I think what that speaks to is the integrity of hon. members in this House in terms of being prepared to go out and ask difficult questions, not closed-ended questions, open-ended questions about how people are experiencing health care in their community. At the same time we went further than that, Mr. Chair, and we also talked about their visions for the future. We heard a lot of concern, for example, from young people about what the health care system was going to do to improve the health status of our population as a whole over time and was that not an objective that should be reflected in the Alberta Health Act. I mentioned in an earlier speech things like chronic disease.

People also talked about the productivity of our workforce and the future of our economy as being connected to health. They talked about things like end-of-life care really having no place under current legislation. They talked about access to and need for recognition of spiritual care services in the health care system, again something that's not reflected in any of our very outdated legislation today. While it's true – and I'd be the first to acknowledge it, Mr. Chair – that people took this opportunity, and we encouraged them to take this opportunity, to talk about their very specific local concerns, that was only one part of the conversation.

For the benefit of the record and perhaps for some hon. members I just want to go back and talk about the genesis of all of this work. This work did not begin three months ago. This work began approximately a little over a year ago now, I guess, with the establishment of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. If

hon. members will recall, at the time when this government discussed its three key initiatives in health care, we described legislative review as one of three steps.

The first that we talked about – and we have now implemented it and are working to continuously improve it – was the reorganization of the delivery system into one health region, one health system for all Albertans, trying to leverage the best of what was available in different parts of the province for the benefit of all citizens while continuing to preserve opportunities for local input and local priority-setting through entities such as the 12 health advisory councils, which assisted with this consultation. So that was the first initiative.

Despite some of the issues that have been raised by this hon. member and others during question period, we are seeing major moves forward to address some of the issues that our constituents raised. For example, we are opening over 1,300 continuing care spaces this year, Mr. Chairman, a fact that should be well known to all members of this House following the debate of the last two weeks. Four point two million dollars in additional funding has been made available for home care for this year alone, and that is going to provide home care to people who are in the community, endeavouring their best to live independently, to a thousand Albertans across the province. That's this fall.

There are many other initiatives that we can point to. The challenge, of course, is to implement them in a timely way, in a way that benefits people who are most in need in their local community. We're taking the steps to do that. That is made possible by the restructuring of the delivery system and by truly establishing one health system for all Albertans in the form of one health region. That was initiative 1.

Two, Mr. Chair, is the question of funding. We've had some discussions in the House and, of course, through the course of the last budget, and I want to acknowledge again that Alberta is the first jurisdiction to move beyond a single budget cycle to try to implement some of these changes and improvements that members are calling for. We have moved to a five-year funding plan with Alberta Health Services. That's recognized in the report, and the role of that sustainable funding is acknowledged directly in this bill.

The third area, of course, and the area that this work and this bill specifically addresses, is the question of the role of legislation. We've talked in this House about and I spoke a bit earlier this afternoon about our legislation. For the benefit of those who don't know, we have over 30 statutes, Mr. Chair, and over a hundred regulations that govern health care in this province alone. Most of these acts date back to 1962 or earlier. As I mentioned earlier, they are not focused on the issues that the hon. member just raised or the ones that we are concerned about on this side of the House; that is, the issues that affect people, the families who are supporting people, and the communities that are supporting better health locally. They support in large part the needs of institutions, the needs of providers, and they present some legal barriers.

5:10

Let's talk for a moment, Mr. Chair, about how this bill will help us to make better decisions in the future about changes to existing legislation, which is in fact not working in the interests of our citizenry. One of the best examples – and I believe other members have brought this up before – is the whole question of the area of continuing care. For example, at this point in Alberta nursing home services can only be provided in a nursing home. The guidelines that are provided in this bill for decision-making in the future, with the priority being on meeting the assessed needs of individuals when we come to look at legislation like the Nursing Homes Act, would

force us to ask the question whether we really want legislation that defines services that are going to be received by Albertans on the basis of the particular bed they happen to be occupying at a given point in time or by the name of the facility that appears over the door of the facility they happen to be living in.

Albertans said they want an overarching piece of legislation that would guide decision-making, so that thing wasn't allowed to occur in the future, that would allow us to unbundle services in such a way that we could support people living in their own homes, in lodges, in other forms of supportive housing and meet their needs for that little bit of extra care that they might require in order to remain independent with their loved ones and within their home communities. That is the kind of decision-making that this bill is intended to guide in the future.

Similarly, we look at the question of the availability of pharmaceuticals. As MLAs we've all heard the concerns of constituents that have had certain drugs and therapies available to them while they were in-patients in hospitals but because of the provisions in the Hospitals Act in many cases these same drugs and therapies are not available to people when they're discharged home. The principles, the charter, the mechanism for consultation with advanced notice and the opportunity for public input is exactly the kind of feedback, Mr. Chair, that's going to help us to not make similar decisions in the future and to make the right kinds of changes that we need to be making today.

There are many, many other examples of what I'll call legislative bias in some of our existing legislation that causes us to offer programs and services and be confined to service models that are not working in the best interests of our citizenry. That is the point of the Alberta Health Act, Mr. Chair.

The third area I just wanted to comment on – and I think a few members have raised it so far – is this whole notion of primary care. If you take a look at the report that's the basis for the legislation, Mr. Chair, you'll see a clear recommendation that the health charter for Albertans should include a provision that all Albertans would have access to team-based primary care. Now, while this is not specifically something that would be legislated in the bill, it is proposed as something that would be included in the charter, which the minister has said will be made available to Albertans for further input.

Let's talk about the opportunity presented by that for just a moment, Mr. Chair. We currently have over 38 primary care networks operating across the province; over 2 million Albertans live in communities that have primary care networks. These have been tremendously successful, and in the course of the consultation, that the hon. member referred to, they were cited in every single community as the most popular initiative in health care today.

The opportunity to treat Albertans not as passive patients in the health system but as respected partners and, in fact, members of a primary care organization that is operating in their community and the opportunity to do that through a health charter, Mr. Chair, I would suggest is a very noble cause for any piece of legislation to enable. I would suggest that it is directly what Albertans want, and I would suggest that it's something that all members of this House should take note of if they care to think about the potential for this bill to guide better decision-making, more future-oriented decision-making, and more decisions that reflect the priorities of Albertans in the future.

I'm going to leave it there, Mr. Chair. There may be some other comments to respond to as well, but in summary, with all respect to the hon. member opposite and with recognition of the issues that he recognized and cited in the delivery system, the intent of this bill is to guide better decision-making, better performance in health care decisions that affect legislation in the future. I don't think any

member of this House would want to stand up and suggest that Albertans should not have a role in setting the priorities and developing the principles that guide those decisions around legislation in the future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Amen. Amen. Amen. You know why I say that, Mr. Chair? What we just heard there was a prayer. It really wasn't a comment about what is happening on the bill. It was a prayer for what he hopes will happen for future legislation, for a charter that may come into it one time to implement better things for a health care system in the future. That's why I said amen. Where I come from, that's what you say after a prayer has been delivered. So to that I say amen because I, too, hope that some day in the future our province or this government will get its head around actual things that are happening in our health care system.

That is the trouble here. I think that because the hon. member has been through a process here, and he may in fact have been set up for this process – okay? – to go out and talk to Albertans, round them up: “We’ve got to go for cover here. They’re circling the wagons. Things are not good. Hon. member, you’ve got to go out. You’ve got to do the due diligence, talk the talk, and come back and give us some cover here for awhile, okay?” Really, back to that prayer business, that’s all we heard here was a prayer that, God willing and the crick don’t rise, things are going to get better here in the future, and somehow this legislation may or may not, should we follow up on it, do something in the future.

What I see is a preamble, a preamble that says some nice stuff, really motherhood and apple pie stuff, where most Albertans can say, “This is great,” and even: “Oh, a health care charter. Wow. Isn’t that going to be good stuff?” But it’s got no teeth to it, no pull to it, no oomph behind it that can really do anything besides give a government that really seems to be at its wit’s end on this a little more time for cover. That’s what it appears the hon. member has been set up to do, and he’s doing the best he can to sell that here.

If we look, then, after the health charter, we go to a health advocate who, again, has really no ability to change things. We have no ability to change things, and that is the entire problem with this bill. What I hear from this is that the hon. member did a whole bunch of consultation with people who said to him: “This sucks. This sucks. That sucks. Now go back and try and do something about it.” Because there are no answers on what to do about it, well, let’s try and run with this for awhile and say that it’s a plan to make a plan to make a plan, okay?

Maybe I’m not giving the hon. member the benefit of the doubt, but I’ve had the honour and the privilege of sitting here for the last few days and heard how we’ve lurched from plan to plan to plan, how we’ve lurched from minister to minister to minister, how we’ve lurched from deputy minister – I think 14 deputy ministers in this department in the last 16 years, very few of them with any relevant experience in health. We wonder why our health care system is in disarray. I think this is just another example. We don’t know what to do, and we’ve got to be seen to be doing something, so let’s do this.

By all means. Hey, I hear and I hope that some of this preamble may get implemented into some vision of a health care system in the future. What I have problems with is the fact that we’re actually here discussing it as an actual fix to anything that’s going on. It’s not. We’re just deluding ourselves if we believe otherwise. I believe that’s why our caucus is, frankly, a little bit insulted by the fact that this has been coming forward. We’re actually hopeful that

there is going to be a day when we’re going to have a better running health care system, maybe one that was modelled on what we had, you know, roughly 25 years ago. That would be good. But we continue to lurch. All this bill is here right now is some legislation designed so the hon. minister of health can run around and say, “Look, I’ve got the Health Care Act.” It’s much like Chamberlain running around with the paper, saying peace for our time. It didn’t mean anything, didn’t amount to nothing. The Germans were still coming. The people are still showing up at the emergency rooms with no clear fix.

Those are my comments, and I cede the floor to others who wish to comment. Thank you very much.

5:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe that this is a document that has been well written. I think that they did listen. However, I have not heard a single thing that I have not heard over the last six years. In fact, many of the things that they have talked about and put in this document, we talked about on the long-term care task force six years ago. There isn’t anything new here. All they’ve managed to do is to actually listen to the people who have been saying this for a long time.

We all know that once you get into the system, the system works fairly well. What we also know now – and this is something that we heard years ago – is that when you’re in the system, it isn’t all that good. There are many, many places where the system is falling down. Certainly, we know that that is reflected in the number of acute beds, but more importantly it’s the number of people that are trained. There is a big difference between trained and experienced staff for acute care than for long-term care, assisted daily living, assisted living, and working with mental health patients. Every area in its own sort of way is a specialized area and needs trained and experienced staff, which doesn’t come with these beds.

As I’ve mentioned, this is a vision document. I didn’t see any action. I really didn’t see any time frame, and I’m a time frame kind of gal. I want a start and I want a finish, and if it means that somebody has to work their tail off in between the start and the finish, so be it. Let’s get a project. Let’s get it going. I want a time frame. It gets to be too loosey-goosey if there are no time frames. Albertans want a health care system that they can trust now.

They also want to be able to trust those that make decisions that affect health care delivery. I think from what I heard quite clearly, they do not trust the Alberta Health Services Board to deliver care. They may not object to having them do administrative things – maybe run HR; maybe run the paycheques; perhaps even create the standards – but they don’t want them enforcing the standards. They want the enforcement of the standards to come through the ministry of health. They don’t want Alberta Health Services making the decisions on how health is being delivered or by whom. They want to be able to know that front-line workers and the doctors and nurses and psychiatrists and staff are actually involved. They are the ones that really know what needs to be done.

There’s really no specific health charter that’s outlined in the legislation, so the main question surrounding the issue is what type of public debate the health charter will receive if it’s not specifically outlined in the Alberta Health Act. I think that we can talk and dialogue until the cows come home, but that does not come up with an action plan. People that go to meetings even now do not want to walk out of a room unless there’s an action plan and it’s actually been assigned to people to make that action happen. Otherwise, they know their time has been totally wasted. People don’t have time to have their time wasted anymore.

There's no mention of timelines, as I've mentioned before, for the creation of the charter, no indication of how public consultation will proceed before the charter is put into force. Well, we've had a whole ton of public consultation. It's in that document. A draft health charter is in the document *Putting People First*, but it is not contained in the actual legislation, and it can't be debated.

The office of the health advocate would be created to ensure that the health charter is enforced. It's difficult to support the creation of an office to enforce a charter which is undefined and really has no legal force behind it.

If I recall, the long-term care task force was also asking for an advocate, an officer that would look after long-term care complaints, of which there were quite a number at the time. There has to be somebody that is totally independent. They're not there to defend the government, and they're not necessarily there to defend the claimant. What they're there for is, for lack of a better word, to negotiate and try to come up with a solution to a problem. When everybody plays nicely in the sandbox, everybody wins, but if you go in as adversaries, it never will work. This side of the House has consistently argued that the advocate should be independent, as I've mentioned, so that they can effectively lobby the government on behalf of the complainant, but in fact what they should be doing is to be sort of the negotiator, the facilitator.

A whole section of roles and responsibilities for organizations that are already covered under pre-existing legislation is redundant at this point in time.

The last issue with this bill is the exceptions that the minister can make to having public input on proposed regulations. If the government wanted transparency in the way the health care system is governed, then they would not have the possible loophole on the public input. When I speak of public input, I'm thinking again of the front-line workers that actually know what's going on. The government may state that if the regulation is created without public input, then the minister must post notice of this decision. But it's sort of like closing the barn door after the horse is out. It will be too late.

This should really be a living document in that input should be allowed from Albertans, especially, as I've said, for those who are actually keeping this health care system running, often at the expense of their own health. We are burning out our health care workers. We are burning out our health care family caregivers. These are the people that are actually saving the government's butt by being able to make sure that people get care, because they care.

As I've mentioned, we need action now, not yet again another vision of perhaps better things to come. I'm not saying that this document should be put aside. I'm saying this document should be dialogued, but in the meantime we have to do something exceptionally concrete.

One of the things that was mentioned was end-of-life and religious care that would be given. Again I go back to the long-term care task force. That was exactly what came up, and that was six years ago that that document came out.

Looking at that same document, staffing, staffing, and staffing was by far the first and foremost concern of people who were speaking about people, and in those days, of course, it was long-term care. We didn't have as many designated assisted living, et cetera, but even in designated assisted living families are expected to do a great deal of the work, especially if the people that are in the homes of their family require that little extra care.

5:30

The advisory councils were also mentioned. I may be wrong, but my understanding is that they have no budgets. If this government

really thought that they were worth creating in the 12 areas, then surely to God they would give them a budget so that at least they could do some kind of research on their own. They have no power. I'm not sure that the people even know what they are, and if they do, they have absolutely no – the word isn't "trust." They actually think that they can do anything because they know that the word "advisory" means that you can basically ignore any advice that you've had.

One of the other things mentioned is that a lot of the regulations in the statutes go back to 1962. Certainly, I know that: again, the long-term care task force. But one of the things that has to be looked at and should have been looked at a long time ago – and I think we could have eliminated some of these problems when we started blaming seniors and calling them bed blockers – is that had we looked at the Nursing Homes Act at the time and upped the mandate for what the nurses could actually do in those nursing homes, more people would have been released to the nursing homes.

The other thing that's happening with the deregulation of long-term care, as we knew it then, the Nursing Homes Act, is that the building codes are different for long-term care residences than they are for any other designation. In long-term care there have to be firewalls, and there have to be different door systems. It is more expensive to build for long-term care; there's no question about it. Clearly, for anybody that wants to make a buck, the buck is on the housing side, not on the care side. So you're going to try and build the cheapest building, put up a couple of nice palm trees in the atrium, and put a little garden outside. I think that's great. But when I go in there with the knowledge that I have, I want to know how much staff is there. I don't give a damn about the potted plants. What I want to know is: who is sitting on the toilet for an hour? Who is not being fed? If they are, is that food cold? Those are the kinds of concrete things that I want to see.

I'm aware of some of the very successful primary care communities that have been created. Not all of them are the same. Some, I think, are more successful than others, and from my limited knowledge I'm thinking that the more successful primary care operations are really based on the doctors that run them, their attitude toward teamwork, and certainly that as long as everyone has a doctor or at least access to a doctor and are not being put off to perhaps someone with lesser assessment skills.

Speaking of assessment skills, that is why RNs are very, very important anywhere where there are seniors. They have the ability to make the assessments that can help keep these seniors out of hospitals. But when somebody falls and the best you can do is call 911, that isn't effective. I know that the member who has written this document is more than aware of all that I'm saying. I know that he is very aware and cognizant of many of these now front-line things, and I guess I would have liked to have seen something a little bit more concrete because this is a vision document.

One of the other things that I have a little bit of a problem with about the primary care is that we were talking about people being partners in looking after themselves, et cetera, et cetera. I think that works well for people who are educated. It doesn't work well for people who are not. We've got people who think they're helping when they say: "Here are the pamphlets. Go home and read them. This is what you've got to do." They sometimes don't have that follow-up that's often required for people who can't look after themselves. When you're sick, you're vulnerable. I don't care how educated you are. If you're sick, you want someone to help. That's what the care system is. It's not: get out of your bed and walk. It's: wait a minute; let's see how we can get you there so that you can walk and go out the door, and you're not going to come back because you've been released too quickly.

I think I'll close there. I know that I will probably have another chance. I just do want to say that I realize the work that's gone into this document. I know that the member has gone across the province and has listened. There are a few things that I think people were quite negative about, and I'm not sure that they really hit this document.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 17.

The Acting Speaker: All those members of the Assembly who concur in the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to move third reading of Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010.

It's a privilege to rise today and once again speak in favour of Bill 16. I appreciate the thoughtful debate we've had on this important piece of legislation, and I want to thank all MLAs from all parties for their input and everyone for participating in this process. I think we all have strong feelings about this issue, but ultimately we all share a common goal: we want to make our roads safer.

I believe this bill has many merits and will benefit Albertans by improving traffic safety in our province. I also know that based on the public reaction so far, Albertans are eager to see Bill 16 become law. We all know that talking or texting on a hand-held cellphone while trying to drive is dangerous, but other activities like reading, writing, shaving, or putting on makeup while driving are just as dangerous. We should all be proud that Bill 16 takes a bold approach and goes beyond banning the use of hand-held cellphones while driving and addresses the broader issue of driver distraction. The challenge we faced was to create a law that is comprehensive, practical, effective, and enforceable. I think Bill 16 strikes the right balance. We got it right. This will give law enforcement another tool to better address distracted driving in Alberta, help reduce collisions, and, ideally, save lives.

Drivers will be restricted from engaging in distracting activities, including but not limited to using hand-held cellphones or other wireless electronic devices, programming GPS units while driving, reading, writing, or grooming. A driver who chooses to put everyone else at risk by driving distracted would face a fine of \$172, which is in line with other moving violations. With the passing of this bill, we are sending a strong safety message to all Albertans: when you are in your vehicle, your focus must be on driving.

I know there were some concerns and questions brought up in debate, like we haven't gone far enough; why not ban hands-free phones as well? Our goal has been clear. We want legislation that is effective and enforceable. No jurisdiction in Canada bans all drivers from using hands-free phones. We have consulted directly with law enforcement, and they have told us that enforcement would be very complex and challenging. We have used research, stakeholder consultation, and best practices to develop a very comprehensive piece of legislation that we feel strikes the right balance to address distracted driving. Alberta has gone further than any other jurisdiction in Canada in addressing this issue. I'm very proud to have been part of this process.

Bill 16 is fundamental to good driving practice, and it will be a key addition to our overall strategy to reduce collisions in Alberta. This is all about changing driver attitudes and behaviours. This legislation, combined with co-ordinated enforcement and education, can help make our roads safer.

Mr. Speaker, it's now my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 16, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to speak briefly on Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010, and again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for his leadership on this bill. His views as a police officer have helped guide us going forward on police concerns and on how this bill will work well both for people who are wishing for greater safety on the road but allow for our police community to adequately enforce and to educate our public.

Really, it's a fairly sensible bill. We on this side of the House had been calling for something similar to this for quite some time. I believe the earliest we brought it to the House was 2002. It was brought back in 2005, but like all things, sometimes it takes a while for the idea to take hold. Now it seems that it has, and I'm glad to see it. The research indicates that this will allow for drivers out there or people using our streets to be more safe. We always have to strike that balance in this House. We want people to have personal freedoms, but at the same time we have to do what's right to protect people from individuals who may not be using care, concern, or caution. It's fine if they maybe do not have any respect for themselves, but if they don't have respect for the others on the road, well, that's where laws are supposed to be made.

Again, it was a pleasure to speak on behalf of this. I like the hard work that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays did, and I hope this will lead to safer Alberta highways and byways and everywhere in between there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and speak in support of Bill 16, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010. Firstly, I would like to compliment

my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this forward a couple of years ago. We've gone through a very extensive process of referring it to committee, and it's now come back as a government bill with proper research and respect for the results of the committee deliberations.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has taken a leadership role to address this important traffic safety issue by the issuing of this bill. Other jurisdictions have simply banned hand-held cellphones or electronic devices, but there are many other activities that drivers engage in that take their hands off the wheel and their attention off the road. This legislation addresses those additional distractions. Traffic collisions impose enormous costs on our society, and anything we can do to improve safety provides tremendous benefits to Albertans.

Sometimes people forget that when you're in your vehicle, your primary focus should be on driving. We seem to treat our vehicles like a second living room or a couch on wheels, so to speak, or even a mobile office sometimes. That has to change. It's all about traffic safety. Make no mistake; you cannot drive safely when you're distracted.

While I believe we are definitely moving in the right direction with this legislation, I have one point I would like to address, and that has to do with the exemption of hands-free phones. I mentioned this in debate the other day, and I would like to return to it. First, let me say that there is no other jurisdiction in Canada and probably in the world that has included hands-free phones in their legislation. I know there is research that says that hands-free are no safer than hand-held, and I do not dispute that research. It's the cognitive act of speaking that is distracting, and this is quite different from simply speaking to a passenger.

I also realize that our Transportation staff has looked at a lot of research in this area as well. They have looked at what is going on in other jurisdictions, best practices, and talked with traffic safety experts and the enforcement community. The bottom line is that from a safety perspective all drivers should put driving first and take care of other business when their vehicle is safely parked. In fact, in our traffic safety literature we encourage people to hang up completely, and our public education and awareness campaigns will continue to stress this. However, in discussions with law enforcement we were advised that enforcing hands-free would be very difficult. Again, the goal of this legislation is that it should be practical, effective, and enforceable.

I know that my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays has talked about this, that the only way to prove that someone was using a hands-free cellphone would be to get the cellphone record. This would mean a police officer would have to get a search warrant for a driver's cellphone records, and this would be very time consuming, quite onerous, and ultimately counterproductive in tying up the courts.

I understand that the review process for any new legislation includes a review of its effectiveness, so Bill 16 will be reviewed in the future, and adjustments could be made as needed. Within four or five years the province will be able to look at the statistics and revisit the issue to include hands-free if necessary. I know that our legislation does go further than any other jurisdiction in Canada. That's something we can all be very proud of.

Education and awareness that complement effective legislation and enforcement are key to changing attitudes and behaviours, so we will continue to reinforce the idea that drivers should hang up altogether and focus on the task of driving. There has been a lot of good debate on this issue, and it appears that most Albertans are eager to see this bill become law. I know I had a lot of comments expressed by my constituents, and they're all supportive of this bill. We know now, Mr. Speaker, that the time is right for this. We must take action on distracted driving. This is all about making our roads safer and saving lives. We are sending a strong safety message to all Albertans: keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.

I strongly support Bill 16 and encourage all members to do so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to close debate.

Mr. Johnston: Yes, I wish to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour and the considerable progress that we made throughout the afternoon, I would like to move that we now adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:49 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, November 17, 2010

Issue 43e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 17, 2010

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 29 Alberta Parks Act

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mrs. Ady]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to address what I see as shortcomings to this particular piece of legislation. My primary concern is that this bill will take the legislation, the public domain, the public input, and place it in the hands of the minister and in the hands of the Lieutenant Governor in Council; in other words, the cabinet.

My concern is that Albertans deserve to have an opportunity to have input into legislation that affects a large part of their enjoyment, whether it's simply birdwatching in a natural reserve setting, whether it's different types of recreational activity, whether it's the appreciation that there's protection for our wild species. The proposal with Bill 29 is to seek a degree of input from Albertans, but the decision-making is taken out of Albertans' hands. It's taken out of their legislative representatives' hands, and it's placed solely at the discretion of the minister or the cabinet.

I have not deliberately – it seems at times that I'm deliberately provoking the members of this Assembly, but I realize that I've tried the patience of the Speaker over the last three days by reading excerpts from people opposed to Bill 29. Rather than reading excerpts from a number of the submissions that I've received – and it's very important to note that these are not sign your name at the bottom and hit send; these are individual concerns that Albertans from across this province have expressed – I have attempted to at least get their names on the record as being passionate Albertans and passionate about parks.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about my personal passion and why I have potentially been seen to try the patience of members of this House. For the last three months myself, my wife, Heather; my sister Barbara; her husband, Ian; and my nieces and nephews have been helping my dad, who is 87 years old, transition from his house, where he's lived for almost 40 years with a wonderful view of the mountains, straight across 37th Street, looking across the Tsuu T'ina reserve, to a condominium.

This past week I spent the morning with my dad at the remembrance assembly at the Museum of the Regiments, and that afternoon I went over and helped him to do what I hoped would be the final clearing out of the garage. Mr. Speaker, when I was in the rafters of the garage, I came across a big piece of canvas tarp, and that takes me back to 1956, where, stationed at Namao air base, my dad was a flight lieutenant. He flew the C-119 Flying Boxcars up north, and when he wasn't flying, he was busy building a camper, a tent trailer. He had acquired from my grandfather a Jeep trailer, and he spent numerous hours over at the wood shop on the base at Namao creating what some would see as a very heavy monstrosity of three-quarter-inch plywood, numerous bolts, numerous butterflies. And it took us as a family, with my brother and myself and my mother

and my dad putting this tent trailer together back in 1956, probably the better part of three-quarters of an hour to get this thing assembled, and then we'd stretch the canvas over it. That's when, I would suggest, my enjoyment of Alberta's wilderness and parks began.

Over the years I've enjoyed that direct experience with the parks. I've realized that there are certain things you can't do in certain parks, and to a large extent I've accepted those limitations. For example, I stopped camping at Little Bow provincial park, very close to Vulcan, because of the Sea-Doos and the powerboats and the skiers. Now, those Sea-Doos and skiers had every right to be on that waterway, but I could not myself enjoy the experience in either my kayaks or my rowboats because of the busy nature. We did at times get into the back irrigation areas, and there was enjoyment.

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, when we first upgraded to a fifth wheel, we went to McLean Creek, and one of the reasons we went to McLean Creek was its close proximity to Calgary. We wanted to try out our new-to-us fifth wheel, and I quickly realized that I was in the wrong campground for the type of recreation that I had in mind because McLean Creek was an ATV, motorcycle-type campground. Understood. I believe that ATVs have a place, that motorcycles have a place, but it wasn't my place because of the noise associated and no sense of sort of refuge.

Mr. Speaker, throughout my life, as I say, I have been connected to camping. My dad had postings throughout Canada, so I have camped in every province. Most recently I had the wonderful experience with my dad of going up to the Northwest Territories to the Nahanni River and going back to living in a tent with my dad for a week as we rafted down the Nahanni River together in a guided undertaking. I appreciate those wilderness experiences, and, as I say, I realize there are certain things that you cannot do.

My concern about what you can and can't do in parks brings me to the point where I would like to put forward an amendment to Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act. I see a page coming over to receive the amendments. Once they have been distributed, I'll speak to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this amendment shall be known as amendment A1. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

7:40

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if this is the appropriate time, but I do want to qualify that I am not looking for a 10-minute recess preceding a standing vote, so if the bells, for example, could be rung just for a one-minute period, that would be quite acceptable. Am I presenting this at the appropriate time?

The Deputy Speaker: I would suggest that we continue, and then we will have a motion on that.

Mr. Chase: Is the one-minute-bell notice sufficient? Okay. Thanks.

Speaking to A1, to put it on the record, I as the MLA for Calgary-Varsity, the Liberal critic for Tourism, Parks and Recreation, move that the motion for second reading of Bill 29, Alberta Parks Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following, that

Bill 29, Alberta Parks Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill will endanger the preservation of Alberta's parks and protected areas for present and future generations and that further input is necessary from the public and from conservation groups.

Mr. Speaker, I now take off my camping backpack and am putting on my teacher's hat, and I believe in doing my homework. I

required for 34 years that my students do their due diligence and do their homework. What we have had in terms of input into the creation of Bill 29 has primarily been online workbooks. There has not been the due diligence, the research, the involvement of a variety of groups. We have two members of the Sierra Club in tonight witnessing the debate. The Alberta Wilderness Association wasn't involved in the creation or the reviewing of this particular bill nor the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and numerous friends of various environmental and protected areas and organizations.

What this bill does, which is most offensive to anyone who values public input, is that it moves the decision-making out of a debatable circumstance, out of legislation, and puts it into regulations, regulations, Mr. Speaker, that have yet to be formed. One of the comments that the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation pointed out was that once this bill was passed, she would then go to the various groups and ask for their advice on forming the regulations. Well, in my way of thinking, that's putting the cart before the horse.

This consultation, that will affect 4 per cent of Alberta's land area, that is made up of between 450 and 500 parks and protected areas, is extremely important to Albertans' well-being. As I say, whether it's a refuge that people seek on the weekend to do a quiet activity or whether it's a particular park that allows motorized access, we cannot lump everything into two groups, which this bill proposes to do, rangeland and parks and protected areas. What happens is that the only wilderness area that has been singled out for special status is the Willmore region. The White Goat, the Siffleur, the Ghost River areas are of equal value in terms of ecological reserves, in terms of wilderness parks, but they're going to be tossed into the blender, given equal value to recreation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this bill was proposed in order to simplify the rules, to let Albertans know what they could do and what they couldn't do in particular areas. That can still be accomplished in legislation. It doesn't have to be put into regulation for that clarity to be provided. When a tourist guide is printed off, it indicates in boxes what facilities are available: showers, electricity, water, et cetera.

Now, that same type of information in terms of zoning, what's allowed in this particular park, whether motorized access is allowed, whether it's a hike-in circumstance and no motor vehicle access, whether mountain biking is permitted, and so on, these various regulations and explanations to Albertans can be enshrined within legislation. By enshrining them in legislation, they're still open for discussion, but once Bill 29 gets passed, if that becomes the will of the Assembly, gone are the opportunities for the public to have any control. Yes, they can still input – yes, they can fill out the online surveys – but they can't control the decision-making, and, Mr. Speaker, that's at the heart of this amendment that I've put forward.

I believe Albertans want the opportunity to have their voices heard and want the opportunities to have any changes in regulation, not simply be given a 60-day notice but given an opportunity to change. We have to go, in terms of valuing Albertans' opinions, beyond consultation. Collaboration is absolutely essential in the protection of our parks and wilderness areas.

I used the analogy of not being able to roller skate in a buffalo herd. Mr. Speaker, I have experienced directly in 2002, 2003, and 2004 the mistakes associated with multi-use. I have seen where ministries have failed to preserve parks. I have brought up the example of Cataract Creek, where fences were not maintained and therefore free-range cattle made their way into the park. I've talked about cattle guards not being maintained, again, to keep the cattle out of the parks.

I talked about how in 2003, when the Lost Creek fire was raging and there was a fire ban on, clear-cut logging was being permitted

by Spray Lakes in the area adjoining the campground. Mr. Speaker, there was only one way out of that campground, and if there had been a fire or a spark caused, the danger that campers would have been placed in by allowing that activity to go on in that park area in the midst of a fire ban, where we couldn't even have a mosquito coil in the campground, would have been disastrous.

Mr. Speaker, over the years I have seen what happens when you diminish the number of conservation officers, when you cut down the conservation offices that provide the tourism information. I am so concerned that these areas are being left to ministerial discretion, to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Normally I would say that this is rather patronizing and patriarchal, but given the minister's gender I would say that it's matronizing and matriarchal. This minister is suggesting that she knows best, and I'm suggesting that Albertans are the ones whom this legislation is supposed to support. Putting recreation into the same designation as protected areas is doing a disservice to Albertans.

I have great concerns based on the industrial intrusion I saw in Cataract Creek in terms of from not only cutting a swath around the campground, taking every lodgepole pine out, practically, to actually going into the campground and taking out campsites to build a road. First Spray Lakes cut the outskirts, and then Bell Pole took what few trees stood.

7:50

If that kind of lack of control is allowed to go into other park areas, then forget any type of recreational activity other than quads going up and down fire lines or survey lines because no one in their right mind would want to hike in a devastated area. How can we protect our woodland caribou? How can we protect our grizzlies? How can we protect any of our species unless we have strong legislation that supports them? How can we guarantee that we have a legacy for future generations, like my two grandsons, to be able to go out into a wilderness circumstance and be able to hike and enjoy the experience, to know that there are conservation officers who can provide the information and the enforcement and safety for their well-being?

Mr. Speaker, I have put forward this reasoned amendment because I believe that Albertans need to be more than consulted; they need to be involved in the process. With legislation that involvement continues because we as their elected representatives can speak on their behalf. If this legislation falls strictly to regulations yet to be determined, then Albertans have lost.

For the sake of not provoking individuals and straining their patience, I will not read the numerous individuals' names into *Hansard* who have objected. Mr. Speaker, I have never in my office been inundated with so many requests to remove Bill 29 and go back to the drawing board, where the proper consultation through the legislative process can take place.

Mr. Speaker, I appeal to you and I appeal to all members of this Assembly who value the wilderness experience to support amendment A1.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, may I interrupt you? I have a note here. Some hon. members wish to revert to Introduction of Guests. Do we have unanimous consent?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members gathered in the House here tonight two members of the Sierra Club who are here to watch this debate at second reading on Bill 29. In the gallery are Mr. Sam Gunsch, parks spokesman for the Sierra Club – Sam, if you would stand, please – and also, Bryn MacDonald, the healthy communities campaigner for the prairie chapter of the Sierra Club. If you would stand as well. If we could all give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I also see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has guests.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well, I'd like to introduce several people who are here. Some of them are here to listen to the debate on the Alberta Parks Act, and some are also here with a keen interest in hearing debate on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act. These members are seated behind me, and they are associated with Friends of Medicare in one way or another: Margaret Brown, Allen Vesicre,* Bob Settle, Diane Lance,* Karen Crank,* Lindsay Henderson,* Catherine Newman,* Trevor Zimmerman, Mary Gordon,* Maurice Beaugeron,* and Josephine Singh,* who was chatting with me outside about her concerns with respect to the Parks Act, and the chair of Friends of Medicare, David Eggen. I'd appreciate it if they could all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 29

Alberta Parks Act

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please continue.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to quickly thank the hon. Member from Calgary-Varsity for his amendment. Certainly, not only in listening to his remarks but having a look at the bill, I think it would be in the interests of all Albertans to see this legislation sent back or, as they would say, returned to sender. This legislation is not in the best interests of the province and the people who live in it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was talking about, you know, this government's habit – I won't call it a chronic habit but a habit – of doing less and less in this Legislative Assembly and more and more through regulation and ministerial order. Here we are on a snowy winter evening debating not only this legislation but perhaps as many as seven other prospective statutes in the time permitted, Mr. Speaker. We were all told, as were the taxpayers of this province, that with the new Premier, after the retirement of Mr. Klein, there would no longer be night sittings, but here we are with this government trying to ram another piece of unpopular legislation through this Assembly at a time when citizens are thinking about other things, including the upcoming Christmas season. It is a tendency, unfortunately, of this government to do less and less in this Assembly, where there is public scrutiny, and more and more through backroom regulations and also through ministerial orders.

Now, some people may think, hon. member, that all regulations are available for those who are interested on any statute, but that is not necessarily true. The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation would certainly be aware of that.

The same is true for ministerial orders. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity in his remarks on this bill today has focused on the unlimited ability of this government to deal with future matters by regulation. Also, there is under ministerial responsibilities, part 3, the ability to write ministerial orders. I must say that I had no idea how many ministerial orders are written by this government that are not published. They remain unpublished and hidden from public view, of course.

Here we have in this section an indication that we're going to give the minister substantial authority to issue ministerial orders. Some of these may seem innocent enough; for instance, an order to temporarily prohibit or restrict the possession or consumption of liquor in a provincial park. Well, that could happen any May long weekend. There are also the ministerial orders allowing for the establishment or the provision of a mechanism for establishing fees relating to Alberta's parks system.

Now, one would assume that all this would be public. This is where the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and the individuals who are e-mailing and phoning have every right to be concerned. In another section of this proposed statute, "the Minister shall provide notice of the closure and the subsequent reopening of [any said] land by any method the minister considers to be most appropriate." So we are giving a lot of discretionary powers.

I know how hard it was for this hon. member to get to the bottom of the pay scale that was quietly set through a ministerial order for cabinet policy committees, Mr. Speaker. Now, the salary was an additional \$35,000 a year at one time for four lucky members of the Conservative government caucus. I noticed that in the indemnity files, and I thought: I wonder where the authority for this rests. I made some inquiries, I was persistent in my enquiries, and finally I did receive almost a year later a ministerial order. It was numbered, and it was dated, and it had provided authority – at least, I think it provided the proper authority – for those cabinet policy committees to receive this substantial increase in their pay. So, Mr. Speaker, that would be one example of the use of ministerial orders by this government.

8:00

Now, I could go through regulations, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity certainly has done a pretty good job of that. We do know that this is yet another example of why this government wants to rule quietly, secretly, with the ability to rule through regulation and ministerial order and not in an open and transparent way in this Legislative Assembly.

Now, there are reasons why hon. members should support this amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. With Bill 29 if we don't accept the amendment as proposed, we're going to give the cabinet more wide-sweeping powers to create parks zones and for the minister to zone parks for different uses. I'm sorry. I don't think that is needed, nor do I think it is necessary.

Establishes a delegated authority for the management of trail systems: who says that we need that? We've got a lot of delegated authorities now that don't seem to be functioning well. Ask a consumer who's just purchased a new \$400,000 home that isn't up to proper building code standards if they're satisfied with their delegated authority. I know what they're going to tell you, that they are not, and they're not satisfied with this government's lame excuse to try to brush everything over and pretend there are no problems. That would be an example of delegated authority.

*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

Now, we're going to create a parks conservation foundation and a parks advisory council. If this was ever to happen, I couldn't think of a more suitable candidate to be on that than the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. I've heard over the years about – is it Chickadee Creek? Is that one of your favourite places?

Mr. Chase: Cataract Creek.

Mr. MacDonald: Cataract Creek. I was just testing him, Mr. Speaker. I knew it was Cataract Creek all along. Chickadee Creek, for those who are interested, is out in the constituency of the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and it, too, is a beautiful place, and I hope it has an opportunity to remain so.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are concerned about the environment. You only have to on a holiday weekend go to the edge of any of our major cities, and you will see a steady stream of traffic loaded down with gear for the outdoors. We may live in cities, but we appreciate the beauty of the rural areas of the province and the beauty of our mountains. It is part of our heritage; there's no doubt about that.

I would please ask hon. members to give due consideration to this amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity because the Alberta Parks Act is not what the citizens of this province want. I think the hon. minister who proposed this legislation knows that. I don't know why the government is insistent that this is the direction that we should go with, but certainly I would urge all hon. members to please consider the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 29(2)(a), allowing for five minutes of questions and comments.

Seeing none, on the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise to speak in support of the amendment brought by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. The Member for Calgary-Varsity spoke at length on Bill 29, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar shed light on the bill, too.

Bill 29 endangers the preservation of Alberta's parks and protected areas for future generations. The proposed legislation is a radical attempt to overhaul the parks system to favour recreational interests, tourism, and development over conservation and preservation. Bill 29 is wrong on a number of fronts, including restructuring of parks systems, the delegation of authority over trails, and the new powers given to the government through regulation.

Firstly, Bill 29's philosophy for Alberta's parks system is gravely concerning. The legislation would enshrine in law that conservation and preservation of Alberta's landscape is less important than exploiting that land for tourism and recreational purposes. This is a fundamentally flawed philosophy that is out of step with the view of Albertans and with evolving parks legislation in other provinces. Ontario, for example, has recently amended its parks legislation to strengthen the primacy of conservation and preservation.

This bill will dismantle Alberta's parks system as we know it today by eliminating the categories of wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, recreational areas, and provincial wildland parks. If this bill is passed in its present form, these areas will be reclassified as parks, and the minister will then be able to assign these areas zoning categories that could permit a range of activities to occur that currently are not permissible. The public will have limited or nonexistent input into how the zone categories will be created and how they will be imposed to carve up Alberta's parks

system. Areas that have been free from interference for many years could find themselves vulnerable to intrusion from tourists, recreationists, and developers. This could undermine Alberta's ability to conduct scientific research on topics such as the impact of climate change as ecological reserves provide valuable benchmarks for these kinds of studies.

It is important to note that even if the government of the day has no intention of using these zoning categories negatively, a future government could come under political pressure to reclassify these areas to permit motorized recreational or oil and gas development. With this legislation they will have the power to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, the creation of delegated authority over trails is vaguely defined and transfers a serious amount of authority into the hands of organizations unaccountable to the public. The government has clearly caved in to the demands of recreational organizations by including this in the legislation, but it must be removed. Conservation groups argue that inclusion of delegated authority with respect to trails opens the door to further usage of this kind of delegation to privatize portions of the parks system in the future.

Finally, this legislation would transfer a vast area of regulation-writing authorities to government. The public's input on changes to the parks system would be fundamentally curtailed.

The notice requirement included in the bill is also unacceptably weak, Mr. Speaker. A two-month statement posted on the minister's website is all that is required. The creation of the parks conservation foundation and the parks advisory council could have been bright spots in this bill, but they are too loosely defined and overly subject to political interference to be successful.

8:10

This bill shows that the government is fundamentally out of touch with the public when it comes to protecting parks. In survey after survey, Mr. Speaker, the public wants to see the amount of land set aside for conservation increased. This legislation makes it easier to decrease the size of parks and heritage rangelands. The public's lowest priority is for the expansion of trails, and this legislation empowers outside organizations to do just that. More broadly, this bill is the latest in a series of attempts by the government to shield their management of public land from public view. Protections have been weakened in a series of bills by transferring them from legislation to regulation.

When we do the sectional analysis, Mr. Speaker, by defining only provincial parks and heritage rangelands in the legislation in section 5 and section 6, the categories of wilderness areas, natural areas, ecological reserves, recreation areas, and provincial wildland parks lose their legislative existence and the protections that that entails.

Further on, section 7 represents an enormous new set of powers for cabinet and even more so for the minister. Instead of legislatively defined categories, the cabinet can simply create zone definitions that can be altered at any time. The minister can then assign these zones to any portion of a provincial park broadly defined. This could allow a range of inappropriate activities to occur in what are currently ecological reserves, natural areas, or wilderness areas.

There is also a profound lack of transparency in this process, Mr. Speaker. The government has defended the zoning process in an attempt to simplify the parks classification system for users. However, the minister already has powers over zoning in the Provincial Parks Act under section 12(2). These provisions could easily be used to create a more simple naming convention to help the public understand what is permitted within the parks. The zoning powers introduced in Bill 29 are clearly intended for a different purpose, to dismantle legal protection for protected areas that have existed in the province for decades.

Further on, in section 8 the public notice provisions in this bill are laughable. To make dramatic changes to the province's park system, changes that could affect tourism, recreation, scientific research, endangered species, and fragile ecosystems, the minister must only post a notice on a government website two months beforehand. Any other formal notices are at the discretion of the minister. Current legislation has a much higher threshold for notice. Section 4(2) of the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act actually requires publication of notices in *Alberta Gazette* and in the print media, Mr. Speaker.

More broadly, this bill should include a duty to consult the public rather than a simple duty to notify. This section reveals the arrogance of this government, its determination to do whatever it likes with Alberta's parks and protected areas regardless of what the public thinks.

These are just some of the reasons – I could go on and on – but for these reasons I urge all the members to support the amendment brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there are five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: This would be on the amendment, Mr. Speaker. If there are those who want to get in on 29(2)(a), I'll take my place until that's done.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there any hon. member using 29(2)(a), the five minutes?

Seeing none, then back to the amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Amendment A1 is that the Alberta Parks Act

be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill will endanger the preservation of Alberta's parks and protected areas for present and future generations and that further input is necessary from the public and from conservation groups.

I regret to inform the minister that I am in full support of this. I paid a good deal of attention to this bill when it was introduced and to the minister's logic for introducing the bill, and I will admit that on the face of it, it certainly seems like a fairly innocuous bill. The minister claims that one of the key things that she's trying to do here is to simplify the classification systems that we have for our various parks and protected areas, everything from ecological reserves to wilderness areas to wildland provincial parks to provincial parks to provincial recreation areas. She says, you know, that it's really tough when people are trying to figure out what they can do in which kind of landscape, what the rules are, and what rules apply to which area.

Her four-zone approach – I don't know whether she intends to colour code things or not – sounds pretty appealing on the face of it. It sounds pretty simple, pretty straightforward. You can go online, theoretically – you can't yet, obviously, but if this bill were to pass you could go online, I would imagine – and say, "I want to go to this particular location," and then you could find out whether it was a zone 1 or a zone 2 or a 3 or a 4.

When the minister and I spoke, I don't think it had been worked out at that point, and I don't know if it's been worked out yet, whether zone 1 or zone 4 would offer the highest level of protection and the other would be the highest level of variety of activities or the other way around. Frankly, I guess, we in the Legislature are not going to have much input into that anyway if this bill passes because

that would all be done in regulation. Still, it sounded appealing, frankly. It sounded simple. It sounded like you could walk into a park and know right from the moment you left the parking lot and got onto that first trail what kind of situation you were dealing with.

But that's on the surface of it, Mr. Speaker. When you drill down even a little bit – and you only do have to drill down a little bit. All you have to do is go on the Alberta Parks website to call up a page called About Alberta's Parks. I mean, it's maybe a little more detailed than the minister would like, but it gives you a pretty good page-and-a-half description of what an ecological reserve is all about, what a wilderness area is all about, and so on and so forth.

Those are already very clearly defined, delineated, designated classes of protected area. Some of them are very protected:

- Ecological reserves contain representative, rare and fragile landscapes, plants, animals and geological features.
- The primary intent of this class is strict preservation of natural ecosystems, habitats and features, and associated biodiversity.
- Ecological reserves serve as outdoor laboratories and classrooms for scientific studies related to the natural environment.
- Public access to ecological reserves is by foot only; public roads and other facilities do not normally exist and will not be developed.
- Most ecological reserves are open to the public for low-impact activities such as photography and wildlife viewing.

Now, as the minister well knows, I'm a birdwatcher. That's a low-impact activity. That is wildlife viewing. Even at that, Mr. Speaker, the job finally got to me and I finally had to admit that I was too busy in this job to keep my volunteer commitments, so this past summer my wife and I stopped volunteering at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary after, I think, probably 11 or 12 years for her and something like 22 years for me. But as a volunteer steward at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary I know very well that even birdwatching can be an activity that is harmful to the landscape, harmful to the environment, if you go about it the wrong way. That's why we insist at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary that the visitors have to stay on the trail. To go off the trails and to go into the woodlands damages the ecosystem, damages the habitat that those birds, largely migratory birds in a wildlife sanctuary in the middle of a city of over a million people, depend on. So you stay on the trail. We were nice about it; we had nice ways of cajoling. We didn't go, "Hey, you, get out of here and get on the trail," or anything like that. In fact, if we had done that, we would have gotten in trouble with our superiors. It is possible to fire volunteers. But that was key.

8:20

Now, when I read that definition of ecological reserves, which is right off the minister's website, right off the Alberta Parks' website, it is very, very clear to me that everybody knows or should know or could very easily within a couple of mouse clicks know the definition of an ecological reserve and understand very clearly that this is not an area to go off-roading in, that this is not an area to go mountain biking in, that this is not an area to, you know, take off your shoes and run through the stream or anything like that. This is an area for very, very low-impact activity, for scientific study. This is an area, Mr. Speaker, where people come second or third or maybe 25th, after all the flora and the fauna, after the rare and fragile landscapes, plants, animals, and geological features that exist there.

Mr. Speaker, I'm as much a fan as anybody else I know in this province of big, palatial resort hotels like the Banff Springs or the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise or any of those. I've stayed in places like that myself. I've enjoyed myself; I've indulged myself in places like that. You know, every couple of years, when you can actually

scrape together the down payment on a night's stay at a place like that, it's really quite a wonderful thing to do.

But I would point out that the Banff Springs, the Chateau Lake Louise, many other resorts like that – I'll leave Kananaskis Village out of it because that's a more recent addition – were built back in a time when there were nowhere near 4 million people in the province of Alberta, when there appeared to be no end to the wilderness, when you could plunk down a hotel, when you could go swimming in the hot springs because we didn't have the scientific knowledge at that point to know that if you swim in the hot springs in Banff, not the upper hot springs but the lower ones, you're depriving a very rare little mollusky, mussel-type thing of the only habitat it has in the world. We didn't know that we were dealing with such an endangered species.

Lots of things we didn't know back then and lots of things, frankly, we didn't need to know because there was so much wilderness. There was so much wildlife. Our footprint upon the landscape was minuscule by comparison to what it is today, our footprint as Albertans. If everybody on the planet lived according to the way we did, we'd need nine and a half planet Earths to support 6.1 billion people in the style to which we have become accustomed.

I think that when our network of parks and protected areas was set up, back around the year 2000, in its current form with ecological reserves, with wilderness areas, with wildland parks, with provincial parks, with provincial recreation areas, also with a couple of other weird, kind of off-to-the-side things – please don't take offence if you have a particular attachment to any of these weird, off-to-the-side things. Willmore wilderness park, for instance, is still, even under the proposals in this legislation, in a class by itself, not covered by Bill 29. Natural areas: not specifically covered by Bill 29. Heritage rangeland areas: specifically kept in its own category under Bill 29. But with the exception of that, everything else, which is very clearly delineated, in my mind, very clearly defined here and very well set up, with protection as the primary goal at the top of the list and working its way down to provincial parks and recreation areas, where you can do a wider variety of stuff, at the bottom of the list – that was and continues to be a very good set-up, something that ain't broke and doesn't need fixing.

I understand that the minister of parks is also the minister of tourism, and she's also the minister of recreation. There can be, depending on how you look at this, Mr. Speaker, an inherent conflict of interest between those three activities. Yes, of course, we want to attract tourists. Yes, of course, we want to give them activities, opportunities to recreate. Yes, of course, we want to give our own people opportunities to recreate. But we have to do so, and we did so 10 years ago with the full knowledge that those opportunities cannot be limitless, cannot be universal, cannot happen anywhere and everywhere that we choose. If it happens to be convenient for us to jump in our vehicle of whatever sort, motorized or not, and tear up the Ghost-Waiparous, that may not be in the public interest today, a hundred years from now, and certainly isn't in the interest of the critters who call that area home today or any time in the future.

We are the dominant species on this planet. We will be until we dominate ourselves into extinction, which hopefully won't be in my time or my children's time or my grandchildren's time. But we need to realize that we share this planet with a myriad of other life forms that need protection primarily from us. The current parks system that we have provides that. Everyone that I've talked to, not only since Bill 29 hit the Order Paper but since I became an MLA and for years and years before that, when we would talk about issues related to parks, to wilderness areas, to natural areas on my various programs on the radio, when we would talk about the grizzly bears, when we would talk about other wildlife, when I was involved in the

creation of Southland natural park in Calgary, throughout all that activity I've never heard anybody say to me: gosh, if only I could do whatever I wanted wherever I wanted; we don't need any more parks. What people say is: we need protected areas.

I'm kind of left scratching my head, at least I would be if I hadn't heard from a number of people that in fact they weren't appropriately consulted on this plan. I'm kind of left scratching my head as to precisely whom the minister and her minions consulted with. I'm sorry; her assistants, her people. Her people didn't call my people; I'll tell you that, Mr. Speaker.

I think that amendment A1 speaks directly to that when it says that "further input is necessary from the public and from conservation groups." Now, there are different ways that we could do this. I know that there are a number of conservation groups in the province of Alberta right now that have done over the course of the last generation, over the course of the last 25 years, a fine job, on many occasions when our government has not, of standing up for our wilderness areas, for our natural world, and the natural inhabitants of that world. They have said that the best thing that could happen to this bill is if it was pulled and a proper process of public consultation take place and the minister bring back a revised bill in the spring of 2011.

Another way to go about this would be, I think, to refer this bill to one of the standing committees of this Assembly because much the same process could be conducted by that venue. This particular amendment would seek to do what the conservation groups would like to do, which is to pull the bill and, I think, instruct the minister to try again, using her best cheddar this time, as the cheese commercial used to go, go through the process of consultation again to consult more broadly, more widely, more deeply and really listen to what it is that the people of Alberta want, which is more parks, not fewer, more opportunities for recreation expressed by more areas in which to recreate that are not currently set aside with any kind of designation on them – in other words, there is nothing wrong with creating an off-roading area in the middle of the prairie; it may not be quite as challenging a ride, but you can do it, as an example – and come back to this Legislature in the spring with a revised bill.

I understand the concept of zoning, and I understand the wisdom, the need to be able to more succinctly express to people through a colour-coded system or whatever, when they get out of the car, lock the door, and walk across the pavement or the gravel to the entrance to the provincial park, what sorts of things you can do there and which areas you can do them in. I understand the need to make it crystal clear that this part of the park is a high-impact activity area, that part of the park is a low-impact activity area, and that corner over there, well, that's actually an ecological reserve, and you've got to tread there with extreme caution or else you're going to be in trouble. I understand that. But let's keep the protection that's there, Mr. Speaker.

I support the amendment.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: On amendment A1, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise in order to offer up the support of my caucus for the passage of the amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. In particular, the Member for Calgary-Varsity is suggesting that this bill not be read a second time. It's primarily for the purpose of ensuring that this bill is then subject to the amount of transparent consultation that it requires in order to be improved to a point where it would be acceptable to the majority of Albertans, which I would suggest right now it is not.

Essentially, you know, the minister has suggested that there has been consultation, and in fact I know that there was some stakeholder consultation immediately prior to this bill, where some of the concepts included in this bill were distributed amongst people who take a keen interest in these issues and are well informed on them, yet we've not received the detailed outcome of that consultation from the minister.

Had she, for instance, been provided with feedback which rejected a number of the principles embedded in this bill, we would not know that because that consultation was done in the way that this government likes to do consultation, which is that they put something out, and they get information back, and then they kind of keep it to themselves. They may or may not sort of conveniently or strategically release small pieces of the consultation, but certainly it will not be shared, and the conversation itself will not be openly transparent so that the debate is available to Albertans. On that basis alone this bill should be reconsidered and put out for a more thorough and transparent review.

Now, there are, of course, a number of other reasons why this bill should be abandoned, and I will get to those in a moment. I think it's important to remember, you know, if you go back in history a little bit, the Member for Rocky Mountain House when he was, strangely, the Minister of Environment. I have to say that I struggle to imagine a world where the Member for Rocky Mountain House served as the Minister of Environment. Nonetheless, when that was the case, that minister brought forward a bill that was designed to overhaul the system of parks in Alberta. That bill, interestingly, managed to inspire the opposition of not only environmental groups but also industry groups. That, I think, takes some genuine skill, but nonetheless it did.

Ultimately, the government had to back down on that particular bill, and then the matter was referred to a committee of MLAs who engaged in a more robust form of consultation. At that point, when that was finished, in about 2000 or 2001 – I can't remember exactly – there were a number of recommendations that came forward. There was a good deal of consensus about those recommendations, but those recommendations ultimately ran up against industrial interests that were represented by different members of cabinet, so those recommendations were never acted on.

It's unfortunate that when you make a decision to protect something in the future, it is sometimes the case that those people who either have a quick buck to make or just a simple, you know, immediate gratification to make off of the most immediate exploitation of a resource will often work very hard to defend their right to engage in the most immediate exploitation of that resource. That sounds maybe sort of complicated, but it's akin to a child with a toy in a sandbox. They know that if they were to treat the toy in a certain way, it might last a bit longer, but you don't expect children to have the kind of impulse control necessary to actually make the hard decisions to make sure that that toy lasts longer.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we are not children; we are adults. As much as this government sometimes acts like the child in the sandbox, the fact of the matter is that they have an obligation and we as members of this Assembly have an obligation to make the hard decisions necessary not only to enhance immediate exploitation of whatever resource is in front of us but, rather, to preserve it and to cherish it and to protect it so that it's actually here for generations and generations to come and maybe even for generations where we're not alive to see the outcome of their enjoyment of it. You know what? It's still a wise decision. It's still representative of good governance.

I know that that immediate gratification way of approaching things that so dominates the way this government manages its day-

to-day affairs tends to discourage that more responsible approach to governance, but I would suggest that that's something that we need to see more of on the part of this government. Certainly, this Alberta Parks Act as it currently exists does not reflect that suggestion. Rather, it reflects the child in the sandbox trying to exploit his toy as quickly as possible.

Under the former Premier, who I think all members of this Assembly have a great deal of respect for, Premier Lougheed, there was a very significant commitment made to the import of preserving and conserving natural resources for future generations and not simply conserving a piece of natural habitat so that we can look at it as we drive through it at 100 clicks an hour on an ATV but, no, to preserve it for its own sake, to preserve it as part of the environment. Yet we have an act here, that this government wants to put forward, that will ensure that we need to balance the ATV against the future preservation and conservation of natural habitat. Only this government could come up with the notion that we need to balance the toy against the future, yet that's certainly what they've done, and that's what is so profoundly wrong at the very heart of this piece of legislation.

Now, the minister has said: well, you know, we have lots of opportunities for consultation in this act because we've got a 60-day notice if I make any changes. I'd just like to say that I think the history of what has led up to this piece of legislation indicates to us that we really cannot count on this minister or this government to engage in meaningful consultation within that 60-day period nor, moreover, can we truly expect citizens to be able to engage in the kind of work necessary to ensure that their contribution to that consultation process is the best that it can be.

You can't do that in 60 days, and God knows how long it takes this government to move forward on policies. You know, the minister of health will tell you that it takes 30 years. To expect people to respond to particular planned changes with respect to the designation of parks or how they will be used within 60 days is a standard, certainly, to which this government does not hold itself in terms of moving forward on policy, so I'm not entirely sure why it is that we should expect citizens with far fewer resources at their disposal to do the same.

Now, one of the things that has been mentioned a number of times that is of concern about this act is the massive amount of regulatory authority that it gives to the minister. Of course, I have to say that it's not this particular minister's issue. It's actually the issue of pretty much every minister in this government. Every time a piece of legislation comes forward, we find that they are giving themselves grand powers to deal with matters through regulation so that that legislation never ever has to come back before this House.

My personal thought is that the ultimate measure of success for that government will be to eliminate all days of legislative sittings entirely. I mean, as it is, the number of days this year that we've sat is shocking and really quite an insult to the notion of democratic accountability. Nonetheless, I think that if they could find a way to pass a budget through regulation, they would. Then, you know, we could just all come here for one big celebration after the election. We could all do that, and then we could never come back here until the next election. I honestly think that that's sort of the route that we want to go.

It's not this particular minister's desire to be able to do everything behind closed doors that is different because, in fact, that's part and parcel of how this government is operating. She's part of that whole gang that wants to do that. But with this act, as with many of the other acts where they've adopted that approach, that shuts out Albertans, and Albertans have a very close tie to and love for the land. They do not want to see themselves shut out of this process the way this minister would like them to be.

8:40

Now, you know, we say: "Oh, well, we should just trust her. We're going to have this nice streamlined process, and it's just going to be simplified. That's all that we need to worry about because it's just a simplification with nothing more meaningful to it than that." I would say: well, if by simplify you mean take it all behind closed doors so that we can streamline away conservation obligations and preservation obligations, then I guess you're right. It will simplify the process, but it won't simplify the process in the minds and the hearts of Albertans who watch as their cherished, unique heritage lands are undermined and jeopardized through the actions of this government.

I think that the purpose of this act is concerning to me. I mean, we had an act before, the act that this is attempting to replace. There were a number of things that were a focus of that act, and conservation and preservation were critical. Now what we've done is basically added this notion of having to balance interests, of having to ensure that our preservation is done with a view to building tourism and enhancing prosperity, so suddenly prosperity and economics becomes something that needs to be considered in the behind-closed-doors designations that will be undertaken by the minister.

I have to say that this is such a huge departure from the recommendations that were made by the government committee back in 2000. It does, however, represent a significant accommodation of the tourism and recreation industry. You know what? I'm not against tourism and recreation, but I also believe that it is important to enable that to occur without in any way jeopardizing, Mr. Speaker, the integrity of our natural lands and areas. Unfortunately, that is not something that I see being achieved through the regime that this minister wants us to accept.

I think the other thing that's really important is that what consultation that has been done publicly, where the government has done surveys, has clearly shown that the majority of Albertans want to see preservation and conservation be the primary objective of what happens within our parks systems and our various reserves. That's clear. That's clear. That's what Albertans have said.

In the very poll that these members here had presented to them at their convention two or three weeks ago, we heard about how Albertans want to see this government protect the environment even if it means jeopardizing jobs. Now, in this case, we're not talking about jeopardizing jobs; we're talking about future growth of friends in the recreation industry. We're not talking about current jobs. It's interesting that Albertans were actually prepared to make that choice as reported to these members of this government by a polling firm that they hired. If they were prepared to make that choice, that follows in line, of course, with the survey results done in 2008, which show that Albertans want to see preservation and conservation remain as the primary priority. So this is, as a result, a very disappointing piece of legislation.

The other thing is that the act replaces not only the old parks act but also the wilderness act. The wilderness act had conservation as its primary and only objective, that wasn't being balanced against tourism and development and those kinds of objectives, so we see in one particular area that, again, we are potentially compromising these objectives.

Ultimately, what we know is that the public wants to see us do a better job of preserving our natural lands. What this government has to figure out is how to grow up, get out of the sandbox, and start preserving our resources like adults and making hard decisions for future generations, which is not what is reflected in the current act that's being put forward to us. So I support this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on the amendment.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I took it from the comments that were made earlier that there may be a willingness in the House to consider unanimous consent to shorten bells in the event of a division. So before you call the question, I would like to ask the House if there might be unanimous consent to shorten the bells to one minute for tonight in the case of a division.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the Deputy Government House Leader, is there unanimous consent, which means: is anybody opposed to shortening to one minute between the division bells? Is any hon. member opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Does any hon. member wish to speak on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:46 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	Notley	Taylor
MacDonald		

8:50

Against the motion:

Ady	Evans	Oberle
Berger	Jablonski	Olson
Calahasen	Jacobs	Prins
Dallas	Johnston	Quest
Danyluk	Liepert	Renner
Denis	Lindsay	VanderBurg
Doerksen	Marz	Vandermeer
Elniski	McFarland	

Totals:	For – 4	Against – 23
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We go back to the bill. The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act. I want to start by acknowledging the passion of members across the way. Though we may have different viewpoints, the passion is still valid and very well understood mostly because of my background and the amount of time I spent in my career being involved in parks debates.

Parks are different things to different people, Mr. Speaker. That's

one of the reasons why parks are always difficult to talk about. I have constituents who think the word “park” means that I should hook up my trailer and go camping for the weekend, some place I’m going to tow my trailer to, which is actually a valid view of parks. I’m sure that the hon. members would agree. But there are many others that believe parks serve some value of ecological protection or preservation of landscapes for future generations. That is every bit as valid a viewpoint, and there are many other viewpoints as to what parks are.

The word “park” actually is kind of a loaded term. Maybe it would be better if we had more than one name for the vast array of uses that parks provide. Every once in a while we venture out and add a name, ecological reserve for example. But somehow we always manage to gravitate back to the word “park” and then we always manage to fight over the word. That’s unfortunate.

I’ve been involved in many debates over parks and many planning exercises around parks, and I’ve learned, certainly, in my time that the debates are always passionate. There are people that argue with deep passion that it is our duty as a society to preserve landscapes and ecological features for future generations. That is absolutely a valid viewpoint. I happen to agree with that viewpoint. But there are also people that argue with equal vigour that they have a right to use public land for ATVs or camping or whatever other use they happen to champion. They are right as well. Public lands are, after all, public, and that’s a valid use of a landscape.

I’m a professional forester and have a background in landscape planning. I’ve learned over time that I think parks systems – and you need to talk about systems – have to accommodate all uses, not just some uses. But, more importantly, no matter what the use, parks have to be managed. We need to understand, agree right up front why a park was established and what steps we need to take to maintain that condition or value on the landscape. Simply putting a fence around something doesn’t always ensure that it’s going to stay there.

Then we can talk about what uses are compatible or would be considered that would not compromise what the original objective of establishing the park was. If I were to establish a park to preserve a cultural feature, for example a prehistoric cave painting, I would suggest that that would require some very strict and hard protection, maybe a fence. There are certainly cave paintings in the world where flash cameras aren’t allowed because the light would damage the painting. Very, very strict protection is required, and very obviously nobody would be allowed to touch it and those sorts of things. Very strict protection.

Not so in a park established for recreational use. We obviously would allow camping or at least day use though we might have some restrictions on where you can go or can’t go – there are certainly campgrounds where you can’t venture just anywhere – and what you can or can’t do. You can’t dump your dishwater on the ground, and you can’t cut bushes. Maybe your kids are not allowed to cut wiener sticks out of the willows that grow along the banks.

Then there are parks that are established for conservation or preservation motives, often encompassing rare or unique features such as rare plants in a bog. Again, a very strict form of protection would be required in that instance.

Sometimes the feature we’re planning to preserve or protect is a landscape feature, a mosaic of vegetation on the landscape. That’s a dynamic feature. Our landscapes are dynamic. They’re shaped by fire and wind and water, and often if we simply put a fence around it and call it protected, the feature will disappear over time. We must consider management actions in that case. In fact, we might consider the use of fire. Jasper or Banff park is a classic example of that. They’ve used fire extensively over the last few years to

preserve habitat or to re-create habitat conditions that were there for many years and started disappearing off the landscape.

Even in the highest protection areas we might consider other uses. We might. For example, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned scientific sampling. One of the reasons we set aside ecological reserves or benchmarks, as was once a very popular term, is to understand or contrast what’s happening on our managed landscape. We can’t do that if we can’t sample or understand, and we certainly want our schoolchildren to be able to understand ecological process.

In some of those, and certainly some would argue in all of those, we want to exclude some uses, like all-terrain vehicles. We’re not going to run all-terrain vehicles across a bog that’s got a rare pitcher plant or some plant in it. Obviously, there are incompatible uses on the landscape.

This always requires rigorous assessment, Mr. Speaker. We need to understand what value or state we are trying to protect, what management actions are required to protect it, what uses will be considered, and what uses won’t be considered on that landscape. Those decisions are complicated by the fact that parks are rarely, if ever, established coincident with the value that we’re trying to protect. If we’re trying to protect a bog with a rare bog plant in it, the park is not the shape of the bog; it’s some square around that. There is an envelope of land encompassing that that might contain several values, some of which we’re trying to preserve, some areas that we might want to allow other uses.

For example, we’re talking about establishing the dinosaur park up in the Grande Prairie country there. Sorry; the name of the park escaped me just then. I’ll bet you that there will be a fairly hard preservation area where we’re not allowed to disturb anything, and somewhere nearby there’ll be a campground because the objective is to attract people to that area. There’s one park that’ll have at least two uses, probably several more.

Often the boundary of the park does not align with whatever value it is we’re trying to protect. Another example occurs in my constituency, where the Caribou Mountains Wildland park established there is established overlapping an area where buffalo traditionally were hunted and, I would argue, still need to be in order to prevent the spread of disease from the wood buffalo herd into domestic buffalo and cattle herds in the farmland outside. That’s worked for years, and the Caribou Mountains park is now not hunted, and the diseased buffalo are moving out. So there are reasons that we allow uses in certain places.

If you look at it locally and we should allow this and not that and we have to consider this special condition, it leads to a whole mosaic of possibilities. It requires real and local management planning, and whatever decision we arrive at, it has to be clear to all the users. I think a system of zoning, fraught as it seems to be with some difficulty, should at least be considered. I think that’s something that would work.

I know that all people that are passionate about parks will approach such a system with trepidation. I bet you Mr. Gunsch in the gallery behind me is deeply concerned about the future of ecological reserves in our province. He should be. He put a lot of years of work into it, and he should be congratulated as a hard-working Albertan. But I think Mr. Gunsch would acknowledge that there are people that drive ATVs in the province that think their ability to use those on public land is also threatened by people that would preserve areas. So it’s always that balance, and it’s always a difficult task. It’s always that way with a parks debate.

9:00

I think a parks act has to be a document that provides for a range of uses on our landscape because we are going to have a range of

uses on our landscape. It has to provide appropriate protection mechanisms where the desired use is protection. When we're trying to save something, we have to make sure we have the mechanisms that will allow it to be saved. It has to provide flexibility, the ability to adjust when the prescribed uses are not protecting the value we want to protect. Jasper park is a classic example of that. Somewhere along the way they had to switch their management practices in order to provide habitat that was disappearing on the landscape. It has to provide clarity to all who are using it. It has to provide teeth. We have to ensure that we can enforce protective actions when we need to. It has to, most of all, Mr. Speaker, provide healthy, diverse landscapes and the ability to enjoy them by future generations. That's what parks are all about at the end.

Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that Bill 29 will do that, just about. Actually, it won't do that, but what it will do is provide an enabling framework that will allow subsequent work to do that. I don't for a second pretend that Bill 29 is the answer to everything, nor do I pretend that going down this road is going to be wonderful and happy for everybody. It doesn't matter how we approach parks legislation or the discussion or the input because we're talking about a diversity of views, a diversity of values, and it's going to be difficult sometimes.

I do believe that Bill 29 and the framework that it scopes out and the future work that it scopes out is the path to proceed with, and I'm going to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Yes, under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. And thank you through you to the hon. member who just spoke. I don't doubt the sincerity of his words for a moment. I mean, clearly, this is a man who has some experience and some knowledge in the area, and I respect very much what he said.

But I am having a hard time understanding, given that zoning is a management tool, given that the member is absolutely right that no matter what classification of park or protected area you're talking about – certainly, it is true that within the boundaries of a particular let's call it park just for simplicity's sake, and Bow Valley provincial park would be a perfect example, you have a number of different areas with a number of different uses and classifications of use in it. In fact, we're doing that already. What I'm not clear on is what there is, in the member's opinion, about our existing parks legislation that prevents us from doing the kind of job of managing parks, wilderness areas, ecological reserves, et cetera, et cetera, that the member is advocating.

I do think that I'm missing a point here. As I see it, we can certainly talk about zoning issues and management issues and make improvements in those areas, but I must admit that I'm coming at it from the perspective that you do that better when you're doing it within a framework, where it's very clear already that you have degrees of protection for some extremely valuable landscapes that are higher than they are for some others.

If the member can answer that question, please.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the same reason that the hon. member expressed dismay that I would argue against the current system, that's precisely why I would argue against the current system. We have a system of park names. If you were to establish a park, we can give it that name or we can give it that name or we can give it that name. None of the three recognize the fact that

there are actually three or four or 10 different values or types of parks within that envelope, within that square, that doesn't coincide with the boundary of some value that we're trying to protect. We may want to include 10 uses in this park, and we may want to include one use in that park and none in that park, and our current system doesn't allow that.

I can give you examples of that. The Caribou Mountains wildland park was established, and now you can't hunt buffalo in there. That excluded a use on the landscape. First of all, that's important to a local economy and an aboriginal economy, but from a disease vector point of view, it's radically important. And all we can do is go: "Oh, it's a park. I'm sorry. We can't allow that." We don't have the mechanisms that allow for local management the way it should be done.

Who gets to define how it's done, how rigorous the regulations are in the end? Who gets input into that? Yeah, I can understand that a lot of people would be concerned about that, as am I. I'm going to be all over that minister when we get to that stage, let me tell you, because I'm passionate about parks and the value they add to our province. But the framework we have is flawed, and it doesn't provide for the range of uses or the range of protection that we need out there.

Mr. Chase: I very much appreciate what the Solicitor General said. I don't want buffalo with tuberculosis affecting larger herds. I totally understand it. In fact, I agree with everything you've said except why the problem cannot be solved by amending existing legislation, strengthening it where it needs to be, and defining the categories as opposed to taking it out of legislation and putting it into regulation yet to be established. Can you explain to me how regulation is superior to legislation?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, if all of the parks we were ever going to have in our province were already established, I guess I'd have to agree with the member that you already know what you've got there, so why can't you just say in legislation how to protect it and we're good to go? What are you going to do about the parks that we haven't established yet? We'd be fools to think that we're going to continue on this landscape without establishing further protected areas. You can't decide what values you're going to protect, how they're best protected, and what other uses are allowable or desirable in that context until you actually have the piece of land and there's a discussion about the values and everybody gets to lay their cards on the table. If you can't have the discussion, how do you enshrine it in legislation? It has to be a flexible system because there are flexible landscapes out there. Not only do we need to be able to define it up front; you have to change it over time.

I've used my time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will pick up on the notion of what's been talked about here in the last few minutes. Frankly, it would strike me that if you have a situation under current legislation, especially given what the Solicitor General just said about, you know, indicating that there is a need going forward to add more land to our inventory of parks and protected areas, then using Caribou Mountains wildland park as an example, it would seem to me that a logical response to the situation that he describes, where diseased buffalo cannot be hunted within the park, would be to try and acquire more land as a buffer zone between the wildland park with the uses that it has now and not the cultivated land but the

rangeland, I guess I'm trying to say, on which the cattle are raised.

Now, you know, if the President of the Treasury Board were here, he'd probably be yelling that it's a spending day, not a savings day, when I suggest that. Obviously, neither Rome nor our parks system was built in a day, so this is an ongoing, evolutionary process. No question about it.

I appreciate what the minister had to say about the notion that doing things in regulation gives that kind of evolutionary flexibility to a situation that may need that flexibility. I'd prefer, whenever possible, to do our legislating, our lawmaking on the floor of the Legislature in legislation, but I understand that there's the perfect world and the real world and that in some instances you really do need to go to regulation because it gives you the ongoing flexibility that you're going to need to meet changing conditions, to meet changing circumstances.

9:10

I just don't think that this is necessarily one of those issues or one of those areas. If it is, let me say that I think we would be better advised to perhaps review the categories that we have now and say: within these definitions do we need to come up with better management plans that, in fact, zone different areas of the wildland park in different ways? That would, I guess, mean going back – if not absolutely to the drawing board, we'd be getting pretty close to there – to redo Bill 29, I think.

I suggest that we'd be better off with that because the Solicitor General touched on it. Parks are a very difficult thing to talk about because they mean different things to different people. I would argue, by the way, that that's one reason why we shouldn't call them all parks, but we should call some of them wilderness areas and some of them wildland parks and some of them ecological reserves. Or maybe, you know, there are categories of protection that we've yet to define that fit in the middle between some of those and define provincial parks in the sense that I think most Albertans and most Canadians probably understand provincial parks, which is an area to go to recreate to some degree of activity, whether that's low impact or higher impact, whether that's going to camp or not, that sort of thing.

The Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation is talking about a management plan, and my quibble with this, quite frankly, is that she's taking the concept of a management plan and zoning and trying to cram that square peg into the round hole called protection, the definition of protected areas. I think we need to keep those two things separate. First, we need to define and delineate the protected areas, and we need to say: this area has this overall level of protection, and this one has a slightly lesser level of protection, et cetera, et cetera. Then within that, you can deal with zoning and management plans, I believe.

I think we'd be well advised to look at the things that we want to call provincial parks and say: these are the areas where, yes, we expect there to be some roads and, yes, we expect there to be some trails, and some of them will be paved so that moms with babies in strollers can get out there and enjoy the wilderness just like some intrepid hiker, that kind of thing. I think we'd be better advised to do this sort of thing that Bill 29 seeks to do within the context that we have.

I understand the Solicitor General's frustration with some definitions, some regulation that perhaps ties his hands or ties people's hands around a crucial issue like diseased buffalo getting out of the park and intermingling with and infecting domestic livestock, that sort of thing. But I suggest that those sorts of things are probably the exception rather than the rule, and if we really came up with the right Bill 29, it would include a way to deal with that

that does not put at risk the near sacred status of an ecological reserve, the one step below sacred status of a wilderness area that says: "Thou shalt not build a road through here. Thou shalt leave the vehicles on the other side of the fence," metaphorically speaking.

The Solicitor General is right, Mr. Speaker. Every single one of us probably has a different expectation of what a provincial park should be, and I come back to the notion that one of the problems that we are having with this legislation is that that concept hasn't been fully enough explored here. The people of Alberta, the citizens of Alberta, have not had enough opportunity, in my belief, to weigh in on this issue and say: this is what we really want.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move another amendment if I could, which I believe is going to give this House the opportunity to go out and seek that consultation, that input from our bosses, from the people we work for, the citizens of Alberta, without having to tear up Bill 29 but in a way that will give us a better Bill 29. I will pass the amendment to the pages and allow it to be passed out, and I'll continue to speak to it when you say so.

The Deputy Speaker: Let's pause a moment for the pages to pass out the amendment.

We have an amendment introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. It shall be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, please continue with your amendment.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief from this point forward because I think that this is very straightforward and self-explanatory. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services in accordance with Standing Order 74.2."

That is, very simply and succinctly, a motion to refer this bill to the standing policy committee of the Legislature on Community Services. One of the ministries for which that standing policy committee is responsible is the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. These standing policy committees in the three or so years of their existence, I think all members of this House would agree, have done some fine work, and they've done it outside of this particular Assembly room, in committee rooms, where perhaps we can put aside some of the partisanship that sometimes colours our debates and question period and everything else that we do in here and get down to work in a bipartisan or multipartisan, all-party fashion to do some really, really good work on behalf of the people of Alberta.

This gives an opportunity for us through the committee to study this bill clause by clause, to study the overall intent of this bill, to seek written submissions from the people of Alberta, to hold public hearings, and to conceivably hold public hearings in a number of locations around the province, to hear from the people of Alberta who have an interest in their parks, which, of course, are not only their parks but the parks of future generations of Albertans. Let the people weigh in in a very public way, in full view of the public, with their opinions on where we should go in defining and delineating our parks.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I don't know that there's anything more that I can really say in support of that particular amendment. I think that explains it, and I prefer not to take up other speakers' time just because I might have a little bit of time left on the clock. I'm sure there are other members of this House who want to speak to this amendment, probably against this amendment, but let's let the debate on the amendment begin.

Thank you.

9:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation on the amendment.

Mrs. Ady: On the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to tell the hon. member that I appreciate the debate that I've been listening to. It reminds me a lot of the three years of consultation that we've been doing around this issue because, as you've said, many people when they think of parks think of such different things, and it's the thing we grow most passionate about because we all love it so much. But, hon. member, I'm going to recommend to the House that they not support the amendment based on the fact that we have done three years of consultation. We've had these kinds of conversations across the province.

One of the things I can tell you is that in the existing legislation, as it sits today, even some of my friends that are really on the conservation side will say to me: actually, the way the legislation is set up today and the way it's developed over the years and the fact that there are three acts, with seven categories and 40 exceptions and over 500 parks, has created confusion, and Albertans need to be able to understand it.

I understand that this is the beginning of the work, that this is enabling legislation, and that it will create the atmosphere for us to get back together and have that next piece of conversation. I think that's important conversation, Mr. Speaker, because as the Sol Gen was saying to us, this is a dynamic landscape that needs enabling legislation because it has to be able to change and move and reflect what happens. It can't stay in rigid boxes.

We do need to protect; we absolutely do. I don't think anyone disagrees with that. That's why we've talked about creating areas where we can define that very specifically so that across the province you can know what that means. So when someone says, "Well, this word means something and that word means something," I would suggest to you that the average Albertan doesn't. To people that work in the area and know it and love it and have spent time there, it means something, but to the others it doesn't particularly, and we have created great confusion. So I think this gets us to the next step.

I will also say, Mr. Speaker, on consultation: we don't make a move in parks anymore without creating consultations, where we bring the local community in, we sit them down, and we have open houses, round-tables. We bring all players in so that they have to kind of discuss it and come up with the best management plan. Those things are all possible under this legislation, and that's the way we want to do our work as we go forward to do the things that need to be done in parks and make sure that we ensure we have a dynamic parks system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would recommend that we not spend more time going back around the circle, that we create enabling legislation, that Bill 29 can do that. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on 29(2)(a).

Ms Notley: Thank you. Under 29(2)(a) my question is to the minister. I appreciate her engaging in the debate and the comments that she's made. You talk about consultation and, certainly, the idea of being able to go out into the communities and listen to what people have to say, not only members of the community but other interested parties because, of course, we have a lot of people who are interested in our ecological reserves and wilderness areas who aren't necessarily members of the community per se. You say that, you know, that's all possible under this enabling legislation. But apart

from the provision that talks about the 60-day notice, can the minister tell members of the House what part of this legislation requires that form of consultation and, in particular, where the terms of that consultation, the extent of the notice, and the folks that need to be advised, and the forum for that consultation are specified so that we can ensure its transparency and accountability?

Mrs. Ady: Well, yes. Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. As you know, legislation today doesn't speak about notice. In this legislation we're saying that we have to give 60 days' notice. In the plan for parks, which is what we so extensively consulted over, there were priorities in there, and one them was that we would do nothing without consultation. Since 2009 we've had 20 consultations. Whenever we make a move in a park, we have a full consultation about that movement. So I would say to the hon. member that as we develop these zones and the regulations, we will continue to do this work. That's how we plan on working going forward. No one should make movement on land that people care about as much as this with, first of all, not notifying that it's going to happen, and, second of all, following up with a consultation. That's what we do, and that's what we're going to continue to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would dearly love to see tabled the examples of the consultations you've had and a record of that information because, as I've said, the only thing I've seen previously is the online workbooks. Now, you talked about open houses and round-tables, and I'm saying that should have been done first. People should have had a chance to look at the legislation that was proposed and comment on it. I'd be interested in hearing your answer.

Mrs. Ady: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, in the three years we spent on the plan for parks, that's where those round-tables and all vested interests were brought together, and we came up with the priorities. As far as, you know, consultations today if you were to go on our website, you'd see the 20 that we've had since 2009. That's specific to anything that's happening in the parks. As far as the legislation itself we contacted those groups. We let them know we were putting it out online so that they could comment. That was the commitment that we had made, that we would get back to them on how we would create a simplified classification system. It was one of the priorities in the plan for parks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'd like to just follow up on the question that I asked previously. You talked, of course, about the possibility for these things, and you said that you've done this consultation in the past, but the question that I actually asked specifically is: can you point to any place in this legislation? It is enabling legislation. It is a hollow shell. So is there any place in that enabling legislation that requires the government to engage in consultation and that stipulates the form of that consultation?

Mrs. Ady: Well, obviously we have a duty to let people know what's happening and then in policy we have it. You know, again, you can go to our website and see what the policy is, but our policy is to always consult. We never don't consult. But you're right; in the legislation there is a duty to inform that it's going to happen.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My point being, through the Speaker, of course: what good is consultation unless there is action taken and people are involved in the decision?

Mrs. Ady: Well, I would say, Mr. Speaker, that there is action taken. That's why we bring them around the table, and that's why we come to an agreement. That's how that work is done. You can no longer go behind closed doors or have someone decide to decide. Everyone has to come around the table, all stakeholders, and we have to come up with a unified decision. You know what? In all honesty, since we started doing that consultation, we have found that we can generally come to some pretty good consensus. In fact, we have other provinces now looking at our consultation policy because it's actually pretty cutting edge, and they're saying: "It's working for you in the province. How are you doing it?" So we're now actually getting to describe that for other provinces.

The Deputy Speaker: We have one second.

On amendment A2, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to the amendment, I guess about the only quality or credit under transparency and accountability that I will recognize our Premier for is his creation of standing policy committees. Now, I'm extremely aware, based on the electorates' choice, that opposition members form a minority on those standing policy committees, but as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out, to a large extent, not always but to a large extent, partisanship can be parked, and the committees can get on with activities that are of value to all Albertans. It's the equivalent of what a Senate is supposed to do, the sober second thought. What we're asking in amendment A2 is to let that thought continue.

The standing policy committees that I'm connected with – Community Services, and I'm the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy – have brought before us numerous individuals on topics of concern, whether it had to do with, I believe, Bill 203 and the electricity franchise fees and rates. I was very surprised that the committee did basically a U-turn and recognized that the AUMA and the AAMD and C were not in favour of having the government determine local franchise fee service rights, and I was very pleased because I was totally in agreement with the decision that was made.

9:30

I also appreciated the opportunity in the Standing Policy Committee on the Economy to discuss the minimum wage, and in that discussion we were incredibly together for almost five months of that discussion, and even at the end there was an opportunity provided in the standing policy committee to offer a minority report. I cannot think of a more democratic opportunity afforded to members of this Legislature to seek out the information that they need to have.

My concern, as I pointed out, is the difference between consultation and collaboration. Consultation just simply means that we're listening. It doesn't mean that we're going to act on what we've heard. This is the concern, that consultation without publicly recording the minutes of the various meetings to show that there is support or lack thereof is meaningless because unless we see the reports, we don't know where people stand.

Now, what we're seeing is, as Sam Gunsch pointed out, watching in the Assembly from the point of view of Albertans in general but

specifically under the Sierra Club's concerns, that back in 2000 we had a much more co-operative circumstance. The act that was put forward by the hon. Gary Mar, Minister of Environment at that time, was entitled the Natural Heritage Act, and we have members who participated at that time; for example, the Member for Banff-Cochrane was a member of that committee. It was an all-government committee, but they did a very good job, and that was before standing policy committees. The Member for Calgary-Fort, who I would like to hear – obviously, I can't tonight – was a part of that committee that worked on the Natural Heritage Act. We had Dave Coutts, the MLA for Livingstone-Macleod; Ron Hierath, MLA for Cardston-Taber-Warner; Dave Broda, the MLA for Redwater; and Ivan Strang, the MLA for West Yellowhead.

They did their due diligence, they involved people in the discussions, and they came up with some very interesting findings, but they defined their roles clearly. For example, the role of the MLA committee: the principal objective of the MLA committee was to develop and oversee a public review of key issues related to the proposed Natural Heritage Act. A public review. Mr. Speaker, I'm suggesting that that public review in terms of reviewing the clauses and concerns of Bill 29 has not taken place.

To accomplish this, the committee defined and monitored a public consultation process to confirm key issues and ensure that the consultation process was conducted in a fair and effective manner. Equus Consulting Group was contracted by Alberta Environment to develop and complete the consultation process. The MLA committee reviewed the findings of the process and developed the recommendations outlined in this report for the minister's consideration. They weren't pre-empting the minister. They were supporting the minister through their research and through their consultation.

In formulating its recommendations, the MLA committee reviewed the findings in relation to existing and proposed policy pertaining to the key issues. The policy and practice of other, comparable Canadian jurisdictions was also reviewed as additional background; in other words, best practice not just within the scope of Alberta but across the nation.

Scope of the review. The MLA committee limited the scope of its review to policy issues relating to five key areas of concern. These were identified through earlier public feedback and confirmed in the consultant's initial issue identification discussions with major stakeholder groups. These included oil and gas exploration and development in parks and protected areas, mining in parks and protected areas, recreational off-highway vehicle, OHV, and snowmobile use in parks and protected areas, hunting in parks and protected areas: ideas that we are discussing tonight and suggesting need to be discussed further by referral to committee, reclassification of natural areas. This is a déjà vu circumstance, Mr. Speaker.

One additional issue, ministerial flexibility versus certainty, was identified through these discussions and was also reviewed by the MLA committee.

Now, what was amazing to me is the amount of agreement. For example, this comes from the *Edmonton Journal*, March 30, 2000. The author was Ed Struzik. This was what was stated.

The Natural Heritage Act will set the stage for phasing out industrial development in most protected areas, and prevent new developments from being approved. The measures are likely to receive the blessing of the oil and gas industry.

Mr. Speaker, they did receive the blessing.

Sources say Mar, who was unavailable for comment, will release the results of a public consultation process that focused on a number of key environmental issues, including the Natural Heritage Act. In its original form, which drew criticism, it would have allowed industrial development in protected areas.

Now, to me, this is key. This is bringing everybody into the discussion.

Last month, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers board of governors reaffirmed its support for a series of protected areas where there will be no development, including oil and gas.

"We have told the government, and we have been telling them since 1994, that CAPP believes that there should be a network of protected spaces in Alberta, and by the strictest definition of protection, there should be no industrial activity, including oil and gas," said Geoff Morrison, the association's manager of environment and operations.

His organization wants a clear process by which industrial interests will be phased out of special areas.

Now, let's see what's happening tonight. What's getting phased out, Mr. Speaker, is special areas. This is counterintuitive. The reason CAPP was in support of this methodology was that what we don't want is a project by project, valley by valley debate every time we make a submission to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. So they got it back then.

Now, more with regard to Gary Mar in terms of putting forward parks legislation. This is from an *Edmonton Journal* article dated April 21, 2000. The author of this article, found on page B4, was Larry Johnsrude.

Resource development in environmentally sensitive areas would be phased out, and off-road vehicles would be restricted, under legislation proposed by a committee of government MLAs.

The suggested Natural Heritage Act, which has caused a split in cabinet, would eventually eliminate all oil, natural gas and mining activity in provincial parks and protected areas.

Environment Minister Gary Mar, who has been at logger-heads with Resources Minister Steve West . . .

And we can substitute our current resource minister.

. . . over the proposed new legislation, said he hopes the report will strengthen his hand in pressing for tougher new environmental rules.

Mar had hoped to introduce the bill this spring but was unable to patch up differences with [Steve] West, who opposes Mar's time frame for phasing out oil and gas activity in protected areas . . .

Liberal environment critic Debby Carlson praised the MLAs' report, released Thursday, but said its implementation will depend on how Mar makes out in his showdown with West.

What was interesting, Mr. Speaker, was that while there was discussion and while there was fraction within the government that was making the decision, in the end the environment basically won out. The Natural Heritage Act was proclaimed. It wasn't as strong as it might have been, but it was considerably stronger through the committee process than what is being proposed tonight without a committee process.

9:40

Mr. Speaker, I talked about omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence being associated with one minister. I believe the combined intelligence in this room, through the standing policy committee recommendation, the Committee on Community Services, could refine the process, could have on the public *Hansard* record the meetings with various environmental groups, industrial groups, anybody who has a desire as to how parks legislation and enforcement should be shaped. This could happen. This is the sort of compromise, middle position. If this middle position is taken out, if Albertans are shut out of the process and their elected representatives cannot hear from the public and act upon what has been heard, then this is a sham. Legislation allows for debate and discussion; regulation shuts it out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and obviously I'm supporting amendment A2.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions or comments.

Seeing none, then on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Yes. I rise as well to support this amendment for many of the reasons that have already been identified. It's really apparent to me that, you know, consultation is one of those words that can be used and overused and sometimes abused. One of the things that makes that word a positive word is when the process of consultation is one for which there is transparency and to which there is accountability.

At this point, as much as we have, you know, these very sweet-natured assurances of consultation and consultation policies, we have absolutely nothing in legislation to ensure consultation, nor do we have anything in the legislation that would set the parameters for the consultation process, nor do we have anything in the legislation that assigns any form of accountability to the outcome of those consultations, nor of course do we have anything that suggests that they would be remotely transparent. That means that we are left completely to hope for the benevolence of whatever minister happens to be in charge of the process at any given time. Of course, as it probably will come as no surprise, the record of this government is not one to make me feel confident that I would give up that kind of input into the process. So it really is a very important thing to address.

Now, we've heard about consultation in the past. You know, I may be corrected over the next few days as I have an opportunity to talk with more people who are coming out and expressing concern about this legislation. But my understanding is that while there has been somewhat positive relationship building and consultation going on with respect to certain policy levels of activity through parks, when it comes to what is actually included in this legislation, this legislation truly does not reflect the majority of the information that was received by this minister or this ministry around the future of our parks regime in this province.

As I've stated before, I think what we see here, then, is an example of why we cannot blindly put our faith in this minister or the next minister or this government to just voluntarily consult and voluntarily make it transparent and voluntarily demonstrate some level of accountability to the consultations and the feedback that they receive from the Alberta public because, as I've said, this act in and of itself reflects a breach of that trust as it is. So there's certainly no reason to go forward and assume that things will be any different.

The Member for Peace River talked about the complexity of the issues that face regulators and this government when it comes to planning the future of our parks system. He talked about different levels of protection that are required and different uses and different objectives. That's all very compelling, and it's all very convincing. Certainly, no one here is suggesting that this is a simple project or a simple issue where you simply go: this is protected land, and it will be this way forever.

I was particularly convinced by the description of how over time the lack of impact on a particular protected area means that you may actually lose that which you are trying to protect or preserve. You know, that's absolutely and totally a legitimate point. I understand that there is complexity to this issue, but that does not, however, automatically lead to the notion that what we should do is give unchecked authority and ability to the minister to deal with these complex and competing and evolving pressures without any type of input from the public or transparency or oversight from the public.

If anything, if it is that complex, if there are those conflicting interests and sometimes even conflicting interests within the scientific community – I’m not even talking about the more, sort of, politicized conflict between conservation and exploitation; I’m just talking about, you know, the complexities that can actually exist within the actual conservation community and the scientific community – then we need to ensure that the public is involved in that discussion and has input in that discussion. There is no provision for that in this legislation.

Now, there are loads of other types of regimes where we engage in the preservation and the administration of the public interest and the public good. There are loads of other cases where when we do that and we decide that it is somewhat complex and that we can’t put every last crossed “t” and dotted “i” in the legislation, there are other mechanisms that we can use. We have administrative tribunals throughout government in a number of different ways. We have hearing processes. We have public hearing processes. We have these kinds of things throughout the province in other areas where government is attempting to preserve the public interest in a changing environment so that we’re not necessarily having to have every issue come back before the Legislature once a week.

But this act does not provide for that type of mechanism. Instead, what this act says is that we’re going to create an enabling piece of legislation to let the government on its own, behind closed doors do whatever in its wisdom – and that is a wisdom that will be gained from consulting with whoever it is they want to because we’re not ever going to ask that they balance out their consultation process or identify who it is they need to hear from. So however their wisdom is gained, at whatever time, based on whatever the political winds are at that time, they can go behind closed doors and come up with regulations and do whatever they would like.

You know, I would be less concerned about it if the overarching objectives of the act remained the same, but as I said before, we’ve clearly played around with them – very subtly, but we have played around with them – so that the objectives and the scope of activity and the purposes of the act have been modified enough to allow even greater authority to the minister to depart from what I think the public would all agree is the primary objective of our parks regime.

9:50

As a result, the motion put forward by the Member for Calgary-Currie suggests that we refer this matter to an all-party committee. That committee can have public hearings, and that committee can decide who to hear from, and that committee can do it all in *Hansard*. The people who want to have their concerns and their issues addressed can come and make submissions and that will be in *Hansard*. Their submissions will be available to the rest of the public, and then the deliberations of the committee and the considerations of the committee mostly will be transparent in that setting. I mean, we know the majority of committee members will sometimes hash it out beforehand and then come into the committee with sort of a preordained decision, but oftentimes these committees function better than that, and we actually see some genuine discussion between government members break out in these committees.

It’s a way to allow for a less politicized, more sort of best-interests mechanism to govern how we make these decisions. We’re also able to have all these players come and fully engage and then the public can see that, oh, well, you know, the government was actually told this, this, this, and this, and they accommodated that concern or they said: we don’t care about that concern. Then at least the decision-making process is more accountable and the government is more accountable to the people of Alberta. To review, most of them

in surveys have said that there’s a certain focus that they want to see represented here that is not. So there needs to be better accountability.

I know it’s tiresome. Lawyers are tiresome, and people talking about legal mechanisms are tiresome, and I understand that. Nonetheless, I actually sort of have some buy-in to them. They sort of do brainwash the least brainwashable of you when you go through that law school process. But I actually think that this bill could benefit from an objective review that looks at coming up with a structure that is an alternative to unrestricted regulation-making authority and instead comes up with a public hearing process, comes up with a process that ensures transparency and ensures accountability and maybe even allows for adjudication.

I know that goes a bit far, and maybe I’m looking for a job for some other time in my life. Nonetheless, the point is that I think, for instance, that that’s something that could be discussed in the setting. We could discuss this idea of whether or not all these complex issues need to be managed by a minister behind closed doors or whether or not there is a better way to preserve and articulate the basic objectives that the majority of Albertans want to see reflected and then also build in an opportunity for those complexities, which the government complains of, to be managed through a much more public and transparent and accountable process.

These are the kinds of things that could be discussed not only with all Members of the Legislative Assembly but with those stakeholders who are deeply, deeply concerned about this parks act.

I just do want to mirror the statements that were made, I think, by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. I, too, have been inundated with e-mails and phone calls and letters from people who are desperately concerned about what this parks act means to the future of our wilderness and ecological reserves and our parks system in general in this province.

Rather than bowling forward in yet another attempt to grab a whole bunch of authority and take it and scurry behind closed doors and do whatever you want to do in the future with no regard for the interests of Albertans, instead what we could do is engage in a much more productive, transparent, and ultimately higher quality process that would produce a product that all Albertans would be proud of and actually could sign on to and would understand. I think that would be in the best interests of not only this government but of all Albertans.

So I urge members of this Assembly to support the motion put forward by the Member for Calgary-Currie because I do believe that it is a mechanism through which we could actually improve substantially the quality and the substance of what is currently a very flawed piece of legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. On amendment A2 I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie for presenting this and allowing the House to consider another way of dealing with the controversy that has surrounded Bill 29. Certainly, as I hear more and more discussion, I’m getting more and more concerned about the direction. I have not been convinced by the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation that there has been due public consultation regarding this matter.

I have a copy of the Plan for Parks from last year. Last year was a very busy year for the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Many hon. members of this Assembly may be astonished to know that that was the only one of the 24 ministries that failed to meet their voted budget. That ministry had a wee bit of a deficit. If you look at the other ministries, many of them contributed significantly back into the stability fund at the end of the year 2009-10. This ministry was very active in the Winter Olympics held in British Columbia. One of the sort of sales pitches was, of course, our wide-open wilderness areas and what we have to offer. We certainly have a lot to offer to tourists and travellers from anywhere on the globe. But I find it interesting that this bill, after that promotion, is before the House in this form.

Now, the Plan for Parks is an interesting read. The hon. Member for Peace River gave a very interesting speech, and I appreciated hearing his remarks on this. Provincial parks account for 4 per cent of Alberta's land mass, and they are certainly very important to our quality of life. We think there is a large land area set aside in this province. We are correct if we look at it as a percentage, but much of it is national park, and when we think of the national parks, we think of Banff and Jasper and Waterton, Elk Island, but we forget about the large area that is included in Wood Buffalo. So I can appreciate that, and I hope I see more land set aside for provincial parks.

I read with interest the message from the minister, the plan for parks, the priority actions, and it's worth noting that there are four strategies. One of the strategies from last year, of course, is to refine the parks classification system. There's no real direction as to how or why or that we're going to have this enabling legislation, Bill 29, as it's known, and this is going to be what citizens need.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if we go a little further on and we find out how this plan was developed, that's quite interesting. If we were to look at this plan as it was developed and we were to consider amendment A2, we would certainly find a need for the Standing Committee on Community Services to get involved and have a series of public hearings not only in the capital, but I would suggest they could break up into subcommittees and travel throughout the province. I'm not sure. I can only think of the Alberta Health Act. The public consultations that this government is currently doing are very contrived. Whenever I experience what was done with supposedly public health consultations, I can confidently say that it was a contrived outcome. I know the Minister of Energy doesn't agree with me, but it certainly is true. Now, if we were to have the Standing Committee on Community Services look at what is in this plan for the parks that was tabled in this Assembly last year and what is in Bill 29, I think we would have to question whether Albertans' expectations and ideas for parks are reflected in Bill 29.

10:00

I heard about this public consultation from the hon. minister, but I read in here that Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation reviewed – reviewed – findings from consultations. Reviewed doesn't say that they've had them on their own; they reviewed consultations and gathered information about best practices in other jurisdictions. I heard earlier, Mr. Speaker, people talking about how the rest of the country was following our lead on this, if I understood correctly, Mr. Speaker, but certainly I'm surprised to learn that we had gathered information about best practices in other jurisdictions. Which other jurisdictions? They don't say. It could be Algeria. I don't know. It could be Saskatchewan. It might be. Maybe whenever they were on the train going up to Whistler at the taxpayers' expense last winter at the Winter Olympics, they had a consultation. Who knows? But they could, I guess, honestly say that they had a consultation.

Now, further input was also sought from a wide range of groups

through First Nations and individuals from different parts of the province. I would certainly like to have a synopsis or a summary of those meetings, meetings with stakeholders and environmental groups, recreation enthusiasts, commercial tourism operators, and municipalities. At some point this evening we're going to have to talk about land sales to municipalities that are considered or written into the statute in section 29, I think.

Public opinion surveys. In these public opinion surveys, if I understand correctly from this document, Albertans told us they want "more involvement in decisions about parks and in the delivery of parks programs." Now, Bill 29 contradicts that. It's enabling legislation. It's enabling this government to do what they want behind closed doors. I can't understand how this government and the speakers who are promoting this bill can make their claims and think that this bill will give interested individuals more involvement in decisions about parks in the delivery of the parks programs.

The parks classification system, which the hon. minister talked about and which is in Bill 29 – we heard various speakers speak about this – certainly is an issue that could be looked at if this amendment were to be passed tonight and this bill was to be provided to the Standing Committee on Community Services for discussion and scrutiny. The parks classification system, it states here, is to "refine the current park classification system so Albertans can easily understand which recreation and conservation activities are supported in each park and why." Fair enough. "Easily understand" is not part of Bill 29 because they're not going to have an opportunity to have a chance to understand what decisions are made.

I can hear people on the other side talk about cabinet confidences or "If you want the information, use FOIP." A favourite one not of yours, hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, but of some of your colleagues: "Well, put it on the Order Paper as a written question or a motion for a return." I can just hear all this. That's why we have to support amendment A2 from the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Now, the parks classification system will require the consolidation and modernization of two pieces of existing park legislation. The hon. Minister told me three, I think, or told the House. I could look at the back, but certainly the Provincial Parks Act and the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act, putting them into a single act, which is proposed here. Certainly, that's all; that's the complete plan for the parks.

Now we have this bill, and I would like to say that we certainly should bring this back to the Standing Committee on Community Services, not the cabinet policy committee. The chairperson of the cabinet policy committee that would look after this would be . . . [interjection] I don't know. I don't know. The only thing I would know is that they're well paid for what they do, but what they do is secret. The taxpayers, the public, have no idea about the cabinet policy committee and the work habits or lack thereof.

But with the hon. members on the Standing Committee on Community Services, of course, everything would be public. There would be minutes. There would be submissions, hopefully oral and written. That's why I think this is a very good idea, and I would, in conclusion, passionately urge even the Minister of the Environment to support amendment A2 on Bill 29.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I'm just wondering. You talked a little bit about value for money. We receive, whether we meet or not, a thousand dollars per month per committee that we're on. Would you suggest that we should be earning our money by being part of a further study of Bill 29 in Community Services?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, certainly all of those committees, whether they're standing committees or special select committees, are well financed, and they're well resourced with support staff. We have facilities in the Annex, and if need be, if we had a large group, we could even use this Assembly to hold a public hearing. So the resources are there, and I really think that January would be an ideal time for this committee to have another look at this bill.

Now, hon. member for – I always want to say, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Cataract Creek, but I don't. I'm going to say the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. I heard tonight that the Canadian Senate for the first time in the last 85 years overturned a private member's bill that had been passed by the House of Commons. Now, I know that the hon. Member for Stony Plain is saying: what's this got to do with this amendment? Well, this is what is happening.

We don't have a Senate in Alberta. I don't think we need one, but we do have these standing committees, and this Standing Committee on Community Services could take a long look this winter at this legislation and, hopefully, make some improvements to it so that it would be acceptable to many of the people in the province who right now, hon. member, think it is unacceptable and that it is poorly drafted. So if the Senate of Canada can overturn a private member's bill, the first time in 85 years – I'm not going to comment any further on that.

Certainly, one of the Senate's responsibilities is to have a second look at legislation, and this committee system that is set up in this province can do exactly the same thing if it is the will of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that every month taxpayers are putting out approximately \$160,000 to members of committees, and that's a very lowball estimate, do you not believe those committees should be meeting at least once a month to discuss important issues such as this one?

Mr. MacDonald: Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker, I agree that those committees should be meeting frequently. I think idle hands are the devil's workshop, and certainly whenever we look at that big government caucus, there's a lot of mischief going on there. [interjection] Well, you have a caucus meeting tomorrow morning, and the longer we're here tonight, the crankier you're going to be, as far as I can see.

I certainly think those committees should be meeting quite frequently, and there are lots of issues, not only Bill 29, that they could have a look at. There are lots of other issues as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on the amendment.

Mr. Kang: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on the amendment brought by the Member for Calgary-Currie, that:

Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Mr. Speaker, the bill is going to have a great impact, a far-

reaching impact and outcome for Alberta's parks and protected areas. It repeals most of the existing parks legislation, including the Provincial Parks Act; the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act; and the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act. It will streamline the parks system by eliminating a number of categories currently defined in the legislation. Currently it's wildland provincial parks, recreation areas, wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, heritage rangelands, and the proposal is "Provincial Park or Heritage Rangeland" as the reserved fragile ecological areas would be deemed provincial parks unless they are grasslands and would be placed under the authority of the minister or the cabinet for zoning. This could leave a number of once-protected areas of Alberta's landscape open to a range of inappropriate activities.

As well, now all land leases in the province would be subject to the same notice provisions when they are altered. It allows for the creation of park zones within the parks system that would define appropriate uses for those areas, and these zone categories are not defined in the legislation. They will be created by cabinet and assigned by the minister.

It would create a public notice requirement of 60 days before any changes are made to any areas of the parks system. This notice is only required to be posted on the minister's website. Currently certain areas such as wilderness areas have high notification requirements. It will establish a delegated authority for trails in the province, which is likely intended to permit a coalition of recreational groups to oversee and manage the trails. It will establish a park conservation foundation to observe the particular mandate of the current Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. It will rename the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation the active Alberta foundation, and it will also create a parks advisory council to advise the minister.

Mr. Speaker, right now there are more than 500 sites and roughly 27,500 square kilometres in total, and that is 4 per cent of the total land mass. When we talk about the consultation process, the government announced in a news release on May 19 that it was considering overhauling the parks legislation. Albertans were given until July 17, less than two months, to fill out the online survey, which was considered highly vague and general by those who completed it. No public meetings were held. Conservation groups have told us that they were not contacted or offered technical briefings on the legislation. The results of the online survey were not even released publicly, as they have been for other consultations in health and education. This nonexistent consultation process demonstrates that the government does not really care what the public or the concerned stakeholders think about the legislation.

By referring this bill to the Standing Committee on Community Services, there will be more consultation done, and maybe this bill will be improved to the satisfaction of all the stakeholders. For those reasons, I'm supporting the amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. One of the recommendations A2 is suggesting is that the committee process has value. Do you see the standing policy committee process as an opportunity to review, an opportunity to discuss? Do you think the committee structure has value?

Mr. Kang: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. There was some poll done, and

85 per cent of Albertans agreed that protecting the natural environment should be a higher priority for Alberta's parks than providing recreation even though both were considered important, and 82 per cent of Albertans felt that more parks facilities should be provided to accommodate population growth and demand. When the consultation process was done, there was not really enough time for Albertans to speak their mind on this bill, Mr. Speaker. By referring this bill to committee, by holding hearings across the province, probably, it will get the input from Albertans, and maybe we can improve this bill to the satisfaction of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order (29)(2)(a).

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I was under the impression that the motion that was agreed to earlier applied for the rest of the evening. If not, I would then move a second motion accordingly, that we have a one-minute bell.

The Deputy Speaker: I heard the motion, but I also understood that the motion applied to this bill. Is that correct?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Taylor: My understanding was that when the Deputy Government House Leader moved that motion, he was talking about all bells, all divisions this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: So we agree that for all bells the division is one minute?

Hon. Members: Yes.

[The division bell was rung at 10:20 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Kang	Notley	

Against the motion:

Ady	Fritz	McFarland
Berger	Jablonski	Oberle
Calahasen	Jacobs	Olson
Campbell	Johnston	Prins
Dallas	Liepert	Quest
Danyluk	Lindsay	Renner
Denis	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Doerksen	Marz	Vandermeer
Elniski		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 25
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Bill 29 at second reading. I have been waiting . . . [interjection] Yes. I had an opportunity to speak to the amendments, and I can also speak to the bill as well. It was a tough fight to get here, and democracy is precious. Isn't that right?

Now, certainly, one of the issues I had – and I was listening with interest to the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security talking about why this bill was needed. I heard earlier that we last had a discussion on this in 1999, and we had some changes, which are reflected in portions of this legislation which are to be repealed. There were reasons suggested that this was to be better, of course, but I'm curious why we need these agreements respecting the sale of land. Why is this at this time necessary? One would be suspicious of this government when you mention the words "land sales."

An Hon. Member: It's a conspiracy theory.

Mr. MacDonald: No, it's not a conspiracy theory, hon. member. It has been proven in the past. It's quite odd that a lot of beautiful land for development close to taxpayer-funded twinned freeways becomes surplus and becomes available and is sold for very modest prices to parties who always find time to make it to the Premier's fundraising dinners. I'll put it that way.

So I would like some clarification, and hopefully, Mr. Speaker, if . . .

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. MacDonald: Relevance, you say? Relevance? I would ask you, hon. member, to read this bill, specifically section 29, for relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important that each and every one of us debate and discuss and put our views on the record regarding various pieces of legislation. I was sitting here waiting patiently for my turn to speak, and I was wondering how many members of that big government caucus haven't said a word yet this fall session. I thought: well, maybe I'll look it up in *Hansard* and see. But I know you would feel that I'm further being distracted by these hon. members.

Specifically on Bill 29 and section 29, agreements respecting the sale of land. The hon. member now seems to agree with my concerns around that, and I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. If we could have some discussion on that: why that is so necessary, which municipalities we have in mind, which parcels of land could be potentially up for sale and to whom, and what sort of restrictions we would put on that. Is it exclusively for municipal parks, or could it be six months later turned into . . .

Mr. Campbell: Condos.

10:30

Mr. MacDonald: . . . a condominium development. You took the words right out of my mouth. Yeah.

Those are some of the issues that, hopefully, would be discussed, but if we were to have another look at giving this bill a pass – don't send it through to committee. Don't send it to third reading. Just get rid of it and have another attempt at making a law that is acceptable

to the majority of citizens, whether they're environmentalists, whether they're landowners, whether they're urban or rural Albertans. I think they deserve better than this. I spoke earlier about the plan that was tabled in this Assembly last year, and it was a 10-year plan. I don't think Bill 29 addresses that.

Now, why should we have another look at this legislation? Well, we only have to look at some of the things that have been said publicly about this. Whether it's in Canmore, whether it's in Edmonton, or whether it's in Calgary, this bill worries people. Environmental groups say that this bill will erode protections now in place for Alberta's provincial parks. The minister argues it's about making classification of parks easier to understand, not changing government policy. But, again, I'm going to repeat: so much of government policy is now behind closed doors and in silence.

Now, in St. Albert citizens have raised concerns. Certainly, other neighbourhoods have raised concerns. The Sierra Club of Canada has actually formed a coalition, as I understand it, and they got a week, November 15 to 20 – and this is the 17th – as Save Our Parks Week. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from Chickadee Creek, I'm sure whenever he goes camping, leaves his clocks, all of them, in Calgary, but I certainly am lucky enough to have a large, open-faced clock that I can view.

Mr. Speaker, in baseball you get three chances before you're out. In the Legislative Assembly here I'm going to give this Assembly one more chance to get rid of this bill. I am proud on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to now move another amendment to give this House an opportunity to rethink Bill 29. I know the opportunity to send it back to one of our standing committees: we didn't agree with that. But, certainly, I think it's time to put forward to the floor of this Assembly a hoist motion to once and for all send this bill back to the department, where it belongs, for further study. I would like to circulate this amendment – it's signed, and it's in order – on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Riverview at this time, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We shall have the pages distribute the amendment.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please continue.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. For the record this will be amendment A3, Mr. Speaker, correct?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, it'll be known as A3.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Liepert: Three strikes and you're out.

Mr. MacDonald: Three strikes and you're out, yes. Unfortunately, hon. Minister of Energy, there are a lot of foul balls in this place.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview moves that the motion for second reading of Bill 29, Alberta Parks Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following, that "Bill 29, Alberta Parks Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

This amendment is again an opportunity, as I said earlier, for the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation to take this bill back to the legislative draft table and have another look at it. It doesn't reflect what Albertans are saying they want and they need in environmental legislation. It doesn't satisfy their view. It certainly doesn't satisfy hon. members on this side of the House.

In conclusion, I would urge all hon. members at this time, Mr. Speaker, to please take one more look at this bill and support

amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'd like to rise tonight to encourage the Assembly not to support this motion. It is a hoist amendment. I think that it kind of flies in the face of the work that has been done in this province. As I have been saying all night, we had three years of consultation, where the plan for parks was developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders, aboriginal groups, park users, academics, and experts. They sat around tables and they came up with the plan for parks. One of the priorities that they noted in those discussions was the confusion in this classification system and how we needed a more robust ability to have parks legislation that could work for us in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is proposing that we have enabling legislation that creates the framework so that this important work can be done. Yes, that will allow for subsequent work to be done, so I again would like to encourage the Assembly not to support this motion.

At this time I'd like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 25

Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 25.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've had ample time to discuss this bill. I appreciate the comments earlier from members opposite. It appears to be what the Freehold Owners Association has been working for for a very long time. I hope they are satisfied with this amendment.

Certainly, it is a pleasure to support Bill 25. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. Speaking to Bill 25, this is an example of when members of this House are able to agree. Bill 25 basically stands up for the rights of individuals, those who have freehold mineral rights. It's what we should be doing, recognizing individual rights.

Mr. Liepert: You're on the wrong bill, Harry.

Mr. Chase: Sorry?

The Deputy Speaker: Bill 25, Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010.

10:40

Mr. Chase: Who's on the wrong bill?

Mr. Liepert: It's not the freehold mineral rights.

Mr. Chase: Sorry. Minister of Energy, are we not talking about freehold mineral rights right now?

An Hon. Member: No, we're talking about taxes.

Mr. Chase: The point I was trying to make, Mr. Speaker, before I was assisted by the Minister of Energy, is the recognition of individual rights, and that's absolutely essential, as essential as the recognition of collective rights. Bill 29, unfortunately, doesn't do that. Bill 25 does. That's why I support Bill 25.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on Bill 25.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ensure that we don't have complete consensus in this House because that would be deeply disturbing to me. I feel the need, of course, to raise a couple of concerns with this bill. We've gone through it in a certain amount of detail, but it appears to me that what this bill does is that it's not changing the rights or giving new rights to freehold mineral rights owners, as far as I can tell; rather, all it is doing is that it's restructuring the way in which the government can collect taxes from those freehold mineral rights owners. If it turns out that I am incorrect, then I apologize to those freehold mineral rights owners who I do agree have been advocating for some time to enhance their rights vis-à-vis their land ownership.

What appears to me to be happening with this bill is primarily that the government is giving itself more authority to assess taxes and then more authority to penalize for nonpayment of taxes and then more authority to take action in the event that those taxes are not paid. You know me. I'm all for taxation, being a New Democrat and everything.

An Hon. Member: She admits it.

Ms Notley: It's late. Again, though, also being a lawyer, probably even more unpopular.

I think that it's really important for people to have as enhanced an opportunity to have their case heard as possible. What this bill does is that it eliminates an appeal board and replaces it simply with the minister. I expect the minister is not going to spend a lot of time personally adjudicating taxation decisions, so ultimately what it actually means is that people who are unhappy with the tax decisions will have to go directly to the Court of Queen's Bench. Unfortunately, as we have heard many people talk about in this House, particularly in this sitting, we have a real problem in terms of access to justice in this province. We have a real problem in terms of access to the courts, we have a problem with delay in the court system, and we have a problem with access to legal counsel in the system and the cost of legal counsel.

The fact of the matter is that not all of these freehold mineral rights owners are necessarily exceptionally wealthy people. What we've done, then, is that we've taken away an administrative tribunal that is user friendly and replaced it with the obligation for these folks to go to the Court of Queen's Bench and pay the additional costs associated with that should they be unhappy with the level of taxation imposed upon them by the minister.

This, to me, is not actually a win for the freehold mineral rights owners. Again, I apologize to them if we've misinterpreted what this bill is designed to do. This being what I think it is, we cannot support this bill as we believe it will be an additional cost to these particular Albertans, and that would be unfortunate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to actually – I wouldn't suggest apologize, but I want to thank the Minister of Energy for clarifying the remainder of the bill's title. It's not just about, as the minister noted, freehold mineral rights, but it's the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010. I thank the Minister of Energy for pointing that out because there is a distinction.

I'm just wondering. To the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona . . . [interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. If the Minister of Employment and Immigration would allow me to continue, I'd gladly do so.

My question to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is: does she see Bill 25, the Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010, falling into the same category as the Alberta Parks Act, Bill 29, in terms of extending ministerial discretion as opposed to legislative appeal processing?

Ms Notley: I will say that in my very brief review of the act I suppose one could argue that it enhances the role of the minister in terms of replacing an appeal board with the minister, but since I suspect that what will actually happen is that most of that work will go to a court, really what this is about is moving that adjudicative function from a more user-friendly setting to the courts. To the extent that appellants are unable to afford the court system, then there's no question that this does take authority from the board and give it to the minister, so at that level it does in fact do what the Member for Calgary-Varsity suggests.

I think the bigger concern simply is about removing an avenue of appeal that is relatively accessible and replacing it with an avenue of appeal which is not relatively accessible, thereby infringing on the rights of this particular group of Albertans in the process.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize hon. members to speak on the bill.

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

Bill 19

Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Battle River-Wainwright I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 19.

Just to remind all members, this bill will allow for the implementation of renewable-fuel standards in Alberta and will clarify some of the tax provisions to make sure that we don't have discriminatory, unintended consequences as a result of introducing renewable fuels in this province. My recollection is that there's been broad-based support for this bill at first and second readings and in committee, so I anticipate that members will have relatively few questions and comments at third reading. However, I welcome their comments.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very good bill. It's a pleasure to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

10:50

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The hon. mover of Bill 19, the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, had indicated that in third reading he would provide me with two answers, so possibly he's passed those answers on to the Minister of Environment. Very quickly, the questions I asked had to do with: would Bill 19 potentially lead towards a requirement of a certain amount of renewable fuels, ethanol for example, being mandated for use in the province of Alberta?

Then my other question was: did this interfere with the extension to the TILMA act? I'm afraid I'm forgetting the number, but it involved having fair prices for Alberta gas transport users. I asked the question: by improving the playing field in Alberta, does that potentially contradict the competitive practices with British Columbia and Saskatchewan?

Hon. Minister of Environment, if you didn't have a chance to receive the answers to that research, I'll understand and look forward to those answers being tabled later, but I did want to raise them.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having accomplished a significant amount of good work tonight, I would like to move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:52 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Notley
Quest
Rogers

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell
Anderson
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
Pastoor
Rogers
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery Kang
Benito Lindsay
Bhardwaj McQueen
Boutilier Olson
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Drysdale Xiao
Hinman

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
Amery Lindsay
Berger McFarland
Calahasen Mitzel
DeLong Notley
Doerksen Pastoor
Forsyth Quest
Groeneveld Sherman
Hinman Tarchuk
Jacobs Taylor
Leskiw

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney
Anderson Groeneveld
Benito Kang
Calahasen Mason
Chase Olson
Dallas Sandhu
Elniski Vandermeer
Fawcett Xiao
Griffiths

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. Drysdale
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang
Boutilier
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Calahasen
Cao
Forsyth
Johnson
MacDonald
Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman
Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 18, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent this weekend. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For several years this Legislature has been the host site for the regional Historica Fair. In 2007 the Legislative Assembly Office initiated an award to recognize Historica Fair participants who demonstrate outstanding achievement in celebrating an aspect of Canadian parliamentary democracy, governance, or political history with a specific focus on Alberta. It's my pleasure to introduce this year's award winner.

Wendy Dyjur was a grade 6 student at the Vital Grandin school in St. Albert last spring when she created an excellent presentation on the role of the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, an interesting topic, indeed. It turns out that Wendy's grandfather, who I'm sure is not very well known in this House, Dr. Steve West, formerly sat in this Chamber as a member and as a cabinet minister. She tells us that she learned a great deal from interviewing him for her project. I'm sure she did. Wendy is accompanied by her father, Duane Dyjur, her grandfather, Dr. Steve West, and her brother and sister, Raeah and Morgan Dyjur. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly eight students from the Yellowhead school, accompanied by their teachers, Brian Gizzie and I'm not sure if the next one is Janet Green or Lynn Howard. Nonetheless, I appreciate them always anyway. The Yellowhead school has a great motto. That motto, which is certainly suitable for us here, is Make Good Decisions. I would ask the group to please now rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of 35 visitors from the Suzuki charter school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The Suzuki charter school is planning a grand opening of their new school in our community, the former Capilano elementary school, which was forced into closure by the Edmonton public school board this past spring. I hope the Suzuki charter school has many years of providing excellent education to students at this new location. The group is led today by teachers Miss Shannon Eremen-

ko and also Miss Ashley Lloyd. I would ask the bright and polite grade 6 students to now please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 15 very special guests from the Public Affairs Bureau. They are seated in the members' gallery, and they are Mr. John Dolphin, Mr. Jag Sandhu, Mrs. Jolayne Manning, Ms Alexandra Bain, Miss Sarah Lysakowski, Miss Marriam Adujan, Mrs. Candice Smith, Ms Karen Johnston, Ms Carrie Sencartier, Miss Lisa Glover, Mr. Ryan O'Byrne, Miss Wickens, Miss Jenna Turner, Mr. Scott Sehested, and Mr. Patrick Mears. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a constituent of mine. Krysteen Fitzgerald is a young police officer from my constituency who was diagnosed with relapsing/remitting multiple sclerosis in 2008. Unable to obtain traditional relief, Krysteen travelled to Mexico, where she had the CCSVI procedure concluded with great results. She is joined today by her mother, Carole, and they're here today as a testimonial for their hope that this procedure will be available here in Canada and in Alberta in the near future. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House visitors from my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They are five representatives from Archbishop O'Leary Catholic high school, which is celebrating their 50th anniversary this year as a school. I will speak more about that milestone celebration in a member's statement this afternoon.

As I mention their names, I would ask them to kindly rise, beginning with Mary Lou Forest, who has been the principal for four years at Archbishop O'Leary school, who is also going through some treatment for cancer at this time. Best wishes to Mary Lou Forest. The whole community is behind you on that, and our prayers are with you and your family. Tim Cusack is the acting principal. Leo Normandeau is a teacher at the school and has been a teacher since 1985. Line Savard is also at the school as head secretary since 2001. Ron Kutney, a former student who graduated from Archbishop O'Leary high school in 1964, has been a teacher at the school since 1987. Congratulations, and thank you for your service. I would ask all members of the Assembly to please give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the child well-being initiative, CWBI, who are here today in an effort to shed light on the catastrophic issues of child poverty in

Alberta. This is a multid denominational group who have provided each member with a symbolic doll bearing messages calling on the government to draft and execute a plan within a year toward eliminating child poverty. Would the members of the group please stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Dr. PearlAnn Reichwein, a professor who specializes in conservation, parks, and tourism history in Alberta. She has joined us today to express her concerns over Bill 29 and, frankly, her opposition to it. I would ask her, please, to rise. She has risen, actually, in the public gallery. Please, everybody, give her a traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House today Daniel Larson. Daniel is a fourth-year anthropology student at the U of A and has a focus in Levantine archeology. On campus he serves as the co-president of the Edmonton Hillel Jewish Students' Association, the umbrella representative body which advocates on behalf of Jewish students in the city, in addition to organizing Jewish educational, cultural, and social programming for the broader student population. Daniel has a keen interest in politics and wanted to accompany his friend, my legislative assistant, Jacque Lycka, on a trip to watch the question period and watch us in action here in the Legislature. If they would rise, please. They are in the members' gallery. Please, everyone, give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Archbishop O'Leary High School Anniversary

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose earlier to introduce representatives from Archbishop O'Leary Catholic high school and congratulated them on their milestone anniversary of 50 years. It was my honour and privilege to be part of this very special milestone celebration on November 6 along with staff, students, and community members from the past and present. The celebration included an open house and anniversary mass where all former and current students, staff, friends, and many, many family members were welcome to participate in these special festivities. The football team, the Spartans, also hosted a special spirit day and alumni football game on October 21.

Mr. Speaker this high school has become an anchor in the north Edmonton community, opening its doors for the first time in 1960. All students who attended Archbishop O'Leary high school have experienced a long-standing tradition of academic and athletic excellence while continuing to receive an education that emphasizes strong Catholic values and a special sense of community amongst all students. As a parent of children who have attended this school, including members of my husband's family, I can honestly say that they received an education that is second to none. Students also have an opportunity to specialize their program at Archbishop O'Leary high school, which has always strived to tailor programs for all students to suit their interests.

The motto of Archbishop O'Leary high school is Viam Veritatis Elegi, we will seek the truth. I know that the students and staff both past and present have continued to live by this particular statement.

This school has played and will continue to play an integral role in the Catholic education system in north Edmonton.

I'd like to thank all students, staff, and families who have supported this particular school and the community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Child Poverty

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today each member of this Assembly was presented with a small, colourful, handmade doll symbolizing children in poverty. I'd like to thank the United Church Women for reaching out to members of this Assembly and touching the heart, the heart of the matter. This child well-being initiative reminds us that child poverty remains a terrible reality, causing misery, disability, and untold loss of human creativity and potential. This travesty of leadership in Alberta, despite unparalleled wealth and resources, has grown in severity as evidenced in our food banks and our housing relief programs.

It's an issue that the Official Opposition has addressed many times in the Legislature. One of our long-standing policies calls for the creation of a child nutrition program to end hunger in children. For about \$2 per student per day we could provide a healthy lunch for all the children at risk of malnutrition in Alberta. Could there be any better investment?

Substantial cuts to family support programs since the 1990s continue to contribute to illness, injury, and preventable problems in our health, education, and justice systems. All of us know that adequate food and shelter are the key elements of a stable family, employment, health, and achievement.

An Alberta Liberal administration would do much more, beginning with a comprehensive plan addressing contributors to child poverty with concrete targets and timelines to ensure progress on eliminating this scourge. We would also appoint an independent child and youth advocate reporting directly to the Legislature.

I hope that the child well-being initiative will help convince lawmakers and leaders that real action is needed now to combat child poverty. We live in a society prosperous enough to ensure that no child need live in poverty. What we lack is the determination to put our prosperity to good use. Children indeed are innocent victims. Let's all commit today to changing that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Children's Vision Initiative

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eighty per cent of a young child's learning experience is based on their vision. Our children learn through their eyes. This is why it's so important for all young children to have full eye examinations before they enter our school system. Alberta has recognized the importance of vision care in our children.

I'm pleased to rise again today to acknowledge the innovative Eye See, Eye Learn program. Eye See, Eye Learn is a program from the Alberta Association of Optometrists, funded by the government of Alberta, that educates parents on the importance of early eye examinations and that will provide a free pair of eyeglasses to every kindergarten student who requires them in most of Alberta's school districts.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 10 per cent of children start school with a vision problem, and this percentage doubles by the time they reach high school. The Eye See, Eye Learn program encourages all

parents to have their child's eyes examined by an optometrist before they enter the school system so that they are able to reach their full potential right from the start.

Part of our province's commitment to ensuring that all of Alberta's children have the best chance to succeed is ensuring that all parents have access to the terrific resource. This is why the Eye See, Eye Learn program has reached out to our new immigrant populations by working with the Alberta Association of Optometrists and the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op to provide information sheets in 12 languages, including English, French, Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Spanish, traditional Chinese, Hindi, Vietnamese, Filipino, Tagalog, Punjabi, and Somali.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans deserve an equal opportunity to thrive in our education system. I therefore would encourage all parents and guardians to take full advantage of the Eye See, Eye Learn program. Parents can visit www.optometrists.ab.ca for more information on this program or to find an optometrist near them. You don't need a referral to visit an optometrist in Alberta, and parents should be aware that eye examinations are covered by the province for all children below the age of 19.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud our government's vision in funding the Eye See, Eye Learn program and encourage all Albertans to take their eye health seriously. It's never too early or too late to have your eyes examined by an optometrist.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Elder Abuse Strategy

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to you about an issue that concerns me very much: elder abuse. I think everyone here would agree that seniors are vital members of our province and that, like all Albertans, seniors deserve to be treated with respect and with dignity. Seniors continue to give so much to Albertans, to our great province; they're our neighbours, our parents, our grandparents, our employers, our volunteers.

That's why it's an unacceptable statistic that up to 10 per cent of all seniors in our province are victims of elder abuse. Sadly, that number doesn't even reflect the numerous other cases that go unreported. Elder abuse knows no gender, ethnicity, income, or education level. It can take many different forms, from financial and physical to medication, sexual, emotional, and neglect. We know elder abuse happens, and that's why this government has worked to raise awareness and to foster prevention through efforts such as legislation like the Protection Against Family Violence Act and the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, supporting World Elder Abuse Awareness Day every year in June, funding shelters for seniors escaping from abusive situations, and involvement in partnerships such as the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network.

I'm here today to tell you that we've taken a big step forward. On Tuesday the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports released a strategy that aims to prevent and address elder abuse. It's titled Addressing Elder Abuse in Alberta: A Strategy for Collective Action. It focuses on collaborating with community partners and all Albertans to work together to eliminate this devastating issue. We all have a role to play in preventing abuse, and the strategy speaks to the important part that communities and municipal and provincial governments must play.

Through my work as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta we'll continue to raise awareness of elder abuse. The strategy takes a comprehensive approach to addressing this complex

issue. By working together with communities and governments, all Albertans will be able to assist.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not only has the Premier lost the confidence of Albertans, but now he has lost the confidence of a respected member of his own caucus. To the Premier. Let's start with the basics: will the Premier accept that he is the one who bears responsibility for the mess in our hospital system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again we're referring to the ER wait times. This is, as I said, a problem in the province of Alberta, that I'm frustrated with, but also one across the country of Canada. There are solutions to it, and that is what Alberta Health Services has been directed to do; that is that to ensure to reduce emergency wait times, we have to find opportunities for people to access health through different means other than just the emergency response and also have more continuing care beds and a good community-based mental health program.

Dr. Swann: It was the Premier and the current Minister of Energy who created a health care bureaucracy clearly unable to fix these problems. Will the Premier acknowledge that creating Alberta Health Services has been a failure?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, by going to one board, we now have one CEO as opposed to 12 or 13, I believe, at one time. We also have reduced the number of accounting and payroll systems, all of those, to bring it down and take all of those savings and put them into the delivery of health care services. I believe at one time the estimate was around \$800 million.

Dr. Swann: Well, how is it working, Mr. Premier? That's the question Albertans are asking, not: how many do you have?

Mr. Stelmach: It's actually working quite well because those savings have gone in. We will continue to find any efficiencies on the bureaucratic side of the delivery and put every penny we can into the direct, front-line services because that's where that money belongs.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government caucus is deeply divided over health care. One of its own members has now publicly stated that the Premier broke the written promise he made to doctors and to the people of Alberta in a letter of February 23, 2008. That member is right, as anyone who reads the letter will see. To the Premier: why did you break the written promise you made in February of 2008?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to a response to the emergency doctors during, I believe, the campaign, that made commitments to increase the number of nurses in the province, to

put more money into health care delivery. Since then we continue to be the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a five-year funding plan in place, increased funding. Nobody has been able to make that commitment, and that allows our Alberta Health Services Board to build better plans for Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, that same member, an emergency physician, has written a warning to Albertans: “[I] do not feel comforted that healthcare will be any better with AHS’ inadequate plan to deal with the crisis . . . that we will be facing in the 4 winter months ahead.” If the Premier’s own caucus members are this worried and concerned about Alberta Health Services’ plan, how can Albertans have any confidence in what you’re doing?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let’s be clear. There are two elements in reducing ER pressures. The first, of course, is moving people as quickly as possible through ERs and making sure that there is appropriate accommodation for them in acute-care beds, a more permanent solution to the issue that they may be facing. The second is to make sure that we are reducing the number of people who access health care through the emergency wards throughout this province, and that is more community-based programs and more primary care networks. We’re up to 38 and growing. About 2 million Albertans now belong to a primary care network.

Dr. Swann: Well, one has to wonder how long this Premier is going to continue to stand up here and say the same things over and over again with no change in the front lines. Your own parliamentary assistant, an ER doctor, has lost trust. Will the Premier appoint a special nonpartisan crisis task force, which includes this parliamentary assistant with other health care experts, to fix this ER problem that Alberta Health Services has failed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the opposition is always looking at some other way of spending money in terms of looking to how we can best solve a situation. I have confidence in my caucus, I have confidence in my minister, I have confidence in my parliamentary assistant to make the best decisions. We are a family on this side of the House and will continue to be that family.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, I’m so glad to hear, Mr. Speaker, that they’re feeling like one big family. It’s so visible.

There were three suggestions from Dr. Soibelman, president of the AMA’s emergency medicine section, in the paper today. Your government has consistently ignored the wisdom and experience of front-line professionals, which is why medical staff are so low in morale presently in the health system. What action is the government taking in response to Dr. Soibelman’s advice? To the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: As I said before, in order to remove emergency wait times, we have to find more permanent solutions, meaning opening up more beds. Tomorrow the Alberta Health Services will be meeting with the emergency docs to discuss the proposal before they make it public on the Monday, I believe, of next week. They’re thinking of making it public once they discuss it with all of the health care providers.

The other is to increase home-care funding. They put in over \$4 million in new dollars, about a thousand more homes, but there’ll be more to come in the very near future.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will the government accept the recommendation for diagnostic imaging services, at least, to be available 24/7 to get results quickly and get people in and out quickly?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, throughout most of the province we do have diagnostic imaging, you know, 24/7. I know in rural Alberta we have the capacity to call people back to the hospital to do the imaging. But we will do whatever we can to reduce the waiting lists and also to make sure that the doctors have the most up-to-date health information through imaging as quickly as possible so that they can make the diagnosis quickly.

Dr. Swann: Blah, blah, blah.

Mr. Speaker, we had a man commit suicide last week in the emergency department. We had a child die with a burst appendix in emergency in Edmonton these past few weeks. What is it going to take for this government to move on this critical issue in the health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that a number of families have experienced tragic events in terms of loss of life, and our thoughts and prayers are with them.

With respect to the question raised by the member, I believe I clearly outlined what the Alberta Health Services board is doing and will continue to do. I know that the best way to see the survey, rather than looking at some numbers, is the satisfaction of Albertans as they see progress being made in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as this government tries to deny the ER crisis, it isn’t going away. Every day more and more emergency room doctors are speaking out. The Wildrose caucus knows there are far too many cases of patients who have been released by their ER doctors but are unable to leave the hospital because the funding for follow-up care is not allowed. To the Premier: will you please verify that approximately 150 patients at the Peter Lougheed hospital have been released by their ER doctor but can’t leave the hospital because the funding for care doesn’t follow the patient home?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, I believe, over 4.3 million, 4.7 million new dollars are going into home care. That’s an additional 1,000 Albertans that can receive home care in their home. We’ll continue to put more resources into that area, but we also have to train more people at the same time. So that’s a continual effort of training more people in various health care capacities to provide the care that people need in their own homes or perhaps in a continuing care facility or in a mental health institution.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, our system is penny-wise and pound-foolish. We’ll pay for a respiratory therapist or drugs in the hospital but not if they go home. To the Premier again: are you aware that the funding is not allowed for the patients; therefore, they are kept in ER hospital beds for seven to 10 days because a respiratory therapist or drugs cannot follow that patient home? It’s a very simple thing to switch and allow it, and we’d save hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we have a better system in place, that’s growing throughout the province, and that’s the primary care networks. Most of them do have respiratory therapists, so if

you're an asthmatic sufferer and you have some issue with respect to your respiratory tract, you can go directly to the primary care network. You don't have to go through a physician, but you can access that service in the 38 primary care networks, most of them in Edmonton and Calgary but also quite a number of them throughout rural Alberta.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the transitional nurses are not allowed to let someone leave the hospital unless there's proper care there. They don't have a respiratory therapist, they don't have drugs that follow them home; therefore, they're stuck for seven to 10 days in our emergency rooms. Will the Premier not designate a chief operating officer who has the authority to ensure that the funding follows the patient to wherever their designated home is?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that the opposition has, you know, a number of solutions to the ER issue. I outlined what we are doing as a government, but I can certainly understand the opposition's desire, especially that party, to use this issue as a means to take Alberta down the path of a two-tiered European health care system. I can tell you that we are not taking Albertans down that path.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Well, it's not for want of trying, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you that.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans should be able to trust the word of their Premier, but this Premier's term so far is littered with broken promises. It's not just the NDP that's saying that. His own parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness said this:

The Premier made a promise to the ER doctors in writing and has broken his promise not only to the ER doctors, but also to the seniors, the 1.8 million Albertans who present for emergency care and their 2 million family members, and to all frontline healthcare professionals.

My question is to the Premier. Why did you break your promise two years ago to ER doctors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I answered in the earlier question, I made a commitment to increase the number of nurses being trained in this province, to build the necessary infrastructure. Part of the way of resolving some of the ER situations is to have more continuing care beds. We will have our thousandth bed open this coming January. We're over 800 now. Our target is 1,300. So that is a good gain in continuing care. But we also have to remember that every month we see 2,000 seniors added to our demographics in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I got the e-mail from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness, and he says, and I repeat it again: "The premier made a promise to the ER doctors in writing and has broken his promise." My question to the Premier: is the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark right or wrong?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that I maintain my commitment to the emergency doctors. I said very early in the campaign of March 2008 that we're going to get everybody together to work towards one common goal, set aside our personal goals, set aside our differences. I can tell you that one good example is to have the United Nurses of Alberta come forward. They agreed to a zero, zero, and 2 per cent increase over the next three years. That's

going to really help us out over the next year to meet many of the challenges we have in health care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I invite the Premier to step out of his message box and actually answer a question for once. The question is: is the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark right or wrong when he says that the Premier made a promise to the ER doctors in writing and has broken his promise? Is he right or wrong, Mr. Premier? Please answer that question.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member also has my reply, and he can see in that reply that what we wrote to the docs is increasing the number of people that are providing care in the hospitals and also to ensure that we maintain the infrastructure and build new infrastructure. I know we're going to take a lot of the pressure off in cancer treatment by adding three additional radiation vaults in Grande Prairie and Lethbridge and Red Deer so that people don't have to drive hundreds of miles to Edmonton or Calgary for treatment. Those are the things that we're going to see, these big changes in Alberta that will improve our quality of life.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to ask about health care, but listening to the questions and the answers that have gone back and forth so far today, I am, and I'm going to ask my questions to the Premier. To the Premier: if primary care networks in this province are working so well, then why are so many sick Albertans falling through the cracks?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, they are working well, but the demand continues to grow for health care in this province. It's a matter of demographics, a matter of us doing more: more heart transplants, more heart surgeries, bone and joint replacements, many things that we're doing in larger number than we did before. I do know that primary care health networks are working because in just talking to those that are involved, the patients especially, the people who access services are very satisfied with the service they're receiving.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: if things are working so well except for this minor little annoyance that our demographics are changing and the demand is outstripping supply, if he can give us that answer today, why can't he and his government get ahead of this curve?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why we want to point fingers at the seniors population and say: well, it's a minor issue. It's not a minor issue. We're all living longer. We're enjoying a good quality of life in the province, so let's not blame one demographic. We know that we're going to be living longer, of course, and we have to make those changes. As I said, 1,300 new beds added just this year alone with another thousand being added next year. That's 2,300 new beds paid for by the taxpayers of the province.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. I wasn't blaming the province's seniors; I was blaming the Premier.

How much longer does the Premier expect Albertans of any age and stage in life to wait until things get better on the health care file? How much longer?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are improvements every day notwithstanding what you hear from some of the opposition members, but especially with the issues being raised here, yet calls from people that have had good access, have been dealt with with huge satisfaction levels, especially those that have been surprised with a diagnosis of cancer and have worked through therapy, radiation and are now here, healthy, to tell us the good parts of what we have accomplished.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Civil Forfeiture Program

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 this Assembly passed the Victim Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, and as you know, it enables the provincial government to ask the court for a civil order forfeiting to the province property either acquired by illegal means or used as an instrument of illegal activity. There's been quite a bit of comment recently about this program, and that's also prompted some questions in my constituency, the question being: so what are you doing with the money? What's happening with the money? I'd like to ask that question to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the successful seizure of property and the sale of property by court order we've been able to establish the civil forfeiture fund. We've recently announced, just on Tuesday in fact, a \$150,000 grant to the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to develop pilot projects and added shelters in rural Alberta to deal directly with victims of domestic violence.

Mr. Olson: My first and only supplemental will be for the Solicitor General. It's good that we've got programs that are supporting survivors of domestic violence. My question is because of some recent concerns I've had from constituents, chilling stories about family violence, and they don't have confidence that the justice system can protect them from future violence. My question for the Solicitor General is if something more can't be done to intervene ahead of time rather than after the fact.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. There are some chilling stories out there, and sometimes the system can't respond quick enough to help people. That is why we established the ITRAC unit that operates under ALERT. It's a group integrated between RCMP, municipal police, and sheriffs, a multidisciplinary group that's very well trained and very well experienced, that provides threat assessments and risk management reports in cases of domestic violence and stalking situations. We've already assisted more than 400 people, provided 117, I think, formal threat assessments.

The Speaker: Is there an additional question?

Mr. Olson: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Child Poverty

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The child well-being initiative was launched three years ago in reaction to a dramatic increase in the number of children accessing food banks and housing programs. Sadly, this government's refusal to make child poverty reduction a priority has meant that the situation is no better today for the 78,000 Alberta children living in poverty. Affordable housing, a living wage, food security, and quality child care are essential pieces to achieve a reduction in poverty rates. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: will the minister commit to implementing a tangible plan to reduce child poverty within the year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this question. I appreciate the question, but I'd like to begin by thanking the guests that were introduced earlier for these precious dolls. I understand that 315 were made to create awareness of the reason why we need a poverty reduction strategy. Also, they were created with a prayer. I know I will cherish this gift, and I do look forward to meeting with this group later.

In answer to the question, as the member indicated, children are not poor; it's their families that are. We need to work together with all the ministries here that are involved in government in increasing the stability . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, I pledge my support to the minister of children's services in terms of trying to come together with a solution. I'll be glad to work with you.

To the Minister of Education: given that children have the right to achieve their full potential regardless of economic circumstances and that one of the most gnawing consequences of poverty is hunger, will the minister commit to implementing a school nutrition program so that no child goes to school in Alberta hungry?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there is much good work happening across the province in the area of children's nutrition in schools. For example, in the Northland school division all of the schools that I've been to have kitchens and have programs in those schools. In many other schools there's a Breakfast for Learning program. So rather than building a big, province-wide bureaucratic breakfast program or child nutrition program that puts lunches in every school, I think the good work that happens in our communities needs to be supported. I do support it, both personally and as a department.

Mr. Chase: There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, about the good work being done by volunteer programs. It needs the co-ordination and the support of the Ministry of Education.

To the minister of health: given that poverty is the number one determinant of health, will the minister take the lead in ensuring the physical and mental well-being of Alberta's children?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of initiatives in that respect, and I'm working very closely with the Minister of Education as well as I am with other ministers because we recognize the importance of this area. In fact, it is one of the central planks of our first-ever wellness forum, that I'll be hosting on December 1, 2, and 3. We're bringing together educators, people from the municipal levels, obviously from the medical community care workers, and others to talk about a team-based approach that will help us achieve even greater results than we're already seeing today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

International Trade Strategy

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations tabled the province's new international strategy. I looked over the document, and it looks nice, but I'm more interested in the substance. To the minister: can she tell us what in this 40-page strategy is different or new?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to be an export-based economy, and this strategy outlines the kinds of things we're going to do, like engaging Albertans that live in other places to get involved in advocacy for the province, forming an internal network to make sure that we're not at cross-purposes between various departments in working together, and working with Alberta businesses abroad. We've had some great successes thus far, and expanding on this advocacy piece will be an important part.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First supplemental to the same minister: can the minister please outline how Albertans and how Alberta businesses were involved in shaping this strategy?

Ms Evans: Well, for one thing, Mr. Speaker, we now have a website, albertacanada.com, that gives us an opportunity for people to have input. The universities, the colleges, the cities, the regional economic development authorities, and the Chamber of Commerce were part of the discussion that helped us put together the materials that are in the report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second supplemental to the same minister. The report says that the province should expand the international offices when economically feasible. To the minister: when might that be, and where would these new offices open?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was asked that question today by the media, and the response I'll give him is the same I have now: until we are back in the black, until our province is seeing that we can grow programs, growing a program like our international offices, which might be very valuable to do and I thoroughly believe in, we'll have to delay until we have the resources. We have got Brazil, the Middle East, and India, where the Premier just was, that are very important trading nations. Opportunities for the future will simply have to wait until we have more resources.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Health System Acute-care Beds

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness has stood in this Legislature day after day to read lists of new hospital beds and programs that he claims to have been opened. The problem is that there's growing concern that what the minister is really doing is opening beds in one area by closing them in another, like rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. Total capacity isn't growing at anywhere near the rate the minister claims. So to the Minister of Health and Wellness: how many of these supposedly expanded services are really just reallocations of existing staff and beds?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member would remember that one of the first acts that I did back in January or February was to ensure that 150 acute-care beds would not be closed in Calgary and approximately 150 or 160 acute-care beds in Edmonton would not be closed. Since then we've asked for more, in fact, to be opened. That's why I keep giving out these numbers, because they're not getting them.

Now, there are a few cases where some beds have been closed, and a commensurate same number might have been opened. The Peter Lougheed Centre is one such example. They closed 120 or 130 beds, somewhere in that neighbourhood, and they opened a brand new wing with the same amount. So there are certain circumstances . . .

Dr. Taft: The minister of health always seems to have this list of new beds to read from when he's cornered, but people are feeling he's played that game too long, and frankly nobody, not even his caucus, trusts him anymore. Will the minister of health quit playing his games and table the total list of acute-care beds by hospital so that we can see whether he's telling the truth or not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The number of new transition beds that have opened are the numbers that I've been rolling out. The number of new hospice beds are the numbers I've been rolling out. There will be some detox beds. There are 21 brand new medical assessment unit beds, that were just announced last week, at the Royal Alex. Those are brand new beds. They also have six observational unit beds. Those are brand new beds. I don't know how much clearer you might want that to be. I could try and give you other numbers if time would permit.

Dr. Taft: Well, those brand new beds are being created because they're closing similar numbers somewhere else in the same facilities. Albertans put their lives on the line when they go to our hospitals, so will the minister put his job on the line? If the medical assessment units that have been opened at various hospitals are just reallocations of existing staff and beds instead of real expansions of total capacity, will he resign for misleading this Assembly?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, you know, the member is so far off base. These are net new beds in most cases. That is additional capacity that's being added. In fact, with respect to the 250 new beds that were announced back on October 20, that results in 230 new full-time equivalents having to be hired. That's new people. I don't know why he's continuing to mislead folks with the information, that is clearly false, which he's giving out. It's just not right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Michener Hill Village

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to hear from constituents and their family members who are concerned about stories they are hearing regarding care services at Michener Hill Village during this transition period. They want assurance that appropriate and adequate care is being provided. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what actions have you taken to assure families and the people of Red Deer that the safety and care of residents is absolutely secure at this facility?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the folks at Alberta Health Services, in fact, were asked to complete a site visit of the Extendicare Michener Hill centre. They did that yesterday, hon. member. They toured this brand new 280-bed facility. As part of that they went in there to look at the standards of care that were being provided and to see where improvements might need to be made. However, as with any major move such as this you have to allow a little bit of time to address some of the challenges that inevitably arise, and that is being done.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the same minister. These concerns have been ongoing since Michener Hill Village opened in September of this year. How can we assure residents and their families that any concerns going forward will be addressed promptly and to their satisfaction?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that, too, is in fact occurring. Alberta Health Services is continuously monitoring all of the sites, including this one. With respect to Extendicare Michener Hill, in fact, they have asked their patient concerns officer to become even more directly involved to ensure that the standards of care are being met so that the safety, security, and quality of service being provided is at the utmost. That is part of this advocate's role.

Mr. Dallas: My second supplemental is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What are you and your department doing to actively support the Michener Hill Village residents? Where are the details?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear that the safety and well-being of all seniors in care is a priority for me and for this government. I understand that there are concerns, and these concerns are taken seriously. Michener Hill was inspected by my department when it opened, was in compliance, and will be inspected again very soon. I have visited Michener Hill several times and spoken to staff, residents, and their families, and many of them are very excited about their new home. I want them to know that my department will continue to monitor this facility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:20

Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, an ER doctor who I'd trust my son's life with and also the parliamentary secretary to the minister of health, made a comment and quite simply said that the Premier has broken his promise. My question is to the minister of health. I want to

know: since the Premier has broken his promise, will you validate the very extreme and sincere comments by the faithful member in your caucus?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the Premier broke any promise. In fact, which other Premier has had the courage to stand up and say that we're going to give health services in this province a five-year funding commitment? Which other province has done that? None, to my knowledge. Which other Premier has said we're going to have a five-year action plan to accompany that and aggressive performance measures, which are still to be coming forward? That's what's different today than a few years ago. Dealing in the past isn't going to solve today's problems. Let's deal with today.

Mr. Boutilier: I asked him if what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark had said was true or not. You're basically saying it's not true, if I understand you correctly. Will you answer the question? What the member wrote was correct, and will you indicate in this House to the people of Alberta that what he wrote was correct? I will wait here until hell freezes over for an answer, and then I'll fight you on the ice.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's so unfortunate when a person who has been elected to this Assembly is so desperate that they have to jump so low into the gutter to try and make a point. You know, it's just so unfortunate. I don't know what the hon. member might have written. I don't have that information whatsoever. What I do know is that there are some overcrowding issues in emergency rooms in some cases, and we're addressing those. There is a plan, and there will be even more progress between now and Christmas.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I will table that, given what the minister has just said. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark copied you on the e-mail, and you're saying you don't know what he wrote. Is what you just said in this House true?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, when this member gets so emotional, you never know what memo he's referring to or what exact e-mail he might be referring to. I get about 300 e-mails per day, and there are occasions when I'm a few days behind. That's just the reality of being in this office. However, if he wants to send me something over so that I can have a look at what it is that he's confusing himself about, I'll be happy to clarify it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Termination Benefits for Former Health Managers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last two years this lavish government set aside \$45 million from the health budget to gold-plate the extra pensions of the 119 very lucky Health Services managers. Jack Davis was one of them, and he now receives a \$22,000 pension for life from this government – \$22,000 a month. To the minister of health: is he your friend? Why was this \$45 million spent on pension top-ups when the needs of patients in emergency rooms were ignored and those needs were so urgent?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the details of the contract that he's talking about, but when a contract gets signed, then the ensuing administration has to honour it. If the numbers are

correct – and I don't know if they are or not. That goes back to a previous era. I'd have to have a look at it.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, it's not a previous era. This minister signed off on the Alberta Health and Wellness annual report, and it's in that report. I would suggest you read it, sir.

Now, again, published reports reveal that in 1995 there was one hospital bed for every 400 Albertans, and now there is one hospital bed for every 515 Albertans. Why did this government fork over \$45 million for gold-plated pensions and not for urgently needed hospital beds?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as of March 31, 2009, my records show there were approximately 7,700 acute-care beds, and as of March 31, 2010, that was increased by 100, up to 7,800 beds. Clearly, the numbers are moving in the right direction. But that's not the only part of it. There are all of these other beds. There are a number of brand new long-term care beds, designated assisted living beds, mental health beds, addiction beds, continuing care beds, palliative, and hospice. There are so many beds out there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that in the last 15 years as we've spent more money lavishly, we have less hospital beds for sick Albertans. Now, again to the minister: why was \$45 million forked over in the last two years for gold-plated pension top-ups when the Norwood Glenrose long-term care facility, which is urgently needed here in Edmonton, was put on hold because there was no money left? You squandered it all.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear that the Health Services budget has received a very significant increase this past year. We've also taken over responsibility for \$1.3 billion of a deficit that they had, and we've assured them of a five-year funding plan. It works like this: 2 per cent to account for inflation growth, 2.5 per cent that will account for population growth and the aging population factor, and 1.5 per cent more for innovation, new procedures, new techniques, new equipment, new pharmaceuticals. That's the stability and predictability that we need and want.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Competitiveness Review

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last several months I have spoken to many business owners and stakeholders in my constituency in Calgary and across the province. Many have identified taxation and regulatory burden imposed at the municipal level as their biggest barrier to competitiveness. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. As we go through reviewing the competitiveness of key industries in our province, are we looking at total tax and regulatory burden imposed on business, including those at the municipal level?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the answer is definitively yes. We are partnering with industry in the competitiveness initiative to look at tax and regulatory factors that do affect the competitiveness of Alberta's businesses in the global market. I expect that there will be a benchmark report released by the Competitiveness Council in the coming month that will show where we stand on tax and fiscal issues and regulatory issues relative to comparable jurisdictions. That will serve as a benchmark for where we go from here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: once this report is produced, how is the government going to reduce the regulatory and tax burden on businesses?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the same four task teams dealing in the areas of agriculture, grains, and oil seeds; petrochemicals; manufacturing; and financial services will give final reports in June of 2011, next year, with specific recommendations to deal with regulatory issues. Also, we have had, of course – this is not something new to the government of Alberta – the Regulatory Review Secretariat since 1999. It's been very successful in reducing the number of regulations in the past and more recently has undertaken to identify cost of regulation as one of the factors that needs to meet approval.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister tell this House what he's doing to ensure that municipalities are doing their part in making our province the best place to invest, operate a business, and create jobs?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are working with municipalities to ensure that Alberta's property taxes stay generally lower than other jurisdictions, other neighbouring provinces. The present financial support that we give to municipalities allows them to do that. Unlike other jurisdictions, Alberta restricts the ability of municipalities to tax property by different classes. In Alberta businesses with major infrastructure must be taxed the same way and at the same rates as some smaller local merchants. We will continue to work with industry and municipalities to make sure that they remain competitive and provide a competitive environment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Long-term Care Beds

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's response to a dire shortage of long-term care beds in this province is to pretend that people don't really need long-term care and to push private-sector assisted or supportive living beds instead, but I have had reports that 30 per cent of beds or more at the Sturgeon hospital and as many as 200 beds a day at the Royal Alex are taken up with patients waiting for long-term care beds. To the minister of health: since hospitals can only move a person from acute or subacute care to a long-term care bed, why is the minister only funding new assisted living care beds? Isn't the government the bed blocker?

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's partly true, but in fact people who are in acute care can also be moved to a transition bed, and that's why we have moved some people into transition beds. That's why in Edmonton, for example, we have about 71 more beds in acute-care hospitals that are comprised of transition beds or medical assessment unit beds or some other types of beds such as the medical observation unit beds, so as to take some pressures off emergency.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Transition beds are limited time, and you've got those transition beds by closing something else.

Now, wait times for ER in Red Deer are the highest in the province for regional hospitals. Will the minister order that the Valley Park Manor long-term care facility remain open to help seniors get off long-term care wait lists and open up hospital beds in Red Deer?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the staff working at the Red Deer regional hospital are doing a fantastic job in emergency and elsewhere. We were just in touch with them through my office a few days ago, and I have to tell you that on certain days this month they got it well settled. There were zero emergency in-patients on a day or two of those past several days, and they're moving in the very right direction with the way that they're providing care there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the minister of health's continuing care strategy, page 12, states that the province will propose incentives for outside partnerships for construction of supportive living accommodations and therefore won't create any new, additional long-term care beds, why is the minister pretending that he is creating long-term care beds when he is not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are. Just to follow through, Extencare Michener in Red Deer just created 280 beds, new beds. That's an additional capacity of about 60 beds, and many of those 280 beds are new long-term care beds.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Commercial Vehicle Weight Regulation

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within Whitecourt-Ste. Anne hundreds of log haul contractors have millions of dollars of investments in their equipment. These folks are the wealth generators in this province. There seems to be a movement within Transportation to make these log contractors and their equipment obsolete, especially their log trailers that have track width less than 2.9 metres and were built prior to 2001. My questions are all to the Minister of Transportation. What's driving this ludicrous change?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell this hon. member that safety is very, very important to this ministry, and that just about drives everything we do within the ministry. Occupational health and safety had concerns about winter weight loads being hauled on trailers with narrower tracks, so a study was done that showed that the wider-tracked trailers were more stable for these heavier winter weights. The changes are being phased in over a 15-year period of time.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, here we go: another study. Boy.

Given that these trailers are meeting the safety standards and are very expensive to replace, will you find a way for this equipment to remain in service?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member brings up a very good point in that narrow-track trailers can be operated very safely within winter weights, but it's a simple matter that these wider-track trailers are even quite a bit more stable. That's one of the reasons that I agreed to extend the original 10-year phase-in until the spring of 2016. This will give industry some extra time to either replace those trailers or retrofit the axles that are on them. This is about finding a balance between safety . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member, please.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept that probably a good way to resolve this issue is giving them that extension.

Are there any new rules or regulations that you're considering that'll cause undue harm to this industry? I need to know that before I go home this weekend.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell this member – I want this member to know – that there's no bigger supporter of this industry than this government. I'd like to point out that it's just the winter weights on narrow trailers that are being phased out, not the trailers themselves. The industry does have a choice and can continue using the narrow trailers after 2016 if they're just hauling the standard weights. We consulted extensively – and I know you want me to sit down now.

Hate Crimes

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Children and Youth Services questioned my motivation for raising the concerns of the Devine family in this Assembly. I can assure her that my only motivation is that I'm trying to do my job, and it's time for the minister to start doing hers. Yesterday in this House the minister stated that her employees are doing good work, but in simple conversation with the Devine family this contradicts that statement. I'd ask: does the minister know what's going on in her department, or does she just not care about the facts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that my department, my staff are firmly focused on the best interests of children. I can also assure you I know that that is my job, that that is their job. I really think it's too bad that this member cannot make that same claim.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. I have a sworn statement here that shows that after the Devines were victims of a vicious home invasion, your staff tried to bully the Devine family, alleging that their social activism detrimentally affected their abilities as parents. I call that victimizing the family, but you seem to think that's a job well done. How about finally admitting your mistake and apologizing to them?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, this member is asking me to take him seriously in bringing whatever it is that he's bringing to the floor of the Assembly in the way that he does. Yesterday in *Hansard* – and it was the day, as you know, that we were recognizing the rights of the child – this member called the situation that he just described now “absurd and, frankly,” that he finds it “a little bit comical.” I can tell you that there's absolutely nothing comical about this situation. Also, I can tell you the information that you have is inaccurate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, what I'd said was that the minister's response to me was absurd and comical, and I'll say that again. Her response today is absurd and comical as well. It's not dealing with this situation.

Instead of being able to help the police with their investigation or to comfort their battered family, the Devine family became the

victim of a witch hunt by Children and Youth Services because of their beliefs. I want to know what the minister's justification is for violating Mr. and Mrs. Devine's fundamental freedoms, contained in section 2 of the Charter.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I go back to this, and I said this earlier, and you know this as well. Even for how you're bringing this to the floor of the Assembly, you were very clear about this. There was absolutely nothing that was in place or a process, policy, procedure that was violated in any way through this ministry. In fact, what you're bringing here is absurd.

I can tell you as well, Mr. Speaker, that my obligations are clearly spelled out in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and in FOIP legislation. It says that the minister

shall preserve confidentiality with respect to personal information that comes to the Minister's . . . attention . . . and shall not disclose or communicate that information except in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Wintertime Highway Maintenance

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the first snowfall there's always a lot of adjustment needed by drivers to adapt to the road conditions, but the experience on highway 2 in the last two days begs some questions to the Minister of Transportation. Mr. Minister, has your department reduced winter maintenance standards on Alberta's busiest highway?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. In fact, our contractors have increased the number of plows and operators on Alberta's major routes in recent years. Thankfully, we had some advance warning of last night's storms, and our contractors were out there creating the best road conditions possible given the weather. Our methods and standards are so good that other provinces and countries have adopted them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, many of my constituents travel highway 2 on a daily basis and are very concerned about the amount of drifting on the highway and want to know why more isn't being done. Does your department have a policy on using snow fences or other methods to combat drifting?

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do use snow fencing in certain areas where drifting is quite common. The area that this member refers to is not traditionally that high a drift area, but when we get winds from unusual directions, such as what occurred last night by Leduc, we will get drifting there. My department and its contractors use a number of different tools in places where they will do the most good.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: what can be done, Mr. Minister, to ensure that plows respond earlier in a snowfall and don't wait until significant accumulations before they get out on the highways?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we know, there's a lot more technology that we have today. Our contractors use a lot of this advanced technology to help them respond proactively to weather

conditions. We have over 75 road weather information stations on our highways that our contractors can access to help them better predict where and when the snow and ice will build up the most or likely be. In addition to the advanced technology, our contractors are out on those roads while the rest of us are sleeping. They get out there, and they check road conditions and get ready to deal with those conditions.

As I mentioned earlier, in my first answer, Mr. Speaker, there are more plows out today than there have been in the past.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 18 members were recognized today. There were 106 questions and responses.

I'd just like to advise hon. members that on Monday international recording artist Gord Bamford will be in the Assembly to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

In a few seconds from now we'll return to our Routine, in about 15 seconds. We have a very tight 18 minutes ahead of us.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Calgary-North Hill Constituency Round-table

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As all hon. members know, the most important aspect of our job is to listen to our constituents. Lately there has been a lot of talk about how social media can make this an easier proposition, and in many respects that sentiment is true. However, I have found that nothing replaces face-to-face contact. Beyond the requirement to listen, it is also important for hon. members to facilitate and engage their constituents in important policy matters and discussions.

For these reasons I put considerable effort into periodically hosting round-table discussions. A week ago Wednesday I hosted the sixth round-table discussion since being elected to this House as the Member for Calgary-North Hill. Last Wednesday's topic was education. More specifically, we discussed ideas put forth in the inspiring action on education framework and future potential changes to the current School Act. Other topics have ranged from discussions on energy, the environment, the economy, provincial budgets, health care, even urban inner-city community challenges. These discussions are purposely focused and have provided me, the representative, with some very broad and specific knowledge about topics from the constituents that I serve.

In total approximately 50 community volunteers, opinion leaders, advocates, and activists in the Calgary-North Hill constituency have participated in one or more of these discussions. These individuals range from seniors, community association board members, high school students, small-business owners, school and parent council volunteers, locally elected representatives, and average citizens with extraordinary passions.

Mr. Speaker, as you are quite aware along with many hon. members of this House, no matter how hard we try, it's impossible to talk to each and every citizen in our constituency. However, utilizing a format such as a round-table discussion that includes a good cross-section of participants is a great opportunity to get feedback on important issues. I want to thank all of those that have participated not only for their time but their passion and dedication in making our province and the communities in Calgary-North Hill the best places to live, work, invest, and raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are proud of the outstanding accomplishments of the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company over the past 40 years. Many of us have enjoyed watching one or more of their exciting performances. Founded in 1969 by Chester and Luba Kuc, the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company began with 19 dancers. The company has grown to include four performing groups, a dance school, and over 100 dancers at various levels.

Based in Edmonton, the company is a leader of Ukrainian dance in Canada. Cheremosh still passionately pursues the goals of its first artistic director, modernizing Ukrainian folk dance and conveying the history and values of Ukrainian people dramatically and effectively through dance. They entertain audiences and further the growth of the rich Ukrainian culture in Canada.

Since 1984 Cheremosh School of Dance has been hosting an annual festival. Every year more than 3,000 Ukrainian dancers gather to perform and share their passion for dance. The Cheremosh festival is one of the largest of its kind in North America. It is a rewarding, constructive, and enjoyable event highly anticipated by Ukrainian dancers of all ages. Through discipline, determination, and hard work Cheremosh has earned phenomenal local, national, and international success. The organization, mostly driven by volunteers, many of them former dancers, continues to grow and foster excellence in the richly intense energy and spirit of Ukrainian dance.

For over four decades Cheremosh has not only trained hundreds of dancers to perform; it has strengthened and satisfied their desire to understand and celebrate Ukrainian heritage and has nurtured a connection with roots steeped in stories and bright colours. Cheremosh has provided dancers, volunteers, and tens of thousands of Canadians who witness the unforgettable cultural entertainment experiences a glimpse of the rich mosaic of Canadian and Ukrainian culture.

We in the NDP caucus celebrate the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company's milestone 40th anniversary. We look forward to Cheremosh continuing to thrive and inspire Albertans for decades to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

National Philanthropy Week

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year in November during National Philanthropy Week Albertans take time to recognize the contributions volunteers, donors, and philanthropists make to our province. While one can measure the amount of money donated or time given, it is those intangible effects of generosity and support that are so important to our communities. Whether it is through Alberta's enhanced charitable tax credit, the highest in Canada, or formally recognizing Albertans here in this Assembly, our government understands that at the heart of a healthy, vibrant province are the men, women, and youth who continually put community before self. The last Statistics Canada summary on charitable donations noted that Albertans made a \$1.4 billion contribution in charitable donations in 2007, so it is apparent that Albertans are some of the most generous, giving people anywhere.

But in an ever-changing social and economic landscape charitable and nonprofit organizations are not without struggles. A group can only go so far with monetary support alone. I'm very proud that our government, through a series of ongoing consultations and dialogue with charitable groups across the province, has shown that in order

to improve things, we must listen and work together. It will be through innovation and thinking outside the box that we will create a thriving charitable and nonprofit sector. A recent *Globe and Mail* article spoke about businesses forgoing typical cheque-writing to support charities. Instead, they're using their business know-how to create efficiency; have measurable, attainable goals; and leave a sustainable, lasting legacy to help those groups to thrive.

Mr. Speaker, my call to action for the members of this House and for all Albertans is to continue to give, continue to encourage youth to volunteer, and continue to help those in need. It is that spirit of generosity that builds and sustains healthy and vibrant Alberta communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to give notice that at the appropriate time I will ask that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the state of emergency medical services in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, November 22, 2010, motions for return 14 and 15 will be dealt with.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the following annual reports: the 2009 annual report from the College of Alberta Denturists, the 2009 annual report from the Alberta College of Medical Laboratory Technologists, and the 2009 annual report of the Alberta College of Optometrists.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies to the Legislative Assembly of a proposed petition to be presented. It's a request that the Assembly "use the present conditions in the lives of Alberta's children as the lens to view and revise its policies to eliminate child poverty and its many manifestations in Alberta."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling, as you directed, a sampling of the hundreds of e-mails I continue to receive from citizens opposed to Bill 29: from Athabasca Jennifer Luckay, Kate Neigel; from Banff Leslie de Bie, Gary and Shirley Truscott; from Black Diamond Peter Oxtoby; from Bon Accord Pamela Stuart; from Bragg Creek Sharon Bayer; from Calgary Ryan Ancelin, Alan MacKeigan, Gerry Richardson, Heather Hood, Carmen Gustafson, Alistair Des Moulins, Josee Archambault, Greg Fredeen, Polly Lee

Knowlton Cockett, Alla Guelber, Sonia Gonsalves, Christina Pickles, Gord James, Sarah Elmeligi, Marijke van Wijk, Lisa Oldridge, Dirk van Wyk, Philip Sarsons, Shannon Curry, Aspen Uzelman, David Crowe, Neal Sanche, Robert Johnston, Bryon Benn, Elspeth Wilman, Jackie Blair, Paul Ruchlewicz, Sheila Tyminski, Thomas Chau, Sarah Makson, James Potter, Scott McKay, Tys von Gaza, Sheila Brown-Eckersley, Chris Hooymans, Gerry Drotar, Libby Hancock, Payman Janbakhsh, Cameron Ansorger, Gord Percival, Diane Roylance, Graciela Pelayo, Lana Stone, Wendy Iredale, Richard Campbell, David Watt, Eileen March, Jonathan Lytton, Gregor Brandt, Jacqueline Louie, Rob Davidson, Ken Schmaltz, Tammy Duncan, Marg Meisner, Meagan Abbott, Patrick Kelly, Julia Pulwiczki, Samantha Weyers; from Canmore Chris Turner, Eric Langshaw, Alex Mowat, Alan and Heather MacFadyen, Karen Halkier, Shauna Morey, Patrick Delaney, Geoff Hill, Jen Olson, Adam Burrell, Joanne Hill; from Caroline Dennis Traverse; from Cochrane Pamela Banting, Linda Mackay; from Coleman Richard Cooke; from Cowley Jillian Lynn Lawson; from Dalemead Corinne Dahm; from Devon Richard Cairney; from Edmonton Chris Buyze, Hannah Milne, Franki Harrogate, Ted Donald Campbell, Leah Girhiny, Brian Stephens, Bill Pearce, Michael Hunter, Karen Wall, Linelle Henderson, Kamren Farr, Bernhard Brinkmann, Erin Pollock, Brian Ladd, David Poetker, Craig Dockrill, Brad Jones, Tannis Fong, Josefine Singh, Michael T. Roeder, Chris Vallee, Pamela Wight, Marianne Kennedy, Mike Dickey, Bali Symenuk, Adrian Thyse, Clay Ellis, David Roberts, Marshall Boyd, Bridget Linder, Joshua Krabbe, Amy Fung, Noelle Hajjar, Dan Archambault, Don McCabe, Ken Collett, Jenny Meers, Kristy Lerch, Ben Cates, Jason Marcus; from Exshaw Sue Arlidge; from Fort McMurray Melissa Grogan; from Fort Saskatchewan Jeff Zukiwsky; from Grande Prairie Carley Termeer, Nicole Martens; from Granum Melanee Thomas; from Jasper Carol Doering; from Lethbridge Barbara Dickinson, Annie Martin; from Priddis Bob Toothill; from Red Deer Mrs. B.J. Denhaan; from Sherwood Park Ryan Melnichuk, Jeff Manchak, Chris Bordato; from Stony Plain Heather Plaizier; from Strathmore Lori Downey; from Three Hills Brianne Lovstrom; from Vegreville Kurt Klingbeil; from Vancouver, B.C., Patrick Thompson, Peter Gumplinger, Joanna Bernat; from Nelson, B.C., Shaun King; from Quathias Cove, B.C., Don McEachern; from Gold River, B.C., Joanne Folkins; from Victoria, B.C., James Ramsay; from Quesnel, B.C., Tim Landon; from Kelowna, B.C., Joan Uzelman; from West Vancouver, B.C., Wilfrid Lamb; from Salt Spring Island, B.C., Karen Clark; from Sooke, B.C., Linda Hughes; from Squamish, B.C., Theodora Carroll; from Sussex, New Brunswick, Gart Bishop; from Toronto, Ontario, Mandy Newby, Stephanie Forder, Benjamin Liadsky, Stephanie Wood; from Ottawa, Ontario, Frithjof Lutscher, Celeste Côté, Erin Hope, Sara Whitteker; from Goderich, Ontario, Rian Allen; from Montreal, Quebec, Leni Parker; from Saint-Laurent Doris Potter; from Gatineau Estelle Hjertaas, Meredith James; from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Andrew Johnson, Gretchen Peterson, Andrew McKinlay; from Regina Jennifer Doucette; from Newfoundland Lois Bateman. [interjections] I will save the others, Mr. Speaker, for another day.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're going through the tablings. If you have their names, continue and get the tabling out of the way.

Mr. Chase: Okay. It's quick. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your permission to do so. From St. John's, Newfoundland, John Jacobs; from Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia, Michael Slusar; from the U.S. Leslie Waters, Christine Lynch, Lisa Jensen, Russell Schumann; and Andrea Pfeuti.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling today. It's an affidavit of Mr. Jason Devine that goes through in detail the incident that happened at his house and then his interactions with child services after.

Thank you very much.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point under Standing Order 7(6) could I ask the Government House Leader to please share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week beginning November 22 and the government business beginning that evening.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, November 22, in the evening we would anticipate dealing with second reading on bills 21, 22, and 29 and then in committee bills 17, 24, 26, and 27 and as per the Order Paper.

On the 23rd in the afternoon in Committee of the Whole we would anticipate spending time on Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, and, time permitting, Bill 20, the Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010, and Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010, and as per the Order Paper. In the evening in Committee of the Whole bills 21, 22, 28, 29, 17, and 26 and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, November 24, we would anticipate spending the afternoon on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, but as per the Order Paper. In the evening Committee of the Whole on Bill 17 and third readings of bills 20, 21, 22, 26, and 28, depending on earlier progress and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, November 25, in the afternoon third reading on bills 24, 26, 28, 29, depending on progress and as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in about a minute and a half we're going to have an interesting question. The chair has ruled in the past that if he had to deal with a point of order or point of privilege and if it started before the 3 o'clock provision with respect to Standing Order 7, we would continue beyond that. In no other circumstances have we ever continued beyond 3 o'clock unless there has been a request made to continue to deal with the business identified in the Routine. We do have an application from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre under Standing Order 30. We will go beyond 3 o'clock. I must recognize now that I guess in less than a minute I'd have to get up and advise all members if I'm going to permit this to go on. This is the first time we've had this that I can recall. So I'm going to sit down and see if anybody is going to present any motion basically saying that we can go beyond 3 o'clock with a complete Routine.

Ms Blakeman: I would ask the support and permission of the House to waive the standing order referred to by the Speaker in order to proceed with the Standing Order 30 that I had given notice of earlier.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has rightfully given notice for a Standing Order 30 application. Standing Order

7(7) says, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." The Speaker has notified the Assembly, and a member has asked for unanimous consent to go beyond 3 o'clock to conclude this business. So I will ask the question. I will ask the question, only one question. Is any member opposed to us continuing the Routine beyond 3 o'clock? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, please proceed.

3:00

Emergency Debate

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, and thank you for the support of the House to allow me to continue. I appreciate that. The text of the motion has been circulated to everyone, but to put it on the record, I'm asking under Standing Order 30 of our standing orders here that the ordinary business of the [House] be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the state of emergency medical services in this province.

Mr. Speaker, a similar Standing Order 30 request was brought to suspend the regular business of this House some three weeks ago, and since then we've been unable to find many improvements. Mostly there's been only further decay in the system. Indeed, doctors that I've consulted say that there are periodic improvements, but those are relatively transient and complicated often by other factors like training and availability of home care. I'm conscious of the citations available under *Beauchesne* and the *House of Commons*, that I am arguing the urgency of the matter, but the issue of a crisis in emergency care across Alberta is compounding itself, with the urgency of the situation continuing and exacerbating.

For example, Mr. Speaker, we have had a hanging in an emergency room, and this absolutely should not happen. Aside from what has happened to the individual and their family, this person was in a care facility. There was not capacity to adequately supervise that individual, so we have someone who was in obvious distress and in a moment of vulnerability was able to hang himself in an emergency department. Aside from what happened to that individual, just imagine being the staffperson who eventually found him.

We've had another miscarriage in a waiting room in Calgary. Now, that was brought to the attention of the government in the July 2008 memo from the ER doctors, and there has been no improvement and no change there. We've had a child dying in emergency with a ruptured appendix shortly after their arrival, and that reflects a failure to respond with full capacity. They did not have the adequate resources.

None of the 322 cases detailed by the ER docs recently are condemning in and of themselves, but the totality is that the system is not working. Other problems persist, like the number of doctors available, a lack of general long-term beds to discharge people to, and the lack of fulfillment of a mental health strategy.

I looked under the *House of Commons* 689 to 698 around urgent and important and requiring urgent consideration. While there was some consideration possible under the previously published projected government business, under the House leaders' business published today and circulated to everyone in the opposition and to members of the government caucus, that bill is not up for debate today. So under *House of Commons* on page 693 we are talking that

the matter is related to a genuine emergency, and the importance and specificity of the issue is important. While we talk often about problems throughout the care system, we are dealing specifically here with a failure of resources, trained staff available, and ways of addressing the wait-list times in the ERs. That is immediately relevant and of attention and concern through the nation, which fulfills that part of the *House of Commons* requirements.

When I go to *Beauchesne* 387 and 389, indicating the primary concern and specifically whether there's opportunity for debate elsewhere, I have a long list that I usually run through for the Speaker, but I will note here that it's not before the courts, the ER issue was not specifically mentioned in the throne speech, there's no press release that I've seen, nor is there a budget that is going to deal with this imminently, no notification of a supplementary supply budget. Under opportunities for debate the Speaker himself often asks us to understand that Oral Question Period is not a place for debate. Under a government bill on the Order Paper we do have Bill 17. As I said, it's not on the House leaders' agreement of business today, and that bill specifically leaves all program details to regulations, so we have no idea how the government would respond specifically to this.

I also looked under *Beauchesne* 659 around second readings – and the second reading we've had earlier this week – specifically saying that this is about the whole principle; it is not regular to discuss in detail the clauses of the bill. When I look at section of 689, on Committee of the Whole, it indicates that there can be motions brought forward, but it is not on the Order Paper until next week, and we are not willing to let the intervening five days pass without the opportunity for more detailed debate on this specific issue. Based on the numbers that we are seeing for the last period of time, we essentially have a flatline in what's happening in our emergency. Even though the government has had this detailed since 2008, these lines are flat. So not enough is happening there.

The Royal Alex has the highest-volume ER in the province. The eight-hour response time over the last week has decreased, Mr. Speaker. According to the weekly emergency department length-of-stay summary, the wait times have increased. There's a percentage change there, and it's not to the good side.

Also, we're coming into the cold and flu season, where ERs are even more pressed dealing with the frail, the elderly, the homeless, and other disadvantaged, particularly the downtown emergencies. So the urgency of this issue continues for the House and for Albertans.

It's so urgent, Mr. Speaker, that a government parliamentary secretary has broken ranks to directly criticize the Premier, the minister, and the government. I can think of no better way to illustrate the seriousness of this issue. If I may quote directly from that member's memo, he says,

please do not feel comforted that healthcare will be any better with AHS' inadequate plan to deal with the crisis [that's the ER crisis] and disasters that we will be facing in the 4 winter months ahead," referring, as I said, to an influx of the cold and flu season.

I ask the Speaker to please rule in favour of this motion and put the question to a vote of the Assembly. Thank you for hearing me today.

The Speaker: Let's really be brief – okay? – because I'm prepared to deal with this matter.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I don't think the system is in a crisis as has been described.

People need to know that there will be emergency care given to them if it's required. Nonetheless, I am prepared to support this motion, and I want to explain, very briefly, why. When a similar motion – and I don't know the exact wording of it – was brought forward on October 25, I knew that we would be bringing the Alberta Health Act into the Assembly and that there would be a chance to debate all of these issues. I was correct in assuming that, because the debate surrounding Bill 17 so far has been very varied, wide ranging, and so on.

Nonetheless, that was then, and this is now, as they say. We won't have another opportunity to meet in this Assembly for about four days as has been just mentioned. We had thought that we might do some additional debate on the bill last night. That was not able to occur because time was consumed with other important bills, and, similarly, it couldn't be scheduled for today. Nonetheless, I will support this motion, Mr. Speaker, for those reasons as well the fact that it would give us the chance to also clarify some of the misconceptions that some people may have. I'm sure there will be some new information brought forward as well.

It will give us a chance to talk in more detail about the plan that is coming forward to address this issue. I'll have a chance during the debate portion to talk about some of the directions that I have given, some of the requests I have given to Alberta Health Services, including things like the hiring of new staff, opening more new beds. We can talk a little bit more about some of the monthly averages, which are starting to come in the right direction. They're not moving fast enough for me to feel comfortable with it, especially with the flu season, which is now here. It wasn't here three weeks ago, but it's certainly here now, and we're seeing some cases. And I'll be able to elaborate a little bit on the discussion I had with the doctors.

So for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be very pleased to support this motion for a debate in this Assembly on the overcrowding pressures in some of our emergency rooms in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm not going to recognize any other members on this point, please. I'm going to deal with the decision. We have a limited amount of time on Thursday afternoon. It's 10 minutes after 3. I will put the question, "Shall the debate in the urgent matter proceed?" because I've come to my conclusion that the request for leave is in order, but I want to have on the record why. First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Centre did meet the requirement of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office and the parliamentary authorities on the subject: *Beauchesne* in paragraphs 387 to 390 and pages 689 to 698 of the *House of Commons*.

3:10

I want to just clarify what happened on October 25. Basically, one of the rules says that you cannot deal with the same matter twice in the same session of the Legislature. On October 25 the House determined that the matter would not proceed, so in fact from that semantic thing we did not deal with it on that particular day.

One of the considerations that the chair must take into account with respect to all of this is the general willingness of the House to proceed with this debate. I indicated that I had already made up my mind before even listening to the arguments, despite the merit of the arguments, the background basis for this, including the fact that since we have started to sit this fall, there have been 54 questions in question period with respect to this subject, and there have been 108 supplementaries with respect to it. Clearly, that's 162 questions and responses on this one particular matter, notwithstanding that the

Alberta Health Act has passed second reading and is in committee. There was an opportunity there. But it just seems to be of general willingness and interest because looking at the questions that were raised, they came from all corners of the House.

The situation is very, very simple. I shall ask the question, "Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?" after indicating the request for leave is in order. If 15 or more members rise, the debate will proceed. Each member who wishes to speak will have 10 minutes to do so until all who wish to speak have done so or until the normal hour of adjournment. Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

[Several members rose]

The Speaker: Without a count it's very clear in my mind that there are beyond 15, so I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to proceed with the debate. Then I will recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Did you allow me to speak first?

The Speaker: Absolutely. It's your motion. Go forward.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will cede my place to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. We're dealing with 10 minutes' speaking time, right?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, indeed, for each individual that speaks.

The Speaker: Okay. Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I can't think of anything more urgent that we discuss in our Legislature than this crisis in health care, that has been called close to collapse by a number of most revered professionals in the system.

I want to put a little context around it. I see emergency as the canary in the mine shaft. In that sense we have a whole system that is straining under poor leadership and poor management. The elimination of beds over the last 15 years; the lack of clear, distinct planning for dealing with the increasing pressures on the system; the inappropriate disruptions to the system; major reorganizations on three occasions in 15 years; and the failure of a particular structure now, which was based on no evidence and no world experience, have pushed us over the top in terms of the ability of a system to respond to either the regional or the more major urban issues that we've been dealing with with a growing and aging population, many of the things that we've heard so much about.

To get to the point, emergency room physicians, who are on the front lines of these issues, have said as far back as 2007, but in 2008 322 cases itemized as very poor care, unacceptable care, risky care, and preventable deaths went to the former minister of health, now the Energy minister, and to the Premier with specifics and requests for action. These were not even responded to. The emergency physicians did not get a response from that very serious request with itemized violations of basic medical care.

To bring us up to the present, there is an ongoing strain on the system, that doctors continue to report on, with intermittent deaths,

in the case of a suicide. Indeed, it's my understanding that there were 12 suicides in hospital in these last four years. A recent suicide in the emergency department itself, a child with a burst appendix that did not survive within the emergency department because of lack of capacity to respond in time, and, frankly, the hundreds of cases that are reported by individuals to members about the suboptimal care, the delays, the frustrations in emergency departments for them and for their family members: this is real, human suffering that has not been seen in this province in the last 50 years. There is an urgent need, then, for action.

What is our solution? We have suggested a five-point plan called back to basics. Return to some regional delivery system. We cannot have one board managing a system of 90,000 employees across this province, ranging from prevention programs through early intervention, investigation, treatment, addictions, cancer, and end-of-life care. It is simply impossible to manage this from a single board.

The second recommendation is that we mobilize more family physicians. There are retired physicians. There are foreign-trained medical graduates who are prepared to do work in their communities and nurses who are retired and able to come to the fore.

The third has to do with long-term care beds. We have been at this for several years, and this government, in order to make short-term savings, is compromising the care for long-term individuals.

Home care services. These have been cut over the years, only recently put back on the front plate and being funded. If old people and disabled people are not supported in their communities, in their homes, they are going to end up in hospitals and in doctors' offices unnecessarily.

The fourth element is prevention. A lot of this is about early intervention, identification of problems, rehabilitation of people who shouldn't even be in hospitals and maintaining them as well and productive in the community.

Those, Mr. Speaker, are the essence of what I think would solve the problem. In the most urgent of the cases we believe that a task force is now needed in the short term to move the system and the Health Services Board, that is not able to deal with this, clearly. After two years of flatlining, as we've seen, in emergency wait times, we need a task force made up partly of professionals in the system who see and deal with these issues on the front line. We need an array of experts that will advise this Health Services Board and this minister in the very short term to turn this around.

Christmas season is only going to increase the demands on the system, with possibilities of the flu pandemic, vehicle accidents: all kinds of potential problems that are only going to aggravate the situation. A task force is needed because, clearly, the existing advice and this existing board are not up to the task.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have received quite a number of notes. We will proceed in the following order for the next four: the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know this is a highly charged and emotional debate, and it's one that I'm going to enjoy listening to and participating in. I want to make a couple of remarks in this regard, specifically with respect to the overcrowding pressures that are occurring in some of our major acute-care centres in Edmonton and Calgary in particular. That is not to say that I'm not aware of some other locations such as Red Deer and so on where pressures also exist.

Nonetheless, I want to start by talking a little bit about the bottlenecks because this was the major subject of the discussion that I had with the head of emergency room doctors in Alberta just three weeks ago or so. Some of those bottlenecks we've already addressed, Mr. Speaker. We know, for example, that people who come into emergency rooms sometimes require overnight stay, what we call admitted patients or emergency in-patients. We also know that when the people then go looking to find a bed for them outside the emergency rooms, the first place they go is normally to the acute-care side of the hospital: where can we send these patients who need overnight accommodations?

However, when they get there, they find out that in many cases the acute-care beds are already full, so that's where some of the bottlenecks start to occur. That's why it's important to know that we have a plan this year to open 1,300 additional spaces in the community called continuing care beds. That's comprised of a different and a more comprehensive list of bed types: DAL, supportive living, long-term care, et cetera. However, we have 1,300 of those beds that are currently being worked on. Eight hundred, Mr. Speaker, have already been opened; 500 more will be opened very soon, before the end of March. That will help.

3:20

Similarly, a number of the statistics that I've already given I'd like to give again, just so people know that this issue is serious, and we're taking it seriously, and so is Alberta Health Services. We are working on it very aggressively. Those figures include the additional transition beds that were already opened at the Royal Alex and are helping. Obviously, there's more that still needs to be done, as our figures would show. We're talking about additional medical assessment unit beds, that I've talked about, that have opened there – 21 more of them have opened – four new transition beds at the University of Alberta hospital, another pressure point in the system; and as of just this week, I believe, 14 more transition beds that were opened at the U of A or will be within a day or two.

We're also talking about additional seniors' mental health beds that are going to be available at Villa Caritas, not just 106 but an additional 44 because that entire site now is going to deal with mental health beds.

In December 12 more detox beds will open in the community here in Edmonton.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, in Calgary. We know that at the Rockyview in September an additional 20 transition beds were opened, and an additional 32 transition beds were opened at the Peter Lougheed. We know that during the weeks of November 2 and November 9 a combination of 12 more transition beds were opened at the Foothills hospital in Calgary. We know that this week they're on track to open 12 more transition beds at the Rockyview hospital. We also know that by the end of this month 20 more hospice beds will be opened at the Peter Lougheed hospital and that by the Christmas period of December 15 an additional 26 transition beds will open at the Foothills.

There's a lot. I'm not going to read all of the good news, but there is something that is being done here. That's part 1 of the plan, to open up more beds to address what is some of the bottlenecks. Those beds are in the community, and some of those beds are in the acute-care hospitals, where emergencies are dealt with.

Secondly, I also want to talk about the additional staff that are being hired to deal with some of these issues; for example, staffing requirements for 250 beds that were announced on October 20 for Edmonton and Calgary for the period of October to December. We know that approximately 230 FTEs will need to be hired to deal with the additional beds that are being opened. Acute-care beds:

approximately 120 of them, Edmonton and Calgary combined. A total of 164 FTEs need to be added, and that will include RNs, LPNs, health care aides, allied health persons such as physiotherapists, other support staff, and so on.

There are a number of additional people that will be needed for the approximately 130 additional continuing care beds that are opening in that same period in Edmonton and Calgary combined. A total of 65 FTEs will be needed for that, including RNs, LPNs, health care aides, and so on. With 120 acute-care beds coming on, which are a part of the 250 I alluded to, about 164 FTEs will be needed there. I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I want to move to the next point.

The next point deals with some of the monthly averages. I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the gains have not maybe been as great as any of us would like. But since we've looked at the September averages, looking forward to the first 14, 15 days of this month, I could tell you that the averages are starting to come down. They're coming down slowly, and they're not coming down in all cases – let's be clear – but they are starting to show signs of improvement.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Health and Wellness is that we do an even more aggressive job to bring those numbers down to where we really need to see them so that we can be better prepared as a health system to deal with what is sure to come, and that is the flu season. That will hit us. Well, it's already starting to hit us, but it will hit us even more. We're doing a lot to start moving those monthly averages down.

The first part is the beds. More beds in the community and more beds in acute-care hospitals, as I've said, will help.

The second part of this is to deal with other issues such as what's causing people to go to emergency in the first place. Now, there are two basic categories here that the doctors have explained to me, and remember that these are their words. Number one are the people with true emergencies. They have a real emergency need, and they should be going to the hospital, and they will continue to be given the best care possible when they do.

But then there's another group of people who perhaps don't really have emergency room types of situations, and they could be and should be going somewhere else. That's part of this Rubik's cube. They need to go to a doctor in some cases. Perhaps they need to go to an urgent care centre or to a medical clinic or wherever they need to go, but in many cases they can't access that particular system. In some cases in the province there might be doctor shortages, and we're addressing that as well. So it's not just one simple thing.

One thing that is going to help a lot is a third part. The third point is with respect to home care. Now, this came up in the House today, and the fact is that we're increasing home-care funding through AHS by about 7 or 8 per cent this year. It's one of the more significant increases in terms of that aspect of their budget, and there will be over \$400 million that will be going toward home care. Now, that number without some relevance maybe doesn't connect with everybody the way that I would hope it might. What it means, Mr. Speaker, is that people who are in home-care services can expect to have better and more home-care service available for them. That will keep them getting the service they need, perhaps, in their homes versus having to go to emergency.

That doesn't mean that if they have an emergency, they shouldn't come to emergency. Of course they should. That's why we have two pilot projects in this respect. We have one in the Misericordia hospital since January, I believe, and one in Calgary. What it requires is for somebody from home care to be right there in the hospital emergency room doing their own sort of triaging, if you will, to help those people right away and then ensure that the plan is in place so that when they are discharged, they can go straight home and know that the supports are going to be there.

That leads me to my fourth point, and that is with the discharge protocols. We have to talk more with docs to see what kind of help we can get on rearranging our discharge protocols. At the moment it's seldom the case that doctors are discharging on Saturdays and Sundays. I mean, they need a break. They need some time off, too. We have to respect that. But if we could figure out a way to start discharging on Saturdays and Sundays, that would free things up for what is usually the busiest day in emergency, and that is Mondays. In other words, we could open up some beds by looking at discharge protocols that would speed that process along. That's another thing that we're working hard on.

My next point is with respect to the asks and the directions that I asked Alberta Health Services to pursue. I asked them to ensure that the performance measures surrounding people who are nonadmitted patients in emergency – in other words, those who do not require an overnight stay – should not exceed four hours of stay. Now, that's a target, Mr. Speaker, and that might have to have an ebb and a flow depending on certain overcrowding pressures that will occur from time to time. I've asked them to improve their protocols by Christmastime for that four-hour group and also for the targeted group in the eight-hour section. The eight-hour section: that group is people who will need an overnight bed for one or two or more nights.

So there's a lot being done, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. We have 61 minutes, and the next five speakers will be the following: the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, then Edmonton-Riverview, then Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, it saddens me that I have to stand up and once again debate the crisis situation in health care. Albertans are tired of waiting. They are tired of waiting for a family doctor. They are tired of waiting for an MRI. They are tired of waiting for their hip surgery. They are tired of waiting to see a specialist. They are tired of waiting to get seen in an emergency room and having to wait for hours. Quite frankly, Albertans are sick and tired of waiting for the care that they need.

Doctors and nurses and other health care professionals are tired of waiting, too. That's why they're coming to us, the Wildrose, and they're sharing their concerns, and they're sharing their heart-felt stories. They are sick of government promises as patients.

The superboard, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, has let Albertans down. The government has let Albertans down. The minister has let Albertans down. The PC caucus has let Albertans down, other than one brave MLA from Edmonton-Meadowlark.

3:30

Albertans are saying, Mr. Speaker, that they want this government to pay attention and they want this government to listen to what they have to say. Doctors and nurses, as I indicated, are tired of waiting. Albertans, quite frankly, are saying: show me the beds. No one can seem to give us an accurate count of beds that are available. How many are open? How many have been closed? All we hear is announcement after announcement. The acute-care bed ratio is 1.9 per thousand on average in Canada. In Alberta it is 1.2 currently, serving a population in Calgary of 750,000. We have over 1 million people there. Where are the beds?

Mr. Speaker, having been a minister of the Crown, I know how important accountability is. Albertans expect the buck has to stop somewhere. When there isn't any accountability, Albertans get lost

in the shuffle. What I can tell you and what I've heard over the last many, many months is that Albertans want the department to run efficiently, they want the department to run with clear outcomes, they want the government to clearly assess needs, and they want the government to clearly set out priorities. More importantly, they want the Premier and the minister of health to answer the questions honestly.

What do Albertans want to see? They want a family doctor. They want cancer treatment in two weeks, not eight. They don't want to wait in pain for months or years to have a necessary procedure. They don't want to have to wait 18 months for a colonoscopy. They want to have a family doctor, and they want to be seen in the emergency sooner.

Let me give you an example of what I mean, Mr. Speaker, as MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek and as the health critic for the Wildrose. The Wildrose plan calls for immediate action of part-time and retired RNs and LPNs to staff ERs; increased administrative support staff for doctors and nurses, freeing up medical professions to focus a hundred per cent on their patients so they're not spending 10 per cent working on their computer as the new directive from Alberta Health Services. Designate a chief medical officer for every Alberta hospital, and empower them with the authority to make the decisions about the hospital units, even if it means usurping Alberta Health Services' directives. Move healthy seniors in hospitals waiting for home care, long-term care, or assisted living spaces along with nurses and support staff into, if we have to, temporary living accommodations until more permanent housing is available; accelerate the building of long-term care and assisted living facilities as well as home care.

Mr. Speaker, I can't praise enough the work being done by our medical professions. Our front-line staff work tirelessly to provide the care Albertans so urgently need day in and day out in this province. We also need to bring in different types of staff to relieve pressure in the system. Nurse practitioners are really underutilized in this province. They are highly experienced and educated professionals. They can take the pressure off our family doctors, and they can speed up access in our emergency rooms.

The minister often talks about needing more time or more progress to see that things are done. He's consulting. He's meeting. He's touring. People have basic questions for the minister: what is timely care? What is reasonable access? The Alberta Health Act bill puts that part in the charter but doesn't answer any of these questions. We've seen what this government has done before, quite frankly, and we've got lessons to learn from that. We've got the Mazankowski report. We've got the Kirby report. We've got the Graydon report. We've got summits. We've got meetings. We've got conferences. We've got committees. Albertans are tired. They want action, and they just want us to fix the system.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a few ideas of what will work, taken straight from the great advice this government has so wrongly ignored and what Albertans have told us: Albertans more than anything want choice. Right now they have to just take what they get. If they don't like their doctor and they want to find a different one, they don't have that choice. They can't even find a family doctor, quite frankly. Patients need to get the right care, at the right time, and in the right place.

There are some things that I have sometimes seen with my own mom, and, quite frankly, it's appalling. Hundreds of seniors are in hospital beds when they should be in a home. If funding followed the patient, that would happen. A sick patient would get treatment, not a chair in a hallway. A sustainable system needs the staff to run the system. We need doctors and nurses doing the jobs they've been trained for. We have doctors not being able to work because of

doing manual data entry. We have nurses changing sheets. We need the right staff doing the job that they were trained to do. If we're going to look at sustainability, we must think about our senior population like my mom and, I suppose, many others who have moms. Those who have worked so hard in life need the proper care and the support that they deserve.

The government's records on seniors is dismal, to say the least. They brought out the drug plan, and that was a failure. The shortage of beds is appalling. Seniors' health is in a crisis also. Not only do we have seniors in the wrong bed and not getting the right care; they're now getting nicked-and-dimed to death. Nursing home residents are providing care to other nursing home residents because others are too poor to afford help taking their medication. Medication assistance from an LPN now costs a senior \$260 a month. Bathing, Mr. Speaker, is \$20 a bath. A night check from a PCN costs \$7. Albertans don't want this. Albertans want solutions, and that's what we're hearing. They know how little home care is available. Seniors, as the Premier has gone on and on, want to stay in their own home or they want to stay together. Well, guess what? That's impossible because there's nowhere for them to go.

I have a mother in a seniors' home. I listen to the seniors at her seniors' residence. Seniors come into my constituency office to tell me what they're facing. Seniors are not being properly taken care of together. I'm dealing with a senior right now whose husband is a two-hour bus ride away from her because – guess what? – there's no room for him, and the facility they're currently in cannot take care of him.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are others that want to speak, and I know time is very valuable. I appreciate the member bringing this emergency debate forward. I hope that the minister is listening, quite frankly. You sometimes need to realize why God gave you two ears and one mouth.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you left 15 seconds on the table; it's 10 minutes maximum.

I have a list of 17 members who want to speak. We have 40 minutes left, so we'll go in the following order for the next four or five speakers. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate this afternoon. I have a number of observations to offer, and perhaps the most important one arises as a result of the wording that is presented in this motion. The Member for Edmonton-Centre presented as the rationale for the motion for an emergency debate, "the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the state of emergency medical services in the province." Well, Mr. Speaker, at least on my own behalf and on behalf of the members of this caucus I want to make it clear that I do not consider the health and safety of all Albertans to be at risk as a result of the current state of affairs in emergency medical services. [interjections] I think that's a bold allegation for which the members – that's their own wording – quite frankly, should be held to account.

If there is a duty of any of us sitting in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, it is, first of all, to recognize the tireless effort and dedication of the health professionals that deliver care in this province and all of the people that support them and, secondly, to express at least on our

own behalf that we have confidence in the care that they provide, we have appreciation for their dedication to the people of this province, and we by no means believe that their work is in vain. [interjections]

3:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have such a shortage of time. I recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. He has the floor. Let's listen.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, very much. I guess my second observation with the debate so far is that we appear to have a number of us standing here who have some ideas around policy options. There are basically two areas of concern, I believe, that we should be addressing.

The first, with respect specifically to emergency medical services in the province, is the question of how we are managing surge capacity issues in the system in response to some current conditions. Those conditions include a high number of visits to emergency rooms from people who don't have family doctors. They include the high occupancy of acute-care beds at the present time with people who are waiting for continuing care. They include a number of other factors, the resolution of which is directly tied to our ability to manage resources within the system, not the members of this House but the people that are appointed to deliver the care, the board members of Alberta Health Services, to manage those resources on a day-to-day basis in order to provide the surge capacity to ensure that people receive timely and appropriate care.

I believe and I know that members on this side of the House believe that the Minister of Health and Wellness has taken many, many very effective steps, provided the leadership that's necessary to Alberta Health Services to help expand that surge capacity. That's an important point. I won't take the time to go through the list of initiatives that the minister just mentioned, but of note: the addition of continuing care spaces in the province and the fact that we have 265 continuing care beds coming on stream this fall – interestingly, the 1,000th continuing care space to be opened this year will be opened in January – and the allocation of additional funding to increase home-care services that will supply a thousand Albertans this fall with home care, many of whom are people who are at risk of inappropriate admission to an acute-care bed through the emergency department without the availability of that additional home-care support; and many other factors.

Perhaps the most encouraging thing of all, Mr. Speaker, is a meeting that will occur tomorrow at the initiative of the board and management of Alberta Health Services with physicians, with nurses, with other health professionals and care providers to collaboratively examine other strategies that could be put into play to expand surge capacity at this critical time, particularly as we approach flu season. For that, I'm quite happy to leave the management of that issue to the minister and to those who are working under his direction.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, though – interestingly, many members feel quite free to wax eloquent on questions such as the structure of the health care system, priorities, resource allocation decisions in the long term. I want to make one point, and that is that we've spent a week here focusing on some very specific performance measures introduced by the minister with respect to the time to be seen in an emergency department and the time to be admitted in the case of patients where an admittance decision has been made. Certainly, those are important indicators, but they are not the ultimate indicators of the health and performance of a strong, publicly funded health care system.

For that question – and I know the hon. Leader of the Opposition would agree with this – we have to look to the factors that actually drive emergency room wait times. I would suggest that those three are access to primary care; access to continuing care, leaving the question of the particular model of care aside for a moment; and, thirdly, access to mental health services, particularly for those patients who suffer from chronic mental illness and are endeavouring to live independently in the community. Again, without going through the minister's list of recent initiatives, I as a member of this House see tremendous hope in our progress on all three fronts.

Unfortunately for some members who want to continue to dwell on their perception of the adequacy of the day-to-day management of resources in the system and how we address that first issue of surge capacity, we have to wait a little longer, Mr. Speaker, to see the results of some of these initiatives.

In the area of primary care we're not talking about something the minister announced last week. We're talking about a historic agreement between the Alberta Medical Association, the former regional health authorities, and the government of Alberta in the trilateral agreement of 2003, which gave us primary care networks. For those that may not be aware, Mr. Speaker, a primary care network is a team of health professionals – I met many of them, including physicians but also including other professionals: nurse practitioners, dietitians, pharmacists, psychiatrists in the city of Edmonton, as a matter of fact 21 psychiatrists now providing services in primary care networks – essentially a home within the health care system both for people to access basic care in a community-based setting and also an opportunity for us to link other sectors that have a real impact on the social determinants of health.

My vision and, I know, the vision of many of my colleagues in the future is that we will begin to see housing organizations, vocational training organizations, other organizations that provide services that ultimately determine the health status of not just this generation but the future linked to those primary care networks as we continue to expand them.

If we consider the possibilities, Mr. Speaker, we're standing here today at a point where over 2 million Albertans live in a community that has a primary care network. We have some very important negotiations under way now for the new master agreement between the three parties I just mentioned, some discussions that will determine the future opportunities, I hope, for primary care networks. We can have hope that that very important influencer of ER wait times will be addressed.

The second area is continuing care. I want to say for the record, Mr. Speaker, that I spent the better part of the last spring and summer touring Alberta as part of a consultation exercise. I had the opportunity to talk to people, to visit a number of continuing care facilities. I think what's represented in the report that was tabled as a result of that consultation and the mechanisms in Bill 17 is that we do have an opportunity to move away from a health system that focuses on servicing the needs of institutions and providers and the transfer of funds to a system, particularly in continuing care, that is focused on meeting the needs of individuals and the families that support those individuals.

I am certainly open to a discussion of other potential models of continuing care that are person focused, that are family focused, to support the family that is helping to care for their loved one in that facility. I know that the health professionals across the province are very interested in doing the same.

The third area is the area of mental health. A lot has been said about mental health in this House, Mr. Speaker, during this session. I think we are doing much, much more. As I mentioned, we're

providing more mental health services in the community through primary care networks. I think we need to look at other opportunities, not to fund more beds in institutions but to provide people with the services that they need and support them in managing their conditions and attaining the highest degree of independence that they possibly can in the community. We have all heard stories, and I'm sure many of us have observed first-hand the plight of many who suffer from mental illness in the community, the reliance that many of them place on emergency departments as a place to go, as a place to be recognized, as a place to express their concerns and to have their health needs met. That is a key driver, Mr. Speaker, of emergency room wait times for the future.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, then Edmonton-Meadowlark, then Lethbridge-East, then Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I'm pleased that we finally have our opportunity to have an emergency debate on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a debate that is as much about politics as it is about policy. We've heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talk about all sorts of technical points, surge capacity, and so on, but I think it's important that we recognize some of the political elements in this debate and the history that is relevant to the situation we now find ourselves in. I think the history is very important.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that you can trust the Progressive Conservative government with our health care system. I think it's patently obvious that this is true. If you go back a few years, a number of years, to the Mazankowski report, which was brought forward by the then Premier Klein, it served as a blueprint for a number of things, including things like delisting of existing services, more user fees, and more private health care delivery. Of course, Mr. Mazankowski sits on the board of at least one large insurance company that would stand to benefit substantially.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think this is important, that we need to recollect that there are very powerful companies involved in insurance, in drugs, and in the provision of private health care that keep pressure on the government and on governments across Canada to increase the degree of privatization that exists in the health care system. Without understanding this, we can't understand the history of what appears to be a gross mismanagement over a long period of time of our health care system by this Progressive Conservative government.

It was followed by the third way. Of course, Premier Klein in response to me in the leaders debate denied that there was a secret plan to privatize health care, yet within a matter of months of that election we were again going down the road of a privatized, two-tier health system.

In the last election, of course, the Premier said very little about health care, but shortly after that election he unleashed the minister of health at the time, now the Minister of Energy, on our health care system, and the chaos that ensued made it very, very difficult for the health care professionals to continue their work. There was closing of acute-care beds, the suggestion that we should close Alberta

Hospital altogether, and there was a reversal of the government's stated position on long-term care during the election.

The Premier, of course, promised in his letter to Dr. Peter Kwan, president of the section of emergency medicine, of February 23, 2008, and I quote: government response to date has included \$300 million in funding for over 600 new and 200 replacement long-term care beds across Alberta, and more are planned. Yet, Mr. Speaker, the NDP caucus was able to produce a report which is dated May 28, 2009, that says that the continuing care strategy targets a significant reduction in long-term care beds. Obviously, they're telling the doctors one thing, and they're doing something else.

I think it's really very much evident in the chaos that we've seen in our health care system that the elimination of the regional health authorities and its replacement with the Alberta Health Services superboard contributed very much to the problem. We went from trying to address a serious nursing shortage and a shortage of other health care professionals in our system to a couple of years ago all of a sudden deciding that we had too many nurses and we couldn't afford them. Now, my wife is a professor in the nursing faculty at the University of Alberta, and she had an entire fourth-year graduating class that could not get jobs because they had put on a hiring freeze, and in fact they were working very hard to reduce the number of nurses in the system through attrition, hoping to avoid layoffs, but, nevertheless, a reduction in nursing care.

Then came this budget, this budget that we're now working with, and the government again reversed itself with respect to that issue. Now again we're trying to address the nursing shortage, but of course we've lost a class, we've lost a year, and the chaos and the misdirection of this government continues to mount and to create more and more difficulties in the system.

One of the things that we talked about today and we've talked about earlier in the week is the attempts that had been made to create a community health centre in my constituency. We had a rally today at noon outside that facility, and there will be, certainly, more rallies. The objective of that facility was to reduce the pressure on the emergency room at the Royal Alex. While they have maintained and transferred the community health clinic to that building, they have yet to open the urgent care centre. That was designed to transfer or to reduce the number of patients in the emergency room that didn't need serious emergency care but needed urgent care, and 32,000 a year was the projection for that.

We've seen a reduction in long-term care, we've seen a tax on mental health care facilities in our province, we've seen good ideas that have been put forward by regional health authorities frozen by the Alberta Health Services and by this Progressive Conservative government, and it's no wonder that we're not making the progress that we want to see.

I don't want to just respond to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but I really do take exception to his suggestion that people are just playing games and that the problems that exist don't mean that Albertans are at risk. I just want to read some things. In September 2010 Shayne William James Hay, 34, hung himself in the Royal Alexandra emergency room. In February 2010 Shayne Alden Anonson, 44, hung himself in the bathroom at the Rockyview hospital. In January 2009 Nicole Theresa Laramée, 27, at Alberta Hospital strangled herself. In December 2008 Lorraine Adolph, 68, a psychiatric patient in Alberta Hospital went missing; her body was later found on the grounds.

Mr. Speaker, there are many more here on the list. People are in fact dying in our emergency rooms because of this crisis. It's more than government incompetence, but it certainly is that. When Dr. Parks first wrote to the Premier, he outlined I think in very clear terms what the problems were. The Premier responded, and I

thought that the response from the Premier was actually quite good, that they would open acute-care beds and long-term care beds. But what happened was it was mere empty words, and the action that was needed has not actually started until quite recently, when the government was faced with this crisis.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that it's got to the point where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who is the parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness, has said that the Premier broke his promise to the emergency room physicians made a year and a half ago. I think the fact that a government member who is an emergency room doctor and who is the parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness would in fact take that action shows just really how serious the rot is in terms of this government and its capacity to solve the problem.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to all of the things that the minister of health was listing off. Some of these things have been offered and promised before and not delivered on. Maybe they'll keep their promise this time or perhaps not. I think the experience has showed us that it's unlikely that they will. I don't believe that this is just a policy debate. I don't believe that the minister is going to solve the problem. I don't believe that this Progressive Conservative government is capable of solving our health care crisis, nor do I accept that we should be dealing with more choice, as the Wildrose Alliance suggests. Mr. Speaker, I think the . . . [Mr. Mason's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise, as all of the other participants have been, because I do believe this is an urgent issue and in far too many cases an issue of human suffering and an issue of life and death.

4:00

Over recent weeks I've had many, many reasons to be concerned about this urgent emergency in our emergency rooms. I've had a significant number of doctors contact me directly. These are not doctors, necessarily, who I've ever known before but doctors who are so exasperated that they pick up the phone and phone me or e-mail me or otherwise contact me as the health critic to express their deep, deep anger and concern about what's happening in emergency rooms.

We also can read some of the statistics that are published and see how our emergency rooms are performing: Red Deer, dismal – and it's not just the statistics; I actually get correspondence on this, which I have passed on to the MLAs from Red Deer in that particular example – the Royal Alex; the University of Alberta hospital, which is in my constituency, bursting at the seams; the Sturgeon in St. Albert; the Foothills in Calgary; and on and on it goes. The major urban and regional hospitals from Grande Prairie to the south are strained beyond the limits. It's well acknowledged that it's common in Alberta for hospitals to be functioning at over a hundred per cent capacity, so there is no surge capacity, to use the term that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford referred to. Where does it spill over? Into the hallways or the emergency rooms.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Sadly, I have to believe that all MLAs have had the kind of correspondence I've had from patients and family members of patients who have suffered badly in emergency rooms and who aren't going to take it anymore. Of course, as has been cited before, there have been quite a tragic number of deaths because of problems in emergency rooms.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark raised a concern in his e-mail that was circulated last evening about the upcoming flu season, and that's pending right now. That will add to the problem, and that's why we need to address this urgently.

As well, of course, if there's any kind of disaster – a bus crash or a plane crash or something like that, an explosion – we don't have the capacity in our emergency rooms to deal with it. We used to, but the long-term, grinding policies of this government have taken that ability away.

The outcome of this isn't just the suffering of the people in emergency rooms and the frustration of the staff. It's a loss of public and professional trust in this minister and in this government. As the public loses confidence, the nerves of this government get frayed, and that's showing in the responses we've seen in recent days. So much of this comes back to problems that could be addressed. There are solutions out there. The longer we delay them, the more difficult they become to implement. But there are solutions out there.

I mean, the Premier himself in a letter addressed to emergency room doctors during the last provincial campaign, February 2008, spelled out some of those solutions. He talked about expanding the number of health professionals. He talked about international recruiting of nurses, for example, and about expanding programs and facilities, but we've seen reversal and abandonment of those policies, which has fuelled anger and confusion.

I'll just give you, you know, a couple of examples for the record, Mr. Speaker. On the confusion around recruiting nurses, I'm reading from some notes here from about 18 months ago. We had been told by government agencies that there was a shortage of 1,400 nurses, and then suddenly, like that, the CEO of Alberta Health Services says: "No, there's no shortage of nurses at all. In fact, we have so many nurses, we're going to start terminating their positions." In a matter of weeks there was this huge U-turn taken on recruiting nurses. Well, are people confused? You bet they are. Are people jaded? Yes, they are. Well over \$20 million was paid to buy out existing nurses.

Just as damaging, CARNA, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, reported that 633 internationally trained nurses were eligible for short-term permits. They'd been identified, they were ready to go, and none of them were able to take positions. Now that is reversed, and suddenly we're in this mad dash to recruit more. It's because, frankly, I think this government just doesn't know what they're doing.

The pattern continues. It continues with capital expenditures. This minister promised in March to have the capital plans out for Edmonton and Calgary. Well, we're still waiting. It's soon going to be December. I need to put this to the minister. From page 12 of the continuing care strategy from 2008 this is an exact quote: "The number of long-term care beds would remain at the current number of 14,500 for the next several years." Now, there are semantic games that get played, and it's easy to get confused: long-term care, continuing care, supportive care, assisted living. The fact is that we are not seeing the investment in long-term care, what used to be called auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes, that is needed. Where are those people ending up? They're ending up in our acute-care hospitals.

These are all fuelling the problems. I really wish I had more time, but I'm going to just quickly wrap up by saying to this minister that it feels like every day in question period he's dancing, and I won't make that any more personal than that. He's avoiding the issues. Over and over he talks about the new beds that are opening without talking about the fact that in many cases those are just replacement beds. Villa Caritas: well, sure it's wonderful, except you know

what? It's mostly replacing beds that are being closed. And it goes on like that. Likewise, all these new hires. Are we into net zero hiring? How many of those hires, Mr. Minister, are simply replacements of people who have left or retired or otherwise are out of the system?

Mr. Speaker, we have life-and-death issues in the system. There are solutions. I would ask the minister and I would ask the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who has some sway in this, and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and indeed all the government members to cut through the confusion, to take a courageous stand, to listen to the emergency room doctors, who are blowing the alarm as loudly as they can, and if necessary call to account the Alberta Health Services Board and CEO for failing the people of Alberta on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a particular question to you before I have to sit down. Many, many people, as you yourself have said, have indicated they'd like to speak to this. We are scheduled to run out of time in 20 minutes. I know it would take unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 30(5)(b), which would allow us, then, to continue this emergency debate until after 4:30. So I would ask you in my last moments up here if you would be prepared to ask the Assembly for unanimous consent to waive the time limit that stops us at 4:30.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Such a request, hon. members, will need two questions. One will deal with, if you look at your standing orders, 30(5)(a) and (b). The debate will conclude

- (a) when all Members who wish to take part have spoken, or
- (b) at the normal hour of adjournment in the afternoon on that day, whichever is first.

That's one of two standing orders that would have to be dealt with.

The other standing order that would have to be dealt with would be 4(2), which says:

When there is no evening sitting, at 6 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday or at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, the Speaker adjourns the Assembly until the next sitting day.

There are two of them. One may be approved; the other one may be rejected. The one that would take precedence with respect to this would be the one dealing with it very clearly in the order, "The Speaker adjourns the Assembly until the next sitting day," which is 4(2).

4:10

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has asked that the Assembly deal with the unanimous request provisions that would have to be waived if we are to continue, I presume, until all members who wish to take part have spoken. I have 16 now on the list, and you can determine in your head what the time frame of that would be. Shall I proceed with asking such questions?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate where the member is coming from. I just want to make it clear that I'm sure there are people who have commitments that they must be at tonight. I know some people have airplanes to catch. I know that the weather is not good and that some people have difficult roads to navigate. As sympathetic as I am to the request – and I really am – I would hope that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. I'm sure there are a thousand considerations with respect to this. It just requires unanimous consent if the members are in favour of waiving Standing Order 30(5)(b), which says, "At the normal hour of adjournment in the afternoon on that

day." If any member is opposed to waiving that – that is, that we would waive the 4:30 rule in this case – just simply say no.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Well, that ends that one.

The Speaker adjourns the Assembly until the next sitting day at 4:30. I presume that that one would be rejected as well. That the Speaker should not do that: that would be the question. Anybody opposed to the Speaker moving that, please say no.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Same thing. We're on until 4:30 p.m.

The next person that I'm recognizing, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Lethbridge-East, followed by Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Speaker: Absolutely. What's the point of order?

**Point of Order
Clarification**

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, just a point of clarification under Standing Order 13(2) on your reasons. If we're worried about the planes and the roads and so forth, can we not, then, extend the time, or do so when we get back, past the normal Routine on Monday?

The Speaker: The rules are very, very clear, hon. member. The standing orders are very clear, particularly 4(2).

I've recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Debate Continued

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour for me to join you and speak on this very important issue. I'd like to start off with a quote from Martin Luther King. "Our life begins to end the day we become silent about things that matter." I've spoken up – I think the whole world knows it now – on something that's really important and matters a lot to society. It matters a lot to me.

This issue is a nonpartisan issue. This has nothing to do with politics. Mr. Speaker, I'm in a unique position. I'm an elected representative of this government. I'm also an emergency physician. As a physician some politicians could think I'm conflicted because those can't mix. To be honest, I think politicians and doctors and health care professionals have the same goals in mind. As a physician I took an oath, the Hippocratic oath. "I will come for the benefit of the sick." I have a moral and ethical duty and responsibility to society as a physician and as an elected member of government to be honest to the public.

I'd just like to tell you a little story about my father. He was admitted a few weeks ago for four days to the emergency department at the U of A. He never saw an in-patient bed for four days. Definitive care was delayed because he never got to the specialists upstairs. Then he got sent home, and within 30 hours, on the day I was supposed to go to India, at 3 in the morning my mother called an ambulance. He had a heart attack. Thanks to Dr. Paul Parks and them clanging the bells, the emergency departments were decanted partially. He survived the heart attack, and he's back home now. He's had five near-death situations this year alone due to waits in the emergency room.

In 2007, when I was in Dr. Paul Parks' position, I called it a crisis on February 2. We had people dying in the emergency departments.

We had five deaths and about a hundred near deaths in the Calgary health region. We met with the Calgary health region, they called in the Health Quality Council, and they sucked blood from stone.

In the Capital health region on January 14, 2008, we clanged the bells through the Capital health region. We predicted an imminent death within 24 hours of this letter, and subsequently we had five to seven deaths and about 200 near deaths in the Edmonton region in one hospital alone or at least delays in care. Those are the 322 cases that were documented at the request of Sheila Weatherill and passed on to upper administration by the ER docs. They were documented at my request when I was the representative of the emergency physicians.

I won't get into problems because I don't have much time, so I'm only going to talk about solutions. The number one solution is simple. We must understand the problem. What I found out is that in health care, in the policy shop and the delivery shop, there are a lot of well-meaning individuals, hard-working individuals in management and front-line staff that are working hard each and every day to give it their absolute best. What I've also found out is that some people at the upper levels – to be honest, I don't know much about the oil industry, and I don't know much about agriculture, but I know a heck of a lot about my industry. Many people designing policy in health care really don't have a health care background, many people on the board have no health care background, and that's part of the problem. I'm just going to give you a few quick solutions immediately on this problem, not the whole system problem.

One, immediately we must convene the experts, which is Alberta Health Services and the board, the ER docs, the Alberta Medical Association leaders, the nursing leaders, and politicians from all parties. We must all put our political beliefs aside at this moment in time. Dr. Paul Parks is absolutely correct in his assertions.

Two, we must call in the Health Quality Council. Dr. John Cowell did a Health Quality Council report for the Calgary health region in 2007, and there are many good recommendations in that report that can be immediately implemented.

Three, we need to call in the SWAT team. The SWAT team would be made up of Dr. Chris Eagle, who was the Calgary health region's COO; Dr. Ken Gardener, who now is on the College of Physicians and Surgeons; Dr. Grant Innes from Calgary; Dr. Tom Noseworthy; Dr. Chip Doig; Dr. P.J. White from the AMA; and I think Janet Davidson would be a good mix. She runs a top hospital in Canada, in Ontario, the Trillium Health Centre. I'd be happy to work along with them.

It is a crisis. The problem is that many of my political colleagues are not physicians. They're not front-line health care workers. They get speaking notes from bureaucrats who have no health care background, and they really don't know. You can't blame them, actually. It's not their fault. The first thing I would do is do a partial implementation of a disaster plan in that we need to redeploy resources. We have God knows how many hundred RNs on Health Link. Let's get them off the call centres and get them in front of patients. Let's redeploy them into primary care networks, home care, and long-term care facilities.

We need to immediately decant the seniors from acute care ASAP. We have beds. We have long-term care beds. At one point in time a decision was made, when there wasn't much money for AHS. That problem has been solved by this minister and this Premier and this government. We have given lots of money and funding to AHS. I dug a shovel at the Villa Caritas in my area, at the Misericordia hospital. That should be used as a long-term care facility. I believe it's built; it should be used immediately.

Secondly, at the Royal Alex hospital, the women's pavilion, we

have 150 empty beds. Since the Lois Hole hospital is open, they can be used as a transition unit immediately, but my understanding is that there is some legislation that needs tweaking and fixing. That should be used as a transition unit for DAL, assisted living. My understanding is that under legislation you have to have the regular staff. We need to immediately look at that and fix that.

Thirdly, home care. Home care, home care, home care is the real solution. There's a lack of good home care. There are a lot of good, hard-working people, but they're grossly underresourced. We have one of the worst home care systems in the country. Ontario and Nova Scotia have the best because the Red Cross and the Victorian Order of Nurses are involved. We need world-class home care. This is actually the solution.

Next, there were 1,000 Filipino nurses recruited. We couldn't afford to pay them. We have the money. Let's bring them in and redeploy them into this home care and into the beds.

4:20

Number eight, the primary care networks. We need to call in the AMA, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Health and Wellness and redeploy the primary care networks into acute care. I'm doing a review, and to be honest, in principle it's good, but it's all wrong. The people that need to be rostered onto those primary care networks as a first priority are those patients who are discharged from acute care. They have no family doctor to follow up with. Therefore, we have a 16 per cent readmission rate. One out of six people end up back in hospital to begin that same darn journey again.

Two, elderly patients who don't have a GP need to be rostered second, right after these people, because they'll get sick, and they're going to be admitted.

Three, chronic disease patients who require care who will probably require hospitalization need to be on there.

Lastly, the healthy families. Don't put the healthy families in there first and the sick patients last. The biggest problem in acute care is that we've got too many sick people. It ain't the runny noses and sore throats causing the problem.

Number nine, prevention. Let's contact our school boards and workplaces and make sure everybody gets vaccinated this flu season. The fewer people that get sick, the fewer admissions in acute care.

Now, after that's done, we need to reassess and debrief, and we need to ensure that our medical system never ever faces this issue again, Mr. Speaker. This thing has been done every year by the emergency doctors for 10 years because this crisis happens every winter, and people die. To be honest, my poor government members have no idea because they're not doctors, and the regions have been covering this up for years.

Then we need accountability measures after this, accountability measures where those who administrate health care must be held accountable. I have the CAEP guidelines here. This needs to be the main accountability measure, the number one performance measure of this system. This happened in the U.K. They had hundreds of deaths, and the ER wait time for admitted people is the number one accountability measure for the whole health system in the U.K. Every other health service feeds into that wait time for admitted patients in the ED. It's not an emergency problem; it's a system problem.

One very important thing that the member here mentioned, mental health. The problem in mental health is that we have a lot of people whom we can't discharge to the street from Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Let's just rent a darn hotel and get them out and then build something for these poor people who are stuck in Alberta Hospital and can't get out.

Now, I'm going to be brutally honest here, Mr. Speaker. Some people may not like this. How did we get here? We got here because of a couple of knucklehead decisions: a knucklehead decision that cancelled Christmas dinner last year, a knucklehead decision to fire God's representative from the Royal Alex hospital, a knucklehead decision to disband the health ethics network and close Alberta Hospital.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. I'm sorry. The time has elapsed for your participation under the rules we have. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose and the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is beyond an honour to be able to stand up in this House and talk about this issue. It's also an honour to be able to follow someone who has – and I will use a polite term here – the backbone to stand up and be counted. That's what elected people are supposed to be doing, and no one in this House wants to stay past 4:30. "No. Why would we discuss something of any merit past 4:30? My God, we have to look after ourselves so we can be comfortable." I am ashamed of this House that they won't stay and argue this.

I could stand here for the next however many minutes it's going to be and go through all of the problems because every single one of you have got these examples of people dying and suffering that are in your constituency offices, and don't tell me that you don't because I know you do. Some of them come to my office when, in fact, you haven't done your job. This is not about all these examples. This is about following the lead of someone who has absolutely shown leadership for once in this House.

In fairness to this present government – in fairness – all of this mess was created with the previous government, but my disappointment is that this government knew it, denied that Bill 11 and the third way were absolutely the wrong way to go. Albertans did not want it; they made it very clear. They went ahead and did it anyway. My disappointment is that this government didn't have the backbone, that one of their members has just shown, to clean up the mess. This mess has been there – I did the MLA task force six years ago. It's the same mess. Don't tell me you didn't know about it.

The Alberta health bill is a good one, but it's a vision. How many times are we going to have visions? Visions are no good anymore. We have to have action. We cannot have people dying.

Long-term care beds. My hon. colleague from away has talked about transition beds and the legislation that would have to go with it, the type of people that would have to be trained to look after them. My mother has now passed, but I wouldn't want the cleaning

lady looking after her. If she needed medical attention, I would want a trained RN that is there 24 hours a day, that can make the assessment that will keep her out of the hospital. Out of the hospital.

For people in our nursing homes, not in long-term care but some of the lodges and some of the designated assisted living, when somebody falls on the floor, there's no one to assess them. What do they do? They call 911. What is that costing the system?

Okay. I'm sorry, but I'm energized by an example of what a good elected person looks like. Although I know I've kind of ranted and raved, I didn't probably have the facts behind me that the hon. member has had.

Mr. Liepert: Good theatre.

Ms Pastoor: Absolutely. If there's anybody that does good theatre, it's the Minister of Energy, but because he doesn't use his outside voice, we can't hear what he's saying. Too bad.

We need to have backbone. We need to care. We need to do exactly what was suggested. This is not a partisan issue. I don't want to play two-bit politics. I want to be allowed to govern. And you know what? So do you guys. You were elected to govern, and you all know it – you all know it – deep in your hearts. Because you are all good people, you know you want to govern. You don't want to play two-bit politics, especially with people's lives. In my maiden speech I said that I hope that no one's parents in this House would ever become a commodity on a bottom line. Six years later, damn it, they are commodities on a bottom line, and it's your relatives that are there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Well, it looks like I have the enviable position of saying the last maybe final few words. There's lots I would like say, but I'm going to have to abbreviate my comments, Mr. Speaker.

I want to acknowledge the passion of all of the members of the House for this subject. I want to acknowledge the opposition members and their passion, but I also want to make the point that there's passion on this side, too. We care about the same issues . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but according to our standing orders 30(5)(b) and 4(2) we will now stand adjourned until 1:30 Monday next.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday, November 22, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to November 18, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cA-14.9]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c7]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c6]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c4]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c5]

- 7* Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft.), 769-82 (Apr. 14 aft.), 850-62 (Apr. 20 aft.), 869-76 (Apr. 20 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 878-84 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2010 c8]
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions; SA 2010 c2]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft.), 735-43 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-804 (Apr. 15 aft.), 868 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 878 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c9]
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 876-77 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c12]
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cW-12.5]
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft.), 743-49 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 862-65 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 885-87 (Apr. 20 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cB-4.8]
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-67 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2010 c10]
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 867 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877-78 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c11]
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c3]

- 16* Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 763 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 956-67 (Oct. 26 aft.), 980-81 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 991-98 (Oct. 27 aft.), 1013-20 (Oct. 28 aft.), 1113-17 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1135-42 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1191-96 (Nov. 15 eve.), 1227-28 (Nov. 16 aft.), 1247-52 (Nov. 16 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1283-84 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)
- 17 Alberta Health Act (Zwozdesky)**
First Reading -- 1010-11 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1072-85 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1210-23 (Nov. 16 aft.), 1236-47 (Nov. 16 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1274-83 (Nov. 17 aft., adjourned)
- 18 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 984-90 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1107-11 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1225-27 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
- 19 Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 981-84 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1224-25 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1304-05 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
- 20 Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 1032 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1065-66 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1100-01 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1229 (Nov. 16 eve., passed)
- 21 Wills and Succession Act (Olson)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1066-67 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1101-03 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1229 (Nov. 16 eve., adjourned)
- 22 Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1067-70 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1103-06 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1229-30 (Nov. 16 eve., adjourned)
- 23* Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1070-72 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1111-13 (Nov. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1227 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
- 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1099-1100 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1180-91 (Nov. 15 eve.), 1268-70 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)
- 25 Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1100 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1175 (Nov. 15 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1223-24 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1303-04 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
- 26 Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 980 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1012-13 (Oct. 28 aft.), 1106-07 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1175-80 (Nov. 15 eve., passed)
- 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010 (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 1098 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1133-34 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1230-33 (Nov. 16 eve.), 1266-68 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)
- 28 Electoral Divisions Act (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1098 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1134 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1233-36 (Nov. 16 eve.), 1270-74 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)

- 29 Alberta Parks Act (\$) (Ady)**
First Reading -- 1131-32 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1265-66 (Nov. 17 aft.), 1285-1303 (Nov. 17 eve., adjourned)
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 709 (Apr. 12 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 c13]
- 202* Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft.), 698-704 (Apr. 12 aft.), 705-09 (Apr. 12 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 819-25 (Apr. 19 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cM-3.3]
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 709-10 (Apr. 12 aft.), 825-32 (Apr. 19 aft.), 836-37 (Apr. 19 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services), (Oct. 27 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 922-28 (Oct. 25 aft.), 1036-44 (Nov. 1 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1044-46 (Nov. 1 aft.), 1155-63 (Nov. 15 aft., passed)
- 206 Utilities Consumer Advocate Act (Kang)**
First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1163-69 (Nov. 15 aft., adjourned)
- 208 Recall Act (Hinman)**
First Reading -- 1033-34 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 732-33 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010]
- Pr2* Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 733-35 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749-50 (Apr. 13 aft.), 768 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 31, 2009]
- Pr3* Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 768-69 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 22, 2010

Issue 44

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 22, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members, the Canadian Country Music Association male artist 2010 recipient, winner of the Country Music Television video of the year, album of the year winner as well as winner of the humanitarian of the year award, Mr. Gord Bamford, an Albertan, will lead us in the singing of our national anthem today.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee. [Applause]

The Speaker: Mr. Bamford, I know that you're used to a six-song set, but today that's where we're going to say thank you. Again, thank you for joining us today.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce four individuals today. My first guest has already been introduced personally to many of you today. We were privileged to have him sing our national anthem. I'll be doing a private member's statement a little while later. Now I would like Mr. Gord Bamford, the CCMA 2010 male vocalist of the year recipient, and his manager, Kelly Resler, to rise and receive the official warm welcome of this Assembly. Kelly is in the members' gallery. Stand up, please, Kelly and Gord.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also very pleased to introduce to you and through you my next guest, who is the first elected mayor of Lacombe, the newest city in Alberta. Steve Christie is truly community oriented. He has served on my constituency board for four years, two years as president. He has been on Lacombe council for the last six years and has served on the Lacombe volunteer fire department for over 11 years. I'm looking forward to a great working relationship with Mayor Christie and an exciting future for the city of Lacombe. He has brought with him the acting CAO of the city of Lacombe, Mr. Michael Minchin. I know that Michael's vast knowledge of municipal issues as well as his calm persona are a huge asset to Mayor Christie and the rest of council. Mayor Christie and Michael, who is in the members' gallery, would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly as well.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great pleasure to be here to introduce some very, very special guests – where are they? – up in the gallery who are here from Julia Kiniski school. They're joined by their teacher group leader, Mrs. Susan Skillings. They represent a growing number of interested people who are here to watch and observe democracy in action. I would ask that all of our guests from Julia Kiniski school please stand and receive the warm ovation of the House. Welcome. Thank you for being here.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I met with the students that are in our gallery from St. Theresa school. They are knowledgeable. They're eager. They'll be here through the question period. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Earle and Ms McKinney, by parent helpers Mrs. O'Connor, Mrs. Hale, and Mrs. Szott. Fellow Members of the Legislative Assembly, please congratulate St. Theresa school for showing the initiative to come in today. Students, please rise.

The Speaker: Do you have another one?

Ms Evans: Yes, I do have, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce Russ and Grace Davidson, who are constituents of mine and residents in Sherwood Park. They've lived there for the last 39 years. Their combined residency in Alberta is 70-plus years. They have two sons diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Tim recently obtained the CCSVI treatment in Mexico, and his life and quality of life have improved considerably. They are hopeful that the minister's announced review of this type of treatment will result in their capacity to see that for their other son. Both sides of the family are here, daughter and daughter-in-law as well. Colleagues, will you please welcome Russ and Grace Davidson to our Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really proud to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 15 visitors who are joining us in the public gallery. To say "students" isn't quite correct, and I'll explain that. They are attending the Bredin Institute in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. These are international pharmacy bridging program students. They are international pharmacy graduates, and they are working towards their accreditation or licences. They are accompanied today by their group leader, Ms Cynthia Lambertson-Poon. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the congratulations and welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly some good folks from my constituency and one from Edmonton. Miss Vickie Jackson and Mrs. Kimberly Armstrong went to India to have the CCSVI operation. While Vickie has shown tremendous progress and success and is able to return to a quality of life that she had only dreamed of months ago, Kimberly is starting

to move backwards. She has shown tremendous progress for two or three months and now finds herself in desperate need of the Doppler ultrasound. They find it frustrating that while they were very willing to go and receive the operation in India, they can't have the follow-up service that would seem to make sense as we put together the data that we need so that we can all tackle MS with a responsible go-forward so that they and their children or grandchildren won't be subject to the same debilitating disease it's become.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask Vickie Jackson, Kimberly Armstrong, and friend Larry Walton to please stand and accept the warm reception of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 14 members of the Smoky Lake ladies' health care auxiliary, led by their president, Diana Hryniw. These hard-working and dedicated ladies are committed to helping rural Albertans by assisting and working in conjunction with medical facilities in Smoky Lake. It's a real privilege to have them visit us here today at the Legislature. I'd ask them to rise and my colleagues to give them the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of our Assembly a member of the New South Wales Attorney General's department, Ms Michelle Browning. Ms Browning is a senior guardian with that department and is here to meet with our government officials on the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, which came into force last October.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, I'm very proud of this groundbreaking legislation, and I am pleased to say that it continues to attract international attention. Ms Browning received the Churchill fellowship to visit Canadian jurisdictions to learn about new models to bring back to Australia. I understand she's particularly interested in the supportive decision-making options available in the AGTA. Ms Browning will be meeting with officials in my department as well as with Alberta Justice and Alberta Health Services while she's here and with advocacy organizations such as the Alberta Association for Community Living. She is joined by Ms Brenda Lee Doyle, director of the office of the public guardian. They are both in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three very special individuals that have had and still have a close place in my life. The first one is my sister-in-law Ghislaine Muise. She is a long-term nurse here in Edmonton. The second one, as well another sister-in-law, Paulette Fortin, who has recently retired, has worked her full career with Telus. For both of them it's their very first time in the Alberta Legislature. They're both accompanied by my wife, Angeline. They're in the public gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce two fine Edmontonians who are with us today in the members' gallery. Mr. Gordon Gordey has contributed 33 years of public service in arts, culture, and human rights in our province, serving with the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit. Also, as CEO of Shumka his 40-year experience as a dancer, writer, choreographer, and stage director was integral in developing Shumka's management and artistic goals. Also with him is his better half, his wife, Cathy Gordey, who currently works for research services at the University of Alberta. Prior to moving to the U of A, however, Cathy was a manager of various portfolios for the government of Alberta. I would like them both to rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests to introduce to you today, and they are seated in the public gallery. I'll ask Ken and Ray to stand. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ken Babey and Ray "Rocky" Herrington. Ken is now in his 24th season as the SAIT Trojans' men's hockey coach. He is the winningest coach in Canadian postsecondary men's hockey league play. The team has won four consecutive titles, which is a tie for the league record. They are currently in their drive for five, and again they're at the top of the league's standings. Along with being head coach of the SAIT Trojans, Ken has been the athletic director at SAIT Polytechnic since 1997.

Ray Herrington is the team manager of the SAIT Trojans. Perhaps his interest in athletics comes from his extensive boxing background. A former Alberta Golden Gloves champion in '62-63, Canadian boxing champion in '63, and Canadian army boxing champion in '63-64, he also went to the Olympic trials for boxing in '64. He was inducted into the Canadian armed forces' sports hall of fame in 1993 and the SAIT wall of distinction in 1998. We affectionately call him Canvasback. Rocky is also the president of the Calgary Booster Club and has operated various fundraising projects, including social gatherings at Rocky's penalty box lounge. All proceeds from these projects have been donated back to the Trojans hockey team. They are rising, so I'll ask you to give them the warm traditional applause of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a constituent of mine, Miss Amy Prins. Amy is a student at NAIT in Edmonton, and she will be spending some time with me today and tomorrow learning about my role as an MLA. Amy is an incredibly bright young student, and I hope that she will enjoy her opportunity to watch question period and to sit in on some meetings with me. Amy is seated in the members' gallery. I'll ask Amy to rise, and let's all give her the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature guests from the Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble of Edmonton. There are five representatives visiting us today at the

Alberta Legislature who, along with their organization, were instrumental in hosting the 33rd annual western Canadian Croatian folklore festival in Edmonton earlier this year, which I will highlight in a member's statement today. I'd like to welcome the following guests, who are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I mention their names. We have with us today Doris Beljan, the Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble president; Tanja Pavelić, secretary for the Domagoj ensemble; Slavka Milicević, treasurer for the ensemble; Zdenka Stipin, who is one of the Domagoj dance instructors; and Jozo Arar, a member of the Domagoj alumni association. You will notice that both Jozo and Zdenka are wearing the national costume of Dalmatia and the coast city of Dubrovnik. I would now ask that we all provide the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Joginder Dhillon, who I consider not only a friend but an older brother, and I want to stress the older part. He was an exceptional supporter of mine in the 2004 and 2000 elections, and I cannot overstate what a pleasure it has been to have him on my side. With him today is his son, Mr. Harvir Dhillon, who I am pleased to report is studying hard to be a doctor and will soon be helping to ease some of the pressures in our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, it is because of wonderful supporters like the Dhillons that I have the honour to represent the constituency of Calgary-McCall and to fight for very important issues facing not only Calgary-McCall but the whole of Calgary, issues such as the airport tunnel that, for the kind information of the Minister of Transportation, is called the airport underpass now, sir. I would ask my guests to rise now, and I would ask all members to extend the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a gentleman in the gallery who many years ago spent a lot of time in this building: Mr. Bob Giffin, who is the former executive director of the office of the Premier. In fact, it was Mr. Giffin that hired me to the role as press secretary back in 1980. I'd ask Bob to stand and be recognized by the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you a Swedish exchange student who is here on a Rotary exchange, Mr. Jonathan Arvidsson. Jonathan is currently attending Strathcona high school and is extremely interested in politics, so he came down to the Assembly to see how politics works. Jonathan is joined today by Fern and Danie Hardie, who are residents of my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. At this time I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've been advised that the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit wishes to present a ministerial statement today. We will surely come up against Standing Order 7(1), which states: "At 1:50 p.m., Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes" shall commence. So in order to deal with this, we're going to have to deal with unanimous consent. Our tradition is that if I recognize the minister, under our rules a

spokesperson from the Official Opposition can automatically have a chance to respond, and then we know that the request will be made for unanimous consent to have additional speakers.

We've arrived at this point, but I started this before the clock hit 1:50 p.m., so I will ask for unanimous consent for us to proceed with ministerial statements at this time. If so, we will deal with the two for sure, and then I'll have to ask the question again for additional ones. The question period will hence then be delayed by that amount of minutes. Is any member opposed to recognition being provided to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to participate in a ministerial statement? If so, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

1:50

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Holodomor Memorial Day

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anyone who has travelled the length and breadth of Alberta has no doubt been struck by the wealth of our agricultural lands. There are crops of all types, but more than any other crop we see fields of wheat. Perhaps we forget that these fields of wheat are fields of life, a living example of our great blessings in this land. We are so used to the presence of the stalks of gold that it takes a considerable effort to imagine them being taken away. Imagine an Alberta without wheat, without crops of any kind. It doesn't seem reasonable. Unfortunately, history has all too many examples of the unreasonable and the unimaginable becoming horrifying reality.

In November 2008 this House unanimously passed the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act. The act commemorates one of history's darkest hours: the famine that ravaged the population of Soviet Ukraine between 1932 and 1933. This famine wasn't due to a cruel trick of fate or an aberration of the weather. It wasn't an act of God; it was an act of men. It was Joseph Stalin's totalitarian regime that pursued this murderous policy. This tragedy is known as Holodomor, which in Ukraine means extermination by means of starvation. Under Stalin's direction officials took the actions that brought misery and death to between 6 million and 7 million men, women, and children. The goal was to force Ukrainians to adopt collective farming practices and, ultimately, to destroy Ukrainian nationalism. It was a barbaric policy. People had to fill government quotas that left them with nothing to eat for themselves. Those who refused saw their crops confiscated and even their valuable seed grain taken away. Men, women, and children were executed for keeping so much as a handful of grain.

One Alberta survivor of the Holodomor, Olga Zazula, spoke to the *Calgary Herald* in 2008. She relived her grief as she spoke of losing her 5-year-old brother to the famine. Her father, who was head of his village, was in prison one day and was never seen again. She and her family were forced to eat grass, leaves, and tree bark. A neighbour even considered eating a dead rat. One chilling observation by a Soviet author was that before they died, people often lost their senses and ceased to become human beings.

The Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act recognizes the famine as an act of genocide. The memorial act designates the fourth Saturday of each November as Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day. It falls on November 27 this year. In Alberta our Ukrainian community will gather to mark this significant day and remember and honour the victims of the tragedy. I urge all Albertans to recognize this important day and, in doing so,

to reflect on our individual and communal roles in the fight against racial, religious, and other forms of hatred.

On Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day we are reminded of our roles in resisting and overcoming injustice, intolerance, and indifference. We must do this locally and globally. We must never forget our responsibility to achieve a common goal of building societies which effectively protect and truly value human rights. We must never forget that our words and our actions can make the difference between justice and injustice, between joy and sorrow. We must never forget, Mr. Speaker, that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. This is how we can truly honour the victims of this genocide.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with sadness that I rise on behalf of the Official Opposition. I certainly had the privilege earlier, at noontime, to witness the hon. Premier, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, and various other members of this Assembly pay respects to the Ukrainian community and to remember the horror that occurred in 1932 and 1933.

It's incredible to live in this province and to think that in parts of the Ukraine, with year after year of bountiful crops, the citizens, the farmers who grew them were restricted and limited. Those crops went to the Soviets; they did not stay behind for the farmers, not even a bit of seed to plant a crop the following year. We certainly have to remember. How we can truly honour the victims of this genocide is to ensure that food is never used again as a political or a military weapon. We must never allow food or the restriction or limitation of a food supply to be used for any means. Never should this occur again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, both the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood have requested that they be permitted to speak. We need unanimous consent of the House. If any members oppose, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We stand here today joined as a community of Albertans who remember the victims of Holodomor and keep their memories alive through this remembrance.

When Ukraine was declared independent from the Soviet Union in 1991, little was known about Holodomor. Slowly stories emerged. We know that during that period of time tremendous suffering occurred: 6 million to 7 million men, women, and children died due to starvation. This was another horrendous act of genocide. Can you imagine helping to harvest the crops, the wheat, the grain and not being allowed to keep any of it? Barbaric regulations and quotas were put in place which enabled the government to confiscate the land and the produce from those who produced it. Imagine seeing your loved ones, your family, your friends, and your neighbours literally starving to death in front of you and being unable to do anything about it because you are too weak yourself. Mr. Speaker, this is something that we can't imagine anymore than to be burned. It's something that cannot be imagined by those who have not experienced it.

It is because of events like these that we keep the memories alive.

It is because of people like you, the Ukrainian people, both the survivors and the descendants, who are brave enough to speak out and tell the stories of the famine, that we are here today. It is because of your refusal to forget dear loved ones who died unjustly that we remember who we honour. They, like you, are now feeling free to share their story. You will tell the story for the ones that could not pass it on themselves, and we will listen.

I remember the quote from Socrates: there is only one good, knowledge; and one evil, ignorance. We must never forget that our words and our actions can make the difference between justice and injustice, between joy and sorrow. Our laws must protect our life, our freedom, and our property. Anything less is unacceptable. They are always passed off by tyrants as good for the whole. We must protect the individual before we can protect the whole of society. We must never forget. This is how we can truly honour the victims of Holodomor.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Assembly. Today we mark Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day, taking place this weekend. The great loss and suffering that took place nearly 80 years ago, when millions of people in Ukraine were subjected to genocide, is one of the blackest calamities in our history. This is an important and sober commemoration for the many Albertans who are part of the Ukrainian community. On behalf of the NDP opposition and all New Democrats I express my sorrow at this terrible event.

It is not just an historic event in Ukrainian history. All of us need to see it as a powerful reminder of the importance of each of us always being prepared to speak up and defend human rights whenever they are under attack. What we permit to happen to others, no matter where they are, increases the danger for all of us. This memorial of a horrible time in modern history is a call to us to defend democratic principles and human rights wherever and whenever they are threatened.

I extend my sympathies to all those who suffered in Holodomor and to the many family members who lost loved ones. As we remember, we recommit to working for a just world. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier took the unprecedented step of updating his blog on Sunday night so that he could read a scripted, rehearsed statement scolding Albertans about theatrics. Is the Premier saying that the thousands of Albertans writing letters to the editor, calling MLAs' offices, even the emergency debate here in the Legislature and concerns about emergency care is theatrics?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wasn't blaming Albertans. Albertans are continuing to tell us that health care is important to them and that they want to see improvements. Right now everyone involved for a period of time was looking at each other and maybe pointing blame. What I've said is: look, the time has come. There

was a very good meeting of health care professionals on Friday that talked about a good plan to be put in place, and I'm looking forward to the implementation of that plan.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier, then, saying that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is not really concerned about health care but is engaged in theatrics?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're all concerned about health care together with all Canadians. This is a serious issue across the country, and that's why we'll continue here as a government to show leadership, to keep improving the system. We've already put more money in. We've opened up more continuing care beds, and we'll continue on with the plan.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans, including health professionals, are feeling a chill in the air. Will the Premier instruct Alberta Health Services to encourage health professionals to speak out with their ideas on how to make this system work?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, 100 or so health care professionals met last Friday. They put their heads together with the Alberta Health Services Board and have come up with, I believe, a very, very good plan. Now it's time to implement that plan and get on with it. That's what we're going to be doing.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Accountability in Health System Governance

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has been consistently failing Alberta's health care system. This gross, misguided experiment in creating one health region has failed. Its implementation has been disastrous, and sadly it has now become a tragic and rather bitter joke. To the Premier: will the Premier, who launched this experiment, bring it to an end through an orderly dismantling of Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the reason we put all of the regions into one was to consolidate the operations – all the human resource departments, all of the auditing departments, the dozen or so CEOs that were scattered across the province – and to take those savings and put them into front-line services. That was roughly about \$800 million. That's over and above the 6 per cent that we gave health care for this year and will continue for the next three years, followed by 4 and a half per cent for the next few years.

Dr. Swann: Well, whether he is simply a political scapegoat or not, Stephen Duckett has lost the confidence and respect of the health professionals in the system and is no longer fit to hold the title of CEO. Will the Premier order the CEO terminated?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, obviously, the party opposite has changed their mind. The colleague sitting next to the leader said at some point that I or the government or whoever was purposely setting up the CEO. Now all of a sudden they changed their mind over the weekend and want him removed. All I can say is that we'll continue to have very serious heart-to-heart discussions with the Alberta Health Services Board. It's something that Albertans certainly don't appreciate, and we've certainly heard from Albertans today and over the weekend.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier not realize that by failing to hold Stephen Duckett accountable for the disrespect he's shown to Albertans, he approves of an action that insulted every single Albertan?

Mr. Stelmach: Dr. Duckett is an employee of the Alberta Health Services Board, and I'm sure that the board, as we speak, is looking at all of the information that's coming forward and will be making a decision. Again, following such intense meetings, good ideas flowing from the 100 or so professionals that met, Dr. Eagle's plan to communicate to all Albertans: that took second fiddle to the comments that were made, unfortunately, by the CEO.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AMA president's letter released last Friday reads, "The delivery of health care in Alberta can continue to lurch from crisis to crisis to crisis, along with a superficial diagnosis and a patchwork of short-term 'solutions'." To the Premier: as part of a long-term solution to the ER crisis will the Premier appoint an emergency task force so that the real experts can get started on cleaning up the mess this Premier has created?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, these were health care professionals that got together on Friday and came up with a comprehensive plan, and now it's up to health care providers and the AHS Board to implement that plan. I would suggest that the sooner we get going on it, the better. I know that they're going to communicate the plan to all of the hospitals and get feedback so that they can implement it efficiently. Of course, a big part of that is to increase more community-based programs and also increase the number of continuing care beds.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we're calling for a task force because the Alberta Health Services Board has clearly shown itself inadequate to the task. We need a long-term task force to merge into a regional delivery system. Does the Premier accuse the president of the AMA of contributing to theatrics because he joined other Albertans in speaking the truth about this failed experiment?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again more chatter, more talk, more loss of focus on what the plan is and again looking and pointing fingers at each other. I've talked to the president of the AMA. He was very supportive of the plan. He thought it was a good plan to move forward. It's a first step. We've got to reduce the number of people that are accessing health through the emergency room, so personal care networks are going to be a huge component of that, and there are other solutions that AHS will announce very shortly.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the president of the AMA also stated in his letter that "the situation in emergency departments . . . is a symptom of a health care system in distress." Will the Premier acknowledge that Alberta Health Services has been a colossal mistake and commit to an orderly transition to a system that has local decision-making, guided by the professionals working in the system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, professionals do work in the system. These are the individuals that are delivering the solutions to many of the problems. But I can tell you that if he thinks we're going to go

back to 300 hospital boards and 300 administrations, we're not. We're going to have people responsible in every hospital for the delivery and people accountable to the public. But to go back to 300 boards and add another \$800 million worth of expenses and take it out of front-line service?

Member Suspension from PC Caucus

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are appalled at this government. What an absolute disgrace this has been, kicking your own emergency room doctor out of caucus right during an emergency room crisis. Shameful. And for what? Sticking up for the sick and the suffering and people dying in our emergency rooms. This Premier should be ashamed of himself. To the Premier: will you immediately apologize for this ridiculous decision that was made today? Absolutely shameful, sir.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think a very good example of theatrics.

In fact, every hour \$300 million is invested in health care in this province. That will continue to grow with the program growth. But every time we just take time to point fingers at each other and take away from the progress that's being made – we have health care professionals ready to go, and I'm there to work with them together with our government.

Mr. Anderson: Not good enough, Mr. Speaker.

Given that this Premier has kicked the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to the curb for speaking out for sick seniors and now the same Premier kicks out an ER doc for speaking out for the sick and suffering Albertans in our emergency rooms, does this Premier give a tinker's damn about anything other than himself and getting his party back into power in 12 months? It ain't going to work.

Mr. Stelmach: That's quite an emotional statement, but it hasn't moved the plan ahead, and that's my focus here, to work with everyone to move the plan that was brought together by health care professionals last week. You know, we can point fingers at each other again and call each other names. What was done has been done. I can't retract what the CEO said. I can't retract what has been said before. All I know is that there is a plan in place; let's get on with it.

2:10

Mr. Anderson: You should be apologizing to every single Albertan and, certainly, to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Given that we live in a democracy that values free speech or is supposed to value free speech and is based on an MLA being able to represent his constituents with everything that he has, how can this Premier sit there and spit in the face of democracy, of free speech, and of an MLA representing and defending the people of Alberta to the best of his ability? How low will you go, Premier? This is absolutely shameful. You should apologize.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again we can talk about the decision that was reached today, but there is nothing holding any member back from talking about how to improve the health care system. The hon. member presented his point of view. Some of that has been incorporated in the plan, and that plan will be delivered by the health care professionals of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Emergency Medical Services

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has just suspended his own parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness for speaking up against this government's disastrous handling of the emergency room crisis. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is a courageous MLA and health care provider who puts his constituents ahead of loyalty to a secretive and incompetent Tory government. Will the Premier apologize for penalizing the members of his caucus that speak the truth and, instead, finally take responsibility for the entire health care crisis that he has created?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a similar question as from the first questioner. It's very clear in terms of the plan that was put together over the weekend. We're now in a process of implementing that plan, and we will continue to implement it no matter how much the opposition tries to oppose it and create diversions. First and foremost, let's get on with the plan to ensure that every Albertan has an equitable opportunity in health care to enter the system appropriately within the right amount of time.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is tired of all the theatrics surrounding health care. To him it's just a soap opera, perhaps called *As the Cookie Crumbles*, but to most Albertans it's a life-or-death issue, and they're glad it's finally getting some public attention. But when a member of the government caucus tries to speak up, he gets kicked out of the PC caucus, just like that. To the Premier: why do you keep trying to sweep the emergency crisis and your job in creating it under the rug? Why are you silencing your own MLAs?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a plan that was put together last Friday. We will implement that plan no matter what the opposition tries to throw in front of government or in front of Alberta Health Services. It's very important that that plan is implemented, at least the beginning of it, because there's more to follow the week after and the week after that in terms of relieving the pressures on the emergency rooms. Like I said, it's community-based programs, and it's also creating more spaces for seniors so they have the proper accommodation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Well, the Premier seems to think our ER crisis is some sort of stage play. If so, it's a combination of tragedy and farce, Mr. Speaker. The author is sitting in the Premier's chair. Will the Premier admit that the decisions of his government have led directly to this ER crisis and that silencing his own parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness only further undermines morale among front-line health care providers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, everybody had an opportunity for input. I've listened to input coming from all groups: health care professionals, those that are advocates for health care in the province, people that were in the system, and people that just took the time to call and say, you know, "I had a pleasant experience." There are, obviously, many that haven't, especially waiting in emergency rooms. We're going to resolve the issue. Like I said before, we're going to try and provide equitable service across the province: three new cancer radiation clinics, in Grande Prairie and Lethbridge and Red Deer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On Friday Alberta Health Services announced ER surge capacity protocols. Ideas may look good on paper, but implementation is everything. My questions will be to the Premier. These changes are to be implemented by next month in an organization that is itself in a management crisis. To the Premier: how are these changes possibly going to be implemented in an organization of 90,000 people in one month?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the plan was entered into by a number of health care professionals, who all had input. Now is the opportunity to disseminate that information to all of the health care providers in the province. That information will go out through the various groups that have responsibility in certain hospitals across the province. We'll also work with the long-term care association, that we continually build more beds and free up acute-care beds in the province. All of those things are part of the overall plan.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody believes this can be done in one month in an organization this size. Alberta Health Services' leadership, hand-picked by this government, is in disarray, but it takes effective leadership to implement these changes. To the Premier: does this government have a plan B when these protocols don't work out?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the plan that health care professionals put together – these are health care providers that came from different corners of the province and spent considerable time putting their ideas forward, looking at them, criticizing each other in terms of, okay, what is good, what is not good in our particular area. They came to agreement, and now is the time to implement it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it seems that Stephen Duckett gets a cookie while the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark gets the boot out of his caucus. Last week this Premier offered support to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, so what has caused the Premier to change his mind?

Mr. Stelmach: My support for the member has not changed. I made a commitment to the member that the discussions we had, because they were of a personal nature, will stay personal. That is the promise I made to the member, and I keep my promise.

The Speaker: The Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Oil Sands Development Communications Strategy

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the news today we saw that three federal government departments have been developing a communications strategy to deal with international global warming policies that target Alberta's oil sands. Therefore, my first question is to the Minister of Energy. How is the Alberta government involved in the development of this strategy that Ottawa is working on regarding our resource?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to see, as the member mentioned, that there is some work taking place at the federal level. I think it reassures us because to date the Prime Minister and senior federal ministers have not been proudly talking on the international stage about the responsible oil sands development. I think it's some 500,000 Canadians that work directly or

indirectly in the Canadian petroleum industry, including about 15,000 who fly in and out of this province every week or two from east of the Manitoba-Ontario boundary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many hard-working and honest Albertans from the energy sector are frustrated with unfounded and unsubstantiated attacks on our oil sands, I'd welcome a better strategy that will yield more informed discussion. Can the minister tell us what level of co-operation he has with his federal counterpart and with the federal government in general on this issue?

Mr. Liepert: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, one of the federal cabinet ministers that is advocating on behalf of the oil and gas industry around the world is the federal minister of energy, Mr. Paradis from Quebec. He and I have agreed that we're going to work towards the development of a national clean energy strategy, and that'll begin next summer, when we host the federal-provincial ministers here in Alberta. I'm also happy to say that the ambassador to Washington, who's the former NDP Premier of Manitoba, has been a very strong advocate on behalf of the oil sands, and it's something that other members of this House could probably take some advice from.

Mr. Johnson: My last question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Many Canadians seem to feel that only Albertans benefit from the oil sands development. Can the minister tell us the extent of the benefits that our oil sands provide the entire country?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. As I said in my previous answers, some 500,000 Canadians either work directly or indirectly in the oil industry in Alberta, and many of those come from east of the Manitoba-Ontario border, and that's not to mention all of the manufacturing jobs that are associated with the oil sands. As a result of that, the Alberta economy generates in the range of some \$55 billion annually, and that pays for such things as health care, advanced education, and in some cases \$7 daycare across the country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:20

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning at the fiscal update we learned that the deficit has ballooned to over \$5 billion. The province is expected to take in slightly more than \$34 billion and, of course, spend \$39 billion. My first question is to the minister of finance. The minister has stated that external factors are to blame for Alberta's deficit and that spending is the only thing that the government can control. My question is: where is the savings plan? When can we expect the savings plan from this government?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it is true that the deficit is now projected to be \$5 billion, not \$4.7 billion, but our actual spending is lower than was projected at budget time if you take away emergency and disaster spending. I'd ask the hon. member opposite: does he not want us to fund emergencies and disasters? Does he want us to take the money back from the flood victims, back from the forest fires, back from the drought victims? Where does he want us to cut the emergency spending?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of finance, with his big spending habits, can't justify disaster relief as the reason why we have a \$5 billion deficit. That's false. It's your mismanagement.

To the President of the Treasury Board. The minister has said that the government is looking at further belt-tightening. I know that last year you showed leadership by finding \$1.5 billion in savings from various ministries. What can the taxpayers expect from your department this year?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the title of our budget last year was Striking the Right Balance. We said at the time that it was a combination of looking where there were opportunities for revenue without raising taxes – and it was on an ongoing basis throughout all the government departments – where we could save money and deliver the services that we need to deliver more efficiently. That isn't done on the one day we deliver the budget. It happens every day that the public service goes to work, looking for better ways to deliver the services that Albertans want more effectively.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of finance. The minister has placed great emphasis on getting value for every dollar spent. We've just heard that. At the same time this government is passing legislation to increase the number of MLAs from 83 to 87, and we've seen an increase in the size of the cabinet since 2008. Could the minister of finance explain how increasing the size of government provides value for money for Alberta taxpayers?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, what I'll explain to the hon. member is that we've actually shrunk the size of government. As I speak today, there are 3,114 fewer employees in the government of Alberta than there were when the recession began. Government is shrinking in Alberta, not growing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Along the same lines, earlier today government released its second-quarter update, informing Albertans about the province's fiscal situation and forecast for the year ahead, including the fact that Alberta's deficit is now forecast at \$5 billion for this fiscal year, up from \$4.7 billion. My question to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise is: would the minister please explain why our deficit has increased? Did we not commit to holding the line on spending?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as I just finished explaining, in fact we did hold the line on spending. Our increase in the size of the deficit is due to emergency spending: \$534 million for flood, drought, forest fires, and pine beetle. These are emergencies that we can't prevent, but we can help the people that suffer from them. We have held the line. If you hold that emergency spending to the side, our spending actually went down.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: how does the government intend to cover the deficit for this year?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the good news is that in Alberta deficit does not equal debt. Because of the fiscal responsibility shown by

a number of governments leading down to the recession in 2008, we went into this recession with \$18 billion in the sustainability fund. Each of the three deficits to date have been offset by the savings from the sustainability fund. At the end of this budget year we project that there'll still be \$11 billion in the sustainability fund.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Final question to the same minister: given that you mentioned uncertainty in global economic conditions affecting the government's bottom line, is it still realistic to expect that Alberta can be back in the black by 2012-13?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, will it be easy to stay in a balanced budget in 2012? No. Is it realistic? Absolutely, yes. If we hold the line on spending, if our revenue projections are accurate, which we think they are – they're in line with private-sector projections – we will be back in the black in two years. It's not only realistic; it's necessary. It's necessary to ensure that we do not end up running up debt. In Alberta the Premier has stated that he will not leave debt on the backs of the next generation. I support that. Everybody on this side of the aisle supports that, and we're going to hit that target.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

School Board Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago at the Alberta School Boards Association MLA breakfast the Minister of Education scolded naughty trustees for uniting with school councils and the Alberta Teachers' Association in opposition to his draconian educational cuts and clawbacks. By initially not honouring the weekly average earnings index, which determined teacher and staff increases, the minister threw a major wrench into budget preparation which lasted until July, forcing boards to redo their budget. To the minister: is the minister's proposal to appoint trustees just the latest punishment for their ongoing opposition to his educational freezes and cuts?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'd love to answer that question, but I have to start with those rather ridiculous preambles. First of all, there were no draconian cuts in the budget last year to education. In fact, the budget went up. When I talked to school board trustees last fall, I wasn't lecturing them or beating them on the head; I was saying to them that what we had started with them was an intelligent and respectful discussion about how to deal more effectively and efficiently with the resources in the system because resources were tight. Secondly, I said to the school boards in the spring, after the budget, that we would honour our commitment to teachers.

The Speaker: I think we're going to get back to this.
The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Despite at least \$8 billion remaining in the sustainability fund, is the minister planning again on playing the recessionary card to deny much-needed capital spending on new school construction and billions of dollars in accumulated school repairs?

Mr. Hancock: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, when the budget came down last year and it did not budget for the teacher increases that we had committed to, I made it very clear to the boards that we were

still committed to providing them with those resources, and I asked them to budget on that basis. The fact that boards did not do that is not my responsibility. The fact that when we came through with the resources in July, which we said we were going to be doing, forced them to come back in the summer to do some more work on their budgets, is not my problem because I told them very, very clearly up front – and you can even read the *Calgary Herald* article, which said: read between the lines; the government is meeting their commitment.

Mr. Chase: I think we just saw a re-enactment of Pontius Pilate washing his hands of the matter.

Does the minister believe that parents, trustees, or teachers would tolerate his further interference in suggesting opening negotiations in the last two years of the five-year labour agreement? What is the minister's word or signature on a contract worth?

Mr. Hancock: A signature of this minister of this government is worth every bit. It can be upheld. We stand behind our commitments. We're standing behind our commitments with respect to that contract. But what I have done is asked the ATA and the school boards to come to the table to talk about how we can extend this period of time of the five-year labour peace that we've had so that we can continue to talk about what the importance and value of education is to Albertans, what education looks like as we go forward, and how we can do it better together.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Landowner Private Property Rights

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks there has been a blizzard of misinformation, even fearmongering, that the property rights of Albertans are threatened by recent provincial legislation, including the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: does the Alberta Bill of Rights take precedence over all other provincial legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the answer to the question is yes, absolutely. The Bill of Rights takes precedence over other Alberta legislation unless there's something in the legislation that says it does not. In this particular case it includes the Land Stewardship Act. The Bill of Rights absolutely overrides the Land Stewardship Act.

Mr. Prins: Again to the same minister: what does it mean when the Alberta Land Stewardship Act says that a regional plan may amend or even extinguish an existing approval?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we need to be clear about this because not only the members of this House but all Albertans need to understand that ALSA, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, cannot and does not take away or extinguish any land title or any mineral right that's held freehold.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how does the Alberta Land Stewardship Act affect Albertans' rights to compensation?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, this is another thing there's been an awful lot of misunderstanding about. ALSA, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, does not preclude any property rights owner, any Albertan, from receiving fair compensation. As a matter of fact, it guarantees fair compensation under any other act that already has compensation allotment in it. ALSA says that you will be compensated under the other legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Children in Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The children's advocate report is out, and even in its most sanitized form the news is not good. Since 2003 the advocate has been begging the government to do a better job supporting the most vulnerable children in government care, youth with complex needs. Seven years later the advocate tells us that no progress has been made. Why does the Minister of Children and Youth Services continue to ignore the youth in her care, who are the absolute most vulnerable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the advocate report reaches back eight months to March 2010 and addresses the previous year to that. In the eight-month period we have made significant progress. While I've been here in this ministry I've seen that. The advocate has given us good advice, and the recommendations that are made in the report make good sense about how our programs and policies can be improved and how they can better assist our families. I can assure this member that we are working toward that. I know that the members address complex needs, and we care.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been seven years that the advocate has been asking for this, so another seven months undoubtedly brings no change.

Given that the advocate reports also failure by the ministry to introduce the most basic of protections from the major safety breaches contained within the kinship program and given that the vast majority of the children in the kinship program are aboriginal, why did the minister refuse to act on the recommendations of her own hand-picked panel to provide specialized support to off-reserve aboriginal children and families?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to you earlier in the Assembly, what the member is referring to with kinship care is that there is kinship care; there is foster care. It is delivered by our child and family services authorities off reserve and by our delegated First Nations agencies on reserve. I am meeting once again with the delegated First Nations agencies this week because they have asked to be the ones to formulate the model that we put in place to address off-reserve care related to kinship care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, that doesn't address the specific recommendation.

Given that the advocate says that the 2009 budget was already shortchanging adolescents in care by cutting supports prematurely, including where the access to PDD funding was blocked because of the shortfalls in that ministry's budget, why is this minister standing by as the very neediest children in care fall through the ever-widening cracks created by her government's neglect?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that I do acknowledge this member's concern. I can tell you that in the spring session, if you'll recall, I did address the budget and monitoring the budget, making changes as they became necessary. In fact, in August of this year the Treasury Board did allocate a further 72 and a half million dollars to this ministry for child care and for child intervention, and that was to support our programs and services. Thirteen million dollars of that funding went to our family support for children with disabilities.

Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard that North Haverbrook finally got its monorail, so I thought I'd see if Fort Macleod might get a police college someday. When Fort Macleod was designated as the site for this training centre in 2006, everyone agreed that a single training facility was necessary. If that's still the case, why is construction taking longer than the completion of the Great Wall of China?

Mr. Oberle: I think I made it pretty clear the last time the hon. member asked some questions about this that I had made a promise to the people of Fort Macleod that I would work very hard to identify a need for a facility, and then I would work hard to get that profiled on the capital plan. I think the member probably read the newspaper articles, and he knows that's coming along, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did actually read in the *Lethbridge Herald* that you had some money for this project, but to be a little more specific, I'm sort of wondering how much is some money to get this project finally on the go.

Mr. Oberle: Well, see, Mr. Speaker, I knew he read the newspaper because that's where he does his research. We've identified some money for planning, and we're going to proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The *Lethbridge Herald* is a good place to get a good tip on what the government is up to, but can we expect a concrete date for construction and when this money will be allocated? And when you're meeting with the townspeople and their P3 partner next week, will you detail when this construction is finally going to take place?

Mr. Oberle: Well, if the member would think about that question for a minute, very obviously I don't at this moment have spending authority, so I could hardly announce any date. I'm working very hard. I've talked to people down in Fort Macleod. As he knows, I've talked to the media. I'm going to be talking more with the people in Fort Macleod. We're working on it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Chateau Estates Access Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For over two years I have been lobbying for the construction of a new road for my constituents in Chateau Estates. A few weeks back in this Assembly the Minister of Transportation said that the road would be ready by October 31. Can the Minister of Transportation explain why the road is not yet ready?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it was certainly our hope to have this road paved and open this construction season, but the paving of this road will not be completed until spring. Any transportation project completion dates always have the proviso of weather permitting, and if this hon. member has been outside lately, you can see that that white stuff that's on the ground doesn't go real well with paving. I'd like to point out that the . . .

The Speaker: We'll come back to you. Don't go away.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, if the road cannot be paved this year, can the minister at the very least make a commitment to my constituents to guarantee it will open as a gravel road sooner rather than later?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is yes. And again I'd like to tell this hon. member that he should maybe go outside and feel what that weather is like and understand that we probably can't pave. But we'll get right on that gravel.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I've been outside repeatedly, feeling what my constituents in Chateau Estates feel. When can this minister make a commitment for the completion of the gravel road?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as soon as the weather clears, we will have people out there working on that road.

I have to say that we're the money supplier on that particular road, and actually it's the county of Rocky View that's delivering the project. But we'll work with them and make sure that they get it done for the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Hospital Site Administrators

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forty days is a long time for an emergency response to a crisis. When someone is having a heart attack or a mental breakdown, they need treatment now, not in 40 days. Why does this government continue down a dead-end road and the bureaucratic doom loop of a centralized superboard? We need hospital administrators in place to make decisions, not more or new protocols. To the minister of health: are you telling Albertans that you have no competent people in your hospitals that you can put in charge to make the decisions tomorrow instead of waiting until January 2011 for a new protocol?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've indicated this before, but I'd like to just repeat it. Every one of the major acute-care site centres has a clinical lead and also a site admin lead. In other words, there are people with local responsibility that also have local authority to act. They don't have to wait until January. What we're talking about here today as a result of the November 19 meeting with over 100 AHS specialists is a set of new protocols to enhance and improve what's already there.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, a competent administrator needs to be appointed to manage our hospitals. When will the government follow our commonsense approach to appoint a chief administrator in every hospital with the actual authority, not written authority, to use their staff and resources to treat patients when they need it? They come in, and they cannot be treated.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, perhaps he didn't hear the answer to the last question. We have those people there now. As the result of

the meeting on Friday, however, they're going to make significant improvements in the way that the patient flow is handled, in the way that additional units across the hospital will free up space to take in some of the people that are in the emergency wards today. There are specific percentiles. When they get reached, a new protocol kicks in. This is a very, very helpful system of improvement that will yield the results that we're all after.

2:40

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, someone doesn't want to be a percentile before they can be treated. We need an administrator who can actually call in staff, open up beds, and do it now. The minister is obviously unaware of the real cost of keeping someone in a hospital simply because AHS policy refuses to vertically integrate their patient care to follow a patient home to convalesce with proper, necessary home care. A chief administrative officer would implement such a plan and integrate vertically all the way home. When will you appoint a chief administrator that can actually do all of these things from emergency rooms to home care?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, there is an executive team there that does exactly that. As a result of that executive team, I have to tell you that we're now going to be opening 360 net new acute-care beds across the province of Alberta. It's a wonderful announcement. As a result of that, we'll also be hiring 500 additional RNs to help staff those beds. This is all part of the plan. Those are net new nurses, so to speak, as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Education Curriculum

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education. There seems to be a lot of pressure on schools to teach a wide variety of subjects such as Canadian history, financial literacy, grammar, home economics, industrial arts, heritage languages, et cetera. Has the minister reviewed the curriculum to determine if there is room to include and/or expand the teaching of some of these subjects within the current program?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, over the course of the last two years we've been engaged in a project we call Inspiring Education. The report came out, and it articulated a vision of three Es for education for the 21st century, to inspire and enable students to achieve successes and fulfillment as engaged thinkers, ethical citizens, with an entrepreneurial spirit. Those are the types of competencies that we need to have in our students. The next step in the process is to figure out how that impacts the development of curriculum and what we include in the curriculum in terms of what knowledge they need to know and what skills they need to have.

Mr. Allred: Following that, Mr. Speaker, does the Department of Education review and prioritize the importance of some of these subjects on a regular basis?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there's a constant process of reviewing and updating curriculum. It involves teachers. It involves stakeholders. It's a fairly comprehensive process. Again, as I indicated in my last answer, we have engaged in this process of Inspiring Education to say: what does 21st century education need to be, and what skills and attributes and knowledge do our students need to have to be successful both locally and globally? We will be reviewing curriculum going forward in that context and evergreening our curriculum in that context.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that it is impossible to include all of the desired courses in a 12-year school program, has the minister considered adding a 13th year to the school program?

Mr. Hancock: Short answer, Mr. Speaker: no. We wouldn't be adding a compulsory 13th year to the curriculum. There is, of course, no reason why a student can't take the courses that they want, take an extra period of time if they want. The school system is open to students up until age 19 at the present time. We are under discussion with the School Act, and there is a possibility that we could discuss whether that should be extended to 20 or 21, but the bottom line is that we will include the core courses that are needed for students to have the knowledge, skills, and attributes that they need to participate globally and locally in the economy, in their community . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July 2009 Transportation released two investment-grade reports on the benefits of high-speed rail service between Edmonton and Calgary. More than a year after paying the consultants close to a million dollars for these and one other, undisclosed report, the Minister of Transportation said that the province was considering its options. To the Minister of Transportation. A million dollars is lots of money for the reports. Has the government used the reports to make any decision, or are the reports now gathering dust on the shelves?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, we haven't made any decisions about actually moving forward immediately. We use the report when we do our own studies. We're still looking at high-speed rail between Edmonton and Calgary. Mr. Speaker, as you know, we've been in some difficult times here budgetwise, and we'll be looking at moving ahead with high-speed rail in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The president of the Alberta High-Speed Rail company told the parliamentary committee in Ottawa that he is planning to put a 300 kilometre per hour train on a dedicated passenger highway. Why do Albertans have to hear about an Alberta project through a committee in Ottawa? Why not, for a start, release the other report?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, he's done some research that I haven't seen about somebody reporting to Ottawa on when we're moving ahead with high-speed rail. I absolutely am not sure what he's talking about there.

Mr. Kang: Well, I think I know what I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Transportation. The estimates are that a high-speed rail line would cost 3 and a half billion dollars and give a \$19 billion boost to the economy over its lifespan, not to mention the environmental, road safety, and job creation benefits. What is the minister doing to move this project forward?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that he did say a few things there now that he knows what he's talking about. There was

some truth in those statements he just made. I have to tell the hon. member that our next step is that I am looking into where we would put the corridors. We have already put in place two pieces of land in Calgary and in Edmonton, and we're looking at connecting those dots.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

NAIT Programs

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was with great disappointment and concern that I read recent reports that NAIT is considering cutting nine of its excellent postsecondary programs, programs like medical transcription, avionics engineering technology, and records management. My question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. The minister often talks about increasing options and opportunities for students, so why are programs being cut?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to be clear that no decisions about cutting programs have been made. I believe that NAIT is simply looking at the relevancy and effectiveness and demand for approximately nine programs. I think it's important that over time our institutions look at all of the programs that they offer to ensure that they are relevant, that they're serving Albertans, they're serving taxpayers. If NAIT or any other institution wishes to suspend a program, they do have to submit a proposal to the ministry for approval, and as I said, we have not received any.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like the hon. minister has final say in this particular process, so given that to be so, what are your decisions to be based on?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that I have not received a proposal from NAIT. When institutions do submit proposals, the final decisions are based on a solid business case. That includes factors like the graduation rates, the enrolments, the needs of employers and Albertans. The most important factor is how the students in these programs are going to be accommodated, those that are enrolled, those that may want to enrol in them. We look at all of those factors.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. If the programs are to be cut, what happens to those students that are currently enrolled in their first year or have just entered their second year of the program?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the impact on the student is the highest priority when an institution enters into a strategic review like this, and I'm sure that that's very high on the agenda of NAIT as well. Institutions have to identify in the proposal that they would eventually submit to the ministry the contingencies that they would use for their overall business case, grandfathering students that are in the program as an example. In the case of NAIT they have assured the department that any prospective students will have those contingencies and those protections.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Alberta Health Services President

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Stephen Duckett's cookie video has had over 70,000 hits on the web in three days. He's sort of on track to rival Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber. He's been on the TV news as far away as Europe. Unfortunately, Dr. Duckett has made himself a joke, which was made clear to me in many candid conversations in the last three days. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does this minister have full confidence in Stephen Duckett as CEO of Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Duckett has an enormous responsibility. He made some inappropriate and very unfortunate comments. I have spoken with him about that. I believe his own board, to whom he reports directly, will also be speaking with him about it. I know he deeply regrets the comments. It's just unfortunate that it happened at a time when we had such good news to share with regard to emergency room protocols.

2:50

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't answer my question, so my question I will repeat. Is the Minister of Health and Wellness still saying he has full confidence in Stephen Duckett as the CEO of Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I know that as part of Dr. Duckett's performance review the board will be speaking with him about performance measures that deal with quality, with access, with sustainability. Perhaps they'll even be talking about these comments. I don't know. That will be up to the board to deal with that. In the meantime we'll continue to focus on what we're trying to do, and that's to improve health care and health care outcomes for Albertans.

Dr. Taft: Well, I think the minister's responses speak volumes. Clearly, he does not have confidence in Dr. Duckett. Let me make a suggestion here. The second-quarter update provided today shows that Alberta Health and Wellness is underspending its budget by \$184 million. Why isn't Alberta Health Services mobilizing all of its resources at its disposal to improve the health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the announcement that he's talking about, which our minister of finance made, refers to a deficit that perhaps may not have been as great as they were projecting, but I'll have the minister of finance augment, please.

The Speaker: I'm afraid the time is gone.

Hon. members, we've been able to recognize 19 members today. There were 114 questions and responses.

Before we continue with the Routine, I would like to advise all members that six years ago, on November 22, 15 of you were elected for the first time. I would like to extend congratulations to the hon. members for Foothills-Rocky View, Peace River, Calgary-West, Calgary-Foothills, Highwood, Calgary-Nose Hill, Calgary-Hays, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Stony Plain, Lacombe-Ponoka, Calgary-Lougheed, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, Calgary-Mountain View, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Currie, and Lethbridge-East. This is your sixth anniversary today. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore: one year ago today you were re-elected for the second time. Today is also the anniversary of his arrival in the world – what a day it was for his mother – of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll continue.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if it might be appropriate, before we start Members' Statements, given the time, to ask that we waive the rule that says we finish at 3 o'clock and allow Members' Statements to be completed in their entirety.

The Speaker: Do I take it that the Routine would then conclude at the conclusion of Members' Statements and the remainder of the Routine would just not be continued with?

Mr. Hancock: That's what I suggested, but perhaps it would be more appropriate to suggest that we complete the Routine.

The Speaker: So because we're coming up against Standing Order 7(7), which basically says that at 3 o'clock the Speaker shall notify the Assembly, there's a motion, which requires unanimous consent, that we would complete the Routine notwithstanding that we've passed 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Okay. We'll continue with Members' Statements, and we'll conclude directly at 3 o'clock. We will conclude then.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka with a member's statement, please.

Gord Bamford

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly honoured now to rise and recognize Mr. Gord Bamford for his many achievements and accomplishments, not only for the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka but for this province and entire country. Gord grew up just outside of Lacombe, where his family recognized the importance of country life and community involvement. One of the most profound childhood experiences for Gord was 4-H, where he learned invaluable life lessons such as responsibility and leadership. He's a true country boy, devoted family man, skilled entertainer, and a very successful multi-award-winning Canadian country music artist. He has written and recorded songs with some of Nashville's greatest and has shared the stage with Reba McEntire, Tim McGraw, Brooks and Dunn, and the legendary George Strait.

Mr. Speaker, this year has been a phenomenal year for Gord: being named the 2010 Canadian Country Music Association male artist of the year award, receiving the Country Music Television video of the year for *Day Job*, album of the year as well as a humanitarian of the year award. Just recently the Lacombe Day-break Rotary Club awarded Gord the Paul Harris fellowship award for his generous support and humanitarian efforts.

Mr. Speaker, Gord is realizing his dream and using his success to create opportunity, strengthen community, and effect positive change for kids. For the past three years he has hosted the Gord Bamford Charity Golf Tournament. In 2009 he raised \$170,000 for local charities, and this year \$230,000 was generated to support charities such as Big Brothers & Big Sisters, Lacombe accessible park, Lacombe Athletic Park society, Ronald McDonald House in Red Deer, and the Make-a-Wish Foundation. As Gord so profoundly said: "It's not about making it, it's about making it matter."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Gord Bamford for his accomplishments and his continued efforts in making it matter. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Provincial Savings Strategy

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first-quarter update forecast the value of the heritage fund at \$14.1 billion. Two years ago last March the fund was valued at \$17 billion. Let's compare the heritage fund's lacklustre performance to the Norway fund, which is now worth over \$500 billion according to the Norwegian central bank. Norway's fund received its first inflow of capital only 14 years ago. They've saved \$500 billion in 14 years while this government has managed to save only \$14 billion in 34 years. What a difference. While Alberta can't even return the heritage fund to its 2008 value of \$17 billion, Norway forecasts that their energy savings will grow by over \$250 billion in the next four years to total \$765 billion.

Research concludes that there is not a significant difference in oil and gas production in Alberta and Norway. In 2009 Norway produced about 2 million barrels per day, Alberta 1.9 million barrels per day. Alberta outperformed in 2009 when it came to natural gas production. It was almost 20 per cent more than what the Norwegians did.

Public debate on the petroleum fund in Norway has included a discussion on whether the country should use more of the energy revenues for the annual budget instead of saving for the future, whether the level of exposure to the volatile and risky stock market is financially safe, and whether the investment policy of the petroleum fund is ethical. These are just a few examples. The Norwegians have devoted a great deal of attention to this issue while Alberta's government has lagged behind.

Alberta Liberals have repeatedly encouraged this government to do a better job of saving for the future. Only the sustainability fund, an Alberta Liberal idea adopted by this government . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege that I rise today to acknowledge and commemorate the 33rd annual Croatian Canadian Folklore Federation West Festival, which was successfully hosted by the Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble and school of Edmonton, held over the May long weekend of this year in our capital city. For over 35 years the Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble of Edmonton, known as Domagoj, under the auspices of the Nativity of Mary Croatian Catholic Church, has exemplified an unwavering commitment to preserve the songs, dances, and national costumes of the centuries-old Croatian culture.

The Domagoj Croatian Folk Dance Ensemble is also a member of the Croatian Canadian Folklore Federation West, whose goal is to preserve traditional Croatian folklore and to share its rich cultural traditions at the national level. Since Domagoj's inception this ensemble has had a long-standing presence in our community by participating in major events in the city of Edmonton, which includes the 1975 opening ceremonies of the Edmonton Coliseum, known today as Rexall Place; the Commonwealth Games in 1978; and is one of the first cultural ensembles to proudly take part in Edmonton's first Heritage Festival.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations and best wishes to all of the performers, teachers, organizers, volunteers, families, and friends who through their tireless generosity, diligence, and dedication ensured an outstanding and very successful folklore festival for all

to enjoy. The diverse cultural mosaic in Alberta, which includes the Croatian heritage and traditions, is truly a blessing for which I'm very grateful. Thank you all and God bless. [Remarks in Croatian]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf.

Carbon Capture and Storage Funding

M14. Mr. Hehr moved on behalf of Dr. Swann that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence sent to the government between January 1, 2008, and September 10, 2010, from businesses and nongovernmental organizations regarding the government's funding of carbon capture and storage technology.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the carbon capture and storage fund is an enormous government expenditure and that it represents government's central response to climate change and that this technology still remains unproven and untested and that 2 billion taxpayer dollars are intended for this technology, Albertans need to know more. With Bill 24 there is no identification on when this long-term liability will be undertaken by the government in terms of when we're going to take it over from the industry. We may have discussed this with the private companies investing in new technology. Furthermore, there's a lack of clarity in how this money will be expended. Again, with assuming long-term liability for these potential products for the good of Albertans, there needs to be public disclosure of the correspondence that has occurred to date between industry and the government on CCS. We require information to understand the government's decision to undertake this liability.

It is for these reasons that we request copies of "all correspondence sent to the government between January 1, 2008, and September 10, 2010, from businesses and nongovernmental organizations regarding the government's funding of carbon capture and storage technology."

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this motion for a return is – I don't know if I'd call it sneaky, but we'll call it sneaky on two accounts. What the opposition is wanting us to do is their research for them. We have the bill before the Legislature. We can debate it as much as we want. But if you heard the preamble by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, what he was really saying is: if you provide us with all this information, then you'll be doing all our research for us as part of the debate on the bill.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, it's sneaky because as a motion for a return this is a direct attempt to bypass freedom of information, and bypassing freedom of information, or the FOIP process, violates third-party confidentiality. The FOIP process is essential to ensure that third-party confidentiality is protected. This request is not for the government's information, but it's for all the public correspondence received from businesses and nongovernmental organizations related to carbon capture and storage technology funding, and it would be inappropriate for the province to release that information without the permission of all third parties.

Now, if the member is interested in really learning more about CCS technology and our work with industry, the member can access the Alberta Energy website. This website lists all the names of

companies who have been asked to submit full-project CCS proposals. If there's an interest in more information about these projects, then it would be simpler to call these companies directly. The companies then could provide the information that the member is requesting. The information can also be requested through appropriate channels such as, as I said earlier, FOIP.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, when we really get to the real intent behind this motion, it's that (a) they want us to do their research for them, and (b) they want to ensure that they bypass the FOIP process. So I would urge all members to reject this motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This motion for a return is calling for transparency and accountability; it's not calling for a shortcutting of the information process. The information has obviously been collected by the government. Albertans are interested in the information, and it is our job to ask the government to provide that information to Albertans. We already know through Bill 24 that the government has committed \$2 billion to sequestration, but what we don't know – and I'm not sure to what extent the government does know, but they could at least bring us up to date and Albertans up to date – is the cost of assuming the liability once the carbon dioxide is placed into the ground, hopefully there to stay.

The Minister of Energy suggests that this is an end run or that this is an alternative to the FOIP process. The FOIP process, Mr. Speaker, is a very lengthy undertaking. It's also a very expensive undertaking. The Liberal opposition caucus does not have the amount of money necessary either to FOIP all the documents or to do the research necessary. It's not as easy as the minister would have us believe, that we simply dial up the various individuals listed on the minister's website and ask them: what do you think?

The information has been gathered. It has been paid for by the taxpayer's dime, in this case probably several millions in terms of consultation efforts. We're simply saying that Albertans deserve to have that information. That's why we as the Liberal opposition are asking for the type of transparency and accountability that the Premier promised during his leadership campaign but, unfortunately, has yet to be delivered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate.

Mr. Hehr: I'll reiterate a few of the points that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity made. If the information is there, I would believe it is in the best interest of all members of the House and, in fact, most people in the province of Alberta to receive this information, for all of us in the House to know what the government is undertaking, what liabilities we the people of Alberta are undertaking in carbon capture and storage and having that information to us from the companies themselves, who will have engineers who have worked on this correspondence, who have understood sort of the risks that they are passing along to the Alberta people and how this may affect us long term and why the government is undertaking this liability.

For one, we can say that we can go through the FOIP process, but again that is very difficult, very onerous, and very costly when the information is already compiled, already ready for Alberta citizens. If we could have that information, it would assist the Alberta people greatly.

[Motion for a Return 14 lost]

Nuclear Power

M15. Mr. Hehr moved on behalf of Dr. Swann that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence between Bruce Power and the government regarding proposals for nuclear power in Alberta for the time period between January 1, 2006, and September 10, 2010.

Mr. Hehr: Immediately following the last provincial election Bruce Power, a major Ontario-based nuclear power company, took over ownership of Energy Alberta Corp., a company that had made an initial proposal to build a nuclear power station in northern Alberta in Peace Country. In March 2008 Bruce Power filed an application with the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to prepare a site for future construction of a nuclear power station. In January 2009 Bruce Power sent a letter to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission announcing that it would be withdrawing its initial application as it had wanted to change the site in question. According to Bruce Power, local residents had great concern about the local aquifers, so BP wanted to shift away from that locale. Bruce Power has settled on the Whitecourt location, northeast of this initial site. The government has continually denied any request for information over this highly controversial topic.

Before we can even consider nuclear power as a potential energy source in Alberta, full consultations with the citizens of this province are a must. The issue deserves a full public debate where all arguments may be heard and the best decision can be made. This government continues to lack transparency in their plans for nuclear energy in Alberta, and in the public interest of Albertans we are requesting that correspondence between Bruce Power and the Alberta government become public.

To give Albertans a sense of the direction of this government, this administration needs to lay its cards on the table. It is for this reason we would ask for copies of “all correspondence between Bruce Power and the government regarding proposals for nuclear power in Alberta for the time period between January 1, 2006, and September 10, 2010.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I rise. This is not dissimilar to the last request. In fact, it's identical, again trying to get us to provide them with all of their research material, and this material, again, is available through the FOIP process. I won't say any more than that because I'm dying to hear the debate under second reading of a couple of private members' initiatives that the members of the third or fourth party over there denied unanimous consent for. They wanted to get on to the debate, so I'll let them get on to it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I, too, am very interested in the private members' debate. However, it's privacy that we're talking about right now.

The information paid for by Alberta taxpayers should not be withheld, should not be used as a force against Albertans. I don't believe, hon. Minister of Energy and Mr. Speaker, that there is a more controversial concern when it comes to power production and dissemination than atomic energy and the potential use and placement of it. For the government to suggest that this is their information, privy to them, that even if we were to put forward a FOIP request, they would provide it to us, is ridiculous. So we did what was requested of us to do. We asked for transparency. We asked for accountability in the form of Motion for a Return 15.

This business of tilting the playing fields. “Because we have all the information, we will control that information, and we'll hold our cards very tightly to our chest because we don't believe, in our omniscient opinion, that it is any of your business” is basically what the Minister of Energy is saying. It's not just Liberal business or information for the hon. members of the Wildrose or the NDP or our independent Member for Calgary-Currie. It's information that is very vital to the health and well-being of Albertans in general.

While the majority of countries in Europe, with the notable exception of France, are moving away from nuclear energy – Germany, for example, being one of the fastest retreaters from nuclear energy – the mere thought that it's being proposed for Alberta, even if it's changed to the Whitecourt area, which is less on the fault lines than was previously proposed, is a major consideration.

Bruce Power backed out, which I'm thankful for. But until Albertans have a sense of where this government is going with future energy production, they have a right to be concerned. If the Minister of Energy is not willing to provide that transparency and accountability, then I suppose we will go through the FOIP process, but I believe it's not only a waste of time but a waste of money. It should be information readily available to all Albertans. We shouldn't have to be standing up in this House through a motion for a return requesting that information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to conclude the debate.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. In my view, Mr. Speaker, the nuclear question is one of the most important debates the Alberta people will have. Any way the Minister of Energy could facilitate this being an open and honest debate and assisting members of this House, all members of this honourable House, with retaining all this information and having all of this information, I believe, would serve its citizens well. I reiterate that I believe our motion for a return is for the benefit of all Albertans, not merely to give our researchers a break. Why go through the FOIP process when this seems like a simple thing that the Alberta people would be most interested in?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Don't shake your head, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo closed the debate.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 206

Utilities Consumer Advocate Act

[Debate adjourned November 15: Ms Notley speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Seven minutes, hon. member. Proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was last speaking about this issue last Monday, obviously, which would make sense, and had risen to speak, generally speaking, in favour of the notion of having a Utilities Consumer Advocate and having that Utilities Consumer Advocate report to the Legislature.

Let me start just ever so briefly. You know, I'm certainly pleased that the Member for Calgary-McCall has put forward this bill. I think it's a good bill. I do need, of course, to suggest that it's not a bill that I would like for us to have a requirement for. It's a bill that arises from the unfortunate fallout from the extremely poorly thought-out decision of this government to embark upon a program of deregulation.

While I appreciate the Member for Calgary-McCall coming forward now and bringing forward this motion, it does of course remind me that when this program was first pursued by this government back in the mid-1990s, members from the Member for Calgary-McCall's own caucus, unfortunately, at the time supported the process of deregulation and advocated in favour of it. I am pleased that they have now reached the point where they acknowledge the error of their ways, and it's really unfortunate that members opposite, members of the government, are not prepared to also acknowledge what an unfortunate turn of events deregulation has been for Alberta consumers.

Having said that, I think that it's really important as well that we talk about why it is we need to have a Utilities Consumer Advocate actually report to the Legislature. I think, if anything, that the events of today are yet another example of why it is that we cannot expect this government to let anybody within their circle speak out openly without fear of reprisal, without fear of having their message sanitized or massaged or limited in some way even where that speaking out might be in the best interests of Albertans. I mean, we've clearly seen that this government is more interested in controlling the message than it is in addressing the substance of that message and engaging Albertans in an effort to reach the best outcome that might come from having a thorough conversation about whatever that message is. Instead, we spend a lot of time massaging the message, spending way too much money on public relations campaigns, in some cases even arguably putting out misinformation through those public relations campaigns. It's all about spin and message and very little about actually fixing the problem.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

What we do know is that Albertans pay, generally speaking, the highest utility rates in the country and that they have been subject to some really quite horrendous hard-sell tactics on the doorstep by the companies that are now in that field. The government's response has been half-hearted and milquetoast at best in terms of protecting consumers even in that setting. We've got this long-standing problem with the rates simply being too high and us now having given up the ability to manage that. We have the spectre of this government under the previous Premier handing out huge cheques to consumers on the eve of elections to try and cover up the fact that deregulation was such a negative development for consumers. Now we have, you know, hard-sell tactics on the doorstep with respect to consumers, who are unable to really wade through the complexity of the market. This is what, of course, the government calls choice, but really all it is is a lack of choice and being forced into the position of having to spend much more for a very basic service than should ever have been the case. That's because of a really, really unwise and ill-thought-out policy decision on the part of this provincial government.

3:20

Certainly, having the consumer advocate report to the Legislature would assist somewhat anyway in this long, sorry tradition of people internal to this government being punished in some way for

attempting to speak out about systemic concerns and problems that they identify in the course of their work within the government. We really do have a long and sorry tradition in that respect in this province. You know, we don't have whistle-blower legislation, which, of course, is something that we've long advocated for. We steadfastly refuse at this point to expand the reporting process of many sort of internal advocate types to the Legislature because we'd much rather make sure that the ministers' offices and their associated communications people can massage whatever types of reports come out if, in fact, they do come out. That, of course, is combined with having a freedom of information regime that allows the government to exempt practically every piece of internal information from disclosure simply by calling it advice to the minister, which is much of what the current utilities advocate information can be characterized as.

We do want to support this movement towards enhancing the independence of the Utilities Consumer Advocate as put forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall. We're in support of the broader jurisdiction and the range of content that is offered up by this legislation. I think that's also an improvement. I would have liked to have seen the enforcement ability of the consumer advocate as outlined in this act be slightly stronger. Nonetheless, fundamental to the rationale behind this act is the notion of independence, and I can think of no better day than today to talk about how much we need to support the opportunity for people to be independent within this government and speak openly as a result.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East on Bill 206.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. This bill would establish the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which would be tasked with providing information to electricity and natural gas consumers. Furthermore, the Utilities Consumer Advocate, UCA for short, would investigate consumer complaints regarding natural gas or electricity. In short, this bill seeks to protect consumers from unfair business practices by giving them an avenue to voice their complaints. This bill offers a good solution.

However, Mr. Speaker, there is no problem to solve. The Utilities Consumer Advocate as it exists today already protects consumers with a collaborative approach. The advocate receives input and guidance from an experienced advisory board, which contains representatives from a range of consumer groups. These representatives are residential and small-business consumers from throughout our province. They then work in collaboration with the department in order to protect Albertans from utility issues, including poor billing practices and inappropriate sales tactics.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this government has shown its dedication to protecting residential and small-business consumers. It is sometimes difficult for small-scale consumers of natural gas and electricity to have a voice if they feel they have been treated improperly. The Utilities Consumer Advocate has given Albertans this voice, but not only does it give Albertans a voice; it also ensures that Albertans are aware of the current state of the natural gas and electricity market. By the end of 2010 the UCA will have attended a total of 40 trade shows, exhibitions, and other events throughout this province. It also provides up-to-date pricing information on its website.

In my experience talking with some of my constituents, I know that finding information on current natural gas and electricity prices is sometimes very difficult. The Utilities Consumer Advocate alleviates some of these difficulties by providing Albertans looking

for information on electricity and natural gas prices with a destination to find this information.

Clearly, the UCA has done nothing short of an outstanding job of being accessible to all Albertans. It has done more than simply inform consumers; it has played an active role in responding to consumer complaints in a responsible manner. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in the last year the UCA has held nearly 100 hearings before the Alberta Utilities Commission. Overall, the combined efforts of the UCA and other intervenors at the rate hearing reduced the price of electricity and natural gas charged by utility companies.

Mr. Speaker, there is no need to implement stand-alone legislation when the UCA already does an admirable job of protecting consumers. Importantly, the advocate does not simply concern itself with problems when they arise. It also prevents future problems by working with consumer groups when there are common interests, and this improves the efficiency of regulatory interventions on behalf of all consumers.

Regulatory intervention is an unfortunate yet inevitable process. It is our duty as a government to step in when it becomes apparent that an individual or corporation is using the system to gain an unfair advantage, and this government has shown its commitment to enhancing the efficiency of this process as it relates to intervention in the natural gas and electricity market. We have done so by creating and maintaining the Utilities Consumer Advocate. It has worked diligently to introduce good evidence supporting consumer requirements in the regulatory process. In short, Mr. Speaker, it gives consumers a collective voice that individuals alone do not possess. The Utilities Consumer Advocate gives a voice to consumers by working closely with industry in order to ensure that consumers are represented.

Mr. Speaker, the Utilities Consumer Advocate already does a commendable job in protecting consumers with a collaborative approach, and this bill does not improve that status quo. Therefore, I will not be supporting this bill, and I urge all members of this House to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you wish to join in 206? I checked the list. You have already spoken in the second reading.

Mr. Hehr: It was such a good bill that I wanted to speak twice, but I understand.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill in second reading? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to speak today to Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. It's brought forward, as we know, by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. As you know, this bill seeks to create the office of a Utilities Consumer Advocate, which would be responsible for providing information and guidance to small electricity and natural gas consumers throughout Alberta. In addition, this Utilities Consumer Advocate as provided for in the legislation would review the effectiveness of government responses made by the Alberta Utilities Commission. The Utilities Consumer Advocate would also have to report annually to this Assembly.

Essentially, this bill seeks to provide better protection for consumers of electricity and natural gas in Alberta, but, with respect, when I look at the bill, I see a piece of legislation that attempts to solve a problem for which a solution already exists. Here in Alberta

we already have the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which has done commendable and effective work in protecting electricity and gas consumers all around the province. The current Utilities Consumer Advocate provides a voice to electricity and gas consumers in Alberta. The Utilities Consumer Advocate has the power to investigate, mediate, and make Albertans' voices heard by both government regulators and the utilities industry. At the end of the day the Utilities Consumer Advocate puts Albertans first and promotes their best interests. The Utilities Consumer Advocate helps these consumers make informed choices regarding their energy options.

3:30

It's clear that Albertans are contacting the Utilities Consumer Advocate and feel that it can protect their best interests. I'm pleased to say that the Utilities Consumer Advocate has protected Albertans from substantial rate increases by intervening in approximately 100 gas and electricity proceedings in front of the Alberta Utilities Commission on an annual basis. It's been the voice of small energy consumers in Alberta since its inception, and Albertans have recognized this. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall would be interested to know that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is contacted by an average of 250 consumers every day. That translates into tens of thousands of calls on an annual basis. It's clear that Albertans know who to contact. They know that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is providing them with a voice and protecting their interests.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate is also constantly working to further educate Albertans on the services offered by their department. For example, in 2006 Albertans told this government that they wanted to know more about the energy options available to them. They also wanted to know how they could better manage their energy use and where to go for help. This led to the redevelopment of the Utilities Consumer Advocate website. The government conducted consumer research to pinpoint the kind of information that is important to consumers, and the redeveloped website certainly helped address those needs.

Currently the Utilities Consumer Advocate is running a consumer awareness campaign. This campaign includes a wide variety of tools, including video and their user-friendly website, that touch on a variety of issues. These issues include how to read a meter, how to read your electrical bill, and a simple explanation of the electricity market, just to name a few. This campaign is designed to reach out to Albertans who may not know that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is a powerful resource that will assist them in making informed decisions regarding their energy options.

Mr. Speaker, not only does the Utilities Consumer Advocate protect and educate consumers, it also investigates complaints. A major part of protecting consumers involves investigating their complaints and responding appropriately. Over the past seven years 414 investigations have been conducted against energy marketers. These investigations are carried out on behalf of the consumer to protect their best interests. From these 414 investigations 193 enforcement actions have taken place. These actions range from warning letters to criminal prosecution. In addition, Service Alberta already investigates complaints from Albertans regarding consumer business transactions that are covered by the Fair Trading Act.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate has a long track record of providing a voice to Albertans and protecting their interests in a wide variety of ways. It has been a valuable tool and voice for thousands of Albertans, and I commend this office on their dedication and commitment to protecting Alberta's energy consumers and assisting Albertans to make informed decisions about their energy choices.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall believes that this bill will go a long way to protecting consumers. I would, however, respectfully submit that the current Utilities Consumer Advocate is already doing this. Albertans are using the Utilities Consumer Advocate because they know it provides them with a voice, they know that it provides numerous educational tools, and because they know it has their best interests in mind.

I would like to thank the member for introducing this legislation because it's given us all an opportunity to consider and contemplate the important work that the Utilities Consumer Advocate has done, but unfortunately I, as would be obvious by now, will not be able to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and join second reading debate on Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. Bill 206 seeks to create the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA. The proposed UCA would be responsible for providing information and advice to small consumers of electricity and natural gas in Alberta. The bill also tasks the Utilities Consumer Advocate with investigating consumer complaints and reviewing the effectiveness of government responses to recommendations made by the Alberta Utilities Commission. If this sounds familiar, it's because the government has already created the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is proposing through this bill that it would make the Utilities Consumer Advocate an officer of the Legislature. In addition, the proposed UCA would have to report annually to this Assembly.

I presume this bill is attempting to fix the Utilities Consumer Advocate. But, Mr. Speaker, the current UCA is protecting Albertans from substantial price increases, it is educating Albertans on energy use, and it gives small energy consumers in this province a voice. The current Utilities Consumer Advocate is working for Albertans, so creating a new stand-alone act that changes a system that Albertans are using and have responded positively to is redundant.

The current UCA's annual budget is \$8.5 million. This is made up of industry funding split between two sources: 80 per cent of the funding for the UCA comes from the Balancing Pool, and the remaining 20 per cent comes from AltaGas and ATCO Gas.

Mr. Speaker, currently the Utilities Consumer Advocate is part of the budget of Service Alberta. Within the budget of Service Alberta our government can adequately prioritize utility matters against other critical issues in Alberta such as education and health care.

Bill 206 will increase costs associated with the Utilities Consumer Advocate as under the proposed act the advocate would be an officer of the Legislature. Repositioning this department will increase the number of staff costs associated with reporting. This government has prioritized its spending, focusing on core programs that Albertans value. Budget 2010 increased funding for priority areas, including \$2.1 billion more for Health and \$250 million more for school boards. This government recently announced that it would provide additional funding to school boards for teacher salaries. Funding for seniors benefits, AISH, and PDD was protected during the downturn. There is a long list of programs and services that this government has been able to increase or maintain funding for during this economic downturn due to a long history of fiscal restraint.

Mr. Speaker, the current Utilities Consumer Advocate fields thousands of calls on a yearly basis. They provide Albertans with

resources to learn about electricity and natural gas, and they provide educational tools that empower consumers. This government is already ensuring that consumers are protected and focusing on core programs that Albertans value.

With that being said, I will not be supporting Bill 206, and I urge all members not to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have on my list here three members: Edmonton-Ellerslie, Calgary-Bow, and Edmonton-Rutherford. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act, being brought forward by the Member for Calgary-McCall. I would like to thank the member for bringing this forward.

The purpose of this bill is to create an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA, which would provide information and advice to small electricity and natural gas consumers in the province. It would also review the effectiveness of government responses to recommendations made by Alberta Utilities Commission. In other words, Mr. Speaker, what this bill is trying to do is introduce more government regulation to the electricity and natural gas sector, regulation that Alberta does not need. Currently our government's regulatory review process is looking to streamline regulation, and Bill 206 goes against this streamlining by creating a redundant regulatory body which our government already has.

Before I begin to go any further on this matter, let me be clear that I believe that consumers in the electricity and natural gas sectors should feel safe and should feel protected. However, that protection should not come in the form of yet another bureaucratic layer of government that will merely be duplication of an already-existing regulatory body.

3:40

Alberta already has a sound regulatory system in the electricity and natural gas sector to protect consumers, which is the existence of the Alberta Utilities Consumer Advocate. There is a framework in place that balances the interests of consumers and utilities. This framework is almost an identical replica of that of the existing UCA. For example, one of the services that UCA intends to provide is giving consumers the information they need to make informed choices about how to purchase electricity and natural gas.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the notion that consumers should be informed and educated about purchasing utilities. The only problem I have is that the existing UCA lists informing and educating consumers about electricity and natural gas issues as one of their main responsibilities. It is the same service just worded differently, so why do we need it twice? Also, the Regulatory Review Secretariat already leads regulatory reform within the government of Alberta and works to support the government's goals and priorities. It does so by placing an emphasis on the development of quality regulations and motions, on the impact of regulation on stakeholders. The streamlining of the regulatory review process does not weaken consumer protection; it makes it easier and less confusing.

The Regulatory Review Secretariat developed guiding principles of regulation which include, first, necessity, meaning that strong evidence is needed before regulating, ensuring that existing regulations remain relevant through ongoing review; second, effectiveness, which implies that a results-based approach and the design of regulation will ensure that regulations adequately comply with the enforcement; thirdly, proportionality, stating that the government should regulate as lightly as possible and use alternatives when possible; and, finally, transparency, stating that government should

consult widely before regulating or changing regulations. This is evidence that the consumers of the utilities sector are being protected, just not with redundant legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the next point I would like to talk about, which goes hand in hand with streamlining the regulatory review process, is Alberta's commitment to staying competitive in the business market. In this Assembly our government recently implemented the Competitiveness Act, which furthers this government's commitment to make Alberta one of the most economically competitive places in the world. Under the act the province is also committed to creating the conditions that will attract new businesses, innovators, and the next generation of entrepreneurs. With stronger competition comes a stronger economy and a better quality of life for all Albertans.

It would make no sense to endorse Bill 206, a bill that preaches more regulation, in a time when we are trying to maximize competitiveness. All this will do is burden the utility companies with another complication in trying to perform their business. It would hinder investment and result in higher rates charged to consumers.

Alberta is fine the way it is, Mr. Speaker. Under the current regulatory regime in the electricity and natural gas sector Alberta has the best of both worlds. We have a regulatory structure that protects our consumers to the fullest extent while at the same time not burdening the market with unnecessary regulations that do nothing but waste time and money. Given the way that the regulations in the electricity and natural gas sectors currently stand and this government's current objective to generate an even better economy, there's no need for the UCA to interfere. Albertans simply do not benefit from this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-McCall for giving me the opportunity to express my views on why we should stay the course with our current regulation practices in the electricity and natural gas sectors. With that being said, I cannot support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. The objective of this bill is to create an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. This bill is not necessary as we already have an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA. Therefore, another office would only create confusion, red tape, and bureaucratic redundancy.

Moreover, Bill 206 proposes to give the UCA broad powers to inquire and investigate, including seizure powers and powers to hold hearings and to compel witnesses. This is inappropriate as these powers affect Albertans' rights. It is unusual to give such powers to a body that's not carrying out quasi-judicial functions. In addition, Bill 206 would allow the UCA to investigate complaints about the fairness of Alberta Utilities Commission hearings. This is wrong as the UCA is a party to a hearing before the Alberta Utilities Commission, and as such it would be improper for it to investigate the fairness of Alberta Utilities Commission hearings.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it is necessary to discuss the role of the current UCA as well as the support that the office provides to consumers so that members of this Legislature clearly understand that an advocate already exists. The current UCA is the voice of small energy consumers in Alberta. It offers mediation services between consumers and the electrical or gas industries. Furthermore, the UCA office intervenes in regulatory hearings to represent the interests of residential, farm, and small commercial consumers. The UCA works with other customer groups where there are

common interests to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of regulatory interventions on behalf of consumers.

Providing support is a priority for the UCA. For instance, the UCA has offices in Calgary and Edmonton to provide support to consumers. In fact, the UCA is contacted by an average of 250 consumers every day. It deals with consumers' concerns about utility companies and helps them make informed choices about their energy options. In general, the majority of calls are from consumers seeking information about the utilities options when they're moving or setting up new accounts. Also, many calls are related to service disconnections and people seeking information about contracts.

In fact, the volume of calls to the UCA represents less than 2 per cent of all calls received by Service Alberta's information call centre. Mr. Speaker, in the past seven years the UCA has investigated 414 consumer complaints against energy marketers and has carried out 193 enforcement actions, ranging from warning letters to criminal prosecutions.

To further raise awareness and increase its presence in Alberta, on July 5 the UCA opened a new Calgary office to industry and government officials. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the UCA is supporting a growing number of Albertans, and here are a few examples. It receives nearly 40,000 phone calls from consumers to the main information line, a 30 per cent increase from the previous year. The UCA website received more than 35,000 visits, a 20 per cent increase from the year before. The UCA is in contact with Alberta consumers through letters and e-mails received as well as office visits and trade shows.

The UCA registered in just about a hundred hearings before the Alberta Utilities Commission in 2009-10. Overall, the combined efforts of the UCA and all intervenors at rate hearings reduced the rate increases requested by utility companies. Throughout the quarter the UCA was active in an average of more than 30 Alberta Utilities Commission proceedings. This is major work that's being done in this province.

3:50

The UCA utilizes the services of a number of legal counsels and consultants to enable it to participate effectively in this large volume of activities. However, not all utility applications are dealt with through litigation processes. In fact, many are dealt with through negotiations, which tend to be less costly than the litigated processes.

Mr. Speaker, the point of this whole speech is to point out that Alberta already has a Utilities Consumer Advocate office, and the office of this UCA is clearly doing a great job fulfilling their role and mandate. For this reason alone I do not support Bill 206 as it's not necessary and would only detract from the great work that the current UCA is doing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased to join debate today in second reading of Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. The intention of this bill, as we know, is to create an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. The bill would create an additional regulatory layer that seeks to supervise an established and successful advocate for Albertans. The protection and education of utility consumers is very important, but this bill, I believe, is redundant as Alberta already has an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA as commonly known. The proposed advocate already exists and plays a vital role in the education of utility consumers in Alberta.

Consumer education in regard to utilities is extremely important, as I think all members of the House would agree. Albertans have a voice when it comes to these matters, and the UCA is that voice. Mr. Speaker, the current UCA is a tool which Albertans may use for issues regarding utilities and for receiving education about utilities in this province. In today's high-technology world accessibility has become a growing concern. The ability of Albertans to contact the UCA is taken extremely seriously. That is why there are a multitude of ways in which consumers can contact the existing UCA. They may contact them via phone, in writing, in person, or through its website.

Mr. Speaker, the Utilities Consumer Advocate provides information and advice and represents Albertans' interests regarding electricity and gas markets in this province. In addition, the information consumers can access through the UCA could be as straightforward as explanations of utility bills and even rate comparisons, but the UCA is readily available, and it is accessed regularly by individuals seeking guidance on making informed decisions about their energy options.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate is in fact contacted by an average of 250 consumers every day, and over the course of a year the UCA fields nearly 40,000 phone calls from consumers. These phone calls come from all areas of the province, and the highly qualified staff of the UCA deal with a myriad of issues concerning utilities in Alberta. Not only do consumers have the ability to call the UCA; they may also access its website. The website, Mr. Speaker, logs over 35,000 visits a year. The website has been designed in a visitor-friendly format. It was reviewed as recently as September and provides even greater access to information today.

Having a Utilities Consumer Advocate is important to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and to further promote awareness of the services it offers, a television advertisement has begun airing on six television networks province-wide. The advertisement directs consumers to the aforementioned website, where they can find helpful information regarding utilities in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, along with the television advertisement the Utilities Consumer Advocate launched a consumer awareness campaign earlier this year. The campaign is targeted toward promoting an increased awareness of the UCA so that consumers know they will have an advocate or a voice who will give them unbiased information regarding utilities. In 2010 alone the advocate attended 35 trade shows throughout the province to help raise awareness levels in our province.

The relationship between utility providers and Alberta consumers, municipalities, and industry is pivotal. To ensure these relationships remain stable and healthy, the UCA has created a stakeholder relations team. This team provides information on issues and seeks opportunities to actively work together to benefit small consumers. Mr. Speaker, in the past year the stakeholder relations team has met with stakeholders in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Strathcona county, Vegreville, St. Albert, Leduc, and Nisku. This team's role is integral to making sure that the right environment is in place for both consumers and utility providers across Alberta.

Utility consumers have a right to access information that will help them make smart choices when dealing with utility providers. That is why in March 2010 the UCA opened an office in Calgary to increase its support to consumers. This office not only provides another outlet in which access to utility information may be found; it also strengthens the role of the advocate in southern Alberta. This Calgary office complements the existing Edmonton office in providing support to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, through an open dialogue with consumers the UCA helps ensure that Albertans are

both informed and educated about their various utility options. Accessing information from the UCA is only a phone call or in many cases a click away.

Mr. Speaker, while I believe the intention of the bill is right and I believe that the Member for Calgary-McCall means well in proposing the bill, I would urge that the creation of an alternate body to the UCA which would do the same thing as the Utilities Consumer Advocate currently does is not only fiscally irresponsible but also redundant. The office of the UCA is doing an exemplary job fulfilling their obligations to the utility consumers in this province, and it is important that Albertans have a reliable and transparent entity to turn to when looking at their energy options. The Utilities Consumer Advocate is that entity. In my view, there is no need to fix or alter this body as proposed by Bill 206. The UCA continues to play an important role in educating consumers on their utility choices, and we should not meddle with that success.

Given that, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully submit that I cannot support Bill 206 and would urge all members of the House to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 206? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really glad that I got a chance to get in here and speak to my colleague's motion on consumer advocates because I'll tell you that in this province as a consumer some days I feel like I'm out there all alone. [interjection] And guess what? I am.

Just a couple of points that I wanted to raise about the idea that's been proposed in Bill 206, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Act. Overall, I do agree with this. Let me back up and start from the beginning. Sometimes I wonder if I'm a changeling in Alberta. I definitely was born in Alberta, but I don't believe in deregulation of utilities. Because utilities are so critical to keeping us alive in this winter climate, I think utilities should be publicly owned and controlled. But that's not happening here in my beloved province, so I'll just have to suck that one up and carry on. That is where I come from, so you'll understand where the rest of my argument is.

I was here for sort of the stage 2 of the electricity deregulation, much to my horror, because that, I swear to you, has not been a great deal for Albertans. I'm sure every MLA gets e-mails from people, and if you read the venting columns in the newspaper – wowee – you find this issue in particular coming up all the time. That's the one where people say: "How the heck is it that I could have incurred \$6.52 worth of electrical use in a month and then I'm charged" – and I'm sorry that I don't have all the proper names in my head; I'll just make them up, but they'll be close enough so people will know what I'm talking about – "a transfer fee and then I'm charged an administration fee on the transfer fee and then I'm charged a delivery fee and then an administration fee on the delivery fee and at the end of the bill I've paid \$72.59 for my \$6.52 worth of electricity? What the heck is going on?"

4:00

Everybody in Alberta feels like that. Like, what happened? I'd love to be able to go to someone, phone them up, and say: could you tell me whether we were always paying all of that for electricity and now they've just broken it out so we can truly sob over all of the extra charges in here, or did somehow those extra charges creep in when we deregulated and separated all of the strands of delivery so that each piece of it could charge us for what they were doing before? You can't get that answer from the government currently. I think you do need someone that stands as an advocate between the

people and the provider, and it's not the government. So I'm very much in favour of what the Member for Calgary-McCall has proposed.

In my caucus we always allow independent thought. I'm sorry. That was just the tiniest little dig, Mr. Speaker, and I'll move right along here. We have free votes on private members' business, so if I might make a few suggestions to my colleague that I just picked up as I went through the act, just a couple of things that I noticed.

On page 3 of the act in section (e) – and I'm not going clause by clause; I'm just vaguely referring by waving the paper around that there might be something in the act in second reading, as we're discussing the principle of it, that would talk about reviewing the adequacy and nature of government response to a commission decision, which I find sort of a strange requirement. I always, just for my own amusement, of course, flip things around and go: okay; if I was government – it's the golden rule principle, really – would I be happy about having to conform to that kind of regulation? Because it's asking that office to somehow rule on the government's adequacy, I think that's very difficult to tabulate or make a decision on. I think we might want to look at that one if we get to Committee of the Whole.

The second area is page 4 under the oath. Now, somebody could correct me on this one, but the way this was written – if it was lifted from another act, then we're probably good, but if it wasn't, it's talking about: whoever is in the advocate's office cannot disclose any information except that provided by law. Those are the kinds of clauses that get you in trouble because if somewhere else in the law you haven't provided for every possible opportunity to speak if they need to, you're in trouble because then you're going to be forever going back and amending every little act in order to actually get your piece to work, so we might want to look at that one as well.

On page 6 it talks about provision of funds to a particular independent agency. Again, I'm playing the golden rule here and flipping it over and going: okay; if I was on the government side, would I be happy about this? I would be ecstatic because if I didn't like the utilities advocate office, I could just not fund them. What that clause essentially says is that provided that there's money that's been voted by the Legislature, then it can be disbursed for various reasons, and then it goes on to list the reasons. I think we need to be careful about how that clause is worded because I ran the Advisory Council on Women's Issues for a number of years here in this province, and that was how they got us. That's eventually how they silenced us. They just withdrew our funding, and then there was no money left for an office or to pay anybody or the per diems for the council members or anything, and that was the end. So we need to be a bit firmer about how money is provided; that money would be provided, for example.

I think the last thing also appears on page 6 if you wanted to go into the fine detail, but of course I'm talking about the principle here. It is around putting in a clause that would require the government to respond within a certain period of time. I would suggest that in the annual report it actually list how long it's been that the government has taken to respond to one of the recommendations from the Utilities Consumer Advocate because that does give you a sense of how slowly or quickly the government is moving on a recommendation.

After years and years and years in this House of watching where there are difficulties – for example, the Auditor General's reports. If you go and look at where particular suggestions have been made repeatedly over the years, you'll find that there's actually a philosophical difference usually in the government, that they don't believe in doing something they've been told, or it's difficult and cumbersome. With enough work eventually all of those things can

be overcome, but it does help you identify where there is a roadblock that needs to be worked on with a bit more care and attention than just telling the government: do this. It's a good way of measuring whether there's a deeper problem on hand there.

I hope you'll allow me or you don't mind my making a couple of suggestions that we can work on when we get to Committee of the Whole on this bill. Overall, I do think this is a good idea because I can't say that the current one that is inside of the department and reports directly to the minister – where we have tried to make use of that office through my constituency office in trying to assist constituents, we haven't always met with the success that we were hoping to meet with. So I think this might be preferable.

That's not to say that the staff there aren't doing a good job, but they may not be in a position to react to me as an MLA or sometimes an opposition MLA. That certainly happens where a government minister says: you're going to deal this way with government members and that way with opposition members. That's just inappropriate, and I think we would want to lift something like this out of that and not allow it to happen.

So vote for Bill 206. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other hon. members wishing to speak on Bill 206?

Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, do you want to close the debate, then?

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to stand up and speak in favour of Bill 206. The other day I was giving all the reasons for Bill 206. As I said, I have nothing negative to say about the current Utilities Consumer Advocate or any of her staff, and I'm sure she's committed to serving consumers as best as she can. We are not here creating another layer of bureaucracy; we are just strengthening what we have with this bill. That's why this bill was put forward.

Bill 206 would only empower the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate by giving them more tools to do their important work for Albertans. Right now, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the Utilities Consumer Advocate is an employee of the government, and their staffers are employed by the government, too, and that is under Service Alberta. Until just recently the Utilities Consumer Advocate was not even a full-time job but one of many hats worn by the deputy minister or an assistant deputy minister or, in other words, someone who directly works for the Minister of Service Alberta.

As an officer of the government the position of the Utilities Consumer Advocate can be eliminated at any time, Mr. Speaker. Their staff can get let go if their budgets are severely cut. Their reports can be edited by government bureaucrats, if they are allowed to release the reports at all. So there are issues with the present Utilities Consumer Advocate office, and they cannot even speak to the media or to the public. Sure, they may be doing a fine job, but they are still maybe restrained in lots of areas from fully doing their job.

4:10

Albertans deserve consumer protection, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that they are not overcharged for utilities and related services. When I read my bill, I wonder, too, how many charges are there, and I just can't figure it out. Most of the time I'm not even in my apartment. Like, you know, I come back after two weeks, three weeks, and I still get the bill for 35, 40, 50 bucks although I haven't used any power, maybe just for the fridge only, and that's it. The interests of the consumers are so important that they should be represented by an office that is independent of the government. Albertans deserve

reliable, understandable consumer information and to have their interests represented at regulatory hearings.

The term of the office of the advocate, I suggest, will be five years, Mr. Speaker, and the Legislative Assembly or the Lieutenant Governor in Council have the ability to suspend or remove the advocate.

The responsibilities of the advocate include but are not limited to representing the interests of electricity and natural gas consumers in proceedings of the Alberta Utilities Commission and other relevant bodies. They will be providing consumers with independent, impartial information about utilities regulations and enforcement, receiving consumer complaints regarding electricity and natural gas provision by the public utilities, investigating complaints about fairness regarding decisions of the commission, reviewing the government's response to decisions of the commission, and educating consumers about electricity and natural gas. Although I heard that, you know, some of the things are getting done, Mr. Speaker, this is just giving the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate more teeth to do their job properly.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, we will not be creating another layer of bureaucracy. That's the main complaint I heard from the hon. members from the other side. It will just give more power to the Utilities Consumer Advocate and make it more open and transparent and protect the consumers of Alberta. For those reasons, I urge all the members of the Legislature to support Bill 206.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now put the question.

[Motion for second reading of Bill 206 lost]

Bill 208 Recall Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on Bill 208.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel like today is a historic day with the things that have happened, with the MLA being kicked out of caucus, with government out of control. The question is: how do we get control of the people that we've elected? That's what Bill 208, the Recall Act, is all about.

I believe this is one of the most important bills we will debate in the Legislature because it goes to the very heart of what it is we as elected members are entrusted with. This bill is entirely about accountability, accountability to the people who actually elected us to this House. The election of MLAs to this House represents a sacred trust between voters and the individuals they select to be their voice to or within government.

Representative democracy is one of the cornerstones of a free society, and there must be a true connection between citizens and their representatives in order to ensure good government. But what happens when that trust and when that connection is broken? What options do citizens have to restore their voice? Unfortunately, in Alberta the answer to that question is nothing. There's nothing that they can do until the next election.

Under our current system there is no true accountability between MLAs and their constituents between elections. If an MLA does something to break trust, whether that's supporting an unpopular policy, position, or bill or breaking an election promise or has simply proven to be an ineffective representative, citizens are completely powerless to replace the MLA. Let me discuss a few . . .

Mr. Liepert: Or cross the floor. Why don't you put that in there?

Mr. Hinman: So pass the bill. The hon. Minister of Energy says that they cross the floor. I would say: so pass the bill. We would be happy to vote for it. That's why we're presenting this bill to the House.

Citizens are completely powerless to replace their MLA or the Environment minister, let alone the Energy minister. Let me discuss a few scenarios that I hope will give members pause to consider supporting this bill. Right now an MLA can break an important election promise mere weeks into a five-year mandate, thereby breaking the trust of voters, and not have to face the people who elected him or her until the next election. Perhaps they don't want to be re-elected, so they can go on their own agenda. Those voters would also be forced to live with an MLA whom they can no longer trust. They'll be less inclined to work with that MLA over the duration of the term, and the MLA risks losing touch with his or her community.

Again, MLAs can conceivably lose interest in a job weeks into a five-year term and be missing in action until the next election. That's a long time for citizens to go without proper representation. [interjection] The Energy minister certainly is having his little fits here today, and that's good. He's aware and awake. A great fear of recall, I'm sure. A former health minister. I mean, what a disaster that has been. How many times would he have been recalled if we had had this bill in this sitting?

MLAs may deceive or cover up past actions that would give voters a good reason not to vote for them and face no immediate repercussions should those truths be revealed after they are elected. Unfortunately, politicians who misrepresent themselves to the voters during an election campaign are a fact of life. We could never make a law to outlaw politicians who deceive, but we could certainly make a law that would empower citizens to recall politicians who do. That's what Bill 208 is mainly about, giving citizens a mechanism to ensure good representation between elections and empowering citizens with a way to stop bad bills that are before the House.

There's much more to recall than the actual act of recalling a politician. I believe that having a law in place will lead to a host of improvements in our democracy. Right now, especially under this government, strict caucus discipline has stripped away accountability from MLAs and left their constituents without a proper voice. MLAs are expected to represent party interests first, constituents' interests second if at all. We have seen earlier today what happens when MLAs dare speak out against their own government when that government fails to act in the best interests of the people they represent. They are kicked out of caucus. We saw it last summer with the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. We saw it today with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Under the threat of being recalled, government MLAs might think twice about supporting a bad or unpopular policy or bill. I am sure that there are more than a few members on the other side of this House, particularly in rural areas, who would have voted differently on Bill 50 if their constituents had the power to recall them. There is no question that this government would not have taken years to change the new royalty framework, a very bad piece of legislation. That hurt thousands of Albertans, and many entrepreneurs lost their business.

Bill 50 is actually a perfect example of why recall legislation is urgently needed. This bill bestowed on government the power to unilaterally expropriate lands they deem necessary for power lines. As every rural MLA in this House knows, the bill was massively unpopular. I'm sure every single one of them received calls from their constituents asking them to vote against it. But that's not how

this place works, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't matter what constituents want; it only matters what the party wants. MLAs who were explicitly and overwhelmingly told to defeat the bill ended up supporting it because the accountability is in the wrong place. If that's not dysfunctional democracy, I don't know what is.

Bill 208 would have gone a long way towards Bill 50's rightful defeat. Instead, we are stuck with another bad law, that is foisting billions and billions of taxpayers' dollars on a massive infrastructure project that isn't even needed. Again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre just said about adding to that bill: she wonders where all of the add-ons come from.

4:20

The current culture of caucus discipline is contributing to bad legislation. MLAs answer to a small group of political leaders who can and often do devise bad laws and bad policy. We need to make MLAs accountable to their constituents first and foremost. That's exactly what Bill 208 would do.

Some in this House may be concerned that having a recall law could lead to frivolous recall campaigns motivated by more personal reasons than matters of public interest. Bill 208 contains the right safeguards against such instances. A notarized petition with the signatures of 33 per cent of that constituency's population, collected within a 60-day period, must be presented in order for a recall and a by-election to take place. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. This is a very high threshold. There would simply be no way for a personal or narrow-minded recall campaign to garner that kind of support.

Given that 33 per cent often exceeds voter turnout in some Alberta constituencies, this threshold would likely only be reached in the event of an urgent matter of public interest, like Bill 50 or Bill 29, that have been thrown in front of this House. They're thrown out quickly, and there's little time for debate or for people to get forces motivated. To them I would say this. We need to have something in place that makes us accountable to the people who voted for us, not just on election day but on every day in between. As I have explained, there are many reasons why voters may come to realize that they elected the wrong person to represent them in the Legislature, and right now they have no way of making that change.

Accountability is critical in all walks of life, in business, and is, I believe, most important for a great representative government. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, the power must rest with the people, not just once every three or five years but every day. When people have no voice, they have no interest. When one has power and authority, one will use it when needed. I would argue that the people of Alberta would engage in politics at a much higher level if they had a process to control elected representatives when they go astray. It seems evident to myself, having been in this House for several years now, that the lack of accountability is our biggest problem. We have elected representatives that, although they may understand the bill, are told by the party: "This is the best we can do. You need to support it. You're not allowed to speak out." Again, we see that we have to suffer here in the province.

I'd like to talk a little bit about our health care system and why accountability is so important. The previous health minister created a superboard, a superdisaster. There was nothing the people of Alberta could do about that, though, until the next election, and that they will do in the next election.

We need accountability when bad bills come forward. There's no way for the people to stop it. Bill 29 is a classic case of where Albertans are outraged, and this government in the short time period of two weeks is going to want to thrust that bill through, and they have the numbers to do it. But if, in fact, the people from Calgary-Shaw want to start a petition tomorrow to recall that minister, I believe that minds would be changed at the level of accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 is about accountability. It's about an open and honest and clear government that is always accountable to the people because the people ultimately hold that power. During an election they turn that over to an elected representative but with recall at any time, for whatever reason. When an MLA is out of touch, they can be recalled and held accountable. That's the most important thing with a good democratic government. Are we and can we be held accountable?

I would urge all members to vote for this. We look forward to the debate and hope that it passes so that we're all more accountable to the people we've been elected to represent.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members who wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour and a privilege for me to rise and speak to Bill 208, the Recall Act. I would really like to applaud the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this bill forward as it has given me a great deal to think about and to look at, some of the pros and cons of this tool, which, by all means, would be very appealing to many members of our community.

We look at some of the highlights of this bill. Recall is a procedure whereby constituents have the power to remove a member of the provincial Legislature before his or her term has expired. It is a system where voters can in effect re-elect their representatives in the Legislature through this electoral procedure, this power of removal. It's granted to do a reverse by the people. Depending on which way you see it, this sends more direction to allow individuals to control the members they elect to this Assembly, to have an ability to punish members of this Assembly who, in their view, are not following what the constituents want or, from what they believe, the members of the community want their MLA to do.

There are some proposed safeguards in here. You would need 33 per cent of the eligible voters in a constituency to be required to sign a petition, and they would have to sign it within six months. You wouldn't have a petition that could run for three and a half years, and then all of a sudden: "Hey, we reached that threshold. Finally, we can get rid of the guy." It has to be a concerted effort, put forth in a very short, distinct period of time. So there are some limitations or some safeguards put into this bill.

I would also note that a former Liberal, Mr. Gary Dickson, brought forward a similar measure in 1993. He put forth this initiative, and some people know the history of this. Mr. Dickson was actually the former MLA for Calgary-Buffalo and is now working in the hon. minister of housing's home province of Saskatchewan as their Privacy Commissioner. So there are lot of tie-ins here. I also note that Percy Wickman spoke in favour of this bill. His son, Ron Wickman, here in town does tremendous stuff on behalf of the disabled community in designing wheelchair-accessible homes and things of that nature.

Nevertheless, returning to this bill, I do note that some Liberals were in favour of this back in 1993. As I've thought about this, I really have at the end of the day come to it that in our system of government our voters should go to the polls, in my view, knowing that they are going to elect a member for a certain period of time. Recall may allow for, I guess, in certain instances a member to be pulled or something of that nature, but in my view I don't know if it serves the best interests of a democracy under our system of government.

Let me put forward an example. Alberta actually fooled around with this in 1934. The hon. Mr. Aberhart implemented this legisla-

tion in 1937, and then, lo and behold, the first person that it was used against was Mr. Bill Aberhart. Okay. So here you have it. The leader of the province, who immediately tries to do something, immediately has this legislation used against him. You can see times where this will occur to an hon. Premier, whatever party that happens to be, where immediately with an unpopular piece of legislation, something that may have to be directed for the long run, the citizens may for a temporary period disagree with it, and that will raise the ire of 33 per cent of the constituents and hold the Premier to a by-election.

In my view, it would be holding the government hostage from decisions that they would have to make, and it would be in the name of sort of doing it – I can see recall being used countless times: very few government members on the front bench against a government backbencher or, in fact, an opposition backbencher. It would ruin the ebb and flow of our democratic principles.

4:30

In my view, our electorate is smarter than that. They're going to be able to judge an MLA they send to the Legislature on the basis of a four-year term, not on the whims of a one-time bill or their anger of the day. They have a longer view of what, in fact, democracy is. I figure they'll be able to look at a member, look at the government, and say: is this what I want? Sometimes the member they get is the member they elect, and sometimes the government they get is the government they elect, and that's the way it goes. I simply don't see for the betterment of democracy or the smoothness of actually running what is often a difficult business, running a province, that to allow this bill to go through would make it any easier.

Nevertheless, I do applaud the member, and I did think long and hard on this. There were some advantages. But at the end of the day, although I might sometimes disagree with the government of the day, I have no doubt the belief is that it is very difficult to govern, and this wouldn't make it any easier.

I thank you for allowing me to speak on this issue. I would urge all members to speak against the proposal for those reasons I have listed, but I applaud the member for bringing the action nonetheless.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the next hon. member on my list is the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and debate at second reading Bill 208, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This is a very hard-working member of this Assembly, and I respect his comments while I may disagree with them. The bill sets out a procedure by which an elected MLA could lose his or her seat in the Assembly based on a petition signed by 33 per cent of the electorate in any electoral division. I want to again thank the people that assisted the member who sponsored this bill, but I cannot support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I've listened with great interest to the argument from the bill's sponsor as well as from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I find it interesting that the member makes this passionate call for recall when all the members sitting next to him had the opportunity to make their own recall instead of crossing the floor. Interestingly enough, using Alberta's current electoral process would have given voters the choice of who their representatives in the House should be rather than them simply moving from one party to another. There's a very little bit of irony in this that I again find interesting to observe.

There's quite a bit of history on recall in this province, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has alluded to. Interestingly enough,

when I was doing some research on this, I found out that *Hansard*, in fact, only goes back to 1971. It's very difficult to get anything from *Hansard* before 1971. I did find a bit of information from 1972, though, from a very distinguished member of this House who was a former cabinet minister under the Social Credit government. *Hansard* April 6, 1972:

I am just going to say this, if you put all the silly little arguments aside, and if you think about it, maybe the people would like to know that there is an election every four years. We have already pointed out that the campaigning starts the minute this House starts.

I have to say that I would agree with that. The next election does begin the day after the previous one. Of course, we're about two and a half years into this cycle, here. I have to say that these are very wise words.

The point: the current system holds all members accountable to their constituents. We're all accountable on a daily basis. If we decide to run again, we're all accountable on the day of the next election. I agree with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The voters often are a lot smarter than the media or whoever else may give them credit for. They're ultimately our bosses. The words that I was speaking earlier, though, speak to the concept that Albertans make their decisions in the totality on the slate of candidates' own position on the issues when they vote in an election. Bill 208, I would have to say with respect, flies in the face of the point being made by the member that I quoted from 1972. His confidence, rather, was that the electoral system was evident in its words.

As the Member for Calgary-Buffalo stated, it was the same Social Credit Party that brought in recall legislation and then moved it out when they were, in fact, the governing party. Well, I guess they recalled the recall. Obviously, that's not how it was intended. History has actually shown that when recall is initiated on a particular issue and not really on specific actions of an elected member – I look no further than our neighbours to the west around the issue of their harmonized sales tax. That's been a very difficult point in that government. Of course, in Alberta we have no sales tax, and we'll bring in no sales tax. They actually did bring in a harmonized sales tax, and now a special-interest group is utilizing B.C.'s recall process to target government MLAs. I don't agree with a sales tax, Mr. Speaker, but it doesn't make for a very stable government when you're only debating that one single issue. I doubt that the B.C. government is actually getting anything done at this given time. So the motivation that they have behind the recall in B.C. right now is, again, the issue and not necessarily the conduct of the members in that Assembly. This is a consideration that I hoped the sponsor of this bill could have clarified a little bit more in his earlier comments.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to raise one more point on the merits of the current system of electing or, in this case, removing members from this Assembly. There are currently four major parties in Alberta, so theoretically you could win an election with 26 per cent of the vote. At any given time you could theoretically have 74 per cent of the people wanting you out. This is a recipe for absolute electoral anarchy. This is democracy in action, the current system that we have, and I believe Albertans see more merit in ballots cast than signatures on a petition. I know I'm not alone in this sentiment.

I am a former member of the federal Canadian Alliance party and, of course, still a member of the Conservative Party of Canada. At one of their first conventions in Montreal – I believe it was in March of 2005 – the issue of a recall policy was put before the members. I actually got up to speak against it at that time as well. We were successful; it was actually removed. It's not something that's palatable in a nation or in a province. It may look good on paper, but it's not something that has ever been good in practice in this country. I raise this point as arguments will be made that other

jurisdictions have recall, so I guess we have to follow that one as well. B.C.'s, as I mentioned, came in 1991, when Mike Harcourt had taken over.

So with respect to the member for Calgary-Glenmore, Mr. Speaker, my argument is backed again that other jurisdictions have removed recall or that recall has not been a successful circumstance in that particular jurisdiction. This is a concept that may seem appealing to some but may not serve the best interests of the voters.

I'm not going to make a financial argument because that's like saying democracy is costly. It does cost money to heat this building, to pay all of our salaries, to go to the polls. I'm not going to make that argument. This in and of itself is not good for the democratic process.

I'm sure other members in this House will debate recall in other jurisdictions again, but I don't think that that's a good comparison. There are a number of instances where an elected official was recalled but only to be re-elected in a subsequent by-election, and there are also just a few points of consideration for Bill 208, as I had mentioned.

I'd like to again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this bill forward. His commitment to democracy is laudable, but I respectfully say again that this is not something that we should be pursuing in Alberta. I'd like to again acknowledge the people who helped draft this bill. They no doubt also have a passion for citizen engagement, and I'm happy to have this debate at all. That notwithstanding, I'm going to reiterate my position of not supporting this legislation and indicate that the when three members of the Member for Calgary-Glenmore's caucus, to my knowledge, were part of the government caucus either this term or in the past, I was unable to find anything of when they were in favour of recall.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That ending was perfect because I'm going to remind him of when I did speak in the Legislature on the issue of recall.

It's my honour to speak to Bill 208, the Recall Act, put forward by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This bill will allow constituents to recall an MLA who has failed to live up to their promises. Legislation like this has been proposed in the House in the past. Are you listening? I spoke for it then, and I speak for it now.

In 1996, Dr. Nicol, then the Member for Lethbridge-East, put forward Bill 206, and I had this to say.

I believe there is no better way to meet the concerns of Albertans about accountability in political life, and it proves to our voters that we take their concerns and their views seriously. Bill 206 in my mind will help put the trust of the electorate back into the Legislature.

If there's one thing I believe in after all my time in government, it's accountability. If someone doesn't deliver on their promises, they should lose their privileges.

4:40

Bill 208 addresses the weaknesses in our system. It allows not only the members to stand up but the people of Alberta to stand up and be heard. The bar is set quite high by the contents of this bill. Some will say: won't we have numerous elections? No. The recall bill will require 33 per cent of eligible voters. Another obstacle to recall is the issue of money. To be truly grassroots, you need to keep money as separate as possible, and the member that just spoke brought that up. The rules are clear in this bill. No one can be paid. We can't have a process hijacked by special interests. People are concerned about money in regular politics. It can't be said that

money will control the recall process; it will be truly a grassroots movement.

People who are against this bill make an argument to me all the time. They say: you wouldn't have crossed the floor if this bill was in place. Of course I would have. If this bill was in place, I would have done the same thing all over again. I followed my convictions, and the people of Calgary-Fish Creek would have supported me.

I can tell you what would have been different if a bill like this was in place. This government wouldn't have passed some of the legislation it did. Bill 50 took the rights from property owners, and it put them in the hands of cabinet. Public consultation has been reduced to the point of uselessness. Rural Albertans are furious. Quite frankly, a lot of government members wouldn't have voted for that bill if this legislation was in place.

The people of British Columbia have had legislation in place for years. The power of recall is obvious to everyone. The current government in British Columbia misled the people it was supposed to represent. Because of its laws upset citizens didn't have to wait until another election. They could take action right away, and they did. The momentum that built has led to the Premier of British Columbia resigning. I know how much that must scare this government, and it should.

As I travel this great province, I hear frustration all over the place. Many have put their frustration to great use. The Wildrose caucus stands here today stronger than ever because of the fears this government has for the people of Alberta. I find it strange, though, that people have to start an entirely new party to make real change and impact in politics. It shouldn't be that way. I talk to my constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek, and they can't believe how hard it is to get real representatives in the Legislature. What constituents want is an elected member that stands up for what they believe in. They want a member that is accountable, and quite frankly the people aren't getting what they want or they're not getting what they need.

The current health care debate is an example. The member for Edmonton-Meadowlark voiced his concerns over the way the emergency room crisis was being handled for over two years. The member is still an emergency doctor. He knows the issues intimately and expertly, yet he was silenced by this government and now given the boot. How very sad. There is no issue closer to the hearts of myself and Albertans than health care.

The government has shot down recall legislation before. Why is it so afraid to allow the recall of a member? I think it's because they realize that the power rests with government when it should be in the hands of the people. The grassroots are where the real Albertans are. They're not in the Premier's office. My constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek tell me that they want a member that truly represents their issues. This Legislature is based upon the fact that one member represents one area. While they are free to contact any MLA, their first point of contact is the member's office in their constituency. Albertans take pride in their communities, and they take pride in their neighbourhoods. It means something to have a spokesperson for their area. Even if a constituent voted for a party that did not win in their riding, they still take great pride in being part of that political process. They want to say to this MLA that they're proud of him or they're proud of her. But sometimes they lose respect and pride. There are some people that get into office and don't take it seriously. Sometimes they just ran for the party and didn't expect to win. Maybe they just didn't know what they were getting into. Other times they are just really selfish. They want the perks of the office, and they forget about the important responsibilities.

So what are constituents supposed to do? We have a first past the post system. A member doesn't need to win a majority of the votes.

They just need one more vote than second place. No system is perfect, but people certainly want to know why improvements aren't being made. The people of Alberta don't want to wait four or five years for another general election. It is said in politics that a week is an eternity. We've been in the session less than one month, and much has happened just on the health care file. Years is too long to wait when the people are being let down by their MLAs. Quite frankly, the people in this province demand better. Some MLAs misrepresent themselves in the public square. There is a great deal of power that is entrusted to this Assembly. Some bad apples out there will do or say anything to get in. What happens if someone lies and gets elected based on these lies and then the truth is revealed mid-term? Public pressure is a powerful force, but the rule of law is stronger.

The people I talk to want engaged representation. When there are five years between elections, it is easy for an elected member to lose enthusiasm for the job mid-term. Motivation isn't a problem for me because I, quite frankly, am more energetic than ever, but it's easy to get comfortable and ride out the term. Albertans demand safeguards in law that ensure that they have the best representation that they can get.

In closing, I fully support Bill 208, the Recall Act. I supported legislation like this before, and I continue to do so now. When Albertans are outraged, they deserve a democratic outlet, not a letter to the editor. If a member doesn't do the job they promised to do, Albertans need a way to get rid of them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have on my list, in the sequence of the notes I received, the hon. members for Edmonton-Centre, Lethbridge-West, Airdrie-Chestermere, Calgary-Mackay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to get up and speak in second reading to Bill 208, the Recall Act, proposed by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I think this discussion is part of a wider discussion that is reflecting the public's perception that they don't have control over their elected official. We're certainly witnessing this Tea Party phenomena in the U.S., but as I listen to what they're actually asking for or expecting, we get not very clear direction. Frankly, I don't know that what's being suggested by that group is very helpful to their elected representative in trying to represent them. I do see this as part of a larger issue around people's misunderstanding or lack of understanding around how the process works and their frustration that they can't make their elected person change the way they're presenting or reacting to an issue.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore started out by saying: "Well, there's nothing the public can do. That's it. They're stuck for five years. Shut the door. It's over." I just don't find that to be the case. I think, you know, that where I've had people complain to me about the actions of a member, whether in the government caucus or in my caucus, I've directed them to the whip, who has a job that is about ensuring discipline in caucus, but that also means the discipline of the caucus and making sure that their members are representing them well outside of that caucus.

I can think of examples where there was an elected member who didn't keep office hours and was very hard to get hold of. There was a fuss made in that government caucus to the individual, and he was told that he should have an accessible office, where people didn't have to phone up and make an appointment. I can think of other ones where there have been complaints about it. I mean, let's be realistic here. I think that the public does have a number of different

ways of trying to achieve some kind of resolution if they're very unhappy with the way their elected member is responding to them. The whip is one of them.

Complaining to the leader is another one. Again, that leader doesn't want the hassle. We actually had somebody thrown out of my caucus because they just took up so much of the leader's time in trying to resolve the difficulties that this person had created that finally they were asked to leave the caucus that I'm in. So appealing to the leader is another way.

4:50

You can appeal to the other caucus members. I think that if I'm hearing things correctly today, there was a decision made by caucus to discipline one of their members. In a larger parliamentary way there's the – I'm not going to get the name of this committee right – privileges and elections, printing and something committee, which is a formal way that you can protest the behaviour of one of our elected members. A committee does review their actions, and there is discipline meted out from that.

Never underestimate the power of public pressure. Never. I've seen public pressure turn all kinds of things around in politics in Alberta, you know, and with the public pressure, if there is enough public pressure, along with that always comes media spotlight. That can certainly change someone's behaviour or have them back off or be able to help the caucus or the whip or whatever convince the individual that that's not the direction that they want to be going in or that they're not representing people adequately.

So to say that there's nothing that people can do, I just don't buy that. There is lots that people can do and do do, and I have examples of everything, actually, that I just discussed there.

I heard another member talk about, "Well, you know, you can get elected and just disengage after a few weeks," which strikes me as very odd. I'm sure that all those that are from the class of 2008 would agree with me that you don't even know what's going on after a few weeks, never mind disengaging. You're full of things that you need to learn and do and fill out and get on top of. It's a beehive of activity, so I don't know how you could disengage unless it was with the assistance of some sort of chemically altering something. I can't see you disengaging after a few weeks or, you know, even after a few years.

I mean, what I've seen is that it takes you a good couple of years to really learn the rules here, where you start to groove along with the Routine and the rhythm of the House. You might get to that point and go: "You know what? I really hate this stuff. I've learned how to do it, and it just does not work for me." Fair enough. I've had a caucus member that felt that way. He still tootled along for the remaining year and a half doing his job and then just didn't run again. But the idea that someone would just check out – well, if they're that miserable, they're going to quit the darn job and go and do something else. They're not going to sit there in the back row twiddling their thumbs and being grumpy. Why would you bother? Life is too short.

Or even the idea that someone didn't expect to get elected and then did get elected. Again, I've served with individuals. I remember looking at one person on election night, and I thought: wow, their eyes are like saucers. You know how they talk about how somebody's eyes are like saucers? This guy's eyes were like saucers. He clearly did not think he was going to get elected. He did, and he was the most engaged, energetic, enthusiastic member of my caucus for that term. You know, why would you run if you didn't want to get elected? I'm sorry, but that just seems such an enormous amount of time and energy and money and that of your family. Why on earth would you get into that if you didn't at least have some ideas of what you would do when you got elected?

I've checked their petitioning process, that's described in Bill 208, against some of the others, and 33 per cent is not a high enough percentage. Most of the good – well, no; let me be careful here. I would venture to say that if you look at how many members were elected by around 50 per cent, you've got people that are on the right vibe with their constituency. They do reflect the views of the people who've elected them, and they're going to weather that storm.

I am so fortunate and so honoured to represent the people in Edmonton-Centre, who are an unending source of enthusiasm and advice and guidance for me, and I so love representing them. We're on pretty much the same vibe, so we don't counter each other. Actually, never. I get a few people who disagree with the way I've gone on something, but overwhelmingly I get people saying: "That's what we wanted. Thank you very much. That's exactly where you want us to go." So I think that the recall of 33 per cent is far too low.

The other part of this is around that package. The only part of that kind of Tea Party, democratic, far right-wing package I hear talked about that I am interested in is citizen initiatives, which gets an idea onto the floor of the Assembly. On the other stuff, about proposals, I just look to the U.S. and go: they're in gridlock in California because of those direct proposals and direct votes.

Look at what Envision Edmonton did to the city of Edmonton, for God's sake, and how much money it cost us for a petition process that was not even in order. What you end up with, bottom line, is that the one with the most money wins, and that is not democracy. So I find that this package of stuff, which includes recall, generally comes from people who want things their way, and they will get money behind them to make it their way, and that to me is not democracy. You should be able to have a good debate with no money on either side. These usually involve somebody pushing a particular idea who's got the money to get it out there, who's got the money to hire the people, the office to print the stuff. That's not why we're in here.

I'm not in favour of Bill 208. You gathered that.
Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can see by the clock that I won't have too long to speak before we move into motions, so I'll be very brief. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing forward Bill 208, the Recall Act.

In starting my discussion, I want to talk about something that happened in Lethbridge, and it was a very unfortunate event. A little over a month ago we had a municipal election, and we had a group of municipal councillors elected. During that election the public was very clear that they wanted to see some change and that they wanted some things to happen. We had a gentleman that was duly elected, in fact, in second place with very strong support, and before being able to be sworn in, the gentleman passed away. It's never happened before in Alberta. Mr. Robert Babki, an attorney, retired in Lethbridge, a family man and a grandfather and a lawyer and a community advocate who put his heart and his life into running for council, passed away, and they had the memorial service today.

I'm only bringing this up because it bears very much on the issue at hand. Since that has happened, I have had innumerable calls. I have e-mails, I have people coming into my office, and each and every one of them says the same thing. They say: "Greg, you know, with all due respect, we just had an election. We selected the people we want to serve us. We don't need to be spending another hundred thousand dollars to run another election. We have had our say." I believe that's what Albertans believe. We're a fiscally responsible

province. I'm a fiscally responsible conservative, as is this party. I believe that I fit very nicely with the views of the people in this province that are fiscally responsible, and those folks have told me that they don't believe that those kinds of expenditures are appropriate. They would prefer to see us do our job to represent the citizens.

I believe that a big part of it – and I agree with what the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* said and Edmonton-Centre as well – is that it's so critically important to listen to the people you represent. It's about doing the job the best you can, and you can't be held ransom to small interest groups or to making one decision that's maybe a little bit unpopular. You have to be able to do what's right. You have to be able to do what's best. Every four years the citizens have an opportunity to weigh all of the things that you did: the good, the things they agreed with, the things they didn't. They can view whether or not they believed that you listened carefully to what they said, and then based on all of that, they're going to make a decision whether you have a right to represent them again or not. I believe that it's critically important that that position be held, that we have the opportunity to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I won't be voting in favour of Bill 208, and I would ask all of the other members to please vote against it as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: It's 5 o'clock, so the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded. We'll continue Bill 208 at the next opportunity.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Program

512. Mr. Vandermeer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider implementing a vehicle inspection and maintenance program requiring vehicles to undergo regular inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and open debate on Motion 512. This would ultimately help improve the air quality in Alberta. Undergoing vehicle inspection and repairs would benefit the environment.

In 2002 Climate Change Central completed a study examining methods for potential greenhouse gas reductions on Alberta roads. The study focused on vehicle inspections and maintenance programs. Unfortunately, despite emissions standards for new vehicles becoming more stringent over the last two decades, urban air quality has not improved. According to Climate Change Central this discrepancy probably occurs because after two years of use vehicles no longer meet the original standards. This decline can arise for several reasons such as failure to adhere to a manufacturer's maintenance schedule; improper adjustments of fuel mixture, spark timing, or other engine emission parameters; premature failure of emission control devices; and/or deliberate removal or disabling of emission control devices.

An IM program can help avoid these problems. Mr. Speaker, there are many versions of IM programs. There isn't one set way to implement the program. There are more than 35 IM programs in the United States, and there are two in Canada. The two programs in Canada are in Ontario and British Columbia. These two programs have similarities but also very many differences. I am not proposing that we adopt the IM programs in Ontario or B.C. This motion is

merely urging the government to consider implementing a vehicle IM program that requires vehicles to undergo inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions.

Motion 512 does not get into specifics, but there are a few options available. For instance, one option would identify vehicles that have higher emissions output than normal vehicles of the same age and type and would require that they be repaired prior to the transfer of title. This option would reduce smog-causing emissions from vehicles that are 10 years or older by having them undergo inspections and necessary repairs. There could also be a program for heavy-duty vehicles such as large trucks and buses and a program for light-duty vehicles. This would include passenger cars, vans, light trucks, and sport-utility vehicles. Licensed technicians would perform the inspections at licensed vehicle facilities. This would mean an automotive repair facility or service stations with repair shops.

The IM program would also exempt certain vehicles from the program as well as include a repair cost limit and a conditional pass to recognize that there are some owners who cannot afford to fully repair vehicles that do not meet emissions standards. The repair cost limit would ensure that motor vehicle emissions are lowered while limiting the financial burden upon the vehicle owners. Vehicle exemptions would take into account that not all vehicles should fall under the program.

Mr. Speaker, again, these are just options. The specific program details would be left to the government to decide. With this motion I would like to start the debate around implementing an IM program that would ultimately improve Alberta's ambient air quality. Moreover, not only is the health of our environment important but also the health of Albertans. This motion may help ensure that smog does not become a serious health issue in the future.

Furthermore, licensed inspection technicians may find safety issues with the vehicle while performing the emissions inspections. If vehicles are inspected, deficiencies are more likely to be caught and fixed. This could include faulty brakes or engine problems, which would seriously put the driver and passengers at risk if not caught and repaired.

Mr. Speaker, this motion would benefit the environment, health of our future generations, and improve the quality of the vehicles on Alberta roads. For this reason I am proposing Motion 512 and look forward to the comments of my colleagues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to acknowledge that I saw a few members. I have a list here: Edmonton-Centre, Airdrie-Chestermere, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Calgary-Glenmore, Strathcona, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Hinman: As well as Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. I'll add on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to my feet and support a motion brought forward by the government member from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This is an idea that is well used in other places, it's not costly to implement, and it very much falls in line with the kinds of things that we've been suggesting from the Liberal caucus, the Official Opposition caucus, for some time.

Part of what I've been trying to get people to understand is that you don't have to spend a ton of money to reduce your impact on the planet and on greenhouse gases. Often I find that the government

doesn't get involved in things because it seems like such an overwhelming, big project with so much money involved, but it doesn't have to be. Frankly, the way to tackle a really big project is usually by breaking it down and doing it incrementally. This is an excellent idea for an incremental change.

We've seen them operating in other places. The one I looked at was Ontario's drive clean, which is a mandatory vehicle emissions testing program very similar to what the member has already been describing. There's a light-duty drive clean. There are exemptions for that. There's an appeals process if people disagree. There's a heavy-duty vehicle program. There are testing requirements for model, year of vehicle, et cetera, et cetera. It's been running for quite a while there, and, you know, we should be able to take advantage of their best practices.

There are others in the country if we want to look at them, B.C.'s as well. Their program is called AirCare and has been running since 1992. So they've had lots of practice at this.

I think there are other things that can also be done by the government that's in the same level of an incremental change, a fairly small change, and a personal change that individuals can take on. It has been my experience that the public is very willing to do stuff. They really understand the issue and the impact of use of fossil fuels and are willing to do quite a bit. The challenge to us as legislators seems to be about designing programs that are accessible enough and easy enough, if I can use that word, that people will take it on.

As an example, I'll talk about the city of Edmonton's recycling program. You know, aside from the opportunity it gives me to boast about the city of Edmonton's world-renowned recycling and composting program, we learned a lot of lessons from that. When people were initially asked to separate paper and other kinds of paper like your cardboard and tin cans and plastic, some people took it up. But it didn't get a huge, enthusiastic uptake on it. You know, it did require some thought. You had to get the right kind of bins. Then somebody would steal the damn bins from the back of your house. So it didn't work as well as they had hoped.

5:10

Then you could mix it up a bit more. Finally, they said: "You know what? We're spending so much time going through the way people have separated this and fixing it, we might as well just do it from the get-go." So they started a blue bag program. The blue bags are available at every store. Glad makes them. All kinds of well-known names make the blue bags. All we ask is that they're blue. The householder or the individual can use those blue bags. They just put all of their recyclable stuff in it. The paper, the cardboard, the metal, the plastic: just chuck it all in there. Don't separate it. Don't fuss about it. You don't have to squish it or anything like that. Just put it in the darn blue bag and put it out back with the garbage. That worked because it was really, really easy. It was easy to get the bags. It was easy to do it. You just put it out back at the same time as the garbage. All of a sudden the uptake on this program was amazing.

[The Speaker in the chair]

If we do the same kind of thing with vehicles – and this does require people to actually take their vehicle somewhere, you know, to a recognized location, to have these particular tests and suggestions done – and find ways to make it as easy as possible for folks, there will be enormous uptake on it.

Just a couple of other things that I want to mention that I think go hand in hand with this. Actually reducing people's use of fossil fuel driven vehicles is also a part of this, working with municipalities

around cycling and walking infrastructure for people to use those venues as commuting, not just recreational, not just walk to the store but actually walk to work or cycle to work. You can cycle to work quite a distance, but it's no fun when you've got to battle the semis on the same road and deal with the potholes and the gravel. You are looking at a different infrastructure here. Again, incremental movements really help. The bikes that you can buy are made for this kind of riding. A lot of things have changed along with this.

That's also what's happening to the vehicle. We will slowly move out of this, and eventually we will all be here with either hybrid cars or probably electric cars or some other version of biofuel cars. I don't know how long that's going to be, but it will start to move in that direction. Really, what we're trying to do with the cars that would fall under what's been proposed here by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is to take the worst offenders, which are, generally speaking, older cars, and try and get people to get them tested and make use of the suggestions.

While I'm at it, the easy part of this is the regular maintenance of your vehicle. One of the biggest problems is underinflated tires for bad car mileage. Now, this is not hard. People should be able to keep their tires inflated to a proper pressure. If you don't know how to do it, just ask, and some helpful soul will help you on how to measure and get it up. That's one of the worst offenders for getting better mileage on your car.

The other one is changing your oil so that the engine runs properly. Again, it's not difficult because in this day and age unless you really want to change your own oil, which you can do, generally speaking you drive into a place and somebody does it while you read the paper, and you drive out the other side, and it's done. This, again, is pretty easy. If you do it on a regular schedule – you know, every spring and fall or whatever – and use the proper kind of multigrade oil that the manufacturer is suggesting for that particular vehicle, you're way ahead of the curve on this one. You've already done a lot to have a better running, cleaner running vehicle that gets better mileage and puts less crap into the air.

I was going to make one other suggestion in that, checking all of the other systems, which again they'll do at the same time as you go through the oil changing place. They will check various other levels of stuff that you put in your car and check the tail lights and all of those kinds of things, brake systems. That will also assist you.

As we look at what we can all do here, I think this is an excellent suggestion. It is incremental. If we combine that with things like cycling and walking infrastructure, with things like using the Green TRIP money for more LRTs in the urban areas, for more public transit in urban and in rural areas – let's even go further and look at high-speed rail, especially if we look at the maglev system, the magnetic levitation system.

We should also consider lower speed vehicles to be allowed on the streets. Right now we don't, but as we start to consider – and they're running some pilot projects of having lower speed limits in certain districts – that may possibly work in with that as well.

So I do encourage everyone to support the member's Motion 512. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, then Calgary-Glenmore, then Strathcona.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to stand up and speak to this motion. I will not be supporting this motion. This is being penny-wise and pound-foolish. A bill that comes stemming from this motion, the only people this is really going to affect, in my view, depending on how the bill was written, of course, are the people who can least afford it.

You know, we talk a lot about being competitive in Alberta and making sure we have a low tax regime and so forth, and obviously that's important. Businesses drive the economy, small businesses drive the economy, and we need that. But we also have to be wary, of course, of those who are struggling and who don't have a lot of money.

I remember when I was – it wasn't too long ago; I guess 12 years ago – in university. My wife and I were just newlyweds at the time. We didn't have much. We didn't have hardly anything. We lived down in the U.S. at the time, that was where I did my undergrad school. In that state they had a law that was similar to this; in other words, it was an emissions standards law. You had to go in every year, and you had to get your car checked. They would stick a rod up the tailpipe, and you'd run your car, and they would check how your emissions were.

Anyway, I had an old, old car. I can't even remember what it was. It was just a terrible vehicle. It would overheat all of the time. It was used. It was probably at the time at least 15, 16, 17 years old. It was just an absolute clunker, but it was cheap. I got it for like 500 bucks, so I was using it. I mean, we were living on basically student loans, and I worked part-time at a hockey arena. You know, you're trying to put yourself through school and all that sort of thing. That was something we valued in our family, to kind of pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get yourself through school and so forth because you would appreciate it more. So we tried to do that through scholarships and working and living frugally.

I remember it was very frustrating because, you know, there would be hardly anything left at the end of the month to do anything with. We certainly didn't go to many movies or much of that sort of thing. We really were struggling to put money together. A big part of the maintenance, of course, was this car that would keep overheating. Of course, I bought all of the manuals so that I could try to repair it as much as possible on my own. I'm a hopeless mechanic, so it wasn't a very fruitful exercise.

5:20

I do remember one time when I went in there, and they said – first, we had to spend the money. It wasn't a ton of money, but for me it was a ton of money at the time. It was like 50 bucks to get this thing checked. The first time was fine, but the second year I remember going back to get it checked because you had to do it annually, and it failed the test. So I had to get some work done on it, and I just simply could not afford it. I actually had to take out a loan from my parents. It wasn't very much. I think it was only like 400 bucks or 500 bucks, but I had to take out a loan and get it repaired. The exhaust system needed some patching up, so we got that done. Of course, I'm lucky that my parents could afford to give me a \$500 loan. I certainly know that there are many people out there that can't afford that and that don't have people that they can just go ask for money from.

I really think that all this law is, essentially, is a fee on the poor, people who can least afford it, seniors that have fixed incomes who are driving older cars. I think of my grandparents right now on a fixed income. They drive a very old car. They keep it up meticulously as much as possible. It's a very old car, and I doubt it has very good emissions standards, but they use it. They make do with it, and that's good. They can't afford to have an extra 50 bucks a year to inspect the thing, and then who knows what the repair costs would be if it was a problem.

Again, to me, I understand the spirit of the bill. No one likes smog in our cities. I know that California has these same tests. They have a huge smog problem. I understand that. I really do. I

think the intentions behind it are noble. I'm not decrying that. I know that this hon. member, for a fact, wouldn't do anything that would intentionally hurt people, certainly not the poor. I know that's not the intent of this legislation, but I think that the unintended consequences of this bill are that. It will do very little to help our environment.

I mean, most people can afford to drive cars that are either new or new used, I guess you could say, five years or newer. Most people can afford to purchase cars like that, and those cars have, you know, very little emissions that go out of their tailpipes relative to older model cars and trucks and vehicles. So this won't affect most of us. It depends, of course, on what the bill says eventually, if it gets implemented. If it's a bill that says that we have to get an annual emissions check, then that's going to be a huge pain for Albertans. It's 50 bucks out of everyone's pocket every year, or, depending on it, it might be even more. I'm not really sure what the charge is for that right now. It's probably higher than 50 bucks. That's what it was back when I was in school.

I would suggest that it would mean an extra tax on everybody, but the people that could least afford it are the people on small incomes. On top of that, if problems were discovered with the emissions, the people that would have the most problems passing these emissions standards tests would be people who aren't wealthy, who aren't even middle income. It would be poor people, people that have older cars. So I really think that if this was ever turned into a bill, you know, it would hurt the people that can least afford it.

There's also the question, too, of big government and intrusive government. It seems that every time we turn around in this Legislature, there's a new law that is being proposed that limits our freedoms or takes away our rights. We see this with property rights legislation: bills 50, 36, and 19. We see this with, my belief is, although, respectfully, I know that the Wildrose caucus had two that voted for and two that voted against, Bill 16, the cellphone law. Of course, we have free votes in this caucus. I know it's a novel concept. The point is that there's the safety vest registry. You know, you have all these different laws and initiatives that are coming forward that I believe are just too far. It's just Big Brother wanting to do too much and getting too involved in our lives.

This is just a little thing, right? It's an emissions check. It seems harmless enough, right? I mean, you've got people who want to make sure that we don't have smog and pollution in the air. But let's be clear what this is. I mean, this is a very small percentage of vehicles that would not meet these tests, but they would literally all be confined to people who probably could least afford it. I just think that that's the wrong way to go about it.

If we want to curb emissions of all kinds – pollutants, emissions of all kinds – then what we need to be looking at is, obviously, more mass transit. I think it's a very good idea, work towards that. That means properly funding our municipalities and decentralizing a lot of decision-making with regard to infrastructure to our municipalities. That would allow them to put in place the types of mass transit infrastructure that would have a real positive effect on reducing emissions, reducing smog, reducing particulates and other pollution, and then . . . [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, might we revert briefly to the introduction of some very special guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: Thank you very much. In all three galleries – the public, the members', and the Speaker's galleries – are municipal representatives. They come from a number of municipalities just a little north of the city of Edmonton. I'd like to introduce them to you. They are here this week to attend the 2010 Alberta Urban Municipalities Association convention, taking place in Edmonton November 23-25, and I'm just really delighted that they've taken time out of their convention schedule to be with us today. As I call on them, if they would rise: from the town of Barrhead, led by His Worship Mayor Brian Schulz, a delegation of municipal representatives; from the town of Westlock, led by His Worship Bruce Lennon, a number of representatives from that municipality; from the town of Morinville, led by Deputy Mayor Paul Krauskopf; from the town of Swan Hills; from the town of Legal, led by His Worship Albert St. Jean; and from the village of Clyde, led by Deputy Mayor Diana Vosseler. I'd ask them all to rise now and receive the very, very warm recognition of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Program

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak with respect to Motion 512. I just want to repeat it because it's the wording of the motion that leads me to want to support it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider implementing a vehicle inspection and maintenance program requiring vehicles to undergo regular inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions.

The intention of the motion, obviously, is to encourage the government to implement a vehicle inspection and maintenance program, or an IM program as I'll refer to it, and may then require vehicles to undergo regular inspections or repairs when necessary. The program would identify vehicles that have higher emissions outputs, perhaps because of comparison to other vehicles of the same age or type. I know that, as we've already heard actually, there could be concerns about this motion, concerns about this kind of an initiative for reasons of cost, inconvenience, possibly even difficulty in implementing. But I think it's a motion worthy of our careful consideration because what it's doing is urging the government to consider implementing such a program, and given the challenges we have with our environment and health issues and so on, I think it's reasonable that we should be taking a close look at this.

There are many possibilities as to how such a program could be implemented; for example, regular annual inspections, which I can see some people having concerns about. I do understand, however, that it's not uncommon for even vehicles of only a couple of years in age quickly becoming inefficient and having problems in terms of their emissions, so that may be an argument for fairly regular checks.

5:30

Another way, I think, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has suggested, is possibly when ownership of a vehicle is being transferred. That would be a sound way to make sure vehicles are being checked at least periodically. I guess the question is: is it worth the cost, the inconvenience, and some might say, the hassle?

I would say that it's, again, pretty much accepted that vehicle emissions are a significant source of pollution, certainly in our province and most definitely in other jurisdictions. In Alberta's urban areas vehicles account for approximately 40 per cent of nitrogen oxides and 30 per cent of volatile organic compound emissions. Province-wide vehicles account for approximately 15 per cent of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compound emissions. These inspections are important because, obviously, the fewer vehicle emissions, the better the ambient air quality, and improving air quality is certainly something that's essential in protecting our environment and improving public health. Reducing unnecessary greenhouse emissions through such a program would help decrease ground-level ozone and smog, and we know that those are hazards that have been linked to acid rain and other forms of environmental damage. It's also worth noting that our population in Alberta is increasing, so this could become an increasingly serious issue.

But it's not only an environmental issue; it's certainly linked to the health of Albertans as well. Obviously, poor air quality makes it harder for a person to breathe. It can irritate an individual's lungs and airways, worsen chronic diseases such as heart disease, bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma. These are severe health issues that can be a huge burden on the lives of Albertans. Asthma alone is one of the leading chronic diseases for Alberta children, for example, and it's also very harmful to lungs and bronchial tubes. Air pollution can play a major role in asthma due to the fact that children breathe faster and spend more time outdoors doing strenuous activities. I understand that studies have shown that even modest increases in air pollution can cause small but measurable increases in emergency room visits and hospital admissions.

The point I'm trying to make is that even a small improvement in air quality would be beneficial to the people in our province. If an inspection and maintenance program can help reduce these greenhouse emissions and improve our air quality, then I believe that a program like this may be justifiable. Obviously, however, it wouldn't be the only solution. It would be one of a range of things that we have to do and remain vigilant on in order to maintain air quality in the province. I believe that it certainly bears further scrutiny, and that's why I'm going to support this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: There are five additional speakers that I have on my list, and we'll go forward with the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then Strathcona, then Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, then Calgary-McCall, then Calgary-Fish Creek. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for bringing forward this motion. I know that it's with great concern for the environment and the desire to make things better here in the province that this motion has been brought forward. I'd just like to speak a little bit, though, on the depth and the scope of this motion and the problems that it would cause. Like I say, I can understand his desire for it, but I cannot vote for this motion because of, I believe, the damage that it will cause to those who can least afford to take their vehicles through an inspection station.

There are a very small number of people who actually drive these older vehicles. There are probably a larger number of vintage vehicles in the province than there are old vehicles on the road that are operating poorly. I know, you know, back in the '70s and '80s when you were driving in town, we saw lots of puffers and smoke coming out, and it was appalling. You'd get behind some of these vehicles, and it would choke you up. But it's not a common

dilemma that I see on the roads very often anymore, and when I do see a vehicle that's old and rusted out and running poorly, usually you can identify with the person driving that vehicle that they're doing this as a last resort, that this is the only thing they can own and operate because of the circumstances that they're in.

To me, when you generally look at people that are doing things that we might think, "Oh, let's raise the standards and stop them from doing those activities," there are generally two reasons why they do that. One is a lack of education. I think we're doing a great job here in the province of educating people about the importance of having a well-run vehicle. You know, if the timing is out and it's rough, you get poor mileage. I think most operators that are operating their vehicles notice that where they used to get 6 litres to the 100 kilometres, now they're at 7 or 8, and their vehicle is running rough. They realize the economic advantage of going in and getting their vehicle tuned up and getting new spark plugs and getting it timed if it's needed.

How many times in our lives have we run into a new problem and looked back and said: if only I had 20/20 hindsight, I wouldn't have done that. Education is critical. I think we do a pretty good job here in the province of getting that out there, the importance of having a well-run vehicle. Again, our mechanics and those shops that we take our vehicles to, they are very good usually at telling people that, you know, you need to have your timing belt changed, you need new spark plugs, whatever it is.

The other dilemma – and this is the bigger area, I guess, I want to address – is that those people that are driving these are really in economic hardship, whether it's a single mother trying to take her child to a soccer game or some other thing, to have that mobility of moving them around, whether it's a senior who's on a fixed income and, again, not able to buy a newer vehicle. The numbers are really very small. I don't know. Perhaps the hon. member has some numbers that he could present to present his case on why we need to do this.

It has been mentioned about the amount of pollution that comes out of our vehicles, and it is a lot. It has an impact in our cities. I've been an advocate for a long time to burn propane and natural gas. I remember when the propane people came and visited me back in, I think, 2005-2006, and they were talking about the new technology and direct injection and those dilemmas.

Why do we want to target a group of people who are suffering economically, in all likelihood, with an old vehicle? If they had the economic means, there's absolutely no question that they would update and drive a new vehicle. They don't have that, so why would we want to target them and then have a bunch of allowances inside this bill that might say: oh, if you have economic hardships, then it's okay; you can continue on driving this. I have concerns about that.

We talk about incremental changes, and we often talk here in this House that, you know, well, it doesn't matter how much it costs if we can save one life. It does. It's where we deploy that money where maybe we can save a thousand asthma patients rather than just save one life by changing a small incremental law.

I think that if we're serious and we're wanting to really address the nitrous oxide, the VOCs, or the volatile organic compounds, those things, what we should be looking at is changing the taxes, changing the incentive to move to a cleaner fuel, a one-carbon fuel rather than a multicarbon fuel, because that reduces all of the pollutants that we really know cause the problems. So I would urge the member and all members in here to vote against this motion. It's not in the proper direction where we really can make some major steps forward.

If our environment is, in fact, what we're trying to approach here, we can look at running natural gas vehicles, liquefied natural gas.

There are many new options that are out there that give us great opportunity. Think of the change – we talk about the change – if we were to switch our coal generation to natural gas generation. We'd also have a huge, significant change if we were to become a nation – and we have an abundance of natural gas – that says: "You know what? We want natural gas powered vehicles here in the province." Set up a system. I remember ATCO in the '70s tried to make the push to do that. Again, the resistance kind of came back, and tax laws changed.

We can and we should enhance the idea of a better, cleaner fuel, but that better, cleaner fuel isn't a 5 per cent ethanol injection into our gas. It's actually using methane, the one-carbon fuel that really reduces all of the organic compounds, that reduces the nitric oxide. All of those problems that we really are concerned with, the smog, are doable by changing to a cleaner fuel.

5:40

I would urge all members to not vote for Motion 512. We can look at other ways to make major changes to the pollution going on in our major cities especially and not target a small group of individuals who, through economic conditions or perhaps educational ones, are still running these old vehicles. There are not that many on the road. This would be very cost prohibitive to many people. Even young individuals who are going off to university often drive an old vehicle because that's all they can afford to get around in. They might only fire it up once every two weeks, yet it's critical for them to be able to get around and to make it to the different functions or classes that they need to. Perhaps it's an evening class and they don't want to have to ride the bus when they've left the university late. There are many reasons why people drive these older vehicles. This motion is targeting those that drive them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I just don't feel, overall, if you weigh the pros to the cons on this, that there is a major benefit where we can say: "Oh, let's move forward. We can see a huge decrease in the amount of pollution. We can feel for those people with asthma that can't walk on the streets." Let's target it at a bigger picture, a greater impact on the pollution and the smog that we have in our cities. I hope that we'll consider looking at burning a one-carbon fuel rather than a multicarbon fuel.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a list here, so I'll just follow the list. The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and speak to Motion 512. This motion does have significant importance to Alberta due to the fact that throughout the province private vehicles generate 7,073 kilotonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, according to a study done by StatsCan in 2007. There's no doubt that the use of vehicles in Alberta has become a way of life, and they are essential for almost all of our residents so that they can perform the day-to-day tasks that require them and their families to be mobile.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 512 urges the government to consider implementing a vehicle inspection maintenance, or IM, program. Under this proposed legislation vehicles would undergo regular inspections and repairs when necessary to reduce automobile-generated emissions. The IM program would allow for certain exemptions as well as include a repair cost limit. The wording of

this motion does not specifically lay out how an IM program would have to be implemented.

I believe it's important and would be beneficial to examine other jurisdictions to learn the specifics of their IM programs for comparison. Mr. Speaker, currently both B.C. and Ontario have functional IM programs in place to reduce smog-causing trucks, cars, and buses. For instance, Ontario's drive clean program states that a vehicle must have an emissions test in order for registration to be renewed beginning five years after its production. I know there are many similar programs in the U.S., especially California. In addition, if a vehicle requires an emissions test, a reminder would be sent to the owner as part of their vehicle licence renewal application from the ministry of transport, so there are no surprises or inconveniences. Similarly, an emissions test is also required for an ownership transfer for vehicles with a model year older than the current calendar year. This ensures the buyer's purchase of a passing vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario's drive clean program has standards for both light duty vehicles such as passenger cars, vans, light trucks, and sport utility vehicles and a program for heavy-duty vehicles such as large trucks and buses. It's also important to note that vehicles of the 1997 and older model years are exempt from testing as well as all hybrid vehicles. Additionally, vehicles designated as historic, light duty commercial farm vehicles, kit cars, and motorcycles are also exempt.

Ontario's drive clean program takes into account that some owners of light duty vehicles cannot fully afford to repair or replace their vehicles to meet the emissions standards. That is why Ontario has included a repair cost limit, or RCL, in its policy framework. This allows vehicles not meeting emissions standards or which fail their retest to be issued a conditional pass report. In the incident that a person's vehicle receives a conditional pass report, they may renew their registration without having their vehicle fully repaired. Ontario's RCL places a maximum of \$450 on what a person must spend on emission-related repairs.

Just in reference to what the members for Airdrie-Chestermere and Calgary-Glenmore had said, there is a cost attached to driving a vehicle. No, not everyone can afford that cost, but in this country most people can. Speaking from experience as a General Motors dealer for a lot of my life, yes, there is a percentage of people that can't afford it, but there is also a percentage of people, Mr. Speaker, that simply choose not to do that maintenance. We've got to keep our vehicles safe, and we have to be responsible for our environment, so there's a line there.

British Columbia also has an IM program. There are similarities between the Ontario program and the B.C. one, but there are differences also. The IM program called AirCare was adopted only in the lower Fraser valley because of its dense population and increasing emissions concerns. The vehicles that are included in the AirCare program are all light-duty vehicles, 5,000 kilograms and under. As of 2009 some of the vehicles that are exempt from B.C.'s AirCare program include 2003 or newer model year vehicles, so seven years old, vehicles with vintage plates, motorcycles, snowmobiles, amphibious vehicles, ATVs, farm fleet and agriculture vehicles, and hybrid vehicles. Those vehicles that fail an AirCare tailpipe test have higher than normal emissions output than vehicles of the same age and type.

The RCL in B.C. are in place to ensure that motor vehicle emissions are lowered while also limiting the financial burden on vehicle owners. In the case that a vehicle is not worth repairing, the ministry recommends removing that vehicle from use. Mr. Speaker, the Ontario and B.C. IM programs are examples showing that there are many ways for IM programs to be implemented.

The Alberta government would have to clearly define which vehicles would be included in the inspection and maintenance program and which vehicles would be exempt. Furthermore, considerations need to be made with regard to RCL and when and how often it's necessary to be inspected and repaired.

I would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this important matter, which has given us the opportunity to discuss it further. Again, I don't think it creates any unnecessary hardship for the vast majority of Albertans, and it is important that vehicles are maintained safely and that we do whatever we can reasonably do for a reasonable cost to protect our environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to be brief. It's surprising the amount of e-mail and calls that we've received on this little motion, which in my time in the Legislature is somewhat unusual because a lot of times Albertans don't pay a lot of attention to the private bill process or motions. While I believe Motion 512 is well intended and it's aimed at cleaning up the environment, in my mind it singles out low-income Albertans, especially seniors. That's where I have a problem, actually, with this particular motion.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to bring you to one of the constituents who has brought this to my attention. He's a sweet, sweet, old senior, and his name is Milo. He came to my office in his well-maintained, older car to share how the government affects him and how he felt about the motion. Milo, or Mr. F., as we like to call him, uses his well-maintained, old car to drive Mrs. F. to church. He also drives her to the doctor because her health isn't good. He also takes her to the grocery store. People like Milo and his wife both live on seniors' fixed income, and he's very, very concerned about what this motion is going to do to his older, well-maintained car.

The other interesting thing that I'm getting a lot of calls on – and I'm not sure if the member is aware of this – is from Albertans who feel they're being targeted. They collect classic, antique cars. They take their little collector car, their little antique car out on a Sunday drive, or they participate in classic car shows. We happen to have a condo in Radium, and it always seems to be the weekend that we're up in Radium when they have their big classic antique car show, and it brings people from all over. You have these proud people displaying their old, classic cars, and I have to admit that I love watching Barrett-Jackson, and I love seeing some of those old cars roll in to get auctioned off. Those are the type of people that feel that they're going to be penalized by this motion, so it would be interesting to hear what the mover has to say about that.

5:50

The majority of the cars on the roads are newer models, and the people that we've talked to with these older cars are well intentioned. They take very good care of their cars, and I refer to the seniors or the car collectors. I'm not a car person, Mr. Speaker. I drive a reliable car, a 2006 RAV4, and I have to have on the record that I love my RAV. It gets me back and forth to Edmonton on the Queen E II all the time very faithfully. It's a car that I really, really enjoy driving. One of the things that was brought to our attention on this particular motion is the brand new cars that they then spend thousands and thousands of dollars souping up and the emissions that they spew out as they're driving down the highway. Like I said, Mr. Speaker, I'm not a car person. I honestly can't tell one car from another other than a RAV because I'm a RAV driver, and I do know what a Mustang looks like because they're pretty hot cars.

While I appreciate what the member is trying to bring forward and I think it's admirable, just at this point in time my job is to represent the people in Calgary-Fish Creek. Actually, as Wildrose members we get a lot of correspondence every day from Albertans, and it's sometimes a little overwhelming just trying to keep up. They have indicated to us as a party that they do not want us to support this bill. As a caucus we believe in democracy, and we believe that our role is to represent Albertans and bring forward their views.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I will not be supporting this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, do you wish to speak?

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak in favour of Motion 512. I've been hearing comments pro and con. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was talking about Mustangs. Maybe she owned one in her younger days. Maybe that was a souped up car for her. My buddy had a Camaro, you know, and we used to have fun driving those old Mustangs and Camaros around, but I think I'm getting a little grey, too, so I stay away from those souped-up cars.

Ms Blakeman: Why?

Mr. Kang: I'm concerned about the environment now, Laurie. In our younger days we do foolish things.

This motion makes sense because time and again we hear that there's a small number of cars which don't meet – maybe, you know, they've got high emissions. This motion, if adopted, I don't think will affect very many people. When the vehicles change hands, there could be – you know, when we're buying a house, we put all kinds of conditions: the fence has to be fixed; the driveway has to be fixed. If you adopt this motion and somebody is buying a car, they could put the condition: have the car brought up to snuff, and only then we will buy it. It will not be too long before, you know, all cars will be meeting the standards.

We've got to pay the price to keep our environment clean. We want to breathe clean air. Poorly maintained vehicles can boost fuel consumption up 15 per cent, and that will significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions. As Environment Canada says, the benefits of better fuel economy will exceed costs by 3 to 1. Twenty-seven per cent of countries' greenhouse gas emissions are produced by cars and trucks and trains and ships. That's a high number, Mr. Speaker. The feds have implemented high-efficiency standards, and the industry expects they will be required to make an average improvement of 20 per cent, likely, by 2017.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but Standing Order 8(3) provides five minutes for the sponsor of the motion to close debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal of Motion 512 is clear: to improve the air quality of Alberta for present and future generations. The motion wording is broad and general, allowing a variety of ways for this goal to be achieved. In this way the government would have the opportunity to develop a made-in-Alberta vehicle inspection maintenance program. For debate purposes one option is to require vehicles older than 10 years to undergo an inspection before the title is transferred.

To answer some of the questions from Airdrie-Chestermere and Calgary-Glenmore, it's not the idea of this motion to test vehicles every year or, as in B.C., every second year. That's not the idea. It's also not the idea for antique vehicles. There would be exemptions for those vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, I know that protecting the environment is one of this government's priorities. Therefore, I look forward to Alberta's future as I know this government will continue to protect Alberta's water, land, and air. Regardless of whether this motion passes here today in the Assembly, I value and respect my colleagues' comments regarding Motion 512 and believe it was an important discussion to

have in this Assembly. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Assembly who participated in this motion debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 512 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House now stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 22, 2010

Issue 45e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 22, 2010

[Mr. McFarland in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 21 Wills and Succession Act

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Zwozdesky]

The Acting Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour and privilege to speak on this bill, especially with the hon. member presiding from the chair. This, again, is in second reading. I've had numerous opportunities to speak about this bill. Again, I applaud the member who has brought this forward as the proposed changes to the act reflect the changing social values in Alberta as well as the evolving estate planning practice, and you see some really positive stuff happening here.

We on this side of the House agree with the vast majority of the changes. I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated that there were a few language issues involved with the bill but merely on the direction of same-sex parenting and that, in her view, the bill could have been improved on, but we'll look for that in future legislation. Other than that, the bill really changes very few things. It helps things along and, in particular, changes a few rules, from when I was in law school, on survivorship. It makes it more clear and sensible, especially if two or more people die.

I see that the hon. Minister of Justice remembers that question on her wills and estates exam, too – you remember that, right? – when two people die at the same time. Yes, every law student who has gone before us remembers that question. The answer has now been changed. I think it's a very good rule that has been changed.

Needless to say, this is good stuff, and we support it on this side of the House. We hope it leads to more clarity amongst the profession as well as people who are having their wills and having their issues looked into after the fact when that is necessary.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to very briefly indicate my support for Bill 21, the Wills and Succession Act. My brother-in-law, a very respected professor from Carleton University and a top consultant when it comes to recidivism and criminal law, died recently. His wife, being the executor of the will, is currently going through the process and the complications associated with it. My wife is the second executor. If the clarity that is brought out in Bill 21 was applied to the process that my brother-in-law's estate is currently undergoing in Ottawa, the process would be considerably simplified.

There is such a tremendous amount of grief associated with a death that anything that will improve the understanding and the processing of wills and successions is to a degree going to begin the healing process associated with the death and loss. Bill 21 accomplishes that, bringing into account the various types of families and the sometimes tricky nature of succession, especially when there's

been more than one marriage and children associated with different mothers. It adds to the complications.

I thank the hon. mover of this Bill 21 for helping to clarify the confusion.

The Acting Speaker: Member, I just need a little clarification. Have you spoken, or are you wishing to address the amendment?

Ms Notley: I was hoping to speak on the bill. I haven't spoken.

The Acting Speaker: Very good. Then we'll hear from Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak on this bill in second reading. My understanding is that this bill is designed for the most part to update the legislative regime that supervises the disposition of assets in the event of a death. It does appear to be designed primarily, you know, to amalgamate and streamline legislation that would cover matters of wills, intestacy, beneficiary designations, survivorship, and family support in those cases where the will does not provide for same. My understanding is that most of this update does pretty much reflect all the work and the recommendations that were performed by the Alberta Law Reform Institute.

There were a couple of questions or concerns that I had that I will put out there, and I suspect the sponsor of the bill will definitely respond to these, based on my experience with the sponsor of the bill. Basically, one possible point of concern is that which relates to the issue of the status of the bill on those occasions where the will is amended without necessarily following the standard forms and procedures, in particular where it is amended that way and you're attempting to give meaning, as it were, to the last wishes of the testator.

In the past it used to be the case that the will was invalidated if a witness to those changes was also a beneficiary. Now we see, of course, through this change that the will itself would not be invalidated. While there is, I believe, the attempt to invalidate the particular disposition to that witness within the will, the question becomes whether or not there may still be occasions where the witness or others who are around the testator when the will is changed may be able to have greater opportunity to influence the outcomes of how the will is ultimately constructed.

7:40

This, of course, is an issue simply where we are concerned about, you know, a growing section of the population which is aging, and certainly the member who sponsored this bill is aware of the many concerns around the rights of seniors as they relate to trusteeship and the ability of seniors to have their desires reflected in these kinds of legal documents without being in some way negatively influenced by those around them, potentially people around them that might be taking advantage of them.

While I appreciate that, on the one hand, waiving the need to go through or adhere to certain forms as strictly as you might have otherwise is desired to ensure that those last wishes are reflected, I'm concerned, I guess, a little bit about balancing that against the opportunity to have the last wishes influenced by those who are in a position of care around that testator and ensuring that there remain safety valves, as it were, for that particular process. That's probably the only concern that I'd be interested to hear from the sponsor on when he has an opportunity to respond.

The only other question I had, really, related to the issue of what happens with the changes with respect to survivorship, where you

have two parties who pass away at essentially the same time. The previous rule was that the party who was the youngest is deemed to have been the second person to pass away, and thus the distribution flows on that basis. Now it appears as though they're being treated as though both are, from what I can tell, the second person to pass away, so I'm not quite sure what the impact is of that new rule on the disposition of the familial assets.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The reason that this is important, of course, is because the question becomes – you know, most wills have this written in, as the sponsor would know. But in cases where it's not written in, if spouses don't pass away together, the assets of one automatically go to the other, and then the second one has the decision about how those assets are distributed to remaining beneficiaries. If the alternative distribution mechanisms between the two spouses are in conflict and they're both deemed to have effectively been the second person passing away, how is that net group of assets distributed?

That's just a question. It's sort of like one of those fun questions or not-so-fun questions that many of us had to suffer through in law school. I look forward to having the sponsor of the bill explain the implication of that change in a bit more detail because as we went through the briefing notes that we received from the ministry in our office, we weren't quite clear on what that actually meant once we sort of worked through an example. We'd be seeking clarification on that one.

Notwithstanding that, because this appears to reflect the recommendations put forward by the Alberta Law Reform Institute and because it does for the most part appear to simply be a matter of streamlining, we are prepared to offer our provisional support for this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Bill 22

Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Zwozdesky]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: A clarification: Bill 22?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll be brief. Regardless of whether we have an opinion on new types of families, the demographic of the husband to the wife and the children has changed tremendously over the years. One of the reasons I support Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, is the fact that this act recognizes the new demographics in families. Alberta has one of the highest if not the highest divorce rates, and beyond a doubt it has high rates of family violence. The idea that our parents experienced, where for the most part they stayed together over their time and they raised their children and they were around to support their grandchildren: as I say, that demographic has changed.

One of the changes that's taken place besides the increase in common-law families is the increase in same-sex couple relation-

ships. Whether or not it's a same-sex couple or the traditional male and female situation, the ability to have assisted human reproduction does change the possibility, and Bill 22 takes this into account. In order to address the growing reliance on assisted human reproduction and to recognize the children who are a product of this birthing method, the ministry has proposed through this bill the following policies in order to provide greater clarity regarding issues of parentage.

Where assisted human reproduction is used and there is a proper combination of biology and consent, couples using AHR can become the legal parents without any added need to begin adoption proceedings as long as one partner or spouse can show a biological connection to the child and the other individual consents to being a parent. In the case of a single individual using assisted human reproduction, that person may become the legal parent without another legal parent being recorded.

As a result of the above changes, same-sex couples who use assisted human reproduction will receive more complete recognition as legal parents in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights. I very much welcome the fact that Alberta has become more understanding of a variety of relationships and, through law, accepting of the fact that a couple, as I say, no longer bears the traditional definition of our parents. I'm proud to say that in my 41 years of marriage to my wife, Heather, when I look around, I see that we're the anomaly as opposed to the rule of law these days.

7:50

Therefore, I appreciate very much the fact that Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, recognizes what is in the best interests of the parent, whether it be a birth parent or someone who has sufficient love to indicate their desire to be a parent. Regardless of the various combinations their right to have and to love and support their children is recognized in law. I very much appreciate the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for recognizing the changing face of Alberta's parenthood and families and doing so with an updated version of what constitutes a family and support for members of that family, in particular the children.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure as well to rise to speak in second reading of Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. This bill, I guess, is designed to amend three existing acts to ensure that children who are born through assisted human reproduction have certainty about their legal parents and also, as has already been mentioned, to abolish the status of illegitimacy. As well, the bill would also make several changes to the powers of the maintenance enforcement program.

Now, there are certain components to this bill which I think are positive. Unfortunately, there are also a couple with which I have some concern, so I'll try and go through each of them in general terms in terms of what our concerns or accolades are.

First of all, I think it's really important to congratulate the government in terms of moving forward with making changes regarding assisted reproduction and recognizing the greater role that that plays in our society. This bill will ensure that determining the parenthood of a child conceived through assisted reproduction is now easier and that there'll be less work and paperwork and all that kind of stuff required with respect to making those parents adopt the children who are conceived through alternative means. This act reflects the evolving picture of our families here in Alberta, and in that sense it is certainly a positive thing. It also, of course, eases the process for single parents and for same-sex couples, and of course

any change in statutes that reflects equality in terms of recognizing the parental authority of same-sex couples is also to be commended.

I would, however, like to repeat a couple of the concerns that were identified by previous speakers with respect to the fact that the act still fails to, shall we say, neutralize the language within itself as it refers to the parents of children. In particular, I think it is possible to talk about parents without necessarily talking about a mother and a father and, in so doing, to recognize and demonstrate respect for the concept of equality and for the fact that families in today's society do look different. They don't always include a mother and a father. They may well include a mother and a mother, they may well include a father and a father, and that's fine. That's what families look like. That's what we've said – well, that's what some of us have said, anyway – should be perfectly embraced and accepted within our society.

We need to continue to be vigilant to eliminate vestiges of a previously more archaic view of these issues. Unfortunately, by not updating the language in the course of making these amendments with that view in mind, we have failed to meet that particular objective. I would much rather see the government amend this legislation in the few cases where it's necessary – and I think they could probably do it without a tremendous amount of difficulty – just to get to the point where we can speak about parents as we talked about the families this act has implications for.

Now, the other thing within this act that is potentially a problem, of course, is the proposal within the act to change the way in which parents become guardians of their children and, in particular, how the noncustodial parent acquires guardianship rights. The status quo, shall I say, is that there needs to be a fairly rigorous assessment of the relationship between that parent and the child for whom they seek guardianship to ensure that the guardianship is an appropriate designation.

This act purports to change that process quite substantially and, instead, to simply have guardianship allocated on the basis of whether the potential guardian has the desire to become a guardian. I think that we really need to consider the implications of this change. I know that in the past the statement has been made: oh, this is just leveling the playing field, and this is just going to ensure that, you know, both parties to the parentage, shall we say, of the child are invited to become part of the process.

I had one person suggest to me in my consultations the following scenario. Mom and dad meet some night, and the result of said meeting is a child, but mom never sees the dad again. Then a few years down the road or a few months down the road or however long the dad develops a new world view of things, shall we say, and becomes very concerned, for instance, about types of medical treatment which they would approve for their child. Four or five years later the child is in the hospital, needs a blood transfusion, and the second parent, who has up to that point never had any kind of parental relationship with the child, either financially or in any other fashion, because of this new set of beliefs arrives on the scene and says, "I now would like to demonstrate my willingness to be a guardian," applies to become a guardian, and starts suggesting that the child cannot receive that particular medical treatment.

Now, that's perhaps an exaggerated example, but it's the kind of example that does show that there is value in assessing the relationship between the child and the parent who seeks guardianship and that it is not a one-way relationship and that simply expressing a desire at some point down the road to take on that role of guardian is not a completely foolproof way of assessing whether designation of that person as a guardian is, in fact, advisable in that particular circumstance.

You know, this is something that is in most cases going to undermine the rights of the custodial parent. In most cases that is

the mother. It's fine that we do everything we can to promote maximum involvement of noncustodial parents with the raising of the children, but we need to at the same time respect the relationship that develops between the custodial parent and the child.

8:00

We need to ensure that we don't inadvertently provide incredible levels of authority to the noncustodial parent simply because we're working so hard to establish some form of equality that we then significantly negate and undermine the authority that ought to flow to the custodial parent due to their relationship with that child. So I'm quite concerned, really, about this trend that appears within the act, and I certainly would like to hear more from the government about why it is we shouldn't be concerned about this and why it is they felt that it was appropriate to move to this new approach for establishing guardianship and, in particular, for establishing the authority of guardianship over that particular child.

When you consider, you know, the kinds of things that come up, medical treatment is one example. Travel is another example. Moving the parent and the child to another jurisdiction is a very common example. What exactly does handing over guardianship that easily to a noncustodial parent do to those kinds of rights of the custodial parent? Are we suddenly going to find custodial parents effectively serving at the whim of the noncustodial parent in terms of whether they can move to a new province or move to a new town or move to a new country simply because the noncustodial parent has expressed a willingness to become a guardian and, in so doing, then gives to themselves the authority to say no to moving the child, letting the child go to a certain school, letting the child have a certain medical treatment, et cetera? I am quite concerned about that.

The final element of the act, which my preliminary consultations appear to support, are the changes to the maintenance enforcement program. I will admit I was a little bit concerned when I first saw that we were going to start spending all this time seeking information on the creditors – i.e., the receiving spouse, in most cases the mother – and ensuring that we're combing through their finances with much more rigour than we ever have in the past. I'm told that in practice the implication of this is that by doing this we assist and promote and encourage having both parties bring the exchange of dollars into the system as opposed to having the system unable to get the contributing parent to make their payments, and then the receiving parent accepts much less outside of the maintenance enforcement process. Then what happens is that the contributing parent is able to use this so-called contribution as a means of challenging the maintenance enforcement program's efforts to collect the full amount. It becomes difficult for maintenance enforcement to mediate if they don't have the information of both parties to the arrangement.

I am told by some that this, in fact, will ultimately ensure that there are more tools for maintenance enforcement to collect the full amount of payments from the contributing parent that are owed to the receiving parent. With those assurances in mind – and I hope that they are correct – we do not have any difficulty with that and, in fact, think that it may be a wise move.

With those preliminary concerns noted, I will take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions or comments.

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to join the debate on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

**Bill 29
Alberta Parks Act**

Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 29, Alberta Parks Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mrs. Ady]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just to refresh members' memories, the amendment to hoist Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, was proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar last Wednesday evening, and given the hour it was adjourned, as was indicated, by the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

The hoist amendment is basically the third strike, as we all know, but it's important to very quickly go over the first two strikes that were attempted as rational alternatives. The first was proposed by myself, and that was a reasoned amendment. What it stated was that at this time there has been insufficient consultation with the public; therefore, the feeling is that the public's best interests are not recognized in the bill as it currently exists. That failed miserably, based on the majority of government members voting against it.

So the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie brought forward the middle-ground position. That middle-ground position was: let's refer it to committee because the committee has the option of calling in a variety of publicly interested groups, the equivalent of holding public hearings. It's a very transparent, accountable process because there is a *Hansard* for the meetings. Invitations are sent out to a wide variety of individuals and groups notifying them well in advance of the possibility to participate in the democratic process, to have their say as opposed to just simply putting something on an online website. Now, unfortunately, the wisdom of the many in terms of the committee process was lost in favour of the wisdom of the one in terms of ministerial discretion or the wisdom of a small group in the form of the Lieutenant Governor in Council or cabinet.

So here we are, Mr. Speaker, at the hoist. The hoist basically is the last attempt in the second portion of debate, second reading, to give the government a chance to do the right thing and determine that this bill not be read at this time. Of course, what we're hoping for is that in the interval the type of consultation that did not go into the preparation of Bill 29 would occur, that the public hearings would take place with the involvement of the public, who have just recently, within the last two weeks, started to wake up to the loss of their public rights and their public governance over parks.

Because this wasn't part of the consultation process, it wasn't brought up about advisory councils or designated alternative groups that would privately manage public lands, not only privately manage it but be able to charge the public for access onto their lands because now the private operator has taken the control that once was part of the public domain. So these came as surprises, Mr. Speaker, and the majority of the public is not aware of them. The people who are most tuned in, the people who have concerns about ecological reserves, wilderness areas, and protected areas, are aware. They're the people whose concerns I have tabled over the past week, four and a half pages worth on Thursday. But the general public has not become aware of this concern, and to a large extent it's going below the radar. This is what I've called a sleeper bill.

8:10

Now, I do appreciate the fact that there have been two articles in the *Rocky Mountain Outlook* that have raised the alarm. I appreciate

the fact that there was an article by Kelly Cryderman of the *Calgary Herald* that raised the alarm or indicated a slight ringing that something was out of place. I thank the *Edmonton Journal* for the editorial this past weekend indicating the problems associated with ministerial discretion as opposed to the public domain of the legislative debate. For the most part it's individuals such as Sam Gunsch, a representative of the Sierra Club, who again is in our gallery because of his concerns about, basically, the privatization movement into parks, the loss of governance over public lands, the generic nature of lumping recreation in with preservation of ecological reserves.

I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, for the sake of Albertans who wish to enjoy parks in a variety of ways that this legislation will get hoisted so that more thought is put into regulations, for example, that have yet to be determined. The minister has said: well, give me the right to have an open book, and I'll write the rules as we go along, and I'll share those rules with you when it's appropriate for you to know what is on my mind. That's not democracy.

For that reason and many reasons like it I don't want to lose the opportunity to debate this bill in the future. I want this bill improved to the point where it has public acceptance, and therefore I am calling for it to be hoisted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there's 29(2)(a) for five minutes of questions and answers. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, my riding of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is, of course, the home to Alberta's largest national park, Wood Buffalo, which I'm proud to represent. While not under provincial jurisdiction it is very important and a reason people move to an important riding in northeastern Alberta. I have to ask the hon. member on the important points that he made today, though – we know that the park is certainly full of wildlife. You can see the bison, the moose, the black bears, and the wolves. I haven't seen any mallards lately or things like that that are going on. I do know the minister of finance talked about mallards today, being not a fiscal hawk but a fiscal mallard. The park, I must say, is also home to endangered species like the whooping crane. In fact, dating back to 1983, the park was declared a UNESCO world heritage site for its biodiversity.

I have to say that an important question that I welcome from the Member for Calgary-Varsity on the very important points that he brought up is what he sees as an alternative to what is being proposed. Clearly, this is another example of an action by an old and tired government of 40 years that has simply run out of ideas, and I'd be very interested in understanding the ideas that you would like to advance relative to Bill 29.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has pointed out the close proximity of Wood Buffalo national park. It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that national parks make up 8 per cent of the land usage of this province, and even though we've had changes in federal government, the democratic process is working in that we don't have the same federal government for a 40-year period. As a result, the strength of the legislation protecting national parks is considerably superior to that of what we're seeing proposed in Bill 29 for provincial parks. We have the wonderful parks such as Wood Buffalo, such as Jasper, such as

Waterton, such as Banff, and thank heavens that they have national governance in legislation, I might note, as opposed to regulation.

My concern is that this government does not see the value of ecological reserves, of protected areas, of wilderness parks such as Siffleur, White Goat. As a result, the protection of the ecological quality, that so many Albertans have said is a priority over simply recreational activities, is lost. They're given the same value regardless of their importance in terms of wildlife connectivity, the Yellowstone to Yukon, the notion that unless species have a chance to breed outside of their immediate area, there is the possibility of a decline in the quality of the animal produced. Without those protected areas that guarantee that animals can travel, we're going to see what happened most recently in Banff park, where an avalanche practically wiped out what little remained of the woodland caribou herd. Therefore, unless we recognize the importance of protecting these endangered species such as the grizzly, this legislation that is being proposed equates riding an ATV with protecting woodland caribou or the grizzly or the swift fox.

Mr. Speaker, we need legislation that is at least as protective for the provincial scene as that afforded by the national government. I thank the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for raising the point that this protection is considerably inferior to that of national standards.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? We still have a few seconds.

Seeing none, the chair just wants to read the names of hon. members who wish to speak on the amendment: the hon. members for Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Fish Creek, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Airdrie-Chestermere. I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In reference to the Member for Calgary-Varsity's comments about the value of wilderness areas for both humans and wildlife, that's the sort of thing that we hear from time to time, and we don't always reference where it comes from. I think that it's important that we reference where that comes from on a day such as today, so I intend to do that in explaining why I will support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's amendment to hoist Bill 29.

It was 38 years ago this very day, November 22, 1972, that the province of Alberta moved to preserve three great swaths of unspoiled wilderness on the eastern boundaries of the Rocky Mountains. The Ghost River, White Goat, and Siffleur wilderness areas had already been established about a decade earlier by the Social Credit government of Premier Ernest Manning, but it was the government of Premier Peter Lougheed, the first in an all-too-long line of PC governments, that enshrined their preservation in the Wilderness Areas Amendment Act of 1972, providing in legislation, Mr. Speaker, the highest level of protection available in this province.

8:20

Dr. Allan Warrack was Premier Lougheed's minister of lands and forests, and here's how he explained it on November 22, 1972, when he moved third reading of Bill 93, The Wilderness Areas Amendment Act, before it was passed into law. That's right. Thirty-eight years ago today, this Legislature was debating the 93rd bill of that session, and here we are debating the 29th. I think that's interesting, how little work we do relative to what legislators used to do in this Assembly. I quote from *Hansard* that day:

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Telephones and Utilities, Mr. Werry, that Bill No. 93, The Wilder-

ness Areas Amendment Act, 1972 be read a third time.

I have on the occasion of second reading, Mr. Speaker, had an opportunity to describe the principles involved in these amendments. Important as they are, I think I can, in the light of brevity, not dwell on them in any detail other than to note quickly that there was the maximum size removal, there was the firming-up of the boundaries for the three wilderness areas that Alberta shall now have, and thirdly, the implementation of the controlled buffer zone concept as a part of the wilderness areas concept.

And then he went on.

The one thing that I would like to do however in addition, Mr. Speaker, is add a description that I have thought about as it pertains to wilderness areas, and that is, for the citizens of this province and this country and indeed our visitors to have the opportunity for the quiet enjoyment of nature. This is possible in wilderness areas that are not encumbered by mechanized activities of any kind. This opportunity is one that people want. It is a reasonable thing for people to want as they maintain a balance in their lives, having regard to the intensity of their schedules at some times, the activities that they need to carry forward with their own responsibilities in society, and that opportunity for retreat. Even though, for some, the use of it may be relatively infrequent . . .

Relatively infrequent.

. . . it is still an opportunity that is there and would not be there if we did not have The Wilderness Areas Act and if we did not have Bill No. 93, The Wilderness Areas Amendment Act to finalize these matters; to have three wilderness areas in the Province of Alberta for people to enjoy that opportunity for quiet communication with nature; and to do so unencumbered by any mechanization that would detract from that quiet enjoyment of nature.

This would be the extent of my remarks in summary, Mr. Speaker, having regard to Bill No. 93.

Hansard then notes, "The motion was carried, and Bill No. 93 was read a third time." There was no one who spoke in opposition to it that day 38 years ago, November 22, 1972.

I think it's worth noting that Bill 93 finalized the protection of these wilderness areas from industrial use and indeed, really, any high-impact human use. The Lougheed government removed pre-existing petroleum and mineral leases from the wilderness areas in exchange for new leases elsewhere. Shell was one of the oil companies involved in this. There were a couple of others as well, I believe. There was among our lawmakers then, Mr. Speaker, a deep understanding – a deep understanding – of the value of wilderness and of preserving our natural heritage. Protecting our most special landscapes in perpetuity seemed like a good idea at the time.

Mr. Speaker, if you've ever wondered how long forever is, just ask the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. She's currently trying to steer this bill through the Legislature, and if the minister succeeds in that, the answer to the question of how long forever is will be 38 years. Bill 29 purports to do you and me and visitors to this province from out of province a big favour. It will clarify park use for the public by consolidating and replacing three separate pieces of legislation to simplify the classification system and bring all the lands governed by those acts under the minister's administration.

On the surface it is a compelling argument. Over the years we have developed in this province a spectrum of green space categories ranging from highly protected to more recreation oriented: ecological reserves, wilderness areas, wildland provincial parks, provincial parks, natural areas, provincial recreation areas. We talked about some of these classifications the other night, Mr. Speaker, when we were debating this bill and the other amendments to it. In fact, Bill 29 removes the legislated protection that wilderness areas, ecological reserves, and wildland provincial parks now have – removes it – and

proposes one catch-all park category, leaving it up to the minister to decide the level of protection in zones that are not defined in the bill. It gives the minister the authority to permit industrial or tourism developments inside any park, including the wilderness areas. I know she says that she's not going to do that, and we're supposed to take her at her word, but we don't have to take anybody at their word under existing legislation because it's right there written into law. It removes the certainty of long-term protection that seemed like such a good idea 38 years ago.

In reality, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's current classifications are consistent with national and international protected area standards. What's most regressive in this bill is that it removes from Alberta law the commitment to making protection of a park's ecological integrity the first priority in management, a monumental step backwards for Alberta's wilderness. That monumental step backwards comes at a time when our reputation is under attack around the world. Is it truly difficult for people who live here or people who visit here to figure out what we can or cannot do in all of our different categories of green space? Not really. The AlbertaParks.ca website clearly spells out everything for anybody who's interested in going and looking there. The minister has done a rather good job, or her staff have, on that website.

Mr. Speaker, Premier Lougheed and his lands and forests minister, Allan Warrack, understood the value of protecting our most special landscapes in perpetuity. Premier Stelmach and his parks minister will dismantle that legacy with Bill 29. Lougheed and Warrack got it right 38 years ago – 38 years ago today. If they proceed tonight in the Legislature, this government is about to get it irreversibly, irretrievably wrong. It is time to withdraw Bill 29 and get back to nature, and that is why I will be supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciated the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie's comments about an area that's so important to all of us. But even more importantly, it is said that a province without a history is a province without a heart. Clearly, the hon. member has indicated how much heart we do have in Alberta, being the first province in all of Canada to have a Ministry of Environment. At the time both SRD, Sustainable Resource Development, and the Ministry of Environment were all one ministry. What a novel idea. Just like as we talk about parks, parks is one idea, and actually it is one idea that is an Alberta value. As the hon. member mentioned earlier, Premier Lougheed, being the first Premier to come forward with the Ministry of Environment, had a vision, but he was mirroring what Albertans believed in in terms of their commitment to the environment, their commitment to parks, their commitment to the wilderness and Mother Nature, and, I might say, the mother ship.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, my question to the hon. member. As we go forward, I know that he also has a better road map in terms of how we protect and how we sustain our parks to ensure that the men and women that are in this Assembly representing constituents will be able to guarantee that their families will continue to enjoy the very parks that we call home, that we have a history of. We do not want to lose that history. So to the member: I'd be interested in his comments relative to the importance of that sustainability and protection of that pristine, shall I say, geographical makeup that he made reference to in his original comments.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the hon. member, there are probably some things in life and in our business in this Legislature that we do that are as important, but I can't think of anything that's any more important for a very simple fact, a very simple reason. Once you build on something natural, once you take nature away from that area, it is gone forever. Now, nature, being a pretty resilient thing, will bring back something. We've all watched – I'm not sure what cable station it's on, whether it's TLC or Discovery Channel or National Geographic, one of those – that program, that series, about the day the people disappeared, and it's all about the concept of what would happen if, magically, all humanity simply disappeared from the Earth, but all other life forms continued on. How long would it take until all of our human-engineered systems broke down? How long would it take until nature reclaimed New York City or Calgary or Edmonton or wherever? In many respects, in some ways it wouldn't take very long at all. It would start within days, but nature won't necessarily bring it back the way it was.

8:30

It's fair to point out as well that the way it is today, even in its native, natural state, untouched by human hands, is not the way that it will be a hundred or a thousand or a million years from now. Nature is an evolving concept, but nature has more smarts about how that should work than the brightest human beings, hon. member, in my opinion. What we're good at as a species is cutting down, tearing down, re-forming, rebuilding, paving over, taking what was here to begin with and using it and reshaping it for some purpose of ours.

Obviously, over the last however many hundreds of thousands or millions – I think the oldest hominid found so far in the Great Rift Valley in Africa is about 4 million years old. Let's say that we've existed in some form standing on two legs, two feet, for 4 million years now. Obviously, over that period of time our ability to manipulate tools, to think problems through to a solution, and so on and so forth has worked just great for us, and in some cases it has worked just great for other species as well, but in many cases it's worked great for us at the expense of whatever nature put here.

Mr. Speaker, when William Cornelius Van Horne was the head of the Canadian Pacific Railway, he said: if we can't bring the mountains to the people . . . [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired] Ah, darn. That was good. Maybe somebody else will ask me another question.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak in favour of this amendment and why it's so important that we take this bill off the table and go back to, I guess, restructuring and asking: what is it that we're really trying to do with our parks here in Alberta?

It's interesting that one of the anti campaign advertisements that was going on out there was trying to tell people not to come and visit Alberta and the beautiful, pristine parks that we have. They're world renowned; they're one of a kind. Of everything from Waterton park to Writing-on-Stone up to Wood Buffalo in the north Albertans are very proud, and they love their parks. It's a sad day when all of a sudden without any notice, without any consultation with numerous groups and Albertans as a whole Bill 29 was thrown in front of this

Legislature and wanting to be pushed through in a short period of two or three weeks maximum. It's been quite astounding. I think I've received 362 e-mails today to my constituency office from people very concerned with Bill 29.

It's very clear, Mr. Speaker, that the government has not done its job on Bill 29. It's trying to force it through in short order and through night sittings, and this is not in the best interest. Once we turn back or we pass this bill and we empower the minister to make broad, sweeping deals on our parks, whether it's allowing an individual to put in a beautiful cabin on a pristine lake, saying that this is good for tourism, whatever it is, there's no going back. We need to be very careful, and this bill is not being very careful. It's just a trust-me bill. We can't even trust this government to look after the people in our emergency rooms. They talk about percentages. They have protocol that kicks in after eight hours.

What's going to be the determination on what the minister decides with our parks? Who she knows? What she wants to do? Who's going to be the next minister? All of these are huge concerns for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and we need to address this problem, but we need to address it properly. Having a few night discussions on how poor this bill is going to serve and protect our parks in the future isn't going to cut it.

There have been amendments. People have tried to bring forward various amendments to the bill. We've failed. This should have gone to committee. This should be studied longer. This is a last attempt by those of us in this Legislature who want to not only preserve our parks but preserve the purpose of this House, to come in and to debate bills, to make them public. This is a bill that is of such importance, Mr. Speaker, that it really should have been tabled in the spring so that people could have had all summer to go around and to discuss and to dissect and to look at what the pros and the cons are.

There are just so many areas where, again, it is just wide open on what the latitude of the minister of parks can do in the future, and that's just unacceptable. We need legislation that is not arbitrary. We need people to know and to understand which parks are protected in which manner, whether it's pristine wilderness or whether it's going to be a recreational park, whether or not trails are going to be allowed in there for RVs. Perhaps it's just going to be horseback or on foot. All of these things have been set up. There has been a great deal of study and research and thought put into the various parks that we have here in the province, and all of that is going to be swept aside with this bill. It's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that this government in the best interests of Albertans and our parks will realize this and that we can vote to hoist this bill. I don't know how we can emphasize more how important it is.

I have to say that it has just been overwhelming, the number of e-mails and phone calls from Albertans that have come into my office who are very, very concerned with where we're going on this bill. One of the universal points that they bring out is: why would you empower the minister in such a way that the minister of parks and recreation could change the use of any park at any time through order in council merely because, in a minister's opinion, this is a good thing to do? It might be a good thing to do for the minister, it might be a good thing to do for the minister's friends, but is it a good thing to do for Albertans?

Conversely, perhaps it is something that is good for Albertans, but why wouldn't we go through the proper process? Why wouldn't we have legislation that would change or protect a park have to come through this House, with the arguments brought forward?

Again, probably the most important thing, Mr. Speaker, is the time allotted to these new bills that are brought forward for Albertans to

see across this great province. Two weeks is not enough time. Three weeks is not enough time. We're not going to have proper evaluation of this bill. We're not going to be able to hear the response of Albertans.

Perhaps, again, another most concerning part is that we just really do not know. This is an arbitrary bill that allows the future of our parks to be held by one individual, and that individual is the minister of parks and recreation, which is unacceptable to the people of Alberta that I've talked to, the people that have sent messages and e-mails to me. I would once again plead with many of the members that have already spoken on this bill to ask the government to vote to hoist this bill so that it might have proper consideration, that it might be rewritten in such a way that Albertans will have comfort and know our parks are protected, that it's not left to one individual.

There are just so many areas. When you think of the beautiful parks, the opportunities that we have there, to think that, wow, all of this is going to be at the discretion of one person to decide what goes forward. Perhaps that minister has a great friend who wants to build a cabin in the Willmore wilderness and to be able to fly in and take his elite friends hunting and not have to hike in or pack in on a horse a great distance. Perhaps what they're going to do with this bill is use it on the other side, this two-edged sword, and that is that an oil and gas company that has put a lot of money up front wants to explore an area, and the minister is going to come in and literally take that back with the option of no compensation and say: oh, we're going to develop a park here. This is a two-edged sword. It can work against those people who own land, and it can work against our parks that the government currently protects.

That's why this bill really needs to be hoisted. When you look at it from one side of the spectrum to the other, there just are no pluses in this bill unless, of course, we want a king to declare where the parks are, who can hunt in those parks, what animals can and will not be hunted. Again, that's going into fish and game, those areas. This bill is truly far too vague and gives far too much latitude and power to the minister.

Again, it leaves those of us in opposition to this bill very little to do other than to continue to talk. Many people will say: "Oh, you're costing taxpayers money. You shouldn't be debating late into the evening." This is the last defence that we have for our parks, and that is to talk and to talk and to talk about this. Some of it might seem like it's repetitious, might be upsetting to some people because they just want to get on and to be able to do this and not be challenged. "Why do you go through this long, drawn-out process trying to delay a bill?" The reason why, Mr. Speaker, is because this bill is wrong. I believe the majority of Albertans feel this bill is wrong.

8:40

It goes back to another episode that we just had earlier this month, where the Minister of SRD flippantly said: "Oh, it's great for Alberta to change some rangeland into some potato land, and we've been doing this for a hundred years. It's within my jurisdiction. I can just do that." There was a huge uproar, and that individual, that company, withdrew that request.

It's hard for the people to just continually have to rise up and to fight these things time and time again. We need better government. We need better laws. We need better debate on these laws. We need a better process. All of these things are being thrown out the window with this bill, and we just have to again urge the members of this government to hoist this bill and realize that it is inadequate.

We'll do a proper consultation with the people of Alberta, and more importantly we'll pass a bill that is legislation and not empowering a minister. We do not want that. This is a constant problem this government seems to be looking at, whether it's the

health minister, the Environment minister, SRD, the Energy minister. They want to empower these offices so that they can arbitrarily change what is going on. It's just not good for Alberta. It's not good for investment. It's not good for landowners to wonder: boy, are they going to come in and declare my land part of a parkland, and are they going to extinguish my rights? What a word to have, I guess, in a few of their bills: to extinguish landowners' rights. Something that this government continues to do is extinguish the rights, the legislation, the purpose of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I will close with that and ask that people will vote in favour of this amendment, that we might not step back, I guess, 38 years of precedent that's been here in the province. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if the hon. member could maybe speak a little bit more about what other bills or what other legislation are examples of where the minister has been given broad-reaching powers and they have abused it. I started thinking, you know, that another one of these is the land-use framework and some of the dangerous things that are coming out of there. In principle, with the land-use framework it seems like, you know, everybody wants to make sure certain places are protected and so forth, but there are just such broad powers in there that it seems to me there's a real danger.

You can already see some of these dangers happening as you discuss with different municipal politicians, specifically in the rural areas, about the land-use framework and you see these plans being made. I know the one up north had some issues where, you know, it doesn't quite jibe with the actual leases up there. There's a conflict between the plan that was put out and some property rights. What are some examples that you see in that regard of a minister having too broad a discretion?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you. That's an excellent question, and it is a concern. There are two ways in which the ministers can broaden their scope. One is through legislation like Bill 29, where they literally say that it's at the minister's discretion. Again, it's been a long time in SRD, where the minister has the authority to buy and sell Crown land as it wishes at the minister's discretion. Perhaps last year, though, was the worst year in Alberta history, where we had a number of bills. Bills 19, 36, and 50 all empowered the minister to basically bypass the courts, to bypass a needs assessment, to bypass the Legislature by declaring these things needful for the good of society. What I want to say is that as good an intent as it is, that intent is wrong. I think the best way you can sum that up is with the simple: power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Perhaps, I guess, on the little broader side, where they've done this is in the centralization of power. Where Alberta has been hurt the most on this is through the disbanding of locally run hospitals and the fact that now we have one individual that's been appointed or hired by this government. Literally, for a while there were no expenditures that he didn't sign off on. It's a broad sense, but when they empower one individual, when they centralize power and decision-making in a minister's office or with a few bureaucrats, it's never in the best interest of the people. They might be trying to act in the best interest, but they always fall short.

Like I say, the area where I'd be most concerned, which isn't actually legislation – well, it is – was when they, you know, created the superboard. Again, they put all that power and decision-making

into one little appointed body and said: we know what's best for health care in Alberta. We can see what a disaster that has been. I mean, they talk about giving five-year funding. Well, why would they keep talking about that all the time? When you look at the last five years, they always increased funding as it was. It's a failed system.

This is going to be a failed system as well if they give that power to the parks minister. We need to be concerned and to vote no against Bill 29 in its current state. It just is not going to enhance our parks or protect property rights going into the future.

The minister can just, like I say, at the stroke of a pen take property and say: oh, this is the fair amount. Or, vice versa, they could allow someone to come in with commercial development to an area that's been protected for decades and say: well, it's for the betterment of Alberta; we're going to get a few bucks here. Or perhaps they're going to have a few friends that can enjoy some pristine wilderness and be able to fly in to a beautiful cabin that's been built.

I hope that answers the hon. member's question. We need to very wary of empowering ministers with that type of authority.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to rise this evening and express my support for the amendment that's currently before the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we are on Bill 29.

Mr. Mason: We're on the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, of course, the amendment to Bill 29, the hoist amendment.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I rise to indicate support for the amendment relative to Bill 29, that in fact this bill not now be read. I think that it is an appropriate amendment. I commend the member for bringing it forward, and I wholeheartedly support it.

Mr. Speaker, we should always try and strike the right balance between individual and private interests and the interests of all of us together. It is a role, in my view, of government to ensure that that balance is maintained. We don't want to interfere with people's ability to create jobs and to create wealth and to do all of the things that keep the economy moving forward, but at the same time we need to protect the longer term interests of the public, of all of us, not just for our generation but for every generation to come. The network of legislation that currently exists surrounding parks in this province and wilderness areas and so on has done that. It has helped to provide that protection and to protect that balance that needs to exist.

What this bill is, fundamentally, in my view, is an attempt to eliminate bit by bit, piece by piece all of the checks and balances that prevent the development of commercial and industrial activities in our protected areas and in our parks. It's clear to me that this is a systematic attempt to make sure that, whether it's the oil industry or a recreational company or tourism interests, they will have the ability to override the long-term protection that is afforded to our natural areas in this province.

8:50

A few examples. There's a new purpose that's been added to this bill, which is in 2(3)(d), "providing for a range of outdoor pursuits

and recreation and tourism development opportunities within the Alberta parks system that contribute to Alberta's overall growth and prosperity." It further goes on to talk about "providing lasting protection for provincially . . . unique or significant recreation and tourism features."

Mr. Speaker, in the current legislation neither prosperity nor tourism is mentioned. I think that's quite deliberate and quite appropriate because the purpose of the legislation that currently exists is to protect natural areas, including protecting them from the overdevelopment of recreational facilities and tourism. Those things can be a threat to our natural areas if they are developed to excess, and I think that the protections here, the balance here is lost.

In the present wilderness act wilderness areas and ecological reserves are afforded the highest level of protection possible. They will be abolished, and these criteria are not replicated in the new legislation anywhere.

There are multiple examples that I could give if we went through in detail. Hopefully, we'll be able to do that in committee if this motion, unfortunately, should fail. The legislation is replete with systematic removal of protection for our wilderness and parks areas. Mr. Speaker, I think we should not pass this; this is an ill-advised piece of legislation.

I've said on a couple of earlier occasions that the suite of bills that the government has brought forward in this session contains some of the most onerous, badly drafted, and ill-thought-out pieces of legislation that I have yet seen in the 10 years that I've been here. I think that it's important that we pause, reflect, make sure that the public is fully aware of what's going on.

While the minister has talked about the wide consultation and so on, she has neglected to point out that in a survey of Alberta public opinion in August 2007 by Ipsos-Reid 85 per cent of both visitors and nonvisitors to our parks said that while both are important, protecting the natural environment should be a higher priority for Alberta's parks than providing recreation.

Mr. Speaker, this says nothing about industrial activity in the parks, especially the development of oil and gas and mineral resources and so on, that is going to become much easier to get approved under this act. In fact, I believe that if the government had no intention of approving those things, they wouldn't be changing the legislation to allow them to do so. The very fact that they are now attempting to change the legislation to give this capacity to the minister to approve these things, to streamline those approval processes and make sure that these kinds of things can happen, is because they intend to do so.

Mr. Speaker, that would be very, very consistent with this government's approach. Underlying all of it, underlying everything this government has done, it is about allowing a free hand or as free a hand as possible for the development of mineral resources of this province by private concerns, most of whom have very, very close financial and other political ties with the Progressive Conservative Party, that forms this government. I think we need to understand why this is happening and what some of those political relationships are because unless we understand those political relationships, we can't understand why the government would be bringing forward legislation like this.

Mr. Speaker, the present system is not overly complicated or confusing, as the minister has tried to tell the House. It clearly protects parks and sets out clear criteria for ecological conservation. It clearly delineates five basic categories of protected areas, listed from the lowest extent of protection to the highest; that is, recreational areas, heritage rangelands, provincial parks, ecological reserves, and wilderness areas. It clearly restricts the development of land, roads, and resources in these areas and sets out clear

penalties for disturbing the natural landscape. There are clear protections for flora, fauna, and ecology.

What is clear about the new Alberta Parks Act is that it will ease commercial land, road, and resource development and erode democratic representation for Albertans. Clearly, the minister will receive excessive powers to decide the fate of Alberta's parks alone and secretly, so the future of Alberta's parks and the wildlife and wilderness in them is becoming more uncertain.

What's unclear is what protections will exist in the new park system. Unclear is the future of the boundaries of Alberta's parks, the meaning of the designation of a park, and protections within each of four zones still to be stipulated. It's unclear whether the public has the ability to effectively voice their concerns, and it is unclear what recourse Albertans have should the choices of the minister be unclear.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is seriously flawed, and I think it's important that we recognize – and I'm going to quote here – that those public organizations most concerned with the protection of natural areas in our province have come together and have issued some joint statements.

I have here a release from the 12th of November from the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, the Sierra Club of Canada, Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. They take strong exception to this bill, and they call for it to be stopped. One person speaking on behalf of the Sierra Club, Diane Pachal, said that "if Bill 29 isn't stopped, Save Our Parks Week will need to be an annual event throughout Alberta." They are specifically calling to have the bill withdrawn by the Tourism, Parks and Recreation minister and are calling on Albertans to save their parks by e-mailing and faxing their MLAs and the Premier with copies to us, the opposition parties, throughout the debate that's now taking place on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, we need legislation which provides for the protection of parks in perpetuity for wildlife and to ensure that future generations enjoy it in the same condition that we have enjoyed it. We need to leave it for them just the way we found it, and that will become impossible if this particular legislation is passed because this legislation is designed to give a green light to development in our parks. Whatever the minister might say, whatever the government might say, the fundamental underlying objective of this bill is to permit that which is not now permissible, and that is the development of roads, the development of petroleum and other resources, the development of tourism, development of all kinds, basically to allow development in the parks.

9:00

Now, the minister says that's not what she wants to do. Then my question is: why is she asking for the power to do it? Why is she asking for unaccountable, excessive authority to override many of the protections that we have had provided to us by previous governments?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to give the PC Party as the government of this province a little bit of credit here. Way back – wait for it, hon. members. Wait, wait, wait a minute. Way back when I was a university student, and that's a while ago – that will tell you how long that is – the Progressive Conservative government was a new and relatively progressive government that swept aside Social Credit and swept aside old ways of doing things. It was a modern government which was in touch with the people. But that was nearly 40 years ago, and it's a long time since they were innovative, progressive, and in touch with the public in this province. They've been coasting a long time, and they have changed. They are no longer a party that will stand up and extend protections for our natural areas.

They don't have a progressive vision anymore. The conservatives are ruling the roost, and the really real conservatives, the really conservative conservative ones, have joined us on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind members that the root of conservative is conserve, and I think there is some value in conserving some of the best things that we have in this province. Surely this is one of the most beautiful, environmentally diverse provinces in all of Canada. There is so much for us to protect, and we should ensure that we do hand over these benefits, these wonderful resources to future generations. It's not our right to consume everything and leave nothing for the generations to come but massive liabilities, yet that seems to be the direction that we're taking.

I thank all hon. members for their kind attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. member – he's been here for 10 years, as he mentioned, and I'm just wondering if he could think back in his years of experience here. You started to mention a little bit about what the minister could do, but what are some of the worst-case scenarios that you would envision that a minister with Bill 29 under their belt or under their jurisdiction – what would be some of the biggest mistakes that you think this government is capable of doing, and why do we need to hoist this bill?

Mr. Mason: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy – happy – to do that. You know, a worst-case situation is that there could be an oil exploration company or a company that wants to develop assets like coal-bed methane or any number of things like that in a pristine wilderness area. And say – I know it's far-fetched – but just say that they'd given several thousand dollars to the Progressive Conservative Party in the last election, and suppose they had the minister's ear. Suppose they sent the minister on a fishing trip on the west coast for three days of salmon fishing. I know this is far-fetched. I know it's far-fetched, but theoretically, at least, it could happen, and then the government and the minister allow something that for 50 years the government has prevented and has prohibited because they knew that their job was to protect these areas for future generations.

But along comes a company that can make several million dollars in a quick turnaround on their investment, and they really, really want to go ahead, and the minister is sympathetic for some reason. Well, then, the minister could allow it, and we could see very, very long-term, permanent damage to the ecology, to the wildlife, even to the potential tourism value or recreational value of that particular part of Alberta. And that, you know, Mr. Speaker, could happen. It actually could happen, and we shouldn't assume that it's just a fantasy of the hon. member or of myself.

Mr. Anderson: I just wanted to know more about this. I have this mental picture in my mind about you in university, and I was just wondering if you could tell us a little bit about those days and if you ever had a chance in those days to go out and enjoy the nature that you're now here fighting to protect. What did you enjoy doing in nature during those times, during your university days?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I will say that in those days, Mr. Speaker – and I appreciate his interest in those days – I very much enjoyed nature when I was a young man. I continue to do so, and I think that

we should do everything possible to protect nature in our province. I think that's our obligation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. My question is relative to the member who made reference to being in university. There was reference made to the minister of finance and him being a professor and teaching you at that time. I'm not sure if that's true or not, but I have to ask you. I know that the minister of finance had a ponytail. Did you have a ponytail when it came to enjoying the actual nature and protecting the very thing that our children and grandchildren enjoy?

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I'll try and turn it into something, you know, remotely resembling the topic at hand, Mr. Speaker. No, I didn't have a ponytail, and I have never been an adherent of the Calgary school, I hate to inform the hon. member.

I'm sorry. I'm having trouble making this relevant, Mr. Speaker, so I'll just sit down.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the hoist amendment.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do say that's a tough act to follow after listening intently.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be really brief here. I want to stand up in regard to the amendment that has been brought before us in regard to hoisting the bill. I have to say that I support that. I have been honoured to be a member of this House for a great period of time.

Mr. Boutilier: Since 1993.

Mrs. Forsyth: Since 1993. Nothing like aging you.

I happen to be the member that carries the name of Calgary-Fish Creek, which I'm incredibly proud of, a provincial park in an urban setting. I can tell you that nothing – nothing – sets the constituents off more than a subject about: don't touch our park in Calgary-Fish Creek. Then it carries on to other parks in this wonderful, wonderful province.

People have, as my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore said, inundated us with e-mails. I, like him, have probably received well over 300 e-mails. I also have had the opportunity to get people to respond on Twitter and Facebook. And they have responded on Facebook. They're also responding on my web page, which means they have a bit of work to do because to respond to my web page, they have to fill out a contact sheet so that we know exactly where they're coming from, and we have received tons of e-mails on my web page also.

9:10

I think what bothers me most about Bill 29 and what people are telling us is the lack of consultation. In fact, it's been quite shocking to people that prior they felt that there was consultation done. It's the ministerial power that has all of a sudden been granted to a minister to be able to make all of these changes and then just come up with this: well, trust me. Well, I can tell you as a former member

of that government for many years and crossing over to the Wildrose in January that “trust me” doesn’t work. It just doesn’t work.

We can see, again, what’s happened today in regard to when the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark took on the “trust me” and spoke out on behalf of emergency and was reassured by the Premier and the minister last week that as an emergency physician they were willing to listen to him. Now we see where we are today, where he has been booted out of cabinet.

You know, if the minister could show to us the evidence of what consultation was done, I would probably feel a little . . .

The Deputy Speaker: On the hoist amendment?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, and I’m going to be speaking on this bill again.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I need to get on the record that Calgary-Fish Creek does support the hoist amendment but quite frankly does not support Bill 29 as it’s written. We will be providing some amendments, and I’m sure that in working with the opposition members, we will be talking about more amendments. But as the bill is written, and as has been explained before, the bill is flawed. It is seriously flawed.

I can’t understand, when the government talks about open and accountable and they talk about the love of the land, why they would bring a piece of legislation that, in my mind, is so flawed. Actually, it’s to the point that it’s ridiculous, and they want people in this Assembly other than the government side to, first of all, support the piece of legislation. What’s more surprising to me than anything is that they want Albertans to buy into this piece of what I would consider crappy legislation.

On that, I will sit down, and I will listen to some of my colleagues and hear what they have to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. A question to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. The hon. members of this House have seen me stand up throughout the past week – and I would have stood up again today given the opportunity – tabling concerns over Bill 29 that I have received not only from Albertans but from throughout North America and across Europe over concerns about the loss of Alberta’s pristine wilderness and its governance. My questions to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek: how important in terms of expressing concerns is the tabling process, and will members of the Wildrose Party be tabling concerns that individuals have sent to them to express their abhorrence of the moving from legislation into regulation that Bill 29 represents?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I would suggest, Member, that probably a lot of the tablings that you’ve already done we’re in receipt of because I know that on some of the ones that I’ve got here, you’ve been CCed. So I would gather that probably a lot of the e-mails and letters and phone calls that you have already tabled we are in receipt of. I can certainly see that you’ve been CCed on a lot of the ones that we have. Will we be tabling the e-mails or the letters or the phone calls we received? You know, I don’t want to be critical, but I think there are other things that we could better spend our time on than the tabling, but we will continue to speak out on behalf of the e-mails, the phone calls, and the letters that we have received.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish

Creek: do you think it’s important that people’s voices, specifically attributed voices, be heard in this Assembly? Are you worried that that ability to have individuals’ concerns expressed will be lost with Bill 29 moving from legislation to regulation?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I understand where this hon. member is going, and I appreciate what he’s trying to do. As I explained, I’ve been a member of this Assembly for many, many years.

I have no problem tabling anything if the person who’s writing me or phoning me says: I want you to specifically table something. I will be tabling something in this Legislature on Wednesday at the request of the people that I have met with that wanted me to specifically table something. I, quite frankly, as a member of the opposition and, I’m sure, this member of an opposition have not got the time, with the budget that we have been given by the members of this Legislature and by Members’ Services, for the staff to take the time to phone all of the individuals that have written me and e-mailed me to ask for their permission to table. We have staff right now, our two little researchers, working hours and hours and hours trying to provide us with at least briefing notes and maybe some half-speeches.

Again, I appreciate where he’s going. I have no problem tabling on behalf of people that have asked me to table, but for the people that have e-mailed me or written, I’m not tabling without their permission.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to get on the record in support of this hoist motion and to acknowledge that this bill is very important to Albertans. The fact that we’ve had four people sitting in the gallery all evening speaks to that the commitment to public lands is universal in Alberta, and it’s nice to see the public taking a very strong position both in writing to us and in actually showing up and listening to what I hope is an informed debate.

I just want to say a couple of things. Trust, again, is the big issue in Alberta, and this government does not have the trust of the people. This particular bill could have slipped through under a Lougheed Progressive Conservative government. They would have seen the intent. They would have seen the commitment of these men and women to the long-term well-being of public lands. Without a land-use framework yet in place, without a clear commitment to water and the vital role that water has in this province, and without a clear commitment to species protection and habitat preservation, it’s clear that this government has a long way to go to rebuild the trust of Albertans and where they’re trying to go with Bill 29. There’s no way that we would be credible if we allowed this bill to go forward, and I hope the other side, the government, is realizing this from both their own e-mails and from what we’re trying to tell them in this debate.

I won’t drag it out. There’s a clear need to rethink this bill. In the interests of Albertans and in your own political interests for the future, this bill has to be hoisted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My question is to the hon. Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Do you think the former minister of sustainable resources

was heading in the right direction when he put water first in terms of six regions in this province and the overarching legislation began with water and moved forward from that position?

9:20

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the question. I gave the minister at the time our qualified support for this important new venture into land-use planning. What a concept: plan for the priority issues across the province; think about resource development, competing interests; focus on water as the primary generator of all human activity. I still honour the minister for setting the standard in the country for that. I hope he will have some influence in moving this forward because it does seem to have stalled, and there is a real need to move that land-use framework forward in the interests of all Albertans. Water is the fundamental question around which the planning has been established, and we need to see that go forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the representative from Calgary-Mountain View: do you believe that the land-use framework should have come first as an overarching piece of legislation, before Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, or Bill 50 with transmission lines was brought forward? Has the government sort of piecemealed a series of circumstances rather than dealing with the entire land-use framework?

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the question. In fact, it has repeatedly been an issue in this Legislature that we're concerned about the delays in creating a framework for development in this province, setting the priorities. There is such a race now for development in this province to try to get ahead of the land-use framework, to try to subvert any regulations or priority designations that the land-use framework would be putting into place. Indeed, the issues around jurisdiction and park identification and levels of protection are part and parcel of what the land-use framework was designed to put in place. So, indeed, we were hoping that this would move forward and we'd have the public debate, that we'd have the land-use framework in place and we could make sensible long-term decisions based on a very progressive-thinking land-use framework.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When I spoke to the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation during constituency week, her reason for pushing Bill 29 through with such speed was that she couldn't afford to wait for the land-use framework to be developed. Do you see anything in Bill 29 that would legitimize this rush to have it passed?

Dr. Swann: An excellent question. I don't see the pressure to get Bill 29 through. I think there are clear guidelines around the different levels of land use, park and protected area use, at the present time. The only reason I can think that might require such urgency would be another agenda, and we've already heard tonight a lot of different theories about what that agenda might be. But it doesn't appear that the priority is long-term habitat protection, species protection, and the protection into perpetuity of our most pristine and important lands and parks in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

All right. The chair shall now call on the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo on the hoist amendment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand tonight in this House and speak to Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act. Alberta's bread and butter are its natural environment. As a former minister of the Crown for the Klein government I can say that nothing is more important to the people of Alberta, having been the first province in all of Canada under the leadership of Peter Lougheed to recognize the value that Albertans have for the environment, something, I might say, that another statesman in our province, former leader Preston Manning, clearly has recognized and understands, the importance of our environment.

My riding of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo: it remains an honour and a privilege to serve the good people of that area, who contribute so much to this province, and all we ask for is a bill that simply makes sense. I might say that this bill in its present form clearly does not capture that spirit dating back to the early 1970s. In fact, if anything, we are losing something.

My riding of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, as I mentioned earlier, has the largest national park, Wood Buffalo. Not only that, I'm proud to say as the former mayor that chose to name our regional municipality after that national park, Wood Buffalo, that while not under provincial jurisdiction, it is important and a reason people move to what I believe to be an important riding in Canada, the economic engine of Canada but also with that important balance of sustaining our environment, recognizing the importance of the environment, recognizing the importance and our commitment we must have to our children because each and every one of us as family members often takes our children to parks. In fact, with a three-year-old son and the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere with four boys aged one, three, four, and six, plus or minus a half-year or so in there, I would say that we tend to spend a lot of time at parks. Parks are very important. Prior to becoming a father, I never recognized how parks play an important role for families, and families are so important to this province. I think all members of this Assembly can agree with the fundamental premise that for the family the ability of sustaining our parks into the future is so important.

What is most important is that you can witness the beauty in the Peace- Athabasca delta, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. I'm proud to call both the northeast and northwest parts of Alberta in my constituency, which spans over 69,000 square kilometres. I want you to know that the park is brimming with wildlife. You can see bison, moose, black bears, wolves, and even ducks. This park is also home to endangered species like the whooping crane. Back in 1983 – if I could go back for a moment to that time – the park was declared a UNESCO world heritage site for its biodiversity. Back in 2007 it came to light that the park is home to the world's largest beaver dam. What's more Canadian than that, I have to ask you? The beaver, of course, is on the back of our nickel, and it clearly is an important, rich heritage for all of us. Right here in our own province of Alberta we recognize the important value.

Now, I want you to know that I see no irony that the economic engine of Canada, the oil sands, is also home to Canada's largest national park. The people of Fort McMurray clearly value their outdoors. The Clearwater and Athabasca rivers run through my constituency in the lower Athabasca, and it's important to say that people from all over Canada come to kayak and come to canoe these great waters. I've lived in Fort McMurray for well over 30 years, and I will say that my three-year-old son, who calls Fort McMurray his home, enjoys the outdoors so much. We visit parks very often in our city, that we refer to as Fort McMurray/Wood Buffalo, and the entire region. Now, maybe we're not playing as much outside today based on the weather.

Having said that, I'm deeply concerned about the direction this government is going with our provincial parks, if this minister is to be believed, and traditionally we tend to give people the benefit of the doubt. We often say: fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. Now, this is just simply, as has been quoted, a bit of housekeeping legislation. Nothing to see here, Albertans. Nothing to worry about. We're just dusting the shelves with this housekeeping legislation, cleaning up a bit. But I can tell you that I don't believe that this is housekeeping. This is a major renovation. In fact, it's not just a renovation; it actually, I believe, could be more of a deconstruction of something that we have enjoyed for so long. The point of this bill is to bring it in line with poor legislation known as the land-use framework, which, I believe and I'm proud to say, the Wildrose caucus will repeal when it becomes the governing party of this province. It will repeal it.

9:30

Another issue that is so important and very much a great concern for us is ministerial power. I can draw upon my time in government as a minister of the Crown for almost eight years in four different ministries. I tell you that this can be extremely difficult. It can be frustrating having to balance all of the stakeholders, including employees and citizens and special interests and even those people that are part of the PC Party. But you know what? That's the job of a minister of the Crown. It's your job to take the time to meet with groups and people and citizens from all corners of this great province of ours, that we call home, that will be impacted by ministerial decisions and new legislation on what is being offered.

If you don't want it, step down so someone else can do the job, but don't write yourself a new job description with superpowers. It's really similar to what was done with the Alberta superboard under the former minister of health, who, of course, came in and appointed his gang to be the superboard. That will be another bill, another superboard legislation that we will immediately repeal. We believe we have a better plan. We are not old and tired. In fact, after 40 years I believe that the new ideas that we bring to the table are something that simply have been lost.

This bill will give the minister – and this is my major concern – the power to change anything he or she wants in any provincial park without any consultation. Let me repeat that again. This bill will give unilateral decision and power to the minister, where he can do that without coming back into this Legislature. In fact, if this bill is successful, it will without question, I believe, create concern for my children and grandchildren and many people who love our parks, that we enjoy.

This is profound. If the minister wants to put a recreational trail through your land, the minister can do so without any accountability. If the government wants your land for parkland, they can just simply take it. The only process in place will be placing a piece of paper on a minister's desk. I have to ask you this. The way our parks should be managed: is this the way you would like them to be managed as Albertans? The message I have received back is an unequivocal no. Managed at the desk of some bureaucrat that will just slide a piece of paper in front of a minister: I do not for a moment accept that.

I believe that in any 21st-century democracy there needs to be a healthy tension between the minister's office and the bureaucracy. We do not want the inmates to be running the asylum, and I often hear from Albertans that that is the view of how this government of 40 years is running. The inmates are running the asylum. With some ministers, I'm proud to say, I have a comfort that they can provide that healthy tension and keep what I call bureaucrats in check and provide a safety net to ensure, but not all ministers across the way are like that. That's where the concern is being raised with

this legislation. There are cabinet shuffles, cabinet ministers are kicked out, other ones are brought in, but clearly the bureaucracy will be around for a long time.

I fundamentally believe that there is not that healthy tension that should be in any modern-day bureaucracy in government right now, and I believe that ultimately there is no safety net. There is a total disconnect, not only a disconnect but a canyon leap, in terms of what is versus what used to be in a government that used to listen to Albertans.

Back in the early '70s you had a Premier named Peter Lougheed, who, in fact, would listen to Albertans. What we have seen evolve over the last 40 years is a government where the canyon has grown wider and the gap has gotten bigger. Now MLAs cannot even speak on behalf of their citizens for fear of being kicked out. We saw that in this very House on this day, November 22, 2010. This day is remembered in history for many reasons, the first being the assassination of an American President in 1963. Today we saw an assassination of an MLA in terms of him and his voice being assassinated by one person on that side, the leader of the government. I want to say that having in fact gone through what I've seen take place here a year and a half ago, it alarms me that in no way, shape, or form do you or will you remember who your bosses are. The bosses of this province, that we all represent in here, something that this party and that party and this independent and that party have not forgotten, are the people of Alberta. They are our bosses.

I looked with interest at the review this afternoon, when the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, in fact, asked questions this afternoon to the chief executive officer of Executive Council, and he asked the Premier specifically on the shamefulness of what took place today. Well, what would ever give us confidence that something would ever change when we see an MLA trying to do his job and ultimately being booted out of his caucus? That's shameful. It's interesting today that the Premier chose to say that it was a caucus decision. It's unanimous as well according to the whip, the Member for West Yellowhead. He said that it was unanimous. I do not believe that Albertans believe that. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, on the hoist amendment.

Mr. Boutillier: On the bill that I'm speaking to, the importance of trust, the importance of our parks, the importance of representing your constituents: I am, Mr. Speaker, talking about the importance of my constituents.

Back in the early '70s Peter Lougheed was still connected to the people of Alberta. He consulted with them. He asked them. He wasn't threatened by new ideas. He actually embraced new ideas. He welcomed people that challenged him as a leader because he thought that if everyone was thinking the same, then nobody was thinking. Well, over here today, when the whip, West Yellowhead, said that it was unanimous, I guess that if everyone is thinking the same, then nobody is thinking. That's the concern with Bill 29.

It's clear to me that what took place here today speaks to the fact that Albertans no longer have a voice when it comes to providing input, and we have a Premier that does not want to listen to Albertans when it comes to the issue of parks. I think this bill is something that needs to go back to the people of Alberta, and the people of Alberta are our bosses, not someone with a fancy title on Executive Council.

I will say that I believe that governments, hopefully, will never make decisions that are willy-nilly. Lately we've seen a whole lot of willy-nilly over on that side from the front benches. That's unfortunate because when I really look at what is taking place today in this bill that's being proposed, I find it interesting that Sustainable

Resource Development mused in public about 32 per cent. You ask: how much? Thirty-two per cent of the lower Athabasca region in my constituency will be moved into a conservation zone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for listening to my important points.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments, questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Having been in this House for six years, I recall the time when the honourable representative, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, was actually a Minister of Environment within the Klein government, which he referenced. Now, frequently when that minister rose to answer questions, he would talk about such things as water for life, which was a concept of his predecessor, Lorne Taylor. He always talked about water first. His favourite expression, almost a mantra which he repeated, was blue gold.

9:40

Now, if we look at the eastern slopes, the area from which we draw most of our water, we can look at Banff and then move south through to Waterton. Waterton used to include approximately 16,000 square kilometres of what we're proposing to return to park status, and that's the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp. Within those eastern slopes, what the Nature Conservancy refers to as the last five miles, is the greatest amount of water that we have left in this province. I'm just wondering. Not only is that an important area for sources of water, but it's an absolutely essential animal corridor for the Yellowstone to Yukon, that I referred to earlier. How important, hon. representative of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, is the protection of the eastern slopes through parks legislation, in your opinion?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brings up such an important point. It really is the mantra that we make reference to as the mother ship and as a former Minister of Environment.

The comment about the Yellowstone to Yukon and wildlife and the protection of our wildlife is so important. He has rightfully indicated that this particular bill that we see today, with the eastern slopes – and I had the honour, like him and many members in this House, to visit the eastern slopes – is something of great concern.

Even more so is the issue of blue gold, the water that we speak of, that the hon. member had also rightfully mentioned. I often had used the example, coming from the oil sands capital of the world, that if you were in a desert and you had a barrel of water or a barrel of oil, which would you prefer? I think the answer to that is quite understandable and what all Albertans would prefer, and that is the value of our water.

I also might say that I had the honour of serving under a former Minister of Environment, the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House. As a young MLA that, in fact, left as mayor to become an MLA back in 1997, almost going on 14 years ago, I had the extreme privilege of serving under him in the Rocky Mountain area and as an SPC chair, as we were called back then. I might say that having worked with so many people, there is no one who knows more about the environment than the hon. member from Rocky. I want to recognize him for that and his excellent work. I can say that we agreed on many issues, and I learned a lot. Clearly, I was dripping

behind the ears back then, in 1997, as a former mayor, but I can say that this bill, obviously, I would assume, is something that raises the eyebrows of many people on that side because we expect more from government.

Also, to be a minister, you know, you don't have to be smart. You just have to be good friends with the chief of staff. That's all you have to do. Clearly, you know, times have changed, and times have changed so much that today there are some good ministers and there are not-so-good ministers. I'll let the people of Alberta determine who they are, but as we go forward, I can humbly say that this issue of parks is so important to all Albertans . . . [Mr. Boutilier's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise once again on this bill and along with all of the other speakers offer my support for the amendment to Bill 29 put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think it's critically important that members in this House give serious consideration to voting in favour of this amendment, and the reason for that is that this bill is really a bad one. It's just not good for Alberta. It is not good for Alberta's future, and it is also quite profoundly disrespectful in many ways of Alberta's past.

I was just looking on the website for Alberta Parks. They do such a grand job of touting the wonderful history of this government and each of the years in which the various and sundry wilderness areas were established. I'm talking in particular about the establishment of the Ghost River wilderness area, the Siffleur wilderness area, and the White Goat wilderness area. These were all areas that were established and protected through legislation, not through regulation but through legislation. They're all areas that were established, actually, even before the current government was in government. They were established back in the 1960s.

Yet – yet – this government proposes to remove the legislative protection of these wilderness areas through the introduction of this parks act. This represents a profound – a profound – step backwards in terms of our protection and our respect for the need to maintain the natural and ecological integrity of these important areas. They are a part of our history, and they're a part of the previous generation's history and the generation's history before that. My hope is that they would be a part of future generations' history. Instead what we've done is that we are proposing through this piece of legislation to give unfettered authority to whatever minister of the day to make whatever changes he or she would like to make to parklands throughout the province, including these wilderness areas.

You know, the government often accuses opposition members of being overly paranoid and overly convinced of a conspiracy where really none exists, that really, in fact, everything is just in the best interests of Albertans, and why are we so darn negative? But then if that were the case, my question is: why would the government not grandfather all of these areas in this new legislation? Why would this new legislation not start by saying that under no circumstances are the current wilderness areas or the current ecological reserves to be touched or changed in any way, shape, or form? Why don't they do that? That would go so far in terms of allaying the fears of the so, so, so many Albertans who have contacted members of this Assembly to lay out their concerns about and their objection to this bill. Yet they didn't do that.

It seems to me that in failing to do that, you know, sometimes silence speaks louder than words. It is not unreasonable based on the past history of this government's conduct for concerned Alber-

tans, Albertans who care about the integrity of our ecological and wilderness lands, to think that the government intends, in fact, to change the way in which they manage either the disposition of resources within these protected areas or the growth and development of tourism and construction and development in relation to these areas.

And all the minister is able to offer to us is: "Well, I've consulted lots of times before, and it's very possible that I'll consult again. You know, I like consulting, so I don't understand why people here are concerned." This is the kind of answer we get, which is really somewhat insulting to members of this Assembly because we know, for instance, that while the government has consulted on their Alberta parks policy, there was absolutely no consultation about this change, about what we see in this act. There was no consultation on that, Mr. Speaker. So let it be very clear that the minister is really and truly not telling the whole story to Albertans or to members of this Legislature when she suggests that there has been a lot of consultation on this act.

They have consulted on pieces of the policy, but they never consulted with Albertans about eliminating legislatively protected wilderness areas, wilderness areas that have existed since the '60s and the '50s, and replacing them with an amorphous parks zone, which may or may not allow certain types of development depending on what side of the bed the minister wakes up on on any given morning and who most recently took her out for dinner, bought her Lady Gaga tickets, or took her fishing.

9:50

The fact of the matter is that Albertans have every, every right to be concerned about this. It is a tremendous slap in the face of the history of this province when you look at how we have in the past made good progress in terms of our approach to parks management and to parks establishment and to ecological reserves and all of that kind of thing. Instead, what we're doing is taking a gargantuan step backwards, and all we're told by this government is: cross your fingers, close your eyes, and trust us. That is ridiculously insulting to the Albertans who care so deeply about this issue.

You know, I found this very interesting. I was looking on the parks website, and I'd like to just sort of read from what still exists on the website. Apparently it has not yet been re-edited to provide for the new regime that the government wants to put forward. They say:

Throughout its formative years, the main focus of Alberta's parks and protected areas network was recreation. [However], in recent years, public interest has focused on preserving the province's natural heritage as a legacy for future generations.

So the people who work for parks themselves understand that that is the focus, understand that that is the interest that attracts the majority of attention of concerned Albertans and that that is the direction that Albertans want to go in.

Yet, notwithstanding that, we seem to be moving back, taking a step back 40 years, where now what we need to be doing is balancing against recreational needs and tourism needs and prosperity needs. I almost wonder: did we sort of accidentally step into a time machine and wake up on the set of *Leave It to Beaver* or something? You know, I don't understand why it is that the government wants to take us so far back when we had previously made progress and have since then.

Also, in reading on this website, I read about sort of the history behind the special places and the work that was done there. Again, the website does a lovely job of talking about the copious amounts of consultation that went into the designation of the 81 new and the 13 expanded preserved sites since the mid-90s. They talked about, you know, putting out a number of possible special place designa-

tions and advertising it widely and going into each community and inviting community members to come and talk about that and setting up a multistakeholder committee that then reviewed these special place designations. The multistakeholder committee consisted of representatives from environmental groups and preservation groups and recreational groups and industry groups, and they all talked amongst each other, and there was a tremendous amount of consultation.

Those special places, those 81 new spaces and those 13 expanded sites, can now be changed with a stroke of a pen, without any consultation, without any legislative requirement to consult. All they have to do is give 60 days' notice, and Bob's your uncle; off we go. It's done. Again, this represents an incredible departure from the culture and the institutional commitment towards community consultation and engagement on this issue that is so meaningful to so many Albertans. I'm once again extremely disappointed by that.

I did note, though, that I did find it very interesting that in looking at this little piece here about the special places and the new designations, I was in fact mistaken. I thought that we were on the verge of – and I guess we have now named a new riding after the former Premier, but I thought to myself: sheesh, whatever happened to former Premier Getty? I found that, indeed, no Tory Premier is left behind, much like the no child left behind program in the States, and that, in fact, we do have the Don Getty wilderness park. How could I have missed that? Thank goodness we have in fact managed to memorialize every prominent Tory without exception. Nonetheless, even there I don't know how much consultation went into the name, but at least there was consultation into the establishment of that area.

One of the things that, again, as I said before, is really concerning is that right now as things stand, exploration and the working of minerals is precluded in ecological reserves and wilderness areas and the Willmore wilderness park. Yet the only piece of land that remains unscathed through this legislation is Willmore wilderness park. The rest of it is subject to the new four-zone program that the minister is going to come up with behind some closed door some morning and without any further consultation or without any legislative requirement for further consultation. I'm very concerned about what this means for the balance between exploration and development in this province and preservation of our wildlands and ecological reserves.

We know that in Alberta there is a profound pressure for the government to side with industrial development at all costs and that that's essentially the choice they have made in every forum when given the opportunity. We also know that there is tremendous pressure for the government to succumb to residential and tourism development in areas that would otherwise be protected. This is not surprising. This is a province where there is industrial growth and then there is population growth.

So now, you see, the decisions become a bit harder. Now it becomes even more necessary than it was 40 years ago for the government to stand up to these pressures and say: "You know what? When we said we wanted to leave a lasting legacy for generations to come, when we said that 35, 40 years ago, we actually meant it. So you know what? We're still going to administer our parks and our ecological reserves and our wilderness areas on the basis of what we said so grandly 40 years ago." The hard decisions come as the pressure increases, but that doesn't mean that the hard decisions aren't just as important now as they were when they were first made. It's very disturbing to see that at the first possible opportunity the government is rushing to give itself permission to run away from the hard decisions and to capitulate to whatever interest group may or may not come to meet with them behind

closed doors about the designation of lands and the use of lands across the province.

This is why this piece of legislation is so bad. We have decades and decades of work that has gone into preserving the integrity of our wilderness areas and our ecological reserves and our parks, and we are planning on doing – well, we don't know what we're planning on doing, but we know that because the minister is not making any assurances around protection in a legislative fashion, we have reason to be concerned.

You know, the minister says: well, we need to do this because we really need to streamline our parks management system. And I've got to say that I'm not talking to people who said: gosh, you know, we're so much in need of streamlining. I'm not talking to people within the stakeholder communities who said: if anything gets done this session, it's got to be this government moving forward with that parks streamlining.

Mr. Mason: Streamlining.

Ms Notley: Streamlining. There were no chants, people in the streets screaming: streamline, streamline, streamline. No. Strangely, there weren't.

In fact, the stakeholders in this area said that never once did the streamlining issue feature in any of their conversations with the minister. So I think the whole concept of streamlining is something that was actually cooked up somewhere deep in the Public Affairs Bureau to give the minister something to say when people challenged her for her decision to throw away 45 years of environmental protection in this province. I think the streamlining issue is nothing more than communications bafflegab that's being used to defend what is otherwise an exceptionally negative and destructive policy change that is pursued by this government.

The minister really has done very, very little to convince us that that which we see is worthy of continuation. [Ms Notley's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), five minutes of questions and answers. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

10:00

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was a very accurate introduction of my constituency.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona if she believes that streamlining is part and parcel of eliminating the various barriers to development that exist in the legislation. In other words, streamlining is not simply unifying the acts and so on but is actually to streamline – that is to say, make easier – the process of allowing development in our parks and natural areas.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. That is where he's from. That was a very good question because, in fact, it really is about making things easier. It's about a continuation of a trend, which a number of Members of this Legislative Assembly have already identified, a trend which is being pursued quite aggressively by the members of this government towards taking everything off the legislative floor, taking it out of statute, and moving it behind closed doors to the backrooms of this government and ensuring that decisions can be

made quickly and efficiently without that annoying little feature of democracy and engagement and responsiveness and all that kind of stuff.

Instead, you know, you can meet with your developer and promise him you'll get it all fixed and then write up your regulation and off you go to Executive Council and boom – again, as I say, Bob's your uncle – no need to respond to the concerns raised by the public, no need to have any form of accountability in the Legislature. All of that, of course, makes the goals that this government is pursuing much easier, and what we've seen over the last few years is that the goal of this government is to exploit the environment and ecological integrity in wilderness areas at any possible opportunity.

That's the kind of thing that, typically, Albertans don't support. We know from this government's own polling, which was discussed at their recent convention, that Albertans don't actually support this; Albertans actually do support the concept of protecting the environment. Albertans are actually even prepared to jeopardize current jobs let alone future jobs if it means protecting the integrity of the environment, not that they necessarily need to. They really strongly believe in the sanctity of our environmental surroundings, yet this government does not. They would rather not have to face those Albertans every time they undercut yet another environmental resource. This is about streamlining the process of ignoring the wishes of Albertans and meeting the needs of their friends in industry on an as-needed basis.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two quick questions for the representative for Edmonton-Strathcona, my home-away-from-home MLA. Do you consider a 60-day notification of proposed park changes without a guarantee of acting on the consultation as sufficient public involvement? With regard to streamlining, do you consider this more ministerial fantasy as opposed to a real concern of Albertans? Do you think the hon. minister of tourism, like former Prime Minister Mackenzie King, is consulting spirits?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let me just start with the first question raised by the Member for Calgary-Varsity around the whole issue of the 60 days' notice. I think the 60 days' notice is insulting. I think it's insulting to Albertans. The fact that they put nothing else in that legislation to talk about the mechanism of consultation, the obligations vis-à-vis what they hear back, the sort of responsiveness that ought to be incorporated into that, an opportunity for transparent hearings as incorporated to, you know, the 60-day notice: I think it's not good enough.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise and speak to this hoist amendment brought by my colleague for Calgary-Varsity and to note how over the course of my last three years I have come to recognize that member's passion for the parks, his dedication to the parks, and his commitment to see them last for future generations. He speaks often of his passion for these places and his passion for bringing his family there. Although I do not get to the parks very much, I know from his passion how important they are to the Alberta people, and I would just like to note that here today on the record.

I have listened to the concerns brought up by many of the members here tonight, and I have listened intently to the debate. All

of the members who have spoken so far have made good points, and they have given us much to think about tonight. In particular, I really appreciated the historical vignette given by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, which rivalled that of the Speaker. If we look at that, how he went back and researched that 38 years ago today some of this legislation was brought in that clearly marked what we were going to do and what areas of this province we were not prepared to compromise, not prepared to give in to whatever the pressures of the day were, not give in to the pressures of business or hunters or whatever you may have. We just weren't prepared in these areas to go any further. It was really wonderful, actually, to hear how that legislation came into being 38 years ago and how it was meant to last for all time.

While I was sitting here listening to a lot of the speeches, I couldn't help but be drawn back to the movie *The Godfather*, part 1. First, the godfather got shot, then Sonny got shot at the causeway, and Michael went back to the old country. But at the end of the thing when they're making up and five families had been at war for what had seemed like a long time, the godfather gets up and says: "How did we get here? What happened to get us here?"

I can imagine 40 years from now, when we look at what could possibly happen with this legislation, with ministerial consent to whatever the pressures of the day are, whether they be from an oil company, whether they be from an individual, whether they be from a recreation group – and I have no doubt that these pressures are severe and that they can be put on a government member or, in fact, a cabinet minister with great zeal – allowing allow that individual to have with the stroke of a pen the ability to change what 38 years ago we weren't prepared to do on what seems like a case-by-case basis, like, "Well, we'll just go into this pristine area once, and we'll get out the coal resources there because there's a lot there" or "We'll only go once over into the other side of the province because there might be some shale gas there, and there's a real big player; by golly, we need it," to make that on a case-by-case basis, saying, "Well, yeah, I guess they are a certain ways apart."

Then all of a sudden you have a recreation group, possibly four or five years later, when the clean-up and all that stuff really has gone on and no one is really thinking about it anymore, so: "Yeah, maybe this is another good idea. We can go into this area. Nothing's really gone wrong, and no one is really talking about those two things anymore. Maybe this is another thing that we can do here in these once-pristine areas." I think we can see that possibly happening with that bill. I think we can see it happening with the regulation moving with the stroke of a pen. Where it was once stated in legislation that we will not do this, we will now make these decisions behind closed doors. I can see the pressure mounting on the minister to maybe not always do what could be in the best interests of our future generations on that.

10:10

Just going back to the vignette of what was happening 38 years ago in this province to have seen us enact this legislation, that's why I tried to put myself back 32 years ago, to 1972. I was turning four that year. I was born in 1969 in the Holy Cross hospital, so putting myself back in that time is difficult, but I do know some of that time period. We had a Lougheed government that had taken over from a Social Credit government, that many view today as essentially a Liberal government under a different name. I'm not going to debate that. Whatever it was, it was seen as a slightly different government than what had gone on in the past. Possibly some of these members back then, maybe Senator Ghitter and people like that who sat in that caucus, looked around at what was happening.

Well, we had had the oil explosion, of course, in the '30s, the '40s, and the '50s. Oil and gas was becoming a very busy commod-

ity and very important to our bottom line, and they were obviously having pressures. Maybe they were seeing some abandoned wells around. Maybe they were seeing some spills that were not getting cleaned up. Maybe they were just concerned that we seemed to be going in this direction. There's got to be a place for both business and our animals and our wilderness. So they said: "Hey. We've got this oil and gas, and, by golly, it's great to have it, but we want to have some of this for the future, and there are certain things that we're not willing to compromise. There are certain things we will not do."

That is where, I believe, they came up with some of this legislation that was passed into place 38 years ago, that we're going to seemingly wipe out inside of three or four days on the legislative charts here without any public consultation, without any need to let people know about the significant change in legislation that is about to occur in how our rules and regulations happen. That's what I think may have been going on in the mind of those individuals, those men and women who were making that legislation. There were certain things they were not prepared to compromise.

Now, let's advance 40 years in this province. You know, we haven't done a great job of, I guess, changing the oars from an oil and gas economy. Maybe the people have gotten more used to oil sands and tailings ponds and us making our living off the petroleum industry. Fourteen per cent of our population directly get their income from it. Probably up to 50 per cent of our population relies on a healthy oil and gas industry to make a living. That's a heavy responsibility on one issue. Nevertheless, I think there are certain things that we shouldn't compromise on, that we shouldn't go forward and change, legislation like this and how we must protect our pristine areas.

Let's also talk about 1972. You know how many people this province had in 1972? One point seven million people – 1.7 million people. Now, in 2010, we have approximately double that, 3.5 million people. So I think about that.

An Hon. Member: It's 3.7 million.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, hon. minister. We're at 3.7 million people; double and a bit is where we are now.

I think about that logically for a second. Would those extra people have more challenges? Is Alberta faced with greater impacts on its environment or lesser? Clearly, the answer to me is greater. You know, some people might even say that here in Alberta, in fact the rest of the world, we're at almost a tipping point, a tipping point of how much we're going to change the land for other uses to live the extraordinary lifestyles that we do. Sir, I do not want to go back to live in a tent. I realize that there have to be limits to that argument as well. Nevertheless, I look at this as saying that we could be at a tipping point here. We're at 3.7 million people. Obviously, more challenges exist with us living friendly with our land, with us living in harmony with nature if the argument could be made that we are at all.

I look at this as maybe being a time when legislation would need to be strengthened in terms of environmental protection, what we as people and as members of this honourable House are not prepared to do. It would look to me like this is a natural time in our history, when we have the eyes of the world looking at us, when maybe we're not getting a fair deal on the oil sands in that from extraction to wheels it's really not that different from other extraction methods. Really, at the end of the day it's not that different. So why wouldn't we as a community, as legislators say: "Let's give some protection to that industry. Let's remain conservative in our approach to what we're going to do in terms of our pristine, natural areas."

I think it may be a wiser course of action that we do that in this case, that we can look people in the eye and say: "Hey. Listen here, rest of the world. We have 47,000 hectares of land that we say we will not do a thing to. We will allow our wildlife and our water and all that stuff to go uninhibited by industry." There's something to be said for that. Looking at the rest of the world: how much land have you designated that will not be touched? I think having us err on the side of caution would not be the worst thing.

So I do find this bill highly, highly concerning. I believe it goes in the wrong direction of where we as a province should be going, where the will of the people actually is on environmental protection in, especially, our pristine wilderness areas that are going to be changed in this bill. For some of the reasons I stated before, I'm highly concerned by the executive power placed in the minister's hands. I believe those lobbyists, the people who come into the minister's office, often with a good idea, often not wanting to do any harm, often saying that the value is there, that the citizens will get their pound of flesh, and that they will clean things up, are too easy to buy into for legislators. I know as a human being that if I was the minister, with pressures put on me like that, I would rather have legislation that said, "Sorry; I can't do this," not one that says, "Well, maybe I can do it." Those pressures can mount, sir.

Mr. Speaker, I bring those up as some of the things that possibly people in 1972 were thinking about, protection for future generations. I believe those arguments are still as valid today, if not more so, as they were in 1972, when those members enacted the legislation, that these are simply areas that we will not go past, not for X, Y, or Z; we simply will not do that.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this bill. I hope the government members will listen to what some of the people have said here.

10:20

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. One of the trial balloons the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation launched this summer was the idea of privately run for-profit recreational trailer parks on public land being granted a 99-year lease. Are you concerned about the loss of public land, public participation, input, and governance with the regulations of Bill 29?

Mr. Hehr: Well, I appreciate the question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity because it highlights some of my concerns with this bill, the inordinate amount of power that we are placing in one ministry to change things with the stroke of a pen. I was born at night, sir, but not last night, and I believe there is tremendous pressure put on ministers of the Crown when they have tremendous power and the ability to do things without public consultation, without rules and regulations, without the need to consult with the people. Those concerns have been highlighted by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's question. We have a great deal now that can be done to public lands, lands that were considered pristine, lands that former members of this House deemed as being Alberta treasures, lands that we would not do anything to under any circumstances regardless of whether it made sense economically, okay? I believe the hon. member highlights that by his question, and I thank him for it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given the example of the government so willing to turn over Crown land to a potato farmer who was going to take out I believe it was 66,000 acres of what had been traditional grazing land, do you have any hope or faith in what could happen to our limited 4 per cent of provincial parkland given the examples we've seen with Crown leases and a willingness to turn supposedly protected grazing land into unprotected, open-for-profit developments?

Mr. Hehr: You highlight, again, a very important point. We had some property in southern Alberta which was pristine grassland or the remainders of a pristine area that was going to put up for sale for a potato farm, essentially potato chips. I think it highlights the fact that we may be at a tipping point on these things. How much do we need? How many potato chips do we need and all that stuff? How many decisions can be made behind closed doors by ministries, whether it's the minister of SRD or whether it's the minister of parks and recreation like we have in this bill?

Regardless of whether I think this minister is going to say no or not to development issues that come up is really immaterial, sir. What has changed, Mr. Speaker, is that now I don't only need to have confidence in this minister; I need confidence in the next 40 – okay? – because this has not been protected for the next 40 or maybe less than that. Maybe I'm exaggerating slightly for the benefit of the members in this honourable House. Maybe the next two or three have a different view or maybe don't value the environment as much as this parks and recreation minister may.

So it's immaterial whether I trust her judgment or trust the next minister's judgment. The thing is that we're not going to be able to discuss it in this House when we go on a case-by-case basis to possibly cherry-pick okay projects – a drilling rig here, a sour gas well over there, an ATV track over here – and we gerrymander decisions of what we think may be okay on a case-by-case basis.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the amendment.

Mr. Anderson: On the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand and rise and speak to this bill and speak against this bill. I think that, absolutely, beyond any shadow of a doubt the current minister of tourism and parks is very, very – she loves our parks for sure. She's very protective of them, and I sure don't see her as someone who is going to undermine the protection of our parks in any way, shape, or form herself. That's not the problem we have. I think pretty much a unanimous criticism of the opposition on this issue is that she's not going to be the minister forever.

You know, things change, obviously. There could be big changes coming. Who knows what happens, whether it's a new minister, a new government, whatever it is? The fact is that there is going to be a different minister and a different cabinet and a different government going forward from time to time, from year to year. So we've got to make sure that we don't give too much discretion to a certain group of people, either a Premier or a minister or a cabinet or even a caucus, give them authority to make unilateral decisions about something as precious and as important to Albertans as our parks.

Obviously, we have beautiful national parks in Alberta – I mean, I'm slightly biased, as we all are here – I would say probably the most beautiful and majestic parks in the world, national parks with Banff and Jasper. I spend much of the summer in there with my boys and Anita, and they are just an awesome, awesome place to spend time in and bond and enjoy nature and everything that it has to offer. The fact that they're in our own backyard is just – I mean, we really are spoiled to have such a treasure, such a jewel right in

our own backyard. People spend their whole lives, some of them, planning a trip just to come to those parks for a week or two in their entire lifetimes, and here we get to see them every day. Well, from my house you can literally see our parks every day from a distance, and spending time there: it's only 45 minutes away. There is no doubt that those are important.

Now, of course we're not talking about our national parks with respect to this bill. We're talking about our provincial parks and our recreational areas and so forth. Those areas are amazing, too. I think of Peter Lougheed provincial park, the amazing area that is, and K Country, all the time I have had the opportunity to spend there. In fact, there is a little book I bought when I was really young. It had kind of a list of 200 really awesome hikes in the Canadian Rockies. I'm pleased to say that I'm over halfway through the list, and the goal is to – I'm going to have to redo it because I'm going to have to go through it with my kids now. Most of those hikes in that particular book are actually not from our national parks but our provincial parks and recreational areas.

There are many more parks, obviously, provincial parks that we have. There is no reason to list them all. These really are jewels. I think everyone in this Assembly believes that. I don't think that anyone would say that they don't value our parks. Certainly, they wouldn't say that if they had any desire whatsoever to get elected again because I think Albertans overwhelmingly support our parks and recreational areas, both national and provincial, and they expect their politicians and their representatives to be protective of those things. It shouldn't be any surprise that we're having such a long debate on this subject because it means a lot to the people that we represent and a lot to Albertans.

10:30

Again, as much as we know, we would hope, that the people in this Assembly respect our provincial parks and recreational areas, I think it's unwise to put into the minister's hand or the government's hand the unilateral authority to change designations, to change boundaries, to change whatever they'd like with regard to recreational areas. Now, of course, this is probably one of those outcomes where it's kind of in line with the land-use framework. Under the land-use framework again we see an issue where we have given far too much power into the hands of the minister and, by extension, the bureaucracy. That's just a very unwise thing.

I think it's absolutely the wrong thing to do, to give such unilateral power to the minister and therefore the bureaucracy, because we really do risk people coming in for whatever reason, whether it be for economic reasons or political reasons, and all of a sudden one day, you know, a little chunk is taken out of a park: oh, it's just 50 square kilometers or 20 square kilometers or whatever; it's not that much. They shave a little part off here. No one will notice. Pretty soon someone else does it, and someone else does it. "Oh, well, we've got a patchwork here, so we'll just change the zoning or change the designation on the whole kit and caboodle. There we go." We've lost a park. We've lost a portion of a park.

I just think that that's too much power to give the executive branch of government, cabinet. I think that if you're going to mess with our parks, if you're going to try to mess with our parks – obviously, the government is the government, and they can pass legislation tomorrow, I guess, if they wanted to, to get rid of all of our provincial parks, but they would at least have to come here and make that proposal. It would have to be public, and we could debate it in the Legislature, and of course it would come under incredible opposition. But if you just allow somebody the authority to in the middle of the night change a border or change a designation or what have you, I just don't think it's a very wise thing to do to give the

executive branch of the government that much power. They should have to come to the legislative branch, the people's representatives, and have the people's representatives debate and make a decision.

You know, it goes to a larger pattern with this government, frankly. It's almost like the House – and I know this; I spent two years in that caucus – is this necessary evil that they've got to go through to get their legislation through. They have to go through all the little steps: "Yeah, yeah, we'll deal with that and this, and we'll just go through it. Yeah, we've got to deal with it." They don't like that. They don't like the fact that they have to go through the House, so as much as possible – you see it with their legislation – they're always enshrining more and more power with the executive branch of government, in the Premier's office, in the office of the minister. With every piece of legislation – the land-use framework, Bill 19, the land assembly act, Bill 36, Bill 50, and, of course, Bill 29 – whatever it is, there's this constant push to make things easier for the government, to streamline the process, they always say, to make it so that it's less cumbersome. They put all these powers in the executive office.

I understand for little things. You know, maybe there's a place for that, for the odd things. Obviously, we don't want to be in here 365 days a year passing legislation, but we're not even close to that right now. We're right now in one of the shortest sessions in recent history in this Legislature, the shortest amount of time sitting in the Legislature over this past year. So we're not at that point. I think that maybe one of the reasons it is the shortest is because they are enshrining so much power in the executive branch. You can just get an order of Executive Council, and it's done. That's not democracy.

You know, we've got to be accountable for the decisions that we make, and the government needs to be accountable for the decisions that they make, and part of that process is coming through this House. Again, if it was a little thing, if it was just – well, I guess there are a whole bunch of little things that can be done with orders of Executive Council. But on something as important as parks I think it's absolutely critical that the government has to come back before this House and put it to a vote of the people's representatives. I think that Albertans expect this.

I mean, we really have received a lot of mail on this issue. People are nervous and, I think, rightfully so. If you think about, you know, the Minister of SRD musing about the land-use framework up in the north there, the little group that's meeting there to come up with the regional plan has come up with a plan. There are a lot of conflicts up there, a lot of conflicts with existing licences and other things that are already in place there. Well, under the land-use framework the minister is going to have the power to sort all that out.

Some of his comments the other day in musing about, you know, how those leases will be handled and so forth make me uneasy, probably because that minister was also one of the individuals in charge of implementing the disastrous new royalty framework. We saw one of the worst policies in this province's history incorporated by that minister, so I'm a little bit uneasy when he starts talking about changing land-use designations and superimposing a regional plan over existing property rights. I think we know from experience that he's not really good at assessing the unintended consequences.

Again, we have a situation here where there are going to be quite possibly unintended consequences from this bill, and one of them is that it gives the minister too much power. I could just see, you know, where you have in future a kind of a minister who isn't on top of the file as well as he or she should be and some bureaucrat coming in and saying: "Okay. We need to make this and this change. It's important, it's easy, and it's not worth going through the Leg. process. That will be too complicated." I could just see someone signing off on that without much thought, and the reason is because I saw that. I think we've all seen it.

If you have a minister who doesn't really know what they're doing and is not on top of their file, it's amazing how the bureaucracy can drive the government and can essentially run the government in that portfolio. That's why we have a check and balance called the Legislative Assembly. It is there to make sure that all legislation passed is in line with what the people's wishes are for their province.

I hope that this government can show some modicum of humility and realize that maybe they've overstepped their bounds here and that maybe it would be wise that we don't give this power to the minister to impose and to have the ability to change our parks and the boundaries and their designations and everything else related to that, that they can see the value in coming back to this House and trusting the people's representatives. I think that that would be a much wiser course of action for this government to undertake.

I will be supporting the amendment, and if that amendment doesn't pass, then I will not be supporting this bill as written. It's just another example of a trust-us law, as I said, that loads up ministerial powers.

The other issue I have with it is that, you know, there's not really evidence of what the consultation process has been, and I think we see that with our e-mail boxes filling up on this issue. There just wasn't a very large consultation process done. In fact, when our researcher was getting briefed on this bill, it was almost like the deputy minister got defensive in talking about that.

10:40

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Prior to politics you practised law. University of Calgary law professor Fluker has indicated both in letters and on his blog how poorly thought-out this legislation is. If Bill 29 is passed in its present form, do you anticipate legal challenges to these regulations, and if you feel comfortable, what areas of this bill might not stand up to legal scrutiny?

Mr. Anderson: It's a good question, hon. member. It kind of goes back to what we were talking about with the Minister of SRD's comments a couple of weeks ago on the north Athabasca plan – I can't remember what it's called – the regional plan up there, on having to superimpose that plan over existing property rights, licences, leases, et cetera, that are already in place. We all know what kind of legal liability could occur if that's not handled just right. The same thing applies here. If you give a minister the opportunity to unilaterally change the designation in certain areas, that affects people's rights. Also, there are all kinds of environmental issues there: water issues, land issues, air issues if it's some kind of industrial development. There are all kinds of things that could result in huge legal penalties and legal proceedings. Absolutely, the danger is definitely there for that. That's what happens when you don't have proper consultation.

We saw this with the royalty framework, again, the made-in-Alberta NEP. It was one of the worst policy disasters in the history of this province economically. The reason it was so brutal and harmed so many people and harmed our economy so deeply was because of the lack of consultation that occurred prior to it. Industry was being ignored. You had our small-business owners and entrepreneurs being ignored. I remember the statements that came out of this government. It really did sound like some government from another country that didn't quite understand the principles of free trade and business and free markets. It's almost like they were oblivious to them. They didn't understand the need for certainty in

the markets when you're trying to attract capital to your jurisdiction. They didn't understand that capital is fluid and can cross borders quite easily.

It was almost beyond their comprehension that someone would take billions of dollars, like Encana did, and move them over to a different place in the United States and invest those dollars there instead of Alberta. "Oh, my gosh. We had the gas. They're going to pay to drill for it. They're going to drill for it. No problem." Well, no. It doesn't work that way. They go to where the best deal is to be made.

You didn't have this consultation, and you had this complete lack of understanding of business and, specifically, of the energy industry. It cost thousands and thousands of jobs, and we all know people that were laid off because of it. It cost the province billions in revenues. We're starting to see a slow climb out of that. Most of those punitive changes have been reversed, thanks in large part, no doubt, to the party which I belong to. [interjections] They're still in denial. That's okay. They're still in denial and still awake. That's good for us. Keep it up.

The fact is that the reason that very poor mistake was made was because they failed to do the proper consultation. They failed to ask the people that knew what they were talking about before they charged ahead and did their little deed. I see the very large similarities now with this bill. They've made a decision without any kind of consultation, without any kind of speaking with experts and affected stakeholders and just regular Albertans, for crying out loud, just people that care about our parks.

You know, there's an old adage: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. I mean, we have some of the best parks in the world here in Alberta. Obviously, there are improvements to be made, no doubt. But why would we put those up and leave to chance these parks being changed by a minister by giving her such great . . . [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other hon. member that wants to speak, before I call the vote, I just want to remind that this is a hoist amendment to the bill. A feature of the hoist amendment is this: if it is carried, that's the end of the matter and the bill disappears from the Order Paper. If it is defeated, the question is immediately put to the motion for second reading of the bill. Having that understood, the chair shall now call the question on the hoist amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Hehr	Notley
Boutilier	Hinman	Swann
Chase	Mason	Taylor
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Amery	Groeneveld	Olson
Bhardwaj	Horne	Ouellette
Campbell	Horner	Quest
DeLong	Jablonski	Redford
Denis	Leskiw	Renner

Elniski	Liepert	Sandhu
Evans	Lund	Vandermeer
Fawcett	Marz	Weadick
Fritz	Morton	Woo-Paw
Totals:	For – 10	Against – 27

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 29 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The chair will go right to the question on the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time] [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The bill is passed. [interjections] You're too late. I looked at you to see if anybody wanted to stand up, and nobody wanted to stand up. It's already been declared. [interjections] Hon. members, it's 11 o'clock at night, so please stay calm.

11:00 **Government Bills and Orders** **Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 24 **Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes** **Amendment Act, 2010**

The Chair: Does any hon. member have any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Chair, thank you. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 24. I'm hearing from Albertans who are concerned about property rights in this province, whether it's Bill 19, 36, 50, or those on the Order Paper today; that's 26, 29, and this one, Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. The government keeps trying to make laws that enable it to act more efficiently but which trample the rights of Albertans. People are getting tired of the government disregarding rights and seeing rights as a nuisance, not as something to respect.

This bill is probably the most extreme example, really. While pore space isn't a resource most individuals have much use for, obviously there is an important use for it if we are going to go ahead with carbon capture and storage. The government wants to begin storing things in these spaces and doesn't want to go through the hassle of getting permission or using only Crown land, so government takes the pretty audacious step of declaring that it owns all pore spaces. It's that simple. Every one in the province: it all belongs to the minister of the Crown, and as the owner he can pump whatever he wants to into it whenever he wants to, and you have to make way.

The minister says that the ownership wasn't clear and insists that it's not confiscating anything. This isn't a matter of interpretation, Mr. Minister, it's wrong because by common law, unless the laws say otherwise, the landowner owns everything down to the centre of the Earth. That means if the law does not say that the government owns spaces under your land, which it doesn't, it belongs to the landowner. Common law makes interpretations like this all the time to apply itself to things the law did not previously make clear.

Now, of course, in Canada our property rights are not as strong as they could be, so the government can change the laws pretty easily

like they are here, when there is a clear public purpose. But they shouldn't pretend that they are just clarifying when they are in fact claiming something that wasn't theirs before. Instead, they should come clean and say: "Look. We need to get at the best pore spaces in the province to store carbon dioxide. Because of these difficulties that will arise if we need to get permission from every single landowner near the spaces and because we are confident that the inconvenience and long-term dangers are small, we are just going to claim it. We don't like doing this, but here's our rationale."

If they respected Albertans, Mr. Chairman, they would go on to say: here's the benefit to Albertans, so here is why we're not going to compensate those who own the land even though they have a reasonable claim to the spaces to begin with. People might be able to understand and respect this, but instead this government just claims it and pretends there is no possible dispute. If they really respected property rights, they would say: here's a small amount of compensation we will offer for the use of pore spaces to those owning the land around it. Many people in rural areas are suffering, Mr. Chair, and this would be a way of helping them instead of snubbing them. Given the \$2 billion amount we've dedicated to this project, this would surely be a drop in the bucket.

We might even find that people in certain areas would be willing to invite companies to use the spaces under their land. Instead, this government takes another step down its path of trampling property rights without any consultation and without any public justification. Maybe that's because they know there's a dispute about the reason that they are doing this, Mr. Chair.

In addition to concerns about property rights I've been hearing concerns from many Albertans, especially in Calgary-Fish Creek, about whether this carbon capture plan really makes sense. They're just not sure about it, Mr. Chair. They know we need to have a strong environmental record, but they think clean air and water and beautiful parks for recreation are priorities. I have a beautiful park in my riding, and it sits on the Bow. We want a clean, beautiful park where we can breathe the air and a clear Bow River running along it.

If companies were dirtying our air, water, or land, you can bet we wouldn't stand for it, but if you tell us they all need to trap their carbon dioxide the same way we exhale as we walk through parks, we're going to have a lot of questions. People from Calgary-Fish Creek support business, but they don't want industries making our province dirty in any way. They just aren't so sure that carbon dioxide is what's important. They aren't persuaded that this huge undertaking is going to make a meaningful contribution to the planet. They worry that it's a huge expense, and the idea of a tanker truck driving around the province to put pure carbon dioxide in the ground raises a lot of questions.

I agree with these concerns, and I think there may be better ways to spend this money, whether it's on transit, reducing traffic jams, or even the high-speed rail the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake gets so excited about. Or maybe there should be a tax incentive to encourage all companies and individuals to invest in more efficient technologies so Alberta can have more output with less input.

I am opposed to this bill because I am very uncomfortable with it on the grounds of property rights and on the grounds of the questionable project it paves the way for. I agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore that we should have a world-class forum so that we can decide the best investments, regulations, or deregulations the Alberta government should be making to protect our environment and make the most of our resources at the same time.

Mr. Chair, I'm looking forward to the discussion. I know that we're going to be bringing several amendments forward, and I

imagine the opposition is, too. I'm looking for a good debate. I'm looking for the minister to stand up and respond on this piece of legislation and answer the questions that Albertans need to have answered.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've circulated to you an amendment to Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, and would ask you to distribute it. I'll talk to it once it's distributed.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. We will pause a moment for the distribution of the amendment paper.

Please proceed, hon. member.

11:10

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are many strong aspects of this bill on carbon capture and storage. It helps identify a number of important legal and ownership issues, liability issues. One of the things it doesn't address, unfortunately, is that the public needs to have some input into the decisions around this bill, and this amendment is designed to enhance the bill. As proposed before section 124, we would like to see the addition of a section to foster public input.

It seems to be a recurring theme in this Legislature that this government wants to pass legislation that minimizes or places barriers before public input. We would like to remind the government that this is still a democratic country and that we want to see and encourage greater citizen involvement with these issues.

Under the first instance,

123.1(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council shall not make any regulation under this Act unless

- (a) the Minister has published a notice of the proposed regulation on the public website . . .
- (b) the notice complies with the requirements of this section,
- (c) the time period specified in the notice, during which members of the public and stakeholders may submit comments, has expired, and
- (d) the Minister has reported to the Legislative Assembly in accordance with subsection (4).

In addition,

- (2) The notice referred to in subsection (1)(a) must contain
 - (a) a summary of the proposed regulation and the proposed text of it;
 - (b) a statement of the time period during which members of the public and stakeholders may submit written comments on the proposed regulation to the Minister and the manner in which the comments must be submitted;
 - (c) any other information that the minister considers appropriate.
- (3) The time period referred to in subsection (2)(b) must not end until at least 30 days after the Minister gives notice.
- (4) After receiving the comments submitted under subsection (2)(b), the Minister must report to the Legislative Assembly on what, if any, changes to the proposed regulation the minister considers appropriate.

This, Mr. Chairman, is all in the name of trying to raise awareness and engagement and ensure that the kind of decisions around ownership, liability, and public right to know and to have property rights respected is addressed in a more open fashion.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Speaking to the amendment, a number of members in this Legislature are old enough to remember a '60s pop song entitled *It's My Party*, and I'll cry if I want to. Well, Mr. Chair, I'm going to change that song to, "It's my birthday, and I'll try if I want to, try if I want to. You would try, too, if it was your birthday, too."

The whole basis of argument in the six years that I've been a member of the Legislature has to do with what is being proposed in amendment A1 to Bill 24, and that is the erosion of democracy, the erosion of legislation, the desire of the government to seize control, whether it's through a centralized superboard or, in this case, putting unbelievable powers in the hands of either the minister or, in this specific case, the Lieutenant Governor in Council. So as an opposition, believing in the democratic process, we consider this movement behind closed doors from legislation into regulation, from the public domain into ministerial whim to be unacceptable not only to members of the opposition but to Albertans in general.

The idea of actually representing our Albertans' viewpoint seems to have been completely lost to members of the government, who no longer feel it's necessary to involve the public through legislative debate. "Just, you know, give us the power. We'll operate in some cases as benevolent dictators, in other cases just simply dictators."

Earlier today we recognized, we held a memorial service for the victims of the famine in 1932-1933, Holodomor, and the subject of that memorial service and what was pointed out in numerous speeches was the problems with dictators, the notion in the historical sense of Holodomor that Stalin ignored his people's wishes and attempted to wipe out an entire race of Ukrainian people. What is happening tonight is not the starvation of individuals in terms of preventing them from having the necessities of life, but they are being prevented from having the necessities of democracy.

Amendment A1 to Bill 24 is basically a cry, albeit somewhat in the wilderness as we approach midnight on November 22, that legislation has to prevail, that the combined wisdom of the House is better than a ministerial desire, an order in council, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the cabinet. Why should Albertans trust that this government, which has already committed \$2 billion into sequestration, will not continue to bleed taxpayers dry when it comes to the liability associated with hopefully keeping CO₂ under the ground in pores? Pore can also refer to poor legislation, and that is what is happening tonight with Bill 24 and the recognition in this amendment that the minister can do what they very well please.

Democracy in this province continues to erode. What little opportunities there are to stand up and debate are being removed one bill at a time. Earlier tonight we talked about Bill 29. You could practically pull any number out of the hat over the last six years, as I say, that I've had direct experience with this Legislature, and you would see a movement to reduce the input Albertans have in the governance of this province. Mr. Chair, this is shameful. When all the members of the government unanimously stand up and say the people's wisdom, the people's value, the people's need for democratic debate counts for nothing and they put themselves on the record as saying regulation trumps legislation, then individuals living in this province should be worried about what little control they have left of the governance of this province.

I don't know if there will be a wake-up call for government members. I know there will be one come the next election, but beyond that, where will be the Damascus moment, the recognition that things must change? Mr. Chair, despite the fact that opposing the government is the equivalent of almost spitting into the wind, if

we don't stand up in opposition, things will be rammed through that much faster. So it is our elected duty as opposition members chosen by our constituents as opposed to their choice of government members to bring a message to the government that this is unacceptable.

I'm very proud as the representative for Calgary-Varsity to carry that message to this Legislature and say that regulation without input, without the test of public hearings is basically regulation without representation. The last time I checked, we were still in a representational democracy. We see movements in the States, the Tea Party, trying to regain what is felt are lost democratic opportunities. While I am opposed to an awful lot of what's going on with the Tea Party, I see the frustration that they have experienced, the loss of the ability to represent the voters and have their concerns taken into account.

11:20

Mr. Chair, I am hoping that within my term I will see the government doing what's best for the people instead of what's best for individuals who have lobbied the government successfully to participate in part of this \$2 billion contracting out for the sequestration of CO₂. Lord help Albertans into the future if sequestration doesn't work and they're on the hook for the liability associated with the leaking.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to rise and speak to amendment A1 on Bill 24, and I'd like to speak in favour of this. There are many amendments that will be coming forward this evening. This is one of many, but the thrust of this amendment, though, is: are we doing proper consultation? This government's track record on consultation has not been that good, and when they do have consultation, they don't listen, and that's a problem. There's been a disconnect for some time now, and I don't see it changing, but we in the opposition will do what we can to filibuster these poorly written, poorly thought-out, and poorly proposed bills that really will not serve the best interests of the people of Alberta.

I guess I'd like to go back and refer to the first consultation that this Premier did, and that was on the proposed fair share legislation. They went out. They put together a committee of five so-called experts, experts in the wrong field – they didn't realize what they were actually asking – but, nevertheless, five experts that the government put together for a panel to listen on whether or not we were getting our fair share from the oil and gas royalties in the province because there was a concern that we were shorting the people of Alberta approximately \$1.4 billion. There were many stakeholders that came and made presentations, and again the problem with their consultation was that many of those stakeholders were confined to a very short presentation time on a very complex issue.

I hate to even mention the thought, but carbon capture and storage makes all of the other things that we've had in front of us pale in comparison. This is like going into grade 1 versus getting a doctor's degree in geology. This is a very, very complicated procedure that we don't know the long-term results of. There's been an awful lot written on both sides. It's interesting that Shell, in their homeland, just got defeated. The sequestration plan that they had to pump CO₂ 20 miles into a cavern was defeated there by the government, that said: "You know what? We don't have the answers to know." So I would say that not only do they need to have the public consulta-

tion; they really need – and the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek alluded to this earlier – a world-class forum. We need to bring in the experts from around the world and look at the complications of CO₂. We need to ask the big questions, not just the little questions on saying: how do we put some CO₂ in the ground? The real question is: is CO₂ even feasible to put in?

Let's just talk here in Alberta first. Our 240 megatonnes that are produced every year here in the province: I have yet to see any plan that shows the capability of even putting 50 per cent of that into the ground, yet we're gung-ho in this province in seeming to appear to be doing something, but it hasn't been thought out all the way. How many times have we heard in the last six years that they have no plan or that they have planned to fail because they've failed to plan the end result of what they're doing?

Premier Klein always talked about the unintended consequences. He was in the Premier's seat for a substantial amount of time, and he was faced with that dilemma many times, where they passed a bill only to realize: oh, we should have thought this through. As human beings one of the blessings that we have is deductive reasoning to ask: what is the consequence of this bill? We know that this immediate action today is going to happen, but what happens tomorrow and the week after that and a year and a decade and a century later?

It's interesting. I believe it was March 2009 that *The Economist* put out an article on CO₂ sequestration and just talked that, you know, it's way too risky and unknown. They at that point estimated that 60 per cent of the CO₂ that we put into these caverns will have escaped within 100 years. If, in fact, CO₂ is the great dilemma facing this Earth and that's what is going to be the cataclysmic cause, according to Al Gore, to raise the sea level 20 feet, flood out millions if not billions of people, you still have to ask the question: how do we best spend the money to adapt to this changing world?

I was just looking at a chart earlier this evening – and I'll see if I've actually still got it up here – where they were discussing the long-term climatic change on Earth. This chart goes back 900 million years. It's amazing to see the cycle of the warming and cooling on Earth in the last 900 million years. To think that we in this last 25 years have caused the change, one has to stop and say: well, are we really looking at the big picture?

The IPCC came up with their climate change panel and wanted to look at this. It's interesting that they said: we just want to look at the last 250 years and see if we can link CO₂ to the climate changes. It's interesting because when you look at some of these experts that have been studying Earth going back, you know, 900 million years, they say that the IPCC is studying 250 years, or just .000027 per cent, of the 900 million years of estimated temperature changes, temperature ranges from 28 degrees centigrade to 2 degrees centigrade with an apparently regular oscillation of about 150 million years. They go on to talk about the big picture and what are possibly some of the bigger things that we should be looking at.

In 1959 Edward Ney proposed that if climate sensitivity were related to the changes in density of tropospheric ions, it would indicate a solar climate link. The most likely explanation for changes in tropospheric ionization is variation in the rate of cosmic rays entering the atmosphere. The question is: what causes the variation? What they went on to look at and say there is that not only does the Earth revolve around the sun, but the sun revolves around the Milky Way Galaxy. It has a 150 million year revolution time period, and as it's going through there, it goes through the various spiral arms, which have intense cosmic rays and have a huge variation on the Earth. At times the ionization is 2.5 times higher in the different cycles.

If we were to have a public consultation, there are experts that

could talk about these things and say: "What is the big picture here? What is it that we're trying to accomplish? Can we, in fact, accomplish what we're setting out to do?" That's what we need to be so, so very careful about because of the incredible amount of money that this government is wanting to put into CO₂ sequestration. Ask whether or not it's viable. There's no question that those companies that have received, you know, the first \$700 million, \$800 million, in fact, are challenged on whether or not we should be doing this. They, of course, say: well, yes, we should be doing it.

11:30

The Chair: Hon. member, we're talking about the amendment, not the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. We're talking about the importance of consultation. There is no expertise here in this House to say: "Oh, we know the answer here. Let's spend \$2 billion to pump CO₂ or plant food into the ground and solve our climate dilemma. There is no question."

I think that the one thing that there is consensus on, which climate change people seem to fail to recognize, is that the Earth's climate does change. But that isn't the end or the beginning of the debate. What we need and why this amendment is so important is because we need that consultation from experts. We don't need to debate three nights here and think that we've come up with the answers for the future of this province on CO₂ and be able to hold up a banner or a piece of paper, like Chamberlain when he came home from Italy, and say, "Oh, I've signed a deal with the devil – oh, I mean Hitler. There's no problem now. We can go on." That's what this is. This bill is signing a deal with the devil, the devil in the details. We don't know them.

Why we would spend so much taxpayers' money without a proper consultation is just critical. We're talking a huge percentage of the budget. You know, when you look at our budget, half of it goes to health care. This government has certainly blown that. They didn't do consultation or any thinking on what to do. They just initiated a superboard and thought that was a superneat idea – "We'll have supercontrol, and off we'll go and solve the problems" – when all they've done is exacerbated the problems. That's the same thing.

Again, we're talking about consultation, Mr. Chair. It's the same dilemma that we face here. They've come up with this super idea to take a very small percentage, five megatonnes out of 240 megatonnes, and pump it in the ground, and we're going to be able to hold up this paper to wave to the rest of the world and say, "What great people we are here in Alberta; we're solving the climate change dilemma," when we haven't even really started to scratch the surface by asking what is causing climate change. Is it the CO₂? We're talking about a trace gas, a trace gas of 300 to 400 parts per million in the atmosphere.

Again, it's just pitiful to me that we have gone after this gas and claimed it a pollutant or a toxin or a dangerous gas when, in fact, that's what is unique about our planet and why we have plant life. CO₂ is critical to that. If I remember my old high school biology, six molecules of CO₂, six molecules of H₂O, a little bit of sunlight produces six sugars, I think C₆H₁₂ or something along that line, and some oxygen, which is critical in our atmosphere. The fresh and clean oxygen that we get is from the plants that are feeding on CO₂. Yet we've gone after this like this is the villain of climate change. What we need to do is to have a public consultation. We need to bring in the experts and ask them, "What do you feel is causing this?" and not just go to Al Gore and say: oh, what kind of a movie have you made?

It's interesting that last week, when he was speaking over in

Europe, he said: well, you know, first-generation ethanol plants I never really should have voted for, but you have to realize that I wanted to be the President of the United States and my Tennessee farmers really wanted ethanol from corn, so I voted for it. You need to ask the same question. Why has he been going around fearmongering in the world about the measured increase in CO₂? I think it's because he wants to put a lot of money in his pocket.

It's funny that, you know, the one side says: "Oh, you know, it's big oil. It's this. It's that." It's got this conspiracy when, in fact, I really think, if you look at it, the real conspiracy is those who say that CO₂ is the devil that's causing this climatic change and we have to eliminate it. I think that if you actually look and analyze each of those individuals and those groups, they're making far more money, far more profits than any of the other opponents of CO₂.

The purpose of this amendment is to say that we don't have the answers. This government isn't necessarily right in what it's doing, and what we really need to do is to have some consultation. Once again, when we look at that consultation, I still have a problem because 30 days isn't enough time – it's a start – to make such a huge decision that's going to have repercussions for years and years.

I just want to go back again and talk about the budget. We're talking \$15 billion for health care, \$6 billion for education, and then we've got this huge one coming in, \$2 billion. Again, the government always wants to point out: well, this is over several years; this isn't all at once. But once you start this, if we trigger it, what have we got to do to keep pumping this into the ground? Again, I think that with public consultation it's amazing some of the directions that they'll talk about and show.

The thing that probably strikes me the most about this technology is the fact that we have to increase our energy consumption by 25 to 30 per cent just to have enough power to pump it into the ground. That's a tremendous increase in the amount of power that we need to generate in order to capture this. One has to give their head a shake and say: well, have we even thought about that? That doesn't even start to address the cost of building pipelines. CO₂ is caustic. If it gets in with any water, it becomes carboic acid. It will destroy the pipes. The stainless steel pipes that are required to transport CO₂ are expensive. So not only do we consume a lot of energy – again, if you're concerned, you know: how much stainless steel do we need to put together? How many miles of pipeline, and what's the purpose?

Then it goes back to what so many members here in the opposition have talked about, you know: what is the science? Is it actually safe to pump this under high pressure into caverns below people's property and be able to say that, yes, it's safe; we don't need to worry about it? That isn't proven. Again, what this bill is looking at saying is: we'll take the litigation and the liability on the people as a whole and not worry about it.

So I have to speak long and hard about the importance of this amendment. I would hope that everybody would vote for it, that we would go out and have public consultation, allow not only the public but go out – and, again, I still think the most critical thing we can do is to call a world-class forum. Let's look at the costs; let's look at the alternatives. We're not even looking at the alternatives. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview the other night talked about reducing our power consumption in those areas and to spend this money – I say, you know, that we could greatly reduce some of the pollutants that we know our coal-fired plants are putting out by merely taking this money and buying those coal plants and converting to gas-generated and combined-cycle plants, which would actually reduce the number of known pollutants in the air. Yet that doesn't seem to be part of the discussion. We're not looking for solutions.

As we try and look at the big picture, ask the questions, and do the deductive reasoning, this bill doesn't stand up to the test of spending that much money and saying: "This is a great idea. It's a great opportunity. Let's go full-steam ahead, full CO₂ compression ahead. We're going to be the flagship that leads the world in CO₂ sequestration."

Again, just a simple question that should be asked in the public consultation is: is it feasible? Do we even have the geological formations to pump 240 megatonnes of gas every year into the earth here in Alberta? The government with this bill wants to claim all the pore space throughout the province basically so that if they find what they think is a good and foolproof facility to take that, then the question is: well, how much pumping can we do?

11:40

Mr. Chase: It's a "pore" idea.

Mr. Hinman: It is. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has pointed out, it's a "pore" idea.

Yes. I see the chair pointing again to the amendment. We're talking about the importance of consultation – that's what this amendment is – and all of the different areas that we should and need to consult on. This is not a simple little bill that is changing our clocks from daylight savings to mountain standard. This is a bill that is going to have repercussions on for decades down the road. We're going to have repercussions on our budget for years and years to come, yet none of those questions are being addressed. They haven't been answered. The government continues to bring forward these poor bills, and they don't even present to Albertans: "Here's the science. This is why we're doing this. This is why we feel it's important that we change the legislation on how we're handling CO₂ here in the province of Alberta."

It's just so critical that we get it right. This is a huge step. You know, are we going to head north, or are we going to head south? If we go too far north, some might say: well, it's okay; it'll melt by the time we walk there, and we'll have vineyards in northern Canada. I don't think so. I think that we need to re-evaluate and look at what we're trying to do. What are the problems that we're facing? What are the challenges here in the province of Alberta? There's no question that we're being challenged with our oil and gas development, but the reality is, Mr. Chair, that we're not going to switch to a new energy in the next five years or seven years or 10 years.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, when the Leader of the Opposition circulated his amendment, I took a look at it, and it was given due consideration. I might have even been in a position to recommend acceptance of it, but I've just been talked out of it by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. You know, there's a saying that more people talk their way out of this building than talk their way in. I think we've just heard one that's on his way out.

I guess if we want to reasonably consider some amendments, we can do that, but based on what I've heard, everything from admitting that the purpose of this is a filibuster to comparing it to the Ukrainian genocide and Hitler and on and on and on, I would suggest that we do not accept this amendment.

Ms Notley: Well, with all due respect to the last speaker, I actually am rising in support of this amendment, and here's why. The amendment simply suggests that there be greater public engagement in the regulation-making process around the carbon capture and storage process, which in and of itself is extremely involved.

You know, when I first saw this proposed amendment, I decided

to take a look at what the regulations were that this amendment was attempting to compel the government to discuss at some minimal length with Albertans. The amendment itself is suggesting that before the government can go behind its traditionally closed doors and make a number of regulations, instead the government needs to publish a notice of the proposed regulations and then set out the time period within which the public can respond, and then the minister has to report to the Assembly about the regulations.

Of course, this requires the whole matter to at least ever so briefly come before this House as opposed to having it stay behind the closed doors of the Conservative government's cabinet room. That's valuable, particularly if the regulations that we're talking about are not purely administrative in nature. So I thought to myself: well, self, let's look at what the regulation-making authority is that they are purporting to give to themselves under this piece of legislation. So I went to section 124 in the act and took a look at that, and there's quite a bit there. Here's what the government wants to be able to do at the cabinet table, behind closed doors, without any consultation with Albertans. They want to make rules respecting the requirements for applicants for any kind of agreements under what would be the section of the mines act, I guess, to conduct risk assessments before being granted an agreement.

Risk assessments. You know what? That's kind of an important issue because the science out there vis-à-vis the ability to engage safely over the long term with carbon sequestration is not clear. Certainly, it's not clear with respect to the different environments within which carbon might be sequestered, nor is it clear with respect to the impact that that sequestration may have on our water supply, for instance, just as an example.

The whole idea of a risk assessment being conducted before industry goes off and starts pumping carbon into whatever the heck it is they plan to pump it into, you know, is kind of a good idea. But then the idea that we're not going to talk about what that risk assessment looks like here in this House but, oh, no, no; we're going to write a cheque for \$2 billion. Then we're going to go behind closed doors, and we're going to say, "You do whatever risk assessment we decide to come up with," without ever consulting with the public, and you're off to the races. Well, I mean, even for this government that is new level of embarking upon ridiculously unsafe and potentially risky and far-reaching industrial activity and supporting it without talking to Albertans about what this means.

I think that the government should have to come back to this Legislature before they make regulations around what a risk assessment would look like. Would they have to talk to people in the community? Would they have to consult with scientists? Would they have to talk to anybody other than the industry that's proposing to be able to engage in the sequestration? Would they have to do anything other than roll the dice and say, "Well, it's not our issue anyway because we're going to hand liability over to the taxpayer ultimately so, you know, whatever"? I mean, what's the risk assessment going to look like? Maybe they'll just write a regulation saying: "You know what? Throw the dice three times, and if it turns up this way, then you're good to go." We don't know, which is why it should come back to the Legislature because this is a really, really important issue.

What else is the minister going to get to make his own rules around? Well, the minister is going to be able to make his own rules around the closure plans for industry once they've established a well or once they've engaged in some form of sequestration, what that looks like and what monitoring plans should look like. Will they monitor once a year? Will they monitor once a decade? Hey, once a century? Let's ensure that they monitor once a century. We'll write that regulation out. We'll do it at the cabinet table, and we will not bring it to Albertans for them to render any decision on.

How about the question of how often they need to report about their plans? Do Albertans get to know about it? Or is it going to be yet another one of those things that is hidden from Albertans because it might possibly have an impact on the competitiveness of business? Albertans can't know about that because it could have an impact on the company's bottom line. Yet it's something that's kind of integral to the safety of our environment and the health of our children and all these kinds of things. You know, once again the government wants to make regulations around that kind of issue behind closed doors without bringing it back into the House to talk to Albertans. Well, that's unacceptable.

Here's one. The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations respecting the injection of captured carbon dioxide. So the whole new world of mining through CCS injection: we're just going to govern that through regulation that we write at the cabinet table without ever talking to Albertans about it. Well, that's just great. I mean, really, this is a new low for this government, I have to say.

11:50

Oh, here's a good one. The government will make regulations respecting the remedial actions that a lessee shall undertake, including regulations respecting when they might need to do a remedial action plan, what that plan would look like, when they have to submit and have the plan approved, when they can amend the plan, and the reporting requirements around that plan. So does the government have to tell taxpayers and citizens about what kind of remedial action an oil company or some other industrial player needs to take once they've engaged in sequestration and, heaven forbid, they have somehow disrupted the environment in the course of doing that? Well, we don't know what they need to do because that's what the minister gets to decide behind closed doors after consulting with his or her friends in industry and — here's the most important thing — without talking to Albertans about it.

In fact, this government is so interested in making sure that they don't talk to Albertans about it that we are having this debate at 10 minutes to midnight — 10 minutes to midnight — on a Monday night. How ridiculous is that? This House has sat a combined total of maybe 16 weeks this year. It is the shortest session, probably, of any Legislative Assembly in the country. The government should be utterly ashamed of how scared they are of this Assembly and how far they will go to hide what they are doing and to shorten the Assembly so that they can stay away from question period one extra day because the minute they come into the Assembly, it starts looking bad for them. Stuff starts blowing up all over, and files start blowing up. There's a press scrum every day, and it's not looking good for them. How do we answer that? Well, we have one of the shortest sittings in the country, if not the shortest. We try to pack everything into a four-week session in the fall, which is, again, shameful, and we decide that we're going to debate this rather meaningful and important piece of legislation at 10 minutes to midnight for no particular reason.

I could kind of get this if we'd been at it for, you know, a number of weeks, but, no. We've barely been in the House. You guys are so scared of the public and so scared of having this stuff talked about in the open that we are here at 10 to midnight. One of the things we are doing while we're here at 10 to midnight is giving you guys regulatory authority to move forward on this bill without ever having to have a conversation that is on the record for Albertans to read or see ever again. That's why the amendment that's been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is so important, because that would require this government, God forbid, to inch their way ever so cautiously and fearfully back into the Assembly and actually

have to talk to Albertans about these extremely consequential changes and proposals that they are considering giving themselves the authority to make under cover of night through this piece of legislation.

So what else is it that they are wanting to do without ever talking to Albertans about it and making sure that we talk about this tonight at 10 to 12 on one of the few days that the Legislature has actually sat this year? Well, they want to be able to make regulations regarding the overall closure of a sequestration initiative. They want to make regulations regarding the \$2 billion fund, regarding the administration of the fund, regarding what the minister can or can't do with the fund, regarding fees into the fund. That's good. We're going to put \$2 billion of taxpayers' money into a fund, but we are not going to articulate how that's to be used in legislation. Wow. That's really quite something.

Then the other one that I find — well, of course, we've also gotten into that they want to make regulations about liability, but we will talk about that a little bit later. The other one that I really find interesting is that what they want to be able to do is to make regulations regarding the monitoring of wells and facilities that must be conducted before and after a closure certificate is issued.

Now, with something as simple as conventional oil this government has dropped the ball with respect to the remediation of orphaned oil wells. We have a huge unfunded liability throughout this province because we have failed to obtain adequate security from industry to cover the remedial costs of the simple conventional oil extraction processes that we have approved over the last 50 years, relatively simple oil extraction, conventional oil. We've got a huge unfunded liability to government. Even in that case, with the nothing-but-successful state of the oil and gas industry over the last 50 years, we have still somehow managed to fail to extract adequate financial security from this industry to deal with that outstanding liability.

Now what we want to do is take \$2 billion of taxpayers' money and give it to industry for a process which most scientists will tell you is experimental at best, which may well have profound consequences to our environment, to our water supplies for beyond generations to come. And we want to do all of that through regulation. We want to do it behind closed doors, and we absolutely do not want this Legislature to ever turn its mind again to how it is that we are going to ensure that they monitor and plan for the safe closure of these wells or these initiatives.

This amendment that's being proposed is actually quite a modest amendment in many regards. Honestly, had I had the chance to think this amendment through and write up such a one myself, I probably would have made it a great deal more rigorous. I would have asked for more notice. I would have stipulated in more detail the consultation process.

What I do like about this is that once the regulation is posted and consultation is completed and input is received, the minister is compelled to come back to the Legislature and at least make a report. Presumably, the intention is that they have to make that report before they can actually enact the regulations, so it allows for some time for the public to respond. I'd still like to see some mechanism to ensure that it's actually debated, and I'm not quite sure how I'm going to do that.

I do applaud the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for attempting to do what's being done here in terms of putting some type of limitation on this emperor-like authority that the minister would like the members of this Assembly to give him with respect to this both very costly and also profoundly impactful initiative that he would like Albertans to fund, both in terms of their immediate dollars as well as the long-term liabilities to their health and safety.

For that reason, I do very much support this amendment, and I anticipate voting in favour of this amendment.

But I really have to say that I'm quite disappointed and really quite surprised to see the members opposite playing the kinds of games that they're playing tonight by ramming this thing through, commencing debate on this bill at 11 p.m. – at 11 p.m. – after the Legislature did not reconvene until October 25, when all of the opposition members were quite happy to be told that we were going to reconvene in the second week of September because, we were told, there was so much important work to be done in this session. So it was really important for us to roll up our sleeves and come back early and really be the good legislators that we are.

Instead, no, no, no. No, we actually could spend another six weeks travelling around, doing a whole bunch of stuff and staying away from any unplanned media events or any kind of open challenge to the merits of their plans, and instead we would limit the legislative session this fall to a mere six weeks. Or what is it? We had two before we broke, and now we're at three: five weeks this fall. That, of course, after we ended in April after a mere two months in session this spring. But I guess it's really, really important that we debate this at midnight because there are just not enough hours in the day and not enough days in the week and not enough weeks in the year, especially when, as I say, we have a government that is so fearful of coming into the Assembly and engaging in an open and moderately accountable form of governance.

That's what we have to say on this. At this point I will once again congratulate the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and indicate that the NDP caucus will be fully supporting this amendment.

12:00

The Chair: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: On the amendment. All right. Bill 24. We we're talking about consultation here, which is the gist of this amendment, and we've been talking about consultation a lot today, or the lack thereof, by this government.

I just had to get up after hearing the gibberish coming from over there from the Minister of Energy talking about how . . . [interjection] You know, I'm glad you're watching the press clippings. That's good. You should keep hearing those footsteps. It's going to be a long night, so get comfortable.

Here's the issue. We keep on passing bills in this Legislature without doing proper consultation on them, and it really doesn't make a whole lot of sense. [interjection] One of the members over there says that we've done more consultation than anybody. Well, if you did so much consultation, you wouldn't have so many people always in an uproar, starting with the new royalty framework, to Bill 50 to Bill 36 to Bill 19 to Bill 29. Bill 17 is coming down the pike. You're losing MLAs left, right, and centre, and the reason you're doing it is because you don't do consultation. If you did consultation, you wouldn't have so damn many problems over there holding on to good people. That's the problem.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, just a point of order. I believe the word "damn" is prohibited under *Beauchesne* 489.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, speak to the amendment.

Mr. Anderson: It's about public input, getting public input. Public input: a synonym for input, consultation. It's not that difficult to get your head around, well, for most people, anyway.

The problem this government has is that they forge ahead without

thinking, without consulting, without having public input, which is what this amendment is about, public input. That's the problem. We see it again and again and again. We just saw it earlier with Bill 29. We go through Bill 29, and they just come up with this new idea that we're going to give the minister all these different powers so that the land-use framework can be implemented as the bureaucracy wants without the problem of having to go to the Legislature and putting their ideas to a vote.

We see it here with carbon capture and storage. There's been no proper public consultation done. I mean, you're talking about science. Yes, for sure, it's been used for enhanced oil recovery. No doubt about it. No one disputes the fact that it's been used for enhanced oil recovery. Absolutely. But never on a mass scale to the degree that we are talking about here has it ever been used. We're not talking about, you know, getting a little bit of oil out of an abandoned well or out of a well that has been left. We're talking about storing massive – massive – amounts, unprecedented amounts of a potentially deadly gas, if it's in high concentrations, in the ground on a massive scale.

I mean, we do not know the effects of this because it's never been done before on this scale. We've seen it used for enhanced oil recovery. We've not seen it stored under the ground to this degree, and it could be very dangerous, Mr. Chair. You know, it worries me, and it worries Albertans. I mean, there are stories. Obviously, if anybody has done any kind of research on this, you have these CO₂ bursts that have occurred in a couple of places in Africa, for example, where naturally occurring CO₂ is released. People die from it. It can happen. We're talking about pumping incredible amounts of this gas into the ground and concentrating it. You know, is it theoretically not supposed to be released? I guess so. But theory is one thing, and reality is another thing, especially when something is unproven, like this is. We also don't understand exactly, when you get so much of this concentrated in a single spot, how it affects the aquifer. We don't quite know that yet because it's never been done on the scale that we're talking about here.

There are all these different questions, not to mention the horrendous cost involved to the taxpayer. I tell you what I'd like to get public input on. The amount of money that this minister and this Premier are investing in carbon capture and storage: is it worth it? Is it worth it to spend this kind of money, \$2 billion, on essentially an unproven science, at least unproven to this degree that they're talking about here, with this massive amount of storage of CO₂, as opposed to enhanced oil recovery? Is it worth \$2 billion in grants to corporations to pump CO₂ into the ground? I mean, it's just beyond belief.

With all of the things that are happening in our health care system and in our education system and all the different priorities, the massive \$5 billion book deficit, a \$7.7 billion cash shortfall that we're funding by draining our sustainability fund, which was at \$18 billion and is now projected to be \$10 billion by the end of this year, the new debt that we're incurring, \$3 billion this year alone, all this stuff, well, that's what I'd like public input on, Mr. Chair. Part of public input is taxpayers. I'm sure the Taxpayers Federation or CFIB or some other entity would want to have public input into these projects as they come forward and certainly into this bill.

That's a problem because I'm extremely confident that if this did go to the public and the public was asked, "Is this an appropriate way to spend \$2 billion?" I am sure the public would come back with the input of: "No, it's not. It's a waste of money. It's an absolute waste of money." Of those that, you know, think that cutting emissions of CO₂ is exceptionally important, I think that even the majority of those people would still think that this is not worth the \$2 billion. They would want to see it spent on other

things, things that are going to actually cut down on pollution overall and actually might do some good for society like mass transportation and increasing that sort of thing or retrofitting homes with panels or something like that. Even people who think that we have to slash our emissions a great deal: those folks think it's a waste of money, too.

Obviously, some of the companies like it because, hey, it's free money. Stick it into the ground; you could use it for enhanced oil recovery. You know, what the heck? This government has been back in the business of business for so long that I think they forget what it was like before. But it's a great deal: "We can get all of this good money. We can pump it into the ground. We can get a little bit of oil, a little bit of money out of it. Super. Great." Well, I don't think taxpayers think it's that good of a deal. If it's such a great idea, well, then let the companies do it themselves. Let them make the investment and pump the CO₂, pump the living daylight out of CO₂ into the ground, as much as they bloody well want, get as much oil out of the ground as they could possibly ever desire with this technology if it's such a good technology.

If we had public input on that, if we actually put it to the taxpayer for public input, I think they'd say that this is garbage, that we shouldn't be investing in this. Clearly, we should be investing in other things if we're going to cut emissions, and we shouldn't be wasting it on this. I think that if we did public input, they'd say: "You know what? We need to worry about our emergency room crisis. We need to worry about making sure that all these empty hospital rooms that we have out there are fully staffed with nurses and doctors." I think the public input would be that that's where we would want the money spent, not \$2 billion on sticking hot air into the ground.

I think that if you did some public input and public consultation, people would say: "You know what? We need schools for our kids. We don't need \$2 billion spent on pumping hot air into the ground." I think that if you did some public input and public consultation, you would see that most of the folks you consulted with would say: "You know what? I'm actually worried about the debt load that we're leaving on our kids."

12:10

Apparently, we've decided, you know, that we're going to spend all the money in the here and now, and we don't give a rat's you-know-what about our kids' future. We're willing to go \$5 billion into the hole this year, actually \$7.7 billion if you include the cash deficit. That's what we're willing to do, and \$2 billion of that, over the next however long it's going to be that they're going to spend on it, is going to be spent on pumping CO₂ into the ground.

I mean, it's just public input. If this government ever did it on this issue, it would clearly come back that this is not worth the money. It's a ton of money. Now, people will say: well, it's only a hundred million dollars this year. Well, a hundred million. Good grief. That's a ton of money this year. That's a lot of money. Jeepers, how many schools is that? That's seven, eight, nine schools – right? – something like that. It's a ton of infrastructure. That's also an amount that you can take off the debt. Not only that, but it's a hundred million this year, and next year it's supposed to be more, and the year after that it's really ramping up.

I really think that it is a huge mistake to invest this type of money on a corporate granting scheme to some of the richest corporations in Alberta. Public input would definitely bring this out, I think. I mean, there's no doubt in my mind. It just shocks me. There are people over there in that caucus who I really thought were conservative. What conservative in their right mind – I think public input would bring this out – would want to spend \$2 billion on a project

like this? I guarantee that if they did a public consultation, the answer that would come back, without any doubt in my mind, is: "No, we don't want you to spend this money on this type of thing. It is ridiculous to spend this kind of money on this."

That's a problem. If you consulted the taxpayers of Alberta and they were allowed to bring forward their thoughts, I'm positive that they would say: not worth it. The government says: oh, we need to do this, you know, so that we can all feel good about it, and we can do our advertising, and our American customers will still buy our oil. It's like they're immune, or they don't read the newspaper or something like that. We just had a shift of historical proportions in the United States. We had there, I think, the biggest swing in seats since 1932. One of the main issues there – there were a couple of them – one of the big three, was the cap and trade, the cap and taxes, as they call it down there in the U.S. Because of that switch, that cap and tax idea was rejected overwhelmingly by the American people.

If anything, the Americans are convinced – our biggest customer is convinced – that they don't want anything to do with these ridiculous carbon emissions and, you know, taking them down using a cap and trade bill or anything else, for that matter. They don't want big government subsidies dedicated to this type of thing, to carbon capture and storage and all these things. It's not a priority for them. When people say, "Well, we're doing this carbon capture and storage in order to appease our American customers," that's garbage. That's not what's happening down there. That agenda has been rejected, and until it's back on the table again, why are we spending money like drunken sailors trying to appease people that are no longer in power? Nancy Pelosi is not the Speaker of the House anymore. Sorry.

An Hon. Member: She is till January.

Mr. Anderson: Well, that's right. She is till January. You're correct on that. That's good.

In January she won't be anymore, so why are we doing all this to appease someone that's not going to be in power in the House? It doesn't make any sense. What we should be doing is concentrating on our people here in Alberta, concentrating on what their needs are. Should we lower pollution? Absolutely we should lower pollution, so let's focus our monies and our energy on lowering real pollutants. Let's spend some money on that. That's all right. There's a balance that has to be put into place, so let's do it, but let's focus on things like good infrastructure that's actually going to take people and workers from point A to point B. That's good infrastructure. That's infrastructure spending that we should be making, investments we should be making, and we do that by decentralizing out to the municipalities and allowing them to spend the money without us holding their hand. They will make those investments in mass transit, and they will make those investments in making our infrastructure greener.

So, yeah, those are all very important things that we can do, but we can't do it if we don't do proper public consultation. I mean, that's the key, hon. member. It really is. We talked earlier about the public consultation that's needed for consulting the taxpayers on such a gross waste of money and how even the NDP, even though they agree that we need to massively slash carbon emissions, thinks that this is a waste of money. You know you've really blown it when even the NDP thinks this is a complete boondoggle. I mean, that really does say something. All you need to know on that.

I really do not accept the premise that we do this in order to advertise or show the world that we're serious about tackling climate change. I mean, we can get into the science about what part is

settled in that debate and what part is not settled. I know that makes everyone very uncomfortable because we don't want to ever talk about something that meaningful that could affect the direction of the entire world, you know, the entire world economic system. Sure wouldn't want to discuss something like that. We just have to kind of – whatever is politically correct, that's all we'll ever say.

For those of us who believe that it's important to make sure we take a very measured response and that any response that we do take to reducing our emissions should be aimed at very practical solutions that actually improve people's lives and reduce harmful pollutants to people's health, you know, this is definitely not the answer. Again, I think it's very clear that if they did a consultation, a proper public consultation, there is no doubt in my mind that the answer that would come back is: no, this is an absolute waste of money, total waste of money. Until this project gets cancelled, we're going to continue to stand in this Legislature until the cows come home and say that it's a waste of money.

I tell you, you talk to Albertans on the doorstep as you go door-knocking, and they talk about the need for new schools in their community. They talk about the need to get more docs and nurses in the empty buildings that we keep building that don't have anybody in them, for health infrastructure. They talk about the need for that, but never have I said: "You know what we really need to do? We really need to spend \$2 billion on pumping CO₂ in the ground. That's what we need to do. What a great idea that is." I mean, it's absolutely asinine, just so ridiculous that we would spend taxpayer money. All the hard hours that go into earning money and paying taxes, and we take it and just flush it down the pipeline to the CO₂ toilet. That's what this is. This is really a CO₂ sewage system that we're creating here. It's like a big septic tank. Yeah, and it's just not very cool.

12:20

You know, it's one of those things where I think that as Albertans get to know how wasteful this project is, and they already are, they will absolutely reject it. I think that if there was proper consultation done, that that would be the verdict. It's too bad, you know, because I would really like – in some ways, if MLAs were able to speak up for their constituents and they were able to actually come into this House and freely say, "You know what; sorry; I know I'm a part of your government, but this is BS; my constituents absolutely do not want this to be something that we spend money on," I think that you would need a little less public consultation because people would actually come here and represent their constituents and say: "You know what? This is a gross waste of taxpayer dollars." Oh, time is up.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm rising to speak to the amendment to Bill 24 which has been proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. I just want to indicate that I'm going to be supporting this amendment. It has, you know, a number of advantages. It provides for some very, very rigorous public consultation, ensures that the public has clear notice of whatever regulations the government is considering, and requires them to actually make sure that the public is aware of that. Those are all good things because I also feel that this particular project, this program of the government of spending \$2 billion on carbon capture and storage, is a waste of taxpayers' money and potentially a big boondoggle.

I've spoken about it already, so I'm not going to speak at length about this, only to say that even the Wildrose Alliance, at least some

of whose members do not actually believe in a human-induced climate change, if you can believe it, despite all of the science, thinks that this is a wasteful project. If even the Wildrose Alliance is saying that this is a waste of money, those members – I mean, I know there's a former Environment minister who has a more scientific view of climate change, but there are a couple of Flat Earth Society characters here that don't actually believe in human-induced climate change. If even those members of the Wildrose Alliance are against this project, you know that it's a bad project and a waste of time.

So I would urge all hon. members to support this particular amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much. It absolutely amazes me, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the very astute comments that he just made relative to this issue. I can say that wonders will never cease in terms of what is taking place and occurring across Alberta. Certainly we can feel the change that is in the air, based on what people are saying in coffee shops. I might add that this amendment that's put forward is really about trying to close the gap between government and what people are saying.

In actual fact, I think perhaps the members across the way will agree to this amendment; they will agree with the idea of consulting with the very bosses that own this resource. The bosses are the people that give each and every one of us in this Assembly the honour and privilege to represent them and to listen to them. Consequently, I believe it's a fundamental principle and pillar of most political parties. It seems to me that this bill, the cavern and the canyon that exists and the gap between what Albertans are saying in coffee shops versus the legislation that we see here – at no point were they consulted. They were ignored. How often can you ignore and how often can you pretend to not listen to your bosses? This is a prime example of that.

We believe that this amendment should clearly be a very noble and principled approach to consulting with Albertans. So to the hon. members across the way, I would only hope that, since they do have the majority of 68 members in here, they give serious thought to this reasoned amendment, this reasoned amendment being that of consulting with Albertans. I don't know any elected official that would want to see this cavern and this gap continue to grow even further.

I think we saw that earlier today, when you had an MLA in the caucus decide to speak on behalf of his constituents and the result was: no, you have to toe the line of the government. Ultimately, when you toe the line, you ignore your bosses, and that is very unfortunate. In fact, often some refer to it as a dilemma. You get elected by your bosses, the voters, you come here, yet someone seems to have forgotten that the gap continues to grow wider in terms of what Albertans are saying and what is going on in the coffee shops and the legislation we see in front of us.

On this day, November 22, now November 23 as it's past midnight, I can only say that there is no doubt in my mind that this will be a pivotal moment in the future of this province. I think the price of this moment will come about a year and a half from now, in March of 2012. So this is friendly advice to the governing party with the majority: it's time for you to consult and listen to Albertans. That's why each and every member of this House, especially on the governing Conservative side or, I should say, the PC side, not the Conservative side – because, really, we speak for the conservatives in Alberta today. We speak for them because it's true Alberta values – true Alberta values – that really are values that are a pillar of this great province.

In fact, even Peter Lougheed back in the early '70s believed in true conservative values. He believed in consulting with Albertans, and that's just simply not happening today. It's the Ed way or the highway. Raj Sherman found that out today, and I discovered that, to my pleasant surprise, last summer.

The Chair: Hon. member, you should not use the names of members. And we're talking about the amendment.

Mr. Boutilier: Oh, I apologize. On the amendment.

I want to clarify, though, on the public consultation, that I'll certainly be consulting with Dr. Raj Sherman . . .

Mr. Anderson: No, no. Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'm sorry. I've read his name so much today in the media, and it's not printed as Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Having said that, I think that on the amendment at some point – we really should get back to standing rules where we talk about people's names because rather than Edmonton-Meadowlark, it seems to be closer to the way people talk in coffee shops. Maybe that's something for further review in terms of the standing orders.

Mr. Anderson: We'll do that in 14 months.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah, in 14 months we'll do it for sure.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, this amendment is about consulting with Albertans. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has, in my judgment, truly not forgotten who his bosses are. This amendment will restore the confidence in consulting with Albertans, asking the bosses what they think of a bill that, in my judgment, will jeopardize the future of Albertans. And for those that have young children, clearly, we are concerned about not only our future with our children and grandchildren but future generations.

At this time our party believes in energy solutions. This is not an energy solution. To the Minister of Environment, who is here this evening, in my community of Fort McMurray it used to take 40 years to be able to get a reclamation certificate. I'm very proud of the great work of our first company in oil sands, then called the Great Canadian Oil Sands, now referred to as Suncor, who, in fact, are receiving their reclamation certificate after only 40 years.

This amendment on consulting with Albertans: Albertans would say that we want to be assured of the future in the oil sands and the future in the environment and that the future of sustaining the environment is absolutely critical for the future of this great province of ours. But, please, it's time to narrow the gap as opposed to widening it. This legislation, failing to consult with Albertans, the failure of this government to believe that they can't simply just go forward and that they're smarter than Albertans is unacceptable.

12:30

Mr. Chair, I believe that the future of our province when it comes to issues such as the amendment to consult with Albertans is very, very important. We need to look, really, deeper into the issues. As we look into the issues that face our sustainability in the future, it's very important. Do we know what this bill will do when it comes to sustainability? I don't think that we have the answers to that.

The problem today is that we continue to see more and more consuming capital, not income. If you're consuming capital but not the income, you are really putting the province as a whole and its

natural resources at a deficit. I believe that in this situation that's exactly what's taking place. I believe that it's important to heighten the discussion. I believe that there's an excellent point in this, that our collective demands on nature's capacity for renewal are being exceeded annually by a certain percentage. On this basis we want to ensure that we don't extract from Mother Nature and Mother Earth and, as I used to refer to it, the mother ship. We don't want to consume capital. We don't want to consume capital because if you're consuming capital, clearly, you are taking away from what the Creator has created.

The echo that you heard was not from the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. That was an echo from paper that I had on my microphone. That's comforting to know.

That's one small step of narrowing the gap between what people are saying in coffee shops versus what we need to be really looking at in the long term.

Now, let me just draw to you a few other comments that I think are very, very important. The legislation that's in front of us is something that we really, really need to examine more closely. Let me give you a few other examples. We want to ensure that there is not what I refer to as joined-up thinking. If everyone is thinking the same, then no one is thinking. So one has to look across the way and wonder: how can a caucus be unanimous when there are 68 elected MLAs? Does that represent the view of Albertans? I think that that's where the gap exists, when you have 68 MLAs, when you have a whip from West Yellowhead saying: it's unanimous; we all think the same way. Yet at the same time Albertans, based on the 600 posted comments tonight, clearly do not think the same way. Look out. You haven't seen anything yet.

Joined-up thinking, I believe, is a weakness when it comes to legislation such as this because joined-up thinking says that we're all thinking the same based on what we're being told as opposed to what our bosses are saying. I believe that you want to ensure that you have active discussion, discussion that will consult with Albertans.

What's missing in this particular issue tonight is the fact that there is not simply any type of tension. There is no type of disagreement. So when I hear the whip from the other side say, "It's unanimous; all 68 of us are thinking the same way," one has to question the fact: have you been listening to what your constituents, your bosses, have been saying? It is the people of Alberta that have the true power, not someone with a fancy minister title, not someone in an Executive Council, not someone with a title who forgets who their bosses are.

As we go forward, we truly have to examine, you know, the insight that is provided from what our people of Alberta are saying. That's for the betterment for our children.

Now, one of the chief architects of our present economic model, in my view, based on this true Conservative party, was Adam Smith, and this year happens to be the 250th anniversary of the publication of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Some of you, many over there, perhaps might have read . . .

The Chair: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, we're talking about the amendment here. The topic of it is public input and all the list of causes here, so please refer to it.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Can I take the opportunity under the public consultation on this issue in making reference to Adam Smith? It happens to be the 250th anniversary. I say that because under public consultation Adam Smith believed, believed clearly, his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which he sought to define the balance between a private right and natural freedom. It's interesting tonight on this bill under a public consultation that he was another one who

recognized that although individual freedom is rooted in our impulse for self-reliance, it must be balanced by the limits imposed by natural law. Natural law, let me say, talks about this very principle tonight of consultation with the public because it must be balanced by the limits imposed by natural law.

I am very concerned that a bill that takes CO₂, puts it in the ground, and fails to consult with the true owners of our democratic freedoms that we have is missing the point because I believe it's tipping the balance, it's tipping the limit, and it also is tipping the moral sense relative to the principle. In all of these principles under Bill 24 we must have a sympathy to all of these things, and it is this sympathy that binds communities together.

What I am concerned about under Bill 24 tonight is the failure to consult because when you have a failure to consult, you have a failure to represent your constituents. Clearly, we are continuing to see more and more examples of that. Rooted – rooted – in our impulse for self-reliance, it must balance those limits imposed by natural law. That's what's missing in this failure to consult. There needs to be exactly and specifically the public's right and responsibility to be consulted with. This is not being adhered to in this motion tonight. Therefore, the existence of what is being done tonight is a disconnect with the very owners who we should be listening to.

I think tonight the bill clearly should be amended to ensure that there is a consultation with the public, so I think it's mandatory for this government, as much as they have 68 members, to truly come forward and support this amendment. I'm sure tonight they will do the correct thing because at the end of the day we want to ensure that there is an organic grammar of harmony when it comes to what is taking place between the public, the bosses, and the existing governing party. So if you're failing to come forward with the organic grammar of harmony which is infused with the awareness of its very own being that Adam Smith talks about, then you're failing the very fundamental principle of conservatism.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I believe we are losing the historic moment. If this motion and this bill tonight and the amendment to this Bill 24 is lost, then clearly the gap will continue to widen. If the gap continues to widen, then we will lose our interconnectedness with our communities. We will continue to lose that important function of creation with harmony existing between all things and all people, and our communities will be lost. The very 68 MLAs that purport to represent their constituencies will have to go back . . .

12:40

An Hon. Member: There are 67 now.

Mr. Boutilier: Oh, I'm sorry. There are 67 now: 72, 71, 70, 69, 68, and now 67. Watch out. That gap will continue if you're not listening to your owners.

Therefore, it's important tonight, in my view as a former Minister of Environment, that we need to build a foundation, a foundation of consulting with what I refer to as our natural House, and the natural House is our communities.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that, ladies and gentlemen in this Assembly tonight, you'll do the right thing. You'll do the right thing of clearly taking this amendment and supporting it. Surprise us all – surprise us all – in terms of how we go forward.

Mr. Chairman, tonight in the amendment to Bill 29, we need to truly learn . . .

Mr. Hinman: Bill 24.

Mr. Boutilier: I was making reference to Bill 24. The hon. Member

for Calgary-Glenmore is always willing to help, and I appreciate his long-term view of showing an interest in the importance of sustainability. But that's what we want to guard against.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I do know I have a few more moments. Having said that, I believe that I will now take my seat and allow my distinguished colleagues . . . [interjection] I see someone across the way was clapping their hands when I said that I would take my seat. Please raise your hand, who was clapping.

Mr. Anderson: They were excited to hear you, Guy. They wanted more, much more.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. I will continue.

The Chair: Hon. members, speak through the Chair, please.

Mr. Boutilier: Through the Chair, Mr. Chairman, I will continue on.

I believe that this fails to demonstrate an elegant piece of long-term thinking. That's what this fails to do. I believe that . . . [Mr. Boutilier's speaking time elapsed] With that, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for listening.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the amendment.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. It's such a short debate we're having on such an important issue. Again, to speak about the importance of public input is paramount. I have to respond to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who brought in the flat Earth theory that I'm not sure he subscribes to or whether he thinks he's falling off of the edge of the Earth. I wonder how many people in Alberta are going to have a medical flatline for lack of public consultation. This, again, is the purpose of this amendment. It's the question that we need to do. The fact is that we're getting e-mails here, and it's my honour to be able to respond and to give the public consultation now, while this bill is being debated in the Committee of the Whole. It's important that we get a few more things on the record on why public input is so important.

There are numerous people throughout the province here that are very concerned about the direction this government is going, the tax dollars they're spending. Again, that's a whole public consultation that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere brought up. Are we going to ask the taxpayers if, in fact, this is a priority when we have failure in our emergency rooms, we have failure for our seniors to have facilities for them to go to, and we have failure for those that have mental health issues? Yet we have \$2 billion to pump CO₂ into the ground, to take plant food and put it into the ground.

Another interesting question that this world-class forum should be having is that the slight rise in the CO₂, from about 300 to 380 parts per million, has actually increased agricultural production, the agronomists feel, between 10 and 15 per cent. What are we looking at? If we have a food shortage, perhaps this is the actual answer versus the problem. It's interesting, though, the huge debate on this that the public would be able to put in to such a forum, to such a venture of this government, to actually listen. But, again, I can understand why many people feel: well, why bother?

It was interesting, when I was out door-knocking, the number of people that asked the question: "Well, why should I bother voting? You're all the same when you get in there. You don't listen. You do what you want to do, and there's a disconnect." We need to stand up for the good policies, good economic policies, to stand up for the good programs that we have for our education, for our health care. It's that public consultation. How much time is actually being spent

going door to door and asking people, you know: what are your priorities? How many people have actually sent out a questionnaire to our constituents saying: "What are your priorities? Are you in favour of spending \$2 billion on CO₂ sequestration?"

When you put out the list of priorities and ask them what they want, I can assure you that the number one priority for the people in my riding is infrastructure. They need a ring road in southwest Alberta. This government – again, another area where it has failed – didn't do the proper consultation with the First Nations. They didn't come up with a credible contract. They didn't say: you know, we will try to get you more land. Even when they do the consultation, they fail often to listen to that consultation.

Mr. Chair, public consultation is critical. It's something that needs to be addressed, but again many Albertans feel: "What's the point of this government doing public consultation? They're not going to listen to us anyway." They didn't listen to the vast majority of people that made presentations to the new royalty commission, and they went ahead against the overwhelming evidence that was presented to them.

Another area here that's very disappointing is that there are no members of the government standing up and speaking and putting forward their reasons, their research on why they say that we should be sequestering CO₂ into the ground. It's also interesting that there is very little that's actually going to enhanced oil recovery. What are the limitations? How much can we use? What percentage can we use? There are just so many areas on public consultation that I am remiss almost to give up the floor for another amendment because it's going to be hard to be able to have so many things that we can draw on to ensure that this bill receives public consultation through tweeting, through Facebook, through e-mails.

Mr. Anderson: You should see all the people who read about CCS on here.

Mr. Hinman: The hon. member is receiving some from Airdrie-Chestermere.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll sit down. I urge this government to vote in favour of this amendment. We need to have more public input. We need to have more expertise input. What we really need is a world-class forum. We need to ask the question: what is the end result? What are the unforeseen consequences of us starting down this road of spending billions of dollars? What's the maximum that we hope to be able to pump into the earth? What's the extra energy that we're going to have to consume in order to do this? There are so many questions that are not answered.

If they were answered, I believe that what we would do is have a change in direction and realize that there are better areas to try and clean up our air, to clean up our land, to clean up our water. I've spoken many times about it, but it's a new energy policy. We should be looking at one-carbon fuels, natural gas, not multicarbon fuels. We could do a much better job of having an impact on our environ-

ment if we actually focused on those areas where we can make the biggest change. Pumping CO₂ into the ground is going to consume energy, consume taxpayers' money, and do very little to change what they are claiming to do, and that's to reduce the temperature increase here on Planet Earth.

I'll see what other members here have to discuss on public consultation. I see some anxious to get up and speak on it.

12:50

The Chair: Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thoroughly enjoyed the debate that we're having this evening. I found it to be interesting, to say the least. As much as I would love to stay and hear from the opposition with more amendments, that I understand are coming, some of us have work to do tomorrow. I would then suggest that perhaps we should try and get a little bit of sleep before we show up for work in the morning. For that reason, I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

The Chair: We need a motion to rise and report.

Mr. Renner: And I will also move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Vandermeer: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 24. I wish to table copies of the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, now I move that the House adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:53 a.m. on Tuesday to 1:30 p.m.]

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Third Session

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Issue 45a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Deputy Government House Leader

Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)

MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)

Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)

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Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC)

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ND Opposition House Leader

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Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)

Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC)

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Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)

Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)

Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),

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Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),

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Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)

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Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)

Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)

Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (Ind)

Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)

Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)

Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),

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Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (Ind)

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Wildrose Alliance: 4

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. From our forests and parklands to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, this year, 2010, marks the 10th anniversary of the School at the Legislature program. Its official launch was in November 2000. Ten years have now passed, and over those 10 years we've welcomed 281 classes and some 10,145 students, teachers, and parent volunteers in this particular program. Seated in the members' gallery today are several students and teachers who participated in the inaugural year of 2010: Mrs. Lorraine Williamson, a teacher; Mr. Dan Serdachny; and students Anthony Smith, Kairee Kirkwood, and Jaine McCorquodale.

With them as well are the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program: from Priority Printing Limited Mr. Tim Downey, president; from Access Television Mr. Lloyd Lewis, vice-president and general manager, CTV Edmonton and Access Television; Mr. Eric Rice from Access Television; from CKUA Radio Mr. Ken Regan, general manager; Mr. Paul Moulton, chair of the CKUA Radio Foundation; and from the Rotary Club of Edmonton Mr. Jack Clements and Mr. Dan Matthys. We also would welcome Mr. Ron La Franchise, a horticulturist and volunteer to our program.

This program has existed for 10 years. We're absolutely overwhelmed with the success we've had in these 10 years, and I'd ask all of our guests today to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a fine group of students from Ardrossan elementary school in the Strathcona constituency. They're accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Arlene Dutchak, Mme Jade Jordan, Mrs. Trish McBride, and aide Mrs. Gwen Sikora, also parent helpers Mr. Paul Bodell, Mr. Ian Osbaldeston, Mrs. Lisa McInnes, Mrs. Glenys Boe, and Mr. Gerald Melloy. They're seated in both the public and members' galleries today. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a real treat for me today to introduce a class from St. Martin school if they're here yet. I'm not sure that they are, but I'll assume I can't see them up in the public gallery. I make a point of going out to as many grade 6 classes as I can, and over 10 years that's been a lot of classes. One class stands

out more than any other year after year after year for being extremely well prepared, and that's the grade 6 class at St. Martin Ukrainian bilingual school, and I think that's a tribute to the teacher there, who is with the class today, Mrs. Harasymiw. I would ask the entire class to rise – oh, there they are in the members' gallery – and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three Albertans closely associated with the aboriginal pride program in place at both the Calgary board of education and Calgary Catholic school district. The aboriginal pride program endeavours to emphasize for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students a sense of value, connectedness, and engagement within the school community. Seated in the members' gallery are Trish Bond, director of the United Way of Calgary strategic initiatives, which include the aboriginal youth and education strategy; Lorianne Tenove, supervisor of instructional support and FNMI education for Calgary Catholic school district; and Chantel Large, a graduate of the Calgary Catholic school district in 2009, who is also now attending the University of Alberta here in Edmonton. I would ask that they now please rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Robin Hill and Mrs. Carla Cuglietta. Mr. Hill is my constituent in Edmonton-Rutherford. He teaches at Strathcona high school, and this year he was selected as a semifinalist for the Alberta excellence in teaching award. Mrs. Cuglietta is chaplain at the Austin O'Brien high school, also located in Edmonton. Earlier this year Mr. Hill and Mrs. Cuglietta were part of a group of six Canadian teachers sponsored by the Canadian Teachers' Federation that travelled to Sierra Leone to train teachers. I want them both to know how proud we are of their work, and I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of my colleagues.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members Mrs. Michele Fidyk and Mrs. Lucie Wong. Mrs. Fidyk is also a teacher. She teaches at St. Teresa school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, and Mrs. Wong is a board member with the Change for Children Association, an Alberta-based charitable organization working to eradicate poverty and teach global citizenship to children. Earlier this year Mrs. Fidyk led a program at St. Teresa school with the Change for Children Association called fill the bus. Thanks to her hard work and that of the students St. Teresa school collected over 11,000 school supplies to be donated to students in Nicaragua, enough to fill the bus. I would like to ask them both to rise and receive our very, very warm welcome and congratulations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three very special constituents that are here today from Athabasca for the Alberta Schools Boards Association convention. From the school

board Aspen View, located in Athabasca, we have Brian LeMessurier, our very well-respected superintendent; Edgar Koehler, our long-time trustee and former county councillor; and Dennis MacNeil, former principal and new trustee, who is also a foster parent of four foster kids and has seen in excess of 30 children come through his home as a great caregiver. I'd like to thank them for their support and direction and hard work and ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce a number of Albertans from Edmonton and neighbouring communities: Tanja Allen, Denise Baillie, Lorraine Bodie, Brendan Fitzgerald, Eva and Karl Grantmyre, Somayya Kasani, Charan Khehra, Dagmar Lofts, Robert Price, Misty Schuster, and Aaron Thompson. They are among the many people in Alberta who live with multiple sclerosis or who are affected as family members and friends. Some of them are members of CCSVI Edmonton, a nonprofit advocacy organization. The daughter of my guests Eva and Karl Grantmyre was treated for CCSVI in Mexico with excellent outcomes. Tanja Allen would like to have the CCSVI treatment but is unable to afford the high cost of treatment and travelling to other countries. Denise Baillie was diagnosed with MS in 2007 and uses a walker to move around. Her health is deteriorating, and she would also like to see CCSVI trials available in Alberta. My guests would like to see Alberta join other provinces in timely approval of CCSVI research and treatment. I want to welcome my guests, who are seated in the public gallery, to this Legislature. I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure my guests are here. If they are, they're in the public gallery, but I'm going to introduce them anyway. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my wife, Linda; my daughter Paula; her husband, Brett; and four of my great grandchildren: Jenna, Keyrai, Anya, and Eilee. If they are here, would they please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Aboriginal Pride Program

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and celebrate the aboriginal pride program in place at both the Calgary board of education and the Calgary Catholic school district. Aboriginal pride programs endeavour to emphasize a sense of value, connectedness, and engagement within the school community. Children and youth who bond to their school environment are more likely to stay in school and more likely to succeed and have success with the programs of study in the Alberta curriculum.

Through an innovative partnership with the United Way of Calgary's aboriginal youth and education strategy pride programming has been implemented in eight different schools, Mr. Speaker, in the Calgary area. The aboriginal pride program shares a similar vision with the historic memorandum of understanding for First Nations education in Alberta, signed in February between the three treaty areas of Alberta, the federal government, and the government

of Alberta. It emphasizes the cultural aspects of education and recognizes that aboriginal students are only one part of a larger picture that includes parents, teachers, community administrators, and policy-makers. We've seen higher graduation rates in pride program schools, proof that the initiative is working.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps this could be summed up by a quote by Gail, a program participant from Siksika Nation, a Treaty 7 First Nation, who recently said: "Not too long ago I was going to give up on school, and now I want to be a psychologist. I know that I will stay friends with the other kids in the program after high school, and the program introduced to me to other, similar programs."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Caucus Discipline

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was another black mark on Alberta's already tarnished reputation as a leader in democratic values. The Premier proved once again that he has no use for MLAs who do what they are supposed to, represent the issues and concerns of the constituents who elected them. Those who dare to step out of line and tell the truth about issues that matter to Albertans are met with swift punishment from the Premier, who obviously prefers to have a caucus of loyalists who protect his interests than a caucus of advocates who fight on behalf of Albertans. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark found out first-hand what happens to MLAs who commit the unforgivable sin of representing Albertans first, as did previously the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

The message from the Premier to his elected MLAs is clear: fall in line, and keep your mouth shut. Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that that is why myself and the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere are on this side of this House and not on that side. Over there the views of constituents take a back seat to the Premier's agenda, and if what your constituents want conflicts with what the Premier wants, you know who you answer to first.

This type of backward accountability continues to drive the wedge between everyday Albertans and the democratic process. We're in the middle of an emergency room crisis, and the government just fired its own emergency room doctor. Strict caucus discipline and heavy-handed leadership by the Premier have cost Albertans precisely the kind of honest and candid input that is needed right now. The bottom line is this. When it comes to democracy, this government and this Premier have failed Albertans time and time again.

Tomorrow our leader in caucus will announce the Wildrose plan to restore our democracy, to give Alberta back to Albertans. The Premier and this government have been slowly chipping away at the values and principles of democracy for years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Penbrooke Meadows School

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak about a very special school – its students, staff, and parents – that has a very special part in my heart. This school, Penbrooke Meadows elementary, located in Penbrooke, the community in which I was born, earlier this year received a community initiatives program grant, that I had the pleasure of presenting, for over \$90,000 to upgrade the playground and other facilities that serves the school and the entire community of Penbrooke Meadows. This fall the school was successful in obtaining a second CIP grant

for over \$40,000 for technology upgrades. These funds are being used to purchase laptops, Smart boards, and other technology, tools that will help students better realize their potential.

However, the real story here is the fact that these students have shown incredible academic progress. Not only have their provincial achievement tests been absolutely astounding in reading and writing, but they are above the provincial standards. This is a huge win for my area. Due to the complexity and diversity of families and learners in my area PAT scores have sometimes been low in comparison to other areas in Calgary. Specifically, in their reading scores they've shown great growth. In just a couple of years grade 6 reading scores have improved by 11 per cent, and the grade 3 students have been above the provincial average by at least 10 per cent over the last two years.

Although PAT scores are important, at the end of the day they're only one touch on the surface of what is significant in the role of an educator. The educators at Penbrooke Meadows recognize that each and every student's educational experience is about more than just scores. I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart the staff that work so hard to inspire and uplift these wonderful students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Remington Carriage Museum

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 25, 2010, all of Alberta celebrated its annual tourism awards. One of the recipients of those awards was the Remington Carriage Museum in my constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. This award recognizes the incredible work that the staff and volunteers of the Remington Carriage Museum put forward during its unveiling of a statue dedicated to George Woolf.

For those who may not know, George Woolf was one of the greatest jockeys of all time, winning over 97 major races. He is perhaps best known as the rider of the legendary Seabiscuit, one of the famous racehorses in the history of the sport. On July 17, 2010, the Remington Carriage Museum, in George Woolf's hometown of Cardston, unveiled a statue of George riding Seabiscuit to widespread acclaim. Organizers of the event were hoping for 500 audience members but were pleasantly surprised when more than 870 spectators showed up. In addition, this event grabbed headlines around the world, in places as far away as India and Japan. The widespread success easily put them in the lead for the top marketing award for events under \$5,000.

I applaud the efforts of the Remington Carriage Museum staff and congratulate them on their well-deserved win. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When a patient is bleeding, you have to stop the bleeding. You also have to look at the entire person to restore health. Similarly, we have to deal with the bleeding in our emergency rooms with more staff and resources. That's clear. We also need to fix the whole system. We have a plan for an orderly transition to a structure that works. We recognize the need for local decision-making and clear, central accountability. To the Premier: will the Premier show leadership and establish a task force to begin an orderly, planned dismantling of Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday with respect to the

ER waiting times, there was a meeting on Friday. Protocols were established. These protocols were established at the request of the minister of health. Over a hundred health care professionals came together, and we are going to begin implementing that plan with Alberta Health Services. I believe it is a good plan. From what I saw, it will be adding more beds and more physicians and more nurses to ease emergency waiting lists.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, every single health professional works tirelessly for his or her patients. These people are torn in two directions. One is to help patients; the other is to follow late, confused directions from the top, a recipe for professional burnout and medical mistakes. To the Premier: what are you doing to restore confidence among our health professionals?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the number of people that were involved in drawing the protocols tells me – and I agree with the minister – that everyone does have a genuine desire to work together to not only reduce the waiting lists in emergency rooms but also to look at the other community-based programs. That's why so many of the allied health care professionals came together, to work with doctors and nurses to establish the protocols.

Dr. Swann: Right now everyone in the health system feels the chill. Will the Premier commit to introducing whistle-blower legislation so that people inside the system can identify problems and solutions without fear of losing their job?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all staff have a professional duty with respect to the disposition of their professional duties, whether they be doctors or nurses, and if there is something inappropriate that is happening, whether it be in an emergency ward or any other delivery of service, I believe it is their duty to ensure that their profession is made aware of that.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Accountability in Health System Governance

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a rebellion growing among the health care system professionals. Frustration was increasing for years, but suspending the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was the last straw. To the Premier: why did you kick out the dedicated, competent Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and still keep the CEO for Alberta Health Services, who has failed to improve the delivery of health services for two years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and I had a very good, long conversation, I think for two hours. We talked about, obviously, the pressures that he was facing as a medical doctor, pressures as a father, and also the difficulties of getting caught between performing his professional duties as a doctor and also some of the issues that he faced in terms of carrying out his duties as an elected member.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me ask the Premier: do you have confidence in the CEO of the Alberta Health Services Board? Do you have confidence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I found the comments last Friday quite offensive. In fact, all Albertans found them offensive. It came at a time when there was a really good plan put in place, but all of that

good work was relegated to the back burner, and all of the focus was on what the comments were. There is a due process in place. I am not the employer; Alberta Health Services is the employer. As I said, due process will occur, and the board will make the appropriate decision.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier has no confidence in the CEO, how can the front-line workers have confidence in the CEO? Take action.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the board is responsible for the CEO. Part of the look at the protocol in terms of improving emergency room waiting times was put together by the professionals. This came up; it was agreed to by the person who was responsible, Dr. Eagle. Now they're disseminating that information to all of the health care facilities to make sure that the plan can be implemented by the end of December.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Workforce Shortages

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, health care professionals are frustrated by the lack of consistency by this Premier on health care. When priorities change day by day, there is no clear direction. Stopping the bleeding in emergency rooms is an important first step, but there needs to be a long-term commitment to proper staffing. To the Premier: will the Premier immediately open and staff all acute-care beds that have been mothballed and keep them open to avert another ER crisis in this coming six months?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. In fact, looking at the protocol, I believe that there will be – and I have to rely on the minister for the actual numbers – something like 500 new nurses hired as quickly as possible and about 300 beds or something like that. It's a large number of beds. It's almost like opening up a couple more hospitals. Again, that is being communicated. I want it to be put in place by the end of December.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, that's good news. Thank you to the Premier.

Our second question. Family doctors will help keep people out of emergency rooms. Will the Premier immediately commit to increasing the number of family physician graduates from medical schools?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have. I made that commitment to Albertans in 2008. We're going to increase the number of spaces both for medical training and for nurses' training and also for LPNs. Now, with respect to family docs they're very important in terms of the health care system. However, what I'd like to see is more primary care networks established above the 38 that we have so that someone that has a chronic illness can come in and go to the appropriate person that's in the PCN without going to a doctor every time.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this Premier spent \$24 million last year cutting 450 nurses, cutting 450 nursing positions. Will the Premier immediately commit to increasing the number of nursing openings in postsecondary schools so we don't have a staff shortage to respond to emergencies?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I made a commitment that we will increase the spaces and train and graduate 2,000 nurses by 2012.

We're going to meet that target. With respect to the doctors I think we're on target for increasing by 295 by 2012. So we're well on the path.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Member Suspension from PC Caucus

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the PC caucus whip told Albertans that they voted to kick out the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark and that it was unanimous. We were also told that the Premier wasn't in the room. My question to the Premier is very simple. Did all 67 of your PC MLAs, including yourself, vote yes to kicking out the only emergency room doctor in government in the middle of an emergency room crisis?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will inform Albertans that I wasn't at the caucus meeting towards the end. I was here in the Legislature commemorating I think one of the world's worst atrocities; that is, the hunger, the famine. If you have somebody that has lived through that period, it is quite emotional. That's all I can say.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regardless of whether or not the Premier was in the room, Albertans know whose fingerprints were all over the decision. The Premier just last Friday made an important point of saying how much he needed the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's help in fixing the ER crisis, and then he simply fires him at the first opportunity. Given how fast you went back on your word, how can Albertans believe anything you say in the future?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, these are caucus decisions. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark today made some comments on the radio in a way saying, you know, that he regretted what was said. I can tell you that we're focused on moving ahead with the protocols. Those are very important to get the plan in place. We can spin this thing for the next week. It's not going to improve in terms of rapid progress on the protocols.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Premier accused my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere of being theatrical when he asked why he fired the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Since then members of our caucus and radio shows across the province have received thousands – I repeat, thousands – of calls and e-mails outraged at the action of this caucus and this Premier. To the Premier: does he think that these Albertans are also being theatrical?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one just had to watch the behaviour of the member yesterday and, in fact, well into the evening. If that isn't theatrics, I don't know what is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. [interjections] Hon. member, you have the floor. Forget about what the guy beside you says. You're recognized.

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two people in the health care system: one person closes hospital beds, lays off nurses,

creates a disastrous flu immunization program and a crisis in our emergency rooms; the other exposes broken promises by the Premier and his health minister and stands up for the patients and front-line health care workers. My question is to the Premier. Which one would the Premier get rid of?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government has met its commitments and will exceed, hopefully, the commitments of increasing the number of nurses, increasing the number of locally trained physicians, increasing the number of continuing care beds in the province. Also, much to the delight of people living in Grande Prairie and Lethbridge and Red Deer, they will have their own local radiation vaults for cancer treatment. That to me is a huge advancement in the delivery of health care in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's typical, but the real answer has already been given by the Premier since actions speak louder than words. The wrong person was fired. The reason for such a bizarre decision is not hard to find. One was doing the government's bidding, and the other was exposing the uncomfortable reality of this government's health care failures. Will the Premier admit that when Dr. Duckett closed acute-care beds, laid off nurses, and created a crisis in Alberta's emergency rooms, he was actually doing the government's bidding?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, something that no other government in Canada has done is give a commitment to a five-year funding agreement. It's the only jurisdiction in Canada. That gives us the opportunity to ensure that we can take care of many more Albertans, Albertans that continually move to the province of Alberta, many that don't come here with their hospital or their medical doctor. That is some of the pressure that we're facing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The message to health care workers, administrators, and politicians alike is now clear. If you cut, privatize, lay off, and generally create chaos in the health care system, you will be rewarded by this Tory government. If you tell the truth about this government's responsibility for the health care crisis, you will be punished. The facts speak for themselves. You can't trust this PC government on health care.

I have no more questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Provincial Deficit

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Conventional crude oil production has increased by 47,000 barrels per day. That's above the government's production assumptions in the recent budget. My first question is to the Premier. Why are conventional crude oil royalties to the treasury \$326 million lower than was anticipated while we see an increase in production and, of course, an increase in price?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the minister of finance and also the Minister of Energy respond, but this year we've had some difficulty, obviously. Oil was discounted considerably during a

difficult period of time, when we saw some interruption in the flow of oil to the south. I think it was discounted to about \$55 a barrel. I stand to be corrected on the exact amounts, but those are some of the issues that we've been facing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. To be specific, that was conventional crude oil. It was not synthetic crude production.

I have another question for the Premier. Can the Premier guarantee that the books will be balanced in this province before an election writ is dropped, that we will have no more billion-dollar deficits before the voters go to the polls?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just to inform the hon. member, all oil flows through the pipeline, whether it's synthetic crude or bitumen. We receive royalties on both, and that oil will continue to flow to our best market, to the United States. However, we're as a government tremendous supporters of a pipeline to Kitimat so that we can open up access to foreign markets, where we'll be able to stabilize the oil pricing well into the future.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, so are we.

Again to the Premier: can the Premier guarantee that the books will be balanced in this province before an election writ is issued? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would just look at the books, in fact the operations of government are balanced, meaning that what we pay for teachers, for doctors, for nurses is all balanced in the year that the expense is created. Where the so-called deficit is – and, again, it's not debt. We're taking money out of the sustainability fund, taking a cash asset and converting it to infrastructure, and that is the infrastructure that the hon. members across there are asking for: more schools, more hospitals, and more roads.

The Speaker: I sincerely hope that as we continue to go forward, we'll have a little more attention, please, to what's going on, and I do apologize to the schoolchildren who see this.

The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Landowner Private Property Rights

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Property rights are an issue that is very much like a birthright to Albertans and, I think, for that matter, probably to all Canadians. I'm getting a lot of concern expressed to me about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and some of the sections that are in it, so I would like to quote section 11(1). "For the purpose of achieving or maintaining an objective or a policy of a regional plan, a regional plan may, by express . . ."

The Speaker: I'm sorry. We're going to whomever this is directed to. Please sit down, sir.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is of course alluding to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. What I will say at the outset is that there is nothing in that act that affects the title of anybody's real estate or freehold mineral rights. There are some inclusions in that legislation relative to statutory consent.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to know how it is that the minister can protect property rights when a section would say that there is no right to compensation by any action under this act.

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it relates to the same issue. In fact, if there is a statutory right that's affected by a plan under the legislation, what happens? It is very clear – it's very clear – that that legislation does not provide compensation, but it expressly states in the legislation that the compensation is housed in other legislation in the province currently in effect such as the Mines and Minerals Act or the forestry act.

Mr. Lund: Statutory consent could be a municipality approving a subdivision, and I'd like to know where that compensation is.

The other thing that really bothers my constituents is the fact that it says in 17(4) that "if there is a conflict or inconsistency between this Act and any other enactment, this Act prevails." How do you protect the property rights of an individual?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, ALSA does not invoke any notwithstanding clause regarding the Alberta Bill of Rights, nor does it expressly provide that any individual could be deprived of real property or mineral title without compensation. This section should be read as consistent with the Alberta Bill of Rights, and it cannot be construed in a manner so as to abrogate or infringe on one's right to the enjoyment of property without corresponding compensation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Home Inspection Industry Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Homebuyers across Alberta practise due diligence by consulting a home inspector before making the largest purchase of their lives. A poor inspection may leave homebuyers with massive repair costs because in Alberta you can be a home inspector just by printing a business card. To the Minister of Service Alberta: given that the department said that it was consulting on this issue 15 months ago, why hasn't the minister released any findings on the home inspection industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the issue of home inspectors we did have an excellent consultation with a number of different stakeholders, from consumers and then from the real estate industry and from a number of people in the business. The point we're at is that we're still engaged in working out some final issues. Again, it's a very complex issue, but it's about informing consumers to make the right decisions as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister dragging her feet again, like always, because accurate home inspections would increase pressures on the government to deal with shoddy home and condo builders?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the whole area of home inspectors under Service Alberta's portfolio there's a whole, very complex area with respect to shoddy building as well as with respect to the New Home Warranty Program and that area. My focus has always been to enable the consumer to make good

decisions, and we know that when you're purchasing a home, make sure that the home inspectors you are going to use are reputable and are going to give you the right information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister's focus is getting a little hazier by the day.

To the minister again: if British Columbia, which licensed home inspectors in January of 2009, can protect homebuyers, why can't Alberta do the same?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there are other provinces that have done this. British Columbia was the first one to do so. I can assure the member this is something that we're looking very seriously at because, ultimately, we want to make sure that consumers, when they do purchase a property, have a reputable home inspector who does have the credentials to protect their decision.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Civic By-elections

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the honour of attending a memorial service in Lethbridge for an outstanding husband, father, lawyer, and community contributor. As you're aware, Mr. Bob Babki garnered the second-highest number of votes in the recent city of Lethbridge municipal elections. Sadly and suddenly, two days before his swearing-in he passed away. A number of residents at the service are still asking what the system is for replacement.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to express my most sincere sympathies to Mr. Babki's family. Due to the unfortunate death of this alderman a vacancy did arise on council, and in accordance with section 162 of the Municipal Government Act in these circumstances a council must hold a by-election to fill this vacancy. This section further states that the by-election must be held within 90 days of that particular vacancy.

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: would this procedure have been different if Mr. Babki had officially been sworn in as alderman?

Mr. Goudreau: No, Mr. Speaker. The situation would have been the same because of the fact that he had been declared elected in accordance with the Local Authorities Election Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The other question I heard quite frequently was: why not simply give the aldermanic position to the next highest number of votes that were garnered?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, under the legislation I as the minister do not have the legislative discretion under the MGA or the Local

Authorities Election Act to appoint the highest unsuccessful candidate to the municipal council. They will have to go through a by-election.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children and Youth Services has stated numerous times in this House that budget cuts will not impact the quality of care. Well, Minister, the advocate begs to differ in his most recent report, and so do I. Youth are being forced out of the system before they are ready and before they've turned 18 because of budget restrictions. To the minister: how is this serving the best interests of vulnerable youth, who desperately need assistance with the transition to adulthood?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is incorrect. We are not taking services away from our children as they transition to adulthood. I can tell you, as I mentioned here in the Assembly yesterday, that \$72 million was added to the ministry's budget in August, and \$13 million of that funding was added to our family support for children with disabilities program, and that very much assists with the transition to adulthood for our youth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It sounds a bit like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

How can the minister deliver services that meet the needs of vulnerable youth when the youth leaving the system aren't even given an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences? Where's the accountability, the evaluation?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, actually youth do give their feedback on their experiences regarding the system, and I can tell you, hon. member, that they give feedback through this ministry and also through the child advocate's office. I want to assure this member that in Children and Youth Services we look after youth up to the age of 18 and that as youth transition to other services that are necessary, we do that over a two-year period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When the advocate argues that changes made 25 years ago have failed to develop an effective role for aboriginal communities in the children's services system, what makes the minister believe that the new round of consultation will be any more successful? We cannot simply revert to failed previous processes.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know this member's interest in the aboriginal community and the resources and services for the aboriginal community, and I can tell you that the advocate, in commenting on 25 years ago, was not saying that today we aren't going to make progress through consultation with the aboriginal community as they assist with the model that should be in place in order for us to care for their children in need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

AHS Food Services Review

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Alberta Health Services announced recommendations from the food services review. The review was in response to complaints about the quality of food and the variety of food served in our nursing homes and small hospitals in rural Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. For residents of these facilities, especially long-term care, meals are a very special, anticipated time of the day. What is being done to respond to these concerns?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question. The first thing that happened, of course, is that an independent consulting team of food service professionals was organized, and they travelled to 26 different sites across the province. They spoke with residents. They spoke with families. They spoke with cooks and other providers. Everyone involved from the staffing level was there. At the same time they came away with some recommendations, which have now been implemented by Alberta Health Services. More food choices, more sampling of menus, and more cultural favorites will be included.

Mr. Berger: To the same minister. In rural centres, particularly the smaller ones, facilities don't have the access to local suppliers that they had in the past. How will AHS be addressing this issue?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, in short, Mr. Speaker, facilities at the local level will now have more flexibility, with regard to the question being asked. At the same time Alberta Health Services will be investing in more on-site training so that the cooks and other people involved in preparing the food that comes out of the kitchen will have a more direct say in these things to be more effective in menu planning and in providing sample menus so that the families and the residents can actually taste in advance what they might be enjoying for the rest of the menu schedule.

Mr. Berger: My final question is to the same minister. The kitchen staff and the staff in these facilities are preparing food for the people they know. It's not a number in a remote area of Alberta; it's people they know. They know their likes, and they know their dislikes. How are we going to respond to that and prepare food that is locally acceptable?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree that it is the kitchen staff, the cooks, and so on at the local facility who know these residents almost as well as the families know them themselves. That's why when they spoke out, we listened. A review was done, solid recommendations are coming forward right now. I can assure you that the nutrition will be there, the home-like meals will be there, and they'll even enjoy such things as – who knows? – holubtsi and perogy if they like.

Health System Concerns

Mrs. Forsyth: Our seniors could be so lucky to get that.

We asked a number of questions to the health minister last week, of course, but we didn't get any answers, so I'm going to ask the same questions, and I hope he takes some time to provide us with some answers. To the health minister. We know that there are beds in Edmonton and Calgary sitting empty while our ERs continue to burst at the seam. Will you immediately conduct an audit of all hospitals so that we know how many empty beds there are?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's not a bad suggestion. In fact, some of that has already been done. I thought I had indicated

something to that effect last week. If I didn't, then I was remiss in not doing that. Nonetheless, some of those beds have already been open. For example – I think I gave this information out – there were a number of beds that were recently opened at what was previously the women's pavilion at the Royal Alex here in Edmonton. Perhaps there are other sites like that. The suggestion to take a look at which beds might be available that weren't closed all that long ago while new ones were opened to replace them is one that is being looked at.

Mrs. Forsyth: We need the audit, Mr. Minister. We want to see what beds are open and what beds have been closed. We want net beds.

Given that we informed you last week that it is up to you to direct the Health Quality Council to investigate serious issues like the tragic deaths occurring in the ER, have you called them in to investigate yet?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council has been consulted. I want to let everybody here know and all Albertans know that with respect to the large number of incidents that Dr. Parks identified in the Thanksgiving e-mail to me a month or so ago, quality assurance reviews are under way right now, and the Health Quality Council had some input into that.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I'd like to see him table the information he gets from the Health Quality Council.

Okay, Minister, I have a new question for you today. Given that seniors and others are being forced to go into their doctor's offices and clinics for simple refills and other things that could be handled over the phone, will the minister abolish the whites-of-the-eyes rule and allow physicians to bill for telephone advice?

2:20

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, let me take that one under advisement because there are a number of things that are coming forward as part of our pharmacy drug review at the moment. I know that there are issues there with respect to prescription refills, prescription adaptations, consultation reviews, and medication reviews, and it's all part of the same scenario. I will get back to the member with the information.

Kainai Community Correctional Centre

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Kainai Community Correctional Centre, a facility mandated to deliver culturally sensitive, community-based programs to low-risk, minimum-security aboriginal inmates was saved from closure by last minute negotiations between Kainai and the Solicitor General. To the Solicitor General, Kainai was cited to close last March as a cost-saving measure, but you gave the facility a year's reprieve. What programs or strategies has your ministry implemented during the past eight months to improve the usage of this facility?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I'm not so sure, Mr. Speaker, that it's a question of what programs my ministry has put in place. The member correctly points out that we reached an agreement with the Kainai facility to extend their operation through this year. The commitment was that we would work together, particularly that the Kainai would work to talk about how they want to profile that facility, how it fits into their community. We certainly have our needs. We've been talking with the Kainai facility, and we're very pleased with the progress made there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Solicitor General suggested that the Kainai correction centre was an asset to the community, as he indicated briefly there, and should be kept open. As such, correction officials were asked for input to ensure that the strategically tailored programs for low-risk, minimum-security aboriginals remain available. Has there been a result of these inquiries?

Mr. Oberle: Well, the member would or might know that our prisoner profile changes over time. We actually don't experience as many minimum-risk offenders as we have in the past, but we are working with the Kainai facility to figure out what we're going to do going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just ask the Solicitor General. The year is almost up. Do you have any indications as to whether we're going to be continuing with the programs at the Kainai centre, or have you made a decision on that front?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know that he's now asking me to divulge budget decisions or contract decisions going forward, and I can't do that. All I can do at this point is inform the member absolutely truthfully and heartfelt that we're having some excellent discussions with the Kainai facility, and we're going to continue that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Education Achievement Tests

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spring of 2009 I brought forward Motion 503, which called for the government to do away with grade 3 provincial achievement tests in favour of an alternative assessment for learning. The Legislature voted in support of this motion, but 18 months later nothing has changed. My question is to the Minister of Education. Can he tell us when he is going to heed the advice of teachers and the desire of the Assembly to put in place testing that supports our students' learning?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an important question. The Legislature will know that we've been engaged in a very thorough discussion of education going forward. It's important to have that foundational discussion. Coming out of that discussion and changes that we make will be changes to programs of study and curriculum and, obviously, alignment of assessment to that. In the meantime we have been investigating other forms of assessment, but until we find a cost-effective way and a more effective way of doing assessment, the PAT 3 tests provide us with important information.

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, my first supplementary is to the same minister. If you are changing the way we develop curriculum, why not do away with these tests in the interim?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the tests are very effective for us both in terms of providing information for the accountability of the system and in terms of how we're doing. The school boards tell us that they can use the results very effectively and do use the results very effectively. It's important information. We shouldn't stop

doing something that provides good information, is a useful tool in the education system for accountability and for development of further educational opportunities for children until we have something better. We will hopefully have something better once we've aligned it with new curriculum development and new resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: That's it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Food security is a growing issue internationally, and Alberta is not free of its challenges. We have lost a significant amount of our prime agricultural land to development, and it could get worse due to an increase in land grabs by corporations and investors, but the land-use framework remains stalled. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: this government recently illustrated its willingness to sell Crown land without a public process, so why should Albertans trust the government to protect our agricultural land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. In fact, what happened with the proposed bid on the Crown land that the member refers to is that it was going through the system and did not happen, which proves to me that the system is working.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: given that there are limited protections in law, how is this government ensuring that other countries and foreign corporations are not grabbing Alberta's land for their own food security needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, of course, have agriculture as our second largest industry in this province, and it's a huge contributor. The agricultural sector has a great deal of input into the land-use framework. As well, Municipal Affairs and my ministry work very hard together over our concerns about fragmentation of land. About 85 per cent of our land base in this province is agricultural land or forestry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without completion of the land-use framework's regional plans, how is the minister able to ensure the protection of agricultural land for the long term?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, we do have foreign ownership land legislation in Alberta that protects us and makes certain that we will continue to own the land and be able to control the food production. But we also have to be aware that we produce far more than we can consume. We export approximately 80 per cent of what we produce.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Education Curriculum

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inspiring Education set a high-level direction for what education in Alberta will look like in the future and what it will mean to be an educated Albertan 20 years from now. Albertans told us that the education system must reflect the growing changes of both our local and global communities. To the Minister of Education: with the high-level direction set, my trustees would like to know how the minister is putting theory into practice in implementing the directions outlined in Inspiring Education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had a very robust discussion. We've had Inspiring Education, which has led us to inspiring action, talking about how we connect the conceptual side to the action side, developing that vision. I want to thank the hon. member for his role in getting us that vision.

There are three pillars which we must relentlessly focus on as we go forward: teaching excellence, recruiting, preparing, inducting, and supporting the best and brightest in becoming and remaining teachers; curriculum that focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy starting in the early years and developing a deeper conceptual understanding in the later years; and the third and perhaps . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the consultation on Speak Out, Setting the Direction, and Inspiring Education can the minister tell my trustees how he is ensuring that the School Act will align with what Albertans are telling us they want and need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member will know, in his report he talked about an education system that produces students who are engaged thinkers, ethical citizens who have an entrepreneurial spirit. We're building on that and bringing it forward for discussion, and it's still in the discussion stage. There's lots of opportunity for people to continue to talk about the issues, but new education legislation will provide an enabling framework which allows for the kind of flexibility, responsiveness, and innovation throughout the province that's essential to realizing the vision. A legislative framework, then policy and curriculum will follow.

Mr. Johnson: Rural Alberta school boards have been innovative in creating a wide range of diverse programs to meet the needs of students during a period of declining enrolments. Can the minister tell my trustees how future funding will support innovation and the maintenance of these necessary programs?

Mr. Hancock: One of the things that essentially will have to follow is a review of the funding framework to see whether it's actually accomplishing what we need. We have put a lot of focus on that. It is one of the issues for us in declining enrolment areas. We have, as the member will know, small schools by necessity, enrolment decline and enrolment growth, rural transportation, small board administration, small class size initiative, and interjurisdiction grants, so a number of areas we're funding now. Obviously, as we move forward and talk about how we deliver educational programs

and options, both digitally and on-site, we're going to have to focus on how that gets funded so that every child has the opportunity to be successful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Seniors' Education Property Tax

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The education property tax assistance for seniors program has been administered by the Seniors and Community Supports ministry since 2005 but not mentioned in any act, administered by any regulations, and is only mentioned as a line item in the annual report. The 72,000 seniors who qualify are supposedly automatically enrolled when they turn 65, except that some of them aren't. To the minister of seniors: why does the government administer a program with no regulations or legislation, providing no oversight from the minister?

2:30

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I understand that seniors, when they are approaching their 65th birthday, do receive a letter from us outlining what our supports are and requesting that they apply for any of our programs. If a senior has missed that letter, I can understand that they may not be enrolled in the education property tax program, but we do send a letter out prior to their 65th birthday to let them know that we have programs and services available.

Ms Blakeman: It actually doesn't work quite that way. Back to the same minister: given that some of the seniors and specifically those who are living in condominiums or in mobile homes, say the department staff, are not automatically enrolled and that when they apply for retroactive enrolment, there is an inconsistent application of the back years they are entitled to, why is Seniors and Community Supports telling some seniors that they can only get the last two fiscal years of education property tax, but others get more if they fight for it?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that when a senior inquires about the education property tax program, we do supply them with the information they need to have some back payment of whatever is owing to them. There are a number of different rules around that. You have to be in a certain place. When you move from your original residence and you start in your new residence, that's when the new education property tax starts on that property. It's a little bit complicated, but I do know that we have an excellent staff.

Ms Blakeman: Actually, that's not written down anywhere, so if you have it, please send it.

To the same minister: given that the regulations for all of the other seniors' benefit programs say 11 months of retroactive benefits but this program has no legislation, no regulations, and no policies written anywhere, could Alberta seniors be given a definitive time when the government will create legislation around this program to ensure that policy directives are applied consistently and not changed arbitrarily and applied differently behind closed doors?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I know that we have an excellent staff that are very concerned about our seniors and deal with them very well on our voice and person-friendly information line. I will check into what this hon. member has asked and will take it under consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Southern Alberta Flood Disaster Relief

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the flood occurred in southeast Alberta late last June, there were a lot of meetings with officials and affected municipalities. After the disaster recovery program was announced, Alberta Emergency Management gave assurances that there would be a 30-day turnaround to complete evaluations. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. My constituents are still asking: is the Alberta Emergency Management Agency meeting these goals, and why is it taking so long to clear up so many of these claims?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as stated on page 11 of our RFP, and its also on our website, our commitment is to do an evaluation within 30 days of receiving an eligible application. We are meeting or exceeding that commitment a hundred per cent of the time. While we can't control all factors that lead to the closing of files, I can tell the member that more than 90 per cent of the residential applications have received an initial payment or are complete.

Mr. Mitzel: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that it's been reported that the LandLink contract is potentially worth \$45 million dollars, will the minister please tell this House if this is indeed true?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, no, that's not true. The figure was incorrectly reported in the media. Again, I'm happy to share the correct facts. The current five-year contract to 2014 has a maximum funding amount of \$20 million, and that's to provide turnkey delivery of all assigned disaster recovery programs across Alberta. If there are no disaster recovery programs, there are no payments. The actual amount depends on the number and severity of all disasters in the province over the term of the contract.

Mr. Mitzel: To the same minister: given that there seems to be a disconnect with the disaster recovery contract agency, how does the minister plan to monitor this contract to ensure that it delivers the required services as it has been nearly six months now?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we have many checks and balances in place. One, our senior staff monitor the contracts very closely, including all invoices; two, the work has to be auditable by two levels of government, our provincial and federal governments – in fact, we randomly review a minimum of 15 per cent of all files prior to payment; and three, as has been stated all along with regard to a program of this size, we will be conducting a third-party review of the process, including LandLink processes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Pre International Baccalaureate Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Highly motivated grade 10 students are eligible to enter the pre international baccalaureate program at many high schools in Alberta. Eligible courses for IB include French and Spanish. To the Minister of Education: I agree that learning other languages is very, very important, but why only specific languages like Spanish and French?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we support provincially quite a number of languages in the province, French as our official language being important but also Spanish, Mandarin, Japanese. Many languages are supported. But when it comes to international baccalaureate programs, those programs are not provincially mandated. They're locally developed courses offered by some school jurisdictions to students in grades 11 and 12. Some schools have created their own international baccalaureate middle years program. Pre-IB is a way to encourage grade 10 students to enter into the full IB program in grades 11 and 12.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what is the process to get other languages and other courses included as part of the pre-IB?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, decisions around pre-IB course offerings are local decisions made by individual schools and school boards. They're locally developed courses which require approval. Choice is one of the important principles that we have in Alberta's educational system. We encourage that type of development of courses, enrichment of programming for those students that need it and want it. But, as I say, they're optional. They're based on student interest and teacher availability. Students and parents who have an interest in these types of programs usually arrange that through their local schools.

Mr. Bhardwaj: My final supplemental to the same minister: is the minister contemplating allowing students to take either IB or Alberta diploma rather than forcing them to take both?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been in discussion with the IB program co-ordinators and leaders across the province over the last little while. I had the privilege of attending their annual meeting about a month ago to talk about some of the requests that they have, including whether or not students should be exempted from the provincial diploma exams if they've taken the IB examination, whether they have a choice to do that, how we can acknowledge their results on the transcripts for students, and how, in fact, we can recognize the role and function of courses like theory of knowledge.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Prepaid Home Contractors

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard concerns from constituents regarding the overt and predatory behaviour of some fly-by-night and dishonest contractors. These questionable businesses are harmful to all Alberta consumers and the reputation of the excellent businesses and contractors in our province. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. How are you protecting consumers from disreputable contractors working in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta has very strict rules for prepaid contractors who take money before the work

is completed and solicit work outside of a regular place of business. The prepaid contractors are licensed with Service Alberta. They also must post a security. So it's very important for consumers, when they are making a decision to renovate or whatever, to make sure they are licensed if they are being prepaid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: it is good to have rules and share information, but what actions are you actually taking to stop these scams?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are severe penalties under the Fair Trading Act, which include fines of up to \$100,000 and up to two years in jail. Also, in extreme cases we lay charges under the Criminal Code. Lastly, this summer we worked very closely with the Calgary Police Service to deal with a repeat offender who was preying on Calgary seniors. Indeed, this department does take action.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you. Again to the same minister. My constituents actually think that these offenders are getting off with a slight slap on the wrist. Are there any real consequences?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really important for Service Alberta to hear from consumers about what they are experiencing with respect to our consumer contact line. Some of the penalties that have been handed out by the courts include fines in excess of \$80,000, restitution of \$70,000, and jail of up to six years' time.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, 20 different members were recognized today for questions, and there were 117 questions and responses.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine, Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Eid al-Adha

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Assalamu Alaikum. I'm pleased to rise today in recognition of the celebration of Eid al-Adha, otherwise known as the festival of sacrifice. I would like to thank you for putting on this important celebration in the rotunda later today.

Eid al-Adha is a Muslim celebration that recognizes the story of Abraham and Ishmael. This is a story shared by three of the world's major faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As the story goes, Abraham, after spending his entire life asking God for a son, was finally blessed with Ishmael. After his son grew up, God came to Abraham and commanded him to sacrifice his son's life. Abraham obeyed this commandment, but as he was about to bring down the knife, God stopped him and told him to sacrifice a ram in Ishmael's

place. Abraham had passed the test and showed his commitment to his God.

Traditionally, Mr. Speaker, members of the Muslim faith recognize this event by making sacrifices to Allah by offering a sheep, camel, or goat and dividing the meat from the slaughtered animal into three sections. The first section is eaten by the immediate family, the second is handed to close friends, and the third delivered to the poor. The festival of sacrifice works to bring the entire community together in celebration of faith.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish all Muslims in Alberta a happy and successful Eid al-Adha. [Remarks in Arabic]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Transgender Day of Remembrance

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend I attended an event celebrating the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Even today the transgendered remain among the most misunderstood community in our province. Unfortunately, members of this community are often victims of physical and mental abuse, prejudice, and outright discrimination.

Recent events have shown that hate crimes remain a very real problem for our province. Intolerance, ignorance, and blind, unreasoning fury have no place in Alberta, yet these hateful actions continue. One of the speakers at the day of remembrance, for example, was working as a teacher, born female, when he was fired last year because he informed his school board that he was transitioning from female to male. Even this government showed a complete lack of tolerance and understanding when it stopped covering gender reassignment surgery, picking on an unpopular group because they knew they could get away with it.

It is astounding that even in the 21st century people can still make a big deal over trivial issues such as skin colour, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Having spoken with the good folks who attended the day of remembrance, I can tell you that they share the same hopes and dreams of any Albertan. There is nothing strange or scary about that. To paraphrase the great civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I dream of a day when people are judged not by the configuration of their gender identity but by the content of their character.

I hope that we can all show some empathy and support for the transgendered Albertans who have faced violence and discrimination because of their gender identification. All citizens deserve an equal measure of respect. That should be the Alberta way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the following annual reports: the 2009 report from the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, the 2009 report from the Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologists, the 2009-2010 report from the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate, the 2009-2010 report from the College of Dietitians of Alberta, the 2009-2010 report from the College of Alberta Psychologists, and finally the 2009-2010 report from the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of tablings for the House today. I'd like to table five copies of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association report of proceedings of the 101st annual general meeting that was held April 22 to April 24, 2010.

The second tabling is five copies of the 2009 annual report of the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition received in my office. This petition states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Ministry of Transportation of Alberta to include the paving of Secondary Highway 529 from the Little Bow Provincial Park intersection to the intersection of Secondary Highway 845 to the 2010/11 - 2012/13 Tentative Major Construction Projects.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table five copies of the program from this year's ASTech awards. The ASTech awards focus on the outstanding achievements of Albertans involved in research and science. It's a great opportunity to recognize the outstanding and talented leadership in Alberta's science and technology community.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling is the special issue of the English Express the Solicitor General used as an important teaching tool for immigrants and foreign work guests working on their literacy to learn about crime and protection in Alberta.

My second tabling is five copies of the teaching notes for the English Express special issue, Help for Victims of Crime, allowing learners to learn new vocabulary, understand our basic legal system, and discuss feelings and emotions about crime.

My third tabling is a letter from Ann Goldblatt to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology asking that he reverse his decision to defund the English Express because "the multiplier effect of this publication is enormous," making a difference to community adult literacy and learning and to thousands of Albertans.

My second set of tablings is from people opposed to Bill 29. From Alberta Rita Werthmann, Felix Camire, Jacques Thouin, Mike Jones, Joyce Griffiths, Rebecca Ellis, Lynda Thiessen, Donald Davidson, Paula Corbeil, Elliot Borisenko, Christine Desjardins, Christina Brown, Cayley Orton, Paula Stein, Lyndon Thiessen, Ray Norman, Lillian Cook, Kevin Brown, Theresa Hannah, Gay Erickson, Candace Hills, Barry Manchak, Darcy Christo, David Rowed, Basia Okoniewska, Ross Dabrusin, Katherine McCawley, Paul Armstrong, Angeles Mendoza Sammet, Kelley Wilson, John Holmes, Don Kenyon, Gabriel Wong, Cecily Mills, Stewart MacDougall, Laura Williams, Alex Taylor, Holly Weber, Melissa Trono, Fred Fountain, Sylvie Jago, and Fred Martin; from outside Alberta Kyle de Hrusoczy-Wirth, Rob Wilson, Stephanie Wood, Elaine Suessmuth, Ralf Buckley, Garret Boyd, Dani Loewenstein, Deborah Krasnicki, and Monica McMahon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of over 700 letters from supporters of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. These Albertans have written to oppose Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act. The first letter is from Jim Dutton of 3235 Beach Drive, Victoria, B.C., and that's the only one I'm going to mention. They're asking that the Legislature protect and conserve the parks for Albertans today and for generations to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, sir.

Hon. members, the chair is also pleased to table five copies of the School at the Legislature report card 2009-2010.

2:50

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Dr. Taft: Mr. Chairman, can I just ask a procedural question? Are we just beginning? I should know this; I'm sorry.

The Deputy Chair: No. We've been debating this already.

Dr. Taft: Yes. That's right. Of course. We spent two hours on it last night.

Actually, I will rise this afternoon to propose an amendment, Mr. Chairman, and I have the appropriate number of copies here.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll ask the pages to distribute those, and then you can proceed. Hon. members, we'll call this amendment A1.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Chairman, that's appropriate because this is an A-one amendment; I can tell you that.

Just to read it into the record, I move that "Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, be amended by striking out section 10." That's the entirety of this proposed amendment. It's quite straightforward that way, but I think it's important to take the time to consider this. I'm going to begin by reading section 10. It's just one paragraph. It's titled Proceedings Not Subject to Review, and it proceeds like this.

A decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them shall not be questioned, reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise, and no order shall be made or process entered or proceedings taken in any court by way of injunction, declaratory judgment, prohibition or mandamus or otherwise to question, review, prohibit, restrain or compel the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them.

Our concern with this particular paragraph, Mr. Chairman, I think should be a concern to anyone who respects the rule of law, who

believes that we are all equal before the law. The remarkable intent and effect of this particular paragraph is, in our view, to put the minister and the health advocate and any employee or agent of either of them above the normal law. Clearly, in our view, Mr. Chairman, that's completely inappropriate. I think we all need to be very, very cautious as legislators about putting anybody above the law, putting anybody beyond a challenge by any court or beyond a challenge by any individual who wants to proceed against the minister or against the advocate or against any agent.

Now, it doesn't take a lot to imagine a situation where this could quite quickly get out of hand. Let's say that the health advocate, swamped by all kinds of complaints, appoints an agent and that agent conducts some kind of review which may or may not be appropriate, which may or may not be conducted by an agent who has any particular training. Who knows what the qualifications of those agents may be? That agent files a report, recommends an action. The action is then taken against somebody. That somebody who is being acted against may say, "Well, this whole process was off base. The agent of the health advocate didn't consider all the facts or wasn't qualified to come to a particular conclusion or in some other way did not conduct things properly. I want to stop this proceeding through an injunction, or I want to seek a court declaration, or I want otherwise to take some legal action."

Well, the effect of this paragraph would preclude that. It would seem to us to cut off the normal legal recourse that's available to people if there is a misconduct or if there is a dispute. That's just not reasonable, Mr. Chairman. We believe that everybody should be equal before the law. I think that this is the kind of legislation that actually begins to erode one of the fundamental values of a modern civilization, which is the rule of law. The rule of law means that the law applies regardless of who you are and regardless of the circumstances. This would seem to be a short-circuiting of that particular principle.

When section 10 states that "a decision or action of the Minister . . . shall not be questioned," I think we have to ask ourselves: how extreme is that? "Shall not be questioned": I mean, that's pretty extreme. Surely, we want individuals to have the right to raise questions or to apply for a court to review a decision.

So I would urge all members of this Assembly to support this amendment. At least I would ask somebody in here, maybe the Minister of Justice, to explain and justify for us why paragraph 10 in the Alberta Health Act should not be tossed out as this amendment proposes. What's the point of going to such extremes in this legislation? If it isn't an absolutely compelling point – and I will wait for the Minister of Justice to try to make that point – then I think, you know, my amendment as proposed is a no-brainer.

3:00

I will take my seat and see if somebody on the government side – and there are many capable members who understand the law in depth. I look at the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Maybe he can explain why we need to put such remarkable provisions in such generally useless legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. It's one of the amendments that we had already proposed and had gotten approval for from Parliamentary Counsel, so it's nice to see that there are a couple of people thinking on the same level.

I, too, have probably very similar questions that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has. I guess what's striking to me is that under that section it says that

a decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them shall not be questioned, reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise . . .

Then it goes on.

. . . and no order shall be made or process entered or proceedings taken in any court by way of injunction . . .

And it continues on.

I guess I'm having difficulty trying to figure out why. I'm not a lawyer. Maybe my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere, because he is a lawyer, can explain to people in the Assembly. Or, for that matter, the Minister of Justice, who is responsible for the justice of this province, can stand up and tell us why this would even be considered in the Alberta Health Act.

I go back to the fact that I'm still trying to rationalize why we are even debating an Alberta Health Act when, quite frankly, Albertans are fed up. I mean, we've seen report after report. We've seen consultation after consultation. I listened to the member who chaired this consultation process to come up with the Alberta Health Act say that he was listening to Albertans. Mr. Chair, one of the things about being a member of the opposition and the health critic, actually, for the Wildrose that I've learned since January is the fact that all of a sudden we get inundated with phone calls, e-mails, letters, and sometimes, quite frankly, it's hard to keep up.

I guess one of the privileges that we have had is all of the health care professionals in this wonderful province that have come forward to talk to us. I sometimes feel that I probably know every hole in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton because people are still concerned about the code of conduct that's under Alberta Health Services. Quite frankly, while the minister and the CEO say that they have the ability to speak up, they don't see that as the opportunity to speak up.

Yet again, we have very clearly written in legislation under section 10 that a decision or action of the minister or, for that matter, the health advocate or any employee or agent shall not be questioned. I'm trying to think of anywhere on this Earth where someone shouldn't be questioned about anything, because ultimately they're responsible to Albertans. If someone sees something that they feel is questionable, then they should have the right to question.

With those short remarks I am going to support what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has brought forward. He wants to strike out the whole of section 10. Until the government or even the author of this report, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, speaks out, is able to stand up in this Legislature like he did when we had the emergency debate and told the members of this Assembly that he didn't see a crisis in health care whatsoever – obviously, he believes, or seems to believe, that there is no crisis in health care. I would love to understand or hear what he has to say on why this particular section was put in this piece of legislation. Otherwise, until we hear from the Minister of Justice, the minister of health, or the member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I will continue not to support this legislation.

I'd look forward to any members of government standing up and speaking to this amendment and why they don't support it. I know that there are many members, including the one from Calgary-Egmont, that are lawyers and understand the law much better than I do, so I look forward to them standing up and speaking in support.

I'll continue to listen to the debate, Mr. Chair, and hear what others have to say.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is indeed a privilege to speak in favour of this amendment brought by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I enjoyed listening to the debate so far. When you see this type of legislation that comes through, where it says in section 10 – and this is right in the act. I think this sort of frames exactly what I'm going to talk about, where we go into the rule of law, what democracy stands for, the ability of the ordinary citizenry to challenge the power of the state and to have their day in court and to see if their rights and privileges under statute are being affected or have been interfered with.

Let's just start with reading section 10. Section 10 states that "a decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee . . . of either . . . shall not be questioned, reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review." It also states that no order shall be made or writ of mandamus, which is defined as a writ that is "issued by a superior court to compel a lower court or a government officer to perform mandatory or purely ministerial duties correctly."

If you look at the wording of that, that gives the government tremendous power, a tremendous ability not to be questioned. Really, the government should reconsider this as a real priority, a real infringement of the rule of law, as I see it, that we here in Alberta and the people of Canada actually have come to enjoy, have come to believe in.

If you look at this type of legislation, which is only meant to quash a citizen's right to appeal a government's behaviour or appeal what a health advocate or employee has done, whether it has merit or not is not the question. It's whether they have an opportunity to do so. It should be judged on procedural fairness but on substantive fairness as well.

These things appear in this section 10 of what is admittedly an inconsequential bill. I described it earlier as being a lot of feathers, not a lot of chicken. Actually, my cousin David Vanrobaeys in Lethbridge did.

3:10

Nevertheless, I think it's an innocuous bill because it really doesn't have much power. It really doesn't say anything. It really doesn't do anything. The government is sort of saying in this section, tacitly admitting by implementing this: "Yeah, this is a waste of time. These people – the minister, the health advocate, or employee – really shouldn't be doing anything, so we won't allow people to go to the courts. Really, the minister, the health advocate, or the employee in regard to this bill shouldn't be doing anything, so we'll just make sure of that by bulletproofing any decision they do make so that we won't be embarrassed in a court later on, that these guys actually tried to do something." That might be a reason why. I'm not sure, but if you're looking for some reason, that could be it. This could be an admission that the act is meant to do nothing. Okay? That's why they put this in here.

Really, in terms of this act the minister is not supposed to do anything. The health advocate really isn't supposed to do anything. Neither are the employees of this health advocate really supposed to do anything. So let's just make sure that if for some reason they wake up and do decide to do something, we're not embarrassed by what they did because this act is not meant to do anything. I think this is just basically an admission of that. Nevertheless, it should not be there.

Although they're probably not supposed to do anything, which is basically – let's face it here, let's look each other in the whites of the eyes and say: guys, this act is merely puffery, merely an act that claims to do something, that does do nothing, that takes a little heat off of us, that is for political purposes only but not really to deliver

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

anything better in terms of health care. Okay. I get that. You guys get that. Everyone here basically gets that. But people out in Alberta may not understand it. They may actually go to a health advocate or something to this effect and try to get some information or ability.

Guess what? There could be a circumstance where, God forbid, the health advocate gives poor advice, an employee takes advantage of an individual who seeks the health advocate's advice. A whole host or a number of situations could occur, and they should have the ability to follow up on that bad advice, an ability to go into some sort of tribunal and then follow that up into a court of law.

A government should really be loath to make this type of law. The hon. minister of housing is a lawyer, and he should be able to explain this. The hon. Minister of Education. They're both here.

Mr. Hancock: You should be able to explain a privative clause.

Mr. Hehr: No, no, no. I need some real expertise. I think that if they remember back from their lab classes, governments should be loath to make this overarching type of ruling, where the citizens are unable to go to a court. Governments should be loath to bring this type of act. I'd like to hear their comments about why this is there, and maybe that would be an excellent opportunity.

Nevertheless, I'm very concerned that our governments are seemingly seeking protection from the courts or from rule of law, the rule of law that this country is founded on, that our governments and our politicians are not above the law, that they can be held accountable by their citizenry, that they can take the actions of their government to court and get a ruling on that. That's been enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms back as far as our nation has been formed.

Going through this, it is simply wrong, and we see this government doing it not only in this bill but other bills where they tend to hide behind ministerial authority. We saw that in the Parks Act. We see it in many acts where this government just doesn't seem to like to let citizens have their day in court or their day in the Legislature, or their day to really question anything this government does. This is a further example and a really egregious example of this government going to extremes to quash any dissent, to quash any problems with a system that right now appears to be broken, and they're just ensuring that that dissent doesn't come up in any embarrassing way.

I thank you very much for allowing me to make those comments. I believe this is overreaching at its worst, and the government should go back and should accept this amendment and possibly redraft this bill to allow for some sort of recourse for the people of Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon. I'm standing today, and we're going to talk about this Bill 17.

The Deputy Chair: On the amendment.

Mr. Anderson: On the amendment. I have a very similar amendment that I'll propose later on, but I'll deal with this amendment. It is to strike out section 10, which, of course, just says:

A decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them shall not be questioned, reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise, and no order shall be made or process entered or proceedings taken in any court by way of injunction, declaratory judgment, prohibition or mandamus or otherwise to question, review, prohibit, restrain or compel the

Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them.

You see a version of this clause in a lot of different legislation, of course. Generally speaking, it insulates the minister from legal liability. There's a liability clause in section 11 which does that further, but this insulates the minister from, actually, any proceedings that might come against them by way of any action that they take under this act.

Here's the problem. Again, I mean, it's like a bad record. Every day we're in here talking about legislation that either gives too broad powers to the minister or takes them off the hook somehow for their decisions. You know, I remember when I was a new member sitting on this side of the House still but in the other party, the governing party, listening to hours and hours of late-night debate, and this hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and other hon. members from that caucus as well as from other opposition parties would constantly bring this subject up.

At first, being new, I said: what's the big deal about that? You know, come on. It's ministers, right? I mean, they have a job to do. Let's just make it easier for them. But as I started listening a little bit more, they started bringing up some good points. The fact is that ministers do need to be accountable, and they do need to be accountable to this Legislature and, by extension, the people. We talked a lot yesterday when we were talking about Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, that giving ministers too much latitude can invite some very bad decisions later on.

This is kind of the same thing, in my view. Although we're not talking about giving the minister unilateral authority to do things through regulation, we are talking about giving them the ability to essentially not be held responsible. We're basically absolving them of all responsibility with regard to their decisions under this act.

3:20

I don't think that's wise. I don't think, of course, that a minister should be sued personally for something that they do as a member of government. They shouldn't have, you know, their bank accounts raided for something that they said as a minister, obviously, unless it's criminal, but that's different. Assuming it's not criminal, they shouldn't be personally liable for their decisions. I don't think anyone disagrees with that. Where I have a problem with section 10 is the fact that it's so broad. It says that any decision of the minister or health advocate or any employee or agent of either shall not even be questioned with something they do in this act.

I think about some of the things that I've experienced even in these last three years. Well, let's think about this emergency room crisis. If this thing lingers on much longer – and it appears that it does – then there might be a situation that comes where the minister needs to be questioned about his handling of the health care crisis. If this were to be passed – and there's obviously a patient bill of rights that's included in this. If the minister obfuscates his responsibilities and refuses to carry out his responsibilities under this act with regard to that bill of rights – say that they were to do so negligently or intentionally or incompetently or, you know, for whatever reason – you would think that we should be able to call in some kind of inquiry, some kind of body that would come and be able to question the minister on their handling of that situation.

I mean, people are dying. I thought this new charter that I read through was very broad. I mean, there are a whole bunch of motherhood and apple pie statements in there. It's kind of impossible to disagree with a lot of them. Nonetheless, there are situations – I know there'll be amendments forthcoming – where we could add in some stronger elements to that charter, whether that be legislated wait times or whether that be, you know, something like that, and

that could really hold the minister's feet to the fire to get some things done, as it should.

To absolve them of all responsibility to actually do what this act says is just wrong. Again, we're not talking about making sure that there's personal liability attached to the minister. We're talking about making sure that we can get to the truth of the situation of a tragedy or something that occurs where the minister has been negligent or has handled the situation very poorly, that they can be questioned and made the subject of a proceeding.

Now, do you necessarily want them in front of a judicial body? Probably not. What about some kind of quasi-judicial body like a quasi-judicial public inquiry on the subject? Why would we absolve them from that responsibility? You see, the problem with this government is that they don't like to be questioned, and it's constant. They don't like to be questioned by anybody. They don't like to be questioned by their own caucus, even by people who clearly know more about the subject than anyone in their caucus, like the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark did about health care and emergency room health care in particular. They don't like to be questioned, so it gets them very nervous when there's a situation that might occur where they would be called to the floor, called onto the mat to defend and to justify their actions or their inactions. I cannot support allowing them to have the ability to get away from ever being questioned on their handling of public health under this act.

The other issue I have – and I'll bring this forward later, when I put out one of my other amendments on it – is that it says that a decision or action of the minister, da, da, da, da, da, “shall not be questioned, reviewed,” even reviewed. Let's talk about that. What does that even mean? It says: “Reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise.” Correct me if I'm wrong, but couldn't “otherwise” mean an Auditor General? Does that apply to the Auditor General? Can the Auditor General not come in and review this because it says “or otherwise”? It's not just judicial review. If the whole point of the Auditor General is to come in to make sure that a department or something in Health or Education or anything is being run efficiently, is above board, that there's no unnecessary waste, that the duties under the act are being carried out, et cetera, if that's the whole point of having the Auditor General there, why would we absolve the minister from any kind of review of that Auditor General by this section in this act?

Again, if we're talking about, strictly speaking, court proceedings, I understand that we don't want the minister to be sued every two seconds because someone thinks that the minister didn't do his duty under a piece of legislation. I understand that. I do. But there are other avenues in government like the Auditor General, like a public inquiry, some of these other things where it is appropriate in certain circumstances, where there has been gross mismanagement or negligence or whatever it be, that we have the ability to review the processes and review the minister's actions and review whether their actions and whether they have in fact complied with the legislation that they are bound to enforce and bound to uphold. So that's another part of the section that I have a very large issue with.

Mr. Hancock: It's the standard privative clause.

Mr. Anderson: Well, you know, if it's the standard . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor. Through the chair.

Mr. Anderson: Well, the Minister of Education brings a good point. We have privative clauses in most legislation, in fact in all legisla-

tion, I would say. Well, almost all legislation. That's right, but I think section 10 goes beyond, as opposed to section 11, which deals with the liability and the action.

No action lies against the Minister, the Crown in right of Alberta, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of any of them for anything done or omitted to be done by that person in good faith while carrying out that person's duties or exercising that person's powers under this Act or the regulations.

That I agree with, section 11, no doubt. You need to have that in there. But I think section 10 goes well beyond that. Section 10 actually absolves the minister from any kind of review by anybody if you look at it. I mean, it even says “questioning.” You can't even question because it says “or otherwise.” It says: “Application for judicial review or otherwise.” What does “otherwise” mean?

Mr. Hancock: In any court.

Mr. Anderson: But that's not what it says. It doesn't say: in any court. It says: “in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise.” I mean, we don't know what type of proceeding we're talking about here. [interjection]

Mrs. Forsyth: He needs to get up and speak on the record.

Mr. Anderson: Well, in a few minutes he can speak on the record, and maybe he can clarify that.

I think that this is too broad of a clause. I don't think this is a basic privative clause. I think that it goes well beyond that. Again, it goes back to the issue of ministers being held accountable for their actions and for how they uphold or don't uphold the law. We're talking about people's health here. We're talking about, essentially, passing a patients' bill of rights or charter of rights or whatever you want to call it. If you're going to put those types of measures in, the minister should be held accountable. Judicial review: does that include judicial inquiries? “Judicial review or otherwise” doesn't include a judicial inquiry? I don't know. That's fuzzy. You'd think it could.

3:30

Anyway, it would be nice to at least have some clarification because the real thing I'm trying to get at here is that we need to make sure that ministers are held accountable for their action or inaction if it becomes gross mismanagement or negligence. Obviously, those ministers should not be sued personally, but should a situation arise where they have been negligent and people's health has been affected and their rights under this act have been violated under this new charter, there should be recourse for that individual to come forward and either go to the Auditor General or ask for a public or quasi-judicial inquiry or whatever to review the situation and call the minister to account. That's really the crux of it.

It does speak, Mr. Chair, to a rather long line of legislation proposed by this government whereby they continually try to insulate their ministers from having to come back to this House and try to bring their legislation and changes to legislation through the House. They're always trying to centralize power in the minister's office, (a), and (b) if they can't do that, they try to absolve them of responsibility. You know, maybe that's why I think we see over time that the sessions get shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter. I don't know. Maybe the Member for Edmonton-Riverview can tell us, in his long political career here in the Legislature, whether he has ever seen a session or a year where we have had as few sitting days as we've had this year. We were told that it was the lowest since the 1970s. Anyway, we'll have to look that up.

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Anderson: On the amendment, that's right. Through the chair, please. Obviously, I look forward to having that question answered. Maybe he can remember.

The point is that these sessions are certainly getting shorter, broadly speaking. The days that we are sitting are certainly getting fewer. I think one of the reasons for that is that there are so many decisions that can be made unilaterally in the executive branch through executive orders, et cetera, that there's no reason to come to the House on so many different things. I think that's wrong, and that type of disrespect or lack of faith in the people's House, in the people's Legislature is disturbing. I think, you know, we see that not only in this act but in many different acts.

I think all Albertans are aware now. It brings this kind of feeling of, you know: who's running the place? Look at the confusion, the utter confusion in health care with regards to giving such broad powers to ministers and absolving all of their responsibility. There's this feeling of distrust, like: "Who's running this thing? Who's running the asylum? Are the inmates running the asylum, or are the politicians?" I guess maybe the politicians are the inmates. I don't know. It's very uncomfortable to know that in health care, for example, we don't know who's running it. We don't know if it's the bureaucracy that's running it or if it's the minister that's running it. The story changes every single day and in almost every single news story depending on if it's good for the government or not.

Mrs. Forsyth: It's the left hand or the right over there.

Mr. Anderson: Right. If it's positive to blame the bureaucracy, the bureaucracy gets blamed. If it's a victory, then the government takes credit for it, you know, even though it was a decision by that same bureaucracy. "Oh, we made that decision." Well, which one is it? Again, it goes back to this idea that there's just too much power being given to our centralized, mammoth bureaucracy and not enough responsibility, like under this section, given to the elected House. The more we allow them to absolve their responsibilities to the bureaucracy or through legislation like this or a section like this, I think that it gets very . . . [interjection] Oh, really? That's interesting. Well, now, congratulations to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on being the new parliamentary assistant for health. Good for him.

You know, we have to come here, and we have to be able to debate different things as they come forward, and giving too much power, concentrating too much power in the office of any one minister is a mistake.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. The amendment seeks to delete section 10 of the act. Section 10 is what's normally known as a privative clause. It's quite a normal clause to have in an act. Notwithstanding all the waxing eloquent that we've heard from members opposite, the section is very clear. It refers to "proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise, and no order shall be made or process entered or proceedings taken in any court by way of injunction." It's very specific to court actions. It's very specific, and it's quite normal to say that legislative processes and public policy should be dealt with by a Legislature and officers of the Legislature, including the ombudsmen, including Auditors General, those sort of things. If the Legislature orders an inquiry, that's a perfectly valid thing for a Legislature to do. The privative clause is a standard privative clause

that talks about review by the court. Obviously, you cannot have a minister of health being taken to court on actions of public policy.

Section 11, that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere indicated, is a normal liability clause and is a usual companion clause. These two clauses go together. I'm sorry, but the comments by the members of the opposition with respect to the extent and breadth of this clause are way off base.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview to strike out section 10. Section 10 states that a decision or action of the minister, the health advocate, or any employee of either shall not be questioned, reviewed, or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review. It also states that no order shall be made or writ of mandamus, which is defined as a writ that is issued by a superior court to compel a lower court or government official to perform mandatory or purely ministerial duties directly.

This is a very broad and overarching section, Mr. Chair. Under this section the reality is that if there's a decision which is not acceptable to Albertans or if any organization, for that matter, disagrees with a decision by the minister, they have no legal recourse to dispute the decision or actions of the minister or their appointed employees. The rule of the law should be applied equally to everybody, and this section is putting the minister of health or any employee above the rule of the law. Even the Auditor General could not question the minister or his or her appointed employees.

3:40

With this section in place, one cannot question the minister on any decision they make, and cannot be held accountable. It would be good to have some clarification from the government side on why this section 10 should not be yanked out of the bill. The bill is useless anyway. I think we should get rid of the whole bill.

From experience the government likes to concentrate power in just one hand, as they did in dissolving the health regions into one superboard. They just keep on experimenting back and forth under the guise of providing good health care service to Albertans, which is not happening, Mr. Chair. It has been going downhill for the last 16, 17 years because health care is being kicked around like a football. It's been a political football, kicked around back and forth between the minister and the AHS. It's not doing us any good. Every day health care is going downhill. Wait times are going up. We have red alerts, and we've got yellow alerts. By giving that much power to the minister, I think we will not be able to question them on anything.

This is very, very broad and overarching, like I said, and it provides too much leeway to the minister and the advocate. I think we should have some legal opinion on this. This entire section seems to be granting a large amount of immunity to the minister and the advocate, and any decision that is made will not be allowed to be reviewed by any means. This is giving lots of power to the minister, and the minister is becoming above the law, Mr. Chair.

Even with the cookie comments they could do whatever. We couldn't question them. You know, he could be eating his hamburger, or he could be eating his fries, or he could be over at Joey's Only having his fish and chips, and people could be dying in the emergency rooms.

Dr. Taft: He could be at the bakery getting cookies.

Mr. Kang: Getting cookies. We couldn't question him.

Mr. Chair, the reality is that if Albertans already recognize and disagree with the decision by the minister, as we have seen, there is no legal recourse to dispute the decision or the action. For those reasons, I'll be supporting the amendment, and we should just quash section 10.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I just want to say a couple things if I may. I actually appreciate the Minister of Education from Edmonton-Whitemud for speaking up and clarifying that. I think he said that section 10 is something that's in all legislation. While I appreciate where he's coming from, I guess here is the question that I have. We've been listening for months to the government in regard to this health charter. It's innovative, and it's new, and it's a first in Canada, and nowhere else has it been done. So all of a sudden we have this charter of rights in regard to patients, and it recognizes and says what it must do. The health charter must recognize this. It acknowledges the person's status. It must not be used to limit access to health services.

While that's admirable, it goes in here – you know, I've been with the government and I sat on the legislative committee in regard . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're on the amendment.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm speaking on the amendment.

I sat with the Legislature lawyers, who I think are unbelievable, good lawyers. What I don't understand is the fact that all of a sudden we're taking a decision or action of the minister and saying that it can't be questioned. On one hand, we talk about a piece of legislation that's innovative, that's new, that's providing a health charter, and then all of a sudden we want to usurp a decision that's been made not only by the minister but the health advocate. I can understand where the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is coming from because, obviously, being a former minister of the Crown for two portfolios, the Solicitor General and the ministry of children's services, yes, you don't want to be dragging the minister into every court case, especially if the government or the department is being sued. I've been sued frequently in both portfolios and had representation where I haven't even been to the courtroom or even known what's going on other than the briefing notes that I get from my department people.

Now we're talking about a charter, and I liken that to the federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and I would wonder if they have this. To me, quite frankly, it's confusing. If you want to have something new and you want to have something that's innovative and you want to give patients what they consider a charter and it tells in the charter what the charter must do, then I think everything in this piece of legislation must go from "may" to "must." We plan on bringing some amendments forward to deal with that in particular because you can't say "must" in one breath and then "may" in another or "shall," for that matter.

Like I said, I'm not a lawyer. My colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere talks about absolving the minister or the health advocate from any review. Yet, you know, in this piece of legislation the health advocate currently is reporting to the minister and not reporting to the Legislature, so that means he is absolved, too.

I'm going to listen, and I'm going to continue to hear. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for trying to clarify what he considers something that's normal in any piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much. I appreciate this. I appreciate the debate, and I wish more of the government members would participate because we really need to see what the possible justification for paragraph 10 in Bill 17 really is. Otherwise, this amendment should pass through. Now, we've heard the Minister of Education say that this kind of paragraph is standard, a boilerplate almost – he didn't use that word, but he might as well have – in all kinds of legislation. I want him to prove it. I'd like to see, for example, how much of the legislation that we've debated this year has that particular paragraph.

As the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out, yeah, paragraph 11 is standard, and I don't think we have a problem with that, that any of us would. But paragraph 10 does seem to me to be a strange piece of legislation.

Mrs. Forsyth: It's not in the Parks Act.

Dr. Taft: As I just heard the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek point out that she can't find it in the Parks Act, Bill 29. Frankly, I'm questioning the claim from the Minister of Education, and I'd like him to prove his case, so let's see it. When I think about this and I study it more closely and I try to imagine myself as a lawyer – I'm not a lawyer, and I never intend to be one, but I'll admit, you know, they have their place, Mr. Chairman. Being surrounded by lawyers at this moment, I have to concede that.

I do want to point out here that it says, essentially, that this means that no action by the minister of health will be questioned and so on. It doesn't limit it to the parameters of this act. It simply says: no action by the minister. Given that the scope of this act is extremely broad – it's the Alberta Health Act – it kind of sets a framework for other legislation covering the whole health system. We're talking about an enormous scope here. I want to be very clear. The way I read paragraph 10, it says, in effect, that no employee or agent of the minister of health will ever be questioned.

Well, Mr. Chairman, there are 90,000 employees under the health system in Alberta, public service employees paid by the tax dollars distributed by this Legislature. Ninety thousand. Are they all in due course of their jobs above the law, then? Are they all exempt from being taken to court or questioned? Are they exempt from a court declaration?

3:50

I wonder if some of the lawyers present might want to think about class-action suits, if there was to be a class-action suit against the minister of health. Let's say that the minister of health fails to properly protect people and a Walkerton case breaks out. Public health standards are under the purview of this minister. One thing leads to the next, and eventually the victims organize a class-action suit against the minister. Well, how does this act affect that sort of course of events? Or does it? And if it does, why? Certainly, the way I would read it, it would seem that it could.

There are any number of those kinds of examples that could arise, and I just don't see the point of this legislation. It seems to me that there's a principle in law about fair application of laws, that there's a whole business of administrative law which gets opened up here. Again, are we saying that this minister and all his agents, which presumably includes the board of Alberta Health Services, all kinds of other organizations, are all above that sort of behaviour?

I wonder if there isn't a bit of a concern here about the success, the very dramatic and clear success, of a court declaration going back a few years. The teachers used the method of a court declaration several years ago when they were in a contentious bargaining situation with the Minister of Education. The Minister of Education

at that time was Lyle Oberg, and the president of the ATA was Larry Booi. The teachers concluded that the minister was not bargaining properly, and they sought a court declaration, and they got the court declaration, which forced the minister to back down.

What's interesting in this current paragraph: court declarations are specifically mentioned. It seems to me that when I read that the minister of health shall not be "made the subject of a proceeding in any court" – and it specifically refers to declaratory judgment of a court – maybe they're concerned that, well, they lost once. They don't want to lose again. What happens in these kinds of situations? We may be seeing some anticipation of future problems.

I also want to return to a point that was briefly mentioned by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, a fundamental principle of parliamentary democracy, which is ministerial accountability. Like it or not, every cabinet minister is accountable for what their department does, and if things go too wrong, they take the hit. They're questioned every day in question period because of that principle. At times – it doesn't happen very often ever in this government but in more democratic, dynamic Legislatures or in the Parliament in Ottawa – ministers resign because something goes wrong in their department. That's the idea of ministerial accountability.

Well, suddenly we have here the principle of ministerial nonaccountability built right into the legislation, Mr. Chairman. It makes me begin to wonder if after 40 years the ministers of this government have begun to imagine they have a divine right to govern, that they are above the law, that they are above the courts. We're not prepared to go along with that, and we don't want to see a piece of legislation that starts etching that into precedents or into law. Very, very dangerous.

I was also struck about another case – the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek might remember this; I don't know; she might have even been the minister at the time – but my memory needs to be firmed up. There was a case brought, I believe, under the AISH program where a large number of AISH – or maybe it was PDD – recipients were not paid what they were due over the course of a few years. This was discovered. [interjection] The Member for Calgary-Buffalo is confirming my hunch that it was AISH. They actually sued, took the government to court, took the minister to court, and won. The government had to pay up, and it was, I think, well over a hundred million dollars the government had to pay out under that.

Well, let's imagine that something similar happens in the health care system, that there's a widespread error and people are not given their due benefits. You know, it's not hard to imagine, whether it could be, as I mentioned earlier, a Walkerton situation or even employees of the department not getting properly treated. Maybe they're not properly paid benefits or maybe subcontracting like we saw at Bee-Clean. All of these issues could end up in court, and the minister or the health advocate or the deputy minister or a regional health authority or some other body may be named in these.

Why do we need this legislation? Nothing I've heard from this government has given me any confidence that this is needed. You know, I have a sinking feeling that this amendment is not going to pass, but we're going to go down with guns blazing, as it were, Mr. Chairman. I think that paragraph is a bad, bad piece of law, and I'm not hearing anything from government members that changes my mind. I invite the Minister of Justice: tell us differently; justify what is otherwise an extreme looking paragraph, please.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was listening very intently to the minister's comments, the Minister of Education, the hon.

House leader, when he was standing up, and he kind of just waved his hand and said: ah, those are in every piece of legislation. Well, we've been looking through the legislation of this government, similar legislation where broad ministerial powers are being given, and there is no such clause in at least the ones that we've looked at. I'm sure that somewhere out there there are similar clauses.

With Bill 29, for example, which is in some ways a similar bill because you're giving broad powers to the minister to do certain things and to have certain responsibilities, et cetera, that's not in there. The liability clause is in there, as we mentioned. It definitely is in there. It's in several other of the bills, but there's not such an expansive privative clause, as he calls it. There isn't at all, and I'd be curious to see what is in other acts. Again, that's the point of debate in this House. We've got to work through these things.

Dr. Taft: It seems like this is meaningful debate.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. It would be nice. It would be nice to have meaningful debate, for sure, but, you know, still waiting. Through the chair, it was good to see the hon. House leader, who stood up and talked about it for a little bit.

The other thing people have to understand is that when we're in the House debating, actually it's funny because it's important what is said on the record. When our justices in our courts interpret a piece of legislation, they actually take into account not only the words of the bill – that's obviously something they take into account – but they also take into account what's said in *Hansard*, in the Legislature, which is important. So when you get that kind of clarification from the minister on the record, it's a good thing. Clearly, he has put on the record that in his interpretation this clause does not insulate the minister from a judicial inquiry or a review by the Auditor General for their actions or inactions as pertaining to Bill 17.

4:00

I think even having that debate on the record is worth having. Now we at least know there will be a better chance that if this ever did become the subject of a legal case, clearly, from the Minister of Education's comments, a justice would say: a judicial review can be called on this minister as could any kind of review by the Auditor General. Now, unfortunately, of course, that's not who decides whether or not there's going to be a judicial review. That's kind of something that has to be brought in by the executive branch or by the Legislature. Anyway, that is now on the record, so that's good. That's good that that's his interpretation.

I would say again that the reason I think that this is still a very clouded issue is because it says:

A decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them shall not be questioned, reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise.

Judicial review or otherwise: could that not include a judicial inquiry? Again, I restate the point that, obviously, you can have a judicial review in a court of law, but I think it's very fuzzy to say that that wouldn't include a quasi-judicial inquiry. Maybe no, maybe yes. So it is important that we have this debate on the record.

I would like to see personally – and maybe we will bring forth an amendment on that, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. We'll have to think about it. It might be nice to have some kind of clarification of what this does and does not apply to; for example, having that you can't have somebody sue the minister for something they did here, but there can be a judicial inquiry or the Auditor General can review it. All of these things would be very helpful to have in there. It would clarify the bill further.

And it's good that the minister is on the record there. Again, I would never think to call that hon. member arrogant by any stretch, so I'm not going to, but just the way in which, "This clearly doesn't say this; this is pretty standard; this is in every piece of legislation like this; you know, we've pointed out three bills," goes back to the larger idea that: "You know what? This is just our standard way of doing things." Well, yeah. We know it's your standard way of doing things, Minister. Everything you do is to insulate your ministers from responsibility and to make sure that they have as broad a power as possible and as broad an authority as possible to unilaterally change legislation. So, yeah. We know that might be the standard operating procedure of this government, but it's sure not acceptable to me and to the constituents of Airdrie-Chestermere, and it's not acceptable to many others in this province. But it is acceptable to government.

You know, just because something is, according to a minister and House leader, quote, unquote, standard operating procedure does not necessarily mean that that's the way we need to do things forever. Things do change. Things are changing now. This is an interesting time in Alberta political history, for sure. We're going to have to start looking at clauses like this, and we're going to have to start thinking very hard about: is this is the way we want to do things? Do we always want to do it this way? Do we always want to insulate the ministers and give them broad regulatory powers and let the bureaucracy run the government as is currently being done? Is that the way we're going to do democracy in this province on a go-forward?

Well, our party clearly does not believe that. We clearly believe that on a go-forward the bureaucracy should not be running the government, but the people's representatives should be running the government, that good, solid public employees have a place, and we value their input and we value the work that they do, but there's a very clear line between supporting the legislative process and taking over the legislative process. I think that line has been clearly crossed on so many different levels.

I mean, I think of the chief of staff to the Premier and how he has incredible influence over the decisions that are made in this Chamber by the governing party. That worries me a lot because, frankly, he doesn't have any special abilities or knowledge that I know of that should give him that kind of sway. That is very concerning to me, and I think it's very concerning to Albertans.

I think that we need to look at ways in all of our legislation going forward that we can enshrine as much responsibility as possible on the House to pass our laws and not through regulation, government by bureaucratic fiat, as I like to call it. That is the hallmark of the Premier's current government. It is all about command, control, and government by bureaucratic fiat, and that, I think, is not healthy. So I would like to see us take a long look at clauses like this to make sure that we are in fact respecting our democratic processes and so forth. I think that's very, very important.

One of the things that this alludes to, that I wonder about, is the Proceedings Not Subject To Review, as the clause says. It kind of calls into question what will be reviewed. I think that when we look at a charter – if you flip back, we were talking about the charter in Bill 17 and how this clause affects that charter – they have all these motherhood and apple pie statements; then they've got the definitions; then they've got the health charter. Obviously, you know, it talks about:

The Minister shall establish a Health Charter to guide the actions of regional health authorities, provincial health boards, operators, health providers, professional colleges, Albertans, and any other persons specified in the regulations.

Holy. That's terrifying. Good grief. Did you hear that? We'll have

to go over that one again: "The Minister shall establish . . . to guide the actions" of Albertans. In other words, you've got that the minister shall establish a health charter to guide the actions of Albertans. I'm not really sure what that means.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Anderson: Well, what we're talking about, Mr. Chair, is how section 10 is going to affect the enforcement of the health charter, which is section 2. I think that what I'm trying to do here is go over section 2 and see how section 10 is going to affect whether section 2 can be enforced and whether or not a minister can be called to the floor for not enforcing it or enforcing it too vigorously or whatever. I think it's important. You know, if we want to talk about whether or not we should allow this type of protection for a minister to be questioned or reviewed under section 10, we need to understand exactly what that minister is being asked to enforce and to oversee. I think that's extremely relevant. The whole clause would be meaningless without knowing that.

Then it says:

- (2) The Health Charter must
 - (a) recognize that health is a partnership among individuals, families, communities, health providers, organizations that deliver health services, and the Government of Alberta, and
 - (b) acknowledge the impact of an individual's health status and other circumstances on the individual's capacity to interact with the health system,
 but the Health Charter must not be used to limit access to health services.

Okay. I think there are some positive elements to what is said there.

4:10

Let's flip to section 10, then. Under section 2(1) the minister shall establish a health charter to guide the actions of regional health authorities, provincial health boards, operators, health providers, professional colleges, Albertans, and any other persons specified in the regulations. The health charter must recognize all these things, and it must not be used to limit access to health services. So the minister is given charge of that responsibility – okay? – and let's say that they blow it. Let's say that they do not do this part here: "But the Health Charter must not be used to limit access to health services." Let's say they do something that, in effect, limits access to health services. Let's say whatever. I always ask myself: what would the NDP caucus do?

Mr. Mason: And then you do the opposite.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. And then I do the opposite, but maybe not in this case.

In this case let's say you had a crazy minister that came in and said: "You know what? We want to have a different style of health care system. We're going to do such and such, and we're going to charge these fees, and we're going to make it private and all that stuff." We wouldn't want that at all. That would be terrible. Under this act you would think that that would be used to limit access to health services for certain people – right? – because certain people can't afford to pay for it. Let's say there was only that system and there wasn't the public system, then there wouldn't be anybody who could afford it. There would be a lot of people that would have to buy their own insurance. It would be like the system south of the border, and nobody wants that. It would contravene this charter.

Okay. The minister is responsible for that, so he comes in and does something that contravenes the charter. Then we go over to section 10. Say he does it for the reason that – oh, I don't know; what would be a reason? – there's a big company out there. We'll call it big health. I know you like that one. Let's say there's a big health company that comes out, and they want to establish their own hospital or something like that and charge people for it. It just so happens that on their board of directors there are a few friends of that minister. Let's say we have a minister that's kind of, you know, a little shady. Not the current health minister; let's pretend that there's a future health minister that does something shady. That shady thing they do to enrich themselves: they don't technically break any law. There is some conflict-of-interest stuff. It's not technically illegal, but it puts money in the pockets of their friends and their donors to the party that they represent.

I mean, that would never happen. Certainly not. That would be an irresponsible, corrupt party that would do that, not right, left, or centre. It doesn't matter. It's just not the right thing to do. But let's say that that happened. I couldn't see that. It would be very difficult to see happening, you know. Ahem, Bill 50. Those things can happen from time to time.

Section 10 clearly says that it absolves the minister from any responsibility for doing something. So it absolves the minister from contravening the Alberta health charter here under this legislation. I just look at that and say: "You know what? That's not right." If there needs to be a judicial inquiry into a minister who uses his powers under this act to enrich his friends or the donors to his party, we should have the ability to call a judicial inquiry. There is a grey area as to whether or not this act allows for that.

Now, what happens if we go a step further? What happens if there's fraudulent misrepresentation? Something fraudulent has occurred, so there's a civil case or maybe even a criminal case, which, of course, is different; it's through a criminal court. But let's say there is something that is so grossly negligent that it goes beyond what is proper. Should we not make it clearer in this legislation that if the action of the minister is done with negative intent, it should be the subject of a proceeding in a court or, at the very least, a judicial inquiry? Isn't that a reasonable thing? I would think it is.

That's an example, I think, of how section 10 could be misused or could be used as not a get-out-of-jail-free card but kind of – what's the word? – a get-out-of-trouble-free card by a health minister that is abusing the health charter and does so intentionally in order to enrich others, maybe themselves but, certainly, maybe their friends or maybe the donors to their party, the governing party. Obviously, we're talking about a hypothetical situation. We're not talking about the current governing party; we're talking about a hypothetical future situation, which is what we do when we debate things. We need to think about hypotheticals and see how the legislation would stand up under those hypothetical situations.

Another example. You look under Health Charter in section 2 again to see the effect of section 10 on the health minister trying to enforce section 2:

- (3) A failure of a person to act in a manner consistent with the Health Charter may be dealt with by the Health Advocate in accordance with sections 4 and 5 or by the Minister under section 8 or 9.

And then

- (4) A failure of a person to act in a manner that is consistent with the Health Charter does not in itself give rise to

and then it goes again into

- (a) a cause of action or other legal enforceable claim, or
(b) proceedings in any court or before any body or person having the power to make decisions under an enactment.

Well, jeepers, doesn't that sound like the exact same clause we're debating?

So that's the other thing. It seems to me that it's almost like there's a lot of duplication here. Maybe I'm wrong, but you have:

A failure of a person to act in a manner consistent with the Health Charter . . .

so would include the minister, obviously, and

does not in itself give rise to

- (a) a cause of action or other legal enforceable claim,
or
(b) proceedings in any court or before any body or person.

So there seems to be some duplication there, Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A1.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to get up and speak on amendment A1 by Dr. Taft, amending by striking out section 10.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, it's the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. You called his name.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm reading here. I apologize, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

The amendment strikes out section 10. I just want to bring it up again. I know that it's been brought up several times.

A decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them shall not be questioned, reviewed or made subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise, and no order shall be made or process entered or proceedings taken in any court by way of injunction, declaratory judgment, prohibition or mandamus or otherwise to question, review, prohibit, restrain or compel the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them.

This is a major concern in a democratic country, where it is supposed to be one law, one people. Nobody should be above the law in Canada.

I know that when we look around at some places in the world and we see the litigious lifestyle that they're leading, that's fearful for many. They say: oh, you know, we don't want to do that. I absolutely agree. We do not want to do that. We do not want to have more court cases going forward, more problems being covered. What we need to do is make sure that the people who are doing those things are doing a good job. Whenever you tell somebody they're free to do what they think is best and, "Just so you know, there is no accountability," it just puts the scales of justice out of balance. As good-hearted and as well-meaning as someone might be, when there's no accountability and they say, "Oh, we're above the law," you create a position that there's going to be a problem with.

4:20

We need accountability. The most important thing in a democratic society is to have that accountability. When someone does something wrong, they need to be held accountable and not be above the law or absent from the law. That's what this is about. This is saying that whatever they do, we're not going to be able to take them to court, we're not going to be able to question them, we're not going to be able to review the subject or what they've done. We're going to take these proceedings out of the courts. [interjection] The Minister of Education is spouting off again. I'm not sure what it is. It's probably not making any sense because they're saying this is standard. Can't you hear him? Can't the chair hear him?

The Deputy Chair: Talk to me. Ignore him. Talk to me.

Mr. Hinman: I'm asking the chair a question. Can you hear him spouting off?

The Deputy Chair: No. Talk to me.

Mr. Hinman: Well, sometimes they need to be addressed through the chair. Mr. Chair, the Minister of Education seems to be spouting off about the judicial system. I know he's a lawyer. Perhaps he thinks that he's above the law, too, and that's why he wants this clause everywhere. I know he spoke earlier to it, saying that this is standard. [interjection] I'm speaking to the chair. How much better can I do?

It's not right for someone that's been in that position to say that we need to be above and beyond the law. It simply isn't acceptable. Again, this is speaking in favour of this bill coming from a minister of this government. We understand that they're in support of this bill. They've looked at it, obviously, in their cabinet and said: this is what we want to bring forward. But the question is: is this in the best interests of Albertans? Is this in the best interests of our health care system?

I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is going to want to bring in legislation to legislate accountability for people working in the health care profession. That's exactly what this government doesn't want. It's one of the reasons, I believe, he's been turfed from the government. It's because he wants accountability. He's struggled for two and a half years inside that caucus, wanting changes.

The Deputy Chair: The bill.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. We're talking about section 10, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Mr. Hinman: What section 10 is saying is that we're not going to be held accountable, that no one can ask a question. I mean, it's right in there on the second line: "shall not be questioned." So I'm speaking on why this needs to be struck, and part of that is an example of what's been going on. We had a report that two and a half years ago was given to this government on the condition of our emergency rooms. But they're not allowed to be questioned. They're not allowed to be held accountable. That's a problem. What this section will say is: no, we can't be questioned. Again, this is what regimes do in other places of the world so that they're able to squash the information. There's not public information. "You can't know about this. It's okay to keep these reports from the Legislature, from the people. We're not going to be questioned."

This is unacceptable if, in fact, we want to move forward. If we're going to have a great health care system, Mr. Chair, it's because there is accountability. It's because people know that I'm not above the law, that I can be questioned, that this is an open and honest... [interjections] We're trying to be efficient here and answer the minister's questions at the same time.

It is interesting the way this government wants to protect itself. What we want is to have the government accountable. What we want is to have health care officials accountable. The creation of the superboard, again, distanced all of those people from accountability. It's interesting, you know, that we have some members now calling for the head of AHS, but the whole process is what's wrong. It's not just who's at the head. It's the process of what that person at the head can do, and it's unacceptable.

Bill 17 in its current condition is not going to serve the public interest, and to say that the people that are put in those positions cannot be questioned is just wrong, Mr. Chair. What we need to do is to continue talking about this, debating this, and going over it and over it until we can come to an acceptable agreement. This section needs to be struck.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview would not have brought this forward just to have debate time. He's been in the health profession. He understands these things far better than I do, but this... [interjection] Yes, but he did do some research under health, I thought. Maybe I'm...

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I'm being easily distracted here because there's so much to talk about, and it's so critical that section 10 get struck from this – I don't even want to call it a bill because all it is is just a bad bill. It's a bill that when you cannot deliver, what you do is you deliver in words. Worse than that, though, you deliver in words, but you put in a clause like clause 10 that says that we're not going to be accountable.

My hon. colleague talked a great deal about the health charter and section 2 and the impact that section 10 has. It negates. My father always says that in a contract the large letters giveth, and the small letters taketh away. Read the details at the bottom of the page. At the start of Bill 17 they give wonderful admonition and wonderful ideas on what they're going to do to fix our health care system. All it is is words.

It's not going to deliver anything that they shouldn't and couldn't already be delivering if they were given the authority to actually act in their respective hospitals and able to fully use their facilities as well as to fully use their staff. They're not allowed to do that, and that's what this should be about. Do we want to hold our people accountable that are in health care? Yes. Do we want just litigious cases going forward? Absolutely not. I think that that's something, though, that can be addressed in the courts, accountability, by actually having to pay for frivolous cases that might be coming forward. That is not what we're trying to accommodate here. What we're trying to do is ensure that the health minister, the health advocate, any employee, or any agent is accountable to Albertans, that they can be questioned.

Again, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark brought this into question. It's fine if the government wants to kick him out for questioning them, but he should be able to continue questioning what's going on and to ask those hard questions. In here the proceedings are not subject to review; that's what section 10 is. These are the proceedings that are not subject to review. I just find it amazing that we have put these clauses in. I would actually think that if you were to take it to proper lawyers, they would say: "Well, no. That clause, even though it's in there, can't trump the Charter of Rights. It can't trump the Bill of Rights." Yet they put that in there, and it's just not what I call good legislation.

If, in fact, the words in the charter that "the Minister shall establish a Health Charter to guide the actions of regional health authorities, provincial health boards" are to have any effect – it's interesting that that's in there. Provincial health boards. Does that mean that they are listening to us and they're going to back off from where they are and go to regional health authorities? What is a regional health authority? Why is that still left in here under section 2? When they say that we're staying with the provincial health board, does that mean that they're going to have several boards that are all above the law and not going to be able to be questioned or, again, taken to court over neglect? That's what this bill in section

10 points to. Perhaps the Minister of Education will get up to clarify. I would be interested to hear his words in clarification, if that, in fact, is what he thinks that he can do on this, that I'm misunderstanding the purpose of this. But it just seems to me to be pretty plain English to say that we want no accountability in the court of law with our health care officials, right from the minister down to any agent that they have asked to carry out their actions.

4:30

Again, I think that it's most clear for us with the superboard that they're given the directions on those agents and what they should be doing. They've got protocols to say: "This is when you can actually open up extra beds in a hospital. You can't do it in seven hours and 45 minutes; it's eight hours." So if you had a loved one that was there and they waited for seven hours and 45 minutes – I'll show the loop back, trust me – the protocol and the administrator that has what I want to call just ridiculous protocol in place says: "Oh, no. We were within our limits. We got you in there before the eight hours." If we can't question that, what are we going to achieve?

This is being set out in the Premier's new protocol that he's so thrilled to talk about. It allows eight hours for someone to sit and suffer and not necessarily be treated underneath what's going to be part of their Health Act, and there's nothing that Albertans can do about it. They'll say: "Well, that's fine. It's within our protocol. That's what we've described." They can't question it. They can't have any course of action in the courts. What can they do on that? There are going to be so many cases and there are currently so many cases of individuals who have lost their quality of life, or they've taken their life, lost their life due to facilities that are being overrun, not enough workers in there, not enough beds being opened up in facilities to move people out of the way to allow new patients in.

You know, we hear mention that this is like a war zone, that there is so much that's happening, that it's just out of control, and they just line the beds up and say: well, the doctors will get there as quick as they can. It's also interesting to me that there's been a lot of discussion about doctors and whether or not we have enough. My understanding is that they've never cancelled a shift because the doctors weren't there but that it has been because the nurses are not there. Again we can see another hole in the system that without an actual administrator, that has the authority over the facilities and over the staff, can't be addressed. This again protects those authorities by saying: well, we can't be questioned. The authorities are handcuffed and they say, "Well, these are the parameters which you must function in. We don't want you to open up extra beds if someone has only waited six hours." We have to ask, "Is that good enough? Can we question it?" Section 10 says that, no, you shall not be questioned.

I just can't for the life of me understand why this government would bring this in and say it's a standard clause. You know, it reminds me of another standard clause that government has when it sells Crown land. The standard clause for years was that if you sell Crown land and there's swamp area on it or rocks or something that you can't actually use as a development or what you're buying it for, you don't have to pay for those acreages. In the same standard clause for years, though, it says: but if you are to drain the swamp or to upgrade it, then you have to pay for it. The government signed a contract with some developers around a city that bought some Crown land, and they struck that clause. So even if it is something they do for years and years, it's amazing when and how they strike clauses, again, at the minister's discretion.

This is just not acceptable, Mr. Chair. We need to take some steps back. We need to do some better consultation and ask: Should not the people have the right to ask questions? Should not health care professions be held accountable?

You know, we've had some sad tragedies in our health care system, and rather than hold people accountable, what we do is pass new protocols. There was a tragic death two or three years ago with a senior who was boiled to death in her bathtub. We had a review. We looked at it. The cost to the system was enormous. But most sad was the cost of life to that individual. Now we've put protocols in place. It's amazing the steps that we have to go through because common sense and accountability were never pursued in that case, in my opinion.

This again allows for such neglect. Whether it's wilful or by accident, neglect is neglect. When we have an accident, we're held accountable. Accidents are supposed to be just that. This was an accident. It wasn't intentional. Nobody intentionally drives into the person in front of them, yet we have a court of law where when that happens, someone can be and is held accountable. We can ask questions. We can refer to the courts for compensation. That's what our system is.

In our Charter of Rights and Freedoms it says right there that we will respect the rule of law. This does not respect the rule of law. This says that we're above the rule of law. We're government. It's okay. We don't have to abide by those rules or regulations because we're of good intent. It doesn't matter whether the intent is out of neglect, whether it's out of sheer selfishness, whatever that intent might be. Although we don't realize the motives behind it, it says that it's okay. We're not going to question. We're not going to take them to court. We're going to look the other way because, oh, this is the health minister or the health authorities, and they've appointed that individual. You know what? Accidents are accidents, and we're not going to hold them accountable, nor are you going to be able to be compensated for an accident.

The sad thing, to try and wrap this up, is that if you don't protect the individual's rights with the rule of law, whether they've been wronged or not, when an accident is not allowed to be followed through, we in fact don't protect our society as a whole. We need to protect a society. The way you protect a society is by protecting the individual. When an individual has been wronged, whether it's on the road, whether it's in our hospitals, wherever it might be, they need to be able to go through the due process of the courts to try for the best, again, with the balance of justice. We talk about it trying to be balanced out. It cannot always be, but we try to accommodate those people.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to rise to speak to this amendment to Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, that Bill 17 be amended by striking out section 10. Now, section 10 is entitled Proceedings Not Subject to Review, and it says that

a decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them shall not be questioned, . . .

I can't believe that that's actually there.

. . . reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise, and no order shall be made or process entered or proceedings taken in any court by way of injunction, declaratory judgment, prohibition or mandamus or otherwise to question, review, prohibit, restrain or compel the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I want to sort of address this in two ways. The first one is a question which I have raised with the Attorney General. The question is whether or not this section is limited to any action or decision made specifically under this act or whether,

because it seems to be written this way, “a decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them” means anything they do under any authority given to them by any other act.

4:40

In my view, if the intention is that their decisions and actions cannot be questioned, reviewed, or made the subject of a proceeding in any court for anything they do under this act, then it should say that very specifically, but it does not. I think there’s a real question of how this would be interpreted by a court. I am assuming that it is not the intention to give the minister this kind of protection for anything he might do. I could be wrong. Maybe that is the intention, in which case it’s a horrendous exemption from due process and accountability.

Regardless, Mr. Chairman, I think that even if it was clearly written to limit scrutiny to functions the minister of health, advocate, their employees, or agents performed under this act only and that was really, really clear in the legislation, it would still be a very bad section, in my view. So for that reason I’m going to support the amendment brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, that this section be struck out. Frankly, I think that this is a very, very wide exemption from scrutiny that shouldn’t exist. I think, for example, that if the minister makes a decision which might cost someone their life or result in permanent, ongoing loss of ability to earn a living, the person who is affected or their family, their survivors, should have right of action against the minister. I think that we owe people that.

I also, you know, want to question the wording here. It’s one thing to protect a minister from a court action for political decisions that they might make, but what this says is that they “shall not be questioned.” I don’t know whether that means they may not be questioned by a court or they may not be questioned by anyone. I guess this reinforces my point, Mr. Chairman, that the language in this section is particularly sloppy and unclear and should, at the very least, be clarified by the government. I would suggest that even if this were to go ahead, the language should be reviewed and tightened up and made very, very clear because it’s not clear at all.

I’d like to just talk a little bit about how this affects the act in general because the entire act is written in a way that makes sure that nothing has to happen. There’s a health charter, and it is not enforceable in a court. There’s a health advocate, and the health advocate doesn’t have to investigate any breaches of the charter. He or she can or may, and if they do, they can’t enforce anything. They have no authority whatsoever. All they can do is write a report and send it to the minister, and even if there’s a complete breach of the provisions of the health charter and the advocate writes a strong report saying that Alberta Health Services, for example, is violating the health charter, the minister doesn’t have to do anything about it.

It leaves us wondering why the government thinks this is such a great step forward in terms of the health system. I don’t think that it’s designed to be effective in any way. I think it’s for show. I think this is something you put in the shop window to try and pretend that you’re doing something.

By including section 10 in the act, we have exempted the minister or the health advocate or any employee or agent of either of them from real accountability. This particular section reinforces the lack of effectiveness of this particular bill. It’s written deliberately and obviously designed to ensure that this act means nothing. There’s nothing enforceable. There is absolutely nothing that anyone can do if the minister doesn’t choose to act or the health advocate doesn’t choose to act no matter how egregious the breach of the charter is. Of course, this doesn’t even address the question that the health

charter itself may in fact not be anything that defines clearly people’s rights.

We’ve had some discussion in the last couple of weeks about national standards for emergency room wait times, and when the emergency room doctors’ letter was first made public, it became apparent that these concerns had been raised nearly two years ago with the Premier. The Premier had promised to do certain things about them and, of course, did not, so that created quite a political problem for the government. The health minister rushed in within a couple of days of the letter, had a meeting with the doctors, assured them that everything would be fine and that they were finally going to act on their concerns.

One of the things that the minister then did was say: I am enforcing national standards in terms of emergency room waiting times on the health system, and we’re going to meet those targets. Of course, it soon became apparent, within days, that that was a joke and that because of the negligence and the failure to act nearly two years before, they were in no position to meet those targets.

At that point someone might have said: in the interests of accountability these standards should be enforceable. We should have been able to take the government to court two years ago to get a court order requiring them to meet those standards. If we had a charter with teeth, a charter that meant something, and if it included those sorts of things, then indeed people would have had recourse against the negligence of this government nearly two years ago and could have obtained, potentially, a court order directing the government to meet the standards that they had set for themselves, but we didn’t, and of course the chaos in the emergency rooms in our major cities has continued to grow unabated, and the suffering and even the dying, Mr. Chairman, have continued because there was not a charter that was enforceable.

4:50

Now, I’m not convinced that the charter is the right approach, but, Mr. Chairman, if we’re going to have a charter, then it seems to me the minister and all of his officials need to abide by it and respect it. This act is designed to let them not do that. It’s specifically designed to exempt them from any responsibility and thus, I think, renders the charter and the health advocate and the entire act virtually meaningless.

I think there’s a possibility that we could bring some relevance and meaning to this entire act by deleting section 10 so that, as I read it, this would imply that decisions or actions of the minister, the health advocate, their employees or agents could be questioned, could be reviewed, or even made the subject of a proceeding in any court by an application for judicial review or otherwise. I think that that gives and that places in the hands of the patient or the patient’s family or ordinary citizens, the people who use the health care system of this province, some rights to actually require the government and require the minister to do the things that they promised to do.

This has emerged, Mr. Chairman, if I may, as one of the defining hallmarks of this government, and that is to say that it makes promises and it makes commitments over and over and over again, and it does not keep them. The people should have some rights to enforce on this government the requirements of meeting the standards that they set out, meeting the promises that they’ve made, especially with respect to things like standards in health care. Had that existed, then I think we could have prevented some deaths and some very serious suffering that’s taken place in our emergency rooms.

Here’s an opportunity for this Assembly to actually put a little bit of teeth into an act that otherwise is just all gums, Mr. Chairman.

You know, it's got no teeth to enforce anything. It could slobber on you a little bit, but it cannot bite, and it cannot be used to make the government accountable, to make the government keep its promises with respect to health care, and to ensure that patients do get the care that they are entitled to under our health care system.

I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has made a very good amendment, one that I think the House should seriously consider. Failing that, then at the very least the language in this particular clause needs to be made much clearer and more certain so that anyone in the future that has to interpret this particular section or interpret this act can do so with a very clear understanding of what this Legislature meant to do. I don't think that with the current wording that's going to be entirely possible. Perhaps a court might interpret it as it's intended, but I wouldn't guarantee that that would be the outcome. I think we're better off to clarify the language so that it's very, very clear that we're not intending a blanket exemption for the minister and the health advocate with respect to any decisions that they might make under any authority that they might have aside from this act.

Mr. Chairman, if I may conclude, this act as it stands is virtually useless. There is no right here of anyone in the province to be able to enforce the health charter so much touted by this government and by the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford, who was today appointed the new parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness. Congratulations to him. Good luck to him, I would say. I do think that if we take out section 10, then there's a little bit of accountability that's injected into this act. I think that if you're going to establish a health charter to set out the rights of patients, then you should make it possible. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Obviously, the hon. minister of finance has got lots of extra energy, you know, which often comes from eating a lot of salmon, Mr. Chairman, and he's obviously got a lot of energy today.

Getting back to this amendment, it really does seem to me that it's clear that a charter that is not enforceable, that doesn't have to be enforced by the health advocate or doesn't have to be investigated by the health advocate, who doesn't have to recommend anything, where the minister doesn't have to act on any report, is a charter that is worse than useless because, Mr. Chairman, it gives false hope. It gives false hope to people who think that they've got rights when, in fact, they don't have any rights at all.

This particular clause makes sure that they don't have any rights, and for that reason I think that we should support the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview because I think that he has shown us a way that we can strengthen this act, however slightly, and maybe make it something that's even worth having, which without this amendment and some of the others it's not.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments made by many of the members who have spoken on this bill so far. I too, like the hon. member who just spoke, believe that this is a bill that does nothing, that prescribes a make-believe charter that may have an advocate who may involve themselves in the health of the citizenry and may have some employees do something on your behalf. That said, it's all "may." The bill has no real force to it, no real oomph to it. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, if you wish to speak to someone here in committee, please sit down beside them rather than standing. Thank you. And that goes for both sides of the floor.

Mr. Hehr: In my view, it's a bill designed to do nothing. That said, despite the fact that this bill is set up to do absolutely nothing does not mean that the government needs to put in a prohibitive clause such as this, that is essentially taking a sledgehammer to kill a fly.

I was just going back – and it's been a while. Nevertheless, I just found this textbook down in the library.

5:00

Dr. Taft: Way to go. A little research.

Mr. Hehr: Yes. I found a library. Yes, I did. It says:

What is administrative law? It is the law that governs public officials and tribunals who make decisions that affect the interests of individual persons and whose authority to make those decisions is derived from statute. Administrative law prescribes the rules by which these authorities are expected to operate and, when these rules are not complied with, provides the complaint procedure and the remedies.

That's essentially what we're discussing here. We've had a minister and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford bring forward an act that apparently is going to have a charter, that is apparently going to have a health advocate, and that is apparently going to do a lot of wonderful things for Albertans.

Dr. Taft: If you believe them.

Mr. Hehr: If you believe them. That is always the thing. That is what it is.

Now, let's go to section 10, what is currently written in section 10. Section 10 states that a decision or action of the minister, the health advocate or any employee of either shall not be questioned, reviewed, or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review. It also states that no order shall be made or writ of mandamus. You get the meaning of that: nothing shall be done at a court of law.

Essentially, what this says is that there shall be no recourse for our citizens should this health charter, in fact, get up, should this health advocate office get going, should this health advocate have two or three employees. Basically, it says that these people are going to be held to no standard whatsoever. There is nothing I can see here that does this.

What is even more troubling to me, even so, is that this is a bill that may actually take the place of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Okay. We have a bill here that is describing a health advocate and people who work very hard, who are going to be dealing with the health system, things that deal with the right to life, liberty, and the security of person. Those are things which our Charter in section 7 holds very dear. Now, call me crazy, Mr. Chair, but a health advocate and his employees will be dealing with things such as the right to life, liberty, and security of person. Okay?

My reading is, at least, that if you've established this for any kind of purpose whatsoever, a health advocate would be dealing with those issues. Under a charter you have to have an ability, then, to go have a tribunal or a court system look at whether the decisions this health advocate is making or this charter is doing have implications on your right to life. It seems fair that if we have a health advocate and we're taking away – we are talking on the amendment, sir.

It's pretty clear to me that we're taking away these people's rights not only to basic administrative law, which I read from earlier, that first chapter in here. It's from *Administrative Law in Canada*, the

fourth edition, by Sara Blake. It actually got to the heart of the issue very quickly. I'll repeat that.

What is administrative law? It is the law that governs public officials and tribunals who make decisions that affect the interests of individual persons and whose authority to make those decisions is derived from statute.

That is the health advocate. That is this health charter. That is all that we're talking about.

Section 10 takes away that basic administrative law principle. It may actually be a Charter violation. In fact, I would go out on a limb and say that if this is challenged and if this health advocate actually does anything – I don't think it does, but let's give the extreme, extreme, extreme benefit of the doubt here that our health advocate is actually supposed to do something – it appears to be an infringement. Really, those are things governments should be loath to do. They should not take away people's rights and so callously throw them to the side.

The second thing. You know, even now, when I think about this even more, if they were just setting this up for shits and giggles – yeah, I'll say that: for shits and giggles – where they were just doing it to have some fun . . . I take that back. Okay? I apologize for using that term. For giggles, to amuse themselves, to say to themselves: hey, let's send these people to a health advocate where they can go rant and rave and do some stuff; it'll take them out of our offices, and we can all have a big joke out of it. I think that is grossly unfair to give this health advocate no power and no ability to do things. When you're dealing with people who have already been overrun by a system that they maybe don't understand and don't understand what is being effected to them and are going through a terrible sickness, terrible illness, or terrible disease, I think that's unfortunate and unnecessary.

If we look at this, back to the amendment on section 10, I stand by it that this is a good amendment that will at least allow people some recourse, allow people some ability to challenge the decision-making process, to have their day in court, to hold the government to account to see if their statutory and Charter rights have been taken advantage of. I think that's an important step. Governments should be loath to do things like putting in this section 10.

Nevertheless, sir, I'd just like to say thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to speak on that, and we'll go from there. This is a good amendment on a bad bill, that makes a bad bill slightly better. Okay?

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the amendment.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. Thank you for respecting my democratic rights to stand up in this House and talk about the bill. [interjection] I am what, Mr. Minister? So disappointing to hear such language. So disappointing.

Obviously, I want to talk on section 10 again, just from different angles. There are just so many different angles to talk about this from because section 10 affects the rest of the bill. Really, I mean, the minister's job is going to be to clearly enforce this bill, enforce the provisions hereunder. So basically everything in this bill relates to section 10 in that if the minister fails to enforce the provisions here, you know, you've got a problem, and section 10 would protect that minister no matter how negligent they were.

5:10

We've gone over section 2, and I'm a little curious about it. I wouldn't mind getting the House leader's comments on this if he'd like to answer as he did the first time. Of course, he's been an MLA

far longer than I have and has far more experience with regard to legislation and writing it and going through it and sifting it and all that sort of thing. He's obviously very skilled at it. I guess my question is that with regard to this section 10 it seems to be somewhat repetitive of section 2(4) of the bill, which says:

A failure of a person to act in a manner that is consistent with the Health Charter does not in itself give rise to

(a) a cause of action or other legal enforceable claim, or

That kind of goes to section 11. Then it says:

(b) proceedings in any court or before any body or person having the power to make decisions under an enactment.

Now, this is very interesting. I really would like the House leader to clarify it. Maybe I'm just not understanding something. That's okay, but I want to understand. If you look at section 10, it says, as we've been discussing:

A decision or action of the Minister, the Health Advocate or any employee or agent of either of them shall not be questioned, reviewed or made the subject of a proceeding in any court by application for judicial review or otherwise.

We've talked about how I think that that could be interpreted to disqualify something like a judicial inquiry. The House leader says that, no, that can't be used for that, clearly, and so forth.

Then it goes over. If you look at section 2(4)(b), it includes any proceedings in any court – okay; that's just like section 10, any court – or before any body, so it almost expands it: before any body or person, even a person, having the power to make decisions under an enactment. I guess the confusion is because 2(4) says, "A failure of a person to act in a manner that is consistent with the Health Charter." So if the minister fails to act in a manner that is consistent with the health charter, under that section it says that that does not in itself give rise to proceedings in any court or before any body – that could include the Auditor General; it could include a judicial inquiry; it could include any of those things – having the power to make decisions under an enactment.

That's troubling to me. If section 10 doesn't prohibit the minister from being responsible to a review of the Auditor General or a judicial inquiry, does section 2(4)(b) not do exactly that? Does it not prohibit the minister from being subject to a judicial inquiry or a review of the Auditor General?

That's my question. If the minister indicates that he would like to answer that question, I'll cede the floor. Otherwise, I can talk more about it. Again, the question that I have is that under section 10 the hon. House leader said this would not preclude a review of a judicial inquiry or a review of the Auditor General. Okay? He said that. But in section 2(4) it says:

A failure of a person to act in a manner that is consistent with the Health Charter does not in itself give rise to . . .

(b) proceedings in any court or before any body or person having the power to make decisions under an enactment.

Does that not preclude a judicial inquiry or anything like that should a minister fail to act in a manner that is consistent with the health charter? I don't know. Is that something that the minister would be willing to answer?

All right. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm always delighted to enter and engage in debate if it can bring something that's as simple as section 10 to a conclusion. Section 10 clearly talks about court reviews of matters happening under the act. Section 2 is about the health charter, and clearly the term "charter" has many meanings in Canadian law and Canadian usage. There's a lot of charter law that has been created since the development of the Canadian Charter of Rights.

This is clearly not intended to be a charter which provides for the courts to spend the next 50 years defining things. This is clearly intended to be a patients' rights or an Albertans' rights charter with respect to the health system and to define the goals and objectives and the responsibilities that people should have under that charter. It provides a process for a health advocate to review and for that process to be dealt with. Those are dealt with clearly in sections 4 and 5 by the health advocate and by the minister under sections 8 and 9. Those are the processes for dealing with issues under the health charter.

Subsection 2(4) is clearly about providing for the fact that this charter is not the kind of charter that allows for litigation for the rest of time but one which is clearly intended to set out a specific set of expectations for Albertans and responsibilities, possibly, when that's developed and then a mechanism for people to deal with issues that arise coming out of that without going through the court system or other processes.

So the act clearly sets up its own processes for review and provides for those processes, and I think that's very clear on the face of it.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I appreciate that. That was very clarifying, and it's good to have this discussion. Basically, what I heard from the minister – and I'll go back and read his comments in *Hansard*, fair comments – seemed to say that this charter is not intended, obviously, to go through any litigation process and so forth.

Now, here's the problem. I agree we don't want health charter challenges blocking our courts unnecessarily. However, I guess the whole point of this bill, Bill 17, is to – well, maybe it's not the whole point. There are a couple of things in it that the government is trying to get at, but one of the main objects of this bill is this health charter. It's to enshrine the rights of patients, Albertans, with regard to their health care system and to try to raise the level of expectation, I guess, or quality that we can expect. I guess I would say that, I mean, if there's no mechanism of enforcement, we're just going to put words on paper and look at the words: "recognize that health is a partnership among individuals, families, communities, health providers, organizations," da, da, da, da, da, "acknowledge the impact of an individual's health status and other circumstances on the individual's capacity to interact with the health system."

The minister is going to establish this health charter, whatever it is, so they put this thing into place. Then let's say that the minister fails to do something, and that triggers subsection (4): "A failure of a person to act in a manner that is consistent with the Health Charter." Under this legislation there's absolutely no penalty or enforcement mechanism or anything. They can't ask anybody to review a situation. They can't ask for a judicial inquiry or the House can't ask for that no matter how egregious the failure to comply with the health charter is.

I guess I'm here left wondering why we are here – and maybe that is why we're here – in this House putting together something that, frankly, the Premier could put out on his blog and say: you know, we're going to put out a set of guidelines and policies that we're going to try to uphold. It's just like the minister of health with his kind of picked-out-of-the-air health targets. It's just kind of like: yeah, sure, we'll do this, and we'll respect patients' rights to get timely care, and we'll make sure that that happens. But if there's no mechanism to enforce it, if one of them says – I'll give you an example, and maybe I'll make myself more clear.

5:20

I had a constituent of mine – and it was in the news a lot – who went to a doctor. He was having all kinds of dizzy spells and

sensitivity to light, and all kinds of awful things were happening to him. He was just 14 at the time. His parents took him in to see a doctor at the Children's hospital. Now, doctors, of course, like everyone else, sometimes make mistakes, and that's what happened here. There was a severe misdiagnosis of this boy. Okay. So that happened. They said that, you know, he'll get over it, whatever, and they sent him home.

Time goes by, situation gets worse, and he's literally on death's door. It got worse and worse and worse and worse. So he went back to the doctor, and he wanted a second opinion because the parents said that they thought something was missed: "It's just not getting better. He's getting more sensitive to light. You have to tinfoil his room. He can't come out." They took him out of school. It ended up that for four years, eventually, they went through this ordeal, but for the first year they had to take him out of school. It just got progressively worse.

He went back, and the doctor said, "No; I won't see you; you're just making it up," da, da, da, da, da, for some reason. This is all documented. It's an absolute tragic case. So they went to try to go to another doctor. They set up the appointment, and just before they went in to that doctor – of course, the new doctor would phone the first doctor to kind of get an idea of what the diagnosis was, and the diagnosis according to that first doctor was that he was making it up. Okay. This happened two or three times to him, and this is over about a four-year period. They tried all kinds of naturopath stuff. I mean, they couldn't get a second opinion.

Eventually, it got so bad he was literally having seizures every day, and they took him down to the United States because there they didn't need permission to go get a second opinion; you just get one. They're not a wealthy family at all, but they raised some money locally, and they went down and got a proper scan. It turned out that he had a golf ball sized tumour in his head that the original scan had missed, and they refused to get him another one after that. So this was what they found. They found it, and they wanted to act upon it, but for whatever reason they still couldn't get back in to see a doctor up here. There was some kind of waiting application process that had to occur for them to be able to do it out of country, et cetera, et cetera.

Long story short – oh, just to give you an essence of how bad it was, I actually talked to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark about it. He actually came down. We actually went together to his house. He did a checkup of this guy and phoned a colleague in Edmonton to come see him. The appointment was booked. The colleague in Edmonton phoned the first doctor at the Children's hospital, and the appointment got cancelled. So even bringing government into this – it was just bizarre. It was like: where do I live? It's insane. In this whole time, by the way, the family doctor kept referring them back to different specialists, so the family doctor was clearly onboard, clearly saw something wrong.

My point is that under a charter I would like to see the right to a second opinion on a life-threatening – if the family doctor says that something life threatening is occurring and the specialist says no, there should be a right to at least get a second opinion. I think that's a very reasonable thing to do.

If someone says that you have cancer and you only have a year to live, I think that it makes absolute sense that you should be able to go get a second opinion on that diagnosis – I think that's only fair – if you feel inclined. Some don't. Some just trust their doctor, and that's fine. But some feel that it's necessary to get a second opinion. In this case the lack of ability to get a second opinion almost cost this little guy – well, he's now 18. It almost cost this boy his life.

If we were to put something like that in the charter – let's say the minister says: yeah, I'm going to put that in my charter under section

2. So he puts it in into the health charter, and then the minister proceeds to do something. In the future someone like that comes to him and says: "I've got a problem. I need you to look into it. I'm not getting a second opinion," and the minister drags his feet. He doesn't get his bureaucracy to do anything about it; he doesn't call the head of the physicians and surgeons and say, "Hey, what's the problem?" et cetera, et cetera, et cetera; he doesn't put the processes in place necessary to make sure that this little guy can get a second opinion, then he would be in contravention of his own charter.

Okay. So that all happens. He's in contravention of his own charter. But then there's no mechanism to enforce it. It doesn't matter. They can't go to their MLAs, because they come to their MLAs and we can't do anything. We can't call a judicial review. We can't call for anything. Under this act we can do jack squat. We can't sue them under this act. We can't do anything. We can't ask the Auditor General to review. We can't do anything to enforce. There's no mechanism of enforcement in this act, and that's according to the House leader's own words. It's not meant to be something that's actually enforced.

Dr. Taft: Heaven forbid.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. It's just words, right? It's a health charter. You know, we're going to try to do our best. It's like Boy Scouts. Do our best: DYB, DYB, DYB; DOB, DOB, DOB. That's what it is and that's why it's . . . [interjection] Absolutely. I'm a chief Scout. You didn't know that, hon. member? You should have remembered that. But I still can't shoot worth a darn.

Anyway, there's no mechanism of enforcement. That's a problem. I get really tired of legislation that comes forward and there is no – if you're going to pass legislation, please put something in that makes it enforceable. Quit the feel-good legislation, you know, whether it's Bill 1, the Competitiveness Act – it's almost laughable, something like that where it's just meaningless. If what we're doing is going to sit here and make a health charter, which I think is a good idea – I like the idea of the health charter. It could be a very powerful idea if it's done right. If the necessary system is in place to make it viable and make it accomplishable, it's a good idea. But the problem is that you can't pass something that has no enforcement mechanism. It's not going to do anything. It's going to amount to a hill of beans. It's feel-good legislation. It doesn't make sense to me.

That gets us back to section 10, which started this conversation. Section 10 essentially seems to be repeating section 2(4)(b), and it takes away any chance that this will ever be enforced by anything. Section 10 says: yeah, sure, there are no courts; there is no judicial inquiry. Well, there are certainly no courts under section 10 according to the House leader, no review by a court, no questioning by a court. But 2(4)(b) says there's no questioning by anybody. No one. If he infringes this legislation, if he drops the ball on this legislation, if he does so intentionally, if he does so negligently, no matter how he does it, there is no mechanism of enforcement.

That's what has come out of this debate. But that's good because we need to know what we're dealing with here. We're dealing with a charter that is essentially a feel-good piece of legislation and nothing more than that. The House leader made that very clear.

Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't have goals. We need goals. Goals are good, and it's not a bad thing to have a goal that you're going to have a healthier population and this, that, and the other thing. I just think it's a lot of work to sit here for hours and hours and hours and hours on end, as we're going to be doing over the next few days, on the Health Act, on various amendments and so

forth, and what we come out with is a piece of legislation that is good for nothing other than to use as kindling.

That, Mr. Chair, is my issue with this legislation.

5:30

Dr. Taft: So, Rob, we'll have a vote?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, we'll vote on this right away. No worries. Have you spoken to this legislation yet, section 10?

Mr. Boutilier: No, I haven't, but I'm looking forward to it.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. You're looking forward to it. That's good. Then we'll have a vote on it right after. Don't worry. Before 6 for sure.

Anyway, we would like to see this legislation have some teeth. Section 10 defangs, makes this legislation essentially not worth the paper it's printed on, Mr. Chair, and that's unacceptable to Albertans.

Those are my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo on amendment A1.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you. On amendment A1. Certainly, I recognize the important comments that have been made by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, which really do capture the nonspirit of what is intended relative to this, quote, unquote, health charter. It is historic, quite clearly, in its rhetoric, but that's about the limit of what it has in it in terms of helping patients and helping Albertans, helping those who are in ERs. Clearly, it fails on all accounts. In doing so, that's what our fundamental concern is.

We are looking for a real dialogue with real legislation. This is not real. This is nothing more than a concocted type of discussion that goes on in a private caucus meeting of the governing party of over 39 years or 40 years, whatever. It'll be nothing more than a footnote in a few months' time, that's for sure.

What is disappointing is that there is an opportunity to be able to better serve Albertans. It is my hope that the amendments that are put forward right now are amendments that truly need to reflect the spirit and the will of Albertans. Albertans, in my judgment, want change. They recognize that this, quite simply, the noncompliance of what has been taking place, is just not satisfactory, and we saw that this week.

I was listening to the radio on my way over tonight relative to the amendment. In fact, a gentleman was making reference to Bill 17 and the amendments that are going forward. That was Mr. Layton on 630 CHED. He made reference to the important amendments that need to be placed to give real teeth, as the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere stated earlier tonight. I think it is so important that these amendments reflect something that has real teeth. We want to be assured that since this bill and these amendments are being proposed to this Legislature, as MLAs, be it with the government or not with the government, there is a judicial responsibility for us in terms of our spirit, in terms of what we believe is important. I don't think there's any member in this Assembly that would feel good about what is taking place today regarding the health care crisis that this government is in. Really, it is in our interest for all of us to have the best health care system possible.

But the dialogue is not real. On these amendments the dialogue is not real because, quite simply, no one is guarding against self-deception. It's not a real discussion. The gap continues to widen,

and the gap continues to widen because of the fact that this amendment is failing in many ways, as much as the spirit is intended to be able to capture what Albertans are looking for. Each of us as MLAs, when we speak for or against amendments, tries to bring forward what our bosses have been telling us.

We saw this week a member of the governing party speak out, and it ultimately related directly back to this amendment because this amendment that is being put forward, I think, is really trying to capture the spirit of what Albertans have been telling us. We're not afraid to talk about that. That's why I stand this afternoon as the proud Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to be able to share with you what citizens in my community have talked to me about. They've talked about the absolutely unacceptable situation that we are facing in a city of over a hundred thousand people. The emergency rooms are clogged.

Consequently, as we go forward, we believe that the community that I represent contributes a lot to this province in terms of royalties, and the funding that is absolutely necessary should not be squandered on rebranding theories of \$25 million but should be going into the front-line troops of men and women who are serving Albertans. That's where it really is. It's not about more money. The issue of this amendment is about a charter that will really, really capture the spirit of what Albertans have been telling all of us. They are watching and they are listening, and I believe that it would be foolhardy if the government were to continue to ignore what they are saying. We know who the bosses are, but the question is: do the authors of this?

I think the people and the members have put forward the amendment . . .

An Hon. Member: We can't hear you.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, there may be a few on the other side who may not want to hear me, but democracy shines brightly in Alberta, and I know that certainly the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is listening intently to all of my words, hanging on to the end of his seat.

I must say that this afternoon we had a good health care discussion, and I appreciated it because it assisted me in answering some important questions of clarity this afternoon. Those types of things are directly related to this amendment, that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere spoke earlier about. I want to say that I'm beginning to clearly be able to capture that spirit of speaking to amendments, how often we talk about the amendment. It's almost instructional. It's almost like listening to Professor Dr. Taft at the University of Alberta. Consequently, this amendment . . .

The Deputy Chair: I'm sorry, hon. member. Names. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Boutilier: Edmonton-Riverview. I seem to always make that mistake, actually, just acting like a person who is in a Tim Hortons or a doughnut shop. I actually call them by their names because when I'm home in Fort McMurray, no one calls me Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. They call me Guy.

An Hon. Member: They call you lots of things.

Mr. Boutilier: In fact, they call me lots of things during elections. In fact, I am certain they will call the government lots of things during the elections.

What's important is to have a real discussion on what is true. What is true is this. We can do better, this Assembly, all members from all parties, in terms of a health charter, a health charter that can be historic. This amendment, I think, will help in moving forward. It will help. The question is: why the authorship of the original frame of this amendment? Why are there so many gaps? We don't want more gaps. We actually want it narrowed down to connect with what the good people across Alberta and in our coffee shops are saying.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I want to say that it's been quite instructive, as we speak to amendments, in terms of: school is in. I think it's important for all of us in terms of life-long learning, when we talk about "school is in" on amendments, to clearly be cognizant of the important spirit and principle of what this actual amendment is trying to achieve.

Mr. Chairman, I would say to you that my citizens are saying that Bill 17 – they have asked me to come forward. I think that members are bringing forward amendments because of the fact that, without any question, this bill is flawed at this time and needs – it's more than just a work-in-progress. It is a work-in-progress and then some in order to widen the gap.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and say that it is my hope – and I welcome comments from others in terms of how we make this the best that it can be for Albertans because Albertans simply deserve no less.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. To close debate. I hope to do that, Mr. Chairman. I want to comment on how extensively and how long the debate on this amendment went; it was longer than I expected. It's because it's such a good amendment. I don't need to repeat the arguments that have been made so often.

I'll thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud on the government side for engaging once in a while, but I do want to challenge him because he made a statement earlier in the debate that paragraphs like section 10 are standard boilerplate in all kinds of legislation. I don't think that's true. In fact, we've checked around and found a piece of legislation from New Brunswick that had a similar paragraph in it, but even that one was followed with a big exemption, so it was very tightly contained.

This kind of blanket exemption from court action I think is extraordinary. I think it's dangerous. Clearly, by moving this amendment, I'm strongly opposed to it. We've heard from several members of the opposition, from all three parties who are all strongly opposed to it, so I think it's time for us, Mr. Chairman, to have a vote on this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:42 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:			Totals:	For – 12	Against – 30
Anderson	Hehr	Mason			
Blakeman	Hinman	Pastoor	[Motion on amendment A1 lost]		
Boutilier	Kang	Swann			
Forsyth	MacDonald	Taft	The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.		
Against the motion:					
Ady	Fawcett	McFarland	Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that we adjourn debate on Bill 17.		
Amery	Fritz	Morton			
Berger	Groeneveld	Olson	[Motion to adjourn debate carried]		
Bhardwaj	Hancock	Ouellette			
Brown	Horner	Prins	The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call it 6 o'clock. The committee stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.		
Calahasen	Jablonski	Quest			
Campbell	Jacobs	Redford			
DeLong	Knight	Vandermeer	[The committee adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]		
Drysdale	Leskiw	Weadick			
Evans	Lund	Woo-Paw			

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Alberta Liberal: 8

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 20 Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about Bill 20, the Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010. Passed in 2003, the Class Proceedings Act established procedural rules enabling one or more persons to advance an action on behalf of a group of people who have suffered the same or similar wrong. The existing act serves three important purposes: increasing efficiency, improving access to justice, and modifying behaviors.

I would like to take the time today to introduce the House amendments that have been proposed to strengthen this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll pause for a moment while the amendment is distributed. Hon. members, this is amendment A1.

Mr. Drysdale: The bill is amended as follows:

- A Section 10 is amended in the proposed section 17.1
 - (a) in subsection (2) by striking out "section 17(1)" and substituting "section 17";
 - (b) in subsection (3) by striking out "to any non-residents".

There have been two proposed amendments to this bill, and I will explain them to provide some context. The Class Proceedings Act sets out procedural rules governing the context of class proceedings. With this bill the government is proposing to replace some of the current procedural rules with new ones. One of the most important changes proposed in Bill 20 is that nonresidents will participate in class proceedings in the same manner as residents. In other words, both residents and nonresidents who meet the criteria to be a member of a class will be considered to be class members unless they decide to opt out of a class proceeding.

Whenever we set out to make procedural changes like this, there is a need to consider when the old rules will apply and when the new rules will apply. The purpose of section 17.1 is to describe how the opting-in provisions in section 17 of the current act will apply to nonresidents once the amendments are brought into force. For example, section 17.1(1) says that if a proceeding is certified as a class proceeding before the amendments are brought into force, the opting-in rule set out in this section of 17(1) of the current act will apply to nonresidents. In other words, when a proceeding is certified before the amendments are in effect, the old rules apply, and nonresidents are required to opt in.

There is currently a problem with section 17.1(1) that we would like to fix. This section says that section 17(1) of the current act will apply to nonresidents if a proceeding is certified before the amendments as part of Bill 20 come into effect. There are other provisions in section 17 that should apply to nonresidents when a proceeding is

certified as a class proceeding before these amendments are brought into force. Fixing this problem is very simple. The problem would be fixed by amending the proposed section 17.1(2) by striking out "17(1)" and substituting "17." This proposed change is necessary so that it is clear that all of the provisions of the current section 17, not just those contained in 17(1), apply to nonresidents when a proceeding is certified as a class proceeding before the amendments are brought into force.

It is important to point out that while section 17.1(2) sets out the general rule, section 17.1(4) provides the court with the authority to order that the new opting-out rules apply to nonresidents even if a proceeding is certified before the amendments are brought into force. Any party may apply for this order, and the court may grant the order if it considers it equitable to do so. This flexibility will give the court the tools it needs so that class proceedings are conducted sensibly and fairly.

An additional amendment for clarification. I would like to introduce a second House amendment, which has been proposed to avoid potential confusion. As I have just explained, section 17.1(2) provides the general rule that opting-in rules contained in the current act apply to nonresidents when a proceeding has been certified as a class proceeding before amendments in Bill 20 are brought into force.

Section 17.1(3) was intended to complete the picture for the reader. This section provides that when an application for certification has been brought before the amendments are brought into force but is not decided, then the opting-out rules will apply to nonresidents. In other words, the new rules will apply to nonresidents when an application for certification is brought before the amendments come into force but is not decided until after the amendments have come into force.

While sections 17.1(2) and (3) were intended to aid interpretation by making it clear which rules apply to nonresidents in different situations, section 17.1(3) as currently drafted may have the opposite effect. The phrase "section 17 of this Act applies to any nonresidents in respect of the proceeding" may lead some readers to wonder whether section 17 of the act as amended applies to anyone other than nonresidents. While it is reasonable to assume the court would conclude that section 17 of the amended act does not apply to everyone, deleting the words "to any non-residents" will remove any doubt.

These two proposed amendments will both clarify and strengthen the current bill.

In conclusion, shifting from an opt-in to an opt-out regime for nonresidents will align Alberta's Class Proceedings Act with legislation in other Canadian jurisdictions. Expanding the requirement for the court approval of a settlement will increase protection for plaintiffs in class proceedings. Mr. Chairman, these changes together with the adoption of criteria to guide the court strengthen the existing act to better reach the goals of increased efficiency, improved access to justice, and behaviour modifications.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Speaking in support of the amendments, what this amendment does is that it's inclusive. It allows individuals, if they so choose, to opt out but guarantees, whether they're a resident or a nonresident, that they will have equal status in Alberta law. That inclusion is extremely important.

With regard to how it affects Bill 20, the Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010, in general, the act is attempting to involve

more people. It's recognizing the need for justice not only to be perceived to be done but to actually be done. My hope is that this will actually occur. The object of the bill, which is being amended by amendment A1, I'm assuming, is defined in situations where a mass wrong has occurred. Class proceedings, often referred to as class-action suits, offer the most efficient means to handle the issue at bar. The primary aim of Bill 20, potentially to be amended by A1, that has just been introduced, is to increase access to justice for claimants that might not otherwise have the ability to bring an action to redress a wrong that has been suffered.

Now, I'd like to just very briefly provide three examples of cases that have been class-action suits that I'm aware of that will hopefully be sped up by this process. I believe it's too late for the pine shakes class-action suit, where the government gave pine shakes made in Alberta equal status to cedar shakes. A number of companies seized the opportunity and went so far as to buy substandard shakes from B.C. Of course, although the pine shakes were approved by the Alberta government, when it turned out that they didn't last very long and caused considerable damage to roofs, there was no redress for the people in the class-action suits because the companies had gone belly up.

7:40

Another class-action suit which is ongoing and that, hopefully, will be helped by this amended legislation is the 40 per cent increase in long-term care costs, where individuals I believe it was in the year 2000 faced this enormous increase in their long-term care costs with no appreciable increase in the degree of services, whether it was the food they received or the care they received in their long-term care.

The most recent case that I'm hoping Bill 20, Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010, as we are hoping to amend it will occur is the case that is being put forward by Robert Lee on behalf of numerous children who have been injured or killed while in the care/custody of this government. I am hoping that this legislation brings the type of justice that so far has not been achieved by these individuals.

With that hope and possibly a degree of naïveté I'm supporting this amendment and Bill 20, Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010.

The Deputy Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1 to Bill 20, the Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Any questions or comments on the bill as amended?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 28

Electoral Divisions Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Two items of controversy associated with this bill, the first being that this bill brings into action four new MLAs and the millions of dollars of service necessary to establish those four new constituencies. I want to have it on the record that the Liberal opposition has been opposed to the idea of creating more government in the form of four additional MLAs. We believe that government should be reduced in size as opposed to a growing, all-consuming being.

The second piece of controversy is the idea of naming a constituency after a person who is still living. There's a historic precedent, whether it's a school or whether it's a park or in this case, I would suggest, a constituency, that the honour is usually bestowed after the person has passed away and time has been given to consider and value their contributions. So with regard to the Electoral Divisions Act, Bill 28, there is controversy over the thought of changing Calgary-North Hill to Calgary-Klein.

Previously, in second reading, the member representing currently Calgary-North Hill indicated that he had talked to individuals at an AGM, and he felt, based on that AGM discussion, that people were in favour. I would suggest that when there is controversy associated, more than just a brief sampling is necessary to justify a specific name change. Therefore, I have concerns about Bill 28.

I do believe that every Albertan deserves to be well represented and have the choice of who it is that represents them and what party that individual belongs to. I believe that we can create the same types of efficiencies as we see with wards. I would not say that I would go to the extent of the MP circumstance and their broadness of boundaries, but we could certainly, I think, provide good governance for Albertans without having to go to 87 seats.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise and join debate on Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, in committee. I've heard and noted the points made by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. I must say that although I, too, would have preferred that we remain at 83 electoral divisions, this Legislature by majority vote made the decision some months ago to go to 87 seats. The Electoral Boundaries Commission had no choice but to follow that dictate, and they did their work, I think rather well from what I can see.

I'm reminded that somebody said – and I don't remember who it was, some wise political wag – that every 10 years or every two election cycles the Electoral Boundaries Commission tells us all where to go knocking on doors, and then we do it. I'm not going to stand here and complain or debate or even comment on the boundaries as they were drawn, you know, except to say that I think the Electoral Boundaries Commission did rather good work.

In consideration of the motion earlier in this session of the House which included the name change that was proposed for Calgary-North Hill, we missed one, Mr. Chairman, one that I think it's high time that we consider doing and one that I think a significant number of people in this province would like to see done. We have a number of electoral divisions that are named after politicians, former Premiers. We have Calgary-Lougheed. We have Edmonton-Manning. We have Edmonton-Rutherford. We also have used the

names of former mayors of Edmonton and Calgary, two of whom subsequently served in another electoral office, for electoral divisions in those cities. This really is not a new trend.

But we have missed one name, and that would be the name of Grant Notley, who began his political life by participating not with any party that I've ever been associated with, although in my past life I did interview the current leader of that party a few times, the Alberta New Democrats. He began his political life by participating with the Alberta NDP on the U of A campus. He became the party's provincial secretary in 1962, after graduation. He was an unsuccessful candidate in '63 and '67 in the provincial elections and in a '69 by-election. He was elected leader of the Alberta New Democrats in 1968. In the 1971 provincial election he won a seat in the Legislative Assembly as the Member for Spirit River-Fairview and was for 11 years the sole New Democrat MLA in this Legislature. As a result of the 1982 provincial election he was joined by a second NDP MLA, Ray Martin, and became Leader of the Opposition at that time.

Grant Notley was voted as one of the top 10 in the *Calgary Herald* search for Alberta's greatest citizen in 2008, called Best of Alberta. He was seen by many as a visionary. Whether or not you agreed with his politics, just about everybody in Alberta at the time respected him, respected his courage, his particular vision and his willingness to stand up for that vision, and his, if I dare say the word – and this may not be the appropriate word – grit. He fought for the NDP cause his whole life regardless of never winning more than two seats in the Legislature during his 13 years of being an MLA in the Assembly. Don Braid in the *Calgary Herald* wrote, "Notley's enduring reputation is remarkable and even inspiring, a testament to public yearning for integrity, character and honesty in politics."

7:50

Mr. Chair, if I may, I would like to move an amendment, and I will pass this amendment to the pages now and allow them to pass it out to everybody. Then I will formally read it into the record.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. We'll pause for a moment while the pages distribute the amendment.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, be amended in the schedule by striking out "Dunvegan-Central Peace" and substituting "Dunvegan-Notley (identified as Dunvegan-Central Peace in the DVD referenced in section 3)."

Grant Notley was killed in a plane crash on October 19, 1984. He was on a small plane that went down, killing six passengers. Everyone at the time was plunged into mourning in this province as Albertans by the thousands honoured a man whose flag they would never follow. They honoured him not because of his political stripe but because of the commitment and dedication he had for Albertans and his vision of Alberta.

I think, Mr. Chair, that the regard for an elected official doesn't get any higher than that. The level of respect that we can hope to earn from our constituents does not get any higher than that, so I would like to honour this great Albertan by amending the name of the riding that he represented for so many years. I mentioned that he was the MLA for Spirit River-Fairview. Over the years the boundaries have changed slightly. The name has changed now to Dunvegan-Central Peace, and I am proposing that we change the name now to Dunvegan-Notley.

Now, Mr. Chair, I'm hardly the first one who has done that. According to the Electoral Boundaries Commission there were

several recommendations to the commission to have the name of Dunvegan-Central Peace changed to Dunvegan-Notley. Thirteen per cent of the written submissions to the Electoral Boundaries Commission – 13 per cent, Mr. Chair – were related to including the name "Notley" in a revised name for the Dunvegan-Central Peace electoral division. Quoting from the commission's final report,

there were a number of submissions related to the naming of electoral divisions, far and away the most suggesting that the name "Notley" be included in the name of the Dunvegan-Central Peace electoral division. Only two of these submissions could be identified as arising from that electoral division. One supported the proposal. The other opposed it on the grounds that the current name clearly indicates the location of the division.

That's the end of the quote, although I will come back to the final report here in a second.

Mr. Chair, I'm proposing something in a sense not unlike what the Member for Calgary-North Hill proposed some weeks ago in proposing the change of name of his electoral district to Calgary-Klein. Not everybody favoured that. Not everybody favours this. But the interesting thing is that this notion had broad support and, I would argue, deep support from across the province in that nothing else came close to the number of requests that the commission got to make this name change in Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Going back to the final report again, they wrote:

In considering the submissions proposing the addition of the name "Notley" to Dunvegan-Central Peace, the Commission noted that the Legislative Assembly had not adopted any protocol regarding the naming of electoral divisions. The Commission generally favours the use of geographical names which provide an indication of the location of the electoral division.

So they decided to stick with the name Dunvegan-Central Peace. However, they said that "it has . . . identified in the Issues for Future Consideration section of this report, the advisability of the Legislative Assembly developing a naming protocol for the guidance of future commissions."

Mr. Speaker, it's probably a very good idea that we do that at some point. This amendment is not proposing that we go this far tonight. This amendment is simply proposing that we rename one electoral division that was represented for a number of years by a highly respected politician, a highly respected Albertan by the name of Grant Notley.

Back to the final report of the boundaries commission again:

The submissions suggesting that the name of Grant Notley be included in the name of Dunvegan-Central Peace . . . and other similar suggestions to name electoral divisions after persons, posed a conundrum for the Commission given the lack of guidance for naming electoral divisions. The last Commission used the names of former Mayors of Edmonton and Calgary, two of whom subsequently served in other elected office, for electoral divisions in those cities. Three electoral divisions are currently named after former Premiers.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned them already. Those are Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Manning, and Calgary-Lougheed.

The commission was, I guess, in a sense looking for guidance from us on what it would do the next time around, and we haven't really given that guidance to the commission in any kind of formal way yet, Mr. Chair. But in dealing with the motion several weeks ago and in making some name changes there, in a sense we've started down this road, and I would like to continue one more kilometre down the road, if you will, and would strongly urge that this Legislature give what I think is the proper honour and the proper due to this great Albertan. Whether or not you agreed with a single thing he stood for, you had to respect the tenacity with which he stood for those things, and you have to respect his integrity and his character and his commitment and his dedication. Therefore, I

propose that we amend the name of the riding that he represented for so many years, and I hope this House will see fit to support my amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed an interesting amendment, a bit of a surprise from the perspective that I had had discussions with House leaders earlier about whether amendments were coming forward and advised them that we would have amendments coming forward with respect to names when we discussed the motion in the House and, in fact, brought forward the amendments that we had indicated we would have.

That being the case, I think it makes sense that hon. members have a chance to look at this motion, particularly the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, and for that reason I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

8:00

**Bill 26
Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane)
Amendment Act, 2010**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Obviously, we've had some discussion about this bill already in the House. Sorry. I'm trying to find something here, but I just cannot do it. I'll have to do it later. Oh, is that what I was looking for? Bill 26, Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Act. Obviously, the issue that we've had with this bill from the get-go is not so much what the government is trying to achieve, which is that we're trying to clear up some of the uncertainty, obviously, surrounding coal-bed gas. In other words, who on a split title – this is where on a title you have someone who is a freehold owner, who owns the minerals, and on that same title you have a separate person that owns the rights to the coal. So you have the split title, with one person or one entity owning the gas and one entity or person owning the coal.

Of course, this didn't used to matter because although people knew that when you mined coal, it would produce as a by-product methane – that's not new – no one knew how to kind of harvest the stuff or produce the stuff. So there's a lot of uncertainty in the law surrounding this issue. It's been litigated, obviously. There's litigation ongoing, and there's been a lot of litigation on this issue. Well, not a ton, but there's been some because we've just come to realize that, you know, there's a heck of a lot of coal-bed methane out there, and it's worth an awful lot of money, although not as much as we hope right now. But it's a valuable commodity, so the question has come as to who owns the rights to this.

Actually, I had the opportunity to work on this case when I was practising law at a law firm in Calgary. It was a situation where at the time we were acting for the gas owners. We came up, and one of the things we had to do was bring in all these experts. They would give this incredibly hypertechnical analysis of whether the gas molecules were attached to the coal or whether they were two separate things and they were just kind of in the same spot or what. The whole point of this was to try to convince the ERCB at the time to recognize this as being purely a gas and therefore owned by the

freehold owner. That went back and forth, and it kind of wove its way through the regulatory body, and there have been a couple of decisions on it. There were some decisions made on it, and there were some court decisions that were made on it, and they've been very fact specific, so they haven't been very clear. There's been no grand pronouncement of who owns the CBM, the coal owner or the freehold owner. Like I said, there's a lot of uncertainty.

Of course, this legislation is an attempt to confirm that the coal gas tenure does not own the coal-bed methane, coal-bed gas rights, which is the same policy that they have in B.C. The implication is that the coal owners will have to pay royalties on the gas if they were to extract their coal, and then their by-product is the coal-bed methane.

Now, here's the issue. There's nothing wrong with creating clarity with regard to ownership. That's a part of our system, and it's an important thing that we want to try to do. The problem is that this has not been done with proper consultation. The issue is that you have a government coming in on a highly technical issue without any real consultation and without any real understanding. I mean, how many of the folks in here honestly understand this issue at all? Not many. Probably none. Like I said, I even worked on this a few years back, and it's already cloudy in my mind, all the technical briefings.

We're being asked to make this huge decision, and if you're going to have a highly technical thing that most lay people aren't going to understand, at least you could have the respect to do proper consultation. The government did a little bit of consultation a few years ago, and what they found out was that people were telling them that, in fact, because it was kind of winding its way through court challenges and court cases, the government should essentially stay out and let the courts decide based on the facts of the case in question.

Now, obviously, the gas owners didn't like that because that meant that they couldn't outright say: we own the gas, and that coal-bed methane belongs to us on the split titles. This was something that they weren't happy with, so they continued to lobby, and now the government is saying: "Okay. Yeah. We're going to recognize you as the owners." Of course, this is an issue because you're essentially taking a right that the coal owners thought that they had and you're saying: "No. You don't have that right. The freehold owner has it, and that's just the way it's going to be. Sorry. No compensation." The act says specifically that there's no compensation for the coal owner. There's nothing. It is what it is. It's just a declaration that this is the way it's going to be. No grandfather clause. Nothing.

There's a huge problem with that, and I want to read an e-mail here from a constituent. There's a split title on which he does not own the gas, but he owns the coal on that split title. I'll just read a small portion of it.

Dear Rob.

I just received a letter from the Minister of Energy . . . He basically side stepped everything I had mentioned regarding Coal Mine Methane and the previous correspondence I've had with the Department of Energy.

He mentioned that I can go back to the ERCB to verify entitlement to produce coal. I have been in contact with the ERCB requesting a preliminary hearing on the entitlement to Coal Mine Methane.

In other words, coal-mine methane, for those of you listening at home and in the gallery – I know this must be a riveting subject for the folks in the gallery – is the methane that's produced when you're mining coal. Okay? It's not total rocket science. That's what it is. So he's been to the ERCB requesting a preliminary hearing on the entitlement to the coal-mine methane.

However in the past they have responded there is no difference between Coalbed methane and Coal mine methane.

Okay. Coal-bed methane is slightly different. It's when you go into a seam of coal and you specifically are going to extract through microfracking and other methods the coal-bed methane from the coal, but you're not actually trying to mine the coal. That's the difference. In one you're mining the coal. The by-product is coal-mine methane. In the other one you're going for the CBM. That's what you're going for, the coal-bed methane, and that's all you're going for.

Okay. They say:

However in the past they have responded there is no difference between Coalbed methane and Coal mine methane in their view and I have yet to hear back from them for the last letters sent. It seems pointless to apply to produce something I don't own or am not entitled to and in the application process they ask you right up front for that information.

I find it very distressing and hurtful that this Minister basically said in his letter he does not care about my little project, this is what we are doing and that is the way it is so [blank] off.

I'm sure the minister didn't actually say that – I sure hope not – in his correspondence, but that's this guy's interpretation of it.

It shows that this man has little interest in the people of Alberta. At least from his letter this is how I feel.

8:10

I can't imagine how this Government extrapolated Ownership of the coalbed methane from the [former] EUB(ERCB) ruling 2007/24 when it was about Entitlement to produce the coalbed methane on certain leases that were under question and ended up in the Court of Alberta. This Bill essentially leaves me with few options for advancement of coal technology and clean coal production as gasifying in place was the best option. They want clean coal . . .

The government does.

. . . but only for the gas industry or major multinational corporations . . . Institutional Investors and the Little guy who throws his few cents into a stock hoping they can make a buck can rest assured their money is safe when they invest in Alberta.

Since the present Government listens to the ERCB and [the ERCB] seem to only speak in Latin, I propose you read this little poem I wrote to them perhaps they will get the gist of Political elitism. If I wanted to live in a communist country where historical property rights can be just deleted on a whim I would move to China.

Regards,

my constituent, who I won't name.

This is the poem he writes.

Truth Conquers all
Dare to be wise Dare to be wise
Truth conquers all
According to art or rule
To Science
The case is not clear, not proven
Mark well
No one assails Science with impunity

I'm reading this from my constituent, and it goes on. It's all in Latin, and then he's got the English version. It doesn't make as much sense when you read it as a poem because it doesn't rhyme, and I need rhyme in my life. But as you can see, this is a very frustrated individual. [interjection] I'm a rhymers. That's right.

Obviously, this constituent of mine feels very much like his rights of ownership have been attacked. They've been taken away from him without any compensation and without any sort of warning, frankly. The government has just imposed itself. I just don't understand why. It just does not make sense to me. A government does a consultation process. The product of the consultation process

is: stay out of it; let it wend its way through the courts and the regulatory process, yada, yada, yada. Then a couple of years later the government says: "Oh, sorry. We're going to change the rules with Bill 26, and you're out of luck, okay? We've got to change the rules, so here we go. This is who owns the coal-bed methane. Period." Out of luck, no questions asked, no compensation, nothing. That's just not the way to go. It's not a way to govern, in my view.

The other thing is this question of in situ gasification from coal. He refers to it, too. There's just not enough clarity around it. Some of the thoughts that we've had here from people as we've met with them – and we've been taking notes. Here are a couple of things that they're saying.

This government is rushing through the legislation for this bill after spending tens of millions of dollars creating coal gasification projects which will be stuck in limbo as ownership of the value-added syn-gas is worked through the justice system. That's one question they have, and I would like to hear from the Minister of Energy or somebody over there that understands. Well, there's a former Minister of Energy over there that maybe can talk about these questions and just give me the clarification. I mean, he was in that portfolio for two years or more than that. Perhaps he can give us some clarification on these questions.

The second one. In situ gasification from coal is not clarified. The naturally pooled gas may belong to gas tenure, but the value-added from coal gasification is not recognized in the bill.

Among the conflicts between gas and coal owners that will arise, the crippling of an in situ gasification project seems to have the greatest potential impact. Does the government know all the ramifications of this when it comes to coal owners wanting to liquefy or gasify coal seams when they don't own the gas already sitting in it? Again, there's some confusion there. If they go and mine it, what are their obligations? What is the plus side of retrieving that gas for the coal owners?

This is the third point. Industry people suggest that pulling out CBM and in situ gasification cannot co-exist. CBM requires dewatering of seams, and in situ usually uses water. Also, the fracking and tapping of a seam for CBM can jeopardize the seal required for gasification. When that happens, there is then the degradation of the coal. We just don't know how this affects the new technology being put together for in situ gasification, which the government is very supportive of. Again, some uncertainty in how using this method will affect the rights of the coal owners.

Four. Without clarification of value-added processes and rushing this bill through legislation, Albertans will be losing a great opportunity with a fuel resource that has opportunities similar to the oil sands. This fact has been reaffirmed many times by the government, yet they seem to have forgotten this in their haste to ram this through.

According to this government

clean coal has a big role to play in Alberta's energy future. The coal beneath our feet contains twice the energy of Alberta's conventional crude, natural gas, and bitumen, combined. To make the most of this massive resource, we'll need to use the same Alberta ingenuity that turned the oil sands into a source of long-term prosperity.

Now, he was talking about the combination of coal and coal-bed methane. They feel that this law will severely harm the ability of these entrepreneurs, these coal owners on split title, to make the most of it by splitting the rights and setting the owners against one another.

Currently the only method this government is actively pursuing towards clean coal is the hugely expensive, unproven, and ineffective carbon capture and storage project, and of course we'll talk about that more when we get to Bill 24.

In any event, those are some of the issues of some of the coal

owners who own some of these coal rights on split title. Now, the Wildrose is not taking sides on this issue. We're not saying that the coal guys are right or that the gas guys are right. We're just saying that both have very legitimate arguments. It's a very complicated issue, so before we go headfirst and take away or at least be perceived to be taking away someone's property rights and ability and the potential of being able to develop a resource that they feel is important to them and to their future, we should do the proper consultation.

We should bring in the coal owners, we should bring in all the stakeholders and the freehold owners and some scientists and get a grasp on what we're talking about here. Maybe let's talk with these folks and see if there's anything we can do to make sure that the coal owners are properly compensated for the fact that they are not going to have the resource that they thought they were going to have. Or maybe we use some kind of grandfathering clause to give them time to develop the resource as much as they can, and then at the end of 10 years it goes into effect, 10, 20 years or whatever. The point is that we can bring certainty, but let's figure out what the right way to do it is rather than just ramming it through.

It's almost like this bill – I mean, it's about the thinness of a napkin – was created on the back of a napkin. There has not been any consultation going into this. With the new royalty framework we saw what happens when government doesn't consult first. When they don't consult first, there are all kinds of unintended consequences. There are all kinds of things that happen that the government surely didn't plan for. They didn't plan to put the oil and gas industry into the tank and cost thousands of Albertans their jobs, but they did it. Why did they do it? Is it because they hate Albertans? Obviously not. It's because they went ahead, they plowed ahead, and they did not do the proper consultation first.

We see it with the health superboard. They plow ahead; they centralize it all in a big board. It was almost instantaneous. It happened in, like, a few weeks. The former minister of health put that together. One of the reasons we see all of the massive problems – the ER crisis, the awful things that are happening in our health care system right now – is the lack of consultation before they acted. You see, if the government had consulted nurses and if they had consulted doctors and front-line staff and done the proper consultation, they could have identified some of the problems that would have happened with a large, massive, centralized, Soviet-style bureaucracy. It doesn't work. So let's do the consultation.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Interesting comments, but the fact of the matter is that there has been discussion about the contents of Bill 26 for many, many years in this province, and it's long past the time when we need to move to deal with the issue of the private ownership rights of individuals in this province.

However, Mr. Chairman, it is important to clarify one section of the bill, so I would like to move on behalf of the bill's sponsor an amendment to Bill 26, which I believe you have at table for circulation.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, it hasn't been circulated yet. We'll pause for a moment, and then we'll circulate it. Then you can proceed. This is amendment A1.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment would essentially amend section 2 of the bill, referencing the new section

10.1, by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

(2) Subsection (1) does not affect any conveyance, agreement, agreement for sale, lease, joint venture or any other contract that specifically grants, leases, excludes, excepts or reserves rights in land in respect of coalbed methane and that was entered into before the coming into force of this section by

- (a) the owner of the title to the natural gas in the land, or any person holding natural gas rights through that owner, and
- (b) the owner of the title to coal in the land, or any person holding coal rights through that owner.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of this amendment is to clarify that subsection and clarify the fact that because this issue has been extant in Alberta for some considerable period of time, there are, in fact, agreements in place between land owners, title owners, and it must be clear that those agreements that were entered into by owners in full knowledge of their situation should be respected and adhered to. That would be the nature of it. It's a minor yet important amendment to the bill.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to stand up and speak on the amendment. I think we were calling it A1, weren't we?

The Deputy Speaker: Amendment A1. Yes, it is.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm somewhat taken aback by this because the government has always said that they have it right, yet they have it wrong. Here we are with a piece of legislation coming forward, and they have supposedly consulted. They've talked to all of the people that are involved in the area. The bill was tabled in the Legislature probably about a month ago. I would hope that when they were doing this in their consulting process and in discussions with the legal people, they had it right. Now all of a sudden on our desk appears an amendment called A1.

Quite frankly, this is just one of many. We've got Bill 29, our Alberta Parks Act. Same thing. Received hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of e-mails on this particular piece of legislation. They were told they were consulted, as this minister has said. Hopefully, maybe the government is listening on that particular piece of legislation. Maybe then we will get some amendments on Bill 29 that will appease Albertans out there that are so upset on that.

Unlike my colleagues from Calgary-Glenmore and Airdrie-Chestermere, who've been following this issue over the last few years, I'm really still trying to learn just what this whole issue is about. It's deep, and it's complicated. I have tried to spend as much time as I can learning about this particular issue.

I've mentioned many times in the Legislature that we're a party of four. We have two researchers, a limited budget, limited time, so we spend a lot of time working, trying to learn these issues, talking to Albertans, talking to people that we consider the experts in the field. That's, you know, the freeholders, the coal owners.

Let me first of all say that our party strongly supports the property rights of freeholders in Alberta and will continue to do so. I also recognize that there are some legal precedents that suggest that the freeholders have a strong claim to the coal-bed methane, and I do not want anything I'm saying here to suggest otherwise. But what I strongly oppose is the way this government is ramming this decision through the House in contradiction of their own stakeholders' consultation in a way that circumvents a court case and in a way that might affect the development of new clean-coal technologies, and that hearkens back to amendment A1.

My colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere indicated earlier that he

suspects – and I suspect – that many of the members in this House are new to the split-title leases and the implications for coal-bed methane. I can tell you that I am. Yet we are here being asked to decide a controversial issue with a long history, an issue winding its way through the courts, with a trial date coming this winter, and we're asked to declare that not only is one side entirely right but to declare that it has always been right. I'm not comfortable with that, Mr. Chair, and I don't think anyone here should be either.

I think we should have much more debate and information presented on the history and the implications of this bill and, quite frankly, on this amendment A1. I just don't see why we can't table the bill – it makes it even more important after we have an amendment before us – and see if the courts come up with an acceptable compromise or at least take some additional time to consider the implications of the bill and, quite frankly, the amendment. I'd also like a clear explanation of why we are circumventing the court.

I think it's important that I put on record some of the questions I have not only about this bill but now, Mr. Chair, about this amendment and that I think everyone should be asking before blindly supporting the bill and supporting the amendment simply because the minister tells us that it's straightforward and that it'll make things easier.

Mr. Chair, the first question I have I need to ask because this amendment is very relevant to the court case. I'm sure the minister will tell us that this very clear piece of legislation, Bill 26 – and it's not so clear anymore because now we have an amendment – will resolve any disputes by declaring all coal-bed methane to have the same status as natural gas. Now, the problem is that clear laws are sometimes too clear; that is, they lose the ability to be fair in the real world, a place where things sometimes aren't so clear. The problem I've been made aware of is that this latest, most practical and even greenest way to use the deeper coal seams in the province is to liquefy or to gasify the coal.

The Minister of Education has tabled this amendment. I'm trying to read what the bill says. His amendment is, as he said, to clarify:

- (a) the owner of the title to the natural gas in the land, or any person holding natural gas rights through that owner, and
- (b) the owner of the title to coal in the land, or any person holding coal rights through that owner.

My colleague has actually talked about the split-title leases, and I'm imagining what this amendment is doing is trying to clarify that split-title lease.

8:30

I guess for us it's important for the minister to clarify exactly what he's trying to get to on this particular amendment. Mr. Chair, quite frankly, we are getting tons of correspondence on this, tons of people that, again, challenge the minister. He alluded to this when he tabled this amendment. The minister has publicly stated that the government consulted with stakeholders. Well, we've heard that before. We're hearing that on Bill 29. We're hearing that on Bill 17.

The consultation that the minister refers to is the final report of the freehold oil and gas issue and the stakeholders' consultation dated March 6, 2009, that recommended – and this is important because this goes back to the consultation process that the minister said has been done over and over again. It clearly said not to legislate anything. So in my mind not only does it talk about legislation, but it talks about the amendments that the House leader has just tabled, and it says clearly in this: "Do not legislate the ownership of CBM in split-title situations; wait for the results of the court cases and support improved negotiations through improved knowledge and understanding." Bill 26 would do just that against the express recommendations of the group established by the government itself.

That goes back to the amendment and trying to again usurp the

court process, which has clearly been asked by the stakeholders in the stakeholder process that was in place. I am going to look forward to some comments from my colleagues, and I'm especially going to look forward to some of my colleagues that are being affected by this. I know the Member for West Yellowhead has an interest in this, and it will be interesting to hear him get up and debate this particular piece of legislation. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that we're hearing from the companies in his riding, and we're also hearing from constituents in his riding that are very, very upset with Bill 26. I imagine that once they see the amendment, it'll be interesting to see what they have to say about this amendment.

Quite frankly, I'm trying to understand how the amendment that the House leader has tabled in the Legislature actually deals with the issues in regard to what we're hearing from the people that are affected by this piece of legislation and the emphasis that they have continually said in regard to letting the courts make the decision. As I indicated before, we strongly support the property rights of the freeholders in Alberta, and we'll continue to do so. I also recognize that there are legal precedents that suggest that the freeholders have a strong claim to the coal-bed methane and do not want anything I'm saying here to suggest otherwise.

Our role in government is to listen to what Albertans are telling us. We have done that. We have no problem with the minister hoisting this piece of legislation. Hopefully, he'll stand up and do the same thing on the Parks Act because we've been again inundated with correspondence from Albertans on that particular piece of legislation. It always seems to be that control. You know, when you give a minister control of anything, you should start worrying about what they're going to change.

Mr. Chair, with those few words I'm going to sit down, and I'm going to hopefully hear from some of the government members on what they have to say on Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, and the amendment that the House leader has tabled, that you've indicated is A1.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Very quickly, this amendment A1 provides clarification. It basically grandfathers the rights of individuals who own the property, whether they're freehold or whether they're owned by companies. It allows for a transition. It protects those people who negotiated in good faith and allows for new laws to take place.

Where I have a concern in terms of when grandfathering is good and when grandfathering is not necessarily the way to go – and it's related to this type of transitioning – is the first in time, first in right that is applied, for example, to water rights or timber rights. I do not believe that water should be considered a commodity sold to the highest bidder. I believe that water should be considered a public right. It's going to become increasingly complex, whether we use grandfathering or some other form of respecting historical right when it comes to water allowances.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're talking to the amendment here, please.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Specifically, this amendment is a grandfathering amendment.

The Deputy Chair: But for natural gas.

Mr. Chase: Pardon?

The Deputy Chair: For coal-bed methane.

Mr. Chase: Yes. For coal-bed methane gas.

My hope is that this would potentially, Mr. Chair, serve as a template for further agreements in terms of declaring what is historically acceptable and at what point we need to transition. This is why I am supporting it, because it provides clarification. Hopefully, it will have some applicability to other circumstances such as water, such as timber if we can use this as a template.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much. I'll speak to the bill, and I'll say to the hon. House leader that I will be supporting this amendment. It's a very, very, very small step towards at least improving the bill if we're going to pass a bill today. I will be voting against the bill in its entirety, but if we can make it less destructive, that's good.

This is a section that obviously is – I don't know if it's really changing what's in the bill, but it's essentially making very clear that any conveyance, agreement, agreement for sale, lease, joint venture or any other contract that specifically grants, leases, excludes, excepts or reserves rights in land in respect of coalbed methane and that was entered into before the coming into force of the section by

- (a) the owner of the title to natural gas in the land, or any person holding natural gas rights through that owner, and . . .

And this is the new part, or one of the new parts:

- (b) the owner of the title to coal in the land, or any person holding coal rights through that owner.

I think that this is good. It changes the act in that it makes it clearer that we're not going to disrupt anything that's happened in the past with regard to conveyancing of different leases and joint ventures and things like that.

The real key here is actually the joint venture or other contract, but specifically it's joint venture. Again, this might be an issue here. Depends if you can prove it, but if there's been a joint venture and an agreement made with regard to a coal owner having the ability or if there's a contractor agreement that they'll be able to mine their coal over a certain period of time, this should protect certain amounts of the owners from there being maybe some legal disputes that come up where there was an agreement in place and then the person in the contract or the freeholder owner says: hey, sorry buddy; I know we had that agreement, but it says I now own the rights, so too bad. So this would kind of take away some of that uncertainty, and that's good. That's a good start.

Again, it doesn't go far enough in that it clearly does not go to the root of the problem, which is that there hasn't been any consultation. So it doesn't change the fact that we're still ramming through a bill, and we're ramming through this amendment. We're doing our business here without doing proper consultation.

8:40

So I will absolutely be bringing forward an amendment. Not right now, but I will bring it in third reading as a hoist amendment to put this into committee. I really do hope that the members opposite will consider that and that we do a proper job of consultation here and make sure that we get this bill right. I will support this amendment so that just in case the government sees fit to drive and hammer this thing through, we can at least do a little less damage by passing this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to

comment briefly on the amendment to the bill as well. I think the amendment does bring some clarity to some agreements that have been made between different stakeholders, probably corporations that maybe own coal or have leases or rights in coal or developing gas. I think some of those stakeholders have probably entered into agreements that are not completely clear. Maybe their lawyers weren't working for them properly when they were entering into these agreements, and maybe they were under a different understanding. I think the amendment now will protect some of those stakeholders, so I would support the amendment and ask all members to support it.

The bill itself, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Act, 2010 . . .

The Deputy Chair: We're only speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Prins: Okay. I'll just leave that. As for the amendment, I think it's a very good amendment, and we need to do this.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, as I've been listening to the debate this evening, I'm quite surprised that after the comment from the hon. Government House Leader regarding the amendment that's proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, complaining about the lack of notice of his amendment, he would provide this amendment to the House with no notice.

Also, in regards to the hon. Government House Leader, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I would have to say this: the less the hon. member states, the more suspicious I become, Mr. Chairman. His rather short introduction of this bill left me with many questions, as did the remarks from the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. I would certainly like to hear from the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka again about how specifically this amendment – and I believe it's A1, or the EnCana amendment as I would call it – will protect resource owners regarding the question of their coal or their coal-bed methane or their natural gas and the arrangements or the agreements that have been made in the past.

Now, certainly, I would like to know before I vote on this amendment, Mr. Chairman, about the Freehold Petroleum & Natural Gas Owners Association of Alberta and whether or not they have been consulted regarding this amendment. The hon. member spoke about corporations, I believe, and the consultation process to reach out to these individual corporations to satisfy their interest in this bill. But what about the Freehold Petroleum & Natural Gas Owners Association?

It has been stated in this House previously that 10 per cent of the mineral rights in Alberta, or over 6.4 million hectares, are privately owned. The freeholders estimate that there are between 40,000 and 50,000 individual owners of freehold mineral rights in Alberta, with about 40 per cent of their members holding title or split-title mineral rights; that is, all mines and minerals except coal or all mines and minerals except coal and petroleum.

This is a very, very important issue, as we all know. There was quite an interesting gathering for a public debate on this matter – and I spoke about this earlier, Mr. Chairman – at a church west of Red Deer, just as you're going south on Highway 2. In fact, you'd be surprised to know that so many of your members were there, your government caucus could have held a caucus meeting in the parking lot.

Mr. Vandermeer: Where was this?

Mr. MacDonald: This was at a church west of Red Deer as you go south on highway 2, or the Queen Elizabeth highway.

There was significant interest. The leader of the Wildrose Alliance was there. The leader of the New Democrats was there. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne was representing the government caucus. There were both cabinet members and government members in attendance at this meeting, Mr. Chairman, and that's testament to how important these freehold rights are to Alberta landowners, particularly the grandsons and granddaughters or great-grandsons and great-granddaughters of our pioneers in central Alberta.

They have a lot of interest in this, and that's why I need to know what consultation has been done with that group in regard to this amendment. I would like to be given an opportunity to consult with them to see how they feel about this because this is more than an innocent little change, from what I can understand. Again, the less the government is saying about something, the more suspicious we all should be, Mr. Chairman. That was interesting.

However, regarding this bill, we would be certainly making some changes about one provision contained in any conveyance. We're deleting that, and we're changing it to: "does not affect any conveyance, agreement." Now, I find that interesting, but what I find most interesting is the new section (2)(b): "the owner of the title to coal in the land, or any person holding coal rights through that owner."

Through this amendment we have seen or someone has suggested that it's necessary to delete the following: "that specifically grants rights in respect of coalbed methane to." We're going to get rid of that, and at the conclusion of that, we're getting rid of "of the title to the coal."

Why is it necessary to suddenly have this change? Whose interests are being served? Whose financial interests are being met and why? We've had this discussion. Certainly, there has been a need for this clarification. There has certainly been need, I believe, since 2003, when the original changes were brought into this House by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. I think this is more than a minor amendment. This is more than a housekeeping amendment. Certainly, until my questions are answered, I would be very reluctant to support this amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to Bill 26 as amended. Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to this bill, Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010. I think the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in many ways articulated some of my original impressions of this bill in that it's very complex and that there are a number of very strong and complex interests that are being considered. Thank you very much, Member.

The analysis of the implications of this is not a simple matter, and this is not an area that I am the critic for. Even though I do have 13 critic areas, this one really is not one of my critic areas, so I'm not able to bring to bear that tremendous level of expertise that I'm able to always bring to my other 13 critic areas. Of course, I say that with tongue in cheek.

8:50

You know, it's interesting. Of course, the government says that the reason for pursuing this bill is because it will enhance and facilitate increased and faster development of coal-bed methane. However, one party, one of the stakeholder groups, actually suggests that, no, this bill will delay development of coal-bed methane, and that's used as a reason to not support it.

I'm in a bit of a conflicted position because in one sense I think that one of the things we've not dealt with yet adequately in this province is developing an adequate environmental regime to govern the development of coal-bed methane in our province, and we've not developed an adequate system of monitoring the implications of this development. I am somewhat concerned about any bill that purports to fuel an increased speed of development. I think that, you know, we don't currently have jobs resting on this, so we have the privilege of being able to take the time to ensure that what we do is done responsibly, with a view to preserving and protecting our long-term environmental interests.

Anyway, it's interesting because some would say that this act will actually slow things down and that perhaps for completely different reasons I should be supporting the act. However, I think others will argue and certainly the government itself argues that the act is designed to speed up development, so that is a concern for me.

On the flip side, though, there is no question that there is a long history in this province of the freehold mineral rights' owners not having their rights properly represented by this government and feeling somewhat frustrated with their inability to have their rights asserted and reflected in a way that allows them to develop their property at a level that gives them the same kind of benefits that larger industry would have.

In that sense, there's sort of a sense of fairness that, you know, we're defining the issue and handing over ownership to a much larger group of individual Albertans who reside in Alberta. From that perspective it's difficult to disagree with that outcome because we're all for ensuring that actual residents of Alberta get the benefit of our resource development as opposed to the shareholders in multinational oil companies, who really have very little vested interest in the future of our province. From that perspective we do support the bill and support that aspect of the decision that is reflected in the bill.

I, too, have concerns, though, because I've seen in the past this government sort of bring forward legislation asserting that it will clarify the process, only for us to discover that if you look at the legislation in a bit more detail, really it's not going to clarify the process, and what it's going to do is give a whole bunch of lawyers a lot more work. It may well be the case that that's what's going to come from this. I guess that remains to be seen.

Ultimately, I think the most important piece that I want to be able to put on the record with respect to this particular piece of legislation, once again, is the really profound need for this government to take seriously the much greater threat to the environment that can be posed by an unmonitored system of coal-bed methane development and the fact that there needs to be an adequate investment in environmental protection to match the rate of development that the government purports to be enabling through this piece of legislation. In failing to do that, this will end up being a net loss at the end of the day for all Albertans and even for those freehold mineral rights owners.

I certainly would like to see the government move forward quite aggressively to enhance the environmental protection resources in line with this development and also to more openly and responsibly respond to concerns that are articulated by Albertans, who already raise environmental concerns around the mining of coal-bed

methane. We need to ensure that those voices are heard because those are the people that live here, those are the people that raise their children here, and those are the people that will be here, presumably, when this particular little gold rush is completed.

Those will be the extent of my comments this evening. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, and I'll be very quick. When I first at second reading spoke to Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010, I used the term "a gift horse," the analogy being that you don't look a gift horse in the mouth. In other words, you have to recognize the values and the possible problems associated with the horse, or in this case coal-bed methane. It's very important, Mr. Chair, that we don't fall into the same trap, that we learn from the experiences that occurred with regard to coal-bed methane fracking in Wyoming and New Mexico, that severely poisoned large underground aquifers.

Water protection in Bill 26 has to come first. I've travelled with either the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar or the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to Nanton, Wetaskiwin, Ponoka, Trochu, Drayton Valley, Ma-Me-O Beach, where large hearings, sometimes between 300 and 500 individuals, gathered because of their concern about the potential extraction of coal-bed methane and the intrusion onto their properties. People became so concerned that they required drilling companies to fill out complex contracts that would basically force the company to move further down the road because of the concern for their water.

Coal-bed methane, while it can provide tremendous resource and tremendous value, also has to be treated with kid gloves. I'm hoping that with Bill 26 not just simply defining that coal-bed methane is a gas separate from the coal that surrounds it but that the methods of extraction are taken into account. Without going into great detail, why did we have canaries in coal mines? It was because of coal-bed methane and other gases that arose from the coal seams. I'm suggesting that as we go forward with Bill 26, we must make sure we have the necessary cautions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is interesting as the debate on Bill 26 continues. Certainly, I appreciated the fond remarks from the hon. Member for Calgary-West towards certain members on this side of the House when the bill was introduced.

9:00

Now, my questions are around consultation regarding the amendment that was introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and the freeholders. Well, there is another issue, Mr. Chairman, and that's the consultation with the coal mining industry and what conversations were struck up with them regarding the drafting of Bill 26.

Many of the different companies that have been proposing coal-bed methane development in this province have curtailed or scaled back their efforts or their plans. Again, I'm going to point to the east side of highway 2, or the Queen Elizabeth II highway, the issue into Red Deer from the north and proceeding to Calgary. One would see a rather large lay-down area for a drilling operation, and the rigs that would be resting there or placed there would be used for the drilling of coal-bed methane wells. Whether they were in production or whether they were exploratory doesn't really matter, but for a while, Mr. Chairman, you would very rarely see one of the rigs laid down

in the yard. Lately you see them there. Sometimes I think the ones that are absent have gone on to another jurisdiction.

The reason for this inactivity is the price of natural gas. It's the price of natural gas. What is the price of natural gas? Well, this government for the second time since their budget in April has revised down their projected price for natural gas in the second-quarter update. The projected price now is \$3.50, so that is certainly going to have an effect on activity around the development of the coal-bed methane industry, particularly when we're looking at large volumes of natural gas that can be produced as a result of fracking.

Now, I was surprised to learn that some people in the coal mining industry in this province were not consulted on Bill 26. I will be surprised if the freeholders haven't been consulted regarding the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that we just passed, but there are other people with concerns about Bill 26, and their concerns need to be part of the official record of this Assembly, in my view. People are writing that there are significant or many shortcomings to Bill 26, and the unintended consequences are significant. These groups are very concerned that Bill 26 does not resolve the current split-title dispute that was articulated earlier. There's no clear answer to the split-title coal-bed methane ownership dispute.

These individuals are also of the view that Bill 26 will not halt the existing litigation and that it could create a new series of lawsuits in relation to existing commercial coal-bed methane production arrangements. I'm sure this has been examined by the ministry or the Department of Energy. I'm sure that they did their very best in drafting this legislation. I hope they weren't preoccupied with trying to get a deal on the bitumen royalties in Fort McMurray, that were under negotiation, and left the drafting of this bill perhaps a little late. Perhaps that's why individuals felt they weren't consulted. Perhaps Bill 26 was put on the back burner, and maybe it should be put on the back burner again, and another round of discussions with concerned citizens can take place. You'd almost think we're talking about the parks bill here, Bill 29, but we're not; we're talking about Bill 26. This is yet another example – I'm surprised – where this government is not consulting with stakeholders.

Now, there is uncertainty around Bill 26 the way it's drafted currently for coal mining operations. Bill 26, it is said, has the potential to complicate an already overloaded permitting system. Bill 26, Mr. Chairman, according to these sources will foster competing resource development and will garner additional industry disputes that, in turn, will generate more litigation. Certainly, the hon. member across the way is not drafting an act to make work for lawyers. I don't think we need to do that.

I talked about the negative impacts on resource development earlier, but I'm surprised to learn again – and I want this as part of the record, Mr. Chairman – no industry consultation on Bill 26. Well, I'll be. I can't believe this.

The announcement on October 27, 2010, regarding the introduction of Bill 26 was a surprise to Sherritt, a rather large, prosperous corporation that makes a significant contribution to this city and to this province, but they claim they were not consulted. It was a surprise to the company. It was a surprise to the coal industry, the natural gas industry, and many other large Alberta utilities. I think we can do better than this.

The absence of industry consultation and the lack of involvement in this significant decision-making process raises other concerns, other questions, including the unknown consequences of existing surface mining operations. Early consultation of coal-bed methane stakeholders, carried out in 2006 with brief follow-up meetings in 2009, in fact, reached consensus to recommend that there be no legislative reform. These are questions that we need to get clarification on before we proceed with this bill.

I was at some of those meetings. I certainly remember seeing Department of Environment officials there and standing up and speaking out but not the Energy officials. I don't recall that any of the individuals from the Department of Energy were in attendance speaking, but certainly ADMs from Environment were there, and they were willing to talk, which was quite interesting.

Now, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek indicated, the split-title issue is already before the courts, and I'm not going to go any further with that, certainly, and bore you, Mr. Chairman. I wouldn't want to do that.

Sherritt indicates that Bill 26 will not accelerate the development of coal-bed methane in Alberta, and we talked about prices being the key driver in that. I certainly would agree with them. But Bill 26 as currently worded, according to the correspondence I've received – and all members have received it – jeopardizes existing coal-bed methane production agreements.

Now, I wasn't satisfied that the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud clarified that sufficiently, and I'm not convinced yet. I'm surprised that as Bill 26 was presented to the Assembly, myself and other members would receive correspondence from Sherritt Coal. Certainly, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere indicated there's significant correspondence coming to their caucus regarding this matter. It certainly is interesting that many of the hon. members of this Assembly would have a significant interest in coal-bed methane development and the rights of property owners, whether they're individual rights that have been handed down through the family since the province has been settled or legacy rights that some corporations like EnCana have inherited. Certainly, Imperial Oil would have rights. Some of the coal companies would have rights.

9:10

I think we should get this right once and for all, this Bill 26, and I think we can satisfy the needs of not only the freeholders but also the corporations who create a lot of the jobs in this province and create a lot of wealth and make a significant contribution to our high standard of living. I think we can do better than this. It'll be interesting to see what happens with this legislation, but this is very disappointing to this hon. member to have to stand here and recognize and put into the public record that, again, this is a government that seems to be preoccupied with their own internal divisions, and they're not reaching out and talking to individuals who make such a significant economic contribution to this province, and that's the coal industry.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, I'm very pleased that this bill has made it to this point. I have many constituents urging me to support this bill, and they've been talking about it for years. There's talk in the House here about consulting and whether or not we have consulted with the freehold owners or owners of coal or gas or split titles. This has been going on for years through our MLAs. MLAs have been consulting with their constituents, and my constituents have been telling me that we need to do this, so I'm very pleased that we're at this stage.

There are many, many thousands of owners of split title, and this whole issue of defining whether coal-bed methane is gas or part of coal only is a concern on split titles because if your title is one title that has coal, gas, and oil, all the gas on those properties is just gas. It's only when you split the coal out that some people, the coal owner, might think that the gas is then part of the coal.

When this became an issue on Crown land a few years ago, the Crown very quickly defined coal-bed methane as natural gas. There have been no lawsuits coming out of that. The government has not been sued or charged here. There have been no legal challenges to that issue. It's been working in British Columbia and in other places. If we now declare coal-bed methane to be natural gas on split titles, it should just clarify that for all owners of split titles where there's been a problem.

Now, in the past, of course, some of these owners of split titles have entered into agreements with developers of natural gas and have actually agreed, maybe, with owners of the coal that they might have part of it. That's why there are the amendments and the subsections to this amendment to the Mines and Minerals Act. What we want to do is clarify that on split titles the coal-bed methane is natural gas as well. It really is a big issue in my constituency. It is only an issue on split titles that were issued between 1902 and 1912. That's about half of each township that was freehold rights in central Alberta, in parts of Alberta that were settled in that time period, because that's the time period that titles were split. After 1912 there were no split titles, so it does not become an issue. Most of the land in my constituency, in my area, was settled in that period of time, so about half of the land in my area is owned by freehold owners, and much of that is split title. So this is huge.

Currently a lot of the freehold properties are being avoided by developers of coal-bed methane because of this problem with lack of clarity. That the developers of coal-bed methane are just avoiding these properties and drilling on Crown land, because that's where they know what's going on, or on titles where the owners own oil, gas, and coal. That's where the development is happening. This will add clarity so that the in-between land will be developed as well and gas will not be stranded, because what is happening is that if you avoid certain parcels, gas becomes stranded in those parcels. When the rest of the gas is developed and the field shuts down, there are just added costs to get these smaller bits of properties online into the pipelines.

This is very good news for the owners of split titles, and it's good news for junior companies that want to develop these types of properties. They can now have clarity. They can make deals with split-title owners, and they can get to business and actually develop these properties and develop resources for the province.

I want to acknowledge, Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Else Pedersen. She is the chairman of the Freehold Owners Association. She's a constituent of mine from Ponoka. She's been working tirelessly on this for years and years, trying to get the attention of the MLAs, the government, and all parties that are responsible for correcting this injustice, I would call it. I just want to acknowledge her and give her a lot of credit, she and her staff, for bringing these issues forward all these times.

I'm just going to wrap up there and ask all my colleagues here to support this bill as amended.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 26, Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 26 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 21 Wills and Succession Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: It's my pleasure to rise, Mr. Chair, in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 21, Wills and Succession Act. I'm pleased to see that this bill has received such strong support from all corners of this House. This act affects all Albertans, and it's important that we modernize existing legislation to bring us into the 21st century. As was mentioned, Bill 21 consolidates five enactments into one. These are the Wills Act, the Intestate Succession Act, the Survivorship Act, the Dependents Relief Act, and section 47 of the Trustee Act.

With regard to wills, the proposed reform is not a major change in policy; rather, it's a modern expression of it. The law would be refocused to ensure testamentary intent is met. Currently in interpreting a will, the court can only look at the words in the will and also look at the testator's circumstances at the time of making the will. As you just mentioned, the testator is the person, of course, who is making the will. No other evidence is allowed. To determine the testator's true intention, the will can now be interpreted by looking at all evidence relating to intention, provided that it's properly corroborated.

If I understood at least one of her questions the other night, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had a concern about new rules around amendments to wills. Section 22 of the act provides the usual requirements for execution of a will, but there is a change in that the court, if there's not compliance with section 22, if it's satisfied on clear and convincing evidence, can recognize an amendment which wouldn't otherwise have been recognized. But it has to be satisfied, again, on clear and convincing evidence that it reflects the intentions of the person making the will. If there's a concern about undue influence and so on, I think that is really dealt with by having to present evidence to the court.

We also removed the law where a will is revoked on marriage because that is not in keeping with current society. Albertans are living longer, and as a result they may enter into second or late-life marriages after having made clear estate plans and wills. Consultation, I should mention, is very supportive of adding new provisions to clearly revoke this portion of the act.

Regarding intestacy – and intestacy means dying without a will or with a will that doesn't cover the circumstances – if there is no will, the property will go to the deceased's family. This isn't new either, but we did remove old rules such as a spouse being disinherited if he or she were living in adultery. This has been replaced by a modern rule that a spouse is disinherited if there has been a two-year separation or a court order separating the property or dealing in a final way with their relationship.

9:20

I'd also like to address a concern of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, and that was regarding the issue of temporary possession of the matrimonial home. This is an important new right provided for in the legislation. An adult interdependent partner or a spouse of a deceased person will have an automatic right to stay in his or her shared home for three months after death. This provides a temporary right of shelter for spouses or partners who are not

registered on the title of their home or named on the lease. I believe that the hon. member had a concern that three months wasn't enough.

This three-month period provides the spouse or partner with time to grieve and make other living arrangements if necessary. But, that said, if a spouse or partner needs longer than three months, it's still open to them to apply to the court to have this time extended. This recognizes the need to balance the rights of the spouse or partner to remain in the home for compassionate reasons with the rights of the ultimate owners or landlords of the home. The courts will be able to hear from the surviving spouse and all parties with an interest in the family home and will be able to determine if the time should be extended and for how long. The inclusion of this right was strongly supported by public consultation. It protects vulnerable Albertans who may otherwise be without shelter immediately after the death of their spouse or partner.

On the issue of family maintenance and support grandchildren can now apply for support from a grandparent's estate. This was also supported in consultation and is a response to a small but growing trend of grandparents parenting grandchildren. When this happens, it may be best for the grandchild to be able to get support directly from the estate because there is a fair likelihood that the child will otherwise be left without support.

In order to truly modernize the law in this area, the act will also abolish a number of outdated presumptions and doctrines related to whether property transfers made during life impact inheritance. These are ancient concepts that no longer reflect modern realities. The court will be given the power to decide what the party's intention was and to make a decision as to how gifts and transfers made during life impact inheritance.

Regarding matrimonial property, the Wills and Succession Act will amend the Matrimonial Property Act to entitle a spouse to matrimonial property whether the marriage ends due to death or due to divorce. As the law currently stands, if spouses are happily married and one dies, the surviving spouse doesn't have a right to apply for his or her share of the matrimonial property; that is, property acquired by the spouses during the course of their marriage. The bill changes this so that the surviving spouse can apply for his or her share of the matrimonial property upon the death of the other spouse.

The right to share in matrimonial property is grounded in the view of marriage as a partnership, where each spouse contributes to the marriage and to acquiring property during the marriage. Consistent with this view the spouse is entitled to an equal share of the assets acquired during the marriage once the marriage ends. This right was also strongly supported in public consultation, and it is consistent with the law in other provinces. Alberta has however maintained the position, supported by the Supreme Court of Canada, that matrimonial property rights do not need to extend to common-law or interdependent couples who choose not to marry.

Regarding survivorship, the survivorship rules in section 5 create a statutory rule that applies if there is no other intention found in the will. A court may find that in interpreting the will to give effect . . .

The Deputy Chair: Just a minute.

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose has the floor, and decorum is that you take your seats, please.

Thank you.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. Regarding survivorship, the survivorship rules in section 5 create a statutory rule that applies if there is no other intention found in the will. A court may find that in interpreting the will to give effect to the intention of an individual, there is evidence through the provisions in the will and in the context of the

individual's circumstances at the time of making the will that show a contrary intention. Examples of this are rare, but through the rules that apply to the types of evidence the court can hear and accept, the court may, in reading the provisions in the will and in considering the individual circumstances, also find that section 5 has been displaced. These instances will be very fact specific.

Finally, section 26 of the bill sets out how a will must be interpreted. It states that a will must be interpreted to give effect to the intention of the testator. In determining this, the court may admit evidence as to the meaning of words, as to the meaning of provisions of the will in the context of the testator's circumstances when the will was made, and as to the testator's intent regarding matters in the will. Survivorship rules generally only apply in tragic accidents, where both spouses die at the same time, such as motor vehicle accidents or mass accidents involving the death of numerous family members at the same time.

The Wills and Succession Act will benefit all Alberta families, and I encourage all members to support Bill 21. These changes reflect the changing family context and property interests in Alberta and will help to provide clarity, improve inefficiencies, and streamline processes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. While I do appreciate the clarification that has been provided by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, I will say that I do feel somewhat more assured by the notion that the court has a positive obligation to satisfy themselves that there's no undue influence when they're assessing amendments to a will that don't adhere to the proper form. I think that as long as there is that active obligation, that is good. I would be concerned, you know, that you'd have a situation where the court would only do it if asked, and then, of course, if the person himself was vulnerable to undue influence, they might not necessarily be the person that would ask.

I think I understand the member correctly, that he is suggesting that there is sort of a positive obligation in the interpretation of this act to ensure either through common law or through the act – I'm not sure which – for the courts to actively assess the issue of undue influence even where it's not raised by the party who might well have been the victim of that. So I think that's an important thing.

I do appreciate as well the amendments that ensure the temporary right to shelter for those residing in the testator's home, who are not ultimately the final recipients of that home. I agree with some about the concern about three months not being long enough. I guess I'm a little bit concerned that often the person that is in that position is also maybe not most able to get in front of a judge to make an application to extend that time. Of course, as we know, getting in front of a judge is not something that's either easy or inexpensive. So I remain a little bit concerned about that, but at least there is some opportunity to remain in the house, so that is good.

I only caught segments of what the member was saying with respect to how this act deals with matrimonial property in the context of wills. There was mention of the fact that a decision was made to not adopt a policy which is different from that which has been articulated by the Supreme Court of Canada, treating matrimonial property rights differently for those who have been officially married versus those who lived in a common-law relationship for a period of time.

If I understood that correctly – and again I will acknowledge that I only heard excerpts of what was being said at that point – I remain somewhat concerned by that. I think that might have been an opportunity for the government to move. The government always

has the legislative authority to move beyond that which the common law currently suggests is the case. I would say that in our current society we have more and more dependent relationships, more and more families where children rely on those relationships of dependency, where the parents have not chosen to marry for a variety of reasons. I do remain concerned that we may in fact be treating particularly those children differently in this act than we would if their parents had gotten married.

9:30

Ultimately, the dependency experienced by the children, often through the surviving partner, whether it be a partner that is in a relationship that's one that is overseen through a marriage contract or one that is just simply through common law – the children are dependent regardless of whether there has been a marriage or not been a marriage. I guess I get a bit concerned if we are still talking about treating that family differently, the children of the survivor differently, where the survivor was married versus where the survivor was not married to the testator. Again, I put an asterisk beside this because I was only able to hear about half of what the member was saying at that point. So I have some concerns about that, and I'd be interested to see if the member could respond at all on that in this back-and-forth.

Again, I did mention that this appears to be a complete and total reflection of what was recommended through the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and I know that that is a very respected mechanism through which consultation can take place and best practices and best opinion can be garnered. I don't as a whole have tremendous concern because I am prepared to defer quite a bit to the opinions and the recommendations that come from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, but I wouldn't mind if the member could perhaps answer that one question about the matrimonial property, just clarify probably what he has already said.

Thank you.

Mr. Olson: I also had a little bit of trouble hearing the question, but I'll try to answer. I think the hon. member's concern was children of a less-than-formal relationship. Part 5 of the act talks about family maintenance and support, and the definition of family member has actually been broadened in this legislation to include children and grandchildren, even great-grandchildren, so I don't think there is a concern there. I think the types of people you describe are covered.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 21, the Wills and Succession Act.

[The clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 22

Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Deputy Chair: In committee this afternoon one amendment was defeated on Bill 17. Are there any comments or questions with regard to this bill?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Question? Holy. We've got a lot of work to do on this one. Come on. Boy, oh boy. Do we ever have a lot of work to do on this bill. [interjection] That's right. I think I'd like to see what the new parliamentary assistant for health after the axing of the doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark, that absolutely pathetic excuse of a decision – it's too bad because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is a good man. [some applause] Absolutely. He's a good man, and he doesn't deserve to come into this position under such ridiculous circumstances as what we saw over the last two days. We have a few people that talk to us, and we got the story pretty good. [interjection] Oh, sorry; caucus confidentiality. That's right.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'm having trouble hearing. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor, please.

Mr. Anderson: You know what? Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm having trouble hearing myself with this guy.

Mr. Chase: Tossed overboard.

Mr. Anderson: Tossed overboard.

One of the reasons this Health Act is an absolute train wreck, and I alluded to it earlier, is the fact that we have given so much power, authority, et cetera, to the minister under this bill, but there's no way to – sorry. We've given them the ability under the bill to obfuscate all of their responsibilities for actually enforcing what's in the health charter that this is proposing, and it's an absolute shame. It really does nothing, so what I'd like to do today is that I'd like to start by proposing an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. We'll pause for a moment while the amendment is distributed.

Hon. members, this is amendment A2.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Well, here we go. We're talking about A2. I'll just read it into the record. I move that Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, be amended in the last recital of the preamble by adding “, namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible” after “Canada Health Act (Canada)”.

If you look at the preamble right now and you look after “Canada Health Act (Canada),” that's on page 2 of the bill under the preamble, a few paragraphs down:

Whereas policies, organization, operations and decisions about Alberta's health system should be guided and measured and sustained consistent with the following principles:

that Alberta is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act (Canada). . .

Then it would read:

, namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible.

9:40

Now, obviously, the Wildrose caucus has made it very clear that we support the principles of the Canada Health Act. I think every party in this Legislature supports the principles of the Canada Health Act. The reason we do is pretty simple, and I think that this is pretty much universal across all party lines. We do not believe that somebody should be denied access to critical health services because of an inability to afford them, an inability to pay.

Speaking as someone who has a family member in the United States suffering through a terminal illness and seeing the financial hardship that that family is going through with the treatments that she has had to take, it's something that you really think about, and it really gives you huge pause when you see it in real life. You know, you hear the stories about people not being insured or having insurance that is subpar, being underinsured I guess. Most have insurance down in the United States, but there are many, many, many that are underinsured. When they're underinsured, there are huge amounts of cost involved in getting expensive treatments like cancer treatment, for example. This is not something that I think any Canadian, certainly not any Albertan, takes lightly. I think the main idea of the Canada Health Act is simply that people should be given the health care that they need, the critical health care they need, the essential health care they need, without regard – in other words, it shouldn't depend on their ability to pay.

Like I said, to watch people in the United States, a particular family member with a terminal illness, struggle through that knowing that they make very little – I mean, a respectable amount of money but, you know, not a lot, very much middle class – and to see the expense of what they have to pay for their copayments and services that are not covered and all the stuff that we take for granted in Canada and in Alberta truly strengthens my resolve and strengthens our caucus's resolve and I'm sure strengthens everyone's resolve to make sure that we uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Now, with that said, we have a system in this province that is broken. The principles are good. Universal coverage: those are good principles. We believe in those principles, but the way that we deliver on those principles is on the verge of collapse. We see this in our emergency rooms with people dying unnecessarily. We see this with a lack of family doctors. We see this with very long waiting lines, some of the longest waiting lists for medical procedures in the entire industrialized world. We do not have a good system. Our principles are good, what we're trying to achieve is right, but we have a system that is absolutely failing Albertans. It's failing to deliver on the principles and the promise of the Canada Health Act, and it needs to change, absolutely needs to change.

The problem is that there is resistance to change. The resistance to change comes from individuals – I do think it's with the best of intent – who are very averse to change. They feel that any type of new idea or new way of delivering health care somehow threatens the principles behind the Canada Health Act, and because of this, they use fear tactics. We hear our own Premier using those fear tactics when he cites, of all things, scary European health care even

though those European systems are so far superior to our own, just beyond superior: shorter wait-lists, lower costs, more competition in a publicly funded universal system. Maybe it's fearmongers, maybe it's ignorance, just a lack of ability to get outside of their preconceived notions about things. They go around spreading lies. That's what they are. They're not true. Whether they think they're true or not, I guess, is another question, but the fact is that they're not true, so we've closed our minds to real health care reform.

We get it in our head that if we believe in competitive delivery where, for example, private deliverers of health care, nonprofit deliverers of health care, and public deliverers of health care compete in the same system for public dollars, competing for the same queue of people waiting for a service – there are people out there who think that that somehow threatens the foundation of universal coverage, public coverage. That's simply not the case. That aversion to change and that aversion to looking at what's working in Sweden and in France and in Luxembourg and in Belgium and in these countries where it's working so well, that push-back, keeps us from getting anywhere.

I would say that probably 80 to 85 per cent of Albertans are in complete agreement with a universal, publicly funded system. There is 10 to 15 per cent that say: "No way, man. Survival of the fittest. Buy your own insurance." But I think that's a small minority. I can understand that small minority's frustration with the current system that we're in, but I think that's a minority opinion. The vast majority of Albertans in all parties believe that we need to make sure everyone is covered, and so do we. That's what Albertans are telling us, so that's what we're bringing forward, as are all parties.

We have to make sure that in our rush to protect this system and the universal aspect of it, the universal coverage and public insurance coverage, we don't overstep our bounds and close our minds to innovative ways of delivering health care. Like so many in this room I have talked to hundreds and hundreds of Albertans, thousands, really, at the door and in our offices. I've heard a couple of interest groups say this in the media, Friends of Medicare in particular, but I've never once heard an Albertan in front of my face say: "You know what? Whatever you do, make sure that, no matter what, all health care is delivered in the public system. I want to make sure that the deliverer of that health care needs to be under the public system." I've never heard that.

They don't care about that. They want to make sure it's paid for universally. They don't want queue jumping; I've heard that. But no one cares if it's a nonprofit provider, if it's a private provider, like out of the Grace hospital, if it's out of a public hospital or facility or surgical centre. They don't care. They just want it done. That's all they care about. Just get it done. They don't want to wait and rot in line for 18 months. That's what they don't want.

I find it irresponsible of this government to sit there – and I hope they change their tune; I really do. I know that there are members over there that have a feeling of openness and are open to new ideas. You know who you are. You're open to new ideas. Just admit it, hon. member. You are different. I know that the hon. finance minister is open. I know he understands these things. He has studied these things. He knows these things, and I know what he has advocated for in the past. I know he still has those beliefs. He knows it because it's just the truth.

Competitive delivery works. It works in other jurisdictions. It works, so let's not shy away from it. Let's say: "Look. We've got 15,000 hip surgeries that we need done. Okay? We're going to break those up into contracts of, say, a thousand each. I don't care if you're public or you're private or you're nonprofit; bid on it. What can you do? What's your cost? Bid on it, and we will give it to the best bidder who can deliver it the fastest, the cheapest, the best." That's what we should be doing to alleviate our lineups.

9:50

We're always worried about more money for health care. Where are we going to get more money for health care? Should we bring in user fees and stuff like that? Should we bring in all these things? No; that's not the answer. The answer is that if you want to bring investment, you have to open up the contracts that are available to the private, nonprofit, and public sectors to bid on them. There's no reason why they can't. When they do that, you'll have people come in, and they'll set up shop. They'll say: "You know what? We're going to turn this building into a surgical centre, and we're going to treat patients in here. We can do this for cheap. We'll do a joint venture. We'll get it in there, and we'll specialize in this. We'll be able to do this cheaper than the big public hospitals, with some of the expensive things that happen in a public monopoly." And there are many.

Now, there will be cases where there will be public hospitals that will be able to deliver it cheaper. They will be able to deliver it cheaper. There are those instances where public hospitals, for whatever reason, do it cheaper, and they will want to compete.

There's a funny story in New Zealand that the leader of our Wildrose Party and caucus, Danielle Smith, always talks about. New Zealand was going broke. They were on the verge of insolvency, bankruptcy. They needed to completely rein in their spending. One of the big issues they had was that they were spending too much on their public service, and everything was nationalized.

One of the things that was nationalized was the ports. They had hundreds of employees at these ports, and the government went and talked with the unions and said, "Look, we need to privatize these ports." The unions came back and said: "You know what? Let us bid on it. We'll see if we can do it cheaper than the private sector." So there was a bid, and they said okay. They gave the opportunity, and the union actually won the bid. I think they cut it down – what was the number? – like, 60 per cent. They did the same work with 60 per cent fewer people, and they were able to do that. Now, obviously, it probably helped because they owned a lot of the infrastructure and all that. But the point is that they were able to cut costs and still deliver the same service.

People don't understand. People talk about private profit margins: oh, if we let the private sector in, that will drive up health care costs because there's a profit margin. Ooh, a profit margin. Well, the problem is that there's a waste margin in public delivery, a huge waste margin, especially when there's no competition. When you're in the public sector and it doesn't matter – you're going to get the same block of funding and increases every year and so forth – there's no incentive to be prudent with your spending. There's none.

Let the private sector, the public sector, the nonprofit sector compete for those public dollars. If that is allowed, you're going to have more investment from the private sector and the nonprofit sector into our health care system, which is less money that the taxpayer has to put in on the infrastructure side, and the public-sector unions and the private companies are going to find ways to streamline costs.

One of the biggest examples of this was HRC. I saw the reports from the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute. That is a nonpartisan, objective, funded by AHS group that did an analysis of the cost of doing hip and knee replacements in all the public hospitals around Alberta as well as in a couple of the private places, namely Grace hospital, HRC. They came back with some startling numbers: 40 per cent cheaper and 40 per cent faster than the average of all the other hospitals. Now, how is that possible? People say: oh, it's cream-skimming; they were cream-skimming. Not true. Absolutely, categorically not true. The patients were coming from the same

queue of people. The doctors would just book their surgeries. They could book them at a public; they could book them at the Grace hospital with HRC. They could book it wherever they wanted, so they would do that. They could do it 40 per cent faster and 40 per cent cheaper.

Now, of course, we all know what happened. It's well documented. They were doing such a good job that they were asked to expand. They expanded, and then they got the rug pulled out from underneath them by our current CEO, Dr. Duckett, who, it seems, is not going to have a job here much longer. That was an incompetent decision, as was his handling of the Cookie Monster incident.

The point is that, you know, that's what happens when you have a large, centralized public monopoly with someone who's a poor central planner. You get bad mistakes made, and that's what they did. We've really got to make sure that we solve that problem.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I have a great deal of difficulty with this amendment because it appears to be just: an interesting idea; let's try it. It's saying that health should be viewed as a commodity, that it should be subject to competition, that competition produces better results. Well, if that were the case, then Australia wouldn't be moving away from private health care delivery back into public systems, buying up private clinics. Neither would Britain be undergoing this particular suggested transition.

It's a little bit of a cover-up circumstance. Use some of the universal health care language such as "publicly administered" and "universal" and "portable" and "accessible," and it sounds very good except that what it becomes, basically, is a voucher system. We'll give you a certain number of dollars, and you can choose where you want to go with those dollars, whether you want to go to a public facility or whether you want to go to a private facility.

What it doesn't take into account is that there are a finite number of doctors. The whole idea that if you allow people to pay for their own coverage and go to a private facility, then you're going to reduce the lineups in the public facilities – well, because there is a finite number of doctors, if they're operating in the private, they're not operating in the public.

Dr. Morton: Why is there a finite number of doctors?

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Chase: Through the chair, the reason there are a finite number of doctors, unfortunately, partly, in Alberta, Mr. Chair, who I'm looking at and speaking directly to, is the number of seats that are afforded for medical training in this province. Unfortunately, as the hon. chair knows, those seats were reduced in 1994 and through 1998, when three of Calgary's hospitals were closed.

Now, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talked about the efficiencies of the HRC and how they could do things so much better, so much faster, and, he suggested, so much cheaper. Well, the reality is that that facility had a 10 per cent premium per operation.

Mr. Anderson: Where's your proof?

Mr. Chase: You look it up. That's the case.

The only reason that facility was even considered was because of the mistakes made by the Klein government in terms of blowing up the General, closing the Grace and allowing it to be converted into a private operating facility, and closing the Holy Cross. A false

demand was created by taking three public hospitals and the operating rooms associated with them out of the circumstance. Therefore, where I'm coming from, Mr. Chair, are the false assumptions that this amendment A2 is coming from.

Now, the idea that physicians should be able to work and straddle both systems is something that I have a great deal of difficulty with. For example, in Quebec physicians are required to make the choice of whether they're going to operate in the private system or in the public system. They don't have the choice of whether they can straddle. Here in Alberta and in B.C. they have the choice of having a private operation or a public operation.

10:00

Mr. Chairman, this appears, as I say, to use some of the universality language, but what it's saying is that we're going to get better health results, as suggested in amendment A2, by just tossing it open to competition. We all know that this is a very questionable argument because when things go wrong in the private facilities, they end up in the public facility. The private, whether it's in the States or in Alberta, in amendment A2, where it talks about portable and accessible, does not take into account that it's only the easier, straightforward, less complicated operations that take place in the private facility. That's where there's less expense. With regard to the HRC, which has gone out of business, if it hadn't been for the guarantee of the WCB cases, of the RCMP cases they would not have been able to make a go of it.

Mr. Chair, when it comes to publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible, and then referencing the Canada Health Act, we wouldn't be able to have Copeman clinics, where they charge a \$3,000 entry fee and then bill their services to the public system. So what's happening is that we're seeing private systems basically getting public funding, and I'm suggesting that the product that is produced is not cheaper, is not more efficient. It is the result of governments' artificially created monopolies. Gimbel, for example, is given all the eye operations.

The Deputy Chair: We're talking about health insurance coverage, period.

Mr. Chase: Yes, we are. And what pays for those operations? If you take them out of the public system, if you delist the number of things covered, then it's the insurance that picks up the difference, and that's what I am saying.

Mazankowski, in terms of insurance, suggested delisting a variety of services. What we have here in terms of the public insurance is not a great system right now in terms of Blue Cross, which is a public insurance, but at least there is some universality to it. When you bring in public and private, paid for at public expense, the mix, I do not believe, ends up with better results. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, while this appears to use the language of universality, it's saying: let's let hospitals compete for the public dollars through the public insurance system, and we're going to have that much of an improved system. If public funding wasn't provided for these private systems through public insurance, these private corporations could not exist.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak on amendment A2, that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has tabled. He has moved that Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, be

amended in the last recital of the preamble by adding: “, namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible” after “Canada Health Act (Canada).” Why this amendment has been brought forward is very simple. It’s what Albertans have been telling us, what Albertans have been asking for.

We’ve had the honour and the privilege to travel this great province, and over the last eight months, I guess, since the 4th of January, when I left the Conservative government and joined the Wildrose, I have spoken to thousands and thousands of Albertans and have had the ability to talk to many health care professionals in the system. I mean, we’ve talked to doctors, nurses, LPNs, NAs; you name it. The minister of health talked a couple of weeks ago about all of the people that he has spoken to, and he went on about talking to the emergency physicians, and he even spoke to the janitors. I guess our comment to that when he said that was: well, you can talk all you want, but have you listened?

That is something that I’m hearing throughout this province. While it’s easy to travel the province and say you’ve visited this and you’ve visited that and you’ve done this and you’ve done that, a whirlwind tour of going into hospitals or a meeting with nurses or doctors or anything like that takes good listening skills to hear what they have to say.

You know, Mr. Chairman, we can see what good listening skills the government has by the recent developments with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and where he’s sitting now, on this side with the opposition, as an independent, and not sitting where he should be sitting as health advocate for the people that voted for him and asked him to serve.

Mr. Chair, Albertans want access to the health care that they need. They don’t want and they have told us that they don’t want a U.S.-styled health care system that leaves millions uninsured. We’ve seen what’s been happening lately in the United States with what President Obama is trying to do and changes to the health care system there, and you can certainly see the reaction that he got by the recent election and some of the resounding defeats that some of his candidates that were running faced.

We have a place in the States, and as soon as you get into the States or you’re at the grocery store or you’re at the restaurant or you’re golfing or whatever, they seem to know you’re from Canada, and they want to talk to you about the health care system, what we have versus theirs. As a Canadian and an Albertan I was quite proud of our health care system until recently, when you see the long lines that we’re facing in our health care system and the long waits in the emergency, where the debate has been quite heated as of late in regard to what is happening in our emergencies. I can tell you as someone who has had a few health problems lately that waiting 18 months to get into a specialist when you’re really not sure what’s going on isn’t what I call fun, and I know that I’m not alone. I mean, I have constituents waiting three years for a procedure. While it might be a test, it’s still an important test to see if they’re cancer free.

So it’s critical that any proposed health reforms that we bring forward – and we have brought our health policy forward as the Wildrose caucus. The health insurance coverage is exactly what the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has said, that it comply with the five key principles of the Canada Health Act. It talks about mainly that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive in scope, universal, portable among provinces, and accessible.

10:10

I look at this fine province, you know, and we can have this continuous debate, if we want, about private health care. I some-

times get a stunned look on my constituents’ faces when we talk and I tell them that the clinic next door to my constituency office is a private clinic. The doctors are private. They’re there, obviously, to make some money. People keep saying: oh, we don’t want to go into private. Well, I guess if that’s truly where Albertans want to go, then we really have to look at our doctors’ offices, et cetera, because there’s that element of private, and it’s no different than anything else that you and I can face on a daily basis.

What Albertans want is timely access. They want to be able to have a family doctor when they need a family doctor. They want it publicly administered. My colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere talked about the incident that we’ve seen with HRC, a private facility, publicly funded, and providing a service for Calgarians of hip and knee replacement at 40 per cent less. You think about that, and, yes, they do make a profit, but, yes, they’ve taken all of the fat that you would probably see in the publicly funded hospital and gotten rid of that.

We did have the opportunity to visit that facility and talk to the patients that had their hip or knee replaced and talk about the planning, not only getting the surgery. Then they were working immediately with a physiotherapist. They were working with a dietitian. Their whole health was treated not only through the surgery procedure but in looking after them and getting them up and walking and running. Then, you know, their dietary needs because in some of the cases where we saw some of the hip replacements, we would have a patient that had a problem being overweight, so really that needed to be addressed.

The hon. member talks about the comprehensiveness, the universal, to be portable, to be accessible, which leads us back to the Health Act and one of the many amendments that we’re going to bring forward on the Health Act. This bill goes on under “whereas” to also talk about reasonable access to timely and appropriate care, including primary care, but at no time anywhere does this bill address what they consider reasonable access to timely and appropriate care. So I think that is a key element that we’re going to be talking about.

It’s unfortunate that there are some special-interest groups out there and political parties that have used what I consider scare tactics. I think that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere bringing this amendment forward makes it very clear where we stand as the Wildrose, that we’re not looking at getting into what everybody says is a U.S.-styled health care system or, for that matter, that we’re going to start privatizing here and there. I can tell you that probably the most effective and sustainable and patient-centred health systems in the world, quite frankly, aren’t found in Canada, and they’re not found in the United States. We’ve heard our leader talk about western European countries such as France, Australia, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland, which all deliver world-class universal public health care systems. Then you hear the opposition standing up, and the Premier especially talking in his theatric style, that we get accused of, about what’s happening in Europe and the tax stuff and things like that.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, obviously, when he travelled this province on this consultation process, heard very much about, as he’s told us, what Albertans want to see in this act. I commend them for taking the time to travel, and I’m sure that I look forward to him standing up and speaking about this particular amendment because I can tell you – I would guarantee it – that we have had people attend some of those consultation processes that he did who talked about the health insurance coverage that is publicly administered and comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible. Enshrining this, I think, in legislation sends a very clear, articulate message to Albertans that this is what we believe in, that this is what

we think is one of the things. If we're going to go to the bother of Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act – quite frankly, it's not one of our priorities. I can tell you as an MLA since 1993 that I don't recall anybody ever coming into my office talking about a health charter, but that's for another day and another conversation and probably another amendment.

With those few words, I'm going to ask members in the House that are here tonight to support amendment A2, as you've referred to it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity on behalf of members of our caucus to speak to the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. A couple of things, and I'm going to speak strictly to what's on the page here as opposed to getting into a discussion of alternate financing approaches to health care systems and some of the other areas that have been explored by earlier speakers.

Initially, to try to determine the intent of the amendment, when the amendment was first distributed, Mr. Chair, I interpreted the purpose as being to add clarity to the particular clause by specifically enumerating the principles that appear in the Canada Health Act today. I suppose that if, in fact, that is the purpose that I'm to interpret from the hon. member, there may be some merit in doing that.

In fact, in consideration and in discussions on our side of the House prior to this bill being drafted, we did look at the question of going to this level of specificity. I guess we rejected it primarily for two reasons, Mr. Chair. First of all, should we choose to list these principles in the statute, assuming this bill is passed, we may run into a situation in the future where the Alberta Health Act, as it may be passed, is in fact not in alignment with the Canada Health Act should something change in the Canada Health Act in the future. That would be, obviously, one reason that we would not want to consider this, and it's a reasonable and prudent approach to drafting legislation.

The second, of course, is just the question of whether the amendment specifically as proposed, again leaving aside all of the other, unrelated discussion about other approaches to health care delivery in other systems, provides any measurable increase in value in the statute, should it be passed. We can't see that, Mr. Chair.

Notwithstanding some of the discussion that has been raised by other members, the premise of this bill is support for a fully publicly funded health care system in Alberta. It is based on the premise of our current single-payer model. To attempt to use this particular clause as a segue perhaps to other changes that people might want to propose in the future would simply be doing something that would be inconsistent with the overall purpose and intent of the legislation.

While I appreciate if, in fact, the original motive for the amendment was to offer some additional clarity on a specific clause, we can't support it, Mr. Chair, for the two reasons that I've just mentioned. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Well, we couldn't disagree more with what the hon. member just said. My goodness. I can only say that the amendment put forward as a notice of amendment clearly is something that has incredible utility. For those who may not be aware, utility is usefulness with incredible value. That, in my judgment, is what the sole purpose is. I'm very disappointed that the

member who has just been appointed the parliamentary secretary, I can only say, is . . . [interjections] There is value.

10:20

Perhaps one of the key principles that we have is: seek first to understand. I'm trying to understand the comments. I'm going to go back into the *Hansard* of what has been said by the new parliamentary secretary. From there, I look at this amendment. It appears that the governing side had looked at this amendment, but they thought that there is no value to it being publicly administered. They believe there's no value to comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible, after the words of the Canada Health Act. Thinking that there is no value to something like publicly funded under the Canada Health Act absolutely astounds me. Quite honestly, it's everything that Alberta and Canada stands for.

What the parliamentary secretary for health really implied was that they don't see any value in this amendment. To the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, I'm certain that must hurt your feelings.

Mr. Anderson: I'm crushed. I don't know what to do.

Mr. Boutilier: I know – I have confidence – that you will, without question, build up and recover from the comments of this new parliamentary secretary for health.

Adding in the preamble “namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered”: this level of detail is required in order to be comprehensive, in order to be universal, in order to be portable and accessible, after the Canada Health Act. The new parliamentary secretary for health, appointed after the doctor got kicked out by his caucus members, says that this has no value. That is beyond comprehension. [interjection] To the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, through the chair, I can only say this. If you think there is no value in the Canada Health Act, then I couldn't disagree with you more because it actually stands for a value and a principle of Alberta.

I must admit that we saw that action today when, of course, we saw them kicking one of their own out. I must say that about a year ago, after I got kicked out for representing my constituents, senior citizens, on their health – they also are very concerned about health. I always give many of the members on the other side the benefit of the doubt that if I had been provided with the opportunity to go to a caucus to explain my situation, they would have understood. They had the opportunity to understand the member, the doctor, but what did they do? It was unanimous.

I can only say that I always had thought that if I had been provided the opportunity by the leader of this government, members on the other side would have listened intently. When I hear comments from people such as the Member for Red Deer-North or Red Deer-South – I'll have to be corrected; I don't know which it is – I'm disappointed that they say: you don't know the whole story. Well, I do know the whole story because the person is my friend. In fact, the very same comments that were made about me are the comments being made now by a member over there. I can only say that this, in terms of seniors, in terms of dealing with the health care of this province, is something that is so important. It's so important to a doctor that these members just kicked out, unanimously according to the whip, the Member for West Yellowhead.

I can only say to you that I had always granted the benefit of the doubt that if I had been given the opportunity, they would have listened. But you know what the comments are? “Oh, you just don't know the whole story.” I know the whole story and then some.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, let's get back to the amendment.

Mr. Boutilier: On the issue of this bill I want to be able to say: just put your hand on your chin and sleep. I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, that this is such an important amendment. We don't know the whole story? Well, I know something. You don't know the whole story of what Albertans think, but we are connected to what Albertans think, and they think right now that the disconnect between the bills that are in here by this government – thank goodness there is a saviour who is in here to be able to put amendments forward by the opposition, to be able to add some sanity to what is going on. [interjections] Mr. Chairman, through the chair, I'm trying to be able to speak.

The Deputy Chair: Well, talk to me. You have the floor. Talk to me.

Mr. Boutilier: I see the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was laughing at my comments when I was speaking about the Canada Health Act and the fact that it has value.

Mr. Hancock: The fact that you talk about yourself as a saviour.

Mr. Boutilier: Excuse me. Through the chair. Mr. Chairman, if he wants to speak, it should be through the chair. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member has the floor, please.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do have the floor, and I intend to have the floor a lot tonight. You know what? My elbows are getting quite sharpened tonight, and you ain't seen nothing yet because there is much more to come.

I want to say that I'm glad to see that the member across the way, when saying that we have no value – can you believe this? No value. It is absolutely unbelievable. No principles. I'm glad to see that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster just realized. I might add that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster just said: no principles. That's what concerns me. I can see that we have an agreement on something, that, yes, there need to be principles and values when decisions are made, Mr. Chairman. We saw some decisions made this afternoon. By the way, those decisions were unanimous. Unbelievable. Unbelievable.

I guess I can only go back tonight and talk to my wife and my three-year-old and say, "You know, Gail, I was thinking that if I had an opportunity to speak to caucus, they're reasonable-minded people," but clearly I have to say: who has no principles or values now?

I do know one thing for sure, that each and every one of us that sits in this Assembly represents people, 3.5 million people all across Alberta, that do have principles, and they do have values for things such as this very bill. I quote the amendment to Bill 17: by adding to the preamble "namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered." What does the new parliamentary secretary of health say? "We didn't think it had any value." The amendment says: "publicly administered, comprehensive." Also, it talks about: "universal, portable and accessible," after the Canada Health Act.

The comment across the way. Not even a parliamentary secretary for 24 hours, and he's saying: we don't think that has any value. Well, holy smokes. I can only say that there is some serious concern. As much as the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere might have hurt his feelings, he will get over this. I'm quite certain.

Mr. Anderson: I will.

Mr. Boutilier: I think he will. Wow, not a good start in the first 24

hours for the parliamentary secretary. As much as the member is not a doctor – and, my goodness, the experience of a doctor, I guess, is not really important any longer. I can only say today that it's clear to me from the drafting of this Bill 17 – and I want to thank the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. In fact, I read in this newspaper today that they referred to him as a rock star. No doubt in my mind. Whoever made that comment was one smart person.

Mrs. Forsyth: It was me.

Mr. Boutilier: The critic in health, I understand, has had an important role to play in that.

I want to say that the administration of health is so important to our seniors, so important to the people of Alberta, and this actual amendment is one that I believe has incredible value, has a tremendous amount of utility. For those who don't know what utility means, that's usefulness and a lot of usefulness that can help Albertans.

So, Mr. Chairman, with that, I can only say that I endorse this amendment one hundred and ten per cent and then some.

10:30

I can only say tonight that as I look across the way and see who's sitting in the Premier's chair right now, I'm not sure if I need to be more worried or happy. Right now I don't know. Should I be worried, or should I be happy? I know I was happy when the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake sat in the Premier's chair.

But the question today is on the amendment, Mr. Chairman. I will be supporting this amendment because it talks about the principles and values. I'm so pleased that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster actually agreed with those very principles that I'm speaking about, so it's obvious to me that this member will be supporting the amendment. I'll be looking for him to stand when this amendment is called for a vote, and I will go back in *Hansard* to see his comments.

To the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, Mr. Chairman, who actually earlier today spoke in front of teachers who actually got a question – actually, he made reference to an Albertan who said: well, that's a very clever way of asking a question, with three or four questions rolled into one. But I actually, within reason, somewhat liked his response because his response had some principle and value. But for the members across the way and the new parliamentary secretary of health to say that it has no value and that this detail is not important is just unacceptable. To that individual member I would only say to govern yourself accordingly with your words when it comes to such important matters as health because, ultimately, there is nothing more sacred to this country and to this province.

I'll even provide an opportunity for him to retract his statement, considering that this amendment says: under the preamble adding, "namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible" after Canada Health Act, that we are very proud of as Canadians. Perhaps later this evening – I'm a gentleman – the new parliamentary secretary, who is less than 24 hours a parliamentary secretary appointed by this Premier, can retract his comments, and I'm sure Albertans will forgive him.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I obviously will be speaking to this important amendment, and at this time I will take my seat. I know people would like me to speak more. I will speak more. Would you like me to speak more?

Mrs. Forsyth: More, yes.

Mr. Boutilier: I will speak more, Mr. Chair, then. I will speak more. In speaking more, it comes back to the framework of community capital. Tonight on the health issue I was posed the question, actually, from the media out in front, asking about the Canada Health Act. Did you know that the media, the CBC and other news agencies, are outside asking about the Canada Health Act? I didn't take the opportunity to say that the parliamentary secretary less than 12 hours on the job said that he didn't see any value in the amendment put forward by Airdrie-Chestermere. But that's okay. We'll provide him ample opportunity to retract those comments, and I'm sure the 3.5 million Albertans will forgive him in his first 12 hours. We'll just call him a newbie in terms of what he was doing and that he just simply wasn't quite aware of the lack of utility in the kind of comments that are being provided.

Mr. Chairman, let us restore the community capital of Alberta. Let us restore the harmony and the organic harmonization that is required when it comes to an amendment to such an important act as the Canada Health Act through this Bill 17. Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that I hope all members will take the opportunity.

As a gentleman I'm quite certain that the member, the new parliamentary secretary, will retract his comments and move on to the important usefulness . . .

Mr. Anderson: He'll have to go back to his seat.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. He'll have to go back to his seat to speak.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that this amendment will go forward. I hope that this member who spoke earlier will be a reflective practitioner, will think about this and realize: oh, my goodness, it was kind of foot-in-mouth disease; ultimately, I will retract, and I will move on with the issue of caring for Albertans and caring for the health of Albertans, such as the principles and the values that are in the Canada Health Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. When I first looked at this amendment, Mr. Chair, I immediately put in my head that I thought that the conversation was going to be about actual insurance, how we have publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible insurance. But the conversation seemed to switch over to the actual delivery. So I'd like to just, I think, address the insurance part and perhaps ask the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to go back and perhaps look at the insurance part. Right now we have Alberta Health, which gets you something, but we also have Blue Cross.

Mr. Anderson: This is looking at it.

Ms Pastoor: Well, it's not really private, but it's more private.

When you talk about insurance coverage, are you talking about public insurance that everybody would be able to afford, or are you talking about over and above that, that the health insurance would be a private company even if it was bought with public dollars? Perhaps if I could ask the member to address the insurance side of it and not the care delivery side.

Mr. Anderson: Well, it's a good question. This is actually just taken out of the Canada Health Act. The Canada Health Act only deals with the coverage aspect, the public coverage, the public insurance aspect. It doesn't say anything about public delivery. Delivery is just not mentioned.

That's a critical distinction. That's what I was saying earlier. You have I would call it a misconception that in order to comply with the Canada Health Act, we need to have complete public delivery of health care. That's just not the case. A good example of this – and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek mentioned it earlier – is just your doctor. When you go into your doctor's office, that's a completely private facility in most cases. I think there are some clinics and hospitals and places like that that would come under public. Essentially, they're all private facilities. They're bought with private money. It's a private professional corporation. It is private. So our entire primary care network, essentially, is private.

You know, we still have problems in the primary care network. Obviously, the issue there is that we have a huge shortage of doctors. But I don't think that's because of the fact that we have private doctors; it's the fact that we're not graduating enough folks and we have quite a brain drain for family doctors to the United States. We're not giving enough incentive salarywise to family docs to stay here. We're not getting these doctors that are coming from foreign countries like India, for example, credentialed. There's some great medical talent that comes out of India and China and the Middle East. They come to our borders, and, you know, they're driving taxis instead of getting the certification they need and practising.

That's not an issue of privatization being the problem. In fact, primary care is actually in much better shape than our hospital care. It's in much better shape. There's just a shortage, and that's being caused, again, by mismanagement of government choking up the supply of doctors. A lot of that, too, I think, is intentional choking of the supply of doctors because they know they can't afford to pay. They're spending so much money in the other areas of health care that it's just ruining our ability to retain the family doctors that we need.

Part of that problem comes from fiscal mismanagement. I mean, you look at the contracts that have been signed. We're the worst offenders here. We tied our wages to the weekly wage index. Of course, if you do that, it's only fair that if you're going to pay a bunch of politicians according to that, you have to have that weekly wage index tied to our nurses' salaries, our doctors' salaries, and all of our public unions' salaries. I mean, it's only fair.

10:40

Ms Pastoor: People on AISH.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Well, they need all the help they can get, though, with regard to money, right?

I think it's unreasonable. The average weekly wage index, which is causing a lot of these problems: I mean, we've got to reassess that because we can't continue to jack up salaries, including, of all people, politicians' salaries. We set the tone. I can see it going up with inflation, but the average weekly earnings index goes way above that in most cases, and it's causing major problems.

I remember the hon. House leader talking today about his deal there with the School Boards Association. He was saying how even in a recession the teachers' hike in salaries next year is on pace to be 4 and a half per cent, even with the revenue issues. So they're going to have another issue where they've signed an incredibly irresponsible contract that's going to have to result in cuts or breaking of the contract. Either way it is completely unacceptable, but that's the position they put themselves in by setting this reckless precedent of tying things to the average weekly wage index. It just doesn't work because it takes into account overtime, and it takes into account all the big salaries of high-income earners, businessmen and so forth. It's just not a fiscally responsible way to run your system.

That goes for us, too. We should set the tone. If anything, we

should freeze our salaries as we've done for the last two years. Of course, what was it, a 34 per cent raise before that? So that's about 11 per cent per year increase. Maybe if we froze ours and then kept everyone else's increases just to the rate of inflation, we'd be in much better shape.

My point in going there is just that we are our own worst enemy with regard to public health care. One of the reasons we have to turn to a lot of these alternative models is because we've made public health care so expensive. So that's why we really have to assess that. We have to get our public health care system working again. Privatization or private delivery has a role, but it will always be somewhat of a limited role. If we don't fix the public aspect of the system, then we're in a heap of trouble. Not only that, but if we don't fix it, you know, it's just not going to be able to compete with other systems around the world, let alone private deliverers within our own borders.

We've got to fix that system. Part of that is curbing and controlling our health care costs, not recklessly throwing money away as the former minister of health, who's mostly been responsible for the ejection of this member and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. He's a one-party wrecking crew. It's a self-destruction button; just push him, and you'll get party self-destruction. Anyway, he's caused a lot of issues in our education system, our health system. Hopefully, he'll be a little more merciful on the Energy ministry.

Aside from that, getting back to the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up some things. We'll have to agree to disagree on this stuff. He cites a whole bunch of facts about HRC, fact after fact. Look, I'm getting my facts from the Alberta bone and joint institute, which is an objective, nonpartisan group that is funded by AHS. I don't know where that hon. member is getting his stats; he didn't put them out there. I believe my sources, which are publicly available, are far more – until I see what his sources are, I don't think there's an argument. There's no doubt they were doing it 30 to 40 per cent cheaper, 30 to 40 per cent faster and that it was as good a service. So I don't know where he's getting that.

He cited the issue of the United Kingdom. The fact is that the United Kingdom is actually doing exactly what we're advocating for. They're introducing more competitive delivery on the delivery side. He was saying that they're moving in the opposite direction. That's just categorically not true. Under Prime Minister Cameron they are clearly moving in this exact direction. I mean, it's literally moving in the direction of more competitive delivery, bringing in more private and nonprofit to compete with the public system, and hopefully tendering out contracts, open tendering contracts, and hopefully there will be good competition for those contracts.

The other thing, too. It's funny. The Wildrose isn't even going as far as what they do in these liberal social democracies like Sweden, Luxembourg, France, these places. We're not even talking about going that far. In those systems they have competitive delivery of publicly funded health services. They have that, but they also have an entire parallel, two-tier system where if you've got the money, you can go and pay for a service at a private clinic.

Now, a very small percentage of the population does that, but we're not even going that far. Look; all we're saying is that the public, the nonprofit, and the private guys should compete for the public dollars for patients. It's such a small, incremental step. If we could do that and maybe get costs under control and bring in more private and nonprofit investment, it would go a long way. Maybe we don't need to go any further. Maybe that fixes things. Maybe we can get the public sector competitive again and make sure that wages are competitive across the board and make sure that unions are involved and are actually stakeholders and they're driving change from within.

I mean, if you look at the case study of Sweden, the nurses union over there has been one of the biggest drivers of innovation and change within the public system. They're competing with the private system, but they've brought in a lot of the innovation. They've found that it actually gives them more options because they've got more than one place that they can bargain with and work at. It gives the workers more options, and they've been a huge driver of change. I don't underestimate the ability of our public-sector unions to actually be drivers of change, but we need to have them compete with private industry and private deliverers of health care and nonprofit deliverers of health care. It will make the system much, much stronger. Now, I want to make it clear where – well, here's another one. We talked about the docs' offices in the United Kingdom.

I want to make sure with regard to this amendment – and I do disagree with the new parliamentary secretary. You know, I do have respect for the hon. member. He's very well meaning. We don't see eye to eye on some things, obviously, but I think he was being as honest and straightforward as he could as to why they don't like this amendment. I think it was because they didn't see utility. It'd just be repeating itself. Maybe the Canada Health Act would change over time.

I would ask him: why would we want to cede our autonomy provincially? We have provincial autonomy to say no. What if they change the Canada Health Act, hon. member, to say that not only must it be publicly insured and universal, accessible, and all that good stuff, but what if they also say that it must all be publicly delivered now? If they say that, then that means we would have to put all of those private doctors and their private clinics under the umbrella of the public system. We shouldn't cede our autonomy. We should be able to say: "No. When we passed this bill, the Canada Health Act said these five things, and that's what we were talking about. We'll have to think about whether we're going to bring those other things into this act."

10:50

I don't think it's wise to cede our autonomy in that way. We're a big province. We're the third largest economy in the country. Surely, we can decide the rules by which health care will be administered. We've chosen as a province. All parties have agreed that we want to comply with the Canada Health Act and what's under the Canada Health Act. But if there is a coalition, NDP-Liberal-Bloc, government and if they were to bring in some very shackling legislation, which banned the public delivery . . . [interjection] That's right. Some would call it shackling. Some would call it innovative. That's right.

If they were to do that, we should be able to say: "You know what? No, we're not doing that. We're not going to include that in our health act because that's not an Alberta value. We do believe in competition. We believe in competitive delivery. That's what we're going to do."

I do want to say that there's no alternative motive here. These are the words that are in the Canada Health Act. The Member for Calgary-Varsity seemed to suggest this is some kind of privatization-by-stealth move here. But, of course, that's just simply not the case. These words are exactly from the Canada Health Act. These are the five principles that we're citing here. I don't see how this does any harm. It clarifies it. It entrenches. It says: look, we have the autonomy as a province to make these decisions. I think that it would be a good amendment to remind people about what we're talking about, that health insurance coverage must be publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, affordable, and accessible. I think that's a very good way of putting it.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Now, I'll put a few more issues on the record about this, hopefully in the time I have left before I have to sit down. But maybe you could pop up and give me a chance to finish it off because it's just two pages.

Mr. Boutilier: I think I probably could.

Mr. Anderson: It's not much.

Alberta's health care system – and this is about this amendment, about the public nature of it – has arrived at a critical crossroad. Despite massive annual increases in health spending, waiting lists are at all-time highs, patients are left languishing in emergency rooms for hours and sometimes days, finding a family physician is increasingly difficult, and many seniors actually find it impossible to secure the care that they so desperately need.

The PC government continues to mismanage health care. They have squandered millions of dollars on executive health salaries and bonuses for chronic underperformance. They've centralized control of health care in a massive health superboard bureaucracy that has been unresponsive to local needs. They have broken contracts with our most effective health care providers, subjected our health care professionals to intimidation and censorship – boy, did we ever see an example of that – and misallocated billions of dollars on projects that are unable to open due to unavailable operating funds and staff shortages.

To be clear, once patients actually gain access to our system, our doctors and nurses provide treatment that is second to none. However, being forced to wait weeks, months, and sometimes years for access to needed health treatments is not health care. It is a prison sentence that thousands of Albertans are suffering through each and every day.

Alberta's health care system can be fixed, but we cannot continue to allow the PC government to repeat the same flawed strategies and expect different results. Reforming health care will take honest and principled leadership. It will take a new government working cooperatively with Albertans and health care professionals to do what is necessary to build a health care system that puts Albertans first, and we believe the Wildrose is ready to be that government.

Albertans want access to the health care they need. Albertans do not want a U.S.-style health care system that leaves millions uninsured. It is critical that any proposed health reforms for our province comply with the five – that's what we're talking about – key principles of the Canada Health Act as per this amendment; namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive in scope, universal, portable among other provinces, and accessible.

Unfortunately, many special-interest groups and political parties have used the obvious flaws inherent in the U.S. health care system to actively scare many Albertans into resisting critically needed health reforms. This has resulted in one of the least accessible, least flexible, and most expensive health care systems in the developed world.

The fact is that the most effective, sustainable, and patient-centred health systems in the world are not found in Canada or the United States. They are found in western Europe. Countries such as France, Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland all deliver world-class, universal public health care to their citizens, and they do this while spending less per person on health care than we do. These countries and others are able to accomplish this by fostering a culture of patient choice and accountability and providing competition within their publicly funded health system.

We cannot continue to allow the voices of the status quo to keep our province from doing what so badly needs to be done. Failure to

change our direction on health care will result in a bankrupt system with ever-growing wait times and increasingly poor health outcomes. Albertans deserve better.

A Wildrose government would implement the following principles to ensure Albertans have timely access to health care. As per this amendment we would uphold the five key principles of the Canada Health Act; namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible. We would foster a culture of patient choice and competition by giving Albertans the right to use their public insurance to obtain needed treatment at the public, private, or nonprofit health provider of their choosing, and we would look to model Alberta's health care system after successful European systems that have substantially shorter waiting lists and higher patient satisfaction while maintaining universal health insurance coverage for all.

Here are some more concepts for you. Canada has the fourth-largest per capita health spending in the world – in the world – but it ranks near the bottom of the OECD nations in results. Almost every single European country has better results with regard to waiting lists, accessibility, number of family doctors per person, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, with less spending than we do. Even with its elderly population – they have one of the oldest populations on the planet – Japan also has a much better system despite spending one-half of what we do on health care. We have to fix the system.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: The chairman, I thought, might have forgotten where I came from.

The Acting Chair: No. I would never do that.

Mr. Boutilier: In light of the fact that we actually sat next to each other for a period of time, I'm glad to see that I've left an impression.

Mr. Chairman, on the amendment that has been put forward, I want to say that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere once again has brought up and highlighted some very important points that we need to really examine. Really, as we look here, I think it's important to recognize that Albertans do deserve better, so let's harness our energy together to determine how we can do better.

How do we better? Well, we change this very legislation that's being proposed. How do we do it? We deal with these amendments because these amendments are going to in fact deal with the ultimate principle. It's going to deal with the values that Albertans have. I know that Albertans truly and clearly recognize the importance of getting it right the first time. But this is not the first time. This is not the second time. This is not the third time. This is not the fourth time. This issue has been going on for years, so this provides an opportunity, and very seldom is there an opportunity placed in front of us.

I might say that getting it right is important, in my judgment. How would I describe it? It's a critical situation because the situation we're in today is so critical. None of us want to see any of our family face what we're witnessing taking place today. This amendment and the umbrella that falls under it is all about the fact that we need to decentralize. We need to move away from this *Pravda*, the idea of a centralized health care system. We have witnessed first-hand that the health board as it exists today is not working, so consequently it has to be changed. It has to be decentralized. When I talk about decentralized, with each passing week it becomes increasingly clear that the PC government's decision to

place control of health care delivery in the hands of a massive, centralized superboard has been one big mother of a mistake. What has been lost is the community capital.

You see, the law of the farm says that there are no quick fixes. You have to plant a seed. You have to hoe the land. You have to fertilize it. And, ultimately, then you will reap the harvest in the fall. But in the law of the school it says that you can pull an all-nighter, or you can go ahead and ignore the community capital of people. You can ignore the ideas of communities across Alberta.

11:00

We have over 360 communities across Alberta that are being ignored under this proposed bill. That should not happen because we believe that the Canada Health Act and the important principles that are in the Canada Health Act and that are in the amendment that we are putting forward tonight will do a major enhancement to what we believe is already a flawed bill. What we're really trying to do is to stop the hemorrhaging in a seed that's been planted wrong.

As we till the land, as we water our crop to allow it to grow, the unfortunate issue is that it doesn't work in terms of from the sky down. By that, the sky down, I'm specifically referring to the example of the CEO of the health superboard, which is an oxymoron in itself. There's nothing super about it. It's just one big superfailure.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

We have other solutions. Our amendments that we're putting forward are about those solutions because Albertans deserve no less. Decentralizing health care is so critical. Ensuring that the flexibility that we have to harness the energy of good ideas from within communities is critical so that these ideas, what I call community capital, are never lost. Right now under the existing centralized system they are being lost. Clearly, the CEO of the superboard and the chairman of the board, who were in fact appointed by the former minister of health – and, wow, we've seen his actions. I diplomatically use the word “gibberish,” but there's more than gibberish in there.

I can only say that we have lost the community capital. We do not support centralized bureaucracy. Albertans are ultimately being put in a situation where they're being embarrassed by a system that has failed miserably, yet we have put in so much money. The Canada Health Act and the amendment that we have under Bill 17 really achieve important principles, important principles that should never be forgotten.

With that community capital comes a better crop, a better crop that right now is being ignored. We're not watering the system. Well, actually, if you consider the money we spend, there's lots of watering going on, but unfortunately the watering is being lost. It's not grabbing hold to the crop that is so important in reaping a good harvest.

Mr. Chairman, I say that the amendment that's being put forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is an important one. You know why? Because it's a new idea. After 39 or 40 years new ideas don't come often. Did you know that? New ideas don't come often after 39 or 40 years. But this amendment really is about not just a new idea; it's a new energy. It really is talking about amendments that are required in order to achieve the best care for Albertans. Therefore, I believe that this new idea, this amendment, has to be fed, and I'm feeding it right now. It has to be nurtured, and I'm nurturing it right now. It has to be given an opportunity to grow. This amendment is an opportunity for everyone across the way, even if this government has been in power for 39, almost 40 years.

Maybe it is old and tired. Yes, it is old and tired. I can see that by some of the closed eyes I see across the way.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I will endure because I'm willing to stay here all night long to feed it, to nurture it, to allow it to grow. That is the new idea of this amendment. Allow it the opportunity to grow. It's called the law of the farm. Rather than the law of the school, of pulling an all-nighter, we want the law of the farm, where there are no quick fixes, where you have to seek first to understand that you have to plow, you have to nurture, you have to fertilize, you have to water, and then with sunshine the idea will grow.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that centralizing the administration and delivery of core social programs does not work. Let me repeat: it does not work. I'm glad to see that some eyelids have been opened again. Eyelids are being opened; perhaps maybe ears would be opened. In fact, it's my hope that even when Q-tips have gone in to clean, they don't fall in; they actually, in fact, clean as opposed to falling in.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I believe that if we centralize control of all food production and delivery in the hands of bureaucrats at the Legislature, long lines, high prices, and shortages will inevitably result. Health care is no different. In fact, Albertans deserve better. In fact, they will get better when it comes to a Wildrose government, and that is a government who is right-thinking. I see members across the way are shaking their heads in agreement. That's nice to see, but I have to say that the door is closed. The door is closed.

I can only say this afternoon and this evening, Mr. Chairman, on this amendment, that I believe that gradually decentralizing the delivery of health care is the answer: decentralizing the care services, tapping into that community capital, tapping in and harnessing that energy of new ideas and new type of nurturing and feeding and all of those things together. [interjections] Mr. Chairman, I have the floor? [interjections] Mr. Chairman, I have the floor?

The Deputy Chair: You have the floor. Keep talking.

Mr. Boutilier: I can't hear myself think with all the noise on that side.

The Deputy Chair: You have the floor. Talk to me.

Mr. Boutilier: Oh, okay. Well, I thought you would interject with the comments on that side, Mr. Chairman. Well, thank you for allowing me to continue. I couldn't hear with all the noise on that side.

Mrs. Forsyth: They were cheering for you.

Mr. Boutilier: They were cheering for me. Oh, I'm glad to see, so glad to see. I am so glad to see. Hallelujah.

Immediately, I think, in getting it right, we have to overhaul the bonus incentives. The minister of finance, who's sitting there with his head lodged on his chair. I'm glad to see that his feet are not up on his desk. I'm glad to see that there is not a cigar hanging out of his mouth, and I'm glad to see that there is no ponytail anymore. That is nice to see because in Alberta what is most important, Mr. Chairman, on this amendment is that we want to overhaul bonuses. Under the Canada Health Act amending what the hon. member has put forward tonight will really, without any question in my mind – and just allow me to comment on this amendment – provide an opportunity to ensure the utility and the value that is utmost to Albertans.

Albertans that I speak to in coffee shops – and, by the way, I'm proud to say that there's no gap in my community. There is no gap in my community because I'm in touch with my community members. They are my bosses. Perhaps others across the way might have forgotten who their bosses are, but I know who my bosses are. They're the people that elect me to give me my job, and then I proudly represent all of them in ensuring they get the best health care, the best service because they deserve no less.

On Bill 17 and the amendment that's been put forward, I want to say, Mr. Chairman, that the Alberta Health Act should be amended in the last recital of the preamble by adding, in my judgment, "namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly" – and let me say publicly, p-u-b-l-i-c-l-y . . . [interjections] I'm glad to see that the member from Bragg Creek and the Member for Lloydminster-Vermilion have been paying attention and they support me; they support the amendment. We will hold to account.

Actually, we saw both of them on television, both of them on television with the podiums the other night. There used to be a cartoon about it, but I thought: I want to use parliamentary language tonight. Consequently, I will withhold my comments, but if you want, I'll share with you later that issue. Oh, they've settled down a bit, Mr. Chairman, right now, and I appreciate the fact that they are listening intently.

11:10

Mr. Chairman, speaking to the amendment, I welcome free advice, but obviously they'll have to wait their turn on this important amendment. I can say to the member from Bragg Creek and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, finance one and finance two, that maybe the idea of merging them together could save Albertans a whole lot of tax money in itself. That's a novel idea in itself. Combining those bureaucracies might be something that might be clever, taking the savings by merging Finance and Treasury Board together. On this amendment, under the Canada Health Act, it would mean that we'd save money that we can put back into the front-line services.

There you go, Mr. Chairman. I think I've silenced both of them because they don't want to lose their ministries or their fancy titles. Well, that's okay. Really, the people with the most important fancy title are the bosses, and that's the people of Alberta, that I haven't forgotten and that I will never forget. By the treatment of the only doctor on that side, it's clear to me that you have forgotten who – I shouldn't make a broad stroke. Some of you have forgotten.

Mr. Horner: You're a bitter man, Guy.

Mr. Boutilier: Now, to the member . . .

The Deputy Chair: Through me.

Mr. Boutilier: Hi, Mr. Chairman.

To the member with the white shirt, the Deputy Premier, I can only say that I look forward with interest to being on a panel where I teach, at the University of Alberta, with the hon. minister of advanced education on Friday because it is going to be quite a beautiful debate. [interjections] Oh, the member over from Red Deer . . . [interjections] Mr. Chair, I have the floor, don't I? On the amendment?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you have the floor. We're talking to the amendment, and talk to me. If you talk to me, the rest of it will settle down.

Mr. Boutilier: I am speaking to you, Mr. Chairman, and I wish you could control your friends across the way. Why they want to speak when I am speaking I don't know.

To the hon. member across the way who wanted to, I think, make a comment relative to my comment on the amendment, which is to Bill 17, I can only say this: there's more to the story, and I know what the rest of the story is. I'm sure we'll read about that in the days to come. [interjections] Yes. Oh, It seems like the Member for Red Deer-North is settling down now. I can only say that I will share with you the rest of the story. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Please, I love the opportunity of being able to participate with such an interactive group tonight. To the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, I would like to say to him that in terms of educating, in fact, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud this morning . . .

Dr. Morton: Through the chair.

Mr. Boutilier: Someone said: through the chair. I find that really quite interesting. Mr. Chair, with the utmost respect, everything I say is through you.

Having said that, I am without question convinced of the ideas that we are harnessing here in this amendment, the idea of taking new ideas, something that on that side they don't really have a lot of after 40 years in power. I embrace them to join us, the Wildrose, with this amendment because this amendment is respecting Albertans, the bosses. Not only is it respecting them in this amendment; it's saying that the Canada Health Act will be publicly funded and that it will ensure that the bill, that is a disaster, Bill 17 – we're trying to stop the bleeding. We're trying to stop the hemorrhaging by this amendment because we believe that, my goodness, I mean, there is going to be a requirement for amputations down the road based on what is happening in here.

I can only say that I look forward to the comments, Mr. Chairman, from all corners of this Assembly because I value opinions when it comes to how we can deliver an amendment that provides the best care and the best hope. Hope is such an important component of who we are, so let me share with you what that means: the hope of a better tomorrow, the hope of a stronger community, the hope of not having to stand in an emergency line for a day, and the hope that when you're in that line, you won't die. I'm speaking about facts based on what Albertans have talked to me about, and that, I believe, is an indictment of this existing government. For the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster to laugh at the fact that someone died, I don't think . . .

Mr. Snelgrove: We're laughing at you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has the floor.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, sir. Mr. Chair, there's nothing funny about this situation. Health care is something that is important to all of us. I think every member in here wants the best health care system. It's unfortunate that the governing PC Party threw out the only doctor they had. He was connected to the people of Alberta.

Ms DeLong: Relevance.

Mr. Boutilier: Let me share with you the relevance since it's been asked for by the Member for Calgary-Bow. Let me share with you the relevance of a doctor because a doctor is not a knucklehead. A doctor knows what's going on.

Ms DeLong: Relevance.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, the member continues to say, "relevance." She's waving a white flag and saying: I surrender. That's what she's doing. There's no doubt in my mind that she should surrender. I'm glad to see she has her white flag.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that they need to do the right thing. You need to immediately remove any clause in the current AHS code of conduct that might act as a deterrent to the ability of health care professionals to voice their ideas and concerns regarding health care.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: I'm sorry. Not on the bill, on amendment A2.

Ms Notley: Indeed. I was rising, in fact, to speak to this amendment.

This is an interesting amendment that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has put forward, that basically we add to the preamble of the Alberta Health Act the further explanation that the Canada Health Act includes that "health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible."

There have been comments made that this is superfluous or that it's unnecessary and that it's not required to have this language describing what the Canada Health Act stands for. Regardless of whether one thinks that that is or isn't accurate, I think it is pretty easy to understand what the impetus for this amendment is. I think it comes from sort of a desire to try and clarify and further describe what it is the government is trying to do with this piece of legislation. I think that it comes probably from sort of an inherent sense of distrust that has developed with respect to what the direction is that this government is going to follow in the future when it comes to the future of our health care system in Alberta.

There's good reason for that sense of distrust, and there's good reason for that sense of confusion. You know, let's face it. The history of this government in terms of its approach to health care over the last 10 or 15 years is one that has repeatedly attracted the ire and the distrust of Albertans concerned about maintaining the public components and the health of their public health system. I think that this must be, obviously, the impetus for this particular motion.

You know, I will say that one of the things that I'm concerned about with this act is that, in fact, in addition to the Canada Health Act most of the substantive protections against efforts to privatize through a variety of different strategies that have been considered by both this government and other advocates of private health care over the past 25 years are included not necessarily in the Canada Health Act but in the interplay between other provincial pieces of legislation either with each other or with the Canada Health Act.

One of the things that concerns me the most about this bill, actually, is that as much as we all talk about enforcing and trying to protect the principles of the Canada Health Act, as it stands right now, many of those principles are actually protected by these acts, all of which stand to be revised substantially by this government in what the minister has referred to as phase 2 of the legislative rewrite.

11:20

Of course, as this government's political stability has become more and more tenuous, the whole concept of phase 1 versus phase 2 developed. It became clear that they really didn't want to take on

phase 2 before an election because Albertans were going to demonstrate the kind of distrust that we see reflected through the introduction of this particular amendment and that it would be very, very difficult for them to run in an election right after phase 2 of the legislative rewrite.

Instead, we have phase 1, and phase 1 talks about, you know, adhering to and respecting the principles of the Canada Health Act. But most people who have spent any time really looking at this issue understand that the matter is a great deal more complex than that and that what really needs to happen is that we need to do a much better job in our province as well as across the country but particularly in our province asserting the fundamental need to preserve public health care, public funding of health care, and public delivery of health care and that, in fact, health care itself needs to be properly defined and provided for.

There's so much complexity to this. We always have this conversation. What is health insurance? What is health care? What is it that we're actually providing to Albertans freely? Of course, we've already seen from this government efforts to reduce the scope of what it is that we provide with last year's delisting of gender reassignment surgery and also chiropractic services. I mean, people use the word "delisting," but delisting is just another way to privatize because you delist it, and then, of course, what has to happen is that people have to pay for it out of their pocket.

We had the introduction of delisting, and then the government's political fortunes took a little bit of a nosedive. I suspect there were probably larger plans to delist subsequent to those two little test balloons, and the government backed off on them. But that whole concept of delisting is another issue about ensuring that our health care is publicly administered. Different people argue over whether the language that's included in this particular amendment, that "health insurance coverage is publicly administered," means that it's actually publicly funded. I think that we all believe that it does, but the jury is still out in many respects.

You know, in a lot of ways I do understand what it is they are trying to get at with this amendment. I guess my concern is that I don't believe it gets them to where they want to go although I'm never sure, with all due respect, where exactly it is this particular group wants to go with health care. I remain somewhat concerned that there is perhaps a sincere but, I would suggest, misguided belief that the more we can expand private delivery and expand the opportunity for private-sector involvement in our health care system, the better off we will all be. Certainly, I will say right off that I do not agree with that.

It's interesting. We all know right now that as much as we have the Canada Health Act, which says what this amendment describes, we actually do right now in Canada and in Alberta pay at least 30 per cent of our public health care out of pocket. At least 30 per cent of the public health care that we receive now is something that is only given to Albertans on the basis of their ability to pay. It is the kind of thing that lower income Albertans do not have access to. We have differential access to public health care in Alberta as we speak. In fact, across the country but certainly in Alberta it's as bad as it is anywhere else and perhaps in some cases worse.

That, of course, doesn't even include the characterization of pharmaceutical prescription as health care. Well, prescription is health care, but the actual intake of pharmaceuticals is, in fact, the most common form of medical treatment now, and that is not for the most part publicly funded. Many, many doctors will talk about how many patients they have that have had their health care and their treatment compromised solely by their income. They cannot afford to access the treatment that the doctor recommends because treatment is pharmaceutical, and pharmaceutical is not publicly funded. That's just one example.

We also have the concern around sort of the continuum of care. What is treatment? Well, treatment is going to see a doctor in a hospital. Well, is that really the best way for treatment? It's actually the most expensive way, but of course people go there because it's the way you actually get it publicly funded. It probably would be a lot more helpful to have the services of a public health nurse, a dietitian, a physiotherapist at your home, miles and miles away from an emergency room. Unfortunately, most of that stuff is not publicly funded right now, so what happens is that people's health deteriorates, and they end up in the emergency room.

All of this is to say that I support in one way the intention behind this amendment because I do believe the intention is to provide certainty to a piece of legislation that has no certainty and to reach out to the Canada Health Act, which, we have all heard for years and years, serves as the foundation of our medicare system. I guess my concern is, as I've said, that many people who spend a bit more time working with this understand that, really, the primary protectors of our public health system are the provincial acts, which function underneath the authority of the Canada Health Act, and also the political jeopardy which arises whenever a government tries to expand the role of privately funded and, indeed, privately delivered health care.

There's nothing to be lost by supporting this amendment. Because I understand the reasons behind it, we're perfectly prepared to support this amendment. But I think that ultimately, even if passed, this amendment will not fix what is a fundamentally broken piece of legislation, will not fix this government's failure to look at the challenges within our health care system head-on and take the kind of decisions that are necessary to truly protect, preserve, and grow a healthy public health system of medicare in Canada.

You know, the newly appointed parliamentary secretary to the minister of health led a consultation across the province that formed the foundation for this piece of legislation. While there were, you know, certain general motherhood and apple pie statements that came from that consultation, I will say that in our caucus's own consultation, which preceded his cross-province tour – if I recall, there had been a plan on the part of the government to have an Edmonton-only, invitation-only sort of consultation process. Then we in our caucus chose to travel across the province, meeting with Albertans in open public-hearing forums, and we prepared our report. Subsequently the government decided to also have a slightly more open hearing process, which ultimately resulted in the report which forms the foundation for this act.

11:30

While we were out there, we heard from people about what needed to happen in health care. There were a lot of truly innovative ideas which really focused on strengthening the quality of care, increasing accessibility, increasing affordability, managing health care in a more effective way, all those kinds of things which I'm sure I'll have a chance to talk about when we talk about the bill in general, all the things that were included in our caucus's report entitled *What Albertans Want*, which is a report which includes about 25 sound recommendations for improving the scope and quality of health care and public health care, particularly in Alberta.

I would have loved to have seen, ultimately, this government at the end of their consultation at least having identified the fact that 30 per cent of our health care right now is privately funded. I would have wanted to have seen some comment about that, some guarantee that that percentage was not going to go up and, perhaps, even an effort on the part of government to bring that percentage down. But as much as they identified the fact that roughly 30 per cent of health care in Alberta is paid for out of pocket by those who can afford to

and not received by those who cannot, in fact, they were silent on that issue, and I think that was a huge shortcoming.

I think that's really what it is that this amendment is trying to get at. It's to refocus the discussion on public funding of health care. Whether describing the Canada Health Act in more detail is necessarily the best way to get to that outcome, I don't know. Certainly, I believe that we need to do whatever we can to legislatively describe and secure the objective of increasing the percentage of health care provided in Alberta that is publicly funded and not privately funded.

Then, of course, I'm reminded as well that there's a whole other issue, which is the issue of public delivery, which I've talked about already. That's an administrative issue, but it's an issue that I think is so blatantly obvious as the best way to provide the most efficient, the most easily managed, and the most comprehensive system of health care that you make sure that as much of it as possible is publicly delivered. The whole notion of carving off pieces to private-sector groups, injecting the profit margins so that suddenly we have to somehow have a health care system that not only provides health care but also provides profits to the shareholders of the for-profit deliverers, to me, on the face of it, just defies common sense, the whole notion of how competition will somehow improve the quality. Well, no, it won't. What it will do is fracture the quality, fragment the quality, make it harder to manage, and ensure less control over the system. So I fundamentally disagree with the mover of this motion on that particular issue, but I'm sure we'll have lots of time to talk about that in more detail down the road.

Having said all that, I certainly think there's no harm to be done by providing more description of the Canada Health Act in this piece of legislation. I would just like as well in the future to see better work in this piece of motherhood and apple pie legislation, that would include something more substantive, which, in my view, would be a commitment to increase the amount of public funding for health care and the percentage of health care which, as I've said, is publicly funded and to reduce the need for people to pay out of pocket for their health care because that is a growing area in Alberta. The more you talk with people about what the pressures are in our health care system, you know, what the pressures are in our ER as well, one of the pressures in our ER is the lack of long-term care. Long-term care needs to be something that is clearly defined as part of our health care system and publicly funded.

Right now we've got sort of a dog's breakfast of arrangements for providing that care, for describing that care, for delivering that care, and for funding that care. Any given day you can have four people in a room talking about it, and they can all be talking about different things. I think in some cases the confusion is intentional. Regardless, that's an important, important component of our system of public health care, yet it remains singularly unaddressed through this legislation or even through their statement of principles within it, so I think that that's another thing that needs to be addressed. You know, you can sort of argue that perhaps you're taking the first step through supporting this amendment here.

With that, I think I will end my comments on this. I look forward to a great deal of more fruitful debate on the state of our health care system in terms of the theatrics that we've observed over the course of the last three or four weeks. I don't actually see the impassioned plea of our ER doctors as theatrics nor the unfortunate circumstances that they've described publicly and openly to Albertans as theatrics, but there's certainly no question that there's been a great deal more public attention paid to our health care system over the course of the last two or three weeks. So I anticipate having some good conversations and debates about that as well, given that I didn't get the opportunity to get up and speak during our emergency debate, which

lasted for, I believe, 65 minutes or something like that. I also look forward to talking more about the kinds of solutions that we in the Alberta NDP need to see aggressively pursued by this government in order to ensure the absolute greatest level of health for the greatest number of Albertans at the least cost to them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's with interest that I rise to participate in the debate on amendment A1.

The Deputy Chair: A2.

Mr. MacDonald: Oh, yes. A1 was defeated, of course. Amendment A2, proposed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Certainly, I listened with interest to the comments, particularly the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who explained why the government at this time was not keen on this proposed amendment. I heard from the hon. members. The hon. members from the Wildrose are sensitive about the perception or the ideas that Albertans have regarding their position on public health care. I think this is a political amendment – there's no doubt about that, Mr. Chairman – to soften or to try to change the image that Albertans have or the questions that Albertans have regarding the hon. members' party and the direction that they may want to take with health care and the health care delivery system.

I have, quite frankly, reservations about the motives of this amendment. It certainly looks good, and it would not hurt, certainly, to have added after "Canada Health Act" in the last recital of the preamble of Bill 17 the fact that "health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible."

I have trouble, I must confess, Mr. Chairman, keeping track of all the committees that this government has struck over the years to have a look at public health care and what should be done, what needs to be done, and what could be done. It's quite odd that in the midst of this debate or discussion we're having on health care, of all the reports and all the committees that were struck, there was never a report done, a cost-benefit analysis done of the consolidation into Alberta Health Services from the nine regions and the Alberta Mental Health Board and the Alberta Cancer Board to determine if (a) costs could be controlled and (b) if it would improve service. There was never an internal study done by this government, nor was there an external study done.

11:40

There were lots of consultants hired. I'm looking at some information in the blue books, in the public accounts, about consultants and this government's use of consultants. Not only were there a lot of reports presented by committees that were struck, but there were also these external consultants. McKinsey & Company comes to mind, Mr. Chairman. They had some very, very good ideas. I rather doubt that they had any input into the drafting of this Bill 17. I rather doubt that they had any input into including in this section that "health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible," as is suggested by the hon. member, but certainly in the discussion about principles for renewed health legislation. I mean, it's a cottage industry. Sometimes I wonder if any of these reports have ever been read by government members.

I was waiting for my turn to speak on this amendment, and I was reading some of the work that was done. I didn't get an opportunity to look it up, but I'm going to go on the record, and if I'm wrong, I

will stand corrected by one of the hon. members across the way. Certainly, in the last period of time – I'm going to say less than two years – McKinsey & Company has invoiced the taxpayers of this province for at least \$1.4 million for reports. Now, were those reports considered when this bill was drafted? I would have to reluctantly say no. Did the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere read those reports? Did he think to himself that maybe, just maybe, this is what the government had in mind, and they overlooked it? That could be a reason for his amendment, but I rather doubt it.

I think it's a political reason, Mr. Chairman, that this particular party – and he's very proud of them, and that's certainly his right. We do know that their public suggestions on health care are contrary to what mainstream Alberta is thinking. Mainstream Alberta is sick and tired of this government. They see through this bill. This amendment is certainly not going to repair the bill to the point where Albertans are going to say: "Okay. This is really what we need, the Alberta Health Act." They're not going to get fooled again.

What Albertans really want and what is not in this bill are some ideas on how we can improve public health care delivery, how we can shorten wait times, how we can eliminate a lot of the chaos and confusion that occurs in emergency rooms. This is what people want. They don't want a public relations exercise, which is this Alberta Health Act. I can see the hon. member's sincerity, his earnest effort to improve this bill. Maybe it was overlooked, but we have to look at this. We have to look at all of the discussions that have occurred.

One of the committees that was struck, the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health: its conclusion is Bill 17. The terms of reference for the committee: as I understand it, there were two principles at the start of the discussion. One was that the public health system will serve the interests of all Albertans regardless of their ability to pay, and access to publicly funded health care services is to be fair and effective. Now, another way of describing these principles is patient centred, publicly funded, and accessible, which the hon. member certainly covers in his amendment. Albertans along with other Canadians value the national framework of health services available on the basis of need, not ability to pay, linking provincial health systems with the principles of the Canada Health Act.

What about quality and safety as principles? A focus on wellness? Well, it's quite interesting. I don't have – I should, but I don't, and I apologize, Mr. Chairman – handy some of the comments that the leader of the Wildrose Alliance has made regarding health care and what she and their party would like to do. It would fit into some of the comments that have been made in the past by some of the government members, not all government members but some. That, in my view, is the reason for this amendment.

When we look at the health care system and keeping it consistent with the Canada Health Act, it must include the principles of public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility, and that's again mentioned in the amendment. Maybe we should have it there. I'm not convinced this bill is necessary, but I may listen to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on this because I'm not so sure that we need that. If it would satisfy the Friends of Medicare, if it would satisfy the many citizens from our constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar who are very, very concerned about the direction this government is going with health care, I would support the amendment.

I'm torn, actually, Mr. Chairman, between the effort of the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and the comments earlier from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford regarding this amendment. What I do know and would like to repeat to all hon. members is that health care is what Albertans want this House, want this Legislative Assembly to fix. They know the system has been run into the ground by this government. We have seen countless managers come

and countless managers go. We have seen ministers. Now, I'm not going to start counting up the members of that front bench who have had a time as minister of health. Certainly, there's the current Minister of Energy, the current Government House Leader, and the Minister of Education, and there's the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Snelgrove: Don't forget about us back here.

Mr. MacDonald: They have not been in health care, Minister, that I'm aware of.

And we have the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. So that's four. I could be missing one; I'm not sure. I could never count up the deputy ministers that have come over the years to Public Accounts. But these are reasons why Albertans in good health or in bad, retired or still working consider this government's management of the health care system a total failure. A total failure.

Now, when we compare their management style, Mr. Chairman, it would be safe to say that we have a minister of finance who is contemplating a different pension system. Meanwhile, we have this lavish pension system for health care managers, in some cases \$22,000 a month for life, indexed. Yet we can have these pensions for these individuals . . .

11:50

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, what does that have to do with the health insurance coverage, with this amendment? Please stick to this amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: I am definitely sticking to this amendment, Mr. Chairman. If you could allow me to finish, you would certainly see where I'm going with this.

The Deputy Chair: Get to the point.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Okay. I certainly will.

Now, it's another example of the mismanagement and the double-talk of this government. In one case we want to restrict and limit pensions for some people, but in other cases individuals who have been running up massive deficits, ruining public confidence in the health care system – and this bill and this amendment are not going to restore, whether we vote for it or not, public confidence in the health care system, because it's been damaged by the mismanagement of this government, totally damaged. There's nothing I can do about that, Mr. Chairman. I know certain members across the way may not appreciate that, but that's how it is.

Citizens are sick and tired. I was waiting for my turn to speak to this amendment, and I couldn't believe some of the comments I was reading on the Internet regarding the latest shenanigans of this government. I couldn't believe it.

Now, this amendment and how it will be reflective of the Canada Health Act: whether it's in there or not, I don't think it's going to make a lot of difference to this bill. Maybe it will. I think that people who understand and appreciate what public health care means and how we're protected by the Canada Health Act will see the efforts of the hon. member and say: okay. They will also see the veiled attempt by this overall legislation that the government is trying to work through here, and that attempt is a public relations exercise to say: "Hey, we're doing something. Finally, we're doing something."

This act, this bill, this amendment is not what Albertans want, Mr. Chairman. What they want are some reasonable solutions to fix the long wait times in emergency rooms. They want to see acute-care beds used in hospitals for those who are in need. It should not be a

bed that's used for a long period of time when you have the patient waiting for long-term care. These individuals tell me that they want the mental health system. They want the plan that the Auditor General so accurately described in his report two years ago. They want that plan implemented. They don't want this bill. They're not talking about this amendment. That is what Albertans expect, and that is what they want. They don't want any more public relations fluff from the government.

No one has phoned and suggested to me today that this amendment is what we need or that Bill 17 is what we need, but people have phoned concerning wait times in the emergency rooms, access to orthopaedic surgery, access to a family doctor. Why are facilities being constructed? Why have the facilities been furnished with medical equipment, but we don't have enough skilled personnel to work in them? Those are the questions people are asking, Mr. Chairman.

In conclusion, when we think of the Canada Health Act and we think that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible, Canadians and Albertans understand that. Hopefully, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere understands that. Hopefully, his party does.

Certainly, I'm going to express my gratitude to him for bringing this amendment forward, but I would like to remind all hon. members to work to ensure that the problems in the system are fixed. We can debate this amendment, we can debate this bill, but the rubber is going to hit the road when this government finally decides that we're going to need some different management techniques and different management skills than they have across the way. They are the leaders. They are the ones that have made the political decisions that have caused all this chaos and confusion, not the appointed or hired individuals. The responsibility lies with the hon. members across the way. That's where the responsibility lies. I know they're going to try to duck that responsibility, but they can't. They are the ones that after the 2008 election, that big majority – I don't know what they were thinking, Mr. Chairman, but Alberta Health Services was not a good idea.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. When we talk about the amendment to Bill 17, I think that patient-centred service delivery is so important, and this is part of what we believe is a fundamental principle. The most fundamental flaw of Alberta's health system is the lack of choice and competition in the delivery of health care services. I think we can all agree with this, and as we look at the Canada Health Act, we believe that this component can be under the Canada Health Act under the amendment that's taken forward.

The provincial government has created a monolithic public delivery monopoly, basically, wherein there is virtually no competition for patients, no incentives for providing effective service. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Just a moment. Hon. members, can you tone it down a little bit? I can't hear a word he's saying. [interjections] I'm the only one who's listening, though, so please tone it down.

Go ahead.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure why the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster would not be. "We're happy for that" is his quote. I'm glad to see that he's paying attention, with his ears wide open. Unfortunately, his mouth is wide open, too, but that's okay.

Choice and competition between health care providers is the key to really solving these problems. In many cases well-run public

hospitals will provide patients with the best and the most timely treatment. The provincial government has created a monolithic public delivery monopoly, that I made reference to earlier, wherein there's virtually no competition for patients. Patients are not able to go to see where they can get the best or the quickest service and the most competent service, and I think it really reflects in terms of the crisis we're facing today when we talk about no competition for patients, no incentives for providing effective services or, for that matter, excellent treatment, and no reason to run hospitals or utilize operating rooms more efficiently. A fundamental flaw.

This amendment, I believe, will in fact be able to enhance the concerns that I raise. Is it any wonder emergency rooms are in the crisis that they're in today? Choices in competition, I believe, between health care providers is the key to solving these problems. In fact, in many cases well-run public hospitals will provide patients with the best and most timely treatment. I say "the best and most timely treatment," which is so important. In other words and in other instances, independent nonprofit and private facilities will be able to treat patients more effectively and efficiently.

12:00

I'd like to use just one example, under this amendment, of how that is done. I am very proud in terms of the category of nonprofit to talk about the Shriners hospital. I'm proud to have been a Shriner for over 10 years, an Al Shamal. In being a Shriner, it's our responsibility as Shriners to – did you know? – raise \$1 million per day, \$1 million per day that go towards not-for-profit hospitals such as the children's Shriners hospital, a wonderful example.

Choice. I believe competition between health care providers is a key to solving the many problems that we are facing. In the example of nonprofit the Shriners hospital, I think, is just one of many examples of where we're able to treat patients more effectively and treat children more effectively and efficiently without long waiting lines. I want to congratulate and I also want to take the time to say thank you to the Shriners across Alberta, the Shriners across Canada, in North America, for that \$1 million a day that they raise 365 days a year.

If you can imagine, their commitment to caring for young children is through the amendment that we're talking about and the principles of the Canada Health Act, that are so important. As I speak about not-for-profit, it's about enhancing. This amendment, I believe, is enhancing the principles of a bill that is, as I mentioned earlier, very flawed but at the same time recognizing that we want to stop the bleeding. We want to be able to treat patients more effectively and efficiently, and our children: we want the best care for them. I don't think anyone in this Assembly would argue such a point as long as the needed service is publicly paid for and done safely. It should not make a difference whether an operating room is run by a public hospital or a private surgical centre.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek earlier and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore earlier and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere clearly recognize the importance of new ideas to the important delivery of health care services to ensure that the actual emergency rooms are no longer faced with the dismal. We want to give people help.

One person who was giving Albertans hope was the doctor who, of course, was recently kicked out. I can say that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is a shining example of hope of the future for a better health care system.

Mr. Chairman, on the amendment that has been put forward, where we talk about, "namely, that health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible," I think that we are able to talk about not-for-profit. We are able to talk about providers such as private and also public all

rolled into one. I think that kind of hybrid approach is one that Albertans expect no less of.

If I could give you an example, and this is where the minister of finance may want to astutely pay attention. The HRC, the Health Resource Centre, in Calgary is an example, under this amendment, where changes have been made, money has been spent, and now what used to be 1,600 people getting hips, knees, and other replacements – I think hip and knee is the most in the HRC. What I find really, really important is that there are going to be another 1,600 people – 1,600 people – who are not going to get due attention. I'm going to be introducing five of them next week with their hips and their knees. They're on wait-lists, and they're in pain because of what has taken place in Calgary.

This amendment is talking about publicly funded even if it means in a private centre, but what it really is about, what Albertans have told me, Mr. Chair, is that we don't care who does it. If it's publicly funded and it's private or if it's not-for-profit or it's private doesn't really matter. What we want to ensure is that the lines go down, no one can queue-jump. In the Canada Health Act no one will be able to queue-jump, and this amendment that's being put forward is another principal pillar in what I believe are Alberta values.

I believe that Albertans deserve better, and I believe that a Wildrose government will ensure, under this amendment, that we are putting forward that Alberta's health care delivery is patient centred and that wait times for specialists and procedures and emergency room care are significantly decreased by implementing important components that are framed under this Canada health umbrella. Let me just give you an example. You ask: give us an example. Well, let me give you an example: significantly reduced wait times for specialists and medical procedures by opening delivery of publicly paid for health services to any accredited private and not-for-profit health service provider. It's not radical science. It's not new. But it all fits under the umbrella of the Canada Health Act, which is of course mentioned in the amendment.

A private or a nonprofit provider such as the Shriners can deliver the same service, either as good or a better quality of care, more quickly. In other words, that person I'm going to be introducing next week in the public gallery here in this Assembly who is agonizing in pain, who is taking drugs because of the pain, because of their hip that they're waiting and waiting for, now that the decisions were made in Calgary, is going to have to wait longer. People and Albertans don't care, Mr. Chairman, under this umbrella of the amendment, under the Canada Health Act. What they care about is being able to get an efficient and effective service quickly. That's not happening in ER rooms, and it clearly is not happening if you happen to require a new knee.

I might add: how many over across the way need a new knee? How many across the way may need a new hip? When I introduce the people up there next week that will be travelling, they are going to be living proof of people that are in a line. You can go and pay out. You know, the HRC, the Health Resource Centre, in Calgary has been absolutely stellar in the approach that they have performing the service. So the public system can actually learn from what is going on. I can only hope that the members across the way may never need a new hip or a new knee because in my judgment they don't want to wait in a line any more than Albertans do, and that's what is happening.

Mr. Chairman, it is clear to me. The choice is obvious. Support this amendment. Do the right thing. You will be able to look yourself in the mirror tonight and sleep well tonight. That's if, in fact, you go home for a sleep tonight. We're not really quite sure on that point because we have lots of energy on this side. In fact, I often say: nous avons l'énergie; we have the energy. It really

captures the spirit, under this amendment, of who we are, what we do, and how we do it.

I can say to you that when you put your hands on your head like this, it means you require more oxygen, just so you know. Some may require more oxygen, others may not, but that's okay because at the end of the day under a really good health care system you shouldn't require more oxygen because you should be getting enough through your ventricles and your blood system that is coming forward. So on this amendment, Mr. Speaker – and I'm not a doctor. In fact, they kicked out the only doctor that was on that side. On the amendment, it was unanimous.

12:10

Mr. Chairman, at the end of all of these important issues of a Canada Health Act, I find it ironic. Introducing a health care funding model in which public and private and not-for-profit health service providers and facilities are compensated according to the quality and the timeliness of care has to be a principle that the Treasury Board President can agree to and the minister of finance can agree to.

Mr. Chair, I see some movement on the other side in the far right corner.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Well, you're talking through me.

Mr. Boutilier: In fact, Mr. Chair, on the amendment, I see a few dolls moving on that side, and it obviously has distracted me from my thoughts. I can only say that, you know, I don't think you're allowed to be theatrical when it comes to holding up dolls and things like that. I think you may want to forewarn your colleagues across the way that it's very important that they play nice in the playground because right now we want to get this right. It's clear to me that I can only say, when it comes to getting this right, a Wildrose government.

In fact, I want to say, Mr. Chairman, on this amendment, that when I drove back from British Columbia into Alberta this summer, there was a beautiful sign put up by the government, and it said: welcome to wild rose country. What a beautiful sign that was. It was truly beautiful. In fact, I got a picture by it. I think I was an independent at the time, on the amendment on the Canada Health Act, but I got a picture from it because I was coming back to wild rose country, and that is so nice.

I think it's important to dream, and in fact this amendment is about dreaming.

An Hon. Member: If you don't have nightmares.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. I would far prefer to have a dream than a nightmare, and I can say, Mr. Chairman, that this amendment is a dream. This is not a nightmare. I think a nightmare is actually Bill 17. I think it is quite simply a train wreck ready to happen, and that's why we want to amend this Bill 17.

Mr. Chairman, I'm finding it difficult to concentrate with all the activity going on. I will continue on without the distraction, but I always welcome active participation in terms of what's going on here. I want to say: how could anyone, on this amendment, disagree with the concepts of ending the practice of building expensive health facilities until there is clearly enough available staff to open them? What a novel idea, under this amendment, on the Canada Health Act. With the money saved from this practice, immediately work to open and staff available capacity within public systems to reduce wait times.

Not only that, Mr. Chairman, but the Minister of Transportation from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake may actually then be able to get some dollars to put some pavement on my highway, which is directly

related to the Canada Health Act because of the fact that I and my family and Albertans who travel that highway that doesn't have pavement on it today may be in jeopardy. That's how that works.

To the head of the oil sands secretariat I can only say: clearly, to me you have a situation, under the amendment on Bill 17, and I think, please, give the Minister of Transportation some money for pavement so that we can save under the Canada Health Act. Right now, Mr. Chairman, clearly, he doesn't have the resources because there's sure no paving going on, and I continue to wait. I divert, for the benefit of my health, from calving caribou. I continue to manoeuvre around migrating birds. We do all of those things because I do know that at the end of the day we want what is the best health care system based on the best transportation. Because, you see, if we don't have a good system, under this amendment, then the health care system is actually going to be further burdened based on, in fact, more accidents.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're talking about health insurance coverage.

Mr. Boutilier: Right. That is so important, and that goes directly to my point, Mr. Chairman. At the end of the day this insurance is something that is an umbrella. This is an enhancement, the amendment that is being put forward here. I want to say that I will sleep better tonight when the members across the way support this amendment. I know they are eager to stand. Maybe it might soon be getting close to calling for the question on this amendment. This amendment stands for the values and the principles of Albertans. It stands for Wildrose Albertans. I mean, all Albertans are Wildrosers because that's actually what it says on our licence plates.

Mr. Chairman, on the amendment to the bill regarding the insurance I want to say that when I get my car insurance . . .

The Deputy Chair: We're talking health insurance.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Car insurance and health insurance are very interrelated.

The Deputy Chair: No. Health insurance coverage.

Mr. Boutilier: Health insurance and car insurance. Why? Because, clearly, we want to ensure that our health care system is not burdened needlessly and unnecessarily. I believe that under the Canada Health Act and their insurance further reducing surgical and specialist wait times by funding patients outside of the province should also be an opportunity to be able to get timely access to medically necessary procedures, which are also sometimes unavailable within the province of Alberta. Of course, I don't think that any of us are at all pleased by that.

In such cases, under this amendment, Mr. Chairman, the costs to the government to have the same procedure performed in Alberta would instead be sent to an out-of-Alberta health provider. If that's what it takes, we will eliminate the 10 people that I'll be introducing in the Assembly next week under the umbrella of the Canada Health Act and the insurance. I might add that when we talk about Bill 17, the health insurance coverage is publicly administered, comprehensive, and, in fact, accessible.

Chair's Ruling Relevance

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, I want to just make a couple of points under Standing Order 23(b) and *Beauchesne's* 459. First is relevance. We are talking to

an amendment on health insurance coverage by adding that “health insurance coverage is publicly administered” go in after “Canada Health Act.” That’s what we are talking about. We’re not talking about paving roads to anywhere. We’re not talking about anything else on this. We are talking about this, so this is where we are going. We’re going to keep it relevant, and I will be calling everyone on relevance. Also, you’ve got to quiet down on both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I’m sure that when it comes to health insurance, as is being proposed in amendment A2, we’re probably all wishing we had the debate on health insurance tonight because it’s 20 after 12, and we’ve been basically chasing our tails with amendment A2.

One of the terms that amendment A2 calls for is “comprehensive.” Comprehensive has a couple of meanings. It means complete; it means understandable. I don’t believe that at this hour we have the comprehension available within this House to actively participate in the best interests of Albertans. Yes, we’re accessible in the sense that we’re all here, but the progress that we’re making, whether it be on amendment A2 as stated, is very questionable.

I do appreciate the hon. chair doing his level best to guide the direction on this debate and to also keep people in check, but the reality is that if there isn’t something particularly creative or changing, then an individual’s ability to participate in the debate on A2, that “Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, be amended in the last recital in the preamble by adding” – without that ability to comprehend what is being discussed tonight, the value of the exercise is terribly diminished. I’m suggesting that if there is the possibility of amendments that are going to bring us forward, that are going to positively impact on Bill 17, then I would suggest it would be very refreshing to move forward beyond this particular amendment.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I would like to call the question.

12:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Well, the reason we’re here talking about this: let’s put it in perspective. People want to know why we’re talking about the same amendment for the last however many hours. It’s probably quite simple: because we think this bill is a piece of garbage. That’s why. We will sit here and we will talk about it and we will talk about it and we will talk about it some more until you guys don’t want to talk about it and make the appropriate motion. That’s all that needs to be done. I’m sorry if that bugs people and if you just think this is such a waste of time. The fact is that people are tired. Albertans are tired of being bullied, and we’re going to stand in here and talk until the cows come home.

We’re going to talk about universal coverage, universal public insurance. That’s what we’re going to talk about. We’re going to continue to talk about it. The reason we’re going to talk about it is because we need some more options in this country with regard to our health care.

There’s no doubt that all this amendment says is – it’s pretty darn simple. It’s just talking about the Canada Health Act and naming the principles in the Canada Health Act. This is not a very large concession that we’re talking about here. It just shows how this government is unwilling to listen and to compromise.

You know, it’s funny. Not all the members on that side are like that, clearly. I know that for a fact. There are some that would love to work on things together and work on things constructively. But,

no. It’s either the way Ron Glen wants to do it or the way somebody wants to do it, and that’s it. That’s the way it’s going to be. So we can’t even clarify what Canada Health Act means without getting permission from the puppet master. It’s not doable. That’s ridiculous.

We’re saying that all we need to do is name the five principles of the Canada Health Act. If you want utility, the reason we would do this is because, well, for one, if the Canada Health Act were to be changed and there were going to be different principles introduced, at least as a province we could keep our autonomy. We could say: no; these are the principles that we were talking about. Whatever the feds pass, do we give up our sovereignty? Am I unaware? Are we a colony or something? No. We’re a province. We have our own laws, and if we say Canada Health Act, it’s the Canada Health Act as it exists today with these five principles. We don’t want anything more than that.

You know, I think that that’s pretty self-explanatory. It’s fundamental. It’s not a big concession. We’ve been here for a long time, and it’s just to demonstrate the fact that this government once again is unwilling to even make the smallest little concession. It’s really about clarification. That’s all it is. It’s not even changing your bill. But you’re not even willing to do that.

It’s indicative of the bully tactics that are used by this government repeatedly, all the time. It’s just unbelievable, you know. I can’t even imagine – well, I can imagine. I do unbelievably still have friends over there, few, and I know what gets said. It’s absolutely ridiculous that we can’t stand here and actually have a debate on health care.

Mr. Boutilier: That’s why they should guard against self-deception.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Guard against self-deception is right.

Now, I would be happy to end this debate on this tonight if you would like. Just say you’d like to end it, and we’ll do it, and you just adjourn it. That’s all we ask, that we adjourn debate until we can do it at an hour that people are actually listening instead of in the wee hours of the night. So it’s totally up to you. You want to go? Make the call. Otherwise, we’re going to talk about this. You guys can camp in the back and you can be friends and buddies and laugh and see how smart you are. Just let us know when you’d like to stop for the night, and we’ll do so.

Why do we believe in universal coverage? Well, as I said earlier, the reason we believe in universal coverage and the reason we think it’s important to enshrine these principles is, hopefully, for the same reason that the government side does. We don’t believe that people should – somebody should not be denied health care coverage . . . [interjection] Pardon me?

Mr. MacDonald: I’m going to support you.

Mr. Anderson: All right. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, he has the floor. He is talking to the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: I’m sorry if I distracted him.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Anderson: I appreciate that.

We on this side of the House don’t think, and I’m pretty positive that most if not all of the folks on the other side of the House believe, that somebody should be denied access to critical or

necessary health care because of an inability to pay. That's wrong, and that's why I think everybody has that concept. But I think people get confused with what's actually in the Canada Health Act.

The Canada Health Act talks about insurance coverage being publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible. It does not talk about the delivery component. What the Canada Health Act clearly does not say is that there needs to be a public monopoly on delivery. I think what this government should be doing – and we'll be bringing in lots of amendments at a better hour, when people are actually listening to this debate. We'll be bringing forward some amendments that, for one, will allow more competitive delivery in the health care system.

We need to allow private, public, and nonprofit providers to compete for every single public dollar that is spent. We think that that's important because we think that it will lead to lower costs, more competition, and more investment in health care from the private sector, and that's a good thing. That's something that we should be encouraging. That's what they do in Europe, and they have managed to almost eliminate waiting times. I mean, their health systems are so vastly superior to what we've become here, this monolithic public monopoly which is just failing Albertans at every turn. You know, that's something that we need to do.

Here we are talking about the Alberta Health Act and trying to find ways that we can make sure that our system remains completely publicly insured but have competitive delivery. We want to make sure that in order to protect that right, the right of having the option of private and public delivery, we have this amendment in there so that it gives us the flexibility. So if the feds decide to change the Canada Health Act to, say, outlaw any kind of competitive delivery, what we are saying is still enshrined in here and won't be automatically changed. I think that's an important thing.

Again, I look at the reason it's important. Well, there are many reasons why it's important, but one of the reasons is that you have in every single system that is superior to ours – in Europe, in particular, and Japan – that they have this competitive delivery model. And it's working, guys. It's working. Look at every report. We're here late at night. I mean, go on the Internet; look it up. Look up what they're doing in Sweden. Look up what they're doing in Luxembourg and France and Switzerland. Look at Japan. Look at those areas and look at the competitive delivery model that they have with private, nonprofit, and public competing for publicly insured patients. It works.

We're in Alberta. In Alberta, Mr. Chair, we should be leading the way. We should be forging the way. We should be the pioneers. There are 67 Progressive Conservatives over there. Well, I always thought that that meant that, you know, we didn't buy into this whole kind of socialistic, monolithic public delivery. I thought that meant that we were forward-thinking. You know, that's what I thought when I was over there. We were forward thinking, we believed in good conservative principles, but we were comfortable enough in our own skin to make sure that the things that weren't working we fixed. That's what I thought it meant to be a Progressive Conservative. But, no, it's not that.

12:30

We've become as status quo as any of the eastern left-wing parties out there, and it's just been ridiculous. It's almost like we're afraid to change or afraid to be pioneers in health care, and it's the most important issue to Albertans. Like, let's do it. I mean, come on, hon. member. Are you telling me that Sweden doesn't work? Is that social democracy too right wing for you? Come on. It's a left-wing social democracy, and they've got more choice in health care than we do by a mile. It just doesn't make sense.

How about France? How about Switzerland? Even the United Kingdom of all places, which, of course, was on the brink of economic bankruptcy, like the United States in a lot of ways, are going towards the models of western Europe. That's what Prime Minister Cameron has done. They're keeping these principles that we see in the Canada Health Act, the universality of public insurance, and they are moving towards a more competitive delivery model. They just ran on it, and they just got a mandate to do so. In the United Kingdom, well, they're far more left wing than we are in Alberta. At least I thought so, anyway. I think they are. And there they go.

Mr. MacDonald: No, they're not.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, sure they are. Well, maybe they're not. Maybe they're not.

Mr. MacDonald: There's a coalition government there.

Mr. Anderson: Well, they're a coalition government though the Social Democrats are allowing them or supporting them to bring in a more competitive delivery model both for health care and education. I think it's a real victory, and we'll see the results. It'll be a good experiment to see the before and the after picture. Will it result in what the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity thinks it'll become, or will it result in something positive? Well, we'll see. I think that it's clear from the evidence that it will result in something positive, that there will be less wait times, more private investment, nonprofit investment, that that will lessen the burden on the public purse for health care, but everyone will still remain publicly insured. It's an incremental step. You never want to go too far. You never want to go jump the gun and just say, "Okay; we're going to jump straight from this system to a totally other system," because you might way overdo it and then cause more harm than good.

Obviously, we know we have far too monolithic a system. I mean does anyone here think we don't have too monolithic a system right now? I guess there might be some. Well, maybe there are some.

An Hon. Member: No comment.

Mr. Anderson: No comment. That's right.

I'd say that a lot of us think that we couldn't really get any more monolithic in our delivery of health care, specifically when you're not talking about primary care. I don't think we could get any more monolithic. So why don't we look at ways that we can open up competitive delivery? Let's open the gates. Let's have some good competition and innovation. We can take the best of those, and we can make a made-in-Alberta approach. It doesn't have to be an exact carbon copy of those western European democracies. We can move more in that direction and see what works for us and what doesn't work for us. But piling more money into the system and making it more monolithic, which is what's happening, the damage we've done with the cataract people and, of course, HRC – I mean, we're becoming more monolithic, and that's not what the Canada Health Act says. That's not what it says. It doesn't talk about that it has to be publicly delivered. It talks about public insurance. I hope that people will realize that.

This isn't some hidden agenda. I mean, we just released a 20-page booklet. It's on our website. It's all in plain black and white what we want to do with this health care system in Alberta. I want to see what the government's plan is other than: "Yeah. Okay. We need more long-term care beds."

An Hon. Member: Let's see what you've got there.

Mr. Anderson: Well, this is just our health care policy.

I mean, that's not rocket science. We all know we need more long-term health care facilities, but what are we going to do to introduce more competition and innovation into the system? That's what I'd like to see.

I would love to debate another bill. That would be really fun tonight. We could leave this for more important things later. I'll leave it to the hon. House leader to decide when he wants to do that. So we'll just keep chatting about it.

I think it's important to understand the dangers of misinterpreting what the Canada Health Act says because if you misinterpret what the Canada Health Act says, that's where you've got a problem, and it leads to big issues. I think that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark had just a fantastic speech in the Legislature during the emergency debate. He encapsulated, I think, a lot of what you see when you don't have a model that incents innovation and incents competition and incents basic accountability in its structures. People say: well, just put in accountability measures, and that will work. Well, it won't work without the driving forces of competition.

People right now when they go into a hospital, when they go for surgery, are all considered an expense. Of course, any business owner knows that if something is considered an expense, you want less of it. It doesn't help. It means less for salaries. It means less for redoing the front lobby in the hospital. It means a whole bunch of different things. It means less. It's an expense. It means less workers to hire and more work to go around to the existing workers. That's what it means.

But if you change the incentive, if you make the incentive that people bring with them – I mean, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity calls it a voucher system. That's not true because you don't actually hand them the voucher, but I would say that there are similarities because the money is following the patient. I think that's what you're alluding to. If we switched that incentive around a little bit and made sure that the money followed not just the patient but followed the patient if they're treated correctly, if they're treated properly, if the proper preventative approaches are taken with that patient – if that's how the money flowed and that patient could decide to go to a public facility or a private facility, all of a sudden they'd become a source of revenue for that elected hospital board, or they'd become a source of revenue for that private hip and knee replacement clinic. They'd become a source of revenue.

Everything that you do at that point is about getting more people to come to you, and if people are coming out of the same queue, you can only do that if you do more. So you streamline your services. You specialize. You try to get more people through the door so you can get more revenue. You want to get more hips done and more knee surgeries done. You want to get as many from the government queue as possible. So if the government's queue is 18 months, that's essentially a huge potential source of revenue. You want to just get as many of those guys through the door as possible. Of course, it all has to be safe, but you specialize and make sure that everything is as efficient as possible so you're getting people through the door.

That's exactly what HRC did, Mr. Chair. They found a way to do hip and knee replacements 30 to 40 per cent faster and, therefore, 30 to 40 per cent cheaper than what was done on average in the public hospitals. It was quite amazing. We talked to nurse after nurse and doc after doc at that HRC. A lot of these nurses were part of the union. They loved it. The quality of conditions, the work environment were fantastic. We didn't hear one complaint, and you could see because these nurses were in the *Calgary Herald* letters to the editor saying how great it was. I think that people lose sight of that

fact, that that kind of choice and competition improves working conditions. I think it's important that we don't lose sight of that.

I think that that's another offshoot, the improved working conditions, the choice that nurses and doctors have in a competitive system. If you're a private clinic, you try to move things through as quickly as possible in a safe, orderly fashion so that you can get more patients through the door, and necessarily that leads to more efficiencies. We're not talking about any kind of U.S.-style, two-tiered thing. That's not what we're talking about, and I think that's pretty clear. It's unfair of the Premier in question period – and we'll call him out on this later on – to somehow refer to what we're proposing as a European two-tiered system.

A two-tiered system, just so that there's clarification, is when you have a system that's publicly paid for, and then you have a parallel system where people can take out their credit card and their chequebook and pay for their own health care. So you've got two systems. One, you've got a public queue, and then you've got a private queue on demand.

12:40

Now, of course, we kind of have a two-tiered system because people can go down to the States and get health care any time they want. Obviously, that's more inconvenient. It's only the really rich that can afford that other tier because you can't get health insurance up here. You don't have that option of private health insurance for critical medically necessary procedures. But that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about a one-tier public queue but with competitive delivery, with more choices on the delivery side. Everyone is coming out of that same queue. If they need a service they've got to get, they've got to line up in that same queue for their hip and knee replacement. But when they get to the front of that queue, they've got an opportunity to go in multiple different places, and because of that there are more options, and you can care for more people.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to rise and speak in favour of amendment A2 to the Alberta Health Act. I think it's quite important that we realize and reflect on why we need to put this amendment in here. This government has tried several times in the last decade to change the Alberta health care system. They've tried in some areas, and they've failed even in bringing the legislation forward. I remember Bill 11, the debate over that and the rallies that were here. The previous health minister said that we just need to do it and not talk about it and push this through. Albertans are very uneasy not knowing what the direction is.

We hear lots about the Canada Health Act, but very few people know, well, what is the Canada Health Act. What are the principles? What this amendment is all about, very simply, is to say: let's name the five principles of the Canada Health Act so people realize exactly where we're coming from. What are those five principles? Namely, that health insurance coverage is "publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable and accessible." That's right out of the Canada Health Act. In Bill 17 what we have in the preamble is: "Whereas policies, organization, operations and decisions about Alberta's health system should be guided and measured and sustained consistent with the following principles." The first principle: "that Alberta is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act." I'm sorry, but when you go and ask most people, the number one thing they usually say is that it's publicly provided. That isn't in the Canada Health Act, but that it's publicly administered is, that it's comprehensive is, and that it's universal and

portable and accessible are. So by putting this little bit of clarification in there, I think that that would set at ease a lot of Albertans because they know that this is what is staying in. Albertans have been very clear in saying that we want to stay within the Canada Health Act. It's one of the great benefits that has . . . [interjections] It's always good to have the House leaders going head to head.

It's a great benefit that Albertans are very grateful for, that when there's a tragic accident, when all of a sudden our personal health or that of a loved one falls apart, the first thing we think about is not: can we afford it? We get there; people are treated. The first thing that's often thought about if it's not a critical problem is: when am I going to be able to get my hip or my knee or my cataract? When am I going to get my shoulder? When am I going to be able to get an MRI to see what it is? That's where in the third one it talks about timely access. We need timely access. It's critical that we have that.

Going back to this amendment and why we should be bringing it forward, like I say, if we reflect on this government and the number of attempts that it has made to improve our health care system, there have been quite a few, but it's always come under, I guess, the argument: oh, they're trying to privatize it. They're going to continue saying: oh, they're going to try and privatize it. So we need to put in that clarification and say: no; we're going to stay within the Canada Health Act, which is, namely – and we'll read it in again – publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible. When you know that these are the parameters within which we're trying to make changes to our health care, people are much more comfortable because they're not worried that: "Oh, am I going to have to start to pay if I go to my doctor and have a checkup to see why I'm having this problem? Am I going to have to pay because I've got a frozen shoulder and need to have an X-ray of it? Oh, I don't want to pay." Albertans are very nervous about that, and they've showed that over and over again.

What we want to do with this amendment, a very simple amendment, is to bring clarity and, I guess, comfort to Albertans, to say: "No. You can depend on this, that we're going to stay within the Canada Health Act and to actually know what it is." Far too often the argument that comes forward is that this is private and this isn't acceptable, yet for most every Albertan that I know who has the benefit of having a family doctor – and there are too many that I'm running across that no longer have that benefit – the clinic that they go to is privately owned. It's privately run by a consortium of doctors, and there isn't a fear or a problem having it privately delivered. That isn't outside the Canada Health Act.

HRC was privately delivered, yet it was inside the Canada Health Act. The Gimbel clinic, world famous, renowned – he's done all kinds of charitable work on other continents; he teaches, does all those things – is a private clinic, and it was paid for by Alberta health when someone was told: oh, you need a new cataract; you need this treatment.

We need to clarify and talk to Albertans and let them know that, no, we are going to stay within the Canada Health Act. Without that in there, we're going to continue to have to argue, to have the debate with Albertans and say: "Oh, no. Trust us. Trust us." No. We learned a long time ago that Albertans do a deal on a handshake, but it's still good. "Don't trust us; we'll put it in writing. We'll have it in the contract, and you don't need to worry. You can take it to the bank. It's written down. It's in legislation. It's within the Canada Health Act."

What is it? There we go. It's publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible. I do not understand why this government is neglecting to realize the importance of this, and we are going to keep talking about it and talking about it because this is what Albertans want. We're not just going to roll over and

say: "Okay. Go ahead. There's nothing we can do." No. There is something we can do. We've been asked to talk about it. We've been elected to represent those people. That is what we're going to do. We want this amendment to go through. We're going to keep talking about it, and we can do that for as long as this government wants to until it listens and says: "Well, I guess that it is okay to clarify our bill. We don't want a misunderstanding going forward, and this is in the best interests of Albertans."

Let's look at health care as a bigger picture and what some of the challenges are. What are the problems, and are those within the Canada Health Act? Wait times have gone up. Emergency rooms are bulging at the seams. We've got people literally waiting in the hallways to get in to get diagnosed and to find out what their problems are. This government has come out with a new protocol. They had a hundred people come together because they said that we need a new protocol. No. What we need is a new process. Those doctors know what to do. It's that they're not allowed to do it. Health care administrators know what to do, but they're not allowed to do it.

I mean, can you believe anything that's so sad as to think that this new protocol says that, well, if someone waits for eight hours – eight hours – then they're in a position of authority to open up some new beds and move people? Why would we want to do that, to wait eight hours? It makes no sense. Nobody can get any understanding of it that's on the outside. We didn't have the privilege of being there for this meeting of 100 special individuals that are trying to accomplish this problem. You have to ask why. What is the difficulty on this? It's because of the process.

12:50

It's very sad to see this week that someone's job is on the line for only carrying out what he's been asked to do. He's been given the mandate: this is what we want you to do; now go and execute. I believe that he's executing what has been wanted to be done, but because he was probably told not to talk to reporters, a cute PR trick was to carry out a cookie, and then that way you can argue: I'm busy; I'm eating a cookie.

I'll take a quick little break here. I'm getting a little dry. I need a little drink here, and then we'll get back to relevance. Yes, I appreciate the motion there and understand what you're trying to relate.

What is the relevance of amendment A2 and Bill 17?

Mr. Boutilier: You don't have to answer their questions.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, no. The chair is asking me. I'm speaking to the chair, answering the chair, and that's what's important.

It's simple. Albertans are nervous and wanting to know what direction this government is going to go. This Bill 17 is full of platitudes, but when they look back over the last two and a half years at what's happened here in the province, everybody shakes their head, and they don't understand it. We're spending more money. We're building more facilities, so many facilities that we're actually shutting down some awesome facilities and are making people . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you have the floor. Continue.

Mr. Hinman: I'm sorry. Some of the chit-chat is kind of amusing, and I got sidetracked. We were talking about health, and someone was worried about someone's health, whether they're alive or not, I think.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, continue.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. We just wouldn't want someone who needs some help missing some help, but that's okay. We'll keep going here. Well, we're concerned about the health of some of the government members there.

What we need to do is back up and look at what's caused the problems when we've tried to make improvements here in Alberta. I think the number one cause of problems is the nervousness of people on whether or not the government is going to stay within the Canada Health Act. It's a simple amendment. It's about clarity. It's about setting out the definition on which we're going to operate. I mean, the whole purpose of bills and legislation is for clarity. It's a simple amendment to put it in there. What is the Canada Health Act? Anybody who opens it up: they read it; they know it. Like I say, I just can't for the life of me understand why this government wouldn't say: "You know what? That is a good thing. We can put it in there." But to say that it has no utility . . . [interjection] I would need more assurance than that. Again, we'll be so shocked, Mr. Chair, and disappointed, as Albertans are, in what this government is doing with health care. We'll say another wonderful line here, but they won't carry it out.

I mean, earlier we talked about the striking out of section 10 because people need to be held accountable. Again, this government wants to say: trust us; let us vote on it. Boom. It's gone by, and then we can't . . . [interjection] Why don't you tell us?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, he'll have an opportunity to speak if he wishes to stand later. Continue with me.

Mr. Hinman: I will sit down and let him speak, then, and jump up after he's done.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. On amendment A2. Now, I've been, again, listening to the discussion. Certainly, I'm leaning more and more into the view of the hon. member who proposed this amendment, the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Again, when we look at Bill 17 and we look at some of the consultation, Mr. Chairman, that occurred leading up to this bill – I spoke earlier about many of the different committees that were struck, and I overlooked the Putting People First, part 1: Recommendations for an Alberta Health Act. Of course, there were many noble principles proposed, and they include the "quality and safety of health services received by individuals, families and communities." That has to be assured. "All Albertans have access to timely and appropriate care." "Accessibility is based on need, not on Albertans' ability to pay." The primary focus of all of these consultations was, of course, Bill 17.

Did anyone make any recommendations or suggestions regarding whether or not we should be looking at the Canada Health Act in Bill 17 and, specifically, if we should be looking at anything in here that would not just talk about the Canada Health Act but would enshrine the principles of that act into the bill? Now, what the hon. member is attempting to do is I think supporting one of the recommendations of the Putting People First document.

When we consider the shape and the content of the components of the Alberta Health Act, everyone has talked about how they appreciate public health care. Certainly, the hon. member from Airdrie-Rocky View – why do I want to call that Rocky View? Airdrie-Chestermere. Through all of these consultation processes,

it's been articulated by the hon. members that Albertans express a strong desire, Mr. Chairman, in support of medicare in Canada and for the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Now, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I have to say that whenever we're talking about the Canada Health Act, everyone thinks, of course, of Saskatchewan and Tommy Douglas. I was surprised and somewhat delighted to read in the *Globe and Mail* yesterday about the contributions Ernest C. Manning made to universal health care in this very Assembly. I doubt if it was at this hour of the night. The research that was conducted by this writer indicated that, of course, the Alberta Social Credit government was the first one to introduce medicare for seniors. To the hon. member through the chair, Tommy Douglas, when he was Premier of Saskatchewan, didn't introduce the actual medicare bill there. It was the individual who occupied the Premier's office after he did. That is a little vignette, shall I say, Mr. Chairman, on medicare in this country.

Of course, the Canada Health Act came through the federal government. I believe it was in 1982. Now, I could stand corrected on that, but Monique Bégin was the health minister at the time. I believe she's a professor at the University of Chicago at this point in her life, but I'm not sure about that, Mr. Chairman. The Canada Health Act was certainly discussed in one of the framework documents that led up to the drafting of this legislation.

1:00

It is noted and is interesting to note – and I think this is what the hon. member is trying to finish with his amendment – that these principles of the Canada Health Act have influenced publicly funded health care across Canada. That's another term that we cannot forget, publicly funded health care. Certainly – and it's been said here all evening – that's what Albertans want. I'm pleased to see that the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake agrees. I appreciate that.

Now, as principles-based legislation the Alberta Health Act stands to have a similarly powerful influence within our province. Well, I think the individuals who worked on this document, Putting People First: Recommendations for the Alberta Health Act, got a little zealous with that. I'm not so sure this legislation is going to have a powerful influence within our province. Certainly, the Public Affairs Bureau may have every intention of creating confidence in the public health care system through this bill, but I don't think it will work, Mr. Chairman.

The principles within an Alberta Health Act from the Canada Health Act must embody and reflect the kind of health care system Albertans want for themselves and their families. Sure, it has to be modern, it has to be efficient, it has to be economical, and it has to be a system that is focused on individual needs, recognizes a broader continuum of care, and works to support their overall wellness. Albertans said that the principles laid out in another report had merit but wanted to see transparency, accountability, and sustainability added to the principles of the act.

If we take what the hon. member is suggesting here – and that is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, affordable, and accessible – will that satisfy Albertans, and will it work? Well, Albertans also want to know where the system is headed. Again, that has been discussed at length this evening. Not everyone has the same confidence that some government members have. Albertans realize that the system is continuously changing. Now, we only have to look at the IT budget of the government to know how much the entire system is changing. Many members here would be astonished to realize that we have spent or that the former health regions and the current Alberta Health Services have spent in the last four years on IT alone \$1 billion. One billion dollars.

They have increased spending in that same time period by \$270

million on emergency rooms. The reason I know this, Mr. Chairman, is because constituents ask me: where are they spending the money? I go to the coffee shop, I go to the dry cleaners, I go to the Safeway, and people stop me all the time – Mr. Chairman, I'm sure they stop you in Medicine Hat and Cypress Hills – and ask: hon. member, where is the government spending all that money? The budget keeps going up. Services are going down. Is it going to improve with Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act? I'm sure you're asked that question all the time. Is this the answer?

I don't know what you say, and it's your reply, but certainly if we look at this amendment, I can understand where the hon. member is coming from to try to ensure that everything in this initiative will be under the Canada Health Act.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when we look at some of the recommendations from Putting People First, that supposedly was the initial document that related to the drafting of this bill, the number one aspiration Albertans had for their health system, the legislative language in the preamble to the act – you'll be surprised and, I think, you'll be delighted to hear that the number one item on the list was that Alberta has to be committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act. That's reflected in the legislation. Specifically, it goes on to state: universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability, and public administration of our health system.

Now, I heard, as I said before, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford regarding why the government decided they just wouldn't put that in. I think the amendment from the hon. member certainly corrects an oversight by the government. If this was in the consultation report, the date of this report is very important: nine weeks ago.

We all work on behalf of our constituents. Some individuals had a chance to be involved in the emergency debate last Thursday afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Others did not have an opportunity to stand up and express on behalf of their constituents what they were hearing regarding the attempts by this government to reform and improve health care. Some members didn't get that chance, and I would say that this evening is an ideal opportunity. Whether it's on amendment A2 or whether it's on Bill 17 itself, it gives each and every one of us an opportunity to stand up and express on behalf of our constituents precisely what we're hearing about public health care and the delivery of public health care throughout the province.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the number one aspiration – and I'm going to repeat this for all hon. members – as set out in this report that was the basis for this bill: we have to remain committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act. I have no doubt of the sincerity of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but certainly it was spelled out here. It appears to have been overlooked, and it has been corrected by this amendment. I think we should commend and congratulate and thank the hon. member for bringing this amendment forward. Again, we have to remember that we each have an obligation to try to fix the horrendous mistake that was made by this government when they consolidated the nine health regions into the Alberta Health Services Board.

I know, Mr. Chairman, it is difficult for some government members, but they only have to look at the financial statements, which are here in the Health and Wellness annual report 2009-10. They can see for themselves where the money that was budgeted went. Oddly enough, \$220 million of that was unexpended, which the President of the Treasury Board put back in his bank.

The Deputy Chair: We're on A2.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, we certainly are on A2.

The Deputy Chair: And you are on A2?

Mr. MacDonald: It's 10 after 1. It's not near 2 o'clock.

The Deputy Chair: We are on amendment A2. You are on amendment A2?

1:10

Mr. MacDonald: Of course we're on A2. Yes, we certainly are, Mr. Chairman.

When we look at the principles that define our beliefs and how they're reflected in the public health care system, we should use them as a guide in our efforts to fix the mess that was made by the hon. members across the way with our public health care system. Now, some Albertans gave this government a bit of direction, and I'm sure they would be frustrated. I'm sure some of them would be suspicious, and I'm sure some of them would think to themselves: am I just part of some elaborate public relations exercise? I bet there was even a facilitator involved in this. That in itself would get some people suspicious of the direction that the government wanted them to go in. But we have this report. This report clearly outlines what the recommended components for the Alberta Health Act should be, and it's not there. Some of it is there, not all of it, but the number one recommendation is not there.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when I look through some of these other things that are in the bill, I think we're going to need amendments on that, too. Several members have suggested to me that they already have amendments drafted, so I think we're going to go from A2 to who knows what before we're finished with this.

I would like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by thanking the hon. member for bringing this forward. I don't know where the hon. member got the idea for this amendment, whether he got it in the Putting People First document, part 1, or not, but it is a good suggestion. If it was the spirit of Tommy Douglas that mobilized the hon. member, I'm not going to say a word about that. I'm just glad that it has occurred and that we have this amendment before the Legislative Assembly at this time.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my remarks and cede the floor to another hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I really enjoyed the vignette and some of the other items that you brought up on why this amendment is so important. I guess I have to express my disappointment with the Deputy Premier from Spruce Grove, who pretended to want to talk and say: look what we're going to do. It's so typical of this government and this cabinet that they say that they're going to do one thing, and then it goes in another direction. That's why we need to have this clarity, this amendment A2, because of the misleading preamble that comes out of these ministers' mouths, and then they don't do it.

To clarify for them, Mr. Chair, what they need to do is to stand up and to say: you know, we see that this is a good amendment, and I'm for it. If they were to stand up and start saying, "I'm for this; I'm going to vote for this amendment," at that point we'll be happy to go to a vote. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I mentioned it when you were up before that they have the opportunity to stand up and speak if they wish after you're finished. If they wish. You have the floor now. We're speaking to A2.

Mr. Hinman: As you had mentioned it, I am also mentioning it to

them because I don't think it quite clicked. We're talking about A2, so they know what they can stand up and vote for. They don't seem to understand that, so I was trying to clarify it.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Let's talk to A2.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, let's talk to A2 and how we can pass this amendment. That's what we're trying to discuss. The way that this can get passed is for members like myself – Edmonton-Gold Bar, Calgary-Varsity, Lethbridge-East – to get up and say: "I'm in favour of this amendment. I think that this is a good amendment, and this adds clarity to Bill 17."

Mr. Fawcett: Let's vote on it.

Mr. Hinman: See, Mr. Chair? They don't even understand plain English. It's not: let's vote. Stand up and make your declaration. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, Calgary-Glenmore has the floor speaking to A2, not about whether someone else should vote or not. Speak to A2.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Amendment A2 is an important amendment, and we'll keep repeating that. It's about clarity. It's about assurance. It's about comfort for Albertans to know the direction it's going. This government's track record continues to be poorer and poorer, and there are more and more questions and doubt and no trust anymore on what this government is going to do.

As I mentioned before, the previous health minister was very outspoken and said: our mistake was in the past. This is about clarity and why it needs to be written, Mr. Chair. Do you just want me to keep saying the same thing over and over again or try and explain it?

Mr. Chair, the former health minister has made this statement publicly many times: where we've made the mistake in the past is that we discussed it and said what we wanted to do, and there was opposition to it. So what we're going to now and what he did with the superboard was that we're just going to do it. That's the problem. Albertans want to know before, not after, and if Albertans don't like what's there, then we expect them to speak out and to limit the discussion on what they're trying to do. What we want to do is to put trust by passing legislation that says: this is what we're going to do. We're going to stay within the bounds of the Canada Health Act and then state what those are so that people have the comfort because people question that now.

Many people have gone out there and said that what the Canada Health Act is is publicly delivered, and that is not in there. That's why we put here, Mr. Chair, what it states, that it's publicly administered. Again, when you go to the family doctor, it's not publicly delivered; it's privately. That doctor has his own private clinic, and he is publicly funded. That's an important clarity that needs to be brought forward to give Albertans the assurance that these are the parameters on what we're going to do when we amend or move forward with some of our health acts.

It's frustrating for Albertans, just as it was frustrating for me to listen to the Deputy Premier say: oh, we'll vote and show you. What they're going to do is vote, and it doesn't add to the trust of the people on the way they're speaking and what they're doing. Because of that, we need to put this amendment A2 in. It's their track record. It's just like someone who goes and gets a credit check. If they've failed to pay their bills month in and month out, they can't just go in and say: oh, we're going to go by Canada credit,

so you can extend us credit. Well, no, what are the parameters of that?

This is the dilemma that we're in here in the province of Alberta. Because of the past actions, because of the process this government has put in place, people question it. They question why these different facilities are being opened up and why other ones are being closed down. The arbitrary decision of the minister has gone forward, and all of a sudden with four days' notice our minister got up and said that we've received some RFPs and that in four days we're shutting down these four eye clinics, and we're going to open these other ones.

What we need is assurance. Yes, assurance. That's what this is. It's very simple. I don't understand the confusion about explaining why we need to have this amendment. I'm giving examples of what's happened in the past and why we need to have this amendment and what the Canada Health Act is because most Albertans think that it's just getting thrown out. So just to put in there the Canada Health Act. We need the clarity. Simple addition, simple procedure for members in the House to get up and say: "You know what? This is the right thing to do. I'm in favour of this amendment." It's that simple, Mr. Chair. But, again, simple isn't always easy to do, which has been demonstrated this evening by this government and its obstinance in stepping up to the plate and saying: "Yes. Let's make this clarity. Let's improve this bill so Albertans know where we're at and where we're going to go."

1:20

You know, there isn't a bigger expenditure in the province than what we do on Alberta health. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I didn't realize that. I always appreciate his astuteness in the numbers that he brings forward, but a billion dollars on IT: is that correct? A billion dollars, and we have to ask: is that in the Canada Health Act? Is IT in there? No, I don't think it is. But Albertans want to know where the money is being spent. Hon. members like those that spoke earlier here, especially the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, point that out time and time again in this House where money is being spent. Is that money being spent within the Canada Health Act? That's a question that many Albertans are interested in and would like to know.

It's such a simple thing to do. It's the right thing to do, to give that assurance. It's to say that, yes, you can count on us to follow the Canada Health Act. What that is is publicly administered, comprehensive, universal, portable, and accessible.

Accessible. Isn't that an interesting word to bring up when we hear day in and day out how many people don't have access to an emergency room? When they are in that emergency room, Mr. Chair, they don't have access to a bed to be moved up. Then when they are in that bed and moved up, they don't have access to a surgeon because the facility has shut down. We only operated for eight hours today, and then this expensive surgical room is being shut down. Why it needs to be in there is that it's accessible because then people can say: well, if it's accessible, why am I waiting here and have no access to the system?

That's what happened day in and day out. It was very disappointing to hear the Premier respond earlier this week. When asked what he was going to do, he says: we're not going to go back to 300 health boards. We've never had 300 health boards. Why would he make such an absurd statement that we're not going to go back to 300 health boards, that we're going to go to a two-tier European system like the Wildrose? I mean, they're just ridiculous statements, Mr. Chair.

What we need to do is have a bill with clarity to say: where are we going to draw the parameters on the Alberta Health Act? I mean,

when you read through this document, Bill 17, and you go through the preamble and you read all of it, it's words. The reason why this government is putting out this wordy piece of proclamation of what they're going to do is because they've failed to do it. So they think this can buy them another year if they just put out a wonderful document, pass it as legislation, call it the Health Act, and then people will buy that smoke and mirrors for another year because we're saying that we're doing all of these things.

Are these things – what are they inside of? Oh. “Alberta is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act (Canada); that individuals, families and communities receive quality health services that are safe.” What are they saying? That before this bill came in, they weren't safe? That all of a sudden they've discovered – yet we know the number of errors that are made. “Albertans have reasonable access to timely and appropriate care, including primary care.” I spoke earlier. What's appropriate care, and what's timely care?

I asked the health minister a week ago to please provide an audit of all of the facilities and how many beds are closed in those facilities, and he refused to answer the question, which is regular. But it was amazing that yesterday he got up and he spoke: we've just opened up 360 beds. For two and a half years have these 360 beds been mysteriously closed off and shut so people don't have access when, in fact, the Canada Health Act says that we're to have access? Oh, no. You can line up and wait eight, 12, 16, 24 hours in the emergency room because I guess that's access. You've come in. You've checked in. We've seen you appear. But they don't address it.

The Deputy Chair: Are you on A2?

Mr. Hinman: Yes. About access.

The Deputy Chair: It's about health insurance coverage.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Maybe I should come up, Mr. Chair, and see if we have the same amendment. Would you like me to do that?

The Deputy Chair: Health insurance coverage: accessible.

Mr. Hinman: Accessible. That's the word I'm talking about right now, accessible.

This government is coming up with a new protocol that they think they'll be able to initiate in 40 days. This is an emergency. In 40 days we'll be able to initiate this new accessibility, and we have these wonderful numbers and formulas that, when reached, trigger a reaction. We don't need to worry about reacting when they come through the door. It's when they pile up enough that all of a sudden: “Oh, wow. We get the formula. It's been hit. Now we can open up a bed for them. They've been here eight hours.” At seven hours, 55 minutes someone could still be sitting there, and they move them through in a disorderly manner. Why? Because they're handcuffed. They're gagged. They're chained. It says: “Oh, no. You can't actually work on this person and open up a bed to move out someone else because we haven't hit the trigger of eight hours or that 33 per cent of the beds or less are available.”

It's ridiculous to think that that is how we're going to manage our health care system: here are these wonderful formulas to assure you the comfort that you have accessibility. That's not accessibility.

Again, in the Chaoulli case, in Quebec, the Supreme Court ruled that waiting does not meet the Canada Health Act. To wait for eight months for a hip, to wait a year for a cataract, to wait nine months for an MRI because it's not deemed deadly, that you're okay: we're missing the point. We're not spending our money well.

We could ask some of the very simple, simple questions, Mr. Chair, when someone even comes into the emergency room. Often an ER doctor within an hour or two has a patient stabilized and is willing to sign off and say: “This one is now ready to be moved into an acute-care bed. We've done our job here.” But they can't do it. We've seen night after night the ambulances with a policeman, two paramedics sitting there looking after an individual because they're not allowed to leave until there's been the proper transition. We know with the transitional nurses, in their job, when the ER doctor has actually signed off and said, “This person is stabilized; you can now move them out,” the transitional nurse often has that individual for seven to 10 days inside their double computer system. Again, I say double computer system because my understanding is that they have to put all of the entries into two systems because they're moving from the hospital into postcare somewhere else, and they can't move them out. So they're locked into this system for seven to 10 days.

They're missing that we're not talking about that. We're not talking about accessibility. We're talking about formulas – formulas – that are going to somehow enhance your quality of life. No. It's actually having the accessibility to get the treatment that you need. That's what the Canada Health Act is about. That's why they took it to the Supreme Court in Quebec, and it was ruled that waiting eight months or waiting six months was inappropriate.

Then government comes up with formulas saying that this is acceptable. Well, why is it acceptable? If your father was having a heart attack, would you find it acceptable to wait six hours, have damage that's irreversible because there were three other individuals who had heart attacks first? We didn't want to call in another doctor even though there were doctors that were available if the CEO or the chief administrator had that authority to call up and say: look, we've got a problem.

I mean, when you go to a simple thing like a grocery store, you have the manager there. When people line up too much, there's someone there that says: “You know what? We need to open up another till.” They'll bring workers in because they understand the importance of service. We've lost that whole concept in our monolithic formula health care delivery system. It's not about people. It's not about service. It's just about numbers. What are the formulas on these numbers?

1:30

I can't even understand how our morale is where it is when someone has to go through one of those tough periods where people show up at the emergency room and aren't being treated. I can't imagine what it must have been like to be in that hospital, to find someone who had hung themselves or to be the person who actually delivered a pen and paper to him and was so busy and so distracted that it didn't even dawn on them why this individual would want a piece of paper and a pen. There are some major problems here on accessibility.

Why is this government so stubborn as to say, “We're not going to accept this amendment; we're not going to say that it's going to be accessible”? It's beyond those of us in opposition as we continue to say that we need a better bill. We need a health care bill that doesn't just give insurance in words but actually sees the action. We should stay in here and talk until that action is actually in place in the hospitals. I think that then those individuals over there would say: we need action now. They don't want to wait here 24 hours for something. They want it now. So maybe we should debate in here as long as people have to wait in an emergency room and say: “You know what? Let's see what it's like to be 24 hours.” They've got

comfortable chairs. They're laid back. They've got their eyes closed so that they can think deeply and reflect on what we should be doing here.

I can almost feel the vibes, that they're thinking: "You know, I think it would be right to put in the definition of the Canada Health Act and actually ensure that when people show up at our emergency rooms, right now we're on top of it. We're bringing people in there. We realize what it is. Why not have the triage nurse – and they do this in some of the hospitals – say: "You know what? You need to go to your family doctor tomorrow."

But there, again, is the problem. Our system is such that people can't get in to a family doctor. It's very discouraging for individuals. I've talked to too many now who say that they can't find a family doctor. Theirs is retiring. They've had this doctor for 30 years. "Can you please help us find a new family doctor?" Family doctors are so busy that they're actually screening new patients or have signs on the door that say: "We're not accepting any new patients. Our practice is full."

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. If I could speak to the process. We've had considerable discussion on A2 as it relates to Bill 17, and I think part of the reason that we've had such a lengthy discussion has to do with trust in the process. So I'm going to very quickly suggest that the process amongst the House leaders was that Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, would be debated and adjourned. I would suggest that it would be time to adjourn the amendment A2 so that we could then go home and come back tomorrow refreshed. I know that some of us will be in Public Accounts at 8:30 tomorrow, talking with Intergovernmental Relations. I, myself, would like to be sufficiently sharp to hold that ministry to account. Therefore, I'm suggesting that we adjourn debate on motion A2.

The Deputy Chair: Are you moving that?

Mr. Chase: That is what I am moving, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: You're moving a motion to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the House now rise and report bills 26, 21, 22, 20 and report progress on Bill 28 and Bill 17.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 21, Bill 22. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 20 and Bill 26. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 28 and Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: All those members of the Assembly that concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn till 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:37 a.m. on Wednesday to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 24, 2010

Issue 46a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 24, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure today to introduce you to the family members of our Clerk Assistant and director of House services, Louise Kamuchik. All members will know that several days ago I indicated that Mrs. Kamuchik will be leaving us for a retirement plan to begin in mid-December. Today at the Legislative Assembly we held a retirement reception, this morning, in her honour, and there was a very, very important and major turnout. I want to thank all members of the Assembly and other staff for that. Louise's contribution, as I've indicated before, has been invaluable, and she will certainly be missed.

Today her family members are here. If they'd rise, please: Bill Kamuchik, Louise's husband; Lorraine O'Connor, Louise's sister; Blythe Peleskei, Louise's stepdaughter; and Sherry Pleszuk, Louise's daughter-in-law. If you would welcome them all.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 84 visitors from St. Albert representing the Muriel Martin school. We have 72 very bright and energetic young students, who I hope can come back and see the magic spot when it is in operation. It was one of the things they missed on their tour today, but I'm sure they'll be back. They're accompanied by their teachers: Mrs. Jody Bialowas, Mlle Danielle Jean, Mlle Janelle Longpré, Mrs. Rhonda Surmon, and Mlle Britany Giles as well as parent helpers Mrs. Tracy Tiedeman, Mrs. Wendy Taylor, Mrs. Kathy Leachman, Mr. Tyng Ho, Mr. Kevin Huang, Mrs. Michelle Veldhuis, and Mrs. Wendy Grimshaw. I believe that they are seated in both of our galleries. I would ask that our guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure today for me to rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a wonderful group of 15 grade 6 students from the brand new Monsignor William Irwin school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. I had the honour of attending the opening of this great school earlier this fall. It's one of the ASAP 1 schools, one of the new P3 schools. It's a beautiful facility, but more importantly it has wonderful children and wonderful teachers. Fifteen of them are here with us today with their teacher, Michael Leskow, along with parent helpers Alan

Simmonds and Gary Leskow, and that, indeed, is Michael Leskow's dad, who's helping him out, which is really wonderful.

When speaking with the students earlier today, we had some interesting questions. I know more questions will come when they invite me to come back to talk with them about government in their classroom. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 18 grades 5 and 6 students from Horse Hill elementary school. Horse Hill school is located in the northeast corner of the city just off the Manning freeway. These students are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Karen Fischer, and Mr. Ryan Duggan today. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in June of '09 an accident at the intersection of highways 16 and 897 claimed the life of Pearl Watt, a long-time Kitscoty resident. Then again this August a tragic accident claimed the life of a young lady named Leasa Headon. At that time two young ladies from our constituency decided that something should be done, and they set out to start a petition to bring awareness about this intersection. In a very short time they raised 7,000 names on this petition, not only bringing attention to the intersection but to the fact of how much they cared about their friend and their community. The petition will be tabled later by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that even the President of the Treasury Board needs to occasionally lobby our Minister of Transportation for intersections that make our highways safer, and I will continue to do that in their memory. At this time, though, to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, I'd like to ask these two young ladies, Miss Kylie McLean and Miss Erin O'Neill, to stand up so we can thank them.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature a group of constituents from Edmonton-Castle Downs who also happen to be friends with our colleague from Calgary-East. The first one is Sheikh Ramez Mounzer. He is from the Druze Association of Edmonton. He has been a practising clergyman in our city for over 54 years, definitely serving the Druze community in our province with honour and dignity. He is accompanied today by his wife, Mazina Mounzer, who I have to tell you is a fabulous chef. She drops by my constituency once in a while with fabulous Lebanese cuisine, which I truly enjoy, and it shows. They are also accompanied by a friend, Rabha Ammur. I would like them to rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the newly appointed managing director of the Alberta

Emergency Management Agency, Mr. Dana Woodworth. Mr. Woodworth brings to the agency an accomplished background with the Canadian armed forces, including an assignment as the commanding officer of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team from 2007 to 2009. In addition to various leadership positions during his 28-year tenure with the military, Mr. Woodworth also served as director of human resources for the Land Force Western Area and was deputy commander of the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering. Mr. Woodworth's most recent private-sector business management experience has been with Nuna Logistics Limited.

I'm confident that Mr. Woodworth's vast experience and collaborative leadership style will provide a great benefit to the agency as it continues to lead the co-ordination, collaboration, and co-operation of all organizations involved in prevention, preparedness, and response to disasters and emergencies. I would now ask Mr. Woodworth to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four great Albertans that I have the privilege of knowing. The government of Alberta has been a proud supporter of Habitat for Humanity projects, including Anderson Gardens located in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Our guests are looking forward to all members of this Assembly attending our MLA build on December 14. These guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise as I mention their names: Alfred Nikolai, CEO; Steve Hertzog, COO and a U of S graduate; Susan Green, board chair; and Bill Winter, board member. I'd ask that all members please give the traditional warm welcome to these outstanding Albertans.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure indeed to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a guest from the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. Jane Chase is an area manager with Alberta Employment and Immigration for the Edmonton east area, which consists of Alberta Works offices in the Edmonton north, located in Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton south, Sherwood Park, Leduc-Parkland, and St. Albert offices. She is an active member of both the senior and regional management teams in the Edmonton region and is the chair of the linkages committee between Employment and Immigration and Children's Services. Jane Chase is also the lead and has been very involved with the families first project in the Edmonton region. I'll shed a little bit more light on the progress of the new office in Edmonton-Decore in a member's statement later on. I would ask that Jane Chase please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 18 members of the Elder Advocates of Alberta Society. I was pleased to meet with this group last week to discuss the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act and how they feel it strips vulnerable seniors of

their rights. Now, my mom is a senior, and the stories that they have told me tear at my heart. They are here today hoping that the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports will meet with them to discuss this act. Later I will be doing a tabling with literally thousands of names opposed to the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act. I would like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the mayor of Crossfield and four councillors who are with him today. This mayor is someone that I've had many a scrap with through my life and thrown many punches with. He happens to be my brother, and I'm very proud of him.

Mr. Boutilier: His Worship.

Mr. Anderson: His Worship. I don't think I could ever call him that, though; that's for sure.

If he could please stand. There's Mayor Nathan Anderson of Crossfield, Deputy Mayor Jo Tennant, Councillor James Ginter, Councillor Jason Harvey, and Councillor Garry Richardson. If we could all give them the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to have two introductions to make today. First of all, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the group of seven from Strathmore, the group of seven for their impact and significance, not their tenure just yet. Led by Mayor Steve Grajczyk, Deputy Mayor Bob Sobol, councillors Earl Best, Rocky Blokland, Dave Hamilton, and John Rempel, and accompanied today as well by the town manager, Dwight Stanford, I'd ask them all to rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the councillors and mayors from the city of Brooks. They're in the public gallery, so I can't see them, but I know they're up there: Mayor Martin Shields, Deputy Mayor Barry Morishita, councillors Kimberley Sharkey, Norm Gerestein, Ron Yewchuk, Noel Moriyama, and Bill Prentice as well as Bill's wife, Shirley Prentice, and accompanied today as well by the city manager, Wanda Mortensen, and by the city clerk, Amanda Peterson. I'd ask you all to stand and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Habitat for Humanity Anderson Gardens

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to stand here today to announce a Habitat for Humanity development called Anderson Gardens, which will provide 47 new homes for low-income families in the Bergman neighbourhood of northeast Edmonton. As the MLA for this constituency I am overjoyed since these new homes will benefit local families and residents.

On December 18, 2010, the first set of keys will be handed over to deserving families. On this day six of the 47 Edmonton families will see their dreams of affordable home ownership realized. Families who live in these homes will feel a sense of pride and community spirit.

Mr. Speaker, Habitat for Humanity builds more than just houses; it provides families with a better quality of life and a sense of belonging and safety. This is all possible thanks to Habitat for Humanity Edmonton and the many volunteers who donate their time and, of course, the Alberta government for donating \$1.4 million to support this development. Anderson Gardens is the biggest development to date for Habitat for Humanity Edmonton and is also the biggest built green project in Canada. Not only is this an investment in affordable housing but an investment in the futures of the families who live in these homes, good news for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, indeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Health Care Solutions

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three weeks ago in my member's statement I suggested that the health care crisis goes beyond partisan politics and that this Assembly should work together to fix the problem. It was a suggestion that was well received from all sides of the House at the time. Around that time we saw a shift in here, with question period often focused for the next several days after that on proposals and ideas about how to fix our ailing health care system and the government seemingly more receptive to opposition ideas.

However, recent events have once again put partisan politics ahead of solutions, I feel, and that, Mr. Speaker, is troublesome, especially in the life-and-death crisis situation that Albertans face in hospital. Members must not at any time forget who we work for – we work for our constituents and for the people of Alberta – and especially not at such a pressing time.

Unfortunately, I feel that in this instance Albertans aren't feeling like all of us are doing our jobs. Albertans are mad about health. Each week they're told there's a new reason for the crisis – acute-care beds, mental health funding, long-term care, home care, assisted living, you name it – but they're not given solutions. They're told instead by both sides, "We're working on it" or "No, you're not" before next week's issue comes forward.

Albertans don't want to hear any more about the problems. They want to hear about solutions, Mr. Speaker. They want transparency. They want reasoning. They want to be able to see what we're doing to solve the problem. Frankly, right now they're not getting that.

I applaud the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for realizing the importance of this issue and the need for proposing feasible solutions in an open manner, and I encourage the rest of us to follow suit. I call on all members of the Assembly to stop telling us what's wrong but instead tell us what can be right. To the government, no more saying: we have a plan; we'll release it soon. Release it now for the people of Alberta to hear and evaluate. To those of us on the opposition benches, no more jumping from one problem to the next, finding more issues than solutions, more clubs to bash the government over the head with. To everybody, let's see the plan, give constructive criticism, work together to solve this crisis once and for all.

Thank you.

Northern Student Teacher Bursary

Ms Calahasen: School divisions across this province face some significant workforce planning challenges over the next few years, especially in northern Alberta, where a growing number of teacher retirements, growing student enrolment, and a decreasing supply of specialty teachers is causing great concern. One of the major

challenges is recruiting and keeping teachers in these northern communities.

To address this challenge, government announced last year a northern student teacher bursary for new teachers. More than 150 students applied for the bursary, with 56 successful candidates.

This year Alberta Education and the Northern Alberta Development Council will be providing bursaries to a second group of postsecondary students who are interested in teaching in northern Alberta communities. To qualify, students must be in their last two years of teacher preparation studies at a postsecondary institution in Canada and meet other eligibility criteria. Successful applicants must live and work in the north for three years after graduating.

Many of my colleagues, like you, Mr. Speaker, know northern Alberta communities have a great quality of life to offer. I am pleased that this bursary will provide new teachers with an extra incentive to teach in these communities, and I have no doubt that three years will be more than enough to teach these young teachers to make northern Alberta their new home. More information on the northern student teacher bursary is available on the Northern Alberta Development Council's bursary website at www.benorth.ca.

That's why I'm pleased today to celebrate this exciting bursary and to encourage students to take advantage of all the financial support available to them for postsecondary education and training, so we can continue to grow our own, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Alberta Health Services Board

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The person most responsible for the situation we're in right now in health care is the former minister of health, who received a promotion for his bungling and inept health care experiment. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, on the other hand, got expelled from caucus, and the CEO of Alberta Health Services is hanging in the balance for showing frustration at attempting to implement this government's failed health policy. To the Premier: does the Premier appreciate how demoralizing it is to health care workers when he rewards incompetence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government agreed to move to one board for Alberta Health Services. It was a decision made after careful thought, looking at the number of regions that we had, the duplication of administration. There were huge savings in reorganizing. I admit it was a huge merger. It was one of the largest in the country of Canada: a lot of staff, a lot of money. But it was the right decision to be made, and I stand by it.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that Stephen Duckett must go. But does the Premier believe that firing Stephen Duckett will really solve the problem, which is the Alberta Health Services Board that this government has put in place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the board will be deliberating in terms of the individual mentioned by the hon. member. That's another example, you know, of always looking for someone to blame. These are Albertans that came forward. It's really almost like a voluntary position because this is serious business, delivering health care in this province. They're working very hard at it and will continue to work with government and work with health care providers to find the best way of delivering health care in Alberta.

Dr. Swann: So the Premier saved dollars. How many lives did that cost? When will the Premier cowboy up and place the blame for the crisis where it properly belongs: on himself and on the former health minister for breaking the system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all of the money that was saved in the reorganization went to front-line services. Where does he think that we found the money to pay off all of the preceding deficits of the regional health authorities, to bring them up to what they thought would be the new level of standard to reflect the demands of Albertans? Again, add 6 per cent on top of that in last year's budget and then come forward with a five-year agreement. It all started by reorganizing and making sure that we reduced administration, moved forward with moving those dollars to the front line.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: to show his commitment to solving the emergency room crisis, will he support legislating emergency room wait times, which will keep this government accountable? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's a bit ironic because I just heard comments from one of the members across the way that that was not the way to go. I guess the bill is up for debate here in the House, and the motion will be made, and it will be debated. But there are other ways of resolving this issue, and that is to work with the 100 health care providers that came together that are moving forward on hiring 500 more nurses and opening 300 net new beds.

Dr. Swann: Well, to the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the United Kingdom has established these and had tremendous results.

To the Premier, again: will the individuals, both in Alberta Health Services and government, responsible for achieving wait time goals be truly held accountable by putting their jobs on the line to ensure these are achieved? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I don't know who he is referring to, but I hope he's not referring to the people that are providing the service. Protocols have been put in place, there's additional money in place, there are new beds opening up, and of course there are more nurses being hired. So after that if there still is a backlog, we want to know what the reason for it is, and it shouldn't be vested in the board's domain because this is what has been done in the last week and unfortunately overshadowed by a lot of the antics since Friday. But that was a good decision made by 100 or so health care providers.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, to the health minister: why is the health minister trying to avoid putting his responsibility for achieving wait times into legislation? Is he afraid he can't deliver?

Mr. Zwozdesky: This question in other jurisdictions around the world would show you that in many cases the health system was more involved in the court system than it was in providing health services. So you don't want to go down that path. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, you can't just talk about legislating something in one area of health care. If you're going to talk about legislating it, you better be prepared to legislate everything, all the places that might have wait times, and that just is not possible.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Municipal Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to fail municipalities. This government has failed to institute a long-term funding arrangement, failed to comprehensively review the Municipal Government Act, and failed to make headway on the provincial land-use framework. To the Premier. In 2008 the government committed to complete the development of seven regional plans by this year, 2010. They have failed to do so. Why?

Mr. Stelmach: That statement is absolutely wrong in terms of completing the land-use framework by this time. In fact, we are the only jurisdiction in the world that has built a land-use framework based on the seven watersheds of the province. That, to me, puts a very important resource forward, which is water. The planning is continuing on the lower Athabasca, and to say that this government does not treat municipalities fairly with funding is just purely ridiculous.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, municipalities need stability, as you well know, having been involved. Will the Premier commit to entrenching a stable long-term funding plan for municipalities?

Mr. Stelmach: To all the municipal leaders here: sorry. Really. We have in place a municipal sustainability initiative. It's \$836 million more money, more money than the traditional programs that we had in this government going to municipalities. It is the best funding model in the country of Canada. Just go to B.C., go to Ontario, go to the Maritimes.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier, once again, this time open a comprehensive review of the Municipal Government Act instead of the piecemeal work that's been done every year, a comprehensive review of the MGA to provide greater autonomy to municipalities?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, unless something has changed recently, municipalities have a lot of autonomy. In fact, that's the reason why we're such good partners in delivering services for the very same taxpayer, the same voter. Just travel around Alberta and look at the improvements in infrastructure, again, municipalities working together where there's first response, buying fire trucks together, doing other municipal work together, building hockey arenas together. We have the mayor of Brooks here. I mean, go to that municipality, and look at the relationship they have with the county and the city. Now, get out of here, and go out and have a look.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Alberta Health Services Board (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After a week of public outrage, Dr. Duckett's job is on the line. It's obvious to Albertans that this is a case of shooting the messenger, a scapegoat. The superboard is as ill-conceived a concept as was the new royalty framework. Dr. Duckett was hired by the former health minister. It's the Premier's and cabinet's idea that central planning is best. This plan does not work. Dr. Duckett's action last week reflects the attitude of the former health minister and how he deals with the public. Will the Premier admit the obvious, that their superboard is a failure and damaging our health system and it must be dismantled in an orderly way?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my answer to that question is the same as to the first. It is the very same question as was raised by the opposition leader. We made a decision to reduce the amount of administration in the province of Alberta. We went to one board. We used a lot of those savings to pay down the deficit. We also put more money into the system, and we gave Alberta Health Services a five-year funding plan. There is no jurisdiction that's done that. That gives them a good planning mechanism for future use.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Central planning does not work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but Dr. Duckett's expertise is in measuring the cost and effectiveness of a health care system, not in the delivery of that system. It seems like the Premier and his cabinet have no idea of what his specialty is. Before you fire Dr. Duckett and pay him \$700,000, wouldn't it be wiser to retain him to measure the actual cost and effectiveness of our health care system and to dismantle the superboard in an orderly way?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: I have to correct the hon. member. He has to learn that the board is responsible for the employment of their CEO, and the board will make that decision. It's not a government decision. Then, again, I can tell you that we're not going back to 300 hospital boards. Where are you going to find the money? I just don't know where they're coming from.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier doesn't even know what he's talking about. There never were 300 health care boards. No fearmongering. Get to it. And the Energy minister is a failure.

Not only does this superboard's failure destroy patient lives; it's also destroying careers. On Monday the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, one of our emergency room doctors, was kicked out of this government's caucus. On Tuesday Dr. Duckett's job is on the line. We need to refocus Dr. Duckett to dismantle the failed superboard in an orderly way and to do an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of our health care system. The people want their hospitals back. They ask you, the Premier, to dismantle the superboard.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Hinman: There is no question. Dismantle the superboard.

The Speaker: I heard there was no question. [interjection] Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, I'll be happy not to recognize you in the question period if you don't want to raise questions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Alberta Health Services President and CEO

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday outside this Assembly the Premier used what he called pretty strong language to criticize the CEO of Alberta Health Services. Can the Premier explain to this Assembly what his concern with the CEO of Alberta Health Services is?

Mr. Stelmach: Just reflecting what I heard from Albertans and that was clearly communicated to me as the Premier of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the CEO of Alberta Health Services presided over a disastrous H1N1 immunization program, and this government said nothing. He presided over the closure of hospital beds and the elimination of nursing positions, and this government said nothing. But when he created a distraction from the government's messaging, he became a marked man. My question is to the Premier. Why does this government care more about its propaganda than about fixing the health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I don't know where the hon. member is coming from, but I think everyone in Alberta watched and saw the offensive comments. I'll just leave it at that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, when Dr. Duckett presided over an emergency room crisis that left hundreds waiting for hours on end suffering and even dying in emergency rooms, this government didn't issue one word of criticism. But when he embarrassed this government by eating a cookie, his days became numbered. Will the Premier admit that Dr. Duckett was doing the government's dirty work all along, and the reason that he is being fired, potentially, is because he embarrassed the government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when the CEO was first hired, there was a completely different scenario. We met with the Alberta Health Services Board to look at how we could bring about savings. Part of that, of course, was to reduce the administration in the system. All of those dollars went to front-line services, and then we also as a government looked at what was needed to deliver some long-term stability to health care in this province. That's why we took money out of other departments. We put it into health, which has a five-year funding model. Again, we're the only jurisdiction to do that.

Support for Policing

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association has been a strong advocate for urban communities for more than a century and are concerned that Alberta has the second-fewest police officers per 100,000 people. My question is for the Solicitor General. Policing costs for all municipalities have increased at a greater rate than population inflation, but the provincial policing grant has only increased to match population growth. Will the minister commit to finally take action and address this imbalance?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for bringing that up. Just as a matter of fact, I sat this morning in a bear-pit session with the AUMA, where not one single member raised any such objection to the work that we're doing in my ministry. We work with the AUMA as partners in delivery of law enforcement, and the funding that the department has brought forward has greatly exceeded the amount of population growth when you consider ALERT or sheriffs and any number of initiatives.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the AUMA members are very hospitable during breakfast and kind to the Solicitor General, so I'll ask some real questions here. Given that Alberta ranks 12th out of 13 among the provinces and territories for police officers per capita, in my view, this proves that the government isn't doing enough to protect Albertans. What does the minister say to that?

The Speaker: If this is government policy, go ahead.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I deny the remarks, and I suggest that the hon. member shouldn't lightly brush over the concerns of the AUMA and suggest that they weren't ready for tough questioning at breakfast. It was after breakfast, for starters. Second of all, to the representatives here, we've worked very closely with them, and we're open to all concerns and questions that are brought forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just saying that they're probably very hospitable and very nice people, and they don't always like to bring up things. That's all I'm saying, very hospitable.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, although recent allocations of a hundred police officers per annum look impressive and make for a good sound bite, they still leave Alberta's urban centres underpoliced. As such, I'd like to know how many additional officers Calgary and Edmonton can expect during the upcoming fiscal year?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it's good of the hon. member to correct himself there because what he first said was that they're incapable of asking good questions. Trust me; they're perfectly capable of asking good and tough questions, much more so than that member is there.

We continue to work with the Alberta municipalities, all of them, in the delivery of policing in this province. The member will know that the statistics are improving. We have a long way to go, but we'll get there by working together, not by lobbing bombs at each other.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Air Quality Monitoring

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some say Alberta is lagging behind when it comes to air quality monitoring and reporting. Other Canadian jurisdictions have adopted the federal air quality health index, yet Alberta continues to use the provincial air quality index. To the Minister of Environment: when will Alberta adopt the air quality health index, which some are arguing is superior?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been in the centre of much discussion of late respecting the respective merits of both the provincial air monitoring program and the federal air monitoring program. I want to advise this member in the House that I even directed my officials to sit down with the federal government in a constructive way and develop a process whereby Alberta can adopt the federal program sometime in 2011. There are some system enhancements that need to be made, we believe, to our system and theirs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. Well, I guess that I'm happy progress is being made, or is said to be being made. The bottom line is that Albertans deserve and expect air quality monitoring and reporting right now. In the interim, how is this minister going to ensure Albertans have strong air quality monitoring, a system that they can rely on?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. We have an air quality reporting mechanism that's up and operating and has been

for quite some time. There are a lot of people who believe that there is an advantage to the system that we have in Alberta in that we have real-time reporting; the federal system doesn't. We have a greater range of pollutants that are monitored; for example, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, and carbon monoxide. What we have to have that will serve the needs of Albertans the best is a hybrid model incorporating the best of the federal . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is encouraging.

My second supplemental to the same minister. Last summer we all had a skyline in Alberta that was covered with forest fire smoke from British Columbia. What other measures are in place to help protect and ensure our air quality for Albertans?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, following the events of last summer, in August of 2010 we established the first-ever initiative in Canada, between the government of Alberta and the government of B.C., that will allow for a forecasting system that will take into account natural events like forest fires. The system will be an online system. It will deliver hour-by-hour forecasts of location and concentrations of smoke up to 48 hours in advance. I think that will be of much improvement over where we were last year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Environmental Impact of Oil Sands

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Proper environmental management of our oil sands is good economics. But instead of using the last two years of slower production as an opportunity to get ahead of the curve, this government has wasted it with international PR campaigns and spin. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that both the feds and this government have been throwing money at PR for years and lobbying campaigns with no success – the blows keep coming – will the government take real action and actually protect our assets, action before advertising?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member should know that all the advertising in the world won't do any good if you can't back it up with real evidence and real progress. Contrary to what this member would have Albertans believe, we have done just that. We have in the last year initiated something called directive 074, a significant advance. We've seen the first tailings pond reduced. We've seen dramatic reductions in the amount of CO₂ emissions that are associated with in situ. The list goes on and on and on. She just chooses to ignore it.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, Mr. Speaker, that's just sad. There is no evidence there.

Back to the same minister: is the minister so trapped in this government's rhetoric that he's unable to see the real environmental downside that our oil industry faces?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the message that I have been delivering wherever I go is that there are challenges associated with the development of this resource. There are challenges associated with the development of any resource. But for this member or

anyone to suggest that Alberta is ignoring those challenges, is doing nothing to protect the environment, is in my opinion doing a disservice to thousands upon thousands of people in the industry and in government who are working on this.

Ms Blakeman: Well, there's evidence, and we can all look at it.

My next question is to the Minister of Energy. In seeking wider markets in which to sell our oil, is the minister actively seeking countries with higher environmental standards, or do a country's environmental standards factor into the minister's strategy at all?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we've made it very clear that what Alberta has to do is to ensure that we seek new markets because we are very much reliant on one market, and that's the market to the south. But I think what the member is actually asking is that we should somehow in Alberta be discouraging the sale and the production and the development of our resources. I would suggest that maybe they want to take that out as a policy platform in their next election.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Health Care Workforce

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. For many years now we have been hearing a great deal about the shortage of health care workers in many parts of our province. My constituents of Calgary-East and all Albertans, for that matter, want to know how that shortage is affecting the delivery of health services and how it is affecting the current situations at the ER departments.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the shortage that we have of health workers in certain parts of the province is in other parts of the hospital, not necessarily in emergency rooms per se. That's one reason why for other parts of the hospital system we are increasing the number of nurses who are going into positions. Our target over the next year and a bit will be about 1,900 more nurses. We're also adding additional LPNs. In the last couple of years, the last two years in particular, the LPN workforce has grown by more than 17 per cent, and similar statistics are available about doctors that are being recruited and hired.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister inform Albertans if the staff shortage is delaying the opening of new beds in our health facilities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're opening more beds at a faster rate than in the history of the province. We're keeping up with demand, and I can tell you that in terms of training spaces we are training more doctors right now. First-year spaces in Alberta's two medical schools increased by more than 60 per cent just in the last few years, and this year the first-year intake is still going to be 50 per cent higher than a few years ago. We're moving in the right directions to fill those gaps where they exist in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister inform Albertans as to what concrete action he is taking to recruit the health

workforce we need in order to meet the current and future health care needs for Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that Alberta Health Services is very aggressively helping to recruit more doctors, more specialists. In that vein I have to tell you that we are leading Canada today in recruiting physicians and in recruiting specialists. In the last few years our physician workforce grew by 23 per cent, which is far ahead of any other province. Similarly, under the new three-year nursing agreement Alberta Health Services will be hiring at least 70 per cent of all the nursing graduates on a per annual basis. That's more than 1,100 new nurses. It's tremendous news.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, a full year since the farm safety record report was completed, its release yesterday came with an announcement of yet another round of consultations but no action to give paid farm workers rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act or to provide paid farm workers with mandatory WCB coverage. To the minister of agriculture: why does the minister continue to allow paid farm workers to be refused the same rights as other workers in Alberta, and has he spoken to his colleague the Minister of Employment and Immigration?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what's happened with this report's release is that it's pointed out what the industry itself has asked for. The industry itself has asked for a farm safety council so that they can determine their own future, which I think is important. This government is interested in saving lives, not complicating them like members on the opposite side.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I will direct my next question to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given that Alberta could easily be faced with condemnation from the United Nations International Labour Organization for breaking international law, as Ontario was last week, will the minister amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include paid farm workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary. Alberta is encouraging, actually, our federal government to become a signatory to the international convention because we are so confident that our standards are not only adequate to meet the international criteria, but we by far exceed them. So we want to partake in that. I have to tell you that the best solutions will come always from the industry, that is aware of what they're doing, and that is why I believe the minister of agriculture is doing the right thing, asking farmers what is good for farmers.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister: when the minister publicly stated that more substance needs to be added to the government's safety strategy for all workers, why does the minister continue to refuse to include paid farm workers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans know that the majority of farms in Alberta, even though incorporated, are still family farms.

By virtue of that, they are very unique workplaces because they're not only workplaces, but they're also places where people live and enjoy their lives. The fact is that the protocol that has been put in place will be consulting with farmers, those who actually live and produce. They will make sure that they are safe on farms, and they will tell us how to achieve that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Levy on Beef and Beef Products

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the request of the Alberta Beef Producers and the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development recently announced that he would be making the \$1 national levy a mandatory, nonrefundable component of the beef cattle check-off. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Why is this change being made now, when we just got rid of this check-off as part of the \$3 check-off not that long ago?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The industry itself realized, I believe, the mistake that had been made earlier in that those groups that had lobbied for that found that it's very important that we put money into the Canadian Beef Cattle Research, Market Development and Promotion Agency. The \$1 national check-off puts us on a level playing field with the rest of the nation and puts in place things that make the same things available to us as a country that other countries have.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: could the minister explain just how important these changes are to the beef industry, and will this be applied to imported cattle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. This now allows us to charge a levy on cattle that are imported into Canada, which is what we have to do when our cattle are imported into the United States. When we export into the United States, we pay a levy. That levy will amount to approximately a million dollars a year that will go towards market development and research to increase the possibilities for our business.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: when can the industry expect these changes to be implemented?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, we've been moving it through the process as quickly as we can, and while this is maybe a best-case scenario and a best-guess scenario, I expect the changes to be implemented at the very latest by the end of this week.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Federal Support for Expo 2017 Bid

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a bad-news week for Edmonton and all Alberta as the federal Conservatives have rejected

support for the popular campaign to bring Expo to Alberta's capital. Albertans are furious with being treated like this by a party that claimed they would give Albertans a seat at the national table while, instead, taking us for granted at every turn. But there is blame to go around. My question is to the minister of federal and intergovernmental affairs. Can she describe what direct efforts she and members of this cabinet have made to persuade their federal cousins to support Alberta's Expo bid?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have a member of our caucus and cabinet that actually sits on the committee. We've had numerous meetings, both individually and collectively, with members of the committee. We have spoken with our federal counterparts. Our minister of tourism has been extremely active on this file at every turn, even in the visits with Shanghai, talking to the federal officials. There isn't one person at this table, including the Deputy Premier, that hasn't made considerable efforts with the MPs and with the Prime Minister's office.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that, in fact, several Alberta cabinet ministers have justified luxurious junkets to foreign places as being part of supporting the Expo bid, will the minister tell this House why they have not been equally keen to get on a routine, early-morning flight to Ottawa to express as often as necessary to their federal Tory cousins that Expo would more than repay itself in the prosperity that it would generate in Edmonton, all Alberta, and Canada?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, not only have we lobbied, but we have put our money where our mouth is in support of this bid. Up to \$3 million was spent, taxpayers' money, to support the Expo bid. There hasn't been anybody that hasn't, on their trips when they visit with the people in Ottawa, mentioned this. I recall last summer at the Stampede there were numerous overtures made to MPs when they were here in Alberta, not costing dollars to travel elsewhere. We've made a number of efforts on this file and many other files to try and support our province.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that it has taken Alberta's lone NDP MP to raise the federal Tories' abandonment of Alberta in the House of Commons and given that there is not one word on the public record of our Premier or any of this cabinet publicly urging the federal Conservative government to join the campaign, will the minister agree at this late point to finally get moving and publicly call on her federal Tory friends to reconsider their abandonment of Alberta? Will she do that today?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there has been no attempt to be private about this. This has been very public, including texts of the Premier's speeches, in fact, asking for just exactly that. There has been nobody that's made an overture stronger than this Premier to that government.

May I also point out one other thing, Mr. Speaker. If we were on the floor of the House in Ottawa, we'd be doing exactly what the hon. member from the NDP caucus is doing and lobbying on behalf of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Electricity Costs

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's electricity deregulation policy is like its health care policy, another

mess that they're incapable of trying to fix. This government's flawed electricity policy drives up prices when temperatures go down. Yesterday the daily average pool price for power was over 20 cents a kilowatt, when the temperature was well below minus 20. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that consumers won't see these high prices on their already high bills until after Christmas, how much will the price spike cost them?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the easy answer to that question is that power prices in this province today on an annual basis are less than they were five years ago. You can take one particular example at one particular time of the day and make the comment that the member raised, but what he should do is look at it over the annual basis, and he'd come up with a different result.

Mr. MacDonald: This minister is responsible for driving up power prices in this province, and he knows it. Consumers know it every time they open their monthly bill.

Given that yesterday evening at 6 o'clock we were consuming here in Alberta over 10,000 megawatts of power, can this government guarantee that we now have enough power at a reasonable price to meet our demands on a winter day?

Mr. Liepert: Well, what we don't have, Mr. Speaker, is adequate transmission. That's why we brought in Bill 50, so maybe you want to think about whether you support Bill 50 or not.

Mr. MacDonald: You messed that up, too, and we don't have enough operating reserve either. We do not have that, and you know it.

Now, what operating reserve is adequate when we have a 10,000 megawatt demand for our electricity at supertime on one of the coldest days of the year? Is it 5 per cent, 7 per cent, 9 per cent?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, if you want to see a messed-up electricity system, go to Ontario, where the price is increasing by 15 per cent. It'll double in the next 10 years. That's a Liberal government in Ontario.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Teacher Evaluation Process

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Having the highest quality teachers is a fundamental pillar of a high-performing education system. Our education system is ranked amongst the best in the world, and to maintain that position, we must ensure we have excellence in teaching. To the Minister of Education: what policies are in place to annually review the performance of teachers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is exactly right. If we want to have the best education system in the world, we have to have excellence in teaching. That's fundamental. We have a very good track record in that regard, and we have some excellent teachers in the province. Most of our teachers, I would say, are responsible for helping us to be among the top five in the world. We have a teaching quality standard that outlines the knowledge, skills, and attributes that teachers are expected to demonstrate. When there's a formal complaint with respect to that, there's a process to handle that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what policies do we have in place to potentially remove teachers that may not be providing the best education to our students?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, that would be the practice review of teachers regulation, which outlines the appropriate process to review a complaint. Principals can utilize that process. Parents can utilize that process in the case of complaints about teachers in public and separate schools. In the public school system those go to a review process, which has been delegated to the ATA to administer. With respect to complaints about teachers in private or charter schools those go to a similar process but through the department.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, my last question to the same minister: does the concept of tenure apply in our public education system, and does that potentially create barriers that may not be in the best interests of our students?

Mr. Hancock: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is no. There's no tenure for teachers in Alberta. Teachers are hired by school boards as contract employees, and if they're not performing up to the terms of the contract, the teaching quality standards, their performance can be reviewed, and their employment can be terminated. They are professionals, so there's a process for professional complaint if they are not practising to a professional level. So the old concept that teachers are there forever is not true. The new concept is that we have excellent teachers in this province, and we're going to continue to ensure that they are excellent.

Alberta Health Services Board

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Today the Premier did what he does whenever he finds a public policy disaster on his hands: he finds a scapegoat. When the new royalty framework was exposed as a job killer, he blamed oil and gas entrepreneurs. When the budget crashed to unprecedented deficit levels, he fired his finance minister. And when his health superboard experiment turned into a bureaucratic centralized nightmare, guess what? He fired his parliamentary assistant and will likely axe the CEO. To the health minister: when is this government going to take responsibility for its actions, admit that they were wrong, and disband the failed . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that there have been some wonderful efficiencies brought about as a result of amalgamating the nine regions under one centralized administrative authority. I've indicated this before, but in case the member missed it, let me just repeat that we have reduced significantly the number of CEOs in the system, we have reduced significantly the number of VPs in the system, we have centralized the payroll, and also we've gotten into bulk buying or common procurement, which together with other things has saved us about \$500 million to \$600 million annually, and it's all going right back into health care to help in other areas.

Mr. Anderson: An 18 per cent increase in the health budget this year: that's efficiency. Congratulations.

This health minister isn't listening. The CEO and the doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark are not your problems. Your flawed policy

is. The superboard experiment has failed. It's over. The emperor has no clothes. Will this minister do the right thing and disband the superboard and put in place a plan to immediately decentralize control of health care back to front-line doctors and nurses in local communities? Decentralize.

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the member would take liberty with some of these numbers without explaining that out of that 15 per cent increase \$1.3 billion was to get rid of deficits that in some parts were the creations of some of the former health regions, not all but some. That's a very important part of the equation we have to remember. Secondly, let's remember that in order to provide the best, predictable, stable planning, we brought in a five-year assured-funding plan for the first time in the history of this country, and we're going to stick to it.

Mr. Anderson: You're wrong, Minister. The superboard is a disaster, and anyone with a shred of credibility knows it. Not only has the superboard experiment failed; it has resulted in unneeded suffering and many deaths of Albertans. If you are going to stand behind this superboard, will you make this one promise? If your wait-time targets for the ER aren't being met over 95 per cent of the time within the next three months, will you resign your position? Will you do it, sir?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what this province-wide Alberta Health Services Board has done is that they've just increased the number of acute-care hospital beds by 360, they've just increased the number of continuing care beds across this province by over 1,400, and they've just ensured that an additional 500 RNs will be hired to staff the acute-care beds. If time were to allow it, I could go on at some length about some of the accomplishments. Have there been some problems along the way? Yes, there have. Have they been owned up to? Yes, they have. Are they being fixed? You're darn right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Civil Forfeiture Program

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we heard about how the proceeds of criminal activity seized through the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act are being directed towards victims' groups and crime prevention projects throughout the province. My first question to the Minister of Justice: can the minister tell me how seized profits of crime and gang activity are being used to help vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we introduced this legislation two years ago, we made it very clear that there were two purposes to the legislation. The first was to directly impact street level crime and to give police the opportunity to intervene and to stop that crime. The other was to compensate victims. Through the last year and a half we've been able to seize almost \$20 million worth of property and have now developed a civil forfeiture fund, which is funding community-based projects that deal with both prevention, dealing with the roots of crime, and also the protection of victims.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: why were these particular projects selected to be recipients of this funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The civil forfeiture fund will now be used to ensure that people who are impacted by crime at a community level working on projects in partnership with volunteers are able to develop both preventative programs and also support for victims. We've been able to support rural women's shelters across this province. We've also funded nine projects that are dealing with youth at risk to ensure that they have mentoring opportunities so that they make choices that aren't going to lead them to lives of crime.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second supplementary to the same minister. It's been two years now since this has been implemented. Is there any indication that this legislation is actually making our communities safer?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning, there were two objectives. The first was to actually cut down on criminal activity, and what we have seen and what we have had reported in statistics from the police is that we are seeing much more seizure of marijuana grow ops. We're seeing the seizure of vehicles that are used in dial-a-dope operations to the point where in some cases, as ridiculous as it sounds, people that used to use vehicles to sell drugs are now walking because they're too afraid their vehicles are going to be seized. I know this has been a tremendous success in Edmonton, in particular. We've seized over 20 houses in Calgary. It is very effective.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Affordable Accessible Housing

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta the number of affordable housing units for those with disabilities is extremely low. For the few available spaces there are often long waiting lists, and few units provide in-house services. Those that cannot find housing often end up in seniors' long-term care facilities. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: does the minister agree that it is inappropriate to house a healthy 25-year-old in a long-term care facility with mostly seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This member has a good question about accessible living and affordable housing. I've had the privilege of opening up and visiting many affordable housing projects that we've spearheaded through the entire province, not just in urban Alberta. It's actually our goal to have about 10 per cent of new affordable housing projects being fully accessible to people with mobility issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that housing is essential for independence, why has this minister forgotten about these Albertans in his 10-year housing plan?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to with respect reiterate my earlier answer. We have not forgotten about people who have affordable housing needs and who also have mobility issues. Again, about 10 per cent of the new affordable housing that we have is designated as accessible living. This is something that I'm very proud of as a minister.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister immediately provide policy direction to increase the number of adaptive and wheelchair accessible units to 5 per cent, which is needed right now? I know you've been talking about 10 per cent.

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that, no, I will not immediately increase it to 5 per cent because, in fact, we're already doing 10 per cent. This is something that doesn't cost the taxpayer much more but at the same time has a big impact on the lives of people who require affordable housing and who may have mobility issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Grey Cup

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the teams now determined and the playing field at Commonwealth Stadium being prepared for the 98th Grey Cup, my questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. With an early ticket sellout for the game and significant corporate sponsorship and fan interest why is the government of Alberta involved financially in the Grey Cup?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's one of those things. All of that success was predicated on a couple of different things, the early organization by the excellent Edmonton Grey Cup Festival Committee, but also, because we committed our money early this spring, the Edmonton Grey Cup Festival Committee was able to secure the corporate sponsors, they were able to go to the market with tickets, and they were able to sell out the Grey Cup prior to this season. Also, we did it because, like the Olympics, it was an opportunity for us to host the world, to host our federal counterparts. We have a large contingent of members . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. There is a lot of media attention and questions being put forth by my constituents regarding Huddle Town and the Grey Cup festival. Can the minister advise my constituents exactly what the government's role is in the Grey Cup festival?

Mr. Blackett: Just to finish off, Mr. Speaker, part of the reason that we did that is that, as I said before, because we have all these people from around the country, with a focus on Alberta a large contingent of our MLAs are going to be able to work with our federal counterparts to lobby on a wide range of issues, something the opposition members asked us to do, something that we continue to do.

As for the request about Huddle Town, it's an opportunity, through \$300,000 from our department, to support Alberta artists, put them on a stage, showcase the great talent that we have, and

make a venue that's available not just to those football participants but also those families in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation. What are the tourism and economic impacts of hosting the Grey Cup game for the province of Alberta?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a Stamped fan I'm a little sad, but as the tourism minister I am delighted because we're seeing the hotels and the motels fill up, and the restaurants and the bars. I think there's going to be a run on watermelons in this province. When we look back to Calgary last year, Calgary Tourism estimated \$61 million in economic impact for the city and another \$20 million for the rest of Alberta. Also, we showcase this great province. We can throw a great festival, and we're going to see Edmonton do that in the next few days.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Farm Safety

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety of Alberta farmers continues to be an important topic of discussion for many of my constituents. Yesterday the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development announced the creation of a farm safety advisory council. I wonder if the minister can tell us why he created this council and what he hopes to achieve.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through this council we're going to be able to work together with industry and labour organizations to pave the way for an enhanced safety system for agriculture. Stakeholders are going to be part of the solution. The council will be co-chaired by someone from my department and people from the industry, and its membership will include people from all parts of the agriculture industry to reduce farm injuries and fatalities.

2:40

Mr. Prins: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. The minister talks about working with industry in the formation of the council. What kind of input did the farming industry actually have in the work that went on prior to the announcement of this council?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the industry were the only people involved in the development of the recommendations that have come forward from Employment and Immigration. The consultation took place with 20 different agricultural groups that represented over 50,000 primary agriculture people. The message was very clear. There were 10 main recommendations, and we are acting on some of the recommendations already. One of the main recommendations was to establish this council so that people whose lives are at risk for injury or loss are the people that are putting together the plan for these safety programs that we need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: when is this council going to be formed, and what tasks will be assigned to the council?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to announce early in the process the names of the people who will be on the council. I want the council's work to begin and be under way early in the new year. We'll be working with that group to set the agenda for the type of issues that they want to see addressed, and we're going to work very closely with them to achieve that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-answer period for today. Nineteen members were recognized. There were 113 questions and responses.

Before we move on to the Routine, there's a matter I want to raise with the Assembly when the maximum number of members are here.

Speaker's Ruling

Cellphone Cameras in the Chamber

The Speaker: This morning when I arrived at my office, because I could not join members until 1:35 or 2 o'clock this morning because you were in committee, a number of members brought to my attention a very serious violation of our rules and ethics which occurred in this House at approximately 1:30 in the morning.

The transgression goes to the very heart of the integrity of this Assembly and the right of members to do their work and the security and the privacy of members in this Assembly. Cameras and the taking of pictures is strictly prohibited in this Assembly, and at least several members – that is, more than two – identified one particular member who was undertaking such an activity.

This chair has made mention of this for going on nearly 14 years, so it's not the first time it's been raised. It's raised in a letter that's sent to all members prior to the commencement of a session.

No member rose last night on a point of privilege. That would have been the right of a member, to rise on a point of privilege. The member in question who committed this unethical transgression has been talked to by the Sergeant-at-Arms, has admitted it, and has apologized. I want to assure all members that if such an unethical transgression repeats itself in this Assembly, it is your responsibility and duty as a member of this Assembly to rise on a point of privilege, and we will deal with it in the Assembly on the subsequent day.

Members in this Assembly are elected to have all the freedom and all the rights of privacy and privilege when they work in this Assembly, and they are not to be interfered with by anyone, intimidated by anyone under the guise of whatever it is. It is not a joking matter in the eyes and the mind of this chair, this Speaker. You have every right – every right. I'll tell you why. I'll give you an example of why intimidation is so important. In 1933 in another country in this world, in the national Assembly of the Reichstag in Germany, storm troopers came into the Assembly and stood beside members who did not want to vote for the Nazi Party and intimidated the living daylights out of them to vote themselves out of existence.

It is a fundamental right for members to be in this Assembly and to have every right without harassment, intimidation, interference from any other member to do their particular duties. I raise that, but if members are aware of this, they must bring it to the attention of other members, and they must deal with it.

Thirty seconds from now we'll continue.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Calgary-Mackay School Achievements

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to bring some exciting updates from the constituency of Calgary-Mackay, a community with about 10,500 young people attending K to 12 schools. Panorama Hills elementary now has its beautiful playground in place due to the tremendous efforts of the parents, who worked on the playground on a windy and snowy day but with warm support from numerous local businesses as well as the excited, watchful eyes of the students. The playground is well used by students during recess, gym class, and after school.

John G. Diefenbaker high school, a feeder school for students from Calgary-Mackay, is proud to report that \$700,000 in scholarships was granted at the fall awards program while Crescent Heights high school handed out over \$350,000 for postsecondary scholarships.

Notre Dame high school, the only high school located within the Calgary-Mackay constituency, started the school year with the addition of the prestigious international baccalaureate designation. Additionally, the number of students that earned the Rutherford scholarship doubled this year to 122 students. In the athletics area the school's senior football team has repeated as the city of Calgary division 1 champions. The junior football team is also the division 1 champion.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Kevin deSouza, the school's principal, told me that they cannot remember the last time a school won both senior and junior division 1 championships in the same year. More yet, this school's senior girls soccer team won its third consecutive silver medal in division 1, and the senior boys volleyball team is entering into the division 2 championship.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am very proud of the achievements of these students, and I'd like to applaud the efforts and supports from the teachers, school personnel, and the parents of these young people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

North Edmonton Alberta Works Office

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 21, 2010, I was so pleased to help cut the ceremonial ribbon at the opening of the new north Edmonton Alberta Works office in Northgate Centre, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. I was pleased to be joined by my colleagues the hon. members for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and St. Albert and the Minister of Employment and Immigration to witness this exciting event.

Alberta Works offices are an important and integral part of our communities throughout the province. Our government strongly believes in the importance of equipping our workforce, both present and future, with all of the necessary resources for them to succeed. Mr. Speaker, this can only be accomplished through the wonderful and well-informed, competent staff at the Alberta Works offices. They offer career and employment programs and services to help Albertans prepare for employment opportunities. They also provide support for training and temporary employment programs.

Alberta Works offices offer four special categories of services for their clientele: employment and training services, income support, health benefits, and child support services. I am very proud to say that the new Alberta Works office at Northgate Centre is the sixth centre in Edmonton and the 11th in the capital region, which is indicative of the level of support our government offers to help Albertans, from those looking for their first job to others who wish to make career changes but don't know where to begin.

This new office provides Edmontonians with more convenient choices when seeking career services. Also, not only is the location itself very convenient for those who live in the area; it is very accessible by using the light rapid transit system. There is ample free parking. I am assured that it's going to help Edmontonians and Albertans to reach their goals.

The Alberta Works office is a great addition to north Edmonton, and I look forward to hearing the success stories.

Government Accountability

Mr. Hinman: Today the Wildrose caucus released our democracy and accountability policy. The political atmosphere of Alberta has been reduced to an undemocratic, aristocratic attitude. This government does not understand the importance of open and honest debate. They meet behind closed doors and use blind loyalty to support plans they know are failing. They follow along the theme that if you tell a big enough lie and repeat it often enough, the people will believe. The idea to bury ER reports for two and a half years is unacceptable. To force people to wait in hallways because they refuse to open closed units is wrong. They say, "People first," but their actions scream: not so.

2:50

They gag our health care workers with the threat of their jobs and then claim it's a misunderstanding. Their MLAs love the gag orders. It's blanket coverage for their bad decisions. They can come out and tell their constituents, "I voted against it in caucus" but that they lost the vote and must respect the majority of caucus. They truly believe that if you bury it deep enough and deny it long enough, people will believe. Oh, they have free votes. It's simple: you are free to leave. There are very few who have the intestinal fortitude to stand against, let alone speak out against, what they know is wrong: the new royalty framework, \$15 billion in untendered and unneeded power lines, and the centralization of our health board, to name a few.

What has happened to transparency and accountability in government? The bills and regulations being passed make it more and more difficult for everyday Albertans to try and access information and carry on business here in the province. The first action of this new government was to give cabinet massive raises and sign gold-plated contracts with their friends and supporters. The next major act was to centralize our health care and sign new contracts with bonuses that are unexplained and seem only to be related to the time they remain on the job.

All decision-making processes should be done in the best interests and wishes of the people, not elected officials but the people. You say the right things, but your actions speak louder than your words.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and present a petition on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. This petition contains approximately 7,000 signatures, as was indicated earlier today, and urges the government of Alberta to make changes to the intersection of highway 16 and highway 897 near Kitscoty. The signatures include constituents from Vermilion-Lloydminster along with many other Albertans that travel the highway and are concerned with the safety of that intersection.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately abandon plans to increase the role of private insurance in the health care system, and instead, commit to strengthening the single-payer, public system.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice today of a motion.

Be it resolved that the Assembly waive Standing Order 3(4)(b) and extend the fall sitting as provided for under Standing Order 3(9).

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an article written on August 12, 2008, by Danielle Smith, who is now the leader of the Wildrose Alliance Party. In the column that she wrote, it says that the former health minister was not planning to "tear the health system down brick by brick . . . Not by a longshot." She says, "He wants to make important changes, to be sure, but the system is in no danger."

The Speaker: I was so proud of you yesterday, hon. member, for standing up, identifying a document, and sitting down. Now today you want to have a debate. Table the document. Let's move on because we have to come to Calgary-Varsity yet, and we're running out of time.

Mr. Mason: But, Mr. Speaker, I'm doing God's work here.

The Speaker: I know.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I will just table this document. It says, "There is nothing [the former health minister] is contemplating that is the least bit scary. In fact, he's off to a pretty good start."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from a constituent, Marjorie McIlveen, that was sent to the Premier asking that seniors' benefits that were taken away during the early '90s be fully reinstated. She is particularly angered because seniors do not get the full cost-of-living bonus in Alberta, which other provinces give to their seniors, and because seniors' benefits in this province are, she says, determined by an unfair means test.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to have to catch up on the tablings of my letter and donation to the food banks. As per my pledge in the Assembly on April 2, 2007, half my indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank in southern Alberta to push the fact that AISH should be similarly increased and

indexed, which is only fair. I am tabling five copies of my letters: in March to the Crowsnest Pass food bank; in April it was the Claresholm food bank; and in May it was the Vulcan food bank.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter dated August 4, 2010, and it is a letter I received from the hon. Minister of Energy indicating that “pursuant to Section 50 of the Mines and Minerals Act, Alberta Energy is prohibited from disclosing the names of the producers that have disputed the basis of bitumen royalty valuation.”

The second tabling I have is on behalf of a constituent. I have permission from Vanessa Pierce to table this correspondence. Vanessa Pierce is expressing concern towards the government regarding psychiatric care beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter signed by thousands – and I mean thousands – of Albertans who believe that the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act is unjust legislation that violates the rights of vulnerable seniors. It’s shameful, and with the minister recently doing a tabling on seniors abuse, it is my hope that the minister of seniors will meet with them and realize how abusive this legislation is.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling with permission an e-mail from a constituent, Charmaine Roux, who wants the government to understand how difficult it is to survive on the current rate of AISH and to encourage changes in the amounts of the AISH benefits. She believes the government pledged in election promises to help the homeless and the disabled and would like to hold them accountable for thus far not doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling e-mails from the following people opposed to Bill 29: from Alberta Judy-Anne Wilson, Jill Seaton, Martin Lambert, Andrew Hurly, Alice Easton, Bill Termeer, Kathy Rothwell, Tim Hartley, Kristine Kowalchuck, Lisa Downing, Mike Warren, Robyn Termeer, Julie Desautels, Stephanie Hrehirchuk, William Strean, Kevin Calpas, Bonnie Drozdowski, Shane Drozdowski, Ngaio Hotte, Andrew Higgins, Bob Wieterman, Nancy Rourke, Tanis Eaker, Ross Smith, Wendy Seniuk, Roberta and Daryl Palanuik, Veronica Jordan, Leslie Ann McCloskey, Chuck and Lesley Young, Arthur Powlyk, Barry Ferguson, Cindy Davies, Shantel Koenig, Kerry Donahue, Kyle Cossette, Mike Blennerhassett, Caroline Bees, David Janzen, Renee Krysko, Tony Fricke, Emily Moss, Simon Ham, Hilary Young, Blair Shunk, Bryce Hleucka; from outside of Alberta Brian Kowalski, Bruce Donnell, Blair Jamieson, Ellinor Sandberg, Deanne O'Donnell, Fred Kaarsemaker, Joël Prades, Ben Ruwe, Sandra Deneault, Sarah Richardson, Frances Searle, David Hulsman, Alison Woodley, Bradd Tuck, Pierce Sharelove, Janet Feduszczyk, Sheila Adams, Tom Potter, C. Cummings, Bessie Wapp, Clare Powell, Lindsay Ansell, Barry Carter, David DeBacker, Georg Saure, Katherine Elliot, Jennifer Rae, Ross Powell, Robert Hii, and Oliver Kent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of Mr. McFarland, the hon. Member for Little Bow, a copy of a petition signed by 66 Coaldale and area residents requesting amendments to section 7(1)(c) of the Alberta Human Rights Act.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Address to the Legislative Assembly by the Governor General

20. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly invite Their Excellencies the Right Honourable David Johnston, CC, CMM, COM, CD, Governor General of Canada, and Mrs. Sharon Johnston, CC, to the floor of this Chamber in order to have His Excellency address the Legislative Assembly on Monday, November 29, 2010, and that this address be the first order of business after Prayers, following which the ordinary business of the Assembly will resume notwithstanding the designated times stipulated in Standing Order 7(1). Be it further resolved that His Excellency’s address become part of the permanent record of the Assembly.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to move Government Motion 20. We have had a new Governor General appointed recently in Canada, as everyone knows. He is making the capital of Alberta one of his first official visits, and it is both prudent and appropriate for us to invite him, while here in Edmonton, to address this Assembly.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion if anybody wants to participate. If not, I’ll call the question. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

3:00

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Chair: Any comments or questions on amendment A2? We continue on.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that we’ve debated this amendment long enough. Just to recap very quickly, we want to enshrine in our legislation, in the Alberta patient charter, the principles of the Canada Health Act, meaning that publicly insured services for health care are universal, accessible, portable, and so forth. We put that into the record a hundred times last night. We’ve debated this. So I would hope that we can call the question on this amendment.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on amendment A2?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Sherman
Boutilier	Hinman	

Against the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Pastoor
Allred	Hancock	Prins
Berger	Horner	Renner
Bhullar	Jablonski	Rogers
Blackett	Johnson	Sandhu
Blakeman	Johnston	Sarich
Brown	Klimchuk	Snelgrove
Campbell	Liepert	Tarchuk
Chase	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Dallas	MacDonald	Webber
DeLong	Marz	Xiao
Denis	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Drysdale	Oberle	

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chair, I rise to speak on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act. I have an amendment I would like to distribute and speak to.

The Chair: All right. We'll pause a moment for the pages to distribute the amendment.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, please continue on the amendment. It's now known as amendment A3.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to speak to Bill 17. I think it is a very decent bill with good principles in it. I understand the work that was involved in bringing this together. The public was consulted by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

I think there are some very good principles in this bill. I like the idea that there's going to be a patient charter. I like the idea about principles. Now, some critics may say that that's to insinuate that we didn't have any principles to begin with. I disagree with that assertion. I think that we have had principles, but we're actually legislating them into the act. I think that's a very good, symbolic thing. The reason I think it's a very good thing is because the Canada Health Act is undergoing a review in 2014. The nation is watching to see what this province is doing in health care. I think that not only standing on principles but actually legislating principles is an honourable thing for this province to do, and I'm wholeheartedly in agreement with this.

3:20

Now, the main concern that I have with this. To be honest, I'm not really a policy guy. I'm just a stupid front-line emergency

doctor from an inner-city hospital. I don't really understand policy. I'm a new member of government. I just got elected a couple of years ago. What's most important to me, Mr. Chair, is how policy is actually translated and implemented on the front lines, on the street, how it affects individual people and individual families. The thing that concerns me as a front-line health care professional and all front-line health care professionals and all patients is: what does this really mean for me?

Now, having said that, I think this is a very decent piece of legislation. My amendment is introduced for the purpose of making this a fantastic piece of legislation, something that Albertans can relate to. As you can see, there are four simple guiding principles that the average Albertan, Martha and Henry, can relate to.

Number one, the guiding principle is that we shall have in our system no unnecessary deaths. We shall have no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays to care, and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur. And we need to set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals with the Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding, published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

Mr. Chair, recently you have heard of our crisis in the emergency departments. Dr. Paul Parks, the spokesperson for all of the emergency doctors of this wonderful province, 300-plus ER doctors, has raised a concern, a significant concern for public safety. We've had an emergency debate on this. The concern was that in the upcoming flu season the system may face a potentially catastrophic collapse of emergency services. These are not my words; these are the words of Dr. Paul Parks, who is the spokesperson for all the emergency doctors of this great province. The question is, Mr. Chair: how did we come to this?

Before I go on, I'd like to tell people specifically what this position statement for emergency doctors is. You can go online on your computer right now. Go to www.caep.ca. Look at the 2007 position statement. It means that if you're a minor case that goes to emergency, you need to be upstairs in the hospital or on your way home within four hours of entering the emergency room. If you're a major case, what we call a CTAS I, II, or III, the minors being IV and V, you need to be upstairs in the hospital if you're admitted or on your way home within six hours at the 95th percentile.

Some will argue that this is going to be causing lawsuits and legal challenges and that this is a wait times guarantee to people. It is not a wait times guarantee. The statement is about accountability measures for everyone working within the health system.

Lawsuits can only happen when there is harm that comes to a patient, when there's a duty of care and there's a breach of that duty, and there's a relationship between the breach of that duty and the harm. These are the four conditions that must be met for a successful lawsuit. I can tell you what Dr. Paul Parks' position currently is: thank God that Albertans are wonderful, forgiving, caring people.

As the previous representative of the emergency doctors of this wonderful province I was in Dr. Paul Parks' position. I was quoted in February 2007 as saying: it's a crisis; I have never seen it this bad before.

We are not meeting the basic standards of care as set by the emergency physicians of this province, the standards of care being from when you present to an ER department to getting your painkiller when you have a broken leg or when your child has a broken wrist and they're suffering, from when you present to an emergency department when your grandmother or grandfather is having crushing chest pain, and they're sweating, and they're short of breath to getting their ECG within 10 minutes – you can't get a clot-buster if you don't get the ECG to get the diagnosis, if you wait

for four hours on an ambulance stretcher to off-load. We are missing all the time standards of care, not all the time but many times.

Look at the Health Quality Council report of 2009. From 2007 to 2009 the emergency wait times have gone up the wrong way – these are pre Dr. Duckett wait times – by 30 per cent for admitted patients, the sickest patients in the system.

Mr. Chairman, these are major issues and major concerns that have been raised, the six-hour and four-hour rules at the 95th percentile. This is actually a health care system problem. The health care system is broken, and we broke it. You can't blame anyone else. We can't blame these guys over here, we can't blame these guys over here, and we can't blame those guys over there. We can't blame the nurses, we can't blame the doctors, and we can't blame the patients. We broke it.

Mr. Chair, my own father has had five near-death instances when his care was delayed. When he actually got care, I'll tell you, he got world-class care. We have a fantastic group of health care professionals from the paramedics to the unit clerks to the people who clean the hospitals to the nurses to the nurse practitioners and the LPNs and the nursing aides and doctors and administrators. Once you get into the hands of these wonderful people, you don't have to worry about anything. They care for you and look after you.

The problem, Mr. Chair, is getting in, whether it's for cancer care, whether it's for your prostate surgery, whether it's for your child waiting for that hernia to be done, whether it's for your wife to get her hysterectomy, or whether it's for you to deal with your brain tumour. Fifteen to 20 per cent of Albertans don't have a family doctor, and if you have one, you have to wait – I don't know – a month, two months, to get in. If you get in, it's five minutes for one problem.

The waits to see specialists have gone through the roof. The waits to get surgery have gone the wrong way since I got elected, Mr. Chair. They have gone the wrong way. Yes, we've done some blitzes recently. I think the current minister of health is a fantastic fellow. That guy is the best thing that has happened to health care in modern-day times. He is working his buns off to fix a very broken system, that was broken by the previous minister of health.

How can I say that objectively speaking? Objectively speaking, I must give you objective information. You know what? I actually can't blame that minister either because it's a joint decision made by everybody on that side. I was there, and I accept responsibility for it personally. I didn't say anything. How do I know? Number one, the main system measure is how long admitted people sit in the emergency departments. It is the number one performance measure in the U.K., how long people wait in the emergency room. Every measure in acute-care feeds into that, whether it's your surgery time, your cancer time, from every medical service.

This is not an emergency problem. It is a broken health care system problem that manifests itself in the emergency room. That's the issue, Mr. Chair. We have to make this clear. It is not the runny noses and sore throats causing the problem in the emergency room. This is a rush hour issue. When you leave in rush hour, you know, when you leave the building at work, do you guys ever wonder: what the heck is taking so long getting home? Who's that guy or gal at the beginning of rush hour slowing everything down? Somebody is up there. Well, I'll tell you what the problem is. Health care is an input, throughput, output issue. For everyone who is a businessperson here, they would understand this.

3:30

Acute care cannot function if you can't get out of the hospital. To get out of the hospital, here are the solutions. I don't want to talk

about negative stuff anymore; I want to talk about positive stuff. The solutions are, number one, we have probably one of the most mediocre home care systems in Canada because they're grossly underresourced. That's not any disrespect for the front-line staff at all. In fact, they're fantastic. They're overworked, they're overburdened, and we don't have enough of them. We need to have investments into home care, home care, and home care. When you're a senior, the best home to be in is the home with your own yard and your own flowers and your own spouse and your own family with the smell of your cooking and the smell of your own carpet, their own physical space. You know what happens to seniors when they leave that? They get confused and disoriented at nighttime. That's what happens.

Secondly, we need to invest in subacute care. Subacute care is if you break your pelvis, you don't need an operation, but you can't go home because you can't move. You don't need a doctor and a nurse; you need a couple of big, strong, husky, tough people to pick you up to take you to the washroom and move you around so you don't get a blood clot in your leg, so you actually can get some fresh air and get out and get fed. Your brain is working okay, you can change your own diaper, but you can't physically move. So we need more investments into subacute care, which is actually beyond acute care.

Then there's rehab care. The future is a lot of seniors, a lot of young people with chronic disease, younger people getting sick earlier, seniors living longer, getting sick when they should be getting sick at the age of 80 or 90. They're going to be having strokes, hip replacements, knee replacements, and they're going to fall. When they fall, the best thing is to rehabilitate them to get them back into the best bed, which is that bed with that nice comfortable blanket that they've had for 15 years, with their loving spouse beside them. So home care, subacute care, rehabilitation care.

Lastly, we have a lot of seniors, a lot of people actually, not just seniors, people with malignant illnesses like cancer, and they're dying. Well, you know where they end up dying? There are not enough community palliative care and hospice beds. They actually are brought to the emergency rooms. I've seen first-hand, as have many of you, and all of my colleagues in the emergency front lines will echo, that to lie three days half naked in a cold emergency department hallway with the whole world passing by you in the last few days of your life has got to be probably the most horrific way to exit life.

Then we need long-term care. Today one major reason the emergency department crisis has happened is that we have 800 seniors who are homeless. In fact, it contradicts the policy of this province's government because they're separated from their spouse. Eight hundred of them are all alone in cardiology wards, orthopaedic wards, medical wards, deserted in emergency rooms because they're homeless. They can't stay in their own home, there's not enough home care, so guess what? We're not building any long-term care, and they actually need long-term care.

When they come into emergency, maybe they don't need long-term care right away. But once you spend 10 to 15 days in hospital in a cardiology ward, you get confused at night and disoriented. You don't get up and walk around. All of a sudden you turn into a long-term care patient for the rest of your life probably – I don't know the number – maybe two, three, four weeks into it. You have healthy seniors sitting beside sick people, who have fevers and pneumonia, and then they get sick in hospital. That's on the output side.

On the input side, Mr. Chair, did you know – the data that I have I was given by AHS informally – that 16 per cent of patients are actually readmitted to hospital within seven to 14 days? First, they're discharged. They have no family doctor to go back to, and

sometimes they're discharged too quickly. So we plug up the hospitals with healthy seniors though we are forcing the doctors on the ward to discharge a day or two earlier patients who probably need to stay one or two more days. So they actually end up, one-sixth of the time, back to begin the journey all over again, that I may not tell you about.

What happens is that upstairs is plugged up by long-term care. The emergencies, they get plugged up by sick admitted patients, patients who have been triaged, assessed, treated, stabilized, admitted, and they just never leave. They stay in the emergency room for one day, two days, three days. The record, I heard, was 11 days with the wrong doctor, wrong nurse, wrong hallway, for the wrong period of time. It's not the wait in the emergency room; it's actually the four or five days that the care is delayed, the specialty care upstairs. For every admission through acute care, their care is delayed for anywhere from eight hours to 11 days. So they actually are sicker by the time they get upstairs, which means they actually need to be upstairs in the hospital longer.

A pneumonia should be in the hospital five days on the average. When you spend the first four and a half days in emergency, well, what are they going to do? Kick you out in six hours when you get upstairs? Well, they actually need to be upstairs for an extra four or five days.

So the emergencies are plugged up by admitted patients who don't belong there. When I got elected, during the election in the University of Alberta hospital in a 48-bed emergency department there were 42 admitted patients. We were operating a quaternary care trauma centre out of six beds. There were people dying in the waiting rooms. The Royal Alex had 40 admitted patients. It was a crisis. My own father had an illness where he was triage category 3. He should have been in a bed in 30 minutes. He waited, I think, four to six hours in the waiting room. He was dehydrated. He just needed a bag of water. He was dehydrated from the flu, but due to his bad heart, it failed, and then he had a massive heart attack. He spent five days sucking on a ventilator tube and 10 days in the intensive care unit during the election.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Dr. Sherman: Yes. They had an emergency doctor in the province who's running for government, and I didn't ask for special care. I have never asked, but I do know that paramedics, nurses, and doctors know that that's my father, and they probably pulled him out of the waiting room two hours earlier. So how about all of your constituents? What hope was there for them during the election?

Dr. Paul Parks recently brought up 322 cases. These cases happened during the election. During the day of the debate the Leader of the Opposition questioned the leader of the party that I ran for, that people are dying in waiting rooms, and our province's leader laughed at him and said: no, they're not. There were at least five deaths. Those 322 cases are just from the University of Alberta hospital at one point in time, and this was happening in every hospital. The doctors had given up, said: we're not going to document this anymore because it doesn't make any difference.

What have I done? Did this happen today? [Dr. Sherman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on amendment A3.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I want to begin my comments here by saying that this amendment, unfortunately, is not one that I could support. I'm going to explain why. I realize

that the member who presented it has some expertise in this area, obviously.

Some Hon. Members: Some?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm talking about legislation, some expertise with respect to legislation and amendments and so on. I also recognize that he has a lot of expertise specific to emergency rooms and that he's trained a number of people in that field. He has my utmost respect for what he has done to help in that regard.

I want to comment a little bit here about a few things that he said which I, frankly, disagree with. Number one, I cannot agree at all with anyone telling me that the system is broken because the health system is not broken. I acknowledged today in question period that there are some problems. I've acknowledged that before, and I've also said: but we're working very hard to fix those problems.

With respect to the now-infamous Thanksgiving e-mail that was sent to me by Dr. Paul Parks, the current head of the Alberta emergency docs who work in this province, he did not say, that I can remember, that the system was broken. I think what he did was a good job of pointing out that some large potential – and I want to emphasize the word “potential” – problems exist in the system and need to be addressed immediately. Let me rephrase that: some large problems exist that could cause even larger potential problems. I think he used the term “potential collapse” or words to that effect. So let's not forget what was really said there. That is not to say that there aren't some problems. I'm acknowledging that there are, and we're working hard to do that.

3:40

The problem that I see here with respect to this particular amendment, however, is that in order to legislate the standards for lengths of stay in emergency departments and so on, that is something that you've got to be really careful over. I can't support doing it, and I want to explain why.

Number one, when you put something into legislation, as we all know, you are putting something into law, and if you put something into law and someone breaks it, then there are going to have to be some repercussions for that. Now, that's okay. That's called accountability. But what you have to understand, though, is that you can't just put one aspect of health care under that microscope. You would have to put all aspects of health care under that microscope because then others would come in and say: well, what about legislating wait times for cancer care, for access for kidney cancer, for brain cancer, for lung cancer? And the list goes on. Why not put in wait times by law for eye surgery? Why not put into law wait times for access to continuing care or whatever type of care you might have?

Now, while it sounds easy to say that that could be done, it's just not practical because as new improvements are made, what are you going to do? Bring that act in here every few months for changing, for updating, go through the whole rigamarole of yet another debate? Where those kinds of issues belong, Mr. Chairman, is in policy. They belong in policy, and they belong in action plans, and they belong in performance measures. That's what's coming forward. But for a lot of things that have taken us a little off that path that we were on so aggressively a couple of weeks ago, we would've had that all done and announced by now. But, no, we had to stop and take time for some of the other stuff that arose rather unexpectedly. So we've done that.

The danger with having something like this in legislation is to say that the court system would become even more involved than it already is. There's nothing wrong with that to a degree, but in the

health care system it would hold up so many things that need to be done and acted on quickly without coming in for a full debate per se to change an act or words to that effect.

What is important here is to take a look at what we are doing, so I want to talk about a few things that we're doing that will help address exactly what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is talking about. First of all, what are the problems that we see with respect to the wait times in emergency rooms? One of the single largest problems, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that the emergency docs who wish to admit a patient for overnight stay, what they call an EIP, an emergency in-patient, have not enough places to refer them to because other parts of the hospital system are full; they're blocked, as the doctors would say.

Typically, a person who needs an overnight stay has to go to an acute-care bed. Typically. There are other options today, but that's typically what happens. As a result of that, they look to see what availabilities there are in acute care, and in many cases they'll find there is no availability. So you've got to take a look at who's in acute care and can we move some of those people out? That's why we are this year alone building now over 1,400 new continuing care spaces, to unclog the backlog of people who are in acute care that could be, should be, and ought to be in a different care setting. Fourteen hundred beds: that's up from the original target this year of something like 1,100. It's certainly up from 1,300 that was talked about just as early as two weeks ago. So you can see that significant improvements are happening, and that's just on the continuing care piece.

Similarly, there are other options with respect to opening up more beds to unclog that blockage that I was just talking about. We know that in Edmonton and in Calgary, for example, at least 70 more beds have opened or will have opened since September through to Christmastime this year, at least 70 additional beds. They're different types of beds. There are transition beds. There are medical assessment unit beds. There are medical observation beds. In some cases they might be hospice beds, and in other cases they might be detox beds. There's a lot of activity going on with that. So that's one of the solutions to the problems.

Another major issue with respect to what's causing the wait times to stagger back the way that they have been lately in particular is with respect to who is actually going to these emergency departments to begin with. Why are people going to these emergency departments? There are a number of reasons apart from the obvious. A serious, real, complex emergency should always be taken to and dealt with in emergency. Of course it should.

However, there are a number of people who are going to emergency today that perhaps have minor complications that could be dealt with in a medicentre or in a medical clinic or in some cases by a doctor, but perhaps the doctors' offices are full or maybe they're closed or whatever the case might be. People who are in the system, who work in it would tell you – I've talked to hundreds of them, and I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has as well – that there are simply too many people coming into emergency who may not have a true emergency, but they have no place else to go or they don't know of someplace else that they can go.

That's why it's important to publicize things like the Health Link line. I had a couple of cases this weekend where people called, and they were immediately referred to the Health Link line. There are hundreds of these people, Mr. Chair. I just happen to know of two personally. They got the help that they needed through the Health Link line, and they didn't have to go to emergency. After checking with them today, their problem is under control. It just illustrates one point.

The other related point to that is with respect to physician supply, the number of doctors that we have throughout the system, and the number of nurses that we have throughout the system. That's why I indicated some of the good news on that front as well. Today I talked about the fact that there are more than 8,500 licensed practical nurses in Alberta, for example. That means that our LPN workforce has grown by more than 17 per cent in just the past two years – in just the past two years. This is tremendously good news.

Similarly, we continue to invest in the future of registered nurses and their profession. Over the past few years the number of registered nurses who graduated from training programs in Alberta increased by more than 20 per cent, Mr. Chair. We're also looking at targets for the next year, where we'll be able to bring in about 1,900 new graduates. That will be a total increase of more than 50 per cent in Alberta RN grads over the last five or six or seven years. Very, very good news.

Now, I'm not immune to a point that the opposition has mentioned to me, and that is to take a look at how many nurses are also retiring. I'm taking a look at that with Alberta Health Services because I think it's important to explain to people the difference between more nurses being added versus net new positions being created. We understand that. I'm working on that because I know the public has an appetite for it and so do we, so we're working together on that.

With respect to other areas where we're making significant improvements, through our continuing care strategy we're developing a dementia action plan which is going to be about \$2.5 million, and that's just for the initiative, to create the strategy and implement the plan. That will result in developing guidelines for the care of clients with dementia. It will result in system-wide education and better training plans for all health care workers in that field. It will provide support for the caregivers who are providing that care to clients with dementia, and it will develop some important dementia networks and coalitions with educators, with researchers, with clinicians. I could go on. The point is that there is a major initiative under way in that area as well.

We also have a few other strategies I want to just comment on. One of them is with respect to training more physicians. I talked about one of the issues being that patients don't know who to go to, or maybe they don't have a doctor to go to. Mr. Chair, that's why we're training more doctors. In fact, first-year spaces in Alberta's two medical schools increased by over 60 per cent just in the past few years alone. What that means is that we'll have about a 50 per cent higher intake of year-one students than we've had over the past five years, a 50 per cent increase there alone.

I think I mentioned in question period today, Mr. Chair, that we're leading the country over the last few years in terms of physician recruitment. That's without even getting into the details of the rural physician action plan, which seeks to encourage more doctors to take up positions in rural settings, where they might be remote or where they might have other challenges. Nonetheless, that is an extremely successful program that helps doctors with office start-up costs of approximately \$10,000. It also is a program that allows for additional premiums on top of the regular premium that a doctor in Edmonton or Calgary or elsewhere might get. We're paying those doctors a premium over and above that fee, and we're doing a number of other things to help them out.

3:50

Another area that's really important to take a look at, that is impacting the bigger position here, that is going to talk about what this amendment is all about, is how to shorten lengths of stay, of course, our five-year action plan, which will be coming out very soon. Mr. Chair, what you will see in that particular plan is a lot of

the actions that we're going to take to use most effectively the money provided in the five-year funding plan. The five-year funding plan is the first of its kind ever. We've only had it for about six, seven, eight months now in the province of Alberta since it was passed by this Legislature, and it wasn't easy to get there because other ministries, other parts of the government at this difficult financial time had to give up some of their money so that it could go into front-line care and other forms of improvements in the health system. That five-year action plan and that five-year funding plan will help to address what is in this amendment regarding the lengths of stays in emergency departments.

We're adding 1,430 or so spaces, as I mentioned, in continuing care. We're adding approximately 360 net new positions, or acute-care beds, and 500 net new nursing positions to staff those acute-care beds. That's all happening over the next few months.

As a result, I should probably tell you that we're seeing some good movement, hon. members, with respect to the numbers when it comes to wait times. I can tell you that the monthly averages that we see in the major hospitals in Calgary and the major hospitals in Edmonton are starting to move the right way. The average monthly wait times today are far better in the month of September in Calgary than they were. In Edmonton they're not quite there yet, but they are trending down slowly. There are peaks and valleys and so on, and that's to be expected. I just hope that we can move more quickly, that Alberta Health Services, specifically, can move more quickly with respect to the new protocols that they are bringing in. I'll talk about those protocols in just a minute.

I want to move to another aspect, which is the first item of the amendment, where the member talks about unnecessary deaths. This is a very, very serious part of this, obviously, and I know it took a lot of courage for the hon. member to bring this forward and to talk about it because he lived with it every day of his professional career as a doctor, and on weekends he probably still does. In this respect I think members here know now that when Dr. Parks wrote to me over the Thanksgiving weekend of October 2010, he mentioned a number of cases that had propelled him to in fact write the letter. In response to that and particularly, Mr. Chair, in response to the deaths as referred to in the amendment, I want to tell people that Alberta Health Services has engaged an extremely important process, both within AHS and externally, to look into the deaths or serious incidents that occur within a hospital.

One of these important things that they are doing is with respect to the recent tragic suicide of an Edmonton man at the Royal Alex. I mentioned that I spoke to the family. I expressed my condolences to them. I listened carefully to the father, who explained what had happened and explained what some of the challenges were. One of the most significant problems for people with mental health difficulties – and I'm sure the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would agree – is compliance. Are they being compliant with their drugs? So that's being looked at.

But here's the bottom line to this. At the Royal Alex there are couple of processes that are being looked at and implemented, and I think it will impact other hospitals as well. In fact, two quality assurance reviews are being conducted. One is being conducted by the particular hospital, and the other is being conducted by Alberta Health Services' mental health and addictions services branch, the unit that looks after that kind of work. Both of these reviews are ongoing, and they will serve to establish the facts surrounding that particular tragic death of that young man – on September 18, I believe it was – at the Royal Alex. They're also going to review the clinical systems that were in place and see what improvements might be necessary there. Then they're going to make some recommendations, and as appropriate they're going to move forward.

Once those reviews are completed, the results will first, obviously, be shared with the family, and then depending on confidentiality rules and everything else, we'll see where it goes after that. The point here is that we're expecting both of those reviews to be completed fairly soon and to move forward after that.

I want to conclude that part of my comments by saying that the Health Quality Council, whom I spoke with, were involved in providing some advice on how those quality assurance reviews should best be conducted, so there is some of that involvement with respect to the HQCA as well.

I want to turn my attention a little bit, also, to mental health. Why? Because mental health is, in my view, one of the most underserved areas across the whole country of Canada. That's very true. People who know mental health would agree with me. It's important that we acknowledge that, and we have. I have said this publicly, and I'll say it again: we have to work even harder than we've ever worked if we're ever going to stop what I call the revolving-door syndrome.

I'll probably have the bells ring here very soon and will have to stop, but I'll just tell you that with respect to mental health there are about 43,000 patients per year that go into one of our emergency wards looking for help – 43,000 – out of about half a million or so in total. That needs addressing.

So what are we doing? We're looking at mental health teams who would work in emergency departments. For example, there is an ongoing project that has 24/7 mental health team workers working in the Royal Alex hospital, and that is going to be expanded to the University of Alberta hospital within the next few months. We're also increasing access to addictions treatment with funding through the safe communities initiative, which is another pool of monies, and it's yielding good results. We're introducing hospital-based clinical counsellors that will be right there, right on site, to help persons with mental health complications.

We're also enhancing prevention counselling in our school system. We're also introducing mobile or outreach-type services in Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge to provide services to those individuals with addictions issues who are otherwise hard to reach. Finally, we're expanding services that are available through the provincial family violence treatment program. In addition to that, however, we're also adding more physical capacity. Twelve new detox beds are going to be added at one of our local centres here in Edmonton. That will be very soon. At the same time approximately four to six new crisis beds will be added to another Edmonton residential facility very soon. I think we all know about Villa Caritas and the 150 new beds that are there for seniors with mental health complications. [Mr. Zwodzesky's speaking time expired] I hear the bells.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on amendment A3.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the amendment. The Wildrose caucus will of course be speaking in favour of this amendment. This is the first time I've had the chance to stand up and really have an opportunity to say just how proud I am of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for standing up for his constituents, for speaking out. Never in a million years did I think he would be tossed for what he did, but I just think that what he did is an amazing example of democratic courage. I hope that his constituents understand how difficult it was to do what he did and to have the courage that he did in support of the sick and, in some cases, the dying. That was really an amazing thing to watch. So I support him in what he is doing.

I will say that, you know, we're talking with some of our colleagues over here: the Liberals, the NDP, and the independent. We've kind of been talking about it and addressing this emergency room issue. It's not a left-right issue. It's an issue of competence. It's an issue of accountability and credibility, but definitely accountability.

4:00

Emergency rooms will always be public because it's just the nature of an emergency room. It's urgent. You need the care right now. Period. No questions asked. It doesn't matter if someone has – I know that in the U.S., and we talked about that yesterday, they have systems where you have to pull out your credit card at the emergency room. That will never be the case in Alberta. We'll never allow it. It's so against everything that we stand for. This really isn't a left/right issue. This is about getting it right and making sure that we get people that are going into the emergency room treated appropriately.

In that spirit I think that we need to look to experts. We need to look to people who know what they're talking about. Look; as politicians our job is to listen to experts and try to make good decisions and judgments. We listen to experts, listen to our constituents, and try to take all of that information and make appropriate decisions. We're not experts. We're not scientists. Most of us aren't doctors. Well, we do have a scientist over there. I do know that.

Most of us aren't scientists or doctors, but we do have one doctor in this House. We have an emergency room doctor, and that emergency room doctor understands more about the issues and more about the need for emergency room reform and change than all of the people in this House put together. He understands what needs to be done. To not support what he is proposing – I mean, it's not like this man has not put a lot of thought into this. It's not like he hasn't talked with literally dozens and dozens of emergency room doctors from across the country and from across Alberta to come up with the proposal that he's putting out here.

It's a very reasonable proposal, this amendment. I mean, I wonder how you can disagree with the amendment. He talks about including in the principles of the health charter that "no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." Pretty hard to disagree with that. Subsection (d) says that the health charter should set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

What that basically says, essentially, is that the amendment would call for maximum emergency room wait times to be six hours for 95 per cent of standard patients and four hours for 95 per cent of more seriously ill or injured patients. Four hours for seriously ill people and six hours for – what do they term it? – standard patients is not unreasonable. That should be absolutely the minimum that our emergency rooms are capable of. If we can't do this, if we can't set a standard and make this happen, then this really is pathetic.

Standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the position statement. Read the position statement. It's online. I just went through it. That in a nutshell is what it says: 95 per cent. That's the percentile for four hours and six hours. It's on the website. I looked it up when the member put it out there. That's what it says.

I think that it's an exceptionally important thing that we have accountability. Bill 17 is not worth the paper that it is printed on if it doesn't have any teeth to actually improve care in this province. Right now Bill 17 has absolutely no teeth in it. It is a wishy-washy,

do-nothing, say-nothing document, and that in the middle of an emergency room crisis is not good enough. We have to do better. There are people that are sitting in our emergency rooms right now 12, 24, 36, 48 hours in some cases. There are folks like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's own father that have almost died because of this type of severe waiting that is going on in our emergency rooms. If it's happening to one of us in this House, you know it's happening to a whole bunch more people out there, many more Albertans.

Of course, we know that's happening because we have letters pouring in every day. I know the Liberal caucus has letters on health care every day pouring into their offices. I know the Wildrose caucus does, the ND caucus sure does, and I'm sure that each member of the PC caucus has letters coming into their office on these issues. I mean, just look at it. We have share your health care horror stories with regard to emergency rooms that we put on our website. Every day there are easily a dozen or more new ones. These are not works of fiction. These are real people that are putting their stories online, and some of the things that are being said and reported are terrifying.

We can do better, but you have to have accountability measures. If you don't have accountability, nothing is going to happen. I mean, the minister of health can be as well intentioned and as positive as he wants to be, but just saying, "We're going to do something; we're going to make it happen" is not good enough. Everyone knows this. It's accountability. It's basic. Every organization that is successful has accountability measures in place.

The hon. health minister said earlier: "You know, why do we need to legislate? If we legislate these emergency room targets, it means we're going to have to legislate cancer waiting targets, and then we'll have to legislate targets for hip and knee replacements and for all of the different procedures." You know what? Maybe that's the right thing to do eventually. The reason we're starting with emergency rooms is because we have an emergency room crisis on our hands. That's why we're starting there. I mean, we have to start somewhere, and the emergency rooms have been well documented to be in complete disarray.

It's a catastrophic collapse of our emergency rooms. That's what the doctors are saying. That's what people are saying. Everybody is saying this except for the Premier and the health minister, who are saying: "Oh, it's not that bad. There are a few things we've got to clean up." No. It's a disaster, so let's fix it. But we're never going to fix it if we don't legislate accountability standards. That is absolutely critical as we go forward. Maybe we need to grandfather these standards in, and we can talk about that. Maybe there are some other subamendments that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark can talk to our colleagues over on the government side about to, you know, have some sort of transition period. I don't know.

I'll tell you one thing. I trust his opinion far more than I trust any opinion in this House, including anybody sitting on this side of the House or that side of the House, when it comes to emergency rooms because he's an emergency room physician, one of the best ones in the province. He has said over and over and over again that this needs to change. It's not like this guy went into his office last night and googled online "emergency room wait targets" and pulled this out of a hat and said: this is what we need to do. No. He's done more research on the issue, more thinking about the issue, more everything on the issue than everybody else in this room put together.

I don't trust the health bureaucracy or Mr. Cookie Monster or anyone else, for that matter, to know more about what needs to happen in our emergency rooms than the Member for Edmonton-

Meadowlark. I mean, what's the point of our democracy if we're not going to listen to our MLAs and, certainly, if we're not going to listen to the people that actually know what they're talking about? I don't understand it. I do not get it.

Now, look; we're going to have a lot of time to talk about this tonight and today, no doubt, and we should talk about it a lot. But maybe over this period of time, however long we're here – one day, two days, four days, a week, whatever – as we talk about the health act and as we talk specifically about this amendment, I hope that the government members will have the time to talk to caucus about it and make the right decision on it. We need these legislated wait times. It's that simple. We cannot continue to defer this issue any longer. It's not right. Albertans need us to act. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has put this amendment forward and these solutions forward. Obviously, it's not the whole solution, but it certainly is part of the solution.

4:10

If we can just take this one step and if we can free up the front-line hospitals to individually have the authority to manage their hospitals on the ground and not from AHS – I believe if you combined the accountability measures with what we've been talking about and other opposition parties have been talking about, the decentralization of health care and control of hospitals back to local physicians and health administrators on the ground in the hospitals, if we do that, those two combinations, we will see this occur. We will see these standards being met. But we can't do it if we're not willing to have accountability because if there's no accountability, nothing gets done. If there's accountability, there's healthy fear, and with that healthy fear of not meeting those targets comes action and pragmatism and making sure things get done.

This is not a left/right issue. This is not a Conservative/Liberal issue. This is just about right and wrong and about competence and ineptitude. We've got to put aside all of the things that have been done in the past by past health ministers and concentrate on the here and now if we want to go forward. I think the right thing to do as we go forward is to listen to the only expert that is in this House, who has done more consulting on this issue than anyone else. Listen to the man. Let's put this amendment in there, let's do the right thing, and then let's put together an action plan to make that happen. That is absolutely critical.

With that, Mr. Chair, those are my comments on this. I look forward to hearing from the other opposition parties, the government, and, of course, more than anyone else the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on how we move forward on this issue.

The Chair: I have a list of hon. members to speak. I just want to read it: the hon. members for Edmonton-Gold Bar, St. Albert, Edmonton-Strathcona, Calgary-Varsity, Edmonton-Meadowlark, Calgary-Currie. Any others?

All right. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak on the amendment that has been suggested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. At this time I would like to note that the hon. member has certainly been very active and has a knowledge that this House should appreciate, a knowledge regarding emergency rooms not only in this city but across the province and how they work or do not work. This Assembly would be at a loss not to take the advice of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Now, certainly I and many other members of the House have received significant correspondence, whether it's via e-mail or by

telephone call, regarding the expulsion or whatever you want to call it of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark from the government caucus. When we speak about the Alberta Health Act, this proposed Bill 17, and this amendment A3 as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, we have to recognize first that he is an expert on this issue, and we need to take his advice in this direction.

I have a lot to say regarding this amendment, but first I would like to read into the record, Mr. Chairman, an electronic note that I received. I'm going to keep their names private. I'm not going to be like some government members across the way who, regardless of whether or not FOIP applies, willy-nilly release some information. I will keep their names confidential. It's regarding the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and they start with this: we wish to express our appreciation to you for speaking the truth and saying it as it is; at the same time, we are deeply sorry that you have been unfairly treated by being suspended from caucus for speaking out for Albertans. They go on at length, but that's an expression of gratitude from some individuals living in southern Alberta regarding the efforts that have been made to fix the problem with our public health care system, in particular the emergency room crisis that we're in at the moment.

Now, when we look at amendment A3, certainly, no one in this House should have any objection to including as guiding principles that "no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." There have been examples where – well, we had an individual who unfortunately committed suicide. We have had too many examples of hallway medicine as it is promoted by this government. We've had countless examples of delays in care, and we know that resources have been wasted by this government when they without any cost-benefit analysis went to the consolidated health board, the Alberta Health Services Board. There was no rhyme or reason for just eliminating the regional health authorities.

I've spoken in the past about the Capital health authority and how well respected it was across this country and across this continent. The managers there seemed to be quite competent. They weren't the ones, as the Premier suggested in question period today, that were running up big deficits. Uh-uh. We know and particularly the hon. Minister of Energy would know who they were and they are, and they weren't employed by the Capital health authority.

Now, the emergency room budget. We know that for emergency and outpatient services the budget is a little over \$1.1 billion, and as I said last night, it's gone up in the last four years by close to \$270 million, but the problems persist. That's why we should follow the suggestion of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and support this amendment. The idea that we can set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments consistent with a position statement on emergency department overcrowding published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated a little over three years ago: what would be the harm in that?

I've heard the current minister of health say on a number of occasions: oh, this would just start a legal nightmare. Well, this is the same government that set up a legal nightmare when they consolidated the nine regions and the Alberta Mental Health Board and the Cancer Board. There was no issue at all about the millions of dollars in legal costs that were needed to facilitate the transition from these regions into the one superboard. They didn't care about those legal costs but now are hanging on that as an excuse to try to defeat this amendment.

In fact, I can't find the legal costs for the consolidation of the health board in the financial statements. How much money was spent? Who got that money? Which legal firms? Did legal firms

compete with one another to get that work done? How much did it cost per hour? What was the total cost? With this secretive government we'll never find that out. For this minister of health to get behind the spin, the lame spin, that, oh, no, if we accept this issue of putting a standard of time where people will be seen and looked after in an emergency room, if it's not met, we'll have a legal nightmare – that's so untrue. There was no issue whatsoever with writing a blank cheque to who knows how many law firms in Calgary to facilitate the transition from nine health regions to one.

4:20

Now, when we look, Mr. Chairman, at the measures that perhaps we should introduce, we have to look at what Alberta Health Services has now. Some of this information is older. It's over a year, but it's obvious that Alberta Health Services is tracking emergency wait times. Now, why couldn't we set standards? Well, I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is going to say that we can't set standards because they'd just lower them anyway. That's what this minister was caught doing. He tried to say: oh, no, he had no part of that. But I'll give the hon. minister of health credit. He would look at files. He would certainly read files, and I would be surprised if he was unaware that there was some lowering of the bar with the existing wait times and the standards.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talked about his experiences at, I believe, a neighbourhood in the central area of Edmonton. We have to recognize – and this is something the government hasn't done – the workload that occurs at emergency departments. Now, the emergency departments, as we know, in this city are very, very busy. The top emergency department sites in terms of high patient volume, annual visits greater than 40,000 – and this is going back, unfortunately, three years, Mr. Chairman – have been identified in the city of Edmonton.

Now, what impresses me about the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is that he's backing up his actions. Certainly, there were a lot of Conservative MLAs elected in Edmonton in the last election, and they were all going to be at the table, and they were going to stand up for the city. I heard this on the street corner the other day: "Where are they? The only one that is really speaking up is this individual from Meadowlark." The citizens appreciated that.

When the Capital health authority was disbanded, I never heard a word. When all the restricted and unrestricted funds that the Capital health authority held – and they had them for specific purposes for the city – were used to pay for someone else's mistakes, I never heard a word publicly. We brought this up. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought this up. Did the hon. member get any support from those individuals? Not that I'm aware of. Certainly not that I'm aware of. Where are they now?

If you look at the emergency departments – the U of A, the Misericordia, the Royal Alex, the Grey Nuns, the Sturgeon, the Northeast community health centre in Edmonton – these are all the high volume emergency departments. They're the highest across the province, yet silence. That's not, Mr. Chairman, representing the people, in my view, who were kind enough to vote for you.

Now, we look at the annual report for Health and Wellness. Certainly, the authors of this report, individuals who work in Health and Wellness – it was signed off by the minister, and there's a nice cheerful photograph of the hon. gentleman in the front here on page 5. Certainly, he signed off on this. We hear about management's responsibility, vision, mission, and core businesses, but it is interesting to note the public rating of access to emergency departments. Amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. member would certainly help, if it was adopted, this government meet this performance measure. I don't have much faith in this government's

performance measures because whenever they're not working out, they change them or they eliminate them so the public does not know, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to quote directly:

In 2009, Alberta Health Services established the Emergency Department Integration Team which has developed provincial standards for delivery of emergency department care including addressing the issue of overcrowding and long patient wait times in emergency departments.

This has gone on and on and on from previous health ministers. Last night we counted four. It's a growth industry in the PC caucus. Four health ministers. Four, Mr. Chairman. But, regardless, the problem is always there. They can't solve the problem. They don't know how. Now, there are people that say they're incapable. Others will say that they're incompetent. Could be a bit of both. Certainly, this problem of emergency room overcrowding and long patient wait times has gone on and on and on, way past the term of the current Minister of Education, the current Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. They had a try, a noble try, at solving the problems. It hasn't worked.

Certainly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is making an extraordinary effort to help this government finally come to grips with . . .

Mr. Liepert: He sure is.

Mr. MacDonald: Hon. Minister of Energy, you bet he sure is. Perhaps if you had taken his advice two years ago, we wouldn't be in this mess we're in. I have the memorandum of understanding, the original one that you signed – that you signed – to create this monster, this Alberta Health Services superboard, which is gobbling up financial resources and not improving service to citizens of this province who need it. When they need health care, what happens? What happens?

Mr. Liepert: They get it.

Mr. MacDonald: Forget it? No, I won't forget it.

Mr. Liepert: They get it.

Mr. MacDonald: They get it. Not in a timely fashion. Not in some cases without having to wait a long, long time. Some people can't even get a family physician. Some people are waiting a long time for hip and knee surgery. Some people cannot get psychiatric care. For you to say that they get it is totally wrong. It's totally wrong, Mr. Chairman.

Now, when the government talks about having a public rating of access to emergency department services, the target for this year with this annual report is 60 per cent: 60 per cent of the time the percentage rating ease of actually obtaining emergency department services needed for self as easy. The rating is "easy."

Well, if we adopted and forced – I think it's not too strong a word, Mr. Chairman – this government to make a commitment and meet a standard, perhaps that's what we need. This amendment certainly would force this government. Some hon. members have suggested to make them accountable. Well, I would agree with that. Do they need to be accountable? Yes. Are they accountable? No, they certainly are not. The current Minister of Energy knows fully well that this government is taking the support that citizens have given them for granted. You've forgotten that you can be voted out. You're not the New York Yankees of the political world. You're just not. You may think you are, but you're not. I think you're

going to be judged on your actions, and that judgment may be a little bit more difficult for you to accept than you think. Now, we look at the annual report, we look at other documents from Alberta Health Services, and this initiative to force this government to finally act is a sound one.

4:30

I would, in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, urge all hon. members to please consider supporting amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Certainly, there are principles in here that I think would improve emergency room access for many Albertans, and the standards, the lengths of stay in emergency departments would put the interests of sick and injured Albertans first, not some ideology that this government decided would work in 2008.

Now, we look at some of the consultants that have been hired by this government, and McKinsey & Company comes to mind. They have invoiced a significant amount of money through to the government. They have made some sound recommendations. But I'm quite surprised, Mr. Chairman, that a lot of those recommendations for whatever reason – I don't know whether it's chaos, confusion, mismanagement by this government; I have no idea – it's apparent, have been ignored. I don't know how or why this government would be so willing to hire these consultants and then let the information that they provide rest on a shelf.

Thank you.

The Chair: The chair will now recognize, according to my list I read before, the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

I just want to remind hon. members about movement in our Chamber during committee. Only the speaking member can stand. If anybody else has a conversation, please take a seat rather than stand. Thank you.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've listened very closely to the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness as well as the hon. members for Airdrie-Chestermere and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Above all, I've listened to my constituents, not just in the last week but for the last two and a half years. I recently wrote quite a lengthy letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness even before the emergency crisis erupted in the papers, and I expressed to him a number of concerns. A couple of years ago we were told that the problem with the wait times in emergency was because the acute-care beds were taken up by long-term care patients.

Mr. Liepert: Point of order. Mr. Chairman, I think you just had a ruling. Would you rule on the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, who is just not observing the ruling that you just made? He either sits down or in his own chair. [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, just to get the process going, if you want to have a conversation, please, there is a hallway outside, or take a seat close to the member and then talk. Thank you.

Please continue, hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you again. If I can find where I left off here . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for St. Albert has the floor.

Please continue.

Mr. Allred: I believe, Mr. Chair, I was saying that a few weeks ago I sent a letter to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness expressing some concerns. We were all told in this House that the problem with emergency was that there were too many acute-care beds being taken up by long-term care patients. We've added a lot of long-term care beds, but the problem continues. We were told that we were going to change the ambulance system to get the paramedics back on the streets, where they belong, instead of lining up at the hospitals, yet still today they're lined up in front of the emergency room, waiting to get care for their patients.

Not quite a year ago we paid off all of the deficits of Alberta Health Services and gave very generous funding for five years. I believe that funding was at their request, and we matched the request. Yet we continue to see deterioration of the system. There is no question in my mind that we're in a crisis situation. It's been brewing for many, many months. I'm certainly inclined to support this amendment because we need some accountability in the system. This amendment, Mr. Chair, may not be perfect, but I think it's a good first step.

Now, I heard the hon. minister express some concerns that by putting this amendment in, we would be creating potential legal liability. Well, Mr. Chair, I look at Bill 17, and this is an amendment of section 2. Section 2(1) says, "The Minister shall establish a Health Charter to guide the actions" – to guide the actions – "of regional health authorities." It goes on to say, "But the Health Charter must not be used to limit access to health services." This amendment says: "include as guiding principles." Guiding principles. Those words in both the bill and the amendment I'm sure are very carefully chosen words to avoid any liability. So based on my understanding of what is intended by both the bill and the amendment, I do not see a concern for liability.

I know that in some of the discussion on the health charter and some of the consultations last summer there was concern that by putting in a health charter, we would tie our hands. I know that in speaking to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, there was a very careful attempt to draft the legislation so it wouldn't tie our hands and wouldn't put us in a legal liability situation.

Mr. Chair, I guess that is the extent of my remarks. I know we've all had a lot of concerns expressed by our constituents, particularly over the last week. I must say that despite the crisis that we seem to have been put into in the last week, I think perhaps it's good. We've got to look at this very seriously now and make some changes to our health care system to make sure we can correct the problems that we have found. Get those long-term care patients out of the acute-care beds, get the paramedics back where they belong, on the streets, and get the system working.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have a list here. Referring to my list, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to get up to join debate on this particular amendment to Bill 17. I'd like to start, of course, by congratulating the Member for St. Albert for speaking the truth that not only members on the opposition side of this House are aware of – it is fully the truth – but that I think almost all members of this House are aware of, that there is, in fact, a problem with our health care system. To suggest otherwise is to mislead Albertans, and more importantly it is to ensure that we don't address the problem, that we don't focus on the solutions. So I do congratulate the member for saying what I think all members on both sides of the House are aware of.

4:40

Now, the minister of health rose to speak against this amendment, and one of the reasons that he gave for speaking against this amendment was that it was his view that most of the work is already being done. "We're already on the way to fixing all the problems. Just, you know, hold tight. It'll all be there." In fact, he said that if we hadn't had this little bit of a "but for," but for some of the unanticipated activity of the last week or two, we'd all be there. All the problems would be fixed, and we'd be on the road.

I have to say that I'm not assured by that statement. This is the same minister who very dramatically held a press conference to announce a bunch of important performance measures that he was going to direct Alberta Health Services to put in place, only for us to discover that, in fact, those were performance measures that had been in place for eight or nine months already, and they had been missed. Then after dramatically holding that press conference and announcing that he was going to take action and put those performance measures in place, you know, the ones that had been there for the previous eight months already, he then acknowledged that he was probably going to have to water down those performance measures a little bit, play around with them, because it probably wasn't the case that they were really that realistic.

In fact, after all the drama and all this assertive action-taking was finished, what really happened was that we backed down from the assurances that this government had tried to give Albertans within the last year. So I get concerned about those kinds of statements. Of course, the minister said: you know, we've already announced lots of plans to make things better. I have to say that this, again, does not give me assurances because what we do know is that this government does like to announce things. It's very good at announcing. They must have a whole building stuck aside somewhere that holds the rolls and rolls and rolls of ribbon that they keep aside for their various and sundry ribbon-cutting events. I suspect that every building must presumably come with at least 10 separate events, so you've got to have quite a lot of ribbon stuck aside there.

They announce things. I can't even begin to imagine how many announcements there have been, say, for instance, in Grande Prairie for the hospital that is yet to be built. Announcing really does not make me feel a lot better. Before the last election it was announced that we were going to build 600 or 800 new long-term care beds, yet in fact what we've done is that we've taken long-term care beds out of the system.

This minister's assurance that, "Well, we announced the plan" really rings hollow, and I think it rings hollow for many Albertans, and that is why we are having this growing sense on the part of Albertans that the crisis is not going anywhere. They've just reached their limit in terms of how much comfort they can gain from a ribbon-cutting ceremony, particularly when the ribbon cutting is for a building that, even once it's actually built, still sits empty for weeks and months and years because suddenly one of the things that wasn't mentioned in one of the nine or 10 ribbon-cutting events around that building was that it was always going to be a phased-in project and that we had to reprofile the phasing-in of the project and that kind of thing.

I have to say that the language used by this government is disturbing and distressing, and it does not engender trust on the part of regular Albertans, who are trying to figure out what the heck the government's plans are with respect to health care. Of course, that's all relevant to this amendment because this amendment is about trying to actually inject some modicum of a trackable, accountable performance measure. That's what we don't have right now.

Now, the minister also went on to say, "You know, all of this stuff has to be managed through policy," and policy is part of that trust-us

kind of thing that the government has been doing for years: just trust us; we'll manage it through policy. But policy can change. With this government we know that it can change. We know, for instance, that the government can delist services without touching the legislation, and we know that delisting is another form of privatization. We know that the government can reprofile and restage the opening of a health care centre that they had promised would address the very issue that is driving so many of Albertans' concerns right now, that being the issue of emergency room overflow and the unopened health centre in northern Edmonton.

So policy can change, and with this government it does change. It changes repeatedly. It changes over and over. Every day there's a new direction. The wind changes, and so does this government's plan with respect to health care. The Member for St. Albert expressed frustration because he said: "Well, we were told the problem in ER was long-term care beds. We opened a bunch of long-term care beds, so why is there still a problem?" Well, I will say to the Member for St. Albert that the problem is that we actually haven't opened a bunch of new long-term care beds. What we've opened are other types of beds, other types of beds with much lower levels of care.

I have been in those centres, and I have talked to people from across the province who work in those centres. What they describe is not having the medical staff available to deal with the medical crises of the people who are moved into those centres because there's no other place to go. What do they do? They program their phones to the ER and to the ambulances, and it's a rotating, revolving door between these understaffed centres, that are not designed to provide the long-term care that the government originally promised, and the ERs because there is not adequate medical care in these continuing care centres.

It's been said repeatedly in this House, but it obviously bears repeating: long-term care is not continuing care. Every time we ask the minister, "When are you going to follow through on even a portion of the promises that were made in the last election with respect to long-term care?" the minister comes back and talks about continuing care. We know that continuing care looks very, very different than long-term care. You know, this is not that complex. I'm sure that many MLAs in this building have visited these centres and talked to the people that work in these centres and talked to the families whose relatives are in these centres and understand that most of these centres do not or are unable to provide the level of care that often these people require.

Then, of course, we say: "Well, let's get home care. Let's get some home care. We can ramp up home care and have home care come into these moderately assistive living facilities." Well, that's a great idea if you have enough home care, but in fact this government had a line item for home care which was inadequate to begin with but also which they didn't even spend. They had unexpended home care dollars in the last budget. So not only did they not increase the budget for home care, as is needed to provide a comprehensive home care system, but they didn't even spend the money they have on home care. Yet they repeatedly trot out these speaking points: "Oh, you know, we've got more continuing care beds. We're going to max out home care. Yada, yada, yada." But that's not what you're doing.

It is frustrating, and it's frustrating to hear this minister get up and assure us that what we need to do is simply rely on their exercise of policy and their use of policy to fix the system when in fact what we've got is a strong history of policy being changed repeatedly, objectives not being met, standards changing over and over and over again . . . [interjection] There we go. Thank you. . . . standards not being met over and over again, that kind of problem with policy. So why would we trust it?

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has just brought to my attention that, in fact, the consolidated accounting statements of Alberta Health Services, ended March 31, 2010, show that they spent \$10 million less on home care this year. So, in fact, they're spending less on home care even while this government is getting up in the Legislature and saying: we're going to ramp up home care to deal with the fact that we've broken our promise and decided not to build the long-term care beds because we're just going to have everybody stay in these assisted living hotels, that are mostly privately built and operated, and then we'll deal with the medical needs by bringing up and ramping up more home care. Yet we're actually spending less on home care. So it really doesn't make a lot of sense.

4:50

The problem is that we see the real-life consequences of this failure to take ownership for what you promise you will do, what you say will get done, and making sure that it actually happens. This disconnect between the press release and the ribbon-cutting event and what actually happens once all the media packs up their cameras and drives away and goes home – there is a profound disconnect in this government, so Albertans don't trust it anymore. We need to have clearer measures of accountability built into our system.

Another example. The minister talked about physicians, and he talked about health care professionals. Well, that's yet another – it's like a comedy, like some Greek comedy or something. You watch this government, you know. One minister gets up and passionately defends the need to increase our health care professionals and to increase the number of people entering health care as a profession, and you actually increase some of the spaces for that. But then at the same time, once we've injected all this money into – well, not all this money but a small amount of money into increasing the number of human resources in the health care sector, we then lay them off and have a hiring freeze, and all of these fabulous new nurses that have graduated actually go to other parts of the country because we couldn't be bothered to hire them. What was that? That was the most ridiculous backflip.

You could expect it if this government had been elected a mere six months ago and they were still, you know, wet behind the ears and trying to get used to being in this position. But, really, there is no excuse for a government that has been in power for 40 years to make these kinds of amateur mistakes. It really is quite surprising to see.

I found it interesting that the minister talked about how the LPNs that we have in the province have gone up by 17 per cent. I suspect those may in part consist of the foreign nurses who came in, who were then unable to find work in that setting, so they became LPNs. Oh, but he doesn't say that we have 20 per cent more RNs working in the system. Oh, no. No, no. He says that we have 20 per cent more RNs graduated. Well, indeed, we do because we did put money into ensuring that we had more RNs graduate. Of course, those are the RNs that then left the province because at the same time they were doing this, the right hand, that wasn't aware of what the left hand was doing, had decided to stop hiring those very nurses. So that's a concern.

We have empty assurances with respect to mental health. We have the minister saying – and it's not a direct quote, but it's close – that the area of mental health is one of the most underserved areas of health care throughout Canada. I will give him that. That is a very true statement. But what, of course, he didn't say is that by most measures Alberta is at the very bottom of that list, where across Canada none of us do what we need to do and are sufficiently aware of the investment that needs to go towards providing comprehensive mental health care, but at the same time in Alberta we ranked the

lowest in almost every measure with respect to what we do with mental health care.

I recall that about a year and a half ago we released a leaked document that talked about the number of beds in Alberta and how that related to the shortage of mental health beds across the country. At the time I spoke to the former health minister, now the current Minister of Energy, about why there's such a profound shortage of mental health beds. He pointed me to a joint project that was being orchestrated, with many ribbon cuttings, through the ministry of the Attorney General, where there were a few new health care or rehab beds being opened as part of diversion projects through that ministry.

In effect, what he was saying was: yeah, we're opening new beds for health care, and for anybody that's about to be charged with, you know, break and enter or robbery or some kind of property theft, we might actually be able to divert them from the court system into these mental health beds. Of course, I think it's fairly clear on the face of it that that being the planned path of access to mental health services is probably not the best way to go. I find it amazing that that was even put out as a possible explanation for how we might possibly deal with the issue of mental health services.

I am quite distressed, actually, in the documentation that we received from Alberta Health Services around what they are spending Albertans' money on. We pretty much lost any kind of direct explanation for how much we can observe them spending on mental health services. That's pretty much gone. Not only do we not have the performance measures that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would like to see in this bill; we don't even have the basic ability to review the Alberta Health Services budget, line item by line item, the way we would if it was a direct service provided by the ministry because Alberta Health Services has decided not to break out mental health services in any kind of fashion that allows Albertans who are interested in the issue to track it. So we have no performance measures. In fact, we even look at: well, what are they spending on it? Let's just assume that there is some type of ever so amorphous relationship between the money that is spent on mental health and the outcomes in terms of the services provided to Albertans. But we can't even do that, so that's a problem.

You know, the minister is very proud of the changes that have been made at the Royal Alexandra hospital by having the 24-hour mental health team there. What he doesn't talk about is the fact that that represents a significant step back from what was previously there in terms of the beds that were there before. There are so many ways in which this government fails daily and continuously on the health care file. There are so few ways in which Albertans can transparently keep track of that. What this amendment is about is simply trying to inject more accountability into this process.

I have to say that I'm very, very disappointed that at least the short-term response on the part of this government is: "No, no. We need to carry on. Steady as she goes. Just trust us. Cross your fingers, close your eyes, and trust that we'll write a policy that will help with this and trust that we won't change our mind on that policy within six to 12 months and trust that after we've cut five or six ribbons in front of any particular health care service, there's a 50-50 chance that we'll actually go through with what it was that we announced we were going to do."

As I say, not only do Albertans not trust that; Albertans see what this means to their families in our emergency rooms, in the provision of mental health care, with what happens on our streets and in our communities in terms of the ability of people to seek treatment and what's happening to our seniors, what's happening to them as they are at home waiting for the nurse, who can only come once a week as opposed to the once a day she should be coming, not getting the

medical care they need and hoping that the ambulance will come fast enough to get them to the ER when the predictable results of that lack of care once again force them back into the system at the most difficult place.

All that being said, I think that members of this House should at least consider what it is that this amendment is trying to do and should consider supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In speaking to amendment A3, I want to thank all members who have participated in this very important discussion. I want to particularly recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert, who spoke in terms of his concerns. He spoke of a letter that he had written to the minister of health, I believe, expressing his concerns over the system. For that, I am very appreciative because lately it seems that if you're a member of the Conservative caucus and you speak out, there is potential for punishment.

5:00

Now, I have no trouble with the position of this amendment. I must admit that as a former teacher who marked numerous essays, I had a little bit of trouble with the wording in terms of the double negatives. What I did to get past that retentive nature of myself was I basically rewrote it in the positive. I substituted "unnecessary" for "avoidable" for my own self, but I think it might be helpful to other members: include as guiding principles that avoidable deaths, avoidable harm to patients, avoidable delays in care, and avoidable waste of resources should not occur. That made it easier for me to speak to.

The Chair: Hon. member, may I interrupt?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, please take a seat.

Mrs. Forsyth: Sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, please continue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I also appreciated the comments from the Member for St. Albert with regard to the liability that was apparently a concern of the minister of health. Now, it talks about guiding principles, for example. It talks about: "resources should." It doesn't say: resources must. In other words, if somebody dies in emergency, it doesn't mean that it's an automatic, done-deal lawsuit that the family can put forward. I think that's a bit of a specious argument.

Now, what the amendment is all about regardless of whether you change the wording so that you understand it better is: do no harm. Of course, do no harm is the Hippocratic oath, and it's the oath that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark swore. What has happened is that the hon. member has been compromised. He has had to deal with an internal question of conscience, and he's had to make choices. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark as an emergency physician witnessed the shortcomings of the system with regard to his father's own care. He had sworn the oath to do no harm. He had a duty to himself. He had a duty to his family. He had a duty to his constituents. That brought him into a conflict with the former health minister, and in calling out the former health minister for the decisions he'd made with regard to the structuring of the superboard and the way he dealt with health care professionals, he basically by extension called out the Premier.

Because there is no whistle-blower legislation in this province,

whether you're an orderly or an emergency room physician, he was punished. To his credit, despite the amount of pressure that he's experiencing due to the number of strokes and potential critical events that his father has gone through, he sacrificed his own well-being, his own health, but he did not give up his position as the representative for his constituents.

Now, there is a tremendous amount of stress that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is undergoing, but I firmly believe in what I consider a guiding philosophy. That comes out of the play *Hamlet*, and it was Polonius' advice to Laertes: to thine own self be true, and thence it follows, as night the day, thou canst not be false to any man. If we cannot look into ourselves and live with ourselves, then how can we be any good to anyone else? I compliment the hon. member for sticking to what he believed in and continues to uphold and suffers a great amount of stress, but there is comfort in knowing that you did everything in your power to make things right.

Now, the hon. member, in discussing amendment A3, talked about the right type of care at the right time in the right place. He talked about the importance of home care. He talked about the quality of seniors' lives and what happens when they become disoriented when they're taken out of that circumstance.

With home care, if you look at it, the health minister is rightly concerned about expenses, but expenses versus people's lives: it has to be put into a balance. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talked about home care. Home care, depending on the level of home care, regardless of whether it's professionals coming in or nursing aides or the Victorian Order of Nurses or whether it's a doctor doing a home visit, is considerably less expensive than treatment that takes place in a hospital. A hospital bed basically comes with a \$2,000 bill per day. Yes, it's paid by our health insurance, our public insurance, but it's the wrong place for the wrong types of care, particularly for seniors or people who are younger and need to convalesce at home as opposed to taking up a hospital bed.

Now, in terms of the right place at the right time and the right level of care there's the other concern that the member brought up, about taking pressure off emergency rooms. One of the ways that happens, obviously, would be the family doctor. The family doctor would be the gatekeeper for the type of care you needed, and as you needed more professional specialized help, the family doctor could then refer you to the specialist.

Also, the member referenced the need for primary care networks, the need for a balance between urgent care centres and emergencies. The more people we can keep from having to take emergency services, obviously, the easier it's going to be within the emergency.

Now, in terms of getting the right mix of individuals, when it comes to triaging, what would be very helpful, in my limited medical understanding, would be the equivalent of nurse practitioners so that they could very quickly go throughout and provide the triaging, obviously in a private location so that people would feel that their privacy was respected.

Another combination of individuals we need in the emergency arena are social workers. When you get a senior coming in suffering from a degree of dementia or just stress, having someone to talk to is as important and as healing at least as a first step. I know, having coached wrestling for 25 years and gone to emergency with some big brutes of boys and some pretty significant wrestling girls when they had broken collarbones or broken arms, that just the act of holding their hand, whether it was a big hunk of a boy or not, provided a degree of support and helped relieve the stress until the individual could be seen by the attending doctor. There are a variety of people that can help within that emergency milieu before, actually, the person is seen. A lot of it is support.

I don't want to put orderlies out of a job, but unless we have more orderlies – one of the biggest problems that I've seen when going into a hospital with my wife or other family members is that when they're very weak or very sick, try to find a wheelchair. If you had more orderlies or even hospital volunteers, the equivalent of candy strippers, to do the running around to make sure that a person had a wheelchair at least so that they didn't faint, that would be terrifically helpful.

5:10

In terms of the right care in the right place the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talked about where a person should be in terms of the care necessary. My mother suffered a stroke while she was in Cedars Villa. She was 86 years old at the time, and we knew how in crisis the emergency wards were. We were very fortunate that Dr. Gladman was willing to visit the facility, and he talked to us about where my mother could get the care she needed. It turned out that she could get the type of care that she needed right within the Cedars Villa seniors' home. She could get the oxygen. As the pain increased, she could get the morphine. There was a registered nurse available.

Rather than have my mom take up a hospital bed that could potentially save someone else's life, we made the decision to keep my mother as comfortable as she could be as long as she could with oxygen and with pain control. My mother, being a very strong person, a very stubborn person – guess where I get it from? – lasted almost three days after her initial stroke. The care that was provided in that home was sufficient as opposed to transporting her to the hospital. Again, being proactive and preventative, I spent 15 hours with a paramedic on a paramedic's shift, and I wrote an article, an op-ed, afterwards detailing my experience, called Angels of the Night. It was a minus 30 degree night a couple of years ago in Calgary, and for whatever reason there weren't a lot of calls coming in to the paramedic facility, which was also twinned with a fire hall just down by Stampede Park. Anyway, what we did when we weren't on call was drive around the streets, and very quickly we found a woman lying on the sidewalk. It turned out that her problem was inebriation, but had we not been there, she could very well have frozen to death or, at the very least, suffered frostbite.

Now, the paramedics would go along the river, they would go to the haunts of the homeless who, even in the most severe weather conditions, refused to go into the shelters, and they did those good things. With the woman who was picked up inebriated, instead of taking her to jail or to a hospital, they took her to a facility called Alpha House, and while it was a fairly minor type of treatment, there was at least a mat on a cement floor with 24-hour governance or watching out. The woman was able to sleep off her circumstance. She would awake in the morning with a headache but alive. So the combination is important.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

Something else that would be very helpful is using our facilities to the best extent; for example, posting emergency waiting times. In the Calgary area we've got hospitals in High River, we've got hospitals in Okotoks. Further down we've got hospitals in Canmore. My experience has been that the emergency waiting times in rural centres are considerably reduced. Yes, they have limitations in terms of some of the critical care that they can provide, but that's where the air ambulances come in to transport them to the appropriate care.

The story that I found interesting was the story of a fellow who initially went to Rockyview because he had broken his arm. After

waiting three hours in Rockyview, he had his wife drive him to Canmore. He got his arm casted. Then just out of interest, wondering how the health care system in Calgary had failed him, he went back to Rockyview. It was another four hours before he was seen. They asked: well, why are you here? He said: well, I was checking out the times involved.

Having posted waiting times and being able to transport people who aren't in a life-threatening circumstance to regional hospitals is part of the solution, in my mind.

We need to be able to provide in-home care. People should be able to have the choice of palliative care, whether it be in a facility such as beside the Grace hospital – the name of the facility I forget. It's a wonderful facility. If you have very few options left in life, there is a terrific amount of care that is provided at that facility.

Now, I've recently lost my brother-in-law because of a whole series of failures, not failures in the Alberta system, but I see parallels in what happened to him in Ottawa. While he had a colonoscopy, that wasn't the test that he required. His own GP did not realize the anemic nature and state. Even though he came to his GP in a very jaundiced condition, the physician did not recommend that he go directly to emergency. The following day when his wife drove him to emergency, he fainted in the parking lot and was rushed to the emergency ward, where he languished for eight hours before he got the service. He made the choice with his wife to seek palliative care at home, and that was hope that he would have a degree of comfort and be around his computer and have a little bit of normalcy in his life, but there were restrictions. The government would only fund so many TPN procedures, total parenteral nutrition programs. In other words, he was hooked up to an intravenous feeding tube. Because he was released from hospital and couldn't have a TPN, he died considerably faster than he might have if he'd remained in hospital. We need to realize the right . . .

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, can I interrupt you for a moment, please?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, you're not allowed to move chairs in the Chamber, so could you return to your position, please?

Member, you can continue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I don't believe there is a whole lot to be gained in just simply jumping on the government without offering alternatives, but the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, not only in his amendment A3 but in his participation in the emergency debate, offered several solutions. One of those solutions is having the right combination of professional people. We need to have knowledgeable medical individuals. We need to have management expertise. Getting that right balance is extremely important. Right now the members of the superboard don't have that balance.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. It's an honour for me to stand and speak again. I started off my political career in this House by quoting Martin Luther King in my response to the Speech from the Throne. The quote that I live my life by is: life begins to end the day we become silent about things that matter. We're going to show the people of Alberta what democracy truly is about, talking about something that matters, is so near and dear to their very hearts.

5:20

I just ask one favour of my friends on the other side, who I still consider my colleagues and dear friends. I ask you to respect

democracy and not invoke closure. You are able to invoke closure today, tomorrow, whenever. I ask you to allow this debate to continue until we can't debate this anymore. I humbly ask you to do that on behalf of Albertans who care about this very important issue. My office has received thousands of e-mails. This issue is so near and dear to Albertans. There has been an overwhelming outpouring of support for the likes of Dr. Paul Parks and those front-line health care workers who brave each and every day. Any effort, in my mind, to actually stop us from talking would actually be to disrespect Albertans, disrespect them on the most important issue. So I humbly ask all of my colleagues, whether it's on the left or the right or the middle left or the middle right: let's keep talking about this, my good friends. I promise to stay in this Chamber until I can't talk anymore, until I can't stand anymore, until my eyes can't stay open and my lips can't move.

Now, let's carry on. I would like to just pick up where I left off. I don't have the Blues, so I'll just summarize where we were. So we have people dying in the emergency departments. That's happened. We have people suffering, and we're missing every standard of care in the area that I'm an expert in. Mr. Chairman, I have supported everything of my colleagues for the last 2.8 years, whether I agreed with it or disagreed with it. To be honest, I really didn't know much about it, but the rules of parliamentary democracy are such that when you walk out of this House, you stand as a team. I have supported each and every thing. To be honest, I didn't really like the idea of Bill 44, and my constituents didn't really like it. But you know what? I understand that many people in this province did appreciate it and did like it. For many of my colleagues in rural Alberta it was the right thing, and I supported it despite the fact that my constituents didn't agree with it.

There's only one thing, Mr. Chairman, that I'm really good at. There's only one thing I know. The deepest, innermost fabric of my body has been – it's in my blood. You know why? My great-grandfather Basant Ram Pathak was a captain and surgeon in the Indian army. His best friend was Lala Lajpat Rai. He risked his profession, his honour, and his life in 1928 when the Simon Commission in India – they got beaten with sticks. You know what his friend said? He said: each blow aimed at me is a nail in the coffin of British imperialism. These were men above all men. They freed a nation from an empire to make the biggest democracy on this planet. That was my mother's grandfather. His children were all doctors. Their children are all doctors.

My father's side. His father came here in 1906, as a 17-year-old, to seek opportunity elsewhere. He talked about exclusionary laws in Canada in 1907. They had the head tax. I want to tell you how this links into health care because you have to understand why we're going to talk about this. You need to understand my family's connection to democracy and health care and caring for the most vulnerable. I'm just building context. My dad's father came in 1906 as a 17-year-old to seek opportunity in a strange land called Canada.

In 1914 my great-grandmother's brother, my grandfather's future wife's mom's brother, was on a ship, the *Komagata Maru*. The ship was not allowed to dock in Canada. For two months they were denied the basic necessities of life, and my father's father swam food to them late at night. The ship was turned back to India, and half the people were massacred. He financed India's freedom movement. This is the blood that courses in my veins.

His dream – I just visited India, because my father is not well – is to bring back his father's belongings and memoirs, his cane and the last writings of his father. My dad's sister, the only surviving member from his original family in India said that dad – dad being my grandfather – always wanted a doctor in the family. In my father's family I am the only doctor. In my mother's family, I am one of hundreds of doctors.

I ran because I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to change the world that I live in. I ran because I saw people suffering just metres from care. The hon. minister is a fantastic fellow. He's my *veerji bhaji*; *bhaji* means brother. I have the utmost respect for this man. He said a lot of things that I agree with.

I want to built context on this emergency issue. When I was in Dr. Paul Parks' position, there was a letter written to the minister prior to this minister, prior to that minister, prior to that minister, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park. In 2006, when I was the Dr. Paul Parks, I wrote a letter to her during the leadership race, and they made a commitment that there were long-term care beds coming and this and that and whatnot.

Here's a picture of me in February 2007. I am quoted as saying: "We face a severe challenge right now. 'I believe the problem is worse than it's ever been,' said Sherman, also head of the Emergency Physicians of Alberta. 'I've been working for 15 years and we've never had it this bad.'" We were told that things were going to get done.

So we worked with the minister at the time, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I was shocked. He actually listened. He actually listened to all of us doctors. He mentioned my name in this hallowed Chamber, and we helped implement short-term measures called the overcapacity protocols. It was a temporary measure to put people from the hallways upstairs. We actually increased the burden on all the nurses in every ward in every hospital. We actually reduced emergency wait times significantly while longer term solutions were supposed to come online from the previous minister, such as family doctors, more nurses, more home care, more long-term care.

We thought: fantastic. I respected that minister so much, and I told this Premier: I didn't vote for this government or this party in the last couple of elections because you wrecked health care in the '90s, but I like you and I trust you and I'm actually quite impressed by the fact that you care and you listen. I realized that despite the fact that you read in the newspapers that the Conservatives are made out to be some big, bad bullies, I thought: "You know what? These are actually human beings like anyone else. They are actually pretty decent people, and they're like me and like my friends." I realized everyone in this Chamber is that way.

I sacrificed my career, and I ran. I was quite vocal at that time. Since then I thought I'd try to change the system from within. Here's a commitment by the Premier, who I staked my career on in June of 2007, when everyone said, "It's Harry Strom. The party is over; he's not going to win." My good Liberal friends were supposed to form government at that time. I staked my career at that time when nobody wanted to run for him, at least in my area of Edmonton-Meadowlark. I door-knocked for 10 months, 5 hours a day, 5 days a week, until I wore the cartilage in my knees and I couldn't walk anymore, because he made a commitment to the seniors.

5:30

Dr. Peter Kwan, the section president of the emergency doctors after me, got a letter written to him February 23, 2008, during the election. It was signed by the hon. Premier of our province, Ed Stelmach. There were deaths and near-deaths during the election; those are the 322 cases at the one hospital alone. The ER doctors were going crazy. They were feeding all the political parties what was happening. Dr. Kevin Taft during the election on the day of the debate challenged the Premier and said that people are dying in the emergency departments.

Some Hon. Members: Names. Names.

Dr. Sherman: Oh. Forgive me. Sorry. I apologize, Mr. Chair.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview challenged our Premier. I asked the emergency doctors: "Please do not say a word. Do not interfere in the outcome of the election because I've been told that if you bother the Conservatives, they will beat the heck out of you if they get lots of seats, if they get a majority government." They said no word. Four days after the election a FOIPable e-mail was sent – this isn't government stuff I'm telling you; this is the doctors' stuff – to myself, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who was the hon. minister's assistant at the time, to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness at the time, Edmonton-Whitemud, to the deputy minister at the time, and as well to the Premier. All these cases were sent at that time.

A Health Quality Council review was not done. The Ethics Commissioner of this province knew about all these cases, as did the previous CEO of Capital health services. This happened under Capital health. This is prior to AHS. Here is a commitment in writing.

I sent a famous e-mail recently, for which I apologized to the Premier. It was a factual e-mail. Emergency doctors were supposed to be engaged on a panel to fix this problem. That meeting just happened on Friday. This is dated February 23, 2008. Perhaps I was incorrect. Perhaps the Premier didn't break a promise. He did keep it two and a half years later.

The real issue is that this problem is caused by lack of long-term care and community care and home care in addition to primary care and prevention and wellness. Now, the Health Quality Council did a review of what's going on with long-term care. Here it is.

Dr. John Cowell, October 25, 2010

Gents, as the ED situation continues to be debated and in particular focused on "bed blockers" I thought you might like to see some real data. Raj called me tonight and we discussed some measures and targets for ED performance. I will think about this some more but happened to have this data at hand and believe you should see it.

There are some slides. What you see on the first slide is the proportion of Alberta acute in-patient beds used by patients waiting for an alternate level of patient care, otherwise ALC days, from 2006 to 2009. It went from 5 to 5.3 per cent in 2006-07, to 7.1 in 2007-08, to 8.4 in 2008-09. It's going up, not doing down.

Slide number 2, median ALC days per acute care discharge for patients waiting for ALC days. In 2006 it's 11 days; in 2007-08, 16 days; in 2008-09, 16 days. This is factual data.

Proportion of beds used by patients waiting for alternate level of care, acute hospitals only: in Edmonton and Calgary in 2002-03 3.6 per cent of beds were plugged up, and in 2008-09 it's 5.5 per cent; in Edmonton it was 7.2 per cent in 2003 and 7.9 in 2008-09. All going up. As they went up, the emergency department waits went up, and as they went up, people suffered and died in waiting rooms.

The previous Minister of Health and Wellness: much of the information he reiterated on what they were doing is correct. The reason I know that is because I'm the one who advised him and the deputy minister to do what they're doing. You're talking to the guy that actually listened to somebody who actually understands the one thing in this province that we talk about.

A couple of things I do want to take exception with. The system is broken. Well, if Dr. Paul Parks says that it's on the verge of a catastrophic collapse, if that isn't broken, I don't know what is. People are suffering and dying to get into emergency rooms.

Number 2, to legislate all aspects. To be honest, to achieve that wait time for admitted patients, the only way to achieve it is to actually get your hips and your knees and your cataract surgery and your primary care. Every measure feeds into that. I appreciate the minister. He's a wonderful man. The problem is that he's not a

doctor, and he's not a health care professional. In principle, he makes some good points, but he doesn't understand what this measure is all about. You can't achieve this measure without actually fixing every bottleneck in the system.

Number 3, policy and action plan performance measures. The reason I'm asking for it to be legislated: I was going to bring up a private member's bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-West, who was the minister, said: "Don't do that. We'll make a performance measure." When Dr. Duckett came, I thought he was a saviour because by 2012 the performance measure was supposed to be eight hours at the 90th percentile. Somebody moved the goal posts. They moved the goal posts and made it 2015 and lowered it to 60 per cent by 2012, and then they lumped in the 15 busiest sites to average all the data out so that nothing would change.

Mr. Hinman: Was that the Member for Calgary-West?

Dr. Sherman: Well, I don't know. He wasn't the minister at the time it was changed. It was actually changed under this minister, but it was AHS and the bureaucracy that brought these performance measures. I never saw these. I never had any input into these. I was supposed to until I got turfed out.

It's going the wrong way, my friends. Usually the ministers come in just after the election. They wreck health care. Just before the election they fix it up with speeches, and that's what happened. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park: it got wrecked under her. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud before the election fixed it up. The hon. Member for Calgary-West wrecked it after the election.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

This hon. member is communicating the bejesus out of it, trying to salvage it, and God knows what's going to happen after the next election if there is a majority government over there. God bless us all. No amount of communication will solve this problem. All they had on Friday was a meeting. There was just a meeting. The front-line staff don't even know anything about it yet.

Today I called the emergency departments. There's one available bed in Edmonton. One resuscitation bed in all of Edmonton. Every ER department is on yellow alert, and the flu hasn't yet hit.

Danger. What's the danger of passing this? It's actually dangerous if we don't pass this legislation and put teeth to very good principles. I really like the principles in this act, but this is about teeth and accountability, the strongest measures in the nation as the nation watches.

Mr. MacDonald: Tell us about the resuscitation beds.

Dr. Sherman: The resuscitation beds are where the sickest patients go. Today, if there was a multicase incident in Edmonton or northern Alberta and a tractor trailer hit a busload of school kids or an airplane crashed, we are not prepared for a multicase incident. Other members may disagree, but to be honest, if they did, they wouldn't know what the heck they were talking about. This is the one issue that I really know a lot about, that we have debated in this House for years. On this thing – I'm sorry, guys – I know what I'm talking about.

Physician supply. Yes, we have increased physicians. That's fantastic. The problem is that they're all specialists. We don't need any more. They can't find jobs. They're leaving to the U.S. anyway. What we need is family doctors. We've got to stop creating so many specialists. We're training them, but they're

leaving. RNs: yes, we're hiring them. That's fantastic, but we're putting them on acute care. Stop spending money on acute care. It's downstream and upstream. [Dr. Sherman's speaking time expired]

Thank you, and I'll be speaking again on this.

The Chair: According to the list I have, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

5:40

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment to the Alberta Health Act. You know what? I'm not going to drag this out very long. I know there are other people who want to speak to it as well. I just want to say that I fully endorse this amendment. I think that this is an amendment that this House should pass. I think that this amendment speaks to precisely what we need to do to give Bill 17 some teeth, some clout, some ability to actually make some changes. As it stands right now unamended, the bill is very much an act that approaches health care from the 40,000-foot level.

While I can understand some rationale for doing that and for needing that as an overarching piece of legislation, we also need to give some indication that we know how to get health care legislation down from the 40,000-foot level to ground level, where people live and where people get sick and where people end up in the hospital and where people end up blocking beds in acute-care hospitals because they're waiting for long-term beds, where people end up not being able to get the kind of care they need because of all sorts of blockages and shortages and crises in the health care system. I think, Mr. Chair, that it is really important.

Certainly, this is what I'm hearing from my constituents, what I'm hearing from Albertans. They want solutions to our health care crisis. They don't just want nice, well-meaning words and platitudes that say: you know, this is what it should be. They don't particularly care whether they get a charter right now or not. If it's a matter of choosing between getting a charter or getting a doctor or getting a doctor to look at them, they'd far rather have the doc look at them, quite frankly. I think it is really, really important that we turn this legislation from this 40,000-foot statement of principles that it is into something that actually on behalf of the people of Alberta makes a difference to the state of health care in this province right now.

I will be voting in favour of this amendment, and I urge everybody else in the House to do the same. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, it's your turn, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I guess I want to start out by talking to the principle of the amendment that's in front of us. What I really see encompassed in this is the public's frustration over what they see as a lack of accountability. The whole concept of a wait-list, while it may be arbitrary, might be even a somewhat false accounting – and I'm sure there are people that can argue that – it is something that the public can grasp, look at, compare, and make their own decision on.

Based on what has gone on in this province over the last couple of weeks, the reaction I'm getting from my constituents and from others – and I don't know why I get them from others, but I do; I think because I used to be the health critic, and I'm still on people's Rolodex – is that they're really frustrated and bewildered at what is actually going on. What is the real status of stuff? Is it as bad as people say . . .

Dr. Brown: No.

Ms Blakeman: . . . or is that rhetoric? Well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill says no, but then someone on the other side of me is going to say yes. For the public, who are sitting in the middle of all of this, they're just saying: what the heck is going on? They don't trust us anymore, quite frankly, and they don't believe us. They want a measurement by which they can decide whether they think the system is doing well or not. Remember that most people are not in the health care system and, hopefully, never will be, and I hope that on their behalf, too.

I've just read through a stream of blog postings that roll on, and printed out it was – I don't know – 10 pages or something of people commenting on this. There's mostly – I don't want to say ignorance because that sounds mean – a lack of information about how the system actually works. Occasionally there are a few people who kick in there and say: "No, no, no. They use a system called triage, and here's how it works. For anybody who appears in the emergency room, you know, not breathing, bleeding, not conscious, or with chest pains, then they're in." Then you hear from the people who go: "Yes. That's what happened to me. I was in. I had great care. No problem." Car accidents: front of the line; you're in. But then there ends up being this whole long discussion about how intoxicated people who've been let out of the shelters at 8 o'clock in the morning come in to get a bed to sleep off their drunkenness, and somehow they're getting ahead of other people in the line, and you think: really, I find that very hard to believe. But people swear that it's happening.

This is the kind of discussion that's happening out there. There's a lot of – well, in the theatre biz you call it rhubarb. That's what the crowds do because you don't actually want to hear what an extra is saying in the back, so they do the old: peas and carrots, peas and carrots, rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb. That kind of gives a mumble of dialogue that you can't actually catch hold of. That's what people are experiencing when they look at our health care system and go: what is going on here?

What's being offered in the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, certainly, in the (d) section is:

Standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

Very, very specific. Measurable. I think that's what folks are looking for right now: something that's measurable, that's a clear target, that they personally can monitor and report on and, I suppose, would look to the government to enforce.

You know, today we have another example. We've got Dr. Duckett, who was the one everyone loved to hate. The government could point fingers and say: well, you know, the government didn't do that; Dr. Duckett decided to do that. He'd point fingers back. Well, now, Dr. Duckett has been terminated. Fine. So he's out. Now, what does that tell people about whether the system actually worked or not? It creates more chaos, which I was trying to lessen in the system. To be fair, I think the cookie thing was just too far, and people will not accept it. He's lost the credibility of the staff and the front-line workers and the administration in the system and of the public. He can't rebuild that.

I think that's why people are so interested in those wait lists. I note that Alberta never submitted their wait list times to the national program, so when they do the national announcement and we hear how wait times are getting better or worse, then they have to say, "Alberta is not in this" because we never gave our numbers to them. That also puzzles people. If we're doing so great here and we've got such a great made-in-Alberta system, why can't we put our numbers up against the national numbers?

The other thing that really shocked me was watching Alberta Health Services lowering the targets from where they started. The minister says: the target is 95 per cent on this. But if you watch Alberta Health Services, it starts to come down: 85 per cent, 70 per cent, and it's now come down to something really odd like 55 per cent or 40 per cent. Someone will correct me there. So I think that particularly this second section of this amendment is very good and speaks to what people are trying to grasp onto.

I'm interested in writing legislation. I spend a lot of time reading stuff like this, and I take the government's point that you've got to be careful about what you put in legislation because what is done in the Legislature must be undone in the Legislature, or it can only be changed in the Legislature. If you say that your wait time target is X and it's for eight hours and it has to be – let me make some numbers up here – 80 per cent for people discharged on the eight-hour mark and 70 per cent discharged on the four-hour mark, if you want to change that, even to lift it because you're doing so well, the bill has to come back in front of the Legislature. If you're not in the Legislature, then it gets more complicated. So I understand what the government is trying to say about, you know: don't load too much stuff into legislation.

On the other hand, this government loads nothing into legislation. Everything is by regulation. We have had shell bills as long as I've been elected here, and we have very few decisions that are made on this floor.

5:50

Mr. MacDonald: Shell bills: give me an example of one.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, just about everything that's come in here. The bills are two pages long or three pages long, and essentially they say: and the minister can decide what to do in the following circumstances. There's a long list, and then it says: and they can make regulations. That's empowered to the Lieutenant Governor in Council or to the minister. That's it. There's very little that's outlined by the bill itself, including the new Alberta Health Act as another example of a shell bill.

I'm struggling a bit, and I will look to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to explain this one to me. The (c) section of this talks about including as guiding principles that "no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." I'm not understanding what the measurement is there. How am I as a citizen supposed to figure out what an unnecessary death is? Is it any death? Is it a death that happens within a specified period of time? Is a suicide an unnecessary death? That could be interpreted as a moral overlay rather than a physical overlay, so I'm struggling, to be honest, with the first paragraph because I can't figure out what the measurables are there.

What are the targets? How do I measure that as a citizen when I look at, hopefully, numbers that are published by the ER? What do you mean, unnecessary harm to a patient? I'll tell you. You talk to my mother. Sometimes you just get that close to her, you know, like kind of a quarter-inch away from her skin, and she is so unnerved by that that she is really uncomfortable. You think: okay, did I cause her unnecessary pain there by almost touching her? Hmm. I'm really struggling with the lack of definition around the first clause.

You know, unnecessary delays: what the heck is that? If there is a fire alarm and everybody leaves the building and something didn't happen, was that a necessary or an unnecessary delay? I even might want to recommend to the member that he look at severing these two so they could be voted on separately. At the very least, if he would be so kind as to provide me with some measurables on that first paragraph.

A number of other people have spoken very well about all the other things that could be done in the health care system, and I don't need to repeat them. I will talk very briefly about what my seniors most want, and that is very reliable home care that will keep them independent. The subacute is terrific. Everybody talks about great subacute home care. Wonderful. As soon as you're out of the hospital and at home, they'll come and do your bandages and stuff like that. Everybody thinks that's great.

The home care that is provided to seniors or people that are frail or need long-term assistance in their homes to stay independent: not so good. To me, that is an economics question, and I still argue and I think all the backup tells me and others that putting money into home care saves you money with people in hospital.

All the arguments about long-term care beds, real long-term care beds with the meaning of long-term care beds. Half of them are a medical portion. The government pays part of it. There's a certain staff ratio for RNs there and all the rest of that. We need those to continue to be provided by the government as compared to private providers. The government funnelling everyone towards assisted or supported living is just not the same thing, and I'm irritated that the government pretends that it is.

We need to look at palliative care, end-of-life care. It may well be that people would leave hospital if they knew they could go to a palliative care unit. Right now that's darn hard to do, and there are not very many of them.

Again, where are we with training and creating new school spaces for the medical professionals that we do?

The last thing is that the government is very fond, every time somebody says that everybody should have a family doctor, of saying that primary care networks are the fix. No. Primary care networks do not create doctors. It just takes the doctors that we already have and groups them together in one office clinic. So stop using that as an excuse, and deal with the issues around why people won't become GPs, and I think we'd be a little farther ahead there.

Those are the issues that I've heard from my constituents and my reaction, too. In principle I do support the amendment. I certainly have some real serious questions about the first, which is included here as section (c). I know the member plans on speaking again, so I'll read *Hansard* or listen to him about how he can answer that for me about what the measurables are.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a real honour to rise and to speak to amendment A3 on Bill 17. I find it quite amazing that the government has written Bill 17. We've asked for some amendments such as in section 10 to be accountable, and this amendment is about legislating accountability because that's the problem that we're suffering with. The whole reason why Bill 17 was written, in my opinion and that of many people that I talk to, is because of the debacle that our emergency system is in. This government continues to think that if we put out a nice, wordy document and make a bunch of promises, that will please people, and we'll be able to carry on with this failed system, this failing system.

I kind of compare this to an application on a credit report for a mortgage. If you don't have good credit, you have to have collateral. Let's say that if there was a trust report to have to come out on this government's record and its promises and all of the reports, the ER reports for two and a half years that they buried, this government has lost the trust of people.

The former health minister, the Member for Calgary-West, did a great job of undermining, as the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark

has put out several times, saying that this minister came in and wrecked the system. It's amazing to me that tonight another scapegoat has been shot. They brought in an expert from Australia that, to me, reflected the minister's attitude and the way he dealt with people at the time. They just said: you know, if we're in charge, we can do it. I remember the former minister from Calgary-West saying: "You know, what's failed in the past with our health care reforms is that we discussed it with the people. We're just going to ram it through" or words something like that. You know, we're not going to discuss it; we're going to do it.

They did it, and boy, did they ever do it. They rammed it so far through that we're now at the breaking point. We have emergency doctors after two and a half years being told: "If you speak out, you wait and see what we can do to you. Don't speak out." They passed the superboard, made them sign papers saying that health care workers are not to speak out, with their jobs at risk. Then they say: "Oh, no, no. That's a misunderstanding. It's fine to speak out." I'm sorry. That's like the army in some of these Third World countries saying: "Go ahead and speak out. The last two times someone got

shot, it was merely an accident. Don't worry. Go ahead and speak out."

No. The morale in our health care system is undermined because of the former minister, because of Alberta Health Services and the dictates that they put out that said: "You do this or else. If you don't do this, you watch what we can do to your system. We can fire a thousand nurses. We can shut down the amount of doctors that are coming in." They've been doing that, Mr. Chair.

The reason why the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark wants this legislated is because this government has no trust report anymore. When you get to that point, you don't do a deal on a handshake. You don't do a deal on a wonderful, wordy piece of paper saying: oh, I promise all these things now. No. You have to actually have a contract. You actually have to have legislation.

The Chair: Hon. member, it's 6 o'clock. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) the Committee of the Whole is recessed until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Third Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),

Official Opposition Deputy Whip

Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)

Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)

Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),

Deputy Government House Leader

Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),

Deputy Government House Leader

Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)

Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)

Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)

Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)

Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (Ind)

Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)

Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)

Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),

Leader of the Official Opposition

Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)

Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)

Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (Ind)

VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)

Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)

Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)

Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)

Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)

Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),

Deputy Government House Leader

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Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services

Law Clerk/Director of

Interparliamentary Relations

Senior Parliamentary Counsel/

Clerk of Committees

W.J. David McNeil

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Robert H. Reynolds, QC

Shannon Dean

Clerk of *Journals*/Table Research

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Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Managing Editor of *Alberta Hansard*

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Brian G. Hodgson

Chris Caughell

Gordon H. Munk

Liz Sim

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 67

Alberta Liberal: 8

Wildrose Alliance: 4

New Democrat: 2

Independent: 2

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David Hancock	Minister of Education, Political Minister for Edmonton
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Mel Knight	Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Alison Redford	Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for Calgary
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Mary Anne Jablonski	Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Lindsay Blackett	Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
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Len Webber	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
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Groeneveld
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Quest

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Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 24, 2010

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Deputy Chair: I would like to recognize the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you had a question?

Mr. Hinman: A point of clarification. I thought that I was speaking and that when we adjourned to come back, I'd be able to continue speaking.

The Deputy Chair: We're in committee, and we're going back and forth. I'm sure that you'll have ample time to speak.

Bill 28 Electoral Divisions Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? We are speaking to amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we were last engaged in this debate, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie moved amendment A1. That amendment was with respect to the naming of an electoral division. It was to change the name of the electoral division currently named Dunvegan-Central Peace to Dunvegan-Notley. I would like to move a subamendment to that amendment, and that subamendment would be that the amendment to Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, be amended by striking out "Dunvegan-Notley" and substituting "Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley."

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Hon. members, we'll wait till the amendment is passed out.

Hon. Government House Leader, do you wish to speak?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment was put forward the other night specifically to recognize the former Leader of the Official Opposition, who died in a plane crash while a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

While there have been a number of concerns raised about naming ridings after political figures, it's quite rightly been pointed out that there isn't a naming policy in place. It's hard to refute the comments put forward. I have spoken to the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace. There were in this case a number of recommendations, as was pointed out, made to the commission. There's probably good

rationale to say that we should not move forward with the amendment, but it's a difficult situation to deal with without a naming policy in place.

In any event, I believe I have the support of the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace and would ask for support of the others to put Central Peace back into the name. The rationale for this is that, actually, Mr. Notley represented the riding of Spirit River-Fairview. Later the name was changed to Dunvegan. Dunvegan was not particularly descriptive of location, so it was confusing to people as to where the Dunvegan riding was.

Those of us who grew up in the Peace Country know all about Dunvegan and the Dunvegan bridge, but others were not so familiar with that. In previous redistributions the name Central Peace was added, so instead of Spirit River-Fairview or Dunvegan it became Dunvegan-Central Peace. That lets people know where the constituency is. That name is very important in the opinion, I think, of the member, but in many people's opinions it's important to have location in there.

In an urban riding it's one thing to say Edmonton-McClung or Edmonton with the name added to it, but in a rural area you need the descriptive. While I can appreciate the hon. member's reasons for bringing forward the name Notley, we do need the name Central Peace in there.

My subamendment is to put it back into the name so that it's Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. I would ask members of the House to support it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the Government House Leader's subamendment to my amendment to Bill 28. I fully accept the Government House Leader's explanation for his amendment and the rationale for it and am pleased to support it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I just wanted to get on the record, Mr. Chairman, that I support this subamendment. The original amendment as well is well intentioned. Clearly, we have an individual who as a former member of this House has made a significant contribution to this province. He died tragically in 1984, and ironically I actually had the chance to be taught political science by his former chief of staff.

This is something that we should do in honour of Mr. Notley's memory, and I encourage all members to support this subamendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Delighted to be able to stand up and support this subamendment. I guess I would have liked to have dropped the Dunvegan and just had the two names. However, we'll take what we get.

I certainly was fortunate enough to actually have met Mr. Notley, and I sat right up there in the very first row right in the middle, looking down. It was a number of years ago. I wasn't quite as young as I'd like to let you believe I was. It was a thrill to watch him in action. He certainly was a class act. I did have the opportunity to meet him later at a little bit of a party.

I'm delighted with this. I think that perhaps in time all of our ridings would be named for Albertans that deserve that recognition.

With that, thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will say that the amendment that's put forward is something that this Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo can support without question. I am very proud to sit in front of the member behind me, who, of course, is the daughter of the member named in the proposed amendment. From everything I have heard in my over 12 years on that side of the House and eight as a cabinet minister and the last year as an independent and now as a member of the Wildrose, I have never heard anyone across Alberta speak in any way, shape, or form in a negative way about the member that this amendment is intending to honour. Obviously, what took place was clearly a tragedy.

I will say that as I drive across the High Level Bridge on occasion, there is a park that the city of Edmonton had recognized in his honour. On this amendment, I believe it is another reflection of the people of Edmonton in terms of the role that Mr. Notley played in this province. I rise tonight to say that I without question can support this amendment, and not only that, even more appropriately, I congratulate the city of Edmonton and the council for their vision way back when they decided to take the initiative to name a park after him, Notley park, which you may be aware is just opposite, on the right-hand side, going across the High Level Bridge.

7:40

This amendment will, again, honour someone that was without question viewed as a statesman, a gentleman that was viewed as an honourable MLA and, most importantly on this amendment, was recognized as a wonderful Albertan. No matter what political party or stripe that we all represent, I can only say that the respect that Albertans have for what is intended in this amendment, I think, is unquestionable. Therefore, tonight I say that this amendment is one that I can support, and I look forward to continuing on speaking about this.

When my dad died, I started to reflect on the historical notion of representing and honouring an MLA that tragically, of course, lost his life at such an early age and clearly was at his prime. I mean, who knows? Perhaps this person could have become a Premier of Alberta. The values that that person brought to this Assembly, the respect that he had for others, the commitment he had to his constituents in representing northwestern Alberta are substantial, and I am quite certain that the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, clearly, as a minister of the Crown would agree. We may not agree with the politics, but we do agree with the principles that this hon. member had brought to this House at a very exciting time in Alberta.

I might say that this amendment is timely because once again it is a very exciting time in Alberta. There's the smell of change in the air, and that's exciting, very exciting. What that change will mean and what that change will entail in the months and the weeks ahead, only time will tell.

It appears to me that as I look around this Assembly tonight on this amendment, it's also equally important to recognize that a particular table officer actually is getting ready to retire. The relevance is that she sat in this Assembly and would have seen the hon. member that we're planning in this amendment to honour. What an honour for her and an honour for us to say thank you. So to Louise I say: thank you for all of your work and time, and congratulations in seeing so much change across Alberta, especially when Mr. Notley served as the leader of the New Democratic Party in this Assembly.

I was looking at the number of seats that the New Democrats had

historically. I do know that the daughter of the leader is very proud – very proud – and I might say that she is honoured. Of course, being of the stature that she is, she does not want to participate in this amendment so that it's not viewed as a pecuniary interest in light of the fact that it's her dad. I think it provides an opportunity for each and every one of us in this Assembly to speak about her dad in this amendment.

To the Government House Leader, through the chair, I want to say that this amendment is without question a noble one. It is one that I think clearly reflects the spirit of good work by an MLA who was so suddenly taken from us in the '80s. I can support the amendment under Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, moving to strike out the name "Dunvegan-Notley" and substitute "Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley". I think that Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley really reflects the geography and the spirit of that northwestern part of Alberta.

I know the citizens in that area are, in fact, very proud to have a member in that area today, who – of course, the riding is changing somewhat, but I think that the members in that area have been served well no matter what political party that they represent. Certainly, one of the underlying foundations and principles is that they were men of principle and values that represent the principles and values that they represent. Clearly, they hadn't forgotten who their bosses were. The hon. member who takes that seat today or the majority of that riding, I know, hasn't forgotten that as well, and I recognize that.

This amendment under the Electoral Divisions Act is one that I can support because Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley is something that I believe is honouring the past, the present, and also the future, the future in terms of recognizing the name of a leader of the New Democrats, recognizing the father of a member who sits in this Assembly today in a different region, but also representing the value of the very bosses and constituents that elect the member that sits in that particular riding and that area and constituency. For that, Mr. Chairman, I believe that this is noble. I think it is something that has been long coming, and it provides an opportunity, to the notice of subamendment.

Now, in fact, my understanding is that this is a subamendment, so this subamendment, I believe, is one that is important and also, I might add, reflective of the change that is taking place around our province. Back then there were just under 2 million people in the province of Alberta. Now, of course, we near 3.5 million people; 1.5 million people have since come to this province. I am one of those people, almost 35 years ago coming to Alberta and to the electoral division that I represent, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, but no different than others who come from far away, from other parts of Canada. This subamendment, clearly, under Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, is something that is important, something that is representative but also, what's even more important, represents the values and the spirit of Mr. Notley, who was then the leader of the New Democratic Party and served the people of all Alberta in a very respectful, statesmanlike, and positive manner.

He also spoke not just as a critic or opposition. It was really an important value. He talked about the future. Being able to talk about the future is where my head is, not criticizing but actually talking about the future, talking about a better Alberta, talking about Alberta being a better place to live and raise a family. As a father with a three-year-old I think it's only natural that you think of the future because it's not only about today; it is about tomorrow and what we do in making Alberta an even better place to live, play, and raise a family.

I believe that the Electoral Divisions Act is one that is appropriate. I believe that the notice of subamendment is reflective of the respect that we have for the leader of the then New Democratic Party, Mr.

Notley. When I sat on the other side and when I sat on the other side as a cabinet minister for almost eight years, I remember some of the more elder statesmen on that side of the House, who had served when Mr. Notley was the leader, spoke very kindly about him. That's from all parties: from the PCs, from the Liberals. That, I think, really is a testament to the person in terms of this name honouring the commitment that he made to Albertans and the commitment that he made to his constituents.

He did not serve just the people of Dunvegan and the Central Peace; he served all Albertans because he was the Official Opposition leader. It was at the time when the New Democrats had just under 20 members in this Assembly. It was certainly a time of change, and I think it's only reflective that that time of change is upon us again.

Mr. Chairman, I can stand today and be able to speak towards that, and I'm quite certain the Member for Calgary-Glenmore is quite prepared to stand and speak on this important subamendment regarding the Electoral Divisions Act. I'll add, of course, comments regarding the Electoral Divisions Act in terms of the number of MLAs and so on and so forth because between that and the subamendment, obviously, there may be some disharmony.

7:50

In terms of the name Dunvegan-Notley and it being substituted with Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, it is showing respect to a gentleman and a leader who had committed his time. We are so sorry, of course, for what happened at a point in time in his life that took him away from us in terms of the active debate that he offered and contributed to this Assembly.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and allow other members to speak about this subamendment and the importance of it in honouring a very, very good Albertan in terms of the family and what they have done in contributing to a better Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on the subamendment.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure to speak on the subamendment brought forward by the House leader, amending it by striking out "Dunvegan-Notley" and substituting "Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley." As we all know, Mr. Grant Notley was a great, honourable man, and he made a great contribution to Alberta. His integrity and his commitment for the betterment of Albertans was unquestionable, and he died doing what he loved best, politics. Every time I remember him, you know, tears kind of start to roll down my eyes.

I followed him quite a lot back then. He was one man who was holding the government accountable. It is a great honour for Mr. Notley to keep his memory alive, and all the coming generations will also keep taking guidance from the role he played in Alberta politics and the contribution he made. It shows a great respect for the true Albertan he was.

Mr. Chair, he made a great contribution, as I said. Who knows how our politics might have been if Mr. Notley was around? There was, I think, the best Premier Alberta couldn't have because he left us for a heavenly abode at such a young age.

This will be a great honour. It shows great respect for a gentleman who gave lots to Alberta, and I will be wholeheartedly supporting this amendment, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the subamendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to speak and address this subamendment to change the Electoral Divisions Act from "Dunvegan-Notley," substituting "Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley." I'm just trying to do a little bit of quick research here, and I believe one member said that he actually represented the area of Spirit River-Fairview, an area that I'm quite fond of and have actually gone up there many times to visit and one of the ones, I guess, that's blessed to understand what the Dunvegan bridge is and how important that bridge is in that area.

Mr. Goudreau: It's not the bridge; it's the community.

Mr. Hinman: Well, but we still have the Dunvegan bridge, which is left over and, like I say, is very significant for those people who live north of the river. That's their access across, and they've struggled for a long time trying to get a second bridge in there, so I think it's appropriate that we keep the name Dunvegan. Those people who travel north from Grande Prairie and cross the Dunvegan bridge are aware of it and the number of times that it's reduced to one-way traffic and the frustration that it can cause.

Grant Notley certainly was an incredible individual who had the tenacity to work hard in opposition. I think that he was one of those individuals who stood strong against many who were trying to speak against him.

I just want to do a little vignette here. The 20th Legislature, 1982 to 1986, was unique. It had a four-member opposition, two New Democrats and two independents. The two independents joined forces and then vied for Official Opposition status, which brought extra funding and privileges. That still goes on today, Mr. Chair. They tried to reach the four. It's interesting there, you know, that it's that position of official status to bring extra funding. After hearing arguments from both sides, Speaker Gerard Amerongen chose the New Democrats under Grant Notley, and the party remained the Official Opposition until the 1993 election.

I think that he's quite a remarkable individual who definitely worked very hard for the area of Central Peace. I think that it's fitting to put his name on there as we have so many other areas – Edmonton-Manning, to name one – as a former leader of a party. I'm pleased to rise and to recognize the late Grant Notley and the work that he did for the Legislature and the people of the Central Peace area. I think this is quite a fitting area to call after an individual who spent so much of his time and was so dedicated to the democratic process and wanting to see change here in Alberta.

I speak in favour of this subamendment to the amendment. I think, once again, like I say, that we're remembering the historical realities of the different regions of this country, this province, and the great people that were willing to serve. I wanted to look up a little bit more information – and perhaps someone else can comment on this – but I'm just not sure whether he was on official duty when the plane went down, what he was doing. Anyway, it would be interesting to have a little bit more vignette on what happened and what transpired there and a few more of the things that they know from some of the people that knew Mr. Notley personally. I was hoping to hear from some other members. We'll see if they stand up to speak.

With that, I'll sit down in favour of this subamendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the subamendment?

I will call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Before we move on, hon. members, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's really an honour for me to be able to introduce to you and to all members here a number of guests. First of all, my son Wayne Prins – he's from Fort McMurray – is now the prairies director for the Christian Labour Association of Canada. With him are some of his co-workers: Don Geiger, Dan Dykstra, Dennis Perrin, and Nathan Matthews from Vancouver. Seated with them is Renée Reitsma, the legislative assistant for the hon. members from Red Deer-South and Grande Prairie-Wapiti. The Christian Labour Association of Canada now represents probably 50 per cent or more of all the construction workers in the Fort McMurray oil patch. I'd like to have them stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Bill 28 Electoral Divisions Act (continued)

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we're back to amendment A1 as amended. Does anyone wish to speak to the amendment as amended?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 as amended carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back to Bill 28 as amended. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to make a few comments with regard to Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. In speaking to it, I'd like to compliment the Electoral Boundaries Commission on something they did that I think was fairly unique. As you will recall, in previous electoral divisions acts there is a very short act with about 40 pages of metes and bounds descriptions. I think this Electoral Boundaries Commission has recognized how cumbersome metes and bounds descriptions are, how archaic they are, how the layman really cannot follow them, and they've come up with an innovative section with a map. I believe the map is on electronic disc. It may even be a first in legislative history. I don't know that, but I'm suspecting it may certainly be a first.

8:00

As we all know, a picture is worth a thousand words, and a map portrays boundaries very well. It can be blown up and provide details to show the intricate locations of the boundaries. Electoral boundaries aren't something that need to be defined by a real fine line. Usually they go down a centre of a road allowance or something of that nature. I really want to compliment the Electoral Boundaries Commission for coming up with something that is a 21st century solution, getting rid of those archaic metes and bounds descriptions, which I'm sure very few people read and even less understand.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I haven't had a chance to speak to this piece of legislation yet, and it's fundamental to how we operate in here, so I thought I'd better take the opportunity before it's voted through. I want to get it on the record that I don't believe that we need to increase the number of MLAs. In fact, if I were inclined to lean one way, I'd lean to reducing the number of MLAs. But that's not what's happening in this bill. We're adding four more.

There are a number of reasons not to keep adding, the least of which is that there's not enough room in this Chamber to keep adding many more. But, far more importantly, I just think that we sometimes have too many elected officials at the provincial level in Alberta. One of the things that I think happens, especially in a province that's inclined to give governments huge majorities, is that the government ends up creating, as it were, make-work projects for MLAs to keep them busy. I think sometimes that leads to, frankly, too much government or to misguided government. I think we could run this province quite well, probably, with 65 MLAs or something like that. I wanted to get it on the record that I am not pleased that this bill is getting pushed through with 87 MLAs.

I also wanted to get on the record that I do appreciate that my constituency survived this legislation because I think it was a pretty close thing. I argued and I believe fundamentally that Edmonton-Riverview is a coherent, cohesive, sensible constituency and that . . .

Mr. Hancock: Are you talking about the member or the constituency?

Dr. Taft: Well, I'm not so sure the member is all those things, but the constituency at least is.

If you look at the two sides of the river in Edmonton-Riverview, they are mirror images, in effect. You have very wealthy neighbourhoods on each side lining the top of the river valley. You have solid middle-income neighbourhoods on each side of the river valley, all built in the 1950s, and frankly you have some pockets of fairly transient, lower income neighbourhoods on each side of the valley. Those two mirror images, those two halves of that whole, mean that those people have more in common with each other than they do with people who live out further from the centre of the city. The people living on the south side of the river valley along the top of the river bank, for example, have more in common with those who they can see across the river valley than they do with people way out in the suburbs.

I know that there were concerns for the way the boundary was drawn for the Member for Edmonton-McClung, and frankly the way it ended up I can see why he's concerned. It didn't have to end up that way, but that was not my decision. I do want to express the position that I think it's a good thing that Edmonton-Riverview survived as a constituency.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Back to Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, I too would like to stand and voice my thoughts that 87 MLAs were not needed. We've expanded this. Again, it's a cost that's going to be incurred by the taxpayers. But your question is: is the efficiency of this improving? What are we really going to achieve by expanding from 83 to 87 MLAs? I think that this is an area where we really need to take two steps back. This is another case of the government bringing forward a bill that, I think, is poorly thought out and is just looking at a simple solution.

As was mentioned earlier, this building definitely has limited size. I think that the original Parliament did quite well to build this and to

view the first hundred years and to be able to fit in 83 MLAs. Now we're asking them to look for the next hundred years if we're going to keep growing this way and into this new 21st century. I think we had a great opportunity here to look at what the vision is for the next hundred years. What's the democratic process? What are the electoral boundaries actually going to be in the next hundred years? How are we going to do this process?

I think that we should have perhaps struck up a committee that actually would have asked that question and talked to Albertans on how they wanted to go forward. Instead, this government just took the lackadaisical, simple thing that, "Oh, well, we do well in these areas. Let's just put in a few more MLAs and be able to balance it out with our current system," to be able to say: "There. We've addressed the concerns of those individuals that are now representing more people outside of the boundary of the plus or minus 25 per cent of the means in more than five ridings in the province."

Right now, I believe, the number is five; five ridings can be outside the plus or minus 25 per cent of the mean number that's determined, and from there we're going to divide up areas. When they put this together, even on those grounds, did they really think of, you know, the perception on where the growth is coming from in the next 10 years? I even have to question: on those areas where they put in the extra MLAs, did they really address the growth areas, in Fort McMurray, in Airdrie, in south Calgary, in northwest Calgary? Where's the geographical and population growth going to go? Whereabouts are those suburbs that have already been given the go-ahead by the developers? I don't think that there was a lot of thought going forward so much as to: how do we take a snapshot today and realign these boundaries so it meets the current legislation that we have on how to determine these boundaries?

I was also somewhat disappointed with the government's intervention, I'll call it, the presentation that they made afterwards, much like today. Do we have an Alberta Health Services or a health minister that runs the province? The health minister and the Premier were asked this evening – and I'll show the relevance in a minute here because the same process went through for the Electoral Divisions Act, where the Deputy Premier stepped in and made a presentation. But the Premier and the health minister made some fairly strong remarks about our president and CEO of Alberta Health Services, and not 48 hours later this individual has been dismissed.

I think the same thing happened here. The deputy minister went before this supposed committee and made the recommendations, and those recommendations, if people don't realize that – I don't know if the proper word is "intimidating." They just know that: oh, this is coming from the Deputy Premier, which is obviously coming from the Premier's office, so maybe we'd better look at that. It just strikes me, the changes even in Calgary-Glenmore that were revised. Macleod Trail is a very natural geographical boundary, and the problems or, I guess, the struggles on commuting are very different on one side versus the other of wanting the southwest ring road. It seems like there were two communities, Southwood and Lakeview, that the gerrymandering went on to adjust and change the way the communities were functioning as a whole or the cohesive value of those communities.

8:10

I think that, like I say, people that looked at it that live in those areas approached me and said – I don't know; can you use your own name? – "Paul, why did they change these boundaries?" I had to say, "Well, you know, the government is in that position. They appointed the majority of that panel. I think there's a lot of weight in those decisions."

I think this is another case, Mr. Chair, where the government puts out the words and says: "Well, we're putting up this nonpartisan committee. They're going to study it. Here are the parameters that we want you to use." Then they go forward where, really, what it should have done was start off with a committee to say: "You know, we've gone a hundred years; we need another hundred years. Things have changed. We have the electronic world now." It's quite interesting when you're a shareholder of a company how easy it is to vote, and they can tally up those votes and know whether the shareholders agree or disagree with the motions that that board is presenting.

I've talked to a fair number of individuals about democratic reform, asking them, you know: how do you think we could change things so that we have better representation, where people feel that they have actual input, that they can say, "Well, you know, it makes a difference if I vote"? I think I can almost say that the majority of Albertans, when it comes to provincial elections, feel like it doesn't make a difference, and they don't get out and vote. Over the last 20 years we've seen a continual decline in the number of people that have been willing to come out and vote. Some people give one reason, and the other ones give another one. To me the reason that I have found, talking to people at the doors, talking to people that have run in the past, doing those things, they say: you know, it really doesn't make a difference how I vote because it's just an impact that's going to happen, and once you people get in, it's going to be all the same.

An accountability that we released today at the Wildrose caucus talked very much about that, and we talked about such important things as recall, so when someone gets in, they're not just stuck in there for four or five years and there's nothing that the people can do.

I want to go back and talk a little bit more about what we could have done had we struck up a committee to say: let's study the electoral boundaries and see if there's a better way that we can represent Albertans and try to engage them in the democratic process. I want to refer back, as I mentioned, to electronic balloting, that I believe my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo – what was the number of people that you were representing?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: I apologize. I just didn't have time to do all the research. We're limited, as you know, Mr. Chair, on the research money we have in our small little group, so sometimes just to add efficiency we can ask a question and not get too much heckling going.

It's a hundred thousand that this member represented and currently represents in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo area. Having that many people to represent, yet I know there are other people in this – and perhaps the chair would want to enlighten me how many he represents. I know that his is one of the more less dense areas. Maybe I'm incorrect on this, but some of them are as low as 17,000 in the north area, and in the south there are some areas that don't represent that many. Yet we say: oh, no; it's one citizen, one vote, and we're represented the same. There are many people that went to this boundary commission and said: "Well, my MLA actually only has a vote of 1.7," or "Mine has 2.1," or whatever the number the ratio is because of how many people that actually live in his riding. We did very little to actually address that and look at, you know, how many people are there.

Again, we went with the simple solution that we'll just grow the number rather than say: is there a way to redistribute it and at least keep the same number? I, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Riverview, believe that we could reduce it greatly. I look at the number of aldermen in Calgary and Edmonton, far fewer representing the city at the local level, which really is the government of those cities, yet they run efficiently and effectively with a much reduced number.

I think that it could even possibly be such that if we were to align the provincial boundaries with the aldermanic boundaries, there could be some efficiencies in representing those same areas, where those concerns would actually double up and be of more value, whereas when it's dissected the way it is, the alderman in my area does not represent all of my area. My area is much smaller, but it's still dissected, so I don't know that we look at the overlapping.

This is another problem as we go forward. Even today the one member mentioned and was upset, you know, with the provincial government and the federal government: did they do enough work to lobby for the world Expo? I think that perhaps the most important thing that we could do as elected representatives is to have a much better working relationship with the three levels of government. We have a lot of people that really struggle: "Well, this is municipal. No, that's provincial. No, it's federal." They really struggle with that. I think everybody in here agrees. They go back and say: well, there's only one taxpayer.

To me it should actually be: there's only one government. It has been divided into three levels of government. Right now we have three levels of government, all competing for one taxpayer. Each one has its little jurisdiction where it can tax and put that tax burden on the people. The next government says: well, I want more, so I'll take it. Then the third level says, "Well, we need more," so they'll increase taxes. We're losing the Alberta advantage because of this competitiveness between governments, taking the tax dollars and then trying to influence areas by redistributing those tax dollars.

We have a lot of interference from the provincial and federal levels in municipal politics. There was a question today saying that we need better, stable funding for the AUMA. I agree with that question. I believe it was the Premier who got up and said: oh, we've got the best funding anywhere. It's very, very partisan in the way that money is distributed to these municipal governments. They're very frustrated with the process that they have to go through to apply for money from the provincial and federal governments. There are some small towns that literally can't afford to hire the PR people to study all of the various programs that the government has and try and apply for money.

It's interesting. I was talking with one mayor, and he said, "Well, you know, Paul, we spend . . ." – and I regret that I can't remember the percentage of his budget, but it was significant – ". . . on applications to get funding at the provincial and federal levels." He said: "You know, it's funny. On average we get between \$30 million and \$33 million a year through our applications."

It would just be so much easier if that was assured and they got rid of all of the applications and looked at the different municipalities and said, "This is how much money you're going to get; these are your areas of responsibility: garbage collection, street paving, snow removal." They would have that money, and then they would know. But when they have to rely on applications, it's very difficult.

This government has talked over and over again about how one of their saving arrows for health care is that, wow, we've come up with this new concept of five years of budgeting for health care. They say: oh, now we can do it. To loop that back to the electoral boundaries act, these individuals do not have that stable funding. With our process that we've put in, they don't. I see the chair's eyebrows raising there, so I guess I need to explain that better. Obviously, his area is getting lots of funding, and that's great. That's what these areas talk about. If they've got good political

connections, there's usually no trouble in the grant applications, and they get it. But if you're an area where there's an opposition member, you might be struggling because they don't have that ear of the minister, and they're not even kept in the loop on the priority list that this government has on where the money is going and how much. It's one of those things that we in opposition have always known, but we haven't been on the inside. I'm grateful for my new colleagues. Now, they can just stand up and say: "Well, no, this is the process. This is where it's at."

8:20

The first time I was elected, I was shocked at how many of these small-town mayors came up and asked: you know, with your \$120,000 that's for you to distribute, where are we on your list? They started lobbying me. I went to the now Minister of SRD, and I said, "Where do I get this?" He said – and the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is chuckling – "Oh, no, there isn't any for you. This is just for government members. It doesn't exist the way you've been told." I said, "Well, why would all of these individuals come and ask me?" The previous MLA for Cardston-Taber-Warner worked with them and was lobbied and told them: I can get you this and get you that. So we have a disconnect. We don't have a great electoral system that allows for the municipal governments to be connected to the province and know what their funding is. I really think that we made a mistake in just realigning the Electoral Divisions Act when what we should have been doing was realigning the whole process on how we decided we were going to make the new electoral boundaries.

The biggest and most important question should have been: how many MLAs do we need? What should we be going to in the next election? You know, should it be 83? Should it be 63? I want to talk about what some of the people that I visited with on this said. Again, going back to the electronic voting that we have in corporations and in many other areas, if we were to take an area – and let's just say Calgary – and reduce it to 12 MLAs, then I would roughly be like my hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and might have 80,000 or 90,000 constituents there, and I think that that's doable in these cities. They can represent that.

I know in the rural area it's a real struggle to get around to seven and nine small towns and to represent them. We need to look at: how do we balance that off? Do we continue to have small numbers so that rural areas don't have to keep expanding their boundaries and making it tougher and tougher for the MLA to get around and to allow the MLA to represent so many small towns and jurisdictions? They're already stretched and running off their feet in trying to run around and do all those things. I mean, imagine the first time that you have the 11th of November Remembrance Day come around, and seven towns ask you: would you please be there for our ceremonies? It's not doable, but in the cities it's very doable. We can have multiple representatives there.

How are we going to fix this problem of an MLA with not too many people but a huge area and many towns and villages that want them there for their different functions and those in a big area? I believe that the area that we should be pursuing and looking at is electronic voting. If we were to actually represent – I'm talking electronic voting for MLAs, not for the electorate. Like I say, I might represent Calgary-Lougheed, and Calgary-Glenmore would be combined into one. There are 80,000 people there. Let's say that 50 per cent came out and that 40,000 people actually voted in that election. That could be one way that the MLAs in here represent the number of people that actually voted in their jurisdiction. You take Lethbridge-East. Perhaps 27,000 would come out and vote there, a very high percentage in turnout because they're so impressed with

their MLA and the dedication and the hard work that she does, and they want to support her.

More importantly, if we were actually to do that, then people would say: "You know what? I need to go out and vote because I want my MLA to have a strong vote."

The Deputy Chair: On the bill as amended, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, one thing about this party on this bill is that we may not always agree because we believe in free votes. Not only do we believe; we practise. Talk is cheap; action is more accountable.

With that, I want to say tonight that, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore had indicated earlier, for the last 14 years almost I have represented our population. At one point our population, the electorate, was just actually around 50,000, which I think was just slightly above what the average was. As we all know and as we've heard in this House, my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is the oil sands capital of the world, which I will never apologize for because I'm very, very proud of the contribution that my constituency makes to this very province. I'm quite certain the minister of finance and the Treasury Board president would clearly recognize the dollars that they receive from my community in the royalties that are paid as contributing to the wealth of that. [A timer sounded] I don't know what that was, but I don't think that was your bell, was it, Mr. Chairman?

The Deputy Chair: That was wrong. Carry on.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. Thank you. I thought someone was wanting me to sit down, and I know you love to hear me speak.

With that, I want to just say, Mr. Chairman, that my community has grown from when I had the honour and privilege of being mayor, where it was just over 55,000. It grew over the next five years after the generic fiscal regime under the electoral boundaries, where it grew to then 70,000. That in itself was a small city, just larger than Fort Saskatchewan, that was added to my constituency. I continued to serve them as their MLA and actually was very proud of the fact that I won every poll in the 77 polls that were in that constituency, and it remains an honour and a privilege to serve all of those polls.

Then we went after the generic fiscal regime, which saw a development where we expected \$20 billion of investment in oil sands over the next 20 years. Well, for those of you that sat in this House during that time, the \$20 billion, in fact, went from \$20 billion to almost \$120 billion. In my electoral division of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo that \$120 billion of investment had an impact of people pertaining to the electoral boundaries, going from then 50,000 to 70,000 to 75,000 to 80,000 to 85,000 to 90,000, from 90,000 to 100,000. Presently, according to city council and the mayor, we are now at 104,000 people.

It is the largest geographical constituency of the entire electoral boundaries in Alberta. I don't know if you knew that, Mr. Chair. In actual fact, my riding spans 68,000 square kilometres. I'm very proud to have played an important role, as the first mayor of Wood Buffalo, to amalgamate 13 communities into one. The purpose behind that was that as the oil sands were growing and more people were coming to the electoral division that I had . . . [interjection] The hon. member obviously doesn't know that I have the floor at this time, so maybe we can wait for his imparted wisdom at another time.

Mr. Chair, I was somewhat distracted, but I'll continue on with the important points and the important notes that I have. [interjections] I want to say that I think it's really important that tomorrow I go and get a haircut. You know, every once in a while everyone should get a haircut.

Having said that, Mr. Chair, I want to say that the fact that we've gone from 50,000 to 55,000 to 60,000 to 65,000 to 70,000 to 75,000 to 80,000 to 85,000 to 90,000 in the electoral division – here we remain at 104,000 people. Now, that's a large number for some to understand, but that's what it is. Per citizen those 104,000 contribute more to this Assembly than anywhere else, based on the royalties that are collected in the oil sands capital of the world. You know, the hon. member can roll his eyes, which he is choosing to do, but he might pay attention to the fact that apparently his Premier actually enjoys the oil sands and defending them. Yet, unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, for my citizens in the electoral district he threw the oil sands under the bus a few weeks ago with some dead ducks. Unfortunately, you know, the only person that didn't – I can't believe it – was the Minister of Energy, but the Premier and the Minister of Environment did, which is really ironic. The irony of that is absolutely incredible: purporting to support the oil sands but throwing it under the bus because we want to get the answers.

8:30

Mr. Chairman, for the 103,000 people that I represent, this Electoral Divisions Act really plays an important role for our future. Let me say that under Bill 28 I have mixed feelings relative to the issue of splitting the riding into two. I have already decided in terms of if this Assembly passes the two ridings, which on average would be 51,000 each, which I think is still above the average for what an electoral district would represent – I guess it basically means that for the last 14 years I've been doing the job of two MLAs and very proud of doing that.

Clearly, it's been an honour and a privilege to be rewarded on four occasions during elections and every time with the popular support going up. I know the hon. Speaker from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, I understand, continues to increase his majority when it comes to votes, and I'm proud to say that following in that way is something that I think speaks to the approval rating of your public. I've never forgotten who my bosses are. My bosses are not some person who has a fancy title such as honourable or minister or Premier. It actually is the people that give me my job. They're my bosses, and I have never forgotten that. [interjection] I see that the minister of finance has woken up, Mr. Chair, the hon. professor, as he was once called.

I find it interesting that the 103,000 people in my electoral district – the minister of finance should be smiling because per capita, per citizen, my citizens contribute more to the royalties of this province, that the minister of finance is supposed to steward. Rather than being a fiscal hawk, that I considered supporting as the potential leader and Premier of this province, he ended up to be a mallard. So I'll have to determine what that means.

Mr. Chair, we understand that there are many who want to move on to Bill 17, but before we do, I just want to conclude. In terms of concluding, I want to say that I'm proud to represent, hopefully, God willing – with my family I'm looking forward to reoffering in the next election. This seat now will be split, as proposed, from one into two. It's been an honour to serve 103,000 people. I never thought of it ever as work because when you do something you love, it is truly an honour and a privilege.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, the oil sands capital of the world will continue to have as its slogan, you know, We Have the Energy, capturing the spirit of who we are, what we do, and how we do it.

Mr. Chair, at this point, it's so important to move on to Bill 17. Therefore, I would move that we adjourn debate. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:35 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Pastoor
Boutilier	Kang	Sherman
Forsyth	Mason	Taft

Against the motion:

Ady	Drysdale	Morton
Allred	Goudreau	Sandhu
Benito	Hayden	Sarich
Bhullar	Johnson	Snelgrove
Brown	Johnston	Tarchuk
Dallas	Klimchuk	Webber
Denis	Lukaszuk	Woo-Paw
Doerksen	Marz	

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 23
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[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, as amended. Does any member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm thrilled to be able to get up and to continue talking about that. I couldn't believe how fast 20 minutes went by last time. I look forward to the hon. members across the floor who obviously want to participate in this debate as they all stood up. They even went to a division to let us know how badly they want to speak about this Electoral Divisions Act. That is exciting to me. It's going to be a fun night. We're going to talk about electoral divisions and we're going to have a committee here tonight to discuss how we could possibly change the Electoral Divisions Act. Maybe tonight, in the next 12 hours, we can look at that and realize that there are a lot of great ideas. I'm invigorated to think that there are so many government members that want to talk on this bill that they did not want to adjourn. That's exciting.

I want to continue from where I left off, talking about electronic voting of MLAs and how we could represent more people more efficiently and better if we were to switch to a process like that. To continue, Mr. Chair, what we need to do and look at and discuss – and like I say, I'm excited tonight that we get to do that. If we were to elect some individual, and let's say Calgary-Glenmore was to merge with Calgary-Lougheed and we had 20,000 houses with maybe 80,000 individuals and 50 per cent came out and voted and we had 41,000 individuals who voted, then what we could do is spend some of that billion dollars that they spent on IT for health care and upgrade in here.

So I as a member would vote on a bill, and there was 41,000 people who voted in Calgary-Glenmore, and pushed that. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo had 102,000; a 50 per cent turnout was 51,000. What we would actually have is an

electronic vote representing the number of people that actually voted in those areas. The tally could be such – and it would be far more democratic in the process. Something like that would be exciting, if we would have had the Electoral Boundaries Commission actually look at it. How can we change these boundaries? How can we be more efficient? How can we reduce the number of MLAs and be more effective? That's the key. Can we actually reduce the number of MLAs and be more effective? I believe we can.

8:50

Then if we wanted, we can go to the next whole level and look at: is there something else that we could do? Let's have a full discussion. We're going to have lots of time tonight. I'm more than happy, though, to let government members talk on this, to hear their thoughts. Looking forward to that. What we could actually do is look at those electronic votes, and we could go to the next level. One of the things that I actually brought to Members' Services back in 2005 was to change the way that we actually fund opposition parties.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Hinman: No. This is very relevant to the electoral boundaries act and how we change things. We have an opportunity here, if we defeat this bill, to go back and say: "You know what? We've got time. Let's look at what we're going to do for a new electoral boundaries act."

Mr. Chair, this is critical in my mind. It's a great opportunity. It's the 21st century. I don't know what could be more relevant about the electoral boundaries act than how we want to revise and represent Albertans better and more efficiently. If we were to actually engage – what we want to try and accomplish here is to have Albertans actually feel like: if I vote, I make a difference.

The federal parties actually give a contribution to the party if people get out and vote. I don't particularly like that, but what I do like is if the opposition parties and the government actually received \$5 for every vote they received to do their research. This would be a way of kicking in a mechanism and saying: "You know what? I want to vote for the ND Party." The vote goes from 90,000 to a hundred thousand Albertans; their research funding would go up. [interjections] They don't even run candidates there.

Mr. Mason: I grew up there.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I met your sister. It was a wonderful conversation we had.

Mr. Mason: Did she vote for you?

Mr. Hinman: I don't know. She wouldn't let me put my sign up, but I have to say that there were two or three ND people that took their signs down and put up Wildrose signs. I was quite pleased. We talked about how we want to ensure that people were represented and the wonderful ideas that we had for people that were suffering or needed some social assistance.

Anyway, I think that this would be a great way to engage Albertans. If they believed in the philosophies of whichever party it was, they would realize, "If I go out and vote, that's going to increase the research funding for each of those parties." It's nonpartisan. You don't have a Members' Services Committee that's dominated by one party and can easily decide how they're going to distribute the research money. That's what we want to do. We want to try and be as nonpartisan as possible. How do we actually divide

the electoral areas? Can we reduce the number of MLAs yet increase the actual representation of the people? I think that, Mr. Chair, that's very much what the boundary act was about. They said: "You know, there's not equal representation. We have some MLAs that are only representing 17,000 people. We have other MLAs that are representing a hundred thousand people, and it just isn't right."

The commission was struck, and this government gave them the parameters on what they wanted to do. They said: we want to expand the number of MLAs because we don't want to have to increase the rural ridings anymore. It's already a challenge, I might say, to represent these large rural areas, so we want to go back. I will continue to say that it's important that we have democracy. There are many people that, you know, have pushed a lot on representative democracy. That was not discussed on this. They didn't look at changing any of those things. They didn't look at first past the post, and that's fine. But what areas could we and should we look at in order to improve the democratic representation here in Alberta?

This is what it was all about. The current legislation said that the ridings had to be within plus or minus 25 per cent with the exception of five ridings. We had breached that, so we needed to strike an Electoral Boundaries Commission to see how we are going to address that. This is the proposal that they brought forward, and I would argue, Mr. Chair, that this proposal does not really level the playing field where it's one Albertan, one vote.

If we were to change and, like I say, have electronic voting for the MLAs that represented large areas and those that had small areas, that would be an incentive. But there are two things that we could do also so that those people in those areas would realize: "Man, I want my MLA to have as many votes as possible. I'm going to go out and vote. I want Calgary to be well represented." So they go out and vote. Hopefully, that would be one more little thing that would help to get people to come out and vote. They'd say: I want my MLA to be representing as many people as possible. I think that that's important, Mr. Chair. How do we engage Albertans?

Like I say, there are two ways of engaging them. The other one is to realize that if they vote for the Wildrose, if they vote for the Liberals, if they vote for the NDs, they're actually going to get research funding. Basically, from 2004 to 2008 it was very close to that \$5 per vote, and I actually approached the members from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Boutilier: Oh, we get chicken.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. A big bucket. There are a lot of us here. Two buckets.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Sorry. Trying to be efficient.

Chair's Ruling Relevance

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the purpose of Committee of the Whole is to go through the text of the bill and, if there's anything wrong with it, to propose amendments and discuss those and vote on those amendments. It's not to be changing the whole intent of what is here now. That was in second reading. If you would continue in that vein, then we can move on.

Mr. Hinman: Where are you quoting on that? *Beauchesne* what?

The Deputy Chair: *Beauchesne* 688.

Mr. Hinman: *Beauchesne* 688. Let me write that down so I'm aware of these things in the future. I'll go to that reference after I'm finished.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I'm telling you what Committee of the Whole is for, and I'm just asking you to try and stay relevant and stay with the context of what the bill is here. If you have concerns with the bill, then propose amendments to make those changes.

Mr. Anderson: Word by word. Go over clause by clause.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I'm going to start off with the number, Bill 28. Have to wonder why this government brought forward the other 27. There were many of them that seemed like they were just a frivolous thing, that they're using up time. I don't know if they have researchers or what it is, but to think that it was Bill 28. If this is such a serious thing, why wasn't this Bill 4 or Bill 5? They were outside the actual . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we are on Bill 28. Yes.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. That's what I'm talking to. The question is: why is it Bill 28?

The Deputy Chair: Where have you been?

Mr. Hinman: Oh, I've been in a lot of places in this world. Do you want me to spend 15 minutes telling you where I've travelled?

Chair's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, there's a bit of decorum required in this House. You know the rules. You've been here long enough. Now, sit down. There is a bit of decorum required in here. You know how the Committee of the Whole works. I want you to conduct yourselves in a parliamentary manner, and we can move on with this and not have any of the frivolity that is going on at the moment. When someone mentions something about word for word, you took one point out of there, and now you're going to go through word for word in the entire bill. Look at the whole paragraph in context, and then from there you can go with it.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: Sit down. I ask you to conduct yourselves in a civil manner, and we'll move ahead with this, or we're going to have quite a night.

Mr. Anderson: Can I make a point of order now?

The Deputy Chair: What is your point of order?

Point of Order Explanation of Chair's Ruling

Mr. Anderson: I'm going to quote from *Beauchesne* 688. I would remind the chair—I would hope that the chair would understand that his job is to be an impartial arbiter of the rules of this House and not favouring one side over the other. That's what I'd like to know.

Beauchesne 688 says, "The function of a committee on a bill is to go through the text of the bill clause by clause and, if necessary,

word by word, with a view to making such amendments in it as may seem likely to render it more generally acceptable.” So we can go through it word by word as much as we want today, Mr. Chair. This is parliamentary democracy. This has been done a thousand times. I’m sorry if they’re uncomfortable with the filibuster. That’s not our problem. We are going to do that. It’s part of our rights as MLAs to do it, and until the other side invokes closure, we’re going to keep on going. That’s just the way it’s going to be. So it’s up to them when this ends tonight. That’s my point of order.

9:00

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Hon. member, it is not a point of order because you’ve also left out the fact: with a view of making such amendments as would seem necessary to render it more generally acceptable. If you have an amendment, fine. Then we’ll move with that.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you can proceed.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you very much for that clarification. My first comment is . . .

Mr. Mason: I wanted to speak to that point of order.

The Deputy Chair: I’ve already ruled on it.

Mr. Mason: Well, you’re being arbitrary, sir, and unfair. You should show that you have the respect of the Assembly in doing your job fairly and equitably. You just can’t cut off debate any time you feel like it, sir, with all due respect.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you have the floor.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Not that I want to challenge the chair or anything else on the point of order, but we are filibustering. This government has brought forward a slew of bills that are unacceptable to the people of Alberta, and in my understanding as an elected representative that’s one of the last things an opposition party can do. We’re going to continue talking about the bill and going forward. It’s very parliamentary. I believe that filibustering has been going on from the very start.

I’m even going to go back to where I spoke on the amendment for a minute and talk about the Speaker and what went on back in 1982, when the Speaker ruled on who the opposition party was.

The custom of selecting a Speaker as official parliamentary spokesman dates back to the British Parliament of the 14th century. Early Speakers were messengers who conveyed the monarch’s wishes to Parliament and Parliament’s to the monarch. In the beginning they were the monarch’s servants, but during that long power struggle between Parliament and the monarchy the role of the Speaker changed dramatically. In 1642 a conflict between Charles I and Parliament redefined the Speaker’s role. Charles barged into the House to arrest five members who opposed him, but Speaker William Lenthall refused to turn them over, saying he was the House servant and he would follow only its directions.

Historically, the Speaker’s job could be hazardous, and our Speaker has talked about that. Nine Speakers lost their lives, many of them beheaded for bringing bad news from Parliament to the monarch. The new Speakers often had to be forced, and that’s why they carried them in with two hands. They actually had to be forced to accept the new position.

Today newly elected Speakers commemorate this part of the history by pretending to struggle as they are led to the Speaker’s chair. Physical danger does not stop modern Speakers although they are still all the centre of debate between opposing sides. Today they are referees whose primary role is to enforce the role of parliamentary procedure and oversee parliamentary administration. Speakers are also defenders of the parliamentary privilege.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, can you relate this to Bill 28?

Mr. Hinman: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Please do.

Mr. Hinman: This is filibustering. The Speaker is to . . .

The Deputy Chair: Please do, to Bill 28.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. We’ll go back to Bill 28. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The table of contents, electoral divisions. What are the electoral divisions? If we switch over here to page 3, names of the electoral divisions, we have Dunvegan-Central Peace, Lesser Slave Lake, Calgary-Acadia, Calgary-Bow, Calgary-Buffalo, Calgary-Cross, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-East, Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-Foothills, Calgary-Fort, Calgary-Glenmore. Oh, I should be going: 13, Calgary-Glenmore; 14, Calgary-Greenway, a new name that we’ve amended; 15, Calgary-Hawkwood, a new riding that’s been developed in a city that has multiple MLAs already; 16, Calgary-Hays; 17, Calgary-Klein, another one where we’re recognizing the service of a previous Premier and have renamed it right along with 18, Calgary-Lougheed, another Tory Premier; 19, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill; 20, Calgary-McCall; 21, Calgary-Mountain View; 22, Calgary-North West; 23, Calgary-Northern Hills; 24, Calgary-Shaw; 25, Calgary-South East; 26, Calgary-Varsity; and, finally, 27, Calgary-West.

We have 27 minus the first two: 1, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley now, which is not here, but it’s been amended; 2, Lesser Slave Lake. We have 25 – 25 – electoral boundaries for the city of Calgary. How many aldermen do we have? Half of that and a mayor. What are the jobs of the elected MLAs? We need to ask that question. Not only do we need to ask that question, we need to ask the question: is 25 enough? Obviously, this government felt that it needed more MLAs, and I would have to humbly disagree with that.

Then we move on to Edmonton. Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, 28; 29, Edmonton-Calder; 30, Edmonton-Castle Downs; 31, Edmonton-Centre; 32, Edmonton-Decore, again named after another individual who has passed on but served our province well; Edmonton-Ellerslie; Edmonton-Glenora, 34; 35, Edmonton-Gold Bar; 36, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood; 37, Edmonton-Manning; 38, Edmonton-McClung; 39, Edmonton-Meadowlark; 40, Edmonton-Mill Creek; 41, Edmonton-Mill Woods; 42, Edmonton-Riverview. We’ll turn the page to page 4, and what we have here is 43, Edmonton-Rutherford. For some reason we have an asterisk on that one on this bill. I’m not sure why; maybe because of his newly appointed parliamentary assistance to the health minister. Number 44, Edmonton-South West; 45, Edmonton-Strathcona; 46, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Again, numerous MLAs in a city that does not have nearly as many aldermen that are representing that area. Why would we give the Electoral Boundaries Commission the go-ahead and say, “Let’s do more of the same – more of the same – you know, we’ve had it this way; let’s keep doing it”?

There’s been much speculation on that. I hear over and over

again; it's because we need to make sure we have enough rural votes that we can carry it. Again, that was part of the question that was given to the commission.

Number 47, hon. colleague from Airdrie, no longer Airdrie-Chestermere. Again, another one that you look at. This is truly the definition of gerrymandering when you look at the convoluted map that they were talking about.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to stand up and speak to this. I want to make just a couple of comments with respect to proceedings tonight, if I may, before we get under way, just to indicate that I would like to participate in the discussion but am not intending to participate in any all-night filibuster tonight. I do, however, think that it's important to protect the rights of members to do that because it's a long-established tradition. In my view it's not necessary with respect to this legislation. I do want to just make a few points on each bill, and I do have a few amendments tonight that I'd like to make, if I can stay awake that long.

9:10

With respect to the Electoral Divisions Act I'd like to make a few comments. I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. members for passing the amendment to rename the riding as Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. I appreciate that. I knew Grant Notley as a student, and he got me involved in the New Democratic Party at that time. I admired him very much. He was a person who was very much at home in this Assembly, who was skilled and knowledgeable on a broad range of issues and always tried to put forward the best possible solutions. He is still very much admired in the province, particularly in his former constituency, which was known as Spirit River-Fairview at the time. His untimely death was a tragedy both for our party but I think also for the province as a whole, and I really do appreciate the hon. members for recognizing that. I very much appreciate it, and I can't thank the members on all sides of the House enough for making that recommendation. So thank you for that.

With respect to the issues raised in the legislation, I think that there are some good parts to the bill and some parts that are not as good. I just want to indicate that I think we need to do a better job in reducing the disparity in populations between the ridings. I will recognize that the Electoral Boundaries Commission this time did make an effort to reduce it. The Supreme Court, in respect to a case brought from Alberta, did set boundaries of plus or minus 25 per cent with respect to population of the ridings. In fact, before that in Alberta they often exceeded that. There were urban ridings that had 25,000 to 35,000 people, and one in particular at that time, my recollection is the riding of Cardston, had only about 8,000 people. So it got all the way to the Supreme Court, who directed that, in fairness, it couldn't be more than plus or minus 25 per cent.

Now, the commission made efforts to reduce that to try and hit the target of plus or minus 10 per cent, but they were unable to completely bring all of the constituencies within those ranges. It is a question of disproportionate representation for rural parts of Alberta, and I think that that is something that needs to be addressed. I don't think that Alberta as a very urban province, an increasingly urbanized province, that we can continue to do that indefinitely. I think we have to find more opportunities for equity.

I'd like to speak a little bit about the electoral system, if I can. The first past the post system which we have also creates disproportion in terms of the representation in our Legislature. This is common to all constituency-based or riding-based systems where it's

on a first past the post basis. The argument, of course, is that it gives more stable government. I recollect that a couple of elections ago the Progressive Conservative Party earned less than half of the votes in the province – I think that was the 2004 election – yet they still had 75 to 80 per cent of the seats in the Legislature. Had there been seats allocated on the basis of the popular vote, we would have had a minority government. I know that that thought may make some government members a little nervous, but I think it would have been a very healthy situation for Alberta democracy. Even today, although the Progressive Conservative Party won a majority of votes, they still have a disproportionately massive majority which isn't indicated by their level of actual public support in the province among those who vote.

Which brings me to the next question, which is the whole question of voting turnout in the province, which I think is partly connected to the same first past the post problem because it gives a more predictable result. Many people interpret that as an inevitable result and decline to vote because they don't believe the vote is going to change anything. Now, that's not a problem for the government. I mean, I'm sure that it's, you know, perhaps even welcomed by some. But I think that on balance it's not a healthy situation, and I would like to see a significant increase in voter turnout in our province.

I know that some members have in the past suggested we even make voting mandatory, and I certainly think that it's one of the solutions that could be debated. I would like to see the Chief Electoral Officer involved in trying to encourage voting. There have been some good advertising campaigns. I think one in Ontario had people sitting at a restaurant getting ready to order their dinner and somebody comes along just when the waiter arrives and orders for them. Then the voice-over says: don't let other people make your decisions for you. I think that kind of brings it home. So there has been some effective advertising, and I think that our electoral office could do some of that. I think that we need to think about more ways to improve voter turnout. Certainly, I think the first past the post system has been abandoned in most democracies, and we should consider doing that as well.

In terms of public financing or financing for elections, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore was talking about, I have some thoughts on that as well. We have made some progress in this province in terms of how we handle that, certainly with donation limits and mandatory disclosure. That is certainly some progress that we've made with respect to that issue, but I think we could go further. In the United States, for example, they have donations to political parties in real time, so as soon as a donation is received and processed, it has to be posted so that you can see during the election itself who is giving money to which candidate and to which party, instead of finding out months after the election has already been decided. So that's certainly something that I think is very worth pursuing.

In terms of eliminating the financing of elections from corporations and unions, our party was the first to take that position based on what the NDP government in Manitoba did. That was followed by the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien federally. I think it's an important step to take. It's the citizen who is the core of democracy. He or she is the basic unit of democracy, and they are what democracy is about. It's not about special interests with money. It's not about a corporation or another organization that's prepared to use vast resources to attempt to influence electoral results.

You might say that then you wouldn't be able to afford to run the campaigns, and there would certainly be less money to do that. So some discussion needs to take place about whether or not you offset that with some public financing of elections, which has been done

federally, so each vote is worth 75 cents. Now, I don't know about the research money that the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore was talking about, but this is campaign money that's paid directly to the parties to offset the loss of corporation and union funding. I think that that is something that needs to be considered as well.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to the rest I have already expressed concern with regard to some of the decisions that were made in the second report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. In the first one I thought that they took a real unbiased run at it and made some good decisions. I think that subsequently, after hearing from the political parties, particularly the Progressive Conservative Party's submission was followed in some cases when it shouldn't have been. Certainly, taking a look at – and I mentioned this before – Calder and Glenora, the boundaries were quite rational, following the Yellowhead Trail. Before and afterwards they were changed so that there was all kinds of, you know – a piece here and a piece taken out there and so on, and it's obvious that it's been done in order to create favourable conditions for one or another candidate. And the word for that is gerrymandering.

9:20

Similarly in the two ridings up in Grande Prairie. They were going to follow what I think is a model used in Medicine Hat, where the majority of the city forms a single urban riding, and the remainder is then attached to a surrounding rural area. They tried that in Grande Prairie, but this wasn't to the satisfaction of the existing MLAs. There was a lot of lobbying that went on to change it back, so now Grande Prairie remains split in two and attached to two surrounding rural areas. So instead of having one solid urban riding, you have these two rural-urban amalgamations, which I don't think is what was wanted. When I had conversations with the Electoral Boundaries Commission, we did talk about that, and I strongly urged them, and I thought that they were inclined to try and create all-urban ridings where that was possible. We lost that as well, so I'm disappointed.

I think there was some retrograde movement between the first report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission and the second one. I don't think we made as much progress in terms of rationalizing the boundaries or the populations of the various constituencies as we could have, and I'm disappointed with respect to that.

I just want to indicate, Mr. Chairman, that I have very mixed feelings with respect to this. I think I'll probably vote for it. What swung me over, I guess, is the decision of the members to rename the riding. There was considerable community support for that name change. It didn't just pop out of the blue, and I am greatly pleased. I have warm feelings for the other side for the first time in a long time over that, and I very much appreciate it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to rise tonight to speak and add my comments on Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act this evening. I'd like to thank the last speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, before I get into my comments for his comments and for putting in my mind the former hon. Grant Notley. It was my pleasure as I was a municipal councillor to have met the gentleman on a couple of occasions before his tragic death, and he impressed me as a fine gentleman who was very dedicated to the well-being of Alberta. He was a fine Albertan.

I also feel very fortunate that I represent in my riding many of his

relatives by the same name and that I had the pleasure of presenting him with a 100-year homestead farm award. They've been in the area that long. One of Grant's cousins, Wayne, also served on the David Thompson health authority, and he worked very hard for the province of Alberta in that respect. I consider him a good friend. So I certainly support the addition of the name "Notley" to Dunvegan-Central Peace. I think it's well deserved, well earned, and I'm sure many of my constituents will be pleased with that.

Although I have some trepidation about lengthening the names of constituencies, Mr. Chairman, in sympathy to you and Mr. Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the House because you have to remember all these long names of every constituency, my own constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is a relatively long name. I can't help but think that even the hon. members of this House oftentimes refer to it as Olds-Three Hills or Olds-Didsbury but hardly ever Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. It does become onerous on many of us in here. But I can also understand the reasons, the descriptive reasons and the honorary reasons, for including these names, and it's become a tradition in this province. So I would certainly support that aspect of the addition of that amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I'd specifically like to speak about section 1, the electoral divisions and the addition of four seats, from 83 to 87. Much has been spoken of that, and I'd like to add my comments to that, too. I currently have nine urban centres in my riding as it stands, before any proposed changes, two rural municipalities, three school boards, several community associations, a college, ag societies, legions. I am fortunate that I have a very good working relationship with all my municipalities. I meet with them frequently, whenever they wish. We always arrange a time to discuss their issues, how we can work together for the benefit of all Albertans within the confines of the available dollars that the province has to assist them in their priorities. That works very well, and we have a very good working relationship.

With the new proposed boundaries for my riding, even though we've included four extra seats, I'm going to be going to 12 urban municipalities from nine, three rural municipalities, another school board, and more legions, community associations, and that sort of thing. All would like to see their MLA, and they've grown accustomed to kind of a hands-on meeting scenario.

I guess I'd have to confess, Mr. Chairman, that I'm a bit old school when it comes to electronic communications. I find it impersonal. I find that people feel they almost have a licence to be rude by communicating through that. It's quickly done. It's poorly spelled. The grammar is terrible. It tends to have a little sharper tone to it. I don't know if any other members notice that or not, but I don't think face-to-face conversations can ever be replaced by electronic media totally, to get an understanding of how we meet. If we could do that, we wouldn't need any more chairs in here. We could simply sit at home and do it electronically from a computer at home. Perhaps some members would even entertain that idea. The hon. minister of housing seems to be of that bent, but then he's much younger and more in tune with electronic media.

Being hands on myself and having been accustomed to people in my riding – it's a rural riding, and people are used to communicating face to face; they seem to be comfortable with that – I would have to say that it's going to be more difficult with the new proposed ridings, even by adding four, than it was before to spread yourself around.

I can tell you – and you can check the invitations at my office – that when I'm not up here and have a free day, I tend to have about three invitations for every open space of time in the day. If I say yes to one, I have to say no to at least two and sometimes even more than that. I've been booked 13 months in advance to get to a Remembrance Day function.

I would like to be able to go to all of them. We keep track, and we try to spread ourselves around and try to make at least two. Legally, we can usually make two without attracting the attention of the sheriffs, and I like to keep it that way. We do try to spread it around, and people are understanding of that, but I certainly don't think they'd appreciate me showing up electronically on a television set at their Remembrance Day ceremony just to make myself available.

I think I'd like to at this point commend the Electoral Boundaries Commission for adopting the recommendation of 87 electoral divisions to try to minimize that. There's a huge difference between a rural riding and an urban riding in getting across it. Some of our members in here only have one school board to deal with, only have one council to deal with rather than multiple ones. They may be larger jurisdictions, but as far as the number of meetings, that's minimized. Often in cases you have more than one MLA in those larger urban jurisdictions. That can spread that load out. We don't have the luxury of that in rural Alberta. It's not just a simple matter of driving 20 minutes to half an hour across the city. Sometimes you can drive, depending on the weather, an hour or more in some of these larger ridings.

9:30

Of some of the larger ridings up north, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who's a neighbour, has a much larger riding than mine, huge distances to get across. In some of the northern ridings you can't even get there by car. So there are huge challenges. I think the commission recognized that in their recommendations, and I certainly support that.

I'd also like to commend the Electoral Boundaries Commission, if I may, Mr. Chair, for their openness and willingness during the consultation process. I made a presentation the first go-round, and I also made a presentation the second go-round. I reviewed my presentation with several of my municipal partners, whoever wanted to see it. I posted on my website the proposal I made and invited people to look at it, to provide input to me before I made the presentation. I met with all the municipalities that wanted to meet with me that had concerns, including new ones that were proposed to be part of my riding that aren't currently there, and they certainly seemed to appreciate that opportunity. I made a presentation myself and invited anybody else, if they wanted to make a presentation, whether it supported mine or not, to certainly do so because that's their opportunity to do that, and I certainly believe in that open consultative process.

Credit to the commission; they made some substantive changes that weren't really appreciated the first time around. People didn't think some of the proposals the first time around fit where communities were being split. That was a big concern for communities that worked together for years. Just the other day we met with the Solicitor General with a couple of communities making a proposal for regional policing to save money. They're going to be growing into that 5,000 category, where they're going to have to pay for policing and have to provide for their extra policing costs and actually a police station with cells and everything.

Well, if you've got two communities side by side facing the same issue, it does make sense to propose that we can work together, have one major infrastructure and maybe a storefront police station in the community. I think that's a great idea, and it's exactly what I think this government has been trying to promote for years. The municipalities came forward with their proposal to us. They thought this was something they wanted to try in their community. I certainly embraced the idea, and I believe the minister did, too. That will certainly help in that area.

Those concerns were brought to the commission. We wanted these communities to stay together instead of being in two different electoral divisions, and those ideas that were proposed to the commission were very carefully considered by all members of the commission. I don't know who was appointed by whom, but I think all parties had some input into the makeup of that board. [interjection] Well, I don't think they were all Conservatives, hon. member.

Certainly, they looked at the proposals, and they all commended me for my presentation in Red Deer and said that they'd carefully consider them. I have to say that I'm very pleased by what they brought back as it relates to my riding, which is the proposal to increase it to roughly 41,000 people from 36,000. We'll just be slightly under 7,000 square kilometres to get around. It's quite the distance between some of the communities; others are closer. I'm not complaining about the challenge, but certainly I can recognize that some people in this room here have much greater challenges than I do in servicing some of the huge constituencies we have in the northern part of the province.

With the task they had at hand, I would like to say, Mr. Chairman, that the Electoral Boundaries Commission I think did a very good job in the recommendations, which culminated in Bill 28. With that, I would have to say that I'll be supporting this bill and encourage other members of this Assembly to do the same.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. We're all here in this House because we all want what is best for Alberta. I think we all have more in common than out of sync because politics has a way of exaggerating differences. However, I'd like to talk about some of the differences that I believe set me apart from the government on this bill.

As I travel the province, I hear concerns from Albertans. Being in public office allows me a great opportunity to meet many people from all walks of life. One thing they all mention is how out of touch they feel the government is with regular, everyday Albertans. I'm someone that believes I was given two ears and one mouth for a reason, and that's to listen. When I meet Albertans, I always ask for their solutions because I don't believe I personally have all the answers. The one solution that is never brought up is more elected members. Albertans – and I dare anyone to take a poll – think there are enough politicians out there, and, quite frankly, why do we need more?

Bill 28 will add four electoral divisions in Alberta: one in Edmonton, two in Calgary, and the fourth will be in Fort McMurray. While the Election Act mandates reviews on a regular basis, it doesn't require revision. There is nothing in the Election Act that says that you have to change the boundaries or add members to the Legislature. My concern is that the government is doing something to look busy, especially on a subject of such importance, and that's democracy.

Why does the government feel that they need to look busy? The people of my riding, Calgary-Fish Creek, like all Albertans, just want good government. They want a government that makes sound decisions on the issues that matter to them, like health care and education. From my experience when someone is trying to look busy, it's because they're not getting the job done.

Now, coming back to the four new ridings that will be added by this bill, I ask: does more mean better? I've always believed in quality, not quantity. It's hard to believe that by adding four more MLAs to the House, the frustrations felt by Albertans would be

addressed. People across the province feel ignored by their government, and increasing the number of MLAs by 5 per cent won't fix anything. What is going to happen is that we will have a government pat itself on the back because it thinks it's doing such a great job, when it hasn't really addressed any of the underlying issues.

I have questions about costs. Democracy has a price, but so does a waste of money. There is a balance between sound investment and, quite frankly, throwing away money. Legislative and constituency offices have significant costs associated with them, especially staff. Now, I want to say this, and I want to get it on the record, Mr. Chair. My staff is excellent, and quite frankly they're worth every penny. The Wildrose caucus, in fact, is doing without a leader's allowance and limited dollars. Staff isn't the only obvious cost. The MLAs themselves with their salaries and their allowances are an issue, too. Albertans are upset enough with the raises this government gave its cabinet and the rest of caucus at a time when Albertans are still recovering from the economic recession, and it's hard to believe that spending millions on a few more members of this House is a sound investment.

Another question posed to me quite often when I travel the province is: why do we need more MLAs when most of them now don't stand up and do their jobs? In all honesty, I wonder the same thing. Why won't this government let its caucus do the job it was sent here to do? Every one of us here is in this House to represent the people of their riding. It seems strange that we're adding to this House when we're not using what we have. It seems a lot like the health system in this province right now. Beds aren't being used in the hospitals that aren't open yet. A lot of money is being spent on new capacity that isn't going to be used. This is just another example of how this party governs Alberta. They try to look impressive, like they're making progress, but really, when you step back, everyone asks: "What's going on here? What is the government thinking?"

9:40

My concern as we debate Bill 28 is about democracy, that we're losing the bigger picture. As my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo says, the people of this province are our bosses. We need to look at what they want and what they deserve. In my mind, it's terrible when a government blatantly ignores the will of the people, and the will of the people has never indicated that they want more MLAs.

Mr. Chair, I have to say, though – and I want to say it on the record – that I support the amendments and the name change to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. I never had the opportunity to meet Mr. Notley, but I've heard a great deal of nice things about the man. I even like the proposed name of Calgary-Klein. I had the opportunity of serving under that Premier from 1993 until he left in 2006, and I can quite frankly say that I've never met anyone that I have more respect for or more deeply admire for what he did for this province.

There have been issues on the table about: how dare we name someone when they haven't passed away? Well, I can tell you that the last time I checked, Premier Lougheed was still here. My mother-in-law happens to sell his wife shoes, and she said that he was quite healthy, to be honest with you.

The previous member talked about . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the floor.

Go ahead. You have the floor. I'm just quieting everybody down.

Mrs. Forsyth: You know what, Mr. Chair? I don't listen to them

anyhow when I'm speaking, so it's okay. Thank you. They're just rude.

The previous member talked about the differences between rural and urban, and I found that quite interesting when you listened to him because it's something that we've discussed in the Legislature on numerous occasions. I'm an urban MLA, and I know that some of the members around this House are rural MLAs. I challenged one of my colleagues several years ago in regard to the population and the differences between a rural and an urban MLA. The challenge at that time from the hon. member was: "All right, Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, I'll make you this little bet. You spend a week with me in my rural riding, and then I'll spend a week with you in your urban riding."

I'm not a farm girl by any means, but I certainly got an education in regard to the workings of a rural riding. The member talked about the driving, and I found that interesting. Then I reciprocated, and I had my rural friend come and spend a week with me in an urban setting, where we're dealing with twice as many people in some of the populations. They were quite taken aback at the work that an urban MLA has to do, especially when you have an urban MLA from Calgary or, for that matter, Edmonton – it could be Red Deer or Lethbridge – and the amount of events that that particular individual has to attend. It could be one in a thousand. I mean, Mr. Chair, I know that you probably get as many invitations as I do on a normal day, trying to accommodate some of the things that people want you to attend, if it's this function or that function. I think it was probably a rude awakening for both of us because of that dispute between rural and urban.

What I particularly found fascinating from the member is in regard to his comments about electronics and technology. I'm finding that at my age – and I've struggled with it – we're going into an electronic and technological world. I'm one of these people that has struggled and, with the incredible help from my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere, launched my web page and really started getting into Twitter, trying to communicate with people on that aspect. It's been fascinating, absolutely fascinating, the people you can connect with. Even if you're not face to face, hon. member, you're still connecting with them. You have an opportunity to connect with people. I have been incredibly blessed and surprised at the number of hits that I'm getting on my web page and the number of people that are visiting my web page and the number of people that are commenting on my website, which takes a process to go onto my web page. There's a contact for me, and they have to fill out their names and addresses and things like that. But they're doing that because they truly, truly care about what's happening.

Electronics and the phone and e-mails and Twitter are fascinating processes. I think that in the last two days – you know yourself, Chair, the hours that we've been putting in at the Legislature late into the night. I think on Thursday and Friday of last week we had received something like 326 or 356 e-mails on the Alberta Parks Act. On Monday and Tuesday I think we received another 400. That's just on one act.

You take the Alberta Health Act. Hundreds and hundreds of phone calls and e-mails have come in, to the point where – we've always responded personally to our e-mails – our staff at this particular time in Calgary are a little overwhelmed with trying to answer all of the people that are so upset in regard to what's happening on our health care and with the booting out of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. We're trying diligently to respond to them all personally. You know, you do have that touch. They do appreciate the response back because we get them responding back saying: thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I've been honoured to be in this Legislature since 1993.

I can tell you in all honesty that not one single person that I've ever talked to, whether they're happy with me or angry with me, in all the years that I've campaigned and all the years I door-knocked – and I door-knock every spring, from May till October – has said that we need more MLAs. Never has anyone ever said to me: we need more MLAs. In fact, if anything they've said: there are too many of you. Then they point to other provinces which have a higher population and fewer MLAs.

When the boundaries commission came out, they were somewhat taken aback. The constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek are a very vocal group. They're not a one-issue constituency. They're highly educated. They're well versed on the issues. We try and keep in touch with them in the monthly community newsletter that we write in. I always write an article on my web page called What's on Your Mind? We tally all of the votes or the phone calls, the e-mails, the tweets we get, the one-on-one contact of people coming into the office, the people that stop me in the grocery store. You know yourself, Mr. Chair, that there is not a lot of privacy for an MLA. Then we collate them all. Up pop the issues on the graph in regard to what the issues are.

I can tell you that when this discussion started on the electoral boundaries, that was a hot issue. The people that converse with us at no time said that they wanted Bill 28 to have an increase in MLAs. So it was important for me on behalf of the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek to get on the record that I do not support increasing the number of MLAs. I was fortunate in my riding to not see a lot of changes in my boundaries other than to pick up some more people in my riding, which, of course, like everybody else, is new introductions of yourself, new door-knocking, and introducing people. We'll do that, and we'll continue to connect with the people that we consider are in our new boundaries.

Not only that, Mr. Chair. Of course, for me there's the new challenge of campaigning in the last several elections as a PC candidate and now campaigning as the Wildrose Alliance candidate, which I'm truly looking forward to at the doors. We spent a lot of time this year door-knocking and had a very, very warm reception. The people of Calgary-Fish Creek, quite frankly, when I did cross the floor, somewhat took me aback and surprised me by the overwhelming response that I got on making that decision. But elections can change very, very dramatically. As I said at the press conference on the 4th of January, when the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and I were in front of national media, we would live with the consequences of our decision. We would also hope that if this was what it would take to get democracy back into the system, we were okay with that.

9:50

Incredibly privileged to be able to have the honour to have my buddy from Airdrie-Chestermere beside me in this process. We found it interesting, to say the least, probably a lot more interesting than what our fellow Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo or what the poor guy from Edmonton-Meadowlark is going through right now, to be, both of them, kicked out of a caucus that – you know what, Mr. Chair? – quite frankly has lost its way. I can't say it any more.

In my mind there is absolutely no need – absolutely no need – for more MLAs in this province. It's unfortunate that the decision was made to do that. I think that the commission, with what they were tasked to do, did a good job on the boundaries. As I indicated earlier, my boundaries weren't affected.

I think we're going to have to start getting into this century in regard to what's happening electronically, what's happening, again, with e-mails, Twitter. I can tell you that I spent a great deal of my

time on committee work on the phone when we went through the FOIP legislation. In fact, I'd probably say that 90 per cent of the committee work that I have done has been on the phone, and I've found it very useful. I found it less expensive, quite frankly, than for me to drive down here, claim the mileage for the gas, claim the night for us to do it. I felt that I was being included by everyone who was attending the meeting or that was physically here. I think it's something that we're going to look at and have to do more of when we have all of the responsibilities that we do as MLAs.

What's interesting to me, Mr. Chair, is that when I went home last weekend, a couple of my constituents commented to me that they hadn't seen me around over the last several days. They also indicated that I was looking a little tired. So I can hardly wait to go home this weekend to see what they have to say about me. Their comments were to me that they didn't even know that we were in session. I can guarantee you that probably – I don't know. It would be interesting to take a poll of what percentage of Albertans even know that we're sitting in the Legislature till all hours of the evening.

While I think that's an incredible part of democracy, to be able to have the opportunity to debate legislation and, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, to debate legislation as long as it takes, getting everything on the record, whether we go for days on end or anything – it's an important part of the democratic process for us to have the opportunity to speak.

It's also an opportunity for Albertans to get their feedback through their individual MLAs. I can tell you that last time I counted, I think I've got – and this is just from today – 60 e-mails that people wanted us to read into the record when we're debating the Parks Act. I can't even remember; I think it's Bill 29. Yes. Each of us has been given probably anywhere from 60 to 80 e-mails. People have requested to get their voice heard.

It goes back to what's happening currently in the Health Act and what has happened, actually, to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. People want to voice their opinions in regard to what they consider the democratic process.

I am going to end, Mr. Chair, on the fact that, again, I think it's important to reiterate that the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek and the MLA representing the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek and as one of the four members of the Wildrose we want it on the record that we do not support the increase of MLAs in this province and never have, that our voices as MLAs are to listen to the people that have elected us, and they've clearly, clearly articulated that they do not want more MLAs.

I also want it on the record that I appreciate very much the Member for Calgary-Currie bringing forward the amendment in regard to honouring Mr. Notley. I think that's a wonderful thing for the Legislature to do. As I indicated earlier I have . . . [Mrs. Forsyth's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief because most of the points that I wanted to make have already been made over the last hour probably. However, I did want to get on the record one more time to really express my opposition and objection to this bill for a number of reasons.

I don't believe that a mandate should have been given to this committee, to the Electoral Boundaries Commission, to say: yes, you need four more. They are the ones that should have done the work to actually determine if we needed four. I also believe that we are very, very overgoverned at all three levels, not only in this province but certainly in our country. I understand having to drive large

distances, et cetera, but sometimes distance versus the number of the people that you have to look after is an issue. I understand.

I also believe that we are in the 21st century, and there is some technology that can be used to help eliminate some of those things. I agree with my hon. colleague from across the floor who said that, yes, there will be nothing that beats face to-face, and that is very true, very true. But I think that some of the answers that we can give back to those people could be done through technology, and the answers don't necessarily have to be given face to face. There are many ways to do it that it could remain personal.

The other thing that could well be considered at some point in time is that we could look at ridings that would be rural and urban. We could take part of cities and have part of the riding urban, and then it would branch off into the rural. Those that were, I think, lucky enough to get that type of a constituency certainly would be able to have a much better view of this urban versus rural that we sometimes come across because two-thirds of our citizens, actually, are urban residents.

Mr. Chair, with that I will take my seat. I am opposed to that because I believe that the increase of four seats was never proven. It was just something that was pulled out of the air. I also believe that we are very much overgoverned.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm still waiting on that answer.

I want to talk today about: in this bill we have 87 constituencies listed in the schedule, and of course there used to be 83. I may propose an amendment on this, but I would like to see us remain at 83 constituencies, and I'm going to tell you why.

Ms Pastoor: We can go way down.

Mr. Anderson: We can go way down. You know what? That's not a bad idea. Holy smokes. Especially with some of the seat fillers.

I think we need to at least remain at 83 if not go lower, and I'll tell you why.

10:00

I think that the role of the MLA – and it's the same way in Parliament – we have a chance here in Alberta, and I think you're seeing it. You're seeing it in this House tonight. You're seeing what's going on in our democracy. There's almost like a renaissance going on. You know what? It's a little bit like – it's cross-partisan, so it's different from what's going on down in the States right now. In the States it's more just one side that's really activated. There's that Tea Party movement, and they're really pumped. They're sick of big government and so forth and all that sort of thing, and they're sick of the lack of democracy and people not representing the people and all that. It's generally just on the right side of the spectrum. Of course, we saw that it's very powerful. It shifted the entire United States Congress. It was a powerful, powerful movement.

But I think this is a little bit different in Alberta. I actually think this is happening right across the spectrum. It's happening whether you're a Liberal, whether you're a Conservative, left, right, centre. I think that people right now are rising up. There's a wave of change growing. You saw this in the Calgary mayor's race. There are many different issues out there. There's health care, there's finance, there's education, budget deficits, all these different things that

people are concerned about. But there's kind of this underlying unease that underpins all of these things, and I think it attaches itself to all of these things. People are frustrated with the issues, but they're starting to realize what the root cause of those problems is. It's all the same.

The root cause is that there is absolutely a total lack of democracy in not just our system in Alberta but across Canada and across the United States. In parliamentary democracies and republics like the U.S. people have forgotten – definitely in parliamentary democracies, especially in this country, we have forgotten what the role of the local representative is. So I think, you know, 87 MLAs – why do we need 87 MLAs if those MLAs are nothing more than the government spokespersons to their constituency and to their constituents?

Mr. Kang: Like you were at one time?

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely. Well, I never played by the rules, and that's why I'm over here.

Nonetheless, I think that's what governments and what people in power in our parliamentary democracies think the role of an MLA is. Now, MLAs over there know full well that they do deal with issues. On a lot of the issues that they say they do, they work with their constituents. They help them to get through the bureaucracy on certain things, and they help them to access certain programs. Absolutely. That is one of the roles of an MLA.

Mr. Chair, you're one of them. I know of your reputation for helping people in your constituency in accessing government programs that they need when they need them. You have a reputation of returning your phone calls, and that's good. That is one of the roles of an MLA. I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays is the same way. I think there are many others like that. Some don't. Some don't return their calls at all. I won't get personal tonight, but there are some MLAs in this House with horrible reputations about not getting back to their constituents.

Ms Pastoor: You got that right, because they phone us.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. They blow them off.

Generally speaking, I think most of the MLAs in here really legitimately try to serve their constituents and help them access the programs. Okay? So that's one part of the job of an MLA. Generally, I think, that part's fine. It's like the ombudsman role of an MLA. I think we still do a reasonably good job of that in our parliamentary democracy in Alberta.

Of course, another one is that you want to represent the state, and it's kind of a figurehead role, kind of like the Governor General type of role, where you represent the government in your community at a graduation, at a grand opening for an event or some kind of school, or something like that. Okay? So there's kind of that representing the province role, and then there's the ombudsman role, and I think those two are fine.

But there's a third one, and this one is the most important role of an MLA in my view. It supersedes all else. That is the role that an MLA has to be the voice of their constituents in government. MLAs are not responsible to a party. They're not. There's nothing in our constitution, not a shred of anything in our constitution that says that an MLA is somehow loyal or accountable to their party. That is fiction. It is something that has been bred into our political culture over many years. Now you're seeing the logical extension of that progression, where now we have a situation where with almost everything we do, if you're a government MLA, with regard to bills and things in the Legislature, this House has become a facade. This

is just the Premier and his agenda and his bureaucrats' agenda, and then he gets all of you guys to sit here and push that agenda through.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, no. Many of those guys will agree with that, too.

Mr. Anderson: Some do agree, but many don't.

The point is that it's a facade, and the reason is that we have this mistaken loyalty as MLAs. We think we're loyal to the party, but we're not loyal to parties. We shouldn't be loyal to parties. That's not what we're here for. We shouldn't be loyal to donors. You know what? With regard to when we make legislation and when we vote on legislation, we shouldn't even be loyal to our friends. You know, when we're talking about voting on bills or not voting on bills, not even our friends should hold sway in that. They shouldn't. The people who hold sway when we vote on things should be the people that we represent, the voters, the people who go into that ballot booth and mark their X next to the name of a community member who they are entrusting to represent their interests and the interests of their family in the Legislative Assembly or in Parliament or wherever.

That's really the crux of what an MLA should be. Never should we vote along party line. That should never be a reason to vote. Too often in our political culture that's what it's become, and it's wrong. It's absolutely wrong. You know, with the exception of maybe one hon. member – and I think he's sitting right in front of me – I think every single one of us has voted the party line at one point or another for whatever reason even though we haven't agreed with something, I would think. Maybe not. [interjection] I know. It was easy for him because he was a party of one, so it's easy to not do that, but now that's not the issue.

Dr. Taft: You're going to have to crack the whip on him.

Mr. Anderson: He can crack the whip on himself.

The point is that I think we've all done it, so I'm not trying to point fingers here. I'll tell you one thing. Since I have crossed the floor to the Wildrose, not once – not once – have I voted on a bill that I did not agree with. Not once. On cellphones, for example, we had a caucus that was divided on that. We had two members, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who voted for Bill 16. They voted for it. Myself and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore voted against the bill. I know that our leader felt a certain way about it. I'll let her speak for herself. But it was a divided caucus on that. People asked us about it. I remember that there were a couple of reporters who asked and said: oh, so you have a divided caucus on it? And we're like: absolutely we have a divided caucus on it; we have free votes.

There are many votes where we do feel the same about something. Obviously, we have a small caucus, so it's a little bit easier to agree on some things than it is in a larger caucus. The point is that we have decided as a party, as a caucus that we are not going to go forward. The precedent has gone too far. We are way over the line. Parliamentary democracy has taken on a kind of a different almost bastardized version of democracy, and it's not right. We have to examine the rules. We can't just do things for tradition's sake.

I mean, these folks over here call themselves Progressive Conservatives. Well, progressivism used to mean that you're not stuck in the old ways of doing things, that you're willing to progress and to think about new ways of doing things. That's what I would ask those members over there. Liberalism as well, liberal democracies, liberalism: looking at what's innovative, what's going to build society for the better good, you know, moving forward.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

Ms Pastoor: Progressive.

Mr. Anderson: Progressive. It's kind of the same: progressive, liberalism.

That's what it used to mean, and I think it's still what it means. But in some ways, I'll tell you, certainly on the democracy file the Wildrose Alliance is the most progressive party in this Legislature. I would challenge any caucus to say that we're not on this issue. Now, we can talk about other issues, and I'm sure there would be a different view on that. But there is no way on the issues of democracy that we are not being the most progressive, the most innovative, the most liberal, so to speak, of any of the parties. We want our democracy to change. It is not right the way that we run our party democracies. We have to change it. We have to change our paradigms.

10:10

So that's what we're going to be advocating for. We're going to run an entire election on that. One of the first bills we'll bring into this Legislature if we get elected: we will make sure to separate votes of nonconfidence from all other votes on bills. They will be separated, so never will a vote against any bill or any motion or anything be considered a vote of nonconfidence. Never will that happen. If you do that when you vote on something, again, your devotion to the party in seeing it continue as government trumps what may be the interests of your constituents. So you've got to separate those two things. That would help restore the role of an MLA. That's one thing that we will absolutely do.

Voter recall. There's another excellent example. How can you have truly free votes if you don't have your constituents standing behind you with the ability that if you get out of line, if you continue down that road and it is clearly working against the voters of your constituency, then they can axe you?

An example from my own constituency. We have a community of 40,000 people. Probably 20 per cent of the folks in that community make their living in oil and gas somehow: the service industry; they work downtown Calgary at one of the oil companies; they have some kind of trickle-down business that relates to oil and gas. In fact, if you count the trickle-downs, it's probably even more than that, but direct employment in the oil and gas industry is probably about 20 per cent. I mean, it's so huge in our community, as it is in many communities around the province.

During the new royalty framework debacle, which was a made-in-Alberta NEP and one of the most disastrous policies in this province's history economically, I would say, in my opinion, I had literally hundreds of constituents either write me or tell me, "You either do something about this, or you're gone in the next election. You're gone. I've been voting PC for 30, 40 years, and that's it. We're finished." That's an example of a situation where if I had not spoken out against the royalties, which I couldn't do under the PCs, I believe I would have clearly lost my job in the next election because I wasn't being accountable to my constituents.

But I couldn't break party ranks; I wasn't allowed to break party ranks. It was like shackling. I've never been supportive of the policy. Never once did I support the policy, and it was like being shackled, having to shut up and not say anything about the policy when it was so reprehensible. Everyone on that side of the House knows it. They know that in caucus I spoke out about it all the time. "Oh, Anderson's speaking up: cue to roll your eyes. He's talking about the new royalty framework again." It was torturous to not be able to speak out about that issue.

Airdrie schools was another issue. I talked to a senior official in Education while I was still with the government, and they told me flat out: yes, many of the schools in that 32 that they announced were placed for political reasons, and there was not an objective needs analysis done for some of them. They wanted to be equal between Edmonton public and Calgary public, and they wanted to be equal between Calgary Catholic and Edmonton Catholic. Then they had some rural considerations in the rural areas. This was admitted to me by a senior official. Airdrie, like Beaumont and like Chestermere and some others – we're just talking about the role of an MLA, why we don't need 87, why we only need 83. That's where I'm going with this, Mr. Chair. That's right, Bill 28.

When that happened, as an MLA I needed to speak out about it, but again I couldn't speak out. How could I say that it was politicized when my hands were shackled with party discipline and I didn't feel I could stand up for my constituents the way that I needed to do? I could stand up for them on some things, where it aligned with the governing party. I could do that. But that's it. If it didn't align with the governing party, I couldn't do it. I was shackled.

To the bill, I really feel that we just do not need 87 MLAs if we can't respect the authority or the role that the 83 MLAs already in this Legislature have. If we can't respect that role, it's wrong. I'm excited for what's coming up in the next, you know, 12 to 18 months. This is going to be amazing. We're going to have a democratic revolution here, I think. I think that the members that get elected, whether they be Progressive Conservatives, whether they be Wildrose, whether they be Liberals or New Democrats or independents – who knows? – most of them are going to be elected less on their party's platform and more on: are these people going to represent me in the Legislature? Are they going to be my voice? Are they going to stand up and be accounted for?

You see this with what's happened with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. You see this. People are saying: "That's just not right. He should be able to stand up and voice his concerns publicly. That's part of what an MLA should do." You've certainly seen this in my constituency, and the hon. members will see at the next election. I have people that are NDP and Liberal supporters, and they still support me, only because of the one issue, only because I said: I promise you that the reason I'm leaving the government is because I want to be able to stand up in this Legislature and on every issue vote according to your interests, and party line will mean nothing to me anymore. That alone has been an extremely important thing.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. We ran a poll across the province on every MLA to see what their approval rating was in their different areas. The highest approval rating in the entire province: sitting next to me, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, an 82 per cent approval rating in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for that member. [interjection] Very high but not quite as high. Yours was very high, too, hon. member. Yours was very high as well. I remember that.

An Hon. Member: How many people did you survey?

Mr. Anderson: All 83. We won't get into some of the other numbers.

Mr. Kang: How about me, good neighbour?

Mr. Anderson: I can't remember. I'm sorry. We're not going to release that poll today.

Here's the point. We have got to make sure that as we move forward, we are doing things as MLAs, that we're being first and

foremost loyal not to our party, not to our donors but that we are being loyal to the people that we represent. That has got to be job one. The only way we can do that is by changing a lot of the rules in parliamentary democracy. We've got to do that. That's going to be part of what we need to do moving forward. If we do not change those things, people are going to lose trust in our democracy. People are going stop voting, as they've already stopped voting.

I don't care. If there are PCs over there that are able to – we just saw a great example of this. The Member for St. Albert broke ranks today and spoke out for his constituents. Now, we don't know what the consequences of that will be – we will have to see – but that took courage. That took courage. And you know what? Courage is contagious, and you're seeing it all over the province right now. People are speaking up. They're stepping out on the right, on the left, in the centre. They're saying: "This is unacceptable. The state of our democracy is unacceptable, and whether we're Conservative or Liberal, progressive, moderate, whatever, it doesn't matter. Things are going to change going forward. If that means that we have to start a new party, the Wildrose, or we need to start a new party, the Alberta Party, things are going to change."

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an exciting bill to get up on. I kind of waited a little bit because when we had so many government members speak that they didn't want to adjourn this debate, I thought that some of them would jump up. Just a point of clarification: how quickly do we need to stand up, to be courteous, to allow those who want to call a division even? I believe that it was the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill who stood up and led that division. What's the point of clarification on how quickly we have to stand up in order to let someone else have an opportunity to speak, seeing as how they stood at a division to say that they wanted to continue debate on this bill?

10:20

The Acting Chair: Reasonable time, hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: That's what I love about this government. They're so clear in their definition of things, which is the clarity of this bill. Thank you.

I will continue on, then, and refer back. Because time keeps running out so quickly, I kind of forget. I get listening to the next speaker, and I forget where I started and where I left off, so we might be a little bit repetitive. I should've put a tick mark where I got to.

The number one thing that we're discussing here is numbers 1 through 87. I know I don't need to read them back in because I went through the 87 new ridings that this act, Bill 28, is describing. It's got 87 ridings, and many members have gotten up and spoken, again, that we don't need that. That is the problem and why this bill should not be passed.

This bill should be shelved and put to committee or something else to say: how do we reduce the number of MLAs yet increase the democratic representation and ensure that we're doing a better job for all of the people here in Alberta? How do we engage them so that we can be assured that they feel that they've got good representation?

Where I believe I was, Mr. Chair, was discussing the possibilities of electronic voting for different constituencies and representing different numbers but actually having a true representation of the number of people that voted. As I mentioned earlier, if in the next

election we were to merge Calgary-Glenmore with Calgary-Lougheed and double the number of people there, we could set up electronic voting. It would be recorded. It would instantly go out on the Internet, just as our voice does. People can listen in and watch right now. I don't think it would be expensive to put electronic voting to where the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, which is going to be changed to just Airdrie, would push the button. It might be, like I say, for the total area 65,000 constituents or for mine around 39,000. That's what you would actually represent in the vote.

The other area, like I say, to drop back is to say: well, actually, you just get to represent the number of people that voted from your constituency. That would change things dramatically. People would say: my vote does make a difference; my vote does count because it's an electronic vote, so I'm going to get out to vote this time because I want to make sure that the area of southwest Calgary is well represented so that we can get the ring road there. Maybe I'd get a high turnout of 70 per cent because those people are frustrated that this government has failed to provide a ring road around the city, and the congestion in my riding of Calgary-Glenmore is bad. I continually hear from constituents that have to get onto 14th Street from 90th Avenue and are frustrated with the number of hours they have to sit, often up to an hour and a half, to get out during rush hour because of the lights that are there. They need an overpass.

We want to look at ways of: how can we represent an area better? I talked a little bit earlier about the geographical, making sure that you represent an actual area instead of looping out and reaching across into another area. I believe this electronic vote would be something that would actually encourage people to come out and vote, one, for their area to be represented. Then, two, like I say, I think it could and should be connected to the research money for those MLAs that are elected.

Dr. Taft: What's the electronic vote?

Mr. Hinman: Well, that we would actually come in here – do you know how many people voted in your constituency of Edmonton-Riverview, last time?

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, through the chair. Let's just say that there were 12,000 people that came out and voted in Edmonton-Riverview. That would be the number that the hon. member – when he voted on a bill, it would be 12,000. If someone from another area had a very low turnout . . . [interjection] Well, it just would be immediately tallied because they would know how many we represent here. If someone from another area perhaps only had only 3,000 people come out and vote . . .

Chair's Ruling Relevance

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I have to call you to order on this. This debate in the Committee of the Whole is regarding the clauses of this bill, and while I appreciate your passion and the discourse on various different types of democracy, that's not what the bill is about. So can you confine your comments to what is in the bill?

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess sometimes it takes a little while to wrap it back, but what we're talking about are the 87 ridings that this bill has created, and I can't agree with that. I'm speaking against, you know, the 25 that are represented in Calgary. If you want, I'll be happy to go through those. Obviously, it's been forgotten, but number . . .

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, you are presumed to have agreed to the principles of the bill because it passed second reading. We are now discussing the particular clauses of the bill and whether you have amendments or suggestions or any other discourse regarding the clauses of the bill. If you wish to address them, I'm not intending to restrict in any way your ability to discuss those.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: I have a lot of suggestions on how we could reduce it. To assume that I voted to get this to this point – I'm sorry – that's typical of the word "assume." I don't need to elaborate on what that is. We shouldn't assume things in politics or in life, and I don't want to be the "me" in there. Perhaps you want to be the first part of it, but I just do not want to go there.

I did not vote for this. I voted against it. I don't think it was a standing vote, so we can't go back to the records to look at that.

There are 25 ridings in here for Calgary: Calgary-Acadia, Calgary-Bow, Calgary-Buffalo, Calgary-Cross, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-East, Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-Foothills, Calgary-Fort, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Greenway, Calgary-Hawthwood, Calgary-Hays, Calgary-Klein, Calgary-Lougheed, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, Calgary-McCall, Calgary-Mountain View, Calgary-North West, Calgary-Northern Hills, Calgary-Shaw, Calgary-South East, Calgary-Varsity, and Calgary-West. It's a problem. It's a problem in having that many people come here. It's not functioning.

Perhaps, Mr. Chair, at this point I will move to adjourn debate on Bill 28, and we can move on to something else.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:28 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Pastoor
Boutilier	Kang	Taft
Forsyth	Mason	

10:40

Against the motion:

Ady	Drysdale	Sandhu
Allred	Goudreau	Sarich
Benito	Johnson	Snelgrove
Berger	Klimchuk	Tarchuk
Bhullar	Lukaszuk	Webber
Brown	Marz	Woo-Paw
Campbell	Oberle	Xiao
Denis	Prins	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 24
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[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to say thank you for recognizing me on the bill because that is so important in these types of situations. I want to say this evening that this particular bill,

Bill 28, on electoral divisions, the 105,000, almost, that are in my community, that I've represented over the last 14 years, as much as I've had the honour and privilege of representing them, one thing is for certain: our population has grown from 50,000 to over double that. It remains an honour and a privilege to serve our citizens. After the next election it's my hope and intent to be continuing to serve them because it remains an honour and a privilege, never forgetting who my bosses are, the good people of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, it is interesting, the table of contents and in terms of Bill 28: do we need more MLAs? Now, I want to say that when this Legislature determined that – and of course the majority of the members in this Legislature are the existing government for the last 39 years, so ultimately because they have such a majority, they will determine. We should not confuse Legislature with government because they're really one and the same, even though we proudly stand as an opposition. But that being the case, when we say, "The Legislature gave direction," what we really are talking about is that the PC caucus gives direction to allow this to happen because of the fact that in this democracy there are 67 on that side now. When I first joined, there were 72. As you descend from 72 to 71 to 70 to 69 to 68 to 67, who knows what will happen from there?

Mr. Berger: We're getting better.

Mr. Boutilier: You're getting better. Yeah. You're getting fewer; that's for sure.

Having said that, I want to say that the hon. comments that have been made regarding the constituency we serve under the Electoral Divisions Act, I actually presented and indicated that in my electoral district right now with the 77 polls that are hosted in the community of 13 communities that spans over 68,000 square kilometres – I must admit that one citizen came up to me a couple of months ago when the electoral commission was collecting input, and they said: "Well, how does that work, Guy? You represent 103,000 people, but other MLAs in other areas represent less." They asked me what the actual average was in terms of – and I'm just dating back. I think the average was about 38,000 or 39,000, yet I had grown from 50,000 to 103,000.

Now, I know I have a lot of energy, but what's interesting with this point is that not only is it the most people, but it also is the largest geographical area to cover, 68,000 square kilometres, including Wood Buffalo national park. Now, in fairness, though, there are a lot of trees in those areas, and trees don't vote, but 103,000 people in my riding do. Even with all of those trees, trees don't vote. When I was the Minister of Environment, as much as I encouraged them to participate, it just never quite happened.

Mr. Chairman, I would say on this Bill 28 that I presented to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I indicated that clearly if the average is 39,000 – I think it's going to over 40,000. I don't have the number in front of me of what the average riding is, plus or minus 25 per cent. I am proud to say that I've been able to represent my constituency as a strong voice for the last 14 years with that 103,000. Now, it wasn't always 103,000. In fact, at one point it was just over 50,000, but that was still even above the average.

Mr. Anderson: You're above average, though.

Mr. Boutilier: I'm above average. I don't know about that. My wife indicates I'm not quite above average on certain things, but I'm going continue to work on that.

That being the case, Mr. Chairman, I fundamentally believe we

should have, in fact, fewer MLAs, with no disparaging comment to any of the members and the constituencies they represent. Actually, the idea came from a predecessor of mine. He's now a justice with the Court of Queen's Bench, but he served proudly as a Liberal MLA . . .

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Mr. Boutilier: He did, for the riding of Fort McMurray. I would like to say that I followed him as the MLA. I consider him a close friend.

You may recognize the name Adam Germain, who clearly was viewed as someone that was more conservative than most Conservatives. Having said that, he was elected as a Liberal, no different, actually, than the minister of health at one point, when he served across the way on the other side of the House. Actually, I believe there are only a few of us that have served on a variety of sides in the House, some by choice, some because they were booted, some because they chose to leave. That being the case, I think that each of us has a prime responsibility of serving our bosses.

When I presented, I indicated that I was torn. My fundamental principle was that we needed fewer MLAs, but that would mean everyone's responsibility as an MLA and the number of people they represent would have to go up. I think I can proudly say that that's not an unreasonable approach because I was at the time representing 103,000 citizens. When the average was below 40,000, I was at, I think, 103,400, according to the mayor of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo in the most recent census.

I have to say: could I continue to represent my citizens in the existing riding without having two ridings? Yes, I can. I know each of us brings a lot of energy and interest and passion to this Assembly. I think it's fair to say that we are here because of the gratification we get from serving the public interest. I don't think there's a higher calling in any job or position that you may have wherever you work in Alberta. I will say that I was willing to continue to serve under the existing electoral boundary, meaning I was willing to serve 103,000.

Now, if that is the case, on the average of 103,000, which I've been doing now for almost 14 years – at one point it was lower; it was just around 50,000, but over the last 14 years we have grown with the development in the oil sands. Let's just do the math on that. How many MLAs would we have? With a population of just over 3 million that would be, essentially, 10 MLAs per million. In this Legislature if everyone had the average of what Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo had, of 103,000, then that would mean, based on my understanding of the electoral process, that we would ultimately have about 34 MLAs. Now, my instinct tells me that 34 might be a bit shy of the 87 that's being proposed by this Legislature in the Electoral Divisions Act. So I believe there's a middle ground.

10:50

Actually, to this day I agree with what the former Liberal MLA for Fort McMurray, Justice Germain, had suggested. At the time I was mayor. I agreed with the fact that we should have about 67 MLAs – 67 MLAs – not 87, which means 20 less. There would be no impact. In other words, the proposed extra seat in the Fort McMurray area, which will take it down to about 51,000 for each of the two ridings, would be the result. But I'm saying that for the last 14 years as the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo I feel, certainly, the people of Fort McMurray have rewarded me for my work over four elections.

Obviously, the geographical mass, which is larger than any other constituency, 68,000 square kilometres, and which forms the borders

of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, which we worked collectively on with our stakeholders group to form – we actually had a time in the electoral boundaries when we used to have a snowplow that used to stop at the city border. It used to stop at the border, lift its snowplow blade, and then go through the city when I was the mayor of the former city of Fort McMurray. Then it would put its blade down to continue on in the boundary because that was another one of the rural communities that we bordered. That made absolutely no sense at all. The then Minister of Municipal Affairs, who, I might add, I consider a close friend, was the Member for Vermilion-Viking, Dr. Steve West. I met with him as the minister at the time and me as the mayor of Fort McMurray. I said, “Steve, this makes no sense. Why are your snowplows lifting their blades on provincial highways and going through borders? Why would we not uniformly put the electoral boundary into one?”

Actually, that’s what we did in forming the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, which I believe was a very good move. Did you know the result of that? Well, at the time our taxes went down by almost \$2,000 because in that approach to our electoral boundaries we were able to bring in the oil sands plants. It wasn’t called annexation. It was simply an amalgamation of communities coming together to form the Wood Buffalo name. As a part of history it would be interesting to note, as the former mayor of Fort McMurray and the first mayor of Wood Buffalo, that the name of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is only a temporary name. It’s only a temporary name. The strategy was that in the 13 communities the buffalo and the northern lights and the aboriginal compass on each of our crest that forms Wood Buffalo actually represented every community, and Alberta’s strength was that every community in those 13 regions also had an identity.

I’ll give you an example. In the electoral boundary of Fort Chipewyan the name Fort Chipewyan would follow with the Wood Buffalo umbrella. Anzac as well as Janvier and Conklin as well as many other communities, Sapræ Creek: all of those electoral boundaries fell under the 68,000 square kilometres that, in fact, form that boundary.

I can say that with our 103,000 people that we have today, if every MLA in here were to serve that number of citizens – and I know they would do that proudly and work hard for them – that would mean that there would be only 35 MLAs in this Assembly after the next election with the electoral boundaries no matter what political party you represent.

I presently represent 103,000 people. Let’s really think about this for a minute. I can see the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, the home of the first RCMP troop in all of Canada, shaking his head in agreement, and I thank him for recognizing the good work I do representing those 103,000 people. I’m so pleased by that. I can see the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who actually has been fairly quiet this evening, but I can tell he’s listening intently. I know from his background, be it his experience in hunting, his academic credentials, clearly, he understands that if every MLA were to represent 103,000 people, with 3.3 or 3.4 million Albertans that would be – the math on that maybe he could do for me – I think, on average, Mr. Chairman, under Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, about 34 or 35 MLAs based on it.

Now, it was interesting that the commission had proposed that Fort McMurray would get another seat. I don’t think that’s a surprise to anyone unless they were going to continue with 103,000 per one MLA while other MLAs were serving far fewer people, but what’s interesting is that geographically we still had the largest geographical region in the electoral boundaries. If I travel the Athabasca up north to Fort Chipewyan, that actually takes almost six to seven hours in the middle of summer, and I might say that that’s by canoe. If you travel on the winter road in the wintertime over

Lake Athabasca, it still takes over six hours to get to the northern tip of my riding as it presently exists with that 103,000.

I’m proud to do that and also because of the fact that the oldest settlement – not only is it the largest, with the most people; it’s the oldest settlement, dating back to the 1500s with the Fort Chipewyan people. It is the oldest settlement in all of Alberta, the first settlement in all of Alberta. I must say that I’m very proud of that, and it, indeed, remains an honour and a privilege to serve – to serve – that.

Mr. Chairman, on this Electoral Divisions Act I indicated that if 87 is going to be the number, then Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo and the 13 communities should be treated no less, and they should be treated no less because if an MLA is serving on average now, I don’t know, 50,000 – in some areas it’s lower than that, but that’s not the MLA’s fault. I would have preferred to go back to what I have been able to do in serving, and I’m just really proud to say that I look forward to working with two members in the next Legislature. We will work hard in the election. In fact, I’m very eager about the election. I kind of wish the election was going to be called now because I think that change is in the air.

For me, I am going to be running not as the existing PC Party anymore after 14 years; I’m going to be running proudly as a member of the Wildrose caucus. I’m very proud of that and even more proud to represent the leader of the 21st century, who believes in free votes when it comes to electoral boundaries. We can vote in any way, shape, or form that we would like to vote in this House, and that is interesting because our policy on things that may be controversial is that we believe that ultimately our boss is the people of Alberta. If they feel so strongly about an issue, then we are allowed to have a free vote, and that is a refreshing change from the last 14 years.

Then, again, I have been noted for having free votes no matter what goes on, and that in itself is being true to one’s self. I think it was Shakespeare who actually at one point said: to thine self be true. I’ll have to yield to Dr. Brown to perhaps enlighten me in that. To thine self be true when it comes to electoral boundaries.

The Deputy Chair: To the Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Boutilier: Oh, I’m so sorry. Again, I just continue, Mr. Chair. My apologies. Let me withdraw the name Dr. Neil Brown and say the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill because that’s far more appropriate under the existing rules.

I can say that the next government, I hope, will consider working with the opposition to perhaps have a standing order where we move away from our constituency name to our actual name because that’s the name that we have, and I think it would make it a more collective and a more genuine and, shall I say, productive way so that the chairman would not have to be interrupting – not interrupting; properly calling me on a standing order that I have obviously innocently brought forward.

Perhaps, you know, to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the Member for Edmonton . . . Oh, it seems like we have a change of seating over here right now.

An Hon. Member: It’s committee.

Mr. Boutilier: It’s committee. Okay.

I want to say, Mr. Chairman, on the Electoral Divisions Act that I believe, in my judgment, that I’m willing to move from the 103,000. I have found it, with a three-year-old, to be quite demanding, the geographical region just in itself, with 103,000 people.

By the way, Mr. Chair, did I mention that in this electoral boundary we expected \$20 billion in 20 years? What happened was that in my community, in the oil sands capital of the world, the \$20 billion wasn't \$20 billion in investment. It actually turned out to be \$120 billion. Ultimately, the infrastructure such as a long-term care facility in the electoral district that I represent, which was a hot issue for me, and it remains a hot issue when it comes to the fact that we have 103,000 people – we are the only city of that size in all of Alberta that doesn't have a long-term care centre for seniors. That is sad. It's certainly not because of my attempts as a strong voice to convince the government.

11:00

In fact, on the electoral boundary, at the time I had cabinet agree to it and the funding agreed to. But guess what? It seemed to disappear, to go somewhere else. I'm not sure where that is, but I can tell you that the people of Fort McMurray and the oldest settlement in Fort Chipewyan deserve no less. And all those people were asking for under this division act is something that will speak for the spirit of Alberta.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. The Internet is a wonderful resource and how the Legislature is now hooked up to being able to watch us. Interestingly enough, we had some comments earlier by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and he was talking about the challenges that he faced with the Internet and, you know, wanting that face to face. Well, what's very fascinating is the people that are watching us on the legislative screen. They've been watching the debate and actually have been prompting and asking when the Progressive Conservatives are going to speak to this particular piece of legislation. I find it fascinating how people are starting to get into the technology. I promised that I would wave to them, so I'm waving for those who are watching because they sometimes don't think that we're paying attention. That's the nice thing about allowing us to have computers in the Legislature, and we're grateful for that.

I just want to be brief because I ran out of time, and I had promised the people that I serve and represent in Calgary-Fish Creek that I would make sure that I got all of their comments in. I have the privilege of serving a wonderful constituency called Calgary-Fish Creek, which is a constituency that has a provincial park in an urban setting. I'll be looking forward to the debate when we get to the parks because I'm sure that the minister who's responsible for this piece of legislation has probably been inundated with e-mails like we have. So it will be interesting as someone who lives and enjoys Fish Creek park to hear what she has to say when we get to that bill. That goes back to the democracy issue because if she's listening to the constituents that she represents in Calgary-Shaw, I'm sure they'll be eager to hear what she has to say on the record in *Hansard* when we start the debate of the parks act.

What I want to finish off saying is that democracy is something that we should all be proud of, and we released our democracy platform today. One of the nice things is when you're connecting with the community. They want to talk about the number of MLAs that this particular piece of legislation recommends, and that goes back to the 87 that we've talked about. Quite frankly, I'm really struggling with the fact that I've heard, since we started our debate at 7:30, one individual, one government member speak up and speak eloquently about his particular riding, how his constituents loved the idea of more MLAs.

I guess rural maybe thinks differently than urban, and I can't

speak because I'm not a rural MLA. But I can tell you that I've met with lots of rural-nominated candidates, and they certainly have indicated that they don't support that. We've had the opportunity to travel the province and meet with many of the candidates that we currently have nominated with the Wildrose. They're asking me, as we speak to them and continue to talk to them about policies, where we – we – got the idea that we needed more MLAs because the constituents that they're representing, as they're out there door-knocking – and most of them are door-knocking very hard because of the process that they have to do to take out an incumbent MLA. It's important for them to get to the doors. They're telling us that they aren't hearing anything about more MLAs but are hearing a lot about what's going on in regard to the issues. Of course, that goes back to health care, that goes back to Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, and the property rights.

Mr. Chair, again, I have to get on the record on behalf of Calgary-Fish Creek that people are struggling with this. Constituents are struggling with 87. I'm sure your constituents are struggling with the idea that you're going to support the addition of MLAs, but I guess that's up to you to speak up on behalf of your constituents, as it is up to me, and be on the record.

So with those short remarks, I'm going to sit down. Again, thank you for the time.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to get back and continue that discussion or that dissertation or viewpoint, sharing on why we do not need 87, why I think we should think seriously – and, again, I welcome the thoughts from the other side – about why we need 87 MLAs, as per the schedule here, up from the 83 that we have now when we do not respect the role of an MLA now and we do not let MLAs do their job right now. We talked about the fact that an MLA has many different roles. I say three primary ones, and I'll do them in order from least important to most important.

The first is more of a symbolic role, the state-representative role, where you go to an event, or a new business comes into the community or a new school is opened or something like that and they want their democratically elected representative to come in and represent the government or represent the province at an event or an opening. So it's kind of a ceremonial role, we'll call it. That's the least important, but it's still part of the job.

I would say that the next one up in importance is that of an ombudsman, one that assists constituents to access certain government programs, to weave through the bureaucracy of government, to maybe plead their case to local law enforcement in some cases if there is something that they'd like to see the police take a little bit more time looking at. You know, sometimes they'll come to their MLA, and the MLA will say: "Hey, why don't you watch the street? I hear that there are problems there." So it's kind of a way of relaying information, being the eyes and ears on the street for law enforcement in some cases from what you hear from your constituents. There are all kinds of different ombudsman roles where you're trying to facilitate and assist and so forth. That's the second role and the middle importance role. It is important. There are some things that you can do for your constituents that are very important, and they're personalized. They don't have a kind of macro effect, but they definitely have a micro effect on that individual person.

11:10

The first and I think most important role of an elected official though is to represent the interests and viewpoints, primarily the interests, of their constituents when they vote on legislation. I mean,

that is really what an elected representative is supposed to be. That's what an MLA is supposed to do above all. When they vote on a bill and when they stand up and give their view on things and when they propose amendments to bills and so forth and when they propose bills in their entirety, they should be doing so with one thing in mind: is this in the best interests of my constituents and the province? Those are the things that should be paramount in the mind of an MLA when they make a vote.

If that was the case, if MLAs were fulfilling those three paramount roles, I would say: "You know what? Maybe there's a reason to have 87. Maybe there's a reason to go from 83 to 87." You don't want to water down the representation on votes so much that every person's vote kind of becomes less and less important and so forth. Also, it becomes more difficult for one person to serve a whole bunch of people, especially in rural Alberta, where the ceremonial role is much more elevated because you have more schools to visit and more things to go to than urban MLAs do. I kind of have a middle riding, where it's not quite as time consuming as somebody in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, for example. Probably a more graphic example would be the Minister of Municipal Affairs' riding, where you have this large riding and there are all of these ceremonial things that need to be done. You need to go to and you need to appear at different events and so forth. So as there's more and more population, you know, you might need more MLAs for MLAs to still be able to fulfill that role.

The problem is that that's not the only role of an MLA, and the fact is that it's not the most important. It's the least important. Although, yeah, okay, I understand the pressure of having to get to every school graduation and every ribbon cutting and so forth, that in itself is not a justifiable reason, in my view, to expand the number of seats. What you can do instead is: well, okay, if that's the case, then there are many different ways to solve that issue. I guess you could pay to send a representative of the government. We could give a slightly larger office staff budget to have an office representative go to some of the ceremonial things, like you see with Members of Parliament, for example.

We have a Member of Parliament in our area who has a huge riding. It's a massive riding. Wild Rose, ironically enough, it's called. It's wild rose country. In that riding he has a representative go to many of his things. He has two or three people on his staff, and all their job is to essentially represent him around the riding. So you can address that in a different way other than more MLAs, as our MPs do and are able to fulfill their ceremonial duty.

So it is with ombudsmen. I have an incredible person who's been in Airdrie-Chestermere or Airdrie-Rocky View. It's been switched back and forth. The reason you want to call it Airdrie-Rocky View is that it was once called Airdrie-Rocky View. I think that is what's throwing some of the members off in here. It went from Airdrie-Rocky View to Airdrie-Chestermere, and now it's just going to be Airdrie, as in the bill.

You can hire more staff in the office to fulfill the role of ombudsman in helping them get through the government bureaucracy. Like I said, I have an incredible woman in my constituency office, two actually. One is a little bit newer and is kind of learning the ropes and doing an amazing job, but one has been there for 30 years and is just amazing. She knows every government program like the back of her hand. It makes my job very much easier than it would be otherwise. She really helps with making sure that people's needs are addressed. If someone has an issue with unemployment insurance or WCB or PDD or AISH, any kind of issue, she can immediately help them know exactly who to ask and get it done. She's just marvellous. So she does a great job.

But the point is that you don't need another MLA to do that job.

In fact, MLAs, generally speaking, especially new ones, don't generally have a clue where to begin with regard to that ombudsman role. It takes a lot of time to figure out that role. Some of the folks that have been here a while are probably pretty good at that, but certainly when I first started, I didn't know. Good grief, if someone came to me with an issue with the lottery fund and getting a grant, I didn't know where to start. It takes time. The point is that you can hire people to do that. You don't need more MLAs.

But there's one role you cannot hire out. You cannot hire out the electoral part, the representative part, of an MLA's job. You can't hire that out. That's something that only you as an MLA, only we in this Assembly, each individual MLA, have the ability to perform. Only we have the authority because of the people who went to that ballot box and marked an X by our names, not by a party. They marked it by our names. They did that, and when they did that, they gave us the authority for everyone in here, who won our ridings, to speak for them.

Mr. Hinman: How many didn't win their ridings in here?

Mr. Anderson: No one. That's what I said. I said, "everyone in here." I'm speaking of all of Alberta.

The point is that only we have the authority to speak for our constituents, and we've been given that authority by our Constitution, and we've been given it by the people that we represent. With that in mind, you can't hire that job out. I could see that if we respected that position, if we respected that role of an MLA to represent his constituents in the way that they vote in the Legislature, in public, transparently, if we respected that role, going up to 87 MLAs might be justifiable. It might be. There might be a justifiable reason for that because you cannot hire out that function of an MLA. You just can't do it. That's not something you can delegate. Only you, the MLA, have that authority.

We don't respect that role. We respect the first two. MLAs act as ceremonial representatives and ombudsmen. They do it. Everyone in this area does, some better than others. Most of us do it. But we do a brutal job, generally speaking, of representing our constituents freely in the Legislature. We don't do that. Clearly, we don't. Now, there are some times when the interests of the governing party and the interests of what the government party is proposing and our own constituency interests, in our view, are aligned, and in that case the party whip and the lack of free votes doesn't matter because the interests are aligned.

But there are many times when those interests are not aligned, when the constituency's interests are not in line with what the governing party wants to do, what the executive branch, in particular, of the governing party wants to do, the Premier's office in other words. In that case if you're a government member or, I would say, in most other caucuses, you still have to vote the party line because of caucus unity and team player and all that stuff, because of what I think is a misplaced loyalty to party. There should be no loyalty to party if it conflicts with the views of your constituents. If it's aligned, great. If you can be loyal to your party and you can be loyal to your constituents, that's fine. Great. If you can do both, awesome.

Sometimes you cannot do both, and in those circumstances loyalty to party cannot trump loyalty to constituents. That's why we cannot justify 87 MLAs. Only when we respect the 84 MLAs that are already in this House can we then move on and think about putting in four more MLAs. Until we respect that role, it's just not doable. If anyone has read some of the writings of George Washington, he did a lot of letters, and a lot of the histories of George Washington come from the letters that he wrote back and forth to his family and

to commanders in the field, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. There's so much information in there.

11:20

I read a great book called *1776* on George Washington. One of the things it said was that after he assumed the presidency, which was, of course, after the Revolutionary War, there was this move towards parties. Of course, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were kind of the first leaders of their respective parties, the Democrats and the Whigs. Washington refused to have a party. He wasn't a member of a party. The reason he wasn't a member, he said, was because he thought that parties would be the eventual downfall of democracy because parties take away the whole underpinning of democracy, which is that a person is elected to represent the people that vote for them, the people in the constituency, the people that mark the X, and the loyalty needs to be exclusively there and nowhere else.

He felt that parties were eventually the downfall of democracy because it would allow for, essentially, these parties to form where all the power would be concentrated in the party and all the interests in the party would outweigh and be able to quash kind of the individual needs of the constituents. It didn't really matter who you elected. It was all about what the party wanted, and you'd get small groups of people influencing that party. That's why he stayed out of that.

Now, of course, we all know the history. That's not how it ended up. We know that it has gone into party politics, and I think you see in the U.S. and in Canada what happens when you have partisan party politics. When it's just party versus party, machine versus machine, it's less about what the people want, and it's more about what's good for the party and what's good politics for the party. That's the system that the Wildrose Alliance is going to make an attempt – and it's up to the people of Alberta, obviously, in just over a year. Well, it could be sooner. That's up to the Premier, of course. We will know in the next, say, 12 to 16 months or so if the people will agree with this.

What the Wildrose is trying to do: we believe that we can enact laws and democratic reforms that will allow us to return the role of an MLA, of an elected representative, to its proper place. Again, maybe we could justify these 87 MLAs. Maybe we could insert into Bill 28 a provision that would separate, for example, votes of nonconfidence from all other bills so that you couldn't have both at the same time. They would have to be individual. I think that would be a good amendment to put in Bill 28.

The reason I say that is because if you have them together, then an MLA is voting to save his government in certain situations and is not voting in what are the best interests of his or her constituents whereas if you separate them, then you can still be loyal to your party, you can still be loyal to the Premier, you don't have to defeat the government, you can support your government, and you can vote the will of and in the best interests of your constituents all the time, not just when those interests happen to line up with what the governing party, specifically the executive branch of the governing party, wants to do. So that's one huge thing, if we can amend this bill to be a little bit more broad in here and cover a little bit more. We could justify those four extra MLAs if we could bring that increased democracy into place.

The other thing we could do: you know, it would be interesting to amend or merge the bills. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has Bill 208, which is the Recall Act. Well, that's something that could be placed in here to make MLAs more relevant again.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are you proposing an amendment?

Mr. Anderson: Not yet.

The Deputy Chair: Well, we'll have to speak to the bill as it is, then, please.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Absolutely. I'm saying that right now it's a crappy bill because it doesn't include a specific clause that would see more accountability. I really want to hear from the other members of this House. What I want to hear are some ideas. I mean, rather than wasting paper on amendments, let's look at some ideas here in the bill right now. Why are we not including in here some provisions to – I'll just look. For example, it says, "The boundaries of the electoral divisions are those described in the DVD prepared by the Chief Electoral Officer as directed by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly and tabled as Sessional Paper 315/2010."

Why not have something in here like a subject-to clause? Maybe we should work on that together as a committee and say that we're going to, as I talked about earlier, make sure we separate votes of nonconfidence from votes on the bill and that we're going to have a recall provision in here. It doesn't even have to be his. We're going to have a recall provision in here so that when MLAs get so out of whack from representing their constituents, then we can recall them. The people could say: "You know what? You are going off your rocker. You're not representing us." At that point the MLA would be recalled in that case.

For example, some members over there think that, you know, it was just a travesty that I crossed the floor, that it's just an awful thing, that it's so undemocratic. Well, if we had recall, we'd be able to test that theory out, and that would be good. [interjection] No, no, no. You should get up. You should get up. We should have a chat about that, hon. member. Ask me that question. Get up, and I'll answer it.

Mr. Marz: Mr. Chair, I would be happy to discuss Bill 208, the Recall Act, on Monday when it comes up, but right now we are discussing Bill 28.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Once again we'd better reset, and I'll try and watch the time so I don't get cut off in the middle of a thought. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you have the floor.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Thank you. There was just so much heckling coming from over there from the minister of – I can't remember. He's such a phony minister that I forgot what it is. I'll have to look it up.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Mr. Chair, what we're talking about here is Bill 28 and the need to shelve this bill because, again, it doesn't address the democratic electoral divisions that we really should and need to be addressing. We'll continue discussing the problem of 87 MLAs and why this government felt constrained that it needed to have 87 MLAs.

My hon. colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere has spoken about the three major roles of an MLA, and I would agree. I think the most important role is that when we come to this House, it's our solemn duty to pass good legislation. I've always said that there's

only one thing worse than no legislation, and that's bad legislation. When you have bad legislation, people become discontent. They start going against the law, and it raises chaos in our communities.

One thing that I do know is that by human nature people really do prefer to have peaceful, safe communities and to have elected representatives that they can count on to be looking out for them, ensuring that we have good laws that are passed that add stability, that add safety so that we can enjoy our quality of life.

In the big cities one of the concerns in these areas – and, again, if we spend too much money on elected officials in other areas, we've got different neighbourhoods where crime is on the rise. That's a real concern for people that live in those areas. They're far more interested in seeing bills that are trying to eliminate the crimes in their area and to clamp down on problem people. It just seems like the more MLAs we have, the less value to some of the bills that are coming forward and the discussions we're having on those. I mean, we've tried to accommodate this House twice tonight on adjourning and going on to other bills, but the members keep voting to say that they want to talk. I thought one was getting up, but it's not the case, so I don't know why they don't want to adjourn the bill. We have a few more amendments that we'll be bringing forward tomorrow, but we're happy to keep discussing the lack of accountability of the 83 MLAs that we already have. Why do we need to increase that number?

11:30

I've never, not once, Mr. Chair, in my years of being in here had anybody come and say: "You know, there aren't enough MLAs. Could you cut the boundaries in half and have twice as many?" So I wonder why it was a priority. Again, it was numbered Bill 28; it's not like it was a high one. If it was so important to have this, I don't understand, again, why it wasn't Bill 4 or Bill 5. It's Bill 28 where it came up. Again, why did they not for the 21st century look at reducing the number of MLAs? What possibly went through this government's mind to say that we need more MLAs?

The only answers that I get, Mr. Chair, on why Bill 28 was necessary for this government to increase the number of MLAs is because they didn't want to reduce the number of rural MLAs. They were outside the boundaries of the electoral act that said that, you know, you can only be 25 per cent plus or minus of the average. Of course, again, we still have that exception where five ridings do not have to fit in there, but we had more than that. Two of my colleagues represent an incredible number of people, Airdrie-Chestermere and Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

So because we knew that we were coming up on that – every 10 years we have to look at that again by law – why were we not innovative in looking at and addressing: do we need to spend more money? Do we need more MLAs here in the House? Mr. Chair, I would welcome you to go back to your constituents and ask how many of them were all excited and said: "Oh, yes, we need four more MLAs. You're not able to vote well enough for me. We can't get appointments with you." We don't sit that long up here, so it's quite good to be able to have a lot of time in our home constituencies where we can visit with those who want to talk about democracy. It's more important that we can be that advocate for those people that really are struggling because of the rules and regulations that this government has put forward.

It was interesting to listen to my colleague talk about the wonderful lady that operates and runs his office and that it's taken years to become an expert on all of the different programs and the loops and the fences that you need to jump in order to get the different assistance. That would be a great help to reduce the time being spent on helping constituents if we focused on some of those things.

Why do we put out these programs and then hide them in books that are 200 pages long that nobody knows about? They find it very frustrating to get help.

You know, I often say that we have rules and regulations that are regulating us to death, and I don't think there's ever been a truer time than right now about being regulated to death than the regulations that we have in our Alberta Health Act. That's what we really should be discussing, Bill 17, but we're stuck on Bill 28 because the government keeps voting and saying that we want to stay here. So we'll keep talking about Bill 28 and why we have 25 MLAs to represent Calgary and why we need 87 in the province. Again, we listened, but I haven't heard any government members get up and say why this was such a good bill and why we needed 87.

To get sidetracked onto what the chair would say would be more to the point, section 4 says:

Notwithstanding section 3, if the boundary between 2 electoral divisions passes through a building used for one of more residences, the Chief Electoral Officer, after consultation with the returning officers for those electoral divisions, may by regulation . . .

Again, this is what we're talking about: regulations, regulations, regulations. Why don't we have some cold formulas, some processes in place so we don't always have to wait for the Chief Electoral Officer, so we don't have to wait for the minister, so we don't have to wait for the Premier to make regulations. It says:

prescribe the electoral division in which the building is to be located for the purposes of the Election Act.

Once again, Mr. Chair, what I see with this is purely a regulation given to an arbitrary individual that's appointed by this government that can actually go back and look and see the way that building voted and then say, "You know, I think it's strategic that we put it into this one," or "It's strategic that we put it there if so needed." Why would we not say in this bill that if it is between two boundaries – and we put up our grid, north and south, east and west – if it is touching on the west, it will go to the west. If it's touching on the north, it will go to the north. Anywhere in the province where a building is bisected, you automatically know that it's going to fall into one of those two axes, to the west or to the north, and take the arbitrary decision out of that.

For the life of me I don't understand why these people continue to put in regulations and say that we will allow this appointed person to make the decision on how and where this building is going to be encapsulated in the next election. It just doesn't make any sense to me, Mr. Chair, why this would be set up such, why we would put in a clause like that, to be totally arbitrary at the discretion of the Chief Electoral Officer and the returning officer. That's an amendment, to me, that needs to come forward. When I finish speaking this time, I'll go and talk to the table officers and see what we can do in the middle of the night.

We kind of thought that the government would be reasonable, that we would be able to go on to some other bills, that people were under the understanding we were going to debate tonight. But no. This government wants to push this through and says: "No, no. We've outvoted you twice. We don't want to talk about it." [interjections] Do we need to vote again, hon. member, to see if they're ready to switch to something else that we're prepared to talk on? They just want to overload with paperwork and say: "Oh, no. Just push this through. Just push this through." I would like to challenge – well, push, vote, I don't know what you want to call it. Freeze the water, and throw it in the air.

Dr. Brown: It's called democracy.

Mr. Hinman: Democracy. Now, there's a good concept. Is this

representative democracy, or do you want to go back to the Greeks and have true democracy, where every person gets to vote?

Dr. Brown: Representative.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, yes. It's getting late, and I got sidetracked. I can't believe that the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill would want to pull me aside because he is so often sitting in the chair, and he's not speaking through the chair or allowing me to. Sorry, Mr. Chair.

Let's get back to section 4 and why this bill is set up such that it allows the arbitrary decision of an officer appointed by this government to make that decision. It just isn't right. We could put in rules and formulas that take the arbitrary out.

Dr. Brown: How would you do it?

Mr. Hinman: I just told you. Obviously, I'll have to go through it again. He's not listening. [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the floor.

Please proceed.

Mr. Hinman: Thanks. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill asked me how I would do it, so through the chair I'll respond to him. Because I know that he's not going to have the tenacity to go back and read *Hansard* on what I said, I will go through it again, Mr. Chair, and we'll see if he's able to pick it up this time. He'll probably get cackling or looking at his computer and miss it, but we'll try. I don't mind repeating it. I've raised children. You have to say it and teach them more than once. So if we need to go through that process, I'm happy to do it for the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who wants to know how we would do it.

What I would propose – on maps we have north and south; we have east and west. We have the two axes. We could say in here that any building that's bisected, if it's through the north and the south, all buildings that are cut in half will be moved to the north, to that electoral boundary. If it's being cut between the east and the west, we'd say that all those buildings will go to the west. Therefore, there would be no arbitrary decision. It would actually be a law that makes sense. Common law, Mr. Chair . . .

11:40

The Acting Chair: Are you speaking to the bill, or are you speaking to some hypothetical amendment that may be coming? We're on the bill right now.

Mr. Hinman: I'm speaking about section 4 and what I think is wrong with section 4. I thought that that was totally within the parameters of this when I was reprimanded earlier by the chair, saying that I was off the subject, that I'd have to speak about actual clauses in the bill. I don't know how I could be any more on the bill. I'm discussing the fact that we have an arbitrary clause in here that makes no sense to me. I would think that the government, who brings forward these bills, would do the due diligence and say: let's not have arbitrary decisions in here. That just makes sense to me. The democratic way to me is to pull out the long reach of the government and ensure that people know.

I want to go back and talk a little bit, because we're passing law, about: what is common law? What is the purpose? What is the actual meaning of common law and the origin of that? There are two angles to that, to my understanding. First, common law is that we all have that law in common. It's common amongst all people.

We don't have those who are above the law, which we see many times in these bills that this government passes, that the minister is above the law in the fact that in Bill 17, again, section 10, they cannot be taken to court, that they're above the law. Common law means that it's common for all entities that are under those rules of law as citizens of that country.

The more important thing is that in the British Empire the commoners could understand it. It was to be written in a way – and I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill shaking his head in disagreement on that, so I'll look forward to his getting up and explaining what common law is and what a good law is and what a bad law is. A good law for common law is that all people understand it and that we don't have to go to a barrister or a solicitor and say: could you please explain this to me? It's just what you call the greasy wheel. It's saying: "Oh, let's make it such that people have to come to us. Make it complicated."

We want to – what would I say? – be an unproductive and an uncompetitive country because we want the laws so complicated that people won't invest. People don't know. It's arbitrary. The Premier might change the royalties at any moment and crush the investment integrity that this province had for so long. That's the reason why law is so important, and that's why I talked earlier about good law and bad law.

The most important thing is that people with great law already know before what the outcome is going to be. When you're living in a house and it's in a cul-de-sac and it's actually on range 23, the 24th section, west of the 4th meridian and you know that that's the division line, you know that the law says: it's bisected east to west, so you're going to be in the west electoral riding. That's the importance of good law. They don't have to go to a barrister. They don't have to go to a solicitor. They don't have to go to the Chief Electoral Officer and say: "Where am I going to vote? I don't know because my house is bisected." That is a poor law. It's arbitrary. It's unclear.

The law is to bring clarity, to bring understanding, so the common person can look at it, read through it, and say: "Okay, I get that. I know that I'm voting in Calgary-Glenmore because I'm bisected north to south, so into the north." So it moves to the north into Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Chair, I just do not understand why it's the opposition's job to have to scrutinize these things. It should be government that realizes that we don't want arbitrary decisions in our law. That is a bad law. That is a bad clause. The government should be standing up and saying that we want to amend it. The sad thing is that this House is so partisan that most of the people are blind, and the only thing that they can tell between the two sides is: "Oh, was it the government or was it the opposition that brought that up? If it's the opposition, I oppose it." We always get accused that the opposition opposes things. You can check the voting record. Whenever the government brings something good, we vote on it; we're in favour of it. But if we were to bring forth that amendment, the government is going to say: "Oh, it's from the opposition. We're not going to do it. We oppose that." And they vote against it.

It's kind of discouraging to think: well, why waste a bunch of time writing up amendments? If you point them out, we would expect the government to go into their caucus tomorrow night – and they can't use their own thoughts. They cackle over there and say thoughts. We'll let you know when you have a thought. I would argue again that when you look at the actual cases, these people very seldom – and it has happened twice tonight. They have to look around to the alpha dog and see: "Are we standing up and opposing this? Are we voting this way?" They don't think. They look to follow at very best. Sometimes they can actually bark out a command, and we see them react to that.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was wanting to cackle about thoughts. My question, Mr. Chair, is: did he put any thoughts into this bill and realize the arbitrariness of it, or does the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs think that arbitrary is good and that unclear law is what we want? We want that confusion. We want people not to know. We want them to have to come and ask government, and we'll have more bureaucrats that we can hire that'll be underneath me. As a minister I can brag about how many members are underneath there.

Chair's Ruling Relevance

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, the chair has been listening very intently to your comments and with a lot of interest, but there's nowhere in the bill that the chair finds anything about speculating on the thoughts of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. If you would get back onto the bill, I think everybody would be more interested in it.

Mr. Hinman: Fair enough, Mr. Chair. It's just kind of hard, you know, when you hear this chirping in the background. Sometimes it's amusing, so we like to be amused by it. I apologize. I'll get back to Bill 28 and the fact that we still have arbitrary clauses in Bill 28.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Like I said, I have spoken, and I'll say it again. The government seems very stuck on any amendments that come forward from the opposition, and very, very rarely do they ever make those amendments go through. I would urge the government to adjourn this debate and bring forward an amendment from their side so that it can come through and pass. They have no desire to adjourn the debate. They have no desire to have input into the debate. It just seems wrong, and I'm unable at this point . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired] Oh, so soon.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. We're working on a couple of amendments. Here's the thing. We've been talking a lot about . . .

Mr. Hinman: We've got to do some research here.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Got to do some quick research.

You know, obviously, people are going to ask tomorrow, whenever that comes . . .

Mr. Hinman: Anywhere in *Beauchesne* does it say that there are time outs?

Mr. Anderson: No. No time outs.

. . . why we are putting the House through such torture on this bill? Why is this important? Why is this important? That's a good question. Why are we battling this out? The reason, we think, looking through this bill and making sure that we justify the 87 listed constituencies here in this bill, is because we really do feel as a caucus that one of the signature issues when we go to Albertans at the next election is going to be kind of the spirit of what was contained in this bill, that being: what is the role of an MLA? What does an MLA do? What should they be doing? Unless we can justify that there is a reason for 87 MLAs, for four more MLAs than there are now, then what's the point? What's the point of passing this bill, which asks for four more MLAs?

What I would suggest is that the reason we're having this discussion is because we want the public — of course, if you talk about it loud enough, at least a few people are going to notice that the Wildrose is very concerned with the state of our democracy. We're concerned about the role of an MLA to represent his or her constituents. That's what we're concerned about.

11:50

The thing is that if we can't justify the role of an MLA, if we can't justify that it's worth having four more MLAs under this act, then, you know, what's the point? What are we doing? I think that it's key that we have in our minds — we need to look back. If we're going to be able to justify MLAs, the existence of four more MLAs, we need to — frankly, in order to justify the existence of any of us here, we have to see if we actually are bringing any value-added. We like that term in this Legislature. Are we bringing anything to this Legislature?

Honestly, think of the money we could save if we just elected a president. We could still have a type of democracy. I think it would be pretty dark, and it wouldn't work well, but we could have a type of democracy. We could just elect a president. That president: we could elect him, and it could be all 3 and a half million of us Albertans voting for that president. You could have as many candidates as you want. That president would just roll over us. It would be elected. Right? I mean, the president would be elected, and everything would be great.

Yet we don't have that system. Why don't we have that system? Because we think that there is value in having a diversity of opinion. We think that it is a good check and balance to have more than just one person. In the U.S. government, of course, you've got the President, but you also have a couple of checks and balances. You have the judicial branch and the legislative branch in the Senate and the House. Those are a check on the power of the one President. Well, in a parliamentary democracy the check — some people don't understand this. There is an executive branch, and that's the Premier and the cabinet, the Executive Council. They all sit there in the executive. [interjection] Well, you've got to look at the more detailed one in the final electoral boundaries report, man. Come on.

Mr. Hinman: I couldn't find anything.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, just find it. I think it's Highwood-Norwood or Beverly-Clareview or something like that.

So there's the executive branch, and then there is a legislative branch, which is the whole body here. That's the legislative branch of government. Then there is the judicial branch.

An Hon. Member: First-year law school.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. First-year law school. Judicial branch.

So now the judicial branch is a check on the power of the Legislature for sure. We have that check. But the legislative branch isn't really a check on the executive branch any more. We don't have a check or balance. We don't have an elected check and balance on the power of the executive in this province. We don't. There is nothing, really, during a session that the Legislature can do to check the power of the executive unless there is a minority government. Under our party system unless there is a minority government, there is no check on the power of the executive. The reason we don't have that is because there are no free votes. There are no free votes on any legislation of consequence, really, any legislation at all.

Because of that, if a Premier and his chief of staff get out of

control and start passing laws that nobody wants and that are harmful and that have dire effects on the economy and whatever, there is no way to rein that person in other than to have a full-out government caucus revolt. That's the only way to take a guy down, take an ineffective and ill-advised Premier down. It shouldn't be that way.

If an executive is doing something harmful like, say, the new royalty framework, when it came in – obviously, even the government agrees that it was harmful, or aspects of it were harmful anyway, or they wouldn't have changed it seven times. They couldn't do that until the executive branch gave them permission to do that. That shouldn't be how it is. I think that if there was really a free vote on the issue, if the proposed new royalty framework came through this Legislature, either parts of it would have been rejected outright, or it would have been amended such that we wouldn't have had that problem that we had, which is that the government went way over the line on the conventional side with the huge increase in royalties.

I think that that's something to keep in mind. If we had had a functioning legislative branch, if MLAs had a role in decision-making in this Legislature and it wasn't just all coming out of the executive branch, then we would have been able to stop that bad legislation. You know what? It would have helped the executive branch, too. It would have helped the executive branch in that the Premier would definitely be a lot more popular than he is today if we as a legislative branch had gotten rid of Bill 50 or severely amended it, if we had done more research and had done a better job with regard to Bill 36 or Bill 19 or what's the . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Which one?

Mr. Hinman: Bill 36, 50, or 19?

Mr. Anderson: No, no. The bulletproof vest one. I can't even remember which one that was. Anyway, the vest registry act, whatever that one was.

All these different acts, some of them very silly . . .

Some Hon. Members: Body armour.

Mr. Anderson: The body armour act. Is that what it was? That's right.

All of these different acts. Of course, the body armour one wasn't exactly one that has offended every Albertan, but I still think it was a ridiculously redundant and silly piece of legislation. But the other ones that Albertans are absolutely furious about were the new royalty framework, centralization of the superboard, the property rights bills, or lack thereof of property rights bills. I think the legislative branch, clearly, would have checked or would have kept those bills from going forward as they were. They would have been amended as such, and they would have come out the other end as good, solid pieces of legislation because, you know, the people in this room, generally speaking, are reasonable people.

If we had the freedom to express ourselves and bring forth good ideas to the legislation in a free and democratic way, I think that the wisdom of the common man would prevail. I think we have enough intellectual heft in this House as a collective group that we would be able to put out some good bills. Instead of that, we had a very small group of people, mainly the Premier, his very misguided chief of staff, and a few other people, a few powerful cabinet ministers, making all of this legislation and saying: "Here it is, folks. You vote for it or – we have to vote for it. If you don't vote for it, the government comes down." So, of course, everyone has to vote for

it or they get punted or they get ostracized or they get whatever. It's just this culture.

Some Hon. Members: Kicked out.

Mr. Anderson: Kicked out. Well, that's what I said: the Edmonton-Meadowlark MLA.

Mr. MacDonald: Boutiliered.

Mr. Anderson: Or Boutiliered. That's a term, actually. Boutiliered is actually an action word. It's a verb now. Boutiliered.

Chair's Ruling Relevance

The Acting Chair: For about the last five minutes I've been trying very hard to relate to how your comments can relate to any part of the eight sections in this four-page bill, and I'm having a very hard time trying to do that. I believe the chair has allowed a lot of leeway here, but I need to bring you back to discussion on the bill.

Debate Continued

Mr. Anderson: All right. We'll bring it back. Let me clarify why. On page 3 of the bill – and I know it's a stretch of logic, but where I'm going with this is that you've got 87 in the schedule of names of electoral divisions. Clearly, there are 87 MLAs being contemplated. If you see section 1, it says "The electoral divisions for the purpose of the Election Act are the 87 electoral divisions established by this Act." We think there should just be 83 for now. Maybe there should be less but definitely just 83. So what we want to talk about is that either we need to change – and I don't want to bring an amendment forward to change all the work unless we have agreement in principle that what's in here right now is not proper, that we shouldn't have 87 MLAs until we fix the clear democratic deficit that we're experiencing right now.

12:00

You know, I think of another one, the check-off issue. I know that was a passionate one that you were feeling. I know. That's what I mean. We've got to make MLAs relevant in order to justify the 87. Well, there's a classic example. There are many people in this Legislature that were not in favour of that bill, yet they were forced to vote for it in this Legislature even though I know they weren't for it. I'm not going to name any names, but it's just very clear that they weren't in favour of it, yet it got put through. In fact, if I remember right, the caucus was so divided on that issue in particular that I am sure it wouldn't have passed because I know that with the opposition combined with the people that weren't happy in the government caucus, it wouldn't have gotten through.

Now, how I feel on that particular bill is irrelevant, or how everyone else felt on that is irrelevant. That's not what we're talking about here. What I'm talking about, the point, is that that piece . . .

The Acting Chair: You're right. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about Bill 28, and you were specifically trying to tell me that you're relating back to the 87 members. How all of the votes on previous pieces of legislation that have passed in this House in the past few years relate to that escapes me. So could you talk about one of the eight clauses in the bill?

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I thought I was, hon. member. We'll try this one more time.

Maybe what we'll do instead is that we'll just go to an amend-

ment. What we'll do is I'll propose an amendment. It's a name change amendment. Let's do that. Let's pass this around.

The Acting Chair: Did you want to move the amendment?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. We distribute it first, right?

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this is amendment A2. You may proceed.

Mr. Anderson: All right. I am really excited about this. All of this talk of democracy has inspired me while I've been sitting here. I knew this bill was missing something, and I finally figured it out. One of the great pioneers of democracy in our nation's history, I believe, certainly in Alberta's history, is the former Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Preston Manning, son of Ernest Manning.

Mr. Boutilier: A former Premier.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. Ernest Manning, the former Premier. That's right.

Dr. Taft: Have you moved it yet?

Mr. Anderson: Oh, I have to move it. Right. Sorry. Let me read it. I'm moving that Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, be amended in the schedule by striking out "Calgary-Elbow" and substituting "Calgary-Preston Manning (identified as Calgary-Elbow in the DVD referenced in section 3)".

The reason I want to do a renaming here, since we're in a renaming mood – Calgary-Montrose we've renamed Calgary-Greenway. We've renamed – what was the other one? – Calgary-North Hill as Calgary-Klein. Okay. All right. That's fair enough. I'm a big Ralph fan. He was a great leader, for sure. [interjection] Don't agree with me? No. I don't think anyone agrees with all of his policies, but he did some very good things for this province.

I think of some past renamings that have occurred: well, tonight. We had a great renaming tonight, where we . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Notley.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. I really would like to commend the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs for agreeing to that. I think he's an extremely honourable and gentlemanly member, and I'm so pleased that he would allow his riding to be amended to include the last name of Grant Notley. I think that was an extremely classy move by the minister to allow that, and he's a classy guy. I'm sure he doesn't really care for my compliments, but he's going to get them anyway. It was very, very classy. It was a classy move because I think some partisans would say: ah, we can't have an NDP put in the name of the thing. But, no, he wasn't like that. He rose above politics. I thought that was a very classy move.

We also have renamed, in particular, many names of ridings in the past to reflect the great men or women that went before. What are some examples of that? Edmonton-Manning, which, of course, refers to Ernest Manning, Preston Manning's father and former Premier of Alberta. So you have Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Boutilier: Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, that's right. You have Calgary-Lougheed, of course, after . . . [interjections] It wasn't after Peter Lougheed? Oh, I didn't know that.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, please, through the chair.

Mr. Anderson: Sorry.

I didn't know that. That's interesting. I'll look that up, but thank you for pointing that out. That's why it's important, Mr. Chair, to have these important debates, because we all learn from each other's collective wisdom. I did not know that. I just assumed, and we all know . . . [interjection]

Mr. Boutilier: But then again, some contribute more than others.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. Some contribute more than others. I certainly didn't learn it from that member.

Anyway, my point is that we rename ridings often after great leaders and great people. What's another? Maybe we can have somebody give us a little history lesson on some other examples where this has occurred. I know there are others out there.

Mr. Boutilier: Decore.

Mr. Anderson: Decore. Yeah, of course. Edmonton-Decore. There's another one.

There are all kinds of these different – we've done this in the past. I can think of, really, the great leaders, the great pioneers, the great people that have come out of Alberta and have championed the cause of democracy and equality for the west and for Alberta and strengthening Alberta's place in Confederation and putting us on the map, when we had been kicked around by successive federal Progressive Conservative and federal Liberal governments, who had been kicking us around so much. Then we had a guy who went to the floor and stood up for us, and I think the contribution of Preston Manning has led to so many great advances for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Kang: Like he got rid of the pensions.

12:10

Mr. Anderson: You're going to have to debate this, Member. When I sit down, I want you to stand up and debate this. I think it's only fair that you do because I've got to go through the chair. I would like to talk to you about it.

Mr. Chair, if you look at what Preston Manning accomplished as leader, he really, I think, did a huge service to the province of Alberta. [Mr. Anderson's speaking time expired] Don't I get to speak 20 on the amendment? I thought I got to speak 20 on the amendment. No? Okay.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. It is not Calgary-Preston Manning; it is Calgary-Glenmore.

It's interesting that we've passed many amendments here. We've honoured some great past elected representatives in the province. I would have to say that Preston Manning has done an admirable job through the decades of representing what I want to call reform to democracy, and I think that it is very, very fitting to have a riding named after him because of the service that he's done.

You know, it's interesting to me. One of the things about Preston Manning, being the true statesman that he is, is that when he went in

— again, this is about the importance of being a man of your word, that when you say something, you mean it. I don't know how many people in this House realize this, but the offensive pension plan of the federal government was something that he was very opposed to. [interjection] Would you like to speak on this?

Anyway, we've got another minister that had some comment about Preston that I don't think . . . [interjection] Yes, only a lonely minister, a long-haired, lonely minister with a nice wave to it. He likes to run fast in the wind so that he can feel it. That's the only time he realizes that there's motion. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. Why can't I remember that? He wants to mock Preston Manning. As if he even sits in the same category: just remarkable to me. To say derogatory things about someone like Preston Manning is amazing to me, Mr. Chair. Nevertheless, we'll endure those comments, and we'll go forward. I take it that he won't be voting in favour of this amendment, but we'll see whether he'll get up and speak to it. I doubt it.

Anyway, to talk a little bit more about Preston Manning and why it's fitting to name a riding after him. He wanted reform. He wanted democratic reform, and one of the things that he was very outspoken about was government waste. I still to this day believe that the reason why Paul Martin and the Liberals balanced the budget was because of the pressure of Preston Manning and those early Reformers saying how important it was to be fiscally conservative and balance the budget. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore has the floor.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I didn't realize that he would cause so much pain for the Member for Lethbridge-East as well.

Mrs. Ady: It's the exaggeration.

Mr. Hinman: The exaggeration? Now the minister from Calgary-Shaw wants to mention that it's an exaggeration what Preston Manning has done and the fact that he put pressure on the federal government to balance the budget? We're still hundreds of billions of dollars in debt. I guess now I kind of get it, Mr. Chair. Why these people would mock someone who's a fiscal conservative is because they're spendaholics. They think: let's put out some more money.

The Member for Calgary-Shaw, the minister, talked about the multiplication with the Grey Cup in Calgary last year and then talked about the importance of Expo. If this government is so astute in their fiscal abilities and the games that we get, why did they not put up the money themselves with their, I think, \$12 billion sustainability fund for the 2017 Expo? They said that there's a huge multiplication factor and that you get all the money back. I would think that this government in its astuteness would say: "Let's put the money in there for Expo. We can do it. We have it, and it's a great infrastructure bid."

The Deputy Chair: That does not pertain to the . . .

Mr. Hinman: Oh, yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's getting late, and the members from Calgary-Shaw and whatnot easily distract me. I apologize.

We'll go back to this amendment and why I think it's very fitting that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has brought forward this amendment. I don't see it written on here. Just so I can write it on here, it's A2, to change Calgary-Elbow and substitute Calgary-Preston Manning.

To get back to democratic reform and the years of service: "Oh, isn't this wonderful? Another amendment coming forward. Just what the chair and the people wanted. We're happy to bring them." This is what the chair directed me. I took that direction, and I'm grateful for that direction, Mr. Chair, because you've stimulated the thought, and we're working over here and excited about it.

Preston Manning, in his realization of the poor government and the accountability and the west wanting in, said that we need to be fiscally responsible. The debt load was just taking off hundreds of billions of dollars. It got up to, I think, around \$640 billion before the government finally said: okay; we've got to start balancing the budget.

One of the things I admire the most about Preston is that he said that we're going to axe the pension plan that's so offensive to Canadians. To my knowledge, Mr. Chair, he is the only one who never did accept a pension plan. Preston Manning did his years of service, and he has zero pension plan, the only MP that I know of that put years of service in and has no pension plan. For that alone I think he's worthy of having a riding named after him. The taxpayers certainly aren't paying for his retirement. He worked hard. He's a humble individual, a man of his word.

I'm proud to speak in favour of this amendment, and I look forward, rather than to the heckling, to hearing a few of the government members speak on this and either get behind it or get against it. Stand up and speak out. Oh, you might get kicked out? I don't know, Mr. Chair. It's late. They don't want to adjourn another one, so I'll sit down to see if there are any government members that want to discuss the great opportunity that we have here in Alberta to name a constituency after the hon. Preston Manning, Official Leader of the Opposition of the government of Canada.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Boutilier: He already spoke.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, sorry. I didn't know you were up. Can I cede the floor to the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo? Am I allowed to do that, Mr. Chair?

The Deputy Chair: You want to yield? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's indeed a pleasure to rise again and speak to this bill, Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. I do say that as we go forward with some of the amendments here tonight and the amendment that's in front of us right now, which is referred to as: "Mr. Anderson to move that Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, be amended . . ."

Dr. Brown: Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Boutilier: I'm just reading what the amendment says. It says, "Mr. Anderson," so I correct the doctor from Calgary-Nose Hill.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you know better than that. You know that the clerks, when they call them out, call their names. It is decorum here.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Airdrie-Chestermere, would you accept my apology through the chair?

Mr. Anderson: I totally accept it.

Mr. Boutilier: Thanks, Mr. Chair, for providing me the opportunity to apologize to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Chair, I would like to say that the electoral division is something that I can see is going to carry us through the night; there is no doubt in my mind. Having said that, I think that the energy we use should be directed to some of the Albertans we're honouring with some of these name changes, such as the one in front of us, and the notice of the amendment that's been put forward substituting "Calgary-Preston Manning (identified as Calgary-Elbow in the DVD)" – there's a bit of a typo in here, I think.

With all of the important work that's going on here, I think it's an important move. I certainly hope that everyone in this House will speak to it because it represents the spirit. [interjection] Maybe the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere could go and take care of the business outside while I proceed with the important business inside.

12:20

Mr. Chair, as we go forward, I can say that some of the amendments that we've talked about and this amendment that we are talking about, speaking through the chair, really in fact represent important history to Alberta. I don't know the background to striking out "Calgary-Elbow." I certainly hope that there is not in any way, shape, or form any bad will intended in eliminating the word "Elbow" and substituting the words "Preston Manning." Obviously, we can all agree that I don't think we had a Premier or a leader of a federal party, their family too, that has served so well this province. The name Manning, of course, is presently in one of our existing electoral boundaries. By referring to Calgary-Elbow and substituting Calgary-Preston Manning, we would be honouring a very, very I think distinguished Albertan, an Albertan whose family has deeply etched into the shaping of this province in its second and first centuries.

Mr. Chairman, I do believe that as we go forward, it's really important to recognize people. Often it's said: oh, well, you have to wait until you die before your name should be recognized. I think we had that debate on the issue of Calgary-Klein, and clearly our former Premier is alive and well, and we obviously wish him many, many decades of good health. It's quite enjoyable, like in this particular amendment, to recognize someone who is living and has served this province with distinction. That in itself is worthy of further discussion. Serving with distinction: not everyone can say they have done that.

To the members that sit in this House today, I know that it remains an honour and a privilege for each of us to serve. The majority of us, not everyone in here but a majority of members here, know who their bosses are. Their bosses are not the people in this House but in the very constituencies we represent. Consequently, I don't believe that there was ever a federal leader called Elbow, but clearly there was a federal leader called Manning. Therefore, including that name and the history – of course, Elbow, I think, dates back to the natural flow of its trading corridors through its rivers. The Elbow River, as we know, is one that is so important.

I recall the Member for Fish-Creek saying how difficult it is to be able to talk when others are talking, but it's so important to be able to recognize the importance of Elbow, switching it to Preston Manning. I think Preston Manning is probably smiling and listening intently to this proceeding tonight.

Mr. Anderson: I'm sure he is.

Mr. Boutilier: I'm sure he is.

Mr. Anderson: Has he been tweeting?

Mr. Boutilier: I'm not sure if he tweets or not. I really have not been able to tweet a lot because of the fact that when you have a three-year-old, you don't get to tweet a lot. You tend to watch Treehouse more than you tweet.

Mr. Chair, I can say that this amendment is, I think, an important one. I know this amendment has been put forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Obviously, as we go forward with this road map, I hope everyone will consider following this amendment and supporting it because we have much more to do tonight. I'm not sure what else could be said relative to this amendment, but I'm certainly willing to entertain any thoughtful comments from ministers, the member, the minister from Calgary-Shaw, who, I might say, is one of my most favourite ministers and is joining me tomorrow in travelling to Fort McMurray, the oils sands capital of the world, an electoral division that serves 68,000 square kilometres, which I'm sure is etched in stone.

Mr. Denis: Is that exact?

Mr. Boutilier: That is very exact. In fact, maybe some day the hon. member could go out with a measuring tape and confirm that fact. In fact, doing it in minus 40 degree weather would be a friendly suggestion.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to offer a couple of comments to the three members that have preceded me. If we look at some of the names of constituencies that have in fact been named after previous political figures in this province or in this country, there is one commonality. I'm just going to point this out.

Edmonton-Manning, named after Ernest Manning, of course, who was the president, sorry, the Premier – I'm sorry; it's late, Member – of this great province for these many years, who sat in this House.

Edmonton-Decore, of course, named after Laurence Decore, the former leader of the Liberal Party, who also sat in this House.

An Hon. Member: And mayor of Edmonton.

Mr. Denis: And mayor of Edmonton, the point being that that individual sat in this House, God rest his soul.

Grant Notley: we're naming Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley after the former leader of the NDP, again, Mr. Chair, who sat in this House. We're also naming Calgary-Klein, of course, after the great Premier, Ralph Klein, who also sat in this House.

Now, Preston Manning I have a high regard for as well, but he never sat in this House. I suppose that if you wanted to name a provincial riding after some leader, you could look at maybe Stockwell Day, who was our Treasurer for many years, who brought in the flat tax.

Regardless, these four people that I've mentioned all sat in this House. Preston Manning, unfortunately, did not sit in this House, and I will not be supporting this amendment for that reason. In addition, I have also not heard as to with whom the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere consulted in Calgary-Elbow. Did he consult the Member for Calgary-Elbow? Did he consult anyone in Calgary-Elbow? I have not seen any evidence of that. I'm not saying that he didn't, but I have not seen any evidence of that tabled.

I would urge all members not to support this amendment, with the greatest of respect to a great Albertan, Preston Manning.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to just make a few comments, not that I'm particularly interested in entering into this silliness. I must say that there have been a few statements made in the last hour that have probably been the most intelligent statements made all evening. Those have been with respect to my dear friend Preston Manning, who, I agree, is a very honourable statesman in this country. He's contributed a lot and he continues to contribute a lot through his many lectures, his philosophizing, and his writings.

I've known Preston for many, many years now. I had the privilege of running with him in 1988 in the Reform Party. I was a founding member of the Reform Party, in fact, in Winnipeg with him, when he gave a great speech on the rebellions, political revolutions in Canada. He started off speaking of when Louis Riel stepped on the surveyor's chain in 1869 just outside of Winnipeg. He just went on from there and related the whole history of political rebellions in Canada. It was a very, very interesting speech, and as a result of that speech and his stature he won the leadership of the Reform Party at that time.

I've also been privileged to know most of the members of his family, who also are very respectful citizens. His wife is very committed to education. Even at a later age she has gone, I believe, out to the University of Victoria to get a master's degree after practising real estate and a number of other things while Preston was so busy in Ottawa.

Mr. Chair, I think we're trying to carry this thing too far. The next thing we'll have an Airdrie-Anderson proposal or maybe a Fort McMurray-Boutilier.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I think we're talking about the name of a person that already is an MLA, and that is inappropriate.

12:30

Mr. Allred: Okay. Sorry. My apologies.

Mr. Chair, that's really all I wanted to say. I really wanted to recognize Preston Manning for his statesmanship and the respect that I think most Albertans and certainly a lot of Canadians have for him or for what he has done for this country. Certainly, in my opinion, he has changed the face of Canada in a lot of ways even though he was in opposition. I think a lot of the fiscal restraint that Paul Martin showed in the House of Commons as Finance minister came directly from Preston Manning's debate in the House of Commons. I think we can really respect him and honour him, but I don't think this is the proper place to try and change the name of an established riding in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a delight to be able to stand up at 12:30, in the middle of the night, and be able to address this House. Actually, the more I'm thinking about this kind of an amendment, the more I think that I can support the whole idea. I could support that in time all the ridings could be named after prominent, elected Alberta politicians. We have leaders of different parties that would be worthy of having ridings named after them. I'm thinking of Riverview-Taft, and another one that I think that . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just chastised a person for using the name of a person who was a sitting MLA in a specific riding. Please withdraw that. And would you all think about that a little bit?

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry. I do withdraw that.

It would be good if we could name it Riverview and the last name of the sitting member for Edmonton-Riverview at this point in time.

Now, another one that we might look at is Chestermere-Rocky View. Now, what does Rocky View say? You know what? It's no different – it's sort of like new developments that are built around a waste-water pond and they call them lakeview lots. It's sort of the same idea. Rocky View doesn't really say anything, so it would be really easy to switch it to Chestermere-Nick Taylor, after a prominent leader that sat in this House, Nick Taylor. I think that sounds really good. I really do. I'm serious about this. I really do think that it would be a worthy way of recognizing prominent politicians who have devoted a lot of their life to the betterment of the citizens of this province.

With that, I will say that I could support this amendment simply because I believe that it's a good idea and a very good way of recognizing politicians who, as I say, have spent a good portion of their life making sure that the citizens of Alberta are well looked after.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. This has been a good debate on Preston Manning. I could talk all night about Preston Manning. I just think he's the greatest. I was so disappointed that he didn't run for the leadership in 2006.

Anyway, aside from that, do you know what really set Preston Manning apart? He really was a great politician, I think. He did an incredible thing, starting a grassroots movement from scratch the way that he did. I mean, we're kind of having the opportunity to experience that on a smaller scale with Wildrose provincially. But to do it across the country, I mean, just an unbelievable amount of work must have been involved in doing something like that: the recruiting of the candidates and just all the things involved in that; setting up all the 300 and some constituency associations. It's just amazing to me that he was able to do all that in such a short period of time. He was an amazing tactical politician, but that's not what set him apart because there have been other good politicians.

What really set him apart is that this is a man that never compromised his principles. He always did things for the right reasons, I found. In fact, I honestly think that he was way, way, way ahead of his time. I think some of the proposals that he was bringing forward, not all of them but a great deal of them, were proposals that today would have been far more popular than in the past.

I think of, for example, you know, his idea on balancing budgets. You talked about that earlier and how that led eventually – that pressure was one of the things. I also think that some of the examples of Premier Klein here in Alberta had some effect on that as well. Unfortunately, he is not the leader of your party anymore, evidently. The really important part to remember is that the pressure from Preston Manning in Parliament I think clearly changed a lot of the thinking in the federal Liberal Party. You had another person there, a fiscal conservative, Paul Martin, that was able to balance the budget and balance the books. I think that a lot of that pressure, not all of it, granted – give credit to a whole bunch of different people, but Preston Manning was a huge driving force because he was the Leader of the Official Opposition.

As we know, that is the person, frankly, that the Prime Minister or

the government of the day has to listen to the most, is forced to listen to them in question period, in the media, et cetera. I really do think he had a hugely disproportionate role, him and his movement, in getting our budget balanced again. We had those balanced budgets until just recently. It's very unfortunate that we're back into deficit and debt and under, I think, false pretenses that it was needed, that all this debt and deficit was needed. I think we've kind of thrown away a lot of that great legacy that he was partly responsible for.

He had all these great principles, but he was often chastised or told that he wasn't charismatic enough or that he wasn't this. He wouldn't kowtow to, you know, eastern interests. He wouldn't sacrifice his principles. Because of that, he was never elected in the Toronto area and in Quebec and in other places. A lot of that was because of false information that was spread by the media about him and about the Reform movement. Of course, there were a couple of turkeys in the Reform movement, as there are in every movement. [interjection] No. That's right. You're not welcome. That's the reason why. No turkeys in the Wildrose.

The thing is that it really was amazing to see the media demonize this guy. Yet did you notice? He never became a bitter person. He was always smiling, and he was always quick to shake your hand, quick to have a warm smile, quick to be agreeable on issues and to be a friend. He was just a marvellous person.

Politics can be a rough sport, especially when the media is castigating you relentlessly for things like the way you look. I mean, they were bugging him about his glasses and about some of the inflection in his voice and stuff, just ridiculous things that one should never ever do to another human being, let alone someone who is a very respected political figure. Yet that happened all the time. It really was tragic. That was one of the reasons. Also, the lies on his policy. Preston Manning is one of the most accepting, tolerant people that anyone could ever meet. I mean, this guy doesn't care – he really believed in a meritocracy.

He believed that it doesn't matter what your skin colour is or what your background is or what you did, your faith, or anything else. Everyone should be equal under the law, and everyone should be welcome, but they should be welcome on their own merits. He really embodies the concept that Martin Luther King talked about, that someone should be judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character. That was Preston Manning, in my view. He embodied that. He really did feel . . . [interjections] I'm sorry, hon. member?

12:40

Mr. Hancock: You talk about him as though he has passed on.

Mr. Anderson: No, he hasn't passed on. [interjection] Ralph Klein; that's right. I have no idea where the minister is going. It is late, though. It's okay.

I first met Preston Manning, actually, when I was at the University of Alberta going to law school, and I started a group called Students for a Stronger Alberta. It was just a whole bunch of law students and a few others. Our big charter was all about democratic reform and about getting back to the basics of MLAs representing their constituents and free votes and all that sort of thing. We had this really idealistic charter, that just happens to align perfectly with the Wildrose policy, so maybe that group did actually lead to something good, hopefully, on democratic reform.

Anyway, we had this group. There weren't that many of us, about 30 or 40. We invited Preston Manning to be one of our speakers. We had a speaker series. We were only around for a couple of years, and we only had, like, four or five speakers, but they were big events. We had David Kilgour out to talk about how he crossed the

floor after he stood up against the government, against Brian Mulroney's government and the GST. So just people that had kind of carried the torch on democratic reform.

One of the folks we invited was Preston Manning. We didn't think for a moment that he would accept our invitation because, I mean, he's a busy guy. He didn't know any of us at the time. We didn't have any connection or in with him at all. Somehow – and I forget how – we got hold of his secretary, and we asked him to come. Incredibly, he said: "Absolutely. When would you like me to come?" This was after he had unfortunately just lost the leadership vote to Stockwell Day. You know, I'm not going to get into those politics. Anyway, he had just lost the leadership to Stockwell. I like Stockwell, too. They're both good men.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Anyway, the point is that we invited him to come, and he came. It was 2001, and there were no hard feelings. We started advertising this event for Preston, and it was amazing. So many people were like: "Preston Manning. Oh, that guy. He's this and that and the other thing." Because, you know, universities are so liberal, and they don't like conservative politicians, and they've got bad things to say. It's not cool. So we held the thing anyway. To our amazement – we had an auditorium that could be expanded. It seated a hundred or 200 people, so we booked for a hundred, and the place started filling up like crazy. We had to open up the other auditorium anyway. The place was standing room only, totally packed, at this university, and we had just done a little bit of advertising.

He came in, and he gave one of the most elegant, incredible speeches that I have ever heard. At that point, when I heard him speak, that was absolutely one of the impetuses of making me decide: "You know what? One day I want to get into politics and fight for those same principles." What he talked about was what our democracy could look like in an ideal setting. He talked about direct democracy. He talked about free votes, and he talked about recall and citizens' initiatives and all of the direct democracy stuff that he advocated for for so long. He talked about how there are dangers to those things, to direct democracy, but he explained so eloquently how the positives far outweigh those dangers and how, if you structure them properly, they can actually be a phenomenal strength to society because they allow some of the best ideas to come forward and become law.

So he talked about this, and he was eloquent. He went on for about an hour at least, and he talked about all this. This is university, right? So you have people with nose rings hanging down, and you've got people with the punk hair-dos going on and the colored hair-dos and everything else. These guys were just – you know, he was getting to them. It was kind of funny. They were listening. There was no heckling. Then at the end they gave him a standing ovation when he was done.

I remember the one thing he said that blew me away. Obviously, I can't do it justice, but he said that after the session break, at the last day of session, after all the jabbering that had gone on, he would sit at his desk after everyone had left. He'd actually pick a time where he could come and sit in the Commons by himself, with no one there but maybe a security guard or something, and that's it. He would look at it, and he would just ponder and think about what this – he just had such a profound love for Canada. He has such a profound love for Canada. He would think about how great this country could be if we could put aside our party politics and allow elected representatives to be the voices of their constituents, all these different things, and direct democracy and how we could have a much more civil discourse and debate. He shared all these different ideas about how we could arrive at a better discourse and debate and

more decorum. It literally made you tear up. What guy sits in the Commons afterwards and thinks about these things? You just could see the sincerity, how much he cared about this great country of ours. It really changed my perspective on what the role of a politician could be because up until that time I think I was like most Albertans, most Canadians, very cynical of politicians in general. So to see that, I mean, just blew me away. It was really cool, and I'll never forget that.

Then we had lunch with him after, and we went out with the dean of the law school. At the time it was Dean Percy. Now I'm losing the first name. That's really bothering me; I'm going to have to look that up. Anyway, so we went out to lunch with him, and Dean Percy of the law faculty would ask him to explain: what's the deal with religion and politics? How can they interact? And the way he explained it in legal terms was so eloquent. He had such a grasp of how they're not mutually exclusive, you know, how they can work together to build a strong society, but there's got to be that clear division. He was able to weave it so perfectly, and it just made so much sense. He'd obviously thought about it for hundreds of hours because you couldn't make something like that up on the spot.

I honestly think, Mr. Chair, that he was without a doubt the best Prime Minister that this country never had. It's a shame we never had him as a Prime Minister, but – you know what? – the fact of the matter is that his legacy lives on in the lives of thousands of Canadians across this nation. Many of the people in this Chamber – I heard the hon. Member for St. Albert. I heard, of course, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, myself, and hopefully others – clearly have been inspired by this man and his fairness and his goodness and his principles. If I'm a little gushy, that's just too bad because the fact is that – you know what? – he's just the example that we should all aspire to, including myself. I mean, it's just so clear. It's hard to follow such a high standard, to try to copy that high standard. For example, everyone liked the guy, and I clearly have not reached that standard. He would be able to debate with people, and they wouldn't be mad at him after the debate. You know, you could have a real debate.

12:50

An Hon. Member: A true diplomat.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. A true diplomat.

He could keep his cool, he could drive home really strong points, but people could still look him in the eye and shake his hand afterwards, and they could go out and have a beer. That's something, you know. For a lot of us it's difficult to be diplomatic when you're in debate, so that kind of leads to some harsh feelings once in a while and so forth.

There's so much on virtually every level that we could learn from this man. I would like to see, I hope, that one day our Alberta history books as we go forward, our social studies curriculum, will include a chapter on this great man just like we include a chapter on . . . [interjections] I hope that there's a section or a unit where we explore the contributions of Preston Manning to the country and to the province of Alberta in championing the cause of democratic . . . [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, could we keep the tone down a little bit? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Mr. Anderson: Hopefully, one day in our social studies textbooks there will be a unit devoted to this man and his contributions to the province of Alberta and to the country of Canada because I really

think that it is exceptionally underrated. It is something that we can all be very, very proud of, that this man came out of our province. I think the least we could do is to name a portion of the riding that he used to represent in southwest Calgary, which includes Calgary-Elbow. I mean, Elbow. Great. It's a river. How can we say that that's contributed more to our province . . .

An Hon. Member: Fly-fishing.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. It's great for fly-fishing and all that. That's fantastic.

I think Preston Manning is someone who has inspired the best in all of us. I think that if we were to name that riding after him, I think it would be a great service to the people of Alberta and to his contribution.

So that was my little vignette, so to speak, of how I met Preston Manning. Of course, since that time I've had the opportunity on multiple occasions to sit with him, and it's just been a great, great experience.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to welcome the new crew of government members that's coming in. We've got some exciting amendments here. The one that we're talking about right now is amendment A2 to Bill 28, moved by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, to basically amend Calgary-Elbow and substitute Calgary-Preston Manning. Like I say, truly, when you think of the great elected representatives in this province, Preston is up there with them all, including his father.

I'm just somewhat amazed that the member for – it's going to be Calgary-Acadia. Why am I drawing a blank here right now? Calgary-Egmont. It's getting late, obviously. The Member for Calgary-Egmont gets up and talks about all the precedents, and he went through the names and said that because he hadn't been in this House, he wouldn't be worthy of having a constituency named after him. I couldn't think of anything further from the truth. You know, many things that this government does set a new precedent. More often than not I find it a negative precedent: empowering ministers with power and authority that basically reduces the democratic process.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members. Hon. members, the chair is having a very difficult time hearing the speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the floor. Keep the noise level down. That would be appreciated by everyone. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: I wasn't sure that I heard you, whether I had permission yet or not. Thank you, then, Mr. Chair.

The Member for Calgary-Egmont talked about the precedents and the reasons why he felt that Preston didn't deserve that. I just almost have to laugh that, you know . . . [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, I'm going to have to start calling you by your constituency name and identifying you if you don't keep the sound down. The chair cannot hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, so please keep the tone down.

Please proceed.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I'll try again, Mr. Chair, but it just seems like many here are more interested in something else. I think you've

said many times that they should move out into the lobby if they need to talk at such a level. It's hard to even think in here, and I can't hear your direction. Send them out.

Anyway, I think that Preston Manning is an Albertan that we should all be proud of. More importantly, he's a parliamentarian; he is a leader in Alberta. The effort, the sacrifice that he and his family made is truly incredible and has been mentioned by the hon. members for St. Albert and Airdrie-Chestermere. I'm mistaken. The Member for Calgary-Shaw was speaking to the Member for Lethbridge-East, not to me, on Preston Manning. It's encouraging to hear a few members get up and recognize the contribution that he has made, not only for Alberta but for all of Canada. It's just quite exciting that when we have new electoral boundaries in this act, we actually have an opportunity to honour some of these great people by naming a riding after them. Perhaps it's . . . [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, if you want to have a side conversation, please do it in the hallway or discontinue it.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, continue.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There seems to be quite an amount of excitement at this time, at 1 o'clock. There's a changing of the guard with the government members. I don't know. Maybe we need to go back and repeat a little bit about what we're talking about on this amendment. I don't know that they even know what's in front or whether they've got so much paper on their desks that they're not sure what amendment we're on.

This is an amendment to Bill 28, which . . .

Mr. Hancock: I'm trying to figure out if you know what amendment you're on.

Mr. Hinman: Now we have the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud making some remark about wondering where we're at. I will try and clarify for him. It's obvious that they're not caring too much. We've asked to adjourn this debate to move to some other ones, but this government keeps saying they want to talk about this, so we're happy to keep talking. The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill: if it wasn't for him, we would have moved on. Because no one else was astute enough when we moved to adjourn the debate, the chair actually ruled to have it adjourned, and then he stood up to have a standing count, and we lost this. So because of his astuteness we will continue on. We've asked many times . . . [interjection]

Chair's Ruling Relevance Decorum

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, the chair is quite familiar with the history of this evening and doesn't need to be reminded of it. But I do need to remind you that we are speaking on amendment A2 to Bill 28. If you could confine your remarks to that, I think everybody would appreciate it and be very interested in hearing what you have to say. Please carry on.

1:00

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Chair, I'm trying to listen to you, but there's so much rhetoric and garbage going on, I don't know that I could quite hear you. If you want to repeat it once more. [interjection] What's the blathering minister from Innisfail trying to say, through the chair, now? I couldn't understand him.

The Acting Chair: Carry on with the amendment, please.

Mr. Hinman: Okay.

The Acting Chair: All members of the House have been guilty of infractions of disruption.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Chair, I literally cannot hear you. I don't know if your mike's not on or what.

The Acting Chair: I said that all members of the Assembly recently have been guilty of infractions of disruptions of the House. Please, if I could have everyone's co-operation, I would be much happier, and I'm sure anyone that has the floor would be much happier.

Hon. member, please continue on amendment A2.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We'll try again, but the unrest has come in. You're aware. I'm certainly aware. I've been here the whole evening. We've been speaking on this, but, like I say, I don't think the government members are aware. They're just taking a shift change and sitting like deadheads in their seats. We'll continue and see if we can get somewhere on this amendment and see if some of them will get up and speak, and we could vote and carry on because we have many more amendments that we're looking forward to presenting to this House but having difficulty going through here.

Preston Manning truly is a statesman that's worthy of having a constituency named after him. I disagree with the Member for Calgary-Egmont, who says: oh, he's never sat in this hallowed House. Then for him to go on and say: well, I don't know who he's spoken to. Well, it wasn't me who brought forward this amendment. I'm supporting this amendment. I think that's just how out of touch many of the government members and ministers certainly are. To think that he wouldn't be a recognized icon just shows how poorly connected they are and how self-interested they are.

I'm surprised that they haven't brought an amendment forward to name after the first Premier of their party, that started their dynasty, which they are so disgracefully going to lose after 40 years, kind of like the third or fourth generation family business where they've become out of touch in doing the service to the community, and they lose the family business or the family farm because of laziness and arrogance. I would think that one of these government members might bring forward the name of Peter Lougheed, who started there.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, what this amendment A2 is about is changing the name of Calgary-Elbow to Calgary-Preston Manning, again, an absolute statesman who sacrificed so much in trying to make a difference here in Canada. I just would have to say that he made that difference. He made that impact. He stayed true to his principles, principles that I continue to endorse and would like to see brought home here to Alberta. One of the few things that I ever, discussing with Preston, wouldn't agree with him on is that we needed a provincial Reform Party at the same time. We needed to bring in recall. We needed to bring in accountability. There are so many principles that Preston put forward that the PC Party adopted in part but often would not take the whole principle. Again, to this day it's costing the quality of life here in Alberta.

Mr. Chair, it's like I say. Let's reflect on the different people who have had ridings named after them and compare them to the service and the difference that Preston Manning has made for Albertans. He put us on the map. He's the one who said: the west wants in. He did it in a very eloquent way. He was always graceful. He's one of those individuals who came in and he just had this humble spirit about him that he could debate or discuss with anybody and a very powerful intellect that really understood and loved his country of

Canada and wanted to make a difference. I know that he spent many, many hours consulting with his father, who became a Senator after being the Premier here in this province, trying to make a difference federally.

There are so many areas that we are suffering on because we haven't taken the higher road in saying: this is the better way. This is the democratic way. There are many things that we could talk about, the things that Preston stood for. Like I say, the thing that probably impressed me the most was that when it came to the principle that he had spoken, that the offensive pension plan had to go, you know, the federal Liberals tried to egg him on. Again, all of the other MPs except for Preston – to my understanding, he's the only one who never took a pension because he did not accept what they did. It needed to be a fair one, one that was in line with private industry. He said it wasn't right, and therefore he wouldn't do it.

Like I say, I just have to hold him in the highest regard because of that. Again, he continues to go on and to serve our country. He's founded the Manning Centre for Building Democracy. The purpose of that is to go around and to hold conferences and seminars trying to raise the level of democracy.

It's interesting, you know, that there is an individual in history – again, a lot of times in history we don't always have the best documentation, but Alexander Tytler is one name that's been given to him, a Scottish historian who talks about democracy and the fall of democracies. He says that the reason why democracies fail – and the average failing time is between 200 and 250 years – is because the people eventually vote for the party that will give the most out of the public purse. When we have a politician or a party that promises to take wealth and taxes from one area and redistribute to another area, they often gain and garnish votes. It's not in the best interests of the country as a whole, but it's very much in the best interests of the party that's trying to take over.

What we have, Mr. Chair, is an individual that didn't compromise. His values and his principles were more important than winning. I truly believe that if we had more elected representatives like him, we would have more people coming out and voting because they would understand that. Another thing that I kind of get a chuckle out of is that listening to government members talk, they often wonder: how can the opposition ever get re-elected? They don't understand that. It's because those opposition members know what they stand for. They don't have to worry about them blowing in the wind and changing. People have respect for that.

It's an easier race when you're part of government and you can be in power and you can do what Alexander Tytler talks about, promise extra goodies. I was quite amazed in my last election down in Cardston-Taber-Warner at the number of ministers that came down and promised paved highways, new schools, so many perks, but they said: none of these things come into effect until after the election.

Mr. Anderson: I got promised a new fire truck.

1:10

Mr. Hinman: Yes. We talked about a fire truck to Warner. It's sad to see where we can have democracy get watered down to that level, to where we feel like if we don't vote for the party in power, our area is going to be compromised. Again, the opposition today brought up the question on that, you know, with municipal funding and how there isn't a formula to know how that's going to come forward in the steady amount that's coming.

Preston was above all of that. Preston was a man of principles. Preston was an individual that was eloquent, just a vast knowledge of history, of the country, and he was so dedicated to serve. His family, his father, had spent a lot of time. You look at the time that

he spent away from his family in serving Albertans and being a representative for Alberta. I just think that this is truly an individual that we can and we should name a riding after.

I support this amendment to Bill 28 to substitute the name of Calgary-Elbow with Calgary-Preston Manning. What I would move at this time, Mr. Chair, is that we would allow the government to go out and have a little discussion and come back and vote on this amendment. So I would move that we adjourn this debate at this time, and we can vote on that and then see if we can move on.

At this time I move that we adjourn the debate so the government can talk in private over this.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 17 **Alberta Health Act** (continued)

The Acting Chair: Is there anyone wishing to speak on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Well, this, of course, has been put forward regarding the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's bill of rights, his patients' bill of rights, which is essentially a foundation and the ultimate pillar of, I believe, our health care system and our society. In my judgment, as I speak for the next 20 minutes, I don't think 20 minutes is going to allow me an ample amount of time to be able to speak to this issue. But I will endeavour to try to capture my colleagues relative to what is important in terms of the bill of rights that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has put forward.

The reason why I think this is so important, first and foremost, is that of all the members that are in this Assembly, it's interesting to see that there is only one medical doctor in here. He is the one who was kicked out the PC caucus yesterday, and I understand it was unanimous. I must admit that I was thinking of when they kicked me out, Mr. Chair. You know what? They didn't kick me out; it was one person. I thought that if they had been in the room, they would have defended the honour of representing your constituents, but I guess not. They just simply did that.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I don't see any relevance to amendment A3 in your comments thus far. We are speaking about amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, so if you would please continue on the amendment.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. The point that I was attempting to make was that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who put forward the bill of rights as a medical doctor and an ER doctor, clearly knows much more than, I think, any one of us in here. I believe that his bill of rights is an important one. The distinction I was making was that the bill of rights is something – he's no longer with the government. The relevance was that he's a doctor. So the government had a doctor, but now they don't. In fact, that being said, the relevance is that this bill of rights, I am absolutely impressed with. I think it reflects the spirit and the value of Albertans. Consequently, that's why I will be supporting this in Bill 17.

Now, let me go on further. I also think that it's very important that the doctor spoke with experience. He spoke with passion. He spoke about what he had been hearing from people in emergency rooms. How could we all not be intently listening to such passion when it comes from a front-line MLA and a front-line service provider, as a medical doctor, that now sits as an independent?

I'm very proud, Mr. Chair, to say that I, also, sat as an independ-

ent. The relevance, you may ask, of sitting as an independent is simply this: the bill of rights, in representing patients, is similar to the bill of rights of representing constituents. Proudly, we both sat as independents, him now, because of the relevance that he thought what was more important is the honour of representing his bosses as opposed to honouring something that's not there on the other side when it comes to knowing who your bosses are.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I see the chairmanship has changed. That's always a pleasure. I kind of was liking the other chairman, but of course I like this one, too.

The fact of the relevance is that the Bill 17 amendment is an important bill of rights. It's an important bill of rights because it's coming from an ER doctor who is an MLA. Now, I was waiting on this bill of rights to see if the new parliamentary secretary of health was going to retract the comments. I understand that's becoming a habit on that side because of the Minister of Energy wanting a retraction. So we were hoping that he would retract his comments relative to the relevance of the bill of rights where he said, I think last night in this Assembly, that the Canada Health Act just simply wasn't relevant to supporting the amendment. It's just not important enough. Well, the bill of rights is even more important, more important because it's talking about representing the values of Albertans and, also, the principles of Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, in my judgment the Bill 17 amendment should be supported by everyone. This will give members across the way, the PC caucus, a chance that they never had – and this is their chance – to stand up and to vote unanimously in support of the amendment. Of course, the minister of health has stood in this Assembly on this Bill 17 amendment and said that he will not support it. That's been on the public record. Then after saying that, I'm very pleased to say that I saw members from this side and this side and that side say: we believe that this is a good amendment, first of all, because it's coming from someone who actually knows what they're talking about.

It was interesting. The comment made was, I think, knucklehead, and "knucklehead" is an interesting word. What is a knucklehead when it comes to Bill 17? Well, the direct reference was that there are a lot of knuckleheads that are existing when it comes to the issue of a bill of rights for patients. Rather than a bureaucracy, this bill of rights will be able to cut through that red tape, and that's comforting to know. Retrieving the community capital that's been lost by the Alberta superboard, that's how he framed it, and from an emergency doctor, I can only say that I concur with his observations. I'm sure that he's proudly looking at himself in the mirror tonight knowing he stood up for the principles and the values of Albertans. What more could any constituency ask of their MLA, rather than toeing the party line and thinking that there's a person over there in the front row that thinks they're your boss?

1:20

In the upcoming electoral boundary we just did – I forget; I think it was Bill 28 – the relevance is that the real bosses will determine if the bill of rights is the correct thing. If, in fact, you support the bill of rights that is being put in here with the Bill 17 amendment, will you be rewarded in the next event? We will quickly determine that we will have to listen to our bosses. Some may not like the answers to what our bosses will be saying. But I do say that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, clearly, in my judgment, is directly connected to the information on the front line as an ER doctor but even more to Albertans because of their values.

It was interesting that there was something like over 400 or 500 comments already on the relevance of the Bill 17 amendment and on helping people in the bill of rights. So I think that this is very, very important, and it would be interesting to hear comments from others in this room. I do believe that I have 20 minutes to speak on this issue, which means I have more time to speak, so I want to take full advantage of my time to speak. I can see the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake listening intently. I thank the honourable gentleman for listening to my words of wisdom. It is so nice that he is listening to my words of wisdom. I know he got upset earlier tonight.

The relevance of this is that the bill of rights for patients and for Albertans is our principal responsibility as MLAs. Our principal responsibility as MLAs is to ensure that patients have a bill of rights, and not only a bill of rights, Mr. Chairman, but a bill of rights that will ensure – contrary to what the minister of health seemed to think, when he said he would not support this, I believe that he should support this, and maybe even the former minister of health should support this.

You know, I had accused him, Mr. Chairman, at one point of being full of gibberish. There is no shadow of doubt in my mind that the hon. member actually occasionally has a good idea. In fact, the one good idea that I heard in this very House, when we talk about a bill of rights, was that he didn't throw oil sands companies under the bus like the Premier and the Minister of Environment did.

It's interesting that our bosses – our bosses – have often told us that we should listen to them. I'm listening to them, but I'm also listening to an ER doctor who also happens to serve the people of Alberta. I know that he knows it's an honour and a privilege to do that, and I can only say and confess that he's indeed one of the smartest MLAs that I've met, and a passionate MLA, without any doubt in my mind, is the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Have you noticed I'm not using any names? I'm using the constituency name. Until that standing order is amended at a further date, I will continue to not use the coffee-talk name, rather the Edmonton-Meadowlark name. It's a teachable moment tonight, Mr. Chair, so I congratulate you for that.

I'm so pleased to say that then there are no other interruptions. Because of that fact, I am able to divert my entire amount of energy to the words of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, which is a bill of rights for patients. Think about that for a moment, a bill of rights for patients. What a novel idea. It's like putting a safety net under Albertans because, God only knows, we need a safety net for all Albertans right now based on the crisis that we are faced with.

I know that on this important issue of health care there has been reference made to the Cookie Monster. I won't make any reference to the gentleman's name, pertaining to the bill of rights, but I can say that the Cookie Monster, who was referred to as the CEO of the superboard, is not the issue. The issue is the superboard itself. Under a bill of rights – they don't have a bill of rights right now, but under the superboard, essentially, the Cookie Monster is gone. But what about Ernie and Bert? They have to go next. I mean, Ernie and Bert – you can determine who they are, but clearly the former minister of health and the chair of the superboard are also some things that have to go. Rather than retracting, just simply going would serve that purpose very well.

I have had this direct discussion, Mr. Chair, on the bill of rights, regarding the important initiatives that are being done. Can you imagine if I were to say in here: it's either him or me. That gives a new meaning to democracy. But he appears to have sold a bill of rights in terms of convincing members of the PC caucus that an ER doctor in an ER crisis is not important enough. Nothing could be further from the truth. I would trust my son's life and my wife's life with this doctor. I know many members in here have sought his

advice, and actually, in doing so, he espouses the bill of rights in protecting patients each and every day.

I believe that, clearly, tonight is about honouring the spirit of what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought here. That's why I am here now at 1:30 in the morning, that's why *Hansard* is here at 1:30 in the morning, because of the fact that we're honouring the spirit of what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark represents in the patient bill of rights.

In other words, we need a safety net. And why do we need a safety net? Because of the mess that has been created. Not that it was created deliberately, but it started with the former minister of health, and now it continues with this minister of health. You know, the CEO has been basically fired tonight, but I find it ironic that the chairman of the board is still there – that's like the fox in the henhouse – who was appointed by the former minister of health. I don't think Albertans will be fooled by this, but they will support a bill of rights relative to Bill 17.

I am beginning to get somewhat of a dry mouth at this point. I am so eager to listen to others, but I would really like, Mr. Chair, to use my time for the 20 minutes because I'm usually not short on words. In fact, I've sometimes been occasionally . . .

Mr. Anderson: You can stop and take a drink if you want.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah, I think I'll stop and take a drink, but I don't want to lose my spot, Mr. Chair. Beautiful, blue gold.

Well, Mr. Chair, I will say that I look forward to continuing to debate this issue throughout the entire evening to honour the spirit and the values that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought forward. Actually, we had an interesting discussion this afternoon on the intent of what his bill amendment was. It was so interesting for him to make reference to the fact that his oath that he took as a doctor versus his oath that he took as an MLA, there was an appearance of conflict, conflict from the perspective that he needs to be, first and foremost, for his constituents.

As we go forward, Mr. Chairman, I believe that this bill amendment is a very good initiative. It is a new idea. A new idea is like a newborn child: you have to feed it, you have to nurture it, you have to allow it to grow, you have to protect it. You have to keep enemies away from good ideas. First and foremost, this is a good idea.

Again, the hon. member has just been kicked out of the PC caucus, and why? For standing up for the rights of patients. Good for him for doing that, standing up for the rights of patients, standing up for Albertans. So, Mr. Chairman, I believe . . .

The Deputy Chair: Carry on.

Mr. Boutilier: Oh, I wasn't sure if everyone was listening, but I'm glad to see everyone is. I'm glad to see the member from down south here. I know he has a camera and likes to take lots of pictures. But, in my judgment, I'm glad to see he's paying attention as well, from Strathmore-Brooks.

In fact, speaking of Strathmore-Brooks, the former member from there was a medical doctor as well. He was a medical doctor actually that, again, showed the same type of vision that this medical doctor has shown, and for that I congratulate him. He is no longer a member of this Assembly, but he is still a medical doctor. In fact I spoke to him earlier . . . [A cellphone rang] I thought I heard a band, Mr. Chairman, playing on that side of the House, but I must have been . . .

Mr. Hancock: Do not ask for whom the bell tolls.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has the floor.

1:30

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing that I have the floor. Obviously, the Minister of Education didn't know that I have the floor. But I do have the floor, and I have the floor to talk about a bill of rights, a bill of rights that he should be absolutely compelled to support, to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Perhaps he can't, through the chair, because he doesn't want to be whipped for not following the party line, a party that has thrown a doctor out because of the fact that he stood up for patients' rights. My goodness. Really. To the Minister of Education, I'm actually disappointed in you, that you would not stand for the very principles – the very principles – and values.

Now, we could always have a point of order. I could see the pose of a point of order. That would be really nice. I think he doesn't want to speak about the issue of the bill of rights that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark so astutely put forth because he's a doctor. He's a doctor. He's not a lawyer; he's a doctor. He actually knows something that's going on.

Mr. Chair, I want to say that whatever profession you're in, I know they are all noble professions. Certainly, serving in this House is a noble calling. As we all know, the time that we take to be here, which takes time away from our loved ones and our families, is okay. For those that travel hundreds of kilometres to be here, that speaks to the very principle of what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was espousing when he put forward a patient bill of rights, when it comes to that issue.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say tonight that this clearly, in my judgment . . . [Mr. Boutilier's speaking time expired] What I wanted to say is that my time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your creating the chance – I just need to confirm: how many minutes do I have?

The Deputy Chair: Twenty.

An Hon. Member: It seems like forever.

Dr. Taft: It is 20. Some of these speeches seem to go on forever. That's right.

I haven't had a chance to speak to this particular amendment yet. It was moved this afternoon. I have to sort out my thoughts on this as I listen to the debate. I hope the debate is widespread. We have had some brief discussion on this in our caucus, and I believe that our leader is in favour of this motion, but I just want to explore what it means.

There are two paragraphs to the amendment, and it comes under the section which I think the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was calling a patient bill of rights. It's actually a health charter, but I just want to be clear here. So under Health Charter it would add a couple of paragraphs. In effect the first paragraph would cause Bill 17 to read that the health charter must "include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." That would be part of the effect of this amendment.

A couple of issues come to mind. I'm sure that the spirit of this is something we'd all agree to. Who wants unnecessary deaths or harm and so on? It does raise – and maybe this is just semantics.

Hopefully, all deaths in an emergency room or a hospital are unnecessary as opposed to necessary. I don't know. [interjection] We could have this discussion so Airdrie-Chestermere could explain to me what would be a necessary death or what would be necessary harm, for example. But that's perhaps just semantics.

My concern with this is the practicality. If we pass a law that says there must be a charter that includes guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care, no unnecessary waste of resources should occur, then what happens if those things do occur? What are the consequences? There's no other provision in Bill 17 to impose penalties or sanctions or anything if it's violated. So one of the first questions I have is: what's the effect of this? If we pass this, it's still kind of: so what? Because if there is an unnecessary death, it doesn't say that would trigger an investigation or there will be penalties or anything like that.

The other thing that's even more fundamental than that is that just because we pass a law, that doesn't mean that any of this is actually going to happen, and this is actually one of my concerns with this bill in general. We can talk all we like and put all the wonderful words on paper in this Assembly and turn them into laws, but outside of the walls of this Chamber, it doesn't change anything, certainly not necessarily. If we pass a law that says there shall be no unnecessary deaths in hospitals, it doesn't mean they're not going to happen, so I'm struggling with: what's the point of this first paragraph?

Surely, it's already clear to anybody working in the system that they're not going to cause unnecessary deaths. Doctors and nurses and health professionals have oaths that already preclude this from happening or already commit them to the first principle of medicine: thou shalt do no harm. I may be rambling a bit because it's so late in the night, but I'm not quite sure what the point of that is.

The second part of the amendment is more specific. I must begin by thanking the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, my neighbour here, who has brought to my attention the background document that's referred to in this amendment. What this second paragraph of the amendment would do would be to cause Bill 17 to say that the health charter must

set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

Now, what this is referring to are the famous benchmarks that we've heard quite a lot of discussion about. In fact, a week or two ago I tabled in this Assembly photocopies of pages from an Alberta Health Services report from earlier this year that included their benchmarks, which had been announced the day before by the minister of health as if they were brand new. In fact they'd been there for months and months.

Anyway, I am quoting here from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians' February 2007 Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding. These benchmarks say:

1. That emergency department (ED) length of stay benchmarks be established nationally as follows:
 - (i) ED length of stay not to exceed six hours in 95% of cases for CTAS Level I, II and III patients.

I'm trying to remember what CTAS stands for, but it's essentially the severity. I think maybe triage assessment system or something like that. It's the severity of ailment that the person has.

- (ii) ED length of stay not to exceed four hours in 95% of cases for CTAS Level IV and V patients.

Then, actually, this document goes on at some length, and I suppose I'd better read this into the record because it's crucial to this debate.

1:40

Mr. MacDonald: I think you should because it hasn't been done. It was just referred to on the Internet.

Dr. Taft: My esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar is telling me that this hasn't been read into the record, and it's vital because it's actually directly quoted in the amendment.

2. That all admitted patients must be transferred out of the emergency department to an in-patient area within two hours of decision to admit.
3. That overcapacity protocols be rapidly implemented to allow Canadian hospitals to meet the national emergency department length of stay benchmarks until functional acute care capacity is sufficient.
4. That achievement of these benchmarks must be continually measured and ED length of stay should be documented on a daily basis by hospitals for all patients, and reviewed monthly. Hospital and Regional administrators should be held accountable if the throughput standards are not met.
5. That hospitals optimize bed management strategies to ensure the appropriate use of existing and future acute care beds.
6. That governments sufficiently increase the number of functional acute care beds to achieve regular hospital occupancy rates that do not exceed 85%.

Now, for *Hansard's* purposes this is on the web if you search the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, February 2007.

There's a lot in these standards that's contemplated in this amendment, and I actually rather like – in fact, I think there's an enormously important figure here in paragraph 6 of these standards. I have cited this many times over the years, and it's just been dismissed. It says here, "that governments sufficiently increase the number of functional acute care beds to achieve regular hospital occupancy rates that do not exceed 85%." For years it's been known in hospital circles that the optimal occupancy rate for a hospital is about 85 per cent, and if we have it below that, we're not really being efficient, but if we start to creep too far above that, various problems emerge. One is that you have no surge capacity, you have increased wait times, and so on. But you actually lose efficiency. As you approach a hundred per cent, you lose efficiency.

When I've tried to explain this to people, I use an analogy of a kitchen. If you have a kitchen that's designed for two people to work in and you have three people in it, you start becoming inefficient. If you have four people, you're bumping into each other, and you can't open the fridge, and you throw in an elbow because you're trying . . .

Ms Blakeman: And then you spill something.

Dr. Taft: Yeah.

Hospitals, just like kitchens, when they're working at overcapacity, efficiency goes down. What do we have in Alberta and what have we had in Alberta for the better part of 15 years: hospitals that are at a hundred per cent or 110 per cent capacity. We wonder why costs are so high and efficiencies are poor. The same reason that a kitchen can't function properly when there are too many workers in the kitchen. We need to build hospitals. Please. There's a bunch of cabinet ministers here. Please. You'll improve our system dramatically if you can meet that standard.

That used to be the standard: 85 per cent. So if there's a bus crash, you've got surge room. If there's a flu epidemic, you've got surge room. Day to day you don't have doctors and nurses spending hours and hours trying to find a bed because there's a bed available. I'm really excited about this particular stance because I kind of thought, "God, the world has moved on," and it hasn't. That is a

historically mandated standard. So I like this paragraph in this amendment quite a lot.

Mr. Hancock: The question is: should it be here, or should it be in the context of all the benchmarks that we need to have?

Dr. Taft: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is making some good points. I hope you rise and make those. The question he, I believe, raises – I don't want to put words in his mouth – is: is the Alberta Health Act the right place to put these standards? I think the point is that they need to be put in legislation somewhere because if they aren't put into legislation, we lose accountability, and we have lost that badly.

I want to move back in this discussion to earlier paragraphs in this Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians position paper, and that is to paragraph 1, that says that "length of stay benchmarks be established . . . not to exceed six hours in 95% of cases for CTAS Level I, II and III patients." I wasn't quite right. CTAS stands for Canadian triage and acuity scale. I thought it was Canadian triage assessment system, but I was wrong.

Anyway, I think one of the things we need to think through in this amendment is the kind of chicken-and-egg effect here because until we get our hospital capacity so that hospitals are only functioning at 85 per cent capacity, I don't know that we can meet these benchmarks. What those benchmarks assume is that there's actually enough capacity normally available in a hospital that people can be moved through emergency into the hospital. For us to get that capacity opened up, we need to significantly increase the number of hospital beds.

I just want to return to this point here: in a timely fashion. One of the problems that I think we've had in our health care system for a number of years is that we have refused to have health care professionals in charge of the system. I actually quoted the former minister of health, who is now the Minister of Energy. When he appointed the Alberta Health Services Board, he said that the last thing he wanted was health care professionals on the Health Services Board. I was startled at that, and I challenged him. I said: if you were running an oil company, would you say that the last thing you want on your executive team are experts in the oil industry or that if you were running an airline, the last thing you would want on your board is people who know how to run airlines? It just struck me as crazy.

Then what do we do? We the government go out and hire an economist to be in charge of the health care system. Now, I don't want to necessarily wade into this debate, because it's not over, but an economist is naturally going to want to run things just instinctively at a hundred per cent capacity. Anything less than that, in the mind of an economist, is inefficient. But, actually, a health care professional will tell you that a hundred per cent capacity is inefficient. We have an economist who has constantly kept the screws on the system: "Oh, it's got to be 100 per cent. It's got to be 110. If we can get it to 100, let's get it to 110," not realizing that, in fact, he's breaking the system. The system is broken.

How do we fix it? We need to fix it by getting a little bit of slack in the system. I perhaps shouldn't use the word "slack," but you just need that. Then suddenly you'll be astonished at how much better it will run. Until we get to that point – I don't know – I don't think it's possible to meet these emergency room standards of six hours. So there's a tension, a paradox in this. If we adopt this in the Alberta Health Act, I don't know how we would ever make it work. Of course, again, because there are no consequences if they don't make it work, then maybe it's just all rhetoric, anyway.

There are other aspects of this paper, the Canadian Association of

Emergency Physicians paper, that need to be discussed further, but I am, I think, going to take my seat because I'm getting low on time and will engage in those debates later on.

Thank you.

1:50

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that it was – what was it? – 6 o'clock, so eight hours since they adjourned, and I wasn't able to finish my discussion at 6 this evening. Now we're back onto something that many individuals have been wanting to discuss, the very importance of amendment A3 to Bill 17, which has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Again, I've enjoyed the remarks by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and his falling back on the 85 per cent capacity and the efficiency of it. There are so many areas that he brought up that I would also like to discuss a little bit. What are the ailments of our emergency room and overall health care system? Why is it that we actually need now to write a charter act that actually has some bite to it if, in fact, those time allocations are not met? This government has a terrible track record of saying that it's going to achieve this and then appeasing everybody but that we need six months to do it, that we need a year to do it. Right now with their new protocol, where they've brought everybody together, they say that we need 40 days to approve it. That's the problem when you try to run something like health care by a committee rather than someone in charge.

Earlier today I asked the Premier the direction that he was going and asked him to please dismantle the superboard in an orderly manner. That's the problem. Yet this government fails to see that that's the problem, so we'll continue going through here.

The 85 per cent bed capacity isn't a new concept in the medical field. It's been there for a long time, and it does make sense when you talk to someone who is running a hospital. It's always disappointing for an individual who has gone in for elective surgery only to find out that that surgery has been cancelled because there are no beds. These are the types of things where our operating rooms can't function at full capacity and our doctors can't operate because there are no beds available.

I want to go down a little different line of thinking than the Member for Edmonton-Riverview in that he says that we need to build more hospitals. I was talking to an emergency room doctor from the Peter Lougheed last week. He said: Paul, at any given time there are between 130 and 150 patients who have come in through the emergency room, and I have signed off and said that they can be discharged, but the transitional nurse said, "Well, no, they need to have their oxygen monitored for another four days" or "They need to take these antibiotics." They realize that if they send them home – it might be a senior who is on an absolute fixed income. Because they won't send the drugs home with them, they have to remain in the hospital for what might be a \$70 or \$90 drug charge. They won't send them home. Or someone needs to have their oxygen monitored, but there's nobody there to do it.

If you had a vertically integrated system, where the chief operating officer says that we need to hire more respiratory therapists that can actually go out and monitor these people, we could clear up the beds. I believe that in talking to these individuals, there are far more beds available if we would just actually move the people through. We don't necessarily need to have more senior care facilities – that certainly is one of the problems – but we won't even allow them to go back to their home residence because we won't follow up, which is all that's needed.

I also talked to this emergency room doctor, and he said: Paul, the absolute worst place for these individuals to be, especially because the majority of those people are coming in with congested breathing and breathing problems, is in the hospital. We can treat them. We can get, you know, the inflammation down and get them on oxygen, but the worst place to be is in the hospital. It gives them the highest chance of having a secondary problem because they're being exposed in a high-exposure area, and he said: we can't get them out.

He went on to talk about these transitional nurses and how they have to double-enter all of the data about those individuals into two systems because they're in the hospital and they're moving out. The IT doesn't even connect, so they have to actually double-enter. They spend a lot of time doing that. They can't even go and assess people where the doctor has said: "You know what? This person can go out." They're backlogged because of the paperwork or the double filing they have to do. They can't even go and assess them.

Mr. Chair, what's so disappointing is that there are so many answers by doctors, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who work the system and actually know the problems because they've signed them off and said, "They can move out" or said: "Okay, you can move them up. They don't need to be in the emergency room. They need to be in acute care now for a week. We've signed them out of emergency. We've got them under control, but there are no beds." Why are there no beds? Because of who is stuck in those beds because there isn't a place to take them to, and there's no follow-up, which is far cheaper.

Think of the costs. I said, "Down south maybe the problem is that the cost of the respiratory therapist and them driving around just isn't efficient, and it takes too long. Maybe they can only see 12 in a day." He said, "Paul, if they can only see 12 in a day, if that's all they see in a day, that is far cheaper than to have all 12 of those people in beds, let alone one person, at \$800 to \$1,200 a day occupying a hospital bed." He said: it's not about the money; it's about a failed, disjointed, disconnected system that's not vertically integrated; myself as an ER doctor I do not have the authority to tell those people to move them out or to hire more respiratory therapists or to say: "You know what? Send home the antibiotics with this senior so that they can take them for a week, and let's have a nurse or an RN drop by and visit them."

There are so many areas. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark wants to put accountability in, where it says in (d): "set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the 'Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding.'" He wants to put that in there in writing. I understand why the government says: oh, we can't afford to do that. Even though the answers are there, they refuse to do it. Now if they're going to be held accountable with legislation, they just look at this as an entire economic boondoggle, that they can't afford to do it.

I want to switch back now for a minute and talk about our Cookie Monster, who's been released of his duty, and go back and ask: why did we hire this individual? What's the position of this individual? How could he have helped Alberta Health Services if at all? Could he do that? This individual is an economist, but more interesting about him is that he's actually capable of going into a hospital like the Royal Alexandra and going through their financial statements and saying: "You know what? The actual cost of keeping someone in a bed in here" – this is going back to relevance, Mr. Chair, on why we need to get these people out. The time allocation will actually put the force through to the government to say: "You know what? We have to address this."

But why we don't address it is because we haven't had someone come in to actually nail down the costs of these different areas where

we have patients stuck, and we don't actually look at the economic cost. We just look at: "It's not in my department, so it's okay. I can shuffle off the cost and the responsibility somewhere else." If we had a vertically integrated health care system and someone like Dr. Duckett went in and said, "Here's the actual cost; it really does cost us \$850 a day to have someone sitting in this bed when we could send them home for a cost of \$75 a day and clear that bed out" – the biggest problem that we face inside Alberta Health Services is that we do not know the actual cost, whether it's for an MRI, whether it's for setting a broken leg, whether it's for having to do a lung transplant. We don't know the costs, and to think that we have an individual that this government has paid \$600,000, \$700,000 a year to be here and we're not utilizing his talents is shameful.

2:00

What we've done is that we've hired someone who, let's say, is a quarterback of a team and said: "Oh, by the way, we want you to be the centre. The Grey Cup is coming up. We want you to be the centre." They've never done that position in their life before. They're not educated or built for it, yet we put them there, and then when it fails, we say, "Well, we'll get someone new in that position." It isn't going to work. But if the government was held accountable with legislation like this, they would be far more likely to say: "You know what? We have to address this. We have to be honest with ourselves and realize that this is not working effectively. It's not working efficiently. It's costing lives."

I mean, right in here it says: "include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." Mr. Chair, all of those are occurring in our current system. We've had unnecessary deaths. We've had unnecessary harm to patients. When the overcrowding is there, when there are too many cooks in the kitchen, it increases the number of mistakes, and it's impacting on people's lives. It's impacting on the patients and it has harmed.

Unnecessary delays. That's what happens every day when someone has had the unfortunate situation where they have to go to the emergency room because of a medical ailment. They go in there, and they are unable to be treated because of the backlog just sitting there. Way too many unnecessary delays in care.

Unnecessary waste of resources. What does that mean? To me the first and foremost resource that we have is the actual workers in the health care system. How many of them are not being used to full capacity? Even the ER doctor that I talked to said, "You know, it would be so much help to have an input person that is inputting our data." He said that there could be a possible increase in data error for doing that. What he would really like and does not have – when he's charting his patients and following them through, every day he has to start over. There isn't a cut and paste. There isn't a file that he adds to. It's day 3 and he has to enter all the data again. Again, it makes no sense, yet there's no overall CEO that they can go to and say: "Look. This is the problem. What can you do to solve it?"

There are just so many aspects in all of these areas where we could and would do better if there was an incentive whereby these hospitals received bonuses on merit. You know, it goes back to before we amalgamated – I said "we" again; I guess I'm like Edmonton-Riverview – before they amalgamated into one super-board. There are different hospitals around the province. Again, we had so many. It's always a little disappointing to hear the Premier talk about these 300 health boards when all we had was 121 acute-care facilities. I don't think that we had two health boards, Mr. Chair, for every facility. That would only make it 240.

Again, the fearmongering that is being put out there is disappointing. They're not addressing the full thing. That isn't what anybody

is advocating for, 300 boards. I don't know why the Premier keeps bringing that up in question period. It's not accurate. It's not true. There never were 300 health boards in this province. I don't know who his researchers are or who brings that stuff.

Those are the points on why we need accountability, why we need to ensure that we're using our resources to full capacity, but as pointed out so eloquently here tonight, full capacity means 85 per cent. That's optimum. That's where we actually have the breathing room to be able to absorb these when the flu epidemic comes or whatever else so that people can come in and move through.

To go back to Dr. Duckett, his specialty is to look at the actual costs of those things. When you actually have costs, you can make better decisions, whether it's some of the diagnostic clinics that we have outside of our hospitals – it's amazing the efficiencies that they have there. I had a frozen shoulder for some time and went into the diagnostic clinic. It was, you know, a private clinic but publicly funded. The doctors were excellent. The efficiencies were there. It was quite amazing. But the question for someone like Dr. Duckett is: what's the cost to Alberta Health Services to have me go to this separate clinic versus waiting and going to a hospital and taking up room in a hospital with diagnostic equipment there that needs to be ready in case of an emergency? On the reverse side, because those emergencies are happening, they can't schedule and adequately move patients through on a regular basis.

What we need to do – and what we realize here is that this government's credibility, this government's trust factor has been thrown out the window. Albertans are upset that there's no movement forward. Two and half years ago was when this first report came forward to show the problems in our emergency rooms. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark gave up his daily charge, where he was working on those people, to come here because he was told: we're going to change these things. Two and a half years later, as he pointed out earlier – and I guess we call it today in *Hansard* because it's still the same day – the Premier finally called these people together to meet, two and a half years after that promise was given. So now the promise is fulfilled, but they say that it's going to take 40 days to put this information together to see if we can come up with new protocols on how to deal with people in the emergency room.

I humbly submit to the chair that we already have people in those hospitals that know what to do tomorrow. The problem is that our rules and our regulations have at no other time been so literal that they're actually regulating people to death. That is very, very sad, that when we have an emergency, we have people, we have doctors sitting there wanting to respond, but they're not allowed to. We really and truly have reached the point in the province of Alberta where we're regulating people to death. We talk about that all the time about businesses, but now the Alberta advantage has been lost so much that we're actually doing it to human beings. It has become a literal effect now, and we've had way too many Albertans that have fallen into that category.

Mr. Chair, I have to say that I'm very much in favour of the intent of this amendment. I'm looking forward to the hon. member giving some explanations. There have been some good questions, so I don't want to go over those again for the hon. member to answer. But the bottom line is that this government has brought forward Bill 17 to be another – I don't know whether you'd call it a white flag or their surrender; I call it another paper promise. It's paper-thin. What the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is trying to do is: let's write it and legislate it. Let's not make it paper-thin. Let's just not make it a hope, a whim, a thought, a wonderful oration of what we dream to have here for Alberta Health Services, for health care. It's not worth the paper.

There's just a lack of trust, a lack of delivery, a lack of understanding that goes very deep in this government on what the problem is with the health care system. They continue to think that if we centralize the power, if we centralize the decision-making, if we centralize the money and we dictate where it goes, somehow they'll get a handle on it. They're not. It's getting out of control at an unprecedented rate. The minister talked about the 18 per cent, and he said: "Oh, no. That was before we centralized."

You know, it's interesting the points he brings up and that he says how important centralization is and the \$600 million, I think, that he claims that they've saved. I would surely like to see them actually provide a paper and track the money that's being spent and show us where they're saving \$600 million. On the inverse, on the new royalty framework they were going to get \$1.4 billion; this one they were going to save \$1.4 billion, yet it has cost us more. Both of them are faulty ideas. They're not going to work, and Albertans are very disappointed. Again, we've had a scapegoat today . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

2:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to continue discussing the details concerning the document that's specifically named in the second paragraph of this amendment. Can you remind me: is this amendment A3?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, A3.

Dr. Taft: Amendment A3. Okay. Thank you.

So once again, just for the purposes of the record, I'm quoting from the position statement on emergency department overcrowding from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians of February 2007. It's a position that has six paragraphs, or six points, to it. I discussed paragraph 6 initially because that's the one that talks about getting hospitals to a regular hospital occupancy rate that does not exceed 85 per cent. To me that ought to be our long-term goal. We haven't been at that goal in more than 15 years, and it's no coincidence that it's also those 15 years that we've had such problems. The challenge is that it's going to be years to get to that point. It means building physical capacity and training thousands of staff.

I then went from that paragraph to paragraph 1, which speaks about the benchmarks of six hours for patients who are levels 1, 2, or 3 on the Canadian triage and acuity scale, and four hours in 95 per cent of cases for levels 4 and 5 patients on the Canadian triage and acuity scale. My concern that I was raising concerning paragraph 1 is: how in the world do we meet those benchmarks when we have hospitals that are operating at 100 per cent to 110 per cent capacity? I was and I am skeptical that those benchmarks can be met.

It is worth noting in paragraphs 2, 3, 4, and 5 of this statement that the emergency physicians have actually given this some specific thought and laid out some guidelines. Paragraph 2 states: "That all admitted patients must be transferred out of the emergency department to an in-patient area within two hours of decision to admit." In effect, that's another benchmark. That's saying that if you go to emergency as a patient, if the medical staff assesses you and says that this person, you, must be admitted, then this benchmark says that within two hours you actually have to be transferred out of emergency into an in-patient area. So that's an additional benchmark.

Then paragraph 3 begins to frankly address reality. Reality is that we don't have those in-patient areas. We don't have any excess

capacity that we can move people from emergency into. Paragraph 3 reads: “That overcapacity protocols be rapidly implemented to allow Canadian hospitals to meet the national emergency department length of stay benchmarks until functional acute care capacity is sufficient.” So they are beginning here, in paragraph 3, to admit that there is a capacity problem and that overcapacity protocols need to be implemented and need to be implemented rapidly. Now, what in the world is an overcapacity protocol? Well, essentially, it’s a series of steps formally laid out to follow when an emergency room is over capacity. That might mean transferring them to a medical assessment unit or opening extra beds in the women’s pavilion of the Royal Alex or whatever the protocols might be. It doesn’t get that specific here.

Paragraph 4 of this document reads:

That achievement of these benchmarks must be continually measured and ED length of stay should be documented on a daily basis by hospitals for all patients, and reviewed monthly. Hospital and Regional administrators should be held accountable if the throughput standards are not met.

Essentially, what this would mean, Mr. Chairman, is that every day all of the patients coming into an emergency room are tracked, and how long they are in there and where they go is tracked, and those are documented and compiled every day. If you were the site manager there or the chief of the emergency department, each morning you’d come in and you’d get a report: yesterday we had 49 patients come in, and a certain number met the benchmark, and a certain number didn’t, and some went into in-patient treatment, and some were discharged. That would be made available every day.

It says here in these standards, “documented on a daily basis by hospitals” and then reviewed monthly. So once a month, presumably, there would be a meeting of all the senior management, and they would say: “Okay. How are we doing? How are we going to do better? Are we meeting our benchmarks? If we’re not, what are we going to do to meet them?”

Then it says – and this is crucial, something really missing in the system right now – “Hospital and Regional administrators should be held accountable.” Well, certainly, those numbers are not published, as far as I know. Actually, I might stand to be corrected on that because there’s so much information out there. You know, Mr. Chairman, I just need to pause and think here because, in fact, I think those numbers are published at least on a quarterly basis.

My question, then, would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is being done to hold hospitals accountable? I’m looking right now at the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and, even more importantly, the Member for Red Deer-North. The Red Deer regional hospital, Mr. Chairman, has one of the worst performing emergency rooms in the province. How do we know that? Because those numbers are actually published. So I’ve talked myself in a complete circle. Those numbers are published.

Then my question to the Member for Red Deer-North is: what’s being done to hold that hospital to account for failing to meet those benchmarks? When the Red Deer regional hospital emergency room has some of the slowest, longest waiting lists for admission and so on – maybe the Member for Red Deer-North will rise and engage in this debate – how are those people being held to account? To be honest, that shouldn’t directly be our job. That should be the job of somebody in the system. But when month after month after month you don’t see the improvement, then we’re the ones as MLAs who hear about it, and we’re the ones as MLAs who begin asking questions. So I hope the Member for Red Deer-North will speak to that.

Number 4, actually, is doable, and we are, at least I think, most of the way to doing that in Alberta, so that’s a good thing. Then

number 5 from this position paper from the emergency physicians reads “that hospitals optimize bed management strategies to ensure the appropriate use of existing and future acute care beds.” That’s kind of a motherhood statement, to be honest, Mr. Chairman. Any management team in a hospital ought to be optimizing their bed management. Of course, in Alberta as a system we haven’t done a very good job of that because we are allowing far too many long-term care patients to be in our acute-care beds.

I had a call the other day from a physician at the Royal Alex telling me that about 200 of the beds at the Royal Alex were taken up by people waiting to be discharged into long-term care. I know from a week ago, because I was in there visiting a relative, that in the Sturgeon hospital 30 to 40 per cent of their beds – and that’s a significant hospital for this region – were taken up by people waiting for long-term care.

2:20

There’s a semantic game that gets played in here when we raise these issues. The minister pops up and talks about all of the continuing care beds and all of the assisted living and so on. What we need in this province is long-term care, what used to be auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes. If you’re sick enough to be spending weeks in an acute-care hospital, you’re not going to get discharged to assisted living. You’re going to need to go to, quote, a nursing home. When the minister talks about continuing care beds, those are not nursing home beds. So there’s a kind of semantic dodging that goes on in this Assembly which is quite frustrating.

The question raised by these standards would be: are hospitals managing their beds optimally when it comes to acute care? The answer would be, clearly, no. It’s one of the mysteries to me, Mr. Chairman, why we aren’t doing a better job on this in this government.

It may well be the case that passing this amendment and actually putting this into law is the only way that we’ll actually force something on the issue, but I’m not even convinced that’ll work because if they break this law, there’s no consequence. Nobody is going to go to jail. Nobody is going to get reprimanded.

An Hon. Member: I don’t know if we want jail time for them.

Dr. Taft: Maybe they shouldn’t go to jail. That’s fair enough. But there’s no consequence at all.

Again, I keep returning to this theme: is this bill really worth the paper it’s printed on? I can hear from some of the sounds around me that other members have the same sense of skepticism.

Mr. Chairman, I think that pretty well wraps up my comments on those six paragraphs in that position statement from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. That, then, leaves among many questions unanswered the one that I mentioned a moment ago, which is: why hasn’t this government acted sooner, and why are we having to bring this sort of thing forward?

I was elected to this Assembly early in 2001, and I was made the health critic. In 2002 we produced in the Alberta Liberal caucus a very extensive health policy. I was reviewing that either today or yesterday, and I’ll bring it with me later in the debate, Mr. Chairman. But in 2002 we talked at length about emergency room overcrowding and the need to address it, and we had various solutions which are along the lines of those being proposed now, eight years later.

In 2006 we updated that health policy, and in a rather infamous and inglorious moment in this Legislative Assembly we sent it over to the then Premier, Ralph Klein, who announced – and I think this is in *Hansard* – “I don’t want this crap,” and he threw it at the page. Well, you know what was in there? In 2006 we were calling for

solutions to emergency room overcrowding that are very much like these now.

So my question to the members of this Assembly – I see the new parliamentary assistant for health care is over there, and I appreciate he's paying attention – why haven't we acted more effectively and sooner? These are not new problems. They're all over the front pages in the last few weeks, but these have been around for 10 years and more, and all they've done is get worse and worse and worse.

Sometimes I get offended in here by the kind of joking and banter because we forget that behind these stories are real people, real people who have died, real people who have suffered, real families who go to an emergency room and are told that it's going to be days, and in the process they watch a loved one suffer and, too often, pass away. We forget that behind these policy debates are real human beings, and we're much too quick to dismiss that.

I'd invite any member of the government to stand up and explain why we have let these very serious problems fester so badly for so long when they've been broadly identified by the opposition and all kinds of other people for a decade or more. If we had solved them, you know, the smallest achievement is that we wouldn't be sitting here at 2:25 a.m. debating them. The much more important achievement is that countless thousands of people would have got the emergency care they needed. I hope that somebody on the government side gives me some explanation of why all these years have gone by and this problem hasn't been more effectively addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thought those were insightful comments by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I thought that he had some very interesting things to say there. He is right on this, that a piece of legislation such as Bill 17 in its current form is worthless without any way of enforcing it. Of course, the way that you enforce it is worth having a debate over. Obviously, someone should not go to jail for not meeting the benchmarks, but that's not what we're talking about.

What I think we could tie to those benchmarks is remuneration of some kind to the person overseeing it. We could have a person who's responsible for implementing this procedure at the individual hospital; in other words, if you had a local chief medical officer at each of the hospitals with an emergency room in it, as the Wildrose Alliance has been proposing, if you had that chief medical officer – it would be a doctor, generally, an on-staff doctor – that had the authority to open up beds in other places in the hospital, other wards, if there was a backlog. If certain things occurred, he or she would have that authority to open those beds, to move people, to do what needed to be done to achieve those targets. If you had that in place, that would be, I think, how you could get those benchmarks accomplished.

If they were unable to achieve those benchmarks, if they consistently missed them, they would be penalized somehow, whether that would be that they wouldn't receive part of their salary or, if it was consistent over time, they wouldn't continue on in that position as chief medical officer for that hospital, that delivery room. These are some things that you could do to enforce those benchmarks. You cannot have benchmarks without any kind of accountability, without any kind of enforcement. Obviously, we're not talking about criminal enforcement. Obviously, that's not what we're talking about. If you put someone in charge and there's accountability and they're given the authority to do what they need to do within the

hospitals to achieve those benchmarks, then I think that it would do a lot of good.

I will say this, that I have incredible respect for the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. He's just a wonderful person and human being, and he's so passionate about health care and about helping people. He hates seeing needless suffering. I just have so much respect for people who leave a job, a position like that, take a huge cut in pay, and come and try to serve this Assembly and try to serve the people. I remember so many nights where some of the rookie MLAs, when we first got elected, would get together, and we would talk about the things we were passionate about until sometimes all hours of the morning. I just remember the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talking so many times about the health care system and all the things that we could do better. That just really was what drove him.

2:30

He does a lot of volunteer work – I don't know if he's done it since he's become a member because, obviously, it's hard to juggle – with, you know, Doctors without Borders or whatever they're called. He goes to India and does a whole bunch of charity work there and does a whole bunch of different stuff. It's all about health care for him. He's just so passionate about it. I think that he's also an exceptionally smart individual – exceptionally smart – a genius in a lot of areas.

One of those areas, obviously, is the understanding of medicine. Another area of that, I think, is the understanding of the business side or kind of the technical side of an emergency room. He understands where the blockages are. He understands them clearly because he saw them every day, and he still sees them every week when he's doing his shift, usually on Sundays. He sees everything first-hand. He has a first-hand knowledge.

What's so spectacular about having him in this Assembly is that we don't have to worry. We don't have to spend millions of dollars on consultants or advisers or doing all these expensive studies. We don't need that because we have an expert on it in the room. Now, obviously, we'd want to confirm with other such experts, but they have been. If you talk with Dr. Paul Parks, if you talk with some of these other folks, as we have done as a caucus about this issue, you're finding that what they are saying is lining up with what the good doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark is proposing. It's not like he woke up one day and said: "You know what? I've got an idea. We're going to pull this out of a hat. We're going to legislate these wait times" and never gave any thought to it. He's been thinking about this. This is almost like his life's work.

He's so passionate about our health care system, in particular making sure that our emergency room system is solid, and how does this government treat him? Well, he speaks out about health care, and the Minister of Energy gets hurt feelings, and he's booted from caucus. I mean, it's beyond belief, really, that people would treat him in that way, just thinking what he could bring to the table. I mean, good grief. It's caucus solidarity gone absolutely amok. In any case, he's still in this Legislature. He's not on the government side, but he's still here. I think the whole point of this debate – and it will be for a while – is to hear this hon. member bring forth his ideas for health care.

I tell you that they're going to have to shut the doors and lock the gates, et cetera, before we're going to sit down, until there are an emergency room plan and legislated wait times for emergency rooms put in place under this legislation. Ultimately, it's up to the government. Obviously, they have a huge majority. But we are going to do our part with our caucus of four, making sure that we support the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in making sure that

at the end of the day we have legislated wait times for our emergency rooms and some sort of accountability so that we could say that we left this session this year and have accomplished something good, and we've taken a first step.

It's not the last step. There's so much work to be done in our health care system. It almost hurts the brain to think about how much there is to do and how many different aspects there are. With regard to emergency wait times there actually are a few simple things that we could do, and this is one of them. I think it's very critical that we do so, and I look forward to hearing that member's comments as we move forward.

All right. I want to go over this document because it's part of the amendment. The amendment was a movement to amend section 2(2) in Bill 17. Section 2(2), of course, is the health charter, and it talks about what the health charter must contain. Section 2(2) says that the health charter must

- (a) recognize that health is a partnership among individuals, families, communities, health providers, organizations that deliver health services, and the Government of Alberta, and
- (b) acknowledge the impact of an individual's health status and other circumstances on the individual's capacity to interact with the health system,

but the Health Charter must not be used to limit access to health services.

With all due respect to the author of this bill – he's a good individual, and I know he, too, feels passionate about health care – these two statements are borderline meaningless. That's great: health care is a partnership between individuals, families, and communities. There is absolutely nothing new in that, and I don't see how we have to recognize the blatantly obvious.

The second: "acknowledge the impact of an individual's health status and other circumstances on the individual's capacity to interact with the health system." Okay. Great. This is going to do nothing to help Albertans, absolutely nothing, as written here. Nothing. What I like about these amendments is that these will do something to help the health of Albertans, and it would be great to put something in this legislation that is going to actually accomplish something.

What the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark proposes is to include a sub (c), which is that the health charter needs to "include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was saying that he didn't quite understand what that meant. Granted, I'm not the expert on what it means, obviously, but my interpretation of it is: no unnecessary deaths. There are going to be deaths in emergency rooms, clearly. That can't be avoided. That's kind of the nature of the thing. Some people cannot be repaired. That's part of life, as we all know.

What I think was meant by this, in response to the Edmonton-Riverview MLA, is that unnecessary deaths – unnecessary deaths – are preventable deaths. They're ones that do not need to occur, and it should always be the goal of the emergency room to make sure that we are treating people and giving them the best chance possible to survive, the best chance possible to heal. That's why the revelations that have come forward from Dr. Paul Parks and others that we have had just over the last little while – five emergency room deaths that have occurred that are preventable.

Now, there have been other deaths in that time in emergency rooms, but there have been those five recent ones that were identified as being unnecessary, as being preventable, meaning that if the ER system had performed properly, had functioned properly, those deaths would not have occurred. That's what the hon. member, I believe, is referring to, unnecessary deaths. There are going to be

deaths. You can't prevent certain deaths, but these ones – I think of the young man who hung himself and who, right before he did so, asked for a pen and a piece of paper. I mean, if that isn't a warning sign, when a suicidal individual asks for a pen and a piece of paper, I don't know what is. That's a preventable death if proper protocols were in place.

That's why we've been asking for the Health Quality Council to come in and investigate that. We've got to make sure there are protocols in place in the future that make sure that that situation does not repeat itself or that we figure out if those protocols do exist. I don't know; maybe they do. If they do exist, why were they not followed in this case? That's why it's so important to have the Health Quality Council come and investigate such an egregious preventable death. That's what I think we're talking about there.

No unnecessary harm to patients: now, that's pretty obvious. When you go to an emergency room, sometimes you have to cause harm to patients in order to fix them. You have to do surgery. You have to make cuts, incisions. You know, sometimes you need to break bones. You need to do all kinds of things in order to eventually be able to repair them. Doctors, of course, in their Hippocratic oath do no harm. It's all about making sure they never do something to somebody unless it's for their benefit, unless it's to eventually make them better. I believe that's all we're talking about there.

2:40

"No unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." Now, those last two are kind of motherhood and apple pie statements, I would say, especially the first one, "no unnecessary delays in care." "Unnecessary" is very vague in that way. That's why I think subsection (d) is so important, because it defines "no unnecessary delays." What are unnecessary delays? In other words, what are preventable delays? Well, he goes into that. This health charter should

- (d) set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency [room] departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

I love that because it is specific. It's a real benchmark. It's something you can sink your teeth into, and it's something that will hold people accountable.

Let's go over the position statement on emergency department overcrowding. Here's the position statement. Here are the things that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would like to see in this health charter, and that's what the amendment says.

That emergency department (ED) length of stay benchmarks be established nationally as follows:

- (i) ED length of stay not to exceed six hours in 95% of cases for . . . Level I, II and III patients.

Level I, II, and III patients are those who are very ill, who need urgent care but aren't on death's door. I mean, that's kind of in layman's terms. So within six hours for those folks. Then for those who are really in trouble,

- (ii) ED length of stay not to exceed four hours in 95% of cases for CTAS Level IV and V patients.

Of course, those are very technical terms, but it's just a basic benchmark that says that we expect that in 95 per cent of circumstances – there is going to be the odd time where there's a bus crash or there's something brutal that happens where there's just not enough staff to deal with it. You can't achieve what are acceptable levels of care a hundred per cent of the time because stuff does happen, but 95 per cent is reasonable. The system should be such that in almost every case when someone goes to the emergency room, they're treated in an acceptable amount of time.

Think about the numbers here: four and six hours 95 per cent of the time. That is so much faster than what's going on in our emergency rooms right now. We're talking about 12-hour waits, 16-hour waits, 24-hour waits, 48-hour waits for people. I mean, how can we sit here and allow that to happen in our own emergency rooms? Shouldn't we do whatever it takes to get those down? You know, we've got to address the wait times for everything, for hip and knee replacements, for cataract surgery. We've got to address all that stuff. Absolutely. But before we even go into that other stuff, shouldn't we prioritize and make sure that the matter of life and death that occurs at the emergency room each and every day – shouldn't we make absolutely certain that that happens right away?

Somebody was asking for a solution. The solution is simple. As we said, appoint a chief medical officer in every single hospital so that there's always a chief medical officer on staff at the hospital. It usually will be a doctor. You don't need to hire a bureaucrat; usually it should be a doctor that's on staff. That chief medical officer should be empowered to do what is necessary to move to open up wards of the hospital that aren't necessarily the emergency wards, to get alternative arrangements for seniors who are able, where it's safe, to leave their acute-care beds and go into a different type of facility, so have kind of like a place where if things get bad, if a nurse needs to take a couple of seniors to a senior-safe hotel or something like that to get them out of acute-care beds and then take care of them for that time or whatever in an emergency situation, that's what they could do. That might save lives. It would save lives. I think that's a solution. That's what we could do. But it's not going to happen if we don't give the proper authority and if we don't have the proper expectations.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise again to speak to amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I have listened with interest to various speakers for the last couple of hours regarding the amendment and the position statement on emergency department overcrowding published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, that is dated the second month of 2007.

Now, there has been a lot of effort made over the years by this government to try to solve the problems with emergency department overcrowding and with health care in general. It's certainly a file that they're having a great deal of difficulty managing. Our party has come up with a lot of very, very good solutions to this problem, but to date they have unfortunately been ignored by this government. I would like to say at this hour of the morning, hon. members: put your pride in your pockets and take some good, sound advice. Certainly, we have suggested innovative strategies to reduce emergency room overcrowding.

Of course, where would you begin? Well, you would begin with increasing acute-care capacity. Now, the minister of health gives a list of the number of beds. The number, Mr. Chairman, seems to always change. It goes up. It goes down. It never remains the same. In the length of time – and I'm now of the opinion I'm going to have ample opportunity to speak – there's going to be a lot of information, some of which the government has been reviewing, and I'm not going to say scheming, but information that they have been reviewing for some time regarding solutions. Emergency department overcrowding, not only in Alberta but in the entire country, has been escalating. We've heard about patients who suffer prolonged waiting times, a reduction in the level of service or care, and adverse patient outcomes.

Now, Mr. Chairman, this whole issue: I'm not going to say that it

boiled over, but it came to a point about a month ago, in October. A letter, of course, was written by Dr. Paul Parks, the president of emergency medicine with the Alberta Medical Association. This letter was obtained by local news media. This doctor issued a serious warning to both Alberta Health Services and to this government across the aisle regarding the state of Alberta's emergency rooms.

2:50

This is why, I think, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was forced from that caucus, forced to sit here under the watchful gaze of Prince Philip, a younger Prince Philip. I don't know how old he was when that portrait was commissioned but a few years younger than he is now. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark from this seat proposed this amendment earlier this afternoon.

Now, I think he was compelled to act. I think his actions here are sound. When we think of what the president of emergency medicine outlined in his letter, certainly, there are still grave concerns a month later regarding the overcrowding in Alberta's emergency rooms, and the province has been informed of and aware of these concerns for at least two years.

We heard earlier about the leadership debate that occurred in the 2008 election. I'm not so sure, Mr. Chairman, with the noise . . . [interjection] I'm on the bill. Give me a break.

The Deputy Chair: On the amendment. On the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm on the amendment. I don't need that, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: What's that got to do with the leadership?

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry?

The Deputy Chair: I hope you bring it together.

Mr. MacDonald: I've heard all of the speakers this evening address this Legislative Assembly without interruption from the chair . . .

The Deputy Chair: The comments on the leadership: I hope you bring them into this.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry?

The Deputy Chair: I'm saying that I hope you pull the comments on the leadership into the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: You bet I will if you'll allow me.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. So in the leadership debate that occurred in 2008, we had the current Premier, we had the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview – and this was talked about earlier this afternoon, if you were listening, Mr. Chairman. During that debate there was the whole issue of emergency rooms, what was going on in them, who was waiting, for how long, and what the consequences of those long waits were, and the Premier laughed it off. He brushed it off.

We know from the letter that was issued last month about the overcrowding that this government knew it was going on, and they have done nothing about it for two years. For two years not a thing.

Here we are at 5 to 3 in the morning discussing this issue. We could almost say that we're having another emergency debate on emergency room overcrowding. This amendment A3 certainly is turning into this.

The letter from Dr. Parks states that the overcrowding is due to blocks in access to the rest of the hospital units, which is a direct result of the lack of capacity, both in acute-care beds and in continuing care beds. We have been suggesting, as I said earlier, that the start of solving the problem begins with acute-care beds. Now, Dr. Parks' letter also reads: "Our overcrowding problem continues to worsen and we anticipate the potential catastrophic collapse of timely emergency care delivery in the upcoming months. There must be an intervention immediately."

Well, this amendment, these guiding principles and these standards, certainly would force this government to act. They haven't done a thing in two years. The situation is deteriorating. So I think that if we need another reason to support the amendment, that certainly would be it. Dr. Parks also advocates for the tracking of true, objective wait times, not averages, and that those responsible for the management of the system be held to account on whether the measures are met or not.

Now, I have the view that Dr. Parks' letter is the most likely reason the minister of health made the impromptu announcement on October 20, in the press conference regarding the government's response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's report, that 250 new acute-care, continuing care, and detox beds would be open by December 2010.

Through access to information the Official Opposition received quite some time ago, over a year ago, April 2009, a document regarding the shortage of health care workers in Capital health. This is information that was obtained by Capital health through reports and studies that they had commissioned. The projection that I'm looking at, Mr. Chairman, is between the years 2000 and 2010. It's ten years. By the year 2010 the projected nursing demand is estimated here by the letter "X". They don't know. They don't know how many nurses they may need, but they give us a list of long-term care beds, acute-care beds, and estimated total beds: 930 long-term care beds would be needed and 380 acute-care beds, for a total of 1,310 beds. No idea how many nurses would be needed, but those are the beds.

The hon. health minister made his announcement on the fly, and it was completely different than that. It would be interesting to get from the government members an accurate, up-to-date list of the beds, what kind they are and where they are.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Totals. Maybe a total monthly count by hospital.

Mr. MacDonald: Totals.

Mr. Hinman: We've been calling for an audit for two weeks on that.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, you have, and rightfully so.

Now, the proof on the announcement of new acute-care beds was shown in a *Calgary Herald* story where Alberta Health Services medical director, Dr. Francois Belanger, said that he could not provide specifics on how much staff were needed and what the cost of the initiative would be. The actual quote that came after that was: "We don't have a final plan yet. I'll have to get back to you with those numbers."

Mr. Chairman, the letter "X" represents what Capital health thought may or may not be needed, and I find that interesting. But here is another fact, and that is that the 250 beds announced on

October 20 included the 132 additional beds for Calgary that were announced on September 8. So if the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore is talking about having an audit to see what beds are where and what potentially they could be used for, that sounds like a logical and reasonable request because it's one of the tricks of this government. If you go onto the Alberta government website and if you look at the press releases, sometimes you could just go back four or five years, change the date in the press releases, and make new announcements. You just have to change the date, and you could save a few dollars over at the Public Affairs Bureau.

There are serious concerns about how these additional beds will be funded. The minister of health has stated that the new beds will not be funded with additional money from the government. Where's the funding going to come from? Maybe we're going to take some of it from the surplus, the surplus that the ministry of health had last year.

3:00

Dr. Taft: Maybe the federal government. Instead of funding Expo, they'll fund health care.

Mr. MacDonald: Maybe they will fund health care instead of Expo. That's quite a thought.

Maybe we could, through the course of the discussion on this amendment, Mr. Chairman, also get to the bottom of the issue of the money that's coming from the federal government for emergency room response times. We never did get an answer on whether that money was left on the table or not.

Now, Mr. Chairman, there's also real concern whether or not the new beds can be staffed. We have gone through this training and recruitment exercise of this government. We see the issues that have not been dealt with. We have one month a shortage of nurses; the next month it is declared there is a surplus of nurses. We have money being spent in Employment and Immigration on foreign recruitment of nurses. The recruitment activities take place. In some cases the individual nurses are attracted to this province from different places – the Philippines, India, Australia, New Zealand – and there's no job. Of course, those folks go home, and they tell the people in their communities of their experience. It's not a good one here. The next time that we need to recruit individuals, it's going to be a lot tougher.

This debate we're having is the result of a government that is in complete damage control over this emergency room overcrowding, the chaos and confusion surrounding our emergency rooms. Does this amendment help? I certainly think so. It improves Bill 17. I don't know whether I'm going to vote for it or not, but I think I would support this amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark certainly has a plan and some good, sound ideas as to how we can fix the system. But clearly this government has no plan – no plan whatsoever – for the future of public health care, and it is clear that they're flying by the seat of their pants. The most telling part of this whole issue is that it seems that Alberta Health Services was completely, as I said earlier, taken off guard by the minister of health's declaration.

If we could get these beds up and running and staffed, I think it would help. But, Mr. Chairman, not only should we have a look at this proposal, A3, but we've got to recognize that it will alleviate the long delays in emergency wards that are frustrating the public and turning the public against this government. In fact, opposition to this government is growing within the Assembly and is certainly growing outside the Assembly in communities across this province because this government cannot get a handle on the health care file. They just can't for whatever reason.

Now, it is common to hear concerns that people are using the

emergency rooms or the emergency wards by visiting them when they only have a minor ailment. That is certainly not true. A large portion of emergency patients do not have life-threatening problems; however, very few people visit an emergency room or a ward without a justifiable reason or a justifiable illness. People often go there because there is no reasonable alternative, especially after hours and especially since we don't have enough family-trained physicians.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark spoke earlier today about how we need more front-line health care workers, more family physicians. I was interested to listen to his remarks regarding the training of specialists. I didn't know that, and I was unaware that so many of them that we are training – I knew a few were leaving this jurisdiction, but from his comments I think we all should be concerned.

Now, there are innovations. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm sorry I ran out of time. I look forward to participating in the debate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise again. I think there is a song out by the Rankins: *Rise Again*.

The Bill 17 amendment, in my judgment, is important. Most importantly, it sets standards for the lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the position statement on emergency department overcrowding published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. I might say that we actually sit a lot closer to a physician than you guys do, and that was because of your unanimous vote the other day. Guess what? It's important to recognize in the amendment to Bill 17 that we "include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths," which is very important, "no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste in resources should occur." I think this in itself, Mr. Chairman, is something that is reasonable, even more so because it has a tremendous amount of credibility from the physician that we sit close to.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that Alberta's health care system really has arrived at a critical crossroad. It's like talking about an important story to my three-year-old son. Despite massive annual increases in health spending, waiting lists are at an all-time high. Patients are left languishing in emergency rooms for hours and hours and hours. How long do you say? Hours and hours and hours and sometimes days. Finding a family physician is increasingly difficult, and many seniors find it impossible to secure the care that they so desperately need.

I must say that as we look at the guiding principles, that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm, no unnecessary delays in care, and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur, I believe that setting standards for lengths of stay in emergency departments of hospitals consistent with, again, the position statement on emergency department overcrowding published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians is so important.

The PC government, as you know, Mr. Chairman, on Bill 17 and on this amendment, let me just say, continues to unfortunately mismanage health care, squandered millions of dollars into a big black hole. No one knows, no one can even determine or measure if it is effective or not. This centralization, which I used to refer to as *Pravda* – they have centralized control of health care, losing all of the community capital that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark did not want to lose. I want to say that the doctor that wrote this was on that side. You guys were close to him. Now

you've lost him. You've lost him, and we're closer to him than you guys.

3:10

I want to say, Mr. Chairman, that change is in the air, and this bill amendment is a refreshing, refreshing, refreshing start to that change. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark because he is capturing the important points that he sees front line in emergency rooms on a weekly and daily basis.

Alberta's health care system can be fixed. But, you know, I will always yield to a doctor or to an MLA who knows what he's talking about, certainly more so from that side. With that, the hon. doctor, I think, is ready to speak. Therefore, I will yield my time, Mr. Chair, to the hon. doctor, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. You've recognized me. I will grant my time to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo obviously thinks we're in the U.S. Senate or something, where he can cede his time or cede his place.

Mr. Boutilier: I didn't give my time to him.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you don't have time.

Mr. Boutilier: I didn't yield my time. Raj was up ahead of Dave.

Mr. Hancock: I don't think so. Besides, Mr. Chair, as you so rightly recognize, we do tend to go back and forth when the opportunity affords. In any event, I won't be very long. Don't worry about it. I just wanted to put a couple of comments on the record about the amendment because I have a lot of respect for the hon. member who moved this amendment in terms of his abilities. I've worked with him on health issues over the years and don't necessarily disagree with the concepts embodied in the amendment.

The first one, as was quite rightly pointed out in a very interesting speech, one of the only real interesting speeches of the evening, actually, by Edmonton-Riverview, who said some very, I think, appropriate things about this amendment, in particular the first piece, the guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources – I mean, fundamentally, if you have to write an act to say that, you probably should have gone home a long time ago. That is a fundamental understanding of a health system, that you're preventing preventable deaths and you're not doing harm. In fact, that's the fundamental oath in medicine. So I'm not going to dwell on that. I'm not going to repeat what Edmonton-Riverview said, I'm just going to say that I appreciated him rising and saying it.

With respect to the second piece, setting standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments, that, too, is actually something that's very unnecessary. The only question is: what's the appropriate way to do it? The answer is: not in the foundational statute that talks about the things the Alberta Health Act, Bill 17, talks about but, rather, in a comprehensive set of appropriate benchmarks for the health system that we're prepared to have the system be accountable to and have government be accountable to in terms of what we're aspiring to. Those targets should be national and international standards, but they also should be standards which can be adjusted as things change for the better: new technologies, new techniques, new drugs, new procedures, new processes.

In fact, Alberta can be very proud of being leading edge in a number of different areas in terms of pushing the envelope and doing things. We're doing hip surgery now on 90-year-olds that you never used to do on anybody over the age of 70. A great Albertan, Ray Nelson, passed away not too long ago. He had a heart transplant at approximately the age of 80. It might have been 79, but at that age. That was something that you would never have seen happen anywhere in the world earlier on.

Standards change. They get better. We push the envelope. We have the Mazankowski health centre here in Edmonton, in Alberta, with some of the finest technology and some of the finest doctors working on not only new and better procedures to assist people who have health issues related to the cardiac area but also to push the envelope on the prevention side, to help people stay healthy.

We could say the same thing about diabetes in Alberta. We could say the same thing in some areas of cancer, where we have some of the finest specialists in cancer research and cancer care right here in Alberta. When the Edmonton clinic opens, we'll be able to say that about ambulatory care processes.

We should have benchmarks that are published, that are out there, that say what we aspire to and how we're going to get there, but is it appropriate to pick one of them and put it into the middle of this act, where it has no relational context and the act doesn't actually speak to that particular aspect? No.

With respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark – and I'm just saying now to the House what I've said to him before – I certainly appreciate the standards with respect to care in emergency medicine, the other standards which need to be discussed with respect to how the health system should perform and what we want as Albertans, the standards that we aspire to in the health system, that we should be able to meet, the national and international benchmarking standards. Absolutely. The Premier has said that we're going to have the best health care system in Canada if not in North America, and to do that, you have to know what the benchmarks are. So, yes, we should have benchmarks, yes, we want to make sure that they're published, yes, we need to be able to get to them and we need to have a plan to show how we're going to get to them, but no, they shouldn't be part of Bill 17 because it's not the right context, not the right place. It's picking one benchmark, albeit an important one, albeit a pivotal one in terms of how you measure a health system, but not in this place.

I think we can look forward to these actually being published and part of the health care system in the future, but I would say that they do not belong in this particular act of the Legislature. I would ask the hon. member to keep these in his back pocket or on his blog or wherever he wants to keep them, and let's discuss them at the appropriate place and stage of the process. I would suggest, Mr. Chair, we've been debating this bill in second reading and then committee for a lot of hours, and I've heard people say that they have a lot of things that they want to talk about with respect to this bill. I would suggest that we vote on this amendment and that we see what else there is that other people would like to talk about with respect to Bill 17. I for one would be very interested.

I think Bill 17 is a great foundational bill. It sets some really key areas for health in terms of how we build and where we go in building that comprehensive, quality health care system for Albertans, building on the great health care system we have now, because we do have a great health care system. We've got issues – no question – but we have a great health care system. It always pains me, Mr. Chairman, when I hear somebody talking about a Third World health care system because they have obviously never been anywhere near the Third World. When you see the type of technology and equipment we have, the type of facilities we have, and, most

importantly, the quality of the health care professionals we have and the number of health care professionals we have, we have an excellent health care system. But we do have issues, and this government has been working on those issues and will continue to work on those issues.

You might be surprised, Mr. Chairman, for me to say that the fact of the matter is that there will always be issues because the nature of the system, the nature of a changing population, the nature of demands on the system will always require that we continue to work. There will be no time where you can stop and say: "The job is done. It is complete. No more needs to be done." It will always be a moving target, and it will always require work. We have an excellent system. There are things we need to deal with now to move to the next level. We need to identify the benchmarks but not in the bill.

I would say to the House, you know, that we've spent a lot of time. We've spent all afternoon on this particular amendment and now several hours tonight on this particular amendment. Now is the time to vote on this amendment and then bring forward the other amendments. Let's see what else there is in the bill that needs to be discussed because this should be the best foundational act for health in this country if not in North America or the world. Let's make it that way. If it's not that way now, if you think there's something better to put in this act, then bring it up. But we've spent a lot of time on this particular one, and I don't think there's a lot more to say, Mr. Chairman.

3:20

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. It's truly an honour to join all of you today. I'm truly humbled to speak to a very important topic that affects all of us. For me, I feel like being a doctor again because, by the grace of God, when I was working full-time as an emergency doctor, the phone would ring, and I'd get my STARS bag when it was an emergency. I'd jump in my car, get to the helicopter; it's an emergency. We're having an emergency debate. I'm here with my pillow, and I'm here with my blanket. If somebody wants to talk theatrics, this is not theatrics. I'm here to camp out all week and all month to talk about a very important issue.

Mr. Chair, I want to speak to a very important issue. This is the Alberta Health Act. First of all, I'd like to start off by a quote. Many of these members were sleeping when I first said this quote, and now that they're awake, I'm going to reiterate it for their benefit. As Martin Luther King said, life begins to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Another quote, Mr. Chairman – and I don't mean this in any way, but it's going to hook up at the end of this debate. I'm going to give a short snippet of it: evil happens when good men and women stay silent. The reason we're here is that there is an emergency debate. You know, we all agreed on the state of the health care system. The reason I'm here tonight is that we had an emergency debate, and there is a bill before the House as a result of the emergency debate. I have introduced an amendment on behalf of all the front-line health care workers: doctors, nurses, paramedics, unit clerks, cleaning staff, you name it, all those warriors of health care, the gatekeepers of health care.

The amendment to Bill 17: the reason I did it is because Bill 17, I believe, is actually a very good piece. I really can't disagree with anything in here. These are very good principles. It talks about a health charter, a patient advocate. I really can't disagree with much in here. It's a decent piece of legislation. Now, the critics can say: "Why do we have to enshrine principles into legislation? Is the

intent that we actually didn't have them to begin with?" We've always had them, but we're actually enshrining them into legislation, which has never been done. I think the symbolism is so important.

Now, my amendment: what is it doing to Bill 17? My amendment to Bill 17 is to turn a decent piece of legislation into a great piece of legislation. Some critics will say that Bill 17 is a bunch of airy-fairy principles. I don't believe that. But the amendment makes it absolutely clear that there's nothing airy-fairy about this bill. This is to legislate teeth. The teeth to health care is the accountability and performance piece, where we tell the nation and we tell the country and this province that we are actually really serious about fixing health care. Mr. Chairman, I'm just a simple emergency doctor from the Royal Alex. It's inner city. You know what? Just simple people come to that place. They suffer, many of them dying metres from care and suffering metres from care, and I feel it's important to speak on their behalf.

Mr. Chairman, Dr. Paul Parks, the section president of the emergency doctors of the province, raised legitimate concerns on behalf of all the emergency doctors to the public. On October 8 a letter was sent to the Premier, to the current minister of health, to myself, and I guess that letter was sent across the world or at least across the province and across the country. In his letter a quote was: the emergency health care system is on the verge of a catastrophic collapse if something is not done urgently as soon as the flu hits. As an emergency doctor I fully agree with those remarks. Absolutely.

Yesterday I made a phone call to the emergency rooms. There was only one resuscitation bed available in all of Edmonton. No other emergency beds were available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is a good fellow. He's a good friend of mine. He actually convinced me to run for public service. Before I ran, I said: "You know, hon. member, I've got to admit. I have to be honest that I didn't vote for your party because you wrecked health care over the previous couple of elections." But I said: "You know what? I like you, and I trust you, and if you listen, I will help you and advise you."

I want to put everything into context before I talk about details. When I was in Dr. Paul Parks' position, as section president in 2006 I sent a letter to the minister prior to the hon. member, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, saying that the emergency departments are in big trouble. There was a leadership campaign that was on, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud subsequently became the health minister.

When he became the health care minister, the health care system suddenly over that winter, after the leadership race in 2006 for the PC Party was over – he inherited the health care file. It wasn't his fault, Mr. Chair. It was a result of neglect by the previous ministers.

Here are my comments when I was in Dr. Paul Parks' position. I will read this article to you.

Crisis in the ER: Doctor Cites 11-day Wait for Patient in Emergency Room.

A veteran emergency room physician says that the state of the city's ERs is the worst he's ever seen.

Dr. Raj Sherman, an ER doctor at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, told the *Sun* that emergency rooms are routinely overcrowded.

In one recent case he said an admitted patient had to wait in ER for 11 days before a bed became available elsewhere.

"I believe the problem is worse than it's ever been," says Sherman, also head of Emergency Physicians of Alberta. "I've been working for 15 years and we've never had it this bad."

Capital Health is expected to unveil a plan in the next few weeks to deal with the problem of admitted patients clogging up ERs.

It's expected to improve what's being called a "full-capacity protocol" – an idea being pushed by Sherman's group and endorsed by the Alberta Medical Association.

Under the plan, patients in the emergency department would be transferred to a non-emergency ward within four hours of being admitted, whether there is a bed available or not.

It might mean lying on stretchers in hallways, but at least patients would be receiving the specialized care they need, Sherman said.

Moving the admitted patients would free up ER beds for new patients, reducing waits.

It would also spread the burden of over-crowded emergency department rooms hospital-wide, Sherman said.

"We'll hopefully be able to say something about it in the next few weeks," said Capital Health spokesman Steve Buick.

Buick said that the protocol is being considered for the whole region, which would be a first in Canada.

While some hospitals in other provinces have introduced similar measures, no health care authority in Canada has adopted it for all their hospitals.

Buick emphasized it would be a temporary measure.

A temporary measure, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud: this man was the first minister in the nation to have the courage to do this in every hospital, and I have to thank him, and I owe him that respect. Edmonton-Whitemud, when he was minister, saved hundreds of lives by listening to the emergency doctors. He did. Please give this man a round of applause. [some applause]

He said that, ultimately, more beds are needed in the system.

Guys, listen up here. More beds would be needed in the system. Come on, guys. Wake up here, please. It's very important.

3:30

He said more doctors and nurses are also needed.

"We face a severe challenge right now," Sherman said.

"I don't believe we've ever had a day in the past year where there's not been an admitted patient waiting in emergency for longer than they should."

Coun. Linda Sloan, a former emergency room nurse, said while the full-capacity protocol is not ideal, it may temporarily ease some of the ER pressures.

"I really don't believe we can achieve quality and ethical care of patients when we're delivering the care in the hallways," Sloan said.

Mr. Chairman, this was a temporary solution to an urgent emergent crisis.

In fact, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was the assistant to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I worked very closely with them. And you know what? They were actually very gracious, very decent. So I have to pay due respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. You did the right thing. Thank you so much. What happened, Mr. Chairman, is that we actually saved hundreds of lives. We actually had a number of deaths and near-deaths, and we were not meeting the basic standards of care. Now, this was the alternative. We weren't happy about putting people in hallways upstairs.

We had 42 admitted patients at the University of Alberta hospital in a 48-bed emergency department. We had six beds at the U of A in a quaternary care referral trauma centre for all of northern Alberta. Six beds. As a result, the waiting room was full with 50 patients. Guess what? The ambulances were waiting six to eight hours with the sickest patients in town. Intracerebral bleeds were waiting six hours on beds until they seized. Pregnant women were miscarrying on the triage stretcher. People with heart attacks were diagnosed and sat in waiting rooms with a hep-lock in their hands for five hours after the diagnosis. We had a gentleman who had a ruptured esophagus. He waited seven hours in the waiting room until he collapsed, and then we looked after him immediately because we did not have a resuscitation bed. We had hypertensive

ruptured ectopic pregnancies, women whose pregnancies were outside of their wombs, lying on stretchers for six hours with low blood pressures, dying and bleeding to death.

The alternative was to have untreated, undiagnosed, undifferentiated patients in the waiting room and delaying their care. What was worse: record numbers of sick people were leaving without even being seen after waiting six to eight hours. I am aware of a case. Somebody had fantastic cardiac surgery; we were number one in Canada. But guess what? They had a complication. They waited eight hours in the waiting room. They had what we call a pericardial tamponade. Fluid built up around the heart, and that fluid built up so much that it constricted the heart. They actually died in the waiting room. When they had cardiac arrest, they got immediate care, but we had to tell the family that we did the best we could. Mr. Chairman and hon. members over there who are talking amongst yourselves, I ask you to listen to this carefully. Did the system really do what it could for that patient?

Mr. Chairman, there was another patient with a pericardial tamponade. The fantastic cardiac surgeons had operated on a patient. That patient left without ever being seen, and I am aware that they never came back. I am aware that there was no ambulance on the street to respond to an urgent 911 call because the whole fleet of ambulances were tied up in the emergency room waiting to off-load patients. They called the ambulance when that patient had a cardiac arrest at home. It wasn't available, and by the time the ambulance arrived, that patient never came to the emergency room. My good friends, that patient went straight to the morgue, to the coroner's office.

Mr. Chairman, the morale of front-line staff in Alberta is at 25 per cent for the doctors. They are supposed to be the leaders of the team. It's at 36 per cent for everyone else.

I worked permanent night shifts at the Royal Alex through the cutbacks. We only had one doctor who worked nights. When we cut beds to half overnight, your friend, this guy, looked after all of the disasters of northern Alberta and Edmonton. People were dying left and right in waiting rooms in the midst of the cutbacks in the '90s. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I was there, and I am still there. I advocated. In fact, before me Dr. Chris Evans advocated with the previous ministers prior to the minister from Sherwood Park. He advocated with the three, four, or five ministers prior to this minister. We have been advocating with every minister.

This system didn't start getting broken yesterday or the day before. This started in the mid-90s when it was dismantled, when the government at the time had an agenda. Well, mind you, they were in a tough situation. The economy was really bad. They were advised that privatization was a solution, and under their watch hundreds of patients died in waiting rooms and suffered when their care was delayed. The front-line staff banded together and said: "Politicians, bureaucrats, and administrators don't care. We must fix this system." With regionalization everything went vertical. We broke those vertical lines. We said: "Forget it. We're going to talk to one another on the front lines." We held hands. We went horizontal. The front-line staff did it. The system actually came back.

It actually improved until the boom hit, before we drove the staff out. This time we drove 1,800,000 patients in without the staff. Guess what? The same thing. It's a supply and demand issue. A lot of illness, not enough health care workers; teachers, roads, you know it. Society's and the system's problems end up in the emergency rooms.

I appreciate what the hon. member says, that this is not the place to put these, Mr. Chairman. Imagine if every patient was an airplane. You know what would be happening? There would be an

airplane crashing every 10 minutes in this province. This isn't a funny thing. Would this be acceptable in the airline industry? The members on the board are all businesspeople. Mr. Franceschini is on the board. Would this be acceptable in Stantec? I think not. Is this acceptable in any society?

Mr. Chairman, I worked with the hon. member. He actually convinced me. He said: "Raj, get off the headlines. If you want to fix this problem, come on inside where you can truly make a difference." By the grace of God and the grace of the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark, I was elected, and I thought that we would have the health care dream team with myself – I'm just a simple front-line guy. I don't know much else other than doctoring and maybe looking after a couple of kids and coaching soccer and basketball in McKernan. I thought: we have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who is the policy expert in this House – I'm just a delivery expert – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I thought: wow, we would be the health care dream team and we would fix it.

When I received my phone call to be parliamentary assistant, I was so honoured. I thought I'd be so honoured to work with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. But there was silence on the other end of the phone. This minister actually reduced emergency wait times.

The health care system is broken. There's only one governmental party in this House, that needs to take the full responsibility for breaking it. It wasn't these guys in the red. It wasn't those guys in the orange. What colour are you guys, by the way?

An Hon. Member: Green.

Dr. Sherman: It wasn't these guys in the green and gold. It was my good friends for whom I ran, the guys in the blue. Nobody else.

When we ran . . . [Dr. Sherman's speaking time expired]

3:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. Well, personally, I would like to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, if he would continue, hear a little bit more about what he would suggest for our health care system, he being the only emergency doctor in this Assembly and, clearly, the expert on the subject. I'm learning a lot every time he stands up, so I hope that he would do that.

The Deputy Chair: Yeah. It's not 29(2)(a). You spoke, and it's his turn to speak again.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. I'm honoured and humbled to have the opportunity to keep speaking. Thank you.

After this, I declared it was a crisis. The hon. member did the right thing. He responded, and we actually improved emergency department wait times. That was in 2007.

In 2008, in the lead-up to the election, in the fall the flu hit. This was a temporary measure, so we actually increased the workload of the nurses on the wards upstairs by 3 to 5 per cent. I had talked to Heather Smith three times. In fact, you know what? I had talked to everybody. I had talked to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre in her office. I talked to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I said: "Please, I ask you and urge you, do not fight about this in the Legislature. This is a nonpartisan issue. I ask all of you to support it."

To Heather Smith from the United Nurses of Alberta I said:

"Heather, your nurses on the front lines are working at 140 per cent, and they're burning out. Please have the rest of your nurses, the clan, come rescue the front-line guys and gals. I know they're already overburdened upstairs. I know their work is going to go up 3 to 5 per cent more. The real solution is more nurses, investments to long-term care, home care, and then more beds, and I will be advocating for that in addition to this. So please don't say this is a bad thing. It's the alternative to what's a disaster." Then summer hit and, you know, we have elective surgery cancellations, and usually the flu is gone. It was okay.

In the fall of 2008, because it takes time for long-term care beds and all this stuff, I was working in the emergency room. I was already nominated, actually, to run along with my hon. colleagues across the way as a candidate. The election wasn't yet on. What happened when I was an emergency doctor one day – when the Royal Alexandra ER gets up to 30 admitted patients, we know that everybody else is plugged, that the other hospitals in Edmonton are plugged. When the Royal Alex hits 30 and our resuscitation beds – we had none in the city. We had 15 closed ICU beds. All our trauma beds were full of intensive-care unit patients in the departments.

On one shift I had four cardiac arrests. Mr. Chairman, I ran two of them in the hallway in front of the nursing station. It was sort of like TV on the show *ER*. I mean, George Clooney is just an actor. My buddies are the real deal. We ran cardiac arrests in the hallway. Thirty people were watching a good Albertan suffer and die in a hallway. The two following cardiac arrests we actually ran in a storage closet. I said: "This is horrendous for the staff and the other patients and the other family members. We can't let them see this."

I had a young fellow who got stabbed. It was 2:20 in the morning. He was being rolled in by the paramedics. My shift was over, and I was with this young student resident. You know, I'm one of the old dogs in the emergency – well, maybe not the oldest one. That would be Dr. Sosnowski. But I was the first emergency-trained doctor in the Edmonton training program in '93. I was a rural family doctor. I went back and specialized because our job became so specialized. I needed more education and training to do the job, and the nurses had to do that as well. That's why they're more highly trained, so we can do more. Patients are more complex, and they have more problems.

Anyway, getting back to this guy who was being rolled in. I told this young student: "Look, son. Let's stick around and keep an eye on things." We had no trauma bed available, so you know what? He got stabbed in the chest in the same hallway, across from the nursing station. We did what we call the full meal deal. The full meal deal is that he lost his pulse because he had bled out from the hole in his heart. The whole team, just like on TV, cracked his chest, put a tube in his windpipe, opened up both sides of his lungs, made sure we fixed the collapsed lungs.

For the young surgical residents this is the moment that we live for, the front emergency room doctors. They're tragic situations for the patient, but this is what we're trained to do. Immediately that chest was opened up, the hole was discovered, the finger was plugged. Between myself and the student, I said: "You know what? Watch these young guys. They get so excited that they're going to forget the most basic thing, to put the central line in." So I taught this young student how to put the central line in. We ordered some blood, some fluids, got them into the body so that patient could actually have some volume with which to have a pulse.

It was fantastic what we did, but it was tragic because we did it in a hallway in front of everybody. Those are the circumstances under this good minister, who did the best that he could but inherited a disaster, and under the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. They listened. They did the best that they could.

After this, during the election I clanged the bells. We had an emergency meeting with the chairman of the board, who is now the Ethics Commissioner, and with the previous CEO, Sheila Weatherill. As soon as we phoned, that same afternoon we had a meeting. Boom. She was a nurse, and she listened. Right away she said: I want to know what's going on on the front lines. She was up here. She said: tell us what's going on because the junior and mid-level administration isn't telling us. She actually asked the front-line doctors to document cases and pass them on to junior management and to senior management, which is herself and the chairman of the board, Neil Wilkinson.

Then there was another action. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who actually happened to be my MLA, during the debate challenged the hon. Premier, for whom I sacrificed my career and my reputation, and said: people are dying in the emergency rooms. I saw the debate, and I was a little ashamed that my leader actually laughed at him, laughed at him and shouted him down during the debate. Unfortunately, for some reason the hon. member was unable to convince Albertans that this was a significant issue. I had asked the ER doctors: "Please do not interfere in the outcome of an election. You'll be critiqued for politicking."

Jim Dau, the previous Premier's communications fellow, said: "Raj, don't mess with the Conservative Party because they'll get you. That's how things work in Alberta. Don't do it. Work with the system because those guys will get you. I'm just telling you." I met with him at the Century Grill. That made the hair stand on the back of my neck. He said: "They can do it in any other province; there are changes in government. But do not even think about it in Alberta. Don't even consider it." So I told the doctors: "Shut up, guys, please. If you guys go public and if these guys get a majority, oh, God, you guys are done. Don't say anything during the election. I'm begging you."

Mr. Chairman, I rolled my dad into the emergency room Monday in the middle of the election. He had the flu. He was dehydrated. He needed one bag of water. He's got a bad heart, that functions at 10 per cent. The waiting room was full at the U of A hospital. I left him there in the emergency room. I have never asked for special care for my father. Having said that, I know that the staff know him. The doctors know him because many of them trained me, and I trained many of them as well as the nurses and the paramedics. I know he got special care because people were waiting eight hours in the waiting room, and he actually only had to wait six hours in the waiting room. He should have been in in 30 minutes. He was a triage category 3 patient. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 is most urgent, immediate; 5 is two hours. He was supposed to be seen within 30 minutes. He got special care, and he got seen within five or six hours. His heart failed. Suddenly they called me and said, "Raj, you better come back. Your father is dying. He's on a ventilator." He sucked on a ventilator tube for five days in the intensive care unit, seconds from death. His heart got so damaged he spent 10 days in the ICU during the election.

3:50

Some people say: why does Raj always talk about his father? I talk about my father because I want people to know that if it's affecting my father – you know what? – it's affecting their father and their mother and their daughter and their wife and their grandmother. I want people out there to just understand that there's someone in the Legislature who actually, truly cares and understands. In fact, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud understands, too, because his mother suffered. His family members suffered, too. That's why he wanted this fixed. He understands. This affects everybody. This is a nonpartisan issue. This has

nothing to do with politics. It's a human issue. It's an issue of human dignity and human honour.

Mr. Chairman, as a front-line health care worker my heart goes out to all those families whose family members are suffering. Many have died metres from care. I'm aware of at least four, five, six deaths and probably a hundred near-deaths during the election. Those 322 cases released by Dr. Paul Parks were from during that election period in 2008. That's when those 322 cases were from.

I want to put everything into context. I want all the front-line health care workers to understand that there are people in this Legislature who understand their issues. My heart goes out to each and every patient. Mr. Chairman, we cannot wait to fix this broken health care system. This is not an emergency problem. This is a health care system problem that manifests itself in the emergency rooms. I believe this system can be better. Our lives depend upon it.

I want to talk about solutions. That's what we've been talking about. We've been talking about solutions for years. These are the solutions. The solutions are: one, let's reduce the number of patients. Let's not get sick in the first place. The way to do that is to actually get healthy seniors who are homeless out of hospitals because they're sitting beside sick, infectious patients and getting sick in acute care. Let's get them back home where they belong, with their spouse or their family, with world-class home care. Let's invest in subacute care, rehab care, community hospices. It's unacceptable for patients who are palliative to be dying in emergency rooms in the last days of their life.

This is the sequence of investments that needs to be made and then long-term care. Then if we need acute-care beds, then, yes, build acute-care beds. That's on the output side of acute care. Then let's deal with the input side. Everyone needs good primary care. The primary care system is broken. There's only been one government in power here. They broke it. Nobody else broke it. They broke it, the government that I ran for. The primary care system is broken. We need to concentrate on health promotion and injury prevention.

Number two. Let's ask the front-line health care providers for local solutions to local problems. This is what used to happen. We had site-based decision-making until we regionalized, when we went up four levels. Guess what we just did? We just regionalized. Now we went up seven levels. We broke all the horizontal linkages. I'm sure the hon. members for Edmonton-Whitemud and Edmonton-Rutherford would not agree with how the one region was implemented and communicated to the front lines – I would ask them to comment on that – by the previous minister of health, the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Going to one region in principle may be a good idea, I think, certainly for the centralized functions of bulk purchasing, bulk ordering, standards of care, human resources, electronic health records. For the backroom stuff, absolutely. But, Mr. Chairman, the problem in health care isn't backroom stuff; it's front-room stuff, where I come from.

The hon. member did the best he could to address it with the workforce action plan: training more doctors and getting more beds. In my home he announced 600 new long-term care beds. All the heads of the medical association were in my home. He announced that. I dug the shovel at the Villa Caritas to build long-term care beds in my area. I dug it. Later on I found out those were actually just replacement beds. I was shocked when I found out they were replacement beds.

Mr. MacDonald: How did you find out?

Dr. Sherman: Oh, I think I read it in the newspaper.

I didn't know they were replacement beds. I thought they were brand new beds. The hon. members for Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Whitemud were in my home. I thought: what? Replacement beds? They're going to shut down the ones at the – hold it. We're closing down beds and opening new beds. We're just replacing them. All we're doing is shuffling deck chairs on the *Titanic* while the ship is sinking. This is the reason the emergency health system is in crisis.

Here is the evidence. You need real evidence. Heart-wrenching stories are one thing, but you need evidence. The Health Quality Council of Alberta shows the median alternate level of care days per acute-care discharge for patients waiting for ALC beds. For 2002-03 the number was trending down, from 15 days down to 11 days in 2005-06. For 2006-07 the number went from 11 days to 16 days. So the numbers were actually trending down under the previous Premier. Things were coming down until 2006, and then there was a change in leadership, and the numbers started going up. As they started going up, more bed blockers increased upstairs, more emergency beds were plugged.

And Paul Parks. You see, I sounded the bells in February, in the second hit of the flu season, but Dr. Paul Parks has rung the bells, and the flu season hasn't even hit. We have never clanged the bells in the emergency rooms before fall. This was a first, actually, a first during this decade. We actually clanged the bells in the '90s, when they did the cutbacks. And when they did, every front-line health care staff who complained even two words at a staff meeting was punished. They were made to be punished by their own colleagues.

Mr. Hinman: What was the punishment?

Dr. Sherman: Well, gee. Mr. Chairman, you don't want to know. They'd find one case, one mistake, one complaint. They would have your own colleagues research the one mistake, if it was a mistake, and they would take it to the college because the College of Physicians and Surgeons is underneath the government. The government would have those colleagues under contract to the region take that complaint to the college. Sometimes the doctors would get upset. Then when they'd get upset, they'd say: hey, these guys are crazy. They were passionate, but they'd say they were crazy.

You know how I know they do this? Because at one medical staff meeting, Mr. Chairman, when I was working nights, I said to my doctor colleagues at a closed-door staff meeting: "Look, people. How can we find this acceptable? We're doctors. If we're not going to stand up for patients, who is?" I said maybe 10 words. How do I know this? This happened to me. The wrath of Capital health fell on my head. It took me 10 months to get my name and privileges back.

Mr. Chairman, recently I heard there is a smear campaign, a whisper campaign. I don't believe this, but about 10 different people have told me, from Don Braid to Jodie Sinnema. I don't even know what that is: a whisper campaign started against Raj Sherman about what happened years ago, a Gordon Campbell moment in my life, I was told. I'm just telling you what the Gordon Campbell moment was. I've got nothing to hide. My colleagues punished me. It took me 10 months to clear my name and my honour. They used my colleagues on contract under Capital health to punish me for a patient complaint that was never shown to me. There was no legitimacy to it. To this day there has not been one official complaint against me to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. It took me 10 months to clear my name and my honour, and there's no

negative record with the College of Physicians and Surgeons on my record. After 100,000 patients there has not been one complaint to the college.

4:00

Mr. Vandermeer: What was their rationale for that?

Dr. Sherman: The rationale is not the important issue, hon. member. The important issue was the fact that front-line staff were bullied. They were bullied then. They are bullied now. When the minister . . . [Dr. Sherman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can tell that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark needs to continue talking, and I'm interested in listening, so I'd be interested if he would continue.
Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much. Chair of the CPC for health, because of confidentiality reasons I'm not at liberty to discuss the details, because of patient confidentiality and regional confidentiality. I had to sign these things in order to ensure I wouldn't sue. They did this to three or four other doctors, and they actually successfully sued for \$4 million or \$5 million. I don't know the truth, but the rumour was that, hey, this was all hushed up, and the money was hidden in the books. They left town, and they were blackballed, never to work in this province ever again. I signed a confidentiality agreement saying I promised not to sue. I promised never to discuss details. So, hon. member, I'm sorry. I can't discuss the details.

The point being, this happened to front-line staff. When the hon. Member for Calgary-West, incoming after the election, the new minister, came in, they went to one region, and they brought in something called the code of conduct, a very draconian code. The code of conduct means the same thing: "Anybody who says anything, look out. We're going to deal with you. We're going to hammer you." This is why the Alberta Medical Association and all of the physicians said: "Hey. This is unacceptable. We need to advocate for our patients. We have a duty of care."

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you're my friend. I know we can't talk about caucus confidentiality, but I think we can talk about the stuff before we walk into the caucus room. We were both pulled aside before entering the caucus room by the previous hon. minister of health from Calgary-West, and he said: "Well, by the way, I'll tell you guys before you walk into the room. We're going to one region, and we're meeting the board." That's when we found out – isn't that correct? – that we were going to one region. You and I are the health leads in this government. You're the chair, and I'm the junior health minister.

Mr. Anderson: Raj, I was there, too.

Dr. Sherman: This hon. member was there.

We were told one minute before we walked into the room, and that hon. member, the minister, brought in this region. I had no input into who was on the board and who was the chairman of the board and the deputy minister. They brought in draconian code of conduct measures. That's what this is. It's about intimidating front-line staff. If they speak up, they will be hammered. That's why our front-line staff, from the nurses to the doctors, said that this is unacceptable.

Poor Dr. Duckett, who just got released from his job, didn't create this. He walked into it. He actually amended it. He actually amended it and improved it and said: I'm happy with people talking.

This is actually what I did. This is a case in point, Mr. Chairman. We have an oath as doctors and nurses as health care providers when we get a licence. It's a duty that trumps every other duty, our oath that we must speak up for patients when they're suffering. We must. It trumps every other oath. It actually trumps the oath that I've taken in this Legislature. If given an option, yes, that oath sits above this oath for me as a physician. It does. I'm sorry. It's intertwined in the deepest inner fabric of every health care worker, and that must trump.

So you had the junior health minister, who's a doctor, who actually clanged the bells and who supported Dr. Paul Parks. Case in point, I just got removed from my position because I spoke up. It appears that the code of conduct within the government that I ran for still exists. It appears I spoke up for patients who were dying and suffering, and as parliamentary assistant I was told that I violated the ingrained code because I went against the minister as parliamentary assistant. My oath as a PA: I cannot speak against the minister and the government.

Mr. Chairman, what really happened? My family, my grandpa was a rural family doctor and a sugar cane and dairy farmer. I grew up in India.

An Hon. Member: Where?

Dr. Sherman: In India.

In my mother's family they're all doctors. Everyone is a doctor. In my dad's family they're all freedom fighters. There's one doctor, which is me, from my dad's side of the family. We were taught by our grandparents – I was raised by my grandparents; my mother has five sisters and two brothers – to always tell the truth, always be honest. The truth will never hurt you.

I was told by my grandfather on a nice, beautiful night in India – I think I was three years old. He said: son – he was my father, really. I thought my mother was my sister. I didn't see my dad for seven years. He was in Canada trying to make a better life for our family. I was the baby of the family. My mom was a single mom with three boys. I remember it was a beautiful night. There would be hyenas in the background. You know, we had tigers. We didn't have little snakes; we had pythons. It was sort of like Mowgli where I grew up. We had real guns. We had 20-gauge elephant guns where we grew up, and we didn't go hunting until a tiger ate at least 10 of us. We didn't go hunting for Bambi. That's where I grew up.

My grandfather – I remember this night. The moon was up, and it was a beautiful sky. He said, "Son, there are three things in this world you cannot hide." He pointed at the moon, and he said: "The moon. We named you Rajnish. Raja means king. Nish means night, moon. We named you after that. You are king of the moon." Interestingly enough, I worked all night shifts at the emergency room. I was actually king of the night shift. He said: you can't hide the moon. During the day he showed me the sun, and he said: you can't hide the sun. You know what else he told me? You can't hide the truth. The sun, the moon, and the truth you cannot hide.

He said: "Son, above all. In our family your forefathers helped free a nation from an empire without spilling blood. When you utter the truth, God will protect you. You must have the courage when you are faced with making a choice to have the courage that my father had." My great-grandfather, my grandfather's father, was a captain and surgeon in the Indian army. His friend was Lala Lajpat Rai. In 1928 there was a protest of the Simon Commission. It was in the movie Gandhi, where they got beaten with sticks. My great-

grandfather, Basant Ram Pathak had the courage to stand up to an empire for freedom, and they were beaten with sticks. He was in prison three times. My great-grandfather was a physician. He was beaten with sticks. His brother Mukand Lal Pathak came to the U.S. in 1906. He invented the modern-day steam engine. I've got to write a book about this. I heard Obama's story, and I thought: jeez, that's nothing.

4:10

Getting back to this bill. We're talking about health care and medicine. We're talking about the courage of speaking up, of getting beaten with sticks. In this society we are not beaten with sticks literally. The front-line health care workers, when they speak up, they are figuratively beaten with sticks. Doctors in this province, I will name them. Dr. David Swann: Mr. Chairman, you beat him with a stick, and you fired him when he spoke up as a health care professional on the Kyoto protocol.

Dr. John O'Connor was beaten with figurative sticks by this government when he raised legitimate concerns. They used the college of physicians and the Alberta Medical Association to beat him. They use our profession during contract negotiations. Our profession is told: deal with your members if you want this contract done. This is how things work in this province.

Dr. Lyle Oberg, another member of this government, talked about skeletons. In my mind, you know, he's a doctor—he's a rural family doctor—and he's probably talking about patients dying in hospitals and emergency rooms. That's what was happening, and they beat him with figurative sticks, and they stuck him on this side. Mr. Chairman, you know what? This is so sad and tragic. The only way to keep my sanity is that I have to smile and laugh.

Their own junior health minister, me, stood up and spoke not against my government but for my government, for this province, and figuratively I have been beaten by the same stick, and watch what's going to happen. They're going to stand up and beat me again. They're going to say I'm wrong. They're going to bring up some other excuse of why they expelled me from caucus. We will give them a chance in the Legislature to tell the world why they expelled me from caucus. The hon. Deputy Premier will have an opportunity to explain this.

Mr. Chairman, I'll tell you. My dad's father came to Canada in 1906 and on the ship *Komagata Maru* came my great-grandmother's brothers. This is my grandfather, my dad's father, who wanted one doctor in his family. He died 10 months before my birth. I just went to India, and my dad's sister said: my gosh; I swear you are our father, and you are back. He helped finance the freedom movement of India.

Here is a little historical fact. In 1913 the Ghadar Party started on the west coast of North America, from Vancouver to San Francisco. Ghadar means revolution. He was the western hemispheric operations manager for the world for the Ghadar Party. My mother's family were in that Bhagat party, which means patriotism. Her family were the politicians, with Gandhi and Nehru. My dad's father was with the soldiers, with the warriors. They were going to bomb the Indian Assembly, and he says: "Hey, hey, hey, guys. Don't do that. Don't be killing people. If you want, throw a little firecracker to make a point." So that's what they did. They had a big fight. In 1928 Bhagat Singh threw a little firecracker into the Assembly to make a point about freedom.

Mr. Chairman, I know what you're going to say, and I'm going to quickly come back to the point. This is what I'm doing, this is a figurative bomb in this Assembly that I'm throwing today on health care, that my dad's father had thrown into the Indian Assembly. They didn't hurt anyone. They just wanted to make a point. I'm not hurting anyone. My family asked me not to bring this up, but I said

I must. This is 72 years later in a different country, that guy's grandson, myself. This is a political bomb that's being thrown into this Chamber. We cannot ignore what's happening in the health care system.

The health care system is in crisis. It is broken. The government of this province broke it. The problem surfaces in the emergency rooms, and the doctors are clanging the bells.

Why did I go public? Before the doctors went public, I had Dr. Paul Parks meet the deputy minister. They met with him, and he had Alberta Health Services meet with the docs, and they were told by Alberta Health Services that there's a plan coming August 2011 to fix this problem. The doctors were blown off.

The AMA, Alberta Medical Association, met in September at the emergency meeting on a Thursday night. I got my ear chewed off by the 30 ER docs from all across the province. They said: "Raj, we have lost faith in you. You told us not to say anything. We haven't said anything for years. We actually don't even vote for this party or this government. We've been silenced." I in my exasperation said: "Gentlemen, I give up. I've done all that I could. Your voice has gotten to the caucus table of the government."

I've been the parliamentary assistant of two ministers. The previous minister may disagree with me. He may have heard me, but I don't think he listened to me. He may say: hey, Raj never said anything. Come on. Do you seriously think that I was in the media 45 times, and then I ran, and I didn't say anything to the previous minister about this issue? Come on. If he says that, that's a ridiculous allegation if that ever comes up. The hon. members here know that I've been fighting like stink for health care workers at caucus because those are the rules. I've been silent publicly. I've gotten lots of criticism, saying: "Raj, why didn't you speak up earlier? Why now?"

When Dr. Paul Parks felt like he and the emergency doctors weren't listened to, I told them that before they called the media, it's their responsibility to let the current minister know, because this guy didn't receive the letter, and let the current deputy minister know and let the current chairman of the board of AHS know and let the current CEO of Alberta Health Services know because they didn't have this letter from 2008, when they sent that letter to the hon. members for Edmonton-Whitemud, Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Meadowlark, to the hon. Premier, and to the hon. deputy minister at the time, in 2008. I said: you have to resend that information because since then we've had an interim board for a year, we've had an interim CEO, and then we've had another minister in between.

Oh, by the way, when the hon. Member for Calgary-West was minister, he got a letter from Dr. Kwan, who was the section president between myself and Dr. Paul Parks, and he said that it's just runny noses and sore throats. He said: we've got too many doctors and too many nurses. The previous hon. minister did the right thing. He said that we need more doctors and nurses and long-term care beds. Then the election happened, I was paired up with the minister, and suddenly I thought: what the heck? He's saying that we don't need long-term care beds; we're capping them. He says that we've got too many doctors and too many nurses. I said to myself: what's this? So we fought at caucus.

Then Dr. Paul Parks felt they weren't heard recently, so they sent the letter on October 8, 2010, the same FOIPable e-mail, but we don't need to FOIP it because some emergency doctor got upset and sent it to the media. Those are those 322 cases. There's no patient-identifying information on those cases. It just tells the story. The patient identifiers are separate because that would be a violation of patient confidentiality. And it was Sheila Weatherill who actually wanted these cases in this format. So those cases are in there.

I believe the letter from the Premier is there, a commitment from the Premier to the emergency doctors during the election. It's on PC Alberta letterhead. There are three letters that are attached, which are letters to the minister of health Edmonton-Whitemud, to the minister of health Calgary-West, to the minister of health Edmonton-Mill Creek. There's no confidentiality of patients that's broken. Dr. Paul Parks sent these in 2008, and he resent them again. He sent them to me again as well.

I'm an elected member of government. I said: hold me accountable. This is why I publicly have said that I take personal responsibility because I was here, and I knew about it. Society can blame me. It is my fault. I'm a doctor. They may not know what they're talking about, but I know what I'm talking about. It is my fault. I was the assistant to the health minister; however, I was powerless to do anything about it. I did bring it up at caucus. I am only one vote. It's a parliamentary democracy.

I took an oath as a parliamentary assistant. I took an oath as a member of the Legislature. When Dr. Paul Parks went public, suddenly, Mr. Chairman, came a collision of values and principles. That's what happened, a collision of values and principles. The values of a political party collided, and political loyalty collided with the values that my grandfather taught me on that starry night and the values of my profession.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I do intend to provide the hon. member with another opportunity to speak, as have others, because I'm sure that he does want to continue speaking. I would like to put on record my views on the amendment to Bill 17, which is actually what we should be talking about here in the House. We shouldn't be talking about, you know, reasons why someone would have been suspended from a caucus because the hon. member well knows why he was suspended from caucus, and it had nothing to do with his views around health care. In fact, we had a good discussion about this amendment at one of our caucus discussions.

As has been pointed out by members of the opposition, there are some issues with this amendment. To put into law that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care, and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur – well, Mr. Chair, we've heard a lot about family. My father was a family doctor. My father was a doctor that used to do house calls, used to drive out in the middle of winter and do an appendix operation on a table in the country. That's pretty good commitment. I'm sure that he would have said that there is no such thing as a necessary death, that there's no such thing as necessary harm to a patient, and he would also say that you don't put that into a legislative framework.

They already have an oath, Mr. Chairman, not to do that. But, as we have seen, sometimes oaths are broken, and there should be consequences for that. This amendment doesn't provide any consequences, as was pointed out by the hon. member from the Liberal opposition. What's the consequence? Is it a feel-good statement? Is that what this is about?

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has some very positive things to say about our health care system. He has some very positive things to say about what we need to do to change our health care system, and we applaud him for that. Every member on this side of the bench applauds him for his views on health care. That's not why he was suspended from our caucus, and it isn't the floor of this House that we would talk about that.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot support this amendment, and I can't support it because it's not good legislation, not because of the context of the amendment, not because of the spirit of it. Certainly,

everybody in this House can agree to the spirit of this amendment. But, again, in agreement with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I believe that this is not something you would put into the legislation that should be part of Bill 17. Therefore, I cannot support the amendment.

I would also point out, Mr. Chairman, that the hon. member knows full well why he was suspended from our caucus.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, may I just say that we have listened with compassion and interest for the last hour on the things you've told us, and I will direct you to deal directly with the amendment.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. I really appreciate it, and I am truly honoured and humbled to rise again and rebut some of the remarks of the Deputy Premier. I like him. His father is a rural guy. Like my grandfather and my great-grandfather, he was a rural family doctor.

The reason we're talking about the amendment is that these are the accountability measures. I encourage every member right now to log onto www.caep.ca, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. The amendment talks about this position statement of the emergency doctors of this country. The four principles of the amendment are a guiding principle for the whole system, that there should be no unnecessary deaths. People are going to die. If you have a cardiac arrest, you're probably going to die. But if you go in with appendicitis, you wait for eight hours, it ruptures, and you die in a waiting room, that's an unnecessary death, that tragic case.

My heart goes out to the family of Dr. Guy Woolsey. He's my friend, actually. He's my friend. The mother of my children: he was good friends with her years ago, her best friend in university. We were all good friends. His brother hung himself in the emergency room at the Royal Alex when he sought mental health services. And somebody was going to close Alberta Hospital Edmonton. That was an unnecessary death, when you go for care, you wait for hours at the University of Alberta hospital emergency department, you walk across a bridge and think about jumping, and you think: "You know what? My brother is a doctor. I'm going to go to the Royal Alex, where they look after everyone." Every hour he came out of the room to say: when is a psychiatrist coming?

The department was plugged up by admitted patients and psychiatry patients. Every psychiatry bed was plugged up. They say: "What's the purpose of coming down at midnight? We can't do anything anyway. We've got no beds." Then he asked a nurse for a pen. I read this in the paper, so I'm not violating patient confidentiality. This was a story in the *Edmonton Journal* by Jodie Sinnema. He asked the nurses for a pen, and do you know what he did with that pen, Mr. Chairman, in this story that I read in the paper? He penned his suicide note.

Mr. Chairman, do you know why the morale of front-line staff is at 25 per cent? My emergency doctors, nurses, staff, and colleagues at the Royal Alex emergency department – dear hon. members, please listen to this. Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, please listen to this, please. You know what happened? When the staff opened the curtain in his room, they found my friend's brother hanging from the rafters.

Mr. Chairman, there's a smear campaign saying that Raj has an emotional problem. Damn right I have an emotional problem. Someone I love in the Public Affairs Bureau has leaked something, that Raj has an emotional problem.

My father almost died four weeks ago. He never got to an in-hospital bed. He was discharged from the emergency room after four days. He never got upstairs. On the day I went to India, within

30 hours his arm hurt and he had a heart attack. I'm sitting in the intensive care unit with my family at 4 p.m. on October 28 because the cab is coming at 5 p.m., and I've got to go to the airport, and my dad is possibly dying in the ICU. I have a couple of uncles that passed away, who raised me, that I mentioned earlier. One had died two months ago. I had to go bereaved to that family. This has been such a hard time for my family, for my children to see their grandfathers.

4:30

This has been such a hard time for me as a human being. Damn right I have an emotional problem. I have been part of a government that dismantled a broken health care system. I cannot defend it any longer, and they're smearing my name to discredit me. I spoke up, and they fired me.

The other thing is that I hurt the feelings of the hon. Member for Calgary-West. I hurt his feelings. [interjections] I'm just answering the hon. member's questions. I have on the *Rutherford* show said: I wear my heart on one sleeve, and I wear my brain on the other sleeve. I'm a passionate guy. You are always going to get the honest truth from me. Damn it, when somebody is suffering and they need someone to stand up for them, then somebody needs to take an arrow for them. Damn it, I came from a family that will do that. I came from a profession that will stand up for those that nobody will stand up for. It's in my blood. It's in the fabric of who I am. Beat me with a stick. Every time I am beaten, I am strengthened.

I mentioned earlier that I will not stop talking in this House until my lips can't move anymore. I will not stop talking until an ambulance has to carry me out of this Legislature. Mr. Chairman, if a human being doesn't sleep for 72 hours, they have a cardiac arrest. If they don't sleep for 24 or 48 hours, they'll go insane; normal human beings will. I have brought my pillow, and I have brought my blanket, and I have brought my STARS bag. This is who I am.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to get back on point, to the hon. member. The amendment has a guiding principle of no unnecessary deaths. People that are going to die are going to die, but people that shouldn't die shouldn't die. "No unnecessary harm to patients" means if you've got a broken leg and you've got to leave without treatment or when you've got fluid around your heart after your operation and wait for eight hours and you've got to leave out of frustration; that's unnecessary harm, and you die at home. That's unnecessary.

When you have fluid around your heart, a pericardial tamponade, and you wait for eight hours in the waiting room, when you have an ectopic pregnancy and it's ruptured and your blood pressure is in the boots and you're waiting for six hours on an ambulance stretcher metres from care, when you've got a brain aneurism that's burst and you're sitting for eight hours on an ambulance stretcher metres from care, when your child has a fever – we don't know if it's meningitis or a sore throat, a runny nose. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman; a nurse in a call centre can't tell. The hon. member here is not a doctor, but his father would tell him that a nurse in a call centre can't tell. His father would tell him a doctor has to see that patient. So that's unnecessary delay in care.

"Unnecessary waste" refers to: where do we make the investments into health care? Are we making them in the necessary spots or unnecessary spots?

Then part (d) says:

Set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

Please, hon. members, turn your computers on and stop talking.

You have all got to listen to this so that I don't have to repeat it again. Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, please get that group to listen so I don't have to repeat it again. I'm repeating this for the second time. In this statement are the details of the accountability measures. I will quickly try to get these for you here. Mr. Chairman, if you will just indulge me and just give me a little bit more time while I keep speaking to the amendment to the Alberta Health Act.

I've talked enough about problems. You know what? Somebody may say that this is theatrics. If anyone were to say that this is theatrics – well, it's for society to judge what this says.

Here it is, the position statement on emergency department overcrowding from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, February 2007. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said that there should be "national and international standards." Well, this is the national standard. Hear it today.

CAEP Position

1. That emergency department (ED) length of stay benchmarks be established nationally as follows:
 - (i) ED length of stay not to exceed six hours in 95% of cases for CTAS Level I, II and III patients
 - (ii) ED length of stay not to exceed four hours in 95% of cases for CTAS Level IV and V patients
2. That all admitted patients must be transferred out of the emergency department to an in-patient area within two hours of decision to admit.

That comes underneath (i) and (ii). Let's go to three.

3. That overcapacity protocols be rapidly implemented to allow Canadian hospitals to meet the national emergency department length of stay benchmarks until functional acute care capacity is sufficient.
4. That achievement of these benchmarks must be continually measured and ED length of stay should be documented on a daily basis by hospitals for all patients, and reviewed monthly. Hospital and Regional administrators should be held accountable if the throughput standards are not met.
5. That hospitals optimize bed management strategies to ensure the appropriate use of existing and future acute care beds.
6. That governments sufficiently increase the number of functional acute care beds to achieve regular hospital occupancy rates that do not exceed 85%.

We have been above 100 per cent for a decade. This didn't start yesterday; this started in the mid-90s. There's one government that broke the system. It ain't the green guys, the orange guys, or the red guys; it's the blue guys, that I ran for. This Premier actually didn't start it.

These hon. members that I ran with, fantastic people, are my friends. I have the utmost respect for each and every one of them. We're not even debating differences of ideas. We want to fix this. We actually are in agreement with all of this. We just have a difference of opinion on how to fix it.

We'll go back to the statement, that speaks to the amendment, as you had asked, Mr. Chairman. Point 1 in the footnotes:

ED length of stay is the time of patient first encounter (the earlier of triage nurse assessment or patient registration) Until the time of patient departure from the [emergency department].

So they register at triage, and they physically leave the department on their way home or physically leave the department on their way upstairs to an in-hospital bed.

Footnote 2:

For more information on the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS) . . .

That's for CTAS I, II, III, IV, V: I is the most urgent; V is the least urgent. They all need to be seen. Patients don't know what their diagnosis is. You know what? The front-line triage nurse doesn't

know the diagnosis but is able to assess, based on protocols, where the patient fits. It's the doctor who actually is trained to do the diagnosis.

The hon. member who's the Deputy Premier would sort of understand it if he ever talked to his dad about health care and doctoring. His dad would fully understand it, God bless his soul.

The background on this statement:

Emergency department (ED) overcrowding occurs when the demand for emergency services exceeds the ability of an emergency department to provide quality care within appropriate time frames. ED overcrowding in Canada has been escalating resulting in patient suffering, prolonged wait times, deteriorating levels of service, and adverse patient outcomes.

4:40

Causes and Consequences of ED Overcrowding

The primary cause of ED overcrowding is hospital overcrowding. Hospital overcrowding arises from several factors, including a shortage of acute care beds, staffing shortages, limited community care resources, and a lack of integration of community and hospital-based resources. With the shortage of hospital beds, hospitals increasingly have more patients requiring admission than there are beds to accommodate them. The current approach to dealing with hospital overcrowding involves an excessive and unsafe use of EDs to inappropriately "warehouse" admitted patients, both stable and unstable, for long periods of time. This causes a blockage in the outflow of admitted patients from the emergency department to hospital in-patient areas, which in turn results in ED overcrowding. ED overcrowding is not caused by inappropriate use of [emergency departments] or inefficiencies within EDs. This is because "non-urgent" patients do not occupy acute care stretchers, require little nursing care, and typically have brief treatment times.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud understood it. The hon. Member for Calgary-West said that it's the runny noses and sore throats causing the problem. This refutes that statement.

A significant consequence of hospital and ED overcrowding is "access block." This is a situation in which referring hospitals and ambulances are unable to access secondary and tertiary care facilities or their emergency departments in a timely fashion.

Access block is a particular issue for rural physicians . . .

Rural physicians, the same physician who is the father of the Deputy Premier and his colleagues in all of rural Alberta and all of rural Canada. This is a particular issue, actually, for all of my rural colleagues here. It's actually worse for them.

We're talking about access block.

. . . who are frequently unable to transfer patients requiring a higher level of care because urban receiving facilities are full.

The rural doctors cannot get their sick patients into the cities because the city hospitals are full.

Similarly, when EDs are gridlocked with admitted patients, paramedics are unable to transfer care to ED staff in a timely fashion, or are diverted [elsewhere].

You get ambulances flying across the city, from one end of town to the other, with sick patients.

This leaves paramedics and their patients in an untenable situation and compromises the ability of the emergency health services system to serve other patients requiring emergency pre-hospital care. Access block also occurs within hospitals when elective surgery cases are cancelled in an effort to deal with hospital and ED overcrowding.

When people are dying, they actually cancel elective surgeries because there are no beds. They take the elective surgery beds because people are dying in waiting rooms. Given an option, it's a partial deployment of the disaster plan. That's what that is. So for poor patients who are waiting for six months for cancer surgery, hip and knee surgery, the surgery is cancelled because if given an

option, we have to re-triage to look after dying patients in waiting rooms. This is why surgeries are cancelled. A significant consequence of hospital and ED overcrowding is access block.

Canada has only 3 hospital beds per 1,000 Canadians, ranking 26th out of 30 OECD countries.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, how many hospital beds do we have per 1,000 population?

Ms Blakeman: I have no idea.

Mr. MacDonald: How many hospital beds per population? In Alberta there 515 Albertans for one bed.

Dr. Sherman: Okay. So the ratio in this province is even lower.

Our lack of acute care beds means that most Canadian hospitals frequently operate at unsustainable occupancy rates of higher than 90%.

In this province it's been higher than 100 per cent for years. [Dr. Sherman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to stand up and give my views on this amendment, A3 I believe it is. Are we on A3, or are we on Members' Statements?

The Deputy Chair: On A3.

Mr. Marz: Thank you. I have a great deal of respect for you, Mr. Chairman, and for the rules of this Assembly, so I would try to stick to the subject matter as much as I can, but I've noticed you've afforded some examples to relate back. I, too, would probably like to be afforded that same privilege, and I'm asking for that up front.

Much has been said about the health care system: broken, problems with it, needs fixing. I'm not going to get into putting a specific label on it. I guess we've all got experiences with the health care system, and I'd like to have the patience of the Assembly just to outline some of my experience that would relate back to how this amendment would fix it or not fix it. I'll try to respect the confidentiality. A lot of it involves my family members, and I don't want that in *Hansard* too badly, but I have to say something in response to what I've heard here tonight.

In 1998, a year after I was elected, the whip saw me sitting down at that end – I think it was the hon. Member for Medicine Hat – and insisted I go up to the clinic because he said that I didn't look very well, so I went to the clinic. I just accepted any doctor that would look at me, and I ended up by ambulance in the Royal Alex, which I thought was very good. I ended up with a stent, and a day later I was back in the Assembly. I probably shouldn't have been – I was told not to be for a few days – but I was back here because I think the work of this Assembly is important.

Ten years later that same doctor that I saw at the clinic that day – I had kept in touch with her over the years – called me and initiated an appointment. I didn't call that particular doctor. I said: well, my schedule is quite busy, so if you want me to come in, I would like an appointment first thing in the morning or first thing in the afternoon, when the clinic opens. Now that particular doctor was working in a different clinic. Well, when I got there at 1 o'clock, the arranged time, there was a big lineup, and the doors were locked. After 15 minutes I saw them through the glass window, the staff and the doctor, so I phoned them. They looked at the phone and kept on talking, and the doors remained locked. I happened to inquire with the group of people that had assembled outside, "Does anyone else

have an appointment here for 1 o'clock?" and three other people put up their hands. I then pursued it because I was under the impression that when I make an appointment, I'm entitled to about 15 minutes. That could be erroneous, but that's the assumption I had.

I asked if anybody else had an appointment with that doctor at 1:15, and four more people put up their hands. Again, I asked about 1:30, and again four more people put up their hands. So when the doors opened, needless to say there was a rush for the counter, and I no longer was first. It probably was after 3 o'clock before I finally got in.

Now, when I got in, I was asked by the doctor that arranged the appointment, not at my request but at theirs, what I was there for. I said, "Well, you called me in." A chart was dug out, and I was told, "Well, we need to double your prescriptions because you're about to have a heart attack." Well, that sounded strange because about a month ago I had just visited the cardiologist that did the stent 10 years ago, and he had updated my prescriptions, and he'd just renewed them. I said, "I find that odd." I was told that, no, I was wrong. I said, "Well, could I please look at the chart?" I was handed the chart, and I looked at the date, and it was 10 years old. I'm wondering if the mover of the amendment could tell me how this is going to fix that.

4:50

I was asked by the member to look up the protocols in the position statement on emergency department overcrowding, which I did yesterday. A couple of points. Number 2 says that all admitted patients will be transferred to an in-patient facility within two hours of the decision to admit. I'm not sure if the in-patient beds will be available, but nevertheless that's what it says. Number 4 is interesting. It says that failure to fulfill that would result – I'm not quoting it exactly. The hospital or regional administrators should be held accountable. Well, I'm not sure how holding a hospital or regional administrator accountable for the actions of that doctor's office would have solved that problem. If anybody thinks that that's not a problem, then I guess I'm in the wrong place. I think that's a major problem.

Mr. Chair, if you'll indulge me, another situation. My wife was unfortunate enough a few years ago to have back surgery in the Foothills hospital in Calgary. It was the fall of the year. We were harvesting, and my wife is an integral part of the harvest operation as she is my combine operator. Her appointment came up, and we dropped everything and went down. She had the surgery. I did not leave her bedside the first two days. If she needed ice in a cup, I got it for her. There was no burden on the staff for that. I stayed in the room 24 hours except to go out for a sandwich. Once she needed to get up on her feet walking after surgery, I was the one that took her down the hall and walked her. I did everything to help.

On the Saturday morning the doctor came in and told both of us that there was no way she would be going home until the Monday. This was at about 10 o'clock in the morning. So the doctor told us there was no way she was going home at 10 o'clock in the morning, so my wife, being a good farmer's wife, insisted. She heard the weather forecast, a chance of rain. I'd better go home and do harvesting. She assured me she'd be all right without me there. I reluctantly left.

When I got home, I noticed the answering machine was flashing. Before I was here, I didn't pack a cellphone around very much. I checked the answering machine. My wife had called, and she said that within 15 minutes after I left, some nurses came into her room and said that they had no plans on manning that ward she was in and there was no room in another ward, so they were discharging her. She was sitting in the waiting room of the Foothills hospital on the

say-so of three nurses that came in after the doctor told her she had to stay until Monday. So I had to turn around, race back to Calgary, pick her up, and take her home and watch her. By Monday she had an infection and some complications, and I had to get her back to a local doctor in Three Hills, who had to transfer her back to another city hospital for treatment. I'm not sure how this amendment and keeping some regional hospital administrator accountable for the actions of some individuals is going to fix that. I don't believe it is.

Mr. Chair, I've got a lot more stories. My parents both died of cancer in their 50s. I've got a long history with the health care system from Edmonton south with various things. I have a practice that when a loved one of mine went into a hospital, whether it was one of my children or my wife, I stayed there until they were released, and I did everything I could to make sure that they were tended to properly because I guess, quite frankly, I didn't trust what I saw happen. We can blame the system. We can blame government. But, you know, there are individuals making decisions. I went and sat up at the station and watched TV at various times of the day just to see how things were going.

I disagree with a lot of the things that were said tonight. We've talked about everything in the last couple hours except this amendment. I'm trying to relate my comments to the amendment. I just don't feel that this amendment is going to fix the problems that I've encountered with the system. Therefore, I can't support it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Got to stretch my legs a little bit and talk about health care. This is what I find amusing, that all the comments I've heard from the Deputy Premier – and I do appreciate the Deputy Premier speaking to the bill and actually putting something on the record and the member that just spoke and earlier the Education minister and so forth. I really appreciate that because it's good. That's what a debate is. We've had more debate on health care in the last couple of days than we've probably had in this Assembly, certainly, during my time here, so that's three years or thereabouts. It is exciting to see.

Here's the thing, though. I just don't think we're quite in tune, we're quite listening to Raj with regard to what he is proposing.

Some Hon. Members: Names. The rules of the House.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, yes. Sorry. I get tired, as we all are tired. That was a mental mistake. I apologize. I withdraw saying his name. Sorry about that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

What I would say is that we have a situation here where you have an emergency room doctor. This was the head emergency physician in the province for a time. This guy understands the health care system with respect to the emergency room more than anybody in the province or as well as anybody in the province. So I get a real kick out of watching people who don't have a clue what they're talking about with regard to emergency rooms.

Mr. Hancock: That would be you.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. That would be me. The hon. member doesn't know, but certainly the Education minister gets it, clearly, because the system is so good right now. You clearly get it, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark doesn't get it. Think about what you're saying.

The arrogance is unbelievable. I'm listening to him. I'm listening to him, and so are all the people over here who are going to be supporting this amendment. This didn't come from the Wildrose.

It's not a Wildrose amendment. This is the amendment of an emergency room expert, a doctor, okay? What I would like to see is a little bit of humility and a little bit of listening and realize that sometimes there are people out there that know more than you do about a subject. I certainly know that that member understands a lot more about the emergency room than I do.

We have an expert here. He has come up with a very good plan. He has put it before this House, and now we have an opportunity to debate and vote on it and accept it. I'm telling you that we are not going to do anything in this. We're going to continue on Bill 17, talking about this, until this is passed or until you throw us out. That's one of the two. It's your pick, okay? That's all it is. You decide.

So we want to make sure that we have an ample opportunity, that all the people in Alberta can come here, and they can sit in the gallery. They can look on their Internet TV, and they can have the opportunity to take a good look at this amendment and take a good look at this government, who refuse to listen to an expert on emergency rooms during an emergency room crisis. Absolutely hilarious. If it wasn't so serious, it would be hilarious. It's unbelievable to me that you folks over there can't see the value in this amendment. It's about accountability.

I know that's a foreign concept. I really do know it's a foreign concept to a lot of the folks over there. But it's absolutely amazing to me that you can say that you want to pass this fluff piece of legislation. That's what it is. It's a piece of fluff. It's nothing more. Read it. Like, look at the health charter. The health charter must "recognize that health is a partnership among individuals, families, communities, health providers, organizations that deliver health services, and the Government of Alberta." Seriously? That's the health charter? That's what we're going to recognize in the health charter?

5:00

We've put a bill together, and we've spent time running around the province talking to people and talking to so-called experts, and the best we came up with was that a health charter must "recognize that health is a partnership among individuals, families, communities, health providers, organizations that deliver services, and the Government of Alberta"? Holy Toledo. That's some creative thinking. Way to go. That'll blow the roof off the place.

Then the health charter must "acknowledge the impact of an individual's health status . . ."

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're on the amendment. You're on the bill. We're on the amendment.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Fine. This amendment here amends in this book here section 2, and I'm reading section 2. Okay? This amends it.

Here we go: "acknowledges the impact of an individual's health status and other circumstances on the individual's capacity to interact with the health system." Okay? That's what it says. It's fluff.

The member comes along with this amendment, and he says: "Look, we're going to take this piece of fluff, and we're actually going to make it a bill worth passing. We're actually going to make it worth something, okay? What we're going to do is we're going to add (c)." I mean, (c) is good. Those are good principles. They're also a little bit of motherhood and apple pie, but, you know, they're okay.

Then it says:

- (d) set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on

Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

Then you go to that document, and it lists very clearly for us that what we're talking about here; that is, hitting our targets for seriously ill patients of a maximum six-hour wait and for very ill patients a maximum of a four-hour wait 95 per cent of the time. It gives actual targets, actual accountability. That's what this Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has essentially flushed his career with the folks over on that side of the House down the toilet with because he thinks this is more important. He thinks it's more important that we actually have some accountability targets in place, and then we can work towards those targets.

The way you work towards those targets is to do what Dr. Paul Parks and the other emergency doctors have done if you're going to achieve the targets that are in this amendment. The way you do it is you do what the Wildrose has been proposing and what these other emergency room doctors are proposing. You put site-based decision-making or a chief medical officer – call it whatever you want – in that hospital and let him make site-based decisions to achieve these targets. It is doable, but if we don't even pass the accountability measures, how is it going to happen? It's not going to happen. It's pie in the sky.

It's like the health minister when he came and said: "Don't worry. I know we have an ER . . ." – he didn't call it an ER crisis. "We have some issues in the ER, and guess what we're going to do? We're going to make sure that we meet these targets. We're going to move it from the 25 per cent or 30 per cent it is right now to 40 per cent or 55 per cent" or something like that. I mean, what's that going to do? There have got to be teeth. If it's not legislated, nothing is going to happen. It's just going to be a feel-good statement.

I mean, look at all the books that we've gone through with the government plans for different departments. "This is our plan. This is what we're going to do. This is what we aspire to." How many times are those plans met? Not a whole lot. It's government; it's slow. If it's not legislated, if we don't hold the government to account, it's like spending. If you don't have spending control, if it's not legislated, it ain't going to happen because there's no accountability.

That's what I want to see, and that's what the constituents of Airdrie-Chestermere want to see. The constituents of Airdrie-Chestermere don't have an emergency room. We want to see targets. We want to know, if we are going to have an ambulance take the extra time it takes to come out and get us into an emergency room, that when our folks get to that emergency room, there are targets in place that are going to make sure that the wait is as short as possible so that we can save lives.

I go back to the main issue here. We have the former head of emergency physicians in the province, an accomplished emergency room doctor, putting out on a platter some very, very doable targets. He's the expert. How many doctors do we have sitting in this House? We have none except for him, and he was in government. Now he's not in government because he chose to speak out for his constituents and for the people he cares about. They make some ridiculous, you know, antidemocratic malarkey about caucus unity: oh, we've got to keep caucus unity.

There are people dying in hospital rooms, for crying out loud. Give your heads a shake. Get your priorities straight. Pass the blinking legislation. This isn't rocket science, guys. It's an accountability target. Legislate it, and then give the doctors in the specific hospitals the authority, the site-based authority, to make it happen. [interjection] Well, you debate that, hon. minister. I want

to hear it, but you've got to stand up when I'm done and tell me what we need to do on this, okay? I want to hear it. I want action. Okay?

We're sitting in here. There are people dying in the emergency rooms, and we're doing nothing about it. You want to pass this stuff, this fluff. Look at this stuff. The health charter must "recognize that health is a partnership among individuals, families, communities, health providers." Wow. Inspirational. That will do something. And it goes on.

The hon. member is proposing something that is going to save lives, guys and gals. It's going to save lives. Lives. This is what he is proposing, and if we put this on the shelf and we ignore it, you know what? I hope the hon. member doesn't go too far because I only have about 10 minutes.

It just makes sense that we actually put some teeth in this legislation. If the members on the other side of the House have proposals or amendments that they'd like to share, then I would ask them, you know, between when I'm speaking or when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is speaking, to share what they're going to bring forward. Share it. [interjection] No. We're not going to go down that road because then we can't come back to this once it's passed or once it's been defeated.

Mr. Horner: So it's all about you?

Mr. Anderson: No, it's not. What kind of logic is that? Honestly. Thank goodness you're not going to be in that chair in 14 months. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Mr. Anderson: It's ridiculous, the absolute blinders that these folks on the front bench have on. That's right. Take a picture of me. It's all about you guys. It's all about power. That's all it has ever been about with you. Does it look like we're about power here and that Edmonton-Meadowlark is about power? We're sitting in the back because of undemocratic people like you. You're the reason your party is tanking right now. You. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, through the chair.

Mr. Anderson: Anyway, that's the reason.

The point is to the amendment. We've got this position statement on emergency department overcrowding, and we need to find a way – and I hope the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark understands this. I hope the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is listening and takes his seat in his chair here pretty quick. In your chair, please. Please go to the chair. There you go. Okay. You don't need to be in the chair anymore.

Okay. We've got this bill, and we've got this document that one of the foremost experts on emergency room care in the province has given us.

5:10

An Hon. Member: Are you his flunky?

Mr. Anderson: Am I his flunky? You guys are so ridiculous. It's just unbelievable. Do you guys care about anything other than yourselves? [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair. Speak through the chair.

Mr. Anderson: Well, then, tell them to stop chirping. [interjections] Not during debate. Not tonight. Keep yapping.

Here it is. Here's the opportunity that we have to do something about this. We've got an opportunity to put some targets in place and have accountability, and that's what we want. If you don't have any kind of accountability measures, if you don't have any kind of targets, how are you going to have accountability? How is it going to be reached?

The hon. members on the other side can chirp all they want and make fun: oh, this is just all theatrics. No, it's not theatrics. I trust the emergency doc. That's who I trust. I don't trust any of you on this issue. You think I trust the Minister of Energy on this issue or the Minister of Education or any of you all? No. Because you don't know what you're talking about, and neither do I, but he does. So let's trust the guy who's the expert, okay? The finance minister has many strengths, but he has no clue about emergency room care. That's not his area of expertise. But the emergency doc from Edmonton-Meadowlark does.

It's not like this is just his idea. Other emergency doctors have spoken out about this issue as well and said that we need this, so why are we afraid to actually have some accountability measures in our emergency rooms? Why are we afraid to do that? That principle is sound. That much I do know, that if you do not have legislated accountability standards, it will not fly.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

I'm telling the members in the House that this is self-survival for you folks. If this issue is not taken care of in 14 months, you're gone. That's the way it's going to be, guys. So fix it, okay? Do something about it. Don't just go to your blinking caucus meetings and do nothing and just be a bunch of trained seals. Stand up and be accounted for. I don't expect anything different from the front bench. But the people in the back: you guys know better. You can do something about it. You can do anything you want about it right now. They can't afford to do anything to you because they're on the edge. So do something about it.

Don't take my word for it. Take the emergency doctor's. If this was a finance bill or something like that, then, yeah, we'd talk to some of the people who have an economics background here. We'd listen to them a little bit more and give their opinion more weight. When we have issues on education, we give larger weight to some of the teachers. We want to hear what the teachers in this Assembly have to say about it. That's important. We need to take that into account. That doesn't mean we give them carte blanche, but it does mean that we listen to them. If we don't have a clue what we're talking about, then we listen to experts. We bring in more experts in committee, and we listen to experts outside of this House.

This government doesn't do that. It plows ahead with endless different rules and laws and regulations, and it doesn't listen to experts until it's almost too late, until a lot of the damage has been done. Whether it's the new royalty framework or it's the ridiculous way that schools were chosen around this province or the ridiculous centralization of the superboard, et cetera, it's all a product of not doing the job.

I'm glad we're having a lively debate, and we should. This isn't a partisan issue. That's what's so funny about it. It's not. This is not a left or right issue. It's not a conservative, liberal, or moderate issue. This is about doing the right thing. That's what this is about. I think that the government has an awesome opportunity here to show that democracy still lives, to show that – you know what? – the right thing to do is to be accountable, to stand up and say that we need to set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency depart-

ments. They need to be legislated, and then we need to empower the chief medical officers or physicians on the ground at the site and allow them to do what is needed to get the job done, give them the authority that they need to get the job done.

You know, it's just like the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake on Motion 503. There's a teacher. She knows, because she taught grade 3 students, that those PATs weren't working. She had seen it up close. She saw the damage they were doing. They weren't working. They were just giving hardship to the kids and all that sort of thing. I come from a nonteaching background, but I listened to that member, and she and a couple of others convinced me.

We need to listen to the docs in that same exact way.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to continue on with some of the comments that I was making before. I'd like to just cite another example or two of how I don't feel this amendment would address some of the problems that I've encountered. I've outlined some in the past, some in the last 10 years, and one more recently, that I'd like to share.

We all know what our schedules are like, up here all week. I recently had a requisition done for some blood tests. By the time you get home Thursday night, there's no place to get them done, and Friday you're at the constituency office all day, with no chance to get them done. So these requisitions were bouncing around on the dash of my vehicle for about a month. My wife kept telling me that I should get these done. I said, "Well, I'll have to wait till session is over to get them done because there's just no opportunity to do that." She said, "Well, the lab is open every Saturday morning, and staff is there until noon, from 8 o'clock till noon." She insisted I go.

Obedient husband that I am, I drove in and got there about 8:30. To my surprise every chair in the waiting room was absolutely empty. There was one person getting up from the chair, rolling his sleeve down. I didn't see it, but I assumed that he'd just had some blood taken. I'm standing there with the requisition, and I was asked, "What do you want?" I said, "Well, I'm here with a requisition for some blood tests." I was told abruptly, "We only do emergencies on Saturdays." That's what I was told, and that's how I was told. I was a bit taken aback, and I didn't know how to respond to it because, of course, there's a sign there: zero tolerance for abuse. Although I felt I'd just been abused myself, I guess this only applies one way.

I tried to be as diplomatic as I could, and I said: "Perhaps I'll take a seat down at the far end of the lineup here because I can see that you're swamped. Perhaps by the time you get to me just before noon, I will become emergent, and I'll qualify." At that point the paper was ripped out of my hand. "I'll do you now." So I got the blood test, and I hoped that I hadn't appeared to be abusive to any staff because I certainly didn't want to do that.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I'm wondering: is that a systemic problem, or is that an attitudinal problem? I would say that it's an attitudinal problem. I've already cited a couple of other examples over a longer period of time, and I can go back to the '70s, when both of my parents died of cancer, in 1972 and 1976. They were in their fifties. I've had lots of experience along that line, too. You know what? Without going into detail about that, I saw those same attitudinal situations at that time in many different facilities in the province, and it disappoints me. So this is not a new thing. It's something that needs to be addressed, but I can't possibly see how this amendment is going to address that. Therefore, I think it's going to continue, which is unfortunate.

5:20

I'm not trying to pick on anybody here. I'm trying to come up with solutions, but all fingers are always pointing at administration. They're always pointing at governance. I believe the problems are much deeper than that. Maybe I'm alone in my thoughts in this Assembly. I'd be happy to hear if people think I am. I can tell you they are my personal experiences, and they're the truth. I can produce my wife as a witness. She has been with me every step of the way, or I've been with her.

I'm looking at this amendment closely, and I was hoping the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was listening intently to my comments so that he could respond to them. I don't see that happening, which is unfortunate because I did sit here and show the respect for all the members and listened intently to everyone's comments tonight. I don't see that I'm afforded the same respect by my colleagues in the House, and I'm truly disappointed in that, Mr. Chairman.

With that, I'll take my seat.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark according to my list.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hon. member, may I have that computer again, please? Just carrying on in answering the question of the hon. Deputy Premier, on speaking to the amendment, staying on topic, I wasn't finished reading the CAEP guidelines under subsection (d). I will ask all hon. members to go to www.caep.ca to pull this up on their computer and go to position statement 2007 so that they know what I'm talking about. Some may say that this is an old, outdated position statement. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, Edmonton-Mill Creek, I believe, is on record as saying that it's an old statement, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is talking about national-international standards. I am debating and answering those questions.

These are the Canadian national standards, set by the experts. The politicians have set eight-hour and four-hour rules, targets that they aren't even achieving. That's something from the politicians and the bureaucrats, who are good people doing their best in an area where sometimes they're a little in over their head, but they mean well. I understand that because I'm actually a politician. I meant well alongside all of my colleagues, but the experts are the front-line doctors and nurses, the emergency doctors of the nation. These are their standards in Canada. The international standard benchmark is in the United Kingdom. Their standards are even more strict.

When I went to visit my uncle, to bereave in India, I went to the top hospitals in India. On the way back I went to the top hospital in London. I talked to Dr. Matthew Cooke. He's an emergency doctor.

People were dying in the emergency departments in the U.K. left and right. A reporter's mother died. That reporter – and this is a message to all the media when they listen tomorrow morning – ran headlines for two weeks, every day on the front pages, when his mother died in a waiting room. Prime Minister Tony Blair got 5 million letters. If any media is listening tomorrow, I would ask you to run this in national headlines. I ask you, the public in this province and in this nation, to write the Prime Minister of this nation and the Premiers and elected members of this nation 5 million letters on this issue.

Prime Minister Tony Blair passed the toughest performance measure on the planet for a nation. On the planet. Once you present to an emergency room, you've got to be in and out, either out on your way home or up. Regardless of the reason that you came, whether it's a CTAS level I, II, III, IV, V, you've got to be in and out or in and upstairs to a bed in four hours at the 98 percentile.

Mr. Chairman, I don't know much about oil sands, and I don't know much about the environment. I'm trying to learn. But I'll tell you that growing up in India, what really matters is math. You learn calculus in elementary school. You know what? English and biology were my lousiest courses in high school. I only got 94 per cent on those. I got 100 per cent in every math course in high school and from 97 to 100 per cent in university. What I understand are numbers and statistics, the P and P confidence intervals and all this. What I can tell you is that people who are experts in numbers, the fuzzy numbers, the fuzzy magic, can issue fuzzy magic and fuzzy numbers, and suddenly politicians can spin stuff.

In statistics there are means, medians, modes, percentiles, averages. They're all over the place. The most accurate measure in this situation is the percentile measure. I'm still speaking to this amendment because that's what we're talking about, percentiles. In the U.K. it's a four-hour rule at the 98th percentile. These are the most stringent measures on the planet, in answering the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud on international standards.

Dr. Chris Evans was the past president of the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. He works at the Royal Alexandra hospital. Interestingly, from the Royal Alex as well is Dr. Louis Francescutti, who is a specialist of all the doctors of the nation today. They're the ones that trained me. I'm just the little guy on the block that just showed up. I just had a little bee in my bonnet about this issue. Yeah, I'm an expert amongst the members here, to be honest. I am not the national expert. The national experts are the Dr. Francescutti and the Dr. Chris Evanses and the Dr. Cathy MacLeans. Dr. Cathy MacLean is the head family doctor in the nation.

In Calgary you've got the head specialist in the nation, the head family doctor in the nation, and the head emergency doctor in the nation in this province. Dr. Chip Doig is an intensive care unit doctor and past AMA president. His sister was the head doctor in the nation in the neighbouring province. Mr. Chairman, we have world-class talent here that wasn't listened to. I'm not the world-class guy. I'm just a simple little ER guy who is a politician, probably more of a politician than an ER guy because I haven't spoken up for the past three years.

I've broken my silence publicly. I'm going back to everything that I said before I ran. There was no reason things weren't changing. I tried to work within the system, but I said that I could remain silent no longer. That oath, the principles of morality and ethics: there was collision of principles. There will be caucus confidentiality about these things that were brought up, but really a collision of principles is happening that is bringing us to discuss this amendment on Bill 17: the principles that collided with the values of my family to tell the truth, the principles of partisan politics that collided with my values as a health care professional who took a Hippocratic oath.

These principles far outweigh those principles of partisan politics and allegiances. This is not a partisan political issue. It's a nonpartisan issue, and I'm actually quite impressed that the left, the middle, the right, the extreme right, the extreme left, the extreme middle are actually all here, staying up here all night supporting this. My gosh. I'm so impressed by these people here, from the red caucus to the orange caucus to the green one and to the independent caucus, I guess. I'm so impressed that we're actually united on this issue.

5:30

Getting back to the international standard, in the U.K. it's four hours at the 98th percentile. Did you know that the administrators in the U.K. are based on those accountability measures set by Prime Minister Tony Blair? They're actually fired every 18 months. The

politicians outsurvive the ministers whereas in this province the administrators outsurvive the politicians, outsurvive leaders, outsurvive ministers. When people die in emergency departments, we break every standard of care. What do we do? We give them a tip. We give them a tip.

There's only been one government here that hasn't set any accountability measures. You can't blame the red, orange, and green guys. There have been no performance and accountability standards. The ER doctors have been talking about this issue, that front-line staff have been redlining for 15 years, and this is why it is so essentially important.

This amendment is actually a conservative value because it's about fiscal responsibility. It's about fiscal responsibility because health care spending under the Premier that started the PC Party was like this until 1993. There was a dip, and then the health care spending went up, and the waits started because there was no accountability. Premier Lougheed brought in Dr. Cochrane as the deputy minister, and he straightened out the bureaucracy shop and the delivery shop, and that all got wrecked in the mid-90s. That's why the country has watched to see what we in Alberta do. This is why in the nation health care spending has gone up, why waits have gone up. Because we broke it, and the nation followed suit with Alberta.

The nation is watching to see what we're doing, my good friends. The Canada Health Act is coming. Some people think private, for-profit delivery is the solution. That may be one small part of the solution for the rich guys, who have lots of money. Personally, I think how businesses are run is actually the solution for the public system. It needs to be run with the efficiency of a finely tuned business like the airplane industry, with performance measures and checklists of the airplane industry. Dr. Atul Gawande from Harvard took checklists from Boeing and applied them to the health care system.

I completely agree with the private business principles of a successful company. This is like today. If patients were airplanes, I tell you, holy cow, there would be an airplane crashing in this province every 15 minutes, like they're crashing right now. There's only one bed available.

Getting back to the percentiles, it was four hours at the 98th percentile in the U.K. They're meeting it at the 96th percentile all the time, actually, in the U.K. They are meeting it in a nation of—I don't know; what is it?—70 million, 75 million people. The problem is that they're having to fire their administrators every 18 months: the top administrators, the board, the chairman of the board, the CEOs, not the middle management. They actually reduced it to the 95th percentile so they don't have to keep changing their top-level managers.

I was just in the U.K. I was at St. Mary's hospital with Dr. Matthew Cooke, the top emergency doctor in the United Kingdom. The rules of debate here are based on the U.K. Their emergency room had about six, seven people, who were waiting not too long in the waiting rooms. What CAEP did was it took the U.K. standard and said: "Look, that's too strict. Let's go to six hours and four hours at the 95th percentile." That's what's in here.

I'd like to just finish off with a statement here on the CAEP on overcrowding.

Canada has only 3 hospital beds per 1,000 Canadians, ranking 26th out of 30 OECD countries. Our lack of acute care beds means that most Canadian hospitals frequently operate at unsustainable occupancy rates of higher than 90%, . . .

I mentioned that in Alberta we've been higher than a hundred per cent for the last 15 years.

. . . a level at which regular bed shortages, periodic bed crises, and hospital overcrowding are inevitable. Acute care bed capacity is

also significantly affected by patients who require an “alternate level of care” . . . but cannot access this care because of shortages in community resources and chronic/palliative care beds. These patients account for up to 20% of acute care hospital beds and thereby contribute to ED overcrowding by preventing the admission of emergency patients to hospital beds.

Solutions. Implement overcapacity protocols, which is what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud did.

ED overcrowding is symptomatic of demand exceeding capacity in hospitals and requires system-wide solutions. ED overcrowding can be addressed immediately, with existing resources, through mechanisms to improve patient flow. CAEP recommends the rapid implementation of overcapacity protocols so that all hospitals have an organized approach to deal, in the best manner possible, with situations of demand exceeding capacity. Implementing overcapacity protocols would effectively share the responsibility of already stabilized and admitted patients with all wards in the hospital, instead of just “warehousing” them in the emergency department with the wrong doctor, wrong nurse, wrong hallway, wrong place, for the wrong period of time.

It is anticipated that the need to regularly utilize such protocols will end when initiatives to increase in-patient and ALC bed capacity are successful.

Mr. Chairman, what has caused health care to be unsustainable is people who are sick and in their most dire circumstances, who wait in an emergency room with crushing chest pain. When that care is delayed – listen up. Listen up, please. Past Minister of Health and Wellness from Calgary-West, listen up. Listen up, gentlemen in the front row: the Deputy Premier, the past Minister of Health and Wellness from Edmonton-Whitemud. This is very important. You need to understand this. And, finance minister, this is what’s costing you all your money.

When the care is delayed for the man with crushing chest pain . . .

Mr. Marz: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: There’s a point of order. Yes, hon. member.

Point of Order

Criticizing Members

Mr. Marz: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is playing your role as chairman, identifying certain members to pay attention. I can’t let this slide without mentioning that while I was speaking and mentioning certain concerns I had to, specifically, this member, he was in a huddle paying no attention to me whatsoever. I’m still waiting for him to address my concerns, which haven’t been addressed yet.

The Chair: Hon. member, there’s a point of order. My explanation is that when an hon. member speaks, if you are eloquent enough, you draw the attention of others. Also, you need to focus on the amendment that you have.

Please continue, hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, I will keep addressing my concerns to you. I was not addressing my concerns to them. If I have done something wrong, I apologize. As a new member of government this is a very new thing for me. I have never spoken up. I am just a simple emergency doctor from the Royal Alex trying to do his very best. I humbly apologize.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to continue.

Debate Continued

Dr. Sherman: I will read the footnotes to this, and this speaks to the amendment on the bill. Under subsection (d) this is the information.

- ³ OECD. OECD Health Data 2003: A comparative analysis of 30 countries. 2003.
- ⁴ Wait Time Alliance. It’s About Time: Achieving benchmarks and best practices in wait time management. Final Report. August 2005.
- ⁵ Bagust A., Pace M., Posnett JW. Dynamics of bed use in accommodating emergency admissions: Stochastic simulation model. *BMJ*. 1999; 319; 155-8.
- ⁶ Forster AJ, Stiell I, Wells G, Lee AJ, Van Walraven C. The effect of hospital occupancy on emergency department length of stay and patient disposition. *Acad Emerg Med* 2003; 10; 127-33.
- ⁷ Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. Background-er: Emergency Department Overcrowding in Canada. 2004.

5:40

Under solutions we’ve talked about implementing overcapacity protocols and their footnotes. Now I will move on.

Establish national benchmarks for total ED length of stay

CAEP recommends the establishment of national benchmarks for total ED length of stay. ED length of stay begins when the patient is first registered or triaged in the [emergency department] and ends when the patient physically leaves the [emergency department.] An ED length of stay benchmark must be measurable and be linked to an accountability framework in order to adequately assess performance. Reliable, complete, and accurate data, such as ED process time and ED length of stay must also be collected in every ED so that progress can be measured and evaluated.

Link ED length of stay benchmarks to incentives and infrastructure investment

ED length of stay benchmarks must be linked with positive incentives and infrastructure investment for meaningful change to be achieved. The UK has achieved significant reductions in ED wait times following the adoption of a country-wide target.

A country-wide target. As I mentioned, the nation is watching to see what Alberta does. This is a challenge to every member to keep going with the status quo and mediocrity. Do we know what the definition of insanity is? Keep doing the same thing and expect a different result. This system has a mental health problem.

I will continue.

All patients should be admitted, discharged or transferred within four hours of arrival at an ED. This was coupled with financial incentives, accountability measures, and tackling delays in access to in-patient beds, specialist doctors, and diagnostic investigations. 96% of patients now spend four hours or less in UK [emergency departments.]

Increase bed capacity & optimize bed management.

In addition to increasing the absolute number of acute care beds, in-patient bed capacity can also be improved by optimizing bed management. Effective bed management strategies should smooth the degree of variability in the numbers of admissions and discharges. Such strategies can target discharge planning, admission procedures, capacity planning, operational planning, and hospital policies for bed availability priorities and bed use.

Mr. Chairman, may I get back on the list, please? Thank you.

The Chair: I have a list here. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: I’m good. Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to address some of the earlier speakers. I appreciate the Member for Olds-Didsbury sharing his concerns, and I would have to say that I concur with

many of the things that you were saying, that it is very frustrating. You asked the question, you know, whether it was attitudinal. I think that attitude starts at the top and comes down. It's been talked to many times this evening about the general morale of our front-line workers, that it isn't good.

But I would go back to the overall problem, in my mind, and to why amendment A3 is worth continuing the discussion on. Because it's always about accountability. Mr. Chair, if there's no accountability, there is no improvement. If there's no measurement, we don't know where we're at. This government for 18 months failed to put forward the results in our emergency rooms, and it was demoralizing for those people working in there, knowing that the problems existed yet with nothing being reported. The big problem that we have, Mr. Chair – I must not be eloquent enough; the chair is looking in other directions – is that we don't have accountability in the system.

I do agree with the Member for Olds-Didsbury that . . .

Mr. Marz: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Hinman: I'm sorry. I can only go to two. I know the feeling, being formerly from Cardston-Taber-Warner. I agree that the names should be much shorter, but it's the way it is.

Mr. Marz: It's the respectful thing to do.

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate that. As you mentioned in your talk earlier, that I was listening to, it's hard for us to remember so many two- and three-name constituencies. I apologize. You know, you've been in here longer than myself, and you're used to it. There's just so much. We don't have the researchers. It's difficult to spend the time making sure I know all of them. I do have the chart here.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills referred earlier to the frustration of going in and sitting down just to get a simple process like a blood test and the attitude that he received. I kind of enjoyed the way he dealt with it to get through that. Sometimes it is frustrating, but think of the other side, Mr. Chair, if you were actually working in those conditions and had an individual that you needed to rush in to get treatment, but the person in charge said: "No. The beds are all full. We're not going to move anything upstairs. They're just going to have to fill up and back up down here." It's just not a good situation.

I think some of the questions that were asked are good questions. In section (c) it says, "include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths . . ." Unfortunately, we know those have been occurring. Those reports finally came to light, that have been buried by this government, by the Premier, by the health minister, for two and a half years. That's not right, Mr. Chair. Where's the accountability for something like that? These reports come forward. They're not being forwarded to the Canadian Medical Association, where they're supposed to go, or whatever that group is. They weren't reported from the Premier's or the minister's office. They just got buried, taken in and buried. Then we expect to see some changes come in. Somehow in Bill 17 we need to address that. But the bottom line is that what we've got here for Bill 17 and the amendment here is paper. I don't think that the words they're putting down there are worth it.

I'd have to tip my hat, if I had one, to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and say that, yes, he is very eloquent. He can get up, and he understands these things. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has given him and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford a lot of praise, that they made great efforts, but somehow that all dropped when it got passed on to the next minister.

It's interesting to hear the speech and the discussion on how the superboard was introduced to caucus over there, that they came in and said: this is what we're doing. A very, very poor system of governance, an even poorer system of accountability and actually doing the homework and going forward. It's just really appalling to hear the conditions, the decisions, and the way things are handled. You know, it kind of goes back to that old Shakespearean quote: thou dost protest too much for an innocent man.

I think that Albertans are getting tired. This idea that we're solving our health care because now we have five years of stable funding – you know, I asked two weeks ago and a week ago for an audit of all of the closed beds in our current hospitals and facilities. I'm saying that I know they're there. I've talked to emergency room doctors. I've talked to nurses. We can do much better. That's what we need to do. We need to refocus. We need to be honest.

I enjoyed the member talking about truth. I think the truth is that he has a little bit more to say, so I'll sit down. The chair will probably recognize him as the next speaker, and we'll see where we go.

5:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments on amendment A3 as has been proposed. I want to throw in an example of the other side of the equation. I've heard some interesting comments about redlining for 15 years. I've heard about proposals, that we could enact a very good possible system where people have to be moved out of an emergency room and placed either in an acute-care bed or in intensive care or presumably discharged in four hours.

But I want to relate an actual story about a constituent. He was a passenger in a vehicle accident who was delivered to a hospital that I'm quite familiar with by an ambulance, who was examined by the nurse, who called in the emergency room doctor, who looked at this individual, who had sustained head injuries as a result of his head hitting the dash as a passenger in the middle seat of a car, who had the orbital bones broken, who had damaged eye sockets. Granted, this person had had some alcohol to drink, but he was not driving. He was a passenger. And I think the emergency room doc had this opinion that maybe the alcohol was more to blame and of bigger concern to him than the injuries to this individual.

The resulting action of this emergency room doc – I guess he was living up to his own guideline of handling the patient within four hours – was to take this young individual, parade him nude down to the X-ray room with a pillow in front of his private parts. That was his proper way of treating this individual with quite a severe head injury. After the X-ray was taken, they proceeded to tell this young gentleman – he was over 18 – that he should go to Calgary and that they would be forwarding directions to the receiving people up there, and he would be undertaking some reconstructive surgery.

Now, I think this is a pretty good example of how you really move people through the system and get them handled within four hours. I don't think for one minute, Mr. Chairman, that those standards are exactly something that you want to have etched in gold if it's up to the discretion of an emergency room doctor who obviously has a bias to somebody that, God forbid, had a drink and had been in an accident.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking to amendment A3 and

just because it's approximately 15 hours ago since amendment A3 was brought onto this floor, I'll refresh individuals' memories. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark moved that Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, be amended in section 2(2) by striking out "and" at the end of clause (a) and by adding the following after clause (b):

- (c) include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur, and

So the first part of the amendment was guidelines. Then:

- (d) set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

Mr. Chair, since that was brought forth, as I say, approximately 15 hours ago, the time, while it may have stood still in this House, has moved on. This House began sitting at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 24, 2010. For the rest of the province it's 6 a.m. on Thursday, November 25, 2010, but this House with its parliamentary rules stubbornly clings to the notion that it's still Wednesday. We all know what happened. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out that when King Canute attempted to control the tides, it was a foolish effort, just as debating throughout the night is not good for the health of the individuals in this House, nor is it good for the health of democracy in Alberta.

The hon. Minister of Education, the Government House Leader, suggested at the beginning of Orders yesterday – and it was yesterday. I'm one of those who clings to the reality that today's date is actually November 25 and not November 24. He talked about the possibility of extending the session. Mr. Chair, I think that's absolutely necessary, that it be extended during the day, during the regular hours of 1:30 to 6, as opposed to what we're experiencing right now. We've got people, many of whom have been here for significant portions of if not the whole night, attempting to have the government recognize that they're not infallible, that amendments are necessary to even attempt to make Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, functional.

Now, one of the observations I made when I walked into this House at slightly after 5 a.m. on November 25, 2010, was that this House needs a prescription. What we have here, if you look around, is far too much testosterone and not nearly enough estrogen. What estrogen does is provide the equivalence of the Senate, the sober second thought. What has happened is that instead of policy, this has become a question of potency versus impotence. We have individuals who feel the need to continue to force their way, to have their way. That's not democracy, Mr. Chair. That's bully tactics.

Now, to have the least degree of intelligent debate, people have to be awake. They have to be alive. They have to be able to participate with a degree of energy. What we've seen, basically: I was here till 1 o'clock on Tuesday the 23rd. I was here till 20 to 2 in the morning on Wednesday the 24th.

The Chair: Hon. member, we have amendment A3. We're not talking about the process of parliament.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Yes, we have an amendment that talks about guidelines, guidelines that are missing in this province. It talks about standards and the fact that we don't have standards in this province. What we have are targets. We have targets that shift. When government can't meet the targets, they lower them, and when they can't meet the lowered targets, they extend the time period to meet those targets, those standards.

The political farce that's being played out in this province goes beyond health. It goes to the health of our democratic state. In 2008 in terms of a healthy democracy, which A3 is attempting to improve

on, barely 40 per cent of Alberta's population felt sufficiently motivated, sufficiently healthy to participate in the democratic process. What happened, Mr. Chair, was that barely 21 per cent of the healthy, eligible Albertans that chose to participate in the democratic process gave this government a majority, and our health, as A3 points out, has been in jeopardy ever since.

6:00

Mr. Chair, A3 recognizes attempts to undermine the public health care system. You cannot help but go back in time to other attempts by this government, whether it's Bill 11 or Premier Klein's third way. The health, the standards, the guidelines have been missing. This government has tried to rewrite the Health Act. When Premier Klein tried to ignore the Canada Health Act by allowing physicians to extra-bill, the federal government recognized that the types of guidelines and standards that had been established, that A3 is talking about, were broken; therefore, the federal government withheld transfer payments to this province.

It's my hope that not just the government but all of us in this House take the time to recognize what is necessary not only to improve the emergency health care delivery but to improve the guidelines and the standards for democratic participation within this province. Mr. Chair, other provinces do their business in the day as opposed to conducting it like a thief in the night. They have sessions in the spring. They have sessions in the fall. Their houses of parliament meet as long as is deemed necessary by the majority of voters and participants, whether it's MPs or MPPs or, in our Alberta case, MLAs. They do the business that they were elected to do, and they do it during the daylight hours, when our cognitive powers are, hopefully, at their highest point.

Mr. Liepert: It's the best time of day. It's first thing in the morning.

Mr. Chase: Yes, hon. Minister of Energy, I'm glad you've recognized that it's morning. Through the chair, I wonder if the hon. Minister of Energy knows what morning it is, what the date is. Does he believe, as parliamentary rules would suggest, that we're still on Wednesday? Or, through the chair, as we debate A3, does the hon. Minister of Energy recognize . . .

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader – sorry; Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: You keep demoting me, Mr. Chair, and I suppose you'll want me to take the pay cut that goes with it.

Point of Order Committee of the Whole Debate

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chair, I rise under 23(b), which says that a member will be called to order by the Speaker if in the Speaker's opinion the member speaks to matters other than the question under discussion. It's 23(b)(i), the question under discussion. I raise that because the hon. member is really, understandably, instead of talking about the amendment, talking about the time of day. In doing so, he's attempting to focus on the fact that this House is debating this amendment to Bill 17 at about 6 in the morning, having been debating it all night, and somehow relating that to parliamentary democracy, none of which actually is in Bill 17. So he's not debating the amendment to 17.

We're in committee, and in committee there's actually, Mr. Chairman, notwithstanding – and I don't mean this in any pejorative sense – the fairly lax standards we have relative to keeping to the

protocols in the House, a line-by-line discussion of the bill, and it's actually very, very focused. Second reading is a very broad discussion of the bill, about the principles. Third reading is a narrower discussion of the bill, having already approved the principles and the line-by-line, word-by-word analysis. But committee is focused on the word-by-word, line-by-line analysis of the bill. That's what it is.

In this particular case, we're discussing Bill 17, and we're discussing an amendment to Bill 17 which is fairly specific. The hon. member is far from that, so I would suggest that under the standing order he ought to be asked to debate the bill. I think it's important to really point out why he's so far off base. Mr. Chairman, I want to do that by saying that his concern seems to be that we need time to debate bills. Time is a very relevant issue because in committee there is an abundance of time. You can debate over and over again if you want to. You can say the same things incessantly, and members opposite do and have for the last 15 hours.

I want to say this because it's particularly important to the member's point that he was trying to make even though it wasn't on the bill and, therefore, violates section 23 of our standing orders. The point he's making is that we should just confine debate between the hours of 1:30 and 6 p.m., the standard afternoon hours of the House. That would be a very wonderful idea, but those sorts of standard practices don't work when opposition members use, admittedly, the only tool they have in a parliamentary democracy where they're not in a minority government, and that tool is time.

So, Mr. Chairman, you end up in situations when a Government House Leader wants to schedule debate to allow for a fulsome discussion of a bill without using the other appropriate tools, as they use regularly in the federal House when they schedule a bill, setting out the amount of time that you'll spend debating the bill. We could in this House use time allocation, which says that we'll have an hour.

But, no, on an important bill like health we want members of the opposition to bring forward because we've heard members from the Wildrose Party particularly say: this is such a waste; there are so many things we can improve. In fact, I've heard people say that they've had in the past stacks of paper on their desks, showing that there are, you know, six or seven or five or nine amendments coming forward. So you need to give them opportunities to do that. But when you do give them opportunities to do that, Mr. Chairman, they don't do that. They spend all night debating one amendment. That's why, Calgary-Varsity, sometimes you stray outside the normal scope of 1:30 to 6 o'clock, because you never, ever finish when you do it that way because somebody always goes back and gets another amendment.

There's no other way to do it. There are only two ways to deal with making sure that debate is fulsome and wholesome in the House, and one is to be here year-round and go for afternoon after afternoon after afternoon. That will never get you to a conclusion. It will never get you to a conclusion because committee is open ended. Or you can bring in a time allocation motion, and then you hear the opposition say: oh, democracy as we know it is dead; debate is being cut off. Or you can provide an opportunity, difficult as it is, hard on us as it is, to do our duty to Albertans by spending the time, sometimes for long, extended periods of time, so that there's very clearly an opportunity for every member of the opposition to put the amendments to the bill that they want discussed, the things that they believe are necessary to improve the bill and make it a wholesome piece of legislation, to allow them to do it.

So, Mr. Chairman, under my point of order under 23 I would ask you to call the member to order and ask him to address the bill.

The Chair: Having heard the point of order, the chair shall make the process go further. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you have 10 minutes on the amendment. Please, from here on focus on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Prior to focusing on the amendment, I would like to have the opportunity to discuss the section that the hon. House leader discussed. He talked about fulsome debate as opposed to foolsome debate, and he was suggesting that this debate had reached the second level, the foolsome, that people weren't directing their comments specifically to amendment A3.

6:10

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Now, I want to read you the first six words of the second part of amendment A3, clause (d), and you can read along with me if you still have sufficient brain cells left to do that given the lateness of this debate. What I'm talking about very specifically in A3 is "set standards for lengths of stay." As I've pointed out and as people have tried to point out in A3, the length of stay is not necessarily profitable. In fact, when it comes to the emergency rooms that we're discussing in A3, the longer a person has to stay in the emergency situation, the less likelihood there is of moving towards the healthy resolution that they came for in the first place.

With regard to the Minister of Education saying we need to focus, somewhere between meeting 365 days of the year and meeting merely weeks in the spring and the fall is probably the right balance in terms of setting guidelines and standards as A3 puts it together.

My concern in talking about the guidelines and standards of A3 is that if we're going to make progress in the emergency departments, A3 is saying that we have to have lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the position statement on emergency department overcrowding. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talked about a standard set in Britain of four hours. After four hours you're either treated and released or you're moved into a bed.

It is impossible, Mr. Chair, at this time to have those standards for lengths of stay because we have a bed shortage. Actually, we don't have a bed shortage; we have a shortage of staffed beds. Therefore, people wait hours and hours and sometimes days on gurneys in hallways, in what had been visiting rooms. We triple-bunk people because we don't have standards. This is what A3 is all about. I'm hoping the hon. Minister of Education, the House leader, is seeing how focused I am on the need to improve the emergency circumstances in this province.

Mr. Chairman, the problem was exacerbated particularly in Calgary when we lost three of our hospitals. Half of our hospitals went. In order to improve where we're at, we need to make sure that when the southeast hospital finally comes online, at close to three times the original expense because of the delay associated with it, we have the people in place who can provide the support both in the emergency departments and throughout the hospital.

In terms of dealing with emergencies and setting standards and guidelines, as A3 proposes, there is concern about the number of mental health beds in the southeast hospital that were cut by this government. We've seen the problems associated with Caritas: the fact that the government didn't draw up a financial contract, the fact that construction of the facility was supposed to allow for an opening in May and now they're suggesting it's going to open in January. Mr. Chair, whether it's guidelines in the emergency department or standards for construction that will relieve the pressures in the emergency departments, major improvements have to be made. A3 talks about guidelines. It talks about what should be done. It provides directions. It indicates the importance of setting standards. If those standards existed, we wouldn't be here at 6:15 in the

morning, whether you call it in parliamentary time, which doesn't seem to have a bearing on reality, on Wednesday, the 24th, or Thursday, the 25th.

Mr. Chair, there is an emergency, and I do understand and I do appreciate the Minister of Education's comments about staying focused. Again, in order to stay focused, we have to be able to have the time to have the types of debates necessary. If this Legislature ends on December 2 despite the best efforts of individuals through the amendment process such as A3 to bring forward suggestions, to have the fulsome debate, to quote the hon. House leader, then there has to be a sufficient time provision.

The hon. House leader, who is very familiar with the rules because of his participation in this process over many years of having been chosen by his constituents, I am sure recognizes the shortcomings of not only what's happening in emergency departments but the shortcomings of what's happening in Parliament. We have SO 30s, Mr. Chair. That's our equivalent of an emergency. But last week, for example, when we were having that SO 30, the government members pulled the plug at 4:30 in the afternoon.

I am glad that the government members have shown sufficient tolerance to this point not to invoke closure or, as the hon. member, the House leader, mentioned, time allocation. At the point when that shoe falls or is dropped, then democracy is effectively shut down. The opportunity to debate, whether it's A3 or A16, will have been lost. That's why the people have stood up throughout the nights of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, throughout the mornings of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, to attempt to improve the legislation through the process that is permitted, amending.

Mr. Chair, there is still hope for democracy in Alberta if we can engage the population that to date has become less and less involved in the process. There is hope. There was an over 53 per cent turnout in the municipal election in Calgary. There was a similar improvement in the municipal turnout in Edmonton. Democracy is not dead, but if we don't allow the time for democracy to take place through the amendment process, then I not only fear for the emergency crisis that is occurring in the shortchanged hospitals across this province, but I fear for the emergency and the well-being of the individuals in this House, who on many occasions after the next election, whenever it occurs, will not be here, some by choice because they feel that they have contributed to the best of their ability, and some by the voters' wish that they not return to this House.

Regardless, Mr. Chair, A3 calls our attention to the necessity of establishing guiding principles, the essential nature of having standards in emergency care, ones that are substantive, ones that are upheld, ones that can provide the type of health care Albertans should be receiving.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

6:20

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure once again to rise and discuss amendment A3 and the reasons why we are discussing this into the wee hours in the morning – and I appreciated the comments by the House Leader – and the importance of it. The opposition does have very limited tools, and those tools are open debate in Committee of the Whole as well as being able to put amendments forward. There's been some discussion that perhaps a person should be putting through a bunch of amendments to be looking more productive. I think that our stance is that there are some critical amendments that could possibly help the bills, but the truth of the matter is that Bill 17, Bill 24, Bill 29, in many in the opposition's opinion, should never leave this committee. They're not worthy to be passed as bills. I talked earlier about: only one

thing worse than no law and no bill, and that's a bad bill or a bad law.

This Health Act is a dilemma that this government is in. They spent many months going around. I went and participated in some of their open houses and the process they were going through to try and find out. It's interesting to me that they would spend so much time opening up and having people come and have a discussion and have breakout groups on what's important when the real problem is the administration and how we're running the process in our hospitals. Like I say, I went and participated in those, that we were going to come up with a new Alberta Health Services that was all of a sudden enlightened. We had this great opportunity to make a wonderful health care system because we went on tour for four months and listened to the people of Alberta.

The fact of the matter, as has been brought up here many times in the last – I don't know – 15 hours is that we have an awful lot of talent here in the province. We had a CEO of Alberta Health Services that on the 24th – I'm confused, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity; I don't have my calendar in front of me – was let go. In the press release they said that they'd come to an agreement. We don't know what the details of that agreement are, but I have a grievance that I think will come to fruition that we'll end up paying \$600,000, \$700,000 to send an individual down under rather than utilize him for what his real expertise was, and that was to actually go in to analyze hospitals, to analyze health care facilities, to know what the actual costs are of running those facilities, and to know a group like HRC, that stepped up to try and improve the quality of care for people needing to get hips and knees, or what we were paying to get them done in the hospital. There was no measurement taken, nothing concrete.

You know, in the reports that came in, it was funny. One of the hospitals here in Edmonton said: well, we just threw numbers together; we didn't think it was serious. The serious nature of our health care system is that there's way too much taken for granted. There's not enough accountability. Here on amendment A3 what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is trying to do is bring in some accountability. I would be the last one in this House, I believe, to say: oh, yes, if we pass this and all the words in it, all of a sudden things are going to be okay.

You mentioned the fact that all they do is change the target. If they put it in there, we'll be back in, and maybe they'd have to sit more days because they'd realize, "Oh, oh; we've got a problem here; we've got to change this bill" and reconvene.

There's a real lack of accountability. There's a lack of understanding how operations work. This government took the attitude – and, again, it was interesting to hear them speak about how the superboard came about. The Energy minister walked into caucus, basically, and told a few people as he was going in: "We're going to have ourselves a superboard. We're going to get rid of the nine boards. We're going to centralize them into one. We're going to put all these individuals on there. Well, actually, there's not too many that know a lot about health care, but these are really good people. They're our friends. We can trust them to carry out our bidding. We don't need to worry about it."

It was kind of interesting. What was the year? Was it 2001 when we were able to elect one-third of our 17 boards that they had shrunk down to and had appointed originally?

Mr. Chase: Less than nine months.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. In nine months they had an uprising. "Oh, my goodness. Elected people. We can't count on them to carry out our bidding. They challenge us. They want answers. They have

different priorities than the top-down direction.” They tried for years to get control of the board and the people through more and more centralization, and it has failed. It has failed everywhere in the world that has ever tried to centralize power and authority, saying: if we just have that benevolent dictator at the top, we are going to have utopia; everything is going to work well.

At this point my pity falls on the new temporary CEO for Alberta Health Services. It kind of sounds to me like being called to be a Speaker in the 1600s. Perhaps they’re dragged in there, kicking and screaming: “No, not me. I don’t want to be number 9.” Right now we’re at number 2 or 3. How many people are going to have their heads roll, their jobs, careers gone before this government is going to come to its senses and realize that centralized health care decision-making, with the dollars and allocating those dollars, doesn’t work?

This bill amendment, though, is being brought forward by an emergency doctor who feels that this would make great movement forward. I, like many in this House, question – this is just a piece of paper that’s written on – how long they will actually leave these documents here before they have to amend them or change them. I certainly understand why they don’t want to legislate them. They wouldn’t be able to just do it by order in council. They can’t just snap their fingers and tell some bureaucrats: “We need to change these regulations. We need to go from four hours at 95 per cent to six hours at 65 per cent.”

These are the shenanigans that continue to go on. They’re not serious about it. If they were serious, they’d be open, and they’d be honest. We’d have those emergency room reports. People would be informed, and we would change that. If they were serious and honest, we would have a vertically integrated system. You’d have someone in charge to say: “You know what? We’ve got an extra 15 people who came in tonight. We need to call in two more doctors. We need to call in 10 more nurses. We need to open up unit 34, that has 24 beds. We only need 15.” Those are the types of things that could be done.

If we were to change the way the funding works – right now the person that’s supposedly put in charge of a hospital is given an allotted amount of money and basically told: you know, if you have money left over at the end of the year, we’ll give you a bonus. So they bring in accountants and actuaries, and they’ll say: well, what we can afford to do is to operate on four people a day even though there’s a capacity for 12, and that way we’ll still have money.

When I was running in the by-election earlier that spring of 2009, the podiatrists had used up their allocated amount of money, and they were told for I think it was six weeks in Calgary that they weren’t to operate, that they’d have to shut down the facilities even though there were people waiting that needed it. We have a standard here: harm to patients, unnecessary delays, and waste of our resources. We had our resources sitting idle. We had unnecessary waste because we had doctors that were here in the province that weren’t allowed to operate. We had the operating rooms there, but they weren’t allowed to do it. Why? Because their allocated dollars had been used up. I don’t know how they messed up so much that they weren’t managing it. Obviously, the doctors were able to do more operations than they were keeping track of.

6:30

We’re in a real dilemma here. Some hon. members say that we shouldn’t be discussing this, that we should just let it pass. I don’t feel I’d be doing my duty if I was to let such a bill of no consequence pass through this House. As I mentioned earlier, there are at least three bills that should not pass this House. When the fall session ends, these bills should die. Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act,

is just paper that these guys can wave like Chamberlain. “Look what we’ve done. Look what our promise is. We’ve got a health charter. We’ve got an ombudsman.” There they are, waving that to say that we’ve got victory now; we’ve passed this through.

The Chair: Hon. member, I wish to draw your attention to amendment A3. Focus on that.

Mr. Hinman: I thought that I was actually talking on that. I’ll try and refocus a little bit so that there’s no question. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have these bills that are before us, and the question is: what accountability is in there? What does the health charter produce for us? Is it going to give us standards for the lengths of stay? The former health minister and the Deputy Premier talked about doctors and how, you know, they’re going to perform that. I don’t dispute what he said. You know what? Every doctor swears that Hippocratic oath, that there is going to be no unnecessary death, that there’s going to be no unnecessary harm to patients. It’s shameful to think that we even need to write it down. That in itself means that we’re failing because if we were doing these things, we wouldn’t be writing them down; it would be accomplished. Actions speak louder than words.

I talked about it, and again the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was very eloquent with his words, a very knowledgeable, wonderful individual. But what good are the words or the ideas when the doctors are handcuffed, when the administration is handcuffed, and they can’t move people up to a bed? So we want to legislate it and think that it’s going to happen? I have to be a skeptic at this point. Like I say, the only tool that’s left is to say that these bills do not deserve to be passed, so the parliamentary procedure that we go through is that we talk. It would give me great pleasure for this House to come to an end in the fall and have those three bills die on the Order Paper and not go forward.

Mr. Chair, that is the reason why we need to keep debating these, because we’re not getting any movement forward. Until we have something where the government members stand up and get on record and say, “We need to do this; this is what we’re going to do,” then the confidence of the opposition is – because they don’t like to be caught in an absolute hypocritical position of standing up and speaking in favour of a bill and then not voting for it. They think that they’re cute and egg us on: oh, let us vote on it. My goodness. You’d think that we’d been up for 46 hours if we’re going to buy into that.

No. They don’t get up. They don’t speak on these bills. They sit there. It’s been nice that we’ve had a little engagement every now and then, every few hours, that it would scratch their conscience and they’d say: well, we’ll speak a little bit on it or share a few thoughts. But these bills . . . [interjection] I’d be happy to.

The Chair: Hon. member, I would like to draw your attention to amendment A3.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Amendment A3, subsection (d): “Set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the ‘Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding’.”

It was interesting to hear the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark back in 2007, where he had to talk to Heather Smith, where he talked to all of the different people, saying: “Look, we’re at 140 per cent down here at emergency. We need you to share some of the load.” It goes back to what I talk about: rules and regulated to death, that, no, it’s okay to back people up in emergency rooms, but we can’t do it upstairs, or we can’t dilute the number of nurses for beds that are

occupied. It's okay for someone to die in the emergency room with a heart attack, but we're not going to move that through. It just talks about the broken system that does literally exist. It's just hard to imagine unless you're sitting there day in and day out.

I've been to the emergency room. I've taken my children there and have been very fortunate, haven't had to wait an overly long time. But the worst time that I had was with my grandmother, who had fallen down, and I was with her way into the night. I thought she was going to be okay. Mr. Chair, she died, internal bleeding. I regret not staying the night with her. She did get moved up, but again the diagnosis wasn't there. They were doing the best they could.

What was really sad about that night, while I sat in there with my grandmother, was that the person who kept coming in – and I was there a couple of hours before I realized what it was – was a volunteer. “Is there anything we can do? Can we help you?” She did the best she could. Finally, I asked: “Is the doctor coming? Who is going to do this? Who is going to be here? What's your position?” She said, “Oh, I'm the volunteer. I only work until 11 o'clock at night, and then I'm off.”

I think that most all of us in here have some horror stories of what goes on in our health care system, yet the question is: as we look around, do we have some other ones that we want to emulate, to look at? That's what our duty is, to look around the world and see those places where they're working. Again, it's sad to hear the Premier mock the idea of looking over to Europe, saying: oh, it's a two-tier European system. I doubt the Premier has even looked at it. Some PR person is filling him with some cute little lines, saying: this is what you need to say, Mr. Premier, when they talk about that; the Wildrose are going to cut \$1.4 billion. Is he clueless, that he doesn't ever listen to prioritizing? One has to ask that question with the remarks.

He doesn't spend a lot of time in here. I know he's busy, but, man, he and his health minister should maybe catch up a little bit to realize what's going on and wake up and put on some new clothes rather than having all of his little minions say: the emperor has no clothes. It's pathetic on many levels, and that's why we're here debating Bill 17 all night. Why? Because it isn't worthy of passing through this House. Those people over there maybe feel it is, but it isn't.

We've got an amendment that's been brought forward by an emergency room doctor that is really frustrated. He was so frustrated. He was told: “You can make a difference. We can change things. Stop your practice. Get elected. Come join us, and we'll do it.” Two and a half years he bit his tongue. He worked and talked himself into a tizzy, no doubt, to say: this is what we need to do, and we haven't done it. This government is fixated. I listened to the Premier and I listened to the health minister at 6:15, 6:30 this evening say, “No, our vision is to have the best health care” – I think they said in the world; I don't remember now – “and the way we do that, our vision, is one superboard.” Well, that vision is a nightmare. It's a nightmare for people who go into the ER. It's a nightmare for the front-line workers. That vision is eventually going to evaporate and be gone. The question is: how many people are going to suffer? What are the standards that they're going to put in place?

I mean, they come up with this protocol after bringing a hundred people together and say: oh, we've got great news, that after eight hours that will be a trigger where we can open up beds. Why eight hours? We questioned this government on how many empty beds were in current facilities. Do an audit. Do they do that? No. They're not taking anything seriously on this, yet when the crisis finally came, when the emergency room doctor couldn't bite it anymore, 360 beds were answered the next day.

The Chair: On my list, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

6:40

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm going to very briefly talk about unnecessary delays. Guy Smith, the head of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees; Heather Smith, the head of the United Nurses association; Elisabeth Ballerman, the head of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta; Dr. Louis Francescutti, who is an Edmonton emergency doctor and is currently the chair of the physicians and surgeons association of Canada – his talents were recognized, and he now represents medical standards throughout the province – have all spoken about staffing and the need to prevent unnecessary delays. What has happened in the province has been the equivalent of a train starting up, sort of a jerking movement: laying off staff at great price, rehiring.

Not only does that point to unnecessary delays; it also points to unnecessary wastes of resources. I would suggest, for example, that blowing up the General hospital without having a replacement was an unnecessary waste of resources; selling off the Holy Cross hospital for approximately \$5 million when it had just undergone \$32 million of upgrading; the delay in the building of the southeast hospital, which should have been built before the General was decommissioned. Forget decommissioned. Blown up.

Mr. Chair, as the hon. House leader pointed out, A3 is at the crux of the matter. If the government rejects the guidelines and the standards that are put forward in amendment A3, then there isn't a whole lot of hope for the process of moving on. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, an emergency physician whose value is no longer deemed sufficient to remain within the government, has pointed out, there is an emergency crisis. For Bill 17 to actually have impact on that part of the crisis in health care in this province, A3 needs to be passed.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, in order to move debate along, I would like to have the vote recorded on A3. If the government supports it, then there's a sense that progress has been made, that the hours that have been spent tonight have been of value, that the point has been made, and we can move further on. So I would like to call the question on A3. [interjection] Apparently, my wires are somewhat crossed here.

It would be premature for me to shortcut the necessary debate on this significant motion that's at the heart. I thought, in the name of progress, that we could move farther, but it's obvious that this is of such an important nature that I would not want to cut out, for example, the other doctor in the House, who has raised similar concerns throughout his time since being first elected on November 22, 2004. I apologize, Mr. Chair, for providing potential false hope for closure. The debate must go on, and therefore I'll take my chair.

The Chair: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Obviously, the most significant issue that we have faced this session is the health care bill and emergency services, the crisis in emergency departments. It's hard to overstate something that has become so dysfunctional and so serious in its impact both on patients and on professionals in the system, a system that is completely overtaxed, that has no surge capacity to deal with the current situation that we're in, with the possible flu season impending, potentially major accidents, that will put extra demands on the system.

Now before us is an amendment that is simply trying to say to people that what we have done so far has not worked. Let us hold ourselves accountable by making specific timed amendment accountabilities, timelines, that have been accepted elsewhere in the world with great effect. I've specifically reviewed the United

Kingdom. They have eliminated their long wait times in emergency departments in the U.K. by legislating wait times, and we can't find any court cases, such as the minister of health would suggest, that might follow this kind of very specific expectation. I'm not sure what the barrier is here to improving the health system.

This is only one small dimension, of course, of what's needed in a health care system that is very complex, very large and that as a result of the former health minister's machinations with the system has resulted in such chaos and such confusion, mixed messages, changes in orders between the Health Services Board and the health minister. There are a tremendous number of areas one could look at for where the problem is, but fundamentally it's a reorganization that has not taken into consideration the vital regional differences and the need for prompt, timely, flexible action in different parts of the province.

As we've said, the various changes that have been attempted to relieve the pressure on emergency departments haven't worked: trying to beef up staffing, trying to extend the number of long-term care beds to relieve pressure on in-hospital beds, the recognition that the elimination of almost 50 per cent of our hospital beds over the last 15 years has resulted in a tremendous backlog of challenges. That in combination with a decline in primary care services, from prevention programs to early intervention programs to home care services to diagnostic services, chronic care management right through to long-term care and palliative care, rehabilitation care, all added to a system that is simply not providing the services that Albertans need. The question before us is whether or not we have the political fortitude to admit that we have done this in a very poor way and that we need to rethink the whole structure of the system, that we need to put in place early intervention measures that will help us to get back on track in our emergency departments.

As has been said by a number of physicians in this province, people are dying from preventable causes in the usual circumstances that we would have found ourselves in. Staff are having to take leave because of stress and overwork. We have professionals leaving the province, retiring early because of the unfortunate work culture that has evolved out of this, a culture of frustration and burnout. We now see an administration that is back on its heels, having lost their CEO, or the scapegoat of their CEO, and that is again unwilling to take responsibility for the chaos in the system, board members who no longer have confidence in this government and its ability to maintain a clear line of authority, clear jurisdiction between health ministry and Health Services Board. Clearly, this is not a recipe for an improved situation as we head into some of the most difficult times in our year in terms of demands on the health care system.

When I look at this amendment, it's bold; it's new for Canada. It's not new elsewhere in the world, but it brings to the fore the key elements of what is needed to make the emergency department work more effectively and more efficiently. It would give a sense of hope to the front-line workers, that are looking for some sense of understanding the system and a willingness by this government to hold themselves accountable. That's fundamentally, of course, where the buck needs to stop.

6:50

No CEO could deliver in an organization with an ambiguous mandate such as he's been given. There's no question that the quality, the access, and even the efficient spending by this government have diminished since this new system was put in place. It's clearly because of a number of factors, not least of which is that a centrally managed organization of 90,000 people with an array of services across the province simply cannot manage to deliver the same services that it's managing. A budget, standards, policies,

statistical gathering, monitoring, enforcement of those standards: we simply cannot expect a single board to do all this and know what's happening in every part of the province in every region and adjust to some of the pressures and unique circumstances, demography, and needs of those areas.

I mean, from top to bottom we need to rethink where we're going. With a two-year time frame since this was put in place and progressive problems in the system and no improvement in emergency wait times, one has to say, surely, that throwing more money at this situation is not an answer. The kind of creative alternative that is being presented here is to legislate wait times and ensure that not only the emergency personnel but the administrators in the different institutions and the Health Services Board and the minister can clearly be held accountable if we do not meet those. Everyone along the line begins to see the connection between the emergency department and the broader health care system.

It all has to work together if the pressure on emergency departments is going to be relieved. If we don't have the prevention programs and early intervention programs, we're going to see people get into trouble and they're going to end up, especially after hours, in emergency departments. If we don't extend the hours of walk-in clinics and physician offices, if we don't expand the staffing across the board and deal with some of the backlog, if we don't maintain people in a healthy, active way in their homes, in their communities, this is going to end up in emergency departments.

When we put timelines on emergency department wait times, that's when we start to see people look at the whole system and say: "We simply can't hire more emergency doctors. That's not the solution. The solution is to reduce the demand on the emergency department." How do you do that? You begin by prevention. You begin with primary care. You begin by ensuring that there are home-care services in every community, a very cost-effective investment that this government has only recently embraced. I mean, the solutions are many and varied. The whole system needs to be addressed, and this is only one element, obviously. This is only one element of what is needed.

Surely we can come to a decision, make a bold decision, pass this amendment, try something new and in the interim begin to make a phased transition from a single management board to zonal or regional, whatever you want to call them, five or more regional delivery systems, where they can be closer to the action, where they can see the local conditions, where they can recognize the pressure points, the staffing needs and address them in a very timely way, instead of the frustrating, "Wait and see," and finally, "Don't even express yourself," in this health care system. You don't express yourself in the health care system because, number one, it takes so long to get an answer and, number two, you risk your job if you challenge the system as it is.

Fundamentally that's what the health professionals that I've talked to are saying: we do not believe in the structure and function of the health system. What we see is a tremendous demoralization across the board in our health professionals, and they're simply not performing because they don't believe in the system that is in existence today. Surely we have to listen to and work with the professionals working in the system.

This amendment would go a long way in sending a message to the health professionals: "We will hold ourselves accountable. We as the authors of governance and policy in this province, we as the custodians of the public well-being, we as the planners for a health care system that's healthy and sustainable, both for professionals and for patients, will take this on and will listen to what patients and professionals are saying and make the necessary changes, the changes that are going to put in place a set of accountability

measures to which not only the professionals but the politicians can be held accountable.”

We are forced, then, to work together to make these timelines work. We are forced to look at the barrier points in the system and the failures that the system has created and, I would say, the inevitability of failure without structural change and without role and responsibility change.

A single board of 14 men and women cannot manage a 90,000-person organization. They simply don't have the flexibility, the time, the knowledge, especially when so few of the board have a medical background. This is not General Motors. This is not producing widgets. This is a complex, interconnected array of human services that have to do much more with understanding how and why people do what they do and a very nuanced recognition that respects individuals, that respects the processes of decision-making at the local level and that honours the commitment that these health professionals have made to a lifetime of caregiving. I know there are some in this House who have a background in health services, and I think they understand that. I hope they can be free to vote with their conscience on this.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has put himself on the line. He has put his neck on the line, and he has opened his heart to Albertans. He has challenged the very powers that be in this province, with their lack of understanding, their lack of clear goals, their lack of commitment to the long-term well-being of the health care system. This is not about short-term fixes. This amendment is part of what would be a long-term commitment to establishing benchmarks all across the system. They don't all have to be legislated, but wait times at the very front end, where the canary in the mine shaft is saying that things are in danger, that we are in danger of a meltdown in this health care system: these kind of measures would avoid this kind of brinkmanship, this pushing us to the edge of what could be a most terrible impact in an overtaxed system, with progressive demoralization of professionals, loss of confidence of the public, and a system that has become untenable for most Albertans.

The 233 stories from the emergency medicine practitioners was one hospital in one month. We have no sense of just how close and how staggering the crisis is. One major disaster, a major epidemic will push this system into chaos. We'll have a breakdown of health professionals. We'll have a breakdown and lawsuits related to poor outcomes and preventable deaths. We simply cannot take this seriously enough. We cannot overstate the seriousness of this issue. When confidence is gone, what is there? When trust is gone, what is there in terms of the possibility of solving problems, small or large, in our health care system?

Very clearly, Mr. Chairman, we have to move on this. We have to support this amendment from a man who has worked in the system, who has experienced all kinds of emergency delivery systems across the world and, based on our research, is moving an amendment that stands to move us to the next level, at least, of accountability, standard setting, and confidence building in the system.

I'm very hopeful that the members in the House will look at this at its face value, look at the seriousness of the situation that we're in, the reason why we're still here today, after a full night of debate, and the reason why this man from Edmonton-Meadowlark has captured the imagination of Albertans in his willingness to stand up and say: the emperor has no clothes.

7:00

This government has no expertise in managing a health care

system this complex. It is not going to work. It is not going to work with this particular arrangement. We have to change the system. There can be no shocks to the system. That's very clear. We cannot cope with major, major change rapidly. It has to be very thoughtful, very planned, very orderly. Over the next one to two years we need to begin to look at a more effective, more thoughtfully managed system, where patients come first, capacity comes first.

The ability to manage disasters has to be at the forefront of everything we're planning. That means taking the pressure off emergency departments in hospitals. I've discussed, as many people have, the range of issues that have to change, but most fundamentally we have to recognize in the emergency department that if we are not doing things to state of the art, to the very best that is happening in the world, then we are not contributing to the kind of outcomes that we say we want and our patients deserve.

Mr. Chairman, I think, I'd just admonish people in the House to put this aside as a partisan issue. This is not a partisan issue. This is a human rights issue. It's a humanity issue. It's an efficiency measure, you could call it. It's a deliverable that we can put in place to build confidence, not only in patients but in professionals, that we have some sense of the seriousness of where we are and have some commitment to making some tough choices to change that.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to make some remarks on amendment A3. This will be my first opportunity to be on the record with regard to the amendment, and having been here throughout the evening with other colleagues, I must say that I think I appreciate most the perspective that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has brought to this debate in the last few minutes.

While I can't agree with the hon. leader that this amendment should pass and that, you know, a key part of the solution to this is to in fact legislate waiting times as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, what I can agree very wholeheartedly with the hon. leader and with others who have raised, I think, similar points throughout the course of the debate is that we need to be looking at the underlying causes that result in some of the waiting times we have seen in emergency rooms in this province. In fact, we're seeing similar times across the country.

I guess I'll just sort of deal, first, with the question of the amendment as proposed. I guess for me, Mr. Chair, I would have to say that given all of the factors that have been discussed in the last 24 hours, the simple passage of this amendment – and I think most members would agree – is not going to result in any immediate change in the issues in our emergency rooms across the province. While it is, perhaps, a noble idea and, certainly, is fundamental to a high-performing health care system that appropriate benchmarks exist, that we measure and we continuously monitor our performance against those benchmarks and, I would say, most importantly, that we take the opportunity to learn from that measurement and create a system that's focused on continuous improvement, putting those sorts of benchmarks in legislation is not the way to go.

There are a number of reasons for that, I think, that have been enumerated over the last little while. One, of course, is that if we accept the notion that we should legislate maximum waiting times in our emergency rooms, no doubt the question will immediately arise as to why this House would not legislate similar benchmarks with respect to elective surgical procedures, with respect to access to family physicians, with respect to a whole lot of other things in our health care system that Albertans are concerned about.

What I think, as I said, we can agree on, and I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition did an excellent job of illustrating, is that the real thing that will drive improvement in any health care system has less to do with technology and equipment. In fact, it has to do with people who deliver health care and with cultural factors within the health care system that create an environment where people do feel free to speak about their concerns, where front-line health professionals are actively engaged in discussion and decision-making because in many cases they're best suited to provide that advice, where, as I said, we use benchmarks, we monitor performance, and we focus on our waiting time targets, not as a static target to be enshrined in legislation in perpetuity but as a target that we hopefully can improve and reduce over time so that people are waiting less. I think it's very important to recognize that as much as we might recognize the spirit of the amendment that has been proposed, it certainly is not a solution, Mr. Chair, in and of itself.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition also talked about a couple of other things that I'd like to elaborate on. I think it's true that when you look at most health care systems around the world, there are really three sectors in the health system that drive waiting times in emergency rooms. If we look at those waiting times in ERs as a snapshot of what is going on in the larger system, at least in Alberta, I think we can say that we can look to three areas in terms of where the drivers are.

The first is the area of primary care. As we know, Mr. Chair, primary care just basically refers to the front door of the health care system. Traditionally for most of us that has been through a family physician. Increasingly today it is through other practitioners – nurse practitioners, pharmacists, and others – working as a team, serving the needs in a particular community. That is a very important issue. We spend a lot of time in this House talking about family physicians as one area of need.

Again, going back to the amendment and following through on my argument here that the simple legislation of these waiting times won't change anything, what I think we need to be doing in primary care is capitalizing on the opportunities that we have with primary care networks. This is a highly successful model. There has been research. There is more evaluation under way now about the model and its effectiveness in reducing the prevalence of chronic disease and proactively helping manage population health by pulling people in for screening, screening that is appropriate to their age and to their health condition. Most importantly, and I think we can put it fairly this way, is having a key priority of the health system being to give our citizens a home within that system. It is very difficult, Mr. Chair, to talk about a system that's focused on the needs of patients and families and their communities if we, in fact, don't take the necessary steps to provide them a home within that system.

The success of our primary care networks, which is a result of collaboration between the Alberta Medical Association, the health regions, represented by our health professionals, particularly physicians and nurses and pharmacists, and the government, has created a situation today where we have 38 primary care networks serving upwards of 2 and a half million Albertans. So it is a realistic goal in terms of looking at this amendment, Mr. Chair, to say that the solution is not to legislate an artificial benchmark, that we may or may not be able to deliver on today, but to look at opportunities in primary care as a key part of reducing those waiting times and, in fact, improving the health status of our own people over time, improving the health status of the next generation. So that would be the one area that drives the waiting times.

The second I'd point to – and this has also been referred to in the debate – is the area of continuing care. A number of hon. members, including the Leader of the Opposition, have talked in this House

about the need to look at continuing care not as a strict series of program types, bed types, and rigid eligibility criteria that govern what needs can be met by citizens who are occupying those facilities but looking at, in fact, continuing care as a continuum of services from independent living and home care all the way through to long-term care, services provided by auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes.

7:10

In fact, again to go back to the amendment, Mr. Chair, just in terms of developing the argument that this initiative to legislate ER wait times is not the answer, I think the bigger discussion – and it has been raised in the House – is to look at how we increase flexibility and how our continuing care system can become more responsive to meet the needs of people where they are, to truly support the notion of aging in place, that has been put forward by this government and that we are working very hard to make possible.

The third area that's a key driver – again, it's not an area that will benefit from the simple passage of this amendment – is the question of mental health services across the province. I think I mentioned in the emergency debate last week, Mr. Chair, that we are now seeing more and more mental health professionals actually practicing in primary care networks, providing services at the coal face, so to speak, of the health care system, providing services in the community, in many cases identifying people who perhaps are at risk of developing a chronic mental illness such as schizophrenia, providing that early intervention and support without which the individual may have been required to receive services in an institutional setting.

That's my argument, Mr. Chair, with respect to the real issues that drive emergency room wait times and why we should be focused on those rather than the bill amendment.

The second area that I just wanted to pick up on briefly – again, it was referred to by the hon. Leader of the Opposition – is what I'll call the question of the culture that we build in our health care system. The mover of this amendment, Mr. Chair, is well known to us as someone who has made a conscious decision to speak out on behalf of his patients and on behalf of other health professionals. I don't think that there is anyone in this House that would suggest for a second that he should not do that. His role as a member of this Assembly offers an important opportunity for him to do that, and he should be encouraged to make use of it. But many of the concerns that he and others have raised really point to the bigger question of the attention that we need to put on building a positive, open, and transparent culture in our health system, particularly with respect to front-line health professionals.

When we talk about the health system and the decisions that have been made around the structure of the system, I think we have to be very careful, Mr. Chair, particularly in terms of this amendment, not to simply decide that we as a House should once again embark on a discussion about the entire reinvention of the publicly funded health care system. I don't think that's what my constituents want, and I don't think that's what most Albertans want. In fact, I think that would be a very destabilizing discussion for this House to embark on. Regardless of the structure, what I think we can point to and the question that we should be asking is: what opportunities and are there sufficient opportunities that physicians and other health care providers have to make constructive comments and to provide advice and to actually participate in the design, the operation, and the improvement of the particular programs that we offer in our health care system? That, Mr. Chair, is a question of leadership that is provided by those who are charged with managing the health care system on a day-to-day basis. It is also a question of policy leadership that is offered not only by the government but by all members of this House as we debate health care issues and as we

discuss future directions like those that are laid out in the Putting People First report and the Alberta Health Act and as we talk about the vision for our health care system in the future and the very strong desire, I believe, on the part of Albertans to look much more broadly, beyond acute care, to look at things like end-of-life care, prevention, mental health.

For all of those reasons, Mr. Chair, I think it should become apparent that the focus of all of us, in fact our duty as legislators, is to focus on the underlying issues that really drive quality and access and improvement and sustainability in our health care system.

With absolutely no disrespect to any members here that have made comments, perhaps to the contrary, that carry a different perspective, my submission is that that is the obligation of all members of the House and, to look at recent events, particularly in the last two weeks, an opportunity to refocus ourselves on those questions. For it is, in fact, the philosophy and the commitment and the attitude that we bring and the principles, if I may say, that we apply to the decision-making, including the ideas that are enumerated in the health charter that's been proposed for Albertans, all of those things together, that will make for a substantive, constructive, and educational debate not only in this House but throughout the province.

I would conclude, Mr. Chair, by indicating that I am unable to support the amendment as proposed, but in many ways I dare say that despite – I was going to say the late hour – I guess, the early hour at this point, despite the amount of time that's been devoted to this amendment discussion in the House, I would suggest that it's not, in fact, in vain provided that we're prepared to look beyond something that is an easy opportunity to simply legislate waiting times and have an honest and fulsome discussion about the priorities in our health care system, about the opportunities for us to provide good leadership and to engender a full debate with the full participation of the professionals that deliver care. That should be, I think, our most important priority.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A3.

Mr. Hinman: It's the same amendment that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was speaking on. I will continue, and I'd like to ask questions on some of the comments that he made, that were illuminating. It's good to see the government members starting to engage in this and realizing that we have a crisis here and need to do something about it.

He talked a little bit about the importance. He mentioned one little item there, about reducing the needs, and he started to refer to and talk about primary care networks. There's no question that another area where we're failing in this province is proper care for the citizens of Alberta. To my understanding, if I remember right, the two big things that we deal with in the province that cost a lot of money are the heart and diabetes. These are two areas that need to be monitored. They need to have a primary care doctor and people to help them.

When we look at the outcome – I talked to a CEO of one of the former regions, a chief medical officer. He talked about the dilemma and how we really need to reduce the number of people coming in. Again, being the former MLA for Cardston-Taber-Warner, it was an interesting dilemma in Taber. They were a small hospital outside of Lethbridge, and they had this dilemma on what they were going to be allowed to run. Dr. Wedel and the doctors in Taber were one of the pilot projects for primary care networks, and their work was quite astounding, I think, and illuminating for this

government. They really had to push hard to say: just let us show you what we can do.

The reduction in emergency admittance went down tremendously when they started monitoring their patients, actually bringing them into their health care facility and educating them on how to monitor their asthma, how to monitor their diabetic condition, and to really educate those individuals in Taber on how to improve their health. It was a huge reduction in the actual needs of the emergency room. It's been a few years, but if my memory serves me right, I think the average number of emergency room visits for asthma patients there was 6.7 or something like that a year, and after they'd been in there and had educated these people, it was reduced to, I believe, 2.5 times per year that they were coming into the hospitals.

Something that we've done a lot of discussion on is the appropriate people being able to intervene at the appropriate time. We have a high volume of individuals that don't have a family doctor, that aren't able to get into a walk-in clinic, so they end up in the emergency room and, again, add to that pressure that we're not able to attend.

7:20

There are just so many aspects. If we take two steps back and are honest with ourselves, we say: well, what can we do? Look at the entire system right from the primary care network physician that has these individuals right up to the aging and realize that it's a cost all the way through that system and not look at it as: well, it's costing this much to have someone go through the emergency room.

There's another interesting statistic. Again, I haven't had the time to reread a lot of these articles, but I believe that an individual that does not have a primary care physician and is sick and ends up at the hospital in an emergency room to see a doctor there is six times more likely to be back in the emergency room to be treated than one who has a primary care network, who went into the emergency room because he couldn't get in to see his doctor and then was able to go back to his primary doctor. He is only two times as likely to show up at the hospital again whereas for someone who actually is able to get in to their primary care network and not have to go to the emergency room, one visit is usually what it is. The member wants to nod.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

We have a lot of expertise that is out there and pilot projects that have looked at these things. Again, what's discouraging for me is that this government has known these things for years and has failed to act on them. They've failed to implement those things that they know work, and I don't understand why they haven't implemented them in more areas. It's hard to understand, and because of that, what we've got to is an emergency room doctor who's brought forward this amendment to Bill 17 and said: "You know, back in 2007 I talked to this hon. member and to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and we were going to do something. We were going to implement them." They did take this Band-Aid by moving people upstairs and increasing the floor capacity to 3 to 5 per cent upstairs, but there was no follow-up. Back then they talked about needing to build new beds, and with this huge gap of two and a half, three years of silence it is astounding to think that they knew this and didn't act.

Now that we have someone who's broken ranks, spoken out, we were able to last Thursday, a week ago now, have an emergency debate, which was very short. Only five people, I think, were able to speak in that short timeline and on a 10-minute basis. It was an emergency debate that was extremely limited and didn't accomplish

anything. Now, though, a week later, we're really into the emergency debate and asking: what are we going to do about this?

Probably the thing, again, that bothers me the most because we'd asked the questions: let's do an audit. Let's know the capacity of our facilities and the utilization of our facilities, and let's bring it forward so that we can actually make some real decisions rather than just talk about values and principles and paper promises of what we're going to do. Again, they haven't come forth. They haven't done that audit. They're not looking at it.

Again, I say with some regret that this is something that Dr. Duckett should have been assigned to do, an audit on the system, and to come back and report to the health minister, saying that, well, this is what we've got. This is where we're starting, and this is where we can go if we go to those principles that we know: 85 per cent utilization, to have those beds where we don't have extended care individuals taking up acute-care beds. I mean, the list just goes on and on and on.

What's upsetting to Albertans and those who have been caught in this system is to find out in this last couple of weeks how much information this government had and did nothing because their attitude was that if we just bury it, if we threaten the health care workers that if they speak out, they're going to lose their jobs, they're going to be demoted, they're going to be decertified – that is truly sad. You have to ask: what type of world are we living in here?

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud kind of scorned at a few people that said that this is Third World health, and I have to agree with him in the fact that if you look at the technology, if you look at the capabilities, we're leading edge in the world. Why are we not leading edge when it comes to administration? Why do we have such great physicians, great facilities yet no administration that seems to be able to put it together?

What the doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark is proposing here is to say: "You know what? It's time we put some pressure on. You've known. You haven't done anything. You've failed the system." The bottom line is that, to compare it to credit, we've extended credit to you over and over and over again. We're going to garnishee your wages now. We're not going to allow it. We're going to go to the courts. We're going to garnishee your wages, and that's just the way it is.

What this is saying in this bill amendment is that this is what you have to do. If four hours kicks in, you have to move them. You have to respond. You have to be accountable. I can truly understand that we don't want to go there with legislation, but the fact is that we didn't pay our debt, we didn't meet our obligations, so now we have people demanding that. We've put ourselves in this conundrum because we didn't act. We didn't show any improvements. It's been a year, and actually the problem is going up.

Like I say, cross our fingers, do what we do, but when the flu season hits, is it going to be a mild one that we skim through, or is it going to be a major one and we get into a pandemic again? We don't know. We're not prepared for that. We can hope for the best, but that's a pretty sad system to be running on, a hope and a prayer that people aren't going to get too sick and show up in mass numbers at our emergency rooms.

Mr. Chair, the dilemma that we're faced with here is two and a half, three years, six years, nine years, going back to the '90s, of failing to do our job. For that reason the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark says: "You know what? It's time to put it on paper. It's time to hold some people accountable." Again, I'll agree that the chances of doing this and, actually, the government being held accountable and actually doing those things is remote, but what else do we do? I haven't heard anything else presented by this govern-

ment that gives me any faith that they're actually going to move on this other than that they're going to try and cover themselves and say: "Well, this is the reason. These are the problems."

Again, we keep hearing the Premier and the health minister talk about the golden arrow that's saving all of this: we've got five years of funding.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I'd just like to know how this relates to amendment A3. It's very interesting subject matter, but I'm missing the connection there.

Mr. Hinman: I can appreciate that, and I guess, you know, we've been here a long time, but I'm just kind of responding to the things from Edmonton-Rutherford. I guess I'd have to ask the same questions. At that time I didn't really know what he was speaking to in regard to this other than saying that we shouldn't have legislation, so I'm trying to say: "No, this is why we've got ourselves in this dilemma. This is why it's been presented." It is the big picture, Mr. Chair, but that's the dilemma that we're in.

The question is: do we pass this legislation? We hear from one government member after another saying: "No, we can't pass this. We can't legislate this." With all due respect, as he says – and this is an open debate, and we're trying to move forward on this – if we legislate this, then what do we have to do? Do we have to legislate cataract times, hip times, and everything else? No, actually, maybe if we got tied and did this and we learned our lesson, if we started having good credit and paying every month, people wouldn't demand those things because they'd actually start to see an improvement. That's what this is about.

7:30

Can we show that turning of the graph to say – you know what? – wait times are starting to go down? We're starting to have fewer people return because we're doing a better job in treating them when they come into our facilities. We're actually doing a better job in our primary care networks in ensuring that people don't need to come back multiple times because they didn't feel comfortable with the treatment they received.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

It's just critical that we come up with a solution. Like I say, we've been here all night, and I haven't heard any solutions from this government, from the health minister, the parliamentary assistant, saying: this is what we are going to do that's new. What they said, Mr. Chair, is: "Oh. What's going to save this is that five years of funding. Now they can go out and do it." So are they saying that for the last five years they always wondered every year whether that hospital was going to get any funding and might be closed down? That's ridiculous. The funding has always been there. They've run debts. They weren't able to balance the books, and they realized that – you know what? – the government has got to come up.

I remember Jack Davis really put the twist to them, I think, in 2008, when the election was coming. He spoke out 30 days before the election. I don't know – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre would probably remember better – but did he actually speak out during the election? Jack Davis from Calgary really put the screws on this government because he knew he had to hammer on them, and they ran it and said: yeah, we'll pay off the debt. I mean, to all of a sudden say that that's what was causing all of the administrative problems, that they didn't have the funding in place, the surety: that's the problem with all of our municipal governments; that's the

problem with our schools. It was not the problem and has never been the problem with our health care facilities. That isn't what it's been about, Mr. Chair.

The problem has been that those people working inside are extremely frustrated because they've talked and they've talked and they've talked and they've pointed out and they've shown the way, yet the administrative level continues to choke them, to hold them back, to handcuff them. Again, it went from a four-tier system to a seven-tier system, and it's elevated to such a height and such a disconnect that these hospitals are not even functioning anymore.

Again, Dr. Duckett backed off, but it seems to me that about eight months ago it was that there was no expenditure over a thousand dollars that didn't cross his desk. Just think of that, with \$15 billion how many things went through. No nurses were hired, no nothing, no changes. They were unable to move, and that caused the deterioration over the last 18 months to where we're in a critical stage here, to where the ER doctors say that again we've reached a new low. And 2007 was bad; now in 2010 we've gone lower. It's always amazing in life that we look at: oh, it can't get any worse than this. And it does.

We really need to take a serious look. This government needs to offer something more than what's put on the paper here, the promises saying: oh, we've seen the light. No. What happened was that the light was exposed, the door was opened on all of the information, all of the documents. All of the discussion has been opened up, and now the public is starting to become aware of it. So now the government is saying: oh, we're going to react. There's this miraculous 360 beds that appeared this last week, when we've been asking for the audits. Then they think they've done something wonderful. No. It's sick to think how many people sat, laid, stood, and waited in ER rooms because of the policy that the superboard has imposed on the hospitals and especially our emergency rooms. It's wrong. This government hasn't offered any solution, so once again what does the ER doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark say? He says that we've got to put it on paper. We've got to hold accountability.

We talked about striking section 10 from Bill 17 and the necessity of doing that so that people could be held accountable. It's interesting to me, you know, that this government hasn't learned with its gold-plated contracts, that it says: oh, we signed the contracts. The previous health minister, when he let them go – I mean, they couldn't sign up their friends and their acquaintances quickly enough to these positions with gold-plated salaries and then gold-plated severance packages. Maybe there's one thing that they could learn if they're hiring the next CEO, to actually not put in a bonus clause; put in a penalty clause. If, in fact, the ER times don't go down, if in fact we don't have better facilities, this administrator is going to lose 10 or 20 per cent of his wage. Say: "No. We expect you to do these things."

The Chair: Hon. member, I'd like to draw attention to amendment A3.

Mr. Hinman: A3. Yes. I'm sorry. We get segued into different directions here because this is such a big and important bill, but we should be talking on A3. I will try and go back.

A3, section (d): "set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency room departments of hospitals consistent with the 'Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding'." Why is it that this government has been changing the standards in order to tell Albertans, "Oh, we're now meeting the standards" when, like I say, it wasn't that it was 95 per cent at eight hours. All of a sudden it goes down to 65 per cent at six hours and reduced the standards. That's why he wants them written.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief. I, for one, don't see a requirement to use the entire 20-minute period each time I rise, but I wanted to make a couple of comments. First of all, thank you for the latitude that you have shown to the members of the House in terms of the importance of keeping the attention on the amendment, and I'll continue to endeavour to do that.

I was encouraged at the beginning of the remarks made by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore early on when he, you know, responded to my suggestion that perhaps at least part of our time would be better spent looking at some of the bigger picture system areas that we need to address that will ultimately result in lower emergency wait times. He talked about primary care networks, particularly the one in Taber, which, I would agree, is a model for the rest of the province in many ways. This is not a new initiative, Mr. Chair, as I'm sure the hon. member knows. We began developing primary care networks in 2003, and as I said before, we have 38 of these today serving over 2 and a half million Albertans.

I guess I just want to take this opportunity to observe, Mr. Chair, in terms of the whole debate on the amendment, that because of the latitude that you've shown the House and because of the, I think, upwards of almost 17 hours now that this amendment has been under debate, you've probably given all of us an opportunity to very, very thoroughly vet and discuss what we might respectively believe are the underlying causes for some of the wait times that we're seeing today, some of the initiatives that should be explored.

With reference to the comments of the hon. Government House Leader early this evening, I think, or at least I'm detecting, based on what I'm hearing, that there are probably a number of other amendments that have been contemplated by members opposite in some of these areas that with some appropriate time for debate in this Chamber might well contribute to the solution for the problems that you're so thoroughly reiterating for us. You know, one of those might be the audit that the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore refers to. There have been a number of other suggestions with respect to structure of the health care system.

I just wanted to express my interest, Mr. Chair, in actually having the opportunity to hear of some of these other amendments that have been perhaps hinted at but have yet to be disclosed by members opposite in the course of this debate. So I would put that, with respect, to the hon. members opposite. If you are of the view, as I think many of us are, that we have pretty much thoroughly debated any conceivable issue directly related or peripherally related to this amendment, I think we should take the opportunity to vote and to move on to other amendments that may be presented.

Thank you.

7:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure for me to rise and speak to the amendment in regard to the legislation of wait times. One feels a lot better when they've had a couple of hours of sleep and have the opportunity to get up and speak. Unfortunately, when you're the health critic, not much sleep is granted. You're keenly interested in what's happening in the Legislature, so instead of sleeping, you end up watching what's happening. You end up, believe it or not, talking until all hours of the morning to people who have been watching this and the health professionals, actually, who have been contacting us, wanting to get their two cents in.

I guess I said to one of the docs I talked to – I don't know what

time it was; 1 in the morning? I was quite surprised. I said to him: well, it's quite late. They're used to these hours, and the doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark can probably attest to that. They're keenly interested in what's happening. They're watching very much what's going on, and I would assume a lot of the health professionals that are watching at this particular period of time have never ever tuned in to what's happening in the Assembly. You just have to look at what's happening in the e-mails that are pouring in to us and the twitters that are coming in.

I have to first of all put on the record that I'm going to stand up, and I'm going to support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'm going to support that particular piece of legislation because as the health critic for the Wildrose and the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek people have clearly articulated that we're in a crisis situation. It's interesting when you start reading through *Hansard*. I'm trying to keep up with that. One member from the opposition says: no, we're in a crisis. Another says: no, we're not in a crisis. Then you have the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who is an emergency physician and, if I can get on the record, a highly respected emergency physician: yes, we are in a crisis.

I think that not only are we in a crisis; this is just the tip of the iceberg. It's amazing to me that neither the health minister nor the new parliamentary secretary from Edmonton-Rutherford is aware of that. Quite frankly, he travelled the province all summer, and if he was listening instead of talking, he would have quickly realized that not only do we have a crisis in ER; we have a crisis amongst our health care professionals. [interjections]

You know, Mr. Chair, it's interesting how you get the government talking away. I don't mind that because I do that also.

Mr. Liepert: Stick to policy and not personal slams.

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, it's the former minister of health . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, address the chair. You have the floor on amendment A3. Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: I am talking about A3.

. . . the current Minister of Energy, who was the previous minister of health and managed to screw that up quite royally, not only the Energy file but the health.

I'm pleased to stand up and talk about legislated wait times. I'm going to go back to *Hansard*, when the current minister of health, from Edmonton-Mill Creek, talked after the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark tabled the amendment. He's talking about: "When you put something into legislation, as [you] know, you are putting something into law." Well, gee, that's an intelligent conversation. "If you put something law and someone breaks it" – well, this is the same government that's put things into law and broke them anyhow. I go to, you know, our deficit accountability act. I mean, you put a piece of law; then you break that law. We're the ones, quite frankly, that are supposed to uphold the law.

Then he goes on to say: "Then there are going to [have to] be some repercussions for that. Now, that's okay. That's called accountability. But what you have to understand, though, is that you can't just put one aspect of health care under that microscope." I guess my answer to that is: why not? I mean, under the microscope right now, quite clearly, has been the emergency crisis that we're dealing with. If you don't think that is under a microscope, then you'd better wake up. Under this microscope all of a sudden we're having talks with emergency physicians, which is in my mind quite interesting because the same emergency physicians that we're talking to – I believe Dr. Parks sent a letter to the government in

2007 reiterating the problems with the emergency situation. Nothing was done. Nothing. I would expect that was under the Minister of Energy when he received that. Then it gets worse. It took a lot of courage, and quite frankly it took a lot of guts for a physician to speak out because of the fact that we've been told by numerous health care professionals about their fear with the code of conduct that came under Dr. Duckett.

So you go back and you think: this is not happening in 2010 in the province of Alberta, when the government continues to talk about this five-year funding and how it's going to change the system. The minister goes on to say:

You would have to put all aspects of health care under that microscope because then others would come in and say: well, what about legislating wait times for cancer care, for access for kidney care, for brain cancer, for lung cancer? And the list goes on.

Well, Mr. Chair, what I would like to say to the minister is: why don't you try a pilot project? The government is great at pilot projects. They have more pilot projects than you can count. So if you want to have one aspect of health care and you want to have one pilot project, then why don't we try and talk about a pilot project, legislate it, and say: okay; let's see if instead of talking about it, we can get it done. If the government is so committed to having this emergency care go from four to eight hours – I had a disturbing call from a senior yesterday who is a real sweetheart. She said to me: Heather, I talked to your mum, and I understand that you're in Edmonton, and when you come home, I need to talk to you. I said: well, why is that? She was having some problems with her heart. She went to emergency and waited seven hours. Now, this is heart problems, and here we are supposed to be having this service that is supposed to be giving us some time. And that seven-hour time was only before there was anything even started.

What you see here is that things aren't happening the way the government wants them to happen. You know, the minister goes on. Not only does he question where the wait times and legislation should be on cancer care, but then he talks about eye surgery. Well, that's shown that's worked after the monopoly and you start hearing from the eye surgeons and the long waits for seniors with cataract problems. I'm sure that's going to roll out as one of the other most successful things the government has done. I can tell you that that's another thing that's going to start biting them in the butt: when you start dealing with what's happening on that aspect of giving two companies a monopoly, and, yup, they can do the eye surgery.

I can tell you that the ophthalmologists that I'm hearing from are quite concerned. The patients they're dealing with I can't even imagine. They're getting me some numbers on the backlog of eye surgery that has gone from here to there and is backing up in the system with people that have got to have cataract surgery. You know, you can talk about whether it's a simple procedure or very complicated, but he seems to think that the eye surgery doesn't have to be legislated either.

7:50

Then he goes on to say, "Why not put into law wait times for access to continuing care or whatever type of care" you want? Well, I'm sure that we'll be dealing with all of these other health issues when you start having people and doctors come out and speak about this.

Now he says, "Now, while it[s] . . . easy to say that that could be done, it's just not practical . . . as new improvements are made, what are you going to do?" You know what, Mr. Chair? That's an interesting comment by a minister of health, when he says, "it's . . . not practical because as new improvements are made, what are you going to do?" Well, you're going to do exactly what we saw yesterday, when we had a piece of legislation that we were currently debating, and an amendment came forward.

If the minister felt that something necessarily had to be done and you needed to bring the House back and make amendments to a piece of legislation, I would suspect that every member in this Legislature would be back here. I mean, you see what's gone on across the country when there's been an emergency situation, whether it's a strike action or something, where the Legislature has been reconvened, and members show up. We all deeply care about what's happening in this province, and we all deeply care about the fact that health care obviously is a number one priority amongst Albertans; at least, it is for Calgary-Fish Creek.

I can tell you that Albertans and the health care professionals have made it very, very clear that there has been no improvement in the system. We continually hear the government talk about the new beds. I've gone to the dictionary, and I've looked up what "new beds" is. You know, while they open a new bed, they're always closing more beds behind.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford wanted to talk about what other amendments we're going to be tabling. I think that at the last count that we had, we had 10 of them. The more that they talk, the more amendments are coming forward in regard to what we think needs to be changed in the legislation.

While I think this bill may have had some good intentions, I can tell you that it's deeply flawed when you have a well-respected doctor come out and talk about guiding principles. It's an interesting amendment. He talks about:

include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur.

Then he goes on to:

set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

That's from emergency physicians.

We had this meeting – I believe it was last Friday – when they brought together 100 people to talk about that. They had given their idea of what they thought was important to improve the emergency situation. We will be interested to see if they table the minutes from that meeting because we had asked that particular question in question period.

Mr. Chair, you know, it's sad when you see what's happened over the last several days in regard to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Now we're hearing about what's happening to Dr. Duckett. We're also hearing that three people, possibly, from the board will also resign. It's shooting the messenger. The messenger that was shot was just delivering what they were being told to by the previous health minister, who's now the Minister of Energy. While it was unfortunate with the cookie situation – and I thought a great deal about that cookie situation – you wonder what kind of state the CEO was in to come out and talk about eating his cookie instead of about health care.

No one likes what's happening. No one trusts the government. We have the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford speak in debate in *Hansard*. He talked about the Canada Health Act amendment that we brought forward, and he didn't support that. He spoke the "we" instead of the "I," which I found quite interesting.

The minister has also spoken about the fact that legislating times hasn't worked because of the tie-up in the court system. Well, there won't be a tie-up in the court system if the expectations of what's in that particular legislation are met. You have to get a buy-in not only by the emergency physicians, but you have to get a buy-in by all of the health care professionals. They want to see a health care system that's fixed.

We have seniors in an acute-care situation that should be in what the Premier calls – I don't even know what he calls it. He has called

it several things, where he wants to see partners together, long-time couples together. Well, that's not happening. You can talk about it, but putting it into effect is very difficult. For example, what I see happening where my mom is staying. They're in assisted living. One partner isn't doing so well compared to another, so you have to move that particular partner into long-term care or a nursing home, and they're separated. It's a goal that has to be well thought out, well done, and researched to see what's going to happen.

Mr. Boutillier: Cindy, is it that cold over there?

Mrs. Forsyth: She's got her Grey Cup jacket on. I'm sure she bought that, too. It's interesting, Mr. Chair, when you talk about a critical situation that we're trying to discuss, and members on that side of the House are talking about the Grey Cup and bragging about their Grey Cup jackets. It's just mind boggling to me at this particular time.

We want to continue to talk – and I've got to do some more assessment in regard to some of the notes – about speaking in *Hansard* that the minister of health has talked about. He talks about:

The danger with having something like this in legislation is to say that the court system would become even more involved than it already is. There's nothing wrong with that to a degree, but in the health care system it would hold up so many things that need to be done and acted on quickly without coming in for a full debate per se to change an act or words to that effect.

Now, that's an interesting comment by the minister. I briefly spoke about that. I guess he's referring to the legislation. If we need a word changed that he thinks is going to add to or is needed in the amendment of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, we will discuss that.

I mean, the government has an incredible amount of resources. An incredible amount of lawyers work for the government. I have had the opportunity in two different ministries to be able to work with the lawyers that are employed by the government. I can tell you that their number one priority is always to do what's right and what they think is good for Albertans. We have lawyers, I know, in the health department, as we do in every department. It would be interesting to see if the minister of health has shown this amendment to the lawyers that he has under his employment. Maybe they can come back with an amendment that they think would be a deterrent to the amendment that Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought forward in regard to legislating the wait times. We're not lawyers on this end, and as I indicated . . . [Mrs. Forsyth's speaking time expired]

8:00

The Chair: Hon. members, I have a list here, and the next hon. member is Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Speaking to amendment A3, which I've previously reread into the record so that people stay focused on your directions, how many times have members of this House heard me say, "I'm conflicted"? The most recent of that conflict arose within the last hour, when I spoke of the possibility of calling the question, moving on.

Now, in the last series of speakers to A3 the . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, Calgary-Varsity has the floor. Please lower your level of conversation.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Within the last four speakers the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford suggested the possibility of moving on to other amendments. I interacted with government members, and I asked, "Do you have other amendments that you

would like to bring forward that could attempt to accomplish what amendment A3 is doing? In other words, do you have amendments that would set standards? Do you have amendments that would set guidelines? Do you have amendments that would provide some teeth to Bill 17, which at this point lacks goals and objectives?" In discussing with members of the government, they said that this is just setting the foundation. We all know the Biblical phrase that if your house is built on sand, it's not going to stand up. Well, neither will emergency responses stand up.

Now, the reason I'm standing up and speaking about amendment A3 is the reality that 24 hours a day individuals come to our emergency departments in varying levels of distress. A number of emergency physicians have said that people are welcome to come to those facilities. They said the problem is not in the medical facilities, not that people shouldn't be there. The problem is that the unnecessary delay that's referred to in A3 is the result of a shortage of supports.

When people come, they've tried the health line, and the health line has recommended that they should see their physician, and their physician's office doesn't open until 9 or 10 in the morning. Then they have no alternative other than to go to emergency. Therefore, 24 hours a day we have that possibility of people being treated at emergency. But the type of treatment they're receiving, through no fault of the staff – the doctors on call, the nurses – is that there is not sufficient capacity in terms of the number of professionals providing the emergent service or the beds available for individuals to be dealt with in a life-saving manner. This is what A3 is about. It's at the heart of the matter.

In talking with government members, they've indicated that they have no desire individually or collectively to see this amendment, which would require guidelines and standards, passed. We're at that impasse circumstance, Mr. Chair, where, unfortunately, we've been for almost 18 hours.

Now, what A3 talks about is guidelines and standards. Mr. Chairman, guidelines and standards are what I as a professional teacher brought into my classroom on a daily basis. Without the type of guidelines and standards, what I called . . . [interjection]

The Chair: Hon. member, please take a seat. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Continue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Chair, without objectives and goals, that I set with my students, there was no direction. If we don't have standards, if we don't have guidelines, if we don't have evaluatory procedures, how can we reach our goals? This is what amendment A3 is about. It's talking about setting standards for lengths of stay. That's just one of the standards that it's talking about.

Mr. Chair, as Bill 17 stands, we have motherhood statements. The government in Bill 17 talks about having a patient advocate, but that advocate has no capacity to ensure that there's a follow-up in treatment. Currently in Calgary we have patient advocates, a gentleman whose wife suffered the indignity and the pain of a miscarriage while waiting for an emergency procedure. While that miscarriage was probably not preventable, the fact that it occurred in the midst of the waiting room certainly should have been preventable. So we have individuals who are raising the cases, but without the power to actually change the procedures that led to the failures of the health system, there's no point in having an advocate who doesn't have a role.

The Chair: Hon. member, please take a seat. Take a seat, please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills talked about the importance of treating each other with respect, and I appreciate, Mr. Chair, that you're attempting to have that type of decorum.

We've been elected to uphold high standards. Unfortunately, those high standards are missing from Bill 17, and that's what A3 is attempting to do. It's trying to inject into Bill 17 the guidelines and standards that are currently missing.

Mr. Chairman, it appears that whether it's the liability excuse, the thought of being sued, whatever the excuses, the government does not appear willing to set minimal standards of care within Bill 17. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford in fact toured the province trying to gather ideas that would provide relief within the health care circumstance. He had direct input. I appreciate the time he spent in consultation throughout the province. But the end result of that consultation, Bill 17, which A3 is attempting to amend, is that there aren't any regulatory standards being set. So people, while we debate the lack of provision of emergency care, are showing up at the various steps, whether it's at the University of Alberta hospital, whether it's at the Children's hospital back in Calgary-Varsity, that I represent. People are coming. Not only are they coming to these emergency departments, but they're experiencing inappropriate delays.

8:10

Everyone in this House appreciates the quality of care that the individuals get once they see the physician. They appreciate the care in the triaging process, where a nurse determines the priority with which they should be seen. But, Mr. Chairman, we're in the wealthiest province in Canada. It's not due to lack of resources that we're not moving forward on what A3 has suggested, guidelines and standards. It's a lack of will. We have within this House the intelligence, whether it's in terms of broader based thinking through all-party standing policy committees, to improve the health care delivery in this province.

In conversations that I've held with hon. government members, the notion of having the right prescription, the right combination of expertise on the boards, on the superboard is absolutely essential. Doctors are trained for specific circumstances. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark specialized in emergency medicine. The former head of Alberta Health Services, Dr. Duckett, his specialty was accounting, management. He's no longer in that position. We have Dr. Chris Eagle, a medically trained individual, as the interim head. But what is lacking is the right combination for A3 to occur. That's a combination of the best intelligence, the best combination, the best team, the managers, the people who do the accounting, the people who create the timelines, and obviously with input from doctors who are on the front lines, coming up with the best possible prescription or recipe for success.

Mr. Chair, we to the largest extent come to our constituency offices. I can't think that there's a single one of us who at four o'clock goes home and that's the end of their expectation. I know that's not the case. How do we, short of lengthy debate, short of SO 30s, get across the point to the government that the collaborative methodology is superior to just simply consultation? Consultation does not require that actual action takes place after the consultation in the same way that the health advocate can bring up a circumstance but doesn't have the power to deal with it. Whether it's the Ombudsman, whether it's the advocate as proposed in Bill 17, whether it's the Auditor General, the powers are limited to raising an issue, to potentially suggest solutions to reduce waiting times, to speed up particular procedures. But they lack the power to do that.

The power rests within this Assembly. We are the ultimate say in

what actions are taking place. How do we prevent, as motion A3 says, “unnecessary deaths . . . unnecessary harm”? Well, hon. Chair, we do it by putting forward the best legislation possible.

Bill 17, I agree, is a work in progress, but so much of Bill 17 is reliant on a health minister to make decisions. Even though there are deputy ministers, even though there are thousands of people employed within the government’s ministries to provide the minister with advice, in the end the minister has to take the best collective wisdom and come up with a decision. But the decisions that have been put forward in Bill 17, that are attempted to being amended by A3, they’re not it. We haven’t reached that ultimate pinnacle of success, and we won’t reach it in Alberta until we have standards such as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, a doctor himself, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, indicated. Unless we have standards similar, at least, to what’s been established in other locations such as in Britain, the four-hour business, we won’t have reached the quality of care that Albertans deserve.

Whether it’s in the legal field or whether it’s in the medical field, we need to incorporate best practices. We need to value the research that other jurisdictions have done and attempt as much as possible, whether it be through amendment A3 or other government amendments, to improve the existing legislation.

Mr. Chair, a concern that has been frequently brought up in this House is: is it best to keep in legislation the authority, the rules, the guidelines, the standards, as A3 is proposing, or to what extent should regulatory powers, discretionary powers be given to the minister? It’s a combination of both that’s necessary. We have the ability through amendments. The government, for example when they realize a shortcoming in the legislation, they want to bring it up to date, as has been the case with a number of bills on wills and succession and so on, updates the legislation.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said: we’ve heard you. You know, I think that at that time he said: we’ve spent 18 hours so far on A3. I believe that was his comment. If I felt that the government had heard what A3 was suggesting, if I felt that the government valued all the concerns that have been brought up by a number of individuals – we’ve heard people recounting. For example, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek recounted the circumstances that she’s had with her mother’s health. We’ve heard from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. We’ve heard from the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. What we are all in agreement on in this House is that the system isn’t working, but the difference between just recognizing that the system isn’t working and actually creating legislation to improve it is, unfortunately, at a standstill.

I would look forward and I would gladly take my seat if the government could show that based on the last 18 hours of discussion, based on years of recommendation from various opposition parties, based on suggestions from their own physicians that they move forward – but this business of, “Trust us; this is just the first step; we’ll move forward” doesn’t provide any assurance to members of this House or to people who, as I say, are currently sitting in one of those chairs in an emergency waiting room across this province.

Please, government members, if amendment A3 is too prescriptive or too restrictive, come up with a middle point. Come up with a middle ground. Come up with a position, a compromise that does not compromise patients’ care but covers your concerns about liabilities. Offer us something. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford indicated a desire to move on, and I would challenge, through the chair, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to, based on your hearings, come up with amendments that will bring us closer to what A3 is asking for.

Mr. Speaker, I don’t want to monopolize the debate. I’ll sit down. I have other concerns, and probably the next time I stand to debate A3, I’ll focus further on the unnecessary waste of resources. Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the debate on A3.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, this motion that was put forward by the only emergency room doctor in this entire building today, who ultimately has put forward an amendment to Bill 17, which is clearly a flawed bill, is trying to resurrect or trying to inject some life into this bill to reflect something that can help front-line doctors and, specifically, the patients that he so deeply cares about. He talks about including as guiding principles – and I might add that this amendment is the direct opposite of what the minister of health said he would not support.

In other words, he would not support: “include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur.” Can you believe that the minister of health will not support that, nor will the newly founded parliamentary health secretary? His job has now been in place for all of 24 hours. Not a good first step by the minister of health or his junior parliamentary boy. Mr. Chairman, I’m glad to see that the Government House Leader is listening intently to my words of wisdom. In fact, I see the connection because, actually, when he was the minister of health, the parliamentary secretary worked for him.

I think that last night the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talked about the government building up health care and then tearing it down. I guess we’ll allow Albertans to determine if the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was the minister of health when it was building up or if he was the minister of health when the tearing down came in? In fact, that same question could be asked of the Member for Sherwood Park. Since both of you were ministers of health following each other, which one tore it down, and which one built it up? I would welcome the answer to that. It seems like the members got very quiet.

Mr. Chairman, setting standards. The minister of health said in this House to the doctor, the only ER doctor – I might say that I have to pose a couple of questions. I find it ironic that the minister of health visits 35 ER rooms, but the member who was then the parliamentary secretary of health was actually number 301 on his e-mails. So it really shows you the absolute failure of structure that is going on over there. Can you believe that? The minister of health has an ER doctor who’s in the front-line troops, and what does the minister of health do? He puts his parliamentary secretary of health as number 301 on his e-mails. What does he do rather than talking and listening to the ER doctor? He goes and visits 35 ERs. One has to really question the wisdom of what is going on on that side of the House.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark astutely said: this government built up health care; then they tore it down. So I’m assuming the Member for Sherwood Park was one of the ministers that was trying to build up health care, and I guess, Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that would mean you would be the one trying to tear it down. As much as I know that that is never the intent, sometimes you have to stand up for the principles of the Canada Health Act, something that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, when the amendment came forward the other night, didn’t want to support, and he had been the secretary of health for less than six hours.

So, Mr. Chair, I have to truly, truly question . . . [interjection] It was on insurance, thank you. I want to thank the Member for

Edmonton-Whitemud because I see he's listening. It was actually about Canada health insurance. The parliamentary secretary didn't support a fundamental cornerstone of Canada. Can you imagine? You just get appointed as a parliamentary secretary to health, but you can't support the cornerstone of our Canada Health Act and its insurance. [interjection]

The Chair: Hon. member, address the chair, and it's about amendment A3.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, on this amendment, of course, we talk about the minister of health. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark said: I want to put in an amendment to "include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm," and the minister of health said that he can't support that. Shame. He said that in here. So let's think about this. Everyone appears to be kind of saying that the Edmonton-Meadowlark doctor knows first-hand what is going on, but in the meantime not one single person over there is willing to help in his amendment. I find that strange. In fact, I think the word is "unanimous." Well, what does that mean? [interjection]

Oh, my goodness. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has awakened. I refer to him as the prime-time rock star. I saw him the other night, and I had a lot of pleasure taking my remote and turning him off because we truly have heard enough from him and, actually, the former minister of health, Mr. Gibberish.

Mr. Chairman, I can say clearly that setting standards – how can a minister of health and a parliamentary secretary of health be against setting standards for lengths of stay? How could you be against setting standards for lengths of stay in emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the position statement on emergency department overcrowding. This is from an ER doctor, but the minister of health and the parliamentary secretary are against the very amendment that this good doctor is bringing forward. I think someone, clearly, needs a doctor.

I can only say that being against this amendment by the good doctor, the only good doctor – and by the way, to the Government House Leader, through the chair, of course, and to the former ministers of health, of which I see three or four over there: I find this ironic. You had an ER doctor right beside you, and what did you do? You threw him under the bus; unanimously, you did. Why? Because he was speaking the truth about health care. I know that he can proudly look at himself in the mirror knowing that he has done his best in advocating for his patients. I have to ask, you know, those who may be well intended, but I'm not going to be as charitable as the good doctor: why would you not stand in here and support this amendment that is being put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark? He is seeing first-hand. Would you deny, to the Government House Leader, that this doctor has seen first-hand what's going on? Why would you not want to take the advice of this good doctor? This good doctor has also developed important links with health care officials.

Why would a minister of health go ahead and put him number 301 on his e-mail list? Mr. Chair, when I asked a question on this amendment last week, the minister of health quite simply said: I didn't see his e-mail; I get so many. It was on the front page of the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*, and the minister of health didn't see it because, one, he's either absolutely incompetent or, two, he's being dishonest. I can only say: I've got the inside story. [interjection] Or his e-mail batteries might have gone again.

We know that the minister of health used to be able to go to an editorial board, pick up his cellphone and be Superman and say: let me call Duckett. Of course, now there's no Cookie Monster

anymore, but we still have Ernie and Bert, and I see one of them right across the way, right next to the Treasury Board president. I find it really quite interesting.

8:30

The system is broken. The Wildrose Alliance has a five-point plan to fix this crisis, that has been created by the very members across the way who are going to vote against an ER doctor who knows what's going on. In fact, the ER doctor made references to knuckleheads. Well, I can only say to you, Mr. Chair, that not supporting this amendment is clearly bordering on not just knuckleheadedness but just pure unacceptable representation of your constituency. Your constituents want solutions. Your constituents want you to be listening to doctors and nurses.

Mr. Chair, I would like to say that I'm so pleased that the Government House Leader is listening, but as a former minister of health who actually hired the parliamentary secretary of health, I find it ironic that the minister of health has said: I'm sorry; I get so many e-mails. Let's think about this. You have one parliamentary secretary who is an ER doctor, yet you don't look at his e-mails. Obviously, the minister of health doesn't read the *Journal* or the *Herald* because it was on the front page talking about the crisis. To this day the crisis that he speaks about continues to worsen.

What separates us from you guys is simply that we have solutions. We don't believe in being critics or just simply being in opposition. We believe in solutions. Not only do we believe in being down the road on health care; we want to be around the corner. Obviously, this side doesn't even know what around the corner means. [interjection] What does it mean, you ask? I'll tell you. It means caring for Albertans, listening to Albertans, listening to the doctors and nurses and health care professionals because they know what's going on. They're not knuckleheads. The knuckleheads are people who don't listen.

Mr. Chairman, I am saddened. At one point I thought: I'm saddened. In fact, my feelings are hurt, similar to the former Minister of Energy. [interjection] No, you're not the former Minister of Energy yet. But I can say that my feelings are hurt that this side would not listen to their own ER doctor, that was right next to their side. What did they do? They threw him over the bus. Not only threw him over the bus . . . [interjection] Thrown over the bus.

Mr. Anderson: Under the bus, wrapped around the tires, and popped out the back.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Threw him overboard.

In fact, I think Albertans are not only just going to throw some folks under the bus in the next election; they're going to put tires on top of a few of you. [interjection] Uh-oh. The Minister of Energy has awakened. That's so nice. I'm going to send him over some Kleenex. I know his feelings were hurt, and I understood that he used the Kleenex from yesterday, blew his nose, and he sent them back over. Thank you so much for that. We're going to do some DNA sampling of that. We'll let you know what we find out, okay? Thank you. [interjection] Oh, Mr. Chair, we also have the *Alberta Primetime* star. It has a lot of pleasure in taking the remote and turning him off at around 11 at night. It really does. So much pleasure.

On a more serious note here, setting standards for lengthy stays in emergency departments is a noble idea. [interjection] Mr. Chair, I'm somewhat worried now because I think the Member for Calgary-Egmont now thinks he's the Premier. That's not a dream; that's a nightmare. That is clearly a nightmare.

I want to say that for the standards that we set, that this ER doctor has put forward, I commend him. I commend him because he has recognized what patients are saying to him. His comments were very heartfelt. What you're seeing is a real person talking about real issues.

Consequently, I believe that as we go forward, Alberta's health care system has arrived at a crossroads. You have the opportunity today, minister of health. For the junior minister, the parliamentary secretary, this is his chance to retract. I've heard that word "retract" a lot lately. I think the parliamentary secretary should have retracted his comments in his first 24 hours, when he said that he doesn't support the Canada Health Act when it comes to insurance. On this amendment that is a fundamental cornerstone of Alberta and Canada in terms of protecting.

That's why I am absolutely shocked. I think it's fair to say that the minister of health has lost his superman status. We saw from the editorial board that I was speaking with that some of the participants at the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald* said: yeah, we began to realize that the minister of health calling Dr. Duckett was not so impressive with, "Let me get him on the phone." But when it came to bonuses, Mr. Chair, his batteries went dead. When it came to trying to deal with putting wait times in legislation, his batteries went dead again. I think we are beginning to have a minister of health whose batteries are going dead, and that's unfortunate. Then, again, if you've been around for 39 or almost 40 years, you need more than a booster jump. Clearly, that booster jump is the Wildrose Alliance because we have new ideas. We have a five-point plan to deal with this very crisis that we are facing.

I can see that Calgary-Edgemont is enjoying sitting in the Premier's chair. That is scary.

An Hon. Member: Where's Edgemont?

Mr. Boutilier: I don't know. It's somewhere. I think you're supposed to represent it. I think you should actually go get door-knocking right now.

An Hon. Member: It's called Egmont.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, I want to say Egmont, Edgemont. You know what? I can only say this. Do the right thing. Look yourself in the mirror. Listen to your inner voice; you know, your inner voice that you have. I hope everyone is feeling good on that side because your inner voice will guide you to the true north. That inner voice will say: care for Albertans. Okay? They obviously do not understand the important value.

Let me share with the former minister – no, he's not the former Minister of Energy yet. He was the minister of health, but then when I asked him the question, Mr. Chair, he said: no, I wasn't the minister of health.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, the relevance comes back to the letter that ER doctors sent to this government and to this Premier two days after the last election. The minister of health at that point said that he wasn't the minister of health. He was trying to distance himself from his own government. It gives a real new meaning to open and transparent. I guess that at that point the Premier was the minister of health. That's just pure gibberish. Obviously, I think it reflects . . .

The Chair: Hon member, we are debating amendment A3, so focus on that.

Mr. Boutilier: Let me conclude, Mr. Chair. I'm going to take my seat. Who would like me to take their seat? Please speak so I can offer a few comments to you. Would anyone like me to take my seat?

The Chair: Hon. member, on A3, and please address the chair.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, before I take my seat, I'd like to offer a comment, through the chair, of course, to the former minister of health. I see the other former minister of health and actually one down there, a former minister of health. Do the right thing. To the former minister of health, I think that in your profession you folks call it billable time or something like that. That's fine in your profession, but my profession is actually to represent my constituents, to listen to my bosses.

I want to say that the 6,000 e-mails and letters that I've received relative to what you . . .

Mr. Anderson: I'm a lawyer, too.

Mr. Boutilier: You know what? There are lawyers. There's good, there's bad, and there's ugly.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Boutilier: I can only say, Mr. Chair, that the relevance is simply this. They may require a lot of lawyers in the future. In fact, it's my understanding that the Minister of Energy's bosom buddy . . . [interjections]

The Chair: The hon. member has the floor.

Hon. member, please stay on amendment A3.

Mr. Boutilier: I'm sorry, but they're trying to lure me into further discussions on other issues.

I can say, Mr. Chair, that I really want to keep on the focus of setting standards. What does this side say? No to setting new standards. What does that side, the government, say on wanting to have guiding principles? They say no to their doctor, that they threw under the bus, and then they rode over him. We have been able to get a jack and lift that bus up, and I can say that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark feels liberated, and so he should. Liberated.

I might add, Mr. Chair, on this amendment, when we talk about setting standards for lengths of stay, how could anyone be against that? That is like motherhood and apple pie.

8:40

The Chair: On my list the next hon. member is Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for permitting this third opportunity this fine morning – it is the morning of November 25 – to participate again in debate on motion A3. The last time I sat down I provided a little bit of a forecast as to where I was going to go next, and that had to do with clause (c), that refers to "no unnecessary waste of resources." What we have seen in terms of the wasting of resources is the reduction. We had fully paid for hospitals such as the General, the Holy Cross, and the Grace, and in terms of reductions and the loss of resources we had the General hospital blown up. That is the greatest monument to unnecessary resource destruction that I think just about any province can point to. Then we had the fools on the hill clapping while the hospital imploded.

Now, not only did we blow up a hospital, but we sold off the valuable asset of the Holy Cross. I referenced it earlier, so I won't

go into the detail that I've put on the record. A concern I have is that in losing those hospitals, the unnecessary waste of resources referenced in motion A3, we not only lost beds, Mr. Chairman; we lost a variety of health support individuals. Nurses were laid off in large numbers. We lost specialists, particularly to the States. The government, in its wisdom or lack thereof in terms of unnecessary waste of resources, did away with a number of the laboratories that provided timely results so that the doctors could continue with their healing work. If that wasn't enough in terms of unnecessary waste of resources, as A3 points out, the government decided that the cheapest way to save money at the advanced education/postsecondary level was to reduce the number of seats for training doctors.

Now, Mr. Chair, that was back in the Ralph Klein era, but in this latest era those reductions are still in place. For example, we had positions, we had seats at our postsecondary institutions for upgrading 60 foreign-accredited doctors to bring them up to speed with our Alberta system. Unfortunately, those seats were reduced from 60 to 40. The government put forward initiatives whereby a variety of postsecondary institutions – Grant MacEwan here in town, SAIT in Calgary in terms of LPNs; Mount Royal becoming a university is another example – took on training registered nurses, and we started to make up for the unnecessary waste of resources that had occurred back in the 1990s with the shortsightedness. Just at the point where we had sufficient nurses to provide the relief necessary to the system, freezes took place.

Now, Mr. Chair, it's important for the general public to realize that when those freezes took place, there was still \$11 billion of the \$18 billion sustainability fund in place, so those nurses could have been hired.

Now, again in terms of A3, unnecessary waste of resources, it's important to note that not only were those nurses not hired, but a whole variety of nurses were fired at a cost of \$22 million in separations. In terms of the wastage of resources we have a system that delegates authority in a questionable manner, that suggests Alberta Health Services works at arm's length from the ministry of health, so they suggest, "Well, we had no part in the retirement bonuses that, for example, Jack Davis was given, that came into the millions, and the fact that he receives \$22,000 a month for the rest of his life." The government claimed that they had no part in the decision of Paddy Meade, who was hired for the superboard, worked barely six months, and then was given two years' worth of compensation.

Where the government positions itself with regard to unnecessary waste of resources, maybe it was necessary, but for Stephen Duckett we'll probably never see the exact details of the settlement that will see him no longer in that position. If it's anything along the lines of what we've seen in previous examples, it'll be a multimillion-dollar settlement.

In terms of unnecessary waste of resources let's look at what happened with the HRG. The HRG was the Health Resources Group that basically bought their operating rooms in the Grace hospital, the best former women's treatment hospital in western Canada. When they picked that up for a song, thanks to the generosity of the former Premier, they were considered the absolute best thing since sliced bread. Talk about a waste of resources. Every operation that was performed at that particular centre came with a 10 per cent premium, and a lot of people don't realize that the doctors who operated in that private facility were public physicians. They were public health care nurses. They performed wonderful service. It was a public service, but they performed it in a much more costly private institution. Now all of a sudden we talk about tossing people under busses, overboard, and things like this. They were tossed.

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. Chase: The relevance? It's directly related to the unnecessary waste of resources. If we don't learn from the past, how can we avoid that waste of resources in the future? The Health Resources Group fell out of favour. Their contract was cancelled.

In terms of unnecessary waste of resources here in Edmonton all eye surgeries, all cataract surgeries were performed within the public domain. Somebody got the neat notion in terms of unnecessary waste of resources that they would contract out privately to a wonderful physician. I will not impugn his reputation. Dr. Gimbel does absolutely wonderful work, but the point is that the costs of doing the cataract operations in Calgary were considerably higher and, therefore, I say, an unnecessary waste of resources than they were in terms of the publicly delivered surgeries that were done here in Edmonton.

In terms of unnecessary waste of resources we see the Copeman clinic, for example, in Calgary charging individuals \$3,000 entry fees, and then they bill the services that they provide, the private services, to the public taxpayer. Mr. Chair, that is another example of an unnecessary waste of resources.

8:50

A further example of unnecessary waste of resources is the number of private MRIs. There are bars and private medical facilities giving away MRIs as prizes. Guess what? When those MRIs take place, quite often the bill makes its way back to the public system. In terms of unnecessary waste of resources, as A3 mentions, the hon. doctor, the representative from Calgary-Mountain View, and I had a discussion with a radiologist at a Calgary hospital. I don't want to mention the hospital for fear of retribution such as we've witnessed with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, but he talked about the unnecessary MRIs . . .

An Hon. Member: Fearmongering.

Mr. Chase: It's not fearmongering, hon. member. It's what happened. Speak up, and see what happens to you.

Now, as I was saying, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and I spoke with a radiologist, and he indicated that the old-fashioned medicine of one-on-one, a GP in his office, could frequently diagnose more accurately than an MRI a particular problem. But MRIs became the soup of the day for medical facilities, so what this government has done – it began with laundry services, and it has proceeded to food services. The government, in the false assumption of saving money, has contracted out a whole series of services formerly delivered within the public domain. Each time that happens, the cost to the health system escalates. This idea of competitive health delivery but publicly funded is one of the most colossal wastes of taxpayers' money possible.

In terms of unnecessary waste of resources, in terms of unnecessary delays, in terms of not doing harm to patients, the best service is the service that follows the attributes of universal health care: publicly administered, publicly funded, and the most important part, Mr. Chair – it's something that countries across the world have come to recognize – publicly delivered. The sooner this government stops the flow of funding into private, contracted institutions and supports our health care system through the education of physicians as opposed to the raiding of doctors from South Africa, the sooner we provide training for nurses and then once we have trained them, instead of wasting the resource that we've invested, hire them, the further we'll be ahead.

Also, this government, in terms of not wasting resources but,

rather, investing, has to put more investment into general practitioners, family doctors. If we had a family doctor for each Albertan, then the emergency crisis would be solved. In terms of unnecessary waste of resources stop promoting private, for-profit assisted living facilities and promote publicly funded long-term care facilities so that people can get the services they need . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, please take a seat.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, continue on.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

. . . so they don't end up being labelled as bed blockers and taking up acute-care beds because there is no long-term placement for them or, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark discussed almost 24 hours ago, the need for improved home care. Unnecessary waste of resources, public first, support the public. Well, actually, public first and public last is the way I would express it in terms of the best utilization of resources.

Mr. Chair, in terms of whether you want to talk about unnecessary delays and harm, the combination is absolutely important to deliver the service. I talked about the necessity of having the right combination in administration, but the right combination at the doctor's office, at the emergency care is absolutely essential. That's part of the triaging effort that this government has to do to prioritize. Now, you can start with the family doctors, or you can go to the emergency facilities and work backwards, but regardless of where you start, you come to the same conclusions: we need better long-term care; we need better home-care support; we need a number of general practitioners; we need a combination of urgent care centres, primary care centres, and delivery through hospitals; we need sufficient beds in the hospitals to provide the different levels of care necessary.

Mr. Chair, the wonderful thing about being in this province is that we still have \$8 billion in the sustainability fund . . . [interjection] Unless I've heard wrong. Maybe it's down to only \$7 billion. The result is that with proper investment, with proper efficiency in the delivery of public health care, we could improve the system. We have the intelligence. Whether it be in accounting, in health care professionals, we have the intelligence to improve the system, but what is lacking is the will. Because of that lack of will, we have been standing for, I think, fairly close to 20 hours now talking about solutions to the problem.

On previous occasions when I've stood, I have challenged the government to come up with amendments that would help to fix their own legislation. They created it. They should be the best ones in the position to fix it. But this is a team effort; therefore, we're offering opportunities to the government. Amendment A3 is the third offering. Amendment A1, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, questioned accountability. We're talking about accountability. We're talking about guidelines. We're talking about standards. I wish we could move on with the process of creating greater efficiency, as A3 refers to.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Chair, and if you could re-add me to the list. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It has been a long 12, 13 and a half hours since 7:30. The time has actually flown by. Every time I look across and see the whip's smiling face, it makes me happy that I'm here.

I just want to again go through this. I'm trying to figure this out in my head after 13 and a half hours. We are in the middle . . .

[interjection] Yeah. I wish I could have figured it out in the first half an hour, but it's so completely nonsensical, so completely asinine that I can't figure it out, Mr. Chair, and I need the members opposite to help me. I need them to help me understand. Here is what I need to know. We're debating this amendment that has coffee stains all over it, this one right here. We're debating this amendment from the hon. doctor and MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The man is an emergency room doctor. He was head of the emergency room physicians in Alberta for how long? Years?

Dr. Sherman: A couple of years.

Mr. Anderson: A couple of years, several years. We're sitting in this House debating a motion that he's brought forward, and the government members over there are somehow under the belief that they know better about how to solve our emergency room crisis than the guy sitting in the seat behind me over here, that they just punted from their caucus. So you have the ER doctor, the expert on emergency room care, one of the foremost in the province, and the government kicks him out in the middle of the largest emergency room crisis in this province's history. If that is not the most nonsensical, ignorant thing to do in such a situation, undemocratic as well, I don't know what is. I don't think it's ever been matched. I mean, it is really something else.

9:00

People are suffering. People are dying. We know that; they're dying. It's well documented. The government even agrees. We've talked in this House during question period many times about this, and somehow the government still thinks that after all this, after all the outcry and after all the e-mails and after all of the people phoning in to talk radio shows and mailing their letters to the constituencies and their e-mails and everything, the Twitters, the blogs – everyone is telling the government to listen to this man, to listen to the doctor, the emergency room expert. Yet they still don't. They still just sit there and say: "No. Well, we know better. That's very nice, Edmonton-Meadowlark MLA. That's very nice. We'll pat you on the head, and you go your way. Just, please, don't be around anymore because you're giving us heartburn. You're not conforming to the plan, man. You're not sticking in the caucus."

Mr. Boutilier: Oh. You mean the five-year fable plan?

Mr. Anderson: The five-year plan, whatever that is.

I just for the life of me can't figure it out. He has clearly documented what needs to happen. We need to have an accounting. We need to have a benchmark, and the benchmark is that seriously ill patients will be seen in four hours 95 per cent of the time; for less seriously ill patients in need of urgent care, six hours 95 per cent of the time or better. Those are the benchmarks that have been laid out. He said that we need to do that.

He also goes on to say further in this amendment – and we've talked about it – that the way to accomplish that, of course, is site-based decision-making, giving somebody at the site, at the hospital, the authority to make decisions immediately: if you need to open up a ward, a different ward in the hospital, if you need to bring in some more nurses at the drop of a hat, if you need to open up more beds, if you need to move some seniors that are plugging up acute-care beds safely into a hotel arrangement with a nurse with them for a couple of nights while they get the emergency room under control, whatever it is.

Of course, all this is safe. That's why you have a doctor who would make these decisions. It would all have to be safe. But the

point is that someone on-site is given the authority to make those decisions, not some bureaucrats sitting in Edmonton in one of the buildings around the Legislature and 85 vice-presidents who have taken three months to solve an emergency room crisis. How's that an emergency response to an emergency room crisis?

This isn't something like: "Ah, we'll get around to it. You know, it's like building a building. It takes some time. We've got to wait a little bit. We've got to make sure of the cement and that we have the foundation." That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about people that are dying in emergency rooms and suffering in emergency rooms unnecessarily while rooms are sitting open and beds are sitting unstaffed, and we've got these 12-, 24-, 48-hour wait times. That's what's going on. All it would take would just be a modicum of effort by this government to say: "You know what? Enough is enough. We are going to set these targets. We are going to show leadership. These are the targets we're going to set, and we're going to empower local physicians, local emergency room doctors and nurses to get the job done."

You know what? If we did that, hon. members, the job would get done because I have total confidence in the emergency room physicians and health care professionals that we have in this province. I have total confidence that if we gave them the independence, if we gave them the authority to act, they would act in the best interests of patients because their whole life's work and purpose is to help people. It's to do the right thing, to not get bogged down in the regulations of a heavy-handed superboard bureaucracy that doesn't know what they're doing.

Good grief. We just lost the Cookie Monster CEO that we had. We just lost him. I mean, I remember when we got the health CEO. You remember that, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. "Oh, we did a world-wide search for the very best talent. You know, we did all of this." This was the former minister of health. "We did all of this. We put it all in the blender, and after an extensive search, tah-dah, we found the best person possible for this job." And here we go, not more than — what is it? — a little bit of a year later or something like that: gone. Gone because not only was he insensitive and completely inept with, obviously, the media, as we saw, but he wasn't getting the job done.

So we give it to his second-in-command, as if that's going to solve the problem even though he's been involved from day one, Dr. Eagle. I'm not besmirching Dr. Eagle, but the fact is that it's not the personnel. I don't care who you have in the seat at the top of the superboard. It's not going to work until you decentralize decision-making down to the local level. That's the way you do it. That's what everyone is telling us, all the medical professionals: put it back in the hands of people in the community, doctors and nurses and chief medical officers in the hospitals.

Now, going back to the emergency room, because it's going to take some time to repair the entire health system and the damage that the superboard has done and that the previous and current health ministers are doing or have done to this health system, what won't take time, what we could do immediately, today — in fact, we could do this 30 seconds from now. We could sit here and we could pass wait-time targets that set a very clear standard for Alberta patients in emergency rooms.

The government members are saying: well, if we do that for emergency rooms, we need to do it for hip and knee replacements and cancer treatments and all this, and it'll just open up a Pandora's box, and pretty soon we'll have to legislate wait times for everything. Well, I think a lot of Albertans might actually kind of like that, but that's not what we're talking about here. We're just talking about starting with the most basic, fundamental level of health care. The most basic, fundamental level. That's emergency room care.

Everyone in this House, when we have family members that are sick or — you know, everyone has had injuries in their families, to their children. Their mother is sick. Their father is sick. Their grandmother or grandfather, their uncle, their aunt, their spouse, whatever it is, is sick. They have times when they need the emergency room, the health care system to respond now. They can't wait. They can't book an appointment. They can't wait for six months for an MRI or a year and a half for a knee replacement. They can't do it because if they wait more than just a couple of hours or even a few minutes in some cases, they will die. They will die or become permanently maimed, or there will be a tremendous negative outcome that will occur.

This is the one thing where you can't get it wrong. People can wait for MRIs. It's not good. We need to solve that problem. Those waiting lists need to be shortened. Same with hip and knee replacements and cataract treatments and all these different things. We need to shorten the waiting lists. But at the end of the day, if they wait a little bit longer, it ain't gonna kill 'em. It's not good, but they're not going to die from it in almost every case.

The emergency room is different. If you screw up at the emergency room, there's a dead person. It's that simple. [interjection] And there's the health minister laughing at that last comment — unbelievable — laughing at the comment that if you don't get treated right away in an emergency room, you may die. I mean, it's unbelievable. It's like he just doesn't get it at all.

Anyway, whatever the case is, if you don't get the emergency care right, if it's not immediate and right when it's needed, people will die. We've seen that. We've seen it five, six times just in the last few months with the five unnecessary deaths that were reported, but does this government do anything about it? Do they pass legislated wait times in this amendment? No, they don't. They don't do anything.

Do they call in the Alberta Health Quality Council to investigate why a suicidal patient went from one emergency room to another emergency room, asked for counselling and care multiple times, did not receive it? Then right before the individual, whom the hon. doctor knows, hung himself, he asked for a pad of paper and a pen. That didn't raise any flags for anybody. Isn't that something worthy of the Health Quality Council coming in to investigate to make sure there are protocols in place to make sure something like that doesn't happen again in the future, never happens again in the future? It's not about allocating blame. It's about: what the heck happened there? Who didn't get the red flag, or are there not protocols in place at all?

9:10

Did this government ask the Health Quality Council? They haven't. We've asked the health minister probably 10 questions, or nine questions, on the Health Quality Council alone. Are you going to bring it in? Are you going to bring them in to investigate the unnecessary deaths? Why aren't you going to do it? Every time: "No. No. We're not going to do it. I'll take it under advisement." Da, da, da, da, da, da. Tap dance, tap dance. Yes, no, maybe so. I mean, it's just absurd. They don't do anything. They have done nothing to address the problem other than hold some meetings at a big centralized bureaucracy, which resulted in a cookie incident which had the CEO fired. I mean, if it wasn't so serious, it would be comical. But the problem is that people are dying. People are dying, and that's what makes it not comical.

All we have to do to get on the road here is pass this amendment, put some basic wait time benchmarks in place, and then make sure you give the authority you need to the front-line staff so that they can move the patients, open up the beds, move things around, make

the decisions that need to be done to meet those targets. If they meet the targets, they get paid, and they get to keep their job or they get whatever financial structure is in place, whatever incentive is there. If they don't meet the targets, they don't get it. If they continuously miss the targets, they get fired and you get somebody in there who can do it. That's what this is about. It's about legislating accountability because there is none in the system right now, none, absolutely zero accountability in the system right now.

We don't even know who's in charge. Who fired Dr. Duckett yesterday? I mean, was it Chairman Hughes? Was it the minister of health? Was it the former minister of health? Was it the Premier? Was it his chief of staff? Who is running health care in this province? Does anybody have any clue over there on the other bench what the heck is going on in our health care system? That's what I want to know because I don't think they do. Every time something bad happens: oh, that's AHS's fault. Every time something good happens: that's all us, guys. Every time that there's confusion, they just look confused and they confuse the doctors.

Staff morale is at all-time lows on the front lines, and these issues are going to take forever to solve. One thing we can – again, I keep going back to it because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark keeps going back to it over and over again. We've been here 18 hours. What have we been? Three o'clock. I don't know; 16 hours or something like that we've been here, 16 hours, 18 hours, something like that. Here we are for 18 hours trying to point out that all this government needs to do to get going in the right direction is to listen to the emergency room doctor in the House, the head, not just any emergency room doctor.

It's not like this is a newbie, you know. Oh, it's a guy cutting his teeth. It's a new emergency doctor: no, no, no. It's not a new emergency doctor. It's the former head of the emergency room doctors in all of Alberta, one of the brightest minds in the entire province, a guy who understands health care, specifically emergency room care, better than anybody in this House and anyone in their bureaucracy could ever dream of understanding the health care system, and they kick him out. Gone. For what? For advocating for sick patients, for advocating for people who are dying and who are suffering.

"Oh, but that's not why we kicked him out," the other side said. We kicked him out because he hurt the former minister of health's feelings. He said something that hurt the man's feelings, and therefore he's got to retract that statement and apologize, and then he can come out.

Even though everyone in the province knows full well that many of the problems in the health care system started to occur, started to go down hill at an accelerated pace – it's not solely his responsibility, but squarely he was part of the problem, the former minister of health. No doubt about it, he is the one that got this. He did nothing about this mess. We knew about it in 2008. The e-mail was sent in 2008. The man did nothing. Now, I'm not saying he wanted to hurt people. Of course not. But I am saying that he didn't know what he was doing, and he did the wrong thing.

If you look at the new minister of health, he has had a chance to do the right thing, and he hasn't. He has diddled and daddled and dithered and done nothing, and that is not appropriate.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. I want to cite *Beauchesne* 459. I also want

to cite 23(h), (i), and (j) out of our own standing orders. Citation 459, as we would all know, is about relevance or, as the case may be, irrelevance. However, I want to talk about imputing false motives. It is simply incorrect for this hon. member to stand there and have the nerve to try and even convince his own caucus colleagues there that this minister, myself, has done nothing to help address this matter, so let's set the record a little bit clear here, Mr. Chair.

Upon getting an e-mail from Dr. Paul Parks on the Thanksgiving Day weekend, immediately I responded to him, immediately we set up a time to meet, immediately we put in place an action plan, and we are now delivering on that action plan. I can go on, Mr. Chairman, but I would simply ask you to remind the member that what he has said here is false. It is incorrect. I would ask him to please retract those comments, which he knows are not accurate.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on this point of order.

Mr. Anderson: On the point of order. The hon. health minister is going to have to show me the record where I said anything that was untrue. I did not say that you received the document in 2008. I said that his office had the document, the former health minister, in 2008. I said nothing untrue.

I know you just got here. You can spin it all you want, but you obviously weren't listening. Until I see the document, sir, that is not what I said. Clearly, that is not what I said. I said that the former minister of health, while he was there, knew about it in 2008, had the document in his possession and did nothing about it. This individual here, the current minister of health, has done nothing about it since.

I didn't say anything about when he got the e-mail. I didn't say anything about that. Okay? There is no point of order.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chair, he said that the current minister, that being me, did nothing about it, and that's the part that's not true. I'm not going to comment about stuff he said about the past. I'm talking about his reference to me as the current minister. I'm sure I heard him correctly saying that I have done nothing about it. I want the record to show clearly that I have done something about it. Not only that, but I did it immediately, within 24 hours, as I recall.

Mr. Anderson: We will let the people decide.

The Chair: On this point of order.

Mr. Anderson: No. I'm done with the point of order. I'm done with the point of order. I'm done with the point of order. Edmonton-Meadowlark would like to speak on the point of order.

The Chair: On the point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have to say that since I made the commitment to go back to the front lines, it's nice doing a night shift all over again. This feels like the emergency room.

On the point of order I think we're talking about semantics. The current minister of health did immediately call Dr. Paul Parks. I have the e-mail. He did his best. He did the right thing. He did the right thing as minister, but the right thing wasn't done for health care. I'll tell you. I sat with Jody yesterday in an emergency department. He did the right thing as a minister, but on the front lines, how things translate onto the street – This is the advantage I have.

The Chair: Hon. member, on the point of order.

Dr. Sherman: It is on this point of order. It is. I was paired up with him to help him and teach him what was happening on the street. He teaches me policy and politics, and I teach him this. On the street nothing has changed. ER departments are all on yellow alert. The flu hasn't hit. There was only one bed that was available, a resuscitation bed, all day yesterday. It was a delivery problem.

The Chair: Please get to the point of order.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the point of order.

Mr. Anderson: No, no. I'm done with the point of order. Are you done with the point of order?

9:20

The Chair: So there's nobody else who wishes to talk on the point of order?

After listening, the chair rules that there is a point of order. I would love to see the hon. member retract the statement that the current minister of health did nothing. I heard that, so please just retract that.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, based on what evidence?

The Chair: I heard both times.

Mr. Anderson: No, no. That's fine. I just need to know for clarification purposes, 13(2). I need to understand what exactly you would like me to retract, the quote. Can you give me the quote from the Blues? If you can do that, if we can get that, I would be happy to retract any untrue statement that I said, but I would like to see the actual quote before I retract something. Okay? Is that fair? So we can retract it later on, but I would like to see the exact wording that I need to retract because it's unclear. I think that's a fair thing.

The Chair: The chair clearly heard that. The words that the chair heard were that the current minister of health did nothing. Those are the words that I heard. So I call on the member to just retract that statement.

Mr. Anderson: Fair enough. Fair enough. Anything that I said that said that he has done nothing, I retract that. Okay?

So I will change the words and say that what he did was completely and totally in no way enough, absolutely did not solve the problem and has not in any way made Albertans safer. That I will not retract because that's the truth.

He might have done something. I retract any untrue statement. He obviously did something.

The Chair: Hon. member, please sit down. I already asked the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to retract saying that the minister did nothing. He has retracted that statement.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I accept the member's retraction.

The Chair: Shall we proceed?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I would like to do that. I know that we don't call points of order on points of order, but if he continues down this line, then I will have to rise on that point as well. Just so that the member is advised.

The Chair: So continue, hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, on

amendment A3. Let's focus on the amendment. Then we'll have no points of order.

Debate Continued

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Fair enough. On the amendment. Absolutely.

We've been here, Mr. Chair, and we're debating this amendment. I will tell you that this minister has not done enough. If this current minister was serious at all about fixing this health care system, he would stand up right now in support of this amendment. That's what he would do. He wouldn't complain and talk about points of order. He would stand up and say: "You know what? We're going to legislate some standards in this province, and we're going to make sure to put all of the resources that we need and give all of the authority needed to allow the front-line staff to get the job done." And he hasn't done that yet. In my opinion, he hasn't done it, and in the doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark's opinion and in Albertans' opinion, generally, from all the e-mails, he hasn't done enough. I think, in my opinion, that he has dithered, that he has done nothing substantive to solve the issue.

The Chair: Hon. member, we are debating amendment A3, not about the hon. minister.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chair, I'm going to raise another point of order. If the member wishes to waste the House's time in this fashion by continuing on with innuendoes under 23(h), (i), and (j), then we will be here forever on points of order. [interjection] Please, I have the floor here.

It is simply inaccurate for him to say that nothing was done or that insufficient amounts of things were done when the member knows full well that a lot has been done. I have stood in this House and answered questions in question period and participated in the debate, and I have said that we have opened more beds. Let me recount this stuff now so that they get it right. We're opening 1,430 more beds. We've already opened 800. That's already done. We've got a new discharge protocol. We had a meeting on Friday, November 20. I could go on with a number of things that have been done. So it's inaccurate for them to be making these false accusations.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has raised a point of order. [interjections] Hon. members, one member stand up and speak at a time. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo stood up first. Please, sit down, hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, I find this interesting . . . [interjections]

The Chair: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for graciously allowing me to participate in the point of order that the hon. minister of health has raised, but this is not a point of order. I heard very distinctly what was said. He said words like "dither"; he had said words like "do nothing" relative to not enough. He actually retracted earlier, which you accepted as the chair when he said that, clearly, it was not enough. In fact, then the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark very astutely stood up and said that it wasn't that the minister of health hadn't done anything; it just happened that nothing got done. The Wildrose looks for outcomes.

Then, Mr. Chairman, on the point of order the minister of health said that he's answered questions in here. I will table in here under the point of order how the questions that he thinks he answered really were not answered. Albertans have talked to us. I'm talking about thousands of seniors that said to me: why doesn't the minister of health ever answer a question? So I offer that, that there is no point of order.

The Chair: Hon. members, on the point of order I think I've heard enough. [interjection] Hon. member, let the chair do his duty here and rule on this. First of all, when the two members talked, that's a matter of the opinions of the two of each other. If we focus on the subject matter, which is amendment A3, rather than on individuals, then we proceed on the proper work of our Legislative Assembly. From this moment on I will call on all hon. members to stay on the subject matter.

Proceed, hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, on the subject.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Denis: Point of order. I have another point of order dealing with the decorum of this House. Mr. Chairman, I just heard the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere refer to me as a joke in his heckling, and I would ask that he please withdraw these comments as they're clearly unparliamentary.

The Chair: On this point of order.

Mr. Anderson: Is he serious? Is that a serious point of order? Is that a serious point of order, Mr. Chair? You're actually going to allow him to call a point of order. Well, with the amount of heckling that goes back . . .

The Chair: The hon. member stood up and spoke on a point of order, so the hon. member now has the floor to reply on the point of order.

Mr. Anderson: I clearly thought that the man, by standing up and making a point of order, was making a joke, so I was just clearly pointing out that I thought he was making a joke. Obviously, he wasn't making a joke. So what are we talking about here? This is a point of order? This is what this has come to?

The Chair: Okay. The chair heard the point of order and heard the response. Let the chair rule on it here. Okay? Please sit down, hon. member. First of all, the comment is not recorded, right? In the Assembly the comments overheard here and there are not part of the record. Two, I want emphasize again: hon. member, stay on the subject matter. We are talking about amendment A3. If you read amendment A3, you know what it is. Please don't impute motives on each other.

Thank you very much.

Shall we proceed on amendment A3, hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere?

Mr. Kang: Mr. Chairman, what is the point of order about? Why don't we deal with the point of order?

The Chair: The chair already ruled on that, so please sit down.

We'll continue with amendment A3. Please refer to amendment A3, read it properly, and debate on that.

Thank you.

Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, continue on amendment A3.

Mr. Anderson: They're not big fans of hearing things that they don't like. They don't really like that.

9:30

Debate Continued

Mr. Anderson: What is contained in this bill is an amendment asking the health charter to include wait time guarantees, legislated wait time guarantees. These legislated wait time guarantees: Mr. Chair, this is the focus here. We've got the wait time guarantees right here. I'm saying that that health minister, by not implementing this piece of paper right here and not agreeing to it, is not doing enough or, in my view, is doing nothing that will help Albertans resolve this ER crisis. That is my opinion. Okay? That's my opinion. I know that's hard for the health minister to understand, but that is my opinion. All right?

When I say that he's doing nothing, what I mean by that is that my opinion is that he's doing nothing because I don't see any results. I don't see this document being passed. That's very frustrating for people who are dying and waiting in emergency rooms. It's really funny for some of the members over there with the smiles on their faces. They get really happy when they call points of order. But I think Albertans want to know why they haven't passed these wait time guarantees. Why are they sitting there just doing nothing about this piece of paper here legislating the wait time guarantees? Why won't they act?

The health minister has clearly met with people. He has met with people lots. But that's not enough, sir. That's not enough for Albertans. We need that health minister to stand up and support this piece of paper, get some benchmarks – that's what this piece of paper calls for – benchmarks for waiting times in our emergency rooms. Once those benchmarks are in place, we will be a whole lot safer in this province, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert according to my list.

Mr. Allred: Well, good morning, Mr. Chair. It's nice to see everybody so bright and chipper this morning. Yesterday I indicated that I was inclined to support this amendment, and since then I've had a pretty good discussion with the minister of health, who is very accommodating, I must say, and provided me with a lot of background information and a lot of projections on the future.

There's been some discussion about the hon. minister dithering and doing nothing. I have to disagree with that. I find the minister has been very responsive. I've had the occasion to meet with him on a number of issues over the last several months, and I've always found him to be very accommodating despite his very busy schedule. I have the utmost respect for him. I've observed his actions over the last eight or nine months – I don't know how many months it's been – and I must say that I've got a lot of admiration for the minister of health. I think he is doing an excellent job in trying his best to bring some accountability and to get the system working.

Mr. Chair, we had a very detailed discussion about the amendment. The minister expressed his concerns to me, and I must admit that I share some of those concerns. In sub (c) it says: "include as guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." The hon. minister expresses concern: what does "unnecessary" mean? I must say that it's pretty difficult to define. What is an unnecessary death? I would have to say that every death is unnecessary. Those are certainly some of his concerns.

Under (d) he has a concern. I will read it:

Set standards for lengths of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals consistent with the "Position Statement on Emergency Department Overcrowding" published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and dated February 2007.

I don't think he has any concern with the first part of it, setting standards for length of stay in the emergency departments of hospitals. The latter part he has a difficulty with. He has expressed a difficulty to me, in any event.

We have a lot of different standards. We have the Alberta health council. I believe we have a national hospital accreditation board, all of these different standards. I guess the concern that he expressed to me is that, really, we're just talking about the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians' standards. We need to be looking at a standard that perhaps we need to create based on our circumstances here, but it must be a realistic standard, and it must be a very aggressive standard.

In thinking a little bit further about this, this is only addressing emergency room standards. I think we need a broader set of standards, and I would really like to see the minister come back with a different amendment, relating to broader standards for the whole health care system as opposed to just picking on the crisis of the week. I think we need to look at a broader set of standards that address all of the different aspects of health care. Maybe we have them through the Alberta health council. I don't know the details.

Mr. Chair, the minister did share some statistics and some projections with me on emergency room standards. Last year the percentage of cases being admitted within eight hours was only 28 per cent. Well, that, in my opinion, is abysmal. The projections – and they're projections – are to rise from 45 per cent on up to 90 per cent four, five years out. That's great, but those are projections. I guess the whole intent of amendment A3 is to set some accountability standards. For that reason and for the reason that I have the utmost respect for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I'm going to continue to support this amendment.

I'm sure this amendment is not going to pass, but I would hope that there is a message in this amendment and that the minister will come back with perhaps something a little more definitive, something a little broader, something that he can live with, something that is very clear and doesn't have some of those unnecessary words like "unnecessary" that are somewhat meaningless.

Mr. Chair, with that said, I'd just like to reaffirm that I think the hon. minister of health has been very receptive and is doing his utmost to try and improve this system. Based on the size of the system, it's a very difficult thing to turn around. We do need to set some standards, and we need to have some accountability in the system.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, you're in a rather unenviable position. You're being called upon to be a referee, to assume the wisdom, the authority provided to you as a result of the position you've been elected to perform.

Very briefly, in speaking to A3 and some of the conflict it's called up, I don't want to come across as sounding holier than thou or delivering a lecture, but a standard principle is that for respect to be earned, it has to first be given. In order for us to get past pettiness, we have to focus, as you've indicated, on A3. We have to move forward, come up with suggestions, debate the suggestions that we have received. Whether or not a person is called on a point of order because they happen to know where the insult was coming from or

if an insult was not necessarily intended but perceived, we have to get past that.

When I came in at 5 o'clock this morning, I talked about too much testosterone. We have to realize that we're here to come up with solutions, and anything that prevents us from doing that is a waste of time. Points of order should not need to be called because the conditions that arose that required them in people's minds should not exist. If there was sufficient attention being paid to the debate, that would also speed up the process.

9:40

In referencing amendment A3, I want to talk about section (c), where it talks about: "include as guiding principles that . . . no unnecessary harm to patients" occurs. Speaking specifically to that clause of the amendment, I want to bring forward Dr. Louis Francescutti, an individual who is a colleague of the representative from Edmonton-Meadowlark. He's the president of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Dr. Louis Francescutti, because he's a front-line individual, has seen unnecessary harm to patients, and he has indicated in numerous articles – and he has spoken of it – that the way to prevent unnecessary harm to patients is not to have them show up in emergency as patients.

One of the areas that he's championed, for example, Mr. Chair, that would prevent unnecessary harm to patients is helmets for ATV users. We've had in the last year almost 20 deaths. The majority of those deaths have been children. Those are the individuals who show up before members like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark or Dr. Francescutti. If we legislated sufficient safety items such as helmets for ATVs, as we have done with helmets for motorcycles, as we have done with seatbelts and, most recently with Bill 16, as we have gotten rid of hand-held cellphone usage, then these people would not show up as patients and would not be subjected to unnecessary harm because they wouldn't be there in the first place.

Now, with regard to A3 and unnecessary harm to patients, Dr. Francescutti has put forward his concerns regarding the fact that this Legislature did not go farther on Bill 16, for example, to include hands-free cellphone usage to prevent people from showing up in his emergency room. He indicated and several studies have indicated that it's the mental interaction of a discussion on a hands-free cellphone that is most likely to cause the accident as opposed to the physical nature of just simply holding the phone. We need to recognize as much as possible safety issues that are going to prevent people from ending up in emergency in the first place. I think the distracted driving legislation, Bill 16, is going to go a long way in that direction.

Now, I want to commend the hon. Member for St. Albert in supporting amendment A3 and seeking from his government colleagues a broader set of standards, concrete timelines. He also to his credit recognized that the chances of this amendment being accepted by his colleagues was very slight. However, when the vote does occur, I hope that he is sufficiently recovered from his hours of service in this debate to be able to stand up and follow through with his concerns over the support necessary for this amendment.

Mr. Chair, we can make the changes that would improve the conditions in health care in general. The hon. Member for St. Albert felt that strictly focusing on the emergency room was limiting the debate. He felt that it was possibly too focused. Well, you've got to start somewhere. Based on the sequence of events that have unfolded this week with the emergency doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark being fired, it brings to a head the specific concerns that A3 raises, and that's emergency care. I appreciate the fact that the hon. Member for St. Albert challenged his colleagues to come forward with amendments to improve Bill 17.

I would like to hear from members of the government as to where they would go from Bill 17. If Bill 17 is the foundation, if Bill 17 is the starting point, I think it would provide Albertans with a degree of comfort to know what the next proposed step is because we have indicated, as the hon. Member for St. Albert inferred, that this first step isn't sufficient.

So the health minister – I appreciate the difficult position he's been placed in. Part of the problem that we're facing, Mr. Chair, is the revolving ministerial doors. You know the expression of not changing horses in mid-stream. Part of the problem is that we haven't had a minister on the job long enough to see the problem through. I appreciate the efforts that a variety of ministers have had with regard to working on the problem, but as has been stated numerous times over the last number of hours, the problems have yet to be solved.

If any members of the government or any members of the opposition have positive suggestions such as amendment A3, if the wisdom of the majority does not believe that A3 is the vehicle to take us to where we need to go, then I would call upon members of the government or members of the opposition or our independent member to put forward other suggestions, if necessary, during the debate on A3. What could members suggest that would fulfill these requirements of no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care, no unnecessary waste of resources? If you have ideas that would augment A3 or if you feel that A3 should be replaced with something more broad or more conclusive, then I would look forward to hearing that.

I would like to see the level of the debate raised. Again, I hope that's not being considered personal conceit on my part. It's a desire for the best possible intellectual considerations to be brought to this argument. Health care at this point in Alberta is not at the level it needs to be. Let's talk about how we can move it further.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the opportunity to join into the debate again. I heard the hon. member across the way say that he would like to hear from government members on a few points, and fair enough. What I want to do in responding partly to that, hon. member, while also addressing this amendment is to make a few comments with respect to the amendment itself, starting with the request that we put in as guiding principles "that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur."

9:50

I want to assure members here that I, too, know something about the health system. Although I've not ever worked in it, I have visited enough facilities now. I have spoken with enough doctors now and nurses and other health caregivers as well as hospital administrators and other people who do work in the system and have passed on their wisdom, their knowledge, the benefit of their experience for me to consider.

So I look at this, and I say that it's a given that there should be no unnecessary deaths. I mean, this is a given thing that the doctors, the nurses, and everybody in the system is pledged to ensure does not occur. Unfortunately, it does occur in hospitals around the world, Mr. Chairman, and there are things that we can do to help prevent it in the same way that we can help prevent the unfortunate syringe incident that occurred in High Prairie and the unfortunate syringe incident that occurred in Hinton. I hesitate to raise those, but I do to

make the point that on occasion there will be human error with respect to some of those administrative protocols.

But for us to have to say that there has to be a definition here included as a guiding principle or whatever is absolutely unnecessary in my viewpoint. We shall not cause "unnecessary harm to patients." Well, I don't think there is anybody who is intentionally creating unnecessary harm. Sometimes you have to have a needle; that's a little bit of harm. But that's not how it's intended, I'm sure.

Now, the point here that "no unnecessary waste of resources should occur." I fully agree with that. I thanked the hon. member for mentioning that yesterday, and I'll thank him again for pointing it out. I fully agree that there shouldn't be any unnecessary waste of resources. That's why we have the specific action plan coming forward that addresses all of these areas of access to care and the quality of care and the sustainability of our health system. Sustainability is right in our action plan, and it talks about exactly this. Of course, there won't be any waste of resources in a perfect world. Now, once in a while that might inadvertently occur. I wouldn't call it a waste; maybe it's an overexpenditure or something like that. Every cent in health care goes toward health care in one fashion or another.

The other point that I want to comment on is, again, setting standards for the lengths of stay in emergency departments of hospitals that would be consistent with the overcrowding protocol published by the Canadian association. I have no problem with abiding by or adhering to those kinds of lengths of stay standards, but I think we should have them across the entire health system. Putting them into policy, which is where I think they belong, and putting them into performance measures, which is where I think they belong, is the better way to go. You cannot start legislating every single aspect of any department, including Health, including Education, including Environment. You would have legislation that you couldn't ever carry in a truck if you were to start doing that.

I don't want to diminish from the importance of what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought forward because he has brought forward some valid issues here. That's why we're going to come forward with a form of support for the member and for all Albertans and for all the docs with our performance measures.

Now, let me talk about what those performance measures would be because it is exactly what this amendment would talk about. I'm telling you that it's already under way, and I've said this for a few weeks already. I will apologize that they're not out sooner because possibly that would have taken away the need for this. Nonetheless, they are there, and I'm going to share a few of my thoughts in that respect.

We need some performance measures not only with respect to emergency rooms; we need performance measures that are accountable for and hold us up to a very high standard in the province and across Canada, for that matter. With regard to, for example, population health, we know that improving population health is extremely important to people. That's why I'm hosting Alberta's first-ever wellness forum on December 1, 2, and 3, to talk about how we can improve population health, to talk about how we can improve health outcomes. How can we help people from needing to go to emergency in the first place? Can we do a better job of that? Yes, I'm sure we can, and I'm sure that we also will.

In that respect, over the next few years I know that we're going to put an expectation on the system that would rival any benchmarks people want to set. In this particular case – you know what, Mr. Chairman? – we haven't yet seen a national benchmark, but we will set one ourselves. We would say that we want life expectancy to increase in a manner that is consistent with the overall Canadian average, but specific to Alberta we will have the goal of being above whatever national average might be forthcoming.

Similarly, we have expectations that there will be improvements for increased life expectancy amongst First Nations populations. That's an important performance measure. That, too, will occur.

We want performance measures with respect to primary health care. That is another way of saying we're setting standards and other targets pertaining to this important area. We know that the rates of hospital admissions for health conditions need to be managed. They need to be improved. I can tell you that the national benchmark is about 320. That's the rate of hospital admissions for health conditions that may be prevented or managed by appropriate primary health care. In Alberta we're going to come out with a target that's better than that. So why would you tie yourself through legislation to something that is outside or beyond our own control when we can do better than that? Why can't we do better than that? We can do better than that. That is the correct thing to do, to strive to be better than the national average.

We're doing the same thing with respect to the percentage of emergency department or urgent care visits for health conditions that can be appropriately managed in a physician's office. We're doing a performance measure in that respect.

We're doing the same thing with respect to continuing care, Mr. Chairman. We're talking about the number of persons that are waiting in an acute-care bed or a subacute hospital bed for continuing care.

I've had numerous discussions with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who has been a guiding light for me in this respect. He has helped me with a lot of information. That's why we've ensured that the thrust of what the hon. member has in mind with this amendment is going to be included in the performance measures. We've already done all that work.

Had we not been distracted by a few recent events, we would have had this all out already, Mr. Chairman. I deeply regret that we were taken off that path because of a few unfortunate events that occurred. Everybody knows very well what I'm talking about, so I won't go on about that.

I think it's important that we have a performance measure that tells us what is an acceptable number of people that might have to be waiting for community care, and we're going to have that as well, even though there is no national benchmark that I'm aware of for that.

So why would you tie yourself to something published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians such as this amendment calls for when we should have something that pertains to Alberta? Let's talk about Alberta. Occasionally we'll measure ourselves against the national standards, the national benchmarks, and I'm fine with that. I'm simply telling members here that we are already doing this and there will be more to be done about it.

We will be talking about average lengths of stay for patients waiting in acute care or subacute hospital beds for continuing care, about patients waiting for long-term care facility placement. We have some work to do in these areas, but those performance measures have to come. [interjections]

You know what, Mr. Chairman? It would be nice if we had a little decorum in the House. Thank you.

The Chair: The minister has the floor, please.

Mr. Zwozdesky: What I'm talking about here is that it's important that we not only talk about lengths of stay in emergency departments, but let's talk about faster access to places where people would have stay provisions such as designated assisted living beds or supportive living beds or long-term care beds or whatever form of stay they might have. Let's talk about the number of home-care

clients by client type. Let's talk about that in terms of this amendment and why this amendment is just not possible to bring in.

The spirit of it is correct. I know the member has his heart in the right place. I know that, and I just want to give him assurances that while he's no longer sitting with us, for the time being at least – I mean, I'm hopeful that something will be worked out; we'll see how that goes. I want him to know that even though he's not here and having this discussion on a daily basis with me like we once used to have, there is action being taken that will satisfy what I think the hon. member has in mind here. I just want to assure him that that is being done. We've always spoken at a high level of respect with and for each other, and I hope we can continue doing that.

Home care is . . . [interjections] Could I ask for decorum again, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, please.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you.

We have to talk about home care in terms of improving that. That's why Alberta Health Services has just increased their home-care budget by another 7 per cent, to ensure that. They're going to have over \$400 million dedicated to home care.

Now, what are they going to do with that money? I want to tell you. First of all, they are going to increase the funding to increase the services, to increase some of the staff positions, and so on. That will give people more home-care expertise, more home-care service, more home-care programs, more home-care advice and help and support. [interjection] Could I ask for decorum again, Mr. Chair, please?

10:00

The Chair: The hon. minister has the floor. Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, please sit down and be calm.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to tie it back together with what I started to say a few sentences ago, and that is that we have to set standards not only for what this amendment calls for in terms of lengths of stay in emergency departments, but you have to look at standards in many other areas that might need improvement. I have already said that there are many aspects that do need improvement, and we're working on that. But for events of recent days we would have been past this and moving forward.

With respect to home care there are also pilot projects going on right now where people who are specialists in the provision of home-care services are right in the emergency departments, right there helping people who are on home care and who have come into hospital for some emergency care and/or have come into the emergency ward and will need home care in follow-up. We have somebody from home care on a couple of pilot projects to see how this can work, a home-care type co-ordinator who will ensure that when that patient is discharged back to the home, the services they need are there, that they are in place so that that person will not be one of the statistical readmits. I know the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would know exactly what I'm talking about even though perhaps a few others might not so sharply know. That is the truth.

We're talking about lengths of stay, that are important in other areas. We're talking about performance measures with respect to acute care. We're looking at how we can reduce the wait time for surgical procedures, not just what the amendment calls for, which is

about emergency department lengths of stay. I'm making the point, Mr. Chair, that it's not just about picking one or two spots. I'm personally very sensitive to the emergency room issues because I was taught and trained somewhat myself what to look for by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and those are valuable lessons. I want to go down on record thanking him for that. I did learn a lot travelling the province with him. I have the utmost respect for his knowledge in this area, and he's taught me what to look for in terms of lengths of stay and how I can help influence better and improved standards in that respect, which is what the amendment talks about. So we're going to do that but not just in emergency care.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I want you to know that we are looking at a better way to reduce the wait time for surgical procedures. We want to look at province-wide access to surgeries in a different way. We know that the national benchmark might be about two weeks. We also know that last year we were a little bit above that; we were at 2.4 weeks. But we need new targets, and our new targets are going to be better than the national average. I don't want to tie ourselves to a third-party type document here, as good as it might be, hon. member. I want our own plan going forward, that is better wherever possible than the national averages issued, put out by some national bodies. That's no disrespect to those national bodies. They have a place to put their information forward. They set a national benchmark, and it's a good one to aspire to. I'm simply saying that I think we can do better than that. We can do better than that in a number of areas.

We can talk about scheduled surgeries. We can talk about cataract surgeries. The maximum time that 9 out of 10 people should wait for a cataract surgery will of course be heavily influenced, as it should be, by the cataract surgeons, the ophthalmologists. Let's talk about the wait time for knee replacements. There are simply lineups here that are too long for hip and knee replacements. We're working on new performance targets now that we have a five-year funding commitment, an unprecedented commitment, Mr. Chair, that will help us set standards, which is exactly what this particular amendment talks about.

I'm very supportive of doing that. I'm just not supportive of putting that into law because that's not where it belongs. It belongs in an accountability document called performance measures and action plans. [interjections] I wonder if I could call for decorum again, Mr. Chair. Just too many interruptions coming from the Alliance side of the House.

The Chair: Hon. members, the minister has the floor. Please, I'd like to listen.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. Now, one other thing I want to mention, and I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark will appreciate this because we've had many discussions about it, the passion that he has shown to me and the passion that I share with him with respect to two very important parts that tie in with emergency wait times or lengths of stay in emergency departments such as this amendment refers to.

One has to do with the four-hour protocol. There is a target that says that we have to examine: how long is an acceptable length of time, all things being equal here? Let's not get carried away or sidetracked by the severity of someone's health condition in an emergency visit. The point is that for people who have what you might call a minor reason for being in an emergency department visit situation, what is the acceptable length of time they should have to wait?

The protocol that we're working on is to say that the percentage for patients treated and discharged from the emergency department

without needing an overnight bed, obviously, would be four hours. I think the hon. member would agree that that is something that we should be aspiring to. I'm not aware of any specific national benchmark that has been identified yet. We're saying that last year's percentages need to be improved upon. We're saying that we have to have a more aggressive approach to this to ensure that we're closer to that four-hour wait time target.

The same thing can be said with regard to the eight-hour wait time target. The eight-hour wait time target talks about the number of patients that are in an emergency room inside the beds. They're involved in a length of stay, and they will need an overnight bed. We're talking about an eight-hour protocol.

What is the acceptable length of time that a person should be spending if they have a very complicated, a life-threatening, a critical type of emergency situation and they're in a space in an emergency room? The common parlance says that it shouldn't be longer than eight hours from the moment they come in, are triaged, are diagnosed, are treated, a bed placement is made, and they are moved out of the emergency into some other part of the hospital, be that into an acute-care bed or a medical assessment unit or a medical observation unit bed or whatever. Eight hours is the target to move them out of emergency, if that's what their complexity is, into another part of the hospital. That is a length of stay target that is coming in these performance measures, and we will have a chance to discuss and debate that further, I'm sure.

The last point I want to make in that respect, Mr. Chairman, is with respect to: which sites? I've had numerous discussions with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and I agree with him that it is not enough to simply aggregate the numbers. It's important to have an aggregate number of the busiest 15 or 16 sites – I'm sure the member would agree – but it's more important to have it on a per site basis, and that's what we're going to have. You might have to have slightly different targets, depending on where in the province that length of stay is occurring and in which hospital and so on. In some of our rural acute-care hospital facilities there are little or few or no lineups that way. In our urban centres, where we have thousands, hundreds of thousands, if not over a million people in the catchment area, then we have to look at what kind of an acceptable wait time is okay in those cases.

We've seen aggregations, for example in the Edmonton area, of eight hospital sites. In Calgary it's more specific to Calgary itself, not metro but just Calgary. In Edmonton we talk about performance measures aggregating Sturgeon community hospital in St. Albert, which I've talked about with the hon. Member for St. Albert. He's very passionate about improvements that need to happen there. I'll be visiting that hospital with him very soon, and we'll talk about these lengths of stay, hon. member, the same way that you and I have talked about them before because I know you're a strong advocate for that.

We talk about lengths of stay in other locations such as Stony Plain, such as Leduc, such as Fort Saskatchewan and the major sites in Edmonton. About seven or eight are aggregated there. I've given my undertaking and my sincere promise and commitment to Edmonton-Meadowlark that we will make those improvements.

The Chair: Now the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has an opportunity to speak here. Stay on the subject matter, amendment A3. Thank you.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I listened very intently to what the minister of health had indicated. I do know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek is trying to do his level best, but I believe there have been some contradictions. He complimented –

he complimented – the only ER doctor in this Assembly, who has been a parliamentary secretary, but I have to say that it's my observation that the minister of health was not listening. That's my observation.

10:10

Why do I say that? He speaks here about a shining light that the Edmonton-Meadowlark doctor brings, but I have to say relative to this amendment that he doesn't defend him when he gets kicked out of the caucus. He actually then – I find this ironic – says all the great things that are going on, but, Mr. Chairman, when it comes to the amendment . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, please. I keep reminding you about the amendment, the substance of the amendment, not about individuals.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. On the amendment, Mr. Chairman, one would think from the words that I have here in the Blues that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek would be supporting the amendment. But we have to judge not by words. We have to judge by actions. I will be watching closely to see that this minister stands and supports the amendment that's being put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. It will give me great joy to see him stand, but only time will tell over the next while if he stands and if he has the courage to stand for the betterment of our citizens.

Mr. Chairman, it's important to note that there is talk about lawsuits relative to this amendment under Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act. It says that it's amended in section 2(2) by striking out "and" at the end of clause (a) and by adding the following after clause (b). It talks about "guiding principles," "no unnecessary deaths" – no one would like to see that – but it's important to note that talk about lawsuits. This is a futile argument. Amendment A3 would add a definition, and I know the minister of health must be aware of that. I cannot understand why he would not want to support this particular amendment.

Amendment A3 would add a definition to section 2, the health charter. It would say that the health charter must, and the following sections deal with the actionability of the health charter. For instance, under subsection (3)

a failure of a person to act in a manner consistent with the Health Charter may be dealt with by the Health Advocate in accordance with sections 4 and 5 or by the Minister under section 8 or 9.

Also, under section (4)

a failure of a person to act in a manner that is consistent with the Health Charter does not in itself give rise to

- (a) a cause of action or other legal enforceable claim, or
- (b) proceedings in any court or before any body or person having the power to make decisions under an enactment.

Then, finally, under section (5), all intended in this amendment, Mr. Chairman,

the Minister shall, subject to the regulations, review the Health Charter at least once every 5 years.

Now, Mr. Chairman, one would think by what we heard from the minister of health that he would be the first to stand to be supporting the doctor, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, but at the end of the day he spoke in this very Assembly saying that he's not going to support the amendment. So here are the words, but here is the action. I can only judge – and the people of Alberta will not judge on words. They will judge on action. I would only suggest that the minister of health guide himself accordingly when it comes to what you say versus what you do.

In my judgment, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is providing guidance in this amendment, one would think, but I predict, Mr. Chairman, that under this amendment every single

member of the governing party will not support the amendment, and that's how Albertans will judge you, not by your words but by your action. If you were to listen to what the minister of health had talked about on this amendment, he made reference to the doctor as a shining star, yet at the very same notion, "Shining star, sorry; you don't get my support of your amendment," and that's very, very unfortunate. Fortunately, Albertans are going to judge this minister and this government not by words but by actions. I'll be looking very closely to see who on that side of the House will in fact support the amendment that is being put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the only ER doctor. I'm going to judge and Albertans are going to judge on where you stand relative to this amendment.

Mr. Chair, in my humble opinion, I believe that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the only ER doctor, has given sound advice, but it's being ignored. That is my opinion, that it is being ignored. With all of the things said by the minister of health, you would think that, obviously, the minister of health is going to go ahead and support this amendment, but then when it comes down to the action, it is my understanding that he's not going to. Only time will tell, and we'll be held in suspense to see if, in fact, the member will stand or not to support the amendment. I'm going to judge and Albertans are going to judge that minister of health by how he supports or doesn't support this amendment. It's like saying one thing out of this side, and then saying another thing out of this side when it comes to the actions. Consequently, I believe that the hon. member has brought forward so many things.

Now I would like to say, though, that I take exception, Mr. Chair, to a comment by the minister of health when he said: I've answered all the questions in here. He said that referring to question period. I've sent him a list of 42 questions that remain unanswered, so I truly have some friendly advice to everyone: guard against self-deception. Guard against self-deception because I can sincerely say that I'm still waiting for the answers to those 42 questions that were asked by this caucus.

On this amendment I want to thank the hon. chairman for the principles relative to having a fruitful debate. But let us judge not by words; let us judge by actions. I am going to be specifically watching this minister of health, who talks a very good game, but at the end of the day we have to judge him by his actions. I think Albertans would expect no less of anyone because that and this amendment is true accountability.

Let me take some time now, Mr. Chair, to talk about accountability. This amendment put forward by the member, the only ER doctor in here, is about accountability: accountability to measure, accountability to hold to account what is taking place. I want to say just on this topic that I found it interesting that the ministry had come up with some statistic that said that wait times potentially could be going down. But when you ask: was the actual evaluation done on a Friday night or a Saturday or Sunday? No. It was done on a Monday morning. Statistics and data can all be left to the beholder in terms of how they can be interpreted. I don't think that is a fair representation of what is taking place in ER rooms today.

In fact, I believe there is denial that we're in a crisis. I heard the minister of health say that there is no crisis. Mr. Chairman, there is a crisis. Please, to the minister of health, guard against self-deception, do the right thing, and support the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, support Albertans, 3.5 million of them, who are being advocated for by a doctor and who are being advocated for by someone who is on the front line who says that we need this amendment. We will wait. We will judge the minister of health and this government not by their words; we'll judge them by their actions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I have on my list the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you. Today I speak as a Member of this Legislative Assembly, and I will iterate words that I have presented to my . . . [interjections] I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. Am I interfering with something?

The Chair: The hon. minister has the floor. I have a list of speakers here. So, hon. minister, please continue. You have the floor.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is aware of my sentiment on this proposed amendment to Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act. It rests not in the substance of the amendment. It rests in the fact, I would venture to state, that there isn't one Member of this Legislative Assembly that is familiar with the position statement on emergency department overcrowding by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians dated February 2007. It behooves us on every piece of legislation that we pass to be fully familiar with it and to determine whether, in fact, Mr. Chairman, the content of that sort of document would be appropriate for legislation and to enshrine it in some kind of legislative amendment.

10:20

In fact, if we endorse that, it is tantamount to giving it the credibility of the balance of the total law. As legislators it seems to me important for us to understand exactly what provoked the emergency department overcrowding position statement and also whether or not this Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians' statement was ever endorsed by the Canadian Medical Association or our own Alberta Medical Association.

Mr. Chairman, in terms of relevance we have passed laws and made amendments to laws based on what we believe to be sound evidence, but I haven't heard anybody this morning expound on any evidence that they have found conclusive from that particular position statement identified in section (d). We have also heard from our minister of health that standards are better kept in policy, in guidelines, or protocols dealing with the delivery of health services rather than enshrined in legislation.

I'm going to give you a parallel example. You can have good curriculum, but with a poor teacher the curriculum matters not. With a good teacher the curriculum is much less relevant because the teacher will find a way to do it. Similarly with our laws, these are not the kind of things that emergency physicians – and I worked in an emergency department, albeit only as a nurse – have placed in front of them. They have in fact got not only the policies of their respective health authority; they've got the protocols in order as agreed to by that hospital administration based on what they're capable of doing. So we find various emergencies with various capacities all over Alberta, some that have linkages with the telehealth and with emergency physicians in Edmonton so that they are able, for example in Beaverlodge, to accomplish so many complex procedures because of the video conferencing that they're able to do.

To pass one particular position paper and enshrine it in legislation, to me it's not the appropriate way to go. I certainly agree that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has the capacity as a physician to understand many of these things in ways that not one other individual here likely has. It's possible that the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition would be fully familiar with those as a physician in the past. I'm sure that may be something he's fully familiar with, although since 2007 I venture a guess that he's been

a part of the legislative process and less likely to be practising with those kinds of length-of-stay acknowledgments contained in this position paper.

Guiding principles, again, by the very definition of guiding principles, are much better placed in a document within the context of the health facility or within the health region itself. In this Legislative Assembly we've had many arguments made by the opposition to having local representatives to help assist in the management of health care delivery pertinent to their own respective areas. If that is the case, then doesn't it behoove those local advisory teams to provide the kind of advice and the kind of support to policies and principles generated within the facility that are appropriate to the capacity of that facility to deliver?

When you look at our ambulance protocols across the province, where we have volunteer support for ambulances, which are delivering as well as they can the highest standard of service they're capable of, they may not have the capacity to deliver the same things they do have in some of the central urban areas. So when I'm asking for a differentiation, putting something in policy or principle within the context of the actual facilities themselves, within the context of the minister of health in the administration of health and the overarching framework, I think that's the right place to do it.

Mr. Chairman, it could be argued that in passing something like this, this Legislative Assembly was less responsible because nobody here has ventured to identify the actual criteria that provoked this position statement. Nobody here has been familiar with the emergency department overcrowding that took place at the time that these physicians provided this. Nobody here has presented any solid evidence that this is the best position paper on such a matter. If it was presented here, then wouldn't it behoove us to have it in a position paper in support of the minister of health. This position paper, by definition, was never forwarded, to the best of our knowledge, to any other government to pass and enshrine as legislation. The argument to have an Alberta criteria, an Alberta model that considers what Alberta and Albertans want is duly made and is duly appropriate.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just simply say that I, too, share the respect of our health minister for the valiant attempts of Edmonton-Meadowlark to suggest that we can do more for emergency rooms. We have agreed with that. There is something being done. There are many things being done. As I explained to one of my constituents yesterday, there is no place else in Canada where a Premier and a caucus have provided leadership for a five-year funding model, a 6 per cent increase after topping up the amounts that were already a part of the supports for health. There's no place else in Canada that provides a higher standard of health overall.

I've had constituents, while I knocked on doors this summer, tell me that if they were in their own province, they wouldn't have had the level of health they've been able to get in health supports here. I had a meeting the other evening with several of my constituents, one of whom had some emergency contacts and need for emergency services. He stated emphatically that this health system, this emergency system, is there when you need it. When you need it. The most important thing in emergency was to be triaged properly, to get the type of care you need when you need it, and if you are waiting in emergency – and waits are regrettable – then we hope that the kinds of service delivery elements that the minister of health is bringing forward will help correct, if not all, at least most of the difficulties that we have been experiencing.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take my leave and thank you very much for the privilege of speaking on this amendment this morning.

The Chair: Thank you.

The chair has a list of speakers here, so I just want to read those on my list: the hon. members for Edmonton-Strathcona, Calgary-Fish Creek, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, Calgary-Varsity, Edmonton-Meadowlark, and Calgary-McCall. So, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, your floor on the amendment.

Ms Notley: On the amendment. Thank you very much. I'm pleased to be able to rise again to speak on the amendment to Bill 17 put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I had a chance earlier today, I guess is the way I would characterize it, to speak on this issue, but I think that there's so much to talk about on this.

What this amendment goes to is the question: how do we build some kind of accountability, accountability that is linked through our democratic process to the people of Alberta for the improvements that need to happen in our health care system? That's really what this amendment is trying to do. It's trying to read into a piece of legislation, legislation which, unlike regulation and unlike policy, is actually directly linked to the people of the province through the democratic process and through this House. In so doing, what we can do is put out there in a way that the people of Alberta can see and touch and feel to some extent the ways in which we are going to hold the government accountable for its treatment of that system for which we all care so deeply, that being our health care system.

10:30

I think that the provisions that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark wants to have us include in the charter are provisions that are geared towards improving our health care system, where the government suggests: well, this is a problem because, you know, we're worried that somehow this will have some kind of legal force and effect, and then we're going to be in court, and we won't be able to meet these objectives, and we're a long way away from these wait time objectives and all that kind of stuff; therefore, this is far, far too dangerous a provision for us to consider including into our piece of legislation. I think that, in fact, what we need to do instead is look at this particular set of standards that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is putting forward and talk about: well, how can we achieve them? Are they achievable?

You know, I was just sort of looking through earlier this morning some of the documents from the plan that Alberta Health Services talked about at their meeting last Friday. In looking through those documents, I have to say – I mean, there are documents in there which appear to me to show a pretty clear pathway to making a pretty significant impact on these wait times very, very quickly. In particular, there is a document that outlines how many days each year, how many hospital bed days each year, we have beds that are occupied by people that ought not to be in acute care. So how many days do we have acute-care beds occupied by people who do not need acute care?

It's kind of a complicated measure, but nonetheless what it's really saying is: to what extent do we have people who need to be in lower levels of medical care, not in hotels, where they have a privately paid for maid pop by once every couple of days, but in places with medical care accessible to them – how much time do we spend, how many days do we have people who need that level of care occupying our most expensive acute-care beds? We know that when those acute-care beds are occupied, everything backs up, and we end up in the situation where our emergency rooms are overcrowded.

I was quite surprised to see this document that had been distributed by Alberta Health Services, that talks about the number of what

they refer to as alternate level of care days. They talk about the number of alternate level of care days in Calgary hospitals from 1999 to 2009. It is really quite a shocking little graph. Basically, from 1998 up until 2007 the number of alternate level of care days went back and forth between about 15,000 and about 24,000 or 25,000 days per year, I think is. So it would be somewhere between 15,000 and 25,000 days per year when hospital beds were occupied by people that ought not to have been in acute care, and for the most part we're talking about our seniors. That's interesting. That's how much we were seeing.

Then in 2003 what was very interesting is that that number dropped. We went from a high in 2003 of about 22,000 days, and it actually dropped in 2005 to about 12,000 days. So we actually saw some progress being made previously on this issue.

Then, lo and behold, along come 2006 and 2007, and between 2007 and 2009 we see this dramatic change in what's happening in our hospitals. In 2007 we had roughly 18,000 days in which we had beds occupied by patients needing a lower level of care, but they were, in fact, in acute-care beds because there was no place to put them, right? So these are the people that need to go into long-term care, but there's no long-term care, so they are occupying acute-care beds at a greater cost to Albertans. That was about 18,000 days. Then here's a good one. Two years later, after the brilliance of this government's approach to health care has really had a chance to percolate through the system, Mr. Chair, 60,000 days per year in Calgary. We start at 18,000 in 2007, and by 2009, two years later, we're at 60,000 days. The line on the graph is almost vertical.

It is unbelievable how many acute-care beds are now being occupied by people that should be in alternate levels of care. We've seen a 300 per cent increase in that phenomenon over the course of the last two years. What's happened in the last two years? Hmm, what can we think of? We've gotten rid of the regional health boards. We've broken our promise to build long-term care beds. We fired a bunch of nurses. We tried to close mental health beds. I mean, the list goes on and on.

I would say that what this shows most clearly is how misguided this government plan with respect to long-term beds has been. What this shows is that as much as the government and representatives of the government can get up and talk about: "Oh, we're building all of these new continuing care beds, and we've come up with this fabulous new term called continuing care. Because we're calling them that, we can throw in all of these great new hotel-type things that we and our developer friends are putting together that have almost no or no medical staff in those buildings. We're going to call those continuing care because, you know, they're wheelchair accessible, and therefore Bob's your uncle. They are now included in this list of beds that we are theoretically building for our seniors." That hasn't worked. That clearly hasn't worked.

This graph shows with such clarity how ineffective that process has been. It shows us that the number of people who are in our acute-care beds who should not be in our acute-care beds has tripled – tripled, my friends – in the last two and a half years in Calgary alone. That's not just a trend that, you know, every province is managing and dealing with. That's not something that's: well, you know, it's a complex case, and we have to gradually work at it. That is a profound change in the effectiveness of the system that can be clearly linked to this government's decision to break its promise and not move forward on building long-term care beds. It is black, and it's white, and it's right within the government's own documents.

They should be ashamed of this. When they look at this amendment and they say, "We can't afford to go ahead with this amendment because we could never meet these standards," they should know that, in fact, there are some answers out there. Perhaps they

could cut by two-thirds the number of people improperly occupying acute-care beds in our hospitals right now were they to start moving forward with the promises they made two and a half years ago, before the election, and subsequently broke. If they were to go back and actually make their promises real, they could actually start to deal with this issue. As a result, this amendment would not be so scary for them because, in theory, they could fix the problem, or they could come awfully close to fixing the problem.

I have to say that I was really quite amazed by this document and what it shows and how clearly it shows the mismanagement not of the Conservative government generally but of this particular administration over the course of two and a half years, the dabbling and the experimentation and the elimination of boards and the creating of new boards and the: "We need more staff. We're going to fire more staff. We're going to build new types of hotels. We're not going to build long-term care. We're going to not spend the amount of money we should be spending on home care." All of these lovely little experiments that these guys are talking about: this is the result of those experiments. It's very clear that this is the result, and it is very clear that this is the explanation for the crisis that we are hearing about in our emergency rooms.

10:40

What is particularly – particularly – dumbfounding about this is that in 2008, right before the Premier of this province was re-elected as the Premier of this province, he received correspondence from front-line professionals who are working in the very place that is most likely to most quickly see the results of this government's failed experiments, that being, you know, our emergency rooms, the metaphorical canary in the coal mine. That's what the emergency rooms are. Those front-line professionals wrote to this Premier before 2008 and said: "Whoa. We have a crisis. Things are about to go down. We need to act on this, and it's only going to get worse."

The Premier responded by saying: we're going to build 600 new long-term care beds. Right after that, he got elected. He broke that promise. He did not move forward on any of that stuff, and exactly as predicted by those professionals who were working in emergency rooms, who were writing to the Premier in good faith in the early spring of 2008, the numbers of people inappropriately in acute-care beds skyrocketed – skyrocketed – and the effects of that were felt, first and foremost, in our emergency rooms because people could not be admitted.

This government has a lot to answer for. I mean, we've got the travesty of this government's history with respect to health care over the last 15 years, the various and sundry attempts to privatize. I can't even remember all the different catchy phrases that their Public Affairs Bureau came up with to describe each of the different attempts to privatize, but I mean we've been through it over and over and over again. There's this constant attempt to overhaul our public health system and open it up to their friends in the private sector and create money-making opportunities for those people at the expense of Albertans. That's been going on for years.

I have to say that just looking at these numbers, I'm not sure whether any of that stuff really has been quite as damaging as what this government has done in the last two and a half years. I suppose I should qualify that a little bit because, in fact, statistics show that in the early '90s, right before the former Premier Klein was elected, we had twice the number of acute-care hospital beds in this province. Under the steady draconian slashing-and-burning leadership of the hon. former Premier, this government managed to close roughly half of those acute-care beds. If you look at the numbers that we had in 1990 in Alberta of acute-care beds, we have cut those

numbers by about one-half. At the same time our population has increased dramatically.

So there's no question that that approach to managing our health care also is in part to blame for the position that we are in right now because we have had a shortage of acute-care beds in this province for two decades. In fact, as this government well knows, we have the lowest number of acute-care beds per capita of any province in the country because of the decisions made by this government when they decided they were going to theoretically eliminate the deficit by just creating other deficits. People dying in emergency rooms are the kind of other deficits that I'm talking about. It's not on the balance sheet, but – you know what? – I think that at the end of the day the families of those people who had to watch the outcomes of those decisions would say that the deficit they describe is far more meaningful than the dollars-and-cents deficit that this government congratulated itself about in the mid- to late-90s.

Nonetheless, that was certainly a huge contribution to the difficulties that we find ourselves in now, when this government chose to aggressively close hospital beds across the province such that we went into the current crisis less prepared than any other province in the country because we had that much less infrastructure, that much less capacity to deal with the demographic changes that are now putting pressure on us.

Of course, let's be clear. When you have demographic changes, these are not things that suddenly you wake up in the morning and discover: "Oh my goodness. One of our caucus members has just decided to talk to the media and stand up for their principles." That's not something that happens overnight. Demographic changes, the kinds of things that are pressuring our health care system right now, are entirely predictable. In fact, I find it interesting. As much as we're in the situation right now where the number of acute-care beds that are occupied by people who don't need that level of care but have no other place to go to get the adequate level of care required has gone up 300 per cent, we know that that number is just going to continue to skyrocket.

This government's own minister of seniors' care has put out the fact that they expect that in roughly 10 years – actually, this number came out last spring, so we're almost at the point of saying nine years. In nine and a half years from now they expect there to be 15,000 more seniors who require some form of medical care. In nine and a half years from now 15,000, my friends.

What's the plan that the government has right now? Well, they have no plan. Now, if you were going to give them a tremendous benefit of the doubt, which I uncharacteristically decided to do last summer, when I was working through these numbers, if you assume for the moment that the continuing care beds that they're building actually provide the care that is required, which I would argue and most people will argue and the numbers in our ER rooms will show you is not true – let's just say for the moment that members of this government actually believe that the continuing care beds that they're building now are the answer to the problem. What I'm talking about here, you know, is: is this intentional mismanagement, or is it hapless mismanagement? How do we characterize the mismanagement that this government is demonstrating to Albertans day in and day out?

If you assume for the moment that the continuing care beds that the government is currently promising are what's needed and if you assume that the government continues to create and build these beds at the level that they currently are building them – and, again, we have no reason to believe that that's the case. The finance minister has started talking about how we're going to have to pull back and cut services more than Albertans are used to in the next year because we're not out of the woods and that if we're going to get rid of the

deficit, we're going to have to start doing some much harder cuts.

Let's just move away for the moment and assume that the government is going to carry on at the same pace that they're carrying on now. Do you know how many beds that would mean they would have to have built nine and a half years from now? The answer is 6,000. Just to go back to what I said before, the number of people that will need beds nine and a half years from now by the government's own number: 15,000. That means that the government's nonplan right now anticipates having 9,000 seniors homeless.

I heard somebody else use the phrase: they are homeless. They are homeless because it is medically dangerous for them to live alone without some form of care in their homes, so they need to go to the hospital, and of course there's no place for them. There's no room for them in the inn, as it were.

This government plans now. Right now they know that the crisis we see is going to increase. If we assume right now that there are about 2,000, 2,500 people that should be in long-term care who aren't, that problem is going to increase by 400 per cent, a little bit less than 400 per cent.

The Chair: On my list, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. I'm truly honoured and humbled to be standing here before you to speak on this very important issue. Like I've said, I'm going to keep talking – my lips are moving – until my lips can't move anymore.

Martin Luther King, I'll reiterate, said: life begins to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Mr. Chairman, these are things that matter to Albertans that we should not be silent on. We have a job to do. Dr. Paul Parks, a representative of the emergency doctors of this province, raised a legitimate health care concern. On October 8 he sent an e-mail to the Premier and to the minister, to myself when I was on that side of the government, to the deputy minister, to Mr. Ken Hughes, to Dr. Duckett saying that when the flu season hits, the emergency medical system of this province is on the verge of a potential catastrophic collapse.

10:50

Mr. Chairman, emergency doctors don't clang bells if they don't need to be clanged. We don't complain. And emergency nurses don't do that either. Paramedics don't do that either, and neither do police officers or firefighters or unit clerks or cleaning staff of the emergency room or the nurses on the front lines or the nurses in the back lines. Health care workers do not cry, "The sky is falling" for political gain. Politicians do that. This is why the respect in this society for firefighters, for paramedics, for nurses, for pharmacists, for doctors is above 90 per cent, and this is why the respect for politicians is below 14 per cent: when the people elected by the people blow the people off and do not listen to the people.

Mr. Chair, I don't know what it will take to get my colleagues on that side to listen. I tried from within caucus. I didn't intend to be here. I did not make this decision. They made that decision. I will say that these are the words I said within caucus, and they will hear them outside of caucus in the Legislature because they made that decision. We are bound by the truth.

My grandfather, when I was a child, put me on his lap. I remember this moment. I was three years old. My grandfather was a sugar cane and dairy farmer in India and a rural family doctor. His sons are doctors. His father was a doctor. His grandson is a doctor. My grandpappy put me on his lap. My father left for Canada in search of opportunity when I was two months old, so he was really my fa'ther, as were my uncles. It was a beautiful sky; I remember this

moment. I used to have this photographic memory. He said: "Son, look up there. What do you see in the sky at nighttime?"

The Chair: May I interject, hon. member? This is about amendment A3.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairperson, I'm coming to the point. This is why: I'm building a case. Please indulge me. I'm building a case on why we're discussing the amendment on legislating the emergency department wait times.

This is about a clash of principles. He taught me about the truth. You can't hide the sun, the moon, and the truth, the medical principles of the Hippocratic oath. The nurses and every health care worker take an oath. Politicians take an oath here. Then you have your political oath of partisanship. This is a nonpartisan issue. This is a clash of principles. It is a sad day when you clash with the truth and the principles of health care, when the duty to report and partisan politics clash. You know what won out, Mr. Chairperson? Politics. It was a sad day in this province and in this nation when partisan politics won out.

Dr. Paul Parks raised legitimate concerns. First of all, these gentlemen and gentlewomen here on this side asked for an emergency debate – I was out of this nation visiting, bereaving my uncle that passed away a few months ago – and it was rejected by my colleagues on that side. I found out about it, and I said: "You'll have that 15th vote when I come back into town, guys. Ask for it again." Because I'm personally aware of a number of deaths and a number of near-deaths, I cannot be silent. To my PC caucus friends, I am so sorry. To the PC Party, I am so sorry. Please forgive me. I cannot be silent.

I promised them my vote. I told the minister: it's up to you, my good friend. I can't not support it. Many of my PC colleagues actually supported it, so I have to thank them, credit them, for they actually learned the wisdom to do the right thing from these people. You've got the left, the middle, the right, the extreme left, the extreme right – call it what you want – the orange, the red, and the green. I don't know what I am. Call me brown. We're all united in bringing this up. We're all united in legislating ER wait times.

Dr. Paul Parks brought up a legitimate concern, Mr. Chairperson. Look at what just happened yesterday. A board was set up by the previous minister of health, the hon. Member for Calgary-West. He made some very difficult decisions. From the board that he put in, the chairman that he put in, the CEO that he put in, was just recently removed by the current minister of health. I haven't read the papers, but what I've been told by others is that the whole board was going to walk. One or three members walked. I'm not sure what the truth is.

The CEO of Alberta Health Services was fired. Was he fired for cookiegate? Come on, guys. You can't fire a guy for cookiegate. That's just a poor guy that got stuck by the media. We all get stuck by the media when we walk up the stairs. You can't fire a guy for cookiegate.

The Chair: Hon. member, I just want to remind you that this is the amendment you introduced, so please stay on the amendment. Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairperson, I'm building the case. There's a crisis in the emergency rooms. Three of the board members quit. There's a crisis of confidence in delivering health care services in Alberta today as we speak.

The reason I'm bringing up this amendment is that when I was the hon. Member for Calgary-West's assistant, I think I went to about two minister/deputy minister meetings in two years. At the first one

I was going to bring a private member's bill to legislate emergency department wait times. They asked me not to. They said: "You know what? We'll make it a performance measure."

When they brought in Dr. Duckett, to be honest, at that point in time, with the information that I was given, I was actually quite impressed. I actually defended Dr. Duckett in an all-party committee with the minister. I made those remarks, and I stand by those remarks based on the information that I had at the time.

By 2012 the length of stay in the emergency room for admitted patients, which is a health care system measure – it's not an emergency problem; it's a system problem – was eight hours at the 90th percentile. The 90th percentile. I thought: "Wow. You know what? I can go back to the front lines after 2012. I don't have to be a politician anymore. I can go back and do my job because I love my job as a doctor." This was before any big bailout of money. I was happy with that. I thought: forget legislating it; I agree with you.

What happened is that suddenly Alberta Health Services needed all this money. They asked for 4.5 per cent. I believe the minister actually gave them 6 per cent, which is a good thing. But after that, they actually asked for another billion and a half and five years. At that point in time there was no big bailout that they required.

They asked for all this money, and then they moved the goalposts, Mr. Chairperson, to 2015. Then they reduced it to the 60th percentile by 2012. Then they lumped in the busiest 15 sites. You heard the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness today saying that we're going to talk about this disbanding. In the current measures the emergency issue is only 5 per cent of the measure. Internationally, in the U.K. the emergency department wait time is the number one health care system measure.

The Minister of Health and Wellness: I really respect this guy. We spent a lot of time together. He's a good man. He's a good teacher. He's been working his buns off because he sort of walked into a disaster situation. I gave him a big hug when he became minister, and I gave him my condolences. I said: "You poor sap. You have no idea what you walked into. You poor sap." The emergency department wait times pre Dr. Duckett – he became minister a week before they actually went 30 per cent the wrong way, from when the previous minister started to when this minister came, from 11.2 hours to 14.2 hours. They went the wrong way. The Premier had made a commitment in writing during the last election to Dr. Peter Kwan and the emergency doctors to fix this problem and to put them on a panel, and that had not happened. You heard rumours about an e-mail. I apologized for hurting the Premier's feelings, but I make no apologies because there was no panel that was set up. That meeting just happened. The ER wait times had gone 30 per cent the wrong way by the time this minister started.

11:00

Now Dr. Paul Parks has clanged the bell because the flu season is upon us and we're already in yellow alert. I checked yesterday. Every emergency department in Edmonton is on yellow alert. There was one resuscitation bed available.

With all due respect to the current Minister of Health and Wellness, I don't know a heck of a lot about teaching. I'm an assistant lecturer/clinical professor. I don't know what they call me at the faculty of medicine. I'm not a teacher, but I'll tell you – and I don't mean this with any arrogance, please, so I hope no one takes it this way – I am a doctor. I was the section representative for the emergency doctors. I do know a couple of things – maybe not everything but a couple of things – about health care. Well, maybe more than a couple.

On the emergency issue I was the first emergency-trained doctor

in the Edmonton emergency training program – I was a T100 model – when dummies like me could get in. Now it's the top training program in the nation. Many of the senior members trained me. Since then – I was the first residency trained one – I train them. I was their spokesperson and had their confidence. On February 2, 2007, I called it a crisis. I clanged the bell because the flu season was upon us. Here we are, right here, Mr. Frank Landry of the *Edmonton Sun*.

I'll tell you why I want these legislated, hon. member. Where is he? I wonder if I can invoke his phrase. Mr. Chairman, I wonder: is it appropriate for me to use the words "gobbledygook" and "gibberish"?

My emergency colleagues have been at this for 10 years in advocacy. I became president-elect of the emergency doctors in 2004, and for two years the current president at that time was advocating. I became president in 2006. We got involved in political election campaigns to try to make national and provincial wait time targets. In 2007 disasters were happening. In the fall of 2006 the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, was at that time the Minister of Health and Wellness, and there were deaths and disasters happening in the waiting rooms. Okay? They were happening at that time. We were given these reassurances and promises that long-term care beds were coming, that more beds were coming.

Then in February 2007 – I wish the ministers were in this room because I could ask them questions and challenge them. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness at that time – oh, there he is; he's over there; Mr. Chairman, I'll speak through you – from Edmonton-Whitemud actually listened. He mentioned my name in the Legislature. With the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, they allowed us to help them with their policy on overcapacity and protocols. He did the right thing. I owe him a great amount of due respect. He's a good man. He actually convinced me to run. Despite the fact that I told him I didn't vote for your government because you wrecked health care in the '90s, I said, "You're a good man, and I like you. You know what? I'll stake my career on you." I had never met the Premier at the time, "but if you trust him, I trust him."

What happened in 2007 is that in Vegreville and in Lloydminster there were some infection prevention and control issues. That occupied the attention of the hon. member who was minister at the time, so the government – I was quite disappointed – introduced Bill 41. The doctors from the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the AMA weren't happy about it because it was a hammer against the doctors, a hammer to deal with something that actually required a scalpel. Even we emergency doctors don't use chainsaws or hammers. We use a blunt scalpel, not the plastic surgery ones. Even we use a scalpel, and we're known to be sort of the guys who aren't so good at cutting.

The government got distracted because of headlines and politics because it happened in the Premier's and the Treasury Board president's constituencies. What happened? Health care got ignored, and in 2008 when election day came, people were dying left and right in the emergency rooms. Those 322 cases that Dr. Paul Parks sent to the Premier were actually sent four days after the election in 2008 to the hon. members for Edmonton-Whitemud, Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Meadowlark, the deputy minister at the time who was under the hon. Member for Calgary-West, and to the Premier, and they sent them again as a reminder because the Premier made a commitment in writing during the election to solve this problem.

During the election people were dying. They died. For the ones that didn't die, what was more tragic were the delays in care. We

had mothers miscarrying on triage stretchers. We were examining children in tents at the University of Alberta hospital. In waiting rooms we were looking at intracerebral bleeds that were waiting for eight hours. Women who had ruptured ectopic pregnancies were waiting for six hours on ambulance stretchers until they seized. A man with a ruptured esophagus waited seven hours in the waiting room. A woman bled to death in the emergency department at the Grey Nuns hospital. In this e-mail that everyone talks about, that I sent to the Premier, this doctor at the Grey Nuns hospital had the courage to put his name forward. A senior bled to death in the emergency department at the Grey Nuns hospital. These are just a couple of cases that were documented. The emergency doctors said: we can't document them anymore; there are just too many, and nothing has been done.

I worked with that minister. Previous to that the other guy worked with that minister. I worked with the minister from Edmonton-Whitemud. I was the assistant to the minister from Calgary-West. Dr. Paul Parks says that it's worse than it's ever been. I didn't call this a catastrophic collapse; I just called it a crisis. Are we crying wolf? Do we not know what we're talking about? Do politicians know more about front-line health care than doctors and nurses and paramedics and firefighters?

Then we have the other minister. He's a decent man, but I'll tell you where we do disagree. I had to read in the newspaper about the four new members of the board. No one asked me what I thought of them. I read it in the newspaper. I got to – well, I can't tell you what had happened at caucus. That would be inappropriate for me to mention here because of confidentiality rules.

I really didn't have any say in the emergency performance measures. I commented on them. I can't tell you what happened at caucus, but I'll tell you that the emergency measure is only 5 per cent. In the United Kingdom it is the number one measure. It's an international benchmark because it cannot be achieved until you solve the family doctor problem, the home care, the long-term care, the hips, the knees, the cataracts, everything the minister said. Yes. You don't have to do all those other ones. You just have to do this one because everything else feeds into this one. The length of stay for admitted people in the emergency room: you cannot meet that until you meet those other ones. This is the international measure, and the emergency physicians of this nation developed these guidelines, the CAEP guidelines.

You're going to love this, Mr. Chairman. The minister said: well, what about Alberta? Dr. Chris Evans was the head emergency doctor in the nation. He's from Alberta. He works at the Royal Alexandra hospital, and he's on the board of the Alberta Medical Association.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll be back.

The Chair: On my list here, the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to this debate very patiently yesterday all the way from the conclusion of question period at probably around 3 p.m. until about 1:30 this morning and then again from 8:30 a.m. I'd like to offer a few comments on this amendment and, in extension, on the nature of the debate.

11:10

I have to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that I have a number of concerns that I have to bring to your attention, but I think there are a number of commonalities in this Chamber that we can all agree upon. First of all, there is not a doubt in my mind that there isn't a member in

this Chamber who doesn't honestly and sincerely care about the state of health care in this province and in this country. I would suggest that there isn't one member in this Chamber that would not like to see our constituents and, by extension, our families – our mothers, our daughters, our fathers – when in need, receive the best quality of care possible, on time and with compassion wherever they happen to reside in the province of Alberta. We can have titles in front or behind our names, whether it's hon. or MLA or MD, but in the end we're all human beings, and we all have families. At the end of the day when we leave this Chamber, we are just average Albertans who want to make sure that our families and our constituents and our friends receive the best care possible. I think that this is what we have in common. I don't think that needs to be belaboured any further.

Where the differences lie, though, is in what the approach to fixing our current state of health care should be, and further political considerations make that even more blurry. I would have to point out to you, Mr. Chairman, that in this amendment the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is basically asking for something that all of us would agree upon. He says: let's improve health care. Really, what both his subsections (c) and (d) say, in essence, is: let's make health care more responsive; let's fix health care. As I said earlier, all of us agree on that. The problem is that the fix is not that simple.

I just read in a newspaper article a few minutes ago that Edmontonians said: well, why is it that they can't figure out how to fix the system? Well, Mr. Chairman, obviously, it is a complex system; there isn't a one-bullet solution that will fix the problem. I have to tell you, sir, that it was actually this government that for a number of years – I have been here in this Chamber now soon to be 10 years. I recall that on at least 10 different occasions government has brought forward a very clear statement saying that the state of health care, the way it operates right now, cannot last. This health care system that we have right now is doomed to fail sooner or later. We argued that it is not sustainable in the manner that it is managed right now.

A number of solutions were brought forward, but every time government brought forward possible solutions, all of the opposition would scream and shout and say: "No. You're trying to privatize the health care system. You're trying to make sure that instead of an Alberta health care card, at that time people will have to bring a Visa card. You're bringing an American-style health care system to Alberta." Basically, the message from the opposition constantly has been: fix it, but don't change anything. And I don't think anybody in this Chamber would argue that.

Well, Mr. Chairman, the prognosis of this government of a decade ago and even as recently as two or three years ago is coming true. Perhaps in some areas of our health care system the wheels are starting to fall off. We had predicted that that would happen because if we don't change and improve the system, that's inevitably what will happen. But the message still out there is: fix it, but don't change it.

The amendment that the member brings forward says, basically, to legislate time limits on how long a patient can sit in an emergency room from the moment he walks in to the moment he starts receiving care. Well, that, you'd think, logically makes sense. You know, if you put a limit so I know that if I walk in with, God forbid, my daughter one day into an emergency room, I can have the assurance that no matter what – no matter what car accidents happen, no matter what airplanes may crash on that day – I have the legislated right to have a doctor see her within four hours.

Well, it sounds good, but this is truly not innovative. It was actually tried. The United Kingdom legislated waiting times, and soon after Australia followed suit. They tried it. So we're not

dealing here with an untried model. They actually implemented legislated waiting periods. Mr. Chairman, guess what happened? A few weeks ago the United Kingdom got rid of that. Now Australia, right now as we're speaking, is in the process of eliminating legislated, mandated waiting times. Why? Well, because it didn't work.

Now, why didn't it work, Mr. Chairman? It didn't work because it was putting unreasonable and unrealistic pressure on the service providers, on the very physicians like the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The fact is that emergency changes from minute to minute. Different cases arrive. Different accidents happen. Different levels of urgencies of patients are there. But if you legislate waiting times, you're basically putting a gun to the physicians' heads and saying: "I don't care what you have to deal with. I don't care what kind of patients you have in your emergency room right now. I don't care how many of them you have. You will be seeing every single one of them within four hours."

What the U.K. has found and Australia is finding right now is that as a result of this, the quality of care has significantly deteriorated because our health care providers were scrambling to meet those deadlines and, consequently, probably have seen every single patient within a specified period of time because there were penalties if they didn't. But at what expense? At the expense of the quality of care. Now you could not prioritize the person with, perhaps, a lacerated finger and say: "Look, you can wait much longer. We have other, more urgent cases to see." Now they have to see everybody within a specified period of time.

Is it well intended? Does it mean well? Yes. Has it worked? No. So why should we assume that if it hasn't worked in two Commonwealth countries already as recently as a few weeks ago, we will implement it here and make it work? It simply makes no sense whatsoever.

My other concern, Mr. Chairman, is the quality of debate over here. As I said earlier, we all agree that health care is this government's priority, without a doubt. Just look at the budget and the resources allocated to it. But the quality of discussion: I would say that 80 per cent of the last 12 hours had really nothing to do with health care. It was simple political posturing.

You know, during my 12 hours here I definitely concluded that we have somehow lost focus. I know the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo took a great deal of time discussing my hair. He was giving me advice to go to a barber and get a haircut, and he was talking about the wind blowing through my hair. I see the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is now looking with envy, but trust me, nothing to envy. You have other gifts that I don't, so I think we're even there.

The fact is that – you know, it's a funny matter. If health care is really that important to these members, which I don't doubt it is, why are we doing this? Why are we discussing my hair during a debate on health care? Well, I'll tell you why, Mr. Chairman. Because this is simply about politics. The fact of the matter is that if we really want to focus on fixing health care, the fix won't come from this Chamber. The fix is outside of the Chamber, and that's exactly what the minister is doing. That's why you see the minister running spastically in and out of the Chamber, because the actual work is being done outside of the Chamber with the health authority, with Alberta Health Services, and with the front-line workers, with the doctors who are now gathering and pulling together, pooling expertise and giving advice. That's where the fix will come from.

You know, these misguided debates, taking pictures of each other in the Chamber or the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark pointing his fingers as if he was shooting individuals with a gun: that's really not doing us any good. Mr. Chairman, I think that having some 16,

17 hours of theatrics on a topic that's very important – but the substance of the debate definitely was not reflective of the importance of the topic – was not as productive as it definitely could have been.

The amendment that we have before us right now, Mr. Chairman, I know is very well intended but, as I said earlier, has proven itself not to be workable. Most of the debate was not about the amendment. Nobody has discussed the U.K. model and the Australian model of this amendment actually being in action and being pooled. Nobody has shown what the time limit should be. Is four hours a reasonable time? Should it be three or should it be six? I don't know that. How can we possibly debate this amendment in this House and now legislate our physicians, our nurses, our paramedics to a standard when we don't even know in this Chamber if it's a reasonable standard?

11:20

I'll give you an example, Mr. Chair. About a year ago I had the opportunity, a sad opportunity – I had to take my daughter to emergency. She opened the door as she was leaving school, wind blew, dust and sand fell into her eye, and it swelled up. I needed to take her to emergency to have the eye looked at and washed out. It was quickly determined that there was a minor scratch on her cornea.

We waited in the emergency room for a very long period of time. I think we were there for about six hours. Was it irritating? Extremely. But then I started to inquire. I was wondering: why are we here for so long? Well, the fact of the matter – I figured it out very soon – was that the other cases that were going in for care before my daughter were victims of car accidents. I believe there was even a shooting that day, so there was a gun-wound victim that went ahead of us. So there were many other, more urgent cases that were receiving care. Now, imagine if it was to happen after we'd passed this amendment. My daughter would have the very same right to see a physician as the guy who arrived with a bullet hole through his chest. By legislation this one doctor in that emergency room would have to see her, perhaps, before him because she arrived earlier. Is that what we want? I don't believe so.

Mr. Chair, I always believe that the best ideas will come from within the system. We have to make sure we enable them to do that. I know the minister is on the right track. I know the funding is in place. But perhaps if there is one lesson that we could have learned from these last God knows how many hours we've been here, it's the fact that the predictions of this government a few years ago that the system simply needs to be amended, needs to be improved, needs to change were valid predictions.

Now we're starting to see signs, very tangible signs, of the fact that some serious fixing needs to be done, and I hope that as a result of this lengthy debate and some of the high-pressure points within our system that are now starting to percolate, the opposition will come to the realization that this approach of fix it, but don't change anything, having Friends of Medicare saying that you're privatizing health care, or you're bringing American-style health care, whatever that may mean, is not constructive. If we continue doing this for another decade, Mr. Chairman, there will be other pressure points in other parts of the system. The fact of the matter is that the system is strained, and it needs to be amended.

Mr. Chair, I think that we need to engage in a more substantive discussion. We know we have a lot of reports collecting dust that can be implemented wholly or in part or combined. There are great ideas on the table for improving the system. I know that the hard-working health care providers in the system also want the system fixed because they actually bear the brunt of it. We bear the political

brunt. We get e-mails. We get phone calls. But they actually deal with this day to day, and they are the ones facing unhappy patients and cannot have the professional satisfaction of delivering the quality of service that they would want to.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would say to you that it's time to end this debate, the political debate, the debate aimed at scoring points and twittering and facebooking and taking pictures of each other and pointing gun finger signs at each other. Let's get into a more substantive debate on how, actually, we are going to fix the health care system so that when we go back to our constituencies on Friday, we will be able to say to our constituents that we're actually working on the health care system, not working on increasing our margins of votes for the next election. That's not what this is really all about.

At this point, Mr. Chair, I suggest to you that the prudent thing to do would be to adjourn this debate, and I'm putting a motion forward for adjournment of this debate.

The Chair: The chair heard the motion by the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration to adjourn the committee debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:25 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hancock	Ouellette
Allred	Hayden	Prins
Benito	Horne	Quest
Bhullar	Jacobs	Rodney
Blackett	Johnson	Rogers
Campbell	Knight	Sarich
Dallas	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Denis	Mason	Tarchuk
Elniski	McQueen	VanderBurg
Evans	Notley	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Kang	Swann
Chase	Pastoor	Taft
Forsyth	Sherman	Taylor
Hinman		

Totals: For – 31 Against – 10

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would move that we rise and report progress from the committee, if any.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please take your seats.
The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 17 and Bill 28. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the House concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

11:40

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 20

Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Drysdale: I move third reading of Bill 20, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 20?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Bill 21

Wills and Succession Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move third reading of the Wills and Succession Act.

Mr. Speaker, as this document stands, we are going to be bringing the wills and successions of this province into the modern realm, into the 21st century. The amendments in this act are positive for people throughout this entire province. It's important that everyday people understand as much as possible their legal rights and obligations, and that is what this act actually does.

Moving forward, this shows, further, that Alberta is prepared to lead this country and, in fact, the common-law world, which obviously includes the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia, in moving forward from old traditions past and, rather, reflecting the modern reality of our society and the modern reality of wills and estates precedence.

On that, I would say that we move third reading on Bill 21, the Wills and Succession Act.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 21?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

Bill 22

Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 22, the Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I did give a rather lengthy and rapid speech to this bill in second reading, and I will not beat a dead horse, as the saying may go. This also brings us into the modern reality, reflecting the modern reality of Alberta's families, of Alberta's legal practice. This bill also reflects some changing practices in reproductive technology. I would submit to this House that it is simply good law that we actually look forward to what may happen as opposed to simply relying upon the courts for absolutely everything. I think the Minister of Justice and Attorney General has done a good job with this law, and I'm pleased to stand and recommend third reading to you.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 22?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

Bill 26
Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane)
Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010, for third reading.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very good day, in my view, that we're at third reading of this bill. When this bill passes, if the Legislature so agrees, we will have done something that many of my constituents have been asking for for a long, long time, and that is to clarify the ownership rights of their private property.

People who have had the privilege of living in this province, actually, for a long, long time were able to obtain title to land prior to 1930, when lands were transferred and mines and minerals essentially became the purview of the Crown under those titles. But for many families who had land before that, mines and minerals went with the title of the land. In some cases, the coal was separated as a separate title, depending on how close it was to one of the railroads. It's this problem that has been extant in Alberta for a considerable period of time, the question of the gas that is in the coal. Who does that belong to? Obviously, there are issues around this issue because if you were to mine the coal without having first dealt with the gas issue, that might cause a problem. There are issues, of course.

One of the most important issues is to define the ownership of the gas for private property owners in the same way that it's already been defined for some time for government, and that is that gas is a mineral which is owned by the mineral title holder, and coal may be a property which could be held on a separate title by a separate owner, and the owner of the mines and minerals title owns the gas. That is what my constituents have been asking for for lots of years. We've been working for a number of years to try and get this resolved.

I'm so pleased today to be able to move this bill for third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on Bill 26? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand to speak briefly on Bill 26 at third reading. I spoke a little bit in second reading. I was unable to get to Committee of the Whole, so I'd like

to be able to just share a few concerns. This is an important bill, but the question is about timing. The question is about expertise in the decision that's been made. As the minister mentioned, this has been an ongoing debate for a considerable length of time, and it's been in question as to who does own the gas in the coal. The thing that we're concerned about here is that this is a complex issue.

This government made agreements back in 2006 saying that they weren't going to change anything, that they were going to let it go through the courts. My understanding is that the courts have been preparing for two and a half years, and it's coming with a date in March of next year. The question is: are we preempting the courts? What we've normally seen here in the province is that when something goes to the courts, we stand back and say: well, we'll wait until it has gone through the courts, and then if there's a problem, we'll clarify it or pass legislation.

It's just one of those things, Mr. Speaker, where it caught a lot of people off guard. They thought that there was an agreement that was going to go through the court. There's been a lot of time and preparation with experts to present the case to a judge who is going to be able to understand the full scope of it. What we've done is taken a very technical, difficult question and boiled it down to a simple bill, that this government is just going to pass without all of the expert knowledge.

Certainly, as a member in this Legislature in passing a bill like this, although we've done a little bit of research and talked to both sides — like I say, this is a very complex bill. It should not be passed, in our minds. We should be waiting until next spring. Probably the most disappointing thing is that if they wanted to bring this bill forward and pass it, it should have been brought forward in the spring session to have the time through the summer and then have the fall to pass it through. But it was just sprung on people a short two and a half weeks ago, and there's been very little time to debate or to get out and to talk to experts in this area, and there are not a lot of experts, Mr. Speaker.

11:50

We just need to be on the record that we feel that this is a bill that is being pushed through without the due diligence that should have been done, which seems like the protocol of this government this sitting, to push these bills through fast and basically cut off any opportunity to really study these and know why we're passing these bills.

I'm not in favour of this bill. I think this bill should fail and that we should be waiting until the spring and bringing it back and letting the discussion go forward and, most importantly, letting the court case finish going through rather than intervening two-thirds or three-quarters of the way through the litigation process when they're getting ready to go to court.

With that, I'll sit down, Mr. Speaker, and hope that this bill doesn't pass. We'll see the results which we all know will be.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a very, very important bill. It's been I don't know exactly how many years but a lot of years now that we've been waiting for this. It seems like everybody has been delaying in the actual courts.

Gas has always been gas for the Crown. So if gas is gas for the Crown, the only really fair thing to do is to make sure that gas is gas for the private mineral rights holder. For those reasons I think that everybody should be supporting this bill. If you think about people's rights, if it's right for the Crown, it's right for private individuals. I really believe that we should be going forward and passing this bill right away.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 26, the Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010. In particular, I'd like to clarify a few comments made on November 3, as recorded on page 1106 of *Hansard*.

There is no question that the concept of split titles for subsurface minerals is a very complex issue that has evolved over a millennium of real property law. It just seems to get more complicated every day. Even though Bill 26 is intended to clarify the situation of who owns the methane that is contained within seams of coal, it doesn't make the situation less complex.

Mr. Speaker, my comments relate to the debate of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Actually, Mr. Speaker, I've got good news for her, and I've got bad news. Firstly, even though she thought that she had lost the mineral rights to her small lot in the heart of Edmonton, she still owns them. When a lot is subdivided or in her case replotted, a mineral title is cancelled as to the surface only, and a new title is issued for the new surface parcel. The minerals remain in the name of the original owner in a separate mineral title. So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre still owns those minerals in that small lot.

Now for the bad news. Actually it isn't really so bad. The mineral title for a 33-foot lot is probably worthless given its location in the heart of Edmonton. But don't give up, my friend. With modern technology – you never know – you may in fact become the next Jed Clampett of *The Beverly Hillbillies* fame.

There's a further point I'd like to clarify in the hon. member's comments. I understood her to say that under this legislation coal-bed methane would become the property of the Crown. Except in a very few cases where the Crown owns the natural gas and the freehold owner owns the coal, this is not the intent of Bill 26. The intent of this legislation, as I understand it, is merely to declare that whoever owned the natural gas is confirmed as the owner of the coal-bed methane. I understand that there may be very few cases, about 2 per cent of the cases, where freeholders have ownership of the minerals. The Crown may own the natural gas and hence become the owner of the coal-bed methane pursuant to this proposed legislation. Given this intent, Mr. Speaker, the original freehold owner of the natural gas would be confirmed as the owner of the coal-bed methane, and the owner of the coal would not.

Another clarification, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore stated in the House on November 15, the surface owner owns more than the top 10 inches. The owner of the surface is presumed to own everything from the centre of the earth to the sky above, the heaven-to-hell concept, or as the lawyers like to use the Latin phrase, *cujus est solum ejus est usque ad coelum et ad infernos*: to whomever the soil belongs, he owns also to the sky and to the depths. Yet the minerals can be split out of that title and owned by a number of private owners. To complicate things even more, the Crown owns all gold and silver even though there is no title for gold and silver.

As I said, these are not simple concepts, particularly when you have a land registration system that guarantees title to each and every one of these landowners, be they surface or mineral owners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to clarify these matters for the record. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has any additional comments, unfortunately there's no further time to debate it, but I would be pleased to talk to her further on this issue.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, I have on my list here two hon. members, Whitecourt-St. Anne and Lacombe-Ponoka. The hon. member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity last spring to address a couple of hundred freehold mineral rights owners in Red Deer at a conference that was held by the association. They stated very clearly to me that the coal-bed methane and natural gas for both Crown and freehold minerals needed to be defined, and they asked for this legislation. I find it very interesting that the leader of the NDP, the leader of the Wildrose opposition, and a member of the Liberal Party all slammed the government for not dealing with this. Here we've dealt with it, and I hear their remarks.

I'm very proud today to stand up and say that we've dealt with Bill 26 and that we've fulfilled our commitments to that group of very important Albertans. Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I will not repeat what all the other members on my side have said about this issue. I think the issues are very clear. The ownership of coal-bed methane in split titles is now going to be clear. I am somewhat interested in what the opposition has said about this. The last member that spoke said that they're now contradicting themselves.

I want to thank once more all the people that have talked to me, all my constituents and others from around the province that have brought this up, particularly my constituent Mrs. Else Pedersen, who is the president of the Freehold Owners Association, and her staffpeople, and especially David Speirs from Calgary, who's a consultant that has worked very closely with our government and the people working on this issue. I'm going to recommend to them that they use their website to broadcast to all their members our comments and also the comments of the opposition because they're always talking about property rights. I would like our members of the Freehold Owners Association to know where the Wildrose Alliance has now stated their position on property rights related to coal-bed methane. I think this would be very interesting to the 70,000 freeholders in the province and their families and their friends.

I'm going to just leave my comments at that and ask all my colleagues to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I would like to ask the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka: do you feel that the courts are insignificant and the promises that this government made, that they weren't going to do anything? What I spoke on – and you can send the actual *Hansard* – is that this government is jumping in and breaking promises, saying: we're not going to do it. It's the short period of time; that's the problem, member. It's the short period of time this government does it. It all of a sudden throws out a bill and says: okay; let's pass this.

There is nobody – nobody – in this province that respects property rights more than the Wildrose Alliance. It's your Bill 50, your Bill 36, your Bill 19 that say that we will extinguish rights. We didn't put that in there. We spoke against it. So, hon. member, you should think a little bit. Your other minister from – I can't ever remember

where he's from. He's sitting there talking and claiming that you're looking after people when you're not. What you're doing is politicizing it. You want to jump in because it's four months away from a court case. Just be open and up front. Why didn't you bring the bill forward? If they've been doing it for so long, why wouldn't you have the respect for Albertans and bring the bill forward in the spring?

My question is: why would they do this? Why would they ram it through in three weeks when it's been pending in the courts for years and they said that they weren't going to interfere?

12:00

Mr. Prins: I would like to answer some of those questions. First of all, our constituents have been asking for this for many years. This is about property rights. This doesn't have to be settled in court. The entire issue of coal-bed methane on freehold split titles is not a court issue. This is a legislative issue. The issues that are in court are specific issues that are separate from the entire legislation. We have the right to do this, and this is the right thing to do.

Regarding property rights with Bill 36, the Alberta Bill of Rights completely and totally protects property rights, and this is property. Natural gas and oil or coal are property, and the Alberta Bill of Rights protects that. We're just adding clarity to what natural gas is and coal-bed methane is.

This is a very good bill. I'm going to encourage members, all colleagues to support it. The members of the Freehold Owners Association will take note of what this member has said.

Thank you.

Mr. Hinman: You failed to ask the question: why does this government play such politics and only bring it forward with less than three weeks? Why did you bring it forward on such short notice? We've known about this for years. Since 2006 you've been dealing it. What was all of a sudden the rush that you had to do that? We respect property rights. We also respect the rule of law. Obviously, you don't. You're in trouble with your Bill 50, going through your own property there. You're not sticking up for your landowners. This is nothing but a smokescreen. We stick up for property rights. Why two weeks?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Any other hon. member on Bill 26? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Is the Member for Calgary-Glenmore concerned that this is a slippery slope and that eventually the government will be going in to seize people's guns and things like that?

Mr. Hinman: No. The concern that we have from talking to both sides is that this is very technical. The government has stood off for a long time, and now they're saying: oh, in a two-week period we're going to change and pass the rules on this. That's fine.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, there's a point of order, please.

Point of Order

Question-and-comment Period

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would have appreciated if you had interrupted the speaker before he continued because, in fact, 29(2)(a) does not provide for questions and answers all around the House. As much as I was interested, quite frankly, in the

response to that question, I thought it's not quite an appropriate question. Actually, the hon. member has to raise questions of the speaker and not of everybody else in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. I agree there's a point of order there. Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for questions and comments to the sponsor of the bill.

Dr. Taft: I'll retract my question, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hayden	Pastoor
Allred	Horne	Prins
Benito	Jacobs	Quest
Bhullar	Johnson	Rodney
Blackett	Kang	Rogers
Campbell	Klimchuk	Sandhu
Cao	Lukaszuk	Sarich
Dallas	Mason	Sherman
Denis	McQueen	Snelgrove
Drysdale	Mitzel	Swann
Elniski	Notley	Taft
Evans	Oberle	Tarchuk
Hancock	Ouellette	VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Anderson Boutilier

Totals: For – 39 Against – 2

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

(continued)

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 27

Police Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise this morning to begin debate in committee on Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010. I want to get on to the debate and listen to what the opposition has to say about it. I would like to clarify a

couple of points that were raised in second reading, though, that I think are quite key to the debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo had a number of comments on a number of areas. First of all, I'll start with the issue of third-party complaints, the idea that a person that's not involved – they're not a witness, and they're not affected by a particular police act – but they see something in the news that disturbs them, and they're prevented by this bill from lodging a complaint. They are prevented in a sense from lodging a formal complaint, but anybody at any time can complain to a police chief about the conduct of his officers, and the chief is responsible to the commission, so there is a complaint process even for somebody that's completely unaffected by a particular act. So it's not true that people don't have the right to complain. As I said, if they do complain to the chief and they're not satisfied with his response, they can complain directly to the commission, which is the chief's employer. I think they still have access.

Now, there was an issue raised also by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I believe, about providing the Law Enforcement Review Board with the authority to dismiss an appeal if a complainant fails to follow the process. Mr. Chairman, the spirit and intent of this provision is to address extreme cases of belligerent or obstructive behaviour. It's not intended to restrict participant behaviour. Certainly, the complainant whose behaviour or conduct is under question has the right to attend the hearing and to be represented by counsel. It would be the extremes of behaviour that would allow the LERB to dismiss a complaint. I'll give you an example. If somebody has moved from the province, the LERB can dismiss the complaint, and when the complainant doesn't return to the province to participate, the LERB has to have a recourse.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood did table some concerns about whether the chief should be able to decide when a matter is not serious. I think we have to admit that some matters simply are not serious such as, for example, a complaint of disrespectful behaviour on the part of an officer during a traffic stop. While I don't for a second deny that such things go on and that people should have a right to complain, there's a point where such a complaint should not proceed to the Law Enforcement Review Board. The person does have a right to complain to the chief. If they're not happy with the chief's decision, they have the right to complain against the chief. In addition, the Police Amendment Act brings forth a number of alternative dispute mechanisms. The employment of one such mechanism would probably lead the police chief to dismiss the formal side of the complaint and proceed with the alternative dispute resolution.

12:20

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about the ability for the LERB to dismiss a complaint outright. All complainants can appeal the decision of a chief of police directly to the LERB within 30 days. The Police Amendment Act does allow the LERB to decide if the complaint is valid or frivolous or vexatious or made in bad faith. Again, the person has a right to be there and a right to have counsel present. Such a claim can be made in a court case as well.

For valid appeals the amendment act allows the LERB to decide which appeal process is most appropriate and to ensure timely and efficient resolution. That's what this bill is about, Mr. Chair. We have to find a way to get these complaints and appeals through a process in a timely fashion so that Albertans are satisfied with the response and the timing of the response.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo raised some interesting concerns

about the powers of public complaint directors and said that the provision allows for the second-guessing of investigators during an investigation and provides for unnecessary scrutiny over investigators. The integrity of the investigative process is paramount; I agree with that. We did some pretty extensive consulting on this one after the member raised those concerns.

Really, the Police Amendment Act clarifies that the role of the public complaint director is to monitor. The complaint director has no investigative function at all. His role is to support the integrity of the complaint process from a civilian standpoint. It's an oversight role. The provisions forwarded here are consistent with the move in British Columbia and Ontario legislation to secure a higher level of civilian oversight – I think that's what we're all after – and the due diligence of complaint investigations. But the complaint director cannot intervene in an investigation. It's, in fact, obstruction to do so.

In Alberta the police chief is the disciplinary authority here. The police investigations of misconduct not properly investigated would bring a police service into disrepute. I don't find any cause for complaint there.

But I'll say in closing, Mr. Chairman, that I was surprised by the objection to the bill on that side of the House by the various opposition members that spoke to it. We double-checked with our stakeholders that, in fact, they were consulted on these and that they remain in support. That is, in fact, the case. The couple I talked to – I made a commitment, but I'll publicly make the commitment here. I think for some of the people that originally provided input, the stakeholder groups that provided input, the devil may be in the details. So I've committed to a couple and I'll commit here in the House that we will take the regulations out before we pass them or go back to our stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the House for the ability to speak to address some of the concerns on Bill 27. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 27 in committee. I appreciated the comments from the Solicitor General. It's always valuable when the minister brings back specific answers to questions that are raised in debate.

If I heard correctly, I was particularly struck and pleased by the minister's closing comments that he would take regulations and circulate them around back to stakeholders before implementing them. Of course, we would prefer a process in which the regulations were brought forward with the legislation. Believe it or not, there was a time when that was the practice. Nonetheless, I do appreciate the responsiveness of the Solicitor General.

This bill is about something very fundamental to our society, which is public confidence in the police. We spoke about this. I spoke about this the other night. Canadians have a wonderful heritage, a very important heritage, in our civilized country of excellent relations in general between civilians and police. In many, many countries in the world there's always tension between the police and the civilians. Even with our neighbours to the south many, many times the relations between police and civilians are strained. Certainly, in many countries in less developed parts of the world, you know, the term "police state" is used for a reason. People live in fear of the police.

Sadly, as has been remarked in this Assembly, the reputation of police in Canada has been tarnished in the last decade or so, whether it's dramatic cases involving tasers – and it's not just the RCMP; it's

many other police forces who are caught in controversies concerning tasers or around other complaints: the G-20 episode in Toronto or the Whyte Avenue riots in Edmonton several years ago, where police conduct is being called into question. We need to have measures in place to ensure that civilians have confidence that if they file a complaint against the police if they feel that police are abusive, the complaint will be properly dealt with.

At the same time, it's delicate because we have to respect the very difficult job the police have in dealing with people who are themselves abusive, violent, you know, sometimes intoxicated, or otherwise difficult. So my huge respect goes out to all police officers who try to navigate that line about treating people with respect when those people are often being abusive to the police. Nonetheless, as an Assembly we have a job to protect the public confidence in the police.

I know our caucus has looked at this legislation, Mr. Chairman. I actually have an amendment to propose for Bill 27, and I've got the appropriate number of copies here.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Hon. member, we'll have the pages distribute them, and then we'll proceed.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, please proceed.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This will be, I take it, amendment A1?

The Deputy Chair: Amendment A1.

Dr. Taft: I'll read it into the record. It's very brief. I signed this amendment on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is our critic for this area, and it reads as follows: "Mr. Hehr to move that Bill 27, Police Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 6(a), in the proposed section 20(1)(e.1) and (e.2), by striking out 'is unable' wherever it occurs." That's the sum total of this amendment, Mr. Chairman.

12:30

Really, this amendment is about clarification. This isn't, I don't think, a controversial move, but it is about precise language and clarification of what's intended here. Now, at this stage, in committee, I just want to get into the record our understanding of how Bill 27 reads before this amendment. As it stands right now section 20 of Bill 27 was amended

in subsection (1) by adding the following after clause (c):

(e.1) if a complainant fails to attend, to answer questions or to produce an item as required under clause (c) or (d),

and then the next two words are crucial, Mr. Chairman, is unable or refuses to participate or to follow processes or conducts himself or herself in an inappropriate manner, the Board may dismiss the matter;

and then it continues:

(e.2) if a witness fails to attend or to answer questions, is unable or refuses to participate or to follow processes or conducts himself or herself in an inappropriate manner, the Board may dismiss the witness and continue with the matter.

Mr. Chairman, the point of the amendment I have moved on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is to pull out those two words "is unable" because as we read it, it doesn't make sense. Let's imagine that for whatever reason somebody is unable: they're in a coma or they're somehow predisposed. We shouldn't have legislation that forces this particular outcome. Even where a complainant – well, I'll go on our briefing notes here.

The proposed changes to section 20 are patently absurd in situations where the complainant or a witness is unable to respond. Their inability should not be used as a pretext to dismiss what might be a valid appeal. Even where a complainant or witness falls into any of the behavioural classes provided above, it should simply be assessed against their credibility rather than used as a means to expedite the disposal of the appeal. This type of power is foreign to criminal matters, civil trials, administrative tribunals, or almost any other professional discipline systems. In almost any other adjudicative setting if a complainant or a witness is guilty of behaving in the ways listed in (e.1) or (e.2), the hearing would simply proceed to its conclusion based on the available evidence. In other words, this is an opportunity to refine and clarify the language of this legislation, Mr. Chairman.

With those comments, I look forward to hearing from any other members on this. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Is there nobody else?

The Deputy Chair: Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity wish to speak?

Mr. Chase: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. From my – and I'll put it on the record – limited understanding of legal procedures despite the fact that my son-in-law is a member of Bennett Jones and my brother is a partner at Miles Davison, and I'm proud of both of them, and the hon. housing minister went to school with my son-in-law at the University of Alberta, a terrific institution . . .

Mr. Denis: Bar school.

Mr. Chase: Oh, pardon me. Bar school. Okay. They went to the bar frequently together.

My understanding, Mr. Chair, of this legislation, is that it's attempting to recognize that a person who is being tried has every right to fair representation. In other words, if for some reason they're affected by addictions, if for some reason they're affected by mental illness, if there is an intellectual capacity problem, if there is a health concern, if they're not capable of interpreting and understanding and responding in the court proceedings, then they should not, basically – I think the word is indemnify themselves; in other words, they should not accidentally not be able to defend themselves.

Therefore, this amendment, by taking out "is unable," recognizes the fact that certain individuals require almost greater understanding or greater appreciation than a person whose faculties are without question. It may be, Mr. Chair, a person who does not have the educational background to fully comprehend what is taking place during the court proceedings. This amendment gives more protection to the complainant to ensure that they're fully understanding and can then be properly supported. It's an attempt, basically, to make the law level to all individuals regardless of where they're at in their comprehension.

Mr. Chair, I very much appreciate the opportunity to do a little bit of service toward explaining the justification for this amendment, and I'm going to turn it over to the professionals to argue it to a stronger extent. Thank you for the opportunity to participate on amendment A1.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak in general on this bill at the committee stage and particularly to the amendment which we have before us today. I'd like to start by saying that had I had my way, I would have been able to speak on this bill in second reading as had been originally planned. But through some unfortunate turn of events the matter was voted out of second reading, even though the opposition had indicated that they had some amendments prepared to first address this bill in second reading.

One of those amendments, of course, which relates to this amendment, was simply to have the whole bill referred to committee for greater review because there are a number of elements in the bill which sort of seem to appear out of nowhere and do not reflect extensive consultation with all of the stakeholders involved in police complaints, police oversight, and the policing process. I appreciate that not all the stakeholders in this community, for lack of a better word, necessarily have the same position on issues as it relates to how this overall function is administered. Nonetheless, it appears to me through my consultations that there is a fair amount of consensus that would be better dealt with by an opportunity to review it in its entirety with all of the stakeholders. There is quite a bit of consensus in that regard.

Having said that, though, we are now in committee because we didn't have an opportunity to refer this bill to a standing committee of the House, where we could have a more wide-ranging conversation. Now we're in the position of looking at amendment after amendment after amendment to this bill.

The amendment that was brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo relates to one particular element of this bill which is problematic, and that, in particular, deals with the rights generally of the complainant in this process because, you know, one person's streamlining of an adjudicated process is another person's loss of rights. Of course, in this particular case what we are dealing with are those people who are filing complaints against the actions of the police.

12:40

Let me start by saying that, like most members of this House, I have tremendous respect for the work done by our police officers and the important role that they play within our society and within our communities in terms of keeping people safe. They often put themselves on the line, and they jeopardize their own safety day in, day out in terms of doing that work. I don't think it's possible, really, you know, to articulate often enough our appreciation for that choice that they make. And let me just sort of say as well, before I get to my next point, that because we believe generally in the important role that the police play, we have also often supported calls to increase the number of police officers who are funded throughout our province and in our communities.

Notwithstanding that, while our community and all of us from all sides of the House have tremendous respect for the police, we do that because they have a tremendous public trust. They hold a tremendous public trust, and they are in a position of tremendous public trust. Because of that they are given uncommon levels of authority and uncommon tools with which to administer that authority. And it is when you give over to a group of people a tremendous amount of public trust that on the flip side of that you also raise the bar of what it is and how it is you expect them to conduct themselves. You cannot hand over public trust to such a level that we do to the police without at the same time expecting a very high standard of conduct. I know that we get a very high standard of conduct from the majority of police the majority of the time, and I don't question that.

But the reality is that sometimes – they are human, like anyone else – the dynamics of the relationship between the police and the public is such that there is a particular portion of the public that they're most likely to come into contact with. That particular portion of the public is not, actually, you know, the gangland dealers and the Tony Sopranos of the world and all those people. It often, actually, tends to be the most downtrodden within our society who engage in property crimes and who suffer from a variety of other challenges within society. Those people, who are often very voiceless and are struggling themselves, are the ones who make up the biggest group that the police deal with. Those are the people with the least amount of voice.

So when we have a group that has unprecedented authority, unprecedented capacity to exercise that authority, and unprecedented levels of public trust coming up against a group that has an unprecedented lack of all those things, the possibility exists for there to be problems in that relationship, and there needs to be a mechanism for those folks to be able to file complaints against the police where it is necessary, where the circumstances require that. What this act does in general is that it limits the scope and the opportunity for that to happen. In particular, in the section that this particular amendment addresses, section 20, it expands tremendously the ability of the panel which would hear these complaints to dismiss the complaints when they seek to deal with their workload or move through a problematic process or whatever.

The new bill actually would allow for a much broader range of circumstances within which these complaints can be dismissed by this panel. One of the ways that this bill would allow for these complaints to be summarily dismissed by this panel is by essentially saying that they can dismiss them if they are unable to participate in the process.

Well, let's talk a little bit about the various ways in which a member of the public might be unable to participate in the process. Let's think about the most well-known example of where a person, a citizen who came into contact with the police was unable to defend themselves. I speak of the Dziekanski case in Vancouver. There we had the classic example of somebody who came into a tragic and unfortunate interaction with legal authority in that this was a person with a mental health issue. That person was taken into custody. They had a mental health issue. They were unable to describe their situation, to describe what was going on with themselves, and then they were accidentally killed, frankly, in that process. All of that happened because they were unable to stand up for themselves or speak up for themselves in the first place. Then, of course, they were unable to speak for themselves subsequently because they were dead.

That's the most obvious place where someone might be unable to participate in a process. But had that situation unfolded slightly differently, wherein Mr. Dziekanski had simply ended up in the hospital and, we wish desperately, had actually survived that process such that he might have been able to file a complaint against his treatment by the police at that time, he still may well have been unable to meet the requirements that this minister wants us to put into this act in terms of how he fulfills his complaint or how he handles his complaint. Under this act the panel has the authority to dismiss a complaint where the complainant, well, fails to attend, fails to answer questions, fails to produce an item required, refuses to participate, refuses to follow processes, or basically fails to conduct himself or herself in an appropriate manner.

Well, I hate to break it to you, but a lot of the people who have legitimate complaints against the police happen to have what are referred to as comorbid conditions of mental health issues and addictions issues, and they may well not be able to meet these

criteria. It may simply be a function of being unable to meet these criteria because of their mental health issues. This gives far, far too much authority to the Law Enforcement Review Board or to the police chief to dismiss the complaint just like that. So what we do, then, is we take these people who have been historically and systemically marginalized within our society, and we crystalize that process of marginalization within this piece of legislation so that it builds on itself and just grows from itself. We do that in a way that I think does not befit the intentions of the police complaint process and, I think, even perhaps the intentions, in many respects, of this government. This is something that needs to be changed.

Last year I went to . . . [interjection] Pardon me? Sorry. I'm receiving a note of some type.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, could you clear the paper away from your microphone? Then perhaps we'll be able to hear better.

Ms Notley: Oh, sorry. I thought it actually wasn't by my mike but was by my colleague's mike. Who knows? Thank you. Sorry about that.

I remember last year going to a meeting around the closure of Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and at that time we had a representative from the Vancouver Police Department come and speak to us at a rally that consisted of 500 or 600 very concerned and upset Albertans. They spoke to us about the fact that – I can't remember the specific figures, so you'll have to take this with a grain of salt, but I'm close to having the right ones, anyway – roughly 60 per cent of the work that they did involved about 500 of the same people going through the system over and over and over and over again. Those people went through the system over and over and over again because they were basically people conducting petty crimes and were homeless in many cases and suffered from mental health issues. They were the people that were the result of a failed experiment in B.C. to deinstitutionalize mental health and close a mental health institution akin to Alberta Hospital.

12:50

The fact of the matter is that these police officers came to us and said: "The vast majority of our work is working with the mentally ill now. Just so you know, you're paying your police officers and giving them all this authority but not training them to do this job. But because we are the place of last resort, because we are the emergency responders, we are the ones who are dealing with these people. They've long since been moved out or kicked out of the ERs in many cases, and we are the last responders. This is whom we do the most of our work with." That's what they told us at this really important public information rally.

In fact, what happens is that they often end up putting these folks into jails because there's no other place for them. We talk about how expensive the acute-care beds are in our hospitals, and in fact the beds in jails are even more expensive, if you can believe it. Nonetheless, all this goes to say that these are the people that come into the most contact, unfortunately, these days with our police officers. These are the people who are most likely to fit the description of being unable to meet the various criteria which are set out in this section of the act that this government wants us to pass, so these are the people who are most likely going to be the recipients of this new discretion that we give to the Law Enforcement Review Board to simply dismiss their claims.

You know what? Just because someone is mentally ill does not mean that there wasn't something done to them that was unfair. You know the old saying: just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean that someone isn't out to get you. Well, the fact of the matter is that

if you're living on the street and you're coming into contact with law enforcement officers over and over and over again, there may well be some inappropriate interactions between you and that law enforcement officer. We have heard examples of that through the previous hearings that we've had to date that were conducted by the Law Enforcement Review Board. I shudder to think what would have happened to some of those high-profile cases if this piece of legislation were in place. They probably would have been dismissed very, very early on.

Last night, Mr. Chairman, I was at an event in my community that was a fundraiser for an organization that assists young adults who live on the street in my riding. Of course, in my riding, including the Whyte Ave. area, we have probably a disproportionate number of young people who, unfortunately, are living on the street because they have fallen through the ever-widening cracks created by our inadequate system of social supports. While there, I spoke to some volunteers who work in that area, and they talked very positively about the intentions of some of the community police that they had run into. They talked very positively about the practice of many of the police officers whom they had had occasion to work with and those police officers within the community. They spoke very positively about their own interaction with them, and they also spoke very positively about how many of them interacted with people on the street.

However, they also talked to me about how in some cases, in the minority of cases, yes, but in some cases nonetheless, they observed a distinct change in the way the officers interacted with the young people who were living on the street who were often causing – you know, they were definitely engaging in criminal activity, not by any way the most serious criminal activity on the spectrum of criminal activity but criminal activity nonetheless. They talked about how these officers changed the way they dealt with those people and how a very different, authoritarian, and sometimes inappropriate process or inappropriate set of tactics was engaged in. Let me be clear. This was without question the minority, the very small minority of police officers, but they told me just last night that they saw that occurring.

Once again the young adult, who should be in receipt of benefits for persons with development difficulties, who according to the children's advocate clearly is not receiving that kind of support because of the budget cuts with PDD, who should still be in care and receiving support through Children and Youth Services but who has effectively been cut loose because they are of the older group and the resources have been cut – and this is exactly the thing that the children's advocate talked about in his report, that was filed in this Legislature a mere week ago.

That child or young adult may suffer from a range of challenges, whether they be learning disabilities, whether they be mental health issues, whether they be addictions issues, whether they be issues arising from growing up as victims in abusive households. Whatever their story is, these are people that come into contact with the police on a regular basis, who very possibly will be unable to meet the criteria that are set out by the Law Enforcement Review Board and who as a result would be summarily dismissed from being able to file and have seen through complaints against police officers at the Law Enforcement Review Board.

This is why this amendment is an important first step. It's a small first step. If I had written the amendment, I might have written it a bit differently. I might have done more than simply remove the one clause which allows them to be summarily dismissed. I might have actually, instead of removing the words "is unable" . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] Sorry. I'll speak to it again.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak to the

amendment to Bill 27? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to speak again on amendment A1. I very much appreciated the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who has the legal background and knowledge to more thoroughly explain what is being asked for in the amendment. I do want to point out that while I believe in the need for civilian oversight, very much in the way I have expressed the need for ministerial oversight, legislation as opposed to regulation, I have tremendous faith in a number of individuals that I have come into contact with.

This gives me an opportunity to indicate Inspector Guy Slater of the Calgary police force, who has provided a tremendous amount of information. Also, I want to toss a bouquet to Police Chief Rick Hanson of the Calgary police force, Police Chief Mike Boyd, who is soon retiring from the Edmonton police force and who spent a tremendous amount of his policing time in the RCMP. I want to send out bouquets to all the school resource officers, who involve themselves with youth at a very early age and help to establish the respect that police are due in the pursuit of their duties. So thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to pass out those bouquets.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, I need to address some of the comments that were tabled, in particular, by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. First, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview made an interesting comment – I don't have the words here – something in the nature that police forces have fallen into disrepute or incidents of disrepute in the last few years. I wouldn't deny that. I don't think anybody in Canada would deny that there have been some serious incidents, but I beg to point out: not in Alberta.

1:00

Mr. Chair, we've got an excellent police system in our province, an excellent group of fine, professional police officers in the towns and cities, whether it's the RCMP, the municipal police forces, our sheriffs. We have a great law enforcement system in our province, in fact. It's not because we just happened to get the luck of the draw and get some really good, fine, upstanding officers, which we did. We have a good oversight system, and I would argue that oversight is absolutely critical.

The current Police Amendment Act before us attempts to maybe streamline that process a little bit and bring added rigour to it, I think, but it doesn't intend to in any way overturn it, restrict anybody's access to the system in any way. I've heard comments of closing of ranks or something like that. Far from the truth. Not only does it continue to allow everybody access to the system; it allows for alternate dispute resolution mechanisms, which broadens the range of options available to us.

Nonetheless, occasionally there are people that come before the system that refuse to participate in the system for whatever reason, and I would have to admit up front that I can't say that I understand it. It is true that there are occasionally frivolous complaints. There are complainants who do not participate, who refuse to show up at hearing. There has to be a way at stages through the complaint process where people that are there for whatever reason but not for the reason to forward a legitimate complaint through the system – we have to be able to halt the process, to say, "This is not a legitimate complaint" or "This complainant is acting in a frivolous or

vexatious manner." That's a remedy that the courts also have available to them.

I've got to say, though, that the view of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona regarding the word "unable," while it certainly tugs the heartstrings, is not a very fair characterization of how the process works. If I was to envision some poor perhaps handicapped, challenged person sitting at a table with floodlights pointing at them and this array of mean-looking police officers and lawyers and maybe the odd police officer had his hand on his weapon or something, the person trembling there, being beaten upon, I might agree that the person might in that circumstance be unable to participate. I think the member would have to agree that that's most certainly not how the complaints process works. For starters, that person most likely is going to have either counsel or some agent or representative with them, who would be able to participate, and second of all, this is not an inquisition. It's a professional dispute resolution mechanism.

So I take a little bit of offence at that because it's an unfair characterization of how the complaints process works. In actual fact, it works very well today, and it's going to work better after the passage of the Police Amendment Act. Today citizens across our province, whether they're in a large municipality policed by a municipal police force or in a rural municipality policed by the RCMP, have access to what I think is an excellent oversight mechanism, and it's staffed by a bunch of great people, whether they're police commissions or committees. There are complaints directors. Department staff work very hard to ensure that policing is fair and effective and that oversight is fair and effective in our province. And I do seriously think that they do a bang-up job of it.

Mr. Chair, one of the reasons that works is because there's excellent communication, and I think that's borne out in the consultation that happened leading up to the tabling of this bill. All of the stakeholder groups were consulted. You know, we went to great lengths to talk to people, recognizing that sometimes compromise is required between divergent viewpoints. In many cases unanimous opinion was forwarded about sections of the act that need tweaking.

Again, I don't think this is an overhaul of the discipline process. It's a bill designed to streamline, to make it more effective and more transparent. It doesn't restrict anybody's access, and I think that's important.

While I don't think the hon. member wishes to bring any police forces or any police commissions or the LERB or anybody into disrepute, I think the characterization of the word "unable" in that particular case is perhaps a little unfair to how the process actually works.

Mr. Chair, the functioning of police in our society is absolutely critical, obviously, and hand in hand with that is the understanding of the populace that their actions are fair and effective. I think that our current complaints process as proposed to be modified by this bill provides that oversight.

We have not only the oversight process that's scoped out in this bill, but the very serious complaints involving severe officer misconduct that may bring the reputation of a police force into disrepute or conduct that injures or causes fatalities to civilians are in fact removed from this investigative process. They're turned over to ASIRT, the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team. That is just another part of what I think is an excellent oversight system of our police.

That provides for independent investigation by professional investigators. It's been lauded nationally as an oversight model. It's been accepted, in fact, by the RCMP, who have, you know, their own complaint system. They have nationally endorsed ASIRT or

ASIRT-like models. That is something for Albertans to be proud of. It was struck, designed here.

It's chaired by the unbelievably capable Clifton Purvis, who is just amazing, actually a public prosecutor in our system. He chairs ASIRT and does just a bang-up job. While there have been incidents in other provinces and there have been incidents here, they've been effectively and quickly and to a proper and right end investigated and dealt with.

Some of the issues that we see residing within the complaint system now actually predate some of the oversight mechanisms that we have today, and that's precisely why the amendment act is required. We want to continue to clean up our system, to provide a flow. It's got to be effective and timely and transparent and all those things.

I really do honestly believe that the current Police Amendment Act before us is a good bill. It will move forward. It will improve our oversight system in the province. It will continue to allow complainants to bring forward complaints.

There was one other argument made in second reading that I failed to address and that I need to mention here, that being the issue of: now we've curtailed the timelines. There's a point where it's too late, where a complainant should not be able to bring a complaint forward. Actually, we haven't changed the timeline except that we've allowed for the timeline to be from not the incident happening but from the discovery of the evidence. In fact, that extends the timeline, not shortens it.

If I was a complainant before the system and during the complaints process, after a couple of appeals and going back to the police chief and whatever else happens in the disposition of that complaint, I were to discover that a police officer had actually illegally searched my name, through criminal records or some other system, I could at that point, even though it may be two years later, lodge a complaint within one year of my discovering that that actually happened. It's unlikely that I would discover that the night that the original incident happened. Maybe the police officer never even did it that night, but it's unlikely to impossible that I would know that that happened that night. So the complaints process actually extends the timeline from the point of discovery, not from the point of the initial incident.

I just wanted to relay those comments. I believe that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview wants to rise. I'm going to take my chair, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

1:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you. I just wanted to comment on a couple of the comments made by the minister before the Member for Edmonton-Riverview proceeds to close debate on this amendment. The minister suggested that I had unfairly characterized the hearing process and unfairly characterized what constitutes "unable," and I really do feel the need to challenge his challenge of my characterization.

First of all, I think it's important to understand that this amendment goes together with an attempt to address as well other parts of the act that are changing. One of the key parts of the act that is changing is the fact that the people who are characterized as parties or who are eligible to serve as parties are limited. Where you might have a complainant who truly for all intents and purposes is not able to navigate through a complaint process, right now it is possible for other interested third parties to file a complaint on their behalf. Indeed, we have specific examples of this having occurred in the last two or three years, where other interested parties have filed a

complaint on behalf of someone who has been the unfortunate recipient or victim of inappropriate activity on the part of the representative of the police force. So that is a concern. Because that's going to be limited, those people truly may not be able to conduct themselves appropriately, and that's just the way it is.

Another reason why they may not be able. I mean, the minister said: well, they may well have access to a representative or counsel. The minister sits directly beside the Attorney General and has observed the conversations that have gone on at some length over the course of the last year where we have determined that regardless of who is funding what and whose fault it is that the net amount of money available to our legal aid system has dropped dramatically, the fact of the matter is that legal aid has dropped dramatically. It is no longer the way it used to be, and access to counsel is prohibitive. Prohibitive. The fact of the matter is that it is very commonly the case that people go before administrative tribunals without the benefit of counsel.

As someone who has in the past sat as a member of an administrative tribunal, I know full well that the rules of administrative tribunals actually in some cases limit tribunal members from attempting to engage in what could be characterized as any form of advocacy for an unrepresented complainant who comes before them. They may know that the complainant clearly does not understand the issue that is being discussed at that particular point. They may know that the conversation has moved on to, let's say, some type of preliminary legal issue, but they see that the complainant completely does not understand that that's what happened and are unable to make the appropriate legal argument on their behalf. This happens in administrative tribunals all the time. So they sit with their hands tied because the person that comes before them simply is unable to represent themselves or to follow the process or to do any of that kind of stuff. There's only so much discretion that administrative tribunal members are given to allow for a certain amount of latitude in terms of process.

With this clause, counsel for the other parties, the police, may well actually have the ability to use this clause to specifically compel the LERB to dismiss something even where the LERB may not want to. They'll certainly now be able to make an application under this clause. So we're actually going to increase the opportunity for the person's voice to be lost in this process.

I want to say very clearly that as someone who has served as a member of an administrative tribunal, I do believe that my characterization of "unable" is absolutely fair and that it's not in any way a comment that is meant to be negative about how the LERB functions. Quite the opposite. It is how most administrative tribunals are compelled to function. I have heard from all parties that they're quite happy generally with how the LERB functions, but it's an administrative tribunal, and it is complex, and it is legalese, and the people that come before it as complainants are often not able to function at the level that others might want them to, particularly because of the population that we're talking about here. That group is particularly vulnerable to suffering the negative impact that I am suggesting this act will bring about.

To be clear, I will say that I support this amendment, and I urge members to pass this amendment. I will however go further to say that I think this amendment only starts to get at the problem and that what we really need to do is delete subsection 6(a)(e.1). I am prepared to consider that the witness element of it might need to stay, but the complainant piece absolutely should not. That needs to go. But since that's not the amendment before us and we're simply talking about constricting the application of that amendment somewhat, as a first start I would urge all members to consider supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we continue, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ms Luanne Whitmarsh, a constituent of mine in Calgary-North West and the CEO of the Kerby Centre in Calgary. The Kerby Centre is an organization run by seniors for seniors with the support of more than 500 volunteers, who contributed more than 80,000 hours of support in 2009 alone. Ms Whitmarsh, a social worker by trade, is someone who has worked with communities and our seniors throughout her professional career. I invite her to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, from the bottom of my heart. I've been waiting for approximately six months to make this introduction, so today is a wonderful day. I'm overflowing with appreciation as I introduce the three most important people in my life, who are sitting in your gallery today. My wife, Jennifer, is truly my hero, and just one reason for that is that just over six months ago, after a very difficult labour and emergency C-section surgery, she gave birth to a little one, whom we think is tied for the title of the world's most beautiful boy. Early in the pregnancy we were told that there may be serious complications for our baby, so we gave him the name Evan, which means God is gracious, and we thought he could use a strong middle name, especially under the circumstances, so we chose Armstrong. I'm proud and humbled to report that everything worked out very, very well. Evan Armstrong Rodney was nine pounds, six ounces when he was born, and he is now a very strong, peaceful, and happy young man, who has without a doubt the best mom in the whole wide world. He greatly admires my third guest, our first-born, Dawson Logan Rodney, who is athletic, intelligent, and respectful. I would ask that all of our colleagues join me in welcoming my family to our Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is obviously going to be a day of families. I have three introductions today, and I am so very proud to be able to introduce to you and through you to this House three amazing young women, who are coincidentally my daughters. My oldest daughter, Florence Christophers, mother to my granddaughter Skye, was the president of her high school and a STEP student for the late MLA Dick Johnston. She's a grad of the University of Alberta and was elected to student council. Her master's in philosophy is from Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. She was a constituency manager for a retired member of this House, Dr. Raj Pannu. She worked for the UN organization with children from war-torn countries. Florence ran for the first time in the last municipal election and is now a councillor for the town of Okotoks.

My youngest daughter, Bridget Mearns, belonged to the Progres-

sive Conservative Youth Association, along with many of those who are staff members to ministers of this government today. She was also a STEP student for the late MLA Dick Johnston. Her undergraduate degree is from the University of Lethbridge, and she has a French language diploma from the University of Rouen in France. She worked on the Hill in Ottawa as an executive assistant to MP Blaine Thacker. She was an executive assistant and constituency office manager for this member and actually was considered the babysitter. She has extensive knowledge in the financial investment industry. Bridget ran for the first time in the last municipal election and is now an alderman for the city of Lethbridge.

1:20

My middle daughter, Shelagh, is the mother of my granddaughter Kerstin, and she is our reality rock. She is not political at all. However, she did work for the Member for Strathcona. She is the one with the real walking around skills. She is a hairstylist and, before she hurt her back, was an exceptional personal care aide in geriatrics. She can drive a combine, a five-ton truck, a tractor. She can vaccinate and tag calves. In other words, she can feed us. She is presently with the *Sherwood Park News*.

Please join me as I ask my girls to stand for the traditional welcome.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Today I'd like to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three awesome classes of students from George McDougall high school who I had the opportunity to meet just a few moments ago and their teachers Ms Stephanie Malo, Mrs. Barb Racine, Mr. Gregg Moss, and Mrs. Virginia Taumoli, of course, and their parent helpers who are there with them: Mrs. Carolyne Turk, Mr. Terry Little, Mr. Andrew Talbot, Mr. Scott Kolstad, and Mrs. Diane Martin. If they would all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others?

Hon. members, it's my pleasure today to introduce today to the members of the Assembly 15 students from the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta who are enrolled in a course on legislative process and legislative drafting taught by the law clerk here, Mr. Rob Reynolds, and the chief legislative counsel for the government, Mr. Peter Pagano, who is accompanying them. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm just noticing an introduction of special guests slip at the adjacent desk, and I'd like to report on behalf of the hon. Member for Medicine Hat that if those from Alberta Environment haven't been introduced, I would be honored to do so: Susan Johnstone, Janelle Hancock, Jacqueline Desrochers, Nick Beranek, and Josh McGregor. If they are indeed in the members' gallery or in the public gallery, I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm acclaim of our members here.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others?

Dr. Taft: Mr. Chairman, I know that in a moment the Member for Edmonton-Centre wants to introduce some special guests. She just got pulled out of the Assembly for a moment, so we may have to revert again.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. We will revert back.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much.

Bill 27
Police Amendment Act, 2010
(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We will go back to amendment A1. Any comments or questions on amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and just offer some comments here. I am going to support the notice of amendment on Bill 27 that we received from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I first just want to tell this House how I'm excited that there are 15 future lawyers in the galleries. If there's one thing we need, it's more lawyers in this Chamber.

This bill, of course, is about police oversight. When dealing with police oversight I often look back – one of my best friends is a police officer in the city of Calgary. He often tells me what the complaints process is about, some of the things he's gone through, some of the things that are good, some of the things are bad. But where this all really goes back to is the whole concept of the common law rule of law, Mr. Chair. I pulled up something just on the Internet briefly about the rule of law, and it goes back to 1610.

Amongst many other points of happiness and freedom, which your majesty's subjects of this kingdom have enjoyed under your royal progenitors, kings and queens of this realm, there is none which they have accounted more dear and precious than this, to be guided and governed by certain rule of law, which giveth both to the head and members that which of right belongeth to them; and not by any uncertain or arbitrary form of government.

In the spirit of our common law tradition that we have in place in places like Canada, of course, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and several other realms across the globe, I'd argue that this is one of the best aspects of our whole system, the fact that all people are considered to be equal before the law.

As this relates to the Police Amendment Act, Bill 27, dealing with police oversight, the police in our society and our province and our cities and our towns are an essential service. Even the hardest core of libertarians would argue that police are one of the essential services of the government. But the police are comprised of individuals, and guess what? Individuals make mistakes. That's why we need a police oversight process and an adequate complaints process.

This bill in and of itself, Mr. Chair, is going to streamline the complaints process. It's going to make the process better. It's going to make the process more accessible to the average, everyday person. It's going to deal with frivolous and vexatious complaints. These types of complaints, obviously, are going to be dismissed summarily, and I wanted to commend the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security for dealing with that and recognizing that, in fact, there can be frivolous complaints that are deceitful, that inveigle, that obfuscate the entire process.

In addition, this bill also prevents unaffected third parties from filing a complaint. That doesn't mean that a third party cannot have access to the complaints process, Mr. Chair. It means, rather, that we have to set reasonable checks and balances. A third party can still go and apply to the chief of police if he or she feels that they are aggrieved.

Now, in particular, I wanted to just address a couple of things.

Dealing with the amendment itself, though, the amendment seeks to amend in section 6(a) proposed section 20(1)(e.1) and (e.2) by striking out "is unable" wherever it occurs. Now, just moving to section 6 here as it currently reads:

If a complainant fails to attend, to answer questions or to produce an item as required under [a subsequent clause], is unable or refuses to participate or to follow processes or conducts himself or herself in an inappropriate matter, the Board may dismiss the matter.

The amendment as it is proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview removes the word "unable" in this case. What that would indicate is that removing "unable" removes the fact that a person could make a defence indicating: oh, I was unable to perform these duties. Well, that is a rather subjective determination. I think the member is actually quite correct because if you talk about just refusing as opposed to being unable, refusing, again, is just someone who makes a negative reaction: we need you to produce this, and they simply say no.

Clearly, the spirit of this bill, again, is to streamline the whole process, and by streamlining the whole process, you're going to have a better process in which people can have confidence in the entire police system of oversight but also in the entire complaint process as well.

I did have a couple of comments on Twitter about this. I'm not going to quote them directly, Mr. Chair, but people here just want an adequate complaints process.

Dealing with this amendment, I have to say that this is one of the rare situations where I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I know of maybe one other; I think maybe it had to do with the head of state in this country. But I think that he's on the right track here, and realistically as a government we have to go and be open and actually consider some things that the opposition has to say. They do have some good ideas occasionally, and this is actually one of them as well.

I think that this amendment, again, will further foster greater confidence in our police process, in our system of rule of law, and also in the complaints process. I actually was part of one of the complaint processes, representing someone once. Of course, I won't say what that was. In particular, this process must be accessible to the average, everyday person, knowing that not everybody has a law degree; not everybody is a police officer.

Supporting this amendment goes directly in favour of the pith and substance of Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010. I would just encourage all members to support this amendment, as I will be doing.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, may we revert again briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

1:30

Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to my colleagues in the House for allowing us to revert. You've helped me out of a bind because, believe you me, asking drag queens to come this early in the day is one thing, but asking them to come and then not introducing them truly would have made a short end to my life. So thank you so much.

I am very, very honoured to have visiting us here in the Alberta Legislature in the public gallery members of the current year of the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose. Now, this is one

chapter of an international group that exists in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. Our court here in Edmonton is celebrating its 35th year. They are primarily a service organization and fundraising arm. Currently they are supporting prostate cancer research, HIV/AIDS research at the U of A, Camp fYrefly youth leadership camp, the John M. Kerr scholarship fund, and they're working on a partnership with HIV Edmonton to create a camp for children who are infected and affected by HIV.

I would ask the following people to please rise: the Personal Puppy Prince to Emperor 35, Randy Quiver; His Most Imperial and Sovereign Grace, Imperial Grand Duke 35, JJ Velour; His Most Imperial and Sovereign Highness, Imperial Crown Prince 35, Jeffylube XXXPress; Her Most Imperial and Sovereign Majesty, Empress 35 and 1/2, Oprah Cleo Patra. Introducing the current reigning monarchs, friends of mine – I'm very proud of them – His Most Imperial and Sovereign Majesty, the Superhero Wannabee, Playful Puppy, Emerald Emperor, 35th Elected Emperor of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Lj Steele; and Her Most Imperial and Sovereign Majesty, the Twisted Emerald Starlight Empress of the People, the 35th Elected Empress of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Dee Luv.

Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: The Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It truly is an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mark and Stacy Maurier. This spring Mark and his lovely wife, Stacy, attended the St. Albert Housing Society's second annual home-style breakfast. There was an auction to raise some money for the society, and they were the successful bidders for a lunch at the Legislature. They had intended on watching question period; however, I'm sure they're getting an education as to how we work here in this Legislature today.

Mark is the president and owner of Cam-Trac Inspection Services, operating out of Legal. Cam-Trac cleans and inspects water and sewer pipelines in many of our municipalities and cities in Alberta and the Northwest Territories. His wife, Stacy, is a lawyer practising litigation and wills and estate law at Stewart, Weir & Co. in St. Albert. She is the secretary-treasurer for the Canadian Bar Association's solo and small practice forum. Together Stacy and Mark have two girls, Brooke and Trinity, who attend school at l'école Father Jan. They're very active in ringette. We had a great discussion around ringette and living in our riding. As well, we had a great discussion around property rights and the future of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, the family resides on an acreage outside St. Albert in Sturgeon county. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Bill 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010 (continued)

The Deputy Chair: We will go back to amendment A1. Does anyone else wish to speak? The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just need to make a couple of additional comments and bring this debate on this amendment to a close. The amendment was numbered A1, I believe, so we will refer to it in that sense.

Mr. Chair, again, the operation of the police in our province is, I think, an excellent system of professional police officers overseen by

a very professional and modern oversight mechanism. This bill endeavours to bring more clarity, more certainty, and streamline the timelines of that complaints process without restricting people's access to it. I think that's important.

It follows some moves that have been made in other provinces. I think it's sort of leading edge for how oversight is conducted. I believe our oversight mechanism, in fact, stands up to national scrutiny and, as I mentioned earlier, has been nationally lauded as an excellent model. So we want to continue on in that vein, and we want to provide an oversight mechanism that continues to meet the needs of the citizens and allows the police to function but makes sure that they function in a way that they're intended to.

We run a community policing model in our province, which has police officers as members of a community, accountable to the community for how they operate, and I think that this oversight mechanism provides exactly that. That's why we're proposing the amendments to the Police Act today.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to amendment A1 it proposes to amend section 20(1)(e.1) and (e.2) by striking out the words "is unable." The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona made some – and I'm not entirely sure that they're fair. Nonetheless, the context that she used of being a disabled or otherwise incapacitated person, literally unable to participate in the process, and that we're just going to say: well, sorry; you have to go. I think that's clearly – clearly – (a) not the situation that arises but (b) also not the intent of the bill. So the amendment has given me some pause here, some cause to reflect on the wording.

I believe that the words "is unable" as they appear in the sentence "is unable or refuses to participate" are intended to address a situation where a person as an excuse says: "Well, I'm unable to attend. I know your hearing is on November 29. I am unable to attend." That is a classic approach. And there are complainants in the system that will use that repeatedly: I'm unable to attend.

I find, though, that if that's the intent of those particular words, that's pretty much covered by the opening: "If a complainant fails to attend, to answer questions" – and the sentence goes on – "or to produce an item . . . is unable or refuses to participate." I think "if a complainant fails to attend or refuses to participate" probably covers the situation where the complainant is unable to participate, in the context I believe it to mean, the context that it should mean. And there are other reasons here: fails to produce an item as required or conducts himself or herself in an inappropriate manner. I think the intent is already captured in those other words, Mr. Chair.

I find that amendment A1 is in order and productive. I'm quite willing to support this amendment to the bill, and I would urge my colleagues to do the same. I see no problem in doing so.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill as amended, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: On the bill as amended, I want to open by thanking the Solicitor General and all members of the government caucus for supporting that amendment. It was meant in the spirit of improving legislation, and it was obviously received that way. So that's good.

Mr. Chairman, I have a second amendment, which is consistent with the one that we just passed, that I would like to propose for Bill 27.

1:40

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause while the pages deliver that amendment.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Chairman, if I could just briefly, while we're distributing this – we have a lot of guests in the gallery. I don't want to introduce them but just explain to them briefly that we are debating a piece of legislation that governs how complaints about police are handled. I don't want to speak for all members of the Assembly, but I think the debate reflects that we all understand that the police have an extremely difficult job, and they have to navigate that fine line between respecting everybody and treating them fairly, at the same time dealing with people who sometimes are very disrespectful and even violent with the police.

Sometimes there are complaints against police officers for overzealous pursuit of their duties or unnecessary use of tasing, unnecessary use of violence, and there's a process in place for handling those kinds of complaints. We need to respect the police and their situation in this, but we also need to respect the public and ensure that public confidence in the police remains very high.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I believe that you handed the same amendment to the pages.

Dr. Taft: No. It's very similar, but it's to a different section.

The Deputy Chair: It's to another section. Okay. All right. Thank you.

Dr. Taft: If everybody has it, Mr. Chairman, I am moving this on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is our critic for this area. It reads as follows: "Mr. Hehr to move that Bill 27, Police Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 17(a), in the proposed section 47(1)(d.1) and (d.2), by striking out 'is unable' wherever it occurs."

We don't need to repeat all the same debate that we had. I did want to just point out to the minister that while we have immense respect for the women and men who serve in Alberta's police forces, whether they're RCMP or municipal forces, there are incidents in Alberta right now where there are very public complaints about police behaviour, both municipal forces and RCMP. I think there was one that played out this week about the tasing of a civilian and an investigation into how that was handled. These are constantly going to be occurring in that interface between the police and the public, so I just wanted to make sure the Solicitor General understands that these are issues that do play out not only in British Columbia and Ontario but also in Alberta.

The purpose of this amendment, similar to the previous one, is taking out the term "unable." Right now the section that we're amending reads:

If a complainant fails to attend, to answer questions or to produce an item as required under clause (c), is unable or refuses to participate or to follow processes or conducts himself or herself in an inappropriate manner, the person conducting the hearing may dismiss the matter.

We simply want to take out "unable." If somebody is unable, genuinely unable to participate in the process, the person conducting that hearing should not be tied by the legislation. Where a complainant is unable, it's not grounds for the matter to be summarily dismissed. We should, in our view, simply proceed with the hearing until it is concluded, deciding the case strictly on its merits, which is done, I'm told, in Law Society hearings and other professional discipline hearings. So this is a point where we just want to refine the wording of the legislation so that it's that much more effective.

With those comments, I look forward to any further debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Pleased again to rise here to address Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010, and the amendment before us now, amendment A2, which, as pointed out by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, is quite similar in content and intent to the previous amendment. I'm curious as to why they weren't merged into one amendment. They're similar. That being the case, having accepted the previous amendment, having been persuaded through the rigours of parliamentary debate, or having folded like a cheap tent, depending on your viewpoint in the House, I find it hard to understand how I would object to the current amendment, which does exactly the same thing to a different section of the act. I'm certainly leaning that way.

I do want to point out, Mr. Chair, that in both of the sections the fact that a complainant fails to attend, fails to answer questions or produce an item as required, and, as currently worded, is unable to participate, follow processes, or conducts themselves in an inappropriate manner does not require the board or the person who hears the complaint to reject it. It says that they may dismiss the complaint. It does not require them to. So I did want to point that out, which further clarifies the intent of this. It gives the board some tools to manage the flow without throwing out legitimate complaints.

Nonetheless, we have before us an amendment which deals with the same wording. It intends to strike out the words "is unable." I again find, Mr. Chair, that the situation where I think that wording would come into play would be already addressed if the complainant fails to attend, fails to follow processes, fails to conduct themselves appropriately: those sorts of things. I think the intent of the section is there and is not harmed by removing the words "is unable", and I'm quite prepared to accept this amendment as well.

With that, I'll close my remarks, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, and I'll be extremely quick. It's basically passing out bouquets. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who together with our researcher Michael Decore suggested improvements to Bill 27. I am very thankful that the hon. Solicitor General saw the intent to improve the legislation and embraced the amendments. I want to thank the minister of housing. I'm glad he's back here to hear the thank you for the work he's done with a lot of people who were involved with Bill 27.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out the homeless. The plan to end homelessness now has eight years to go, but the member has been active in working with groups such as – a bouquet to Bonnie Malach, who is the head of the Homeless Awareness Calgary Committee, that receives funding from the United Way. I'd like to thank Dermot Baldwin, who is recently retiring from his terrific work in the homeless shelter, where he has enabled tens of thousands of individuals seeking refuge, seeking health care, and seeking guidance over the years.

With that, Mr. Chair, I am pleased to sit.

The Deputy Chair: I will call the question on amendment A2 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really am pleased that we were able to make some progress on Bill 27. That was one of those bills that we hadn't had a chance to deal with, and I would like to move that we adjourn Bill 27 at this point. It's not part of the motion, but I do anticipate that it'll come back on Monday evening at first order of business.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: We will report progress when the committee rises.

1:50

Bill 17
Alberta Health Act
(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Any comments or considerations or questions with respect to this bill? We are speaking to amendment A3. The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This morning in an earlier discussion I raised the question about section (d) in the bill amendment and suggested that perhaps it would be useful to have an understanding of exactly what the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians said in their paper of February 2007. When I finish my comments, I will table five copies for the Legislative Assembly, something I don't think has been presented.

In fact, the CAEP position talks about the length of stay benchmarks nationally and talks about how

admitted patients must be transferred out of the emergency department to an in-patient area within two hours of decision to admit.

It goes further to talk about overcapacity protocols to be implemented to allow Canadian hospitals to meet the national emergency department length of stay benchmarks until functional acute care capacity is sufficient.

Then it talks further, that

achievement of these benchmarks must be continually measured and ED length of stay should be documented on a daily basis, and reviewed monthly.

Then it goes further.

Hospital and Regional administrators should be held accountable if the throughput standards are not met.

It goes finally to point 5,

that hospitals optimize bed management strategies, [et cetera],

and then

that governments sufficiently increase the number of functional acute care beds to achieve regular hospital occupancy rates that do not exceed 85%.

Mr. Chairman, there's significant meat in these particular procedures, but I would suggest that this is a protocol that does not in any part of this information talk about legislating such a particular position. Legislation, I think, would be wrong.

If you go to the Hippocratic oath, you look at the fact that what was suggested in the Hippocratic oath has been updated and amended a number of times. The original Hippocratic oath was translated from the Greek by Ludwig Edelstein with the Johns Hopkins Press in 1943, then again by Louis Lasagna, dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, in 1964, and then the last editorial amendment on July 13, 2002. I quote that because frequently even things that we hold as cherished commandments, if you will, of our profession are updated to keep pace with current times.

I would like to challenge this Assembly to really pay attention to what the minister of health has stated; namely, that Alberta's standards be developed, that Alberta's standards be enforced, that we

look at new technologies and the rapid evolution of technologies and look at a process for implementing protocols that really apply to Alberta facilities, Alberta physicians, Alberta health care workers and apply to the circumstances we find in a province that's the size of three European countries and not to without study or merit really look at something and accept something that I have no knowledge whether was accepted on a national level by the Canadian Medical Association.

I have not heard whether our Alberta Medical Association adopted this, but if they did adopt this – if they did – then at no time in the previous history of our discussions in this Legislative Assembly that I can remember in the last almost 14 years did anybody ever table this kind of document. It's only that narrow window of how we admit patients and deal with overcrowding and does not apply to the overall standards that must be in place in any kind of health care facility. Mr. Chairman, I'm going to table these particular pages.

I would encourage my colleagues to consider that when we fetter legislation with a formula or regulation that has been adopted at a finite time, in this case February 2007, and not adopt it as a legislative amendment – we should look very carefully at legislation through a different, broader lens to make sure that it keeps pace with the policy, the progressive nature of what government should be, not look back at what it was but look forward to what it could be with a very properly managed health care system, a system that, I will underscore once again, has in place a five-year funding capacity at 6 per cent per year after a topped-up budget that has positioned us to do the very best possible work for the patients and for the families and for the communities in Alberta. Reject this particular amendment and challenge the health care professionals in consultation, as they already are, with the minister of health to make progress on standards that will be implemented in our facilities and will be a guideline for hospital administrators, not legislate something that was suggested at another point in time in another place but look to the future of what Alberta needs.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my leave.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, thank you very much. I listened intently to the former minister of health from Sherwood Park, a nurse, actually. It's interesting to hear her speak up and eloquently speak in regard to the position statement on emergency department overcrowding that was published by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, dated February 2007.

I guess my question to the minister at that time, if she's so passionate about these protocols, is: why didn't she bring them in when she was the minister of health? Then we probably wouldn't be where we were today. I can't even remember when she was minister of health, but to passionately speak about the protocols and not talk about legislation: if the protocols had been put in place when she was the minister of health, we wouldn't be sitting here talking about legislation five or six years later. [interjection] The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is obviously going to get up and speak about this because he's trying to carry on some conversations with me also. It's the same minister who doesn't have the hospital in the constituency, so it just shows, you know, where we're going with the government.

Mr. Chair, I'm pleased, again, to be speaking to this important amendment, put forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark. He's someone whose opinion I value because of the experience in emergency room medicine. Not only was he a doctor; he was the AMA section chief for emergency medicine. Clearly, he's a leader in the field. He's so well thought of that the minister

of health this morning or last night indicated that he had the utmost respect for the member. He spoke about his passion. He spoke about numerous other things that the member has done and how he respected him – I've got notes all over the place – but still they managed to boot the poor guy out. I've never seen anything like that as long as I've been an MLA.

My colleagues and I have spent the last day in this Chamber – a day or two days? It's been a long time, anyhow, listening to the members of the government repeatedly, on one hand, praise the member and, on the other hand, dispute any of these ideas that he's clearly put forward. The hon. health minister, as I indicated, described the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark as his guiding light, and then he went on to dispute and second-guess everything that he has put forward.

Now, his amendments call for a legislated wait time in emergency rooms, and we've all heard from the government how bad the idea is. They tell us how it can't be done. They tell us how it doesn't work. The health minister has repeatedly said in the House over the last 24 hours how wait times don't belong in law. He goes on at length about how important wait time limits are, but he refuses to give them an anchor in legislation. He likes to say how wait time limits belong in performance measures.

Given how often and how badly this government misses its performance measures or changes them to claim political victories, how can anyone, seriously, any Albertan, believe this government will meet guidelines on their own without a law to enforce it? The bottom line is that the government won't legislate wait times because they know they have no plan to actually meet them. A performance measure can be missed or it can be changed with no repercussions, but this government continues to be allergic to accountability, and we've seen that over and over and over again.

2:00

Mr. Chair, the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was trying to discredit other jurisdictions who have legislated wait time limits. He says that time limits that are enshrined into law are like putting a gun to the heads of doctors, but there are countries that have succeeded where this government continues to fail when it comes to legislating wait times in health care delivery. In Norway the patients' bill of rights guarantees that you see a specialist within 30 days of referral. The legislated time limit has been in place since 1999, and quite frankly it's still working. It works because the system is accountable to patients. If the system can't meet the obliged time limit, patients are treated in nearby Scandinavian countries at no cost to them. This example illustrates how accountability measures and practical solutions that are entrenched in law force government and, quite frankly, force the bureaucrats to adapt and respond to the needs of patients.

The minister also talked about court time and how he wants people to get into the health system and that he doesn't want them to be tied up in court time. I found that comment very interesting, actually, coming from the minister. Quite frankly, you can learn from what other people have done and what other mistakes have been made. He has a huge, huge department, and he can find out what they were doing right and what they were doing wrong. It's a good way to learn where others have made mistakes or why they were not able to make the legislated wait times. The government is continuing, again, to show a stunning lack of political courage in making themselves accountable.

I'd also like to talk about Scotland, a jurisdiction that is similar in size and system to Alberta, that is moving forward on legislated wait times. It's single payer. It's universal. It's a publicly funded system, just like ours. They have a superboard; we have a superboard. They have an aging population; we have an aging population. They have pharmaceutical drug growth; we have pharmaceutical

drug growth. They have a shortage of family doctors; we have a shortage of family doctors. But they're moving ahead while this government keeps dragging its heels and refuses to show leadership.

We have a lot to learn from social demographics in Europe and elsewhere. We aren't the only ones trying to find solutions, but we seem to be the only ones who lack the courage to make the decisions that professionals like the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark are asking for. It's our front-line medical staff like doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, LPNs, nursing assistants who intimately understand the complexities of our health care system. They know the reforms, they know the answers, they like the legislated wait times, and they know that that will at least improve one area of the system.

We've heard a lot of criticism from the minister in regard to the repercussions and that if we legislate wait times for emergency, why aren't we legislating wait times for cancer care, for access to kidney care, for brain cancer, for lung cancer? The list goes on. Well, Mr. Chair, they're all connected. Quite frankly, if you're someone that is unfortunate enough to have cancer, whether it's kidney cancer, brain cancer, lung cancer, any kind of cancer, if you have eye problems, if you have knee problems, your first point of entry when you're not feeling well is emergency. If you can't get into emergency when you're feeling sick or you need to have some care because you're throwing up from the chemotherapy, you can't even possibly think of getting well.

The health professionals who work in the trenches, as I indicated, know the answers. They only need to be asked. While the government indicates health care professionals can speak out and indicates that the code of conduct, better known as the code, doesn't stop them, the message in the trenches is, quite frankly, much different, and they're scared of coming forward.

I can tell you as the health critic and as a member of the Wildrose – and I've mentioned this in my speaking – that I don't know how many meetings we've had in quiet places where no one can see the health care professionals that we meet with. I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who is just as interested in the health debate as I am and is interested in health – I can't even tell you how many meetings we've had. We've met in places that we didn't even know existed in Calgary, meeting with some docs and some emergency docs, a lot of doctors and a lot of health care professionals that want to talk.

Mr. Chair, let's be honest here. Quite frankly, we wouldn't be having this debate at all if the government had been doing their job in the first place. It's amazing to me that the Member for Sherwood Park can stand up and literally read from a doctor's oath, I think it was, and can read from the physicians, and she is a former health minister. She's talking about all these protocols that we can put in place, and she had the opportunity to when she was the minister of health, as did the Minister of Energy when he was minister of health, as did the Minister of Education. We're now on a new health minister, so that's four health ministers, that I can recall, that all had the opportunity to put this protocol in place, which they haven't put in place. That's exactly why we're spending hours and hours debating this particular issue.

This emergency issue is not a new issue. It's an old issue. It was brought to the forefront by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark when he was an emergency physician. It was brought to, I'm sure, both ministers' attention, that being the Minister of Energy when he was minister of health and now the current minister of health, when they were ministers, about what was happening in the system. Then it was rebrought up by Dr. Parks after he had sent an e-mail to the Minister of Energy, who was then the minister of health, telling him about the emergency.

The letter that we happened to get and leak out was from Dr. Duckett indicating that health care was in a crisis at that particular time. He indicated right in that letter that one of the reasons that they were dealing with this situation, which I found absolutely appalling, was public pressure. If that public pressure hadn't been there and if the courageous doctor from emergency, Dr. Parks, and our doctor here hadn't brought this again to the forefront, I'm not even sure if we would be talking about the amendment that's before us at this particular time.

The amendment, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is proposing is what I think goes to the heart of the system, truly goes to the heart of the health care system. The other thing it goes to is the heart of accountability, and that's accountability in the health care system. We have decided as our caucus and, I know, probably as the Liberal caucus and the ND caucus and our independent members – and we have quite eloquently heard from one of the government members, the Member for St. Albert, about how they support this particular amendment. I think that's very brave on behalf of the Member for St. Albert.

2:10

I sat here for hours along with my colleagues waiting for some of the other government members to come up and speak out about the fact that they believe that this is the right amendment. They have to, have to, have to be hearing from their constituents. Mr. Chair, we're inundated with phone calls, e-mails. I was on the phone till 1:30 last night talking to doctors, telling them that we're into a late night, and my caucus was kind enough to let me go home and grab a few hours of sleep. When they were e-mailing me, I said to them by e-mail that, oh, it was late, and they insisted that I call them anyhow. When I did call them, talking to them till 1:30 in the morning, I was saying: well, don't you find this late? It is a normal procedure for them to be up at 1:30 in the morning and doing their emergency care, et cetera.

We could go on and on, Mr. Chair, about this amendment, but I can tell you, in all honesty, that why I believe this amendment is the right thing is twofold. The first reason, quite frankly, is what we're hearing from the emergency physician from Edmonton-Meadowlark and what we're hearing from other health care providers in the system, that they believe in that. That goes to the emergency doctors, in fact all doctors and, quite frankly, all health care professionals.

I think that more important, though – and this goes to the heart of the situation – is what we're hearing from our constituents and what we're hearing from Albertans about the importance of the amendment that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought forward. We've spent hours and hours of debate on this. I would hope that the government members will speak up on this particular amendment, whether they support it or not, and if they support it, as the Member for St. Albert explained why he supports it. I have the utmost respect for members to get up and speak about why they don't support the amendment because, ultimately, the buck stops with them, and the voters in their constituencies are the bosses, as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo likes to say.

We have continually debated this one amendment, and we will continue to debate this amendment. We've all obviously said that we're prepared to go for all hours at night to discuss this. I'm pleased once again to stand up and support the amendment that Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought forward. In fact, I'm proud to be able to stand up and support this particular amendment. I'm proud to stand up on behalf of the unbelievably dedicated, compassionate health care professionals, and that's all health care professionals. That goes down to the janitors and every other single person that works in this health care system that tries to make this health

care system run smoothly no matter what job they take on. They're all important.

I'm more proud, actually, Mr. Chair, to speak on behalf of the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek as the health critic for the Wildrose Alliance, to speak on behalf of the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of e-mails, Twitters, letters, phone calls that we have received on behalf of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have certainly gone around and around and around on the great health care crisis here in Alberta, and we haven't heard a great deal of anything except how bad it is. We've heard how good it would be if we'd just pass the law making it good. It is as simplistic as saying that somehow the five-year funding arrangement was going to make the financial pressures go away or that if we're just the most compassionate people here and we just outlaw poverty magically, we won't have to worry about those poor people.

We have watched over the last few years a health care debate in the States, our neighbours to the south, where they can't even agree to get together to talk about it, a system that's funded by pharmaceuticals, by private interest, and by lawyers. The last thing that a publicly funded health care system needs is lawyers in there telling doctors what they can and cannot do and how quickly they're going to do it. If I am a patient in this system, I want the doctor to know that he can take the time it takes to assess what's wrong with me. That might be a while, but I want to get the treatment that the doctor believes is necessary and not their lawyer.

Mr. Chairman, it's really tragic that it seems like the only way one of the other parties can get their message out is to exploit fear. We live in an area of the world where – they wouldn't want to admit it – we have one of the best health care systems in the world. People come to this province looking for the health care that's provided here. That's not a big secret to Albertans. We hear every day, literally, from hundreds that get treatment in this system that they wouldn't get other places.

Is there a problem with overcrowding in emergency rooms? Absolutely. The solution is not to sit in here and call names or infer somehow that we're not doing anything. In 1995 we were spending \$15 billion total as a government. We're spending that now on health care. If you listen to them, they say that the health care problem is all the fault of the superboard, that if they were gone, things would be magically better. Well, we didn't get to this problem with the superboard, Mr. Chairman. We got here with hundreds at the start and then a dozen regions. We had no cohesive go-forward so that Albertans in every corner of Alberta could access the extremely good care that we have at some of the most highly respected institutions in the world in Edmonton and Calgary.

I believe and I think this government believes that everyone in Alberta should have access to world-class, leading – not research but results and care. If that is such a bad thing, then they've got to stand up and – I mean, it's perfect. It's acceptable and not only acceptable but appropriate that we have different policies to go forward with different challenges that we're faced with. Ours is to first put the patient first. It is exactly what we stated and what we're going to do. We're going to do it respectfully. We're going to do it in a system that can be sustainable, so that it's here for our children and their children, and we're going to work with the health care professionals that want to work within the system.

For most of the health care system they do very well. They sit there and say how much they appreciate all the health care profes-

sionals – they really do – and then they trash the system. It's really a shame for the 50,000 people in Alberta that go through our health care system every day and get great care, for the people in our nursing homes and our long-term care facilities that are dealt with on a daily basis, with great compassion and an attachment to the people that care for them, to then hear in here that our health care system is just – well, I don't think we can use the parliamentary language that would explain it.

We've got health care funding of around \$15 billion, and I'm one that can say: well, you have to keep an eye on your spending. This isn't being driven by spending. No one has suggested, including the emergency room doctors, that if they just had more money, it would be better. So the obvious choice here is to deal with them, to look at all of the contributing factors to an overcrowded emergency room situation.

About a week ago we watched the minister and a doctor on Global Television talk for half an hour respectfully, intelligently to Albertans about some of the challenges. For anyone that had the opportunity – don't pass this around – to go to CBC after, they had a whole show on the health care crisis in Canada. If you were to listen to those folks over there, you would think we were the only place that was having a problem with emergency room crowding. Well, Mr. Chairman, much to our surprise, all across Canada, in every corner, the demands on the system are changing. We don't have family doctors that are either willing to live in small communities or willing to maintain their practice as family doctors, so people are forced to go to emergency rooms. That's a fact. So you can throw out all of the other gobbledygook about what's going on; we need to understand all the factors contributing to the situation.

2:20

Where they were able to identify Alberta as having a problem – and what a wonderful opportunity it is for some political parties and some media to exploit the emotions of a very caring physician. It's unconscionable, but that's a different story. They were able to focus on the crises in Alberta and in Vancouver and in Toronto and in the Maritimes and compare us to the rest of the world.

Mr. Chairman, we have the opportunity in Alberta to work our way through this. Albertans tell us on a consistent basis that they would like to see the evolution of health care, not the revolution of health care. We've got a very good system, and we're going to make it better. We have issues with access, and we're going to start to remove those issues.

To suggest that nothing has happened is – I mean, I could accept that there were probably times last night when some of our hearing aids would have been turned off, mercifully so. But to suggest nothing is happening in the health care system is so stupid that any clear-thinking Albertan sees through it. We are building centres for continuing care now that will get people out of hospitals and into their homes. It can be an institution but a home. Isn't the most important thing we need to look at: what quality of life does that person deserve? They don't want to be in that hospital. They want to be in the facility that suits their needs.

Mr. Chairman, we are working. We've listened to our constituents. We've listened to people that historically had to be separated because they didn't have the same level of care requirements. In my case of a couple together for 74 years, one had to go to Consort, and one had to go to Two Hills because of an Alzheimer's issue. Is that the system that they want over there, to go back to bunching them up somewhere that we can't find them? No. Albertans have told us clearly that things are different. The aging population is more active. They want facilities where they can live and grow old, still stay active. We know and it's agreed that we need to move those people out.

One of the solutions to the emergency room issue is to make sure that, wherever possible, we can get anyone that's in that facility that doesn't need to be there moved out so that those front-line emergency room physicians do have access to more beds. That can't be accomplished overnight, but, Mr. Chairman, it is absolutely one of the requirements if we're going to make more effective use of our hospitals and of our emergency room physicians.

The other thing that was stated in the CBC article – I'm not picking out Alberta – is that approximately 80 per cent of the people in the emergency rooms shouldn't have been there. They should have been in clinics. So if we know that – and that wasn't an Alberta issue – the fact is: do you want to attack the system, the reason that they're going there, or do you want to pass a law that says that if you've got all those people there, they've got to be admitted and treated? Come on. Let's get real. Let's work together in the way we have been in trying to make sure that people know where the appropriate health care is available to them, things like health hotlines, things like walk-in clinics. Those are all part of the solutions. I mean, I don't know why they don't just pass a law saying: "Let's not go to mandated wait times. Let's just pass a law that no one gets sick." We'd all support that – we'd all support that – and then we wouldn't need that amendment.

Does it contribute to health care to have a debate that's pretty much emotionally and politically charged? No. Is it important that we listen to people that do have the expertise in it? It absolutely is. Mr. Chairman, I readily admit I am not a physician. I am a politician who's grown up in this province with two older parents, both in their 80s, four children. We've all had health issues. Whether they're from the glorious arrival of our children or a father with liver cancer, we've all been faced with these things.

But I can tell you, as someone in this business, that you never put your family ahead of anyone else in the medical system. You need to be a part of it. We are a part of it. We shouldn't receive anything other than what we'd expect Albertans to accept, exactly the same level. Is it difficult? Yes, it is. But we all have the attachment to the health care system universally across the board. I impugn no motives to the opposition or to any of the speakers in this House. We all want a health care system that can satisfy Albertans' needs in a timely manner. That's a fact. I wouldn't question anyone's motives. But we do have different methods of trying to attract attention for what we're trying to do. [interjection] Don't worry. Nobody listens to him anyhow, Mr. Chairman, so I'm not worried.

We made a commitment, Mr. Chair, when we started to bring the regions together, to try and understand where the synergies were. There is no question that when you're running a corporation with 96,000 employees covering an area this size with the number of facilities that we've got, you are going to run into glitches. But the people in that system deserve the opportunity to continue to work to build the health care system we want. Focusing solely in here on a legislated requirement around wait times in ER may solve one very small part of the health care system.

Dr. Swann: No. It's a symptom of a broken system, Lloyd.

Mr. Snelgrove: I know. And so are ducks in tailings ponds bad for energy. You have your own opinion, and you can talk next. I've been very respectful as I've sat in here, so I would appreciate it. I don't expect it, but I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Chairman, we need to also share what we're doing with the other provinces. When we meet with our counterparts across this country, they tell us continually: you are the only province with enough guts to tackle health care head-on. For the hon. member to

suggest we didn't have the courage to change, talk to the other provinces. They'll tell you that Albertans are people that are willing to try, and Albertans have guts to go ahead with changes. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. president has the floor. [interjections]
The hon. president has the floor.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, do we have an obligation to look very, very seriously at the issues around the emergency room wait times? Absolutely. That obligation is bigger than just Alberta. The obligation is to work with our neighbouring provinces, with our federal government, with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, with everyone who wants to make a positive change to the situation that's there.

Mr. Chairman, I'm perfectly willing to sit here as long as they want. They don't probably want to tell the taxpayer what it costs to stay here day after day; that money hasn't entered into it. So we'll listen. I've made a list of the positive suggestions that have come up in this debate. It's very short. I think the best suggestion was that we would adjourn, and we did.

One positive note before I quit, Mr. Chairman, and I'll warn them right now that it doesn't have much relevance to the health care debate. For a brief moment last night we talked about the boundaries. I just want to say to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that she should be very proud of the fact that in this Assembly we talked about the name for her father, and it was supported overwhelmingly by every member of this House, both past and present. You should be very proud. [applause]

I can only say this, Mr. Chairman: were he still here, he would probably have some very positive suggestions towards health care in Alberta.

With that, I'll take my chair.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a great honour and privilege to stand and introduce to you and through you to the House some very dedicated front-line health professionals, mostly emergency physicians, who are here to stand in solidarity with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and to support him in this very challenging time addressing the most fundamental part of the front line of the health care system, its ability to deliver emergency services.

2:30

Mr. MacDonald: Are they making a House call?

Dr. Swann: They're making a House call today, and I'd like them to stand as I introduce them by name so that we can recognize them and welcome them to the House: Dr. Roger Yao, Dr. Darren Nichols, Dr. Jarrod Anderson, Dr. Samina Ali, Dr. Aisha Mirza, Dr. Hussein Kanji, Dr. Wiley Thompson, and Dr. Jennifer Williams. Let's give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chair, I'd just like to thank all of my friends for coming to this very important debate. Thank you so much.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act (continued)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A3.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to begin my resumption of the debate on amendment A3 of Bill 17 by thanking the members in the gallery, that the hon. Leader of the Opposition just introduced, many of whom have come off last night's shift in order to be a part of this very necessary debate on Bill 17 and the emergent state of health care in Alberta. I think we have a sense, those of us who have participated for the last three nights and mornings in debate, of what these emergency physicians go through. We have a small sense of the hours and dedication necessary to do their job.

Earlier this morning, about the 18th hour of debate, throughout the current minister of health's commentary and those of previous and subsequent contributors, I listened intently to concerns raised and have taken notes to be accurate and focused on amendment A3. Both the minister of health and the hon. Member for St. Albert spoke about a need to broaden standards, suggesting that A3 is too narrow.

Mr. Chair, the proof is in the pudding. The hon. minister of health has frequently referenced his extensive consultations, which are appreciated. He is probably the most travelled minister within Alberta, whether in his role of Minister of Education or as minister of aboriginal affairs. There is no doubt about his consultative efforts. However, the time has come for the minister to sit, to summarize, and to act on the information he has gathered.

The minister suggested: let's talk about faster access to care, whether at home or in a health care providing institution. The minister talked about moving beyond emergency care improvements. The minister of health talked about exceeding national standards and the need to create a made-in-Alberta solution. My concern is: how far into the future is this solution going to occur? Bill 17 doesn't go far enough in setting standards or guidelines as amendment A3 would recommend.

Now, something, Mr. Chair, that you're familiar with and a number of members of this House are familiar with, particularly the hon. minister of finance, is the hunting analogy. There's been an awful lot of talk about targets. Depending on what target you are aiming at, the instrument you use varies. For example, when duck hunting, you don't use a .22 as it limits your chances of a successful shot, and your single missed slug can travel up to a kilometre. On the other hand, you don't use birdshot to bring down a larger animal. Rather than the broad, scattershot approach the minister is suggesting, I suggest he start with a single focus, a .22 approach, which will cause a ripple effect in health care.

Amendment A3 says to start the healing with emergent care and go forward from there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's been a good discussion by all sides of the House, both last night and this morning. I want to give the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark the utmost respect from me and from my constituents and from my family. When my granddaughter needed help, he was there for my granddaughter. Many of his constituents and the people that he works with, whether they be younger people like what's here: he has offered lots of assistance to them.

Last week we had a hundred clinical leaders from across Alberta's health services create a task force and tell us what they felt we

should do. In turn, I went home on the weekend and talked with constituents. We counted on the advice that the hundred clinical leaders from across this province had given us. They said: "Give it a chance. Give it a chance, and let's see how this will work. We haven't been happy with what has happened to date, but give it a chance."

I have to tell you that, you know, when I read parts of the bill and reference A3, I look back home and say that in rural Alberta we count on the good work of the emergency physicians and the professional caregivers in the city. When the doctors at home in Whitecourt or in Mayerthorpe get into trouble, they count on these people helping my constituents out, and they do a darn good job of it. My mom and dad have both ended up there, and we can't say enough for the care, the dedication, and the love that they have given to my family.

Mr. Chairman, I think we owe it to the experts that gathered last week to give it a try at what they've come up with. You know, if that doesn't work, we're going to have to have a debate again. I don't mind spending the evening or however many evenings it takes to get this debate out and get the feelings of each and every member from across this great province. I don't think there is one fix to the issues that are in front of us.

In my constituency I had the honour to have the previous minister of health out, and we talked about the care that's needed in our lodges. And what do we have today? We have 24-hour care in those lodges that is offered through the Lac Ste Anne Foundation and through Alberta Health Services, a great partnership that doesn't exist everywhere. The last place I want people to end up is in emergency, so that's how I felt that in Whitecourt-St. Anne we could reduce the pressure on these folks. We don't want them there. We want to keep them healthy. We want our parents and our grandparents living in a place where they can get that 24-hour care, so that they don't overdose on medication, where they have their nails taken care of before they have an ingrown toenail, before they have an infection. These are the things that we see in rural Alberta that are so very, very important.

I'm not going to stand up here and say that I know anything close to what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark knows. I'm going to say that the hundred clinical leaders from across this province that got together do know, and I'm going to put my faith and my vote and my trust in them. If it doesn't work, you can count on me supporting an emergency debate again, like I did last time. I supported that as well. I've learned from all of us around this table. So let's learn from those hundred clinical leaders that have said: "This is what we've come up with. Let's give it a try." Let's respect them and give them the respect that this Legislature should give them, and let them do their work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm truly honoured and humbled to get up and speak again on this very important subject that's very important to all Albertans. We've been going – oh, geez – how long now? How long, guys? Twenty hours? Twenty-two hours? It's a good thing I'm an emergency doctor. I used to do permanent nights. I think I used to work 27 shifts a month, 12 nights, and I got cut back to 16. So, guys, I haven't even started yet.

Now, the reason we're here on Bill 17, the reason I gave this amendment. I'd like to reiterate: the Alberta Health Act is decent legislation. It talks about a health advocate. People who have problems with health care are going to complain to a health advo-

cate. It talks about principles. I do agree that we've always had principles, but I think it's important to legislate them.

2:40

An Hon. Member: Live up to them.

Dr. Sherman: Absolutely. I do believe it's important to live up to those principles.

If today we had a health advocate, that poor advocate would have 1,000 complaints a day from Edmonton alone just on the emergency issue. This is why. The reason I'm amending this bill is actually to make it a much better bill, the best bill in this nation. The reason it hasn't been done in the nation before is because no one has shown leadership in this nation.

Health care is an international problem. This is why one of the four principles is no unnecessary deaths. This is what an unnecessary death is. My father has a cardiac arrest, and he dies. That's not unnecessary. That's going to happen. My good friend Dr. Guy Woolsey: his brother walks into a department, can't get in, walks across the bridge, waits for 12 hours at the Royal Alex emergency department. These doctors have seen him. They're waiting for a psychiatrist to see him, but there are no beds. The patient: sheesh, my heart really goes out to this family. I was in tears last night talking about this. He comes out every hour asking: when is the psychiatrist going to come? Then he asks the nurse for a pen or a pencil; I'm not sure what it was. I read it in the paper, from Jodie Sinnema's article. And then he hung himself in the department.

A young child with a ruptured appendix who waited in the waiting room died. There are mothers miscarrying on triage stretchers. Guys, I don't work at all at the Royal Alex anymore. I work at the Northeast in minor emergency, but these people all work there. I trained them all, and my colleagues trained them all. We can talk gobbledegook and gibberish in here all we want. Come on, guys. Why do you think front-line staff are demoralized? Staff morale is at 45 per cent. Because of the malarkey in this House. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to use that word, Mr. Chair. If I'm not, I apologize.

An Hon. Member: Policy decisions.

Dr. Sherman: Absolutely correct.

Before I ran for politics – again, I will reiterate. Here's my picture. I said, "It's a crisis" in 2007, when I was in Dr. Paul Parks' position. To the hon. minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, who's a nurse, who was the health minister at the time, I wrote a letter in 2006. Prior to that, in 2004, our godfather, Dr. Chris Evans, who was the head emergency doctor in the nation last year, homegrown right here in Alberta – he is on the board of the Alberta Medical Association. Isn't that right, guys? He's the one who drafted these guidelines. They're made in Alberta. Do we want some other province to do this first, or do you guys want to do it when our expert is the one who did it? Come on, guys. Does Alberta want to lead by following, or does Alberta want to lead by leading?

The reason I'm asking for these to be legislated is because these are the teeth. They will actually hold doctors accountable, administrators accountable, nurses accountable. In fact, it's actually good for politicians. No one is going to get sued because of it. The health care system is actually currently going to be sued because of all the delays in care.

What I mentioned was an unnecessary death. So no unnecessary deaths. No unnecessary harm. The harm is when you wait eight hours in a waiting room with a bellyache and your appendix ruptures. That's unnecessary harm. That's unnecessary. If you

come in with a ruptured appendix, that's a ruptured appendix. If you come in with a ruptured appendix and you wait eight hours in a waiting room and then you die from it, that's unnecessary.

No unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm, no unnecessary delays in care, and then no unnecessary waste: these are just simple principles. You know where I got them from? They're at the Trillium Health Centre, a top-performing hospital in this nation, in Ontario. Their staff morale is at 92 per cent. Their CEO is Janet Davidson. Guess where she's from? Take a guess. She ran the U of A hospital years ago. She used to be an assistant deputy minister in this government. All our best people have left for Ontario. We lost the cream of the crop. There are still good ones here. There are some good ones here. But we still lost a lot of good ones, and there are a lot of good ones right now who are feeling that their voice is not being heard. You know what? They're actually better than good; they're actually great. But they're not being heard. We have a whole bunch that will be great, but if they feel that the great ones aren't being heard, well, they're not going to get involved.

So they are the four principles, and the most important part is the teeth of legislating ER wait times. It's actually not an emergency problem; it's a health care system problem that manifests itself in the emergency room. The people who are discharged: that's more sort of an emergency/hospital problem. The people who are admitted: that's more of a hospital/system problem. It's like rush hour. Did you ever leave work and then go: who the heck is slowing everything down at the front? Well, somebody who's driving really slowly and cautiously, probably my grandma or my grandpa.

That's the problem. We have an inadequate home-care system in this province. We have not enough. It's inadequate because it's not appropriately resourced. It's not inadequate because the staff are not good. They're great, but they're overworked and overburdened. We need a lot more staff. We don't have enough subacute care. We don't have enough rehab care. We need more community hospices and palliative care beds. People should not have to die in an emergency department half-naked at the end of their life with the whole world walking by for four days. And then we need long-term care. If we actually need acute-care beds, then, sure, go ahead and build more acute-care beds.

Then what we need is to work on the input side. We have a broken primary care system. That's actually the problem. We have too many sick people. People are sick because they have no access to primary care. You can't get in to see a family doctor for a month or two – five minutes, one problem – and 20 per cent of Albertans on the average don't even have one. In rural Alberta the problem is actually even more acute. These problems all back up into the emergency room.

They have 48 beds at the University emergency room. During the election 42 were plugged up by admitted people. There were 50 sick people, not sore throats and runny noses, in the waiting rooms, dying in the waiting room to get in. These are the 322 cases that Sheila Weatherill asked these doctors to collect. She asked them to collect them, and these are the cases that Dr. Paul Parks gave to the Premier and to the hon. past Minister of Health and Wellness from Edmonton-Whitemud, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford when he was his assistant, and to myself and to Paddy Meade, who was the deputy minister at the time. These are the cases that he actually re-sent just recently with the letter with the Premier's commitment from 2008, with the letter to three different ministers, which didn't include my letter to the minister in 2006 or Dr. Evans's letter to the minister in 2005 or to the minister in 2004 or in 2003 or in 2002 or in 2001.

2:50

The hon. minister, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, in my

home announced 600 long-term care beds prior to the election. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was there, as was all the Alberta Medical Association leadership. I'm just looking at my watch. It's 2010, and it's November 25. The question is: when are politicians going to stop announcing things five times and taking pictures and doing gobbledygook and malarkey, call it what you may, and not actually doing anything and trying to sneak through an election with a Public Affairs Bureau that will spin the bejesus out of things? That's what drives these guys crazy, and that's what causes good Albertans to suffer: governments that do not have the moral backbone to be honest and who do not do the right things by patients.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pulled up on her computer a graph of how many days in Calgary alternate level of care patients wait on acute care. The graph sort of went like this up until 2006, and then the line took off like this, at a 50- to 60-degree angle. Would that be correct? At a 50- to 60-degree angle. Upstairs is plugged up by healthy seniors who are actually separated from their spouses and their families for up to a year or two years, sitting in cardiology and orthopaedic and medical wards. It's actually contrary to the Premier's policy. They are separated. They have been separated for years. Nothing has been done. This promise was made in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009.

That's why admitted people, who should have been upstairs three or four days ago, plug up the ER. That's why sick people who should be in ER beds are in waiting rooms and on ambulance stretchers. That's why ambulances that should be on the street are actually all clogged up, waiting to off-load patients in the emergency room or taking sick people and giving them tours of the city while they're dying at the other end of town because they can't get into emergency departments, and that's why there are no ambulances on the street to respond to an urgent 911 call. They're all waiting to off-load sick people.

The whole province's ambulance fleet is tied up in emergency departments. We used to have 12 cars on the road when I started that did eight to 12 trips a night. Now we have 37 cars in Edmonton that do one to three trips a nights. They're sitting around on lawn chairs, ordering dinner, changing their shifts, and people are suffering.

I do not know how much more I can tell my colleagues in government. This is why I lost confidence in the leadership of this province. This is why I sent that e-mail. I apologized to the Premier because I thought it was important for the province to have confidence in their leadership. I do not apologize for sending that letter. It's entirely truthful. I am so sorry, my good friends. I am so sorry.

Here's where partisan politics butted heads with the values my family taught me, to be truthful. The truth will never hurt you, said my grandfather when I was a three-year-old child. There are three things in this world, he pointed out. He said: you can't hide the sun, the moon, and the truth. Then there's the oath that we all took, the Hippocratic oath to society, the same society we represent, that we must do no harm. We must tell the truth.

What happened was a battle of principles between partisan politics and the truth and moral values of an honourable profession. It's a sad day in this democratic country, which is the greatest country on the planet and the greatest province, when partisan politics actually win. I had to be honest. I'm so sorry. This is why we must legislate these wait times. It has been too long, far too long. These people are burning out. This is our new, young group. You'll see that there are no old guys here because they're burned out. They're waiting for retirement. These are their babies.

I'm not burned out yet. I haven't even started yet. I will not stop talking on this issue until I have no pulse in my body. I will keep

talking on this issue. One day when my pulse ends – those guys up there have a lot of pulse, and they're going to do it. The reason they are here is because I want 10 of them to run as MLAs, and I want one of them to be the Premier. If you guys don't fix it, they're going to fix it. But I'll tell you that if they run against you, you guys aren't going to win. That's why I bring every medical student to the Legislature. I've said: if these people don't listen, take them out.

We must legislate this, my good friends. It's actually good for the government. Your health care spending will actually come down; we will actually improve care. Governments are at risk of lawsuits currently because of the delays in care. This will actually reduce the lawsuits that the regions and government are currently having. How do I know that? Because I actually used to sue the system. When doctors and the system made mistakes, I'd say: hey, they made a mistake. Guess what? After I got elected, when I became the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health of Wellness from Calgary-West, there were a few major lawsuits settled against the Calgary health region because I gave the expert opinion. They did not want to put the junior health minister on the stand.

I know the province is being sued because I gave the expert opinions. In fact, I got the province off the hook and the doctors off the hook. I'd say: "Look, they didn't make a mistake. The patient would have died anyway, and the harm would have happened anyway." But many times the delays in care caused the harm. That is actually what causes the lawsuits we have. This legislation will actually reduce the lawsuits that we're currently having, improve care, and decrease that spending curve. We must do it, I tell you, because Ontario will legislate this before we do, something that our head doctor, homegrown here, did.

This government legislated no deficits. How do you get a deficit? It's really simple math. You spend too much, or you don't earn enough. We just repealed that legislation. Well, what's the number one cost expenditure? It's health care. So why would we not legislate this? The difference is that we're actually legislating human care and human values. These are the values Albertans espouse. My dear friends, I don't know how to convince you. Do you really want to send the message to the people of Alberta that you do not want to enshrine into law the values that you have, the compassion you have for their suffering?

We pass so many other laws here, guys. I have to be honest to my team. I have supported a lot of laws that I didn't agree with because of the rules of parliamentary democracy and for teammates. I ran for only one reason. I realize that as an MLA you have many other duties to do, and I've learned them, and I've done my best at them. But this is the main reason I ran: to be the voice of all health care professionals, not just emergency doctors. They're just the gatekeepers to a very important system, a fantastic system, actually, because once you get in, you actually get world-class care. That's something the province should be proud of, and that's something this government has actually done. Geez, guys, give a round of applause. This government did that.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to join debate on this bill, Bill 17. I first of all want to thank all members that have had the opportunity to join in on the debate. I think we've had many hours of good debate and good discussion. I want to begin this debate and my discussion by doing as I have locally to our health care professionals, by thanking all health care professionals across this province for the outstanding job that they

do every day, 24 hours a day, seven days a week to make sure that we are all well taken care of as it is relating to our health care.

3:00

I want us to as well acknowledge the work that has gone into this Alberta Health Act. I want to commend the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for spending the time to go and talk to Albertans across the province and the extra time to come into my community of Drayton Valley-Calmar for us to be able to have the opportunity in our constituency to have some good discussion and good input into this act.

I want to tell you that folks want us to get on with the business of health care and reducing the wait-list times. They want us to get on with the vision of Vision 2020. They want us to make sure that our seniors – the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek spoke early this morning when I was here about her mother, as she has many times, and I can relate to that. Both of my parents, my father first, were in acute care, a place that is not a place for our seniors, but long-term care after that. I have to say that in the acute-care beds for both my father and my mother, who have since passed on but had both spent time in both of those types of beds: outstanding service. Albertans all say, no matter who talks to us, that when they are in the Alberta health care system, they receive outstanding service from our health care professionals, so I say that. When they were able to move into long-term care, there's even better service there because that is the quality of care.

In saying that, my parents were married for over 50 years, and I can tell you that splitting up couples and partners for life, not being able to share in the same health care facilities, is not the answer for our seniors. It's not the answer for them. Part of that answer is that we have accommodations, assisted living accommodations, where a well senior and a not-well senior that needs some extra health care have the opportunity to live together. As we've added and we continue to add more assisted living beds, as we continue to make sure that we have our seniors in the beds that are right for them, we then free up the acute-care beds, which we so desperately need to do. That is part of our long-term vision. When we look at Vision 2020, we talk about that.

When we look at the Alberta Health Act and putting patients first, that's what Albertans have told us. That's what our constituents have told us. They want us to get on to the business of doing that. When we spoke about that and we talked about a five-year commitment to funding, people were very happy about that, to see that the health care workers that are there day to day, 24/7 are able to do their job while those that are looking after budget needs and hiring needs and all of those things have a longer term outlook, have a broader outlook rather than from year to year. We're very happy about that piece.

Now, in saying this, folks that are in, I would say, the bigger centres compared to our local emergency hospitals – I have to speak very highly of the emergency hospital in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar. You may have to wait, but the wait is certainly not the wait that we would see in our larger centres of Edmonton and Calgary. In saying that, folks from my constituency that have been in both of those centres have said to me that if they absolutely needed the health care to get into emergency, they get there, and they're well taken care of. They commend the health care professionals that we have. That does not mean that we can't do better and that we won't do better and that we should not do better, because we will. That is what this act is about. It's about doing better. It's about setting priorities.

It's important that we as elected folks listen to those folks. That is why when the 100 health care workers came together with a plan

to really look at this and how to deal with it, I put a whole lot of respect into those folks. Those are the folks that are dealing with the health care system. Those are the folks that understand what needs to be done in emergency care. Those are the folks that are going to play a large piece in helping us resolve the issues that we have.

I have to just say again how much my constituents appreciate the work that happens in our health care system and the great work that the staff do. We will work together with our minister and with this act and with the Premier and with all of our colleagues and with all of us on all sides of the House to find solutions. That's what Albertans want. They want us to start finding solutions so that together, for them and with them, we will find solutions to reduce the wait-lists, to increase the amount of beds for assisted living and for our seniors' care, thus freeing up acute-care beds so that those beds are there for the people that need them at that time.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for the work that he has done across this province. What people told me was that this member in particular, as he respectfully travelled across the province – there was a quote earlier today that someone made: but did he listen? My constituents said that not only did the member listen; he heard and he reflected back in this act exactly what they were saying.

Together, let's make sure that we're all working for all Albertans to make this a better health care system. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's been a privilege to participate in this debate on amendment A3 to Bill 17. There have been a lot of good things said. There's been a lot of repetition. We've got an opportunity. I think the one thing that I would focus on is that we need to respect and look at the truth. Why are we here? When we look at and analyze the function that's been the process of the last year and a half since the superboard came in place, it's one of these systems where we've been regulated to death in the literal sense. It's very disappointing that we're not actually looking at and addressing the different bottlenecks. There are many of them that we've talked about. There are many of them that have been pointed out. The question is: are we going to address them?

Again, we've asked for an audit. It's always the first and most critical thing if you want to be able to make the improvements. How many beds do we really have in our facilities that are currently closed down and could be opened? We found last week that there were 360 beds that miraculously opened when all of these problems came to light. All of a sudden the door was opened up, and there was a light on: oh, we need to do something; we need to do it now. Three hundred and sixty beds miraculously appeared. Where did they come from? How many do we have in there?

We've had several of the government members talk about how this is all about politics. That's exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has been saying. This has been about politics. It hasn't been about addressing the problems in our facilities. We need to do better. We've talked about the number of people that show up in our emergency rooms, up to 80 per cent that don't belong there. What are we going to do about that to address that?

We've talked about the people that are in there that don't have a bed to go to upstairs. Again, it's been said many times – I can't remember who all they are now that spoke it – that site-based decisions are critical. You can't have someone in Edmonton say:

here's the formula; when you hit it, then we're going to react. What you need is a chief administrative officer that's looking after that facility top to bottom that says that we're going to act on this because this person needs it and they need it now, not looking at a clock or looking at the percentage of beds and saying: now we've hit the trigger point. It isn't good enough.

One member said: "You know what? This document going back to 2007 is from another time and another place." No; 2007 existed here. We made adjustments for the Band-Aid, but did we follow through and get the proper treatment, to open up those beds, to have the site-based decisions? Mr. Chair, we did not.

The biggest problem – and this is what goes back to the crux of all of this – has been the cover-up. They've been given this information for years. It hasn't been released. They need to be honest with Albertans and put out the reports, let them know what is happening, where it's happening, and what they're doing about it.

We can't keep doing this. This idea that they continue to hang onto about the superboard as the solution isn't it. Until they let go of that and say, "How do we get those site-based decisions? How do we actually get it moving through the system?" it's not going to change, Mr. Chair. We need critically to go back and to give people the authority to make the decisions.

3:10

We have another problem in the system, and that's the funding of the system. Currently, how are our emergency rooms, our hospitals funded? There's just a bulk funding. It goes there, and those people that have that so-called position, compartmentalized to be able to make a decision here or one here, start off with their money, their budget for the year. Then they're told to work it out so it's going to last a year. Every doctor that shows up, every nurse that shows up, every patient that shows up, every facility worker that shows up is an expense in our system. We've talked many, many times about changing that around to where the funding needs to follow the service. We have to think outside the box and change this to where an administrator realizes that if he's more efficient, he's going to have more money.

We have an economist that specializes in health care that was fired a day and a half ago. I don't know what the agreement is, but we tried speaking out before it came. What we need to do is this audit and an analysis of the system so we know where we're starting from. This hasn't happened. I don't hear it happening.

What's discouraging for Albertans – the doctors, the patients, the people that we're talking to – is, they say, that these people are not reacting to the problems. Again, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark repeated that time and time again. We gave them the information, it was politicized, and there was never a solution. They never reacted. They just took the information, buried it, put it in a compartment, and said: "Yes, we're going to look after it. Don't worry about it." It doesn't work that way.

We need to change our system. We need to have someone who's actually in charge locally and has the authority to make those decisions realize: "You know what? We've got to call in an extra shift of nurses. We need to call in an extra doctor." And they can, not go for the approval and call up to Edmonton or say: oh, look at the formulas here; we're okay.

It's unbelievable; it's shameful, the number of paramedics and ambulances that we have sitting for hours and hours at an emergency room and no response. They seem to think that that's the norm now. It isn't right. It shouldn't be the norm, and it shouldn't be accepted. We need to change what we're doing.

What I wanted to do to bring this all together is the fact that when you read Bill 17 and you read the amendment to Bill 17, it's really nice words. It's really flowery. You've got a health charter.

You've got a health advocate. We've got it written down here where we have this many hours and we're going to react. We don't need the words. We don't need the papers. We need the work actually done. We need a system that's smooth running, that grabs these people, puts them through, treats them, and gets them to the right area.

Another problem that we have is that we're not using our trained people to their full scope of practice. I talked to way too many on how much time they're spending on things that they shouldn't have to be doing. We could hire someone else.

Again, it's been said many times that what we need to do is allow that vertically integrated system, to say: "You know what? These seven people are through the emergency room. They're stabilized. It's not healthy for them to be in the hospital here. We're going to send them home." Again, this person, this network looks at that and says: "You know what? We're going to hire two more respiratory therapists. We're going to hire these other individuals that are going to go and check on them and see that they're okay." We save thousands of dollars a day by moving these people out. But, more importantly, we save them from the high risk of sitting in a hospital, being exposed in a high-risk area.

There are so many things that if we just look at them and start one by one checking them off and start addressing them, we could make a move. Are we going to deny that a year and a half later our wait times are longer, that people who want hips can't get them?

It just goes on and on, Mr. Chair, and we have to change. We have to look at it. We need to do this in a systematic way, look at where the bottlenecks are, and move forward. How many times have we heard that we don't have enough long-term care beds and promises going back two and three years that we're going to build them? We need to change what we're doing. Bill 17: the reason why we've talked about it so much and will continue to talk about it is because it isn't good enough. It isn't going to change things to make a new statement and say: now we're going to do it.

We had a hundred ER doctors that got together – and this sounds like the Committee of the Whole, that they're going to throw things together and do that. I don't think so. Just the idea that it's going to take 40 days tells you that there's something wrong with this when they can't come up with a solution. As the Edmonton-Meadowlark MLA said, we have people that know how to run these facilities. Some of the best ones that have been trained have left the province. We have more here that could do it. Are we going to hire someone to actually run these facilities in an orderly fashion that doesn't have the waste, that doesn't go through those four points that he talks about, to do no harm or not cause unnecessary deaths, unnecessary pain? We're not addressing those things. It just seems like we're in a disconnect. We have the triage nurses. We can move them through if we just open up the system.

Mr. Chair, I'll sit down, but we haven't come up with any solutions. All we've done is talk and talk and talk, and Bill 17 does not address the problems that we're facing here. It's a feel-good paper. It's a paper with promises. As has been mentioned, there are no teeth in it. What we need are actions. We don't need words. We don't need promises. We actually need actions where people can see the numbers going down, realize that we're changing our system and that we're doing it right.

As much as the members want to continue saying, "Oh, it's the superboard" or "It's not the superboard" – 90,000 people, one CEO: show me where that's worked anywhere in the world. Centralized government, centralized planning: it hasn't worked. We need to dismantle the superboard in an orderly fashion. We need to go back to people that understand how to run the facilities. It's not about 300 beds.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, we are speaking about amendment A3 and the content thereof. If you could confine your remarks to that amendment, please.

Mr. Hinman: I will try and do that.

I appreciate the time to speak on this. I realize that the reason why the discussion has gone on is because the solutions have not been proposed by this government. They're not in the bill. We need to do better. It's a flat, wasted bill. There are broken promises that are now paper promises.

I'll sit down. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The chair will recognize the Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to both this important amendment and some of the impacts of the bill. It's been a pleasure to be here over the evening and listen to a lot of the discussion around both the bill and this amendment as well as a whole lot of other things that have been discussed through the evening.

I'd first like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing this forward and creating the opportunity for discussion around wait times. I'd also like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for taking the time over the past two years to explain a little bit about what it's like being an emergency room doctor to me. Never having worked in the industry or been part of the health care system, really I didn't understand a lot of the issues around emergency rooms, emergency room medicine, so it's been really nice to have the member explain some of that to me and talk about some of the wait times.

Wait time is one of those words that you hear, and every person I talk to has a different idea of what wait time is. Is it waiting to get into an emergency room, waiting to talk to a triage nurse, waiting to get into a bed, waiting for the tests that you actually need so that a doctor can do an assessment to get you into a bed? There are a whole host of things, and the member did take some time to talk about how that flows within an emergency room and where the critical pieces of that might be.

3:20

I did bring up the CAEP, Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, pages and read a lot of what's in there around their overcrowding position, around some of the issues that they see that might fix that, and there are some really unique things. What I'd really like to talk about is Lethbridge. I come from Lethbridge, and with the Member for Lethbridge-East we're very, very pleased and proud to represent Lethbridge, and southern Alberta is very well represented. In Lethbridge we also have wait time issues, Mr. Chairman, that I'd like to talk about and address a little bit because that's what we're talking about in this piece of legislation.

In Lethbridge we have made significant changes. Now, Lethbridge is a unique area. We have in southern Alberta Medicine Hat and Lethbridge, two urban areas, and large rural areas with a variety of things happening, farming and ranching, people living long distances from services. We also service a great swath of southeastern British Columbia in Lethbridge, so activities and actions there can create impacts on wait times.

As was said in the CAEP pages, a big chunk of emergency department overcrowding is really hard to predict because it can occur any time for a whole host of reasons. You can't often predict. In southern Alberta we've been very fortunate to have very manage-

able wait times. I believe wait time averages are around two and a half hours to get a bed in southern Alberta. They've rated hospitals across the country, and Medicine Hat and Lethbridge continue to be in the top few hospitals across the country for wait times as specified through this amendment.

I think that we can look to some of the places right here in Alberta where really good things have already been done within the system, where Alberta Health Services and the men and women on the front lines have worked together and created protocols where wait times have been significantly reduced. One of those things that's happened in our region is the increase in continuing care spaces and home care. We've increased over the past few years from a thousand to 1,500 continuing care spaces. I'll tell you what. Having those extra care spaces, where we can move acute-care patients into the appropriate level of care, freeing up acute-care beds, has been a significant move towards helping maintain these wait times that we see.

I'm going to quote the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark when he said that we have a primary care problem, and these problems back up into the emergency room and plug it up. I think what we need to focus on is that we've got to fix those issues. We've talked a lot about emergency room wait times, about trying to set standards for that, but until we can start to deal with those issues that are backing everything up in the emergency room, those standards will mean little.

We must – we must – continue to work. Some of the good work that has been done across the system in beginning to reduce some of these impediments, building new long-term care beds and facilities across the province, has been helpful, but we've got a ways to go there yet.

In Lethbridge we're also blessed with a combined service. We have a fire-ambulance service that works together, jointly. Alberta Health Services have worked with us to create the opportunity. We just signed a new contract to continue delivering that service as a combined service. It's wonderful for our community. The ambulances are less expensive to run, and they provide great service, and it also helps to keep our fire-ambulance system operating well. This is a place where through creative thinking, through working together with our municipality, with the city of Lethbridge, with our health care providers – don't forget that those emergency room doctors, as well as doing all that they do in the emergency room, are on the phone with our paramedics, working with them as they triage patients in their homes, in travel, around the community. These men and women are very, very busy and are helping us to make sure that people even in their own homes, before they ever get brought to the emergency room, are being dealt with effectively.

Mr. Chairman, I believe those are the kinds of things that we have to continue to do, that we have to continue to take across the province. We've talked a lot about Bill 17. We heard things like: well, you know, this is about a health charter and a health advocate. You know, people in Lethbridge believe that a health advocate and a health charter are good things. They believe that Bill 17, generally, is a good thing. When the member from Edmonton came to Lethbridge and held sessions around what we need to do in health care, people came out. They showed up, and they spoke freely about what they saw and what they thought needed to be done.

Mr. Chair, that is outlined in this bill. The vision of Albertans as we met with them is carried forward here, and I believe that we need a vision for health care. If we're going to fix all those things as laid out under CAEP to do with overcrowding and a whole host of other things, we need that overall, overarching vision to go towards. This bill will help give us that vision. It will help create the opportunity

into the future and maybe allow us to deal with some of these very critical issues around overcrowding, wait times, and others.

Mr. Chairman, I think that we continue to move forward using some of those wonderful examples across the province of Alberta of where things are being done right, where Alberta Health Services and the men and women at the front lines are delivering fabulous service to our citizens. Most of the people that I talked to, when they get into our system, are so pleased with the level of care that they get. I get calls and people dropping into my office every week saying: you know, Greg, it took a little while to get in, but when I got in, the service I got was unbelievable. We have a fabulous health care system here. We need to keep what we have as well as develop and increase the quality of our emergency rooms, speeding up that service, but we do that as a holistic approach. I believe this bill will do that, and I would ask everyone to support that.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The chair recognizes the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to get another opportunity to speak on health care and the delivery of health care, on this government's record, and on what we need to do to improve access to emergency care for sick and injured Albertans across the province. Certainly, amendment A3, that was introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, needs consideration from this Assembly.

Now, I've been hearing all afternoon and last night as well that, of course, there's no need for this, that we can't have this sort of legislation. In particular, I listened with interest to the President of the Treasury Board, and I certainly appreciated his remarks. He talked about a number of things, but this is a government that at one point had to have a law to protect themselves from their own deficit habits. In other words, Mr. Chairman, this is a government that is reluctant to put into the act the suggestions not only from one emergency room physician here in Edmonton but recommendations from their national association. We can't have that written into the law – and I'm going to use that as an example – but when this government had ballooning deficits, of course, they had to have a law to control themselves and meet a certain standard. If you can have that standard for financial requirements, how come you can't have it for medical attention? That would be my first point.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Now, the President of the Treasury Board talked at length about health care costs, and he's absolutely right. He talked, Mr. Chairman, about a time – I think he said 15 years ago – when the total budget of the province was \$15 billion, and now we have a \$15 billion Health and Wellness budget. I understand we have to improve service and we have to control costs, but how can this government stand up and complain about the increasing financial costs on this treasury of health care delivery when they consolidated the nine regional health authorities into one superboard and did this without a cost-benefit analysis, either among themselves or by hiring an external consultant, to see if it would control costs and improve service? They didn't do it. They publicly acknowledged that they didn't do it, so to stand up and complain about costs getting out of control is totally wrong.

3:30

Now, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians has a good standard. Why it can't become part of this bill is beyond me.

Maybe the government knows they could never, never meet that standard. I talked last night about how suddenly the minister and Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services had to change the bar and lower it because they knew full well they couldn't meet it. But these are standards that should be met and, I think, can be met.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has worked for the last decade to come up with solutions so that we can accelerate access by sick and injured Albertans to the health system. It's all there for everyone to see. There have been a lot of proposals put forward, but it was always with the interest of accelerating access for those who need for one reason or another to visit a doctor or a hospital.

Speaking of hospitals, the former minister of health, the current Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, spoke earlier about hospitals and what we need to do.

Dr. Taft: Does she have a hospital in her constituency?

Mr. MacDonald: No. There is no hospital in Sherwood Park. There is a form of a hospital. Maybe it'll become a primary care network. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and I had the privilege of visiting a primary care network in the south part of the city, a fast-growing neighbourhood, and it was quite interesting to see. That was one of the ideas that the hon. member and this party had been talking about quite some time ago, and it's a pleasure to see the government adopt in one form or another another one of our fine ideas.

The former minister of health was talking about the three-page document that was referred to many times in debate by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and I believe she went as far as to table it. I appreciate that. Certainly, there are a lot of items that have been used in the debate so far this afternoon on this amendment A3 that should be tabled. I would certainly like to see the hon. Member for St. Albert's letter, that he sent to the current minister of health I think a couple of weeks ago, two or three weeks ago. I would love to have a look at that. I appreciate the hon. Member for St. Albert's participation. It's almost 24 hours since he had an opportunity to participate in this, but I would like to see that document, get a chance to have a look at that. I would also like to see some of the other documents referred to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in his discussion and debate on this issue.

However, with regard to the former minister of health, the Member for Sherwood Park, who has no hospital, when we look at the details that are provided by the emergency room doctors from across Canada – and, unfortunately, this a 2007 document – they state that Canada has only three hospital beds per 1,000 Canadians, ranking 26th out of 30 countries in the OECD. Now, this is quite interesting because if that's the Canadian average, three beds per 1,000 Canadians, in Alberta we have one bed for every 515 citizens. I'm getting this information from a distinguished researcher, Donna Wilson. I think she's a professor of nursing over at the University of Alberta.

That is quite a change, and we've talked about this before. We see the announcements – we have a hard job keeping up with them – that this government makes. Essentially, this is a government of ribbon cutters. They love to cut ribbons. They love to have photo ops making announcements, but they have a hard job getting the project finished. An example of that would be the Mazankowski heart centre. I was astonished to find out that we had a grand opening and a gala.

Dr. Taft: The Prime Minister was there.

Mr. MacDonald: The Prime Minister was there.

Dr. Taft: I think Diana Krall was there.

Mr. MacDonald: Diana Krall was, yes.

Dr. Taft: Lady Gaga wasn't, though.

Mr. MacDonald: Lady Gaga wasn't there, no. Or if she was there, I didn't know about it.

But that would be an example, Mr. Chairman, of inaction by this government.

Now, our bed total here in this province. If we go back 15 years, to when we had less money, the hon. President of the Treasury Board was talking about that the total provincial budget was not more than what we're currently spending on health care. I'm going to find the figure here, Mr. Chairman, because it's really, really important. We had one hospital bed for every 400 Albertans. When we had less resources, we put more time, it seems, into keeping hospital beds open. Hospital beds are very, very important. They're what keeps the system operating. We heard that from the hon. member.

One of the solutions that we could look at again – and the President of the Treasury Board knows better than I. Certainly, McKinsey & Company, the research and consulting company, has done some very interesting work for the province. They talk about primary care networks. They talk about reducing the pressure on the emergency rooms through health centres such as the one that has recently opened in northeast Edmonton but for some reason or another is slow to get up to full function. In the course of this we have put an additional \$3 billion recently into the budget of Alberta Health Services.

We've got the famous five-year funding, stable funding, which is interesting. I hope it continues. I'm not so sure. The current minister of health is very proud of that and takes full credit for it, but I believe we have to publicly give credit to the current Energy minister, who at the time was health minister. I think it was him that brought that through Treasury Board. He did the heavy lifting on that file. [interjection] Oh, I think he did. I think he did the heavy lifting on that file. Others are wanting to take credit . . .

Mr. Snelgrove: If it works, others will take credit. If it doesn't, we'll blame them.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. But it takes more than one guy to score a touchdown, and you know that.

Mr. Chairman, they're distracting me over there.

Now, I would like to remind the House of some of the solutions that we could have to speed up access to the system and that I think would be much, much better. The immediate shortage of health care professionals – physicians, nurses – we talked about last night. We talked about the issue of recruiting abroad, at taxpayers' expense locally, and then not hiring the people. We've got to get our act together on that. Staff shortages are forcing hospitals throughout Alberta to close some of their operations and some of their units. We know that. We've got to train locally as well. That's reflected in the McKinsey report. That's reflected in work that the current Minister of Education did when he was advanced education minister.

There was quite an effort put forward to once and for all end the shortages by recruiting and retaining and training people in the health care professions. But this all fell by the wayside for some curious reason, and here we are 24 hours later in this House having what I consider another emergency debate on health care. Whether

we want to look at it or not, we're also discussing the track record of this government over the last two decades, and it's not a very good record. It's not a record you should be proud of, but it's your record, and you're going to have to live with it.

3:40

Now, unfortunately, 1 in 5 Albertans don't have access in a quick fashion to a family physician. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and this party have talked about increasing the number of seats in the medical schools. That has to be done. Don't listen to us; listen to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark because he put it quite well, I think, in the first or second hour of this debate.

Building capacity and easing ER overcrowding: I think we can certainly do that, and we can do that without increasing the deficit in this province, but the government has to make commitments and priorities. Right now their commitments and their priorities are wrong.

Another idea of ours was to have these bed management coordinators in some of the busiest hospitals in the province. We suggested that it be a pilot project six years ago, and it's quite interesting to hear this minister talk about it.

Speaking of pilot projects, Mr. Chairman, regarding emergency department overcrowding, the British Columbia government did pilot projects on what may or may not work with health care. They didn't dismantle the whole system and create one superboard. They have pilot projects going on all the time to see if they will improve service and control costs. But not here. This crowd meets behind closed doors and decides through this memorandum of understanding, that the former minister of health, the current Minister of Energy, quarterbacked, and of course that's the memorandum of understanding which created the superboard. I just can't understand that, when I do research on what goes on in British Columbia and how they do pilot projects, and then this crowd here.

Now, also with emergency room overcrowding we immediately need to increase the number of available long-term care beds. We have discussed this. That gets me to another point I would like to make, and that's about the remarks that the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar gave. I appreciated, again, hearing from her.

Now, this McKinsey & Company report. This is a million-dollar consulting contract. They indicate here the percentage of acute-care patients waiting for continuing care. This is why we have suggested the idea that we get some long-term care beds constructed in a timely fashion. In 2007 – and the government may have updated statistics on this – Aspen was 19 per cent. In the former Aspen health region 19 per cent of acute-care patients were waiting at any one time for continuing care; East Central, 16 per cent; Peace River, 14; Palliser, 13; followed by Capital health region with 11 per cent; and Calgary was the lowest, at 9. So you can see that in some of the former rural regional health authorities they had the largest number of patients waiting in acute-care beds. This is a big issue that we need to resolve. I would certainly photocopy any of this information that the minister of health would be interested in reading over the weekend.

Now, we can do better. We've seen these policies or these programs that have been introduced. We've seen arbitrary cutbacks. We've seen poor manning. We have seen creeping privatization. All erode not only the public health care system but confidence in that health system.

In the time I have left I would like to remind this House and the President of the Treasury Board again that we can't blame senior citizens or an aging population for driving up health care costs and creating this mess that the government is in. We have demographi-

cally one of the youngest provinces, if not the youngest, in Canada. The three youngest metropolitan census areas in Statistics Canada's catalogue respectively are Saskatoon and Edmonton followed by Calgary. The average age is 36 years. So we don't have, hon. minister, an aging population driving up health care costs.

If we plan this now for when the President of the Treasury Board is ready to retire, we'll have a place for him. We'll have a nice, comfortable place that's safe and secure for the hon. minister to retire. He can think about his curling games and his football games and his construction projects. He'll have lots of time.

We do not have an aging population that's driving up these health care costs, and I resent the spin by the Public Affair Bureau that this is what's causing our problems.

Mr. Chairman, I certainly would urge all hon. members to have another look at amendment A3.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm a little late. I had two guests that I was going to introduce, but one just left. The one that just left was a former president of the PC Association of Alberta, Marg Mrazek.

My other guest is my best friend, my confidante, my best supporter ever, my first wife, Jan. She's my wife of 45 years, so I suspect she'll also be my last wife. I would ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's a real delight to see up in the gallery an unexpected guest, a former member of this Assembly who served for, I think, two terms, one term that he wanted to, and who also served quite a length of time on St. Albert city council. I'd ask him to rise. His name is Len Bracko. It's great to see you here.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce a former colleague of ours, the former Member for Edmonton-Calder. He is the executive director of Friends of Medicare and was recently nominated as the NDP candidate for Edmonton-Glenora. Mr. David Eggen, if you would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other introductions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Despite all of the negative stuff that's happened recently, I'd like to introduce Sharon MacLean. She's the love of my life. Thank you so much, dear, for supporting me through this interesting time.

Bill 17
Alberta Health Act
(continued)

The Deputy Chair: The next hon. member to speak is the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity. Relative to this amendment, in retrospect I'm glad that I moved the adjournment at the time that I did because I have to tell you that the level of discussion has definitely significantly improved compared to what was happening at night. That's quite reassuring and refreshing.

3:50

First of all, I would like to start by sincerely saying thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing forward this amendment. As I said earlier, there is not a doubt in my mind that he is a well-intended individual who shares with all of us in this Chamber the common goal of trying to make our health care as good as it possibly can be in this province. At the same time, I have to say that even though our goal is the same, I'm not sure that the means, the vehicle by which we arrive at this particular goal should be the one that he furthers in his amendment.

I will tell you, Mr. Chairman, that I'm looking right now at a daily publication, a national Internet-based newspaper publication called *canada.com*, and coincidence would have it that one of the major headlines in this paper is

Heading to Emergency room? Bring lunch, maybe a pillow, too.

Then the article goes on to say:

Patients in Ottawa and surrounding areas can expect to spend about 7.4 hours in the emergency department, according to a new report on emergency wait times in Ontario from the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

The article goes on to say, if I may take the liberty of reading one paragraph:

Patients in Ottawa and area emergency rooms are not being treated within recommended times, according to a new report on emergency visits in Ontario by the Canadian Institute of Health Information.

Last fall, benchmarks set in a report by the Ontario Hospital Association, the Ontario Medical Association and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recommended that 90 per cent of patients requiring urgent care should complete their emergency department visit within six hours. Those needing less urgent care should stay a maximum of four hours.

Mr. Chairman, as they report, their average waiting time is 7.4 hours, surpassing the urgent and nonurgent, obviously, by far. Now, this takes me back to two points. Number one, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark eloquently argued that the best of the best and the brightest of the brightest left Alberta and went to Ontario, and they're working very hard to improve the Ontario health system. I am not doubting that they are good, and I'm not doubting that they're working hard in Ontario, but if we are to measure their success by what I'm reading here in this article, they're not doing so well. Their waiting times are actually longer than what we have here in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, that also brings me to another point. In Ontario they have set guidelines for what the average waiting time should be – and as the article indicates, it should be six hours for urgent, four hours for nonurgent – and even though they have those guidelines in place, those guidelines mean nothing. Patients in Ottawa are waiting 7.4 hours on average and are advised to bring lunch and pillows with them to emergency. That really speaks to the fact that what point is there to legislating, basically setting in stone, the maximum allowable time for a patient to wait in an emergency room when the

fact of the matter is that the emergency room cannot live up to that standard?

What I find very interesting is that the Wildrose opposition is in support of legislating timelines, yet their argument just about four or five days ago on a bill relevant to distracted driving and using cellphones in cars was: we don't support any law that cannot be implemented and/or enforced. They argue that there is no way to implement that law; there is no way to enforce that law. Why would you pass a law when right off the top you know that you cannot either (a) implement it or (b) enforce it? Here they're arguing, Mr. Chairman, that we should pass a law right now in this Chamber that we know right now we can neither implement nor can we enforce.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a habit of somehow always including me in her speeches, and I thank her for that because I take that as a sign of either adoring me or recognizing me in a positive way. She indicates that I said earlier last night that passing a law like this would be like putting a gun to those doctors' heads in the emergency room. I stand by that comment. If we all in this Chamber in good conscience know that today if this law was to pass, our emergency doctors, with their best skills and best intentions, which they have, are simply not able to meet those targets, why would we now legislate them by law to meet those targets? Mr. Chairman, that would be patently unreasonable. Why would you force someone to do something that you know he cannot do to begin with?

Why can't they do this? That should be the question that we should be asking ourselves. Perhaps passing this kind of legislation later on, when achieving those guidelines is actually practical and possible, would be the right thing to do. But now I think we need to step back and ask ourselves: why is it that we can't get to those desirable waiting time limits so that we can legislate them perhaps or put them into practice guidelines and compel our system to live up to those guidelines?

Well, Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier, it is again a twist of irony – and now I will refer to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Just a few months ago she sat on this side, and she sat on this side for many, many years. She was one of the contributors in a positive way to this government in arguing that something has to change in health care, that we just can't carry on like this. She was here in this Chamber during the Bill 11 debate. Remember the infamous Bill 11, when we had rallies in front of the Legislature where people actually were breaking windows to get into the building, where one individual was hanging off this bannister over here, trying to jump into the Chamber? The fact is that opposition and special-interest groups fought against Bill 11 because government was going to change health care.

Ms Blakeman: They were going to privatize it.

Mr. Lukaszuk: That's right. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre says, we were going to privatize it. We were going to bring American-style health care. They were saying: fix health care, but don't change anything. Then this government, including the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, was saying: "We live in this province, just like everybody else. We share the best interests of health care, just like anybody else. But we foresee a day when if we continue managing our health care system the way we're managing it right now, there will be problems. There will be growing lineups in emergencies. There will be patients that won't be served at a level that we would like to see them served. Since we are aware of the fact that this will happen, let's change it." But, no, the opposition were very much set in their opinion that we shouldn't be doing anything. Just put more money into the system.

Well, Mr. Chairman, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was right, and this government was right. We are starting to see issues in the health care system that could have been prevented. Now, the irony of ironies is that when this government for another reason tried to repeal Bill 11 because we were bringing in other legislation, that very same opposition then fought against repealing Bill 11. So the message is clear. Either the opposition didn't read either piece of legislation, or the fact still remains that health care is a topic on which one can definitely arouse the masses because we all care for health care.

All of us have family members, have children, parents, or others in health care or simply anticipate that one day we will need it, and we are very emotional about it. Like the Member for Lethbridge-East said: health care is emotional. Well, health care is emotional, particularly when you make it emotional, and unfortunately in our political structure we make health care political. Really, in essence, in the very nature of health care there is nothing political about it.

You know, there are really two systems that interact with each other. There is the medical profession, the healers, that do their art of taking care of human beings, and then there is the administration, that runs the system. Those are the only two arms that should be involved in managing health care. But once you include the third, the politicizing of the system, you end up with 24-hour Legislature sittings where we discuss everything and anything other than actually the merit of what needs to be discussed. The question is: why did we get to where we've gotten to, and how are we going to get out of it?

The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark said that in general our health care system is fabulous, and just two, three minutes ago here in this Chamber he told me that even relative to the emergency room situation we are the best of the lot, that we are the best in Canada.

4:00

Dr. Taft: That's not true.

Mr. Lukaszuk: The Member for Edmonton-Riverview says, "That's not true." Well, Mr. Chairman, if the Member for Edmonton-Riverview accuses me of lying, let him do so, but I just spoke to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark literally 15 minutes ago in this chair beside me, and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark told me that we're the best of the lot.

He further said that it's a national problem. It's not an Alberta problem; it's a national problem. The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that I believe what we need to do – and the minister of health has been doing this, not only this one but the previous one and the ones prior to him – is focus on the actual health care system. Perhaps with some degree of co-operation from the opposition we could introduce amendments to the system that will result in better quality of care to our patients, to our constituents, because that's what all of us really want at the end of the day.

Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier, I am glad that the level of the debate has elevated somewhat. I am glad that we had this opportunity to discuss this matter, albeit for 24 hours now. I have confidence in this particular minister of health. I know his intentions are nothing but the best. I know that Alberta has the means of having the best health care system in Canada. Definitely, the situation is not a financial problem because we have the best-funded health care system in Canada. We have the only system that has at least some predictability in its funding. We definitely have the infrastructure, and we're building the infrastructure, so we're ahead of the curve that way. If we only remove one component, if we remove the politics out of this and stop scaring our constituents, then perhaps we can focus on the real issue, on the issue of fixing access to the

emergency rooms and making sure that those who really need it receive emergency care and that those who have less urgent medical needs will have a place to turn to as well.

On this note, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity. Even though lengthy, it was definitely time well spent. It's a topic definitely worthy of the time of this Chamber and every single member, and I believe that in some spirit of co-operation and less politicizing we actually can also elevate not only the level of debate but the level of the quality of care.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's been a long 24 hours – that's for sure; I think everyone agrees about that – but I think that it was a good debate. I think there's still more to debate on the amendment. The reason I say that is that I still have not heard a compelling reason given by this government why – I mean, the government members are all saying the same thing. It's like watching reruns or something. It's amazing. The caucus is very united. It's almost like there's no . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Mr. Anderson: Sometimes when I speak, Mr. Chair, it's very compelling for the members opposite, and they feel that they need to comment, and I think that's positive.

The thing is that, again, it's like we hear the same thing over and over. They're saying the right things. They want a good health care system. "Look how great our health care system is. We're doing everything we can to fix our health care system. We've got the best health care system in the country." It's very touching that they're so unified, but the fact of the matter is that no one in the province believes a word they're saying about it. That's what's funny about it. No one believes that they are doing the job in health care at all. Now, we can talk about that, and we can throw statistics around about how off base they've become with regard to public opinion on this issue, but I agree with the hon. member opposite that last spoke. Let's just talk about solutions. That's what we're going to try to do.

I think that the first thing we need to assess is: where do we go from here? We have so many problems in our health care system. Some are systemic – most are systemic, actually – in their nature, so we're not going to fix anything like that right now, okay? We can start on the road to fixing it, but we're not going to fix systemic problems overnight. Everyone agrees. The government says that all the time, that these things don't happen overnight. The Treasury Board president just was pontificating for a good 20 minutes on how things just don't change overnight. We got it.

But there are some things that we can change, and one of the things that we can change immediately is that we can raise the level of expectation in our health care system, in our emergency rooms in particular. We can start there. You've got to start somewhere. Everybody knows in this House that when you have a mammoth task to accomplish, you've got to start somewhere. You've got to start somewhere, and what better place to start in our health care system than the place where we have a crisis on our hands? Wouldn't that be a good first step? You know, instead of addressing something that is going to cause delays and is going to adversely affect people but they will still be alive at the end of that delay – yes, they will have more pain and suffering and all that sort of thing, and it's important to alleviate that, but it's going to take some time to get those wait times under control.

If we're going to put our energies into something, why don't we attack the place where we are weakest right now, the place where we are failing utterly and completely? That is in our emergency rooms. People are dying in the emergency rooms. I didn't write the documents; the emergency room docs wrote the documents. I'm not writing up letters to, you know, the Wildrose caucus and the Liberal caucus and the NDP caucus and the PC caucus saying: oh, look at all the problems in the emergency room. Those aren't coming from us. They're not coming from the politicians in this room. All we're doing is communicating what we're hearing to the government and saying that this is what is being said about our emergency rooms.

Every one of us in here – well, I'm not going to speak to that. Certainly, from my constituency office and from the letters to the editor in my local papers every indicator that I can possibly get right now says that we have a major emergency room crisis on our hands. People are scared to go to the emergency room. They are. There are so many people that they don't know what to expect when they go there. They honestly don't.

You know, I just had a constituent the other day come in and tell me about him and his wife. His wife has had a history of problems, various health issues, and she had an episode of what she struggles with. They went to the emergency room, and they spent over two days there. Now, she ended up not dying, which is fantastic, but she was in pain for 48 hours, in total, excruciating pain. They finally saw her. It was actually a pretty minor thing that they needed to do. It barely took any time. It was like half an hour, kind of: see, assess, get a test, and so forth. I understand there are more complicated cases, but this is not something that we're making up.

I think the bottom line is that we have to start somewhere, and let's pick an issue that is nonpartisan in nature. I think emergency rooms are nonpartisan. They're not left, right. There are no ideological differences on what to do about the emergency room. That's not what we're debating here. We're just debating on the method. I think there are several members on the government side that said that, and I agree with that, so let's start there.

But how can you start there if you don't have any accountability in the system? Just promising is not enough. Everybody knows that. You've got to have some kind of accountability measure. We're not talking about if the minister or if somebody fails to get these targets, as per the 2007 statement, to treat them in four hours or less or, for less serious patients, six hours or less 95 per cent of the time. I don't think we're even disagreeing on that. I think the only difference I'm hearing in this debate – we all agree that this is probably the right standard or close to it, anyway; it's just that we don't like the legislated part. Well, the thing with the legislated part is that it's the only way you can put teeth in the legislation to make it happen.

4:10

Now, what the penalties are for not adhering to those standards: that's up for debate. We can talk about that. Obviously, you shouldn't send someone to jail for not accomplishing these things. That's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about giving them fines. What we are talking about is that if we're going to hire somebody to oversee a hospital and make sure that an emergency room is working effectively, then we should tie their salary or tie the existence of their job, whether they can keep it or not, to whether they are accomplishing the targets.

Most importantly, give them the authority to do what they need to do. Give them the authority to open up the beds if they need opening. Let's say that there are five or six seniors in an emergency room who are clogging up acute-care beds and therefore it's backlogging the emergency room. Have those people have the authority to designate a couple of nurses and put them in temporary, safe hotel arrangements with those nurses to oversee their care to

open up those beds quickly if there's a huge overload on the system. Right now there's none of that.

We've talked to so many emergency doctors, and they say that that is not in place. There's no one in a hospital who can say: "Okay. This ward needs to open up these two beds. It's a nonemergency ward, and you need to open these two beds right now. We're going to staff them. We're going to get people in there. It's done. It's temporary, but we need it right now to fix the problem, the overload." There's no one with that authority right now, so how do we expect them to fix the system?

All of the solutions I hear from that side are long-term solutions. Yeah, we all agree that there's a need for more long-term care. Does anyone in this House disagree with that? I don't think anyone does. Everyone is saying it; the government is saying it. Great. So build the long-term care facilities. But that takes time, and it doesn't solve the crisis now. What does solve the crisis is giving local people, local chief medical officers, the ability, the authority to open up beds, to move people into other accommodation and so forth.

These are achievable goals. These wait times are achievable, but it just won't be done. If we don't legislate them, guys, and give the person the authority needed to run the hospital and make sure that the backlog is taken care of, if we don't do that, it won't get done. The answer will always be, "Oh, we just need more long-term care," and slowly but surely over time we will build our long-term care infrastructure and capacity. But in the interim there will be a lot of dead people and a whole lot more injured people or suffering people that don't need to be suffering. That's what this whole amendment is about.

Nobody here wants unnecessary deaths. The health minister, clearly, does not want any unnecessary deaths and unnecessary suffering. You know what? I think the health minister thinks that everybody is as motivated as he is on everything, and it's just not the case. If you don't have accountability measures in place, if you can't hold someone's feet to the fire, inevitably things get put off, and people take the easy way out, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. If we don't have these accountability measures, nothing is going to happen.

A good quote is: a goal unwritten is only a wish. A goal unwritten is only a wish, and we all wish for a better system, but that's not enough. We have to get past this. In every system that we have, it seems that we just want to spend, spend, spend, and we don't ever ask for accountability. It's just not working.

Why do we want to start with emergency room wait times? It's very simple. With emergency room wait times, if you don't solve the problem, you have dead people on your hands. It's a crisis right now. It's not like access to family doctors. Do we need to improve access to family doctors? Obviously, we do, but there are not too many people that are going to die because they don't have a family doctor at that time. They can go to a walk-in clinic. They can self-diagnose if it's a cold or a fever or something like that. It's not the end of the world. It's not going to kill the person right there. Is it going to cause problems in the system down the road? Yeah. That's why we need to solve the problem.

It's the same with a hip replacement. Is that going to kill a person if they can't get their hip replacement in three months and, instead, they have to wait nine months? No. But it means lots of suffering, absolutely. We want to alleviate those lists and alleviate that suffering, absolutely, but it's not going to kill the person right now. So let's work on it together and get that done, but there's going to be a time period.

The emergency room crisis is different. People are dying now. They're suffering now. There's an immediate need. I challenge the government. Honestly, government, I know you're not listening, but

are you honestly saying that you want to come out of this session and have absolutely nothing to show? You want absolutely nothing to show for this session on the issue of emergency wait times other than a few promises? There's nothing you want to go to the people of Alberta with and say: "Okay. We're serious enough about this that we're going to put it in writing. It's in writing. It's a contract with the people of Alberta that this is going to be how long you wait and no longer in our emergency rooms." It just needs to be done.

You can almost sense that there are going to be several issues. There's going to be an issue that happens in the next little while – you know it's going to happen – where someone is going to lose their life because they were unnecessarily in an emergency room for 10 hours and didn't get treated. People are going to say: "Oh, that's too bad. Oh, that's so tragic. We're going to get more long-term care beds in place." That's what the government line is going to be. "We grieve with the family. Here's our plan for more long-term beds." That's going to be the government line, and someone else is going to die unnecessarily.

It just seems so preventable to me to just do what is needed to be done now. Pass the accountability measures. Empower a chief medical officer at every single hospital with an emergency room that has authority to move people around that hospital at will without AHS hording over them and telling them what they can and can't do with different regulations. That doesn't work.

You know, one of the things that works for every big corporation – look at other big corporations. Look at WestJet. Does everyone agree that WestJet is – does everybody want to agree? You know, to the doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark: are you familiar with WestJet?

'Mr. Chair, the thing with WestJet is that these folks actually empower their folks on the ground to make decisions about, you know, whether someone gets a free flight because of a screw-up. They empower people right there, their front-line people on the ground. They empower them. They say: "You are going to have the authority to make decisions. You'll be accountable for those decisions at the end of the day, but you have the authority to make decisions. You don't have to go to the CEO of WestJet. You don't have to go to managers below the CEO of WestJet. If you think there's an issue here and the customer needs to be serviced right now, you can make a decision, and you will be accountable for that decision." There's no red tape. You just do it. And if you did a bad job, you'll pay for it later. You'll be accountable for it later.

Why don't we treat our health care system more like that? Why don't we say to our doctors and nurses on the ground . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, can you please keep it down? It's getting difficult to hear. Please keep it down.

Mr. Anderson: As I was saying, with WestJet – and Walmart is another example of a company that empowers their front-line employees to make decisions right there on the ground without having to go to upper management to make them. They have to be accountable for those decisions later on – they're assessed – but they make the decisions on the ground. If Walmart trusts the Walmart greeters, why can we not trust our doctors and nurses, who are some of the most highly trained health professionals in the world, to make the right decision?

4:20

An Hon. Member: They're not WestJet; they're Air Canada.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. You know what? That's right. It's because we're not WestJet here; we're Air Canada here. That's it.

We call it Air Communist. That's how this government believes health care should be run. Everything has got to go through the Air Canada administration. Everything has got to go through the bureaucracy to get any kind of decisions, and that's why Air Canada stinks. That's why WestJet is a better company and it's more profitable and people like flying it more. Same with Southwest. They do the same thing. Same with Walmart. That's why everyone shops there, because if you need something returned, if you need a decision made, bang. The person on the ground makes the decision, period, and then is accountable for it later when they do assessment because there are accountability measures in place in all those companies.

Just look at some of these corporations. Why wouldn't we do this in our emergency rooms? Let's set the targets. Let's set the standards: this is the WestJet standard. Then empower our doctors, our highly paid, our highly trained doctors and nurses to make those life-and-death decisions right away on the ground, no questions asked. You need a bed opened up in unit 32? Bang. Done. It's open. We're bringing in that nurse to staff those five beds or those two nurses to staff those five beds, period. We don't care if those five beds aren't in the emergency room. They're open now. That's the type of service that we need to get to, but we can't do it unless we empower our local health care professionals on the ground.

It's too bad that we've gone through this 24-hour – you know, all I would ask the government to do: if we're going to come back on Monday, come back with an amendment. Come back with something. Just show us beforehand how you want to take action on this right away so we can all get behind it. We can come out and say to Albertans: here's the plan. Together we're going to legislate it. This is the way it's going to be. If there's some wording here that you think needs tinkering, let's talk to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Maybe we need to make some slight tinkering. I don't know. I'm not the emergency room doctor here. Certainly, you guys aren't. But there's one sitting in the back row right there. So why don't we work with him to go over this amendment or maybe propose an entirely new amendment that he feels will do the job and that the government is comfortable with. Until that happens, I would feel guilty as the representative of Airdrie-Chestermere for going forward with this without finding a solution.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to stand today to join the debate on the amendment by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, a member that has educated me on many of the needs of the health care system and has been able to do it in a language that a politician and an agricultural producer can understand, which is indeed a rare ability in these days.

What that member told me was that being 85 years old in Alberta is not a health condition; it's a condition of health. As we talk about this amendment and we talk about the emergency care in our province, our problem isn't the people that give that emergency care. It isn't the front-line workers. They are very, very qualified. The problem is having the proper places for the people as they age. As a government we are doing a great deal in that direction, in making sure that people are able to age in the right place. The efforts that are being made are going to take time.

Mr. Chair, there's no magic dust that we can sprinkle into an emergency ward today that's going to make all the problems go away. If there was, that magic dust would have to make the patients go away, and that's simply not going to happen.

It's my pleasure to speak on this today and on this amendment

partially because of the position that I have in the order of speakers, which is right towards the end of our day. I think Albertans deserve to finish off this week of the Legislature in speaking on this amendment with good news. The good news is that in this province we invest per capita either the highest or close to the highest of anywhere in this nation. We have taken steps in the reduction of administration that have put \$600 million more into the system. We need to talk about the facts and what's really taking place in this province. [interjections] I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I'm having a little trouble talking over the members.

Mr. Chair, people are living longer and having a better quality of life. This amendment moves in the direction, I know, to try and improve that, but those numbers would wind up a minimum, and we need to do better than that. When I look at the care received in this province, I try to think historically. When my family first came to this province, life expectancy was 47. A child born in Alberta today will live one hour longer than a child born in Alberta yesterday.

The system is not failing. There are things that we need to do to improve it, but people are living very well. The procedures and things that we're doing and that our medical profession is doing for people now in many cases did not exist in my father's generation, and it has produced a quality of life for me that generations before me haven't seen.

Mr. Chair, we have many people in this province that we need to take care of and that are at risk. We run a danger when we look at one area specifically and think that that will solve all of our problems. Some of those people that are at risk are losing our time and attention because of spending too much time in certain areas and not enough time in looking at our overall system. I do not want people not getting the support that they need out there in our society, losing faith, and possibly taking their lives before they ever get anywhere near our health system. We have a lot of things to take care of. Let's think about them reasonably.

Let's think about this amendment. This amendment is at best a Band-Aid. We are called to a lot higher effort than that as Albertans, and we will achieve a lot higher effort than that. I have faith in our health care workers. I have faith in Albertans, and if there was a message I could leave with them in speaking about this amendment today, it would be: "If you need emergency care, do not be afraid to go into the system that we have before you because we have the best

health care professionals in the world. You can go in there. You will be taken care of, and your quality of life will be great."

Mr. Chair, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 17.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Chair, I would move that the committee now rise and report what progress is possible on bills 17 and 27.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 27 and Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Acting Speaker: All those members in favour of the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that in the real world it's actually Thursday, but for us here in this Assembly it is still Wednesday because members dedicated themselves to an all-night, two-day debate on important issues. We have now sat for 27 consecutive hours, and I just want to say thank you to everybody for their input.

On that note I would move that the House now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 29, 2010

Issue 48

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 29, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As legislators we give thanks for the rich heritage and the diversity of the people of our province. We are thankful for the many opportunities so abundant in the province of Alberta. On this occasion, as we welcome His Excellency the Governor General of Canada into our Legislature, we dedicate ourselves to both the present and the future in the service of Alberta and Canada. Amen.

Please be seated.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Governor General]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, the Royal Canadian Artillery Band will now play the movement *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba* by composer George Frideric Handel. The timeless splendour and beauty of this music is a fitting prelude to the entrance of His Excellency the Governor General into the Alberta Legislature. The band is under the direction of Captain Eric Gagnon, who is in the Speaker's gallery.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, and Her Excellency Mrs. Sharon Johnston await.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Excellency the Right Honourable Governor General of Canada and Her Excellency.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Excellency the Right Honourable Governor General of Canada, David Johnston, CC, CMM, COM, CD, and Mrs. Sharon Johnston, their party, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Excellency took his place upon the throne]

The Speaker: I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

Hon. Members and Guests:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Your Excellencies, hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

On behalf of all members and the people of Alberta I am pleased to welcome Your Excellencies to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

By any measure Your Excellency is an exceptional Canadian of uncommon and high achievement in many fields. Her Excellency and your family mirror your devotion to the service of others, family, and the ideals we strive to embrace as a nation. We congratulate you on your appointment as Canada's 28th Governor General.

This is a rare and significant occasion. Today marks only the second time that a Governor General has addressed our Assembly since its first sitting in 1906. [applause]

1:40

Your Excellency's presence here today serves to underline the connection between the Crown and our Assembly. The authority for all that we do here flows from the Crown, and the acts of this provincial parliament are in the name of the person that you have the honour to represent in every cardinal point in this great dominion, Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada.

Please carry the affection, great respect, and the good wishes of all members of this House with you wherever your travels take you throughout this beautiful province and across our absolutely outstanding country.

It is my honour now to invite the hon. the Premier of Alberta, Premier Ed Stelmach, to deliver his remarks to Your Excellencies and the citizens of Alberta.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Boy, that was quite a rendition of *O Canada*.

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests in all the galleries, ladies and gentlemen, it is my very great privilege to welcome Their Excellencies the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General and also commander in chief, and Mrs. Sharon Johnston to the Alberta Legislature.

Earlier today I had the privilege of hosting a luncheon in their honour at Government House. Many of our guests at the luncheon are seated in the galleries today. At lunch I announced the creation of the David Johnston law scholarship to mark His Excellency's first official visit to Alberta. This scholarship is a new addition to Alberta's already generous scholarship program and will provide two annual awards of \$10,000 each, beginning next year. They will be for students taking a law degree, one at the University of Alberta and the other at the University of Calgary. The David Johnston law scholarship will be awarded to students who demonstrate academic achievement and community service. I'm sure that all members of this Assembly will agree with me that this is a fitting tribute to a man with such a long and distinguished career as His Excellency has had.

Your Excellencies, all Albertans are honoured to receive you as our guests, as we are honoured that Her Majesty's representative in Canada has come to Alberta so early in his term. We hope that you both enjoy your visit to our province and experience the warm western hospitality which Albertans are so well known for. You'll find that there are no more proud or committed Canadians than Albertans.

Thank you so very, very much, and welcome once again to our Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

I would now invite His Excellency the Right Honourable David

Johnston, Governor General of Canada, to address the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

**Address to the Legislative Assembly by
His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston**

His Excellency: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, Members of the Legislative Assembly, dear friends, let me begin with a question. Is there any place in Canada where *O Canada* is sung with the enthusiasm and pride as in this Legislature in Alberta? Wonderful to hear.

Mr. Premier, let me say first of all how deeply touched I am with these two scholarships to recognize the first visit that Sharon and I have paid to Alberta. You could not do anything that would touch my heart more. Thank you.

Je veux dire aussi félicitations sur l'événement d'hier, la Coupe Grey. C'est vraiment une organisation spectaculaire. La Coupe Grey est un festival national, et ici en Alberta vous avez montré à tout notre pays les méthodes d'organisation de vraiment créer un spectacle que j'admire beaucoup, ici à Edmonton cette année et l'année dernière à Calgary. Merci et félicitations pour cet événement.

Now, if some of you have roots in Saskatchewan, you may not have quite the same enthusiasm that I have for the Grey Cup.

In my installation speech some two months ago I spoke about a dream. I spoke about a smart and caring nation, a call for service, the Canada that we wish to be. There were three pillars in that caring and smart nation. One had to do with family and children, the second had to do with learning and innovation, and the third had to do with philanthropy and volunteerism. I can tell you what we've seen in a short 24 hours in this remarkable province of Alberta. You do all three of those things very well and set the standard for the rest of Canada.

Family. We spent a wonderful hour this morning at St. Mary Catholic school in south Edmonton, and for those of you who have not seen the innovative programs there, particularly the information technology, it is a wonder to see, and I urge you to visit it. Again setting the standard.

You know, one of the very special things about this country is that I think we've tried harder at equality of opportunity than any nation in history. Our challenge is to have both equality of opportunity and excellence, too, to see those two qualities or objectives as not competing ones but complementary ones. At the heart of it is our public education system, which you consistently have done so well in this province at every level and are setting the standards for the country and setting the standards for the world.

Our country more than any other is a country of immigrants, people who came to this country with little more than the shirts on their backs but a firm determination that life should be better for their children than it is for them, and that dream lives so well.

Vague après vague, des immigrants sont venus ici, abandonnant tout dans leur pays natal, mais par leur ardent désir d'offrir une vie meilleure à leurs enfants. En Alberta cet esprit de pionnier est encore bien vivant. Vous comprenez l'importance d'aider vos voisins, et je vous en félicite.

We spoke about a couple of paintings at lunchtime that hang in Rideau Hall, and I invite all of you and your families to visit the people's home, which is Rideau Hall. As you come into the foyer, as I was telling Premier Stelmach as we were speaking about his own upbringing, there are four pictures by William Kurelek there. The first shows a scene in the Ukraine in 1931 with a little girl leaving her home clothed in rags in the middle of winter with a begging bowl to go to the neighbours for help. In the background it

shows soldiers rounding up the adults in that village to take them off somewhere unknown. The second picture shows those families from the Ukraine landing at Halifax, at Pier 21, coming to this country with nothing more than hope. The third picture is a scene from the prairies. It's the same families there with the forest, and they're cutting down the trees to clear the land. The fourth picture is a picture some 20 years later of a farmer standing up to his chin in a grain field looking at the bounty that this has promised. This is this land, Canada, with equality of opportunity and excellence, too.

Let me move from family and children to learning and innovation and say to you what you probably don't fully comprehend because you're in Alberta and part of Alberta. When we look at Alberta from the rest of the country and the rest of the world, we see a spirit of entrepreneurship, of innovation here which is breathtaking and is very heartening to everybody across the country. It's the entrepreneurship that I want to teach to my children.

I once was asked by our students at the University of Waterloo to address their conference on entrepreneurship. They asked me to address the question: "Can you teach entrepreneurship, or is it simply something you have? Is it born in your DNA, or do you learn it?" I said: well, let me tell you about my granddaughter Emma. We have seven grandchildren. Emma was then four years old. She's now eight, a lovely little girl adopted from an orphanage in Colombia. She calls me Grampa Book. I was with her one evening in Ottawa and brought the book to read to her, and we finished the book. Because she's a very lively little girl, you always have to keep her engaged, so I said: "Now, darling, your mum and dad tell me that you're taking dancing lessons. Will you dance for Grampa Book?" She said, "Well, Grampa Book, if I dance for you, how much money will you give me?" Four years old. Now, you're always looking for a teaching opportunity, so I said: "Now, darling, Grampa Book loves you, and you love Grampa Book. Will you dance for Grampa Book for love?" She says, "Grampa Book, for love you can dance for yourself."

1:50

There is a cluster effect that is very important in this business of family and children, of learning and innovation and philanthropy and volunteerism. Philanthropy and volunteerism I depict with a metaphor I use from my part of the country, Waterloo country, which is barn raising. When a neighbour's barn burns down, all the other neighbours go to help. When a newcomer comes to the community, the other neighbours come to help that person raise their barn.

A story that Sharon and I tell. We live on a farm, 11 minutes from my office, in Mennonite country. Our neighbours are horse-and-buggy people. Sharon runs a stable with 30 horses boarded there. It's a tough business to break even in, I've got to tell you. Those of you who are farmers here will understand that. We were there a couple of years, and the insurance had gone up, and Sharon was looking at each of the buildings on the property to determine what the right valuation was. Could we lower it to reduce our premiums?

Edgar Shantz, our neighbour who farms our land, happened to be there at the same time. She said, "Edgar, this drive shed: we've got a value of \$20,000 on it; is that right, or could it be less?" He said, "Well, why do you ask?" She said, "Well, I have to insure it." He said, "Why are you insuring it?" She said, "Well, if it burns down, we have to replace it." He said: "If it burns down, we'll replace it. We'll come and help you. That's what neighbours do." Then he said: "Well, on second-hand materials, which we can get, I'm not so sure. You might want something new. So put a \$2,000 value on it. That will cover the materials. If it burns down, we'll come and help you." That wonderful spirit of volunteerism.

These things come together in a very interesting cluster effect. I just leave you with this story, and then I'll finish so that I don't occupy too much time in the Legislature today. There's a reinforcing cluster that's very important. I love history. One of my favourite periods of history is the 16th century. It's a story that has either three characters or four characters or more if I have more time. Today it will be only four characters. The characters are John, Marty, Fred, and Nick. Take 1523 as your year of departure, and ask yourself: who were John, Marty, Fred, and Nick? John is a bit earlier. For Marty, that year would be fine; for Fred, that year would be fine; and for Nick, that year would be fine.

Well, John was Johannes Gutenberg, who developed movable type, who, quote, invented the printing press. That was in 1470 or so in Amsterdam. He was a jeweller, and he went bankrupt not once but twice. His printing press didn't go anywhere. His technology did not take root.

It wasn't until 1523, when Marty came along, who started the Protestant and cultural revolution in Europe. Marty was Martin Luther. In 1523 he translated the Bible from its original Hebrew and Greek, not the Latin translation of the church but the original Hebrew and Greek, into German, into the vernacular, so that people could understand the Bible in their own language.

The most important thing in 1523 was an individual's relationship with God, but heretofore that had been translated for that individual by priests and bishops and cardinals and popes, an intermediation. He began the process of disintermediation and permitted people to seek out those truths on their own, not relying on authority and an oral tradition but reasoning it through themselves in their own language. Others did the same thing. Wycliffe in England and others translated the Bible, the Holy Word, into the language people could understand, and that Protestant revolution of people learning in a different way took the printing press and transferred it across Europe.

What about Fred? Fred was essential. Fred was Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, who in 1523 sheltered Luther for one year in his castle in Wartburg. Had he not done so, Luther would not have been able to translate the Bible. He needed protection from other forces that said: "This revolution in thinking, in communication shall not occur. This revolution in technology of the printed word shall not occur."

All three were indispensable. What happened from that is that the religious tracts, the religious word began being disseminated not through an oral and authoritarian tradition but by people reading on their own, interpreting for themselves, developing critical thinking, and that was the breakdown of feudalism in Europe. The cities began to rise, serfdom diminished, people began to contract for their labour, the Industrial Revolution began, democratic governments began to establish themselves, public education, where people were taught to do this, spread throughout the lands, and Europe advanced.

The fourth person was Nick, Niccolò Machiavelli, who in 1523 wrote *The Prince* in Florence, that beautiful city, the cradle of the Renaissance, and that was the first secular book to become a bestseller. So the printing press no longer was simply for religious education; it was for education and learning of all kinds. Now, it took 250 years for the printing press to reach the stage where a majority of the people in Europe enjoyed the benefits. The Internet took 10 years to achieve the same kind of revolution. Just think about that.

That's how western Europe advanced, and if you doubt that, realize that for 2,000 years the world of Islam, the world of China, and the world of India were advanced beyond western Europe. Western Europe was the backward power for 1,500 years of the 2,000 years, but western Europe advanced because this new method of communication spread into the hands of all people imaginable. China had the printing press when Marco Polo arrived there in 1215.

It is believed that movable type was invented in Korea in the second century AD. Those other civilizations – Islam, well advanced in engineering, India, where mathematics began – those societies all had the Johns. All had the technological revolution. What they lacked was the Martyrs, and what they lacked was the Freds and then the Nicks.

You ask: today who represents the Freds? You represent the Freds right here. We create an environment in which learning can advance, in which we can innovate, in which people can ensure that life is better for their children than it is for themselves, and in which philanthropy and volunteerism are not simply something that we opt into or opt out of when the United Way or the Salvation Army comes canvassing or our neighbour needs a barn built but as a mainstream feature of Canadian life.

In the year 2017 we'll celebrate our 150th anniversary. I hope that as we proceed to that time, the people of Alberta will continue to lead Canada, as you have so well, in being a smart and caring nation. Let me leave you with just two lines that I quoted to the Premier at lunch that I love and I'll use again. They come from Shaw, and they go this way: some people see things as they are and wonder why; we dream of things that ought to be and ask why not.

Thank you for the great privilege of addressing you today. [applause]

The Speaker: I invite all of you to remain standing, please. I'd like to thank His Excellency for his warmth, his enthusiasm, and his humour, all fundamental traits of the people of Alberta, and I believe that from my quick consultation with the Premier, that manifests itself into declaring you an honorary citizen of Alberta. [applause]

Excellency, I'd like to also draw to your attention one situation in this Assembly which is unique in the country of Canada. This is the only parliament in the country of Canada that flies all of the flags of the provinces and territories in it. It's unique.

I would now like to invite all of you to rise, please, to join in the singing of the royal anthem, *God Save The Queen*. We'll be led once again by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Would you please remain standing for the departure of Their Excellencies after the conclusion of *God Save The Queen*.

2:00

Hon. Members and Guests:

God save our gracious Queen
long live our noble Queen,
God save The Queen!
Send her victorious,
happy and glorious,
long to reign over us:
God save The Queen!

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Excellencies, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated. Hon. members, we will continue the Routine momentarily. I just want to ensure that we have one clarification today. As a result of Government Motion 20, passed the other day, which afforded the opportunity for His Excellency the Governor General to be with us today, we had to in essence waive standing orders, which basically say that we would commence at 1:30. We will commence the Routine momentarily, and my understanding is that we will continue to the conclusion of the Routine even if it goes beyond the 3 o'clock that's mentioned in Standing Order 7(7). Is that everybody's understanding?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Then, once we begin the Routine, we will conclude the Routine.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you two groups of people. First of all, I'd like to introduce three board members from the Assist Community Services Centre. I'm not sure where they're sitting, so if you can see from the other side, you can let me know. They're there. Wonderful. Today we have Mr. Allan Kwan, the vice-president; Mrs. Mary Fung, the public relations director; and Mrs. Mei Hung, the treasurer. I would ask them all to now rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, carrying right along, the second group that I'd like to introduce is 34 parents, teachers, and students from the Coralwood academy. The Coralwood, a Seventh-day Adventist academy, is a family facility, and they exist to teach children to follow Jesus, to nurture their love for Him and for others, to teach them to think, and to empower them to serve. The Coralwood staff and students are very committed to the highest standards of personal and academic excellence. With our 25 students today are five staff and parents. We have Ms Marian Rochford, Mr. Dan Rochford, Ms Ellen Kim, Ms Sharon Baragona, and Mr. Michael Adams. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly if they're here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members 22 students from Rideau Park elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They're accompanied this afternoon by teacher Mrs. Tanja Burns and by parent helpers Mrs. Susanne Hoffmann and Mr. Oliver Schmidt. This is a fine group of grade 6 students that have asked some very astute questions, many interested in the parliamentary process. I'd like to invite all of them to stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today, one a little bit lengthy, that I hope you will indulge as it is a number of individuals in our galleries. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 16 students that are here today representing the medical schools of both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. They are here along with several other medical students to share some of the great ideas about how we can ensure postsecondary, particularly our medical schools, as an option for all Albertans regardless of their background.

I'll just read through their names, Mr. Speaker, and if they are seated in the galleries, I would ask that each of them stand as I call their name to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. They are Sahil Gupta, Stephane Doucette-Preville, Kelsey Macleod, Inka Toman, Salma Shivji, Kelli Taylor, Mischa Snopkowski, Lise Malta, Alyssa Cruz, Danielle Maurice, Adil Abdulla, Esther Kim, Alistair Waugh, Graeme Mulholland, Jennifer Amyotte, Daryl Dillman.

These students are very concerned about the diversity of our medical schools and the diversity of the clinicians that will be treating our patients in Alberta for years to come. They have come to our Legislature to spread their message of concern. I would ask all members of the Legislature to give them a very warm reception.

Mr. Speaker, I have one more introduction – and I believe that she's still in our gallery – my partner of 30 years. It was our anniversary this year. I've taken several different directions in my career over the years, and she has stayed with me over that period of time as well as taught our three children the values of Albertans and the values of staying in our province. She is a grandmother this year, as I am a grandfather, I guess. The things that I have accomplished could not have been possible without my partner of 30 years, Aukje Rose Marie Horner, who I believe is sitting in the gallery, and if she is, if she would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've never ever in the time that I've been Speaker had this list of introductions before me. At 2:22 we are going to the question period, so we'll just continue through the process.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to stand up to introduce to you and through you to this House a woman who probably needs no introduction, but it is my pleasure to be able to do so. We are pleased to have Senator Joyce Fairbairn here with us this afternoon, an amazing woman who has worked on the Hill in Ottawa for 50 years next year. That is an amazing accomplishment for a woman. She started off in the press gallery, worked in the Trudeau government, and, of course, has served for 25 years as a senator. Her main focus has always been literacy for all Canadians, and she has used her position as a Senator to forward that. She is here with her aide-de-camp, retired Warrant Officer Glenn Miller. I would ask you to welcome both of them to this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Was somebody introducing his school group? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups, actually, to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly. The first group is on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Crestwood elementary-junior high school is with us today. The group of 38 is lead by Ms Ludwig and is accompanied by parents Mrs. Tracy von der Ohe, Mrs. Lee, and Mr. Procter. They were in the public gallery, and if they're still in attendance, I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

I have a second introduction today, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure also to introduce a former colleague of mine in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Bharat Agnihotri of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Bharat is accompanied by a past candidate for the Alberta Liberal Party, Aman Gill. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to also rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour, a privilege, and a pleasure to introduce an important person in my life to this

Assembly, my wife, Debbie. We've been through a lot in nearly 27 years of marriage now, and it's been a pleasure every step of the way. I believe that I'm the luckiest man in the world, and I believe that because she tells me regularly. My wife, Debbie.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very good friend of mine, Nick Ziemann. Nick and I have been friends for our entire lives as our parents were good friends. He's come up today to watch the proceedings. Nick lives in Chestermere, and he's a welder. He's been married to his wife, Krista, for almost five years now, and they have a very cute daughter who turns two in April, and her name's Sienna. I would like Nick to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our Governor General made reference to this moments ago, and it's now my honour to introduce a number of individuals who are responsible for arranging the 2010 edition of the largest annual sporting event in this country, the CFL's Grey Cup, which set a record for the fastest sellout ever in just one week. With roots in Saskatchewan and as a Calgary Stampeders season ticket holder, this is not easy for me to say, but the truth is that from east to west people agree. I'd like to thank everyone in Edmonton for putting on the best Grey Cup Festival ever. Over 600 people were involved, and over 30 people served on the steering committee, some of whom have joined us today, including – if you would stand, please – co-chairs Doug Goss and Rick LeLacheur, executive director Duane Vienneau, Joan Forge, Bruce Bentley, Shirley Zylstra, Cathy Presniak, Bruce Keltie, Greg Treble, Terry O'Flynn, John Moquin, Bob Turner, Brad Sparrow, and Keith Keating. Thank you all, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House two old friends, active citizens and real philanthropists, having given the largest single donation of land to the University of Alberta. May I introduce John and Jenny Bocock in the members' gallery and thank them on behalf of all of us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege to dine with six people from Alberta today that are promoting the passport to Alberta's community icons. With us today is the first Albertan to complete the Alberta icon journey, Mario Boulanger, and his favourite daughter, Christina. Along with them are the promoters of this program from Woodlands county, that both you and I have the great honour to represent: first, Jim Rennie, mayor of Woodlands county, councillor Alan Deane, councillor Daryl Yagos, and their communications director, Brigitte Jobin. I'd ask them all now to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you Miss Gwen Cham.

Gwen is the project director for south health campus with Alberta Health Services, which is anticipated to open in 2012. Her role there is to oversee the \$1.4 billion capital development and the \$400 million clinical, nonclinical, and IT operational planning and implementation. This centre is designed to transform health care by way of efficiency and reshaping demand, with the emphasis on patient-family centred care. I see Gwen as representative of a generation of young and innovative professionals working diligently at improving our health services. I would like to ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce three students through you to this House: Nikhil Shah, Ambica Parmar, and Matthew Karpman. This morning I had the great pleasure and opportunity to discuss with them the issue of demographic diversity of the medical students in the universities in this province. I'd like to ask them to rise to receive the warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to rise and introduce through you to all members of this Assembly your wife, Kristina Kowalski. It's great to see Kristina in the gallery today. You are an inspiration to us all. I know my colleagues would want to join me in giving you the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege and an honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Mike and Mrs. Maureen Mahon. Mike is the president of the University of Lethbridge, recently installed. We're pleased to have him up here today and would ask you to give him the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Yash Gill, who is visiting us here from India. Mr. Gill works as an excise and taxation officer for the government of Punjab. He came to my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie to visit his friend Sanjiv Aggrewal. Mr. Gill is very interested in the political system of both Alberta and Canada. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Gill earlier this afternoon, and he was very much looking forward to the visit of the hon. Governor General. At this time I ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine, Mr. Parshotam Aggrewal. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary last week. He's joined here today by his son Sanjiv Aggrewal. At this time I'd like him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly

Mrs. Lulu Bernal. Mrs. Bernal, a retired employee of CIBC for 30 years, is the past secretary-general of the Filipino Retirees' Association in Alberta. Mrs. Bernal helps many Filipino foreign workers because she believes that it meets the economic needs of this province. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour today to introduce a very principled and huge community contributor, a philanthropist who knows no boundaries, a quiet man in his own way who has done so much for this city, who recently took leave of his law practice to chair the Grant MacEwan board, a very valued institution with over 20,000 students. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd invite John Day to rise. Let's all salute a man who is doing great things in our community and in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone that I just noticed in the gallery, a very good constituent of mine who I'd like to have rise now. This gentleman is certainly someone who is known to us all here, and I'd like to introduce to you Mr. Tom Olsen.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature constituents of mine, Loretta Adams and her husband, Keith. Loretta was diagnosed with MS in 2003 and is scheduled to travel to California for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, known as CCSVI, testing in December. Loretta is a member of CCSVI Edmonton, a group seeking to increase awareness of CCSVI and its link to MS, and she encourages our government to support and participate in research on this important matter. My guests are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives from the Palestine Solidarity Network, the Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, and the Canada-Palestine Cultural Association. Today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. In 1977 the United Nations General Assembly called for the annual observance on the 29th of November each year as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise as I call their name and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. From the group Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East Breanna Ho, Nariman Saidane, Bryan Hosking; from the Canada-Palestine Cultural Association Ahmad Mustapha, Mohamad Issa, Anas Elkhateeb, Mousa Qasqas, Hani Huoseh, Hani El-Zein, Alaa Kadri; and from the Palestine Solidarity Network Alex Freeman. If they would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I indicated earlier that this is very unique. I still have 11 members that want to introduce their guests. We're now 20 minutes into the Routine; it's 2:22. I indicated that normally under our rules we start at 1:30; at 1:50, 20 minutes later, we'd be into the question period. I'm going to ask if I can have unanimous consent to conclude these introductions.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Okay. We're into the question period. Clerk, please proceed.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Publicly Funded Health Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus has just obtained a leaked document proving this government's hidden agenda for Alberta's health care system, an agenda which pushes our health care system towards two-tiered, American-style health care. To the Premier: given this document describes the government's plans for private health insurance, delisting, increased for-profit delivery of health care, when was the Premier planning to make this document public? We'll table it in the House today.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This government is committed to a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This document shows the government has two phases of the Alberta Health Act: the one we're in now, which does nothing, and the second one, which dismantles everything that Albertans cherish about our system. How can the Premier explain this plan to Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if only the member would have read the bill that's before the House. It commits us in legislation to a publicly funded health care system.

Dr. Swann: Is the real reason the government will limit debate to one hour on the Alberta Health Act so that the government can ram this new legislation down our throats?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to having a full and open debate on all the legislation. We have had over 27 hours of debate in this House on the bill. Isn't it interesting? After months of open-door consultation with Albertans, with medical professionals at the table listening to Albertans and health care advocates, what is in this bill that is not what Albertans told us to put in? I want to know from that party.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, what the public assumed was simply incompetence by the government is now revealed as a cynical, subversive agenda to sneak two-tiered, American-style health care into Alberta. Again to the Premier. This

document talks repeatedly about pursuing private insurance options. Does the Premier stand behind what this document says about shifting from public to private health insurance? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I stand behind a publicly funded health care system, and I'll defend it to the very end.

Dr. Swann: While the U.S. is trying to get a single-payer system, this government is trying to dismantle ours. Why is the government pushing towards more private health insurance? How much are Albertans going to be asked to pay?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have in this country of Canada a good publicly funded health care system. As we heard earlier today from the Governor General, the province is leading in many ways in terms of compassion and care not only for Albertans but for Canadians. I would ask everybody to just set aside this bickering back and forth. Let's just focus on outcomes, move the system ahead so we can show progress not only for Albertans but for the rest of Canada.

Dr. Swann: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans are asking: has the Premier kept Alberta's health care system in a state of permanent crisis in order to pave the way for two-tiered American-style health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, being the only jurisdiction in Canada to actually have a five-year funding plan, which gives a commitment to a publicly funded health care system, I would say: you're saying that we're moving to a two-tiered system?

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier can say what he wants, but this document shows what the Premier really has in store for Albertans, and just like the failed experiment of the Alberta Health Services Board, the public won't know what he's planning until the next election is over. To the Premier. Let's have some straight answers. Do you or do you not support forcing Albertans to pay for private insurance for services now publicly funded?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I have to repeat in the House that this government is firmly committed to a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system. Period.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, does this Premier support a single-payer public health care insurance system? If so, why is he opening the door to private insurance?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, as I said, not only in the bill but after hearing hundreds of Albertans that took time during a busy summer to provide their input into the legislation that's before the House, I firmly believe it is good legislation. It reflects the values and priorities of Albertans. Just move on with the bill and get it passed so we can show some outcomes.

Dr. Swann: How can this Premier stand in the House and pretend to be open and transparent when a document shows that the Premier and this government are anything but open and transparent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, this government is open; it is transparent. It has consulted time and time again with

Albertans. This time we went out and said: look, let's go out there, talk to Albertans, all kinds of Albertans in every corner of the province. They brought their views forward. Those views and priorities and comments were all reflected in the document that went for further consultation. After another round of consultation it came back, it was formed into a piece of legislation, and it's now before the House for debate.

Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week the new parliamentary assistant for health called the president of the AMA and told him he was concerned with the mental health of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. This has resulted in the good doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark being ordered by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to undergo a psychiatric evaluation in order to retain his medical licence. Regardless of the intent of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, what he has done is inappropriate given his position of influence. Will the Premier instruct this member to apologize for what he has done?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the accusations raised by the member are absolutely not true. Nobody in this government has the authority to pull anyone's licence. As I said the other day before the media, we don't even have the authority to pull a driver's licence, let alone a medical licence. There's a professional organization in charge. Leave it to them. Just leave it. It doesn't belong on the floor of this Assembly. I don't want to besmirch anyone's reputation because of some political motives on that side.

Mr. Anderson: As everyone in this House knows, he did make the call, Premier. Quit contorting and distorting the facts.

2:30

Will the Premier now personally apologize for the way this member has been treated by this government caucus and immediately call the AMA and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, asking them to ignore the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and withdraw their order mandating that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark submit to a psychiatric evaluation? It's absolutely shameful, Premier, that you've allowed your caucus to do this to this hon. member. Shameful.

The Speaker: We've got a point of order here. This is going to discontinue. The language is to become temperate here pretty quick. Hon. the Premier, do you want to participate in this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, members of this government caucus have reached out to the member a number of times, taken the time to support him through what he described as a bit of a difficult period. We're still behind him to offer any help that may be available. He is a valued representative for his constituency. It's unfortunate that comments have been misconstrued by some opposition members, who, quite frankly, won't even sit and listen to the response because they do not want to hear the truth.

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjections] The hon. member. [interjections] The member has been recognized. I take it we're finished? Do you have a question?

Mr. Anderson: Yes.

The Speaker: I've recognized you three times.

Mr. Anderson: The public's confidence in this government has been shaken to its core. Last week the curtain was pulled back on a culture of fear and intimidation, and we see that here today: MLAs being effectively coerced to toe the party line even if it means turning their backs on those they represent, whisper campaigns targeted at the very livelihoods of the government's opponents. The government may think this will all blow over, but it won't. This government has lost the moral authority to govern, and Albertans will make that very clear at the next election. Shame on all of you. Shame on every one of you. No question needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government has a justly deserved reputation as a bully. Just ask Dr. John O'Connor from Fort Chipewyan or the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View. Now, steeped in sanctimonious protestations of compassion, the government is attempting to discredit the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. My question is to the Premier. Why are you and your MLAs attempting to discredit this MLA if not for the very fact that he poses a mortal danger to your government?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure what the member is talking about. I don't know what was said about the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, but he is the Leader of the Official Opposition, he's in the House, and I'm sure that he is very capable of defending himself and speaking up for himself in this Legislature.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier forgets that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View got fired when he spoke out against climate change when he was a medical officer of health. Now we're seeing the same pattern continue, Mr. Premier. I want to know, again, why this government is trying to discredit the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark if not because his articulate vision for health care completely blows up your government's credibility.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, nobody is destroying anyone's credibility. This is an open and transparent House. Anybody can bring up different issues and make comments.

With respect to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, as I said, he was elected, he's a member of this House, and he can bring forward any of his comments or any position that he wants to bring forward to the House. He doesn't need him to bring it up.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we realize why this is actually happening. The government has produced a document dated July 12, 2010, that shows that phase 2 of the legislation this government is planning talks about private hospitals, opting out by physicians, and double billing. Will the Premier admit that his secret plan to privatize our health care system is the real reason for the persecution of this hon. member?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, not true at all. Once again, as a province we're trying to move to a position where we can provide equitable health care across the province, sustain it for the next generation, deal with some of the demographic issues that we'll be facing in the province over the next five to 10 years. This is all planning for the future and ensuring that we have the best publicly funded health care system in the country of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Provincial Achievement Tests

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education uses the results of provincial achievement tests for grades 3, 6, and 9 as a key indicator of progress in achieving the admirable goal of attaining excellence in student learning outcomes. I'm interested in what appears to be the minister's curious definition of the word "progress" because his ministry's targets for both acceptable and excellent levels of achievement in the tests in 2012-13 are precisely 1 per cent better than the results achieved in 2008-09 – 1 per cent in five years. Can the minister disclose the rationale for setting a target of a mere 1 per cent improvement in student learning outcomes over a five-year period?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, when you're doing exceptionally well, it's hard to get even better.

Mr. Taylor: Well, it was concise in any event.

Again to the minister: given that he's actually set these targets eight-tenths of a per cent lower for acceptable and over 2 and a half per cent lower for excellent than the targets he set in his previous business plan, can he explain why he's become more pessimistic about the ability of Alberta Education to produce the desired results?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one of the goals that this government has is to encourage high school completion. I think it probably goes without saying, but I'll say in any event that as we get more students who are dropping out of school to stay in school and complete, it's likely that the results on exceptional and perhaps even acceptable may go down. We have a huge achievement gap, for example, with the FNMI population. If we can bring FNMI students into the school, keep them in school, and encourage their success, it will in fact be better for everyone, but the overall targets will flatten.

Mr. Taylor: Interesting considering that we still have about the lowest high school completion rate in the country.

Can the minister explain why a nearly 70 per cent increase in government funding of basic education between 2004 and 2009 would translate into a 6 per cent decline in the number of students who tested at the acceptable level in '04 and the number expected to hit that mark in 2013?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, we have a number of competing values in the system. One is to encourage excellence in education and make sure that every single student has the opportunity to be the best that they can be. One of the other goals that we have is to include more people in the education system, to bring students into the education system and to make sure that every student is a participant and every student aspires to be successful. That will in fact lower the overall results. So there are two competing goals that we have. One is to raise the number of students who achieve the standard of excellence and the acceptable standards, and the other is to make sure more students . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are very concerned about the emergency department issues. Everyone knows that wait times are too long. My constituents want answers. So do I. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. How long do we have to wait before we see real action, not just words?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the hon. member that action is occurring right now. In fact, it's the most aggressive action with solutions for any jurisdiction in Canada. We're adding more acute-care beds in the hospitals. We're adding more transition beds. We're adding more continuing care beds. We've got a new discharge protocol that's occurring, and there are more improvements coming. We've put that squarely before Alberta Health Services, they are responding, and yet more will occur before Christmas.

Mr. Xiao: Really? Then what action will you take if the improvements are not in place by your deadline, which is December? What is the accountability for that?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the administration at Alberta Health Services has responded very appropriately. There is no option other than to accomplish what they've been asked to accomplish. They're working very hard with a new CEO, who's in there doing the best that he can to make sure that these new protocols are coming forward. That's why 100 of Alberta's top administrators, top medics, top nurses, and other people involved with health care met on November 20. We're trying to move forward with that action plan because that's what people really want to see.

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister. Will there be public transparency and reporting about these actions? How will Albertans know what is actually going on?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question, and I'm pleased to tell the hon. member that the short answer is yes. In fact, Alberta Health Services has been posting and they will be posting more of the information pertaining to Alberta's busiest and largest ER departments as we speak, and even more of that transparency and accountability will be forthcoming, as is characteristic of this government and of them themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:40 Health System Acute-care Beds

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only thing that this government has been consistent with in health services over the last few decades is cutting acute-care capacity. In 1989 Alberta had 13,300 acute-care beds. Alberta Health Services' annual report shows that now we have 7,802. That's why we are in an acute-care crisis: a history of government cuts. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. The minister of health states that around 300 acute-care beds will be opened . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how the question ends, but let me just say that there have been a number of improvements and additions to the acute-care system. Alberta Health Services has a number of details that they'd be happy to share with you. However, in March of 2009 there were over 7,700 acute-care beds, a year later there were over 7,800 acute-care beds, and now they are adding another 360 hospital beds, all of which is in stream and under way right now, and the staff will be there to accompany that announcement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I won't ask the question because you answered some of my questions. My question is: I want to know the absolute total number of acute-care beds that we have as we speak that are actually with trained staff.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to get the exact number through Alberta Health Services, and perhaps they can accommodate that request. But the important thing to know is that we are opening more beds in the hospitals, in our communities, and wherever we can to help address the pressures that the system is facing, and the response so far has been very good. Alberta Health Services is doing a good job to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: I'm fine. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Arts and Education Grant Program

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of mine have been advised that the funding for the arts and education program has been cut completely from the budget of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts effective March 31, 2011. Could the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit please advise if this is true?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to respond by saying unequivocally and emphatically that there will be no funding cuts to the arts and education grant program in the forthcoming year.

Mr. Allred: My second question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Why does the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit fund this program and not the Ministry of Education?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, arts and culture in our province transcend a variety of different ministries, and we fund this program like many others such as the AFA youth program, the arts summer schools, the community presenting and individual artist grant streams because it's important in our communities right across our province that we continue to fund the vital fabric of our communities.

Mr. Allred: Well, my final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Education. What, sir, are your plans to provide for education in the arts in the future?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it should be clear as we move into further discussions about what a 21st century education looks like and what our children need that arts are not peripheral to education; arts are core to education. But education is not just about what the Department of Education does, so we very much value the work that we share with Culture and Community Spirit and with others. We are revising the arts curriculum because it hasn't been revised for the last 25 years. There's been public discussion on that. That will continue. But I can assure the hon. member and all Albertans that arts are core to education, they're not peripheral, and they will be part of our curriculum going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Alberta Health Services Board

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has created hundreds of agencies, boards, and commissions. When critics look for ministerial responsibility or accountability for these creatures of government, we are told that they are independent, that they operate at arm's length, that the government is not responsible for their decisions. We believe the government is responsible. The government creates, funds, and directs these agencies, and indeed the chairman of Alberta Health Services has said that the minister gave clear directions on firing the CEO. To the Premier: does the government rely . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier. [interjection] Okay. We're moving on.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Health and Wellness would probably like to clarify the reporting procedure.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's be very clear. I did not give such an instruction. The instruction – call it a request, call it a direction – that I gave was for an immediate decision because we could not wait for two weeks or two months or whatever for a decision to be made.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. Back to the Premier: given that there have now been resignations from that board on the grounds of government interference along with a call for clarified roles and responsibilities, what will be told to the new board members about their role in overseeing delivery of health care in this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the role and the mandate of the Alberta Health Services Board is very clear. They're there to promote and protect the health of Albertans. They're there on an ongoing basis to assess the health needs of Albertans. They're there to help determine priorities for the provision of those health services, for operating the system, and for ensuring that reasonable access is there as well as sustainability of the health system for all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again, to the Premier: how can the government claim to be transparent and accountable when they deliberately send conflicting messages about who is in charge and, therefore, who is responsible for delivery of health services in this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear in the Regional Health Authorities Act, which I would encourage the hon. member and others to have a look at, that the Alberta Health Services Board reports to Albertans through and to the minister of health.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Foreign Qualifications and Credentials

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I often talk about wasted potential in two forms. One is those that fail to utilize their

true educational capacities, and two is new immigrants where we as Canadian institutions fail to recognize their educational credentials. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why do we encourage economic class immigrants to come here, give them credit for their specific work and educational experience when applying, when there are no jobs for them in their respective careers here?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, let's be clear. It is the federal minister of immigration, not I, who assigns points to individuals for their education and credentials in their assessing of their visa application abroad. I can tell you that this ministry works not only with immigrants but with all Albertans to make sure that those who are unemployed become employed and those who are underemployed become fully employed. For that reason, we have 59 or so offices throughout the province working with Albertans to make sure that their skills and education are utilized to the maximum of their benefit and, by extension, to our benefit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we really need is we need the minister to push the professional organizations and colleges to recognize their credentials. Minister, what is your ministry doing to help skilled, educated newcomers get their qualifications and experience recognized here so that they can play their rightful role in Canadian society?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Very good question, Mr. Speaker. First, as you may know, just a few days ago I held a forum in Edmonton with experts in that area, those being the service providers, educational institutions, and many employers in the province, to recognize the credentials of foreign skilled and foreign educated individuals. This ministry has programs in place that assist foreign credentialed individuals to enter our workforce. At the same time, we have to make sure that we don't jeopardize in any way the standards that we are accustomed to have over here. So it's a balance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that I agree that we should not jeopardize our standards, but at the same time we should push the envelope to ensure Canadians are not engaging in protectionist behaviour. Does this mean, based on what the minister just said, that doctors, accountants, and other highly skilled professionals can hopefully sometime soon stop working in entry-level jobs that are absolutely unrelated to their professions?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what this ministry is doing. I cannot speak for my federal counterparts. First of all, we have published very clear information on our websites with associations, with colleges, and with many self-governing bodies to allow individuals who are contemplating coming to Alberta to find out what the process will be for them to become credentialed. We're working very closely with professional colleges to make sure that the process of accrediting foreign-trained individuals is as smooth and as short as possible. At the end of the day it is to our benefit. We recognize that everybody should be working to the maximum of their credentials.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:50 **Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark**
(continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Assembly has often been referred to as the people's House. We heard that from the Governor General earlier today. What's interesting is that government is now running and hiding. In fact, one MLA on that side has said: we just want to get out of Dodge as quick as possible. That's code for saying: we're afraid of questions in question period. Why is this government so afraid of being accountable to the people of Alberta by invoking closure?

Mr. Horner: As the Deputy Premier I guess I'll answer the question. We're not afraid of anybody, Mr. Speaker. We're here to represent the people of Alberta that elected us to this Legislature, similarly to them. We also believe that no one should hijack the process of this Legislature so that I don't get a chance to vote or that any of my colleagues don't get a chance to vote and move the agenda forward for Albertans.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health says that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is a friend, yet he votes to kick him out of caucus. The minister of health says that he wants to listen to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, yet he rejects his accountability amendment when it comes to Bill 17. My question is: why did you vote to kick this member, the only ER doctor, out of your caucus? Why did you vote to kick him out?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I have no idea what this has to do with government policy.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'll just clarify, Mr. Speaker, that I was not present for any such vote.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister of health was not present, it's interesting to say, then: he's trying to distance himself from the decision of this caucus. My question to the minister of health is: why doesn't he support his friend, who is an ER doctor?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the member referred to was my friend, is my friend, and I'm sure always will be my friend. The fact here, however, is that we have a difference of opinion on where these lengths of stay protocols should be in place. He would like them in legislation. I've explained why they can't be in the law from my perspective, but I'll be happy to put them into the action plan and into the performance measures, which will be released very soon.

The Speaker: I don't know what the motivation is here.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Emergency Room Statistics

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services posts on its website wait times for its emergency departments in the large urban hospitals. This information on wait times for both discharged and admitted patients goes back to November 2009. To the health minister: does Alberta Health Services have this wait time data going back to 2002, when emergency room doctors identified the problems around lengthy emergency wait times?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the great benefits of having one single province-wide health authority now is that they will have more consistent gathering of data and, equally important, more consistent delivery of data. Right now that's exactly what they're doing. They're collecting that information on a site-by-site basis at the busiest sites – I've answered this question earlier today – and they're going to continue doing that. Equally important, they're going to be reporting it fully, transparently to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the minister of health. Sir, with all due respect, you have not answered the question. In light of openness and transparency will you admit to this House and to the people of the province that you have data going back prior to 2009 on how the emergency rooms in the large urban centres were working or were not working?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how data was collected back in 2002, but I'd be happy to take that question under advisement and have a look and see if I can get the answer that the member is looking for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the health minister. You have to provide this information, sir. Given that these emergency room wait times are very important statistics for the government to know, why is this information not publicly available now if we're trying to solve this emergency room crisis?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it's hard to live in the past. What I would prefer to do, if the hon. member doesn't mind, is to indicate very clearly that since I've come into this post, I've had some of these discussions with Alberta Health Services. They are posting not only the busiest sites aggregately, but they're also posting information on an individual site basis. I've taken under advisement the earlier question, and I will look into it for the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Alberta Junior Hockey League Outdoor Game

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Alberta hosted a memorable Grey Cup match, but that's not the only major sporting event that happened this past weekend. The community of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo did an outstanding job hosting the first outdoor junior hockey game in Canada last Friday, with their team battling my team, the Drayton Valley Thunder. I commend the community, mayor and council, and of course the local MLA and players all. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. The province invested \$1.1 million in Grey Cup festivities. Was there any support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, this was a great event. It was inspired by community spirit. I was able to be up there last Thursday for the jersey gala, and I was so impressed with what the community had been able to do. They pulled it together in less than three months. It was sold out in less than an hour. They built a

temporary outdoor stadium at MacDonald Island Park. Although we did not provide funding for this special event, the province had previously committed \$1.3 million for the MacDonald Island Park multiplex to help promote recreation in the region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: can the minister tell the Assembly if, in fact, she supports the AJHL, and if so, why didn't the province provide funding for the event, and will they consider future funding for events like this?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the event, as I said before, was pulled together very quickly. It was amazing, the community spirit in Fort McMurray. Volunteers actually built the outdoor stadium, 5,000 seats in it. They raised \$75,000 on their own in order to help cover the costs of this event. It was only one night, but there are great benefits from it. The ice rink is going to stay in place this entire season for the families of Fort McMurray to use. As well, the boards are going to be donated to a community in rural Alberta. A great outcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Alberta Health Services Board (continued)

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the health minister. I was wondering: will the selection of the new CEO for Alberta Health Services be done in a completely open and transparent manner?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are specific protocols on how the Alberta Health Services Board goes about recruiting positions like that. To the best of my knowledge they will be following those protocols. At the end of the day typically people are invited through an application process to submit resumés, and those resumés would be considered through the application process that follows.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, again this is for the hon. minister of health. Can the minister guarantee that whoever is selected will be someone with experience in patient care, someone who views patients as who and what they are, people who need care and respect, more than the just a line item on a budget?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that the acting CEO of Alberta Health Services has 33 years of experience in the medical community, 20 of those years include administrative type work in the health area. I think that the Health Services Board, which is responsible for the recruitment of a full-time, permanent CEO, will take every one of those types of criteria under their purview as they design the process going forward. I'll make sure they see your comment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new CEO is just a person who implements the policies of government. We can see so far that they haven't led us to a very good point right now. My final question for the minister is: will the minister make change that really matters and appoint a task force to immediately start planning the orderly dismantling of Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that that would be necessary. We have a board that laid out a large game plan, and that game plan includes things to do with the health workforce, facility operations, acute care, continuing care, and the list goes on. Now there is a very competent group of people who have the day-to-day job to implement those strategies, and they're doing it. That's why we're anxious to get on with these plans as opposed to being sidetracked by some of these peripheral issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:00

School Construction

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over a week ago a group from Airdrie had a rally at the Legislature calling for new schools to address the needs in that community. Airdrie is not alone. There are many other communities in this province needing new schools, such as Beaumont in my constituency. My question is to the Minister of Education. How does the Ministry of Education determine its priorities in the capital planning process to address the needs of its school boards and their students?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we do consult with school boards on a regular basis. In fact, we ask school boards to provide us with a three-year capital plan and update it annually so that we know exactly what their priorities are in their jurisdictions. Obviously, we have to overlay that with our own demographic analysis with respect to the demographic shifts that are happening in the province, the growth of students and the areas of growth, which hopefully will match what the school boards are telling us, and have those discussions. Then, of course, we have to deal with priorities across the province with respect to health and safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate those comments. Again, Mr. Minister, we have communities that are bursting at the seams, communities like Beaumont, where 25 per cent of the population is under 20. How does the minister deal with these priorities where communities are bursting at the seams? How do we deal with these situations?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, we have to work with communities that have these types of growth issues, and we have worked with Beaumont and with Rocky View with respect to the Airdrie community and others to try and assist them in getting, for example, modular classrooms in place to deal with growth on an immediate term. At the same time, we're working on a longer term capital plan which will put in place immediate construction in those areas that need it, and plan for the longer term for those areas that can wait a while. But there are issues across the province relative to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: when will you provide Albertans with a long-range, sustainable, and sensible plan to address the urgent needs not only for today but for the future?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we do have that plan. We're working through it in the department. We're looking at the issues of growth. We're looking at the fact that 50 per cent of our schools are more

than 50 years old, and that has implications for us. We also need to note where we're going to need those schools going forward, which ones need to be renewed and refreshed going forward, and which ones are going to be external to our needs. That's a long-term plan that we are working on going forward, and I hope that we'll have announcements with respect to that within the near term.

Funding for Medical Students

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign the very first promise the governing party made was to aggressively increase the number of health care professionals in this province. Three years later Albertans are still waiting. To the Deputy Premier: if the Premier wants to make it easier for Albertans to study medicine, why did this government cut postsecondary education so much that the U of A and the U of C had to trim medical schools by 31 spaces this year?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, we have exceeded the promise that we made in our campaign in 2008. We had said that by 2012 we would have a minimum increase of physician graduates from 227 to 295. Our target right now is still 295, and in fact we believe we're going to exceed that target by a very good margin. It is true that given that this year's enrollments were down a little bit from last year . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did health sciences and related clinical fields, the health professionals Alberta desperately needs, have the highest number of qualified students refused admission not only last year but for the last five years in a row? Something is not right here.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member needs to look at the number of spaces that we've increased. We have increased a tremendous amount, and we've actually reduced the number of turnaways, if that definition is still out there. We have reduced the number of turnaways in every jurisdiction in this province, and we've done it very substantially. We are increasing the number of health care spaces in the province. We're going to increase the number of graduates in the health care fields. That's the important part, the graduates.

Mr. Chase: So like with the minister of health: we'll wait for Christmas for his gifts; we'll wait until 2012 for yours. Mind you, this government won't be around to see it.

How can the government claim that Alberta Health Services has a handle on workforce planning when the College and Association of Registered Nurses said just this month that AHS's workforce plans are not based on sound evidence and research?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I would be in disagreement with that because the number of health officials and health experts that I was in the room with when we did work on the plan and established those targets indicated to us that that was the appropriate level of staffing. It's a staffing mix. You can't listen to just one part of the model; you have to listen to all parts of the system.

We will have an increase of approximately 350 graduating physicians in 2012. We're going to be beyond our 2,000 nurses commitment that we made, and we're going to be beyond our 1,000 LPNs commitment we made. We are building more spaces than any other jurisdiction in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Support for Rural Tourism

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the Grey Cup being hosted here in Edmonton this weekend, we hear lots about what's being done to promote tourism in the big cities. As I will mention later in my member's statement, there are unique, innovative programs in rural Alberta that are worthy of attention. My questions are to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. How do more operators, especially those in rural Alberta, get funding and support from Travel Alberta?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to see communities working together, like on the icon passport system. The tourism industry is always stronger when we work together. I always say: hunt in a pack. So we see these kinds of creative initiatives come out, like the passport system. It's a great example of creative thinking that's fostered through Travel Alberta. Last year Travel Alberta provided \$2.6 million to north, central, and south tourism destination regions to come up with these kinds of innovative ways to attract tourism.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, that's great news.

To the same minister. Mr. Speaker, you know, again, we hear the stats about the visitors to the Grey Cup. We hear about the millions of dollars that are being spent in Edmonton with this great event. My question to this minister is: are we seeing more people visiting and spending money in other parts of this great province, like in rural Alberta?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. During the economic downturn there's no question that tourism took some hits, but I've always said that this is a resilient industry. It knows how to battle and fight. It just didn't sit down and mire in the fact that it was losing ground during an economic turnaround. They got out; they promoted. They've worked very, very hard. This icon passport is one great example of them working together. I am starting to see the tourism industry turn around, and we're seeing activity out there.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister. We talk lots about the innovative ways that operators are continuing to build this industry, but what's your ministry doing to promote more campgrounds? They're all full; you can't get in anywhere.

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have wonderful campgrounds in this province, and I understand why they're full. We actually created 100 new campsites last year in the province of Alberta. We need to add more. We're out looking at opportunities at this very moment on adding to those. We brought our reservation system – remember we doubled it from 25 to 50? We had 180,000 reservations on that campground reservation system last year. We're doing a lot; we need to do more. It's a wonderful province, and people want to visit it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

School Utilization Formula

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The school utilization formula is creating challenges across Alberta in both rural and urban areas alike. Last year the Edmonton public school board voted to close five of its schools, which was hugely upsetting to the affected

students and their community schools, which are the hub of these communities. My question is to the Minister of Education. Given that schools are a vital component of a community, why could your department not find some way to keep these schools open?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the governance of education and the government of education is a two-pronged process: there's the provincial level, of course, the Department of Education, the ministry, and there are local school boards. We ask school boards to govern in their area by making determinations about what their physical plant needs are, where they need to have school spaces, and in doing so, we hope that they will work with the community. We help to guide some of that discussion where appropriate and work with them on shaping that, but ultimately it comes to a school board determining whether or not the school facilities they have are the ones that are necessary in order to provide the programs. This is where it's really critical. It's all about the appropriate . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Given that these schools are critically important and many of these particular schools had low utilization rates based on your department's admittedly flawed formula for calculating utilization, when can we expect to see a new formula in place?

3:10

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, an important question that needs to be addressed from a number of different aspects. First of all, the utilization formula that people talk about and say is flawed does take into account — people suggest that it doesn't take into account the other spaces in the school, but it does provide a formula which calculates how much gymnasium, how much hallway, how much other space needs to be put in place. It should be clear that the utilization formula, which was critical a number of years ago in making determinations about where new schools were allocated and those sorts of things, doesn't play that significant a role currently in that process. So the utilization formula . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What can communities do to help prevent the closure of these neighbourhood schools and protect them for the future?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, again a very important question. First of all, we would encourage school boards and communities and municipal councils, et cetera, to work together to talk about the future of the community, what the needs are for the future of that community, what the cycle of growth might be in that community, and how to appropriately use the school facilities first and foremost for education purposes and then when no longer needed for education purposes, for some other community use until the cycle of the community comes around and the school is again needed for educational purposes in that area. That can't be simply a matter of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Condominium Bylaws

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know some

constituents have concerns regarding the purchase of condominium units. I have heard my colleagues say in the past that consumers need to do their homework before investing in new or used condo units as their new home. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. How can consumers do the homework you suggest before buying a condo when it can be difficult to get condo bylaws and financial information from the condominium association?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Condominium Property Act buyers can certainly ask the board for copies of documents, which include bylaws, meeting minutes, the budget and most recent financial statements, and the statement of the reserve fund, which is absolutely so important. The board must provide the buyer the requested information within 10 days. Many condominium boards are responsive. If a potential buyer is concerned, they should put a subject-to condition on the offer to ensure that they get to see the documents before the offer closes.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister. It takes so long for an interested buyer to arm themselves with vital information to help them make the best decision. Why is this the case?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It can certainly take time for the property managers or the board to go through the files, retrieve the documents, and send them to the recipient. As well, if a buyer would like to receive a copy of the bylaws right away, they can do so by logging onto the Service Alberta website, and ordering a copy from the spatial information system for a \$5 fee to expedite the process and to ensure that they get the right information.

Mr. Benito: Again to the same minister: why are there big differences in the charges to the potential buyer when requesting this documentation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently the Condominium Property Act requires that fees charged for producing and providing corporation documents be reasonable. Under the current review of the Condominium Property Act we are looking at options for standardizing fees, making sure that they are affordable to owners and buyers. These kinds of discussions and options will be included in the consultation document as we move forward with the consultation in late spring of 2011.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, you were catching my eye a minute or two ago. Did you want to rise on something?

Mr. Denis: I wanted to rise, actually, on a point of order.

The Speaker: We'll deal with the point of order later, at the conclusion of the Routine.

Hon. members, 20 members were recognized today for 115 questions and responses.

We'll continue the Routine momentarily.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: First of all, I want to draw to the attention of all members revisions with respect to the rotation of questions and

members' statements. I want to advise of certain modifications as a result of recent changes to the composition of caucuses. As of Tuesday, November 23, 2010, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is sitting in the Assembly as an independent. This change affects the rotation of questions and of members' statements outlined in the chair's October 25, 2010, statement in this Assembly at pages 917 and 918 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

Given the number of changes to the rotation and to the seating plan so far this session the chair has attempted to integrate the new independent member into the rotation of questions and members' statements with a minimum of disruption to the existing order. As this chair has indicated previously, changes to the rotation are done in the spirit of fairness, that marks the proceedings of this Assembly. Accordingly, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, like the Member for Calgary-Currie, will be entitled to one question every four days.

Today is considered day 1 in the rotation scheme used in the Assembly. As the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark took his new seat Tuesday, November 23, it seems appropriate that he be able to ask a question this Wednesday, which is December 1, 2010, or day 3 in the rotation. He will be entitled to ask the sixth question, and the remaining places will be moved down one, so the Official Opposition will have the seventh question, government members the eighth question, et cetera. It will mark a departure from our previous rotation as the Official Opposition will now have the 18th question.

Similarly, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark will be able to participate in Members' Statements on the same basis as the other independent member. Given that the member's affiliation was changed last Tuesday, by the rotation used in this matter, he will be entitled to a member's statement also on Wednesday, December 1. The chair will provide calendars and outlines of the order of questions during question period to all members.

Now, hon. members, as the part of the Routine we were at before we moved to the question period was dealing with Introduction of Guests, we will now return to that. I have still, I believe, 11 members that wish to participate, so I'll go through my list, and I will ask you if you want to do an introduction or not.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The guests have departed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce two very bright women: Corrie Adolph, who is seeking the Wildrose nomination in Calgary-Currie, and Joanne Autio, who is seeking the Wildrose nomination in Edmonton-Mill Woods. Both Corrie and Joanne will be shadowing me today to find out what an MLA does on a daily basis. I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me today and gives me pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members my wife of 37 years, Pauline Prins. Pauline has been a registered nurse for the past 36 years and has worked in the health care system in Edmonton, Bentley, Ponoka, and Lacombe. She retired earlier this year after working many years serving the people

of these communities. She is now on the Lacombe hospital foundation board.

Pauline came by her love of medicine and serving people in need from her grandfather, the late Dr. Klaas Lugtenborg, who practised for many decades in the Netherlands. Mr. Speaker, she has passed on this dedication to our son Mark, who is also a medical doctor, well known to many members in this House. Now, this past summer Mark married the love of his life, another doctor, Dr. Nadia Salvaterra. Our son and daughter-in-law are now working in Rankin Inlet in Nunavut.

Mr. Speaker, I've been surrounded by health care professionals for most of my life, including two sisters-in-law and four nieces who are nurses, so I want to recognize all the wonderful work that they do. Pauline is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask all members to give her the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very good friend and an extremely dedicated volunteer from my constituency. Marcia McLeod has volunteered with the Black Gold Health Foundation, the Leduc hospital, the Edmonton International Airport, Santa's Helpers, Leduc-Nisku EDA, Leduc chamber of commerce, and many other organizations in the city of Leduc. She also served as the president of my constituency association. I'd like to ask Marcia McLeod to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, my guest, my daughter, had to get on the road back home, so she has left. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, would you like to proceed?

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests have also departed the Assembly, so I'll pass on that. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Is there anybody that I missed? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to introduce a constituent of mine. His name is Ravi Grewal. I'm not sure if he's still here, but if we could give him a warm welcome.

3:20

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. minister of tourism and recreation.

2010 Grey Cup

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to congratulate the Grey Cup Committee, the city of Edmonton, and all Albertans in our capital region on an extraordinary weekend of Grey Cup hospitality and celebration. I'm so proud of the welcome extended to the Governor General, the Prime Minister, Premiers of several provinces, and thousands of Saskatchewan and Montreal fans. This city was at its best.

Last weekend you couldn't go anywhere in Edmonton without seeing happy, smiling visitors. From Huddle Town and all the fun activities in Churchill Square to the parade and the amazing game

and halftime entertainment at Commonwealth Stadium in front of more than 63,000 fans and millions more television viewers across the country, Edmonton has once again shown that we know how to welcome the world.

Our government is proud to have supported the 2009 Grey Cup in Calgary and this year's Grey Cup in Edmonton. One truly wonderful and memorable event was the youth brunch that we hosted on Saturday morning. Through our sponsorship of the Grey Cup we were able to provide 50 tickets for deserving youth and minor football players in the Edmonton region to attend the Grey Cup game.

As we did at the Vancouver Winter Olympics, we took advantage of this opportunity to showcase Alberta artists and culture at the Huddle Town Alberta House. Aboriginal storyteller Ron Walker, Rapid Fire Theatre, and artists from U22 Productions entertained visitors while they enjoyed hot chocolate and marshmallows and warm Alberta hospitality. This was a fabulous opportunity to promote Alberta's performers on a national stage.

Mr. Speaker, the economic impact of hosting an event like the Grey Cup is significant. As I mentioned last week, fans stayed in hotels and motels. They ate in restaurants and bars, went shopping, and spent money here. Calgary Tourism estimated that the economic impact from last year's Grey Cup was \$61 million for the city and a further \$20 million in impact across the province. We expect that economic impact for Edmonton may be even higher. This is one of the reasons that we're disappointed that the Edmonton Expo 2017 bid is not proceeding.

Edmonton has successfully hosted numerous world-class events over the years, from the '78 Commonwealth Games, that gave us Commonwealth Stadium, to the '83 Universiade Games, the 2001 World Championships in Athletics, the 2003 Heritage Classic outdoor hockey game, the 2005 World Masters, and four Grey Cup championships.

Congratulations to the Montreal Alouettes on their second Grey Cup victory in Alberta, and congratulations to the Saskatchewan Roughriders and the Rider Nation fans for their tremendous heart and team spirit and camaraderie.

My thanks to the Grey Cup Committee and the more than 700 volunteers and citizens who helped make this the best Grey Cup weekend in Edmonton and such a resounding success. Congratulations to everyone involved. We can all be very proud.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During its long and storied history the Grey Cup has evolved into one of our nation's most treasured institutions. Though the championship game itself remains the heart of the event, the parties and exhibitions and celebrations leading up to the kickoff have become a phenomenon all their own. For that reason the people of Edmonton must be saluted. They welcomed visitors from across the nation, including Their Excellencies Governor General David Johnston and Mrs. Sharon Johnston, and showed them the celebration of a lifetime.

Thousands of Canadians came together in downtown Edmonton to enjoy the festivities of Huddle Town. It was full of activities which brought together family and friends. Many even had the pleasure of zip-lining through our province's capital.

Without the hard work of countless volunteers this feat would have been impossible. The 98th Grey Cup event showcased the spirit of Albertans, where they had such an overwhelming response that they were quickly at full capacity and unable to accept any more volunteers.

The good-natured spirit of the event can be seen in that not one charge was laid all weekend as a result of the Grey Cup festivities. This spirit is unmatched anywhere in the world.

This Grey Cup was particularly personal for me as it had a potential to create conflict in my family. You see, Mr. Speaker, I was born in Saskatoon, and my brother Greg was born in Montreal. Yet instead of creating divisions between family and friends, this great Canadian game unites all of us in our love of sport, a true testament to how great it is.

I can tell you from my experience playing rugby for 17 years that when it comes to the finals, players always give 110 per cent. This Grey Cup was no exception. While the best team won, all players on both teams played valiantly, and they can all leave Edmonton with their heads held high.

The Eskimos may not have made it to the final this year, but by playing host to thousands of excited Canadians from across the country, Edmontonians have proved that this remains the city of champions.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, may I respond to the statement?

The Speaker: I gather there's a request for unanimous consent to allow the Member for Calgary-Glenmore to participate in this.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Wildrose I'd like to congratulate the 98th Grey Cup organizers, who have done an extremely wonderful job in bringing Canadians together for our Grey Cup event. Special congratulations, though, are due to three members of the champion Montreal Alouettes who hail from Alberta: offensive lineman Jeff Perrett – I might add that his parents have come and visited me twice, and I have a photograph from him, an outstanding athlete – and Dylan Steenbergen, both from the Lethbridge area, and defensive tackle J.P. Bekasiak from Edmonton. We also recognize offensive lineman Chris Best from Calgary and defensive tackle Keith Shologan from Spruce Grove, who came up just short as members of the Saskatchewan Roughriders team.

What a wonderful weekend for Canadians and the fans who had the opportunity to enjoy this fine city and the thousands who watched the game on TV. Congratulations to all involved and for those who got to participate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Before we move on to the next item, it's now 27 minutes after 3, and I think it would be inhumane on my part to deny hon. members an opportunity to have tea or juice or coffee in the House before we call Orders of the Day. I'm not going to call Orders of the Day, but you can order such if you wish.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

2010 Grey Cup Festival

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been proud to host the Canadian Football League's Grey Cup for each of the past two years. Congratulations go out to repeat champions Anthony Calvillo and the Montreal Alouettes on an inspirational and well-deserved victory.

Mr. Speaker, everything is just fine in the New West Partnership, which originated between the Alberta and Saskatchewan governments, but 2010 just wasn't quite the year for our teams. I'd like to

again salute the Grey Cup steering committee, which I was able to introduce earlier, and their volunteers. It was an amazing festival, and it included an extremely successful parade, the entertaining and free Huddle Town, which featured not only a 520-foot zip line but, for me the important thing, contributions to the armed forces, a great selection of receptions, ever-exciting player awards, and countless other unforgettable activities.

I would like to acknowledge the ministries of Culture and Community Spirit and Tourism, Parks and Recreation for invaluable initiatives. I'd also note the contributions of the ministries of Children and Youth Services, Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Public Affairs Bureau. In the grant agreement \$200,000 was earmarked for cultural activities, which provided a fabulous showcase for our world-class Alberta performers. Another highlight was Alberta House, which featured our trademark western hospitality.

Mr. Speaker, at one time I thought there might be one way for this year's event to be slightly better, for Albertans at least, and that would be if the Calgary Stampeders and the Edmonton Eskimos had both qualified for the big game using the crossover format and played to a tie. But, of course, that scenario cannot happen. There needs to be a winner. My point, though, is that in many ways, with the way things were organized, all of Canada, all Canadians, were winners in the 98th edition of the only truly Canadian professional sport, with Albertans as the gracious hosts.

Next year, with Vancouver arranging the festivities, hopefully the Stampeders or the Eskimos will bring the cup back to Alberta, where it belongs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Alberta Liberal Emergency Health Care Solutions

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday I launched the Official Opposition's plan to help Alberta navigate its way through the current crisis in our emergency departments. It's a long-standing crisis caused solely by the mismanagement and incompetence of this Progressive Conservative administration. I urge the Premier to adopt this plan immediately to undo some of the damage from perpetual disruptive organizational change and revolving doors in senior leadership.

Our health care system is lurching from crisis to crisis to crisis. Conditions in emergency rooms across Alberta are worse than ever before, with patients waiting dozens of hours, some dying before receiving the treatment they need. We must take the pressure off the system and treat the situation as if a major event such as a bus or plane crash or a serious epidemic existed.

In the next few months we must anticipate and avert the potential for catastrophe by creating space, surge capacity in the system. A short-term investment now will reduce costs in the longer term. We must act now. The lack of front-line health care professionals is the number one cause of the crisis. The government must hire more health care professionals while at the same time creating enough long-term care space to meet Alberta's needs.

3:30

Our plan has seven steps: the creation of an emergency task force comprised of top-tier professionals to report daily on bed availability and wait times and ensure people move through emergency departments quickly; a mobilization of all available health care professionals; an advertising campaign to help Albertans navigate the system more effectively; the immediate provision of alternative long-term care settings; extended hours for diagnostic imaging and lab testing;

the opening of mothballed acute-care beds in Edmonton and Calgary; and initiating a long-term plan for the future improvement of public health care, including a regional delivery system.

Mr. Speaker, the Tory administration has caused the greatest health care crisis in our history. This government has a duty to immediately atone for dangerous mismanagement. Act now and save lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Investing in New Canadians Program

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on an innovative research initiative between the University of Calgary and RBC to study how organizations can take full advantage of Calgary's diverse working community. As Roger Straathof, vice-president of RBC, said:

It's estimated that more than 80,000 Canadians with professional credentials are not recognized by industry simply because their credentials were earned outside of [Canada]. This is equal to billions of dollars in human resource waste annually.

A \$1 million gift from RBC offers the U of C's Haskayne School of Business the unique opportunity to look at the ingredients of a successful immigrant-employer relationship in a longitudinal study.

Mr. Speaker, the investing in new Canadians program would develop, promote, and facilitate talent management programs to internationally qualified new Canadian professionals. The fundamental intention is to assist immigrants with professional-level foreign credentials in gaining employment in their field of expertise. The university will partner with a number of Calgary organizations, including the Bow Valley College, Alberta Talent Pool, and the Calgary Region Immigrant Employment Council, to look at the effectiveness of current mentorship and recruitment programs when it comes to including new immigrants in the Calgary workforce. The investing in new Canadians program will launch in 2011.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure we can all see how this type of collaborative initiative is immensely important to a growing, developing province like ours. This initiative holds real promise in addressing our critical workforce needs in areas of health services and resource development and, in fact, all aspects of our economy and social infrastructure.

I would like to extend my congratulations and best wishes to this much-needed project that will help our province immensely. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Alberta Icons Passport Program

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to talk about a great new program that's drawing attention to some of Alberta's most unique attractions and helping to encourage tourism in our great province. Woodlands county has spearheaded the creation of the passport to Alberta's community icons. The passport is a free traveller's guide that's stamped at 24 of the big-things sites across Alberta, from the world's largest bee in Falher to the Taber cornstalk and almost everything in between. The passport program has been very successful so far, and there's already one Albertan, that I introduced earlier, Mr. Mario Boulanger, who has completed the entire passport and visited all 24 sites.

These communities are proud to celebrate their claim to fame on a monumental scale. Their icons are symbols of our heritage. They are reminders of what makes these communities so special. I invite my colleagues to join me in thanking Woodlands county, the

participating communities, and their partners at Travel Alberta for promoting these sites and communities.

Mr. Speaker, on your desk and, colleagues, on your desk is a copy of the passport. I encourage Albertans to visit www.alberta-icons.com to learn more about the big things icon passport program and to get out and explore our beautiful province.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Recognition of Legislature House Staff

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is probably fair to say that we don't often achieve unanimity in this Chamber, but I want to speak to a matter today about which I think we can all agree. As you know, in the last few weeks we've been putting in very long hours, and the schedule has been gruelling. Some of us, certainly me, may have felt at times that it was just almost more than a person could bear, almost above and beyond the call of duty.

I was here for the debate in the middle of the night last week at probably about 3 in the morning on Thursday when I slipped out for a short break and happened to strike up a conversation with a member of the security detail. They were doing their usual job plus also taking a turn at some of the duties normally performed by the pages. I asked him when his shift had started, and he indicated that he had started at 1 p.m. the previous day. He also indicated that they aren't platooning. They're not taking shifts because there aren't enough of them, so they just work right through until whenever the session for the day ends. In fact, some of those people had been here since 8 a.m. the previous day.

This got me to thinking about all of the people who work so hard to make it possible for this Chamber to operate, even around the clock when necessary. These security people, pages, table officers and officials, the Sergeant-at-Arms, *Hansard* staff, camera and sound people, leg. and office assistants, researchers, maintenance and janitorial staff all do their jobs quietly and professionally and always in the most accommodating way. They truly go above and beyond the call of duty, and their families often have to make adjustments and sacrifices for them to do their job.

Mr. Speaker, these are Albertans who are great leaders. They lead by example, by their work ethic, and by their service. I would like to thank them for what they do.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The way you were going there, I thought you were going to conclude that the Speaker was a brutal boss for making people work from 8 in the morning to 4 the next day. But, in the end, I gather that leadership is all important, right?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Assist Community Services Centre

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this House to discuss a very important community organization in Edmonton, the Assist Community Services Centre. Earlier I had introduced Mr. Allan Kwan, vice-president of Assist; Ms Mary Fung, their public relations director; and Mei Hung, the treasurer. Originally this organization was known as the Chinese Community Services Centre. Assist was founded by Mr. Kim Hung.

It's a nonprofit, charitable organization that provides many valuable services to its community. It's been a pillar of the Chinese community in Edmonton for over 30 years and has become more prominent as the Chinese community has grown. Although it is primarily a centre for immigrants of Chinese origin, Assist offers services in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Korean, and

Arabic. In helping immigrants, its overarching vision is to enhance the lives of individuals and families through quality programs and services.

Mr. Speaker, it has certainly achieved its vision over the past several decades in a number of ways. Assist empowers immigrants by providing essential services that help make the transition to living in Alberta much easier. These programs include adult English courses, one-on-one counselling, group activities, and an integrated services program. Just this past weekend Assist hosted an information session on employment insurance. Future workshops include one on how to become a journeyman in Alberta and one on the public school system in our province. The centre also provides children, youth, family, and senior services.

Mr. Speaker, the Assist Community Services Centre is a tremendous organization which gives back to the community by helping immigrants adjust to life in Edmonton. It helps immigrants of all ages by providing a number of useful services. The volunteers at this organization are tremendously dedicated and hard working. I would ask this House to please give the members of Assist the warm welcome that they deserve.

Thank you, sir.

Water Allocation

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, water and access to it is the lifeblood of our province. It sustains our ecosystems and contributes to Albertans' high quality of life. However, our water supply is limited, and in order that we continue to grow agriculturally, industrially, environmentally, and economically, we must face these challenges. We've already seen the ramifications in the South Saskatchewan River basin, where there is not enough water to meet a variety of demands.

3:40

Albertans expect our water resources to be managed in a way that ensures the province can fully weather future growth demands. That's precisely why the government of Alberta is reviewing ways in which water is allocated in the province. Not surprisingly, Albertans are interested in what changes may occur. For example, we've heard concerns about a free market system where water licences would only be available to the highest bidder. Let me be clear. This will not happen. The government of Alberta has no intention of privatizing or selling Alberta's water resources, and this includes any transfer outside of our province. Water is owned by the Crown on behalf of Albertans, and its use in Alberta is regulated by the province. Any new tool for Alberta's future water management would have that same provincial oversight.

No decisions have been made about the future of Alberta's water resources, and no decisions will be made until the people of this province are consulted. Throughout all of this the guiding principle is that the government of Alberta remains firmly committed to ensuring water resources are protected. The review is about enhancing a system that has supported Alberta well over the past century but may not be sufficient to meet our future social, economic, and environmental expectations. We must adapt and be prepared. I urge all Albertans to take advantage of engagement opportunities when the time comes.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand from the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that we will be in

need of a search committee for the Ombudsman's position. That being the case and given the potential agenda for the House under standing orders to conclude by Thursday unless otherwise ordered, it would be prudent, therefore, for me to put on notice a motion.

Be it resolved that a Select Special Ombudsman Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed consisting of the following members, namely Mr. Mitzel, chair; Mr. Lund, deputy chair; Mr. Marz; Mr. Lindsay; Mr. Quest; Mr. Rogers; Ms Blakeman; Ms Notley; and Mr. Hinman, for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Ombudsman and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.

- (1) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (2) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (3) In carrying out its responsibilities the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (4) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (5) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

In providing this notice, Mr. Speaker, I am anticipating perhaps a tabling that might be made later, but I think it was prudent to give notice to the House of the necessity for this motion so that it could come to the floor on a timely basis this week. I would also indicate that I have approached members of the opposition to confirm that they would allow their name to stand in the motion as I have reflected it.

The Speaker: The House will deal with the motion a little later. It was my intent as Speaker to have tabled the letter from the Ombudsman on Thursday last, but unfortunately there was no opportunity to do it. The chair of the Leg. Offices Committee has a copy of that letter. Mr. Button did meet with me, and he's resigning effective May 31, 2011, for personal and family reasons. There are some issues, and both he and his wife want to have a different future than to be under pressure. We will deal with that later in the week, but the letter is there, and the chair has it as well.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Okay. Like Introduction of Guests today, I have a very long list.

We will deal with the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table eight copies of my response to amended Written Question 10 as submitted by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, which reads, "As of December 31, 2009, how many Albertans were on wait-lists for long-term care placement both in hospital facilities and in the community?"

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table eight copies of my response to Written Question 23, as submitted also by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, which reads, "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Health and Wellness on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?"

It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that written questions 9, 36, 37, and 38, which were directed to my ministry, are being tabled by the Clerk. Thank you.

Also, if I could, I would quickly like to table the appropriate number of copies of the following annual reports: the 2009-2010 report of the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists and the 2009-2010 report of the Health Quality Council of Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, two tablings. One on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise responding to questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with regard to expenditures on external consultants during the past three years.

Also, Mr. Speaker, on my behalf, responding to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to the same question: how much had Treasury Board spent on external consultants during the past three fiscal years? Those appropriate numbers of documents will be tabled.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. It's okay. I'm getting it all down. It's going to take a long time before we ever get there.

The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg your indulgence for the number of things that I must table. Number one, I am pleased to respond to Written Question 15, that was posed to me by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, which read, "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Employment and Immigration on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?" In my correspondence I addressed that question to the point that I'm sharing it with this Assembly at this point.

Mr. Speaker, my next tabling. As required, I am tabling five copies of the 2010 annual report of the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta. For those in the House who don't know, CGA Alberta is a self-regulated organization of professional accountants created to further the interests of Albertans in our business community and develop professional standards in the province for that particular profession. Thank you.

My next tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta 2009 annual report, the last available, Bridges, which I'm compelled to share with this Legislative Assembly. Much like the prior report, this self-governing body administers the professional conduct of its members and assures the quality of standards of services rendered to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, my next tabling is again five copies, as required, of the annual report of the Radiation Health Administrative Organization. Not to repeat myself over and over, but this is again a self-governing body that assures the quality of service provided to us in our health care system among radiation professionals.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I again am required to table with you today five copies of the Alberta Dental Association and College 2009 radiation health and safety program. This organization has developed a program for Albertans to ascertain that we receive the best quality of care when it comes to radiation. This is to be tabled with the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, next, from the University of Calgary five copies of the annual report of the University of Calgary, again on radiation health administration issued by that university.

I feel bad for the pages, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Don't worry about the pages. You just continue.

Mr. Lukaszuk: And about your patience as well.

Mr. Speaker, I have five copies of the Authorized Radiation Health Administrative Organization annual report for 2010 as well.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, also the annual report of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta for 2009-2010.

Mr. Speaker, also the last report available for the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table five copies of the College of Alberta Professional Foresters 2010 annual report.

Mr. Speaker, last but not least, I would like to table five copies of the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta annual report.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a document that I will table today on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and I have the required number of copies. The document is a letter scribed by Mr. Earl Kading of Cessford, Alberta, a constituent of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, requesting to have secondary highway 561, known locally as the Cessford road, paved from Veterans highway 36 to secondary highway 884. Mr. Kading notes that as a member of the special . . .

The Speaker: That's probably a pretty good summarization you've got already. You can probably table it now and move on.

Mr. Doerksen: I will do that. It is signed by more than 100 residents from the Cessford area. Some are my constituents. I won't read them this afternoon.

The Speaker: Wonderful.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, you have one, too, now? Same road?

Mr. Hayden: No, Mr. Speaker, unless it's hidden in my papers.

But I do, Mr. Speaker, want to table in response to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East the response to their request for the amount spent over the past three years on external consultants. I'll table the required number of copies.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to table the response to the question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview with respect to: "What is the total number of complaints regarding zoo standards dealt with by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development from January 1, 2003, to February 7, 2010?"

I also have, Mr. Speaker, the response to the question from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East with respect to: "What specific programs have been developed to aid Alberta pork producers who suffered economic losses due to the recent H1N1 outbreak?" I have the required number of copies.

I also would like to table the required number of copies of the Stakeholder Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety report as prepared by Stroh Consulting, covering the 10 questions that were to

explore ways to get others involved with health and safety by encouraging collaborative partnerships

and initiating processes for agricultural societies to include health and safety activities as part of their program. Also:

Research approaches used for [occupational health and safety] in other jurisdictions and consider adopting best practices in Alberta, [as an example] do we need a safety organization?

Continue [Employment and Immigration] and ARD [occupational health and safety] project team to facilitate industry engagement.

Create and launch a multi-phase awareness campaign for [occupational health and safety] in the agriculture industry.

Facilitate an industry and government process to develop a long term Agriculture Health and Safety Enhancement Strategy.

Investigate possible recognition programs similar to the Partnerships in Health and Safety Certificate of Recognition (COR) Program to cover the agriculture industry.

Identify an industry champion for health and safety on farms and ranches to maintain profile and promote safety initiatives.

Identify possible incentives for improved practices ([and those are like] reduced Workers' Compensation premiums, reduced premiums for crop insurance, interest rates or increased benefits of grant programs).

Investigate possible inclusion of contractors carrying out non-agricultural work on farms under [occupational health and safety] . . .

And finally, Mr. Speaker, to

develop best practices guide for high risk duties.

I have the required number, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to table them.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have one document I'd like to table. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies in response to Written Question 26, which I received through my office from the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. This response to Written Question 26 lists payments of external consultants for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, which consists of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs and the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. I'd also like to note that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs was established on April 1, 2008, and as such, the external consultant records pertaining to the '07-08 fiscal year will be included in the response from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. I would indicate also that the amount is negligible.

Thank you.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the appropriate number of copies in response to Written Question 1, raised in the Third Session of the 27th Legislature by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. The question was: "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?" Two, the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit was constituted in 2008, and we have records for the last three years to that effect.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table eight copies of the response to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, who had posed a question in the House that had to do with external consultants which the ministry has used over the last three years, which we were able to bring forward, being developed on a lot of these things. I believe that – was it you, member?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. You bet. I appreciate this.

The Speaker: Anyway, would you speak through the chair. He feels lonely if you don't.

Mr. Horner: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I heard the hon. member question where this should go, but I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity will provide the answer to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I have the appropriate number of copies here. As I said, the question was: "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?" We've just broken it out into a summary, and we'd be happy to provide that.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Currie, I think, is going to have a lot of reading to do here tonight if we sit fairly late because I, too, have a tabling of a request, Written Question 25, from the Member for Calgary-Currie, again relative to payments to external consultants as it relates to the Ministry of Energy. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is a government of Alberta policy and strategy document entitled Alberta's Health Legislation: Moving Forward, from July 2010; in particular page 15, advocating allowing opt-in/opt-out provisions by health professionals; page 19, advocating new legislation for different funding models; and page 21, advocating private insurance options for public health care.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of a report that I comprised because I received 307 signed letters from Friends of Medicare from Albertans all over the province. Rather than table 307, I've done a report of those that wrote and a sample copy of the letter that they wrote expressing their concerns about scrapping existing laws, putting too much power into the hands of health ministers. They're wanting to see open and transparent processes and encourage reviewing other options.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to table five copies of the June 2010 Inspiring Action on Education, Alberta Education's follow-up document to Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans. Inspiring Action connects the high-level policy and governance shifts of Inspiring Education to the everyday work of students, teachers, principals, and school boards. Many Albertans have contributed their views about this particular document through an online discussion process at www.education.alberta.ca/engage.

Also, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I am pleased to table today the 2009-2010 year in review for Speak Out, the Alberta student engagement initiative first promised by this government in the 2008 Speech from the Throne. In the past year Speak Out has heard from over 2,300 students about what works and doesn't work in their education and has garnered significant international attention and many awards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As per my pledge in the Assembly on April 2, 2007, half my indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank in southern Alberta until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. I am tabling the required five copies of my letter and donation to, for June, Medicine Hat food bank; July, Lethbridge Salvation Army food bank; and August, Lethbridge Interfaith Food Bank.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from Anne Landry — she's a concerned citizen — regarding her complaint dated October 28, 2010, to the hon. Premier. This letter outlines her concerns with her personal information being held at ATB Investor Services, ATB Financial, and information regarding a series of unresolved breaches of security of personal information. Ms Landry's case has been ongoing for seven years. She hopes that this letter will encourage the government to change legislation to ensure that the harm that has occurred to her will not happen to others.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table the appropriate number of copies of your passport to Alberta's community icons, just in case you didn't get the message earlier.

Also, I did an interview last week with the Whitecourt radio station and promised that I would table the appropriate number of copies of the emergency department surge capacity protocols, sir.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only have one tabling today. I'm pleased to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of our response to Written Question 6 from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. The question was: what was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from me to the Member for Edmonton-Centre responding to her written question as to the payments to external consultants that were provided by my department for the years 2007, 2008, 2009, and a total for the three years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have just two tablings today. The first is a photo and article about Afghanistan's first national park, Band-e-Amir, which became a park on Earth Day 2009 despite three decades of warfare. The park is critical to biodiversity, conservation, and economic development.

My second tabling is from Christopher Shank, PhD, from Cochrane, who wrote from Afghanistan disconcerted that halfway around the world he is working to organize world-class protected areas while this province is dismantling legal protections for its parks and wilderness areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as required by Standing Order 114, I'm pleased to present you with the 2009 annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office and the 2009 annual report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Alberta Branch. The report includes the LAO annual report, the financial statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, and highlights the activities and achievements of the LAO for the calendar year ending December 31, 2009. It also contains a report of members who have participated under various other Commonwealth Parliamentary Association activities as well.

The hon. Minister of Education on tablings? Sorry. Did I miss you?

Mr. Hancock: You did.

The Speaker: Oh, a thousand apologies. How could I have done that?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No apologies necessary. That was a long list.

As you may have discerned, the written questions that were accepted and the motions for returns that were accepted some time ago are due today. Therefore, we do have an obligation to get them on the table today. I appreciate your allowing me to proceed with the ones that I have, not having had an opportunity to table them last Thursday.

First and foremost, I do want to table responses to written questions 5 and 29. Written Question 5 reads, "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Education on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?" And Written Question 29 reads, "What was the total number of sole-source contracts the Ministry of Education entered into in Edmonton during the past three fiscal years?" Those are responsive to the MLA for Calgary-Varsity.

I also have, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of other members who have a responsibility to table today answers to written questions because they're due today. On behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports in response to a question from the MLA for Lethbridge-East the appropriate number of copies of the response to Written Question 20: "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?"

As well, on behalf of the Minister of Children and Youth Services in response to Written Question 4 from the Member for Calgary-Varsity a response with respect to the total amount of payments for Children and Youth Services.

With respect to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General a response to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo with respect to Written Question 7: "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Justice on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?"

Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of tabling on behalf of the Alberta Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security the response to Written Question 8 asked by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo: "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?"

I also, Mr. Speaker, have the privilege on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta to provide to the House the answer to Written Question 12: "What was the total amount spent by the Ministry of Service Alberta on external consultants during the past three fiscal year?"

I have the privilege as well, of course, on behalf of the Minister of Transportation of tabling the appropriate number of copies of the response to Written Question 13 requesting the total amount spent,

in aggregate, on external consultants per fiscal year for the Ministry of Transportation.

I'm sorry. The last one was a response to a question from the Member for Calgary-McCall, and I don't think I mentioned that the previous one was also from the Member for Calgary-McCall.

This one, Written Question 19, was raised by the MLA for Lethbridge-East, and I'm pleased to table the written response to that question on behalf of the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. That is, again, a question relating to the total amount spent, in aggregate, on external consultants per fiscal year.

Then on behalf of the hon. the Premier I'm pleased to table the response to Written Question 21 raised by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I believe. Written Question 21: "What was the total amount spent by Executive Council on external consultants during the past three fiscal years?"

Finally with respect to those tablings, from the Minister of Aboriginal Relations a response to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview with respect to Written Question 22 on the same general matter.

Mr. Speaker, those are the responses to the required tablings, because they're due today, of answers in response to written questions. I do have a few other tablings.

4:10

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table to the Legislative Assembly today the requisite number of the individual audited financial statements of school jurisdictions for the school year ended August 31, 2009, that I'm obliged to table in the House. Treasury Board directive 05/98 requires that the individual financial statements of organizations be tabled in the Legislative Assembly when only a summary of individual statements is included in the ministry's annual report, which is the case for Alberta Education's annual report and the financial statements of school jurisdictions. It's off here because you'll recognize that our fiscal year is from April 1 to March 31 and the school jurisdictions' fiscal year is from September 1 to August 31. This tabling shows that the school jurisdictions' accumulated operating surplus was \$371 million as of August 31, 2009. Our school jurisdictions are in excellent fiscal shape. I've taken the liberty of providing the other copies to the chair because they are fairly large volumes, so the other copies required for tabling have been delivered to the Clerk's table already.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to also table on behalf of the minister of international and intergovernmental affairs the requisite number of copies of a position statement on emergency department overcrowding from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, February 2007. This is a statement that has been referred to in debate a number of times but was specifically referred to by the hon. minister of intergovernmental affairs during her debate on Bill 17, and as such she was required to table it. She attempted to table it at the time, and it had been returned to her for tabling at the appropriate time, which is now.

I would also like to table, Mr. Speaker, the appropriate number of copies of a document entitled The President's Letter dated November 26, 2010. It's a copy of the letter written by the president of the AMA and published on the AMA website. It references a number of matters that have been raised in the House and may indeed be raised again in the House. In order to make sure that the House has access to the actual document itself, it's prudent to have that tabled.

The penultimate tabling, Mr. Speaker, would be a report on the OECD education ministerial meeting, Investing in Human and Social Capital: New Challenges, which was held in Paris on November 4 and 5 and which I had the privilege of attending on

behalf of not only Alberta but on behalf of the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada. It was focused around the necessity for governments to continue to invest in education even in troubled fiscal times. It's very good reading, and I would commend it to members of the House to read because it is a very important topic. [interjections]

I'm hearing grumblings from the opposite side. Mr. Speaker, we hear them tabling all sorts of things all the time, but these ones are things that we are required to table for the most part.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a document entitled *Success in School for Children and Youth In Care: Provincial Protocol Framework*. It's a very important document. This very evening we're celebrating with the participants in the departments of Education and Children and Youth Services and Health and also community partners who have put together this protocol, which helps set the parameters so that we can share information with respect to children in care appropriately so that Children and Youth Services, Education, and all of those who are interested in sharing the success of children communicate appropriate information appropriately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Directly to the chair I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of my response to Written Question 11, whereby the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall asked for the total amount spent by the Ministry of Infrastructure on external consultants during the past three years. The Ministry of Infrastructure makes use of experts in the province as we work to fulfill the Premier's vision of the most advanced infrastructure in North America. We have a responsibility to ensure that the buildings we construct are well planned and designed for the Albertans who use them and for the communities that surround them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have one document to table from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. I have the appropriate number of copies to table, and this is in response to Written Question 28 regarding the total amounts spent on consultants. We've covered the years 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10. Those, again, include the amounts for both contractors and consultant payments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, return to order of the Assembly MR 1 asked for by Mr. Hehr on March 15, 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Minister Zwozdesky, minister of health, response to Written Question 9, asked for by Mr. Hehr on March 15, 2010, and responses to written questions 36, 37, and 38, all asked for by Dr. Taft on March 15, 2010.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have three points of order we have to deal with today. You've been duly notified during the session.

The first point of order was raised by the hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Improper Questions

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe that we are achieving a new low in terms of the decorum and respect that we have in the House. I raised a point of order with respect to a purported question being raised by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere during question period today. I raised that point of order – and I haven't been raising points of order in this House – because I am very, very concerned that if we do not have the respect that's deserved for elected members in this province in this House, we can hardly expect anyone in the province to respect the process of government. I'm not asking for respect for any individual member. That has to be earned.

I'm rising under a number of citations, Mr. Speaker, and I want to give you the citations because there are a considerable number of ways in which the presentation by the hon. member – and I don't have his exact words with me. I assume that by now you have the Blues. I don't have that benefit. I want to give you the citations and then get into the gist of why I believe that we need to take a step back, calm down, and get to what the regular business of the House is and what the appropriate use of question period is.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member"; 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member"; and 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language." It is the very essence of this place that government governs and the opposition calls government to account. In fact, it goes further than that for private members in the House because under the parliamentary rule of government, cabinet is the government, and all members of the House are here to hold government to account and to make sure that government is governing in the interests of all Albertans. It's essential to government that we have a structure and a set of processes that we adhere to. One of those processes is question period, and the principles of question period – and they're clearly delineated in all the rule books – indicate what question period can be used for and what it can't be used for.

Today in question period the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere made allegations with respect to statements that he, obviously, is not privy to. He made assumptions with respect to those statements. He made the suggestion on the floor of the House that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had done certain things which had led to certain other things which had led to certain other things. Not only was he making allegations under 23(h); he was imputing false and unavowed motives under 23(i). In doing so, I think all members of the House would agree that he used very abusive language, under 23(j).

I want to give a few other citations, Mr. Speaker, which are relevant to the points in question. First of all, I would refer the House to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*. Under that particular document – and I'm reading from the sixth edition by Fraser, Dawson, and Holtby of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* – number 64 on page 19: "The House has occasionally taken notice of attacks on individual Members." It goes on, and I'll just paraphrase it. It basically goes on to discourage and, in fact, to indicate that it's inappropriate to make attacks on individual members. That's 64.

Then, of course, we go over to 409 on page 120. In *Beauchesne's* 409 there are a number of citations which are particularly relevant with respect to questions. Under 409(1) "it must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate." Well, in the way in which the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere phrased his interceding in question period today, it was

clearly an expression of opinion because he had no knowledge of the facts. He couldn't possibly have had any knowledge of the facts. Clearly an expression of opinion, clearly a representation, obviously, in the very nature of all of those that heard it, argumentation and therefore out of order under 409(1).

4:20

I would also direct the chair's attention to 409(3). "The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion . . . be argumentative or make representations." I'll come back and cite why I believe 409(3) is relevant.

Beauchesne 409(7): "A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it." The hon. member was clearly out of line on that point.

There has been a very unfortunate amount of public airing of issues relative to the circumstances surrounding the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and other comments made in that context. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has made certain things that he is aware of public, but he was not aware of – no one has been able to comment, other than the president of the AMA and the president's letter, that I have tabled, on what exactly happened with respect to the series of events that the hon. member referred to in the preamble to his question and during his question. He had no knowledge of it. He was making assumptions, and in making the question, he also, clearly, cast aspersions.

Beauchesne 409(10) says, "A question ought not to refer to a statement made outside the House by a Minister."

Then on page 122 of *Beauchesne's* it is observed under 410:

- (10) The subject matter of questions must be within the collective responsibility of the Government or the individual responsibilities of Ministers . . .
- (16) Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios.
- (17) Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities.

I'll come back to those later.

Mr. Speaker, it's also clear in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009, on page 502 that a member should

- ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the individual Minister addressed and may not
- reflect on the character or the conduct of Chair Occupants, members of the House and of the Senate or members of the judiciary . . .

clearly reflecting on the character or conduct of a member of the House,

- refer to public statements by Ministers on matters not directly related to their departmental duties;
- address a Minister's former portfolio or any other presumed functions . . .
- create disorder;
- make a charge by way of a preamble to a question.

Now, some of those relate to other actions that have happened in and around the House in the course of the last few days and few months, but making a charge by way of a preamble to a question falls full square on what the hon. member did this afternoon.

At the top of page 504 it goes on. A question should not

- seek information from a Minister of a purely personal nature . . .
- concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses.

Again, you'll see, just by stating those, how they have relevance to the question at hand.

Then, of course, to the bible of parliamentary conduct, *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice*, 23rd edition, published in 2004. There are just a couple of matters there, but they back up what I've been talking about, and that is that

questions addressed to Ministers should relate to the public affairs with which they are officially connected, to proceedings pending in Parliament, or to matters of administration for which they are responsible.

That's on page 344.

On page 346:

Questions which seek an expression of opinion, or which contain arguments, expressions of opinion, inferences, imputations, unnecessary epithets, or rhetorical, controversial, ironical or offensive expressions, are not in order.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all of that is to say that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere breached virtually all of those citations that I mentioned in one question today and in many questions over the course of this fall session.

But let me just reference today. I don't have the Blues, as I said, but I clearly heard the hon. member indicate that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had made a call to the AMA and that that call had resulted in some action being taken by the College of Physicians and Surgeons against the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

First and foremost, there is no evidence of any sort that that happened. The only evidence that there is, and that is evidenced by the president's letter and by an admission made by Edmonton-Rutherford – and he may wish to address this – is that the hon. member made a call to Dr. P.J. White, who is a personal friend, to raise a concern with him about another personal friend so that other friends of Edmonton-Meadowlark could be attentive to his health. Now, that was a perfectly reasonable thing to do, as Dr. White indicates. That was a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I myself on Wednesday, prior to the debate continuing the way it did, approached members of your office to ensure that we had in the Legislative Assembly, not in the Assembly itself but in the precincts, people who had a first-responder capability in health because I was concerned not just about Edmonton-Meadowlark but about the health of other members of the House. I think it's prudent for us as House leaders, it's prudent for us as members, above all the passion that we bring, to be caring, responsible adults and friends.

I can say very easily that I am friends with members of the opposition, a number of members of the opposition that I would consider friends. We don't necessarily agree on everything, but that does not detract from our humanity. It's very clear that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford engaged in nothing but an act of friendship and humanity, and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is attempting to impugn his motives and make representations about things that he has no knowledge of whatsoever. There is absolutely nothing to connect that call with any action being taken by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the first that we've heard of that particular piece. So the hon. member ought to retract his question and apologize to Edmonton-Rutherford and to the House for that alone.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also indicate that it's more than just that allegation of motive and imputation of character that's important although that's the most important piece. It's also the abusive language, the talking about morals and ethics that constantly come from that hon. member. This is important. This is very important to the integrity of the House and how we do our business as all members. If we want the public to respect government – and I don't mean government as in the 24 members now who formally form government. I'm talking about the governance structure of our province, as the Governor General today indicated, that defends our

democracy and allows us the opportunity to speak freely and to participate in our own governance. If we want to have respect for that, we cannot be engaging in this type of degradation that goes on. That's not necessary in a partisan political process. We can have adult discussion and debate about policy issues with honest differences of viewpoint.

I share honest differences of viewpoint with Calgary-Varsity on a daily basis. He and I agree on some things with respect to education, and we disagree on some things on education. We attend a lot of events together. We don't hold hands and sing *Kumbaya*, but we have engaged in a few renditions of *Me and My Shadow*, and, Mr. Speaker, it's important. It's important that we have the opportunity to discuss important issues of public policy and public importance in this House and in public without having people attack our character and our morals. That is not on. That's not happening for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark from this side of the House, and it's not happening for anyone else. We will not be engaged in that kind of activity.

Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, with a smirk on his face and a laugh on his face, it shouldn't be happening from you. It should not be happening. The only way that government, we the Legislature, does its job is if we are able to come to this place with the passions that we hold for public policy and for the future of this province and be able to engage in that debate respectfully and honestly and for government to be called to account by members of the opposition and private members of the House on the government side for what the government is doing in an honest, respectful way.

I'm not asking anybody to like me as a member. I'm just saying that when I hold office, I hold office not for myself; I hold office for the public of Alberta. You can disrespect me as a person, but you must respect the office. It's the only way government works. We have to raise the level of debate and raise the level of decorum in this House, Mr. Speaker. I have refrained from raising points of order on these matters, but it's gone too far. It's gone too far with today's question and the circumstances today when above all, if for no other reason, we should be respecting individual members of the House, and now I'm talking about Edmonton-Meadowlark.

4:30

It is not appropriate for the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to be talking about Edmonton-Meadowlark in the House. If Edmonton-Meadowlark wants to talk about the issues that he's had, that's fair game. I mean, that's up to him. Advisable or not advisable, that's in his hands. For the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to be doing it is, as well, totally inappropriate.

So for all of those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you call the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to order and ask him to retract the preamble and questions that he raised in the House today and to engage in the future in a much more respectful manner, not respectful of cabinet because, clearly, he has no respect for members of cabinet but respect for the process and the institution, which is something that we all owe an obligation to Albertans about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, please.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, a lot of information there. I do actually have a tremendous amount of respect for this hon. member that raised the point of order. I always have. I've always thought of him as someone — although I disagree with him on some issues, I agree with him on many other issues. I find him to be very respectful and a true democrat, so to speak. He's a parliamentarian that I hold in high regard. You know, it's obviously tough medicine to hear such things from such a gentleman. I will

say that I agree with his viewpoint that we must respect the office.

I, for one, respect the office, and I'll tell you why. The office of MLA is what we're talking about. I respect the office because I believe that there's no higher calling that I am aware of than having the opportunity to represent in this House the people that voted for me in Airdrie-Chestermere. I do so with everything and every fibre of my being. No doubt, there are times when I get emotional and get very passionate about it, and that can be interpreted many different ways, to be sure. One of the things that I am very sensitive to — and the hon. member opposite mentioned it, and you could see it in the way he was defending his friend from Edmonton-Rutherford. I defend my friends when there has been a wrong done to them.

I feel very strongly that there has been a wrong done to a very good friend of mine, someone that I've spent a great deal of time with both when I was in government and since I've been out of government, spent time with him, talking with him, et cetera. I refer, of course, to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. It has been very difficult and has opened up some old wounds in this House to hear and to see first-hand the way that he was ejected from caucus. I, of course, was not ejected from caucus, but many of the same feelings of intimidation that I experienced I feel he has experienced, although he has experienced far more than I have had to.

Going back to the question, Mr. Speaker, and on the point of order, I do have the question in front of me. I have notes of what I said. I said: "Last week the new parliamentary assistant for health called the president of the AMA and told him he was concerned with the mental health of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark." Obviously, the member opposite, the House leader, was very clear that that is not being challenged. That, in fact, did happen. I think that has been very clear both in the media and from the comments in this House. I then went on to say that "this has resulted in the good doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark being ordered by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to undergo a psychiatric evaluation in order to retain his medical licence." I'm assuming that that's what the hon. member opposite, the House leader, was taking issue with.

Now, obviously, in a 35-second question it's very difficult to explain all the dot to dot to dot things that have happened in this sequence of events this last week, but I have heard two phone recordings on this exact thing. I've heard the three doctors in question first-hand, heard the recordings. I've heard what was said by the president of the AMA to them and also what they thought the direction of this would lead to, which would be a psychiatric assessment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I heard these things first-hand. I'm not making these things up. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, of course, will have the opportunity to release those phone messages if he so chooses. That's his right, not mine.

I am very convinced that the actions of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, regardless of whether it was intentional or nonintentional — and I'll get to that in a second. I never impugned his intentions, and I want that to be on the record. Regardless of whether it was intentional or nonintentional, it did lead to what has happened, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark having to submit to a psychiatric evaluation in order to maintain his licence, which brings me to the intention, Mr. Speaker. Never in my remarks — in fact, I even said: "Regardless of the intent of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford." In other words, I did not impute any bad intentions. I said that what he has done, regardless of his intentions, "is inappropriate given his position of influence."

Now, I don't know the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford very well, but what I do know of him, I do hold him in high regard. I can't imagine that he would be the type of person that would

intentionally do this to injure a friend, nor have I ever said that. What I do think, though, is that he acted very naively if he thought that a person in his position as the parliamentary assistant to the minister of health – it's very naive to think that someone like that calling in the middle of the night to the president of the Alberta Medical Association would not have an unintended effect.

That effect is that you have with the president of the Medical Association, which is, of course, a bargaining unit, a group of people that bargains with the government for the salaries for our physicians here in Alberta. To think that that wouldn't create undue influence on what the president would do next, that for just a layperson, even if it's not true, just the appearance of it seems very – it's not something, certainly, that we should aspire to in this House. It doesn't look good. I would say that although I don't think his intentions were malicious, I do think that it was very inappropriate, and I say that in my question. I felt that it was necessary for the Premier to ask the member to apologize for this. I think this is only right, and I think it's a very minor thing to ask.

Regarding his statements on language and decorum, Mr. Speaker, I'll be the first to admit in this House that I could definitely – like I said, I do often let my emotions get the better of me when I'm talking about things that I'm especially passionate about and especially when I see and feel that democracy and a friend have been wronged. I know that members opposite don't agree that that's the case, and that's fine, but I do feel it's the case. I do feel that the member was wronged, so when I gave the questions, when I talk about moral authority to govern and the fact that I believe this government has lost that moral authority to govern, I do mean that.

It is a serious allegation, but it is one that I feel strongly about because I don't feel that what they have done to the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, ejecting him from caucus for the reasons that they stated, as well as their ejection of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark as well as the way that they dealt with me personally when I started to speak out publicly . . .

The Speaker: Can we stay with what we're talking about?

4:40

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I'm just trying to explain why I think the government has lost its moral authority to govern. I'll move to a different point. Absolutely.

The Speaker: That's not the issue here.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. If that's not the issue and that's not going to be a problem, I'll just leave that out.

I mean, I just feel that, obviously, in a give-and-take opinions are given. The opposite side is not going to agree with my opinion a lot of the time, certainly. Mr. Speaker, I will say that I will attempt – it's like those New Year's resolutions that you keep making and breaking – as we go forward to have a higher level of decorum. But please do not ask me to apologize for defending my friend and for defending his interests from what I think has been an absolutely mishandled and reprehensible situation.

If you just look at the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and what he did, if that's all we're talking about, then I would say the intentions are – I'm not questioning his intentions. I still think it was inappropriate. However, if we're going outside of that and we're talking about some of the other whisper campaigns that I know of first-hand, which we're not talking about, then that's where I go back to that strong language that I used about this government losing the spirit or the moral authority from the people.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

The Speaker: I think it's appropriate, as part of the question here today involves the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, that we hear from him on this matter as a direct participant in the question if he chooses to. And if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is about, somebody might find him.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, please.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult to know where to begin. I will certainly attempt to be brief, and I will attempt to speak as directly as possible to the point of order that has been raised by the hon. Government House Leader.

I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere began his first question of the hon. the Premier as follows:

Mr. Speaker, last week the new parliamentary assistant for health called the president of the AMA and told him he was concerned with the mental health of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. This has resulted in the good doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark being ordered by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to undergo a psychiatric evaluation in order to retain his medical licence. Regardless of the intent of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, what he has done is inappropriate given his position of influence. Will the Premier instruct this member to apologize for what he has done?

Mr. Speaker, I can't think of a way to imagine a grosser distortion of the facts, and I find it difficult to imagine how any member of this House could take greater liberty with discussing private and personal affairs of another member of this House as we have observed here today. We've observed it in the media in the last few days, and we've heard other members from other caucuses also speculate as to what took place. I'm going to take a second, if you'll permit me, just to set the record straight.

The Speaker: Oh, I think it's very important to get the record set straight. Proceed.

Mr. Horne: Absolutely. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I entered the House at 1 a.m. on Thursday last. Those proceedings, of course, are recorded as proceedings of Wednesday, November 24, in *Hansard*. I have been close friends – and this is not new – with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for a number of years preceding our entry into politics in the election of 2008. I have been involved in discussions with my friend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for some time, for the last couple of years in fact, regarding some shared concerns and some shared ideas we have around Alberta's health care system, what the issues are and how some of those might be approached.

I've taken a great deal of pleasure in working collaboratively with that member, Mr. Speaker, over the last several years. I know that is true for many other members, I dare say, on all sides of the House. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is particularly knowledgeable given his position as a physician. He's in a unique position to talk about the issues, to identify potential solutions, and he has done nothing but work collaboratively with all of us to try to move improvements forward.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that I have become concerned about the stress that my friend had been experiencing, particularly in the last few weeks, and this sort of brings to bear the first incorrect statement made by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I must say that I feel quite uncomfortable because the subject that we're talking about here is mental health. At no time did I express concern for the mental health of that member or another member of this House. At no time did I suggest that any member of this House suffered from a mental illness or disability of any kind. I am not

qualified and neither is any other member of this House with the exception perhaps of the two physicians who are members, given their experience and training, to make such a determination, and I would never take it upon myself to do so.

What I have been concerned with, in addition to the declining decorum in the House in recent weeks, is the human factor, the stress, particularly in the early morning hours of Thursday last when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, basically carrying a debate on his own with respect to a particular amendment under debate with Bill 17, was obviously very tired. I will leave it to hon. members who wish to consult *Hansard* from those hours to observe for themselves that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark discussed many issues of a personal nature that – and I want to be respectful in how I say this – were completely unrelated to the amendment that was under discussion at the time.

Unlike perhaps some other members in this House, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to take the time to reiterate what those are other than to say – and those of us that were in the House at the time observed it – that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark took upon himself, as an example, responsibility for the deaths and some of the adverse events that have been reported to have taken place in emergency departments and other health care facilities in the last few weeks. He in front of the House took personal responsibility for that. He talked about a number of other personal matters, including family issues, talked at length about previous experiences he had in dealing with regulatory bodies and previously constituted health delivery organizations in the province.

In short, Mr. Speaker, it was very apparent to me that this was a friend who was speaking on the record and perhaps disclosing information that he might not otherwise have chosen to disclose about himself at a time of great stress. As members who might have been here at the time would have observed, I crossed from my seat to the seat occupied by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods so that I could sit closer to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, my friend, and attempt to offer him whatever personal support I might be able to, including perhaps an opportunity to step out into the lounge and chat for a few moments. But the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was vigorously engaged in the debate. He was not interested in such a discussion, and it was very clear to me that I would be unable to offer him any personal support or advice or encouragement or otherwise that might be of assistance to him in those particular circumstances.

I'm being as careful as I can here in terms of the tone. [interjections] If I do have the floor, Mr. Speaker, I will continue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford does have the floor. This is a matter that is very serious, and I want everybody else to shut up and listen.

4:50

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I offer all of this because I do believe that under 23(h), (i), and (j) the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has called my character and my conduct into question.

From that point, then, what I did was that I had a personal conversation to the side with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. As I said, it was clear to me that he was determined to continue and that he appeared to be unconcerned about some of the information that he was disclosing that was unrelated to the amendment under debate. He made a statement to me, which I won't relate, to the effect that this would all be over very soon, that I need not be concerned, and that he would not be around to have to worry about it any further.

At that point, Mr. Speaker, I made a decision to call a mutual friend, who the hon. Government House Leader had referred to earlier, not to express an opinion about the mental state of any member of this House because I'm not qualified to do so and not to request the commencement of any sort of proceeding by a regulatory body. I'd like to remind the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere that the Alberta Medical Association is not a regulatory body in this province. It does not control licensing of physicians. I made a decision to call that friend, and I made that call in confidence.

When I made the call, I asked for the assistance of Dr. White in perhaps identifying other physician colleagues who the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark might be interested in hearing from, who might reach out to him, who might offer support either here outside the Chamber or subsequently. That was the reason that I made the call. The Alberta Medical Association has a very well-known peer support program, Mr. Speaker, that they make available, much like many organizations offer to their members.

The point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is that at the time I had every reason to believe and I should still have reason to believe that that conversation was held in confidence. The fact that the call was made – and I've just relayed what the contents of the call were to others – is not something that I can take responsibility for. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has played, I would suggest respectfully, fast and loose with the truth, if not logic, by suggesting a cause and effect relationship between the telephone call that I made to our mutual friend and any other actions.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that if the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is aware of any proceedings that might be under way by a regulatory body with respect to health professionals in this province, I would have to question why he would be aware of such a thing. I certainly am not, and I am aware that legislation in this province protects our health professionals from such information, including the existence of any sort of investigation or discussion, from being disclosed. I think, as part of this, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere needs to be called to account for making such a statement in this House, not to mention, if he believes that to be true – and I certainly have no knowledge of any of that – attributing that inquiry or investigation or proceeding to some action on my part.

Mr. Speaker, what it boils down to is this. But for the actions and the statements of some members of this House in the last few days in the media and then quite boldly in this House today during question period, none of what I have just revealed to this House – certainly, it's against my feeling of proper procedure and proper treatment of a human being to actually say what I have said. But for their actions none of this information would be in the public domain. The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere would have no basis – and I hesitate to use the word “basis” – to make the speculation and the innuendo and the other assertions that he's making irresponsibly in this House. Neither would other hon. members on the opposite side who have done so over the last few days as well.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I have felt compelled to offer this more detailed account of events. Again, my telephone call was to a mutual friend. I've explained the intentions behind it. Quite frankly, I'm not interested in the evaluation of the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere of my intentions. I stand by my actions. I believe they were correct. I believe that the person I called took the correct action in terms of trying to initiate some peer support. I think those who have chosen to put this information in the public domain, to speculate loosely about motives, about consequential events that may have occurred, do so at their own peril, and they will be held to account by their own constituents for those actions.

The final thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that in addition to the transgressions under 23(h), (i), and (j) with respect to allegations against myself, with respect to imputing false or unavowed motives to myself, and I dare say with respect to using abusive and insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder – I think, quite frankly, we’re quickly approaching that point in terms of the way that this Assembly is addressing an issue as important as mental health and an area of health that is subject to such a legacy of stigma. We – I guess I would have to include myself by virtue of the comments I’ve just made – do a disservice not only to this House but to Albertans and particularly those and their families that deal with these issues.

To conclude, I made no such allegation regarding the health of another member. I completely deny the allegations, as loosely framed as they have been, with respect to any of my conduct. I hope I have explained it to the satisfaction of yourself, Mr. Speaker, and I leave it to your good judgment as to whether this member should be called to order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: As I listened very attentively to the exchange, I heard the Government House Leader, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned. Only one other member, who just has risen here, was ever mentioned in any of the context, and that was the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

I don’t know how you get into this, but if you have something to add to our understanding of it, please proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in my note, I’ll be extremely quick. I understand the hon. Government House Leader’s desire to have decorum in the House. That’s something that yourself as the Speaker and every other Speaker attempts to achieve to the best of their ability. What happens when short sessions lead to stress, which leads to inappropriate actions and words, particularly at 12 o’clock, 2 a.m., 5 a.m. . . .

The Speaker: Okay. I think, hon. member, we’d better have relevance with respect to the question being discussed, okay?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. The relevance is that allegations, perceived intentions, innuendo are very difficult to interpret, to judge. That’s what you’re being asked to do today, Mr. Speaker, and you have qualifications to do so. There is precedent, and there is a reason for the individual from Edmonton-Meadowlark to feel chastised. Dr. John O’Connor is an example of an individual being beaten up by both the provincial government and the federal government for speaking out on health issues relating to First Nations in Fort MacKay and Fort Chip.

The Speaker: Please, please, please. This is a very, very fine point that we’re dealing with, and the truth is all that’s important to me. Let’s focus on what it is. If you have something further to add, fine, not speculation that because something happened over there, this obviously happens over here. Let’s be very specific. I’ll still recognize you. [interjection] Airdrie-Chestermere, we’ve already heard from you.

Calgary-Varsity, if you want to continue.

Mr. Chase: That’s fine. [interjection]

The Speaker: Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you do not determine who speaks.

Are you finished, Calgary-Varsity?

5:00

Mr. Chase: I thought that was your wish, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No. I said: just focus on the issue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Speaker: We’re going to have full transparency here if it applies to this issue. Only if it applies to this issue.

Mr. Chase: Right. What I’m saying, Mr. Speaker, is that we do not operate at our best at 2 a.m.

The Speaker: But we’re now at 5 p.m.

Mr. Chase: And, I gather, Mr. Speaker, you’re suggesting that we’re not operating at our best at 5 p.m.

The Speaker: Oh, no. We are at 5 p.m. much better than 2 a.m.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Who else wanted to participate? Now, how does Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood get involved in this? You were not mentioned by anybody.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, I have been involved in this, and I have prepared to discuss this point.

The Speaker: Okay. We’re on the point now. Were you here in the House to hear all the other debate?

Mr. Mason: I heard it. I heard it on the speaker and came as quickly as I could.

The Speaker: Okay. As long as you’re up to date so you’re not missing anything.

Mr. Mason: And I have the Blues as well.

The Speaker: Proceed. Proceed on the point we’re talking about.

Mr. Mason: Now, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Government House Leader has stood up in this House and has brought an allegation against the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere under sections 23(h), which is making allegations, (i) imputing false motives, and (j) abusive or insulting language. Now, I have, in fact, the Blues, and I have the question.

The Speaker: But, hon. member, you haven’t concluded the list. There are another nine more. Well, okay. Now, let’s do them all.

Mr. Mason: I’ll address these ones, Mr. Speaker, if I can.

I have the questions of the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and here’s what he said. He said that “the new parliamentary assistant for health called the president of the AMA and told him he was concerned with the mental health of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.” That much, I think, is all agreed.

The Speaker: Okay. I said earlier, when we were listening to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford: everybody, shut up. The same applies now.

Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The suggestion of stress has been used, and of course other things have been implied, and this is something that needs to be taken into account, the implications here that are coming from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and from other members on the government side.

Stress. It was interpreted as mental health. I have the letter from Dr. White to AMA members with respect to this matter. I have also followed his other public comments with respect to this, and he has acknowledged that he used – not the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford – the word “manic,” and he drew the conclusion that that would be used, in a sense, in a general way rather than in a specific medical application. That was based on his conversation from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere said, “mental health,” and I think that is a reasonable interpretation. Then he goes on to say that it

has resulted in the good doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark being ordered by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to undergo a psychiatric evaluation in order to maintain his medical licence.

He is making a connection with respect to this, a call that was made by Edmonton-Rutherford to the doctor as contributing to – he says “has resulted.” That is an interpretation, Mr. Speaker, which I share. I believe that the call which was made to the president of the Alberta Medical Association and a practising psychiatrist has lead directly to the College of Physicians and Surgeons now being involved. That is my opinion, but I think it is a reasonable opinion that a reasonable person could hold.

He goes on to say that “regardless of the intent of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, what he has done is inappropriate.” My goodness, Mr. Speaker, there’s language that is designed to incite disorder in the House, to say that someone did something inappropriate. Then he asks the Premier to instruct the member to apologize.

Mr. Speaker, he goes on, then, in the second question, to ask the Premier to personally apologize and asked him to “ignore the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.” In the last question I don’t believe the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is mentioned at all.

So, Mr. Speaker, the whole charge that’s been brought by the Government House Leader against Airdrie-Chestermere is based on his suggestion that Edmonton-Rutherford said that he was concerned about the mental health of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and his interpretation that that has led directly to the action by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that those are both very reasonable assumptions and connections. I fail to see that there is anything here that would fit the definition of (h), (i), and (j). I know that government members are angry and frustrated at the situation they’ve found themselves in, and they want to lash out. We have seen some of the things that happen to people when they dare to criticize this government.

I think that there is not a point of order here that I can see in any way. I think that the statements by Airdrie-Chestermere simply say two things: one, he alleges that Edmonton-Rutherford said “mental health,” and I think there is plenty of evidence that that is an interpretation that is reasonable; and secondly, he connects that phone call to the subsequent actions of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which is a connection I share.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I hope that we can expect that when members stand up in this House, they have a wide latitude to make political points, and the fact that the government and government members right now are feeling an enormous amount of heat frankly is immaterial.

What the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did was

inappropriate. As much as he would like to address it in terms of friendship between three old friends, there are other relationships that are very, very pertinent. He is a member who has just been appointed as the parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness, a government that’s under heavy attack for its mishandling of the health care system, hurting badly, and he phones a psychiatrist and the head of the Alberta Medical Association about an opposition colleague who’s creating a great deal of trouble for the government. That’s another way to look at it, Mr. Speaker, and a legitimate way to look at it. It’s certainly how I look at it.

Frankly, I think some of the hypocrisy on the other side is not a sufficient reason for us to proceed with a point of order against Airdrie-Chestermere, who was doing his job as an opposition MLA in holding the government to account for its bullying tactics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. I want to deal only with people who have an interest in this matter directly, not speculative debate.

How are you, sir, minister of housing, involved?

Mr. Denis: I’m involved, sir, because I wish to correct the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in a statement that he had just made which I believe is inconsistent with the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

The Speaker: You want to correct the statement made.

Mr. Denis: That’s correct.

The Speaker: A statement of fact or a statement of opinion?

Mr. Denis: It’s a statement of fact that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood indicated that we were agreed on the whole facts of the whole situation. In fact, that is not the case. It’s inconsistent.

The Speaker: Well, obviously you’re going. Proceed to conclude it.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise and correct that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood had indicated that there was somehow an agreement as to a statement of facts here between the earlier submission and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. The correction is, first off, that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford contacted the Alberta Medical Association, not the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. There’s a distinct difference between the two. One is a licensing body; one is not. That’s like the Law Society and the Canadian Bar Association.

In addition, the manner in which the comments were disseminated, you have to include the tone and the context, and we have to stick to the facts here, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did not make that agreement, and that’s very material to the entire issue that we are debating here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Now, hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, how are you involved in this?

5:10

Mr. Boutilier: Well, sir, I am because I actually heard the tape recording by the member.

The Speaker: But that's not unique, hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: No, it's not unique.

The Speaker: Everybody else has heard the tape.

Mr. Boutilier: But I also must say that as a member who spoke directly with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark . . .

The Speaker: That's not unique either. Virtually everybody else has, too.

Mr. Boutilier: Also, I might say, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and I talked about the actual tactics of a government that have taken on me as a member who got kicked out.

The Speaker: Well, that's not relevant to this either. Okay, I'm going to recognize you, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, but you are going to stick to the point that we're talking about. Your issue and your case are nothing to do with any of this, okay?

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had spoken to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. We had spoken specifically about what had transpired pertaining to this actual point of order that's being raised, that we didn't know was going to be raised. However, it's important that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere clearly had pointed out something that I believe is not a point of order.

Even more importantly, I can say this: the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and I had talked about the whisper campaign that was going on about him relative to this point of order. Specifically, there were two things that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark had heard, the whispers of the government about him and his health condition, the same whispers that were about this member a year ago, but also the member's comments that were made about: you don't know the whole story. It seems to be a common theme that is being made by this government.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark actually called me, he provided me with a tape of the recording. The term that was used in the recording was "hypermanic," to be very specific. I do know that tomorrow that the member and perhaps you would like to hear the tape recording by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in terms of making your conclusion on this point of order, which I do not believe it is. Clearly, that information the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has I think is very important to this issue, and the term that was used was "hypermanic."

Mr. Speaker, I clearly do not believe there is a point of order. I can say that the whispers that continue on relative to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the whispers – and I might add just one final note, that in actual fact the same reporter, and I will name him, from the *Calgary Herald*, Don Braid, called the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The same call came to me, and it was about: watch your back because of the whispers they're making and the allegations they're making against both of you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Hold on, now. Hold on, please. Please. How does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar get into this? You're next on my list. What's your involvement in this?

Mr. MacDonald: I would be delighted to share that with you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm not interested in opinions. We're dealing with the point of order.

Mr. MacDonald: No. I'm certainly not going to express an opinion, as much as I would like.

The Speaker: Proceed, then.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I've been listening to this. I was present in the Assembly for the recorded date of Wednesday. It was Thursday morning. I think it was well after 4 o'clock, when I was preparing for debate on amendment A3 on Bill 17, when I saw the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford come across with the hon. Member for Camrose-Wetaskiwin to have a talk to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Of course, we were in committee. That's certainly allowed. I'm surprised that as a result of that chat we now have a classic example of damage control.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, certainly in my view, did not violate 23(h), (i), and (j), as has been suggested. He was, in my view, doing his job. If you look at *Beauchesne* and you look at oral questions and what's permitted, specifically 409 suggests a question must be brief. The hon. member's question was brief. He was certainly trying to seek information. It is an important matter. It certainly was not frivolous, as *Beauchesne* indicates it should not be. The matter ought to have some urgency. Well, I would suggest that it certainly does, when we had such a quick letter from the president of the Alberta Medical Association to all members of this Assembly regarding the matter before us in this point of order.

In conclusion, I would like to remind all members, Mr. Speaker, before you make your decision, that the primary purpose of question period is a seeking of information and calling the government to account. Well, we have government members here. We certainly have the cabinet here, as the hon. House leader pointed out. But the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere was just doing his job, and the greatest possible freedom should be given to members consistent with the other rules and practices during question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, with due deference, everybody's your friend; everybody says they're your friend. Have you heard anything of what's gone on in the last hour and 15 minutes?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, to be honest, I was in my office when my assistant said that there were some allegations about me saying something to the effect that I wasn't going to be around much longer so nothing mattered. My assistant said: you'd better get your butt in the House and clarify some incorrect statements that were said here by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I haven't seen the statements.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. Sherman: I guess, everyone should actually hear from me.

The Speaker: We're on a point of order, hon. member. If you want clarification, it's with a point of order that we have. We're not interested in the history or anything else. We're on a specific point of order here.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, if you can just give me a two-sentence, Coles Notes version of what went on in here because I'm not privy . . .

The Speaker: I can't do that, hon. member. I cannot give a précis of what these hon. members have said in two minutes, so take your place. The Blues will be available. They'll be provided. You can get a hold of them.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, I rise to address this point of order with Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j); *Beauchesne* 64; *Beauchesne* 409(3), (7), and (10) on page 120; and *House of Commons* 502 and 504. It's interesting and it needs to be brought up that the discussion has gone on, but the point of order that's being asked is missing the whole point of the actual question, which was asking for an apology.

I, too, have no understanding of why there was a point of order called on all of this. It has been totally inappropriate, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, on the evidence and the speaking notes that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford put in there. He continues to imply and make innuendos concerning the health of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. He made specific statements with absolutely no proof of evidence, saying: this is what he told to me when I was in there. I won't repeat them. They were very damning, and they were inappropriate. If this was a court of law, there was no evidence on that.

The point going back is . . . [interjection] Did you not listen to the things that he said?

The Speaker: Through the chair.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, I guess I'll repeat some of them in the fact that . . .

The Speaker: No. You don't have to. I heard them.

Mr. Hinman: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark perhaps hasn't, so to bring him up to date . . .

The Speaker: No. You'll deal with the point of order.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. He continued to undermine the character of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in his remarks. He said that he was a close friend. He understands very well, and he sits there with a straight face and says: I had no idea, nor do I have any desire for any repercussions to come out of this. There's absolutely no question of the repercussions that have come. The letter has come from the Alberta Medical Association stating these things. To declare that nothing happened – he continues to imply and now makes remarks with no proof of personal conversation stating that the member said to him: not to worry; it will be over soon. He continued to go on with that line of speech.

They're missing the whole point of this point of order, which was that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere asked the Premier to ask that member to apologize. That's what it was. Then it got out of hand from there. Again, the comments and the statements that have been implied by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford continue to undermine the character, implying that this member is not of stable mind. Again, he should be apologizing for what he said here because he acted like this was a public conversation. He said: oh, I really don't want to put it on the record, but I feel like I have to. Then he continued pouring all of this information out that is absolutely inappropriate and wrong. He should get up and apologize for that.

Mr. Speaker, there was nothing wrong with what the member asked. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, though, very much made many comments in here, insinuating that the Member for

Edmonton-Meadowlark was suicidal, though he was very careful not to say that. That's what's on the Blues, and I'll stand by that. He needs to apologize, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Speaker: Well, that is quite a statement. That really, really is. I sat here; I've listened, one of the few people in the Assembly that has not moved since this started. I've seen people go in and out, go back and forth, papers flying. I'm the one sitting here. I never heard that. I don't know where that came from with those words, hon. member. Now, look, it's very important – okay? – that we use the words that were used. He never said that, and I've sat here and listened. Why do you say that he said that?

Mr. Hinman: Because that was the whole point of what he said when he talked about that he's not going to be around long, that it's going to take care of itself.

The Speaker: That's what he said. That's what he said.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Those are all great innuendos undermining the character and the state of mind of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and he did a very, very good job of doing that.

The Speaker: Oh, you know, hon. member, whoa. We've got some great connections here. Whoa. Okay. I'm not a psychiatrist. I don't pretend to be. What I am is a wordsmith, and I listened very attentively to the words, and I know what the meanings of the words are. After that it's supposition and a whole series of other things. I just want the truth, okay? I just want the truth.

Now, who else has something important to add to this situation? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I'm happy to recognize you on the point of order.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not much for wordsmithing.

The Speaker: Oh, you're good at it. I've known you a long time.

Dr. Sherman: Let me set the record straight. I have not been suicidal or homicidal. Period. The words that I heard, I didn't utter those words in this House to the hon. member when he sat beside me. Those are incorrect. I would ask the hon. member to apologize and withdraw those statements.

At 9:30 in the morning Dr. Chris Evans telephoned me and said, "Raj, you have to listen to this message" on his machine. The message was from the AMA president. The message went something like this: "Hi, Chris. P.J. here. Fred called me and said Raj is manic."

I had another doctor, Andrew Stagg – I have a message on my machine; you can listen to it. He said that a fellow by the name of Dr. P.J. White, who identified himself as my friend, as the AMA president called to rally support and he alluded to the fact that I was hypomanic and I was – what was the word, guys?

Mr. Boutillier: Hypomanic.

Dr. Sherman: Hypomanic and destabilizing in the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, as a physician – I am a physician – I am the one who certifies people; so are the emergency colleagues. When they are manic or suicidal or homicidal, for mental health reasons we fill in the mental health form, and we certify people to the hospital to protect them against their will.

I take offence at the fact that these allegations, these smear campaigns, have happened against me. They've been going on for six weeks. Don Braid told me this was happening; Jodie Sinnema told me this was happening. I've heard this from PC Party insiders who've said: "Raj, watch your back. We like you. The knives are out for you." I take exception to the fact that we are even having this conversation. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has the floor.

Dr. Sherman: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the hon. member from Camrose came beside here – I don't know – at 4:30 or 5 in the morning while I was doing my job. It's a filibuster, and I introduced an amendment. I am doing my job to stand up for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: Okay. Sir, please, the issue we're talking about.

Dr. Sherman: I am alleged to have said these statements, which are absolutely incorrect. It's a lie. Why would I say those when I'm doing my job, and I stayed doing my job until 4:30. I'm still here doing my job. I would ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to apologize and withdraw those statements.

Thank you so much. Let's stop this nonsense.

The Speaker: Okay. Does anyone else want to participate in this discussion? Hon. Member for St. Albert, how are you directly involved?

Mr. Allred: On a point of relevance, Mr. Speaker, the issue is the conversation of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. The issue is not what the subsequent consequences were between Dr. White and the AMA or whoever. The only thing that is relevant is what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said, nothing more.

Thank you. [Dr. Sherman rose]

The Speaker: Sorry, sir. I've already recognized you.

Does anybody else want to participate?

All right. Let me, first of all, point out *Beauchesne* 494: "It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted." So from that perspective I will accept the word of everybody who has spoken today. It goes on to say, "On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident." Okay. We have a point of order. All of the citations were correct, every one of them. The citations are absolutely correct, and they could be used in the whole thing.

I am not finding a point of order with respect to this. [interjection] No, don't do that to me, please. It's not a popularity contest. I will do what's right, not what you think is right.

This is on the edge, however. This is on the edge with respect to the use of language. I heard the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, but I've heard him before, say that he believes that decorum in this House is important and he will try really hard. Well, I've heard it before. The sledgehammer is coming down next time. This House cannot afford to have that decorum.

I heard the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere say, "Please, do not ask me to apologize." Well, why, sir, did you ask the Premier to apologize? This is the contradiction that I find in all of this. On the one hand, it's okay to do it; on the other hand, don't have it apply to me. I don't think anybody has to apologize for what they say in here

unless they're completely, 100 per cent off base and erroneous, deliberately erroneous. Then there's more than an apology that is required.

I think it's been a really stressful week. We're on the edge here with respect to some really difficult issues. I think that hon. members should take a deep breath. Everybody, take a deep breath. Politics, once to be played outside of this House, is now coming into this House. I think this is not good. I think this is inappropriate. I think this is wrong. Everybody in here purports to be a friend of everybody else. Let's show the respect that's required. Some people argue and shake their head and say: no, no; I'm not a friend of somebody else. Well, too bad. Poor guy. Sit by yourself in a feeling of paranoia. That's your choice. But I think that most people here should have respect for one another.

So I repeat. It's not a point of order. It was a useful discussion. We have to accept the words of different members because that's important. I would like to see an elevation of decorum, please. I'm saying this on behalf of the children of Alberta who continue to send me e-mails mentioning some of you by name as being bad. Well, we can make all that public, too.

That was point of order 1. It's 5:29.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader, point of order 2.

Mr. Hancock: The Deputy Government House Leader?

The Speaker: Sorry. I meant the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: It's just a series of times in which I've been demoted, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No, no. That was no disrespect on my part.

Point of Order

Questions about Caucus Matters

Mr. Hancock: I'll be very brief on the second one, Mr. Speaker, because I think that much of the discussion that happened was the important discussion we had this afternoon. Under Standing Order 23 and under *Beauchesne* that I cited earlier – and I won't waste the House's time by citing them again. Suffice it to say that in those citations "Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities" and "Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios," *Beauchesne*, page 122, 410(16) and (17), and questions that "concern internal party matters" are not appropriate, *House of Commons*, page 504.

5:30

Today in question period the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was raising questions about the participation of the minister of health in kicking a member out of caucus and a lot of language around that. Again, I haven't got the Blues in front of me to get the precise language, but, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for us to put on the table in a point of order of this nature the question of what is appropriate for questions and what's not appropriate for questions. It's entirely appropriate for the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo or any other member to hold the government to account and certainly to ask tough questions of the Minister of Health and Wellness. Albertans want tough questions asked. They want issues around health raised in this House, and there's certainly nothing wrong with that.

But we've heard day after day from members on the other side with their own version of reality relative to why a member might or might not still be a member of our caucus, and that is really a matter for individual members of the House, Mr. Speaker. As you've said

from time to time in this House – I’m paraphrasing, and if I paraphrase wrongly, I’m certain you’ll correct me – we are members of party caucuses by virtue of choice. We are elected as individuals to this House, and we choose to sit together to form a caucus so that we can form a government or be part of an opposition.

No one commands our vote in this House. Our vote is our own vote, that we hold and we use in the interests of our constituents, but we remember that our constituents elected us not only because we are such upstanding individuals but because we have aligned ourselves with a party platform and a leader and those other things. When we come to this House, we sit here as members. We choose whom we sit with, and we choose when we won’t sit with them anymore. That’s a matter of choice.

But it is not under the rules of this House for the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to ask a minister or anyone in this House what role they had in a member staying in or leaving a caucus or what the circumstances were around a member staying in or leaving a caucus. That’s, quite frankly, party business. That has nothing to do with the policy nature. Unless they can carefully craft a question around a policy issue, it’s totally inappropriate, and I would ask that you rule so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, please.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Government House Leader’s comments relative to choosing to sit in a caucus and choosing where we sit in this Legislature. I proudly represent my constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo as I’ve always viewed them as my boss. Having said that, what he makes reference to, I chose to sit in the PC caucus, that the Government House Leader has now just brought up. Then at that point it was one person, not actually the PC caucus but one person, the Premier of Alberta, who kicked me out of that caucus that I chose to sit in representing my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, on the point of order that the member raises and the words that he just said, I would like to make a point of clarification. I chose not to be over here, but actually based on what the Government House Leader has said, in actual fact I was kicked out not by caucus or by that party; it was by one person. I sit here proudly to represent my constituents. I have been in direct relation on the ER crisis with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and I do say that I do not believe it is a point of order on any of what I have asked this afternoon.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to get involved in this? Well, now, pray tell, what’s the involvement, please?

Mr. MacDonald: As a member of this House and a witness to what happened in question period this afternoon.

The Speaker: You’re not a member of the caucus.

Mr. MacDonald: Pardon me?

The Speaker: You’re not a member of either caucus.

Mr. MacDonald: No. I said that I’m a member of this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Agreed. Proceed. Right to the point on the subject we’re talking about.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Certainly, I would disagree with the hon. House leader that there’s a point of order

here. I would remind hon. members of this House that the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was certainly asking a valid question. When we consider that we now have a new parliamentary secretary of health – and we know where the old parliamentary secretary of health is now sitting, on this side of the House – and that the salary for that individual is paid for by taxpayers, the hon. member has every right to ask for direction and seek opinion on that. The new parliamentary secretary is certainly one of the architects of the rather controversial bill that’s before the House, the Alberta Health Act.

The Speaker: Would you please get to the point?

Mr. MacDonald: The point in all of this is – and we get to *Beauchesne* 416: “A Minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for refusing, and insistence on an answer is out of order, with no debate being allowed.” When we look at *Beauchesne* 416, I certainly don’t see any point of order here. The hon. minister of health could simply do as he usually does if he’s not satisfied with the question, refuse to answer it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. I think that’s enough. Hon. members, the question is very, very clear with respect to the Blues with respect to this. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo: “My question is: why did you vote to kick this member, the only ER doctor, out of your caucus? Why did you vote to kick him out?” Well, okay. Then the hon. minister of health comes back and says, “I was not [even] present.”

Then we have the most important citation of all. This is traditional. It’s been raised time and time and time and time again in that questions with respect to party matters are not the purview of the House and have nothing to do with government policy. Participation in a caucus is by those who belong to a caucus. If a caucus chooses to ask someone to leave, that’s always a right, a fundamental right of that particular caucus.

In this case there was an inappropriate question. The point of order is a valid one. I’ll start ruling all of these questions out of order before they even get here if they have to deal with party matters.

Okay. Number three. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I just want to rise on a point of order, and I’ll undertake to be brief. An infraction occurred on Thursday, November 25, but I was made aware of this alleged offence the evening of the same day, well after this House had adjourned. *Beauchesne* 319 says:

Any Member is entitled, even bound, to bring to the Speaker’s immediate notice any instance of a breach of order.

It also states:

Even the provisions in the Standing Orders that action must be taken “forthwith” or “forthwith without debate” with respect to certain proceedings do not bar a Member from raising a point of order when a serious irregularity occurs.

This point of order is raised at this point at the earliest opportunity after learning of the alleged infraction. *Beauchesne* 289(3) under Attendance of Members states: “This absence from the chamber should not be the subject of comment.” That particularly gets to the crux of the matter, Mr. Speaker. It doesn’t restrict it to verbal comment; it restricts it to comments that are made within this House.

Keeping this important principle in mind, the point of order I have arises from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's comments. He stated on November 25 at 3:26 a.m., "No," and it's the last name of the Minister of Energy; "No," and there's the last name of the Minister of Health and Wellness, "just a lot of sleeping Tories." This clearly indicates an absence of a member in the House. I'd put to this chair that this is a clear violation of *Beauchesne* 289(3) and may also be a violation of Standing Order 23(h) and (i).

Mr. Speaker, you had raised a similar infraction on November 24, last week, when ruling on pictures taken of members in this House with a cellphone camera by another member. In your words you said:

Members in this Assembly are elected to have all the freedom and all the rights of privacy and privilege when they work in this Assembly, and they are not to be interfered with by anyone, intimidated by anyone under the guise of whatever it is.

You further went on to state that

it is a fundamental right for members to be in this Assembly and to have every right without harassment, intimidation, interference from any other member to do their particular duties.

Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 1 indicates that a principle of parliamentary law is "to express opinions within limits necessary to preserve decorum." That is the crux of the matter that we've been debating today. This is an important, time-honoured principle that is relevant today with the new opportunities available to communicate with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, you also stated on November 24 that "the transgression goes to the very heart of the integrity of this Assembly and the right of members to do their work and the security and the privacy of members in this Assembly." There are no precedents in *Beauchesne* for using social media to violate the rules of this House, but I put it to the chair that we need to set some.

Moving forward, we're in a different situation than we were even five, 10 years ago, than I'd say even two years ago. The method used to disseminate the information that led to the infraction was a social media application called Twitter, an application I actually find very useful as a member of this Assembly. However, this application was used as a tool to violate the very principles and rules of this Assembly.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, I put to you and to all members of this Assembly that we all work hard. There is a long-established rule that we do not name members that are not present within the House. It is true that the medium used was not a traditional one, but this should not change the fact that rules were broken and that principles were in fact violated. The important distinction is that the application was used during House proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, my submission to you is that we need more established rules for dealing with social media. I'd ask you to take the appropriate action against this member or rule me out of order. We need to know one way or the other what is acceptable.

Just in conclusion, I do want to mention something that the Member for Calgary-Varsity had mentioned in an earlier point, that I think was quite astute, the fact that we are not our best at 2 in the morning. Well, similarly, this same member, quoted, just said: "Quick." The Minister of Education "is getting his jollies in the house calling points of order." Mr. Speaker, this is inappropriate. We need to have some decorum in and outside of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, you were identified, so I'm going to recognize two of you. First of all, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to a ruling on this, too, because I think there's not a lot of precedent, obviously, around this new technology, Twitter, and its use in the Legislature. I do look forward to and will respect any decision that you make on the matter, obviously.

I do want to point out the incredible hypocrisy of this member on this point. I'm not denying that I made this statement on Twitter. I absolutely did make the statement on Twitter. This same member retweeted on Twitter just the day previous that the Wildrose Alliance members were not in the House for the third reading vote on Bill 16, so he's actually done exactly what he's accusing me of doing. Of course, we have four members, so if none of us are here, that's impugning that we're all not here, obviously. I would say that it is extremely hypocritical.

With regard to the photo that he talked about earlier, Mr. Speaker, there was no photo. That was just people at 2 o'clock being jumpy. There was no photo; it wasn't there. So they can be – I don't know – paranoid if they want, but there's no photo. I don't think that that should even be assessed in this argument. I don't see any evidence of a photo. There is no photo. I can show the pictures of my kids on my phone to prove it.

Anyway, I will say this. I'll put in quickly what I hope you will find on this point of order and, of course, will leave it completely to you. With regard to Twitter and with regard to social media I think it's important that we're able to communicate with people outside of the House about the goings-on in the House that perhaps they can't see. Now, I think that's an important kind of new way that we've involved people in the process, and I think it's been very helpful.

This hon. member talks about and quotes another couple of Twitters that I've put on there. You know, it's funny because I follow the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, as I think a thousand other Albertans do. I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've heard him many times slag the Wildrose and slag our leader and slag other people in his Twitter comments. Of course, what slag means is subject to interpretation, but the point is that this is part of the give-and-take. Usually the comments are good. They're just good debate back and forth, and sometimes we poke a little fun at each other, as is the case in this case.

I just don't see the difference, Mr. Speaker, between somebody watching the online version of the Legislative Assembly, that you've set up very nicely for us, that people from home can watch – I don't see the difference between if I was sitting there, you know, and somebody was watching from home. They can see who's there and who's not there. As long as it's not done in this House – if I was to say it in the House verbally, then I totally agree that that's out of order. I think that it's in Twitter nation, so to speak; it's a fair way to get people involved in the process. Again, I defer to you on your ruling on it, for sure.

The Speaker: Okay. Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of individuals, including yourself, here who are teachers. You referenced bad-behaviour letters you had received from elementary schoolchildren.

The Speaker: Oh, and older folks, too.

Mr. Chase: And older folks as well.

The point is that we're elected to respectfully carry out the wishes of our constituents, and I think we all need to learn lessons. We could probably cite all kinds of examples where someone took offence. I remember, Mr. Speaker, for example, that I think it was

14 times that you drew to my attention how loud and raucous I'd been in the Assembly. That was probably about two and a half years ago. I would offer myself as an example. If I can tone it down, if I can avoid the heckling, if I can avoid the raucous behaviour, then I would put out the challenge to everyone in this House to get on with the business that we were elected to do.

I don't see it as a point of order, the tit-for-tat bit that was going on that evening. If all we dealt with were points of order, we would never have even approached the debate on amendment A3.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a fairly narrow but fairly important piece that we need to deal with. In the ordinary business of the House members come and go. We have a lot of duties that we attend to. We're not all sitting here all the time, and it is the assumption and the rule that we will not refer to the presence or absence of members. The one exception to that is when there's a standing vote and votes are recorded so that people know who was there for the vote and who wasn't there for the vote.

It's an important piece for us. It's important in the House. The fact of the matter is that once we've moved past a period of time, you can make whatever allegation, I suppose, outside the House that you want, but there's no record of who was present and who was absent except for when there's a standing vote. Therefore, the assumption is that members will attend to their business in the House, but there's also an understanding that we often have meetings or other things which take us outside the House, and we need to maintain a quorum in the House to carry on the duty of the House.

It is important, then, when you get to the question of the social media piece, where people are starting to follow, and we have members – and I use it myself periodically – trying to engage people in public discussion and an understanding and interest in what we're doing here. We always want to try and make sure that the public is interested in what we're doing here.

There are protocols, I think, that we need to utilize, and those protocols include – I mean, I don't have any problem with somebody on Twitter, whether it's Airdrie-Chestermere or somebody else, making comments. People make comments all the time. They'll be judged for their comments, and I'll be judged for my comments – that's quite appropriate – even the comment that Airdrie-Chestermere made about an hour ago saying: "Quick – Hancock is getting his jollies in the house calling points of order on me – how fun is this?"

Mr. Horner: Great respect for the institution.

Mr. Hancock: It shows a complete disrespect for the discussion we had, but it's up to him to say it. He has to be accountable for what he says, and people will judge it.

The point is that because I was here at that time in the morning, I could easily have written a tweet at the same time commenting on a member on that side who was absent or resting his eyes or some other characterization of what he might have been doing. It would have been true, but it wouldn't have been appropriate, and I didn't do it. I think that we have to govern ourselves.

I'm not chastising the hon. member in this. I don't intend to. I'm just saying that the rules in the House are here for a reason. Again, to go back to a point I made it seems like eons ago, if we want people to respect the job we do, then we need to have that decorum recognized. If we want them to respect us, we have to guard what we say in public and make sure that we say things that are appropri-

ate and that we handle ourselves appropriately. I've always been of the view that I shouldn't do anything I wouldn't want my mother to have read when she was alive, rest her soul, on the front page of the newspaper. That's a personal thing, and that's how we get our personal respect.

With respect for the institution and respect for Albertans in terms of governance, we do have to be very careful about this sort of thing, so I'd ask you to consider this. I would ask you not to clamp down on use of social media, and quite frankly I would hope that we could even broaden it so that we could actually use our iPads during question period because it's very useful to check our calendars and to do other things.

I'm not suggesting that we should clamp down on this. I'm suggesting we should as members follow the rules that we have in the House with respect to what we do in the House even when we're communicating not on the record, not shouting across the floor, but communicating using social media tools.

5:50

The Speaker: This is not a generational thing, okay?

First of all, a clarification. If you're here in the question period, why are you dealing with items in your calendar? Why aren't you listening to what's going on in the question period and paying attention to what's going on in the question period?

Secondly, if three people say, "You did this" and you stand up in this Assembly and say, "I did not" and you were before a court of law, what would the judge say if three people verified that you did it? I think there's some thinking here with some statements that I've heard this afternoon because I have written evidence about certain things being denied in the last little while.

Now, what's really interesting in here is that the hon. minister has raised a point of order concerning the use of technology. Okay. Fine. We're dealing with principle. The technology of today will be outmoded five years from now. All the twittering we're doing today will be something else five years from now. It'll be gone. It'll be forgotten. It'll be like the 33s, the 78s, all the other stuff, so don't get captured with the little toy of the day kind of thing. If you've been here for more than 35 years in your life, you'll know what I'm saying. We have evolved. Twitter is just a game that somebody is making a ton of money on.

The point of order that was made here is that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere announced on Twitter that certain members were absent. The principle is, though, that if the member would have said that in the House, he'd have been called to order. How is this any different if we're dealing with a principle?

It's like saying that you can do something if you go through the back door which you can't do if you go through the front door. The point is that you can't do it, period, but somehow you can go one way, and you can get it. You can't beat the system by using words to say: well, if the principles don't count, why have any rule?

Without any doubt, if that would have been made in the Assembly, it would have been called to order, and it would have been right. You can look at the references in *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 289(3) and 481(c) and page 213 of the second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

I want to make it very, very clear that whatever technology we have today will become outmoded in a couple of years, before we even get the investment return on it. Look back to see when the first computers were brought into the system and why we have a policy that says that every two years it's going to be changed and that something else is going to happen. It's the rules and the principles that we have to make and common sense and a whole series of other things, not the technology, that should be driving us. If our rule is

that you don't make mention of the absence of a member, it has to be applied in all worlds. It has to be applied universally across the spectrum. Otherwise, why have it?

Needless to say, there's nothing in the standing orders with respect to twittering, I'm sure, in the same way that there's nothing in the standing orders with respect to 33 records or anything else. It's the decorum. It's the dignity and what this is all about. Unless you can elevate it, this is childlike, juvenile action. "Oh, sir, sir, sir, can I?" "No." "But sir, sir, sir, Johnny is getting away with it." Basically, what we're coming down to is childlike behaviour at some point.

A guy walks around in this Assembly at 3:30 in the morning with a camera in his hand, verified and witnessed by others: that's wrong. That's wrong, and this is going to lead to a point of privilege one of these days in which there is going to be a *prima facie* case of privilege. It's going to go to a committee that can actually do a lot of very serious things to the reputation of a member. If a member wants to stand up at 4 o'clock in the morning and say, "I don't believe in rules; I don't follow rules; I won't abide by any rules," you go home and tell your children that. Tell your children that. Go to Sunday school on Sunday, and tell everybody there: "I don't believe in the rules of this place. It's not important for me to abide by rules."

It's on the record. *Hansard* is fabulous reading. A lot of people should actually take time to read it. It's amazing what we'll learn about one another.

So, darn right this is a point of order. This should not have

happened. The Legislative Assembly of Alberta provides for the materials. We're not going to take the materials away from anybody. We're not going to end it. We're not going to have a universal rule because 82 people out of 83 abide by the dignity and the decorum and the honour of the Assembly and one violates it. We'll recognize the one who violates it. That's what we'll do. This is a point of order, and that's where it will land.

Hon. Government House Leader, I was going to call Orders of the Day. Did you want to do something else?

Mr. Hancock: I think you have to call Orders of the Day before I do something else.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that in light of the hour and in light of the afternoon it would be prudent for us to move adjournment until 7:30.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. Government House Leader. I have not left my chair since 1:30, and it's time for me, too.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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Issue 49e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Horne
Lindsay
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Hinman
Lindsay
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell
Anderson
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
Pastoor
Rogers
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery Kang
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Calahasen Sandhu
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Hinman

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
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Cao
Forsyth
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Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman
Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 29, 2010

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It saddens me that now that we've arrived at the point where we're calling the question on Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010, I must rise this evening and offer an amendment to the bill.

If I could have the amendment circulated, please.

The Chair: We'll pause a moment for the pages to distribute the amendment. This amendment is now known as amendment A3.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to my colleagues in the House, I'll guide you through this. Essentially, at the request of the federal government, of the military police, we were asked to include the military police as a police force in Alberta falling under the jurisdiction of this act, most particularly with respect to ASIRT and the jurisdiction of ASIRT in investigations of serious incidents. Though it was at the request of the federal government, upon further review, for reasons that I'm afraid I can't share because I don't understand them myself, the federal government has now decided, at least at this time, that they do not want to fall under that provincial jurisdiction, so they have asked that we withdraw military police from consideration in this bill.

Therefore, the amendment that I've tabled before you first of all strikes out section 15, which reads in its entirety: "For the purposes of this section, 'police service' includes military police as defined in section 250 of the National Defence Act (Canada)." What this amendment does is that it strikes out the reference to military police. It makes no other changes provincially.

The second part of this amendment makes an amendment to section 22, and you can see the wording there. All it does is remove the reference to section 15, which is struck out under section A. So all we're doing here is, at the request of the federal government, remove military police from the provincial jurisdiction at this time. They may, in fact, at some later date decide to move forward, but that's the state of affairs at this point.

We've decided to move forward, and I propose this amendment for discussion, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak on amendment A3?

Ms Blakeman: I'd like to support the Solicitor General in this amendment because I don't really think it's appropriate that the

government would have control over military police as defined in section 250 of the National Defence Act. So, yeah, I think it's very important that they're not in there, actually. I can't understand why they put themselves in there in the first place, but I'm glad they asked to be taken out, and I'm happy to co-operate with the government members in agreeing to do so.

The Chair: Any other hon. members?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, back to Bill 27. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and again discuss Bill 27, the Police Amendment Act, 2010. As I mentioned briefly at first but will expand upon further through some amendments I propose today, this is a very important bill. Often when we go about our daily business, we take the police for granted. We understand that their role both to protect and serve is a very important one and that in the vast, vast majority of cases our police officers go above and beyond the call of duty. They go on to both protect our rights as citizens and keep us free from harm and the threat of violence and also the loss of personal property.

They're also there to uphold our democracy, for without the police and, by extension, the government there would really not be any real civil liberties because, sadly, we need the protection of the police officers and the protection of the government for us to live truly free lives. Without those two apparatuses and the rule of law, simply put, in my view, the world would be considerably less free. It would be considerably less free for most individuals. To start naming them would take too long. Needless to say, they play a very important as well as privileged role in our society.

It's on that note, because of the police's special duty both to us as citizens as well as to upholding the Canadian Constitution, that this act is very important. The police not only protect our powers; they protect our rights as citizens. They also have an ability to step in for the government and at times, maybe, go further than the power that we, the Legislature of Alberta and our federal government counterparts, have given them. When that happens, we need an apparatus that effectively deals with those situations, no matter how rare they are, no matter how unfortunate they are.

When these situations happen or when they're even perceived to have happened, it's very important that there be an avenue for individuals to go on to a complaints process that allows them, rightly or wrongly, to have had their day in court, shall we say, even though it's not in court, their day in front of the Law Enforcement Review Board or their day in front of whomever our panel of decision-makers is.

It's because of that that this bill has been changing some of those rules and regulations and, in my view, has been limiting some of those rights and privileges and, in fact, conferring far more of an ability for lessening people's ability to be heard in these situations. In my view that is the wrong direction not only for this province but for democracy in general.

Like I said, the police have a special duty, and when citizens have their rights really infringed or a perception that their rights have been infringed on by a person in a position of power such as a police officer, it's our duty to allow them to have a venue not only for their protection but for the protection of democracy, like I said earlier.

7:40

On that note, I would like to go through and offer some amendments tonight. Hopefully, we can hear and discuss, and hopefully I can engage people's attention to possibly consider these as, in my view, I believe the act will be better.

I left some amendments up there for Parliamentary Counsel, and if we could distribute the first one there at this time, that would be great.

The Chair: We shall pause for a moment for the distribution of the amendment. This amendment is now known as amendment A4.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, please proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much. If we take a look at this section 19.3, it reads as this: "The Board may dismiss an appeal if a direction given by the Board under section 19.2(3) has not been complied with by a party or if a party has not responded to the Board's direction." You can see I've amended that in section 5 by striking out the proposed section 19.3.

The reason for that, in my view, comes back to some of the things I was saying before. When an individual is making a complaint before a board or a tribunal such as the LERB, despite how frivolous or nonsensical or even minuscule you or I or even the police service sees it as or how unlikely it is to succeed, I believe it would be important to be able to allow them to hear the complaint, to give the party an opportunity to at least present their case at a hearing.

To dismiss what may be bona fide complaints without a hearing can really lead to problems in both our respect for police officers and respect for the rule of law and allow people to fall through the cracks. If you give them the opportunity to be heard, I think many times people will go to these proceedings and realize: man, that really didn't make sense, when they explained it to me or dismissed it, why it was dismissed or why this wasn't the most appropriate venue. It can become clear.

Incorporating this type of power for the LERB will jeopardize procedural fairness, principles of natural justice, and access to justice for those who make complaints. I don't know if many of you were in the House here last time when we discussed procedural fairness. It's one of the basic concepts of law. If a government body or an arm of the government, the police, is subject to a type of complaint, it is most scholars' view that they are given an opportunity to speak and at least to be heard. This is taking away that right.

This amendment was developed in response to, I think, many stakeholders who have said that this is not a good amendment, who indicated during the initial discussions surrounding these amendments that the dismissal process at the LERB on the listed grounds would water down the complaints process to a point where it just simply didn't serve the interests of the general public.

Those are my comments. I believe in this place we should err on the side of allowing people to be heard in this forum rather than shutting them down.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to respond. I must with regret inform the hon. member that despite having favourably reviewed two previous amendments, this one I cannot agree with. The amendment proposes to strike out the proposed section 19.3, which says, "The Board may" – not shall; it's not a requirement – "dismiss an appeal if a direction given by the Board under section 19.2(3) has not been complied with by a party

or if a party has not responded to the Board's direction." It doesn't require the board to dismiss an appeal; it allows them to. This is one of the central reasons for this bill: allowing the board to manage the flow of its business.

Now, we have had cases where respondents have moved out of province and refused to participate and the appeal is open because the board has no powers to dismiss it. All we're doing is providing them with the power. In this clause "may" does not direct that they shall. We're allowing the board to manage. I think the hon. member will agree with me that any court of law in the province is also allowed the same powers. Just because you've filed a complaint or a case doesn't mean you get your day in the sun no matter how you act from that point forward, right?

So there are some requirements here, but again I'll stress that the board may dismiss. It doesn't require them to dismiss. There are, certainly, always extenuating circumstances which the board or any court in the province could consider in the event that this clause is triggered.

I regret that I can't agree with the member and his comments. To me this is fairly central to the bill. We need to allow the Law Enforcement Review Board to manage the flow of its cases so that they move through and they're effective and they're seen to be effective and that justice is not only complete and effective but swift.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A4.

Ms. Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'm mindful of what the previous two speakers have laid on the floor before us. I think that what we're always trying to achieve is a fair balance. It shouldn't swing to one side or the other. I tend to err on the side of allowing people to be heard, to make sure that the appeal processes are in place for them to take advantage of them.

I understand what the Solicitor General is saying in that you can't take a process hostage through neglect, which is what he's actually describing here, if someone moves out of province. Yes, you can see that, but there are other reasons why somebody may not be complying with what the board has given directions to do. I think we have to be very, very careful here. We are playing with a very powerful force; that is, the police forces and the power that they hold over our lives. We give them that power. They govern by consent. They police by consent. But we do give our consent for that. We need to be careful that when we get into situations of dispute with the police, people are able to carry on.

I understand what the Solicitor General is telling me, but I believe there are other circumstances in which you may be wanting to take advantage of the amendment that is proposed by Calgary-Buffalo. I'm not going to agree with the Solicitor General, but I am going to give my colleague another opportunity to make his case.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do understand the Solicitor General. The board and tribunal process needs to move along. It needs to move along with some speed and in some reasonable fashion. In this situation we're dealing with a police officer, who holds a very sacrosanct responsibility in not only protecting us but protecting the rule of law and as such has an extreme position of importance. They have a position that they can abuse. Although it happens rarely, they can and do abuse their

authority from time to time. That's why we have the LERB and other investigative tools, to allow for them to do a full and fair investigation.

I just find that if people have gone through the process, filed their thing, whether they've moved or whether they haven't or whether the commission – when you use the term “may”, that always leads it into the commission's hands. I know many people in the LERB, and they're very good people. In most cases they're the most rational people in the world. In 99 per cent of the time, there's probably a valid reason why you would use “may,” and they would only dismiss those cases that they would deem appropriate to dismiss.

7:50

The only thing here is that because this is such an important tribunal and such an important area, I think we have to err on the side of caution. In my view, you would eliminate “may,” eliminate the human error factor, and allow people to get there. They show up, and they say: “Yeah. These are the crackpots. Here's how we're going to get rid of this case.” Understandably, that's going to take five or six minutes, and it's going to set them back, and they may have to schedule a new thing. I understand that's going to happen a lot of times. In my view, because of the importance of the situation, I think we should err on the side of caution and allow for this procedural fairness to occur.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Oberle: Just a brief comment in response to the last speech by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I'll point out again that this is in respect of an appeal. The board may, not shall but may, dismiss an appeal. We're talking about people that have already made a complaint and had it investigated and adjudicated, and they may now wish to file an appeal with the board. So they've already proven themselves capable of going through the process, either themselves or with counsel, which they're allowed to have as they go through the process.

So all this refers to is whether or not a direction given by the board; that is, to produce certain evidence or those sorts of things, has been complied with or if the party has responded to the board's direction. The hon. member mentioned crackpot behaviour. Nothing in here says anything about behaviour. It's failure to comply with the direction of the board. You're talking about a person who's capable or has counsel that's capable of replying to the direction of the board. So what I'm asking for here is to allow the board to manage their process. This has nothing to do with behaviour or how one deports themselves during the course of said appeal. That's not allowed here, actually.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Any other hon. members on amendment A4?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the bill.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Not to belabour this any further, but I do have another amendment. If we could pass that out to the hon. members of this House, that would be great.

The Chair: All right. We shall pause for the distribution of the amendment. This amendment is now known as amendment A5.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, please proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is an amendment we've passed out, where it states as follows – and this is the original wording

9 Section 28.1 is amended

- (a) in subsection (2) by striking out “or” at the end of clause (c), adding “or” at the end of clause (d) and adding the following after clause (d).

And then (c)(iii)(d) reads: “review the investigation conducted in respect of a complaint during the course of the investigation and at the conclusion of the investigation.”

If we look at this act, what this act has . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, let's pause a bit here. I have in my hand amendment A5: “amended in section 9(c)(iii) by striking out the proposed section 28.1(3)(d).” Is that the one?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Just to make sure.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Okay. I'm often confused, too, Mr. Chair, so I'm glad you got me on the correct page there. Thank you very much.

What this act has is a body in it called the public complaint director. So any complaint that is lodged under the Police Act can be subject to a public complaint director. If we look at this, one of the principal concerns or one of the principal mantras of policing is the independence of a police officer to carry out their investigation without any interference from political individuals, from other members of the force, from people outside the realm, from a person's neighbour. In other words, one of the core principles of policing is that the investigator has the ability to oversee the investigation from start to finish and to come to a conclusion of that investigation without being prompted by the political arm; in this case it looks like the public complaint director.

Actually, this came to me after a discussion with some people from the Calgary Police Commission. They were worried that not amending it in this fashion would allow the public complaint director to second-guess an investigator during the course of an ongoing investigation. The proposed change could result in the public complaint director overseeing and unnecessarily scrutinizing the investigator and the investigator's actions. They also expressed the concern that the complaint director could attempt to insert himself or herself into the investigative process.

In my view, it would be unwise to allow the public complaint director's own opinions or views of how the police process should go when an investigator is in the very middle of a police investigation. It goes against the core belief of policing, that the investigation should not be interfered with from a political arm. In my view, that extends to a public complaint director, who may be in contact with all sorts of people. You know, I don't know where the public complaint director could be getting his information.

Nevertheless, I think it would be wise for us to allow our police officers to investigate the process and go on that notion. I believe the police officers would be jeopardized somewhat in being able to do their investigations, and there would always be someone looking over their head who could interfere in actually finding out the true process of what is in fact going on. Our police officers must be trusted to do their own investigations, or else they should not be in that role.

It is with that in mind that I make this amendment. I urge all hon. members of this Assembly to support this amendment because I believe it leads to better policing and better results and less political interference.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

8:00

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Chairman, unless I'm missing something, this is, as I would read it, sort of a reversal of what the hon. member argued in the last amendment, which would be that oversight of police and the rights of the individual are paramount in the process. In here they are arguing that there should be no external examination of the investigation, and I find that curious.

The proposed clause does not allow the complaints director to inject themselves into an investigation. It does not ask them to investigate. It talks about reviewing the investigation – and I think that's fair – to monitor the flow of an investigation through the police force and to inform a complainant as to where we are in the process without injecting oneself into the investigation. I firmly believe that. So the intent of that clause is to have someone independent oversee the flow of that investigation. It does not say that that complaints director should investigate. They do not have investigative powers. They are not allowed to inject themselves into an investigation. I think that's a fair way of providing oversight without allowing the complaints director to interfere in an investigation, on which I certainly agree with the hon. member.

I might add, Mr. Chairman, that the clause in question – well, the bill itself. You know, we did consult with police commissions, and we received no complaints from police members or police commissions on this or any clause that I'm aware of. You'll understand what some of the concerns forwarded are, and some were mentioned in this House, but I have not heard from a police commission that they have a problem with this particular clause.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the amendment.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the Solicitor General's comments here. That actually helped me a little bit on the fact that you often get a call from the public that will say: what's the state of existence of my complaint? I understand that they should have an opportunity to hear that complaint. I'm just wondering if there's someplace in the regulations or someplace else where it sort of limits the power of the public complaints director in this regard.

I just see this "review the investigation conducted in respect of a complaint during the course of the investigation and at the conclusion of the investigation" as still being somewhat of a slippery slope where a public complaints director, when he is worried – or not even worried. Let's just say for optics that we could use the scenario where this individual may want to interfere. In my view, there's an opportunity for him in the middle of an investigation to get hold of a police officer and possibly interfere. I don't know if there's a place in the regulations or if it could be more defined in this act. Nevertheless, I still look at this at face value, and it says to me that the person could investigate during the course of an investigation. This leads me to being somewhat of a nervous Nellie or what have you on that note.

I also just want to respond to the first comments to make sure that these are two separate issues, what I'm talking about in this act and what I discussed in the first bill. I understand I'm asking for police oversight and for us to have an effective process. But this is one of those internal things where you can be for police doing their investigation while at the same time being for an oversight body, and I just want to make sure that, you know – I think I am reasonable and rational in having both those points of view in discussing this bill.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I must rise and apologize to the hon. member. I'll begin by offering an apology. Your comment now

clarifies for me what your concern with this clause is. It's a bit of a conundrum. You would agree that a public complaints director needs to be independent of the police. For an independent person, yourself, for example, or myself for that matter, if we were to phone the Calgary police to inquire about the progress of an investigation, we would be told quite short and sweet what we should be doing that afternoon.

Clearly, this public complaints director has to have different powers than an independent member of the public. There has to be some power specified where they can be involved in this investigation somehow so that they can monitor at least the flow through. So there's the rub. I have to grant that person some additional powers, and that's what this clause proposes to do.

The member is right. He referred several times to regulation. In my mind, this has to be nailed down further in regulation. While we've received no complaints from a police commission with regard to this clause, we've been rather well received out there by committing that once this act is passed, I will go back to the stakeholders with a regulation. I don't think there's any misalignment of intent at this point, but the proof is always in the pudding. We've already committed that to all of our stakeholders. We will go back with the regulation because, you know, there are a couple of pretty key points about police oversight and independence and those sorts of things that need to be nailed down when we get to the fine detail, and I've already committed to doing that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I don't have the benefit of the entire act in front of me – maybe the minister does – but I take it, then, that there is specific meaning assigned to the word "review" versus the meaning that is assigned to the word "investigate." Therefore, when the clause says, "Review the investigation conducted in respect of a complaint during the course of the investigation and at the conclusion of the investigation," review has a different meaning. Someone who is reviewing something would not – oh, this is why the specificity of language is so important.

For example, in a not-for-profit society you can have an audit, which means that it is conducted by a registered CMA or CA, and they go through that according to certain principles, or if you're a smaller agency, you can have a review, and a review is by two members who didn't prepare the books, who can look everything over and then sign off on it. Is that what I'm understanding is being contemplated here, that someone who reviews this is not taking the same actions as someone who would be an investigator? Can you explain that?

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That would be correct. To investigate would clearly be different than to review an investigation. The public complaints director has to be able to follow this process through to its conclusion to ensure that a complainant has had reasonable access to it, that the flow is reasonable, and that the complainant can get their questions answered at an appropriate time, without investigating because this clause does not allow them to investigate. They can be a police officer, but they cannot be from that force. They are an independent person. They cannot investigate. They are to review the investigation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Any other hon. members on the amendment?
Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Hon. members, I've gotten a note here. May we revert briefly to introductions before carrying on?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three guests in the public gallery. Their names are as follows: Doug MacDonald, Karen Sevcik, and Ray Pinkosky. I'd ask them to rise, and I'd like all members of the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010 (continued)

The Chair: All right. Now we'll get back to Bill 27. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. If we could just get to it, I'd like to pass out another amendment here.

The Chair: We'll pause briefly for the distribution of the amendment. It will be known as amendment A6.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, please proceed on amendment A6.

8:10

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The amendment, as you see before you, says that the Police Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 12(d) in the proposed section 43(11) by striking out "one year" and substituting "two years." You can see that that just refers to the ability of the police chief or the commission with respect to a complaint, that they

shall dismiss any complaint that is made more than one year after

- (a) the conduct complained of occurred, or
- (b) the complainant first knew or ought to have known that the conduct complained of had occurred.

Mr. Chair, the reason for this amendment is, I think, fairly clear. It allows for more time for an individual to review the circumstances and to fully appreciate what may or may not have occurred to them and decide whether to go ahead with their case under the Police Act. If we look at this, this simply moves more in line with what other discovery principles in law are.

Recently in our courts of Alberta we now accept that there is a two-year discoverability principle when people knew or ought to have known when they had a claim against them or when their legal rights began to run in regard to a situation. It has been pretty much accepted that two years is the standard here in Alberta and, in fact, throughout Canada for this to happen. This first change came about in about 2000, and we recently, I believe, codified it in the *Rules of Court* in about 2006. Again, this is just to keep it more consistent with, basically, legal forums throughout Alberta.

I've read some things on the discoverability principle from different law groups, and in my view there's been an acceptance that

two years is the standard course that this should run. Given what we've discussed earlier, the importance of police and their importance in looking after the rule of law and people's rights and how from time to time situations may come where police officers may or may not overstep their bounds and that there will be an opportunity for citizens to make their case heard, in my view it would be wise for us to use the two-year benchmark instead of shortened to the first year. In this situation I think we should give more opportunity for a person to bring a complaint.

There are often intimidation factors or a fear factor for a person to get over to feel comfortable filing a complaint. If we look at it, many of the people who are affected by our legal system or who could possibly have dealings with the police officers are often people who may be on the margins of society, who may not have a voice, who may not understand that there is a recourse for them, who may be outside the traditional person who would feel comfortable filing a complaint in these circumstances. We just should err on the side of caution and, because of the importance of this, allow people the two-year limit to file their complaints. I think it would be wise of this House in this situation to recognize that.

It most likely wouldn't affect very many complaints. If they didn't file it in one year, I'll tell you what: they're most likely not going to file it in two. But there may be three, four, five situations where it allows that person to gain the confidence or the comfort or to line up the witnesses or line up moral support to be able to do that.

I put that to us and would say that we would be wise to follow what many in our legal profession have already gotten to us. In this case, it makes even more sense to do it. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I guess I'm coming at the same issue here but slightly differently than my colleague because I can recall several bills that have gone through this House in which we were trying to achieve that standard. I'm sorry. There is a word that's used where you're accepting a certain protocol or certain standard across the country. It is two years, so I'm a little surprised to see one year in here. That's certainly what came out in the Limitations Act. It tends to be mostly two years. We changed it in this House around reporting either violence or sexual assault against women to make sure that the two-year rule came into play.

The language that's used in this section is that the chief of police, with respect to a complaint referred,

shall dismiss any complaint that is made more than one year after

- (a) the conduct complained of occurred, or
- (b) the complainant first knew or ought to have known that the conduct complained of had occurred.

That's pretty cut and dried. This is not a may situation or a might situation; it's "shall." I'm wondering if this just isn't a bit too narrowly focused. Why was this choice made over the two years, which is much more common?

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Might I begin by pointing out that the previous clause said that the chief of police "shall dismiss any complaint that is made more than one year after the events on which it is based occurred." There is no discoverability: ought to have known or should have known. One year is the window. So this is not a change from the previous bill. That clause has actually been in our legislation for some time. I'm unaware of any complaints that were made because the timeline had expired and a complainant was unable to approach the police.

Secondly, it refers to when “the conduct complained of occurred” – so there’s still the one-year timeline from when the actual conduct occurred – or when “the complainant first knew or ought to have known that the conduct complained of had occurred.” Now, that actually extends the timeline that was under the previous act because it brings in: how could I have possibly known that two days after this event occurred, the police officer illegally searched my name through the records system? If I don’t discover that for a year or two years, I wouldn’t be allowed to complain about it under the old act. Now I would be because I now have an additional one-year window. So it actually extends the timeline.

Just before we go there, both of the speakers alleged, you know, some form of criminal behaviour: what if an assault occurred? True, in many of our courts, actually, it allows two years as a limitation period. Under the Municipal Government Act it allows 90 days to sue a municipality for certain instances. So two years is not a standard window, but in serious things like a criminal assault, for example, a two-year window might be reasonable.

8:20

This clause would not kick in in the case of a criminal assault. Any case that involves that discreditable a conduct of a police officer, involving the injury or death of a civilian, any injury, requires an immediate notification of the Solicitor General under section 46.1 of the Police Act, and we can institute an investigation immediately without a complaint. We can investigate either by calling in ASIRT, by calling in a companion police force, or directing that particular police force to continue with the investigation. We can oversee it right there without any public complaint. You’re not really talking about complainants having brought forward some alleged criminal activity or alleged criminal assault and then being unable to have it investigated because it was a year later. We’d be all over that one the night it happened.

We’re talking about a less serious offence at this point. I think it’s reasonable to put the limitation of one year. Again, it allows for a reasonable flow of complaints, and the way it’s worded does extend the complaint period now because of discoverability.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hehr: I appreciate the comments of the Solicitor General, and I really thank him, actually, for talking about this. I realize that it does expand the rights that were given under the last act. That has to be a positive change, and I’m not denying that. But, you know, simply because an assault would always have the two years or something more serious would have the two-year window or an ability for the police to investigate the misconduct, I don’t think it lessens the need to put the discoverability principle for something that might be less egregious.

In my view, it would be wise for us not only to give that protection and that larger window for individuals but also just for clarity of our legal proceedings. You know, obviously, that has an argument to it as well. Broadening the ability of people to be heard and to file their information with this type of organization is paramount to it at least being able to be seen as an adequate place where justice is heard. In my view, it would be wise for us to do this.

The second thing. Yes, although they put in the Municipal Government Act that you only have 90 days to sue the city of Calgary, the vast majority of people know that you can file with the court and they’ll hear the whole thing, that it’s a two-year discovery principle. In my view, that act should be changed, too. Because that act is wrong doesn’t mean that this act should be wrong, okay? I don’t think that was a valid recommendation.

I thank the Solicitor General, and if he wishes to talk some more, that would be fine.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on amendment A6?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: Now we will go back to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If you could pass out my last amendment.

The Chair: We’ll pause for the amendment to be distributed. This amendment now is known as amendment A7.

On amendment A7, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Section 45 is amended by adding the following after subsection (4): “(4.1) Where the chief of police disposes of a matter under subsection (4), the decision of the chief of police is final.” What we have here is a situation where a matter has gone through its initial phase of review, and it could go up to another higher level of viewing either with the LERB or somewhere else, yet in this part of the act, so far as it’s drawn, we have allowed the police chief to decide in his sole discretion whether or not this should be heard by the LERB. In my view, this is a horrible change. You know, this change is wrong. It can only jeopardize procedural fairness, the principles of natural justice, and access to justice for anyone who has made a complaint.

This amendment will enable the police chief to evade LERB scrutiny simply by characterizing the misconduct as not a serious matter. End quote. Lord knows I like our police officers. I love them to death. I think nothing but the most of our police chiefs, in particular the one in Calgary, Chief Rick Hanson. He’s done an amazing job and has the respect of his troops. He has really presented both a tough-on-crime stance but an understanding of the roots of crime as well and an understanding that it’s not an either/or, that there have to be all points discovered.

Nevertheless, I’m not comfortable with even him having this power to dismiss a complaint if, in his view, it is not a serious matter. We have examples of cases where, in fact, things would not have gone before the LERB, that we know would not have gone before the LERB, where chiefs have said that this is not a serious matter, but in fact the LERB saw that it was and dealt with it accordingly. There are incidents out there in the not-too-distant past where this has occurred, and in my view to simply say that the police chief, whoever that might be, is above board and should have this decision-making power is wrong. It’s wrong in the fact that, simply put, it shouldn’t happen for the sake of civilian oversight, for the ability of people to be heard, for people to have their day in court. To have a matter disposed of by the police chief, “Well, that is not of a serious matter” – let’s face it; this bill is not only about whether it is a serious matter or not a serious matter. That’s not what this bill is all about. It’s the optics of procedural fairness, the optics of Caesar’s wife rule, of not only being pure but seen to be pure. Okay?

In this case if someone gets a note back saying, “I would love to appeal this, but the police chief said that my concern wasn’t a serious matter,” can you imagine what that person feels like? They feel like they’re not being heard. They feel as if the police have drummed it up, have said that no one can be heard, no one can see

what's in front of them. There's that big blue wall up there that no one gets past, and they protect their bone no matter what. In my view, that would be enforcing that unfair stigma instead of trying to break that down and giving people every avenue, every recourse out there to be heard. That's what we should have in this bill.

Even though I understand that sometimes there may be issues, that may not be of the highest priority, shall we say. That doesn't matter. They should have the opportunity to be heard. That's why I disagree fundamentally with this bill even though I understand that very good people are working in our police forces and in particular the leaders of our police forces.

I thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I urge all members of this Assembly to support this amendment.

8:30

The Chair: Any other hon. members? The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to rise and address the comments of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The member has certainly hit upon, I guess, what is the crux of the act, or some of the concerns about the act, in that it allows a police chief to dismiss a complaint, and when the chief does that, the decision of the police chief is final. I might point out that that's one of the reasons that it's useful to have a public complaints director reviewing the investigation as it goes along.

But at the end of the day the police chief does not operate independently, nor does he have pure and independent power. The police chief is accountable to his community and to his police commission. In the event that a police chief acts unreasonably in dismissing a complaint and calling it final, then the police chief's conduct itself is subject to review by the police commission, either upon recommendation of a complaints director or by a complainant filing a complaint about the police chief. "You didn't think my complaint was serious? I don't agree with you. I'm filing a complaint about you." So it's not as if the police chief is independently able to decide, "That's it. This is a stupid complaint. We're not proceeding from here" and have nobody review that. There is lots of review, and the person's right to carry that complaint further is in no way erased.

What it does though, again, is manage the flow of complaints to allow more serious complaints to get to and through the Law Enforcement Review Board process. That's the intent of this clause.

Having said that and having discussed this clause with other stakeholders, again, it's one of those where the intent appears to be clear and agreed upon, but the proof is in the pudding. This clause is actually the main reason that I committed to take the regulations out to stakeholders. How the regulation around this one is written is pretty key, and I wholeheartedly agree with that. I think the member would agree with that as well. So this was the clause that caused us to think that we'd better take the regulation out there. I've already committed that to stakeholders, and I commit it again here tonight.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hehr: I thank the hon. Solicitor General for again agreeing to take this regulation and already identifying, before I did, that there may in fact be some difficulty for this as it is proposed. I would like to just say a couple of things in the spirit of what we're involved in here, sharing ideas. I'm sure some people will bring this up to him along the regulation path, but I don't know if you've seen Rick Hanson lately in Calgary; he's the most popular guy there. It is what it is.

The police chief holds an unbelievable amount of power in our city, and I have a feeling that he does in many places. So for us to

then believe that the public complaints director is going to take on the police chief, well, God love us, but I think that might be a little bit naive. Okay? That's simply why, in my view especially, we'd be saving the police chief a whole lot of unnecessary grief, where no doubt there is going to be a case which somehow gets out from under him and it spirals out of control. In my view a police chief has far too much power to expect that—I hope the commission would be able to and I hope the public complaints director would be able to; however, in the real world that I live in sometimes I question that, whether they would have the intestinal fortitude. I hope so, but I think that to err on the side of caution, it might be wise for us to do it.

On the other point, I've already forgotten. I trust that the Solicitor General is going to go out and find this in regulation, unless an hon. colleague brings it out. I've enjoyed this tonight. It sounds like we're going to go get some input from stakeholders on the regs, and I look forward to that process and will note that I'll pay attention to it when the time comes.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Oberle: I wonder if I might just add one comment in closing this debate on the amendment here, and that is that Chief Hanson has obtained the position in his community because of wisdom and effective leadership, not by making frivolous decisions that the community doesn't agree with.

Also, I just want to clarify that in the event that such a thing happened, it would be the police commission that oversees the activities of the chief, who have the ability to hire and fire chiefs and who, very clearly, are accountable to the community and to city council, not to the chief. They are his boss. So there is an accountability mechanism.

Despite the fact that you called him the guy in Calgary, I somehow felt the need to jump to his defence anyway.

I offer those comments.

Mr. Hehr: One more time just for the record, I think Rick Hanson is doing a fabulous job, too. I meant it as a compliment that he's doing a wonderful job. That's just for clarity as well.

The Chair: Any other hon. members on amendment A7?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: On the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the bill.

[The clauses of Bill 27 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 27.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 27. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening thankful for the to-ing and fro-ing that we've had with the opposition parties. A couple of well-thought-out amendments came from there. I'm pleased with the way the act has been amended. I now propose that we call the question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. I, too, would like to thank the Solicitor General for participating in debate and going back and forth on this and considering what I had to say. I think we should have more of that in this House. I appreciated very much the fact that the Solicitor General has indicated he will go out on the road and continue to find ways to better this act through regulation. But I am also a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and I can't in all good conscience let this bill go through without one last kick at the cat, if you know what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker.

8:40

If you look at this bill in its entirety, for the importance I stated in both second reading and for the reasons I said in committee and those amendments I put forward, I believe that this bill could be better. It could be better. I think that this bill goes a long way to shortening the ability of the public to make complaints against a police force. In my view it goes against the best interests of our justice system in both the short and the long run, Mr. Speaker.

I've said that overall the importance of police officers is second to almost none in our society. They protect the very freedoms that you and I take for granted, and without their protection I think it would be very difficult for any of us in this House or people outside of this House to enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of association, in fact all of the Charter rights that we believe in. It's not a perfect world out there, and the police officers not only protect those values that we have enshrined in the Charter, but they also protect our homes, where our families live, where we keep whatever possessions we may have, where we have an ability to go to bed at night, and where we feel safe and protected. I, like most people in society, view the police as being the perfect role models out there for any society and the perfect protectors of that peace.

That said, sometimes things go wrong, where a police officer can have a bad day on the job, where circumstances exist where things go off the rails, so to speak, and a wrong is done to an individual at

the hands of a police officer. Am I saying that it happens very often? No. To be honest, I am sure it happens relatively slightly. In fact, it's amazing more complaints aren't lodged against the police given their power and their ability to, I guess, enforce the law. It's their expertise and their training that even is a reflection of the fact that there are very few cases that go forward.

Nevertheless, for the comments, you know the old Caesar's wife rule: that we cannot only be seen to be pure, we must – I messed it up. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is looking at me, and I always get nervous when she looks at me . . .

Ms Blakeman: Because it's sexist.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Allegedly. I'm not going to say that saying anymore. That's the last time you heard me say the Caesar's wife rule.

Nevertheless, I think – I think – this bill could be better, and that's why I'm going to put through one more amendment, and we can go from there. So without further ado, can we put that through?

The Deputy Speaker: We will pause for the distribution of the amendment.

Hon. members, this amendment is now known as amendment A1 to the bill.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It says that

Bill 27, Police Amendment Act, 2010, be not now read a third time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill is contrary to the public interest and will jeopardize access to justice, procedural fairness, and the fundamental principles of natural justice for Albertans victimized by police misconduct.

Sir, many of the arguments I have made in this review are more along the lines of: justice not only must be done; it must be seen to be done. Did anyone get the slight nuance there? Justice not only must be done; it must be seen to be done. Not only that, but perception is reality, and we go from there. Nevertheless, on this act we should bend over backwards to ensure that procedural fairness and the fundamental principles of natural justice are followed.

I believe this bill waters down some of the principles that we hold near and dear to our hearts, and I would advise that it's something that can be put aside, that it is not of such an immediacy that it needs to be passed through. I am confident in the Solicitor General and his staff's ability to come back in the fall or the spring with a better bill that can ensure some of these concerns are brought in. For those reasons I'd ask all members of this honourable House to get behind this sentiment, to agree that more work needs to be done and that we can bring it ahead at some other time but after some more work is done.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been an honour and a privilege to take part in this debate this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak to this amendment. I agree with it. It's similar to an amendment that I also have, but this one is the more general of the two. I think it wraps up my view of this, that this bill "is contrary to the public interest and will jeopardize access to justice, procedural fairness, and the fundamental principles of natural justice for Albertans victimized by police misconduct."

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more with the sentiment here. We have before us a bill that creates a process for dealing with police

misconduct that is the equivalent of a great big sieve. All kinds of things will slip through this, and the government has not been prepared to accept some of the amendments that have been put forward, some very minor amendments.

People who fail to participate, follow process, or conduct themselves in an appropriate manner may get their appeal dismissed. It narrows severely the categories of people who are eligible to bring forward appeals and excludes others who may have an indirect relationship or have a specific interest in ensuring good conduct on the part of the police. In doing so, it will permit misconduct by police to go ahead and to continue without being effectively challenged. That's why I compare it to a sieve.

I think that it's very important that we have the highest standards. I know that one section in particular, section 45(4), provides that the chief of police may dispose of a complaint if he or she is of the opinion the grievance is not serious. Mr. Speaker, it's really shocking.

8:50

It's interesting that amongst all the bills that we've debated – and there has been a particularly bad batch in this session, in my view, Mr. Speaker – the government has been seemingly most determined on pushing this particular piece of legislation through the Assembly. This is a bill designed not to hold police accountable, to provide every possible opportunity for the police or the chief of police or the system as a whole to avoid accountability and to leave wrongdoing, which occasionally occurs on the part of police, uncorrected and certainly unpunished. For that reason, I believe that the Assembly ought to pass this reasoned amendment and not give the bill third reading because of the reasons that I've stated.

I think this is a very disturbing piece of legislation because it seems to so deliberately provide the police with opportunities to avoid accountability. If that's the objective of the government, I wish they would just say so and we might know why that is. But in the absence of that, I'm certainly going to give this amendment my full support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a) for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the amendment.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I wasn't going to speak to this, but the remarks from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood got me thinking. You know, I guess it would be six years ago that it would have been unbelievable for people to think that police would search a database for a personal reason – it would just be unthinkable – or that police would deliberately follow a prominent individual home trying to catch them drinking and driving. It just could not happen. No one would believe that those kinds of shenanigans would go on in a police force from a metropolitan area in Alberta.

I mean, granted, we've all read the books of the New York police and the Chicago police and the L.A. police and the different times they've gone through, where they seem to have become rife with corruption, and all kinds of terrible things happened, and they got themselves straightened out. But it was just far beyond the realm of possibility that any of our police services would ever step outside of or even stick a toe across the line, yet in the last 10 years we've found out that they can and they did. They did do things that were not acceptable.

When it was first raised that this was a possibility, that somebody started talking about that, we'd say: "Oh, absolutely no way. That's

totally ridiculous." In fact, the first police officer that looked at it did dismiss it, and that rolling through is a big piece of why we have this legislation in front of us today, because people didn't accept it. They would not accept the police investigating themselves.

I around that time was the Official Opposition critic for the Solicitor General and Justice, and I remember asking question after question and making public statement after public statement that they had to have independent oversight and an independent complaints system because it didn't work for either side. If an officer was cleared by his own people, nobody would believe that he was truly cleared; it was all an inside job, and it was all done with a wink and a handshake. No one would believe it, which is terribly unfair to someone who should be cleared. You know, if they've gone through the system, we should believe that person is innocent and get on with it or that they were found guilty of something.

Our world has changed a whole lot in Alberta in the last 10 years around police complaint processes. I'm pleased to see that we got to where we did with the act that's before us, but in reviewing what I've just gone through in the last couple of minutes, I thought: is this really the best we can be? Is this the best we could achieve with this amending act? Because, really, it's been my experience that once an issue kind of rolls through, it comes to the attention of government, they deal with it, they bring forward an amending act, they pass it, and it's a good five years before you can get the issue back up again. So if it wasn't perfect the first time you passed it, you're going to have to live with it for at least five years and more likely 10 and in some cases longer than that. Is this really the best that we could be? Did we really achieve the balance we were trying to achieve? Did we achieve the credibility that we were trying to achieve for both sides involved here?

I think that based on all of the things we've learned – and, particularly, we have to be very careful about complaints being dismissed – we could do better. I'll certainly support the reasoned amendment brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, on the amendment, the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't going to rise on this, but now I feel compelled to based on the comments I've heard from the three members over there, most recently from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Through the course of the debate in talking about police forces, we have referred a number of times to incidents. I believe in most cases those were hypothetical incidents, for instances. For example, what if a policeman did this, or what if a complaints director did that? It's useful, of course, to use hypothetical examples and to underline a point for whatever reason we might do it.

But the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre in her last speech brought forth a couple of examples that may not have been hypothetical incidents and said that there was a time we couldn't have imagined those happening and that now all of a sudden they're happening. I would pose the alternate to that, Mr. Speaker, in that it's possible there was a time that they were happening and we didn't know about it and, might I point out, that because of the legislative framework we already have in Alberta, we now know.

In those particular incidents, if that member was referring to particular incidents, there was a complaints process and officers were disciplined and charges were laid and heads rolled. They went through the process. That was proof of the system working, not

proof of the declining state of our police forces in the province. Quite the opposite, I am intensely proud of the police forces and their conduct and, at least in part, of the oversight mechanisms that we have in place today, that strike what I think is the appropriate balance.

We have the bill before us, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's pretty fair to say that I do not agree with the amendment, which would say that the bill is contrary to the public interest and will jeopardize access to justice, procedural fairness, and fundamental principles of natural justice. Clearly, I don't agree with that. I think it enhances an already solid complaints and police oversight system. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out a couple of examples of where it worked very well, and we get examples every day of where it worked very well.

It adds to an existing complaints process speedier disposition of complaints. I must say that contrary to a din of complaining about our oversight process, the only complaints I hear about are people wondering why it takes five years or more to get through a complaints process. I agree with that. Justice should be speedier than that. I think it's a system that will be speedy and will be seen to be fair as well as be fair, in reference to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's comments. It introduces a new, maybe emerging concept of alternate dispute resolution, which is very timely and will be very effective in this case.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood painted us as not being open to any amendments at all. I count three amendments that were passed by this House, only one of which was offered by myself, by the government party. Whether they're minor or not, two amendments were accepted over there. So the math is not quite right.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I'm clearly – very clearly – not in agreement with the amendment or the wording of what the opinion of this House would be. I just simply do not agree with it.

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on the amendment.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in regard to the amendment brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I have to get on the record that I don't support his amendment. I can tell you that having had the privilege of being the former Solicitor General from 2001 to 2004, I found it a great privilege to be able to serve and work with the police and peace officers in this province. I can tell you that 99 per cent of them do a very, very good job on behalf of the citizens of Alberta.

Like any other profession there are a few bad apples in the police force – very, very few. Even 1 per cent might be stretching it a little bit. I can tell you that over the recent years since I've been there, you can see how the police chiefs in this province are dealing with them. We have a complaint process in place. We have the Law Enforcement Review Board in place.

I truly, truly believe that the police officers and peace officers in this province do an incredible job under very, very difficult situations, so I want it on record that we will not be supporting this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Mr. Mason: I just wanted to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek if she feels that, you know, a good bill dealing with checks and balances with respect to police – that is to say, the ability of citizens to bring forward complaints of misconduct – that should be

easily dismissed on a number of pretexts and, in particular, by a chief of police who might determine, as the act says, that the particular complaint is not serious: is that really the kind of limitations on justice for people who may have been mistreated that we want to see?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, in the time that I served, from 2001 to 2004, and from 2004 till 2010 under the current Solicitor General, I can only tell you that the police that I'm familiar with in this province and the chiefs – and I've been honoured to be able to keep in touch with them and know them very well – take seriously every complaint that they get. They look at it, they look at the complainant, and they look at the investigation of the police officer. Honestly, Member, I've never really seen anything that you may be saying.

There are some frivolous complaints, obviously, and those have to be dealt with, and the complaints that you're probably referring to are dealt with very seriously by the police chiefs. I'm sorry. I just support them.

Mr. Mason: Well, I'll just bring one example to the hon. member's attention. I think this was probably before she served as the Solicitor General. There was a case in which a police constable in the Edmonton police force, who happened to be the son of the chief, tasered a passed-out man named Randy Fryingpan multiple times while he was in a vehicle. That resulted in a complaint which was dismissed, and ultimately the complaint process completely broke down. There are other examples as well.

Obviously, most police officers are respectful and responsible members who carry the enormous powers that they're given on behalf of all of us very well. But when something occurs, then there needs to be a fair process. Simply saying, "Well, I know that all police chiefs are, you know, good guys or good gals, and they really wouldn't do something" doesn't fit the bill, as far as I'm concerned, with respect to what we need in this legislation.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate where he's coming from. I am aware of that incident, and I don't believe it was under my tenure. I can tell you that that was then, and this is now. The chiefs in this province have worked very, very hard, when you have incidents like that, to correct those incidents. We've had the previous Solicitor General from Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-Buffalo, and then it was, I think, Stony Plain, and now we've got the new Solicitor General.

That was a very rare incident. It was brought to the public. It obviously put some onus on the police chiefs in this province in that Albertans are not going to tolerate that. They want to see incidents like that dealt with. You now have the ASIRT team, that has been called in to deal with serious incidents if a police officer is involved. So while I appreciate the incident that you're using that I think was probably in the year 2000 – and I may be stretching my time – or even in '99, it's a good lesson. It was a lesson well learned by the police chiefs in this province. I think they can only get better and continue to do a good job on behalf of the citizens of this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek a question. I believe that in her comments she said that this was a rare incident, where an issue like this was reported. By your comment are you saying that it's all right that it rarely happens? [The time limit for questions and comments expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Back to the amendment. The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this has been a really interesting discussion tonight. If we look back to why this legislation has been introduced, we know that in this province we have had a very strong record of dealing with police discipline. One of the reasons that we've had that record is because of the close partnership between this government and chiefs of police across this province. There's always the opportunity, no matter what we're talking about, to find those incidents where there's been a problem. That's the nature of what happens in policing, in justice, sometimes in government in general.

Mr. Speaker, what legislation is supposed to do is to continually improve the process. What we know is that through the work that's been done by the Solicitor General in consultation with chiefs of police across this province, with police commissions across this province, with people that are at the moment working on this board, we are continuing to create a system that allows the public to have even greater confidence in police disciplinary measures.

Now, Mr. Speaker, earlier this evening we heard the Solicitor General refer to the fact that when particular incidents happen, we now have a system where the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team would be brought in or perhaps where criminal charges might be laid. What we have in this province is an entire umbrella of opportunities for members of the public to see the chiefs of police take the discipline of their officers very seriously. When we talk to people in communities across this province, they have confidence in their police officers. They have confidence in their chiefs of police. I think their chiefs of police take that confidence very seriously. It's one of the reasons that we're able to create a partnership where everyone can have confidence in what this legislation does and in what we're trying to achieve.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to offer a comment and a question to the hon. Minister of Justice. I want to quote from Justice Dixon in *Gabrielson versus Hindle* of 1987. The judgment says in part that

police forces are given a very special niche in our society. They represent us in the protection of our property and our well-being from abuses and ravages of those who commit crime. They are given special powers and a corresponding standard of conduct is demanded of them. Police powers are to be used intelligently, fairly, and without rancour or favour.

I won't read the rest, but it concludes: "With all privileges," meaning privileges of the police, "go responsibility."

9:10

I really wonder if the Minister of Justice feels that it's enough to say that we have a wonderful relationship with our police chiefs and that our police chiefs are wonderful police chiefs and that they do a good job and that they take everything seriously and that, therefore, we can have a system of recourse for citizens who are not treated properly or legally by the police that is so full of loopholes and opportunities to dismiss legitimate complaints. Simply, the question is: do you really base law on that? Do you really say that we don't need, for example, to have laws against certain kinds of activity because, you know, we really trust the people that are involved not to do it? Does it not simply negate the whole basis of a legal system?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not quite sure where the hon. member was when I was speaking, but that is not what I said. What I said is that we have a legislative framework in front of us that creates a system of laws that people in this province can have confidence in. Our whole foundation of democracy and public accountability is based on our legislation. We have a system where we introduce laws. We set out rules and expectations. We expect people to honour those laws. We do our very best as a Legislature, as we have done, to make sure that this covers exactly what it needs to cover. Ultimately, at the end of the day, as the hon. member referred to, if there are issues, they will go to court.

I am not for a moment suggesting that this is some hollow piece of work or that we don't need to have this legislation. We need this legislation. It's good legislation. One of the reasons we know it's good legislation, Mr. Speaker, is because we have consulted on this legislation. We have consulted with police officers, with members of the community, with stakeholders, with victims' groups. This is good legislation. It will stand up to the test. There are not loopholes in this legislation, and it should be passed.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, just a comment. It's beyond me that the minister thinks that there are no loopholes when the police chief can simply dismiss a complaint that he or she feels is unreasonable. That's absurd.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments?

Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 27 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Now, we go back to the bill, Bill 27, on third reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would like to move on behalf of my colleague the hon. MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona that third reading of Bill 27, Police Amendment Act, 2010, be amended by deleting all words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 27, Police Amendment Act, 2010, be not now read a third time because the bill fails to provide for improved procedures for complaints concerning police officers and police services."

The Deputy Speaker: We'll pause for a moment to have the amendment distributed.

We have an amendment here. It's now known as amendment A2, and it is a reasoned amendment.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please continue.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some of my comments from the previous reasoned amendment will apply as well to this one. This one is a little more specific, saying that we not read the bill at third reading because it "fails to provide for improved procedures for complaints concerning police officers and police services."

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote from a letter that was sent to the Minister of Justice by David G. Chow from the Calgary law firm Molle Roulston Chow. I'm just going to read a section of his comments with respect to the bill into the record because I think these are quite on point and probably a lot more eloquent than I could provide. Mr. Chow says:

I start from the proposition police are employed in a position of trust. Given police are equipped with weapons, special equipment, powers to interfere with a citizen's liberty through detention and arrest along with the authority to exercise tremendous discretion enforcing a seemingly endless sea of laws, there is perhaps no greater fiduciary [duty] than that owed by police to the citizens they serve . . .

With all the privileges [that police have], there must also be accountability.

Section 38(1) of the Police Act . . . recognizes the special role of police in our society. According to s. 38, every police officer has the authority, responsibility and duty to encourage and assist the community in preventing crime and to encourage and foster a cooperative relationship between the police and community. This cannot be merely a high sounding objective, it must be meaningful.

He goes on to say:

I fail to understand how legislation insulating police who abuse their authority from a citizen's complaint encourages and fosters cooperative relationships between the police and public. The very existence of an open, tolerant and reasonably flexible citizen's complaint process supplies a valuable safeguard against abuses by those acting in the line of duty. By significantly diminishing the ability of a complainant to lodge and/or maintain a grievance through a principled citizen's complaint process creates a reasonable apprehension that Government is prepared to protect law enforcement from having its excesses scrutinized by those empowered to defend the public interest.

The irony is Government exists to represent the public interest; yet the Alberta Government tables legislation which arguably offends its public interest mandate.

Why is the Alberta Government interested in insulating police from accountability?

Though the [Criminal Trial Lawyers Association] has succinctly and effectively expressed many of my concerns, I am compelled to add a few additional comments.

With respect to section 20 of the Police Amendment Act, 2010, it stipulates a wide range of circumstances whereby a complaint can be dismissed. An action can be dismissed if a complainant "fails to attend", "fails to answer questions", fails to produce an item required; is "unable" to participate, "refuses" to participate, fails to "follow processes" or fails to conduct himself or herself in an appropriate manner.

9:20

It does not take a particularly active imagination to envision a plethora of reasonable circumstances to justify any combination of "failures" that may now result in the dismissal of a complaint. By way of example, perhaps the complainant is remanded in custody? Perhaps the complainant has somehow been rendered incapacitated such that he or she cannot participate? What if the complainant has been incapacitated as a result of the actions of police? Perhaps the complainant is out of the country or cannot produce an item required due to an unfortunate event, such as fire, flood, theft or the seizure of materials by police who are the subject of the complaint? Perhaps the complainant has been accused by the police of a crime and must now exercise his or her Constitutional right to silence?

Though I could certainly compose a much more exhaustive list of examples, I think the point is made.

The fact that an action may be dismissed if a complainant fails to conduct himself in an appropriate manner is highly problematic; for there is no rational nexus between the conduct of a complainant in a proceeding and the alleged police conduct underlying the accusation. An unruly complainant may nevertheless have a highly legitimate grievance. To dismiss a justified grievance simply because a complainant somehow offends a Government tribunal, or falls into error adhering to process is antagonistic to the notion that the conduct underlying the complaint ought to be determined on the basis of all available evidence. In criminal law, courts consistently refuse to permit form to rule over substance; yet it appears the

Alberta Government is prepared to protect law enforcement in precisely this manner.

Section 42

Section 42.1(1) unreasonably restricts the class of complainant. A complaint may now only be brought by a "person" who was the subject of the conduct complained of, an agent of a person who was the subject of the conduct complained of, or a person who was present at the time of the incident and witnessed the conduct complained of, or a person who was in a personal relationship with the subject of the conduct complained of and suffered loss, damage, distress, danger or inconvenience as a result of the conduct.

This class limitation unduly restricts other persons or organizations acting in the public interest from launching a justified grievance. There are many reasons why the subject of the conduct complained of may not complain. Perhaps the target of the police conduct is afraid to lodge a complaint? Perhaps the target is accused by police of a crime and due to the practical realities of criminal justice, will not file a grievance out of fear police will place undue pressure on Prosecutors to pursue conviction in an effort to protect themselves from sanction through the citizen's complaint process? Though I am certain you will dismiss the latter example, my experience suggests police interference is a legitimate concern.

Whatever the case, it is ironic that the legislation effectively prevents a myriad of public officials, who represent the public interest, from lodging a complaint on behalf of the people whom they serve.

By way of example, Government employs Crown Prosecutors to act in the public interest. What if a Prosecutor became aware of information justifying a hearing into police misconduct? By operation of s. 42.1(1), absent authority to act as an agent, Crown's are incapable of filing a grievance because they do not fit into the class of persons entitled to make a complaint. Similar logic applies to any number of other groups acting in the public interest. These groups include police and other law enforcement officials, civil liberties organizations, the CTLA, city Alderman, a Mayor or even the Attorney General of Alberta, the Solicitor General of Alberta or the Prime Minister of Canada. That the Prime Minister of Canada or the Minister of Justice of Alberta (or others) would have to obtain specific authorization to act as an agent for an aggrieved party in order to advance a public interest complaint is not only absurd, it is inconsistent with the function of public office.

In the words of the CTLA, "[t]here is no basis for this [amendment] other than to disenfranchise those who are powerless to complain or afraid or who otherwise will not complain".

Section 43

Section 43 stipulates that if a complainant refuses or fails to participate in an investigation the commission may dismiss the complaint. Though I appreciate dismissal due to non-participation is permissive, the amendment is nevertheless impractical and arguably draconian in scope. As aforementioned, there may be any number of justified reasons explaining a complainant's non-participation in the complaint process. What is troubling is that a complaint can be dismissed even where evidence demonstrates the grievance to be justified. This defies both logic and common sense.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to leave out some sections here as they don't pertain to the amendment specifically. The letter concludes:

At the end of the day, I question the Alberta Government's motive for the amendments. Politically, morally and legally, it is inconsistent to our purportedly free and democratic society to enact laws shielding law enforcement from accountability. This is what Bill 27: The Police Amendment Act 2010 accomplishes.

Though I [am] becoming more inclined to think our legal principles are little more than high sounding, yet empty and meaningless rhetoric, I nevertheless naively believe, as Ritter J stated in *R v. Cornell*, [2009] . . . that "Canada is not a Police State". When my Government proposes brazen laws such as Bill 27: The Police Amendment Act 2010, it becomes increasingly more difficult to hold fast to such naivety.

Mr. Speaker, I think that letter speaks volumes with respect to some of the specifics related to this bill. I completely concur with

the author's contention that this is a bill designed to lessen the accountability of our police forces, and for the life of me I do not understand why this government is taking that direction. Given all of the difficulties that we've seen over the years in the public cases that have come to light, of which I've given only one example tonight, it really speaks to the importance of making sure that citizens and people acting in the public interest have access to an effective and flexible opportunity to bring police misconduct, where it does exist, to a satisfactory conclusion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on amendment A2. Please go ahead.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I, too, will speak to the amendment brought by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. He's brought up some very good points there. Most of those points relate to the fact that our police officers hold a very high and honoured position in our society. When they break their trust and when they overstep their bounds, there have to be rules and regulations in place where people can go to at least be heard and to have justice be done.

This act goes a long way in taking away some of those rights, in taking away the ability of people to get a fair hearing and a fair opportunity to be heard. The member did an excellent job of pointing out that sometimes in society things go off the rails, that there are bad things that happen even with an organization as honourable and well respected as the police. When that occurs, we have to be there to provide opportunities for civilian oversight, for the police to be held accountable. To have any ability for them to do their jobs, this is for their benefit as well. If people lose trust and faith in the police, they lose trust and faith in their government, and by extension they lose trust and faith in democracy. So that's why bills like these are important.

In my view, we are better off erring on the side of caution by allowing for more cases to be heard. I heard earlier that one of the things that the hon. minister heard in his travels was that, well, they wanted a case to be heard in quicker than five years. I agree that that's far too long. But the answer is not to make the process easier; it's to make the process better.

Either way, we need to then hire more people to do some investigative work. Give the LERB or other institutions the tools necessary to complete investigations inside of two years or less, to go forward and say, "We're going to invest in protecting the public," not simply ignore what is happening and say, "Let's try and get rid of a few malcontents" because it's easier. No. In my view, that's wrong. In some cases you can see where in the name of expediency and in the name of getting things done a little quicker, this government has cut corners. I believe this bill was brought in to cut corners and to not allow for people to be heard, to maybe keep some complaints down, for them to deal with the complaints process more quickly.

But that's not what this bill should be about. This bill should be about letting people be heard. That's why I agree that this is a bad bill that is going in the wrong direction in terms of civilian oversight and in terms of protecting our police officers, protecting the public confidence in our police officers. The police officers do, in turn, that service to us to allow for a democracy, to protect us from people who – there are some not very nice people in this world, and they do sometimes some horrible things, and we need the police to protect us from them.

9:30

That is all well and good, but at the same time we need an avenue where people can be heard, and this bill is taking away that avenue.

Given the importance of police, the importance of citizens wishing to be heard, I support this amendment and thank the hon. member for bringing it and would encourage all members to support it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 27 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We'll go back to the bill. Any hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole (continued)

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any amendments or questions to be offered? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I'm glad to have the opportunity to rise and speak in committee on Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I'm very frustrated by this bill because I as the Environment critic and my caucus do not object to carbon capture and storage or carbon capture sequestration per se, but we're very uncomfortable with this bill for a number of reasons. Let me just go through some of them.

The Minister of Energy in his opening remarks in second reading talked about how the International Energy Agency in their report from October of 2010, Carbon Capture and Storage: Legal and Regulatory Review – I'm sorry; I don't have the *Hansard*, so I don't have his exact remarks, but he gave me the impression that this was a stamp of approval from this agency. I asked him for a copy of the report, and he was kind enough to provide it for me immediately. Then, being the difficult gal that I am, I actually read it. You know what? It actually doesn't provide a stamp of approval. It's an arm's-length observation of how it has gone in different places.

I just want to quote from the article on page 9. This is talking about just generally gaining public acceptance. It's a little paragraph on how sometimes that's not as easy as it looks. They're using Germany as an example here.

Germany provides a striking example of the impact that public opposition can have on CCS regulatory frameworks. The German federal cabinet approved a draft CCS law in April 2009. Public consultations, which had begun before the cabinet's approval and continued with the German federal parliament into May, highlighted concerns over the risk of leakage, contamination of drinking water, safety and liability, and land rights. This led first to the inclusion in the draft law of a "sunset" clause, requiring the law to be reviewed in 2015, and then to the law being postponed until after the German federal elections in September 2009. The new government ex-

pressed its intention to implement the CCS law promptly in its coalition agreement of October 2009, but has acknowledged the importance of public acceptance. The draft law is [now] being amended to enhance the rights of site owners and emphasise that CCS must be technically proven before it is commercially applied.

Very interesting what someone a little bit ahead of us but not that far ahead of us has been going through.

I looked at what it had to say about Canada and Alberta. In fact, it talks about: "The federal government has the ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999." Well, yeah, it could be read that way. It goes on to say that overall the government supports the approach to climate change through harmonization of climate and energy policies, particularly looking at the United States.

I looked for the section on Alberta, and it says, "Alberta has well-developed regulatory frameworks in the oil and gas sector that are applicable to CCS projects." Well, again, yes, but the government is actually having to enable itself to enter this. So we had previous legislation which set out the money part of it, and we have this bill in front of us, which is actually setting out how it would enable this to happen.

Then it talks about that the Alberta CCS Development Council, with members from industry, academia, and government, concluded in its March '09 report that the regulatory preparedness was well advanced, and then it makes a number of recommendations on how outstanding issues such as pore space ownership and long-term liability could be addressed. So this is actually a straight-across review of what's going on. It isn't a stamp of approval by any means. It just says that this is where it's at, not as the minister was, I believe, trying to get me to believe.

When we look at the particulars of the bill, the first time I spoke to this, I spoke about — one of the areas that I'm truly conflicted about is contained in this bill, and in fact I just referred to it because it's around the ownership of that pore space. This is where I'm conflicted because I have some problem with the government kind of swooping in and taking something that people had for a long time believed they owned, and no one had disabused them of that belief. Now, when it gets important and/or it has money attached, the government says: well, no, actually we're taking all of that. So this is specific to the pore space.

I do believe generally in as much as possible communal ownership of our natural resources. It also makes sense to me that we would share, that all Albertans would share in this ownership, and it wouldn't be owned by a few people who happen to be standing on the right spot of land at the right time in our history to be able to derive economic benefit for themselves only from this process. This is where I struggle with this, because I'm not really comfortable with just coming to somebody and saying: "You thought it was yours, but — ha, ha; guess what? — it's not. We're taking it."

9:40

On the other hand, this is a newly discovered source of revenue, it's a newly discovered source of energy, and that is something that should be shared. I'm not comfortable with the way this has been directed. I think I'd be more comfortable if it acknowledged some sort of expropriation and it acknowledged that that's, in effect, what it was doing or if there was some compensation. I admit that when you start looking at compensation, it could become overwhelming to the point where everything stalled. I do believe that CCS is a useful tool but one tool, not the whole darn thing.

What I keep seeing this government doing is: "No problem. Keep doing what you're doing. Business as usual. Drive your cars like crazy. Don't stop whatever you're doing now. Don't worry about conservation. Don't worry about alternative energy. We're not

going to fund any of those things. But, hey, we've got this be-all and end-all where we're going to capture the carbon and stuff it underground. If we're really lucky and in the right place, we're actually going to use it for enhanced oil recovery. If we can get it stuffed down in the right place, it's going to get underneath the oil and push the oil up that we haven't been able to recover." I just think: hmm, that's not quite the way I'd like to go about things in Alberta.

I've thought about this quite a bit, and I think that supporting the bill demonstrates a support for some things that, again, I don't think are right and things that I'm struggling with accepting in this bill; that is, the government's decision to accept long-term liability, which is totally unknown in scope, on behalf of Albertans without acknowledging the amount of security that will be provided by the industry. The government said: well, in order to get industry involved in this and get them onboard, we're going to accept the long-term liability.

Well, that also means they're accepting risk for Albertans. I don't see any good explanations of how much risk or liability they think they're going to be accepting, just: come on down; we're going to accept it. I think this is where we as legislators have to be careful what we commit ourselves and what we commit future legislators to on behalf of the public. Because this is still fairly unknown, I'm not convinced that we won't be incurring a huge liability on behalf of current and future Albertans.

Let me go to the next stage of that. Based on the kinds of reclamation costs that we have seen thus far, I would argue that this government is never vigorous enough in setting out what kinds of money can be collected and put into a fund to pay for future reclamation. We have the example of how much Syncrude spent on its one acre of land called — no one around me remembers. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on that one acre of land. Yet the amount that they collect per acre from most involved in the industry is in the tens of dollars, not the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Right there we see a huge disparity between how much it actually costs today to reclaim land or to reposition it or to return it to something that's useful, however you want to describe that, versus in today's dollars how much we're collecting. There's a massive disparity there. Assuming that the government is going to keep operating the same way, we can expect that disparity to again show up in things like CCS and other kinds of resource development that they're involved with for any kind of reclamation or restoration.

Orphan wells is another one, and that's a perfect example of how stuff gets away from us. Again, it never occurred to people that companies would go bankrupt, they'd get bought, they'd get bought again, they'd split, they'd merge, they'd get bought again, and somewhere down the line everybody forgets where the wells were for, you know, company A now that you're in subsidiary M. They seem to have lost track of this. Now the liability is carried by Albertans to be able to reconstitute this. I just think it's very problematic, and I'm not willing to support that assumption that is in this act that the government should accept that long-term liability.

Secondly, the collection of the security that's meant to cover those costs of reclamation. What we're doing today is grossly insufficient, and I don't see a commitment to increasing that or to making it more reflective of the actual costs of reclamation. That's the second reason.

The third reason is the long-term costs associated with captured carbon. I've had this disagreement with people pretty close to me where I've said, "Oh, jeez; I still think it's unknown," and as soon as I said that, people jumped on me, saying: "No, it isn't. We've got something happening in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. We've got

something in Texas. We've got something happening all over the place, and it's all great." But none of these have been operating for very long. I think the longest one we've got is 20 years or maybe 30, but lots of them are much less than that.

In going through this report, that the Minister of Energy was kind enough to give to me, from the International Energy Agency, a surprising number are passing legislation and starting to get into this now. The number of dates that show up as 2009, 2010, expected to pass legislation in 2011 as this review looks across the world is very high, and when you do find an older piece of legislation, it's like I referred to in the Canadian example. Well, yes, it's environmental protection law, which can be used in certain circumstances to apply to CCS.

The fourth example is the issue I talked about of the government's removal of landowner rights. The pore space is what we're talking about here. Doing it without any kind of compensation really rankles me.

Lastly and, I think, most important is the fact that this is enabling legislation that is a shell bill, so we're getting no details in here. Everything is about: it's being decided by the minister. It all comes back to the minister, to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, or whoever is empowered by the minister. Everything else is going into regs. I just think that with something this big, this new, and this important, it should be coming out of this Chamber, not out of a government cabinet discussion.

You know, the golden rule is very helpful here, Mr. Chair. I know it never crosses the minds of my hon. colleagues opposite that they would be sitting over here some day, but use that golden rule and think about how happy you folks over there would be if I got to make all of those decisions behind that same door over there. I don't think you'd be very happy about that. You'd be wanting it to be discussed in here and to be able to bring in the opinions of your constituents and to be able to hash it out on the floor here. I don't think you'd be too happy about me making those decisions behind that closed door over there, with you having no input. So the golden rule is very interesting to apply and see how it fits. I don't think that one would fit all that well with you.

Because of those issues – well, I'll be interested to see the rest of the debate on this particular bill, to see if anybody can convince me otherwise. To my mind, there are too many things stacking up against support of this bill and not enough stacking up in favour of supporting the concept of CCS. It doesn't mean that I don't support the concept, but I really have trouble with the implementation of it, the way this particular government is going about it with Bill 24. So I look forward to the give-and-take of the Committee of the Whole debate on this bill, and I will take my seat and look forward to the issues being brought forward by others.

Thank you.

9:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. On the bill at this point. This really is an important bill for Albertans. There's no question that this is one of those bills that the government has brought forward that's going to have long-term impact on Albertans, Alberta taxpayers, and on those people who own the land. This bill is about basically expropriating the rights of pore space from surface owners and saying: "Well, don't worry about it. Everything will be okay. We're going to take on the liability. It's nothing to concern yourself with." Everything in the world points to that there is a lot to be concerned about.

It's interesting that just this past month the Shell carbon capture project in Barendrecht, Holland, was cancelled even though 90 per

cent of the cost was paid for by the Dutch government. The Dutch were giving a subsidy of \$100 per tonne of carbon dioxide. My question would be for the Minister of Energy. Why are we giving a subsidy of nearly \$850 per tonne of carbon dioxide? The math doesn't add up. The carbon capture math of this government is drastically different than the math of other countries. Holland was offering that \$100 a tonne subsidy, which paid for 90 per cent of the project. Why is this government paying \$856 per tonne for the project here? Shell is a leader in marketing carbon capture and storage projects around the world. Why would this government offer eight and a half times what the Dutch government offered and almost eight times the cost of the project that they're working on?

This government is giving to a few companies interested in the carbon capture rather than to a level playing field. But carbon capture projects are being killed around the world and could derail CCS entirely. The citizens of Holland, Germany, and the United States are speaking out against CCS. To the Minister of Energy again: why would we be expediting this bill through the House when the science is definitely not proven? The citizens around the world are speaking out, and the giving of a gift of \$850 per tonne to a few chosen companies is very concerning.

The Chicago Climate Exchange will be closing its doors on November – well, I think it did a couple of weeks ago. Again, we have to ask: what's happening here? We've been talking about climate change. This government has said that this is our solution to climate change and those people that are speaking out against it. But, boy, in the last year, since the Copenhagen accord, things have really changed.

I'd like to read an article from the *National Post* by Adrian MacNair on the 26th of November, 2010. He talks about three kinds of people on the Internet that you don't want to have a conversation with. He says:

The last – and in my opinion the most fervent – believers are those who worship at the altar of anthropogenic global warming. These people are so obsessed with their cause you get the sense they would imprison unbelievers if they had the power. And that's certainly been suggested by some of the high priests.

Otherwise likeable, ordinary folks can turn suddenly pretentious and indignant if you so much as joke that a cold snap in Vancouver means global warming went on vacation. This is an affront to their very belief system, and they will quickly remind you that global warming can result in more snow and cold just as readily as it can result in more drought, desertification, sand storms, windstorms, pine beetles, floods, forest fires, and earthquakes.

It isn't that I'm surprised anyone would believe in man-made climate change. It's a readily accepted theory by a majority of people and the scientific community. I would, however, caution that we continue to use the word theory in discussing the topic.

"I don't believe in global warming, I believe in the facts," the zealot will pontificate proudly.

Well, sure, but that depends on what sort of facts you're presenting. It's difficult for a lot of people to believe the hype about global warming when scientists consistently get their predictions wrong. And sometimes the scientific community doesn't just get it wrong; they don't even come close.

Scientists had been warning for years about the extinction of salmon in British Columbia. In 2007 senior fisheries biologists in Ireland predicted pink salmon stocks on the mid-coast could soon be expected to collapse into localized extinction because of sea lice infestations.

This year 34 million salmon returned to the Fraser River for spawning, turning science on its head and leaving the prognosticators running for their labs. Experts who had predicted 1.5 million salmon or less were left more than a little puzzled.

It's now suggested many of the salmon extinction reports were spread by activists hoping to damage the concept of B.C. salmon

farms for moralistic reasons rather than scientific ones.

The green fundamentalists who call for an immediate restructuring of post-industrialized civilization to cater to their theories are absurd individuals. They will shun you for disagreement, and even blacklist you for the audacity of unbelieving. I have met more humourless, fanatical, devoted environmentalist demagogues than I have of the religious equivalent.

Curiously, the punishment they promise unbelievers is death by flood, drought or starvation. It's like reading the book of Revelation.

The best thing to do when somebody goes on about the Armageddon is to smile, nod approvingly, and change the subject. Otherwise you risk the possibility of being called a heretic and burned at the metaphorical stake.

I have a live and let live attitude. If you want to believe that glacial meltwater spells the doom of the planet, so be it. Just don't force me to wear the uniform and march in the parades with you.

That was by Adrian MacNair, a very interesting article in the *National Post*.

Mr. Chair, there are a lot of questions right now. What's happened, again, in the last year with the facts that have come to light is rather scary when we look at what's been presented in the past and what we currently have before us in this bill, again declaring that if we don't do something right away, the glaciers are going to melt, the sea waters are going to come up, and the world as we know it is going to come to an end.

It's interesting, again, when we look at what's happened. England is a classic place that we can look at because they've been working quite diligently on this. Their leader over there said that they were going to do something about it. They were going to spend a lot of money. That's starting to fall apart over there. The people are starting to realize, you know: how much can we afford to spend on that?

I'm just trying to find the data on England. I think it was a hundred billion dollars. Here it is. The IPCC is the United Nations body that in 1995 allowed a single activist scientist, Ben Santer, to rewrite part of the key chapter 8 of the second assessment report, Detection of Climate Change and Attribution of Causes, in alarmist terms, changing a previous wording that had been agreed to among the other scientific authors. The rewriting was undertaken in order to make the chapter agree with politically contrived statements in the influential summary of the policy-makers – garbage in, garbage out – applied to computer modelling endeavors, applied to the economic studies that purport to give policy advice against the threat of future climate change.

How effective? According to the article in the *Times* of London, September 30, 2008, the U.K.'s plans to cut carbon emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 would reduce the world's temperature in 2100 by four ten-thousandths of a degree centigrade. Now, one might argue that it's still worth while. If everyone in the world did it, that might add up to something. But here's the number you need to begin your additions with. This plan is expected to cost as much as £100 billion.

Mr. Chair, as we look at this project and what they're trying to accomplish with Bill 24 and the \$2 billion that the government has put into carbon capture and storage, we find that it's an immense expense. The question is: how much good are we going to get out of it? I mean, earlier the opposition members talked about that by 2015 we'll be storing five megatonnes. According to their statistics and many other researchers in 2005 there were 240 megatonnes of emission. That means that we will store a total of 2 per cent of the emissions if everything goes as planned.

10:00

I have to say that I'm not impressed with the payout and the tremendous expenditure of taxpayers' dollars. I am a little bit

curious about how many emissions will be created by the storage process. I've talked about that before and the fact that many of those emissions that we can't capture and store come from vehicles. Even on a provincial scale the amount that will be stored is not that impressive considering what else we could do with this money. What's even more humbling is the amount that we think about, the increases, coming out of growing economies like Asia.

But we're hardly alone in pursuing expensive projects for the sake of greenwashing our government's record. Again, I referred to England and to Europe, the money that they're spending there, and a little bit about the Royal Dutch and what they're trying to do in Rotterdam. It's interesting when you look at that because Royal Dutch Shell really has been the leader around the world in carbon capture and storage.

I just want to go a little sideways here for a minute. We're talking here about carbon capture and storage.

Ms Blakeman: A minute?

Mr. Hinman: Well, then I'll come back.

Ms Blakeman: You were going sideways for . . .

Mr. Hinman: For 11 minutes, 32 seconds.

Ms Blakeman: That would be right.

Mr. Hinman: CCS is a long way from the government's hope of recapturing – I can't remember what they were saying. Is it a hundred billion dollars in oil, they think? Or is it \$10 billion? What did they say in this project? I think a hundred billion. The point they talk about, though, is enhanced oil recovery, which is very different than carbon capture and storage and how much we can put in. Often many members refer to the Weyburn enhanced oil recovery, and that's very different, where they actually have a very metered effect on how much CO₂ they're putting into the fields to flood that to enhance the oil recovery. The two projects often seem to get combined into one, that it's the same, and it isn't. Carbon storage is extremely different than enhanced oil recovery.

It's interesting. If, in fact, enhanced oil recovery is cost-effective, we would never need to subsidize any of these oil and gas companies because they'd look at the cost of injecting the compressed CO₂ versus the recovery. The government talks about the huge multiplication factor and how much money they're going to make. Well, if they're making that, whether it's a 30 per cent royalty – I'm not sure where it's going to be in the future – well, then, that would have to relate to corporations that are making huge profits.

Mr. Mason: Profit is not a dirty word.

Mr. Hinman: That is correct, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, profit is not a dirty word. That's what makes the free world function. We can do our philanthropy for those areas of the world that have dictatorships and other tyrannical leaders that are suppressing the people there and their rights.

It's interesting, to go back now to Rotterdam, that the residents and the town officials are opposing the plan, citing safety concerns and the project's experimental nature. An independent panel appointed by the national and provincial governments to assess the project said in April of last year that the plan sufficiently addressed safety concerns. The bill, again, doesn't. The people rose up there, and that now has been cancelled in an area that has been leading the world. Again, that was carbon capture and storage.

A major concern is and will continue to be: will this really remain stored under the ground with no worries? Most places in the world now are saying: "Well, gosh. If we're going to have to take on the liability, I'm not sure I want to do this." The sad part about this bill is that it's about confiscating the land of Albertans to pump CO₂ under their houses or their property. How is this kind of story going to reassure them? The fact of the matter is that when that CO₂ gets down into the storage facilities, if it comes in contact with water, it becomes an acid and starts to eat away at the cavity in which it's being stored. There are just many, many comments that have been discussed. Again, we don't know what the long-term effect is there.

It's interesting that Bill 24 talks about: oh, this storage is permanent. I think it's anything but permanent. It's just got so many questions and concerns for Albertans other than the economical ones. We need to really address and ask those questions. One of the points that this bill addresses, and whether properly or not is why we're debating this, is the clarification over ownership of the pore space in which the sequestered carbon dioxide is injected. It's just our case that this is wrong for the government to confiscate this and say: don't worry; everything will be okay.

Allocation of long-term liability for the intended permanent sequestration of CO₂, again, the intended permanent sequestration. Who is going to have the long-term liability? Again it's going to be the taxpayers here. Does it address the disappearing corporation and the creation of a postclosure stewardship fund? You know, we've got the orphaned well fund. Many people will argue that it doesn't even come close to the actual cost of if we were to clean up all the orphaned wells. What kind of a cost and how dangerous would it be to in fact put this into the ground and then wonder: well, what's the cost when the first leak appears? What's going to be the cost? What can happen? We know that death is certainly imminent if you're around and you get a blanket of CO₂ hugging the earth's surface where you're trying to live.

Mr. Chair, there are just so many concerns that need to be addressed in this bill and, again, questions that haven't been answered. That's probably the biggest disappointment that I've had in this government in the time that they've looked at this. What I would consider the duty of the government and the Energy minister is to actually produce the research papers, the reasons why, the cost-effectiveness, the economic cases of all of these things to say: look; this is where we expected to go. Yes, there are numerous reports, and there have been lots of studies done on this, but they're not complete. They usually actually end up creating more questions than answers that we need to look at.

I talked earlier about and I'll repeat it again because one kind of forgets all the studying and the notes done versus what we've presented here in the House but that we really want to look at cleaning up our atmosphere and the pollution – you know, the SO_x, the NO_x, and VOCs, the volatile organic compounds – that we know without a doubt the problems that these substances create when they're put into our atmosphere. We know currently that there is a huge spread, I guess I want to say, on what we're releasing into our atmosphere if we run combined-cycle natural gas generation versus the old coal plants that we have going here in the province, that are currently producing 60 per cent of the electricity in the province. We should be looking at major ways of cleaning up our industrial plants rather than looking at a small area where we're going to spend billions of dollars and not know if we're going to make a change in the temperature in the earth of less than four ten-thousandths of a degree in the next 50 years.

When we look at the balance on many of these things, we fail to ask the real question: is this the wisest and best place to spend taxpayers' money? It just seems like we're blinded by that, that that

isn't something to even consider, that all we need to do is push ahead and say that we're going to capture all of the CO₂ when, in fact, we're not able to do that, and to act like: "Well, now we're the heroes here. Look how much money we're spending." And bragging about it. This government is notorious for bragging about how much money they're spending on hospitals, the new beds they're building, how many miles of roads they're building, overpasses they're building, but they fail to ask the question: are we getting value for our money?

10:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm always fascinated by the speeches of the hon. members for Calgary-Glenmore and Airdrie-Chestermere when it comes to the question of climate change. You know, I think it's an alternate world view, and in the past I have called it akin to the Flat Earth Society. But there were three breathtaking logical lapses in the hon. member's last comments which I want to address. Then I'm going to introduce an amendment because I agree with them that this is a pretty bad bill, and we need to oppose it.

The first one is that because you call something a theory that it isn't proven, and that's not necessarily the case. If he doubts, for example, the theory of gravity, I would invite him to take a step off a very tall building and see if, in fact, the theory of gravity is merely a theory because it's called a theory, that it's not necessarily true. This argument is often used to counteract or argue against the theory of evolution as if it was not essentially true and proven because it's still called a theory. Science has a couple of meanings for theories. One is an untested hypothesis, and the other is a body of well-formulated and proven ideas that explain in a very reliable way certain phenomena.

He's also argued that because science can be wrong and scientists can be wrong, we therefore cannot accept scientific advice or scientific predictions. He used, for example, some misses in terms of predictions for the salmon run on the west coast. It is logically not correct that because science can be wrong, it therefore is completely unreliable and we can't depend on it. Certainly, in this case I think there is plenty of good science to indicate that the theory of climate change is correct, that it is caused by human activity primarily. I think the consensus among scientists is overwhelming.

The third point I'd like to make is – and I don't want anyone to interpret this as an argument in support of this bill or this carbon capture and storage project – the sense that because something has a very small, incremental impact that it's not worth doing. That has to be measured against the impact of not doing something. In this particular case it means, essentially, the deaths in future generations of billions of people and perhaps unforeseen consequences in terms of that.

Certainly, the glaciers are melting. Not universally but in almost all places, certainly in Canada, glaciers are melting very quickly. I invite the hon. member to pay a visit to the Columbia Icefield, between Jasper and Banff. When I was a small boy, my family visited that. I can see how much that glacier, one of the major glaciers in the Rocky Mountains, has receded just in the time between when I was a small boy and today. I know that's a long time, but in geological history it's a fraction of a second. You can see relentless loss. In fact, I think the hon. member's riding is on the Bow or the Elbow River, which is glacier fed, and the glacier, I believe, that feeds the Bow River has a life expectancy due to climate change measured in a very small number of decades. Then there are going to be some serious water shortages in southern

Alberta. The glacier that feeds the North Saskatchewan River has, I think, somewhat less than a hundred years left before it's gone, and the North Saskatchewan River will then become a seasonal river, with very low flows except in the spring. These impacts are very severe.

The question, though, is whether carbon capture and storage is the right way to go, and I don't think it is, Mr. Chairman, because you're not really getting at the problem. I have put my views on the record a number of times with respect to that.

As much as I enjoy all of my colleagues' company, it's not my intention to do so for six or eight hours from this point, so I would like to put my amendment on the floor so that we can debate it, and I can go home. This has to do with the information that you're allowed to have as a result of the application of this act. As it now stands, information required under this act – that is, reports that are required to be filed with the government – are not FOIPable, and the people don't have access to it. Now, this is a small point, but I believe that people should have access to information, and it should not be exempted.

I'm going to move on behalf of my hon. colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 2(18) by adding the following after the proposed section 114:

114.1 Notwithstanding section 50 of this Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act applies to a record or other information collected or generated under this Part.

I'll provide that to the table.

The Chair: We'll pause for a moment for the amendment to be distributed.

This amendment is now known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Well, the amendment is that we amend the act in section 2(18) by adding the following, numbered 114.1, under the proposed section 114: "Notwithstanding section 50 of this Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act applies to a record or other information collected or generated under this Part."

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that certain reports filed by lessees could be obtained through a freedom of information request. Section 50 of the Mines and Minerals Act exempts most information obtained under that act from the FOIP Act.

This amendment would add to section 2(18) of the bill, which begins on page 10 and continues to page 18; 2(18) would add part 9, entitled Sequestration of Captured Carbon Dioxide, to the act. Within that part lessees involved in CCS projects are required to file a number of reports with the government, reports which would not be available to the public through FOIP. These reports are under the proposed section 115(3)(a) on page 11. A lessee who has entered into an agreement to drill an evaluation well shall "submit a monitoring, measurement and verification plan."

10:20

Similarly, in the proposed section 116(3)(a) a lessee who has entered into an agreement to sequester carbon would be required to submit the same type of plan.

Finally, lessees would be required under the proposed section 120 to submit an application for a closure certificate.

Mr. Chairman, I will argue that there is a clear public interest in knowing the particulars of plans dealing with CCS projects. Members of the public should be able to make a request for access to such plans under the provisions of the Freedom of Information

and Protection of Privacy Act, and I would urge all hon. members to support this amendment so that that goal can be accomplished.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A2.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I think this is a good amendment because from the reading I've done, public buy-in, public trust, is a big part of the success of this.

I actually would have said that they're just supposed to post it or put it online. I don't know why we always allow stuff to be hidden, and then we allow for a FOIP to be put in place. It's just faster and cheaper if we just put it online, where people can go and see it for themselves. I mean, what's the big secret here? If this is a good system and it works, post it.

At the very least allow for members of the media, members of the opposition, members of the public, members of the industry to be able to apply through freedom of information and protection of privacy to get some of these plans so they could see exactly what was happening with the monitoring, measurement, and verification plan or that the plan, in fact, had been approved or that the reports that were expected for monitoring, measurement, and verification had been submitted or that the work requirements had fulfilled the agreement.

That's all perfectly reasonable, and that's what appears under this bill's section 2(18) under the sequestration of captured carbon dioxide, part 9. It appears between definition sections 114 and 115.

If you go on, section 116 is talking about agreements that grant the right to inject this, and the lessee of an agreement shall obtain a well licence and should in accordance with the regulations submit monitoring, measurement, and verification plans. They have to comply with these plans that have been approved. They have to provide reports. They have to fulfill the work requirements. It's the same checklist that appears in each case and, again, under section 120, which is the closure certificate, showing that they have complied with the requirements there. All of that should be readily available. Again, I would argue it should all be posted on the website, but at the very least it should be available through FOIP so that anybody can see what's going on here.

You know, having just gone through a review of the FOIP Act, one of the excuses that's used for not giving people faster, better information is that it's onerous for the group to try and find that information. One of my suggestions was: "Well, make it easier to post it on the website, and then everyone could see it, and it doesn't cost you any money to go looking in the boxes in the basement for it."

Yeah, I'll happily support this amendment. I think it's a good one, and it's certainly doable. It's all about transparency and accountability, and it allows the public to go searching themselves and finding out how things are going with these implementation plans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On amendment A2, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I would like to speak in favour of A2 as well. I'm not sure; I think that perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is the one that's stuck on the flat earth, but that's all a perspective view. When it comes to openness, accountability, and transparency, I think that we can agree that it's essential

for a free society to have freedom and access to that information. It's a concern, especially when this is such an unknown.

The monitoring of what's happening needs to be there, Mr. Chair. What causes the problem is when people can hide the fact of whether there has been a leak or whatever is going on, where the trust of the people in a government is lost. It just makes good sense in a democracy to ensure that the people are informed and have access to all this information.

I would have to agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I would even have to agree with the Member for Edmonton-Centre in that it should just be publicly posted. We shouldn't have to be filing for information all the time. She rightly mentioned – and I believe she sat on that committee – that the privacy act is overwhelming. They extended the time that the Privacy Commissioner can react from 90 days, I think, to a year because they can't get the information that's being requested out quick enough. We don't want to continue adding to that problem and costing more money to hire individuals to be retrieving this information to produce it for reporters, opposition, the public at large.

Mr. Chair, I hope that the government will accept this amendment so that we can ensure that the public and all the people of Alberta are able to follow and see the results and what's happening with CCS if, in fact, the projects go ahead.

The Chair: On the amendment, any other hon. member? The hon. Minister of Energy on the amendment.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I hesitate to get involved in the debate on this amendment because I don't want to drag it out any longer than I have to. By the member's own admission he wanted to speed up the process so he could go home. I'm disappointed that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood won't be around for the remainder of the debate on this bill if that's what, in fact, he is proposing to do.

I would encourage the Assembly to not approve this amendment, Mr. Chairman. There are a couple of things that are being asked for here. We have to remember that this legislation before the House today is enabling legislation that in all cases involves a partnership with the private sector. These are projects that require technology that may be very much proprietary to the participants and the partners in these projects.

We have made it very clear that there are a number of routes that we will undertake to ensure that the progress on these projects is well defined for the public and for members of this Assembly. There is no need to establish this in legislation.

With those few words, Mr. Chairman, I would encourage the Assembly to defeat this motion and grant the member his wish that he can go home.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just on that, to the minister: is it not the case that proprietary information is already exempt under provisions in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, that may very well be the case. As I said, we will be more than happy to ensure that the information of government will be provided.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I'm always delighted when the Minister of Energy engages in the discussion. I always find him quite knowledgeable about his area and certainly lively.

Where exactly in the sections that have been talked about covered by FOIP would the proprietary part come out? When we talked about the lessee of an agreement under section 116, "submit a monitoring, measurement and verification plan for approval," where in there would be the proprietary information exactly? So you submit, you comply with, and you provide reports on a monitoring measurement and verification plan. Where in there, exactly, would you be giving away proprietary information?

10:30

The other section where this came up was around well licences and approval of the board under the Oil and Gas Conservation Act prior to drilling or using a well for the purposes of this section. Again, the lessee, in accordance with the regs, is to submit, comply with, and provide reports on monitoring measurement and verification plans.

The final section that was covered by the request was under section 120. This is a closure certificate showing that the lessee has complied with section 119, which is cessation of injection, that they've complied with the reclamation requirements, and that all abandoned wells and facilities have been done in accordance with the requirements. Then we get into the closure period and the conditions specified in the regs and that it's behaving in a stable and predictable manner. So where in those three sections would you be giving away proprietary information?

Second to that, you know, one of the things I've learned since I came here is that there's a difference between the process and the ingredients; for example, what is used in the fracking substance that's injected. In the States they require you to say what's in it but not the recipe, how the components are mixed. Fair enough. At least you know. You can read and see whether they used diesel oil or not. But you don't know – that's like saying, "Here are the ingredients to Kentucky Fried Chicken," but it doesn't tell you how to mix it, in what proportion, so you're not going to end up with the same recipe. That's the second piece of this. If the minister objects to this on the grounds that it's going to interfere with proprietary information, where in here is the proprietary? Secondly, who's to say that the proprietary information can't be given in a way that gives us the information we need without jeopardizing their actual recipe? If I can use that wording.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A2.

Mr. Hinman: I guess I'd just like to get up and speak once more because I was disappointed to hear the Energy minister say, "Let's just go to the question," rather than answering the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

This isn't a problem about proprietary information. This is the government again not doing its due diligence in producing legislation that ensures the safety of Albertans in the storage of CO₂. This is the crux of the problem with this bill in that we don't know what it's going to do. We need to monitor those facilities, and it needs to be public. I would sure like the minister to get up and answer the question on proprietary information because that was not the intent of or what is going to be affected by this amendment. I would hope that they could come up with a plausible explanation rather than "Let's just vote on the question" so that everybody can say yea and not think about it anymore.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We shall now go to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the bill.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Back on the bill and the multiple problems of this bill again, I guess, to address a few of the concerns of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood before he leaves, this is very much the untested hypothesis that we're talking about on CCS. I need to ensure that you realize that. The astuteness of the member to say that the glaciers have been melting in his lifetime – I think almost everybody in this House realizes that the entire province, down to the southern region, was covered with a glacier and that for millions of years it's been receding. That isn't some new science that realizes: oh, my goodness, it's been receding. I mean, it's been doing it for millions of years, and we're at that far end of the cycle. In the '70s – I know the hon. member is old enough to remember the '70s – we actually thought the glacial period was turning around and we were going to be covered in ice again. Those scientists at that point had their hypothesis that this was the dilemma we were in.

So it is an unsettled science. As much as I read in the *National Post* article where Adrian very much is concerned about the zealots on this and the ability to challenge, there have been more and more scientists who have come out and spoken out against the problems of just reacting to this in a simplified manner and saying: oh, no, it's anthropogenic. The climate is changing; there is no denial of that. The Earth has gone through constant change in climate.

I spoke last time about the 900 million year chart of the Earth and how it goes through a cycle every 150 million years. It's been well documented in the cycles that go on here on this Earth inside the Milky Way Galaxy, so it's just ridiculous to think that all of those other things have no consequence anymore and that it's just the anthropogenic CO₂ that's coming out.

What we really need to be doing here – and again this is a dilemma with the bills that this government continues to bring forward. They're ill conceived, they're poorly thought out, and they don't look at the long-term consequences. You can go through bill after bill that this government's been passing. They are not in the best state that they should be, or perhaps more importantly, most of these bills should not even be in front of the House to be passed in this fall session.

It's very disappointing that this bill wasn't brought forward in the spring for Albertans to have a longer time to address it. But at this time, because there is very little question that this government is pushing this through, what we'll try and do is amend a bad bill that is not going to protect Albertans or the future and at least start by correcting some of the terminology and the problems with this bill.

I would like to propose an amendment at this time to Bill 24.

The Chair: We shall now pause for a brief moment while the pages distribute the amendment. The amendment is now known as amendment A3.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I propose that the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be amended in section 2(2)(c) in the proposed clause (y.1) by striking out "permanent" and substituting "long-term."

In here it says that sequestration means permanent disposal. That

simply isn't true. I mean, even going back a year and a half ago, in *The Economist* – I can't remember whether it was March or April – they talked about a 100-year lifespan of many of these storage facilities, and they estimated that 60 per cent of the CO₂ will have escaped within the next hundred years. I think that that's quite striking, to think that we would spend that much money for possibly a 60-year cycle. The point is that there are very few things that are permanent when it comes to building or containing or storing.

10:40

That's one of the problems with the nuclear industry. How do we permanently store the nuclear waste? There has been lots of debate about this, and now we're looking at declaring that we're permanently storing the CO₂. Mr. Chair, it's just one in a long list of problems with this. The question is: is there such a thing as permanent storage for CO₂? Are these caverns beneath Alberta, in the pore spaces that we have, a facility that we could possibly call permanent storage?

I think at this point I'll sit down and, hopefully, listen to the Energy minister and see if his response is amiable or whether he's opposed to this as well, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wish to join in the debate on amendment A3?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I won't disappoint the hon. member. What's very clear in this bill, Mr. Chairman, is that it is the intention of this government. We are not skeptics, like those who sit in that end of the Chamber, who believe that somehow this storage is going to be leaking in 60 years. We believe it is permanent, and that's what it should say in the legislation. Members should defeat this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo on amendment A3.

Mr. Boutillier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just looking to see if anyone is saying anything over there now. They're pretty quiet. The Minister of Energy just simply said "skeptics." He's a politician, not a scientist. Clearly, we are not skeptics; we are pragmatists. We believe in what we're listening to and what we're hearing from our constituents. I'm proud to say, unlike the Minister of Energy, who can't say it, that my constituency is the oil sands capital of the world. In fact, I'd encourage him to visit. Maybe he can learn something from what's going on there. Actually, I have to credit the member because he did come. During the petroleum trade show he did come out for an hour or two. I guess that was good if you like an hour or two.

Having said that, I want to say that we are not skeptics. We are practical, we are pragmatists, and we believe in Mother Earth. We listen to our constituents. Mother Earth, by the way, was created by the Creator, believe it or not. Mr. Chairman, we are not skeptics. Contrary to what was being suggested by the Minister of Energy, nothing could be further from the truth.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on amendment A3.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. I find it really funny whenever a cabinet minister gets up and says, "we believe." Like, all 67 in lockstep: we believe. It really is like a little church group over there; it's really quite something. I would hope, in fact I know, that there are many people over on that side that are very much skeptical of the

debate, so for this minister to put words in the mouths of other members by saying “we believe” is really quite rich, as scientifically gifted as the member is, of course.

I know this is going to be a foreign concept for the minister, but in the Wildrose we have free speech and free votes and the ability to think freely. We actually have many different viewpoints in the Wildrose. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has a viewpoint. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a different viewpoint on this issue, as does the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, as do I.

For example, I would describe the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore as truly a skeptic of the science. I would say that I am much more open to the idea. I think that there is a case to be made that carbon dioxide is affecting the planet's temperature. However, I do feel that there is a very robust debate going on as to the extent of that effect and as to whether the things that we are doing here in the province of Alberta, in Canada, even in North America will have any material effect whatsoever on curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

Now, I hope that doesn't make me a member of the Flat Earth Society because there really are a lot of smart people that – you know, some of those smart people are in the U.K. Royal Society. They just released a really good report if you have a chance. Obviously, it's one group of scientists' viewpoint, and those change. The IPCC has a different viewpoint, and there are other groups that have different viewpoints.

Obviously, the Royal Society is a very respected scientific organization in the world, and they've kind of gone through and they've said: okay; here's the science, with all of the media reports and all of the faulty reports, frankly, that have come out of the United Nations on climate change – it's not all aspects but some aspects – and all the debate about the e-mail, climategate as it's called, where there were obviously some untoward things going on, at least at that university, one of the foremost universities on climate change, East Anglia.

The Chair: Hon. member, may I just draw to your attention that this is Committee of the Whole? We talk about details of the bill, and there's an amendment here.

Mr. Anderson: Why do you always – man, I was just getting revved up. This is good stuff here.

Well, anyway, on the amendment, we're talking about permanent versus long term. Unless we have an understanding, why would we want to permanently store something that may not be hurting the planet? I want to go back. That's where the relevance is. I want to make sure that there's an understanding of where my viewpoint is, whether there's any need to have permanent storage, whether this is, in fact, a harmful gas.

Going back to what I was saying, you have the Royal Society, that has this literature, and it actually goes through and says: here's where the science is clearly settled, and then here's where it's generally settled but where there is some debate as to extent, et cetera, and then here's where science is completely unsettled on climate change. It's a great document, and I think that, absolutely, the Minister of Environment should definitely read it. But there are a lot of areas where we need to learn more.

I hope that we don't fall into the trap in this Assembly of trying to pigeonhole people into certain belief systems, which is clearly not true and clearly disingenuous. I think everyone should account for how they feel personally about a subject or what their studies have shown them. You know, I really enjoy this subject. I enjoy learning more about it. I enjoy all the different viewpoints on it.

One of the things that is very uncertain according to the Royal

Society is the extent to which global warming is happening. I believe it is occurring. I do believe that man is one of the causes of it, but the extent is extremely uncertain. That's, actually, in both the IPCC report as well as in the Royal Society report. They give the thing where they predict that in the next 100 years because of global warming it will increase anywhere from 1.5 degrees to seven degrees Celsius. I mean, that's a huge, absolutely monstrous variation, that shows just how unsettled the science is around that issue. They say that in the next 20 years it's likely to be anywhere from 0.2 to 0.4 degrees Celsius, and then it will speed up after that. I mean, they're the scientists. I'm not. I'm just reading what they put in front of me. That's all I can do.

10:50

As a politician and as someone who has to sit in the House and try to contribute to decisions made by this House, I feel that it's important that we get a little bit of control and start thinking a little bit more clearly about what we are talking about here. We're not talking about a science that is totally settled. There are a lot of different questions. Before we jump into the arena and before we start using words like “permanent” and so forth, before we start spending massive amounts of money and so forth on something like this, I think we should really start thinking about: is this the right use of taxpayer money, or are we completely overcorrecting or going down the wrong path, doing something for no reason just to be seen to be doing something?

If you think about it, if the variation is 1.5 to seven degrees over the next hundred years and Alberta is responsible for 0.01 per cent or something like that of the Earth's greenhouse gas emissions and with China doing what they're doing, just throwing massive amounts of coal plants on, and India and everyone else, the emissions are just going through the roof. Why are we spending such an exorbitant amount of money on a technology that may not even work on the scale that this government is saying that it can be used for? Why are we taking on all these costs?

I would say that I think what's more important is that we use our time to think about ways we can cut greenhouse gas emissions and do so in ways that won't just cut greenhouse gas emissions but also will cut other pollutants as well, NOx and SOx and particulates of all kinds, all kinds of things that we should be looking towards, and I don't see this as being a way of doing it, certainly not an economic way.

If we're going to spend \$2 billion on this permanent solution, as it says in the amendment here, I guess I would ask: why don't we spend it on something that's actually going to help the province economically and help the individual person in society in our province to, you know, be more productive and to have more utility; for example, mass transit? There is a way we can cut greenhouse gas emissions. We can cut other emissions. We can unclog roads. We can accomplish different things with that. Incentives for retrofitting our houses to be more energy efficient, to use less electricity and natural gas: these are common-sense solutions. I think that the money that we're spending on this would be far better spent on the things that I mentioned rather than pumping CO₂ into the ground. I think that's a gross misuse of taxpayer funds, and it's a bit of a pipe dream.

The funny thing is that even if we capture every last particle of carbon, it isn't going to make a lick of difference in stopping the 1.5 to seven degree greenhouse gas that is happening. Until China and India, those guys, get on board, it ain't going to work. People say: we'll make the technology here, and then we'll expand it to China. I don't know. I mean, it just will not happen. It will not happen unless it's economically viable because that's how the world works, and economically viable is enhanced oil recovery.

From the amendment, Mr. Chair, using some of this permanent CO₂, to pump it underneath there and get the oil out of the ground: well, if that is economic, great. Then companies should be able to afford to do it by themselves. They don't need a grant from the government. If it's economic, great. They can do that, and they can recover it and all that sort of thing. But if it's not economical, which this isn't, which is why we need to provide a big granting program, then why are we doing it? Why is government getting in the business of being in business and saying: we're going to put in this investment because we're going to get all the money back in royalties? Well, no. Since when? Then we may as well just take over our entire oil and gas industry for that reason. I mean, it just doesn't make any sense. [some applause] Well, yes, one member is in favour of that, but the rest? Well, maybe two, maybe three or four. Who knows?

I think most members in the Assembly would agree that that's a bad idea. Government just should not be in the business of deciding what technologies, et cetera, are going to be used to extract our resources, especially if they're not proven on the scale that this is being contemplated and especially when public opinion has so clearly shifted against these types of projects.

I mean, if the NDP, you know – actually, I'm not going to speak for the Liberals on this because I'm tired and I can't remember where they are on this issue. I know where they are on CO₂; I'm just not sure about the carbon capture and storage thing. I'm sorry. I have to be reminded by one of the members over there. But the Wildrose and, I know, many of the members – I mean, we agree that this is a bad bill. This isn't the way to go. Even though we're coming at it from two different angles, reasons why we don't like it, we still believe it's a total waste. If it was such a good environmental idea, you'd think these guys would be running all over the place saying: oh, wonderful. But they're not, and neither are we because we think it's a bad idea as well. It's a waste of taxpayer money, and it does nothing to help the environment. It's not practical.

I think we need to make sure in this Assembly that we don't judge people and say: "Look, this is the way that group thinks. They're cynics. You know, they're all just cynics." No. There are many different, varying degrees of where we're coming from on this, but one thing we do all agree on – I know that – is that government should not be subsidizing industry to the point of \$2 billion to do what industry should be able to do for itself if it's economically viable as is claimed. That's something, I think, we can all agree on.

Do we need to move forward on doing things that are going to cut emissions, greenhouse gas emissions and all other emissions? Absolutely. At least, I believe that. But I think that this is just the absolute wrong way to do it.

With that, Mr. Chair, I wanted to make sure that it was on the record that we have a diversity of opinion in the Wildrose caucus on the subject. We have the ability to openly vote and freely vote in the way that we feel is appropriate. The one thing we are unified in: this is a total and complete and utter waste of taxpayer money for absolutely no reason.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've had some good progress and discussion on this bill this evening. Given that the hour is approaching or encroaching or moving forward, let's say, I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would now move that the committee rise and report Bill 24.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 24. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now adjourn until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 30, 2010

Issue 49a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 30, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly RCMP Deputy Commissioner Dale McGowan, who is in your gallery today. Deputy Commissioner McGowan was recently appointed commanding officer of K Division in Alberta and, as such, is responsible for all RCMP operations in Alberta, including the RCMP as Alberta's provincial police service. He was born and raised in Edmonton and, since joining the RCMP in 1978, has served in a variety of senior positions in Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and all three northern territories. He brings a wealth of operational, northern, and First Nations experience, and I look forward to working with him to continue the excellent relationship we have with the RCMP here in Alberta. With the Deputy Commissioner today is RCMP Inspector Glenn de Goeij. I ask them both to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly a very distinguished group of Albertans, all of whom have been associated in one way or another with naval service in Canada. This group is representative of the Jenny Wrens of Edmonton, the Edmonton branch of HMCS Nonsuch, and the Royal Canadian Naval Association. I've asked them here today so that as an Assembly we can show our gratitude to them for their selfless contribution to Canada and assist in commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Canadian navy.

Mr. Speaker, these distinguished guests, five veterans among them, are seated in your gallery, and I would ask that each stand as I call their names: Lieutenant Commander Frank van Staaldin, commanding officer, HMCS Nonsuch; Lieutenant (Navy) Tim Cusack, executive officer, HMCS Nonsuch; Captain (Navy) Glen Power, retired, past commanding officer, HMCS Nonsuch; Captain (Navy) Edward Brownfield, retired, past commanding officer, HMCS Nonsuch; Lieutenant (Navy) Jim Humphries, president, Naval Officers' Association of Edmonton; Mr. Gordon Wright, president, Royal Canadian Naval Association, and World War II veteran, who served in the Battle of the Atlantic; Ms June Greig, secretary/treasurer, Royal Canadian Naval Association, area division for prairies for the national association; Mrs. Hazel Juchli, president, Jenny Wrens of Edmonton, and World War II veteran; Mrs. Ruby Marles, member of the Jenny Wrens of Edmonton and World War II veteran; and Mr. and Mrs. Warren and Jean Urquhart, representing the Royal Canadian Naval Association.

Mr. Speaker, these guests are seated in your gallery, and I'm very proud to introduce such a distinguished group. I'd ask that all members join me in providing them the traditional warm welcome of our House. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House guests from the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They are 33 wonderful students filled with passion for education from St. Anne Catholic elementary school, where with pride they emulate their school motto, The Little School with a Big Heart. I know from meeting very briefly today with these great kids and their adult helpers and teachers that this is absolutely true. It's my pleasure to introduce who's in the gallery, beginning with teachers and group leaders Mrs. Amber Morgan-Manchuk, Mrs. Sylvia Prodor, Mrs. Isabel Dennis, Mrs. Oksana Marchioro, Mrs. Margaret Gagliardi, and Ms Aurelia Uarsama. I would now ask the students of St. Anne school to please rise along with their teachers and parent helpers so that we can give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There are many terrific schools in the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. McKernan elementary/junior high is among the best. It has produced at least two of the current members of this Assembly and at least one former member of this Assembly. It's a very accomplished school. We're visited today by 35 visitors related to McKernan, two classes of students. There are three teachers – Mme Jasmine Kinjo, Mrs. Stephanie Garcia, and Miss Michelle Villetard – and two parent helpers, Ms Andrea Smith and Ms Anita Lum. I welcome them to this Assembly and hope that that school continues to produce many fine MLAs. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all of us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 28 visitors from Belmead elementary school in Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'd like to ask Mrs. Lisa Zimmer, Ms Pat Sachse-Brown, principal, Mr. Darrell Cass, Mr. Ramsey Albert, and all the students to stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest who is here from India, Mr. Manjinder Singh Chaudhary, who is secretary in charge of the frontal organization of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee. He is visiting Alberta for the first time. He is accompanied by some very special guests from my area – Mr. Dave Purewal, Mr. Paul Hundal, and Mr. Harinder Kailay – who are showing him around our beautiful city and our province. I would ask them all to be warmly greeted by the Assembly on this special occasion. Welcome. Ji aian nu.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an honour today on behalf of our Deputy Premier to introduce a group of eight members of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS as it's known, representing over 70,000 students from the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I ask each to stand and then at the conclusion the warm applause, please, of the Assembly. May I introduce Hardave Birk, CAUS chair and U of C Students' Union vice-president external; Keith McLaughlin, CAUS vice-chair and University of Alberta Students' Union vice-president academic; Nick Dehod, University of Alberta Students' Union president; Lauren Webber, University of Calgary Students' Union president; Taz Kassam, University of Lethbridge Students' Union president; Aden Murphy, University of Alberta Students' Union vice-president external; Andrew McIntyre, University of Calgary Students' Union government relations adviser; and, last but not least, Duncan Wojtaszek, CAUS executive director. Ladies and gentlemen, our wonderful student representatives.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to select one individual out of the group that was just introduced. I don't know if it's appropriate or not, but I'd like to introduce her again. Her name is Lauren Webber, and she happens to be my daughter. She's the president of the University of Calgary Students' Union, and I'm quite proud of her. Hello, Lauren.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

1:40

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a baseball coach I had the privilege of coaching a lot of fine young people, and four of them are with us today in the members' gallery. It's my great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature these four young men. If they would rise as I call their names and then remain standing. Clark Banack, from just north of Camrose, is just finishing off his PhD in religion and political thought in Alberta and has a particular interest in rural politics. Ryan Falk, from Ferintosh, now living in Edmonton, works for Service Alberta, and I'm very pleased to see that he is a team lead on collections, so he's trying to keep us in the black. Jason Buzzell, who is our American import, actually came up here to play hockey. He's got a degree in journalism from the University of Nebraska in Omaha and is a linesman in the Alberta Junior Hockey League. And my son, Hans Olson, has a degree in philosophy from Augustana in Camrose and is working for the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation. He's a filmmaker. He studied in Vancouver and Toronto, and he's now my roommate. He's moved back home to Alberta. If you would all, please, give them your warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you four members of the CCSVI Edmonton organization: Tanya Allen, Lorraine Bodie, Brenda Requier, and Warren Stefanuk. Sadly, three of these individuals have been directly affected by multiple sclerosis and one has a family member affected by the disease. They are here today to urge the government to fund CCSVI clinical trials for over 11,000

Albertans who suffer from MS. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Wayde Lever, president of the Wildrose Alliance Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood Constituency Association and our candidate in that same riding. Wayde currently serves as the chairman of the Innovative Housing Society of Canada and has been an active member of the community, volunteering with the Cerebral Palsy Association, Artspace Housing Co-op, and the Canadian Burn Foundation. He has resided in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for over 13 years and is proud to call Edmonton home. It is my pleasure to welcome Wayde to the Wildrose Alliance team. I would ask that all members offer him the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives from local lodge 99 of the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers: Neil Rudiger, president; Rick Arsenault, directing business rep; and Kevin Clark, business representative. My guests are here today representing the 40 maintenance workers at the Calgary Stampede who exercised their democratic rights and joined the machinists' union local 99 on April 8 of this year. This small group of employees is looking for a fair and equitable collective agreement that reflects the western values and heritage of co-operation. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and they've risen. I would now ask the Legislature to provide to them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a visitor from Lebanon, Mr. Yahya Ammar, visiting family and friends. This 83-year-old soldier turned historian, author, and poet is fluent in three different languages: Arabic, English, and French. He authored several books on the history of the Middle East and wrote many passionate poems, including one for the city of Edmonton. During a short visit with this wise man last night he told me that he strongly believes that Alberta is the best place on earth in which to live, work, and raise a family. My guest today is accompanied by Mr. Kamal Amar, Mr. Waseem Jabre, and of course my friend and the friend of the hon. Minister of the Employment and Immigration, Dr. Ziad Aboultaif. They're all seated in the members' gallery. They have risen, and I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Canadian Naval Centennial

Mr. Horne: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. A few moments ago I introduced some very distinguished guests who are in the House today to help commemorate the Canadian naval centennial. Fellow members will have received a naval centennial commemorative pin on their desk as they came into the House this afternoon.

The centennial is an extremely significant milestone both in our

navy and in our nation's history, Mr. Speaker. Events across Canada over the past several months have focused on honouring the proud past of the navy, showcasing today's navy and, perhaps most importantly, highlighting the very important role the navy will continue to play in Canada's future.

Although we are a landlocked province, Albertans, including our guests today, have a proud tradition of service to Canada through the navy and naval reserve over many decades. HMCS Nonsuch, the Edmonton division of the Canadian Naval Reserve, has seen several thousand naval volunteers pass through basic training since the White Ensign was first run up in Edmonton in April 1923. While the idea of sailors in Edmonton was unheard of at the time, the leadership and determination of the late Lieutenant Commander Athol Blair MacLeod, a veteran of the First World War, resulted in the establishment of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve Edmonton Half-company. Since that time the sense of duty and willingness to sacrifice all on the part of all who have passed through Nonsuch has continued to make Alberta and Canada proud.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask my fellow colleagues to join in honouring all of these sailors as well as thank all the individuals in the organizations that they represent for their courageous work, for their dedication, and for being such a tremendous example to us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health System Governance

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it remains an honour and a privilege to be a strong voice for the people of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. It is said that we can all learn from history. This past week what started as an ER crisis evolved into cookiegate, followed by the ejection of the only ER doctor, the MLA from Edmonton-Meadowlark, and that was after a two and a half hour meeting with the Premier, then the firing of CEO Duckett, and the resignation of not three but four superboard members.

I quote one board member, Dr. Andreas Laupacis, who said: it's also my impression that the blurring of the boundary of the superboard and the ministry of health creates confusion of who actually is making the decisions. Quite an indictment, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans don't embarrass easily, but this week took the cake. As I reviewed feedback from my constituents, I feel there is a need to offer something positive and hopeful. As the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere often says, I've never seen Albertans more engaged in provincial politics than they are now. There is a sort of political renaissance going on in every corner of our province, and as embarrassed and disappointed as our government has made us feel, I'm equally proud of how we are seeing Albertans reunited and responding, our true bosses.

There is a movement sweeping our province right now, and the reason is simple. Albertans want their MLAs to work for them. They are tired of their MLAs placing loyalty to their political party line over loyalty to the very people they're supposed to serve. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has not forgotten who his bosses are.

It is said that you can measure the character of a person not during times of comfort and convenience but, rather, during times of challenge and controversy. This week, like most Albertans, we witnessed a rare display of character, and it's a shining example that surely will lead to a more true representative and democratic province.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Publicly Funded Health Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The secret document which revealed plans to bring in two-tiered American-style health care that we released yesterday is dated July 12, 2010. The minister of health was on the job at that time, so there's no way he can pass the buck on this one. To the Premier: the minister of health is quoted in the media as saying, quote, I want to make it clear that this is not my document. End quote. How will the minister substantiate his statements? Or is the minister saying that this scheme is being hatched right under his nose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to take that question. It's a simple statement of fact that it is not a document that I authored. What it is is a document that reflects concerns, opinions, and comments from Albertans, and inasmuch as there are some things in there that we looked at and decided not to do – specifically, I went out and said that I'm not going to do this – we have to listen to what Albertans have to say.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Well, I guess all of us are wondering why it was kept so secret for so long. This document is dated four months ago and clearly shows that the government is planning to open the health care system to private insurance and private delivery. How can the minister explain the contradiction between himself and the Premier on what purpose this document has?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's no contradiction whatsoever. What would be the point of releasing a document that you're not going to implement? There are parts in it that are okay, and there are a lot of parts in it that aren't. We're not going to put stuff out there that possibly might contravene the principles of the Canada Health Act or that might contravene current Alberta legislation. There's just no point to doing that. Why would you fuel that speculation?

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans did not go into an election asking for the failed experiment we have today with the Alberta Health Services Board. This secret document reveals that this government is going to betray Albertans again after the next election. Will the Premier commit right now that he supports a publicly delivered, single-payer health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think we've made it very clear and the Premier has made it very clear. We are not looking at anything to do with a two-tiered system in this province. We are firmly committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act. That's why we want to get that legislation through and done with. Let's get on with that.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of health said, "The role and the mandate of the Alberta Health Services Board is very clear." But Dr. Andreas Laupacis said

he resigned because of, quote, increased blurring of the roles between Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness. End quote. To the Premier again: how does the Premier explain this conflict?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is a roles and mandate document that is coming forward that will put even more clarity to the issue. The simple fact is that as the Minister of Health and Wellness I am ultimately responsible for what goes on in health. I will take that responsibility and I will take that accountability because that's what Albertans expect. They also expect action. That's why we released . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Ken Hughes last week said that Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness need to clarify roles and responsibilities, but the minister of health says everything is clear. Again to the Premier: who is out to lunch, the board chairman or the minister?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's clearly understand here. There are two arms in health care. One of them is the department. It deals with health legislation, health regulation, health policy, strategic directions and so on, the global budget. The other arm is responsible for delivering it. That's called Alberta Health Services. They have their own structure. They have their own committees. Both arms report to the minister of health. I don't know how many more times people want me to explain that. Ultimately I am the elected person who is responsible. That's just simple straight fact.

Dr. Swann: Simple straight fact to the minister but not to his board chairman. How does one explain that, Mr. Minister? Dr. Laupacis also said that the minister of health delayed the release of strategic documents for months. For example, the 2010 capital health plan for Edmonton and Calgary is still stuck on the minister's desk, and 11 months are gone. Will the Premier admit that political meddling by him has brought this plan to its knees?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I've only been in the job about 9 months, not 11. I don't know where he's counting that all up. Ten months. Sorry.

The point here is that we do have a strategic capital infrastructure plan. We rolled out the first part of it in July. It's about \$2.4 billion, and as I've indicated, I will be rolling out the Edmonton and the Calgary plans very soon.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my former partner and colleague, the Minister of Health and Wellness. On July 5, 2010, you and your DM and ADMs approved the leaked document Alberta's Health Legislation: Moving Forward. Later your current PA presented it to all government MLAs, where the controversial items of phase 2 of the Alberta Health Act were discussed: from changing legislation from prescriptive to enabling, putting everything under regulations, private insurance, and physicians opting out based on the Chaoulli decision. At what point after my removal was the decision made to not move forward with this strategic policy?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which particular meeting he's talking about. The leaked document is dated July 12,

and I wasn't here at that time. The point here is that there's a lot of input that that hon. member provided, and for that we thanked him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you. To the same minister: given that on March 2, 2000, Bill 11 was first read into this Assembly, claiming to ensure the well-being of the public health care system in the province while helping to reduce wait lists, what is the difference between Bill 17 and Bill 11 and the third way?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what is infinitely different today than some of the past historic moments the member may be reliving is that we now have a five-year funding commitment, and today in this province we have a five-year action plan with very detailed, specific performance measures that will improve access to the health system, that will reduce wait times, that will give us greater stability in the system, the best ever and the first of its kind, the most ambitious and the most aggressive agenda in the history of this country.

Dr. Sherman: To the same minister. Given that on page 26 of Alberta's five-year action plan mid- to long-term goals include phase 2, changes to regulations, policies, and to the Public Health Act, can you honestly say, Minister, that the third way is DOA, or are you actually just keeping it on life support until after the next election?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many more times we have to make this clear. There is no agenda of that sort whatsoever. There are opinions that were expressed by Albertans, and they were put forward in a very open, honest fashion. Just because some Albertans may have opinions different from some of ours, it doesn't mean they don't deserve to have them reflected in a document for consideration. We considered them, and we decided against some of what they asked for. I don't think that that bears any further clarification.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Alberta Health Services Board

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday a fourth member of the AHS board resigned. Why? Because of, and I quote, interference from the minister of health in the AHS board's decision about how to deal with Dr. Duckett. The minister of health keeps saying that AHS is an arm's-length board that makes their own decisions. Two arms, neither of them knows what the other one is talking about. Then yesterday the minister confused us again, saying that the board will respond to the minister when it is required. To the minister of health: is the board independent or not? Which arm are we talking about?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the board is, has, and going forward will always be arm's length, but they report to the minister. It's in legislation. I don't understand why somebody is questioning the legislation. If you want to change the legislation, then stand up and say so. The fact is that the lines are very clear.

The other fact, Mr. Speaker, is that I have worked with the board chair and with the board to make some important decisions together. Why? Because we have a five-year funding plan that is very different than not having one and then looking for \$1.3 billion in savings.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of listening to

this minister, so let's try one more. Okay. You seem to think that it's best to leave things up to the experts who know the most about health and administration, but clearly you can't help but interfere. Will the minister admit that the resignations are at least partially his fault? Yes or no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, what people choose to do as individuals is totally up to them. That is absolutely fundamental, and I respect that. But when you're talking about moving ahead and moving forward, what Albertans want is what we released today: this document, the 5-Year Health Action Plan, that talks about what we're doing. It's time for less talk and more action, and the hon. member might want to observe that.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans want is the truth. Clearly, having one board in Edmonton making all the decisions is too tempting for any minister to keep his nose out of it. Independence is impossible. Will the minister admit that decentralized boards would be more independent and would save him from the temptations that he can't resist?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear that the Alberta Health Services Board was established by ministerial order under the Regional Health Authorities Act, and it's very clear that it is accountable to the minister for the delivery and operation of the public health system. And that's what they're trying to do: operate the public health system. They get their money – guess from whom? – from the taxpayers. Guess who has to sign off on that budget? I do. I'm accountable for it, and so are they for delivering and operating within those parameters, and they're doing a pretty good job of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:00 Publicly Funded Health Care (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister is not a doctor, but he could sure play one on TV. Yesterday a document was leaked outlining the PC government's political strategy for privatized health care. This government has twice been re-elected by denying its true intentions regarding privatization of our health care system. Now their plan to do it yet a third time has been exposed. My question is to the Premier. Why don't you just admit that Albertans cannot trust this PC government with our health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to take that question for the Premier because the answers are just very straightforward, and the member knows this. What they can rely on is for this government to continue addressing their priorities. What are those priorities? Improve our access, reduce our wait times, build a first-class health system, give us the best performing system in Canada, and that's what we're doing. That's why I keep showing these documents, because people want action already. It's enough of this rhetoric. Let's get on with the plans. That's what we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, if people really want action, they're going to have to elect a new government. Mr. Speaker, this minister announces and reannounces and

reannounces money, commitments to hire people, all kinds of targets that are supposed to be met, and nobody, frankly, believes it anymore. The document shows that the government wants to have private insurance, delisting of services, private delivery, and physicians opting in and out of the public health system. Why should people trust this government to protect their health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is because we've proven ourselves, and we're going to prove it again. That's why we released and made public this five-year plan for performance measures and performance targets. In here you will find 50 different performance measures, which are public, that the folks of Alberta can look at, can monitor, can track, and which Alberta Health Services will report on every quarter. Nobody else does that except here in Alberta, and that's trust.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, nobody trusts this government to do what they're saying they're going to do. It's obvious that they can't be trusted with respect to the health care system. I want to ask the health minister why he thinks that the five-year plan and the five-year funding plan are going to last any more than a year and a half, which is about when the next election is. Once the election is over, those promises are gone.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the simple fact is that this started with a five-year funding commitment, the first of its kind in Canada. We've got that. The next step is to put in place the action that shows you how we're going to use that money. We've done that today. Then we have the performance measures, and people will be able to track this. It has nothing whatsoever to do with an election. This is a five-year plan for performance targets in 50 different cases, showing you cancer care, showing you continuing care, showing you acute care, showing you emergency department wait times, showing you access to various surgeries, and slicing the wait times . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Health Care Workforce Supply

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago Alberta Health Services was short 1,400 nurses. Last year it cut 450 more at a cost of \$24 million. Now they say that they're hiring 500, which means that today we are still almost 1,000 nurses short. To the minister of health: how can the minister claim any credibility on this?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member didn't read the rest of the sentence in *Hansard*. What we said was that there are 500 more nurses being hired just for the 360 additional acute-care beds that we're adding.

Let's not make any mistake about it. Registered nurses are an important part of our overall system, and the total number who graduated from training programs in our province was increased by more than 20 per cent over the last four years alone, and there's more good news on that front coming.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister of health is starting to sound like a broken record here. We need to see some concrete results in our ERs to cut wait times now. To the minister

of health again. Alberta Health Services said that because of the hiring freeze last year “many of these vacancies will need to be filled in 2010/11 in order to maintain service levels.” Will the minister admit that we are in this mess because of his hiring freeze?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there is no hiring freeze. In fact, what there is is a very good, concrete commitment and accord between Alberta Health Services and the nurses’ association, and that says that they will be hiring 70 per cent of all nursing graduates in this province. It’s a phenomenal commitment. Why? Because they’re needed, and they’re doing an outstanding job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Albertans are sick and tired of listening to promises. To the minister again: will the minister be honest and admit that there is still a terrible shortage of nurses in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I’ve always said that we could hire more nurses, and that’s one of the reasons, I’m sure, why Alberta Health Services took the big, bold step that they did. We also need more doctors, but we need to remember that we are training more doctors. We are increasing more first-year spaces. In fact, over the last few years that number has increased by 50 per cent, so good headway is being made. Why? Because we have a five-year funding commitment now to do it, and it’s working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Beef Exports to the European Market

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can we change topics? My questions are for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. A restrictive 11,000-tonne quota shared with the United States, restrictions on the use of growth promotants, and the high European Union tariff have combined to make the high-value European Union beef market very difficult for Alberta producers to be competitive in. I understand that Canada has recently gained duty-free access to the EU for a 20,000-tonne annual quota. Can the minister of agriculture please tell us how this increased access impacts Alberta beef producers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This new arrangement is for a 20,000-tonne hormone-free beef export into the European market duty free. Just to give an indication of the effect on the beef industry, which is mostly housed in Alberta, we’re looking at probably a savings of over \$10 million because of the duty-free designation, that will go into the pockets of our industry. It’s very significant.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This expanded quota is a marked improvement, but further expansion of a quota will attract more higher volume Alberta players into this market. Do any of our competitors have this kind of access to the EU? I ask the minister: is there an opportunity for this quota to increase in the future?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, there are increased opportunities. We do have competition, as we always have, globally, and when you talk about the European Union, it’s the United States and Australia. But we know that we’re going to have an additional 3,200 tonnes’ access this year, and we know that by 2012 the increase will be between 4,600 and 4,800 tonnes of duty-free beef going into the European Union. Our business will be able to go after that, and we know we’re going to get a very good chunk of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a significant quota. Market access is a federal government responsibility. I ask the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: what can Alberta do to support federal government efforts to increase these kinds of international market opportunities for Canadian producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it’s just very important that we’re supportive of the efforts of our federal government and Minister Ritz. We’ve shown that just recently with our meetings with industry in Japan and China. When you go into China and you meet in cities that exceed 50 million people and over 24 million people in Japan in a matter of a few days, the markets are unbelievable, the potential is great, and we’ll continue to work with our federal government to increase that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Long-term Care Beds

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m sure that I don’t need a preamble about health care beds in this province. To the minister of health: according to the new five-year plan, of the 1,300 continuing care beds that you have been talking about, how many are actually long-term care beds, the type of bed that front-line professionals have identified that we need in this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don’t have the exact number in my head right now, but there are a number of additional beds that are being added. Many of that number will be long-term care, and others will be a different type of bed. There are so many beds right now, so many different numbers right now, so if you want the exact number, hon. member, which I gather you do, I’ll undertake to try and provide that to you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. This minister’s continuing care strategy states that it’s the goal of this government to cap the number of long-term care beds at 14,500. How can the minister deny that that policy has directly contributed to the ER bed crisis?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it’s true that there are some people in acute-care beds who need to be moved to transition beds and from transition beds out into the community. That’s why we’re building somewhere around 1,400 different or new spaces this year. Eight hundred of those have already been built, another 500 or 600 will be built by the end of March, and the following year another 1,100 will be built and the year after that probably another thousand or so.

Those are the targets that we've set, and to the best of my knowledge we are on track to accomplishing them so that seniors can age in place.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to the same minister. We're not talking about the same thing. I'm talking about long-term care beds. How can the minister defend capping the number of long-term care beds in this province when right now there are a thousand seniors waiting for long-term care and the seniors population is increasing daily?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, just to be a little clearer on that, let's understand that when we're talking about these 1,400 spaces, there's a new way of thinking about what kinds of spaces they're going to be. Instead of moving people from supportive living to designated assisted living or vice versa and ultimately to long-term care, under the continuing care strategy we're simply building spaces so that people can age in place, and the services will change to meet them in their homes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Immigrant Nominee Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite the economic downturn many of my constituents are having difficulty securing enough low- and semiskilled workers to keep their businesses operational. However, the process of retaining good workers from outside of the country is burdensome and very difficult for small-business owners to navigate. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is the minister doing to ensure the workforce needs for our small businesses are met?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It should be clear that this government's number one priority is to employ Albertans and Canadians. That means that those who are unemployed we're matching with employers through our labour market information centres. We have 59 of them throughout the province. To those who are underemployed and not working to their capacity we're providing a variety of educational upgrading programs to link them with employers. This is our strategy for our local unemployed Albertans, matching them with the workforce.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that Alberta still has a strong need for permanent and not just temporary workers, why is the Alberta immigration nominee program only able to support 5,000 immigrants per year?

Mr. Lukaszuk: That is, I agree, a very good question. As a matter of fact, there is a need for temporary workers when temporary projects exist or seasonal projects exist, but frankly Alberta needs permanent foreign workers, workers that can settle over here, bring their families over here, buy cars and houses over here, Mr. Speaker,

and not leave our communities with transient populations. That is why I have negotiated an increase to a cap of 5,000. It's nowhere near being enough, but it is a federal cap that's put on Alberta of 5,000. I hope that increases because we need permanent foreign workers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: given that our cap is the same as many other provinces' despite a drastic difference in labour needs, what is the minister doing to advocate for Alberta's businesses to ensure we have the workforce that our economy needs?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have communicated very clearly to our federal counterparts that we do have a need for permanent foreign workers, that the temporary foreign worker program, although designed for the purpose that it was designed, has served us well. The demographics of our province, of our country clearly show that we will be short thousands of workers into the many years to come, and we will be convincing our federal counterparts that we should consider more of a temporary, economically based immigration policy as opposed to the transient policy we have right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Transparency is important. That's why Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness are inviting you to track the progress being made at some of the province's biggest and busiest emergency departments." To the minister of health: if transparency is important, why is the information on emergency department wait times prior to November 2009 not posted on the Internet for people to see? What are you hiding now?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I wonder how deep he had to dig for that question, Mr. Speaker. If you want something very specific that goes back a year or two or three, I'll be happy to feed that into Health Services and see if they can provide the answer.

The thing is, Mr. Speaker, that there were nine different health regions. They all had different systems. They all kept their own information in their own ways, and bringing all of that together has been quite a challenge and quite a chore. But I'll do my best to see what I can do for the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how can progress be tracked if you do not post on the Internet information gathered on emergency room wait times prior to November 2007? Why did you suddenly pick November 2007 to start your wait time list on the Internet? What are you hiding?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm not sure exactly which website he's talking about, Mr. Speaker, but I will have a chance to look at that, I'm sure.

What's important here is that we have all the transparency people need. It's the key performance measures, and in there on page 4 is a good statement about how we're going to reduce the length of stay for patients in emergency departments. The targets are very clear.

If the member would like to look at that – I just released it today – I think he'll be quite pleased with what he sees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the minister is transparent, certainly the citizens of this province see through his lame efforts to defend the government's record on promoting and enhancing public health care. Now, I know you took this question under advisement yesterday and you promised me information today, but will you put this information on the website before the end of this week so that Albertans can see how their emergency departments have been performing since 2002, when the doctors first started to complain?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't recall saying that I'll get you an answer in 24 hours, but I do recall saying that I would take the question under advisement, and I will. I will look at it, and as soon as I can, I'll get back to him.

What's important right now is that people want action on emergency rooms, and that's why we are setting some targets in here that will report publicly – they already do – on the busiest site aggregate basis and on an individual site basis. That's good transparency, and that's darn good accountability, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Bail System

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I heard from constituents that were upset that a man in Whitecourt-St. Anne, who has been accused of second-degree murder, has been granted bail by a federal judge despite the opposition from a provincial Crown prosecutor on the case. My first question is to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister tell me why an accused murderer would be granted bail for merely \$5,000 even though the provincial Crown thought he should be kept behind bars?

The Speaker: Whoa. I'm not sure if this matter comes under the subjudice rule. Interestingly enough, the only person I can ask for clarification of that is the person to whom the question is addressed. The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're correct. I won't speak to the specifics of this. What I did want to say today is that we know that our Crowns work very hard to make representations to the court. We also know in those cases that it's entirely within the court's decision as to what recommendations they will take.

Our concern as a government is with respect to the tests for bail. The tests for bail are set out in the Criminal Code. We've made it very clear to the federal government that we think those tests need to be changed. We think there needs to be much more consideration given to whether or not the administration of justice is brought into disrepute with respect to bail, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, I'll be more general. Does the minister think that it's fair that people accused of serious crimes are granted bail so that they can walk around freely, possibly putting people, innocent people, at risk?

The Speaker: If we deal with policy, fine. Opinion is not really that important.

Ms Redford: And it is only policy, Mr. Speaker. It's very clear that within Canada we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. People are presumed to be innocent until they're proven guilty. That is why we have a bail process in place. Our view as a government is that that process works. The independence of the courts is critical; however, we do think that within the legislative framework federally we could look to changing that bail test.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, a clarification on process. Can the minister tell me if a provincial Crown can appeal a bail ruling to have it overturned or at least a fine more fitting to the seriousness of these charges?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, again with respect to process, in extraordinary cases it is possible for the Crown who is arguing that case to make the determination that they do want to appeal a decision of the court, as the Crown can with respect to anything. Again, they would look to whether or not it is in the public interest to do so and whether or not they would likely be successful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Publicly Funded Health Care

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Phase 2 is out in the daylight now, and this government's secret agenda to increase privately funded health care has been exposed. This agenda explains what is an otherwise unfathomable level of incompetence in running our public health care system. The Tories are determined to ruin the public system to set the table for private, American-style health care. Will the health minister quit treating Albertans like we were born yesterday and admit that his leaked document describes a plan to put one over on Albertans after the next election?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of talk about agendas. Let me tell you what the real agenda is, never mind the speculative inaccuracies coming from the opposition. Our agenda is, among other things, to reduce wait times for hip surgery by 60 per cent; to increase the number of people that we're able to move from hospital beds into community care beds, when they're eligible, by 68 per cent; to add 65 more mental health staff in schools and in clinics. If time permits, I'd like to go on. Those are just some of the agenda items that we have to improve health outcomes for Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, he may have an agenda, but we have a record: two and a half years of the Premier ignoring the concerns of ER physicians, a political agenda to open the door to more privately funded care, a broken promise on long-term care, cruel neglect of the mental health system, and now a provincial health board that cannot function. Will this minister admit that he is just the latest entry in a parade of Tories, almost a minister a year for the last four years, directed to distract this public from the PC plan to undermine and dismantle our public health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we're doing exactly the opposite of what those accusations are. We are making significant improvements to speed up access to the system, to reduce wait times. For example, the wait times for cardiac surgery are going to be reduced significantly. The wait times for knee replacements, the wait times for hip replacements, the wait times for cataract surgeries,

the wait times for scheduled surgeries, the wait times for cancer treatment from referral to start-up: all of these things are part of the key performance measures and action plan. That's what people want. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you go forward with your question. Put your hand on the shoulder of the person to your right to settle him down. Okay? Go ahead.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the government has spent the last four weeks ineptly rolling out an exact replica of phase 1 of this government's allegedly abandoned plan and given that not once in the course of their consulting and their announcing and their ribbon cutting did they ever mention opt-in and -out capability for doctors, delisting, or private insurance funded health care, will this minister admit that even the most reasonable of Albertans simply cannot ever trust a single word on health care by this minister or any other member of this government ever again?

Mr. Zwodsky: Mr. Speaker, what a bunch of nonsense. I've already clarified that there are opinions from Albertans that were part of a survey. They inputted, and I've said which parts of that we're not going to follow. There is no privatization occurring. We are strongly committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and we're even more committed to helping Albertans access more continuing care, to helping them access more home care, to access more children's mental health care, and I could go on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Film and Television Support

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been months since the minister of culture intervened in a panel at the Banff TV festival to declare that his ministry funded crap. The minister later claimed that he did this to encourage discussion. To the minister of culture. Since the Banff TV festival is an international forum to pitch projects to buyers, I'm wondering if the minister can answer this skill-testing question on whether the comments resulted in more projects or less projects being picked up or shot in Alberta this fall.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to say that it resulted in more projects being shot here, more opportunities for people to come here and scout in Alberta because people from Los Angeles, Europe, British Columbia, and Ontario want to come to a place where we value quality of production over number of productions.

Ms Blakeman: Eh-uh. Sorry, Minister. There were fewer.

Given the loss of work for Alberta film and TV workers, from eight crews working in Alberta five years ago to two and a half crews barely working now, and given the exodus of our workers to B.C. and other provinces, can the minister explain why Alberta is training film and TV workers for our competition in B.C.? Please explain.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we sat here in this House last March, and the hon. member told us all that the film industry in Alberta was dead. This past summer three Los Angeles producers came to see me in Calgary to ask about different productions. We have one U.S. production, AMC's *Hell on Wheels*, that we hope to get green-lit in the next couple of weeks, and we'll start production

here next spring. That will go on top of *Heartland*, that we have here, and *Blackstone*, that's being filmed here in Edmonton. We also have the Sam Steele movie for CBC that will start here next spring.

Ms Blakeman: They didn't shoot this year, honey.

Back to the same minister. Given that there is no movement on a Calgary film production studio, that the minister didn't even know there was an Edmonton production studio, and that there have been no new incentives to encourage investment, can the minister tell us of any positive changes in this area under his watch other than some that may come in the future?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the other member has been doing, but we've been sitting down with the Alberta Film Advisory Council, which is a combination of unions and guild representatives. It's film producers, it's the film schools, and there are film commissioners. We have worked together in two particular instances. We're focusing on innovation and competitiveness. We've looked at changing our film development fund to make that more enticing. We're in the top five most competitive jurisdictions in North America. We are working now to get a combination agreement with our unions and guilds so that we are competitive with other jurisdictions. We have worked on training on 3-D technology. We brought 120 people from our industry and representatives from the United States.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Review of Government Programs

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the head of the Treasury Board. Reviewing government programs not only helps us ensure effective and prudent spending; it also helps us foster a culture of innovation, where we see continuous improvements. We need to review programs to ensure they are actually solving the problems intended in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Will the minister look at enacting a policy whereby all government programs are reviewed annually?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General does review all government expenditures. More importantly, in December of 2006 this Premier asked me to set in place a process whereby we could review our ongoing expenses to make sure that our expenditures were not only achieving what they were intended to but that we were getting good value for our money. Since then we've implemented five or six re-engineering projects, we call it, to make sure that we're not duplicating program delivery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: has your ministry enacted any policies to investigate and eliminate old, unused, or irrelevant programs as well as programs that overlap or are duplicates; that is, where two programs are trying to achieve the same outcome?

Mr. Snelgrove: Exactly, hon. member. Certainly, last year alone in our budget we saw the amalgamation of 70-some municipal grant programs down to 23. We've seen the development of issue-based funds, where we bring ministers together. And we've had tremendous success in tackling the issues of homelessness and safe

communities. We as a government have understood that we need to remove the duplication both internally and to our external partners that help deliver these goods. We have also achieved considerable financial savings besides the operational savings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister for the last time: how do we measure the success of such reviews? Are the people involved in the program reviews actually independent of the people delivering the programs?

Mr. Snelgrove: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because it's easy to identify the savings. In the first year alone we looked for \$240 million; we found nearly half a billion. Last year we found over \$700 million. Probably more importantly, we consult with the groups that the government deals with on an ongoing basis, in the spring and the fall, and we ask them: are we still achieving the goals you expect from us with your tax dollars? Those consultations have been extremely successful in telling us that we are on the right track.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Health Services Performance Measures

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The *Titanic* sunk, and many lives were lost. Despite the committee of captains saying that all is well, the superboard is sinking. Five officers have jumped into lifeboats in just the last week. There's nothing honourable about leaving the patients to go down with the ship. To the minister: given that today's plan still has a superboard in place, how does it not allowing funding to follow the patient? Why should we trust that your latest plan is going to steer us away from the iceberg?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is: because the plan announced today focuses on what I've said at least four or five times already. It focuses on improving access, on reducing wait times, and on building the best-performing health system in Canada. It takes a good, solid strategy to get there. We've spent several months working on that strategy. It's now ready to be further implemented, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They've been saying that for two and a half years with no changes.

Albertans have lost trust in our health minister and his system. Now they're being promised a 50 to 60 per cent improvement, with a 6 per cent funding increase, without changes in the system. To the minister. What are you really going to do: lower your targets again, increase your funding again, or are you going to do both?

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I'll tell you exactly what we're going to do, Mr. Speaker. We're going to add more beds. We're going to have some facility expansions. We're going to build some new facilities. We have over 1,000 health care facilities on the books or being built right now for over \$5 billion. That's what we're going to do, keep doing that. We're going to develop a provincial plan for cancer. We're going to develop a mental health strategy for that area. There are a lot of things that we're doing, and most of those are well along the way.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has brought forward many good suggestions on how to improve ER care here in the province, and this government has treated him shamefully. Yesterday the House's ER doctor asked for an apology from the health minister's parliamentary assistant. Today Albertans are calling for a public apology. When is this going to happen?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans are more focused on action than they are on words right now, and they need to see that. The sooner that we can get on with that agenda, the sooner you're going to see all of these things start to occur, the reductions in wait times. I mean, these are serious and very significant moves forward, and that's why Albertans want to hear about them, not about the rhetoric and the innuendo.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Charitable Tax Credit

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been a number of media reports recently about pressures on nonprofit organizations due to the sluggish economy. Representatives from these agencies say that growing demand amid stretched fund resources will only worsen without greater investments of dollars and volunteers. It's certainly something I'm hearing in my own constituency. My first question to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: how is the government's charitable tax credit actually encouraging giving?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know and understand that things are tight. A recent StatsCan survey showed that Albertans had given \$1.25 billion to charities in Alberta in 2009. Unfortunately, that's down 9 per cent from 2008. We're supporting Alberta's giving through the enhanced charitable tax credit. Through the tax credit, which is worth over \$80 million a year, we're encouraging Albertans to give more. If you give over \$200, you will get a 50 per cent tax credit. If you give under \$200, you get a 20 per cent tax credit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister: in these more difficult times what effect is the community spirit program actually having?

Mr. Blackett: Well, in the last couple of years, Mr. Speaker, the community spirit donor program itself, in addition to the tax credit, gave \$38 million to 3,238 different charitable organizations. One example: the Central Alberta African Centre in Red Deer opened an office to ensure better access to new immigrant services. This program helps small, medium, and large organizations, and it's providing much-needed dollars for much-needed organizations to make our communities stronger and safer, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. member?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

School Board Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, November 22, the Minister of Education informed the House that it's, quote, not his problem that school boards were not able to budget properly because of this government's mixed signals on funding staff wage increases.

However, the Auditor General has been saying for four years that the department needs to provide trustees with more timely, accurate financial information. To the minister: why is this government still taking school boards on wild financial rides instead of implementing the Auditor General's recommendation from 2006, which is still outstanding today?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there were no mixed signals to school boards. Prior to the budget we talked about the need for us to do value reviews and make sure we were spending the resources that we were granted in the appropriate ways. On the day of the budget I spoke with school boards, and I indicated to them that we had a firm commitment to meet our commitment to the average weekly earnings increase. The money was not in the budget, but they had the commitment from government that it would be there and they should plan on that basis. The fact that they chose to plan on a different basis was what I was referring to as not my problem. The clear signals were there. They chose . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given that chronic budgeting problems in the Northland board had been in AG reports for years, did the department's failure to work with the board set Northland up to be fired by this minister?

Mr. Hancock: That's a very unfortunate characterization. The department did not fail to work with the board. In fact, there has been comprehensive work with the Northland board over years that can be clearly demonstrated.

Mr. Chase: It's another case of: off with their heads.

Although the results have left much to be desired, the government likes to boast about its five-year funding model for health care. So will the government commit to multiyear, stable funding for school boards?

Mr. Hancock: A very interesting concept, Mr. Speaker, and one that I have been trying to explore in the context of discussions that we're having with school boards and the ATA. But it is a bit of a different situation when you have 63 school boards plus charter schools plus private schools that have public funding and a number of different things that have to be funded within the system. If there's a possible way to achieve that goal, we're certainly prepared to look at it, and we'll certainly talk with school boards about it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With construction set to wrap up next fall on the northwest Anthony Henday Drive project, motorists in Edmonton will be turning their attention to the final eight kilometres of the Edmonton ring road and completion of the northeast section. My questions are all to the Minister of Transportation. When will the province finally move forward on the final section of the northeast Anthony Henday?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that a considerable amount of work is already under way so that we can move forward on that final leg. My department is finishing up the preliminary engineering work, we're completing the land assembly for the

project, and we're working on the utility and railroad. I can tell this hon. member that the Anthony Henday will move ahead.

Mr. Vandermeer: Mr. Speaker, I had a meeting with a city councillor last week, and he informed me that it was put on hold. Can you explain that to me? I've got a document here that says that it's going to be finished in 2015.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have always said that we were trying to complete that full ring road in 2015. There have been different challenges with budgeting and getting all of our engineering work and all of our fundamental stuff put together. I think what he's talking about is that there has been an announcement that there was going to be a \$7 million reprofiling, but that absolutely is not delaying the project. To put this into perspective . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that construction costs are going down and labour costs are going down, wouldn't it be prudent to work on those final eight kilometres and get the job finally done?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been trying to tell this hon. member that we are moving ahead. Almost 90 per cent of the Henday will be free flow and open to traffic next fall. All five of the interchanges on southwest will be complete, and the northwest will be also complete, so 90 per cent, and that will be a \$2.5 billion investment into the ring road.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why does the minister continue to exclude paid farm workers from even the most basic employment protections available to all other workers in Alberta? The Liberal opposition has been asking this for years. We have yet to get a clear rationale.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview will know that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has undertaken an initiative where he will be drawing advice from those they're actually seeking to protect, from farmers, to advise us what is the best kind of coverage that would work for them, whether education would satisfy them. You will hear from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in due course of what the outcome will be.

Dr. Taft: Well, back to this minister, who is after all responsible for worker safety. Given that the last farm safety report took almost two years to complete and given that 13 people died in farm incidents in 2009 alone, how long will this new consultation take before we see action? How many more people are going to have to die?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, this member knows the answer to this question very well because I had a private discussion with him just a couple of days ago. I made it very clear to him that our priority is to keep our farmers in Alberta safe. At the same time we have to

make sure that we put in a process that actually achieves that goal. This process will be derived from consultation with farmers. They will be providing us with feedback on what kind of protection they want. Keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that there are challenges because the majority of farms in Alberta are still homesteads, where families actually not only work but live. It's a unique environment that will require a unique solution.

2:40

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. We have temporary farm workers, sometimes including innocent children, who are paid to work on farms in Alberta. Does the minister see these temporary farm workers, including their children, as workers who are undeserving of the same rights as other paid workers in Alberta? That's how they're getting treated.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, every Albertan is deserving of protection, and that's what they are getting and will be getting. But the member just identified the challenge. A farming environment is not your regular, standard industrialized environment. You have family members working. You have relatives working. You have neighbours helping neighbours. It is not the standard work environment, so we will be seeking advice from our farming community to tell us what type of assistance they can receive from the Alberta government to make sure that they stay as safe as humanly possible.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-response period for today. Nineteen members were recognized, and there were 112 questions and responses.

I'd also like to advise the members of a point of sadness with the passing of Mr. Aleck Trawick, QC, on November 20, 2010. Mr. Trawick served as the fourth Alberta Ombudsman from October 1, 1987, to September 15, 1989. I know you'll join with me in extending sympathy to the Trawick family.

Statement by the Speaker

The Talking Stick

The Speaker: I have something to show all members. I have a box. Boxes are really quite interesting. When you open the box, you find a carved instrument, and it's called the talking stick. Let me read the description of the talking stick. For centuries – not days, centuries – talking sticks have been used by the west coast First Nations during potlatches and other ceremonial celebrations, symbolizing the sacred power and honour to speak uninterrupted. It empowers the speaker to speak honestly and truthfully from the heart. The talking stick also serves as a reminder to witnesses of their vital role of listening thoughtfully. When it is passed, the honour is then transferred to the next speaker. The talking stick teaches us to honour the sacred point of view of every living creature. This has been known to wise people for a long period of time.

We'll now continue with our Routine in a matter of seconds and move forward with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Chateau Estates Access Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 I learned of a long-planned road closure. With the ring road construction access to 84th Street N.E. was to be closed from 16th Avenue,

directly impacting the residents of Chateau Estates. I remember the first meeting I had with the community, a Friday night leading to a long weekend, and approximately 100 people showed up. I let my constituents know that I would put everything I had on the table trying to find a solution because this issue meant more than just road access to a community. It meant a community that often felt forgotten would once again believe that someone was standing up for their interests.

Through much discussion we succeeded in delaying the road closure until 2009, buying some time to come up with better solutions. Other levels of government were not willing to join us in finding a solution or, for that matter, helping pay for it, so we as a government needed to do more. After months of work with Alberta Transportation they purchased land to create a solution for Chateau Estates residents. Range road 243A was going to be built. But as we all know, the road less travelled is often the road with many obstacles. As construction was about to get under way, Alberta Transportation was told conventional methods to build the road would not be an option due to gas lines on the land. Consultation with gas companies resulted in the moving of gas lines and revisions to construction plans, which meant a delay of approximately one year.

It was cause for great excitement earlier this year when the road construction finally began, and we had hopes of having the road fully paved by fall. However, Mother Nature had other plans. Heavy snowfall delayed the paving, once again causing delays. So I once again stood up in the Legislature to be a voice for my friends in Chateau Estates and got agreement from Alberta Transportation that the road would be opened temporarily as a gravel road.

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted that this road is now finally open. My constituents in Chateau Estates have what they deserve. [Mr. Bhullar's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Cardston Elementary School Choir

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and share with this Assembly some exciting news from my constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. Earlier this summer the Cardston Cavatina Choir was awarded first place at the National Music Festival in Montreal. This is no small feat. Before they could even present at this festival, they first had to compete provincially against all the talented singers here in Alberta. I am very proud of these youngsters, especially since one of them is my grandson, Dylan Strang.

Mr. Speaker, competing at this level required a tremendous investment of time and effort. The students practised weekly and sacrificed much of their personal time for the cause. It is very uplifting to see the results of hard work and dedication, and I guarantee that the students who made up this choir will take this lesson with them throughout the rest of their lives. I would also like to acknowledge and thank all the dedicated teachers and instructors who put in the time and effort to teach these talented students. Without their effort and support, success would not have been possible.

To win this event, members of the choir sang two songs: *J'entends le Moulin*, a French-Canadian folk song, and *Kyrie*, a Latin piece. I find it astounding that these children can speak French and Latin much better than I so that they could recite these songs in both languages. I also find it astounding, Mr. Speaker, that because this group could not travel to Montreal, they won this national award by sending in a video recording.

I congratulate all of these students and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

Thank you.

Audrey Anderson

Ms Calahasen: We all have movers and shakers in our constituencies, people who care, people who move mountains for what they believe in. Gift Lake school teacher Audrey Anderson is one of these people.

She put a lot of time and effort to ensure that students at the small Northland school division school would have access to computers and modern technology. She was passionate in her view that children be introduced to these tools early in their lives so they can use them to further their education and be competitive wherever they went in life. So she went to work finding patrons, and she hit the jackpot from the Belinda Stronach Foundation, which donated a computer for every student in Gift Lake.

Not only did she find computers; she also volunteered her time on a special committee to ensure that a Métis perspective was represented in the educational software provided on these computers. Thanks to her, students now have programs to help them learn about aboriginal music and sound terminology, along with 25 books written by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit authors that are a valuable addition to the traditional programs.

These laptops will ensure that teachers like Audrey will be able to combine the power of technology and education and will also ensure that the Métis children at the Gift Lake school have the same opportunities as all children in this province and in Canada.

Congratulations, Gift Lake school and especially to Audrey Anderson for all your hard work. I wish you and your students continued success.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Legal Aid

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An unjust society. Our troops around the world are fighting for and protecting human rights, freedom, justice, and peace. Although we as members of the Legislative Assembly paid lip service to child and spousal abuse by declaring November Family Violence Prevention Month, the family litigation advocacy association, FLAA, indicates that there is another type of war taking place right here in Alberta that isn't recognized. The Alberta government's refusal to fully fund legal aid means drastically reduced access to legal counsel. Poor remuneration for legal aid lawyers allows those with the means to purchase enhanced legal services.

Alberta families are suffering from years of legal abuse over custody, access, child maintenance, support, divorce, division of property, and injury damages. They have lost their freedom to move on with life beyond abusive partners. They are trapped in civil wars perpetuated by criminally convicted abusers. As a result their children have never known peace.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, without sufficient provincial government funding to support qualified legal aid, the Alberta government continues to be an accomplice to a system that allows litigants with financial means to stalk their victims through the court for years. This government has an obligation to ensure that vulnerable Alberta families can protect themselves both from within and from our court system. The adage that justice is blind should not be applied by extension to wilful government neglect.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Bill 217

Election Statutes (Electoral Reform) Amendment Act, 2010

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Election Statutes (Electoral Reform) Amendment Act, 2010. It will be known as Bill 217.

The central purpose of this private member's bill is to ensure that Albertans are provided with the fullest opportunity to participate effectively in political life. The right to vote is enshrined in Canadian law as both the greatest responsibility and the most cherished fundamental right for citizens in a democracy. It's also been strongly defended by the courts, who make it clear that the right to vote involves more than marking a ballot; it involves the administration of the entire election process. I hope the measures contained in the bill such as fixed election dates and expanded access to polling stations can further these ends.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 217 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Bill 230

Anti-Idling Act

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 230, the Anti-Idling Act.

The goal of Bill 230 is to take a simple and straightforward province-wide approach to reducing vehicle idling times and, therefore, vehicle emissions and greenhouse gas emissions, especially by encouraging drivers to turn off their engines when their vehicles are not in motion. Vehicles will be limited to idling for three minutes in any 60-minute period. Emergency vehicles and public transit vehicles are exempted, and all vehicles are exempted when the ambient temperature outside the vehicle is lower than minus 23 degrees Celsius.

Bill 230, if passed, is proposed to come into force on January 1, 2012, after which time excessive idling would carry a fine of \$100.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 230 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table the 2010-2011 second-quarter update on the fund. Copies of this report have been distributed to members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition received in my office. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to ensure the appointment of the candidate for alderman who placed ninth in the general local election of October 18, 2010 in the City of Lethbridge to the position of Alderman for the City of Lethbridge, including all the rights and privileges of that position. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As per my pledge in the Assembly on October 2, 2007, half my indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank in southern Alberta until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. I'm tabling the required five copies of my letter and donation that will clear it up to the end of this year. In September it was the Lethbridge Food Bank; in October, Coaldale Food Bank; in November, the Interfaith Food Bank; and December will be again the Coaldale Food Bank.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings on the theme of organizations working in Alberta to eliminate poverty. I have the requisite number of copies of the program of the Aspen 2010 annual meeting and HOPE awards to table today. Aspen supports Calgary and area children, youth, and families who are living in vulnerable situations, with the vast majority experiencing poverty-related challenges, and I'm very grateful for the work they do that makes Alberta a better place.

Mr. Speaker, I have two sets of tablings from the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families: a journal that is put out twice a year and copies of the 2009 annual report.

Mr. Speaker, I have copies from an organization, Habitat for Humanity, that through leverage can turn a dime into a dollar.

I have, again on the theme of poverty, five booklets, Dashed Dreams New Realities: Calgarians Talk Frankly about the Impact of the Economic Downturn.

I have five copies of Poverty Talks! that is trying to make a difference in the lives of Albertans.

I have five copies from Goodwill Industries of Alberta, an organization that for 20 years has been working and turning over their funds to support mental health initiatives.

I have two sets of copies of, first, Make an Impact: Pair Up from Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Calgary and Area '08-09. I also have another handout, entitled Share a Little Magic, which also comes from Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

I have, I believe, completed my tablings. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings at this time: the requisite number of copies of a letter from a constituent of mine, Brenda Mackie, to the health minister and the former CEO of Alberta Health Services, dated November 3. Brenda is a constituent, also the chair of the Community and Partners Advisory Committee of the Hotchkiss Brain Institute in Calgary. Her organization partners with ARBI, the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured, which helps rehabilitate individuals who have suffered from traumatic and nontraumatic injuries. Her letter is inquiring into why ARBI does not receive any funding from Alberta Health Services.

I also have the requisite number of copies of a letter from another constituent, Rona Altrows, actually an e-mail which she sent to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit detailing her concern with the announced termination of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts artists and education program. The program cuts will affect many of her colleagues if, in fact, they go forward.

Mr. Speaker, I am retabling a letter that I tabled last week, I believe, from Marjorie McIlveen regarding seniors' benefits. We're tabling this letter again because the first time it was denied because it was not signed. This letter is now signed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am tabling today with the House a letter of resignation received November 24, 2010, from Mr. G.B. (Gord) Button, the Alberta Ombudsman. The resignation takes effect May 31, 2011.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. My first tabling is an article I've referred to, Preserving the Right to a Fair Trial: Stelmach Government's Changes to Legal Aid May Leave Thousands of Low-income Albertans out in the Cold.

My second tabling today is a letter to Mr. Don M. Herring, president of the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors, that he received from the hon. Minister of Energy. In my opinion it appears to be a rude and offensive letter, but we'll leave that to the people who are looking at it in the tablings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, proceed.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a colleague of mine from the Royal Alex emergency department, Wilf Mackie. Just as sometimes people would think that the health care system is on a ventilator and a respirator, Wilf is a respiratory therapist, and many times we rescued very sick patients in the middle of the night. He was kind enough, he and his colleagues, to help us out and do the job of saving the lives of hard-working Albertans. I would ask Wilf to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 17

22. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had a considerable

amount of debate on Bill 17, and that's only appropriate because Bill 17 is a very important bill. It had a considerable number of hours at second reading and, I think, some thorough discussion of its principles. We then got into Committee of the Whole, and as House leader I endeavoured to ensure that we had a sufficient amount of time available for every concern that members of the House might have to be addressed in Committee of the Whole. In fact, by my count debate carried on for over 27 hours last week continuously, not continuously on Bill 17, I hasten to add. You know, there was a brief break in there to discuss another bill.

We did spend a considerable amount of time in committee. In fact, we dealt with two amendments fairly thoroughly. Then the third amendment came to the table, and that amendment we dealt with for hours and hours and hours and hours. In the context of that discussion it became very clear that the House had no desire to move off that particular amendment. [interjection] One of the hon. members opposite says that that's because it's important. But if one was to go back and read *Hansard*, as you admonish us to do from time to time, Mr. Speaker, you'd find that they dealt with it with very little importance for most of their debate.

Most of the salient points can be made in any debate in a good 20-minute speech. If you can't do it in 20 minutes – and sometimes, I admit, I can't – sometimes you need a second 20 minutes. We've had opportunities for every member of the opposition to have many 20 minutes on that. It's patently obvious, if for no other reason than because it's been stated by members of at least one of the opposition parties, that they have no intention of ever getting to a vote on that particular section. They've also moderated that in some other statements to say that they had no intention of getting to a vote on that particular section unless we agree to vote in their manner. Neither of those are particularly appropriate statements to be made. Both of those indicate that it is time for us to move on.

I'm moving this motion so that we can come back into debate on Bill 17 in committee. There, of course, will be time for debate on Bill 17 in third reading, but in committee there's an hour proposed so that we conclude the points that need to be made and vote on the bill in committee. Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for the support of the House.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 21(3), the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on this matter.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is a sad day. I won't say that it's a pleasure to stand and respond to this motion for closure, otherwise called time allocation, since it proposes to prematurely end an important debate on an issue that is of vital importance to Albertans and is in the midst of a crisis, but respond I must.

Mr. Speaker, there are many ways to derail democracy, and this government has a long, long list of ways to deal with this. This health care debate really is much more about public trust than it is about the specifics of this bill or the amendment that's been put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. It's really about whether this public and these members representing the public of Alberta can trust that this government has the best interests of Albertans and the understanding and the competence to deal with this in a way that will serve the public interest. Clearly, we do not believe that it is there yet. They have not been willing to reconsider the amendment. They have not been willing to reconsider the bill. They have not seen the wisdom of changing the health care system in ways that many experts and much evidence is suggesting would actually deliver the goods on the ground.

The other side of this question about trust has to do with trust in the democratic process and the willingness of this government to

cheapen democracy and to diminish the input from not only the opposition members but the public in meaningful ways. The intimidation that has grown to be a norm in Alberta and the culture of silence on the other side in relation to dissent and challenging the decisions of the leadership of this government have become mythic in this province. More and more people are deciding with their feet and, unfortunately, being blamed for not being engaged in the so-called democratic deficit that this government puts onto individuals rather than taking responsibility itself for creating a climate of fear, intimidation, cronyism, and a lack of real accountability to the very people that voted for them.

There are token consultations, of course, and increasingly it's being shown to be a sham, especially when we look at what's happened to our health care system, with petition after petition on how to improve the health care system, how to improve its accountability, clarify roles and responsibilities, deliver health care in the regions, where people can actually respond and address pressing needs there. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this government has lost it. It's putting forward a half-dozen time allocation motions in 30 minutes, a clear sign the Premier doesn't want to listen to anyone except a close circle of friends and cronies, the people who directly profit from the mistakes and bad policy of this government.

In the middle of the health care crisis, you've chosen not to listen to a respected emergency room physician, instead booting him out of caucus for standing up for Albertans. You've chosen not to listen to my own emergency plan for the emergency room, instead releasing yet another toothless plan to develop a plan that will be forgotten along with the other plans collecting dust over many years. Considering the information released to the public yesterday, don't expect Albertans to believe your fairy-tale nonsense. You're so frightened of the public that you're champing at the bit to get out of the Legislature and retreat to home.

Mr. Speaker, this administration doesn't have a divine right to govern. Alberta is not a one-party state, yet that's exactly how the Premier and MLAs are behaving, with contempt for democracy and the people of Alberta. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has crafted an amendment that could significantly increase accountability for emergency room wait times, an amendment that could strongly motivate senior management and government to actually improve the situation in ERs and work together to do so.

But, of course, this government hates accountability, as witnessed by this motion for time allocation and five others brought forward today. The idea of healthy debate is one in which the Premier and his ministers get to call the shots and avoid answers: if you don't like it, get the hell out. Clearly, the fact that your hidden agenda to privatize health care has leaked has scared the daylights out of this administration. We should be in here debating the document, one that threatens a treasured Canadian institution and puts the health of Albertans at increasing risk.

But all that can happen here is denial, dissembling, and ducking for cover. Alberta Liberals and, I dare say, the members of other opposition parties and our independent members believe in democracy with room for dissent. Progressive Conservatives believe in covering their butts when the going gets tough. You have the power to shut down this debate in the Legislature, it's true, but that's where your power stops. Outside of the dome, back out in the real world, the debate continues around every kitchen table in this province. You can do your best to punish and threaten and suppress debate inside; you can't stop the rising tide of Albertans who have lost confidence in this government's ability to manage public health care among many other services. You've lost the moral authority to govern.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 22 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:08 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Doerksen	Mitzel
Allred	Elniski	Quest
Amery	Hancock	Rodney
Benito	Hayden	Rogers
Berger	Horne	Sandhu
Bhullar	Jacobs	Sarich
Campbell	Johnston	Tarchuk
Cao	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Dallas	McFarland	Vandermeer
DeLong	McQueen	Zwozdesky

3:20

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hehr	Pastoor
Blakeman	Hinman	Sherman
Boutilier	Kang	Swann
Chase	MacDonald	Taft
Forsyth	Mason	
Totals:	For – 30	Against – 14

[Government Motion 22 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Chair: We have one hour of debate. Any interruption is still within the hour.

On amendment A3 of Bill 17 the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise once again to speak in general about my support for this bill, Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, and in particular to address comments referred to during the debate on the amendment. I also want to just clarify a little bit about what the bill proposes here as it touches on this amendment because I know some members have had some angst with respect to where this particular amendment might go and what it might encompass.

As all members of this House know, Bill 17 has been arrived at as the result of more than a year-long conversation with Albertans from all parts of the province. It's true that during that time we heard a lot about emergency rooms, and that's what this amendment talks about. It's also true that we heard a lot about other things. In fact, that's what the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health set out to do in 2009 and concluded with our government accepting all 15 recommendations of the Putting People First report, that came out on October 20.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

In that respect, Mr. Chair, we were well aware of some of the pressures and the crowdings that have occurred in some of our acute-care hospital emergency rooms. That's why it's important to get on with the action that people want. That's why today I released the 5-Year Health Action Plan and along with it aggressive performance measures that talk about exactly this point, and the point is with respect to the lengths of stay.

Now, Mr. Chairman, you would know from the item that we discussed earlier today that it's important to have such performance measures, and it's important to have them in a place and in a form where they can be addressed and where they can be updated and where we can perhaps shoot for new targets without coming in and taking up the Legislature's time to do that.

We want to have in our plan with respect to the length of stay, which is what this amendment is all about, a specific target that deals with the percentage of patients treated and discharged from the emergency department who do not require an overnight stay. In many cases they refer to this as being the four-hour stay. I can tell you that we're working very aggressively on improving that right now. That's why the new protocols have been brought in, Mr. Chairman. That's why the new performance measures have been brought in. That's what Albertans want. They want us to address this aggressively, and we are doing that.

Albertans also told us a lot with respect to what was working well in other parts of the health system. In particular, they talked to us about what needs to be improved and what kind of new health legislation should be brought in. That's why we're bringing in this legislation at this time, because among many things it helps empower and engage people in an active, meaningful discussion with respect to health care. It shouldn't be lost on people that more than 3,000 people were consulted and had input into this Putting People First report, including the people that live in about 23 communities plus numerous other communities. More than 1,500 completed online surveys were recorded, and more than 80 organizations provided written submissions, and many of them touched on the issue of emergency rooms, such as this amendment refers to.

I'm recounting a little bit of this history, Mr. Chairman, just to emphasize to you that Bill 17 really is the voice of thousands of Albertans being reported through this legislation. It's important work that has given us greater understanding of what Albertans expect from their publicly funded health care system and what we as a government are doing to make it even stronger.

In a nutshell, we're talking about Bill 17 in its entirety, not just with respect to one amendment that looks at just one aspect of the Rubik's cube of health but with respect to a set of principles that are described quite vividly in Bill 17 and will help us deliver a better health system overall. In fact, the bill does recognize in writing our commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act while including a set of our own made-in-Alberta principles, principles that describe the kind of health system our Alberta people want now and going forward.

That's why we're proposing in there establishing a health charter, that will set out even more clarity on principles and responsibilities with regard to the health system. It talks about establishing a health advocate to resolve citizens' concerns with the health system as they relate to the health charter that is forthcoming. Within that context they will have yet more opportunity to talk about lengths of stay in emergency rooms or access to a specialist or access to cancer treatment start-up after the point of referral. That's why those kinds of discussions have to be assured so that people can have their ability to input, and that's probably the single most important part of this bill, to have a clear direction with regard to the engagement process, Mr. Chairman, a clear engagement process that allows

Albertans an opportunity to provide meaningful input, not just on emergency room wait times but on everything to do with health care.

3:30

The next phase of our ongoing work is to conclude this debate on Bill 17 so that we can get on with the action, Mr. Chairman, and we can get on with the specifics of all the good stuff that I announced today. What is it that people want? They want improvement of access to health care in general, they want reductions in wait times, they want a strong, confident health system that will be there for them today and tomorrow and for generations to come, and a large number of additional things as well. That's what this Alberta Health Act will do. It will allow us to turn the page and get on with things.

I can appreciate why some members on the other side are trying to stall things and everything else. It's only that they don't want action taken because they know that the action I outlined today, for example, and the actions that Alberta Health Services through their health providers have been tracking and working on for the past number of months are all being accomplished. They're moving forward.

In that respect, I want to just address this issue about some of the lengthy stays. Some of those lengthy stays, Mr. Chairman, have to be examined in terms of what's causing them. We've already talked about the overcrowding pressures in some emergency rooms in some of our acute-care hospitals in this province and what has to be done about it. That's why 100 of our top administrators, our top health care providers – the doctors, the nurses, and others involved in the delivery of health care – met for a whole day, on November 19, to address ER protocols, which is exactly the thrust of this particular amendment.

Now, Mr. Chairman, this particular amendment was the subject of great discussion, in fact, with respect to lengths of stays in emergency rooms. We have to look at those beds that are occupied now – specifically, I'm talking about acute-care beds – those acute beds that are perhaps occupied today by individuals who could be and should be in a different form of care setting such as a long-term care bed or a designated assisted living bed or some other form of supportive living bed in general, some kind of a continuing care bed that could well be outside the hospital setting.

That's why it's so important to understand the commitment that has been given and the action that's already been taken on opening up more beds in the community. Approximately 1,400 more this year will be opened. That will address the overcrowding pressures. But we're also going further. Through Alberta Health Services we'll be opening another 360 acute-care beds in the hospitals. There are more transition beds being added. There are more medical assessment unit beds, more medical observation unit beds, however you want to call them and classify them. The point here is that many, many more beds are being added to address the overcrowding that exists in some hospitals.

Secondly, they're still talking about the best way to implement the new discharge policy that has been discussed. Again, these changes can't happen that quickly, overnight, but they are happening as fast as they can. The new CEO for Alberta Health Services, Dr. Chris Eagle, who has 33 years of experience as a medical doctor and about 20 years of experience within that of leading health care administrative teams and so on, is doing his best to ensure that these targets are met. Once they are met, Mr. Chairman, you will see reductions in the lengths of stays in the emergency rooms, and that is the central part of all of this.

We know that there are concerns that have been raised that impact this decision and what the role will be of the health charter, how it interfaces with lengths of stays, how the role of the health advocate

will interface with the amendment that's on the floor. We also know that meaningful input, which is guaranteed in the bill once it is passed, will also impact lengths of stays in our emergency rooms. It's in that respect that Bill 17, in my view, provides a very practical recourse for a number of issues, including the comments that were made about the health charter that is forthcoming – it still has to be designed – including the health advocate, whose position, I've indicated before, will be similar to but not identical to the Mental Health Patient Advocate's job description.

What we're getting here is a bigger picture of a large number of issues, not just the ER issues. The ER issues are critical – of course they're important – and nobody from this side of the House has said anything different. We understand that, and we're actively pursuing what we can to help strengthen the emergency room scenarios.

Just a couple of quick comments about future decisions that will have to be made and future directions that we'll be going in. As I indicated, Mr. Chairman, I think I answered 30 questions on health care today, and many of them touched on future directions. I want to just assure everybody that those future directions include the strong performance measures that I've alluded to. Without having to put them into law, they will be there along with the other suite of performance targets. In total, we have about 50 new performance targets coming forward that talk about what this amendment talks about: wait times being reduced in ERs, wait times being reduced to see a specialist, wait times being reduced to get into continuing care, wait times being reduced significantly for hip replacements, wait times being reduced for cancer care. There are 50 different performance measures in this document that was released by me and Dr. Chris Eagle today.

The important thing about that, particularly when it comes to the point that the amendment is talking about, which is with respect to the emergency rooms . . .

Mr. Mason: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Mason: A point of order with respect to relevance. First of all, the government has limited remaining debate on this amendment to one hour. Now the minister is proceeding to talk about other matters and to use up a great deal of time in doing so.

There was also a list that was left from the debate that is not being adhered to. I would just request that the chair ask the minister to wrap up his remarks and let other members use what little time there is to actually debate this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, yes, you're quite correct. But no lists are kept from previous days. I have a list from today that has been set up, and I'm working off that list.

Hon. member, please keep your comments relevant.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, I believe I've tied back to the amendment on about 15 occasions so far. I haven't been counting them.

Debate Continued

Mr. Zwozdesky: The point that I'm trying to make here, Mr. Chairman, is that this is not just about emergency rooms. This is about a Rubik's cube of health care delivery that impacts emergency rooms. Beds in acute-care settings impact that. Transition beds

impact that. Community care beds impact that. How much service people are getting from home care impacts that. The number of doctors in the system impacts that. So there's a wide range of latitude here.

I've listened very carefully here in the House or in the privacy of my office to some of the meanderings from the other side, and I want to make it quite relevant here that the principles that we're talking about here are important – of course they are – but they're not just restricted to one single part of the system. Emergency rooms, as doctors would tell you, are impacted by a variety of issues, all of them to do with health care, obviously. That's why we're putting into legislation things like the commitment for greater consultation, and that is specific also to other parts of health care. The emergency rooms: with the particular amendment before us and the lengths of stays, that's an important thing that Albertans want to have more say in. And guess what? They're going to get it – they're going to get it – and they're also going to see it.

That's why it's important for us to understand that this amendment is a good amendment from the standpoint of the thrust and spirit of it, and we've included it and incorporated it elsewhere. It's just that it doesn't belong in law. As I indicated before, you can't have this kind of an amendment going into law for fear of some of our doctors or nurses being put under pressure that they shouldn't break the law and perhaps rushing a treatment for a patient that's come in with a legitimate concern. The doctor or the nurse doesn't need to have this kind of legal issue hanging over their heads in addition to the legal obligations and the moral obligations and the Hippocratic oath obligations that they already have. If you take a look at the risks and dangers of putting something like this into law, that would be one significant factor.

Another important factor for not putting an issue like this into specific law, Mr. Chairman, is that you would have so many issues going forward to the courts that you would have the health system, potentially, in the court system more than it is out there serving the public. We wouldn't want that to happen. I know that there are jurisdictions who have tried this and floated the idea out and wound up backing off it. I want to make it very clear that I understand the importance of having performance measures, performance targets, and so on. That's why we've put them into the performance measures document, which I released today.

3:40

It's important to note, too, Mr. Chairman, that many provinces have had this discussion. It's important to note that the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians has had a large role to play in this respect and that they are trying to get more provinces onside with some of their national benchmarks. National benchmarks do exist in many cases, and that's an important feature of the system as well. But there are other cases where no national benchmark has yet been agreed to by all provinces; at least, that's my understanding. As a result of that, we have to proceed very carefully and cautiously here, too, because we are tied to a larger body here going across Canada.

My final comments, Mr. Chairman, are just these. There are always going to be more and more debates held with respect to health care. There are always going to be more concerns raised with respect to the length of stay as this amendment talks about. What I'm trying to give people a level of comfort on is that while this amendment is not something that I can support into law, I certainly support the thrust of it in another location. It belongs in policy and it belongs in performance measures and it belongs in the action plan, and we will aggressively pursue that.

Specifically, we're going to set targets so that we see improve-

ments rather immediately. That's what the emergency protocol meeting was about. I helped prompt that meeting because I connected with the board chair back in October, following my meeting with the head of emergency services for Alberta. We talked about the length of stay, which is exactly what this amendment is about. But this amendment also talks about unnecessary resources being allocated. It talks about unnecessary deaths and unnecessary harm. Well, those are givens, Mr. Chairman. Those are givens. You don't have to put that into law. Those are givens. That amendment doesn't have merit, in my view, for the reason that it's already accounted for.

Let's talk about the second part of the amendment a little bit more here before I just conclude. We are going to see aggressive targets that will lead us to what I think the mover of the motion has asked for, and that is a target that would have as many people, even up to 90 per cent, or what's called the 90th percentile, accessing services from treatment and discharge for minor cases within a four-hour period to those that are more complicated and do require an overnight stay to perhaps up to eight hours.

Then I've indicated with respect to the lengths of stays that this amendment talks about that that information will be reported publicly, Mr. Chairman. It will be reported in an aggregate sense in terms of the busiest sites, the busiest 16 sites in the case of the four-hour measurement, also on an individual site for that particular performance measure, and the busiest 15 sites in the case of the eight-hour example I gave as well as a reporting of all individual sites.

So are there issues here? Of course there are. Are there some problems? Of course there are. Are we dealing with them? Yes, we are. It's just that for the reasons given, Mr. Chairman, I cannot support this amendment going into law. It's already in other parts of the document, and I would say thank you to the House for understanding that and for understanding also why I'm not able to support it going into law. I'm firmly in favour of it going into our performance measures and targets, and that's what we've done.

Thank you very much for your attention, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As Leader of the Opposition I feel it incumbent to make my statements again on the record. I'll be very brief. I want to focus very specifically on the amendment and say that this amendment is really about holding a government accountable. We've had two years of chaos, confusion, suffering, and preventable deaths in the system, and this amendment is going to hold the real parties accountable, the Premier and the minister. Of course, they don't want to accept accountability for this. They haven't done so before this. Why would they embrace legislation that would force that to occur?

Imagine if you could, Mr. Chairman, a child in emergency with an injured leg sitting beside a woman in emergency who is bleeding, sitting beside an older man who's had a partial stroke, sitting beside a middle-aged woman who's had a fever for 24 hours, sitting beside a middle-aged man who has just had the most severe headache he's had in his life. All these people are sitting together, waiting and waiting and waiting, in some cases in such discomfort that they are affecting the emotions of the people next to them. Health professionals are going in to see these people, trying to cope with the stress and discomfort or pain or need for urgent care, and it's not happening. The anxiety, the fear: imagine that these people are your family members.

This is what we're talking about, Mr. Chairman. We're talking about real people suffering real consequences from the lack of

understanding and commitment to the health care system as it is today. Two years with no improvement in these very fundamental parts of the system, no improvement in family doctor access, no improvement in home care services, no improvement in long-term care facilities so that we still have people that should be in long-term care taking up beds in hospitals.

Mr. Chairman, this is about accountability. This amendment is really going to for the first time get beyond numbers and plans, plan after plan after plan, which we have seen in this House and beyond this House without results. It's saying to the government: you are responsible. This minister is responsible and this Premier is responsible for a system that is totally broken down in providing the basics of care to Albertans. That is what this is about. It must be supported in order to hold us accountable as legislators, especially those who make the rules here.

Mr. Chairman, I can't emphasize enough that this would make an important difference to a system that has lost all credibility not only among professionals, who are at the end of their ropes, but among the populace, who no longer have confidence in the ability of the government or the system to provide them with their most basic of needs.

I encourage people to the utmost to ensure that this amendment gets passed so that we can, indeed, look Albertans in the eye and say: we are setting targets, and we are going to hold each other accountable for them. We are not going to continue year after year after year changing and lowering the standards, as we have seen in this latest plan today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak again to amendment A3 to Bill 17. As we know, there have been a number of speeches on this over the last little while and, I would say, some very important points made by members on all sides of the House. I'd like to take a few moments to talk about some of those and, in particular, to explain why as important as I think measurement and monitoring of performance are in relation to this amendment, I also think that we can't lose sight of the fact that there are a number of factors, some of which have already been discussed, that are, in fact, the root causes of some of the lengthy emergency room wait times we've seen across the province.

To begin, with respect to the amendment, Mr. Chair, I guess we have some disagreement, obviously, around the House as to whether legislation is the right place to establish such targets, but I think where we appear to be in agreement is that these targets are all important. They're all important not only for the question of wait times for emergency room services, but I would argue also that they are equally important for other key access points in the system. Some of these have already been mentioned: access to family physicians or primary care teams where they are available; access to continuing care; access to mental health services; access to services which have a direct impact on the social determinants of health, so for people who are homeless, access to homes and to support for their needs once they have found housing; access to income support services. All of these things make a very important contribution to the length of the wait times that Albertans may encounter in their emergency rooms.

I would be the first to say, Mr. Chair, that certainly based on feedback from my constituents and feedback received during the consultation that led up to the development of Bill 17, emergency room wait times are among the highest concerns of Albertans, particularly in our larger urban centres. I must also tell you that at

no time did I encounter the suggestion that we enshrine targets in legislation as a suggested solution from anyone that I talked to over those few months.

3:50

In fact, what people called for – and this is certainly outlined in the Putting People First report – was attention to the various factors that I just mentioned, primary care probably the most important. I visited a number of rural communities, smaller communities across the province where because of a lack of family physicians or, where physicians exist, a lack of appropriate clinical facilities for them to practice within, a large number of people reported the need to use the emergency department as a way to access family medicine.

While it obviously caused all of us great concern, Mr. Chair, I think what was more illuminating was that Albertans also reported that they were aware that the use of the emergency department to access primary care was not an appropriate use of the emergency department. While many reported having no other option, again going back to my earlier point about the root causes, a number of them also suggested that they would prefer to see government focus on expanding access to primary care than setting hard-and-fast targets, which they felt, at least at this point, we would not be in a position to meet. I think that's another area that we need to look at a little here.

While the notion of enshrining targets in legislation I think would be an extremely important symbol to Albertans – and I think some other members of the House have presented arguments as to why that might be a good idea – I think what Albertans are looking for and what the minister is endeavouring to deliver here is some concrete action around the factors that contribute to those long emergency room wait times.

In addition to the measures that he's just reviewed – the addition of 360 more hospital beds and 3,000 more surgical procedures, expanding Health Link services, the addition of additional continuing care spaces – I think, Mr. Chair, that we do need a discussion about how our continuing care system is structured and whether it is providing sufficient capacity to meet the needs of people, particularly those who are waiting in acute-care beds.

Back to the amendment. In terms of other root causes that are being addressed, the addition of 65 more staff to work in mental health and addictions programs in schools and clinics and the increased focus on wellness, which the minister talked about extensively – my position, then, with respect to the amendment, Mr. Chair, would be that an integrated approach to these kinds of initiatives and others is what is going to actually drive an improvement in this all-important measurement of the performance of our health care system.

The other thing that I think should be pointed out with respect to the proposal in this amendment is that when we look at what we would be enshrining in legislation if this amendment were to pass, essentially what we would have available to us is an entitlement or a right provided for in legislation. You know, to go back to some of the arguments that have been used about other aspects of Bill 17, I can't foresee what possible recourse would be available to people in the event that in some part of Alberta those wait time targets could not be met as would be prescribed by legislation if this amendment was in fact approved.

This brings me to the question then, Mr. Chair: what is actually being proposed for inclusion in the bill through the amendment? What we have proposed for inclusion is, in fact, as far as I understand it and it's been explained to me, the gold standard in terms of clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of patients in emergency rooms. That goes to the maximum waiting times that are

proposed by this amendment. Again, this document was developed by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, but if you have the opportunity to look at it a little further, you'll see that there are other protocols that are included in that document, things that have to do with the assessment process and the triage process for patients when they come into the emergency room, things that have to do with the appropriate review of patient needs and of opportunities for appropriate referral to other parts of the health care system where those needs can be more effectively met.

In fact, the solution, Mr. Chair, in my view, would not be the enshrining of those maximum wait times, as important a symbolic gesture as that may be. I would agree that it might be considered a very important symbol to Albertans who have encountered very long waiting times. The real solution, I think, is a determined effort to look at the areas that I mentioned, the areas that drive ER wait times – principally primary care, continuing care services, making some improvements in those areas – building on the things that have already been announced and, in fact, not proceeding with what I would call a right-space solution, which would be the approval of an amendment as proposed, as this one is, as part of the bill, but a practice-based solution that is supported by adequate resources, of course, that is supported by the recognition and the adoption of appropriate evidence-based clinical protocols that are recommended not by government but by health professionals, by practitioners who have reviewed evidence, who have refined procedures, and who are in a position to speak with authority on such matters.

Then, of course, the third area. I think the minister has embarked on this today. The third thing we would need to do, as opposed to what's been proposed here, is to make the commitment to appropriately measure the right things, monitor and publicly report on our performance and commit ourselves to learning from that measurement, and truly enter into a system that is focused on continuous improvement. A lot of that job, Mr. Chair, you know, notwithstanding the important symbol that this amendment might represent for a lot of Albertans – those things are actually driven by a commitment. They are driven by a commitment by government, by all members of this House. They are driven by appropriate and meaningful engagement of front-line health professionals in looking at the issues, in determining what the best approaches should be.

I've always been, you know, a firm believer that we can't do enough in terms of consultation with the people that work in our health system, both the regulated professions that deliver care and all of the other employees who support them. There are many, many support workers who work in that regard.

I think that going forward, while I can't support the amendment as proposed, what I certainly can support, Mr. Chair, is a much more extensive discussion of the guidelines that have been proposed for inclusion in Bill 17, meaningful and ongoing engagement with not just physicians but other health professionals that work with physicians to support them in delivering emergency room care. While we have some good performance measures that have been laid out here, I think those, too, should be the subject of continuous discussion and refinement and would play a part in the solution as opposed to legislating the maximum wait times that are proposed here, a think-through supported by consultation of our whole continuing-care system, looking at the need or the unmet need, as may be perceived, for long-term care beds but also looking at the whole continuum of services that need to be provided.

You'll recall, Mr. Chair, that the report that is the foundation for Bill 17 talked a lot about a system much more focused on the needs of people and families and communities as opposed to institutions. Unfortunately, the amendment as proposed, as I see it, while it may be an important symbol in the short term, would ultimately just serve

to reinforce the current bias in some of our legislation toward meeting the needs of an institution. A number of hon. members in the course of this debate have talked about their considered reading of the varying experiences with this type of legislated wait times in other jurisdictions. We've heard various accounts of some success and also, certainly, some failure and some concern about, in order to assist and having to adjust itself in order to meet these stringent targets, perhaps not doing the best that could be possibly done to meet the needs of all patients who present for treatment.

4:00

These are all very important considerations, I think, going forward. How do we do this? I say again that I don't think we do it by legislating a static target for all time. I'm not disputing the fact that we need to have these targets. This is probably the best possible target we could look at, ultimately, as things begin to improve. This is without question the gold standard that's been set out. But to legislate that at this point, Mr. Chair, would do a couple of things.

First of all, I would suggest that if this amendment were to pass and the bill that it's meant to amend were to pass, we would be in a position here very quickly, upon royal assent, where we have committed ourselves as an Assembly to some wait time targets in law that I'm not convinced we will be able to achieve, certainly not right away.

One of the good things about the debate on this amendment, I must say, has been the very thorough vetting of this issue of emergency wait times and the things that drive it. It has been a very good and thorough vetting of the need to do a better job of engaging directly with physicians and other health professionals, not necessarily by politicians but by the organization that delivers Alberta Health Services, by the colleges that govern our health professions, by the professional associations, by researchers, by all of those, Mr. Chair, who actually have a stake and have some capacity to help us achieve such an important goal. That would be one of the things I would offer in terms of concerns about the amendment as proposed passing.

I guess the second thing is just what it might lead to, Mr. Chair, in terms of legislating maximum wait times for other procedures. There was an initiative in this regard that was launched a few years ago by the federal government under the then minister of health, who attempted through discussion and consultation and consideration of evidence to actually work to try to achieve national consensus on maximum wait times for a variety of services, including elective surgeries like arthroplasty, hip and knee surgery, cataract surgery, cardiac bypass surgery, and many other areas.

You know, I had the opportunity to follow those discussions and to attend a couple of the meetings. I can tell you from listening to other provinces that have perhaps in many ways, I guess at least in terms of health care dollars, less capacity than Alberta to deliver on a commitment to national wait time targets – at the time I can recall hearing about their concerns and, too, those within our system, as fortunate as we are, at least from a dollar point of view, to have the resources to allocate to health care. That's about 41 per cent of our operating budget at the moment, Mr. Chair.

The other concern I would have is whether we could make a commitment that the achievement of these guidelines could be equally delivered in all parts of our health care system. Just going back to my initial point, you know, I did visit a number of rural communities where the emergency department, unfortunately, is functioning in large part as the family practice clinic for that community because of things like lack of physicians and lack of facilities for physicians to practise in.

I think all of these things, Mr. Chair, for me would point to a need to work on a few things; first of all, looking at not just the formal

adoption of these guidelines by either the government or Alberta Health Services as our commitment – I think they're a worthy target that we should work toward – but looking at other wait time targets that we need to establish. Some have been announced, I guess, by the minister today, and people will take the time to review and determine whether those are appropriate.

Looking at how we better engage health professionals in the kind of robust discussion that as elected people we've been able to have over this particular amendment I think has been very helpful, but I'd be the first to admit, not counting the number of members in this House who are health professionals, that we need to hear from a lot more. They want us to hear from them. There was certainly no greater lesson than that in the consultation process over the spring and summer.

The third is that we really need to get our heads around what we can do in primary care. The Putting People First report proposed that the proposed health charter include a commitment that all Albertans would have access to a primary care team. By virtue of being residents of Alberta, Albertans should have access to a primary care team, including a family physician. That needs to be part of the discussion before considering an amendment such as this, I would suggest, Mr. Chair.

Then the other area I mentioned that I'm hoping to have some time to talk to people about and to roll up sleeves and work on is that whole area of continuing care and whether the range of services that we currently have in place is actually meeting the needs of people and actually achieving what we have committed to do, which is to assist people to age in place.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Chair, I don't believe that the amendment as proposed will achieve the sorts of objectives that I've talked about. I'm willing to acknowledge, of course, that it may be to many Albertans an important symbol of a commitment to act on a very urgent issue, but I do not believe that the government would be in a position to be able to be accountable at this stage in time should the overarching bill pass this House. I really don't believe that we've had the level of engagement and discussion with the people who actually deliver the care to justify the amendment. For those reasons I also see risk to the passage of amendment A3.

Mr. Chair, those are my best arguments in terms of acknowledging the merit of the concept but also some of the risks and some of the opportunities we need to pursue to be able to actually deliver on a commitment like that. I hope, regardless of the outcome of the debate on this amendment, that this discussion will in fact lead to serious consideration about how these guidelines are formally integrated into the health care system and that it will lead to a discussion about what other sorts of targets we need to establish, what the evidence should be to support those targets, and how we're going to orchestrate the mechanisms in our health system to measure and monitor and report on the performance.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm honoured and humbled to rise and speak to a very important issue to all Albertans, to my family, to every health care worker, and to myself.

I'd like to start off by talking to you about the filibuster. In ancient Rome one of the first known practitioners of the filibuster was the Roman Senator Cato the Younger. In debates over legislation he especially opposed, Cato would often obstruct the measure by speaking continuously until nightfall as the Roman Senate had a rule requiring all business to conclude by dusk. His long-winded speeches were an effective device to forestall a vote.

In this case Raj the Younger wasn't attempting to forestall the vote on the amendment. The point was actually to improve the bill currently before us. Cato made use of the filibuster in 59 BC in response to a land reform bill, and in the end Caesar, who needed to pass the bill before his co-consul took possession of the fasces at the end of the month, immediately recognized Cato's intent and ordered the lictors to jail him for the rest of the day. The move was unpopular with many Senators, and Caesar, realizing his mistake, soon ordered Cato's release. The day was wasted without the Senate ever getting to vote on a motion supporting the bill, but Caesar eventually circumvented Cato's opposition by taking the measure to the tribal assembly, where it passed.

Mr. Chairperson, the reason we're talking about this very important bill is because I was in Dr. Paul Parks's position, and I had brought this matter up to the hon. Member for Sherwood Park when she was the Minister of Health and Wellness. My colleagues before me had brought this matter up in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005. In 2007 we worked with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. We achieved some short-term gains, but the hon. member was busy passing Bill 41, beating up the doctors and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and dropped the ball. All of these 322 cases and these deaths have been under the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was his executive assistant.

Then, come 2008 and the election in 2009, we had a decent health care system, that was jackhammered by the hon. Member for Calgary-West. The health care system became worse.

4:10

That sequence of events led to Dr. Paul Parks writing a letter on October 8 to the Premier saying that the emergency medical services are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. This is after letters were written to all these ministers and reassurances were given. Announcements were made in my home of God knows how many long-term care beds to address this issue. Mr. Chairperson, God knows what's going to happen after 2011.

We have made the largest investment into health care in the largest economic downturn in history. Part of the things that led me to speak out was when Dr. Paul Parks spoke up. My friends and family members and I became aware of many bad outcomes and deaths, and I had a moral and an ethical duty and a covenant as a physician to inform the public. Those who manage the system and run the system were a threat to the public safety of the emergency medical system.

How did this happen? The problem really is that our seniors have inadequate home care and home supports, so they plug up our acute-care beds. The number of ALC days in acute care since 2006 has gone up at a 60 per cent rate, which in turn leads to admitted people plugging up the emergency department, which in turn leads to sick people plugging up the waiting rooms, which in turn also leads to a whole ambulance fleet waiting metres from care with sick patients for hours on end until the patients decompensate, which in turn would lead to no ambulances on the street to respond to urgent 911 calls. We recently have had red alerts in not only Edmonton but Calgary and rural Alberta, which in turn also led to record numbers of sick patients leaving without treatment.

I counted about 80 patients six weeks ago at the Royal Alexandra hospital alone: two stabbings, six major traumas, six suicidal patients, four overdoses, three miscarrying mothers, six elderly men with crushing chest pain and two elderly men who were unable to urinate, four seizures, God knows how many children with fevers, and God knows what their diagnosis was. These were people who left without treatment.

Mr. Chairperson, the health care system is broken. This government broke it. This minister has done his very best. I worked with him. The previous minister smashed it. These are the problems.

Secondly, the problem is that we have a 16 per cent readmission rate. Once you go through that whole tortuous journey, you actually get started again 16 per cent of the time because there is no family doctor to follow up with. We have a broken primary care system. This government broke it.

What brought me to this point? It was a sequence of events that all occurred at the same time after Dr. Paul Parks's letter. I had to read in the newspapers who the four new board members were. As the parliamentary assistant I did not have the opportunity to say if there was a good idea or a bad idea. Secondly, all these performance measures were brought up at a last committee meeting before they went to caucus. The one performance measure that should be the number one performance measure for a system was worth 5 per cent of it, hugged, buried, deep within the document. I did not agree with it. It was brought back from caucus. I had no input into it, still have had no input into it.

By 2012 the length of stay was supposed to be eight hours at the 90th percentile before the big bailout of billions of dollars. That goalpost got moved to 2015. That measure got reduced to 60 per cent and by mixing in the top 15 sites. The hon. member from across the way raised legitimate concerns about the Foothills hospital. The care for those patients will be no better because the data will be diluted by the fantastic work done in Lethbridge and in Medicine Hat.

We've had deaths and bad outcomes for years on end. Health care staff have been afraid to speak up. If they speak up, they get hammered. You know how I know this? I spoke up 11 years ago, and I got hammered, just like I got hammered now. This is the same old movie. What they do with anybody that complains is predictable. They either find something that you did wrong and try to take your licence away, or you get upset and then they say that you're crazy. This is an old, boring movie, Mr. Chairperson.

We've had an emergency debate that was rejected. Then we had an emergency debate that was accepted. Mr. Chairman, we have many other amendments that need to be debated. We've only worked for five weeks in this Legislature, after the biggest pay raise in history for the cabinet ministers. Albertans expect us to earn our wage for an honest day's work. Can we honestly tell them that we have done that after the largest pay raise?

We've had a CEO that was fired. We've had four board members that have resigned. The confidence in the health care system is in the boots. The morale of front-line staff is at 25 per cent. I think the front-line staff, starting with this one right here, are sick and tired of the gibberish and the gobbledygook and the rumours and the innuendos. We've had a leaked document to privatize health care. When the Premier said that the third way is DOA, it appears that it's alive and well, and we have all seen it in caucus, behind the scenes.

We've had billions of dollars. Not only that, but more importantly there are a hundred thousand health care workers, from cleaning staff to nurses and doctors and paramedics and firefighters, working hard each and every day while 3.5 million Albertans wait metres from care with their family members. Mr. Chairman, the number one perception of the health care system of Albertans is their experience in the emergency room, and the second is access to a family doctor.

Mr. Chairman, if we don't look at past mistakes – we've had many mistakes. The Health Quality Council hasn't been called in to do a system review. If this was the airline industry and the patient was an airplane, we would have an airplane crashing every 15 minutes in this province.

I would have to say that as a doctor we have a mental health certificate form when you're a danger to yourself or others. I would have to say that the decisions made by this government, which I was a part of, are a danger to themselves and to patients. That would be reason to certify this government under the Mental Health Act to Alberta Hospital Edmonton. But guess what? There's no room. They were going to blow it up.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to talk about solutions. Solutions are very simple. One is: let's work on the output of health care. Let's concentrate on home care, home care, and home care, and home supports. Let's call in those nurses that were recruited that were turned down, bring them in as nursing aides. Let's call in the Red Cross or the Victorian Order of Nurses. We have one of the most underresourced home care systems in the country despite the recent investment. We need to do better. Let's keep seniors in their own homes with their own family members.

Let's invest after that in subacute care, rehab care, palliative care, hospice care. Let's allow our seniors to die with dignity with their loved ones around them, not in a waiting room metres from care, half-naked in a skinny little gown, as the world walks by.

Let's not examine our children in tents anymore. It's not an emergency problem. This is a health care system problem that manifests itself in the emergency room.

Then let's concentrate on long-term care beds. If we need any acute-care beds, let's do the acute-care beds, but first let's get the bed blockers out.

Secondly, let's concentrate on input. The real problem is that we have too many sick people because of our broken primary care system. That's the underlying problem. We need to get these primary care networks. Patients who are discharged from hospital must be the first ones rostered on. Maybe those patients should be worth a hundred bucks a pop, and money should follow that patient into a primary care network because they're likely to get readmitted. You know why? They have no family doctor to follow up with. Let's roster them into the PCNs first. Let's get those seniors whose family doctor is retiring or is sick – maybe 75 bucks a pop – a family doctor and a PCN second because they are likely to get admitted. Those with two or three chronic diseases – you know what? – let's get them rostered third because they are likely to get admitted.

The healthy patient in Edmonton-Whitemud, which is probably a doctor married to a doctor, with three healthy kids: they've got lots of money. They're healthy as can be. You know what? They probably don't need a primary care network in that area because they are all health care professionals anyway, and they're doing the right thing.

It's the inner city that needs the resourcing. It's Edmonton-Meadowlark, where all the seniors are, that needs the resourcing. It's rural Alberta. It's Bonnyville. It's Cold Lake. It's southern Alberta. Let's concentrate on wellness: school place, workplace, and community-based wellness and especially injury prevention.

So input and output, then lastly is throughput. Throughput is where the performance and accountability measures come for those who work in and administrate and run the health care system. There is no legal liability with this legislation. The fact that we have these airplanes crashing every 15 minutes, that is what causes legal liability. To sue the health care system: there were six major lawsuits settled with the Calgary health region two weeks after I became the parliamentary assistant because of delays in care. This will actually save on legalities. This is not a wait time guarantee for patients that will sue; it's actually a performance measure for those who do administrative work in health care. Members on the other side are mistaken.

4:20

Today if we had an advocate, they would get at least 2,000 to 5,000 complaints a day. With these performance and accountability measures let's fix up the system with the toughest accountability measures in the nation, and then bring in the advocate. You're going to need a thousand advocates to deal with all of the complaints that we get today.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to talk about mental health. Everyone's talking about mental health, and I'd like to change the conversation from my mental health. To be honest, I've admitted that, of course, I'm crazy, you guys. I gave up a world-class career to run for politics. I fully admit that I was crazy as hell to do that. Guilty as charged.

But I'll tell you: I ain't stupid, and I know what I'm talking about. Nobody over there has listened, and they've got to listen now. There are a lot of well-meaning people over there, but to be honest, they have no clue about what's going on in the business of health care because they have no health care background, just like I have no clue about what's going on in the oil industry. Anything I know is the result of what other health care workers have taught me. I do not have the arrogance to say that I know everything, but I do listen, and I listen a lot to those who know what they're talking about.

Mr. Chairman, this is a sad day for Alberta. A province that prides itself on excellence chickened out – it chickened out – on being excellent. We settled for probably not even second best, probably not even third best. Some other province is actually going to do this before us. Dr. Chris Evans, who is the head doctor in the nation, is the one who worked on these measures, our homegrown guy. Must some other province do this?

I'd like to read quotes by Gandhi. My grandfather was his friend. They freed a nation.

Non-cooperation with evil is a sacred duty.

You assist an evil system most effectively by obeying its orders and decrees. An evil system never deserves such allegiance. Allegiance to it means partaking of the evil. A good person will resist an evil system with his or her whole soul.

Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

Whether humanity will consciously follow the law of love, I do not know. But that need not disturb me. The law will work just as the law of gravitation works, whether we accept it or not. The person who discovered the law of love was a far greater scientist than any of our modern scientists.

Mr. Chairman, I challenge all of my friends here to put their partisan beliefs aside. There's no possible way a hundred per cent of the people on one side can agree. All of these folks from the left and the right and the middle and the centre and the independents have all come to agreement – in fact, one of these people may actually form the next government – and they said: we're willing to be held accountable by these performance measures. I challenge my colleagues on the other side to have the moral courage to show leadership and stand up for what they believe in, for what is right, for what is just, for what the doctors believe in, for what Albertans deserve, for what all those patients deserve. I challenge you to vote your conscience and vote for your constituents.

May God bless Alberta. May God bless us all. Thank you so much.

Ms DeLong: I want to say thank you very much, first of all, to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark because I think that he has added an awful lot of emotion to this debate. I believe that as Canadians we tend to be a little too acquiescent, so he has added emotion. But as the government . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, but pursuant to Government Motion 22, agreed to on November 30, 2010, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be put to conclude debate on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the following questions.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:25 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Forsyth	Notley
Anderson	Hehr	Pastoor
Blakeman	Hinman	Sherman
Boutilier	Kang	Swann
Chase	MacDonald	

Against the motion:

Ady	Griffiths	McFarland
Amery	Groeneveld	Morton
Benito	Hancock	Ouellette
Berger	Hayden	Quest
Bhullar	Horne	Rodney
Calahasen	Jacobs	Sarich
Campbell	Johnston	Tarchuk
Dallas	Leskiw	VanderBurg
DeLong	Lindsay	Zwozdesky
Elniski	Marz	

Totals:	For – 14	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Now the chair shall call the question on the bill. On the clauses of the bill are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 17 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:39 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For:

Ady	Elniski	McFarland
Allred	Groeneveld	McQueen
Amery	Hancock	Morton
Benito	Hayden	Ouellette
Berger	Horne	Quest
Bhullar	Jacobs	Rodney
Calahasen	Johnston	Sarich
Campbell	Leskiw	Tarchuk
Dallas	Lindsay	VanderBurg
DeLong	Marz	Zwozdesky

4:50

Against:

Anderson
Blakeman
Boutilier
Chase
Forsyth

Hehr
Hinman
Kang
MacDonald

Notley
Pastoor
Sherman
Swann

Totals:

For – 30

Against – 13

[The clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

The Chair: The chair shall now ask the question on the title and preamble.

[The voice vote indicated that the title and preamble were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:53 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For:

Ady
Amery
Benito
Berger
Bhullar
Calahasen
Campbell
Dallas
DeLong
Elniski

Griffiths
Groeneveld
Hancock
Hayden
Horne
Jacobs
Johnston
Leskiw
Lindsay
Marz

McFarland
McQueen
Morton
Quest
Rodney
Sarich
Tarchuk
VanderBurg
Zwozdesky

Against:

Anderson
Boutilier
Chase
Forsyth

Hehr
Hinman
Kang
MacDonald

Notley
Pastoor
Sherman

Totals:

For – 29

Against – 11

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wonder if it would be appropriate at this stage to ask for the unanimous consent of the House, in the event of further bills this afternoon in committee or in the House, that the time between bells might be shortened to one minute.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 17 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:07 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For:

Ady
Amery
Benito
Berger
Bhullar
Calahasen
Campbell
Dallas
DeLong
Elniski

Griffiths
Groeneveld
Hancock
Hayden
Jacobs
Johnston
Leskiw
Marz
McFarland

McQueen
Morton
Ouellette
Quest
Rodney
Sarich
Tarchuk
VanderBurg
Zwozdesky

Against:

Anderson
Chase
Forsyth

Hehr
Kang
MacDonald

Notley
Pastoor
Sherman

Totals:

For – 28

Against – 9

[Request to report Bill 17 carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

5:20

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report Bill 17.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please take your seats.
The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 17. I wish to table all copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and to move third reading of Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, we've now had over 30 hours of debate and time spent on this bill, and I know that we will have yet another two hours or more as we go through the final stage, or what is called third reading. Bill 17 responds to the principles that Albertans told us that they want to see enshrined in legislation that would guide actions

and decisions in our health system. The principles, acknowledged in word, in deed, and in law, reflect and acknowledge our commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act and also to a set of made-in-Alberta principles, principles that are progressive and that reflect Albertans' values.

More specifically, Mr. Speaker, the proposed bill will require the minister to establish a health charter that sets out principles and responsibilities within the health system, establishes a health advocate to resolve citizen concerns with the health system as they relate to that charter, and provides for public input in the development of health regulations under the act.

We have spent a lot of time listening to what Albertans said they want in their health system and how they want to be involved in decisions about their publicly funded health system. This bill as proposed, otherwise known as the Alberta Health Act, will allow us to deliver and to address those expectations. Bill 17 is an integral part of our ongoing work to build the best performing publicly funded health system in Canada. My Department of Health and Wellness will lead the work to establish the health advocate I referred to and to finalize the health charter in consultation with Albertans. I'm looking forward to more public discussions and to more input as we complete this important work.

Our next steps will be to validate that charter, once it's arrived at with the people, and ensure what was first proposed in the document Putting People First as presented and advocated to me by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. This will involve input from the public and from key stakeholders, and it will also include health providers and numerous health organizations. Following that feedback, Mr. Speaker, the health charter will be finalized, and it will be made available to the public, but I want to stress that the public will be involved in the design and development of that particular charter once we conclude this debate and get started on it.

Health professional regulatory bodies will also be required to align their bylaws, codes of conduct, and operational guidelines to be consistent with that charter.

The health advocate will be established at the same time, prior to the implementation of the health charter. The health advocate will address citizen concerns that relate to the health charter and will report annually to Albertans through the Minister of Health and Wellness. The health advocate should be in place by the end of 2011 or sooner if possible.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has set out a bold vision. As I've mentioned numerous times, that vision is the best performing publicly funded health system in Canada. This bill, once it's passed, finalized, and brought into law, will help us get there.

Earlier today, alongside the acting CEO from Alberta Health Services, I announced our concrete commitment to Albertans to achieve that vision. This plan that I announced today, called Becoming the Best, outlines five key strategies to drive improvements in our health system, improvements that this bill pledges to see through.

Those five strategies include improving access and reducing wait times, providing more options for continuing care, strengthening primary health care, staying healthy, and building one health system. Under each of these strategies we outline where we want to be in year 1 of the plan, in year 2 of the plan, in years 3, 4, and 5 of the plan. Our five-year health action plan, Becoming the Best, is a serious step toward what Albertans have asked for, and that is action. That action plan is accompanied by specific performance measures, which have been talked about with reference to this bill even just earlier this afternoon. This means that we're going to have a health system that is more focused than ever before on the things that Albertans have told us they want from their health system.

This bill, Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, is about many things, and it includes, as referenced on page 2 of the Bill, "reasonable access to timely and appropriate care." It enshrines that accessibility to publicly funded health services, and it says that it will be based on need, not on ability to pay. I want to repeat that. It enshrines that "accessibility to publicly funded health services is based on need, not on the ability to pay." So anybody who is out there telling you that there is some agenda to the contrary is wrong. There is nothing to do with privatization here. There are no hidden agendas. There haven't been any, and there won't be any.

Albertans have told us clearly what they want. They want shorter wait lists, and that's what they're going to get with this action plan, shorter wait lists for key hospital services. That's one reason why we're opening 360 new hospital beds as part of this plan.

Albertans want more access to primary care. That means expanding the current 38 primary care networks, and we'll do that as well.

Albertans want more access to continuing care. That's why we're opening 1,400 or so new continuing care spaces in the community.

Albertans also want more focus on wellness, which is why I'm hosting Alberta's first-ever wellness forum in Edmonton starting tomorrow for three days.

Albertans also want one health system, and that's one reason why we're expanding our current electronic health records system and establishing a patient portal to deliver on that promise as well.

On the topic raised in the bill that deals with access, we will have better access to key services like emergency, like surgery, like cancer care and continuing care. The announcement I made today, which flows right out of this bill that we're debating here today, outlines the most ambitious, the most aggressive, and the most comprehensive set of commitments to improve health access in Canada, Mr. Speaker, and it's backed by a solid plan to deliver on those commitments. For example, during the course of the five-year funding plan, that I announced today with CEO Dr. Chris Eagle from Alberta Health Services, here are some of the things we are going to do to "strengthen the overall health and wellness of Albertans," to quote from the top of page 2 of the bill we're debating.

We're going to reduce wait times for hip replacements by more than half, from 35 weeks last year down to 14 weeks.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, sir. I think this relates in that the hon. minister is talking about his five-point plan that he introduced today. He's not really talking about the act and what is implemented. I think we heard a lot about a plan, but it's not about the act. I don't know. Maybe I was mishearing you. Maybe, if you do that, that would be fine. On the act.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. I don't know if it was a question of mishearing, but perhaps I didn't make it as clear as I would have liked to. I'm quoting the act itself.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, continue on.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yeah. It says on the top of page 2 of the bill that we "should strengthen the overall health and wellness of Albertans," and I'm telling you now some of the things we're doing to deliver on that. I'll be as brief as I can, Mr. Speaker, because this is a very comprehensive set of things we'll be doing.

I was saying that we're going to reduce wait times for hip replacements by more than half, from 35 weeks last year down to 14 weeks during the course of this plan. We're going to reduce wait times for cancer patients to see an oncologist by two-thirds, from seven weeks down to only two weeks over the course of the plan. We're going to reduce the amount of time that seriously sick patients – and I'm talking here about patients who require hospitalization, otherwise known as an overnight stay for one or more nights – spend in emergency. That will be a maximum of eight hours before they move to a hospital bed. That means having 90 per cent of patients admitted to an overnight bed within that time frame as compared to 38 per cent last year, and this applies to the 15 biggest emergency departments. That's all about access, Mr. Speaker, as referenced here in the act on page 2, four paragraphs from the bottom, "that Albertans [will] have reasonable access to timely and appropriate care," and it goes on.

It also means that those patients who do not require hospitalization but have gone to an emergency room for whatever reason should be into and out of that emergency room and on their way back home within four hours if they don't need an overnight stay. Again, that's all at the 90th percentile over the course of the plan.

Our goals here are in line with the standards set by Canadian physicians, and in several cases, Mr. Speaker, we plan to exceed those national standards, and we've debated some of those national standards here as part of our discussion.

Under the issue also of a person's physical, spiritual, and mental health, as referenced on page 2 of the bill, two paragraphs from the bottom it says that "Alberta's health system recognizes that health encompasses a person's physical, spiritual and mental health, from birth to the end of life."

I want to tell you that with respect to the physical side Canada's orthopaedic surgeons have said that hip replacements should be done within 26 weeks. Our target is to do far better than that. We're targeting 14 weeks. Similarly, regarding radiation treatment, the provinces have adopted a common goal of four weeks to start radiation after seeing an oncologist. Alberta has also adopted a target of a maximum of four weeks to see a radiation oncologist; that is, after referral from a general practitioner. Now we're stepping that target up to two weeks.

Regarding ER targets, which was the subject of an amendment pertaining to this bill not long ago, it's important to note that our emergency targets are the same as those in Ontario, for example, where 90 per cent of patients who are in need of an overnight stay will be admitted within eight hours of first arriving in the emergency room. If they don't need an overnight stay, they will be seen, and they will be discharged and sent home with proper care having been given within four hours. Our wait times at present are actually slightly better than many provinces', I understand.

With this new plan and now that we have the new act going forward through the final stages, we will see the improvements that we seek. That's what this bill is all about, Mr. Speaker. It's a bill that talks about how we can help Albertans navigate the system. That's why an important part, to me, of this bill, other than what I've already mentioned, is on page 9, where it talks about public input. It's important for Albertans to know that any time we are addressing some of these issues I've just talked about, the more comprehensive ones, the more substantive ones, there is a clause – well, it's more than a clause. It's a significant amount of text dedicated to public input.

I just want to refresh people's memory quickly on it. On page 9 it reads:

14(1) Neither the Minister nor the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall make any regulation under this Act unless

- (a) the Minister has published a notice of the proposed regulation on the public website of the Minister's department,
- (b) the notice complies with the requirements of this section,
- (c) the time period specified in the notice, during which members of the public and stakeholders may submit comments, has expired, and
- (d) the Minister has reported to the Executive Council in accordance with subsection (4).

(2) The notice referred to in subsection (1)(a) must contain . . .

And it goes on to say:

- (a) a summary of the proposed regulation and the proposed text of it;
- (b) a statement of the time period during which members of the public and stakeholders may submit written comments on the proposed regulation to the Minister and the manner in which the comments must be submitted;
- (c) any other information that the Minister considers appropriate.

It's very transparent. It's very inclusionary.

I'll just close by saying, Mr. Speaker, that this act will help us move the system forward to where we believe it needs to go. It needs to go to where people can better understand what we're trying to do to improve it, it needs to go to where the public has continued, meaningful input in the dialogue and the discussion on things that are of critical importance to them, and it goes to where we as a government are accountable for it, where we have made the approach through a very open form of dialogue, engaging Albertans, and it speaks to our commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act and to those principles of highest regard in the minds of Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat so that others can comment, and I would ask everyone to please now allow Bill 17 to be moved and adopted and passed in this Assembly so that we can get on with the actions that were announced today and with the performance measures that need to be met tomorrow.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list of people who sent me a note: in sequence here the hon. members for Edmonton-Strathcona, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Fish Creek, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

All right. We go through the parties: the Liberals, the WRA, and the NDs in sequence – right? – and then back to the government. Opposition, government, but in the sequence I just said about the parties.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, has been touted, trumpeted by this government as the cure to what ails the system. However, it offers nothing in terms of timelines or targets, nothing in terms of financial commitments. The escape clause is: over the course of the plan. The escape clause is "that the Minister considers appropriate."

Rien, nyet, nada, nothing is being promised. Targets can be changed. Timelines can be changed. Any of the requirements can be left to ministerial discretion. How is this going to move us from where the destruction of the system began back in 1993-1994? I don't see it. Simply coming up with numbers – for example, the Sesame Street number of the day brought to you by the minister of health is five, so we keep hearing about five this, five that, five the other. This is a wish rather than a plan. There's no commitment, no obligation. Publishing notices is the lowest form of consultation.

5:40

Basically, the bill has two parts. It has a patients' so-called bill of rights or a charter of rights, and it has the provision for a patient advocate. Health advocate is the other terminology used. But the health advocate has no power. The health advocate can bring something to the minister's attention, but there's no requirement that whatever is brought to the minister's attention actually gets fixed. I would suggest that we're starting off with a health advocate who has been fixed to begin with. How is that health person going to accomplish anything other than raising an issue that can be filed in that file 13, the round one at the end of the desk? The patient advocate has no power, so let's get rid of the idea of a patient advocate. Unless you have a patient advocate who reports directly to this Assembly, as has been the case that we have asked for, for the children's advocate to report directly, reporting to the minister, potentially behind closed doors, serves no purpose.

Now, the biggest problem with this whole bill is what the minister has referred to as a charter or bill of rights. It's actually, Mr. Speaker, a bill of wrongs. What we have here are wishes that we're going to improve cancer care, wishes that we're going to improve home care, but there are no commitments. We've already seen the minister move from targets established at 90 down to 60. Why should we trust this government to move forward? Forget the fourth way. The document that was revealed to the Liberal caucus and to the NDP caucus and to the Wildrose caucus is actually the fifth way. Premier Klein tried his third way; it didn't work. The government has fiddled and fuddled for two, two and a half years with the superboard – we'll call that the fourth way – and now we're into the fifth way.

There is nothing in this circumstance that increases the number of front-line workers, for example. Without an increase in front-line workers, without a requirement of guidelines and standards, as was proposed in amendment A3, there is no way of evaluating that you've actually hit this imaginary moving target that's been set forth. There is nothing in this new act in terms of increasing the number of staff within the emergency circumstance to prevent, for example, the suicides that we've previously seen. When those approximately 300 reports that were given back prior to the 2008 election were provided to the then minister of health, that was from one hospital, Mr. Speaker. We have hospitals throughout this province that have similarly ugly lists of patient failures, and it's not the fault of the front-line staff; there aren't enough of them.

Now, we have talked about the need to cure the problem. We've suggested that if you started the emergency care provisions and worked backwards, that would be part of the solution. This government has played musical beds for, basically, 16 years. With the blowing up of the General, with the loss of the Holy Cross and the Grace, we lost capacity. We lost beds. With all the beds the hon. minister of health has promised, we'll be barely over half the number of beds we had back in 1994 with a population towards a million less or, not to exaggerate, at least half a million people less.

Until there is a financial commitment by this government to increase the number of seats at university for training medical professionals, a requirement to hire the graduates – not 70 per cent of the graduates. This system needs every single graduate that has the academic requirements to fulfill the positions. It's not enough to operate on a 9 to 4 system with the exception of emergency. As the Liberal plan called for, we have to extend the hours of diagnostic testing. We have to extend the hours of laboratory test results.

There are simple things, Mr. Speaker. When we discharge a patient from a bed, we need an orderly in that room immediately cleaning that bed, preparing it for the next patient to come along. We need home care, not promises of home care. We need funding

for home care, and that home care will gradually help relieve the pressure on the emergency system.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister of health talked about increasing the number of primary health care networks. Well, that requires having a sufficient number of doctors to operate those primary care networks. The reality, despite what was said in this House yesterday by the minister of advanced education, is that the government is reducing the number of seats for doctors, not only for doctors trained in Alberta, but they've reduced the number of accreditation spots for foreign doctors from 60 to 40. There is nothing in Bill 17 that guarantees that within such-and-such a time, with such-and-such an expenditure we're going to have the medical staff necessary to provide that relief.

This government has gone through a series of failed experiments, and what they've come up with is this rather thin gruel, this promise that things are going to be better: trust us. Yet while they're saying, "Trust us," we've got a document that's talking about delisting of services. We've got a document that's talking about having doctors with one foot in the public system and one foot in the private system but publicly funded.

The minister talks about his upholding of universal health care. The key component of universal health care is publicly delivered. So what are we to believe in terms of plans? Are we supposed to believe Bill 17? Are we supposed to believe in the July 2010 document? How many plans over the next five years, Mr. Speaker, are we going to see revised? How many targets are going to be reduced? The reality is that if you keep reducing the target, if you keep reducing the goal, eventually, probably sooner than later, you're going to meet it.

Albertans do not want a reduction in services; they require an increase in services. Mr. Speaker, in our plan we said: utilize the existing beds that we have. Take them out of mothballs. That requires hiring the staff to support them. We've talked about opening as opposed to closing long-term health care centres such as we've seen in Red Deer. The reality is that the equipment exists. The diagnostic equipment exists. The beds exist. We have trained individuals within this province who we could hire tomorrow, who are qualified and would be glad to be a part of the system even as it fragments at the top. These people on the front lines at the bottom of the system have the capability, with the proper governance, to bail the government out in its failures. But that doesn't show up in Bill 17.

There is no guarantee that by Christmas, for example, the long-term beds are going to be there and in place and staffed. I said long-term care beds as opposed to assisted living beds. Mr. Speaker, there is no guarantee even that Caritas, that was supposed to be finished in the summer, is going to be finished before January. That's another example of a target being moved, being moved, being moved. We're about to enter into the flu season. Is the government going to erect another soccer dome in front of the Stollery hospital and call it a treatment centre? Are we going to have the MASH units bailing us out?

5:50

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal plan called for an immediate medically trained and understanding team to create the solutions. Bill 17 is about widespread, loosey-goosey motherhood: we'll meet in five years. What we need is a medical team right now saying: "Okay. Here's the problem at the Misericordia. Here's the problem at the Foothills. We need this number of staff. Here they go. Let's knock down those wait limits." We need consequences for the government, not for Alberta Health Services or the superboard, if the fleeting goals are not met. There is nothing in Bill 17 that has a consequence for the health minister if the targets aren't met.

Mr. Speaker, when Bill 17 gets passed, without amendments such as A3 to provide standards and guidelines, we are not going to be any appreciably better than we were before. All we have is rhetoric, unsupported, unqualified rhetoric. I have no desire to add to that rhetoric. I'm looking for results. I'm looking for standards. I'm looking for guidelines. I'm looking for measurable results. I'm looking for commitments. There is nothing in Bill 17 as it stands that would provide myself or any Albertan assurance that when they need health care, there will be a family doctor available, that the office will be open sufficiently long for them to go there instead of going to emergency. There is no guarantee that there will be urgent care centres that are properly staffed so that I or my loved ones don't have to show up at emergency. None of the proposals, the seven solutions, that the Liberal plan provided are raised in this Bill 17.

Trust is gone, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 17 is a very important act as we move forward in ensuring that we have the opportunity and the ability to take what is an excellent health system in the province today and build on that excellence to ensure that we have an excellent health system for Alberta and Albertans tomorrow.

We spent a considerable amount of time in this House debating the bill, over 30 hours. However, unfortunately, most of that time was spent discussing an amendment about emergency wait times. The House has very rightly agreed that the bill has fundamental importance but that emergency wait times, while extremely important, do not belong in this particular bill. Emergency, while important, is not the whole system. The challenge is not the expansion of emergency, but the challenge is to deal with the whole system. That's what Bill 17 is about: building a very strong foundation to take the excellent health system that we have today and to continue to build it into an excellent health system tomorrow.

I have much more to say, Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill 17, but the time will probably not allow us to get into it. So at this point I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions (*reversion*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 24

24. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's just sufficient time remaining to conduct this piece of business. It's clear from the debate that happened earlier with respect to this particular bill, Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, the five hours and 17 minutes that have been spent in debate on it, that

members of the opposition have no intention of passing it out of committee. In fact, we've been asked to deal with it by way of providing the appropriate motion, I think was the term that was used by the House leader from the Wildrose Alliance. The appropriate motion is now here, and we're asking them to support an allocation of time in committee so that we can deal with it further.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for the opposition to speak on this motion. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down.

Mr. Anderson: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: There is a standing order here, Standing Order 21(3), that a member of the Official Opposition may respond for five minutes, so an hon. member of the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Where does one start when, clearly, although this is certainly how the rules are played in the House, everyone on every side, of course, tries for the advantage? However, I do believe that perhaps five hours isn't enough. Maybe we should have more. Maybe we should have more time to speak to other people outside of this House that would like to perhaps give us more information.

I still think that the bottom line and the crux of this whole matter, no matter which way you cut it, no matter whatever you say about it, is closure. Filibustering is a very difficult thing to do. It's certainly more successful when there are larger opposition numbers; however, it is a legitimate method whereby people can try to stall a bill and, in fact, hope that perhaps that bill could be lifted off the table and sent back to committee so that it could be reviewed. Clearly, if people are willing to stay up for 30 hours, someone is behind that idea to say: no, don't give up; keep working away on it. Hopefully, the light would be seen and the bill would be perhaps sent back and reworked.

I'm not just speaking about Bill 17, which had closure, or Bill 24, which had closure. I believe Bill 28 will probably have closure as well. The whole point of it is that these are games. These are games that are played, and they actually can be named games, but truly they are legitimate ways of the opposition being able to say to the government: no, you guys are wrong; don't walk over us. Listen to what we're saying. See if we can't work together to make the bill better, which is what the opposition would try to do, or, in fact, as I've said, pick it up.

It's also the government's ability to call for closure. Again, that is part of the way the House is run. It does boil down, unfortunately more often than not, to partisan politics, and that is a shame. We really should be working together in here.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

[Government Motion 24 carried]

Mr. Hancock: I move that we adjourn until 7:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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Third Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 30, 2010

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Deputy Chair: Any comments or questions to be offered to this bill? We are speaking to amendment A3. One hour. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, members, for that. I am pleased to rise in support of Bill 24. I think we have had some good discussion about this bill, and I want to focus on some of the items I have heard during previous debate to address some of the concerns or misunderstandings that have been expressed in this Assembly.

I think there were two major issues that have been identified to which I would like to speak. The first is Bill 24's pore space ownership clause. Let's be clear, very clear. The amendment to declare pore space ownership does not change the definition of land ownership. One member said that landowners have ownership from heaven to hell. In reality we know that's not so. In fact, in most cases there are different surface and mineral rights owners. Even putting that aside, surface rights owners have never been able to lay claim to something they can't practically use. For example, if they truly owned to heaven, no airplanes would be able to fly because landowners would have had the power to stop them or charge them rent. The reality is that ownership of pore space has never been resolved by the courts or in the Alberta Legislature. This bill makes it clear.

Some members question why this bill doesn't focus on taking pore space under Crown land only. At this point we cannot be absolutely sure the best storage sites are only on Crown land. To ensure that the most appropriate site is chosen, we need to have access to more pore space, not just some of it.

Clarifying pore space ownership and accepting long-term liability for the injected CO₂ were recommendations made by two expert panels, the provincial-federal EcoEnergy Carbon Capture and Storage Task Force and Alberta's Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council. Again, let me be very clear. If landowners owned the mineral rights under their land, this legislation does not change that. Landowners still have all the authority to those rights, and this will not change. Companies will still be required to negotiate with landowners for surface access to their land and will be compensated fairly. This also has not changed. Before applicants are given access by the minister and, again, by the Energy Resources Conservation Board, they must demonstrate that the project will not impact resources such as oil, gas, and coal.

I would also like to clarify that this bill does not allow companies to inject whatever they want, whenever they want, as one member stated. The intent of this bill is to facilitate the injection of captured carbon dioxide and, certainly, not "whatever."

Let's talk about taxpayer subsidy for a moment. Some are saying that CCS is a new taxpayer supported industry. It is expensive to implement new technology, and CCS is expensive. The project

proponents are investing hundreds of millions of their own dollars into these projects, so industry is clearly committed to the advancement of CCS. Let me repeat that. Industry is investing hundreds of millions of dollars. This is not a handout. This is a partnership between government and industry investing in a technology that we fully expect will be viable and effective. In fact, just yesterday the global carbon capture and storage initiative, which is funded by the Australian government, announced that it is committing \$5 million to one of the projects we are currently negotiating a grant agreement with.

When I was in Europe in March, I toured many countries pursuing CCS, including Norway, the U.K., and Germany. There is considerable interest in these countries in what is happening here in Alberta relative to CCS, and actually they not only congratulated but commended our government and the Canadian government for our leadership in CCS. Naturally, people are very interested in technological advancement, not just that which can make carbon capture and storage possible on a commercial scale but technology that can bring down the cost of CCS.

There is also a lot of interest from abroad in how Alberta is going about the implementation of CCS. What will the rules and the regulations be? How will we regulate the industry? These are the things we're talking about with Bill 24 and amendments. We're talking about the fundamental things that need to be in place as we move toward putting shovels in the ground.

Be assured that our \$2 billion financial investment in CCS is being made with the future in mind. CO₂ used for enhanced oil recovery is expected to create up to \$25 billion in royalties and taxes for Alberta. Not bad for a \$2 billion investment. This is not a made-up number by government but an estimate from the Alberta Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council, a consortium of experts.

We just have to look to Saskatchewan to find the world's largest enhanced oil recovery project, which has been in operation for 10 years. The project at Weyburn has been piping CO₂ in from North Dakota and using it to revive an aging conventional reservoir. In fact, this project has extended the life of the reservoir by at least two decades and has helped produce more than 1 million barrels of oil. This project has been monitored by CCS experts and teams around the world, and there have been no safety or leakage issues, nor have there been any issues with the pipeline that runs more than 300 kilometres through two countries. In fact, there are more than 2,400 kilometres of CO₂ pipelines in operation in the United States today.

This is an opportunity for Alberta to develop and refine its expertise in CCS, a technology being pursued world-wide. We want to be leaders in the technology and then share our knowledge with the world. That will result in tremendous economic spinoffs like highly skilled jobs for generations to come, and that is the payoff for Albertans, as one member wondered about.

Greenhouse gas emission reductions and increased revenue to pay for health care and schools and other services so that we can enjoy an opportunity to become world leaders in a technology being pursued around the globe: I must say that I think this is a terrific payoff and good leadership, just as we had strong leadership with Premier Lougheed, when we originally explored and developed our oil sands.

I have heard a number of members talk about the overall cost of the \$2 billion CCS program. Some members think there is a better way to use the money. One member suggested getting rid of greenhouse gas emissions by spending the \$2 billion purchasing coal plants in the province and shutting them down. That would force us to move to renewable sources of energy, which is not bad. That would also force us to lose 60 per cent of the electricity capacity in the province, resulting in instant price hikes to consumers. Frankly,

I don't know of any coal plant for sale in Alberta as they are owned by private industry. In fact, a coal plant – that's one coal plant – can't even be built for \$2 billion. So is that a reasonable, logical step to take to reducing greenhouse gas emissions? I would have to say not.

The time to act is now. The International Energy Agency says that there will be a 70 per cent increase in the global cost of emission reductions without CCS. Carbon capture and storage is the only technology currently available in Alberta to address large-volume emissions. The IPCC says that the cost of building and operating CO₂ capture systems will fall over time as a result of technological advances.

One of the most sensational arguments against CCS is to compare it to the unfortunate event in Cameroon, where CO₂ erupted from a lake, killing 1,700 people. To compare the leading-edge technology of CCS to an unfortunate event caused by Mother Nature a quarter-century ago is incorrect. There is just no comparison. There will be an extensive measuring, monitoring, and verification of all injection sites in Alberta. Any release of CO₂ would quickly be detected and remediated. This was not the case there when the incident occurred.

7:40

It is also important as we discuss CCS to talk about exactly where it would be injected. Water sources are typically a couple of hundred metres below surface, well above CO₂ injection depths, which are expected to be as deep as two kilometres. Projects must ensure long-term protection of these shallow aquifers. Alberta's geology is uniquely suited to the safe storage of CO₂ in deep formations. This province's long history of oil and gas exploration provides a wealth of information about deep oil and gas reservoirs and geological formations that can be used to store CO₂.

A detailed review of regulations around CCS will begin in 2011 to ensure that safety and environmental outcomes are achieved. It will be completed long before large-scale injection begins in 2015. Alberta is leading the way on CCS, but we are not alone. Countries all over the world are pursuing this technology. The United Kingdom, Norway, the United States, China, and Australia all agree that CCS will mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. There are other projects happening around the world, two in Norway alone and another in Algeria.

The second major issue that I see in our debate is that of long-term liability. The province is proposing to take liability for the CO₂ only after the companies have proven it is stable and behaving as it should. The time period required before government will take liability has yet to be worked out, but I expect we are talking about having decades' worth of information and not months or years. Through its existing regulatory framework and the proposed legislation Alberta will impose very strict monitoring requirements on large-scale CCS projects. It would be irresponsible for government to not take liability. Who would be responsible if these companies go out of business? Remember, we are talking about storage of hundreds and thousands of years.

Dr. David Keith from the University of Calgary rates the overall risk from stored carbon dioxide as relatively low and said that experience with storage of more than 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, mostly in Texas, bears that out. Dr. Keith also says that should a problem arise, it will do so in the first decade, so it will be up to the operator to fix.

The Crown is taking long-term liability for the CO₂ many years after injection has been completed. Insurance products for CCS projects under construction and operation are available for companies to purchase and have been since January 2009. Bill 24 ensures that CCS operators will finance a fund which will pay for ongoing monitoring and any remedial work.

CCS is an important tool we can use to secure Alberta's place as a responsible energy supplier, but we will move forward carefully and prudently. Albertans were encouraged to give feedback to Alberta's climate change strategy, which developed the province's long-term goal to address climate change. It is expected that once the process required for large-scale CCS projects is determined, it will be similar to the one in place for oil and gas development. The operator will be required to inform the public and receive feedback on the project.

We are moving forward with this technology and are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. Alberta's pioneering spirit ensures that we are doers, and we are not watchers. All we have to do is look at our oil sands industry, which is unique in the world. Because government and industry embraced and acted on that vision decades ago, Albertans today continue to enjoy a terrific standard of living without paying a high level of personal income tax that would otherwise be required. Albertans also enjoy the plentiful social programs funded by government, in part thanks to the royalties from this resource.

Mr. Chair, the time for CCS is now. I fully support Bill 24 and encourage all members to fully support it as we move ahead with this game-changing technology. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. We're on an amendment, correct, Mr. Chairman?

The Deputy Chair: Amendment A3.

Mr. MacDonald: Amendment A3. Okay. I can appreciate that. I didn't hear a word on the amendment in the hon. member's remarks, but that was a fine speech. I appreciate her support of carbon capture and storage. We first talked about this in the Legislative Assembly close to eight years ago, Mr. Chairman. I for one think it is part of the solution to our fight against greenhouse gasses.

How will amendment A3 change this bill? That question remains to be answered. The difference between permanent and long term as defined by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore is not really going to change the intent of this bill in my view. Certainly, the intent of this bill is to put some rules around the liability issue. Whether it's permanent or long term, regardless of how you describe it, it is to put some liability rules around the issue of CO₂ storage.

I have had a look at the debate so far, and I'm disappointed that in *Hansard* I'm not getting any information regarding comparisons to other jurisdictions. The hon. member talked about Cameroon. Certainly, other hon. members have talked about Weyburn, Saskatchewan, and what's going on there. We have a pilot project going on east of Joffre. We have the Norwegians. We have the Americans that are doing some work. [interjections] Yes, the Norwegians. The Norwegians, hon. member, are doing remarkable things with CO₂ sequestration, as they are with their royalties.

An Hon. Member: They're remarkable people.

Mr. MacDonald: They are exceptionally remarkable people. They have collected over \$500 billion in 14 years in their savings fund. We, Mr. Chairman, have over 30 years, 35 years of history collecting royalties on our energy resources, and we have \$14 billion.

Dr. Morton: Because they don't have Ottawa picking their pockets. What about those transfer payments?

Mr. MacDonald: Now, a former member of the federal party, who is the current financial guy in the province here, is talking about how the federal government is picking his pocket. Well, he should stand up once and for all for Albertans whenever we get to the negotiations . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. When we get to the negotiations on the Canada health transfer, I certainly hope he stands up for Alberta, not his right-wing cousins from the University of Calgary. Let's make sure you do that, sir.

Now, when we talk about CO₂ sequestration and the future it has, it does have a very bright future in this province. The hon. member spoke about CO₂ sequestration and how the oil revenue has improved the standard and quality of life in this province, and she's absolutely right. Where CO₂ will come into play in this province is in enhanced oil recovery. Drayton Valley, for instance, is a very mature, established oil field. Hopefully, some of the formations there that have not been swept with a water flood in the past could be used for CO₂ sequestration.

But we have to be very careful with this bill. There are liability issues here that have yet to be addressed in this Assembly, in my view, in the discussion of this bill. We have to be very careful. We have to answer the question about the liability, of course, of the transportation system, the gathering system of the CO₂ from the source to the final well where it is going to be sequestered into a deep formation. We're going to have to clarify the issue around water. I don't think the deep formations are going to affect drinking water, but I think we need some more testing done to make sure, really sure that we're not affecting our water supplies.

Now, CO₂ is already a commodity; it's a tradable commodity. It's sold across the border from America into Canada for the Weyburn sequestration projects, and there doesn't seem to be any problems in Weyburn. Mr. Chairman, to point that out, at Weyburn the monitoring using seismic pressure and geochemical techniques indicates that no leaks had taken place even though more than a thousand wells, dating back to the 1960s, were present within the Weyburn field. This is an important finding because abandoned wells are thought to be an important potential leakage path for CO₂. That's what they've discovered to date in Weyburn. We know that EnCana's oil production in Weyburn has increased significantly on a barrel-per-day rate

7:50

The Americans – and I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this – have released a carbon capture and storage interagency task force. In February of this year President Obama alerted the heads of 14 executive departments and federal agencies, establishing this task force on carbon capture and storage. The goal in America was to develop a comprehensive and co-ordinated federal strategy to speed the commercial development and deployment of clean-coal technologies. The task force, co-chaired by the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency, was charged with proposing a plan to overcome the barriers to the widespread, cost-effective deployment of carbon capture and storage within 10 years, with a goal of bringing five to 10 commercial demonstration projects online by 2016.

Now, as this bill was being drafted in Alberta, this task force delivered a series of recommendations to President Obama. I'm sure the hon. minister of Finance is a big fan of President Obama. [interjection] I shouldn't have brought that up because I already knew the answer.

This is what the Americans have done. I heard the consultation process explained by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, but on the issue of liability, when it starts, the issue of how this industry fund is going to work, I'm still not satisfied that we have an explanation. We've got to get this right because if we download or transfer all the liabilities onto the taxpayers very quickly, anything could happen. I'm not going to say it will happen, but it certainly could happen. We've got to make sure that we have the issue of long-term liability and storage frameworks in place.

There are a few options for us to consider. We can look at what's going on now in this bill, and we can leave it alone. We can just ignore the amendment from the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and carry on as usual. We can look at this bill, and we can say: "That's it. We're going to be content with that." The Minister of Energy is going to write the regulations, and we're going to hope that there's no long-term liabilities. We already know that there are significant liabilities left to the taxpayers and to the citizens of this province as a result of abandoned oil wells and gas wells and compressor stations, batteries, gathering systems, liabilities that are measured not in the millions but in the billions of dollars according to the ERCB. So we have to be very careful about this.

Now, will we have limitations on claims, and what will those limitations be? That's another question I haven't heard in any of the discussions here. The creation of this industry finance trust fund is to support long-term storageship activities and compensate parties, as I understand it. How exactly will this work? What types and forms of losses would be allowed to be withdrawn from this fund? Again, we have to be very careful.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the latitude you're giving me on this. I know we should be on amendment A3. We should be talking about the difference between permanent and long term, but we're looking, really, at whether it's a long-term liability or not. That's what we're doing.

Now, the transfer of the liability from the operator to the taxpayers is essentially what we're going to get here after the site closure happens. There are rules and ifs, ands, and buts. But that's what we're going to get. I'm not convinced that this bill in this form – I'm a fan of CO₂. I think it is an answer to part of the problem with CO₂ emissions and how we control them. But I'm not so sure that this bill is drafted to protect owners, taxpayers, in this province. I'm just not convinced of that, Mr. Chairman.

Different jurisdictions have different ways of looking at this long-term liability transfer. Who will ultimately have complete financial responsibility? If one of the hon. government members would answer this in the course of the time we have left – I know we're dealing with closure, and I know time is limited, and I know it's precious. Who will have financial responsibility for the post injection site care? By that, I mean that after the CO₂ is injected, the well is sealed off – and hopefully there's going to be no CO₂ migrating up through the formation into the atmosphere. I can't see it, but we've got to make darn sure that that's not going to happen. In this post injection site care who's responsible? Is it the owner or operator, or is it the citizens? I don't think this bill satisfies that. I think that's very important, Mr. Chairman.

I don't know exactly how this long-term liability transfer is going to work. Are we going to have a certificate of completion, where the operator of a sequestration site can transfer title and liability to the province after demonstrating to an agency – in this case I'm going to pick the ERCB – that the site is stable for a certain period of time after the last CO₂ has been injected and the site has been closed? Who remains liable? For how long? Ten, 20, 35 years?

I would like to know which jurisdictions have accepted liability for pilot projects within their borders. I would like to get more

information from the Alberta Research Council on exactly what is happening with the pure CO₂ stream that's coming in at Joffre and going into the existing oil field just to the east. I would like to know what EnCana thinks about what's going on in Norway.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to remind the House again about how much money Norway has in their bank and how little we have in our bank. What exactly are the Norwegians doing right with their CO₂ sequestration in the North Sea? Those would be some questions I have.

Dr. Taft: They're sequestering all their money down there.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is absolutely right when he says that not only are they sequestering CO₂; they're sequestering their money. The \$500 billion is, I think, over 1 per cent of the entire equities traded on the globe.

I don't want to be accused of getting off track. [interjection] They're your friends. You deal with them. They're from the Calgary school, and so are you. You're a proud graduate of that school, sir.

8:00

In conclusion, I would like to remind all hon. members that if we pass this bill, we have to make sure that in the future our grandchildren are not scratching their heads after they're left with another enormous environmental liability. I think this bill should be set aside. I think there should be a committee of this Legislative Assembly, perhaps one that one of these fine gentlemen chair. They could have a look at the recommendations that have come from the American task force and compare what the Americans are contemplating doing and what we are doing with this bill. I think that would be an ideal project for one of these policy committees, and they could report back to this House perhaps next spring.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and cede the floor to another hon. member. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to offer my support for Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. We've had some very spirited discussion relative to both the specifics of the bill and to its merits. Bill 24 will set in place some of the framework required to move forward with commercial-scale carbon capture and storage.

There are some people in this House who do not believe that we should move forward on carbon capture and storage. They just don't see the value in it. It's consistent for these people to oppose legislation that establishes the conditions to implement something they just don't seem to believe in. But they should believe in CCS, if for no other reason than that carbon capture and storage is an excellent long-term investment for this province. CO₂ used for enhanced oil recovery, or EOR, alone is expected to create up to \$25 billion in royalties. Mr. Chair, that's \$25 billion with a "b" as in beautiful. As the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has stated, that's not a made-up number by government. In fact, it's been computed by a consortium of experts, the Alberta Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council. We can rely on that number.

We just have to look a little bit east of here to the land of my birth, in Saskatchewan, to find the world's largest enhanced oil recovery project, which has been in operation for over a decade. A lot of people don't know that, but I know that because it's very close to my hometown of Yorkton, Saskatchewan. It's in Weyburn. A lot of

folks find it hard to believe, but Beulah, North Dakota, has been piping CO₂ there and has been reviving this aging conventional reservoir. It's going to extend the life of the reservoir by over 20 years, and it's helped produce more than a million barrels of incremental oil. Mr. Chair, we just can't ignore that kind of success story.

Here in this province for Albertans a scenario like this would mean that roads and pipelines and other infrastructure already in place will have their useful lives extended, and that would mean continued prosperity for the communities and the residents near those fields here in Alberta.

Back in Weyburn – we can learn from them – the project has been monitored by CCS experts and teams from around the world. These aren't just local folks, even though they're completely capable. They have all found that there are no safety or leakage issues, as even the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has agreed. There haven't been any issues with that pipeline running more than 300 kilometres, through two countries. I think I've heard before that 2,400 kilometres of CO₂ pipelines are in operation in the U. S. today alone.

Mr. Chair, back here in Alberta we've made great strides to advance alternative renewable energy sources. We haven't been resting on our laurels. I think it would be good for other jurisdictions to know that not only do we have oil and gas; we've got 700 megawatts of capacity of wind-generated electricity, and we're upgrading the transmission system to allow even more in the future. We also have a bioenergy program which Albertans can be extremely proud of, and it's generating another 300 megawatts of electricity.

This is all completely pertinent to amendment A3. There are considerable achievements, and there are going to be more as we go forward. But I know when people talk about A3, they're wondering: what can we underline? Despite all of this and similar achievements elsewhere, the world's going to continue to depend on fossil fuels for many, many more years to come and likely decades. Mr. Chair, it's a fact of life. When we burn fossil fuels, we get carbon dioxide. Another fact of life is that this province is blessed with an abundance of fossil fuels, and specific to carbon capture and storage it's coal and oil. Many people are starting to understand as well that the second point we need to underline pertinent to A3 is that Alberta is also blessed with the perfect geology in which to put the carbon dioxide back underground on a permanent basis.

As certain members have been quick to point out, when we get started on the development of carbon capture and storage technologies, there's going to be a significant financial investment. It includes large amounts from private industry. Mr. Chair, these firms will need to answer some very basic questions for their shareholders before they can commit to spending money on CCS technologies.

The first question might be: if I'm going to pump liquefied carbon dioxide deep underground, from whom do I have to get permission? The answer to that would be the owner. This bill provides certainty as to who that owner is and should put the minds of opposition, media, and all others to rest. It is indeed the Crown, the people of Alberta.

Let's be really clear on the question that's been raised in the House around property rights. Bill 24 has no impact on ownership, ownership of land or mineral rights ownership. Mr. Chair, pore space exists in the absence of minerals. Any mineral right will be exactly the same the day after this bill is proclaimed as it was the day before the proclamation.

Then we ask the question: how does this pertain to A3 when it comes to landowners? Well, when it comes to this amendment, again this will not create a change. Landowners who also own minerals rights will continue to own those rights. But, as I've

mentioned, pore space exists in the absence of minerals. I learned that in grade 7 science, but in grade 7 I wasn't a landowner. The question is: does this amendment affect the rights of the landowners; does that mean landowners won't receive any compensation, Mr. Chair? No, it doesn't mean that at all.

Firms that pump carbon dioxide underground will require an above ground injection site, and just as if they were on someone else's land drilling for oil and gas, the firms will have to pay the landowner a surface rights fee for the injection site. The landowner will continue to have the right to negotiate that fee directly with the company, to seek an arbitrated fee through the Surface Rights Board, and if they're unsatisfied after that, they can seek leave to appeal in the courts.

What we're talking about are tiny holes in rocks where there are no minerals. They are deep, potentially kilometres under the surface of the land. So a company which is preparing to invest tens or perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars in CCS would also sensibly want to know what the rules and regulations are. Bill 24 and this amendment enable this government to create the framework for large-scale carbon capture and storage, including policies and regulations needed for this technology to be developed over the next couple of years, long before injection begins.

Finally, Mr. Chair, any company investing its shareholder dollars into CCS obviously needs to understand the technology and the rules and regulations, but they also need to understand the short, medium, and long-term liabilities. That's perfectly reasonable. It's responsible. It's expected. It's the expectation of this bill and this amendment, which respond reasonably and responsibly to exactly that.

The legislation states that while a company is pumping the carbon dioxide into deep underground formations, that company is responsible to ensure that the entire operation is safe and secure. It's the right thing to do. Additionally, the legislation states that once a company has completed pumping the CO₂ underground, they must continue to be responsible for the project until such time as they can satisfy the regulator that they've continued to scientifically monitor the sequestration using the best available technology and methodology and that they can demonstrate that the sequestration is secure.

8:10

It's very much how we regulate surface disruption of Crown land. If you disturb Crown land in the course of taking minerals out, you have to reclaim that land once you're finished. You don't get to decide as a company what constitutes proper reclamation; the people's government decides. The company would remain liable for that disturbance until the government is satisfied that the land has been reclaimed to the very high standards that Albertans have set.

It will work the same way for sequestered carbon dioxide. The government will set the standards for injection, the standards for monitoring, and the standard of proof required to show that the injection is stable and secure. It would be irresponsible for the government to not take liability. Who would take responsibility if these companies went out of business? Remember, we're talking about storage for hundreds and thousands of years.

David Keith, a doctor from the University of Calgary, rates the overall risk from stored carbon dioxide as relatively low and said that experience with storage of more than 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, mostly in Texas, bears that out. That's not from us; that's from Dr. Keith. I haven't spoken to him about the amendment, but his comments that apply to A3 would be that should a problem arise, it'll do so in the first decade, so it would be up to the operator to fix, which will put the minds of the Albertan taxpayer to rest.

The Crown is taking long-term liability for the projects only, most likely decades after injection has been completed. However, it's

worth noting that insurance products for CCS projects under construction and operation are available for companies to purchase and have been since January 2009. Bill 24 ensures that CCS operators will finance a fund which will pay for ongoing monitoring and any remedial work.

Mr. Chair, countries from all over the world are pursuing this technology: the U.K., Norway, the U.S., China, and Australia. They all agree CCS will mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. There are other projects happening around the world, two in Norway and another in In Salah, Algeria. What we have with Bill 24 is the instrument to make Alberta a global leader in CCS technology.

I offer my full support and encourage all members to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. There are two main concerns that I'm hearing from Albertans about this bill: one is the erosion of property rights in this province; the other is the government wasting money on things that are not priorities for Albertans.

I'll just say a few words about the first point. Whether it's Bill 19, 36, 50, or other outrageous bills from the last few years or this session's 26 or 29 or this one, Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, the government keeps passing laws that remove the little obstacles that are in their way for the minister doing what he wants to do but which trample over the property rights of Albertans. The main point of property rights is that they protect people from the government, not that they protect themselves from each other. But this government continues to ignore this basic fact.

This bill is the clearest example of confiscating property of citizens even if it's not the most upsetting. Pore space isn't something that people have thought much about. Many probably don't even know if it's under their land. But it's obviously worth more than people realize because the government is suddenly putting a value on carbon storage. Even if the value is somewhat artificially inflated because of the scheme the government is insisting on pursuing, it is still of value and it still belongs to the landowners.

The government wants to begin storing things in these spaces. Now, if they respected property rights, they could try to keep themselves to Crown land or only use space on land where they are given permission. But that's a hassle, and this whole project is inefficient enough already. So what does the government do? It removes the hassle that individual property rights could pose. It simply declares that it owns all pore space, not just in a certain area but everywhere. It's that simple. Everywhere in the province it all belongs to the Crown. As the owner the minister of the Crown can pump whatever he wants into it, whenever he wants, and you have to take it that way.

Many speakers in the opposition have pointed out that the idea that landowners own the land below the surface isn't a matter of interpretation, Mr. Chair; it's established in common law. This government is confiscating property without compensation. As we so often see, they are putting all of the powers that a minister could possibly use into his hands and are eliminating opposition. It's undemocratic, and it's wrong. That's the property rights side of this, and that's very important. It fits with an utterly disturbing pattern that this government has embarked upon over the last few years.

But, of course, sometimes the government needs to compromise individual property rights for the sake of important projects that benefit Albertans. That right should still be respected in that those affected should be compensated. When there is some great public good, like a railroad or a highway or even power lines, if we actually

needed them, we can't let one stubborn person hold projects for ransom when the province really needs them. We should have the due process of the courts, Mr. Chair. The carbon capture and storage project does not at all seem to benefit Albertans. Therefore, in light of it being the reason for the government to confiscate all of the pore space in the province, I'll turn in the second part of my speech to a summary of some of the obvious problems.

I've been hearing concerns from many Albertans about whether the carbon capture plan really makes sense economically, environmentally. The town of Barendrecht, Holland, was supposed to have a carbon capture space put under part of their own town. The citizens didn't want it. They weren't sure about this unproven technology and just didn't think it was worth the risk, so they exercised their democratic rights and held a municipal plebiscite that forbade Shell from going ahead with a project that would store CO₂ under the city in two former natural gas basins. Citizens in Holland and Germany as well have had their chance to oppose projects happening in their backyards.

Under this bill, as is far too common, Albertans will have no such recourse against the minister's discretion. The Shell carbon capture project in Barendrecht, Holland, has other interesting insights that cast light on the flaws of this government's plan to capture and store CO₂. As in Alberta, because this is not an economically feasible project that an independent company would invest in, the Dutch government was subsidizing most of the cost. Actually, they were subsidizing 90 per cent of it. Here in Alberta our government claims that they will be subsidizing no more than two-thirds of the cost. Sounds like a deal. It's not. Even at 90 per cent Shell told the Dutch government that it would cost them approximately \$100 a tonne for carbon dioxide. Here in Alberta Shell is telling our government that their two-thirds subsidy will work out to \$865 per tonne. I find it hard to believe that this project costs more than 10 times what it costs to do in Europe, Mr. Chair.

It makes me wonder if this is another case of this government failing to do due diligence with these big companies, kind of like when they went to TransAlta and said: how big do you need your lines to be? They'd come back and ask for the moon to start their negotiations, only to have the government turn around and say: okay. Whether there's a similarity or not, I've never heard an explanation as to why this government is approving a subsidy more than 8.5 times larger than the Holland subsidy. In fact, Rob Seeley, general manager of sustainable development for Shell right here in Fort Saskatchewan, stated that it costs \$80 to \$140 per tonne to build one of these CCS systems. The Alberta government instead is claiming that it costs \$1,300 per tonne.

How did the government end up with a number that is 12 times what Mr. Seeley estimated? Who in this government approved this Enron-like overvaluation? It really seems like there's a shell game going on somewhere here, Mr. Chair, but we can never get to the bottom of it because this government is so secretive. As my colleagues have pointed out, carbon capture projects are being killed around the world, yet here we are clinging to this idea.

Just this weekend Kevin Libin in the *National Post* wrote an article talking about how obsessing over carbon is not nearly as cool as it was a few years ago. Even Greenpeace and Al Gore argue that this kind of project is a waste of money and can never be competitive compared to all of the other things that we could be doing. If so many are turning against it, why are we going ahead? The vice-president of Shell himself was quoted as saying:

Carbon capture and storage is presently generating costs but yields no revenues. It is one of the few technologies that is entirely climate change driven. Without policy intervention to create a market price for CO₂, development and deployment of CCS will simply not happen.

8:20

The Canadian and Alberta governments announced that they would spend a combined \$865 million to help Royal Dutch Shell build commercial-scale carbon capture and storage for Alberta's oil sands for a project that will store 1 million metric tonnes of CO₂. This government could have bought an equivalent amount of credits on the Chicago exchange for \$50,000. Maybe that would have helped keep the exchange afloat, for whatever that's worth. If the rest of our projects are as efficient, then the \$2 billion would work out to about \$130,000 worth of credits in the defunct exchange that they set up in Chicago. If the world market wouldn't even pay \$200,000 for carbon we're storing, why are we forcing Alberta taxpayers to spend \$2 billion to store it?

The only answer is that this government is so desperate to be politically correct, they are willing to pay any cost for this CCS. It was a very politely fashionable concept a few years ago, when they embarked on it, but as my colleagues have been explaining, many commentators are pointing out that this is falling out of fashion as even the environmentalists realize that it brings so little benefit for what it costs.

These are some of the kinds of questions that I've asked and I'm concerned about for my constituents especially. Albertans know we need to have a strong environmental record, but they think clean air and water and beautiful parks for recreation are what the priorities should be. That's why the government heard from so many Albertans on Bill 29 but will never hear about the support for this boondoggle. They aren't persuaded that this huge undertaking is going to make a meaningful contribution to the planet. They worry that it's a huge expense, and the idea of tanker trucks driving around the province to put plant food in the ground raises a lot of questions. How much energy will be used to separate the gases? How much will be used to compress it? How much will be used to transport it? I'm opposed to this bill because, like citizens across Alberta, I am very uncomfortable with it in the ground and taking away from our property rights.

I'll repeat my call, instead, for a world-class symposium so that we can have the proper, informed discussion that this deserves. Then, hopefully, we can make a better decision about the most effective and responsible things Albertans can do to protect our environment and make the most of our resources at the same time.

Mr. Chair, the most important thing that we can do is to continue studying this problem. There are many scientists on both sides talking about CO₂, talking about the cost of storage and what we can do. I very much agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in that this bill should be set aside, as was Bill 29. That would be the right thing to do. It would be very easy to bring forward a couple of pilot projects that we have, as pilot projects and not all inclusive.

The most important thing that we can do if we're really concerned about the environment is to move to a cleaner fuel, a one-carbon fuel, natural gas. There are many new and exciting ideas on what we can do with natural gas versus the burning of long carbon chains like diesel and coal. We need to be looking at this. If we're going to spend \$2 billion, the question that we should be asking Albertans is: is this where you want it spent? Do you want it spent on carbon capture and storage? I believe the resounding remarks coming back from Albertans would be saying: "No. We haven't studied this enough."

Mr. Chair, with that, I'll sit down and allow someone else to discuss it. This bill should be following Bill 29, should be pulled aside. We could do some more studying and listening to Albertans on how they want to spend our ever short dollars that we have in the province of Alberta, running a \$7 billion cash deficit.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert on the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to speak on a very specific issue that's been raised a number of times in debate on this issue, and that's the concept of the ownership of a parcel of land. The heaven-to-hell concept has been raised in a number of issues. It's called the infinite carrot, where you, in fact, own from heaven to hell, right to the centre of the Earth. Now, that's basically the concept of land ownership. The Crown was the initial owner of the land, and the Crown is the only absolute owner of land today. Land ownership can be equated to a bundle of rights.

Mr. Chair, am I out of order on this?

The Deputy Chair: I'd like you to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Allred: What is the amendment?

The Deputy Chair: Striking out "permanent" and substituting "long-term."

Mr. Allred: Okay. Mr. Chairman, I guess I'm out of order, then. [interjections] Keep going?

Mr. Chairman, a number of people have raised this issue, and I think it needs to be clarified. As I indicated, the Crown is the absolute owner of the land, and the Crown initially owned all the land from heaven to hell. The Crown at various times granted land. Initially they granted the whole parcel of land, but the Crown always retains certain rights. The Crown has the right of taxation, police power, the right to expropriation, et cetera.

By the end of about the 1890s the Crown decided that mines and minerals were very valuable, particularly coal initially and later petroleum and natural gas, so the Crown in grants after that period of time withheld those minerals. Now, they didn't withhold all of the land under the surface. They only withheld that parcel of coal that was within that infinite carrot or that oil that was within that infinite carrot, et cetera. We've got a system of split titles, where we've got a lot of confusion in the issue. At an even later date the Crown decided to retain gold and silver.

Now, the issue of airspace has also been mentioned. Yes, you own the airspace. However, we all know that planes fly over our airspace all the time. That was the subject of a court case. I believe it was called *Lacroix versus The Queen* in 1954. I'll just quote from the case. "It seems to me that the owner of land has a limited right in the air space over his property, it is limited by what he can possess or occupy for the use and enjoyment of his land." I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that this bill, that grants the Crown ownership of the pore space, is analogous to that ownership of the airspace. If you can't use it, you can't really, effectively, own it. You can't possess it, and you can't occupy it.

Mr. Chair, just to sum up, landownership, as I indicated, is really composed of a bundle of rights. As I indicated, the Crown owns all the sticks in the bundle of rights and has absolute ownership. They can give out certain sticks in that bundle, so to speak. They can give out mines and minerals, as they have done in the cases I've mentioned. They can give out leases, or an individual owner can give out leases or life estates or easements, et cetera.

I just wanted to clarify that, Mr. Chair, because it's come up a number of times during the debate, and I think it needs to be clarified. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It's an honour to follow the Member for St. Albert. The Member for St. Albert stated that the Crown historically owned lands from heaven to hell. The question regarding amendment A3 to Bill 24 is: are we going to hell in a handbasket? That's kind of what amendment A3 to Bill 24 is all about. My Wildrose colleagues there have no doubt that not only are we potentially going to hell with Bill 24, but we have no idea how long our period in purgatory is going to be, and that's part of my concern. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar talked about potentially decades before the government assumes the responsibility of the pores underground throughout Alberta.

My biggest concern with this bill has to do with liability. We know, for example, that the government has committed to invest \$2 billion worth of taxpayers' money in this particular undertaking. We do not know to what extent they'll be successful. Using the example of what has happened with orphaned wells and the insolvency associated with a number of companies, particularly foreign-owned companies, what's to say that if certain companies experience recessions, Norway with Statoil excluded, how do we know that they wouldn't simply pull out and leave us literally holding the CO₂ bag? I'm concerned that we don't have a sense of what the actual liability is. So much of this is a trust, and we know for a fact with regard to orphaned wells that what the government is requiring is basically 10 cents on the dollar to be set aside. We have seen with the development of the oil sands . . .

8:30

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, but pursuant to Government Motion 24, agreed to November 30, 2010, which states that after one hour of debate, questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the questions to conclude debate.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that we rise and report Bill 24.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 24. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 17

23. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 17, Alberta Health Act, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need not reiterate, I don't think, much of the discussion of this afternoon. Suffice to say that with debate this afternoon there is well over 30 hours of debate on this bill. The bill, as members opposite have pained to observe, is not a very big bill, but it is a very important bill. The opposition has very clearly indicated and said on the record that they would like us to bring the appropriate motion to deal with the bill because it's the only way that they would allow it to be dealt with.

It is a very important bill. It should be dealt with, and I would ask members to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 21(3) the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Of course, Mr. Speaker, the concern, as always, is how much time is sufficient to solve a problem. Now, I'll use the analogy of thieves in the night, a shadow of darkness. I would rather be debating this bill during the daytime, during a thoughtful period, but I am aware of the reality that we can do nothing to Bill 17. The amendments have been rejected by the government. The government is committed, come hell or high water, to push this thing through, and they have the majority, given to them by the people of Alberta, so it's going to happen.

But, Mr. Speaker, the democratic process is being subverted by this need to have a four-week session, to push things through the evening to the point where last week it became absolutely ridiculous. I agree with the hon. Government House Leader that any thought of decorum was potentially lost. Because it's only 8:30 tonight, we're actually rather civilized, and it's my hope that that civilized attitude will continue, but it does not take away from the fact that we have been short shrifted on the amount of time to come together to create a bill that would actually have consequences, timelines, standards, and guidelines. Bill 17 doesn't do it, but we might as well get on with the process.

I mentioned previously this afternoon my concerns over the document Alberta's Health Legislation: Moving Forward. I don't know which document the government is talking about when it talks about Bill 17. It was the other document, a Bill 18, that's going to be introduced in the springtime to further push privatization. There are so many unanswered questions, Mr. Speaker, and not sufficient time to hold the government to account.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 23 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:37 p.m.]

For the motion:

Ady	Evans	McQueen
Allred	Griffiths	Morton
Amery	Hancock	Redford
Benito	Hayden	Rodney
Berger	Horne	Rogers
Bhullar	Jacobs	Sarich
Campbell	Johnston	Tarchuk
DeLong	Knight	VanderBurg
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	Zwozdesky
Elniski	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Pastoor
Boutilier	MacDonald	Sherman
Chase	Notley	Taft
Forsyth		

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 10
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[Government Motion 23 carried]

8:50

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 17 Alberta Health Act

[Adjourned debate November 30: Mr. Hancock]

The Acting Speaker: A reminder, hon. members, that the debate will conclude at about 10:50.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon in debate I think I finished by saying that access to emergency in the health system, while important, is not the whole system. The challenge is not just simply the expansion of emergency or dealing with the issues in emergency although those are very important; the challenge is to deal with the whole system and the needs of the whole system.

I want to start by saying: let's be perfectly clear. I think there needs to be, after all of this discussion, a statement made to Albertans that really sets the record straight. The Alberta health system is a fantastic health system. In Alberta we have top facilities, we have leading-edge equipment, and most importantly we have some of the finest health care professionals in the world. We can be truly proud of the capacity, the ability, and the comprehensiveness of our system.

There are issues, of course, and those issues need to be dealt with. But it's also important to focus not just on the immediate issues, while they are important, but on the long term and the big picture to create a framework for a system going forward that will enable the system to continue to adapt to meet the challenges of change and growth. That is, of course, where the issues come from.

This province continues to grow, and population continues to shift both in terms of demographics and geographics. This puts pressure on parts of the system in parts of the province. People age, and as we age, our health needs grow. As we discover new drugs, new techniques, and new technologies, we can do more things for more people, and we do, and we want to.

In just the last 13 years that I've been in this House, the number of MRI machines, for example, has grown from somewhere close to zero to somewhere over 50. Every time we've added an MRI machine, up until recently at least, the lines didn't get shorter; the lines got longer because each new MRI machine that came in had new abilities, new capacities, and could be used for more things. Many thousands of MRI scans are now done each year. For many years we've been doing more hips, more knees, more hearts, more of everything in this system by an exponential growth factor. By any measure the system is responding exceedingly well, but again there are issues that need to be dealt with. There's no question about that.

The population that can be treated in our health system has grown not only because our population has grown but because of new techniques, new technologies, and drugs. You can now do major surgery on 90-year-olds that you never used to do on anybody over the age of 70. In just the past month Ray Nelson from Lloydminster passed away. He was, I think, aged 78 – it might have been a little older – when he had a heart transplant. In my short lifetime, Mr. Speaker, we started on doing heart transplants, and now we're doing them as almost routine procedures on people who never ever would have had that available to them and many other types of surgeries and many other types of treatments. So the population that can be treated has grown.

As we continue to improve, we'll continue to have problems that need to be addressed. And as we continue to improve, we need to ensure that while we address the immediate issues and pressures, we ensure that we have a comprehensive and nimble approach, a strong framework on which to build the next health system, build on the excellence we have today for excellence we can have tomorrow.

That's where Bill 17 comes in, Mr. Speaker. Bill 17 helps to create that new framework so that we can build on that excellence that we have today and the excellent work that's being done today by health care professionals, so that we can focus forward on a sustainable, accessible, publicly funded health system that provides quality care on a timely basis to Albertans without regard for their ability to pay. The act provides for a number of things, Mr. Speaker, that are very important as we build that long-term framework.

Principles. It's important for any future decision-making and any future decisions that those be founded on basic principles, and those principles are set out in the proposed Alberta Health Act.

The creation of a health charter to create a clear understanding of what Albertans can expect from their health system and what each of us has as responsibilities within that system: very important.

The appointment of a health advocate to assist persons who have difficulty with the health system. There will always be people who have difficulty with the health system. No system can do everything perfectly, so when there are problems with the health system, when there are problems that a patient has, they need to have a clear way to have those problems solved and resolved in an easy way. A health advocate is a very important addition to the system to make sure that people know exactly where they need to go if they have problems with where they are in the system or the service that they get in the system or their access to the system.

Roles and responsibilities. We've talked a lot about roles and responsibilities in terms of the fact that we have a health board and what its roles and responsibilities are. Under a new health act we'll be able to clearly delineate the role of the department of health and the ministry of health and the role of the health board. And that's important. It was important when we had nine health boards; it's important when we have one health board. It's important because there are issues of policy and direction which are clearly the purview of the province on behalf of the citizens of Alberta.

Then there's the board to implement those policies, to make sure

that they adhere to infection prevention control standards, for example, that they adhere to the policies and directions that are set on behalf of Albertans by the government through the ministry. There are distinct roles, and those roles and responsibilities need to be clearly understood.

The Health Act provides for reporting. It allows the minister to request of health providers, whether they're inside the publicly funded health system or otherwise, if they're paid for with the public dollar, to require that they provide certain data and information, and that is important. It's very important. It's appropriate because if we want informed decision-making, it has to be data based and, if necessary, ensured that appropriate data is collected and that data that's collected is used appropriately.

Nonidentifiable information can be utilized in health planning, but it can also be utilized in accountability for the system. Decisions can be made on the basis of the best data, and appropriate nonidentifiable data can be reported to the public for transparency and openness with respect to systems performance.

Most importantly, Bill 17 provides for public input and involvement in future regulation and development.

Mr. Boutilier: Who wrote that for you?

Mr. Hancock: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo asks who wrote this for me. I can assure him it's in my own handwriting.

Mr. Boutilier: Did you write it, Dave?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, I did. I wrote this all by my little self.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: What's important is that all Albertans want to be involved in writing the next chapter, so that piece in Bill 17 is very important, the commitment that regulations under this act will be discussed in public with the public before they are approved. That discussion with the public, obviously, Mr. Speaker, will be done in an informed way and in a responsible way and in a respectful way, not at all like the debate we heard from the Wildrose earlier in the Chamber.

All of those pieces in the Alberta Health Act, Mr. Speaker, provide us important fundamentals for the future. The minister of health today laid out more groundwork by publishing *Becoming the Best: Alberta's 5-Year Health Action Plan* and accompanying performance measures. This five-year action plan deals with a wide variety of matters within the health system.

Mr. Speaker, this takes us forward, but it's not the whole picture. Bill 17 recognizes in its preamble that Albertans want "reasonable access to timely and appropriate care, including primary care." Primary care is an essential piece going forward. Primary care networks are well advanced in Alberta but with much more to do to ensure that primary care networks are available to all Albertans, that primary care networks are established in a way which allows for and ensures that the wide variety of health care providers and caregivers that we have in this province can participate at their highest level of ability and capacity, and that the focus of primary care be on helping Albertans stay healthy and to manage their chronic conditions. In other words, to help Albertans stay out of the acute-care system rather than being the gateway into the health care system.

9:00

There is simply no question that if we want a sustainable, affordable acute-care system that is there for every Albertan on a

timely basis, when they need it and with the fullest range of capabilities and leading-edge care, most of us have to be healthy most of the time. We'll never be able to afford a health care system which allows every Albertan in the door all the time; therefore, it's incumbent on us to focus on prevention, to focus on health, to focus on keeping ourselves healthy, and to focus on primary care accessible to all Albertans, which will assist us in managing chronic conditions, which will assist us in keeping ourselves healthy rather than focusing on how we get into the acute-care system.

That means that where possible, and there are times when it's not, we must . . .

Mr. Boutilier: But "I" wrote this stuff.

Mr. Hancock: I did write it myself, and I can't read the darn writing.

There are times, of course, Mr. Speaker, that through no fault of our own we come down with illness or trauma or disease, but where possible we must take responsibility to be as healthy as possible and have those primary care networks there to support us in staying healthy and, as I said before, to manage our chronic conditions.

Primary care networks, as I've said, can help us with chronic conditions and staying healthy, but they also have other important opportunities and functions. In geriatric care, for example, I have personal experience with my own family. I've been to emergency many, many times, and I've stayed overnight in emergency. It's not a pleasant experience, and it's not what we want for our parents as they age. I don't want to go through that again, quite frankly, and we shouldn't have to because for most in many, many cases, certainly in many of the times that I was there, emergency wasn't the place where we ought to have been; it was the door in to have certain procedures done. But if we had the kind of primary care networks and the kind of support systems to those primary care networks that I'm talking about and that we've been talking about in this province, we would be able to deal with many of those conditions that our aging parents have outside of emergency, with a lot more respect, quite frankly, and dignity. That's what we need to look to to build on the system.

Albertans need to have early access and preventive access to mental health care and community treatment. We have examples already of primary care networks that have psychiatrists and specialists in mental health attached to them.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) five minutes for questions and comments are available. The hon. minister of health under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Zwozdesky: If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would just elaborate a little bit more on some of the experiences that he had in emergency, that he referred to, which is one of the major performance target areas that we've had. It's generated a lot of debate in this Assembly. I don't mean to take too much time. I just wondered if he had some suggestions on what we might do to make that experience better than he has experienced through the pain and suffering that he may have had himself or through pain and suffering that some of his relatives may have gone through.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have so much more to say, but I'll leave that for another day, and I will answer the hon. member's question. I was in emergency a number of times with my mom because she had a congenital heart condition, and oftentimes

we attended in emergency because that's where we were told we needed to go so that they could deal with the buildup of fluids and those sorts of things. It came to a point where I believe I could have done that process myself, but I wouldn't dare. The reality is that there could be a geriatric care area where you could go for that kind of care. You could set that aside with its own special entry model and deal with people on a much more timely basis and with a lot more dignity.

Quite frankly, there's a hallway at the Royal Alex that I was going to put up a sign in because that was my mom's parking spot. That's not what we want to do in the future. There are issues we can deal with in terms of making it possible for greater so-called throughput, and that's important, but it's also important to understand who needs to go to emergency and why and what we can do, particularly in geriatric care. There's a lot more that can be done if we focus on how to do that properly and if we focus on the patient, the dignity of the patient and the procedures that need to be done that are not emergency procedures but are very important and need to be done on a timely basis.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and former health minister this. I, too, was in emergency during the time when you were the health minister. I was working in emergency along with the 300 emergency doctors and the thousands of emergency nurses. Those 322 cases that became public were from a two-week period at the University of Alberta hospital. My father nearly died in the emergency department during the election. He spent 10 days in the ICU because he waited eight hours in the waiting room for care. Those 322 cases were from a two-week period at one hospital alone, under your leadership when you were the health care minister. Having understood the issue and being a family member of an ailing parent, did you call in the Health Quality Council? What did you do to improve the situation other than to beat up the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the AMA over Bill 41, over a minor infection prevention matter, which is an important issue, by the way?

The second question. The primary care networks are a good thing, but are you aware that of the \$149 million spent, there are only 425 full-time equivalents, allied health professionals, which works out to about \$352,000 per allied health professional? The people that really need to be rostered into the primary care networks are the poor and the vulnerable, especially the ones in the inner city. They're actually not rostered onto them. They are the ones admitted to acute care, and 16 per cent of the time they end up back in acute care within seven to 14 days. Are you aware of that? You as the minister were in charge of those primary care networks, and that's currently what's happening. The people that are rostered are all the people in Edmonton-Whitemud and Calgary-West.

So if you could answer those two questions: what did you do as minister, and did you call the Health Quality Council?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to answer the questions. The hon. member already knows the answer because he was with me when I went to meet with both the Calgary health authority and the Capital health authority and encouraged them – I more than encouraged them; I perhaps even browbeat them a little bit – to establish the full capacity protocol which that member brought to my attention as an appropriate way to deal with that kind of an issue on a short-term basis as we dealt with the long-term issue. So he knows full well that I was there making a difference in emergency at the

time that I was health minister, and I was doing it with his advice and direction in terms of what we should be doing.

With respect to that system, the hon. member will also recall that that particular time that he spoke about, in February, it was the middle of flu season. Capital health put up the emergency response tent in their parking lot at that point in time, right in the middle of the election. So there was no secret about what was happening. It was being done in full sight of the public, and we were dealing with the issues in emergency at that time.

With respect to the rostering of members the hon. member is actually very correct on that. We need to make sure that everyone is allowed the opportunity to be rostered to a health authority on a voluntary basis, if there's one available to them.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I have found this whole debate fascinating. I sometimes think that I'm here but not really here.

You know, it's interesting. The former minister of health from Edmonton-Whitemud had the opportunity to fix the system. The former minister from Sherwood Park had the opportunity to fix the system. The former minister from Calgary-West had an opportunity to fix the system, and now the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has an opportunity to fix the system because, quite frankly, we still have a broken system.

I'm saddened to be speaking once again on Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act, which is cut short by a time allocation that the government has put forward. I've stood in this House over and over debating, and I've spent hours and hours listening intently. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has provided a solution to the crisis we are facing in our emergency room, as has the Wildrose caucus. The amendment, that was defeated, included the guiding principles that no unnecessary deaths, no unnecessary harm to patients, no unnecessary delays in care, and no unnecessary waste of resources should occur, with some straightforward criteria that had to be met.

9:10

Bill 17 the way it is written talks only in the preamble about reasonable access to timely and appropriate care. Albertans want the wait times in legislation, not performance measures on a piece of paper. If the government is transparent, accountable, and serious about providing the best health care in Canada, then put your money where your mouth is and put it in legislation. The minister goes on to say that while there is nothing wrong with legislated time frames, the court system would become more involved than it already is. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark indicated that four conditions must be met for a successful lawsuit.

Mr. Speaker, where I'm struggling and, more importantly, what Albertans are saying is that if the government is serious about fixing the system, they first have to acknowledge that it is in crisis. We have heard from the health minister, and not only does he disagree that we are in a crisis, but he also doesn't believe that the health care system is broken. Since October 25 the Wildrose caucus has continually asked the government pointed questions, which they respond to by saying that they don't know. They dance around the question. They continue to repeat answers that are irrelevant to the questions, and I could go on and on.

Albertans want answers, and they want to know numbers, like how many net new acute-care beds there are in the health care

system and how many beds have been closed. They want to know how many family doctors there are in the province and why it is so difficult to find one. They want increased home care and want to know how many nursing beds are available. They want to know how many long-term care beds are available, and they want our beloved seniors to quit being nickelled and dimed to death.

The government's own documents indicate that Alberta's health system is highly complex and confusing. People have difficulty accessing health services, and their own public service feedback indicates significant skepticism and mistrust of government. It goes even further to say that the Alberta Health Act is not on the public's radar and that wait times and access to family doctors are the number one concern and the number one priority of Albertans. What is interesting here, Mr. Speaker, is that the government's own MAC committee also recognizes that wait times and access to family doctors is the number one priority of Albertans. Now, once again the government has evoked time allocation on an amendment that Albertans have clearly articulated they support.

Mr. Speaker, in my 15 years in this Legislature I can't remember an amendment that has pulled at the heart of Albertans this much. Not only are they upset about how the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was treated; they are appalled at the government refusing to listen to a front-line, well-respected emergency physician. What is and has happened to this individual is criminal; nothing more, nothing less. You know, when an issue is resonating with Albertans, they let their own MLAs know by the phone calls, the e-mails, tweets, Facebook messages. They stop you on the street asking and questioning: why is the government doing this?

The government pretends everything is all right. While they can live in their la-la-land, Albertans know differently. Albertans are tired of the government not listening. Albertans are tired of the government's gobbledygook. Albertans are proud people. They want their MLAs to do the job that they were sent to do. They want their MLAs to listen and to represent their views. They want their MLA to stand up on their behalf, for them and their loved ones. What is truly sad, Mr. Speaker, is that the government has let the people of Alberta down. That is not acceptable.

I was in the government, Mr. Speaker, for many years. I know how they act, I know how they bully, and I know how they intimidate. I know how they always feel that they are right and that it doesn't matter what Albertans want or think. I left that government on January 4 of this year because I couldn't pass the mirror test anymore. When you have trouble not being able to look in the mirror anymore, it's time to move on. My role as the MLA for the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek is to represent my constituents, and as a member of the PC government I couldn't do that anymore. Ten months ago I stood before the press and I stood before Albertans, telling them why I was crossing the floor for a number of reasons, health care being one of the top priorities.

Today, Mr. Speaker, is a sad day for Albertans, it's a sad day for democracy, and it's a sad day for health care in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments.

Seeing no one, the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to rise this evening and to speak on behalf of the government on Bill 17. When I review the Alberta Health Act, it seems like for the past 13-plus years that I have been a member of this caucus in this government, we have been waiting for just such an act that clearly identifies principles, access, reasonableness, the Canada Health Act, and rolls

into one piece of legislation a framework that Albertans can rely on to deliver health. Surely, there can be no better act of a Legislature than to pass a framework in support of the health that we hope to have for our families and for our loved ones and for our communities as a whole.

Within this act there are words in the preamble such as enhancing the health and wellness and the quality of life of Albertans, that is influenced by their economic, social, cultural, physical, and spiritual contexts. I'm especially proud that the word "spiritual" is included because in my background training as a nurse at the Holy Cross, spiritual was a great part of what we talked about when we talked about the health of an individual and recognized that it was integral to the health of the individual. This Alberta Health Act enshrines that, that our system should strengthen the overall health and wellness of Albertans.

Clearly, a good part of this will involve the public education of Albertans on how we can best take care of our own health. Surely, access to our facilities would improve if Albertans right from day 1 were taught about keeping themselves well, keeping themselves safe, and keeping themselves in a position of maximizing their potential. It's great preventive medicine to teach a child how to cross the street safely, how to wipe their nose, wash their hands, and care for their own, immediate person. As we grow to adults, to keep care of each other is a very important thing. Our legislation contradicting smoking is a direct path of where this government intends to go. In other words, try to compel people who have not their best interests at heart to really take a look at the net impact not only to themselves but to their community and fellow man of doing those kinds of practices that are deleterious to their health.

The act speaks of individuals, families, and community receiving quality health services that are safe, and safe is an important element of why we have the Health Quality Council and why so much of our direction in hospitals is dedicated to making hospitals make health care facilities safe.

That Albertans have reasonable access to timely and appropriate care, including primary care: clearly, since the time we had the hon. member now with us as our representative in Washington working on establishing primary care networks, the primary care networks are singularly one of the beacons of light that this government can look back on to say that we have advanced this considerably, and in doing so, we have provided people access to care that would not otherwise have it.

When we talk about publicly funded health services based on need and not the ability to pay, here enshrined in this Alberta Health Act is clearly the statement that I think Albertans can rely on to look at the fact that this is a publicly funded health system, not contingent on their capacity to pay.

9:20

Again, the reference to physical, spiritual, and mental health, Mr. Speaker, mental health is hugely important and hugely influential on the overall health of the individual. I am glad now to note that we have a mental health advocate office to look after the very particular needs that we have to emphasize in culturing a society where mental health is consistently looked after in the proper fashion, where treatments are available, where early identification and triage are successfully put in place so that people with mental health issues can receive their services.

Where it discusses health services being delivered in ways that understand the experience, recognize perspectives, and respond to the health needs of individuals, Mr. Speaker, this is consistent with the legislation for family supports for children with disabilities, recognizing the potential, recognizing the need, recognizing the

unique characteristics of individuals, recognizing the unique characteristics of families and communities.

This act talks about long-term planning, innovation, adaptation, and continuous improvement. One of the reasons why I think this particular piece of legislation is a quality framework is that the canvassing that was done by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has set the stage for us putting in place something that can be continually evaluated in terms of a future charter, in terms of health decisions, financial stewardship, and the allocation of those resources.

The definitions, Mr. Speaker, are most appropriate, talking about promoting and maintaining physical or mental health, preventing illness, diagnosing, treating, or rehabilitating, and taking care of the health needs of the ill, disabled, injured, or dying.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken many times recently about the issues for my mother, and I'm very happy to say that her experience in the Foothills hospital was one of genuine caring, expedient action, and the most appropriate kinds of delivery of service imaginable. She has commented many times about the professionalism of the staff, the capacity they had for calming her down even though she went through a series of tests and X-rays. Even though that evening it was very busy in the emergency department when I found her, she was magnificently cared for by quality and caring staff. We can do no less than to offer an act that will enable us to perpetuate this kind of opportunity.

The advancement of a health charter contained within this act recognizes that health is a partnership among individuals, that families, communities, and health providers must work together with the government and acknowledge the impact of the individual's health status and other circumstances on the individual's capacity to interact with the system but must not be used to limit access to health services. I think that admonition is a reasonable caution for whomever is in the position of evaluating the individual's health status so that, in fact, the charter itself becomes something that we can rely on as something that sets the highest possible standards and does not diminish in any way the opportunity an individual would have to access the proper services.

More than that, review of the health charter at least once every five years is a responsible opportunity to measure the performance, to look at the performance measures, the regulations, to review them to see if they're still current and relevant. I think this is extremely important, Mr. Speaker, because Alberta geographically is the size of three European countries, has many remote spots, has many places where service delivery may not be as easily accessed. I think the health charter, with the principles enshrined in here considerate and concurrent with the principles in the Canada Health Act, behooves us to look every once in a while, at least every five years, to make sure that we are staying current with new technological advances and that we are providing the best possible health service.

The advocacy contained in this act, the appointment of a health advocate: we should do not less. We should in fact make sure that there is somebody to whom complaints can be leveled if there is a belief that the health service provided is not contingent with what this health act outlines. That person, following a review, must report. That particular acknowledgement that the advocate shall prepare and submit a report summarizing the activities will in fact assure that this is transparent, that the people of Alberta have an opportunity to review what the advocate has said and whether or not the particular roles and responsibilities of the health act have been maintained.

Again, this particular section strengthens the health system in Alberta because it assures, beyond the people that are charged with

the responsibility of delivering health to our citizens, there is somebody that is monitoring that health, somebody that is acting as a sober, cold-eye review of whatever complaint is brought forward and considers carefully not only the acknowledgement within this act but the Canada Health Act to make sure that we are accountable, that we're dealing with it in a comprehensive fashion, that reasonable access, above all, is maintained.

Now, I do agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who acknowledges the two issues that I think are uppermost in the minds of the people in my constituency: access and how long they have to wait for service. I recognize that putting in place this act in itself will not accomplish all of the things that the health minister, that the people in the health care delivery mode have to do, but it gives some type of framework and guarantee that this province means to service the public health system in the best way possible. It acknowledges the need for looking at access as a primary portion of it, and the principles and the performance measures that have been further expanded on in the five-year action plan that the health minister has delivered today fit contiguously into the cycle of the health act, setting out a broad-stroke policy document with principles, with wait times, with assurances to Albertans that we expect to see some results within the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, there is an expression. Rome was not built in a day. I am absolutely convinced as a Member of this Legislative Assembly that if I were to return here in 15 or 20 years, there would still be significant conversations in this Legislative Assembly about health care. Why? Because that will always be what we cherish the most as a society. That will be the hallmark of how Alberta either performs better or at least as well as the minimum standards that are established in Canada and perhaps even the world.

Mr. Speaker, at the time that I was privileged to be in the health file, I remember a physician relocating back to Oxford to look at the alma mater that he was trained at and to contemplate whether or not he could do more there to deliver better management of strokes and various circulatory issues. The framework that he established here and that we ultimately expanded upon for stroke treatments and early diagnosis in Alberta has made us leaders in the kinds of things that we deliver for people who have suffered a stroke or people who may be in need of receipt of some kind of medication or medical treatment throughout Alberta to assure that they get the best opportunity to maximize their return and rehabilitation.

We have made strides step-by-step, stride-by-stride, and we have been acknowledged for the many things that we have done to improve the system. I have a hope, when I read this Alberta Health Act and contemplate it in the Canadian context, that a great part of what we will do in the years ahead is to enable the minister as the appointed and elected leader of the health care delivery system to expand upon the research and development that will further improve best practices in the health management of our system and also on the individual's health and wellness. When we look at the kinds of things that have been delivered today in the five-year action plan, I respect and believe that that will take place.

The ministerial regulations here are not a large, lengthy list of what the minister may do. It is, in fact, in the broad strokes of this health act that we find the real truth of the publicly funded system that the minister intends to deliver in this piece of legislation.

9:30

One final comment, Mr. Speaker, relative to public input. Again, if we came back here 10, 15, 20 years from now, we should be proud that we are encouraging public input not only from the complaints management position of the advocate but from the opportunity to continually inform ourselves either through the website or new

technology that will enable us to learn more about the health system, that will enable us in the future to manage our own electronic health care record. My hope is that my grandchildren someday will look at their own electronic health record, see how they've performed, be able to weigh the evidence from one year to the next, not only their weight, what their dietary implications would be, but be able to measure it against performance measures that would be posted that would have been approved by perhaps the College of Physicians and Surgeons, that would talk, in fact, about the kinds of things that would make them a healthy, well person.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the hon. member, a former health minister: is there anything in Bill 17 that enables them to do something that they already cannot do? This is such a hollow bill. What is in here that is one thing that is essential to their five-year action plan or anything else that they could not do without this bill?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that this sets the framework for a charter, something that has been long a subject of debate here. What people have been asking us for is the opportunity for that public input. Yes, we could do it, I'm sure, without a bill, but this bill strengthens that, gives people the right.

I'm just going to answer this way. After we passed the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, people wept. People who had children that needed supports wept because they could finally look at not just one line contained in some bill on child welfare. It spelled out clearly what they could expect as families. This spells out clearly what people can expect in a public health system that we would deliver. It also acknowledges the minister's role in making sure that a health charter would be provided, that public health would be there, that public input would be there in a way that I think Albertans are expecting. I think Albertans are expecting this. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in my constituency I think they're demanding it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar under 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the citizens in the constituency of Sherwood Park are demanding is a hospital. Now, the minister indicated in her remarks that Rome wasn't built in a day. Well, Sherwood Park has been waiting years for a hospital. You were talking about reasonable and timely access to care for all citizens, and you also mentioned that, certainly, citizens in Sherwood Park want access to the system and do not want to wait a long period of time for service. My question to you would be: why is there not a public hospital in the constituency of Sherwood Park after so many years of promises?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, to be germane to this particular piece of legislation, this speaks to the broader health context. I would say that initially, in 1977, there was a study done, and it was determined that likely Mill Woods would have the greater numbers of population, and population projections and demographics at that time precipitated that the Grey Nuns hospital as it currently stands would be built. It's only in the last few years, when we've had expanded population, that the study that was then done by Capital health implemented a different type of acknowledgement of the birth rates, the demographics, and the population east of Edmonton and acknowledged that because of the attendance area there may be reasonableness in building a different type of facility.

Mr. Speaker, if I could invite the hon. member, phase 1 of that facility is already up. There are at least frameworks there of steel, which gives me great hope that the emergency services and access to the emergency services in my community will be more evidenced than, let's say, 10 years ago. Ever since the tornado ripped through that green space, we've had certainly a lot more interest in a facility there, and we have actually seen the beginnings of that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Sherwood Park for her remarks. My understanding is that she was a nurse years ago, and as a nurse she should know that on the front lines talk is cheap and that we're more interested in action. I heard the hon. member speak when I was at the AMA forum in 2006, and I was really encouraged by the words, but I was disappointed by the action.

On the spiritual side what we've recently done at the Royal Alex hospital is that we fired God's representative, Dr. Neil Elford. We fired the Provincial Health Ethics Network. We fired the ethical and the moral people in the health system. The front-line staff have a major mental health problem. Twenty-five per cent morale is in the absolute boots. Rome wasn't built in a day, and the health care system wasn't torn down in a day.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join the debate, this very limited and abbreviated debate, on Bill 17 in third reading. I have to say that when I think about Bill 17, my first thought, of course, is that it's a very empty piece of legislation and that it's in many ways exceptionally meaningless. In fact, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore asked a very excellent question when he asked the previous speaker what exactly it is that this act allows someone to do that couldn't be done before because, of course, it is meaningless.

That being the case, why, then, are we so concerned that the government has chosen to limit debate on this bill? I will say that the reason for that is because at the eleventh hour, much to the chagrin of this government, the actual explanation for the role and the meaning of Bill 17 was leaked and became apparent to Albertans. With that context now in place the significance of Bill 17 becomes greater. Unfortunately, at the same time that that new information inadvertently has come out, much to the chagrin of this government and despite their attempts to keep this information away from Albertans, the government this very day has chosen to limit debate on Bill 17.

It's really frustrating, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's disrespectful to all Albertans because, quite frankly, the information included in the document Alberta's Health Legislation: Moving Forward is the kind of thing that Albertans deserve to have substantive and substantial debate on in this Legislature, not to have the rules of closure and bully through this act and try to get out of the Legislature so that they don't have to talk about this document. That's not what Albertans want. When this government did their consultation this summer on what Albertans wanted, I'm pretty sure that Albertans did not say: "Put up a piece of fluffy legislation. Don't tell us what's behind it. Bring down closure if that information happens to get out." I'm quite sure and I can say with some certainty that that is not what Albertans asked for.

Now, many people have said already that what Albertans actually want is a functional health care system. It's truly unfortunate that we're not able to say that that's what they have right now, but we're not able to say that. I believe that the reason we have so many challenges within our health care system is because this government is actually quite interested in creating an appetite for more private delivery and more private funding within the health care system, and I've thought that for a very long time.

I have to say – I mentioned this in question period today – that the level of incompetence that this government has demonstrated in the management of our health care system is unfathomable. One cannot imagine how you could accidentally make as many mistakes as this government has made. So when it becomes the case that it's not just a 50-50 flip of a coin – will they get it right; will they not? – that, in fact, they make mistakes that are against all odds, then you think that there has to be something more to it. This document, Alberta's Health Legislation: Moving Forward, is in fact the explanation for what it is the government actually wants to do.

9:40

This bill, originally perceived by most engaged Albertans to be something that was nothing but an empty shell, a bit of fluff, something put together by the government in a desperate attempt to regain some level of public trust in their administration of health care, does in fact have a very clear purpose, and it's set out in this document. The purpose of this bill, Bill 17, is to, quote, build public confidence because one thing that this government heard about this summer was that there is no public confidence in the health care system.

How are they going to build public confidence? Well, in Bill 17 we have some vague principles saying that we are in support of the Canada Health Act. That's just great except that any health policy analyst knows that the Canada Health Act is only one of a number of acts that protect Canadians from having their health care system privatized. Just as important to that scheme of protective legislation is a whole series of provincial acts. These are the provincial acts that the government is not committing to. These are the provincial acts that are touched on by this document. These are the provincial acts that the government plans to change after the next election to open the door to more private delivery and more private funding of health care in Alberta.

That principle, that statement, "We commit to the Canada Health Act," is somewhat duplicitous because the fact of the matter is that most people know that that is not the full answer to the question. The government knows that it's not the full answer to the question, but they are not telling Albertans that fact.

What else does this Bill 17 create? Well, it creates a patient charter. You know, I have to say that I listened with much amusement over the extended debate about the amendment that was put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. All government members got up and said: oh, we couldn't possibly include in the charter this issue of wait times because, you know, that would just grind the system to a halt. But that was, really, a truly duplicitous argument because we all know that this charter is in and of itself meaningless. It has no force and effect. It's not enforceable. It doesn't have any legal authority. Like this whole act, it's meaningless. It's fluff. It's PR. That's all it is. It's just another part of the build public confidence piece that someone in the PAB cooked up together with whomever in the ministry of health.

Also, this act is supposed to lay out a scheme for further public engagement. Well, that one, Mr. Speaker, really got me giggling. Here's the scheme for public engagement that's set out in this act.

The minister will give notice of no less than 30 days, and then the minister will tell cabinet that he gave notice. Then the minister will go ahead and change the regulations to do whatever the heck he wants. Well, let me tell you that that is not what Albertans perceive as public consultation. That's notice that we're going to do something that you don't like, and you don't have any guaranteed right to say anything back or in any way to hold us accountable for what you tell us. That's what that is. That's not consultation; that's nothingness. Moreover, it's such a meaningless, laughable system of public engagement; the only thing that makes it more meaningless and more laughable is the provision which allows the minister to waive it. That's as close as this act gets to providing for any kind of engagement. It's as empty and as meaningless as the rest of the stuff in this act.

What's important about this act? Why do we care if it's so meaningless? Well, here's why we care. This act according to this document is, in fact, phase 1. When you have a phase 1 and you get through phase 1, then you have to be worried about what's going to happen when you get to phase 2. Well, phase 2, my friends, is where the rubber hits the road. Phase 2 is where this government plans to put one over on Albertans. Phase 2 is something that this government will not have the courage to bring forward or admit to Albertans until after the next election. That is very clear.

Phase 2 includes opt-in, opt-out privileges for physicians. Let's just be clear. Having a privately funded parallel system does not magically create more doctors. It does not magically create more nurses. It does not magically create any of that. What it does is that it allows doctors to practise in both. So for those doctors who decide to put a few more hours of the day in the private system and for whomever can afford to walk into that private system, they get their services first.

The public system is starved. The public system gets less. The services that we've talked about being so inadequate, the pain and the suffering that we have heard about in excruciating detail over the course of the last few weeks: it gets worse, Mr. Speaker, if possible. That's what happens when you allow physicians to opt in and opt out of the public system, to do both.

What else are they talking about doing? Well, they're talking about coming up with evidence-based assessment to decide what the real essential health care services are. Well, we all know. Again, anyone who followed the debate through the Romanow report and the Mazankowski report knows that's the crux of the matter. If this government starts giving itself permission to delist services, those services that are delisted become privately funded. This is not rocket science, folks.

If there comes an agenda to limit the scope of publicly funded essential health care services, the remainder becomes privately funded, which is only available to those with the resources to pay for it, and the rest of us will just have to do without. That's the direction this government wants to take Albertans in through phase 2, and it's wrong. I would suggest that not coming out openly and talking about this with Albertans is dishonest. All members of the government who had anything to do with this document should be apologizing to Albertans for the dishonesty which is inherent in this document.

What else does this document talk about? Well, we talk about exploring new benefit models for providing those not quite essential health care services. What that means is coming up with private insurers to insure things like – hmm, let's think about this – somebody making you a meal when you're in long-term care because you can't possibly get out of your bed. Well, we know now chiropractic is already off, maybe physiotherapy next time, maybe more eye exams, maybe speech pathology services for children

under 12, maybe dietitian services for diabetics who are in long-term care. Who knows the plethora of services that this government could decide are only partially essential, that would benefit from an alternative model of insurance?

All of that means more money out of taxpayers' pockets to pay for health care that we as a community, as a province, as a country have always all believed ought to be something that is equally available to all of us at no cost. That's what this government wants to do, and that's what's included in this document, and that is what this government plans to follow up this meaningless, fluffy piece of legislation with. So that's why it matters.

The other thing that, of course, the government wants to do and has talked about in this document is this idea of changing the rules so that more public dollars can go to undesignated, unregulated facilities, again, something else which is currently monitored or overseen by the Hospitals Act, another one of those pieces of legislation that this government intends to deal with after the next election, Mr. Speaker. After the next election, not before, because they wouldn't dare go to the public with this agenda right before the next election.

Well, guess what? It's out now, and the most they can do right now is try to pretend that it's not their document, that this document with government of Alberta written all over it by people within the ministry of health, not Alberta Health Services, not that amorphous little board that they sometimes have control over and sometimes don't have control over. No, no. This is from the department of health, that which is directly accountable and responsible to the minister of health. They created this document with these ideas inside it.

I've listened to the minister of health try to suggest that he had no idea, that it wasn't his document, that they weren't his ideas. Well, that is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely ridiculous. Either the minister is in charge of his ministry or he's not.

Based on what this province and the people of this province have told this government over and over and over again about their opinions with respect to the privatization of health care, if staff within the ministry of health are coming up with a 40-page PowerPoint presentation on how to privatize health care and the minister of health doesn't know about it, well, then that sounds to me like the most ridiculous waste of wages, and in fact those folks ought to be fired, but I suspect they were only doing what they were asked to do. But someone ought to go, probably this government.

9:50

You know, I guess that at the end of the day we have staff sort of arbitrarily creating this document, and we have the minister of health suggesting he didn't know it was there, that it was actually just sort of a combination of ideas that people gave to the government. Then, of course, the now parliamentary secretary of health, who was actually overseeing that collection of ideas – well, it wasn't his document either. Everyone is throwing the document around like a metaphorical hot potato. But, really, you can dance around it all you want. You can come up with five-year plans and 10-year plans and performance targets and new beds and old beds and net beds. Then you can turn around and not make your targets. You can delay your targets, and you can lower your targets, and you can reprofile your hospital openings. I love that one. I loved it when I heard the minister say: we're reprofiling the opening of that hospital. Good Lord, the words that the PAB comes up with. It is unbelievable the way they redefine language. It's really quite a work of art. They can say all those things, but it doesn't matter.

Albertans told this government they wanted their health care fixed. Albertans told this government they wanted long-term care beds. The government broke their promise. They wanted home care; the government isn't even spending the money they've dedicated to it so far. They didn't want their nurses fired; they wanted them kept. They wanted more acute-care beds, not less, and they want mental health addressed once and for all because this is one of the biggest issues causing problems in our health care system throughout.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Five minutes are available under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. We're looking at closure here by this government, not only on this legislation but on two other bills as well. When the count is done, this government will have used closure six times in scarcely more than a day of legislative debate. We have the Health Services Board, where four of them have resigned. We have emergency room doctors who are pointing out how this government has mismanaged the system. We have billions of dollars in deficits as a result of health care mismanagement. We also have, incredibly, a document which you referred to, and you correctly referred to it. But do you find it suspicious that now we're having these closure motions, yet the government saw fit in July of this year to have a secret consultation process regarding public health care and the future direction that we're going in?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, hon. member. I would say that I find it incredibly disingenuous, and I would say that the government has completely lost touch with what their relationship should be with the voters of Alberta. I suspect that their current polling will tell them that that's really true if it wasn't already true and that they're going to have some real difficulties. But, you know, hon. member, I have to say that it doesn't surprise me. It does not surprise me. This is a government that's been in power for 40 years, that has completely become so enmeshed in its own need to justify everything that it does, it can't distinguish reality from mythology.

They've got their Public Affairs Bureau, that just recharacterizes the truth and spins it around and around and around, and I think the people whose heads spin the most probably are most of the members over on the opposite side. They've lost touch with what's real and what's, in fact, just a PAB document. But I will say that it doesn't surprise me because that's the way this government has been operating. It is – and I will say it again – the most secretive government in the country, and it is a government that is dedicated to undermining our public health care system, and it's a government that is deathly afraid of coming clean with Albertans about that agenda. It has once again, very cynically, decided to move forward on an agenda which is very much in opposition to the majority of Albertans' beliefs behind closed doors.

So, hon. member, I will say that it is unfortunate, but with this particular government it is hardly surprising.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand this evening and speak in support of third reading of Bill 17, the Alberta Health Act. I'm going to cover a few areas, but I'd like to begin by thanking the literally thousands of Albertans who

participated in two important consultation processes over the last year and two months.

The first process was under the auspices of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health, which I had the privilege to co-chair. That work paved the way for a broader consultation with Albertans that took place over the last spring and summer. In fact, that subsequent work provides the detailed foundation for the Alberta Health Act bill which is before the House at this time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a minute and acknowledge the effort and dedication that was exhibited in every corner of this province by people who chose to participate in this process. Not surprising, I'm sure, to any of us in this House, the process confirmed that publicly funded health care, our public health care system, is indeed our most important public good. Albertans view it that way now, they have always viewed it that way, and they will continue, I believe, well into the future to regard the excellent health care system that we have here and the dedicated professionals that deliver the care as really in many cases the most important thing that we can possibly strive to achieve and to improve as a society.

Now, that said, there were some strong messages from Albertans through these two processes as well. You know, in previous discussion on this bill I have talked about the legislative framework and the reasons for looking at the legislative framework as a basis to set a foundation for the future and to provide some parameters that would guide the continuous improvement of our health care system.

I just want to mention again, Mr. Speaker, you know, that legislation does not stand alone, as we all know, as the only basis to look at the quality of our health care system, but it does play an important role, as does the Canada Health Act, as did the Health Insurance Act of 1935, which was passed in Alberta, the first kind of such legislation in the country. It does stand as a very important statement of what we believe in as a society when we talk about health and health care, because both are important, as one of our most valued public goods.

That message was delivered loud and clear by Albertans over the last several months. When we initially began the consultation process, you know, we mentioned that while we're looking at legislative change, legislative improvement as part of this process, it was also accompanied by two other key initiatives. Improvements in the delivery system we've talked about and have had some really good discussion about the need for open and transparent performance measures. The minister has released some of those today. There is a very high demand and, I would say, a very high level of knowledge, very sophisticated knowledge on behalf of the people that we spoke to in the consultation process, basically saying: you are not going to be able to effectively manage what you cannot measure. In part, you know, I credit their messages and their suggestions as put forward in the Putting People First document as also being able to have an impact on that area of the delivery system and how we go about making improvements.

The second area. I think, you know, as a society we have been perhaps preoccupied with the question of funding for health care. I say "preoccupied" in a sense not because financial resources are not important but because Albertans recognize two things. One is numerous attempts over the years to find a magic bullet, to find one approach, one fix to the issues in health care. What they told us quite convincingly and quite strongly right at the beginning of the consultation was: "We're not interested in a search for a magic bullet. Neither are we interested in a debate about the right amount of money the government should be spending on health care." People would frequently say to me: "Well, whether you ask me if \$10 billion is enough or \$15 billion or \$20 billion, I'm not going to know that answer. I'm not interested in cost. What I'm interested

in is value. If you're going to talk to me about the third initiative, which is the legislative framework for health, then I want to focus on that question of the value that we are getting for the resources expended, both financial and the very precious resources that are in the form of the health care professionals that deliver care." That was an important message, and I believe that the spirit of that, which is documented in the report, is reflected in this bill.

10:00

So I want to expand on that a little bit, Mr. Speaker, as part of my argument as to why I'd encourage hon. members to support the bill. The first is that attitudes toward health and the purpose of a publicly funded health care system, I believe, have changed. Our current legislation, which is dated, much of it, from the 1960s and earlier, focused on the health care system as it existed in the early days of medicare, the years around 1962 in particular. That, of course, was when health care consisted of physician services and hospital services largely based on the principles of insurance, so basically ensuring that no citizen would suffer undue financial hardship as a result of their inability to pay for health care services.

Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker – and the Alberta Health Act bill before us bears this out; Bill 17 bears this out – that Albertans have a much broader view of both the purpose of our health care system and what it should consist of today. You know, we've talked about questions around specific services that are included under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act bill and things that are listed and things that may be delisted or have been delisted in the past. I can tell you that Albertans are very interested in accessing the services that they need. But their predominant concern – and it's something that's spoken to extensively in this bill – is as the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations said: it's to do with access; it's to do with getting in the front door of the health care system.

I'm sure we've all heard from constituents the frequent comment that, you know, the system works great once you can get into it. The debate over this bill and the amendments that were proposed to this bill have, I think, illustrated very well that point over the last few weeks.

That begs the question, Mr. Speaker, then, of how using legislation we show that we are focusing on the things that matter most to Albertans, not in terms of immediate decisions, decisions that are important and that have been made and will continue to be made around things like increasing continuing care bed capacity, having proven evidence-based strategies to deal with things like emergency room wait times. Those are all extremely important. We heard about those in the consultation. But Albertans were very interested in not what does the government stand for, but what do we as a society, what do Albertans as a people stand for when it comes to health care. The answer was that we stand for a system that recognizes health in the true sense, that is well-being, as being the most important, the primary purpose of having publicly funded health care in Alberta or, in fact, anywhere in Canada.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, the bill before us speaks in the preamble and in other places in the bill to questions such as the need for an integrated approach to policy development in the health care system. That means being willing to look at education and housing and income support and all of those other things that have a very direct bearing on the health status of our people at the same time as we're talking about the bricks and mortar of the health care system, which, I believe, we do a lot. We probably do more talking about the bricks and mortar than we talk about the social care in the truest sense.

Albertans through the consultation and as reflected in the bill talked about the need for things like spiritual care, consideration

around end-of-life care issues, better primary care, looking at how we integrate the public health care system with services in housing and income support and other areas. They talked about the health of this generation and, most importantly, of this bill being able to provide hope for better health for the generations to come. That is one of the foundational elements of this bill, Mr. Speaker, and why it is important, perhaps not for the immediate discussion of the issues of the day – we've had a long vetting of those over the last couple of weeks – maybe not as important to those questions, but certainly very important in terms of establishing clearly where we in 2010 stand as a province and as a people and, most importantly, what we are prepared to do and stand for in terms of improving the health of the generations to come, including the children and grandchildren of the members here and of the people that participated in the process.

That brings me, Mr. Speaker, to some other feedback from the consultation, and perhaps it will explain to some extent questions that have been asked about what is not in this bill. It was very clear when we began. We asked people, quite frankly, as part of this what they were open to in the future if we were going to be developing overarching legislation that would guide decision-making, that would set clear parameters in terms of principles and a patient charter. When we asked them about those components of this bill, we had an obligation and a duty – and we did so – to ask them what they are open to and what they are not open to.

Mr. Speaker, you know, it was very clear – and it should be a surprise to no members in this House – that the majority of people that we spoke to are not in favour of additional privatization of the health care system. You know what? There are no avenues that open that in this bill. In fact, there are some very stringent restrictions in this bill that would not allow the consolidation of some of our existing legislation or future legislative changes without consultation. There's nothing in this bill that allows a Minister of Health and Wellness to unilaterally by ministerial order or by order in council amend any existing legislation and move what's in statute today into regulations tomorrow. That is not enabled by this bill in any way, shape, or form.

Albertans were very clear that they want above all engagement and dialogue. As the individual that had the responsibility of leading this process, I believe that we have begun the process, Mr. Speaker, of moving from conflict about health care, at least in terms of the discourse in the community, to true dialogue about health care. Maybe we should take a moment to reflect on what the bill might do to enable that in the future.

Now, there's been some criticism this evening about the provision around consultation, that would require the minister to provide notice, consult with Albertans about proposed changes or new regulations, and to consider the feedback that is provided. While I can agree that in and of itself such a mechanism may not adequately reflect the spirit that we want to employ when we conduct dialogue in the future, it is nonetheless a very important development in health care legislation in this country to have such a requirement placed in legislation. That is in direct response to the wishes of Albertans.

In the report *Putting People First*, that supports this legislation, we do see some suggested principles to guide consultation in the future. In very practical terms, Mr. Speaker, what do people want? Well, what they don't want is to be asked to pick from two or three options in response to a problem that they've had no involvement in framing. What they do want is to be actively engaged in a discussion about what the problems are, to have the opportunity to reflect those issues, those challenges and the opportunities in the context of their own community, not just the province as a whole but what will

work in their community and, most importantly – and I believe that we achieve this in the consultation process – that we reflect back to them after the fact what they said and we show them very clearly what impact that had on final decisions that were made. This is one of the transitions that I think will be enabled by the Alberta Health Act in the future.

The other area I wanted to just touch on briefly is – and we've talked about it a bit earlier tonight – this whole question of the health charter. Now, a number of hon. members have raised concerns about the provision that's in here for a charter not providing an enforceable charter. In other words, some surprise, I guess, that we did not propose in this bill a rights-based patient charter. [Mr. Horne's speaking time expired]

10:10

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just heard a very smooth, shrewd, silver-tongued former deputy health minister, now parliamentary secretary to the minister of health, talk about Bill 17 and how important it is and how enabling it is and the consultation that they went through, but I'll ask him the same question. What they're really saying in all of this long-drawn-out speech is that for the last four health ministers we've failed Albertans. Now, though, we've gone out and consulted with them to listen to them and say: well, what promise do we need to do to put in a bill so that you'll have confidence in us? This is what they think this promise is: a flat, hollow bill with a charter and an advocate in there that is accountable to the minister.

What in this bill, Mr. Speaker, enables or changes anything that the health minister couldn't or shouldn't have already done? The last health minister wouldn't answer my question. I'll ask this one. What is one thing in this bill that they couldn't already do if they actually wanted to do it? They're all talk, no walk, no action. Why do they need to pass this bill on closure? There is nothing new in here other than a promise on a piece of paper that, like I say, Chamberlain would be embarrassed to bring home and wave to the people and say: oh, look what I've passed.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the hon. member's question, if all one is interested in is changes to existing programs and services, if your focus is on institutions and the transfer of money and beds, I suppose that this bill in and of itself would not offer you a lot of reason to think that your particular expectations would be met. I believe that there are many citizens in this province who are interested in how we are going to approach building the health care system of the future, acknowledging the challenges that exist today and with every responsibility, of course, to deal with those challenges.

If you're interested in the future, if you recognize the complexity of the decisions that will have to be made in response to things such as our aging population and technology and other factors that influence health care, if you acknowledge that there are finite resources within which we must work in order to make all of this possible, and, most of all, if you want hope as a citizen of this province that you will actually have a say and have an opportunity for some direct influence in shaping that system, not only for yourself but perhaps on behalf of the aging parents that you're caring for or the generation that's going to follow you, then I think this bill has an awful lot to offer, Mr. Speaker.

I would be remiss if I didn't say that despite a lot of the challenges that we've talked about in the House and some of the minister's recent announcements designed to address those challenges, those came up in the consultations. Those weren't off the table, Mr. Speaker. Those were the first questions that we asked to try to get a sense of what was going on in each community.

The most important thing that we heard was that people want hope and they want engagement and they want involvement in shaping the health care system of the future. While it's true there was support for recommitting Alberta to the principles in the Canada Health Act, I think anyone who takes an opportunity to look at this bill, Mr. Speaker, will see that the additional principles that have been developed and proposed by Albertans through the consultation are an important reflection of where we stand as a society.

The principles that we want to see applied, that I would suggest citizens want to see applied and for which we as elected members of this Assembly will be held to account: they want to see those in writing. They want to see the mechanism for consultation in writing. It was the feeling of the majority of the people that participated that they wanted to see not a rights-based Charter of Rights and Freedoms type document, not a way to enable more litigation and more conflict in the health care system, but a health charter to chart the course for the future, Mr. Speaker. That is what the charter is all about, and Albertans were very willing to talk about roles and responsibilities in that context, both in terms of government, health providers, and also citizen roles and responsibilities with that very important provision, that the charter under no circumstances could be used to deny anyone care.

Mr. Speaker, these are important thoughts. This is the thoughtful consideration and investment of time of our people, and we should . . . [Mr. Horne's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly honoured to have another opportunity to speak to this very important issue. You know, I'm not sure if I'm allowed to use this word. I should ask your permission. Am I allowed to use the word "malarkey" in this honoured, hallowed Chamber? I looked up the definition of malarkey. It means exaggerated or foolish talk usually intended to deceive.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've heard a ton of malarkey in this House. I'm just telling you. I've heard a ton of malarkey behind the scenes. I've got a whole bunch of questions where I'm thinking: holy cow. My son is a 15-year-old. He loves *Star Wars*, and he was telling me about the Jedi Knights and the Sith. The Sith clouded what the Jedi would normally see.

I'll tell you that these are a couple of things that I've pieced together. I may be wrong on a couple of these, so other members may correct me. These are facts. First, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek was associate minister of health in the late 1990s, when the minister at that time was really interested in privatization.

Mr. Hinman: What was the name of the minister?

Dr. Sherman: Oh, geez, I have no idea. I don't think I was much interested in politicians at that time because they sort of wrecked health care.

He said nothing, didn't have the courage to stand up to say, "This is the wrong thing" at that time. Now he's the Minister of Health

and Wellness, bringing Bill 17 and this document. I sat with him at a committee meeting, and I said: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hey, this is the third wave." The Premier said that the third wave is DOA. The previous Premier, Klein, had already said that we're not going to do this. The public already was banging on the doors of the Leg. I said: "You're going to get crucified on election day." They decided: "Hey, let's split it up. Let's do the good stuff before the election; we'll do the other stuff after the election." I was there. I was his assistant. I was there at caucus when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford presented this document to caucus. That's the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness today.

It is my understanding – and I may be wrong; I've been told this – that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had taken over the whole third floor of the Telus building when the whole Bill 11 debate was happening. He can correct me on that. And he's been on Agenda and Priorities. As a parliamentary assistant I never saw this stuff until the decision was already made.

In this leaked document the issues: the word "prescriptive" to "enabling." That's a very dangerous change to the public health care system. There's a reason Premier Lougheed, Premier Getty, Premier Klein kept that word in. That is such an important change, the word "prescriptive" to "enabling."

Secondly, there are reasons that most of these things are under the act, in the legislation, because health care is the most cherished thing that Albertans and Canadians find important to them. This is what differentiates us from our cousins south of the border. This is the most important value to Canadians. To simply put it under a regulation when it's holiday time – a minister gives 30 days' notice. When the whole province is working hard all year long and takes some summer holidays, they make a regulation change, and the minister and the bureaucrat of the day does God knows what to the health care system.

That's another very dangerous thing to the Canadian health care system. You guys on that side need to know about this stuff. You guys are sleeping at the wheel. I didn't understand this stuff. I thought: geez, I was clouded by the Sith. My son calls me the Jedi Knight.

The other issue is that the stars are aligned. Now the former associate minister of health and wellness, who didn't have the courage to stand up with the previous minister in the late '90s, has got the parliamentary assistant who brought up the Bill 11 debate.

The stars are aligned for this thing to happen. I've got nothing to do with this, guys. I had nothing to do with this as a parliamentary assistant. I heard about it. I advised the minister: bad thing for the election, that privatization stuff. The question is that I wish that somebody would actually be honest. If you want to privatize, just say, "We want to do it," and do it. Have the courage to actually bring it up and have a real debate on it.

10:20

Now, if you actually, really want to fix the public health system, all of those folks over there – there are two past ministers of health, a current minister of health, an ex associate minister of health, and a major adviser to this government for a decade – have not brought in accountability measures. Now we're bringing them in, and they're probably the most mediocre measures I've ever seen on the planet. You know how I know that? Because I just toured the planet. I've been to the top hospitals in Canada, the top hospitals in the U.S. I've been to the top hospitals in India. I just went to the top hospitals in the U.K., that have the top performance measures on the planet. I know this because I actually toured the planet, and I sort of know what I'm talking about. These are the guys who bugged up health care when I was working on the front lines. I'll take the

words "bugged up" back. I apologize. Wrecked. Maybe "wrecked" is better. And the minister that smashed it: he ain't here.

The stars are aligned. The problem is that they've actually upset the right because no one has the courage to say, "Hey, we want to privatize it," and they've upset the left because we're not actually looking after the people that well.

Once they get in, they get great care, Mr. Speaker, without a doubt. We've got the best health care staff on the planet, and I think we'll all agree on that, the hardest working health care staff. You know what? I'll tell you that the evidence is that they're the most demoralized staff in the nation. It ain't his fault. It ain't his fault. It's you guys' fault, and it was my fault when I was there because I didn't have the courage to speak up.

Let's just stick to facts. Let's just stick to facts. Here are the facts. Dr. Paul Parks said that the emergency medical services of this province are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. The CEO was fired. Four board members have quit. There's a major confidence motion here, people. The board that this government put in is just all resigning en masse. In fact, the funny thing is that it's actually the good guys that resigned. The good guys are actually the ones that resigned. The one doctor on the board resigned. Linda Hohol, a smart, bright woman, resigned. Tony Franceschini ran a very successful business. He resigned. The same government that designed the health care system and the board is the same government that intervened.

Geez, Mr. Speaker, I'm just telling you that it's just so hard sitting here. Yes, all the health care staff do have a mental health problem. They are all depressed. They are all depressed because of the decisions made by this government. No other government has been here. You can't blame anyone else. Here's objective evidence right here. This is why, when I sent that e-mail to the Premier, I wasn't kidding or lying. I apologized for hurting his feelings, but I wasn't lying.

I'll tell you why. This is from Alberta Health Services. The community long-term care access block: increasing ALC days in Calgary hospitals from 1999 to 2009. Under the previous Premier the number of bed days went anywhere from – in fact, they were actually down at the bottom when the previous Premier left in 2006, at 15,000 bed days in 2006-07. Have a look at that line. It's gone at a 55 per cent angle up. That's why people are dying in waiting rooms, because this government has failed the seniors.

The minister from Edmonton-Whitemud announced 600 long-term care beds in my home, and the other guy shows up – first, to be honest, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud did the right thing. He did the overcapacity protocols. He's absolutely correct. He listened to us doctors. He did. I like that guy. That's why I ran for public office. He also announced all these beds. He had the workforce action plan to get more doctors and more nurses. He did the right things, but the other guy showed up, Calgary-West: let's cut the number of doctors, cut the number of nurses, stop building long-term care beds. Mr. Speaker, if that isn't schizophrenic, I don't know what is, seriously.

Now this other minister shows up, and this guy is doing the right thing, too, to be honest. He listened to me, and he's doing his best. He is, honestly. He's a good guy. I like him. Now we're hiring all the nurses and doctors again. Now we're in a big rush. Do you understand why the front-line staff are thinking: what the heck are you people in the Legislature doing? Do you understand why they're demoralized? You make a decision just before election to cheer them up. Then you make a knucklehead decision right after the election. Then you try to cheer them up with the gobbledygook and gibberish and malarkey and all this stuff, whatever you want to call it. This is a mental health problem that this government has, to be honest.

Mr. Speaker, you can censure me all you want. I can't take that back because that's what the front-line staff are saying. They say: you guys all deserve to be locked up in a mental health institution. But guess what? There are no beds. There are no beds. They were going to blow it up. They'd have to wait for God knows how many hours in the Royal Alex emergency department. My friend's brother hung himself, unfortunately, God bless his soul, and God bless his family. That's what front-line staff see, patients suffering metres from care, and they feel helpless.

I don't know how I can communicate in any other way. I've appealed to the humanitarian side of my colleagues. I've appealed to the evidence-based side of my colleagues. I've appealed to the common-sense side of my colleagues.

How about the money side? The hon. member over here, the Finance minister, must just be, geez, soiling himself because he's the one who's going to have the big deficit. Why? Because the number one cost expenditure is health care. It's not the policy and the legislation. We have to understand, people, that it's actually the mismanagement, the lack of understanding of what the underlying problem is, the acknowledgement that this government broke the health care system and just smashed it again. They broke primary care. They broke long-term care. This graph is proof. The hon. minister from Sherwood Park, when she was health minister: these decisions were made under her.

The hon. minister from Edmonton-Whitemud came in after her, and he made an announcement. He made an announcement, but I'll tell you: he didn't do anything about it. Then the other guy, Calgary-West, showed up. Well, he was at least honest about it. He wasn't going to build them at all. All of these members sat back quietly and let it happen.

I'll tell you that at CPC on Health, when this long-term care policy came up – I can't use this word. The letter starts between the letter E and the letter G. I told the minister of health: "I'm telling you that in the third year people are going to be dying in the waiting rooms. The emergency docs are going to go crazy. I'm going to say that I told you so, and I'm going to be hammering you." I told them this, everyone who was in the CPC on Health. This hon. member was there. Hardly anyone even voted for it. Wasn't that right?

Geez, I really don't know what to say. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs sat there telling me: "Look, Raj, nobody is listening to these speeches. The galleries are empty. When it really mattered, they were banging on the doors of the Leg., 10,000 of them, on Bill 11." I'd say, Mr. Speaker, that the Sith has pulled the cover over the eyes of the Jedi Knights, which are the hard-working Albertans, the 100,000 hard-working staff who bleed every day, 24 hours a day, while we sleep comfortably in our beds and snicker and cheer and slam our hands on the desks.

You vote for something you don't actually understand and you haven't even read, and you've got to whip the vote because you're going to lose your job and you're going to get chucked out if you vote against it. They're just shaking their heads.

I am not going to give you any inspirational speech here. I'm going to cut through the malarkey and just be brutally honest. I think this government needs to go

10:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Allred: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has talked quite a bit about emergency wait times, and of course he's got a lot of experience with wait times. I know the previous speaker made the comment: once you get into the system, you get great care. I know I've heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark say essentially the same thing.

Something that really concerns me is that it seems that a doctor cannot admit a patient directly into the hospital. They have to go through emergency. I had a case recently reported to me where a patient came into a doctor, and he had broken his foot, and the doctor sent for X-rays. "Yes. You've got a broken foot. You've got to go to the hospital." He went to the hospital, he went to the emergency, and what did they do? They had to reX-ray the foot before they would do anything. Now, that seems like a waste of money, a waste of time, and causes wait time backups. Perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark could comment on what the situation is with having to go through emergency to get into the hospital for something that's referred from another doc.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert for that very good question. In the CAEP document for health care to function appropriately we need some flexibility in the system, which is that you need to function at 85 per cent. It's just like a car: it shouldn't redline at 7,000 rpms; 5,000 is okay. So 85 per cent is the 5,000 level. Health care for the past, oh, geez, 10, 12 years has been redlining at 104 per cent capacity.

There have never been any empty beds upstairs on the ward to do a direct admit because upstairs is plugged up by long-term care patients, 20 per cent of the beds are, because of the decisions made in 2005-2006 by these ministers of health here. Because upstairs is plugged up, even the ER beds are plugged up by admitted patients. I have yet to admit a patient straight up to their room without coming through the ER, simply because there's no bed upstairs, hon. member, because they're plugged up by long-term care, the bed blockers.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I enjoyed the hon. member's speech. Specifically around this issue, now, I know the hon. member earlier said that he implored his physician colleagues not to go public – and this is leading up to the 2008 election – because he had been told that "if you bother the Conservatives, they will beat the heck out of you if they get lots of seats."

Now, it as been reported in a published newsletter that one physician leader says that they actually stayed quiet in response to a request from the minister of health at the time leading up to the 2008 election, which was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Did the hon. member hear such threats leading up, prior, and during the 2008 election from the health minister?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Okay.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hancock: Under 23(h), (i), and (j), making allegations against another member, the hon. member is raising a question which has nothing to do with Bill 17 to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who can't answer it relative to the actions that I took as a member of the Legislature and when I was minister of health. It's totally inappropriate for him to be raising that question. If he

wants to raise that question with me, he's certainly able to. He could have raised that question with me when I spoke earlier.

Mr. MacDonald: There's closure on it. You can't.

Mr. Hancock: No. You actually could have raised that question with me because I spoke earlier, and there's a five minute comment and question. It's totally inappropriate for him to be raising questions in this House tonight and making innuendoes about what I might or might not have done and casting aspersions on my character and ability.

That's the type of activity we talked about yesterday. That's the type of problem that we had relative to issues that were raised in the point of order yesterday, Mr. Speaker. The Speaker, while he ruled against that particular point of order, did agree that it was totally inappropriate to have that kind of drive-by smear and innuendo.

Now, I can tell the hon. member that I acted entirely appropriately during the last election. There was no secret about anything that happened. In fact, as I mentioned earlier in my remarks, there was an emergency tent put up at the University of Alberta hospital by the Capital health authority during the election to deal with issues around emergency. There was no secret about the issues around emergency, and there was no keeping the emergency docs quiet during the election. There was an emergency tent, a big tent put up outside the University hospital to deal with the overflow in emergency at that time.

So to suggest, as that hon. member is, that somehow I was meeting with and beating people down and intimidating them is an absolutely obnoxious and outrageous comment, and I'd ask that he be called to account.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you wish to speak?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can understand the hon. minister's sensitivity, but certainly there's no point of order here. I refer to *Beauchesne* 496: "a Member may read excerpts from documents, books, or other printed publications as part of a speech" provided that there's no infringement of the rules. There's certainly no infringement of the rules here.

If you've got an exception, you call Mark Lisac from *Insight into Government* on a point of order. He's the one that's reporting this in his weekly newsletter published last Friday. If you've got a problem with that, you talk to him, not to me or other members of the House. The hon. member has every right to express an opinion on that question.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

You're finished?

Mr. MacDonald: You bet.

The Acting Speaker: Does any other member wish to speak to this point of order? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on the point of order.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, maybe I could clarify. When I was section president, I was advocating during the election campaign. I met a Mr. Jim Dau, who was the communications person for Premier Ralph Klein when the cutbacks happened. He sat me down at Century Grill and said: Raj, I've got to tell you that you don't want to criticize the Conservatives because they'll get

you after the election; it's best to work with them. He advised me that he was working with the hon. Premier. He said: it's better to work behind the scenes.

Mr. Hayden: On the point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, we're speaking to a point of order.

Do you have another point of order?

Mr. Hayden: No. I'm just saying: on the point of order.

Dr. Sherman: In February 2007 I met with Capital health. As section president my colleagues had asked me: look, you've got to say something. I called it a crisis. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who at that time was executive assistant to the hon. minister, phoned me and said: "Raj, how come you're calling the media? I thought we had a deal here."

So I just thought I'd add to the point of order here. There has been intimidation of front-line staff any time you speak up.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, listening to this, it is my decision that the question that was asked was certainly not relevant to the bill. We will move on. Also a reminder that the clock does not stop while we're doing this.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Debate Continued

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak on Bill 17. A thing I'd like to talk about, that has been widely talked about in this last day or two in the House, is this issue of privatization. I want to read to all of you that are listening out there from page 2 of Bill 17.

Whereas policies, organization, operations and decisions about Alberta's health [care] system should be guided and measured and sustained consistent with the following principles:

that Alberta is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

I think the Canada Health Act says very clearly that we're not putting for sale signs up on our hospitals. We're not about to see who comes to my community, and the highest bidder runs the health care system. The day that happens, I'll be sitting right beside you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and so will many of you. Our Premier made it very, very clear that the system in Alberta will remain public and will remain strong. I see it right here in the bill, the bill that everybody is so afraid of: "Alberta is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act." Well, I think that lays that issue to rest, Mr. Speaker.

Another thing that I want to tell you about – and I know very well about the great staff and the dedication and the love and the caring that Alberta health care workers have given in the number of years that I've had the honour to use the system. I have a daughter-in-law that works for Alberta health care, and she, too, is frustrated. Not frustrated with Bill 17, she's frustrated with all the bad publicity and the BS that seems to have been overwhelming the great services and the work that they do.

10:40

You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you that I've had the chance to use the health care system, and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark knows why. May 12, May 19, May 26 I was in the University hospital. June 2, June 9, June 16, June 23, June 30 I was in the University hospital. July 7, July 14, July 21, July 28 I was in the hospital. August 4, August 11, August 18,

August 25 I was in the hospital; September 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, October 6, 13, 20, 27, and next week again.

You know, all I see is good work and darn dedicated people. Do they think the system can be better? Yes, they do. Do they want to work within the system to make sure it's better? Yes, they do. There's no greater place in this province than in this Legislature, in this government working with the opposition to create change and to create a better health care system.

I think that when we look at the opportunities that are in this bill, the health charter must "recognize that Alberta is a partnership among individuals, families, communities, health [care] providers, organizations that deliver health [care] services, and the Government of Alberta," not solely the government of Alberta. The health charter must "acknowledge the impact of an individual's health status and other circumstances on the individual's capacity to interact with the health [care] system."

I heard many times the member from Calgary ask people that have spoken today: well, what is Bill 17 going to do for us? Well, I think the health care advocate is a big, big positive in this bill. You know, those of you that have health services in each corner of your city, there are lots of people that your constituents can go to. But in rural Alberta most times they end up at the MLA's office, and the MLA's office could use the Alberta health advocate. I will make sure that in order to carry out my duties as a representative from a rural constituency in Whitecourt-St. Anne, a health care advocate can exercise powers than can help out my constituents and people that are in need of access to the medical system.

I had the opportunity today to have lunch with a good friend of mine, and his two next-door neighbours are doctors at the Stollery hospital. They told him again and over and over again that there is no better place in the world – these are two foreign doctors – than to work in the Stollery hospital in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

You know, just recently in Whitecourt, a community of 10,000 people, we have 15 doctors, doctors from all over the world that have come to practise in a little community, in Whitecourt. I think that says a lot about the opportunities that these doctors had. They could have gone wherever they wanted, but they came to Alberta, they came to Whitecourt, and they came to serve the people of northern Alberta.

You know, there have been an awful lot of back-and-forth accusations. Nobody has ever, ever held a gun to my head in this caucus on which way to vote, what to speak on, and what not to speak on. I talk freely. I always have. At times I agree, and at times I don't agree. You know, sometimes democracy sucks, but I don't know a better system, Mr. Speaker. You know, sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, but all the time you do it with respect for your fellow colleagues on all sides of the House. You do it in here. The business is done in here, and the business is done with respect and decency to the office that each and every one of us serves.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the health advocate in this act and the way the health advocate can really serve each and every one of us that serves our constituents. Many, many times as an MLA in a small community it's frustrating when people are looking to you for help and advice and you don't know which way to turn. You have the minister's office and you have the other colleagues to turn to, and you have some contacts, but sometimes you need someone with that legislative authority, that authority that's given here in this bill, to act on constituents' concerns. It might be complaints, because not everybody has had a great experience, and it might be just to help get some access. Many, many times that's what I hear from constituents, the issue of access.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark spoke about when you're

treated or when you have a parent or a child that needs health care services, the people that treat you do so with compassion, with dedication, with love, with great enthusiasm about their job. They care about their patient. I think that goes back a bit to the education system that we have here and the opportunities for young Albertans to become medical doctors. When we saw the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's guests here, it made me feel a little old when looking up at the group because they were about the age of my sons. I thought: what a great opportunity for young people to get involved in the health care business in this province and make a darn good living at it, too.

Further on I look into the bill, and we talk about the directions by the minister.

Subject to the regulations, the Minister may, by order, direct a regional health authority, a health provider, professional college or operator or any other person involved in the provision of a health service to do any one or more of the following as specified . . .

(a) comply with the Health Charter;

That doesn't talk about privatization.

Mr. MacDonald: No. But this document does.

Mr. VanderBurg: No, it doesn't. I'm talking about Bill 17, not about some document that someone may have discussed at one time. I'm talking about the bill that's in front of us, sir.

It also says that the minister may

(b) develop and adopt a charter, consistent with the Health Charter, specific to that person's role in the health [care] system.

I see a lot of opportunity to make and deliver a better health care system through this bill.

Will we in the future need more regulations and maybe miscellaneous amendments to this bill? I would say yes. My nine years here tell me that we evolve and technologies change and services change and expectations change. We know about the expectations of Albertans. They're high, and they deserve to be high. We're spending close to \$15 billion on this health care system, I think a great percentage higher per capita than any other province. Should we get results when we pay good money? Yes, we should. We all work darn hard for those tax dollars, and Albertans deserve that service.

I want to talk a bit about the opportunities to keep people out of the emergency departments and talk on the wellness side. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark came out to my constituency, oh, I would say a year and a half ago, and the discussion we had with my constituents had nothing to do with wait times . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, but pursuant to Government Motion 23 agreed to on November 30, 2010, I must now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady
Allred

Evans
Griffiths

McQueen
Morton

Amery	Hancock	Redford
Benito	Hayden	Rodney
Bhullar	Horne	Rogers
Campbell	Jacobs	Sarich
DeLong	Johnston	Tarchuk
Drysdale	Knight	VanderBurg
Elniski	McFarland	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Sherman
Boutilier	MacDonald	Swann
Chase	Notley	Taft
Forsyth		

Totals: For – 27 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Bill 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to move third reading of Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is a money bill. I've just noted it has to be moved by a minister.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nice catch by the table. My apologies to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. I would move Bill 24 for third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have concerns. I've expressed my concerns about the liability associated with carbon sequestration. I've mentioned that committing \$2 billion is a tangible amount, but we have no idea what the cost of keeping the CO₂ underground will be. I would have preferred to have what I would consider to be a double-barrelled approach where rather than committing \$2 billion to sequestration, which I hope will be partially successful as a solution for CO₂, I would have liked to have seen a billion dollars spent on Green TRIP initiatives, where we could see immediate results in terms of reduced traffic on highways, improved commuting, LRTs in major cities, and eventually – we don't have the money now – moving on the rapid rail transit, the equivalent of our bullet train, from Calgary through to Edmonton, with a significant stop at Red Deer.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm worried about is the technology and the advance, as the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar mentioned, the potential of liability being assumed decades from now. I've been asking myself: are we entering into a brave new world of technology, or are we continuing to fly by the seat of our pants, operating on a wing and a prayer? That's the whole question with regard to CO₂ sequestration. CO₂ is the equivalent of a genie in a bottle, which we hope won't escape, or the winds tied in the bag in Pandora's box that were released with dramatic consequences. Before I'm sequestered, I want to have sound scientific assurance that my

grandsons won't be dealing with the fallout of another failed government experiment.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move adjournment on Bill 24.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions (continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 28

26. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forth-with.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the third time, unfortunately, I've had to move a motion today with respect to time allocation in committee. Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with time allocation. Time allocation is actually a tool that's used in the federal Parliament rather regularly with respect to bills, setting out a period of time for debate so that there can be a planned process and allotted time for each bill that comes before the House. In our House we don't use it that way. We use it only sparingly, and we only use it when it's very clear that the opposition is using their tool, which is the abuse of time.

Clearly, on Bill 28, which I might remind the House is the Electoral Divisions Act . . .

An Hon. Member: Is it 28 or 26?

Mr. Hancock: It's Motion 26 with respect to Bill 28.

It's a very simple bill. It puts into effect the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. There's no issue with respect to the number of seats. That was decided in a previous bill that was enacted, yet the opposition wants to talk about the number of seats.

There's no issue about the boundaries. There's no suggestion that boundaries should be changed in the House. The DVD was filed. It was very clear that if people wanted to make adjustments to that, that should have been done when the motion was passed. Yet we have spent, by my calculation, six hours and 30 minutes debating the Electoral Divisions Act. Six hours and 30 minutes, Mr. Speaker. We had one amendment to the bill, which was quite an interesting and quite an appropriate amendment, and I was pleased to do a subamendment so that Dunvegan-Central Peace could be named Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley in recognition of a person who actually did serve with honour in this House, someone who died while in office in this House. That amendment was made, and it was quite appropriate.

Then we heard a bunch of scurrilous debate for a long period of time until the Wildrose members could discover how to put together an amendment, and they started running in an amendment that I think is the amendment that's on the floor right now. Obviously, it's to change the name to Calgary-Preston Manning. Who knows what the next one will be?

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear and the opposition again is on record saying that they want to debate this one forever. It's clear from the record. I'm not talking about all of the opposition, actually. The

Liberal opposition hasn't done that; the NDP opposition certainly hasn't done that. But the Wildrose seems to believe that it's appropriate to take the Electoral Divisions Act and use it as a tool to disrupt democracy, and that just can't be allowed.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on behalf of the Official Opposition.

11:10

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to take this opportunity to get on the record that because of time allocation on the previous bill, I sat here for two hours and had no opportunity. I thought it was pretty rich listening to the Government House Leader speak about the abuse of time. What we're really seeing here is the abuse of power, the heavy-handed abuse of power.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, Government House Leader tonight, said that six and a half hours of debate was more than enough to cover this piece of legislation. Well, let's think about six and a half hours. Six and a half hours is less than one working day. Somebody goes to work from 9 in the morning until noon, takes an hour for lunch to go back at 1, you know, and before their workday is over, six and a half hours have passed. That's the amount of time that we've allowed for this debate, and the debate on this bill, Mr. Speaker, is important.

Admittedly, in the middle of the night when I was here a few days ago, some of the debate got a bit silly, but that's because we were forced to take it through the middle of the night, Mr. Speaker. Six and a half hours is not an abuse of time. I think it's telling, and I think it's important to think about an attitude that's become engendered in a government that's been in power for 40 years, that thinks that a six-and-a-half-hour debate – that's moving through first, second, and committee – is somehow excessive. This is not a minor bill; this is a significant bill. It will affect every single member of this Assembly, and it will affect every single citizen of this province.

I am disgraced by the kinds of comments I heard a few minutes ago, and I think this Assembly is disgraced by a government that has so often in the last day brought in time allocation, which is closure by any other term. Clearly, I'm unhappy. This habit cost me my right to participate tonight. I have sat here for two hours wanting to debate third reading of Bill 17 – I am the health critic – and I never had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, because of the heavy hand of this government. So I have no sympathy for the comments.

Mr. Hancock: That's not even true.

Dr. Taft: I am getting heckled by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and it is true. [interjection]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has the floor.

Dr. Taft: Anyway, I think that if there is a conscience over there on the government side – and I know in some members there is – I hope it needles them at least a little bit to think that in a democracy six and a half hours of debate on a major bill is seen as excessive.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 26 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:13 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Evans	McQueen
Allred	Griffiths	Morton
Amery	Hancock	Redford
Benito	Hayden	Rodney
Bhullar	Jacobs	Rogers
Campbell	Johnston	Sarich
DeLong	Knight	Tarchuk
Drysdale	McFarland	VanderBurg
Elniski		

Against the motion:

Anderson	MacDonald	Sherman
Chase	Notley	Taft
Hinman		

Totals:	For – 25	Against – 7
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[Government Motion 26 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:26 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 1, 2010

Issue 50a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)

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WA Opposition House Leader

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Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC)

Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)

Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC)

Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC)

Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),

Official Opposition Deputy Leader,

Official Opposition House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 1, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Kaoru Ishikawa, the ambassador of Japan, who is accompanied by his wife, Masako Ishikawa. Also joining him this afternoon is Mr. Yasuo Minemura, the consul general of Japan in the Calgary office, and Kyoko Minemura, the wife of the consul general, as well as Yuji Sekiguchi, first secretary, embassy of Japan in Ottawa, as well as Naoki Sasahara, vice-consul, culture and information section, consulate general of Japan in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to welcome His Excellency to Alberta as we celebrate two important milestones in our relations with Japan. I had the honour of hosting the entire delegation for lunch today, and we discussed the fact that it was about 40 years ago that the Alberta-Japan office began its work in Tokyo promoting trade and investment opportunities in our province. As a result of the office's work Japan's JACOS was one of the first international companies to invest in our oil sands.

This year we also mark the 30th anniversary of our twinning relationship with the prefecture of Hokkaido. As part of this relationship Alberta receives a special adviser from Hokkaido every year to help develop Japanese culture and language programs for our school curriculum. We really appreciate the relationship that we have with Japan, and we look forward to many more decades of co-operation.

Mr. Speaker, I now ask that His Excellency and the delegation please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 13 representatives of the First Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. The commander-in-chief's unit commendation for 1 PPCLI battle group task force 1-06 was presented on November 29 by the Governor General, and these representatives were honoured here today at a reception attended by MLAs, hosted by myself and the Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Speaker, between January and August of 2006 Task Force Orion operated throughout southern Afghanistan with good success. Theirs was to be a transition mission, and as you will hear later today, this small force did the work of the much larger one which replaced it. The task force had over 100 contacts with the Taliban; 50 of these involved intensive firefights, complex battalion manoeuvres, and the use of artillery fire and support aircraft. Despite

some very harsh conditions morale has remained very, very high. They inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, and of course, as we all know in this Assembly, we lost some brave soldiers that year. Their sacrifice contributed to the success of that task force. To say the least, Canada is very proud of the entire battalion.

Our honoured guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I humbly ask that each would stand as I call their name to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly when they are all standing: Captain Dylan Dewar, Corporal Daniel Malho, Corporal Joseph Robb, Master Corporal Shane Stackpole, Corporal Kevin Koldeweihe, Corporal Dale Miller, Master Corporal Peter Chan, Corporal Adam Hilton, Corporal Alec Richard, Corporal Darren Lynch, Master Corporal William Tyers, Corporal Michael Mulesa, Corporal Adam Gee. Mr. Speaker, they have now risen in your gallery. I would ask that the Legislative Assembly give their warmest regards. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate introductions for three very special guests seated in your gallery today. First, Mr. Kerry Diotte, who is no stranger to the Legislature and no stranger to many of us who are here today. As we're all aware, Mr. Diotte was a well-known journalist in our city prior to running for city council. Mr. Diotte was elected for his first term as a city councillor in ward 11 on October 18, 2010. Of course, ward 11 shares voters with my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Mr. Diotte, welcome to public office, and welcome to serving the great people of southeast Edmonton. At this time I ask Mr. Diotte to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, for my second introduction I have two school board trustees, who are also sitting in your gallery and who were elected on October 18 to serve southeast Edmonton as well. To begin with, Ms Leslie Cleary, the Edmonton public school board trustee for ward I. Ms Cleary had many years of experience in the nonprofit sector before being elected on October 18. Seated beside her is Ms Laura Thibert. Laura was elected as a Catholic school board trustee in ward 77 on October 18 as well. Laura brings a wealth of experience from the nonprofit sector and has been deeply involved in the community for many, many years. I look forward to working with all of my elected colleagues, and I ask at this time for both of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Dave Loken. Mr. Loken is the new councillor for ward 3 in the capital city of Edmonton, and ward 3 is part of the constituency of Edmonton-Decore.

As a new councillor Mr. Loken has taken on many new roles and duties, and one of these is as the co-chair of Edmonton Salutes Committee. He represents this committee at council, standing committees, and other public functions, which also included joining the military representatives today at the Alberta Legislature. Edmonton Salutes promotes and recognizes the importance of our local military and their contributions both at home and abroad. The ultimate goal of this program is to let our military personnel and their families know how important they are to the fabric of our community and how we truly thank them for their service on behalf of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask Mr. Loken, city councillor for ward 3, who is seated in your gallery, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's definitely an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature 52 young people from Lorelei elementary school. I had the pleasure of visiting that class about a week ago as they're covering right now a social studies unit on government. I have to tell you that their level of understanding of our process and the quality of questions they had were second to none. Accompanying these students are teachers and group leaders Mrs. Ellen Aker, Mr. Mark George, and Ms Karen Mundorf. Also accompanying them are parent helpers Mr. Steve Abbott, Mrs. Zohreh Assi, Mrs. Catrina Fahie, Mr. Lem Mundorf, and Mr. Ed Remesz. I would ask them all to rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's such a pleasure and such a joy to introduce to you and through you some of Alberta's brightest young students from my constituency. They are, of course, from Waverley elementary. They are here today to observe democracy in action, and in a moment I'm going to ask them to rise with their group leader/teacher Mrs. Flook and also their parent helpers Mrs. Davidson and Ms Woychuk. Would they all rise, and would the rest of us please applaud them for being here on this wonderful day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a bunch of enthusiastic students from St. Francis of Assisi Catholic elementary school. They are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Kevin McGoey, Mrs. Audrey Fitzpatrick, and student teacher Ms Kelsey Kat. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the House three special guests sitting in the members' gallery today: Mr. Dick Chamney, an Edmontonian and the president of International Social Service Canada; Dr. Lorne Jaques, professor for the only international social work master's program in Canada from the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work; and Ms Brianna Strumm, graduate student of the international social work master's program from U of C and a social worker with the city of Calgary currently. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have my two constituency assistants in the Assembly today. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I believe my leg. assistant is with them: Wendy Pasiuk, Laurie Huolt, and Lindsay Cooke. If they would please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of representatives from the Canadian Federation of University Women, Edmonton chapter.

The Canadian Federation of University Women is an international group comprised of women who have graduated from any university. As a matter of interest, the Edmonton chapter celebrated its 100th birthday last year. In addition to having interests in a number of areas of public policy such as the environment, health, and many others, the group meets once a month to hear from significant speakers. They also provide on a regular basis resolutions to all levels of government and even have a voice at the United Nations.

These guests are seated in the public gallery today, and I would ask that each guest rise and stand as I call her name: Judi Cook, Gerry Cameron, Janet Clark, Jude de Almeida-Beaudry, Betty Gravett, Joy Hurst, Tammy Irwin, Alberta Boytzun, Shirley Shostak, Shirley Reid, and Jean Wells. I'd ask that all members of the Assembly join me in giving this fine group of women the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm truly humbled to recognize some of our country's great soldiers, the First Battalion of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. This Monday the unit was awarded the rare honour of the commander-in-chief unit commendation by our Governor General at Edmonton Garrison, and I was honoured to be in attendance.

They were recognized for exceptional determination and courage during relentless combat in Afghanistan from January to August 2006. During this time period the 1,200 soldiers in this unit, known as Task Force Orion, operated alone in southern Afghanistan in an area now occupied by over 30,000 NATO forces. Because of their determination NATO was able to assume command in southern Afghanistan and prevent the city of Kandahar from falling to the Taliban.

Mr. Speaker, as the Deputy Premier mentioned, Task Force Orion was involved in over a hundred contacts with the Taliban, and this cost Canada the lives of 19 brave men and women, with another 76 wounded in action. One of these brave men was Corporal Bryce Keller. I had the privilege of meeting his wife, Sarah, his father, Mel, and his grandparents this Monday. It's unfortunate that Sarah cannot be with us today, but Corporal Keller's family exemplifies the sacrifice made by all the families of our lost soldiers.

They can take pride in knowing that the world is a better place for millions of people because of their sacrifice. As just one example, before Corporal Keller arrived in Afghanistan, there were only 1 million primary students, none of which were girls. Today there are 6 million students enrolled in primary school in Afghanistan, including 2 million girls.

Mr. Speaker, the Patricias here today are part of one of the most decorated military regiments in the Canadian Forces, with a proud history dating back to 1914. Their mottos – Once a Patricia, Always a Patricia; Valour and Pride; as well as their unofficial motto, First in the Field – will tell you all you need to know about these very special Canadians.

Alberta is very proud of our soldiers, and I'd ask all the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating and thanking the 1st Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and their families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Rosza Award Acceptance Speech

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year I introduced Tom McFall from the Alberta Craft Council to you. He was the recipient of the top award from the Rosza awards for arts administration. Now, it's tradition for each outgoing recipient to report on their activities and successes during the Rosza year, and I wanted to share an excerpt from his speech with you as it outlines in his own voice the challenges faced by arts groups in Alberta today. From Tom.

This should be a joyous event, but I need to tell you, the worst part of the year started with the shocking news that the provincial government was cutting \$5 million from its already meagre arts support. Five million may not be much in other sectors, but this is the largest funding cut in the 30 years that I have been working in the arts.

The entire arts sector, including all of the nominees tonight, is being hit hard. The Craft Council as well as the professional and community craft scenes are taking a major hit. The Alberta Craft Council board and staff and I are currently cancelling or postponing major projects. We have cancelled a large touring exhibition called Clay 2010. You could have seen it at the Triangle Gallery later this year. We are cutting national and international projects. We are postponing the search for a proposed Calgary location, and we are also cutting or delaying our provincial travelling exhibitions. One of these, for example, went to 22 locations from Milk River to Peace River and was seen by over 15,000 visitors.

I'm telling you this news at this event because, sadly and ironically, these cuts are to the Craft Council's most adventurous and outward-thinking projects, the very projects that last year most attracted the jurors of the Rosza award. Without these innovative projects I suspect the Craft Council and I would not have been chosen for this impressive award. As we collectively lose millions of dollars of provincial investment in the arts sector, at least, thankfully, we do have the Rosza award to honour, celebrate, and support excellence in arts management.

To close, I think – Laurie thinks – that this government needs to rethink its investment in the arts, quit cutting programs, and aim for economic diversity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

World AIDS Day

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in recognition of December 1, World AIDS Day. On this day every year we have the opportunity to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS, to remember those who have passed on, to be thankful for increased access to prevention and treatment, and to realize that there is much more work to be done to stop the spread of AIDS. Around the world people mark this day by wearing a red ribbon as a symbol of their solidarity for people living with HIV and AIDS.

AIDS was first reported in June of 1981. Globally by the end of 2009 approximately 33 million people were living with AIDS. Mr. Speaker, antiretroviral treatment can slow the course of the disease; however, there is no known cure or vaccine for AIDS and HIV at this time. Although the cost of antiretroviral drugs has fallen in low-income countries, the majority of the world's infected individuals do not have access to the medication and treatment.

Mr. Speaker, the stigma associated with AIDS can range from ostracism to violence against the infected individuals, which, sadly, creates obstacles for many people to be tested or to seek treatment. As a result, what could possibly be a manageable chronic illness can

become a death sentence for the infected individuals and also perpetuate the spread of HIV.

Keep the Promise, Mr. Speaker, is a political commitment of universal access. Access to antiretroviral treatment is dependent upon access to quality primary health care where voluntary testing and counselling are available. This year's World AIDS Day theme is Act Aware. I would like to ask all members of this House to take some time today to reflect on the goal of . . . [Mr. Xiao's speaking time expired]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Publicly Funded Health Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Monday we tabled the government's strategy to privatize health care in Alberta. The government responded with the usual unbelievable denials of, quote, it's just a discussion document. End quote. And, quote, I never saw it. End quote. Since this Premier has totally lost the confidence of Albertans, I'm going to try to help him out with a statement I have crafted today and will send to his office imminently. Will the Premier in writing promise Albertans that a government led by him will never violate the principles of the Canada Health Act?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the member already knows the answer to that question. We had 27 hours of debate on the health bill, and that is specifically stated in the health bill. I hope he's supporting the health bill. It's going to receive royal assent. That's just, I guess, part and parcel of the debate that went on in this House, that nobody really focused on the components of the bill.

Dr. Swann: Well, I didn't actually hear an answer to the question, of course, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Premier in writing promise Albertans he will not allow doctors to work in both the public and the private systems at the same time? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's most unfortunate, but we do have doctors that do opt out, and when they opt out, they stay out. That is a provision that's available to doctors today. The one thing that all members should focus on is that the bill that we've debated in this House says very explicitly that Albertans will have a say in the future direction of health care delivery in this province. That means any regulation changes will have to be posted on the website and discussed with Albertans. Albertans will have a say.

Dr. Swann: Well, again a bit evasive, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you'll agree.

Will the Premier in writing promise Albertans that he will never allow private insurance for medically necessary services? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, the legislation is very clear in this area. Some other level of government, especially the federal government, may bring about changes, but I can tell you that any changes – any changes – in terms of health care delivery the way we know it today will have to be discussed with Albertans. Albertans will have a say. But the most important thing is that at the end of the day we have to have the money in place. We've done that. We've opened up more long-term care beds, which has taken some pressure off the emer-

gency rooms. Everything is moving ahead, the process. It's a good bill.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health System Governance

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. It's now clear that centralized decision-making has brought our health care system to a standstill over the past two years, from no health capital plan for Edmonton and Calgary to a strategic plan that has now been delayed for months. To the Premier: will you immediately shift more decision-making power to local authorities in the system until Alberta Health Services can be dismantled in an orderly fashion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, today we've got over a thousand projects just in health facilities alone totalling over \$5 billion. To say that, you know, everything has come to a standstill – I know that we have two very good children's hospitals that are operating very efficiently. We have the Maz centre. We have one of only three burn units in the world, and it's here at the University of Alberta. We've got the virology lab. Li Ka Shing could have gone anyplace in the world and invested \$28 million. Where did it go to? It came to the province of Alberta. To say that nothing is being done in health care is totally erroneous and quite mistaken.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I still don't hear any acknowledgment that the structure is the problem.

Mr. Premier, how are you going to put Humpty Dumpty together again without disrupting patient care? How are you going to disseminate decision-making to the regional level again? Do you see the problem, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I'm not worried about Humpty Dumpty; I'm not worried about fairy tales. But I am worried about how we deliver health care to Albertans. There's a good plan in place. The minister articulated the five-year plan this morning on radio; he had a news conference yesterday. That's a bold step together with funding that's in place plus the fact that we have listened to the AMA section of ER docs. They told us what to do: open up more continuing care beds and find the protocol to move those that are in emergency rooms and admit them to hospital. And we're doing that.

Dr. Swann: Well, if there's one thing that's clear, Mr. Speaker, it's that the structure cannot deliver on these plan after plan after plan. Unless the Premier is prepared to make some tough decisions, we're not going to get these goals met.

When are you going to put real decision-making power into the hands of those in hospitals that know the area, the needs, and know how to fix the problems?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the people that are working in our hospitals and our continuing care facilities are delivering. They are working very hard. The doctors, the nurses, the allied health care providers are the ones that are delivering the service. Most importantly, they know that the money is in place; they can plan for the next five years. They also understand the well-communicated plan to reduce some of the pressures in emergency rooms. We'll continue to ensure that we're bringing forward a good cancer strategy for the province. I mean, we're the only jurisdiction I know that has three additional radiation . . .

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Five-year Health Action Plan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll try a different tack and see if I can get an answer from the minister of finance. The five-year plan from the minister of health is filled with reannouncements, vague promises, holes, and contradictions. To the minister of finance: is it not true that documents on your ministry's website show that the new cancer clinic in Red Deer will be open in 2013?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the website says about the cancer clinic in Red Deer, so I'll have to take a look to get an answer to the member there. I'm proud to say that the five-year plan, the five-year contract, that this government has with Alberta Health Services is going to fund strong growth, responsible growth in medical services both on the service side and the capital side and implement the programs that the hon. minister of health has described.

Dr. Swann: Well, to update the finance minister on his own website, it does say that the Red Deer cancer clinic will be operable by 2013.

However, the five-year plan that was released yesterday by the minister of health reveals that the Red Deer health clinic will be open by 2015. To the minister of health: has the minister deferred the cancer centre in Red Deer, or is the five-year plan wrong?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker. The cancer therapy corridor project for radiation is going ahead. We've already opened a brilliant, beautiful facility in Lethbridge where at least 600 people will be able to benefit from that service in their own community. We've announced that we'll do one in Red Deer as well. There's a design process that has to be worked through, and the Minister of Infrastructure is helping in that regard. So we'll have one in Red Deer as fast as possible. We'll also have another radiation therapy project in Grande Prairie.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really tough to get answers to basic questions in this House. I would hope that we can hold these ministers more accountable in the future.

We're getting very mixed messages on this critical area of cancer treatment, and this government continues to prevaricate. Is this government going to keep its plans straight for the Red Deer cancer clinic and build the faith that people of Grande Prairie will have their hospital with a cancer clinic open in 2014? It's been promised since 2007.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we've announced and made it very clear that these projects are moving ahead as quickly as they possibly can. With respect to the Red Deer project to do with cancer care, we know that we have total provincial support of about \$60 million in the budget for that, and it will be built as quickly and as soon as possible. You have to keep in mind that we have to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

2:00

Health System Governance (continued)

Mr. Hinman: The Wildrose has been calling for a fee for service and a chief medical officer for every acute hospital with the authority and responsibility to operate our hospitals properly. When I asked the minister on November 22, he said that hospitals already

have “a clinical lead and also a site admin lead.” In other words, there are people with local responsibilities that also have the local authority to act. This is false. Yesterday Dr. Eagle agreed with us, saying that we have to give hospital administrators more power to make decisions. What does the minister have to say for himself?

Mr. Zwozdesky: The statements that I made are true, and so, too, are the statements that Dr. Eagle made. It’s just well known that hospitals, acute-care hospitals, which is the subject here, have a clinical lead person. That’s a medical-type person, and they have a clinical lead administrator. Now, the question is that the responsibility and the authority need to be augmented, and we’ve said that we’re going to do that. What confusion could you possibly have in your own mind? I don’t know.

Mr. Hinman: No wonder Albertans are frustrated and confused. You’re frustrated and confused, and your administrators are frustrated and confused. It’s time to end the confusion.

The superboard is imploding before our very eyes. Even the people on it can no longer defend it. Dr. Eagle also admitted yesterday that the superboard has confused administrators, and he insisted that the system needs local innovation and autonomy. When will you dismantle the failed superboard?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the superboard, as he’s referred to it, is actually the Alberta Health Services, a single regional health authority. They are working very hard to address problems that exist in the system. That’s why we work collaboratively with them, with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, with the College of Pharmacists, with the United Nurses of Alberta folks, and also with the Health Quality Council to arrive at a plan. That plan, which talks about specific performance measures that address these issues, is right there. It was released yesterday. It will be followed, and it will make the improvements that we say.

Mr. Hinman: The evidence against this minister has piled up for weeks. Claiming to be blindsided by the ER crisis, he still hasn’t admitted how bad the problem is. He’s withheld information. In the last week he’s desperately turned to scapegoating his CEO and his parliamentary assistant. The best he can do is wave around a Christmas wish with a target that can never be met. The superboard is crumbling, and his reputation is crumbling with it. Even his bureaucracy has lost confidence in him. To the Premier: how long can you stand by this minister, and when will you replace him?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I’m going to stand with my minister and support him. You know why? Because, I think, all Albertans . . . [interjections] Sorry. I know this isn’t the normal behaviour.

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, you have the floor.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you.

The Speaker: Attention will be provided, or I will simply ignore those who are heckling in the question period rotation.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. The reason I’m saying that I’m standing behind my minister is because all Albertans need protection from a

member that just got up and said that what we need to do in this province is charge a fee for service when people enter emergency rooms. That begins to worry me, and I really want to know where that party stands in terms of this two-tiered, European-style health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood if you’re ready.

Publicly Funded Health Care (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. Two days ago a document laying out the government’s secret plan to privatize health care was leaked to opposition parties. Everyone is denying paternity of this inconvenient new arrival, but I can tell you that the baby has a salt and pepper mustache, a cleft in his chin, and a talent for music and languages. The father is sitting right over there. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will you admit that you are the person responsible for this secret Tory plan to privatize our health care system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, let’s be very clear. There is no secret plan. There is no secret agenda. There is nothing on the table whatsoever to do with privatization. There is nothing there to do with a two-tier system. What we’ve made very clear and what I would ask this member to accept and understand is that there are Albertans out there who have opinions of a wide range. Whether we like them or not, whether we agree with them or not, they deserve to be heard, and all that the document reflected is what was heard. Did we act on the things that were contrary to the health act? No.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark described how the Minister of Health and Wellness and his sidekick the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford were pushing this secret privatization plan through the Tory caucus. No wonder they tried to discredit him. To the minister: why don’t you admit that this is your plan and that you intend to privatize our health care system just as soon as you’re re-elected, if that happens?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, simply because all of what he just said is not true. There is no agenda of that kind whatsoever. Were there opinions expressed by Albertans? Yes, there were. Will there be opinions expressed again? Probably so. I don’t know. All I can tell you is that we have passed the health care act in this Legislature, and it is a good act that lays out the framework for improvements that Albertans are waiting to see. They want action, none of this rhetoric that they’re trying to spin from the other side.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I’ve read the summary of the public’s views, and they didn’t say anything that was in that document that you released.

Albertans simply cannot trust this PC government with our health care system. The minister’s so-called five-year plan is just another of his confidence-building measures intended to lull Albertans into a false sense of security. After the next election the government will again reveal its true privatization agenda. To the minister: after all the deception and incompetence your government has displayed on health care, why would anyone in their right mind ever vote for you again?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, because they know that this government has a solid plan to reduce wait times for hips, to reduce wait times for radiation oncologist visits, to reduce wait times for cataract surgery, to open literally thousands more beds to help, to hire more doctors, to hire more nurses and fix some of the problems that are there. That's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years multiple presidents of the Alberta Medical Association section of emergency medicine – amongst them Dr. Peter Kwan, Dr. Paul Parks, and myself – have written to this government and to this Premier pleading for urgent action on access to emergency services. This Premier replied on February 23, 2008, that our “Progressive Conservative government will work directly with emergency physicians to establish, implement and monitor appropriate benchmarks and standards for emergency services on a province-wide basis.” I understand this is actually question period and not answer period, but let's try to get answers here. Why did . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, sir. Somebody is going to respond. If it is the Premier, he is recognized now.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to a document that was a letter that was sent to the doctors. This was during the election, and they wrote letters to all of the parties that had candidates in the election. We responded. We said that we'll increase the number of seats in training colleges for physicians. We said we're going to meet a goal of training an additional 2,000 nurses by 2012. We said that we will be building additional continuing care beds, and we've done that.

Dr. Sherman: Again to the Premier: given that you said, “We will utilize the AMA's Emergency Medicine Position Statement, including the recommended CTAS benchmark and recommendations for overcapacity protocols, as the foundation for the review, to be completed by June 30, 2008,” why did you promise immediate action and then ignore pleas for help from Alberta's emergency doctors during multiple crises only to respond now when your leadership on health care is in crisis? When was this review completed? If not, why not?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, there is no crisis in health care. There are, obviously, longer waiting times in emergency rooms. But, you know, I was just north in Falher and McLennan and Donnelly, and here were people that have raised issues saying: “You know, we need a few more ambulances. We do have additional space in continuing care. We could accept more patients. There are a number of doctors in McLennan. One will be retiring, and one will be moving to another position.” They raised those issues. Okay. So across Alberta we're trying to meet the needs of Albertans and provide equitable health care from one corner of the province to another.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that many senior citizens have contacted our office, even several seniors from Lamont, Fort Saskatchewan, and Vegreville, your constituents, who have expressed disillusionment with your

government's handling of long-term care, the seniors' drug plan, and access to emergency services, what have you got to say for yourself about failing Alberta's most vulnerable citizens in their time of need, those Albertans who built this great province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can stand before this Assembly and say that there is no other jurisdiction in the country of Canada that does more for seniors, whether it's in all of the programs that we have to offer, all of the health services, the number of continuing care facilities that are being built, all of the attention that's being paid to seniors. We know that we are gaining about 2,000 seniors a month. We know that's going to be a huge demographic issue to deal with. In four to five years we'll be looking at about 4,000 a month. These are serious issues, but we're also trying to focus on all of them.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Edmonton-Gold Bar, you've been called.

Canada Pension Plan

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I did not hear you. In 2001 in the famous firewall letter signed by the now finance minister, there was a proposal to have an Alberta agenda that included, among other things, withdrawing from the Canada pension plan and creating an Alberta pension. To the Deputy Premier: the minister of finance carries some serious baggage when it comes to the CPP, so will the Deputy Premier take charge and support expanding the CPP to assist workers by doubling their retirement benefits and enabling their employers to offer a decent pension plan so they can retire with dignity and respect?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the question is more directed to our minister of finance than it is to the Deputy Premier because the minister of finance is engaged in those discussions with our federal government as we speak. Perhaps the minister would like to supplement.

Mr. MacDonald: Dodge.

Now, given that at this time last year the former finance minister was in favour of expanding the CPP to take advantage of the Canada pension plan's investment success and, of course, its portability, is pension reform a matter in which we can expect this government to flip-flop from year to year and from minister to minister?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the Liberal Party is lining up with the Canadian Labour Congress in recommending doubling pension benefits.

Dr. Taft: Is that enough for the working man?

Dr. Morton: The working man. It's a job killer, Mr. Speaker. It's a job killer. [interjections] Every economist will tell you that if you want to create jobs in a recession, which is what a recession needs, more jobs, you don't raise payroll taxes.

The Speaker: I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar if we can sort of just quiet down his benchmate. So if you could just put your arm on his shoulder – okay? – and proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay.

What an elitist answer.

To the Treasury Board president. Given that the minister of finance has claimed that unemployment is high and even a modest increase in CPP premiums will kill jobs at the same time as we have the minister of labour, who has repeatedly said that job figures for Alberta are good and getting better, can the Treasury Board president tell us where this government really stands? Does this government want to allow workers to retire with dignity and respect, or do you want them living on baloney and bread?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, not only do we want them to be able to retire with dignity and respect; we want them to retire very financially comfortable. Isn't it amazing the bleak picture that they want to present? They don't even really seem concerned about getting Albertans to work. They're worried about their retirement. We're putting the province to work. We're leading the country in economic growth and jobs, well-paying jobs, where people have the individual opportunity to invest in themselves, in this province and to look after themselves in the future.

Small-business Tax

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, following on the theme of getting Albertans to work, Alberta has long claimed to have the lowest taxes in Canada. Manitoba now has followed on a plan to cut their small-business tax to zero. This is great news for that province. My question is to the minister of finance. Would lowering these taxes increase our competitiveness and reduce the tax burden on small businesses in this province? Will Alberta follow suit?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's, indeed, good news for Manitoba, and I extend my congratulations to Minister Wowchuk there, the Minister of Finance in an NDP government. It may be a teaching moment for the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that lowering taxes actually creates jobs. I guess the Liberal Party could learn that, too. But I would remind everybody that when you take all taxes into consideration, Alberta still has the lowest taxes on small business.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister. Manitoba is a recipient of equalization and other federal transfers. By reducing the revenues, will they get more?

Dr. Morton: The answer to that, Mr. Speaker, is no. Equalization is based on a formula based on tax capacity, not the actual dollar value of taxes paid but on the tax base. In fact, by lowering the business tax, Manitoba's tax base should actually grow over the next few years and thus shrink its equalization payments. It'll create more jobs, which these people don't seem to understand.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, then, to the same minister. If Alberta reduced its revenues by reducing its small business tax, would Albertans get equal treatment on federal transfers, including the Canada health transfer act? I think you need to work a little harder on that, Minister.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, again the answer is no, which demonstrates the absurdity and the illogical character of the equalization programs. It punishes responsible jurisdictions that keep taxes low and attract investment. It rewards jurisdictions with high taxes. It pays people to stay where there's unemployment. That's why we're going to put this issue on the next agenda of the federal-provincial ministers' meeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, not the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I know. You're so enthusiastic I'll gladly give you a spot.

Dr. Taft: I love it in here, Mr. Speaker. I am enthused.

The Speaker: You love it in here. Okay. I can give you this spot to question and replace Calgary-Varsity because you're chomping at the bit.

Parks Legislation

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, Albertans were temporarily relieved last week when the parks minister acknowledged that more public collaboration was necessary on Bill 29 prior to its spring 2011 resurfacing. Two recurring faults of the bill were that it failed to recognize the primacy of preserving ecological reserves and wilderness areas over recreational parks and that it attempted to preempt public legislation by moving governance into ministerial regulation. To the minister: will your reintroduced bill enshrine this publicly demanded primacy in legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we feel very strongly that the park legislation was heading in the right directions, but we feel like it could use a bit more work. We're back out in public consultation. I just want to go on record as saying that with the plan for parks and the legislation that we're proposing, really, not one inch of Alberta parks would have been less protected, but we recognize that there needs to be further reassurance of that. We're looking at some methods for that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. There has to be a differentiation for ecological reserves and wilderness areas, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to grandfathering established park protection precedents in legislation rather than moving them into ministerial discretionary regulation?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're considering a few different options at this time, so I can't comment specifically. But we have been listening. We're working on this at this point in time. I think that when the hon. member sees us bring it back in the spring, he'll see some relief in this area.

Mr. Chase: Heaven be praised. Rather than limiting consultation to online surveys, will the minister commit to holding a series of well-advertised public hearings throughout the province prior to reintroducing a parks act in the spring?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been in three years of consultation. Is there more that can be done? Always. We're looking at different methodologies of doing that, but I will say that when we ask Albertans how they want to be consulted, their number one way is online. They're busy. They have busy lives, and they want to make sure that they have input as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Educational Outcomes of Children and Youth in Care

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Children and Youth Services and

also the Minister of Education. Children and youth in care are a particularly vulnerable group of students who often have extraordinary needs due to their life circumstances. Significantly more children and youth in care drop out of school, do poorly on achievement tests, fall farther behind in school as they get older, and are less likely to graduate from high school compared to students in the general population. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: what is your ministry doing to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the member. It is critically important that we assist our children and youth with the challenges they may face in school. Success in School for Children and Youth in Care, the provincial protocol framework, is a joint initiative between the Minister of Education and this ministry, and it requires that our caseworkers, our caregivers, our educators, children and youth themselves develop a plan that will assist them with becoming successful with their achievement tests and ultimately with graduating from high school.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'm very encouraged to hear about what this new educational framework is hoping to accomplish. Is there any evidence to show that this new approach will make a tangible difference in improving educational success for children and youth in care?

2:20

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, the protocol was based on stakeholder consultation. It was based on a review of research, current leading practices. There were four demonstration sites across the province, and the valuable information that came back to us, hon. member, shows that it does strengthen relationships for our children in care along with, as I said, the caseworkers and caregivers, educators, other professionals. We are planning to implement that protocol framework program across the province over the next three years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education. There are a number of stakeholders who have the role of playing champions to this initiative for implementing the provincial protocol framework, including Alberta Foster Parent Association, Alberta Teachers' Association, and Alberta School Boards Association. Will you commit that you will keep these people that are closest to them involved in moving forward?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the collaboration that we have in this particular project has been exemplary, and we absolutely need to continue that collaboration, continue to involve the people who are actively engaged in the front lines, including foster parents, including teachers and schools. This has been particularly successful for schools because in the past it's been difficult to share appropriately the information that's necessary to ensure student success. Now under this protocol framework our teachers in schools are working collaboratively with social services, with health units, with others in the community to make sure that those students have every chance to be successful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Arts Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. What is the difference between Mile Zero Dance and Orchesis modern dance? Answer: the minister of culture will continue to fund Mile Zero but not Orchesis, which is affiliated with the university. Arts funding in Alberta is no longer about whether you're an artist but about with whom you associate or under whose roof you perform. My question is to the minister of culture. Does the minister not understand that cutting arts grants to artists in municipalities, universities, schools, and cultural industries is cutting funding to artists?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stood up here in the House the other day and talked about the fact that there were no plans for reductions to the artists and education program. However, we are in reality in the government of Alberta facing a \$5 billion deficit. That's real money. We've made a commitment to health care. We've made a commitment to education. We all have to look at being fiscally responsible and take our medicine. That means not everybody gets to have the same programs year after year that they've enjoyed in the past. We all have to tighten our belts. The arts community, along with everybody else in our department, is going to have to share that burden.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, but not along with everybody else in this government, so back to the same minister. Let's get some clarity. An e-mail from your director of arts development says, "As of April 1, 2011, the AFA will discontinue the Artists and Education program," and "No new grant stream will be put in place to replace [it] or the old Educational Touring grant programs." But Tuesday we hear this same director saying that they won't cut the program until 2012. The ministry has done this flip-flop before in other sectors, so what gives, Mr. Minister? In, out? Yes, no?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre should know, the directives come from the minister of the department, not from the director of the department. That directive had not come through me, was not issued through me. When I saw it, I said that we will not go forward with that. That's where it ends. That's what it is today.

Ms Blakeman: The minister is telling me that he doesn't even know what's going on in his own department. Okay.

Well, back to the same minister. Given that this minister has been on a rampage of cuts through the community series grants, artists and education, cultural industries, and grants affiliated with universities, that directly affect artists' ability to make a living in Alberta, why does the minister believe that other grant programs, unspecified, will cover artists who are cut off when no new money has been added to the department or to AFA?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is absolutely ridiculous. AFA has received a 55 per cent increase in funding since 2005. Look at other provinces across the country: B.C., reduction of 25 per cent; Saskatchewan, a reduction of 7 per cent; Quebec, a reduction of 7 per cent. We're paying 8 and a half billion dollars for their arts and all their other funding. Ontario, who is ready to rock to the bottom, no reduction. We are a fiscally responsible government, we will do things in a prudent manner, and our artists are very well taken care of.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I love December. There's enthusiasm. We're 24 nights away from Christmas, and we're starting to exude it here this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Okotoks Water Licence

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now for some elderly calmness. The town of Okotoks is facing the most important water challenge of any town in Alberta. Development is on hold as the town grapples with finding additional water in a closed basin. The Minister of Environment has consistently indicated that safe, secure drinking water is of paramount importance. If this is the case, why has the minister allowed Okotoks to find itself in such a strained situation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very much aware of the unique circumstances surrounding the town of Okotoks. In fact, just last week this member and I met with the mayor, council, and administration to explore alternatives to deal with their situation. They have a very unique situation in Okotoks in that, unlike most municipalities, they have relied on very shallow wells to service the needs of the town. They are exemplary in their water conservation, and they have not applied for licences that they don't need.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The town of Okotoks has two water transfer applications before Alberta Environment requesting a net diversion licence. Since the town historically returns 80 per cent of the water taken, a net diversion licence would essentially triple the amount of water that these licences would provide. The town is waiting. The development is waiting. When can we expect a decision?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear to this member and to all members of the House: the minister does not make such decisions, nor should the minister be making those decisions. I have however been advised by the department that we do expect a decision to be made fairly quickly. The issue of the net diversion is problematic. While it's true that municipalities return water, it's in an inconsistent way, and it doesn't necessarily meet the needs of the river system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Okotoks is Alberta's fastest growing community in a region experiencing incredible growth. What is the Minister of Environment doing to ensure a long-term water supply strategy for the town of Okotoks?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the applications that are currently before our department are a short-term solution, and I really do hope that decisions are made shortly. In the long term – these are, in fact, short terms – I believe very strongly in the concept of a regional water system, and that regional water system is already under way in the Calgary region. I would encourage the town and I would encourage the Calgary Regional Partnership to proceed with a regional water delivery system.

Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like some answers from the minister of health. Last week the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was not the subject of a demand by the College of Physicians and Surgeons for a psychiatric examination. This week he is. This request by the college occurred right after the president of the AMA was contacted by the parliamentary assistant of health regarding the health of the good doctor. This is inappropriate. I don't care what the intent was or wasn't. It was wrong on many different legal and ethical levels, in my opinion. To the minister of health: will he ask the parliamentary assistant to apologize to the member?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I believe this issue has been clarified sufficiently already.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: No, it hasn't.

Albertans are tired of the culture of fear and intimidation. We want accountability now. The doctor has been smeared, and I find it beyond belief that a former EA to a health minister, someone who's been around government for years, doesn't understand the inappropriateness and the conflict of interest so obvious to everyone else but him of calling the head of the bargaining unit for doctors, the AMA, in the middle of the night to share his concerns about the mental state of the doctor from Edmonton-Meadowlark. Minister, do you not see the obvious conflict of interest and inappropriateness of that phone call?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I was not involved in that, and I believe the issue has been clarified.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: One last time, Mr. Speaker. Many of us have had conversations with multiple members of the media and others that have told us that there is a whisper campaign coming out of this government that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is unstable. This is unacceptable in a free and democratic society. I'd like a promise from this minister that he will personally, if he is truly a friend of this doctor, investigate the origin of that whisper campaign, put an end to it, and have whoever was involved beg for the forgiveness of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Will he undertake that investigation?

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know of any whisper campaign. I don't believe there is any evidence to that effect whatsoever. As I say, the issue has been dealt with. Let's move on and get on with the improvements to health care that people want.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mineral Development in the Eastern Slopes

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2002 residents near the Livingstone Range have been fighting against proposals for a heavy magnetic ore quarry. This spectacular, untouched piece of the eastern slopes is home to countless species, including elk, bighorn sheep, moose, and golden eagles. Any thought of development there should not even be considered. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that this same company has been

applying to develop this quarry for the last eight years with no success, why would the minister consider it at this time?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the quarry in question has been under review for some time, and we believe that the process going forward would allow for proper exploitation of that resource. It's a required resource in the region.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can the minister consider approving any development in this region when the land-use framework's regional plan, which is meant to determine the sustainable level of development, has not been completed?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I have addressed that situation a number of times in the House. The fact of the matter is that as we develop the land-use framework across the province of Alberta, which includes seven plans in seven different regions, you can't stop the province and hold it in abeyance and wait for the plans. We need to continue the development, and the plans will fall into place, and the developments will of course fit into the plans as they're developed.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been waiting years for the land-use framework, and it appears that we're going to wait even longer. Will the minister commit to a moratorium on the development in the eastern slopes?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is no. There are ongoing opportunities for development in the eastern slopes, and that, again, will continue. There are, of course, a number of regional plans in place, smaller ones that do protect certain areas in the eastern slopes now. We will respect those. But development will continue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Primary Care Networks

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness recently released a five-year action plan on health. In there it highlights the importance of primary care networks for the access to and improvement of health care in this province. This really excites my constituents. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can you tell this House and my constituents exactly what role the primary care networks will have in health care in moving the system forward?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that primary care networks will be, I'm sure, for a long time a critical part, a very fundamental part of our health system moving forward. We have 38 of them right now. That involves more than 2,200 family physicians. That includes more than 2.5 million Albertans. Going forward, we'll be adding about 100,000 more per year until all Albertans have access to primary care team members within days, not weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is good news, and again my constituents certainly support this, but they're having a difficult time seeing the impact right now to their health care services. Are there any barriers that are currently inhibiting this

crucial self-organization of health care professionals and innovation in primary care networks that would benefit my constituents and all Albertans moving forward?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if there are any barriers, they may be related to workforce recruitment, workforce retention. They could be related to scope of practice. They could be related to location. There could be a number of factors there that are being looked at. That's why our five-year health action plan has made a strong commitment to further expand our PCN network, to fine-tune it, to also look at innovation within it, and to help ensure that people across this province do have access to primary care in a much more fastidious and effective manner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.*

Southern Alberta Flood Disaster Relief

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last three years the Ministry of Municipal Affairs has spent \$41.5 million paying consultants. Perhaps I'm in the wrong business. With no public accountability flood victims in southern Alberta are still waiting for claims to be resolved. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Albertans have been promised transparency. When will the minister make the LandLink contract public?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the RFP process has certainly been public, and the contract is for considerably less money than what the hon. member is talking about. Over the next five years the contract stipulates that they would get paid, if they are working, \$20 million. But we've got some positive news in the fact that about 94 per cent of all of the residential claims have been resolved. You know, we are open to doing reviews as required.

Ms Pastoor: Can the minister say when the last applicants will actually receive their support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, for the last 6 per cent of the residential applications, a lot of them are from the fact or on the basis that we're still awaiting some additional information from them. You know, some of the files are extremely complicated as well because there are a number of other agencies that are providing support to the applicants, and we are sorting those out. We even expect that in the spring some individuals may realize that they had not submitted certain parts of a claim or realize that they've experienced broader damage than in the past. We are open to accepting additional claims at that particular time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the victims were displaced from last June and that Christmas is three weeks away, what is an acceptable time frame for this resolution?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that's a very, very good question. For those who were displaced, we are working with them directly. We're in touch with them on a day-by-day basis, virtually, and we want to ensure that what they qualify for under the guidelines, they get. You know, suffice it to say that we're still accountable to our taxpayers, and we have to follow some of the federal guidelines in all of this as well.

*See page 1751, right column, paragraph 10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Workers' Compensation Payment Deductions

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government's priority is in safety and accident prevention for workers, but unfortunately work-related accidents do happen. From my constituency office I learned that two injured workers received similar provincial WCB payments and similar federal CPP disability payments. One is allowed to keep both, and the other got CPP disability deducted from his WCB compensation. My question is to the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. On what grounds does WCB deduct federal CPP disability payments?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's impossible for me to comment on specific files that I haven't had an opportunity to even take a look at, but I can tell you that the Workers' Compensation Board is an insurance system paid for wholly by employers of Alberta. CPP, on the other hand, is a federal program to which employees and employers contribute 50-50. Those are two independent programs, but maybe I can comment on policy in a subsequent question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, WCB is a provincial insurance program paid by employers to cover injured workers, and CPP is a federal pension program paid by workers. These are two independent programs. My question to the hon. minister: why does WCB tie the provincial WCB compensation to the federal CPP payment?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, that is not correct. Since, I believe, 1996 the WCB does not deduct any payments from CPP. As a matter of fact, it considers itself the first payer, so no deductions have been made since 1996 to workers' CPP payments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Injured workers are most concerned about their disability and deeply worried about their meagre income after the injury. The question is to the hon. minister. Are you going to look into this situation and rectify the unfair WCB payment deduction in some way?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, definitely, my answer to this member would be the same as it would be to any Member of this Legislative Assembly. If you have any files that require consideration, there is an appeal process built into WCB with an independent Appeals Commission, but if there are any issues of policy that need to be looked at, please make it known to myself. There is an independent board of governors, that is made up of employers and employees, that makes policies for WCB, and I'm sure we can direct them to take a look at this policy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:40

Home Inspections

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the '90s the Conservative government gave municipalities power over home inspections, but if a municipality isn't doing its job, the Minister of Municipal Affairs can take action under the Safety Codes Act. My question is

to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why is the minister refusing to look into cases where residents are being taken to the cleaners because shoddy construction was not found during municipal inspections?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that's a very, very good question. No doubt, over the last couple of years – and, really, some of the concerns go back as far as 2003 – a survey found that a small number of homes were built to code and that those homes built, for instance, with stucco were actually built to code. In the last few years it was our department – I've indicated that before – that initiated some of the studies. We're certainly looking at a range of solutions to this member's concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: how are the municipal inspectors supposed to do their job when the government report found that they spend half of their time in courts against shoddy builders?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are providing additional training and support to the inspectors, and we are working very, very closely with those municipalities that have the authority to hire inspectors to do the actual inspections themselves. There's no doubt that over the last year or so here, with the issues being brought up, the construction industry has been paying a tremendous amount more attention than they have in the past.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that finally something has started to happen.

To the minister again: how can the minister allow another sitting of this Legislature to go by without any action for home and condo owners on those shoddy builders? We should have some kind of protection.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we continue to look at the particular issues, and we are working at solutions to help Albertans have confidence in the construction of their homes. There have been a number of solutions that we're looking at to help improve both the accountability of the construction industry and to help protect the actual homeowners themselves.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in my rush to hear the question of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, I denied the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill his third question, which I will now provide an opportunity for.*

Primary Care Networks

(continued)

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that in the minister's answer to my second question he indicated a number of barriers that exist to PCNs. What is the plan to break down these barriers so that PCNs can flourish in Alberta for the benefit of patients?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that there will be more people recruited, more physicians recruited. There will be more nurses recruited. We're looking at expanding the role of pharmacists, for example. There will likely be a greater role for nurse practitioners and so on. There are a number of actions that

*See page 1750, right column, paragraph 3

will come about now because of the five-year action plan, that I announced yesterday. There will be performance measures to track all of that, and a significant amount of money will go towards PCNs. We're spending about \$1.7 million per hour on health care in this province, and some of that, obviously a large portion of it, will go to help address some of the issues you've raised. It's a very good question that you raised, so please take it back to your constituents that they have a commitment that will be expanding in that regard.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 18 members who were recognized today, 108 questions and responses.

Statement by the Speaker Introduction of Constituency Staff *Hansard* Transcript of All-night Sitting

The Speaker: I've placed on all members' desks a memo with respect to House introductions tomorrow. Because of the large number of constituency staff who will be here, I think it probably would be most effective and efficient if one introduction on behalf of all those is provided from the chair because otherwise we'll be into two hours' worth of introductions.

I would like to draw your attention to something else that might be of historical value to some of you, and that is the *Hansard* of Wednesday evening, November 24, 2010, issue 47, which is 132 pages long. This is the thickest *Hansard* in the history of Alberta going back to 1905. It is, in fact, 24 pages longer than the December 4-5, 2007, issue. You can all take it home. Multiple copies are available for your grandchildren and the like.

When there's great attendance in the House, I'd like to call on the Deputy Speaker to make a special presentation to the pages.

Page Recognition

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, each day of the session we are served by the tireless efforts of our pages. Daily they show patience and understanding of our demanding work in the Assembly. As the Assembly we would like to give each page a Christmas and New Year's gift to say thank you and to wish each and every one a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. One of the pleasant tasks of the Deputy Speaker is to present these gifts to the pages. These gifts are from the personal contributions of each member of the Assembly. I would like to ask Sydney to come and receive her gift and to help distribute the gifts to the other pages. I would like to ask all members to join me in showing appreciation to our pages. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

International Child Protection Initiatives

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spring of 2010 South Africa's government initiated a project to strengthen and improve child protection services. The project was supported by the United Nations and the Canadian International Development Agency, and Alberta was there and contributing. Graduate student Brianna Strumm commenced a 13-week internship with South Africa's Ministry of Social Development last summer to complete her advanced master's of social work degree at the University of

Calgary. Brianna worked to compile child protection research from around the world so that best practices can be applied in South Africa.

Back here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, the University of Calgary offers the only international social work master's program in Canada. Instructing this unique class is Dr. Lorne Jaques, who strives to achieve integrity in his students' experiences. International Social Service Canada also played a role in Brianna's internship. Dick Chamney, another Albertan, is president of ISS Canada, and he made the South African connections that brought Brianna's internship to fruition.

International Social Service is an NGO headquartered in Geneva. Its focus is children and families in distress related to crossing international borders. ISS serves 50,000 people a year in 120 countries through a network of branches, bureaus, and correspondents. ISS Canada handled 250 cases last year, 53 for Alberta children's authorities. Almost all Alberta cases dealt with child welfare or child protection. Alberta cases in 2010 will exceed 60.

In May 2012 ISS International Council members from all continents will gather at beautiful Banff to pursue greater global collaboration supporting children and families at risk. Alberta is a global energy leader and has world renowned expertise in sectors like agriculture and health sciences. We can be proud to add that Alberta is also a leader on the world stage of child protection and social development, and Albertans like Brianna are on the front lines.

Thank you.

Absence of Democracy in Alberta

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, these are very dark days for our democracy: an emergency room doctor kicked out of the government caucus for standing up for the sick and dying; that follows the ejection of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for defending the interests of his senior constituents; smear campaigns initiated by this government about the reputations, health, and state of mind of political opponents; this House shut down by the government without opposition members even given time to speak or voice their final dissenting arguments on important bills; our Wildrose caucus of four intimidated and censored repeatedly by those who should be protecting our rights; our leader, Danielle Smith, being the only human on the planet that we are not able to quote as supposed free members of this Legislature; members of our political party fired and bullied for being a part of the resistance.

2:50

I ask the Assembly as we move forward, each and every one of us, to look in the mirror and decide: are we supporting this culture of fear and intimidation, or are we fighting against it? I give my thanks to the New Democrats, Liberals, and independents for courageously defending our democracy at every turn and defending the rights of those they disagree with politically. You are statesmen and -women of the highest calibre.

As I lay awake in bed at 1 this morning, for the first time I felt some fear creep in, fear of the powerful people who despise me and would like to find a way to silence me or tarnish my reputation. But know this: I will not be held silent. The Wildrose will not be held silent. We will fight every bully tactic and smear, every inch of injustice, and we know Albertans will support us and other opposition parties as we do. The night is darkest just before the dawn, and the dawn is coming.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday democracy was given a time limit. The voices of elected Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta were silenced in order to attend Christmas parties while we discuss the most important issue in one of the shortest legislative sessions in history. Albertans were told by the government: "Trust us. We know what we're doing. We don't need to talk about it in the House."

Trust, Mr. Speaker, is freely given. But once it is betrayed, trust is difficult to earn back. Albertans elect members to this Assembly to represent their hopes, to speak the truth, and to defend their causes. They are given the sacred charge of serving the public good, not their own political party's interest. The Old Bailey courthouse in London, England, has these words inscribed on its walls: "The welfare of the people is supreme."

I can think of no other place in this great province where Albertans' welfare is more in peril than in the emergency departments and the waiting rooms of this province. Our so-called leaders say, "It's not a crisis; it's not a crisis," yet our trusted and dedicated front-line health care workers cry for help, while facing a potential catastrophic collapse. Who can Albertans trust? Who can they turn to to speak the truth and defend the public good when the Premier broke his promise to the emergency doctors, to the vulnerable seniors, and to all Albertans who seek care?

In the last two weeks we witnessed elected members from all political allegiances on this side of the House put aside their differences to work together on the most important issue facing this province and nation, the delivery of health care. Not so on the other side of the House, where we saw dogged adherence to political ideology winning out over common sense.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, I am hopeful and optimistic. I'm hopeful that our new CEO of Alberta Health Services, Dr. Chris Eagle, has the expertise and leadership to re-engineer the health system. I am hopeful that the front-line staff, the dedicated staff will continue to go above and beyond their call of duty. Finally, I am hopeful because I know that Albertans are not easily duped and will follow their conscience when selecting . . . [Dr. Sherman's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising to give oral notice of a motion for the introduction of Bill 223, the Health Statutes (Canada Health Act Reaffirmation) Amendment Act, 2010.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Bill 220

Tailings Ponds Reclamation Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the Official Opposition you don't get to do this very often, so I'm very pleased to be requesting leave to introduce a bill, being the Tailings Ponds Reclamation Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. It is Bill 220.

Mr. Speaker, tailings ponds are the centre of our international environmental black eye. As an Albertan and as a legislator I really want to see some concrete steps taken to stop creating tailings ponds

and to eliminate those that we have. I think those steps include some very direct action around transparency and accountability.

Part of what Bill 220, the Tailings Ponds Reclamation Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, is looking to do is to create a reporting requirement around ERCB directive 074, which would cover an instance of an operator failing to meet the reduction that is stipulated in directive 074; any example where a project has significant changes to the overall tailings management plan, whether or not this requires an amendment to a previous approval; any amendment that has been granted by the board to a plan for a dedicated disposal area, an overall tailings management plan, or an annual tailings management plan, and the reasons for granting that amendment; and any instance where an operator has failed to meet or submit an annual tailings pond management plan.

As part of that I think it's very important that this report, when completed, should be completed no later than a set date; I happen to have chosen September 30. The annual report must be presented to the minister, who then must table it in the Assembly, and that makes it available to all Albertans who want to be able to check what's happened there.

Further, in the act I'm seeking a section that would disallow any amendment or repeal of directive 074 unless this is very well publicized, and I've set out a number of steps that they could go through that. Actually, I've used some of the government examples around consultation, so I'm sure they'll be very accepting of it. This amendment would be publicized, and it would include a public consultation process that could be followed. Again, the information would be submitted in a report, the report would go to the minister, and the minister would table it in the Assembly.

In addition, any noncompliance would be noted, especially if that noncompliance is related to the phase-in sequence of reduction in fluid tailings or the overall tailings management plan by an operator. The board would not allow an amendment or a change in any of that unless they can demonstrate extraordinary circumstances. I would argue that some of what we've seen thus far would not have fit under that definition. Notwithstanding anything else, any information that is submitted by an officer around compliance issues with directive 074 may be made publicly available.

I'm pretty excited about this as you can tell, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad to get the opportunity to ask for first reading of Bill 220. I look forward to everyone having their own printed copy in their hand so that they can go out and talk to their constituents about it. Gee, I'm hoping we won't adjourn tomorrow and I'll have plenty of time to debate it in this Assembly before Christmas.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 220 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table five copies of the 2009-10 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report. This is the 15th annual report on the operation of this act. The report summarizes the activities related to the FOIP Act and outlines significant accomplishments for the 2009-10 fiscal year. The report includes statistics, showing the number of requests made to the Alberta government and local public bodies and the response times. Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act came into effect in 1995. Since then provincial government bodies have responded to 34,600 requests for information.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make two tablings, please. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a petition urging the government to "include Complex Decongestive Therapy in the list of accepted therapeutic procedures covered by Alberta Health Care." CDT is an effective means to manage lymphedema, which is a progressive disorder. The petition has 201 signatures.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of 190 letters signed by Albertans concerned about proposed changes to our health care laws. They ask that the government instead consider ways of strengthening the public health care system such as pharmaceutical reforms, primary care reforms, and more prevention and promotion. These letters were received prior to the news coming out earlier this week.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 7(7) at 3 o'clock I must advise the Assembly.

That being the case, then, before we go to Orders of the Day we must deal with a point of order. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Members' Statements

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose on a point of order during Members' Statements, which I admit is most unusual. In fact, in our practice we normally don't rise on points of order under Members' Statements, but it is allowable under *Beauchesne's*, and I'll provide citations. I rise under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," and also under *Beauchesne's* 374: "Pursuant to Standing Order 31" – that's of the federal House – "Members other than Ministers may make . . . statements . . . The Speaker may cut off individual statements if improper use is made of the Standing Order."

Mr. Speaker, members' statements are a wonderful instrument in this House. It's an opportunity for members of the House, private members of the House who come and serve their constituents to bring forward issues of constituent concern, to raise issues of policy and then make a two-minute statement. Our normal practice and our agreement since we instituted these in the House pursuant to a House leaders' agreement a number of years ago is that they would be an unfettered opportunity for people to make statements about things. We've had wide utilization of that. In fact, we've had utilization that's even breached some of the provisions in *Beauchesne's*, which suggests that poetry shouldn't be allowed, but we have in fact allowed poetry.

But, Mr. Speaker, there has to be some element of legality and respect in those statements. What we heard from the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere today were statements of fact which were allegations, which were smearing members of this House in saying that, basically, a smear campaign was done against another member. What he was doing was using an opportunity, an unfettered opportunity, to state as fact on the record of the House things which are not fact, and there's not been any evidence that those particular instances have taken place. He's had plenty of opportunity to put the evidence forward if there is any evidence, but that hasn't been put forward.

I don't at all wish to stand in the way of that member or any other member making a heartfelt, impassioned plea for any matter of public policy, any matter on representative constituents, any matter that's of public importance to Albertans. In fact, the two-minute member's statement ought to be there so private members of this House, whether opposition or on the government side, can make

exactly those statements. But, Mr. Speaker, they ought not to be used in a manner where no response is allowed or provided for, to provide for unmitigated smearing of the character of members of this House. That's, in fact, what he did today. When that hon. member suggests that all members are involved in smearing another member or raising those sorts of issues, that is inappropriate. The hon. member ought to know it. He talks about morals and ethics. He should use them.

The Speaker: On this point of order, Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here we are again. We debated something similar, too, yesterday or the day before. I forget. It's all a blur now. I think you can see why I made the member's statement that I made. Just the fact that I can't stand in this hall without a member from that side, the hon. House leader, making a case for what I can and I cannot say – it's absolutely amazing that he can't see, in my opinion, his hypocrisy in that.

He says that I slandered all members. What's so ridiculous about that statement, Mr. Speaker, is that I clearly did not slander all members. I simply said that there is a whisper campaign. My questions today, in fact, asked the minister to find out who was involved in that smear campaign. I've repeatedly in this House, as has the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, as have multiple people on this side of the House, told of conversations that we've had with reporters. We've seen the letter from the president of the AMA, clarifying what happened that night. These things have happened. These are matters of fact.

Now, I agree our interpretations of the facts are very much different – no doubt about that – but they are interpretations of fact. We feel very strongly on this side of the House that what we are saying is true. I need to go over the text of what I said because the hon. member is saying that I've somehow smeared the members. Okay. I'll speed up, Mr. Speaker.

The one thing he specifically mentioned was that all members were slandered. This is what I said: "Smear campaigns initiated by this government." Now, government does not just include, as the good member knows, all MLAs. It includes the people that work for the MLAs. It includes the staff in the Premier's office. It includes the Public Affairs Bureau. It includes anybody in government, okay? When I say government, that's who I'm talking about. It might be MLAs. I sure hope that it's not.

I'll tell you one thing. There is a smear campaign going on right now on that good doctor, in my opinion. I think the facts point clearly to it. Whether it was MLAs, whether it's staffers for MLAs: that's the question. I still hope that the government, the House leader will look into that. I really do hope he will.

I did also refer to that I felt a little bit of fear last night over some of the, I guess, perceived enemies, the events that have happened, some of the acrimonious things that have happened. As someone in opposition you feel somewhat vulnerable. This is new to me. I've never been in opposition, obviously, and I feel somewhat vulnerable, not necessarily from individual MLAs over there, but things have been said that have made me feel very vulnerable, not so much in this House but outside this House. That's a very real fear for me.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just ask that you please protect my right to speak in a member's statement of matters of opinion and interpretation of events and not allow this hon. member to curb my ability in that regard. Thank you.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Hon. members, I am prepared to deal with this. This concept of Members' Statements originated out of a series of negotiations that

took place in late 1993. I happened to be the Government House Leader at the time at which negotiations were held with the House leader of the Official Opposition, Grant Mitchell. We agreed on some 100 changes made to the standing orders. This thing was implemented. We also had one-minute recognitions as well. Then over time House leaders have come together and basically said: "Well, okay. Fine. The members don't want to have the Recognitions thing. We'll go essentially to a two-minute member's statement proviso." Which we did and which we conduct today. We've even increased the numbers of them from the handful of members' statements there were to six or seven at a given time.

When I introduced this in 1993 and at subsequent times after 1997, when I was elected as Speaker, there were some principles that were enunciated. Those principles, just to repeat them: number one, that there be given as wide a latitude as possible with respect to members' statements, that members would have an opportunity to stand in the Assembly and to provide a statement in the widest possible latitude, period; number two, we would ask the Speaker never to interfere and intervene and not deal with a point of order about things that are said in a member's statement. Point number three was that members would speak on policy issues and with the highest civility and the highest decorum and not bring in personalities and personal attacks on other members.

This is not the first occasion on which members have intervened – and this has happened on both sides – and basically said: "Speaker, let's have a point of order. Tell somebody they've got to sit down. They can't deal with it." I want to respect the principles that were enunciated and that we have followed in this Assembly with respect to members' statements. I want to repeat again that there should be as wide a latitude as possible provided, that the Speaker should not deal with points arising out of members' statements, but that the members themselves have to discipline themselves with the civility and decorum that's requested and deal with policy matters and not personalities. Without that, it turns into a donnybrook, and the next day somebody else gets up and slams the person from the day before for two minutes about the irresponsible, universal condemnation of everybody and the euphoric enthusiasm to find conspiracy everywhere and that sort of thing.

We've heard the points. The Government House Leader is certainly within his rights to rise on a purported point of order and to raise the matters that he did. An opportunity was provided to the other individual, Airdrie-Chestermere, to deal with this. It seems to be a point of clarity with respect to this. Because of the tradition that we've really established in the House and the latitude given to members' statements, I will not find this as a point of order.

But, once again, I'll repeat what I've said before. Civility, decorum, respect are very important. This is not an opportunity for someone to personally attack someone else. If it is, I would strongly recommend to the members of the Assembly: eliminate Members' Statements from our Routine. I would stand up as the Speaker and say that. If it is to be negated by providing for a chaotic witch-hunting environment, that would be irresponsible. Civility, decorum, and policy, not personality, and things work.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Select Special Ombudsman Search Committee

28. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that a Select Special Ombudsman Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed consisting of the following members, namely Mr. Mitzel, chair; Mr. Lund, deputy chair; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Hinman; Mr. Lindsay; Mr.

Marz; Ms Notley; Mr. Quest; and Mr. Rogers; for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Ombudsman and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.

- (1) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (2) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid, subject to the approval of the chair.
- (3) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (4) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (5) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to move Government Motion 28. It's, unfortunately, necessary for us to proceed with the appointment of a select special committee because of the resignation of the current Ombudsman for reasons which were outlined in a letter, which I believe you tabled yesterday. Unfortunately, I had to give notice of this earlier. I think it's important for us to move ahead. Given that the standing orders provide for the session to end tomorrow, it was important for us to move ahead quickly to put in place a committee so that the work of the committee could be done and that an Ombudsman could be in place at an appropriate time to take over the important duties and functions performed by that office for Albertans.

I would ask for support of the motion.

[Government Motion 28 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 24

25. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not delighted to rise to move Government Motion 25, but it is my duty to do so. I'm not going to repeat the arguments that I made in moving a similar motion yesterday. It is unfortunate that we've got to the stage in this House that we have opposition utilizing the time of the House to basically stop the business of the House and of government rather than to put forward a reasonable argument and amendments. That's what we've seen, in fact. I don't have the hours in front of me today in terms of how many hours we've spent in debate. Indeed, it may

be inappropriate, as some have pointed out, to measure the sufficiency of debate by the number of hours, so I'm not going to go there.

I would say this. When there is a clear indication to the House – and we have had that from members opposite – that the only way in which the business of the House can progress is by allocating time to the rest of the debate, then it is my duty as House leader and the person who's charged with ensuring that the business of the House gets done from the government perspective to bring forward a motion to say that with two more hours of debate we should be able to cover all of the topics that are necessary to be covered if that hasn't been covered before. All members would then be aware of the amount of time they had and can direct their remarks accordingly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. House minister for that introduction. It does cause me some concern, again, that we're here today speaking on what is essentially a closure of debate in this hon. House on what is a very important bill going forward for the Alberta people.

Carbon capture and storage is one of those issues that will affect us for a long time. The government is spending quite a bit of money on this new and unproven technology and is taking on a considerable amount of liability. We see other places around the world where there have been some questions of whether this technology should be going forward. We see that in places like Germany and other places like that who are worried about the liability that's going to be undertaken and what pore spaces are actually supposed to be used for, whether CO₂ is actually going to be harbored underneath the earth and whether it's going to be successful to, I guess, reduce emissions going forward to combat global warming and all of those good things. It's necessary for us, looking at the importance of this bill, to give it time for us to speak on it.

It's also important for another way that I'm going to speak to this, the importance, actually, of the democratic process itself. Really, I think, if you look at it, the government has a large majority, and they can pass bills, you know, essentially when they want to. Allowing the opposition a full and fair opportunity to discuss things at various stages would be fine. I just don't think that in third reading we're getting a fair shake here. We could be spending more time in this House to allow this bill to be discussed. I think it's a heavy-handed approach that the government has taken in regard to this discussion, and I hope at some point in the future we can get on with having more debate, not less debate.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to say my piece, and we'll move on from here.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 25 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:18 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Bhardwaj	Goudreau	Mitzel
Brown	Griffiths	Morton
Dallas	Groeneveld	Olson
Danyluk	Hancock	Quest

DeLong	Horner	Sandhu
Denis	Jablonski	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Jacobs	Vandermeer
Elniski	Leskiw	Weadick
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Woo-Paw
Fritz	McFarland	
Against the motion:		
Anderson	Hehr	Notley
Boutilier	Hinman	Pastoor
Chase	Kang	
Totals:	For – 29	Against – 8

[Government Motion 25 carried]

3:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 28 Electoral Divisions Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? May I remind everyone that we are on amendment A2 as proposed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, that amends by striking out "Calgary-Elbow" and substituting "Calgary-Preston Manning." Also, a reminder that the limit is one hour.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Funnily enough, this is very appropriate because we're talking about renaming a riding after one of the most, I would say, important reformers of democracy in our province's and in our nation's history, possibly not the most important but definitely one of the most important.

You know, I related a story in the wee hours of the morning about Preston Manning that I'll sum up. When we invited him to come speak at an event at the law school I was attending for a group that we had made – and I think the hon. finance minister actually spoke to that same group. He wasn't in the Legislature at that time. It was the Students for a Stronger Alberta, and he was our first speaker. Then we had David Kilgour in to talk about crossing the floor over the GST issue and how he stood up for his constituents on that. Then we had the minister of finance in to talk about all kinds of different things, Senate reform and other different democratic principles that he was very involved with promoting.

We had several others, but another one was Preston Manning. When he spoke, he spoke about the need for real representative democracy. It was funny. I thought he was going to talk about Senate reform because he was kind of known for pushing that idea very hard, as were many others, but he spoke about representative democracy and the importance of an MLA representing the interests of their constituents above all else. I got to thinking about that, and it really had an effect on my life and on my perception of politics.

These two weeks for me, personally, have been a very tumultuous couple of weeks, just seeing the very problems of our democracy on a very close and personal level and how we really have let our system become something that is almost a bastardized form of democracy. It has some elements of fairness and democracy in it,

but in most cases it's not. We've fallen away from what representative democracy was meant to be.

I think of the writings of George Washington and some of the things that he said about representative democracy and how he abhorred parties and party discipline. He thought parties eventually would lead to the end of his new nation, the United States of America, the reason being that parties would take away the autonomy of an elected representative to represent his constituents before all else, that party welfare would be more important to them eventually than would the interests of their constituents. You know, that's a very serious thing, and I think we've seen that. It's not just this Legislature. It's the Parliament. It's other Legislatures. Certainly, other countries have the same issue.

I think that we do see instances where we still have that sort of representative democracy. You see that a lot more in municipal politics. You see that there are no party lines, so municipal politicians generally are responsible to their constituents only. They really do a good job, I think, generally speaking, of standing up for their constituents and what their constituents want. I'm not saying that we need the abolition of parties, but I am saying that we need to put parties in their proper place.

The proper place of a party – and I think Preston Manning would agree with this – is that it's a way to bring natural alliances together and to bring people with common causes together so that they can organize and move the agenda forward on certain key issues that are important to them. I think Preston Manning would say that parties should not be the be-all and end-all. Loyalty to party, loyalty to donors, loyalty to special interests, loyalty to lobbyists: those things shouldn't matter in the end. In a political sense, when you're talking about how someone votes, not even loyalty to friends should supersede that.

The first loyalty when you go to vote as an MLA should be: what is in the best interests of my constituents first and foremost? What is in the best interests of my constituents? What do they want? What is in their best interest? I believe our democracy right now, our system, is not about that at all. It's about supporting the party that you are a part of, and as long as those allegiances are aligned with the party, it works. When your allegiances come in conflict, it doesn't.

If there's one thing we learn from Preston Manning – and it's the reason I think we should name a riding after him – it's that loyalty to one's constituents is by far the most important thing that one should take into account when voting on a bill or when doing anything in government. I just hope that as we move forward, we can try to embody the spirit of Preston in that regard. That's why I think, again, Mr. Chair, that it would be a great idea to name this riding after Preston Manning. He understood this principle, and it's a principle that I think we should all work toward following.

I have a long biography here of Preston that I wanted to talk to you about. Maybe I'll talk a little bit more about the principles that he espoused and why I think it's important to recognize those principles that he had by naming a riding after him.

3:40

Over the last several weeks we've seen what happens when people are disciplined for speaking up for their constituents. It hasn't been pretty. No one can say in this House, I think, that they're happy with the way things have occurred over these last couple of weeks with regard to the doctor and, I think, even before with the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I know that my decision to cross the floor was based almost entirely on the fact that I felt that I could not vote with the government on a variety of issues going forward, and I felt intimidated into doing so lest I lose certain committee work

and so forth and lest I be disciplined in some manner. I didn't feel that was appropriate, and I couldn't go along with it anymore, so it opened up some of those kind of raw feelings.

At different events and things I've had the opportunity to speak with Preston and others about this and just have the counsel there, that understanding that: "Yeah; you know what? As long as it's being done, if you're doing what you're doing for your constituents, if you're doing what you're doing to remain loyal to them before anything else, then it's the right thing to do."

I feel very strongly, and, you know, it's going to be tough to reform this democracy that we have, because it's so entrenched. I'm not just talking about the governing party being around for forty years. That's not what I mean. That's part of it, but what I'm talking about is just that the whole system is entrenched. We saw that with Preston trying to change the federal system and how entrenched that was.

We're really going to have to work hard as a body here, as a group if we want to see the type of democracy that maybe he envisions and that, I think, I hope, many in here envision; that is, a democracy that puts loyalty to constituents first and foremost. It's a democracy wherein parties can work together and cosponsor bills and legislation regardless of whether they're in opposition or in the governing party, where all votes are free, unfettered, where the votes of nonconfidence in the government are separated from all pieces of legislation so that a government can't fall on a bill being voted down.

Think of the good things that could come out of that co-operation if people were free to represent their constituents, if people were able to work with members in different parties on cosponsoring legislation that they felt passionate about. It would change the whole dynamic. Of course, most legislation would still be spurred out of the Premier's office and out of his cabinet, but that would be fine. With a free vote at least you would have the ability as members to veto legislation that wasn't good. Absolutely. Those are the principles, I think, that Preston Manning espoused, the freedom to vote for one's constituents and the freedom of democracy.

One thing I loved about Preston is that he was never a bully. He was never someone that would stand up and try to bully someone into believing in his way or try to shut them up or try to shut them down. He wouldn't use any types of points of order or privilege or anything else to shut people up. He was very, very consistent, and he would always try to appeal to people's better sides, to their better angels, and try to convince them in that way as opposed to fear, intimidation, and so forth. To me, he was a true statesman in that way.

I think that it's entirely appropriate that we have the opportunity to sit here and discuss whether we should name Calgary-Elbow, part of his old constituency, falling in that constituency boundary that he used to represent, Calgary-Preston Manning, give it some meaning. Not that Calgary-Elbow is a poor name, but the feelings of democratic renewal and respect for democracy and statesmanship that are elicited in the vast majority of Albertans when you hear the name Preston Manning I think would be very well served and our democracy well served in naming this constituency after him. I'm sure he would never ask for such a thing. It would be totally beyond his character to ask for such a thing because of the humility that he has, but I think it would be a very noble thing for us to do in this House, to name this constituency after him.

Some of the other principles that Mr. Manning espoused, that I think will justify having a constituency named after him – it's just the effect he had not only on federal politics but on provincial politics. I mean, the coalition of fiscal conservatives, of kind of smaller government libertarians that he brought together became a

huge part of the government of the day, the provincial government of the day. Many great members of the PC Party during the late 1980s and 1990s came from that movement that was started, and it affected a lot of the legislation that you used to see in this Legislature.

You know, I think of the 10 per cent flat tax that Stockwell Day brought through. A lot of those ideas were brought forward and inspired by that reform movement. [interjections] I guess the hon. members opposite don't feel as highly about Mr. Day as potentially I do, or maybe they do, and I'm misinterpreting what they're saying. [interjections] Mr. Chair, do I still have the floor?

The Deputy Chair: You still have the floor.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has the floor.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I was just checking.

I think that as we move forward, a lot of those principles were inspired by that reform movement, so a lot of our own legislation provincially was inspired by Preston Manning, maybe more so than many of the provincial politicians that were there at that time, potentially even more than former Premiers.

I think we need to not just recognize someone for their contribution as an MLA, as we have done in the past, but I think we should open that door more broadly to who the senior statesmen of Alberta are that made a huge difference in this province's history. That shouldn't just be provincial politicians; that should include federal politicians, and it should include other people that aren't politicians, depending on the contribution that they've brought. In any event, that's what I believe.

I would just say that if there's one principle that Preston Manning espoused, it was loyalty: do not misplace your loyalties. As a politician put your loyalties where they belong, and that is to the people that you serve, not to donors, not to a party, not to special interests or lobbyists but to the people that go into that booth and mark an X next to the name of a community member who they have entrusted to represent and serve and watch out for the interests of their family and of them personally.

It is that discarded principle that thousands of our countrymen have fought for and died for, millions more have lived for, and it is that principle that I believe we should be fighting to restore to its proper place in our democracy. Because of that, Mr. Chair, I think that renaming a Calgary riding that used to belong in Preston Manning's federal riding is a very appropriate way to recognize the incredible contribution of this man to our democracy, to bringing forward ideas that may have gone to the wastebasket but are now part of our society and are part of our democratic dialogue and, in fact, in the past have become policy of the government in power and in future will continue to become policy under potential future governments. I think that's something that we need to recognize.

3:50

A final point about Preston is that as much as he did belong to a party, this is a man that respected people from all party backgrounds. I think of some of his closest friends; Rick Anderson, for example, a well-known Trudeau Liberal who he brought over to be part of his group. He reached out to people beyond party lines and brought them into that reform movement. I think there is something to be said. That's the type of statesmanship I think we should reflect as well.

We've seen some of it this week. We've had the opportunity to see what it's like to work with other parties in a common cause. Some things aren't partisan, Mr. Chair, and that's what Preston, I think, really did understand, that there are some things that aren't

left or right or Conservative or Liberal or Wildrose. You know, there's just a right way and a wrong way of doing things sometimes. No party has the corner on the market of truth and good ideas.

So I think that we need to reflect. It sure would be nice to change the rules in here to reflect that principle, to be able to co-sponsor bills with different parties across party lines and to be able to work together on common causes. Wouldn't that be an exciting thing to do? I think we'd get so much more done on health care, on finance, and on all of these things.

Congratulations to Preston Manning for being such a great man.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to say thank you to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for his comments on this amendment and, in a broader sense, on the bill itself. I think it's grand that this member has a particular affinity towards a past leader in the country like Preston Manning. I've only met Preston a couple of times, but he has had a profound impact on our province and, indeed, upon our country.

Similarly, there are other people that we also could look at that we as politicians in this era admire. The member mentioned that some members over here don't admire Stockwell Day. I really admire Stockwell Day, and his legacy of a flat tax and the lowest tax rate in the country is still with us today. In fact, that member was at a fundraiser of mine featuring Stockwell Day in 2008. There are also local people who we admire. He has mentioned, of course, Preston Manning, but people I admire include Jason Kenney or Ric McIver, people in my particular area.

Interestingly enough, the member has mentioned that the southwest area of Calgary was represented by Preston Manning. He's quite correct, it being Calgary Southwest. Well, at the same time, provincial constituencies are usually smaller, as they are in that case, so we could also name other constituencies. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore could want to name his constituency Calgary-Preston Manning. Even part of my constituency, a small portion, is in Calgary Southwest. Just some food for thought.

In a broader sense, Mr. Chair, a review of our electoral boundaries happens every two elections, and this is necessary because the reality is that Alberta is changing. Places like Calgary, where I'm from, grow exponentially over even a short period of time. In fact, in the period in which I've been in Calgary, it has increased in population greater than the size of Regina. That's quite incredible to look at as well.

So we take this opportunity to talk about some issues raised during second reading, specifically this amendment itself. With respect to the concern of adding four electoral divisions, one of which could be named Preston Manning, I want to remind all hon. colleagues that this was a decision of this Assembly in 2009, so there's been a significant amount of time in which to consult upon this issue. By passing Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009, this Assembly directed the commission to divide Alberta into 87 electoral divisions. Of course, this was previously 83.

Now, there are a few we've decided to rename, of course. Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley we've named after the late Grant Notley, something that I supported, someone who made a significant contribution to this province and who once sat in this Assembly. Calgary-Egmont, again, is being renamed Calgary-Acadia, and I think that reflects the modern reality. In fact, many people, Mr. Chair, would call me from the northwest part of the city, an area called Edgemont, thinking I was their MLA. This reflects the modern reality.

Calgary-Montrose has been renamed Calgary-Greenway; Calgary-North Hill – I said North Hill, not Nose Hill – has been renamed Calgary-Klein after the former Premier. We have the new Calgary-South East, and Edmonton-South West is new. Former Airdrie-Chestermere is renamed Airdrie. Chestermere-Rocky View. Fort McMurray-Conklin is one of the new constituencies, and the other new name I found was Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. So there's nothing wrong with renaming a constituency, and we've had some spirited debate on this floor here as well.

I do want to just address the issue of the number of constituencies, one of which could be named after Mr. Manning as the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has indicated. Canada's system of Confederation, Mr. Chair, is set up to recognize unique differences across the country. The tradition in Canada is effective representation, not absolute parity as we see south of the 49th parallel. The balancing of these interests is a delicate one. It involves examination in the depth of social history; it involves demography of communities and, really, a wide sense of criteria as well.

Now, of course, population and population density vary greatly from province to province, and each provincial government has a challenge to go and reflect that. But let's just compare ourselves to a few other provinces here. My home province of Saskatchewan has about 1.04 million people. I think it's hit a million people a few times; a few people like me keep moving out. There are 58 MLAs, so you're dealing with approximately 18,000 citizens there per MLA. Ontario has approximately 13 million residents and 107 MPPs, approximately 123,000 per MPP. Alberta, as we know, has 3.7 million residents, and we're now proposing 87 MLAs, which is about 42,000 per MLA, so we're somewhere roughly in between, Mr. Chair.

One other thing I also wanted to mention. I was just doing some quick math on this whole topic, and 1986 is the last time that the amount of MLAs was changed. In 1986, over 20 years ago, there were 2.3 million people in Alberta. So we had 83 seats then, 27,000 per MLA. In 2010 it's 3.7 million people with 87, so we're dealing with 42,000 per MLA. Even dealing with that, there are more people per MLA, including in constituencies urban and rural. That's an average. So a single benchmark like locking population to the number of residents doesn't work across the entire country, and the fact is that our country reflects that different things work differently in different parts of this nation.

Mr. Chairman, the Electoral Divisions Act is a vital tool for democratic process in this province. The province amends this every two elections, as I mentioned. Again, it reflects a modern Alberta. Albertans vote for the person they support in the area they live, and the fundamental democratic principle is that members are always aware, or should be, of the thoughts and concerns of the people living in the constituencies that we each represent. Of course, there are many ways to represent your constituents. You know, you could represent them in your caucus privately, you could advocate on their behalf through letters, you could represent them publicly.

In the past, for example, I've publicly voiced my concerns with government policy, and sometimes it has not been onside with my own government. Last year I was very outspoken about the government's response to the changing world economy. This year, fortunately, I have a chance to put this into practice in my own department. At the same time, I've also stood in this Assembly and stood against my own government's legislation. I did so earlier this year in a spirited debate on Bill 7. In both cases, though, I was not admonished publicly, I wasn't kicked out, I wasn't admonished behind closed doors or threatened with sanctions, and no one told me that the knives were out for me.

Mr. Chairman, I believe members in this House are hard working, and I believe that we all have the best interests of Albertans in mind. I'll give you an example. I think a good constituency MLA is the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I don't agree with him on a lot of things, but he is a good constituency MLA. The same with Calgary-Glenmore. I think he works really hard in his constituency. That's just a fact. We don't agree on a lot of things, but these are two members who work hard and who put their constituents first. The difference is that we don't single out members nor do we put blame on groups of people. The best of us focus on an issue without laying blame.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

Now, Mr. Chair, there were some comments from hon. members with respect to the composition of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to underline that the Electoral Boundaries Commission looks at all of the names, they look at a variety and a number of factors, but the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act sets out how members of the commission are in fact chosen. Most other provinces choose their commissions in a very similar way. Indeed, I remember that when I was working in the Saskatchewan Legislature, it was done in a very similar way.

4:00

Bill 28 only addresses the placement of electoral boundaries and the names of divisions. I've dealt with some of the names before. We named divisions after certain leaders. Again, Edmonton-Decore was named after a former mayor and Leader of the Opposition from Edmonton, whom I didn't have the chance to meet. It's not about parties. We've recognized people who make contributions regardless of their partisan contribution.

The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has spoken, again, very highly of Preston Manning, and I think very highly of him as well. At the same time, Preston Manning also was a leader who had to invoke discipline in his caucus. I recall back to May 7, 1996, when I just had finished third-year exams, when I found out that the Member for Calgary Southeast, the area that I represent now, Jan Brown, had been booted out of the party. That was where he had actually put in some discipline as well. So leaders make discipline from time to time, Mr. Chair.

I also want to address some previous comments from Edmonton-Riverview on this amendment. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview in the debate on Government Motion 26, which was related to Bill 28, expressed what I would characterize as concerns with the length of time this House has dedicated to Bill 28 and its respective amendments. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview stated – and I'm quoting from *Hansard* – that “six and a half hours is not an abuse of time.” He went on to say: “This is not a minor bill; this is a significant bill. It will affect every single member of this Assembly, and it will affect every . . . citizen of this province.”

I would agree with the member that Bill 28 is indeed a significant bill. I would also agree with his statement that the bill will affect every citizen of this province. The hon. member and I do disagree with the length of time dedicated to the development of this legislation. The time allotted to Bill 28 may not satisfy the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; this is clear, again, from his statement from last night. However, days and months of work from Albertans across the province have been dedicated to the legislation before this House, and the Albertans who contributed to its development should be recognized. In no way do I want to besmirch the Member for Edmonton-Riverview by reading too much into his comments, but I do want to address the assumption that not enough work has been done on Bill 28, Mr. Chair.

As I and other members of this Assembly have stated, there's a long process to develop, draft, and debate legislation and amendments to expand the number of constituencies. This, again, occurred in 2009. There were public consultations throughout the entire province. After that there was a draft submitted with the names of each constituency, and then there was a final draft as well. I was once told as a junior lawyer that unless everybody is a little bit upset, you haven't done a good job. Well, no, this is not a perfect scenario, but I think that the people on the commission have done a good job with the names and with the boundaries, and I think that we should thank them for their service because I do think, Mr. Chair, that it's really a thankless job.

There was another process set out in legislation to create and appoint the Electoral Boundaries Commission. These great Albertans are selected out in the Election Act, and they go to all regions of Alberta. They solicit thoughts and concerns from Albertans on the shape and size of the electoral boundaries. I have to say that this isn't a job that I would want. The sessions and submissions were used to create the first draft of the report, which included the names of the constituencies, which led to the second report being presented in this Assembly.

This report led to a motion in this House, which included extensive and important debate. The discussion on the motion led to important constituency name changes. I dealt with some of those earlier. These changes included recognizing contributions of some great Albertans and some former political leaders. The interesting commonality between them all is not their party, not their ideology, not their particular views, Mr. Chair, but rather that they all served in this Assembly. The passage of the motion that led to debate on the bill is where we're at now in Committee of the Whole, the amendment from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Now, with respect, Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, as I mentioned earlier, had some comments, and he's raised many points throughout this process. I do believe that there have been many opportunities for members to raise relevant points regarding Bill 28. I've heard some from the opposition that I agree with, I've heard some from the government that I agree with, and vice versa. That is honestly true. As the hon. House leader has stated last night, we've heard a debate that's very lengthy, very verbose. I think that we've had some meaningful comments, but there does come a point in time when I hear from members, you know, "We're going to continue debate until it gets to closure" – there is a balance in democracy. A great man named Morris Shumiatcher once told me that there are rights and responsibilities. With the right to debate, you know, we want to be responsible in that type of debate. At the same time, I don't think that it's out of line to ask for time allocation at this juncture.

There is also a difference, of course, in people's meaning of democracy. Many people say that it's undemocratic. In a lot of cases a lot of things can be undemocratic. Similarly, you can't say something is undemocratic just because it doesn't go your way. I've been part of many losing battles in my life and some winning ones too. But you know something? That's just the nature of democracy. It's majority rules, but we also try to protect the minority against the tyranny of the majority. I do think that we have made that appropriate balance in debating this bill and in debating this amendment.

So in the interests of democracy and developing electoral boundaries that reflect a modern Alberta, we should now move forward. We should move forward through this amendment through committee and through third reading. Bill 28, Mr. Chair, reflects the commission's report as amended by the Assembly and will bring Alberta's electoral boundaries and divisions up to date with its population and its current needs. With reasonable accommodation

and also with pride we will honour two great Albertans here. Again, the difference is that these two great Albertans served in this House.

If we're going to name a riding after Preston Manning, I think we should push the federal government to do so on a federal level because he was always a federal politician. We've named Edmonton-Manning after his late father, Ernest Manning, a former Premier of this province, who sat in this Assembly for many years. At the same time, Mr. Chair, his son, as great a man as he is and as great a legacy as he leaves this province and leaves this country and his work with the Manning Centre for Building Democracy, he did not sit in this Assembly.

So I will not be voting in favour of this, but I want this House to know the great deal of reverence and the great deal of appreciation that I have for one of the great leaders of Alberta's history, Preston Manning. I do think that this is something that we should pursue on a federal basis: an Alberta riding, probably in Calgary, maybe a riding in Calgary that even overlaps the constituency that I represent. So I will not be voting in favour of this amendment, and I encourage all members to follow suit.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I've listened with great interest to the presenters who have gone before me, and I, too, shall now make some comments on the amendment to rename one of the constituencies after Preston Manning. It is with some note that we learned that Preston Manning has been an influence on Alberta in many things, and I think that goes without my saying here.

To reiterate what the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere said, he was a democrat who really espoused representing your citizenry and voting as your citizens of your constituency wanted you to vote, that type of representation. Whether it always happened or not, that is another thing, but he at least espoused that principle. I'm sure that from time to time even the Reform Party had to go away from it to enforce party discipline. I know that for the majority of time he at least espoused that principle.

I think Preston's first election was in 1993.

An Hon. Member: It was 1988.

Mr. Hehr: In 1988. Thank you very much. I'm reminded there of the history of Alberta.

I think the initial Reformers ran on not taking their pensions. I'm not sure if I'm right – and maybe someone can correct me on this – but every last one of them took their pensions.

Mr. Anderson: Except for Preston.

Mr. Hehr: Are you sure about that?

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely. He's the only one.

Mr. Hehr: Well, then, that's very good. That is one of those things. Then that is actually very good, a leader of a party who actually ran in that election on that and didn't take his pension. I'll tell you what. That's very honourable. That's actually very honourable.

I did listen to the comments from the hon. minister of housing, and he did point out the fact that most of the people we've been naming our ridings after in this House have been provincial representatives, people who have served in this hon. House. On that point we look at people who have been named before: Decore, and the

new riding of Calgary-Klein. I supported that amendment because of Premier Klein's contribution to this province. Whether you agreed with him or not, he gave up a significant portion of his life to represent us on a provincial scale. That's why I supported that change to that riding.

4:10

However, given that Mr. Manning was a federal politician and did not serve in this House, I am going to vote against this amendment. I'm not taking anything away from what the man did or his service to this country and his contributions to the political landscape. In my view it would be unwise for this Legislature to do that and set that precedent.

On that point, I believe it's better to have a separation between provincial electoral districts and federal electoral districts, to make it easier for people to keep track of those things. In my view, muddying the waters by naming this after a federal politician would be a disservice.

On that note, I'm going to vote against the amendment and would encourage all members of this hon. House to do the same. Thank you very much, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on amendment A2.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to rise and speak in favour of amendment A2. I find it almost humorous that the minister of housing would say that . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I must apologize here because from my view I couldn't see the hon. member stand up. The process is: opposition, government, opposition, government.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I'll be brief if you recognize me.

The Chair: No. Now I must recognize the government side so we follow the proper process. We will recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm grateful for the opportunity to rise today and join the debate on the amendment to Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, being brought forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. Mr. Chairman, when you look at the bill, it formally accepts and implements the revised names and boundaries of Alberta's electoral divisions. The bill as it is is the combination of a long and detailed process involving extensive debate, consultation, and public hearings. Before I go on, I would like to also take time to thank the Electoral Boundaries Commission for all the work they did in laying the groundwork for this important piece of legislation.

An Hon. Member: You've got to be kidding.

Mr. Berger: After all, this groundwork was extensive. You know, we can say, "You've got to be kidding," but they were all over the province. People were consulted, and people brought forward their submissions, both verbal and written.

When we look at an amendment to put a name in there, we have to go forward and say, as has been mentioned in the past: is this name that we're putting forward more to the line of a federal constituency or riding boundary? The great things that this person, Preston Manning, did for our province were as well for the greater part of the country. I would submit, in agreement with some of the

earlier speakers, that we would be better off to lobby federally, when we come up with more ridings, that that name be given to one of those ridings. Respecting all the contributions, it was not just to the province of Alberta, but it was to all of Canada that Preston Manning has contributed and continues to contribute. I think we should honour that.

That is why I can't really agree with the amendment as offered because when we look at what was accomplished by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, it was not an easy task. The commission had the seven considerations that it had to take into account while plotting our new boundaries, and I think everyone in here probably knows what they included. One was the need for effective representation, without a doubt the most important consideration and the one entrenched in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It's not necessarily all about names, as in the amendment, but it's about the rights and the consideration of that in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Two, the need to address population density in Canada. We have a system where a vote in one area does not have to be equal to a vote in another but, instead, insists that they are not unduly disenfranchised. Once again, no mention of the name.

Three, to balance the common community interests, including Indian reserves and Métis settlements. After all, it is important that all communities be kept together. There, too, there is no mention of the names.

Four, the need to respect municipal boundaries wherever possible. Separating a municipality into several ridings could hamper the effectiveness of MLAs in meeting the needs of their communities. Once again, we're not talking about names.

Five, we recognize the challenges faced by the total number of municipalities and local authorities. After all, more municipalities mean more city councils, more school boards, and more interested parties to meet with. There again, no mention of the names.

The sixth, to work with geographical features like roads, rivers, mountain ranges, physical barriers, which are clear guidelines for electoral divisions. Once again, we are not speaking about the names. [interjection] Yes, there are mountains that we could name.

Seven, strive towards clear boundaries whenever possible. This reduces confusion. Names, I would submit, do definitely reduce confusion, and people get used to the names, and we do have to rename new ones and such things, but right now, as we speak to this, in those seven pieces there is no mention specifically of names or this amendment.

Now, if you look at the commission, it's remarkable that they were able to balance all of these often conflicting criteria. Without a doubt one of the greatest challenges faced by the commission was population growth. That was the whole purpose of this, not a name. Mr. Chairman, we all know Alberta has seen tremendous growth in recent years. We are, after all, a beacon of economic promise and prosperity, and Alberta offers a level of freedom not found in most places in the world. It offers a level of economic prosperity not found in most places in Canada. That's talking about the whole province, not the name of any one single constituency.

As a result of this, we have seen a huge influx of people coming to our province. However, this growth has not been consistent and even throughout the province. Without a doubt the largest growth has been in Edmonton, Calgary, and the central Alberta corridor. We don't change the name for that. It doesn't go back to that amendment either. These two cities as well as the municipalities which lie between have grown at an unprecedented rate.

Mr. Chairman, the unevenness of this growth has resulted in the situation where the Electoral Boundaries Commission was forced to redistribute the boundaries of several ridings throughout the province. The only way to balance this growth would have been to

move predominantly rural ridings into one of the major cities. This shift would have been incredibly detrimental to people all over Alberta.

When you have three or four rural municipalities and maybe 14 small urban centres in a constituency, they all, too, would like to have their name in that constituency title, which is impossible throughout the province when you take the diversity of it with the amount of municipalities we all represent.

When you're talking about how many of these municipalities you do represent, especially in a rural constituency such as mine, and the different difficulties that each one is facing at the same time, you're never dealing with the same issue in the whole constituency. You may be dealing with a water system problem in the town of Claresholm. You may at the same time be looking at a waste-water situation in the Crownsnest Pass or even a highway situation in Pincher Creek. You're all over that, and amending the name doesn't help anyone, I think.

4:20

As it stands now, many of Alberta's rural ridings are already so large that they are challenging to represent effectively. If the commission was forced to remove a rural riding, it would force these already large ridings to grow and, effectively, remove any idea of having a local representative in the Legislature. Once again, when you get out into the rural ridings, they know the riding name, they know their town may not be a part of it or the former member or anything else, or even a federal member may not have his name in the name, which leads me to believe that we do have some provincial names incorporated but not federal. Appreciating the intent of the amendment, I still say that it's better left federally.

Now, when you look at the idea of having a local representative in the Legislature – it's something, I believe, I have first-hand knowledge of – Livingstone-Macleod was at one time three separate constituencies. After this is adopted, it will be over three and a half former separate constituencies. Because we were able to increase the number of ridings by four, we were able to address the growth of our urban centres while in some cases preserving the size of our already overstretched rural ridings.

Mr. Chairman, I'm proud that the Electoral Boundaries Commission had the ability to effectively recognize this and decided to make the recommendations that they did. Once again, their recommendations and the naming is a difficult thing, but we could amend this forever. I think we have to take into focus that we have given this adequate debate, and it's now time to move it forward. It has been stated in this House that this bill is being passed too quickly. This amendment is being debated. This bill is of importance and to some should have more debate and public input. I would argue, however, that the holders of this position misconstrue the purpose of Bill 28.

This bill is not about setting the electoral boundaries. If that were the case, I would agree that more consultation could be useful. This amendment is not about the boundaries. It's directly about the names. Rather, what we should be debating here is about accepting the electoral boundaries set out by the boundaries commission, accepting the names as we have brought it forward with no further amendments.

Mr. Chairman, the level of public input and debate was far beyond the level we see for most government bills not only in this province but in Canada as a whole. Contrary to the beliefs of a few, the bill overall, even with the amendments, has received much more than six hours of debate. Moreover, it received extensive debate at the local level, and I will say that names were debated. I know the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod was considered to be changed to High

River-Macleod at one point. There were many people that came forward and said that that would cause a mix-up, so they went back to Livingstone-Macleod even though they changed the electoral boundaries and added a large part of Turner Valley, Black Diamond, and right up to High River.

People in all of Alberta, throughout the province, who wanted to participate did so either verbally or through written submissions, and there weren't that many directed to names, as this amendment brings. As mentioned, throughout their travels the commission met with stakeholders and community members from every corner. This included people who wanted more urban representation. For a new constituency I don't think names came into it at all. It was just creating the constituency in most cases.

It also included people who were concerned about the size of rural ridings. They, too, wanted to discuss names, but they wanted to keep their name in most cases. The odd one wanted to incorporate the name of a town within that constituency, make it more centric to that. It also included people who wanted to ensure that the traditional voting boundaries were upheld wherever possible. Travel patterns, school districts, the geographical boundaries, that I'd mentioned earlier, and a myriad of other issues were all part of what the deliberations were that the boundaries commission took in.

It was up to the commission to review all of these presentations and submissions and balance them with the proper population figures wherever possible. This, I submit, was a monumental task and one that I do not envy. I sat in on the hearings myself in Lethbridge and listened to the comments from the public, the mayors, the councillors, the rural reeves that came forward, and there I did hear questions on names, but it was keeping them the same, again. I've never heard anything since we started debating this from the public to come forward with any more names than what we discussed earlier.

Mr. Chairman, it's also important to note that this work was done in an impartial and nonpartisan setting. The commission was made up of people appointed by both government and the Official Opposition, and they had a mandate to serve the people of Alberta, not any particular political party. I don't believe that when we look at this amendment, we're looking at it from that position either. We're looking at it strictly on the names.

The commission's objectives were to create an effective electoral boundaries system that serves our needs not only now but into the future, 10 years into the future, until the next commission would be called into service, at which time it would be an opportune time to bring forward a name in advance, and this name may be one to bring forward at the time. But right now I believe Mr. Manning is best left at the federal level, and hopefully his name will be reflected and honoured through a federal riding name.

I also believe that with the shift in demographics, job opportunities, we may well see some of the rural ridings actually shrink geographically next time. That would be quite an accomplishment. If you walk down the members' hallway and look at the pictures, it's amazing when you take into consideration the population, the amount of members. But look at the size of the constituencies at the time. They were quite small, very small, to be exact.

In addition to creating electoral maps that address the needs of today, the commission had to look at the growth trends and figure out where the people were moving to and where the people were moving from. There again, we have this amendment for a name, but that isn't exactly what we need to be looking at. We need to be looking at this bill as it is amended to date. As I mentioned earlier, the seven considerations that the commission needed to address when plotting out the new boundaries were addressed, and those

seven did not include any name issue. Now, I'm saying that they had to take all of these considerations and put them in place for not only right now but for the next 10 years.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that the bill as it has been amended, without this current amendment that's offered, is the culmination of over a year of hard work by the Electoral Boundaries Commission and is indicative of the dedication these individuals put towards addressing their difficult task. Moreover, it is representative of all the submissions made by Albertans to the commission's hearings throughout the province. I don't believe that we need to continue to discuss and debate an amendment on a name change. In passing the bill without the amendment, we will recognize and thank the Electoral Boundaries Commission for their hard work, and we will position Alberta's electoral map for the coming decade.

Now, I would like to thank the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for offering the amendment. I believe that all of us in this House feel that that name is one that will be honoured in the future if this is the exact venue for that or by a federal riding or, as one other hon. member had mentioned, maybe there's a mountain at some point that becomes that name.

Mr. Lukaszuk: A new mountain?

Mr. Berger: A new mountain, yeah. Well, there are some that aren't named, actually, strangely enough. As well, there are even creeks that aren't named out there.

I want to thank the Electoral Boundaries Commission for all of their efforts. I thank all the Albertans who took time out of their busy lives to present a submission on this important topic.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude my comments on the amendment. I urge all hon. members to support Bill 28 but to not support this amendment as offered. I think we have debated this long enough now. It's time to move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I will take my seat to hear the rest of the comments on the amendment.

4:30

Mr. Hinman: Well, it's certainly interesting with this closure of debate that's been brought in by the government how they like to talk and go on and on. The hon. member did a great job of saying he was closing but kept waiting to try and talk the clock out.

It is a fitting name. It's fitting to have it provincial. To say that it's because he served federally is very shallow, in my opinion. He's a true honour to all Albertans, someone that we can be proud of, just as the other names that have come forward. To say that, you know, the three names that came forward were fitting for debate but this one is not is another, I just think, error in judgment in what they're looking at.

Mr. Chair, Bill 28 did not do the best job about looking at the boundaries. I think the hon. housing minister spoke on that, the way his riding was being divided up. In Calgary-Glenmore to take Southwood out and put it across to Acadia doesn't make any sense, or to bring in Lakeview on the north across the reservoir. So I'd have to disagree with the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod in that he's in error in what he's looking at and didn't really look at the whole big picture.

The bottom line is that it's obvious this government and the members of this government have no respect for Preston Manning. I understand that. I'm sure they're going to vote overwhelmingly no, and I sure hope that they prove me wrong on that, Mr. Chair. He's a great provincial elected representative that we should all be proud of.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chair, point of order.

The Chair: A point of order, hon. member. Do you want to address it now?

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) the hon. member is imputing the fact that hon. members on this side of the House disrespect a true Albertan, someone who has spent a lot of time in political life, as have many of my relatives. I think the hon. member should retract that statement because almost every one of the colleagues that spoke said that they truly respected that individual, so for him to say it, it's a lie.

The Chair: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt. The one hour is up, so pursuant to Government Motion 26 agreed to on November 30, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude the debate on Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, in Committee of the Whole, I must put the following questions to conclude debate.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 28 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: You keep demoting me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Government House Leader. Sorry.

Mr. Hancock: I hope I don't take a commensurate pay cut.

Mr. Chairman – or should I say deputy chairman of committees?

The Chair: Touché.

Mr. Hancock: I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 28.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 28. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 28 Electoral Divisions Act

Mr. Denis: I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Speaker, we had a very spirited debate in first reading, in second reading, and again just recently in Committee of the Whole on this bill. Indeed, this bill goes to the very fabric of our existence here. We're all elected from a particular constituency to represent the constituents there. Interestingly enough, everyone here was elected under a party banner.

I'd be remiss if I did not mention just a couple of words about my own constituency and the name, which is going to be changed from Calgary-Egmont to Calgary-Acadia.

Years ago, Mr. Speaker, I went and met the former member from my constituency, a gentleman named Denis Herard. He held the constituency from 1993 up until 2008, when I was fortunate enough to take over. I asked him: who was Egmont? Again, I thought it was Edgemont not Egmont. He informed me that, in fact, Calgary-Egmont was named after the Earl of Egmont. I did a little bit of research as to who the Earl of Egmont was, and I'm advised that this individual actually owned a 28-room house on a site at or near what is now known as Southcentre mall, in the south portion of my constituency.

This riding, again, was named after the Earl of Egmont in 1971. I follow three great representatives who represented that area: of course, Merv Leitch, followed by a former Speaker, who used to sit in your chair, Mr. Speaker – his name was David Carter – followed by Denis Herard, former minister of advanced education.

A bit about the Earl of Egmont, to close off his legacy here. The property that this gentleman owned was owned by the Kelwood Corporation, which developed much of what's known now as Fairview in Acadia as well as Willow Park, including the Willow Park golf course, Maple Ridge, and Lake Bonavista, which is slightly outside of the constituency. I've been told that the Earl of Egmont himself actually lived, again, on Macleod Trail and Willow Park Drive S.E. According to the *Calgary Herald* report, the reporter met a fellow at a house and asked if the earl was around, and the fellow said that he was away. If I recall correctly, this was back several decades ago. So the reporter left, and the man was the earl himself.

My understanding is that there is only one part of this house that still remains, and that's actually the spiral staircase, which is in the Black Swan pub just in the constituency, across Macleod Trail from his home site. That's all that remains of the Earl of Egmont's home. You'd never know that there was a connection. I've actually never been there, and one of my staff this week was telling me I need some more hobbies. Maybe I should go there for a drink.

The earl is part of the history of south Calgary but also the rural south of the city. The great ranches of the Calgary area, including the Burns ranch immediately east of the Egmont ranch as well as the Cross ranch, tend to overshadow some of the characters who make up the history of ranching around Calgary, Mr. Speaker. Granted, this is one of the lesser players, but so were Sam Livingston, John Glenn, John Ware, the first African-American rancher, as well as many others who make up the history of Calgary. It's not without some regret that this name is actually leaving.

I can't say simply that all good things must come to an end. I do support the commission's recommendations to rename the constituency Calgary-Acadia. As I mentioned in many of my earlier

speeches, one thing in the modern context of Calgary, there is a northwest community named Edgemont, which I believe is in the constituency of the Member for Calgary-North West. Our offices do get many calls for that. Many people don't know where Egmont actually is, and I do think Acadia reflects the modern reality of the constituency that I have the privilege to represent. A more practical and less romantic form of the name change is, again, that Edgemont is something that is just confused on a regular basis.

4:40

I do want to comment as well in third reading on the commission's report, which was tabled in the Assembly in June of this year. On October 26 a resolution was made in this Assembly, and the contents of the report were debated. All of the boundaries recommended in the commission's report were approved by this Assembly, as were the majority of names and electoral divisions.

There were, of course, some changes to the suggested names of electoral divisions. Mr. Speaker, these suggestions were made in order to better reflect the history and the context of these divisions as well as the desires of the constituents. There have been many submissions made. You can go to the website. The website will reflect that people from anywhere from individuals to organizations, community groups, even political parties have made submissions, and I would say parties of all stripes. These suggestions were made in order to again better reflect the history and the character of these divisions.

Some of the changes, again, we've dealt with. The electoral division of Strathcona is now named Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I see the member over there smiling at me. I see the electoral division of Calgary-Montrose is reflected by the name of Calgary-Greenway. Calgary-North Hill is now named Calgary-Klein, as I mentioned earlier. Dunvegan-Central Peace is now Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

I think that the commission has made a good estimation of what the constraints that they have are, mostly dealing with population as well as with density. Canada, in general, Mr. Speaker, is a very difficult country to govern, and Alberta is no different. We have two major centres, obviously Calgary and Edmonton, but the rural areas are important as well. Interestingly enough, my constituency you can drive across in traffic in 20 minutes tops – tops – and that's in gridlock Calgary traffic. I've heard from people, from the Member for Little Bow for example, who represents a very diverse constituency which takes many hours to drive across.

So we have to realize that more than population is at play here. It is important that we have adequate representation in both urban and rural contexts, but in a rural context you are also dealing with the accessibility of your member. That's something that we have to always consider. I bet you that several members from rural Alberta are just really grinning with Cheshire cat grins that a city boy like me would actually go and recognize that, but that definitely is the case as well. I'm happy that the Member for Little Bow actually does enjoy the golf course in my community. I'm sure that there are many in his community as well.

In conclusion, I just want to mention that Bill 28 reflects the commission's report as amended to this Assembly. This act will repeal and replace the existence of some names. Some new boundaries come into effect, again reflecting the changes in demography and population. Further, Bill 28 will bring Alberta's electoral boundaries and divisions up to date with population and current needs. Bear in mind that everything that we've said here and the commission's actual report will come into play again two elections from now, as the report for the 2004 electoral divisions does come in today.

So I will be supporting this bill. I encourage all members to do the same. I am happy to have been able to take a breath in this speech, but I also want to say, particularly, thanks to Matt Steppan from my office for doing some good work on looking into this bill and the need to have this passed so that we can have a representative democracy in Alberta in the next election and in the election after that, until this is revisited again.

I predict that in two elections, Mr. Speaker, we're going to have a very different discussion, but a lot of the same issues will be brought up. The Electoral Boundaries Commission, I would not want to be a commissioner here because the work that they do is quite incredible for this Assembly, for the people of this province, and I think we really need to have our hats off to the five members.

With that, I would move third reading vote of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and speak to this in third reading of Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. I was listening to the little historical vignette of Calgary-Egmont by the hon. minister of housing. I came forward that I have been in the Black Swan pub. I have actually been in that pub and had a beverage there, but I didn't really view the staircase that the Earl of Egmont used. It may precipitate another journey out there. I can tell you that this summer when I did go to the Black Swan I was with my new executive assistant, Brendan Wade, who was meeting some friends out there. Although they were a tad younger than me, I was convinced to go along. It was a wonderful adventure out to the hon. member's constituency.

Nevertheless, if we return to Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act, this bill was not without its controversy. We have added four more MLAs to the payroll here in this Assembly at a time that the coffers of Alberta may not be as full as they once were. With the addition of four more MLAs comes a price tag of roughly \$50 million over the course of a four-year legislative term. That is no small price we're paying for the addition of these MLAs. In my view, we could have done this province a great service by resisting the temptation to add these new MLAs, by redrawing the map and sufficing with 83 MLAs. I think it would have allowed us to lead by example in this House by showing some restraint in a time of economic downturn. That, to me, Mr. Speaker, was very disturbing and actually something I was not too fond of when we saw the redrawing of this electoral map.

I'd also like to comment a little bit about the composition of the members on the commission. There's no doubt that these five members worked pretty hard. Two are selected from the government's side, and two are selected from the opposition's side, with one more appointed by, I believe, the Speaker. Nevertheless, everyone knows at the end of the day it's a 3 to 2 split. The redrawing of the map is not without its political considerations.

Mr. Hancock: The chair is a judge.

Mr. Hehr: Nevertheless, I think it's fair enough. The person who got selected to chair the commission is a political appointment. For us not to say that there were political decisions made in the redrawing of the electoral map, in my view, would be ignoring the essence of what the commission was established to do.

On that note, you saw specific things that came back with different areas carved up in different fashions and in some very interesting ways. You saw after the initial draft especially the way Grande Prairie was initially redrawn with more of a city focus. Then to the howls and screams of many it got sent back to the drawing

table, and it was redrawn in the fashion that may have been more appropriate to some political considerations. For us to deny that that happened and was happening throughout this process, in my view, would be naive. That is just a comment.

If we look at this going forward, this will set our boundaries for the next two elections. In my view, it also didn't do an adequate job in representing our urban constituents. If we look at the way the map was drawn, clearly one more seat should have gone to an urban constituency. If you look at the actual numbers that were drawn out, the natural constituency for this would have been Calgary. Instead, you saw different aspects. It saw rural Alberta rewarded in a fashion that did not necessarily reflect the population that is currently at play. I understand the arguments of effective representation. This map could have been drawn very easily to recognize the density of our populations in our urban regions and how they have grown significantly. It could have reflected that in a much better fashion.

4:50

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we have gone up and down with this bill. It appears a fait accompli. My hope would be that in the future this become a less partisan process with maybe an independent panel set up to do this who simply goes by the numbers of where the citizens are and what actually would happen to take out the political considerations and eliminate the weird boundary redrawings and go forward on that note. Nonetheless, I thank you for your time and for allowing me to comment on this for the last time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the government side, the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have some comments that I, too, would like to make on this bill, but at this time I would like to call for adjournment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 28

27. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 28, Electoral Divisions Act, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last of these, I hope, for a long time. Again, we've expended quite a considerable amount of time on electoral boundaries. It's an important bill, no question about that. But the clear indication from the Wildrose is that they wish to stop government business, stop the business of the Legislature, hold things in abeyance, and talk forever on the bills. That was a very clear indication on the record in this House. While I personally and I think every member of this Legislature believes that there should be fulsome debate, complete debate on every bill that comes forward, there is a time and place when one has to say: enough.

So I would move Government Motion 27.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to the motion that's just been put on the floor regarding time allocation. I find it quite interesting that time allocation brings out the government members to be very verbose. Actually, they can go on for 20 minutes. Amazing. So in one hour we have the government for 20 minutes, we have the opposition for 20 minutes, and then the government for 20 minutes. Well, you know, that really isn't quite balanced, clearly a way of doing their own little filibuster within their own little time allocation.

It's interesting because we can hardly get a peep out of them during any debates on bills, and especially at 4 o'clock in the morning we hear nothing from them. But, my, time allocation and they're just popping up. Is it fair? No. Is it balanced? No. Is it democratic? Yes. Unfortunately, those are the rules of this House, and these are the rules that we play by on each side of this House.

It's a shame when the opposition has been told by Albertans that they would like to see what they feel is very, very poor legislation go back to the drawing board. I believe that the opposition doesn't stand up and try to filibuster for no reason. There is a reason. They've been told by other Albertans that they don't like the legislation that's coming forward, and it's our job to make sure that we try to persuade the government of the day that they should be listening to us more and that maybe that should go back to the drawing board.

I don't believe it's something that anybody really enjoys, sitting up all night. I know that the first time it happened to me I really was persuaded not to come in with my jammies, my fuzzy slippers, and my hair curlers in my hair. I thought I showed great restraint on that. However, we have had a few evening sessions since, so I realize what happens.

I do believe that by filibustering we are representing Albertans' voices, and I don't think that it should be dismissed as irrelevant. If the government would even give a wiggle on some of the conversations that the opposition does in a filibuster, paid attention, and actually maybe made some movement on that, then I don't believe that time allocation/closure would be necessary.

With those thoughts, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair shall now call the question on the motion.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 27 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:57 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bhardwaj	Goudreau	McQueen
Campbell	Griffiths	Morton
Dallas	Hancock	Olson
Danyluk	Horner	Quest
DeLong	Jablonski	Renner
Denis	Jacobs	Sandhu
Doerksen	Knight	Tarchuk
Elniski	Leskiw	Vandermeer
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Weadick
Fritz	McFarland	Woo-Paw

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Notley
Boutilier	Kang	Pastoor
Hehr		

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 7
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[Government Motion 27 carried]

5:10 Government Bills and Orders Third Reading (continued)

Bill 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 30: Mr. Chase]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and participate in third reading of Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. There has been a lot of vigorous and good discussion on this bill, and before I offer some of my perspectives, I would just like to take the opportunity to thank all hon. members for their participation in this debate.

I agree with the sentiment, surprisingly, from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that we are going to keep using power in this province. It's an undeniable fact. Albertans expect to be able to enjoy the conveniences of modern life. Mr. Speaker, those conveniences mean things like driving cars, using appliances, heat, plastics, electricity; you name it.

The great majority of all of this is derived from oil, natural gas, and coal. I recognize that in this House there may be differences of opinion relating to whether or not our reliance on this type of energy is a good thing, but the essential truth remains that we will continue to use these fuels well into the foreseeable future. Furthermore, this province is blessed by the fact that it contains some of the most abundant energy resources in the world. That means that Alberta's future is certainly tied to the continuing development of our energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that any member would dispute this. I am not implying that things will remain the status quo or that we will continue to develop our resources and market them without undue environmental consideration. I recognize that there is a global movement towards implementing green technologies and conservation into the energy mix. The world needs energy, but the question of what type of energy the world will use is a continually evolving concept. For now it would appear that while the global appetite for energy is ever-increasing, so, too, is the demand that the energy we use also become cleaner. The pursuit of carbon capture and sequestration technology is a part of our government's response to both demands. Alberta's future as a global energy provider is linked to its ability to create clean energy.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I would also like to add that Alberta's two largest universities are also becoming hubs of expertise in this technology. In August the University of Alberta announced its reservoir experimental facility, also known as GeoREF. This facility will also allow for testing of carbon capture and storage and apply recovery techniques to unconventional resources. This facility is expected to open in June 2011 and will be one more reason for students to look to Alberta for postsecondary education.

The University of Calgary's Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy is also a key player in CCS research and education. The CCS research group has a number of projects on the go, including analyzing the costs of CCS and looking at legal and regulatory issues required to move large-scale projects forward. Obviously, there is a tremendous demand for CCS education, and Alberta is offering students and the world the opportunity to be on the rising curve of this technology.

Mr. Speaker, this government accepts that climate change is an issue. It accepts that the energy sector is vital to Alberta's future. It accepts that this province has a broad portfolio of energy resources that all have a role to play in our energy mix, and it sees carbon capture and storage technology as playing a huge role in both clean energy production and enhanced oil recovery. I would also add that regardless of where some members in the House stand with respect to the issue of climate debate, this global shift towards clean energy is undeniable.

Alberta needs to work in partnership with other jurisdictions, and the energy sector needs to continue to adapt with changing global realities. While there are some who would glean short-sighted satisfaction in taking a combative stance, any Alberta government that would actively deny the world's climate issues would risk isolating the province from its global partnerships and ensuring that Alberta's energy industry becomes obsolete. Any approach that would see Alberta address climate issues by relying on one or two principle energy resources is equally narrowly sighted and ignores historical precedent to the contrary.

Mr. Speaker, turning to some of the specifics of Bill 24, this proposed legislation is an important piece of the puzzle required to implement carbon capture and storage. Bill 24 makes clear that the government would assume the long-term liability for carbon capture and storage, and it provides clarity to industry with respect to the issues surrounding access to underground CO₂ storage. Some of the opposition I've heard on this bill relates to the issue of liability, and I would really like to take a moment to address that. The liability of carbon capture and storage projects is one of the more obvious impediments to the development of this technology. One of the reasons for this is because carbon capture and storage is a long-term, indeed, permanent concept, not a short-term one.

Within a long-term time frame projection for a carbon capture and storage project it is entirely feasible that some industry operators would evolve into other entities or may even cease to exist. That being the case, government is realistically the only entity with the capacity and durability to assume this liability. It should be mentioned that this liability will not be entered into lightly but will be contingent upon strict conditions related to the issuance of a closure certificate. Mr. Speaker, any potential lessee would be required to comply with all closure criteria and site monitoring prior to receiving their certificate.

In addition, government's ability to monitor closed project sites will be facilitated by the postclosure stewardship fund. My understanding is that the fund would be established through costs covered by an industry-generated levy collected during the operational phase of a carbon capture and storage project. It will be a key element in ensuring that the means to deal with any postclosure issues for a given project will be able to be addressed, and it adds additional security to government's assumption of liability.

Mr. Speaker, I'm treading on familiar ground that my colleagues have addressed, but I want to reiterate that I do not see this as assuming unnecessary risk. It is part of the package required for the deployment of carbon capture and storage technology. In fact, liability currently remains the biggest question mark for industry. By assuming it, government is ensuring that these technologies are allowed to move forward.

I also recall earlier in our discussions on this issue that an hon. member raised some questions regarding Joffre, and I would like to make a comment. I believe this was a reference to the enhanced oil recovery project in the Joffre-Viking field east of Red Deer, a project which began in 1984 and as of 2009 has stored approximately 1 million tonnes of CO₂ over the past 25 years. Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that 25 years is a long time. We obviously have experience and familiarity with this technology. It is not new or unknown.

Incidentally, other jurisdictions have also been pursuing similar projects. Case in point: the United States has over 90 enhanced oil recovery projects in operation. Most of these are based in the basin west of Texas, and others are found in Wyoming and Mississippi. In fact, CO₂ enhanced oil recovery makes up approximately 37 per cent of all U.S. enhanced oil recovery operations, and that number is expected to grow. I would suggest that many operators are comfortable with this technology.

In addition to the countries I visited in Europe earlier in the year and the U.K. and Norway, today I also met with His Excellency the Japanese Ambassador. He brought up the fact that Japan is also very interested in what Alberta and Canada are doing with regard to carbon capture and storage.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by saying that I recognize that carbon capture and storage technologies are not the singular answer to a clean energy future and climate change. I do however believe that it definitely has a key part in a secure future for Alberta as a global energy supplier. It is also uniquely suited to our province in the sense that it creates further opportunities to better develop our conventional reserves through enhanced oil recovery. I know communities like mine in the Pembina cardium field certainly look forward to opportunities that would exist with enhanced oil recovery.

Members, I would encourage all of you to support this bill as I think it will make great progress for our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it is in order, I would move to adjourn debate on this bill so that we can proceed with Bill 28 very briefly and that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona might be able to make comments on Bill 28 at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 28

Electoral Divisions Act

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to members of the Assembly for allowing me an opportunity to get up and speak on this issue. While in Committee of the Whole this House passed an amendment to this act, Bill 28, to rename the riding of Dunvegan-Central Peace to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. As members know, I was not in the House when that vote was taken, as I believed it was more appropriate to recuse myself for that particular decision.

As well, members may also know that I spoke out in opposition to the renaming of the riding to Calgary-Klein, so I have to say that in considering coming forward to speak positively about the change with respect to Dunvegan-Central Peace, I was somewhat conflicted because it appears somewhat hypocritical on the face of it. Nonethe-

less, I concluded after considering it that it was such an important honour that I thought that the decision of the House warranted comment.

On behalf of my family, my brothers Paul and Stephen, my uncle Bruce Notley, my children Ethan and Sophie, I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to my colleagues in this Legislature for the honour bestowed upon my father in his memory. You should see me at a grade 6 graduation. It's much like this, actually.

Dad's first commitment was to the NDP. He was present when the party was formed. He ran as a candidate in the first election after the party was formed. He left law school to take on the role of provincial secretary when he was 23 or 24. He was elected leader of the party at the age of 28, and after finishing in fourth place in the area of Edson-Hinton, he was elected by the people of Spirit River-Fairview in 1971 at the ripe old age of 32.

My mom and my dad met when my mom started volunteering for the NDP. She finally attracted his attention when she made a deal with him. She would find candidates in Calgary at the last minute if he would take her out on a date. She did, so he did, and the rest was history.

I first met my dad a month after I was born. He'd been in Saskatchewan managing an election campaign for the NDP at the time. When my first brother was born, it only took a week for my dad to make it back from his political assignment. By the time my youngest brother was born, his time management skills, along with my mother's growing annoyance on this issue, had grown to the point where he was actually there for the big event.

My father's commitment to the NDP came from his passionate belief that the values and the policies of the party, simply put, would help the greatest number of Albertans the greatest. He was concerned about our environment and the future of environmental protection in the face of oil and gas development. He believed that Albertans needed to share in the wealth created by our resources, the resources Albertans owned. He actually wanted to see Alberta develop an equity interest in the oil sands, a decision that, had we made it at the time, would see Alberta's wealth from its oil and gas resources far exceed that of Norway or any other oil-producing jurisdiction in the world, rather than falling as far behind as we have.

He cared deeply for our system of public health, and he fought against the introduction of user fees and advocated for greater care for our seniors and for a provincially run pharmacare system. He advocated passionately for the interests of Alberta's most disadvantaged. Indeed, the day before his untimely death he had pressed the government on their treatment of a young indigenous youth who had committed suicide after years in foster care.

As much as the NDP tends to be seen as an urban party, my father was a tireless advocate for the residents of rural Alberta. Having grown up on a dairy farm just west of Olds, he made repeated calls for the government to support the family farm and its long-term sustainability.

Throughout his career in this Legislature my father either sat alone in opposition or, at the very apex of his career, when he served as Leader of the Official Opposition, he benefited from the Herculean efforts of his caucus of one. Speaking entirely objectively, I can say that one-person caucuses can be surprisingly talented.

Although the profound imbalance between government and opposition during my father's time in this Assembly created an almost folk hero-like image, I know that my father believed deeply that a more even balance between parties would have improved public policy substantially. I think it is only after the fact that we learned how effectively he was able to fill the role of an opposition 20 times his size to bring about moderation and increased thoughtfulness in the agenda of the government at the time. I believe there

is a strong consensus that part of the reason he was able to achieve that was through his respect for this Assembly and his remarkable work ethic.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take just a bit of a moment to provide a slightly more informal picture of my father. People sometimes mistakenly associate the NDP with the notion of overspending. As we pointed out recently, a review of spending histories shows that NDP governments have actually balanced their budgets more often than any other political party in Canada over the course of the last 25 years. I think it's fair to say that had my father ever been elected Premier, he would have increased those numbers substantially.

On a personal level, his reputation for being tight with his money was legendary. There are copious stories about this particular personality trait of my father. However, I will share one with members of this Assembly, who may find, in addition to their shared history with my father on the basis of sitting as elected representatives in this Assembly, one other common cause with him. In particular, what I refer to is the likely level of annoyance experienced by government members opposite when they are forced to listen to me argue for more money for a worthwhile program in as public a forum as possible.

What happened was that I was going to college in Grande Prairie, and my father was travelling across the province doing public hearings on the issue of poverty. He went up to Grande Prairie. He was at the Grand Prairie motor inn, and I believe there were about 50 people there. It was sort of a hearing format, and everybody took turns talking about how their lack of money was creating hardship in their lives. He dutifully took notes, and the media was there, and it was a good event.

As the event was ending and people were just starting to file out, though, I stood up in the back row and said quite openly so everyone could hear: "Mr. Notley, I have a question. My father makes too much money, and I can't qualify for a student loan. We're into the third week of the month, and I don't have enough money to buy groceries, and I only have Premium crackers left in my cupboard. What should I do?" The staff who were with him at the time, both of whom ultimately ended up becoming members of this Assembly, Tom Sigurdson and Pam Barrett, pretty much fell over laughing. But my father, very concerned that the media was there, quickly rushed me out of the room in order to deal with my very public request at the time. Probably the thing that goes most to the heart of that particular characteristic of my father was that, bearing in mind that I'd just described how I only had Premium crackers left in my cupboard for the rest of the week, he pulled out a \$10 bill and gave it to me and said: "That should do it. Out with you." You can trust me. Had he become Premier, there would be no deficit right now.

I suspect that the members opposite could easily find that much in common with my dad. When they start to feel a bit irritated with my opposition efforts, it's arguable they come by that sentiment honestly, as did I when it comes to my origin of my advocacy tactics.

Joking aside, I want to emphasize how important the Peace Country was to my father. After spending usually two weeks away somewhere else in the province carrying the weight of provincial opposition on his shoulders, he would come home, meet with constituents, and then relax for an afternoon in our home overlooking the Peace River. Dad would walk for hours around the Peace River hills on the side of the valley, thinking through policies and composing speeches, followed loyally by our pony, Billy, who seemed to think he was more of a dog than a horse. In short, although my father's reputation was established across the province, his heart had taken root in the Peace Country just up the road from Dunvegan.

5:30

I would like to thank the many residents of the Peace Country and from across the province who sent letters to the boundaries commission in support of renaming Dunvegan-Central Peace after my father. I would especially like to thank Mandy Melnyk for her energetic campaigning on this issue as well as Eileen Coristine, Betty McArthur, and the Macklin family.

Once again, to my colleagues, I personally appreciate the recognition accorded to my father through the amendment included in this bill. Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Currie and also to all members who rose to speak in favour of this motion. I read their comments, and I very much appreciate them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think that is a beautiful note for us to end the afternoon on, and I would therefore request the permission of the House to adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:31 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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Wednesday evening, December 1, 2010

Issue 51e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 1, 2010

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate November 30: Mr. Chase]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this potentially final opportunity to speak on Bill 24.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, can you pause a moment? We've checked the record. Have you spoken? You must have. Yes. On the record.

Mr. Chase: You know what? I think I actually adjourned it yesterday. You're correct, Mr. Speaker. You can't fool the Speaker. Okay. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: According to the record the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity adjourned debate, and the hon. member for Drayton Valley spoke after him, so his turn has been taken.

From the opposition the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on Bill 24.

Mr. Hinman: On the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to get up and speak to this as there have been many frustrated opposition MLAs who haven't been able to speak on the different bills as you brought closure to them, seeing as how the government has been able to filibuster and use most of the time on this closure. They said that they refused to speak through the night, yet when they invoke closure, they immediately jump up and use the time. It's been disappointing. As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out, it certainly doesn't seem right.

Anyway, CO₂. Bill 24 perhaps could be one of the most expensive bills that we're going to pass here outside of Bill 17, the health care act. The number one question that, I guess, as elected representatives we need to ask is: are we spending our money wisely? Number two is: are we actually protecting the environment and being able to pass on the beautiful province to our next generation, not only environmentally but fiscally as well? I would have to say that on both those questions this bill fails the test. Environmentally there are so many other areas where we could and should be pointing that kind of money if we're really trying to look at protecting our environment and going forward in the future.

You know, in the 2008 election, when I was discussing it with the Premier and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, one of the companies that I talked about was E-T Energy, quite the innovative private company. I was able to go up to Fort McMurray earlier this year and actually have a visual of it from the air. It's a very small bit of area. The CEO has spent over 20 years, Bruce McGee, trying to develop this, and what he says on the bitumen up there: we are the lowest cost producers out there and holder of the industry's most environmentally friendly technology.

This is the type of innovation that the Governor General talked about that Albertans are capable of if we ensure that we have a level playing field and if we put in the proper rules and regulations that direct that innovation to know that they're going to have that opportunity. They use electricity to heat the ground and extract the oil, and other than the fuel used to create the electricity, there are no more incremental gases after that point as they extract the oil from the bitumen. It's quite an innovative and exciting area.

I know that the University of Calgary has been working on bioenzymes.

My point, Mr. Speaker, that I want to bring up on this and why it's so important to realize these things is that, you know, if you actually put the proper regulations in place or have the proper vision on where we want to go, there are such great opportunities going forward.

Back in 2000, when the government had an opportunity, there was not near the interest in the oil sands. That was the time to set the regulations and even perhaps say: "You know what? We want to see some new innovative technologies that don't use SAGD or settling ponds." The people were out there moving and trying to develop that, but because we didn't put the proper regulations in on water use, consumption, and other areas, it was full steam ahead, no pun intended. The SAGD projects continued to come forward because that was the best at the time and the quickest way to extract it. Their growth was quite alarming to many environmentalists and those people that were against the oil sands to begin with.

When we look at CO₂ and the controversial question of whether or not this is the best way to spend taxpayers' money and the most environmental, economical, and clean way to go forward, I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the answer is no on these areas. Just the extra energy that we're going to need to generate purely to compress and pipe and then pump down into the ground is 25 to 30 per cent. Many people talk about the energy shortage and the fact, you know, that we have this dilemma. Then why would we increase our consumption by such a huge amount when there are so many other ways to look at reducing it?

I've spoken many times about the importance of going to low-carbon fuels, and of course the lowest and the cleanest fuel is natural gas, or methane, a one carbon fuel. There's no reason why we can't look and ensure that we can point in that direction. I think Ronald Reagan coined it best: tax more what you want less of and less what you want more of. We can look at that. It's one thing to put a higher tax on high-carbon fuels, a lower tax on low-carbon fuels, if that's the direction we want to go.

You know, it's been a few years since I've checked the stats, but I believe there are 10 million litres of propane that are extracted and sold in the province here. That's more than enough to run our vehicles and our industry on. Natural gas, with the new technology and fracking: we've gone from what we thought was depleting in, you know, five years, 15 years at the height in July 2008 to where we're now talking 100 years again of this clean fuel.

What is the tax structure setup and what are the incentives on where we should be going on this? This CO₂ bill doesn't address that. It doesn't create a level playing field and allow the entrepreneur to get ahead by being what I want to call economically smart with their investment dollars. What this is doing is actually creating a surge in spending, and people wanting to trace and get after that say: well, if we could get, you know, 20 per cent or 30 per cent of our project paid for by the government, then this is a great way to move ahead.

These are all areas of concern, Mr. Speaker, on why Bill 24 should not be passed at this time. You know, the Government House Leader has said that we've talked at great length to this. He says that

we're filibustering and wasting our time here and that we need to put in time allocations when these bills have barely scratched the surface. If we were really serious about a democratic process and serious about the future of Alberta, this is the type of bill that should be going to a committee.

It astounded me that this government saw the wisdom in withdrawing Bill 29 and saying: "You know what? We need to consult with Albertans. We need to do a little bit more. We haven't done a good enough job." Well, Bill 24 fits in that same category, and there would be nothing that would please me more than the government's Energy minister getting up and saying: you know, maybe we don't have this right. We don't need to pass this bill this evening or tomorrow in order for business to carry on in the province.

7:40

That's the other striking problem with all of these bills: Bill 17, Bill 24, Bill 26. They've brought them forward in this short session of the fall sitting and said that we need to ram these through like there's a forest fire, and we couldn't put up a plane unless we passed legislation to say: well, it's okay to go fight it. Business would carry on. It would actually carry on probably in a more sensible nature if we didn't pass this bill. But when this bill gets passed, what the government has done is say that we're going to spend money on this area because this is the technology, this is the direction, this is the hope for the future on CO₂ storage.

I would argue, just as I did with the new royalty framework, that it's going to cost us a lot. The longer it takes us to realize this, the more it's going to cost Albertans and the Alberta taxpayers before we back out and say: "You know what? Let's just have a level playing field."

If, in fact, there are companies like EnCana that want to run an enhanced oil system and set it up, let them do it. Let's go back to what worked so well with the development of the oil sands, and that was an accelerated capital cost allowance. They looked at it. I've forgotten the bill, whether it's under section 41 under the mining act. What they did is they incorporated the mining in Fort McMurray under the mining act rather than under oil and gas, and that changed the whole dynamics of all of a sudden becoming economically viable. We should be looking at that and new technology of being able to have all of those same breaks if, in fact, they could come up with some new ideas.

Like I say, E-T Energy is very exciting in the development that they've got there. There's some research that's gone on for some time at the U of C on bioenzymes and being able to actually inject enzymes that would release the bitumen from the sand that, again, is very clean. The toe-to-heel air injection has been developed. Again, there's a huge leap forward in new ideas on how we can continue to extract and use our energy here but in a very – what would I say? – enhanced environmental way. This is a huge step forward than what we've been doing with SAGD and with the actual mining and extraction that goes on there in the tailings ponds. Yet Bill 24 doesn't address any new, innovative ideas on what we're going to do here in the province.

One of the other problems, though, Mr. Speaker – and I've spoken on this several times, but I feel it's important to mention here at the last time being able to address this – is what we're actually doing with the pore space in the ground. With the province stepping in and saying that we now are declaring ownership on all of this area, we truly are infringing on property rights and, again, passing on that liability to the property owners rather than going through negotiations and being able to stop it, like they've done in several European countries at this point. They talk about Australia, Germany, and these areas that are doing it, but again if you look at the ripple effect,

there are many areas also where they're stopping it because they're looking at the risk and realizing that: oh, there are some consequences here that we haven't looked at.

The liability, of course, is the big one, and I do hope that the government is right on this, that we don't see it coming down the road where it becomes a liability. We have so many gas and service stations where we've spent millions and millions of dollars because the owners have moved on, and this CO₂ is going to last a lot longer than the companies that put it down there.

It's interesting. I didn't have time to finish looking up the stats, because I wanted to do that, but I think that there are only, like, 17 companies that are still on the Dow after 100 years. We're talking of 100 years as a start point on storing this CO₂. I've referred to the article in *The Economist* where they figure that in 100 years 63 per cent of the CO₂ will escape at a rate of just 1 per cent per year out of the ground. To think that we've spent all this money and all this infrastructure on a temporary program for 63 to 100 years, it just really concerns me. Why this government would be so anxious to say, "This is where we're leading in the world; we're leading in CO₂ storage" – again, it's kind of misleading. We talk so much about CO₂ storage and so little about enhanced oil recovery.

This government has talked about, you know, that this \$2 billion is going to be leveraged out to \$25 billion. I have to question that. If we kept that \$2 billion and put it in another area, what would we have? Fifty billion dollars? A hundred billion dollars? I just really have a problem when the government says, "Oh, this is a great business to invest in" and then puts the taxpayers' money in there. Whether you call it a Swan Hills debacle or a magnesium plant that just has a spark at the start, and then if you don't have your fire going, it's too late.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, fails to address the real problem. This is feel-good, put a bandage on it rather than actually curing the problem. Like I say, I'm disappointed that the government has refused to look into this or to, actually, you know, like we can do in committee, bring in some experts. Probably the most important thing that we could and should do is to have a world-class symposium, bring in the experts, and say, "What are the solutions? What are the problems? Do we really have the scientific information?" and not just take it from one source. Let's have peer review, and let's have the other side, the pros and the cons, who are against it.

I've spoken many times about – I don't know what the proper word is – the CO₂ conspiracy that's gone on. I mean, everything from the hockey stick, that a Canadian was the one who discovered that – you know what? This has not passed the test. The government or the courts in England were the first to strike it down when it actually came to court and had to have a decision on the actual facts. So with all of the things that have happened with global warming – the papers that went out but were never properly peer reviewed, the hysteria, the fearmongering that went on – we've made a knee-jerk reaction in saying that this is what we need to do, that this is where we need to spend billions of dollars to store this CO₂.

Mr. Speaker, the answers are not there. We're passing the bill here without the proper information, without the due diligence, without the consultation of experts, and all of those other ones that are out there, and this bill should be withdrawn by the government for the people of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: We have under Standing Order 29(2)(a) five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You've pointed out examples of failure: the plant up north that was supposed to get rid of toxic waste; you talked

about MagCan. Do you believe that the potential waste of taxpayers' dollars, as you see it, will go far beyond the \$2 billion initial investment? Have you concern about the cost of keeping the CO₂ sequestered and the liability associated with it?

Mr. Hinman: I really appreciate the question, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. This is the problem. This, I believe, is going to be the biggest boondoggle that this province has ever supported. Once it's put in there, absolutely; I mean, there's no question. Yes, they say that for one, two, maybe three decades we're going to claim that these companies are accountable for it. You've spoken many times about the orphan wells, that the funding isn't there to really cover those, so the taxpayers need to cover this. This is a real concern on pushing these projects ahead, incentivizing them the way we have without really having those answers on the costs, the liabilities, the environmental damages that could happen. I just do not believe it's worth the risk. Again, like I say, if the risk is that the CO₂ is raising the Earth's temperature, then there are so many other areas.

Again, when you look at changing a coal-fired plant to a combined-cycle natural gas plant, I believe that it's a 40 per cent reduction in CO₂. Like I say, if we want to be innovative and look at those things, there are so many areas where we could and should direct this money, whether it's, you know, to put it into research and development of other ideas or to give tax incentives for people who can come up with an idea. The question is: is there a better place to spend this money? I truly believe there is.

7:50

The second question is that if we're going to spend that money, let's do it on actual research, on a real symposium where we bring the best of the world here, to Alberta, and say: what are we going to do about it? I mean, the government just spent \$25 million to create prion research here in Edmonton. It's leading the world in the research to actually come up with solutions for misfolding proteins, whether that's Alzheimer's, BSE, chronic wasting disease. That's what we should be doing: looking for some real research to solve this. Instead, what we're doing is saying, "Oh, let's stuff this into the closet; let's put this into the ground." Then we can say that all is well when nothing has been solved. How are we going to reduce and be more energy efficient when, as I say, immediately we raise the consumption of energy by 25 to 30 per cent? There are just so many areas.

Hon. member, I appreciate the question. I think that it's a real concern. The liability and the cost are things that we should be addressing and not simply saying: oh, we've got to ram ahead; we've got to do this because the world is looking at us. The tailings ponds are what they're looking at. It's not the CO₂. It's the tailings ponds if it's the bitumen and the area. It's the number of cars that we're driving on gasoline and diesel. Could we and should we be changing it to propane and methane, compressed natural gas? There are so many more exciting areas that we could be addressing, but we're failing to do that.

I hope that answers your question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In terms of all the vehicle emissions, then, we have the belching from our coal-fired generation plants, which produce considerably more CO₂ than what is currently being produced.

Do you have concerns about the government being back in the business of being in business, and do you believe that the companies

producing the CO₂ should be required to have matching funds? The people of Alberta have laid out \$2 billion. What are the expectations for companies, in your mind?

Mr. Hinman: Another excellent question. Those other companies are matching or actually putting more money forward, I've been told. I'm not sure, though, if they're spending the government's money first and then theirs. But that's a real concern. Again, I've had so many people inundate my office with the connections of these companies, North West Upgrading, with this government and saying: why did they get this? I mean, what are the merits? That's another whole area on those 50 companies. Why did the government just pick four? If they had a tax incentive where they'd say, you know, "You get to keep your royalty," like they did with the bitumen, "at 1 per cent or 3 per cent until you pay out," it would be very different than actually giving them the money.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to, I guess, give my final argument on this bill. It's always nice to have an opportunity to give the final argument on a bill. I didn't have an opportunity on Bill 17 but will do so now with Bill 24. Actually, on Bill 17 I only had a chance to speak on the amendment, not on the actual bill. But I do now for Bill 24, and I'm thankful for that.

I have many issues with Bill 24. One of the biggest issues I have is with what was mentioned earlier, the government getting back into the business of being in business. Although the bill is about liability with regard to the CCS project, the whole concept of CCS and this idea that government is going to be giving some of the largest corporations in Alberta \$2 billion in grants over however many years to pump CO₂ into the ground is a shameful abuse of taxpayers' money. Of course, they like to say, "Oh, we'll make royalties off the use of carbon capture and storage as it's used for enhanced oil recovery." Well, you know, that's a logic I would expect to hear from the two members behind me. It's a logic that says that government should somehow be in the business – well, I mean, we may as well just have a state-run oil company or something like that if we're going to do that. If what we're going to do is say, "Look, we're going to start funding businesses so that we can get more royalties," then why wouldn't we just take over the businesses entirely and just get all the profits.

The reason is because in Alberta we've taken a different approach. I think it's a business-friendly approach, and it's a better approach up until this point, with some exceptions along the way, that government should not be in the business of being in business. Where to place capital, what technology to use to get oil out of the ground, when that capital should be distributed or utilized or invested and when it is not to be invested, when it's a wait-and-see approach, et cetera: all those decisions need to be made and should be made by businesses, not by government. To invest \$2 billion in this technology or in this initiative is to go back on that principle.

We've said many times that this government over the last several years has progressively become more of a left-of-centre party, a party that believes more in government intervention, in the government funding projects, funding corporations, grants to corporations, and grants to specific businesses instead of what a conservative, right-of-centre, free-market government would believe in, which is leveling the playing field for all businesses so they're playing on the same playing field so that the best, the cream of the crop, rises to the top and the businesses that are not any good fail and fail for good reason. That's what free-market principles are about.

When you pick winners and losers, like this government is doing, when you manipulate and you interfere in the marketplace, like this government has done with this bill with CCS and with other projects – you know, we hear all the announcements for all the corporations that have been given handouts by this government – it's just ridiculous. This government should be looking at: "How do we make the playing field for businesses more competitive? How do we do that?" If we're interested in doing so, what we should be looking at is our tax rates. We should be looking at accelerated capital cost allowances, which would arrive at the same policy objective if it is to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Well, why not? If you want people to invest in massive pieces of equipment, large pieces of equipment, then why wouldn't you implement tax incentives for all of industry to use? That would make it more tax advantageous and more profitable to buy new equipment to be used, say, in CCS.

But they don't do that. No. They pick winners and losers. They say: we're going to spend \$2 billion, and we're going to pick who we give it to. It's a very left-wing, socialist mentality, and it goes against the principles that this province, I think, has been founded on, which is that we are supposed to be and we like to call ourselves a meritocracy. A meritocracy is one in which the playing field is kept level, and the best businesses, the best entrepreneurs, the best ideas succeed on their own merits, not because government has interfered and has invested money in their specific business because they happen to have the best lobbyists.

I was in government for two years. I know what it's like to be lobbied by these corporate interests. You know what? They can come up with some very compelling arguments as to why they should have money invested in their particular project or company. Very compelling. It's not a slippery slope. There is no slope. It's a straight-down cliff. Once you cross that line and you decide, you know, that we're going to pick winners and losers, you're automatically disadvantaging one business over another. You're automatically interfering in the marketplace, and it's wrong. It's not the way to go. That's just on the \$2 billion invested in this piece.

8:00

Now, the next piece that I disagree with on this is the priorities. Not only are we in the business of being in business by doing this; we also have decided that this \$2 billion is more important over however many years it is. Maybe it's 10 years it's going to be spent over; I don't know. It's unclear to this point. But we're also spending this money, and meanwhile we've got other needs that I believe and I think Albertans believe are far more important.

We have a deficit, a cash shortfall, of \$7.7 billion. Part of that \$2 billion should be apportioned to that to at least decrease the amount of our deficit and debt and lack of sustainability fund that we're going to be leaving to our kids because we can't control our spending right now. There's one example. How about schools? We still have a school infrastructure shortage. Shouldn't part of that \$2 billion – obviously, not all of it but certainly a portion of it, even just \$100 million or \$200 million of it – be invested over that 10 years in new schools? That's more important to Albertans. How about more health care staff? Certainly not all \$2 billion is needed, but isn't it better served there, where we have an emergency room crisis, where we have a family doctor shortage? Yeah.

It's about priorities, and this is just simply not a priority for Albertans. They say that we need to do it because our customers in the United States need it. They demand it. They demand that we have the CCS. They demand to see that we're becoming more green. Well, good grief. There has been a total rejection of that thought process, of that principle in the last election down in the United States. That type of socialist mentality, the greenwashing

that was going on down there: that agenda was rejected out of hand. Now even Democrats down there are rejecting cap and trade and any of this green agenda that's going on with regard to massive wealth transfers and spending massive amounts of money on government-sponsored pet projects to artificially reduce greenhouse gases. That's been rejected.

Now people are saying: if we're going to go green, let's do it smart. Let's invest in things like mass transit. Let's invest in things like tax incentives to promote green retrofits and things like that. Let's do practical things that are actually going to help people in practical ways rather than pouring money into what they believe is a sinkhole and literally in this case is, essentially, a big hole in the ground. It's priorities. It is such a waste of money to do what we're doing in this regard, and I don't think Albertans will stand for it.

I don't think that this bill will do anything because I think at the end of the day this agenda will also be rejected by the people of Alberta. They will say: we do not want to spend money on this. And guess what? When the government pulls the plug on this CCS project down the road, whether it's a PC government or a Wildrose government or some other government, when that plug gets pulled because the people of Alberta demand it, \$100 million or \$200 million or \$1 billion or however much has been spent will have been spent for no reason. A total waste of money: that is what will happen. I guarantee it. You heard it today. Five years from now we will look back and say: we wasted \$500 million; oops. That's what it's going to be. There will be no fruits shown for doing this.

Now, that's not to say that CCS as a technology is not a good thing. It can be used for good purposes. It can be used for enhanced oil recovery, and when it's economically feasible to do so, corporations should spend their own money, make their own investments in using it for enhanced oil recovery, not put out their hands and get massive subsidies from the government of Alberta. That is not appropriate. It goes against everything that I thought Albertans and the Progressive Conservatives, at least three to four years ago, stood for. Ralph Klein: we're getting out of the business of being in business. And they did so. Well, yeah. Apparently it didn't happen, or it was forgotten in 2006, when new management came in.

The point is that on a go-forward basis I ask and urge the government to please quit pouring more money into corporations with grants. These are nothing but vote-buying schemes. They've got to stop. We don't need to be investing money in companies. It's got to stop. I think that the quicker we do that in Alberta, the quicker we will be able to balance our budget, the quicker we will be able to realize that we should be focusing our monies on leveling the playing field and creating an economic climate where all companies with good ideas can come and invest.

There might be a company out there that would have invested this money in CCS by themselves, but perhaps they won't now because their competitors, another big company in Alberta, have a hundred million dollar head start on them on the technology. Perhaps they won't invest in it anymore. When you interfere with the market, that's what happens, especially interfering in a way that is unnecessary, in a way that pits businesses against one another, in a way that picks winners and losers. It's a totally inappropriate, completely inappropriate, use of taxpayer funds.

For that reason and for the other reasons stated here tonight, I will not be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. member, for your speech. I would just like to ask whether the hon.

member believes that climate change or global warming is, in fact, caused by human activity and what he feels about books such as *The Deniers* by Lawrence Solomon. I know the hon. member is incredibly passionate when he speaks about this area, so I would just like some context about what he thinks about human actions causing climate change.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. Well, I appreciate the question. We talked about this a little bit during the all-night session that we had. I made it very clear. We have a very large diversity of opinion in our caucus on that. We have free votes, and we vote according to the way we feel. I know that one of our members doesn't feel that global warming is in any way caused, materially anyway, by man-made emissions.

Personally, my view is this: I think that global warming is occurring. I think that man is contributing to it through their emissions. I think that it has been significantly overblown. I think it has been significantly exaggerated, and I believe that's the vast majority of public opinion that's there. I think that we need to cut our greenhouse gas emissions, but I think that we need to do so in a way that is practical, that is going to result in utility for average people. Things like mass transit would be an example of doing it in ways that are going to decrease pollutants like NO_x and SO_x and different particulates, et cetera.

These are the things that I think we should be focusing on: retrofits for solar panels to make our houses more energy efficient, things that are actually going to make us more efficient, not random sinkholes like pumping CO₂ into the ground, which I don't think is going to do anything to solve our problems because it gives no utility to anybody. It's not advantageous to any Albertan. Not only that, but the money could be spent so much better on projects that would actually help workers to get to their jobs faster, help people to have lower utility bills, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. If I was going to spend \$2 billion on environmental initiatives, that's where I would put it.

Now, of course, I don't think the people of Alberta want us to put it there right now. I think they want us to balance our budget, I think they want to make sure we have the right amount of schools, and I think they want our emergency rooms to work. That's where I think it needs to be put.

8:10

With regard to global warming, I think that if you look at the new report from the Royal Society in the United Kingdom, they do an excellent job of putting together a list of things in the global warming scientific field that are settled, things that are still being debated – there's some agreement, but generally it's still being debated – and then things that are unsettled entirely. Great report. Every member should read it.

That's not to say that they're infallible, that they're completely correct and that no other scientist has an argument. The fact of the matter is that there is no doubt that even the IPCC themselves and the Royal Society say that global warming over the next 100 years will be anywhere from 1.4 degrees to 7 degrees. Well, that is quite a difference. They don't know how much effect the sunspots are having and cloud cover and a whole bunch of other things that have really kind of thrown the doors to questioning open.

Hon. member, in answer to your question I do believe that the Earth is warming. I do believe that man is a contributing cause to that warming. I do think that that contributing cause has been greatly exaggerated and that governments have way overstepped

their bounds, way overspent, and have made some very poor economic and social decisions that are going to have ramifications for years to come.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have zero seconds.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on the bill.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to join the debate on third reading of Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. As mentioned in second reading debate and Committee of the Whole, Bill 24 creates the regulatory clarity that is needed for Alberta to pursue carbon capture and storage technology. Specifically, this bill will allow the province to accept long-term liability for the carbon dioxide injected into the ground.

In addition, this act would establish a fund to pay for the ongoing costs of monitoring carbon capture projects. It is important to note that this fund would also cover the costs of any remediation of the CCS project if required. In addition, this fund will not be financed by the Alberta taxpayer but, rather, from the carbon capture and storage operators themselves. This legislation is needed to allow us to aggressively move forward with our carbon reduction strategy.

As members of this House know, in 2008 this government committed \$2 billion towards the development and implementation of carbon capture and storage technology. Of this, \$440 million was slated to be spent over the next two years. Mr. Speaker, this is a long-sighted investment, and it has helped to place Alberta in the global forefront of carbon capture and storage development. It demonstrates to the world that Alberta is committed to reducing its carbon footprint. Moreover, Alberta is committed to developing technology that could be utilized all over the world.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the oil sands are not the largest source of carbon dioxide in the world even though many groups would state otherwise. Rather, the bulk of carbon dioxide emissions come from the generation of electricity, specifically through the burning of coal. Coal is cheap, plentiful, and reliable. However, traditional methods for its consumption have been carbon intensive. Carbon capture and storage technology will allow us to more cleanly utilize this energy source while limiting the impact of carbon on our environment.

As the Member for Calgary-Glenmore commented on SAGD, I was left in kind of a quandary to figure out if he's not believing the technology of SAGD or just where he was going with that. The SAGD process itself can be completely carbon neutral if you're generating electricity with the natural gas that's burned and using the steam as a by-product to bring bitumen up from the ground. So I was kind of lost with the comments that were being made over there, but to say that SAGD is not a proven technology really left me in the dust.

In addition to carbon capture and storage, this bill also has the ability to help us expand our conventional oil and gas extraction process. Rather than pumping water or chemicals into our wells to extract oil, through CCS we are able to use a byproduct from the consumption of energy, carbon dioxide, to bring oil back up. CO₂ is a very effective agent to displace oil in porous rock, allowing us to more efficiently recover our natural resources.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council estimates that using captured CO₂ in enhanced oil recovery will help produce an additional 1.4 billion barrels of oil. Let me be clear. That is oil that could not be produced without using enhanced oil recovery. That incremental production is expected to generate up to \$25 billion in additional provincial royalties and taxes.

It almost reminds me of when you've got three rounds left in your barley field. If you put in three gallons of diesel fuel, you can finish combining, but why do that? It's an investment in more carbon. You might as well as leave those three rounds out there. This gives us the ability to extract up to 70 per cent of the conventional oil that is still left in the ground. To me, Mr. Speaker, and the people I represent that is a great investment. It's a terrific environmental and financial return on a \$2 billion investment. Before this technology can be used, however, we need to have the proper legislation in place, legislation like Bill 24. As mentioned, this bill will create environmental protections needed to ensure that our carbon capture and storage projects are safe now and safe in the future.

Without a doubt the most important aspect of this is the creation of the stewardship fund. Mr. Speaker, carbon capture and storage is a safe and proven technology that will have long-term benefits for this province, but as wise stewards it falls to us to ensure that Albertans remain protected from any eventuality. This means we must remain vigilant and monitor these projects to ensure they are not leaking carbon back into the environment.

I heard a comment the other night somewhere along the lines that we were going to collect 1 per cent of 2 per cent, which worked out to .001 per cent, but that if we had a leak, that would then blanket the Earth, and we would be in danger. Well, if it was such a minuscule amount to begin with, I don't see how the leak would ever be a danger, but I'll leave that as it is.

Let me be clear on two points here. Leakage is most unlikely to occur, and even if there is leakage, it would be very slow over time. Still, we must be prudent, so in the unlikely event of a leak there needs to be money in place to repair the project and limit the impact on the environment. Mr. Speaker, we have similar policies in place for our conventional oil and gas wells as well as for our oil sands projects. Bill 24 would simply continue this history of long-term environmental stewardship.

Mr. Speaker, like our conventional oil and gas reclamation fund, the carbon capture and storage stewardship fund will not be financed by the Alberta government. Rather, it will be paid for by the carbon capture and storage operators themselves. Industry will certainly benefit from the implementation of these projects, and they will also accept responsibility for the reclamation and monitoring costs associated with them.

The reduction of carbon in our atmosphere is important to this government, and while Alberta may not be the leading cause of carbon emissions in the world, it has stepped up and become a world leader in its reduction. We have done this by investing in carbon capture and storage, a technology that has the potential to reduce carbon dioxide not only in Alberta but all over the world. This is yet another example of how Alberta leads the way in environmental protection.

8:20

Mr. Speaker, as has been stated before, Bill 24 creates the regulatory clarity on carbon capture which is required by industry. The amendments in this bill are required to facilitate the game-changing technology of carbon capture and storage. In effect, this legislation will set the stage for the implementation of this technology. I'd like to reiterate that in no way did these amendments change the definition of land ownership. Companies will still be required to negotiate with landowners for surface access to their land and will be compensated fairly.

With respect to these issues of liability I would stress that before applicants are given access by the minister and the Energy Resources Conservation Board, they must demonstrate that the project will not impact resources such as oil, gas, and coal. The province

accepting long-term liability for the injected CO₂; it is the responsible thing to do. There will be numerous measures in place to ensure the CO₂ is secure and has been for years before the government will accept liability for it.

As our population and economy continue to grow, energy demand will continue to rise. We know it is not a question of whether energy will continue to be developed but how it can be developed in a cleaner, more responsible way. Carbon capture and storage is one tool in the tool box to fight emissions, and it is a game changer in reducing large volumes of emissions.

Mr. Speaker, governments around the world are exploring ways to support CCS, but Alberta is the first jurisdiction in Canada to move forward with legislative amendments to help facilitate this new technology. Alberta's spirit to achieve in many things, including CCS, will reinforce Alberta's image as a responsible energy producer. Governments world-wide are grappling with how to best deal with emissions.

The International Energy Agency, IEA, recently released a report outlining where 16 countries around the world are at in their pursuit of legal and regulatory requirements for this new technology. This document shows that we're not the only ones pursuing regulatory clarity. It shows that CCS is considered a viable technology world-wide, and many countries are moving forward with changes to facilitate it. CCS has long been a key component of the province's climate change strategy. The proposed changes to this act are necessary to ensure Alberta's continued leadership in CCS and responsible energy development, and it is an initiative that all Albertans can be proud of.

In conclusion, I am pleased to recommend to all of my colleagues to stand with me in support of Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Mr. Hinman: I'm pleased to be able to ask the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod a question. Being a former reeve, I know he's in touch with farmers, but his analogy – I'm sorry – went way over my head. I have never heard of the government needing to go out to farmers and say: here's some extra money to harvest the last three rounds of your field.

What is very interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, is that, in fact, this government is going to oil and gas companies. I understand that 70 per cent of the oil is generally left in the ground. They're not able to extract it. That's why enhanced oil recovery is so exciting for many of these companies. But is he really going to tell me that these oil companies wouldn't go in after that if, in fact, it wasn't economically viable? What farmer would ever leave 70 per cent of his crop in the field and say: oh, we want the government to give us a subsidy on our fuel so we can go out and get the last 70 per cent. I am just astounded with the analogy, to think that farmers would have to be encouraged by government with taxpayers' money to go out and harvest the last three rounds, let alone 70 per cent of the field. It's backwards. I'd like for him to please clarify why he thinks the government should subsidize industry to go get what they're actually producing. If, in fact, it was economically viable, they would go after it and extract it on their own, just as the farmer finishes the field on his own.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for asking that question. As many of you have

probably realized, that's not the first thing that went over his head. Regardless of that point, the analogy I was making is for the Alberta government. If we have the ability to extract \$25 billion more in royalties and taxes because of the 70 per cent that is left in the ground, then a \$2 billion investment, to me, is very good money spent to access that \$25 billion. I have a hard time with the math that the hon. member has done over there, but the comparison was not to say that government would pay for the farmers' fuel. It was to say that any farmer is going to go out and buy that last bit of fuel so he could finish harvesting his crop.

Now, I hope I've gone slow enough and clearly enough that that clarifies it for the hon. member. I'm sure it has because he is also a farmer, and I believe that his common sense has been fighting to come forward right now and think about this logically. Also, we are in opposition, so we have to have those comments back and forth. I can see that he's chomping at the bit to jump back up.

Mr. Mason: You will be in opposition.

Mr. Berger: Pardon me? He's over there with you, Brian.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair.

Mr. Berger: Yes. Anyway, I hope that generally puts it in perspective for the member.

I do have to say, Mr. Speaker, that as members of this Assembly we are here to do the best for all Albertans, not just one, another, or three over here or there. In my job representing the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, I feel that an investment in the future of our oil extraction, when you look at 70 per cent of conventional oil still left in the ground, the way of extracting it through carbon as opposed to using water, like I would assume some people are saying is acceptable across the floor – I think this is a very wise use of carbon. It may take a little bit of incentive to say: "Here. There is that capability of withdrawing that much more in royalties." Over time that money will be well spent.

There was also another comment earlier on about investing in pipelines. I'm not sure if the hon. member would like to take out a map, but I would think he might find that there are quite a few pipelines already buried in Alberta that are no longer in use that could be utilized for moving carbon around. We're not talking about taking it from the vehicles and that type of thing. We're talking about single-source emitters, where it can be easily captured, sent down the pipe, sent to a hole that's no longer producing, pumped down. It releases the oil, brings the oil up. I'm having a hard time understanding why that would not be attractive to the hon. member . . . [interjections]

Mr. Hinman: I'll tell you if you sit down.

Mr. Berger: Actually, I have the floor right now, so I'm not sure that I really would like to sit down.

There are the comments coming out of the hon. member that he did not understand it, so maybe I should go through it once more very slowly. I can do this. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Berger: Maybe we need to go through it again. [The time limit for questions and comments expired] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want a couple of things on the record. I have spoken to this before, but I would like to make sure that, again, I could say what I think. I listened to the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar this afternoon, and I wasn't exactly sure that I understood what I thought my questions were. What I can't understand is that further down the road, actually, we say that it's safe. What do we know in a hundred years? Do we know that we're going to have earth tremors? We have no idea. So I don't understand.

As has already been mentioned, there will be CO₂ escaping and all those sorts of things. I don't think anybody can predict the future. But I don't understand why the taxpayers of Alberta should be the insurance company. Why is there not an insurance company? Has Lloyd's of London been contacted? Would they be interested in making lots of money off an insurance policy that would protect Albertans from a catastrophe that could happen with CO₂?

8:30

It's one of the points that I have been very interested in because I really don't think that we should be the insurance company. We insure our homes. We insure our cars. We insure all kinds of things if we're famous. Betty Grable insured her legs, and I do believe that it was Lloyd's of London that insured her legs. However, the point is that that's what insurance companies are there for. They do insure against catastrophic events. If they looked at it and they decided that, yes, it was worth their taking that risk, then, no, we Albertans should not have to pay for that. Again, I don't see why we are accepting the liabilities.

Just a couple more things. The CCS operator would be responsible for any mitigation work during the operation and up until the closure certificate has been issued by the province. But the time between the closure and the transfer of the long-term liability remains undefined. I really have a problem with why the taxpayer should be picking up that part of it.

We've seen in other security funds in the oil and gas sector that there's a potential that the fund would not cover the full liability. Again, an insurance company is going to weigh the risks. They're going to decide how much they are going to insure it for. If we insure our homes, then, yes, we put a value on it, and if something happens, that's what we get paid for it. But a good insurance company – Lloyd's of London or any of the big fellows – would have done the work that I think should have been done.

I want to know what that insurance is going to cost me. Yes, it says that the companies are going to be putting money into it, but it's for the mitigation and for the work that they will do to make sure that the CO₂ is safe in the ground. It's got nothing to do with a catastrophic event that could happen further down the road. By doing that, the industry is not liable for any assumption of the risk being taken by the government. Again, why should we be taking the risk as Albertans? We're not going to be making any money other than probably a pittance in the royalties, so why should we take that risk? Why shouldn't we be paying an insurance company to take that risk?

Mr. Speaker, that's my main concern. I just don't see why we should be taking the risk when insurance companies are there for that purpose.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has brought up another extremely important concept that this government seems to miss. I'm just wondering if the hon.

Member for Lethbridge-East understands the foolishness of the answer given by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. That's caustic, CO₂, and you need stainless steel pipelines. It's people like that that really worry me. If the government is in charge and says, "Let's pump CO₂ through these pipelines," then we're going to have all of these liability costs. Are you aware that CO₂ must go through stainless steel pipelines in order to be transported to its destination of use?

Ms Pastoor: Yes, actually, I was aware of that. I would hope that we would not buy our pipe through China. Why I'm saying that is because I bought something the other day.

Mr. Lukaszuk: A blender?

Ms Pastoor: No, it wasn't a blender. Actually, it was just a stopper for the bathtub. Off that was a chain that said: stainless steel. It was from China. The very first time it was exposed to water, it rusted. That's not stainless steel. So, yes, I am aware of that.

I think another thing is that if all Albertans looked at a map of Alberta and saw all the pipelines and all of the holes that are dug – actually, there probably isn't one square inch that either isn't sold or leased to oil and gas companies – they would be absolutely astounded.

But to answer the question, yes. Let's just not buy it from China.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: I don't have any questions, Mr. Speaker. She has answered them all, unlike the other side.

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise and participate in this discussion today on Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. I'd like to take the opportunity to clarify some misconceptions about Alberta's leadership in carbon capture and storage. Alberta committed \$2 billion to CCS in 2008. That said, government did not take \$2 billion and put it in a bank account earmarked for this technology. This financial commitment, the largest in the world for a jurisdiction of around 4 million people, is a commitment that will be paid over the next 15 years or so.

The grant agreements government is pursuing with four project proponents ensure that payment to them is based on performance. None of that money will be given out until, first, the grant agreements are signed; secondly, the project meets the milestones outlined in the funding agreements; and, thirdly, the project submits a claim, which is verified. For the first 40 per cent of funding the Department of Energy receives security against the payment in the event it becomes refundable to the government. The next 20 per cent of funding will be paid upon commercial operations. The final 40 per cent of funding is paid out once over a 10-year period as CO₂ is captured and stored.

The reality is that this is a long-term commitment for the funding. There is no pot of \$2 billion that we can just reroute to something else. Let me be perfectly clear. The money in the \$2 billion CCS funding program has to be allocated through an open and transparent process. Industry is making investments into these projects based on this money, and any delay or reduction of funding would have a detrimental impact on this industry. It would impact our global

reputation as a leader in responsible energy development, it would impact our province's long-term economic development, and it would impact our commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that Alberta is not the only government providing funding to this leading-edge technology. The federal government has also committed money to some of the same projects, and earlier this week the Australian government, through its Global CCS Institute, also committed millions to one of the projects. We like to say that Alberta is a leader, and in this case we've shown we're leading as other governments are following our lead.

I'd also like to shed some light about the application of this technology. CCS is not a one-hit wonder. This technology is applicable at any large emitter of greenhouse gas emissions. That means it can be used at cement plants, bitumen upgraders, coal-fired electricity plants: any large industrial emitters. To refine and hone our skills in the technology provides an opportunity for Albertans – that's Albertans, this generation and those still to come.

The World Coal Association says that coal fuels over 40 per cent of the electricity world-wide. That means the potential for this many existing plants to be retrofitted with this technology is tremendous. It also means new plants that will be coming online can be built with this technology. This is not only a game-changing technology for Alberta, Mr. Speaker; this is a game-changing technology for the world. We will be at the forefront, developing the know-how, the knowledge, and the skills, and we will ultimately be sharing that knowledge around the globe as greenhouse gas emissions are a global challenge.

8:40

Maybe it's easy to be short sighted and say that we shouldn't do this and we shouldn't do that, and we should spend the money on something else, but Alberta and Albertans are not short sighted. Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago the government of the day invested in natural gas infrastructure to take that waste that was being burnt at flare stacks and put it into pipelines, had the foresight and didn't have a party saying: don't invest in this, and don't do that. Well, they invested, and today Alberta has reaped the benefits of that investment for 50 years.

Where would this province have been if it hadn't been for that pioneering ingenuity, if we hadn't spotted that oil gusher, Leduc No. 1, in 1947? The province and its people embraced that new industry, Mr. Speaker, and look where we are today. That one well changed the course of history for Alberta and for Canada.

Let's move forward a couple of decades. That's when Great Canadian Oil Sands, now Suncor, started operation of its mine in 1967. Thankfully, these members weren't there saying, "Let's not do that either," because we wouldn't be there either, would we? The government of Alberta was as instrumental in partnering with industry then as we are today, Mr. Speaker, to ensure this valuable resource was developed, and today we're reaping the benefits of that.

It's now 2010. To me, it seems clear that history has proven that we Albertans are doers. Mr. Speaker, we take the initiative and venture forth into territories where others are afraid to go. We take that initiative. We are the best place in the country to live, the best place to invest, and the best place to do business. We know that climate change is real and that something needs to be done about it, and we're going to do it.

The world needs energy, but the question of what type the world will use is continually evolving with the concept. For now it would appear that while the global appetite for energy is still increasing, so,

too, is the demand for energy that is also becoming cleaner. The pursuit of carbon capture and storage technology is a part of our government's response to both demands. Alberta's future as a global energy provider is linked to an ability to create clean energy. CCS will help us in our pursuit of wise energy production because the capture of carbon dioxide can and will be used in enhanced oil recovery. That process helps loosen the tough-to-reach oil from conventional reservoirs. Already, Mr. Speaker, oil companies are out there relooking at fields that have been closed up for a while to look at new and creative opportunities to help fuel the Canada of the future.

I would like to reiterate the point that CCS-related, enhanced oil recovery activities have the potential to create up to \$25 billion in added royalties for our province, not to mention the jobs, the income tax, and all of the other benefits that come from that activity. That figure does not come from the government of Alberta; it comes from the Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council's future report, and I believe they're right. It is that consortium of experts who developed the blueprint for how Alberta could best implement CCS. Bill 24 is the embodiment of recommendations from that council. This bill ensures government assumes the long-term liability for carbon capture and storage, and it provides clarity to industry with respect to the issue surrounding access to underground CO₂ storage.

Mr. Speaker, to move forward with CCS, our government needs to assume long-term liability for the injection of carbon dioxide. We are talking about permanent storage. Not long-term storage; we are talking about permanent storage. Accepting liability for the injected CO₂ will be contingent upon strict conditions related to the issuance of a closure certificate.

In my role as parliamentary assistant in Advanced Education and Technology I have visited with the researchers at the University of Alberta and Calgary. I have been to their labs and met with the research scientists, with the postdoctoral and graduate students that are working in this very exciting area. We have talked about the monitoring programs that they are testing as we speak today, testing to make sure that they can gauge the effectiveness of the storage of our carbon dioxide. Mr. Speaker, these are some of the brightest and best people in the world. They are out there today in our universities, in our colleges teaching our young people, working with them, and generating real opportunities not for investment just in the future but today.

Our young people, Alberta's young people are working today in labs, testing and studying the rock structures, the impacts that CO₂ has on different formations and different rocks. They're looking at how it can be stored underground. Mr. Speaker, this is state-of-the-art work being done right here in Alberta. Some of the finest research is being done, and we're doing it. We're helping to invest in it through these funds so that we can create the environment, the economic development of the future. This is a wonderful opportunity for our province.

Bill 24 indicates that companies would be required to comply with all closure criteria and site monitoring prior to receiving a certificate. The bill also ensures a postclosure stewardship fund will be developed and financed by industry. This fund will ensure that any postclosure issues for a given project will be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill address what steps government needs to take very clearly, I believe this technology is one of the keys to securing Alberta's place as a global energy leader, and I support this legislation and would ask every member of this House to support it as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have a question for the hon. member. First, I find it interesting that when this program was first announced, the government talked about how it was going to be used for emissions coming from oil sands production. Only when we tabled a document later on, after the program had already been announced and \$2 billion committed to it, did they finally realize that the intensity of emissions from oil sands production wasn't sufficient to make it effective, and it could be used, perhaps, for coal. That's the kind of foresight that went into this thing.

Does the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West really expect us to accept his characterization of this investment in carbon capture and storage as the equivalent of the Leduc discovery in 1947? Does he really expect us to see them as equivalent? Before he answers, Mr. Speaker, I will point out that, you know, it was oil companies that found oil that was already there. It wasn't something that was created by the government. I know that some believe that God created the oil for Social Credit and put it in the ground to help Social Credit. I think that was the prevailing view. Maybe the current view is that we're creating the CO₂ for the Progressive Conservatives. I don't know.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate those questions from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I think it shows that even the NDP were thinking about this and looking at ways that we could reduce carbon. The member mentioned that they had thought about using it on coal-fired electricity plants, and that's not a new idea. In fact, right now the carbon from coal-fired energy plants in North Dakota is being harnessed and has been for many, many years. It's piped to southern Saskatchewan, and it's utilized for enhanced oil recovery. So the idea that he had has been used for many, many years, and it's been unique.

You know, I do liken this to those other things in the past: the finding of oil in Leduc, the government's investment in natural gas infrastructure when people said they shouldn't do it – it has been one of the largest income sources for this province and our citizens – as well as the investment in the oil sands. What a wonderful opportunity that's created for Alberta. We're heading towards 3 million barrels a day on something that folks like this would have said we should never do. Mr. Speaker, this is a wonderful opportunity for our province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with great interest not only to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West but also to the WRA members. I listened intently to their differing opinions on climate change and their differing opinions on how things should happen from an economic perspective. I was also very interested in the Member for Lethbridge-West, who talked about the fact that the oil sands wouldn't have been there had it not been for government intervention in many ways in terms of the investment. It was also in terms of direct investment, hon. member, in research and development. [interjection] You should learn your history. [interjection] Hon. member, you should learn your history before you spout off. You should really learn a little more about it.

8:50

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair.

Mr. Horner: The other thing that I would like to ask the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to expand upon is a little bit around the — he comes from a community that has two academic institutions in it that are very involved in alternative energies. There is a relationship between what we're doing in CCS and alternative energies that we're investing in. As the hon. member mentioned, the Helmholtz institutes from the universities in Germany are actively engaged here.

Mr. Boutilier: Is there a question in there?

Mr. Horner: It can be question or comment, hon. member. Learn the rules; read the book. It can be both, hon. member. Learn the rules.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair.

Mr. Horner: Through the chair. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

I think what I'd like the hon. member to talk about is: is that an area of research that is being intently followed, both in the applied and the basic, at the universities in Lethbridge?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the minister makes a very good point: that we also are investing in alternative energies, which are so critically important to this government. I am privileged to come from Lethbridge, where Lethbridge College has the only program of its type in North America where they train wind energy technicians. They train them for companies around the world. These young men and women are being trained and sent to Germany, to Finland, to the United States, and across Canada to help generate green energy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have on my list here the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise, and I thank the Member for Lethbridge-West. As much as some of his comments are open for interpretation, I would say that at least I appreciate his energy on such an important topic, specifically talking about my home, the oil sands capital of the world. Having had the honour of serving as its mayor and a city councillor and now as an MLA for four terms, indeed, I feel quite compelled to speak on such an important topic as Bill 24.

The reason I say that, as I look around the room at the hon. members, is that I find it interesting that as I stand here tonight, I stand as the only former Minister of Environment, who, in fact, in 2005 attended the IPCC in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and addressed on behalf of the people of Alberta the topic of oil sands, not only the topic of oil sands and how it contributes to our economic well-being but also the environmental commitment that Albertans have. I can only say, Mr. Speaker, that the idea that was presented at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change back in 2005 about CCS and technologies was more importantly about energy solutions, and energy solutions are more than just about CCS. That's where I believe the idea that was launched back in 2005 has gone so wrong.

That's why tonight I will be speaking relative to the weaknesses of Bill 24. Specifically, we have an opportunity, and it's an opportunity when it comes to: what are the energy solutions? It is perceived that CCS, carbon capture and storage, is one. But I recall

speaking to the over 150 nations in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2005, and it was clear that there is a multitude of solutions in terms of how we deal with climate change and global warming.

I do believe the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere rightfully pointed out that it's all a sense of contextualizing the issue of climate change because presently the idea of investing in technology with \$2 billion, as much as that was an idea, it was never \$2 billion, and it was never the idea of picking winners and losers. I believe that 53 companies showed an interest in sustainability and environmental protection, who participated in applying for carbon capture and storage — 53 of them — and it's my understanding that only four were selected.

Mr. Anderson: Three? Four?

Mr. Boutilier: Three or four. I stand to be corrected perhaps.

Mr. Speaker, that's where this has gone wrong. What about the other 49 companies that expressed an interest, that would have loved to have been able to participate but were not because it was only the government who chose the winners and the losers? This is the problem, the fundamental flaw, that goes on relative to how we expand our wings in terms of each and every one of us and the responsibility and the role we play.

It is wrong for the government to pick winners and losers. Bill 24 is about exactly that. They picked four, not 53. What about the other 49? I ask each and every one of you. Hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, what about the other 49? Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, what about the other 49? They were left out. They were left out. That creates uncertainty. That creates no sense of focus and fairness, not a level playing field. If you're a big company — and I will not mention any of the four that were selected because some of them are advancing. But what about the other 49 that you turned a blind eye to? That is what is unfortunate.

There was reference made to the Alberta Research Council, and as the Minister of Environment I visited on numerous occasions. I might add, Mr. Speaker, AOSTRA, the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, was a fine example of technology 30-some years ago that ultimately — and I see the Member for Livingstone-Macleod is shaking his head in acknowledgement, recognizing the history.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, in my view if we are to achieve the future, there are a few things we need to focus on. Right now China is behind us in technology. China is right now. But I want to ensure that my son and this man's four children and each of you with children, that our sons and daughters are going to be working at the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary as opposed to what may take place if we do not advance the future by ensuring all of those other 49 companies participate in the technologies of the future.

Way back when, when the technology of the oil sands was advanced, everyone was allowed to play in the sandbox. Now the government has chosen four. Why would you not participate with the other 49 that have been left out? You've picked a winner and a loser, and that is fundamentally wrong. In fact, I believe that the wings of expanding the sustainability file have been lost based on what this bill is not doing.

As we look, China 10 years from now will be ahead of us because one thing about their system: their system doesn't do a lot of consultation; they just move ahead. Ultimately, we need to ensure those other 49 companies are participating in the technology that will advance a greater cause than just the four that this government picked. That is fundamentally wrong. We in the Wildrose believe, Mr. Speaker, that all of those 49 companies should be participating

as well, and the reason why is that we have a greater commitment to the environment and sustainability in dealing with the important issue of climate change and global warming.

I find it really interesting that as we look at picking winners and losers, that this government has done, it is a fundamental flaw in what is taking place under Bill 24. In fact, the Wildrose are not only down the road, like the government; we're around the corner. We're way around the corner because we are forward thinkers. We are future thinkers because we're thinking about our three-year-old children and your children. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod is shaking his head. He has somewhat of a stunned look on his face, but I'm sure he is absorbing the technology and wisdom.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you that, in my judgment, we as Albertans want a centre of excellence, a centre of excellence that we can export to the rest of the world. We can do that, but we cannot do it by just picking four companies. What about the 49 companies you all left out? That's what you've done, and that is fundamentally wrong. Rather than picking and choosing winners and losers, you've acted – it's almost like you've created an unlevel playing field that has been very unfortunate and I believe will delay the progress in dealing with the issue of climate change.

In the meantime, it's the issue of choices. Two billion dollars. What about our schools? What about our emergency rooms? It's an issue of leadership. True leadership is about making decisions and making the right decisions based on the values that Albertans have, and right now the decision you're making on the \$2 billion is fundamentally wrong. We could have included all of those other 49 companies, but unfortunately you chose only four. So it is obviously more than just carbon capture and storage. It's also about the alternative energies that can be used in terms of advancing.

9:00

I want Alberta, not only my community and constituency, to be the oil sands capital of the world. It is my hope and prayer that in the future this province will be not only the oil sands capital of the world but the centre of excellence for technology in reducing CO₂ and in helping in a manner that we can share with the rest of the world to make it a better planet. That is true leadership.

Today selecting only four versus 49 that were left out of the game I believe is unfortunate. I don't know if it's intended or not, but that is the result. So an idea that was a good idea back in 2005 has been lost. You hear the A-Team. They say: I love when a plan comes together. This plan, unfortunately, has not come together because you left out 49 other companies, companies that wanted to participate, companies that wanted to contribute to sustainability in helping to reduce climate change and global warming.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that as we move forward, each of us has a responsibility. Those other 49 companies that applied, I can say I take my hat off to them because they have expressed tremendous interest in terms of wanting to advance. But the government said no to those other 49; they accepted only four. That's unfortunate. As I look around the room, I think all of us should be able to embrace that. Why wouldn't we use all of those 53 companies to be involved in this important initiative of technology, no different than AOSTRA was many, many years ago, that advanced the commitment of oil sands?

Mr. Speaker, in the oil sands capital of the world back when the generic fiscal regime was in fact put in place in 1997, when I had the honour of being mayor, we expected \$20 billion over 20 years. What happened was that it wasn't \$20 billion over 20 years. Ten years ahead of that it was actually \$120 billion over 10 years. The infrastructure that we faced, no different than other communities are facing, was a direct result of the oil sands.

But I believe now more than ever before that those 49 other companies that the government has left out of the CCS program should have been included. That's what is different between us and them. We have policy alternatives that believe everyone should be participating. We do not discriminate in picking winners and losers. We want every single Albertan to participate from a consumption perspective as well as the roles we play in our own backyards.

Consequently, with tax incentives, similar to the fiscal regime, similar to what the tremendous positive result of our generic fiscal regime was, we believe the same framework could have been used for dealing with this issue, rather than you folks picking just four as opposed to the other 49 that you left out. You have to examine what criteria are determined for the four to get in versus the 49 that don't. The Wildrose would have ensured that the 53 are in there, not forgetting the objective of helping and reducing the issue of global warming and climate change.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's interesting to put this into perspective. Did you know that in the United States of America, with over 300 million people, the Obama government has invested \$3 billion? This government, with 3.4 million people, has invested \$2 billion. Consequently, it is clear to me that the decisions that are being chosen for this versus the issue of schools, the issues of ER lineups – it's all about a decision of choices. I believe that the choices that you made by excluding 49 other companies are fundamentally wrong. Your framework of policies is wrong.

Not only that, I'm very proud to say as a former Minister of Environment that back at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change we talked about energy solutions, we talked about trilateral examples, and we talked about partnering. But we didn't talk about picking just one or two or three. We talked about everyone having a role to play. Unfortunately, that's where this bill has failed, and it has failed miserably. It has failed to embrace all Alberta companies and all Albertans, and my humble advice to this government is that, clearly, the idea that was launched in 2005 and 2006 has been lost.

Somehow you have strayed off the mark. For that I will only say that it is my hope and dream that my son and the children that we all have will be able to have a centre of excellence for climate change, for sequestration, for other alternative sources of energy when it comes to dealing with the issue of reducing CO₂.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo care deeply about the air that we breathe and the water we drink and the land we work. In fact, I remember often saying that we have a strong law. Well, I believe that excluding 49 companies has weakened the intent and the spirit of what the expectation of Albertans is when it comes to how we advance forward. I think each and every one of us may have different opinions on climate change and global warming, but I do believe that leaving out the other 49 companies that applied to participate is unfortunate.

That's why I will not support Bill 24, because of the fact that it is not inclusive. It appears to be picked by – I don't even know the criteria of how those four were selected, but unfortunately I believe . . .

An Hon. Member: I kind of have an idea.

Mr. Boutilier: Okay. I think we all may have ideas on how those four were selected. But, Mr. Speaker, I humbly believe that it's flawed, and it clearly should be all the other 49. Who knows? Maybe that 49 could go and be doubled, and maybe it could be 98. Who knows? It could be even tripled and so on and so forth. I believe that never was it intended – I can say that, speaking from my experience – that we would exclude anyone from wanting to participate in helping reduce CO₂ emissions. Everyone has a role

and responsibility for doing that and we should expect no less in terms of the action.

As much as the idea was planted back when I had the honour of serving as the Minister of Environment for then Premier Klein, I want to be able to say, Mr. Speaker, that the idea that was first cast clearly has been lost. That's unfortunate. I'm proud to say the oil sands capital of the world is my home. Actually, it's a resource that's owned by all Albertans, but we can do better than what is taking place. That in itself is so important.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with great interest to the hon. member. [interjections] Pardon me, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the minister has the floor.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate they can't wait for the question.

I listened, Mr. Speaker, with great interest to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo's comments on his time as the Minister of Environment. I can remember a lot of those discussions quite vividly and his support for things that would have included this investment. I also am curious that if all 53 projects, good or bad, were funded by the government of Alberta, wouldn't we then be accused of not doing our due diligence?

In fact, Mr. Speaker, these projects underwent a fairly rigid due diligence by not only industry and environmental experts but also some government folks as well on a committee. I'm curious, hon. member. Do you know any of those 49 companies that had a good enough proposal that could have made it through the RFP process? If so, why would they have not made it through the RFP process, which was open and accountable, as the hon. member knows because he was involved in some of that? That's the first question.

The second question is: the two companies that really were the founding companies in Fort McMurray and the oil sands development – I'm curious – is the hon. member suggesting that there was absolutely no government investment in or direction or control or ability to control those two that really developed the oil sands in Fort McMurray? I'm just curious about the hon. member's position in that respect.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thanks very much. The comments are very liberal of the Deputy Premier, but that's okay because, fundamentally, it's clear to me what the question – and it's very important for him to hear intently. This is about not picking winners or losers. This is about a level playing field where all can play a role, all 53. The question was why. The answer is simple. All should have been included, okay? Unfortunately, the government has chosen.

The government does not understand the idea of tax incentives. Do you not understand how you create an environment of certainty, an environment that will create that investment? I think they realize now that they've made a mistake. I think they have clearly realized that, my goodness, we could have had 49 other companies participating in advancing the cause of reducing CO₂. Unfortunately, they didn't think that way. They thought that those four companies were the best, and unfortunately that is not the case. It's a flaw because you have created an unlevel playing field.

9:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. [interjection] I have been quite patient. Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. In the course of his discussions with the local bitumen and synthetic crude oil producers in Fort McMurray has there ever been a price, a firm price, talked about for the capture and compression of CO₂ emissions? Could he please enlighten the House?

Mr. Boutilier: It's actually a very good question. Obviously, at the time of the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, they made reference to between \$15 and \$30 that was actually being recommended. In fact, at the time companies like GCOS, now Suncor, that the Member for Lethbridge-West mentioned earlier, were trading on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange for \$15. It's really interesting.

I can say that when we deal with the issue of cap and trade, one of the fundamental flaws of cap and trade is that we want to ensure that the technologies are invested in Alberta as opposed to going to other parts of the world. We don't want to lose that so that, in fact, my son and yours can actually be learning at that centre of excellence, which would be right here in the capital or in Calgary or somewhere else – who knows? – maybe even a university in Fort McMurray, right next to and adjacent to the oil sands, or through Keyano College. To the minister of advanced ed, Keyano College university might be a good touch when it comes to the centre of excellence in capturing and storing CO₂ and exporting that type of thing to the rest of the world.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona on the bill.

Mr. Quest: On the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of this bill. There's been some interesting discussion. There have been a few points that I don't think have been raised up until now. When we talk about carbon capture and storage, now, many of us think about these four projects currently in the grant agreement stage. I have to say that I'm a little bit confused. Some members from the WRA talking about – I think Airdrie-Chestermere was talking about: we should never ever be in business, never, never, never, never, never.

The point has been raised a couple of times . . .

Mr. Anderson: Here it comes.

Mr. Quest: No. I don't think we would have an oil sands industry today. So there would be nothing to talk about. Without the vision of a previous Progressive Conservative government 40 years ago . . .

Ms Pastoor: Peter Lougheed.

Mr. Quest: Peter Lougheed. Exactly.

I'm a bit confused because we've got Airdrie-Chestermere telling us that we should never be in business, yet we've got the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo telling us that – what is it? – 53 companies we should be in partnership with. I guess I just don't understand. Of course, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has mentioned that four companies were picked to get to the grant agreement stage through a very, very thorough process, RFPs and so on, to bring them to that position. [interjections]

But just to broaden out the focus a bit and speaking of education – and it sounds like we need some education in the room here – I'd like to address what seems to have been a bit of a math puzzle

brought forward by some of the members in recent days. I have heard, just from looking at *Hansard*, that perhaps some members have talked about the government subsidizing CCS to the tune of \$865 a tonne, which is a ridiculously inaccurate number. Alberta's commitment of the \$2 billion will see the four projects capturing and storing over 5 million tonnes per year beginning in 2015, Mr. Speaker. Five million tonnes a year for at least 10 years, so 50 million tonnes of CO₂; the scale of this is incredible. If you divide the \$2 billion by the 50 million tonnes that are going to be stored, it's about \$40 a tonne, clearly a figure nowhere near what some people have calculated. It's time to get some facts on the table.

On the topic of money let me just say that the assertion that the government is confiscating property now without compensation is also absolutely inaccurate, Mr. Speaker. Surface rights owners have never been able to lay claim to something that they can't practically use. The reality is that ownership of pore space has never been resolved by the courts or in Alberta legislation, but this bill makes it clear. That's why we need this bill. If landowners own the mineral rights under their land, this legislation does not change that. Landowners will still have the authority to those rights, and that will not change. Companies will still be required to negotiate with landowners for surface access to their land, and they'll be compensated fairly, so that has not changed. Before applicants are given access by the minister and again by the ERCB, they must demonstrate that the project will not impact resources such as oil, gas, or coal.

Another point that was brought up this week was about how the fund financed by CCS operators would work and what it would cover. Those details will be worked out at the beginning of spring 2011 with a review of the regulatory framework. It's expected there will be a fee per tonne of CO₂ injected and that it would cover a variety of costs, including reclaiming and remediating orphaned facilities.

Another question was about the long-term liability transfer and how it would work, and that's come up several times. This is another detail that will be reviewed in the spring, and it's expected that tremendous technical data will be required. Most importantly, this review will be completed long before the large-scale injection begins in 2015. Alberta has a great deal of experience regulating what comes out of and now goes into the ground. In fact, our province's oil and gas industry has been doing enhanced oil recovery for years, and we've touched on that, Mr. Speaker.

Again, discussions come up many times about the money and how it can be used elsewhere. I believe the Member for Livingstone-Macleod brought up a little earlier that the province's revenues through royalties and taxation will be at least 10 times what our initial investment is. I think most of us in this room can do the math. Ten times: how often do you get an opportunity to get 10 times the return on your investment, Mr. Speaker? Why we're quibbling about this, I really don't know. I'm sure the WRA probably also understands the concept of investment and return. Again, I just can't imagine a better opportunity than what we have in front of us here.

There have been many similar smaller scale projects, so we're just doing this in a bigger way. I think many would be familiar with the project at Joffre. It was a pilot project in 1984, and then it was commercialized in 1991. It's the only commercial CO₂ enhanced oil recovery project in Canada, using industrial emissions coming from the NOVA plant. The captured CO₂ has helped give new production life to what once was an abandoned oil field. This has come up many times. It has helped to recover an additional 12 to 25 per cent of the original oil.

Well, with that said, I can't imagine why anybody wouldn't

support Bill 24, Mr. Speaker. We know it's a technology that's being developed in other countries, we know that we'll be world leaders in developing this technology, we know it's great for our environment, and we know that our geology can fully support permanent storage. We know that we can become world leaders offering CCS education at our postsecondary institutions, and we know that we can become leaders in implementing these large-scale projects.

I second the comments made by my colleague the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy, regarding the body of expertise around CCS that's being built at Alberta's very fine postsecondary institutions. This has come up, and I would add to her impressive list the new centre for clean coal at the U of A and the development of geospatial expertise at the University of Calgary. In essence, we have graduate students studying at our universities who will have unique knowledge and experience that they can take into the workforce so that industry has the skilled workers they will need to put these technologies into action. We know that industry fully supports the technology as it is putting in hundreds of millions of its own dollars. I know this has come up before. I'm talking about industry doing it on its own. This is a partnership, Mr. Speaker. This is for everybody. Industry is heavily involved in this, very committed and hugely supportive of carbon capture and storage.

9:20

What we do know is that climate change is real, so we'll be assured that our \$2 billion financial investment in CCS is being made with the future in mind. We want to be leaders in the technology and to then share our knowledge with the world. That will result in tremendous economic spinoffs like highly skilled jobs for generations to come. The time to act is now. Mr. Speaker, the time for CCS is now. I fully support this bill and encourage all members to fully support it as we do need to move ahead with this game-changing technology.

Again, I remember when I was a child, Mr. Speaker, in the early 1970s, and just reading even then about this new and emerging technology . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Are you ever young.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, I think.

. . . and the vision that this government had even then to develop what a lot of people really thought couldn't be done. Industry, as we know, moves around. Industry has many, many opportunities. I would think that exploring the option of . . . [Mr. Quest's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Strathcona. Pursuant to Government Motion 25, agreed to on December 1, 2010, the time for debate has expired. I must now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:22 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Berger	Fawcett	McFarland
Bhardwaj	Fritz	McQueen
Bhullar	Goudreau	Olson
Campbell	Griffiths	Quest
Dallas	Groeneveld	Renner
Danyluk	Hancock	Tarchuk
DeLong	Horner	Vandermeer
Denis	Jablonski	Weadick
Doerksen	Leskiw	Woo-Paw
Elniski	Lukaszuk	

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Mason
Boutilier	MacDonald	Pastoor
Chase		

Totals: For – 29 Against – 7

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Bill 28 Electoral Divisions Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today on this bill, which is Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. As was mentioned previously, this bill sets out the names and boundaries of Alberta's electoral divisions. Alberta is changing, and it's necessary to ensure the electoral map continues to properly reflect our evolving and growing province.

As I begin, I'd like to first thank the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission for its work to date. By name they are the Hon. Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, the chair of the commission; Keith Archer; Brian Evans; Peter Dobbie; and Allyson Jeffs. Mr. Speaker, I have met Judge Walter, and I want to express my further appreciation for him as a man of the people.

I will tell you a true story about Judge Walter that proves to you that he is indeed a man of the people. Judge Walter would travel to different jurisdictions to preside over the courts in his circuit. Each time, usually once every two weeks, he visited the constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul, there would be a group of seniors in the front row, who listened very intently to the evidence. Judge Walter would carefully make his ruling, and just after he announced his verdict, he would look over to the group of seniors. Judge Walter would then know whether he had made the right ruling or not because this group of seniors would either nod their heads up and down to show him they were in agreement or they would shake their heads back and forth from side to side to indicate they did not agree. Mr. Speaker, any judge who looked to a group of seniors to see if they agreed or disagreed with a decision that he made can indeed be considered a man of the people.

The commission's review of the existing electoral map and subsequent recommendations on the areas, boundaries, and names for Alberta's electoral divisions will help ensure that Albertans have effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. The work was extensive, beginning with the commission holding a series of public hearings across the province in September and October 2009. The commission received some very thoughtful comments from all corners of our province. We do indeed have a lot of people in this great province who are passionate about their communities and passionate about government representation.

I know all members greatly appreciated the input of Albertans who participated in the consultation process, and I, too, thank them for providing their feedback. I especially would like to thank the people of Red Deer; my own constituency association president, Duane Smethurst; and our board members who took the time to make a presentation on behalf of the city of Red Deer.

In May of last year the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act was amended to establish an Electoral Boundaries Commission. The act directed the commission, an independent body, to divide the province into 87 electoral divisions with a population within 25 per cent of the provincial average in a way that will ensure effective representation for Albertans. This is a critical point, Mr. Speaker, because Alberta's changing population distribution and densities, community interests, and other factors require us to periodically review and update our electoral boundaries.

Over the course of a year the commission travelled around the province and consulted with Albertans about this mandate. The commission reviewed the existing electoral map and made recommendations on the areas, boundaries, and names for 87 electoral divisions based on the latest census and population information, input they received from Albertans, and of course the applicable legal principles.

9:40

As I mentioned, the commission was mandated to divide Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions by taking the following factors into consideration: the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; sparsity and density of population; common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements; wherever possible the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary; wherever possible the existing municipal boundaries, which is what they did for the city of Red Deer. Although I lost two polls that were rural and highly supportive, I've also gained some other wonderful, thoughtful constituents from the neighbourhood of Deer Park in Red Deer.

Mr. Speaker, the last time the number of electoral divisions was changed was in 1986, and since that time Alberta's population has grown by approximately 1 million people. As our population increases, we must revisit the number of officials we elect to this Assembly. According to the official population list the population of Alberta has increased by 258,945 since the adjusted 2006 census. As a result, the total population that was considered by the commission was 3,556,583.

I'd like to address some of the concerns raised in this Assembly regarding the number of electoral divisions. The Electoral Boundaries Commission reviewed the existing electoral map of Alberta and made recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on the areas, boundaries, and names for 87 electoral divisions, four more than at present, based on the latest census and population information. Some members of this Assembly have indicated that Albertans are adequately represented by 83 electoral divisions and that the addition of another four would represent an additional burden. Mr. Speaker, the commission was indeed mandated to divide Alberta into 87 divisions but with a population within 25 per cent of the provincial average, and I emphasize this point: 25 per cent of the provincial average. Due to increases in population, it has been determined that four more divisions are necessary to reflect our population growth. We must ensure Albertans are effectively represented in our Legislative Assembly, hence the additional divisions.

In fact, population growth was identified in the commission's report as a future consideration.

If the population growth pattern of the past two decades continues in the future, by far the most significant issue for future Electoral Boundaries Commissions will be the effect of the concentration of population in the Calgary/Edmonton corridor and in the Grande Prairie and Wood Buffalo areas on the distribution of electoral divisions in the rest of the province.

The constituency that I represent is within the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, and it's identified as the economic tiger. It's important to my constituents that there is equitable and fair representation for all Albertans. I think it was the mantra of the original Boston Harbor Tea Party that claimed: no taxation without representation. Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that all Albertans are fairly and equitably represented.

The commission received well over 500 written comments on the interim report, and 117 persons addressed the commission in the April and May public hearings. Thirty-seven per cent of the written submissions were related to the interim proposed boundaries in the area of the county of Newell and the county of Wheatland.

Another 13 per cent were related to including the name Notley in a revised name for the Dunvegan-Central Peace electoral division. Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of this Assembly that they were able to set aside partisan politics and rightfully recognize one of our most beloved and dedicated politicians, Grant Notley. We heard a beautiful thank you and tribute by Grant Notley's own daughter, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, a daughter anyone could be proud of.

Sixteen per cent of the written submissions were related to the interim proposed boundaries in south-central Alberta, 10 per cent of the submissions related to the Grande Prairie area, 8 per cent related to Calgary proposals, and, finally, 4 per cent related to Edmonton proposals. The remaining 12 per cent addressed other issues throughout Alberta.

Lastly, I address the concerns over the electoral name changes. I remind members that the commission's report was approved by this Assembly as were the majority of names of the electoral divisions. There were, however, changes to the suggested names of four electoral divisions. Mr. Speaker, those suggestions were made in order to better reflect the history and character of those divisions as well as the desires of their constituents. Specifically, the Assembly approved the following name changes. The proposed electoral division referred to by the commission as Okotoks-High River will retain its existing name of Highwood, the electoral division of Strathcona will now be named Strathcona-Sherwood Park, the electoral division of Calgary-Montrose will now be named Calgary-Greenway, and the electoral division of Calgary-North Hill will now be named Calgary-Klein.

I'd like to elaborate, if I may. As an hon. member pointed out, we have a long-standing tradition of naming some ridings for leaders of different political parties. Edmonton-Manning and Calgary-Lougheed were given as examples. To add my voice to the mix, I'm pleased the amendment was made to rename Dunvegan-Central Peace to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. Renaming Calgary-North Hill and Dunvegan-Central Peace clearly signals our deepest appreciation for the work of past leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 28 will repeal and replace the existing act of the same name, and the new electoral boundaries will come into effect when the next general election is called in Alberta. Bill 28 will bring Alberta's electoral boundaries and divisions up to date with its population and current needs. We must keep pace with the growth of this province. We must adequately represent the geography and the interests of our citizens.

The decisions made by the Electoral Boundaries Commission were not easy ones and involved a very labour-intensive process.

The commission had to take into account a lot of different factors when rendering their decisions, factors that may be lost on some members of this House. But this isn't about numbers, Mr. Speaker. This is about representing the needs of all Albertans. The right to be heard is quintessential in this province and in Canada. Rural or urban, let's ensure that our people have a voice in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, today many of us met members of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, who have faced life-and-death decisions in Afghanistan and have committed their lives to the freedom and quality of life that we have as Canadians. Just as it is their duty and responsibility to protect our country and our freedoms, it is our duty and responsibility to live up to the gift of freedom that they protect by ensuring that all Albertans have fair representation and the right to be heard in this great province in this great country of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this Assembly to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the very thoughtful words of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. She's always been a very thoughtful individual, and I thought her words were very appropriate.

I do have a couple of concerns, though, and I'd like to get her input and her feelings on them. As the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere we, of course, have a very large population right now, about 65,000 people in our riding, so we needed some boundary redraw. We had dozens and dozens and dozens of people make presentations. We had our mayor of Airdrie, aldermen in Airdrie, mayor of Chestermere, aldermen in Chestermere, our county. We had our trustees. We had many, many different chambers of commerce, et cetera, make presentations, and almost every presentation given – in particular the area residents around Chestermere and Langdon and Balzac, where you have the big CrossIron Mills mall, Beiseker, Irricana, and so forth – said the same thing: we don't want to get lumped in with the Calgary riding, of course, but we think that it would be appropriate for us to be part of an east Calgary rural area.

9:50

Generally speaking, it was going to be Chestermere-Strathmore. In fact, in the first report that was put out, Chestermere-Strathmore was actually the proposed riding. Unfortunately, what happened after that was that a document was put forward between the first report and the final report where the Deputy Premier put forward on his government letterhead a set of recommendations from caucus, things that caucus members had requested the ridings be changed to, and sent it to the boundaries commission. We've gone over that in question period; we don't need to rehash it here. But the result of that, whether it was that or something else, I found very interesting in that the boundaries in my area – even though the MLA and all the different individuals living in the area had made clear statements as to how they thought the boundaries should go and the first report reflected those statements, all of a sudden we got the final report, and it had changed. All of a sudden Chestermere was this weird, funky horseshoe around north Calgary. It kind of goes in between Airdrie and Calgary. There's a small little flick there for Balzac that's included, and it takes in west Rocky View, and then it goes down and takes in Chestermere and Langdon.

It was very confusing for the people in my community as to why that happened because there was really no reason for it other than it seemed clear to me that the submissions that were made, in particu-

lar by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks as well as others in the government that we saw, are the ones that seemed to get implemented in the final report.

Now, for myself anyway, I found that quite offensive. I found that it was a complete interference in a nonpartisan, nonpolitical process by the government. Even if it wasn't, the perception was pretty damning. I understand that you're happy with the boundary redraws, and I understand that most of the government members are happy with the boundary redraws. But you know what? The people of Airdrie-Chestermere feel that there was political interference, and I would like you to ease my mind and ease constituents about that situation.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I haven't looked closely at the boundaries of Airdrie-Chestermere, but I would say to you that this funky horseshoe thing that the member is referring to also happened in my riding as it is today. The funky horseshoe that goes around Red Deer-North is now going to be Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, so people who live one block from the city of Red Deer will have to now vote in the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake poll. So I would say to the member: please don't think that there was anything specifically against your riding of Airdrie-Chestermere because I suffer the same thing.

I would have to say that I don't want to second-guess the wisdom and whatever criteria our commission used because I think that our commission was made up of excellent members. Although some of us may not be entirely happy about what our boundaries are, I still feel that having the four extra electoral divisions is important to the people of Alberta since we've grown by 1 million people since 1986, which was the last time that the number of electoral divisions was changed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I recognize, as did the hon. seniors' minister, that the members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission did exactly what they were asked to do. They toured the province. They had representation from all parties in terms of the selection of the members, and they did the best job they could given the rationale that they were presented with. There's no doubt about their qualifications. The hon. member mentioned her fondness for the judge. We had great respect for the selection of Keith Archer, a well-known professor and environmentalist, who had both a rural, in terms of living in the Banff-Canmore area, and an urban perspective, having taught in Calgary.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is the representation by population aspect of things. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, I believe, mentioned the incident at the Boston Tea Party. No taxation without representation was the cry made when English bundles of tea were tossed into the harbour. My concern, however, is representation by population. The fact is that 80 per cent plus of Alberta's population lives in urban centres, urban constituencies. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out the disproportionate representation. He's in charge of an area that has 65,000 constituents, an extremely large constituency, yet in some rural areas the size of the constituency is almost one-third of what he is expected to represent. That suggests that some rural members are more worthy of representation, in other words a 3 to 1 representation for their population, than urban members are.

Regardless of that lack of representation I don't believe the answer, Mr. Speaker, is in expanding what I see as a dysfunctional democratic arrangement that we currently have. With regard to that dysfunction, it doesn't matter if you have 87 members or 83

members; it matters how you represent your members. What we have seen over the last two weeks in particular is a series of debates rushed through this House through the evening hours, the early morning hours, and there's not going to be an improvement in that process until there is a change either in government or a change in government attitude. My particular hope is that whenever the next election occurs, we will do a better job in Alberta with a minority coalition government than is currently the case with the federal government.

The electoral boundaries process expands the size of government. The expansion, Mr. Speaker, I believe is unwarranted. We have representation in our cities, whether it be Red Deer or Medicine Hat, our smaller cities, Lethbridge, and so on, Leduc being one of our newest cities, that have considerably fewer Reeves or councillors or alderpeople to do the democratic job, and they seem to do it well. Somewhere between the number of representatives in terms of MPs and the representation of alderpeople I think would be the right amount.

In Calgary-Varsity the population that I represent is in the area of about 45,000 to 50,000. That's the sort of average. Then the Electoral Boundaries Commission was tasked with looking at a certain percentage above, a certain percentage below. Just adding more people to a process that I am feeling is currently dysfunctional is not going to provide Albertans with an improved democratic experience. There will be people that are not necessarily as stretched as they were, as currently is the case for the representative from Airdrie-Chestermere, but will that mean an improvement in the democratic turnout when it comes to vote?

10:00

I would hope that that was part of the wisdom of the government in moving from 83 to 87, but in terms of government wisdom or lack thereof, we've seen various new Premiers come in and first decrease the size of cabinet and then increase it so that everybody had a job or everybody was the parliamentary assistant or the associate to or was on a committee, et cetera, et cetera.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission did what it was tasked to do, to find four more centres of population that the government felt were underrepresented. As I say, it's not the number of individuals represented; it's the quality of the representation they receive. Mr. Speaker, I believe the proportion in this House will change dramatically after the next election, and I am hoping that the coalition that forms the next government can create greater efficiency than what we have seen since Peter Lougheed left office.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A twofold question. I'm wondering whether this member would clarify his comments because he's insinuating that members of this Legislature that are not in cabinet or are not parliamentary assistants have no job, have no work. Is he implying that he actually, not being in cabinet and not being a parliamentary assistant, has idle hands and is not working? [interjections] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood obviously has no work because he's taking time heckling me right now.

Is he also insinuating that the opposition in this Legislature, being the WRA, the NDs, and Liberals, are about to form a coalition to take over the government, which would be very similar to what happened in Ottawa not too long ago and didn't work very well? I

would like to hear about this coalition conspiracy that's going on in the opposition.

Mr. Chase: I would love to enlighten the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. Mind you, I only have about three minutes left to do so, and it's a rather impossible task, but I will start. I will start.

Mr. MacDonald: Are you saying that he's a slow student?

Mr. Chase: No. He's a teacher. I respect all teachers.

With regard to the representation, I hope the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration recognizes the difference in the workload of an opposition member. Whether it be a member of the NDP caucus, which has to divide up their portfolio responsibilities by two, or the Wildrose by four, or the Liberals by eight, the amount of effort that is required given our very limited caucus budgets is tremendous. To suggest that a Conservative backbencher has any type of the workload within the parliament – I'm not saying within their constituencies. Within our constituencies we all have a tremendous, important responsibility.

As to the coalition that you asked me to talk about, I said that I didn't want to see the types of coalitions of opportunism that had been formed in the federal government. If it was convenient, on one occasion the NDP and the Liberals would work together. Maybe the Bloc would join. At other times the Conservatives depended on the Bloc to push through a particular desire they had. Now, that was a coalition of opportunism.

My belief is that if you have a type of proportional representation, if you use the best thoughts from all parties – and, hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration, I did not suggest that the coalition could not include Conservative members. I didn't say what the coalition would look like. I just said that there would be a coalition. Whether it's the health care crisis, whether it's the crisis in education, whether it's the crisis that we're experiencing with over 78,000 children living below the poverty line, Albertans have lost their patience with this government's inaction, particularly since 1994, so I believe we're going to see a wider representation from a variety of parties than the Conservative majority, that has dominated this province's governments for over 40 years.

Now, I am a big fan of Peter Lougheed. Peter Lougheed was a builder. He built schools. He built hospitals. He recognized the importance of investing in the oil sands, part of what we talked about in Bill 24 tonight. Unfortunately, we have not had that calibre since Peter Lougheed.

We have seen Getty do his best in a very troubled economic time. We've seen Premier Klein bring stable institutions of public support to their knees from 1994 to 1998. We have this particular Premier, who has yet to get a handle on education even though he had wonderful surpluses to begin his leadership. There is simply no kind of a handle on health care.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly pleased to rise this evening and join in third reading debate on Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. Members may want to take a moment and fasten their seatbelts here because I'm going to race through some material that I think is important to discuss tonight.

It's a person's basic right to be able to vote in this country, and this bill, I believe, will help ensure that all Albertans have a voice that is heard and a voice that matters, Mr. Speaker. Five generations

of my family voted in Alberta, one of the most cherished privileges that we have in this great province. I'd submit to you that in those earlier years that was about all my family had, that right to participate in our parliamentary democracy, to have representation, and beyond that, to have representation that they could meet with, that they could greet personally, that they could interact with, that they could explore ideas and their vision for Alberta with, not only what we'd become but where we would go forward.

Essentially, this bill will ensure that the electoral map continues to properly reflect the province's ever-changing population. As Alberta's population grows, so does the requirement to represent and accommodate this growth in the Assembly. This is why Bill 28 will divide the province into 87 electoral divisions, which, of course, is four more than currently in place in Alberta. The four additional electoral boundaries will include Calgary-Hawkwood, Calgary-South East, Edmonton-South West, and Fort McMurray-Conklin.

Mr. Speaker, the last time the number of electoral divisions was updated was back in 1986, 24 years ago. Since then, Alberta's population has grown by approximately 1 million people. These extra 1 million people deserve equitable representation.

10:10

Mr. Speaker, as members in this Assembly know, we are here to work for and represent our constituents. We work for them, and we are accountable to them. Alberta is a large province with a diverse landscape, population, and demographics. This diverse province and population means that many different opinions and concerns need to be represented through elected representation right here in this Assembly. A person's address should not affect their right to be heard. This is why more electoral boundaries are needed. More seats are required in order to give all Albertans a voice in this Assembly.

Furthermore, Bill 28 is consistent with the Electoral Boundaries Commission's report and reflects what Albertans said that they wanted. As a reminder to all members in this Assembly, the Legislature accepted the recommendations of the independent Electoral Boundaries Commission. Over the course of a year this commission travelled around the province. Twice, I know, Mr. Speaker, they visited Red Deer, once early in the process and later to discuss an interim report that was filed. They stuck to their mandate of reviewing all of the electoral boundaries throughout our great province. The commission received well over 500 written comments on the interim report, and 117 people addressed the commission in the April and May public hearings.

Bill 28 ensures that the commission's recommendations are adopted. I guess a question to members who oppose this bill is: why would we ignore the recommendations of an independent commission who consulted with Albertans for over a year?

Mr. Speaker, Albertans know too well what it is like to fight for a voice in Canada. As most know, the heavily populated provinces of Ontario and Quebec can often determine the outcome of a federal election even before the votes from the west are tallied. This has resulted in a scenario where people from the west have felt disenfranchised from the rest of the country. I probably could go on for hours on this matter, but that is a discussion for another time.

My point is that this same argument can be used here today with Bill 28. Mr. Speaker, I do not understand how someone cannot support giving a voice and meaningful representation to Albertans. Bill 28 will provide more equitable representation for Albertans. It's plain, and it's simple.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition members' argument against Bill 28 is very shortsighted in the grand scheme of things. Opposition members argue that Bill 28 will increase costs as four more MLAs

are required. Essentially, this argument comes down to not thinking that equitable representation is worth the small additional cost.

One of the things that has been ingrained in me, Mr. Speaker, over the years is that while we appreciate the value and the privilege of having a parliamentary democracy in Alberta, it's never been described as cheap. I believe that all Albertans would support the idea of investing a few dollars per Albertan per year to make sure that the integrity of the great sense of representation, the model that we've developed, is maintained going forward and never compromised by the ability to feel that Albertans are not provided with adequate representation. The benefits will definitely outweigh the cost in the short term and, without a doubt, in the long term.

Opposition members also sometimes argue that four new seats are not needed because new technology allows us to communicate with our constituents quicker and over longer distances. Technology has evolved, Mr. Speaker, over the years. In fact, in driving up and down many of the gravel roads in Alberta and the highways in Alberta, I can remember the days of communicating via pay phone. Yes, they had pay phones when I first started doing that.

An Hon. Member: How much was it for a call?

Mr. Dallas: I think it was probably a dime, hon. member.

I remember later on having a Bag Phone in my car—that probably weighed about 20 pounds; it only really worked when you were driving or parked in the median or at the side of a major primary highway, to be honest about it—and then the evolution of cellphones and that type of thing. Technology has evolved now, and certainly one of the things that as a representative I'm trying to do is minimize the amount of time that I'm spending talking on a phone while I'm driving even though I've had hands-free devices for a number of years.

You know, when I think about constituents and what their expectations are in terms of communicating with me, yes, we receive some inquiries where the constituent really is trying to secure some information, and providing them with a link to a website or being able to provide them with a document through the office or potentially receiving through the mail a letter or that type of thing is satisfactory. But far more often, Mr. Speaker, what the constituent wants to do is meet personally. They want to gain context on the kinds of policies and decisions that are being made, the legislation that's being enacted through this Legislature, and they want to interact in a very direct way. They want to meet.

Mr. Speaker, even though my constituency of Red Deer-South is entirely urban and I have the ability to do that, to attend small gatherings, to meet one-on-one with constituents, I know that the challenges in many parts of Alberta are significantly greater in terms of that ability. The distance to travel, the time that's involved to move around to the various parts of the province provide some very unique and distinct challenges to provide representation. I would suggest that contrary arguments to providing the additional representation are not particularly well thought out. We're able to communicate over longer distances with the phone and Internet, but really nothing replaces the expectation that a constituent has to provide face-to-face interaction.

Just imagine some scenarios that might evolve in the future going forward, perhaps a high school graduation where in expectation of their elected representative, their MLA, they receive their greetings by some type of a BlackBerry message or a voice recording or, you know, sending them a video on an iPhone. I don't think that replaces the kind of interaction that constituents are expecting. I fear that sometimes the movement towards technology like this will maybe serve to further disenfranchise voters and ultimately weaken

our political system and the way that we do representation. Occasionally there is new technology that evolves that helps us communicate, but it also always comes with some challenges.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe that Albertans would like to have a say in how their tax dollars are being spent. They can do that through this type of enhanced representation, and this government is not going to deny any Albertan that right. Bill 28 will bring Alberta's electoral boundaries and divisions up to date with its population and reflect Alberta's and Albertans' current needs.

The most important point is that this bill will add four more electoral divisions, which means equitable representation for all Albertans. This is a step that has not been taken in over 20 years and is one that is needed now. Bill 28 reflects the Electoral Boundaries Commission report as amended in the Assembly. The consultation and thought that went into this document are admirable, and I would like to take this time to thank the commission for their hard work.

With that, I'll conclude my comments, Mr. Speaker, and I urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

10:20

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Red Deer-South I have this question. I heard a speaker from the government caucus on the previous bill, on CO₂ sequestration, complaining about the \$5 billion deficit that we have in this province and expressing a great deal of worry about having this \$5 billion deficit. If that is the case, how can this government member now turn around half an hour later and say that we can afford to expand the size of this Assembly from 83 seats to 87 seats? Shouldn't we be saving money and reducing the size of this bloated Executive Council?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks, hon. member, for the observation and the question. I need to be a little careful with my math here, but I think that about 0.01 per cent of budget expenditures are involved in support of this entire Assembly. I know that there are some expenditures that are incremental that would perhaps be added to the Assembly in terms of the addition of four members, but I think the question is not: how much is the expenditure, and, you know, is it appropriate or not? I think we simply need to ask Albertans: what's the price of having a democracy that provides them with the representation that they're looking for?

Mr. Speaker, I think the answer to that would be that Albertans would resoundingly tell us that they have an expectation that that expenditure, however small, however large it is, is the price of having an effective democracy in Alberta, and it would be a priority for Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In terms of fairness of representation do you think it's fair that there are some rural constituencies under 30,000 and that we have Airdrie-Chestermere with 65,000? How is that fair?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question, actually, from the Member for Calgary-Varsity, and I'd be happy to address that. I guess one needs to distinguish between the terms "fair" and "equal." I would suggest to you that Red Deer-South, while it's not quite the size in terms of the number of constituents of Airdrie-Chestermere, it is, in fact, prior to the adjustments that are proposed, one of the largest constituencies in Alberta. Even though I will deeply miss the loss of some constituents that are proposed to move to Red Deer-North, it will still be one of the largest constituencies. What I heard after the interim report was filed and the commission came back to Red Deer: throughout our community was a desire to make sure that the constituency was aligned such that representation was distinctly urban and was provided from the city as opposed to some of the opportunities to move the boundaries here and there.

As I alluded to earlier, Mr. Speaker, I know that some of these constituencies require virtually half a dozen hours to drive from one end to the other. There are some constituencies in our great province, in fact, where it's not even possible to drive to all of the constituents, and air travel and other modes of getting into remote communities are necessary. But that said, those Albertans are afforded and have every right to exactly the same privileges of meeting and interacting with and addressing their elected representative as any Albertan that happens to live in an urban area that has high population density.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have 35 seconds. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to dwell on that for just a second longer. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, when he was speaking, had talked about: it's how you represent your constituents. I just need to know from yourself, when you talk about representation, if you're taking into account access and opportunity for those individuals being able to see their representative?

The Deputy Speaker: The next hon. member to speak on the bill is the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we've spoken a lot on this bill, obviously, or on a few amendments on it, anyway, over the last little while. I'd like to sum up my arguments for why I cannot support this bill. We talked a little bit earlier about what I think is some clear political interference that went into the report, from the first to the final report, of the Electoral Boundaries Commission in certain ridings, so I can't support it for that reason.

I can't support it for the reason that I do not feel that this province needs four additional MLAs. I do not feel it's justified to have four additional MLAs. I think you could redraw the boundaries appropriately, even out the constituency populations as much as possible, and that would have been fine going forward. You know, I would have had more of a stomach for four additional seats had I felt that the role of an MLA as it pertains to his role as a voting member in this House was legitimate.

The Member for Red Deer-South talked about a meaningful role for MLAs, having more meaningful representation, I believe his words were. That's right; we do need more meaningful representation. When I sit here and I look at the other side – let's just take four bills and use them as an example. Bill 43 from last year, the agriculture marketing act I think it was, something like that, essentially the check-off bill, where we talked about whether the check-off was mandatory or not, that you have to allow choice: that

bill was passed. Now, however you feel about that bill, for or against it – I was in the caucus still, and I was for the choice. I supported the agriculture minister on that. That was my choice, and I voted that way in caucus and in this Legislature, and I stand by that choice.

I know for a fact that there were many, many, many members of that caucus, who I won't name because that's not fair to them, who clearly did not agree with that bill, and if they had had the freedom to vote on that bill, they would have voted against it. If you add up the people on this side of the House at that time and the opposition that were against it . . .

Some Hon. Members: Relevance. Relevance.

Mr. Anderson: How is this not relevant?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. I just want to read something here. Standing Order 23(c) says: "persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session." Just pay attention. Things have been decided already.

Mr. Anderson: We're cutting off democracy in this House. You know, I hope I can represent my constituency here. I hope I can do that. Maybe I can't even do that.

I'll talk about it again: meaningful MLAs, meaningful representation. If we're going to have four more MLAs, you need to have MLAs that are able to freely vote, not act like trained seals. I know for a fact that there are people on the other side of the House that continually vote for bills in this House that they vote against in caucus, or maybe they don't even vote in caucus. It depends if we have a vote, like with the human rights tribunal. You remember that vote that never occurred.

The point is that they vote against these things in one area, and then they vote for them in another area. That shows me, Mr. Speaker, that it is not meaningful to be an MLA in this House, and that is wrong. It is absolutely wrong. If we want to have meaningful representation in this House, we need to have free votes, period, on every piece of legislation.

When you go into this House, you are the people's representative. Each and every one of us is the people's representative. We're not loyal to parties, or we sure shouldn't be. We're not loyal to donors or special interests or lobbyists. We're not loyal to the Premier. The reason we're not loyal to those people – we can be loyal to them, but they're not the ones that we are most loyal to. The people that we are most loyal to, most accountable to in this House should be the people that we represent, first and foremost. Now, if that loyalty lines up with loyalty to the Premier and loyalty to the party, great, but if it conflicts, our duty as members is to vote for what is in the best interests of our constituents, plain and simple. That principle has been entirely lost by this PC government. Look at the lack of democracy and bullying . . .

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, please address the chair.

Also, hon. Government House Leader, you have something to say?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I rise on a point of order with respect to relevance, *Beauchesne's* 459. The point on relevance is very clear. The question before the House right now is Bill 28, and Bill 28 has a very succinct purpose.

Mr. Anderson: Why do we need more MLAs? That's the question I'm asking.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member shouts out: why do we need more MLAs? I would point out to him that that was decided when the bill was passed setting up the Electoral Boundaries Commission. The boundaries commission was established under a different act of the Legislature, and that act directed them to use 87 seats. So they had no choice. They came back with their report with 87 seats.

The effect of the Electoral Divisions Act that's before us today has nothing to do with whether there are 83 or 87 seats. It has nothing to do with what the hon. member is talking about. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: It has nothing to do with any of the things that he was talking about. That's a very interesting topic, and I would love to debate that hon. member on his topic about his particular relevancy in the process, how he can make a difference in the process, what advocacy inside a caucus and outside the caucus looks like. All of those things are very important things. How parliamentary democracy works is a very important topic, and I'd love to discuss that with him.

But what we're discussing tonight and the rules of the House relating to what we're doing tonight is the Electoral Divisions Act, an act which puts in place the report, the effect of the report, which was adopted by this House in a motion. All this act really is about is what the boundaries are for those 87 seats.

The hon. member may want to stray a little bit and talk about 83 to 87 seats. Nobody objected when he did that before in committee or anywhere else. Nobody objected to that. But when he talks about caucus and being part of a caucus, when he starts to make insinuations about what happened and what didn't happen when he was in caucus . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: . . . forgetting any of the morals and ethics that he might have had as a member of a caucus in terms of what gets discussed, knowing and understanding that when he makes insinuations about what happened in a caucus, other members of the caucus will not respond to those because they have honour and integrity and understand that being involved in a caucus means that sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. In fact, in this business if you bat .360 consistently, you ought to go to the hall of fame. He should understand that, but he doesn't seem to understand that, and he wants to drag it into debate on bills in the House on issues that have no relevance to what he's talking about. So, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that you call him on the point of order with respect to relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have something to say about this point of order? Go ahead.

Mr. Anderson: It is so absolutely amazing to me that we're sitting here after all of the bullying, after shutting down debate – shutting down debate – in this Legislature with time allocation, shutting it down, the undemocratic nature of this, and this member continues to call points of order saying, “Oh, you know, relevancy, relevancy” when we just allowed the Member for Red Deer-South, the Member for Red Deer-North to talk on this exact same subject. You know what? Great. That's great. I support that. That's democracy. That's debate. I've enjoyed the speeches.

I get up, and I make the government leader a little bit uncomfortable because he knows full well that I'm telling the truth, so he gets up, and he calls another point of order. Now, he can disagree with me, and I ask him to stand up and disagree with me when it's his turn to talk and tell me how parliamentary democracy works in his world. But in my world an MLA represents his constituents first. I wanted to make that clear as a justification for having four additional MLAs under this bill. I think that is not only relevant; it is pertinent to everything that has happened in this session during the last three weeks.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, the chair heard both sides of the point of order. What I have just read before regarding Standing Order 23(c): “needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session.” I would like to call on the hon. member to focus on Bill 28. Of course, you are free to represent your constituents' views and any other views of your constituents, but tonight we're talking about Bill 28. You still have time, so stay on Bill 28.

Mr. Chase: With regard to the point of order, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I already ruled on it. Please sit down. Thanks.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Debate Continued

Mr. Anderson: Maybe we should have another point of order. Let's do it. This government has once again shown that they are absolutely unwilling to allow free votes in this Legislature. They do it on every single bill, Mr. Speaker, every single one. They do it again and again and again. Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. Okay. Let's take a second to calm down and think. We are here to debate on Bill 28, and we have a limit of two hours to debate.

All right. I would like to remind the hon. member to stay on Bill 28. That's the subject matter today.

An Hon. Member: Let's hear about Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Anderson: Chestermere-Rocky View: let's hear about that, then.

You know what? I had a much higher level of respect for the House leader over there until this session. I thought he was a democrat. He is not.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, Bill 28.

Mr. Anderson: Chestermere-Rocky View. On the debate on Bill 28. One of the most ridiculous examples of not only the gerrymandering but of government interference that was put into this bill and put into the final report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission

was, as I said earlier, the way that Airdrie-Chestermere was split up into many different constituencies. Now, electorally that did not hurt me, and it won't hurt me in any way, shape, or form, but I know very much that the people in my riding, especially in Chestermere, were very, very displeased. They put their input in there, as did Airdrie, as did many other stakeholders, and then the first report came out. That first report reflected the input of what the folks in my riding had said. Then afterwards, after the Deputy Premier sent his political, interfering letter . . .

Mr. Horner: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There's a point of order to be addressed right now.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Horner: Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member has referred to allegations of gerrymandering. He has referred to political interference in a report which we've already decided on in this House. It's pretty obvious that his vision of democracy is only if it agrees with what his vision is, and it's pretty obvious that if the vote doesn't go his way, it's not democratic. We saw that when he was in our caucus, and it's obvious that he's got a revisionist view of history, as well.

10:40

Certainly, we're here talking about Bill 28. He's obviously taunting the chair. He's obviously trying to upset the proceedings of this House this evening. He's doing a good job of it. But, Mr. Speaker, he's not on the topic of the bill at hand, which is the democratic process and the parliamentary process in this Legislature. In his area of life, wherever he is, perhaps it isn't, but in this House, Mr. Speaker, he should be on the bill, on topic.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, stay on the bill. Rather than talking about individuals, let's discuss the bill which is on the table.

Mr. Anderson: You know, Mr. Speaker, democracy in this Legislature is dead for the time being. Dead. These folks over here are bullies. They are fearmongers. They hate dissent. They hate debate. They don't like people telling them what they . . . [interjections] No. This is on the point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I want to repeat again. Talk about the bill. Don't talk about this guy or these people and so on. Talk about the bill, please.

Debate Continued

Mr. Anderson: I do not support Bill 28 because it stems out of a corrupted process, and I will not support a bill that stems out of a corrupted process. It is corrupt in every single way, and I will not in any way support a bill that has come about because of an interfered-with process. I'm not even going to say who interfered with it. We'll just let the public make the connection. But I would say that it was interfered with by some unknown force, and I don't think that that was proper. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore feels the same way about how his riding was effectively, in my view, gerrymandered. Is that also subject to a point of order? No? Good.

Again, it's amazing that the only people in this House that don't understand how ridiculous, how undemocratic, how pathetic they look are the people over there. I know that Albertans are ashamed

of them and disappointed in them. I can only say, Mr. Speaker, that in 12 months this will be resolved, and there will be a lot of people not on that side and a lot of disappointed faces over on that side.

I will conclude debate since I cannot speak on anything actually relevant to this bill because I have been silenced by that group, who doesn't want to hear dissent, who doesn't want to hear anything but their own voices because they care only about themselves and clinging to power and will do so with everything they have left in their hands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Doerksen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is on 29(2)(a), and I do have some questions for the hon. member. I hope that you will allow me enough time to frame those questions because I have more than one. I have heard, as have other members in the House, some rather pompous comments about political interference, lack of democracy, and also statements about loyalty. I would ask the hon. member across the way, first of all, if the mandate and the carrying out of the Electoral Boundaries Commission did not in fact highlight the work of democracy in consultation with Albertans.

There were some comments made earlier with regard to potential political interference with regard to some rural ridings and some of the ways that they were divided up. If I look at the mandate that the commission was to work under, I believe that they actually responded very well to some of the comments of Albertans. In fact, in the Strathmore-Brooks constituency there was not an initial public consultation as there was in many other parts of the province. When you look at what the interim report spelled out, it actually divided that particular riding into more diverse disconnections than most other ridings in the province. In fact, when Albertans heard the interim report, 37 per cent of responses to the interim report came from the Strathmore-Brooks constituency. [interjections] Do I have the floor, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks has the floor. [interjection] Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks has the floor.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I would ask the member across the way if he's actually read some of the comments that were put to the commission following the interim report and the response particularly from residents of Strathmore-Brooks, who made up 37 per cent of the responses to the interim report. My estimate of that – and I would ask the member if he wouldn't agree to some extent – is that maybe this is actually a triumph of democracy and consultation with Albertans. I would suggest – and it's reflected in the comments of residents of several constituencies and particularly the constituents of Strathmore-Brooks – that, in fact, they didn't respond to the initial invitation for responses because the riding that they resided in actually met the mandate that the commission had been given with regard to how they were to divide up the province.

To me, when I look at what the commission actually did, I would suggest that it is a triumph for democracy and consultation because if you look at what happened with regard to the whole mandate that they had, we know that the most rapid growth and the biggest population variances were either in or around our two largest cities of Calgary and Edmonton. There's no question that when constituencies are changed or altered, that creates some concern for residents, but it would just be logical, to my estimate – and I would ask the member if he wouldn't agree with that – that that's where

some of the most significant shifts would take place and that in the more rural and diverse areas of the province that, in fact, are divided by natural boundaries like rivers and that kind of thing, similar to what happens in Strathmore-Brooks, we would try and it would be a logical effort to listen to what Albertans had to say and maybe adjust plans as a result of that.

I can say as a representative of members of my constituency that they felt the response to the interim report that came out as part of the final report actually left them feeling that democracy worked in this province and that there was a consultative process that could change, that when the interim report came out, it wasn't fixed in stone, that there was a process for that to be changed and that that process actually worked. One of my questions to the member across the way is: does he not agree that that's a plausible situation?

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I've used up the time.

The Deputy Speaker: The five minutes for Standing Order 29(2)(a) is up.

The next hon. member to speak is the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you wish to speak after, right?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to be able to rise and speak today on Bill 28, the Electoral Divisions Act. I'm well aware of the purpose of this bill, as I'm sure all members of this Legislature are after our previous discussion and debate over its content and purposes. Bill 28, of course, sets out the names and boundaries of Alberta's electoral divisions.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the commission on its very fine work. As most, if not all, of us here already know, the commission was established in July 2009. It submitted its interim report as required on February 24, 2010. The commission then held an additional series of public hearings and considered well over 500 written submissions commenting on the interim report. The commission was required to submit its final report within five months of submitting the interim report. The commission completed its mandate basically in full when it submitted its final report.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to recognize here the importance of the input of many Albertans who took part in the commission's process. Commissions such as the Electoral Boundaries Commission that have a mandate to hear from Albertans in some respects are only as effective as the people they hear from and the submissions they make. In this case I think most members of this Assembly would agree that the commission did a credible and thorough job in this report, and I think that speaks well to the quality of the submissions Albertans made.

10:50

With that in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many Albertans who took the time and trouble to share their thoughts and opinions with the commission. Public contribution to work such as the commission's is vital to a successful, full result, and in this case Albertans have through their submissions demonstrated once again their commitment to this province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to the individuals and organizations that have provided submissions and made presentations to the Electoral Boundaries

Commission. I know one of the constituents of Calgary-Mackay spent many, many, many hours studying the history of the riding, the demographic makeup, the changes over time as well as comparing our constituency with other ridings in preparation for a very comprehensive submission to the commission. I also want to thank the members of the Calgary-Mackay association for also preparing and submitting a report to the commission.

I want to thank all the fine citizens in the Calgary-Mackay constituency for their valuable participation in this important public process. This kind of active civic engagement is absolutely critical in helping to sustain a high level of democracy, of democratic life in our communities and society.

Mr. Speaker, the contribution of Albertans symbolizes the importance of the commission's work to ensure Alberta remains democratically representative and effective. Proper and appropriate representation on the electoral map is fundamental to the proper and effective functioning of any democracy. For that to be true in Alberta, as has been observed already in this Assembly, it is necessary to ensure the electoral map continues to properly reflect the province's changing population distribution.

As a result of the fine efforts of the commission, the following name changes are proposed: first, Dunvegan-Central Peace to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley; Calgary-Acadia from Calgary-Egmont; Calgary-Greenway from Calgary-Montrose; Calgary-Hawkwood is added; Calgary-Klein from Calgary-North Hill; Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill from Calgary-Nose Hill; Calgary-Northern Hills from Calgary-Mackay; and Calgary-South East is also added.

The electoral map must also continue to reflect changing population densities as well as community interests and other factors, as the commission's report explains. Here I'm quoting directly from its final report.

The 2006 Canada Census resulted in an Alberta population of 3,290,350.

It was identified that three Indian reserves were incompletely enumerated, with the result that

the provincial population was adjusted by 7,288 persons, based on data provided by Alberta Aboriginal Relations. Therefore, the total Alberta population to be used by the Commission based on the Census in recommending the boundaries of electoral divisions is 3,297,638. The issue of net undercoverage in the 2006 Canada Census, in the view of the Commission, has been addressed by the use of the subsequent Alberta Municipal Affairs information and, in any event, could not accurately be allocated to electoral divisions.

This was the number used for the householder

distributed in September 2009 and subsequently adjusted with more recent sources of data.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth noting that the commission's report also confirms it considered more recent population information as follows:

Alberta Municipal Affairs annually publishes an Official Population List. When the Commission began its work preparing this Interim Report, the 2008 list was available and several of the larger urban municipalities had announced results of their 2009 municipal census. The Commission decided to use the additional population information to determine a "provincial quotient" and subsequently in recommending electoral division boundaries in municipalities where the additional population information was available in a format that permitted its use for these purposes.

The report goes on to say that

the Official Population List identifies that 142 municipalities and the 8 Metis Settlements, representing more than 85% of the total provincial population, have taken a census subsequent to the 2006 Canada Census.

Ultimately, the commission determined:

The population of Alberta has increased by 258,945 since the adjusted 2006 census of 3,297,638. The total population being considered by the commission is 3,556,583.

Using all of this information, the commission found that the average population per electoral division is 40,880.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear from the above that not only did the commission do a remarkable job in accurately assessing the population figures on which to base its work; I think it also shows that the commission performed its work with great attention to detail. I for one am pleased to stand today and thank them for that.

I want to stay with the subject of the commission's work around arriving at an accurate assessment of Alberta's population. To do that, I will again quote from the commission's final report.

The Commission opted to use updated information because the 2006 Canada Census data are more than three years old. The authoritative source for updated information is the Official Population List published by Alberta Municipal Affairs. This list is normally published in early November. There was broad-based support for using updated data.

In order to meet its legislated deadlines, the Commission held its initial round of public hearings in late September and early October. In order to inform the public and provide time to prepare submissions, the information Householder was distributed in September to all Alberta households. At that time, the only population information available was the 2006 census information. Many people making submissions invested a considerable amount of time in analyzing this data as part of preparing their submissions.

However, between the preparation of the Householder and the start of the public hearings, the Commission did receive 2009 municipal census information announced by the majority of the largest urban municipalities. The major effect of this was a significant increase in the quotient from that mentioned in the Householder, which consequently outdated the analyses in the submissions.

There were also considerable technical challenges in incorporating the updated population information into the electronic mapping program which is designed for use with census data that contains a greater level of geographic detail. This was a particular challenge where a municipality is located in more than one electoral division.

If future Commissions plan to use updated population information, it would assist persons wishing to make submissions if the Householder is published once the updated information has been incorporated into the population data so that there is a common data base.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the above quotations indicate the scrupulosity with which the commission carried out its work. I think the quotations also speak to the commission's commitment to the accuracy of this work. Ultimately, I think both its scrupulosity and its commitment to accuracy demonstrate again why Albertans can be confident in the recommendations of the commission's final report.

Mr. Speaker, if I might add, the fact that the report can therefore be seen as so reliable is testimony to the integrity and commitment of the commission's members. I think it also speaks very well of the process Alberta uses to ensure balanced, effective, and fair representation on the commission. As we know, the commission was an independent body composed of five individuals. The task they took on was a huge one and one that must have seemed, or at least would have seemed to me, quite daunting. The fact that they fulfilled the commission's mandate and purpose within the allotted time frame is a credit to their efforts and abilities. I would once again like to offer my thanks to them officially on the record for the work they so ably accomplished.

11:00

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I feel obliged to address another

matter related to the commission's work, and it concerns remarks made recently by an hon. member of this Assembly. Some comments have been made that the amount of debate set aside for Bill 28 should be longer than six hours given its importance. Now, I want to make it very clear before continuing any further that I am a firm believer in sufficient and appropriate debate for any bill brought before this Assembly. I'm sure every hon. member who sits in this Legislature would agree with me that open debate and discussion in this Assembly is absolutely fundamental to the proper functioning of democracy.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, a point of order. Relevance. I mean, really.

Ms Woo-Paw: I think it's safe to say that the people of Alberta expect no less from us.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. There's no relevance here at all, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has the floor. Continue on Bill 28.

Ms Woo-Paw: Continue? Okay. I'll finish. Thank you.

Each of us here carries a responsibility to our constituents of being effective representatives on their behalf in the Legislature, and being effective representatives means allocating and using our available time wisely and to the best effect. I want to say, then, that the suggestion that Bill 28 requires longer than six hours of debate because of its nature suggests internal failure to understand the process that Bill 28 is the product of.

I already stated earlier how well I thought the commission did this work, how I was proud to thank the commission's members for their very thorough and meticulous work. I also thank Albertans for their contributions to the commission as it solicited comments and opinions and suggestions from around the province. In that regard, it's also worth noting that the commission did its work and heard from Albertans over the course of an entire year. The final report contains their recommendations based on their extensive work. As the members of the Assembly know, the process the commission went through to arrive at those recommendations as well as the very nature of the commission itself, at arm's length from government, and this Legislature's acceptance of those recommendations when they were presented means that, basically, the rationale for prolonged and protracted discussion and debate would be repetitive and redundant.

I have faith that the intentions of the hon. member who suggested longer than six hours for debate of Bill 28 are good and well meant. Nevertheless, I think it's also important that he recognizes that the wiser, most judicious course would be to have this Assembly debate Bill 28 using the current allotted time. That time is absolutely sufficient for a bill that is based on recommendations this Assembly has already accepted.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks for five minutes of comments or questions.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I realize that in the last question I raised, I guess I took too much time.

I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay for a very thoughtful contribution to the discussion around third reading of Bill

28. I would simply ask a question for clarification around the process that really makes up how the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission carried out its mandate and the total aspect of what involves a changing of the electoral boundaries in this province. Part of that process involved work with the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and I think the member very adequately explained that work.

Part of that process is also consideration of the report here in the House. I think the member very adequately spelled out the length of time that this Legislature has taken to discuss the bill, to discuss the report, and to consider amendments to the bill. I think that's an integral part of what we've ended up with in the end and the bill that we will finally vote on. I just want a point of clarification from the member: if that was, in fact, her intention with regard to the extensive discussion that we've had with regard to this bill, please.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for this very, very excellent question. I wanted to profile the meticulous work that the commission had undertaken to not only hear from Albertans from all parts of the province, but they took the time also to look at the most updated data from the municipalities, which is critically important for a fast-growing, developing province like ours. The fact that they updated the data to ensure the ultimate distribution of the boundaries is important in ensuring that we have balanced and effective representation for our ridings.

So I want to thank the commission for their very thorough job and for taking the time to work it into the year-long process to ensure that they used the most updated data to ensure that the boundaries are designed and divided in a way that allows for the maximum effectiveness of representation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening with great interest to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay as she was talking about the number of presentations that were made by her constituents in talking about the presentations that were made to the commission. I was wondering if she could expand on the piece about her constituents actually being a part of this very democratic process as we move through Bill 28.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I was very pleased to see the kind of participation from the constituents of Calgary-Mackay. Not only did the Calgary-Mackay association participate, but we had individuals from the constituency who took a lot of personal time to do a lot of research. I think it's partly because in a riding like Calgary-Mackay, which is about 30 per cent above the average size of a constituency in this province and is growing at a very, very fast pace, people are very concerned about the level of representation for their interests, you know, in terms of having adequate representation to ensure that the educational needs, the health needs, the social services needs of the riding are adequately addressed. People felt very strongly that they needed to participate and have a voice in this process.

In fact, I'm also very pleased to say that what they recommended to the commission was the final recommendation from the commission in coming out with a new riding called Calgary-Northern Hills. So I'm sure that the constituents who participated in this process

appreciated the opportunity to have their voices heard and also to have their recommendations included in the final report.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have an opportunity even though we're under the time restraints of closure on this bill. I can't imagine how democracy is served. I heard many people try to defend democracy and explain how precious it is in this province, yet we're under a closure motion twice with Bill 28.

Mr. Hancock: It's a time allocation motion.

Mr. MacDonald: No. It is a closure motion, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and you know it. You can call it what you want, but it's a closure motion.

We forget also that this process, Mr. Speaker, has been sped up by almost a complete year. If we were to look at the original legislation, it should be just a discussion on an evening like this on what the proposed commission should look into. But here we are because this is a government that wants the option of calling a quick election.

11:10

If we look at the 87 seats, we don't need that many, obviously. People are crying in here about the government deficit and, "What are we going to do about it?" and "Oh, my gosh; we have a \$5 billion deficit." Well, you start with small things like reducing expenditures for MLAs. We could have lots of use for that money, but that's not going to happen with this big majority. They want a bigger government.

Other jurisdictions work quite effectively. Their representatives work quite effectively with much larger constituencies – much larger constituencies – some with close to 100,000 constituents. They manage. They do well. I can't understand or accept the argument made, Mr. Speaker, that we need more and that more is better.

Now, Mr. Speaker, also, we have to recognize that there are other things with our election system that we should be discussing along with this idea of having 87 MLAs. Our own constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar has certainly been changed again. It's been changed radically each and every redistribution. It's odd how our strongest polls are chopped off, and we move on. But we do our best, and it has been a pleasure, I must say. I'm disappointed that if this bill becomes law, we are going to lose the fine communities of McCauley, Commonwealth, Riverdale. It was an honour and a privilege to represent those communities in this Legislative Assembly, and I will continue to do so. But that is an example of how our district was changed.

I went to one of the commission's meetings. I respectfully waited. There was a gentleman that was in a hurry, a Conservative from rural Alberta. He had commitments, so I let him make his presentation first over at the Edmonton inn. I listened with interest to his presentation.

I also listened with interest to His Worship Mayor Mandel, the mayor of Edmonton, make a very rational argument. He presented his case very well, as I thought several other individuals did, to ask respectfully that not only should the city of Edmonton get back what it lost in the last go-round with redistribution but that we get one additional seat. That was not considered by this boundaries commission, and of course Edmonton is underrepresented in this Assembly under the current mathematics. That's a fact. The mayor

made an argument. We made the same argument, but unfortunately the commission didn't see it that way. I know there's a delicate balance here, but this government discriminated against the city by taking the eraser to the electoral map in the last redistribution process and thinks that the city should be grateful for getting back what they took away in the first place.

Now, where should those seats be removed? Where there are significantly less people. We can put additional modest resources forward for those members, but there's no reason why urban voters and urban Albertans should be discriminated against. They're being discriminated against with this proposed legislation, that has been forced through this Assembly by closure.

We know this is not a democratic process. We know that on an occasion there was a member of this Assembly, a duly-elected member of this Assembly, who said twice that we were going to get four more seats. Four more seats. Guess what happened? The commission was struck. We get four more seats. That individual wasn't a member of this caucus, our caucus, or the New Democrat caucus. So figure it out. If people don't have confidence in this commission, you can see why. It was a predetermined outcome.

Mr. Hancock: The act was passed to make it 87. It wasn't predetermined. The Legislature determines that.

Mr. MacDonald: The Legislature. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, within an hour, by midnight, the law will be in effect. The process will have started that we're going to expand to 87 seats. In the precious time that I have, I'm not going to talk about the size of this government and the size of the Executive Council. We'll leave that for another time.

In our community of Edmonton-Gold Bar there are certainly reasons why the citizens are suspicious of this commission and this set-up in determining our boundaries. I'll go back to 2004. It wasn't the New Democratic Party, and it wasn't the Wildrose Party that had any trouble. It was the Conservative Party who had the unsavoury practice of asking homeless people to take out Conservative Party memberships for cigarettes and whiskey and get them to the nomination meeting. He laughs, but that's a historical fact. It's wrong, Mr. Speaker, but that's what happened.

What happened in the last election? The ballot box was taken from room to room in the Chinese Free Masons apartment complex, when it should have been placed at a table and people would come and vote if their names were on the list. If their names weren't on the list, then they would be sworn in. None of this happened.

Here we have two examples in the election of 2004 and again in 2008 of problems, major problems, major violations of the Election Act. This is what we should be talking about whenever we're talking about electoral reform and redrawing the map of this province. We should be talking about financial reform. Who gives what amount of money to whom? That's not: oh, we can't talk about that in this boundaries commission report. We can't talk about what the previous Chief Electoral Officer suggested to improve the voting process.

I would have to say, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, that we should not be accepting the recommendations of this commission. We should not be forced by the act of closure to restrict and limit debate on this redistribution of the seats. I think it's amusing that we would consider that six hours-plus is an adequate amount of time to publicly discuss this matter. I think we are incredibly disrespectful of the taxpayers and the citizens of this province. I have not had one person approach me in the last couple of years and say that we need more MLAs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: None like you.

Mr. MacDonald: No, hon. minister of labour. What they have said to me is: why doesn't the minister of labour ensure that we have enough nurses trained to work in our emergency rooms? Why does the advanced education minister not have enough seats in our medical schools to ensure that we have enough doctors for both urban and rural Alberta? We don't have enough doctors. How come we can't afford hospital beds but we can afford more MLAs? That's what the citizens have told me that they would like to see accomplished by this Legislative Assembly, not the creation of more seats for MLAs.

In fact, they're very confused by the direction that this government has taken on this matter, very, very confused and very, very disappointed. Some have even suggested at the coffee shop in the Capilano Mall that this is a government that's completely out of touch. What the citizens, what the voters want is more emergency room doctors, more nurses to provide compassionate care. They want more teachers. They certainly do not want, no one has expressed, I'm disappointed to say, an opinion that they want more politicians in this province. They want politicians to work harder and ensure that the money that they contribute through their taxes is wisely spent. I can say that I have the view, as they do, that our money that we are making in a contribution to the Treasury is not being spent wisely by this government.

Thank you.

11:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister for Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity. I've been listening, actually, quite attentively. I managed to squeeze a word or two in between the member's debate, but what really troubles me – and maybe the member can explain it to me – is that a lot of insinuations have been made over the last couple of hours by the member from the WRA and now this member. One says that this whole process is a sham or is a joke, I believe was the term being used.

Now, this member more directly indicates that he feels that this commission was biased and that there was a foregone conclusion. Is he insinuating that Judge Walter was actually influenced by this government? He made comments about money exchanges, who gives money to him. Why don't the member and the other members have the fortitude and, instead of implying in roundabout ways, stand up and say what you're really saying? That's what you're saying. There's no other way of interpreting what you're saying, that Judge Walter was actually influenced by one or all members of this government. He was told what to do, and he simply tabled a report that this government told him to table. Is that what you're saying?

Somehow no one seems to have the fortitude in this House to stand up and accuse Judge Walter. We all know Judge Walter. He is probably one of our most renowned judges on the provincial bench, and the entire bench would be supportive of him. I imagine the entire bar of this province would be supportive of him. No one would have the fortitude to accuse the judge of it, and no one would definitely say that outside of this House, yet you're standing up, members, and insinuating that this report is biased and influenced by this government.

Let's be honest. This report was written and signed by this particular judge. If you have a problem with the process, if you have a problem with the report, what you're really doing is accusing the

judge. Have the fortitude, have the honour to stand up in the House and say that. Or more, go outside of the House and say that. I don't hear you saying that, and you won't do it. You don't have what it takes to do that. You're just making insinuations, hoping to score some cheap political points, and you know that it's wrong. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of cheap political points, that's a cheap political trick right over there. At one point in his political career he won his seat by three votes through judicial inquiry, and he had to go three times through the courts to hold onto the seat.

No one, Mr. Speaker, no one talked about the commission. What we said, if he had been listening and not chatting with his colleagues, was that one hon. member of this House who is not a member of that caucus, not a member of our caucus, nor is that individual a member of the New Democrat caucus, said publicly twice what the commission was going to decide before the commission even had one meeting. You figure it out, hon. member. If you want to go in the gutter and you want to have all these innuendoes and these speeches, you go right ahead. You go right ahead. [interjections]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened attentively to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I never agree with a lot of what he has to say, but I really take exception to one thing that he had to say, and that was his comment about homeless people being influenced. Homeless people are entitled to vote just like any one of us. We have a homeless identification program, but even with that, you don't actually need identification to vote. I really take exception to this member's comments that they can be easily influenced or somehow that people are inappropriately abusing homeless people. I think it's ridiculous. Maybe he'd like to retract these statements.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I have to give this member a history lesson. I don't know how much time I have left. It was the PC Party, when they were determining which candidate in 2004 they were going to nominate in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The PC Party had to overturn the decision that they made in a community hall because the party members did it wrong. You took people off the street, you promised them money, you promised them cigarettes, and you promised them liquor if they would take a PC card and go to a community hall and vote. It's you, sir, that should apologize and your party that should apologize to the homeless people. It had nothing to do with me. It's your party and how it's run, and it was run corruptly. Sorry.

Mr. Denis: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, you have the floor.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm rising on a point of order here. This makes allegations against every member of the government caucus that are completely unfounded. This member is out of order.

Mr. MacDonald: There's no citation there. Mr. Speaker, again to the hon. member: before you rise in this House and bring this matter up again, please review the unsavoury history of your PC party in our constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, if there's any time left . . . [The time limit for questions and comments expired] There's no time left.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, there's no time left. You are right, hon. member.

I hesitate to interrupt the hon. members here, but pursuant to Government Motion 27, agreed to on December 1, 2010, I must now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Berger	Fawcett	McFarland
Bhardwaj	Fritz	McQueen
Bhullar	Goudreau	Olson
Campbell	Griffiths	Quest
Dallas	Groeneveld	Renner
Danyluk	Hancock	Tarchuk
DeLong	Horner	Vandermeer
Denis	Jablonski	Weadick
Doerksen	Leskiw	Woo-Paw
Elniski	Lukaszuk	

Against the motion:

Anderson	Hinman	Pastoor
Chase	MacDonald	

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 5
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[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

11:40 Recognition of Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services

Mr. Hancock moved that the Assembly recognize the work of Mrs. Louise Kamuchik, Clerk Assistant and director of House services, on her last evening sitting.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, just prior to moving adjournment, I would like to beg the indulgence of

the House in a motion, if I may, because tonight is, I believe, the last night that we are to be served in this House by Louise Kamuchik. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps fitting that today, being her last day, we sit until 11:40. Louise has been in this House, I think, for four late, overnight session-type sittings and has put in years of service with a fair, impartial, and very friendly demeanour. She's been most helpful. I've developed an immense respect for her over the 13 years that I've been here. This House has been very, very well served, as have the people around her.

The Deputy Speaker: I think our Government House Leader just moved that motion about Louise.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, may I speak to the motion?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

J'appécie beaucoup tout ce que vous avez fait pendant vos années de travail dans cette Assemblée. Nous, nous allons vous manquer. Ma femme et moi, nous avons apprécié tout ce que vous avez accompli dans votre tour de la Ville de Québec. Merci beaucoup pour votre service pour tous les Albertains.

[Motion carried unanimously]

Mr. Hancock: With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move that this House do now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:42 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, December 2, 2010

Issue 51a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Third Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, December 2, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to introduce to you two gentlemen who are currently in the Speaker's gallery. The first gentleman is Giuseppe Filippo Imbalzano. If he would rise, please. Mr. Imbalzano is a retired diplomat for the government of Italy. He served in a number of postings throughout the world. A good friend of the province of Alberta, he served in this province as vice-consul for his government from 1991 to 1995. He is a commander in the Italian Navy Reserve and is here in Edmonton visiting with the honorary president of the Alberta branch of the Italian Naval Association, Mr. Vito Spadavecchia – if he would rise as well, please – who is a long-time resident here in the city of Edmonton and a good friend to all. He's a retired mechanical engineer with the Italian navy and merchant navy. Our guests are good friends of ours, and I'd ask that the members provide them with a warm reception here.

Hon. members, also in the Assembly today is a large group of individuals who play a key role in the democratic process in the province of Alberta. These individuals, 75 of them, are staff who work at our constituency offices. They often provide the first point of contact for our constituents, and they certainly represent our offices in this Assembly wherever they are. These special individuals are participating in the winter constituency employee seminar, which is an opportunity for all to visit and become updated in terms of what's happening. We'll receive them with great joy and honour this evening as I host a dinner for them. Seventy-five constituency employees from throughout the province of Alberta, your personal representatives: I'd ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. It truly is an honour to start with an introduction of two individuals from Lethbridge College, Dr. Tracy Edwards and Mr. Randy Jespersen. Dr. Edwards is the president and CEO of Lethbridge College and chair of the Council of Presidents of the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes, otherwise known as AACTI, and she's doing a great job at the college and a fabulous job as president of AACTI.

Effective September 2010 Randy Jespersen was appointed board chair for Lethbridge College. He is a distinguished alumnus of the college and has recently retired from his position as president and CEO of Terasen Inc., primarily a natural gas utility and alternative energy service provider in British Columbia. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the experiences that he's had over his number of years have certainly endeared him to Lethbridge College and certainly

made him one of their stars. He continues to have connections in southern Alberta, and each year you will find him in Taber, helping with harvest on the family farm.

Mr. Jespersen and Dr. Edwards will make a formidable team, I'm sure you would agree. They're both in the members' gallery. I see they've risen. I'd ask all members to give them the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have one other if I may. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members a group of gentlemen who this spring attended the St. Albert Housing Society's second annual homestyle breakfast. There was an auction held to see who would come and have sandwiches with me in the office and discuss things of relevance to Alberta. These gentlemen are Alistair Hazewinkel, director of finance, and Mr. Reid Lillico, president and COO of the Commonwealth Corporate Support Services Group Canada Ltd., otherwise known as the Commonwealth Group; Mr. David Woodman, regional managing partner of Meyers Norris Penny, consisting of 2,300 team members across Canada with their head offices in Calgary; and Mr. Bob Walker, vice-president of Ledcor Construction. With roots firmly planted in the oil patch, Ledcor is a leader in sustainable building practices and techniques and an entrepreneur in resourcefulness, accounting, and innovation. They are in the members' gallery, I believe, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of the Legislature here a friend and a business associate of my wife, Mr. Jim Shortt, who is a mortgage broker with Dominion Lending in Edmonton. He's a resident of Edmonton and a Rotarian. With him is my wife, Debbie, who is an agent with Dominion Lending. Mr. Speaker, should you have any borrowing needs, feel free to give them a call. I invite all to give them the warm traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the staff of the government members' caucus. We are all dependent on our legislative assistants and our research and communications branch to help us navigate our way through sessions such as this one. I know that I speak for all my caucus colleagues when I say thank you for all the hard work you have done and continue to do for us. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [some applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of young people who are here from the Alberta Youth Congress: John Sulit, chair and CEO; Johnny Mio; Deseray Mason; and Stephanie Ross. They currently have started touring around Alberta from school to school, making presentations about the congress and bullying. The Alberta Youth Congress also believes that this province is the best place to invest in and has the best publicly funded health care system in Canada. They are seated in

the members' gallery, I believe. I would ask that they rise and received the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very good friend to me visiting us here today, David Olson. David is my cousin, more like a brother, whom I grew up with. Thanks to great parents and great grandparents we had a fantastic childhood. He's been away from Canada the last 12 years working in the IT and communications industry in the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands. It's great for me to have him here. I think he's in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some members of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations. This council is co-chaired by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and myself. The council met this morning here at the Leg. to brainstorm some ideas that were presented a month ago with our counterparts from Saskatchewan. We're working hard to set directions for the years to come.

They're seated in the visitor's gallery, and I would ask them to stand as I introduce them. Dr. Ehor Gauk is past chair of Osvita medical project and a professor emeritus of pediatrics and neurology at the University of Alberta. Ken Korchinski is a retired vice-president and Edmonton regional manager at UMA Engineering. Mr. Korchinski is actively involved in initiatives to develop opportunities in Ukraine and Poland. Dr. Roman Petryshyn is the founder and director of the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre at Grant MacEwan College and is instrumental in opening a Grant MacEwan office in Kiev. Ed Piasta is involved in the promotion and organization of business investment ventures in Ukraine both as a participant and as a legal counsel. Edith Zawadiuk is a director of Friends of the Ukrainian Village and past president of the Kalyna Country Eco-museum, and she's been involved in 4-H agricultural projects in Ukraine. I would ask the Assembly to give them a traditional warm welcome.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Connie Whiteley, Brian Johnson, and Yvonne Byer. These individuals have been directly affected by the shoddy construction of their homes and have been pressing the government for over two years to protect new home and condo buyers by implementing stricter regulations and making warranties mandatory. They remain hopeful that the government will catch up to the other provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia and provide greater protection for its citizens. They have risen. I would ask all the members to extend the traditional warm welcome of this House to my special guests.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

International Human Rights Day

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. December 10 is International Human Rights Day and marks the signing of the universal declaration of human rights by United Nations members in 1948. The declaration arose directly from the experience of the Second World War and represents the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are entitled.

Mr. Speaker, each year a different focus is encouraged on Human Rights Day, and this year the UN has launched a campaign called Speak Up, Stop Discrimination. This campaign highlights and promotes the achievements of human rights defenders and encourages all global citizens to speak out against discrimination in all forms.

On Human Rights Day I encourage all Albertans to reflect on what we can do to prevent and stop discrimination in our communities. Discrimination based on race, gender, age, religious belief, sexual orientation, or any other protected ground is unacceptable in a free, fair, and democratic society. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's diversity is our strength. By combating discrimination and helping to build welcoming and inclusive communities, we create a society that benefits everyone.

It is important to note, however, that although we are recognizing this day, the effort to combat discrimination is a year-round initiative, and it's an initiative that involves not just organizations and levels of governments but every single human being and every single member of a free and democratic society. It comes from the core of every human being's actions. It's not a war against discrimination but a movement to spread love, peace, freedom, and respect from one human being to another human being. Such actions should not be left to just the top. These movements and the greatest human rights movements I've witnessed in my life have been on account of a single individual at a time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a shameful record, letting working people pay the price of unsafe workplaces. Too many workers suffer injuries or health problems related to workplaces, and far too many families lose loved ones. The NDP and labour organizations have raised concerns about this for many years. The Auditor General has made strong recommendations about how poorly Alberta does in this area. For those who work on farms and other agricultural settings, the story is especially terrible: 389 deaths, 62 of them children, over the past 15 years.

Many people have observed we seem to have tougher laws and penalties for farm animals being mistreated than we do for workers in that same location, but workplace dangers faced by farm and agriculture industry workers are amongst the greatest of any occupation. The astonishing thing is that there is no protection under the Occupational Health and Safety Act or the Workers' Compensation Act for these people. Only Alberta in all of Canada permits this irresponsible reality. A provincial judge has expressed concern about this in the course of an inquiry into a death, and last year alone 13 people died on the job on farms.

The recent announcement of this government that this shameful situation will be addressed by little more than education is utterly inadequate. Colouring books at community fairs and dust-covered posters at the local seed plant will not change what is happening. This government made nearly no effort to talk to actual farm workers before making its latest inadequate pronouncements. It's time to stop listening only to employers. Government has a duty to

ensure that workers can have confidence that health and safety are not sacrificed so they can earn a living. Making occupational health and safety laws and penalties apply in the agricultural industry will be quite manageable for employers if there is a well-designed phase-in plan beginning with the largest employers.

Farm workers have the security of this protection everywhere else in Canada. Well-designed, comprehensive education is needed but not good enough. An advisory committee as a response to the unending record of death . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Raymond J. Nelson

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to a respected businessman, a visionary, a successful entrepreneur, a philanthropist who had a sincere passion for his community and his country, a family man, a community leader, a true Albertan, a mentor, and a friend. Many will remember Mr. Ray Nelson as the founder along with his brother of the Nelson Lumber Company and Nelson Homes.

Ray was much more than a businessman. He was a true humanitarian, giving of his time, energy, and expertise to many directorships. He never stopped thinking of ways to improve and grow his community. Ray Nelson was sincere in making his community a better place. Over the years his charity commitment and support extended as well to worthy causes and projects well beyond the borders of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Ray Nelson was a deeply spiritual man, often remarking that one could not serve God without serving mankind. He sought practical ways to exhibit his great passion and personal faith, including playing an integral role in the formation and ongoing success of the annual Alberta Premier's prayer breakfast. I had the pleasure of working with him on the prayer breakfast since 2001, so I am well aware of his past leadership skills and also his passion.

He lived by his own motto, that the greatest wealth is the freedom to choose. Ray Nelson chose to effectively bring worthy ideas to reality for the betterment of his fellow man, and he did so with quiet humility and integrity.

At the age of 79 he was the oldest recipient of a heart transplant. At the age of 84 he sold his shares in his business with a 10-year noncompete clause. Before he signed the papers, he looked up and said: you know, 10 years is a long time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

National Safe Driving Week

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December 1 to 7 marks National Safe Driving Week and serves as a reminder to drivers to operate their vehicles in a responsible and safe manner. This message is particularly important now that winter has arrived and the holiday season is just around the corner. We all know that winter driving is perilous, with slippery roads and reduced visibility. In these conditions we need to leave earlier and slow down and not tailgate. Arriving five minutes earlier is not worth risking your life or the lives of others.

During National Safe Driving Week we need to make time to inspect our vehicles and ensure that they're ready for winter driving. By this time we should have changed to winter tires, if possible, and made sure our cars are equipped with roadside emergency kits if the worst were to happen.

This government has always taken the issue of safety on Alberta's roads seriously, but it also falls to individual drivers to make safe

decisions on the road. I urge all Albertans to drive safely this holiday season.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to wish all of the Legislature staff, my colleagues, and all their family members a merry Christmas and happy holidays. I'm looking forward to seeing you all in the new year, the Year of the Rabbit.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Quality Council

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health Quality Council is the only body charged with measuring the quality and efficiency of the health care system. It's the only watchdog on the health care system, but it cannot initiate investigations at its own discretion. It takes direction from the minister of health. To the minister of health. In February the minister of health requested that the Health Quality Council investigate the botched H1N1 response. The report was supposed to be released months ago. How can you say that the quality council is independent when the report has been delayed for months by this government's meddling?

1:50

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely not true. I spoke with the Health Quality Council yesterday. They said they had just about finished their report, and it will be sent along very soon. I'd ask you to retract those derogatory remarks against the Health Quality Council, who's job it is to ensure that safety and quality are looked after.

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council can only investigate at the request of the minister or the Health Services Board. Since Albertans want truly independent quality assessments, why will the minister not give them the power to initiate investigations where they see cause, such as the 322 cases compromised by care in one emergency room over one month?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council of Alberta is involved in many different ways: with respect to recent issues in emergency rooms, for example; the two reviews that are going on following some unfortunate incidents. They've been involved. They've had their input. They are highly respected and highly regarded in that way. The legislation at the moment stands the way that it is.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the minister we're talking to. It is quite within his realm to change that. It's clear that the Health Quality Council does not have the independence it needs. Will the minister build trust in Albertans and change the reporting relationship of the Health Quality Council so they report directly to this Legislature?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's a suggestion that I'm prepared to take under advisement, and I thank the member for raising it in a civil tone.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Publicly Funded Health Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the minister of health said that he didn't author the document which reveals the government's real plan to introduce two-tiered, American-style health care. To the minister of health: why won't you reveal who did author this document that lays out the real plan?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I already said that that is a departmental document that reflected views, opinions, comments, and ideas by Albertans, so you might say that it came from a variety of sources right across the province. All that the department did was co-ordinate all of that, put it into one document, and said: here's what Albertans said. We looked at the document, and I said that there are things in here that we can do and things that we can't do. It's that straightforward. We can't violate the Canada Health Act, and we can't violate our own legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. [interjections] Did the hon. member for Edmonton-Centre want to do this question instead?

Ms Blakeman: It's coming.

Dr. Swann: My question is to the Premier. The five-year plan that was released by the minister this week makes reference to phase 1 and phase 2 of the Alberta Health Act, just like the leaked document. Both mention consolidating the five core health acts, but only the leaked document reveals the true intent of this legislative change. How can the Premier deny the solid proof of this long-standing agenda to privatize health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 ensures that all Albertans will have their say in the health care system. That means that whenever any new ideas are introduced, they will have an opportunity to respond and to support or oppose any changes. I would sooner, you know, consult with Albertans on what they want to see in their health care system as opposed to dealing with various ideologies. I think this is an opportunity, a great opportunity, for all Albertans to get involved.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has said he will consult with Albertans before making changes to the health care system. What consultation existed before the 2008 decision to blow up the health care system and make the most radical changes to health care in our history? Actions speak louder than words. You, sir, have lost the trust of Albertans. You've certainly lost the trust of health professionals in this province. I believe you've lost the confidence of most of this Legislature. I will not give him the opportunity to ask another question . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the floor.

Dr. Swann: No further questions, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, you ran out of time anyway.
The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what the public is looking at, that kind of theatrics. I can tell you that all the theatrics and all of the 27 hours of debate never moved one person through emergency any faster or provided cancer treatment any faster. We're going to stay the course, and we're going to get the job done.

The Speaker: Now, do I take it there is no third Official Opposition main question? Oh, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, please.

Arts Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister of culture yesterday argued that arts funding had been increasing. Given that two years ago funding was \$76 million, last year the funding was \$67 million, and this year it's \$56 million, could the minister explain how this is an increase?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where she gets her numbers from. Look at *Hansard*. I did not say that we increased funding. We said that we have increased funding since 2005 to 2010. That includes the 16 per cent reduction that was dealt out in March 31st of this year.

Ms Blakeman: Sounds like a decrease to me.

Back to the same minister: given that the minister has reversed planned cuts to two programs, artists affiliated with municipalities and artists funded by the artists and education program, would the minister add two more programs to that list and reverse the cuts to artists affiliated with universities and the cuts to cultural industries?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, right now we are in the budget deliberation process through our caucus and with my government colleagues. We haven't made any determination about budget, but as the hon. member knows, we will give that information as the budget is brought forward. At this particular point in time we're not able to make that kind of commitment.

Ms Blakeman: Well, except you've already done it twice. I thought maybe you could do it a couple of more times.

My final question to the minister is: given that every other minister defends their department's programs, why does this minister of culture defend the cuts to his ministry's programs?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I defend our programs. Creative industries create \$4.5 billion of gross domestic product. Our government contributes some \$60 million towards arts and culture. We are the third-highest per capita contributor to arts of any provincial government in the country, third only to Ontario and Quebec. We support our artists. We had \$200,000 towards our artists to give them a stage at the Grey Cup here last weekend. We spent \$6 million in the Cultural Olympiad for the last three years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health Care System

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House the Premier told Albertans: "There is no crisis in health care." How the leader of this province can say something that's so out of touch with what Albertans are thinking is beyond my comprehension. I invite him to visit emergency rooms and our hospital wards with overflowing patients and waiting hours that are beyond belief in terms of the time. Will he look those patients in the eyes and apologize to them?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I stand by my word. I said yesterday, "There is no crisis." There are challenges, obviously, in various components of delivering health care in the province, but to say that there is a crisis is a complete disservice to the hundreds of profes-

sionals that we have in this province that are delivering services every day. Every day people access emergency rooms, babies are born, cancer is treated, the shortest waiting list now for heart transplants or heart surgery: all of those things are very, very positive in the province.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, that explanation is just simply not good enough for Albertans. The only MLA who's an ER doctor had indicated that it was a crisis, other doctors have said it's a crisis, but you're in denial. You have to guard against self deception. All you have is a five-year plan, a Christmas wish list. I want to give the Premier, in fairness, another opportunity to retract his statement that there is no crisis in health care.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, to say that there's a crisis in health care ignores all of the good work that's being done in the province, whether it's at the Mazankowski heart centre, whether it's in all of the clinics that have been opened recently in Edmonton and Calgary, the two world-class children's hospitals. I mean, we're doing things there that other provinces just simply can't. People are coming here from other provinces for certain surgeries that can't be done in their province, and, like I said before, one of only three burn units in all of the world is here in the city of Edmonton.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in the newspaper the AMA's Dr. Paul Parks and Dr. Felix Soibelman wrote a letter that said, "The crisis has not abated." If the Premier is saying that there is no crisis and these leading medical doctors are saying that there is a crisis, I know who I would believe, and I think I know who Albertans would believe. To the Premier: are you prepared to stand by your assertion that there is no crisis in health care and tell Dr. Parks and Dr. Soibelman right here, right now that they're wrong?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is no crisis. You know, just recently the Canadian Institute for Health Information released a report that reconfirms the fact that Alberta by far is the most attractive place in Canada to attract physicians. Over the past decade we've seen an increase in physicians, an increase of over 52 per cent. That's two and a half times more than the Canadian average. They're all coming here to the province because it is the most attractive place to perform their professional duties, right here in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Fall Session Encapsulation

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This very short session has been a disaster for this PC government. Despite emergency room doctors warning of an imminent collapse of emergency room services, Alberta Health Services' leadership falling apart, and massive confusion in the system, the Premier yesterday denied that there was a crisis in health care. My question is to the Premier. How did you get so far out of touch with Albertans?

The Speaker: Well, if this has to do with government policy, go ahead.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think today and the last few days

there have been letters written to various newspapers, especially the *Edmonton Journal*. People have been watching the last couple of weeks in this House and disagree with some of the positions taken by the opposition. They have a job to do, I guess, but part of that job is not to create a situation where we put fear into people that they may not be able to access any health services in this province. We have a very good system. It needs improving. It will. We have the money in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This session has seen the ejection of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and his subsequent persecution. Albertans have overwhelmingly rallied to his defence and reacted to the government's treatment of him with disgust. My question is to the Premier. Why do you condone actions against dissident MLAs that most Albertans find reprehensible?

Mr. Stelmach: There were no actions against any MLA.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier is also out of touch with reality.

This Premier not only ignores the appeals of front-line health employees, expels anyone who points this out from his caucus, but he has imposed closure on debate in this session of the Legislature on more bills than in any other session in recent memory. My question is to the Premier. How did it come to pass that basic principles of democracy and decency have been so trampled as to be almost unrecognizable?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously, that member has a very short memory, but that's for him to deal with on his own. I can tell you that in the last number of weeks in this House there have been 27 hours of debate. I invite all Albertans to read the transcript of *Hansard*. Just read some of the things that have been presented by the opposition. I want to know where, in any of that debate, it actually moved one more person quicker through emergency or improved cancer treatment in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

New Home Warranty Program

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is failing homeowners on construction codes not enforced through a home warranty scheme that is both deficient and lacks financial transparency. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why are the financial statements for the Alberta New Home Warranty Program not available to the public, sir?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we're working hard to develop various solutions to ensure the integrity of new homes that are being built in the province. We want to ensure that new homes, basically the single largest investment that individuals will make in their lifetime, are being built right. We recognize that there are a number of solutions out there that affect a number of people and organizations, and we need to continue to work with them. Those include groups like homeowners themselves or municipalities or builders.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister didn't answer my question. I was asking: why are the financial statements not being released to the public?

To the minister again: what was the Alberta New Home Warranty surplus last year, sir?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I will have to look at the New Home Warranty numbers. I'm not sure exactly where those numbers are, but those numbers should be available to the public, and I see no reason why they would not be released.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Out of the claims made, how many claims are paid out under the New Home Warranty Program?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that there are a number of claims that are being made against the New Home Warranty Program. Again, I don't have those actual numbers. We recognize that often individual actions within homes will trigger certain concerns within the home. Let me use an example. If somebody installs, for instance, a hot tub in a home without proper ventilation, they'll create some of their own . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Secondary Suites

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Studies show that increasing the supply of secondary suites can intrinsically address the availability of affordable housing, a game changer for the poor. However, the reality is that some residents have several concerns. As this seems to be an urban issue, what has the minister done to reduce the anxiety that some Calgarians have with secondary suites in their neighbourhood?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question for urban Alberta in particular. The issue of secondary suites has come to my office recently. First and foremost, I believe in the private property rights of the individuals who do own the suites but also of the neighbours. We are working with some municipalities on this issue. Let's face it, though. It's expensive to live in Alberta, particularly in the city of Calgary, and we need a variety of affordable housing options.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question to the same minister. A lecture on private property and agreeing that secondary suites are important for the rental market does not address the concerns local residents have regarding congestion and other issues. I ask you again: what has this minister done to overcome these concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, we are working with local municipalities, but this is largely a local issue to work out. We

want to get out of the way and help local municipalities arrive at the solution that's best for them. Let's face it again. What works in Calgary might not work in Fort McMurray or in Grande Prairie or in Red Deer. You get my point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last question to the same minister. My alderman is concerned with the existing number of noncompliant secondary suites in our area. How does your policy on affordable housing encourage construction that is, number one, safe; number two, wanted by the local residents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. First off, we have an RFP process throughout this entire province. We're mandated to create 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012, we're doing so in an economical fashion for the taxpayer, and \$97,500 is our average cost per unit. A few years ago the Ministry of Municipal Affairs actually underwent a safety code study from 2006, and we're working on these issues but on an individual basis that works for the local community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Government Employee Credit Checks

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Privacy Commissioner issued an investigative report finding that Alberta Justice had been conducting unlawful credit checks on its own employees without their knowledge or consent. To the Minister of Justice. Alberta's privacy law for government has been in place for 15 years. How could this breach have happened? Is it that you don't train your employees, or do you simply allow your employees to break the law?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'll say is that I have incredible confidence in the employees that work in the Department of Justice and serve this province. The second thing I will say is that the reason we know that this is a public issue is because this was part of the annual report of the Privacy Commissioner. It was a matter that arose out of normal operations last year in maintenance enforcement. It was brought to the attention of management and the Privacy Commissioner. We acknowledged the error immediately. We took every step recommended by the Privacy Commissioner to deal with it, and the Privacy Commissioner in their annual report actually said that we took all appropriate steps and had no further recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question again for the Justice minister: if your staff doesn't know that they can't surveil department employees without legal authority, what else don't they know? Are they also breaching the privacy of other members of the public?

2:10

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this will be a short answer. Maintenance

enforcement does a tremendous job for families, people, and children in this province. It was an incident that happened, it was investigated, all appropriate steps were taken, and I have confidence in the people that work in my department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Has a full audit been done of your department to see whether any other privacy complaints have arisen?

Ms Redford: Actually, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had read the whole report and the recommendations, he would have seen that that was one of the recommendations. It was done, and we're fine, thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Separate School System

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A former education minister, David King, has launched a website and a petition calling for a referendum on abolishing publicly funded Roman Catholic and Protestant schools in the province of Alberta in favour of a single public system. The president of the ACSTA, and I'm proud to say a constituent and good friend of mine, has contacted me, asking the minister for his position. To the Minister of Education: can he please explain the history and constitutional rights of separate school boards in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, clearly, in Alberta Albertans have the rights to minority denominational education and minority language education, and that is described in and protected by the Canadian Constitution. We cannot compare different provinces in the country in that regard because different provinces had different educational systems in place as they entered Confederation, and as they entered into Confederation, the constitutional rights that their citizens had at the time were enshrined. So the 1905 Alberta Act enshrined those rights for Albertans, both minority faiths and minority languages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is one out of three provinces in Canada with religion-based separate schools, so my next question to the same minister: is there any plan to look at changing ours, and is the minister in support of this change?

Mr. Hancock: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is no. We're not planning to change the rights of Albertans. That would require a constitutional amendment. There is no apparent interest in Alberta. We'll see what comes from Mr. King's petition, but I see no reason to change a system that is working very well. We are working at transforming the system to do even better in the future, but that change will not eliminate choice for Albertans to choose the kind of education that works well for their students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. Mr. King criticizes the separate education system for the exclusion of children from classrooms and adults from the separate school boards based solely on religion. So my question is:

please clarify how our separate education system is, in fact, reflective of Canadian values like multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity?

The Speaker: Is that opinion or government policy? Proceed.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's actually also a matter of Alberta law. Section 3 of the School Act requires that every school in Alberta, all education programs in Alberta "reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta, promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans." Also, in section 3(2) the School Act provides that the doctrines of racial or ethnic or religious superiority or persecution cannot be promoted in our schools. So we not only protect the freedoms of Albertans and promote the values of Albertans, but we also encourage the diversity of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

School Utilization Formula

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, to its credit the newly elected Edmonton public school board placed a two-year moratorium on school closures. The government's combined failure to update its school space utilization formula to reflect learning commission class size reductions and its ongoing refusal to either repair aging schools or build desperately needed new ones has contributed to overcrowding, unnecessary school closures, and school shortages in rapid-growth areas like Airdrie and Leduc. To the minister: when will you fix the formula?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are talking with stakeholders in the education system about our funding formulas. We're also talking about what kind of schools we should be building in the province for the future. It's all part of Inspiring Education, discussing what kind of education system we need to have to make sure that Alberta students are well prepared to be global citizens and local citizens, to be participants in the global economy and the local economy. That's the very activity we've been engaged in for the last two years. It's an ongoing process. There's no single point at which there's a light switch flipped and everything is perfect, but we have an ongoing discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think this government is having trouble finding the light switch.

Space utilization formula. Until such time as you fix the faulty space utilization formula, will you at the very least place a province-wide moratorium on school closures? They're directly related.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is under the delusion that the space utilization formula plays a large role in the process today. It does not. Since we brought in the class size formulas, in fact, a number of different things in the past four or five years, certainly, space utilization is one of the trigger points. We want to know how well a school board is using the physical assets that it has on behalf of the students in their jurisdiction before we add more spaces and places, but it's not the be-all and the end-all in the process. First and foremost, the safety of the students and the health of the students is there, and then accommodation . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The space utilization is 10 years old. It doesn't reflect the Learning Commission's recommendations.

Given that there is a 40 per cent recessional discount on materials and labour, why aren't you finally addressing the \$2 billion plus schools repair bill and building the new schools needed for rapid-growth areas such as Airdrie and Leduc?

Mr. Hancock: And Beaumont and Medicine Hat and Fort McMurray and a number of other places in the province. In fact, as I've said in this House a number of times, I've put together a plan that shows what we need to do in terms of new schools, in terms of improving the schools that are aging and that we still need and, yes, phasing out those schools which are no longer needed in the program. We're working with school boards to make sure we have the right kind of places and the right kinds of spaces. Then the next piece, of course, is to find the funding because Albertans are very interested also in the appropriate allocation . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Private Vocational Institution Credits

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of Alberta students choose to attend private vocational colleges as a valid option for their postsecondary studies, an option that allows students to fast-track their careers. However, some of these students want to continue their learning at publicly funded institutions, but many cannot transfer the credits they earned in the private colleges. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why don't publicly funded postsecondary institutions like the University of Alberta recognize credits earned at private vocational colleges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do recognize private vocational institutions. They have a very important role to play in Campus Alberta. Access is very important. Choice is very important. Not all things fit all models of students; different strokes for different folks kind of thing. Students that are applying to a publicly funded institution have the opportunity to present their transcript. The institutions within Campus Alberta are the ones that determine whether or not the training that they've had at that private vocational school is applicable.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. I'm talking to a lot of my constituents regarding this, and they have concerns. Do you consider the training at private accredited vocational colleges equal to the training earned at publicly funded institutions?

The Speaker: Again, is that opinion or government policy?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, our department does monitor these private vocational institutions, and we also work with Campus Alberta to try to ensure that we have as much transferability within the system as possible. But remember. A private vocational institution is usually driven by training provided for the economy, for employers, for various other things. So the program, to compare apples to apples, sometimes is a bit of a challenge. The institutions

will look at individual modules within those programs. Again, it's up to the individual institutions and students to do their homework.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: are there any plans to have private vocational colleges align more closely with the publicly funded institutions in Campus Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, we are working on that right now. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, who's the parliamentary assistant in this department, is actively engaged in reviewing the private vocational education programs within the province and within the system, and we'll be talking about that as a Campus Alberta group very, very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Long-term Care Beds

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's strategy to bury their agenda for health care privatization in more five-year plans isn't fooling anyone. If they really wanted to address ER wait times and health care chaos, they would add long-term care beds and somewhere between 500 to 1,000 mental health beds. It's clear that this government is more concerned with public relations than it is with doing what's right for Albertans in need. So how can the minister of health expect anyone to believe his plan when it ignores the two key issues of mental health and long-term care beds?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's very straightforward. We've worked out a plan that involves doctors and pharmacists and nurses and Health Quality Council people, and of course leading the charge was Alberta Health Services with my Department of Health and Wellness. The result of all of that and the result of listening to a lot of Albertans who said, "Build us more continuing care facilities" is why we're adding up to about 1,400 this year, next year another thousand, the year after that another thousand. It's a very aggressive and ambitious plan, probably the largest per capita in Canada.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, continuing care is not long-term care.

Now, Dr. Paul Parks stated that more than half of the people in acute-care beds in big city hospitals are waiting for long-term care, not other forms of continuing care. He affirmed what this party has been saying for years, that by offering chronically ill seniors only fancy condos with housekeeping, you ensure more chronically ill seniors in acute-care hospital beds. Why won't the health minister take the cotton out of his ears and commit to hard numbers for long-term care beds?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, some of the beds I just referred to are long-term care. Why don't they just be patient until they all get finished? In the meantime, let's also remember that we're increasing home care funding. One of the largest increases to any part of the Alberta Health Services budget is to increase it by 7 per cent, well over \$400 million. When you put the whole picture together, they're spending about \$30 million per day on health care in this province. Phenomenal.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, to the minister of health. Albertans

deserve to know how many of the hundreds and hundreds of beds they keep bragging about every day are long-term care beds. If he cannot tell Albertans how many of those beds are long-term care beds, will he just give his job over to someone else who can?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it might be time for that hon. member to switch to decaf.

The fact is that there are some specific details that someone else asked for; I said I would try and get that information for them. Meanwhile, Alberta Health Services is compiling that information that was requested earlier, and as soon as they provide it, I'll try and give more detail. The important thing here is that we're building continuing care facilities, and we're having people stay there to receive the services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

AIMCo Investments

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AIMCo has assets under its management of over \$70 billion. Twelve billion dollars of these assets are externally managed. Last year these externally managed assets shrank in value by over \$542 million. By law the minister of finance is responsible for AIMCo, this Crown corporation. My first question is to the minister of finance. Given that this government signed up these external managers to manage this \$12 billion pool of assets, why are their investment costs so high?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that, in fact, internalizing those investment decisions has significantly reduced the cost of outside consultants. If the hon. member consults the report more closely, he'll see that.

Mr. MacDonald: The report is right here, Mr. Speaker, and the minister of finance is wrong.

Given that this loss of \$542 million was in the last year, how do you explain that AIMCo had to pay \$169 million in total investment costs, much more than for the \$58 billion that was managed internally?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the relevant figures are the reduction in external consulting costs, which have gone down repeatedly in the last two years that AIMCo has taken over.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, they're excessive, and the finance minister surely should know that.

Now, again, why would you give, specifically, a \$25 million performance fee to managers who on their watch saw this pool of money shrink by over half a billion dollars? Why would they get a \$25 million bonus whenever they did such a poor job of managing pensioners' assets and even this government's assets?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member should read the report carefully. AIMCo in the 2009 year outperformed the market in all of its investment portfolios.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Road Density Thresholds

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Road density is frequently recognized in conservation circles as a canary in the coal mine for

human impact on natural ecological systems and, likewise, an important factor in the recovery plans for both the grizzly bear and woodland caribou. All my questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister commit to this House that the road density thresholds will be taken into account in the development of the regional plans which are required under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that many factors relevant to environmental conservation would be taken into account in these plans, but the regional plans are high-level, broad-based plans, and they do not and will not get down to the level of dealing with things like road density. The regional plans will support the plans that we have with respect to the caribou and grizzly bear recovery plan that we have. Nevertheless, the species recovery would deal with road density issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister commit to ensuring that any road density thresholds apply to all linear features available to motorized vehicle use such as gated roads, cut lines, power lines, or decommissioned roads, not just open-route density?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't intend to create an across-the-board regulatory definition for linear features or for motorized access. It's very, very difficult. The thing for threatened species like the grizzly bear and caribou: it's better dealt with when we do this on a site-specific case. So there won't be a broad-based creation of regulatory definition for these linear characteristics.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: are there any barriers, financial or other, including all linear features, that exist for determining road density thresholds?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth repeating that we're not going to create a regulatory definition with respect to thresholds at a broad level. If you look at motorized vehicle access, there are a lot of examples where the access needs to be there, and in certain circumstances it's impossible or very difficult for us to map the access capability of things like small motorcycles and that sort of thing. We'll continue to work on these things in specific situations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Southwest Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has failed in so many ways this year. Our finances are a mess, our health care system is crumbling, and they could not even negotiate a right-of-way so that southwest Calgary would actually have a ring road. My constituents of Calgary-Glenmore as well as the rest of the residents of southwest Calgary are upset with this government. They have failed them and demand this government get the job done right. Chief Big Plume has just been re-elected with a 90 per cent support. To the Minister of Transportation: are you going to reopen talks to solve the ring road dilemma, or have you simply abandoned this project?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very important project to

this government, and it's very important to the city of Calgary. We're working in partnership today with the city of Calgary's transportation, and we're working on moving the project forward.

Mr. Hinman: Given the arrogance and the incompetence over there it shouldn't surprise us that you thought you could simply talk to the band council of the Tsuu T'ina and that that would be enough. Clearly, this has failed because you left the Tsuu T'ina people and their elders as well as the federal government out of the loop. Will you make some concrete plans to bring everyone to the table this time? Who are you going to invite?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, needless to say, this hon. member doesn't listen to anything we talk about on this side of the House, so why would he even deserve our giving him an answer? But because we're such good guys on this side of the House, I will tell him that we're working towards making progress, and I'm not going to second-guess what the city of Calgary and our officials are doing in bringing together a solution.

Mr. Hinman: He has no answer. He's incompetent, and he's arrogant.

Mr. Speaker, it is only when you are not sincere about negotiations that you will give up in hopelessness. That is exactly what this government has done. This process was flawed and weak from the start. Will the Minister of Transportation commit to fixing this problem, or will the residents of southwest Calgary have to wait for a Wildrose government to do the job and get it right?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, he doesn't even deserve an answer. You want to talk arrogance? We just heard arrogance coming right out of whatever you call his mouth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Dual High School and University Credits

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Assembly has heard me speak on several occasions about innovation in education, ideas like dual credit and real-world learning opportunities. I have gone further and found a postsecondary institution willing to offer high school students in Forest Lawn and Lester B. Pearson free postsecondary courses. Will the Minister of Education assure me that these students will receive high school credit for these postsecondary courses?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, dual credit courses are actually a great way to encourage students to finish their high school and bridge to postsecondary. We know that 80 per cent of the new jobs coming forward in future years are going to require postsecondary education, so we want to encourage that. Of course, we're working on protocols relative to dual credit courses. We have some of them in place already, and we're working on doing more of them in our system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased the minister is willing to consider doing more of them. However, I would like to know whether, at present, this postsecondary that

stepped up to the plate to offer courses for these two high schools, whether these students will receive credit for these courses.

Mr. Hancock: I'm not familiar with the specific circumstance, but I can say this, Mr. Speaker: we have a dual credit working group between Education, Advanced Education, and Employment and Immigration working on expanding the programs offering dual credit courses. Of course, it's a partnership between postsecondaries and high schools to do it. We do have right now a moratorium on locally developed courses for this year while we revise our curriculum processes under Inspiring Education, so there may be a problem in this year or within the next short while approving locally developed courses that are outside the current spectrum.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to hear that work is being done in this area. I would only wish that work would be sped up in this specific area so that students can get results sooner. We have a profound education system, so I would just want to make sure that we continue to have one of the best performing education systems in the world. To the same minister: what can the minister offer students in high school today if not these particular results?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, of course, that's one of the real challenges. As we're trying to redesign the education system to make sure that we have the education system of the future, we have to continue to do things today to help students today. I can commit to this hon. member that we're prepared always to look at any new and innovative way of providing better opportunities for our students. We'll look at any proposal that comes forward. While we have an overall moratorium on locally developed courses for this year, we're certainly willing to look at innovation on a case-by-case basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's seniors' pharmaceutical plan was announced in December 2008, changed in April 2009, and delayed indefinitely in March 2010. Seniors are still wondering when and if their medication bills are going to increase. To the minister of health: will you give Alberta seniors the news that they want to hear, that the seniors' pharmaceutical plan will be scrapped?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I met with a number of seniors and senior advocacy bodies. They asked us to hold back and have some increased dialogue with them, and that's what we're doing.

Ms Pastoor: Well, Mr. Minister, this is not Shumka, so I want you to quit dancing around the issue and show Alberta seniors that you really have been listening. Tell them today what's really going on.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I did. Thank you for referencing my more agile days. I feel pretty good today, too.

The short answer is, honestly, hon. member, just like I told you. There are some issues there that they wanted us to address, to have a little deeper think tank with them before we moved forward, so that's what we're doing. There are some regulatory things that

might require some attention. There might be some legislative things that require attention. We've looked at that as well. In the meantime, seniors will continue to receive the outstanding coverage they have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to the same minister. The idea really was not welcomed, and there was certainly a huge push-back from seniors. They showed their fear and their opposition. Will the minister admit that the plan was wrong and that something else should be thought about?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker, that's not the issue. The issue is that there are some issues that they have that they want to be further consulted on, and that's what we're doing. In the meantime, we've lowered the overall cost of drugs for people in various plans, and we will continue to address issues of efficiency through that method.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Public Library Services

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of our public libraries are the focal point of community life. In 2008 an MLA committee on the future of public library services in Alberta was created. After consulting 11 communities throughout the province, the committee proposed 18 recommendations, and the government accepted 15 of them. All of my questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Of the 15 recommendations that the government committed to, how many of them have been implemented?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the government has implemented several of the 18 recommendations. For example, we've significantly increased the operating grant funding to library boards, and we've increased the bandwidth to public libraries through the Alberta SuperNet, and we've taken a much broader leadership role in public library policy and planning. As a government we're developing an integrated library policy to guide decision-making, strategic planning, and investment.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, how will the minister ensure that the library experience continues to improve in our province so that Albertans can take advantage of the excellent library resources that our province has?

Mr. Goudreau: That's an excellent question. We're developing a provincial public library technology plan that will improve access and make more digital resources available. This way we can take advantage of technologies to improve service and reduce duplication. It's also worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that we're collaborating with key partners to increase services to print-disabled Albertans, our francophones, the aboriginal communities, and our new Canadians.

Ms Woo-Paw: My last question is to the same minister. How does your ministry work with other departments to support learning initiatives for children in Alberta?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, libraries are a key component of Alberta's strong communities, especially in tougher economic times.

We are working with other ministries to develop a provincial approach to better position publicly funded libraries to meet the needs of Albertans. Our vision is that all Albertans, regardless of where they live, work, or read, will have improved access to information resources and expertise from our publicly funded libraries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Grow Ops

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to realtors in my community, they've brought up the issue of sick houses created from marijuana grow ops in residential properties. All my questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Mr. Minister, what do we have in place to ensure the safety of these dwellings for home purchasers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as you may be aware, Municipal Affairs is represented on a cross-ministry working group through the safe communities initiative to address issues of houses formerly used as marijuana grow ops. Of course, houses used as grow operations create health and safety hazards that often require expensive remediation, and this working group is finalizing a policy paper and is considering a number of recommendations that will be passed on to us.

Mr. Weadick: Mr. Minister, some residents haven't had the luxury of knowing that the home they've purchased has been used for a grow op. What's your ministry doing to help mediate the health problems for these people?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the ministry is focused on ideas for improving building inspections and standards for remediation of grow-op housing. I can assure the member that remediation and enforcement along with health and safety are key areas that we are looking at very seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an increasing problem according to our realtors, and it's growing very quickly. What is your government going to do about this problem?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that grow ops contribute to creating unsafe communities, and that's why we're taking a cross-ministry approach to ensure that this is given the proper direction it needs. My ministry along with Health and Wellness, the Solicitor General, Public Security, and Justice are working together on the best way to address a very complex issue.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. Nineteen members were recognized, 114 questions and responses.

At 3 p.m. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor will visit the House, so we're going to just continue with the Routine forthwith without a break.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

St. Mary of the Lake Catholic School

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, every now and then we see gold achieved as a result of people working together. That's the case of

one of my many schools in Lesser Slave Lake, and that's St. Mary of the Lake Catholic school, which has students from preschool to grade 12. Of course, they wanted to see their students be successful in all aspects of their lives. Despite all of its challenges this school took the view that its students mattered, that parents and the community needed to be involved and be active participants, and that the student's individuality and culture were celebrated.

And, yes, success. A recent survey by Alberta Education showed that St. Mary's students scored excellent in a number of areas last year: for being safe and caring, preparing students for lifelong learning, involving parents, and continually improving and achieving high scores on standardized tests.

To the board, the superintendent, the principal, the teachers, the parents, the Catholic community, and especially to the students, congratulations on achieving your academic goals. May you keep up the great work.

Thank you.

Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley Constituency

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, most people see this Legislature as a source of constant partisan attacks and bickering. That's the way our democratic system is set up, and to be honest, that's probably the way it works best. We're all here to reflect the diversity of our province, and we're not always going to agree. In fact, when we disagree, it's our sworn duty to fight for our respective positions with all our strength and ability. Yet at the end of the day we're all Albertans, and we share many goals and values.

Despite our bickering, sometimes this Assembly is home to some surprisingly touching moments of humanity. Yesterday, outside the glare of the television cameras for question period, I witnessed one of these moments. I'm speaking, in particular, of this Legislature's common desire to pay tribute to a great Albertan, Grant Notley, by renaming one of our constituencies in his honour. This could have easily degenerated into partisan manoeuvring, but in this case everyone recognized the value of moving forward together. Yesterday the actions of the hon. Government House Leader and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona moved me with their classy handling of the situation.

As we say goodbye to this place for a few weeks and prepare for the holidays, I hope we can keep the holiday spirit and the value of mutual respect in mind. Democracy is the ultimate victory of civilization over savagery. I am grateful that we settle our differences with words, even harsh ones, rather than the violence that is so common in other parts of the world. We have so much to be thankful for, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

International Volunteer Day

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, International Volunteer Day is celebrated globally every year on December 5. This important day was established by the United Nations General Assembly to commemorate the contributions and dedication of volunteers world-wide. Volunteerism is a source of community strength, resilience, and solidarity. It brings positive social change by fostering respect, equality, and participation of all.

Albertans have a rich history of volunteering and community involvement. Volunteers can be found on the front lines of all of our community services, including health care, heritage, the arts, disaster relief, sports, and the list goes on. There are over 1.4 million volunteers in Alberta. Tomorrow, in light of International Volunteer Day, this government is recognizing six inspiring Albertans for their dedication to their communities during the 11th annual Stars of

Alberta volunteer awards: Ms Shaughnessy Fulawka from Lac La Biche, Mr. Danny Guo from Edmonton, Mrs. Chris Burton from Lethbridge, Ms Joanne Roberts from Fort McMurray, Mrs. Olivia Butti from Edmonton, and Mrs. Maureen Willis from Cochrane.

I encourage the members of this Assembly and all Albertans to join me in thanking Alberta's volunteers and to use Sunday as an opportunity to reflect on what more each of us can do to make a difference in our communities.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 223

Health Statutes (Canada Health Act Reaffirmation) Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to request leave to introduce Bill 223, the Health Statutes (Canada Health Act Reaffirmation) Amendment Act, 2010.

Bill 223 is a substantial piece of legislation to secure public health care in Alberta. The bill interprets the Canada Health Act to ensure that key principles such as comprehensiveness, universality, and portability, vital to all Albertans, are strengthened. It would amend several Alberta acts in doing this.

The provisions of this bill address what Albertans are really saying they want, things the NDP caucus heard in its health hearings, with meaningful content and not vague platitudes. This bill would help ensure the mess we're seeing with health care services in Alberta could not happen. These provisions include an explicit prohibition on extra billing. It would ensure no health facility could provide preferred access to insured services for those who pay. The law already prohibits such preferred access to insured surgical procedures. The bill would extend that sensible protection to all insured health services. It would guarantee access to real long-term care for those medically assessed as requiring it.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years important health services have been moved out of many communities, forcing some people to go to Edmonton or Calgary for treatment. This bill would require the government to set out which services will be available in regional facilities throughout the province.

Bill 223 expands insured health services by requiring the minister to present to the Legislature a comprehensive plan, including cost estimates, to meet two key objectives to improve health care: a prescription drug program that would ensure access to drugs is not impeded by cost and insured coverage for all dental services for those under 18 years of age except those solely for cosmetic purposes. An effective public health service would ensure that services are not only publicly funded but as much as possible publicly delivered as well. This bill would ensure that within five years all insured surgical procedures would be delivered in public or not-for-profit facilities.

The sustainability of our health system has been threatened by lack of planning for infrastructure, capital spending, and human resources. Bill 223 would establish a health planning council so that planning is co-ordinated with clear timelines.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the bill would make the health care system more accountable by bringing transparency to the health budget and ensuring the public is consulted through elected regional health advisory bodies.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is about the health services that Albertans need and desire. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 223 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Can we be brief today? I'd like to give you some numbers before we get to the appointed time.

Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the program used November 26, 2010, for the commander-in-chief's unit commendation for the 1 PPCLI Battle Group Task Force 1-06 as presented by Canada's Governor General at Edmonton Garrison, which I attended. This unit, known as Task Force Orion, consists of 1,200 soldiers. The commander-in-chief's unit commendation was created on July 3, 2002, in recognition of outstanding services by units of the Canadian Forces under direct fire in times of conflict.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 130 letters signed by Albertans concerned about proposed changes to our health care laws. They ask that the government instead consider ways of strengthening public health care along the lines of what is in the bill just introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I have already provided the government's 2010-11 second-quarter fiscal update to all MLAs. I've also made the fiscal update public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. The Government Accountability Act requires the government to table a quarterly fiscal update no later than 60 days after each quarter. Accordingly, I wish to table the 2010-11 second-quarter fiscal update, which serves as the amended fiscal plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of an amendment to Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. Unfortunately, the amendment will not be discussed due to the government invoking time allocation to limit debate and force a vote on Bill 24. It's a shame that the debate on Bill 24 was cut short considering all the . . .

The Speaker: Okay. Let's go on with this. The debate is over.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling letters from Patsy Price of Calgary; Barbara Slade from Grace Martin school in Edmonton, that serves non English-speaking refugee children; Dr. Alvin Finkel, a professor at Athabasca University; Marnie Schaetti, formerly with Project Read, Claresholm, the Association of Literacy Coordinators of Alberta, and Literacy Alberta; Miranda Bestman, an ESL teacher from Edmonton; Julia Melnyk of Calgary; and Dr. Eric Stockton of Calgary, all urging the minister of advanced education to recognize the immense value of the unique publication English Express and requesting that he reinstate the funding for this treasured publication.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon.

Mr. Snelgrove, President of the Treasury Board, pursuant to the Conflicts of Interest Act the report of selected payments to members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, year ended March 31, 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Redford, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta 2009 annual accountability report.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd be very interested in knowing whether the Government House Leader had any projected government House business for us for any week, whether it be next or not.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think it's very obvious to all members of the House that the business on the Order Paper has for the most part been concluded, with the exception of Bill 29, which will remain on the Order Paper. I anticipate that we might adjourn the session in accordance with the standing orders this afternoon after the appearance of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

Statement by the Speaker

Sessional Statistics

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few moments from now the Lieutenant Governor will be arriving. I'm assuming that this is going to be the last day of this fall session, so I'd like to give you some numbers with respect to what you have accomplished in the year 2010. These numbers should be current to basically midnight last night, when essentially you left.

The number of sitting days that we had in the year 2010 – that is, from February 4 to December 1 – was 50, including today, which included seven evening sittings. Last year, in 2009, there were 64 days, with 10 evening sittings.

The number of minutes this year was approximately 14,864 – that's pretty specific – compared to 17,446 minutes in 2009. The number of hours not including today was 248 hours, compared to 291 in 2009. The number of words spoken by members in the 2010 sitting was 2,100,000, just a bit beyond that, compared to 2,320,000 for 2009. The number of words spoken during the November 24 evening sitting, as a number of you asked and I said we didn't have that number yesterday, was 167,471.

Interestingly enough, standing committees seem to be increasing in activity. The number of words spoken by members in standing committee meetings this year was 1,310,219, compared to 1,188,234 in 2009. The number of committee meetings, again, to date has dramatically increased from last year. It's 170 hours plus. Last year it was 141.

Dramatic changes in the question period in terms of allowing members to participate and having members participate. In 2010 there were 17 occasions, and there were 18 sets of questions and answers, compared to 11 in 2009. There were 21 occasions in 2010 with 19 sets of questions and answers, compared to one a year ago. This year there were seven occasions on which 20 sets of questions and responses occurred. In 2009 there were zero days. So there's a very dramatic increase in the number of members that are basically participating. We're averaging 108 questions and responses per day.

The total number of questions and answers for 2009 was 6,170. This year, in 2010, it was 5,284. This year, as I said, we're averaging 108 questions and responses per day. Last year, in 2009, it was 96. That is a very significant increase. The greatest number of questions and answers that we've ever had in one question period was on March 22 of this year, when there were 121. In the past: 108 on three occasions.

The number of government bills that received royal assent to date is 15, with another 13 scheduled to receive royal assent this afternoon. That would be 28 bills in 2010, compared to 62 last year. The number of government bills left on the Order Paper in 2010 is one compared to zero last year. The number of private member's public bills that received royal assent this year is two, the same as in 2009. That makes 48 private member's bills that have now taken place.

You may be interested in some history of all-nighters, seeing as you were involved in a very historic one this year. The first all-nighter actually occurred on October 8, 1913. In 1913 the Assembly convened at 3 in the afternoon, sat till 6 o'clock, and then went from 8 p.m. to 3:15, and that was viewed as an all-nighter. Mind you, that was 1913. We've had a number of all-nighters over the years. The first, basically, all-nighter that went beyond 3:15 occurred on December 7, 1981. That was the same day that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, the anniversary of it anyway, just a few years' difference. That one began at 2:30 p.m. and ended at 5:27 p.m. the following day. It was 981 minutes, or 16 hours.

The second all-nighter took place on November 9, 1993. A couple of members in the House were here at that time. There's only one person in the House here from the 1981 one, but there are a couple here from the one on November 9, 1993. The afternoon sitting started at 1:30 p.m. and ended at 5:30 p.m., with the evening sitting starting at 8 p.m. and then ending at 4:11 p.m. the following afternoon. So 24 hours and 11 minutes.

The third all-nighter took place May 28, 2001. There were a number of individuals here. That one went for 25 hours and 18 minutes. Then on May 9, 2007 – a large number of you were here – it went to 10:45 a.m. the following day. So 19 hours and 45 minutes.

The fifth one took place on December 4, 2007. That was a long one. The afternoon sitting began at 1 p.m. and went to 6 p.m. The evening sitting began at 8 p.m. and lasted till 5:53 the following afternoon. So that was 26 hours. That was a 108-page *Hansard* as compared to the 132-page *Hansard* we did the other day.

Of course, the most recent one, 25 hours and 30 minutes, we've already talked about. In order of precedence the length of the sittings breaks down as follows: the December 4, '07, one at 26 hours, and then you go down to the lesser ones I've already talked about. There was a great amount of time spent in 2010, not so much in days but certainly with respect to those other matters of time.

Orders of the Day

Royal Assent

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: As we await the return of the Premier with His Honour, I thought that I would read a poem for you. It's called *Season's Greetings*. It was written by the Member of the Provincial

Parliament for Oshawa in the province of Ontario and given in the Ontario Legislature. As this gentleman is not a member of our House, I can mention his name. His name is Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette, MPP for Oshawa. He recited this in the Ontario Legislature.

'Twas just weeks before Christmas and all through the House,
The members were scurrying for the rise of the House.
And the pages all stood firm in their place,
guarding and watching our ominous mace.
Now the Speaker just stood for a quieting therein,
calling "Order! Order!" as he said with no grin,
"I know all are restless, with shouting and posturing about,
but it's order we'll have or I'll toss you straight out."
Then the members, they seated and they listened with care,
in hopes an agreement soon would be there.
Now the sergeant is seated with sword at his side,
maintaining the order that he does with such pride.
And Hansard, yes, Hansard, and the words that they know,
for who has said what, with the occasional show.
The Clerk being seated and advising the Chair,
reviewing petitions and order questions with care.
Then the House, it did rise, and the members went home,
leaving the Speaker just standing and being alone.
But it's the House, yes, the House, or the chamber you see
that influences generations, many yet to be.
Then the doors, they are closed, and the lights put on dim,
awaiting a time once again, when all shall begin.

3:00

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

His Honour: Please be seated.

The Speaker: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sittings passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 16 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010
- 17 Alberta Health Act
- 18 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010
- 19 Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010
- 20 Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010
- 21 Wills and Succession Act
- 22 Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010
- 23 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010
- 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010
- 25 Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010

- 26 Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane)
Amendment Act, 2010
- 27 Police Amendment Act, 2010
- 28 Electoral Divisions Act

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.
The hon. Government House Leader.

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly do now adjourn, and I advise the House that pursuant to Standing Order 3(4)(b) the session would be recessed.

The Speaker: Merry Christmas, and be safe.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:05 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 3(4)(b)]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 3rd Session (2010)

Activity to December 02, 2010

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft.), 403-09 (Mar. 10 aft.), 414-15 (Mar. 10 aft.), 434-40 (Mar. 11 aft.), 487-89 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 519-27 (Mar. 17 aft.), 556-61 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 660-61 (Mar. 24 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cA-14.9]

2* Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft.), 430-34 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 489-92 (Mar. 16 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 678 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c7]

3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)

First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 413-14 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 492 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c6]

4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)

First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 410-12 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 529-32 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 678-79 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c4]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 1 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 1, 2010; SA 2010 c1]

6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft.), 412-13 (Mar. 10 aft.), 489 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 527-29 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 679-80 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c5]

- 7* Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 402-03 (Mar. 10 aft.), 492-503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 533-37 (Mar. 17 aft.), 561-62 (Mar. 18 aft.), 769-82 (Apr. 14 aft.), 850-62 (Apr. 20 aft.), 869-76 (Apr. 20 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 878-84 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2010 c8]
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 334 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 429-30 (Mar. 11 aft.), 503 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 532--33 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 680-81 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010, with exceptions; SA 2010 c2]
- 9 Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 615-16 (Mar. 23 aft.), 735-43 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-804 (Apr. 15 aft.), 868 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 878 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c9]
- 10 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Redford)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 618-20 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 682-83 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 876-77 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c12]
- 11 Witness Security Act (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 486 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518 (Mar. 17 aft.), 620-24 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cW-12.5]
- 12 Body Armour Control Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 486-87 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 518-19 (Mar. 17 aft.), 624-28 (Mar. 23 aft.), 743-49 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 862-65 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 885-87 (Apr. 20 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cB-4.8]
- 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Morton)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 616-17 (Mar. 23 aft.), 681-82 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-67 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2010 c10]
- 14 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2010 (Ouellette)**
First Reading -- 552 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 617-18 (Mar. 23 aft.), 682 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 867 (Apr. 20 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 877-78 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c11]
- 15 Appropriation Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 576 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 608-15 (Mar. 23 aft.), 627-28 (Mar. 23 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 643-60 (Mar. 24 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 675-78 (Mar. 25 aft.), 684 (Mar. 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 25 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 25, 2010; SA 2010 c3]

- 16* Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving) Amendment Act, 2010 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 763 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 956-67 (Oct. 26 aft.), 980-81 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 991-98 (Oct. 27 aft.), 1013-20 (Oct. 28 aft.), 1113-17 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1135-42 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1191-96 (Nov. 15 eve.), 1227-28 (Nov. 16 aft.), 1247-52 (Nov. 16 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1283-84 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA2010 c23]
- 17 Alberta Health Act (Zwozdesky)**
First Reading -- 1010-11 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1072-85 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1210-23 (Nov. 16 aft.), 1236-47 (Nov. 16 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1274-83 (Nov. 17 aft.), 1409-26 (Nov. 23 aft.), 1440-65 (Nov. 23 eve.), 1480-98 (Nov. 24 aft.), 1499, 1534-99, 1613-30 (Nov. 24 eve.), 1704-12 (Nov. 30 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 1712-16 (Nov. 30 aft.), 1724-39 (Nov. 30 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA2010 cA-19.5]
- 18 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2010 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 984-90 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1107-11 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1225-27 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force Dec. 2, with exceptions; SA2010 c19]
- 19 Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 981-84 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1224-25 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1304-05 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force Dec. 2, with exceptions; SA2010 c18]
- 20* Class Proceedings Amendment Act, 2010 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 1032 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1065-66 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1100-01 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1229 (Nov. 16 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1427-28 (Nov. 23 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1599 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA2010 c15]
- 21 Wills and Succession Act (Olson)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1066-67 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1101-03 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1229 (Nov. 16 eve.), 1365-66 (Nov. 22 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1438-39 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1599 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA2010 cW-12.2]
- 22 Family Law Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1067-70 (Nov. 2 aft.), 1103-06 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1229-30 (Nov. 16 eve.), 1366-67 (Nov. 22 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1439-40 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1599-1600 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA2010 c16]
- 23* Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1070-72 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1111-13 (Nov. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1227 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA2010 c22]
- 24 Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1099-1100 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1180-91 (Nov. 15 eve.), 1268-70 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1385-96 (Nov. 22 eve.), 1679-88 (Nov. 29 eve.), 1717-24 (Nov. 30 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1739 (Nov. 30 eve.), 1766-67 (Dec. 1 aft.), 1771-84 (Dec. 1 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force Dec. 2; SA2010 c14]

- 25 Freehold Mineral Rights Tax Amendment Act, 2010 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1033 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1100 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1175 (Nov. 15 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1223-24 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1303-04 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force Dec. 2; SA2010 c17]
- 26* Mines and Minerals (Coalbed Methane) Amendment Act, 2010 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 980 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1012-13 (Oct. 28 aft.), 1106-07 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1175-80 (Nov. 15 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1430-38 (Nov. 23 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1600-02 (Nov. 24 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force Dec. 2; SA2010 c20]
- 27* Police Amendment Act, 2010 (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 1098 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1133-34 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1230-33 (Nov. 16 eve.), 1266-68 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1602-13 (Nov. 24 eve.), 1667-74 (Nov. 29 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1674-79 (Nov. 29 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA2010 c21]
- 28* Electoral Divisions Act (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1098 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1134 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1233-36 (Nov. 16 eve.), 1270-74 (Nov. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1428-30 (Nov. 23 eve.), 1499-1534 (Nov. 24 eve.), 1756-63 (Dec. 1 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1764-65, 1767-69 (Dec. 1 aft.), 1784-96 (Dec. 1 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 2 aft.) [Comes into force on day writ issued, with exceptions; SA2010 cE-4.2]
- 29 Alberta Parks Act (\$) (Ady)**
First Reading -- 1131-32 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1265-66 (Nov. 17 aft.), 1285-1303 (Nov. 17 eve.), 1368-85 (Nov. 22 eve., passed)
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 577-85 (Mar. 22 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 709 (Apr. 12 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 c13]
- 202* Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-48 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 586-89 (Mar. 22 aft.), 698-704 (Apr. 12 aft.), 705-09 (Apr. 12 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 819-25 (Apr. 19 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2010 cM-3.3]
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 709-10 (Apr. 12 aft.), 825-32 (Apr. 19 aft.), 836-37 (Apr. 19 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services), (Oct. 27 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 922-28 (Oct. 25 aft.), 1036-44 (Nov. 1 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 916 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1044-46 (Nov. 1 aft.), 1155-63 (Nov. 15 aft., passed)
- 206 Utilities Consumer Advocate Act (Kang)**
First Reading -- 1012 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1163-69 (Nov. 15 aft.), 1345-52 (Nov. 22 aft., defeated)

- 208 Recall Act (Hinman)**
First Reading -- 1033-34 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1352-57 (Nov. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 217 Election Statutes (Electoral Reform) Amendment Act, 2010 (Taft)**
First Reading -- 1701 (Nov. 30 aft., passed)
- 220 Tailings Ponds Reclamation Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 1753 (Dec. 1 aft., passed)
- 223 Health Statutes (Canada Health Act Reaffirmation) Amendment Act, 2010 (Mason)**
First Reading -- 1810 (Dec. 2 aft., passed)
- 230 Anti-Idling Act (Taylor)**
First Reading -- 1701 (Nov. 30)
- Pr1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 732-33 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA2010 c25]
- Pr2* Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010 (DeLong)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 733-35 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 749-50 (Apr. 13 aft.), 768 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 31, 2009; SA 2010 c24]
- Pr3* Lamont Health Care Centre Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 366 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 768-69 (Apr. 14 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 804 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 22 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 22, 2010; SA 2010 c26]

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Adopt a highway program
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- d. Headings that begin with an abbreviation, such as St., Mr., Dr., are filed as though they are spelled out in full.

Example:	Divorce	Safety Codes Council
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- e. Hyphens, slashes, or brackets within headings are ignored for filing purposes.

Example:	Alberta Opportunity Company	School buses
	Alberta-Pacific Industries Inc.	School/business co-operation
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- f. Other interior punctuation in headings is also ignored for filing purposes.

Example:	Seniors' Action and Liason Team
	Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta
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Abbreviations

Conventional abbreviations are used as required. Acronyms and other abbreviations are listed in alphabetical order in the subject index. Abbreviations for political parties are as follows:

AL	Alberta Liberal Party
PC	Progressive Conservative Party
Ind.	Independent (Member has no party affiliation)
WA	Wildrose Alliance Party
ND	New Democratic Party
AB	Alberta Party

See/See Also References

See or see also references can point to either another main heading alone or to a main heading plus subheading. If the reference points to a main heading plus subheading, it appears in the index with a colon separating the main heading from the subheading.

Example: **Child custody**
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Subjects Not Indexed

Subjects arising under the following headings in the text are not indexed:

- Prayers, Notices of Motion, and Projected Government Business
- Detailed topics arising during debate on bills and motions are not indexed either; however their general content is indexed under an appropriate subject heading.

Please note, however, that from 1976 onward all text, including the above mentioned sections, is searchable on the *Hansard* online system. The Assembly's website is www.assembly.ab.ca. Click on Quick Access, then on Search Hansard to access the search engine. A customized Help screen can provide searching hints. However, please contact the *Hansard* indexer if you need assistance in finding information in *Hansard*.

House Business Entries

The following index headings represent various "items of business" appearing in the text. They are a type of summary or quick reference to subjects that have come up under them.

- Bills
- Budget Address and debate
- Chair – Rulings and statements
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- Speaker – Rulings
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Topics arising under these headings can also be found under other relevant subject headings and, in the case of bills, under the title of the bill as well.

Tablings (sessional papers) are indexed under relevant subject headings only; numeric access can be found through the Assembly's website in either the Required Tablings, Sessional Papers, or Intersessional Deposits databases on the Assembly Documents and Records page.

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Solicitor General and Public Security	Public Safety and Services
Sustainable Resource Development	Resources and Environment
Tourism, Parks and Recreation	Community Services
Transportation	Economy
Treasury Board	Public Safety and Services

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- Bill 19 *See* **Land Assembly Project Area Act (Bill 19, 2009)**
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- Information about any of the following Bills may be found by looking under the title of the Bill.
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*VanderBurg ... 674***Demolition industry – Waste disposal/recycling**

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*Blakeman ... 277**Renner ... 277***Dental Association and College***See Alberta Dental Association and College***Dental hygienists**Workers' compensation coverage, letter re (SP196/10:
Tabled)*Chase ... 795***Dental Technologists of Alberta, College of***See College of Dental Technologists of Alberta***Dentistry – Standards**

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*Cao ... 695**Zwozdesky ... 695***Denturists, College of Alberta***See College of Alberta Denturists***Dept. of Aboriginal Relations**Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit
SP265/10)*Webber ... 19 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and
Proceedings 25 Oct./10)*

External consultants expenditures (Q22/10: Accepted)

*Taft ... 454*External consultants expenditures (Q22/10: Response
tabled as SP472/10)*Hancock ... 1652**Webber ... 1652*

Main estimates 2010-11, passed

*Deputy Chair ... 554**Griffiths ... 556*Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during
(SP85/10: Tabled)*Clerk, The ... 401–02**Webber ... 401–02*

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*Taft ... 1095, 1127**Webber ... 1095, 1128***Dept. of Advanced Education and Technology**Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit
SP237/10)*Horner ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and
Proceedings 25 Oct./10)*

External consultants expenditures (Q3/10: Accepted)

*Chase ... 453***Dept. of Advanced Education and Technology***(Continued)*External consultants expenditures (Q3/10: Response
tabled as SP448/10)*Horner ... 1650–51*

Main estimates 2010-11, passed

*Deputy Chair ... 554**Griffiths ... 556*Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during
(SP187/10: Tabled)*Clerk, The ... 764**Horner ... 764*

Supplementary estimates 2009-10, debated

*Chase ... 157–58, 160**Horner ... 157–60**Notley ... 159–60*

Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed

*Griffiths ... 176***Dept. of Agriculture and Rural Development**

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*MacDonald ... 981*Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit
SP238/10)*Hayden ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and
Proceedings 25 Oct./10)*

External consultants expenditures (Q18/10: Accepted)

*Pastoor ... 454*External consultants expenditures (Q18/10: Response
tabled as SP442/10)*Hayden ... 1650*

Main estimates 2010-11, passed

*Griffiths ... 556***Dept. of Children and Youth Services**Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit
SP239/10)*Fritz ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings
25 Oct./10)*

External consultants expenditures (Q4/10: Accepted)

*Chase ... 453*External consultants expenditures (Q4/10: Response
tabled as SP465/10)*Fritz ... 1652**Hancock ... 1652*Funding cuts impact on front-line services, point of
order re*Anderson ... 642**Hancock ... 641–42**MacDonald ... 642**Notley ... 640–41**Speaker, The ... 642–43*

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*Chase ... 545–46**Fritz ... 545–46*

Main estimates 2010-11, passed

*Deputy Chair ... 555**Griffiths ... 556*Main estimates 2010-11, written response to questions
during*Chase ... 545–46, 790**Fritz ... 545–46, 790*

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 - Hinman* ... 601
 - Stelmach* ... 601
- Minister's instructions re foster care funding
 - Anderson* ... 632–33
 - Fritz* ... 605
 - Hinman* ... 601, 666
 - Notley* ... 605, 633
 - Stelmach* ... 601, 632–33, 666
- Staffing reductions
 - DeLong* ... 305
 - Fritz* ... 305

Dept. of Culture and Community Spirit

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP240/10)
 - Blackett* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q1/10: Accepted)
 - Blakeman* ... 453
- External consultants expenditures (Q1/10: Response tabled as SP447/10)
 - Blackett* ... 1650
- Grants to nonprofit organizations
 - Bhardwaj* ... 1207
 - Blackett* ... 1207
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Deputy Chair* ... 555
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during (SP154/10: Tabled)
 - Blackett* ... 675
- Public education initiatives
 - Blackett* ... 540
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, debated
 - Blakeman* ... 173–74
 - Snelgrove* ... 173–74
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 176

Dept. of Education

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP241/10)
 - Hancock* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q5/10: Accepted)
 - Chase* ... 453
- External consultants expenditures (Q5/10: Response tabled as SP463/10)
 - Hancock* ... 1652
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Provision of bursaries to student teachers
 - Calahasen* ... 1469
- Role of, in oversight of special-needs children
 - Fritz* ... 910
- Sole-source contracts entered into (Q29/10: Accepted)
 - Chase* ... 454
- Sole-source contracts entered into (Q29/10: Response tabled as SP29/10)
 - Hancock* ... 1652

Dept. of Employment and Immigration

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP242/10)
 - Lukaszuk* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q15/10: Accepted)
 - MacDonald* ... 454

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- External consultants expenditures (Q15/10: Response tabled as SP430/10)
 - Lukaszuk* ... 1649
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Deputy Chair* ... 555
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during (SP175/10: Tabled)
 - Lukaszuk* ... 763
- Minister's workforce forum, member's statement re
 - Woo-Paw* ... 1010
- Online database of employer safety records, accuracy of
 - Dallas* ... 1206
 - Lukaszuk* ... 1206
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, debated
 - Chase* ... 162
 - Snelgrove* ... 161–62
 - Taylor* ... 160–62
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 176

Dept. of Employment and Immigration. Employment standards branch

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Dept. of Energy

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP243/10)
 - Liepert* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q25/10: Accepted)
 - Taylor* ... 454
- External consultants expenditures (Q25/10: Response tabled as SP449/10)
 - Liepert* ... 1651
- Investigation of oil sands tailings pond containment
 - Blakeman* ... 1149
 - Renner* ... 1149
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 556

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Solar Decathlon competition *See Solar Decathlon competition 2011 (U.S. Dept. of Energy)*

Dept. of Environment

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP244/10)
 - Renner* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- Budget cuts
 - Blakeman* ... 148
 - Renner* ... 148
- External consultants expenditures (Q2/10: Accepted)
 - Blakeman* ... 453
- External consultants expenditures (Q2/10: Response tabled as SP459/10)
 - Renner* ... 1651
- Investigation of oil sands tailings pond containment
 - Stelmach* ... 1145–46
 - Swann* ... 1145
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Deputy Chair* ... 555
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Main estimates 2010-11, questions remaining from (SP129/10: Tabled)
 - Blakeman* ... 577
- Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during (SP203/10: Tabled)
 - Clerk, The* ... 816
 - Renner* ... 816

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- Minister's response to waterfowl death on tailing ponds
 - Stelmach* ... 937
 - Swann* ... 937
- Role re sodium hydroxide spill in Athabasca-Redwater
 - Johnson* ... 846–47
 - Renner* ... 847

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- Minister of Finance and Enterprise correspondence with re HST
 - Dallas* ... 1028
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- Administration of Alberta farm fuel benefit program
 - MacDonald* ... 981
- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP246/10)
 - Morton* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q16/10: Accepted)
 - MacDonald* ... 454
- External consultants expenditures (Q16/10: Response tabled as SP428/10)
 - Morton* ... 1649
 - Snelgrove* ... 1649
- Main estimates 2010-11, response to questions during (SP143/10: Tabled)
 - Clerk, The* ... 608
 - Morton* ... 608
- Minister's comments re government spending policy
 - Anderson* ... 276
 - Morton* ... 276
- Minister's role in budget finalization
 - Anderson* ... 386
 - Stelmach* ... 386
- Minister's role in Canada health transfer review
 - Stelmach* ... 387
- Second-quarter fiscal update 2010-11 (SP517/10: Tabled)
 - Morton* ... 1811
- Second-quarter fiscal update 2010-11, public reporting of
 - Morton* ... 1811

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- [See also **Minister's Advisory Committee on Health**]
 - 2010 capital plan, publication of
 - Swann* ... 1692
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1692
 - Annual report
 - MacDonald* ... 1315
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1315
 - Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP247/10)
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
 - Children's healthy development, initiatives re
 - Rogers* ... 928
 - Weadick* ... 930
 - Deputy ministers, bonus frozen
 - Taft* ... 723
 - Zwozdesky* ... 723
 - Deputy ministers, qualifications of
 - Taft* ... 1075
 - Deputy ministers, turnover rate
 - Hehr* ... 1241
 - Taft* ... 1074
 - Expenditures under budget
 - Taft* ... 1342
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1342

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- External consultants expenditures (Q23/10: Accepted)
 - Taft* ... 454
- External consultants expenditures (Q23/10: Response tabled as SP425/10)
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1649
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Deputy Chair* ... 555
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Minister's accountability re emergency room wait times
 - Mason* ... 973
 - Stelmach* ... 973, 1001
 - Swann* ... 1001
- Minister's sign-off on Health Services senior executives contracts
 - Taft* ... 720, 722–23
 - Zwozdesky* ... 720, 722–23
- Minister's travel expenses paid by Telus
 - Mason* ... 1123
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1123
- Parliamentary assistant for (Dr. Sherman) See **Edmonton-Meadowlark (Constituency): Member for; Government caucus: Suspension of Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark**
- Policy decision-making authority
 - Stelmach* ... 370, 508
 - Swann* ... 370, 508
 - Taft* ... 43–44
 - Zwozdesky* ... 44
- Review of ministerial decisions and actions, legislation re See **Alberta Health Act (Bill 17): Committee, amendment A1 (removal of privative clause)**
- Role of
 - Swann* ... 1692
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1692
- Role of, in oversight of special-needs children
 - Chase* ... 910
 - Zwozdesky* ... 910
- Role of, per Alberta Health Act
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1073
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, debated
 - MacDonald* ... 155–56
 - Snelgrove* ... 156
 - Zwozdesky* ... 155–56
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 176
- Wellness forums
 - Chase* ... 1312
 - Zwozdesky* ... 1313

Dept. of Housing and Urban Affairs

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP248/10)
 - Denis* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q26/10: Accepted)
 - Taylor* ... 454
- External consultants expenditures (Q26/10: Response tabled as SP446/10)
 - Denis* ... 1650
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Deputy Chair* ... 555
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, debated
 - Chase* ... 163–66
 - Denis* ... 163–66
 - Notley* ... 163–66
 - Snelgrove* ... 164–65
 - Taylor* ... 162–63

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Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
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 Supplementary estimates 2009-10, responses to questions during (SP104/10: Tabled)
Clerk, The ... 453
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Dept. of Infrastructure

Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP249/10)
Danyluk ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
 External consultants expenditures (Q11/10: Accepted)
Kang ... 453
 External consultants expenditures (Q11/10: Response tabled as SP480/10)
Danyluk ... 1653
 Main estimates 2010-11, passed
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 Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during (SP158/10: Tabled)
Clerk, The ... 675
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Dept. of International and Intergovernmental Relations

Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP250/10)
Evans ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
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Morton ... 50
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Pastoor ... 454
 External consultants expenditures (Q19/10: Response tabled as SP470/10)
Evans ... 1652
Hancock ... 1652
 Main estimates 2010-11, passed
Griffiths ... 556

Dept. of Justice and Attorney General

Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP251/10)
Redford ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
 Credit checks on employees, policy and procedure re
Hehr ... 1804-05
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 External consultants expenditures (Q7/10: Accepted)
Hehr ... 453
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Denis ... 1068
 Main estimates 2010-11, passed
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Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP252/10)
Goudreau ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
 External consultants expenditures (Q28/10: Accepted)
Taylor ... 454
 External consultants expenditures (Q28/10: Response tabled as SP481/10)
Goudreau ... 1653
 Main estimates 2010-11, passed
Griffiths ... 556
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 Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
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Dept. of Seniors and Community Supports

Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP253/10)
Jablonski ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
 Community supports division, impact of demographic changes on
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Pastoor ... 454
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Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP254/10)
Klimchuk ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
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 External consultants expenditures (Q12/10: Accepted)
Kang ... 453
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Klimchuk ... 1652

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- Main estimates 2010-11, errata for p.15 & 342 of (SP23/10: Tabled)
 - Clerk, The* ... 64
 - Klimchuk* ... 64
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Main estimates 2010-11, response to question during (SP142/10: Tabled)
 - Clerk, The* ... 608
 - Klimchuk* ... 608
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 - Chase* ... 944
 - Klimchuk* ... 944
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 - Kang* ... 364
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Dept. of Solicitor General and Public Security

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP255/10)
 - Oberle* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q8/10: Accepted)
 - Hehr* ... 453
- External consultants expenditures (Q8/10: Response tabled as SP467/10)
 - Hancock* ... 1652
 - Oberle* ... 1652
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during (SP200/10: Tabled)
 - Clerk, The* ... 796
 - Oberle* ... 796
- Minister's trip to New York
 - Lukaszuk* ... 637-38
 - MacDonald* ... 637
- Victims services branch memorandum of understanding with RCMP, member's statement re
 - McQueen* ... 1131
- Victims services branch status report 2008-09 (SP2/10: Tabled)
 - Oberle* ... 16
- Victims services branch status report 2009-10 (SP350/10: Tabled)
 - Oberle* ... 1209

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- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP256/10)
 - Knight* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during (SP287/10: Tabled)
 - Clerk, The* ... 946
 - Knight* ... 946
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, debated
 - Chase* ... 167-68
 - Hehr* ... 166-67
 - Knight* ... 166-68
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 176

Dept. of Tourism, Parks and Recreation

- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP257/10)
 - Ady* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- Budget cuts
 - Chase* ... 332
- External consultants expenditures (Q6/10: Accepted)
 - Chase* ... 453
- External consultants expenditures (Q6/10: Response tabled as SP458/10)
 - Ady* ... 1651
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, debated
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 - Snelgrove* ... 170-73
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 176

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- Annual report 2009-10 (Tabled as intersessional deposit SP258/10)
 - Ouellette* ... 1 Oct./10 (reported in Votes and Proceedings 25 Oct./10)
- External consultants expenditures (Q13/10: Accepted)
 - Kang* ... 454
- External consultants expenditures (Q13/10: Response tabled as SP469/10)
 - Hancock* ... 1652
 - Ouellette* ... 1652
- Main estimates 2010-11, passed
 - Deputy Chair* ... 555
 - Griffiths* ... 556
- Main estimates 2010-11, responses to questions during (SP124/10: Tabled)
 - Clerk, The* ... 553
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 - Blakeman* ... 509
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 - Kang* ... 116
 - Ouellette* ... 116
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 - Chase* ... 174-76
 - Snelgrove* ... 174-76
- Supplementary estimates 2009-10, passed
 - Griffiths* ... 176

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- Consolidation and modernization of
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- Achievement bonuses, suspension of
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- Submission to Electoral Boundaries Commission, withdrawal of
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- See Electric utilities – Regulations: Deregulation*

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- [*See also Disabled: Adult children*]

- Administrative review of program, report on
 - Jablonski ... 1058*
 - Pastoor ... 1058*
 - Community boards, provincial strategy re
 - Jablonski ... 1097*
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 - Funding for programs for
 - Benito ... 815*
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 - Forsyth ... 15, 186–87*
 - Fritz ... 1340*
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 - Pastoor ... 9–10, 58, 272, 728*
 - Stelmach ... 271–72, 301, 666*
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 - Funding for programs for, appeal process re
 - Blakeman ... 542*
 - Jablonski ... 542, 813*
 - Pastoor ... 812–13*
 - Funding for programs for, letters re (SP21-22/10: Tabled)
 - Blakeman ... 64*
 - Funding for programs for, member's statement re
 - Pastoor ... 39*
 - Swann ... 270*
 - Funding for programs for, service provider agreement reduction re (SP122/10: Tabled)
 - Blakeman ... 553*
 - Review of services to
 - Jablonski ... 1097*
 - Pastoor ... 1097*
 - Service providers, letter re funding cuts to (SP41/10: Tabled)
 - MacDonald ... 213*
 - Supports for, assessment tool re (SIS)
 - Hinman ... 331–32*
 - Jablonski ... 97, 117, 208–09, 331–32*
 - Pastoor ... 97, 117, 208–09*
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 - Benito ... 815*
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- Funding to service providers for programs for
 - Blakeman ... 542*
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 - Pastoor ... 812–13*
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- Support programs for
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- See Children – Protective services: Removal from family home, Jason Devine case, affidavit re (SP389/10: Tabled)*

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- See Underground facilities – Registration*

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- See Introduction of Visitors (Visiting dignitaries)*

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- See Turner Valley Gas Plant (Historic site): Dingman No. 2 gas well flare containment*

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- See Student testing: Diploma exams, petition tabled re (SP211/10)*

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 - Leskiw ... 757*
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 - Horne ... 507*
 - Olson ... 914–15*
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 - Olson ... 1198–99*
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 - Jablonski ... 1205*
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 - Horne ... 271*
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 - Jablonski ... 571–72*
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